Chapter VII
Some Concluding Observations

This dissertation has looked at the vexing issues of identity in the state of Mizoram and has brought to the fore the contested nature of the same. The work has concentrated on highlighting several issues that form the complex matrix of identity within the terrain of the socio-political-cultural landscape. Identity building can only be understood within the context of the articulation, and there is no final deciding logic to this complex structuring of identity. Thus, the articulation of identity politics eschews all forms of fixity and essentialism. Social, political and class formations do not exist a priori. They are a product of articulation.

Each chapter of this dissertation deals with specific core issues and interweaves the complex multi-layered arguments into the broader frame of the process of the evolution of identity formation among the Zo/Mizo people.

The introduction and the subsequent chapter throw light on the complex inter-layered web underneath the process of Identity building or Identity formation among the tribes in Mizoram. The chapter brings to surface the contestation on the issue of the Identity among the Zo/Mizo tribes as a consequence of the colonial encounter as well as the response that it generated among the southerners vis-à-vis the northerners. It contextualises the evolution of identity politics and brings to the fore the contested nature of the debate on 'generic versus phonetic' identity, and also the nature of the 'Zo-reunification' process overtime. In this chapter, my engagement has been with the recording of the entire historical process of Zo reunification from the days before the colonial encounter and beyond. Second, I have charted the internal and external forces that propelled the construction of 'Zomi' identity. Also, through these two chapters I have catalogued the spirit of the contesting identities and the mood swings in the attempt at maintaining Zo hegemony over the 'Others'.

Chapter III explores how leadership became democratised and how new leadership adopted different 'Markers' for identity construction. The arguments in this Chapter,
illustrate how the identity of a place and its people get shaped and reaffirmed in the midst of the growing encapsulating homogeneity and the fragmentation of space, how the concreteness of the territory, and its visual markers, gets secured through material forms in everyday life and language. The chapter also beams some light on the intriguing phenomenon of hybridization of identity in the identity politics in Mizoram.

This chapter also provides a nuanced understanding on the issue of leadership and identity formation in Mizoram taking the case of Laldenga, Thenphunga Sailo and Lalthanhawla with the overriding intention to chart the nature of political developments in the post-British period upto the formation of statehood and its affect/influence on the identity-building processes. The arguments in this chapter further substantiate that leadership occupies an important place in identity movements because the leaders are responsible for and instrumental in translating objective causes into subjective consciousness, articulating the causes of deprivation in whatsoever form of which the common people may have little or no knowledge. I arrive at a conclusion that the three different leaders and their types of leadership become prominent in various phases. For instance, the militant leadership of Laldenga dominated the initial phases of the Zo/Mizo identity movement while more accommodationist leaders came to the forefront as the movement required negotiation with its opponents. The Politics of Tlawmghain has by and large been the guiding principle of Zo/Mizo politics, be it Laldenga organising the Famine Front to distribute food to the Mautam victims, or Brig. Sailo using the power of the pen to write about the Human Rights violations during the insurgency in order to mobilise the Zo/Mizo consciousness, or Lalthanhawla leaving aside his post of the elected Chief Minister of Mizoram for Laldenga all for the greater cause of peace and stability and the realisation of the greater long term goal of creating/building an Ideal Zo Christian State. The Politics of Tlawmghain has been one of the strategies adopted by the leadership to emphasise and display the superiority of the Zo hnahthalak over and above the ‘Others’ in the terrain of identity politics in Mizoram.

Chapter IV highlights the braided nature of the relations between ‘the Centre and the State’ and also looks at the process of party formation and attitudes towards the southerners vis-à-vis the northerners in the process of identity formation. The Chapter illustrates the
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'Zo/Mizo-Mara'; 'Zo/Mizo-Lai'; 'Zo/Mizo-Chakma' conflicts which reflects another dimension of the Zo/Mizo vis-à-vis the 'Other' problem in the arena of identity politics in Mizoram.

The chapter also highlights the undercurrent of ethnic enclaves/ethnic cocooning that accompanies the politics of Autonomous District Councils. My study arrives at the conclusion that local autonomy has not solved the problem of ethnic conflict. The case of the Mara, the Lai and the Chakma throws up a number of issues of autonomy, ethnicity and governance. The Mizoram experience re-confirms that 'Autonomy' becomes a part of the problem and not the solution. The minorities such as the Chakma or the Bru (Reang) or any other 'marginal/peripheral' group, feel discriminated against and seek further autonomy in the form of an Autonomous District or Union Territory or Statehood depending on the time and space factor.

Likewise another interesting feature of the Autonomy movements in Mizoram is that they are viewed in terms of 'Ethnic enclaves' for cocooning a certain group. This encourages the other ethnic groups to channel their claims around newly created ethnic labels. The initiation of the power sharing model in the post-statehood period for mellowing down the MNF; the exploitation of Article 356 to maintain the supremacy of the Centre in the State; the provisions under Article 371G (Constitutional amendment, 1986) in respect of the religious or social practices of the Mizos, customary laws and procedures and such other provisions all indicated a smooth exchange of power relations between the centre and the state.

The chapter also deals with the much debated issue of 'Vai Party versus Zo/Mizo Party' which strongly conveys the contested nature of the authentic people's representative party. The three prominent political parties in Mizoram namely: the Congress, the People's Conference and the Mizo National Front (MNF) have been vying to be the real representative of the Zo/Mizo people and their identity. That 'the process of party formation cannot be isolated from the process of identity formation' becomes truer in the case of Mizoram. A multifold recapitulation of the historical as well as political developments during the period
1970s-80s as done in this chapter, ‘helps one to understand the different strategies adopted by the Centre and the local stakeholders cutting across party affiliations to make democracy functional and make meaning of the constitutional provisions’ by interpreting them to fit their vested logic.

