Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

Apart from transforming the social, economic and political life and activities of the indigenous tribal communities, the onset of modernization in India’s northeast has led to the emergence of a new group of elites who contributed considerably to social and political awakening of the hill communities. Under the guidance and leadership of the emerging modern indigenous elites, the tribal communities transformed themselves to more organized and politically conscious ethnic communities or nationalities. Relatively smaller indigenous tribal communities of Manipur such as the Paite have also experienced similar process of change. Yet in-depth studies on process of change taking place in the Paite studies are very few. Although some interesting descriptive, historical, anthropological, linguistic, and political studies on the Paite and the Zomi are available, there has not been any systematic work that has examined and analyzed the process of formation of Paite identity and Zomi identity consciousness among the Paite community. Moreover, none of the existing studies on Paite-Zomi examined the politics of identity formation among the community using the rich theoretical insights available on issues of ethnicity and identity. Further, although the indigenous elites has been playing important roles in guiding and leading the Paite politics, there is no study on the multiple roles the Paite elites have been playing in Paite politics. These limitations in the existing literature underscore the need to study the role played by the emerging elites in the identity discourse of the Paite community using appropriate theoretical insights. The research study is undertaken with three broad objectives viz. i) To
understand the emergence and growth of modern Paite elites in Manipur; ii) To examine the social, economic, and ideological background of the Paite elites in Churachandpur district; iii) To study the role of Paite elites in the formation of Paite identity and Zomi identity consciousness among the Paite in Manipur. Apart from exploring these objectives, attempts are also made to understand different inter-related issues relevant to the study such as the development of ethnic community, nature and dynamics of the ethnic elites, politics of boundary making, role of language and literature, and the relevance or irrelevance of the memories of the past in construction of identities. This concluding chapter sums up the major theoretical and empirical findings of the study and draws some conclusions and observations based on the research findings.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

There is abundant theoretical literature available on issues concerning ethnicity, ethnic elites and identity formation. However, for understanding the role of elites in the construction of ethnic identities among smaller ethnic communities like the Paite, one needs to distinguish between the relevant and not-so-relevant ones. The primordial theories are not taken into consideration as they do not give much importance to the political construction of ethnic identity. Many contemporary social and political identities and alignments are created through both primary and secondary processes of socialization. Primordial theories fail to explain why and how particular ethnic identities emerge, change and dissolve, or why so many people choose to emigrate to and
assimilate with other ethnic communities. Similarly, Relative Deprivation theories are not found reliable for the study because although it talks about the social conditions that give rise to ethnic consciousness and identity, they do not account for individuals and agencies that articulate the needs of the community. Moreover, the significance of cultural features does not find a significant place in their analysis. As pointed out by Pradeep Kumar, economic factor may not be sufficient factor to generate regional pulls, and one has to go beyond the socio-economic syndrome to understand some of the other subjective and objective factors that may be necessary for a mass scale mobilization on regional issues. Similarly, class based theories such as Split-Labor Market theory and Middleman Minority theory are not relevant to study of ethnic dynamics in tribal communities, which have not yet witnessed antagonistic class struggles. The Rational Choice theory has been criticized for giving much emphasis to rational preferences or choices of the individuals, ignoring the emotional factors influencing the mobilization of communities of people. The theory transforms all choices, including cultural ones, into economic choices. They view ethnicity as located more in the mind than in the genes or in cultural differences. Moreover, it ignores the fact that the ethnic assertions are

influenced more by emotions rather than by reason. Instrumentalist theories are criticized for viewing ethnicity as a property of individuals. Their accounts leave no place for collective values, memories and emotions, but only for goods of wealth, status and power. While the instrumentalists inform us on how group identity can be manipulated and/or constructed through the actions of the elites, they fail to explain why the 'masses' should so readily respond to ethnic calls for unity and struggles. Consequently, it fails to explain why ethnic conflicts are so often intense and unpredictable. Moreover, historical movements and ideas are determined by a number of variables, almost all of which are beyond the control of individual leaders. The limitations notwithstanding, one cannot completely neglect the role of elites and organizations in ethnic movements.

