CLAIMS OF INDIGENEITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT: A STUDY OF MIZO AND CHAKMA IN MIZORAM, 1972-2017

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

This thesis entitled "**Claims of Indigeneity and Ethnic Conflict: A Study of Mizo and Chakma in Mizoram, 1972-2017**", submitted to the Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** is my original work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree to this university or any other university.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION

A

All Chakma Students' Union
AICSU 194
Assistant Electoral Registration Officers
AERO 160,174

B

Bharatiya Janata Party
BJP 181
Block Development Officer
BDO 187
Border Area Development Programme
BADP 178,179
Border Security Forces
BSF 140

C

Central Young Mizo Association
CYMA 32
Chakma Autonomous District Council
CADC 5, 75
Chakma National Council of India
CNCI 8
Chief Executive Member
CEM 149
Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHT 5
Circle Interpreters
CI 103
Common Era
CE 78

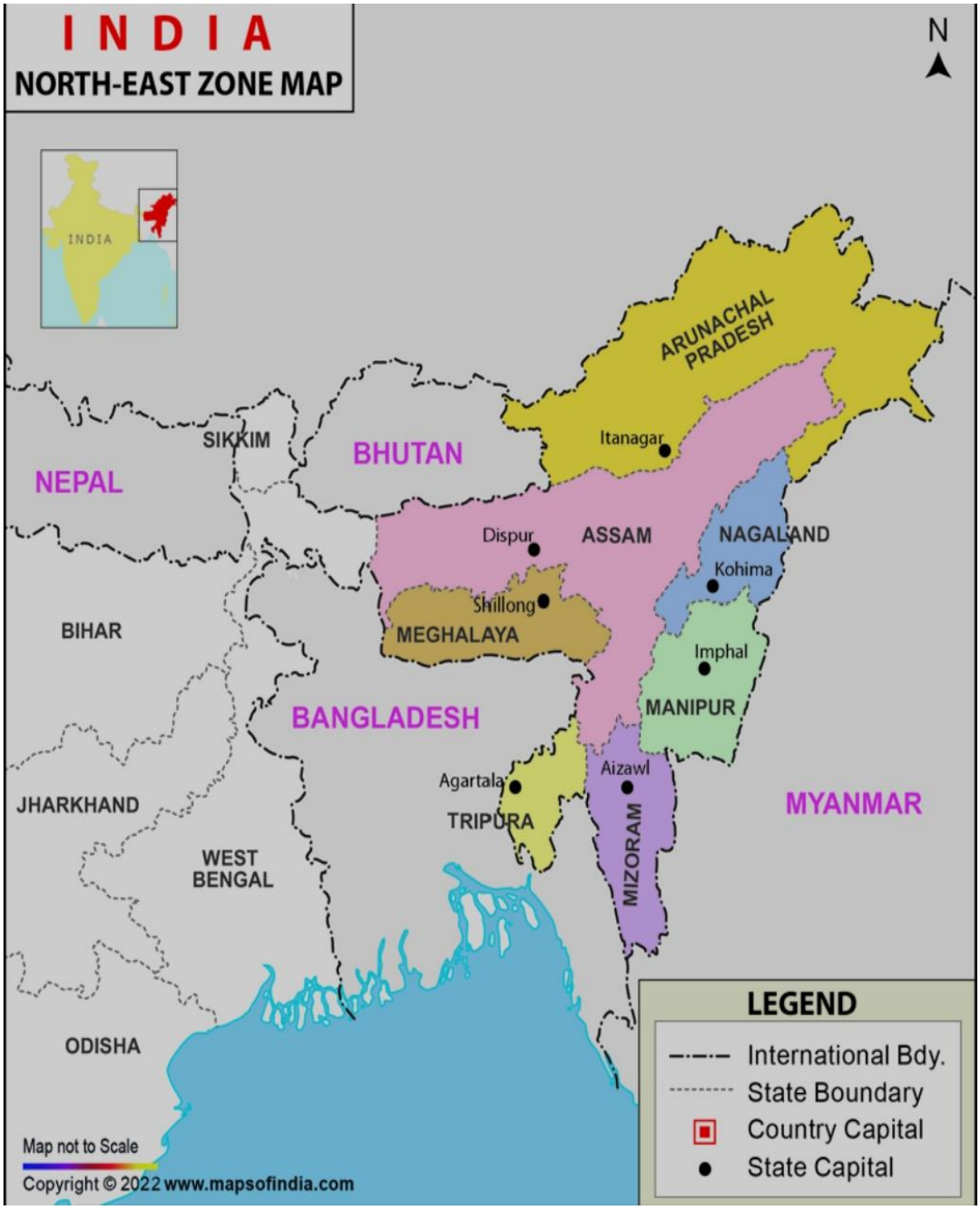
E

Electoral Registration Officers
ERO 168

I

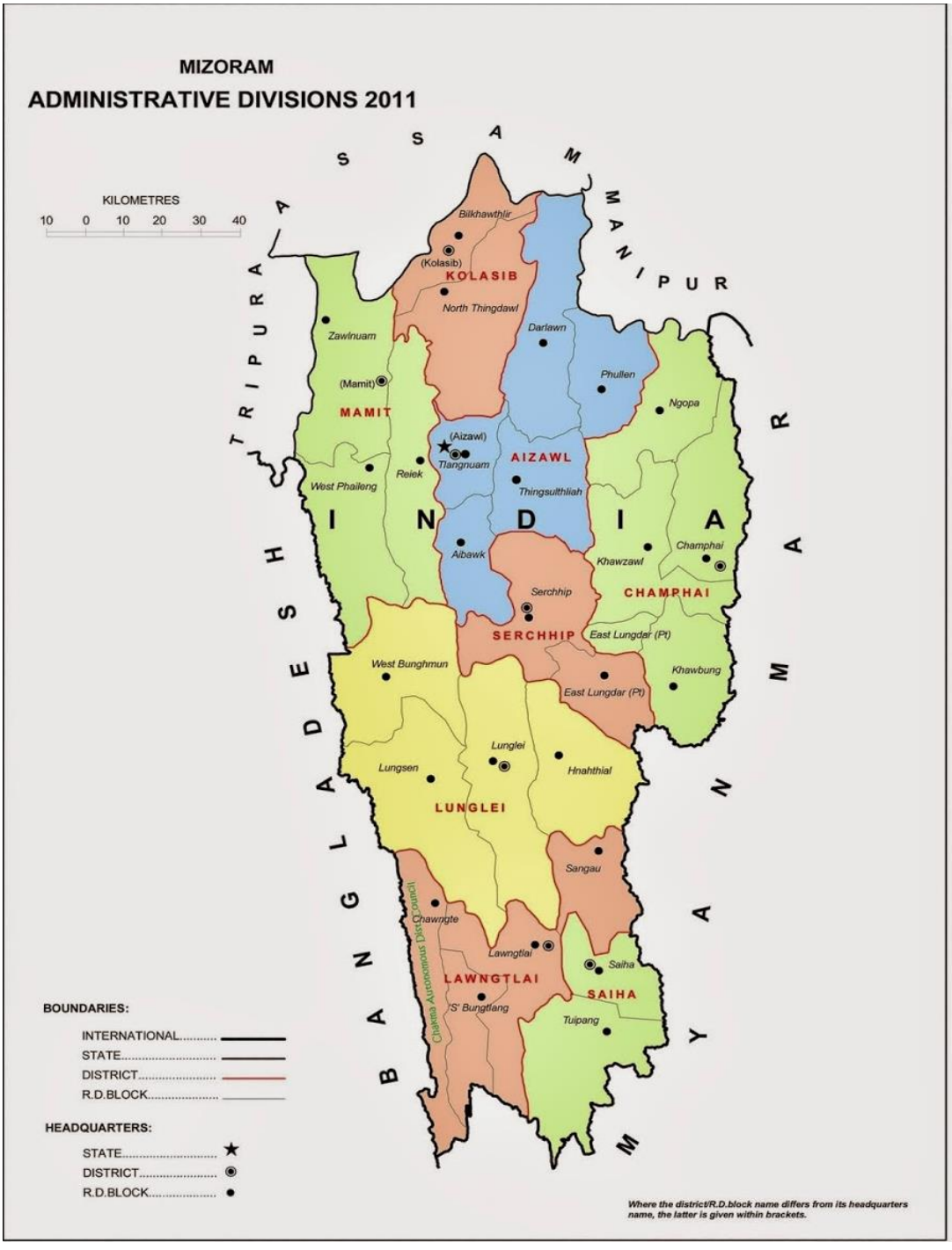
Ibidem
Ibid 44
Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples
ICITP 49
International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

POLITICAL MAPS



Map 1 Political Map of Northeast India.

Source: www.mapsofindia.com



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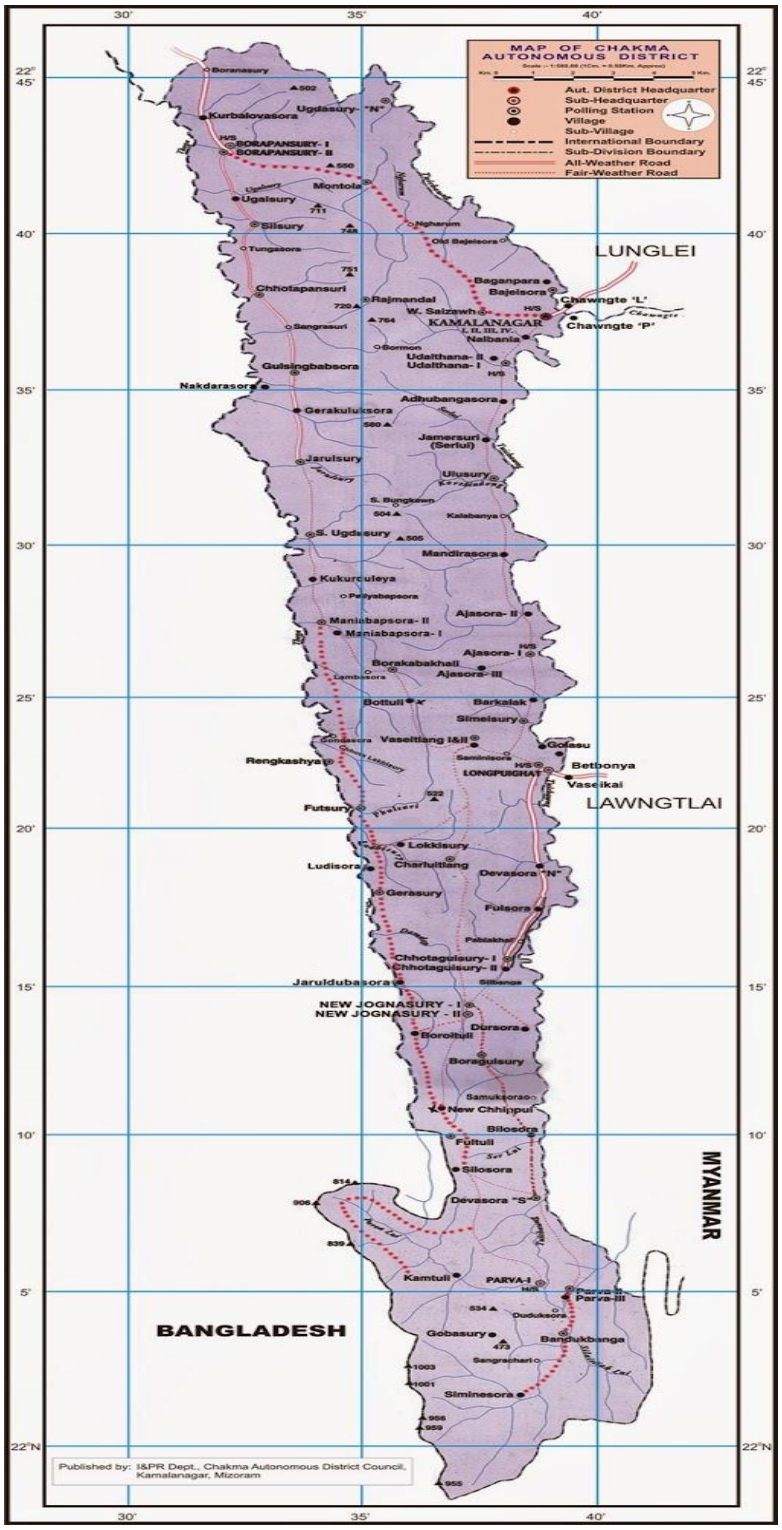

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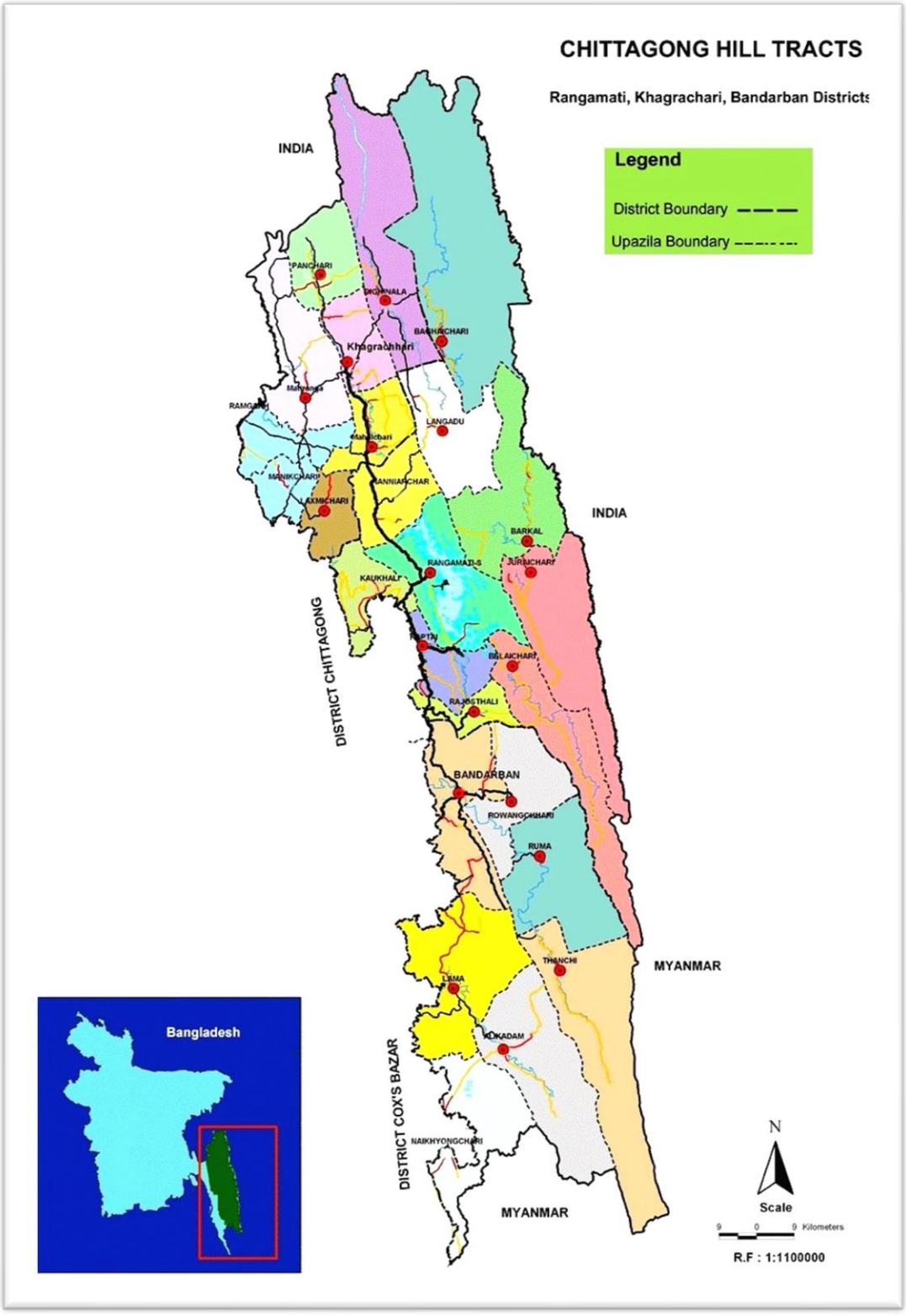

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Source: bktcht.wordpress.com

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Most societies today consist of numerous ethnic groups, each of which may have its own language, religion, political affiliations, or socio-economic status. Notwithstanding these differences, they share a similar background of origins. The advent of modern nation-states in the past century or so, with its emphasis on uniformity to create unified national identities among the populace, often downplayed the distinct characteristics of smaller communities. This could translate into derecognition of language and cultural practices, loss of control over natural or material resources, displacement from roots and seat of power. Therefore, these communities came together around the concept of ethnic identity and asserted their differences, using both violent and other persuasive methods, to strive for recognition and fight against the prospect of being subsumed by a larger identity. So, ethnic identity acquires political significance when it is contested or denied by the dominant community or the state. And, despite being one of the most recent social categories, ethnicity supersedes other notions of identity meant to convey cultural differences between groups.

While ethnic differences by themselves do not always lead to conflict, it is possible that they do if there is ethnicity-induced mutual mistrust and disharmony between groups or between groups and the state. This is typically due to perceived or actual political unrest, economic antagonism, or a threat to cultural survival. In most cases of conflict over ethnicity, identity has rarely been the sole issue, which makes it imperative to account for the wider political and economic context. In its extreme form, ethnic conflict causes large-scale war, pogroms and insurgency. To be sure, not every conflict is large-scale and has all these consequences. Yet there is one feature that most ethnic conflicts have in common: the immense human suffering they tend

to bring. If for no other reason, it is crucial to study ethnic conflict to better understand its causes, management strategies and potential solutions. Rightly so, ethnic conflict has become one of the central topics of discussion among scholars, social scientists, and academicians in contemporary time (Cordell and Wolff 2011).

Conflict among ethnic groups has always been a common occurrence in history across the world.[1] When the Cold War ended, public expectations were high. There was an assumption that tensions would be reduced and stability prevailed worldwide. Scholars spoke of "the end of history", and political leaders toyed with the idea of a "New World Order". However, the numerous ethnic conflicts that have ravaged the so-called new world crashed these expectations. The problem of ethnic conflict, which is generally an outcome of ethnic assertion and identity politics, also hit different parts of India, especially the Northeastern region. In fact, the Northeast is notorious for violent conflict that arises from ethnic separatist movements against the Indian state. In the post-independence era, it became a political crisis in the form of armed secessionist struggles and inter-group ethnic conflicts.[2]

Ethnicity and its diverse manifestations in Northeast India have been complex and fluid. It has taken multiple forms, as an insurgency movement for secession, as nationality conflicts, as movements for autonomy within the Indian state, as agitations against migrants and foreigners, as intra-tribal feuds, as demands for protection and promotion of language and culture, and as movements for

[1] Most notable ones include conflicts between the Walloons and the Flemish in Belgium, the Scots, Welsh and Irish in United Kingdom, the Albanians and Serbs in Yugoslavia, the Maronites and Muslim Arabs in Lebanon, the Sunni Kurds and Shia Muslims in Iran, the Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Mohajirs and the Sindhis in Pakistan, the Drukpas and Lhotshampas in Bhutan, the Muslims and Buddhists in Bangladesh, the Bahuns – Chhetris and the Newars in Nepal and so on (Rastogi 1993).

[2] Rebellion broke out in Naga Hills district (now Nagaland) of the then Assam state, followed by Lushai Hills district (now Mizoram). Soon, it overtook Assam, then Tripura and Manipur. Of recent, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh also have plunged into an unstable situation incited by ethnic related social and political issues. Besides separatist movements, violent inter-group ethnic conflict have frequently occurred, alongside contestations over resources and opportunities (Hassan 2007). To cite such instances, in Assam the language movements over the Official Language Bill in 1960 and in 1972, followed by anti-foreigners or 'sons of the soil' movements which resulted in deadly ethnic conflict between Assamese and Hindu Bengalis as well as Assamese and immigrant Bengali Muslims (Baruah 1999), Bodo-Santhal ethnic clashes in 1996, Bodo-Muslim clashes in 2008 and 2012 (Haloi 2015), Hmar-Dimasa violence in 2003, Karbi-Dimasa conflict in 2005, Naga-Kuki violent clashes between 1992-98, Meiteis-Muslims clashes in 1993 and Kuki-Paite clashes in 1997 in Manipur, Chakhesangs- Tangkhuls conflict during 1995-96 in Nagaland, Tribal- non-Tribal violence in Tripura in 1997-80, uneasy relations between Khasis and Garos in Meghalaya; Reangs- Mizos discord in Mizoram, and so on (Srikanth 2002; Fernandes 1999; Shimray 2004).

restoration of ancient religions or faiths (Srikanth 2002; Nag 2014). As elsewhere, centuries-long colonialism and the making of contemporary Indian nation-state undermined communities on the periphery who had languages and identities distinct from those of nationalistic civic identity. Local languages and customs might no longer be recognized or threatened, access to natural or economic resources could be lost, and people might be uprooted from their homeland. As a result, ethnicity has the strongest articulation among the linguistic and tribal communities of the Northeast. This has made the region an important area of study to understand the nature and dynamics of ethnicity, ethnic movements, and identity politics.

In this context, this research aims to address the problem of ethnic conflict in the ethnically-polarized state of Mizoram. The focus is on two ethnic groups, the Mizos and the Chakmas, who have been in hostile and uneasy relations since the colonial period. Since 2014, conflicts between the two communities have surfaced in the public domain and become a state-wide issue, after staying dormant for two and half decades. In recent past, an electoral revision drive sanctioned by the state government triggered an 'anti-foreigner' movement, mostly directed at the Chakmas. This agitation, spearheaded by a Mizo student body called Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) or Mizo Students' Association, has swept the entire state in the middle of the 1990s. Inter-ethnic tussles, albeit on a smaller scale, between the Mizos and Chakmas, have taken place on various fronts in the past, but had not necessarily transformed into state-wide public protests and confrontations until recently. The current impasse, it suggests, is an outburst of a persistent ethnic divide between the two groups. Given the explosive situation and historical nature of the troubled relations, it is crucial to understand the dynamics, causes and consequences of the conflict to identify a way out of this crisis. This research is an attempt to do that.

About Mizoram: Ethnic Configuration and History of Immigration

Contrary to the popular notion in 'mainland' India that Assamese live in Assam or Manipuris in Manipur, people of different nationalities and ethnicities live in each of the Northeastern states. Mizoram is one of the hill states in the Northeast region of India. It is in the southern corner, occupying a territory of 21,087 sq.km. It shares international boundaries with Myanmar and Bangladesh in the southeast and the west

respectively; and interstate boundaries with Tripura, Assam and Manipur. In terms of administration, the state has eight districts, namely Aizawl (the capital city), Lunglei, Serchhip, Kolasib, Champhai, Mamit, Saiha and Lawngtlai; and three Autonomous District Councils. According to the 2011 census of India, Mizoram has a population of 1,091,014. The Mizos, earlier known as Lushai/Lusei during the colonial period, constituted the majority, forming 75 percent of the total population. The Lais, Maras and Chakmas, who respectively constitute 4.9 percent, 4 percent, and 9.3 percent of the population, are residing in the southern belts with separate autonomous district councils. Also, on the eastern region and the western border of the state are the Hmars and the Brus, who together form a small portion of 5.3 percent of the total population. Besides these ethnic groups, there are other minority communities, like the Nagas, Khasi, Kuki, Bawms and Pangs, who inhabit different parts of the state.[3] Mizoram is also predominantly a Christian state. The latest census figures show that 87.16 percent of the population professes Christianity. Other than Christianity, Buddhism is followed by 8.51 percent of the population, Hinduism by 2.75 percent, and Islam by 1.35 percent. Sikhism and Jainism are 0.03 percent each.[4] The Chakmas, who are mostly Buddhist followers, constitute much of the non-Christian population.

Mizoram, known as the Lushai Hills district in colonial times, was annexed to British India in 1891 after military expeditions. Initially, it was divided into the North and South Lushai Hill Districts, put under the government of Assam and the government of Bengal respectively. However, for more administrative convenience, they were amalgamated into a unified Hills district under the Assam government in 1898. In 1930, the southern region inhabited by Lais, Maras, and Chakmas became part of the Lushai Hills. The Hills remained under the British rule until 1947, and merged with India after independence. In 1952, the Lushai Hills District was upgraded to Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. A year later, a separate Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was also carved out for small ethnic groups, namely the Lais, Maras, and Chakmas, to provide certain autonomy. In 1954, Mizo District replaced Lushai Hills District, and was upgraded into a Union Territory (UT) in 1972. The erstwhile Pawi-Lakher Regional Council

[3] Scheduled Tribes Population by Religious Community, http://www.censusindia.gov.in. Accessed November 7, 2016.
[4] Mizoram Population Census Data 2011, http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/mizoram.html. Accessed September 25, 2016.

was also trifurcated into three Autonomous Districts, namely Lai Autonomous District Council, Mara Autonomous District Council and Chakma Autonomous District Council. Then, eventually, after twenty years of the secessionist movement, Mizoram became a full-fledged state within the Union of India in February 1987 (Tribal Research Institute 1994). Like everywhere else, the population of Mizoram consists of different inhabitants who come into the region at various points in history. The focus would be on the two ethnic groups, namely the Mizos and the Chakmas.

Mizo

The Mizos/Luseis are the biggest group and dominant inhabitant of Mizoram. They are part of the Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes, addressed by British administrators as the "Chin-Kuki-Lushai", who emigrated from the Chin Hills in Myanmar to the present Northeastern region of India. The colonial linguist G.A. Grierson placed these people under the central China sub-group, within the larger category of the Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman (Grierson 1904). Successive waves of emigration over centuries landed this group into their present habitat. The Luseis, who are in Mizoram, are only a subgroup. With other allied clans, including Ralte, Chawngthus, Khiangtes, Hauhnars, Chuaungos, Chuauhangs, Ngentes, Puntes, who came to be associated with the name Mizo, they had arrived at the present Mizoram in the early 1700s. Before coming to the Lushai Hills, they were said to be residing in the Chin Hills. During their settlement in the Chin Hills, they were scattered and lived clan-based, and soon petty feuds marred the possibility of coexistence. However, as the nearby groups whom they called Pawi became frequent sources of terror, it was necessary to see beyond clans and institute a chieftainship system to organize themselves against the warring neighbours (Siama 1975; Vanlawma 1989). Under the chief's rule, the Luseis and other cognate clans came to prominence in the eighteenth-century Lushai Hills. They then absorbed other smaller clans within the fold of Luseis, and even subjugated other royal clans, like Zadeng, Palian, Rivung, Thangluah, Chawngthus, Raltes, etc. By doing so, the chiefs united these clans and consolidated the common identity Lushai/Mizo, who later inhabited Mizoram.

Chakma

The Chakmas are one of the ethnic communities in Mizoram, also belonging to Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups. The majority of the community lives in the Chakma

Autonomous District Council (CADC) area in the south-western part of Lunglei district bordering Bangladesh. They also live in Lawngtlai and Mamit district. According to the latest census figure, Chakmas number 96,972, occupying 9.3 percent of the total population in Mizoram.[5] Outside Mizoram, Chakmas also inhabit hill regions in Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh in India, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh and Arakan in Myanmar. Among ethnic groups, they are certainly a group of more recent immigrants to Mizoram, having moved mostly from the hill tracts of Chittagong (Tribal Research Institute 1994).

There have been different opinions about the origins of the Chakmas. Many writers opine that the Chakmas are of Arakanese origin, who immigrated into the CHT, intermarried with the locals and settled. Although there can be endless debate, there is now a broad consensus that Arakan was home to the Chakmas prior to migration. Before the British colonization, the Chakmas under the Raja's rule were controlled by the Arakanese king until 1666, when Mughal Bengal Governor Shaista Khan annexed the region. Under Mughal, the Chakma Raja agreed to pay annual tribute for the border trade and was in turn granted local autonomy vis-à-vis the Mughal ruler. The East India Company annexed the hill tracts in 1760, after a pact between Mir Khan and the British. Over time, several administrative adjustments were made to safeguard the political economy of the people. The most significant reform, among other things, was the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation of 1900, also called the *CHT Manual*. It trifurcated the Chittagong district into three circles. Each circle was assigned a local monarch, responsible for keeping order and collecting taxes. The CHT was designated a "totally excluded area" under the Government of India Act in 1935. This made it difficult for Bengali political leaders and administrators from the plains to exert influence or control over the region (Singh 2010; Talukdar 1987).

In the post-independence, the CHT, populated by a whopping 97 percent non-Muslim hill people, became part of Pakistan. The natural resources were heavily exploited by succeeding regimes and ethnic minorities experiencing institutionalized religious persecution and discrimination. The status of the "excluded area" was also

[5] Scheduled Tribes Population by Religious Community, http://www.censusindia.gov.in. Accessed November 7, 2016.

abolished in 1964, which marked the end of the exceptional position of CHT granted by the 1900 Regulation. Shortly after the Partition, about hundreds of Chakma families fled to India, and were accommodated in the Northeast partly because of the ethnic proximity. The construction of Kaptai hydro-electric dam in 1959 submerged vast Chakma areas of arable land, and uprooted thousands of families. As many as 40,000 Chakmas were forced to take asylum in India as refugees (Singh 2010; Zaman 1982).

Due to the Indo-Pakistan war and insurgency in Mizo District, as well as strategic calculation vis-à-vis China, the Chakmas were resettled in the sparsely populated state of Arunachal Pradesh. Another wave of influx began in the late 1970s, following serious political and social tensions in CHT due to Islamization of Bangladesh, onset of Chakma militancy, military campaigns against Chakmas etc. These people were received at various refugee camps in Tripura. Presently, the Chakma community lives in three states in Northeast viz. Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram. Unlike their counterparts in the first two states, where they are branded as 'foreigners' without the attendant socio-political rights and entitlements, the Chakmas in Mizoram avail the status of the Scheduled Tribe (ST), citizenship and autonomy through the mechanism of the Autonomous District Council. They claim to occupy parts of Mizoram even before the partition, which naturally made them an original and legitimate inhabitant of the state. In this context, the problem of ethnic conflict in Mizoram cannot be approached wholly as an issue of immigration or refugees.

An Overview of the Mizo-Chakma Relationship: Contemporary and the Past

Since the early 2010, ethnic tension between the Mizos and the Chakmas has become intense, with fervent ethnic assertions in the public space. The question of who is 'indigenous' to Mizoram is what unintentionally reignites their hostile relationship, which is characterized by mistrust. While the Mizos assert they are the only indigenous group and view the Chakmas as non-indigenous or occasionally 'illegal' immigrants, the Chakmas dispute these claims, maintaining that they are also an indigenous group based on history and Scheduled Tribe (ST) designation. These disputes about who is indigenous—between the Chakma and the Mizo—have

polarized the communities and placed Mizoram in a precarious situation with a risk of inter-ethnic violent conflict. The ethnic tussle between the Mizos and the Chakmas, however, is not a recent phenomenon, but has a deep historical root going back to the pre-colonial period. Thus, the current crisis over indigeneity is an outburst of the long-standing ethnic divide between the two communities, which is also further aggravated by the rapid growth of Chakma population in Mizoram, allegedly due to 'illegal' immigration from Bangladesh since the early 1980s. As a result, both communities have been in an uneasy and hostile relationship. The entry of the indigenous question is simply the manifestation of the already widening antagonism between the two ethnic groups (Roluahpuia 2016).

The tussle around indigeneity began when the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) protested the inclusion of 38 Chakmas and three non-Mizo students under Category I for medical and engineering courses in 2014.[6] Under the existing rules, about 85 percent of these seats are reserved for the Category I population, described as those who are indigenous people of the State and have been residing permanently in the State of Mizoram", while the remaining seats are divided among Category II and III. The MZP therefore interpreted that Category I was reserved exclusively for the indigenous Mizo community, and the insertion of Chakmas amounted to an encroachment on the privileges of the indigenous group. Due to popular pressure, the state government amended the laws and redefined Category I as Zo-Ethnic people who are native inhabitants, thus relegating Chakmas to non-indigenous Category II.[7] These rules uprooted the question of indigenous status as claimed by the Chakmas, made distinction on the basis of ethnicity, and defined indigenous and non-indigenous status accordingly. Several Chakma student bodies rose to strong opposition by filing a Public Interest Litigation against the rules and protesting on the streets, but with varying degrees of success. They stated that the Chakmas are 'sons of the soil', and the laws and policies of Mizoram violate principles of equality under the International

[6] Mizo Zirlai Pawl is an apex students' body in Mizoram, established on 27 October 1935 in Shillong. Originally named Lushai Students Association (LSA), it was later renamed as Mizo Zirlai Pawl. Its general headquarters is in the state capital of Mizoram, Aizawl, and has 12 headquarters inside and outside of Mizoram, including Churachandpur (in Manipur), Behliangchhip (in Tripura), and in Mizoram state - Serchhip, Biate, Champhai, Darlawn, Kolasib, Mamit, Zawlnuam, Saitual, Lunglei and Khawzawl. Additionally, MZP has 50 Sub-Headquarters and many branches.

[7] *Vanglaini.* 2015. "STEE Hrilhfiahna Siamthat A ni." April 6. Accessed April 21, 2018. http://www.vanglaini.org/tualchhung/33777

Conventions and Indian Constitution, by prioritizing the Mizos for higher and technical education. The recent crisis and debate over the indigenous question has left both sides sticking to divergent positions. Most Chakma civil organizations, like the Chakma National Council of India (CNCI), claim that the Chakmas historically inhabited the western part of what is now Mizoram, based on colonial records. Indeed, the drawing of a boundary on ethnic lines and the isolation of one ethnic group within a definite geographic territory was part of the careful administrative strategy of the British. This has not only stopped inter-tribal warfare and raids, but also introduced the notion of territory vis-à-vis their identity. As for the MZP, the indigenous status of the Mizos is beyond challenge. Therefore, they should be privileged and have their rights not encroached upon. Such claims and counterclaims not only polarize the two, but also rekindle the fear of ethnic violence (Roluahpuia 2016).

The relationship between the Mizos and Chakmas has a long history that extends back to the pre-colonial period. As they lived in an adjacent geographical region, their history has also intertwined. Furthermore, the colonial governance, nation-state formation, and the Partition of India also contribute to their contiguity and complexity of the relationship. During the nineteenth century, the Mizos, then called Kuki or Lusei, frequently raided Chakma settlements and took captives, which formed the basis of interaction. When the British set out to contain these aggressions, hundreds of Chakmas assisted in the quest (Lewin 1977). After official boundaries were laid down, Chakmas also entered and settled in the Lushai Hills with the permission of local chiefs, who benefited from local taxes and revenues. These admissions were mostly without prior approval from the government. Upon noticing population movements in the frontier, the British began to regulate the entry and settlement of Chakmas in the Hills by issuing passes. This system went on till after India's independence.

While the British regarded the Chakmas in the CHT and Arakan as legitimate British citizens, they were treated as non-native inhabitants in the Lushai Hills. For instance, while the Lushai and their kin tribes were levied ₹2 as hill house tax, the Chakma were levied ₹5, the same as for 'foreigner' (Lianchhinga 2004). It can be observed that an outline of indigenous and nonindigenous groups had already

been institutionalized because of British policies. Such policies were a general practice under colonial rule in the Northeast. When the British placed the tribes in a specific physical arrangement, they have also produced a sense of both territorial belonging and non-belonging, which has a long lasting imprint on contemporary politics in Mizoram (Baruah 2008). Both Mizos and Chakmas were included in the Assam Scheduled Tribe List, 1956, as part of the Scheduled Tribe community. The Mizo political leaders also discontinued the colonial restrictions and policies put in place by the British concerning the non-Lushai like Chakmas. For instance, when the Mizo District Council laid down rules regarding the collection of taxes, an unequal amount of house tax was done away with (Tribal Research Institute 1994).

The Mizo National Front, Chakma Autonomous District Council, and the Mizo Zirlai Pawl Movement

In the new India's democratic system, there was also a new political opportunity and avenue for the people, which also led to the birth of political parties in Mizoram. There was space for more robust ethnic articulations and claims, especially in the form of ethnic nationalism in the case of the Mizos. This culminated in the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement for an independent state. As much as such a movement was about sovereignty and secession, it was also a process of identity-making that acquired territoriality and an exclusive outlook that disallowed recognition of other ethnic communities. In this period of intense ethnic and nationalistic assertions, the relationship between the two groups had deteriorated and become more antagonistic, leading to several instances of MNF violence both inside Mizoram and CHT. It is not surprising that during the movement, many Chakmas supplied information to the Indian army on the Mizo rebels, either coerced or provided voluntarily, which immensely contributed to the Mizo's enmity and hostility against the Chakmas (Singh 2010).

Within the same political space, the Chakmas began to engage in politics and contested elections, including the Mizo District Council, and Pawi-Lakher Regional Council, which was shared among the Mara, Lai and Chakma. So, when the Mizo District became Union Territory in 1972, the Regional Council was trifurcated into three District Councils, resulting in the formation of Chakma District Council.

From the start, it became a problem for the Mizos, who questioned the why and how of such political adjustment coming from above. The situation, coupled with ongoing ethnic tensions due to the MNF movement, aggravated the already widening ethnic divide, with several Mizo bodies and political parties calling for its dissolution.

As discussed earlier, the Chakma influx from the CHT into the Indian side of the border, which continued after Bangladesh 'liberation', caused much resentment in host states, such as Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Such demographic invasions and the abnormal rise of the Chakma population increase ethnic tension. Although there has been strong opposition and voices against perceived 'outsiders' in the past, the issue of Chakma's rising population has received wider public attention and participation since the early 1990s. In 1993, the ruling Congress (I) state government convened a meeting with all political parties, and unanimously decided to identify and remove 'foreigners' from the electoral roll. This proposal for a 'detection and deletion' drive was instigated by the Chief Election Commissioner's call for a clean electoral system in the Northeast states and the rest of the country. Following this, the MZP and other political parties asked all the Chakmas who came after 26 January 1950 to quit Mizoram by 15 June 1995. Later, the state government issued a notification directing all 'foreigners' to leave voluntarily by 24 December 1995. The increase in Chakma population from 39,000 in 1981 to an estimated 80,000 in 1994 in the state's population of 700,000, which alarmed the Mizos, had led to the beginning of this movement. However, the deadline set by the MZP passed without much effect, as the Congress government was not willing to take extreme steps (Prakash 2008). Being pressured by parties and student bodies like the MNF and MZP, the state government started its own detection initiative in 1995 and deleted the names of 15,000 'illegal' immigrants, mostly Chakmas, from the voter list. While Chakmas accused the government of arbitrariness in the process of deletion, the latter insisted it acted in total compliance with the law. During this time, in a memorandum submitted to the Petition Committee of the Rajya Sabha, the Chakmas demanded the CADC be upgraded to a Union Territory. A few years before, Chakma organizations had already raised such a petition to the Prime Minister. This was deemed necessary for their survival and safety in the face of Mizo discrimination and ill-treatment. But the central government thought it prudent not to entertain such a demand for fear of

a revival of the Mizo rebellion that had confronted the Indian state in the 1960s and 1970s.

Within Mizoram, the political aspirations of the Chakmas received suspicion from the Mizos. The creation of the Chakma Autonomous District Council in 1972, and the demand for inclusion of all Chakma inhabited areas under one administration and elevation of CADC into UT status, further created tension and conflict. Such demands unintentionally awakened the Mizo community, which began to be wary of the increasing Chakma presence in Mizoram. To summarize, the relationship between the Mizo and the Chakma has always been a confrontational one. Colonial legacy, post-colonial nation state making, and the Mizo movement for independence add to the complexity of the issues. As for Mizoram, the current ethnic tensions are a clear manifestation of the increasing presence of ethnicity in the political space.

Theoretical Framework and Concepts: Writing about Ethnicity and Tribes in India

Central conceptual terms, viz. ethnic groups, ethnicity and ethnic conflict, and the ways in which they inform and shape this research, need to be qualified, especially given the context of Northeast India, in which they are applied. In academics, the emphasis on ethnicity in most European and American literature differs from that of Indian literature. The distinctions in culture within a large racial group have been the focus of the latter, while the former stresses the relationship between ethnicity and race. That is, language would be the primary ethnic distinctions that may be identified among the diverse Indo-Aryan racial group. However, there are certain racial differences in India, as is the case in the Northeast. These are inextricably linked to distinctions in ethnicity, but there is still substantial disagreement about whether to emphasize culture or race, or even whether either concept can be understood outside of political economy and sovereignty issues (Priyam, Menon and Banerjee 2009). Nevertheless, it is well known that a nation with significant internal cultural diversity and well ingrained hierarchies, discussions in India, lack a comprehensive theory of ethnicity (Eriksen 1991).

As previously stated, the ethnicity debate in India is overshadowed by discourse on “tribes”, as ethnic assertions have been most vehemently expressed by

tribal and linguistic communities in the Northeast. The Indian discussion on tribes comes from two broad ways-one, the ideas and generalizations by sociologists, and two, the state and constitutional perspectives. In the first source, tribes are characterized as sharing certain features like animism, absence of real hierarchy and exploitation, homogeneity, and social customs, taboos and moral codes distinct from the caste society. What follows from this is that, especially in the central and western belts, their relationship with the Hindu caste society, explained in terms of assimilation and transformation into caste society, comes to define what is a tribe. Thus, tribes are seen as communities in constant transition that will evolve into a new stage of socio-political formation. Other sociologists, however, do not see assimilation and transformation as overwhelmingly significant elements, but suggest that tribes are simply a whole or distinct society with shared rules and boundaries. The second set of identification of tribes is the interaction with the colonial and post-colonial Indian state. During the British era, the relationship between the tribes and the state was marked by economic exploitation and socio-cultural discrimination. This antagonism gives rise to tribal rebellions in different parts of the country, where the main exploiter, the state, was conceived of as an ‘outsider ‘against which they mobilized and asserted their identity.

The Indian state was also perceived by tribes in the Northeast as nothing but a substitute for the colonial government, which in the past deprived them of their independence. Although the Constitution provided various special welfare policies, including employment reservations and development programs, these had not eased tribal antagonistic relationships with the Indian state. Besides, insignificant numerical presence in the face of the rest of the people in India added to their feeling of negligence, exclusion and inequality. In other parts of tribal areas, the so-called development projects in the name of national interest exploited lands and forest resources, uprooting them from their livelihood and culture. The state is thus seen as hostile and discriminatory against tribal communities. The reaction to this situation, though they varied in different places, was asserting their identities and seeking independence from India (Priyam, Menon and Banerjee 2009). Therefore, the conceptualization of ethnicity in India must incorporate these historical particularities and contexts.

Generally, there are two different ways to use the term ethnic. First, ethnic denotes racial and linguistic differences. This narrow view is popular worldwide. For instance, as mentioned before, the term communal is used in India, while describing politics and conflict based on religion. The word ethnic primarily figures in the linguistic or racial context. Secondly, in a broader sense, taking a cue from Horowitz (1985), the term ethnic implies ascriptive content including race, language, religion, tribe, or caste (Varshney 2001). This research uses the term in this broader sense. Accordingly, ethnic groups are those who identify themselves as belonging together in a group on the basis of race, common descent, language, religion or tribe, or some combination of these, and distinguish themselves from others based on such similar ascriptive traits. A group becomes an ethnic group, in relation to and when recognized as such by other ethnic groups (Barth 1969; Srikanth 2002). The term ethnicity also denotes a sense of shared identity and belonging, which may be based on ancestry, language, history, culture, race, or religion (Varshney 2007). Similarly, all conflicts based on ascriptive group identities, such as race, language, religion, tribes, or caste, can be termed ethnic conflict. At the same time, ethnic conflict and ethnic violence are not interchangeable. In any plural society that allows freedom of expression and political demands, some ethnic conflict is bound to take place, but it may not necessarily lead to violence. If ethnic conflict and confrontation take place in an institutionalized form, like in parliament, assemblies, bureaucratic corridors, or as non-violent protest in the streets, it is conflict not violence. It must be distinguished from a situation in which protest takes violent form, riots in the streets, civil war, or genocide (Varshney 2001).

Regarding the understanding of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, there are three competing approaches, such as the primordialist approach, instrumentalist approach, and constructivist approach. The primordial view of ethnicity is based on the assumption that ethnicity is a natural and given phenomenon. It is believed that ethnic identities date back hundreds or thousands of years, and were essentially unchangeable. In this view, it is implied that ethnic conflict is based on an ‘ancient hatred’ or old hostilities ingrained in the socio-cultural fabric of ethnic groups, which are nearly impossible to eradicate or change (Geertz 1963). It is argued that it is a natural phenomenon with its foundations in family and kinship ties, and attachment that the family members feel not merely to the family members as a person, but as a

processor of certain especially significant relation qualities which could only be described as primordial (Shils 1957). However, primordialism in this form has questions to answer. The first has to do with variations, that if ethnic antagonisms were so deep-rooted and inherent, why did ethnic violence rise and fall at different times? Secondly, it is argued that many cases of ethnic conflict are the clash between old inhabitants and new migrants, and it has nothing to do with old hostilities. Thirdly, constructivist thought argued that nationality and ethnicity are modern constructs, and it is wrong to portray nation or group as having primordial animosities.

The core idea of instrumentalism, the second approach, is that ethnicity and ethnic conflict are neither primordial nor inherent in human beings. Rather, it is the creation of elites to manipulate the masses and pursue their own gains from such ethnic mobilizations (Bates 1974; Brass 1991; Hechter 1986). This approach also has certain difficulties. First, even when the leaders gain by mobilizing along ethnicity lines, why should the rational masses come along? Secondly, if the masses are instrumental, would the free-rider problem cripple ethnic collective action? Third, with such a potential violent mobilization, why would an instrumentally rational masses join in risking their lives? Modern instrumentalist theorists seek to address these problems (Hardin 1995). A big question that remains is: is it possible to explain ethnic preference or mobilization within an entirely instrumental rationality when there is a high risk of injury, incarceration or death, without recourse to psychological or cultural elements? Even if an instrumental use of ethnicity explains part of the phenomenon, it is not capable of explaining incidents based on historical injustices.

The third approach, constructivism, is relatively new in the field of ethnicity. The central idea is that ethnic and national identities are constructs of the modern epoch, with emphasis on the degree to which people change or create their identity. It conceptualizes ethnicity as group identity that is essentially fluid depending on how the boundaries of an ethnic group are drawn in a specific context, and hence the precise content of ethnic identity is defined in relation to the distinct external stimuli (Barth 1969; Brubaker 2004). The claim is not that there were no Tibetans, Turks, Zulus, or Chinese in pre-modern times, but rather that these mass identities were confined within local or regional space. Then, modernity transformed the meaning of ethnic identities by bringing the masses into a vastly expanded framework of consciousness and meanings (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983).

Constructivism accounts for identity formation well, but it does not do a good job of explaining ethnic conflict.

The instrumentalist and constructivist approaches are undoubtedly opposed to the primordialist view of ethnicity, but that is where the similarity ends. According to instrumentalist reasoning, ethnic identity is not valuable in and of itself; it is basically a mask for a core of 'real' interests, political or economic. As interests change, masks also do, making ethnic groups fluid. It is therefore expected that the same people pick different sides of their multiple identities at different times and places. This view should not be equated with constructivism (Varshney 2007). It is proposed here, since ethnic conflicts are mostly dynamic and complex, relying on a single approach is deemed insufficient. Thus, this work employs an eclectic research approach with a multi-theoretical framework.

Indigeneity and Exclusivist Claims in the Northeast: A Colonial Legacy

The term 'indigenous people' gained popularity through the experiences of the Americas and Oceania, where colonization and immigration from European countries resulted in large-scale deprivation, displacement, and discrimination of native communities. Despite the nation state's efforts to eliminate the identity of indigenous peoples, they gradually reorganized themselves and asserted their identity as indigenous peoples, their right to self-determination and self-government to ensure aboriginal rights over the lands and resources.

With immense pressure on the United Nations Organization (UNO) and other international bodies to listen to their plight, and more communities seeking the status of indigenous people, it becomes necessary to have consensus on who is one. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), in its Convention No 169 in 1989, used the term 'indigenous people' to describe both tribal peoples, whose socio-cultural, and economic circumstances set them apart from other groups in the country, and whose status is governed entirely or in part by their own customs and unique laws, and also peoples who descended from populations who lived at the time of conquest or colonization (International Labour Organisation 1994). Following the international discourse and criteria laid down by international organizations, one can discern characteristics: (1) they are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the land before colonial conquest; (2) they are usually tribal or communitarian in their

outlook; (3) they have a subsistence economy; (4) they are united on the basis of real or imaginary common blood ties; (5) they are guided by customary laws; (6) they have been marginalized, and made subordinate to communities that migrated and colonized the land; (7) they continue to follow old customs and traditions despite being a part of nation states with different values and ethos (Srikanth 2014; McKinnon 2011). Thus, the idea of indigenous people or indigeneity is closely associated with notions of land and territory. It entails taking into account the historical and social context, as well as the tales of conquering and spoliation that these people have experienced, and the legitimate entitlements to compensate for the discrimination and loss suffered (Carrin, Kanungo and Gerard 2014; Glauser 2011).

In the Indian context, several tribal communities recognized as Scheduled Tribes are associated with the term 'indigenous', although there is no official acknowledgement of that status. These communities inhabited mountainous terrains and forests, which were difficult to access and away from the sphere of power, state formation and taxation. Since they practiced rotational subsistence farming, which had not allowed for wide disparities in wealth, equality prevailed in the society ruled under the traditional village chief. Although they had never been directly colonized, colonialism and modernization led to fundamental changes in society, culture and statehood. On the one hand, a non-state space was no longer permitted by the idea of territoriality, which is to say, a state with specific bounded territory. Their occupied territories were drawn inside India's boundary, but geographical incorporation did not necessarily imply acceptance as recognized members of the national community. On the other hand, nationalism's demand for a centralized system, followed by a sense of common national identity based on shared language, tradition, and loyalty to one polity, further fanned the flames of their sense of exclusion. So, although they are not officially granted indigenous status, the ST communities from the Northeast and other parts of the country consider and claim themselves as one to the land they inhabit. Recognizing their claims, the central and state governments grant certain tribal areas in the region a special constitutional status through the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, which guarantees administrative and financial autonomy.

Since the internationalization of the rights and privileges associated with the indigenous, the concept became contentious and problematic, subject to critical

challenges in India. It is argued that in a vast country like India, including the Northeast, with a complex history of invasions and successive waves of migration, it is near impossible to identify the first or original settlers. Therefore, either there are no indigenous peoples or alternatively all Indians are indigenous (Beteille 1998). However, academicians and activists discouraged such blanket rejection of indigenous people. For instance, Xaxa suggested that to determine the indigenous, there needs to be a distinction between settlements in the context of the country as a whole and settlements within its regions. He further argued that tribal articulation of indigenous status is not so much about whether they are the original inhabitants, but about the expression of the yearning to have a homeland of their own over which they have prior rights and power over resources. The denial of territorial rights and privileges to tribal communities by a dominant regional community has prompted the former to adopt the idea of indigenous people. Hence, aspects of marginalization, dispossession and deprivation are built into the discourse of indigeneity (Xaxa 1999).

Ethnic homeland, territoriality and indigeneity have become recurrent themes in the post-colonial politics of Northeast India. To a certain extent, they are mechanisms of resistance for the indigenous ethnic groups, who are apprehensive about becoming a minority in the face of massive immigration in a frontier region. But the colonial spatial order that fixed ethnic groups to certain physical locations has greatly shaped the notions of territoriality and indigeneity. Thus, the politics of indigeneity and territoriality aimed to defend the fences and walls that colonial rulers had erected, and it was reflected in both official policy discourse and the political imagination of local ethnic activists (Baruah 2008; Weiner 1978). In 1874, the Indian legislature passed a Scheduled Districts Act, beginning the policy of isolation of tribes. The Government of India Act of 1919 aimed to define the level and scope of isolation, and introduced the idea of a “backward tract”, later changed into “excluded areas”, where laws enacted by the Indian legislature applicable in the rest of British India would not operate. Afterward, the Government of India Act of 1935 came up with “excluded and partially excluded areas”. So, the government identified the hill regions of Assam province as backward tracts, including Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Mikirs, north Cachar, Naga, and Lushai hills (Talukdar 1987). The Constitution of independent India kept most of the provisions of the 1935 Act, with little modification. It also introduced a distinction between tribal areas of Assam (five of

the Northeastern states today) put under the Sixth Schedule, and the rest of tribal areas in the country, put under the Fifth Schedule. When proposing his ideas, G.N. Bordoloi, the chairman of the Constituent Assembly Subcommittee that drafted the Sixth Schedule, cited the uncertain socio-political circumstances in the area at the time of independence as justification. He emphasized the need for ongoing protection due to the indigenous people's concerns about being overrun by 'outsiders'. The Sixth Schedule established autonomous districts and autonomous regions within those districts, with elected councils that have the authority to levy some taxes, set up tribunals for the handling of tribal disputes, and enact laws that are in accordance with local culture and customs (Baruah 2007).

The outbreak of insurgency in different corners of the region indicated that the process of Autonomous District Councils formation proceeded the way Constitution-makers had not anticipated. The government recognized a growing threat to national security in this frontier area, beginning with the China War, when both internal and external 'enemies' came together. Since then, the thrust of Indian policy was on nationalizing this frontier space and extending the institutions of the state all the way to the international border. This created a new federal regional structure, where the area is divided into several mini-states, each of which has the same institutions as any other Indian state government. The most significant aspect of this new regional order, however, is that most seats in the state legislatures of these states are reserved for candidates from the ST, which further consolidates the idea of exclusive ethnic homeland. There is a perception that ST communities with the most comprehensive protective discrimination have benefited economically and have managed to insulate themselves from being overrun by immigrants to a reasonable extent. Ethnic groups, including STs and others who do not have a homeland, aspire to have one, while activists of the existing homeland have fervently defended what they perceive as their entitlement (Baruah 2003). There is a connection between the notion of homeland and the politics of displacement. Groups that belong and those who do not are created in every geographical entity by the discourse of homelands. Therefore, minority groups of all kinds—both tribal and non-tribal—as well as any other community run the risk of succumbing to this politics of displacement. These conflicts generally have as their underpinnings the need to defend an existing homeland from the claims of a rival group, the endeavour to establish a new

homeland, or the worry that one's homeland or a portion of it may be claimed by another. Bringing an ethnically defined group scattered in many states into a homeland, maintaining the territorial integrity of a homeland, creating a new one for a group that does not yet have one are all part of this political discourse.

To sum up, the colonial protective discrimination policies for the people living in isolated regions, once described as "backward tracts", continued in the post-colonial Indian Constitution as the Sixth Schedule, and it has not only given rise to, but also normalized the notion of exclusive homeland for certain ethnically defined groups. These exclusivist claims feed the politics of indigeneity and extremely divisive notions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and this is the context in which ethno-political conflict and violence has taken place in the Northeast in general and Mizoram in particular.

From a 'Tribe' to Indigenous: A New Era of Mizo-Chakma Conflict

The entry of indigenous questions in the Mizo-Chakma conflict is a continuation of the long-standing ethnic divide. It suggests that they are not merely a competition and debate about who is the first settler in the land, but involve more complex elements. Indigenous movements, discourses, and politics form an identity and platform for culturally different, politically dominated, local minority groups who struggle against historical wrong and marginalization. It proved to be a powerful tool for the oppressed people to demand indigenous rights, privileges, and protection thought necessary to correct historical injustices, exclusions, and dispossessions. In the context of conflict with Mizos and political aspirations that continue to be dismissed, it is not surprising that the Chakmas and their various organizations claim indigeneity in Mizoram based on their ST status. At the same time, it is crucial to recognize how exclusivist politics of othering, especially by the dominant and numerically dominating groups, encourage more polarization and conflict through indigenous claims. Many academics associated it with an identity rooted in blood and soil and an inward-looking, essentialist worldview (Béteille 1998; Guha 1999). It follows the assertion that indigenousness supports and amplifies other associated conceptions that are just as divisive and conflict-ridden, including the concept of ethnic homeland and politics of belonging. Thus, indigenous claims play a crucial role in escalating

and prolonging an ongoing ethnic conflict by presenting new contexts, narratives, and justifications for exclusion.

When one of the main ethnic communities in a plural society can claim prerogative by virtue of their indigenous status or prior settlement, the clash between such claim and other values like equality of rights of citizens makes ethnic conflict almost inevitable (Weiner 1978; Horowitz 1985; Esman 1985). When members of a group claim indigenous status, they mean something beyond an assertion that their ancestors were the original inhabitants of the land in question, they claim to be the rightful owners and to have an entitlement to certain prerogatives and often depict other ethnic communities as immigrants or guests who must accept the rules and conditions made by the owners. Claims of homeland and indigeneity are also instigated by other circumstances like colonial experiences and demographic changes (Carroll 1994). For instance, the Mizos feel that the land belongs to them because the British ruled indirectly through the institution of Mizo chieftainship and relinquished the ownership to their hand. When the MNF movement declared Mizoram as land for the Mizos only, it made an exclusive claim of homeland by referring to such colonial experience, and the other ethnic groups like Chakmas are bound to be affected.

From one point of view, conflict of indigeneity is related to the struggle for control over resources, particularly land, government jobs and economic opportunities. This is evident from the claims of MZP which held that prerogatives should be kept for the indigenous community. In the episode of conflict over the issue of medical and engineering seats, the notion of indigeneity is invoked to acquire total reservations for the Mizos, and to redefine the Category I of local residents through the governmental mechanisms to make competition favourable for the Mizos. It is an interesting fact to note that the Chakmas have been getting seats under Category I, with a gradual rise in numbers from 2010 onwards. This increase is what alarmed the MZP which from then on claimed that Category I is the exclusive preserve for the Mizos alone. This has exposed how indigenous claims are rooted in the struggle for resource control. Conflict centred on land also makes an important aspect of struggle over resources as land apart from being an economic asset, is also the centre of people's social and cultural life (Fernandes 2008). This is also closely connected with instrumental rationality. This argument draws from an instrumental approach to

ethnicity and ethnic conflict. Ethnic identity is viewed as little more than a tool or instrument utilized by ethnic leaders, elites, or politicians to compete for material possessions like political influence or economic opportunities. From this view, people follow ethnic leaders when doing so serves their interests, and leaders endeavour to foster ethnic unity when it works for them. The implication is that leaders strategically exploit ethnicity in order to direct their community or followers towards their own goals. The conflicts themselves are typically not ethnic in nature, but motivated by other issues like economic disputes which are later reinterpreted as having been ethnically motivated for political purposes (Brass 1991; Hardin 1995). For instance, the political leaders or student organisation leaders may mobilize the people along ethnic lines and manipulate them to be pitted against other groups over certain issues, to turn them into vote banks or to climb political ladder.

It is not the case that just because two groups in a society belong to different ethnicities they are bound to get into conflict. However, ethnicity itself can generate conflict by associating groups with different cultures. Here, culture refers to the collective framework of meaning that people use to make sense of the world (Geertz 1973). Thus, conflicts are not primarily about the participants' struggle for material goods but about cultural and symbolic issues (Yinger 1997; Ross 2007; Kaufman 2011). The symbolic use of particular cultural markers by a community to set itself apart from other communities is another aspect of ethnic identity. It involves the claims of being superior in status and position in society in relation to other groups (Karna 2008). In this case, indigeneity conflict can be labelled as cultural conflicts because cultural differences can divide ethnic groups. Therefore, another perspective of looking at the Mizo-Chakma conflict is through cultural and symbolic lenses. So, although the question of indigeneity is the central issue here, it can also be a context or platform in which different layers of conflict play out. In other words, indigeneity masks a deeper core of interests, which can be connected to either primordial affinities or instrumental interpretation.

Research Questions

Certain research questions rather than preconceived hypotheses guide this research. They are briefly summarized below. The general aim of this research is to investigate

and understand the nature and dynamics of ethnic conflict between the Mizos and Chakmas in Mizoram. In this, the first set of questions are, what is the nature and history of the relationship between the two communities? What is the historical and political background including colonial and pre-colonial, and contemporary contexts in which ethnic tension between the two have developed? And how does this affect contemporary politics?

Secondly, how do the majority ethnic Mizo communities come to regard the minority Chakmas as 'foreigner'? Was this perception always there? Why is their presence perceived by the Mizo as a threat and demographic imbalance when their numbers are small as compared to the Mizos?

Thirdly, how do the Chakmas respond to the Mizo's 'anti-foreigner' rhetoric and movements? How do they position themselves in Mizoram? Do they consider themselves immigrants or indigenous to the state?

Fourthly, why does the politics of indigeneity take the central stage in the Mizo-Chakma conflict? How does it inform different aspects of the conflict? Does it have to do with actual competition and debate about who is indigenous? Or is it a pretext for something else?

Fifth, is the Mizo-Chakma conflict instrumental in nature? If so, to what extent and manner? and what are the roles of political parties, leaders of civil society, student organisations and their leaders?

And lastly, other than being a struggle for resources and competition that are valued in common by the two communities, could the conflict be also seen as the culmination of cultural conflict and differences where the cultural values, symbols, worth and legitimacy matter and take precedence over the tangible goods and material benefits?

Literature Reviews

The review of literature projects a variety of relevant writings pertaining to concepts and theoretical understanding of indigeneity, ethnicity, and ethnic conflict, and how these played out in the Indian context, especially in the Northeast regions. More importantly, it also highlights how these concepts are challenged, modified, and problematized to better address the shifting context of the study. It also throws some

light on the literature that deals with the history and politics of the two communities in the study.

Ever since the publication of Horowitz's *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, there has been such an explosion of research on ethnicity and ethnic conflict in the field of social science. In this regard, the book can be considered as a seminal text in this particular area. Horowitz (1985) takes the broader view of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, which is the ascriptive character of ethnicity. According to him, ethnic groups are those who identify themselves as belonging together in a group on the basis of race, common descent, language, religion or tribe, or some combination of these, and ethnic conflict refers to all conflict based on these ascriptive identities. A broader understanding is incorporated into this work. He reviewed the earlier approaches to the study of ethnic conflict, namely modernization theory, economic theory and cultural pluralism theory and rejected them for their shortcomings. Specifically, he rebuts the economic theory saying that economic conflict rarely coincides with ethnic conflict due to ethnic division of labour. While he understates economic competition as a source of conflict, this research refuses to underplay economic angle and considers the relevance of the economic theory as a subtext in the context of Mizoram. However, Horowitz's group psychological explanation of ethnic conflict, especially his notion of group comparison of worth and legitimacy as a source of conflict, remains a powerful explanatory tool for this research (Horowitz 1985).

Fredrik Barth's edited *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* introduced an approach to the study of ethnicity which focuses on the interconnectedness of ethnic identities and on-going negotiations of boundaries between groups of people, with a view that such groups are not discontinuous cultural isolates or bound entities. The interdependency of ethnic groups is stressed, and in this view ethnic identities are the product of continuous ascriptions and self-ascriptions. Barth (1969) explained that ethnic groups are formed to the extent that actors use ethnic identity to categorise themselves and others for the purpose of interaction or confrontation. A distinction can be made between the subjective view and the objective view of ethnicity, where ethnic groups are defined both by the cultural modalities of their behaviour including most importantly their linguistic behaviour, and by their subjective views of themselves and each other (Barth 1969). Ethnic groups are situationally defined in

relation to their social interactions with other groups, and the boundaries established and maintained between them as a result of these interactions. The interactive view of ethnicity and the instrumental nature of identity bears relevance to this research. However, it is majorly employed in the context of ethnic identity formation that has begun in the colonial pasts.

In his book, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Anthony Smith (1986) stresses the role of what he called "ethnie" or ethnic communities as precursors of nations and highlights the power of symbols, rituals, values, myths, memories, traditions and ways of life as a key component in the construction of shared identity among members of a particular group. The roles of these components are of great relevance as they are powerful differentiators and reminders of the unique culture and fate of the ethnic community. This formulation has guided the cultural and symbolic explanation of ethnic conflict in this research. Of the same relevance is his idea of an ethnic community which he defined as a "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity" (Smith 1986, 32). According to Smith, such communities have been widespread in all eras of history, and they have been at least as important as other forms of socio-cultural organisation. But this is not to claim that they are continuous and universal, but persistent and widespread.

