

## Who are the Zo/Mizo People?

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The Mizo/Zo is a Tibeto-Mongoloid group of people. Our ancestral homeland of the ZO people was around the South-Eastern Tibet and Western China. They speak a common language belonging to Assam-Burma branch of Tibeto-Burman family having affinity with Filipino, Brunei, Malaysia, Thai, etc. both in the language and culture. They form a group of Tibeto-Burman peoples inhabiting the Mizoram state, Tripura State, Manipur State and Chin Hills in Myanmar and Chittagong Hill Tract of Bangladesh. They are also recorded as Kuki or Chin-Kuki by many colonial civil servants

Mizo or Zo is the name of an ethnic group of people that occupy Northwest Burma, Northeast India, and Northeast Bangladesh, they are and normally known as Lushai, Chin and Kuki by the outsiders. However, a single name "Chin" or "Lushai" or "Kuki" has technical limitation within its own context, since the Mizo (Lushai), the Kuki, the Bawmzo and other ethnic groups would not normally accept a single identity collectively. When the British divided the ZO inhabitation with three international boundaries into India, Burma and Bangladesh; the above stated three main distinctive identities submerged, although those given names are not being used locally and unknown to the natives initially.

### **Meaning and definitions**

The word "Zo" has many literal mean "higher altitude", and "Mi" means "people". Due to external dominance and influence, the Bengali and Assamese called them Kuki, the Burmans called them Chins, the British called them as Lushai or Kuki but the Zo people never called themselves by those names.

The Zo people have been known under different names. They were wrongly identified as Kukis during the time of Lord Warren Hastings when Administrator of Chittagong sought help of the British against the Kuki raiders, and it continued to be applied to the whole group until 1871 when it was supplanted by the term Lushai as a result of the active and prominent part taken by the Lushai, sub-tribe of Zo race, against the British Expedition known as the First Lushai Expedition.

The Lushai-Hills District was thus carved out of the Zo land for administrative convenience and the Zo people living within the District came to be known as Lushais while the other Zo left out of the Lushai Hills District and annexed to the surrounding Districts, continued to be known as Kuki without their consent. However, the solidarity of the Mizo people as a race and a distinct block is testified by the name of places, mountains, and ranges of Manipur State, Cachar (Assam state), Tripura State and Mizoram state of India, Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and Chin Hills of Myanmar (Burma) known and called after the names of them. Shakespeare, Stevenson, Rev. Liangkhaia, Shaw, Kingdonward and Kim of the Statesman are some of the authorities on this.

The ZO people have nothing in common with the Bengali and Assamese nor with the Naga or Manipuri, etc. Wherever they go and wherever they are, they carry with them their primitive customs, cultures and mode of living in its purest origin, always calling and identifying them as Mizo.

The Word "Kuki" is only a name given by the British and the neighbouring foreign nations.

Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck who place Zo people under modern system of administration record as thus: *"Those of the Kuki tribes which we designate as "Chins" do not recognised that name.....they call themselves YO (Zo)...and YO (Zo) is the general name by which the Chins call their race"*.

Another European writer, Sir J. George Scott also claimed that, the Zo people never called themselves by such names as Kuki or Chin or Lushai. He wrote: *"The names like Kuki and Chin are not national, and have been given to them by their neighbours. Like others, the people do not accept the name given by the Burmese and ourselves; they do not call themselves Chins, and they equally flout the name of Kuki which their Assamese neighbours use. They call themselves Zhou or Shu and in other parts Yo or Lai."*

Prof. F.K. Lehman, Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics, University of Illinois (USA), who had done extensive study on the Chin of Burma, said: *"No single Chin word has explicit reference to all the peoples we customarily call Chin, but all - or nearly all of the peoples have a special word for themselves and those of their congeners with whom they are in regular contact. This word is almost always a variant form of a single root, which appears as Zo, Yo, Ysou, Shou and the like"*

The most accurate historical records of the Zo were written by Rev. Fr. Vincentious Sangermano, a Roman Catholic missionary who came to Burma in 1783 A.D. He wrote a book entitled *"A Description of the Burmese Empire"*, which was published in 1835 A.D in Rome in the Latin language. Later on it was translated into English by William Tandy D.D. *"To the east of the Chien Mountains is a pretty nation called 'Jou'. They are supposed to have been Chein, who in the progress of time have become Burmanized, speaking their language, although very corruptly, and adopting all their customs."*

William Shaw also wrote: *"The Koms, Aimols, Khothlangs, Thadous, Lushei, Chirus, Pois, Suktes, Paites, Gangtes, etc are undoubtedly all connected. The language also has many similarities and the syntax is not dissimilar"*.

