Chapter 3

Politics of Identities in the Language of ‘Tribe’

In a perceptive essay Pudaite,1 a renown tribal leader in Manipur, accounts how in 1949 he was led to appeal for the personal intervention of the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, after the Union Ministry of Education denied to grant him a ‘tribal’ postmatric scholarship as his ‘tribe’, 2 ‘Hmar’, was not recognised. Pudaite proudly adumbrates how he and many of his tribal folks in Manipur were consequently persuaded by an anecdote of this kind to represent for their tribes’ recognition to the Other Backward Classes Commission constituted by the Government of India in 1953. Although this may come across as a revealing personal experience,3 it has also got immense impersonal, collective, subjective and symbolic import: the encounter of collective tribal entities with the postcolonial state which has the exclusive right to recognise, privilege and affirm certain labels in accord with its own terms and conditions. This is to say that until identities are mapped, recognised and consolidated (or institutionalised), they shall largely continue to remain at the margins of the modern state. As an inheritor of the colonial state, and drawing as it is from much of antecedent colonial discourses and state practices, postcolonial state’s encounters with tribal communities in North-East India or elsewhere need in-depth study and analysis.

2 If not qualified otherwise we shall employ the term ‘tribe’ in a strict constitutional sense as delineated by Article 366 which considers ‘tribe’ to be those recognised by the President of India via Article 342 of India’s Constitution.
3 Pudaite’s accounts may sound to be simplistic as he gives us this impression that it was on his representation that his ‘tribe’ got recognised in 1956. A critical analysis of the unfolding events in the late 1940s and 50s points however that the Hill Areas of Manipur witnessed an unprecedented ethnic or tribal mobilizations under different ‘dialectal’ groups. The formation of Paite National Council at Tangnum (27 June 1949) and the Hmar National Congress at Parbung (July 1954) were, inter alia, pointers to these mobilizations. We shall use ‘ethnic or tribal mobilisation’ on the lines of Nagel who defined it as ‘the organisation of groups along ethnic lines for collective action.’ See Joanne Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture,” in Michael W. Hughey, New Tribalism: The Resurgence of Race and Ethnicity (London: Macmillan, 1998), p.261. For a better appreciation of the local events of the time see S.N. Ngurte, Hringnun Khawvel (The Believer’s Word)(Churachandpur: PP Publication Centre, 1998); Vumson, Zo History with an Introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and their Status as an Ethnic Minority (Aizawl: Author, n.d), see especially pp.302-10 (hereafter simply as Zo History). Also see G. Zamzachin, Paite Tanchin (Paite History)(Imphal: Tongvom Press, 1992). For a comprehensive view see Naorem Sanajaoba (ed.), Manipur: Past and Present, Vol.3 (New Delhi: Mittal, 1995).
This Chapter examines the politics of identities which gets inscribed into a category called ‘tribe’ from two vantage points, viz., (i) as a site of intersection between state and society where the power and legitimacy of the former is intermediated and negotiated upon by the latter, which in turn is represented by a mass of disparate ‘tribes’; and (ii) as a discursive space where issues of historical marginalization, discrimination as also of contingent problems of minority and minoritisation are sought to be addressed and reconciled via the instrumentality of ‘tribe’ recognition by the state. We shall examine this by looking at the ambiguous ways in which tribes are mapped, institutionalised and consolidated by the colonial and postcolonial state. At the heart of this lies the state which has emerged as the most powerful identifier because of its monopoly over material and ‘symbolic’ forces/resources. The instrumentality of recognition regime it engenders however perpetuates what Anderson calls the ‘classificatory’ and ‘serialization’ grid. We shall argue that this is problematic as an ill-defined and ambiguous regime of this kind engenders possible dissolution and fragmentation of tribes by setting into motion the ‘narcissism of minor difference’ as our case study of the Zo people will amply bear out. It is here that we shall locate the discursive practice of ‘tribe’ which gets sprinkled into their dissensual politics. Embedded into this is what is often called ‘ethnic/tribes parade’ where identities and cultures are invented, produced and reproduced in ingenious tribal ways to suit the ‘classificatory and serialization’ grid of the state. While this is usually

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4 Following Brubaker and Cooper, we shall employ the term ‘symbolic’ here in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense to imply the power of the state ‘to name, to identify, to categorise, to state what is what and who is who.’ See Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” Theory and Society, Vol.29, no.1, February 2000, p.15.

5 We have borrowed the terms ‘classificatory’ and ‘serialization’ from Anderson, who considers them respectively as the warp and weft of colonial state’s style of thinking (of reproducing its domain). See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991 revised edition), p.184; especially chapter 10.

6 Following Ignatieff, we have borrowed the term ‘narcissism of minor difference’ from Freud to imply ‘that the smaller the real difference between two peoples the larger it was bound to loom in their imagination.’ See Michael Ignatieff, Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism (Toronto: Viking, 1993), p.14. It must be qualified here that unlike Ignatieff who used it to refer to two distinct peoples viz. the Serbs and Croats, we shall use it to capture the illusionary division palpable within a people/tribe.

7 We shall employ the ethnic category ‘Zo’ in this chapter which now emerge as the most acceptable candidate among conglomeries of colonial and ‘alien’ terms like ‘Kuki’, ‘Lushai’ and ‘Chin’ across native academicians. For emerging academic consensus over the ethnic term see, inter alia: Vumson, Zo History; Mangkhosat Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture: The Encounter between Christianity and Zo Culture in Mizoram (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997); Siing Khaw Khai, Zo People and their Culture: A Historical, Cultural Study and Critical Analysis of Zo and its Ethnic Tribes (Lamka: Khampu Hatzaw, 1995), and Lalsangkima Pachuau, Ethnic Identity and Christianity (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2002).
done to protect, promote and preserve the unique culture and identity of a given ‘tribe’, it often gives rise to a dissensual politics among communities of a ‘tribe’. Finally we shall take up ongoing attempts to redefine and rethink tribe-identity among the Zo people which would transcend beyond ‘locational dialectal identities’.

I. State, Identities and the Politics of Recognition: Contexts and Conditions

Previous studies on encounters between the postcolonial state and tribal communities, tend to emphasize ‘the complex processes of the adjustment of India’s tribal population to the idiom of an emerging nation.’ Coming close on the heels of radical tribal upsurge in North-East India especially that of the Nagas, which challenged the very edifice of Indian state nation-building, these studies were conducted to help ‘evolve guidelines that could promote the development of emerging forces within the framework of the unity, security and integrity of the country.’ In fact Singh (ed.), *The Tribal Situation in India* (1972) which weaved together sixty-five papers presented during a national seminar on the same theme provided the benchmark for tribal studies in India at least for the next two decades. What clearly emerged from this was the felt-need to evolve ‘integrated’ and ‘coordinated’

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8 We shall employ the term ‘locational dialectal identities’ — for want of better term— to loosely imply identities formed around specific dialectal spheres. For related analysis see L. Lam Khan Piang, *Kinship, Territory and Politics: The Study of Identity Formation amongst the Zo* (New Delhi: Unpublished PhD Thesis, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2005). Piang has used the term ‘locational identity’ which we expand it further here to include ‘dialectal’. Also see his, *A Critical Analysis of Tribe-Identity Formation among the Zo People in Manipur* (New Delhi: Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2000).


10 Despite initial excitement exhibited by the traditional Indian nationalists over the prospect of creating a Hindu state in India after Partition, they are however led to accept the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of India which in turn demand differentiated rights and treatments to collective groups in India. Jaffrelot, for example, examined how this brand of nationalists were led to compromise to what he calls a ‘circumscribed multiculturalism’ in post-Partition era to accommodate linguistic, cultural, religious, caste and tribal diversities in India. In a way, the fact that India is never homogeneous nor a nation, but a state with an intent to build one is increasingly becoming clear and widely accepted. See Christophe Jaffrelot, “Composite Culture is not Multiculturalism: A Study of the Indian Constituent Assembly Debates,” in Ashutosh Varshney (ed.), *India and the Politics of Developing Countries* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), pp.126-49; G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); D.L. Seth, “The Nation-State and Minority Rights,” in D.L. Seth and Gurpreet Mahajan (eds.), *Minority Identities and the Nation-State* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.18-37; and “Introduction” by him and Gurpreet Mahajan in the same book, pp.1-17. Also see Myron Weiner, “India’s Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?” in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *State and Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.459-95.

11 See “Introduction” in Singh (ed.), *The Tribal Situation in India*, p.xi.
area approaches by giving due attention to the contextual specificities of the ethnic and geopolitical situation of North-East India’s tribes. These studies are in contradiction to the oft acclaimed assimilationist approach espoused by Ghurye who considered that tribal problems largely stem from improper absorption of the tribal people, whom he categorized as ‘backward Hindus’. Central to this is what Xaxa calls ‘the denial of difference as type’ between the mainstream Hindu civilization and the tribals. Interestingly the first set of studies following the trend set by Elwin, accepts this structural difference; hence the privileging of integration role of the state. Subsequent studies on this subject privilege the role of tribal elites in explaining tribal politics of North-East India. Chaube, whose *Hill Politics in Northeast India* (1973) in some way becomes a master text is a classic example of this. Following this trend is Rao (ed.), *A Century of Tribal Politics in Northeast India*, which first came out in 1976. A veritable compendium of articles which ran into a series of volumes, these volumes alongside Chaube’s *Hill Politics* continue to inform and chart out our understanding on the broad contours of tribal politics in North-East India.

It is not our intention here to have an extensive survey of previous studies and research on the subject. Suffice it here to identify two broad themes which undercut such studies. The first set of studies encapsulated by Elwin, Singh’s edited book, Rustomji, B.P. Singh, L.P. Singh and others, framed as it were within the statist discourse, privileges the role of the state vis-à-vis the tribals by proffering means and ways by which the state should incorporate and integrate disparate tribal demands and rights. Here the concerns of security, stability, unity and integrity of the state conform to, if not precede,

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tribal rights, interests and demands. The second set of studies exemplified in Chaube,\textsuperscript{19} Rao\textsuperscript{20} and Baruah's\textsuperscript{21} works, inter alia, focus on the performative aspects of tribal elites by evoking subnationalist manoeuvres which are coexisting with, and more often than not run parallel to, the pan-Indian nationalist discourse. They draw our attention to the necessity of appreciating the tribal's genius and perspective to facilitate better coordination and integration into the state nation-building project.

What is missing in these accounts, and on which the present Chapter seeks to put its substantial focus, is the larger picture enacted behind the scene: the unequal and painful ways in which the modern state and its development trajectories (with its welfarist thrust) impinge upon the self-understanding of tribal communities, especially the Zo people in North-East India.

No doubt the postcolonial state has been largely successful in transforming itself from the image of its colonial counterpart as an abstract, distant, alien, marginal and exterior actor to a more immediate, intimate, powerful and sometimes intrusive politico-administrative structure.\textsuperscript{22} It has however retained much of the colonial politico-administrative edifice and reproduces certain discursive practices, which in turn perpetuate tribal dissensions and conflicts in India's North-East. One such discursive practice is the narrative of identities in the language of 'tribe'. This is deeply problematic because the term is vague, amorphous and shorn of certitude as it fails to capture the ground realities which had for long evaded the colonial Raj. Despite this contingency, however, it continues to shape and condition the politics of tribal identities.

A discursive practice of this kind is certainly helpful in constructing the tribal 'other'. Simultaneously, it must also be admitted that it is equally problematic as it is

\textsuperscript{20} V. Venkata Rao, \textit{A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India, 1874-1974} (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1976).
steeped into the Orientalist discourse which privileges an episteme unduly informed by the representational mode.\textsuperscript{23} Accordingly, a distinction is made between the knower (colonial state/anthropologists) and the known (the tribal ‘other’); the former with the exclusive monopoly of power and the rational faculty of knowledge to make an authentic, accurate, and legitimate representation of the tribal ‘other’ which, however, is circumscribed for the latter. In doing so, one of the most common ways of constructing the tribal ‘other’ is by way of distinguishing them with the plain/valley people who nestle ‘civilized’ lifeworld. The hills inhabited by the ‘wild’, ‘savage’ and ‘barbaric’ tribals and the plains inhabited by a relatively ‘cultured’, ‘civilised’ people has been conspicuously bifurcated: the former is considered to be a non-state space occupied by disparate, segmentary tribes and the latter is considered to nurture a state. Not surprisingly this engender a chasm between the hill tribes and valley people in as much as it produces and reproduces stereotyped images and identities, which are, many a times, uncritically accepted as legitimate and authentic representations of the communities concerned.

