

## ORIGIN AND MIGRATION OF THE ZO PEOPLE

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North East India is a hotspot of identity crisis and ethnic divisions. The Chin, Kuki, Mizo and Zomi tribes who are collectively known as Zo are no exception. They have close cultural 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 become the most popular and convincing theory which claims that the Zo tribes are a ten lost tribes of Israel, specifically from the tribe of Manasseh. Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar had recognized them as descendents of Israel in 2005 which was also approved by the Israeli government. Many have consequently immigrated to the 'Holy Land'. On this backdrop, it is worthwhile to study the fact about this claim. This article is an attempt to critically analyse and assess the debates about the different origin theories especially the lost tribe theory as the latest tendency. Based on evidences, the article also tries to support that the Zo people are a lost Manmasi tribe of Israel by substantiating various arguments to validate this origin theory.

The Zos are the indigenous tribes of Manipur, Mizoram and Bangladesh. They are variedly known as Chin, Kuki, Mizo and Zoumi with close affinity to dialects and culture. They have different theories of origin before coming to their present locations. Their original home is explained differently by different scholars. Till recently, their actual original home is shrouded in almost a complete mystery,<sup>1</sup> 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 different theories of origin of these tribes who are collectively known as Zo are :

1. *Chhinlung/Khul (Cave Origin) Theory*: This theory has been brought forth by many writers but now the fame has been much slowing down though it has once been a very popular theory. This theory claims *Chhinlung/Khul*<sup>2</sup> to be their original home. It is believed to be somewhere in China or the Chin Hills of Burma. This theory is supported by many tribal folklores, legends and songs. Some of them are—

*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,*

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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.)<sup>3</sup>  
*Eiteng khawkhawm atuam omlou*  
*Vannuai chiteng khul a piang,*  
*Tun sungkhat a piang hi ngeingei.*<sup>4</sup>  
 (We all are bonded in one, no one stranger,  
 Everyone under the sky born in Khul  
 Born surely from the same ancestor).

In fact, the exact location of Chhinlung is quite uncertain. Different writers claim different locations according to the extent of the wisdom of the informants, who are the forefathers of the Zo people. Some historians believe elsewhere China as the location of *Chhinlung*, from where the Zo tribes made their existence before they immigrated to Burma.<sup>5</sup> Some others locate *Chhinlung* to be in the South West China or that of the Sining in Central China while the others suggests the term, 'Chhinlung' to be a derivation of the Chin dynasty of 221-207 BC.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars opine that the Zo group lived in caves during 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.<sup>7</sup> Dr. G. Zamzachin<sup>8</sup> seems to understand the location of *Chhinlung/Khul* to be in Tibet. Another native writer, Piangzathang<sup>9</sup> 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*.

Obviously, the ancestors of Zos wandered from place to place during the course of their migration and took to 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 a speculation 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<sup>10</sup> 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 in those far off days.” He added that “it is impossible to admit the whole community in a small room of constant darkness.”

Piangzathang<sup>11</sup> 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 ideas 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 or reluctant to their stand, finding themselves at lost to how to pursue the point further. It therefore, just seems to look like a book cover without any page inside.

2. *The Chimnuai (Chin Hills Origin) Theory*: Vumkhohau, Dr. 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. Pu Vum Ko Hau has written thus- ‘The Chins living in the Northern Chin Hills believed then mostly that their foremost fathers settled in Chimnuai, Saizang from where they spreaded to other places in the Chin Hills’.<sup>12</sup>

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 Khovaipei 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> To these days, ‘Kuki’ is used to denote the tribes like the Thadous which is supposed to be a derivation of a Bengali word.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> His view is supported by L.S. Gangte 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.<sup>17</sup>

The remaining group of tribes in the remote hills was 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<sup>18</sup> 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 the '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.<sup>19</sup> It appears to be derivation of a Burmese word, which probably means 'basket',<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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.