### **The People:**

The Mizos are a numerous family of tribes, closely knitted together by common tradition, custom, culture, mode of living, language and rites. They are spread over a wider area extending beyond Mizoram State, Manipur State, Cachar (Assam State), Tripura State, Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and Chin Hills of Myanmar (Burma) contiguous with the boundaries of the present Lushai-Hills District which was carved out arbitrarily for administrative purpose.

According to the first written records, which was the Memorandum submitted to His Majesty's Government and the Government of India and its constituent Assembly through the Advisory Sub-Committee by the Mizo Union in April ni 22, 1947. In this memorandum, 47 sub clan of Mizo or ZO are included, these are:

1. Lusei 2.Hmar 3. Ralte 4. Paite
5. Zo 6. Darlawng 7. Kawm 8. Pawi
9. Thado 10. Chiru 11. Aimual 12. Khawl
- 13.Tarau 14. Anal 15. Purum 16. Tikhup
- 17.Vaiphei 18. Lakher 19. Langrawng 20. Chawrawi

21. Bawng 22. Baite 23. Mualthuam 24. Kaihpen  
25. Pangkhua 26. Tlanglau 27. Hrangkhawl 28. Bawmzo  
29. Miria 30. Dawn 31. Khumi 32. Khiang  
33. Khiangte 34. Pangte 35. Khawlhiring 36. Chawngthu  
37. Vanchiau 38. Chawngte 39. Ngente 40. Renthlei  
41. Hnamte 42. Tlau 43. Pautu 44. Pawite  
45. Vangchhia 46. Zawngte 47. Fanai etc etc.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact population of the Zo, because all the Zo people were divided into three countries. Dr. Vumson, in his book, *“Zo History”*, which was written in 1986, estimates thus: *“There are currently about two and a half million Zomi.... about half of them live in India and the other half in Burma and Bangladesh..”*

According to the 1991 Census, the total populations of Mizo/Zo in different states of North Eastern India were:

State Number of Zo people in state

Arunachal Pradesh 0

Assam 1,031

Manipur 8,240

Meghalaya 3,007

Mizoram 5,00,146

Nagaland 0

Tripura 4,910

TOTAL 5,17,334

*(Tribal land Alienation in North East India: laws and relations, UA Shimary, Guwahati 2006 Pg 8)*

The total population of Zo language 6,74,756 speakers in India (2001 census) There were 9, 07,585 Chins, 19,724 Lusei with the total of 9, 27,309 Zo people in Myanmar on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002 ([www.chhaktiangzirlaite.info](http://www.chhaktiangzirlaite.info)). According to census taken by the Bawm Social Council in 1998 is over 20,000 (twenty thousand). That means there were at least 16, 22,065 (sixteen lakhs) of Zo people in Myanmar, Bangladesh and India.

Mizo Union Memorandum in 1947 stated that according to the Census of 1941, the Zo people in the Lushai Hills (present Mizoram state) alone number 1, 46,900 with an area of 8,143 square miles. In Manipur state about 70,000 with an area of about 3,500 square miles and in Cachar District of Assam, approximately 9,000 with an area of about 300 square miles again in Tripura state approximately 7,000 with an area of about 250 square miles

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, about 15,000 with an area of about 3,000 square miles and Chin Hills (Burma) commonly known and termed as the Chins, number not less than 90,000 with an area of about 3,800 square miles occupied by them.

Thus the total ZO populations in 1941 alone were roughly 3, 38,400 and the areas about 18,993 square miles.

According to Chhinlung - Israel people Convention Memorandum submitted to the UNO Secretary General in 10<sup>th</sup> February 1998, the Zo population in Mizoram State alone around 8,00,000 (Eight hundred thousand) with an area of 22000 Sq.km, Manipur State around 50,00,00 (five hundred thousand) with an area of 9500 Sq.km, Cachar and North Cachar of Assam alone numbers about 20,00,00 (Two hundred thousand) with an area of 1000 sq.km again in Tripura State about 20,000 (twenty thousand) with an area of 800 sq.km.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh alone numbers about 20,00,000 (two hundred thousand) with an area of 7200 Sq.km and in Myanmar (Burma) of Chin Hills, Matu area, Khumi area, Mire area and the Arakan area, etc., contiguous to present Mizoram State of India who are commonly known and called Chin-Lushai-Kuki alone numbers about 3,00,00,00 (three million) with the land area 100000 sqm.

So the total population of Chin-Lushai/ Chhinlungchhuak (that means Zo people) are about 4,72,00,00 (four million seventy two thousands) with the land area of 124500 Sq.km.