The ultimate casualty of this discursive practice is the human agency in the tribal ‘other’ which is reified, domesticated and cast in a certain mould to produce and reproduce unequal, hierarchical relationship. One immediate offshoot is that the tribal ‘other’ is forever condemned to be a ‘receiver’ of the state largesse. Since the state operated through the instrumentality of collective entitlements (accruable to recognised tribes/communities) it engenders politicization of tribal/ethnic identities. Contingent ethnic mobilizations are largely circumscribed by these fragmented ‘tribe’ identities, as many of the sub-tribes recognised as ‘tribe’ tend to play the spoilsport. In the meantime they foundered on the state’s counter narrative which considered ethnic mobilizations even with subnational character as deviation from the rule set by the state and simplistically likened to an ‘unruly classroom scenario’ — to borrow Singh.\textsuperscript{24} The antidote usually prescribed for this is better integration and management by the state, to

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\item This paragraph is informed by Ronald Inden’s arresting piece, “Orientalist Constructions of India,” \textit{Modern Asian Studies}, Vol.20, no.3, 1986, pp. 401-46. Inden considers this episteme problematic as it is reductionist and smacks of what he calls ‘societalism’ by reducing the cultural, political and religious system into a societal essence; the essence being \textit{caste} in this case. He also considers that orientalism as a discourse pertains to the civilized people which he distinguished it from the concern of Anthropology, i.e. ‘primitive tribes’. However, much of the imagery and narrative embedded into orientalist discourse are equally applicable to the study of ‘primitive tribes’.
\item Singh, “North-East India,” p.282.
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reinforce as if the tribals are backward peoples whose attendant problems and anxieties can be offset by better governance. The ‘law and order’ approach which stems from such mindset is hardly useful in ‘managing’ the tribal problems as they are complex and merited political approach.

Identity assertions and contingent ethnic mobilizations of tribal communities in India must be located within the intersection of state and society as it provides a site where intense encounter between modernity and tradition takes place. Intimately entwined with it are issues of autonomy, identity and patriotism. In other words, it throws up a fertile ground of breeding minority identities and rights. While this determines and shapes the character of subnational manoeuvres it also often pose serious challenges to the project of state nation-building as the uniform language of national identity anchored by universal citizenship rights apparently fails to address the particularities of their rights and demands for autonomy. It is also a contested site in so far as the latter are considered to be antithetical to state nation-building as they entail collective rights which are conventionally denied to groups by the modern liberal state. This is precisely where the present discourse on minority rights seeks to negotiate and address upon: can we anchor a new post-national identity which will incorporate the sensitivities and contextual particularities of minority tribal groups? What is the extent to which minority groups be allowed to maintain their unique culture, rights and identities without necessarily jeopardizing state nation-building project? In other words, how do we craft institutions which engender and promote autonomy to these groups without compromising the ‘unity, security and integrity’ of the nation? How then do we understand the problems of minorities within the minority groups? In other words to what extent is it possible to have minoritisation of minority groups without circumscribing our commitments to democracy, development and social justice? Where do we end the problem of minority and minoritisation, given that they now become an enduring feature of our multicultural societies?

It is not the intention of this Chapter to come out with clear cut solutions to these vexatious issues. The Chapter is a modest attempt to examine, understand and rethink, as it were, the discursive practices of the state which are intimately linked with the problems of minority and minoritisation of minority groups in North-East India or elsewhere in the
world. We shall now examine the discursive practice of mapping tribes with special reference to the Zo people.

II. Mapping Tribes: The Classificatory and Serialisation Grid
In an influential intervention Bhabha adumbrates on how Appiah and Gate, Jr.'s contributions to the debate on identities draw our attention 'to face the ethical and political prerogative — what are identities for? — or even to present the pragmatist alternative — what can identities do?' In fact Bhabha, preoccupied as he were with critical epistemological and transitional challenges from the vantage point of liminality, appreciates how Appiah and Gates 'shift the issue of identity from a concern with the persuasion of personhood — whether individual or communal, subaltern or sovereign — and restage it as a question of historical and geographical location.' Though framed in a different context, Bhabha's intervention helps us locate the broad contours within which 'tribes' have been mapped since the late 19th century in Indian subcontinent or elsewhere. Crucial to these are the following questions: what are 'tribes' for? To what extent does identification and categorization of a tribe help in understanding and representing the complex realities of the tribal lifeworld? In other words, even as the label 'tribe' gets internalized, congealed and institutionalised to what extent does it condition and shape inter-tribes and intra-tribes relations? Does it reflect the self-understanding of the tribes themselves? In other words, to what extent does 'tribe' lend meaning and significance to, and shape their everyday lived social experience and practices or vice-versa?

II(a). 'Tribe' Considered
Etymologically derived from the Latin word 'tribus', tribe was initially used in a Biblical connotation to refer to the Israelites. The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary traced its roots to the 13th century to refer to one of the divisions of the ancient Roman people.

27 Ibid., p.434.
Tribe in its varied manifestations and meanings is considered to be largely a modern category constructed by the colonial state to subsume societal diversities it encountered for administrative and political expediency. This is done through the process of enumeration and classification. Writing on the ‘creation of tribe’ in the context of Tanganyika, Iliffe considered:

The notion of the tribe lay at the heart of indirect rule in Tanganyika. Refining the racial thinking common in German times, administrators believed that every African belonged to a tribe, just as every European belonged to a nation. The idea doubtless owed much to the Old Testament, to Tacitus and Caesar, to academic distinctions between tribal societies based on status and modern societies based on contract, and to the post-war anthropologists who preferred ‘tribal’ to the more pejorative word ‘savage’. Tribes were seen as cultural units ‘possessing a common language, a single social system, and an established common law.’ Their political and social systems rested on kinship. Tribal membership was hereditary. Different tribes were related genealogically … As unusually well-informed officials knew, this stereotype bore little relation to Tanganyika’s kaleidoscopic history, but it was the shifting sand on which Cameron and his disciples erected indirect rule by ‘taking the tribal unit’. They had the power and they created the political geography.30

What is remarkable is the striking tandem in which anthropological understanding evolves alongside the colonial state’s project. Morgan, the father of anthropology, writing in 1877 categorised tribe in terms of its general features such as common name, dialect, territory, religion, endogamy, equality and fraternity.31 Almost a century later, his categorization continues to hold ground as Honigmann32 considered tribe in terms of commonality of territory, descent, language, culture and name. From a self-contained autonomous unit informed by kinship relations, tribe is considered to be a whole society with emergent

Chapter 3: Politics of Identities in the Language of 'Tribe'

... the primitive/civilized distinction rests on a view of history, according to which once there was the primitive, the irrational, and the violent; then there was progress towards the civilized, the rational, and the orderly; a progress, however, that has been interrupted from time to time by reversions to primitive barbarism. 34

Beteille is disinclined to accept this evolutionary theory of human history. He considers that in a different context like India where civilization and state coexists, tribe is best considered as something which exists outside the ambit of civilization and state. 35 To be sure this type of view informs much of the colonial state’s practice of classifying and serializing tribe. Not surprisingly, generalized labels like ‘forest tribes’ (1891), ‘hill and forest tribes’ (1921), and ‘primitive tribes’ (1931) got inscribed into the official state census whenever a reference is made to the tribal communities. While these generalized, essentialised and exoticised labels help in general descriptions of the tribes concerned, they fail to capture the particularistic ways of their specific lived existence. Take for instance the conflation of clan, race and tribe in the case of the Zo people. The colonialists accepted that the Zo people (Chin-Kuki-Lushai) belong to ‘the same stock’ (defined in terms of racial, ethnic and linguistic affinity). 37 In the meantime they classified and serialized them as if they belong to different tribes where clans were often mistaken for tribe. This subsequently blurred the lines of distinction between recognised ‘tribes’ as most of the Zo clans were promoted to ‘tribe’ in postcolonial India. This sets in the ‘narcissism of minor difference’ and fragmentary politics in India’s North-East.

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35 For details see Andre Beteille, Six Essays in Comparative Sociology (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974).


Nonetheless, these labels are extremely handy for the colonialists as they reinforced the alterity and marginal location of ‘tribes’ vis-à-vis the state and civilization.

Contingent with this, the colonial Raj came up with certain legislative enactments which institutionalised and legitimised its control over the tribes and their immediate lifeworld. Prominent here is the *Rules for the Treatment and Management of Hillmen*, 1894 which placed the tribals under the authority of the Forest Department. Under this Rules, the tribals are denied of any right to their ancestral forests by declaring them as state’s property. The ramification entailed by this is immense as it opens up floodgates to private contractors for exploitation of their natural resources. In the socio-cultural and political front, the passage of the Inner Line Regulations, 1873 and thereafter the Chin Hills Regulations, 1896, inter alia, helped demarcate territories where tribal socio-economic and cultural values remain insulated and protected from the effect of the mainstream culture and civilization. The Government of India Act, 1919 and thereafter the 1935 Act respectively earmarked ‘Backward Tracts’ and ‘Excluded Areas’ and ‘Partially Excluded Areas’ with the same intent so that the tribals could come directly under their control. This was done purportedly under the guise of special and preferential treatments. In post-Independent India, the incursion of the state into the tribal lifeworld persists with the passage of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 which superseded the 1952 Forest Act. Dieu explices the implications of this, thus:

[The Act] gave magistrate powers to forest officials, who could arbitrarily impose and collect heavy fines from tribals caught in the act of collecting forest produce or cutting firewood. It even allowed these officials to jail any “perpetrator” (tribal that is) without due process of law. In sum, the forest policy became more repressive as it further limited and penalized tribals in their ancestral territory.

It is also pertinent to note here the inscription of religion as a hallmark to differentiate tribals from the non-tribal/mainstream people in India since the Census of 1901. ‘Animism’ introduced in this Census was however replaced by ‘tribal religion’ in the 1921 Census. Subsequent census enumerations showed how religion as an identity marker

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could be deeply problematic as most census enumerators in the tribal areas of India's North-East, who happened to be Hindus, tended to include major chunks of the tribal populations within the Hindu fold whenever their religion could not come under the neat category of 'tribal religion.' It is also deeply problematic in so far as it reduces one’s identity to a singular aspect of one’s multifaceted identities. However, as Ghurye showed, religion, occupation and racial features were not adequate factors for distinguishing tribal from non-tribal groups.

II(b). Institutionalising Tribe: ‘Scheduled Tribe’ as the Modus Operandi

The postcolonial state in India perpetuates the ambiguity and prevarication of the colonial state by institutionalizing tribe under the ‘Scheduled Tribe’ recognition regime (hereafter ST). Under this regime the President of India is accorded a special privilege in so far as he can specify, after consulting the Governor of a state, ‘tribes and tribal communities or part of or groups within tribes or tribal communities’ to be STs for each state of the Union. Once enlisted, a tribe can only be varied only by an Act of Parliament. However, the Government of India is yet to formulate a definite, uniform and standard guide to identify tribes.

This implies that the tribe recognition regime continues to be informed by the essentialised and generalized idea of ‘tribe’ handed down to us since the colonial times. To be sure, several attempts to streamline and standardized the means and ways of identifying a ‘tribe’ remain a constitutional conundrum. In 1951 the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (hereafter CSCST) noted that no uniform test for distinguishing STs had been formulated. In order to streamline one the Commissioner sought the views of the states towards this end. Based on divergent responses, the CSCST proposed tribal origin, primitive way of life, remote habitation, and general backwardness

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40 For an appreciation of the problems of census enumeration pertaining to religion see Hutton, Census of India, 1931 Report.
42 See Article 341 (1) of India’s Constitution.
43 Article 342 (2).
in all respects as the common elements for identifying a tribe. In the meantime, the Tribal Welfare Committee of 1951 which considered the problem of identification came out with a four-fold modalities to categorise tribal communities: (i) those confined to the old forest habitats and following the old patterns of life, (ii) semi-tribal communities or those who have become more or less settled in rural area and have taken to agriculture and allied occupations, (iii) acculturated tribal communities or those who have moved to urban or semi-urban areas and engaged in modern industries and vocations and have adopted modern cultural traits, and (iv) tribals totally assimilated in the Indian populations. It seems that the Committee, influenced as it were by Elwin’s four-fold categorization of tribal communities in his *The Aboriginals* in 1944, reproduced these modalities in a slightly different format. Needless to say this helps in general classification of tribes; yet it does not help us in clearing the cloud of generalised identification. Future endeavours to lay down neat criteria for identifications do not seem to help much. The corollary of this was succinctly put by Galanter, thus:

The Scheduled Caste and Tribe categories are intended to comprise those who were at the bottom or the margins of the Indian social order — those groups who because of