*3. Israel Origin (Lost Tribes) Theory:* This theory has become the most reliable and reasonable 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.<sup>22</sup> It is propounded by many writers, scholars, researchers and intellectuals as well as laymen. Prominent one among them are Dr. Khuplam Lenthang, Navi Songtinlam, Brig. T Sailo, Lalchhanhima Sailo, F. Lala, Z.D. Lalhnuna, N.K Nathanael, T. Kamkhotuan, Zion Ginpu Hangshing, Hilel Helkins, etc.

Accordingly, the Zo tribes who are supposed to be 'Chhinlung Chhuak' are one and the same people, descending from a common ancestor.<sup>23</sup> They share the same customs, culture, traditions, language, religion and social practices. Even the designated term 'Lushei' is believed to have been derived from the word, Lusie/Lucie or 'Luz' which means ten tribes.<sup>24</sup> These ten tribes are believed to be the ten lost tribes of Israel after the Assyrians conquered and plundered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in around 722 BC.<sup>25</sup> The Zos are considered to be one of the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, particularly from the tribe of Manasseh, known to them as Manmasi. It has been mentioned in many of their

traditions, folklores, songs and tales which are passed down from one generation to another.<sup>26</sup>

Few instances which support the Manasseh identity are as below-

*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.*<sup>27</sup>

Free English rendering—

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.

The above lore is chanted when a ritual is being performed for curing typhoid fever. If one suffers from tuberculosis, the following words will be uttered by the priest in exorcism—

*Van apan nong kumkhia a*

*Leitung ah lah mun na neikei a*

*Tui suahgiat ah lah mun na neikei a*

*Manmasi-te tung a natna nontut*

*Tung a Pa Yah in phallou hi.*<sup>28</sup>

The typical English version is—

You came down from the sky

You have no place on the Earth

You have no place in the sea

So you caused illness upon the Manmasi

Heavenly Yah will forbid you.

The above chant is muttered by the priest who performed a sacrifice to propitiate the spirit which is believed to cause the illness. In times of earthquake, storm or whirlwind, chant containing the name of Manasseh/Manmasi is usually muttered. In order to purify selected jhum site, the following incantation is uttered—

*Pawt un, pawt un, ka chem Takkhum sungah um zousia pawtun,*

*Manmasi Naute kigawljawwna ding ahi*

*Asia abal a um leh maw paw puangka.*<sup>29</sup>

Free translation—

Be away be away, who so ever there is within my surrounding  
 It's a place for the Manmasi's children  
 I shall not be held responsible for any consequence.

On way back home from the agricultural field, the following words used to be uttered—

*Lamsak ah umte, lamthang lam ah umte,  
 Kikhin dok unla kitawl dok unla,  
 Manmasi naute kigawljawwna subuai ki un.*<sup>30</sup>

Free translation—

Who so ever there is at the sideway

Move away in a distance

Do not disturb the free passes of Manmasi's children.

When a fury of rainstorm or earthquake occurs, then the following words are uttered—

*Zahngai in zahngai in Manmasi naute ka dam nauve.*<sup>31</sup>

(Be patient be patient, the children of Manmasi are fine).

According to traditions, the progenitor of the Chins, Kukis, Mizos and Zomis is Zo.<sup>32</sup> It has been written variedly as Yo, Sho, Cho, Zo, Yaw or Jo<sup>33</sup> but they are supposed to mean the same person. Diverse spelling occurs due to the fact that different scholars gave their own way of spelling depending on their linguistic affiliation and national background. Those who subscribes to this theory has held the view that Yo, Yaw, Zo or Jo is Joseph/Yoseph, the eleventh son of Jacob (Yacob), whose other name is Israel as found in the Bible. It is thus believed that Yo, Zo or Jo was Joseph from whom the Zos trace their descent and lineage.<sup>34</sup> Chamber Twentieth Century Dictionary<sup>35</sup> maintains Jo or Joe to mean Joseph/Josepha, the son of Jacob. Joseph had two sons— Manasseh and Ephraim. The Zo group claims themselves to be the descendants of Manasseh.

Sing Khaw Khai<sup>36</sup> has thus written:

“...the term Zo (Jo/Yo) had existed long before the Tibeto-Burman people entered into Burma or atleast before the time the Chin ancestors settled in the Chins 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.”

