Chapter V
Politics of Ethnic Identity and Politics of 'Otherisation':

'Zomi/Mizo' and the Vai

The politics of this region has been deeply influenced by the influx of people from other regions. However, the perceptions and the political implications of such movement of people have varied within the same areas depending on the time and specific communities involved. The notion of the 'other' that has evolved in the region has changed through time. In this chapter I take into account the three prominent migrant groups namely the 'Vai', the 'Burma mi' (Burmese, 'Poi') and the 'Gorkha'; and also have a quick glance at the Reang (Bru). I have deliberately picked and chosen these groups of others for the very obvious factor that they do not have institutional mechanisms in the form of an ADC (Autonomous District Council) to support their socio-political spatial rights in Mizoram. I have relied on oral history because 'Oral History', in specific 'Folklore and Folk-culture', is embedded with hidden messages and meanings; and helps to un-screen the hidden mounds lying beneath the dust of time. The chapter specifically explores and brings to the fore the contest between 'Zomi/Mizo' and the 'Vai' which forms and shapes the major part of the landscape of Zo/Mizo Politics. I support my arguments through informal personal interviews of people belonging to the three select groups as well as experiential inputs of their organisations in their attempt to chisel out their spaces in Mizoram.

1 The most striking development has been in Tripura. Over the years, due to the migration of the Bengali Hindu population from East Bengal the tribal autochthones were out-numbered. The tribal population dropped from 64 percent in 1874 to 29 percent in 1971. The Bengali population became 68 percent of the total population in 1971. From all available accounts, the Bengali percentage is now 70. The result has been that political and administrative power passed from the hands of indigenous tribals to immigrant Bengalis. The transfer of land from the tribal population to the Bengali migrants proved to be the most critical factor in deteriorating social relations and a flash-point was reached in June 1980 at Mandia leading to a carnage, initiated by the tribals with Bengalis taking retaliatory measures, in which several hundreds lost their lives and three hundred thousand were rendered homeless. There is widespread apprehension in the minds of the Assamese caste Hindus that in the near future they will lose political power in favour of numerous migrants. The other States of the region also share the Assamese fears. In a democratic framework of one-man-one-vote, the role played by demographic factor remains crucial in bringing about spectacular changes in power politics. B. P. Singh. (1987). North-East India: Demography, Culture and Identity Crisis. Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 21, No. 2. (1987), pp. 257-282.
An important area of concern in contemporary readings of identity discourse has been *the study of food, the culinary tastes, consumption patterns, and food as linked to a culture and identity*. I attempt to explore the identity constructions through the gastronomical perspective and reflect on the acculturation strategies employed by ‘migrants’ living in Mizoram and in particular how food products enter into a discourse of identity construction; and study the strategies adopted/employed by the margins to counter the same. Further confirming the argument that in ‘Identity Politics’, food is not simply a passive symbol that refers to something else, but because “it becomes us”, it is imbued with a distinctive potency in the process of imagining communities. The symbolic force of food in identity politics, it is suggested, lies in the embodiment inherent in the ingestion of food “You are what you eat”. It also demonstrates how food and culinary behaviour are given another symbolic meaning when consumers cross cultural borders between one another and form ‘imagined communities’ and how food itself becomes part of the discourse (big as well as small) of the narrations of identity.

### TABLE 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
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<td>Above 18 years</td>
<td>Private Service</td>
<td>Govt. Service</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorkha</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Own Survey Data*
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*The 100 Gorkha respondents were the descendants of the early Gorkha migrants and among the first settlers of Aizawl. The younger generations were multi-lingual while the older generations mostly spoke Gorkhali and very little Mizo. The 100 Vai respondents consisted of mostly children of officers posted in Mizoram as well as children of college and school teachers born and raised in the Zo hills. All the Vai respondents could speak Mizo. Few of the Vai respondents have married and migrated outside the state and do not seek to return. The 20 Burmese respondents (not shown in the table given above) belonged to the Chin-group and had been settled first in Mizoram in Aizawl and Champhai areas. They were re-located to Delhi following the Quit notices served to them by the YMA and other agencies. They lived in different areas such as Vikaspuri, Sonia Vihar in Delhi and spoke Mizo. All the respondents were single men and many preferred to be anonymous. The two respondents who agreed to be named have been quoted in this work.

5.1. Politics of 'Exclusions' and 'Inclusions': Politics of 'Otherisation'

The notion of citizenship in Mizoram is channelled by the politics of 'Inclusion' and 'Exclusion' or what I call “Politics of 'Check-In' and 'Check-Out'”. Citizenship or recognition as citizens or as persons (migrants) undergoes the unique experience of a 'Regulated Citizenship' filtered through a process of inclusion and exclusion. The politics of 'inclusions' and 'exclusions' is thoroughly directed by the project of building an 'Ideal Zo Christian State'. 'Inclusion' and 'Exclusion', thus, are parallel processes and are often intertwined into a complex mould. Parallel processes, in the sense that the inclusion of one, most evidently or naturally involves the exclusion of the others (select few or many). Complex mould, in the sense that the over-play or the under-play of inclusion and exclusion changes with time and space, in short, what is included today, may be excluded tomorrow or maybe under-played in the near future and vice-versa or it may encapsulate other players in the given space. The Zo/Mizo case substantiates the argument that 'Exclusion' and 'Inclusion' is a complex mould, and that the over-play or the under-play of inclusion and

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2 The movement of people is regulated by those who control and dictate the terms of spatiality in any given situation. Here I am drawing a parallel between the situations mentioned in the Eagles' song 'Hotel California' which runs as ‘...We are programmed to receive. You can checkout any time you like, But you can never leave!’ and the situation of the Vai in Mizoram. Despite numerous hurdles in terms of their existence in Mizoram, the Vai have continued to make the presence felt in Mizoram either voluntarily or under compulsion or in repressed situations where the 'self' is muted.

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exclusion changes with time and space, in short, what is included today, may be excluded tomorrow or maybe under-played in the near future and vice-versa or it may encapsulate other players in the given space.

The notion of 'Others' just like that of foreigners as perceived by the Zo/Mizo is apparently confusing and very broad. The category of the ‘Others’ can be broadly subdivided into ‘permanent pariah’ and ‘temporary pariah’ and thus in general includes the ‘Vai’, the Burma mi (’Poi’, Burmese) and at times incorporates the Gorkha who have attained the status of ‘Denizens’. The category also includes at times the internal tribes or ethnic communities/minorities who maintain cultural, linguistic distinctiveness or exclusiveness whether or not they believe in ‘the mythical origin of the Zo tribes’: the Chhinlung theory. Thus the Mara (Lakher), the Lat (Pawi), the Hmar, the Chakma, the Bru (Reang) and many more also form the nebulous category of the ‘Others’ in Mizoram. The term ‘Triad of the Marginals’ denotes the similar experiences of victim hood, subjugation and the domination of the hegemony of the majority community (ies) which is very male that is patriarchal in nature and experience, which I term as the ‘Nexus of Patriarchy’. The ‘Triad of the Marginals’ is a term used for convenience to club the experiences of victim hood of marginals namely women (as a category without distinction in terms of race, ethnicity etc), the ‘Vai’ and ‘others’, under one head.

Ethnicity is also commonly tied to territory, but Horowitz has shown that changes in territorial boundaries can lead to significant changes in ethnic identities. Individuals may also regard each other as ethnic strangers in one place, but as ethnic kin in another where they may discover both common cultural commitments and common material interests in the face of competitors from radically different cultures. Horowitz argues that ethnic identity can be shifted upwards or downwards to more inclusive or narrower levels to meet situational exigencies. Ethnic and national groups can similarly fuse or split apart. Such processes may

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5.1.1. Tracing the ‘Others’ in the ‘Kuki-Chin-Mizo Oral traditions’

The ‘Kuki-Chin-Mizo oral traditions’ is a blanket term used to refer to the common Oral traditions\footnote{‘Oral History’ is a term used to refer to a wide ranging activities from informal conversations about the past (‘beetein din’) among family members, neighbours, or co-workers especially among migrant communities or displaced persons; to formal, rehearsed accounts of the past presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; to printed compilations of stories told about past times or about experiences-old and new; and to recorded interviews with individuals who have an important story to narrate. Oral history in this sense relies heavily on memories and needs a certain degree of ‘ice-breaking’ between the narrator and the audience.} of the people living in and around the region of the present state of Mizoram in India; and the neighbouring areas including the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and the Chin Hills in Myanmar. The ‘Kuki-Chin-Mizo oral traditions’ are the common heritage of the people of Zo \textit{tlang ram} and a widely found with certain degrees of interpolations and changes. De-Coding these oral traditions helps to reflect on the distorted and stereotyped construction of gendered practices in the Zo/Mizo society, old as well as new. Reading between the lines of these narratives helps to understand two important phenomenon: First, the \textit{calculated process of displacement}\footnote{I consider the process of displacement or marginalisation to be a ‘calculated’ one because the Patriarchy determines how much one is to be displaced, the degree of displacement being controlled by the ‘time and space’ factor which again changes, according to the benefits that it gives to the patriarchy in operation.} of the female and of the marginal agencies by the patriarchy. Re-reading the ‘Zo’ Oral traditions helps to understand the representation of women in the Zo/Mizo society and the complex nature of the power-play functioning under the patriarchy. The oral traditions are coded with socio-economic-political meanings and needs to be de-coded in order to understand their significance to particular local specificities.
5.2. Locating the Vai in Zo/Mizo Society over the years

The relationship between the Mizo/Zo and the Bengali has remained controversial. The arrival of the Bengali ‘baboons’ in the wake of the British colonisation of the region after 1826, created a constant tug of war between the two as ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. While in the case of the Assamiyas-Bengalis in Assam it was more in the context of language. In the case of the ‘Mizo/Zo’-Bengali it had more to do with racial overtones as well as economic-political power play. The traditional ‘Others’ for the Zo tribes have been the Cachari Bengalis, Meiteis (Manipuri), the Burma mi (Burmese), the Naga, the Tripuri.

5.2.1. The Vai in the Zo Oral Traditions

The concept of outsider is seen as prevailing across the North East, albeit under different names. In Mizoram, the term ‘Vai’ evokes mixed feelings of contempt, distrust, mockery and envy. The inflow of the ‘Vai’ in present day Mizoram has a strong colonial linkage. The gradual yet sure, entry of the ‘Vai’ into the Zo/Mizo economy provided for a greater degree of interaction between the ‘Vai’ and Zo/Mizo women. The arena of economics, thus became the realm for the activities of women and ‘Others’, i.e. for all those who were excluded from the realms of spirituality and politics. The Zo/Mizo patriarchy under the impact of Christian traditions began to view economics and the notions of business and that of profit to be both sensuous and materialistic and linked them with the notions of ‘original sin and sexuality’ and everything signified by the word ‘Khawve’ (worldly).

8 After 1826 Assam was placed under Bengal and Bengali was made the official language as well as medium of instructions at school level mainly for economic and administrative convenience of the Colonial regime (H.K. Barpujari. (1977). (Reprinted 1980). Assam in the days of the Company 1826-1858. Guwahati: LBS). The other factor cited for such a strategy was as Guha puts it ‘Assamese had lost its rightful place to Bengali in local schools and courts in 1837 on the false ground that it was a dialect of the latter language’. Amalendu Guha. (1977). (1988). Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research.

9 The early contacts of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai tribes with the neighbouring tribes of the region have been traced to the Rajamala or the Chronicles of Tripura. Suniti Kumar Chatterji in his ‘Kirata-Jana-Krti’ (1974) referred to them as the ‘Kiratas’ who were employed by the Hindu kings of Tripura and Cachar to suppress their enemies time and again. The history of the initial contacts of the ‘Kuki-Chin-Lushai tribes’ with the rest of the tribes in the North-East is still a contestable multilayered terrain. It is safest to have a panoramic vision the whole historical process as a multilayered process of migrations of tribes and non-tribes; and inter-tribal warfare for having a command over the same ‘game-territory’. Sangkima. (2004a). Essays on the History of the Mizos. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications. p.11.
Several of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo Folktales speak of the initial contacts with the Vai-the Plainsmen for instance the story of Lalruanga and Keichalal mentions that on the way to Zangkaki’s village on a hot summer day, Lalruanga swam across the Tuiruang (Barak) river and accidentally dropped his box containing the secrets of magic which he had got from Keichalal. Lalruanga sent a rat known for its speed on a leaf to fetch the box but unfortunately both the box and the rat rifted downstream to the plains to be captured by the Vai ho (Vai people). The plainsmen learnt the art of magic from the box and that of building boats and rowing from the rat. The Zos believe that it is because of this incident that the Vai are better at magic and building boats and rowing. Similarly the story of Tualvungi and Zawlpala and also that of Remenhawii (The Beautiful lady who lived upstream with her husband and the lustful King from the Plains (Chittagong)) speaks of the contacts of the Zos with that of the Vai.\(^{10}\) The Kuki-Chin-Mizo Folklores reflect the diverse range of marginalisation of the ‘triad of the Marginals’ in the Zo oral traditions. The stereotyped depiction of women as greedy, materialistic, vain and immoral (sexual) and the projection of Vai as cunning, shrewd, lustful, always looking for sexual favours from Zo women and the Poi (Burmese) as greedy, rich and foolish in most of the folktales and sayings reflect the underlying patriarchal biases acting against the triad.

5.3.2. The Vai from the Colonial ‘Zo’ world and thereafter

Post-independence administration in the North-East inherited this structure. Though at the outset it seems to be a strategy aimed at fencing off areas, it also contained the initial kernel of plural legal regimes of land use, property, ownership, and control over resources.\(^{11}\) Coupled with this was the great dilemma of democracy which cuts both ways. On the one hand it acts as a great unifier among the group concerned, acting as a cementing force and instils confidence among marginal social groups of their ability to determine their own ‘selves’ and break from the majoritarian encapsulation; on the other, it divides that group from the ‘larger other’ and threatens the larger nation (India) in the making.


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Modernism/Modernity and the sentiments of nationalism that is territorial loyalty seek to substitute primordial loyalties of clan, tribes, castes, race, community and language but in practice end up churning these primordial sentiments even deeper as evident from the Indian experience. The North-East in general has been experiencing this need for re-drawing the boundaries in the North-Eastern territorial zones and spaces that is re-marking the geopolitics based on the logic of traditional game land that the people had lost due to the British and other external forces. With the introduction of these exclusivist-isolationist strategies the age-old cultural-religious contacts of the Plains and the Kuki-Chin-Lushai-Zo/Mizo tribes of the region came to an end. As Suhas Chatterjee (1990, p.6) puts it:

Gone are the days when the Giri monks of Sankaracharya’s order from Badrinath (U.P), Tarakeshwar (West Bengal), and Kamakhya (Assam) used to visit the ‘Black Siva (Kala Siva) in Mizoram after paying their homage to Lord Shiva in the Bhuban Hills (Cachar) during Shivratri festivals.