Deriving from this substantive notion of "ethnie" elaborated by Smith, T.K. Oommen characterized ethnicity or ethnic group as having, a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity. According to Oommen, an ethnic group becomes a nation if it acquires its own territory (Oommen 1997).

However, this is not necessarily the case in the context of the Northeast region (Calhoun 1993). As Sajal Nag (2014) rightly suggests in his article *Resisting Nation-state: Ethnic Upsurge in Post-colonial Northeast India*, ethnicity is a modern development in which mobilization was on the basis of pre-modern concept of solidarity. It was an identity forged by certain kinship groups who failed to qualify as a nation, to counter the oppression of advanced nationalities. Because they drew from pre-colonial notions of kinship, solidarity, and identities, it had a tribal rather than national character. However, ethnic identification was more than just a tribal kinship-based identity; it was a generic attempt to create one identity amidst multiplicity of

tribes inside, imitating national discourse and resembling nationality. Toying with nationality was a gimmick for tactical and political purposes (Nag 2014). This conceptualization fittingly describes the political situations, especially in the case of Mizo and the MNF movement.

Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff's edited book *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict* discussed a variety of issues pertaining to ethnic conflict such as the connection between ethnicity and religion, race and ethnicity, ethnicity as generators of conflict, and so on. The theoretical discussions, frameworks used and a variety of concepts are directly relevant for this work (Cordell and Wolff 2011). Similarly, Ashutosh Varshney's chapter *Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict* in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* briefly summarized the different traditions of explanatory inquiry on ethnicity and ethnic conflict, and discussed their weaknesses as well as the responses of the scholars. Four approaches namely essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism, and institutionalism are discussed (Varshney 2007). This research heavily draws from this, especially instrumental approach and primordialism, and they are the central explanatory tools used in the Mizo-Chakma conflict. Many academics strive to create a compromise between the two theories because they recognize that neither pure primordialism nor pure instrumentalist interpretation can withstand empirical scrutiny. It is argued here that the two approaches need to be integrated in such a way that the instrumentalist account utilizes primordialist knowledge. To comprehend contemporary ethnic issues, one must realize the relevance of history. This strategy assumes that, even while ethnicity may be used or manipulated to gain an advantage over another ethnic group or to control the other, it must be crystallized by historicizing the past in order to inspire mobilization and a sense of solidarity.

There have been several works on the notion of indigeneity, its worldwide movements and evolution as well as its criticisms and critiques (Gray 1995; Kingsbury 1995; Bowen 2000; Karlsson 2001 et al.). The late 1960s saw the emergence of indigenous movements of native communities across the Americas and Oceania, where they faced widespread marginalization and discrimination due to European colonization and immigration. As a result of these movements, the term indigenous peoples acquired global significance. The discourse spread beyond its particular origin, and developed diverse character and application in different

contexts including Asia. It was Bengt Karlsson (2003) who documented the scope and operation of the indigenous movement in the initial period and argued that the meaning of indigenous itself has developed through a dialogue among the non-indigenous bodies, indigenous peoples themselves from different backgrounds, and global institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank (Karlsson 2003). Despite the extreme diversity among these actors, as Carrin, Kanungo and Gerard (2014) noted in their work, *The Politics of Ethnicity in India, Nepal and China*, the movements shared common issues such as, land, distinctive cultures, histories of invasion and continuing marginalization, aspiration for self-determination, and rights and entitlements for reparation of historical wrongs.

Scholars like Andrew Gray (1995) who engaged with indigeneity in Asia, observed that while it was recognized in Europe, it remains contested in Asia where the governments refuse its relevance by citing differences in historical trajectories from those European settings (Gray 1995). Benedict Kingsbury (1998) called this the "Asian Controversy", a situation wherein the governments acknowledge the concept in the western contexts but not in their own. He highlighted three arguments against the use of indigeneity in Asia. First, that its definition was inescapably linked to European colonialism, made it neo-colonialism in Asia. Secondly, it was impractical to identify who first settled after centuries of mixing and assimilation. And thirdly, it was argued that rights and privileges based on historical priority might invite conflicting claims leading to communal and exclusionary politics (Kingsbury 1998). In his work, *Indigeneity in Asia: An Emerging But Contested Concept*, Ian Baird (2016) summarized that this exclusionary tendency of indigenous claims and the idea of self-determination attached to it that could challenge national unity, were the major concerns of these nation-states (Baird, Indigeneity in Asia: An Emerging But Contested Concept 2016). Nevertheless, the concept has significantly expanded in Asia, with varying degree of acceptance, and the traditional idea of indigenous as the 'First peoples' has been reconceptualized in that context as colonized, historically persecuted and disenfranchised yet culturally distinct communities within a nation-state (Baird 2011; Morton 2017). Thus, rather than being seen as a descriptive and analytical category, indigenousness is more commonly seen as a political and relational concept signifying an unequal power structure between the marginalized and the state.

In India also, indigeneity is such a controversial term. The contested issue revolves around the question of whether the Indian tribal communities qualify for the indigenous peoples. The well-known anthropologist K.S. Singh (1995) in his article, *Reflections on the Current Debate Concerning the Indigenous Peoples*, reflected the position of the Indian government that elements of indigenousness such as historical continuity, distinctiveness and non-domination were simply not suitable for the Indian context (K. S. Singh 1995). Andre Beteille (1998) also believed that it was misleading to have a blanket categorization of tribes as indigenous since India witnessed a complex relationship between the tribals and the non-tribals leading to a dynamic cultural transformation, rather than a complete eradication of tribes (Beteille 1998). The majority of debates about Indian indigenous designation emphasized the difficulty in identifying the region's original inhabitants in light of the intricate historical migration and settlement patterns that have occurred on the subcontinent. In his work, *Tribes as Indigenous People of India,* a renowned sociologist Virginius Xaxa (1999) also problematized the idea that tribes or Scheduled Tribes can be regarded as indigenous peoples of India. He stressed the difficulty in qualifying the idea through certain measures such as prior/first settlement and being outside the ambit of civilization. He suggested that indigeneity can be awarded if there is a distinction between a specific region and the country as a whole. For him, the claims of indigenous status of such people reflects their yearning to have an ethnic homeland of their own (Xaxa 1999). Despite these conceptual problems, tribes in India do not stop associating themselves with indigeneity. Sanjib Baruah (2008) also argued that claims of ethnic homeland, territoriality and indigeneity have become a trend in post-colonial Northeast politics. It acts as a mechanism for the people to express their fear of becoming a minority in their land in the wake of massive immigration in the border region. And its roots go back to the colonial spatial practice of assigning ethnic groups to particular geographical spaces, which was continued in post-colonial India (Baruah 2008). This argument also reflects the ethnic situation in Mizoram as both the conflicting groups made such claims with the desire for an exclusive homeland.

The idea of indigenous peoples and global movements also stirred a debate among academics. There are those who embrace the concept as well as those who critique the idea and its implications. For instance, scholars like Guha (1999) cautioned that restructuring society based on assertions of genuine indigeneity and

genealogy will only result in a disastrous outcome like the 'sons of the soil' movements and ethnic conflict, while Bowen (2000) challenged the universality of the concept (Guha 1999; Bowen 2000). Adam Kuper's (2003) *The Return of the Native*, also pointed out the difficulty of identifying the indigenous peoples and criticized the concept by highlighting its connection with essentialist and racist ideology of descent (Kuper 2003). This provoked critical responses from other scholars who accused Kuper of neglecting the history of extreme discrimination and dispossession endured by the people, and argued that indigenous claims were based not on racist principles but on equal acceptance of the economic and social bases of life and reversal of an ongoing marginalization (Kenrick and Lewis 2004a, 2004b). Drawing from the Barthian notion, Sidsel Saugestad (2001b) proposes that the relation of domination and oppression between the state, especially if seen as embodying the dominant non-indigenous majority and the indigenous peoples, is what defines the concept (Saugestad 2001b). In a bid to take a middle stance, Alan Barnard (2006) in his paper *Kalahari Revisionism, Vienna and the 'Indigenous Peoples' Debate*, acknowledged the conceptual and definitional problem but favoured its reconceptualization as political and relational notion, that would provide tool for the oppressed people in their struggle (Barnard 2006).

Yet many academics have problematized the political utility of indigeneity and pointed out the unsettling implications and allusions that these claims have. Since indigeneity has come to the global limelight, Alpha Shah (2007) observed that the communities were rapidly connected with environmentalism and resource sustainability due to their cultural distinctiveness, special relationship with land and traditional knowledge. Indigenous way of life was portrayed as an alternative modernity in the era of global capitalism and consumerism (Shah 2007). In this context, it was argued that the concept remained essentialized and romanticized as being the 'other' of modernity. Willem Schendel (2011) showed how such romantic celebration of indigeneity intensified and escalated the politics of belonging that justify exclusion of non-locals and strangers by claiming historical connection and origins to the land, especially in the South Asian countries (Schendel 2011). The likes of which was discussed by Myron Weiner's (1978) work, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*, in the Assam Movement during the 1980s that sought to expel Bangladeshi immigrants. It was an expression of the politics of belonging

marked by territorialized ethnic identities and claims of exclusive homeland (Weiner 1978). Indigenous claims also support the notion of defending one's homeland against 'outsiders', which is a part of the politics of belonging. These claims have aggressively focused upon geography, especially in Asia. Thus, in most cases it has involved driving out the intruders who were facilitated by the colonial policies (Castree 2004). All these prospects and implications arising out of the politicization of indigeneity, are incorporated in the analysis of the current indigenous conflict in Mizoram.

On the issue of the historical and political relationship between the Mizos and the Chakmas ranging from the colonial to the contemporary time, there already are numerous studies, including both Mizo and Chakma writers as well as other non-local scholars. Mizo writers like Laldova (2014) gives an account of the tribal populations living in the Chittagong hills including Chakmas and Mizos, and their history and relationship among themselves, while others like Lianchhinga (1992) focuses solely on the Chakmas and their association with Mizoram, without the intention of politicizing history (Lianchhinga 1992; Laldova 2014). On the other hand, other Mizo writers like Lalthara (2017) and JV. Hluna (2020) analyzed contemporary political history and openly argued against the claims of Chakmas in Mizoram (Lalthara 2017; Hluna 2020). Roluahpuia's (2016) article *Ethnic Tension in Mizoram: Contested Claims, Conflicting Positions,* also examines the recent Mizo-Chakma conflict in its latest form, the politics of indigenous claims. He argues that the recent episode is a sudden outbreak of old hostilities, the origin of which is hard to trace. At the same time, the conflict is also strongly related to economic and resource competitions (Roluahpuia 2016).

Similarly, Chakma writers and activists like Jyoti Chakma (2015) and Paritosh Chakma (2019) also present the Chakma narratives and maintain that their claims of rights and indigeneity in Mizoram are defensible politically and historically (J. B. Chakma 2015; Chakma 2019). Among the Chakma literature, the work of S.P. Taludar remains one of the authoritative texts. His books, *The Chakmas: Life and Struggle*, and *Chakmas: An Embattled Tribe*, published in 1987 and 1994 respectively, describe a brief history of the Chakmas, their origins, stories of migration, administration under colonial rule, and how they fared in the successive regimes of Pakistan and later Bangladesh, and then in the state of Mizoram. His

account of how the history of the Chakmas has intertwined with that of the Mizos and how they live side by side in a contiguous border region and how they now come to be part of one territory called Mizoram, are illuminating (Talukdar 1987, 1994). Apart from the Mizo and Chakma literature, there are those that provide a non-local perspective on the historical and contemporary political issues. A good example is Deepak Singh's (2010) *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* that discusses the historical struggle and political claims of the Chakmas in India and Bangladesh. While covering many issues of relationship and conflict, all these works were mostly descriptive, scattered and lacked proper analysis through established frameworks and conceptualizations. And moreover there is hardly any pre-existing work that specifically deals with the conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas. Thus this thesis put together all the significant points in history and contemporary politics, along with other primary data and sources, to give a comprehensive view of the problem.

Methodology: Narrating the Field

This research seeks to understand the ethnic conflict between the Mizos and Chakmas in the state of Mizoram, and to investigate its nature, dynamics, and causes. The conflict is not a new issue as its root can be traced to the pre-independent period. Seeing ethnicity and ethnic conflict as being produced historically and discursively, and in a bid to strike a balance between the primordialist view and instrumentalism, this work recognizes the instrumentality of history or the past as one of the key resources to understand the present ethnic identity and conflict arising from that identity. Thus, this research investigates the history of the conflict along with the contemporary manifestation. Implicit in this use of history is the idea that ethnic conflict is the product of prolonged historical processes.

In contemporary times, the conflict has appeared in the public domain in the form of contested indigeneity, the question of who are the indigenous inhabitants of Mizoram, and since then the politics of indigeneity have taken the central stage of the conflict. Apart from the instrumental use of history, attempts are made to address these contemporary issues from other different perspectives like the economic or resources viewpoint, instrumentalist thinking, and political and cultural lens. To do so, this work involved an ethnographic fieldwork among the Mizos and Chakmas, to

gain insight of the insider's or native's views of the problem, thereby incorporating the subjective reality and perspectives of both the community members. Central to this use of ethnographic endeavour is the notion of self-ascription. Their ideas and articulations of who they are, how they see themselves and perceive the nature of their relationship, how they understand the conflict and how they claim their indigeneity, are considered. This is in response to a call to regard ethnography as a thick description, a move to grasp a particular meaning behind social actions and beliefs as well as their symbolic import (Geertz 1973). In addition, the official positions of the state government of Mizoram, as well as the views of other stakeholders like political parties, civil society organisations and student's organisations, are also taken into account.

As a methodology, ethnography privileges an engaged, contextually rich, and nuanced type of qualitative research in which daily 'thick' interactions between the researcher/s and the researched constitute the lifeblood of the data (Falzon 2009, 1). Rooted in the ideal of participant observation, it involves different situational techniques like writing field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), interview, audio or video recording, examination of local literature, participation in an ordinary conversation and interaction, observation of community events- meetings, ceremonies, protest etc. (Wedeen, 2010, p. 257; Kubik, 2009). Ethnographic method also requires what is called a 'sensibility' (Pader 2006; Yanow 2006), "an approach that cares -with possible emotional engagement that applies- to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality" (Schatz 2009a, 5) and juxtaposes that meaning and experience with prevailing scholarly themes, problems and concepts (Wedeen 2010). It is commonly known in the field work and interview experiences that the existing theories with which the researcher is equipped do not necessarily capture the reality of the situation being studied. This reflects an inherent tension between theory (privileged and so-called expert forms of knowledge) and empirical material (situated and experiential knowledge). In order to arrive at a meaningful account of whatever is being studied, these tensions need to be resolved. Therefore, it is necessary to listen to participants and relate their embodied local knowledge to the concerns of established political scientists (Zirakzadeh 2009). In this context, a researcher is expected to be reflexive, that is, to reflect on the techniques and process of data collection, interpretation process of such data,

theoretical paradigms, as well as the social context of the field where data is being gathered. However, apart from engagement with data, reflexivity also entails researchers accessing and engaging with local interpretations and understandings of the subject being investigated and using such local knowledge to inform his or her interpretations and research (Wilkinson 2006).

One of the significant aspects of reflexivity is the relationship between the ethnographer and his or her subjects of study. In the usual sense of the word, ethnography has always been a tool to study the 'others' and their culture. Implicit in this construction therefore is the idea that anthropologists or ethnographers are thought to study the alien culture of others people which further implies the polarization between 'foreign' ethnographers and 'native' ethnographers, who are believed to investigate their own culture from within. Scholars have argued against this dichotomy between 'insider' and 'outsider' and questioned the very possibility of anyone being an authentic insider (Aguilar, 1981; Messerschmidt, 1981). In order to bridge this gap, others emphasize on the shifting identities and quality of relations between the writer and the people they seek to represent- are they merely viewed as fodder for statements about a generalized 'others' or are they accepted as a subjects with voices, views and dilemmas, and call for *enactment of hybridity*, "writing that depicts authors as minimally bicultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life" (Narayan 1993, 672). In this regard, it is crucial to address the location of the ethnographer in this research. As a member of the Mizo community, one of the two communities being studied, doing ethnographic work in Mizoram is investigating one's own society, a study from within, at least partially. Instead of delving into the question of whether an insider's view is more authentic, the embodied knowledge, familiarity and cognizance that come from the researcher's position as 'native' had been set aside while approaching the field. Therefore, this work explored themes of ethnicity, ethnic conflict, and contested indigeneity in Mizoram, through ethnographic categories such as immersion, participant observation, reflexivity, sensibility, and self-ascription. In recent times, conventional ethnography that involves the idea and practice of a relatively long term stay in a single field site, has given way to the emergence of what is called multi-sited ethnography. It is an attempt to study social phenomena that cannot be accounted for by focussing on a single site (Marcus 1995). In multi-sited

ethnography, research involves following people, connections, associations, and relationships across space, and field through which the ethnographer moves via sojourns in two or more places (Falzon 2009, 2). To the extent that this work involves more than one field site, it can be characterized as a multi-sited ethnography.

Most of the primary data is collected from the field, mostly in Aizawl, the capital of the state and Chakma Autonomous District Council areas including Chawngte town. The former is the prime location for the Mizos and the latter for the Chakmas. This was also the most intense and eventful part of the fieldwork which was conducted roughly from October 2020 to March 2021. Other strategic sites were also visited for a brief period in between, including places like Saizawh West, Lunglei and West Phaileng. Different sections of people from the two communities who have stakes in the issue, including students, student leaders, laymen, local politicians, civil society leaders, members of voluntary organisations, government officials and so on, were engaged in this study, and their interpretations and understandings were observed and incorporated.

As it was the height of the global covid pandemic, reaching out to people from other towns and localities, let alone travelling, was highly discouraged. During this time, attempts were made to connect people through telephonic conversation. Even after travel restriction were eased, most people would rather avoid having a conversation or engagement with a stranger, which made the task extremely difficult. In the meantime, one had to resort back to telephone correspondence to interview people. After this ordeal, fieldwork finally headed towards Aizawl where an informant who also has research experiences, provided vital information about contacts of people like prominent former and current civil society leaders, ex-student activists, ex-MLAs, as well as academics and social activists who have been involved in the issue. Some of them also shared confidential documents and materials with the researcher. There was also an opportunity to have an interaction with Chakma student leaders and people from Chakma House in Aizawl. In these, the conversations sought to understand how people perceived the history of the Chakma-Mizo relationship and the contemporary political climate. The researcher usually initiated and slowly encouraged conversation while giving enough space for the other to express opinion and speculate, rather than asking direct questions one after another. Among the Mizo interviewees, it was done in Mizo language while the Chakma respondents either

spoke Chakma or English. The need to follow covid appropriate behaviour and constant physical distancing made the effort even more challenging.

After a few months, fieldwork eventually moved towards Chawngte, about 300 kilometres from Aizawl, also the headquarters of Chakma Autonomous District Council. This time, it was with a research assistant. As road travel tends to be more complicated and time-consuming, especially in the southern and western regions, the preferred mode was air travel by helicopter, albeit more expensive. Upon arrival, the local Presbyterian Church pastor's residence was the first stop. Then afterwards, a Mizo Christian missionary who also happened to be one of the informants, arranged lodging at Circuit House run by the state government. The town is divided into three sections along ethnic as well as administrative lines, Chawngte L, Chawngte P and Chawngte C. The letters signified Lunglei (Mizo), Pawi/Lai and Chakma respectively. These sections were again put under three separate administrative units: the Lunglei District, the Lai Autonomous District Council and the Chakma Autonomous District Council. Although the town is a shared geographical space, there is no indication of unity or solidarity between the people of L and P sections combined (the Mizo residents) and the Chakma side, which itself speaks volumes about the relationship of the two communities.

While the local informants, both Mizos and Chakmas, helped navigate the direction of the fieldwork, participant observations and people's fortuitous remarks also guided in locating strategic places and persons. This directed the researcher to people shared an interest in the political history of Mizo and Chakma, former and incumbent officials of the District Council, civil leaders and Village Council members, office-bearers of Mizo and Chakma student bodies, as well as those who had first-hand knowledge and involvement in the Mizo struggle for independence. Outside of the Chawngte township, the researcher also visited villages with Mizo residents surrounded by Chakma villages. It was learned that for those Mizos living in Chakma dominated areas, the ethnic tension was even more acute. After returning from the Chakma area to the northern side, fieldwork again headed towards towns in the western parts of Mizoram, including Dapchhuah, West Phaileng and Mamit, where many Mizos from Chittagong Hills migrated and settled. Invaluable information and accounts provided by these peoples filled up gaps in the analyses.

Overall, the entire field trip enjoyed full-cooperation and participation from those who were involved with it.

In between the field journey, another set of primary data, spanning from the colonial to post-colonial period, were collected from the Mizoram State Archives (MSA) and the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) library in Aizawl. The State Archives in Aizawl contained easily accessible materials that consisted of colonial era letters exchanged between officials, government orders, memos, notifications, tour reports, memorandums and petitions, and other such documents from the recent past. The use of this data and information allowed for a nuanced approach to history on the frontier and the connection between British policies and inter-ethnic relationships. In addition, archival material found in the CYMA library included other relevant publications, brochures, statistics and souvenir magazines from the state government and civil society organizations. The secondary materials of this work mostly consist of books, journal articles, newspapers, and magazines written in both English and Mizo. This research is a qualitative one, and as far as the research questions are concerned, they can be characterized as descriptive questions which seek an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon of ethnic conflict. For theoretical analyses, it employs an eclectic research approach with a multi-theoretical framework. The two ethnic communities in Mizoram, the Mizos and Chakmas who have been in a conflicting relationship, and their contemporary relationships, are the subject matter of this work.

Chapterization and Conclusion

There are five main chapters in this work, in addition to the introductory chapter and the conclusion. The introductory chapter situates the state of Mizoram and its people, outlining the general ideas about ethnic composition, demography and history. It also highlights literature reviews, theoretical frameworks and concepts, methodology, chapterization and research questions involved in this thesis. The first chapter, titled "Indigeneity, Ethnicity and Conflict: A Conceptual Framework" explores the conceptual background of indigeneity and ethnicity as different but connected and overlapping conceptions of identity. It describes the history of the indigenous discourse and shows how concept spread to other continents, particularly Asia. The arguments and discussions over whether tribal communities in India, particularly

those in the Northeast, should be included in the category of "indigenous people" is then highlighted. The second section of the chapter discusses theoretical investigations and approaches to ethnicity and conflict and makes the suggestion that possibly the two major approaches, instrumentalism and primordialism, might be connected. Finally, it problematizes indigenous claims and makes an effort to establish a conceptual linkage between it and ethnic conflict by highlighting the possible downside of indigeneity. It suggests that indigenous claims have become a new tool in the already raging struggle and conflict.

In the second chapter, "Identity Formation: History, Migration and Ethnic Compositions in Mizoram", the history of the Mizos and the Chakmas from the pre-colonial period to the post-colonial nation-state formation, the accounts of migration and shared pasts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, and how they come to inhabit what is now known as Mizoram, have been discussed. In doing so, it shows how the colonial rules in its various forms and its interaction with the locals served as a cultural tool of identity formation. It makes the case that colonial interference, both in the Chittagong Hills and the Lushai Hills, with its stress on fixity, created the environment for the development of identities according to colonial norms. Through this process, the hill dwellers—including the previously migrating Mizos and Chakmas—came to acquire a territorial ethnic identity based on colonial ideas of fixed territory. This change in thinking about identity—from the idea that it is based on movement and fluidity to the idea that it is based on territoriality—shaped people's perceptions of who they are and where they belong as well as their relationships with others that set them apart. The ways in which post-colonial ethnic claims are being made against the state and other purported 'outsiders', as well as the further articulation of ethnic identity, are influenced by these colonial pasts.

The third chapter, "From Lushai Hills to Mizo District: The Relationship of Mizos and Chakmas in the Colonial Frontiers", outlines the history of contact and contour of the relationship in the context of colonial boundary-making, the Chakma's association with and settlement in the Lushai Hills along with government policies that regulated such population movement, and the changing status of the Chakmas in the new political space after decolonization. Boundaries facilitated running bureaucratic empires, and were drawn by following appropriate physical features,

amenability of rule, practicality of establishing an administrative unit etc. In this exercise, the local inhabitants and their knowledge were given no consideration, which led to confusion and conflict in the border areas later. In Lushai Hills, the strict control of movement and settlements of non-Luseis by the authority resulted in the institutionalization of territorial identity as well as indigenous and nonindigenous communities. Then, in the context of events accompanying the British withdrawal, it was argued that the Mizo-Chakma relationship began to get formalized, marking the inception of Mizo allegations of 'illegal' immigrants and unauthorized settlements of the Chakmas in the Lushai Hills. The birth of Mizo District Council, Pawi-Lakher Regional Council and the political party system brought the relationship into new dimensions. Thus, on the one hand, this resulted in more political inclusion and representation of the Chakmas, but also on the other hand started the Mizo suspicion of an 'illegal' influx that continued to strain the relationship.

The fourth chapter "Mizo Movement for Independence and Chakma Autonomous District Council: The Seeds of Conflict", focuses on the two crucial events in the post-independence period, the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement and formation of Chakma Autonomous District Council, and locates these at the interconnection between primordial thinking and instrumentalism. It shows how more robust ethnic articulations and claims were made possible in Mizoram after the independence and as a result how ethnic tension and conflict developed. Through formalization and recognition of ethnic identities, claims of ethnic homeland are made, which are also at the same time territorial and exclusive, leading to antagonism between the local and the alleged 'outsider'. However, one also has to historicize the past, whether pre-colonial or colonial, in making and solidifying those claims. In the context of the MNF movement and the crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, ethnic relation took a violent turn. In the Mizo district, through politicization of ethnic identity, relations remained hostile especially after the creation of Chakma District Council. Several factors such as, Mizo's claim of influx of Chakma 'foreigners' into Mizoram since 1970s, and attempts to erase 'illegally' enrolled voters, and efforts to undo the Chakma district, resulted in bitter relations and more disagreement.

The fifth chapter, "State, Civil Society and the Politics of Indigeneity" investigates the conflict in the post-statehood period that involved much broader

participation from both sides, constant claims and counter-claims, and the gradual change in the language of conflict albeit connected, from the narrative of 'illegal foreigners' to the questions of indigeneity. Since Mizoram attained statehood in 1987, the ethnic relations between the Mizos and the Chakmas have seen renewed rigours with the entry of multiple players and stakeholders. In this period, the main point of contention concerned the Chakma demand for ethnic homeland in the form of a Union Territory inside Mizoram. The most intense episode began with the MZP movement aiming at driving out an 'illegal foreigner' from the state through government sanctioned electoral roll revision, which was seen by the Chakmas as an attempt to expel them illegally and indiscriminately from Mizoram. However, the MZP activities were to a large extent made ineffective by the state intervention and politicization of the entire affairs. And in the most recent chapter of the conflict, the question of indigeneity comes to occupy the centre stage, with the fundamental discord being who is indigenous and non-indigenous in Mizoram. However, this question involves not only the facts of history, but mostly concerns the political impact and repercussions of such claims of indigeneity. It is argued that in the name of authentic indigeneity, the dominant Mizo community seeks to dissuade Chakma's political ambitions including the formation of an ethnic homeland. Chakmas, challenging the Mizo exclusivist claims by holding that they are also an indigenous, set out to fight for their rights and entitlements, which had historically been denied to them, at par with the Mizos. In a nutshell, indigenous rights and claims could be weaponized at the hands of both the dominant and minority communities. Lastly, the conclusion chapter revisits the research questions and discussion, and reflects on the major themes and insights of the research.

Violent ethnic conflict is a serious impediment to political, social and economic development, and has a devastating impact on human security and well-being. The ethnic tussle in Mizoram is one such long-standing issue that has the potential to turn into an ugly violent conflict. So, understanding why such conflict arises, its nature and dynamics and how it is being sustained, is a very crucial task for the people and society in general. This research, it is believed, can contribute to that endeavour and brings a wider perspective and better grasps on the ethnic issues between the Mizo and the Chakmas.

CHAPTER 1

INDIGENEITY, ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

If real "traditions" are invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and "imagined communities" can become real communities (Anderson 1983), the concepts of ethnicity and indigenous peoples are also of recent inventions that become an increasingly significant notion of community identity. However, the fact that they are of recent origin and are invented does not mean that the communities who identified or recognized as such lack explicit historical consciousness and cultural roots. The term ethnicity first appeared in the English language in the 1950s, while the category of indigenous peoples became politically significant since the late 1960s. Over the past few decades, ethnicity has been at the forefront of discourses on differences and conceptions of identity, proliferated in academics and politics, and quickly replaced other terms like race and nationality as a dominant mode of human association (Hutchinson and Smith 1996). Nowadays, the terms ethnic and indigenous are often used simultaneously to reinvent one's own identity, as countless ethnic communities and groups choose to position themselves as indigenous. This is to expand participation in politics and improve general standing vis-à-vis other citizens and the state. Much of the scholarship and discourse on ethnicity regularly emphasizes the conflicting potential of ethnic communities and the identity and political struggles it tends to draw. So, a discussion of ethnicity is always accompanied by a discussion of ethnic conflict. One must remember, however, that ethnic distinctions by themselves do not necessarily lead to conflict, and that there is no intimate connection between ethnicity and conflict. At the same time, as Horowitz (1985) reminded, the possibility of conflict exists when there are two or more distinct ethnic communities within the territorial state (Horowitz 1985). Even more so when one of the ethnic communities in such society claims indigeneity to assert their dominance over the others or to challenge those who have an upper hand, both in the language of exclusion and privileges (Esman 1985; Carroll 1994; Li 2002; Kuper 2003 et al.). In what follows, this chapter lays down the conceptual framework of these recurrent concepts, themes,

and theories that provide the basis for the fundamental arguments in this work, including indigeneity, ethnicity and ethnic conflict. It discusses the debate, problems, and complexities surrounding these concepts worldwide, and tries to situate the contours and experiences of ethnicity and indigeneity in India in general and Northeast India in particular, within these larger contexts.

The Evolution of Indigenous Peoples: The Experiences of the Americas and Oceania

The terms "indigenous peoples" and "indigeneity" gained momentum through indigenous movements that emerged in the late 1960s throughout the Americas and Oceania, where European colonialism and immigration led to massive discrimination and marginalization of the native communities by the settlers who destroyed their culture, economy, demography, language, and social institutions. With the common theme of self-determination and freedom, the three instances of decolonization of Asia and Africa, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, and the rise of the civil rights movement gave a major impetus to the movement. Thus, the movement basically demanded collective rights to land and culture, and the right to self-determination (Gray 1995). Despite the nation-state's effort to stifle the emergence of their identity, these indigenous representatives from the settler-colonial states continued to assert their identity as indigenous peoples and organized themselves by building networks across the world, campaigning, lobbying, and seeking the attention of international organizations and non-state actors (Srikanth 2014). In fact, it was the activities of these interstate organizations and non-state actors that gave wider acceptance and popularity to the concept of indigenous peoples (Kingsbury 1995).

In the early 1970s, the International Indian Treaty Council of the United States of America and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in Canada were founded as the first international indigenous organizations. It was followed by the founding of the Indian Council of South America, Co-ordinating Body of Indian Peoples, and the Co-ordinating Body of Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon Basin. During the 1980s, with more and more communities seeking recognition as indigenous peoples, claiming their land, identity, and culture, and demanding their rights at the United Nations, the indigenous movement became an international

phenomenon (Gray 1995). There have been various interstate activities concerning indigenous peoples. Since the 1920s, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been working to protect and advance indigenous workers. The major activity of ILO concerning indigenous peoples came in the form of ILO Convention 107 of 1957 followed by a revised version, Convention 169 of 1989, that concerned both indigenous peoples and tribal peoples. The World Bank has also become aware of the impact of their development policies and projects on certain groups. To ensure special protection for such vulnerable groups, the bank adopted as part of its policy an Operational Manual Statement in 1982 that identifies groups as tribal peoples. It was later recast and broadened in 1991 to also apply to those that the bank characterized as indigenous. It would not be entirely wrong to say that the indigenous peoples' movement really took off since the United Nations acknowledged it (Bertrand 2011, 853).

In 1972, a Special Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo, appointed by the UN Sub- Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, studied the issue of discrimination that the indigenous populations face. The final report was submitted in 1986 and became the UN working definition of indigenous peoples (Kingsbury 1998, 419; Burman 2003, 13). The UN also set up the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) in 1982. Since then, the Working Group has held annual gatherings for indigenous peoples, groups and other UN representatives, and proved to be a unique platform to discuss fundamental issues such as land rights, culture, status, self-determination and to initiate dialogue and engagement with states. The Group was also tasked with drafting a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, which was completed in 1993 without adopting a definition of indigeneity. The same year was declared the International Year of World's Indigenous Peoples by the UN General Assembly. After 14 years, the UN General Assembly adopted the draft in 2007 and it became the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples (UNPFIP) were also created in 2000 and 2001 respectively (Das 2015, 12). Along with these global institutions, several regional intergovernmental bodies concerning the affairs of indigenous peoples have sprung up in the Americas and Northern Europe. It is significant to note here that, during the 1970s and 1980s, participation

and attendance at these interstate activities were predominantly from the Americas, New Zealand, and Australia, but rarely from Asia (Kingsbury 1995).

International Definitions of Indigenous: Some Issues

There are three major approaches to international definitions of indigenous peoples. These can be found in the discourses of ILO, World Bank, and UN. While the UN definition and practice has the highest political stakes and widest application, each international discourse is briefly dealt with. Both the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention 107 of 1957 and Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 of 1989, are basically an international legal mechanism with binding standards and provisions for the states to ensure the protection and promotion of indigenous and tribal peoples with respect to equal rights and opportunities, social identity, customs, institutions, land, and environment. As many as 27 countries ratified the Convention 107, while 21 countries ratified the Convention 169. The Convention 107 perceived human progress as evolutionary stages where tribal and indigenous populations occupied the less advanced stage, and regarded these peoples to be later integrated into the national community (International Labour Organization 1996). Following criticism of assimilationist provisions and patronizing tone, a revised version was adopted as Convention 169 in 1989 (B. R. Burman 2003). The term population was also replaced with people. According to Article 1(1) of the Convention 169, it applies to both "tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations" and "indigenous peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions" (International Labour Organization 1996). It also recognized self-identification as a relevant criterion for determining indigeneity.

The World Bank initially used the term tribal peoples to refer to those communities who may require special protection in the wake of implementation of bank-financed development projects. It refers to ethnic groups with stable, low-energy, sustained-yield economy such as shifting farmers, fishermen, herders, or hunter-gatherers who are geographically isolated, unacculturated into the norms of dominant society, non or partly monetized, ethnically and linguistically distinct, closed with one particular territory, possessing indigenous political leadership without national representation. However, the Bank has been criticized for its inadequate protection measures and paternalistic attitude in its policy and its narrower definition of the affected people (Kingsbury 1995, 22-23). Following these criticisms, the bank in 1991 promulgated a new Operational Directive and adopted the term indigenous peoples as an embracing term covering ethnic indigenous peoples, minority tribal groups and scheduled tribes. Accordingly, indigenous peoples are identified by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics- close attachment to ancestral territories and the natural resources; an indigenous language, often different from the national language; self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group; the presence of customary social and political institutions; and primarily subsistence oriented production (World Bank 1991).

While the ILO and World Bank had adopted flexible and expansive definitions of indigenous peoples for their operational and project-related purposes, the UN system, especially UNWGIP and UNPFII, chose not to adopt a formal definition and suggested self-identification as the ultimate criterion (Burman 2003; Das 2015; Morton and Baird 2019). Thus, the Draft Declaration of 1993 as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, lack a precise definition of the term. Such an omission is perhaps politically prudent and necessary if the Declaration is to be acceptable to both indigenous peoples and the states. At the same time, with no functional definition the state can easily ignore the Declaration on the basis of it being inapplicable to them (Kingsbury 1995, 30). Nevertheless, the Draft Declaration and the adopted Declaration recognized the indigenous peoples' individual and collective rights to self-determination understood in international law to determine political status and pursue their development; right to self-definition of their own identity rather than by others; right to maintain and strengthen their socio-

political and cultural institutions without losing the right to participate in the domain of the state; right to traditional resources, land, cultural traditions and customs; right to self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, and others (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1994; United Nations General Assembly 2007). Although not legally binding, they signified an important development of international legal norms, and directed the states to recognize the unique nature of the past injustices and discrimination endured by indigenous peoples and to address these issues by following certain principles (Das 2015; Morton 2017).

Without having a clear definition, the UNWGIP still refers to the tentative definition of the term provided by UN Sub-commission Special Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo.[1] The report underlined five definitional yardsticks: historical connections with pre-colonial societies, self-definition, non-dominance, ethnic identities, and territories. The first three of these need to be further problematized (Kingsbury 1995). Self-definition occupies a prominent place in this report, which says "the right of indigenous peoples themselves to define what and who is indigenous must be recognized" along with the correlative right to determine who is not (Cobo 1987, 28). It also features in the ILO Convention and the World Bank practice (International Labour Organization 1996; World Bank 1991). This is to avoid the idea that recognition of indigenousness is controlled by international bodies and discourse. However, there are certain caveats. First of all, self-identification alone does not determine the applicability of international standards as each international definition also includes objective criteria. For instance, in the ILO Convention 169, objective criteria are set out in Article 1(1), but Article 1(2) says that "self-

[1] The report states that "Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present nondominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. This historical continuity may consist of the continuation, for an extended period reaching into the present, of one or more of the following factors: (a) Occupation of ancestral lands, or at least of part of them; (b) Common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands; (c) Culture in general, or in specific manifestations (such as religion, living under a tribal system, membership of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, life-style, etc.); (d) Language (whether used as the only language, as mother-tongue, as the habitual means of communication at home or in the family, or as the main, preferred, habitual, general or normal language); (e) Residence in certain parts of the country, or in certain regions of the world; (f) Other relevant factors" (Cobo 1987, 29).

identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply" (International Labour Organization 1996). It may entail the power to determine indigeneity at international or intergroup level, but the state is unlikely to accept the notion that indigenous peoples are empowered to make general determinations of this sort. Secondly, self-identification may also denote the right of a group to set a rule governing individual membership. It raises issues when such power to include and exclude individuals, runs contrary to their own wishes. Third, the self-identification process is to be exercised through indigenous procedures and institutions subject to international human-rights standards. This is also problematic when different organizations make a competing claim as to the definition or representation of the group (Kingsbury 1995).

The indigenous demand of historical persistence with pre-invasion societies established on their territory, stood out to be the most problematic and received the sharpest criticism. Similarly, the ILO Convention 169 also stipulates that the indigenous peoples are those who "inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation" (International Labour Organization 1996). These criteria engendered the notion of original or prior occupants that turned out to be inapplicable among most of the Asian and African communities. This is the basis on which governments in Asia and Africa refuse to recognize the presence of indigenous peoples altogether. The UN discourse, especially the Cobo report, has been criticized for being limited and narrow, as it basically relates to the pre-invasion and pre-colonial native aboriginal communities inhabiting the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and ignores many other marginalized tribal and ethnic minorities living in other parts of the world (Srikanth 2010). Declaring the ethnocentric biases of this international discourse, Roy Burman (1995) argues that the technical bodies, gatherings, seminars, and other publication systems were all from the American continent. He maintains that "it is difficult to get away from an uncomfortable feeling that the Convention reflects a political deal between a section of Amerindians and the States in America" (B. R. Burman 1995, 45). Unsurprisingly, many states in other continents have come to argue that the phenomenon of indigeneity occurs only in the condition of settler colonialism. It became difficult for indigenous representatives and communities to claim their status

by virtue of being prior occupants even if that was the case, when the states maintained that it is impossible to show which population groups come first (Kingsbury 1995). Furthermore, casting invasion and colonization as a contingent fact excludes indigenous peoples from being indigenous by contiguous conquest, when the colonization is made by territorial contiguity rather than by overseas expansion. Under such understanding, except for the Samis and Inuits in the circumpolar region, many European indigenous communities would be excluded (B. R. Burman 1995, 2003). Along the same argument, China also claimed that it does not have any indigenous community because all the minority ethnic communities were never invaded or conquered (Kingsbury 1995).

The UN definition takes the most limited view of indigeneity by requiring strict historical precedents while the ILO adopted more diffused historical requirements. But the World Bank has done away altogether with such historical continuity and colonialism, and instead taken functional criteria of cultural difference, an approach applicable in much of Asia. This reflects the fact that there is no consensus regarding the definition. Each of these global instruments formulates principles and criteria abstracted from specific cases and debates and that they are too general and remote to be universally applicable. One thing is clear, that any strict single definition and criteria for universal application would always be unworkable and incoherent.

Indigeneity and the States' Responses

The discourse of indigenous—its meaning, its application, its relationship with states, and its justification for rights, entitlements, and institutional and normative programs—is a moving discourse that evolved and developed through a discussion and exchange among different actors including the indigenous people themselves, non-indigenous entities, and global institutions (Karlsson 2003). The existence of a global indigenous movement, initiated by the indigenous themselves from the European invasion and settlement states, is the main factor behind the origin and spread of the concept. Initially, the scope and operation of the movement was confined within North, South, Central America, Australia, and the Nordic region. For instance, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) founded in 1975, allowed

only the status of an observer for those groups hailing from Asian states like India, Japan, and Thailand. Eventually, the WCIP broadened its scope and geography, and established the Pacific-Asia Council of Indigenous Peoples. Despite being extremely diverse with different political and social backgrounds, the indigenous groups, representatives, and individuals participating in the movement focused on the shared commonality and issues— notion of land and territories, distinctive cultures and languages, aspirations for self-determination, histories of conquest and spoliation and continuing marginalization, rights and entitlements to compensate for the prejudice and loss incurred (Carrin, Kanungo and Gerard 2014).

These demands and agendas have been brought to the UN negotiations and international tables, and heavily influenced norms, beliefs and practices of international bodies and various organizations. In ordinary language, the term indigenous peoples has evolved into normative and legal concepts around which transnational mobilization, networking and movement take place. In 1984, the International Covenant on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples drafted a more precise and clearcut meaning of indigeneity for WCIP, which viewed indigenous peoples as those "who lived in a territory before the entry of a colonizing population, which colonizing population has created a new state or states or extended the jurisdiction of an existing state or states to include the territory, and who continue to live in the territory and who do not control the national government of the state or states within which they live" (Kingsbury 1998, 422) Because of the elements of historical continuity attached to it, the concept also seriously questions the legitimacy and totalizing views of the nation-state, by challenging the conception of a state as dominant embodiment of a nation comprising all of the people within and by claiming the connection to particular territory as its foundation just as the modern nation-states. Thus, the concept of indigenous peoples would legitimize the claims of identity other than the 'nation', and the struggle for recognition for those groups and communities who were earlier subsumed under the broad account of nationalistic history. In its struggle to emulate the nationalistic discourse, the concept has also evolved with new elements of novelty in many places and among diverse groups and societies, providing platform, language, and legitimacy for those who use it flexibly both in international and local politics (Ibid,.423).

It is not surprising then that many nation-states in Europe, Australasia and Americas resisted the concept of indigenous peoples as it seriously challenges the unity of a nation by recognizing the existence of other nations or people within the state. Several governments such as the United States, France, Japan, Sweden, and others, harbour reservations about indigenous peoples and international recognition of their collective rights. For them, there cannot be more than one nation or people within the national territory. Nevertheless, there has been a substantial positive change in the attitudes and approaches of governments regarding indigenous peoples, mainly due to protracted campaigns and lobbying by indigenous activists, transnational networks, political and ideological changes following democratic transitions, and pressures and incentives from international institutions. These shifts have been evident in the United States, Canada, Denmark, Peru, and Australia since the 1970s; and New Zealand, Colombia, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Brazil, Nicaragua, Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Chile, and Russia from the 1980s onward. Despite all this, there is still no consensus among the western liberal states as to the legal status and collective rights of the indigenous peoples in their political systems.

There is a strong nationalistic thinking in the western states that does not sit well with the view of indigenous peoples as ancient or prior nations, predating the nation-state and having special historical ties to their territory, with special entitlements and right to self-determination arising from such historical connections. Furthermore, there are some issues and unresolved tension between the liberal thoughts and the group-based claims of indigenous peoples. Many liberals shun ethnicized politics and nationalism as divisive and dangerous (Ibid,.424-426). Meanwhile, one strand of western liberalism argued for cultural norms and entities as a basis for claiming and restricting collective rights by pointing out the limitations of the individual-rights approach (Sandel 1982; Taylor 1994; Kymlicka 1995). On the other hand, many liberals are doubtful of such group-based claims and advocate freely-choosing individuals as a bearer of rights and ask for state neutrality regarding competing views of what is good (Rawls 1971; Dworkin 1977). Because of these conflicting views within contemporary liberal opinions, there is a tendency to see the issue of indigenous peoples as something outside the purview of human rights programs and other minority rights regimes under multicultural discourse. This is

what the proponents of indigenous rights try to achieve, that is, to differentiate between the claims of indigenous peoples and those claims based both on individual and collective approaches that are made about minorities and other oppressed groups of people (Bowen 2000).

Changing Contours of Indigeneity: The Asian Controversy

As mentioned earlier, even though they have different historical trajectories, representatives from Asia and Africa since the late 1980s began to take part in the international indigenous peoples' movement, institutions and gatherings especially the UN Working Group, and demanded recognition as indigenous peoples in their own countries (Gray 1995; Karlsson 2003; Shah 2007; Srikanth 2014). However, to clarify, the issue of indigeneity in Africa is not considered since it is outside the scope of this work. Hill peoples from Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts and Burma were the first Asian delegates to UNWGIP in the 1984 session (Karlsson 2003, 406). After two years, Asian participation increased with a large number of representatives from West Papua, South Moluccas, Philippines, the Karen and Kachin from Burma, the Nagas and *Adivasi* from India, and the Ainu from Japan. That same year, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples formed its Pacific-Asia Council of Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations, such as the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGPI), the Survival International, the Cultural Survival, the Anti-Slavery Society, started publishing documents on the issues of indigeneity in Asia, covering East Timor, the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, Nagaland in India, the Hmong of Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, West Papua, Burma, Sarawak in Malaysia, India, Tibet and Japan (Gray 1995, 43-44). In 1992, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) was established as an active international network, with a large membership of organizations.[2] All Asian participants accepted the idea that they also fall under

[2] It includes the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights, Chittagong Hill Tracts Peoples Council, BIRSA (Ranchi, India), Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association, , Kachin Land Foundation, Partners of Community Organization (Sabah, Malaysia), Nepal Federation of Nationalities Federal Council, Arakan Human Rights Centre, National Federation of Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines (KAMP), Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines, Cordillera Peoples' Alliance, Homeland Mission 1950 Maluku (Amsterdam), Adivasi Solidarity (Bombay), Lumad Mindanaw (Mindanao, Philippines), and Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia).

the international understanding of indigenous peoples and worked to promote and consolidate the concept in their countries (Kingsbury 1998).

While the concept of indigeneity is fairly established in many places, particularly the European settlement states, the question of indigenousness is much more complex and contested in most of the Asian states, especially Southeast Asia, where the governments deny its relevance, the situation Benedict Kingsbury termed as the "Asian controversy" (Kingsbury 1998). By the international standard of prior occupancy, historical continuities with pre-invasion or pre-colonial societies, special relationship with land and cultural distinctiveness, it is relatively easier in the context of European settler states to make a clear distinction between natives and colonial settlers hence between indigenous and non-indigenous. However, in many Asian states with a demographic history of continuous migration and much less European colonization and settlement, such distinctions tend to be ambiguous and difficult. Thus, the governments in many Asian states maintained that the category of indigenous peoples should be confined to the Americas and Oceania and considered indigeneity to be irrelevant in their own countries since virtually all the citizens are already of Asian descent. This way of accepting the relevance of the concept of indigeneity in other countries and parts of the world and denying the same in the context of their own countries came to be known as the "Salt-water theory". Based on this position, many Asian states come to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with a conviction that it does not apply to their countries. Some of the major concerns of these states include the issue of self-determination associated with the concept of indigeneity that seems to threaten national unity and sovereignty, and the exclusionary tendency of indigenous claims that can lead to ethnic conflict and violence (Baird 2016; Baird, Leepreecha and Yangcheepsutjarit 2017).

Countries like India, China, Bangladesh, Burma and Indonesia have been adamant in their opposition. But the overall attitudes of the governments in Asia towards the concept and its applicability have varied considerably, with some states even showing readiness and progress. This variation is also an outcome of differing impacts of colonialism. During the colonial time till the decolonization movements, the European colonizers and later Asian states used the concept of indigenous to refer

to the colonized Asians or non-European population of their colonies. In part, the international indigenous peoples' movement draws from such discourse. The concept also has its root in the colonial spatial order of fixing distinct non-majority ethnic groups to physical spaces by establishing special laws and policies, inner lines, scheduled areas, frontier zones, and other extra arrangements. These colonial policies deeply influenced the understanding of ethnicity and ethnic relations in the post-colonial states in Asia (Srikanth 2010). There are three arguments against the applicability of the concept of indigeneity in Asia, namely definitional arguments, practical arguments, and policy arguments. The definitional arguments maintain that the indigenous peoples, defined as descendants of original inhabitants who were subjected to colonization and invasion, are inescapably associated with European colonialism. An attempt to apply such concepts in Asian states amounts to a form of neo-colonialism. India, China, Bangladesh, and Myanmar subscribe to such arguments. The practical arguments concern the impossibility of identifying who came first in a country after centuries of migration and assimilation. For instance, the government of India, in the 1991 UNWGIP session, argued that there are common cultural and linguistic features shared between tribes and other non-tribal people in the country. Nevertheless, India has already enumerated a detailed list of scheduled tribes under its Constitution. Policy arguments warn that recognizing prior occupancy as a basis for granting special rights and entitlements might end up excluding those who need this kind of treatment and including those who are not in need. It might also inspire conflicting claims to historical priority made by various ethnic groups, which can lead to chauvinistic politics and communal or ethnic conflicts. Once indigenousness or "sons of the soil" is recognized, others are likely to be stigmatized as non-indigenous or immigrants who may be discriminated against and subjugated. This has been the case in countries like India, Malaysia, and Fiji (Kingsbury 1998, 433-436).

Despite the resistance from the states, there has been significant expansion of indigeneity in Asia and over time many states like Japan, Philippines, Nepal, Taiwan, Cambodia came to recognize its applicability in their own states (Baird 2016). This is in part due to the flexible nature of the indigeneity that steers away from single definitions and provides a space for different interpretations. The UN Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also encourages such

understanding. So, an unending debate on the definition resulted in a wide range of reconceptualization by governments, non-governmental organizations, civil societies, and indigenous activists, depending on the domestic social circumstances and political conditions. In the context of Asia, especially Southeast Asia, the conventional understanding of indigenous peoples as original inhabitants or the "First Peoples" has been reworked to accommodate historically oppressed and marginalized yet culturally distinct groups within a nation-state (Baird 2011; Morton 2017). Andrew Gray, the former head of the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs, reconceptualized indigeneity in the Asian context in a way that could be widely accepted by indigenous peoples and activists in Asia. He proposed that the indigenous peoples in Asia are to apply not only to the original or first peoples per se but more crucially, also to colonized peoples who were subjected to dominance and oppression by other ethnic groups who control the nation-state, and who were more often than not forced to move out to a place where they are not the original inhabitant. For him, indigeneity refers to:

> The quality of a people relating their identity to a particular area and distinguishing them from other, 'alien' people who came to the territory subsequently. These indigenous peoples are 'colonized' in the sense of being disadvantaged and discriminated against. Their right to self-determination is their way of overcoming their obstacles (Gray 1995, 37).

The expansion of conventional boundaries of indigeneity is associated with self-identification, self-determination, political and resource control, and readjustment of power relations between oppressed groups, dominant groups, and the state. By prioritizing being colonized and oppressed over being the first peoples as a criterion for indigeneity, it makes it possible even for a relatively recent migrant group to claim indigenous status by stating that they have been internally colonized and oppressed irrespective of where they are from and how long they live in particular places (Gray 1995; Morton 2017; Morton and Baird 2019). At the same time, it also moves away from the original argument of "First peoples" that form the basis of justifications for indigenous rights and claims (Bowen 2000). From this new conception, indigeneity is "a quality or aspect of the identity of peoples who have lived in an area prior to conquest or colonization and who are not empowered to live according to their socio-cultural, economic and political life-styles. The indigenous movement is an assertion of this identity" (Gray 1995, 40). It is directed mainly against nation-states.

Indigenous rights to self-determination, understood not as a claim to statehood or secession but as more autonomy to have control over land, resources, cultural expression and political future, remain the central demand and are regarded as fundamental in improving their condition. The meaning of indigenous peoples shifts according to the context. So, in the Asian context, indigeneity is perceived as a political and relational concept denoting an unequal power relationship between the marginalized and the state, rather than a substantive and descriptive analytical category.

Indigeneity in India: Contestation, History and Debate

India also denies the existence and relevance of indigenous peoples within its territory. Nevertheless, the concept has entered into Indian politics and quickly became a rallying point for the tribal groups from the Northeast and Central India popularly referred to as *Adivasi***,** a Sanskrit derivation meaning "original dwellers".[3] The increasing use of indigenous peoples by these groups indicated self-identification and an effort to place their local issues at the international forum, alongside the global indigenous peoples' movement (Karlsson 2001). The first indigenous delegates from India participated in the UNWGIP meeting since 1985. In 1987, these participants, mainly from Jharkhand, established the Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP) and participated in Geneva to express solidarity with all the indigenous peoples and voiced their concerns. The main objective is to refute India's position and secure indigenous status for all the tribal communities recognized by the government as Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other communities regarded as tribal but not officially recognized as STs. They also sought to equate the administrative term

[3] The government of India recognized the tribes of India as a special category of peoples and referred to as Scheduled Tribes (ST). The status entitles certain rights and benefits, including reservation in higher education and government jobs, and special allocation of funds for development programmes. According to Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, a list of Scheduled Tribes has been notified and enumerated since 1950, based on loosely defined essential characteristics like, primitive traits; distinctive culture; shyness of contact with the community at large; geographical isolation; and backwardness. The process of scheduling is sometimes inconsistent and highly politicized. A community recognized by the government as ST in one state may not be so in another state. As per 2011 census, there are 705 ethnic groups recognized as STs. They are enumerated at 10.4 crore individuals constituting 8.6 percent of the Indian population (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Statistics Division 2013). The tribes of India inhabit most parts of eastern, western, central India except Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Chandigarh and Pondicherry where they are called *Adivasi*. In addition, large concentrations are found in the northeastern states of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim.

Scheduled Tribe and the Indian term *Adivasi* with the international term indigenous peoples. They claimed that the ST communities in India are equivalent to transnational indigenous peoples as they have remained culturally distinct from the mainstream Indian society after being subjected to colonization and later dominated by a majority controlled nationalistic polity and institutions.

With this background, they argued for the collective right of self-determination in order to restore land and forest rights to India's indigenous peoples (Karlsson 2003; Shah 2007). They invariably demanded, among other things, that the government of India ratify the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal peoples and endorse the then UN draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a key guideline in their treatment of indigenous issues in India. Such a demand has also been put forward by the North-East Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Forum. Various domestic and international organizations in India started to refer to the tribes or STs as the indigenous peoples of the country (Karlsson 2001). However, platforms like ICITP have been criticized for lacking all-India coverage. Frequently, many indigenous leaders were attacked for spending more time outside the groups they represent at the national and international level. In the 1990s, many new organizations emerged, among which was the All-India Coordinating Forum of Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples, which served as an alternative to ICITP. It performs a crucial task in selecting Indian delegates who will receive the UN Voluntary Fund to attend UNWGIP annual sessions. In addition to tribal communities, delegates from the Indian Dalit Community and Kashmir Democratic Forum participated in the UNWGIP session, claiming their status as indigenous peoples, but without the support of other tribal organizations. Most of the organizations continued to demand indigenous status for tribal peoples. Allaying the apprehension of many governments that self-determination attached to indigeneity amounts to secessionism, ICITP asserts that they only seek self-determination within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Naga's claim for full statehood is of course an exception. Overall, the concerns and issues raised by the Indian delegates range from language, development, education, healthcare, land, dams and wildlife sanctuaries to ethnic homeland and autonomy (Karlsson 2003, 408-410).

Thus, the contested issue of indigeneity in India revolves around the question of whether the Indian tribal communities qualify for the international concept of indigenous peoples. The Indian government remains averse to the idea that some groups of people are more indigenous than others, consistently maintaining that neither tribal groups nor any other category of people can be considered indigenous since the concept and related instruments are not appropriate for Indian historical situations. For instance, the official position of the Indian government is reflected in the writings of K.S. Singh, a renowned anthropologist of the Anthropological Survey of India. Reflecting on the international ingredients of indigenousness as historical continuity, cultural distinctiveness and non-dominance, he argues that the concept does not fit in with the historical context of the old world, like "melting pot" India where peoples of all races and languages mix and interact to form highly composite culture and where the tribal peoples do not necessarily constitute the non-dominant section of society everywhere. Instead, he sticks to the local term *Adivasi*, understood as old but not original settlers in the hills, forests and remote areas (Singh 1995, 30-33).

There are two major types of arguments against the utility of the term indigenous, viz substantivist and political. While the former points to the impossibility of universally applicable criteria or definition and dismisses indigenous peoples as unfounded because of varied historical experiences all over the world, the latter cautions the likely undesirable consequences of conflict among different marginalized groups in the wake of ethnic mobilization based on indigenousness (Karlsson 2003, 404-405). Arguing along these lines, some of the leading scholars and anthropologists in India have also challenged the idea of indigeneity and its appropriateness in the Indian context. This in a way contributes to the negative attitude and reluctance with which the government of India perceives the term indigenous peoples (Karlsson 2001; Schendel 2011). B.K. Roy Burman (1995) backs the position of the Indian government and contends that the entire discourse of indigenous peoples, including ILO Conventions and UNWGIP, is oriented to the system prevailing among the Americas and Oceania. He criticizes the lack of Asian participation in their work and their results that will eventually create confusion and complexities in Asia and Africa (B. R. Burman 1995). He also alleges that the undefined concept of indigeneity makes it impossible to regard who is indigenous

and who is not, and demands a precise definition of the term. Even the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 still lacks such definition. While he criticizes the concept as lacking proper definition, he endorses the Indian government's protection mechanism of Scheduled Tribes that already treats the tribal as indigenous (B. R. Burman 1996, 2003). However, the fact that this category also operates without precise definition exposes the double standard in his criticism of indigenous peoples.

One of the well-known Indian sociologists, Andre Beteille (1998) also problematizes the categorization of tribes in India as indigenous peoples. He points out the already existing problem of finding a definition of tribe as a social formation distinctive from other social groups, that will be applicable for all the existing communities. Drawing from the experiences of the African, the Melanesian, and the North American, the nineteenth-century anthropology saw tribes as a particular type of society which was still evolving, who were isolated, self-contained, primitive, and homogeneous. This conception of tribe however does not sit well with the inherent historical realities of South Asia, where there was co-existence in the proximity and intimate relationship between tribes and other social groups for centuries. This is evident from the colonial ethnography in India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that habitually confused tribe with caste. In colonial and post-colonial India, the term tribe became increasingly important, having political, legal, and constitutional implications as it served as a reference point for positive discrimination and affirmative action. Even the post-colonial official term for tribal people, Scheduled Tribes, does not have a formal definition. It simply stands for a group of communities listed on the scheduled list. Moreover, these communities exhibit great diversity in terms of population size, mode of livelihood, geographical spread, and social organization. In this context, he argues, while there are places like Australia where the tribes are recognized as indigenous groups, a blanket categorization of tribes in India as indigenous peoples is seriously problematic and misleading. Indigeneity, he contends, acquires significance from a particular historical background of settlement and usurpation where there is stark contrast between the old populations and the new settlers in terms of race, language, and culture. But in the Indian context, through usurpation, miscegenation, and migration, instead of complete decimation of tribal culture there has been a long and complex

interaction between the tribal and the non-tribal population resulting in cultural transformation and diversity among both the tribal and general population. Therefore, it is next to impossible to draw a clear line between the two whether in terms of habitat, language, or religion. So, in India, either everyone is indigenous or no one is. According to him, the merit of the term indigenous peoples lies in its political correctness and not in its practical usefulness. He also cautions that the blind application of the concept, which is developed from particular context and experience, to other parts of the world may "provide ideological ammunition to those who would reorder the world according to the claims of blood and soil" (Béteille 1998, 187-191).

Besides the problem related to the definition, the other contentious issue with the concept of indigenous peoples is the right to self-determination closely attached to it. From the very beginning, the indigenous right to self-determination is the driving force as well as the ultimate goal of most of the contemporary indigenous peoples' movements all over the world, including India. Eventually, Article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that "indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination", and by extension the right to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (United Nations General Assembly 2007).

From the perspective of the Indian state, it encourages secession, an independence movement that threatens the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a state. For most of the post-colonial states in Asia that experienced colonial "divide and rule", the integrity of a nation-state is secured when the dominant mainstream identity, language and culture remain unchallenged by the separate sub-stream community or sub-national identity. On the other hand, most of the Indian tribal communities do not take the state interpretation of the right to self-determination as secessionism seriously. For them, it often has more to do with a right to autonomy, to uphold their culture and way of life, to run their affairs without interference of dominant forces, to have control over their land and resources. Although there are few exceptions, an independent political entity has never been a goal for most tribal communities seeking self-determination. Tribal communities seeking self-determination or autonomy is not new in India, especially in the Northeast. The Indian

state has absorbed a great deal of such demands, with varying degrees of success, through various institutional arrangements particularly under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, including separate states, union territories, and autonomous district councils. If these arrangements fail to bring the desired result, applying the concept of indigeneity with internationally approved rights and safeguards would radically restructure the terms of negotiations with the state and other powerful groups in their favour (Fernandes 1995; Karlsson 2001, 15-16).

From Colonial to Post-colonial: The Indian Debate

Indian debates on tribes and indigeneity have gone a long way in history before the recent international concerns and coinage, that goes back to the colonial and the post-colonial anthropological exercise and the constitutional recognition of tribes as Scheduled Tribes or *Adivasi* (Shah 2007). There are strong administrative and political implications in the time to come. The main objective of nineteenth-century anthropology was to bring a meaningful order to the hierarchical Indian society in which caste distinction was a prevalent marker of difference (Pinney 1990). This was to create power division between the colonial rulers and the Indian subjects but also among different categories of colonial subjects. Racial ideology, which was influential at the time, strongly affected the colonial classification and categorization of the Indian people at the initial stage (C. Bates 1995). For H.H. Risley, one of the colonial administrators and ethnographers in the late nineteenth century, such distinction was based on the physical properties of Indian bodies such as the "nasal index" and complexion. Accordingly, those who had sharp noses and light complexions like Europeans, were descendants of the Aryan upper castes such as Rajputs and Sikhs, and those with snub noses and dark complexions were primitive tribes, forest dwellers and hill peoples (Shah 2007, 1808). David Arnold (2004) writes:

> By the eighteen-thirties, as the interior of India became more accessible to Europeans, an increasingly explicit 'racial' contrast was being drawn between the Indians of the plains, who were seen broadly to conform to the Caucasian 'type' and whose ancestors were thought centuries earlier to have brought the Aryan or Indo-European languages into South Asia, and the 'aboriginal' or 'tribal' peoples of India who inhabited hills and forests, especially across central India. In this evolving representation of India's 'aboriginal' several sets of antithetical ideas were brought together- the almost naked versus the fully clothed, hunting and shifting cultivation as

> against settled agriculture as the primary mode of subsistence, and the jungle-dweller as opposed to the denizens of the plains (D. Arnold 2004, 266).

