

Ethnic History and Identity of the Zo Tribes in North East India

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North East India is a hotspot of identity crisis and ethnic divisions. The Chin, Kuki, Zomi and Mizo tribes who are collectively known as Zo people are no exception. They have close cultural, lingual and religious affinities and a common ancestor called Zo. Historically, they have different theories of origin and migration based on their folklores, folktales and songs narrated down from one generation to another. The different origin theories like the Khul/Chhinlung or Cave origin theory, Chin Hills origin theory and Lost tribe (Manmasi) theory are among the most significant theories so far which speak, to some extent, something about their history and origin. Of late, the Lost Tribe theory has gained momentum which claims that the Zo tribes are among the ten lost tribes of Israel, particularly from the tribe of Manasseh. Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar had recognised them as descendents of Israel in 2005, which was also approved by the Israeli government. Many have consequently immigrated to the 'Holy Land'. In this backdrop, this paper attempts to critically analyse and assess the ethnic origin of the Zo people with special reference to the lost tribe theory. Based on cultural and oral traditions, and Biblical sources, it also attempts to support that the Zo people are the ten lost tribe of Israel by substantiating various arguments to validate this origin theory.

Keywords: Zo, Khul origin theory, Chin Hills theory, Lost tribe, Manmasi

Introduction

The Zo people are indigenous tribes of Manipur and Mizoram in Northeast India, Bangladesh and Chin State of Myanmar. They are believed to be the descendents of a common ancestor known as Zo though they are variedly known today as Chin, Kuki, Mizo or Zomi. They resemble in physical appearance and also have close cultural affinity and mutually intelligible. Their traditional religious practice was animism but they were converted into Christianity during the past hundred years. Lately there are also proselytised Jews increasing among them.

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They have different theories of origin before coming to their present locations. Their place of origin is traced differently by different scholars. Till recently, their actual original home is shrouded in almost a complete mystery (Khai, 1995: 8) except the view that they originated from a cave called *Chhinlung/Sinlung* or *Khul*. However, there are many scholars who hold the view that they are the descendents of one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. The most common theories on the origin of the Zo tribes may be discussed as below.

Chhinlung/Khul or Cave Origin Theory

Many early local writers claimed that their forefathers once dwelled in the bowels of the earth variedly known to them as Chhinlung, Sinlung and Khul, believed to be somewhere in China.¹ They came out of this hole and spread to different directions in batches, as far as Northeast India. This Chhinlung/Khul or whatsoever name has generally been understood to mean a cave or tiny vale surrounded by hill locks. The popularity of this theory has subsided though it was once a celebrated one. It is however, supported by a number of their folklores, legends and songs like:

*Kan siengna Sinlung ram hmingthang,
Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai,
Chawngzil ang kokir thei changsien,
Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai.*

(My Motherland, famous Sinlung,
Home of my own ancestors,
Could it be called back like Chawngzil,
Home of my own ancestors).

*Khaw Sinlung ah,
Kawt siel ang ka zuong suok a;
Mi le nel lo tam a e,
Hriemi hrai a.*

(Out of city Sinlung
I jumped out like a mithun;
Innumerable were the encounters,
With the children of men.) (Pudaite, 1963: 21; Lalrinmawia 1981: 24)

*Eiteng khawkhawm atuam omlou
Vannuai chiteng khul a piang,
Tun sungkhat a piang hi ngeingei.*

(We all are bonded in one, no one stranger,
Everyone under the sky born in Khul
Born surely from the same ancestor). (Zamzachin, 1992: 2)