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46 The Tribal Welfare Committee (1951) was composed of prominent anthropologists, administrators, and other social workers. It deliberated on the issue of identifying tribes under the auspices of the Indian Conference of Social Workers, Calcutta. See Xaxa, “Tribes in India,” ibid.
47 Ibid., p.382.
48 According to Verrier Elwin the tribals could be categorised into four class according to the level of their incorporation and development vis-à-vis the mainstream Hindu society, viz; (i) Class I: tribals who live in near total isolation and are least contaminated by Hindu influence. Hence they are considered to be ‘wilder’, ‘semi-civilised’ and the purest of all the tribals; (ii) Class II: tribals who retained their tribal mode of living yet showed a propensity to: individualism, decline of shared sense, disappearance of axe cultivation, and contamination by the life of outsiders. Hence they are considered less simple and less honest than Class I tribals; (iii) Class III: tribals in transition who were increasingly exposed to the economic and socio-cultural forces of the Hindu society while a section of them embraced Christianity. They constituted at least four-fifth of the tribals and are the largest chunk of tribal populations. They were sometimes referred to as Backward Hindus; and (iv) Class IV: tribals who essentially constituted the old aristocracy such as the great Bhil and Naga chieftains, the Gond Rajas, Bineshevar and Bhuyian landlords, Korku noblemen, wealthy Santhals, Oraon leaders, and some highly enlightened Mundas. They retained the old tribal names and clan and totemic rituals and observed elements of tribal religion though they generally adopted the full Hindu faith and lived in modern and even European style. Elwin then came out with a pragmatic policy suggestion by pointing out that India’s tribal future policy should be to help peaceful transition of Class I & II directly into Class IV tribes without the necessity of having them suffer the despair and degradation of the third. We inferred the above points verbatim without apology from Xaxa, “Tribes in India,” p.382. Cf. Verrier Elwin, *The Aboriginals* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1944 revised edition)[First published in 1943]; also see Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*; and his “Beating a Dead Horse,” *Seminar*, 14, October 1960, pp.25-8.
their low ritual status in the traditional Hindu hierarchy or their spatial and cultural isolation were subjected to imposition of disabilities and lack of opportunity.\textsuperscript{49}

Galanter avers that in the absence of a clear theoretical formulation to solve what he calls ‘an immediate and intractable problem’ of preparing a well-defined STs List, a ‘rough approximate’ model was adopted. For him, this stems from the fact that ST identification has never been considered as difficult and complex as identifying SCs. In a ‘few years later the criteria for Scheduled Tribes seemed wholly unproblematic.’\textsuperscript{50} In fact, the Home Minister while placing a Memorandum in 1956 referred to the existence of ‘well-defined and easily ascertained’\textsuperscript{51} criteria for distinguishing a tribal from a non-tribal. Not surprisingly when the Dhebar Commission, also known as the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, reported in 1961 that it did not feel the need to devote any attention to the problem of identifying tribes.\textsuperscript{52} The constitution of an independent committee to revise the ST List in 1965 under the chairmanship of B.N. Lokur, the then Law Secretary, however showed that a ‘well-defined and easily ascertained’ criteria was not yet in place. In fact, the Lokur Committee persevered with the ‘level of incorporation and development model’ evolved by Elwin et al by considering that ‘tribes whose members have by and large mixed up with the general population are not eligible to be in the list of Scheduled Tribes.’\textsuperscript{53} Interestingly, it came out with five set of markers to identify tribes. These are: (i) primitive traits, (ii) distinctive culture, (iii) geographic isolation, (iv) shyness of contact with the community at large, and (v) backwardness.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{49} Galanter, \textit{Competing Equalities}, p.122.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p.152.
\textsuperscript{54} See Department of Social Security, \textit{Report}, ibid.; also see Galanter, \textit{Competing Equalities}, p.152 and Ghatak, “The Scheduled Tribes in India".
What ultimately prevails as the standard criteria for enlisting tribes is, as Xaxa reminded us, one based purely on enumeration and has little to do with the anthropological notion of tribe. Xaxa incisively points out that: ‘but since the list is linked to the extension of administrative and political concessions to the groups concerned, the exclusion or inclusion of a particular group reflects political mobilization rather than a neutral application of criteria.’

Thus by a constitutional sleight of hand tribes are transformed into objects of the welfare state as ‘recognition’ entails special collective entitlements like: special reservation of seats in the Parliament and state legislatures, reservation of seats and posts both in the union and state governments’ services, provision of special administration system under the Fifth and Sixth Schedule of India’s Constitution, special socio-economic and development plans especially earmarked since the Fifth Five Year Plans (1974-79) by introducing the Tribal Sub-Plan etc.

That the recognition regime continues to be vague and ill-defined means there is ample scope for politicizing the whole administrative process of identification, which involves the state government and the Union government’s agencies including the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (hitherto National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) and the Registrar General of India. Involving different levels of state and union government functionaries in the whole process of identification and finalization of ST List puts in place an intricate maze of legal and politico-administrative complexities. This is a no nonsense affair as it takes a whole lot of political and legal dealings, necessitating in turn the consensus of the state concerned. This explains why almost throughout the two initial decades of enforcement of the Constitution, the state government of Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India, refused to recognise any ST in the state despite the existence of a number of groups who had all the requisite characteristics as would merit recognition to counterpart groups in the neighbouring states.

It will not be out of place here to note recent mobilization (May-
June 2007) of the Gujjar community to get itself enlisted in ST List in Rajasthan and the stout resistance it encountered from the Meena ST community which led to the death of twenty-six persons; twenty-one of them in police firings and five persons in inter-community clashes. The Gujjars who were branded as a criminal tribe in 1857 got enlisted as Backward Caste in 1981 and thereafter in the Other Backward Classes in 1993. It had since 1984 demanded for inclusion in the ST category. The Meenas were apparently averse to this mobilization as they see in it attempts to use the ST category as a leverage to exert political influence. Potentially, this could threaten their dominance in the state.\textsuperscript{57} Tribe recognition, couched in a vague regime as it were, has indeed become agonic site of contestation and renegotiation.

We shall now turn our focus to the case of the Zo people, who have witnessed intense and disparate ‘tribe’ mobilizations in the 1950s and 1960s which persist till today. We shall examine especially how the inscription of ‘tribe’ as a marker of identity has nourished, congealed, and institutionalised dialectal and clan differences among the Zo people. This gives rise to the privileging of what we call ‘locational dialectal identities’. We shall situate this within what we shall call the ‘vernacularisation of clan politics’.\textsuperscript{58} Crucial to this is the coming of the Christian missions alongside the colonial state, which productively used the new print technology to reduce clan dialects into print language. Bible translation and thereafter production of different vernacular literatures became the most effective ways of doing this. The simultaneous operations of different Christian missions in a particular mission field also implied that they carried with them the seeds of denominational divide. Denominational divide, many a time based on dialectal groupings, reinforced by the mushroom growth of dialect-based socio-cultural and political associations/organisations conditions the extent of social closure/interaction. Many a


\textsuperscript{58} It is a ‘given’ in social anthropology that a clan is marked by distinct dialect and kinship relations/ties. Most tribal villages are characterized by homogenous clan and its concomitant clan dialect. In the context of the Zo people, it must be explicitly made clear that most of the ‘tribes’ enlisted in the ST List are dialect-based clan groups. When politics are conducted through the medium of clan-based identities, then it can be considered as a ‘vernacularisation of clan politics’. This may involve systematic reduction of clan dialect into standard print-language which later on became a material resource for political mobilization.
times, dialects erect illusionary ‘cultural boundary [ies]’, which in turn become resources to position ‘tribe’ identities. The Zo people, who already experienced political and administrative divisions, had to face two endogenous threats: the ecclesiastical divide and the dialect-based socio-cultural and political organisations’ divide. While ecclesiastical divide in some ways contribute to the congealment of these organisations and its attendant ‘locational dialectal identities’, the latter play a formidable part in extending the colonial and postcolonial state praxis of *divide et imperia*. To a considerable degree these organisations condition ‘tribe’ mobilization and consequent ‘pan-tribe’ mobilization for most of the postcolonial times. This sets in the ‘narcissism of minor difference.’ Central to this is the role of dialect/language and custom/cultural symbols, which are being invented, modified and standardized to suit the classificatory grid of the state.

### III. The Narcissism of Minor Difference:

‘Dissensual Communities (?)’ in Conversation

It is a truism that the classification and serialization of the Zo people into more than forty ‘Scheduled Tribes’ via the ST recognition regime solidifies and institutionalizes the ‘narcissism of minor difference’. Yet, this regime has adopted inconsistent principles/modalities in classifying the Zo people in India’s North-East. It is striking to note that the *The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950* categorised the Zo people under ‘any Lushai’ and ‘any Kuki’ tribes in Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura. When the Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar visited Manipur and other Northeastern states in the winter of 1953, it received as many as 132 memoranda. Central to these memoranda especially in the context of the

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59 We inferred this from Barth’s idea of ‘cultural boundary’. According to him, it is not the subjective idea of a nation but rather an objective category like culture which plays a prominent role in the shaping of an identity and its concomitant ethnic consciousness. See Fredrik Barth, “Introduction” (pp.9-38) and “Pathan Identity and its Maintenance,” (pp.117-34) in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference* (Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget, 1969).

60 As amended consecutively in 1956, 1987 and 2003. In other states of India’s North-East, the Zo people are yet to be recognised. See <http://lawmin.nic.in/legislative/election/volume%201/rules%20&%20order%20under%20Constitution/TH%20CONSTITUTION%20(SCHEDULED%20TRIBES)%20ORDER,%201950.pdf (1950)> [Accessed on 12 June 2007].

61 The Kalelkar Commission visited ten cities/towns in Assam from 7-29 November 1953 and received 113 memoranda, 29 replies to questionnaires and interviewed 336 persons. It visited six towns in Manipur and Agartala, Tripura from 22-24 November 1953. In Manipur it got 14 memoranda, 3 replies to its
Zo people in Manipur is the demand for delineating ‘locational dialectal identities’ as separate categories in the ST Order’s list (hereafter simply as List). For one thing, the Commission was unenviably placed to study the details of the tribes ‘because of lack of communication and want of time’. For another, ‘information in the possession of Government was neither adequate nor up-to-date.’ As a corollary, the Commission had to depend upon the feedback of the questionnaires that it distributed as also on the information it gleaned from 461 persons it interviewed. To quote:

From information made available to us, it was found that the tribes in Assam and Manipur had been classified by British Officers as Kukis, Nagas, Akas or Lushais in a casual fashion. Some of these are tribal names and others regional. Certain tribes resented being included wrongly under different regional or tribal names. It was suggested that the Schedule should simply not solve the problem satisfactorily. There are the ‘Hmars’, the ‘Paites’ and others, for instance, who refused to be classified amongst ‘Kukis’ or ‘Nagas’. Though some of the ‘Paites’ are ‘Chins’, an objection was raised to their classification under the general heading of ‘Chins’, in these circumstances, we are of [the] opinion that it would be more convenient to list all the tribes by their own particular names in the hilly areas of Assam and Manipur.

This finding formed the basis of scheduling tribes in 1956 when a modified list came out. One conspicuous effect of this was that the denomination ‘Kuki’ disappeared from the list of STs in Manipur. Thus the list showed separate tribes numbering twenty-nine in all (see Table 3.1 below). In a modification of the List in 2003 the denomination ‘any Kuki tribes’ reentered; this time the difference being no sub-tribe is separately listed under it.

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questionnaires and interviewed 120 persons. In Agartala, it received 5 memoranda, 5 replies to its questionnaires and interviewed 5 persons. For details see “Appendix I” to Kalelkar Report, pp.213-4.

62 See Kalelkar Report, especially pp.154-58.
63 Ibid., p.155.
64 Ibid.
## Table 3.1

Population of Scheduled Tribes of Manipur

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<td>64298</td>
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<td>3452</td>
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**Source:** Various Census Data.
Table 3.2
List of Zo Sub-Tribes in India’s North-East

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<th>Meghalaya</th>
<th>Mizoram**</th>
<th>Tripura</th>
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<td>1. Hmar (5)</td>
<td>1. Hmar (5)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>2. Any Kuki tribes, including (7):</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>(i) Biate, Biete</td>
<td>(i) Biate, Biete</td>
<td>(i) Biate or Biete</td>
<td>(i) Baite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(ii) Changsan</td>
<td>(ii) Baite</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>(v) Gamalhou</td>
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<td>(xiii) Name</td>
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<td>(xxx) Selham</td>
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</tr>
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<td>(xxxi) Singson</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4. Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes (10)</td>
<td>4. Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes (10)</td>
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Note: * In the autonomous districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills as substituted by Act 47 of 2003, s.2; ** Substituted/inserted by Act 10 of 2003, s.4 & 2nd Sch; **2 Ins. by Act 34 of 1986, s. 14 and the Third Sch. (w.e.f. 20-2-1987).

Numbers in bracket at the right margin of each tribe indicates the serial number of tribe in the state list.

66 According to The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 as amended respectively in 1956, 1987 and 2003. This excludes Manipur where separate tribe listing of the Zo people is given in Table 3.1. In other states of India’s North-East, the Zo people are yet to be recognised.
Interestingly, the denomination ‘any Kuki’ seemed to be interpreted in a broader sense in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram where thirty-seven sub-tribes each are included under it. Apparently, some of them like Gangte, Vaiphei, Sukte and Thadou which are separately listed in Manipur are subsumed under the category ‘any Kuki’ in these states. However, this is ill-defined and casually done in the case of Tripura where many of the sub-tribes are wrongly spelt (See Table 3.2 above).