However, the pre-British contacts of the ‘Vai’ and the Zo/Mizo tribes were temporary and of short duration as evident from the seasonal visit to the tribes to the trade marts in the plains and the movement of the tradesmen to the interiors of the Hills. The Zo/Mizo welcomed the traders as friends as they used to get their supplies of sulphur, gun and flint glass from them. Enterprising tradesmen, familiar with the topography of the Hills and language, rendered valuable services in bringing the British into closer ties with the Lushais. Overtime the modern system of economics replaced the barter trade at the ‘Bepari Bazaar’ in Sylhet border and Kasalang in the Chittagong border. Lalrimawia (1995) cites

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W.W Hunter's "Statistical Account of Assam 1879", mentioning Captain Lewin's efforts of encouraging the 'Vai' traders to set-up permanent marts in different places in Chittagong Hill Tracts. These traders would pay rent in kind, which would be a permanent source of income for the Chiefs; and as a token of good will gesture, the Chiefs, on their turn would guarantee the traders security of life and property. The coming of the 'Vai' via the British rule marked another hallmark in the Zo/Mizo society: the change in the nature and mode of Zo economy from a barter system to a permanent economy. However, the entry of the 'Vai' was limited by the restrictions imposed on the entry of the outsiders inside the Mizo Hills the Chin Hills Regulations of 1896 and the Inner Line Permit.16

The direct result of the entry of permanent economy in the form of 'Vai' settlement was that the Lushais became totally dependent on external resources17 for the daily commodities and this phenomenon continues even to this day. The 'self-sufficient primitive economy' gave way to the 'modern economy', and introduced along with it the phenomenon of Commodity and Cultural Fetishism. The 'Vai' as a result were stereotyped as 'Sum dawn' (Traders/Businessmen), economic animals, 'Vai Phakar' (Cunning); guided by profit mentality and 'Ui Kawm' (miser). The permanent entry of the 'Vai' in the Zo/Mizo economy provided a space for greater degree of interaction between the 'Vai' and Zo/Mizo women. This interactive economic space boosted the local business (shops) run by Zo/Mizo women. Trade centred around the flow of goods like cotton, woollen yams, brass, enamel, aluminium utensils, iron, pan (Betel leaves), tobacco, matches, soaps, chillies, ginger, oranges, forest products and other fancy goods.18


The arena of Economics was automatically ascribed a secondary existence and women being excluded from the realms of spirituality and politics became fit, along side the marginal groups like the ‘Vai’ and the Burma mi (‘Poi’, Burmese) to occupy the realms of economics and form the Triad of the Marginals. The Zo/Mizo patriarchy, under the impact of Christian traditions, began to view economics and the notions of business and profit to be both sensuous and materialistic and linked them with the notions of original sin and sexuality. The ‘Nexus of Patriarchy’ associated the ‘Triad of the Marginals’ with moral degradation, sin, immorality and everything signified by the word ‘Khawvel’ (worldly). Controlling the sexuality and mapping the spatial domain of the ‘Triad of the Marginals’ thus became the holy goal of the Zo Christian society. In other words, notions of spirituality, divinity and God are used as weapons to oppress the members of the ‘Triad of the Marginals’. Religion and Politics thus began to be considered superior, powerful and therefore more alluring; this led to the ‘male-fying’ of religion and politics and the creation of the ‘Nexus of Patriarchy’.

The Vai over the years have made a considerable presence in the economics of Zo/Mizo society. However, the Vai is still considered to be a ‘permanent pariah’, especially by people who lived and experienced the trauma of insurgency and counter-insurgency. The memories and pain of the troubled times continues to mould and shape the pattern of social interactions and relations with the ‘Vai’. Zaliana’s observation sums up the attitude of people who lived through the insurgency and counter-insurgency:

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Buai kum a khan Mizo kanlo la mol amaeroh chu kan nun khan a rong lo'...Indian Army kha a rong zok (during the insurgency times we
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19 Gurpreet Mahajan, “A Gendered Diary: Subject Dharma Kumar”, in Economic and Political Weekly, June 3, 2000, p. 1899, gives a similar explanation for the exclusion of women from the realms of spirituality. My argument carries forward Mahajan’s lines and locates the ultimate option left for the women in the Mizo society that is the realms of economics, which according to the Mizo patriarchy is both sensuous, and materialistic, ‘Khawvel’ (worldly). Women in subsistence economies are allowed to participate in the whole process of ‘economic pooling’ as long as it is profitable to Patriarchy to get the economic pie enlarged. So long as the resources are enlarged, the Patriarchy does not feel threatened by the activities of the women and marginals.

(Mizos) were really backward but we had our sense of humanity intact...the Indian Army had lost its sense of humanity. They did not differentiate between MNF and the innocent civilians. Assam’s politicians are to be blamed for they tried to impose Ahom identity and they felt the Indian Army’s action to be a befitting response to the anti-Ahom response that they got from the Mizo Hills. Assam should be blamed because they sealed-off Mizoram and sent the armed forces to take maximum action. No entry was permitted as well as an exit. The Army was left at its free will to handle the situation.  

The attitude towards the 'Vai' and the continued stigmatization of the group has a long history of projections of cultural superiority by the same. The history of Mizo Hills under Assam shows that the Zo/Mizo had to face a series of policies and strategies in the name of Ahomisation. The superiority projected by the Assamese overlooked the sensibilities of the Mizo Hills. The Assam Government during that period posted officials who were mostly inefficient and known to be corrupt in the Police Department, Agriculture, and other determining positions. These early Assamese officials were the first few Indians with whom the Zo/Mizo had contact after the independence of India. Naturally the natives began to compare and contrast the attitudes and the dealings of these new set of people with the early benevolent rulers. These officials thus imprinted the image of the ‘Indian’ as being inefficient, corrupt and racist in the minds of the people. For instance, the early police officials recall the Assamese Superintendent of Police in the Mizo Hills from the APS (Assam Police Service) cadre who was known for suspending junior officers and constables and had a history of siphoning their subsistence allowance in his own pocket. He terrorised the local shopkeepers and extorted money and was known for non-payment. Such was his

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Pu Zaliana, (Senior Research Officer, 'Tribal Research Institute', Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram, McDonald Hill). *Personal Interview. Zarkawt, Aizawl: 22nd, 23rd & 24th January 2008; Pi Rochhungi, a lady in her early 60s now living in Zarkawt who happens to be my aunt shared her experiences during the insurgency and the Indian Government’s response through the attack on Champhai. Both Zaliana and Rochhungi are originally from Champhai and moved to Aizawl after the counter-insurgency. Also substantiated by Pi Vanramchhuangi (‘Ruatfelanu’), (Director HRLN Mizoram, Social Activist). *Personal Interview. Chaltlang, Aizawl: 28th & 29th January 2008.

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unpopularity that he had to flee Aizawl on the very day Mizoram was granted a Union Territory Status.22

Another incident which triggered public anger was the murder of Pu Khawpuia the rich businessman in Aizawl. Before UT status was granted to Mizo Hills money inflow into the hills was limited and the means of communication in terms of connectivity was poor. The Police Department was not paid regularly and often like other departments had to take advance loan from Pu Khawpuia. During one such financial crunch a batch of Assam Police constables who were the escort party to bring the money for the salaries of the police department took the chance and went to Khawpuia on the false pretext to collect the advance money. Khawpuia readily gave the amount. The Assam Police constables not only collected the amount but also killed him and fled with the whole chest of money. The constables took advantage of the situation. Everybody thought it was ‘those’ regular extortion killing by the MNF, but investigations revealed the involvement of the police. In his haste to leave Aizawl with the booty one of the constables had left behind his service rifle with which Khawpuia had been shot.23 As the saying goes ‘The first impression is the last impression’, the ‘Vai’ continued to be viewed through such stereotypes. This impression was during the 50s and early 60s.

The next mass encounter with the ‘Vai’ came in the form of direct contact with mainland Indians, mostly Sikhs and other north Indians, during the counter-insurgency. The mass rapes of women and the atrocities committed projected another negative image to the notion of the ‘Vai’. It was during this period that ‘the image of the ‘Vai Rapist’/Sikh Rapist’’ was constructed. This image continues to haunt the people who lived and experienced the insurgency in Mizoram. Such an image is most strong in areas where the Army actions were most severe such as the plains of Champhai and the circle of Aizawl.24

22 Based on interviews conducted in early 2008 of Retired Police Officers and Police constables serving in Mizoram during that time (Names withheld on request).

23 Based on informal talks with retired Police Officials as well as junior officers of that time (Names withheld on request).

Champhai in the western borders had to face the counter-insurgency strategies because the MNF had a strong hold in the area and had launched their programme from the region having easy connectivity with adjoining areas of Chin Hills in the than Burma. Aizawl earned the distinction of being the only Indian city shelled by its own Army; naturally the image of the Indian and India could not be a happy one. The mass rapes committed by the CRPF and the Indian Army remain to this day, a picky memory in the way of mellowing the everyday lived-in relations between the Zo/Mizo and the ‘Vai’. The attitudes towards the outsiders are projected through the lenses of that memory of ‘rape’.

The image of the Army that a common man has is that of a robust, Indian (mostly Sikhs) who raped ‘their’ women in full public display. Zaliana observes:

The Indian Army/CRPF looked like dogs in heat; raping our women in public, dishonouring us (‘Indian Army/ CRPF kha ran angchia in an che a; mi hma ngeia khan hmeichhia kha an pawl mei a nia’). They created a permanent scar in the memories and life of the Mizo people, a scar (sernung) that cannot be healed for a life time; no amount of interaction will really remove that scar.’ The memory of Rape and Violence remains embedded in the collective social memory of the Zo people. Most of the women are aged between 60-70 years and they still live with that shame and humiliation. ‘We have documentations on the mass rapes but we do not want to talk about it. Nor do we want to mention the names of neither the persons nor their villages. ‘Mi nun a sernung a awm, a a na em em mai a ni; a zathlak’ (‘There is a living scar in peoples lives and it is really painful; ‘Shame and humiliation’ being the major concern’).


26 My mother Seema (Chettri) Chakraborty was in her early teens and had witnessed the bombing of Aizawl town. She and her family had to live in bunkers in the jungles for months at a stretch with very little supply of food following the shellings in 1966.

In other words, the ‘Vai’ was projected as a sexual enemy from whom ‘our women’ have to be saved. ‘People with whom we have such deep economic ties: the ‘Vai’ can never be trusted and made a part of our lives’. ‘We cannot get close enough to the Vai’, ‘they remain as permanent outsiders’ (‘Sumdawngna kan kom reng mi kha nunna a kan kom thei lo. Vai hi kan ngai thei lo’). Zaliana says, the ‘people in the age group 45-70 in Mizoram in special Champhai will never forgive the Indian Army (Vai, Sikh). This is one of the prime reasons which people from Champhai and adjoining areas are so suspicious of outsiders especially the ‘Vai’. This was the image and the impression created of the ‘Vai’ during the late 60s and early 80s and it was based on a short but fast interaction of the two groups within a span of 4 years (1966-70).

The MNF considered the ‘Vai’ to be an object of pain and corruption for the Mizo/Zo society and employed different strategies to oust the Vais from the ‘Holy land’ - ‘Zo Khristian ram’. The most prominent regulating mechanism for the outsiders was the ‘Quit Mizoram Notices’ within a certain time span the Vai were expected to leave Mizoram. Failure to do so would amount to threat or death. The next popular mechanism was that or terrorising those ‘Vai’ who married Mizo women and settled in Mizoram. Later Laldenga ordered his men to make sure to kill these Vai men who married local women so as to instil a fear among other Vai who were intending to marry Mizo women and vice versa. The relation between the Vai and the Mizo during the troubled times was based and channelled by a series of retaliatory violence or chain reaction of violence. For instance, in June 13th 1979 the Sub-divisional officer (PWD) Mr. Chaudhury was abducted and murdered by the MNF. Chaudhury was a native of Silchar and the murder evoked strong reactions in Silchar. Several businesses run by Mizos were attacked and property damaged including the Salvation Army Hall which was burnt down by the mob. The violence against the Mizos in Silchar had its chain reactions in Mizoram and several shops owned by ‘Vai’ were destroyed and looted. The violence was followed by the exodus of the ‘Vai’. The ‘Quit Notices’ issues to the ‘Vai’ were extended to all Meiteis living in Zo/Mizo inhabited areas in Manipur, creating a ripple effect in the ethnic


fabric of Manipur and adjoining areas. The only ‘Vai’ who were exempted from the ‘Quit Mizoram Notices’ were those involved with Missionary activities in Mizoram.

The ‘Vai’ being ‘socially ostracised’ felt it better to leave Mizoram and or limit their businesses in Mizoram so that it would be easy to wind-up their businesses. There was not just an exodus of ordinary ‘Vai’ but also the applications for transfer from Mizoram by non-Mizo officers on deputation increased multifold. With papers and requests for transfers increasing on the table, and pressure from Assam seeking explanations Brigadier Sailo the then Chief Minister, decided to break his silence on the activities of the MNF and assured security of the non-Mizos to the Assam government. The MNF could hardly digest the audacity of Sailo to grant security to the ‘Vai’ and defy the dictats of the MNF. Shortly after the MNF declared ‘Quit Notice’ to Sailo and declared that Sailo was their target in line for assassination; and by mid June 1979 the MNF issued notices (‘Hriattirna’) that ‘visiting Central Ministers or officials from Delhi should be shot at sight and as many non-Mizos possible should be killed.’ Special instructions on how to carry these killings were given by the Tactical Headquarters Hit squads of the MNF. The relations between the ‘Vai’ and the Zo/Mizo further escalated by 7th August 1979, following the murder of seven non-Mizos travelling in a civilian lorry in Bilkhawthlir area.

During this period Silchar had an upper hand in channelling the negotiation process and the terms set by Silchar. In short the ‘Vai’ had to be agreed upon by the Zo/Mizo out of economic compulsions. The NH 54 connecting Mizoram to rest of India ran through Silchar and was the only artery for entry into Mizoram. Economic blockade meant limited or no supply of commodities and everyday requirements into Mizoram and total isolation of the area. These economic blockades were the last resort or the trump card for the ‘Vai’ in creating a space for dialogue with the Zo/Mizo and even the Zo/Mizo realised its impact on life in Mizoram. This however, does not go to suggest that economic blockade is no longer in use or importance. It is very much a part and parcel of bringing the two clashing groups to the negotiation table. With the increased development in communication services in the form

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of connectivity via air and alternate roads connecting Mizoram through Manipur the affectivity of economic blockade for a short period has decreased; economic blockade for a longer period is still very much relevant. Post-Peace Accord with the more intense interaction of the two groups the stereotypes projected towards each other has changed, though the total reciprocal acceptance of the two groups is yet to be achieved.

Soon after the attainment of Statehood, the tensions between the ‘Vai’ and the Zo/Mizo erupted in the form of forcibly ousting the ‘Vai’. A series of ‘Vai Bandhs’ were organised by the students and youths organisations like the MZP and the YMA. Interestingly the parties in opposition, notably the People’s Conference and the Congress, took turns to support these movements and fan the communal tensions. The Zo/Mizo wanted to cleanse Mizoram, the projected ‘Holy land’ of the unwanted ‘others’, and move towards the dream of reunification of the ‘Zo hnahthlak’. In other words the newly created state of Mizoram should be a space of only the ‘Zo hnahthlak’. The first and most obvious step towards that end would be finding the enemy to be ousted. The first target in the line was the ‘Vai’, most of whom, came from Cachar-Silchar in the borders of Assam and Mizoram. These were the group of ‘Vai’ with whom a common man in Mizoram had the most interactions, thus the common stereotype that we still see in rural settings is that of a ‘Bagha Vai’, ‘Silchar Vai’, ‘Silchar Bengoli’. These stereotypes have inherent attitudes of contempt, superiority, anger and a desire to inflict pain on the victims that is the ‘Vai’.

