

KUKI CULTURE AND ORIGIN

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To be ignorant of what happened
before you were born is to be ever
a child. For what is the value of
human life unless it is interwoven
with past events by the records of
history?

- Marcus Tullius Cicero
(106-43 B.C.)

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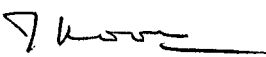
January 5, 1984

CERTIFICATE

This Dissertation entitled "KUKI CULTURE AND ORIGIN" by Mr. HOL KHO LUN LHUNGDIM for the Degree of Master of Philosophy is an original work and has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any University.

We recommend this Dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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'TO GOD BE THE GLORY'

Jawaharlal Nehru University,
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H. Lhungdim
(HOL KHO LUN LHUNGDIM)

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We read the past by the light of the present, and the forms vary as the shadows fall, or as the point of vision alters.

- J.A. Froude (1818-94)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Lying in the easternmost corner of India and bordering Burma, Manipur (which can rightly be called a mini India with its outwardly appearance of Unity amidst diversities of culture, race and past history), is peopled by Hillmen and Plaindwellers when spoken of in general. But, on closer observation, it can be seen that both the Hilldwellers and Valleydwellers, within each, have distinct characteristics in their social, cultural and religious life. The Meiteis, Muslims and outsiders (colloquially known as 'Pangals' and 'Mayangs' respectively in Manipur) form the plain dwelling peoples, while, Kukis and Nagas form those inhabiting the hilly regions. Quite contrary to the Meiteis, Muslims and Mayangs, the Nagas and Kukis have further sub-divisions among themselves. While the Nagas comprise of tribes like the Tangkhuis, Kabuis, Maos, etc., each speaking a completely different dialect, the tribes connoted by Kuki were: "Anals, Aimols, Chirus, Gangtes, Hmars, Koms, Lisheis, Paites, Purams, Raltos, Soktes, Thadous/Thados, etc.",¹ each able to understand another's dialect and having a common social and cultural life and place of origin. Upto the time of the promulgation

1. Grierson, G.A. Linguistic Survey of India, vol.III, Part III, Delhi, 1904, pp.2-3.

of the list of tribes recognised or scheduled by the Govt. of India in 1956, these tribes were identified by others as 'Kukis'. But since then, each tribe has been recognised as a separate tribe.

The oneness of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of tribes (whose past is a dim past, "a past that has no record except that inscribed upon the hearts of the people by the accumulation of experience after experience related from father to son down through the ages"² is known "only from comparatively modern times"³) can be clearly known from the universal characteristics they possess (possessed). These universal characteristics recorded by some writers like Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck were: "the slow speech, the serious manner, the respect for birth and the knowledge of pedigrees, the duty of revenge, the taste for and the treacherous method of warfare, the curse of drink, the virtue of hospitality, the clannish feeling, the vice of avarice, the filthy state of the body, mutual distrust, impatience under control, the want of power of combination and of continued effort, arrogance in victory, speedy discouragement and panic in defeat".⁴ With the exception of the Meiteis (the Meiteis are also included in

2. Mc Call, A.G. *Lushai Chrysalis*, Luzac & Co. (England), 1949, p.29.

3. Grierson, G.A. *op. cit.*, p.2.

4. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. *The Chin Hills*, vol.I, Rangoon, 1896, p.165.

Kuki-Chin in the Linguistic Survey of India, vol. III, Part III), all the Kuki-Chin tribes "lived in a nomadic state for some centuries"⁵ and gradually "the Kukis migrated to Manipur in the eighteenth century"⁶ (7) in two groups - one group entering from the eastern side bordering Burma and the other from the south via the Lushai hills (Mizoram).

Legends hold that from time immemorial the Kuki tribes lived together and considered themselves as one and the same people amidst inter-tribe rivalries and feuds. But due to the opportunistic and suppressive modes followed by the earliest few Kuki learned men, all the different Kuki tribes petitioned for the separate recognition of each tribe and its inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes' List promulgated by the Govt. of India in 1956. Accordingly, the Govt. of India approved their petitions and thus separated the once inseparable tribes (their petitions being further pressurised by some leaders of the hill who were not Kuki-Chin themselves, and who also wanted to play the old British policy of 'Divide and Rule' and bring about disunity among the brave, intelligent, adventurous and populous Kuki tribes). Besides, "soon after independence, the tribal groups living in this area (Manipur South District) felt the need for solidifying their

5. Grierson, G.A. op. cit., p.2.

6. Singh, K.S. (Ed.) Tribal Movements in India, vol. I, Manohar, New Delhi, 1982, p.53.

group identity on the social, economic and political fronts"⁷ and most of them (even the leaders) say that "they are not to be called "Chin' or 'Mizo' or 'Kuki'"⁸ anymore as "they feel convinced that the whole group must advance culturally, and educationally".⁹ A writer in Burma also remarks that the "people now living in Mizoram dislike being called Kukis. In fact there were no more Kukis in the true sense of the word. Still Thado and Khuangsai (Khongsai) of Manipur are mentioned as Kukis".¹⁰ With the separate recognition of tribes the Kuki nomenclature became only of name, and to some, even being identified by it has become awkward. Even today, the Kuki Students' Organisation of Manipur's initiative for re-unification under Kuki is still mistaken to be 'old wine in a new bottle'. But, of late, having realised the undeniable need for their unity and realising they have started reaping the bitter fruit of selfishness and obscurantism sown by the earlier leaders (the present socio-political and economic disharmony), there has come up a group which believe that the Kuki-Chin-Mizos could all come under 'Zomi' (zo' is the name of the farthest progenitor of the group traced so far, and

7. Ibid., p.127.

8. Ibid., p.127.

9. Ibid., p.127.

10. Lalthang Liana, B. History of Mizo in Burma, Zawlbuk Agencies, Aizawal, April 1977, p.69.

'MI' means Man, thereby implying descendants of 'Zo') as they find historicity, authenticity and a possibility of unity under it. It is a matter of time and circumstance as to its success or failure, but it will be unfortunate for them if they cannot come even under this newly discovered name.

The term 'New Kuki' being "synonymous with the Thadou Clan",¹¹ today, when Kuki is used it implies the Thadou tribe only. Thadou, again, is the progenitor of Sitihou, Lhouvun, Singson, etc., sub-clans. Having been a little bit ahead of other clans in the field of education and exposure to the fast developing world, the Thadous foresaw the advantages they would get in putting under their Thadou the other clans speaking the same language such as Lunkim, Len thang, Baite, Lhungdim, Mate, Changsan, Misao, etc., who equally have their own lineages. Even if they had used 'Chongthu' (Please see Chapter on Origin) some of these clans would have still been left out. Unlike the Thadous, other Kuki-Chin tribes do not use the name of one's clan for the tribe's name. But since the early 60s, Kuki has been successfully running parallel to Thadou in the sphere of Literature (Recognition of Kuki as a tribal dialect in Manipur and recommendation of books in Kuki for use in Middle Schools by the State Education Department, and translation of the Holy Bible in Kuki), Politics (the

11. Shakespear, J. (Lt. Colonel) The Lushai Kuki Clans, London, 1917, p.187.

only recognised regional political party in the state besides the M.P.P. (Manipur People's Party) - the Kuki National Assembly and the Kuki Students' Organisation), Religion (Kuki Baptist Convention, Kuki Christian Association, Kuki Christian Church). The change for the 30 minutes programme in the Imphal station of All India Radio from Thadou to Kuki as used in the Kohima and Gauhati/Shillong stations of AIR) and the tribe's name (as in Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and Meghalaya (surprisingly although there are negligible number of Kukis in the state, it is recognised by the State Government as a tribe of the state) is yet to come.

With this background in view, the present study will concentrate on the controversial Thadou language speakers referring to them as Kukis, but at the same time not neglecting other related tribes where mention be necessary. It mainly aims at examining the culture and tradition and start a specific study for a path to trace the origin of the tribe and of the whole Kuki-Chin-Mizo race as it still remains obscure and this obscurity is believed to be one of the main hindrances to their unity. Here, mention of different names by which this race has been identified in different places would prove worthwhile. In Burma they are known as 'Chin', 'Kuki' in the Indian states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura and Chittagong (in Bangladesh). But, "there being no proper name comprising all these tribes... the word Kuki

and Chin are synonymous".¹² The origin and meaning of the word Kuki equally remains in controversy. Writing on the wild tribes of India with a few paragraphs on 'Kookies' Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney records that, "the appellation 'Kookie' is equally unknown to all of them, having been given to them by the inhabitants of East Bengal (Bangladesh)".¹³ Some believe Kuki to have come from Persian 'Koochi/Kuchi' which means nomadic (in this, it is believed that the British identified them with a nomadic tribe in Afghanistan but pronounced it as 'Kuki'). The meaning of 'Chin' equally remains controversial. Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck records that Chin, "is said to be a Burmese corruption of the Chinese "Jin" or "Yen", meaning "man",¹⁴ while, F.K. Lehman writes that, "it is a Burmese word (Khyang), not a Chin word. It is homologous with the contemporary Burmese word meaning "basket",¹⁵ but further states that he is being informed by Professor G.H. Luce of Rangoon that Chin is in fact "an old Burmese word (Khyan) meaning "ally or comrade",¹⁶

12. Grierson, G.A. *op. cit.*, p.1.

13. Rowney, Horatio Bickerstaffe *The Wild Tribes of India*, Thomas De La Rue & Co., London, 1882, p.180.

14. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. *op. cit.*, p.3.

15. Lehman, F.K. *The Structure of Chin Society*, Illinois Studies in Anthropology No.3, The University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1953, p.3.

16. *Ibid.*, p.3.

Therefore, despite their being of the same stock, and scattered and partitioned into different countries to this day as they are, they have been known by different names by outsiders, and so, although the present study particularises on a tribe of the stock, the findings can also be applied to those of other tribes - particularly on the origin, as the mystery or curiosity on this is felt by all of them surprisingly in this supersonic thermonuclear age.

The present study is divided into six main chapters. The first is a brief introduction to the Kukis and of other tribes close to them. The chapter on "Domestic Life" contains short notes on their Habitat and Costume, Houses and Villages, Furniture and Utensils used, Food and Drink and their method of preparation, Domestic animals, Main occupations and Relation with their neighbours. The next chapter deals with the Social Structure covering structure of Kuki family and Kinship Terminology, Marriage, Naming of children, Inheritance and Adoption, Political organisation, Decision of Disputes, Death and Funerary Rites, Religion and Festivals. A brief study of the Advent of Christianity and the Kuki Rebellion (1917 to 1919) form the Fourth chapter. This chapter is only a brief presentation of facts as a detailed study of this may require voluminous writing. In the Fifth chapter, "Theories of Origin" is presented with the 'Khul' (Khoal) Theory and the Israel or Jewish Theory along with the

Migration and present settlements. Here also, a deeper or a more scientific study would require going beyond the limited time besides the available literature and the unrecorded oral tradition of the race, which, for the present study, despite the desire, is quite unthinkable.

Any student making a research on the Kuki-Chin tribes will find that very scanty reliable literature could be obtained for the study. Excepting the books written on them by earlier foreign writers, practically, there is no authentic work by any modern writer, nor is any writer or authority trying to record the distinct culture and tradition of the Kuki-Chin-Mizos and the tribals in general. No doubt, some books are written on them, but the irony and pity combined is that most of these are of commercial motive and fictionalized. Further, if the tribes are taken separately still fewer documents could be found for the information sought. The negligence of tribals in the North-East and other parts of the Asian continent who still live in their traditional jungle life in the midst of twentieth century civilization can be clearly understood by Dr. U. Vam Kho hao's statement that, "In this supersonic and thermonuclear age it is ironic that some of the people of South-East Asia, an area which has produced the Secretary General of the U.N., still remain in the Stone-Age".¹⁷ He further states that inspite of being

17. Vam Ko Hau, Dr. U. Profile of a Burma Frontier Man, Bandung, Indonesia, 1963, p.XIV.

a 'source of delight' to anthropologists financed by 'wealthy philanthropic foundations' (whose main purpose is to record the existing naked "Cultural anthropology"), their upliftment is never thought of nor cared by them (the anthropologists, and the philanthropic foundations financing them). It is also obvious that "Not an inch of cloth has ever been offered by these Philanthropic foundations to aid these people".¹⁸

18. Ibid., p.XIV.

CHAPTER II

DOMESTIC LIFE

1. HABITAT AND COSTUME

Besides being a tribe of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo (Lushai) group of tribes which have been recorded to be nomadic by nature by many writers,¹ nomadism was more prevalent among the Kukis. This migratory spirit they possessed, therefore, scattered them to different states and countries as they are to the present day and has left them without a state or land they can really call their own. Even in the few areas they occupied some decades back, they have been either outnumbered or almost overshadowed by the later immigrants from more interior parts of the state and the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) who were none other than their own affined tribesmen of the race. Besides, the unchecked infiltration of Nepalese in the Kuki inhabited areas particularly in the Sadar Hills District of Manipur by the State Government since early 1950s (For example, "there were about 2,800 Nepalese in Manipur

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1. Ravindra Pratap Singh in his book Geography of Manipur (National Book Trust, India, 1982, p.123) writes, "Some of the tribes among them (Kuki-Chins), particularly the Kukis and Thadous, have migratory practices." Shaw, William's Notes on the Thadou Kukis (Published on behalf of the Govt. of Assam by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1929, p.16) records, "The Thadou (Kuki) is migratory and moves from village to village on the slightest pretext. Sometimes whole villages vanish to be absorbed in others just because they have had enough of the place and the wander-lust has got hold of them".

in the fifties. Being cultivators they live in the hill areas. Their number has swelled to 75,000 (certainly more unofficially)² has had a drastic impact on the Socio-Economic ("the land ownership is changing hands where Nepalese live... This in fact is against the law which prohibits the transfer of tribal land without the sanction of the authorities"³) and political life of the Kukis (It may be worth mentioning that, of the reserved constituencies, in the state, one constituency falling in the Kuki area of Kangpokpi in Sadar hills District has been de-reserved since 1974 mid-term poll by the State Government under instigation of non Kuki-Chin hill leaders who still have the opportunistic and suppressive attitude towards the Kukis who were ahead of them in practically everything in the bygone decades. As a result, the immigrant Nepalese, supported by non-Kukis became the single largest party to face the Kuki candidates and their clannish tribesmen, and thereby become victorious for two consecutive times, or, "in the 1980 elections a Nepalese candidate was returned"⁴). The Kukis in Manipur live "in a large area of hilly country bounded by the Angami Nagas of the Naga hills District (now Nagaland) in the north, the province of Burma

2. Constantine, R. Manipur Maid of the Mountains, Lancers Publishers, New Delhi-48, 1981, p.254.

3. Ibid., p.254.

4. Ibid., p.254.

in the east, the Chin Hills and Lushai Hills in the South and the District of Cachar in the West".⁵ In other words, they occupy the hills of the State of Manipur on all sides of the Imphal valley.

In the neighbouring State Nagaland, Kukis numbering from 14,000 to 15,000 settle mainly in the Kohima district, occupying one of the most fertile regions in the state. There too, as in other states they are found, they are scattered in 35 villages. In Assam also the Kukis are found in the North Cachar District and the Karbi Anglong District. Their exact number is not known, but there also they do not settle in a compact area. In Tripura, the tribe identified as Kuki "would be over 30,000".⁶ Kukis in Bangladesh "Inhabit the Sylhet region"⁷ and "the region West of the upper Chindwin river in Burma".⁸ In the absence of a proper demographic study and scattered to this day as they were, describing the permanent abode of the Kukis today will be a difficult task. But, as far as we could gather information, one may be rightly justified in placing Manipur as the present habitat of the tribe as the state seem to hold the largest/biggest Kuki

5. Shaw, William op. cit., p.11.

6. Shillong Kuki Students' Union's First Annual Magazine, 1981-82, p.1.

7. Kipgen, Khai Kho tin thang The Thadou Kukis, Imphal, 1982, p.2.

8. Ibid., p.2.

population⁹ (comparatively).