Vumson and Sing Khaw Khai have grouped the Zos into Northern and Southern Zo, and the land they settled into Northern Zoram (Zo Land), Southern Zoram, Eastern and Western Zoram. Sing Khaw Khai includes the Thadous, Suktes, Siyins (Sihzang), Raltes and Paites as the Northern Zo group. The Tashon, Lai, Lakher (Mara), Lushai (Mizo), Bangjogi and Pankhu are classified as the Centre Zo Group and they are referred to as the New Kuki group. The Southern Group includes the Chins, Weluang, Chinbox, Yindu, Chinbon, Khyang/Sho and Khami/Khumi who

are classified as the Old Kuki group. The other Old Kuki groups are the Rangkhoh, Bete, Hallam, Langrong, Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Hiroi-Lamgang, Koiren, Kom, Purum, Hmar and Chothe.<sup>37</sup>

As written in the Bible,<sup>38</sup> Jacob had twelve sons, who subsequently became the progenitor of the twelve tribes of Israel. Among his sons, Joseph was most loved by Jacob and mostly stayed with him when his other brothers went out for tending the herds. Knowing this, his brothers hated him and eventually conspired against him. One day, when Joseph came to deliver provisions in the grass land where they fed their flocks, they caught him and sold him off to Ishmaelite traders who in turn sold him to Potiphar, the Captain of the guard for Pharaoh in Egypt. There, Joseph earned the favour of his master and became his overseer over his house. However, he was wrongfully charged and thrown into prison. Yet, his ability to correctly interpret strange dreams earned him a reputation that he was not only discharge but was subsequently promoted to the highest post of office next only to the Pharaoh. He married an Egyptian who bore him two sons. Soon after, severe famine broke out all over the land and Joseph got the opportunity to meet his brothers who came to Egypt to procure grain. He subsequently brought the whole family of Jacob to stay with him at Goshen, a grassy place in Egypt.

After the death of Joseph, the Israelites were ill treated by the next Pharaohs who made them a slave for four hundred and thirty years between c.1700-1250 BC. Being alarmed at their increased population, every male born child of Israel below the age of two was decreed to be killed in Egypt. However Moses, a beautiful baby escaped this sentence as he was hidden beside the river Nile where Pharaoh's daughter found him and adopted him as her own son. Moses grew up with all the facilities of royalty in the Egyptian Palace but he knew himself that he was a Jewish by birth. In c.1250 BC, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and sacrificed his whole life for his people otherwise he would be the crown prince of Egypt.<sup>39</sup>

After forty years of journey towards the 'Promise Land', the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua reached Canaan in c.1210 BC, Moses having died already. They occupied the Land to establish a powerful kingdom by defeating the six major tribes who had inhabited the Land of Palestine. However, the Israelites still remained a loose confederacy of tribes, leadership being exercised by heroic figures known as Judges.

Between c.1030-1010 BC, Saul ruled over them as the first anointed king of Israel, the first time ever in their history. King David, a mighty and great ruler succeeded him for forty years (c.1010-970 BC). David was succeeded by his son, Solomon (c.970-93 BC) for another forty one years and his reign marked the zenith of the Kingdom of Israel. After the death of King Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel broke into two parts—The Southern Kingdom called Judah, ruled by his son Rehoboam and the Northern Kingdom called Israel, ruled over by King Jeroboam. The two tribes of Judah and Benjamin made their allegiance to the Southern King

Rehoboam (931-913 BC) while the other ten tribes of Israel paid their obeisance to Jeroboam (931-910 BC). Jeroboam was a man of valour whom King Solomon had made him as labour minister in his time.<sup>40</sup>

In 722 BC, the Assyrians under King Shalmaneser invaded the Northern Kingdom and ravaged the city of Samaria. Hoshea (732-723) was then the King of Israel while Ahaz (736-716) ruled in the Southern Kingdom called Judah. Many Israelites were brought captive by the Assyrians while the rest dispersed in all directions. The Southern Kingdom of Judah, however, lingered on for some more years until Jerusalem was conquered in July 587 BC. The fall of Jerusalem too ended the glory of Judah. Hereafter the Jews were taken into exile in Babylonia. This event took place when Zedekiah (598-587) was the king of Judah and Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon.<sup>41</sup>

When the Persians gained supremacy in around 550 BC, the Jews were granted the right to return back to their homeland. The Edict of Cyrus permitted the Jews to return home in 538 BC and the foundations of new Temple in Jerusalem was laid in 337 BC. The Walls of Jerusalem which had been destructed were restored between 445-443 BC. However the holy city, Jerusalem, known as the abode of God 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 BC to 4 BC. These events resulted into dispersal of the Jews known in history as the Diaspora.