The discussions in this chapter also bring out the complex within tribe relations which are moulded by strictures of patriarchal control and are exerted very intensely over issues of identity formation, centre-state relations and governance; and such relations continue to be moulded in the strict notions of Zo/Mizo understanding of identity and development.

Chapter V, through the oral history method, makes an attempt to locate the ‘Other’ in Zo/Mizo society. The chapter highlights the ever changing notion of the ‘other’ that has evolved in the region over time by taking recourse to culinary tastes, and dress and other aspects of material culture. Taking the case of the three prominent migrant groups namely the ‘Vai’, the ‘Burma mi’ (Burmese, ‘Poi’) and the ‘Gorkha’; and their organisational efforts to chisel their respective spaces in the Zo world, the chapter explores and brings to the fore the contest between ‘Zomi/Mizo’ and the ‘Others’. The chapter reaffirms the argument that ‘Exclusion’ and ‘Inclusion’ is a complex mould, and 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. I support my arguments in this chapter 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.

The arguments and observations in the chapter signal that 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 findings in this chapter also signal that there is a partial acceptance of the ‘Other’ which has opened up avenues for the germination of hybrid identities. At the same time, possibilities of such hybridization continue to be dictated and channelled by the terms of the *Nexus of Patriarchy*. And also, the experience of the
insurgency and counter-insurgency times continues to cloud the relations between the Zo/Mizo and the Vai. For instance, memory of the troubled times remains a pricky issue in mellowing the Zo/Mizo-Vai relations and removing the Assam Rifles from the heart of Aizawl city remains an urgent goal of the Zo hnahthlak; the ‘natural landscape’, taking the form of ‘a contested cultural landscape’.

Chapter VI which is the last chapter so far as my empirical findings are concerned, discusses the complex relationship of identity in the context of peace, development, globalisation and culture, and explores the ever changing nature of the same over time and space in Mizoram. The multifold developments in the post-Peace Accord times have led to several contestations and the creation of a critical space leading towards greater participation of the people in governance. The chapter provides an understanding of the post-Peace Accord trends in political participation of the Elderly Citizens and the Youths against the silhouette of the project of building an Ideal Zo Christian State and the overwhelming presence of the Nexus of Patriarchy and its agencies. These are the various voices of the people as individuals, communities and civil society, thrown towards the government’s decisions on issues that affect their lives.

I therefore, chart these voices which had remained largely inaudible, by looking at cyberspace, newspapers and periodicals, coupled with in-depth interviews of residents of the city, human rights activists, academicians, writers, journalists and the youths over the years in order to understand the emergent identity consciousness in Mizoram. My work, by interweaving the above sources with local television programmes, music albums, films and the like, has highlighted that the voice is often political in nature and content and takes the form of activist citizenry.

While charting the voices I found that the emergent Zo ‘Cyber Politics’ is very much a logical outcome of the contest between the generic and the phonetic identity. The transportation of the ‘Dream of Zo reunification’ to some infinite future compelled the Zo hnahthlak to opt for alternative space to find suitable emotional bonding across territories. The cyberspace provided ample space and raw material for that imagination. The emergence
of Virtual Identity reflects yet another changing dimension of identity and culture politics in Mizoram.

The contribution of this dissertation to the study of Politics specifically lies in its interpretation and interweaving of existing knowledge with my findings and observations which opens up newer avenues for future research. Identity movements are not eternal. In other words, the goals of the movement change in relation to the dialectical agent-structural interactions with the society, state and institutions. And, it goes without saying that the strategy and changes in it not only reflect the changes in the objectives of the movement, but are also strongly influenced by the relationship of the movement to the larger society and other movements as well. Hence, as a collectivity, the movement is characterised by an emergent social structure and culture. The social structure is reflected in the relationship between the leaders and followers. The culture of the movement encompasses both norms, that is, the standardised expectations of behaviour developed by the members of the movement, and values, which include programme, the scheme of change, and ideology justifying the programme and strategy of the movement.

The underlying realities of 'Politics in Mizoram,' more specifically the construction of identities and its contestations, exhibit the hegemony of the 'Nexus of Patriarchy'; and also display the bargaining positions of the marginal in their effort to chisel out their spaces as citizens within the ambit of the Zo/Mizo Christian World.

The Zomi identity shows strands of a project not settled and displaying both fixity in terms of markers of identity and fluidity in terms of hybridization of identity. The contested nature of 'Zomi versus Mizo' debate makes it almost impossible for people to make an expressive choice and the oblique or the hyphen continues to make its presence in the identity of the people. The lack of consensus is evident from the fact that a large section of the 'Zo inhahlhak' (Zo people) within the boundary of present day Mizoram consider themselves to be 'Indian-Mizo/Zo' and those from across the borders are labelled as 'Burmese-Mizo/Zo' or 'Mizo-2' (numerical 2); and those from Manipur as 'Manipur-Mizo/Zo' or 'Kuki' or 'Mizo/Zo-2' (numerical 2) or 'Mizo/Zo suak' (implying a phoney or
duplicate Mizo/Zo). An important message underneath the phenomenon of hybridization in identity politics in Mizoram is that the 'Zo should never be relegated to positions of subordination to other contending groups'. Even in the midst of hybridization, the Zo continues to have an elevated existence over and above other contesting identities in Mizoram.

The hybridization of identities and the hegemony of the *Nexus of Patriarchy* in Mizoram seem to make the double helix of identity more complex and at the same time an inescapable reality of the Zo/Mizo 'socio-political-cultural landscape'.

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