Early colonial writing viewed different communities in India as distinct social groups, and the description of groups from caste/tribe perspectives came later. The early ethnographers also had difficulty differentiating caste and tribe. The terms were used interchangeably, and sometimes in a cognate manner. For instance, the 1881 census of India used the term "forest tribes" as a subheading under the broader section of agricultural and pastoral caste. Effort was taken to find a criterion of distinction between the two. Thus, in the subsequent census of 1901, 1910 and 1921, “forest tribes” were defined as those who practiced “animism”, which was later changed to “tribal religion”. However unsatisfactory it might be, it was nevertheless used extensively (Xaxa 1999a). Gradually, the term tribe came to be differentiated from other terms like race and caste, and acquired a more specific meaning. The colonial rulers now sought to understand the concept of tribe through what Ajay Skaria (1997) terms as anachronistic thought, in which societies of the world are ranked in the hierarchical and singular line of progress and civilization where European society served as a standard for evaluation (Skaria 1997). On this scale of modernity, the Indian tribes occupied the lowest rank, being the furthest behind in time from European civilization. Thus, tribes are seen as a type and stage of society characterized by geographical isolation, simple technology and modes of subsistence, general backwardness, primitiveness, animism, savagery, hill and forest territories, and predictably categorized as the ‘other’ of civilized European and caste Hindus. With a gradual loss of such features, tribes are also assumed to be assimilated into a dominant society (Xaxa 1999b; Zou 2010).

The Indian anthropologists in the colonial as well as post-colonial period were more concerned with the practical identification of tribes than with the theoretical exercise of definition (Xaxa 1999b; Béteille 1998). Based on a loosely held characteristic which was neither clearly formulated nor systematically applied, an exhaustive list of Indian tribes was drawn. The result was that it included communities and groups who were strikingly different from each other in respect of those characteristics they were said to have shared on a same level (Xaxa 1999b). Ajay Skaria (1997) points out that the list was arbitrary and inconsistent in almost all

cases and the groups identified as tribes shared more socio-economic and cultural attributes with their caste neighbours in the region than other tribes all over India (Skaria 1997). Despite its inaccuracy, Indian anthropologists and social scientists continued to use the label uncritically. In colonial parlance, the term tribe as a bearer of specific cultural traits slowly takes a backseat, but increasingly represents unequal power relationships between the selected population and the British rulers as well as the Indian elites and dominant class. Inspired by the ideology of Social Darwinism which argued that the most 'civilized' and hence the 'fittest' are destined to rule over others, tribal communities were seen as uncivilized, subordinated to a superior race, to be protected and civilized (Schendel 2011). Such ideas of tribal subordination and racial anthropology were also easily accepted by the local elites who wanted to justify local hierarchy and achieve parity with the European rulers (Guha 1999). The colonial tribal treatment, paternalistic policies and violent civilizing mission went hand in hand. They were administered differently, exoticized and patronized, separated spatially and administratively from the non-tribal population. For instance, the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874 already excluded the so-called "Scheduled Area" from the rest of the country politically and legally. The Government of India Act of 1919 introduced the idea of a backward track, later changed into excluded areas, where laws made by the Indian legislature applicable in the rest of British India would not operate. Later, the Government of India Act of 1935 provided for the (non)administration of excluded and partially excluded areas.

These colonial policies and attitudes are what made tribes a political reality. In their being outside the civilization of the caste Hindus and the Europeans, and not in their shared cultural traits that the tribes in India hold commonality. In this sense, the concept of tribe is an invention of the colonial rulers and the local elites who created an essentialized and stereotypical identity of a people as forest dwellers, isolated and backward, a powerful image that still influences society and politics in India. Besides the invention of primitive tribes, the colonial policies of domination served to consolidate many hill and forest inhabitants into a distinctive identity as tribal or *Adivasi*. Colonial extension of state control over land, forests, resources, and revenue collection in many hilly tracts created a common feeling of domination and oppression among a wide variety of people, especially in the resource-rich regions of central India such as Chhotanagpur, Bastar, and Singbhum. State expansion was

accompanied by exploitative officials, landlords, money lenders, and many others. In such a situation, loss of culture, land and resources led to many resistance movements. To unite people to fight an outsider's rule, many communities came to identify themselves as *Adivasi* (Shah 2007).

At the dawn of India's independence, there was a renewed effort and debate around the question of caste-tribe distinction. But now, it was a different context dominated by nationalistic discourse that revolved around the ideas of unity, integrity, and sovereignty. Though the colonial and post-colonial/nationalist ethnographies maintained a distinction between caste and tribe, their conception of the relationship between the two differed. The colonial ethnography stressed that tribes are not only culturally different from caste but also living in complete isolation and without any interaction. This was reflected in the philosophy and writings of an anthropologist, Verrier Elwin, who went on to influence Nehruvian tribal protection policies in independent India (Elwin 1943). In contrast, the native or nationalistic ethnographies, while distinguishing tribe from caste, emphasized the nature of closeness and interaction between the tribal communities and the majority Hindu society and the ways in which the tribal communities were eventually absorbed into the Hindu society (Xaxa 1999b). This is in line with the thinking of nationalists who were committed to linking the Indian tribes to wider mainstream Indian society for the cause of a unified independent nation (Shah 2007; Zou 2010). An eminent Indian sociologist, G.S. Ghurye (1943), in his book *The Aborigines- "So-Called"- and Their Future*, gives evidence to show the interpenetration of animist tribal and non-tribal Hindus in terms of their cultural practices and social organizations. He argues that the so-called "aboriginal" tribes were best described as "backward Hindus" (Ghurye 1943).

S.C. Sinha (1958), in a radical break from ideas of tribal isolation, went to the extent of claiming tribal cultures as a dimension of the "little tradition" that can be subsumed under the great Indian tradition (Sinha 1958). Such perspective is neither attractive nor empowering for the tribal people as it deprives them of their agency and independent voice (Zou 2010). In such conception, tribes have come to be studied and sought to be understood only in relation to features and characteristics of the larger society, to be absorbed into a society that represents civilization. In the

process, it is denied that a tribe on its own is a whole society or people, not an element of the whole society. In this context, Xaxa (1999a; 1999b) argues that the counterparts of tribes are not castes or peasants but communities or societies such as Bengali or Gujarati (1999a; 1999b). At independence, the national elites imitated the colonial master's view of tribes as backward and primitive to be protected and uplifted. Thus, the Constitution also took cognizance of their cultural and historical specificities. Nevertheless, the avowed intention of the Indian nationalist elite to bring the tribal communities into a newly created sovereign nation-state brought conflict and violence for many years to come. Indian tribal communities officially became Scheduled Tribes, a category that has a sanction of Constitution and law. It provides special provisions for reservations in education, employment, and political positions. The ST communities are also divided into tribal areas of Assam including Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Mikirs, north Cachar, Naga, and Lushai hills put under the Sixth Schedule, and the remaining tribal areas which fall under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. While tribal communities in the Northeast enjoy a certain degree of administrative and financial autonomy, tribal areas under the Fifth Schedule have repeatedly witnessed persistent threats of land loss and land transfer at the hands of neo-liberal state policies and corporate greed (Shah 2007).

The term indigenous people, though recently popularized at the international level, has been in use in India since the early twentieth century. The Indian equivalent term *Adivasi* and other related terms like "aborigines" and "autochthonous" have been used by social workers, missionaries, and political activists to refer to tribal people, and later by the people themselves. It was mainly used to designate certain groups of people who are different in their language, custom, physical features, religion etc. There was no problem in its usage, neither question nor debate. However, with the internationalization of the concept along with the rights and entitlements attached to it, the usage of the term has been challenged and questioned in the Indian context. While the early concept of indigenous peoples, for instance the ILO Convention of 1957, signalled the integration of indigenous and tribal peoples into the larger system, the current idea of indigeneity speaks the language of empowerment, rights, and mentions the marginalization and oppression of those considered indigenous. It is this shift that makes a country like India deny the relevance of such a category. Most of the discussions challenging indigenous status

in India stressed the impossibility in determining who are the original inhabitants or indigenous in the context of complex historical movement and settlement of people in the subcontinent. It is invariably accepted that the communities who belong to groups other than that of the Aryans, speaking different languages family such as Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Burman, and who settled before the arrival of the Aryans be considered as India's indigenous. But it is also an accepted fact that not all the groups recognized as tribes in India have settled before the Aryans. For instance, this is the case with the tribal communities in Northeast India who speak Tibeto-Burman language groups, such as Nagas, Mizo, Kuki, whose arrival is later than that of the Aryans. In contrast, many non-tribal groups like Oriyas have an older history. Thus, it cannot be argued that all tribes are earlier settlers than the Aryans and hence indigenous. The way out is to make a distinction between settlements in view of the entire country as a whole and settlements with a particular region. For instance, the Santhals may have settled in the Santhal Pargana later than those communities like Bengalis. However, their settlement in India is prior to the latter. Conversely, the settlement of the Mizos in India may have been later than other non-tribal, but their settlement in their current territory is prior to those of Gujaratis or Bengalis. But to claim indigenous status on such grounds is not very simple as those groups considered indigenous with respect to the whole country may not be regarded as such when it comes to their settlement in each territory and vice versa. Besides, many of the Dravidian speaking groups like Tamilians and Malayalis could not stake their claims of indigeneity by virtue of their prior settlement because they are not recognized as tribes since they have not been subjected to exploitation and marginalization (Xaxa 1999b, 3590-3593).

Indeed, the identification of indigenous people in India is problematic. Whether the group of people associated with a particular territory are indigenous to that territory is a question that will always be contested. Nevertheless, such conceptual difficulty and lack of clarity does not prevent the tribal communities' claims of indigenous status. Even if they are not the original inhabitants of India, they have come to develop special association with a territory where they live over the course of history. Within these territories, they consider themselves to have priority in benefits and entitlement. They aspire to have a homeland or state where they have prior rights over others. Most of the dominant communities have such special

territories that they define and understand themselves with in a special way. In such a homeland, they have prior right over others though implicitly recognized. Bengalis have a special relationship with Bengal, and so do Tamilians in Tamil Nadu. While such special homelands are recognized in respect of the dominant communities, the same has been denied to the tribal communities. Subsequently, they have no rights or control of land, water, forest, minerals, and other resources in their territory despite being the original inhabitants, leading to injustice and exploitation. In the absence of such rights, the articulation of indigenous identity has taken a concrete shape among the tribes of different parts of India. The claims of indigenous identity are more strongly articulated in the tribal pockets of Western, Southern and Central India than of the Northeast, where tribes exercise some form of control over their land (Ibid,.3593-3595). However, the tribal policies in the Northeast also faced serious legitimacy problems when the state responded to tribal dissatisfaction and autonomy movements with military violence justified in the name of uplifting and bringing the backward tribes into mainstream society, just as during colonial times. In this context, one of the responses of the tribal peoples was to claim and seek refuge in the global category of indigenous peoples. So, since 1980s, among the tribal communities not only in India but the entire Southeast Asia, the term tribe has been increasingly abandoned for the concept of indigenous peoples. Unlike the category of tribe loaded with colonial paternalistic tone of primitivity, backwardness and aversion to modernity, identity of indigenous peoples paid not much attention to internal consistency, cultural homogeneity, and social characteristics. It is not surprising then that the concept became widely popular among the marginalized peoples who sought to politicize their identity in order to ameliorate their situation and make their voice heard (Schendel 2011).

Critique of Indigeneity: Anthropological Advocacy

The world-wide rise in popularity of the idea of indigenous peoples and movements is partly due to its engagement with anthropology and the kind of stir and debate it created amongst the academic circles. On the one hand, there are those who critiqued the idea of indigenous people and shunned political engagement and anthropological advocacy, and on the other hand, there are anthropologists who espouse the concept and feel morally obliged to assist the indigenous peoples in their collective struggle.

During the 1980s, the concept of indigeneity was against the prevailing theoretical trends within anthropology. The "revisionists" in the Kalahari debate questioned the image of *San* society as ancient, autonomous, culturally unique and argued rather that they were a dependent underclass whose isolation and even indigenous status was a product of global historical process and social formation (Wilmsen 1989; Barnard 2006). Moreover, since the scholarship on the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and related arguments that culture itself is a construction with a dynamic process, many scholars began to see authentic indigenous culture as problematic and pointless (Dove 2006).

Following this trend, an Indian sociologist Andre Beteille (1998) critiqued the idea of indigeneity as an essentialist and merely politically correct term without practical usefulness. He also cautioned that indigeneity tends to reinforce claims based on blood and soil. (Béteille 1998). Similarly, Guha (1999) warned that an attempt to reorient the society based on the claims of authentic indigeneity and genealogy can only lead to a dangerous consequence of ethnic conflict (Guha 1999). In the same vein, Bowen (2000) questioned the analytical helpfulness of indigeneity as a universal concept. He argued that indigenous peoples might be useful for purposes of analysis and political struggle in certain context, but in other places like Indonesia where he worked, it is neither useful as an analytical instrument since it obscures local significance nor feasible as a rationale for policy intervention as it would instigate ethnically biased determination leading to polarization and conflict. He also mentioned the fact that being indigenous has a local meaning in the different parts of the world where they are sometimes interpreted as something not intended by the UN system, like the "sons of the soil" arguments that sharply distinguish between indigenous and immigrants, fuelling and even justifying violence (Bowen 2000). In western Europe, it takes the form of right-wing racist assertions against immigrants (Arnold 1990). In Africa, the massacre of the Tutsi cast as aliens was justified by some of the Hutus who drew from those narratives that depict Hutus as Rwanda's indigenous peoples (Taylor 1999). In India, it is also often the case that, in justifying communalism and hatred towards Muslim others, the Hindu nationalist activists portray Muslims as the invaders of the indigenous Hindus (Bowen 2000).

While some scholars argued against the concept, others maintained that anthropologists ought to closely monitor the actual condition and, if necessary, take part in the politics of indigenous claims and articulations (Karlsson 2003). Taking an activist stance, Marcus Colchester (2002) calls for an anthropologist to take advantage of international recognition of rights and to engage with the indigenous peoples in their struggle (Colchester 2002). They are less disturbed by the problem of the absence of universal definition of indigeneity, citing that even the UN still lacks such definition. Pointing out the very dangers of fixed definition, they argue instead for adjustable and broad insight that accommodates local variations and shifting contexts. The term over time acquires strategic significance, and to dismiss it is to discredit the struggle of the most marginalized peoples who are fighting for their land and rights (Macintosh 2002; Rosengren 2002). The juxtaposition of indigenous rights and movements with racial ideology and ethnic conflict also needs to be contextualized as claims of indigeneity by the dominant majority groups and by the discriminated and dispossessed smaller groups are altogether different stories. At the same time, it is sheer naivety to assume that the claimants of indigeneity are more tolerant towards those perceived as 'outsiders' or 'intruders' (Karlsson 2003).

One of the most scathing attacks on the notion of indigenous people comes from the writings of Adam Kuper. Kuper (2003) begins by pointing out the difficulty of defining and identifying indigenous people, and criticizes the concept of indigenous people as being based on "essentialist ideologies of culture and identity" and relying on "obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision" (Kuper 2003, 395). For him, indigeneity is simply a euphemism for primitive culture. Based on this essentialist understanding, Kuper then argues that the indigenous peoples defined as the first people in a country insist on certain privileges and even exclusive proprietorship of its resources over other immigrants based on a "blood and soil" ideology of decent, that is chillingly similar to the narratives of European right-wing parties' anti-immigration and Nazi or apartheid racial ideologies. He further argues that since the essentialized representation of indigenous identity is far from the ground realities and there is a relative economic disparity between the activists and the subjects, indigenous movements are likely to be undemocratic. Moreover, "wherever special land and hunting rights have been extended to so-called indigenous peoples, local ethnic frictions have been

exacerbated", and it might lead to ethnic conflict (Ibid,.395). Kuper's attack on indigeneity had created controversy among anthropologists and was followed by several counterarguments that set out to uphold the concept. Justin Kenrick and Jerome Lewis (2004a) wrote against Kuper's accusations as misplaced and lacking contextual nuances. They argue that, in accusing indigenous subjects of seeking privileged rights over others, Kuper neglects "the context of the extreme discrimination faced by indigenous peoples and their many experiences of dispossession by more powerful groups" (Kenrick and Lewis 2004a, 4). In fact, "what people claiming indigenous status are seeking is not a privileged position but equal rights based on an equal acceptance of the economic and social bases of their ways of life and on reversing the ongoing history of their dispossession" (Kenrick and Lewis 2004b, 263). Equating indigenous movements with Nazi or apartheid narratives, Kuper also depicts indigenous movements as racist on the grounds that it invokes the principle of descent and criteria of collective characteristics as a primary basis to determine indigenous identity and claims to rights. However, Turner (2004) asserts, "indigenous identity is defined primarily in terms of relative historical priority of occupancy of a territory in contrast to the dominant population of a nation-state" and established not simply by descent but by "direct participation in indigenous communities or cultural enclaves based on a variety of kinship, affinal, and adoptive relations" (Turner 2004, 265).

In his usage of "blood and soil" metaphor to describe indigenous movements, Kuper is also accused of misrepresenting what is a peaceful movement as aggressive one, and depicting an attempt to fight discrimination to bring about desirable equality as claims of privileges based on racist principles (Kenrick and Lewis 2004a; Saugestad 2004). On the question of problem of definition, Saugestad (2004) exhorts anthropologists to pay more attention to the codification of the concept within the UN system and proposes four principal criteria based on the consensus in international discourses to be recognized as a *de facto* definition (Saugestad 2004, 264). The criteria to be considered in the definition include: (a) first come, (b) cultural difference, (c) non-domination, (d) self-ascription (Saugestad 2001a, 42). Again, for Kuper, such criteria are still problematic (Kuper 2004). However, more important in such a polythetic definition is its reference to the relational aspect of indigeneity, especially self-ascription, and non-domination (Barnard 2006). Taking a cue from the

Barthian notion of ethnicity (Barth 1969), Saugestad (2001b) suggests that it is crucial to understand indigeneity through relational approach rather than an essentialist approach- the one that takes seriously the experience and articulation of the people concerned, focusing on the issues of power and dispossession, and socio-economic and religious practices that constitute their connection with land and other peoples (Saugestad 2001b, 306). According to this view, what defines an indigenous people is the relation of domination and oppression of one group by the other or the state especially when the state is perceived as representing the dominant culture of the non-indigenous over the indigenous. Alan Barnard (2006) reiterates this line of thought when he contends that there can be no universally applicable definition of indigeneity and argues for adoption of polythetic definition as a logical solution. Taking a middle stance vis-à-vis Kuper's position, he agrees with him that, anthropologically, historically, and even philosophically, the concept of indigeneity is problematic. But, at the same time, he believes that as a political and legal concept, it might provide a political tool for oppressed people who seek to "regain the lands of their ancestors or to link their causes with the causes of others, on different continents, in similar positions" (Barnard 2006, 13). Hinting at Saugestad's rendition, he proposes that reconceptualizing indigeneity as a political and relational concept would jettison its anthropological association with the 'primitive' (Ibid,.10).

The Dark Side of Indigeneity: Claims of Ethnic Homeland and Conflict

Even though the concept of indigenous peoples and the indigenous rights claim has firmly established globally, many scholars point out to the disturbing connotations and allusions such claims tend to carry—romantic celebration, politics of belonging, hierarchy of belonging, sedentarist metaphysic (concept of place), ethnic homeland—that translate into serious political consequences, especially in the context of African and Asian societies (Li 2002; Schendel 2011; Balaton-Chrimes 2013; Thawnghmung 2016).

Since the issue of indigeneity has come into the global spotlight, indigenous communities are quickly associated with discourse of environmentalism and sustainability, under the patronage of a host of non-governmental organizations like Environmental Defence Fund, Forest Peoples' Movement, Rainforest Action

Network (Shah 2007). Due to their so-called cultural distinctiveness, spiritual connection to land, alternative knowledge and medicine, shamanism, and special wisdom, they are increasingly seen as benevolent guardians of nature, environment and resources. In the era of post-industrial global capitalism, mindless consumerism, discredited models of development and technological shortsightedness, indigenous communities and knowledge are thought to be the basis of alternate modernity and sustainable ways of life that may save the planet in time to come. On the one hand, the notion of indigeneity escapes the tag of primitive, but on the other hand, it remains essentialized and romanticized through externally-imposed cultural scheme, as the other of hegemonic modernity (Bowen 2000; Schendel 2011).

Such a romantic celebration of indigenous identity leads to an intensification of what is called the "politics of belonging" (Schendel 2011). The questions of who belongs to particular territory and hence the status of citizenship, are locally determined by origins and historical rootedness to that particular place, that has often been used to justify a violent exclusion of those who are regarded as strangers or non-locals, even if they are of the same nationality who resided in that area for centuries. The social distinction between the locals and extra-locals has always been there, but without any malevolent implications. After decolonization, however, such distinction has taken a violent and exclusive turn, instigating the sons of the soil conflicts that seek to protect and demarcate ethnic homeland and deny the strangers access to land, jobs and other economic opportunities, and political participation (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000, 423). The politics of belonging have not only given rise to a battle between those "truly rooted in the soil" and "fake autochthones" over the protection of homeland and control over resources (for example, the Bodo agitation in Assam from 1987), but also caused conflict amongst those communities who considered themselves indigenous to the same territory about the degree or extent of indigeneity to claim an exclusive homeland of their own (the Karbi-Dimasa conflict in 2005) (Vandekerckhove 2009, 525). In India, the Assam Movement of the 1980s seeking to dispel the Bangladeshi immigrants, which social scientist Myron Weiner warned about (Weiner 1978), was the manifestation of the new politics of belonging characterized by highly territorialized ethnic identities, boundaries and exclusion (Baruah 2003, 2008). The concept of indigenous people has a tendency to exacerbate such exclusion and consolidate extremely divisive notions of 'insiders' and

'outsiders'. Indigenous labels can be used not only for dispossessed communities to demand basic rights, but also for dominant groups to eliminate alien others. Many examples abound, such as anti-immigrant movements in Europe, genocide in Rwanda, Hindu right wing actions against Muslim and Christian minorities in India. Such campaigns can later turn into "movements for defensible places, exclusionary territories or geographical apartheid" (Schendel 2011).

The notion of defending the homeland against others inherent in the politics of belonging is also vindicated by indigenous claims. Indigenous rights claims, especially in South Asia, have placed a strong focus upon place and differential geographies. The argument is that since during the colonial period, the groups who now identify themselves as indigenous peoples have their lands, biodiversity, mineral resources and their knowledge about these taken away by colonial government and other groups either by rendering their land and resources a public property or by bringing more people who are not indigenous and allowing them to acquire land in their habitats (Castree 2004). In the context of such dispossession and dislocation, the indigenous communities' solution to their grievances is to stake a claim to a particular territory with an intention to reacquire them, a process which usually implies driving out the intruders. This claim of exclusive place has terrible side effects of violent expulsion and displacement. There is a disturbing connection between the notion of ethnic homeland and displacement. Sanjib Baruah summarizes this relationship:

> The discourse of homelands creates in every territorial entity- existing and potential- groups that belong and those who do not. Thus denizen communities as well as minority groups of all kinds—tribals as well as non-tribals—face the danger of falling victim to this politics of displacement. The urge to protect an existing homeland against the homeland claims of a rival group, the project of creating a new homeland or the fear that one ethnically defined group's homeland or a part of it can be claimed by another are typically the subtexts of these conflicts (Baruah 2003, 57).

Many South Asian countries have bitter experience of claims of exclusive homelands and displacement. Despite such experiences, the model of separate homelands has become a popular solution for political and law and order problems, especially in the Northeast region of India where many homeland movements have been operating with varying degrees of success (Schendel 2011). In recent times, the exclusionary politics of belonging and sons of the soil conflicts based on roots and origins has been seen as a reactionary effort to counter the de-rooting of identity within the neoliberal

globalization context—political and economic liberalization, decentralization and democratization. In a globalized world, while there is an increasing movement towards cosmopolitanism, openness and shrinkage of boundaries, there is also a strong tendency towards new boundaries, re-localization and exclusion (Appadurai 1998; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Bayart 2005). Indeed, the politics of belonging is very much part of the globalization process. However, it was also a result of colonial and post-colonial practice of politicization of identities as highly and ethnically territorialized and constant reaffirmation of natural link between ethnic groups and territory, through an intensified yet ambivalent process of identification, classification and ethnographic mapping (Chandhoke 2006; Vandekerckhove 2009). In other words, what Sanjib Baruah termed the colonial "protective discrimination regime" (Baruah 2005) which was devised to protect the people living in an isolated region once described as "backward tracts", continued in the post-colonial India as the Sixth Schedule provisions, has not only brought about, but also normalized the notion of exclusive homeland for certain ethnically defined groups.

At the base of the politics of belonging and claims and defence of ethnic homeland, lies a powerful sedentarist metaphysic upon which indigenous rights claims have been built. The sedentarist metaphysic "valorises people living in their 'proper' place, rooted in their native soil, and views displaced, 'uprooted' people, migrants and refuges [*sic*], as pathological" (Li 2002, 362). It focuses on people in a native place and presents indigenous peoples as deeply attached and being one with their land. It logically follows that all the rights and claims of indigenous communities can be justified by the intimate connection they have with their ancestral land, the loss of which proves to be destructive and even ethnocidal. Thus, reclaiming their culture and way of life is equivalent to reclaiming their territory. It also seeks to redress past injustices, grant full citizenship and allocate rights by recognizing the importance of relationships between people and places. At the same time, such sedentarist thinking quickly leads to violent exclusion of migrants, refugees and others who are increasingly seen as enemies by those who have native attachment. Writing about the indigenous rights movement and activists who support their cause in Indonesia, Li (2002) argues that the sedentarist metaphysic forms the basis of claims being made by many indigenous peoples. She cites as an example of the implications of grounding rights and identity in a sedentarist metaphysic when the

indigenous Dayaks murdered 500-1000 Madurese migrants and expelled another 30,000-80,000 during the 2001 crisis in Central Kalimantan (Ibid,. 362-365).

Samantha Balaton-Chrimes (2013), in her case study of indigenous movements in Kenya, suggested yet another grounds on which the meaning and political utility of indigeneity should be problematized (Balaton-Chrimes 2013, 349). Typically, in the global indigenous movements and the discourses of activists and academics, indigeneity is associated with minority groups of people who has a distinctive culture and way of life that require special protection and preservation, as well as marginalized peoples who find themselves on the receiving end of unequal power relations and seek special rights and assistance to remedy the past injustice and historical deprivation. In this understanding, indigeneity is a special status which entails special claims and rights based on special circumstances—historical injustice and suffering that the indigenous groups experienced in the past. However, in the context of Kenya, Samantha Balaton-Chrimes (2013) argues that indigeneity can be deployed in different ways as well (Ibid,.).

In this conception, indigeneity is not a special rights aimed at a reversion to the status quo ante by asserting special arrangements and assistance, rather it is more commonly seen as a norm or status that seeks equality and sameness (rather than difference) with other ethnic groups (in this case, the '42 tribes' of Kenya, who are implicitly considered indigenous when Kenya as such came into existence). Recognition as an indigenous has now taken a different turn and carried important political repercussions since indigeneity has become a precondition for equal citizenship, access to rights and other benefits and rightful belonging to the Kenyan nation. Groups who are both racially and ethnically distinct from the mainstream population or society recognized as indigenous and those groups who can not prove their indigenous lineage suffer exclusion and discrimination from access to rights and entitlements accorded to citizenship, including land, education and employment quotas, administrative and electoral influence (Ibid,.332-337). Since being an indigenous or a membership in a particular indigenous tribe is a prerequisite for enjoying rights and benefits, certain sections of existing communities who are not recognized as indigenous will be deprived of full citizenship even though they have long term relationships with the land and other communities. Even if they achieve

citizenship status, they still are citizens minus. This is the predicament of those stranger groups as opposed to indigenous ethnic groups.

Even among indigenous ethnic groups, conflicting claims of indigeneity will exacerbate the already existing inter-ethnic conflict and competition over access to land, resources and state power. Inter-ethnic conflict is acute when more than one group asserts their exclusive land rights to the same land (Ibid,. 346-348). Such competition tends to be fueled by indigenous claims because being indigenous to an area justifies exclusive rights and belonging. Therefore, the politics of indigeneity provide a new arena for ethnic competitions and conflict, and indigenous claims can become a new weapon in ethnic conflict.

Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Conflict

Ethnicity is a relatively new term for difference and identity in social science, first appearing in the English language in the 1950s. However, the English adjective "ethnic" from which it was derived goes back to the Middle Ages. The meaning has changed significantly throughout history. It originated from the ancient Greek word *ethnos*, which was used in a variety of ways. While the English language has no concrete equivalent noun for *ethnos*, in French *ethnos* becomes *ethnie* with an associated adjective *ethnique* that denotes an ethnic group or ethnic communities. In these various usages, a common theme emerged, that *ethnos* constitutes a group of people or animals who share similar culture and biological characteristics and who live and act in unison. It also implies a strong sense of othering, a dichotomy between a non-ethnic "us" and ethnic "others". For instance, non-Greeks and foreign barbarians are referred to as *ethnea* (Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 4). In the nineteenth century, the term ethnic or *ethnie* also acquired racial characteristics in the West as it was used to refer to minorities and immigrant communities from Europe (Eriksen 1993). Among the American and the English, the term "nation" was used to talk about themselves, the dominant majorities, while "ethnic" or "ethnic minorities" was reserved for immigrant peoples. Thus, in its analytical origins, ethnic was the others, the minority out-group, the marginalized and oppressed within the larger dominant society or nation, and ethnicity was a marker of difference from dominant norms and identity.

Over time, ethnicity became popularized in politics and academics as one of the dominant conceptions of identity, and even universalized as a transcendent category. However, such a move tends to render ethnicity insignificant and indistinguishable from other conceptions of human identity such as race, immigrants, refugees, nationality. It also tends to undermine vital differences between various forms of identity and reduce their meanings to virtually nothing more than a vague and generalized sense. There is also a tendency to relate ethnicity and nationality as some sort of continuity. Anthony Smith (1986) stresses the role of *ethnie* or ethnic communities as a precursor of nations and grounds nationalism in ethnic identity (Smith 1986). Deriving from this notion of *ethnie* elaborated by Smith, T.K. Oommen maintains that an ethnic group becomes a nation if it acquires its own territory (Oommen 1997). However, this might not be the case in different places. Writing in the context of Northeast India, Sajal Nag suggests that ethnicity is a development that emerged with modernity in which the pre-modern concept of solidarity formed the basis of mobilization. In other words, ethnicity is a premodern identity which burst into the scene in modern times (Nag 2014).

While scholars disagree with the universality of ethnic identity, there are more agreements on the essence or ethnic content of an ethnic group. There are two different ways of defining the term ethnicity or ethnic groups—a narrower sense and a broader sense. In a narrower sense, ethnic groups refer to grouping and solidarity based on racial or linguistic characteristics, hence racial or linguistic groups. This understanding dominates the popular discourse. For example, in India, while describing politics and conflict based on religion, the term communal not ethnic, is used. The latter is used primarily in terms of linguistic or racial context. In a broader sense, taking a cue from Horowitz (1985), the term ethnic implies ascriptive content including race, language, religion, tribe or caste (Varshney 2001, 364). Horowitz (1985) takes a broader view of ethnicity, which focuses on ascriptive character. According to him, ethnic groups are those who identify themselves as belonging together in a group on the basis of language, race, common descent, religion or tribe, or some combination of these. Ethnic identity is ultimately based on kinship myth and on a sense of group worth, legitimacy, and self-esteem in relation to other groups (Horowitz 1985). Anthony Smith (1986) also highlights the power of symbols, rituals, values, myths, memories, traditions, and ways of life as a key component in

the construction of shared identity among members of a particular group. The roles of these components are of great relevance as they are powerful markers of distinct culture and future of the ethnic community. Accordingly, he defined ethnic groups as a "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity" (Smith 1986, 32). Rather than emphasizing the cultural contents within the social boundary, Fredrik Barth (1969) focuses on the ethnic boundaries itself, the continuous interactions along the boundaries with other groups and the symbolic 'border guards' like food, language, dress, that define and sustain the ethnic community. In his view, ethnic groups are a form of social organization based on the characteristics of self-ascription and ascription by others (Barth 1969).

Accordingly, ethnic groups are those who identify themselves as belonging together in a group based on common descent, race, language, tribe, religion, or some combination of these, and distinguish themselves from others based on such similar ascriptive traits. Groups become ethnic groups only, in relation to and when recognized as such by other ethnic groups (Barth 1969; Srikanth 2002). The term ethnicity or ethnic identity designates a sense of togetherness and belonging, which can be grounded in language, common descent, history, culture, race, or religion (Varshney 2007). Similarly, all conflict based on ascriptive features of a group, can be termed as ethnic conflict. In this view, notable cases of conflict around the world including racial conflict in the United States and South Africa, the Hindu-Muslim violence in India, the Protestant-Catholic discord in Northern Ireland, the antagonism between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, troubles among Shia and Sunni, could all be described as ethnic conflicts. Here, it is also crucial to clarify that ethnic conflict and ethnic violence are not the same thing. Any multicultural democratic society with constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and a space where public grievances can be raised is bound to witness some form of ethnic conflict. However, at the same time, one must not assume that such conflict invariably brings about violent situations. If ethnic conflict and confrontation take place as an institutionalized form, like in parliament, in public places and democratic spaces, in bureaucratic forums, it is a case of ethnic conflict but not necessarily violence. Such must be differentiated from a violent form of protest, riots in the streets, civil war, or state-induced pogroms (Varshney 2001). Ethnic conflict occurs either through the politicization of ethnic

community and identity or through the impact of political conflicts on ethnic communities. Economic inequality and the struggle for scarce resources exacerbate cultural differences, notably linguistic and religious, and deepen the rift between ethnic groups. This often results in severe conflict. Another major source of conflict is the distribution of political rewards within poly-ethnic states where two groups compete for such benefits and merits (Hutchinson and Smith 1996).

Approaches to Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict

Ethnicity is a very complex identity. Ethnic communities show a wide range of characteristics and paradoxes in terms of numbers, duration, lifetime and shift in ethnic identification. Ethnic identity also overlaps with other categories of grouping such as race, class, gender, religion and the like. While there are highly durable ethnic communities who trace their origin back to several centuries, some ethnic communities are newly emerged. At the same time, some older ethnic groups have dissolved and others have gone through significant cultural transformations. When dealing with such complex phenomena, scholars have adopted two major approaches-primordialist and instrumentalist, and other alternative approaches.

The primordialist approach begins with the presupposition that ethnicity is a natural phenomenon rooted in culture and actual history. Ethnic identities are thought to go back hundreds or thousands of years and were essentially unchangeable. In this view, it is implied that ethnic conflict is based on an ancient hatred or old hostilities that are nearly impossible to eradicate or change. In general human conduct and behaviour, it is believed that primordial ethnic bond is stronger than the modern civic ties (Geertz 1963). Edward Shils, a prominent primordialist, viewed that ethnic affinity and connection has its natural anchor in family and kinship links, an attachment that could only be described as primordial (Shils 1957). Another form of primordialism, called Socio-biological approach, regards genetic reproductive capacity as a basis of ethnic group. In this view, ethnicity is an extension of actual kinship groups where the members as a carrier of genes try to perpetuate their line through kin selection, inclusive fitness, and nepotism (Van den Berghe 1979).

The primordialist approach has been criticized and attacked on many grounds. Scholars argue that it overlooks the fluidity of ethnic identity and its

overlapping with other forms of social grouping that any community can assume in different situations. It was contended that the idea of ethnic community as ancient, immemorial, bounded and objective is rendered obsolete by the facts of migration, colonization, intermarriage, and general interaction of human society. Primordialism also needs to account for questions like, if ethnic antagonisms were so deep-rooted and inherent, why did ethnic violence come and go at different times? It is argued that many cases of ethnic conflict are the clash between old inhabitants and new migrants, and it has nothing to do with old hostilities. In recent times, Petersen (2002) revives primordialism with psychological theories about emotions and human nature (Petersen 2002). On "ancient hatreds", he argues that its ancient origins need not be proven. Even if it has a non-ancient origin, it can still shape and motivate human behaviour in the support or participation in ethnic violence. He bases his primordialism on four types of human emotions or natural viz: hatred, fear, rage, and resentment. Hatred towards another group plays out in the context of perceived or actual historical injustice or offence. Fear, on the other hand, becomes a key drive in the presence of security issues and other life-threatening situations. Resentment as an emotion is something that accompanies the realization and awareness of status discrepancy, while rage simply conveys the need to lash out pent up frustrations without a particular reason or target. In the end, the main argument was that "resentment born out of status reversals explained most of the ethnic violence", while other cases of ethnic conflict could be explained from hatred, fear, and rage (Varshney 2007, 281).

In contrast to primordialism, instrumentalist approach treats ethnicity and ethnic conflict as neither primordial nor inherent in human beings. It is rather a social or political construct. One version of instrumentalism focuses on elite competition for resources and power and the manipulation of the masses to garner their support and to achieve political goals. In this view, it is a creation of rabble-rousing elites to manipulate the masses and pursue their own gains from such ethnic mobilizations (Bates 1974; Brass 1991). Another version examines the elite strategy of expanding preferences in terms of individual rational choices. Here, rational individuals participate in ethnic mobilization in order to acquire wealth, power, and status either by lobbying the state or through secession (Hechter 1986). The instrumentalist approach, it is argued, has a tendency to neglect the wider cultural context in which

elite competition takes place. It is also criticized for defining interests solely in terms of material goods and failing to give adequate cognizance to the affective dimensions of ethnicity. Many scholars argue that conflicts are not primarily about the participants' struggle for material goods but also about cultural and symbolic issues (Yinger 1997; Ross 2007; Kaufman 2011).

The instrumentalist approach also has other difficulties. First, even when the leaders gain by mobilizing along ethnicity lines, why should the rational masses come along? Secondly, if the masses are instrumental, would the free-rider problem cripple ethnic collective action? Third, with such a potential violent mobilization, why would an instrumentally rational masses join in risking their lives? Is it really possible to explain ethnic preference or mobilization within an entirely instrumental rationality when there is high risks of injury, incarceration or death, without recourse to psychological or cultural elements? Even if an instrumental use of ethnicity explains part of the phenomenon, it is not capable of explaining incidents based on historical indignities and injustices (Varshney 2007, 282). While there are many instances of instrumental use of ethnicity, not every form of ethnic mobilization, identification and conflict can be explained by instrumental rationality.

These two approaches, primordialism and instrumentalist interpretation, have a tendency to dominate the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. In other words, these two are usually treated as representing irrefutable categories while approaching ethnic issues. However, as discussed above, the two are also related by their contrast and tension with regard to identity formation, whether primordial or constructed, and trajectories of its growth, whether in terms of continuity or characterized by modification and alteration. Many scholars acknowledge the fact that neither pure primordialism nor sole instrumentalist interpretation survives empirical scrutiny, and attempt to strike a balance between the two. Some even ask why one needs to choose between the two as each interpretation brings important additions to an understanding of ethnic politics (Esman 1994). Along with this, there was a growing realization that ethnicity has elements of both continuity and change. On the one hand, the claims of primordial identity do not afford to ignore that there are certain modern factors in its construction, while on the other hand, instrumentalist thinking has to come to terms with the fact that the shared pasts and historical cognizance need to be acknowledged.

However, this is no way to argue that such shared histories are objective and factual, but to say that they are often exploited in identity construction (Parkin 2000).

In this regard, it is significant to mention other approaches that take into account the need to address the inherent tension between primordial thinking and instrumental reasoning. One such approach is called constructivism. The central argument is that ethnic and other identities are products of modernity with emphasis on the degree to which people change or create their identity. It conceptualizes ethnicity as essentially fluid depending upon how the boundaries of an ethnic group are drawn in a specific context, and hence the precise content of ethnic identity is defined in relation to the distinct external stimuli (Barth 1969; Brubaker 2004). For instance, Fredrik Barth (1969) focuses on the interconnectedness of ethnic identities and continuing negotiations of boundaries between groups of people, arguing that such groups are not disjointed bound entities. The interdependency of ethnic groups is stressed, and in this view ethnic identities are the product of continuous ascriptions and self-ascriptions. Ethnic identities and boundaries are thus situationally determined and then maintained by the extent of their social interactions with other cultural groups (Barth 1969). In pre-modern times, it was argued ethnic identities were rather local and regional, and they have been transformed into mass and larger national and ethnic identity by modernity (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Even though this does not mean that they are interchangeable, to the extent that they stand opposed to primordialist assumptions, the instrumentalist and constructivist approaches share some similarities. According to instrumentalist view, ethnic identity is not an end or asset, rather it is a cloak for a deeper interest which can be political, economic, or symbolic in nature. As and when such interest behind the smokescreen of ethnic consensus has changed, so has the cloak, rendering ethnic identity fluid. But constructivism is not about oscillation between different multiple identities or short-term malleability, "it is about the long-run formation, and the consequent stickiness of identities" (Varshney 2007, 288).

Similarly, Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolic approach emphasizes the importance of myths, symbols, rituals, values, myths of origin, memories, traditions, nostalgia for past lifestyles, religious civilizations, memories of golden ages etc., the cultural stuff that Barth had discounted. He focuses on their vital role in constructing

a shared ethnic identity, unifying the members, and ensuring their continuity through time as a cultural community. Such communities have been widespread in all eras of history and they have been at least as important as other forms of socio-cultural organization. But this is not to claim that they are continuous and universal, but persistent and widespread (Smith 1986). This approach pointed out the notion that ethnicity is perhaps constructed, but doing so requires reference to objective cultural substances in the past. Alternatively, Horowitz's (1985) social psychological approach uses group psychology to explain ethnic affiliation and identity. He talks about the differential estimation of group worth, legitimacy, and collective stereotypes. Ethnic identification is then based on a sense of group honour and legitimacy in relation to other groups. Thus, in his conception, ethnic conflict also arises from group comparison, where people evaluate their group worth, legitimacy, and self-esteem relative to other groups. Such a notion of group comparison is always at the expense of other groups. The crucial point that can be arrived at is that what is at stake in ethnic conflict is not just always about absolute benefit, but rather cultural and symbolic in nature (Horowitz 1985).

Taking a cue from these studies, it is argued here that given the complexity and changing nature and dynamics of conflict under study, no single approach is ever likely adequate to explain and make sense of the ethnic situation. Furthermore, various dimensions of conflict also need to be engaged with and addressed. So, to this end, this work employs an eclectic research approach with a multi-theoretical framework. It meant that this work not only draws from the existing conceptual frames but also problematized and rearranged them to bring about coherent analysis of the present case of study. This involves a recognition of the instrumentality of the past in understanding identity, as well as the idea that ethnic identity formation is an unending construction subject to reinvention and modification. Similarly, ethnic conflict is seen as an outcome of manipulation or crystallization of ethnicity which, at the same time, necessitates historicization of selected pasts that foster solidarity and mobilization.

Conclusion

This chapter makes an attempt to provide theoretical and conceptual background of indigeneity and ethnicity as a different but related and overlapping conception of identity and mode of human association. It recounts the origin of a discourse of indigeneity, indigenous peoples and the global movements from the experiences of Americas and Oceania and the role of international bodies, agencies, inter-governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations in spreading and consolidating indigenous identity, rights and claims. It also traces the stretching of the category into other parts of the world, especially Asia, where it was not welcomed with open arms by various states but nevertheless adopted by the indigenous and tribal peoples. It then highlights the debate and controversy surrounding the applicability of indigenous people categories to tribal communities in India, especially in the Northeast where the so-called tribal population resides. The second part of the chapter deals with different theoretical enquiries and approaches to ethnicity, ethnic identity and conflict. Drawing from prominent scholars in the field such as Fredrik Barth, Donald Horowitz, Anthony Smith, and others, it attempts to define and conceptualize ethnic groups and ethnic conflicts. Finally, it attempts to forge a conceptual linkage between indigeneity and ethnic conflict by drawing attention to the potential dark side of indigeneity and suggests that indigenous claim becomes a new weapon in the already existing tension and conflict. With these conceptual terms and themes, the succeeding chapters engage with the case of Mizo-Chakma conflict.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY FORMATION: HISTORY, MIGRATION AND ETHNIC COMPOSITIONS IN MIZORAM

Introduction

A study of ethnicity and conflict needs to investigate the ethnic composition, and most importantly the history of those groups in question, as well as their regions, as reference to these pasts is often required to make sense of the present. Accordingly, this chapter looks into the history of the Mizos and the Chakmas from the pre-colonial period to the post-colonial era, their stories of migration and shared pasts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, and how they come to inhabit what is now known as Mizoram. Of particular importance is the idea that colonialism in both the Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts forms an ethnic identity and fixes physical and cultural boundaries, as elsewhere. Thus, how colonial intervention in its various forms and interaction with the locals served as a cultural tool of identity formation is a point of focus. While doing so, this study also repudiates the common and dominant Lusei-centric writing of the Mizo past, which tends to produce historically inaccurate and politically biased ethnic identity and boundary, and even inadvertently promotes ethnic exclusivity. It instead adopts a wider perspective that expands the scope of looking at and writing Mizo history by taking into account the hitherto neglected groups and regions. This, it is believed, sheds light on the complex history of migration, contact and confrontation, and brings a better understanding of the old and contemporary conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas. It also foregrounds the shared pasts and intertwined histories that had not been adequately unearthed in earlier studies. Therefore, although Mizoram and its history are the main focus of this work, it is imperative to visit the pre-colonial and colonial history of Chittagong Hill Tracts as well.

Mizoram: A Brief Historical and Ethnic Profile

Mizoram, formerly known as Lushai Hills, is one of the states in Northeast India. It is located in the southern corner of that region, occupying a territory of 21,087 sq.km.

It shares international boundaries with Bangladesh and Myanmar in the west and southeast respectively; and inter-state boundaries with Tripura, Assam and Manipur. In terms of administration, the state has eleven districts, namely Aizawl (the capital), Lunglei, Serchhip, Kolasib, Champhai, Mamit, Siaha, Lawngtlai, Khawzawl, Hnahthial and Saitual; and three Autonomous District Councils, namely Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC), Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) and Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) for the Maras, Lais and Chakmas respectively. Like the other Northeast states, the inhabitants of Mizoram consist of different ethnic groups who settled in the region throughout different periods of history.

According to the 2011 census of India, Mizoram has a total population of 1,091,014. Among the major ethnic groups permanently residing in the state, Lusei (Lushai by colonial ethnographers)[1] and other allied clans absorbed within its fold, commonly known as Mizos, constitute the majority, forming the 75 percent of the population. They mostly occupy the northern and central part of the state. Their language, known as *Mizo/Duhlian* also became the lingua franca of the state. Other major ethnic groups, who may or may not identify as Mizo, include Lai (Pawi), Mara (Lakher) and Chakma, who respectively constitute 4.9 percent, 4 percent and 9.3 percent of the population, and are residing in the southern region of the state with separate autonomous district councils established under the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution. Also, on the eastern region and the western border are the Hmars and the Brus, who together form a small portion of 5.3 percent of the total population. Besides these groups, there are other smaller ethnic communities like Bawm, Pang, Tlanglau, Naga, Khasi, and Kuki, inhabiting different parts of the state, including the Sixth Scheduled areas, and again who may or may not identify with Mizos.[2] Except for the Chakma and the Bru, most of the tribal groups in Mizoram belong to a conglomerate tribe of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic stock or group, Chin-Kuki-Lushai as known by the colonial writers, who traced their origin to the mythical *Chhinlung* cave in the east. In terms of religion, Mizoram is predominantly a Christian state. The latest census figures show that 87.16 percent of the population professes

[1] The terms Lushai and Lusei are used interchangeably.
[2] Scheduled Tribes Population by Religious Community, http://www.censusindia.gov.in. Accessed November 7, 2016.

Christianity. Presbyterian and Baptist churches, most common among northern Lusei groups, are the two largest denominations. Other than Christianity, the remaining 8.51 percent of the population follow Buddhism, a little over 2.75 percent Hinduism, and 1.35 percent Islam. Sikhism and Jainism have 0.03 percent each follower.[3] The Chakmas, who are mostly Buddhist followers, constitute the majority of the non-Christian population. Different people from the other and nearby states, such as Assamese, Bengalis, Biharis, Oriyas, Nepalese, etc. who immigrated into Mizoram, make up the rest of the non-Christian population. The dominant Christian presence in Mizoram is the result of the evangelistic mission brought about by the colonial missionaries in the late nineteenth century.

Here, it is important to clarify that, despite the criticism that colonial interpretations disallow history from the indigenous viewpoint and agency, and only reflect the colonial perspectives, one starts with such historiography in this case. To the extent that colonial knowledge and interpretation of history informs discourses related to the so-called frontier regions, one cannot but engage with those colonial texts and contexts. The colonial expansion into Northeast India's plain and hilly regions slowly began with the cession of Chittagong to Robert Clive of the East India Company by Mir Qasim, Nawab of Bengal, and the opening of trade with the adjacent hill tracts to the west of what was later called South Lushai Hills. Along with these developments in the Chittagong-Lushai Hills border area, extensive internal changes were already taking place in Lushai Hills (McCall 1949). After the Treaty of Yandabo, a peace agreement ending the first Anglo-Burmese war was signed in 1826, the British decided to occupy the Brahmaputra valley mainly due to the discovery of a tea plantation (Pachuau 2014). Seeing these colonial settlements as an encroachment on their territories, the chiefs of Lusei, Lai, Mara and other clans retaliated by raiding and plundering the British territories and its inhabitants. While the British initially distanced themselves from the domain of the tribal chiefs, these acts prompted military expeditions, which were eventually undertaken in 1871-72 and again in 1889-90, for both punitive measures and for subjugation of the tribal communities (Reid 1893; McCall 1949). After the succeeding expeditions that subdued most of the chiefs, the Lushai hills were annexed to British India in 1891.

[3] Mizoram Population Census data 2011, http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/mizoram.html. Accessed September 25, 2016.

Consequently, on the annexation, it was divided into North Lushai Hills District with headquarters at Aijal (Aizawl) under the government of Assam, and South Lushai Hills District with headquarters at Lungleh (Lunglei), which was administered by the government of Bengal. The two districts were later amalgamated as unified Lushai Hills in 1898. The post of District Superintendent was also created to designate an officer to be in charge of the Hills' administration. In 1931-32, the Mara-dominated Zongling area on the southern corner, previously under loose British control, was incorporated into the Lushai Hills (Reid 1942).

The Hills remained under the rule of British India until 1947. In the post-independence era, it was merged with the Indian state as Lushai Hills District. In 1952, the district was upgraded to Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution. Year later, a separate Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) was also created for small ethnic groups, namely the Lais, Maras, and Chakmas, which provided a certain degree of autonomy from the larger Lushai Hills administration. As per the Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act, 1954, enacted by the Indian parliament, the name Mizo District replaced Lushai Hills District in 1954. Demand for more political status ensued, and after the enactment of the Constitution (Twenty Seventh Amendment) Act, 1971 and the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, the Mizo District acquired the status of Union Territory, to be called Mizoram in 1972.[4] Effectively, the Mizo District Council was abolished. At the same time, three Regional Councils, namely Pawi Regional Council, Lakher Regional Council and Chakma Regional Council, emerged from the erstwhile Pawi-Lakher Regional Council. They were later upgraded into the status of Autonomous District Council. With the enactment of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1988, the Pawi Autonomous District Council was renamed Lai Autonomous District Council, as was the Lakher Autonomous District Council to Mara Autonomous District Council.[5] After twenty long years of insurgent

[4] The Constitution (Twenty-seventh Amendment) Act, 1971 [30th December, 1971.], https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/amendments/constitution-india-twenty-seventh-amendment-act-1971 Accessed October 15, 2020.
The North- Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 Act No. 81 Of 1971 [30th December, 1971.], https://indiankanoon.org/doc/318384/ Accessed October 14, 2020.
[5] Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1988 No 67 of 1988 [16th December, 1988], http://www.indianlegislation.in/BA/BaActToc.aspx?actid=32247 Accessed October 15, 2020.

movement of the Mizo National Front (MNF), Union Territory of Mizoram was granted statehood in 1987.

Expanding Mizo History: Geographic and Ethnic Boundaries

Simply put, the goal of writing history of any given society is to comprehend all that has passed, and make sense of the present. Any culture must therefore preserve its own history in order to situate itself in the larger canvas of the world. As a highly ambiguous and deeply political enterprise, the ways and methods of writing history need to be flexible, without fear of deviation from an existing structure, to allow the scope for expansion, revision and reinterpretation in light of new sources and evidence. Incorporating new information and facts often involves the need to rewrite or expand the boundaries of the history of any given community. In the context of this study, it is believed that the dominant narratives of Mizo history must be revisited and revised to adequately address the questions central to this work.

The historiography of "Mizo history", i.e., the manners and methods of writing Mizo history, has been for some time biased towards some geographical regions and peoples while selectively ignoring others, thereby limiting the extent of history, the identity and ethnic boundary of its people. The early Mizo history, mostly based on oral narratives, begins with a vague memory of settlements in Central China prior to the westward mass migration towards Burma in the early eighth century CE; then crossing of the Tiau river in Burma in the sixteenth century, and eventually a bulk movement of peoples to the different parts of the Southeast Asian region where they are scattered today. In the earlier literature, the native writers and historians, while writing Mizo history, had focused heavily on the history of geographical regions of Chin Hills and the North Lushai Hills, the domain of Lusei and their allied clans, especially the Sailo chiefs. At the same time, they have left out most of the South Lushai Hills, which remained under the rule of different chiefs, namely Pawi (Lai), Lakher (Mara) and Fanai. The Chittagong Hill Tracts areas inhabited by Bawm, Pang and some other Lusei sub-clans, such as Palian, Rivung and Rokhum, had also

hardly been featured in the literature of Mizo history.[6] Recently, historians also seem to follow the same methodology.[7] One of the consequences of such history writing is the shrinking boundary of history vis-à-vis geography. Due to the great emphasis placed on the Lusei communities and the territories that came under the dominion of the Sailo chiefs, Mizo history has gradually constricted inside the geographical confines of what is now Mizoram.

This narrow perspective on history led to the idea that even the identity of Mizo is predominantly constituted by the Lusei and other cognate clans who reside in Mizoram, and that other kindred tribes outside the state are simply a subordinate clan within that identity. Clearly, the geographical and ethnic boundaries of Mizo history need to be expanded and redrawn, which invariably asks, who are the Mizos and who are to be included in Mizo identity? In one of the earliest locally written works on Mizo history, Rev Liangkhaia (1938) drew a comprehensive list of different tribes and communities who together formed the Mizo identity. These include Lusei[8] (Lushai), Ralte, Hmar, Pawi (Lai), Paite, Chawngthu, Khawlhring, Chawhte, Khiangte, Ngente, Tlau, Renthei, Pautu, Zawngte, Rawite, Punte and Vangchhia. He also suggested that other hill tribes, like the Old Kuki and New Kuki groups, can also be put under the category of Mizo (Liangkhaia 1938, 17-42). On the other hand, there are those who perceive the term Mizo as a generic name for all the Chin-Kuki-Lushai group of people (Laldova 2014).[9] In practice, identity is a highly contested and politically-charged issue. As such, there has always been a conflicting idea about the

[6] See Liangkhaia. 1938 (2002). *Mizo Chanchin*. Aizawl: L.T.L Publication; Siama, V L. 1953. *Mizo History*. Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press; Lalthangliana, B. 1980. *History of Mizo in Burma*. Aizawl: R L Rina, Zawlbuk Agencies.

[7] For instance, see Lalrimawia. 1995. *Mizoram: History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications; Kipgen, Mangkhosat. 1996. *Christianity and Mizo Culture: The Encounter between Christianity and Zo Culture in Mizoram.* Aizawl: The Mizo Theological Conference.

[8] According to Rev Liangkhaia, Lusei comprises the following clans viz. Pachuau, Chhangte, Chawngte, Chuaungo, Chuauhang, Chhakchhuak, Hauhnar, Hrahsel, Tochhawng, Vanchhawng, and the royal clans such as Sailo, Palian, Zadeng, Rokhum, Thangluah, Rivung, Chenkual and Chawnglul (Liangkhaia 1938, 24-26).

[9] For instance, historian Laldova (2014) includes the following communities in the lists of what he calls 'Mizo family': Lusei, Hmar, Lai or Pawi, Lakher or Mara, Ralte, Pang, Bawm, Chawngthu, Khiang or Khiangte, Zawngte, Vangte, Chawhte, Punte, Ngente, Vuite, Rawite, Sukte, Bete (Biate), Jete, Maite, Simte, Tiante, Paihte, Rangte, Bawlte, Chawngte, Baite, Rawnte, Hnamte, Renthlei, Pautu, Vangchhia, Khawlhring, Vaphai, Kamhau, Hrangkhawl, Dawn, Hrahsel, Zahau, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Kolhen, Kawm, Parum, Tikhup, Tarau, Tlau, Songchungnung, Lunglai, Laisel, Remhual, Mirem, Tumtin, Vanbia, Mualthuam or Molsom, Ranglong, Vanchiau, Fanai, Chawrai, Darlong, Thado, Miria, Khumi, Bawng, Kaihpeng, Tlanglau, Malu, Zou or Zo, Zotung, Zophei, Mirawng, Ngawn, Amo, Koireng, Lamkang, Maring, Monsang, Moian, Thangkal, Rokhum, Bawngchet, Kawrbawng, Dap, Langkaih, Saihmar, Rupini, Koloi, Sakechep, Thangachep. (Laldova 2014, 131).

meaning of the term Mizo. Some ethnic groups who are put under the term Mizo, especially the Mara and Lai, may or may not agree with such inclusivity. It largely depends on the context and political condition. Mizo ethnic identity takes over other smaller ethnic identities when the perceived threat is a larger nationality from the outside. But, when ethnic survival and preservation vis-à-vis other ethnic groups is the main concern, Mizo identity takes a back seat. In practice, it is contextual and fluid. Nevertheless, in this study, the term Mizo is used to encompass all those groups of tribes with similar ethnic features, culture, and tradition, except the Chakmas and Brus who have different cultures and languages.

Major Mizo Tribes: Chieftainship, Migration and Settlement in Mizoram and Chittagong Hill Tracts

As mentioned above, majority of the tribes in Mizoram, including Lusei, Lai, Mara, Bawm, Pang etc, belong to the Kuki-Chin ethnic conglomerate of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family (Grierson 1904). As a semi-nomadic tribe, successive waves of emigration over centuries landed this group of tribes into their present habitats in India, Bangladesh and other Southeast Asian countries. The name 'Chin-Kuki' derived from the fact that they were called different names in different places where they stayed for an extended period. As they moved in a large batch, they acquired different identities over time and place. Identities were indeed created in movement (Pachuau 2014). During their sojourn in Burma, about 900 to 1500 CE, this group of people were called "Chin" by the Burmese (Tribal Research Institute 1994). "Chin" is a Burmese, which refers to the hill tribes living between Burma and the Provinces of Bengal and Assam (Grierson 1904, 2). When they crossed over Burma and entered undivided India, the Bengalis called them "Kuki" (Lewin 1870). The term "Kuki" is also an old term, which was already mentioned in the *Raj Mala,* a chronicle of the Kings of Tripura during the fifteenth century CE (Grierson 1904, 1). The Kuki people were said to live in the Tripura Hills. Later, as early as the 1870s, Lushai (an anglicized form of Lusei) was added to this group. Various names, such as Chin, Kuki and Lushai, were used to address the people who lived in the hills between the plains of Burma and India's northeast region, including the Bangladesh border. By this time, the British officers and administrators came to believe that this group of tribes with

numerous clans and families, who are given different names in different regions, were the same kind of people, and hence began to refer to them by hyphenated name, Chin-Kuki-Lushai (Kipgen 1996). It was believed that, even though the common origin was slowly lost sight of because of the feuds between different clans, which tended to widen the breach between them, the Kukis, Chins and Lushais are nevertheless the same race (Shakespear 1912, 8).

Except for oral traditions, myths, legends and stories, and due to the absence of written records, the origin and ancestral home of this group are largely unknown. Apart from those, the writings of colonial administrators, anthropologists and missionaries are the primary source of history. One of the most popular myths maintained that the Chin-Kuki-Lushai people originated from a hole or a cave on the mountain called *Chhinlung*, situated in the east. Several local historians and writers have attempted to rationalize the origin myth. Some historians demystified *Chhinlung* as connected to a deposed prince or ruler in China, who garnered many followers, among whom the Chin-Kuki group were included, and hence their origin (Liangkhaia 1938). Whereas, another historian, like B.Thangliana, argued that the word *Chhinlung* came from a province in China called *Qinglong*, inhabited by a Tibeto-Burman group of people, who migrated to Southeast Asia (Thangliana 2001). It is safe to say that the *Chhinlung* cave might have just referred to the time when the ancestors of these people lived in a cave. Nevertheless, it is now generally accepted that they were moving southward from central China into the plains of Burma, the Chindwin valley. A large portion of the group moved further south and entered the southern part of the present Chin state, where they were known as *Asho* or plain Chins. The core group settled in the Kabaw valley in Burma somewhere in the eighth century CE, where they had a free mixing with the Burmese. During this time in the valley, the first town called *Khampat* was established, where all the major tribes who now inhabit the Chin state, Manipur, Mizoram, Assam and Tripura, were believed to have settled together under a great chief. They were also said to have a good relationship with the Burmese. This prosperous settlement lasted for a long time. After this settlement in the plains, they had to leave eventually due to various reasons, such as natural calamities and fear of the stronger enemies (Kipgen 1996).

From the Kabaw valley, the majority group seemed to move towards the western direction and entered the hill areas of Burma, and occupied the Indo-Burmese frontiers, known as Chin Hills, in the early fourteenth century. As the geographical condition of the hill prohibited a large settlement in sizable units, migration continued, but in a smaller group or clan-wise, forcing them to scatter all over the place (Lalrimawia 1995, 14). According to local historians, the stay in the Chin Hills was somewhere between 1300 and 1700 CE (Siama 1975; Lalthangliana 1980). Some groups parted ways with others and began an exodus westward, which lasted until they found a haven in Manipur Hills, where they were known as Anal, Lamkang, Purum, Maring, Chiru, Kom, Aimol, Chothe, Vaiphei, etc. Shakespear (1912) would club these groups of people as the Old Kuki Clan of Manipur. They seemed to be the first to move, as they were being referred to in the Manipur chronicle in the sixteenth century (Shakespear 1912, 149-150). Several groups of tribes also began crossing the Tiau river and settled down in different parts of Lushai Hills from the middle of the sixteenth century. They were smaller communities without the power of social cohesion, and consisted of Pautu, Hualngo, Khawlhring, Darlong, Hmar, Hrangkhawl, Biate, Gangte and other allied clans. These clans were also distinguished as the Old Kuki Clan. They were said to be the earlier settlers in the Lushai Hills. Other smaller tribes, such as Dawn, Pangkhua, Tlanglau, Bawm, Mualthuam, Kaipeng, Bawmzo, Chawrei, Khiang, Bawmzo etc., had also settled in Lushai land (Shakespear 1912; Liangkhaia 1938). While some of these groups were assimilated into the Lusei fold and became a subject of the Sailo chiefs, many people fled north and north-west into Cachar, Tripura, Manipur, and Sylhet due to the arrival of the New Kuki into the scene. According to Shakespear, the New Kuki clans mostly included Thadous and their off-shoots, who built and solidified their chiefdoms in the North Lushai Hills (Shakespear 1912). The last group of people to come and set up home in the then Lushai Hills were Luseis and other allied clans, who arrived in the early 1700s. This group was made up of Lusei and other allied clans, such as Ralte, Chawngthu, Khiangte, Hauhnar, Chuaungo, Chuauhang, Ngente, Punte, who together came to be associated with the term Lusei. Eventually, the Thadou clans themselves were gradually expelled by the Luseis from the Lushai Hills, and were driven into the plains of Cachar and the hills of Manipur in about 1848 CE (Grierson

1904; Shakespear 1912). In what follows, there will be a brief description of some of these major groups in Mizoram.