### **The Zos in Diaspora**

After the fall of Samaria in 722 BC, the ten Northern tribes of Israel were in exile. They were considered as the 'lost tribes' for their whereabouts were difficult to ascertain. When the Jewish state of Israel was born in May, 1948, many Jews from around the globe returned back to this 'Promised Land' but none from the Manasseh tribe was found. The Israeli government was worried the whereabouts of this particular tribe.

There is a difference between the lost tribes and the scattering tribes. While the 'lost tribes' have lost their identity in the lands where they exile, the 'scattered tribes' still retain most of their identity in one form or the other. The search for the lost tribes is a primary concern while the scattered tribes were easily traceable. The recent view is that the lost tribes dispersed towards the East as far as India, China, Burma and Bangladesh. Moreover, the lost tribes intermingled with other nations in the course of their migrations and discarded their identity, culture, tradition, customs, belief and religion that they began to practice the customs and religion of the other people around them. This in the long run made them to assume themselves that they are apart of the people whom they live together with.

It is believed that the lost tribes might still have been in large numbers in elsewhere Mongolia, Tibet, Indonesia, Vietnam and South West China. If this is



true, it must be highlighted that in the course of their journey, the lost tribes moved towards the east while the other scattering Jews went westward and formed a mighty and powerful nation in Europe and America. In conjecture, some western nations are assumed to belong to the tribe of Ephraim. The term, 'British' came from the two words, 'BRIT' meaning 'Covenant' and 'ISH' meaning 'People', and the combination of the two denotes 'covenant people.'<sup>42</sup> The same nation immigrated to America and built a united states known as USA.

Many lost tribes around the globe have now reasserted Jewish identity and the Zo tribes are no exception. This assertion has been a process of survey and research studies today. R. K. Karantia has thus written—<sup>43</sup>

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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> is in the North Eastern India.

Coincidentally, the Intelligence services have been noticing, strange going on in the Area.

Zion Ginpu Hangshing<sup>44</sup> has hinted out a list of not less than fifty four evidences while Songtinlam<sup>45</sup> has given more than twenty five similarities based on customs, culture, traditions and religious practices which justify the Manmasi claim. Both of them give their evidences mainly from the Old Testament of the Bible and ancient traditions of their forefathers. Dr. Khuplam Lenthang<sup>46</sup> has been well-known for his research of more than fifty years in this field. He has collected as many as hundred evidences based on customs, culture, folklores, folktales, priestly ritual and sacrifices to justify his claim. Khuplam also founded the Nation Research laboratory for this purpose.

The following folksongs illustrate this connection—

*Mihing kipatna hilta ningla YA-EH (Yahweh)*

*A bulpi suita ningla YA-EH (Yahweh)*

*Minu Mipa Leila noisia e*

*Mikuan nati tang e aw YA-EH (Yahweh).<sup>47</sup>*

Its typical rendering goes as—

Let me narrate the root of man YA-EH (Yahweh)

Let me explore the root (of man) YA-EH (Yahweh)

Having trounced the enemies;

Would I ask who he is YA-EH (Yahweh).