Costume:

In appearance, Kukis did not differ much from the other Kuki-Chin tribes (in being of Mongoloid stock), with their "short stature, flat nose, big or plump leg and a bit yellowish in colour".¹⁰ The mature males kept long hair (regularly shaven clean leaving a tuft at the back end of the head before reaching the age of puberty and from thence never to be cut again) and tied in a knot known as 'Tuhcha' on the nape of the neck after being combed back from the forehead and often smeared with pig's tallow. A turban like covering of the head called 'Diel kop' or 'Del kop' covered the hair. The mail's ears also being bored at birth, a 'cornelian bead', considered a valuable item and often forming an item in prices paid for brides, was worn in each ear tied with a piece of cotton to the lobe of the ear. Around the neck a string known as 'SA O/SA AW' was worn with a tiger's tooth, one or two feathers of a cock and sometimes 'a pair of tweezers and thorn pick' all tied separately on the thread of the string as a 'love token'. The shirt worn 'Boitong' was armless, resembling the modern waist-coat or a smock and mostly of white colour although the colour often appeared brownish because of dirt collected through the years. Besides 'Boitong',

9. Grierson op. cit., p.2.

10. Gougin, T. Discovery of Zoland, Churachandpur, 1980, p.13.

one or two clothes were always found with the man to wrap around themselves over one shoulder or both. A loin-cloth was worn almost in the same way as the Indian 'Dhoti' is worn. Either leather or the string tied to the wooden flap holding the 'Dao' called 'Chempai' (Chem=Dao or knife, Pai=Holder) served as belt and this flap and the dao used to produce a funny sound 'Klak-Klok, Klak-Klok' when a Kuki would pass by. A bamboo or cane spun basket 'PAI PEN' for carrying 'odds and ends' like tobacco, tiffin, vegetable, etc., was hung with a leather strap from the shoulder (generally from the left shoulder to the right side entangling the body with the strap - one running down the chest, the other on the back of it). Here, it may be worth mentioning that as every male of the Kuki-Chin race carried this, they might have been identified as 'Carriers of basket' by the Burmese since "basket is also called 'Chin' by the Burmese"¹¹ besides meaning 'comrade' as mentioned earlier. In some places young boys and girls wore a piece of thread tied just above the ankle supposed to make the feet attractive. But only the male tied a wire around the wrist. Very few used wooden and rubber 'chappals' and so the majority walked bare-footed.

Bare-footed like the males, the Kuki women wore a type

11. Lalthangliana, B. op. cit., p.69.

of 'Lungi' called 'Pon Ve' (Pon=cloth, Ve=wrap around) of a particular pattern called 'Khamtang' which is black in colour with skillfully woven design of the cucumber seeds in yellow colour running through the whole length with a breadth of 2 to 3 inches, each line 3 to 4 inches from both the edges. The 'Jem' or design of 'Khamtang Pon ve' (the 'Khamtang Lungi') is believed to be copied from the skin of pythons, of which, there are also many tales. This Lungi covered the breast as it was worn or wrapped tightly over it and tucked on the left hand side below under the armpit. This ran only upto the knee or a little below it. Underneath the lungi was worn a petticoat of red and black stripes ('Nih') which was tied to the waistline with a string and ran only upto a little over halfway down their thighs. The neck of a woman was adorned with this or more strings of red and blue beads called 'Khi or Khiba' (Khi=Necklace, Da=Wear). Ear-rings were also worn, and some areas had unmarried girls wearing thick layers of bangles on both the hands. Although some writers have recorded that "the girls are also shaven..... ..when they reach maturity - sometimes a little before - their hair is allowed to grow",¹² as far as I am able to trace, it appears to be only in some regions like Tamenglong (West District of Manipur) where writers like William Shaw

12. Shaw, William op. cit., p.13.

were based. The women's hair was properly greased with animal oil and after being neatly combed, was parted in the centre of the head and plaited into two strands and brought round the head (the plaited right taken around the back of the head over the left ear and meeting the other which is taken from the other side) and tied in front above the forehead. This tying was convenienced with the help of black strings of thread 'Sam Khao' (Sam=Hair, Khao=thread or rope) plaited together with the hair at the end of the plait.

The clothes used for dresses were all woven from cotton grown on the lands and spun by the womenfolk. A woman's skill in weaving was considered one of the qualities sought by youngmen. Every Kuki girl therefore used to be skilled in it, and a girl not knowing the art of weaving at least the 'Ngou Pong Fon' (white cloth for use as a bed sheet) was a rare case. But since the advent of Christianity, Kuki costumes have changed. Now, long after every man has taken on the modern costume, the women continue to wear the traditional 'Khamtang Ponve' but in a modified form - tucked on the waist and the length reaching the ankle.

Attired in these, the Kukis were very fond of smoking pipes called 'Dum Bel' (Dum=Tobacco, Bel=Pot), "The Thadous (Kukis) used a short metal pipe with both stem and bowl made of brass or iron",¹³ while, the Suktes of a heavy bamboo

13. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.183.

bowl with a 3 or 4 foot stem and sometimes the bowl made of mited clay and baked. The most common pipe used, however, was a bamboo bowl lined with copper or metal to prevent it from burning, smoked with a bamboo stem 10 to 12 inches long. In the olden days the pipe used to be lighted with 'flint and steel', which was carried by almost every Kuki-Chin male for making fire. The Kuki women, in some areas, smoked pipes known as 'Tui Duh' (Tui=water, Suh or Booh=container) or "hubble-bubbles"¹⁴ made of a clay bowl, a bamboo or gourd water receptacle and metal stem in which the smoke passes from the bowl into the gourd or bamboo receptacle, filling the water with nicotine. Kuki-Chin women, particularly those in Burma smoked greatly. But this was not only for the pleasure or taste but mainly to collect nicotine water in the above mentioned procedure which was supplied to the men or their lovers who sipped it as often as possible and did not swallow but spit it out after keeping in the mouth for sometime. Most men also carried a small container called 'Tuibuh' (Tui=water or Nicotine water and Buh=container) made of gourds. But Kukis living in some areas like Tengnoupal District and Ukhrul District seldom used pipes. Instead they smoked cigarettes rolled from partially dried leaves of a particular tree. The tobacco was grown in their own lands and those

14. Ibid., p.183.

who smoke it in rolled form mixed it with 'Song Ko' and 'Thingthal' (names of plants or trees, the later producing a sweet smell). But, in whichever form they took, they smoked greatly. It is said that "one of his (Kuki) few means of calculating time and distance was by the number of pipes he smoked"¹⁵ and "all (men, women and children) smoked to the greatest extent".¹⁶

When dressed in these costumes in the olden days one was able to distinguish a Kuki from other tribals of the regions they occupied, and even made the differentiation among the Kuki-Chin themselves easier as their dresses differed slightly here and there. But with the coming of missionaries with their religion and education the Kuki life, and for that matter those of other tribals began to change gradually. Today, though recognisable from the physical stature to a certain extent, a Kuki may not be differentiated easily from others in dress alone. Every youth prefers to attire himself in the latest fashion of the world than the primitive man's outdated and outfashioned costume. Mention may be made that, "the items and pattern of the dress of the tribal people though suitable to their climatic conditions, economic system and cultural pattern are undergoing a process

15. Steward North Cachar, p.24.

16. Ibid., p.24.

of radical change",¹⁷ and, as mentioned above, "the educated young men and women have nearly rejected the dress of their ancestors".¹⁸ In going for the European dress even with latest modifications, "they look smart and assuring",¹⁹ although, "the materials and fittings needed for the same are mostly imported"²⁰; and thereby, "is bound to impair their economy".²¹

However, in the midst of this fast changing world of fashion and other developments, the Kukis and other tribals have, of late, become conscious of their past and there have sprung up cultural revivalists who are keen on the past culture and tradition of their tribes, and who also fear the ultimate loss of their culture, tradition and customs. The outcome is that although the traditional dresses are not worn all the time, they are worn on functions connected with the traditional festivals by those performing the dances (as on 'Chavang Kut' which literally means 'Autumn Festival' and which is declared as a public holiday by the State Govt. in Manipur and fixed on 1st November every year).

17. Roy, J. History of Manipur, Calcutta, 1958, p.194.

18. Ibid., pp.194-95.

19. Ibid., pp.194-95.

20. Ibid., pp.194-95.

21. Ibid., pp.194-95.

and at times by all participants in the function.

2. HOUSES AND VILLAGES

In choosing a site for a house and its construction, although not compulsory, curious persons liked their dreams to be interpreted and would perform various acts to see if the site chosen for the house and the village was healthy or with bad omens.

The tribe being nomadic by nature and backward, the construction of houses to last them ages was not thought of, nor practiced in any case. Though simple in appearance, the houses were built in such a way that the inside and outside of the completed house had different significant purposes. Being settled in the hills, the ground was first of all levelled or flattened for the construction. Before this knowledge came into being, houses were constructed without flattening - that is, while the "house rests some 3 feet off the ground on the uphill side it is perhaps 15 and 20 feet (depending on the slope) off the ground and supported by long posts on the down-hill side".²² The houses usually consisted of three parts - the front verandah, the main room and in some a small closet partitioned off at the far end ('Pin Dan'), and a back verandah ('Kem Chol'). But generally speaking,

22. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.177.

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especially in very olden times, Kuki houses had a verandah in the front portion one half to the door of the house raised on the level of the floor in the house and the right side of the remaining half without any planks for keeping mortar used in husking paddy. The inside portion of the house was of "usually one room only, which served the family both as living and sleeping apartment",²³ and the houses of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai (Mizo) race were conventionally one-storeyed with no windows or chimneys and the "smoke escaped as it can",²⁴ The average house used to be 20 feet wide and 40 feet long, but in Chin hills, it is said that well-to-do Kukis sometimes built houses 20 ft high, 50 to 200 ft long and 30 ft broad. In other words, the size of the house depended on the position and affluence of the owner. For instance, the chief's house needed to be bigger than those of others as village meetings, festivals, etc. were mostly held in his house (this is practised even today).

The houses looked simple but usually took three or more years to be satisfactorily completed because of the large amount of materials used and also the "poles and planks had to be felled and dragged some miles to the village after they were properly seasoned".²⁵ For planks, trees were felled

23. Davis, A.W. Gazetteer of the North Lushai Hills, Shillong, 1894, p.8.

24. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.177.

25. Ibid., p.178.

and splitted into two and after shaping them by trimming with the 'Dao' or the axe ("after the tree is split into two the axe-head was taken out of the handle and replaced with the face at right-angles to the handle and was thus transformed into an adze"),²⁶ and brought and stored in the village with the help of friends and relatives if the number of planks and other materials for the planned house were many. Usually, the owner offered 'Ju' (fermented rice beer) to his companions on reaching home. However, in the construction of a Chief's house, all the villagers helped him in cutting, transporting, and building the house without any cost and grievances. The walls were made of "bamboo matting"²⁷ and the roof was thatched either with "cane leaves"²⁸ or grasses or with leaves of other plants available in the region and considered best to suit the purpose, and these were tied with splitted and flattened bamboos. The ridges of the houses were "parallel with the floors, and the pitch of the roof was low",²⁹ Besides planks, "splitted and plaited bamboos"³⁰ were also used for the floor. On the front wall of the house, skulls of animals killed by the owner of the house and his ancestors

26. Ibid., p.179.

27. Davis, A.W. op. cit., p.8.

28. Ibid., p.8.

29. Ibid., p.8.

30. Mc Call, A.G. op. cit., p.167.

were hung or exhibited and from this an outsider would easily know the different games found in the area. Human heads brought from battles were never brought inside the village, and in Southern Chin Hills of Burma, heads of even tigers and panthers were not allowed to be included in the collection though allowed in the Northern Chin Hills.

Immediately after entering a Kuki house, one would meet with darkness as there were no windows and this darkness of houses was explained in some Kuki villages as, "wind enters the same apertures as light and that they prefer warmth and darkness to light and wind"³¹, while, some believed that when even "with only one entrance to their houses they find it impossible to keep out thieves, if they had more openings into the house they would have no property left at all".³² In the living-room cum bed-room, there was usually one hearth, made of "mud about 6 to 9 inches deep and 3 feet square"³³ resting on the plaited bamboo floor or the wooden plank floor. In the middle of the hearth, are "three stones of conical shape placed slanting inwards so as to hold the utensils for cooking, and the fire is placed between the stones",³⁴ and three planks hold the mud or clay on the 3 sides away from

31. Carey, S. Bertram & Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.176.

32. Ibid., p.176.

33. Shaw, William Notes on Thadou Kukis, Calcutta, 1929, p.84.

34. Ibid., p.84.

the wall. Above this main hearth of the family are hung 2 to 3 layers of platforms or racks, of which, the first or the lowest layer serve as the drying place for paddy to be pounded the next morning by the women of the family (generally, paddy was pounded for a day or two's sufficiency). The other two layers are used for storing other things like baskets containing dried meat and others. In the lowest layer, above the fire and below the drying paddy are dried meat pierced through lines of trimmed bamboo sticks or small-pointed iron rod. In some well-to-do families, there were often more than one hearth, the other being used when feasting or when necessitated. Beside the fire-place or "on one side of the fire-place was usually placed the family 'four-poster bed', which was raised about a foot above the level of the floor",³⁵ made either of planks or bamboos and this bed was mainly "reserved for the parents",³⁶ while the unmarried girls and children used the other remaining bed in the partitioned portion (if the house happened to have a partitioned room) or placed in the same room. The bachelors or young men, as will be seen later, slept in the 'Sawm' which was very similar to the 'Zawlbuk' - "bachelors' hall" or dormitory of the Lushais (Mizos); though in the former, bachelors used to sleep throughout the year (often in groups) at a chosen girl's

35. Davis, A.W. op. cit., p.8.

36. Shakespeare, J. The Lushai-Kuki Clans, Part I, London, 1917, p.24.

house, all the bachelors of a village or locality used to gather at a house built mainly for the purpose in the centre of the village or in front of the Chief's house in the latter.

✓ In the middle of the houses of the Kuki-Chin race, there is a plinth or wooden post of the house called 'Sut Phung' (pronounced as 'Soot Phung'). Whenever any animal other than the mithun was to be used for sacrifices, it was killed there with some 'Jantra mantras'. Hollow-Bamboo tubes used in keeping water were put on one corner beside the door, and usually on the other corner was stored paddy in a "circular bamboo bin".³⁷ As stated, a house normally had two doors - the front door or the entrance and the backdoor. In the backdoor was a balcony as the platform in front of the house (please see below). This was used more by the women than men and was used mainly for "weaving or performing their toilet".³⁸ The houses being raised, the underneath of the floor was used for the "pig and cattle pen"³⁹ and the disgusting smell and unhygienic condition a house would have bore could be well imagined.

In the lower side of the front of the house (a court levelled from the side of the hill) was a "raised platform

37. Ibid., p.24.

38. Carey, S. Bertram & Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.178.

39. Ibid., p.177.

from 20 to 100 feet in length",⁴⁰ supported by long posts like the downward side of the house. Here, "men congregate of in the evening or at any time to discuss any village politics or disputes"⁴¹ and to "sit, loll about and drink when they were not busy, and by the women to weave on in warm weather".⁴² To prevent children and drunks from falling, the downward side of the platform (which usually stands 10 to 20 ft) was railed. Though not compulsory, the chief's house and those of the well-to-dos had their houses palisaded by planks roughly shaped from logs, tied together with split cane or bamboo called 'Nang' (pronounced as Naang) to keep them in position and were supported by wooden posts at intervals. This was mainly to keep away the mithuns not belonging to him. Houses did not last longer than 10 to 20 years, and sometimes a very short time when the whole village moved to another place for some reasons.

According to the unwritten customary law of the tribe, there was no joint family system, and as such, sons, excepting the eldest (who was to inherit the family property) were to build a new house for themselves after 3 years of marriage. When any family desired to shift to another village for any reason, he sought the permission of his village Chief (Hausa).

40. Ibid., p.177.

41. Shaw, William op. cit., p.83.

42. Carey, S. Bertram & Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.177.

Upto the outbreak of World War II, a Kuki family was not allowed to break down and transport any part of his house after the 'Thul' (Thool - a bamboo or cane plaited basket or box with four short legs about twelve inches square at the bottom, widening till the mouth in which is a circle with a diameter of about 30 inches and a conical lid owned by every Kuki family for storing valuable articles in the house) had finally been taken out with his belongings inside from his house, and he could not claim his house any more nor anything left in it.