Lusei

The Luseis are the biggest group and the dominant inhabitants of the present Mizoram. Colonial discourse placed them under the central Chin sub-group; within the larger category of Kuki-Chin group. As previously mentioned, these groups of tribes were the last and most powerful among those who moved from the Chin Hills to the Lushai Hills, pushing away the former inhabitants like the Thadous northwards and westwards. By 1850, the Sailo chiefs obtained complete possession of the North Lushai Hills (Grierson 1904). John Shakespear (1912) described the extent as "country between the Kurnaphuli river and its main tributary, the Tuilianpui on the west, and the Tyao [Tiau] and Koladyne [Kaladan] river on the east, while their southern boundary is roughly a line drawn east and west through the junction of the Mat and Koladyne rivers, and their most northerly villages are found on the borders of the Silchar district" (Shakespear 1912, 2). During their stay in Chin Hills, Lentlang areas and on the banks of the Tiau river, they began clan-based settlements, and soon petty feuds frequently threatened their unity.[10] Even the fight between Luseis and other Luseis was inevitable. However, the neighbouring tribes living in the southern parts of Chin Hills, such as Halkha, Falam, Sukte and Thlantlang, were a source of terror. Soon, the institution of chieftainship was necessary to organize themselves against theem (Siama 1953). This was believed to be during the time of settlements on the east of the Tiau river (Liangkhaia 1938).

The Lusei chiefs claimed to have descended from one man, named Zahmuaka, a small-time chief of Hnamte clans who ruled Khawrua and Tlangkhua. He fathered six sons, namely, Paliana, Rivunga, Thangluaha, Zadenga, Rokhuma and Thangura. All of them and their descendants had become a chief on their own account, with villages and subjects, the name of the progenitor being the title of the chiefs. In addition to Zahmuaka's offspring, there emerged chiefs from Hualngo, Chuaungo, Chuauhang, Ralte, Ngente. However, in time, the descendants of

[10] Luseis settled at Seipui and Khawkawk, Raltes at Suaipui and Saihmun, Chawngthus at Sanzawl and Bochung, Khiangtes at Pelpawl, Belmuang and Lungchhuan, Chuaungos, Chuauhangs and Hauhnars at Hauhnar Tlang, Ngentes, Puntes and Partes at Chawnghawih and Siallam (Liangkhaia 1938, 43)

Thangura, who came to be called Sailo chiefs (Sailoa was the grandson of Thangura), proved to be the most prudent and shrewd among all the chiefs. The Sailo clans, therefore, maintained a hereditary chieftainship (Vanlawma 1989). Under their rule, the Luseis and other cognate clans came to appropriate other smaller clans, and even the chiefs of other Luseis, like Zadeng, Palian, Rivung, Thangluah, Chawngthus, Raltes, etc, were conquered and assimilated. By doing so, Sailo chiefs united these clans and consolidated the common identity of Lusei/Mizo. Over time, their homeland in the Chin Hills had become inadequate and lack resources to accommodate the growing population. Besides, the fear of Pawi was a constant concern. These factors made it necessary for them to migrate towards a seemingly empty land in the Lushai Hills. The weaker chiefs were the first to begin their westward journey, while the stronger ones were biding their time (Lalthangliana 1980).

The Palian clans were the first to move into the Lushai Hills and initially settled at Duntlang, said to contain 3000 households, under the leadership of Pubuara and Huliana. Pubuara pushed westwards till Pukzing, and his village was shattered by the joined forces of Sailo, Zadeng and Chakma. Other Sailo chiefs later defeated his successors. Huliana settled himself at Thinglian and Sialhau, and moved further west till Chipui mountain in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Another Palian chief named Lalchungnunga also erected a village at Lungtian on the Sajek mountain range (Laldova 2014). Sibuta and his grandson Lalsuthlaha were also well known chiefs of this clan. The Zadeng clans came second and passed through Champhai. They moved westwards and settled at Mualthuam, Tuahzawl, Kawrthah, and Vachhe tlang. Notable chiefs were Lianbula, his son Khawzahulha and his grandson Lalchungnunga, who were later invaded and conquered by the Sailo chiefs of Lallula's descendants in about 1815. The Rokhum clans followed the same route as Zadengs and settled at Ngentlang, Arbawm and Sihfa. They were not as numerous and powerful as their cousins, which also shortened their chiefship. The Thangluah clans crossed the Tiau river through Farkawn and established themselves in the Vanlaiphai area. Over time, they pushed westwards and erected villages near Thorang mountains. Notable chiefs were Lalpuihluta, Lalhluma, Lalthawmliana and Liansavunga. Since they were constantly at war with the Sailo chiefs, particularly the descendants of Lianlula, they had to flee further to the west and later settled down at

Thehlep and Uiphum mountains. One of the chiefs, Rothangpuia, penetrated as far as Tlabung (Demagiri) and Sajek mountain (Barkal). The Rivung clans took the most southerly course, and settled at Senlawng mountain beyond Lunglei. The famous chief Vanhnuaithanga entered Chittagong Hill Tracts and set up a townlet on the Longteroi Hills between the Chengri and Kassalong rivers. Shortly after his death, around 1850, his village was attacked and destroyed by Sailo chief, Vuttaia of Lallula's family. His remaining descendants fled to Tripura Hills (Shakespear 1912; Liangkhaia 1938). The Sailos, the descendants of Thangura, were the last to cross the Tiau river and move westwards to the Lushai Hills, which probably commenced around 1780. Having crushed and absorbed all their rival chiefs and clans, including their own cousins, they commanded undisputable sway over the entire country. By 1810, the Sailos, thanks to Lallula's leadership, firmly established their dominion by occupying most of the "country between Champhai and Demagiri northwards up to the borders of Cachar and Sylhet" (McCall 1949, 35-36; Elly 1893). In time, the Sailo chiefs, except for the southern chieftainships of Lai, Mara and Fanai villages, ruled the entire Lushai Hills. They also maintained the territorial integrity of Lushai Hills by constantly checking the encroachment of the Pawis from Burma Hills (Kipgen 1996). Since they scattered in every nook and corner of Lushai Hills, inter-clan war also began shortly. A war between the northern chiefs, descendants of Lallula, and the southern chiefs, descendants of Lalchera, broke out in 1856 over a land dispute. Later again in 1877, the chiefs of the eastern and western region, all Sailos, went into war (Shakespear 1912). Although they constantly fought themselves, the Pawis, including Hakha, Falam and Sukte, were the common enemy. Most of the Sailo chiefs were, in their own domain, tackling the threat of the Pawis (Vanlawma 1989).

Lai/Pawi

The Lais/Pawis are the inhabitants of the southern district of Lawngtlai, Mizoram, where they govern themselves under the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). Regional autonomous status was granted to them on the ground that they have a distinct culture from the rest of the groups in Mizoram. However, as they were ruled by the same British administration and evangelized by the same missionary society like the Luseis, they have been deeply integrated into the mainstream Lusei-

dominated Mizo society (Hminga 1987). The latest census shows that the Lai community covers 5 percent of the population of Mizoram.[11]

The Lais came from the different places in the Chin Hills. During the sojourn in the Chin Hills, they established permanent settlements at Falam, Tiddim, Halkha (Haka) and Thlantlang (Klangklang). Some of them still moved further south up to the Lunglei Subdivision of Lushai Hills, where they were called Pawi by the Luseis. In fact, the Luseis called Lais and other kindred tribes who had hair knots on their foreheads Pawi. The Lais have over 166 clans and subclans, but the chief clans are Chinzah, Hlawncheu, Hlawnchhing, Hnialum and Khenglawt. Their main dialects spoken in Mizoram are Khuofo and Thlantlang (Tribal Research Institute 1994). Along with the Luseis, Lakhers and Zahau group, the Lais belong to the larger Kuki-Chin group, and are part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. As warring tribes, the Haka clans were at war with the Sunthla, while the Thlantlang clans frequently raided the Arakan border and Chittagong, where they were called Shendus (Grierson 1904). In fact, the great Lusei migration from the Chill Hills was caused by the menace of Pawis. While the Lusei chiefs were constantly fighting with the Pawis in the Chin Hills, the Pawis and other groups like the Lakhers and Fanai chiefs in the southern part of Mizoram were uninvolved with the Lusei chiefs, despite occasional raids and counterraids. Even when the Sailo chiefs consolidated their position in the entire Lushai Hills, these southern chiefs maintained their sovereignty. Some Lai clans, such as Fanai and Chinzah, came under a strong influence of the Lusei in terms of language and dress.

Mara/Lakher

The Maras/Lakhers are one of the tribal groups in Mizoram. Neighbouring the Lai Autonomous District Council, they are concentrated in the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) area at the south-eastern corner of Mizoram. A township called Siaha is the headquarter of the district council, and most Mara towns and villages are located on the east of the Koladyne river. The Maras are socio-culturally and ethnically similar with the Lais than with the Luseis. While the Lais have been socially closer to the Luseis through Christianity and Christian missionary agencies,

[11] Scheduled Tribes Population by Religious Community, http://www.censusindia.gov.in. Accessed November 7, 2016.

the social and cultural interaction and reciprocal influence between the Maras and Luseis are relatively less. This might be attributed to the fact that while the Lais and Luseis were Christianized by the same missionary agency, the Maras were evangelized by different Christian missionaries. These missionaries did the pioneer works, such as language script-writing, dictionary making, literature translation, other work of literacy and church establishment, all of which contributed to ethnic identity consciousness. Due to the geographical remoteness and isolation of Mara areas vis-à-vis the Lusei's, social interaction and influence are also lesser. But as they all belong to the central Chin sub-group, their languages and culture have certain similarities (Goswami 1958). According to the latest census figure, they are numbering 42,055, occupying 4 percent of the total population.[12]

The name Lakher was given by the Luseis, and the name they prefer is Mara. They are also called Shendus by the colonial writers (Lewin 1869; Grierson 1904). The Maras came from the Haka Subdivision and Thlantlang of the Chin Hills, from where they were being pushed away by stronger enemies (Shakespear 1912; Parry 1932). According to N.E. Parry, they are part of the Lai tribes in Chin Hills, and their language is also similar to the Lai's (Parry 1932). The tribes that T.H Lewin addressed as Shendus, in his *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, must have included both the Lakher and the Pawis. Grierson (1904) also stated that the Lakhers are an offshoot of the Tlantlang tribe of Lais (Grierson 1904). It is clear that the Lakhers and Pawis are very close in their culture, as they came from the same region. In fact, there are also certain common clans among them. The Lakher group can be divided into six clans, namely Hawthai, Zeuhnang, Tlongsai, Sabeu, Heima and Lialai. The society is divided into three classes that maintain the social structure. The highest are the chief clans, followed by the highborn or Phansang clans, and then the common people called Machhi (Tribal Research Institute 1994). In addition to occasional skirmishes with neighbouring tribes like Lusei chiefs, the Maras also frequently raided and forayed Chittagong Hill Tracts and Arakan, proving to be quite a thorn in the side of the British authorities. The Lushai Expedition 1869-71, while subduing the Lusei chiefs, left the Lakhers unscathed. However, after the Chin-Lushai Expedition 1889-90, the British began to administer some of the Lakher villages for

[12] Ibid.,

the first time. The process was completed only in 1924, when all villages were put under the district administration of Lushai Hills, Chin Hills and North Arakan (Parry 1932).

Bawm and Pang

The Bawm and Pang are two of the smallest ethnic tribes in Mizoram, mostly in the Sixth Schedule areas of Lai and Chakma Autonomous District Council, as well as some villages in Lunglei and Aizawl district. Some villages within these areas include Chamdurtlang, Chamdur 'P', Bungtlang 'S', Vathuampui, Chikhurlui, Hmunnuam, Chawngte, Tlabung, West Phaileng and Pukzing (Tribal Research Institute 2007). However, majority reside within the Chakma Circle or Rangamati district (Pang) and Bohmong Circle or Bandarban district (Bawm) of Chittagong Hill Tracts of the present day Bangladesh (Laldova 2014). Those currently living in Mizoram had either immigrated from Chittagong Hill Tracts or had their villages incorporated within the official boundary of Mizoram, as most of these villages are situated at the western borderlands between Mizoram and Bangladesh. Many had moved to Mizoram, along with the MNF insurgents, who were returning after a Peace Accord was reached in 1986. Though most chiefs ruled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Bawms and Pangs in Mizoram also had their own chiefs. Due to their ethnic affinity and similarity in terms of languages and customs, the Bawms and Pangs of Mizoram, under the strong influence of Luseis, generally acknowledged Mizo identity. They fully participated in the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and had their student organizations like Pang Zirlai Pawl (PZP) and Mizoram Bawm Students' Association (MBSA) affiliated with Mizo Zirlai Pawl and Mizo Students' Union. Linguistically, right next to the Lusei, Lai and Mara, they are part of the Kuki-Chin group (Grierson 1904).

Although they are not one and the same, the colonial writers regarded Bawm and Pang (written as Bunjogees and Pankhos) as closely allied and of a common origin, and took note of the similarity in their habits, customs and language. The only noticeable distinction between the two is the style of hair knot of the male individual. Bawm wears a hair knot in their forehead, like the Shendoos and Khumi, while Pang ties his hair at the back of his head, like the Lusei clans (Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1906). These two groups also strongly resemble other neighbouring clans like Luseis,

Maras and Lais in their physique, appearance and language. This led the colonial writers to conclude that they are an offshoot of Lais (Hutchinson 1906) and Luseis (Lewin 1869). The Bawms are said to be a branch of Lai tribe,[13] who occupied a country in the Chin Hills between the Tashons to the north and the Zos to the south. As seen earlier, the Lais in the Chill Hills extended towards the Lushai Hills and Arakan. Some of them settled in the Uiphum hill range, at the southwestern fringe of the Lushai Hills. From there, they might have moved more westward. At the same time, Bawms had also entered Chittagong Hills from the Arakan and settled in the Bandarban district where they are found today. Writing from the perspective of Chittagong Hill Tracts, T.H. Lewin stated they claimed to come from the south, probably Arakan (Lewin 1869, 96). It can be corroborated from a letter received about the 24th June, 1787, from the King of Arakan to the Chief of Chittagong. The short version reads, "Domcan Chukma [Chakma], and Kiecopa Lies [Lai], Marring and other inhabitants of Arracan [Arakan], have now absconded and taken refuge near the mountains within your border, and exercise depredations on the people belonging to both countries… It is not proper that you should give asylum to them or the other Mughs [Mogh] who have absconded from Arracan, and you will do right to drive them from your country" (Lewin 1870, 75). This letter dealt with the Chakma, Lai (Bunjogee or Bawm), Mro and Mogh, who probably left Arakan without the consent of the authorities. This is also in sync with the Mogh history concerning the flight of the Mogh (Bohmong) chief, Kong-Hla-Phrue, to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, escaping the yoke of Arakan court (Hutchinson 1906, 160).

In 1799, the name Bunjogee was mentioned in the article by John Macrae related to the Kuki tribes living on the mountains to the north-east of the Chittagong province (Grierson 1904). He stated that the Bunjogees often attacked the Kukis and prevailed, owing to the fact that they were united under one chief despite few in numbers. They also exacted an annual tribute of salt from the Kuki chiefs (Harrington

[13] The Bawms as a whole can be divided into two main groups, Sunthla Bawm and Panghawi Bawm. The former group includes a number of clans in common with the Lais, such as Chinzah, Hlawncheu, Bawitlung etc. The latter group are again closely allied with the Pangs. Sunthla Bawm includes the following: Chinza, Lawncheu, Bawitlung, Lawnsing, Maram, Thingur, Thlotlang, Hauheng, Vandir, Luangngo, Tongir, Cheulei, Leitak, Lalnam, Cheurek, Demrawng, Ngapu, Milu, Pawngkeng, Tenu, Aineh. And under the Panghawi Bawm are, Sailuk, Ichia, Lengtong, Nako, Kawmlau, Thangming, Sangla (Singla), Samthang, Rukha, Amlai, Khengkhung, Chahu (Sahu), Ripachai, Tangthing, Charang, Palang, Setek, Kaihnawn, Milai, Sakhawng, Leihang, Khualhring (Laldova 2014, 152-153).

Esq. 1803). A year earlier in 1798, Francis Buchanan also mentioned in his tour of Chittagong Hill Tracts, the chief of the Bunjogees named Tai-koup, whose subjects consisted of two tribes, the Bon-zu and the Loo-sai (Schendel 1992b, 110). In his *Account of Arakan*, Lieut. Phayre, Senior Assistant Commissioner of Arakan, gave a brief description of the people who occupied the west of the upper Kaladan river beyond the British frontier, known by the Arakanese and the Kumi as Lungkhe or Bunjogee. The name of their chief was Lengkung, who belonged to the Hlaing-chou clan (most probably Hlawncheu) of the Tsein-du tribe (Shendoo). In October 1838, the Lungkhes led by Lengkung attacked a Kumi village called Hlengkreing on the Kaladan, killed several people and captured women and children as slaves. After this ordeal, Lieut. Phayre went on, they fled westward into the hills of Chittagong district along with their prisoners, and sought refuge under the protection of Bohmong Raja Sathang Prue (Phayre 1841, 706-708). In fact, the Bohmong Raja that time was a son of Kong-Hla-Phrue, who left the Arakan court fifty years ago. This was probably the time when the Bawm or Bunjogee penetrated and settled in the Bohmong circle of Chittagong Hill Tracts. N.E. Parry (1932) observed that Lungkhes referred to by Lieut. Phayre are a branch of Mara or Lakher, while the chief Lengkung was a Pawi or Lai, known to the Mara as Laikong, and that both Lakhers and Lais made up his villagers (Parry 1932). This is also likely, since the term Shendoo covered both Pawi and Lakher.

Unlike Bawms, the Pangs had migrated from the Chin Hills to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, after passing through the Lushai Hills. However, like Bawms, the Pangs are not a homogenized tribe, but a composite community made up of different clans, such as Lusei, Lai, Hmar, Zahau, Khawlhring etc. Nevertheless, the identity of Pang is consolidated. Being a small tribe, the British writers had not invested much in documenting their history, and only mentioned it in passing. Therefore, most of their history has come from native historians, who asserted that the Pangs were the first to move out from Chin Hills and entered Chittagong as early as the thirteenth century CE (Laldova 2014). They were the first group among Chin-Kuki people to inhabit Chittagong. They were also probably the first to settle in the Hill Tracts, as can be seen from R.H. Sneyd Hutchinson's book, where he stated, "the Chittagong Hill Tracts were originally occupied by the different tribes belonging to the Kuki group" (Hutchinson 1906, 24). The earliest mention of the Pang community

was in the writing of T.H. Lewin in 1869, where he called them Pankhos and clubbed together with Bunjogees, within the category of Toungtha, sons of the hill (Lewin 1869).

The early known history of Pang begins from the settlement at Lengtlang in the Chin Hills. Those clans who called themselves Pang lived in a particular village called Pangzawl in that area. The name of the clan itself must have come from the name of that village. Due to the emergence of stronger clans, they were forced to leave Chin Hills and move towards the west. After crossing the Tiau river, they settled in the village called Pangzawl, located at the midway between Serchhip and Lunglei township of Mizoram. After some years of settlement, the first group moved further westward, crossing the Karnaphuli river, up to the Mahmuam and Lungsir of Sajek ranges in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Here, they occupied vacant lands and established new villages like Zopui, Thangnang, Lungtian, Chipui, Chhippui, Mahmuam, Lawngkawt etc. The second group had moved southward and settled at a village called Pangkhua, situated near the confluence of Tiau and Kaladan river, within the boundary of the current Lai Autonomous District Council, and spread all over from there (Tribal Research Institute 2007; Laldova 2014). Writing in 1906, the then Superintendent of Chittagong Hill Tracts, R.H. Sneyd Hutchinson, recalled how he met with a few Bunjogees and Pankhos in the Lushai Hills, living in the village on the upper Kaladan river (Hutchinson 1906, 160). These must have been those who remained in the Pangkhua village and its surroundings. When colonial rule came at their doorsteps, some sections of the Pang community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts even moved back eastwards and settled in the Uiphum and Thorang range of the then Lushai Hills. After leaving the Hills, they loosely dropped the Pang identity and reclaimed the title of their own clan and its language (Laldova 2014). As mentioned earlier, the Pangs[14] are a mixed community and constituted by the conglomeration of various clans. The ruling clan, Laitluang, are Chhakchhuak clan of Lusei tribe, Sizang is the ruling clan of Zahau, Milai, Khualring, Bawngkhuai and Leisete are Khawlhring of Lusei, Vanzang and Lawitlang are sub-clans of Hmar, Tenu, Ripachei, Sakhawng, Palang are Bawm sub-clans (Tribal Research Institute 2007). This had

[14] The different clans of Pang are, Laitluang, Seizang (Sizang), Dawn, Vanzang (Banzang), Leihang, Khualring (Khawlhring), Milai, Rama, Lawitlang, Sakechep, Palang, Laisuak, Laibur, Lainguk, Palo, Singla, Tenu, Ripachei, Sakhawng, Bawngkhuai, Leisete, Sehval, Siarsei, Pipiling, Luangngo, Pualhnam, Rualleng, Saken, Mizen (Laldova 2014, 171)

caused a great confusion among the colonial writers about the ethnic identity of the Pangs.

Nikhama Chhakchhuak (1530-1622) was one of the earliest known chiefs of the Pang community, whose descendants continued to remain a ruling family till the institution of chieftainship was regulated by the government in the twentieth century. He established his village called Hmunpuichhip at Barkal or Sajek range. His son, Laitluanga (1580-1670), from whom the name of the clan was taken by the later generations, however shifted his village from Hmunphuichhip to Khantlang, west of Sajek mountain between Rangamati and Chittagong, to gain access to the Chittagong market. His eldest son, named Khamlaia (1620-1708), started a new village by his own at the southern corner of Sajek range called Lungngo, and was a great chief. He found mention in *The Gazetteer of Eastern Bengal* in 1784 as 'King Khawlige', the only chief of Pang to whom the British gave a king title. From Khantlang, Laitluanga's other sons, Ramthlenga (1640-1710) and Sialkaithanga (1643-1720), also moved east and established a new village on the bank of Karnaphuli river. One of Ramthlenga's great-grandsons, Sumlala (1740-1810), is said to have developed good relations with his neighbours, Chakmas, and other groups with whom he lived side by side. He also featured in the Chakma folklore and ballad.

In the late eighteenth century, the growing influence of the British was a major concern among the chiefs around the Chittagong and its hill tracts. When the Chakma Raja proposed an unified resistance against the colonial authority and asked for cooperation, one of the chiefs known as Chaltuahkhupa was said to send around a hundred men, with Dothanga as the group leader (Laldova 2014, 177-187). Upon hearing no instances of war against the British, there was a perception that the Chakmas instead cooperated with the British and used their muscle and resources to conquer their land. This showed that when the British made first contact with the Chakmas and exacted tributes from the Raja, they left the other tribes living in the more remote hill tracts largely untouched until much later. One of the Pang chiefs, mentioned in the colonial writing, was Ngunchungnunga (1815-1895), a grandson of Chaltuahkhupa. T.H.Lewin wrote, "in the time of one of their Rajah Ngungjungnung, the Pankhos and Bunjogees asserted they were the dominant and most numerous of all the tribes in this part of the world" (Lewin 1869, 96). During his reign, the British

authority had already annexed the hill tracts of Chittagong, but had only a vague idea of what lies within the hills and ethnic communities. It was only in 1900, after forty years of full annexation, that the government uncovered every nook and corner of the hill tracts. Under the Rules for Administration of Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1892 and Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1900 (1 of 1900), popularly known as CTH Manual, the government formalized the institution of chieftainship by delimiting the boundary and extent of authority of each chief and raja, called Mouza. Each Mouza, ruled by a headman, has its name and number. In the entire hill tracts area, there are 371 Mouza, 178 in Chakma Circle, 105 in Bohmong Circle and 88 in Mong Circle. Currently, there are six Bawm headmen in Bohmong Circle and fourteen Pang and Lusei combined headmen in Chakma Circle (Laldova 2014). In the early census after 1860, the Pang and Bawm community together numbered about 700 households or 3000 population (Lewin 1869, 96). In 1998, there were already 64 Bawm villages and 2 villages inhabited by both, numbering around 9238 (Laldova 2014, 138). Now, the population of the Bawm and Pang communities in Bangladesh is roughly 12000 and 4000, respectively.[15]

The Chakma of Chittagong Hill Tracts: History and Migration

The Chakmas are one of the ethnic groups in Mizoram, who belong to Sino-Tibetan stocks, but gradually adopted an Indo-Aryan language. While most Chakmas reside in the geographical area of the Chakma Autonomous District Council, in the south-western region of Lawngtlai district bordering Bangladesh, they are also settled in Lunglei and Mamit districts. According to the latest census figure, the Chakmas are numbering 96,972, which is 9.3 percent of the total population in Mizoram.[16] Outside Mizoram, Chakmas inhabited Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, hilly areas in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura in India, as well as Arakan in Myanmar. Among the ethnic groups in Mizoram, they are certainly of a more recent one, having

[15] Bawm of Bangladesh, 2020 https://www.peoplegroups.org/explore/groupdetails.aspx?peid=1153 Accessed October 29, 2020.
Pankhu or Panko in Bangladesh, 2020 https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14300/BG Accessed October 29, 2020.
[16] Scheduled Tribes Population by Religious Community, http://www.censusindia.gov.in. Accessed November 7, 2016.

moved mostly from the Hill Tracts of Chittagong since the colonial period (Tribal Research Institute 1994).

Origin Theories and Relationships with the Mughals and the British

It is generally accepted that the Chakmas are of Arakanese origin who immigrated into the Chittagong Hill Tracts, intermarried with the locals, and settled there. Many of them have moved to the regions where they are now found today in good numbers. With regard to the origin of the Chakmas and their ancestors, there has been much debate. Moreover, the Muslim names and later Bengali names of the Chakma chiefs further confused their genealogy. According to the Chakmas, they came originally from a country called Champak Nagar believed to be situated in the north-western province of India, present-day Bihar, and were descendants of *Kshatriya* warriors of North Indian Aryan, who marched against the Arakan king during the late fourteenth century, defeated them and established there themselves (Lewin 1869; Roy 1958) The colonial writers considered the *Kshatriya* lineage a myth, that was forged during the reign of Kalindi Rani between 1832-1874, when the influence of Hinduism in the form of Shiva and Kali worship was at its peak in her court (Hutchinson 1906). Another theory maintained that the Chakmas were of Muslim origin, and that they originated from a union between the hill women and Mughal soldiers under Nawab Shaista Khan, a governor of Lower Bengal. Similarly, the Magh tradition held that the captive Mughal soldiers who married the local Arakanese women were the ancestors of the Chakmas. This theory seemed to find credibility among the colonial writers (Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1906). During that time, the Chakma chief Chaman Khan (sometime about 1650) was said to forge a relationship with the Wazir of Chittagong through a marriage alliance, and thus earned the title ‘Khan’. With regard to the Muslim title and origin, modern writers opine that the Arakanese captured a considerable number of Mughal armies as captives is hard to establish. Besides, having a Muslim name does not necessarily mean they are of Muslim origin, and these names were no doubt adopted in deference to the ruling power of their times (Hutchinson 1906; Serajuddin and Buller 1984).

The title ‘Khan’ that the Chakma Rajas adopted might have been Turkic in origin, which meant commander or leader, first used by the Mongol rulers. The then Mughal rulers appeared to have taken the title from the Mongol, and the Chakma

Rajas of that period adopted the same, probably to raise their status at par with the Great Khans of Central Asia. One of the Chakma origin theories widely accepted among the Chakmas themselves was that they were the descendants of the Sakya. According to Buddhist literature, the Sakya ruled over Kapilavastu in the Himalayan foothills of Nepal and parts of Gangetic India (Bikkhu 2015). Yet another theory had suggested that the Chakmas were of Tai origin from the Mongoloid race, like Ahom of Assam, Magh of Arakan, who fled from Central Asia and moved towards the western Yunnan and Burma (Talukdar 1987). Notwithstanding the different opinions and theories as to the origin of the Chakmas,[17] there is a broad consensus that they were once an inhabitant of Arakan before they migrated to Chittagong and its Hill Tracts. The Chakmas were referred to as *Sak* or *Thek* by the Arakanese, and found mention in that name in many parts of Arakan history. They were said to be living in the northern mountains of Arakan (Phayre 1844). Due to the hostile and anarchical rule of the Arakan king, a wave of Chakma migration towards Chittagong had started from the fifteenth century till the early eighteenth century. Under the aegis of Sultan of Bengal, Jalaluddin Mohammad Shah, who brought Arakan under Bengali dominance, "the Chakmas came through the Matamuhuri valley and first established themselves at Ali Kadam on the southern frontier of Chittagong, and were then gradually pushed northwards by the advancing Magh tribes until they found themselves permanently settling in and around the hills north of the Karnaphuli in the early 18th century" (Serajuddin and Buller 1984, 91).

When in 1666, the Mughal Nawab of Bengal took the possession of Chittagong from the Portuguese and Arakanese control, the Chakma Raja also came under the Mughal rule. However, most of the Chakma areas lied outside the Mughal administration and hence remained largely unaffected. In 1711, when Chandan Khan was elected as Raja by the people through franchise, his appointment was approved by the King of Arakan, indicating that they were still under the rule of the latter. Eventually, the Mughal state demanded some form of tribute from the Raja, in

[17] For a detailed discussion on the different Chakma origin theories, see Bikkhu, Prajnalankar. 2015. "The Chakmas: A Missing Link of the Sakya Tribe." *Chakma Literary Journal* (Chakma Literary Academy) 1 (1): 42-59; Debnath, Rupak. 2015. "Origin of the Chakmas: Ethnogenesis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts." *Chakma Literary Journal* (Chakma Literary Academy) 1 (1): 7-26.

exchange for a permission for the hill people to trade with the Mughal territory of the lowland. Raja Jalal Khan agreed to the said tribute payment in cotton, beginning from 1715 (Information & Public Relations Department n.d.). However, the Mughals never were interested in a complete political subjugation of the hill region which ensured their longstanding self-determination. The terms of relation remained commercial, but unfair and oppressive for the Chakmas since they paid tribute for economic activities which benefited both sides. Over the years, the revenue seemed to have been paid irregularly and eventually stopped in 1724, the consequence of which was an assault on the Chakma settlements by the Mughals. The Chakma Raja himself was put to flight to Arakan where he died soon after. But, being under the suzerainty of Arakan King was no better than the Mughals that the successor Raja Sher Musta Khan reappeared before the Mughal government and renewed the tribute agreement in 1737. In addition, he was also granted land in the Hills of Rangunia district (A. M. Serajuddin 1971, 52-54).

Once the East India Company extended their authority to Chittagong in 1760, the Chakma Raja continued to pay the annual tribute in cotton. In turn, the Company recognized their autonomy and the privileges of trade. In fact, as early as 1763, Mr. Henry Verelest, the Company official, declared that the local jurisdiction of Chakma Raja extended from Feni River to the hills of Kuki chief (Talukdar 1987, 35). During the reign of Raja Sher Daulat Khan, the Chakmas made another attempt to take back the lost sovereignty by withholding tribute payment, imposing rents and taxes from plain people who cultivated land within the Raja's jurisdiction, and reasserting territorial sovereignty. Sher Daulat Khan's general Ramu Khan also raided the plain areas of Rangunia in 1777 and entered into war with the Company which lasted till 1787. A military campaign was sent to capture him, but to no avail (Serajuddin and Buller 1984, 93-96).

What transpired as a declaration of sovereign right was to the British, nothing more than 'tribal' lawlessness, as was revealed from the letter of Chief of Chittagong to the Governor- General, accusing Ramu Khan of committing violence and collecting taxes without proper official capacity (Lewin 1869). The Company sought to suppress the uprising by blocking the essential supplies to the hills, which ultimately compelled the Raja to submit to the English authority in 1787. Raja

Tabbauk Khan, who succeeded his father, refused to acknowledge the British domination over his territory and continued to fight for sovereignty till he was defeated by the British troops in 1793-94. In the meantime, Ramu Khan never yielded to the British authority and fought against them until the end of his life (Qanungo 1998, 54-55). According to Francis Buchanan, who visited the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1798, Ramu Khan after being defeated by the British troops, retired in the jungle and killed himself by consuming poison in 1795-96 (Schendel 1992b, 110). Those tribute paid to the Mughals by the hill people in exchange for privilege to do trade with the former's territory, had also been increasingly misinterpreted by the English as an official tax regime payable to the state. So, after Chakma Raja Jan Bux Khan conceded in 1787, the Company replaced cotton tribute with cash payment, signalling the change from mere tribute to revenue to the state. It also started the administrative relations between the hill people and the Company's government. This move was later institutionalized through the Permanent Settlement of 1793 (Mackenzie 1884; Serajuddin and Buller 1984). Successive Chakma Rajas were paying the revenue as per the agreed terms which was occasionally renewed. A series of administrative changes affected the Raja's authority and their settlements as well. When the British annexed the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a separate district in 1860, the Chakmas settled around Rangunia, and later shifted to Rangamati with the change of district headquarter from Chandraghona to Rangamati in 1865. This was a period when the colonial state began to enter the Hill Tracts, followed by the entire paraphernalia of authority. Following the implementation of Rules for the Administration of Chittagong Hill Tracts 1892 and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1900 (I of 1900), also known as CTH Manual, the Chakma raja continued to inhabit the Chakma Circle, exercising wide extent of self-rule including revenue collection and justice dispensation (Hutchinson 1906).

British Imperial Policies: Making of Identity

The fate of both the Hills and their inhabitants had been intertwined since the coming up of colonialism in this part of the world. With the consolidation of the East India Company's rule in the Indian sub-continent after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 CE, little did they know that the world as they knew it, was about to change. Before the

British turned towards what was known as the North-East Frontier of Bengal, they already annexed and formed a relation with the coastal area of Chittagong in 1760 when it was ceded to Lord Clive. It became one of the places from where the British expanded and incorporated the entire eastern frontier region (Pachuau 2014). In what follows, this section looks at the history of colonial expansion into these areas and how it affects the ideas of boundary, ethnic identity and sense of belonging of its inhabitants. This is in sync with the recent studies that have increasingly perceived colonization as a cultural domination, not merely as military, economic or political subjugation. Culture itself was seen as a project of control and order, where the colonized were marked off 'essentially' from one another through the notions of language, landscape, geography and history, that, in effect, had repercussions on how identity and territorial belonging came to be understood in local indigenous terms (Dirks 1992; Cohn 1996; Sluyter 2001 et al.). These narratives focus on the various implications of 'modernizing' technologies employed by colonial empire, which are being overlooked by the earlier literatures which understand colonial rule and its ramifications through the accounts of military subjugation of the land and its people, with legal and administrative changes that are introduced to manage the subjects. One of the main emphases of such recent studies is on the making of identity and creation of fixed territory in relation to the colonial state and other subjects (Pachuau 2014). In the context of India and the Northeast in particular, various scholars showed how the colonial encounter basically 'made' people (Padel 1995; Baruah 2008; Pachuau 2014). Taking a cue from such studies, this study looks at colonialism both from its coercive parameters, what it inhibits as well as from its creative side, what it facilitates.

Colonial Intervention in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Lushai Hills

The Chittagong Hill Tracts as a geographical region, comprises three districts, namely Khagrachari district, Rangamati district and Bandarban district within the Chittagong Division in south-eastern Bangladesh. According to the 2001 census of Bangladesh, out of the entire tribal population of 1.4 million (1.13 percent of the total population), 41.92 percent reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.[18] The tribal community in the hill tracts includes Chakma, Marma (Mogh), Tripura, Tonchongya, Mro, Chak, Khumi,

[18] Banglapedia National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh, Population 2015 http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Population Accessed October 30, 2020.

Khiang, Bawm (Bawmzo), Pang (Pangkhua), and Lusei. In the sixteenth century, before the advent of British colonialism, the sea-board of Chittagong, part of Lower Bengal was a battle ground for supremacy among the Tripura Raja, Arakan king, Mughal and Portuguese. The Arakan king harboured Portuguese settlers and other European fugitives and gave them permission to occupy Chittagong, in order to protect his frontier from the Mughals. They regularly engaged in piracy, and conducted slave trade with other Europeans including the Portuguese of Hooghly, who established there under the permission of Mughal Emperor Jahangir. These kinds of activities proved displeasure for the succeeding Emperor Shah Jahan, son of Jahangir, who later besieged the town and ended the Portuguese settlement at Hooghly in 1632. During Emperor Aurangzeb's reign, his army general and Governor of Lower Bengal, Shaista Khan launched a military campaign against Chittagong and conquered the Portuguese and Arakan raja in 1666. Chittagong was established as a district under the Bengal Subah of the Mughal empire the same year. It continued to be under the Mughal for the next hundred years, until it was relinquished to the East India Company by the then Nawab of Bengal. When the British took over, they paid full attention to the administration of the district of Chittagong Proper. At the same time, there was no initiative to directly administer the Hill Tracts and its inhabitants, except for the payment of tribute in cotton to the British in exchange for a privilege of free-trade between the hills and the plains. The two recognized chiefs, the Chakmas living to the north of the river Karnaphuli and Moghs residing to the south of the river, paid these tributes, which shortly afterwards was converted into money payment (Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1906). This indicated that the relations between the hill people and the Company was an informal rule confined to an economic affair, despite the bloody history of Chakma rebellion.

In the North-East Frontier, the colonial expansion began with the Treaty of Yandabo signed between the British government and the Burmese in 1826. It effectively put an end to the Burmese claims on the region and their expansionist campaign that extended till the valley of Brahmaputra in Assam. Prior to the Treaty, the early colonial intervention was limited as the region offered no significant economic viability for the East India Company. However, with the discovery of tea plantations, the British government decided to occupy the Brahmaputra plains. Upon realizing the interconnection between the political economy of the plains and the

outlying hills, the British decided to control the hill region one after another including the Lushai Hills, and eventually the entire hill area, known today as Northeast, was brought under British domination (Pachuau 2014). As mentioned earlier, the frequent internecine feuds among different chiefs for political supremacy defined life in the Lushai Hills before the British. In the meanwhile, when the British began the tea plantation in the Assam plains, especially the Cachar area, these chiefs felt that their territory and rights were being encroached upon. They then started attacking and raiding the plains people's settlements. These raids were carried out on the entire region bordering the northern Lushai Hills, including Manipur, Tripura frontiers, Silchar, Sylhet and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Not only the native British subjects but also the Englishman became the victims of these attacks. The British government promptly avenged by sending reconciliatory as well as retributory expeditions into the Lushai Hills. Since then, the connection between the British and the Lushai land has begun.

From 1844, when the Palian chief Lalsukthlaa raided Sylhet frontiers, the instances of raids on British territory by the Luseis and other clans became more frequent. Similar kinds of Lusei raids occurred in 1847, 1849, 1850 and 1869 among the settlements in Sylhet, Tripura, Cachar and Manipur. The British reacted by sending punitive expeditions to deal with the chiefs who were identified as culprits. And in 1871, another series of raids were perpetrated by the other Lushai chiefs on the Chittagong frontiers in 1871 which were more organized and determined than the earlier raids (Mackenzie 1884; Elly 1893; McCall 1949). In the southern and western sides, the Lakher or Shendu forays on the subjects of Chakma Raja and Phru (Bohmong) Raja in the Chittagong Hill Tracts were frequently reported from 1847. These incidents were attributed to the works of Shendus or tribes from the south (Parry 1932). In what came to be known as the "Great Kookie Invasion of 1860", another series of raids and plunders befell the British subjects in the adjacent Tripura District. The perpetrators were said to be the followers of Lusei chief Rothangpuia, who lived far up between the upper source of the Feni river and Karnaphuli river. These large-scale outrages proved anxious to the British authority, and it was felt necessary to interfere to protect the subjects from the aggressions of the frontier tribes. This led to a formal annexation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. An Act XXII of 1860 was accordingly passed and the Hill Tracts of Chittagong was removed from

the plain country of Chittagong as a separate district, which was put under the authority of the newly appointed Superintendent (Lewin 1869; Mackenzie 1884). After considering the measures to be adopted in the wake of these incidents, the government of Assam and Bengal decided that an armed expedition should be made into the Lushai Hills, which remained *terra incognita*, with the objectives of "preventing the recurrence of the outrages committed in British territory" and permanently establishing the security of the British frontier (Mackenzie 1884, 310). The expedition which came to be known as the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, set out in two columns; one from Cachar and the other column from Chittagong. Armed with mountain artillery, sappers and miners, and a good number of infantry, they achieved what they set out to do. As a result, more than 60 villages surrendered and all the intransigent Lusei chiefs were subdued, and forced to promise their lasting friendship and peace. Bazaars were set up at Changsil, Sonai and Tipaimukh to encourage the trade between the Lushais and the neighbours, as well as long lasting peace and tranquility in the Hills (Elly 1893; McCall 1949).

After a decade, neither these military measures nor the annexation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts fully ceased the raids and plunder, as these troubles coming from the Lushai Hills were once again encountered. In 1888, a raiding party of Shendus under Hausata attacked a small official survey band near the Saichal range, few miles within the boundary and murdered the commander and three others. A few days later, another pillage struck the village of Prenkhyn Mro in the Chema (Chengri) valley to the south of Chittagong Hill Tracts, also attributed to Shendus. The government responded by strengthening police outposts with 250 sepoys of 9th Bengal Infantry, which proved to be terribly insufficient. This event was followed by another series of large-scale raids in 1889, which took place in the Chengri valley on the Chittagong frontier (Reid 1893; Elly 1893). By this time, it was decided that permanent conquest of the entire hill was necessary. To that end, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal proposed another operation, that came to be known as the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90, with the chief objectives of reducing the Shendus and Luseis to full submission, punishing the perpetrators and freeing the captives. The Lushai Hills was attacked simultaneously from three sides, Chittagong, Chin Hills and Cachar. The whole operation was completed in 1890. It resulted in the complete pacification and British occupation of the Lushai land. Military outposts were built

at Aijal (Aizawl) and Changsil in the north, and in the south Fort Treager was established while the existing Fort Lunglei was upgraded and improved (Reid 1893; Reid 1942).

Enter the Colonial State: Breaking down the Land

The various tools of colonial governmentality that were adopted in these two hill regions with regard to territory, administration, governance etc, besides being an instrument of domination, had also shaped and created the idea of land and identity among the subjects. The colonial enterprise brought with it an entire regime of information gathering, cartographic exercise and topographical surveys on the land and its inhabitants, which was required to rule the colonized. It also introduced a system of classification and categorization. Through such modes of differentiation, peoples, landscapes, regions or territories, were evaluated, graded and accorded administrative status in relation to their strategic importance for the economic and political interest of the colonial state. What followed was a different degree of governance where the areas amenable to direct rules were differentiated from those that were controlled indirectly or unsuccessfully and those that were yet to be conquered. The already incorporated areas had now been put in contrast to those intransigent peoples and their regions. Thus, the frontier hill tracts and its people came to be defined in terms of their differences from the settled peoples from the Brahmaputra plains. This scheme not only discriminated between the hills and the valleys as 'savage' and 'civilized' on the basis of factors defined by the colonial state, but also created cleavages among the hill areas and the peoples themselves by assigning particular degrees of 'wildness' and 'barbarism'.

In this, the notion of Inner Line, which was introduced through the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act framed in 1873, was significant. It was an abstract boundary line between the frontier tribes and the British territory, beyond which no British subjects and non-local residents could travel across without a license or pass.[19]

[19] In 1879, the inner line system was extended to the Chittagong Hill Tracts that in turn affected the South Lushai Hills. The line started from the Jampui hill range in Tripura following the whole course of Tuilenpui river to its junction with the Karnaphuli river; after which it continued eastwards up to the junction of Tuichong river till it reached the hill station of Uiphum; then turning westwards and followed Thega Khall river to its source; then again it turned south-westwards and joined the southern hill station of Keokradong on the south-eastern boundary of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Mackenzie 1884, 397).

It is to be noted that, the inner line did not amount to the territorial boundary of a country or tribes under control, as it only represented a frontier line between administered and unadministered areas. Moreover, it did not grant any kind of sovereignty to the territories beyond (Zahluna 2011). The inner line was to regulate the commercial relations between British subjects and the hillmen, and also to protect the lives of the British subjects. But, it also formalized this hill and valley or uncivilized and civilized dichotomy, where the government enclaved those areas that could only be governed or influenced indirectly. The drawing of an inner line across hitherto unrestricted land, separating different hill tribes and their territories from the plains and other British subjects, and limiting the movement, had led to a rudimentary sense of fixed territoriality. This was succeeded by various acts such as the Scheduled Districts Act 1874, Government of India Act 1919 and 1935, that classified different parts of the hill tracts, including the Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hills, as excluded and isolated regions, furthering the idea of bounded territory and identity. Through such categorization, not only was there a demarcation between the hills and plains, but also among the hill tracts.

In administering the hills, the colonial authority followed the practice of putting tribes in a certain territory with clearly demarcated boundaries for administrative expediency. This enforced the colonial idea of space and territory as a fixed notion, as opposed to the native understanding of identity and territory as fluid notion, based on movement. Consequently, certain tribes were located to their space, and the lands were marked and christened as belonging to them (Pachuau 2014). In Chittagong, the Hill Tracts were divided into three Subdivision namely, Headquarter Subdivision, Sangu Subdivision and Cox Bazar Subdivision, with the capital Rangamati, Ruma and Cox Bazar, respectively. The three Subdivisions were also inhabited by the Chakma, Bohmong and Mong Raja in that order. After the annexation of Lushai Hills by the British, the Hill Tracts was administered as an independent subdivision of Chittagong from 1892, and special rules for the administration of Chittagong Hill Tracts was framed the same year. It was again divided into four Circles viz, Chakma Circle, Mong Circle, Bohmong Circle, and Government Protected Reserve Forest Circle. This special rule was revisited and improved in the form of Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation 1900 (I of 1900). Under this rule, the three Rajas, Chakma, Bohmong and Mong, were given a great autonomy

to regulate the affairs of their own Circles and appoint a Headmen within it. They were also granted power to impose fines, enforce restitution and sanction an imprisonment (Hutchinson 1906). From such exercise, the colonial concept of identity rooted to a fixed territory emerged.

In the Lushai Hills, the North Lushai Hills District was constituted in 1890 as a part of Assam, with Aizawl as headquarters. In 1891, the South Lushai Hills District was also established as a part of Bengal with Lunglei as headquarters. In both Hills, the British officers, from the start, had undertaken a long expedition to capture and subdue all the evasive chiefs. By 1895, virtually all the chiefs were subjugated. In 1898, the two Hills were merged as one district under Assam. During this period, there was also a reorganization of boundaries between the Lushai Hills and the Chittagong District. While drawing the boundary, a tract of land known as Rothangpui's villages with Demagiri station, then within the area of Chittagong Hill Tracts, was carved out and included as part of the Lushai Hills (Reid 1942). Such demarcation of land by authority often ignored the local perception of land and the fluidity of boundary, and created a condition for conflict in the border areas.

In the newly created Lushai Hills, a Land Settlement system was introduced in 1898-99, where each chief was granted a fixed portion of the country within which they could move about. In 1901, a system of Circle Administration was put in place through which the whole district was divided into 18 circles, 12 in the Aizawl Subdivision and 6 in the Lunglei Subdivision, with an interpreter for each circle who acted as a channel between the Superintendent and the people. The boundary line on the southern region was later demarcated in 1911. It commenced from Keokradong peak in Bandarban in the west, it then ran eastwards across the Kaladan river and then north-east past Laiki and Zongling. Starting from 1917 through 1922, communal agitation developed in the extreme southern areas of the Lushai Hills which remained more or less unadministered. It prompted occasional punitive visits to these areas by the officials. Eventually, in 1932, the Lakher villages of Zongling, Chapi, Laki and others were included in the general system of administration of the Lushai Hills District (Reid 1942; McCall 1949). Such creation of definite boundaries, not only among the hill tracts, but also among the chiefs' land in a particular area, consolidated their identification and association with the land. Joy Pachuau (2014), with regard to

the notion of fixed boundaries and its ramifications in the Lushai Hills, observed that "the delineation of boundaries linked the people with the land in a way that was unknown in earlier times, providing scope for a broader macro identification amongst the people, as well as distinguishing them from others" (Pachuau 2014, 99).

The colonial administration in terms of actual rule on the ground, functioned through an already established system of authority and institutions. By doing this, stability was maintained and the economic interest of the empire was safeguarded. This was true for both the Lushai and the Chittagong Hills. At the same time, the local power structures and understanding of authority had also changed under the new system. While the chiefs were still a legitimized authority in local context, the nature of their power and role were now different. In Chittagong Hills, a territorial system was introduced, where the chiefs drew their legitimacy from the state authority as opposed to the earlier kinship based ideology. The extent of their jurisdiction was also determined by the territory they were given, not by the number of followers or villagers. Likewise, taxes were also demanded on the same territorial basis. Being an agent of the state, the chiefs including Chakma chief, Bohmong chief and Mong chief, were given responsibility of tax collection in their own area, as well as over other smaller chiefs, and were treated as landholder and tax collector under the law (Schendel 1992a). In the Lushai Hills also, the British maintained the existing chieftaincies and even created new ones among those who proved useful to them. With the aid of the office of Circle Interpreter (CI), the chiefs were made to report crucial information about the villages such as number of births and deaths, guns, diseases, annual harvest, and to collect taxes from the villagers (Pachuau 2014). It is to be noted that the main objective and interest in such reorganization of chief's territory along a fixed and clearly demarcated territorial boundary, was to facilitate surplus extraction of taxes and revenues from the hill tracts for the colonial exchequer. From these, an understanding of a new order emerged that placed strong emphasis on the connection between certain territories and the tribes or groups through which the colonial state had ruled. In time, it strengthened solidarity among the people at the level of a particular chief's land and also formed a larger identity at the level of a district, in contrast to the ruler who imposed stringent laws and regulations from above.

In sum, it can be argued that the colonial intervention, both in the Chittagong Hills and Lushai Hills, with its emphasis on fixity and bounded existence, created a condition for identity formation along colonial parameters. In this process, the inhabitants of the hills, including the Mizos and the Chakmas, who were previously a moving people, came to develop territorial ethnic identity rooted in the colonial notions of fixed space. This shift in the understanding of identity as based on movement and fluidity, to the notion of identity founded on territoriality, not only shaped peoples' perception of who they are and where they belong, but also their relationship with others that made them distinguished. As a result, a notion of 'insider' and 'outsider', foreigner and local, started developing slowly and manifesting especially in the contexts of decolonization and the whole political situations that accompanied it. These colonial pasts conditioned the ways in which post-colonial ethnic claims are being made vis-à-vis the state and other alleged 'outsiders', and the further articulation of ethnic identity.

Conclusion

From the fifteenth century to the twentieth century, much of the world had been shaped by western and European colonialism and imperialism. Delimitation and demarcation of boundaries was one of the most essential instruments of colonization. Socio-political and geographical boundaries are created to buttress and legitimize the colonial policy of divide and rule. By putting ethnic communities in a bounded territory, it ensures that each one is on their own, and binds previously migrating people to a fixed place. In this part of the world, the Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, it is by no means different from the experience of others. The most significant consequence of boundary was the slow emergence of the concept of indigenous ethnic community vis-à-vis the 'outsiders', and the birth of discrimination between the two. It further led to the creation and consolidation of ethnic solidarity and ethnic identity with strong association with land, especially after independence and the increasing politicization of identity and territorial homeland. As shown in the succeeding chapters, in the context of Mizoram, the contemporary political issues surrounding the conflicting claims of indigeneity, land and belonging in the state are the direct consequences of these colonial encounters.

CHAPTER 3

FROM LUSHAI HILLS TO MIZO DISTRICT: THE RELATIONSHIP OF MIZOS AND CHAKMAS IN THE COLONIAL FRONTIERS

Introduction

Looking at the origin myths, history of migration, and shared pasts on the colonial frontiers, the Mizo and Chakma communities are known to have lived in relative proximity. The onset of colonial rule had further shrunk their world in a way that the people living in the frontiers, previously unaware of each other's existence, had come into contact more often than before. While the earlier chapter briefly discusses the historical encounter between the two communities, the present chapter explores the changing relationship through time. Recognizing the instrumentality of the past as one of the key resources to understand the conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas, it outlines the history of contact and confrontation, contour of the relationship, the Chakma's association with and settlement in the Lushai Hills (later known as Mizoram) and the changing status of Chakmas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Mizo District. It is based on the question that the ethnic divide between the Mizos and the Chakmas had a historical root which must then be understood in this context. Implicit in this use of history is the idea that ethnic conflict may have been a product of prolonged historical processes. These processes shall be located in the context of colonial ethnography, policies, official reports, sociological and anthropological literature, the Partition of India, and the politics of post-colonial nation-state formation and its aftermath.

Early Contact at Frontiers: The Chequered Past

The Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Lushai Hills were contiguous borderlands, part of what was then known as the East Frontier of Bengal. In the pre-British period, people had no concept of clearly defined borders and no regulation of population movement. Remaining beyond British power, it is likely that there was a correspondence between the inhabitants of these areas and other tribes in the vicinity. But the frequency of contact and nature of ethnic relations in those times was largely unknown, except for

some accounts found in colonial records and ethnographies. The Mizos (known as Kuki) and the Chakmas were not strangers to each other. But their relationship was marked by both mutual hostility and instances of collaboration. One of the earliest records of the hill tribes was featured in a written communication between the Chief of Chittagong and the Governor General Warren Hastings in 1777. In that correspondence, there was a report about a hill man who called the assistance of his neighbouring Kukis, who lived in the far east of the hills. T.H. Lewin in 1869 wrote:

> The earliest record of our dealings with the hill tribes is a letter from the Chief of Chittagong to the Governor General, the Hon'ble Warren Hastings, Esquire, date 10th April 1777, in which he reports that "a mountaineer, named Ramoo Cawn, who pays the Company a small revenue on their cotton farm, has, since my being here, either through ill usage from the revenue farmer, or from a disposition to revolt, for some months past, committed great violence on the Company's landholders…" The letter goes on to state that the writer "was flattered with hopes of securing the person of this said Ramoo Cawn", but this scheme proved abortive, as the man fled from his usual place of residence. "He has now assembled men in yet larger bodies" and has called to his aid "large bodies of Kookie men, who lives far in the interior parts of the hills, who have not the use of fire-arms, and whose bodies go unclothed" (Lewin 1869, 21).

The person mentioned above as Ramoo Cawn was Ramu Khan, a Chakma military general of Raja Sher Daulat Khan, who was then waging a guerrilla war against the British administration and their expansionist policy that immediately targeted the Chakma Raja's territory (Qanungo 1998). In his resistance against the British, he sought the aid of Kukis residing in the Hill Tracts. One of the Kuki chiefs, Chaltuahkhupa, who ruled Khantlang village in the Sajek range, was said to respond to the call by sending hundreds of his men (Laldova 2014). The Chakma rebellion against the British lasted till 1798, ultimately leading to the complete annexation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1860 (Qanungo 1998). Another notable account of the alliance between the Mizos and the Chakmas was also found in Lt. Colonel Shakespear's *The Lushei Kuki Clans*. As various Lusei chiefs were frequently at war, two or more chiefs colluding up against a more powerful chief was not unheard of. In the same fashion, a combined force of Sailo, Zadeng and Chakma attacked the Palian chief named Purbura in 1830. His village Pukzing, abutting the Sajek range in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, was totally wiped out (Shakespear 1912, 6). The fact that the Chakmas joined hands with the Lusei chiefs in their fight against another Lusei chief underscored the idea that there were multi-layered relations between the

Chakmas and various groups of Kuki. During the reign of Kalindi Rani (1832-1873), one of the aristocrats named Nilo Chandra Dewan defied the authority and revolted against the queen. In this crisis, she was also said to have sought the help of the Kukis and crushed the rebellion with their assistance (Talukdar 1987, 38).

Almost sixty years before the British colonization, Dr. Francis Buchanan, a Company official, took up a month-long survey of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1798. Although he toured the area to collect information about the prospect of spice cultivation, his account also contained full observation of social life and ethnic relations in the eighteenth-century colonial frontiers (Schendel 1992b). His information on the Kukis and the Chakmas, and their mutual relationship, although scattered, proved invaluable. Despite the numerous accounts that portrayed a semblance of cordial relationships between the two communities, deep mistrust and hostility characterized ethnic relations. In addition to the frequent internecine feuds for political supremacy, the Kuki raids in the surrounding areas, including Sylhet, Manipur, Silchar, Tripura frontiers and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, were common. Chakmas and the Raja's territory in the Hill Tracts were also subjected to these recurring raids. The colonial records of Assam and Bengal till the end of the nineteenth century were filled with reports of raids and plunder. For instance, in Alexander Mackenzie's *The North-east Frontier of Bengal*, the parts that dealt with the Kukis and the Chittagong frontier tribes were full of accounts of raids that various Kuki chiefs had unleashed in the neighboring areas. In his words, "the whole history of this frontier is indeed the story of their outrages and of the efforts to prevent, repel, or avenge these" (Mackenzie 1884, 331). The Kuki incursions were also reported in the previous century. In 1798, while touring the plain areas of Chittagong in the south-west, Francis Buchanan came across Tipperahs and Chakmas in the nearby hills, engaging in shifting cultivation. They changed their settlements regularly "owing chiefly to the incursions of a very savage people called Koongkies [Kukis], who live at a great distance, but who frequently make attacks on the inhabitants of the hills" (Schendel 1992b, 16). The Kukis residing in the Sajek range, a far north-east corner of the Hill Tracts, were also a source of terror for the Chakmas. They refused to go further up the streams of Kasalong river due to the fear of Kukis, who they believed would take their life. In 1793, Chakma Raja, who lived in Dungata far up the Cheemay (Chengri) river, also had to flee his residence due to a threat

associated with the Kukis. As Schendel (1992b) pointed out, it is extremely difficult to reconstruct the pre-colonial historical development of ethnic identities, let alone to trace the relationship between two communities, especially in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Historical records also rarely focused on such questions (Ibid.,). Nevertheless, it can be argued that there was ethnic hostility and mutual tensions between the Chakmas and the Kukis. However, even among the various Kuki groups, their relationship with the neighboring Chakmas differed. It is these intricate ethnic relationships among the hill tribes that underwent far-reaching transformation in the wake of colonial rule, the area discussed in the previous chapter.

Colonial Annexation and Boundary Demarcation in the Hill Tracts

From 1847 onward, there have been reports of Kuki aggression against Chakma and Bohmong Raja's subjects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. These attacks culminated in what came to be known as the "Great Kookie Invasion of 1860", where the followers of Lusei chief Rothangpuia wreaked havoc on the British subjects in Tripura, burning villages, looting, and taking captives. It became a matter of great concern for the British, and initiatives were taken to protect the subjects from these aggressions of the frontier tribes. The Lieutenant Governor had recommended a whole new administration for the people of the Hills Tracts, as separate from the Chittagong district. Then, the Act XXII of 1860 detached the Hill Tracts of Chittagong from the plain country of Chittagong as a separate district, which was to be under the newly appointed Superintendent (Mackenzie 1884; Talukdar 1987). In the words of Alexander Mackenzie, "the whole aim of our frontier policy has of late years been the protection of the other tribes already named from the raids of the Chittagong Lushais and Shindus [Shendus]" (Mackenzie 1884, 331).

What Mackenzie (1884) referred to as the "Chittagong Lushais" and "Shendus" were the Kukis, under the category of Toungtha or sons of the hill in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. From the perspective of the Chittagong colonial government, the Kukis of Chittagong were of two kinds. The first group referred to those who were subjected to British influence, but without an obligation to pay revenue, the Bunjogees (Bawm) and the Pankhos (Pang). Other groups included the Lushais (Luseis) and the Shendus and Lakher (Pawi), who were completely independent from

the colonial government (Lewin 1869). These Kukis inhabited mostly the eastern fringe of the Hill Tracts bordering the Lushai Hills. Francis Buchanan reported that the hills towards the sources of the Chimay (Chengri) and Karnaphuli rivers, probably thirty to forty miles from east to west and about seventy miles from north to south, were occupied by the Kunkis (Kukis) called Lusai (Lusei) who stayed beyond the control of Mugg (Chakma) chief (Buchanan 1825, 34). At the same time, there were other Kuki and Tripura villages in the territory of the Chakma Raja. For instance, the Kuki occupied country between the Chingay (Chengri) and Rampahar was more or less subject to the Chakma chief (Ibid.,43). According to Laldova (2014), the Sajek ranges in the Hill Tracts were the ancestral home of one of the Kuki groups known by the British as Pankhos or Pang. Their settlements and villages were found in a continuous range of mountains along the eastern borderline, namely Zopui, Thangnang (adjacent to Tuipuibari of Mizoram), Lungtian, Chipui, Chhippui (adjacent to Phuldungsei of Mizoram), Mahmuam, Longkar (adjacent to Marpara of Mizoram), Sabual, Vaihmite, Tlangpui, Dumva, Tuibung, Laizo and Bunghmun (adjacent to Tlabung of Mizoram), Hmunpuichhip and Lungngo (Laldova 2014, 5). On the other hand, the Bunjogees or Bawm were settling in the south-east frontier. They mostly resided in the country to the east of the Sangu and the south-east side of the Karnaphuli river (Buchanan 1825; Mackenzie 1884). The Shendus or Lakhers lived in the north-east and east of the Blue Mountain. They were known to be the forayers of all the countries south of the Karnaphuli. Lastly, the Chittagong Luseis were composed of three septs, namely the Haulong, the Sailo and Rothangpuia's clan. These groups of clans were said to inhabit the hills to the north-east (Mackenzie 1884). Again, there seemed to be variations in the manner in which the Chakmas and the different Kuki clans were related. While the Sailo, Shendus, Haulong and Rothangpuia clan were known for their raids and pillage in the Chakma territories, the relationship between the Pang Kuki and Bawm and the Chakmas was marked by coexistence, if not cooperation. It is evident from the fact that some Kuki villages existed within the jurisdiction of the Chakma Raja.

As already mentioned in the preceding chapter, the creation of the Hill Tracts as a separate district was accompanied by several other changes in congruence with the colonial strategy of maintaining distance vis-à-vis the economic, political, and social life of the hill people. At the same time, the question of definite borderline and

its security became a topic of serious discussion. In 1862, Captain G.M. Graham, the then Superintendent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, started a series of negotiations with a band of Lusei chiefs whose clans lived north-east of the Hill Tracts, including Rothangpuia, Sailo chiefs Savunga, Lalpuithanga, Sangvunga, and Haulong chief Tlutpawrha, Khawsaia and Vansanga. This led to the preservation of peace for years to come (Lewin 1869; Mackenzie 1884). From 1862 to 1871, the Kukis committed another series of raids on British subjects, which eventually led to a military clampdown on the Kuki chiefs in the Lushai Hills. The quest, known as the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, set out to stop all the outrages on the colonial subjects, subjugate the perpetrators and secure the frontier areas. To these ends, the government had contemplated a policy of fixed boundary line between the frontier tribes and the British territory.

When the Chittagong fell to the British hand in 1760, the officials recognized the territorial jurisdiction of the Chakma Raja as "all the hills from the Feni River to the Sangoo [Sangu] and from Nizampur Road in Chittagong to the hills of Kooki Raja" (Talukdar 1987, 35), but had not identified the Kuki chief that time, and the extent of his jurisdiction. After a hundred years, TH Lewin (1869), then Deputy Commissioner of the Hill Tracts, observed, "while to the north and north-east the boundary is undefined, and may be said to be coterminous with the extent to which the influence of the British Government is acknowledged among the hill tribes in that direction" (Lewin 1869, 1). It was clear that the borderline or boundary was not yet drawn between the British territory and the unadministered frontier. It also indicated that the British had not ascertained the extent of influence they exerted among the people living in the hill to the East. Besides, due to the recurrent raids committed by the Kukis, the Joomea (Jumma) cultivators left behind a sizeable area of frontier land (Mackenzie 1884), which created a vast tract of deserted country between the British frontier and the Lushai land extending from south to north in a breadth of fifty miles (Lewin 1912, 190). Government officials observed there were no boundary questions on the Chittagong side due to the wide gap of land between the border checkpoints and the unadministered tribes, and that it was not necessary to lay down a fixed limit. However, it was advocated that a strong chain of posts be established from which the outer tribes could be dealt with (Mackenzie 1884).