In a way, there is no single theory that can be relied upon for exploring all objectives of the present study. Nevertheless, it is found that theoretical contributions of some of the scholars can be used for the present study. Elite Competition Theory of Paul R Brass, as propounded in his work, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, is one such study. To Brass, ethnicity is a modern phenomenon, socially and politically constructed. The process involves competition and conflict between the ethnic elites of the dominant group and those of the non-dominant group, and between the states and ethnic elites. Competition arises from the broader economic and political environment rather than from the cultural values of the ethnic communities in question.

Cultural forms, values and practices of the ethnic groups becomes political resources in

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their competition for gaining the support of the masses and achieving political goals. Brass, however, admits that mere elite competition alone cannot explain communal mobilizations. For successful mass mobilization, the ethnic elites have to go beyond competition.⁹

Deviating from the dominant sociological and anthropological perception on the central role of cultural stuff in the definition of ethnic groups, Frederick Barth¹⁰ focused his analysis on making and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. To Barth, a group is defined by boundaries, not by the cultural stuff that it encloses. Cultural markers play a secondary role in the making of ethnic boundaries. Selective cultural features, not all cultural differences or similarities, go into the making and maintenance of the socio-cultural boundaries of the group. Instead, ethnic boundaries are perpetuated by the structural differences and political perceptions of the group. Boundaries persist in spite of the continuous inter-ethnic contact, interdependence, and flow of personnel across the groups.

By moving away from the modernist interpretations of nationalism as given by scholars like Gellner, who looked at ethnic roots as navels which have little significance to the modern nations, Anthony D Smith holds the view that historical and / or sociological explanations are necessary for understanding the continuing emotional attachment of people to their primordial ethnic ties / past. Smith explains the resurgence

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⁹ Ibid., pp. 62-66.
and power of ethnicity in the contemporary world by using ethno-symbolism approach.\textsuperscript{11} The approach emerged in response to systemic failure to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch. Ethnosymbolists see the power of ethnicity / nationalism in the modern world in the rediscovery and reinterpretation myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages by modern nationalist intelligentsia. These cultural and historical elements provide motives for conflicts as well as solidarity.\textsuperscript{12} In short, ethno-symbolist scholars seek to overcome the limitations of instrumentalist versions, while acknowledging the modernist insights of nationalism.

To T K Oommen, ethnicity is an ongoing process, which emerges as a result of conquest, colonization, and immigration and the consequent disengagement between culture and territory.\textsuperscript{13} He interprets ethnics as aliens in their own homelands. Most of them are deprived collectivities both in symbolic and material terms.\textsuperscript{14} Oommen believes that an ethnie can transform itself into a nation and vice versa. Language is common to both nation and ethnie. Nation is a territorial entity to which the people have emotional attachment. It is the fusion of territory and language.\textsuperscript{15} When nation dissociates itself with its homeland, they become an ethnie.\textsuperscript{16} Oommen also talked of six processes of ‘ethnification’, a process through which the link between territory and culture is attenuated and the possibility of a nation sustaining its integrity is put into jeopardy.

\textsuperscript{12} Anthony D Smith, 1999, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 13-22.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 20.
Like Oommen, Paul R Brass also believes that an ethnic group can transform itself into community and nationality. However, Brass approach is different from that of Oommen. To Brass, formation of nationality involves three stages. The first stage involves the movement from ethnic category to community, which entails creation of a self-conscious language community out of a group of related speakers, the formation of an ethnic association, or a community of believers from the followers of a particular religious leader. Brass relates this phenomenon with the early stages of modernization in multiethnic societies where languages are yet to be standardized, where religious groups have not become highly structured and compartmentalized, and where social fragmentation is prevalent. To Brass, the movement from ethnic group to community is a transition that some groups never made, that others made initially in modern times, and still others undergo repeatedly at different points in time. The second stage in the transformation of ethnic groups, according to Brass, involves articulation and acquisition of social, economic, and political rights for members of the group or for the group as a whole. As such, mere subjective consciousness of the group of its cultural identities and its (culture) further employment for achieving group solidarity and interest are essential condition for emergence of a subjectively self-conscious (political) community. If the ethnic group succeeds by its own efforts in achieving and maintaining group rights through political action and political mobilization, it has gone beyond ethnicity to establish itself as a nationality. To Brass, the politicized ethnic elites, who constitute the most articulate and dominant sections of the community, becomes the social agents of identity construction.