Villages:

In appearance, a Kuki village can be easily mistaken for any other tribe's of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race. The Kukis (and other tribes of the race) "were very particular about their place of residence, and considerable thought was spent on the subject of the village site".⁴³ In choosing a village, besides taking into consideration the defensive position or advantages it would hold, the supply of water, the proximity of the fields, getting of morning sunlight, and other beliefs, the Kukis also performed tests in many forms to satisfy themselves that the chosen site did not hold any evil omen. Some interpreted their dreams when constructing houses and establishing villages. Along with this, "the elders would sleep the night at the site,

43. Mc Call, A.G. op. cit., p.165.

taking with them a cock. If it did not crow like a good lusty cock should one hour before dawn, it was taken as a bad omen".⁴⁴ Another method believed and practiced was with an egg. In this, "a small bit of the shell was removed at one end and the egg was then placed on three sticks under which a small fire was lighted. If the egg bursted or overflowed then it was bad, but if the liquid came out and congealed on top like a cap and none of it trickled down to the sticks holding up the egg or to the ground then it was a good omen and a village was established".⁴⁵ In addition to these, water was also used. A small hole about the size of a dinner plate and about 6 inches deep would be dug. This was lined with any kind of leaves and then water poured in quickly to fill the hole. After the pouring, if the water went round clockwise it was bad but if anti-clockwise it was good. When any of these tests was performed and the result satisfying to the elders, a village was often formed without any fixed number of houses ranging from 5 or 10 to 50, 60, and even more. As will be dealt with later (on the powers and functions of a Chief), the formation of a new village was obviously for petty reasons like the desire of a man to be an independent Chief, the rise of an aggressive neighbouring Chief (who usually embarrassed the weaker chiefs

44. Ibid., p.166.

45. Shaw, William op. cit., p.84.

by spreading his dominion), and for unavoidable catastrophes like the spread of epidemics and bad harvest (even one year's failure of harvest was "quite enough to break up a large village").⁴⁶

In most of the villages, at the outskirts was a gate-like thing called 'Dawng/Dong' and usually there were two - one at the main entrance to the village and the other on the way to the fields. The two were often connected by fencings of wooden logs called 'sielthaw/seltho' (Sel-Mithun, tho-fencing) and at these two gates were posted watchmen during the spread of epidemic diseases in other parts and thereby not allowing any person coming from the direction or region where the epidemic was, and Sentries were also posted during war. Even persons coming from the safe directions during the spread of epidemics were first identified and sprinkled with a mixture of water and other medicinal plants of the jungle after uttering some make-believe magic words (believed to be able to protect any harmful germs). Strangers coming from the direction where the diseases spread would be supplied food and other requirements though not allowed to enter the village. In some villages, houses faced each other with a road forming the village street in the middle, while in others, houses were scattered and built independently without distinction of

46. Davis, A.W. op. cit., p.13.

position and affluence. Sufficient space was also left to serve as a public road from one house or compound to another. The distance of villages was usually not far and often not more than "fifteen miles apart".⁴⁷

Though the villages appeared simple and often of very few houses, they were "not always named at haphazard",⁴⁸ and this practice was common to the whole Kiki-Chin-Mizo race. The villages were named according to the Geographical situation of the land, in remembrance of a member of a clan, the name of the former villages from which shifted, and so on; e.g. Molpi (Mol^l=a hill, 'pi^l=large, i.e., the village on the big hill)".⁴⁹ In short, funny as it may sound to a stranger not knowing the language, the names of villages are symbolical or meaningful to the tribe and others understanding the language. These villages were self contained units and ruled by hereditary chiefs, exercising political control over large areas and recognised as "lords of the soil", receiving tribute from the villagers and enjoying the plenipotentiary powers.⁵⁰

Each village being an independent unit, the government of the village was in the hands of the Chief and he was always

47. Mc Call, A.G. op. cit., p.30.

48. Carey, S. Bertram & Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.176.

49. Ibid., p.176.

50. Encyclopædia Britannica, vol.5, p.55.

a member of one or other of the royal families. The power of the chief, though unlimited in theory, was in practice limited by the right that any and all of his free subjects possess (of transferring their allegiance to any other chief, should they become dissatisfied with the rule of the Chief in whose village they were living). A chief's subject pays him tribute in the shape of some 'bengs' (baskets each about 20 Kgs) of paddy a house a year. They also build his house, and cut, but do not cultivate, his jhums. A chief was further entitled to one tusk of every elephant killed by his subjects, and to a portion of the flesh of every animal killed in the chase. The Chief was, in fact, the father of his people, and his house was, to quote from one of Mr. Mc Cabe's diaries, "a refuge for the penniless and insane, so it may be described as a combination of orphanage, refuge, lunatic asylum, saloon and council hall".⁵¹

3. FURNITURE AND UTENSILS

As could be known by now from the few descriptions of the Kikis in the earlier chapter, the tribe, together with its Kiki-Chin-Mizo brothers, were nomadic and for this particular reason they did not have much furniture.⁵² Furniture owned by a family was similar to another families of the

51. Davis, A.W. op. cit., p.12.

52. Shakespear, J. op. cit., p.26.

village, other villages, and throughout the villages of the race. It was only in the early part of this century that the use of modern furniture came to be known by them. Before that, "a few cooking pots, some gourds and a basket or two made the total of the property",⁵³ and as such, possession of furniture as needed or required was out of the question. However, inspite of these shortcomings, furniture in limited form and quantity were found. They were: some wooden platters, a few earthenware like rice-beer pots or 'Zubel' (Zu=fermented rice beer, Belepot - generally strengthened by plaited cane coverings to make it last longer), brass pots in very few houses, implements of agricultural works, and many different kinds of baskets, in which "valuable or perishable articles were preserved"⁵⁴ and used for different purposes like holding grain,⁵⁵ sifting rice, "measures of quantity",⁵⁶ and for many different uses.

Together with these, bamboo tubes ('Tuithei', Tui=water, Thei=container) for carrying and storing water, earthenware cooking pots and bamboo spoons called 'Khe' or Gokhe (Go=Bamboo, Khe=spoon) bow and arrow (and gun in the house of

53. Shaw, William op. cit., p.84.

54. Shakespeare, J. op. cit., p.26.

55. Ibid., p.27.

56. Ibid., p.27.

those who could afford and skilled in using), gongs, a string of cane (or a bamboo was hung in a corner for hanging clothes), and some other items were also kept and used in the houses. Wooden plates were shaped or cut from big woods and had a stand shaped from within itself of the same log, and were used for laying food. In short, as they were of nomadic nature, furniture and utensils needed most were kept or used, and no thought of beautifying the house nor preserving more utensils for use was taken into consideration; and therefore, the state of living in those days was always temporary in nature.

4. FOOD AND DRINK, AND THEIR METHOD OF PREPARATION

The foods taken by the Kukis varied from region to region, and this shows that they adapted themselves to the food procurable in the place of abode. Apart from rice (considered to be the staple food of the Kukis in Manipur), the Kukis of Chin Hills in Burma (and for that matter the whole Kuki-Chin-Mizo race) often took millet and was taken to be the staple food there. In addition to these, maize, pulses, Indian-corn, jungle roots or herbs, yams and sweet-potatoes (often mixed with beans) were taken as food, and pumpkin, cabbage, onion, brinjal, yam, cucumber, creeper beans, ginger, arum, bamboo shoots, and many jungle herbs and leaves, "provided the main aids to a staple diet of rice or maize, none of which was

taken in the ground form".⁵⁷ Fruits like Banana, Papaya, Guava, Mango, various wild plums, Mulberries, Figs, and the nutty fruits of the jungle were also taken. Though grain was their staple food, flesh or meat was taken when feasting and after a hunting game. When meat was in super abundance "strips of flesh were broiled over the fire, and were thus preserved"⁵⁸, and roasting as well as frying was not known or practised by anyone. Whether meat or cereal was cooked, it was done by boiling ("the only form of cooking widely used")⁵⁹ and often two separate pots were not used but cooked in the same pot (but this practice has faded about a century ago, and since then Kukis have practised cooking different ingredients in different pots according to taste). Three regular meals, at Sunrise (morning), noon, and Sunset were taken though the items in all did not vary much from cooked rice with boiled vegetables (with Salt, Chillies, occasionally ginger and turmeric, and sometimes with either dried or fresh meat and fish). In earlier times, food was served on leaves, then on 'Godal' (Winnowing fan), and since the last one and a half century, on wooden platters (shaped or trimmed of wood with stands below, also shaped from the same log), and the curry served was either put in a dish and placed in the

57. Mc Call, A.G. op. cit., p.186.

58. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.181.

59. Mc Call, A.G. op. cit., p.186.

centre of this plate or just poured down in the centre of the plate. At meal time, all the family members used to sit around the food served and satisfied themselves with the content greedily. Guests were not served separately and had to make themselves at home as much as possible, failing which, a day or a night of half-filled stomach was to make them regret. However, maternal uncles or maternal relations were to observe the unwritten conventional customary law by not taking meat in the houses of nephews or sons-in-law (they were nevertheless allowed to take any other kind of vegetables inside the house of those mentioned, and had to eat outside the house (at the verandah) if they so desired to enjoy or taste the meat cooked there).

Whenever a pig was killed, it was killed in a repulsive manner. It was laid on its side and a bamboo skewer, taken from the hair of a man, or a wooden spike, was driven through its side and into the heart, which was then stirred about, and the pig would die without losing a drop of blood. The blood was then carefully collected and cooked as blood sausages. After the animal (pig, dog, and any other small animals) was killed it was invariably impaled with a pole, which passes through the body out of the mouth and the animal on the centre of the pole was held by two men at either end over a burning fire.

'Zu' or 'Ju' (fermented rice beer) was served when

celebrating the arrival of successful hunting expeditions, harvest festivals, and return of a good friend from a long journey"⁶⁰ and consumed in larger quantities on the occasion of "funeral ceremonies and other events when feasts were held".⁶¹ To the Kukis, a feast meant "a drinking bout sometimes of many days' duration",⁶² and feasts or drinking Zu took place mostly at births and marriages, deaths and sacrifices, the payment of debts, the courting of sweet hearts, the making of agreement, the slaughter of enemies, the shooting of a deer and other animals. But it may be noted that though Zu was used in all these, the style or nature of the feasts and the quantity of liquor to be consumed varied according to the importance of the occasion (viz., only a pot of Zu at welcoming a visitor, while, all the villagers and chiefs of the neighbouring villages were to assemble and drink Zu for some days and thereby drown their sorrows in intoxication at the death of a chief). In other words, no ceremony or feast could be performed without Zu. Zu was prepared from rice, various millets, Indiancorn or according to the staple crop of the region, and prepared by fermenting the grain to be used. The grain or crop was

60. Pudaito Roehunga The Education of The Hmar People, Churachandpur, Manipur, 1963, C.46.

61. Soppit, C.A. A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North East Frontier, published in Bhamo, Burmain, 1893, p.9.

62. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.186.

dampened, packed in a long and narrow jar or in several layers of leaves after adding 'chol' (alcohol?) and thereby caused to ferment. After keeping in this condition for about 30 days (or more if a superior or better quality of beer is wanted), the fermented grain was put in an empty earthen jar and well pressed down with a reed passing through the middle almost to the bottom (and left there ready for sucking); water would then be filled and the mouth of the jar closed with leaves, and after allowing the pot's content to soak for some minutes, the much wanted Zu would be ready for consumption. Zu was generally sucked through bamboo reed or pipe in turns of seniority or preference of the host (though the principal guests were commonly served first), or drunk after drawing out the Zu from the pot with the help of 'Dawn Kai' ("an inverted V shaped joint of bee wax or metal and which acts, when sucked with the lips until the stream commences to flow as syphon").⁶³ Another type of 'Zu' taken was called 'Zu Kha' (very intoxicating with a bitter and repulsive flavour), and it used to be prepared by boiling fermented Zu or grains in a pot. A bent tube would be inserted inside the pot and firmly sealed, and after much beating of the fire a strong spirit runs off from the pot through the tube, and the little drops of spirit are collected

63. Ibid., p.184.

in a vessel or bottle and ready for use. This liquor was not taken often as the production used to be slow and consumed much grain than the "Zupi" or Zuting" (the former Zu) inspite of its little production, and was often made "only on special occasions".⁶⁴

After consuming large quantity of Zu, they often get drunk to the extent of not remembering for how many nights they had been feasting and drinking, not to mention the ignorance of bruises received in the fights. These brutal actions and incidents of the drunk clearly justified the recognised rule of the Kuki-Chin race - "No act of a man is a crime when drunk". The importance of Zu to the Kuki tribes and other tribes of Manipur (and other places) can therefore be imagined and understood. The traditional importance of Zu, however, has faded with the coming of Christianity, which forbid (the protestant Christians) drinking of Zu in any form and manner. It is now substituted by tea, coffee, and other beverages available in the market.

5. DOMESTIC ANIMALS

The domesticated animals of the Kukis and their fellow tribes consisted of Mithuns ('Bos Frontalis'), pigs, goats, dogs, cats, fowls, and only of late, cows and buffaloes.

64. Shakespeare, J. op. cit., p.37.

Before the rearing of buffaloes, all the other domestic animals were kept mainly for meat and sacrifices and were "neither milked nor used for traction".⁶⁵ Of all these animals, the mithun was mainly used as the sacrificial animal and considered "a symbol of wealth and prestige",⁶⁶ while pigs were considered the greatest delicacy as food (often, a pig would be killed as the highest compliment for entertaining a guest). Pigs were fed with species of arum and husks boiled together, and also used as the scavengers of the villages. When male pigs reached 3 to 6 months, they were castrated and for some obscure reasons, never allowed to grow upto full natural size. Goats and fowls (not fed but allowed to graze in the jungles and compounds) were also taken to be as delicious as pigs and mithuns. But though there was no restriction to taking dog meat, it was not generally preferred to the other ones, and women in particular disliked the taste as well as the idea of taking it. However, dogs were reared for 'hunting and trade to the Nagas'⁶⁷ who "are very fond of dog's flesh"⁶⁸ and "a good trade existed in this line between the Kikis and

65. Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol.5, p.55.

66. Ibid., p.55.

67. Shaw, William op. cit., p.86.

68. Ibid., p.86.

Nagas⁶⁹ and were also used in sacrifices. Dogs reared from the early time to this day are of ordinary pariah dog type and the wild long haired bushy-tailed dog.

As regards measuring the size of pigs they used and still use "a piece of cane or creeper",⁷⁰ which is passed round the body immediately behind the fore legs, and the wanted size is known by folding the whole length of the tape or creeper once or making it into two equal parts and thereafter measuring the folded tape by the fists or 'Tuh' (Folded Fist). The number of 'tuh' measured accounts for the actual size of the pig measured. This practice is common to all the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race upto this day. However, all the animals reared or trapped are not measured in this way. Unlike the measurement of pigs, mithuns were and are still measured and valued on the length of the horns, while other animals are judged and the price fixed from its outward appearance. 'Lam' (the full length of horizontally stretched hands, pronounced as 'Laam') was used in measuring the length of bigger animals together with 'Tong' (length from finger tip to elbow of hand).

6. MAIN OCCUPATIONS

The main occupations of the Kukis were agriculture,

69. Ibid., p.86.

70. Carey, S. Bertram & Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.180.

fishing and hunting, for a common man, while, some gifted persons were given to blacksmithy, wooden works to a limited extent, bamboo and cane works, and weaving for women.

(a) Agriculture:

Like other tribals of Manipur and Assam, Kuki economy is mainly based on agriculture till today. It is just recently that terrace cultivation in the plains was practiced and adopted by them. Prior to this, jhuming (shifting cultivation) was the only method of cultivation practiced by the Kukis and all the tribals of Manipur and Burma. In this, land was cultivated in rotation of areas and usually took from 5 to 10 years (or more if the land belonging to the village was big enough for cultivation during that period) to return to the area they had cultivated earlier, which by then reverted as it was when first jhumed. In the primitive days, the land was worked by pointed sticks and bones of animals; but since 3-4 centuries, the Kukis have used hoes manufactured by the village blacksmith. The main crops grown in the Jhooms were rice, millet, maize, pulses, corns, and other vegetables as well as fruits as they do not usually have separate gardens for separate crops. Cotton was also grown in the fields (grown at the same place where paddy was sown).

In Jhoom cultivation, hill slopes are cultivated from top to bottom with variations of height and various unavoidable stages are undergone. The first stage starts with the cutting

down of trees and others that grow about in the selected site for cultivation during December and January, and burnt after letting the cut trees dry (usually during the end of March to the beginning of May). The next stages comprises of the sowing of seeds, weeding of plants (done whenever required), and finally the harvest. The main crop is reaped between the 15th November and 15th December, while other vegetable plants and cash crops are taken and reaped when ripe. After harvest, paddy was kept in the field where a small house called 'Lou Buh' (Lou=field, Buh=hut) had been constructed after the burning of the field in the beginning of the work, and if the field was quite far a store house was built in the half-way, and from there finally carried home at fixed days (when all the villagers would carry home their respective paddy from their respective fields or 'lou buhs'). Paddy, millet and pulses were carried by baskets called 'Beng' (conical shaped basket with a diameter of about 24 inches at its mouth and about 26 inches long able to hold 20-25 kgs of paddy), and 'Tumbu' (a folded-blanket container). In 'the Chin Hills', the writers Carey S. Bertram and H.N. Tuck record that, "The carrying capacity of the Chin equals that of the Bhutia and is superior to that of the Gurkha in as much as he is faster. It is not uncommon to find a man carrying 180 lbs. for a 12 mile stage, and such a load as 60 lbs. appears hardly to affect the ordinary pace of the

carrier, who will march 20 miles in the day.

"The Chins and the Southern Kukis of Manipur being the same race, living in the same class of country and under the same conditions, are, as to be expected, equally good carriers; but for short distances neither are as fast as the most satisfactory of all the foreign coolies who have worked in the Chin Hills, the Tunkai.

