Chapter V

DEVELOPMENT OF ZOMI CONSCIOUSNESS
AMONG THE PAITE

People's self-definition of their collective ethnic identity may be very different from the way outsiders define them. While there were instances of communities accepting the outsiders' imposed nomenclature, there are also cases of contestation and/or rejection of such imposed names. Zomi is one such name in the trans-border areas of India and Myanmar propagated by the Zo communities, which were opposed to accepting the externally imposed identities and sought for. Etymologically, the term Zomi is derived from two words ‘Zo’ and ‘mi’. While the term ‘mi’ stands for ‘people’, the term ‘Zo’ is interpreted as the ancestor of Zo peoples. Consequently, the Zomi are viewed as the descendants of Zo (that is Zosuante / Zofate / Zatate). In other words, Zomi are those linguistic and cultural groupings of people who believe in commonly inherited history, tradition and culture of the ‘Zo’ and Zomi as their collective name. Many Zo intellectuals argue that the Zo people have almost forgotten their ‘Zo’ primal identity because of the subjugation, segmentation, and division of their territory during the colonial period. The Zo people who resided in the trans-border area of India and Burma are known in Burma as Chin and are called Kuki in India. Lushai took the place of Kuki for people of the Lushai Hills during the British rule. The hyphenated term

1 Another interpretation of the term Zomi (Mizo) is Hillman or highlanders where the term ‘Zo’ is taken to denote hill and ‘mi’ stands for ‘people’.

Chin-Kuki or Chin-Kuki-Lushai were used to refer to these culturally, linguistically, and ethnically related people. Even though the Zo communities accepted these names for sometimes, some started rejecting them even during the British times. As H Kamkhenthang noted, “at one time Kuki and Chin were used as a force of identity. People identified themselves willy-nilly either as Chin or Kuki or Lushai in order to be accepted in military services before India and Burma got independence”.

The communities that have rejected outsiders’ given name asserted what the people called ‘their genuine and true identity’. In the hills of Manipur, rejecting outsider’s given names, the Zo communities such as Paite, Vaiphei, Zou, Simte, Mate, Kom, and other accepted the generic name Zomi.

In ‘A Historical Study of the ‘Zo Struggle’, published in Economic and Political Weekly, 2010 David Vumlallian Zou writes, “Though the etymology and precise meaning of ‘Zo’ or ‘Zomi’ still prove illusive within academic debate, that it is an indigenous or a ‘national’ ethnic name has been well accepted. It is quite a different matter that some local scholars question the inevitability of adopting an indigenous term than colonial names like Chin and Kuki”.

Constructing Zo-ness

In Manipur, a number of scholars and writers have considered the dominant attitude of the Thadou speaking community as one reason for rejection of Kuki by the Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Lusei, Kom, Anals, and others. In William Shaw’s book, The Notes

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4 The people of the then Lushai Hills (present day Mizoram state) have also successfully refuted foreign ascribed Kuki-Chin-Lushai term by an indigenously evolved generic term Mizo.
on Thadou Kukis, published by the Asiatic Society in 1929, the writer propounded the supremacy of the Thadou over other Kuki tribes. Shaw’s idea of Thadou dominance over other tribes appears to be based on Jamkinthang Sithlou’s book, Under the Wings of Thadou.\(^6\) In the year 1942, chiefs of all Zo tribes held two meetings - one at Mongon village in June 26 and another one at Thanlon village in August (both in Churachandpur district). The participants strongly condemned the remark made by Shaw. Again, the Khuga Valley Chiefs’ Conference of June 28, 1947 denounced the term Kuki on the ground that it was not their forefather’s name.\(^7\) Writing about the prevailing situation of the time, Rev. S Prim Vaiphei in ‘Who Are We / Who We Are?’ states, “During the 1950s, while I was still a young boy, I heard that many social and political leaders tried to bring unity among these Kuki-Chin tribes and many new nomenclatures were proposed...Frankly speaking, all these names were proposed to oppose the name Kuki because the Thadou speaking group regard this name Kuki as their own. Some of the leaders even used the word ‘Kuki Siki’, Kuki-Makhai (pseudo Kuki, half Kuki) to refer the non-Thadou speaking community”.\(^8\) According to Chinkholian Guite, different sub-tribes felt that they were being neglected and controlled and their leaders were always drawn from the dominant Thadou community. Moreover, the other smaller communities believed that the Thadou who are in majority enjoyed all privileges given to them by the government.\(^9\) In the words of Bhagat Oinam, the smaller other communities resented the


\(^8\) S Prim Vaiphei, ‘Who Are We / Who We Are?’, in H Kamkhenthang, S Prim Vaiphei, et.al (eds.), op. cit., p. 22.

big brotherly attitude of the Thadous. Apart from the above factors, some other reasons also led to Zo consciousness.

**Paite Elites and Politics of Zomi Unification**

The British exercised some control over the hill areas of Manipur inhabited by various Naga and Zo tribes after the princely state of Manipur was taken over by the British in 1891. By 1890 the British took full control of the Chin-Lushai Hills and divided the territory into three units. The Chin Hills with headquarters at Falam was kept under the province of Burma. Initially the Lushai Hills was divided into two administrative units viz. North Lushai Hills and South Lushai Hills. While the North Lushai Hills with the headquarters at Aizawl was kept under the province of Assam, the South Lushai Hills with headquarters at Lunglei was kept under the province of Bengal administration through Chittagong. Later, the British thought of bringing the Chin and Lushai Hills under one administration when they realized that ethnologically the Chin and the Lushai were the same. Subsequently the issues of governance and unification of all Zo people inhabited areas were discussed in the Chin-Lushai Conference held at Fort William in Calcutta from January 25-29, 1892. However, no decision could be taken to bring together all ethnically and culturally related Zo tribes under one administrative

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umbrella. Yet, the Calcutta Conference of 1892 did help in rousing the political consciousness of the Zo people to initiate struggles in pursuit of the Zo unity.  

With the growth of Zomi identity assertions, a number of organizations clamoring for Zo solidarity have come up from time to time. In Manipur, Kuki National Assembly (KNA) formed in 1946 attempted to bring solidarity among the Zo communities such as Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, etc. However, KNA leaders failed in their pursuit as the Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Gangte, Koireng, Kom and others rejected to identify themselves as Kukis. Instead, recalling their common myth of origin from the mythical cave ‘Khul’, the Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Kom, and others formed Khulmi National Union (KNU) in 1948. Though ‘Khulmi’ idea received popular support for some time, it could not survive long. Aheibam Koireng Singh writes that the unification process under the nomenclature ‘Khulmi’ received a fatal blow, as it was not granted recognition by the Government of India in 1951. According to Zarzolien, the main reason was the breaking away of the Paite and Hmar from the Union on the question of language. The breakdown of KNU was followed by the formation of independent and distinct ethnic political organizations by the communities. Each ethnic organization began to project their shade of distinctiveness in dialect, dress, dance, custom, culture and so on. Some of the communities even appended the term ‘national’ in their organization’s name.