The exact location of Chhinlung is quite uncertain. Different writers claim different locations according to the extent of the wisdom of the early informants. Some historians believe elsewhere in China as the location of *Chhinlung*, from where the Zo tribes made their existence before they immigrated to Burma. Some others locate *Chhinlung* to be in the South West China or that of the Sining in Central China while the others suggest the

term, 'Chhinlung' to be a derivation of the Chin dynasty of 221-207 BC (Lalrinmawia, *op. cit.*). Some scholars opine that the Zo group lived in caves around 246-219 BC when the Chinese Emperor Shi-Huang Ti ruled over China. They stated that the Zo ancestors lived in caves or pit known by their memory as *Chhinlung*, *Sinlung* or *Khul*, where they were supposed to have hidden themselves from the Chinese Emperor, who had conscripted them as labour force for building the Great Wall of China (Lenthang n.d: 9; Lian, 2010: 107). Zamzachin (*op. cit.*: 3) claims that the location of *Chhinlung/Khul* to be in Tibet. Another native writer, Piangzathang (1989: 3) hinted that their ancestors migrated to Mongolia and China from Tibet whence they entered Burma and Chin Hills and during the course of their nomadic lives, they at times settled in caves (*Khul*) due to lack of permanent home, which came to be known as *Khul/Chhinlung* later.

Obviously, the ancestors of Zos wandered from place to place during the course of their migration and took shelter in caves, holes, pits and hill locked vales which later on descended down to their memory as *Chhinlung*, *Sinlung* or *Khul* according to the tongue of each tribe. Therefore, there exists confusion in the whereabouts of this location. As their ancestors wandered through the length of Tibet, China, Mongolia, Burma and the Chin Hills until they reach their present settlement, the location of *Chhinlung* could be speculated to be in Tibet, China, Burma and even within the Chin Hills. Such speculations of the varied locations of *Chhinlung* exposed the hollowness and fallacy of this theory. The term which varies in its name like *Chhinlung*, *Sinlung* and *Khul* too denigrate its authenticity. As Z.Z. Lien (1981: 19) writes: "Whatever may be the case, the word, 'Chhinlung' or 'Khul' as the other groups call it was an imaginary homeland of the U-Now people (kindred tribes) in those far off days." He added that "it is impossible to admit the whole community in a small room of constant darkness."

Piangzathang has stated that it is a matter of words orally passed down from the father to the son narrating that 'we' are born of *Khul*, and thus so, the earliest ancestors they could be able to tell is Songthu, Songza and Zahong. This gives us a clear picture that the *Chhinlung* origin theory is only a myth or a hypothetical statement of human memory. In fact, no modern scholar would neither believe nor maintain the vague theory that human being is born out of a cave or pit. Instead, the majority of the scholars who share this idea stated that these people had once lived in the *Chhinlung*, rather than maintaining that they originated from it. Thus it appears that the claimants themselves and their supporters were illusive to their stand, finding themselves at lost on how to pursue the point further. It therefore seems to look like a book cover without any page inside.

The Chimnuai (Chin Hills Origin) Theory

Vumkhohau, Tualchin Neihzial and few others held the view that the Zo ancestors first lived at Chiimnuai in the Chin Hills of Burma from where they dispersed in different directions. Vum Ko Hau (1990: 1) has written: "The Chins living in the Northern Chin Hills believed then mostly that their foremost fathers settled in Chimnuai, Saizang from where they spread to other places in the Chin Hills".

As they went in various directions, those who went towards the south were known as the Suktes and Simtes, meaning southerners, and those others who migrated to the

north came to be called the Hmars meaning northerners, those others who moved to a particular position of land called Gangam are known as Gangtes, still others who went out and built a large and prosperous village of Khovaiphei were designated as the Vaipheis and the rest who peddled beyond the Guun River as far as Manipur, Mizoram and Assam came to be known as the Paites, meaning "On Goers". The Thadous were called the "Khongjais" by the Meitei (Manipuris) after their settlement in Manipur (Ibid., 10-11; Haokip, 1998). During the Colonial period, they were referred to as "Kukis" by the Britishers. "Kuki" as a generic term originated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh which most probably means "hill men", because these tribes mostly settled on mountain tops for security concern (Hangshing 2004). To these days, "Kuki" is used to denote the Zo tribes of Assam which is supposed to be a derivation of a Bengali word (Soppit, 1893: 1-2; George Scott, 1911: 104). Songtinlam has maintained that the term "Kuki" is derived from the Bengali or Paktoon word, "Coochi Manu" meaning nomadic tribes, as Coochi means nomads or wanderer (Songtinlam 1997: 45). His view is supported by L.S. Gangte (2001) as he has stated that "Kuki" is taken from Baluchistan word, "Kuchi" which means nomads, and as the English could not spell out the proper sound of "Chi", they pronounced it as "Ki", thus the name "Kuki" derived.