What is striking is the consistency shown in enlisting ‘any Lushai (Mizo)’ in the five states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura where no separate sub-tribe listing is tagged to it. Significantly, Hmar, Lakher and Pawi are consistently kept outside the purview of either ‘any Kuki’ or ‘any Lushai (Mizo)’ labels. Two significant inclusions in the 2003 List are: (i) ‘Paite’ as a separate tribe in Mizoram which was enthusiastically celebrated in different parts of Mizoram, and (ii) the inclusion of ‘any Kuki’ as a separate entity from ‘Thadou’ in Manipur, which had at least internalized and espoused the cause of ‘Kuki’ in Manipur or elsewhere. A separate listing of this kind further confounds the problem as ‘Thadou’, perhaps the only Zo sub-tribe which traditionally stands for the label ‘Kuki’ is bifurcated from the latter to appear as if it were a separate ‘tribe’ entity. On the face of it, this is a gross misrepresentation which stems from misrecognition. This, notwithstanding the seemingly plausible argument that segregation of ‘Thadou’ from ‘Kuki’ is essential for a while, if not permanently, to reinforce the idea that ‘Kuki’ is the genus of which ‘Thadou’ and other cognate ‘tribes’ like Gangte, Vaiphei, Simte, Paite, Zou, Sukte, and Hmar are the species. Given the increasing saliency of vernacularisation of clan politics since the mid-1940s and 50s, an argument of such kind is hardly plausible as the patterns of mobilization suggest otherwise. The formation of clan-based dialectal organisations like the Vaiphei National Organisation (1944), Kuki National Assembly (1947), Paite National Council (1949), United Manipur Joumi Organisation (1948) [later changed as United Zomi Organisation (1958)], Hmar National Congress (1954) [to become Hmar National Union (1958)], Simte

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National Council (1957), Tedim Chin Union (1961), Gangte Tribal Union, among others, precluded the emergence of a pan-tribe organisation.\(^{68}\) It is unmistakable to identify a pattern wherein ‘locational dialectal identities’ based on clans become the basic point of reference in constructing ‘tribe’ identities among the Zo people although there is a parallel trend to transcend this by constructing a larger ethnic category. The problem is confounded by imprecise standards adopted in the identification of ‘tribes’ where slight local variation in dialect and customary practice could be mistaken as meriting separate ‘tribe’ recognition.

A cursory perusal of the List will convince a bystander that there is nothing much significant in this whole business of listing and modifying ‘tribes’. It must be realized that politics is deeply imbricated into the system making the recognition regime fluid and sometime an explosive site for contestation and embittered negotiation. Rishang Keishing, a veteran tribal leader and a seasoned politician, rightly sensed this when he participated in the Lok Sabha’s debate on the Kalelkar Commission Report in 1956. He took strong exception to the discrepancies adopted in enlisting STs especially among the Nagas and the Zo people (here the Kukis) and contended that ‘... either they should be classified as a distinct tribe or a sub-tribe everywhere. A uniform policy has to be followed everywhere ... ’\(^{69}\) Responding to Keishing’s reservations, H.V. Patashkar, the then Minister of Legal Affairs, contended that since the Tribe List was prepared on the recommendation of the Kalelkar Commission which actively involved the state government, it would have been the most plausible way of doing it.\(^{70}\)

When it is not plausible to have a uniform policy vis-à-vis tribe recognition, the larger questions remain: was listing of tribes severally in certain instances and bundling tribes together in another the only option available in 1956 or was the state too soft to cower to the demands posited by minority sub-tribal groups? To put it differently, did it sound the death knell to tribal unity and solidarity among the Zo people, if there had ever been one? If this be the case, to what extent did it play a part in institutionalizing the

\(^{68}\) See Vumson, *Zo History*, especially pp.302-10;


\(^{70}\) See *Lok Sabha Debates*, ibid.
Chapter 3: Politics of Identities in the Language of 'Tribe'

'narcissism of minor difference'? In other words, did it herald a new era of self-understanding among the Zo people, where 'locational dialectal identities' trump Zo tribal/ethnic identity? Did it lend significance and add meaning to their social lived existence? Integrally linked with these are issues of minority rights and minoritisation among the Zo people which we shall now examine.

At one level it may be argued that the 1956 modification order legitimised ongoing dissolution of the Zo people as an ethnic category which attained increasing saliency since the mid-1940s. It may as well be argued that it marked a stepping stone to the emergence of frameworks for larger unity. In the course of my field work, I have come across many tribal leaders who considered that categorization of Zo sub-tribes into a full-fledged 'tribe' certainly helps as it lends meaning and significance. For one "it means that the erstwhile feuding and parochially organised dialectal clan groups could finally shed their past differences and come together under the banner of a tribe-identity. It also signifies the emergence of a broader identity as 'tribe' helps transcend these narrow and segmental divides." For many others, given the nascent state of Zo ethnic consciousness this may be useful for the time-being. However, its long-term viability is under suspect as it can erect obstacles to the ultimate goal of Zo nation-building. If seen through this lens, it can be inferred that the Kalelkar Commission did a commendable job as it could gauge the ground realities and help solve the contingent problems of divisions and disunity among the Zo sub-tribes by recommending separate listing of tribes. However

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71 The term 'ethnic' is used here in the same sense as Smith who considers ethnic group as characterized by a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity. See Anthony D. Smith, The Ethnic Origin of Nations (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), especially chapter 2.
72 Interview with Kamkholal Vaiphei, the current President of Vaiphei People's Council at his residence in Lamka, Churachandpur, 23 December 2006. It is pertinent to note here that all the tribal leaders whom I interviewed more or less agreed with Kamkholal on this count. However, they differ on the extent and desirability of having permanent 'tribe'. Many of them consider that legalizing 'locational dialectal identities' as 'tribes' may not be desirable as it is a symptom of disunity and solidarity of the Zo people, in as much as it is a cause for it. For related discussion see B.K. Roy Burman, "Crisis of Identity among Mizos," in Chaudhuri (ed.), Tribal Transformation, pp.534-49. Also see Lal Dena, "Tribalism or Detribalisation," in Imphal Free Press (ed.), Selected Writings on Issues of Identity (Imphal: Imphal Free Press, 23 July 2003), p.15.
73 This is the common refrain that I faced in all the interviews I conducted. See "List of Interviews with Dates" in Appendix I.
Gangte, a respondent who happened to be an academic and understood the problems well, considered that giving ST recognition to ‘tribes’ severally in the Zo context legitimized the segmentary organization of the Zo people wherein every person is reminded again and again of his clan and dialectal identity. This, he contended, reinforces fragmented identities. Gangte sees the ‘seed of division’ among the Zo people under the extant tribe recognition regime and made a case for rethinking its edifice.

Coming back, the first level of argument may however be contextualized by digging out the Zo ethnohistory which bears the imprint of innumerable exogenous and endogenous factors, each having both centrifugal and centripetal effects. Given the sensitivity of the issue involved here, it would be fruitful to put into perspective the uneven diffusion of Zo ethnohistory. We shall examine how the initial colonial predicament to intimately know the Zo people and their propensity to employ and sustain imposed generic labels later on colonized the minds of disparate clan-based dialectal groups’ leaders. We shall also show how they uncritically and readily use different clan-based dialectal identity labels alongside their inherited colonial generic labels as ‘authentic’ identity labels to claim collective entitlements from the state.

IV. A Synoptic Overview of Zo Ethnohistory:
Different Signifiers, Same Significance or Different Signifiers, Different Significance?

The Zo people who are now spread across India, Bangladesh and Myanmar have been invariably known by different signifiers: as ‘Kukis’ in Manipur, ‘Lushais’ (now Mizos) in Mizoram, and ‘Chins’ in Myanmar. These signifiers are interminably employed to imply the same significance in some instance and to imply different significance in other instances, depending upon the specific contingency of the situation. To be sure, the Zo people have undergone rapid transformations and changes vis-à-vis their culture, identity and their self-understanding since the onset of the British Raj in the nineteenth century. For one thing, the Zo country and its people remained distant borderlands for the Raj,

74 Interview with Dr. Thangkhomang S. Gangte at his residence on 30 December 2006. Dr. Gangte categorically made this clear in his response to my questionnaire, which he had kindly sent me by speed-post all the way down from Imphal to Varanasi. Incidentally Gangte died after my interview. He was the author of *The Kukis of Manipur* and in favour of the term ‘Kuki’ or ‘Chikimi’.
which extended its rule through disparate intermediaries (chiefs) and its system of rules, regulations and administration. Thus the encounter of the Raj with the Zo people had been gradual and uneven. For another, the constant raids and concomitant ‘law and order’ problems engendered by the Zo people compelled the Raj to undertake a series of military expeditions, viz., the Lushai Hills Expeditions of 1871-72 and 1878, and the Chin Hills Expedition of 1891-92. These expeditions aroused keen interest in maintaining intimate control over the Zo people. The Chin-Lushai Conference of 1892 which deliberated on the desirability of administrative unification of the Chin-Lushai country is a case in point. Although this was not fructified, it at least led to the unification of the Lushai Hills under the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1896 which was later handed over to a District Superintendent based in Aizawl in 1898. Having separate administrative arrangements for the Zo people also meant erecting political barrier to their unification, which engenders an altogether different politics of survival. Suffice it to mention here that gaining administrative leeway also gives the much needed latitude for the Raj to have an intimate understanding and survey of the land and its people.

Consequently, by the beginning of the twentieth century when the British administrators-cum-ethnographers more or less consolidated their hold and completed their ethnographic accounts of the Zo people in India (then including parts of the present day Bangladesh and Myanmar), they were identified with disparate generic terms like

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76 See Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India*. Also see Khup Za Go (ed.), *Zo Chronicles: A Documentary Study of History and Culture of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai Tribe* (New Delhi: Mittal, 2008).

77 The occupation of the Zo country in the late nineteenth century also coincided with accelerated attempts of the colonial Raj to undertake extensive ethnographic surveys of the whole of North-East Frontier’s peoples under the able leadership of P.R.T. Gurdon, who started off his ethnographic monographs on the Khasis in 1907. The project was sanctioned by the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir Bamfylde Fuller in 1903. This was the first time that a series of separate monographs on ‘the more important tribes and castes of the Province’ was undertaken on an extensive scale under the active supervision and patronage of the Raj. Needless to point out, these series of monographs was wind up by the late 1920s. To have a fair idea of how this come about see Charles Lyall, “Introduction,” in P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis* (Delhi: Low Price Publication, 1990 reprint)[First published in 1907], pp.xv-xxvii.
‘Chin-Lushai’, ‘Kuki-Chin’, ‘Lushei-Kuki’ and sometimes ‘Kuki-Lushai-Chin.’ While the word ‘Kuki’ is considered to be a Bengalese term, ‘Chin’ is a variant of the Burmese word ‘Khyen’/’Khyang’ and ‘Lushai’ is a corrupted word for Lusei (a dominant clan). These labels come about depending upon the location of the British administrator/ethnographer who undertook the survey, classification and serialization of Zo ‘tribes’. A Carey and Tuck based in the Chin Hills of present day Myanmar would refer to them as ‘Chins’, a Grierson who undertook the most extensive linguistic survey in the Indo-Burma border would use the denomination ‘Kuki-Chin’ and a Lieutenant Colonel Shakespeare based in the Lushai Hills and thereafter in Manipur would prefer the term ‘Lushei-Kuki’. Apparently most colonial studies of the Zo people, being carried out with the help of proximate native informants who at times were equally ignorant of the actual ground realities, tended to conflate dialectal or clan groups with tribe or vice-versa.

This is how ‘locational dialectal identities’ like Hmar (meaning North), Lai (Central), Simte (Southerners), etc. came about. One striking example of this approach is Grierson’s work. Drawing from earlier ethnographic and administrative accounts, he is famous for consolidating what we call ‘locational dialectal identities’ by classifying and serializing Zo dialectal groups according to the specificity of their geographical location and depending upon the time-period of their migration.

In his monumental contribution, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Grierson classified the Zo people into thirty-one subgroups which encompassed what he called the Old Kuki, as well as the Northern, Central and Southern Groups. He listed five subgroups in the Northern group, viz: the Thadou, Sokte (Sukte), Siyin, Ralte, and Paite. In the Central group he incorporated six subgroups: Tashon, Lai, Lakher, Lushei, Banjogi and Pankhu. Seven subgroups, viz.: Chinme, Welaung, Chinbok, Yendu, Chinbon, Khyang or Sho and

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79 See Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*.
80 See particularly Shakespeare, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*.
82 Shaw, an authority on the Kukis, while admitting the obscure origin of the term ‘Kuki’ traced its first appearance in Bengal in the Rawlins’s writing of 1792 titled, “Cucis or Mountainers of Tipra,” *Asiatick Researches*, Vol.2, p.xii. The term evidently is a corrupted and pejorative word employed by the Bengalese and Assamese to designate the Khongsai (Khongjais) and Thadou clans. See William Shaw, *Notes on the Thadou Kukis* (Delhi: Spectrum, 1997 reprint)[First published in 1929].
Khami were included in the Southern groups. Finally he included thirteen subgroups in the Old Kuki category: Rankhol (Hrangkhol), Bete (Biete), Hallam, Langrong (Halong or Hajong), Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Hiroi-Lamgang, Kolren (Koiren/Koireng), Kom, Purum, Mhar (Hmar) and Cha. He conveniently categorized these groups as ‘Kuki-Chin’. Explaining his predilection over the choice of ‘Kuki-Chin’ he contended:

The denomination Kuki-Chin is a purely conventional one, there being no proper name comprising all these tribes. Meithei-Chin would be a better appellation, as the whole group can be subdivided into two sub-groups, the Meitheis and the various tribes which are known to us under the names of Kuki and Chin. I have, therefore, to avoid confusion, retained the old terminology.