During this period the menial workers, masons and barbers were rounded-off in trucks and off-loaded in the nearest ‘Vai ram’ (‘Vai land’) that is Bagha Bazaar. Interestingly the MZP, and other agencies proclaimed the need of the hour, that is to be ‘intohdel’ (self-sufficient) keeping in vision Gandhi’s vision of respect for ‘manual labour’ (kut-hnahthok). The outbreak of this tension between the ‘Vai’ and the ‘Mizo/Zomi’ can be considered to be the first major outbreak of tensions in the post-Statehood period. The most important outcome of this first tension was that the ‘Mizo/Zomi’ replaced that ‘Vai’ in the job of the barber and till today its difficult to find a ‘Vai’ barber who has an independent shop in

31 The spellings mentioned here are based on the common pronunciations made in Mizo.
Aizawl or the whole state. The same could not hold true for the jobs of masonry, even though a good number of workers are of ‘Zo hnahthlak’ from across the borders either from Manipur or Myanmar (Burma).

The second type of tensions occurred in 1992-94 when hundreds of non-tribals, especially Bengali traders, fled in panic after the Government cancelled their ILP and trade licenses and the Mizoram Chamber of Commerce and the MZP issued ‘quit’ notices with an August 25th deadline. Many of those affected are said to have had invalid or expired ILPs. Violence broke out within a month with the killing of a Mizo truck driver by plainsmen near the Cachar-Mizoram border. In swift retaliation, some 90 non-Mizo shops and establishments in Aizawl were burnt down and 15 trucks and buses damaged. A number of persons were injured and an estimated 1500 to 6000 “outsiders” fled the state. The Aizawl-Silchar highway, Mizoram’s lifeline was cut. The Government pleaded a shortage of Police personnel and the situation was only brought under control with the arrival of the CRPF.

The third type of tension of the early 90s centred around the issue of ‘Quota’ for Medical and Engineering. Few quotas were given to the children of prominent ‘Vai’ officials posted in Mizoram. Upset that the children of outsiders were admitted to medical colleges at the expense of natives, ‘student protestors clashed with the police in Aizawl and attacked shops and vehicles of ‘outsiders’. Following which curfew is imposed in the capital’. One of these prominent figures was Kiran Bedi’s daughter ‘Tara’. Looked at from the arguments posed by the MZP the act of giving quotas to ‘Vai’ who had worked in Mizoram for not even two years was not acceptable. The public cry forced the Congress government to wake-up and re-think their mistake. The MZP organised rallies and dharnas against Kiran Bedi and

32 For instance, Chapter VIII, Miscellaneous Occupation, under heading ‘Domestic and Personal Service’, pp.204-205 mentions that in the 70s professional barbers were very little and the profession provided an average monthly income of Rs. 900/-. For details Cf., TRI. (1989). Mizoram District Gazetteers. Guwahati: Eastern Press & Publications Private Ltd. on behalf of Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram.

Being rare in the hills the barbers could also charge higher prices for their services. The plains barbers almost automatically got a permanent customer in the form of the Police and other officers from mainland India. Few of these barbers also got absorbed into the Police Department. Ousting the Vai barbers could mean an opportunity for absorbing local talent into the profession and livelihood for the local. Based on numerous interactions with Prabhat, a professional barber with the Police Department in Aizawl.
chanted the slogan ‘Kiran Bedi go back’. The situation was so tense that Kiran Bedi had to flee Aizawl in the dead of the night. The MZP had cut down the ‘super-cop’ to her human stature. The movement in course of time took the form of identifying all ‘Vai’ without legal documents living in Mizoram. By the end of 1993 the movement opened the proverbial Pandora’s Box in the identity politics in Mizoram and the MZP dabbled with multiple issues from checking the list of legal ‘Vai’ in Mizoram to that of permit and license; to reviewing who should be given the benefit of affirmative action through reservation; head count of the original Gorkhas; checking the ‘Burma mi’; relocating the Assam Rifles from the heart of the City to a less prominent place in the fringes of Aizawl. These web of arguments and concerns ultimately led to the stigmatisation of the ‘Vai’ as the ‘Permanent Pariah’ in post-statehood Mizoram; alongside it also showed the Gorkhas their positionality as ‘Denizens’ welcome in select arenas and the ‘Burma mi’ or ‘Zo hnahthlak’ from adjoining areas as the ‘Mizo-2’ or ‘Temporary Pariah’.

During the whole period, the inaction and at times the over-action of the State Police could be seen. The demonstration of the MZP at times overpowered the Police and the ‘tear-gas’ fired by the police would often be thrown back towards the Police. Most local officers acted hesitantly to act against the students keeping in tune to the diktat given by the Church and the MZP that all those who are Zo/Mizo, that is Zo hnahthlak and a Christian should support the move to oust the ‘Vai’. The burning of shops in a hill-top like Aizawl could be seen from a 360 degree perspective keeping in view the very nature of Aizawl city. Kulbir Singh, the IG Police, failed to see the burning flames from the window in his office and his residence at Police Headquarters at Shivaji Tilla, Khatla and reported to the central body which came to investigate that ‘the allegations made by the ‘Vai’ were fabricated’. The Congress led Lalthanhawla Government rewarded Kulbir Singh for his report by promoting him as the DGP of Mizoram without the consent of the Home Ministry. Lalthanhawla justified his Government’s move as a State promotion.33

33 Based on innumerable discussions which sometimes became really charged and heated on the issue of the ‘Vai’ and the ‘Gorkha’ with my father, Mr. A.S Chakraborty, (Rtd. S.P (Security) Mizoram). Who has served in the Mizoram Police for over 30 years; also substantiated by the informal talks with Mizo as well as Gorkha police officials in Mizoram.
The prominent ‘Vai dawr’ (Vai shops/businesses) in Aizawl like Chottelal Seth, M.K Guha, Bhomraj Seth, M.L. Chaudhury, Lala Sardar etc. had to round-off their business following the mob-violence. The mob-violence was followed by lynching of the ‘Vai’. Most of these incidences of violence were not heard in the National media mostly because of censorship by the Congress led Government. The reporting on the violence against the minorities on ‘Zee TV’ was followed by blanking of cable services in the State. The PTI and other media agencies were asked not to report so that the image of the most peaceful state in India would not be tarnished. Schools and Colleges were open but a subtle warning was given to ‘Vai’ students (college as well as school) to stay indoors for their own safety by the MZP. During the incident (1994) ‘I had the privilege to attend school being blessed that I was not an ordinary ‘Vai’: my father being an official in the Police Department and; my mother the daughter of ‘one of the prominent Gorkha’ in Mizoram. I along with my little sister were escorted in a police vehicle to school. To my utter surprise out of the 400 or more students only four ‘non-Mizo’ (the more acceptable and less harmful word for ‘Vai’) turned up. The reaction to us attending school during the time when the MZP had warned ‘Vai’ from venturing out was far from warm. The only people who seemed to care for our security and happy that we had at least made it to school were the Missionary Fathers and Sisters who ran the School. Classes were held sparingly as most teachers were ‘Vai’ and had to stay indoors. In one such class our Mizo lady teacher who taught ‘Hindi’ and also a substitute teacher who taught ‘Mizo’ gave a lecture on the need and the urgency to oust the ‘Vai’. Our presence in the class made little impact on toning down the communal content of their lecture’.

During the tensions of early and mid 90s between ‘Vai’ and Mizo/Zo in Mizoram many shops belonging to Vai were looted and common people who would otherwise never take part in such activities could be seen actively participating and instituting the mob to take action. The most busy and posh area in Aizawl city, Zarkawt which happens to be the locality of the Congress leader Lalthanawla was one such area which showed a surprising out-burst

34 Based on informal talks with the Vai business people in Mizoram as well as retired Vai officers settled in Kolkata and elsewhere in other parts of India who had served in Mizoram during that time.

35 Reflecting back on the ‘Vai’ knot chuah of 1993-94, I was studying in class-VIII in St. Paul’s High School, Tlangnuam, Aizawl, Mizoram.
of mob-action which was followed in Electric Veng, Canteen Kual and so on. ‘People could be seen carrying head-loads of goods ranging from daily grocery items to refrigerators, Television sets, Godrej home appliances, sewing machines and every possible commodity which could be imagined including garments and cash’.36 Strangely once the tensions subsided, the Church and its agencies came out and declared that all mob-violence and lootings were the handiwork of the migrants from across the borders namely the ‘Burma mi’ to destabilise the Ideal Zo Christian State and the ‘Remna leh muanna’ (peace and tranquillity) that has been ushered through the Peace Accord. All the churches came together and called for mass participation in a public prayer meeting (‘Vantlang twang tai’) for peace.

The post-independence Zo/Mizo politics propelled by the Politics of the Pan Optics relied heavily on the youth and students’ organizations like the Young Mizo Association (YMA), the Khrishtian Thalai Pawl (KTP) and also the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) for ‘systemic or structural control’. ‘Vai Bandh’ for instance, is the most often sought mechanism for “Regulating Citizenship” and controlling the flow of the Vai in Mizoram. These ‘Vai Bandhs’ are often preceded by ‘quit Mizoram notices’ to the non-tribals.37 Defying the diktat is followed by physical assaults and mob fury; not surprisingly the victims are the petty migrant labourers mostly from Cachar and Bihar who are rounded-off by the Police in lock-ups. ‘The ‘Vai Bandhs’ instils among the ‘Vai’ fear so strong that the ‘Vai’ go into a mode of stocking up food and everyday commodities to deal with the diktat’ which may last as long as the Nexus of Patriarchy wants them to be invisible. Evidently, the ‘Vai Bandh’ is a systematic process of making the ‘Vai’ invisible and the Zo/ Mizo as the visible majority.

36 Based on conversations with the street hawkers’ in Zarkawt and Bara Bazaar during my field visit in 2008 and also inputs from late Pi Bawii (Bhauju), a third generation Gorkha convert who happens to be a neighbour of my maternal uncles in Babulang, Aizawl and has been a hawker for as long as any one can remember in Aizawl city.

37 For instance, in 2004 the YMA served notices to the non-Mizos to quit Mizoram within a month. These Bandhs can stretch from 12 hours to 48 hours or more and the ‘Vai’ are subtly directed to stay in-doors (invisible) and restrain from venturing out-doors (outdoors) for the sake of their own “safety”.

38 Akhalaque Ahmed Ansari (User Administrator, IBM India Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore). Electronic Interview. 03rd November 2009.
An interesting occurrence that takes place post-Vai-Bandh, is that women either as individuals or as organisations, along with the Y.M.A, K.T.P and other such organisations visit these lock-ups and offer eggs, bread and tea to those who faced the brunt of mob fury. From a communitarian perspective, this action can be viewed as the perpetrators of violence taking the role of healers. It is an undeniable fact that the realms of women and men are always clearly demarcated in any society. Stereotypically, the role of the healer is “reserved” for women while men justify violence in the name of protection. Thus, women are directly not party to the actions of their men and may even disagree with them but, given their operating spaces they often follow the decision of their men. The high moralistic standards applied to women also, make them the best targets to “hurt your enemy where it hurts the most”. Further, women may be entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the captured as a subtle means of evoking their sympathies and creating a more human face. The message conveyed through these contradictory actions demonstrates the willingness of the Mizo’s to let the ‘Vai’ exist within restricted spaces, under the condition of total acceptance of decisions made by the Zo/Mizo community.

The strained relations between the ‘Vai’ and the Zo/Mizo have thus been moulded by tradition and experience across time. The politics of Otherisation is so intense that even ordinary often mundane things of everyday life such as fragrance, smell or aroma or for instance colour is categorised as ‘Vai rong’ (Vai colour), ‘Vai rim’ (Vai smell (not aroma, not fragrance)). Infact one of my Vai respondent who happens to be my sister Anita humorously puts it: ‘a Mizo/Zo child is bom with ‘Vai detector genes’ as because even a toddler who would find it difficult to name it’s parents is able to identify a ‘Vai’ and get petrified or annoyed by the mere presence of a ‘Vai’ (‘Vai misual’ (‘a rouge Vai’, to be precise)).

Similarly, Paulomi Dutta felt that the politics of Otherisation is taken to the level of barring the Vai youngsters from taking part in sports and other co-curricular activities in schools and projecting them as ‘tlo’, ‘zoi’, ‘chaklo’ i.e. clumsy, feeble, weak.

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The ‘Vai’ over the years have moulded their survival strategies which includes ‘adopting Zo/Mizo names’, ‘converting to Christianity’ and marrying local tribal women’. These survival strategies or politics of camouflaging helps the Vai to bargain their existence in the Zo world. This politics of camouflaging is adopted for a plethora of reasons from that of personal security to that of private business or for being accepted as a ‘Denizen’.

5.3. Locating the Burma mi/Poi in Zo/Mizo Society over the years

The Burma mi are most often members of the ‘Poi’ or ‘Pawi’ a sub-section of the tribes called ‘Chin’ living in Indo-Myanmar border. They live in the Southern fringes of Mizoram and refer to themselves of late as ‘Lai’. The coming of the British introduced settled life especially symbolized by the boundary. These migratory tribes were forcibly compelled to live in fixed territories and as is the case of almost all tribes in the North-East, the Poi or Pawi have their kinsmen or sub-clans speaking the same dialect on the other sides of the International border (Myanmar).\[41\] I use the term ‘Poi’ to specifically refer to the section of this particular tribe living in present day Myanmar (Burma) and ‘Pawi’ or ‘Lai’ interchangeably to refer to the section living in present day Mizoram. The story of ‘Kelngotei’ and the tales of ‘Chura leh Nahaia’ reflect the stereotypes of the Poi (Burma mi) as greedy, rich and foolish. Most of the folktales and sayings reflect the underlying prejudices acting against the Poi. So much so, that they are depicted as being very rich but easily gullible and a kind of economic animal bringing in goods from Burma to the Zo hills for business.

5.3.1. The Burma mi/Poi from the Colonial ‘Zo’ world and thereafter

The coming of the British marked an interesting phenomenon namely the institutionalization of migrations in the form of the permanent entry of the ‘Arakanese’, ‘Hakka’ tribes of Burma conveniently clubbed as ‘Poi’ or ‘Burma mi’ (Burmese). The ‘Poi’ being an off-shoot of the sub-tribes in the Southern Hills was a traditional other and at the same time was not an unknown other. They moved in around the Zo Hills since time immemorial. Infact the creation of the boundary by the British sealed off their ties with the

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rest of their groups in Mizoram. As a result the group from the Chin Hills or Myanmar (Burma) came to be treated as 'Poi' (Burma mi) distinct from the 'Pawi' (who now call themselves as 'Lai') in Mizoram.

Waves of Burmese Refugees started pouring into India following the widespread civil unrest in Burma in March 1988. Most of these refugees belonged to the 'Poi' group. The demand for a multi-party democracy by the people was met with stiff opposition by the Military Junta Regime forcing thousands of innocent civilians to flee their country to take shelter in India and Thailand. India took a cautious pro-democracy stand on Burma (Myanmar) and accepted all those people who left Burma in fear of persecution as Refugees, and suitably placed them in Mizoram. At least 50,000 ethnic 'Poi' (Chin) refugees from Burma were settled in Mizoram right after the Peace Accord. The 'Poi' refugees felt they were in safe hands because of the historical and ethnic rooted ness to the nostalgia of Zopiti-Khampat and Chhinlung. However, the picture began to change after the 1990s when the agencies of the Nexus of Patriarchy began to start its mission of accelerating its mission of creating an Ideal Zo Christian State. The YMA, issued “eviction notices” to all “foreigners” (Burmese Chin) who lived in Mizoram and the chief minister made a statement supporting the activities of the agencies by ‘the border with Burma needs to be fenced to check the further infiltration of immigrants in the state’.

