CHAPTER VIII

EPILOGUE

This work began with a critique of the traditional history writing which exists where women are marginalized and hidden while men are presented as playing the dominant role. This was because most of the earlier historians were male and they recorded and wrote what they thought to be important. Since they were all men and influenced by patriarchal thoughts, the works and achievements of men were regarded to be important and worthy of being written down. However these biased writings were later found to be an injustice by many women. They also realised that women were subordinated in all walks of life and so this was reflected in the writings of history. This study therefore adopted the Socialist Feminist Theory as discussed in Chapter I as this theory believes that the differences between women and men are not dictated nor are they pre-social and given but are socially constructed and are liable to change. It also advocated that gender relations are not constant and that the level of patriarchy could vary in different societies and in different periods of time. Therefore, by using Socialist Feminism as the analytical tool, women’s position and gender relations among the Mizo has been sought to be understood. This study has also been structured according to additive gender history whereby the existing secondary and primary sources are reinterpreted from the perspective of the women. Hence under the framework of Socialist Feminist theory and on the lines of additive gender history, this work has tried to study how gender relations had changed in Mizo society when they were in the process of migration from Myanmar (Burma) to present Mizoram and when they were exposed to different forms of changes like cultural, religious and political.
Mizo is a generic term to denote the people who were earlier called as Kuki, Lushai and Chin. As described earlier the different tribes under Mizo are believed to have migrated from China to Myanmar. Most of the sources had to be based on oral traditions as the people did not have a written script. In Myanmar they had settled in Chindwin and later in Kale-Kabaw Valley. However after years of staying there they had to move to the hills. So, from the folk tales and other oral traditions which were mentioned it has been shown how patriarchy had existed and that most of the decisions were taken by the head of the family which was the eldest male. There were chores which were supposed to be done by men and women but it appeared that from the tales of Chhura that there was no clear cut division of labour. Men also did the household chores if needed which as discussed earlier was not done in the period after migration. Hence gender roles did not seem to have been very distinctly carved out which reflect that patriarchy was not very deeply entrenched in the society. When the people were still in Myanmar, they had a more or less similar way of life and customs. These customs were still practiced when they dispersed. However as the different tribes began to live on their own, it was inevitable that some changes would occur in the society. As discussed in Chapter III, when the people dispersed from Kale Kabaw Valley, they began to separate according to their clans and took different routes. A clan often moved together and went on migrating. The Thado, Paite etc were the earlier ones to migrate. The Lai moved to Hmunli and settled in the present Chin Hills. But some of them entered present Mizoram and settled in the southern part. The Lusei settled in Lentlang and moved towards the Tiau river and entered Mizoram and settled there. When the different tribes settled in the hills

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1 See Chapter II
gender roles were seen to have become clearly demarcated. Women had to work in the jhum fields and in the household. Pottery and weaving were included in the household chores. Men on the other hand were confined to building houses, clear the forest for jhum cultivation and hunt. In the later part of their stay in Myanmar, they began to indulge in warfare and so the men assumed the position of warriors. They were thus raiders and protectors of their villages which made women dependent on men. Men began to assert their superiority as protectors of the women, who gradually came to be presented as the weaker sex and the societal norms socialized women into these perceptions. Patriarchal ideas were now asserted more than before and those began to influence the beliefs of the Mizo and Zo societies so much so that they believed that only those who had performed the various feasts of merit and who had killed all the required animals would go to pialral (the highest abode of the place of the dead) as discussed earlier. Moreover honour was bestowed upon a person who could kill an enemy. Since women were not supposed to hunt and raid, women did not have the chance to get honour in the village and also did not have the chance to attain the merit to enter pialral. Moreover the society did not have any facilities to award honour to women. Hence, women did not have any chance to get recognition or honour from the people. The people rather believed that women could go to pialral only through their husbands. This belief was designed to make women more dependent on men. Thus these beliefs show that gender relations tended towards idealizing male dominance and female submissiveness.
The Mizo then migrated towards the west and settled in present Mizoram while the Zo stayed back in Myanmar and settled in present Chin Hills. Those who migrated and settled in present Mizoram have been called Mizo and those who stayed back have been identified as Zo. As mentioned earlier, the Zo and Mizo society were also strictly patriarchal. Hence women did not have any voice in the society and in the family. They were under the diktats of their fathers and after getting married their husbands. There was also a clear division of labour as was found among the Mizo. Men concentrated on building houses, raids, hunting, felling and burning for the jhum fields. Women on the other hand, had to do all the other works of jhum labour, household chores, pottery and weaving. They also had to smoke continuously to supply their family members with nicotine water. Women's position in the society and their subordination in the family and society were seen in the customary laws that prevailed where women could not own any land or property nor could they inherit from their father or husband. So we find that what a woman owned was just her personal clothes and ornaments. A widow could look after the house if she continued to live and look after her children. Like the Mizo women, Zo women too were not seen to have a leading role in any of the religious functions except that the animals such as pigs and chickens which were killed for offerings were all reared by women. Both the Mizo and Zo women did not play any leadership roles in the village administration. All the councils of elders were men and this would mean that women would have no power in the village decision making. So raids, shifting of village and the time for communal sacrifices were all decided by men. However all Mizo women did not remain invisible as there were some women,