It is remarkable, however, that Grierson could capture the self-understanding of the Zo people, when he considered the label ‘Chins’, thus:

Chin is a Burmese word used to denote the various hill tribes living in the country between Burma and the Provinces of Assam and Bengal. It is written and dialectically pronounced Khyang. The name is not used by the tribes themselves, who use titles such as Zo or Yo and Sho. (emphasis added)

Grierson in a way validated what had been respectively maintained by his predecessors like Lewin, Rundall, and Carey and Tuck that the Zo people knew themselves by the generic names ‘Dzo’, ‘Zo’ and ‘Yo’. Following Grierson, but on a slightly different note, is Shakespeare who had one of the longest and most intimate experiences with the

83 Grierson, Linguistic Survey, pp.2-3.
84 Ibid., p.1.
85 Ibid., p.2.
86 T.H. Lewin’s involvement in the Lushai Hills Expeditions in 1870-71 gave him an opportunity to intimately know the Zo people and to conclude that ‘the generic name of the whole nation is Dzo’. See T.H. Lewin, A Fly on the Wheel, or How I Helped to Govern India (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977 reprint) [First published in 1912], p.246.
88 Carey and Tuck, The Chin Hills.
89 Lewin, A Fly on the Wheel, p.246.
Zo people both in the Lushai Hills and in Manipur. After twenty years of service in the Lushai Hills and Manipur, Shakespeare wrote one of the most insightful accounts of the Zo people. For him, ‘There is no doubt that the Kukis, Chins and Lushais are all of the same race.’

It is noteworthy to mention here that Shakespeare consistently employed ‘clan’ instead of ‘tribe’ while referring to the various Lushei-Kuki groups. In some way he carried forward the insights of Dun who considered in 1886 that the ‘term ‘clan’ is undoubtedly the best to apply to the Kuki subdivisions.’

Categorising these clans and dialectal groups under a neat category had not been easy. Piang, a native scholar maintained that the ‘Simmte’ (hereafter Simte) of Dun are the same as the ‘Paithe’ (Paite) of Shakespeare’s account despite their claim to belong to a different group. Piang substantiates his argument by considering that ‘Sumkam’, the prominent Simte Chief of Dun was no other than the son of the illustrious Guite Chief, Go Khaw Thang, who could as well become Shakespeare’s “Paithe” Chief. To add another dimension to this, it may be pointed out that the lineage of the Guite Chiefs was traced alongside the Sukte or Kam Hau by Mackenzie. This mistaken and overlapping use of ‘clan’ and ‘tribe’ by the colonial administrators-cum-ethnographers later on played a crucial role in ossifying splintered and fragmented identities as they were more often than not uncritically internalized by the Zo clan-based dialectal groups. In many occasions this facilitate the use of different signifiers like “Kuki”, ‘Chin’, ‘Lushai’ for the same significance, meaning same ethnic and racial stock, i.e. ‘Zo’, ‘Yo’, ‘Sho’ or ‘Dzo’. In the meantime these signifiers are also used in certain instances to imply different significance depending upon the exigency of the situation.

It is precisely in the latter sense that the counter discourse on the Zo people be located. Here the ethnic, linguistic and racial unity of the Zo people is under suspect. Kipgen included Rowney and Mackenzie within this fold as they were never prepared

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94 See Piang, *Kinship, Territory and Politics*, especially see Chapter 2, pp.70-107.
95 See Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipur*, p.33.
96 See Shakespeare, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*.
97 See Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India*, Chapter 16, especially pp.163-75. It is pertinent to mention here that Mackenzie consistently spelt Go Khaw Thang wrongly as Kokatung.
to accept a common name for the ‘whole race’.\textsuperscript{100} While trying to contextualize their considered opinion on this Kipgen contends that: ‘There is good reason for their position because while writing their monographs the authors were mainly familiar with the section of the Kuki-Chin people living in Tripura, Cachar and Manipur, the so-called Old and New Kukis, who were unfamiliar with the word “Zo”, except for a small tribe in Manipur called Zou. But Zo was used extensively both in the Chin Hills of Burma and the Lushai Hills of Assam.’\textsuperscript{101} Carey was another officer who vehemently denied racial unity among the Zo people. In the wake of a proposal to administratively unify the Lushai Hills and the Chin Hills at the Chin-Lushai Conference (Fort William, Calcutta, 1892), he wrote a confidential semi-official letter to Mackenzie, the then Chief Commissioner of Burma, expressing his firm conviction that ‘the Chins have nothing in common with the Lushais in Assam.’\textsuperscript{102} Standing on this premise Mackenzie and Carey, influential participants as they were in the Conference, successfully persuaded their colleagues to put on hold a resolution to effect administrative unification of the Chin-Lushai Hills until proper study was done to prove otherwise.

Four years down the line, however, Carey had undertaken extensive empirical study with his colleague Tuck in the Chin Hills. Thereafter he recanted his earlier thesis and came to this conclusion with Tuck, thus:

\begin{quote}
Without pretending to speak with authority on the subject, we may reasonably accept the theory that the Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam, and the Chins originally lived in what we know as Tibet and are of \textit{one and the same stock}; their form of government, method of cultivation, manners and customs, beliefs and traditions all point to one origin.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

How then do we explain this type of initial confusion (of course later attenuated to reflect the ground realities) which often led to misrepresentation and misrecognition of the Zo people about their ethnic and racial similarity? Most native scholars who extensively work

\textsuperscript{99} See Mackenzie, \textit{The North East Frontier of India}, especially chapter 21.
\textsuperscript{100} Cited in Kipgen, \textit{Christianity and Mizo Culture}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} See Demi-Official letter from B.S. Carey, Esq., Political Officer, Fort White, to the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, dated 4 February 1892, in \textit{Foreign Department Report}, no.45, p.2, cited in Kipgen, \textit{Christianity and Mizo Culture}, p.25.
\textsuperscript{103} Carey and Tuck, \textit{The Chin Hills}, p.2.
on the Zo people attributed this to many factors: migratory habits, geographical isolation, intra-clan and inter-clans feuds and dynasticity, political and administrative divisions, ecclesiastical division, and most recently the institutionalization of clan-based locational dialectal identities into tribe-identities by the ST recognition regime. 104

IV(a). The Emergence of Locational Dialectal Identities

One common source which underlines most of the native scholars’ account on the emergence of different locational dialectal identities among the Zo people is their migratory habit. On this, the Zo people have a compelling myth which highly resembles the Biblical story of the Babel Tower. The myth tells us:

Many centuries ago all the Chins [Zo people] lived in one large village, somewhere south of Haka. They all spoke the same language, and had the same customs. One day, at a big council, it was decided that the moon should be captured, and made to shine permanently. By this means [of] great deal of unnecessary expense and bother would be saved in lighting. In consequences, the construction of a tower began, which was to reach the moon. After years of labour the tower got so high that it meant days of hard marching for the people working at the top to come down to the village to get provisions. It was, therefore, decided that, as stage upon stage was built, it should be inhabited, and that food and other necessities should be passed up from below from stage to stage. Thus the people of the different stages had very little intercourse, and gradually acquired different manners, languages, and customs. At last, when the structure was all but finished, the nat in the moon fell into a rage at the audacity of the Chins, and raised a fearful storm, which brought down the tower. It fell from south to north. The people inhabiting the different stages were consequently strewn over the land, and built villages where they fell. Hence the different clans and tribes vary[ing] in

language and customs. The stones and building materials which formed the huge tower now form the Chin Hills.  

The empirical veracity of this myth may be hard to ascertain objectively, yet it certainly validates a very crucial moment of Zo ethnohistory. Retrospective reconstruction of Zo ethnohistory shows that the Zo people witnessed a series of migrations since the last century B.C when they migrated from South-West China. They were considered to have traversed through South-East Asia around the eight century A.D and entered Burma thereafter. One crucial moment of migration which contributed to large-scale dispersal of Zo clan groups was traced around the twelfth century A.D after their settlement in the Khampat area in Kabaw Valley for about 200 years. Vumson considered that this migration towards the North and the South-West must have probably been caused either by famine or by cruel chiefs.

What follows then is a series of contestation over power and control of lands for jhum-lands (for swidden cultivation) and slave labours. The Hmars and the Thadous groups in North Lushai Hills were a case in point. They were considered to have dislodged groups such as the Hallams, Hrangkhawls and Bietes at the turn of the eighteenth century from northern Lushai Hills. These groups were then forced to migrate to as far as Cachar, Tripura and Sylhet (now in Bangladesh). Again, when the Sailo chiefs established themselves firmly in Lushai Hills they compelled many groups to submit to themselves and drove out others including the Thadous towards the north. Consequently, the Thadous migrated to the plains of Cachar and the southern hills of Manipur about 1848.

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106 There are various views regarding the historical specificity of these migrations. G.H. Luce, one of the three members of linguistic study team sponsored by the Rangoon University in 1953-54, contended that the Zo people must have entered South-East Asia and through it to Burma around the middle of the eight century A.D. F.K. Lehman however considered that this could be much earlier and he dated it shortly after the beginning of the Christian era. See G.H. Luce, "Chin Hills Linguistic Tour (December 1954) — University Project," *Journal of Burma Research Society*, Vol.42, no.1, June 1959, pp.9-31, cited in Go, *Bible Translations*, p.22. Also see F.K. Lehman, *Structure of Chin Society* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1960 second edition), p.13.
It is beyond the scope of this Chapter to go into these details. Suffice to note here that these inter-clan rivalries and contingent geographical isolation expedite local variation in language, culture and traditions. In due course of time they nourished, congealed and ossified clan-based dialectal identities. Hence when the colonial administrators-cum-ethnographers began their early encounters, they were often confounded by the existence of numerous clans and dialectal groups who despite their ethnic homogeneity fought against one another like ‘warring tribes’. They appeared to the ‘Other’ simultaneously both as a heterogeneous and a homogeneous group(s) of ‘wandering tribes/race’ who were ‘wild’, ‘warlike’ and ‘savage’. Since the encounters with the colonial Raj had not been uniform but several, it gave rise to different classificatory labels which consequently led to the privileging of clans-based locational dialectal identities by the early 20th century. Carving out separate politico-administrative arrangements reinforced separate identities, culture and politics for the Zo people.

It is not surprising therefore that the postcolonial state with its apparent welfarist and developmental plans provide leeway for these disparate dialectal groups to proudly parade their distinct, separate and unique identities and claim collective entitlements. As pointed out earlier the modern state, couched as it were on a vague tribe recognition regime, more than readily serialized and classified these locational dialectal identities into full fledged ‘tribes’. These locational dialectal identities with their avowed ‘national’ characters and disparate claims could not have fit into this regime better. Vernacularisation of clan politics was at its best moment, to say the least.