"The Chin man's method of carrying is on the back, the load being attached to a wooden yoke which fits on the back of the neck and the strain relieved by a band which passes through the ends of the yoke and round the brow of the head. The women invariably carry their loads in large bamboo cane baskets which rest against the shoulder blades and which are supported by a brow-band".⁷¹ The quantity of paddy reaped are measured (determined) now a days by the Manipuri system of 'Sangphai' (a large basket which could hold from 38 kgs to 42 kgs) in some areas, while in some by the traditional way. In the traditional way of measuring, the quantity of paddy produced are measured by the number of loads carried to the 'Loubuh' for storing and a load is "about 50 lbs".⁷² In the earlier days, the quantity of unhusked paddy was also measured by the "height of his hand or hoe or axe held

71. Carey, S. Bertram & Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.166.

72. Shakespeare, J. op. cit., p.18.

up⁷³ for lesser quantities (after piling the rice in a conical heap). Agriculture means the cultivation of rice or maize to them from the early days to the present age. The cultivation of rice also forms the main occupation of all the villagers and had stood from time immemorial to be the only source of food and economy. During the season of cultivation, every villager does not find much leisure as the process of Jhooming needs the right manual at the right time, and very often, young boys and girls "would join together in corporate labour"⁷⁴ called 'Lawn' and go to the fields of its 'lawn' members in rotation.

(b) Manufactures:

Almost every article used by a Kuki was manufactured in the village and things beyond the manufacturing knowledge of the village manufacturers were seldom used. Upto this day, the Kukis and their brothers of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race have not advanced much in the field of manufacturing. Though little improvement has taken in their way of living and other aspects recently, much has not changed from the former years in their domestic life. In manufacturing, they did not have any idea beyond weaving, blacksmithy, bamboo and cane works and a little carpentry, and the manufactured goods

73. Ibid., p.18.

74. Pudaite, Rochunga op. cit., p.45.

found little or no demand in the plains. Therefore, every good manufactured was for his own requirements.

Weaving:

The indigenous looms used by all the Kuki-Chin-Mizo are of the same style and used in the same manner. The warp is bound over a fixed beam of wood or bamboo, and the other end is tightened by the weaver wearing, round the hollow of her back, a leather strap is attached to the other end of the loom. The weaver sits between this leather and the loom, adjusting her position to suit the warp length, or in other words stretches the threads to the requisite degree of tightness. "The woof is passed through by means of prepared spindles, and is battened firmly down by the use of a smooth, and comparatively weighty, blade of polished wood, usually of Sago palm".⁷⁵ The loom appears to be quite easy for handling, but "considerable practice is necessary to ensure equality in dimensions and regularity of design".⁷⁶ The cotton used in weaving was planted in the fields together with paddy and collected when ripe. After thoroughly drying, it was cleaned in a home made gin. The gin consists of a frame holding two wooden rollers, one end of each being carved for a few inches of its length into a screw, cut or hollowed in

75. Mc Call, A.G. op. cit., p.183.

76. Ibid., p.183.

the opposite way to the other, so that when the handle is turned the rollers move in opposite directions, and the cotton is drawn between them, with the seeds left behind. The cotton is then worked by hand into rolls of few inches long and spun into the rod of a spinning wheel. When the spindle is twisted sharply, cotton is drawn into a thread by its own weight. The thread thus obtained, is wetted and hung in loops of 3 to 4 feet long over a horizontal bar and in the loops are put heavy bars to suspend it and dry it.

All the clothes ranging from dresses of both men and women to the blankets used by the family members were woven in this way by the women. In weaving thick blankets like 'Phoipi' unspun cotton was woven in between the threads of the blanket, and this thick but soft blanket gave much warmth in the winter season. Coats and shirts were sometimes stitched by the men, though mainly left to women. Weaving was an art supposed to be mastered by every woman, and when a woman did not master it or was ignorant of the art, she often lacked male suitors excepting the married men or the widowers who often were on the look out for a new bride.⁷⁷

Males did not weave at all even if some could, but the males were responsible for making the tools for the loom. The designs of clothes woven were simply of plain or without any

77. As related to me by old people.

designs in the earlier times, but these days, many symbolic designs have been woven. Some of the designs woven today are - Saipikhup (Saipi=elephant, khup=knee), Thangnang, Mangvom (Mang=edge, vom=black) and Khamtang. The Saipikhup and Thangnang are black in colour with its 6 to 8 inches design in red, green, yellow and white colours woven 3 to 4 inches from the edges of the breadth. Mang Vom is white in colour with a 2 to 4 inches design of black only woven also on the edges as Saipikhup and Thangnang. Khamtang as mentioned in the women's dress, is black in colour with skillfully woven design resembling the cucumber seeds in yellow colour running through the whole length with a breadth of 2 to 3 inches, each line 3 to 4 inches from both the edges. Formerly, the woven clothes were used by the family members and within the village limit, but the woven clothes of many designs are today sold to other places for money and have thereby given indirect occupation to many women. Dyeing was practised in a limited form. It was done with the leaves of a strong smelling plant called 'Moa' (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolia*) for black, and the roots of a plant mixed with "chang al tui" (water filtered through ash) for red. The leaves were powdered after plucking and put together with the spun thread inside a dish or a hollow log, in the water for a fortnight (for black dyeing); and the thread was mixed with 'chengal tui' for the dyeing of red colour. Besides, white, black and red,

no other colour was used by the Kuki in the earlier times. But as can be imagined, their art of weaving and dyeing is more limited as it was, today.

(b) Blacksmithy and Carpentry:

In every village, there used to be a village blacksmith appointed by the village chief. If the village was big, two or more blacksmiths were appointed (depending on the number of houses in the village). The tools used by a village blacksmith and its mechanism were simple. The bellows consisted of two bellow wooden cylinders in which pistons fringed with feathers were worked up and down. The lower ends of the cylinders were buried in the ground, side by side, and from them two bamboo tubes stretched out and meet just behind a stone through which was a hole. When the charcoal-fire was lighted in front of this stone and the pistons worked, a very strong current of wind was obtained and this kept the charcoal fire burning for heating the iron to be used. The village blacksmith manufactured and repaired the tools used in the jhums like the dao (a long knife), hoe and weapons of war like spears, arrows, and even gun locks (though no remains of guns manufactured are available). The villagers paid him a fixed basket of paddy annually for his service and he was regarded as one of the officials of the village. Considering the rough nature of the tools a village blacksmith used, some

of them were "very skillful workmen".⁷⁸

In carpentry, excepting the carving or shaping of wooden platters and other household furniture like the simple four-footed cot, etc., there was no other specialised production in the art. Carpentry was therefore practically nil though wooden and stone works were practised only in the manufacture of mainly household utensils.

(d) Bamboo and cane works:

Besides agriculture, this was the only art for men to show their skill in the society, and in one way the most beneficial art practised. It was chiefly carried on by men, though very few women also mastered the art (but fewer still practised as it was believed that the husband of a woman expert in bamboo and cane works did not usually live long). All the works in this art were done by bamboo and cane lashings, by plaiting and knitting them in such a way that baskets of various sizes and purposes were made. The art required practice and skill, and was often mastered by very few men in the whole village, but in some villages, almost every male was able to make baskets and other goods for other purposes. Some of the important woven products of bamboo and cane works were baskets of various shapes and sizes, and serving many different

78. Davis, A.W. Op. cit., p.12.

purposes like the 'Thul' (or 'Thool') (please see page),
 Winnowing basket or fan called 'Godal', etc. Unlike the
 blacksmith, the few carpenters or craftsmen available in
 a village did not receive any form of tax or compulsory pay-
 ment. They were, however, paid by any villager buying his
 goods.

(e) Hunting and Fishing:

From time immemorial, hunting had been practiced by the
 Kukis and their fellow Kuki-Chin-Mizo brothers along with
 other tribes. Before the use of gun was known to them, bow
 and arrow was used; but still earlier to that, the only form
 of killing wild animals was by means of different types of
 traps. Although "Prowess in hunting had religious significance,
 and the slayer of much game was believed to enjoy high rank
 in after life",⁷⁹ hunting was done more for fun and fame
 than for obtaining the animal's meat for consumption. The
 different types of traps used were for big and small animals.
 For bigger animals like tigers, bears and the like, 'Pel'
 is used (Pel, is a large falling trap made of logs of wood
 which fall on and crush the animal). When this trap was laid,
 a smelly piece of decomposed meat or a pig put inside a basket
 was placed below the platform of logs to attract the animal.
 When the beast touches it, it releases a trigger and thus
 causes the heavy platform of logs to fall and crush it. For

79. Encyclopaedia Britannica, op. cit., p.435.

smaller games, logs of wood were placed upright in the ground parallel to each other thus making a passage. Over the space between these walls a large log weighted with stones was hung so that when the animal passed through the passage it was crushed. For small deers, wild pigs, squirrels, and such small animals, a stick was planted on the ground and pulled down with a piece of string, at the end of which was a noose. When the game would pass over the noose it releases the spring and the animal would be held strangled in the air by the noose, and at the same time whipped up by the string on the peg which kept it down. In addition to these mentioned, the Kukis also used the "spring-gun traps",⁸⁰ and the large pit traps. Of the two, in the latter, large pits were dug with sharp pointed bamboos placed firmly upright in them, so that when the animal falls it was pinned. This kind of trap was also used when driving any kind of game. Apart from these, when a village was much troubled by a tiger and thereby way-laying its livestock, a general hunt was ordered. Guns would be borrowed from other villages and the animal traced down. When found, the tiger or the hunted animal would be approached by a shouting mob, and from this the tiger would flee, after completely tiring the tiger, it would be killed. For killing large games like Elephants, more bullets or thicker layers

80. Shaw, William op. cit., p.89.

of gun 'powder' was put in their single barrel muzzle loading (SBML) guns and caused to wound his victim in such a place that the beast would find it very painful to move, and then killed easily. For trapping birds traps were also laid and tree-gums were also used. Mr. William Shaw has rightly remarked that the Kukis were "exceedingly expert in making all kinds of traps for animals, birds and fish".⁸¹

A good hunter was born and not made. Gifted with the art, a good hunter usually killed about 200 to 300 or more animals in his life time. Among the animals of ^{the} jungle, animals which eat the raw meat of other animals were not eaten (when killed, the meat of animals like tiger, lion, etc., were given to the children who took them with a wish to be as strong as the animal taken in all the activities of life). The skin and the teeth of the tiger were, however, taken to be of great value. Whenever a man or a hunter killed an edible animal (e.g., Deer, Elephant, wild Mithun, wild Boar, etc.) he was bound by the customary law of the race to observe - 'Sangawng Se' (giving of a portion of the neck to the parents or elder brother of one's mother), and a foreleg of the slain animal to the village chief. But in the case of tiger, its tooth was given in the place of its foreleg and for other wild animals (which eat raw flesh of other animals)

81. Ibid., p.16.

the observation of 'Sangawng Se' and the giving of a foreleg to the Chief was not practised. In some villages, when an animal was slain and was too big for the hunter to bring it home alone, he would come to the village and set off with the other villagers and bring it home. While, in some, the hunter would go back to carry only with his relatives, but in both the systems, feasting on the night with 'Zu' and dancing was a necessity. Having slain a tiger or any bigger games the hunter was to perform a combined war cry and a war dance called "Hanla" and called the names of his ancestors and the place of their origin (this combined war cry and dance is also common to all the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race), and if he could afford, celebrates the "Sa ai" (a feast hosted by a hunter for the commemoration of the number of bigger games slained). Environmental changes compel the tribals today to slowly give up hunting and the traditional system of trapping animals has thinned out by and by with the acquirement of the knowledge of handling guns (the guns used for games in earlier time were the flintlocks and muzzleloading guns, and the latter is still in use to this day for game).

In fishing-cast nets, bamboo traps, poison and draining were used. The most important and reliable methods were by poisoning ('gu') and 'ngawi' (a construction of bamboo platform in the river). In poisoning, the poison was taken from plants called 'Guteng' and 'Nam tul' (a creeping plant). The roots

of the former were used while the plant itself was used in the latter plant. These two plants were cut into pieces and boiled on the bank and the water poured in the river after boiling. Sometimes the plants were also just crushed or powdered in the water. Fishes could not tolerate the smell as well as the taste, and would be easily caught by the villagers. 'Gu Suh' or poisoning by crushing was usually done by the whole villagers and the fish caught distributed equally among themselves. In catching fish by means of 'Ngawi', a weir of timber and bamboos (with stones inside) was stretched from one side of the river to the other side. At one side, an opening was left through which the water rushes with great force into a long bamboo shoot, which curves slightly upwards and ends in a deep space of plaited bamboos. The force of the water carries the fish into this built-in space and remain collected there, while the water escapes through the bamboos. Any openings in which a small fish could escape were leaked with conical baskets. The whole structure was usually done by all the villagers. When fishing with nets, two persons were usually required - one to fish with the net, while the other to collect and carry the fish caught (the share of the two was to be equal). Fishing had no particular season but that of 'gu' was often done in dry seasons when water in the rivers would be shallow, while that of 'ngawi' would be done any time except when the rivers got over flooded with rain

water. Unlike hunting, fishing was not considered of much importance and no function or feast connected with it was ever performed. Almost all the fish found and caught were considered edible excepting the 'Ngami' which measures about 5 to 6 feet in length and about 3 to 4 'tuh' (measurement by fists as in the measurement of pigs).

(f) Trade:

Before the coming of the British some 200 years ago in the hills, the Kukis did not know the use of money for exchange *with* articles or goods. Every article wanted was bartered for with another item the possessor liked or lacked. With the coming of British and their connection with the hill tribes in Manipur and Burma, money value came into consideration. Some octogenerian Kukis of today claim that in their lifetime money or currency was changed often and thereby left some baffled (from King George's coins to King Edward's, and then to Queen Victoria's; and finally independent India's Rupee). Most of the articles wanted were exchanged with paddy and some domesticated animals like the mithuns, pigs, Goats, fowls, etc. For example for a mithun costing Rs. 30 Rs. 5 was paid in cash and the remaining paid in kind by paddy or Pigs of 'tuh 5' (measurement for pigs) at the rate of Rs. 5 for one. Similar was the system in buying other valuables like a Gun which cost Rs. 30 (it should be noted that guns were

not sold or issued by the Manipur King if houses in a village did not reach 30, and the gun sold was also intended for the defense of the village by the village chief and his villagers).

Comparing the price of valuable articles and the daily wage income of an individual then, it may be seen that goods in those days were no cheaper than today's. In 1923, a healthy strong man could earn only 2 annas as his wage in a day, or had to work 8 days to earn a full rupee. A hen would cost a "Makhai" (8 annas), a pup 4 annas, a pig of "Tuh" 5, 8, 6, and so on. The main source of income was from (as said earlier) paddy, mithun, pigs, fowls, and other domesticated animals, and the richest man of a village often did not have more than three hundred or four hundred rupees. When transaction with money was introduced in the hills, old people were usually confused in the calculation of fractions of the money; and inspite of this difficulty, strangely enough, trade flourished gradually. But before that trade was practically unknown (whatever a barter was to take place, it was done only in the village jurisdiction and never beyond; and every village bartered their goods only in their own villages - inter village trade or exchange for trade was not practised). Salt was obtained from the hills, and a seer or kg. was sold for 8 annas. The annual House Tax (introduced by the British) of three rupees was either paid in cash or

in kind (in blankets, cane bundles, etc.), and those paying in kind had to drop or transport the given goods upto the nearest motorable station (Moirang, a distance of 22 kms from Churachandpur for those living in the present Lankha or Churachandpur region of Manipur state).

7. RELATION WITH THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Being a migratory tribe, by the end of the nineteenth century they were to be found in Assam, Nagaland (the Naga hills then), Tripura and Manipur in India, and the Chin hills in Burma and the Chittagong hills in the present Bangladesh. Therefore, their neighbours differed and so were their relations. Even in the State of Manipur where their number is the biggest compared to those of other places, their neighbours were not the same in all directions. In the east the Tangkhul Nagas were their neighbour, the Kabui Nagas in the west, and the Meiteis in the valley. Taking the Nagas of the east and west as of one community and the Meiteis on the other, their neighbours in Manipur were the Nagas and Meiteis. Due to certain limitations, their relation with other communities will be dealt only of Manipur. However, their relation with the British is given in the chapter "Advent of Christianity and the Kuki Rebellion".

