

Indigeneity, Borderlands and Memory of Homeland: A Reappraisal of Zomia Theory vis-à-vis 'Tribes' of India-Burma/ Myanmar Frontier

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Abstract: *In this article the themes of indigeneity, borderlands and memory are juxtaposed in order to discuss the relevance of theory of Zomia vis-à-vis 'tribes' of India-Burma/ Myanmar – Bangladesh frontier. Historically speaking, the colonial rulers had segregated allied 'tribes' in diverse 'administrative' zones, to maintain 'order' in the frontier. This ploy of divide and rule was maintained by postcolonial states of India and Burma, though a mechanism of free movement regime facilitated people to intermingle with each other. Unsurprisingly, the tribes on both sides felt that their homeland has been forcibly alienated by the two nations. Hence, we witness the growth of feelings of 'in-group' vis-à-vis 'out-group' and tribal resistance. In this backdrop, the article tries to re-contextualise and reinterpret the tribespeople's own insights and sensitivities in volatile India-Burma-Bangladesh zone, where the notion of 'homeland' and memory pertaining to indigeneity/ethnic origin are strong. The article has also touched upon the deceptive colonial pigeonholing and arbitrary labeling of tribespeople in colonial era. In this context, Zomia is discussed, since this borderland is birthplace of notion of Zomia. In order to refute the logic of Zomia theory specific ethnographic instances are provided. It is observed that in the actual ethnographic scenario many a conceptual features of Zomia do not match. Thus, notwithstanding certain essentials of upland culture appearing uniform in terms of language, culture, textiles, animism, shamanism, and practices of shifting-cultivation, the projected generalization about highland societies/polities being 'anarchic' seems too idealistic, even in historical milieu. No highland tribe is "lawless" and they indeed function in accordance with their customary laws and through self –governing institutions, which in contemporary times have the backing of the modern state, though disastrously.*

Introduction

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The anthropological discourse pertaining to 'borders', is traceable to analysis of social boundaries and territorial borders (Evans-Pritchard 1940). Border came to limelight in the later studies pertaining to ethnic boundary (Barth, 1969), identity, community and social boundary (Rosaldo, 1988). New studies have focused on power, culture and memory in relation to border identity (www.borderidentities.com). Borderlands do not indicate a fixed topographical site between two fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures), but an interstitial zone of displacement and de-territorialisation that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject. Hence, the notion of borderlands is regarded as a more adequate conceptualization of the "normal" locale of the postmodern subject (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). In his work on the highlands of Burma, Edmund Leach (1960) had problematized the conventional notion of political frontiers and located a zone in which cultures interpenetrated dynamically, through varied political, ecological, economic and kinship frameworks. "Borderlands" do separate physical topographies, but they also comprise people flanking cultural, social, linguistic, environmental, and folkloric domains. The Indo-Burma borderlands, in general, are inhabited by highlanders, who adhere to common cultural, social, linguistic, environmental, and folkloric traditions, though divided within different nation-states. It may be argued that in situations like the Indo-Burma borderlands, the indigeneity theme becomes vital because the transnational indigenous communities occupying either sides of the border claim the borders to be their primeval 'homeland', ruined by colonial/postcolonial powers.

Border studies pertaining to Indo-Burma/ Myanmar –Bangladesh Borderlands broadly perpetuate the direction provided in the "Burmese" studies by Leach and Lehman in 1960s. In the monographs of Lehman and Leach societies were considered as complex systems in perpetual movement rather than static objects. Leach (1954:281) challenged "conventions as to what constitutes a culture or a tribe" and simultaneously undermined the structural-functionalist conception of a tribe as a discrete, homogeneous social unit in equilibrium (1954:43). Whereas Leach's aim is to show that valley neighbours influence hill sociocultural systems, Lehman's aim is to show in what ways they do so (Lehman, 1963). In this context, Moerman (1968:156-58) highlighted the need to understand the degree of resilience or vulnerability of ethnic identity in the context of shifting patterns of intergroup relations, -- to determine the content of ethnic self-identification (because ethnic identities exhibit systematicity and complexity). The monograph on kinship and law in Naga society (Das 1993) belongs to this genre. Reviewing this monograph, Lehman observed that 'elders defined by their descent position and their concomitant position within the age set system, serve to manage the application of jural rules, whilst others, serve as exemplary models of social propriety on account of their prestige as men of wealth and generosity'. F.K. Lehman, also noted that 'a married woman retains a distinct claim on some of the land and other property of her natal family as well as on possible residence there, so that we find a nice instance of a principle common to asymmetrical marriage systems, namely, that the more a woman seem to be transferred at her marriage, the more it is because what is really transferred is her status as a member of an affinal lineage, a principle Edmund Leach was unclear about with regard to Lushai, Lakher, and Kachin instances (F.K. Lehman (Anthropos 92, 1997). In the ultimate analysis, the Kachin, Chin and Naga exhibit common principles of group formation,

territoriality, kinship, internal polity and vibrant folklore supported by ethnic memory as we shall elucidate below in order to compare and counter the theoretical premise of Zomia.

Advocates of the Zomia theory have concentrated on historical sources as also 'selected' secondary ethnographic stuff provided in old ethnographies. The term Zomia, coined in 2002 by Willem van Schendel (2002) and elaborated by Scott (2009) refers to the huge massif of Mainland Southeast Asia in a geographical sense. The Zomia zone includes Himalayan Massif and it stretching over India-Burma-Bangladesh highlands, Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Zomia area is inside the fringe of nine nation-states and at the middle of none. It has roughly 100 million highlanders including the Hmong, Kachin, Karen, Lisu, Shan, Wa, Zomi, Mizo, Kuki-Chin, Naga. It is important here to mention that Zomia Studies represents an emerging ecological area study of upland and so called "Hill Peoples" of Southeast Asia and South Asia that includes the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Schendel 2002; Scott 2009). Indeed, Schendel's work on Bangladesh in general and the region of CHT in particular has been key to the conceptualization of Zomia Studies and the problem of existing approaches to area studies that focus too much on political or state boundaries (Khairul Chowdhury, 2014). CHT region was made famous through works of Claude Levi Strauss' (1950), and other French and German ethnographers, though only a few of these accounts are available in English (Kantikar 1968). CHT was shut for foreigners in the early 1960s on the pretext of the security of the state. CHT in the meantime emerged as a classic case of development displacement (Bodley 1975). In the early 1980s, the region and its indigenous communities also sprung to the attention of international news and human rights organizations as well as Bangladeshi and international scholars across many disciplines because of human rights violations, displacements and counter-insurgency led development. Since then, CHT has become the object of studies and inquiries by a number of Bangladeshi and other academics (Chowdhury 2002, Chakma, B., 2010), Mey, W. 1984, Chowdhury, B. H. 2002, Schendel, 1992).