Along the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, a survey operation was also carried out in the area between Cachar and Chittagong along the eastern frontier of Hill Tripura, to identify the proposed boundary line. On the Chittagong side, Mr. Cooke and Captain T.H. Lewin were deputed for the survey operation. They suggested a system of posts and patrols along the Uiphum, Saichal and Sirte ranges in the immediate vicinity of Thangluah chief Rothangpuia and the other Sailo chiefs of Lusei. Therefore, border posts were erected at Demagiri, Uiphum range, Sirte range, Saichal range, Politai range and Sangu valley (Mackenzie 1884; Elly 1893). Instead of the mountain ranges, the Lieutenant Governor proposed a river boundary that runs along the Sazuk (Tuilianpui) river in the north, Karnaphuli (Khawthlangtuipui) river, and then to the Tuichawng river till Arakan. These proposals were accepted and the boundaries were notified (Foreign and Political Dept. Report 1874). On 12th September 1876, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal declared the boundary between the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Lushai country as below:

> This line of boundary commences at the hill station marked S, south of Betling Sib [Behliangchhip] 2234, on the Jampoi range of hills forming the Hill Tipperah eastern frontier; it then runs along the whole course of the 'Tulenpui' [Tuilianpui] or 'Sujjuk' River to its junction with the Karnaphuli River, a little north of Demagiri; thence it continues eastwards along this stream up to the junction of the 'Tui Chong' River, after which it follows the whole course of this river to a point immediately to the south-east of the hill station of the Ohiphum [Uiphum]No.5; then turning westwards, crosses the Ohiphum range of hills and joins the Thega Khall at a point midway between the hill stations of Saichal, Nos.2 and 3, after which it follows the course of the Thega Khall River to its source; then again turns south-westwards and follows the water-shed of the Weybong [Waibung] range of hills, until it meets the southern hill station of Keokradong on the south-eastern boundary of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, following the water-shed until it meets the frontier of that portion of the Arracan Hill Tracts in which order and regularity are maintained.[1]

It is to be noted that when the inner line system was extended to the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the 30th June 1879, it ran along the same borderline. However, the inner line system and the officially recognized borderline had not completely halted the Kuki incursions into the Hill Tracts. A fresh series of raids were reported in 1882, 1888 and 1889 on British subjects in the Hill Tracts and Cachar border. Now, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal proposed another operation, the Chin-Lushai

[1] Mizoram State Archive (MSA) CB5/POL5, Memorandum Describing the Boundary between the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Lushai country.

Expedition of 1889-90, with the chief objective of reducing the Shendus and Luseis to submission. It resulted in the complete pacification and British annexation of the Lushai Hills. Under the British administration, the Lushai Hills were divided into two districts. The Chief Commissioner's letter No. 1468-P, dated the 22nd April 1890, stated that the scope of North Lushai Hills includes "the tract lying between the Cachar Frontier on the north, Hill Tipperah on the west, the Manipur river on the east, and on the south an imaginary line drawn east and west through Darlung Peak" (Reid 1942, 22). In 1891, the South Lushai Hills District was also established as part of Bengal, with Lunglei as its headquarters. According to the Bengal government's letter in 1890, the northern boundary of the South Lushai Hills was decided to be the southern border of the land controlled by the descendants of Sailo chief Lallula.

The British annexation of the Lushai Hills had an impact on the colonial boundaries between the two hills. As early as 1892, the government mulled over the issue of unification of the North and South Lushai Hills into one district. Among other considerations, there was a proposition to put Demagiri and its adjoining villages, previously part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in the Lushai Hills. It was eventually implemented when the two hills were merged. This in turn affected the boundary between the Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as the borderline would now run along the Thega Khal (Kawrpui) river instead of the Tuichawng river. The transfer of land from the Hill Tracts to the South Lushai Hills and the amalgamation of the North and South Lushai Hills were simultaneously officialized in 1898. The government of India, by a Proclamation No. 591-E.B., dated the 1st April 1898, declared that the South Lushai Hills and the tract known as Rothangpuia's villages, including Demagiri station in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong, then included within the Lower Provinces of Bengal, should be placed under the administration of the Chief Commissioner of Assam (Reid 1942; McCall 1949). Thus, the boundary between the Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the newly created Lushai Hills was also re-demarcated. In a notification dated the 25th August 1898, the Lieutenant Governor declared the new boundary as follows:

> The boundary commences from the western extremity of the northern boundary of the Arakan Hill Tracts and proceeds along the water-shed of the Mraneedong range of hills until it meets the hill station of Keokradong, thence following the water-shed of the Weybong [Waibung] range until it turns north-eastwards to meet Thega Khal river at the source. From this point

> it proceeds along the course of the Thega Khal river to the junction with the Karnaphuli river, thence westwards along the Karnaphuli river to the Harin Khal (locally known as the Baraharina river), thence along that river to the source, and from that point by a straight line eastwards to the Tuilenpui river, and thence along that river up to the hill station Betleing [Behliang] Southern Peak on the Jampui range of hills.[2]

Due to this revision of boundary, those Chakmas inhabiting the areas beyond the eastern banks of the Thega river were now part of the Lushai Hills (Talukdar 1987). Similarly, all those Kukis living in the Sajek and Barkal range and on the west of the Thega river were put under the administration of the Hill Tracts (Tribal Research Institute 1996; Hmingthanga 2003). Chakma Raja Bhuvan Mohan has protested the transfer of a tract formerly known as Rothangpuia territory to the Lushai Hills. However, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam HJS Cotton apprised him that the new boundary of the Hill Tracts was already decided by the government six years ago under its executive orders.[3] In the colonial scheme of things, boundaries and demarcation facilitated administration, hierarchy and command, the full running of an empire. Boundaries were drawn by following appropriate topographical and geographical features, amenability of the people to control and rules, the practicality of establishing an administrative unit, etc. In this exercise, the local inhabitants and their knowledge were given no consideration, which led to confusion and conflict in the border areas later.

Chakmas' Association with the Lushai Hills

Apart from the occasional raids upon the Chakma settlements by the Lusei and other clans from the Lushai Hills, the first time the Chakma set foot upon the Lushai Hills was reported when Chakma queen Kalindi Rani, aided the British by supplying her men during the Lushai Expedition in 1871-72, on account of which her revenue was also lessened (Bisht and Bankoti 2004, 275). However, those Chakmas, engaged as the labour corps, returned to Chittagong after the expedition. Then, with the formal transfer of a tract known as Demagiri in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the South Lushai Hills District, including many nearby Chakma villages, began the official

[2] MSA CB5/POL13, Notification-No. 2095P.
[3] MSA CB5/POL11, Letter exchanged between HJS Cotton and Raja Bhuvan Mohan regarding the boundary of CHT and South Lushai Hills, dated 19th Sept 1898.

association of the Chakmas with the Lushai Hills. When the North and South Lushai Hills District were amalgamated into a single administrative entity, these Chakma villages became part of the Lushai Hills. Afterwards, a small number of Chakma set foot in Lushai Hills as captives when they were captured by the Lushai chiefs, who frequently raided the valleys in Chittagong. It is to be noted here that the Chakma Raja's jurisdiction had not extended to the boundary of what is now Mizoram, nor did he collect a tribute among the population. Once the British formally established their rule in the Lushai Hills and secured the frontier, the Chakmas slowly entered and settled.

The Chakmas also entered the Lushai Hills with the permission of the Lusei chiefs, and settled in villages like Pukzing, Marpara, Phuldungsei, Serhmun, Mualvawm, Aivaphai in the Uiphum range. The hill range was an abode of Bawm, Pang and Tlanglau chiefs. For want of subjects and local taxes, they were mostly admitted without prior approval from the government. One of the Tlanglau chiefs named Vannawla and his son Zakhupa, who ruled over Lunginkhar in the Hill Tracts, was known to leave his village and move up in the adjacent Muallianpui and Ngharum areas of Uiphum range in the Lushai Hills. The Chakma subjects who followed him were allowed to settle at Sakhai (now called Boropansuri) as a satellite village. Since 1905, the Chakmas were said to settle in Samakkah river (Gerauluksora) and Lamthai Sazuk river banks. This is evident from a letter from the Sub-Inspector of Demagiri to the Sub Divisional Officer of Lungleh Sub Division in 1903, reporting about the settlement of Dhon Singh Raja in the Sazuk (Bara Harina) area without having a boundary paper of his land.[4] The villages in the western belt of the Lushai Hills like Tiante, Lungno, Thingsen, and Muallianpui were all ruled by the Mizo/Kuki chiefs, and the uninhabited areas surrounding these villages were one of the first settlements of the Chakmas. The colonial government had also noticed this movement in the frontier. In the letter No. 172G, dated the 15th May 1905, the Sub Divisional Officer of Lungleh required instruction from the Superintendent of Lushai Hills on whether to allow Chakmas to settle at Bara Harina toll station.[5] In 1918, some Chakmas are also reported to have settled at Marpara village, situated

[4] MSA CB6/POL60, Letter from Sub-Inspector, Demagiri PS to Sub-Divisional Officer Lungleh Sub-Division, No-556, about Chakma settlement in Thangzovi's land dated 10th Dec 1903.
[5] MSA CB11/G134, Letter No.172G, dated Lungleh the 15th May 1905.

within the jurisdiction of Pukzing chief. In 1925, few Chakmas settled as satellite villages in Mualvawm and Aivapui, which fell under the land of Phuldungsei chief (Lianchhinga 1992).

In 1933, the British also started regulation of entry and settlement of Chakmas in the Lushai Hills. This was carried out most often by bypassing the authority of local chiefs, who occasionally gave permission in their domains. For example, the Sub Divisional Officer Lungleh granted such permission to Chakma headman Debicharan in 1933. Order No. 4 of 1933-34, stated that:

> Debicharan is allowed to settle with his 15 houses in the land of Lukisuri. The provisionary boundary of which will be as follows. West- Thega lui, North-Up the Lukisurilui from its junction with the Thega to its source in the Uiphum tlang, East- Along the Uiphum tlang to the source of Silsurilui, South- Down the Silsurilui from its source in the Uiphum tlang to its junction with the Thega. In the event of Debicharan committing any misdemeanour, he is liable to be turned out on being given a month's notice (Tribal Research Institute 1996, 42).

In the following year, the government also laid down taxation rules and laws for those non-Lusei inhabitants. In the exercise of the power conferred by section 35 of the Chin Hills regulation, 1896 (Regulation V of 1896) as extended to the Lushai Hills District, the government of Assam prescribed the House Tax at ₹2 per year for Lusei and ₹5 per year for non-Lusei (Lianchhinga 1992, 34). This was a continuation of the Standing Order No. 16 of 1928, issued by C.G.G Helme, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills, that commanded the House Tax at ₹5 to be paid to government, two baskets of paddy or ₹2 to the local chief, and cattle tax at ₹2 to the chief, for all foreigners in the district.[6] Such rules and laws crafted by the colonial authority, in this case differential treatments in taxation, sought to make a marked distinction between the local and the 'outsiders' or non-native inhabitants, within ethnically bounded territory.

During the Second World War, many of the Chakmas who served as the Labour Transport Corps entered Lushai Hills and decided to settle themselves (Prakash 2008). Over a decade, the Chakma population of 836 in 1931 rose to 5088 in 1941, with a population growth rate of 508.6 percent.[7] As part of the government's

[6] Standing Order No. 16 of 1928, dated Aijal the 16th August 1928 (See Appendix A).
[7] Population of Chakma in Mizoram, 1901-2011 with a Decadal Growth Rate. Census figures from 1901 to 1941 are acquired from the Chakma Study Group of Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) and census figures from 1951 to 2011 are acquired from Deputy Director of Census Operation, Government of Mizoram through the Right to Information Act (see Appendix B).

population management and in response to the increasing numbers of Chakmas and other foreigners in the South Lushai Hills, E.S. Hyde, the Assistant Superintendent of South Lushai Hills District, issued an order in 1944 that read:

> (a) Owing to the large number of Chakma now settled in South Lushai Hills, most of whom have considerable families, no further application for settlement will be considered but for the most exceptional reasons.
> (b) No passes for now separate houses will be considered except where the applicant is.
> (c) The grown-up married son of a Chakma who has been settled for at least ten years in the Lushai hills.
> (d) The grown-up married grandson of such a settler. In both these cases the applicant himself must be a permanent resident of the Lushai Hills.[8]

Even those already settled, when they joined the main Lusei village, were not allowed to have jhum or paddy fields on a separate tract of land far from the Luseis.[9] These were some policies and decisions that the British government had taken vis-à-vis the Chakmas in particular and all the non-Luseis or non-natives in general, in the Lushai Hills before India's independence. The British authorities regarded and taxed Chakmas as non-native or foreigner. Their migration and settlements in the Lushai Hills were always subject to the permission of the Lusei or Kuki chiefs and then the government officials, and for that they paid taxes in cash and in kind, to the local Lusei chiefs (Hluna 2020). In all these administrative designs and actions, there was already an institutionalization of indigenous and nonindigenous groups or people. Indeed, such practices under colonial rule were common in all the erstwhile colonies, including the Bengal frontier regions. By fixing certain tribes in a particular area where they were allegedly historically rooted, the British policies emboldened and reinforced the idea of territorial belonging of some and, by extension, non-belonging of others (Baruah 2008). These policies and practices have had a long-term impact on contemporary ethnic politics in post-colonial societies. And, rightly so, the ethnic relationship between the Mizos and the Chakmas has been historically shaped by such colonial pasts.

[8] Chakma Settlement in the Lushai Hills, dated Lunglei the 21st March 1944 (see Appendix C).
[9] MSA CB54/G675, Order No. 3461-71G of 8.8.1946, with Copy to the chiefs of western villages, Rengdil, Kawrthah, Tukkalh, Bunghmun, Suarhliap, Vawngawn, Sabual, Mamit, Luangpawl, Phulpui, Phuldungsei

Exodus to India: Chakma under Pakistani and Bangladeshi Regime

When the Partition of India became imminent, there was widespread disunity among the hill tribes about the future of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The three chiefs, Chakma, Bohmong and Mong, wanted to establish each of their circles as independent native states, even forming the Hillmen Association to guide the people in that direction. At the same time, many other Chakma leaders, like Sneha Kumar Chakma and Kamini Dewan, wished to join India, and engaged with the then Congress leaders. Meanwhile, the Bohmong Raja of Bandarban made known their desire to be assimilated into Burma. Such absence of consensus and unpreparedness of the Hill people on the future of the Hill Tracts was partly due to the British policy of isolation of tribes, as well as the failure of the chiefs to educate and inform the people on such issues (Mohsin 1997). Nevertheless, the Hill Tracts with its inhabitants of different non-Muslim ethnic tribes, became part of East Pakistan. For the hill people, especially the Chakmas, it was such a missed opportunity that would in future lay a path for their misfortune (P. Chakma 2015). Many Chakmas, who wanted to integrate Chittagong Hill Tracts with India, took flight to India.

Over the years, under the watchful eye of the state, the colonial era measures of protection and special excluded area status of the hill people were advertently weakened, and the hill people like Chakmas had become ethnic minorities, subjected to large-scale influx of Bengali Muslims, systematic discrimination and religious persecution (J. B. Chakma 2015). Various development programs and infrastructure projects negatively affected the Hill Tracts and its inhabitants. The dam project, undertaken by the Pakistani government between 1959 and 1963 at the heart of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, created a huge Kaptai lake. The dam construction submerged vast Chakma areas and arable lands, roughly half of all cultivable land in the Hill Tracts, uprooting hundreds of thousands of hill people. Because of inadequate rehabilitation and inept resettlement, coupled with constant political-religious persecution by the Pakistani regime, a whopping 40,000 Chakmas were forced to take asylum in India as refugees (Zaman 1982; Singh 2010). India took this seriously and made rehabilitation initiatives in the Tripura, Mizoram and Cachar areas of Assam. However, due to the Indo-Pakistan war and the onset of the insurgency in Mizoram, as well as strategic calculation vis-à-vis China, the Chakmas were resettled in the sparsely populated state of Arunachal Pradesh. They were accommodated in the

districts of Lohit, Changlang and Papumpare (J. B. Chakma 2015). Earlier, the Assam government instructed the Mizo District authority to take a census of the new Chakma migrants who entered India after 1st January 1964.[10] By the end of April 1964, as many as 12000 migrants crossed over the Mizo District,[11] and were offered transit camps along the Aizawl-Lunglei road for their journey.[12] The Northeast India was chosen partly because of the ethnic proximity and ethnic consciousness in the region, which was thought to be still infant. At the same time, the process of settling Chakma refugees in India was not easy, as it faced local hostile opposition, particularly since their elevation to statehood (Prakash 2008).

The government's indifference to the plight of the hill people was visibly shown when the Pakistan government grabbed their land to provide military base camps for the Mizo rebels, who waged war of independence against the Indian state. After the liberation war and the creation of Bangladesh, the distrustful relationship between the hill people and the Bengalis, who constituted the majority, further worsened. During the Bangladesh war of independence in 1971, two notable figures among the hill people, namely the then Chakma Raja Tridev Roy and the brother of the Bohmong Raja, publicly supported Pakistan. Tridev Roy continued to side with Pakistan after the war, even abdicated his Rajaship and took flight to Pakistan. This created a perception among the Bengalis that the hill people were unfaithful and disloyal to the cause of Bangladesh independence. It was followed by a military reprisal against the hill tribes in the name of weeding out those who collaborated with the Pakistan army during the war (The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission 1991). In response to the violence and also to voice their concerns, the hill people under the command of M N Larma, formed a political platform called the Parbottya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) in 1972. The same year, the hill leaders submitted a memorandum to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first President of Bangladesh, seeking to retain the lost autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts with the retention of 1900 Regulation and a ban of non-tribal influx. At the height of Bengal nationalism, the

[10] MSA C113/G1375, Letter No RHA.16/64/60 dated Shillong the 2nd April 1964.
[11] MSA C113/G1375, Office of the Sub-divisional Officer, Lungleh. Weekly Report of Influx of Refugees from East Pakistan in respect of Lungleh Sub-division for the period ending the 28th April, 1963.
[12] MSA C113/G1375, Letter No. GLR 10 A/64, dated Aijal the 2nd June 1964.

President instead advised them to put aside ethnic identities and embrace Bengali identity and culture. Under his regime, there was a widespread process of detribalization, dispossession of agricultural land from the hill people, and distribution among the rehabilitated Bengalis in the Hill Tracts, followed by an ever increasing permanent settlement of non-tribals. Moreover, the 1972 Constitution had not specified special provision for the Hill Tracts. In order to repudiate the dominant Bengali nationalism and assert their distinctiveness from the mainstream Bengali people, the ethnic minorities living in the Hill Tracts, namely Chakma, Marma (Mogh), Tripura, Tonchongya, Mro, Chak, Khumi, Khiang, Bawm (Bawmzo), Pang (Pangkhua), and Lusei, invented a new collective self-identity called Jummas or Jumma people. The Chakmas, the dominant community among these minorities, provided articulation and leadership in the construction of a common identity. Despite their long history of hostility and tribal warfare, the invention of the Jumma nationhood, the idea of being a Jumma, had brought a shared sense of victimhood and unified identity (Schendel 1992a; Levene 1999). In a literal term, the concept of Jumma comes from the word jhum, the practice of slash and burn method of cultivation by the hill people, as opposed to wet-rice cultivation in the plain areas.

Faced with government policies that threatened their identities and traditional rights, the hill people had no choice but to respond with armed resistance. Soon, the PCJSS launched its armed wing called Gana Mukti Fouj, popularly known as Shanti Bahini. It actively engaged in guerilla warfare and offensive attacks against the government's forces and Bengali settlements since the mid 1970s. Both organizations were largely dominated by the Chakmas, who were the worst sufferers. The Shanti Bahini attacks on the government almost always resulted in another military reprisal on the hill people (The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission 1991; Mohsin 2010).

After the coup that led to the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur and the emergence of military government under General Ziaur Rahman in 1975, the situation of the hill people further deteriorated. The activities of the insurgents were met with heavy military presence, that for every eight hillmen there was one armed soldier (Zaman 1982). Military officers actively took over all functions of civilian government, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board established in

1976. In other words, life in the entire Chittagong Hill Tracts had become militarized (Montu 1980). Following these serious political problems in the Hill Tracts due to Islamization of Bangladesh, onset of tribal militancy, military and punitive campaigns against Chakmas and other hill people, there began a series of migration from the Hill Tracts to India since the late 1970s (Weiner 1993; Prakash 2008). Attacks on the hill people had been alleged every now and then. In one of the major incidents reported in 1980 at Kalampati, as many as 300 people were killed. The next year, another violence in Matiranga forced 25,000 hill people to flee to India, but later repatriated to Bangladesh. Similarly, under General Ershad regime in 1984, a Shanti Bahini attack triggered another reprisal assault on the hill people at Barkal. This time, around 7000 people took flight to the Indian state of Mizoram, but were returned the following year. Between 1971 and 1983, as many as 85,000 people fled the Hill Tracts due to systematic discrimination and religious persecution. Many of them went to Tripura, as well as Burma. In Mizoram also, as many as 12,000 Chakmas came and settled in 1980 (Talukdar 1994, 76-80).

What seemed to be an endless loop of insurgent attacks and counter-attacks by the government, caused much of the sufferings of the tribals and their exodus to India. In 1986, another mass exodus of hill inhabitants was triggered in the wake of reprisal attacks by the Muslim settlers and government forces. It was to retaliate for the actions of Shanti Bahini, who raided several army camps and Bengali settlements early in the same year. As a result, approximately 56,000 tribal refugees, mostly Chakmas, fled to the relief camps set up in Tripura (The Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission 1991). By 1991, the number of refugees rose to 70,000. In the 1951 census, the non-tribals were just 9 percent of the Hill Tracts population, but in 1991, their number climbed up to 49 percent. The reason for the sharp increase in non-tribal population, mostly Bengali Muslim settlers, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, was primarily due to the Bangladesh government policy of aggressive settlement, accompanied by the continual outflow of tribal people from the Hill Tracts to India. Thus, the Chakmas have been fleeing to India from the Chittagong Hill Tracts since the partition, and currently concentrated in the three states of Northeast India viz. Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. After the independence, like everybody else within the territory of India, those Chakmas who settled in the Lushai Hills became an Indian citizen. They were also included in the Assam Scheduled Tribe List

1956, as a Scheduled Tribe community, and had the same status as the Mizos in political participation and payment of taxes (Tribal Research Institute 1994).

Post-independence India: Politics and Representation in the Mizo District

It was in the context of newly emerged political consciousness among the people of the region and events accompanying the British withdrawal from India, that the Mizo-Chakma relationship and hence conflict began to get formalized. After independence, the Lushai Hills was merged into the Indian Union as the Lushai Hills District. In 1952, it became the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Year later, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) was also carved out of the hills for the smaller ethnic groups. The Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act, 1954, enacted by the Indian Parliament, renamed the Lushai Hills District as the Mizo District.[13] These developments, including the birth of the Mizo District Council and the political party system, brought the relationship between the Mizos and the Chakmas into new dimensions.

Lushai Hills/Mizo District Council and the Political Representation of Chakmas

On the eve of India's independence, the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly, widely known as the Bordoloi Committee, arrived at Aizawl on the 17th April 1947. They met with representatives of various organizations in Lushai Hills, including the Church, Ex-Servicemen's Association, chiefs, Mizo Union (first political party in the Lushai Hills), Women Union, Government servants, Salvation Army, Students' Federation, as well as non-Lushai settlers, to discuss the upcoming political arrangement and the way the Lushai Hills was to be inducted into India. The Committee recommended the creation of Autonomous District Councils and Regional Councils if there was a distinct group of people therein, for each of the tribal areas of undivided Assam. First

[13] According to Vanlawma, one of the veteran politicians, the original proposal in the Indian parliament was to change the Lushai Hills into Mizoram. However, it was also a time when the Lusei chiefs who owned a vast land or *ram* under their traditional authority, were about to be dethroned by an Act of Parliament. Under the circumstances, anticipating any problems that could accrue from land compensation, the Assam government allowed the term Mizo only, instead of Mizoram (Vanlawma [1965] 1989, 238) .

and foremost, it suggested an advisory council, an interim arrangement that would enable transition from Lushai Hills to District Council (Thanhranga 2007).

On the 10th November 1947, the Bordoloi Committee met with the delegates and agreed that the advisory council, later called the Lushai Hills District Advisory Council, be established with a total membership of 35, 10 seats for the representatives of the chiefs and 25 for the commoners' representatives, that included 3 seats for the Town representatives and 2 for women.[14] The next year, on the 7th January 1948, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills issued a notification fixing the dates of the Lushai Hills District Advisory Council election as 23rd March for the chiefs and 15th April for the commoners. Accordingly, the elections were held in two batches under the principle of universal adult franchise. The ten elected members from the chiefs were Lalsailova, Khawkunga, Ch.Ngura, Lalbuanga, Taikhuma, Lalthawvenga, Awksarala, Lalbuana, Chhunmunga, and Lianmana (Lalnithanga 2006). Owing to their unity and consensus, most of the members from the chiefs were elected unopposed.[15]

However, the Advisory Council election among the commoners turned into a battleground between the Mizo Union and the United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO).[16] But, the Mizo Union won most general seats, mostly due to their popularity. The elected members from the commoners, 25 in total, were, R. Thanhlira, Zadailova, Vaitlaia, H. Khuma, Chaltuahkhuma, Hrangaia, R.B. Chawnga, Khuangliana, Hengmanga, Vakova, Vanlalbuka, Khelhnuna, Chhunbura, Pasena, Saitawna, Chawnghuaia, H. Vanthuama, R. Dengthuama, Ch, Saprawnga, Tuikhurliana, Lalmawia, Khawtinkhuma, Lalchungnunga, Lalsangpuii, and Remthangi (Thanhranga 2007). Now, this election to the Lushai Hills District Advisory Council has had a significant impact on the future relations between the Mizo and the Chakma. It was for the first time that the Chakmas, who were

[14] MSA CB11/POL1, Statement showing the allocation of the number of ballot papers for the constituencies of the Lushai Hills District Advisory Council Election, 1948, dated 27th February 1948.
[15] MSA, CB11/SLNo 102, Order, dated 23rd March 1948.
[16] The Mizo Union, earlier called Mizo Commoner's Union, was the first political party in the Lushai Hills, formed on 9th April 1946. It strived for District Autonomy under the Indian Union and championed the abolition of the institution of chiefship and all the privileges that accompany it. The UMFO (United Mizo Freedom Organization) was founded on the 5th July 1947 by a breakaway group from the Mizo Union. It was known to be leaning towards the chiefs and their plight, and received enthusiastic support from them. They also advocated joining Burma when the political future of the Hills was still under consideration (Zakhuma 2001).

considered a 'foreigner' till then, were given voting rights in that election. It was decided that only the native inhabitants of the Hills could vote in the Advisory Council election (Hmingthanga 2003). However, due to their need for a vote bank, the Mizo Union was said to be in favour of giving the Chakmas voting rights. In the words of an octogenarian, former NGO leader and Village Council President of Chawngte town:

> In that Advisory Council election, there are 25 constituencies. That time, it was called Circle. And, among those Circles, Tlabung/Demagiri was one of them, number 17 or 18. In that Circle, as an election to that Advisory Council approached, the Mizo Union nominated Tuikhurliana as their candidate. When the Mizo Union were not confident to defeat the UMFO candidate, United Mizo Freedom Organization, or Zalen Pawl in that Tlabung circle, they were in favour of giving the Chakmas who happened to be concentrated in that circle a voting right. But, only the Chakmas currently living then and there, excluding those who may have come later. This was one of the first mistakes.[17]

For many Mizo writers, leaders and public, this was the beginning of the so-called 'Chakma issue' in Mizoram. They contended that the Mizo politicians and leaders were seeking Chakma votes for their political and electoral gain, while ignoring the issue of infiltration and 'illegal' settlements of Chakmas if they served as a vote bank. This, they believed, was a reason why the Chakmas can now claim to be a natural inhabitant of Mizoram.[18] Although there is a broad consensus among the Mizos that there has to be a distinction between the Chakmas who resided in Mizoram with permission, since before the independence, like Debicharan, and those who had migrated and settled illegally after independence, the Mizo perception of Chakmas as a 'foreigner' remains well alive (Lalthara 2017; Hluna 2020). Two years after the Indian Constitution came into effect, the first election to the Lushai Hills District Council was held on the 4th January 1952. It was keenly contested between the Mizo Union, UMFO and Tribal Union parties. There were 24 seats, of which 18 seats were to be elected and another 6 seats were nominated. The Mizo Union captured 15 seats and formed a government (Thanhranga 2007). Under the Mizo Union dominated

[17] A personal conversation with an octogenarian ex Village Council President of Chawngte P, dated Chawngte the 19th January 2021.

[18] A personal conversation with the current General Secretary of Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA), dated Aizawl the 15th December 2020.

District Council, one of the nominated seats was given to a Chakma politician as well (Lianchhinga 1992).

As more arenas for political engagement and activities were opened up, there was also a realization that votes could be capitalized where people are concentrated in certain areas. In the second Mizo District Council election held on 25th January 1957, Medhia Chakma, a nominated member in the previous term, was elected from Congress ticket. And, in the third and fourth general elections held in 1962 and 1970 respectively, Hari Kristo Chakma was elected twice from the Tlabung/Demagiri circle (Thanhranga 2007). One of the most significant legislations during the time of Mizo Union-controlled District Council was the enactment of the Lushai Hills District (Revenue Assessment) Regulation, 1953. It reduced the amount of house tax that the Chakmas paid annually from ₹5 to ₹2, same as the amount that the local Mizos were paying. This signified a break from the colonial policies and restrictions vis-à-vis the non-Lusei inhabitants. But, for many Mizos, it was seen as a way to placate the internal minority groups who could be useful in their political scoreboard. They pointed out that, before the Chakmas were even included among the Scheduled Tribe communities of India, in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, the Mizo Union leaders were too keen to pursue inclusive policies, even more so than the Indian state itself (Lianchhinga 1992; Hmingthanga 2003; Lalrinthanga 2018). It is to be mentioned here that while the Chakmas were not part of the Scheduled Tribes list in 1950,[19] they were eventually featured in the Scheduled Tribes list as per the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes List (Modification) Order, 1956.[20]

Status of Chakma in the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council

In the meantime, as recommended by the Bordoloi Committee, a Regional Council called Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was also constituted for the ethnic groups living in the southern Mizo Hills, mostly Pawi (Lai) and Lakher (Mara) and other tribes like Bawm, Pang, Chakma, Tlangau and Bru. The administrative area of the Regional Council covered the entire territory of the current three Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram. As per the power provided under paragraph 2(6) of the

[19] Ministry of Law Notification, New Delhi, the 6th September 1950. S.R.O. 510, The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.

[20] Ministry of Home Affairs Notification, New Delhi, the 29th October 1956. S.R.O.2477A, The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Order, 1956.

Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the Assam government enacted the Pawi-Lakher Autonomous Region (Constitution of the Regional Council) Rules, 1952, which in turn formed the Pawi-Lakher Region Advisory Council with the Sub Divisional Officer of Lunglei, B.W. Roy as the chairman. The Advisory Council laid down the rules for the elections, the number of elected and nominated seats in the Council and such. Accordingly, election was held on the basis of universal adult franchise for the 9 elected seats, in addition to 3 nominated seats in 1953. The elected members and the nominated ones, then officially constituted the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council on 23rd April 1953 (Lalchhawna 2014; Doungel 2015). Like in the District Council, the Chakmas had also managed to achieve political representation under the Regional Council. From the second Regional Council election onwards, Atul Chandra Chakma was elected as a Member of Regional Council (MRC). For the next two consecutive terms he continued to keep the constituency. In the fourth term election too in 1970, Arun Kumar Dewan from the Chakma community was elected as a Member of Regional Council, and was also appointed as a Deputy Chairman of the Regional Council (Doungel 2015).

From the very beginning of the Regional Council, the issue of boundary with the District Council became a bone of contention between the Mizo Union leaders and Tribal Union or Pawi/Lakher leaders. The Mizo Union dominated Mizo District Council Advisory Committee, with three representatives from the Pawi-Lakher area namely, Hengmanga, Vakova and Chhohmo, was authorized to demarcate the territorial boundary. From the start, the Mizo Union leaders abhorred the idea of separate Regional Council within the District Council territory, seeing it as the disintegration of Mizo identity. The Pawi-Lakher leaders made an all-out effort to include all the Pawi and Lakher villages within the Regional Council while the Mizo Union leaders pushed for the opposite. Initially, it was arranged that the people decide their choice through referendum, whether they wanted to be part of the District Council or Regional Council. While the referendum was going on in the villages, there was also a closed-door meeting among the leaders to find a reasonable compromise. As a result, all the Lakher inhabited areas were included within the Regional Council, whereas some of the Pawi inhabited areas stayed within the District Council. And, the Chakmas living in the Uiphum hill range under the domain of Tlanglaus and Bawms, were also included in the Regional Council territory

(Lalchhawna 2014). Even after the settlement of the boundary, the Mizo Union leaders were doing everything they could to retrieve their vote bank. As mentioned earlier, the Mizo Union leader, Tuikhurliana contested and won in the Chakmas inhabited constituency during the Advisory Council election in 1948. Now, he and Medhia Chakma sent a letter to the Chief Executive Member of the District Council in 1954, seeking to include the Chakma within the District Council jurisdiction. The same had been recommended to the District Commissioner by the Chief Executive Member.[21] However, the District Commissioner found no justification to revise the existing boundary between the Regional Council and the District Council.[22] Relentlessly, the District Council sent another letter to the Tribal Area Department of Assam government at Shillong, claiming that more than 1344 Chakma families are included in Regional Council without their consent being obtained, and that "these people protest against their inclusion in the Region ever more seriously today, demanding to be included under the administration of this District Council".[23] In return, the Chief Executive Member of the Regional Council confirmed to the Chief Minister of Assam, that the wish of the people was respected and followed while making a line of demarcation, as opposed to the claims of the District Council.[24]

Since a new democratic system and administrative structures took hold in the Lushai Hills, there was a new form of political equality among the ethnic groups that allowed participation from every corner. While the Mizos controlled the District Council, other smaller groups occupied the Regional Council. This enabled more political representation and inclusion of communities like the Chakmas, as well as an assertion of ethnic differences that ran parallel with administrative boundaries. There was also an increasing presence of ethnicity in the political space. People became more and more well versed in the 'way' politics was being conducted, and from the beginning, it was clear that politicians and ethnic leaders, especially the minority groups, quickly saw in the new administrative system an opportunity to politicize their own identity. The provisions of the District Council and Regional Council became an instrument of autonomy and identity consolidation.

[21] MSA CB76/G918, Letter No. E 5971/T-4, dated Aijal the 22nd Feb 1954.
[22] MSA CB76/G918, Letter No. RC.11/54/16, dated Aijal the 5th June 1954.
[23] MSA CB76/G927, Letter No. E/10616/C-10, dated Aijal the 4th December 1954.
[24] MSA CB12/POL3, Memo No-RCL.4/55/170, dated Lungleh the 11th April 1955.

The Tag of a 'Foreigner'

It is crucial to highlight that even in the new democratic systems, the government's stance towards the Chakmas had been oftentimes ambiguous. This had significantly contributed to the Mizo perception of other ethnic groups despite their presence and representation in the political system. It can be argued that with regard to the administrative decisions concerning the people's movement in the post-independence, there was an element of both continuity and discontinuity. For instance, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills, S.N. Barkataki, upon visiting Lungleh, wrote an inspection note about the Chakmas and Tripuras in 1949, titled 'Chakma and Tripura Register':

> No new passes are being issued. These people are foreigners and I do not see any reason why they should not pay tax at the foreigner's rate of Rs. 5/- each. Tax must be realised at this rate from 1950-1951. Mr. Hyde's order dated 21st March 1944 should be republished both from Lungleh and Aijal. All chiefs and C. I's (Circle Interpreters) should be asked to report the names of Chakmas and Tripuras who entered the District in violation of that order after 1944. The list must reach me by 31-1-1950. Any chief who does not report the infiltration of Chakma and Tripura to their ram [*sic*] will be dealt with severely.[25]

In a similar fashion, a Standing Order issued by the Deputy Commissioner of the Lushai Hills in 1954 also read:

> It is hereby notified for information and strict compliance by all chiefs and headmen in the Lushai Hills district that no influx of Chakma and Tripuras will be allowed without the prior permission in writing of the Deputy Commissioner, Lushai Hills. Serious notice will be taken if any chief/headman fails to report the names and particulars of new arrivals (Chakma and Tripuras) in his jurisdiction.[26]

From the administrative point of view, the Chakmas and Tripuras were considered 'foreigners' in the Lushai Hills and their movements and settlements were to be regulated and subject to the permission of the government even years after India's independence. In the words of the Tribal Secretary of Assam government in 1950, while it was desirable to control the influx of Chakmas to Lushai Hills District, it would not be wise to prohibit their entry into the Lushai Hills altogether. Even then, the District Commissioner of the Lushai Hills opined that Chakma influx into Lushai

[25] Extract from Inspection Note of the Superintendent, Lushai Hills on SDO's Office Lungleh, Chakma and Tripura Register, No. 10385 G/11-7 of 2.12.1949 (see Appendix D). Additionally, the local word *ram* in the last sentence of the inspection note refers to land or territory, in this context, under the jurisdiction of chiefs.

[26] Standing Order No. 5 of 1954, dated Aijal the 2nd July 1954 (see Appendix E).

Hills and another neighbouring district should be controlled, in order to sustain the fertile land in the riverine area.[27] In 1954, the Lungleh Sub divisional Officer reported that the total number of Chakmas living in the Lungleh Sub division including the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council area was 10,488 persons. This was in addition to a few Chakmas living within Circle 10 and 11 in the Aizawl Sub division that time.[28] And in that context it was suggested that:

> The Chakmas have been residing in the District since many years and it may not be possible to evict so many people from the District whether their permanent settlement is advisable or not. So, those who have already settled here may be allowed to remain on condition that they settle in fixed villages as approved by the authority. Influx of more Chakmas from outside the District is undesirable and may be controlled to a great extent by enforcing strict orders on the border chiefs or other village authorities on pain of heavy fines for harbouring new Chakmas from outside the District and by having their number checked by the Police and Circle Staff or the Lushai Hills District Council Staff occasionally. It will be necessary to open registers of Chakmas resident in the District, one Register for each village, so that new entrants may be easily detected and evicted.[29]

Accordingly, the District Commissioner had reiterated to both the Sub divisional Officer[30] and the District Council authority,[31] that settlement of Chakmas was prohibited except with the permission of the District Commissioner and such permission for settlement in Lunglei given by the Sub divisional Officer should in all cases be submitted for approval to the District Commissioner, and no passes were required for those who settled permanently. The Chakmas also challenged the situation that they were put into. As an inhabitant of independent India, they were unwilling to obtain permission or pass or to leave the Lushai Hills. Even when they were willing to get a pass from the government, they complained, some of them had not gotten pass despite their application and that neither the District Council nor the chiefs declared any necessity of pass as a result of which, many of them were without it. The Chakmas therefore sought the withdrawal of the pass system and the District Council Ordinance that ordered those without pass to leave the Lushai Hills.[32] In

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[27] MSA CB11/POL10, Letter No. LGP.11/53/26, dated Lungleh the 17th August 1953.
[28] MSA CB105/G1279, Number of Villages and Houses of Tuikuks, Chakmas and Hrangkhawl from Aijal Sub-Division, dated the 26th May 1941.
[29] MSA CB79/G960, Letter No. LGP.11/54/18, dated Lungleh the 11th March 1954.
[30] MSA CB79/G960, Letter No. GP.21/54/50, dated Aijal the 29th June 1954.
[31] MSA CB79/G960, Letter No. GP. 21/54/47 of 5.6.1954.
[32] MSA CB79/G960, Petition Submitted by Jagat Mohan Chakma, Gopal Nanda Karbari, Chadi Karbari, Sakuni Karbari, Kripacharjya Karbari, on behalf of Chakma People, dated the 24th August 1954.

some places like Pukzing village, the Chakmas were reported to wilfully defy the Village Council and even District Council authority up to the point that their actions were deemed a civil disobedience movement against the District Council.[33] The District Council authority also apprised the Deputy Commissioner of these incidents, claiming that this sort of activities was not confined to Pukzing village alone and there were good reasons to believe that all such activities had been directed by a few leaders from Demagiri.[34] In effect, the Deputy Commissioner K.G. R. Iyer issued Order No.6 of 1955, stating that:

> It has been reported that some Chakmas are not complying with the orders and instructions issued by the District Council and Village Councils on subjects which they are competent to administer. Anyone who is found to defy duly constituted authority or to persuade the people to disobey orders issued by competent authority will be severely dealt with and may even be externed if his presence in this District is found to be undesirable in the public interest.[35]

During this time, there has been a numerous report of unauthorized entry of Chakmas in the Hills from Pakistan. From the Village Councils to the Circle Officer/Assistant to the District Council authority, the Deputy Commissioner's office had received such reports on a regular basis.[36] It eventually led to the issuance of a public order in 1957 stating that "all those who have made unauthorized entry must be served with a notice to go within 7 days of receipt failing which they will be severely dealt with".[37] The United Mizo Freedom Organization party also took the matter of unauthorized entry in their own hand and sent a recommendation letter to the Deputy Commissioner. Some of the recommendations include, deputing a Circle interpreter to make out list of the Chakmas and in case of any of them found staying in the District without pass be evicted, deporting those Chakmas whose names have not been included in the electoral roll of 1952, and making the Chakmas live in groups having permanent village like the Mizos and be restricted to scatter.[38]

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[33] MSA CB105/G1279, Extract from C. O's Reports, dated the 25th September 1055.
[34] MSA CB105/G1279, Letter No. EV.5881/V-8(a), dated Aijal, the 19th October 1955.
[35] MSA CB105/G1279, Order No. 6 of 1955, dated the 22nd October 1955.
[36] MSA CB105/G1279, Memo No. Cad/146/P- dated Demagiri the 22nd September 1955.
MSA CB97/G1190, Letter No. EV.25/57/L-11, dated Aijal the 29th April 1957.
MSA CB97/G1190, Memo No. EV. 3502/orgl of 3.9.57.
[37] MSA CB97/G1190, Order Memo. No. GP. 21/57/5 of 2.2.1957.
[38] MSA CB97/G1190, Letter from UMFO President to District Commissioner regarding Illegal Entry of Chakmas.

Thus, on the one hand, the Chakmas were allowed political representation and privileges under the political system. But, on the other hand, they were subjected to indiscriminate government scrutiny concerning the legality of their settlement and status, and an object of suspicion for the general Mizos who believed that even though the entry and settlement of the Chakmas are strictly regulated and controlled, majority of them were in the Lushai Hills without a proper approval. Hence, the tag of a 'foreigner' or stranger had always been tied to the Chakmas even after a significant political representation.

Conclusion

Throughout the colonial period, the Mizos (then known as Kukis) and the Chakmas were not entirely unknown to each other as history suggested, and their relationship had been marked by both mutual hostilities owing majorly to the plunders and raids committed by the Kukis, and few instances of collaboration as well. The gradual colonial expansion brought about boundary-making, regularization of population movement and settlement, and institutionalization of indigenous and non-indigenous communities in terms of taxation, and differentiation of communities on ethnic lines. As a consequence, people developed a sense of belonging and non-belongingness of others, especially the Chakma community. Then, in the context of newly emerged political consciousness among the people of the region and events accompanying the British withdrawal from India, that the Mizo-Chakma relationship and hence conflict began to get formalized, marking the inception of Mizo allegations of 'illegal' immigrants and settlements of the Chakmas in the Lushai Hills. The birth of the Mizo District Council, Pawi-Lakher Regional Council and the political party system brought the relationship into new dimensions, bringing about more political inclusion and representation of the Chakmas. But at the same time, this period also witnessed the Mizo suspicion of influx of Chakma, mostly due to the 'unnatural' high rate of growth, that continues to strain the relationship between the two communities.

CHAPTER 4

MIZO MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE AND CHAKMA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL: THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT

Introduction

Much has already been written about the tension between primordialism and instrumentalism in the study of ethnic identity and conflict. That is, between the alleged old roots of ethnicity, hence "ancient hatred" and its modern and instrumentalized manifestations. The question of whether ethnic identity and ethnic conflict are natural phenomena or societal constructs that have been contrived for manipulation or politicization, was raised to address this issue. In addition, existing wisdom on ethnic studies is confined within these two fundamental approaches. However, it is suggested here that primordialist and instrumentalist accounts are neither mutually exclusive, nor by extension, capable of independently explaining ethnic conflict. The way forward, it is believed, is to link the two concepts, where the instrumentalist account draws on the insight of primordialism to make sense of the present. This approach assumes that, while ethnicity might be used to dominate or gain advantage at the expense of other ethnic groups, it needs to be crystallized by historicizing culture's pasts for mobilization and solidarity. It is in the context of this interconnection between primordialism and instrumentalism that this chapter, and this work in general, is located. It is argued that only after their placement in the larger Indian political context after independence, more robust ethnic articulations and claims are feasible in Mizoram. To that end, two crucial events in the post-independence, the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement and the formation of Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), are discussed. In doing so, it takes into account an insight into the native's views of the problem, thereby incorporating the subjective reality and perspectives of both the communities.

Laying Down the Context: Formalizing Ethnic Claims and Conflict

Mizoram, literally meaning the land of the Mizos, formally became a full-fledged state of India in February 1987. In the Indian context, where recognition as a people

and crystallization of identity frequently happened after the founding of a state, based mostly on language, the elevation to statehood was significant. Seen in this light, the formation of Mizoram state can be interpreted as a culmination of Mizo identity making, which has been in development since the arrival of colonialism in the region. No matter how incoherent at the outset, this process of identity construction, with its own share of bloodshed, had in the long run acquired legitimacy and concreteness from colonial and post-colonial governance. The consecutive shifts in nomenclature from Lushai Hills District to Mizo Hills District, and from Mizoram as a Union Territory under Assam to Mizoram as a state, are clear indications (Pachuau 2014). This solidification and formalization of Mizo as a distinct ethnic group has had an indirect implication for the case of Mizo-Chakma conflict, as recognition for one group may imply de-recognition for others.

The preceding chapters have shown how British colonial policies had impacted and given shape to identity, boundaries, and territorial belonging. It is also argued that ethnic articulations and claims are only feasible in the context of the political atmosphere created by the British withdrawal from India and the people's growing self-awareness or consciousness. Colonial rule in the Lushai Hills, which lasted over five decades, was an indirect rule in which the traditional chiefs were acting as a proxy for daily administration. The chiefs, who were instrumental in enforcing the colonial policies and measures, were thus allowed to keep authority and privileges. This ensured an efficient and inexpensive administration system. The common people were forced to perform porter duty or *puak phurh,* whenever called upon. Moreover, each family had an obligation to provide money or food for British officials during their tour and inspection. In addition, any open political activity or assertion of identity was denied. It came as no surprise that, from the 1930s onward, there was a strong resentment among the Mizos towards these repressive measures and colonial rule in general. A new awakening or consciousness, led by the newly emerging college educated elites, quickly enabled the people to take note of their political deprivation under the oppressive colonial system, and the need to fight for their rights, especially in the face of imminent decolonization, was keenly felt (Zakhuma 2001). This resulted in the formation of the first political party in Mizoram called the Mizo Commoner’s Union in 1946, later renamed the Mizo Union. As the name itself suggested, the party represented the interests of the commoners against

the arbitrary power of the chiefs backed by the administration, signalling in a way the advent of modernity in this part of the world. Under the Mizo Union, the institution of chiefship, increasingly seen as an oppressive tool for the colonial enterprise, was abolished. Effectively, the democratic institution of the Village Council, based on the principle of universal suffrage, replaced the old system of village administration under traditional chiefs.

The birth of the first political party itself was a milestone in Mizo's political history. But, more significantly, it marked a significant change in the way the Mizos perceived themselves and others. First, the use of the term 'Mizo' for a political party or social organization signified the coming of age of Mizo. It reflected a new idea of self-recognition and construction of Mizo as one group, or at least the need to see themselves as a unit. Secondly, in addition to the formalization of identity, it also conveyed a breakaway from the colonial construction, even though resorting to history, especially the colonial period, to understand and substantiate one's own identity was not uncommon. It was a conscious decision to challenge, negotiate and eventually broaden the parameters of ethnic boundaries and ethnic identity beyond the colonial framings. This was clearly seen, among other things, in the change of name of Mizo's largest social organization, i.e., from the Young Lushai Association (YLA) formed in 1935 to the Young Mizo Association (YMA) in 1947.[1] If the term 'Lushai' was associated with the British, 'Mizo' was used by the people themselves to escape the colonial notions and knowledge production (Pachuau 2014).

Yet again, one must be reminded of the context in which all these developments took place. In the years preceding and following independence, when the retreat of colonization became imminent, the emerging local elites and writers in Lushai Hills District also felt the need to write and discuss the political future.

[1] The founding of the Young Lushai Association (YLA), later changed to the Young Mizo Association (YMA), on the lines of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), was also in the context of the coming up of modernity and emerging political consciousness. It aimed to ensure a smooth process of transformation of Mizo society in the face of social imbalances arising out of the decline in the traditional norms and values on the one hand and the advent of modernization process on the other hand. Based on the value of *Tlawmngaihna* (broadly defined as a moral code which finds expression in self-sacrifice for the service of others), YMA continued to render social services and humanitarian work in the society. In terms of structural administration, there are over 702 Branches and 50 Groups (made up of several Branches), spanning all over Mizoram and the neighbouring states in Northeast.

Recollecting and historicizing the Mizo past, origins, and myth by penning down history, creating a single and consistent narrative, and then formalizing their identity and story, was a way to locate themselves within the larger canvas of the new modern era.[2] In a nutshell, it was an endeavour to construct and recognize themselves as a nation, as opposed to a conglomerate of disparate tribes.

For instance, Liangkhaia, who authored one of the earliest works on Mizo history, *Mizo Chanchin* in 1938, reasoned that writing the history was a recognition of Mizo nationhood (Ibid.,). Similarly, when the first school textbook on Mizo history was published in 1953, the author V.L. Siama, a teacher himself, implored teachers and students alike to help steer the Mizo *Hnam* (nation) towards more *Hmasawnna* (advancement or betterment). To him, doing so would require not only looking forward to the future, but also revisiting the desirable cultural values and norms of the old (Siama 1953). R. Vanlawma, one of the chief architects of the Mizo Union party, revealed the mood of the people a few years before independence. According to him, the need to think and prepare for the future required the founding of the first political party, even though many people conceived the idea as an instrument to curb the power of the now traditional chiefs. It was intended as a common platform where the Mizos as unified people could fight for the best possible political arrangement, hinting that they now regarded themselves as a nation, inhabitants of a common territory, rather than seeing themselves as a group of tribes or as a subject of different chiefs. R. Vanlawma also time and again stressed the importance of Mizo as a category, as it was the only term that could integrate all other Mizo tribes outside the geographical boundaries of the Lushai Hills District. To that end, there was a talk of 'Greater Mizoram' and unity of the tribes through the use of a common language (Vanlawma [1965] 1989, 113-136).

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the slow development of *Hnam* or nationhood feeling could also be observed in the ways in which the Mizos wrote

[2] For the earliest published works on Mizo articulation of who they are and what they like to be, see Liangkhaia. 1938. *Mizo Chanchin.* Aizawl: L.T.L Publication; Vanchhunga. [1955] 1994. *Lusei leh a vela Hnam Dangte Chanchin.* Aizawl: Department of Art and Culture; Zawla, K. [1964] 1989. *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin.* Aizawl: The Gosen Press; Zatluanga. [1966] 1996. *Mizo Chanchin.* Aizawl: Directorate of Art and Culture.

about themselves and opinions in *Mizo leh Vai*, a monthly journal launched in 1902. Initially, it worked as a gazette for the colonial government to disseminate various orders and notifications to the public. Administrators themselves, including Superintendents of the Lushai Hills, also wrote commentary or advice on local issues, in addition to general knowledge about the outside world. It was basically a tool to civilize the people (Pachuau 2014). However, the journal soon became an instrument for the Mizos to express themselves and opinions on various societal and political matters at that time. A shift in their vantage point could be seen from the fact that they increasingly used phrases such as *Kan ram leh hnam tan*, literally translated "for our country and our nation", and posing a question like "how are we going ahead as nation" (Lalsailova 1941).

The need for the Mizos, or any other ethnic community in the Northeast, to assert themselves as a nation must be juxtaposed with the larger and dominant Indian nationality in making. Two fundamental changes affected these communities—the modern European understanding of territoriality and nationalism. First, the notion of territoriality, a state with definite bounded territory, no longer allowed for a non-state space. Thus, they would be pulled inside the boundary of the Indian state. But geographical inclusion did not exactly equate to becoming recognized members of the national community. Secondly, nationalism's demand for a sense of common national identity based on shared language, heritage, and loyalty to one polity, followed by a centralized system, put them in a difficult position. In this context, Sajal Nag (2014) made an interesting comment, suggesting that amid hegemonic nationalities, ethnic identity was forged based on traditional notions of kinship and cohesion, to emulate national discourse by bringing together myriads of tribes under one identity (Nag 2014). There was a realization that recognition as a group, and the advantages which accrued from it, necessitated coming together as one unit.

The formalization and recognition of Mizo identity, however, spawned its own problems. On the one hand, it led to serious redefinition of who constitutes that identity and how far its membership should extend both ethnically and geographically. On the other hand, the Mizo self-identification and connection with Mizoram, which gave territoriality to their identity, may deny the same for other groups, such as the Chakmas, who are outside the larger 'Mizo family'. In other

words, one may argue that this is the beginning of aggrandizement of ethnic claims and all the conflicts that later ensue. In what follows, it is shown how the territorialized ethnic identity developed further during the MNF movement for independence, and how it affected ethnic relationships in Mizoram.

Mizo National Front and the Movement for Independence: Implications

On 1 March 1966, the Mizo National Front (MNF), headed by Laldenga, its founder and ideologue, declared Mizoram independence (then Mizo District) from India. This was followed by a twenty-year-long armed struggle between the MNF and the Indian state, which the Mizos often referred to as *Rambuai lai* or troubled times. Asserting the Mizo nationhood and their distinctiveness from the Indians, the MNF deemed India "unworthy and unfit to rule over" the Mizos, and thereby upheld their "rightful and legitimate demand for self-determination".[3] After a prolonged violent fight, it ended with the signing of the peace accord designated as the Memorandum of Settlement, on 30 June 1986.[4] A year later, the status of statehood, which was assured in the same accord, was granted to the then Union Territory of Mizoram.

While the basis for MNF's claim to independence was Mizo nationhood, the initial outburst of Mizo nationalism was ignited by their perceived sense of marginality and alienation within the Indian state for the past decade and a half. This feeling was fuelled by several factors, including economic grievances, lack of development and infrastructure, anti-Christian policies of the Indian government, negligence and absence of relief and assistance in times of severe *Mautam*[5] or bamboo famine that affected the Mizo District in 1960, and the Assamese cultural chauvinism in the context of the imposition of Assamese language in the state. However, all these grievances were not stand-alone issues, and definitely not a new

[3] MNF Declaration of Independence of Mizoram.

[4] C. Zama's Untold Atrocity: The Struggle for Freedom in Mizoram 1966-1986, published in 2014, gives a detailed account of killing, rape, murder and other human rights offences that the Mizos had to suffer at the hands of the Indian armed forces during the initial period of intense counter-insurgency measures.

[5] *Mautam* means death of bamboos, a natural phenomenon that occurs in Mizoram every 50 years. When bamboo flowered it produced seeds that fell on the ground. Before those seeds took root, they were eaten up by jungle rats. With such a good source of protein and sugar content, rats rapidly increased in numbers and devoured whatever was cultivated in the paddy fields overnight, hence the famine.

one. Even before independence, anti-Indian sentiments were expressed, as can be seen from R. Vanlawma's autobiography. When discussing their political future in India, Mizos expressed their concern about integration with a country associated with Hinduism. As a Christian, they were reluctant to be affiliated with the worshipers of idols (Vanlawma [1965] 1989, 131). This was one of the points cited by the MNF in their declaration of independence. Religious angle was powerful in the context of Christianized Mizos, as it also formed one fundamental aspect of their identity.[6]

The Mizo National Front began as Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), a relief organization founded in 1960 for mobilizing assistance for the distressed during the *Mautam*. The MNFF itself evolved from the Mizo Cultural Society, formed by a group of intellectuals who sought to promote the idea of Mizo independence and unity among the populace. Many youths from across the district volunteered for the relief work, handing out aid to remote towns and villages. In such a situation, one can only imagine the kind of resentment and discontent among the people, especially given that there were already strong anti-India sentiments. It was this ethnically fragile situation in the hills that the MNF exploited to propagate their ideological and political goals, by proclaiming the inherent antagonism between the Mizo "national way of life" and that of the rest of India. As soon as the famine subsided, the relief organization removed the word 'famine' from its appellation and transformed into a new political party in 1961. It had an objective of attaining independence for Mizoram and uniting all the ethnic Mizo tribes inhabiting the contiguous areas of Mizo District under it (Nunthara 1996; Zakhuma 2001).[7] Right from its inception, the MNF religiously spread the vision of free Mizoram among the masses, legitimizing their right to self-determination, and heavily recruiting the youths of the new generation through intensive campaigns all over the district. Riding the wave of decolonization, they also claimed to have the backing of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other independent nations across the globe. In no time, the MNF began training its volunteers on guerrilla warfare and

[6] For the connection between Christianity and Mizo identity, see Pachuau, Joy L.K. 2016. "Christianity in Mizoram: An Ethnography." In *Christianity in Indian History: Issues of Culture, Power and Knowledge*, by Pius Malekandathil, Joy L.K Pachuau and Tanika Sarkar, 46-57. New Delhi: Primus Books.

[7] When the MNF started as a political party, it set out three major aims, viz. (1) To struggle for independence of Mizoram as a sovereign and to unite all Mizo clans under one political umbrella (2) To protect and safeguard Christianity (3) To uplift and progress Mizo nation (Zama 2014, 8-9).

stockpiling arms and ammunition with the help of East Pakistan, all the while contesting the State Assembly and District Council elections. Participating in the electoral process was, in hindsight, just a masquerade to bide their time until they laid out every possible plan. By the end of 1965, as many as 8000 volunteers were recruited (Zakhuma 2001, 102).

MNF Memorandum: Themes of Ethnic Homeland and 'Primordial' Territorial Identity

When the Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, visited Assam in 1965, the MNF leaders took the opportunity to submit a memorandum, that could also be regarded as their ultimatum. It sought to appeal to the government of India for independence, territorial integrity and solidarity of the Mizo nation. It reads as under:

> The Mizos, from time immemorial lived in complete independence without foreign interference. Chiefs of different clans ruled over separate hills and valleys with supreme authority and their administration was very much like that of the Greek city state in the past. Their territory or any part thereof have never been conquered or subjugated by their neighbouring state. However, there had been border disputes and frontier clashes with their neighbouring people which ultimately brought the British government to the scene in 1844. The Mizo country was subsequently brought under the British political control in December 1895 when a little more than half the country was arbitrarily carved out and name Lushai Hills (now Mizo District) and the rest of their land was parcelled out of their hands to the adjoining people for the sole purpose of administrative convenience without obtaining their will or consent. Scattered as they are divided, the Mizo people are inseparably knitted together by their strong bond of tradition, custom, culture, language, social life and religion wherever they are. The Mizo stood as a separate nation even before the advent of the British government, having a nationally distinct and separate from that of India. In a nutshell, they are a distinct nation, created, moulded and nurtured by God and Nature.
>
> When the British India was given a dominion status by promulgating the Constitution Act of 1935, the British government having fully realized the distinct and separate nationality of Mizo people decided that they should be excluded from the purview of the new Constitution and they were accordingly classed as an Excluded Area in terms of the Government Order of 1936. Their land was then kept under the special responsibility of the Governor General in his capacity of the Crown Representative; and the Legislature of the British India had no influence whatsoever. In other words, the Mizos had never been under the Indian government and never had any connection with the politics and the polities of the various groups of Indian opinion.[8]

[8] Memorandum Submitted to the Prime Minister of India by the Mizo National Front Headquarters, Aizawl, Mizoram on October 30, 1965.

This memorandum went on to argue for the Mizo's political demand, citing the history of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period to buttress their rightful and legitimate claim, and concluded that, "whether the Mizo nation should shed her tears in joy, to establish firm and lasting friendship with India in war and in peace or in sorrow and in anger, is up to the government of India to decide".[9] The idea of independent and unified national identity, which the MNF and thereby the Mizos claimed and demanded, was not new at this point in time. As mentioned before in the preceding section, this process was in the making long before the MNF came into existence. In this sense, what the MNF set in motion could be seen as the formalization or culmination of Mizo identity claims that appeared to be highly primordial, territorialized, and exclusive. Writing about Mizo identity making in the context of the above-mentioned memorandum, Joy Pachuau (2014) observed that:

> The leaders of the MNF were clearly resorting to history to claim their right to independence. In historicizing their past, the 'Mizo' identity was considered a given and therefore 'primordial'; although past histories of feuding chiefs belonging to different clans were not denied, there was an insistence that they all had recognized themselves as 'Mizo'. In claiming that colonial intervention had bifurcated their territory, they were also claiming for themselves an ancient territorial identity that did not recognize the boundaries that had been created by state intervention, whether colonial or post-colonial. In maintaining that there were connections between the various fragments thus created, they chose to stress the 'primordiality' of their 'united' identity (Pachuau 2014, 83).

Apart from the goal of creating sovereign Mizo land independent from India, the MNF movement also strived to solidify and legitimize Mizo identity, because it was the basis of which they laid their claim to independence, the coming of age of Mizo nationhood. To further consolidate, they had also resolved to bring together all the other tribes they considered Mizo family, inhabiting the contiguous territories in Tripura, Manipur, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Assam, inside the Mizo ethnic homeland. Laldenga himself wrote that the main objectives of the party were, "to reunite all the Mizo people living in the contiguous areas, liberate Mizoram from India, to uplift the living standard of the Mizo, to safeguard and promote Christianity" (Zakhuma 2001, 98). Trying to reunite all the Mizo people would have to involve the assumption that they were once unified under one umbrella in the past. All these

[9] Ibid.,

assumptions and claims were possible only due to the process of identity making that slowly began since the coming up of colonialism.

Here in the MNF scheme of reasonings, one can clearly see an interconnection between primordialism and instrumentalism. To assert an emergence of unified Mizo ethnic identity and of course nationality, from which the MNF movement drew their strength and legitimacy, and to mobilize the people to rally behind the causes, they had to resort to the past by claiming the existence of persistent and primordial ethnic Mizo identity, that was "inseparably knitted together by their strong bond of tradition, custom, culture, language, social life and religion wherever they are".[10] Not only was the identity primordial, it was also territorial rooted in the native soil that had never been conquered by any other states or groups. It was claimed to be what Anthony Smith had characterized as an ethnic group "named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity" (Smith 1986, 32).

But such assertions also entailed claims of ethnic homeland and the politics of belonging, in the language of exclusion and privilege, that did not intend to incorporate people of different ethnicities (Schendel 2011). Even in the early days before the MNF, Laldenga himself reportedly stated on many occasions that Mizoram is for Mizos only (Nibedon 1980). This notion of ethnic homeland being defended and justified by the intimate connection they have with it, and from which the claims of identity rested, did not bode well for the other communities, who would be categorized in this order of things as "others", "out of place" or non-indigenous. Therefore, the MNF movement also intendedly or unintendedly propelled a more intensified politics of belonging, where the questions of who belongs to a particular territory and hence the status of citizenship are determined by historical rootedness to that particular place, which has often been used to justify a violent exclusion of people who are regarded as strangers or non-locals, even if they subscribed to the same national identity and occupied the same area for centuries. This MNF politics of belonging is also connected to what Tania Li called sedentarist metaphysic, that "valorises people living in their 'proper' place, rooted in their native soil, and views displaced, 'uprooted' people, migrants and refuges [*sic*], as pathological" (Li 2002,

[10] Ibid,.