14 The first Zo people movement for a unified ‘Zo nation’ was witnessed in the then Lushai Hill (present Mizoram state in India) during the 1940s and during the 1960s.  
15 The ‘Khulmi’ concept evolved out of their belief in their common origins from mythical cave named ‘Khul’. The Lusei called this mythical cave as ‘Chhinlung’, and the Hmar named it ‘Sinthung’.  
16 The Thadou-Kuki did not join KNU.  
During the last part of the 1950s, Paite National Council (PNC) adopted a resolution in favor of ‘Chin Re-unification’ and sought integration of various Zo people of India and Burma. The PNC Annual General Assembly held at Hanship village, Lamka on October 10-13, 1957 arrived at a political resolution to pursue ‘Chin Re-unification’ as the long-term objective of PNC. In pursuance of the resolution arrived at its General Assembly held at Mualnuam village from February 6-8, 1960, PNC submitted a memorandum to the Indian Government on May 30, 1960. The memorandum was entitled “Re-unification of the Chins of India, Burma and Pakistan under one Country”. The memorandum claimed that Chin include over thirty ethnically, culturally, linguistically related tribes inhabiting in trans-border areas of India and Myanmar and Kuki is only a sub-group of the Chin. The memorandum requested the Government of India to take initiative to bring in all Chin inhabited areas of India, Burma and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) within one country in order to safeguard the socio-political, cultural and economic rights of the people. In 1959, Tunkhopum Baite of Panglian village, Lamka, Manipur formed Chin Liberation Army (CLA). L Lam Khan Piang noted that the CLA was synonymous with what Maloy Krishna Dhar mentioned as the Paite Liberation Front. To begin their activities, CLA attacked and captured the police stations in Sugnu, Lamka, and Singngat (all in Churachandpur district, Manipur) and hoisted their flag at each sub-divisional office in January 1963. Even though a number of Paite joined CLA, the PNC leaders in Manipur gradually distanced themselves from the

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20 The memorandum was submitted during the PNC’s Presidentship of T Goukhenpau and its Chief Secretary then was S Vungkhom.
22 Cited in L Lam Khan Piang, op. cit., p. 212 (footnote).
activities of CLA. B K Dasgupta writes, “The Paite leaders are not much enthusiastic about the idea of ‘Chinhood’, ... Now the Paite leaders and the office bearers of the PNC tell us that they are not to be called ‘Chin’ or Kuki’.” 23 The community leaders feel that their interests would be better served by upholding their own group identity rather than by merging themselves with bigger and similar groups.

It is important to point out that during the same period in the Lushai Hills (present Mizoram state), Mizo National Front (MNF) also launched unification movement under the leadership of Laldenga. MNF fought to integrate all Zo people inhabited areas of India, Burma and Bangladesh under one administrative unit. In January 1966 Tunkhopum and some CLA leaders - Suakdam Galte (President, Paite National Council, Sialkal block, Mizoram), Hang Khawkan (General Commander, CLA) and Lamkhawsiam (Southern Commander, CLA) from India side had a meeting with MNF leaders on January 15, 1966 in Sihphir, Lushai Hills. In the meeting, Tunkhopum and Laldenga agreed to help each other in their endeavors. Laldenga wanted the CLA to take on the Government of India. However, Tunkhopum declined by saying, “the Government of India is very powerful to be defeated” and told Laldenga, “We will camp at Sialkal ranges and do not disturb us”. 24 According to the agreement of the meeting, CLA would help MNF with arms and ammunitions. The same year, Tunkhopum and some of his men started from their Lamka camp and went to East Pakistan to acquire some arms and ammunitions for the newly recruited CLA cadre. However, MNF ambushed them at Aiduzawl (Aizawl) and kept the leaders under their

24 Cited in L Lam Khan Piang, op. cit., p. 4.
custody. After one year, Tunkhopum was killed. Describing the events, C G Vergese and R L Thanzawna noted in their book, *A History of Mizos*, “Some armed clashes took place between the Paites and the Mizo National Army (MNA). Twenty volunteers of PNC were captured by MNA. Six PNC volunteers, including the PNC Secretary Suakdam of Teikhang, east of Khawdungsin (in Mizoram) were said to have been killed by the MNA in May 1967. A dozen of volunteers were also killed by the MNA at Mimbung northeast of Teikhang. These killings were aimed to stop anti-MNF activities”. Some who could escape from the MNF attack ran to Lamka, mourned the death of their leaders and shunned the dreams of liberating their homeland. This incident created a strong resentment against the MNF and the Zo activists of Lamka, Manipur appealed to the Government of India for help. After fighting against the Indian Government for more than a decade, MNF signed the Mizo Accord in 1986. As L Keivom writes in ‘Towards Zo Unification’, “The political dust kicked up by the MNF movement in 1966 settled with the grant of Statehood...the euphoria the new status has created soon waned and evaporated...Mizoram has begun to slowly abandon its role model as a forerunner of Zo integration and has become less and less accommodating”.

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29 With assistance of Indian government, the Zo people such as Paite, Zou, Vaiphei, etc joined Village Volunteer Force (VVF) popularly known as Home Guard, whose main task was to fight the Naga and Mizo insurgents of the 1960s.
The 1970s and early part of 1980s again witnessed Zo unification movement. This time Zomi National Congress (ZNC) founded in 1972 by T Gougin at Daizang village, Lamka, was at the forefront of the movement. The declared aims of ZNC were "to inculcate a sense of Zomi nationalism among the people of Zoland and for this purpose, to organize a political platform from the village level strictly based on principles and discipline, and to fulfill the above, it shall be the prime duty of ZNC to pull down the communal barriers that obstruct the Zomi unity and to ensure that the liberty, equality and fraternity for all the Zomis by enlightening the people through education and extensive tours; to guarantee that Zomi nationalism has within itself as its contents the institution of a social democracy sans poverty and inequality, and pledge to establish a free and democratic state called Zoland so that every Zomi has a) the liberty of every individual growth, b) freedom of expression and c) the right to sue for justice and the right to join a government of his choice (sic)".\(^3^1\) According to T Gougin, "The birth of ZNC was necessary for the political salvation of all the Zomis (known by others as Kuki, Chin and Lushai)...whose ultimate goal was nothing less than their political emancipation and the reunification of all the Zomis".\(^3^2\) The ZNC organized volunteers drawn from different Zo communities. ZNC began its political campaign from the villages in Lamka district and gradually expanded their activities to Lamka town, the district headquarters. The organization submitted memorandum to the Government of India in 1972 and 1982 wherein they stated their political objective of Zomi unification and sought the help of India to achieve its goals. It become a sort of mass movement and reached it highest peak in the middle of the 1980s. In a meeting that he had with

Laldenga on May 5, 1982, Gougin advocated Zomi (Zo people), while Laldenga insisted that Mizo (people of Zo) is a better choice.\textsuperscript{33} Sharing his views on the Mizo-Zomi semantic continuum F K Lehman of the University of Illinois (USA) said, "... between Zomi and Mizo, I cannot think what to say. Their meanings are identical, clearly." On the little acceptance of Mizo outside Mizoram, the possible explanation as given by F K Lehman is the 'unavoidable overtones of Mizo dominance' - linked, in turn, to the past prestige of Sailo chiefs.\textsuperscript{34} At its special assembly held on July 8-9, 1983 at Zoveng, Lamka ZNC arrived at a political resolution that read, "Resolved that all Zomis should live together under one administrative umbrella with the protection and care of Indian Union".\textsuperscript{35} The resolution was moved by S Thangkhangin Ngaihte, the General Secretary of ZNC. In a show of strength and as one of its campaign strategy, the ZNC launched a twelve-day long march from Sipuikawn to Lamka town (265 km). Writing on the ZNC movement, Gougin wrote, "We move on under the banner of Zomi. So long as one Zomi survives on earth, the slogan of Zomi reunification will be sounded no matter who perish".\textsuperscript{36}