The remaining group of tribes in the remote hills were known by the British as Lushai or Lushei when they penetrated the Lushai Hills, presently known as Mizoram. The Colonialists included a number of tribes within the Lushai fold because these people had the same appearance, customs and livelihood and spoke the same language of dialects which were akin to one another. The hills they occupied were designated as the Lushai Hills. Vumson (2003: 2) has written that "the British knew the Zo people as Lushai, Kuki, New Kuki, Khyang, Chin and Plains Chin."

Those who remained in the Chin Hills towards the South of Manipur were broadly classified as "Chins" who were sub-divided into many more tribes and clans. And the hills they belong to came to be known as the Chin Hills after its name. However, the term "Chin" is also considered to be an application of a foreign name which the people themselves do not admit and do not call themselves to these days by this given name (Stevenson, 1986: 11; Khai, 1984: 2).² It appears to be derivation of a Burmese word, which probably means "basket" (Gangte, op. cit.), as the hill tribes in Burma used to carry a bamboo basket on their back. The other meaning is "friend" or "ally" which implies that they became the friends of the plain Burmese (Vumson 2003: 4).

Whatever derivations they might be, it must be understood that the Zo people entered the Chin Hills not earlier than 1200 AD and therefore, they are not the permanent settlers of the land. So, the Chin Hills origin theory is also not a reliable fact on the history of the origin of the Zo people.

Israel Origin (Lost Tribes) Theory

This theory has become the most reliable theory on the origin of the Zo people. It has been the most convincing and acceptable one which goes current not only among the Zo people but also among the other scholars observing them. It is propounded by many local writers, scholars, researchers and intellectuals as well as layman like Khuplam Lenthang, Navi Songtinlam, T. Sailo, Lalchhanhima Sailo, F. Lala, Z. D. Lalhnuna, N.

K. Nathanael, T. Kamkhotuan and Zion Ginpu Hangshing. Hilel Halkins is a freelance foreign journalist who has published his research about these tribes worldwide.

Scholars who advance this theory claim that the Zos are “Chhinlung Chhuak” from the same progenitor, sharing similar customs, culture, traditions, language, religion and social practices (Lala, 2002: 62).³ They asserted that the term “Lusei” was derived from the word, “Lusie”/ “Lucie” or “Luz” meaning “ten tribes” (Chib, 1984: 301; Lalthangliana, 1975: 70).⁴ The ten tribes are believed to be the ten lost tribes of Israel after the conquest of Northern Kingdom of Israel and plundered by the Assyrians in around 722 BC. Many writers asserted that the Zos are one among the lost tribes scattered by the Assyrians and belong to the tribe of Manasseh. They generally substantiated their view on the basis of traditions, folklores, songs and tales which the tribes possess through the ages.

The following incantation uttered by the priest during a sacrifice to cure a person from typhoid fever illustrates Jewish identity.

Manmasi Aw Tuipi Tuita kan in na hong
Tanglian tangneu kan in na hong
Melmak gamlei tuangtun in,
Asin alung na deihman hi
Asin alung na tangin Manmasi. (Hangshing, n.d: 6)

(Oh Manmasi! You came crossing rivers and seas
 Over mountains and hills
 Across the lands of strangers
 It is because you want the heart and liver
 Acquire the heart and the liver Manmasi.)

Chants were meant to propitiate the spirits believed to cause illness. In times of their distress or fear, the Zos’ forefathers muttered chants which included the name of Manasseh/ Manmasi. For instance, to escape from fury of storm or earthquake, lore like “*Zahngai in zahngai in Manmasi naute ka dam nauve*” (Be patient! The children of Manmasi are fine) were repeatedly uttered.