The YMA is the most popular face of Humanitarian Institution in Mizoram and the code of ‘tlawmgaihna’ is considered to be its inbuilt mechanism. Every Mizo is a member of this institution and life revolves around this philanthropic institution. The numerous songs and poems written on the YMA stand as strong proof of its deep roots in the Zo/Mizo society. The institution is an intrinsic part of the everyday life of the Zo/Mizo society. However, the picture perfect public face of the institution has a hidden face. The Humanitarian face has a hidden mask: ‘the mask of Hegemony’.

The Youth and students’ organisations like the YMA, the Khristian Thalai Pawl (K.T.P) and also the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) function as instruments of ‘systemic or structural control’. The Nexus of Patriarchy in the attempt to build the ‘Ideal Zo Christian
Chapter V Politics of Ethnic Identity and Politics of 'Otherisation': 'Zomi/Mizo' and the Vai

State', projects a spectrum of varying attitudes from 'controlling sexual behaviour' to 'checking prostitution'\textsuperscript{42} to controlling HIV/AIDS and checking foreigners and such other tactics. The last tactics of checking foreigners is the most commonly used mechanism to control the 'Burma mi'. As because the 'Poi', like the 'Vai', occupy the realms of economics they become victimised if they fail to contribute to the weekly collection of donations by the agencies of the patriarchy- the MZP and YMA. For instance, Tuan Nei Sum, a Burmese national who had lived in Mizoram, says:

> I was being harassed by the local youths of my locality to pay money and the owner of the shop where I was working did not want to pay me wages for my service just because the YMA and the church had ordered all Burmese nationals to be moved out of Mizoram. The Police intervened and defended me.\textsuperscript{43}

The Zo/Mizo situation reflects the 'dynamic strategies employed' in different societies for the construction, justification and continuance of the patriarchal hegemony, and the strategies adopted by the marginals to create their 'own spaces'.\textsuperscript{44} The agencies selectively target women, the Burmese and the Vai's: projecting them as 'the nexus of evil', conspiring to destabilise\textsuperscript{45} the Ideal Zo Christian state. There seems to be little public resistance to the activities of 'Community Policing'. For instance, the YMA, served quit Mizoram notices to Myanmarese migrants for allegedly harassing girls in a village, YMA

\textsuperscript{42} An instance of discriminatory attitudes and high handedness of the 'Nexus of Patriarchy' targeted specifically at women is the forced closure of the Salvation Army 'night shelter for women', by the Tuikual South Young Mizo Association Branch (Thangliana, Zoram.com 'Narrow minded society'). The State, the Church and its agencies are absolutely opposed to having a 'red light area' in the Ideal Zo Christian state. These organizations like the Young Mizo Association (Y.M.A), the Khristian Thalai Pawl (K.T.P) & also the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (M.Z.P) have been functioning as self proclaimed 'moral guardians' of the Zo society.

\textsuperscript{43} Burmese Refugee Tuan Nei Sum. \textit{Informal semi-structured interview}. Vikaspuri, Delhi: July-August 2004.


leaders said “We have asked Burmese migrant workers to leave by October 4”. YMA leader Lalrinsanga told reporters:

The immediate provocation for the quit notice was a brawl at Tanhril village, about 20 kilometre north of capital Aizawl, between villagers and Myanmar nationals over the alleged harassment of some Mizo girls by migrants. The Burmese migrants also physically assaulted a local Mizo boy who came to the rescue of the women.46

Contact with the social and political pariah that is ‘outsiders’ and foreigners most prominently the ‘Vai’ and the ‘Burma mi’ is considered by the Nexus of Patriarchy to be ‘Self-polluting’. In short, ‘Ethnic exclusiveness’ and ‘cultural revivalism’ are employed as defence mechanisms to overcome perceived ‘imagined’ or ‘real’ or ‘apparent’ threat. Culture becomes a useful weapon in the search for the new dynamics of acquiring and sustaining political power and status. The following select portions of interviews (informal/unstructured) of Burmese Refugees conducted by me in Delhi in July-August 2004 enables one to have a feel of the attitude of the YMA towards the ‘Burma mi’.

**Case 1:** Burmese Refugee Thawng Za Khen, aged 38 years has been living in India for the last 2 years. Before coming to Delhi was living in Mizoram but due to the hostility of the local population he was forced to leave the state.

Thawng Za Khen felt that:

The Mizos are very insensitive to the issues of the Burmese community seeking shelter in Mizoram and it is surprising that they look at us that is Burmese as a threat to their community in terms of jobs and resources and such fear is a totally fabricated one and not at all true. Even though we speak the same language we have not been able to get rid of this kind of fear of the “other”. The YMA and the Church authorities in Mizoram forcefully moved us (Burmese) and threatened us with dire consequences if we return to their land. My friends and I were forcefully taken in a truck and left on the border of Mizoram and from there on, me and my

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friends are trying to keep ourselves together. The local youths and the churchmen and the YMA almost everyday threatened me just because I am a Burmese and not a native of Mizoram. I was even robbed of my hard earned money one day when I returned home late after working as a daily wage earner in a carpentry workshop. I feel that no Refugee can be safe in Mizoram because the fear of the other is too intense. The Refugees and the Non-Mizo community in Mizoram face the same kind of problems from the native Mizos and their churchmen. The police in Mizoram are very protective and helpful towards the Refugee community. I have never faced any problems with the Police in Mizoram and when ever I was in trouble either due to the local youths or my landlord in Mizoram the Police always came to protect me. I went to the Police station to get help as I was being harassed by the local youths of my locality in Mizoram and also my landlord was forcing me to move out of my rented room in the dark of the night just because the YMA and the church had ordered all Burmese nationals to be moved out of Mizoram. ‘However, when I was deported forcibly by the YMA and MZP the police just remained spectators and did little action. I personally favour local integration especially in a state like Mizoram where I can feel at home provided the masses under go a change in their outlook and their heart. For people like me who can speak Mizo I feel local integration to be the best solution for it’s easy to mingle with the local population and carry on a new life.47

Case 2: Burmese Refugee Tuan Nei Sum, age 32 years has been living alone in India for the last 6 years. He has been living in Vikaspuri, Delhi for the past 2 years. Before that, he lived in Mizoram.

Tuan Nei Suma mentioned that:

The YMA, KPT-‘Khristian Thalai Pawl’, the churchmen and the student’s union-‘MZP’ forced him to leave the state and move to Delhi. The Mizos are very threatened by the presence of the Burmese

community in Mizoram and fear that the Burmese community will spoil the social structure of the Mizo community. The YMA and the Church authorities in Mizoram forcefully moved us Burmese and threatened to shed blood if we did not leave their land. I and my friends were forcefully moved to the border of Mizoram and from there we moved to Kolkata and from there to Delhi. It has been a terrible long journey since then. The Mizoram Police is efficient and very protective and helpful towards the Refugee community. I have not faced any problems with the Police in Mizoram when I was in trouble because of the student’s union, YMA or my landlord in Mizoram the Police always came to protect me.

Tuan Nei Suma mentions an instance when he had gone to the Police station to seek help:

I was being harassed by the local youths of my locality to pay money and the owner of the shop where I was working did not want to pay me wages for my service just because the YMA and the church had ordered all Burmese nationals to be moved out of Mizoram. The Police intervened and defended me. The local youths in Mizoram and the student’s union and the churchmen and the YMA almost everyday threatened me just because I am a Burmese and gave me notices to leave Mizoram within a stipulated time or face life threats. No Refugee can be safe in Mizoram because the common people have fallen victims to false propaganda in Mizoram.

Both the respondents were nostalgic about their ‘home’, their people and the closest similarity that they could imagine in India was staying in Mizoram. The similarities in food, language and climatic conditions made them feel at ‘home’ in Mizoram. Though they faced hardships during their stay in Mizoram they were supportive of ‘Greater Mizoram’ and the cause of the ‘Zo Reunification’. They felt emotional about the issue of the unification of all the ‘Zo hnahthlak’. They also considered it to be the best solution to bring peace in the region. Burmese refugees seeking refuge in Mizoram is a very common phenomenon and their presence in Mizoram serves as a source of easy and cheap labour. The entry of ‘Burma mi’
has always been there and the number of migrants increases as and when the turmoil and political tensions in Myanmar (Burma) increases.\textsuperscript{48}

The ‘love-hate’ relationship between the two sets of ‘Zo hnahthlak’ that is the Zo/Mizo from within the state of Mizoram and the Zo from across the international borders can be summed up through the following lines in the \textit{Evening Post}, Aizawl, dated 2\textsuperscript{nd} June, 2004:

\textit{Mizoram and its inhabitants are true followers of the spirit. The problems in the state are due to the migrants from across the borders in India (Manipur, Tripura) and in Burma. Though they are the source of evil in Mizoram however, it is not ethical to push them across the borders because of the ethnic closeness; and being ‘Zo hnahthlak’ we need to treat them well).}\textsuperscript{49}

5.4. Locating the Gorkha in Zo/Mizo Society over the years

For this study I use the term ‘Gorkha’ or ‘Gorkhali’ to denote all ethnic tribes who migrated from Nepal to present day Mizoram during the British times and who speak the ‘Khas Kura’ the lingua franca of Nepal. ‘Gorkha’ thus is a blanket term to refer to all migrant ‘Nepali’ population in Mizoram. The present work does not intend to delve on the debates on the correct nomenclature for the said group as argued by A.C. Sinha in the


Prologue to A.C. Sinha & T.B. Subba (Ed.) ‘The Nepalis In Northeast India: A Community in Search of Indian Identity’ (2003). Moreover, I consider it more appropriate to refer to the said group as ‘Gorkhalı’/’Gorkha’ because of their colonial linkages as migrants either recruited in the British Indian Army or Administration.  

Ever since the British occupation there has been a steady flow of the Nepali population into Assam. However it would be misreading the presence of Nepalese population in Assam and its fringes as the total outcome of immigration alone. Though, the contacts between India and Nepal can be traced to times immemorial through the Epics, historical exchanges, pilgrimages and trade relations. It were ‘the British (who) proved to be a catalyst for an organised migration from Nepal hills to the Indian frontiers’. What is interesting to note is the fact that the very term ‘Gorkha’ is basically the name of a district in present day Nepal, and later the term acquired a special meaning in British martial


52 The ties between ancient Assam and Nepal have been mentioned in several ancient texts as well. Such texts, reaffirms matrimonial ties between the ruling families of Assam and Nepal. There is no doubt that the British facilitated the systematic inflow of people of Nepalese origin into the region. The colonial rulers as an integral part of the policies of expansion encouraged the Nepalese to occupy the buffer zones and provide some sort of security to the British as the British could not fully trust and rely on the local natives for providing such security. Another view cites the aspect of Nepalese immigrants raising the Government exchequer. There are numerous strands explaining the reasons for the ready immigration by the Nepalese into the region. One for instance is the military-economic explanation. Nepal being an economically backward country the poor hilly Nepalese have been migrating to India in general and Assam in particular seeking means of livelihood. Many of these Nepalese in course of time settled permanently in the forests lands as graziers and cultivators. Similarly, the British too facilitated the process of Nepali migration as they needed laborious people to work in their army and other establishments. As such, the martial/tribes of the Nepalese were recruited in the military force and many of them, after retirement settled in different parts of the country, including Assam’. For details Cf., A.C. Sinha & T. B. Subba. (Ed). (2003). The Nepalis In Northeast India: A Community in Search of Indian Identity. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company/ICSSR, New Delhi/ NERC, Shillong/DRS, NEHU

discourses. The term ‘Gorkha’ has got a community appellation and transformed its culture-historical underpinnings into an ethno-political one.

5.4.1. The Gorkha from the Colonial ‘Zo’ world and thereafter

The history of the Gorkha in Mizoram followed a distinct and unique narrative than that of the other migrants namely the ‘Vai’ and the Burma mi/Poi. The Gorkha migrated to Mizoram with the sequel British Expeditions into the Zo/Mizo territory in the late 19th Century.

The migration of the Gorkha was considered to be a security booster for British activities in the region including: administration and proselytisation; with the larger aim being ‘to tame the wild tribes of the frontier regions’ so as to serve the commercial interests of the British Tea Plantations in the North-East of India. The migrant populations were encouraged to settle in the buffer zones to serve two prime functions first, that of providing security to the Sahebs (‘Saps’) and second, to demarcate the worlds of the ‘Colonised Masters’ and ‘the Natives’.

The history of the permanent settlement of the Gorkha in Mizoram began in the year 1891 though they had been active in the region throughout the initial encounters between the British and the ‘Kuki-Chin-Lushai tribes’. The expansion of territories by the Kuki, Chin-Lushais towards south and south-west from Hakka and towards eastern Mizoram from Tiddim Falam region of Burma (Myanmar) in the beginning of the 19th century and the gradual extension of the British Frontiers towards the North-East led to the confrontation.


between the ‘wild tribes’ and the ‘Colonial world’. The British developed the ingenious method of protecting the frontier by establishing of fortified posts\textsuperscript{58} in the hills. Such a move would call for import of manpower, and the experience in Darjeeling and elsewhere made the Gorkha the chosen work force. T. H. Lewin (1912) summed up the reasons for the migrations of the Gorkha into the Zo Hills as follows:

I had formed a high opinion of the little Gorkha, who under Col. Macpherson, had done the fighting of the expedition, and I obtained permission to send to Nepal and get immigrants from there to colonize my frontier wastes’ (Lewin, 1912). ‘...the country where the villages were located had previously been uninhabited, through fear of marauding Lushais, and my idea had been to establish there good stockaded villages of courageous, stiff-necked people like the Gorkhas, who should serve as the buffer between the Mong Raja’s territory and the independent Lushais to the east.

The British employed the ‘Gallawalahs’ to convince the Gorkha to migrate to the Zo Hills and assured them ‘security and prosperity’. For instance the attractive pay, ‘Doodh le moo dhunu’ (mouthwash with milk), ‘Patha ko sikar; rah pakwah’ (lots of meat, mutton), and ample opportunity for ‘Ladai khelnu’ (to play battle for in the Gorkha tradition a battle is to be played not fought) etc. Thus ‘food security’ in the British territory was an important factor that acted as an added attraction for migration.\textsuperscript{59} Along side the ‘food security’ angle was the British construction of the ‘myth of the invincible Gorkha warrior’: the martial race that encouraged the inflow of the Gorkha.

After the construction of stockades at Lunglei and Aizawl, peace was restored in most of the parts of the hills especially near and around the stockades by the spring of 1891. The

\textsuperscript{58} Col. Skinner selected Aizawl for the construction of a permanent post in the North Lushai Hills. Once the construction of the post was completed the column retreated back to Silchar leaving behind a garrison of 200 riflemen mostly Gorkhas of the Surma Valley Military Police Battalion (SVMP). This garrison was later renamed the First Assam Rifles and set its base in the North Lushai Hills. Likewise in the South Lushai Hills the 400 Gorkha soldiers of the 2/2 G.R attached to the 9th Bengal Infantry led by Brig. F.V.G. Treagears set their base in Lungleh via Demagiri (Tlabung). With these expeditions began the official migration of the Gorkhas into the Zo Hills.

expansion work at Aizawl and Lunglei as well as the administrative machinery required the
increase in the inflow of immigrants i.e. the trusted ‘Gorkhas’ as mentioned by O.A. Chambers in his ‘Hand Book of The Lushai Country’ (1899, Reprinted 2005). The colonial
system of administration required manpower as dak-runners, chowkidars, peons, cart-drivers,
traders, masons etc and such work being unknown to the native wild tribes made it more
compelling to introduce migrant labour. Migration or introduction of non-native labour or
work-force was a natural corollary for sustaining the Colonial domination in unknown
territories as reflected from the experience of colonial domination elsewhere for instance in
the Tea Plantation in Assam or Darjeeling or the Sugar Plantation Colonies in the
Caribbean’s - ‘Jamaica’ and ‘Trinidad and Tobago’.