The song of crossing the Red Sea (Tuipi San Kan La) and many more festive songs have been possessed by the Zo tribes passed down from generation to generations from times immemorial which supported the lost tribe theory. The English translation for 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!<sup>48</sup>*

Ramchuan Sena Samuelson has written in her book 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 Christianity enters the Land. She added that the Lushais were quite aware with many of the Bible stories and rituals even before they came to know about Christianity.<sup>49</sup>

George Haokip 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.<sup>50</sup>

N K Nathanael, who has also given not less than twenty points of argument in support of this theory, has written about the interview between Laldenga and Indira Gandhi. 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.<sup>51</sup>

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—<sup>52</sup>

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, the two persons were given Rs.8/-, one bag of salt, cups, clothes and other items. Then what connection does the balloon and the Lushais (or Zo) have? F. Lala has stated that atleast 85% of the indigenous songs composed and sang by the Lushais depict the Israeli components.<sup>53</sup>

On December 1-3, 2000 at Aizawl, Rabbi Jonathan of Israel has declared to the world and in front of the Assembly of thousands that the Mizos are one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. He also distributed one thousand Israeli shawls to the Mizos on the day.<sup>54</sup> On 28 October, 1999, the CIPC had declared a referendum of the Mizo (Chhinlung Chhuak) Israel and the then Ex-Chief Minister of Mizoram, Pu Lalthanhawla who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest stated in his memorable speech as, "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 stood up and said—"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 building a nation under the recognition of the UN and in accordance with the international law."

The introductory note in the Declaration runs thus-

"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."<sup>55</sup>

The initiative of the CIPC was remarked by C. G. Prasad of Chennai in his 'letter to the Editor' of the Week Magazine on the 24<sup>th</sup> 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 Chakravyooh. Our greatest dangers are the Jehadis in Kashmir, infiltration from Bangladesh and something akin to East Timor coming up in the North East."<sup>56</sup>

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.<sup>57</sup>

To some extent, 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.<sup>58</sup> The study compared DNA samples taken from several hundred members of the tribes and from members of various other recognized 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”.<sup>59</sup> 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 *The Telegraph*, Monday, the 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1997.<sup>60</sup>

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 in searching 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’,<sup>61</sup> a pain staking labour for five years after visiting Mizoram and Manipur thrice between 1998 and 2002.<sup>62</sup> 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.

In 2005, the Chief Rabbinate in Israel had given its recognition that the Bnei Manasseh, literally known as the ‘Sons of Manasseh’ in North East India are one lost tribe of Israel. This led the Israeli government to approve that the Bnei Manasseh from the Northeast India are apart of the lost Jews and plan to take home in batches the remaining group who have long been waiting to return. The immigration was,

however, frozen in 2007 by the then government, headed by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, after members of the cabinet, in particular the then interior minister, M.K. Meir Sheerit, opposed it on political grounds.

About 1725 members from Manipur and Mizoram had returned to Israel till 2007 after Israel's Sephardic chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, issued a formal recognition of the Bnei Menashe as "descendants of the Jewish people."<sup>63</sup> 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 flying 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 last December and January 2013 by Shavei Israel, a Jewish organization for facilitating the return of people of Jewish origin to that country.<sup>64</sup> Another such forum is the Amishav, meaning 'My People Returneth', headed by Rabbi Eliahu Avichail. Previously on October 24, 2012, the Knesset, the unicameral legislature of Israel, passed a resolution allowing resumption of migration to Israel of people who are officially accepted as one of the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel", a biblical legend.<sup>65</sup>

It is an undeniable fact that the Zo tribes in India have been recognized as the lost Jews beyond the Sambatyon<sup>66</sup> who have reached their present location a few hundred years ago and are found out after 27 centuries of exile. Michael Freund, 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.'<sup>67</sup>

While the other theories like the Chhinlung Origin and Chin Hills Origin of the Zo people not only failed us to give a definite conclusion, the Lost tribe theory has turned out to be not only a mere theory, but a palpable truth. The other theories of origin have become part and parcel of the lost tribe origin theory today. Debates over lost tribe issue have been there in the past but the challenge have subsided over the past few years. Thus, the Lost Tribes theory gains more and more impetus within and outside due to the fact that it has become the most convincing and authentic one. It could not be ignored in so far as the original root and ethnic identity of the Zos is to be traced in history.