In spite of the euphoria, popularity, and high drama of Zomi movements, ZNC could not achieve their political goals and began to lose its popularity in due course. After the initial excitement died down in Manipur, the ZNC had a new lease of life as its Burma chapter commenced in 1988.\textsuperscript{37} In Burma ZNC had successfully contested election as a regional political party even though it was short lived. It may be noted that a short-

\textsuperscript{33} David Vumlallian Zou, 2010, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61.  
\textsuperscript{34} F K Lehman, cited in \textit{Ibid.}, p. 61.  
\textsuperscript{35} Cited in T Gougin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 244.  
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 249.  
\textsuperscript{37} David Vumlallian Zou, 'The Role of Literature in Nation Building: The Case of Zo People', in \textit{Prism of the Zo People}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 11.
lived democratic government was installed in Burma in the year 1988. On December 6, 1988 ZNC Burma proclaimed Zomi to be the racial identity of the people known as Chin in Burma. The last paragraph of ZNC Burma Declaration read, "...We proclaim that the racial name Chin should be done away with and Zo must be reinstated to its proper place and status of racial identity." ZNC was also instrumental in organizing the 'First World Zomi Convention' held at Champhai, Mizoram from May 19-21, 1988 where representatives from Mizoram and Manipur participated. One of the outcomes of the Convention was a declaration that reads, "We, the people of Zo ethnic group, inhabitants of the highlands in the Chin Hills and Arakans of Burma, the Chittagong hill Tracts of Bangladesh, the Mizoram state and adjoining hill areas of India are descendants of one ancestor. Our language, our culture and tradition, and no less our social and customary practices are clear evidences of the ethnological facts. Further, our historical records, and footprints both written and unwritten in the sands of time testify to the truth of our common ancestry...".

Although many among the Paite lent their support to the activities of ZNC, there were also forces of opposition within the community. According to H Kamkhenthang, while accepting the term Zomi, there was an organizational misunderstanding between ZNC and the then leaders of PNC. He also noted that all Paite were not loyal to PNC or to ZNC. In the interviews that the author conducted, some Paite elites mentioned that the strained relationship between the two organizations was mainly because of election

39 For details, refer, Khup Za Go, ibid., pp. 177-179.
politics of the then leaders of PNC and ZNC. Community organizations such as PNC were initially motivated by electoral politics. When the ZNC also contested election directly, it faced stiff challenges from the existing tribe-based organizations. It was also pointed out that the then PNC leaders lacked the political vision for Zo unification as they were driven by their narrow community interest. Lack of consultations between the two organizations at that time was another reason for misunderstandings. The PNC leaders felt sidelined as they were not consulted or informed sufficiently. However, as one person noted, “Given the widespread nature of its movement, ZNC had become a clear threat for the erstwhile leadership of PNC. Even though there are many Paite supporting the ZNC and its policy, they all succumbed to the threat and onslaught of the erstwhile PNC”.

According to the ZNC sources, PNC leaders opposed Zomi movement launched by it because of narrow communal politics. It was further pointed out that had the PNC leaders had the vision and concern for the Paite people, they would have supported ZNC. PNC leaders on the other hand asserted that PNC was not against Zomi and that they always stood for unification of various communities that have shared common customs, traditions and culture under a commonly acceptable nomenclature. The PNC source cited the general discussion that it had on nomenclature at its Annual General Assembly in the year 1982 and the resolution it had taken to accept in principle that all

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41 These views are expressed by Paite elites. Interviews are conducted by the author from December 2007-February 2008.
42 For details, refer, letter of S Thangkhangin Ngaihte, the General Secretary of ZNC, titled, ‘Zogam Itna Laikhak Khatna’ (in a booklet), distributed by Zomi National Congress Party, Headquarters at its Party Congress, Behiang (T), Singngat Block, Lamka, September 8-10, 1985, pp. 2-3.
43 Inaugural speech of T Phungzathang, General President, Paite National Council (in a booklet) at its General Assembly held at Lungchin Village, Singngat Subdivision, Churachandpur, Manipur, February 19-20, 1986, p. 5; also see leaflet of Paite National Council (Information Wing), Headquarters, Lamka, February 17, 1986.
the hill tribes should have a common political platform.\textsuperscript{44} It also pointed out that before a common political platform was formed, there was the need to hold consultative meetings among the different stakeholders.\textsuperscript{45} Despite such differences of opinions, one fact was certain that the Zomi movement launched by ZNC had succeeded in arousing pan-Zomi consciousness in the minds of the general masses. As T Chinsum Naulak rightly put it, "the emergence of Zomi National Congress can be considered as the beginning of Zomi nationalism among us (read Paite)".\textsuperscript{46}

The 1990s again saw the resurgence of Zomi nationalism as a potent force in the trans-border area of India and Burma. This time, Zomi Re-unification Organization (ZRO) professing to reunify the ethnified 'Zo nation', formed in 1993 at Phapian (Kachin state) of Burma was at the forefront of the movement. Its armed wing Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) recruited cadres from different Zo communities of India and Burma. The political situation of the 1990s in the hill areas of Manipur provided an opportunity to Zomi leaders of Manipur to pursue Zo unity. The Kuki-Naga conflict (Manipur) that broke out in 1992 had uprooted and displaced many Naga and Thadou-Kuki villagers. The conflict made the Zomi leaders feel that their political survival depended on their ability to unite different Zo communities. The feeling of insecurity they experienced as individual tribes / communities compelled the Zomi leaders of Manipur to come together under a common political platform.\textsuperscript{47} In this context, the

\textsuperscript{44} PNC Annual General Assembly held at Tuithapi village, Churachandpur 1982, cited in T Phungzathang, \textit{ibid.} p. 5.
\textsuperscript{45} For detail, refer, T Phungzathang, \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{47} These views are expressed by Paite elites. Interviews conducted by the author from December 2007-February 2008.
remark made by T Gougin, in his booklet, *Discovery of Zomi Resurgence*, is worth noting: “Whether Zomis shall sink in or swim across the storming sea of the modern world will depend on their ability to unify the scattered Zomis here and there into one single family or one nomenclature on the basis of their blood relationship and ethnical oneness... The word Zomi is not so selfish as we, who are still the slaves of selfishness... When we like to come under the name Zomi, we can think of bigger aims, bigger plans...”.

The ZRO aims to achieve geographical, political and cultural/social reunification of the Zo people of India and Burma. The preamble of ZRO reads, “We, the indigenous Zomi ethnic group once a free people having a country of our own, but now divided by international and national boundaries of India, Burma and Bangladesh with no political future, have solemnly decided to launch a struggle for reunification...”.