The migrant Gorkhas resembled the natives to an extent and the factor of external
beauty/attractive physical features and fair skin made them more acceptable to the ‘native
wild tribes’ or ‘garkholas’ (‘ass flaunters’) as the Gorkhas called them. Though the Gorkhas
were not allowed to settle outside the allotted areas, many Lushai chiefs were eager to have
them in their villages. Through my interviews, I was able to get answer to the question why
the local chiefs wanted the Gorkhas within their villages. Most evidently because most of the
Gorkhas working with the British armed forces (and later the Indian armed forces) even after
retirement could be utilised for obtaining cheaper goods, food, clothing and foreign liquor
easily from the Army canteens. The local chiefs could buy these goods through the Gorkhas
and keeping in view the difficult terrain and the lack of ready available goods (during that
time) made the option of having a permanent source of procurement in the form of the
Gorkha a blessing. They even entreated the Superintendent of Lushai Hills to permit the
Gorkhas to reside in their villages. Accordingly, one or two Gorkhas were given permission
to settle in some of the Lushai villages.60 The settlement of the Gorkhas and the Santhals
(‘Midum’ (Blacks)) led to the beginning of wet rice cultivation in the plains of Champhai.61

60 The Superintendent of Lushai Hills Order No. 31 of 1922 in Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu, 1923, p.33.
61 Thangvunga Pachuau, ‘Champhai Zawl Leilet Chanchin’, Venglai, in ‘Champhai Centenary
The terms of the Chin Hills Regulations were twisted and flouted as reflected from the rapid increase in the flow of outsiders in and around Aizawl during the early part of the 20th century. A large number of these outsiders were the descendants of the discharged military policemen and Colonial staffs. As had happened with the indentured labourers of the Sugar Plantations in the Caribbean's, many ex-servicemen were lured by the Colonial master's to remain in Mizoram and were allotted plots and privileges at par with the Lushai Chiefs with hereditary right of succession. For instance, Dhojbir Rai was awarded the whole area of Survey Tillah (now Dinthar-II); Sriman Rai, the whole area of Sriman Tillah (now Zotlang); Singbir Rai with holdings in Chawnchhim (Champhai); Lalsing Lama was made the chief of Hrangmual (area around present day Synod Book Room, Aizawl) and Joy Bahadur in Tuisenhnar Leilet (paddy field) settlement.63 The Gorkhas were in majority in Aizawl town during the colonial days and naturally the names of places were in Nepali/Gorkhali, these were in course of the evolution of identity consciousness among the Zo/Mizo tribes were changed in keeping with Zo/Mizo nomenclature.64

The institution of Gorkha Manjadar was introduced in course of time to exercise some administrative co-ordination over the Gorkha population with the aim of easy collection of foreigner's tax; and later abolished in 1953 with the end of Chieftainship. The initiation of the Village Council politics was followed by the emergence of 'Gorkha Panchayat', with an autonomous sphere of action and minimal interference of the Magistrate of the District.65 When the Village Council was introduced, the Gorkha were represented fairly through election or nomination and some influential Gorkhas even managed to hold the posts of V.C. President. For instance, Bir Bahadur Limbu of Sriman Tilla (Aizawl) was the

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first Gorkha V.C. President in 1958. The Gorkha were able to get a political platform alongside the natives that is the Zo/Mizo during the initial phases when the natives needed guidance and probably the Zo/Mizo did not realise the potential threat of the migrant population. With the gradual advancement in the political system and political education of the natives, the true nature of a contested terrain encapsulating every aspect of life began to unfold and the Gorkhas gradually began to be trimmed to size in the political arena.

Culturally the Gorkha have to an extent successfully assimilated themselves to the local customs and practices while retaining their distinct cultural packages. The Gorkha in Mizoram have succeeded at crossing the threshold of the stigmas of the boundaries faced by the 'Vai' or the Burma mi ('Poi', Burmese) community. The recognition of the Gorkha as 'Denizens' in Mizoram reflects well through the common conversational phrases used for denoting their historicity 'Sap hun lai' (from the colonial times) and their assimilation into the Zo/Mizo world 'Mizo ang chiah' (just like the Mizo), 'Zo rilru an pu' (they think and feel like the Mizo).

The Gorkha have actively participated in the constitutionally recognised as well as the shadow or parallel MNF politics of Mizoram. For instance, in the parallel MNF politics a

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69 However, this does not mean that the Gorkha has been accepted unconditionally. The diaspora Mizo/Zo or the Zo hnakhilak from Tripura, Manipur and elsewhere have been voicing their concerns over the issue of accepting the Gorkha as Denizens, while they inspite of being Zo hnakhilak remain at the threshold of carving a niche for themselves within the larger ambit of Zomi identity. For similar arguments Cf Roseim Pudaite. (2006). 'Ramruak Khawvelah: Huat tur haw lo, huat loh tur hua kan ni em?'. ZOlife. Aizawl: April.pp.8-9.
large number of Gorkha from the Assam Rifles and the Assam Regiment posted in Mizoram supported the movement. And at the constitutionally recognised Zo/Mizo politics the Gorkhas had representation in the Village Council elections or nominations. This trend continued till the ushering in of a higher, more sophisticated politics of the Union Territory Model. The nomination of Kapur Chand Thakuri to the Mizoram Legislative Assembly in 1972 was the last significant entry of the migrant Gorkha community into the revered arena of ‘Zo/Mizo politics’, which is reserved exclusively for political insiders. Thereafter the Gorkha community has taken refuge to the politics of appeasements and camouflaging.

During the 70s -80s many Gorkha left Mizoram to re-settle in Deradun and other hill areas of Uttar Pradesh as well as Darjeeling. During this period, the Mizoram Gorkha Sangh requested the UT Government for the first time to recognise the Gorkhas of Mizoram as one of the tribes of Mizoram which was not accepted. Later in the year 1984 a renewed demand for inclusion of the Gorkha community in the Mizoram Official Handbook so as to prove their recognised citizenship in India and residence in Mizoram was made to Lalthanhawla’s Congress Government. The Congress leaders showed some muted support to the issues and concerns of the Gorkhas in Mizoram.

With the attainment of statehood and the change in power-positions in the form of the rise of the MNF, the Gorkha openly declared their total support for the MNF and publicly made statements that pinched the Congress. For instance, a number of Gorkhas working for the Congress switched sides thinking the tide would be in their favour. With the re-entry of the Congress (I) in the 2nd State Assembly Elections the Gorkha realised their political mistake and once more switched sides. This time under the Gorkha workers within the Congress (I) like N.S. Chettri, J.P. Thapa, M.K. Limbu, B.K. Thapa and others demanded the ‘Conferment of Equal Facilities to the Permanent Gorkha Settlers of Mizoram’. This time around the congress did not want to lose its traditional minority vote-bank and decided to accord certain facilities and decided that ‘there should be a fresh census with the co-operation of the Gorkha community residing in Mizoram as on 26th January 1950 and direct descendants of those people. The Cabinet Meeting of 20th December 1991 resolved to extend

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certain facilities to the *Gorkha* of Mizoram who have been residing in Mizoram prior to 26 January 1950. Lalthanhawla announced the decision before a large crowd in Gorkha School premises in Khatla, Aizawl. The facilities extended included granting of Post-Matric Scholarships, extension of facilities in the matters of education, land settlements certificates including transfer of ownership, employment and trade and commerce on par with the Mizos, issue of Permanent Residential Certificates.\(^71\) The Student’s Joint Action Committee vehemently criticised the Government and forced the Government to review its decision to grant facilities to the *Gorkhas* ‘on par’ with the Mizos.

The *second tensions* between the Vai and the Mizo/Zo in the 90s did not spare even the *Gorkha*. The immunity of the *Gorkha* was lost through the action and vocality of the Students’ Union. Several shops and little business owned by the *Gorkha* community were burnt including the shop of Kapur Chand Thakuri the political face of the *Gorkha* in Mizoram. The MZP forced many *Gorkha* to roll down the shutters and move out of business. Though treated as ‘Denizens’ the *Gorkha* were being shown their spatial domain by the agencies of the patriarchy. To counter the trimming mission of the agencies the *Gorkha* conveyed full support to the actions of the MZP to move out the Vai from Mizoram. The *Gorkha* youths and students union came out with pamphlets supporting the cause of the MZP and the agencies of the Nexus; even though it meant that the *Gorkha* were also affected. They declared all losses were for greater glory and glory of both the communities that have been living in peace since times immemorial. The tensions were followed by the strategy of mass conversions. Many *Gorkha* converted as they thought conversion to be an effective mechanism to gain their lost grounds in Mizoram. ‘*Ka piangthar a, Khristiana hi a changkang zok tlat, kan him zok*’ (I converted, to be a Christian is more safe and will lead to faster progress and security) says, Sheela Chhetri a widow and a mother of three.\(^72\) ‘*Mizo nupui ka thlang zok, mizoramah awmnan a him zok, hna ka hmu pha anga*’ (I prefer a Mizo wife (over a *Gorkha*) as I have to live in Mizoram, it will fetch me security and a job) says,


\(^72\) Informal discussions with Sheela Chhetri, (Dinthar Veng). Zarkawt, Aizawl :10\(^{th}\) February, 2008.
Zorama (Gorkha name ‘Kamal’) a third generation Gorkha resident from Zarkawt (Aizawl). The MNF Party in the 1998 elections promised to grant OBC status under the constitutional provisions of the Mandal Commission Report if the Gorkha acted as their vote-bank. The Government of Mizoram accepted 4453 as the figure of the permanent Gorkha settled in Mizoram prior to 26th January 1950 and approved the issue of LSC/Passes in respect of land traditionally held by them.

From the 1980s onwards, the Gorkha have been facing serious challenges to their foothold in Mizoram due to the unchecked flow of migrants from Nepal. The Government after the Peace Accord clubbed both the categories as ‘Foreigners’ being unable to distinguish between the ‘old settlers’ and the ‘new migrants’. Such a move triggered the need to consolidate the permanent Gorkhas and make their positions clear in terms of ‘genuine citizenship’ traced back to the colonial times. The MGYA and other Gorkha organisations have been approaching the different governments from 2002 onwards ‘to push forward their demand of being granted and recognised as OBCs in Mizoram’. To substantiate their


75 The Mizoram Gazette, Extra-Ordinary (2001) Notification. 17th May vide Regd.No.F20215/85/94-HM-Vol-II, Vol. XXX, Aizawl, Friday, 18-05-2001, Vaisakha 28, S.E. 1923, Issue No. 19. However, most of my elderly respondents during my field visit narrated personal experiences of difficulties that they faced in order to prove their citizenship in Mizoram. For instance, they had to painstakingly produce and preserve the ‘Domicile Certificate’ given to their great-grand parents by the British to prove their historical roots in Mizoram. Failure to produce such documents led to difficulties to claim their authentic citizenship in Mizoram as well as India. Cf. Appendix V for an example of ‘Domicile Certificate’ given by the British to my maternal grand-father ‘Tulsi Chetri’ dated 9-8-1938 signed by A.G. McCall.

arguments for OBC status, they appended documentations from other states and regions where the Gorkha have been recognised as OBCs such as Meghalaya, Nagaland, Assam, Haryana, Punjab, and the Mandal Commission Report which suggested the Gorkha as one of the Backward Classes in Mizoram. The following news reports from 2007 and 2008 reflect the ongoing tussle between the Zo/Mizo and the Denizens:

The Gorkhas of Mizoram in 2007 criticised the state government of refusing to recognise the Permanent Gorkha residents as an OBC category though the Mandal Commission had identified and recommended them as the OBCs group in Mizoram as early as in 1992. Despite the repeated pleas of the various Gorkha organisations, spearheaded by the Mizoram Gorkha Students’ Union (MGSU), the state government has failed to do so. ‘This came a few days after the Rajya Sabha has been informed that the states of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Lakshadweep have no OBCs’. Mr. Subba, (MGSU Adviser) added that as far as language, religion, economy, education, politics and social life are concerned, Gorkhas in Mizoram are backward classes. He emphasised that provisions of the historic Peace Accord, signed between the Mizo National Front and the Indian Government in 1986, stated that the social and economic advancement of minorities in Mizoram shall be preserved, protected and ensured. Mr. Subba further highlighted that during the period of Mizo district council under the Assam state, the “Gorkhas” enjoyed equal rights with their Mizo counterparts without any discrimination. As a result, many Gorkhas could contest and got elected in the village council elections, he added. The Gorkhas came to settle in Mizoram along with the British colonialists since the 1890s; Mr. Subba said and added that as far as the

77 Based on a series of telephonic interviews throughout 2007 of Mr. Shiva Kumar Thapa a prominent leader of the MGYA and an activist for inclusion of Gorkhas as OBCs in Mizoram; and also informal discussions on 27th January 2008 over dinner at his residence.
general people are concerned, the Gorkhas were not treated as outsiders.\footnote{\textit{Mizoram refuses to recognise its Gorkhas as OBC} Aizawl, Friday, May 11 2007 15:56:01 IST<http://news.webindia123.com/news/ar_showdetails.asp?id=705110554&cat=&n_date=20070511> accessed on 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 2009.}

The Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) is up in arms against giving OBC status to the \textit{Gorkha} community in Mizoram. Referring to Minister H. Vanlalauva’s remarks that the Mizoram government would do anything to ensure the inclusion of \textit{Gorkha} in the OBC category, CYMA leaders met Chief Minister Zoramthanga and strongly opposed any move to include \textit{Gorkha} in the OBC category. The CYMA leaders felt it would not be sensible to give OBC status to \textit{Gorkha} as it could result in demographic invasion given the nature of free flow of people between India and Nepal.\footnote{Aizawl, Friday, July 18\textsuperscript{th} 2008 (UNI) <http://news.oneindia.in/2008/07/18/cyma-against-obc-to-mizorams-gorkhas-1216389950.html> accessed on 2\textsuperscript{nd} July 2009.}

5.5. Ideal Zo Christian State and the others: ‘Politics of camouflaging’ and ‘Manufacturing of Spaces’

The politics of social inclusion in Mizoram unravels the complex web of religious and linguistic proximity and also to an extent the culinary proximity which fuses the ethno-political divide. The migrant experience does not end with the first point of settlement. It is handed down through the generations, consciously or unconsciously making its contribution to the ways in which those in diaspora negotiate their existence through societies in which they and their cultures are in minority. Being in the diaspora means living in a cross-cultural context, one in which change, fusion and expansion are inevitable. Those aware of the complexities of this recognise the need to redefine their identity and the necessity to discover a medium through which they articulate their progress. Likewise the others who form the ‘Triad of the Marginals’ namely, the ‘\textit{Vai}’ and ‘\textit{Poi}’ (Burmese) who live in Mizoram have also channelised their own strategies to overcome the hegemony of the Nexus of Patriarchy. The \textit{Vai}, the \textit{Burma mi (Poi, Burmese)} and the \textit{Gorkha} through the politics of camouflaging
which include a wide spectrum of strategies ranging from adopting Zo names\(^{80}\), to converting to Christianity, to marrying local tribal women and such tactics to bargain their existence in the Zo world. The ability to rise to the position of a Denizen, thereby sets oneself free from being constantly ostracised as the 'Permanent Pariah' as is the case of the Vai, the Chakma, the Reang or the 'Temporary Pariah' as is the case of the Burmese and the other Zo tribes from beyond the borders of present day Mizoram. The politics of camouflaging helps the 'migrant others' to bargain their existence in the Zo world; and at the same time there is a constant attempt at 'back-linking' with the past, the country of origin in terms of rituals, practices and values, relationships and family ties.\(^{81}\)

The politics of camouflaging may or may not solve the complex problem of acceptance in the battle of identities. For instance, all the three migrants employ the tactics of marrying local women. While it has healing effect for the 'Poi' and the Gorkha, it hardly acts as a full proof strategy for the Vai. The Vai continues to be a 'permanent pariah' fit to occupy the realms of economy. The very nature of the historical linkages and the spectre of the insurgency and counter-insurgency mould and shape the everyday lived-in relationships between the Vai and the Zo/Mizo or the 'Zo hnahthlak' or 'Zomi'.