**IV(b). Christian Missions and the Vernacularisation of Clan Politics**

At another level, it can as well be discerned that the Christian missions which came to the Zo country almost alongside the colonial Raj towards the end of the 19th century also contributed to and in some way legitimised the vernacularisation of clan politics. Like the colonial Raj, Christian missions came into the Zo country in several denominations and in gradual ways. It was through these missions that the ‘savaged’, ‘wild’ and ‘barbaric’ Zo sub-tribes were imparted the first formal education. In fact, the missionaries saw this as a

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preparatory work for the larger end: to transform the hearts, minds and soul of the Zo people; in other words, simply to 'civilise' them.\footnote{For an insightful account vis-à-vis North-East India, see David Vumlallian Zou, "Colonial Discourse and Evangelical Imagining on Northeast India," \textit{Religion and Society}, Vol.48, no.2, June 2003, pp.57-93. Also see Ashis Nandy, \textit{The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).} Translating the scriptural injunction of reaching (the gospel) out to all the tongues into practice necessitates that all dialects be reduced into standard print-languages. While this helped expedite reaching out to the jungle of illiterate Zo sub-tribes, it also unconsciously set in motion unseemly phenomena wherein dialects become the hallmark of defining identities. Writing in a different context, Hastings considers Bible translation or its equivalent as perhaps 'the single most significant turning point in the development of a collective sense of identity for an entire community.'\footnote{Adrian Hastings considers Christianity as a 'religion of translation' which has the 'use of the world's vernaculars inscribed in its origins.' Hastings cited in David Vumlallian Zou, "Glimpses of Zou Ethno-History," in United Zomi Organisation, \textit{Golden Jubilee (1954-2004) Souvenir} (Churachandpur: P.Tongthang Zou, 2004)[Editor: Thangchinsuan], pp.129-30. Cf. Adrian Hastings, \textit{The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.194-95.} His contention, however, is belied by the case of the Zo people as unrestrained translations have 'the effect of canonizing their internal differences to arrest the process of ethnic fusion, and condemn the concerned linguistic communities to further marginalization.'\footnote{Zou, "Glimpses of Zou Ethno-History," p.130.}

The operation of various Christian missions in the Zo country with a more or less similar evangelistic zeal implies that the Zo people were to have different dialectal texts and print-languages in due course of time. To be sure, Bible translations which reduced most of the Zo dialects into print-language became one of the most effective instruments for constructing disparate identities within the Zo people. Beginning with the Duhlian dialect in 1898 and thereafter the Mara (1912), Tedim (1914) and Vaiphei (1917) in successive sequence, Bible translations into the various Zo dialects are still an ongoing process. The latest dialectal group to have a full-fledged Bible among the Zo people is the Simtes who had it in 1993.\footnote{For a cursory glance at the progress of Bible translations among the Zo people see Table 3.3 below.}

In a pioneering work, Go argued that Bible translations among the Zo dialectal groups had indeed played a formidable role in dividing the Zo people.\footnote{See Go, \textit{Bible Translations}.} According to...
him, a critical analysis of Bible translations among the Zo people demonstrates 'the ascendancy of dialect[ic]al clan identity over the[ir] tribal identity.' Go showed how this was complicated by the coming of various Christian missions in the Zo country. For him the two prominent Christian missions in the Lushai Hills, viz; the Welsh Presbyterian and the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) was perhaps an exception as they could put in place a 'comity agreement' in 1903 wherein the latter was allowed to confine its works on southern Lushai Hills. The efforts of David E. Jones and Edward Rowlands of the Welsh Presbyterian as also of J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge of the BMS to reach out to the entire Lushai Hills soon bore fruits. Within less than a decade of their work, they helped reduce the Duhlian dialect into a standard print-language in 1898. This was followed in quick succession by the publication of two influential local monthly magazines in the same dialect *Lushei (now Mizo) leh Vai Chanchinbu* and *Khrista Tlangau* respectively since 1902 and 1911 under the editorships of J. Shakespeare, the then Superintendent of Lushai Hills and R. Dala. Thus by the beginning of the 20th century Duhlian dialect (now known as Mizo) already became the *lingua franca* in the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram). Not surprisingly, *Khristian Tlangau* (earlier *Krista Tlangau*) is now the most widely circulated journal in Mizoram.

Go contrasted the case of Manipur with that of Lushai Hills. According to him, the Christian Missions in Manipur often worked at cross-purposes owing to breach of 'comity agreement' among them. The Indo-Burma Thadou Kuki Pioneer Mission (IBTKPM) established by Robert Watkins, a former Welsh Presbyterian, with the assistance of some native believers since 1910 is a classic example. IBTKPM chose to work in the South

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116 Ibid., p.42.
117 'Comity Agreement' is an agreement or an undertaking that a prospective Christian mission had to undertake before it operationalised its missions. It clearly specifies that no mission would, until duly authorized and permitted to do so, work in the same mission field with each other. In a way it fixes the boundary of each mission groups.
118 For a perceptive account see Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, especially chapter 6.
120 See Piang, *Kinship, Territory and Politics*, p.130.
121 The mission was set up upon an invitation extended to Watkins who was then stationed at Aizawl by the Chief of Senvon, Kamkholun. The Mission was later nourished with the help of Vanzika, Thangchhingpuia and Savoma; three students of Watkins who were deputed by him to Senvon. For related study see Frederick S. Downs, *The Mighty Works of God: A Brief History of the Baptist Churches in North East India: Mission Period 1936-1950* (Gauhati: Christian Literature Centre, 1971).
of Manipur valley notwithstanding the fact that the American Baptist Mission was exclusively assigned to carry out mission work in the entire state of Manipur. However, the Mission which worked in concert among the Thadous, Hmars, Paite and Vaiphei showed signs of internal crisis in the 1920s and 1930s. The establishment of the North East India General Mission as a break away faction from this, again led by Robert Watkins was a crucible as it soon dissolved into dialects-based Evangelical Congregational Churches of India, prominently led by the Paites, Hmars, Thadous, Gangtes and Hmars. The period of crisis also coincided with parallel efforts to translate the Bible into different dialects. As pointed out earlier, by the middle of 1920 four dialectal clan groups had already got portions of the Bible translated into their own dialects, viz; Tedim (1914), Vaiphei (1917), Hmar (1920), and Thadou-Kuki (1924). They in turn determine the contours of vernacularisation of clan politics since the 1940s when various associational groups were formed around these dialects. Most of these associations chose the appellation ‘National’ while organizing themselves.

It is pertinent here to ask as to whether Bible translations per se caused divisions and in some ways legitimised the vernacularisation of clan politics. As Go reminded us, these may not always be the cause of divisions among the Zo people as they may as well be symptomatic of ‘dialectal chauvinism’ among the Zo people. Roy Burman also contends, although in a different context, that had it not been the Christian missions or ‘foreign missionaries’ or the emergent middle class, ‘more or less similar developments would have taken place.' Hence the role of Christian missions may be considered to be contingent and not the only possible cause of divisions/change among the Zo people. In balance, it can be safely argued that it gives us a fair glimpse of the broad contours of the emerging ‘narcissism of minor difference’ among the various Zo locational dialectal groups.

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Table 3.3
A Glance at Bible Translation among the Zo People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.no</th>
<th>Dialect</th>
<th>Approx No. of Speakers</th>
<th>Portions</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Bible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Lusei</td>
<td>384,000</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mara</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tedim</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Vaiphei</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Haka</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Hmar</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Asho</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Kuki/Thadou</td>
<td>78,883</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Falam</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Khumi</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Paite</td>
<td>41,000</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Biate</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Zotung</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Kom Rem</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Simte</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Hallam</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Chorei)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Zou</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Darlong</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NT= New Testament
Source: "Appendix C" to Khup Za Go, A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations among the Zo People in North East India (Churachandpur: Chin Baptist Literature Board, 1996).

The standardization of language which came along with the Christian missions’ emphasis on education also meant that each dialectal group began to have its own primer, dictionary, grammar books and other text-books. Proliferation of vernacular texts and literature along these lines gradually led to the ossification of locational dialectal identities. It is interesting to note that in 1975 three Zo dialects, viz; Hmar, Thadou Kuki and Paite were incorporated as ‘languages’ course into Manipur state’s educational curricula (class 1-5). These ‘languages’ were upgraded to the tenth standard in the late 1980s and thereafter to the twelfth standard; some of them are now even allowed to be studied as full-fledged papers under the Major Indian Language Category in Manipur.

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Consequently ‘language’ transforms itself into a site where unique identities and culture are constructed.

That ‘language’ is deeply imbricated into the politics and daily social lived existence of the Zo people is attested by the recent controversy over ‘link language’ in All India Radio (AIR) sub-station at Tuibuang, Churachandpur. The six kilo watt, Frequency Modulation (FM) AIR substation was taken up as a pilot project by Prasar Bharati under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi during the Seventh Five Year Plan. When the substation was completed in mid-2000 the Station Director, AIR, Imphal accordingly intimated the Government of Manipur on 5 June 2000 with the request that the latter decided on the ‘link language’. Apparently the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), Government of Manipur asked the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Churachandpur to give his advice on the issue. R.K. Nimai Singh, the then DC in responding to the Director of DIPR based his view on 1981 census data and noted that out of the 24 different tribes in Churachandpur ‘no dialect can claim that it is spoken by a majority of the population.’

Paite, Hmar and Thadou-Kuki being the major dialects, he suggested, they may be ‘used as link language on alternate days or for the time being Manipuri is [be] used as the link dialect.’ On 19 September 2000 Henry K. Honi, Commissioner (Information and Public Relations), Government of Manipur intimated to the Station Director, Prasar Bharati Broadcasting Corporation of India, AIR, Imphal that Paite was selected as the ‘linking announcement broadcast language for A.I.R. Churachandpur.’ The matter was purportedly sealed by the Office Memorandum of the Director (Policy), Prasar Bharati, New Delhi on 6 November 2000 when it was finally

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124 Zou is the latest entrant to these, which is being studied till the High School since November 2000. It is still being upgraded to the XIIth standard. Paite is the latest entry to the University level. For related account see M. Lachinkhai, “Zou Literature in India: Its Beginning, Progress and Prospects,” in United Zomi Organisation, Golden Jubilee (1954-2004) Souvenir, pp.141-45. Also see S. Ngulzdal, Paite Zoumite Loipau (Paite Zoumi Literature)(New Lamka: Convention Press, 1999).

125 The Deputy Commissioner provided the census figures of ten major tribes in Churachandpur (in percentage) as: (i) Paite (21.63), (ii) Hmar (19.03), (iii) Thadou Kuki (12.76), (iv) Vaiphei (8.18), (v) Zou (7.20), (vi) Gangte (4.02), (vii) Mizo (3.42), (viii) Simte (3.36), (ix) Kom (2.45), and (x) Kabui (1.84). See official response of the Deputy Commissioner, Churachandpur to the Director, Information and Publicity, Government of Manipur, memo no.DC(CCP)/Estt/2000-2, Churachandpur, 29 June 2000.

126 Ibid.

decided that Paite will be the ‘link language’.

Notwithstanding this, the inauguration has been kept in suspended animation. Not long thereafter the issue was politicized which seemed to put two ‘dissensual communities’ into a headlong tussle. On the one side the Zomi Council, an apex body of five recognised Zo ‘tribes’ viz; Paite, Simte, Sukte (Tedim Chin), Vaphei and Zou, made a representation to the Chief Minister of Manipur on 18 September 2002 to implement the decision. The Council speaking in ‘the larger interest of the people of Churachandpur District’ contended that ‘the policy of AIR is to communicate to the people in language understood by them.’ It demanded that no ‘alteration or modification’ should be made vis-à-vis the link language. On the other side, the Hmars and the Kukis were critical of the hush-up manner in which the decision was taken and resisted its implementation. In the course of my interviews with prominent Hmar Inpui and Kuki Inpi’s leaders, I had not been able to obtain any concrete documentary evidence to demonstrate their stand. However, my interviews with H.K. Jote and Holkholun Lhungdim, who are respectively the incumbent Chairman/President of Hmar Inpui and Kuki Inpi, convinced me that the issue could have been evenly and openly handled by taking the confidence of all tribe leaders. That the final order to make Paite as the link language came from New Delhi seemed to have impressed some tribe leaders that they lost out a bargaining power to the more powerful and well-connected Paites. Jote and Lhungdim emphasised that inter-tribe negotiations and consultations are needed to solve the problem. Evidently, five tribes including the Hmars and Kukis had represented to the Deputy Director (North East), Prasar Bharati to replace ‘Paite’ with ‘English’ as the link language. While this seemed to be the product

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128 See Office Memorandum issued by Dr. R.A.P. Rao, Director (Policy) for the Director General, Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India), Directorate-General: All India Radio, no.13/12/2000-P III, dated 6 November 2000.

129 See the representation made by the Zomi Council signed by the then Chairman, L.B. Sona to the Chief Minister of Manipur in memo no.ZC/1/2002, dated 18 September 2002. Three more ‘Tribes’ viz. Mate, Thangkhal and Kom have recently been inducted into ZC.

130 Ibid.

131 Interview with H.K. Jote, Chairman of Hmar Inpui (since 1999), General Headquarters, Churachandpur, 27 December 2006.

132 Interview with Holkholun Lhungdim, President, Kuki Inpi (since October 2006), General Headquarters, Churachandpur, 30 December 2006.

133 See letter of V. Sekhose, Deputy Director General (NE), Prasar Bharti (Broadcasting Corporation of India), All India Radio, Guwahati addressed to H. Nengsong, no. NER-2(6)/2000-P-II (CCP)/1967, dated 10 February 2003.
of level headed minds that is sensitive to the communal tangle in which the issue is already steeped into, the prognosis did not cut ice with the Paites.

Concomitantly, the matter was brought to the Guwahati High Court in the form of a Writ Petition (PIL no.5) on 29 May 2003. Delivering its judgement on the same day, the Court noted that since the matter falls ‘within the domain of the State Government’, it ‘will have to take decision considering the various aspects namely the census report etc. in consultation with the proper authority.’ The Court disposed the matter by directing H. Nengsong, the petitioner, that he represented the case to the State Government. Following this, Nengsong made representation to four authorities on 7 July 2003, namely: (i) the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi, (ii) Director-General, Prasar Bharati, New Delhi, (iii) The Chief Executive Officer, Prasar Bharati, New Delhi, and (iv) The Commissioner/Secretary, DIPR, Government of Manipur, Imphal. The issue was later followed up by the Siamsinpawlp (Paites Students’ Welfare Association) General Headquarters, Churachandpur when it petitioned to the Rajya Sabha on 2 April 2005. The Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Mani Charenamei and Rishang Keishing, MP (Rajya Sabha) from Manipur also made separate representations to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting respectively on 19 October 2004 and 8 April 2005 for expediting the implementation of the November 2000 Prasar Bharati’s Order. The Ministry then sought the ‘guidance and direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs who, in turn have elicited the views of the State Government.’ The latest situation is captured by S. Jaipal Reddy’s response to Charamenei’s representation: the issue is yet to be resolved ‘due to resistance of other tribes’ and that the ‘views of the State Government’ in light of the Guwahati High Court (29 May 2003)’s judgement ‘are awaited.’