Relation with the Meiteis:

Although the Kukis lived in the hills and the Meiteis in

the valley, the latter being the dominant population in the state (or Kingdom in those days), occupying almost the whole valley, their social intercourse with each other was unavoidable. Prior to the coming of the British in the nineteenth century, the Kukis stood on equal footing as the Manipur King and were on friendly terms. Mutual co-operation existed in the form of trade (barter system) and as allies at war time. Unknown to the Kukis (or may be out of mutual understanding that they did not bother to think further), however, "the Thados (Kukis) were used on many occasions to punish Naga tribes whom the Manipuris were unable to reduce to submission".⁸² Besides, "the superior cunning of the Manipuris enabled them to maintain their influence over the Thadous (Kukis) by skilfully playing off one family against another".⁸³ As an ally of the Manipur King, "the Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh maintained a close relationship with the powerful Kuki villages of Sangmao and Khaochangbung to protect the western hills".⁸⁴ An event, significant of the alliance the Kukis and the Manipur King had, with the valour and allegiance of the Kukis to their ally, may rightly be worth inclusion in this as recalled by William Shaw. He writes, "At the time of the Burmese Invasion ("The Burmese invaded Manipur

82. Shakespear, J. op. cit., p.190.

83. Ibid., p.190.

84. Kipgen, Kh. op. cit., p.26.

in 1755, 1758, 1765, etc. repeatedly until the end of First Burmese War in 1826" - J.H. Hutton) the Raja of Manipur fled for protection to the house of Khongsat - Kuki's father where he ate 'ga' (beans) only for several months. When the Burmese left the valley he returned home with Khongsat's father and Kaikholal Kuki. So the Manipuris have always treated the Kukis with respect since then. When Ngameingam or Chandrakirti Singh Raja was on the throne he collected a great force to attack Molben village (Kamhao chief of the Suhte clan). Thangkhohen, chief of Sangnao village, sent his cousin Pujam, chief of Bijang village, with some 1000 Kukis to help Ngameingam. The result was sad, as Kamhao chief won the battle, inflicting great loss on the Manipuris and their Kuki levies (?). Pujam, Jankhopao and Langhel were the leaders of the Kukis. It came about as follows: just before the fight started the Suhtes shouted out that the Manipuris were attacking them because the Suhtes had revenged the death of Thangpao and Thanglam at the hands of Kaisap village of Kom Kukis. Also at that time the present village of Khongjang in the Churachandpur area was living with Kamhao. Thanglam was Pujam chief's father. Consequently the Kukis did not help and the force was defeated. The Raja was weeping on the banks of the Gun (Imphal) river at such disgrace when one Chongja Kuki taking pity on him fired off his gun before the Raja and said, "The Raja shall not die until I, Chongja, am

first killed by the Raja's enemies". This cheered up the Raja and the followers of Chongja having made a 'Vailang' (cane suspension bridge) got the Raja safely across and into safety.

"When Chandra Kirti Singh was about to die he directed that the custom of inheritance as among the Thadous (Kukis) was to be observed in the future and so elected his eldest son to be Raja after him in token of all the help the Kukis had given him ("The Meithei custom seemed formerly to have been for the throne to pass from the elder to the youngest brother, and then to the eldest son of the latter and so on, and not, as one would expect, back to the eldest brother's children" - J.H. Hutton). However, Sena Koireng deposed the new Raja and set himself on the throne. The ex-Raja fled to the British and appealed. In consequence of this the Chief Commissioner of Assam came to Imphal, the capital of Manipur State, but Sena Koireng murdered him with four other 'Sahabs' also and drove out the remaining British force. Most of the Thadous (Kukis) fought for the Raja on that occasion. This resulted in the Manipur war of 1891 but the Kukis did not help the Manipuris then, as they knew that the latter had no chance. Sena Koireng fled to Tonglhu chief of Chahsat and sought his protection. Tonglhu said he was seriously thinking of taking revenge for his father Nehlam's murder but as the 'Sirkar' were in search of the Raja he

told him to go away as he (Tonglu) could not grant such protection. However, in revenge for Nehlam's murder the Chahsat group attacked and destroyed a Burmese thana and implicated Manipuris thereby. For Soya chief's murder the village of Chongjang in the Naga hills attacked and destroyed a Manipuri Thana at Makui village. This was after Henima outpost had been established⁸⁵ ("The Henima outpost was established early in 1881" - J.H. Hutton). During the same time, when the Lusheis (Mizos) tried to enter the South-West hills of Manipur" the Shingsons (a Kuki clan) drove them out".⁸⁶

The cordial relation changed after 1834 when Maharaja Garib Nawaj embraced the Vaishnava faith and helped its spread. With it came the hitherto unknown 'Mangba Sengba' (unclean and clean) or the untouchable and the touchable in the kingdom. The hillmen being considered the untouchable group, their relation weakened - the Kukis not agreeing to their being so considered, and the newly converted Meiteis believing themselves to be superior. The relation further slackened after the coming of the British, when in 1916, the Meitei King Churachand agreed to supply 'Labour corps' for British soldiers in France (First World War) - without the

85. Shaw, William op. cit., p.48.

86. Ibid., p.49.

prior consent of the hillmen. Other tribes did not disobey, but the Kukis did. It resulted in the 'Kuki Rebellion' (please see chapter IV). But today, having realised their mistakes and the mistakes their forefathers had committed, the inter-relation of the Meiteis and Kukis or tribals in general has improved greatly.

Relation with the Nagas:

It has been recorded with exaggeration that, "the Kukis and Nagas are traditional enemies",⁸⁷ but mention of their having had a cordial relation in the past is quite rare. Being their immediate neighbour in most parts of the state, it is quite natural that inter-tribe rivalries and feuds, very common in tribal societies, will be found in their relation also. Besides being slightly different in physical appearance ("The dress of the Naga is invariably a cloth tied round the loins with the loose ends hanging down in front, while the Kuki either wears nothing but a blanket or else a "dhoti" wound round the loins passing between the legs from the front and fastened behind in the regular Indian way... Nagas cut their hair which the Kukis never do. The Naga features are more pronounced and in many other ways the light-hearted Naga is far apart from the solemn slow-speaking Kuki"),⁸⁸ their mentality or outlook also differed. While

87. Constantine, R. op. cit., p.65.

88. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.3.

the Nagas are lighthearted, the Kukis are "slow but deep thinker for the average wild man. He is very obstinate and wilful".⁸⁹ Being the first to manufacture and use guns among the tribals of the region, the Kukis enjoyed influence. It may be improper in a sense to give in detail of their past relationship, the memory of which I believe, may still be lingering afresh on the other party even today. So I am sure one would have a clearer mind to imagine with Shakespear's remark that, "in Manipur they (Kukis) have settled themselves among the more peaceful Nagas, and until the British Government assumed control of the State (only after the suppression of the Kuki Rebellion) they lived largely on the labour of these unfortunate people, whom they had virtually reduced to slaves".⁹⁰ In their day to day relation also, Shaw writes, "I have often seen Thadous (Kukis) and Nagas pass each other on the paths and in nearly every instance the Thadou (Kuki) has kept the path while the Naga moves aside to let him pass. In Naga villages when some dancing is on and there happen to be some Kukis present they will almost always push aside the Naga lookers on and get in front so as to have the best position without the slightest compunction".⁹¹

89. Shaw, William op. cit., p.21.

90. Shakespear, J. op. cit., p.190.

91. Shaw, William op. cit., p.22.

That they still remember the blunder the Kukis committed may rightly be justified from what Prof. Gangmunei Kabui writes when writing on "the Zeliangrong Movement". He describes the second phase of the movement to be of a political character, and to be "anti-British and anti-Kuki".⁹² Justification of the historical blunders will certainly be inhumane, grieving in on is tolerable, but to be always on the look out for vengeance will certainly be equal to being inhumane. But thanks to Christianity which soon followed the colonial rulers to Manipur in 1694. Christianity, with its 'universal brotherhood' changed the tribal ways of life and also brought about an understanding among the Kukis and Nagas which, otherwise, would have worsened to this day.

From these two relationships the Kukis had, one can easily make out the outlook or mentality of the Kukis. No doubt they were truculent, arrogant and brave, but they were always loyal in any relation. Loyalty meant and means a lot to the Kukis even to this day.

92. Singh, K.S. (Ed.) op. cit., p.56.

CHAPTER III
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

1. STRUCTURE OF KUKI FAMILY AND KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

In the Kuki society, family is the fundamental unit of Social Structure with a built-in arrangement of parts involving many kinds of social relations. It is fundamental because it is universal and the core of the kinship system which is an integral part of the social structure, is originated here. Functionally, again, the family maintains a sustained relationship with other internal and external systems of the structure. It is also the smallest unit having extension in the Nuclear type of family and is the residential kin group enduring over time.

The structure of Kuki family is primarily that of Patrilineal structure with patrilineal rules of descent, inheritance and a patrilocal residence. After marriage, however, the couple start a new family of procreation through neolocal residence (In some, this takes place soon after marriage or within a few years, while there are also those who separate from the parents' house only after the birth of a child or two). Therefore, one nuclear family acts as the 'radiating centre and creates by virtue of its innate centrifugal force all other nuclear families'. In as much as the Kuki terminology, both of Kinship and Affinity

originate from and centre around marriage, so is also equally in the structure of the family. The family being patrilineal and nuclear, only the eldest son (married or unmarried) and the unmarried children live with the parents. Besides being patrilineal and nuclear groupings of family, there is a peculiar structure of family in the Kuki society (Kuki-Chins) which can rightly be called the Household Council consisting of a 'three-tier system' or what I would like to call 'inter-related relation' in the society. Every household has got its own relation of this type. The three most important relations or relatives of a Ruki family are - the 'TUCHA' (TU=Nephew or Son-in-law, 'Cha'=son), 'Becha' (Be=relative, often of the same clan; and Cha=son), and 'Sung Gao' (a term used to connote one's mother's brothers or their sons). In all these, it can be seen that each originates from, formulates with and terminates in marriage, which in turn had sprung up from the family. They are therefore inter-related. Each of these are also assigned with a built-in duty or duties to be performed by each, necessitating their participation without any hesitation, regardless of one's position.

The 'Tucha' takes charge of almost any work from preparation of curry, cooking, etc. to taking charge of cleaning the corpse and its burial in the house of in-laws when somebody dies. The 'Be' or 'Bepa' stands in the place of the family on such occasions when a family to which he

is their 'Be pa' may be befallen with misfortunes or joyous celebrations, at which, that family or its head may not be in the mood or situation to take the right decision. Often, this relationship is called 'Jol' (or 'Jawl' = most intimate friend) when the same clan is not found in the village or when one's clan may be found but prefer the relation with that of a friend belonging to other clans. In any feast the 'Be' or 'Jol Pa' supervises activities and important matters on behalf of the family head who is his 'Jol Pa' or 'Bepa', they being 'Becha'. The 'Sung Gao', on the other hand, is the Guest of Honour - in the sense that he does not perform any duty of importance in the functions (be it feasting or mourning) held at his sisters' and aunts' houses.

As mentioned, the Tucha, Bepa (Becha) and Sunggao are inter-related. The Tucha could exist because the Sung Gao is there and gives the females in marriage by which a person becomes 'Tupa' or Sin-in-law of the giver and thereby become 'Tucha' in their house. The Bepa or Jolpa prevails because of his friend or clansman who is the giver or the host. In this way, the majority of families in a Kuki village which usually do not have more than 100 or 200 houses (despite its being a state in itself ruled by a chief which is hereditary) are inter-related. In other words, 'A', who is a 'Tucha' at B's house might have been the 'Jolpa' or 'Bepa' of 'C', who in turn might be the 'Sunggao' of 'B', and 'B' a Tucha

at C's family, and so on. When a Tucha finds himself overburdened with the work due to lack of other Tuchas or the largeness of the family, he in turn requests his Bepa or Tucha to help him, and thereby almost every participant at a feast busy about. The duties performed are in no way for financial or material gain. They are all done on reciprocal basis. This is still practised today.

A family usually has a number of Tuchas in their relationship, and of these one is called a Tu Bul (Tu=Nephew or Son-in-law, and Bul=Beginning) who need not necessarily be a son-in-law, but must have had at least a woman of the clan to which he is 'Tubul' as his wife, or even if he did not have, his brothers' or uncles' must have been one. Tubul, Tucha, Be/Jol cannot be ordinarily changed. The relation is continued by the eldest sons in their generation. 'Sung Gao', however, disappears gradually, and within three or four generations its presence in that particular family will be felt but not as forceful or visible as it used to be.

Kinship Terminology:

Among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race, the respect for birth and the knowledge of pedigrees is common and preserved strictly, and every Kuki (and for that matter the whole race mentioned) *addresses another person in strict accordance with the genealogical tree, regardless of age*,¹ and *this custom is

1. Dr. U. Vamko hau Profile of a Burma Frontier Man, published in Djakarta (Indonesia); p.212.

still observed with the main objects of preserving genealogical family trees".² Below are given some of the kinship terminologies for consanguineal, collateral and affinal relatives.

Consanguineals:

Father's/mother's father	- Pa or Hepu
Father's/mother's mother	- Pi or Hepi
Father	- Pa or Hepa
Mother	- Nu or Menu
Son	- Chapa
Daughter	- Cha Nu
Son's/Daughter's son	- Tu Pa
Son's/Daughter's daughter	- Tu Nu

Collaterals:

Father's elder brother	- Pa Lien (Len)
Father's younger brother	- Pa Neu/Pa Ngah
Father's elder brother's son	- U or Nao (if older) (if younger)
Father's elder brother's daughter	- (Same as above)
Father's younger brother's son	- (Same as above)
Father's younger brother's daughter	- (Same as above)
Father's elder or younger sister	- Ni or Heni

2. Ibid., p.212.

Elder Brother - U or ka U pa

Elder Sister - U or Ka Unu

Affinals:

Father's elder brother's wife - Nu Lien

Father's younger brother's wife - Nu Neu/Nu Ngah

Father's sister's husband - Gang or He Gang

Mother's brother's wife - Pi or He Pi

Mother's sister's husband - Pa

Son's Wife - Mounu

Daughter's husband - Mah Pa or Tupa

Elder brother's wife - U or Unu

Younger brother's wife - Naonu

Sister's Son - Tupa

Sister's daughter - Tu nu

Elder sister's husband - Tupa

Wife - Jinu

Wife's father - Pu

Wife's mother - Pi

Wife's elder brother - Pu

Wife's younger brother - Pu

Wife's elder sister - U (oo)

Wife's younger sister - Nao

Husband - Jipa

Husband's Father	- Gang (when husband's mother is of the same clan as speaker, otherwise 'Hepa')
Husband's Mother	- Ni (if of the same clan as speaker, otherwise 'Honu')
Husband's elder brother	- U Pa
Husband's younger sister	- Nau Nu
Husband's father's sisters	- Ni te

From the above, it may easily be understood that the important terms of relationship indicate definite classification of relation from marriage. As will also be seen later on the topic of marriage discussed in this study, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage prevailed till the bygone decade (but still practised in some areas), and so marriage meant marrying beyond sexual satisfaction and a union of two individuals. In a way it was to strengthen the family ties, and thereby facilitate in preserving the family genealogical tree for which the Kukis are fond of and well noted of, to this day. Each of these have a role to play whenever any important function is held in a relative's house. On such days work is not allotted, but work allotment is already built-in in the relation. As for instance, the preparation of curry, fetching of water, is to be already the work of 'Tuchaho' (Sons-in-law and the families of one's sisters). It may also be noticed that in the terminologies more honorific ones begin with 'He' (e.g., Henu, Hepa, Hepu, Hepi, He U, etc.), and very often 'Hepu' is used for important persons without

any implication of kinship.

The continuance of the 'Household Council' or the inter-related relations of the Kukis and the kinship terminologies, even after many changes in the social and cultural life, is a sign of continuity in one of the most important social structure apart from Marriage, Religion and Festivals which are on the verge of diminishing point. This continuance is also important because other important customs which still continue to this day (e.g., Naming of children, Death and Funerary Rites, etc.) are based and connected with this (the family structure and kinship terminology). It may be rightly affirmed that, even if there comes a change in the few existing traditional customs, the inter-related relations and the terminologies used will not fade away.

2. MARRIAGE

To the Kukis, marriage is a civil contract and a social obligation with acquisition by one family of a wife for one of its sons from another family - normally of the maternal uncles' side or at least of the mother's clan, and in the process the wife becoming a member of her husband's family. Like other tribals, in the regulation of Kuki marriage, "notion of Kinship and determination of the range of prohibited degree are two important factors. Even when other rules permit, it is the Kinship prohibition which disallows

marriage".³ Clan exogamy was in operation, but for reasons not known (it could possibly be because of their being clannish), the practice and preference of clan Endogamy has become quite popular in the present day marriages since the last few decades. However, village or local exogamy, regional endogamy, and ceremonial kinship rules have not regulated Kuki marriages in any way.

The purpose of marriage appears to be twofold - Economic (the family receives an extra hand and when the couple start a new family the husband is thereby helped in his works) and the continuation of the family line. Here, it may be referred that, "Marriage is not complete without issue of male child".⁴ To give her husband a son is a wife's greatest pride, and barrenness or even issues without male is considered a grievous curse. It is also said that only at the birth of a male child the wife could proudly or sadly proclaim she has become 'MI PHUNG' (MI=Man, PHUNG=Clan; thereby meaning the husband's clan). Again, "If no male is born, the husband is at liberty to marry another woman".⁵ There are also curses (the Kukis are well noted for cursing and in fact they have got curses

3. Mukherjee, Shabananda Structure and Kinship in Tribal India, Minerva Associates (Publications) Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1981, p.56.