#### *Notes and References*

1. Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture*, Khampu Hatzaw Publication, Churachandpur: 1995, p. 18.
2. 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'.
3. Pudaite, Rochunga, 1963, *The Education of the Hmar People*, Sielmat: Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, p. 21. Also see Ralrinmawia, 1981, 'Pre-Historic and Historic Migration of the Mizos' in *Proceedings of the North East India History Associations*, Second Session, Dibrugarh: NEIHA, p. 24.
4. Zamzachin, 1992, Dr. G. *Paite Tanchin* (Paite History), Imphal: p. 2. It is a Paite folk song, usually sang in accompaniment of drum and gong.

5. Hangshing, Thathang 2004 'The Zoumi Traditional Tribal Value' in *NEHU History Association Newsletter*, Shillong: NEHU.
6. Lalrinmawia, *op. cit.*
7. Khuplam, Dr. n.d. *A Brief History of Kuki and Meitei*, Imphal: p. 9; Rev. Vungh Suan Lian, 2010 'Eite Kuate (Who We Are)', in *Zolus Journal*, No. 14, Yangon: p. 107.
8. Zamzachin, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
9. Piangzathang, 1989 *Guite Khangthu Leh Ngeina Dante* (History and Culture of the Guites), Lamka: Goukthothang Memorial Trust (GMT), p. 3.
10. Lien, Z. Z. 1981 *The U-Now People*, Churachandpur: p. 19.
11. Piangzathang, *op. cit.*
12. Vum Ko Hau, 1990 *History of the Zoumi (Chin) Race*, Tualchin Neihsial (ed.) Zougam Research Publication, p. 1. The name, 'Zo' is the progenitor of the Chin, Kuki, Mizo and Zoumi and is therefore a generic term to mean all these tribes, thus a bigger connotation.
13. Haokip, P.S. 1998 *Zale'ngam, The Kuki Nation*, KNO Publication; Vum Ko Hau, *Ibid*, p. 10-11.
14. Thathang Hangshing, *loc. cit.*
15. Vum Ko Hau, *op. cit.*; Soppit, C. A. 1893 *A Short Account of the Kuki Lushai Tribes on the North East Frontier*, pp.1-2; George Scott, Sir J, 1911 *Burma, A Handbook of Practical Information*, p. 104.
16. Songtinlam, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 45.
17. Gangte, L. S. 2001 'Zomite leh Kipumkhatna (The Zomis and Unity)' in *The 53rd Zomi Nam Ni Souvenir*, Lamka, p. 72.
18. Vumson, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
19. HNC Stevenson, 1986 *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes*, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, Reprint, p. 11; Rev. S.T. Hau Gou, *Some Random Thoughts about our People, our Language and our Culture*, Chin Literature Sub-Committee Magazine, 1970-71, p. 9; Singkhawkhai, 1984 *The Cultural Meaning of the Racial Name Zomi*, Tualchin Neihsial (ed.) Zougam News Research Pub, p. 2.
20. L.S. Gangte, *op. cit.*
21. Vumson, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
22. Haokip, George T. 2008 'Kuki-Chin-Mizo: The Lost Tribes of Israel' in *The Sangai Express*, a local English daily, Tuesday, 11 Sept., p. 2.
23. 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; Lala, F. 2002 *CIPC (Chhinlung Israel People Convention) Diary*, Lamka: Translated Version, pub. by Pu Dolian Colney, p. 62.
24. 'Lu' is a Burmese word which means men or tribe and "Se' means ten, 'Luse' means ten tribes. Chib, S. S. 1984 *Caste, Tribes and Culture of India*, Vol 8, North-Eastern India, New Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, p. 301 Lalthangliana, B. 1975 *History of Mizo in Burma*, Aizawl: Zawlbuk Agencies, p. 70.
25. Haokip, George T 2012 'Jewish Lost Tribes in the Hill Areas of North-East India' in his edited *Problems of Hill Areas in North-East India*, New Delhi: Maxford, p. 216; Songtinlam, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