According to Scott, Zomia is peopled by those who are essentially 'maroon, runaway, populations' who, over the past two millennia, peopled the hills through lawlessness. In Scott's thesis Zomia highlanders are contemplated as 'barbarians' and 'ungoverned' vis-à-vis civilized/valley states. Thus, whilst the valleys are homogenized and centralized, hills produce decentralization, economic minimalism, and fuzzy ethnic boundaries. Such an insular typology as Zomia appears analogous to debatable Orientalism theory of the west. Victor Lieberman, writing for the journal of Global History, which published a special issue- "Zomia and Beyond" (2010), argued that the highland peoples 'crafted their own social worlds in response to the political and natural environments that they encountered', and thus he disagreed with Scott's documentation. More recently, Scott's claims have been questioned by Tom Brass (2012), who maintains that it is incorrect to characterize upland Southeast Asia as 'state-repelling' 'zones of refuge/asylum' to which people voluntarily migrate. This is, he argues, an idealization consistent with the 'new' populist postmodernism, but not supported by ethnographic evidence. Populations neither choose to migrate to upland areas, nor – once there – are they beyond the reach of the lowland State. Consequently, they are anything but empowered and safe

in such contexts. Michaud argues that historical and anthropological approaches can be employed with profit to recount life in highland boundaries of Asia (2011).

Ethnic and linguistic connection of Northeast and Southeast Asia is illustrious. In fact entire India, Burma (Myanmar)-Bangladesh borderlands have identical Tibeto-Burman indigenous tribes. The Singphos are an officially designated Indian 'tribe' living in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam but they are widely known as the Kachin or Jingpo in Burma, among whom anthropologist Edmund Leach had worked. The Shan are present in Arunachal Pradesh so also in Yunnan (China), Burma and North Thailand. There are differing understanding with regard to delimitation of the border between countries and the border tribes. The Naga live in India and Burma, and Indo-Burmese border runs through several Naga villages and even cuts through people's houses. The Chin/Mizo comprises a unique category of several allied tribes in the hilly areas of Manipur, Mizoram, and Sagaing division and Chin state of Burma. The Naga and Chin 'tribes' strongly resent that their homelands have been divided by the two nations without their consent.

The term 'tribe' is widely used in the academic circles even as anthropologists have pointed to the problematic origins of the term. Outside the anthropological realm, 'tribe' is also used as administrative category, particularly as 'scheduled tribe' in India. In much of South Asia and particularly in India, anthropologists remain obsessed with the study of tribes, even though some scholars find difficulty with definition and nomenclature issues. In recent years a new genre of 'tribal study' (propagated by university grants commission) and a new 'adivasi study' approach is being advocated by some historians (albeit leaning heavily on anthropological approaches). Fact remains that the intents of these new projects can not really be divorced from basic premises of anthropological genre devoted to cause of tribes historically and their transformed concerns for indigeneity and indigenous people in recent years (Das, 2015).

Issue of indigeneity and the fluctuations inherent in identity-formation as also diverse experiences of people spread in transnational frontier region, such as India-Burma-Bangladesh zone needs to be re-examined. The sentiments of people regarding the 'homeland' and memory pertaining to indigeneity/ethnic origin are strong. There is need to re-contextualise and reinterpret the tribespeople's own insights and sensitivities in volatile border areas, where the creation of new nation-states gave birth to fragmentation of indigenous Mongoloid 'tribes'. In general the Indian state did not impose any rigid regulation and thus the mechanism of a free movement regime provides the tribes the access and opportunity to intermingle with each other. Side by side, sadly also flourishes the cross-border movement of insurgents and criminals through the porous border is a cause of serious concern and a source of persistent risk of instability. Unregulated trans-border movement of people exposes the population to communicable disease such as TB, HIV, bird flu and polio. This has serious implications since control of such diseases is not easy, should they spread to the dense population centres on the Indian side of the border (http://www.claws.in/images/journals_doc/1607981726_NarenderKumar.pdf).

Zo- Zomi- Mizo and Kuki- Chin Identity and Memory of 'Chhinlung'

Zomia is drawn from the name Zomi, a popular generic term used in vast India-Burma-Bangladesh border. According to Scott, Zo is a relational term meaning "remote" and hence carries a connotation of living in the hills; Mi-zo or Zo-mi entails hill people (Scott 2009: 14–16). The indigenous term Zo (according to Lehman) "means, roughly, 'unsophisticated' [in contrast to Vai, that] connotes a positive [valuation] of Burman civilization. Vai stands for civilization—" (1963: 3, 30). Term Zomia theoretically then encompasses all highlanders (Tibeto-Burman group and other Mongoloid stock), who identify themselves as Zo/ Zomi/ Mizo/ Kuki/ Chin in Indo-Burma-Bangladesh space. If diverse memory – based sources are pulled together migration saga seems to follow the following chronological order, which also indicates minor linguistic segregation.

1. The Mon-Khmer (Talaing, Palaung, En Raing, Pa-o, Khasi, Annamite)
2. The Tibeto-Burman (Pyu, Kanan, Thet, Burman, Chin, Kachin, Naga, Lolo)
3. The Tai-Chinese (Shan, Siamese, Karen).

