Chapter V

CONCLUSION
Writing the history of the people who had a past but not a history is a daunting task that acquires importance and thus leads us to the part of innovation. In the post colonial period the colonised people like the Indians etc., started writing history in the language of the colonised as the counter narratives that provided new perspectives about their past with a view to reclaim their histories. Indian history has come of age and is able to engage with most of the issues in the global academia using the latest tools and methods. The linguistic turn of the 1980’s that employed radical rhetoric and innovative methods taking from the works of Michel Foucault, Derrida and Heidegger had all been taken by the many Indian historians. However, these developments seem to have by passed the Mizo region and by extension, the whole of North East India. The first chapter therefore begins with a critique of the historiographical trends and goes on to explore the rich varieties of themes that one could engage with in reconstructing the Mizo cultural history based on the new paradigms and methods using wide variety of sources. The chapter ends by positing that the bamboo cycle or Mautam can be one of the most important frames of references to reconstruct the chronology of the Mizo history.

History of North east India and more specifically of the Mizo cultural area has primarily been studied under the rubric of political history; a cultural history on the other hand has more or less largely been studied under anthropology or political history. This is one of the vestiges of colonialism. Owing to the highly politicized nature of the context, cultural history has become labelled as exotic and thereby the practices were studied in isolation. At another level they have been studied as part of a project of the identity. A historiography of tracing the earliest writings by the European administrators and the colonial ethnographers is essayed in the chapter beginning from Shakespear, Alexander Mackenzie, Perry, Lloyd etc. The die was cast by these early writers who produced generalized images of Mizo cultural area. These encounters between the colonizers and the colonized brought in a new method of writing history based on the written records. In this chapter a detailed discussion about the problems of the inadequacy of such a project is explained here. The inadequacy begins with the fundamental fact of why the Mizo society was Oral, whereas the history writing was based on printed works. In spite of the prevalence of many sources like archeological, oral and other foreign accounts the European
method of history writing based on written records and the idea of progress became predominant thereby relegating the earlier accounts by de-legitimizing them and also considering them as inauthentic. In the 1960’s the rise of new cultural history in the west followed by the linguistic turn in the 1980’s have given us innovative methods to deal with such context rich recovery of the past. One needs to mention the presence of megaliths that are one of the most important sources like Sibuta Lung, Mangkhaia Lung and Darthiangi Lung. The oral sources associated with the megaliths also informs the myths that still inform the Mizos about their past. One such important myth is a Chhinlung Myth which is accepted by all the clans of the Mizos. Though the church discourse is a strong influence, the concept of Chhinlung, Rih Dil continued to exist posing a problem for the historians. These residual elements in the Mizo tradition are some of the rich repository of the cultural elements. Reconstruction of history by using these elements could make our reading of the past richer. The bamboo famine has been one of the most important events in the history of post colonial Mizo region. In such a situation the entire encounter with a new set of values and institutions was triggered off by the Mizo bamboo famine or Muatam. It is proposed here that the Mautam can be scientifically placed as part of the bamboo flowering cycle and dated with accuracy. This chapter thematically ends the discussion on historiography by proposing the use of Mautam as an important tool to re-construct the periodisation of Pre-British Mizoram. This will help to rehabilitate Mizo history and thus enable us to reconstruct the Mizo history using indigenous categories that are scientifically valid for understanding of the periodisation.

In the next theme the focus is on another area which takes from the historiographical trends by trying to problematise the Mizo myth of origin. In the north east with special reference to the Mizo cultural area that extend beyond to Burma shared not only a myth of origin but also a feeling of kindred oneness which is strengthened by the mutually intelligible languages. As mentioned earlier, the coalition of an oral tradition with a large scale well organized colonial narratives backed by both religious and scientific legitimacy possessing a written form took place. In this encounter, what emerged was the predominance of European narrative along with Christianity. It was hoped that the early Mizo historians like Vanchhunga,
still earlier were the first group of people who followed Shakespeare, started a narrative that was more oriented towards biblical explanation like Liangkhaia’s book on Mizo Chanchin. The prevailing climate expresses the view that these views would be dominated and the oral tradition would disappear in course of time. In the post colonial scenario the Mizos have one of the largest literacy rates in India and the world and also one of the largest percentages of church going followers. Given this objective condition the wishful thinking of the early missionary that the attitudes towards myth would be eroded and almost be a residual element has been proved wrong. Contrary to this, even today the Chhinlung myth is one of the most researched topics and all schools of history adhered to this as reference point. The Lushai, Chins, Maras, Lai, Mizos Israeli every one emphasize a fundamental beginning of their narratives from this myth. How does one explain this has been posited as a building block of the Mizo societies? The primordial feature of the Mizo society is firmly anchored on this origin myth which explains the importance of this myth. The building block, the primordial elements is reflected in this myth.