4. Misao, P.C. History and Customs of the Thadou Kukis, Imphal, 1970, p.34.

5. Ibid., p.34.

befitting any given circumstance and person) in connection with or for issueless of a male child, e.g. CHAPA-GAPMO/CHAPAGAIMO (CHAPA=SON, GAM/GAP=EXTINCT - meaning 'May you remain without son' or it can even mean 'May your lineage be stopped'). Therefore, a man becomes CHAPA GAP if without any male issue and 'IN GAP' (IN=House, GAP or GAM=extinct), on or for total extinction.

In the ancient Kuki society there used to be four kinds of marriage - CHONG MOU, SAHAP SAT, JOL LHAH, and KIJAM MANG. A proper ceremony and process is gone through in the first two, but the latter two amount to elopement.

The process of the first two marriage usually start with the taking of a pot of JU (substituted by tea with the coming of Christianity) by the boy's party (normally the 'Tucha ho' Sons-in-law and other relatives) to the girl's house on behalf of the boy and his parents. If the proposal is accepted, the parents of the girl kill a pig for the representatives of the boy and his parents and they all eat it and much JU used to be drunk, followed by the deep discussion on the price of the bride-to-be and how much of it should be brought on the 'MOU PUI' day (MOU=Bride, PUI=Take), and the day of the marriage fixed. This feast is called 'SUM TAN SHA' (SUM=Money, TAN=Cut or block and SHA=Meat), and interestingly, a marriage is broken off or postponed on account of the occurrence of a death in either family during the preliminaries.

In case of postponement the parties are careful to note, during the time agreed upon, whether or not further calamities occur, in which case the marriage is usually broken off. The bride-price usually differs from clan to clan, and the type of marriage followed. In the CHONGKOU and SAHAPSAT marriage or the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage as this type of marriage generally used to be, it usually does not exceed a Shemithun with a young mithun or more mithuns depending on the girl's parents (many other items are also made compulsory to accompany the mithuns in the bride price - 'Dahpi' (Gong), Khiba (Beaded necklace), cash, etc. Again, if the question of the bride-price should arise afterwards for some reason or other leading to divorce then the SUMTANSHA expenditure is to be returned. It should be noted here, that the practice seems simple and easy enough, but in almost all cases the girl's parents do not give their consent at the first approach (it might be because of prestige question), but by the third or fourth approach the actual truth is known. Also, the bride-price is never paid in full even if the boy's side could well afford to do so. The reason given is 'for good health of the new couple' (but from the quarrels when they are drunk, it must have been left out to serve as a reason to continue the haggling over it for which also the Kuki-Chins are shamelessly fond of and noted of).

After everything is fixed, the boy's side sends strong

young men with representatives to take away the bride on the day fixed sending that part of the marriage price agreed on to be paid at the time, but leaving the greater or the smaller part (as agreed upon) to be paid later. These representatives are feasted at the expense of the bride's people and both parties wrestle and much mithun dung, pig dung, and filth is thrown at the bridegroom's party first on their arrival at the bride's house, then when the pig is killed for the feast on the following day, and finally when the groom's party departs with the bride. It is also said that the young men who wrestle must be perfect, and none of them must lack a limb or an organ or even a little finger joint. Even the THEMPU (priest) who officiates marriages is to be physically fit. However, wrestling and other festivities are not indulged in and the bride is taken on the same day or early the next morning. Even after the wedding marriage is not consummated till the new couple revisited the in-law's house in what is known as 'IN LUT' (IN=House, LUT=Enter) after a few weeks or even some months.

JOL LHAH

In this type of marriage no arrangement regarding price is made. It is a case of pregnancy resulting from an intrigue between a young man and a girl. The man takes her as a wife when her state is known. Although bride-price is settled upon as a rule, no previous arrangement exists between the parties

and no ceremonies are held.

KIJAM NANG (ELOPEMENT)

This marriage can also be called the love marriage. In this, lovers elope if circumstances from both parents did not favour to their marrying (and return only when both parents agree to accept the couple back after much negotiations; but if it cannot be settled amicably, the couple had to find some other means like settling in another village for good, or end their lives by committing suicide as was the case some years ago at Deniha village in Upper Burma. In this type of marriage, the bride price used to be extremely high, and if the parents of the girl did not want their daughter to marry the boy, the bride-price was fixed at a rate usually impossible to be met by them. In any case, the price is not to exceed rupees one thousand. On their part, though dowry system was not known and practiced, the girl's parents were to give to their daughter two or three beads and some clothes. Though the bride price was a must according to the custom of the Kuki-Chin Mizo race, yet, it should not be mistaken for a mere commercial transaction nor as the complete sale of a woman. The system had been initiated by elders "to force some discipline on the parties concerned"⁷ and also means several ideals and values like "compensating the family for

7. Baveja, G.D. The Land Where the Bamboo Flowers, Gauhati, 1970, p.25.

parting a daughter, symbolizing a new relationship between the two families and perpetuating relationship already in existence between the two families".⁸ It is also the gift to seal the contract.

The marriage ritual was simple and performed by the village priest known as THEMPU and completed with the giving of threaded necklace to the groom and bride (signifying the acceptance of the bride as one of the family member from thence). Feasting followed the wedding for some days and merriment prevailed throughout the village. Amidst this merriment, the priest would take a mouthful of Zu and spray it from the mouth on the couple and bless them uttering some words meaning:

'May ye enjoy good health,
 Be ye be surrounded by your children,
 May riches be yours, with mithuns and money
 And may you lead a long life!
 May your grand children see your grey hair,
 And may ye excel your friends in prosperity'.

The Kukis are attached to monogamy, but divorce was not unknown, though very rare. Divorce was permissible in case of barrenness of either of the partners, unfaithfulness of

8. Singh, S.B. (Ed.) An Introduction to Tribal Language and Culture of Manipur (7 tribes), published in Imphal by the Manipur State Kala Akademi in 1976, p.122.

either partner, in the absence of male issues. If the divorce is advanced by the husband, he has to pay a sum of rupees forty (or a mithun) but not allowed to receive back any amount of the bride price paid; on the other hand, if the initiation was from the wife, her parents are to return all the bride-price they had received from the boy. In the absence of male issue from the wife, the husband marries another woman after divorcing her, but if a mutual understanding could be gained, he marries without divorcing, and the two wives live together in the same house. But in the unfaithfulness of the wife, not only the divorce takes place, but the adulterer has to be fined as well and the bride price paid returned to the husband. Widow remarriage is also permitted, but since Levirate marriage was also a rigid custom enforced, a widow was to be looked after by the husband's elder or younger brother whoever is alive and nearest to the husband in the brotherhood. However, if the brothers of the deceased and his widow disapprove, the widow returns to her house, and the bride price remains with her parents.

3. NAMING OF CHILDREN

In naming children the 'respect for birth and the knowledge of pedigrees' (for which the Ruki-Chin race has been characterized) is made possible, and is strictly preserved upto this day. Strictly preserved and equally important as

it is, an expectant mother usually keeps a pot of Ju ready to be used by the midwives and others involved on the delivery day of the child. On the eighth day the child's ears are bored with a porcupine quill or a hair pin, and after ^{it} is about a month old its head is shaved and kept so for the first few years of its life".⁹

In this traditional custom, "an eldest son takes the last name (syllable) of his grand father; the second son of his mother's father; the first daughter is named after the paternal grandmother, the second daughter after the maternal grandmother, the second daughter after the maternal grandmother and so on",¹⁰ (e.g., THANG HEM - HEM KHO TIN LEN, HEM KHO TIN LEN - LEN KHO PAO - LEN KHO PAO - PAO AND LUN, PAO KHO LUN - LUN MIN THANG, and so on for men; for females, e.g., LAM JA LHEI - LHEI KHO CHIN, LHEI KHO CHIN - CHIN KHO CHONG, CHIN KHO CHONG - CHONG NEI LHING, CHONG NEI LHING - LHING NEI KIM, LHING NEI KIM - KIM NEI NG, and so on). But in very exceptional cases, the naming of 'MIN PUT' (MIN=NAME, PUT=Take, carry) of an offspring can be from the name of a close relative, a close friend, or someone thought to be worthy of remembering by the child's parents (in this case, the second, third or fourth offsprings are usually preferred to be given).

9. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. The Chin Hills, Rangoon, 1896, p.197.

10. Dr. U. Vamko Hau op. cit., p.212.

Along with this practice, meaningful names are also given to the child with the view that the child may live to the name given (e.g. LHUN - Accomplish; Lun - Lordly; Vum - Lifty, Hau - Rich; Kho - Town (village, and so on).

4. INHERITANCE AND ADOPTION

In the unwritten conventional law of the Kukis, the eldest son in a family inherits the property of his father, and if he be the Chief's son, also inherits all the tithes and tributes received by his father. He is at liberty to distribute or not to his younger brothers, but often, "the cattle are divided amongst all the sons"¹¹ with the eldest son taking the major portion as he is responsible for the maintenance of the womenfolk of the family, who do not inherit anything from the parents' property besides "jewellery belonging to the mother",¹² and these too, are "divided amongst the brothers and sisters".¹³ In the absence of any male issue, and on the death of a husband without any child (or with girls but without a son), the property left by him is not inherited by the daughters nor the wife in the case of the latter. It is rather, to be inherited by the "nearest

11. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.208.

12. Soppit, C.A. A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontiers, Bhamo (Burma), 1887, p.16.

13. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.208.

male relative of the deceased".¹⁴ If such could not be still found, the property goes to the nearest relative or the head of the sub-clan to which he belongs.

The custom also permits adoption. Generally, a near relative like one's brother's child is adopted. The adopted son is allowed to inherit the property of the step father. Persons adopting a child are generally those without children of their own. When a child other than a brother's child and grand children or one's sister's child is adopted, people usually regard him as a slave. In any case, once a male child was adopted, he was regarded as the son of the man adopting and given the right to inherit.

5. POLITICAL ORGANISATION/VILLAGE POLITY

A Kuki village is a separate state in itself notwithstanding the number of houses constituting it, and each ruled by its own 'Hausa' or 'Chief'. The Chiefship is hereditary, and the chiefs exercised political control over his areas and they were recognised as "lords of the soil".¹⁵ A Chief was assisted in his day to day functioning by two or three noble men known as 'SIEMANG UPA or HAUSA-UPA' or ministers, and together, they formed a sort of Council which discussed all disputes between people of the village. They were remunerated

14. Soppit, C.A. op. cit., p.16.

15. Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol.14, p.435.

for their service with the fines imposed on the guilty at a case. They were also exempted from the tribute paid to the village Chief in the form of paddy known as 'Bu Sun' (BU= Paddy, SUN=Pour) or 'Chang Seu', but instead they were to bring a jar or pot of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ each to the Chief's house to quench the thirst of their fellow villagers who go there to submit their 'Chang Seu'. The giving of this was done on a fixed day (announced some days in advance by the village crier or announcer - also appointed by the village chief) and it was to be brought at the chief's house where the paddy was measured with the 'BU SUN BENG' (the basket for measuring the 'BU SUN'/'CHANGSEU' Paddy) and this measuring basket differed from village to village (depending on the chief's decision). The chief also received one fore-leg of every wild animal shot by any of his men, and one of the tusks when an elephant was killed. The house of the chief was to be built by the villagers, but not the cultivation of his jhooms. Though the chief was a despot to a certain extent, yet, his subjects could easily transfer their allegiance to some rival chief. In ruling, his success or failure depended entirely on the ability and capability of his personality.

(1) Lawms

'Lawm' literally means "corporate labour"¹⁶ or labour in rotation. In this system, a group of young boys and girls

16. Pudaite, Rochunga op. cit., p.45.

form a group or society of five, six, seven and more, and work in the jhums of each member day after day in rotation. After the rotation, if the jhum cultivation had not finished, and if the 'lawm' wanted to continue, the work would be resumed. While the 'lawm' circled, the owner of the jhoom in which they work provided the tiffin with food and Jū (though in some, every member brings his own). Often, they sang songs while working and eased their tiredness with humour. One lawm generally rears a pig for feast at the end of cultivation (Lawm Juneh), and this feasting of lawms (done separately by different lawm as there may be several such groups in a village according to its size) was considered a period of great merriment by the young people. Lawm is still practised in the hill upto this day, but the provision of tiffin by the jhum owner is by and by thinning; while, the 'Lawm Juneh' (annual feasting with drinks and dances) has faded with the coming and spread of Christianity, which does not permit the consumption of intoxicating drinks. On the other hand, this and other feasts (as will be described in the following paras) are now substituted by the Christmas and New Year Celebrations.

(11) Som or Shom:

A very peculiar social set-up found in most of the tribal societies of North-east India known as the 'Bachelors' Dormitory', in which, "all the bachelors of the village sleep

in the houses of the chief, persons of importance and influences",¹⁷ was not found among the Kukis in the manner practised by other tribes. The Kukis practised 'SHOM', in which, bachelors of the village slept in groups or unspecified number in the houses of unmarried girls, the girls thereby becoming their 'SHOM NU' (more or less meaning their intimate girl-friend in the village). In this, the Shom members become part of the family and therefore attend to household duties like repairing of baskets, preparation of bamboo splits called 'Naang' (bamboo strings very essential in a Kuki's day to day living and used for tying things), making of the Shomnu's tools for the Loom, Comb, etc. Their Shomnu on her part mended their clothes when required and supplied each with night blankets woven by her, and she consoled them when broken-hearted. Despite their intimate relation and close association, sexual relation as well as cases of unmarried pregnancy were unheard of between the Shom members and their Shomnu.

In the evenings, young boys would visit their beloved or fiancée in her house (those not having would straight away go to their Shom), return to sleep at the Shom, and go back to his house only in the morning for lunch, after which the day's work in the field would start with his 'LOM/LAWM' members.

17. Parry, N.E. The Lakhers, Mac Millan & Co. Ltd., London, 1932, p.245.

So, it is clear that a Kuki youth spent most of his time outside his house. There was gradation of age among its members on age basis in the Shoms. The juniors obeyed their senior who lead them and served as their counsellors. It was here that they learnt "the basic principles of discipline, co-operation and respect for elders".¹⁸ When a Shom member misbehaved or lacked discipline, he was advised, and if he continued, expelled. The Shom, today, has been discontinued and is in a way replaced by Schools, where too, one has to learn the basic principles of life.

6. DECISION OF DISPUTES

As in the case of the other tribes of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race, disputes of any sort in the village were settled by the Chief together with his advisers. If any dispute was brought for consideration before the Chief's Court, the appellant and the accused, first of all were to bring a pot of 'JU' each for the Chief, his advisers, and the others gathered for the case.¹⁹ The guilty in a more serious case had to perform 'Salam Sat' (a fine of a killing of pig and mithun - the size depending on the seriousness of the crime; e.g. the size of the pig to be killed had to be at least 'Tuh' 4 (measurement of pigs) in adultery; while,

18. Singh, K.B. (Ed.) op. cit., p.119.

19. Pailot, Chins' Rules (in Chin), Imphal, 1958.

a reasonable size of mithun is also accepted). But if the suspect deny being guilty, or "it being impossible to ascertain the respective veracity of two statements",²⁰ 'Tuilut' (the water-test) was performed. The water-test is still in use in some areas, and in this, the villagers and witnesses from both parties are summoned and at a given signal, both men plunge into the river and attempt to reach to the bottom. The one who fails to reach the bottom or in other words the one who emerges out first is "the guilty".²¹ But if both emerge out at the same time, "both are considered to have been in the wrong".²² In minor cases like theft, etc., the 'Salam Sat' could be performed without the killing of a mithun, but in both minor and major crimes, once the matter reaches the 'Tuilut' (Water-Test), the 'Salam Sat' fine has to be of both killing pig of a minimum size of 'Tuh' 4 and a mithun. Like the pots of Ju, the 'Salam Sat' meat is eaten by the Chief, his advisors, and both the parties (the appellant, the accused, and their party who had been summoned to be either witnesses or sympathisers). In disputes between one village and another village, the 'Mengchol' (Lambu) on behalf of the Government either settled the matter at his

20. Soppit, C.A. op. cit., p.22.

21. Ibid., p.22.

22. Ibid., p.22.

own disposal, or arranged the matter to be brought to the notice of higher authorities than the village Chief and his Council. But often, the 'Lambu' decided/judged cases on his own, and the party which favoured him more usually won cases even if on the wrong stand. Disputes of minor cases are still settled in the villages by the Village Authority, for which, usually the village chief is the Chairman; while, it is common knowledge that bigger matters are settled by courts or the government.