The Tibeto-Burman group initially moved toward the west and thereafter subdivided themselves into several groups. They followed different routes, one group reaching northern Tibet, where some stayed behind, while others, moving in three waves, reached Burma. These people were:

1. The Chin-Kachin-Naga group
2. The Burman and Old-Burman (Pyu, Kanan, Thet) group
3. The Lolo group (Enriquez 1924: 8).

Unlike historical reconstruction method, the anthropologists have focused on 'the development within the general region of Burma of symbiotic socio-cultural systems: civilizations and hill societies' (Lehman 1963: 22). In the ultimate analysis indeed the historians, anthropologists and linguists, suppose that the ancestors of these various peoples did indeed come from the north. Lehman demonstrated that 'the ancestors of the Chin and the Burman must have been distinct from each other even before they first appeared in Burma' (also see Sakhong, 2003). He concludes, by saying: 'Chin history begins after A.D. 750, with the development of Burman civilization and Chin interaction with it' (ibid.). Chin scholars like T. S. Gangte agree with Leach and Lehman (Sakhong, 2000, 2003).

Native scholars have accepted the 'Chinlung' tradition as the origin of the Chin and proclaim that the Chindwin Valley is where Chin history begins. Similar to Gangte, the 'Khuangsai source of Chin tradition mentions that the location of Chin-lung was somewhere in the Chindwin area' (Sing Kho Khai 1984: 10).

Zomi indicates a large ethnic constellation spread in various parts of South and South East Asia. Zomi as the common ethnic nomenclature of all Zo descendants is a fact which can not be refuted. The

British called them as Chin in Myanmar, Kuki in Manipur and Lushai (now Mizo) in Mizoram. The Kuki-Chin people of Manipur –Mizoram-Nagaland-Burma zones have been recorded in early colonial reports variously such as Kuki-Chin in Chin Hills, Lushai in the Lushai Hills and Kuki in other parts of northeast India. Zomi tribes indeed have commonalities of cultural practices, social systems, traditional beliefs, customary and traditional practices, religious beliefs, and most of all, a common ancestry. According to Tom Lewin, the generic name of these groups of people is Dzo, now spelled Zo. Zo Mi (literal translation of Zo people/Zo tribe) is the correct original historical name of the Zo people who originally called themselves as ZOU or YO or YAW, having a common ancestry. The different Zo tribes hold the common belief that they originally emerged out of a cave. This mythological cave is known by various names like Khuul, Khur, Khurpui, Khurtu-bijur, Sinlung, Chinlung, Chhinlung by various tribes like Thadou (Shaw 1929:24-26), Lushai (Shakespeare: 1912), Lakher (Parry 1932:4), Tedim/Paite-Chin (Kamkhenthang 1988), Moyon-Monsang and Hmar. 'Mizo' became the official name of the people of Mizoram after 1946 when the Lushai Hills was changed to 'Mizo Hills' and the first indigenous political party, the Mizo Common People's Union was formed on 9th April 1946. The Party was later renamed the Mizo Union. The Mizo Union wanted the Lushai hills to be called Mizo hills and the people to be officially called Mizo (Memorandum of the Mizo Union 1947 to the government of India. Only the word 'Mizo' stands for all groups : Lusei, Hmar, Ralte, Paite, Zo, Darlawng, Kawm, Pawi, Thado, Chiru, Aimol, Khawl, Tarau, Anal, Puram, Tikhup, Vaiphei, Lakher, Langrawng, Chawrai; Bawng, Baite, Mualthuam, Kaihpen, Pangkhua, Tlangau, Hrangkhawl, Bawmzo, Miria, Dawn, Kumi, Kiangte, Kiang, Pangte, Khawhring, Chawngthu, Vanchiau, Chawhte, Ngente, Renthlei, Hnamte, Tlau, Pautu, Pawite, Vangchhia, Zawngte, Fanai, and they are all closely related to one another culturally, socially, economically and physically thus forming a distinct ethnic unit" (www.misual.com/2011).

Indigenous scholars regard the Chin people as 'ethnic nationality' and Chinland (Chinram) as the 'nation' (Sakhong, 2003). However the Chin people are restricted within the Chin State, Kachin State, Karen State created under the Burmese Union Constitution of 1974. Sakhong (2003) uses the traditional Chin concepts of Miphun, Ram, and Phunglam. The meaning and concept of Miphun is an ethnics or a 'race' or a 'people' who believe that they come from a common descent or ancestor. Ram is a homeland, a country or a nation with well-defined territory and claimed by a certain people who have belonged to it historically; and the broad concept of Phunglam is 'ways of life', which includes almost all cultural and social aspects of life, religious practices, belief and value systems, customary law and political structure and the many aesthetic aspects of life such as dance, song, and even the customs of feasts and festivals, all the elements in life that 'bind successive generations of members together' as a people and a nationality, and at the same time separate them from others. By the turn of twentieth century, Chin society was abruptly transformed by powerful outside forces. The British conquered Chinram and Christian missionaries followed the colonial powers and converted the people. After the colonial period, they found themselves again being separated into three different countries – India, Burma and Bangladesh – without their consent. While West Chinram (the present Mizoram State) became part of India, East Chinram (present Chin State) joined the Union of Burma

according to the Panglong Agreement signed in 1947. The smaller part of Chinram became part of present-day Bangladesh (Sakhong 2003: xvi).

The designation of Kuki was seldom used by the Chin people themselves, not even by the Zomi, for whom the word is intended. Soppit, who was Assistant Commissioner of Burma and later Sub-Divisional Officer in the North Cacher Hills, Assam, remarked in 1893 in his study of Lushai-Kuki: The designation of Kuki is never used by the tribes themselves (Soppit 1893: 2). Shakespear, an authority on the Chin, said in 1912, "The term Kuki on the Chittagong border, is loosely applied to most of the inhabitants of the interior hills beyond the Chittagong Hill Tracts; in the Cachar it generally means some families of the Thado and Khuathlang clans, locally distinguished as new Kuki and old Kuki. The term is now superseded by Lushai in the Chin Hills, and generally on the Burma border all these clans are called Chin. These Kuki are more closely allied to the Chakmas, and the Lushai are more closely to their eastern neighbours who are known as Chin.