In the words of K Guite, founder President of ZRO, “a land or people which were once a union need to be unified... A broken nation need to be patched up. Hence, re-unification, the big task of re-unifying the Zomis and the land they occupied thereof is the main aim of this organization”. To L Lam Khan Piang, “the organization was formed on the principle that if others armed with sophisticated weapons laid claim even to one’s hearth and home, and yet one did not have any proper means to safeguard, then one cannot help but arm oneselfs”. The ZRO issued its first press note on August 1993. The press note reads, “…we are Zomis not because we live in the highland or hills, but we are Zomi and called ourselves Zomi because we are the descendants of our great ancestor Zo / Zou / Zhou... The Bengalis then the Britishers called us Kukis in India, but

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48 T Gougin, cited in T Chinsum Naulak, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
49 For detail discussion on ZRO, its organizational structure, aim and objectives, etc. refer *The Indigenous Zomi*, edited and published by Information and Public Relation Department, Zomi Re-unification Organisation, Ciimnuai, 2005, pp. 109-125.
50 K Guite, cited in T Chinsum Naulak, *op. cit.*
we are not and we don’t call ourselves so. Therefore, it is an imposed name, not from within. The Burmese, then the Britishers called us Chin in Burma and the name foreign to us. We know best who we are and what we are. So, Zomi is the name by which we called ourselves. The name was passed on to us by none else, but our great great ancestor, Zo...This is our appeal...We are not two, but one under Zomi. Let us wake up, and join hands for the geographical, political and social reunification of the already divided Zos...Come forward with your clear vision, your might, your money and your whole being to build a unified Zogam / Zoland / Zoram. Come and join ZRO with your identity for it is ZRO alone, which gives equal respect to all Zomi tribes, big or small. It is ZRO, which guarantees to protect, safeguard and preserved every tone of language. Unity in diversity is the guiding principle of ZRO...It is an organization committed to Zomi Re-unification (sic)”.^2

As the rhetoric of unification reverberated among the educated, intellectuals and enlightened masses, the Zomi Co-ordination Committee meeting held at Pearsonmun village, Lamka attended by different recognized Zo tribes of Manipur viz Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Gangte, Simte, and Zou came out with a resolution, which read: “In continuation of Zomi movement, the members felt the necessity of having a common identity with which all tribes can identify themselves without any reservation or hesitation for unity, solidarity and safety. The leaders present, therefore, adopted the name Zomi for common identity which will take immediate effect from today (sic)”.^3

^2 ZRO: An Appeal, Publicity Wing, Zomi Re-unification Organization (ZRO), Ciimnuai, Zo land, August 9, 1993.
The PNC gave recognition and support to ZRO in the year 1994. Resolution five of the Chief Executive Council (CEC) meeting of PNC dated January 10, 1994 reads “Recognizing that it is necessary for the achievement of its long-term policy of ‘Chin Reunification,’ PNC declare its recognition and support to ZRO”. Again, resolution 4 (i) of PNC’s CEC meeting of February 14, 1996 accepted Zomi to be its nomenclature. Different apex Zomi organizations such as Zomi Council (ZC), Zomi Students’ Federation (ZSF), Zomi Youth Association (ZYA), Zomi Mothers’ Association (ZMA), Zomi Human Rights Forum (ZHRF), Zomi Economic Planning and Development Agency (ZEPADA) also emerged one after another.\(^54\) With the formation of ZC in 1997, PNC becomes one of the constituent members of ZC.\(^55\) Formally subscribing to the idea that Paite together with other cognate Zo tribes / communities form the ‘Zo nation’, the 48\(^{th}\) General Assembly of PNC of June 27, 2003 rechristened itself as Paite Tribe Council (PTC) vide resolution No. 5.\(^56\) In ‘Paite Nam Lailam Politics’, John K Ngaihte writes that the international boundary runs cutting their traditional territory. By the time they become conscious of their status, they found themselves living in two separate countries, India and Burma. But the fact is that in terms of identity, clans and language they are same people, and now they have accepted Zomi as their nomenclature.\(^57\) Writing on the renaming of PNC to PTC, H Nengsong, former President of PTC writes that when PNC

\(^{54}\) With the formation of different Zomi organizations, the apex organization of different Zo communities of Manipur becomes the constituent members of Zomi organizations.


\(^{56}\) This resolution was taken during the Presidentship of Pu H Nengsong. The PNC’s 48\(^{th}\) General Assembly dated June 27 2003 changed the name of PNC to PTC.

was formed, Paite leaders had a very broad conception of Paite that would include Zou, Simte, Vaiphei, Gangte and others living in Manipur and the Chin Hills. However, when the Government of India recognized twenty-nine tribes of Manipur in 1956 including Paite, Simte, Gangte, Vaiphei, Zou, they all gained equal legal and political status.\(^58\) As no individual Zo tribe could become a nation, it was necessary to make alliance with other tribes. The feelings of insecurity as individual tribes and instincts of survival compelled the leaders to assert their common ethnic identity. In a way, it amounted to embracement and acceptance of their primal identity deeply rooted in the social and cultural milieu of the people.\(^59\)

On December 18, 2004 Zomi leaders of Manipur issued a press communiqué in one Lamka based vernacular newspaper that reads “We, the undersigned tribe leaders, representing our own tribe declare … with a distinctive sincerity and conviction, Zo is our own common ancestor… it is the duty of every Zo descendant to strive for the re-unification of the Zo descendant ethnically, emotionally and geographically… the Zo descendants’ having a separate political status of our own within the Indian Union is a mandatory; the different clans and tribes within Zo nomenclature enjoying an equal status is our unique glamour… organizing movement in the name and style of a particular tribes or clan is inharmonious and deviating from the Zomi National Movement and

\(^{59}\) These views are expressed by Paite elites. The interviews conducted by the author from December 2007-February 2008.
interest... (sic)". The Cabinet meeting of ZC held on March 16, 2005 endorsed this declaration under Resolution 1.

Kuki-Zomi Conflict

Even though Zomi identity and its political movements was initially articulated to include all Zo (Kuki-Chin) communities, political conflicts and competition in Manipur compelled Zomi as a political platform for the non-Thadou-Kuki speaking Zo communities in Manipur. The idea of Zomi as something opposed to Kuki received wider audience during the Kuki-Zomi conflict of 1997. The Kuki-Zomi conflict had widened the gap among the ranks of Zo nationalists of Kuki advocators and Zomi protagonists. The conflict had uprooted and displaced a number of people from both the communities. Scholars like T T Haokip, Bhagat Oinam, Aheibam Koireng Singh see the conflict as largely the outcome of Kuki-Naga conflict of 1992. According to T T Haokip, displacement of Kukis to Sadar Hills and Churachandpur district because of the Kuki-Naga conflict resulted to a spin-off conflict between the Kuki and the Zomi. The Kukis claimed that during the height of Kuki-Naga conflict, the Zomis instead of supporting them, maintained closer relations with the Nagas. In T T Haokip’s view, the apprehensions of the Zomis that the displaced Kukis would dominate and subjugate them

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60 All Presidents of the constituent tribes of Zomi signed the press communiqué. Refer, Manipur Express, Lamka, December 18, 2004.
62 Sadar Hills is a sub-division in Senapati district, Manipur.
in various ways was the real cause for Kuki-Zomi tensions. Similar argument was presented by Bhagat Oinam who argued that the fear among the Zomis of being demographically overshadowed, land being snatched, and politically dominated by the increasing Thadou-Kuki migration in Lamka district were the major causes for the conflict. Oinam attributed the immediate cause of Kuki-Zomi conflict to Zomis' refusal to help the Kukis during the Kuki-Naga clashes and the consequent act of vengeance by the Kukis. Kuki asserted its supremacy over the Zomis exactly in the same way the Nagas did to them. According to Aheibam Koireng Singh, because of displacement of the Kukis to Churachandpur, law and order problems relating to flesh trade, extortion and burglary, collection of taxes were on the rise as those displaced came to Lamka in pauperized state. Apart from the influx of Thadou-Kuki to Lamka, the activities of Kuki militants coming from Sadar Hills who did not have any knowledge of the local sentiments proved to be a fertile ground for Kuki-Zomi clashes. In general, these scholars have taken political development of 1990s as the point of their analysis and did not give much emphasis to the politics of the Kuki and Zomi of the period prior to 1990s. As has been noted earlier, Zomi leaders sought unification of the different Zo communities. The advocators of Zomi and Kuki identities competed with each other as champions of different Zo communities. "As the rhetoric of 'unification' spun off the academic circles, it got increasingly radicalized in Manipur in the 1990s. The genie of irredentism has grown out too big for rational dialogue and debate. It coincided with the advent of gun culture. Ironically, an internecine Kuki-Zomi (1997-1998) clash took place

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64 Ibid.
65 Bhagat Oinam, op. cit., p. 2036.
in Manipur amidst irredentist rhetoric. In other words, the ideological differences and the politics of unification of the two communities reached highest pitch during 1990s with the outbreak of Kuki-Naga conflict. In the background of this political situation, an open Kuki-Zomi conflict broke out when Kuki National Front (KNF) killed ten Paite and injuring other four persons at Saikul village on the night of June 24, 1997. This incident provoked retaliation from the Zomis.