The various narratives that place the different clans take out from the shared myths and then fixed themselves. Thus we get the settlement patterns of the Lushai, Mara, Lai, the Old Kuki and the new Kuki, the Chins and the other cognate people in a stretch. This large area extending from Assam in the west to the hills of Burma, Manipur and Burma is the core area where the different cognate groups of the Mizos circulated. Why chieftaincy evolved a new polity based on clans or organize that led to political contestation among different groups. Such pulls and pushes of political expansionism of a resource and territorial ity led to migrations. An examination of the narrative in this chapter gives an account of the migrations of the Lushai and the associated clans to Mizoram, the settlement of the Pawih and different clans like Chawngthu and Ralte. While it may be easy to question these claims and counter claims on the basis of conventional historiography that employs a set of source materials that are written in nature, orality does not provide an answer. The answer however lies deeper in the nature of political organization when we find that this large swath of territory from the borders of Assam to the borders of China including all of highland South East Asia is a term called Zomia. One of the central features of Zomia is the opposition to state and all statist apparatuses like writing etc., that
would mean loss of political freedom. Keeping this larger formulation in mind the lack of written documents to explain migration doesn’t become an exception but a rule in Zomia. When we re-read these migratory narratives against the background of Zomia they give us an idea of alternate historical consciousness which is not rooted in any written narratives. These narratives engage with the landscape some of which are mythical like Pialral, mythical but with a specified location like Rih dil (Rih Lake) and places with a fixed existence. The interaction of the different groups of people in this highland terrain with the communication based on mutually intelligible dialects led to many cultural flows. The expression of such cultural practices is reflected in the everyday life and practices with the shared common origins. Though there are differences, they are primarily at the level of nomenclature with each cognate tribe claiming a different name. The chapter ends by positing that the term ‘Mizo’ may be a generic term as the cultural patterns and shared histories of these different clans Ralte, Chawngthu, Lai and Mara etc., converged towards a common cultural form which is proposed as ‘Mizo’.

In the pre-literate Mizo societies, one of the main bases of identity was geography as it constituted a worldview formed out of the interaction with a definite terrain. In this case the highland hill regions of North East India stretching to Burma till the Chindwin river form the core area of the Mizo society with certain regions concentrated settlement Aizawl, Hakka, Tidim etc., a cursory description of physical geography would convey only an incomplete understanding of the Mizo culture. Borrowed from Robert Redfield’s work on the ‘worldview’ along with the concept of sacred geography one finds that many of the places mentioned along with the myths gave a clear meaning when these concepts are applied, for example the story of Tlingi and Ngama leads us to the idea of the immortality. This immortality is not only spatially encoded but also tied up with the production pattern. Here we see that Thangchhuah and the others are only having restricted entry. This is tied up with the process of re-distribution. Similarly other functions served by the sacred geography include aspects of prohibition as found in the Dil huai where morality is stressed. The sacred geography is a series of places that served to explain the unexplainable and the agents of this process are the super-natural beings in the forms of spirits, demons, patrons of wild animals etc,. By their functions, they give meaning and
approval to certain forms of conduct which lead to the regulation of society. Therefore, the organisation of society can be explained by an engagement not only with the real world that is physically discernible but also the unseen world which is invisible and believe to regulate many of the natural phenomena in all their multifarious aspects. Thus helping the individual to overcome one of the most primal fears, the fear of the unknown and in this process give a coherent worldview of the natural social and religious phenomena with their explanations. We have observed that in this juncture centuries old worldview with the colonial encounter and spread of Christianity. While the early missionary writings and church practices did not encourage these narratives, their persistence points to the solidity of their primordial foundation and as such remained as one of the sources of identity. In the recent days their incorporation in to the church lyrics marched a new process whereby the Mizos have negotiated to blend the aspects of past with modernity creating a form of Christianity wherein the rootedness within the Mizo cultural is firmly established.