A popular statement discouraging marriages with the Vai says 'Ali a fapa chu Ali a ni' ('the son of Ali is Ali' meaning that the child born out of inter-community marriages will have his fathers name and of mixed blood therefore an 'outsider'). The mother being a local does little to help the children born out of such marriages. But as is the spirit of the Zo/Mizo society every problem has a solution or 'compensation'. The most easy solution is to make the children adopt a series of strategies to overcome their 'otherness' including taking name echoing their Zo linkages for instance, most children born out of such wedlock are christened with names beginning with a prefix 'Zo'; changing fathers name or adopting the mother's father's name as the biological father in school and other certificates (so as not to hamper the

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possibilities of the child to enjoy the benefits of reservation in future). Adopting the religion of the mother being the most ready and obvious solution. All these strategies are geared to make the children enjoy the benefits of the state in terms of affirmative actions, scholarships, quotas for studying in higher education etc. ‘to make life secured’.

Even though the Vai is brushed aside to the economic space, the Vai continues to camouflage his identity behind the veil of the local women. For instance, the permit for the trade or shop or any local business including contracts will be in the name of a local person mostly women. The Vai in Zo/Mizo economics is not a free player. The women continue to be partners in the game and also the agencies of the Patriarchy have to be constantly paid donations failure to do so will lead to both ‘Vai’ businessman and local women being branded as the ‘partners-in-crime’ functioning against the vision of an ‘Ideal Zo Christian State’. Vanramchhuangi in one of her articles in local daily Vanglaini, 9 April, 2005 titled ‘Vai suppliers Vrs MZP’ mentions the unhealthy flow of finances between the two groups which amounts to extortion and corruption in Mizoram:

Mizo Zirlai Pawl-ten Vai Supplier hnenah pawisa an khawn thin tih hi phungleatangin ka hre fova, an lo khawn thin tak tak a nih chuan Zirlai pawltre che tutee maw (Vai hnena Supply hna pe theitu) ang vel an nih dawn chu ka ti deuh a ni. Ram leiting faten an thawh vel theih reng; hnam dang hnena hna pek ching hi chuan hna pek te hnenah pawisa an khawn thin a nih loh taka leh vai bawng sakei she tit a ila vai bawng sakeiin a she phah ka ring chiam lo! (The MZP extorts money from Vai suppliers and give them contracts for assignments which could have been given to people from within the state. The activities of the MZP betray the cause of the ‘sons of the soil’ and the Zo Khristian State).

The agencies of the ‘Nexus of Patriarchy’ seasonally organise mechanism to check the inflow of ‘outsiders’ in order to regulate the spaces of the ‘others’. The most popular mechanism to regulate the flow of people is through ‘Vai Bandhs’. The latest of these ‘Vai Bandhs’ were called by the MZP, the Mizo Students’ Union and the YMA following the killing of a Mizo youth on 18 July, 2007 by suspected Bangladeshi goons at Dholai in Cachar District, Assam. ‘Quit Mizoram’ notices were issued to the ‘Vai’ and a blanket curfew was
imposed on the ‘Vai’ which was lifted only on the 25th of July 2007. The MZP, however, claimed that it had not imposed any curfew, but merely requested non-Mizos to stay indoors for their own safety. It also called a 24 hour bandh at Vairengte the nearest town to Silchar, Cachar or the plains and demanded Rs. 15 lakhs as compensation for the slain youth.82

Different perceptions prevail: bordering between individual attitudes of acceptance to collective attitudes of repulsion. For instance, Social Activists for Human Rights feel such actions as reflective of the narrow mindedness of the people. ‘Vai Bands’ are not just plain and simple humiliating they are ineffective in a globalised world. Vanramchhuangi (Ruatfela nu) says ‘Vai kan namoh theu theu’ (it is not possible for the Zo/Mizo live in isolation, we need the Vai) ‘If we really want to keep Mizoram free from the ‘Vai’ then Mizos should stop helping them get ILP, Permits, contracts, leasing as well as employ local labourers for construction works’. While contrarily ‘Vai Bandhs are also considered to be effective weapons for demonstrating the hegemony of the Nexus of Patriarchy and it agencies of systemic control over the Vai.’83

Even though historically speaking the Gorkha, are a later migrant population. They have succeeded in camouflaging their identity with the majority Zo/Mizo identity. For instance, the Gorkha organisations in Mizoram like the ‘Mizoram Gorkha Youth Association’ (MGYA) formed in 1976 on the lines of the YMA aim at cultural assimilation with the majority Zo/Mizo culture while maintaining its distinct Gorkha flavour: further substantiating the argument that migrations does not imply a complete break from the past; rather the migrant must be understood as inhabiting two worlds simultaneously.85 The acceptance of the Gorkha as being Denizens of the ‘Zo world’ has to be understood in the


84 The aims and objectives of the MGYA mentioned in its Constitution openly declare the total submission of the community to the larger Mizo community and the subservient position within Mizoram.

context of Colonial legacy as well as the race factor (white skin, good features etc.) coupled with their conversion to Christianity and acumen of the local Duhlian dialect. The Gorkha for the Zo/Mizo tribes in Mizoram symbolise the memories of the Colonial past and the benevolent rule of the ‘Sap’ (Whiteman). 86

Occasionally the Zo/Mizo support strikes to check the Nepali inflow into the region however; privately they also continue to support and accept the Gorkha in Mizoram. The very nature in which both terms are used that is Gorkha for signifying ‘the descendants of the Nepalese population that came with the British’ and the Nepali for signifying ‘the later immigrants after independence’ seem to display the subtle difference in treatment from local population. Vanramchhuangi for instance, mentions that the ‘Gorkha’ are being treated with more warmth mainly because of their nature and at times they are more accepted than the other ‘Zo hnaihlak’ such as the ‘Poi’ (Burma mi). The position of the ‘Denizen’ ascribed to the Gorkha gives them a vocality which is louder in degrees as compared to the other migrants namely the ‘Vai’ and the ‘Poi’ (Burma mi). Interestingly, most of my Gorkha respondents identified themselves as ‘Zo/Mizo-Gorkha’ rather than just a ‘Gorkha’. The definition as a ‘Zo/Mizo-Gorkha’ has enabled the Gorkha to cross the threshold of the exclusion-inclusion divide and attain the position of Denizens in Mizo/Zo society, further substantiating the argument that the issue of ‘self-definition’ and ‘the recognition of that self-definition’ by ‘others’ helps to authenticate that group identity.

The case of the ‘Vai’ reflects the inability to assume the position of Denizens as has been achieved by the later migrants, the Gorkhas; and at the same time reflects the struggle to set oneself free from being constantly ostracised as the ‘Permanent Pariah’ within the spatial politics of Mizoram. An interesting phenomenon that can be observed in the whole process of ‘self-preservation/protection’ or ‘ethnic-cocooning’ is that the inflow, as well as the outflow of migrants/’Others’ is thoroughly dictated by the sense of perceived or apparent threat as projected by the majoritarian tribes. In short, acceptance as citizens is channelled by the underlying politics of ‘Regulated Citizenship’ filtered through a process of “Politics of ‘Check-In’ and ‘Check-Out’”.

The 'Vai', most predominantly are Bengali Muslims from Cachar and Karimganj and come to Mizoram as menial labour. Many a times they do not possess legal documents or their documents have expired making them illegal migrants. The vanguards of the *Ideal Zo Christian state* target this group of people and exploit them for selfish ends including physical assaults. Of late the 'Vai' has been regulating their presence by emulating the twin model YMA and MGYA to chisel out their space within the ambit of the *Ideal Zo Christian state* in Mizoram. The 'Vai' predominantly Muslim populations have formed the 'Mizoram Muslim Welfare Society (MMWS)' in-order to consolidate their voices and have aligned themselves on the lines of YMA and have attempted to work in co-relation with the YMA. However, the YMA continues to channel the terms of negotiation during conflicts between the 'Vai' and the Mizo/Zo. For instance, in case of assaults or manhandling of the 'Vai' by the MZP or YMA or KTP the first step that the victim of mob-rule is to do is 'non-reporting' that is the victim should not report to the Police or legal agencies. Instead the victim should bring the case to the notice of the Central YMA and the Church. Failure to do so makes the case unfit for discussion at the negotiation table and the victim has to face the bell.88

The elevation of the Muslim as OBC category in Mizoram under the aegis of the Mizoram Muslim Welfare Society has not gone very well with the Gorkha who till late occupied the status of respectable Denizens. In short, fissures and internal rumblings have

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87 The Muslim Welfare Society was established in 2001 (Cf., Appendix VII) at the Bara Bazar Mosque Complex, Aizawl. However, it was registered as a society on 13th October 2004. What comes as a surprise is that this nascent organisation has managed to secure the status of OBC to the Muslim minority in Mizoram. The activities of the Muslim Welfare Society can well be summed up by glancing at the letters and correspondences made by the body over the years:
3. Muslim Welfare Society. *To The Director, Barak Valley Cement Ltd. Badarpur, Assam*. Letter No./Ref No: MWS/06-07/07. 17 March 2006: Aizawl (See, Appendix VI for an example of the content of the request letter);
4. Muslim Welfare Society. Memorandum for opening of All India Pre-Medical Entrance Test Centre at Aizawl and allotment of seat in the Aligarh Medical College for the minority community living in Mizoram. *To The Vice-President of India*. 2 November 2007: Aizawl.

started to erupt within the category of ‘Others’ for enjoying the benefits of proximity to power and resources. The *Gorkha* community is hopeful that the ‘Tini Mohini factor’\(^{89}\) will enable the *Gorkha* to have a better bargaining position and retain their coveted position as *Denizens* in Mizoram. The *Gorkha* are confident that Tini Mohini Thapa representing Mizoram in *Indian Idol Season 5* will enable them make a mark for their community just as the ‘Prashant Tamang factor’ during *Indian Idol Season 3* had revived the Gorkhaland consciousness in Darjeeling. The *Gorkha* in Mizoram hope to match the efforts put forward by the Muslim Welfare Society, this time through a ‘Reality Show’ on Sony Television.

The identity construction and the coping mechanisms\(^{90}\) directed by the ‘Vai’ and the ‘Poi’ and the *Gorkha* in the present day Mizoram needs to be explored through the gastronomical perspective as well. An important area of concern in contemporary readings of Identity discourse has been *the study of food, the culinary tastes, consumption patterns, and food as linked to a culture and identity*. ‘Food and cuisine’ have not been considered to be prominent markers of identity and naturally unlike the prominent markers of identity like clothing and festivals, they have not been the centre of focus of debates on markers of identity till recent times. However, of late food has begun to display its important role in demarcating a distinct cultural identity especially in the context of Diaspora citizens.

The *Vai*, unlike the *Gorkha*, has largely been unable to cross the threshold of gastronomical divide even though the Zo/Mizo has been by and large able to cross the

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\(^{90}\) The acculturation strategies employed by ‘Diaspora citizens’ in Mizoram revolves around the nostalgia of imagined communities, ‘mental spaces’, return to ‘home’ (*Desh*; *Pil Pu ram*), culinary tactics etc. all geared to counter the hegemonic politics. The immigrants through these strategies continuously dabble with a more or less dual cultural background walk/live through the trapeze of the ‘two worlds’. It becomes essential to explore aspects of the ways in which everyday life becomes invested with meanings as they play out in the social, political, and economic relationships and symbolic transactions between the peripheral cultures and the dominant cultures. Furthering confirming the argument that in Identity Politics, the migrant (‘other’) and their ways of life is not simply a passive symbol but something imbued with a distinctive potency in the trajectory of imagining communities.
Chapter V  
Politics of Ethnic Identity and Politics of 'Otherisation': 'Zomi/Mizo' and the Vai

gastronomical barrier by incorporating Indian spices etc into their food. The pungent smell of fermented delicacies and the local food continues to be repulsive to the 'Vai' (a large majority of whom are Bengalis). Gastronomically adjusting to local situations remains an uphill task for the Bengali for whom a 'Bengali food' ('Bangali ranna') is the ultimate culinary destination. The Vai is yet to overcome the subtle divide and chisel out their space in the Zo world and cross the threshold of the permanent pariah. The Gorkha have overtime incorporated Zo/Mizo food into their diet and this culinary proximity has to a large extent fused the gastronomical divide; which otherwise is strongly sensed in comparison to the Vai. The Gorkha in Mizoram have to an extent assimilated themselves to the local customs, practices and food habits. Naturally they have succeeded in crossing the stigmas of the boundaries faced by the Vai or the 'Burma mi' (Poi, Burmese). The everyday use of language by the Zo to refer to the Gorkha such as 'Mizo ang chiah' ('just like the Mizos') speaks in volumes about their place in the Zo/Mizo society.

The 'Poi' also referred to as 'Burma mi' though belonging to the 'Zo hnahthlak' continue to be ostracised as 'Temporary Pariah' best signified by the cynical term 'Zo/Mizo Two' (numerical 2) used to refer to their partial acceptance into the Zo/Mizo society. The similarity in food habits, language, and imagined or real history has had very little impact on their spatial existence in Mizoram after the Peace Accord, the most obvious factor, being the simple reason that the 'Zo hnahthlak', in Mizoram has assumed for itself identities traits of the permanent/traditional other- the Indian. For instance, there has been a sea-change in the food habit of the middle class and upper middle class in Mizoram. Few prominent changes in terms of food habits and ways of dining are that the Zo/Mizo way of having food together with servants on the same table has been replaced by separate tables for servants and domestic helpers even though the timings (supper by 6-7:00 pm) remain the same in most middle class houses. The ways of dining have changed for the elite class and most Police Officials holding higher posts. There seems to be an unwritten code saying, 'Officers (Mizo officers) are suppose to have Vai chaw' (Vai food) and follow 'Vai dinner' timings. The

91 The timing followed is the ‘Vai timing’ that is supper between 8-9:00 pm. Likewise the content food served has also been Indianised in varying degrees including the use of ‘Paneer’ (cottage hung cheese) and Vai masala, with doses of ‘sarsaon tel’ and ‘dal’ (pulses) with ‘tarka’ etc. Zo/Mizo
youngsters who have spent a substantial part of the educational days in mainland India find it difficult to adjust to the local cuisines and prefer ‘Indian food’. The same goes for Indians as well though they have not been able to overcome the gastronomical barrier; they have also accepted that such local food is not bad after all; it is healthy and should be tried out (occasionally).