Peace and normalcy returned to the two communities with the signing of Peace Accord on October 1, 1998 by Albert Gen Goukhup, President of Kuki Inpi, on behalf of Kukis and K Vungzalian, Chairman of Zomi Council, on behalf of the Zomis. Both the parties agreed to forgive and forget the past mistakes committed against each other. The peace accord that they entered into declared, “As a token of customary apology for the mowing down of ten innocent persons and injuring other four persons on the night of June 24, 1997 at Saikul village by the KNF, thereby dragging the two communities into conflict, the Kuki Inpi offered a feast by killing a four legged animal, a bull (bawngtal) on September 29, 1998. In a very cordial atmosphere and mutual trust, the feast was happily shared together by leaders of the Kuki Inpi and the Zomi Council. In response to the good gesture shown by the Kuki Inpi, the Zomi Council showed their goodness and love for peace in the form of killing another four legged animal, a pig, the following day, September 30, 1998, which was happily shared together by both community leaders”. The two communities also agreed on the following points - “i) That, the nomenclatures

Kuki and Zomi shall be mutually respected by all Zomis and Kukis. Every individual or group of persons shall be at liberty to call himself or themselves by any name, and the nomenclature Kuki and Zomi shall not in any way be imposed upon any person or group against his / their will at any point of time. ii) That, any person who has occupied or has physical possession of any land / private building / houses and quarters wrongfully and illegally during the period of clashes shall return and restore to the rightful owners, such lands and buildings. iii) That, no Kuki or Zomi militants shall indulge themselves in any forcible collection of funds, taxes, etc, against their counterpart nomenclature be it from the Government officials, individuals, contractors and business establishments. iv) That, all points of MOUs between the Kuki Inpi and the Zomi Council shall be operative and binding to all concerned persons and parties including the government (sic).". 70

**Contribution of Indigenous Intelligentsia to Zomi Identity**

Literature has the capacity to mould public opinion. From the available writings of a community, it is possible to learn the dominant thoughts and feelings of a community of a particular period and time. Usually educated elites and intelligentsia make use of literature to propagate their thoughts and ideas to the general masses. In India’s northeast the introduction of modern education by the Christian missionaries led to the emergence of new group of people who are capable of reading and writing. Attaining higher education in higher institution of learning exposed them to literature (especially in English). In their zeal to understand their communities, many indigenous educated tribal elites and intelligentsia took up their own communities as fields of their study and in the

process came out with books, presenting a larger picture of their communities through their works.

The first generation of Zo scholars from Manipur managed to enter the country’s higher institutions of learning, including the premier institutions like Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi. In the year 1979, S Thangkhangin Ngaihte and L S Gangte submitted their M. Phil dissertations at Jawaharlal Nehru University. While L S Gangte worked on Zomi polity of Manipur, Thangkhangin Ngaihte presented a historical analysis of the pre-colonial society of the Zomi. Explaining the emergence of clan based identities among the Zos, Ngaihte writes that in the past, the Zo people were forced to disperse and migrate to the hills and in the course of their migrations in small groups; their society underwent serious stresses and peculiar socio-economic transformation. Because of this, the Zo society regressed to the clan-based society, to the extent of forgetting their original common name, and calling themselves after their respective clan leaders. Both scholars strongly argued that Zomi was the oldest and appropriate generic name of the so called Kuki-Chin groups of people. T Gougin also contributed to the cause of Zomi consciousness through his writings. His two most enduring works are *The Discovery of Zoland*, 1980 and *History of Zomi*, 1984. In the year 1987, Vumson published his work *Zo History: With an Introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and their Status as Ethnic Minority in India, Burma and

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71 David Vumlallian Zou, 2008, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12
73 S Thangkhangin Ngaihte, *op. cit.*, whole chapter 2.
74 T Gougin, *op. cit.*
Bangladesh. Tualchin Neihsial was another person whose contribution to Zo consciousness cannot be ignored. In the year 1984, Neihsial started one journal Zogam News Research Journal, published and circulated from Lamka. Apart from sharing his ideas on Zomi, Neihsial used the journal to publish academic writings on Zomi. Later, Neihsial took up Ph. D work on ‘History and Culture of the Zomis’ and submitted his thesis in the year 1993. In ‘Groping for Identity’ an article written in an edited book In Search of Identity published in 1986, H Kamkhenthang’s wrote, “Nowadays, there is another name getting more and more popular. This name is not a new name but remained dormant in the social and cultural layers of the past. It is called Zomi...Zogam (Zoland) and Zo remained in the layers of their folksongs and are now exposed in the social, religious and political life of the people”. The ‘Zo’ and Zomi concept gained currency in the academic circles as a result of these works. Apart from generating enthusiasm among Zo readers, they became the intellectual foundations for subsequent studies on Zo people.

A good number of English language writings from secular and theological academic backgrounds also appeared during the 1990s. In his work, Tribal Agrarian System of Manipur: A Study of Zomi, L Chinzakham Ngaihte critically examined the agrarian system of the Zo people. Chinkholian Guite and Vanlalruat Guite submitted their

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75 Vumson, op. cit.
76 Neihsial Tualchin, op. cit.

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Ph. D theses in 1995 and 1999 respectively.\textsuperscript{80} The work of Chinkholian Guite analyzed the political and economic development of the Zomis of Manipur, and that of Vanlalruat Guite presented a historical study of the dresses and crafts of the Zomi. The Ph. D thesis of L Lam Khan Piang, ‘Kinship, Territory and Politics: The Study of Identity Formation amongst the Zo’,\textsuperscript{81} argued that the term ‘Zo’ is a cultural or a primal name of the Kuki-Chin people. By applying T K Oommen’s concept of ‘ethnification’, Lam Khan Piang explained how the Zo people had become an ‘ethnified nation’. He attributed the ‘ethnification’ process and dissolution of the Zo people to the annexation and separation of the people (territory) by the British imperialists into three different independent territories Burma, India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Similar arguments can also be seen from the work of Vumlallian who wrote, “it became quite common to hear historical narratives about the partition of the ‘Zo nation’ and their current ‘minority status’ within the nation-state of Burma, Bangladesh and India. After the discovery of this ‘problem’, an irredentist line of thinking prescribes the solution as ‘ethnic unification’”\textsuperscript{82}.