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3 See Chapter IV and V
as mentioned in the earlier chapter, who could rule over the village after their husbands died. Ropuiliani, one of the women chiefs proved herself to be a brave and fearless chief. Hence it could be seen that women had the capability to rule the people but they were not given the chance to prove it. The few women who were chiefs also could attain this position because of their relationship with a chief and due to some specific circumstances. However in the recorded history and oral tradition we find that there were no women chiefs among the Zo. Thus it could be said that Zo women did not inherit or look after the village even if their husbands happened to die. From this it can be inferred that women were not considered worthy enough to look after the affairs of the people. Thus both Mizo and Zo women were under the subordination of men both in the private and public domain. The control of women by men could also be seen in the society’s attitude that women had to always please the men. Women could not do things and act as she liked. Thus women were in constant need of curbing their desires and had to act according to what would please the men. But the existing oral traditions show that there were women achievers in the society like composers, zawlnei, soothsayers whose identities has been submerged and hidden in the conventional recordings.

As the Mizo and Zo society migrated towards their new land, it can be seen that gender relations of the Mizo and Zo society had undergone some changes and that the changes were in favour of men 3. When the Mizo migrated to present Mizoram, the Sailo gradually asserted their supremacy among the Lusei. It was in this period after the Sailo became the ruling clan of the Lusei that we find many sayings which accorded women an inferior status. The sayings which were prevalent

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3 See Chapter VI and VII
were “Women’s wisdom do not cross the village spring”, “Women and crab do not have religion”, “A dog, walnut and women, the more you beat them the better they be”, “A wife and an old fence can be easily replaced”, “A woman’s word is no word just as crab meat is not real meat”. After settling in the hills by themselves, the Zo also had some sayings to show their attitude towards women. Some of the sayings were “As a gong is to be beaten, so are women”, “Unthreatened women and uncut grass are both unbearable”, “A woman’s word and a female mithun’s horn cannot be used for anything”. However it appears that Mizo had more sayings which show women’s inferiority, than the Zo people. These sayings show that women were subordinated, presumed to be intellectually inferior to men and hence had to be excluded in the decision making processes. Thus by the time the people were settled in their new lands, we see that there was a strengthening of patriarchal ideas and greater marginalisation of women.

As the Sailo dominated over most parts of present Mizoram, the term for women in the Mizo language also changed to hmeichhia (hmei – mistress/concubine; chhia – bad) which was derogatory and which inferred that women were regarded as inferiors. The term also denoted that women were regarded as commodity. However the Zo refer to their women as minu which denotes a feminine gender and is not degrading. It was during this same period that beliefs like Pawla began to emerge. As mentioned earlier it was believed that Pawla would shoot any man who did not have sexual intercourse with women. This belief would also show that men were trying to control and subordinate women’s sexuality. So the various sayings, term for women and belief of Pawla reflect the societal attitude towards women. This belief that a man who did not have sexual intercourse with women would be shot was
absent in the Zo, Lai and Mara's concept of life after death which showed that this particular belief rose after the Mizo had separated from the other Zo tribes and had lived by themselves. The patriarchal ideas which had become more entrenched in the society was also seen in the decline of the female deity khuanu. The people began to take more interest in the pathian which is a male deity. Hence Khuanu began to be found merely in songs and other poetic expressions. Even in the written accounts of the Mizo khuanu is not given importance. So it can be said that the Mizo religious beliefs and practices after their migration were becoming more patriarchal.

It was in this type of patriarchal society that British government and Christian missionaries entered Mizoram and Chin Hills. Many people began to be converted to Christianity and education which was also introduced by the missionaries was acquired by the people. Women also received education though it was much slower than the men. Nevertheless education opened new avenues and many women were employed both under the government, private sector and the church. Education was more accessible for the women in Mizoram than the Zo in Myanmar because schools for girls were opened both in the north and south Mizoram. But in the Chin Hills, separate schools for girls were not opened and hence girls could not receive education as the boys did in the earlier stage as their parents were more partial to boys than girls to go to school. Thus both Mizo and Zo women due to being educated are seen to be employed in different sectors whereby they could earn their own income. But due to the turbulent political scene in Myanmar, Zo people could not have complete freedom and had to go to other countries as refugees and work as maids and in other jobs which were available. So this created many problems for the Zo especially women. It is seen that even though Zo women
face many difficulties, they are also responsible for earning and maintaining their family. However though Zo and Mizo women are earning and contributing to the family’s income, they still cannot inherit the property except in rare cases. Lands are still owned by the men and so in case of divorce and death, the wife very often has to go back to her parent’s house without taking any of the property except her personal belongings. So it can be seen that women’s position in terms of inheritance and property has changed very little even after being educated and being Christians.