362). Such sedentarist thinking easily rationalizes the exclusion of migrants, refugees and others who find themselves out of place, who are increasingly seen as an 'enemy' by those who claim to have native attachment. In light of these analyses of what the MNF or the Mizos had claimed for themselves, and its implications for other communities, it can be argued that the stage had been set and the seeds of conflict had already planted. It was in the actual outbreak of the armed insurgency that ethnic tensions and hostilities had flared up.

A War Within a War: MNF and Ethnic Violence

The MNF declaration of independence was preceded by what came to be known as Operation Jericho, coordinated attacks on government offices and paramilitary camps in different parts of the district from the night of 28 February. Mizo National Army, its military wing, and other local volunteers simultaneously hit and captured several towns, such as Aizawl, Lunglei, Vairengte, Chawngte, Kolasib, Champhai, Sairang and Demagiri, seizing the posts of Assam Rifles and Border Security Forces (BSF), looting the treasury, kidnapping government officials, and killing security personnel. On 2 March, the government of Assam declared the Mizo District a "disturbed area" under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1955, and invoked the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, which granted exceptional power to the Indian Armed Forces operating in those areas. From 5 March onward, the Indian government had retaliated by sending fighter jets that carried out extensive aerial strikes on the capital town and other neighbouring villages. It was followed by a heavy military reinforcement that swept through the entire area and recaptured what the MNF had taken control of. This thus began twenty-years of armed conflict, rendering the district completely militarized and normal life disrupted (Nibedon 1982; Nunthara 1996; Nag 2002).

Due to heavy military presence, the MNF fighters retreated in the shadows and merged with the civilians in the villages, from where they received food and shelter and launched their attacks on the Indian armed forces. An open rebellion thus quickly turned into protracted guerrilla warfare. So, to flush out the MNF rebels and sever their contact with the civilians, the government decided to turn to the people and used a method called village regrouping, in which most villages along with its inhabitants were forcefully shifted to a selected larger villages or settlements, usually

along the main highway nearby the military camps where they could be kept under constant surveillance. When a village was relocated to a new grouping site, the army mostly burnt down the abandoned place, granaries, and paddy fields to discourage the villagers and MNF cadre from returning. Living in a grouping centre, with its miserable conditions of impending hunger, humiliation, and death, was considered one of the worst tragedies in Mizo history (Zama 2014). From the beginning of 1967 till 1970, the grouping system was implemented in four distinct categories of settlement across the district, viz. Protected and Progressive Villages, New Grouping Centres, Voluntary Grouping, and the Extended Loop Areas. As a result, as many as 82 percent of the population of the district were eventually affected by the grouping scheme or dislocated from their villages (Nag 2012, 10).[11]

It became increasingly difficult for the MNF to continue their guerrilla warfare in Mizoram, thanks to the ubiquitous armed forces and their repressive measures. The leaders decided to move the entire operation, including the provisional Mizoram government established earlier, to East Pakistan.[12] The MNF leaders and fighters traversed the Indian border and arrived in the Sajek region of Chittagong Hill Tracts, where they rebuilt their camps and military headquarters. This was a conscious choice, as the Sajek mountain ranges, adjacent to the western border of the Mizo District, were inhabited by the Mizo ethnic groups, namely Lusei and Pang. Moreover, it was understandable that the Pakistan government found it prudent to offer a haven for the MNF rebels and provided them with arms and training, as part of their policy to destabilize India's Northeast region. By 1969, most of the MNF leaders and cadres had crossed the border. Chittagong Hill Tracts, the home of many ethnic groups, administered separately from the Bengali population, slowly became

[11] The Protected and Progressive Villages involved 106 villages, grouped together into 18 grouping centres containing a population of 52,210, within a 10-mile radius along the Silchar-Kolasib-Aizawl-Lunglei highway. The second category New Grouping Centres, introduced in August 1969, covered five sectors of the population: Tripura border, Lunglei-Lawngtlai road, Darngawn (Khawzawl)-Bungzung north, Vanlaiphai-Serchhip Road and Seling-Champhai Road, involving 184 villages grouped into 40 centres with a total population of 97,339. And, the third one Voluntary Grouping Centre, introduced in August 1970 covered the population from different parts of the Mizo Hills, involving villages grouped into 26 grouping centres with a population of 47,156. The last category Extended Loop Areas, ordered in 1970, involved putting 63 villages with a total population of 34,219 into 17 centres. Besides, there were three more grouping centres in Mamit, Tuipang and Sangau with a combined population of 4938. Thus, in the entire district, village grouping had affected a population of 236,162 out of a total population of 318,093 in 1970 (Nag 2012, 10).

[12] The MNF formed a parallel Government of Mizoram in September 1965, a Presidential form of government, along the lines of the American Constitution (Bualhranga 2016).

a theatre of war (Schendel 2015, 16-17). Since then, the MNF movement centred around the Mizo villages, such as Mahmuam, Chhippui, Chipui, Zotui, Lungtian, Bunghmun, Laizo and others. To be more precise, the civil administration and military bases were established in Chhippui village, while the Parliament and MNF party general headquarter were built in Mahmuam village (Vanlawma [1965] 1989, 324).

Under the Pakistan government's protection, the MNF movement and the exile Mizoram government were operating without any hindrances, until East Pakistan plunged into war in March 1971. In the initial stage of what came to be known as Bangladesh Liberation War, the clashes between Pakistani forces and Bengali rebels rarely impacted the Mizos, who were encamped in the hilly region of East Pakistan, which at that time was largely free of the Bengali population. Although the Bengali freedom fighters did come to the Hill Tracts, the Sajek regions remained outside their operation. As the war continued, however, the MNF rebels and their guerrilla expertise were employed by the Pakistani troops, albeit limited, in their fight against both the Bengali fighters and the Indian armed forces who came to the former's aid. So, while continuing their activities against the Indian army, the MNF also joined hands with Pakistani troops in fighting the Bengali. However, their safety was compromised when the Indian troops overpowered Pakistani forces and enabled Bangladesh to become an independent state in December 1971. Yet again, a large chunk of the MNF fighters and their leaders had to flee to Arakan, fearing a retribution from the infant Bangladesh government, and sought protection there from the Burmese Communist Party, a rebel outfit that dominated the border areas between Myanmar and Mizoram (Schendel 2015, 19-33).

The birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation-state not only changed the dynamic of hostilities and ethnic relations, but also started another war between government troops and local insurgents from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. As mentioned before, after their inclusion into East Pakistan, the non-Muslim and non-Bengali ethnic groups in the Hill Tracts, among whom the Chakmas were dominant, had become minorities subjected to large-scale influx of others, systematic discrimination, and religious persecution (Chakma 2015). After the war, the distrustful relationship between the hill people and the Bengalis, who constituted the

majority, further worsened. At the height of Bengal nationalism, there was a widespread process of detribalization and dispossession of agricultural land from the hill people. The land was redistributed among the rehabilitated Bengalis, followed by an ever-increasing permanent settlement of non-tribals. This eventually led to an insurrection that would go on until 1997. The hill people formed a military outfit called Shanti Bahini, which engaged in guerrilla warfare and offensive attacks against the government's forces and Bengali settlements (Mohsin 2010). In the meantime, few of the MNF who had stayed back in Bangladesh also continued to indulge in small-scale clashes with the new government's forces, attacking police stations in the southern Hill Tracts and capturing arms and ammunition (Nibedon 1980). However, under the circumstances of the uprising in the Hill, the Bangladesh authority now saw the MNF in a new light, a convenient ally. Thus, the MNF fighters were now pitted against the rebels in the Hill Tracts, mostly the Chakmas. Once again, the MNF and the Mizos had earned supply and support from the Bangladeshi government, which also allowed them to rebuild their headquarters in the Chittagong Hill Tracts yet again (Schendel 2015, 36-37).

Accounts from the Fields: Aggrandizement of Ethnic Hostilities

During the field work, there is a general perception among the Mizos and the Chakmas alike that the ethnic relationship had deteriorated and become hostile since the MNF movement started in 1966. The implication is that when the Mizo District was declared a disturbed area in the wake of the uprising and put under military control, the functioning of government and civil administration was virtually stifled, and in that situation ethnic tension turned into violent conflict. One can say that a shared history of distrust between the two communities that built up since the nineteenth-century Mizo raids has exploded in the height of Mizo nationalism in the late 1960s. As shown in the next section, these violent conflicts were seen both in the Mizo District and the Hill Tracts of Chittagong.

One narrative that stands out was that after the MNF movement and military intervention, the Chakmas turned against the MNF and thereby the Mizos, by giving information about the rebels to the Indian army, and in doing so, secured protection. This was possible, it was believed, since the Chakmas with whom the Indian state had no issue were linguistically and culturally similar to the Indian army personnel

when the Mizos in general did not know Hindi. Moreover, there was no reason for the Chakmas to stay supportive of the MNF and the Mizos. A strict military rule was a blessing in disguise for the Chakmas, who were not subjected to these rules, as they now comprehended a change in the status quo vis-à-vis the Mizos and exploited the situation to tilt the balance of power in their favour. One of the points that Mizos, especially those living nearby the Chakmas, stressed was the indiscriminate reporting of any Mizos as an insurgent. Due to the Chakmas' intelligence report and sometimes false accusations, several Mizo civilians and the rebels were caught, imprisoned, and killed by the armed forces. The news of such incidents clearly antagonized the MNF towards the Chakmas. In retaliation, the MNF also started killing the Chakmas on many occasions and could not fully trust the community in general.[13] In such a situation, the Mizos who had previously neither supported the MNF nor distrusted the Chakmas developed a new sense of hatred and hostility towards the latter and vice versa. Most of these incidents happened in the western belt of Mizoram, the current territory of the Chakma Autonomous District Council, where the Chakmas resided, and it was also the areas the MNF fighters frequented on their way to East Pakistan.

It all started when the MNF unleashed the first multiple strikes simultaneously across the Mizo District on 1 March 1966. In the western region, one of the Border Security Forces camps, located at Chawngte C area, was the target of the MNF rebels.[14] Just when the rebels were about to begin their surprise assault on the BSF camp, so the story goes, the Chakmas on the other side alerted the army duty, thereby rendering the MNF operation compromised.[15] Such incidents easily contributed to a trust deficit between the two sides. Another incident in the same year,

[13] A personal conversation with former Village Council President of Saizawh West, dated Saizawh West the 20th January 2021, and with ex MNF army and resident of Chawngte 'P', dated Chawngte 'P' the 18th January 2021.

[14] Chawngte is a township in the western belt of Mizoram inhabited by both the Mizos and the Chakmas, and is currently the headquarter of the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC). The town is divided into three sections along the ethnic as well as administrative lines, Chawngte L, Chawngte P and Chawngte C. The letters signified Lunglei (Lusei/Mizo), Pawi/Lai and Chakma respectively. These sections were again put under three separate administrative units, Lunglei District, the Lai Autonomous District Council and the Chakma Autonomous District Council, all under the Mizoram state government. It is the Chawngte C where CADC headquarter is located. Although the town is a shared geographical space, there is no indication of unity or connection between the people of L and P combined (the Mizos) and the Chakma side. Since, it is a tri junction point where three administrative units converge, there can be overlapping in terms of administrative powers.

[15] A personal conversation with a retired Range Officer under Environment and Forest Department of Mizoram government and a resident of Chawngte L, dated Chawngte L the 19th January 2021.

but this time at Tlabung or Demagiri, made ethnic tension high when the Mizo preacher Hrangchhingpuia, along with his daughter and some other colleagues, were allegedly killed by the Chakmas. To make the matter worse, another preacher Lalthansanga and his allies who went to retrieve their bodies were also manhandled (Lianchhinga 1992, 57-58). These incidents begged for retribution, and thus the cycle of violence had begun.

There is no denying even among the Chakma leaders and politicians that the Chakmas might have sided with the Indian army and helped them against the MNF in the early days of the insurgency period. However, there is a strong tendency, on the one hand, to explain such occurrences as unfortunate and unintended accidents caused by certain kinds of people under fragile circumstances. And if that happened, it was not the whole story, as this was not the case everywhere. There is also a powerful counter-narrative that aimed to negate conjectural and one-dimensional discourse, by stressing that there were countless Chakmas who helped the MNF escape caught by an Indian army.[16] On the other hand, from the perspective of the Chakmas, it was not a simple case of Chakmas betraying the Mizo insurgents as the Mizo counterpart would have put it. They might have been doing such services to the army under duress. One of the informants had put it this way:

> There is a perception I believe that the Chakmas were pro-Indian or pro-army. Since Chakmas were also living here, and MNF movement had to be carried out in this area where they hid and operated, this resulted in a very difficult situation for the Chakmas. The Indian army might have taken help and intelligence from the local Chakma, maybe they were also pressurized [*sic*] into giving information or whereabouts of the MNF hideouts. So, this had become known to the MNF and felt antagonized towards the Chakmas for providing information. It was difficult here actually. So, this is how the trust deficit has built up.[17]

Nevertheless, the MNF related violence was not the only problem that rocked the ethnic relationship between the Mizos and the Chakmas. In the early years of the MNF movement between 1966 and 1969, it was revealed that there were several instances of Chakma killing and looting the Mizo folks, livestock, paddy fields, granaries. In one instance, a man named Japanraia was allegedly killed in 1967 when

[16] A personal conversation with a history teacher in Govt. Kamlanagar College and a resident of Chawngte C, dated Chawngte C the 16th January 2021.

[17] A personal conversation with the Information and Public Relation Officer of the Chakma Autonomous District Council and a resident of Chawngte C, dated Chawngte the 17th January 2021.

he worked in his cultivation field at the Chawngte river bank. In another incident, the Chakmas also reportedly killed a person named Vanthlira at Muallianpui village in 1969. It was argued that those Mizos, especially Bawm, living near the Chakmas, were not safe during this period. Even though the village grouping scheme was not fully extended to this part of Mizoram, inhabited mostly by Lai, Mara, and Chakma due to a relatively weak MNF influence, the situation of the people was as precarious as any other parts. Since jhum cultivation, a major agricultural practice for livelihood, was virtually impossible, there was a shortage of food everywhere.

Describing the situation in those days, one of the informants from Chawngte L recalled that the Mizo civilians fleeing from the Indian army used to run to the jungle to hide. While they left their home unattended, the Chakma gang showed up in the villages and stole from their houses. These activities were carried out only because the protection from the Indian army. Keeping the Mizo houses and villages intact and safe from such theft and robbery was the last thing the army cared about.[18] One of the informants from Saizawh village who lived nearby the Chakmas spoke of what happened and what changed in the wake of the MNF movement:

> It seemed as if the Chakmas shed their skin and became what they actually were, susceptible to mischief and even killing when opportunity showed. Our livestock, like buffaloes/gayals and cows, were left in the nearby jungle for grazing. And since it is *Rambuai*, our grandfather gathered his folks, around five men, and set out to check our livestock just in case the Chakmas were doing anything to them. They went to Udalthana to drive them home. Little did they know that the Chakmas, under the favour of the army, grew colder towards the Mizos. When they reached the place, they were given food as usual, but while they were eating, the Chakmas captured them. We never found their bodies till today. There was also a possibility that they were being handed over to the army, falsely accused as MNF insurgents. Mostly, the reason we, in western Mizoram, suffered at the hands of the army was due to the information given by the Chakmas. Our villages also got robbed and thrashed by Chakma dacoits, usually a group of men. This was in 1967-69. Since the army got the upper hand over the MNF in this area, there were not many MNF or others to fight back the Chakmas also. Most of them fled to Chittagong Hill Tracts. On top of that, all the civil arms were confiscated by the army. We were simply defenceless against the rage

[18] A personal conversation with a retired Range Officer under Environment and Forest Department of Mizoram government and a resident of Chawngte L, dated Chawngte L the 19th January 2021.

> of Chakma dacoits. In that manner, most of the Mizo villages in the Uiphum hills were chased and pillaged by the Chakma dacoits.[19]

There is general suspicion that the Chakmas, the Indian army, as well as the civil administrators from Assam, worked hand in hand against the Mizos. Interestingly, while there was no grouping of villages among Lai and Mara in the southern and western part of Mizo District, the Chakmas in the same areas were said to be put together into 13 grouping centres, viz. Parva, Damdep, Vaseitlang, Jarulsuri, Sakhai (Borapansuri), Khaijoisuri, Tlabung, Puankhu, Tuichawng, Lungsen, Chawngte, Marpara and Tuipuibari. It was believed that these centres were strategically placed along the Bangladesh borderlands, to deter the movement of MNF rebels who established their headquarters at Chittagong Hill Tracts (Lianchhinga 1992, 1996).

Throughout the fieldwork among the Mizos in the Chawngte township and other surrounding areas, people easily expressed their personal feeling of mistrust or general suspicion on the Chakmas, citing those past incidents of violence and mischief. There was a common expression among the Mizos while talking about ethnic issues, i.e. *Chakma ho chu an feeling lutuk* literally means "Chakmas are very feeling". But, here the word feeling is used locally as an adjective, to refer to the fact that the Chakmas are generally receptive and politically aware of their community and its affairs. The Chakmas, on the other hand, do not categorically convey their mistrust or cite those histories of violence, but choose to stress on the complexity of the issue and how there are always two sides of the story. There was an inclination to see the history of ethnic violence during the MNF period as an activity of certain anti-social elements within the Chakma community. They also maintained that conflict would have happened because of military coercion, and that the history of coexistence of different ethnic tribes like Lushai, Bawm, Pang, Chakma etc. testified that there was no inherent hostility and hatred. Perhaps, for a community of a minority within another minority striving for a better life, carefully resorting to a certain past and memories, not just any other, is another strategy of survival.

On the other side of the border in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, especially in the Sajek region where the MNF hid and launched their operation in the late 1960s,

[19] A personal conversation with former Village Council President of Saizawh West, dated Saizawh West the 20th January 2021. According to him, the victims of the above-mentioned incident were said to be, Neihlianthanga, Lalkima, Thatleisanga, Pakhama, and Sanleihkima.

the ethnic relationship also became increasingly antagonistic between the Chakmas and the MNF. But this time, both Chakmas and Mizos were bearing the brunt of the MNF movement, which again had different kinds of impact and consequences. During the fieldwork, interactions with the Mizos, who originally hailed from this part of the Hill Tracts and later moved to Mizoram, revealed the situation and ethnic relations during the MNF movement. When the MNF shifted to the Sajek region, all they had was arms and ammunition, and for accommodation they had to take the help of the local Mizo villagers. Initially, the MNF rebels were distributed as a guest to each family, and later the villagers also had to volunteer for work while erecting camps and other headquarters. In terms of food, however, they depended on whatever the local people had in their paddy fields. Besides, the MNF frequently asked for donations, in cash and in kind. Due to these involuntary aids and frequent donations, it became increasingly burdensome for the local Mizos, most of whom were farmers, to cater for the MNF. An old gentleman, a nonagenarian, who lived in Chhippui village in Sajek when Laldenga himself lived, had recalled:

> Due to our duty and obligation to facilitate their food and shelter, we got poorer and poorer, since we also had our own kids and families to feed and to put a roof over their heads. They came to our jhum and grabbed whatever vegetables or agricultural products they liked, without any consideration for us, the owner, who also depended on whatever grew in that jhum. They collected the vegetables in a way that had not guaranteed its regrowth.
>
> All of us were forced to contribute to the MNF. We had to make time for them to do their work. Whether we had time or not, we had to grind their rice and clean for them. Donations were given in cash and in rice. All of us in the Sajek hill range villages suffered such hardship.[20]

While the Mizos endured troubles and difficulties due to the MNF movement being centred in their villages and a war being waged in their midst, the Chakmas in the surrounding areas were the worst sufferers. The MNF stole paddy from their fields, extorted money and medicines, asked for donations, and even killed those who refused to comply (Verghese and Thanzawna 1997, 110). The MNF clearly acted upon those bitter experiences with the Chakmas from Mizoram. When the Chakma leaders rallied the hill people and launched their war against the Bangladesh government in the mid 1970s, the latter employed the MNF rebels as a counter-

[20] A personal conversation with a nonagenarian and a former resident of Chhippui village in the CHT, dated West Phaileng the 22nd February 2021.

guerrilla measure by giving them sanctuaries. This only escalated the already existing antagonism between the Chakmas and MNF. One can say there was no love lost between the MNF and the Chakmas. (Schendel 2015, 36).

On the one hand, while the MNF movement caused suffering and bloodshed, it also awakened political consciousness and nationalistic or ethnic feeling among the hill people of Chittagong Hill Tracts. For the Chakmas, this at least partly contributed to the formation of armed outfits to fight for their identity, rights and homeland within Bangladesh. For the Mizos, there was some form of enlightenment about their ethnic Mizo identity and history. The MNF regularly organized public meetings with local Mizos, and gave speeches reminding them of the need to conserve and preserve Mizoram. One of the informants who migrated from the Sajek region to Mizoram profusely talked about how Laldenga instilled enthusiasm and passion among the youth. Just when they were about to get assimilated in the Bangladeshi society, and on the verge of losing Mizo identity, even trying to learn their language and taking pride in it, he continued, the MNF came to remind them of who they are. When the movement came to an end, and a new state was about to be born, most of them followed the returning MNF rebels and settled inside Mizoram.[21] Between the fear of Shanti Bahini without the protection of MNF and the anti-hill people measures of the government that vehemently imposed Bengali language and culture, there was no better choice. It is clear from the above observation that the MNF movement, policies and ideology surely deepened the ethnic divide between the Mizos and the Chakmas.

Politics 'Overground': Union Territory of Mizoram and the Chakma Autonomous District Council

While the MNF engaged in a protracted guerrilla fight against the Indian armed forces for independence, several significant developments took place in Mizo District. After the insurgency plunged the hill into chaos, the leaders of the Mizo Union, who controlled the District Council office, actively petitioned the Indian government for higher political status. The ultimate objective, that the Mizo Union set by passing it

[21] A personal conversation with former government employee of Bangladesh government until migration to Mizoram in 1997 and currently a resident of West Phaileng, dated West Phaileng the 22nd February 2021.

in the Special Assembly in 1963, was for statehood status within the provisions of the Indian Constitution. In 1971, the Mizo Union joined hands with the Dengthuama's faction of Congress and became the United Mizo Parliamentary Party (UMPP), and together they mounted renewed pressure on the government. Similarly, upon hearing the talk of Union Territory, the leaders of the Pawi Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) also decided to insist on a better status, which meant a more autonomous arrangement in the form of District Council as opposed to the existing Regional Council. Some leaders of the PLRC, including Zakhua Hlychho, then Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the PLRC representing Lakher/Mara, Lalchunga Chinzah, one of the Members of Assam Legislative Assembly from Mizo District representing Pawi/Lai, and Atul Chandra Chakma representing Chakma, reportedly tried and apprised Assam government of their desire to have a separate District Council. They secured an endorsement from the Assam Home Minister for their demand.[22]

The Assam government selected a former Sub Divisional Officer of Lunglei to constitute a One-Man Commission to investigate the matters. But its recommendations were set aside once the Indian Parliament enacted the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, which, among other things, detached the Mizo District from Assam (Vanlawma [1965] 1989, 373). On 21 January 1972, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared Mizo District a Union Territory, a status still short of the original demand, i.e., statehood. Mizoram was to have three districts, the erstwhile North District became Aizawl District, the South District became Lunglei District, and the PLRC region became Chhimtuipui District. The Mizo District Council was also dismantled, and the Pawi Lakher Regional Council was trifurcated into three separate Regional Councils for the Chakma, Lai, and Mara. While the Lais and Maras time and again conveyed their wishes for separate arrangements which were in the public domain, the birth of Chakma District Council was unforeseen, unexpected, and widely regarded as unacceptable by the public in general, and since then it became the heart of conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas.

[22] A personal conversation with an octogenarian ex Village Council President of Chawngte P, dated Chawngte the 19th January 2021.

Chakma Autonomous District Council: A Surprise Package or Policy Directed against the MNF

Few months after they merged into one party, the UMPP leaders met Indira Gandhi to get the demand of statehood across. While the Prime Minister did not entertain the demand, she made it clear that the Mizo District was soon to be separated from Assam, alluding to the status of Union Territory. Considering the ongoing MNF movement being harbored in East Pakistan and the Bangladesh Liberation War where India had a high stake, perhaps upgrading the District Council to a Union Territory, in the context of Mizo District, was one way of creating a political challenge for the rebellion. Soon, the government sent Cachar and Mizo District Commissioner S.J. Das on 17 July 1971 to Mizo District mainly to sell the UT status to the politicians and local leaders. The PLRC officials also accepted the UT status on the condition that the Regional Council be upgraded to District Council. But when they realized that the District Council leaders were cutting deals with the Indian government behind their backs, they decided to meet the central leadership in Delhi and demand a separate District Council for themselves.

In the month of September, the same year the PLRC representatives including, F Manghnuna, Sapliana Vandir, K Sangchhum from Pawi community, Zakhu Hlychho, Mylai Hlychho and S Hiato from Lakher community and Atul Chandra from Chakma community, set out to meet the Prime Minister. Before they secured an appointment with the Prime Minister, they met up with Union Ministers from Assam, Home Secretary M.G. Pimputkar and Joint Secretary. And on 10 September 1971, they met Indira Gandhi and submitted their memorandum for the demand of the District Council for the Pawi and Lakher. The Prime Minister reportedly assured that the PLRC would be upgraded to Autonomous District Council once UT status was finalized. Apparently, around the same time the UMPP leaders were also meeting the Prime Minister primarily to convey their acceptance of the UT status. They even pleaded with the PLRC leaders to withdraw their demand for separate administration, which fell on deaf ears. Up until this point, there was no mention of or demand for separate Chakma District Council. Being a small community among Pawi and Lakher in the Regional Council area, without the support of numerical strength and legitimacy, a separate administration was not considered applicable for the Chakmas. But when these leaders of PLRC met with M.G. Pimputkar for the second time,

apprising him of the assurance they received from the Prime Minister herself, Chakma leader Atul Chandra took the opportunity and directly asked for a separate District Council for the Chakmas, citing their social and cultural differences from the rest of the groups (Vanlawma [1965] 1989; Hluna 2020).

Back in the District, the Mizo Union organized a General Assembly on 2 October 1971 and despite the opposition from the youth group and student organizations, the Assembly resolved to accept the UT status. Accordingly, the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 was passed and Mizo District became Union Territory of Mizoram on 21 January 1972. Immediately, the Mizo District Council was dissolved, and the first Mizoram Assembly election was scheduled to be held on 18 April 1972. And in the interim period, the existing CEM Ch.Chhunga and his cabinet were acting as caretaker government while S.J. Das was promoted as the Chief Commissioner and Administrator of the new Mizoram. But, in anticipation of the upcoming election, the central Congress party sent an agent to fix the rift in the Congress family between Dengthuama's and Hrangchhuana's group, which negatively affected the relationship between the former group and Mizo Union. As a result, Ch.Chhunga stepped down from his post, and Zalawma and his Congressmen occupied all the other posts in the Council. During the interim period between the declaration of UT and the first Assembly election, the Chief Commissioner S.J. Das and the Deputy Commissioner A.C. Ray were the only ones who wielded actual political power (Vanlawma [1965] 1989, 369-372).

It was these two administrators, the twin heads of the interim government who executed Indira Gandhi's promise of upgrading the existing Regional Council into District Council once Mizo District became a Union Territory. S.J. Das and his deputy began meeting with the political leaders from both the District and Regional Council. They discussed the new arrangement that came along with the UT status, the proposed District Councils for Pawi, Lakher and Chakma, and got their token approval for it. In February, they traveled to Siaha to meet with the Regional Council leaders. While the Lakher and Chakma leaders showed no opposition, there was a divided opinion among the Pawi leaders due to the fact that the Chakma District was to be carved out from the Pawi District (Hluna 2020, 25). Nevertheless, the plan was already set in motion. So, on 1 April, Chief Commissioner S.J. Das issued Pawi-

Lakher Autonomous Region (Reorganization) Order, 1972[23] and on the next day, Regional Council Rules 1972.[24] In effect, the erstwhile PLRC had been trifurcated into Pawi, Lakher and Chakma Regional Council (Hmingthanga 2003, 36). Caretaker CEM were appointed for each Council; Lalchunga Chinzah, Zakhu Hlychho and Atul Chandra Chakma for Pawi, Lakher and Chakma respectively. Since these Regional Councils were existing on paper only, there was no election or functioning of the Councils. On 29 April, with the administrator's notification of Mizo District Council (Miscellaneous) Order 1972, these three Regional Councils were elevated to Autonomous District Council.

While the Mizos expressed no opposition to the Pawi and Lakher District Council, the Chakmas District Council was considered an aberration, something which was created without their consent in their own land. Seeing it as a conspiracy against the Mizo community, it antagonized them against the Chakmas who were now being accused of grabbing Mizo land by using the central government's sympathy. It was even painted as one of the biggest historical wrongs in Mizo political history (Lalthara 2020). The immediate blame went to the Mizo Union and Congress leaders who enabled the Chief Commissioner to do what he did, which would not have been possible without their approval. In the first Legislative Assembly session, the Mizo Union and Congress MLAs accused each other of being an enabler for the creation of Chakma District (Vanlawma [1965] 1989; Hmingthanga 2003).

But, there was also a belief that the formation of Chakma District was largely a policy of the government to counter the MNF operation in East Pakistan. A government agent, the former Deputy Commissioner of Mizoram Union Territory, A.C. Ray was said to have argued along this line in 1996. When the MNF rebels rebuilt their camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, they could easily cross the border without detection, entered Mizoram through the western borderlands and carried out their activities before returning to East Pakistan. It was frustrating for the Indian government as they were not able to effectively follow their trails on foreign soil. The

[23] The Pawi-Lakher Autonomous Region (Re-Organisation) Order, 1972 No. CCMP. 3/72/70-77, The 1st April, 1972, The Mizoram Gazette Vol. I Aizawl, Friday, April, 14, 1972.
[24] The Regional Councils Rules, 1972 No. CCMP 3/72/78-79, the 2nd April, 1972. The Mizoram Gazette Vol. I Aizawl, Friday, April, 14, 1972.

Chakma community on the other hand were not moved by the MNF ideology and the cause of Mizo independence, and were socio-culturally and religiously distinct from the Mizos. At this point, A.C. Ray admitted, creating the Chakma land on the Indo-Bangladesh border areas was a deterrence against the MNF 'underground' movement (Hluna 2020, 24). While some of the Mizo writers saw the creation of Chakma Autonomous District as directed by the central government, others considered different variables at play, linking it with the rise of Bengal nationalism after the Bangladesh war. It was argued that the two Bengali administrators S.J. Das and A.C. Ray were keen on creating the Chakma District because it was required to accommodate the Chakmas who were fleeing their home in the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a result of government-sanctioned detribalization measures. It was considered to be in the interest of Bengali land (Vanlawma [1965] 1989, 375). Nevertheless, the creation of Chakma District exacerbated the distrust that the Mizos had in the central leadership and 'mainland' Indian administrators in general.

'Unconstitutionality' of CADC: Read Between the Lines

Coming from the perspective that Chakmas are not indigenous tribal group in the Northeast or colonial Assam, the Mizos argued that the creation of CADC was not in tune with the aims and objectives of the Sixth Schedule provisions, which was precisely to give autonomous administration to tribal groups in the Northeast to preserve their land and culture. Mizos also questioned the manners and procedures in which few of the lawmakers paved the way for the Chakma District Council and kept the people of the Mizo District and the Members of Parliament in the dark while doing so. The argument was not that it was illegal but that the legal procedures involved indicated discrepancies, and that it was intendedly done in such a way that there would be no opposition from the public, especially the Mizos.

This aggravated the already widening ethnic divide between Mizos and Chakmas. There are two important legislations that enabled the creation of the Union Territory of Mizoram and the trifurcation of the existing Pawi-Lakher regional Council, viz. the North East Reorganization Act, 1971 and the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Act, 1971. These two pieces of legislation made significant change or amendment in the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution, so as to expedite the legal processes concerning the formation of new District Council. It was

argued that these changes were there to deceive and confuse the actual outcome with the said intention of these acts. On the section 13 of the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Act, 1971, titled Amendment of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, it read:

> 13. Amendment of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. - On and from the day on which the Legislative Assembly of the Union territory of Mizoram has been duly constituted under and in accordance with the provisions of the principal Act, in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, -
>
> (ii) in paragraph 20, in Part III of the table, the words "The Mizo District" shall be omitted; (iii) for paragraph 20A, the following paragraphs shall be substituted, namely: -
>
> 20A. Dissolution of the Mizo District Council. - (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Schedule, the District Council of the Mizo District existing immediately before the prescribed date (hereinafter referred to as the Mizo, District Council) shall stand dissolved and cease to exist.
>
> 20B. Autonomous regions in the Union territory of Mizoram to be autonomous districts and transitory provisions consequent thereto.
>
> (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Schedule, - (a) every autonomous region existing immediately before the prescribed date in the Union Territory of Mizoram shall, on and from that date, be an autonomous district in that Union territory (hereafter referred to as the corresponding new district) and the Administrator thereof may, by one or more orders, direct that such consequential amendments as are necessary to give effect to the provisions of this clause shall be made, in paragraph 20 of this Schedule (including Part III of the table appended to that paragraph) and thereupon the said paragraph and the said Part III shall be deemed to have been amended accordingly;
>
> (2) Every member whether elected or nominated of an existing Regional Council shall be deemed to have been elected or, as the case may be, nominated to the corresponding new District Council and shall hold office until a District Council is duly constituted for the corresponding new district under this Schedule.
>
> (4) The Administrator of the Union territory of Mizoram may, by one or more orders, provide for all or any of the following matters, namely: - (a) the transfer in whole or in part of the assets, rights and liabilities of the existing Regional Council (including the rights and liabilities under any contract may by it) to the corresponding new District Council; (b) the substitution of the corresponding new District Council for the existing Regional Council as a party to the legal proceedings to which the existing Regional Council is a party; (c) the transfer or re-employment of any employees of the existing Regional Council to or by the corresponding new District Council, the terms and conditions of service applicable to such employees after such transfer or re-employment; (d) the continuance of any laws made by the existing Regional Council and in force immediately before

> the prescribed date, subject to such adaptations and modifications, whether by way of repeal or amendment, as the Administrator may make in this behalf until such laws are altered, repealed or amended by a competent Legislature or other competent authority; (e) such incidental, consequential and supplementary matters as the Administrator considers necessary.[25]

From paragraph 20B(1)(a), it stated that once the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram had been constituted, every existing autonomous region would become an autonomous district in the Union Territory of Mizoram. When the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Act, 1971 was passed in the Parliament, there was only one Regional Council in the Mizo District, i.e., Pawi Lakher Regional Council. The understanding of the general public and the Members of Parliament was that Pawi Lakher Regional Council would be upgraded to Pawi Lakher District Council. There was no mention whatsoever of breaking up the existing Regional Council or of adding the Chakma District Council. Amendments to the Sixth Schedule were made, it was argued, specifically to achieve what was intended without violating the law of the land. It was made obscured, ambiguous, and unclear of its intentions so that the administrators could issue any orders in the window period between election to the Mizoram Legislative Assembly and the actual constitution of the same Legislative Assembly. Had the public been made aware, as the argument goes, there would have been some form of objection. But it was designed in such a way that there would be no opposition and no scrutiny from democratically elected governments. It was also argued that the power of the Administrator mentioned in the 20B(4) involving the "incidental, consequential and supplementary matters" did not include the authority to create a new Regional Council or elevate the existing ones to the District Council (Lalthara 2020). Another argument pointing out a discrepancy in the process, maintained that in the light of Paragraph 20B (2) of the Sixth Schedule, upgrading the Chakma Regional Council that existed in paper for less than a month, to District Council status was against the rule. There was no office, election nomination or inauguration of Chakma Regional Council (Hmingthanga 2003, 34). In retrospect, the Mizos found it hard to accept the fact that such changes were made without their knowledge.

[25] The Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Act, 1971, Official Gazette Government of Goa, Daman and Diu, Panaji, 9th March 1972, Series 1 No.5.

Political Parties, Peace Accord and Politicization

The issue of Chakma District Council continued to become a point of contention among major political parties in Mizoram. A new political party came into being in 1975 called People's Conference Party (PC) headed by a retired Indian Army officer Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo.[26] While the Mizo Union and Congress won the first Legislative Assembly election of Mizoram in 1972, this new party came to win majority seats in the second election that was held in 1978. Except for an interlude for few months due to President's Rule being imposed in Mizoram as a result of a rift in the party, it formed a government for an entire term. One of their political objectives was preserving and protecting Mizo culture and language, which was quickly linked with a discourse of assimilation and 'illegal' infiltration, targeting especially the Chakmas and 'mainland' Indians in general. So, from the very beginning of the PC government in Mizoram, they promptly took up the issue of alleged Chakma infiltration and 'unconstitutionality' of the Chakma District Council. In 1979, Brig. T Sailo as a Chief Minister even wrote a pamphlet titled *Influx of Chakma of Bangladesh into Mizoram* and had it widely circulated. He even discussed the matters with the leaders in Delhi, as a result of which a battalion of Border Security Force under the operational control of the army was stationed along the border, tasked with a duty of detecting and pushing back infiltrators (Hluna 2020, 29-31).

However, opposition to his efforts came from Mizoram Congress party, who accused the PC party of driving out the Chakmas from Mizoram. A letter from the General Secretary of Mizoram Congress to the Chief Minister, stated that Chakmas were also an inhabitant of Mizoram, and for that reason they were entitled to whatever the Pawi and Lakher availed. The Congress party even urged that a bank, treasury, godown, hospital, roads, educational institutions, and other development

[26] Amid heavy army crackdown on the MNF forces and excessive military outrages, the innocent civilians were often the worst sufferers. Civil liberty was curtailed and there was no measure for redressals. In this grave situation, Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo formed the Human Rights Committee on 1 June 1974, to protect the rights and liberties of the citizens guaranteed in the Constitution and to seek judicial intervention for the alleged Human Rights offences by the armed forces. These activities became the main source of political capital when the Human Rights Committee converted into the People's Conference party in 1975 and went on to secure majority seats in the second Legislative Assembly of Mizoram.

infrastructures be built in the Chakma areas.[27] Nevertheless, the PC party dismissed those as a strategy for vote bank politics. On 11 June 1980, Brig. T Sailo sent a letter to Giani Zail Singh, Union Home Minister explaining the importance of curbing uncontrolled influx of Chakmas and the need to put more troops on the border. He even suggested raising Mizoram Military Police Battalion if there was a shortage of Border Security Forces.[28] By 1982, as many as 4527 Chakmas considered as 'foreigners' were pushed back (Ibid.,33).

In the face of considerable opposition from Mizoram Congress who were a part of the central ruling party and an ongoing MNF movement, Brig. T Sailo and his PC Ministry stayed relentless and submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 10 June 1982, with the hope of expediting the effort for more effective results. It explained the perspectives of the Mizos on the Chakma District Council and alleged infiltration into Mizoram, and resorted to the recent past while making such claims. Some parts of the memorandum thus read:

> During the British days that is, before 1947, Chakmas used to apply for permission to settle in villages bordering the then East Bengal (now Bangladesh). The British Government used to sparingly grant permission to the Chakma applicants to settle in the Mizo villages with a clear stipulation that they were the subjects of the hereditary chieftains of the villages. The total number of Chakmas permitted to settle in the Mizo villages up to 1947 was around about 3,000 approximately. After 1947, due to various reasons, there was a certain amount of relaxation or slackness in watching the entry of Chakmas into Mizoram on the border. In other words, the Chakmas kept on infiltrating into Mizoram over the years and [the] Mizoram government were [*sic*], to put it bluntly, negligent in that no real check was made.
>
> In due course of time, the number of infiltrators became very big. Eventually, on account of certain 'political convenience of some politicians (vote catching game)' the Chakmas claimed to form a small district along the Mizoram-Bangladesh border which was conceded to. Thus, a strip of land of the territory of Mizoram along the border has been made into a Chakma district, to accommodate foreign nationals. This is entirely wrong action on the part of the then authorities. And in course of time, more and more Chakmas infiltrated into Mizoram. The 1981 Census will possibly give a figure of 20,000-30,000 Chakmas as opposed to the 2 or 3 thousand odd Chakmas granted permission to settle in Mizo villages prior to 1947. This situation is ominous. Our people can perhaps reconcile themselves to the idea of accepting those Chakmas who came into Mizoram in the 40s and 50s

[27] J. Lalsangzuala, General Secretary Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) letter No.MCC.17/80/43 dated Aizawl the 5th June 1980.

[28] Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo, Chief Minister Mizoram, Letter to Shri Giani Zail Singh, Home Minister Government of India, D.O. No. CMS. 136/80/1-2 Aizawl the 11th June, 1980.

> but are greatly exercised about those who came into Mizoram in the 60s and 70s. Here lies the main issue. Our people do not easily take to agitation but the fact is that they are greatly exercised about this issue.[29]

A day after the memorandum, the president of PC party received a letter from the MNF President Emissary, instructing the former to stop all efforts to check Chakma infiltration and to dissolve the Chakma District Council as it was part of the MNF objectives all along. [30] In other words, the MNF believed that the PC and their activities concerning the Chakmas, was taking away their future trophy. This issue combined with the PC being accused of forming an anti-MNF policy led to a rift between the two, resulting in the death of some PC party leaders (Zakhuma 2001). Such violent opposition stifled their work to a great extent. While they left the job of dismantling the Chakma District Council to the MNF, they continued to press the authority to erase the alleged 'foreigners' from the electoral roll. In a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner of India, Brig. T Sailo wrote about the influx of immigrants from Bangladesh from 1971, who might have been included in the successive electoral rolls in Mizoram due to inadequate attention from the earlier authorities and careless officials concerned with enumeration. Citing the Ministry of Home Affairs' letter No.11/180/72-TX dated 30th September 1972 that maintained that immigrants from Bangladesh after 25th March, 1971 should be treated as illegal entrants, he requested the Chief Election Commissioner to observe the same and disenfranchise those who came after that date, while preparing the electoral rolls in Mizoram.[31] In the fourth election in 1984, however, T Sailo's party lost the people's mandate and the Congress returned to power. In the period between the Congress Ministry and the signing of Peace Accord in 1986, it was alleged that since there was no longer an effort from the new government many Chakmas had entered Mizoram. They set up a new village in Dampa sanctuary and the surrounding areas in the western borderlands, and were enrolled in the electoral list as well (Hluna 2020, 38-39).

[29] Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo, Chief Minister of Mizoram Memorandum to Smt. Indira Gandhi Prime Minister of India, New Delhi the 10th June 1982, see Appendix F.
[30] Aichhinga, Emissary of MNF president, Letter to PC party president, dated Mizoram the 11th June 1982, see Appendix G.
[31] Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo, Chief Minister of Mizoram Letter to Shri R K Trivedi, Chief Election Commissioner of India, D.O. No. CMS 236/83/8-9 dated Aizawl the 19th November 1983.

Amidst all these Mizo's allegations, claims of 'illegal' immigration, and all-out effort of ejection, the Chakma leaders also appealed to authority for their plight and grievances and stated their own demands by writing or submitting a memorandum. Alleging socio-political discrimination and stepmotherly treatment from the Mizoram government and the Mizos in general, a better and bigger autonomous administration that could accommodate all the Chakmas in Mizoram was the ultimate demand and considered an answer to their problems. In an appeal letter that the leaders of the Chakmas District Council sent to the Lt. Governor of Mizoram in 1983, there was a demand for territorial expansion of Chakma District as it had not encompassed all the Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram. The letter argued that, Tlabung or Demagiri considered as the main centre of the whole Chakma area itself and many other parts had been deprived of the right to autonomy, and that these areas should be included in the District Council territory so that there would be betterment in all kinds of social and administrative aspects. Geographical separation or being under a different administrative roof was seen as inimical to their cultural and societal integrity. The Council leaders also asked for more power to the District Council by demanding the transfer of more subjects to their Council like Agriculture, Public Work Department, Medical, Soil Conservation, Social Welfare, Co-operative Societies, Community Projects, Fisheries and Animal Husbandry, as envisaged in Paragraph 6 of the Sixth Schedule.[32]

The following year, Chakma leaders brought to the notice of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi their demand for inclusion of Chakma areas into Chakma District Council. In a letter, they stated:

> It is a matter of great regret that out of about 42,000 Chakmas living in geographically contiguous areas in Mizoram were deliberately put into different administrative roofs, only one third of the Chakma inhabited areas and population were included in the Chakma District Council (which was carved out of the erstwhile Pawi-Lakher Regional Council). Consequently, a uniform socio-economic development of the Chakmas have [*sic*] been much hampered. The major portion of the Chakmas i.e., two third of the Chakma population has been kept outside Chakma District Council, whereas they are also entitled under the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India to an Autonomous District and there is no reason of their being deprived of this right. Hence, the creation and the very purpose of the Chakma District Council failed to serve any meaning to the Chakmas,

[32] An Appeal from the People of the Chakma District Council to the Hon'ble Lt. Governor of Mizoram, Camp Chawngte, dated the 10th October, 1983, see Appendix H.

> therefore, under above circumstances, inclusion into Chakma District Council of the Chakma inhabited area is desired and prayed for by the Chakma people.[33]

Due to the state government's discrimination and neglectful treatment of Chakma areas, the letter alleged, no development work could be materialized. In this situation, it was suggested that there be implementation of the Twenty Point Programme launched by Indira Gandhi herself, in Chakma inhabited areas under centrally sponsored agencies. The letter also expressed their apprehension about the granting of statehood to Mizoram given the Mizo ways of perceiving the Chakmas, indicating a deep-seated mistrust they had with the state government controlled by the ethnic Mizos.

The demand for extension of Chakma District Council moved one step further and now called for a separate administration in the form of Union Territory for the entire Chakma populated areas in Mizoram. This was made explicit in a new memorandum to Rajiv Gandhi then Prime Minister of India in 1985 by a few Chakma leaders who also belonged to the Congress (I) party. For a variety of reasons, demand for Union Territory status was considered warranted and necessary for minimum safeguard and protection of the Chakmas. In a way, this memorandum can be seen as a response from the Chakmas vis-à-vis the Mizo narratives that tend to perceive the former as non-local inhabitants, 'illegal infiltrators' and pro-Indian in the context of MNF movement. It claimed that their homeland in the present western part of Mizoram along the international border of Bangladesh was shifted to the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) in 1897 by the British for administrative gains, and that since then their presence in the western belt of Mizoram has been causing anxiety.

During the insurgency, it continued, the Chakmas remained uninfluenced by the MNF and insurrectionist activities of the Mizos, instead they extended help to the army as guide and worked as a focus of torch, standing against a secessionist force. As a result, it was alleged that the Mizo leaders have been up against the Chakmas to degenerate them as a 'foreigner', while the MNF insurgents killed many of them, burnt and looted villages and levied heavy taxes. In short, Chakmas paid a heavy price for doing their duty for the integrity of the country. Since then, the Mizo leaders

[33] A Humble Representation to Smt, Indira Gandhi Prime Minister, Camp: Chawngte, from the People of the Chakma District Council, the 17th April, 1984.

pursued a policy of denial and deprivation aimed at annihilating the Chakmas, that pushed them in the backyard of development and progress. The memorandum went on to state that for these reasons and the fact that the Chakmas stood beside the government of India at the test of time with loyalty, that they have a legitimate case for Union Territory status.[34]

On 30 June 1986, the Indian government and MNF signed a peace agreement or Peace Accord as it was known, ending two decades long violent insurgency in Mizoram. Contrary to what the PC party leaders and the Mizo public had anticipated, the Accord had no mention of 'Chakma issue' or dissolution of Chakma District Council. It instead laid down in clause 9 that, "the rights and privileges of the minorities in Mizoram as envisaged in the Constitution, shall continue to be preserved and protected and their social and economic advancement shall be ensured" (Ibid.,48). When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Mizoram to celebrate the peace agreement, the PC party took the chance to discuss with him the issue that the Accord had missed out on and submitted a memorandum as well. The party argued that for the preservation of Mizo ethnic identity, an influx of 'foreigners' from Bangladesh into Mizoram had to be stopped and those who had infiltrated for the past two decades or so needed to be detected and pushed back. Abolition of Chakma District Council was recommended as a first step to ensure stoppage of future infiltration. As the Indian Constitution provided for the well-being of minorities and preservation of their identity, the memorandum then appealed to the Prime Minister to consider their plea.[35] As per the Accord, an interim government before the official status of statehood, was set up on 21 August 1986. The Ministry consisted of Laldenga as Chief Minister, Lalthanhawla as Deputy Chief Minister, and three ministers from the MNF and Congress each. During the Assembly Session from 2 September to 5 September 1986, three MLAs of the PC party jointly moved a resolution in the House, seeking the abolition of Chakma Autonomous District Council. After long deliberation, the House Speaker decided to take a vote, and the resolution was eventually defeated (Ibid.,59-62). It can be argued that the so-called 'Chakma Issue'

[34] A Memorandum to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi from Chakma Leaders, Mizoram, dated the 1st February, 1985.
[35] Memorandum Submitted to Shri Rajiv Gandhi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India by the People's Conference Party of Mizoram on his visit to Mizoram on the 9th July 1986.

had clearly become a subject of politicization and instrumental calculations for the political leaders and parties in Mizoram.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the focus has been on how more formal and robust ethnic articulations and claims are made possible in Mizoram after the independence and as a result how ethnic tension and conflict developed. Through formalization of ethnic identities, claims of ethnic homeland are made, which are also at the same time territorial and exclusive. This led to ethnic antagonism between those who regarded themselves as local and who they considered as an 'outsider', hence the politics of belonging. However, it was also shown that one has to historicize the past whether pre-colonial or colonial to make and solidify those claims. In the context of the MNF movement and the crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the ethnic relationship between the Mizos and the Chakmas took a violent turn that resulted in a deep-seated mistrust and hostility between the two. In the Mizo District, through politicization of ethnic identity, ethnic relations remained hostile especially after the creation of Chakma District Council. The formation of Chakma Autonomous District Council in addition to the claims of Chakma influx from Bangladesh, then formed a core issue of conflict in this period. And the narrative of 'illegal immigration' was linked with the need to dissolve the Chakma District. At the same time, it is significant to note that the ethnic discords and contentions were also increasingly politicized by the Mizo political parties, indicating the complex and dynamic nature of the conflict.

CHAPTER 5

STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICS OF INDIGENEITY

Introduction

To outline what was shown in the preceding chapters, the rise of Chakma population in Mizoram, coupled with the formation of Chakma District Council in 1972, which the Mizos claimed was a result of demographic invasion from Bangladesh and an 'unconstitutional' political manoeuvre respectively, significantly changed the ethnic relationship. This was already marked by a shared history of distrust that has built up since the nineteenth century. Violent incidents during the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement also amplified ethnic discord and contributed to a more perceptible antagonism and resentment against one another. During the People's Conference government, there were attempts to identify and deport 'illegal' Chakma residents, and to dissolve the Chakma District Council, as it was seen as enabling more such inroads. While denying those claims, the Chakmas also asserted themselves as native to Mizoram. They claimed that despite no physical violence, they were the targets of government-instigated systematic exclusion and discrimination. Within Mizoram, the political aspirations of the Chakmas provoked suspicions from the Mizos, as one can observe from the public reaction of the Chakma District Council and later, the demand for inclusion of all Chakma inhabited areas into one district. Even then, the theatre of conflict was confined to certain arenas, such as Parliament, Assembly, or bureaucratic corridors, without much wider public attention and participation. However, it is argued that ever since the demand for upgrading the Chakma District into Union Territory (UT) was made, it once again precipitated such a fierce reaction from the Mizos. The so-called 'Chakma issue' seemed to inadvertently awaken the latter, who saw the demand for larger Chakma land as the last straw. In the following, the last chapter looks into the post-statehood period, which involved much broader participation from both sides, constant claims and counter-claims, and the gradual change in the language of conflict, albeit connected, from the narrative of 'illegal foreigners' to the questions of indigeneity.

Chakma Demand for Union Territory in Mizoram: Looking Back to Look Ahead

Ever since the Lushai Hills District Advisory Council election in 1948, there has been a growing utility of ethnicity in the political arena. For most political parties and politicians vying for victory, ethnic identity has become a commonly exploited resource. Depending on their position in the District Council or State Legislative Assembly, whether they are ruling or in opposition, their approaches vary when they are concerned about an ethnic issue. This dynamic was seen playing out in the ways in which different political parties reacted to the Mizo-Chakma ethnic tussle, discussed in the previous chapter. Likewise, the MNF party, which headed the interim government until 1989, did not shy away from championing the abrogation of the Chakma District even after the promise in the peace agreement to protect the rights and privileges of the minorities in Mizoram as per the Constitution of India. Between the interim MNF ministry and the next two Legislative Assembly under the Congress party, twenty-one Private Members' resolutions, mostly belonging to the MNF, were introduced in the House calling for the abolition of the Chakma District Council. In these, seven were rejected, fourteen admitted, and of which two were discussed and defeated, mostly due to opposition from the Congress party (Bhaumik and Bhattacharya 2005, 228-229). It is no surprise that the Chakmas have accused the MNF and their ministry of failure to honour their words. In this context, the role of the political parties indeed manifests the instrumental rationality, and the material nature of the Mizo-Chakma conflict. But this was just one part of the larger story.

Thus, when the Congress party, known for their sympathy, formed a state government in 1989, Chakmas saw it as an opportunity to voice their grievances. So, on 17 September 1990, the president of the Chakma Jatiya Parishad B.B. Chakma submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, raising the demand for UT for all the Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram. The memorandum maintained that the Chakmas remained the most backward and downtrodden tribal community with poor living conditions, deprived of their rights and benefits granted by the Indian Constitution, in terms of education, medical facilities, roads or any other economic and infrastructure development. Several factors have been attributed to impoverished conditions and ill treatment. First, due to their cultural, linguistic and religious differences from the Mizos, it argued, Chakmas have been disregarded and scorned

as backward people, subjected to discrimination, unfair treatment and humiliation. The memorandum also stated that, precisely due to these ethnic differences, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council, inclusive of the Chakma area, was formed in 1953 under the Assam administration. When Mizoram became Union Territory, it was further argued Chakmas lost the safeguards granted under the Assam administration and fell victim to the Mizos who wielded political power. This went on, it was claimed, even after the formation of Mizoram state.[1]

Just because two groups in a society belong to different ethnicities, it does not follow that they are bound to get into such conflict. However, as the Chakma memorandum suggested, ethnicity itself can generate conflict by associating groups with different cultures. From this viewpoint, the conflicts which are ethnic in nature are very real, and they stem directly from the way people's ethnicity defines their identity, which is inherently linked to culture and cultural expressions that distinguish one group from others (Yinger 1997; Ross 2007; Kaufman 2011). In a culturally plural society, there can be different groups with mutually incompatible institutional systems, which include social structures, values and belief patterns that form the core of culture. Each group tends to form a closed socio-cultural unit towards internal integration and consistency, and that condition creates a structural imperative for political order in which one of these sections is subordinated to the other. Such a society is defined by discord and loaded with conflict prospects. Moreover, the absence of consensus often requires regulation by force. Consequently, plural society tends to produce ethnic hierarchy or ranked systems. Thus, ethnic conflict comes from group comparison, where people evaluate their group worth, legitimacy and self-esteem relative to other groups. Such a notion of comparison is always at the expense of other groups. And what is at stake in ethnic conflict is not just about absolute benefit, it is rather cultural and symbolic (Horowitz 1985). This line of argument alluded to the idea that the ethnic tension and conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas may have been spurred by primordial hostilities and cultural differences. The memorandum argued that Mizo's discriminatory attitude and resentment was deepened by the MNF's anti-Chakma rhetoric, which probably aimed

[1] A Memorandum to Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, New Delhi Submitted by Shri B.B. Chakma President, Chakma Jatiyo Parishad, Ex-MLA and CEM, Chakma District Council, Kamlanagar, Mizoram dated the 17th September 1990.

to settle an old score with the Chakmas due to their activities and help rendered to the Indian army operation during the MNF movement. All these, it was argued, culminated in a sinister plan intended to drive the Chakmas out of Mizoram. It also reminded of the fact that much of Chakma's population of around 55,000 living outside the District Council area was denied their constitutional safeguards.

Considering the state of affairs, the Chakmas demanded the integration of all the inhabited areas in Mizoram to form one administrative unit, which would later be upgraded into Union Territory. This was considered a solution to backwardness and underdevelopment, since it was to be under the direct control and guidance of the central government. Interestingly, the incumbent Congress government in Mizoram had no objection to the demand and requested detailed information on territory for which the status of UT was sought, along with the latest population figure and community wise break-up of people.[2] Chakma's demand for UT, which was to be taken out from within Mizoram, drew strong reaction and counter contention from the Mizo community, especially those from the Lunglei district. The common Mizo standpoint, which does not accept Chakmas as 'sons of the soil', both socially and politically but considered 'foreigners', has been reaffirmed. With this counter contention, the Mizos urged the Prime Minister not to entertain the Chakmas' political aspirations, and not to consent to the UT demand to avoid unhealthy communal feeling and disturbance in time to come (Lianchhinga 1992, 115-120).

Meanwhile, Mizo students outside the state also expressed their concern by stating that the influx of 'foreign nationals' and non-Mizos has gone beyond proportion. This, they believed, was partly due to condonation by the concerned authorities, who harboured 'foreigners' for personal gain and benefit, and the general callousness and short-sighted attitude of the local inhabitants. While non-Mizo residents under the Inner Line Regulation were thought to contribute to the development of the Mizos, the other non-Mizos from Bangladesh, Burma and other neighbours were seen as 'illegal' immigrants who exploited revenue and monopolized businesses, detrimental to the local economy. In a press release, the Mizo Students' Union (MSU), Shillong publicly stated that such presence of foreign

[2] Government of Mizoram, Political and Cabinet Department, No: J-15011/6/91- POL, dated Aizawl the 8th July 1991, see Appendix I.

nationals was a threat to the foundation and existence of the Mizos as distinct people.[3] On account of such social disorder, they feared that the Mizo population could be submerged within no time. Furthermore, they exhorted all the Mizo leaders, politicians, social workers, church workers, government employees, voluntary organizations, students, and every Mizo citizen to stand united to safeguard the distinctive composition of Mizo society.[4] On the one hand, such a statement was clearly a reaction to the Chakma's endeavour to have UT of their own inside the territory of Mizoram, incidentally seen as an encroachment to the Mizo homeland. However, it also indicated that there was growing intolerance of those who were regarded as non-locals in Mizoram, the degree of which was not seen earlier. At the same time, there was an acknowledgment that the instrumentalist strategy of Mizo leaders and politicians, who utilized ethnic identity for their own gains, was responsible for such intractable problems. In a sense, it was a clarion call to ethnic Mizos for self-introspection that would pave the way for a united front. This was a time when more and more student bodies in the Northeast had involved in the social issues of the day, and the most common problem was the influx of foreign nationals. The North East Student's Co-ordination Committee (NESCC), a joint body that comprised student organizations from Northeast states, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister in 1992 about the foreigner issues in the region. If left unchecked, they argued, the problem could lead to a serious demographic imbalance. Following the government inaction, a northeast-wide total bandh was organized on 11 August 1993. The Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), literally meaning Mizo Students' Association, a constituent unit of NESCC, also observed a total bandh in Mizoram.[5] In what follows, it is shown how such students' bodies and non-governmental organizations played a larger role in the conflict.

[3] Press Release, The Mizo Students' Union: Shillong, Regd. No. SR/MSWS-88/80 Ref. No. MSUS/EX-C/92-93/01 dated Shillong the 23rd August 1993.
[4] Public Statement, Office of the Mizo Students' Union, Shillong Regd. No. SR/MSWS-88/80 Ref. No. MSUS/EX-C/92-93/02 dated Shillong the 23rd August 1993.
[5] North East Total Bandh, Issued by Students' Joint Meeting Aizawl Mizoram, 1993.

Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls: MZP, State and Sentiments against 'Outsiders'

During the tenure of T.N. Seshan as the Chief Election Commissioner of India, major election reform took place nation-wide. One such reform was a total overhaul of the list of voters and electoral rolls in India, which had direct implications for citizenship. It was notified that only a person born in India and whose parents who were in India before 26th January 1950 and their direct descendants were to be included in the electoral roll, effectively the citizens of India.[6] This also served as a guideline for the determination of foreigners and citizens thereof.

In Mizoram, the Chief Election Commissioner's call for electoral reform was seen as an opportunity to detect and remove Chakmas from the voter list and eventually push back. From state agencies and political parties to non-governmental and student organizations, the Election Commission's detection and deletion drive was welcomed with open arms. One significant factor that provoked such a strong 'anti-foreigner' stance was the alleged statement of Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan in 1993 regarding the abolition of the Inner Line Permit regime, considered a protective layer for their own land. This statement caused the Mizos' apprehension about the presence and influx of 'outsiders', which was mostly directed at the Chakmas. Under such circumstances, the Chakmas became a major target of electoral roll revision and the 'anti-foreigner' movement (Singh 2010, 115). Accordingly, the Joint Electoral Officer of Mizoram appointed officials for the three Districts, and beseeched political parties, leaders, and the people of Mizoram to help in identifying 'foreigners'.[7]

Following the instructions of the Election Commission of India, the Joint Chief Electoral Officer notified that the commencement date of the Indian Constitution, 26th January 1950, would be used for the determination of citizens, and that a person who migrated to India after this date could apply for citizenship to the

[6] Election Commission of India, No.23/91/VOL III/6215, dated 9th September 1994.
[7] Hriattirna, Directorate of Election Government of Mizoram, No. H.11011/5/92-CEO, dated Aizawl the 4th August, 1994.

appropriate authorities.[8] The ruling Congress party in the state, in a bid to show its collaboration in the effort of electoral revision, called for a discussion with the representatives of the political parties, Electoral Registration Officers (ERO), Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AERO) and other government officials in September 1994. They unanimously agreed that the state needs an error-free electoral roll. The meeting also decided that the 1952 electoral roll be used as a base year, for it was the first voter list since independence. Law Secretary P. Chakravarty further explained the criteria that people born in India between 26 January 1950 and 1 July 1987, irrespective of their parents, had to be included in the Electoral Rolls, on their production of sufficient proof of their birth in India. And, people born after 1 July 1987, if either of their parents was a citizen, were also to be included (Hluna 2020, 123-127).

The Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), which had just undergone a serious revamp of its orientation and direction after a decade of stifled existence, also took the proposed electoral reform as a chance to launch a new movement. This was in connection with what the MZP claimed to have been doing since the 1980s, which was protecting the interests of Mizos against any alleged 'outsider'. The MZP has in the past protested the inclusion or selection of non-Mizo students under Mizoram state quotas for medical and technical courses, and demanded a dissolution of the Chakma District Council. In 1982, the state government banned the MZP, and when the ban was withdrawn in 1985, various smaller students' organizations that sprung up to fill the vacuum made it impossible to revive. And in 1993, these smaller associations agreed to come together, and MZP as a new organization was reborn. They resolved to fight for the rights of the indigenous Mizo since.[9] Claiming the moral mandate of the Mizos and a legal backup from the Election Commission of India, MZP issued a Quit Mizoram notice on 28 January 1995, directing the Chakmas, except for those who lived in Mizoram before 26 January 1950 and their direct descendants, to leave the state. In a way, this could also be seen as MZP declaring their intentions to participate in the electoral reform, preferably as a supplementary aid for the state government, partly because they could not fully rely on the latter. Since the MZP activities and

[8] Letter to the Electoral Registration Officers, Directorate of Election Government of Mizoram, No. H. 11011/5/94-CEO, dated Aizawl the 7th September 1994, see Appendix J.
[9] A personal conversation with former MZP leader and Officer Bearer, dated Aizawl the 15th December 2021.

notice were in accordance with the official decree, even the state government was not able to dismiss them.