Among the theologian writers the work of Sing Khaw Khai, \textit{Zo People and Their Culture: A Historical, Cultural Study and Critical Analysis of Zo and its Ethnic Tribes}\textsuperscript{83} and that of Khup Za Go’s, \textit{A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations among the Zo}

\textsuperscript{81} L Lam Khan Piang, Kinship, \textit{op. cit.}, whole Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{82} David Vumlallian Zou, 2008, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 12.
People in Northeast India are worth noting. Sing Khaw Khai’s work gives insight into the historical, cultural and traditional, religious beliefs / concepts of the Zo people. It also deals with the various clans and tribes of the Zo people. Khup Za Go narrated how the translation of the Bible into different Zo dialects denigrated the integrity and unity of the Zo people. His work shows that more than twenty dialect groups, many quite small, have their own Bible printed in their language. Khup Za Go’s Zo Chronicles, a compilation of rare documents, reports, and memoranda from colonial to post-independence period provides invaluable information about social, cultural and political history of the Zo people. The objective of publishing the book as admitted by Khup Za Go was to inculcate a spirit of unity, harmony and to create consciousness of their unique oneness of the Zo people. The effort made by Zomi leaders to create wider consciousness is also clearly reflected in Prism of the Zo People, which was published to commemorate 60th Zomi Nam Ni Celebration, 2008. The book contains contributions from native scholars and writers about the history, land, culture, economy and traditions of the people. The objective for publishing the book as pointed out by the publication board was to instill the spirit of oneness among the Zo people. This was clearly spelt out by the publication board which reads, “we hope that it inspire the readers to take more interest in the issue...may reinvigorate the spirit of oneness among the Zo kindred tribes and take them to higher level of patriotism; bring forth peace and fraternity amongst them, and led them towards preserving, promoting and protecting their indigenous rights as a nation (sic)”.

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84 Khup Za Go, A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations among the Zo People in Northeast India, Chin Baptist Literature Board, Lamka, Manipur, 1996.
85 Khup Za Go, op. cit.
86 Prism of the Zo People, op. cit.
87 The occasion falls on February 20. Every year, all Zomis of India and Myanmar celebrate the occasion.
88 Prism of the Zo People, op. cit.
The contribution of vernacular works on Zomi consciousness is no less significance. Mention may be made here of the contributions of Nengzalam Guite, Thanga Tonsing, and Lalneihthang Hatlangh. Recalling their perceived common ancestor ‘Zo’, the trio founded a vernacular comic named Zokhankhual in 1984 during the height of ZNC’s political movements for unification. As claimed by the author, the comic was founded with the objective of furthering political consciousness among their people.

The story of Zokhankhual revolves around one main character named Zokhankhual who is projected as ‘The Tribal Superman’ by the author. The stories written in a rather humorous style convey messages political and reformative in nature. Recently, some diehard Zomi from Delhi posted the back issues of Zokhankhual in the net and it was received with much applause from the site visitors. While English writings serve the English knowing people within the community, vernacular literature fills the gap by disseminating information to the non-English literate masses, thereby contributing to wider circulation of ideas among the Zomi masses.

**Representation of Zomi consciousness in Vernacular Songs and Lyrics**

What effects do the sweet love songs and nostalgic feelings express by a person have on the masses? How would a nationalist express his or her love and feelings to his

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89 Zokhankhual is a combination of term ‘Zo’ progenitor / ancestor of the Zo people, and ‘khankhual’, which means ‘concern for the welfare and development’.


The use of language in the form of poetry or lyrics had always been to attract the attention of the masses. Songs are carriers of tradition, cultural ethos and the collective psyche of the people. Songs not only reflect the personality of the composer, but also the feelings, emotions and the day-to-day personal experiences. In addition, songs mirror the wider picture of the historical context of the period in which they were composed. Songs have the capacity to stir emotions and reinforce communal solidarity. Among Zomis there are songs composed on topical issues with explicit and implicit undertones of message - political and reformist in nature. While some songs may be a response to particular social or political event and phenomenon, nevertheless, they have the capacity to create wider consciousness among the people. Although there are traditional folklores and folksongs that reflect the history, tradition, and culture, many of the contemporary Zomi nationalist songs were outcomes of political consciousness aroused by the surge of Zomi nationalism during the 1970s and 1980s. Most songs composed during this period were songs of lamentation, expression of love for their land, their desire for unification, the need to work and serve their land. One popular song composed by Late Jelshyam in 1965 appeals to his people, especially the younger generation to work hard and serve their motherland faithfully. The song talks about the importance of good personality, firm determination, spirit of teamwork, and the will to help others. The poet appealed to his people to pursue education and learn whatever they could for their land, their birthplace. The land of ancestors prospers only when the youth works.

I am using 'valentine' to denote the love and feelings that people have for their land. People love their land and are ready to do anything for their land. Hence, for a nationalist or people who have a nationalist feelings 'their land and their people has becomes their lover' i.e. their valentine.

Late Jelshyam IAS was a bureaucrat by profession, formerly the Chief Secretary of Manipur. He composed the song in the year 1965 during his college days in Shillong.
The song in Paite goes like this,

\[ I \text{ tuun leh zua lung mawl in, Piaanna gam giabang zuun di’}n / \text{Sen vontawite hon ngak uh, Sinin, seemin, giabang zuun.} \]

\[ \text{Dialdial in dialdial leng lawm / Vualzawlna I gam lei di’}n. \]

\[ \text{Sum leh pai lamtam sang in / Sakmin hoih manpha zaw hi / Lawmvual liangvai panpih ding / Na min lawi bang hong thang ding.} \]

\[ \text{Khai le lawm aw, masuan ni / Lungkelou in pang ve ni / I tunnu zuapa gamlei / noplenna gam hong suak diing.} \]

Free Translation in English is as follows:

Our simple, naïve forefathers / To tend and serve motherland / Waited for us – we young folks / Let us learn, labor and serve.

Friends, if we live in harmony / Blessings shall be for our land.

Instead of more money and riches / Good name is far valuable / Serving the poor and needy / Your fame will spread far and wide.

Friends lets rise and march ahead / Lets strive and not disappoint / Then our beloved motherland / Will turn into land of bliss

A song composed by Lengtong Pauno, Sua Mang and T S Khai during 1988 invokes Zo solidarity by appealing to their shared origin and sentiments in Burma and India and urges them to stand united. It also conveys their desire to be integrated politically, which the poet dreams that their wish could be achieved one day. Yet
skeptical of their political unification, the poet says, “Though may not unite in this world, we shall unite in heaven above”. The song runs as follow,

Tuunsung khat pan piang hi ngeingei hang e.

Sakmi khangmi ki khenlou in / Mimbang pianna Chiimtui vangkhua / I heina pian in dang zong leng / Sinlai pai tembang kuah chiat veni.

Ziin in khen maw, Sianmang in khen maw? / Sinlai a na saang e / Gihbang khen zong lung a ki ngilh kei ni / Tuunsung khat pan piang hi ngeingei hang e.

Simthu tuibang luangkhawm den ni / Kawlgam vaigam gibang khen zong / Simlei tuibang gawmlou mah leh / Thangvan a tuibang ki gawm nawn ni.

Free translation of the song is as follows:

For sure the same mother had borne us.

With shared origin in Chiimtui / Kinsfolk from north and south shall not part / Though we dwell in divided worlds / Let’s stick together like sheathed knives / Whether God’s will or Satan’s wiles / Partition hurts all the same / While separated, forget not that /

For sure the same mother had borne us.94

Be always of one mind like water that flows together / Though live in India and Myanmar / Though may not unite in this world / Again, we shall unite in heaven above.