7. DEATH AND FUNERARY RITES

When it was sensed that a man or woman was dying, his or her neighbours and relatives gathered to hear advice and valediction. After death the corpse would be washed, the hair dressed carefully, and the body attached in a sitting position to a bamboo frame called 'SANGLAI' (a bamboo frame or a rough bamboo arm-chair) adorned with fine raiment, necklaces, etc.²³ for women; but if the deceased was a man, "his gun, dao, etc., are put near him".²⁴ With the death of a person, messengers would be sent to other villages to summon relatives and friends of the deceased, while a pig, a dog, a goat, or mithun (if the family could afford) would be

23. Shakespeare, J. The Lushai Kuki Clans, London, 1917, p.84.

24. Ibid.

killed and cooked in "anticipation of the arrival of the friends and neighbours who had been invited to the funeral".²⁵ The corpse was generally kept for two to six or seven days, and even more on the death of great and famous persons like the ace hunters²⁶ and great Chiefs. While the corpse remains, throughout the nights the deceased's sisters, their husbands, children, and relatives had to sit by the dead body or had to stay inside the house and help in the maintenance of the house and the function. They were also responsible for digging the grave, and they in turn request their 'tucha' (one's married sister's family) to help them. This 'tucha' further asks his 'tucha' (every family has one tucha or more, depending on the number of sisters and aunts one has; even in the absence of such, 'tucha' was to be selected from one or two families of the village by the family head) to help in the digging, and in this way all the youths of the village were indirectly involved and responsible in the digging of grave. This system is not practiced today, being substituted by the voluntary service of youths of the village and the neighbouring villages.

A customary rite or function known as 'KOSA' (a day on which the deceased's mother's relatives come to the house to

25. Ibid.

26. As related to me by some elders.

condole and pay their last homage to their 'tupa' (one's sister's or aunt's son). This is to be performed one day before the burial by the "Pu te" (male relatives of one's mother). In this performance, every 'Pu' (mother's brothers) brings a pig each and the pigs are killed and eaten by the gathering as a token of love, and bidding farewell to their nephew or 'Tu pa' (the husband or son of one's sister). On this night, like the other nights, dancing, drinking and the singing of a "low mournful tune"²⁷ to the accompaniment of horn beating and gongs take place.

When the necessary rites or ceremonies connected with death were finished, the corpse was wrapped in a cloth and carried out for burial on a stretcher called "lang" by four persons (who could be village youth or anyone). If the deceased had performed the 'CHON' or 'CHONG', 'Ai', or any other feast of Merit, his body was bounced or made to bounce up and down on the stretcher ('THI LAPI) amidst flashing spears and knives. For elders and famed personalities, a side room or space for putting the body known as 'KOCHONG' was dug on a side of the bottom. Having done so, the bottom portion of the pit is closed with a slab of stone and finally with earth after the elder of the family breath forth the following spell:

27. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.187.

'Hunger for me no longer,
 I have not made thee a Victim of enemies and beasts,
 Long neither for shelter,
 Nor for food beneath the logs in the field,
 Harm not our grown crops'.

While uttering so, he breaks a brittle bottle on the ear of the dead man. In the tomb, an erect-stick was kept half buried signifying freedom to such souls who might have been buried by mistake, and the same was taken out when the tomb would be filled saying:

"Come forth oh soul!
 Come forth oh soul!
 That dwell in the depths of the earth!
 Lest the ants press thee down eternity".

The crowd then used to respond by shouting 'Here it comes'. After this, the daughter of the deceased prepares a bon fire over the tomb to prevent spirits from swallowing up the buried corpse. On the death of an ace hunter, crying and shedding tears was not allowed as it was believed that if his death was mourned by the shedding of tears, the spirit of the wild animals (like tiger, bear, leopard, elephnat, etc.) he had slain would easily devour his soul. Further, during his last agony, a dog was killed and dragged around the house with its blood dripping all round with the belief that any evil spirit wanting to devour the great hunter's

soul might be distracted by the taste of the dog's blood and thereby forget to advance but retreat. The village priest would also challenge the spirits of the slain animals by shoutings:

"Ye, wretched beast with furious eyes,
 Ye, round eyed,
 Ye, with your swollen eyes,
 Eater of raw meat,
 Who preyed the pigs,
 He who snatched the Chickens,
 Ye who roamed stealthily,
 I have made a meal of thee,
 And have shined your head!"

With this, the cooked flesh of the animal offered or used would be eaten by some of the gathering to satisfy themselves with the thought that the meat eaten was of the spirit of the animals slain by the deceased. Along with this, the dead would be buried and several colourful flags hung at the tomb and at the home of the deceased. The different colours of flags signified different animals (red flag - tiger, lion; black flag - bear, wild boar, elephant and other big games; white flag - ordinary games like deer and stag). Several soft cock feathers were woven in a ring shape and placed by the dead man's head and gun shots filled the atmosphere of the day.

The yard in front of the house served as the family grave yard, and all the dead bodies were buried there (in separate tombs) except the first child to die. When the first born of a family dies, he or she was buried underneath the floor of the house and the rite was called "Lam Zul". In one case, a grown up man already with family was buried in the 'Lam Zul' fashion according to the wish of his parents (who were still alive at his death) being their first born and the first to die in the family.

8. RELIGION AND FESTIVALS

(1) Nature of Popular Beliefs

Before the coming of Christianity, the Kukis together with their fellow tribesmen of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race were said to be animists, worshipping spirits. Though "they believed in the existence of one omnipotence",²⁸ yet, the idea of God was not clear and everything good was associated with HIM. They did not worship the Sun or Moon, or any other natural forces, though when wishing to emphasise a statement they frequently say, 'If what I say is not true, may the sun and the moon desert me'. God was not worshipped for praise or thanks giving, and there was no personal relation with the gods believed. Evil spirits were taken to cause all the shortcomings in their daily lives, and for this, the God worshipped was mainly for the "appeasement and of seeking

28. Gougin, T. The Discovery of ZOLAND, Churachandpur, 1980, p.14.

favour",²⁹ As will be seen in the following para, the Kukis did not worship idols, although figurines of mud were made to represent the soul of the sick person to be exchanged for the real soul believed to be in the hands of the evil spirit. Again, though not Fetish in the real sense of the term, they also offered clay images of animals to represent one in reality.

Whenever a religious rite was performed, it was done at the 'Sut Phung' (a wooden post situated at the back wall of a house). Here, the God worshipped (believed to be the creator of the ancestors) was adored by sacrificing pigs, fowls, and other domesticated animals (but not the mithun, for which a separate permanent post was erected in front of the house) by the eldest of the family or clan, pouring water over the sacrificed animal and uttering:

'Be satisfied and content we beseech, oh spirit/
soul of our progenitor,
Spirit of the father also, be gratified,
And also spirits of his wife and children, be
yet, rejoiced'.

After saying so, all the names of the family's dead ancestors that could be remembered are recollected by uttering their names seniority-wise and concluded with a supplication saying:

29. Singh, K.B. op. cit., (Ed.), p.131.

Forgive our mispronouncement and the suppression (silence) of some names and formalities we are ignorant of, and also forgive the evil deeds we might have committed.

The necessary rite over, the animal was cut, cooked and eaten by the family members.

From the above, it can be concluded that the Kukis believed in one supreme God called 'PATHEN', remembered their ancestors with reverence and appeased the spirits in and around the village (a Kuki's life was often "spent in propitiating these spirits").³⁰ Like other tribes ^{of} Manipur, they also believe "in the existence of soul and its rebirth",³¹ and that while the righteous go to heaven after death, the sinners are punished by the Gods or sent to hell (although "its conception was not very clear").³²

(ii) Sacrifices

As mentioned in the last para, prayers were offered to both God (PATHEN) and demons or evil spirits. Any prayer offered began with:

"Be pleased, oh my God!

Be pleased, oh my evil (Lung Zai)

30. Shakespeare, J. op. cit., p.61.

31. Roy, J. History of Manipur, Calcutta, 1956, p.198.

32. Ibid., p.198.

Be pleased, oh Sun,
 Be pleased, oh Moon,
 Be pleased, oh heaven,
 Be pleased, oh earth,
 Be pleased, oh beginning,
 Be pleased, oh first creation,
 I am the first to exist,
 But it was the beginning
 Let my sacrifice bring health for whom I prey".

Sacrifice of many types were offered according to the need of the occasion. Sacrifices were made for the sick people, for abundant harvest, for fortune, and other requirements. In most of the sacrifices, the 'THEMPU' (Soothsayer, village Priest or Sorcerer) of the village performed the main rites (like the killing of the sacrificial animal, the uttering of the necessary prayers, and so on). Generally, when sacrifices were made for the sick, the priest took the sacrificial animal to the forest and killed it pouring 'Zu' over it and muttering to the spirit, "you have wanted a pig and so one has been killed; now be satisfied and remove the sickness which you have put upon the man",³³ and called upon all the names of rivers, streams, hills and haunted places of the area. By doing so, they believed that the evil spirits

33. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.198.

who cause the sickness would be pleased or contented and thereby relieve the sickness. If the illness was not cured by the first sacrifice, it was assumed that the animal sacrificed was not acceptable to the spirit causing the illness; therefore, a bigger animal or a different animal was offered, and if still not proving any result, the sacrifice continued with the offered animals increasing in size. In short, it was not an uncommon thing for a man to sacrifice mithun after mithun during an illness, and sometimes a Chief will sacrifice as many as ten during one illness. While the sacrifice and prayer for the sick was performed (Kithoi), the doors of the house of the sick would remain closed, and were to be opened only by the 'THEMPU' on his return after completion of the sacrifice. The meat sacrificed was usually selected by the priest and he often chose pigs, probably arguing that the spirit, like himself, preferred pig to all other flesh.

The form of prayer offered differed from one occasion to another. The prayer for an abundant harvest used to be somewhat like:

'Ye spirits of the crops, come,
 Come, spirit of (the owner's name) crop,
 Come, oh abandoned spirits of crops -
 Ye who art scattered hither and thither".

The prayer over a sick man affected by the field ran,

'Release, release,
 Lest I will uproot the trees
 And plant them upside down!
 I will turn the heavens upside down,
 If ye linger on,
 And release not the one you trapped!'

In the domestic sacrifice, the prayer used was,

"Be pleased, oh God of my grand fathers,
 Be pleased, oh God of my father!
 (Names of grand parents' parents are mentioned or
 recalled)

I entreat, I entreat him/her,
 I entreat for (name of the sick member).
 I beckon, stray spirit,
 I beckon, heavenward soul,
 Those in heaven both befool you,
 With false zu and meat.
 Longest not for other's drink,
 Longest not for other's meat".

For one affected by the forest, the following prayer
 was used:

"Release release,
 If ye be trapped by a haunted place (Saitaa) release,
 If ye be trapped by a cursed place, release.
 If ye be trapped by a landslide dam,

Ye gain nothing by keeping him/her,

Ye gain nothing by killing him/her,

Have I ransomed him/her with many mithun,

Have I ransomed him/her with much money,

(Mithuns and money mentioned here are made of mud,
dried and taken to the forest).

Ye gain nothing by keeping him/her,

Ye gain nothing by killing him/her.

Let him/her come again to the warmth of his/her home.

Let him/her come again to the warmth of his/her field

Leave him in peace of mind and heart*.

In the case of bad dreams and bad fortunes befalling
upon a person, his relatives condoled him with the prayer,

"I wish you

stay on,

And I say stay!

As many times as there are

feathers on my chicken

And hairs on my pig.

If ye be trapped by a

haunted place,

I have ransomed you with my black and

white animals

Do thou accept,

My offerings of black and white animals

I have ransomed him/her from bad dreams
of day and night.

Linger on,

As many times there are feathers on my chicken
And hairs on my animals!

Creator of my father and grand-father take you

'Tis coming

'Tis coming!

Yes, the creator of my father and grand father

Yes, he summons these at the mouth of the river!

Yes, he summons at the valley".

In love and enticement, the prayer was,

"ye, my sweet tabacco,

Turn the eyes of ... (name of beloved)

Turn the heart of (.....)

And cling together,

Be his/her blood!

Let him/her see me a Sun-flower

United theirs together!

United theirs together!

Unite their souls,

Unite their eyes,

Unite their blood,

Unite them flesh and flesh

Let them one,

Like unto binded her
 Make them one, make them one!
 Unite their hearts
 Unite their souls".

Sickness of every kind was looked after by the village priest or Sorcerer and every sacrifice was undergone according to his prescription, and surprisingly enough, most of the sacrifices or treatment ('Kithoi') undergone proved successful.

Festivals and Feasts of Merit:

The social and cultural life together with the festivals of tribals in Manipur were "agriculture-oriented".³⁴ Here, it may be noted that besides being agriculture-oriented, the festivals celebrated by the Kukis had religious significances. They were also celebrated mostly before the sowing began and after the harvest with the motive of praying for a good season and thanks giving after harvest.

(1) CHAVANG KUT and MIM KUT

Chavang Kut (Chavang=Autumn, Kut=Festival) and Mim Kut (Mim=Job's tear, Kut=Festival) were celebrated for more or less the same purpose - that of thanks-giving and dedication to the supreme Power 'Pathen' who once again led His people safely to a period of plenty. The festival used to be for about a week filled with prayers, feasting, singing and

34. Roy, J. op. cit., p.201.

dancing. It did not have a fixed-day like the Hindu festivals, and after being fixed, every household of the village prepares for the drinks and food. On the morning of the festival day, the village crier known as 'LIANG SAM PA' would shout "KHO ATHENGE, KHO ATHENGE"³⁵ (The village is clean, the village is clean) and with it the 'THEMPU' (the village Priest) would also announce the start of the festival. The village youths then used to go out chasing mithun to be killed for the festival. Meanwhile, the village folk prepared bread or cake out of pounded rice (Job's tears, maize and millet in some places where these form the main food) and brought at a common place (usually the chief's house) with jars of JU to be shared by all. The Ju taken was consecrated first by the village Priest and "all the villagers - even the sick and weak would taste it".³⁶ Apart from drinking, singing, dancing and sports of SEL KAN or SEL KAL, which mean jumping over the mithun which had been weakened (the increase of the height being done by placing folded blankets stretched on the mithun), "serious business of the village"³⁷ would also be discussed. Taking advantage of the situation, "the chief and elders

35. Hangshing, Tong Kho hao in CHAVANG KUT 1982 SOUVENIR, p.

36. Ibid., p.xx.

37. Doungel, Chung Kho Kai in Chavang Kut 1982 Souvenir, p.II.

deliberate over the affairs of the village on how to meet the grain requirement for the coming year, select site for next year's jhuming area, what precautions to take in the event of wild-fire and whether water supply requires any improvement, etc."³⁸

The songs sung were "both traditional songs and those composed for the occasion"³⁹ comparable to ballads. These songs also differed from village to village (or region to region) in as much as the days of the festivals differed. A song quite popular among the Kukis in Nagaland was:

"Let's be up to enjoy feasts
 Job-tears are now in plenty
 Come. Birds should not waste our
 labour
 Here is the stone to scare them away
 Kites, there would pounce upon
 them
 And we would enjoy our feast".⁴⁰

The origin of Mim Kut (also known in some parts as 'CHANG KUT' - Chang=Paddy, Kut=Festival) is traced from the legendary

38. Ibid., p.II.

39. Ibid., p.II.

40. Festivals of Nagaland, Published by the Directorate of Information, Publicity and Tourism, Government of Nagaland, Kohima, 1979, p.4.

story of a widower who was asked to forsake his two sons from his former wife by the woman he married, who herself was also a widow. Being left to themselves in the forest, the elder brother climbed a tree in order to view which direction to follow. There he found two eggs and being hungry he broke one and drank it up. Soon he was turned into a horn bill (VA PHOL). The younger brother who was called Dapa asked his brother who had turned into hornbill to give him also. The elder brother threw the other egg, but it fell on the ground and its contents were spilled. However, his hornbill brother guided him through his shadow to get out of the forest. But soon dark clouds came and Dapa lost the track of the hornbill. He was eating some jungle fruits when he met two persons who were carrying a sack of money. The elder one threatened to kill Dapa, but he pacified him and by a trick learnt their magic and somehow took away the money sack. Soon he reached his aunt's village and lived there. Later on he married a daughter of the village-elder and cultivated land which gave him plenty of job's tear, rice, maize and other crops.

Having felt the separation of his brother, he hosted a feast where he invited all the birds and animals. His hornbill brother also came, and being pleased distributed his feathers to the guests. Besides being a thanks-giving festival it is believed that 'MIM KUT' was celebrated to

commemorate Dapa's feast. But the majority of old people are of the opinion that the festival might have evolved from religious sanctions.

Mim Kut and Chavang Kut are taken to be synonymous although the literal meaning differ slightly (Mim Kut for Mim Festival and Chavang Kut for Autumn Festival). To support their synonymity, although both are celebrated in two different states on different days (MIMKUT is celebrated or observed in Nagaland as a holiday on January 16, and 'Chavang Kut' on November 1 since 1982 as a holiday in Manipur State), both celebrate for the same purpose.