The myth of common origin from Chhinlung/Sinlung, a rock cave in the Kachin state of Burma (Khamrangpui) is well recognized and native scholars have written about this for long. Recalling 'homeland', one Zomi folksong tellingly delineates the area of Zomi:

*"Penlehpi leh Kangtui minthang,
A tua tong Zota kual sung chi ua;*

*Khang Vaimang leh tuan a pupa,
Tongchiamna Kangtui minthang aw"*

This song refers to vast Zomi Homeland, which is geographically contiguous, compact and has been the land where the Zomi permanently settled for centuries (www. Wikipedia). For people with no writing system, a rich oral tradition consisting of folksong and folklore was the most reliable means of transmitting past events and collective memories through time. The songs were sung repeatedly during feasts and festivals, and the tales that made up Chin folklore were told and retold over the generations. In this way, such collective memories as the origin myth and the myth of common ancestors were handed down. Different tribes and groups of Chin kept the tradition of 'Chinlung' in several versions; the Hmar group of the Mizo tribe, who now live in Mizoram State of India, which Sakhong (2003) refers as West Chinram, have a traditional folk song:

*Kan Seingna Sinlung [Chinlung] ram hmingthang
Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai
Chawngzil ang Kokir thei changsien
Ka nu ram ka pa ngai.*

In English it translates as: 'Famous Sinlung [Chinlung] is my motherland and the home of my ancestors. It could be called back like chawngzil, the home of my ancestors' (Chatterjee 1990: 328).

This folksong also describes that the Chins were driven out of their original homeland, called 'Chinlung'. Another folksong, traditionally sung at the Khuahrum sacrificial ceremony and other important occasions, reads as follows:

My Chinland of old,
My grandfather's land Himalei,
My grandfather's way excels,
Chinlung's way excels (Kipgen 1996: 36).

Modern scholars generally agree with the traditional account of the origin of the name 'Chin': the word comes from 'Chinlung'. Hrang Nawl, a prominent scholar and politician among the Chin, confirms that the term 'Chin ... come(s) from Ciinlung, Chhinlung or Tsinlung, the cave or the rock, where, according to legend, the Chin people emerged into this world as humans' (Vumson 1986: 3). There is no dispute that the Chin 'were originally from a cave called Chinnlung, which is given different locations by different clans' (Vumson 1986: 26). In addition to individual scholars and researchers, many political and other organizations of the Chin accepted the Chinlung tradition not only as a myth but as a historical fact. The Paite National Council, formed by the Chin people of Manipur and Mizoram States, claimed Chinlung as the origin of the Chin people in a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India. The memorandum stated: 'The traditional memory claimed that their remote original place was a cave in China where, for fear of enemies, they hid themselves, which is interpreted in different dialects as "Sinlung" [Chinlung] in Hmar and Khul in Paite and others.' In this memorandum, they suggested that the Government of India take initiative to group all Chin people inhabiting the Indo-Burma border areas within one country as specified and justified for the safeguard of their economic, social and political rights. The literal meaning of Chin-lung is 'the cave or the hole of the Chin', the same meaning as the Burmese word for Chindwin, as in 'Chindwin River', also 'the hole of the Chin' or 'the river of the Chin' (Lehman 1963: 20).

As noted already, one such myth handed down through generations describes how the Chin 'came out of the bowels of the earth or a cave called Chinlung or Cin-lung' (Gangte 1993: 14). According to some, it was located somewhere in China and others claimed it to be in Tibet; yet others suggested that it must be somewhere in the Chindwin Valley since the literal meaning of Chindwin is 'the cave or the hole of the Chin' (Gangte 1993: 14). Almost all of the Chin tribes and clans have promulgated similar but slightly different versions of the myth, which brings the ancestors of the Chin out from the hole or the bowels of earth. The Ralte clan/group of the Mizo tribe, also known as the Lushai, have a tradition now generally known as 'Chinlung tradition' that brings their progenitors from the bowels of the earth. The story was translated into English and recorded by J. Shakespear in 1912. Yet another story of the origin of the Chin, also connected with the 'Chinlung tradition' as handed down among the Mara group of the Laimi tribe (also known as the Lakher) was recorded by N. E. Parry in 1932: All sources of Chin traditions maintain that their ancestors originated from 'Chinlung' or 'Cin-lung'. Sometimes the name for 'Chinlung' or 'Cinlung' differs, depending on the specific Chin dialect – such as Khul, Khur and Lung-kua, – but it always means 'cave' or 'hole' no matter what the dialect. The reason that Chin-lung was abandoned, however, varies from one source to another. Depending on the dialect and local traditions, it is said that Chin-lung was abandoned as a result of an adventure, or because of the great darkness called Khazanghra, Thimzing Or Chunmui.

In contrast to the stories above, persisting memories maintain that their original homeland was destroyed by a flood. The Laimi tribe from the Haka and Thlantlang areas had a very well-known myth called Ngun Nu Tuanbia, which related the destruction of human life on Earth by the flood. The Zophei also had their own version of the story about the flood, called Tuirang-aa-ia (literally meaning: 'white water/river is pouring out or gushing'), which destroyed their original homeland. Many Chin tribes called the Chindwin River the 'White River', Tui-rang, Tuikhang, Tirang, Tuipui-ia, etc.; all have the same meaning but differ only in dialect term. Referring to such 'memory', so vibrant in the region, Hutton, Sing Kho Khai and Gangte, supposed that the traditional account of the flood story, which destroyed the Chin's original 'homeland', might be the flood of the Chindwin River. They therefore claim that the Chin's original homeland was in the Chindwin Valley and nowhere else.