17 Paul R Brass, op. cit., pp. 22-23.
In his ‘imagined community theory’, Benedict Anderson perceives nation as an imagined political community, which is inherently limited and sovereign. The idea of nation comes into maturity at a stage of human history after the legitimacy of the divinely ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm was destroyed. Prior to the emergence of national culture was the dominant religious culture. National culture replaced the predominant religious culture, and this transformation was facilitated by the development of print capitalism. According to Anderson, development of print capitalism was responsible for the development of nations. Development of print languages, which owed much of its success to print-capitalism made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others.

The ‘invention of tradition’ thesis of Eric Hobsbawm does not believe in the logic of natural origins of nation or in the essential role of history. He sees national consciousness as a modern phenomenon constructed around the ruins of the past. Hobsbawm central arguments on the emergence of nationalism and national consciousness rests on the belief that many of the traditions which were considered as very ancient in their origins were in fact invented comparatively recently. Hobsbawm thesis presented complex linkages between past and present, thereby, deepening our understanding of communities and nationalities cherished myths.

Various theories of ethnicity discussed above have highlighted different aspects of the nature and dynamics of ethnic communities and the politics of identity formation. The

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availability of diverse approaches or theories on ethnicity indicates that no single theory can explain all aspects of ethnicity. The indigenous ethnic elites play an important role in the construction of ethnic identities and in promotion of the political and economic interests of the communities they represent by making use of select cultural and historical markers. Although instrumentalist theories help us to understand the manner in which the elites and organizations work, one needs to understand that even the elites and organizations also work within the structural and cultural limits. Hence, it is necessary to widen our understanding of the role played by the elites in the light of more refined theories offered by scholars like Paul Brass, Benedict Anderson, Frederick Barth, Anthony D Smith and Eric Hobsbawm.

Findings of the Study

The preceding chapters have discussed in detail different aspects of the study. The major findings of the thesis can be summarized as follows:

Development of Modern Paite Elites: Autonomy that the hill areas of Manipur enjoyed during the colonial period led to a new trajectory in the history of the hill communities in Manipur. In the pre-colonial era the Paite lived in villages and the village chief and his council of elders exercised considerable influence in social, political and cultural life of the people in the villages. However, after they came under the influence of modernization, the traditional political system, social values and the traditional power structure of the Paite, which were intact for centuries, began to transform gradually. Different factors like the growth of Christianity, exposure to modern education,
development of new social, political and economic institutions, policies of the Government of India and Government of Manipur, etc., led to the emergence and growth of new indigenous Paite elites. These resulted in dual leadership situations: the traditional Paite elites represented by the chiefs and his council of elders on the one side and the newly emerging Christianized modern Paite elites on the other side. As they saw a threat to their authority and status, the traditional chiefs tried to stop their villagers from embracing Christianity. Even though there was stiff resistance from the chiefs and elders to the new faith and modern ideas, the traditional forces could not stand against the newly emerging social forces in long run. Despite the challenges that the new forces posed to traditions and customs of the community, the growth of modern forces could not eliminate customary practices completely. The emerging Paite elites soon consolidated their hold over the society by occupying position of influence. Under their guidance and leadership, initiatives were taken to develop vernacular print language and literature. By the time India attained independence, a considerable number of modern elites emerged among the Paite. The competition and conflict with other ethnic communities in the region also contributed to the shaping up of their political and ideological orientation.

**Birth of Ethnic Organizations:** Another development that advanced the cause of the Paite community was formation of different Paite organizations, which played important roles in the development of the Paite community in Manipur. The first organization that emerged among the Paite community, *Siamsinpawlpi* (formerly known as Paite Students Association), was formed on January 13, 1947. It was followed by founding of Paite National Council (1949), Young Paite Association (1953), Paite
Literature Society (1954), and different Church denominations. Formation of different Paite organizations strengthened the up-coming Paite elites and facilitated the emergence of student and youth leaders. Emergence of Paite centric organizations also help in reinforcing the social boundaries of the community.