Tradition holds that the progenitor of the Chin, Kuki, Mizo and Zomi tribes is Zo (Vumson 2003: 184.), which was written variedly as Yo, Sho, Cho, Zo, Yaw or Jo (Khai, 1984: 3-4). Diverse spelling apparently occurs due to the fact that different scholars gave their own way of spelling depending upon their linguistic affiliation and ethnic background. Many scholars came to believe that Zo as a person was Joseph/Yoseph, found in the Bible. Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob (Yacob), progenitor of the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph was the father of Manasseh, from whom the Zos traced their descent and origin (Songtinlam 1997: 43ff). The old edition of Chamber Twentieth Century Dictionary (Geddie 1971: 1354) also affirms that “Zo” was derived from Joseph.

Khai (*op. cit.*:4-5) writes:

...the term Zo (Jo/Yo) had existed long before the Tibeto-Burman people entered into Burma or at least before the time the Chin ancestors settled in the Chin mountains- the Chin State. So it would confidently be concluded that the term Zo or Jo or Yo had originated long

before a date indicated by any present historical evidence. So, the term Zo expresses its universal character in its existence in history.

The Diaspora

In 722 BC, the Assyrians under King Shalmaneser invaded the Northern Kingdom of Israel and ravaged the city of Samaria. Hoshea (732-723 BC) was the King of Israel while Ahaz (736-716 BC) ruled in the Southern Kingdom called Judah. Many Israelites were brought captive by the Assyrians while the rest were dispersed in all directions. The Kingdom of Judah, however, survived for some more years until Jerusalem was captured in July 587 BC. The splendor of Judah then ended and the Jews were exiled into Babylonia. This event took place when Zedekiah (598-587 BC) was the king of Judah and Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon (Scofield, 1945).⁵

With the Persian ascendancy in around 550 BC, the Jews were permitted to return back to Palestine. The Edict of Cyrus in 538 BC allowed them to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple which was done in 337 BC. The Walls of Jerusalem which had been destructed were also restored during 445-443 BC. However, Jerusalem was recaptured in 63 BC by the Roman General Pompeii. Since then Palestine was ruled in succession by puppet kings appointed by Rome, one of whom was Herod the Great who ruled from 37-4 BC. These events eventually scattered the Jews in different directions known as the Jewish Diaspora.

Many scholars hold the view that the lost tribes dispersed towards the East as far as Tibet, China, Burma, India and Bangladesh. When the tribes intermingled with other nations like the Chinese, Burmese, Shans and Tibetan tribes during the course of their migrations, they had forgotten or discarded their true identity, culture, tradition, customs and belief. This finally led them to lose their Jewish ethnic identity.

Many tribes around the globe have now asserted Jewish identity and the Zo tribes are no exception. These assertions have been observed and examined almost everywhere. Karantia (1986) has written:

Israel claims 12 Jewish Tribes in North-East India— The Indian Intelligence community is deeply worried about certain new developments among the tribal population of North Eastern India. It appears that Israel is claiming that the main population in the region is the 12th Jewish Tribe that it has been searching for. In what is called the Diaspora twelve had been dispersed, of this eleven have already been traced and integrated in the Israel State. The hypothesis is that the 12th is in the North Eastern India. Coincidentally, the Intelligence services have been noticing, strange going on in the Area.

Ginpu Hangshing (*op. cit.*: 6-8) has pointed about fifty four evidences to support the Jewish contention while Songtinlam (*op. cit.*: 64-66) has given more than twenty five similarities between the Zos and the Jews. The two writers substantiated their arguments based mainly on tribal customs, culture, traditions and religious practices. Khuplam Lenthang (2005), a well-known researcher for, more than fifty years in this field has collected hundred evidences based on folklores, folktales, priesthood system and ritual sacrifices to justify his claim. He also founded the Nation Research Laboratory to promote his research study.