According to the Memorandum Submitted by ZoRO in 20<sup>th</sup> May 1995, the total population of Zo people in India, Myanmar and Bangladesh is around 50 Lakhs.

**However, on the basis of the 2001 Census of India, and available Census reports of Bangladesh and Burma, Zo population in India, Burma and Bangladesh can be estimated at around 9-10 million.**

### **The Land:**

As written above, the Mizo or Zo People are spread in Manipur State, Cachar (Assam state), Tripura State and Mizoram state of India, Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and Chin Hills of Myanmar (Burma). The Zoram or Zoland, the Mizo or Zo people living area is situated between 92 ° and 95 ° longitude (East) and between 20 ° and 25 ° latitude North of Equator. The whole area is roughly about 91,000 square miles with a population of about 9-10 million. The Zo dynasty or Zo Kingdom was built sometime between 200 AD and 700 AD.

According to Mizo Union Memorandum in 1946, the Zo people living area in 1941 was: In the Lushai Hills (present Mizoram state ) alone an area of 8,143 square miles, In Manipur State with an area of about 3,500 square miles and in the Cachar District of Assam state around 300 square miles. In Tripura state about 250 square miles, and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, with an area of about 3,000 square miles. In the Chin Hills (Burma) an area around 3,800 square miles occupied by the ZO people. Thus the total area covered by Zo people areas is about 18,993 square miles (30,566.195 Sq Km).

It is a great injustice and terrible that the Mizos having one and the same culture, speaking one and the same language, professing one and the same religion, and knit together by common customs and traditions have been divided into many countries without our will.

S. T. Hau Go, a former Lecturer of Mandalay University and an authority on the Zomi wrote about the Zo people living area: *“Our present geographical distribution extends from the Naga Hills and the Hukawng Valley in the north to Bassein and the Irrawaddy Delta in the south, from the Irrawaddy and Sittang Valleys in the east to the Arakan coast, Bangladesh, Assam and*

*Manipur in the West. In short, we occupy the mountainous region between India and Bangladesh in the west and the Chindwin-Irrawaddy valleys in the east, and the plains and valleys adjacent to these hilly regions”*

Col. E.B Elly, Asst Quarter Master General, also pointed out that, *“All these were people of the same race, speaking dialects of the same language, wearing the same dress, and having the same customs, form of politics, and religious belief... “*

### **The Language:**

The language or languages spoken by the Mizos belong to the Tibeto-Assam branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. The major clans speak different dialects but having strong and direct links to one another. In time the Duhlian dialect of the politically dominant Lusei clan became the lingua franca of the majority of communities under the umbrella of the Mizo nationality.

This dialect received a further boost when Christian missionaries arrived in 1894, namely, Rev. F.W. Savidge and Rev. J.H. Lorrain, who reduced the language into writing, using a simple and effective phonetic Hunterian system of Roman script. An earlier attempt to use the Devanagiri script had been made but met with poor results. Though, as Pu Buanga himself confessed, there is something to be desired for a fuller and more developed system of writing, their endeavour has remained totally successful to this day. The language has a phonetic nature like many other Indian languages which, in a script other than the missionaries had rendered it to, would have an array of phonetic characters beyond the ability of the then Mizos to master, with the effect that the present status would never have been attained.

The Mizo or Zo language is spoken in Mizoram, Manipur, eastern parts of Tripura, northern part of Assam in India and the Chittagong Hill tracts of Bangladesh and Chin Hills and its adjoining states in Burma. Mizo literally means "Highlander" (mi = "people", zo = "highland").

### **Dialects**

Different Zo people have their distinct dialect, some of them were Hmar, Ralte, Zou, Lai (Pawi), Mara (Lakher), Taru, Pangkhua, Bawm(zo), Paite, Zahau, Hrangkhawl, Thado, Anal, Aimawl, Gangte, Kawm, Chawte, Tarau, etc

#### *Writing System:*

The British Christian missionaries started developing a script for the language adopting the Roman alphabet with a phonetic form of spelling based on the Hunterian system of transliteration. The letters are: a, aw, b, ch, d, e, f, g, ng, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, \, u, , v, and z.

#### *Sounds:*

Later there were radical developments in the language where the symbol â used for the sound of long o was replaced by aw with a circumflex, and the symbol a used for plain o was changed to aw without any diacritic. The following few words suggest that Mizo and the Burmese are of the same family: kun ("to bend"), kam ("bank of a river"), kha ("bitter"), sam ("hair"), mei ("fire"), that ("to kill"), ni ("sun").

Posted by Zo Indigenous Forum at [11:52 AM](#) [Links to this post](#) \_

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