Post-colonial Influences on Paite Elites: Apart from the structural changes, the changing political situation in the hills of Manipur since India's independence has also influenced the political outlook and dynamics of the modern Paite elites. Political transformation of the state of Manipur from monarchy to constitutional monarchy on the eve of India's independence saw induction of the tribal people in the political affairs of the state. The subsequent integration of Manipur state into the Indian Union and adoption of parliamentary democratic form of government created a new platform for the hill communities including the Paite. The post-colonial developments such as enactment of Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947; Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act 1947; Manipur Village Authorities (in Hill Areas) Act 1956; Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act 1960; Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act 1967; Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act 1971, also influenced the political orientations of modern Paite elites. The process of urbanization, expansion of communication network, modern facilities, and market economy further opened up new opportunities and avenues for employment and people began to get jobs in various fields of administration and trades. All these developments led to the growing influence of the indigenous modern elites - politicians, intellectuals, bureaucrats and businessmen - in Paite public life.
Compromise between traditional and modern elites: Although at one time, it appeared that the emerging modern Paite elites would completely do away with the traditional elite as in the Mizo hills, political developments in the hills in Manipur after Indian independence forced a compromise between traditional and modern elites. Far from acting as rivals, the traditional elites began to change, while modern elites stopped targeting the traditional elites. The political compulsions to protect collective interests of the community forced them to come together to resist the real or imagined threat of domination by more powerful ethnic communities in the state. Because of such elite compromise, one can see elements of both modernity and tradition co-existing among the Paite elites.

Influence of Elections: Drawn into election politics, the ethnic communities in Manipur began to view it as a matter of prestige to have their community members represented in the Parliament and the State Legislative Assembly. This resulted in competition for political power based on community lines. In their competition for political space or power, the community leaders made use of ethnic organizations to gain the support of their community members. Since its inception in the year 1949 as the common political platform for the Paite community in Manipur, Paite National Council (PNC) has been playing an active role in the Paite politics in particular and the politics of the state in general. At the time of elections, PNC used to declare the names of candidates that it supports. Initially PNC exercised considerable influence over electoral and voting behavior of the Paite people. Paite voters developed the feeling that the defeat of the candidate from Paite community in elections was the defeat of the Paite community.
Therefore, every voter used to cast his or her vote for the candidate belonging to the Paite community. In case, there were more than one candidates contesting from the same constituency, the majority of voters cast their vote to the candidates put up by PNC. However, in recent years with the growth of political elites among the Paite, political elites within the same community started competing with one another for winning political power.

Socio-Economic Status of Elites: Some studies on elites have shown that high levels of education, higher incomes and high standards of living, job security, wider exposure, etc., are important attributes of modern leaders / elites. Since there is no empirical work to prove whether these assumptions are true in case of the Paite elites also, in chapter III, a survey was undertaken in the district of Churachandpur to comprehend the social, economic and ideological position of modern Paite elites and understand their role in construction of Paite and Zomi identities in Manipur. The following are the observations drawn from the survey:

i) It is observed that an overwhelming number of Paite elites are above forty years of age. Eleven (forty-four percent) are in the middle age group (41-60) and ten (forty percent) in the old age (61 and above) group. There are only four (sixteen percent) in the young age group (14 -40).

ii) There is an unequal gender representation in the affairs of the community. Only one member of the elite out of the twenty-five surveyed elites is a

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20 Lianhnun Guite, 'A Study of the Village Administration among the Paite with Special Reference to that of the Paites of Manipur', M. Phil Dissertation, Manipur University, Imphal, 1991, p. 188.
woman. Further investigation shows that only in student (Siamsinpawlpi) and church organizations, women participation was noticed. Even in these organizations, women generally occupy lower rungs of hierarchy.

iii) There are no illiterate elites among the respondents. All elites are educated and most of them have completed degree.

iv) Even though the elites are drawn from different occupational backgrounds, most of them are salaried employees and have stable economic means.