The Zo forefathers possessed the song of crossing the Red Sea (*Tuipi San Kan La*) and many more festive songs passed down from their forefathers which were similar to what is found in the Bible. The English rendition of the Red Sea Song is as follows:

During the celebration of the Great festival,
 The great red water dried up
 We were led by cloud by day
 Column of fire by night
 Behind our enemies pursued day and night,
 Swallowed up by the great sea like a plague
 The birds moving onward!
 Out of the rock, upon the holy mountain
 That came out flowing water, we fetches, Selah! (Dena, 2008: 10; Haokip, 2012: 218)

Ramchuan Samuelson opines that the Lushais (Mizos) used of the name “Pawla” may suggest some links as the name which is current among the Jews is also commonly used by the Mizos, even before they were converted into Christianity. She stated that the Lushais were quite aware with many of the Bible stories and rituals even before they came to know about Christianity (Samuelson 1985: 2-3).

George Haokip (2008: 2) also writes:

A century ago, when British missionaries entered the region they were astonished to find that the local tribesmen here worshipped one god and were familiar with many of the stories of the Bible. Before long, the missionaries managed to convert most of their population. This must be the reason why conversion is swift and easier here and almost cent per cent has by now been converted into either Christianity, Messianic or Judaism.

Nathanael, a Zo writer who gives no less than twenty evidences in support of Jewish identity, has written about the interview between Laldenga and Indira Gandhi. Accordingly, when Indira asked Laldenga to which tribe he belongs to, the latter replied that he belongs to Mizo. Then Indira told him that “he (Laldenga) doesn’t even know to which tribe he really belongs to”.⁶

On 21 February 1945 a balloon of the size of 1 sq.m fell off near the village of Serchip in the Lushai Hills. The balloon was picked up by two Mizos- Pu Taiduma and Pu Rangkhuma of Serchip and then carried home. By close observation, the following insertions were seen inside the balloon (Lala, 2002: 61):

The balloon was flown out from the World Zionist Organization, California USA 1944. This scientific Programmable balloons was made by the World Zionist Organization which everywhere and there to be gone down and landed in the dwelling regions of the lost ten tribe of Israel. Judah and the lost ten tribes of Israel should be joined together on some day. The written is as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Exodus, Zachariah and Hoses inside the broken balloon which were contained in the Holy Bible.

The balloon was presented to ARH McDonald, ICS Lushai Hills (DC) and as a token of

appreciation. McDonald gave the two persons Rs.8/-, one bag of salt, cups, clothes and other items. This instance is a memorable one in Zo ethnic history. Lala, an ardent promoter of this view from Mizoram asserted that atleast 85 percent of the indigenous songs composed and sang by the Mizos depict the Israeli components (Lala, 2007: 10).

On the occasions of Referendum Declaration of CIPC (Chhinlung Israel People's Convention) during 1-3 December 2000 at Aizawl, Rabbi Jonathan of Israel has affirmed that the Mizos are a lost tribe of Israel (*Ibid.*: 72). Pu Lalthanhawla, the Chief Minister of Mizoram graced the occasion as the Chief Guest with his memorable speech: "I am much delightful to take this opportunity offered by the CIPC to declare about our true ethnic Israel identity today." The Chief Host for the day, David R. Ashkenazi of Israel also stated: "I am very glad that I could be in your midst on this day of Identity Referendum Declaration, and you have now more than fulfilled what is necessary which the coming generations would not forget, by not only proclaiming yourself as a nation but has also started the process of nation building under the recognition of the UN and in accordance with the international law."

The introductory note in the Declaration reads:

First World identity Referendum of the Chin-Lushai_Kuki/Chhinlung Chhuak/Mizo Identity Referendum Declaration and charter of agreement of the Chhinlung Israel, the lost tribes of Israel, scattered in Myanmar, Bangladesh and India under a Non-Religious, Non-Political organization, a forum called Chhinlung Israel People Convention.⁷

The initiative of the CIPC was remarked by C. G. Prasad (2001) of Chennai in his 'Letter to the Editor' of the Week Magazine on the 24 July 2001 as:

...The Islamic World continues to be our Achilles heels. We should plough ahead closer to the US and Israel particularly as our only insurance against Pakistan-Bangladesh-China Chakravayoh. Our greatest dangers are the Jehadis in Kashmir, infiltration from Bangladesh and something akin to East Timor coming up in the North East.