94 Translation of the first nine lines are that of David Vumlallian Zou taken from his article, ‘A Historical Study of the ‘Zo Struggle’, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLV, No. 14, April 3, 2010, pp. 61-62, while the rest are translated by the author. The author owns the responsibility of the limitations or mistakes, if any, in the translation of these songs.
The song composed by Thawnzachin talks about feelings and attachment that he has with Zogam. He addresses his people as ‘separated lovers’. He expresses his love and feelings for his land in melancholic notes. The poet compares himself with some of the creatures found in his native land such as the cicada, the wild dove and quail. Striking a sad note, the poet says that these creatures will go on singing, crying and moaning in the thick jungles and in the bushes. Like these creatures, the poet cries for Zogam and his sadness and grief would last as long as these creatures continue to sing. The close attachment that he had with his land is clearly reflected when he says, “The pure Zo breeze that gently sweeps around, reminds me I am a Zo”. In Paite, the song runs like this:

Galkhua dak kimvel veng, Zo lenmui kai chiaichiai e / Lungzuan zatam in tuibang hon tum e / Vang kingai gibang khen Kawlgam Vaigam a heite / Lungzuan ka sialna tul singbang saang lua sa’ng.

Zolengthe lah khuangkhuang diing a maw / Zo sinlai ah na saang e / Zo huih khisiang hong leeng hialhialte in zong / Zomi nahi hong chi uh.

Leenna tang kitawi pan galkhua ko’n don chiaichiai a / Vaang k’on ngaihman mimva bang thumthum ing e / Itluat, ngaihluat ngabang ka lenna gam vaangla pan in / Vaang ko’n ngaihman Zo huiva bang mau ing e.

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95 In English, Zogam (also Zoram) means Zoland where ‘gam’ stands for ‘land’.
96 Separated by the international boundary that runs between India and Burma.
Free translation of the song is given below:

As I look around yonder, Zo cloud\textsuperscript{97} hang in the air / Like a flood, deep yearning overwhelms me / Separated lovers living in Myanmar and India / My yearning has become as high as the tree.

Zo cicada\textsuperscript{98} will go on singing / Its painful in my Zo’s heart / The pure Zo breeze\textsuperscript{99} that gently sweeps around / Reminds me I am a Zo.

I look at you yonder from my high hilly abode / I keep wailing like a quail, yearning for you / Beloved, darling, as I love you from my distant abode / I keep wailing and wailing like the Zo dove.\textsuperscript{100}

An impassioned nationalist feelings conveyed rather in a sad notes is reflected in a song composed by V Paukhansiam.

\textit{Zuang diing in, Zogam zuang se / Liang diing in, Zogam liang se / Simlei mizata pak palh bang / Zolei aw nang, tulpan na kai maw / Vontawite hambang huaikhawm in / Sambang khen ding, Zogam na lawmlou.}

\textit{Singgam a niang-le-tai /Zogam a kial leh taak / Zolei aw nang sunni’n hong taanlou maw / Aw solkha siang Zogam na taanlou maw.}

Free translation of it in English:

Of nostalgia, Zogam feels more nostalgic / Of poverty, Zogam is more poor /

While others are like full bloom flowers / O Zogam, you have gather moss /

\textsuperscript{97} Cloud is referred to as \textit{Zo lenmui} (Zo cloud) by the poet.
\textsuperscript{98} The cicada is called \textit{Zolengthe} (Zo cicada).
\textsuperscript{99} The cold breeze that blows is referred to as ‘\textit{Zo huih khisiang}’ (pure Zo breeze).
\textsuperscript{100} Dove is addressed as \textit{Zo dove} (Zo huiva)
Gather your children together / Zogam, you don’t looked seemly to be divided.
Abundance in others’ land / Hunger and thirst in Zogam / O Zogam, does not the
sun shine on you? / O moon, do you not shine upon Zogam?

In another song of V Paukhansiam, the poet pours out his love and feelings for
Zogam. Praising the beautiful orchids that perched in a tree, the poet said that there is no
one as beautiful as they are. Nothing can equal their beauty in this world. While the poet
uses sweet love notes to express his feelings for Zogam, he also tells us about his
perception on the status of his land. No matter what its social and political status of his
land, the poet is still very much enchanted and overwhelmed by the beauty of his land
that he sing the beauty of his land. Ultimately, the poet conveys the message that the land
of his birth is more beautiful than anything else, and it is not possible for him and the son
of Zogam to forget their land. This is the song in Paite,

Na tuanna tulising niam saang e / Tullel heisa etlawm nou aw / Na sakmelnou
ngailou om diam? / Simlei a nangbang mi om diam?
Sakmel etlawm heisa aw, Na heina tulliim ngai veeng / Huihkhi’n honsem heh
heisa aw, Na heina Zogam nuam e / Zolei vontawi zatam in, zunlouh Zogam
ngilhtheilou diing / Heisa leh mimbang pianna gam, Kenzong pham dong ngilh
kei ning...
Tulel Heisa pal lawmnou aw / Sakminthang duangzen ngaihnou aw / Na sakmel
in Zogam zeem hi / Zatam lung in na taisak.
...Huihkhi, siktui leh Heisa in, Zolei zata lungtai sak.
Free translation

The tree on which you perch is lowly / O beautiful orchid on the tree / Who'll not love your tender look / Will there be one like you on earth?

Oh, you beautiful orchid, I love the shade of your abode / Let the breeze sweep you, O orchid / Pleasant is Zogam your abode / Children of Zogam cannot forget the untended Zogam / The orchids and land of my birth, I too 'll not forget till I die.

O beautiful orchid on the tree / Oh, enchanting darling of great fame / Your look beautifies Zogam / You gladden the hearts of myriads.

...Gentle breeze, stream and orchids gladden the hearts of Zolanders.

The song\textsuperscript{101} sung by Biaklian Samte talks about the good and happy times that the poet had together with his fellow friends. The songs tells about the difficulties and hardships that he had encountered in his daily life such as the autumn rain, the loneliness that he experienced in the dark night without food, and his longing for Zogam to be liberated. The poet visualizes what the situation will be when they achieve their political struggle. He says that while those alive enjoy the fruits of their struggle drunk with the sweet wine of Zogam. This has saddened the poet. The song clearly reflected the loyalty that the poet had for his land and his people.

\textit{Heina tum in dang ta, Lailung zuang veeng e / Lungdeih simthu suut a, Kholhpih gualngaih teng toh / Nuihchiam I leenlai ni, Loubang tul dia lawmlou /}

\textsuperscript{101} The song is composed by a person who had joined his fellow friends in the jungle.
Zogam vaangin tuangnung siah mai ta hang e maw.

Doulai dai bang theng a, Zogam a hong paal chiang / Guabang a hing lai teng.
Dawnbang tuak kimuh chiang / Zotui nunkhum ning zou diing / Aw, lungdeih teng
kim nawnlou diing.

Sunni mualdawn liam a, Muikhua hong ziing in / Zogam vang a tulvuah luang leh
zaan mial nuai a / Genthei thuak in laigil kial leh selung zuan toh / I Zolei gam
hong paallun diing hai bang ngak laang

Tangpa dougal lai ah, Kha ka pham zong in / Kawlgam, Vaigam a hei, Laizom
tuibang gawm a / Zolei vonte'n Zogam, Khuambang a luah nak leh / Lungtup
tuibang tung hi, Chi'n lailungdam ning e.