However, the Congress government created a separate Task Force in each district to carry out an electoral revision drive. In a meeting of the government Task Force, MZP and representatives of political parties on 31 May 1995, it was made clear that the ruling Congress government did not let the students' organization do as they pleased, and that the Task Force was created to counteract their activities. All the other party leaders, however, affirmed their approval and support for the MZP and their way of doing things. In fact, the opposition alleged Congress had no intention of clearing 'foreigners' from the electoral roll, as they constituted a huge vote bank, and that the government's half-hearted effort was just a facade, trying to win the confidence of the people and the Election Commission (Ibid.,128-130). No political party, including the ruling Congress and opposition MNF party, wanted to share the political mileage that accrued from it. Even though it might have led to a loss of voters from the Chakmas, the Congress government decided to launch a detection drive, and not to fully suppress the MZP movement. While the government Task Force was composed of officials including AEROs, supervisors and enumerators, with real authority to add and subtract names in and from the voter list, the MZP workforce was to advise and monitor these processes. Similarly, the opposition parties had also engaged in scrutinizing the government's efforts so that the public noticed their participation. For the opposition parties, adopting a hard-line 'anti-foreigner' stance was also another way to prevent the ruling party from tapping all political capital by themselves.

MZP Movement and Role of the State Government: 'Anti-Foreigner' or Anti-Chakma

According to the government plan, certain constituencies, mostly Chakma areas, were selected as containing a large concentration of illegal voters. Then the election officials and enumerators would conduct a hearing where a person had to prove legality of his/her citizenship by producing supporting documents, and such person if approved would be listed in the draft electoral roll. Then, the time for the claim and objection was to be opened again, in which a declared 'foreigner' and those who

could not come to the hearing previously were given time to claim citizenship by providing additional evidence. People who had already been listed in the roll, but later objected by others as doubtful, were also allowed to apply for revisions during the claim and objection. Ultimately, the decision to accept or reject such reapplications is with officials.

Even though the Congress government always maintained a distance from their activities, MZP went ahead with their own rendition of detection and deletion drive, directing mostly at the Chakma inhabited areas. In May 1995, MZP leaders and student volunteers started the 'Chakma census' as part of a pilot investigation. On 25 May, a group of MZP began collecting information about Chakma villages, number of households and population within the Aizawl District areas. They visited six Chakmas inhabited villages, namely Hnahva, Silsury, Marpara South, Marpara North, Tuipuibari II and Andermanik. Another group of MZP workforce left Aizawl on 6 May to undertake the same activity covering Chakma areas in Chhimtuipui and Lunglei District.[10] After conducting intensive investigation and census on Chakma population, and juxtaposing those information and particulars with the 1952 and 1956 electoral rolls of Mizoram and 1951 Census, MZP came up with a comprehensive assessment of 'foreigners' and citizens list among the Chakma community. The criteria for determining Chakmas of Indian origin were based on whether they were Indian citizens on or before 26 January 1950; whether they were direct descendants of those who were enrolled as voters in the Mizoram electoral rolls of 1952 and 1956; and whether they obtained Indian citizenship from competent authority.

In the third Federal Council sitting held on 13 June, MZP resolved that the joint effort with the state government on the ongoing movement would be governed by its own terms. It was agreed that a 'foreigner' detection drive involving spot verification in every Chakma village was to begin on 16 June, so that no wrong person was put in the voter list. This was to be conducted in such a way that the safety of legitimate Chakma citizens was ensured.[11] Yet again, MZP affirmed their resolution to remove all the 'foreigner' Chakma from the electoral roll, and declared that their

[10] Press Release, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, General Headquarters, No. E-'93/MZP-GHQ/95/10, dated Aizawl the 5th June 1995.
[11] Thurel, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, General Headquarters, Federal Council Sitting (1994-95), dated Aizawl the 13th June 1995.

involvement and participation in the government's effort towards achieving those goals was imperative. It went to such an extent that they would take matters into their own hands in the unlikely event of failure of the state government.[12]

With such conviction, MZP leaders and workers toured Chakma villages and conducted house to house investigations about the family, history of arrival, time of migration and such. However, as it was not practical to visit each house, they had to rely on the information provided by the residents, mostly Mizos, concerning the identity of the 'illegal' residents. One of the Mizo informants during the fieldwork even talked of the possibility that Chakmas also pointed out 'illegal' ones among themselves.[13] Those who had been designated as a 'foreigner' by the MZP were required to prove their status before the government officials. In this way, MZP compiled their own list of Chakma citizens and 'foreigners', which may not be shared by the government. In MZP's book, out of 60,893 population residing in 117 villages in Mizoram, a whopping 58,789 Chakmas were 'foreigners', while only 2104 were noted as Indian citizens.[14] The Chakmas deeply resented MZP activities and dismissed them as illegal moves. In many places, they reported to the police, who arrested several MZP leaders and members. In some villages, such as Chawngte, even the local Mizo folks were said to have alerted the police when the MZP arrived.[15] For instance, on 27 July, MZP leaders who travelled to Chawngte were driven off by the 36th Battalion Central Reserve Police Force. In the later stages of the MZP movement, there were several instances where their members and activists were manhandled, incarcerated, and even hospitalized. Such incidents were also reported in places like Khojoisuri, Tlabung, and Lungsen (Hluna 2020, 131). Such police repression also came from the order of the state government, which always remained cautious of the MZP activities, especially when it gave an impression of the Mizos having wholesale hatred for the entire Chakma community in Mizoram. Indeed, ethnic tension was high at this point. This was evident from the report of alleged involvement of Shanti Bahini. It showed that the Shanti Bahini recruited 25

[12] Mizo Zirlai Pawl Kawngzawh Resolutions, dated Aizawl the 4th July 1995.
[13] A personal conversation with a retired Range Officer under Environment and Forest Department of Mizoram government and a resident of Chawngte L, dated Chawngte L the 19th January 2021.
[14] Mizo Zirlai Pawl, A Memorandum Submitted to His Excellency, the President of India by Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) on Foreigner's Issue in the State of Mizoram, dated Aizawl 1995, see Appendix K.
[15] A personal conversation with ex MNF army, and a resident of Chawngte 'P', dated Chawngte 'P' the 18th January 2021.

volunteers from each Chakma Village Council, and started the training to prepare a defence force to counter the MZP. Volunteers from the west of Tlabung were trained at the Shanti Bahini camp in Balukiasury, and those volunteers from the east of Tlabung received their training in nearby Tiperaghat village. The Arakan Army, known for being an ally of Shanti Bahini, also provided three instructors to give training. It was also reported that Village Council presidents of Nunsury, Silsury and Hruiduk, all Chakma villages, were instrumental in recruitment and training.[16]

Under these circumstances, there was a belief that a strong anti-Chakma sentiment in Mizoram was being instigated by the state government-approved MZP movement. The Congress-led state government had to clarify its position and the general situation in Mizoram. It admitted that the 'unnatural' growth of Chakma population in Mizoram and the failure of the authorities concerned to prevent the same had agitated the minds of the people, and that political parties, students' and civil organizations made Chakma infiltration an issue and even received moral support of the people by and large. In this, the state government also shared the same concern. The government also clarified that the Task Force, created for detecting and pushing back 'foreigners', targeted not only the Bangladeshis, but also illegal voters from Myanmar. This was to impress the government of India that the Mizos were not against the Indian Chakmas, but were concerned about the continuing infiltration of Bangladeshi Chakmas into the state. Although the state Task Force accepted help from political parties and non-governmental organizations, it did not allow anybody to take law into their own hand. The government also contested the Union Home Ministry's point that the cut-off date for determining the status of Bangladeshi foreigners for inclusion in the electoral rolls should be 25 March 1971, as per the Indira-Mujib Agreement, and not 26 January 1950.[17] Such statements alluded to the fact that, on the one hand, the government saw the 'Chakma issue' as real and pressing, and on the other hand, it meant to accept the aid of MZP only in its advisory capacity.

[16] Letter to R. Vanlalvena, Chairman Working Committee from, H. Daniela, Publicity Secretary MZP Headquarters, Aizawl dated the 31st August 1995.
[17] The Chakma Issue in Mizoram, Chief Secretary Government of Mizoram, dated 28th July, 1995, see Appendix L.

When the state government launched its detection/electoral revision drive, MZP's recommendation and assessment were side-lined in many places by the enumerators and officials. As mentioned earlier, MZP had prepared a list of 'foreigners' and citizens in every Chakma village, and advised the government enumerators and officials to add and remove names in the revised electoral rolls on that basis. Since the MZP could not shove down their lists on officials' throats, they came to the spot, screening and observing whatever the state agents were doing. Just as the government was not willing to give them leeway in the entire episode, MZP could not also fully trust the former. The hearings in Chhimtuipui and Lunglei District, which also called for claims and objection times, took place at Chawngte, the headquarters of Chakma Autonomous District Council, and Tlabung, a relatively bigger town.

Thanks to the informants from Chakma and Mizo residents of Chawngte, who could recall those periods, at least a glimpse of what went down in those times could be revealed. In the hearing, the enumerators called the doubtful voters in the Sub-Divisional Office to prove legality of their citizenship. If such objected persons produced supporting evidence to the satisfaction of the enumerator, they would be put in the draft electoral roll. Those who never enrolled in the electoral roll also had the chance to claim their citizenship through the same process. But the ultimate decision rested with state officials. In this exercise, the MZP was instrumental in bringing the names of objected persons. At Chawngte, it was mentioned that MZP brought residents from Saizawh West village, a kilometre from Chawngte, to be objectors at the hearing. This was confirmed from a conversation with one of Saizawh residents during the fieldwork, who held that it was the duty of the 'sons of the soil' to provide the information of 'illegal' immigrants, as the Chakmas themselves would never do it.[18] According to one Chakma informant who was occupying an official position in the District Council at that time, MZP objectors from Saizawh were indiscriminately declaring almost all the entire residents of Chawngte as doubtful without knowing the person. The same informant also argued that, according to the information he received from Tlabung town, the same discrepancies occurred.[19] In

[18] A personal conversation with former Village Council President of Saizawh West, dated Saizawh West the 20th January 2021.
[19] A personal conversation with former Chief Executive Member, Chakma Autonomous District Council, dated Chawngte C the 17th January 2021.

fact, the local Mizo informants from Chawngte also lamented that MZP simply accepted the local reports and accused a person that he came from Bangladesh illegally, without having any idea of which village he/she came from or who was his/her family etc. However, it was acknowledged that, due to the fact that there were countless 'foreigners', MZP might have listed real ones while also making inaccurate decisions in some places.[20]

Within the Aizawl District area, four Chakma-dominated villages, namely Silsury, Hruiduk, Marpara I and Marpara II, were selected for electoral revision starting in August 1995. MZP delivered a copy of their citizens' list to enumerators and supervisors in charge of these places, and insisted only those names found in their list be inserted in the electoral roll. But they decided to monitor the process on the spot, which the officials allowed for only a day. The MZP representatives, however, reported several cases of negligence, where the enumerators accepted questionable documents being provided by Chakmas and enrolled those people. The MZP leaders even expressed their suspicion that government officials were instructed from the top to ensure that a certain number of Chakmas were enrolled. In protest, MZP representatives withdrew from the operation and declared the draft roll unacceptable.[21] In the following month, another series of claim and objection hearings was undertaken in the same villages under the order of the Election Commission. It was meant to revise the draft roll prepared earlier, another chance for people who were earlier rejected to lay their claim afresh. Here also, MZP undertook the same scrutiny, though they did not have any real power. Furthermore, just like the previous episode, MZP complained about the carelessness of enumerators and AEROs in their exercise. According to the MZP report, many people categorized as 'foreigners' were included in the roll. Representatives of opposition parties who monitored the process also witnessed similar laxity. As a result, there appeared to be a stark difference between the government and MZP regarding the numbers. For instance, in a Chakma village called Silsury with 376 households, while the government agency enrolled 310 persons in the electoral roll as a legitimate citizen, MZP found only 33 people as citizens according to their list. This was the case in

[20] A personal conversation with current Village Council Secretary, Chawngte P, dated the 18th January 2021.
[21] Report, Chairman Working Committee, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, Aizawl 5th August, 1995.

other villages. Disregarding the government decision, MZP sent their list of 'foreigners' to the government on 23 August 1995, and demanded their deportation from Mizoram.[22] However, the state had not shared the same enthusiasm of MZP as could be observed from the Mizoram Assembly session from 27 September to 5 October 1995, where the resolution seeking an eviction of foreign Chakmas was defeated by Congress MLAs (Ibid.,130).

In order to put more pressure on the government, the MZP observed 24 hours total bandh in the state on 17 October.[23] As a consequence, the state Home Minister issued an order asking all 'foreigners' to leave Mizoram voluntarily by December 1995, indicating that the Congress government was not ready to take extreme steps. And it did pacify MZP for some time.[24] However, the deadline went by without much effect. In the following year, there was still no concrete initiative from the government, and in fact, 1233 more Chakma voters were put back in the Chawngte circle electoral roll. This provoked strong criticism from MZP and the opposition parties.[25] In a bid to push the government to act, and to protest the inclusion of more Chakmas in the roll, MZP organized a Long March from Aizawl to Chawngte, approximately 250 Kilometre distance, starting from 22 April 1996. It was termed *Mizoram leh Hnam Chhanchhuahna Kawngzawh*, meaning a march to save Mizoram.[26] The MZP also declared the new electoral roll unacceptable and claimed that, under the aegis of the government officials, more than 20,000 names of 'foreigners' had been included in the new electoral roll. In connection with that, they also announced their plan to boycott the Lok Sabha election, held the same year in the state.[27]

The state government stated that, during the entire episode of roll revision, the names of as many as 15,000 'illegal' immigrants, mostly Chakmas, had been deleted from the electoral roll. Reports of violation of Chakmas' human rights, and

[22] Report, Vice President, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, Aizawl 1995.
[23] Circular, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, No.202/95-96/1, dated Aizawl the 11th October 1995.
[24] Press Release, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, No. E-93/MZP-GHQ/95-96/13, dated Aizawl the 1st November 1995.
[25] Letter to the Chief Electoral Officer, The Mizo National Front, Aizawl, No.5/96/31, dated the 15th April 1996, see Appendix M.
[26] Long March Programmes, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, No. D-93/MZP-GHQ/95-96/18, dated Aizawl the 15th April 1996.
[27] Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP)-in M.P. Election Boycott a tum chhan leh Chakma Foreigners chungchang leh Kum 1996-a siam Electoral Roll diklohna, Publicity Secretary, dated Aizawl the 17th April 1996.

accusation of Mizoram government for arbitrary removal of *bona fide* Chakma from the roll, quickly surfaced in public. This was followed by allegations and counter-allegations by Mizo authority and the Chakmas (Singh 2010, 116). On 30 November 1995, the Chakma Jatiya Parishad sent a memorandum to the National Human Rights Commission, condemning the government for high-handedness and unfair discrimination against the Chakma citizens. The following day, the Commission ordered the state government to halt its conduct. After the state government responded that they were only deleting 'illegal' ones, the Commission allowed the detection drive to resume on the condition that it was conducted with fairness and that Chakmas were given access to approach authorities for relief (Hussain 1997). The lone Chakma minister in the Congress government, Nirupam Chakma, also accused his own government of removing genuine Indian citizens from the electoral roll. While he appreciated the move to identify 'foreigners', he wanted the government to ensure that no legal citizens were harassed or humiliated (Bhattacharjee 1996; (Hussain 1997).

After all these commotions, according to local informants at Chawngte, both Mizos and Chakmas alike, most of the people were inserted again eventually. At the same time, many people had not enrolled again and deprived of government facilities and public distribution systems.[28] Many people settled down in the villages near the Indo-Bangladesh border, like Borapansury, Chhotapansury, Silsury, Boronasury. When elections come near and roll revision starts, there would be a time or opportunity for them to enroll again.[29] The local Mizo residents also, while welcoming the MZP movement, expressed their suspicion that they had a different agenda or reason behind the movement. It might have been the case that they did it to demand or get something from the government. One local Mizo resident opined:

> The movement and its purpose were good, better if they had done things maturely and properly. But if it was done just to get back at the government, it had no meaning. Like we feared, they went back and the movement died quickly. It did not yield a positive result.[30]

[28] A personal conversation with former Chief Executive Member, Chakma Autonomous District Council, dated Chawngte C the 17th January 2021.
[29] A personal conversation with ex MNF army, and a resident of Chawngte 'P', dated the 18th January 2021.
[30] A personal conversation with current Village Council Secretary, Chawngte P, dated the 18th January 2021.

In contrast, some felt that MZP did this to humiliate and mortify the Chakmas, because they could not stand the fact that they were growing at a high pace in Mizoram.[31] Most people believed it was the initiative of the state government, but later steered and turned into an ethnic issue by the MZP who took over it as a movement. For Chakmas, the state government and MZP were one entity. The government's involvement and activities also indicated that it had its own self-interest in the enterprise. Oscillating between enabling and inhibiting the MZP moves, the government was at pains to maintain neutrality and a safe distance from the former. At the same time, it also acted in the face of the mounting pressure from influential organizations like MZP and opposition parties, as well as the sentiments of the people. From Chakma's perspective, there was a political motive in the movement, and the anti-Chakma sentiments it instigated along the way, perhaps for political gain, vote bank and popularity. They argued that there were not many episodes of communal tension and conflict before 1994. But thanks to the state-sanctioned electoral revision drive, which was taken over by the MZP as an 'anti-foreigners' and anti-Chakma movement, and the Long March, aimed at dropping significant numbers of Chakmas from electoral rolls, communal politics had started in a big way, and issues and tensions became more frequent and intense.[32] But, all things considered, Chakmas believed that what seemed like ethnic and communal conflict was in reality something that politically motivated people incited for their own gain, alluding to the idea that it was just a political manifestation of the instrumentalist strategy of the Mizos.

Chakma Memorandum to the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petition: Responses and Consequences

On 16 January 1995, two Chakma social workers, Snehadini Talukdar and Subimal Chakma, submitted a joint petition to the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petition. The letter, which depicted the sorry state of affairs of the Chakmas in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh with their recommendations for the government, was addressed

[31] A personal conversation with retired Range Officer under Environment and Forest Department of Mizoram government and a resident of Chawngte L, dated the 19th January 2021.
[32] A personal conversation with a history teacher in Govt. Kamlanagar College and a resident of Chawngte C, dated Chawngte C the 16th January 2021.

to the Council of States, New Delhi, and presented to Rajya Sabha on 23 August the same year. Citing historical evidence recorded in the Provincial Gazetteer of India, Volume V at page 413, they claimed that the present areas inhabited by 80,000 Chakmas in a contiguous belt along the Indo-Bangladesh border, spanning the three districts of Mizoram, had always been their ancestral homeland before they were transferred to Lushai Hills in 1897. They further complained that the Mizos continuously depicted Chakmas as 'outsiders' or 'foreigners' disregarding their status as original inhabitants, and that all political and non-political organizations, in connivance with the state government, had attempted to remove Chakmas from the electoral roll and deport them from Mizoram. The letter claimed that more than 50 percent of Chakma voters were struck off in Tlabung, Buarpui and Chawngte constituencies. Moreover, all the Chakma inhabited areas were put outside state development projects, resulting in lack of infrastructure like high schools, hospitals and motorable roads. For the consideration of the central government, they demanded that the Chakma areas in the western belt of Mizoram be put in a single administrative unit under the central government agency, and that all eligible Chakmas voters be enrolled in the roll. They also sought to ensure that no Chakmas should be treated as doubtful citizens. For the safety of the lives and properties of the Chakmas, the letter also recommended the deployment of impartial Central Forces. It was also suggested that a special development scheme under the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) for the Chakma inhabited areas of Mizoram be undertaken.[33]

Another memorandum containing roughly similar claims and petitions was submitted to the Prime Minister of India in January 1995. This time, it was from 61 Chakma leaders, including Village Council Presidents, prominent members of the Young Chakma Association (YCA) and religious leaders residing outside the geographical boundaries of Chakma District Council. It was more or less a reaction to the proposed detection and deletion exercise initiated by the Mizoram government. The western belt of Mizoram, from Tripura border to Sajek river, then Karnaphuli river to Tuichawng river, and from Uiphum range till the Arakan, was claimed to be Chakma land from ages ago. For instance, Tlabung or Demagiri, which was put inside the Lushai Hills after a boundary with Chittagong Hill Tracts was demarcated in

[33] The Humble Joint Petition of Smt. Snehadini Talukdar (Chakma) and Shri Subimal Chakma, Voluntary Social Worker, presented to Rajya Sabha on 23rd August, 1995, see Appendix N.

1897, used to be Chakma cultural centre. The major appeal was that 50,000 Chakmas in Mizoram, who lived outside the protection of Chakma District Council, be united with the rest of the Chakma population under one administrative umbrella, which was to be upgraded to Union Territory status. They also petitioned the central government to reinsert all the deleted Chakma names in the roll, and to disallow the involvement of non-governmental organizations and political parties in the roll revision (Hluna 2020, 80-82).

On July 12 of the same year, Chakma Autonomous District Council Chairman Roshik Mohan Chakma and the Chakma District Congress Committee President Nutun Kumar Chakma, on behalf of the Chakma community, sent another memorandum to the Union Home Minister. The main points and requests could be summarized as follows. It was claimed that Chakma Council areas had never been under the rule of traditional Mizo chiefs. But when the Chakma District Council was constituted, many Chakma inhabited areas in Tlabung, Buarpui, Phuldungsei and Kawrthah Assembly Constituencies had been excluded from its administration. This resulted in many Chakmas being left outside the Chakma District Council. Citing the MZP Executive Committee Resolution in 1995 on Quit Mizoram notice being served to the Chakmas, they argued that these kinds of politically motivated moves had rendered the Chakma community petrified. They stated that in almost all the elections within the Chakma District Council, and other Chakma inhabited areas since 1972, the Chakmas voted for Congress to power. In this connection, they opined that removing the Chakma voters from the electoral roll was just a political game to disintegrate the Congress vote bank (Ibid.,78-79).

Reactions from the Union Home Ministry and Mizoram Government

Since the beginning of the roll revision drive and the onset of the MZP movement, several Chakma organizations seek intervention from various offices and bodies, including the Prime Minister's Office, Union Home Ministry, National Human Rights Commission, Election Commission of India, Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions, and Guwahati High Court. In these, they criticized the Mizoram government, churches, political parties, and non-governmental and students' organizations, and accused them of being co-conspirators in attempts to get rid of the Chakmas from their homeland. The central government, its agencies and independent

bodies took the matter seriously. The Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions held 17 meetings in connection with the Chakma issues in Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. They issued an order to the Union Home Ministry and state governments to explain the situation and their own side of the story.

The Rajya Sabha Committee received a comment from the Home Ministry regarding the Chakma petition on 18 September 1996, which was given by the Mizoram government. Denying the Chakma claims, it stated that Chittagong Hill Tracts were the original home of the Chakmas. About 198 Chakmas, who were mentioned in the 1901 Census in Mizoram, were given permission to settle by the British authorities. With that authorization system, by India's independence, there were 5000 Chakmas with permits in Mizoram. Since there was no mechanism to prevent influx, it further argued that the decadal growth rate of Chakma population between 1941 and 1951 Census was staggering 508.6 percent. Against the accusations levelled by Chakma that the state government had connived with the MZP in removing Chakma voters from the electoral roll, the government maintained that there was no indiscriminate attempt to remove Chakma, but revision and preparation of new electoral rolls in accordance with the instructions issued by the Election Commission of India. The allegations that Chakmas had been deprived of government sanctioned projects and infrastructure development were also countered by the Mizoram government by highlighting the existing primary infrastructure. Besides, it argued that all the BADP funds from the central government were utilized in the Mizoram-Bangladesh border, the Chakma dominated areas (Ibid.,69-70).

The Mizoram government also responded to queries from the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petition on 14 February 1997. Firstly, it argued that when Demagiri (Tlabung) with a population of 1500, claimed by the Chakmas as part of their ancestral homeland, was put under the Lushai Hills, all the 1500 residents were not Chakmas alone, but a mixed population of Mizos and Chakmas. Secondly, according to the Circle Interpreter report in 1946, there were 93 Chakma families in the Circle XII and 857 in Circle XVIII, totalling 950 Chakma families. This could be roughly 5000 people, under the rule of the Mizo chiefs. Only those who secured permission could settle by paying tax to their respective chiefs. Chakmas were only concentrated inside these two circles, which became Buarpui and Tlabung MLA constituency after

Mizoram became a Union Territory. After independence, due to an absence of such a colonial era permission system, Chakmas freely entered Mizoram and settled at any vacant land, especially after the creation of Chakma District Council in 1972. By that time, as many as 110 new Chakma villages sprang up, which had not existed ten years before. In this light, the state government found Chakma's demand for a single administrative unit dividing Mizoram territory unreasonable and unacceptable. Thirdly, it also dismissed the allegation that the Chakma areas had been excluded in development works, and declared that five crores of Rupees had been earmarked every year for the Chakma District Council. In conclusion, the state government reiterated its position and stressed that no slice of Mizoram territory was ever part of Chakma's ancestral land, and not a single inch more would be taken apart for the Chakmas again.[34] After the Mizoram government gave its statements to the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions, the Chief Secretary of Mizoram was also called before the latter on 22 March 1997. The Chief Secretary expressed mostly what the state government had already stated in connection with the accusations and prayers of the Chakmas, which need not be repeated here.[35]

Report 105th of August 14, 1997: Rajya Sabha Committee Recommendation and Mizo Memorandum

After thoroughly examining the input taken from several Chakma memoranda and letters, the responses and comments from the Union Home Ministry, National Human Rights Commission, Election Commission of India, and Mizoram government, the Rajya Sabha Committee finally published its observation and recommendations, which was termed Report 105th of August 14, 1997. The Committee contended that the Chakma demand of joining CADC territory and other Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram would be considered only after obtaining the factual ground situation and the real numbers and percentage of Chakma population in those areas. It recognized that the Chakma District Council lagged behind in every yardstick of development, especially in literacy and education, compared to the other existing District Councils in Mizoram and the rest of the state in general. In this connection, the Committee found that the six crores of Rupees set aside annually for the Chakma District Council

[34] Comments received from the State Government of Mizoram, Letter No. C 13016/1/96-HNF dated the 14th February 1997.
[35] Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions in Mizoram with Chief Secretary, Memo No-MZ/CS/4.10/M-1/Petitions/21.3.1997, dated New Delhi the 21st March 1997.

out of six hundred crores state budget meagre, and suggested that as Chakma comprised ten percent of the population, the said fund should be increased to ten percent of the state budget. The Committee lauded the state government's readiness to accept the Chakmas, who came before 25 March 1971, as a citizen, according to the Indira-Mujib Accord of 1972. These groups of Chakmas and those born in the state were to be given citizenship, and Scheduled Tribe status. The Committee further instructed the government of India to collaborate with Bangladesh, and work out a policy to deport anyone not covered by the Indira-Mujib Accord, who came to Mizoram after the said date (Rajya Sabha Committee on Petition 1997).

The recommendations of the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions received widespread protests in Mizoram. The situation was intense, with ethnic identity and preservation becoming the driving force of politics. The central government led by I.K. Gujral decided to withdraw the recommendations (Singh 2010, 118). After the presentation of the Rajya Sabha Committee report, the political parties, including Congress, MNF, Mizo People's Conference (MPC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Janata Dal, and major non-governmental organizations, such as YMA, MZP, Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (Mizo Women Federation), Mizoram Upa Pawl (Mizoram Elders' Association), formed a Joint Action Committee under the Chairmanship of Central YMA, to prepare an appropriate response. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 26 September 1997, the Joint Action Committee put forward certain points and allegations that expressed the Mizo perspective. First, the Joint Action Committee found the Rajya Sabha Committee partial in their recommendation, which was prepared without visiting the state for ground study and consultation with the people there. They could not accept the proposition of taking away part of Mizoram and creating Chakma land out of it. In this connection, they demanded dissolution of the Chakma Autonomous District Council, as it was established without the knowledge of the Mizos. Secondly, they accused the Rajya Sabha Committee of failing to discriminate between *bona fide* Chakmas and 'illegal foreigners' by accepting the population figure as 80,000, as stated in the Chakma petition. Instead, they strongly believed it was imperative for the authority to do exactly that. Thirdly, considering the census report and average decadal growth rate of the Indian population at 23 percent, it was argued the Chakma population could not have been more than 30,000, and the rest had to be considered

'foreigners' and deported accordingly. They also contested the Indira-Mujib Accord of 1972 as a basis for granting citizenship to Chakmas. Due to all these reasons, the Joint Action Committee rejected the recommendations of the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions in toto, and urged the Prime Minister not to entertain the same.[36] The Joint Action Committee on the same day passed a unanimous resolution to reject any proposal that sought to establish a Union Territory for the Chakmas inside Mizoram, and to dismantle the already existing Chakma District Council.

The Lunglei District Joint Action Committee, composed of the same political parties and non-governmental organizations at the district level, also sent a separate memorandum to the Prime Minister on 15 October 1997. Here as well, they stressed on the same points as the earlier memorandum, such as abolition of Chakma Autonomous District Council, deportation of immigrants, mostly Chakmas from Mizoram and steadfast opposition to any separate administrative set up for the Chakmas within Mizoram. They opined that further ethnic and political division might create unhealthy communal feeling even to the extent of large-scale violence between the Mizos and the Chakmas. Countering the step-motherly attitude and ill-treatments as allegedly shown by the Mizo and the state government, they argued that it was the Chakmas who were unfriendly and hostile. They cited history of brutal killing that Mizos suffered at the hands of Chakmas and the Mizo villages in the Chakma dominated areas being extorted and ousted with the help of Shanti Bahini. Some of these villages included Bungkawn, Sertlangpui West, Ngharum, Kanghmun, Muallianpui, Saikhai, Saisih, Chhippui, Serlui, Mualbului, Uiphum, Sirte, Puankhai, Hmundo, Mauzam and Tiante.[37] The Chakmas either occupied these villages or started a new one nearby and slowly outnumbered the Mizo residents, and changed the village's name into Chakma. For instance, a village built from the ashes of an earlier Mizo village called Kanghmun was named Rajmundal. Other Mizo villages like Ngharum which became Chakma village after the residents abandoned it, were not renamed officially in the record but called by Chakma names.[38]

[36] Memorandum Submitted to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri I.K Gujral on the 26th September, 1997 by Joint Action Committee, Mizoram.
[37] Memorandum Submitted by Joint Action Committee Lunglei District to the Prime Minister of India, dated Lunglei the 15th October 1997.
[38] A personal conversation with former Village Council President of Saizawh West, dated Saizawh West the 20th January 2021.

When ethnic tension between the Mizos and the Chakmas was already running high, the appeal of the Mizo residents within the Chakma District Council area to the Chief Minister of Mizoram, certainly made the matter more intense. Much like what the Chakmas had claimed and complained against the larger Mizo community, they alleged discrimination in terms of development, education, job appointment etc., and cultural as well as religious oppression at the hands of the Chakmas who controlled the District Council. They claimed that even though they were the original inhabitants of Uiphum areas, now within the CADC territory, which was testified by the fact that there was no Chakma chief or ruler in these areas, the creation of CADC abruptly made them a minority in their own land. In the face of rapid growth of Chakma population and continuing discrimination because of which they were losing their land, rights, customary law, and even reserved forest, they urged the Chief Minister to establish Uiphum Development Council to be administered directly by the state government (Hluna 2020, 135-140). Describing their overall situation, one resident of the Mizo village stated:

> Nowadays, you might say that, in the midst of more numerous Chakmas, being a minority within a minority, we seemed to be safe and free. But that was not the case. There is always danger and possible ethnocide lurking behind. Our safety is guaranteed only by the very existence of Mizo society and NGOs, whose protection as you see is a long distant one. In reality, the Chakmas wish to do away with all the *Zohnahthlak* people or Mizos. Voting, in general, is meaningless to us because we know that there is a divide along the ethnic lines. As long as you are Mizo, no matter how good you are, the Chakmas are never going to vote for you. The peace and coexistence that you see, especially between Chakmas and Bawm, is fragile one, like sitting on a thin ice. If any untoward incident were to happen, the next move would be ethnocide. Chakmas are also trying to assimilate us. The rich ones come and ask us to buy our land, trying to peacefully acquire and make the CADC only the Chakma area. Our village, Saizawh West, is mulling over the idea of submitting a petition to the Mizoram government to shift the entire village outside the jurisdiction of CADC. But till now, it never materialises. On the other hand, the MZP leaders told us to remain here. The reason is that it is our land as a Mizo, it is inside Mizoram, and abandoning it would mean willingly giving it to the Chakmas. So, they refused to give us a recommendation for our petition idea. If that is the case, the least they can do to make us stay is to accelerate development and infrastructure building in the Mizo areas.[39]

Such statements alone expressed the seriousness of ethnic situation between the Mizos and the Chakmas. While the Mizos, through several comments and

[39] Ibid.,

memoranda, seemed to accept that there were certain portions of Chakmas who were genuine citizens and inhabitants of Mizoram, such acceptance had not really allowed for the political aspirations of the Chakmas to grow bigger. The Mizo agenda of abolition of Chakma District Council had been pursued mainly due to the idea that it incentivized more political demands like the Union Territory status and encouraged more infiltrations. This could be seen in the context of the recommendation of the Rajya Sabha Committee and the reactions of the Mizos. On the one hand, the emphasis on the issue of Chakma immigration, was a genuine reaction to a real and menacing presence of 'foreigners', it was also on the other hand, a way of delegitimizing such aspirations. It was believed that as long as more than a majority of the Chakmas were designated as 'foreigners', their political demands and claims would not be entertained. But, for the Chakmas their demand which itself was propelled by the Mizos' actions and discrimination, was more than legitimate as they had also been in Mizoram for generations, with or without 'illegal immigrations'.

The Politics of Indigeneity: The New Language of Ethnic Conflict

With the absence of major protests and campaigns from Mizo social and non-governmental organizations, the issue of 'influx' of Chakmas became a political football among the political parties. In connection to the matter, the new MNF government in 1998 proposed to conduct "Village Population Census" directing at Chakmas, in collaboration with the Central YMA. But when the Congress came to power in 2008, even though its election manifesto featured "Village Population Register" there was no large-scale undertaking towards that end (Zobiakvela 2014). However, ever since the notions of indigenous peoples and indigeneity became popular worldwide after the adoption of the United Nations Declaration of Rights of the Indigenous Peoples by the UN General Assembly in 2007, the question of indigeneity had begun to take centre stage in the conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas. As discussed in the following, the change in language of conflict could be clearly noticed from the rhetoric and discourse of the Mizo campaign against the Chakmas and vice versa. The debate as well as claims and counter-claims over who is 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous' in Mizoram between the ethnic Mizo and the minority Chakma, had rendered their already hostile relation more polarized, upping

the ante in the long-standing conflict. While the Mizo asserted themselves to be the only indigenous ethnic community based on the claim of being the original and native inhabitants of Mizoram, they denied indigeneity of Chakmas on account of them being an immigrant. But, in contrast, the Chakma repudiated the Mizo claims and declared themselves to be a minority indigenous community based on history and their Scheduled Tribe (ST) status in India. The entry of indigenous question is the latest manifestation of Mizo-Chakma conflict (Roluahpuia 2016). Before dealing with the contested claims of indigeneity, it may be noted that the narrative of 'illegal immigration' is intrinsically connected with the indigenous claims. The Mizo narrative that only the Mizos are indigenous to Mizoram while refuting the same for Chakmas, goes hand in hand with the contention that the Chakmas are 'foreigners' or immigrants.

Linking 'Illegal Immigration' and (Non) Indigeneity: Two Narratives

Since the PC government and throughout the episode of electoral roll revision and the MZP movement, immigration had been the biggest issue and source of tension between the Mizos and the Chakmas. The Mizo narrative on this issue can be seen from numerous memoranda and petitions that have been discussed at length in this chapter as well as in the previous ones. Again, this narrative was based on the evidence culled from the colonial era notices and orders, and periodic population census and growth rate of Chakmas prepared by succeeding Mizo political parties and social organizations. But it is also important here to consider the experiences and observations of both the Mizo and Chakma residents in the CADC and nearby areas where all the 'illegal' influx had been allegedly taking place. When commenting on the Chakma population in Mizoram, Mizo residents used the term *Pem Pung*, meaning immigration-induced growth as opposed to *Piang Pung* denoting natural or biological growth. The local Mizo narrative was that a small number of Chakma living at the bank of Kawrpui river (Thega) during the British period, came to settle inside Mizoram and gradually occupied the western part of Mizoram bordering the Chittagong Hill Tracts under the permission of the Mizo chiefs. By the time of independence, there was a sizable Chakma population. Though they were not coming in large numbers, they were always living at the border areas and then moved around slowly. After the Mizo District became UT in 1972, the formation of Chakma District Council encouraged more and more Chakma settlement in Mizoram. One of the many

reasons that Chakmas came in large numbers was that they feared losing the District Council status.[40] It was also believed that infiltration and immigration continued, especially after the setting up of CADC.[41] The protection and benefits that came with the District Council offered better a future for many Chakmas who are from the other side of the border. One of the Chawngte P Mizo residents gave such a comprehensive understanding on the complicated situation of the Chakmas after the establishment of CADC and the ensuing influx from across the border, he observed:

> No one knew how administration, file system, documentation worked. Things were done verbally. The staff were half Mizos, since Chakmas could not fill the posts…But after a few years, all those posts were gradually getting filled by the Chakmas themselves, some of whom were coming from Bangladesh and other parts of Indian states like Tripura and Assam. That time, right after Bangladesh liberation, many Chakmas must have come to the Indian side, doing small business and generally looking for work and opportunity, at some point even fleeing religious persecution, especially since the establishment of CADC that Chakmas could claim as their homeland, their *Jerusalem*. In fact, on the other side in Bangladesh, the Chakmas were already oppressed people, since the time of Pakistan. In terms of education and development, they were not allowed to achieve up to a certain point. They even formed an underground Shanti Bahini that was fighting against the government. They were in a pretty precarious situation. They must have had a relationship with them across the border. Even Chakma from here went to join the underground in Chittagong Hill Tracts…Borders were all free for all movement. And those Chakmas who ever got educated early, whether from Arunachal or Tripura, they came to Mizoram and filled those posts in the CADC. But later on, when the Mizoram Chakmas also progressed with education and more political awareness, they became conscious of the other Chakmas from different states and reserved those important posts and jobs in the CADC for themselves. They developed a sense of local Chakmas and foreigner Chakmas as time went by.[42]

Such observations indicated that, even though the Mizos considered the majority of the Chakmas as 'illegal immigrants' who came after independence, there was an understanding that in many cases it was caused by internal pressure and unchecked circumstances. It also conveyed the idea that, immigration happened within Indian territory as well and not only from the Bangladesh side. At the same time, it suggested

[40]A personal conversation with ex MNF army and resident of Chawngte 'P', dated Chawngte 'P' the 18th January 2021.

[41] A personal conversation with former Village Council President of Saizawh West, dated Saizawh West the 20th January 2021.

[42] A personal conversation with current Village Council Secretary, Chawngte P, dated the 18th January 2021.

that after more political consciousness developed among the Chakmas, there was a sense of divide between the local Chakmas in Mizoram and those they considered as 'foreigner' Chakmas. Another local Mizo resident talked of the same situation when he stated that: "Even among the Chakmas, there is a feeling of congestion, geographically, politically, and economically, in the CADC area. There is inter competition and fight in terms of employment and other resources. Many now do not wish to accept their folks from outside with open arms".[43]

On the one hand, the Mizos believed that in the context of immigration, the Chakmas perhaps through the Council authority, had arranged enabling conditions for others to come over and settle at places like Borapansury, Chhotapansury, Montola, Chawngte C etc., and helped each other enrolled in the voter list. On the other hand, there was also a position that the root of the immigration problem was the Mizo themselves, officers like Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and Block Development Officer (BDO) who administered the Chakma District as an agent of the state government. The point was that the Mizo officers under the influence of the politicians and political parties, decided who enrolled in the government register, and issued legal documents like birth certificates or voter identification. For instance, it was pointed out that during the election to the District Council or State Legislative Assembly, the political parties especially the ruling ones, used to enrol those Chakmas who could be their vote banks, suggesting that to certain extent, issue of immigration became resource for political gains. While expressing that there was a genuine concern about the unnatural increase in the Chakma population, they also believed it was instrumentalized and manipulated by whoever had the right platform, which was indicated by the fact that whoever came to power, be it MNF or Congress, they hesitated to adopt any major measures against the Chakmas. "What they said has been a far cry from what they actually did when in power, Zoramthanga (MNF leader) could not fulfil his words, and Lalthanhawla (Congress) was even worse because he was the one who gave Chakma ministership", remarked a local Mizo resident.[44]

In order to show that there indeed had been Chakma 'illegal' immigration in Mizoram, Mizo non-governmental organizations and political parties prepared

[43] A personal conversation with a retired Range Officer under Environment and Forest Department of Mizoram government and a resident of Chawngte L, dated Chawngte L the 19th January 2021.
[44] Ibid.,

decadal growth rate of Chakmas from 1901 to 2011.[45] Using the information, the Mizo claimed that there had been a serious influx of Chakmas into the then Lushai Hills even before Indian independence, which continued in the post-independence period especially during 1970 to 1980. While the Chakmas acknowledged the census figure from 1951, the official figure after India became a sovereign state, they maintained that all the census data before 1951 that the Mizos came up with was not validated or official. On the one hand, Chakmas had not denied that infiltration from Bangladesh had been taking place, on the other hand, distancing themselves from that, they stressed on the fact that it was not their obligation, and shifted the onus of preventing such infiltration on to the government. One of the officials in the Chakma District Council admitted:

> If I say there were [*sic*] no infiltration and nobody came, it might be wrong, but what came to be publicized was also wrong. There was not that much huge influx. It is a small place, we know each other. But even then, if at all somebody came, all the administration rested with [the] central and state government. It is their duty to prevent the infiltration. And the local people can help the administration. The government has to prepare modality and take initiative to work together with the locals. Without that kind of mechanism, it is very wrong to blame the locals. It creates resentment in the people's mind. Among the Chakmas also, they are feeling cheated, and among the Mizo also they are asking why should the Chakma come. Some even blamed the Chakmas, when the entire blame should have gone to the government, not the local people. Let [the] government prepare a modality where the locals can get involved for [*sic*] helping the government.[46]

There was also a tendency among the Chakmas to rationalize such extra rates of population growth. After comparing the decadal growth of Chakma and Mizo from 1951, it was argued that the difference between the two was hardly three to five percent, which was normal in the light of the average national growth rate. Among other reasons as to why such an increase in the growth rate occurred was a widespread illiteracy among the Chakmas. It was reasoned that since there was no sense of need for population control or family planning Chakmas reproduced a lot at great pace, some people even having close to a dozen children, which contributed to their rapid growth as compared to the Mizos. Again, due to lack of education and low literacy, it was argued, most Chakmas, semi nomadic agriculturalists, paid no attention to

[45] See Appendix B.

[46] A personal conversation with former Chief Executive Member, Chakma Autonomous District Council, dated Chawngte C the 17th January 2021.

obtaining legal documents like birth certificates or voter identification, and had no idea that without them they would be termed 'illegal' occupants. Only in the 1990s did the majority of the Chakmas come to be aware about the necessity of these things. This was one of the reasons why there seemed to be such a big boom in the Chakma population. The point being that sizable population was already there that time, but just not in the electoral rolls or official records.[47] Another factor, according to the Chakmas, that contributed to the Mizo allegations of 'unnatural' growth of population came from a simple misunderstanding which was exploited by politically motivated people. They argued that the Mizo wrongly perceived that during the great exodus of the Chakmas from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1964, many refugees did not go to Arunachal Pradesh but stayed back in Mizoram. But, many Chakmas who were already in Mizoram moved to Arunachal Pradesh with those refugees, hoping that they would be entitled to free ration and financial help from the government.[48]

The Chakmas also emphasized the complex circumstances in which such an influx took place and argued that, as opposed to what the Mizos claimed and publicized, the rate of influx was not that high. It was claimed that rapid population growth happened only in the CADC area and the Chakma inhabited areas in other districts witnessed population growth rate that was even less than average. The reason was that the Chakma District Council and autonomy that came with it, provided opportunity for many people, and became a source of livelihood. Even within India, Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura came to settle in CADC areas. For instance, most of the early bureaucrats in the CADC came from there. Twenty years before the formation of the CADC, the current Chawngte area was a small village. Later, when people came to know that it was the headquarters of CADC, and the main source of the revenue, many people began to come from other states as well as even from Lunglei and Mamit district within Mizoram.

In contrast to the allegations levelled by the Mizos that the Mizoram Chakmas were helping the Chakmas on the other side of the border in obtaining legal documents and Indian citizenship, the Chakmas contended that they had no authority

[47] A personal discussion with Mizoram Chakma Students' Union (MCSU) leaders, dated Chawngte C the 16th January 2021.
[48] A personal conversation with a history teacher in Govt. Kamlanagar College and a resident of Chawngte C, dated Chawngte C the 16th January 2021.

or capacity to enrol their own people in the electoral roll or confer citizenship. If there were anyone who could, it was the state government agent or official who obviously was a Mizo. While explaining that they were not in a position to give access to those who were coming from across the border, they normalized the porousness of the border and free movement of people from both sides. One Chakma officer in the Chakma District Council justified:

> Border areas experienced infiltration. It is very normal. Border areas were not created by those communities, but by politics, you can say international politics. We did not have [a] clearly defined line of demarcation where one community lived, and other [*sic*] began. Due to partition, a single community got divided. One part lived in one country and another part in another country. This happened to the Mizos also. Some Maras, Lais or Mizos also still live in Myanmar. Even though there are state or political boundary, the communities did not recognise that. So, intermarriage, going and coming, and visiting across the border, are happening in every border area.[49]

It was stressed that they themselves did not allow Bangladeshi, even if they were kith and kin, to stay permanently inside Mizoram. It was also time and again emphasized that just as much as the Mizos opposed the influx of 'foreigners' in Mizoram, the Chakmas were equally apprehensive as they were also facing unemployment and losing opportunity in their own domain.

Considering these claims and counter claims, indeed the issue of immigration remained the root cause of Mizo-Chakma conflict. At the same time, it appeared that resolving the issue by deporting all the alleged 'foreigners' or by stopping further infiltration, and political inclusion through granting of formal citizenship, was not going to bring social accommodation of Chakmas in the fabric of Mizo society. This even led to the idea among the Chakmas that what seemed to be a politicization of ethnicity also entailed primordial animosity. At the end of the day, whether there was influx or not, it was far from being the only source of contention. One can argue that it was the indigenous assertion, political aspiration, and activities of the Chakmas arising out of their desire to have ethic homeland of their own, and not only their increasing presence in Mizoram, that led to Mizo's anti-Chakma dispositions. What followed was a contested claims of indigeneity stemming

[49] A personal conversation with the Information and Public Relation Officer of the Chakma Autonomous District Council and a resident of Chawngte C, dated Chawngte the 17th January 2021.

from these conflicting narratives of 'illegal immigration', even though the reason and intention for these indigenous claims might not be the same for the two communities.

Chakma Census and Technical Entrance Examination: State, NGOs and Indigeneity

The latest series of conflict began with the MZP's plan to erect the *Zofate Chawlhbuk* or Mizo Inn, at Borapansury a southern village in Mizoram on the Indo-Bangladesh border in June 2014, triggering ethnic tension once again in the CADC areas. Terming the increasing numbers of Chakma in Mizoram as extremely 'abnormal', caused by massive immigration from Bangladesh that has become demographically alarming for the Mizos, MZP stated that it was constructed as a token of protest against such influx. They stated that the land on which it was constructed was allotted to the MZP by the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department of the state government. It attracted stiff opposition from the Chakmas, and in protest all Chakma organizations and political parties of the Chakma community boycotted the byelection to Borapansury-II Member of District Council (MDC) seat held earlier that month.[50] The Mizoram Chakma Development Fund (MCDF) had also accused MZP of grabbing Chakma land. While maintaining that the Chakmas in Mizoram are not the indigenous tribe of the state, MZP also affirmed that the construction of Mizo Inn was to show their discontent with the Chakmas and to declare that Mizoram belongs to the Mizos only.[51]

After three years, as a show of support for the MZP activities, the Joint NGO Coordination Committee, of which MZP was a part, demanded the resignation of Dr. B.D. Chakma from his post as a Minister of State in the state government, for his alleged role in that byelection boycott.[52] In June 2014, the CYMA proposed to conduct a census of Chakmas, and formed a Chakma Study Group. It was decided

[50] MZP constructs Zofate Chawlhbuk along Indo-Bangladesh border, Business Standard, 25 June 2014, https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/mzp-constructs-zofate-chawlhbuk-along-indo-bangla-border-114062500858_1.html, Accessed October 2, 2021.

[51] Mizo govt beefs up security in Chakma area, Eastern Mirror, 21 June 2014, https://easternmirrornagaland.com/mizo-govt-beefs-up-security-in-chakma-area/, Accessed October 2, 2021.

[52] Letter to the Chief Minister of Mizoram, by the Joint NGO Coordination Committee (CYMA, MUP, MHIP, MZP and MSU), dated Aizawl the 27th July, 2017.

that an amount of five rupees from each YMA member be collected for that purpose.[53] On 25 July, the Study Group visited Lunglei District for a preliminary survey and suggested that the 1995 Mizoram electoral rolls be used for conducting the census.[54] After CYMA announced their proposal, the Home Department of the state government called for a meeting with the CYMA, where the two parties agreed that the government should initiate detection of 'illegal' immigrants by legislation in the State Assembly.[55] The Home Minister later asked the CYMA leaders to halt their plan as it would be unconstitutional to conduct an ethnic-based census, and instead sought their cooperation with the government in maintaining village register, the purpose of which was to keep record of genuine inhabitants of each village.[56] Meanwhile, Chakmas submitted a memorandum to the Union Home Minister of State, demanding immediate direction to the state government of Mizoram to stop the proposed "head count" census on the Chakmas by the CYMA. They alleged that it was an excuse to unleash a reign of terror and persecution of minority Chakma.[57] CYMA then announced their cooperation with the government in the matter but decided to continue collection of donations from its members, hinting that they were still determined to go ahead with the census.[58] However, in the face of objections from the government, there were no further actions from CYMA with regard to the Chakma census.

In connection with these incidents, the issue of indigeneity became a point of contention in June 2014 when MZP protested the inclusion of 38 Chakma students and three non-Mizo students under Category I of the State Technical Entrance Examination, for medical and engineering courses. Under the Mizoram (Selection of Candidates for Higher Technical Courses) Rules, 1999, enacted by the government of Mizoram, 85 percent of seats are reserved for Category I, and the remaining 15 percent seats are divided between Category II and III. The eligibility criteria for

[53] Letter to the President and Secretary of all branches of YMA, by the General Secretary of CYMA, No. CYMA.130/2013-2014/23 of 4.8.2014.
[54] Office Order, No. CYMA.130/2013-2014/22 of 24.7.2014.
[55] Home Department, Government of Mizoram, No. A.14033/1/2014-HM, dated Aizawl the 7th August 2014.
[56] Chakma census may ignite separatism: Mizo legislator Zothansanga, Eastern Mirror, 8 September 2014, https://easternmirrornagaland.com/chakma-census-may-ignite-separatism-mizo-legislator-zothansanga/, Accessed October 2, 2021.
[57] A Memorandum submitted to Shri Kiren Rijiju, Hon'ble Union Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, on 6 September 2014, by the Chakma Representatives, Mizoram.
[58] CYMA Thuchhuak, No. CYMA 74/2013-2014/20 of 11/9/2014.

Category I are given as, “children of local permanent residents of Mizoram State”, and the term local permanent residents means those “who are indigenous people of the State of Mizoram and have been residing permanently in the State” (Sangkhumi 2017). Therefore, from the MZP standpoint, the seats under Category I are strictly set aside for the indigenous Mizo community, and such inclusion of Chakmas under the same category is an infringement of the rights and privileges of the indigenous community. On 25 September 2014, MZP came out in the streets in protest against what they saw as misplacement of non-indigenous people under Category I, and it soon gained wider backing from the Mizo populace. Popular pressure in support of the MZP cause had eventually pushed the state government to change the existing rules to fulfil the demand of the student’s body. On 23 April 2015, the government issued notification of the new rules, the Mizoram (Selection of Candidates for Higher Technical Courses) (Sixth Amendment) Rules, 2015, which redefined the local permanent residents and indigenous peoples as “Zo-ethnic people” while terming the non-Zo ethic people like Chakma as non-indigenous belonging to Category II.[59] The Chakma students’ body, Mizoram Chakma Students’ Union (MCSU) filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Guwahati High Court challenging the constitutional validity of the 2015 Rules, which was later followed by the Court stay order.

The following year, the state government introduced the Mizoram (Selection of Candidates for Higher Technical Courses) Rules, 2016, that further reserved 95 percent seats for Category I, and 4 percent and 1 percent for Category II and III respectively. This new rule omitted the words indigenous and non-indigenous, but put the Chakmas under Category II. After it was being challenged in the court once again by the same Chakma students’ body, the Court released a stay order and halted seat allotment under the new rule.[60] Eventually, in February 2019, the petitioner won a legal victory over the Mizoram government with the High Court directing the government to place the Chakmas and other non-Zo Schedule Tribes of Mizoram under Category I. This issue continued in 2017 when the state government annulled

[59] *Vanglaini.* 2015. "STEE Hrilhfiahna Siamthat A ni." April 6. Accessed April 21, 2018. http://www.vanglaini.org/tualchhung/33777,

[60] Press Releases, Directorate Of information & Public Relations Government of Mizoram, dated Aizawl the 28th June 2016, https://dipr.mizoram.gov.in/press-release/higher-technical-educationdepartment-thuchhuah-3/lang/mz, Accessed April 21, 2018.

a medical seat allotment for four Chakma students who were selected under Mizoram quota through National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), following the pressure from MZP which demanded that the seats be given to the Mizo students only. All NGOs Coordination Committee, composed of all major Mizo organizations, also announced their support for the MZP demand against inclusion of Chakmas under Category I for seat allotment. They further stated that Chakmas are not indigenous in Mizoram and never have been before, and they could not avail entitlements accorded to the indigenous Mizos. They also released a formal request to all the political parties not to field any Chakma candidates in the upcoming State Legislative Assembly election in 2018.[61] The then Minister of Higher and Technical Education of Mizoram government, also reportedly stated that reservations of seats under Category I are only for the sons of the Zo-ethnic people. Mizoram government, in the affidavit filed on 6 April 2018, stated:

> The Chakmas originally came from Bangladesh. The first Chakmas who came from Bangladesh settled under the Mizo chieftains as immigrant dwellers, later when the British invaded Mizoram, to subdue and conquer the Mizo chieftains who were ruling the Mizo land, they continued to stay and were given the District Council without the consent of the Mizo people. In the subsequent years more and more Chakmas illegally migrated from Bangladesh and settled and occupied a large portion of the western part of Mizoram. As such, the Chakmas are not indigenous people of Mizoram (Chakma 2019, 98).

As a response against ethnic discrimination and oppression in the name of indigeneity, Chakma students' bodies and civil society organizations, under the leadership of All Chakma Students' Union (AICSU), mobilized simultaneous protests at several places including Chawngte, Silchar, Guwahati, Bangalore, and New Delhi on 17 August 2017. The AICSU stated that the Chakmas too are 'sons of the soil', and the laws and policies of Mizoram that give preference to the majority Mizos for higher and technical education violated Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1966 ratified by India in 1968 and Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. As the Chakmas and Mizos are STs in Mizoram under the Constitution, according to the AICSU, there should not be any form of discrimination or differentiations between them (Karmakar 2017). Commenting on the indigeneity of Chakmas, leaders of MCSU remarked that they

[61] NGO- Coordination Committee Thuchhuak, dated Aizawl the 25th July 2017.

are Scheduled Tribes and indigenous from the angle of the Constitution, thus the state government has to accept that any tribal ethnic groups in Mizoram are automatically indigenous.[62]

Conflicting Indigenous Claims: Historical and Political

Since the Mizo claims of indigenousness have been dealt with at length in the preceding chapters, it is not required to repeat it here. The common Mizo standpoint was that Chakmas were Indian, but were not indigenous to Mizoram. And as they had already staked their claim as an indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, they could not claim Mizoram as their indigenous homeland.[63] For the Mizos, the Indian citizenship and ST status of Chakmas had no connection with their indigenous claim. One of the leaders of CYMA clarified their position:

> The Mizo and Chakma are not primordial enemies. The issue is that, even though they are not indigenous, they are and have been eating from our share of the pie (rights and opportunity). They have been benefiting from what is not entitled to them in the first place. A very conspicuous example right before our eyes is the establishment of CADC. Since then, we are concerned more with their political aspirations.[64]

The Chakma claim was seen instead as a strategy to push further their political ambitions and aspirations, ultimately aiming at a separate ethnic homeland in Mizoram. From the Chakma perspective, such narratives were socially manufactured and politically driven to further discriminate and repress the Chakmas' demand for equal treatment, and to justify exclusion and denial of their rights and opportunities in Mizoram, simply on the ground of their ethnic origin. According to the Chakmas, the fact that the Mizo appeared to have no issue with the Lai and Mara Autonomous District Council, considered to be kindred tribes of the Mizo family, while making all the efforts to dismantle the Chakma District, showed that it was so. This alluded to the idea that conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas was nothing but a clash of two ethnic nationalism based on 'ancient hatred' or old hostilities, purely out of the difference in their ethnic identity. It was claimed that the twin allegations of immigrants and non-indigenousness of the Chakmas completed and complemented

[62] A personal discussion with Mizoram Chakma Students' Union (MCSU) leaders, dated Chawngte C the 16th January 2021.
[63] A personal conversation with former Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) President, dated Aizawl the 9th December 2020.
[64] A personal conversation with the incumbent Assistant Secretary, CYMA, dated Aizawl the 10th December 2020.

one another. While the 'foreigner' tag was meant to deny the Chakmas any rights and privileges that accrued from the status of Indian citizenship, the non-indigenousness reduced the Chakma to a second-class citizen, inferior in every way and not entitled to economic resources and opportunities at par with the indigenous Mizos (Chakma 2019).

In historicizing the past, Chakmas maintained that they were the first people to settle in the western and south-western parts of what is known today as Mizoram, thus making them indigenous or native inhabitants. These said areas which were earlier part of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, had been occupied by the Chakmas in the pre-colonial period even before the arrival and settlement of other tribes like Kuki and Lushai. However, according to the Chakma narrative, continuous batches of migration of the Kuki and Lushai groups into the Lushai Hills, resulted in ejection of the Chakmas from their homeland in the western and south-western belt, that pushed them beyond the Barkal range in the South Lushai Hills and Sajek river in the North Lushai Hills. The flight of Chakmas continued from the latter half of the eighteenth century till the early nineteenth century. Thus, they were forced to desert their villages and paddy fields and move west-ward into the Chittagong Hill Tracts where Chakma kingdom flourished. After the British conquest of Lushai country, raids and headhunting expeditions were put to stop and stability set in, people began to come again and settle permanently in these areas.[65] To show that the Chakma Raja ruled the western and south-western parts of Mizoram, including Demagiri and Uiphum ranges currently falling in the Chakma District Council territory, one Chakma author wrote:

> The ancient Chakma kingdom had flourished on the banks of the Karnaphuli river and its tributaries. The earliest surviving map of Bengal drawn by Portuguese cartographer Joao Baptista Lavanhas (1555-1624) and published in 1615 AD in Volume IV of *Decadas da Asia* by famous Portuguese historian Joao de Barros mentioned 'Chocomos' on the banks of Karnaphuli between the kingdoms of Tripura and Arakan. Places/rivers such as Demagiri, Thega, Bur Harina, and Sajek (the British called the river Sajjuk) are pre-colonial settlements of the Chakmas and their non-Mizo nomenclature testify this. But after the Lushais/Mizos established their reign, they renamed Demagiri as 'Tlabung' and Sajek river as 'Tuilianpui'. Today, Sajek, Harina, and Thega rivers form the natural boundary between India (Mizoram) and Bangladesh (CHT). In fact, there are indications that

[65] A personal conversation with a history teacher in Govt. Kamlanagar College and a resident of Chawngte C, dated Chawngte C the 16th January 2021.

> the ancient Chakma kingdom had extended further eastward and the discovery of Buddhist sites in South Mizoram are incontrovertible evidence of Chakma settlement (Chakma 2019, 39).

When the colonial authority demarcated a new boundary between the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Lushai Hills in 1897, the strip of land in the east of CHT including the station of Demagiri with a population of about 1500, was proposed to be transferred to the Lushai Hills. The following year, the proposal came to effect and this strip of land became part of the unified Lushai Hills District under Assam. Thus, according to Chakmas, the transfer of part of their ancestral territories meant that they became natural inhabitants and natives of the Lushai Hills since 1898, and hence the indigenous peoples of Mizoram (Ibid.,). Chakmas also based their claim of indigeneity on the status of Scheduled Tribe, which they argued in the context of India, was synonymous and interchangeable with indigenous people.

Although the government of India had not recognized the applicability of indigenous peoples in the Indian context, it was argued that, the Supreme Court Bench of Justice Markandey Katju and Justice Gyan Sudha Misra in 2011, established that the Scheduled Tribes are India's indigenous peoples. In connection to this argument, Chakmas claimed that since they were also listed as ST in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order of 1956, they are genuine indigenous peoples of Mizoram as much as the Mizos themselves are indigenous. While the Mizo dismissed the existence of more than one indigenous group in Mizoram apart from themselves, the Chakmas insisted that there were also minority indigenous communities, including Brus and other smaller groups. It may be noted here that while the heart of the matter was the question of indigeneity, the Chakma indigenous status in Mizoram was at the centre of the discord, and the same status for the Mizos was rarely questioned or challenged. In this sense, it can be argued that indigenous claims had been employed for different ends. Indigenousness of the Mizos was asserted only when it was needed to counter similar claims from other ethnic communities. Unless the Chakma or other group has staked their claims as indigenous people in Mizoram, there was no rationale for the Mizos to champion their indigeneity and stress on the non-indigenousness of others. For the Chakmas, indigeneity was claimed and proclaimed in the face of strategic denial by the Mizo counterpart. And it was to raise the ante against the Mizo and to negate the exclusivist claim that Mizoram belonged only to the Mizos.

Weaponization of Indigeneity

Indigeneity, its movements and the discourses and politics surrounding it, was about finding and forming the identity of minority ethnic groups who were, in a given territory, relatively prior occupants, non-dominant, culturally distinctive, and who found themselves at the receiving end of the global historical process and system of domination. Identification of an indigenous peoples was also associated with assertions and claims of indigenous rights, privileges and protection deemed necessary to undo and rectify historical injustices, exclusion and dispossession against the state or the majority dominant group. It has been shown that the term indigeneity gradually moved from being an essentialist and descriptive notion to a more politico-legal concept and a symbol of struggle. This momentous shift had a far-reaching ramification for those who identified as one as well as those who stood opposed to it, as the concept has come to acquire different utility, attachment, and local variations in different contexts. Even though the only thing that scholars agreed unanimously is the problematic nature of the concept with its anthropological, historical, and philosophical implications, it cannot be denied that it provided a powerful tool through which the marginalized resist their relation of oppression vis-à-vis the dominant groups. However, in as much as the claim of indigeneity is utilized by the dispossessed it can also be weaponized at the hands of the majority or the dominant. Here lies one of the most crucial grounds on which the concept of indigeneity and its allied connotations ought to be problematized. Indigenous claims allow itself to be available for both the dominant and the non-dominant communities to either abuse or make use of it contingent upon the context of power relations.

It is imperative to take note of the fact that indigenous claims invite more polarization and conflict by allowing exclusivist politics of othering especially by the dominant and numerically strong groups. Many scholars connected it with inward looking, essentialist ideology and identity, based on blood and soil (Béteille 1998; Guha 1999). Furthermore, it follows from these principles that, there are other related notions and relations which are equally divisive, discriminatory and conflict ridden, that the claim of indigeneity justifies and intensifies. These include, among other things, politics of belonging, concept of ethnic homeland, and sedentarist metaphysic, all of which are associated with indigenous claims. With all these prospects of malevolence, the label of indigenous becomes instrumental in exacerbating and

prolonging an ongoing ethnic conflict by providing new arenas, narratives and legitimacy for exclusion.