v) Although some of their parents have agricultural background, none of the elites is found to be engaged in cultivation for their livelihood. This indicates total shift of elites from agriculture to modern activities and symbolizes the decline of traditional hold on the society.

vi) It is observed that majority of the elites hail from joint family background (thirteen members of elites i.e. fifty-two percent are from joint family's background). The average size of family ranges from six to 10.4.

vii) Although the incidences of inter-community marriage are not many, it is observed that community elites are quite open and liberal when it comes to inter-community marriages.

viii) There is more than one earning member in the families of the respondents. Together there are sixty earning members in the families of twenty-five surveyed elites. The average number of earners in Paite elite family ranges from two to three.
ix) Even though the families depended from two or more different sources, salaries (ninety-two percent regular and forty-eight percent pensions) is the main source of earnings for majority of the families.

x) The majority of the Paite elite families surveyed have a decent income of over sixteen thousand per month. This is explained by the presence of a large number of joint families among the families of the elites. It is also related to the existence of significant number of earning family members.

xi) Out of the twenty-five surveyed elites, only one family (four percent) did not have television, three (twelve percent) families are without fridge, eight (thirty-two percent) families did not possess washing machine, and one family (four percent) did not have vehicle. Even though none of the elites is found to possess all these household items, it is found that they enjoy comfortable standard life and possess households amenities considered luxuries by the poorer sections.

xii) It is observed that fourteen members of elites (fifty-six percent) out of the twenty-five respondents are associated with three or more than three community organizations while six (twenty-four percent) are associated with only one organization. Four (sixteen percent) others claimed that they work for two organizations. The data indicates high involvement of the elites in community affairs. The study shows that twelve members of elites (forty-eight percent) are involved in organizing and planning of public meetings, while eleven members of elites (forty-four percent) are found to attend public meetings just to listen to what leaders say. Ten members of
elites (forty-percent) usually participate in public meetings as special guests. The study also shows overlapping of roles performed by the elites. In contrast to the above, fourteen members of elites (fifty-six percent) stay away from political demonstrations and processions.

xiii) It is observed that only two members of elites (eight percent) have affiliation to political parties. Twelve members of elites (forty-eight percent) expressed that they are not interested in political affiliation while nine members of elites (thirty-six percent) said that they are concerned with candidates, not with political parties. The finding clearly reveals the insignificant role of political parties in the political life of the elites. It also shows the general apathy of the Paite people towards political parties. The track record of parties and party manifestoes are not relevant to them. It is then natural that they cast their votes without any consideration for political ideology and can easily switch their loyalty from one party to another.

xiv) From the survey, it is learned that all respondents read newspapers regularly. Seventeen (sixty-eight percent) of them reported that they are most interested on issues concerning community. The study established that news relating to the community issues is the first preference of elites.

**Development of Paite Script and its Impact:** Development of the script for Paite language played an important role in the advancement of Paite community. In the year 1903 a Welsh Calvinistic Foreign Missionary Rev. David E Jones and T Vialphung
(1889-1936) of Kaihlam village, who was attending mission school in Aizawl prepared Paite Primer. Almost at the same time in 1904, George A Grierson published his linguistic survey of North-Eastern India, which made reference to Paite language. In Tedim region in Chin state of Burma, Rev. J H Cope, a Christian missionary, who also was a linguist, prepared Chin Primers in Tedim (Paite) dialect in the year 1913. The New Testament of the Bible was published in Tedim in 1932. Dr. Crozier, a North East India General Mission (NEIGM) missionary, went with H Chinlang, a NEIGM worker-cum-headmaster and some other Paite to Tedim and brought the Primer, songbook and the New Testament of the Bible to Manipur. However, the arrival of H Nengzachin on the scene during the last part of the 1930s had set a new trend in the development of Paite language. Nengzachin was one of the earliest educated Paite-Zomi from Manipur. In the year 1944 Nengzachin started translation of the New Testament of the Bible with Psalms in Paite. To learn Paite, he wrote Paite primer *Sintung Bu* in the year 1945. Nengzachin, thus laid the foundation for Paite literature on the India side.