Unfortunately, what could have peacefully passed off as a win-win situation has now assumed a zero-sum game, where ‘narcissism of minor difference’ is the obvious

134 See H. Nengsong vs the Union of India et al, Writ Petition (PIL) no.5 of 2003, Gauhati High Court, 29 May 2003.
135 Ibid.
136 H. Nengsong, true copy of his personal letter, dated 7 July 2003 that he kindly gave me.
138 S. Jaipal Reddy was the then Minister, Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
139 Ibid.
winner. The episode is also a stark reminder of how sensitive ‘language’ could assume in today’s daily social lived experiences of the Zo people. Practically, language has become a site to position one’s tribe identity, dignity and sense of respect. The episode also bespeaks how uncritically the various dialectal ‘tribe’ labels have been internalised by the Zo people and how ‘dialects’/‘languages’ define socio-economic, political and cultural boundaries of their contemporary intercourse. This is complicated by the mushrooming growth of armed groups for almost every dialectal group in the Zo society. In a situation like this, it could forge circumstances wherein various locational dialectal identities appear as if they were ‘dissensual communities’ in conversation.

If this be the case, do we consider that these locational dialectal identities now embark upon inconvertible paths to separation or do they depict a tale of ‘dissensual communities’ in conversation? Does this imply the end of a pan-Zo tribal identity and a constricted ‘national’ discourse where ‘national’ is often conflated or confused with ‘tribe’/dialectal identity? In the following section we shall argue that despite internal dissensions and conflicts, the idea of a pan-Zo tribal identity is very much alive as their contemporary ethnic manoeuvres in the Hill Areas of Manipur amply bear out.

V. Rethinking ‘Tribe’ Identities: Beyond Locational Dialectal Identities

The issue of a common tribe identity among the Zo people has been a subject which intensely engaged both the colonial and postcolonial state, in as much as it generates searching debates and discussions within the Zo dialectal communities. Despite existence of ‘given’ alien signifiers, viz; ‘Kuki’, ‘Chin’, ‘Lushei’ and the recently indigenous self-identifiers, namely ‘Zomi’ and ‘Mizo’ which come along with the affirmation of their common ethnic identity, a common label/identity seem to be still elusive at the level of their socio-economic, cultural and political praxis. The intermittent use of vague labels like ‘Khul’, ‘Unau’ and ‘Eimi’ to capture the essence of pan-tribes identity among.

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140 Sumant Singh, the then Deputy Commissioner of Churachandpur accounted twelve armed groups operating in Churachandpur alone, which means that half of the tribes in the town are armed. Personal Interview with him on 29 December 2006.

141 The term ‘Khul’ is derived from the mythical cave from which the Zo people were considered to have originated.

142 ‘Unau’ may be translated as ‘kin’.

143 ‘Eimi’ simply means ‘Our people’.
the Zo people is symptomatic of a deep-rooted amnesia and their inability to privilege one of the labels as the essence of their pan-tribes identity.

To be sure, forging a common tribal name among the Zo people has simultaneously evolved alongside the ossification of their locational dialectal ‘tribes’ identities. The first instance to forge a pan-tribes identity beyond locational dialectal identities among the Zo people in the Indian context can be traced to the formation of the Mizo Union (MU)\(^{144}\) in Muallungthu on 9 April 1946 in the then Lushai Hills. Formed by non-Lushei tribe leaders like Vanlawma [who incidentally happened to be a Pawi (now Lai)] originally as the Mizo Commoners’ Union, the term ‘Mizo’ was a deliberate political contrivance to construct an inclusive and broad based socio-cultural and political identity in juxtaposition to alien and imposed names like ‘Lushai’, ‘Chin’ and ‘Kuki’. The popularization of MU in the Lushai Hills also extolled a death-knell to the monopoly of aristocratic powers of the Sailo Chiefs (of the Lushei clan) in the Lushai Hills in 1954 when the institution of Chiefship was abolished. MU extended its base in Manipur as early as 1948 when some Hmar leaders formed the Union.\(^{145}\) By the time the Mizo National Front of Laldenga gained ground, there were already equally strong and parallel socio-political movements among the Kukis, Hmars and Paite to chart out altogether different political trajectories. This was borne out most strikingly by the Kalelkar Commission Report, 1955 and the Patashkar Commission Report, 1965\(^{146}\) which noted the dissatisfaction of these communities to be categorised under one ethnic label. It was altogether another reason that the term ‘Mizo’ could not have a wide political appeal with the sequential formation of, inter alia, the Kuki National Assembly (1947), Khul National Union (1947), and the Paite National Congress (1949) in Manipur.


\(^{145}\) See Ngurte, *Hringnun Khawvel*, for a perceptive account on this.

The formation of these socio-political organisations was a significant epoch in rethinking tribe-identity among the Zo people as it reflected the lack of, or rather the absence of an attempt to forge, a consensus over pan-tribe identity label. It is a truism that the term ‘Kuki’ is inscribed into the history the Zo people in present Manipur as they had been collectively identified since the colonial times by this alien, imposed label. Despite the concerted attempts of certain dialectal communities to persevere with this label, this label was soon contested as it failed to capture the self-understanding of the Zo people. Vaiphei, a native scholar, in analyzing the underpinnings of what he calls ‘schism among the Kukis’ noted:

Today with the exception of the Thadou speaking Kukis, most of the tribes disown Kuki. They want to identify individually but not as a Kuki. The term Kuki is now applied only to the Thadou speaking Kukis. This is because late Mr. Jamkithang Sitlhou claimed to be the head of all these tribes. Some of the Thadou leaders also claimed to be one rupee Kuki and regarded others as ½ a rupee Kuki, ¼ a Kuki (i.e. Kuki makhai, Kuki siki). The reaction to this attitude from other groups were so strong that most of them began to withdraw and disown the term Kuki thus they got recognition of their respective tribes from the Government of India.

To put into retrospective perspective, the label ‘Kuki’ was soon losing ground after Indian Independence. In fact, when the question of nomenclature was taken up at the Thanlon Area Chiefs’ Conference held at Thanlon (in Churachandpur district) in 1947, ‘Kuki’ could muster the support of just 14 votes, whereas ‘Mizo’ could garner 32 and ‘Khul’ got 111 votes. The Conference was significant as it was attended by 48 village chiefs and two representatives each from the Village Authorities. While this may not necessarily stems from ideological conflict, it certainly bears the imprint of politics of survival. The increasing popularity of KNU over KNA was evident in a representation made by Teba

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147 See S. Prim Vaiphei, “Who We are/Who are We?” in Kamkhenthang et al (ed.), In Search of Identity, p.22.
Kilong to the Dewan of Manipur on 31 July 1949. Kilong noted that ‘Khul’ encompassed and represented 22 ‘tribes’/dialectal groups and had 7 Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) whereas ‘Kuki’ had just 2 MLAs. Owing to the compulsion of electoral politics and the ‘lack of proper leader[s]’, KNU however could not capture the minds of the Zo people for long.

In 1960, there was an attempt to reinterpret Zo ‘tribe-identity’ by the Paite National Congress (PNC) when it unequivocally stood for the label ‘Chin’ in preference over ‘Kuki’. In doing so, it contended that whereas ‘Chin’ is a genus, ‘Kuki’ is a species; ‘Hence Chin is a wider denotation and Kuki a narrower denotation.’ Interestingly, the Paite now consider ‘Chin’ a misnomer and prefer ‘Zomi’, an indigenous label, for their ‘national’ designation even as they assumed a vanguard role for re-unification of ‘Zomi’ under the banner of Zomi Re-unification Organisation (ZRO) since 1993.

The formation of the Zomi National Congress (ZNC) under the leadership of Gougin at Daizang village on 28 January 1972 was another epochal moment in redefining Zo tribe-identity. For one, it is epochal in so far as it was an attempt to transcend postcolonial state’s ‘tribe’ category, namely ‘Zou’ and construct a ‘national’ identity which would encompass all the Zo ‘tribes’. For another, it was also significant in so far as it represented a purported ‘national’ organisation formed from what Vumson calls a ‘clan perspective.’ This was glaringly evident when Gougin, the founder President of ZNC, in explicating the idea of ‘Zomi’ unabashedly juxtaposed it with ‘Mizo’. He considers ‘Zomi’ as the ‘only correct name’ and precludes the use of ‘Mizo’ as an authentic label to

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151 See Letter of Teba Kilong, Forest Minister, Manipur to the Dewan of Manipur State, dated 31 July 1947 in “Appendix IV” to Piang, Kinship, Territory and Politics.
152 The 22 sub-tribes enlisted in this letter under ‘Khul’ are: Vaiphei, Gangte, Simte, Paite, Zou, Manlun Manchong, Kom, Chiru, Aimol, Purum, Tarao, Mayon, Anal, Maring, Mate, Baite, Hanghal, Lunkim, Changsan, Hlangum, Lenthang, Saum Doungel.
153 Vaiphei considers the ‘lack of proper leader’ as the main cause behind the demise of KNU. See Vaiphei, “The Kukis,” p.128.
154 See Memorandum submitted by the Paite National Council for Re-unification of Chin People of India and Burma under one Country to the Prime Minister, Government of India, New Delhi (Churachandpur: 30 May 1960).
capture the 'national' identity of the whole Zo people on the ground that it made poor 'grammatical' sense. Explaining this he said:

Mizo means grammatically Man-hill ... So Mizo when literally translated means manhill, whereas Zomi means Hillman (highlander) because Zo means hill, Mi means man. Semantically, this also is correct although our brothers in erstwhile Lushai Hills rightly or wrongly are familiar with the word Mizo instead of Zomi.\(^{156}\)

That Zomi got a wider appeal from other cognate 'tribes' at least in Manipur was evident by the confirmation of ZNC as the appropriate forum for the unification of the Zo people on 9 July 1983 at Zogonal Hall, Churachandpur.\(^{157}\) However, the involvement of ZNC into electoral politics in 1984 proved to be its nemesis and did not augur well for the idea of 'Zomi' as it was given a constricted interpretation thenceforth.\(^{158}\) It also explains why no significant 'tribe' like Paite wholeheartedly rally behind ZNC during its entire career. However ZNC played a commendable role in germinating the seed of pan-tribe identity among the Zo people as it prepared them to one of the most significant affirmations of the unity, solidarity and nationality of the Zo people. In fact, it was under the auspices of the ZNC and the Peoples' Conference (PC) of Mizoram that the First Zo Convention was held at Champhai, Mizoram during 19-21 May 1988 to reunify the Zo people under 'one administrative umbrella' in India.\(^{159}\) The Convention's Declaration signed by 40 delegates representing various organisations indelibly defines the idea of Zo as:

> We, the people of Zo ethnic group, inhabitants of the highlands in the Chin Hills and Arakans of Burma, the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Mizoram state and adjoining hill areas of India, are descendants of one ancestor. Our language, our culture and tradition, and no less our social and customary practices, are clear evidences of the

\(^{157}\) See Gougin, Life Sketch, p.140.
\(^{158}\) ZNC was a house divided on the question of electoral involvement as some prominent members had, during the confirmation ceremony, warned against it. Holkholun Lhungdim, a ZNC enthusiast, was one among the many who were against bringing ZNC into the electoral fray. He told me this during my interview with him. When S. Thangkhangin Ngaihte, who became the General Secretary of ZNC in 1984 chose to contest, he already had prominent opponents from other 'tribes'. Phungzathang Tonsing (of Congress I and a Paite) who finally won in the Thanlon constituency against Ngaihte sounded the cymbal of ZNC's retreat and made it a constricted 'national' organisation. For related account see Gougin, Life Sketch, ibid.
\(^{159}\) See Pau, When the World of the Zomi Changed, pp.10-11.
ethnological facts. Further, our historical records, and footprints both written and
unwritten, in the sands of time testify, to the truth of our common ancestry. Most importantly, a political forum called the ‘Zo Re-unification Organisation’ (ZORO) was formed at the Champhai Convention ‘to lend support to the just struggle for Zo re-unification at all levels and at different stages.’ The delegates also affirmed that ‘ZORO as a forum shall not interfere in any local political programmes and activities of any constituent political party.’ The Champhai Convention may be considered the most significant epoch in defining and affirming an all encompassing ‘Zo’ identity since the formation of Mizo National Front in the 1960s. In some ways, the Convention may be seen as the fruit of longstanding efforts to bring about emotional and ‘national’ unity of the Zo people.