26. Songtinlam, *op. cit.*, p. 57; Zion Ginpu Hangshing, n.d. *Manasseh/Manmasi, mongoloid Jews in North East India*, Churachandpur, p. 6. Both the terms, Manasseh and Manmasi refer the same person. Slight variation exists but one could neither be claimed genuine nor did the other reject as conjured. In personal interview, E. Soikhanthang, Govt. Teacher, (Retd.) who is well versed in this field, states that the above variation exists perhaps due to the improper pronunciation of any one of them. He points further that it is not a matter of concern for distinguished journalists like Hillel Halkin, who has maintained that the original terminology in Hebrew is not definitely known, therefore 'how you are using might be more correct than how the English have used it, who knows.' The current Hebrew terminology is Menasha.
27. Ginpu Hangshing, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Songtinlam, *op. cit.* p. 57.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
32. Vumson, Dr. 2003 'Zo People: Where did they come from?' in *Young Paite Association Golden Jubilee, 1953-2003 Souvenir*, Lamka: YPA Headquarters Publication, p. 184.
33. Sing Khaw Khai, 1984 *Cultural Meaning of Racial Name 'Zomi'*, Lamka: Zogam News Research Publications, pp. 4-5.
34. Songtinlam, *op. cit.*, pp. 43ff.
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36. Sing Khaw Khai, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.
37. *Ibid.*; Lalrinmawia, *op. cit.*, p. 30; Soppitt, C. A. 1976 *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes*, Aizawl: p. 7; Vumson *op. cit.*, pp. 40ff.
38. Scofield, Rev. C.I. (ed.) 1945 *The Holy Bible*, New York: Oxford University Press, See Genesis 37, 39-46.
39. *Ibid.* Exodus 1-12.
40. The Bible, I Samuel 9; II Samuel 2-5 & I Kings 2ff.
41. Refer II Kings 17: 6, 18: 9-11 and 25: 1-11. Read the whole chapters for detail. Cf. I Chronicles 5: 26, II Kings 15: 29.
42. Ginpu Hangshing, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
43. Karantia, RK. 1986 'The Tribal Population of North East India, Israel Claims 12 Jewish Tribe in North East India' in *BLITZ*, 20th Sept.
44. Hangshing, Ginpu *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8.
45. Songtinlam, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-66.
46. See Khuplam Lenthang Dr. 2005 *Manmasi Chate (Kuki-Chin-Mizo) thulhun kidang masa (The Wonderful Genealogical tales of the Manmasi)*, Moreh: Hill Tribals' Council.
47. Songtinlam, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
48. George, 'Jewish Lost Tribes', *op. cit.*, p. 218; Cf. Lal Dena, 2008 *In Search of Identity, Hmars of North-East India*, New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, p. 10.

49. Sena Samuelson, Ramchuani, 1985 *Love Mizoram*, Imphal: pp. 2-3.
50. George, *loc. cit.*, p. 2.
51. 'The Saying of Indira Gandhi and her Brief Biography' in *Bulletin*, Vol.1 Issue No. 2, dated 27/4/2000. See Nathanael, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
52. Lala, *CIPC Diary 2002*, p. 61; Nathanael, *Ibid.*, p. 80.
53. Lala, F. 2007 *Chhinlung Chhuak Movement* (The Movement of Chhinlung Origin), p. 10.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
55. Lala, *CIPC Diary, op. cit.*, 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.
56. Prasad, C. G. 2001 'Letter to the Editor' in *The Week Magazine*, dated, the 24<sup>th</sup> July.
57. Judson, Dr. *My Visiting Countries of the World*, p. 92, quoted in Lahnuna, Z.D. 2008, *Zofate Tobul leh Pathian Thu* (Traditions and Religion of the Zos), Aizawl: Hnam Kawng Zawngtute, p. 143.
58. *Haaretz*, an Israel daily, English Edition, Israel, dated April 1, 2005.
59. Sheleg, Yair 'Bnei Menashe are descendants of ancient Israelites' in *Haaretz* Israel daily, dated, 01/04/2005.
60. Quoted in *CIPC Diary, op. cit.*, p. 65.
61. **Halkin, Hillel** 2002 *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
62. 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 04-04-2010.
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66. '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.
67. Michael Freund, 'The 2,000<sup>th</sup> "Lost Tribe" Bnei Manashe Immigrant Arrives in Tel Aviv' in [www.shavei.org](http://www.shavei.org), January 17, 2013, accessed on May 10, 2013.