While colonialism constructed the image of the pre modern Mizo as a savage, they were informed primarily by the hunters whose occasion was dubbed as ferocious. On a closer observance we find that the colonial view has challenged one of the ideals of the Mizo society; Thangchhuah Pa has not been fully rehabilitated in history. The final chapter is an attempt to restore the rightful place of Thangchhuah in history and also to problematise the concept of hunting as a very sophisticated form of production. In the process of hunting as the form of production, the Thangchhuah can be located as an institution in a clan based chiefdom. The economic basis of the chiefdom rested on subsistence jhum cultivation and hunting gathering, which were the constituents of the used economy. Therefore, the institution of Thangchhuah as a feast involved a sacrifice of a set of animals that were hunted. There are two ways of attaining this status Inlam Thangchhuah and Ramlam Thangchhuah.

As the feasts were an event and Thangchhuahpa had to spend a sizable sum and also mobilise recourses it needed both physical bravery and economic basis to enter the higher strata. Thus, the combination of bravery and economic prosperity regulated the entry of the potential Thangchhuahpa. In addition it also generated
symbols visible not only in names and titles but also in two important aspects – the construction of house and dress. While the construction of the house was a visible and tangible form of superordinate status, it showed the dynamics of stratification and also indicated the capability of a person. In a society where markers of status are symbolically encoded in dress the song of the Thangchhuah served as a semiotic currency which was recognizable everywhere in the Mizo cultural area more specifically in the immediate kin based chiefdom.

Tlawmngaihna is another important concept which outlined the ethics of hunting and also synchronises hunting in its social ecology. Long lists of taboos and do’s and don’ts let to sustainable use and prevented over exploitation of the forest. The matters of rituals to the contribution of Mizo cultural formation is also reflected in the folk songs. The folk songs also reveal a clear material base emanating from the Thangchhuah practices. The war cry, the contents of the song are all reflective of the brave warrior in the rugged terrain. Further the direct input into the belief systems comes from the Thangchhuah which is clearly revealed as an etymological analysis of Sakhua biakna is done. The cycle of seasons of sacrifice are largely determined by the Thangchhuah.

Therefore we have seen that the practices of the Mizos were determined by the environment they had interacted with but we cannot labelled it as geographical determinism since a historical study shows the effect of human agency and veers towards a combination of geographical determinism and possiblism. The development of implements and tools had also affected the practices as well as the creation of hierarchy within the society. We also see that the structures of dress, housing pattern, naming etc.

Thus Thangchhuah reflects the process of re-distribution and reciprocity by regulating excess hunting and preventing unsustainable destructons of animal life. It also regulates the entry into social hierarchy by strong gradation based on redistribution of the resources which are the products of hunting. Similarly the clan egalitarianism is upheld by the reciprocity that is culturally enjoined and ritually sanctioned.
The cultural history of the Mizos during the pre-British period can be written only with a fair use of the oral literature and a study of the practices of hunting and sacred geography by using new methods from cultural history and employing indigenous concepts and categories like Pialral and Thangchhuah. It accomplishes two things; firstly, to negate the negative colonial historiography and rehabilitate Mizo history by providing judicious reading based on combination of modern methods rooted in the Mizo cultural tradition. The thesis proposes that the concept of worldview and Thangchhuah are important makers that bring forth the Mizo identity in a wider canvas and give explanation to myths and legends that are in alienable part and continue to be so in the Mizo worldview even today. On a methodological note, the thesis ends by proposing the use of Mautam as a chronological marker that is both culturally consonant and scientifically valid along with the use of generic term Mizo. It is hoped that the employment of this term would give a full play to the various identities and their histories that are mutually intelligible societies which have now emerged as the Mizo.