For the Chin, Miphun cannot exist without Ram. They therefore define themselves as a Miphun with a strong reference to Ram – the original homeland, a particular locus and territory, which they all collectively claim to be their own. The inner link between the concepts of Miphun and Ram was strengthened in Chin society through the worship of Khua-hrum at the Tual ground. In Chin society, the Tual grounds, the site of where they worshipped the guardian god Khuahrum, were the sacred centers, which stood as protectors of both men and land. While the religious-ritual foundation of the ancestry is discarded in view of widespread Christianity in both Burma and Mizoram, the Burmese Chins (unlike West Chinram/Mizoram state) are faced with oblique religious discrimination of sort, under new regime of Buddhist Myanmar. The term 'Myanmar' has been used to denote the ethnicity of Myanmar, which is inseparably intertwined with their state religion of Buddhism. The term Myanmar is exclusive, and does not include the Chin and other ethnic groups who joined the Union of Burma in 1947 on the principle of equality.

Deceptive Colonial Pigeonholing and Oscillatory Labels

The Naga, Mizo, Kuki are not primeval ethnic nomenclatures. They are generally the colonial era fabrications. They are also not single entities ('tribes'). They are rather constellation of dissimilar social formations. Having been on move, when they settled in specific territories, in the hills terrain, various clans and small segments diversely identified themselves and were differently labelled by their immediate/distant neighbours. Naga tribes, with presence in northeast India and Burma too have been subjected to deceptive colonial era pigeonholing. Each localised Naga 'tribe', based in a village or a cluster of villages, for example, had a blurred idea about its maximal tribal boundary, as inter-tribe relation existed in hostile terms. Colonial rulers misunderstood the tribal notions of territory and indigenous nomenclatures. Hence, they often merged local tribes within some nomenclature deriving terms from local vocabulary or inventing new names. Generally unreal and often value-loaded, some labels used by colonial masters gradually came to be widely internalised, even though they remained flawed (Das 1989, 2007). In Nagaland, for example, name 'Angami' belongs to section 'Tengima' (Tengimi) but the British established the label Angami not only for the Tengima but also for several

other 'tribes' living contiguously such as Chakroma, Tengima, Chakrima (Chakrama), Kezami, Memi and Dzunokehena (Zounuo-Keyhonuo). Field research of this author revealed that these six tribes [within Angami] never formed an interactive network and, they never interacted practically with each other (Das, 1993:24). With purpose of deconstruction of colonial categories and upholding self-perception of the Naga tribe, this author took up for intensive legal anthropological study one section of Angami called as Zounuo-Keyhonuo, who regard their 'tribe' as a giant patri-clan having descended from 'Zounuo' and 'Keyhonuo', twin apical ancestors. A segmentary kinship principle, and a moiety order, encompasses interlocking descent groups (thenu, sarra, punumi etc), which are demonstrable in a pyramidal genealogical superstructure (Das 1993, 93-94). Just like the Zounuo-Keyhonuo, Tikhir, Chirr and the Makware resent their inclusion within the Yimchunger label. While studying Chakhesang tribe in Phek- Meluri areas, in early 1980s, this author confronted the Pochury Nagas, who retained distinct myths, kinship pattern and dialect. Hence, a separate report for the Pochury was written. This ethnographic material was consciously used by then MLA and student leaders to claim separate identification as a 'distinct' Naga tribe. After a few years, they became a distinct Naga tribe. Folklore collected earlier by this author in 1980s indicates that most Naga tribes are immigrants, and non-indigenous. Legends indicate immigration and absorption of segments and clans of 'tribes', mainly amongst Sangtam and Chakhesang Nagas (Das 1994; Pochury, Chakhesang and Sangtam reports are part of Nagaland state volume under People of India series of ASI). The Angami, Chakhesang, Lotha, Rengma and Sema have a 'shared myth' of origin from a single stock (getting separated and acquiring separate identities in distinct hill ranges). A popular folktale narrates that the ancestors of the Lotha, Sema, Rengma and the Angami had migrated together from certain location in South-East Asian region and after immigration lived together at "Kezakenoma" before pushed by the Tengima. The remaining three groups went to Themoketsa hill where the Rengma split off, the Lotha settled in and around Wokha and the Sema settled down in Zhonobot area (Das 1994). Ahoms and early British called the Konyak and other sections as Banferia and Jobokia, as per passes they used to visit Assam plains. Indeed the names of Naga tribes appearing in thirteenth century-Ahom-Buranjis [chronicles] are difficult to be located today.

Edmund Leach observed that Kachin political units were unstable, differing from one another in scale and principles of structure (Leach, 1954). Leach devised ideal types using old ethnographies for the models of the gumsa (hereditary aristocracy, based on Konyak and Sema Naga chiefs) and gumlao (based on Angami Naga 'democratic' polity). Dewar, compared Kachin-Naga hereditary headmen (Dewar 1931). In modern era also; political compulsions led to re-articulation and re-christening the ethnic labels of the tribes. Indeed the 'dominant' political appeal of Nagas in Nagaland – Manipur hills zones had prompted some Kuki tribes of Manipur such as the Anal, Mayon, Monsong, Lamgang, Chothe, Chiru, and Kom to opt for 'Naga' identification. The Kukis, though originating from the Chin ethnic brand, were subjected to dual identities in historical contexts, as they maintained greater migratory tendencies. Amazingly some reports described them as Nagas in 1929, though they are antagonistic to each other today. The Kuki-Chin identity is a well-established identity in Manipur –Mizoram-Nagaland-Burma zones. The early colonial ethnographers recorded Kukis as Chin in the Chin Hills, Lushai in the Lushai Hills and Kuki in other parts of northeast India. The

Burmese government vaguely identifies several sub-ethnic groups under 'Chin' nomenclature, of which some are: Awa Khami, Chin, Gunte (Lyente), Gwete, Kaung, Khami, Khawno, Lushei (Lushay), Lyente, Meithei (Kathe), Mgan, Mi-er, Miram (Mara), Naga, Ngorn, Sentang, Taishon, Tanghkul, Tapong, Thado, Tiddim (Hai-Dim), Wakim Zo, and Zo-Pe.