This gastronomical perspective enables us to explore the minute often over-looked mundane taken for granted issues in everyday life which does contribute to the complex-layered web of Identity Politics. For instance, through these gastronomical changes we can see that there is a gradual often slow acceptance of the ‘Vai’ and Indian identity from the side of the micro level i.e. from a small elite section from within the community. At the same time there is a very miniscule change in the acceptance of the ‘Zo/Mizo’ by the larger community that is the Indian. The Zo/Mizo through the Peace Accord has been able to except the Indianness and added it as a prefix or suffix to its generic or phonetic identity (‘Indian-Mizo’ or ‘Zo/Mizo-Indian’); but the Indian has not been able to accept the appendages to the identity of the said group. ‘Zo/Mizo of a certain age group are gradually crossing the gastronomical divide and gradually accepting ‘Vai’ culture via globalisation via the West and not directly through Delhi. As because the west is openly accepting India and its cultures, so, Zo/Mizo, are also following trend’ says, Vanramchhuangi. The Zo/Mizo have been able to identify with India over the past 10 years but Indians are yet to identify themselves with this part of India. The above instances provide an insight into acculturation processes of the migrants and the ‘Natives’ by taking the ‘gastronomical highway’ or the culinary behaviour.

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92 Based on my observation of having the chance to live in Mizoram for twenty one years and dine with the local community innumerable times and converse on such mundane issues which are often brushed aside as being insignificant. My observations were further substantiated by interactions with Zo/Mizo youths studying in colleges in Kolkata and Darjeeling in the period 2005-2008.

93 Based on informal discussions with officers from mainland India who had a chance to serve the people of Mizoram and also their children most of whom were born in Mizoram and spent a substantial part of their lives in Mizoram.
5. 6. Locating the Bru (Reang/ ‘Tuikuk’) in Zo/Mizo Society

Depending on one’s vantage point, displacement and deterritorialisation may shape the social construction of ‘nationness’, naturalness, history, identity and enmity. The construction of a national past is a construction of history of a particular kind; it is one that claims moral attachments to specific territories, motherlands or homelands, and posits time-honoured links between people, polity and territory. How such collective histories come to challenge one another, or to engage in struggles over history and truth, can become a particularly challenging question among minorities and displaced people (Reang and Chakma). According to the ‘Minorities at Risk Project, Assessment for Mizos in India, 2000’:

Disagreements between the Mizos and the Reang (also referred to as Bru), another tribal group that resides in Mizoram, erupted in violence in 1998 and resulted in the exodus of thousands of Reang into neighboring Tripura state. The Reang remain in refugee camps in Tripura and a rebel organization, the Bru National Liberation Front, is demanding the creation of a separate Reang state or autonomy within Mizoram. The BNFL, fighting for separate autonomous district council and treatment at par with the ‘Kashmiri Pundits’ in western Mizoram, signed an MoU with the Central and the State governments in April 2005 leading to the surrender of about 1,040 BNFL militants.

The Home Secretary, Government of Mizoram, met the BNLF leaders to pacify them from taking up the issue in the Supreme Court and the non-implementation of repatriation by the Mizoram Government. However, the dilatory tactics adopted by the Mizoram government and its consistent refusal to consider either of the demands even after 10 rounds of peace talks, have induced rethinking in the BNFL ranks. BNFL chief Surjyamoni Reang

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targeting the Government of Mizoram says ‘If the Chakmas, Pawis and Lakhers in Mizoram can have district councils based on the Sixth Schedule, why not Reangs, who are the second largest community in the state?’ The Reang agitation for an ADC has gathered momentum from 1997 in west Mizoram. The Reang or Bru as they call themselves have been strongly resisting the subtle process that has been initiated by the northern majority tribes through their generic identity ‘Mizo’. The large number of missionaries being sent to the Reang areas to bring them to the fold of the book (Bible and the Law) is reflective of the mission of assimilation within the Mizo Identity. The state is sponsoring studies to come out with reliable work to support their Zo/Mizo linkages so as to tone down the emergent ethnic consciousness built around the ‘Koch-borok folklores’ of the Koch and Bodo tribes of Assam and Coochbehar.

Most of my respondents from the north and dominant Mizo group felt ‘the Reang (Bru) are ‘nobody tribes’, they are like gypsies’. Zaliana says with full zeal that ‘Tuikuk (Reang (Bru)) and ‘Takam’ (Chakma) should pray and revere the Mizos as gods because they have been so benevolent to them. They (Reang and Chakma) do not use the money sent to them for development seriously and the elites siphon the funds for their own interest.’

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98 The origin of Reang is said to be Maian Tlang, a hill near Rangamati of Bangladesh. Some opine that they originally belong to the Shan state of Burma where they migrated from Chittagong and then into Tripura during 14th century. The Reang folklore of the two brothers Bruha and Braiha speaks of the west-ward migration of the Reangs. The party led by Braiha in course of the migration went ahead and the party led by Bruha failed to catch up with the elder brother. As a result the party led by Bruha stayed back in the Zo hills and came to be known as Bru; while the party led by Braiha went ahead into Chittagong Hill Tracts and from there on to the present day Tripura and became the original settlers of that region. Cf., TRI, (1986). A Brief History of Riangs In Mizoram. Aizawl: United Press/Everly Press, pp.1-22.

99 The BJP is exploring the possibility of using the Reang (Bru) issue to enter into a Christian majority state politics. Supporting the displaced Bru is in effect an attempt to break the glass ceiling.

100 Personal Interviews: Prof. Lianzel & Professor Thangehungnunga (Department of Economics, Mizoram University). Tanhrihl, Aizawl: 24th January 2008; Pu Lallianchhunga (Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Mizoram University). Chaltlang Campus, Aizawl: 19th January 2008; Prof. Lalrinthanga (Public Administration, Mizoram University). Chaltlang Campus, Aizawl: 19th January 2008.
"Tuikuk Pathian siamtheilo ‘kha siam kan tum’ (‘we are trying to make humans out of those people who failed God’). ‘No report of atrocities against Mizo by Tuikuk. The NHRC has been filled with false allegations. Saikapthianga (Mizo MLA from that area) and his family have been really benevolent on them. On the contrary, it is the Reang (Bru) who have committed crime and violence. For instance, they raped and murdered the Mizo missionary Rohmingthangi who was working among them (Chakma and Tuikuk). It has never been vice versa. Mizos do not kill or commit atrocities on the minorities. Do we have any reports on custodial deaths? Or reports on crimes? Not one’ says, Zaliana.101 The Reang (Bru) have been creating trouble in Mizoram and demanding ADC status. The Reang (Bru) are a cross border migratory tribe with no fixed territory. If their demands are fulfilled than every other ethnic minority will demand it. The Reang (Bru) are ‘a problem tribe’ and should go back to Tripura.102

5.7. The Assam Rifles Battalion Headquarters as the ‘Symbol’ of the ‘Others’

Anderson’s Imagined Communities (1991) substantiates how spatial dimensions implicitly trigger the construction of otherness. The process of creating enemies, or what Tidwell (1998, p.126) describes as ‘enimification’, injects emotional power into a conflict, and the medium of education is often (mis)used for the purpose. And here ‘History’ becomes both a regulator of individual behaviour and a medium for creating and maintaining ties/links between members of the group. ‘The image of the ‘Other’ do not remain confined to political elite, they are transmitted to the masses through education and media’.103 Aizawl104 was


102 Personal Interviews: Prof. Lianzela & Prof. Thangchungnunga (Department of Economics, Mizoram University). Tanhri, Aizawl: 24th January 2008; Lallianchhunga (Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Mizoram University). Chaltlang Campus, Aizawl: 19th January 2008; Professor Lalrinthanga (Public Administration, Mizoram University) Chaltlang Campus, Aizawl: 19th January 2008.


104 ‘Aijal’ or ‘Aizawl’ as it is know today the capital city of Mizoram belonged to the chiefdom of Khalkoma, the eldest son of Sukapuilala, the Northern Lushai Chief. Few scholars like Ray and Nag are of the opinion that ‘Aijal’ or ‘Aizawl’ belonged to the punji of Thanruma. Originally a fallow
selected for the construction of a permanent post in the North Lushai Hills. Once the construction of the post was completed, the column retreated back to Silchar leaving behind a garrison of 200 riflemen, mostly Gorkha of the Surma Valley Military Police Battalion (SVMP). This garrison was later renamed the First Assam Rifles (Lushai Hills Battalion) and set its base in the North Lushai Hills. Likewise in the South Lushai Hills the 400 Gorkha soldiers of the 2/2 G.R attached to the 9th Bengal Infantry led by Brig. F.V.G. Treagears set their base in Lungleh via Demagiri (Tlabung). The city’s Colonial history and Colonial architecture has by and large been erased and replaced by the façade of unplanned hastily built concrete jungles. The history thus being systematically eroded has very little influence on its present dwellers, most of whom are migrants from other regions. Naturally the sense of history and the need for a heritage is transported to some distant future, making the whole process of ‘heritage building’ around the city an impossible task.

The making of Aizawl is closely linked to the history and coming of the Assam Rifles in Mizoram. In fact both processes are embedded and intertwined in the same historical process. The issue of removing the Assam Rifles physically from the Centre of the city has been a living issue in Zo/Mizo politics. A prominent public irritant to the Mizo sentiment has been the delay in shifting the headquarters of the Assam Rifles Battalion from the very


105 The old Surma Valley Frontier Police, later named Military Police Battalion, were commanded by Mr. Daly (Civil Police) for many years. He was followed by Lieut. Plowden, Capt. Bromhead, and Capt. Broughton. In 1890 the major portion of the S.V.M.P was sent up to Aijal, where it became a separate unit, known from then on as the North Lushai Hills M.P. Battalion. Cf., Appendix A, p.274 in L.W. Shakespear. (1927). History of The Assam Rifles. Calcutta: Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute.

106 After the construction of stockades at Lunglei and Aizawl, peace was restored in most of the parts of the hills especially near and around the stockades by the spring of 1891. The expansion work at Aizawl and Lunglei as well as the administrative machinery required the increase in the inflow of immigrants i.e. the trusted ‘Gorkhas’ as mentioned by O.A. Chambers in his ‘Hand Book of The Lushai Country’ (1899, Reprinted 2005).

107 ‘Eight people are killed and 30 injured when Indian troops confront a mob that breaks into their camp in Mizoram. The mob accuses the Assam Rifles of assaulting a police officer. Assemblies are been banned in the state capital, Aizawl, but a workers’ strike is held’ (Reuters, March 30th, 1988).
The heart of the city of Aizawl to a less prominent location outside the city. The battalion headquarters were established at the present site over a 100 year ago on a 99 year lease which has expired. Though the Battalion forms an integral part of Mizoram's history, political considerations certainly warrant relocation at a less intrusive site even at some cost. Many consider the whole issue of removing the Assam Rifles from the heart of the city to be trivial and diverting attention from other glaring issues like the 'Aizawl Syndrome' that haunts the city.

Aizawl the capital remains a space of paradoxes. For instance, it resembles many prosperous cities across the country, boasting Adidas and Benetton showrooms as exemplified by the 'Millennium Complex Mall'; but at the same time it lacks other markers of an urban city like proper hotels, cinemas, parks, entertainment and amusements, well maintained public libraries, night-life etc. The history of Aizawl reflects the complex birth of a 'City' from a cluster of villages to the most urbanised space in North East and India at large. The underlying complexities and the spectre of tribal village administration continues to haunt the psyche of its dwellers as reflected from the phenomenon of mob-rule and archaic voyeuristic mechanisms employed by the various organisations functioning in and around the city of Aizawl for the purpose of chiselling the vision of an 'Ideal Zo Christian State'. Though overtly 'urban', the city of Aizawl reflects the reminiscent of the bygone days of inter-tribal warfare and village administration. An interesting line of argument placed to justify the demand for removing the Assam Rifles is the possible space that it would leave behind which would solve the problems of hasty urban growth and 'breathing space' to the city.

The main reason that a few of the Lower Division Clerks and Officials at the Secretariat gave for the frequent rise in the demand for the removal of the Assam Rifles from the city is that though the Assam Rifles are yet to agree to move out to the selected site at

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109 Most of my young college respondents from Aizawl felt that removal of the Assam Rifles from the city centre would give the city of Aizawl the space that it required for breathing and expansion.
'Zokhawsang' near Zemabawk, which has been offered by the Government; the land sharks and ministers are already talking of dividing the patta of the land in their name. Most of the clerks and insiders in the Secretariat and other Government offices spoke about these under table dealings in hushed voices. It seems that the rumours has some amount of truth as it is really common to see in Mizoram that a minister or an influential local officer or the Church offers their own land which is in the ‘outskirts and in a less prominent place’ in an exchange for ‘a more prominent land inside the city in prime location’. This phenomenon is known as ‘ram in thleng’ (exchange of property) in Zo/Mizo political circles. The opposition and the ruling governments which ever party they belonged to seem to be in an agreement that the Assam Rifles had to be relocated elsewhere. Though there seems to be no agreement as to where to relocate them or what to do with the land thus acquired.

The site of the Assam Rifles Battalion Headquarters becomes invested with meanings and the compound spanning across half of the city of Aizawl becomes the ‘Symbol’ of the ‘Others’. The ‘Sipai compound’ becomes a constant reminder of the years of counter-insurgency and the repressive action of the Centre that is the ‘Vai’. Though the Assam Rifles were not directly responsible for all the violence during the insurgency over time it has been objectified as the source of pain in public memory. The compound of the Assam Rifles thus becomes the constant public irritant and the space of the ‘other’ which is protected or sealed-off with a boundary that becomes difficult and almost inaccessible for the natives and the agencies of the Nexus of Patriarchy. Removing the Assam Rifles from the heart of the city of Aizawl thus over time is interpreted to mean the final solution to remove the ‘Sernung’ (living-scar) from public memory (for details on memory and space refer to Chapter III).

The project of removing the Assam Rifles or the ‘Sipai’ enters the narratives of the nationalist discourse in the Zo tlang ram and is also interpreted as the triumph of Zo/Mizo nationalism over the ‘other’. The whole project is also interpreted as a public effort to cut

110 Based on a series of informal exchanges on varying issues in Mizoram with the office bearers and officers in the Secretariat and other Government offices during my field trip to Mizoram in early 2008 and early 2009; and telephonic and electronic exchanges during 2004-2009. Most of my respondents being Government officials were hesitant to be named.
down the ‘Other’ to its size and show the ‘Vai’ their space in Mizoram. The site of the Assam Rifles Headquarters is selected as the final battle ground where the Vai and the Zo/Mizo mi leh sa’, ‘Zo hnahthlak’ will contest their spatial domain. This strategy, of selective tradition of nationalism, is the key for the consolidation of the idea of the state, and is produced by the institutions and personnel of the state system. This tradition is critical to the construction of hegemony by agents and institutions of the state system. The production of a selective tradition by the state system is a powerful and vulnerable hegemonic process.\textsuperscript{111} A hegemonic selective tradition is always challenged by alternative and oppositional traditions that dispute dominant articulations of space, time, and substance and can even question the identity between nation and state.