Free translation of the song is:

My dwelling place has changed, I feel nostalgic / Days when with beloved friends
/ We discussed choice topics / And filled with laughter / Seems unreal to pass
away / For the sake of Zogam, we’ve left those things behind.

When the wars are over, and Zogam flourishes / Those who are alive meet with
one another / We’ll enjoy Zogam’s nectar / O! not all loved ones would be there.

As the sun descend in the hills, and darkness sets in / For Zogam’s sake, under
torrent and the dark night / Wretched, hungry and yearning / I eagerly waited for
Zogam to bloom.

Youngman amidst enemies, even if I die / If kindreds, of India and Burma unite /
And Zo offspring inherit Zogam / I’ll be satisfied, saying my hearts desire is
fulfilled.
This is a song composed by Siamchinthang during 1990s. The poet sings that as long as the son of the soil live, no one except the Zo people will occupy their land. The poet asked his people to have faith in the almighty God and march ahead for their land. This is the song,

Khua kiim a mi singta paalte'n / I Zogam nuam khuambang luah ning chi e / Tuan a Pupa, I Zogam nuam / Kuataan khuambang a luah thei diam? / Salpha taangbang dam lai veeng e.

Pitu Thianmang muang in / Lunglellou in machiang suan leng / Paksil bang in hong luam diing a / A sung a lungtuak ngabang I leeng diing hi.

Siktui duh gilkial dangtak in / Om muangmun a deihbang lellel diing maw? /
Machiang suan in khaubang chiah ni / Zo siktui kuan hong dawn hiam? / Selung in gel hun lota e.

Free translation of the song is:

Other people who live around / Say they will occupy our sweet Zogam / Sweet land of forefathers of yore / How can anyone occupy it /
1, man of valor am still alive.

Trust in God, our guide / If we march on undauntedly / Our land will blossom like flowers / We shall dwell in it in harmony.

Panting for water, hungry and thirsty / Shall we idle away, talking heart’s desire? /
Let us march on and go ahead / Who has drunk Zogam’s water? / Its high time to think about.
Another song that became popular in the 1990s was a song composed by Thawnkham. The song goes like this,

Zogam, tuan a Pupa luahna gam / Zogam, khangsawnte luahna gam / Zogam mualdawn leemui kai e, ngeisok paak san silsial / Zogam ton leh lamna Zogam / Zogam, gaal leh sa-aih na gam / Zogam, ningzu khuaizu bang khum, lenkhuang toh zaila’n awi, Pu leh Pa leenna gam.

Kolgam, vaigam ka zin zong in / Kawi anne, mangin sung ka om zong in / Zo ann, Zo in mah lunggulh ing / Zo ngeina mah deih ing / Zogam, zalmang in hon mang in / Zogam mubang ken hong ngai veeng / Itna damtui a luan na gam / Beh leh phung teenna gam / U le nau kichinna.

Zogam aw, ken hong taisan kei ning / Zogam aw, na kha nuai hon keem aw / Ka lam khatna, ka lutang phumna’ng Zogam / Kong it hi Zogam aw.


Zogam, Zomi khantouh na di / Pilna, siamna leh neih leh lam, lungsim pumpi khoul sisan piakkhiat na toh sem ni / Kawlgam, vaigam a Zomi te / A nei a lam Zomite / Mualdawn Zomite kahna aw, nu-le-pa tauna aw / Hong huh hong chiak un chi.
Free translation of the song goes,

Zogam, the land inhabited by ancestors / Zogam, the land inherited by new
generations / Cloud hangs around, red rhododendrons bloom on Zogam hills /
Zoram, the land of celebrations and dances / Zogam, the land where the killing of
enemies and animals are celebrated / Zoram where forefathers lived, people sip rice beer as sweet as honey, and sing with beating of drum.

Though I travel to Myanmar or India / Though I take Myanmarese food, or live in
royal palace / I long for Zo food and Zo home / And love Zo culture and traditions /
Zogam, I dream of you in my dreams / Zogam, I love you / The land where the
stream of love flows / The land where my clan and kinsmen live / Where many
brothers and sisters live.

O Zogam, I will not forsake you / O Zogam, shelter me under your wings / Zogam
where my placenta dropped, where my head shall be buried / O Zogam, I love
you.

Zogam, do people despise you? / Zogam, do your people forsake you? / Zogam
groans in hunger and thirst, will you watch her with folded hands? / Zogam, show me your celebrations and dances / Zogam, I sing your songs / Zogam, serve me with your rice beer / Show us again your culture and traditions.

For the development of Zogam and Zo people / let us work, dedicate our wisdom,
knowledge, wealth and riches, mind, sweat and blood / Zo people of Myanmar
and India / The rich and the wealthy Zo people / The cry of the highland Zo
people, the groaning of parents / Call you to come to their help.
There are several other Zomi nationalistic songs in Paite, which are not mentioned in this research work. These songs did not just remain as lyrics or in text form; they are sung and played in most of the public meetings and community gatherings. Many of the songs were now accessible through internet and other means of communication. Most of the songs, which in fact, reflect the mind of the Zomi masses, are avowedly vocal in their assertion of their political aspirations.

**Conclusion**

Paul Brass writes that the ethnic community or nation created through the efforts of ethnic elites using the cultural markers need not necessarily constitute an entirely new entity but one that has been transformed, whose boundaries have in some ways been widened.\(^{102}\) On ‘The Nature of ethnonational bond’, Walker Conner states that nationalist were “mindful of the common blood component of ethno-national psychology and did not hesitate to appeal to it when seeking for popular support.”\(^{103}\) A community of people engaged in search for identity, generally traces back their ethnic roots in order to legitimize their claims. As seen from the above discussion, the propagation and articulation of Zo / Zomi identity has socio-cultural and pre-existing ethnic linkages. Although Zomi is not exclusive to Paite community alone and that other Zo communities worked for the development of Zomi consciousness, the Paite did play an important role in propagating and asserting Zomi identity in Manipur. As claimed by the community leaders, renaming of Paite as a tribe within the Zo nation was the result of their admission

\(^{102}\) Paul R Brass, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
and acceptance of their primal name ‘Zo’, which was deeply rooted in the social and cultural milieu of the Zo people. In the construction of Zo-ness among the Paite, several Paite intellectuals and elites have given vigor to Zomi identity through their writings. From the reading of the available indigenous works on Zomi, one can get the Zomis point of view about themselves, their history, and their political goals. Their writings reflected the social, cultural, political and historical experiences and political aspirations of the Zo people. The emergence of Zomi nationalist movement facilitated in creating wider consciousness among the Zo masses about the need for unity. The rise of Zo solidarity movement witnessed the surge of Zomi nationalist songs, which are avowedly political and reformist in nature. In fact, Zomi nationalism would not have achieved present vigor and popularity among the Paite and other Zo communities in Manipur had there been no organizations and elites that worked hard to uphold and safeguard the interests and identity of the Zo people. By repeatedly refuting the colonial names attributed to them; emphasizing on their common ethnic origins and roots; narrating on how the Zo people had become an ‘ethnified nation’ due to division of their ancestral homeland into India, Burma and Bangladesh, and by effectively convincing their communities that they all have common ancestor ‘Zo’, the indigenous Zomi intellectuals and elites professing the Zomi cause succeeded in creating Zo solidarity and unity among the different Zo communities.

Even though Zomi identity was initially articulated to include all Zo communities, political conflicts, interests, and competition in Manipur made it a common generic name of the Paite, Vaiphei, Zou, Simte, Mate, Kom, and other Zo communities in Chin states of Myanmar.