In the Burmese classification then the Kuki, Naga and Meiteis, belonging to single mongoloid stock and speaking Tibeto-Burman languages, are all categorized in a single 'ethnic' category. In India, the government recognizes Kukis, Meiteis and Nagas as three separate ethnic entities. Meiteis, despite their limited adoption of Hinduism do retain many a tribal practices and the clanship structure seems more in tune with tribal social formation. These historical factors may have prompted 'tribes' such as Aimol, Anal, Maring, Monsang, Moyon Kom, Thangal to adopt Naga 'identity' for availing advantages. Today however Naga – Kuki enmity is more apparent in terms of their respective claims for territorial supremacy mostly in those parts/districts of Manipur, which are part of the 'declared Nagalim' of NSCN.

The Nagas of Myanmar are called Eastern Nagas. They are found in Sagaing Division and Kachin state. Burma claims that the Nagas attended the so-called Panglong Agreement in 1947 and that they agreed to join Burmese Union along with other ethnic communities. The term Naga, now trendy in India –Burma area, is a value loaded cliché, forced by valley dwellers upon highlanders, who were often found scantily dressed. In pre-colonial 'headhunting' days till colonial era, the Naga segments (tribes/sub tribes) were made to alter and adjust their ethnonyms, as they came in contact with 'exogenous' agents, valley Kingdoms, valley dwellers, traders, British and colonial officials. Valley based Ahom Kings granted Nagas with revenue free canals and plots – Naga Khats (Das 1989: 56). These were arranged with the understanding that the Naga would refrain from 'raids' in the Assam plains. Trade relation existed too and Nagas favoured barter- trading (a major medium of exchange) of salt, cotton, medicinal herbs, ivory, bee's wax, mats, and daos (adzes) for Assamese rice, cloth, and beads. Manipur kings had maintained formal traditional links with the hill Nagas. A sort of ancestry of the Nagas is found in the Royal Chronicles of Manipur in which a Manipuri king Meidingu Lairen Phakhamba mentions Haochong village of Impui Nagas around (33-150 C.E.) and another Manipuri king Ningthourel Lamba mentions the same village around (662-762 E. C.). Based on this evidence, scholars believe that the Nagas could have migrated and settled in the present land at least before 2nd century B.C.E (Kamei, 2010). These varied linkages of the Nagas with the valley kingdoms, though sporadic, disprove arguments that state formations in valleys were constrained.

The "Barbaric-Anarchic" Hypothesis vis-à-vis Self-Governance: Ethnographic Illustration of a Naga Tribe

Zomia concept, as outlined by James Scott, defines uplands of Zomia region as a 'non-state space', peopled by those who are essentially 'maroon, runaway, populations' who, over the past two millennia, peopled the hills pursuing swidden-agriculture and foraging in large part (Scott 2009:276-279). Scott says the state has particular difficulty in establishing any authority over Zomia highlands (Scott 2009:13) where he sees "escape social structure" and practices of dispersion, fission, and

'statelessness' designed to evade state structures. Scott regards upland societies as lawless and ungoverned people (Scott 2009:279). No doubt, Scott's claims have been questioned by many scholars who have known societies in uplands and who have long ethnographic experiences in the region. Thus, Tom Brass (2012) maintains that it is incorrect to characterize upland as 'state-repelling' 'zones of refuge/asylum' to which people voluntarily migrate. Zomia, according to Brass is an idealization, consistent with the 'new' populist postmodernism, but not supported by ethnographic evidence. Conceptualization of Zomia through statelessness ('societies as lawless and ungoverned') we may argue, neglects the existence of complex systems of social order, law-enforcement, informal ranking and honour, particularly in hills of Indo-Burma borderlands. The hills people adapted to hills variously and indigenously shaped their society and polity patterns. In hills of northeast India, we witness multiple social formations including growth of 'segmentary' acephalous 'stateless' tribes as well as tribes with strong chieftaincies (Nagaland, Mizoram and elsewhere). What is more challenging is that northeast region including immediate eastern Himalaya did witness growth of 'tribal- states' and kingdoms. Diverse polities and societies pursued their own mechanisms of social order and law-enforcement (Das, 2005). These facts refute the basic claims of the Zomianists.

In order to counter the basic premise of Zomia theory, governance model in an 'acephalous' Naga tribe will be briefly elucidated below. Governance is an institution that is a natural reflection of norms, customs and practices. The governance models acquire various forms influenced by environmental factors, normative values, kinship principles, polity formation, societal philosophy and worldview. Among the Naga tribes, law and custom arose out of special martial conditions which influenced diverse polity fruition. Since the colonial era, 'indirect rule' in tribal areas was launched by recognizing the customary laws, including the traditional modes of dispute settlement and informal law-enforcement mechanism. Like in colonial era, the tribal mode of governance remained unaffected and the customary authorities continue to persist in the hills of northeast in independent India.

The Zounuo-Keyhonuo Nagas (Southern Angami), representing a segmentary stateless tribe, live in villages located in southern hill ranges in Nagaland-Manipur border, adjoining Japfu peak. This author had collected ethnographic data from the major Zounuo-Keyhonuo village Viswema during 1977-78 under a PhD programme (Das 1993). Later in 1989 and again in 2011 as visiting fellow of ASI, this author had further conducted fieldwork in same village. Data used here are mostly from these various studies. In Viswema village, like most of Naga Hills, 'independent' clans occupy distinct clan-territories and enjoy jural and economic rights over well-defined land and forest areas including water resources and fishing areas. Lineages also have their distinct land and forest areas including water resources and fishing areas. In the absence of a distinct political authority, the lineage-clan elders/headmen emerge as key figures in maintaining social control and jural order. In this tribe the married daughters also enjoy jural rights over paternal property which includes land. Despite the existence of about eighty percent of Christianity adherents, the villagers have 'retained' a great deal of long-established values and ritual practice. In their traditional wisdom the villagers have their own typology of wrongdoings and internal mechanisms of dispute resolution. The offenses are regarded as wrongs and transgressions and are ordered by the villagers in terms of their cruelty. In this tribe there are informal adjudicators

who resolve trouble cases, although such adjudicators do not have formal status needed to enforce their decisions. Surmising the field data of 1978, this author had earlier observed that:

“The mechanism of social control, the rules of conduct and the customary laws among the Zounuo-Keyhonuo cover a complex and wide range including the rights and duties of the villagers, marriage laws, rules for the relations between husband and wife, parents and children and between siblings and other kinsfolk, the law of property relating to land tenure, cattle and other animals, and inheritance, and for the variety of legal wrongs against the person” (Das 1993: 45).