As different persons were involved in developing the script for the Paite of India and Burma, one could see differences in spelling and writing. Notwithstanding such limitations in the script, the very development of a script language enhances the power of the language thereby, increasing the consciousness of the members as a political community. The development of script was accompanied by the formation of Paite organizations through which emerging Paite leaders / elites articulated and propagated the identity and interests of the community both within and outside the social boundary.
Movement for Tribe Recognition: The first Scheduled Tribes list order issued by the President of India in 1951 categorized the indigenous tribes of Manipur as any Naga tribes, any Kuki tribes, and any Lushai tribes. Because of non-inclusion of the Paite in the first Scheduled Tribes list, the nomination papers of the PNC supported candidate named T Thangkhai was rejected, when he refused to declare himself as Naga or Kuki or Lushai. Hurt by the incident, the PNC leaders demanded recognition of the Paite as a distinct scheduled tribe. The demand for political recognition was mobilized by PNC and its leaders. Paite leaders and PNC initiated peaceful and democratic movement. They presented a memorandum to the Government of India in 1955 wherein they stated that Paite have their own customs, language and literature, and identity different from their neighbors and sought promotion of Paite culture, customs, and language and demanded that all benefits and safeguards be guaranteed to the tribes under the Indian Constitution. The PNC's memorandum asserted that the Paite cannot be dubbed as Kukis, Nagas or Lushai. It also pleaded to the government to rectify its earlier policy of not permitting the Paite to contest the elections as Paite. Ultimately, in the year 1956 the Paite was recognized as a distinct schedule tribe of India.

Multiple Roles of Paite Elites: Recognition of Paite as a distinct Scheduled Tribal Community cannot be conceived in the absence of Paite elites. Since then, a number of steps and decisions were taken by the community leaders to further strengthen the identity base of the community. These apart, the PNC and Paite leaders codified all customary laws and practices of the community. The codification of Paite customary
laws, which can be invoked through the *Indongta*, the village authority, Paite Tribe Council Court or any court of law set up by the government, made it possible for application of common and uniform laws in dealings with cases, which concern the Paite. Demand was also made insisting on introduction of Paite vernacular subject in schools and colleges in Manipur. Initially, Paite vernacular paper was introduced in 1975 from class I to class V in Manipur. Since the academic year 2004-2005, it has been introduced as a subject at college level also.

**Growth of Paite Literature:** The development of Paite script and introduction of Paite language papers at school and college levels facilitated the growth of vernacular literature. Paite vernacular writers have also contributed considerably to the promotion of Paite language and literature in their writings. Their writings reflected the thoughts, ideas and aspirations of the Paite elites. At the organizational level also, a number of decisions and resolutions were taken by Paite leaders to further improve and facilitate the growth of Paite language and literature. The growth of print media and books including magazines and journals in the secular and non-secular fields enabled the Paite people to become conscious of their history, customs, traditions and culture.

**Development of Zo Consciousness:** The Zo people who reside in the trans-border area of India and Burma are known in Burma as Chin and are called Kuki or Lushai in India. The hyphenated term Chin-Kuki or Chin-Kuki-Lushai were used to refer to these culturally, linguistically, and ethnically related people. Even though the Zo people

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22 The *Indongta* (Household Council) is the traditional social institution of the Paite-Zomi. It has been discussed in brief in chapter II.
accepted these names for sometime, some started rejecting them even during the British
times. In Manipur, a number of scholars and writers have considered the dominant
attitude of the Thadou community as responsible for the rejection of Kuki by the Paite,
Hmar, Vaiphei, Lusei, Kom, Anals, and others. The Kuki tag is contested also on the
ground that it was not indigenous name, but imposed upon them by outsiders.