Dr. Judson, a missionary to Burma visited various parts of Burma in 1853. After three years he wrote his "My visiting Countries of the World", in which he mentions that Luz, Chins, Outchins, Kachins, Karens and Siam of Thailand are exactly similar to the ten lost tribes of Israel. He said further, "I want to declare this truth to the world" that every lifestyles and culture of these people are in close affinities with what the Bible has spoken about the ten lost tribes of Israel. Even from their biological appearances, there arises not a case to be suspicious.⁸

Evidences in support of this theory also come from scientific line. A genetic test performed by a team of experts under V. K. Kashyap at Centre Forensic Science Laboratory, Calcutta on September 12, 2004 found a genetic link of the Zos with the Middle East people.⁹ The study compared DNA samples taken from several hundred members of the Zo tribes and from members of various other recognised Jewish communities, as well as from other tribes living near the Zo tribes. Due to some criticisms on the technique of the test performed, another study was conducted by Central Forensic Institute,

Calcutta in 2005 and concluded that “while the masculine side of the tribes bears no links to Israel, the feminine side suggests a genetic profile with Middle Eastern people that may have arisen through inter-marriage” (Sheleg 2005). However, such scientific tests were inconclusive.

Another scientific finding based on medical test suggests that a particular disease, Tay-Sachs and Saitika-Zenghit, a genetic bone disease is inherited by the Semitic Jews. Coincidentally, the same disease which is normally found absent with other racial groups is inherited by the North East tribes of Chhinlung origin. This finding is according to the study performed and reported by Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Science, Lucknow, part of which appeared in Monday edition of *The Telegraph*, 12 May 1997 (Quoted in Lala, 2002: 65).

Hillel Halkin, a renowned international journalist and translator working for the *New York Sun* and *Jerusalem Post* has proved with ample empirical evidences in his research work about the Jewish lost tribes that the Mizo and Kuki tribes of North East India and Chin State, Burma are a lost tribe of Israel. His findings are mainly based on history, culture, traditional social and religious practices, folklores, folktales and migration apart from Biblical parallels. His concluding evidence is so strong that his readers are struck with awe after reading his work “Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe” (2002), a pain staking labour for five years after visiting Mizoram and Manipur thrice between 1998 and 2002.⁹ The book has earned several reviews worldwide soon after it was published in 2002 and has become one of his best selling books so far. Halkin derived much of his evidences from Dr. Khuplam, a self trained researcher and the only ethnographer at work in the area who provided him adequate materials needed for his research. Halkin was influenced by this medical doctor after reading his work, “The Wonderful Genealogical Tales of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo” which was the result of more than fifty years of his research on the Manmasi lost tribe. Khuplam has established his own National Research Office in Manipur and for many years, worked with the help of this centre which earned him several recognitions and awards from private and governmental agencies within and outside.

My People Return

In 2005 the Chief Rabbinate in Israel gave the recognition that the Bnei Manasseh, literally known as the ‘Sons of Manasseh’ in North East India, are a lost tribe of Israel. This resulted into the approval of the Israeli government that the Bnei Manasseh from the Northeast India are apart of the lost Jews and planed to take home in batches these lost tribes who have long been waiting to return. The immigration was, however, frozen in 2007 by the government under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, after some members of the cabinet, in particular the then interior minister, M.K. Meir Sheetrit, opposed it on political ground.

About 1725 members from Manipur and Mizoram had returned to Israel till 2007 since Israel’s Sephardic chief, Rabbi Shlomo Amar issued a formal recognition of the Bnei Menashe as “descendants of the Jewish people” (Chhakchhuak, 2005). Members of the Rabbinic court had visited Mizoram in September 2005 and completed the conversion process for 218 people of the Kuki-Mizo tribes before taking them to Jerusalem

for settlement. In 2007, 230 members left India for the “Promised Land”. After a halt of five years, 275 members were taken to Israel during December and January 2013 by Shavei Israel, a Jewish organisation for facilitating the return of people of Jewish origin to Israel.¹⁰ Another batch of around 240 Mizo Jews left Mizoram in January 2014 in a phase manner. The latest instance of such immigration to the “Holy Land” was witnessed in **May 2014** with the reunion of a decade long separated couple when the husband of an Indian Israeli citizen from Manipur was immigrated to Israel.