An interesting explanation for the ‘Otherisation’ of the Assam Rifles is that the Army or Paramilitary personnel evoke a sense of envy among residents of the North-East when they occasionally exchange thoughts about the easy availability of cheap commodities including foreign liquor (in a State that publicly exhibits pride in its ‘Total Prohibition’ regime) in their ‘Army Canteens’ and regular supply of goods in camps while the same items are available for three-times the written Maximum Retails Price (MRP) in the local markets. The scarcity of commodities for the locals and surplus for the ‘Army-wallas’ make the locals envious of the other. The Army personnel aware of the local situations often befriend the easy targets from the local community, mostly the women and the young; and lure them into relationships in exchange for ‘goodies’ from the canteen. The Army Jawans seldom exchange words with the local community and spend years in their camps without interacting or learning the local languages/customs and think/suffer from superiority complex.\textsuperscript{112} By


\textsuperscript{112} An interesting development that deserves special mention is that the Assam Rifles eversince the passing of the Government of Mizoram. (2007). The Assam Rifles Act, 2006 (The Mizoram Gazette, Extra-Ordinary (2007) Notification No.H.12017/55/2007-JD, 17th January, 2007 vide Regd.No.NE-313(MZ),Vol. XXXVI, Aizawl, Friday, 23-02-2007, Phalguna 4, S.E. 1928, Issue No. 46) has been directing its activities towards bridging its links with the people of the state through social service initiatives and relief works. For instance, during the ‘Aila’ 2009 the Assam Rifles actively helped in relief works along with the local YMA, KTP and other agencies. For details Cf., Vanglaini. (2010). ‘Assam Rifles-in mipuite tan thawk tha’. Aizawl: 12 January. Similarly the Assam Rifles has begun a ‘Bharat Darsha type’ trips for Mizo Students to make the unfamiliar familiar and cement the forces of...
speaking in Hindi and maintaining their North Indian/Gangetic lifestyle within their camps in the North-East, they think they have upheld Indianness and recreated a mini-India within their camps/garrisons. Sanjoy Barbora (2006) call this in essence the ‘Garrison Mentality’ that governs India’s North-East.

The Assam Rifles compound is thus held to be endowed with the capacity to express symbols and cultural icons that have influenced cultural identity of the Zo/Mizo in Mizoram vis-à-vis the ‘Other’ (‘Vai’). It evidently becomes more urgent for the heroes (here MZP) of a nation to free or symbolically cleanse that space or territory from the unwanted ‘Other’. In other words, the ‘natural landscape’, takes the form of ‘a contested cultural landscape’.

5.8. MZP and the politics of ‘Exclusions’ and ‘Inclusions’

The MZP is the most active agency of the Nexus of Patriarchy in Mizoram. It acts as a mechanism of systemic control through which the politics of ‘Exclusions’ and ‘Inclusions’ is put to function. The MZP was originally formed on the lines of Assam Students’ Union back in 1942 as the Lushai Students’ Union in Shillong. It shifted its base to Aizawl in 1970. The MZP came to public prominence from its earlier role of a partner in collection of donations for the MNF movement in the 1980s when it called for the removal of the Director of Agriculture, M.N. Mallik. The MZP accused Mallik of having admitted four non-Mizo students including his son to the Agriculture Institute in Aizawl against an unfulfilled reserved seat. The protest against Mallik by mid 1981 gradually displaced itself and the MZP demanded the resignation of the then Chief Minister Brigadier T. Sailo.

The streets of Aizawl were filled with the activities of the MZP. The MZP gheraoed the office of Mallik and prevented the staff from entering the Agriculture office. This was followed by arrests of four prominent MZP leaders on 21st July 1981. The next day 1000 MZP members’ led by Vanlalzari gheraoed the Police Station at Bara Bazaar, Aizawl and

113 Vanlalzari was the undercover agent of the MNF who acted as the PA of the IGP, Mizoram G.S. Arya and helped the assassination of IGP, G.S. Arya; DIG, T.S. Quinn and S.P (CID) Thakur on 13th January 1975. She was on bail during that time. She is said to have manhandled the then SDPO
started rioting and damaging the Police Station. The Police had to resort to *lathi*-charge and fire tear gas to disperse the mob. Both party sustained injuries Section 144 was imposed and curfew covered Aizawl. On 24th July 1981 the curfew was lifted and the following night the MZP set fire to a Police Jeep. Tension crept in once again. Following talks with the Chief Secretary, the MZP agreed to resolve conflict through peaceful means. The 73 students arrested were released and on 27th July 1981 the MZP in a public meeting demanded compensation of rupees 10,000/- for each student who had sustained injuries, immediate dismissal of the PC government and release of MZP leaders for alleged tax collection for the MNF.\textsuperscript{114}

The MZP boycotted the 1981 Independence Day celebration and declared 15th August to be 'that' day when the Zo/Mizo entered slavery. In a speech delivered on the occasion, the MZP adviser P. Siamliana posed a doubt on whether the 'Mizos could truly accept the Indian flag as their own flag'.\textsuperscript{115} During this period, the MZP began to publicly exhibit its pro-MNF organisation and many considered it to be the students' body of the MNF. Sailo in order to counter the rising wave of youth support in favour of Laldenga mobilised a section of the MZP to his side and organised a youth wing of the PC party. Similarly the Congress attempted to organise the youth force in its favour. The final result was that all parties took to appeasement policies towards the MZP which further reinforced the MZP position and it got a political platform. The students movement in Mizoram thus crystallised on issues if reservation, foreigner's issues, supporting peace settlement with the MNF, 'Greater Mizoram', resignation of the PC Ministry etc. However, at no stage was the MZP affiliated to any political party. But it is true as in many of the developing countries/societies the political


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. p.257.
leaders often took a direct and active interest in students agitations and demands. The MZP though outwardly is a non-partisan outfit it does take side as an when its interests are highlighted or given due recognition by political leaders.

The most common tactics employed to regulate the 'Vai' is the 'Vai Bandh' which is a systematic process of making the 'Vai' invisible and the Zo/ Mizo as the visible majority. The MZP takes the best possible precautions to check the illegal flow of Vai skilled labourers and businessmen into the state. Through these acts of vigilance and moral policing in the Zo/Mizo society the MZP has earned the reputation of being the 'Government of MZP'. Identities are constructed through difference- through the relation to what is not, to what is lacking, to what has been called “the other” or the “constitutive outside”. Identities “can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’ objected.117
TABLE 5.2

Opinion of the 200 Mizo respondents on issues relating to the ‘Others’

(\textit{in numbers})

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>'Yes'</th>
<th>'No'</th>
<th>'No Idea'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the existence of an overwhelming Gorkhas community in Mizoram a threat to the Zos/Mizos?</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are ‘Vai Bandhs’ an effective mechanism?</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the Vais a threat to Zo Culture?</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Assam or to be specific Cachar a threat to Mizoram/ Zo Culture?</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own Survey

# Table 5.2 (above) shows the fragmented opinion (in numbers) of the Zo hnahthlak on a wide range of issue pertaining to the ‘Others’ and in special the ‘Vai’ and Gorkha in Mizoram. The table also shows a gradual shift in attitudes towards the migrant population. The presence of the Gorkha as respectable Denizens in Mizoram is steadily being brought to the scanner as evident from the threat perception, 105 respondents felt Gorkhas are a threat to Zo hnahthlak. Cachar or Assam relations, remains a pricky issue in opinion of the Zo hnahthlak. The issue of Vai culture and threat perception; Vai Bandhs and its effectiveness remains open to strong contestation. For instance, the affirmative and those negating stand at 75 each on the issue of Vais being a threat to Zo culture, while another 50 gave the response ‘No Idea’. The response ‘No Idea’ conveys a strong silence which remains open to interpretations.
TABLE 5.3
Opinion of the 200 Mizo respondents on relevant issues

(in numbers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>No Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you perceive the Army and agencies of the Indian government in contemporary times?</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the role of Media in Mizoram</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the role of leaders/politicians in Mizoram</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the attitude of the church towards urban lifestyles, westernization and consumerist culture</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own Survey

# Table 5.3 (above) shows the contesting opinion (in numbers) of the Zo hnahthlak on a wide range of issue ranging from attitude towards the Indian Army; to role of media in Mizoram; to role of leaders; to attitude of church towards urban lifestyles and consumerist culture. The table shows that the Army generates strong negative vibes in Mizoram, 90 respondents felt it is negative. The Media walks a tight rope between negative and positive in opinion of the Zo hnahthlak. Leadership evokes a sense of negativity with 100 of the respondents opting for “Negative”. The issue of the Churches attitude towards urban lifestyle and consumerist culture remains open to strong contestation. The response ‘No Idea’ conveys a strong silence which remains open to interpretations.
5.9. Tug of War over Identity: Indian and ‘Mizo/Zomi’

Post-kargil developments\textsuperscript{118} coupled with the invasion of Indian mass media into the living rooms of the Zo/Mizo has brought about striking shifts in the attitude towards Indian and being an Indian and at the same time carrying forward the Zo/Mizo identity along with a baggage of multi-layered identities. The bodies of the Zo/Mizo soldiers killed in kargil when brought back to Mizoram evoked the sense of being with India. The solidarity expressed through dances and music in Vanapa Hall post-kargil is a standing witness towards this strange mix of identities displayed in the public. Inclusion of the Zo/Mizo in the Indian Army and Police as well as Administrative positions across India has mellowed down the ‘anti-India feeling’ and has to an extent contributed to the emergent Zo/Mizo/Indian Identity in a complex baggage.

On the issue of Zo/Mizo response to India and Indian Identity Vanramchhuangi observes:

Mizos have only recently realised their ‘Indianness’... It took the Mizo/Zo almost 23 years to realise their 'Indianness'. For instance, ‘a large number of Mizos at one time would support Pakistan or USA or any country competing against India in an international event. Today we see a strong support for India in a cricket match. For the Mizo 'Cricket' as a sport is a very recent phenomenon. It is youngsters who have spent a substantial number of years in other cities in India for education who have brought the game to Mizoram. It has enabled the Mizo to identify with the game which has become a passion almost an obsession for India. Similarly we have been supporting India over the years in Olympics and other international events as because India has realised the potential of Mizo players and given a chance to them in the national platform and represent India. Now the support for India has become more and more visible. Through this representation at national level

sports meet and other events what happens is that the rest of India will
come to know Mizoram and its people. In other words, the larger India
comes to meet the smaller India and the manufacturing of an ‘Indian
Identity’ get cemented both ways.

We are becoming more and more Indian...in fashion and taste. The
restrictions imposed by men and the Church against wearing of ‘Vaikawr’
(salwar kameez) by women has been effectively countered by ‘It’s
my life attitude’ by women. Media is acting as a levelling factor. The
over all result is the attitude against India. Indian culture is all mellowing
down and both men and women in Mizoram are moving towards
accepting the Indian. The other obvious factor which has shifted the
attitude in favour of India is the cheap availability of Indian goods in the
market which are durable and of better quality than cheap Chinese goods
in the grey market. The international recognition given to India by the
whites (Americans, UK etc.) is also a contributing factor as to why the
Mizos want to stand by the side of ‘an emerging power-India. ...the
Mizos have realised that it is good to be with India.\(^{119}\)

Today the state of Mizoram is trying to re-mould its identity and identify itself with
the larger nation within the framework of the Indian constitution. The Zomi movement is
very much exclusivist and is also being constantly challenged by the legally accepted generic
identity ‘Mizo’. The embattledness of both the phonetic identity and generic identity
continues to be a fact of the ‘political landscape’ of Mizoram. The lack of consensus is
evident from the fact that a large section of the ‘Zo hnalhthlas’ (Zo people) within the
boundary of present day Mizoram consider themselves to be ‘Indian-Mizo/Zo’ and those
from across the international borders as ‘Burmese-Mizo/Zo’ or ‘Mizo-2’ (numerical 2); and
those from Manipur as ‘Manipur-Mizo/Zo’ or ‘Mizo/Zo-2’ (numerical 2) or ‘Mizo/Zo suak’
(implying a phoney or duplicate Zo/Mizo).

Zaliana further substantiates:

Chapter V
Politics of Ethnic Identity and Politics of 'Otherisation': 'Zomi/Mizo' and the Vai

From 1986 onwards we (Zo/Mizo) have accepted Indian identity. The lack of knowledge about Mizos in mainland India is primarily because of the lack of representation in every matter and also because how history is written. We are not Hindus, and also we do not use scripts such as Bengali script (Indian scripts) all these adds to alienation from the mainland. 'It's natural because India is so vast, Indians themselves do not know their own land at large. We need to know India so that we can define Indian-ness. Mizoram has been added to the political map of India and no movement great or small can ever challenge its existence. Knowing the 'other' goes both ways 'from inside and outside'. Ministers at the central level should be made aware of the political map and geography of India so that they do not make statements that may hurt the feelings and attitudes of people in the northeast fringes. The vastness of Indian cities and the geographic distance makes the importance of Mizoram lesser in degree than other places. The Mizos need India more than India needs the Mizos. So it's natural that locating Mizoram in the map of India remains a challenging task for most Indians. The importance of the physical territory overshadows its people, especially when looked at from the defence strategy perspectives. Mizos should be included more in the centres projects and only then we can attain prominence.\(^\text{120}\)

The attitude towards 'Vai' culture, Hindi, Bollywood, Indian television, food and clothing in other words, lifestyle has been more openly accepted by the younger generation especially those born through the 80s and after the Peace-Accord as reflected by the questions answered on the issues of 'Vai' culture, cultural assimilation, Mizo identity, Indian identity, development and peace etc (for details refer to Chapter VI).

Conclusion:

The notion of citizenship in the 'North-East' more so in Mizoram, is channelled by a yearning for definition of a native, immigrant and insider in order to prove original inhabitance. Interestingly the usage of the term "self" in a tribal context is itself debatable.\(^\text{120}\) Pu Zaliana. Personal Interview. Op. cit.
Here the individual gains his identity through the collective and historical identity of the tribe which has been preserved and transferred through generations. Hence, the notion of "self" transcends to that of collective good and rights rather than individual benefit.

The strategies adopted by the 'Vai', the 'Poi' and the 'Gorkha' reflect the survival strategies to counter the Politics of Silencing at various levels and the 'manufacturing of spaces' in the politics of Mizoram. The case of the 'Vai' reflects the inability to assume the position of Denizens as has been achieved by the later migrants, the Gorkhas; and at the same time reflects the struggle to set oneself free from being constantly ostracised as the 'Permanent Pariah' within the spatial politics of Mizoram. An interesting phenomenon that can be observed in the whole process of 'self-preservation/protection' or 'ethnic-cocooning' is that the inflow, as well as the outflow of migrants/Others is thoroughly dictated by the sense of perceived or apparent threat as projected by the majoritarian tribes. For instance, a survey of the State Excise Department Records (1997-2005), ever since the imposition of 'Total Liquor Prohibition', shows a constant rise in illegal liquor trade and drug trafficking in Mizoram. Interestingly, in almost all these cases of 'illegal liquor and drug trafficking', the local women, the 'Vai' and 'Poi' are picketed and victimised as 'Zu Zuar' (liquor sellers, vendors), 'Drug Zuar' (drug peddlers); even though state records and surveys reveal the active involvement of Zo/Mizo men in such cases. The Zo/Mizo situation reflects the dynamic strategies employed in different societies for the construction, justification and continuance of the patriarchal hegemony, and strategies adopted by the marginals to create their own spaces.

The hallmark of migration is its ambiguity. Even as migrants struggle to transform themselves and their families, they are torn between competing ideals: to separate their families and gain access to the power and resources of new places, or to remain together: to retain links with their villages or to break away from their often constructive and burdensome

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obligations: to return or to stay. Migration always involves relations of power, whether these are between states, cities and rural areas, or regions, between migrants and non-migrants or would-be-migrants or between individuals within a migrant’s household or family.\textsuperscript{122} The case of the ‘Vai’, Gorkha and the Burma mi (‘Poi’) in Mizoram supports the understanding that identity is affected by conversion, migration, modernisation, westernisation, partition and the politics of the dominant group. Horowitz’s (1985) claim that ‘Identity is formed by the process of fission as well as fusion. In the former process, the boundary of the group contracts through division and creates a new group. In the latter process, the boundary of the group expands by incorporation and amalgamation of some other groups through assimilation’. The latter stands true in the case of ‘Identity Politics’ among the migrants in Mizoram. The boundary problem of ‘outside/inside’ must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. The ‘other’ is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously ‘between ourselves’.