The role of the Church is no less significant in this respect. Way back in 1952, the Falam, Haka and Tedim Associations in Burma (now Myanmar) decided to set up an overarching denomination bearing a ‘national’ name called Zomi Baptist Convention. Sukte T. Hau Go, the brain behind this, justified the name because he was ‘convinced that inspite of slight variations this ZO is our original historical national name.’ During 1981-83 the Kuki-Chin Baptist leaders also attempted to forge a common identity among the Zo people, the outcome of which was published in a booklet titled, In Search of Identity (1986). Despite holding three consecutive consultative meetings on 9 November 1981 (at Kuki Baptist Convention Office, Imphal), 6 June 1982 (at Thadou Baptist Association, Motbung) and 9 March 1983 (at Vaiphei Baptist Association, Kamuching), they could not come out with a concrete national name. The continued use of ‘Kuki-Chin’ and the naming of the book as In Search of Identity in preference over the other suggested title We are One is significant as it suggests that they continued to be chained by what they considered ‘alien’ and ‘imposed’ names, namely ‘Kuki’ and ‘Chin’. It also

161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 See Sukte T. Hau Go, “Adoption of the Name Zomi Baptist Convention,” in “Appendix I” to Khai, Zo People and their Culture, p.70.
164 The initiative was made by the Kuki-Chin Baptist leaders largely drawn from Tedim Chin, Vaiphei and Thadou Kuki church leaders. When the final moment for naming the organisation came it was striking that they decided to use ‘Kuki-Chin Baptist Union’, which was done in the last consultative meeting held at Kamuching (9 March 1983). See Hawlingam Haokip, “Introduction,” in Kamkhenthang et al (ed.), In Search of Identity, p.xi.
Chapter 3: Politics of Identities in the Language of 'Tribe'

reflects how political divisions seep into the mental makeup of the Zo church leaders.\textsuperscript{165} The imbrication of politics into their \textit{Search} is unmistakable as all the five papers in the Booklet unequivocally affirms that the Kuki-Chin people are ‘one’ and have the same ‘national identity’, which they consider as ‘Zo’, though this was not formally adopted in the consultative meetings. The \textit{Search} also indicates how politics, church and social movements in the Zo context are intertwined with one another.

The latest significant moment in rethinking tribe-identity is represented by the formation of the Zomi Re-unification Organisation (ZRO) in April 1993 at Phapian, Kachin State in Myanmar. In a book titled, \textit{The Indigenous Zomi}, ZRO clearly sets out the main agenda of the Organisation: to bring to fruition the ‘Zomi re-unification’\textsuperscript{166} which would entail a three-fold process: geographical, political, and cultural or social re-unification.\textsuperscript{167} It considers this ‘not a matter of choice or option’ but ‘rather ... more of their rights, considering that they [Zomi] are of the same race.’ Interestingly, the idea of ‘Zomi’ is conceptualized here as an ‘ethnic group’\textsuperscript{168} posited in juxtaposition to the ‘other’ (of ‘surrounding and dominant plains people’). The hallmarks of ‘Zomi’ identity are characterized by ‘distinct culture, customs, traditions, values, dances, dress and folktales.’\textsuperscript{169} \textit{The Indigenous Zomi} justifies the rationale of the formation of ZRO in terms of the failure of the Mizo Accord 1986 and the ZORO to fructify what it calls ‘the ultimate political goal of “unification and integrity [integration]”’.\textsuperscript{170} While this was considered to have been sacrificed by the former at ‘the altar of a limited state [Mizoram] for a limited Zomi of a limited area’, the latter was considered to have compromised the Charter of Declaration leading to the ‘lost [of] its mass appeal once the constituent party, ZNC and PC, fought State elections in Manipur and Mizoram respectively.’\textsuperscript{171} What is of interests here is the sense of pragmatism evinced by ZRO in accepting English and not

\textsuperscript{165} For details see ibid, pp.i-xvi.
\textsuperscript{166} See Zomi Re-unification Organisation (ZRO), \textit{The Indigenous Zomi} (Ciimnuai: Information and Publicity Relation Department, 2005), p.110.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p.112.
\textsuperscript{168} See \textit{Preamble} of ZRO, in ZRO, \textit{The Indigenous Zomi}, p.109.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., p.112.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., p.110.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., p.110.
one of the Zo vernaculars as its *lingua franca*.\(^{172}\) While this is purportedly intended to ensure ‘the fairness of a level playing field’\(^{173}\) for all dialectal groups, it may be also seen as a master stroke to transcend ‘dialectal chauvinism’ and the contingent ‘clan perspective’ it engenders among the Zo people. It also bespeaks of the ZRO leadership’s realization of the sensitive import of ‘language’ in framing their ‘national’ project.

The formation of ZRO was followed by intense intra-tribe and inter-tribes mobilisations. To be sure, on 26 June 1993 seven recognised tribes, namely Gangte, Hmar, Paite, Simte, Sukte (Tedim Chin), Vaiphei and Zou met at Pearsonmun, Churachandpur and adopted ‘Zomi’ as their ‘common identity’ ‘for unity, solidarity and safety.’\(^{174}\) This was followed by formal extension of support to ZRO by four ‘tribes’ organisations viz, PNC, SNC, TCU, and VNO on 2 September 1995. In 2003, another two tribe organisations, namely the United Zoumi Organisation and the Mate Tribe’s Council also extended their formal support.\(^{175}\)

One immediate offshoot of the ZRO movement is that its component tribes reinterpret their self-understanding, leading in some cases to change in the label of their tribe’s organisation *per se*. As a corollary, the Paite National Council was changed to Paite Tribe Council,\(^{176}\) the Simte National Council to Simte Tribe Council, and Vaiphei National Organisation to Vaiphei People’s Council during 2003-04.\(^{177}\) A caveat which underlines all these changes, or transformation of tribe identity, is reflected in the arguments put forward by the PTC. Given the emergent national consciousness, PTC

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172 Ibid., p.119. The adoption of English as a *lingua franca* is considered to be one of the operative principles of ‘diversity in unity’ among Zomi.

173 Ibid.


176 The name ‘Paite National Council’ was proposed to be changed to ‘Paite Tribe Council’ (PTC) vide resolution no.5 of the 48th PTC Assembly 2003 under Agenda no. 3 titled, ‘PNC Constitution Amendments (Tenth)’ on 27 June 2003. See PNC Rising Day 54 Na Celebration leh PNC Kumsim Kwawnpi 48 Na: Proceedings and Resolutions, YPA/Hq Hall, Upper Lamka, 27 June 2003, p.12. This was finally approved by the 49th PTC by passing the PTC Constitution (Eleventh Amendment) during the PTC Annual Assembly held on 29 June 2004 at YPA Hall, New Lamka and enforced on 1 July 2004. See Paite Tribe Council Ki-Ukna Dan (11-vei Puahphatna), 2004 [Paite Tribe Council Constitution (Eleventh Amendment), 2004] [Lamka: PTC Hq, 2005 reprint], p.ix.

177 The SNC and VNO were changed to STC and VPC in mid 2004. In my interview with Kamkholal Vaiphei, the then President of VPC, he simplistically considered that the term ‘national’ is not suitable for a ‘tribe’ like Vaiphei. ‘People’ according to him, could better capture the nature of the Vaipheis, without being able to explicate it further. Interview with Kamkholal on 23 December 2006 at his residence in Churachandpur.
avers, the term ‘national’ employed in the organizational sense is inconsistent and no longer tenable.\footnote{127}

The issue of redefining tribe-identity among the Zo people is still an ongoing process. During the 1997-98 Kuki-Paite (later Kuki-Zomi) internecine conflict it became increasingly clear that identity labels could embitter inter-tribes relations and engender bloody conflicts.\footnote{128} That ‘identity’ was one of the formidable causes of the conflict was convincingly proved by the first point of the Final Peace Accord (1 October 1998): “That, the nomenclature of Kukis and Zomis shall be mutually respected by all Zomis and Kukis … [and] shall not in any way be imposed upon any person against their will.”\footnote{129} While this led in some significant measure to permutations and transformations in the ‘tribes’ themselves, the very idea of pan-tribe identity also undergoes simultaneous transformations to reflect the mood-swing and changed socio-political and cultural context of the Zo people. One significant inter-tribes realignment, which took place after the Final Peace Accord was the merger between the Gangte Youth Association of Manipur and the Young Mizo Association of Mizoram on 10 February 1999 at Churachandpur.\footnote{130} According to S. Gangte, the then General Secretary of Gangte People’s Council, this was undergirded by an ‘anthropological and not political’ consideration. On the nature of the merger, he adumbrated that ‘… Gangtes will remain as Gangtes under the Mizo umbrella. In the past we were classified as Kukis but we never claimed to be Kukis. The merger does not pose any threats to our identities.’\footnote{131} The formation of the

\footnote{127} The local language used here is ‘... PAITE NATIONAL COUNCIL nana kichi pen a khiaakna leh minam dinmun toh kilem zou nawnlou sakna om a akithel manin ... PNC kichipen PTC kichita hi.’ See Paite Tribe Council (Eleventh Amendment) 2004, ibid.

\footnote{128} According to one unofficial report, casualty list in the Kuki-Zomi ethnic clash of 1997-98 exceeded 450 lives lost; 6,000 house burnt or destroyed; and the value of properties lost is estimated at Rs.50,00,00,000/- (Rupees fifty crore). See Project Report for Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Victims of the Ethnic Clash between KNF and ZRA in Churachandpur District (1997-98) p.4 & 15. Another source citing official figures put the casualty list at 227 dead, 4008 houses set ablaze and thousands of families displaced. See The Telegraph, Calcutta, 2 February 2000.


\footnote{131} Ibid. Also see P.T. Hitson Jusho, Politics of Ethnicity in North-East India (with special reference to Manipur) (New Delhi: Regency, 2004), pp.40-1.
Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Council (ITLC), Manipur by three major identity formations among the Zo people, namely Kuki Inpi, Hmar Inpui and Zomi Council in April 2003 thereafter is significant in many respects. For one, it inscribes the idea of 'indigenous people' into the body politics of the Zo people. For another, it is also a manifestation of their inability to shed colonial labels (hence their frantic search for an alternative identity) and lack of political will to employ a label, which captures their collective self-understanding. Interestingly, the Mizo Peoples' Convention, Manipur opt out of ITLC on the ground that 'the Mizos are not indigenous to the state of Manipur.'

What emerges finally from this is that the search for a common identity label among the Zo people remains inconclusive. The increasing saliency of 'tribe' identities which run parallel to attempts to forge an overarching identity tend to complicate the already intricate identity formations among the Zo people. The post Gangte-Mizo merger events reaffirm an emergent model of 'diversity in unity' among the Zo people whereby loyalties to locational dialectal identities precede that of loyalty to an overarching 'national' identity. It also bespeaks of the level of uncritical acceptance and internalization of disparate tribes recognised by the Indian state. While this certainly privileges the role of a Pudaite in the unending process of identification and categorization of 'tribes', it can as well act as a double edged sword to unify and dissolve existing tribal societies. Parading 'tribes' to fit into the 'categorization and serialization grid' of the state was instrumentally helpful in the 1950s given the existence of few educated tribal aspirants to suitably fit into the state's sizeable largesse. Increasing spread of education and development among the tribe communities now means that these largesses could hardly match the concomitant explosions of tribal elites. Hence, although recognition of tribes and contingent parade of tribes may be useful in extending minority rights to a certain extent, it simultaneously tends to canonize the 'narcissism of minor differences' within a tribe and has proved to be unhelpful in solving the burgeoning minority problems. There is an urgent need to rethink

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183 ITLC was formally launched on 5 April 2003. See ITLC, *The Constitution of Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Council, Manipur* (As enacted on 5th April, 2003 A.D.). It is intended to be a formal supra-tribe organisation incorporating as its members apart from 20 nominated members from different walks of life, five representatives each from each and every recognised Tribe inclusive of the incumbent President and General Secretary and three representatives from every unrecognized Tribe.

184 Interview with H.V.L. Sanga, current General Secretary, Mizo Peoples' Convention, 22 December 2006 at his residence in Churachandpur.
the whole edifice of tribe recognition to factor in these emerging socio-political and cultural contexts.

The greatest challenge facing the Indian state and the Zo people today is the ability to craft an institutional framework and a contingent state recognition regime, which would help capture the collective self-understanding of the Zo people. This is compelling in a situation where a vaguely defined tribe recognition regime engenders split identities which tend to proliferate over time. It must be remembered that the more fractured these identities are, the more conflict-prone and fractured will our democratic experience be as these identities would somehow demand and compete for the scarce resources that the state put on offer.\footnote{For a perceptive analysis on Punjab, see Neera Chandhoke, "The Political Consequences of Ethnic Mapping," Discussion paper no.14 (London: Development Research Centre, Crisis States Programme, DESTIN, LSE, December 2005). Also see Paul R. Brass, \textit{Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparisons} (New Delhi: Sage, 1991).} That each identity is perched on imagined homelands can engender an intense politics of territoriality. This in turn engenders overlapping identities and multiple layers of 'national' loyalties, which we shall examine in the subsequent chapter.