In Viswema the peaceful compromise is the most preferred mode of dispute settlement. Peaceful compromise is called Kezekevizhonu in Viswema dialect. If the parties fail to compromise peacefully the elders present suggest them to opt for the oath administration, as per century –old custom. The oaths are taken by both contenders one by one claiming lives of family members. Normally a person taking an oath on larger number of lives of his kinsmen with enormous self confidence the decree goes in his/her favour. During my last visit to the village in 2011 I was told that the legitimacy of oath taking is still in vogue and even in the district level customary law courts the oath administration is often resorted to in order to decide the complicated cases. Indeed, any oath, whereby lives of others are made responsible for its truth, as well as the life of the swearer, is usually accepted by either party (Das 1993:95).

The Zounuo-Keyhonuo village Viswema is self-sufficient economically as people get adequate produce by depending on both pani-kheti (wet terrace rice cultivation) and jhum-kheti (shifting cultivation) judiciously. The terrain of the hills does not offer enough scope for a large scale conversion to terrace fields hence the Viswema villagers eke out their food supply by growing potatoes in jhum or shifting fields. Villages located in the summits of hills are systematically drained and succession of fine terraces of paddy fields maintained for centuries using indigenous knowledge, under guidance of clan elders and headmen. Terraces have some natural source of water supply (i.e. streams) or man-made irrigational water channels – dzuye (Das 1993:65-67). The water flows down from the upper terrace to the one below and a complicated system of water rights governs its distribution. Indeed water in Viswema is a cause of many disputes. In questions involving water, water channels, and streams the agnates, siblings and neighbours often tend to be rivals. In Zounuo-Keyhonuo society precise economic rights and jural liabilities exist in unison with descent principles and kinship rules. Prominent headmen and rich individuals often articulate their demands and priorities by influencing some obliging kinsfolk. Some actors even redefine the lineage pedigree and capitalize on the support base gained through allies (obliging kinsfolk) vis-à-vis rivals (or other agnates) and thereby make strategic choices with support of their allies (Das 1993:117). These are more contemporary occurrences observed in the village. Nonetheless, despite modern-time aberrations, ultimately the village solidarity remains intact. Even during 2011 field investigation this author could not identify a single individual or a family which tried to drastically undermine the descent principles and kinship rules which define the stateless polity of this tribe.

Indirect Rule and Colonial Enforcement of Legal Pluralism

In order to control village administration official headmen were selected and nominated as 'gaon-bura' and 'dobashi-interpreter'. This method of administration, called as 'Indirect Rule' was common feature of colonized countries of Asia and Africa. Nevertheless, the clan and village elders, in the hills regions of northeast India, continued to be influential being the custodians of kinship norms and lineage and clan affiliated economic resources (forest, arable land, water channels). Indeed, the tribal areas were placed 'outside the jurisdiction of the normal colonial administration', as affected through Scheduled Districts Act XVI, 1874, and later the Assam General Clauses Act, 1915, which had legitimised tribal customs and practices. The Government of India Act, 1935, divided the Hills Districts/ Areas into 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded Areas' and stipulated that "no Act of the Central or Provincial Legislatures would apply to 'excluded' areas". The Naga Hills district, the Lushai Hills district, the North Cachar Hills, CHT and the North-East Frontier Tracts were specified as 'excluded areas' (Das 2015: 34). Over the passage of time, the Dobashi-interpreters, by virtue of their experience and knowledge, were inducted as official adjudicators in colonial district headquarters. The non-heinous crimes were tried by the traditional village authorities, as also the dobhashis, and penalties were awarded as per conventions of customary laws. However, heinous crimes like murder, extortion, armed robbery and arson were brought under the Indian Penal Code (Law Research institute, 1987:662). This was the commencement of an early trend of legal pluralism, introduced and implemented in hills areas (Das 2012).

Mechanism of indirect governance, through gaon-buras and the dobashi courts was retained after independence. The Dobashi courts, 'un-codified' legal systems, came to be placed at par with the codified state legal systems. Further, in independent India, different tribes were brought under special safeguards provided in Indian constitution. In Nagaland, for example, 'Naga customary law and procedure' is protected by the Article 371A of Indian Constitution. The proclivity to settle most of the cases through the 'traditional justice system' and its acceptability has ensured speedy resolution of grievances and significantly lessened the extent of litigation, as observed in the Nagaland State Human Development Report, October 2004 (Report, 2004, Department of Planning and Coordination; Government of Nagaland; Kohima, Nagaland). Gradually, several amendments were introduced and 'major' disputes were brought under state juridical courts. Even people belonging to same tribe or same village were given option to 'challenge' the customary village court and DB court and appeal at higher courts of law. A review of judgments passed by state courts shows that the original verdict passed by customary law courts are sustained in most cases.