Paite Elites and Zo Movement: A number of organizations clamoring for Zo
solidarity have come up from time to time. The Paite people lent support to different
political and militant organizations such as Khulmi National Union (KNU), Chin
Liberation Army (CLA), Zomi National Congress (ZNC), Zomi Re-unification
Organization (ZRO), etc., which promised to unite Zo communities in India and Burma.
Paite elites from time to time reiterated its resolve or support to all efforts to unite all Zo
people, as seen in the resolutions of PNC Annual General Assemblies and the PNC Chief
Executive Council meetings. For instance, PNC Annual General Assembly held at
Hanship village, Churachandpur on October 10-13, 1957 adopted 'Chin Re-unification'
as its long term objective; PNC General Assembly held at Tuithapi village,
Churachandpur from May 6-9, 1983 declared its desire to build closer relations and
secure coordination among different Zo communities who share common customs,
traditions and culture but speak different dialects / languages. The Assembly also felt the
need to have common political platform for all the Zo peoples of Manipur at the earliest
possible time. To achieve this objective, PNC decided to work at the political
organization level, work together with the church, and through literature. In its Chief
Executive Council meeting dated October 10, 1994 PNC resolved that in line with the
PNC's long-term policy of Chin Re-unification, PNC declared its recognition and support to ZRO. PNC's CEC meeting of February 14, 1996 formally accepted Zomi to be its nomenclature. In the year 1997 Zomi Council (ZC), apex Zomi organization in Manipur was formed and PNC became one of the constituent members of ZC. Again, recognizing that one tribe (read Paite) alone cannot become a nation (in the context of the Zo people), the 48th Annual General Assembly of PNC dated June 27, 2003 rechristened PNC as Paite Tribe Council. In the year 2004, Zomi leaders of Manipur issued a press communiqué that read, “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…”

Conflicts and Compromises: Even though Zomi identity and its political movement initially sought to include all Zo communities, the term became popular among the non-Thadou-Kuki 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 came to an end with the signing of a Peace Accord on October 1, 1998 by President of Kuki Inpi, on behalf of Kukis and Chairman of Zomi Council, on behalf of the Zomis wherein both the parties agreed that, the nomenclatures Kuki and Zomi shall be mutually respected by all Zomis and Kukis and every individual or group

23 The press communiqué was signed by constituent community leaders of the Zomi of Manipur. See, Manipur Express, December 18, 2004.
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. Thereafter, the term Zomi again began to signify all those Zo communities who accept to be designated that way.

Impact of Zo Intellectuals and Writers: Apart from the above, the scholarly works of indigenous intelligentsia both from the secular and theologian backgrounds have also facilitated in creating common ethnic consciousness among the Zomis. From the reading of the available indigenous works on Zomi, one can get the Zomi’s 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. They repeatedly refuted the colonial names attributed to them; emphasized on their common ethnic origins and roots; narrated on how the Zo people had become an ‘ethnified nation’ due to division of their ancestral homeland among Burma, India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Apart from the writings in English, the indigenous intelligentsia wrote a number of vernacular works on Zomi which help in disseminating information to the non-English literate Zo people about their history and politics. Apart from the scholarly writings, the Zomi activists effectively used folklore, songs and poems to rouse the political consciousness of the members. Many of the Zomi nationalist songs espouse love for their land, express their desire for unification and inspire the Zomis to work together. These songs which are popular among the Zo people contributed considerably to the strengthening of Zomi consciousness. Several Paite writers, lyricists
and singers played a conscious role in using the cultural forms to promote and strengthen the Zo/Zomi consciousness among the Paite.