In political field also, women are still rarely seen. Politics is still left to men and few women who are involved in politics do not have leadership roles. They are also not given any important posts in the party as a whole. The leadership roles which they could get are only in the women’s wing. Only one woman was made a minister but she had worked in the male dominated arena, so she had little voice. Among the Zo, women did not play any major part in the politics and so there are no women politicians. So the decision of the management of the state and society is always under the domain of men which is almost similar to the period prior to the advent of the British administration.

In religious field also, the part played by Christian women is almost similar to the roles they have in the traditional religion. They are still not given important posts so that they could not have a voice in the affairs of the church. In the traditional religion, they are the ones to rear the animals and chickens to be offered for sacrifices and in Christianity also, the important role they play are mostly as fund raisers and other supportive works which were done in the background. In the traditional religion there were women seers or prophetess who were consulted by the people and whose opinion were respected by the people. In the earlier stage of the
spread of Christianity, there were Bible Women who were appointed by the church but this post was soon abolished. There are of course women theologians but they are few in number and they do not enjoy the same rights as the male theologians. Even though qualification wide they are equal to the men theologians they are not allowed to be ordained as pastors, proving the point of gender historians that women have been discriminated against for biological reasons. Since women could not be ordained as ministers, these women theologians are posted in the general department in which they cannot preside over the important sacraments. However in the Chin Hills, under the Baptist church, women are ordained as ministers. But these women ministers are not allowed to get married. So even though they are ordained and seem to be in a better position than the Mizo women, yet, it can be seen that they still have to act according to the structure designed by men and they have no right to decide about their lives. They are not in a position to change the laws in the church. So it can be said that Christianity has brought some positive changes for women especially in the family atmosphere and in employment as explained in the earlier chapter but in the real sense it can also be said that Christianity has reinforced patriarchy.

From the discussion and the evidence provided in the earlier chapters it can be concluded that in the Mizo society class formation has not yet crystallised and the stratification of the society is still at a low level. In the traditional society there were the chiefs' wives and in the modern scenario there are the educated and employed women who are seen to have better positions than the other women. However these women are also subordinated by patriarchal values. Patriarchal norms are therefore seen to exist in the society and it affects women of all strata irrespective of being
educated or uneducated. Hence in this study socialist feminist theoretical framework was used to see gender relations as an “individual’s life experience is shaped by her sex and gender...class, race and nationality” and is liable to change through its conscious and cooperative productive capacity. The use of additive approach to gender history within the socialist feminist thought is thus relevant for this study as it provides a model within which gender relation in the society can be analysed. Thus sources which were available have been used and re-interpreted from the perspective of the woman. By using the above mentioned theoretical framework, a comparative study was made between the Mizo and Zo women through the process of migration and examining whether patriarchy had remained constant or did it vary in different periods of time and the final findings of this study are that in the pre-migration period there is no indication of the existence of a mother right and patriarchal ideas had found its roots among the people but these ideas were still at a weaker level. Gender roles were not clearly defined as yet. As the Mizo and Zo migrated to the hills of Burma, patriarchy came to be gradually intensified due to the wars and interclan rivalries and men assumed the gendered roles of warriors. Women began to be marginalized more than before and gender roles was clearly defined. As the Mizo migrated to present Mizoram, Sailo supremacy was ascertained and various sayings and terms for women which were degrading were seen to have become popularly used in the society during this period. The religious beliefs also began to be used to give legitimacy to the patriarchal values. Zawlbuk which was established in all the Lusei villages proved to be one of the center of the subordination of women. Women were thus pushed to the background and as a result all the gender relations were in favour of men and men alone were the decision makers in the religious beliefs and
practices, political, economy and in the society. Thus patriarchy was deeply entrenched in the society. The introduction of Christianity and education did not change the patriarchal norms and values which existed in the society but rather re-enforced patriarchy.

The one important conclusion that can be seen as emerging from this study is that relations of power and authority were the dominant strains of the gender relations in both the Zo and Mizo societies. Power and authority basically signify subordination by those who have power and submission by the powerless and in both Zo and Mizo society, power was a male prerogative and submission the fate of the women. However these relations were not always constant and in many respects patriarchal domination in Zo society was less overbearing. But the process of migration seems to have deepened and intensified patriarchy so that in the Mizo society patriarchal norms have come to be more domineering and suffocating for the majority of the women and Christianity and modern administration has not brought about any basic structural changes.