Another forum to facilitate such return to Israel is the Amishav, meaning “My People Returned”, headed by Rabbi Eliahu Avichail. These immigrations could lately be resumed after a long halt as a result of the resolution passed by the Knesset, the unicameral legislature of Israel on 24 October 2012, allowing resumption of migration to Israel of the people who are officially accepted as one of the “Ten Lost Tribes of Israel”, a biblical legend (Freund, 2012). The process of inducting new batches are underway till the remaining group of around seven thousand members are completely absorbed to the promised land.

Conclusion

The Zo tribes in Northeast India have been recognised as the lost Jews beyond the Sambatyon¹¹ who have reached their present location a few hundred years ago and are found out after 27 centuries of exile. Michael Freund (2013), founder of Shavei Israel has stated that “we will not rest until all the remaining Bnei Manashe still in India are able to make aliyah as well.”

While the other theories like the Chhinlung Origin and Chin Hills Origin of the Zo people have failed us to give a definite conclusion, the lost tribe theory appears to be the most reliable fact. The other theories of origin have become part and parcel of this theory today. Debates and challenges over the lost tribe origin have always been there but they have subsided over the past few years. It has gained more impetus today due to its authenticity and validity. This historical truth can hardly be ignored to study the ethnic origin of the Zo people.

It is notable that not only the tribes claimed themselves to be the Jewish descendants, but scholars around the globe and more importantly, the Israeli Knesset and the Rabbinic council have also recognised and accepted them as a Jewish lost tribe for over a decade. It is a heave of sigh for the people under study to explore something about their identity and ethnic origin which may otherwise still remain a perpetual myth.

Notes

1. The term “Chhinlung” is a Mizo terminology which means a cave, hole or pit, for the Hmars it is “Sinlung” and the Zomis and Kukis called it “Khul”.
2. Hau Gou, Rev. S.T. *Some Random Thoughts about our People, our Language and our Culture*, Chin Literature Sub-Committee Magazine, 1970-71, p. 9.
3. Nathanael, NK. 2003 “Na Hihna Diktak Thei In (Know Your True Identity)” in *Young Paite Association Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, 1953-2003, Lamka: YPA Headquarters Publication, pp. 78-79.
4. “Lu” is a Burmese word meaning men or tribe and “Se” means ten, “Luse” means ten tribes.

5. Refer II Kings 17: 6, 18: 9-11 and 25: 1-11. Read the whole chapters for detail. Cf. Chronicles 5: 26, II Kings 15: 29.
6. “The Saying of Indira Gandhi and her Brief Biography” in *Bulletin*, Vol.1 Issue No. 2, dated 27 April 2000. See Nathanael, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
7. See Lala, *CIPC Diary*, 2002., pp. 48ff. CIPC is a registered body with its General Headquarters at Aizawl, Mizoram and sub-headquarters in Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The President of the Gen. Headquarter and presidents of all the sub-headquarters appended their signatures in the Declaration. The UN accepted it as a Permanent Agenda on the 13th October, 2000. The referendum copy was submitted to several governments like US, UK, China, India, Burma and Bangladesh.
8. Judson, Dr. *My Visiting Countries of the World*, p. 92, quoted in Lalhnuna, Z.D. 2008, *Zofate Tobul leh Pathian Thu* (Traditions and Religion of the Zos), Aizawl: Hnam Kawng Zawngtute, p. 143.
9. Hillel Halkin says he is “107 percent certain” in his findings. See “Found: A Lost Tribe” in *The Jewish Week*, <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=6535>, accessed on 04 April 2010.
10. “Israel Chief Rabbi greets newly arrived Bnei Menashe immigrants” a report in *www.shavei.org*, 11March 2013, accessed on 10 May, 2013.
11. “Sambatyon” was a mystic river in elsewhere Damascus, Syria which flowed with tremendous force for six days in a week and rested on the seventh day like the Jews do.

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