**Concluding Observations**

Community life and community interests are not determined by individual/personal choices. Objective material conditions in which they live determine the nature and dynamics of the community. However, in every community, we see leaders/elites, who organize, guide and lead the social, political, cultural/identity movements of the people. The study shows that in the Paite society also indigenous elites actively involved themselves in the identity discourse of the community. The Paite elites, through their relentless campaign, succeeded in securing official recognition of Paite as a distinct tribal community. Recognition of Paite as a separate schedule tribe community, codification of customary practices of Paite community, introduction of Paite language and literature in school and college syllabi etc., could become possible only because of the efforts of the Paite elites. The community leaders or elites articulated the interests of the community within and outside the social boundaries through community organizations. The transformation of the spoken dialect of the Paite into a print language and the consequent growth of Paite literature enhanced the consciousness of the members as a political community. The Paite elites with the help of mass media and different literary and cultural organizations played an important role in the development of language and literature. The crucial role played by the language and literature in the formation of Paite identity consciousness underscore the views of Benedict Anderson and Paul Brass.
Initially while advocating the separate identity of the Paite, the Paite elites tried to project Paite as a distinct nation and named their political organization as Paite National Council. The community leaders initially attempted to construct ‘nation’ out of Paite identity. However, learning from the experience, the Paite elites realized that one tribal community alone cannot make a nation. Therefore, accepting more pragmatic idea that the Paite and other cognate Zo communities could together build ‘Zo nation’, the Paite leaders renamed Paite National Council (PNC) as Paite Tribe Council (PTC) and chose to work together with other Zo communities to strengthen Zo solidarity among different Kuki-Chin communities in Manipur. This experience of the Paite is a deviation from Paul Brass’s formulation regarding development of an ethnic community to the stage of a nationality. Nevertheless, the renaming of PNC to PTC by the community leaders after more than fifty years of its (PNC) inception has a much deeper symbolic significance. As claimed by Paul R Brass, if the ethnic elites succeeded in their efforts, the nationality thus created does not result in the emergence of an entirely new entity, but one that has been transformed, whose boundaries have in some ways been widened. In the case of the Paite, though the community has failed short of achieving nationality status, formal acceptance of Zomi appears to be the resultant rediscovery of their primal Zo identity, perceived to be deeply rooted in the social and cultural milieu of the Paite and other culturally related Zo communities.

The Zo people did not completely cut-off themselves from traditions, as Gellner would expect. This becomes evident from their beliefs, folklores, and contemporary literature. The Zomi experience reminds us of Anthony D Smith’s argument that in their

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quest to discover a true identity, the communities look backwards to find their origins and
genealogy. The assertion of Zomi identity based on the socio-cultural and ethnic ties
validates Smith's contention that ethnic beliefs and myths become a rallying point for
marginalized and submerged communities aspiring for national status and territorial
recognition. In the absence of written traditions, it is difficult to ascertain how old these
traditions and beliefs really are. But the Zo people's interpretation of Zo as the fore-father
of all Zo communities appears to validate Eric Hobsbawm thesis on 'invention of
tradition', wherein he says that many of the traditions which were considered as very
ancient are, in fact, constructed or invented rather recently by community or nationalists
leaders to meet various political, social and cultural needs and challenges of the
community. Nevertheless, their invocation of what they believe to be their primal name,
reminds us of what Walker Conner wrote in his article, 'A Nation is a Nation, is a State,
is an Ethnic, is a...', wherein he says that in "analyzing socio-political situations, what
ultimately matters is not what is but what people believe is".

Alongside consolidating the Paite identity, the Paite elites also played an
important role in the movements for Zomi identity with the aim to integrate or unify all
the Zo communities / tribes of India and Burma. The Zomi leaders rejected the name
Kuki declaring it as the name imposed by outsiders and instead articulated their common
ethnic origins and cultural similarities to bring the cognate Zo communities under a
common platform. They propagated Zomi nationalism with the help of community

26 Ibid., p. 61.
27 Walker Conner, 'A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic, is a...' in John Hutchinson and Anthony D
organizations, literature and folklores, political and militant outfits and mass media. Even though Zomi solidarity was initially articulated to include all the Zo communities, the political conflicts and competition in Manipur compelled Zomi as a political platform for the non-Thadou Kuki speaking Zo communities in Manipur. Drawing of boundaries between Zomi and Kuki in spite of their shared cultural and ethnic features validates Fredrik Barth’s view of transient nature of ethnic boundaries. The Zomi and Kuki experience shows the relevance of Barth’s thesis that mere cultural and racial similarities are not enough to create and consolidate social boundaries. Political interests, as perceived and articulated by the community elites, play important role in the politics of boundary maintenance and identity construction.

To conclude, apart from throwing light on the contribution of the Paite-Zomi elites, the present study on the role of Paite elites in construction of Paite identity and Zomi consciousness among the Paite shows how complex socio-political issues and trajectories influence the role of elites in construction of ethnic identities among smaller ethnic communities.