In Nagaland and other hills areas, one witnesses today numerous 'development' related new laws, which have led to displacements also. These new laws have indeed confronted century old customary rights, and have directly crushed the basic tenets of customary laws and clashed with customary land rights of tribespeople. For example, the Nagaland (Ownership and Transfer of Land its Resources) Act, 1990 (Nagaland Gazette - 6th July, 1993) may be perceived as a direct threat to 'sovereign' customary ownership right of Naga tribespeople. Such examples, being the feature of policy of 'legal

pluralism', tend to collide with basic code of Article 371A (Das 2012). At the same time, such interface of customary tribal law with modern administrative and legal systems in North East India has led to lopsided development in the form of sidelining the women issue and ushering in an era of class struggle (Pereira, Melvil. 2009).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this brief analysis, an attempt has been made to juxtapose the themes of indigeneity, borderlands and memory to discuss the relevance of theory of Zomia vis-à-vis 'tribes' of India-Burma/ Myanmar – Bangladesh frontier. Borderlands are 'the contact zones, imagined geographies, and discourses that produce both order and violence' (José Antonio Lucero 2014). In reality, there are more issues involved, as we discussed above, from sociological and historical perspectives. In actual fact, one notices contradictions and differing perceptions with regard to delimitation of the border between India and Burma and the border tribes. In general the Indian state did not impose any rigid regulation and thus the free movement regime continues to provide the tribes the access and opportunity to intermingle with each other. The Naga and Chin tribes, on both sides felt that their homeland has been forcibly alienated by the two nations. Historically speaking, the colonial rulers had segregated allied 'tribes', in diverse 'administrative' zones, to maintain 'order' in the frontier. Creation of 'Inner line' between hills and plains was the clever ploy to divide and rule. On the eve of independence of India, the indigenous people of highlands realized the futility of their incorporation within new India-Burma nations, without their consent, and they expressed such feelings furiously. This factor led to the growth of resentment and steady feelings of 'in-group' vis-à-vis 'out-group' (Das 2007). The border region of India, Burma and Bangladesh has been the scene of tribal resistance since the independence of India in 1947. These resistance movements virtually link up to the discourse of indigenous rights (Das N. K. 2015). There is need to relate such rights of indigenous and minority communities in any analysis of ethnicity and historicity pertaining to border areas. Independent India continued the policy of indirect control, granting special rights to the tribal customary authorities and the inner line policy remained in force in the hills, which barred plains-people to enter the hills. The special provisions and self-governance institutions established to provide 'autonomy' in India's northeast barely thrived though.

In contiguous hills the subsequent governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh (since 1971) moved towards 'inclusion of the tribal territories'. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts this attempt of national inclusion resulted in a vicious war between indigenous insurgents and the state. The Peace Accord of 1997 seems to have not solved the local problems and conflicts, which are mainly related to 'land-grabbing' by Bengali settlers (Khairul Chowdhury, 2014). The tribes in adjacent northeast India too experienced the processes of dispossession and dislocation. Though peace parleys are going on with region's major militant outfits, such as NSCN and ULFA, some tribes of northeast India are in the forefront of militant conflicts seeking self-determination.

Until 1948, Burma's diverse peoples lived within its ill-defined borders. For over six decades, the army has been battling diverse ethnic insurgencies. The authorities continued to regard the Muslim and Christian religious minorities with suspicion. In 1989 the government began a policy of seeking cease-fire agreements with most ethnic insurgent groups along the borders. By early 2012 a total of 12 armed groups had respectively signed preliminary peace agreements with the government at state or central levels (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/burma.htm>). Naga insurgents are based in the Kachin state of Burma and have been supported by Kachin insurgents (Cultural Survival, Inc., CSQ Issue: 11.4 (Winter 1987) Militarization and Indigenous Peoples: Part 2 Africa, Asia.). The Nagas prolonged struggle of 'self-determination' pertaining to Greater Nagaland or Nagalim involves liberation of two administrative divisions of Myanmar, mainly Kachin state and Sagaing division. There are both trans-national syndicates for organised crimes and insurgents taking advantage of the porosity of the border to pursue their own agendas. In these borderlands the tribal nationalism is certainly stronger than state nationalism.

The article has pleaded that there is need to re-contextualise and reinterpret the tribespeople's own insights and sensitivities in volatile border areas, where the creation of new nation-states gave birth to fragmentation of indigenous Mongoloid 'tribes'. Thus, the issue of indigeneity and the fluctuations inherent in identity-formation as also diverse experiences of people spread in transnational frontier region, such as India-Burma-Bangladesh zone, needs to be re-examined. The sentiments of people regarding the 'homeland' and memory pertaining to indigeneity/ethnic origin are strong. The article has also touched upon the deceptive colonial pigeonholing and arbitrary labeling of tribespeople in colonial era, which was part of hegemonic rush to catalogue the subjects. As we discussed, the Naga, Mizo, Kuki are not primeval ethnic nomenclatures. They are generally the colonial era fabrications. They are also not single entities ('tribes'). They are rather constellation of dissimilar social formations. Having been on move, when they settled in specific territories, in the hills terrain, various clans and small segments diversely identified themselves and were differently labelled by their immediate/distant neighbours. In the Burmese classification, in reality, the Kuki, Naga and Meiteis, speaking Tibeto-Burman languages, are all categorized in a single 'ethnic' category. In India, the government recognizes Kukis, Meiteis and Nagas as three separate ethnic entities.

Zomia being the major thrust of the article, author discussed how folklore and memory of homeland is sustained by Zomi and allied 'tribes' now placed on both sides of borders over vast Indo-Burma borders, in order to reclaim the original 'identity'. In these borderlands, the struggle for identity and indigeneity is projected through folkloric illustrations and historical processes of 'memory' articulation. It is argued that the Zomia concept, despite being highly debatable, provides a model to combine social history, historical ethnography and geography specially to study the struggles of indigenous minorities, seeking preservation of basic heritages. We have observed that in the actual ethnographic scenario many a conceptual features of Zomia do not match. Thus, notwithstanding certain essentials of upland culture appearing uniform in terms of language, culture, textiles, animism, shamanism, and practices of shifting-cultivation, the projected generalization about highland

societies/polities being 'anarchic' seems too idealistic, even in historical milieu. No highland tribe is "lawless" and they indeed function in accordance with their customary laws and through self – governing institutions, which in contemporary times have the backing of the modern state, though disastrously.

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