The politics of indigenous claim was not merely a competition and debate about who was the first settler in the land, but entailed more complex elements which are mentioned above. When members of a group, in this case the Mizos, claimed indigenous status, they invariably asked for something much more than a simple recognition of the alleged fact that their ancestors were the original inhabitants of the land in question. They claimed to be the rightful owners and to have an entitlement to certain prerogatives consequently. Other ethnic communities, like the Chakmas, were portrayed as non-indigenous immigrants or guests, who had to adapt themselves to rules and conditions established by the owners. This portrayal of others as non-indigenous is often justified and legitimized through the allegations of 'illegal' infiltration. Also, when one of the ethnic communities in a plural society claimed prerogative by virtue of their indigeneity status, there is a clash between such claim and other values like equality and rights of citizens, making ethnic conflict almost inevitable (Weiner 1978; Horowitz 1985; Esman 1985). Priority in the social and political entitlements and other prerogatives recognizably disregarded the egalitarian notions of equal treatment, respect and rights accorded to all the free and equal citizens in democracy. In such cases, indigeneity and its inegalitarian claims created a condition where ethnic relations and competitions are inescapably conflict bound.

However, when the Mizos asserted indigeneity, it was not an end in itself as it was never called into question. It was rather serving as a means of pursuing some other ends. In this context, indigenous questions were brought into action to gain more credibility in their claims and arguments against the former. That is, the question of indigeneity or the non-indigeneity of the Chakmas, has been utilized to delegitimize and discredit the latter's demands for more advanced political arrangements and ethnic homeland in Mizoram. In this sense, Mizo claims of having prerogatives for being the only indigenous, was not about them fighting for those privileges which were unfairly denied to them. It was intended for a justification that they themselves alone were eligible for those rights and opportunities, and that no Chakmas, whom they perceived to be an 'outsider', would be benefitting from what was rightfully theirs. If the narrative of 'illegal immigration' was not enough to fully

discard the political demands of the Chakmas, their non-indigeneity would surely become another nail in the coffin for such political aspirations and claims.

In the politics of belonging, inherent in the claims of indigeneity, the idea of who belongs to a particular territory are locally determined by origins and historical rootedness to that place (Schendel 2011). To establish such original link and to claim local roots, community or ethnic group needs to take recourse from history especially the colonial experiences where ethnic demarcations and boundaries were drawn along with its territorial limits through the process of identification, classification, and population mapping (Chandhoke 2006; Vandekerckhove 2009). This created as well as intensified the social distinction between the natives and the 'outsiders', and reiterated the natural connection between ethnic groups and their land. There was conflict in the claims of belonging because it usually followed that where one belonged the other did not. Belongingness has often been used to justify a violent exclusion of those who are regarded as non-belonging in that area, even if they are people with the same nationality but ethnic difference who have lived in that place for centuries. Especially after decolonization, the distinction between the locals and extra-locals evolved into sharper and more violent conflicts that sought to protect the native groups from the strangers through political exclusion and denial of access to economic and social opportunities (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000). So, such politics of belonging pitted those who are "truly rooted in the soil" against the "fake autochthones". At the same time, it also resulted in a conflict amongst those communities who considered themselves indigenous to the same territory, about the degree of indigeneity to claim an exclusive homeland of their own (Vandekerckhove 2009). Since indigenous rights claims have placed strong emphasis on place or territory, the politics of belonging also involves the divisive and exclusive notion of defending ethnic homeland against those who do not belong and those who have such rival claims of homeland in the same areas. The idea of belonging to a certain territory carries justification for both creating a new separate homeland either by acquiring it or by driving out the intruders, and for protecting the existing homeland or part of it from such rival claims. As subjects of colonial practices of politicization of highly territorialized ethnic identity, both the Mizos and Chakmas make inferences from the colonial past to establish their belongingness.

Claim of homeland was also instigated by different circumstances of colonial rules (Carroll 1994). For instance, the ethnic Mizo believed that the land belonged to them due the fact that the British ruled indirectly through the institution of local Mizo chieftainship and relinquished the ownership to the Mizos after decolonization. When the MNF insurgency movement declared that Mizoram was the land for Mizos only, it made such an exclusive claim of homeland by referring to such colonial experience. Therefore, when the ethnic Mizos made such exclusive claims over the land, the other ethnic groups like Chakmas were bound to be affected. The Chakmas have claimed indigeneity and belongingness in the western parts of Mizoram by citing the history of their presence in those areas, and so has the Mizos in the entire state of Mizoram. In this issue, the politics of belonging has different implications for the two ethnic groups. For the Chakmas, the claims of being historically rooted and belonging supply better and powerful grounds for demanding a new separate ethnic homeland inside Mizoram in the form of either a Union Territory or other arrangements. And for the Mizos, it provides a rational tool with which they defend against the prospect of losing parts of their land. To delink the natural association of the Chakmas with Mizoram and their historical rootedness, is to undermine their fight for separate ethnic homeland.

Considering all these manifestations, it can be argued that in the context of Mizo and Chakma conflict, indigenous claims have taken slightly different twists and turns. Indigeneity is no longer a special status or rights that aimed at a reversion to the status quo ante by asserting privileges and assistance, it is rather about a struggle for equality and sameness. Recognition as an indigenous has become a norm that seeks equal rights and similar treatments (sameness rather than difference) with other ethnic groups, instead of an exception that entails special privileges and exclusive status. It also means that being an indigenous has been made a prerequisite for equal citizenship, access to rights, land, entitlements and other socio-economic benefits like education and employment quotas. Communities who are ethnically different from the dominant population recognized as indigenous, and those groups who are not able to prove their indigenous descent, suffer exclusion and discrimination from those things accorded to citizenship. Even if those groups attain full citizenship, they still are citizen minus the allegations that the Chakmas have levelled time and again against the Mizo organizations, government authorities and society as a whole. What

the Chakmas hoped to achieve through indigenous claims, in the context of an ongoing conflict with the Mizo, was an equal treatment and fair distribution of resources and opportunities among all the ethnic groups in Mizoram. In this connection, the Chakma demand for inclusion in the Category I was to solidify their claim of indigenous status and not the educational opportunities, which in return gave legitimacy and credibility to their political claims and aspirations. Whereas, for the Mizos, the lone indigenous status in Mizoram that they claimed for themselves, was to maintain the status quo and keep ethnic competitors at bay.

Thus, the label of indigenous can be used not only for the dispossessed communities to demand rights and equality, but also for the dominant groups to eliminate the alien others. In the case of Mizo-Chakma conflict, the politics of indigeneity provides a new context for ethnic competitions and conflict. For the dominant ethnic group, indigenous claims are used to buttress their upper hand and suppress the demands of minority groups and thwart their political ambition. At the same time, for the Chakmas, it becomes a weapon to counter the hegemony of the dominant group, and a strategy to seek equal rather than special positioning, and fair distribution of power and resources, for it was realized that any attempt to radically alter the status quo was no longer a viable political solution. For the minority ethnic groups, the demand for recognition of authentic indigeneity, as it implies equal rights and distribution of benefits, holds the most potential for rightful and equal belonging not only as a legitimate citizen but also as a recognized member of the society.

Conclusion

Since the grant of statehood to then Union Territory of Mizoram in 1987, which was regarded as the maturity of Mizo identity within the bounds of the Indian state, the ethnic relations between the Mizos and the Chakmas had seen renewed rigours with the entry of multiple players and stakeholders. These players, which had begun to be keenly involved in the later post-statehood stages of the conflict, include non-governmental organizations, students' bodies, and civil societies from both sides of the two communities, as well as political parties and government authorities. There have also been significant changes in terms of languages and issues of discord. In this period, the main point of contention concerned the Chakma demand of ethnic

homeland in the form of a Union Territory inside the state of Mizoram, which apparently provoked the dominant Mizo community leading to an acute situation. This claim, according to the Chakmas, was justified on account of the Mizo discriminatory attitude towards the Chakmas and anti-Chakma policies. The most intense episode began with the MZP movement aiming at driving out 'foreigners' through government-sanctioned electoral roll revision. The Chakmas saw such detection and deletion exercises as an attempt to expel them illegally and indiscriminately from Mizoram. However, the MZP activities were to a large extent made ineffective by the state intervention and politicization of the entire affairs. These issues culminated in the Chakma memorandum to the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petition, that upon learning relevant comments and accounts from all sides, advocated the merger of Chakma District Council territory and other Chakma inhabited areas under one unit. But this and other suggestions made by the Committee had to be withdrawn in the face of widespread protests in Mizoram, especially from the Mizo civil societies and political parties. Then, after a brief lull, in the most recent chapter of the conflict, the question of indigeneity comes to occupy the centre stage, with the fundamental discord being who is an indigenous and non-indigenous in Mizoram. However, this question involves not only about the facts of history, but mostly concerns the political impact and repercussions of such conflicting claims of indigeneity. In the name of authentic indigeneity, the dominant and majority Mizo community, claiming for themselves the only indigenous status, seeks to dissuade the Chakma political ambitions including the formation of an ethnic homeland. The Chakmas, challenging the Mizo exclusivist claims by holding that they are also an indigenous, set out to fight for their rights and entitlements, which had been historically denied to them, at par with the Mizos. In this ongoing conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas, it is argued that, indigenous rights and claims could be weaponized at the hands of both the dominant and minority communities, and that signifies a further prolongation of the already long-standing conflict in the future.

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

This thesis is about analysing and understanding the long-standing ethnic conflict between the Mizos and the Chakmas in Mizoram. In doing so, it aims to reinterpret the historical and political background of the relationship between the two communities in the colonial and pre-colonial contexts, and tries to show the ways in which these pasts gave rise to the post-colonial ethnic politics and discourses where the Mizo's 'anti-foreigner' sentiments and rhetoric perceived the Chakmas as 'illegal' residents and 'non-indigenous' in Mizoram. It further sets out to present in a new light the formal and gradual politicization of ethnicity, as well as ethnicization of politics in Mizo District in the aftermath of the democratic system. This is to put forward the arguments that Mizo-Chakma ethnic discord and conflict had been aggravated in the new democratic space in which ethnic assertion and politics took the form of nationalistic movement for independence from India, and the demand for ethnic homeland within Mizoram. This work also seeks to identify the underlying issues, points of contention and contested claims in this conflict, understand how they sustained through time, and evolved into disagreements about the questions of indigeneity and non-indigeneity in Mizoram. In this connection, it attempts to comprehend the ramifications of the politics of indigeneity in the ongoing conflict. While trying to understand all these various aspects, issues and dimensions of the Mizo-Chakma conflict, a primary focus has been on whether the conflict was essentially instrumental in nature or deeply cultural or primordial in its outlook. In other words, following the quintessential subject matter of any ethnic studies, this thesis asks if the conflict, other than being a competition for material benefits, could be seen as cultural antagonism and differences where values, symbols, worth and legitimacy preceded the tangible goods. However, going beyond this strict dichotomy, it follows a conceptual frame that recognized the instrumentality of the past in the construction and manipulation of ethnic identity in the present.

By examining ethnic identity formation process and contour of relationships in the context of shifting socio-political situations from the nineteenth-century colonial encounters to the twentieth-century decolonization and democratization, this

work has shown that Mizo-Chakma conflict is a product of both historical factors and the politicization of ethnic identity in the contemporary period. It has demonstrated that under colonial rule, the empire's 'modernizing tools' had various ramifications and impressions on the land and its people, beyond military pacification and the installation of governmental structures and systems of law. A brief description of the pre-colonial histories of various tribes in Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hills, including the present day Mizos and the Chakmas, has shown that these people were used to perceiving themselves and their territories as fluid and unbounded. History for them is essentially the history of migration and relocation, and their identities were formed in movement. Through various acts and policies, such as Act XXII of 1860, the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873, the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874, the Land Settlement system in 1898, the Inner Line system, the colonial rule imposed, among other things, ideas of identity linked to a fixed notion of space on the subject peoples who subscribed to more fluid notions of space and territory. This created a state of bounded existence, and involuntarily embedded the erstwhile moving people to a fixed place, which resulted in effectuating an idea of identity rooted in territoriality.

A fixed notion of identity was also entrenched through other colonial practices like topography, map-making, gradation and categorization, a different standard of administration, hill-plain dichotomy, etc. These practices not only discriminated between the hills and the plains through different levels of control and amenability to rules, but also introduced a division between the various hills and the peoples by assigning varying degrees of 'savagery'. At the heart of such exercises was the commencement of boundary-making, an operation that frequently ignored local perceptions of land and the fluidity of boundaries, and followed instead criteria that facilitated colonial political and economic interests. Consequently, in this practice of putting tribes in a certain bounded territory, the hill people were located to their space, and the lands were marked, demarcated and christened as belonging to them, which further reinforced the association with land. This was the case in both the Lushai Hills and Chittagong Hills. As a consequence of the inability to withstand the colonial state, what emerged was new perceptions to the understanding of 'self' and their land.

This thesis also explored the history of the relationship between the two communities in the context of colonial boundary-making, and the accounts of Chakma's identification with and settlement in the Lushai Hills, along with government policies that regulated such population movement. It is argued that, especially in the Lushai Hills, such strict control of movement and settlements of non-Luseis, such as Chakmas, by the authority led to normalization of territorial identity, as well as the polarity between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. It is also shown that in independent India, as well as Pakistan, these colonial policies echoed in the official discourse of the government, and the political imagination of the people. In India, for instance, the institutionalization of the Sixth Schedule provisions gradually formalized the idea of exclusive homeland for certain ethnically defined tribal groups through the mechanisms of Regional Councils and Autonomous District Councils, and indirectly inculcated a divisive notion of 'insider' and 'outsider'. The need to protect an existing homeland against the claims of a rival group, the project of creating a new one, or the fear that one's homeland or some parts could be claimed by another, are typically the subtexts of this political discourse. However, the Chakmas and other tribal groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts had their colonial-era measures and autonomous status weakened and eventually revoked by the state, and faced dire political scenarios that necessitated ethnic assertions in the form of armed resistance against the dominant Bengali nationalism and identity. Such circumstances led to the exodus of the Chakmas to India and inflow of non-tribals to the hill areas. Thus, within forty years, the numbers of non-tribal residents rose to half of the entire population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

In light of the new perception of self and territory and ethnic political consciousness among the people in the Mizo District, it is contended that there were stronger ethnic assertions, particularly in the form of ethnic nationalism and articulations of territorial identity. In such a political climate, the presence of Chakmas, who have been an inhabitant of southern and western fringes of the land since colonial times, started to become a concern for the Mizos. But the democratic set-up of the new District brought significant changes that in turn shaped the social and political relationship between the two. On the one hand, equality prevailed in terms of political participation and opportunities for mobilization based on ethnic identity, but on the other hand, social inclusion and acceptance had yet to be realized.

Thus, even though the Chakmas availed political representation and privileges under the political system, they were an object of suspicion for the Mizo populace, who held that most of the Chakmas were in the Mizo District without authority's approval. Therefore, the label of 'foreigner' had been tied to the Chakmas even after significant political representation.

As part of the project of Mizo identity construction, the rising Mizo nationalism against the Indian state, which culminated in the Mizo National Front movement in 1966, became a crucial factor in understanding the Mizo-Chakma conflict in the post-independence period. This work argues that the Mizo ethnic nationality, which was professed and asserted through the MNF declaration, exemplified a highly territorialized, primordial and exclusive identity, which did not allow Chakma's territorial identification with Mizoram. At the height of Mizo nationalism, the consequences were the claim of an ethnic homeland, and the politics of belonging, where the exclusion of people who were portrayed as having no roots in the land could be justified. It also demonstrates that in the actual armed struggle, the Chakmas in Mizoram and Chittagong Hills regularly suffered from MNF presence and violence. Even where there were no violent incidents, rumours and stories of such events created a condition of mistrust and antagonism in society. In analysing the ramifications of the MNF movement, policies and ideology, it is argued that the twenty year-long insurrection evidently deepened the ethnic divide between the Mizos and the Chakmas. It is also observed that, in constructing and politicizing the Mizo ethnicity as primordial and territorial identity, the MNF historicized the Mizo pasts, both pre-colonial and colonial, and claimed it as an ancient and persistent identity that stood the test of time. This shows that crystallization and instrumental manipulation of identity required resorting to and acknowledging the cultural pasts that inspired unity and cohesion. Similarly, the ethnic situation prompted by the MNF movement was a consequence of politicization of ethnicity and Mizo engagement with primordiality of their identity.

During this period in Mizo District, it is shown that the development-induced crisis in the Chittagong Hills and the resulting flight of Chakmas to India, added to the already deep-seated ethnic tension caused by the MNF movement. This was also the beginning of the Mizo allegation of 'illegal' influx of Chakmas.

Increasing politicization of ethnic identity among the Chakmas also led to a demand for ethnic homeland in the form of District Council. The Central Government granted the same in 1972. From its very inception, the Mizos opposed the Chakma Autonomous District Council. Coming from the perspective that Chakmas are not an indigenous tribal group in the Northeast, they argued that the creation of CADC was not in tune with the aims and objectives of the Sixth Schedule provisions, which was precisely to give autonomous administration to tribal groups in the Northeast to preserve their land and culture. This argument was also connected with the claims of Chakma 'illegal' immigration into Mizoram, which formed the main source of tension and conflict in the long run. At the same time, competition quickly arose among political parties who sought to secure political capital out of the alleged Chakma influx and discontent over the District Council. While the incumbent PC party zealously made efforts to identify and deport Chakmas considered an 'illegal' resident, and to dissolve the Chakma District Council, as it was also seen as enabling more such inroads, the Congress steadfastly opposed such exercises and urged the former to treat all inhabitants of Mizoram, especially the minorities, equally. Meanwhile, the MNF also protested the PC campaign against the Chakmas, not because they disagreed, but because they refused to let all the credit of checking infiltration and dissolving Chakma land go to them. To top it all, despite their objectives, the MNF took a reverse turn and promised to protect the interests of all minorities in their Peace Accord. This was reflected in the interim Mizoram government from 1986-89, jointly controlled by the MNF and Congress, where a resolution in the Assembly House seeking to abolish the Chakma District was defeated. From this observation, it has been argued that the ethnic issue had clearly become a subject of politicization and instrumental calculations for the political leaders and parties in Mizoram. Going back to the main theme of this work, it was also noted that creating such narratives and justifying the abrogation of Chakma homeland involved constant reference to the pasts that legitimized the present claims.

While denying Mizo's claims of 'illegal' influx, Chakmas established their native status in Mizoram by highlighting historical evidence that their homeland at the international border with Bangladesh was shifted to the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) in 1897 by the British for administrative gains. Chakmas also reasoned that ethnic violence during the MNF insurrection contributed to the Mizo's anti-Chakma

attitudes even after statehood. Due to memories of such recent pasts, even though there was no physical violence, the Chakmas were subjected to systematic discrimination and exclusion. They alleged that while in the past the MNF insurgents killed many of them and levied heavy taxes, the Mizo leaders continued to pursue a policy of denial and deprivation aimed at annihilating the Chakmas. Simultaneously, in addition to MNF's anti-Chakma policy and rhetoric, the Chakmas also attributed their primordial differences in culture, language, religion, etc from the Mizos, to the latter's discriminatory attitude and resentment. In mentioning how they never made gazetted officers in the state government, and how the Mizos welcomed the Lai and Mara Districts, while vehemently trying to dissolve the same for Chakmas, they expressed that ethnic issues also have something to do with cultural differences. Such observations, it is argued, indicate that there have been primordial factors at play. Thus, for the preservation of their cultural integrity and to counter Mizo discrimination and perception, as well as the state government's neglectful handling of development in their areas, the Chakmas made a case for territorial expansion and upgradation of the existing Chakma District.

In the post-statehood period, it is shown that the demand for upgrading the Chakma District into Union Territory (UT) status precipitated such a fierce reaction against the Chakmas that further polarized both the communities. The petition was also made explicit in a memorandum to Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 by a few Chakma leaders who also belonged to the Congress (I). The immediate reaction from the Mizos came in the form of the MZP movement in 1995, which turned the government electoral roll revision into an opportunity to expel the non-citizen Chakmas and others from Mizoram. When the Congress-controlled state government launched a foreigner detection and deletion drive, the MZP as a student body was allowed to monitor and aid the exercises. The MZP leaders and workers toured the Chakma area for a few months, prepared a comprehensive list of 'foreigners' and citizens, and urged the authorities to deport the alleged 'illegal' residents, mostly the Chakmas.

However, the government moved cautiously not to take extreme measures. Whereas, the opposition parties, including MNF, approved the MZP ways and adopted a hard-line 'anti-foreigner' stance. Chakmas strongly resented being subjected to MZP scrutiny. The strong anti-Chakma sentiment was widely believed

to have been instigated by the state government-approved MZP movement. The incumbent government promptly clarified that the Mizos were not against the Indian Chakmas, but were concerned about the continuing infiltration of Bangladeshi into the state, and that no non-state bodies were allowed to proceed unchecked in the roll revision exercise. In the end, the state removed as many as 15,000 names from the voter list. It was followed by media reports of violation of Chakma's human rights and arbitrary deletion of citizens from the electoral roll. It was learned that eventually many people were enrolled again, especially during the election time, while others were not. Most Mizos believed it was the initiative of the state government, but later steered into an ethnic issue by the MZP. Mizo residents in the Chakma area, while welcoming the MZP initiative, voiced their reservations about the agenda behind it. The activities of the government also demonstrated that it was involved in this venture for self-interest. It made an effort to maintain neutrality and a safe distance from the MZP actions, while swinging back and forth between facilitating and obstructing the latter. But it has also taken action amid growing pressure from opposition parties and powerful social organizations like the MZP, as well as public sentiment. For Chakmas, the state government and MZP were one entity in the exercise. They believed that all political and non-political organizations worked together in connivance with the state government to undertake a drive to remove Chakma voters from the electoral roll and deport them from Mizoram. They argued that due to the state sanctioned electoral revision drive, which was taken over by the MZP as the anti-Chakma movement, communal issues and tensions became more frequent and intense. From their perspective, there was also a political motive behind the entire movement and the anti-Chakma sentiments it instigated along the way. They expressed that what seemed like an ethnic and communal conflict was in reality something that politically motivated people incited for their own gain, alluding to the idea that it was a result of Mizo manipulation of ethnic identity and others. In maintaining that the Chakmas were mostly Congress voters since the formation of the Chakma District, they argued that the removal of Chakma voters from the electoral record might have been a political ploy to split up the Congress vote.

In response to these situations, the Chakmas through memoranda and petitions asserted that areas inhabited by Chakmas in a contiguous belt along the Indo-Bangladesh border had always been their ancestral homeland before they were

made part of Lushai Hills in 1897. Historicizing the past, they stressed that the current Chakma Council areas had never been under the rule of traditional Mizo chiefs. Chakmas, who were living outside the protection of the District Council, also appealed for unity with the rest of the population under one administrative umbrella, which was to be upgraded to Union Territory status. They criticized the Mizoram government, churches, political parties, and non-governmental and students' organizations, and accused them of being co-conspirators in attempts to get rid of the Chakmas from their homeland. However, the state government, in its replies to the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions, dismissed Chakma's demand for a single administrative unit and reiterated its position that no area of Mizoram territory was ever part of Chakma's ancestral land. In addition, the Mizo political parties and non-governmental organizations came together to oppose any proposal that sought to take away part of Mizoram and create Chakma land, and instead demanded dissolution of the existing one.

Within Mizoram, it is argued, the political aspirations of Chakma received suspicions from the Mizos. While the Mizos appeared to recognize that some Chakma were legitimate Mizoram residents and citizens, such recognition had not truly allowed Chakma's political ambition to expand. This brought to the fore the Mizo allegations of 'illegal' immigration and the agenda of abolishing Chakma District. The insistence on these issues was both a reaction to a real concern for continuing border infiltration and a way to downplay Chakma's political pursuit. It was assumed that the Chakmas' political demands and claims would not be legitimate, as long as the majority were classified as unauthorized 'foreigner'. However, for the Chakmas, their demand, which was prompted by the Mizo prejudice, was more than justified in their eyes, because they also lived in Mizoram for many generations, with or without immigration. Simultaneously, it is argued that addressing immigration by expelling all 'foreigners' or completely halting further infiltration, and political inclusion through formal citizenship, would not result in the social integration of Chakmas in the Mizo society. It was their political aspirations to secure ethnic homelands and an assertion of indigenousness, not only their growing population, that caused Mizo's anti-Chakma positions.

In the most recent tussle, the debate and claims over who is indigenous and non-indigenous in Mizoram upped the ante in the long-standing conflict. It is the latest manifestation of the Mizo-Chakma conflict. While the Mizo asserted themselves to be the only indigenous ethnic community based on the claim of being the original and native inhabitants of Mizoram, and denied the indigeneity of Chakmas on the basis of immigrant status. But, in contrast, Chakmas repudiated the Mizo claims and declared themselves a minority indigenous community based on history and their ST status in India. This work argues that the language and discourse of conflict changed gradually, from the accounts of 'illegal foreigners' to the questions of indigeneity, even though the two are inherently connected. Indigenous conflict was instigated in 2014 after the MZP proposed building an inn inside a Chakma village on the international border as a token of protests against a massive influx from Bangladesh. While drawing support from other Mizo civil bodies, the MZP proclaimed that Chakmas in Mizoram are not the indigenous tribe of the state, and that Mizoram belongs to the Mizos only, triggering another ethnic tension. This was further heightened by the CYMA's plan to conduct an ethnic-based census in connection with what they called unnatural growth of the Chakma population.

Indigenous questions were also exemplified in the context of the distribution of educational opportunities, in which the exclusion of Chakma students was justified in relation to their non-indigeneity. It once again opened up about the wounds of bitter experiences of ethnic hostilities a decade ago. In response to discrimination in the name of indigeneity, Chakma students' bodies and civil society organizations mobilized simultaneous protests in several places, while arguing that the Chakmas are indigenous to Mizoram through historical and political arguments. According to their viewpoint, the two charges – 'illegal immigrants' and non-indigenous status – were complementary and reinforced each other. Whereas, the 'foreigner' tag denied Chakmas the rights and privileges of citizens, the non-indigenous label downplayed the legitimacy of their political claims.

In analysing the indigenous conflict, while not denying that indigenous claims provided a powerful tool for the marginalized, this work also problematizes the other implications by showing how indigenous claims invite more polarization and conflict by allowing exclusivist politics of othering, especially by the dominant

and numerically strong groups. It is shown that the label of indigenous became instrumental in exacerbating and prolonging an ongoing ethnic conflict by providing new arenas, narratives and legitimacy for exclusion. When the Mizos proclaimed their indigenous status or emphasized the non-indigenousness of others, it was to refute similar assertions made by other ethnic populations. For the Chakmas, indigeneity was claimed and proclaimed due to strategic denial by the Mizo counterpart, and to negate the exclusivist idea that Mizoram belongs solely to the Mizos. In the context of Mizoram, this thesis demonstrates that indigeneity no longer entails a special status or rights, but a struggle for equality and sameness. What Chakmas intended to achieve through indigenous claims in this context was an equal treatment and fair distribution of resources and opportunities among all ethnic groups in Mizoram. Whereas, for Mizos, the lone indigenous standing in Mizoram was to maintain the status quo and keep ethnic competitors at bay. Thus, the term "indigenous" could be used not only by the dispossessed communities to demand rights and equality, but also by the dominant groups to drive out the others. For the Mizos, indigenousness buttresses their upper hand, suppresses the demands of minority groups, and thwarts their political ambition. Similarly, Chakmas weaponized it to counter the hegemony of the Mizos, and to push for equal rather than special positioning and fair distribution of power and resources, for it was realized that any attempt to radically alter the status quo was no longer a viable political solution. For them, the demand for recognition of authentic indigeneity, as it implies equal rights and distribution of benefits, holds the most potential for rightful and equal belonging not only as a legitimate citizen, but also as a recognized member of society.

The case of Mizo-Chakma conflict is an enduring and deep-rooted one in which ethnic identity and ethnic preservation gradually shape the directions of the conflict. However, ethnic consciousness and identification had not begun virtually out of nothing, as for instance, the "invention of tradition" tradition would have likely put it. Instead, identity construction requires solid history and explicit consciousness, or at least claims of its existence, to generate perception of oneself and their difference from others. It is in this process of ethnic identity making through history that this work traces the beginning of the conflict and establishes that the Mizo and Chakma identity, and hence, their conflict, is a creation of modern times that has its

basis and justification in the actual culture's past and political history, especially the colonial ones. Thus, in studying the Mizo-Chakma conflict, this work follows an approach of recognizing the instrumentality of the past to understand the present ethnic identity and conflict arising from that identity.

Apart from the instrumental reading of history, this thesis undertook an ethnographic work to understand contemporary ethnic problems. This enables the researcher to incorporate the subjective reality and perspectives of both community members. Primary data is collected from the field, mostly in Aizawl, the capital of the state, and Chakma Autonomous District Council areas, including Chawngte town. Other strategic sites were also visited for a brief period in between. Different sections of people from the two communities who have stakes in the issue, including students, student leaders, laymen, local politicians, civil society leaders, members of voluntary organizations, government officials, are engaged in this study. Between the field journey, another set of primary data is collected from the Mizoram State Archives and the CYMA library in Aizawl. They provided accessible materials of colonial era letters exchanged between officials, government orders, memos, notifications, tour reports, memoranda and petitions, and other such documents from the recent past. The use of this data and information allows for a nuanced approach to history. It is commonly known that the existing theories with which the researchers equipped themselves do not necessarily capture the reality of the situation, reflecting an inherent tension between theory and empirical condition as situated and experiential. In this connection, the researcher's experiences and findings in the field demand a revisit of the prevailing theories and conceptual framework in the study of ethnic identity and conflict. It was realized that neither pure primordialism nor sole instrumentalist interpretation can produce a full account of what is being studied. This work therefore strikes a balance between the two approaches. Thus, the main approach of this thesis entails the notion that the formation and consolidation of ethnic identity is an ongoing process open to revision and alteration. Similarly, ethnic conflict is also understood as the result of the manipulation or crystallization of ethnicity, which also makes it necessary to historicize certain pasts to encourage solidarity and mobilization.

As with most research works, this thesis is also subject to several limitations pertaining to the methodological matter, as well as the researcher's personal issues. Ethnography has traditionally been used as a method to study the 'others' and their culture. As a result, it indicates the division between 'foreign' ethnographers and 'local' ethnographers, who are supposed to study their own culture from within. This construction also implies that ethnographers are thought to study the alien culture of other people. Scholars have contested this 'insider/outsider' binary and questioned whether someone could ever be an authentic insider. In this context, the location of the researcher is limited or perhaps tricky, as ethnographic work in Mizoram amounts to studying one's own society. In connection, as a study of sensitive topics like ethnic conflict, this work can be problematized on the ground that the researcher, as a member of one of the communities being studied, might have carried cultural and political bias that can hamper the legitimacy of the work. As a subjective being, no one is ever free from such biases. However, when approaching the field, the researcher had put aside the embodied knowledge and presuppositions that might come from being an 'insider'. As ethnography demands, it was also made sure that the researcher reflected on the process of data collection and interpretation, as well as the social context of the field, and engaged with local interpretations by juxtaposing them with established theories and concepts.

Another limitation of this study concerns the nature and extent of sample selection. Ethnographic methods require participant observation, in which mundane conversations and interactions between the researcher and the subjects constitute data. As far as participation observation is concerned, this work could have been done better. Instead, it has to rely heavily on long, open-ended conversations, where the researcher usually encourages light discussion and gives enough space for the other to express opinion and speculate, rather than asking direct questions one after another. As fieldwork was conducted during the height of the global covid pandemic, most people would rather avoid having a conversation or engagement with a stranger, which made ethnographic work extremely difficult. This limiting condition greatly affects the size of the sample and direction of this work, and many of the major limitations of this work are attributable to it. Apart from Aizawl and Chawngte, only a dozen sites are visited for fieldwork within the constraints of time and lockdown related restrictions. In the fields, with the help of local informants, the interviewees

are selected on the basis of how well-informed and involved they are in ethnic issues. The research questions and assumptions also determine whom to have conversations with. It ultimately leads the researcher to prominent current and former members of the legislative branch, civil society leaders, student activists, intellectuals, and social activists, ignoring the perspectives of ordinary people. This may render the work less representative and reflect the narratives of the elites and leaders. However, given the fact that the Mizo-Chakma conflict is a long-established dispute, with all major points of discord widely known in the public, and that any ethnic issues involve the willing participation of both the leaders and the masses, the current ethnographic data can provide an accurate depiction. Moreover, it is also noted that while having conversation with the people or during observation in the field, there are saturation points in both Mizo and Chakma accounts and arguments, indicating the convergence of opinions of the elite and the masses. Throughout the fieldwork, the implications of gender, income, education or status differences of respondents are not taken into account, given the nature of the research questions and subject matter of the study. This constitutes another limitation of this work, which can be connected with earlier points. It is believed that, despite this exclusion, this research taps into adequate and appropriate resources to be as inclusive and comprehensive as possible. All in all, these 'limiting' methods do not compromise the explanatory capacity of this work and quality of the findings.

This thesis is an attempt to provide a comprehensive explanation and exploration of the Mizo-Chakma conflict in Mizoram. Even though a conflict like this is not uncommon in the post-colonial world, especially Southeast Asia, this work shows that any study of ethnic conflict warrants consideration of all kinds of historical and contemporary factors peculiar in their own context. That is, ethnic problems are complex and multifaceted, acquiring different characteristics and dimensions with the changes in socio-political circumstances. These dimensions and issues can only be addressed by acknowledging the insufficiency of the two major interpretations and the need to link the insights of the two approaches. Whereas this work tries to unpack the Mizo-Chakma conflict, further research, while building on the theoretical and practical implications discussed here, needs to focus on identifying the prospects of conflict resolution and peace-building, not only an occasional conflict management. Such projects should ideally include the participation of civil bodies and student

organizations, and the mutual understanding that co-existence in the same socio-political space is a common good for society. For instance, the first step in such a direction may take building and enhancing bridging social capital between the two groups, defined as social networks, norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness.

There has been ample literature and research on ethnicity and identity in the Indian context and other parts of the world. This thesis also draws from and builds on this existing literature, and at the same time problematizes and challenges some of the prevailing conceptual frameworks in the particular context of study, which is Northeast India. It acknowledges the difference in the focus of western and Indian subcontinental studies on ethnicity, and notes that ethnic discussions in India apply to the tribal and linguistic communities in the Northeast and other parts of the country. Because these people actively enunciated ethnic assertions. Thus, ethnicity and conflict studies in India are overshadowed by discourse on "tribes". To the extent that this is the case, this work is an attempt to contribute to the Indian debate on tribe and ethnic identity. One characteristic that ethnic groups share is that ethnic identity tends to concretize and acquire political relevance when it is challenged or dismissed by the state or the dominant community. Based on this observation, this work also emphasizes that in India, the interaction with not only the post-colonial but also the colonial state constitutes the identity of ethnic groups. This allows an analysis of the implications of colonialism in the formation of ethnic identity and sense of belonging. In this regard, it seeks to contribute to the present trend that conceptualization of ethnicity in India must incorporate these historical particularities and contexts.

It is well-acknowledged that in the study of ethnicity and conflict, there has always been a tension between primordial thinking and instrumental interpretations. This contradiction arises from the difference in the understanding of identity itself. A cursory glance at the contemporary interest in identities indicates that there was a tendency to emphasize the fluidity of identity and porousness of its boundary, combined with the idea that it is constructed arbitrarily out of nothing. However, others have also pointed out that the identity creation process involves both continuity and innovation, which had to resort to something in the actual cultural history. Taking these two into consideration, this thesis maintains that while instrumentalist theory must accept that shared histories and historical consciousness must be acknowledged,

claims of primordial identification cannot afford to disregard the role that certain contemporary factors played in their development. In this sense, this work aims to foreground theoretical frameworks in ethnic studies that seek to balance the seemingly contrasted positions of primordialism and instrumentalism.

Numerous works have been written about the concept of indigeneity, its global movements and evolution, as well as its criticisms and critiques. The goal of indigenous movements, discourses, and politics was to create the identity of minority ethnic groups who were prior occupants, non-dominant, culturally distinctive, and at the receiving end of the historical process and system of dominance on a global scale. It has become a powerful tool through which the marginalized resist their relation of oppression vis-à-vis the dominant groups. However, this work seeks to uncover the implications of indigenous claims in the context of ethnic conflict by drawing attention to the grounds on which the concept must be problematized. Thus, it is an attempt to draw attention to the idea that indigenous tags can have serious political repercussions. Similarly, there have been several existing scholarly and non-scholarly works pertaining to the two communities, their history and relationship, both by local and non-local writers. However, most of these studies are descriptive, dispersed, and lack adequate theoretical and conceptual structure, despite covering a wide range of topics. In the midst of these, this thesis is an attempt to give an extensive analysis of the Mizo-Chakma conflict through established frameworks and conceptualizations. In doing so, it connects all the pivotal moments in history and contemporary politics, and engages with additional primary sources and ethnographic materials grounded in reality. It is desired that this thesis is instrumental in bringing a new perspective and larger picture to the Mizo-Chakma discord, and finding the right step in the right direction towards the initiative of conflict resolution.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

STANDING ORDER NO.16 OF 1928

In future all foreigners including Coalas settled in this District will pay taxes as below:-

1. House Tax Rs. 5/- to Government.
2. Two Basket of Paddy or Rs. 2/- per annum/per house to the Chief if they have Jhum.
3. Rs. 2/- per annum to the Chief by those who keep cattle for trade in addition to usual crazing fee to be paid to Government

Date Aijal, the 16. Aug. 1928
Col- No. 1
File No. 8 of 1928

Sd/- C.G.G. HELME
Superintendent,
Lushai Hills.

Appendix B

Population of Chakma in Mizoram, 1901-2011 with a Decadal Growth Rate

YEAR	POPULATION	GROWTH PERCENTAGE
1901	198	-
1911	302	52.50%
1921	680	125.10%
1931	836	22.94%
1941	5088	508.60%
1951	15297	200.64%
1961	19337	26.41%
1971	22393	15.80%
1981	39905	78.20%
1991	54194	35.80%
2001	71283	31.53%
2011	96972	36.04%

Appendix C

CHAKMA SETTLEMENT IN THE SOUTH LUSHAI HILLS

The following principles will be observed in dealing with the Chakma (and Tripura) settlement and bastis in the South Lushai Hills: -

(1) Owing to the large number of Chakma now settled in South Lushai Hills, most of whom have considerable families, no further application for settlement will be considered but for the most exceptional reasons.

(2) No passes for now separate houses will be considered except where the applicant is.

   (a) The grown-up married son of a Chakma who has been settled for at least ten years in the Lushai hills.

   (b) The grown-up married grandson of such a settlers. In both these cases the applicant himself must be a permanent resident of the Lushai Hills. In both these cases the applicant himself must also be a permanent resident of the Lushai Hills. Passes for daughters will not be considered. If these marry outside Chakma, they must go to their husband's village. If they marry Lushai Chakma the husband will be covered by the rules above.

(3) The site of each Chakma bastes will be decided by the Chief in consultation with Karbari and will be reported to the Circle Interpreter. This site will not be changed without the permission from the Sub-Divisional Officer or Superintendent. The name of the Karbari with the location of the basti will be reported for record in this Office.

(4) The bastes shall consist of not less than 15 houses which are to be concentrated in a village site, or along a lawn which shall not be more than half a mile long. No dwelling houses shall be built outside this site other than Jhum houses, granaries etc.

(5) The Chakma will make and maintain throughout the year a footpath from their baste to the Chief's village.

(6) Chiefs will be responsible for the general control of the Chakmas in their ram (land). They will normally work through the Karbari who will be removable and the recommendation of the chief, if he is found to be either ineffective or of bad character.

(7) Mass movements of a whole or the large part of the baste from one chief's ram to another will require the sanction of the Sub-Divisional Officer or Superintendent. Individual shifting of houses and families will be allowed as n Lushai villages.

Dated Lungleh, Sd/- E.S. Hyde

The 21st March 1944 Superintendent, South Lushai Hills

Copy to: - Superintendent, Lushai Hills vide No. 173D/III-19 of 12.3.1944

Appendix D

Extraction from Inspection Note of the Superintendent, Lushai Hills on S.D.O's Office Lungleh.

CHAKMA AND TRIPURA REGISTER

No new passes are being issued. These people are foreigners and I do not see any reason why they should not pay tax at the foreigner's rate of Rs. 5/- each. Tax must be realised at this rate from 1950-1951. Mr. Hyde's order dated 21st March 1944 should be republished both from Lungleh and Aijal. All chiefs and C. I's (Circle Interpreters) should be asked to report the names of Chakmas and Tripuras who entered the District in violation of that order after 1944. The list must reach me by 31-1-1950. Any chief who does not report the infiltration of Chakma and Tripura to their ram will be dealt with severely. All the chiefs should be warned accordingly.

No. 10585G/11-7 of 2.12.49

Extract to officer i/c House Tax for needful.

For
Superintendent Lushai Hills

TELEGRAM (16)

SDO LUNGLEH STATE

10413 G REFER SWPDTS INSPECTION NOTES ON CHAKMA REGISTER STOP PLEASE SEND MR HYDES ORDER OF TWENTYFIFTH MARCH 1944 IMMEDIATELY

Superintendent

6.12.49

Appendix E

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
LUSHAI HILLS

STANDING ORDER NO. 5 OF 1954

It is hereby notified for information and strict compliance by all chiefs and headmen in the Lushai Hills district that no influx of Chakma and Tripuras will be allowed without the prior permission in writing of the Deputy Commissioner, Lushai Hills.

Serious notice will be taken if any chief/headman fails to report the names and particulars of new arrivals (Chakma and Tripuras) in his jurisdiction.

Sd/- K.G.R. IYER
Deputy Commissioner, Lushai Hills

Memo No. G.P. 21/54/52
Dated Aijal, the 2nd July 1954
Copy to 1) S.D.O Lungleh for information and necessary action.
2) All Chiefs/Headmen in the North Lushai Hills.
3) All residence C.I's of Aijal Sub-Division.
4) C.E.M Lushai Hills District Council, Aijal

Sd/- K.G.R. IYER
Deputy Commissioner, Lushai Hills

Forwarded by: -
D.S. Khongdup
Asst. to Deputy Commissioner,
Lushai Hills.

Appendix F

(Text of D.O. letter written by Brig. T. Sailo, ASM (Retd) Chief Minister Mizoram to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India on 14th June, 1982)

Dear Respected Prime Minister,

You will perhaps recall that during the height of agitation by the Assam students on foreign national issue you called all the Chief Ministers of the North Eastern States/Union Territories for discussion with you at your office in Delhi. This was some time towards the end of March 1980. During the course of the meeting, you asked us, the Chief Ministers, whether we also had the problem of foreign national issue. I replied to you that we did have live problem of foreign national issue in Mizoram, namely the influx of Chakmas from Bangladesh and the infiltration of Nepalese from Nepal. I further said that this problem greatly exercised the minds of the Mizo public as a whole. I also added that since you had so much problems on your hand then, I and my colleagues would try our best to persuade our people from launching an agitation on the issue of foreign nationals for the time being. By and large, we have succeeded in persuading our people from the idea of agitation but the issue is very live problem to our people who expect us to take up the issue through negotiations as early as possible.

I am now writing this letter to you on the issue of the influx of Chakmas of Bangladesh into Mizoram.

The Chakmas are Buddhist tribals from Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Chakma hill tracts directly borders Mizoram. The Chakma population is of the order of 6-8 lakhs (population of Mizoram today is about 4 lakhs).

During the British days that is, before 1947, Chakmas used to apply for permission to settle in villages bordering the then East Bengal (now Bangladesh). The British Government used to sparingly grant permission to the Chakma applicants to settle in the Mizo villages with a clear stipulation that they were the subjects of the hereditary chieftains of the villages. The total number of Chakmas permitted to settle in the Mizo villages up to 1947 was around about 3,000 approximately. After 1947, due to various reasons, there was a certain amount of relaxation or slackness in watching the entry of Chakmas into Mizoram on the border. In other words, the Chakmas kept on infiltrating into Mizoram over the years and Mizoram government were, to put it bluntly, negligent in that no real check was made.

In due course of time, the number of infiltrators became very big. Eventually, on account of certain 'political convenience of some politicians (vote catching game)' the Chakmas claimed to form a small district along the Mizoram-Bangladesh border which was conceded to. Thus, a strip of land of the territory of

Mizoram along the border has been made into a Chakma district, to accommodate foreign nationals. This is entirely wrong action on the part of the then authorities. And in course of time, more and more Chakmas infiltrated into Mizoram. The 1981 Census will possibly give a figure of 20,000-30,000 Chakmas as opposed to the 2 or 3 thousand odd Chakmas granted permission to settle in Mizo villages prior to 1947. This situation is ominous.

Recently Government of India had realised the possible consequences as a result of uncontrolled influx of Chakmas into Mizoram and have shown great attention to the local feeling and sentiments of the people of Mizoram in this regard by giving suitable direction to detect and push back any Chakmas who cross over to Mizoram. A fairly substantial number had been pushed back. The Government of India had directed that the Army units deployed in Mizoram for insurgency duty should be made responsible for detecting and pushing back of Chakma infiltrators. One BSF Battalion under the operational control of the Army is deployed along the border and is entrusted with the task of detecting and pushing back Chakma infiltrators.

The Security Forces deployed on the border are successful, though not entirely, in detecting and pushing back Chakma infiltrators. What the people of Mizoram are exercised and agitated about is the question of Chakma infiltrators in the recent past, say the last 10-20 years. Our people can perhaps reconcile themselves to the idea of accepting those Chakmas who came into Mizoram in the 40s and 50s but are greatly exercised about those who came into Mizoram in the 60s and 70s. Here lies the main issue.

Our people do not easily take to agitation but the fact is that they are greatly exercised about this issue.

I shall be grateful if you can have this matter examined at the appropriate level of the appropriate Ministry. I and my colleagues desire to meet you on this issue after you have got the matter thoroughly examined.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

(BRIG. T. SAILO)

Smt. Indira Gandhi

Prime Minister of India

New Delhi.

Appendix G

Pu Zahawm tak,

A hnuaia thu hi ngun taka ingaihtuah a, Pathian leh kan ram tan a pawimawh a ni tih hre renga zawm nghal turin ka han hriattir a che.

I hriat angin tunah hian MNF aiawh leh India Sawrkar chu inremna kawng zawngin hma an la mek a ni a; hemi ah hian MNF-ten an lallukhum rawn gawn ngei tur nia lang chu Chakma District Council thiah (dissolved) leh Chakma lo lut thar te hnawh kir lehna hi a ni a. Tunah hian heng thil te ti hlawhtling tur hian P.C. Party chuan nasa takin hma in la tih kan hriat in leh India Prime Minister hnenah Memorandum hian in lo thehlut ve a ni ith kan hriat hian MNF te hamthatna tur chuhpui tu ni ah kan ngai che u a. Chuvangin tun atang chuan hemi kawnga in hma lakna zawng zawng hi lo ti tawp ghal turin ka han hriattir in ka han ngen che a ni e.

Pathian leh Kan ram tan,

(AICHHINGA)

President Emissary

Dated Mizoram,

The 11th June 1982

Appendix H

AN APPEAL FROM THE PEOPLE OF THE CHAKMA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL TO THE HON'BLE LT. GOVERNOR OF MIZORAM CAMP CHAWNGTE

Most Trusted and Honored Sir,

We have the honor to lay the following a few points before your honor for favor of your patient hearing and sympathetic action.

EXTENSION OF CDC

(1) When the Mizoram Union Territory was an Autonomous District Council, the area consisting of the present Autonomous District Council viz Pawi, Lakher and Chakma was an Autonomous Pawi-Lakher Regional Council and the area of the present Chakma District Council was covered by the said Regional Council.

(2) After the Mizoram Autonomous District Council was upgraded to UT, the aforesaid Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was split into three District Councils and in the same course the Chakma District Council automatically came into being with effect from 29 April '72 along with two other Pawi and Lakher and for this reason the question of the other Chakma inhabited area in Mizoram did not arise for inclusion in this present CDC and since then it is left so.

(3) As provided in the Constitution of India and the Sixth Schedule there-to the other part of the Chakma area in Mizoram deserve the right of the enjoyment of an autonomous body like the present Chakma District Council, Pawi District and Lakher District Council.

(4) Demagiri (now Tlabung) is the main center of the whole Chakma populated area in Mizoram and this and the other part of the Chakma area which have been deprived of the right of autonomy contain more population than that of the present Chakma District Council area.

(5) Had the whole of the Chakma populated area in Mizoram been included in the Chakma District Council area there would have surely been obtain by now a betterment in culture, social, administrative and other self-determination aspects.

(6) It can not be denied that due to the separation of Chakmas in Mizoram our integrity in cultural and social aspect is facing a great threat whereas the benevolent government are very keenly interested in preservation and

improvement of social culture of the Schedule Tribes in the country, and this is the outcome of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

(7) As provided in Para 1 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution to your honor is the authority to extend the area of autonomous District Council and even to create a new District.

(8) The demand for inclusion of the rest of Chakma area in Chakma District Council has been placed since long to the government by the Chakmas both of the Chakma District Council and out of the Chakma District Council.

It is therefore earnestly prayed that in the light of special consideration of the items (1), (6) and (7) above your honor would be graciously pleased to extend the Chakma District Council area to cover the whole of the rest of the Chakma areas in Mizoram.

TRIBAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

As provided in the Para 4 of the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of India the constitution of a tribal advisory council in Mizoram is deserved. Hence, the government is requested to take action to constitute the aforesaid council.

ENHANCEMENT OF POWERS TO THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

(1) The Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram came into being as provided by the Constitution of India and the Sixth Schedule there to facilitate self determination of the Schedule Tribes in Mizoram.

(2) In Para 6 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Autonomous District Council are entitled to exercise the powers of establishment, management and control of primary education, dispensary, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads transports, water ways, forest, agriculture, animal husbandry, community projects, co-operative societies, social welfare, village planning and town planning. But till today, partly only 4 subjects viz, villages roads, forest, sanitation and water supply and primary education have been entrusted to the District Councils.

(3) The District Council authorities have been pressing the government since long for transfer of all subject to the District Councils. The jurisdiction in short are as follows: - (a) Without the functions of the PWD the subject in the name road communication is useless. So, the District Councils should be entrusted with PWD (b) Revenue Department is the authority over all lands of the District Councils. Hence, the agriculture lands and fishery ponds cannot be split from these lands. Hence agriculture and fisheries should be transfer to the District Councils (c) Forest and Soil conservation are twins and the local authorities are sure to know the best sources and ways of achieving the targets of soil conservation. Hence, the soil conservation should come under the District Council (d) Unless social welfare is entrusted to the District Council, the very aim of the Sixth Schedule become useless. Hence this should be entrusted to the District Councils (e) As regards establishment of dispensaries,

it is beyond argument that the medical aid is a must for all. Hence, this department also should fall under legitimate claim.

(4) The matter of enhancement of power has been placed before the government since 1979, and the issue is yet to be finalized.

Under the above, your honor is earnestly requested to take action to transfer the subjects of agriculture, PWD, medical, soil conservation, social welfare, co-operative societies, community projects, fisheries and animal husbandry to the District Councils.

Yours faithfully,

(P.S. Chakma)
Chief Executive Member

(J.K. Tongtungia)
E.M

(N.K Chakma)
Chairman

(A.C. Chakma)

(A.B. Chakma)
Deputy Chairman

Other six members of the District Council,
10.10.1983.

Appendix I

GOVERNMENT OF MIZORAM

POLITICAL AND CABINET DEPARTMENT

No: J-15011/6/91- POL

Dated Aizawl, the 8th July, 1991

To,

The President,

Chakma Jatiyo Parishad

C/o Chakma District Council, Kamalanagar, Mizoram

Subject: A Memorandum submitted to Prime Minister of India for creation of Union Territory for Chakma residing in Mizoram

Sir,

In inviting a reference to your joint memorandum submitted to the then Prime Minister of India on the above mentioned subject, I am directed to request you kindly to provide the following information to this department for further consideration.

(1) Area of the territory for which formation of U.T is demanded.
(2) Latest population figure as per 1991 Census.
(3) Break-up of population, community wise.

Matter most urgent.

Yours Faithfully,

Sd/- R.K. Singha,

Under Secretary to the Govt of Mizoram, Aizawl.

Appendix J

NO.H.11011/5/94-CEO

GOVERNMENT OF MIZORAM

DIRECTORATE OF ELECTION

Dated Aizawl, the 7th September 1994.

To,

The Electoral Registration Officer,

Aizawl/Lunglei/Chhimtuipui District.

Subject: Guidelines for determination of Foreigners and citizen thereof.

Sir,

It has been brought to my notice that there are some problems faced by our Enumerators/Supervisors while conducting house-to-house enumeration for enrolment of voters in the Electoral Rolls in regard to determination of citizenship and foreigners.

In this connection, I would like to inform you that for the determination of citizens, the Constitution of India which commenced on the 26th January 1950, should be used as factor, an extract copy of which is appended herewith for your further action and communication to all A.E.R.Os and Enumerators/Supervisors under your jurisdiction as quick as possible.

The implication of Article 5 of the Constitution of India is persons who was born in the Territory of India and whose parents who was in the Territory of India before 26th January, 1950 and their direct descendants are Indian citizens. However, persons who migrated to India after this date, may apply for citizenship to the appropriate authorities and if allowed, can also be citizen of India as per existing rules.

Yours faithfully,

Sd/- L. KAWLHMINGTHANGA

Jt. Chief Electoral Officer,

Mizoram: Aizawl.

Appendix K

MIZO ZIRLAI PAWL

General Headquarters: Aizawl, Mizoram

P.O. Box- 91 PIN:796001

Thupui: Tanrual hi Chakna a Ni

A MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA BY MIZO ZIRLAI PAWL (MZP) ON FOREIGNERS ISSUE IN THE STATE OF MIZORAM

This memorandum seeks to impress upon the Head of State, His Excellency, the President of India, Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, that nearly sixty thousand foreigner Chakmas are illegally staying in the territory of Mizoram, and that infiltration of foreigners into Mizoram from across the 700-odd kilometre long international border has become the real contextual social and political issue of the hour.

Mizo Zirlai Pawl is a non-political student body with the general headquarters in Aizawl. The MZP deemed it to be imperative to identify and locate who the foreigner Chakmas in Mizoram are, and accordingly conducted an intensive investigation and census on Chakma population during the months of May to August this year. The criteria used for determining legitimate Chakmas of India origin and that of foreigner Chakmas has been broadly based on whether or not (a) they are domiciles of India Territory on January 26th, 1950; (b) they are direct descendants of the Chakmas of Indian origin permanently settling down in the Indian territory of Mizoram; (c) they are direct descendants of the legitimate electors whose names were enrolled as voters in the electoral rolls of Mizoram published in 1952 and 1956; (d) they obtained citizenship of India from competent authority. Also, the MZP took pains in having examined the particulars of some members of the Chakma community whose claims of their Indian citizenship are doubtful by comparing their particulars as registered in the electoral rolls of Mizoram used for the previous elections to the State Assembly in 1984, 1987, 1993.

The census operation conducted by the MZP has revealed the alarming figure that there are, at present, as many as 58,789 foreigner Chakmas out of 60,893 Chakmas living in 117 villages of Mizoram. The population of Chakmas of Indian origin is 2104.

Now, furnishing herewith the list of foreigner Chakmas and the list of Mizoram Chakmas of Indian origin, the MZP implore the Head of State, His Excellency, Dr

S.D. Sharma, to share the burden of Mizo Students over the foreigner issue and appeal to the highest authority of the nation to intervene in the process for deportation of foreigner Chakmas from Mizoram State, for the action of which the MZP had earlier submitted representations to the government of Mizoram and also to the Union Home Minister, New Delhi.

(LALLIANZUALA RALTE) (R. VANLALVENA)

Secretary, Working Committee Chairman, Working Committee

Appendix L

Chief Secretary,

Government of Mizoram

Lalfakzuala IAS

Dt.28.7.95

THE CHAKMA ISSUE IN MIZORAM

As there appears to be an impression in Delhi and elsewhere that there are strong anti-Chakma sentiments in Mizoram, it is necessary to clarify the position.

Chakmas are Buddhist tribals who inhabit the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Mizoram has more than 300 Kms long international border with this Tract. During the period prior to 1947, the Chakmas used to apply for permission to settle in villages along the western border of Mizoram. The British government used to sparingly grant such permission to the Chakma applicants with a clear condition that they would be the subjects of the concerned chiefs of the villages. Up to the year 1947, there were about 5,000 Chakmas who were permitted to settle in Mizo villages. After 1947, due to the absence of proper arrangements to prevent their entry into Mizoram and the number of such infiltrators has now become very large. The following Census figure indicate the growth rate of Chakma population in Mizoram: -

1901	198	(Growth rate)
1911	302	52.5%
1921	680	125.1%
1931	836	22.8%
1941	5,088	508.6%
1951	15,297	202.3%
1961	19,327	26.41%
1971	22,393	15.8%
1981	39,905	78.2%
1991	80,000	100.4%

(The 1991 Census figures are yet not available. It is estimated that the actual Chakma population in Mizoram will be in the neighbourhood of one lakh. In their recent Memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Chakma leaders contended that there are 80,000 Chakmas in Mizoram).

The villages under the seven Development Blocks located along the border with Bangladesh have witnessed a very steep increase in population due to Chakma infiltration. Moreover, as many as 131 new villages which were not in existence prior to 1961 have come up in the western border of Mizoram and these are mostly populated by Chakmas. This is certainly due to large scale infiltration of the Chakmas from neighbouring Bangladesh during the last two decades.

The Home Ministry have informed the Government of Mizoram that the cut-off date for determining the status of Bangladesh foreigners for inclusion in the electoral rolls should be 25 March, 1971 as per the Indira-Mujib Agreement, and not 26 January, 1950. The State government is contesting this point. A copy of CM's letter dated June 30, 1995 to Union Home Minister is enclosed.

The Chakmas have been given an Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Mizoram is perhaps the only State in India where the Chakmas can say (and are saying) that they have a homeland. They have come out with a demand for Union Territory.

The fantastic growth of Chakma population in Mizoram and the failure of the authorities concerned to prevent their further influx into Mizoram have agitated the minds of many people in the State. Successive governments have made effort to remedy the situation but without much success. Political parties and students' and other organizations have made Chakma infiltration as an issue and they, by and large, get the moral support of the people. The State government is no less concerned with the matter. However, effective action not only to detect and push back the infiltrators, but also to prevent further infiltration is easier said than done. The Security Forces deployed on the border to prevent further infiltration are totally inadequate.

Recently, the State government has formed a Task Force in each District with Deputy Commissioner as its head for the purpose of detecting and pushing back foreigners (all foreigners). It may be noted here that apart from Bangladeshis, there are other foreigners including those from Myanmar. The Task Force comprises only officials. However, it accepts help from political parties and non-governmental organizations.

The State government would like to emphatically impress upon the Government of India that the Mizos are not against the Indian Chakmas. What they are concerned about is the continuing infiltration of Bangladeshi Chakmas into the State. It may be mentioned in this connection that the State government would not allow anybody to take law into one's own hands in detecting and deporting the foreigners.

The Chakma issue is real and pressing and concerns not only for the State of Mizoram but also the country at large. It is of vital importance that the issue is examined and appropriate measures taken to detect and repatriate the Chakma foreigners presently living in Mizoram and prevent their further infiltration. Government of India need to strengthen the hands of the State Government in this regard.

Appendix M

THE MIZO NATIONAL FRONT GENERAL HEADQUARTERS

ZARKAWT, AIZAWL- 796001, MIZORAM

MNF NO.5/96/31

April 15, 1996

The Chief Electoral Officer,

Mizoram, Aizawl

Subject: Inclusion of 1233 names in Chawngte (ST) Electoral Roll

Ref: Our No. MNF 5/96/30 April 8, 1996

Sir,

This is to say that the MNF Party is most unhappy over the recent inclusion of 1233 names in Chawngte (ST) Electoral Roll as against the prescribed manner.

On the occasion of the public procession organised in Aizawl today, April 15, 1996 by the MNF Party in protest against inclusion of 1233 persons in Chawngte (ST) Electoral Roll to be totally unacceptable. The persons concerned should not be allowed to vote during the Lok Sabha polls on the ground that no proper scrutiny was exercised by the ERO concerned regarding eligibility of these persons for inclusion of their names in Mizoram electoral rolls.

For and on behalf of MNF Party,

(LALKHAWLIANA)

General Secretary.

Copy to : 1) Chief Election Commissioner, New Delhi

2) Home Minister, Mizoram

Appendix N

Presented to Rajya Sabha on 23rd August, 1995

To,

The Council of States,

(Rajya Sabha)

New Delhi.

The humble joint petition of Smt. Snehadini Talukdar (Chakma) and Shri Subimal Chakma, voluntary social worker.

Sheweth: -

(MIZORAM)

1. That 80,000 Chakma tribals living in a contiguous belt along the Indo-Bangladesh border, covering the three Districts of Mizoram, namely: Aizawl, Lunglei and Chhimtuipui respectively have been inhabiting this ancestral homeland since centuries before 1892. This evidence of history is recorded in the Provincial Gazetteer of India, Volume V at p-413 and states:
   "The station of Demagiri (a Chakma concentrated place) is not situated within the present area of Chittagong Hill Tracts. But under Sir Charles Eliot's order passed in 1892, it was declared that for administrative purposes Demagiri should be considered to be a part and parcel of South Lushai Hills. The boundaries were revised and a strip on the east including Demagiri with population about 1500 was transferred to Lushai Hills."
2. That, although the 80,000 Chakma tribal population have been inhabiting in this contiguous area of Mizoram, they have been put under four separate administrative units- namely, Aizawl District, Lunglei District, Chakma Autonomous District Council and the Lai Autonomous District Council. As a result, the cultural, social and political unity of the Chakmas have been disrupted leading to gross underdevelopment of Chakma-inhabited areas.
3. That, disregarding historical evidences as mentioned earlier, the Mizos have been continuously depicting the Chakmas as doubtful foreigners and have

been undertaking attempts to drive out the Chakmas from Mizoram. As for instance, recently, the MZP (Mizo Students Union) in connivance with all political and non-political organisations and the Government of Mizoram are being active in deleting Chakma voters from the Electoral roll. After the recent enumeration work, more than 50% of the Chakma voters have been intentionally deleted in Tlabung, Buarpui and Chawngte assembly constituencies. That also back in 1991, 380 Chakma houses in Marpara, Hnahva, Sachan villages were burnt down causing tremendous hardship to the victims and their families, whereas no compensation was given to them.

4. That all Chakma inhabited areas are left outside the purview of development schemes taken up by the State Government. Consequently, there is not a single High School, not a single hospital and not one motorable road in the entire Chakma inhabited area in Mizoram.

Accordingly, your humble petitioners pray that: -

(FOR MIZORAM)

1. The ancestral homeland of the Chakmas bordering Indo-Bangladesh on the Western belt of Mizoram, and all the 80,000 Chakmas inhabiting therein, should be put in a single administrative unit and administered separately through a suitable Central Government agency such as Chief Commissioner/ Administrator etc.
2. All eligible Chakma voters should be enrolled in the Electoral roll and no Chakma should be treated as a 'doubtful foreigner'. Immediate security measures for the safety of the life and properties of the Chakmas may be undertaken by deploying impartial Central Forces in the Chakma inhabited areas of Mizoram.
3. A special development programme may be undertaken by the Central Government directly in context with the ongoing Border Area Development Programme (B.A.D.P) envisaged by the Government of India in the Chakma inhabited of Mizoram in that the area falls in the Indo-Bangladesh border and has been totally neglected by the State.

And your petitioners as are duty bound shall ever pray.

Name of Petitioner	Address	Signature
Mrs. Snehadini Talukdar	Kamlanagar	sd/-

(Chakma) P.O. Chawngte Mrs. Snehadini Talukdar

District Chhimtuipui 16.1.95

(MIZORAM), PIN 796770

Mr. Subimal Chakma Ashok Buddha Vihara sd/-

Old Power House Road Mr. Subimal Chakma

Rajghat, New Delhi-11002 16.1.95

Phone: 3253462

Countersigned by:

sd/-

SANGH PRIYA GAUTAM,

Member, Rajya Sabha

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