In the olden days the feast of the festival continued for over a week, but today, they are celebrated just for the sake of commemoration of the gone by centuries of plentiful.

(11) Luoi Khai:

Luoi Khai means Hanging or Suspension of the Swing (Luoi - swing, Khai - hang or suspend). It was a festival in which a swing which could accommodate four to six persons was made of creeper planks and bamboos, and suspended or hung on the tallest and biggest tree of a nearby forest. Being a feast mainly for boys and girls, and celebrated soon after the sowing season (between May and June), they usually enjoyed swinging away their leisure hours. As far as can be seen and traced, the festival did not hold any religious or cultural significance.

(iii) Chon/Chong:

This was a feast generally given by a well to do person to show that he and his family lead a much happier life than other families and that they had enough wealth to rely upon. Guests would be invited from different parts days ahead and the feast was celebrated with drinks of Ju, dancing and eating - usually mithun was used. After mercilessly beating the animal with pounding sticks, youngmen compete by jhuming over it, the increment of the height for those succeeding being done by placing layers of folded blankets over the half dead standing body of the mithun. After this ill treatment, the master of the feast (host) attired in the warrior's costume would come and kill the animal whose meat was then cooked and eaten. Along with other traditional songs sung at the feast, this song also used to be prominent:

'Oh mithun, oh mithun!
 It is better for thee to lie in dead,
 On a prepared raised ground,
 On a prepared raised ground,
 It is the tenth time,
 That I rejoice raising your horn.'

Persons who have performed the 'CHON' were buried only after seven days of their death, carried about and made to bounce about ('Lap') on the way to the tomb for burial, and a special pot of 'Ju' always reserved at every 'feasts of

merit' for them from which those who had not performed the feasts could not have their share unless given the share by a member who was thus eligible.

(iv) CHANG AI

This was a feast celebrated in the olden days to mark or commemorate "the greatness and achievement of women".⁴¹ A woman (and sometimes a man) performed this feast at an "exceptionally good harvest"⁴² year as "a thank-offering for the good harvest"⁴³ unlike the 'sai ai' (Please see next para) and ceremonies held when slaying an enemy, in which a performer was assumed to obtain advantage in the next world. The feast was usually celebrated by killing fowls, pigs, or mithuns, and could all be killed if the performer could afford. Like in other 'feasts of merit', a special pot of 'Ju' was prepared and put on the platform in front of the house, from which, only those who had performed the 'CHANG AI' feast could drink. The person who gave the last feast of this was called forward to have the advantage of being the first to drink or suck from the 'special pot' (the tastiest and strongest Ju is obtained from the first round in a pot). As a rule, CHANG AI was generally performed by families who gather more than 100

41. Hangshing Ngulseh The History of Kuki groups of North Eastern India (1057-1950 A.D.), Churachandpur, p.36.

42. Shakespeare, J. op. cit., p.91.

43. Ibid., p.91.

measuring baskets of paddy at harvest time; but even if the paddy collected was more than this, very few people dared to perform the feast because of the heavy expenditure incurred therein.

(v) SA AI

Like the former feast, this feast was celebrated to mark a man's wealth, skill, and bravery in hunting. A performer of this feast and that of 'GAL AI' (celebration at/on slaying enemies) was assumed to obtain an advantageous or prestigious life in the life after death at 'Mithi Kho' (village of the dead), and could also gain possession of the spirits of his enemies and wild animals he had killed in this life. This also served as the main reason or object for the 'Sa ai' celebration/feast. As a rule and practice, a man performing the 'Sa ai' feast must have killed "all the different kinds of dangerous animals"⁴⁴ or several wild games when games were available easily. But with the decrease of games, the performance of this feast depended on the wealth a would be performer possessed. However, to justify the ceremony, at least one animal must have been killed (either by hunting or trapping, but not tamed animals, being his property already) by a man intending to perform

44. Shaw, William op. cit., p.75.

the feast. In the feast, the whole village and other invited guests from other villages far and near were fed by the performer for one day or more days if he could afford to. In this feast (and at funerals), "the name of all the progenitors of the whole clan (the performer's) are called out by the priest concerned (who generally used to be the head of a performer's clan)"⁴⁵ with the prayer or thanksgiving mentioned earlier. In this feast also (like in the 'CHON' and 'CHANG AI') persons who have performed this feast and the former feasts were honoured as in the last two feasts or ceremonies as far as drinking of Ju was concerned. In case of a man having celebrated the 'Sa ai' for more than once, the share of meat given to him varied according to the number of times he had celebrated (e.g., one piece if once, two pieces if twice, and so on).

In these feasts, apart from the eating of meat, singing and dancing filled the atmosphere of the days and nights. The songs sung were a "low mournful tune"⁴⁶ accompanied by the beating of mithun or buffalo-horns and the gongs in a regular timing to suit the steps or movement of the dancers. The dancers sang the 'low mournful tune' (the singers taking different voices of the song) after forming a circle with

45. Dr. Vun Ko Hau op. cit., p.212.

46. Carey, S. Bertram op. cit., p.187.

their arms locked round each other and swinging the body, and at the same time keeping the steps. In some places the dance was by holding hands and dancing round and round like children. Along with these two, dancers also danced singly (solo dance) or in turns of pairs (a boy and a girl dancing in the centre while others accompany them with songs and beating horns). As the night wore on, the revellers become hopelessly drunk with some sitting moodily in corners, some lying with their faces in the dirt, some quarrelling and fighting with fists, whilst others devoted their attentions to the women who were as drunk as themselves.⁴⁷ As mentioned earlier, the participants drank to the extent of not remembering for how many nights they had feasted with drinks and food, and unable to recollect how they had received bruises (from the fights). In some places guns were often hidden or put in a neighbour's house during a feast to be "out of the reach of the drunken and irresponsible assemblage".⁴⁸ Therefore, the frequent quarrels were usually decided with fists, a stone, a piece of wood, and even with hair-pins possessed by almost every man and woman for positioning the hair in shape. The fights that took place during feasts and the ignorance of them by the drunks involving in them easily justified the

47. Ibid., p.187.

48. Ibid., p.187.

recognized rule of the Kuki-Chin race that 'no act of a man is a crime when drunk'.

By giving these 'feasts of merit', it was generally believed that a "desirable fate after death"⁴⁹ was attained together "with social advancement".⁵⁰ But on deeper examination, it is learned that the 'feasts of merit' had been performed partially for the reasons mentioned above, and mainly for the status or privileges enjoyed by one who had performed (e.g., the privilege to take from the 'special pot of Ju at every feast, etc.). Besides these 'feasts of merit', the Kuki culture is also characterized by other cultural feasts different from the other feasts explained above. Some of the feasts celebrated upto the advent of Christianity were as briefly explained.

49. Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol.5, p.55.

50. Ibid., p.5.

CHAPTER IV

ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE KUKI REBELLION (1917-1919)

Spread of Christianity among the Kuki Tribe in Manipur (South District)

In tracing the history or the spread of Christianity among the Kuki tribe or any other tribes of Manipur, it is quite a must to make mention of the earliest pioneers of the faith in the North-Eastern hill areas of India, and of Manipur hills' in our study. Again, in tracing so, it should be kept in mind the two divisions of the Christian faith - the Protestants and Catholics (Roman Catholics) and their activities in spreading the faith.

As recorded in many different books, Rev. William Pettigrew who arrived at Imphal on 6th February, 1894 and established a school under the 'Arthington Aborigine Mission'¹ was the first pioneer of the Protestant Christian faith in Manipur. But learning that preaching of Christian faith was not going to be permitted in the Vaishnavite Hindu dominated Meitei areas of Manipur from Major Maxwell (who had returned from his long leave),² Pettigrew approached Kamkholum Singson,

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1. Kuki Christian Association's Silver Jubilee Conference Programme, held at Molnom Village, Churachandpur, Manipur South District from February 24-27, 1977.
 2. Thumra, J.H.: The Scriptural basis of giving, and the problem of self support of the Church in Manipur. (A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity, Serampore Collego (University), 1956, pp.1-2.

Chief of Sanvon for permission to work there and establish his headquarter there. Being very new to the faith and its ideology, the great Chief refused the Reverend's request. Permission being denied in the midst of difficulties to preach in the plains, Rev. William Pettigrew went to the Tangkhul area in Ukhrul and established his work centre there in 1895.³ After the First World War and the Kuki Rebellion, Rev. Pettigrew asked Dr. Crozier who was serving as a Medical Officer at Tura (Garo Hills) to work with him in Manipur. With the arrival of Dr. Crozier, a new Mission Centre was opened at Kangpokpi and this remains a mission centre to this day.⁴

Although the 'Arthington Aborigine Mission' (by then taken over by the American Baptist Mission) had undertaken the first step to propagate Christianity in Manipur since 1895, their activities had so far been confined only to the Northern and Eastern regions of the state. In 1909, the wave of the great revivalist movement of 1904 among the Welsh Presbyterian Christians in Europe and their missionary activities which had reached the Khasi Hills and Lushai Hills (now 'Mizoram') with their head quarter at Shillong, also reached Sanvon where Kamkhölon was the Chief. Having seen the opening of Schools

3. Downs, F.S. The Mighty Works of God (Published by the Christian Literature Centre, Pan Bazar, Gauhati), p.77.

4. K.C.A. Silver Jubilee Programme, p.1.

and people being converted to the new faith in Aizawl and learning a little bit of the faith from the Book of John (a portion in the Holy Bible) which had somehow reached him, Kamkholun tore a page of it and wrote to Watkin Roberts requesting him to come to his village and open a school and teach him and his villagers of the new faith. Feeling this invitation to be a 'Macedonian Call',⁵ Rev. Watkin Roberts and Dr. Frazer sent representatives to Senvon to examine or enquire further in the winter of 1909. After their return and full confirmation of the possibility to open a new school at Senvon, Rev. Watkin Roberts set out in March 1910 to Senvon together with Thangkai Vaiphei and Lungpau (Pauva) Vaiphei who had gone from Manipur to Aizawl out of curiosity to learn the art of reading and writing, and who were also "the first converts among the Vaipheis"⁶ or the people of "the South-West Manipur as a whole".⁷ By 1911, a new school and a mission Centre was opened at Senvon village. But in those days, since only American Baptist Mission was allowed, Rev. Watkin Roberts used the native name and started a mission known as the (Chin) Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission.

Under this name the missionaries started their activities and the newly established Head Quarter was again transferred

5. S. Prim Vaiphei, B.D. The Vaiphei Tribe (Published in Imphal, 1975), p.48.

6. Ibid., p.48.

7. Ibid., p.48.

after some years to Tinsuong village where Ngullen Singson was the Chief. From 1913 onward, Rev. R. Dala (Ralzadala) became the Director of the Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission. After him, Rohmingliana followed, and he was further succeeded by H.K. Dohnuana who had been invited for the same from Tripura. The mission Centre was again transferred to Lakhipur (Assam) in 1925. From 1926 to 1927, the Funds sent for mission workers from U.S.A. was used misappropriately by H.K. Dohnuana and as a result, the mission workers could not enjoy their stipends or salaries as they ought to. The report or complains having reached the head quarter in U.S.A., Rev. H.H. Coleman, Rev. William and Dr. Turnley were sent to enquire and look into the matter.⁶ On reaching India, the three gentlemen did not stop at Calcutta and meet Rev. Watkin Roberts who was the head of the mission as a whole in India. Instead, they had come direct to Lakhipur (Assam) and started their enquiry, and subsequently brought into light the misappropriate use of the Fund by H.K. Dohnuana. On learning of their coming and activities, Rev. Watkin Roberts felt awkward and neglected. This and other reasons combined made Rev. Watkin Roberts and H.K. Dohnuana to find another mission

6. K.C.A. Silver Jubilee Programme, op. cit., p.2.

in 1926, while Rev. H.H. Coleman led the North East India General Mission (changing the (Chin) Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission into it).

In 1928, Rev. Paul Rostad and his wife came and opened the Dinwiddie Memorial Bible School (now at Churachandpur Mission Compound) at Lakhipur.⁹ In 1930, Maharaj Churachand's daughter was seriously ill, and Dr. Crozier cured her with the help of his skilled experience and prayer. In return, as a token of gratitude, the Maharaja granted him a portion of land to establish his mission in the present South District. The portion of land given by the Maharajah of Manipur became the Churachand Mission Compound (in remembrance of the Maharajah) and remains the Mission Compound of residence of the mission workers of the N.E.I.G. Mission to this day. The naming of Churachandpur town itself was also taken from the Churachand Mission Compound. The Mission Compound had to be evacuated from 1944 to 1946 because of the raging World War II (known to the locals as 'Japan Gal' or Japanese War). During the war, the mission works continued under the leadership of Pastor Nengjachin at Kailem Village, under Dr. Thanglung at Lungthulen village, and under Mr. Lampum at Santing village. With the end of the war, the Mission

9. Jou Christian Association's Silver Jubilee Programme held at Twaitengphai Village (Churachandpur, Manipur South District) in February 1978, p.4.

compound at Churachandpur was re-occupied with continuation of the school which had functioned upto Class VIII during the war under Pastor Nengjachin at Kailam village and the Bible School of Patpimun village.¹⁰ During and after the war (upto the return of the English missionaries), the N.E.I.G. Mission was solely under the leadership and guidance of Pastor Laithanlien. However, in 1949, with the return of Rev. Paul Rostad the Principalship of the Bible School and the leadership of the Mission went to him. But unfortunately, Rev. Paul Rostad's wife died suddenly in 1950 and as he returned to his country, the charge again went to Rev. Laithanliana till the arrival of Rev. Royal C. Paddock to the mission. But in 1953, when the Government of India declared foreign missionaries to leave India, Rev. Royal C. Paddock left for his native land and the charge of the mission's Superintendentship and the Principalship went to Rev. Nengjachin. With the opening of Senior High School, the Bible School of Mission compound was closed down (and reopened again only in 1972 after much pressurization and pleading by Rev. Khupjepao Singson and other mission workers).¹¹

~Till 1948, practically the whole Mikl-Chin Lushai race of Southern Manipur had grouped themselves under the N.E.I.G.

10. K.C.A. Silver Jubilee, op. cit., p.4.

11. Ibid., p.4.

Mission. But in 1949, besides the difficulty in preaching to another tribe in a dialect which was not fully understood by them, some mission workers realised the urgency of the necessity to have more workers from every tribe as they feared many would have died without being converted by the time the Mission as a whole realised the urgency and train workers for the purpose. They also believed that if every tribe was to stand on its own in the propagation of the faith, the advancement in spreading the religion would be far quicker and better than all the tribes combined and confined in one Association.¹² With this in view, and permission to organise itself under the wing of N.E.I.G. Mission from the 'Home Board', the Paite tribe separated themselves under the Convention Church (now Evangelical Convention Church) in 1949.¹³ This separation greatly helped in the spread of the faith and education among the Paite tribe. Seeing this result, other tribes also soon followed (e.g., Thadou-speaking people under 'Kuki Christian Association', Vaipheis under 'Manipur Christian Organization', Gangtes under 'Manipur Christian Synod', Hmars under the same old Assembly, Lushais under 'Tuithaphai Presbytery').¹⁴ Soon, change of respective names of organizations followed (even though all of them were and

12. Ibid., p.5.

13. Ibid., p.5.

14. Ibid., p.5.

are still under the N.E.I.G. Mission). The new names of the associations or organizations were: the Paite tribe's 'Convention Church' to 'Evangelical Convention Church'; the Gangte tribe's 'Manipur Christian Synod' to 'Evangelical Congregation Church'; the Vaiphei tribe's remained the same; the Hmar tribe's 'Assembly' to 'Evangelical Assembly Church' (and now split to many other more); the Thadou-speaking people's name remains the same upto this day; and the Lushais left the N.E.I.G. Mission and joined the Welsh's 'Presbyterian Mission'.¹⁵

Growth of the Roman Catholic Church

As mentioned earlier, the growth of the Catholic Church in Manipur was equally of a long and slow process like the other Protestant missions. But the advantage of the Protestant missionaries was that they had arrived earlier than the Catholic missionaries, and it may be noted that by the time they (the Catholic missionaries) came to Manipur, their counterpart had practically done what they wanted. However, inspite of this, the Catholic missionaries worked hard, and their dedication as well as some other ostensible reasons known to everybody, converted many new souls particularly among the more backward tribes and liberal minded people of every tribe to the newly arrived group of Christianity.

15. Ibid., p.5.

With the passage of time, the Catholic Church also grew, but among the Kukis it has not spread beyond Sugunu area in the Tengnoupal District of Manipur. However, by the 37th year of the Catholic Church in Sugunu area, a Kuki by the name of Peter Tong Kho mang Haokip was ordained to be the First ordained Priest of the Catholic Church in Sugunu area. He is the first Kuki Catholic Priest in Manipur and second only to one in Burma.¹⁶

Impact of Christianity on the Kuki tribes
(and other tribes of Manipur)

When writing the impact of Christianity on the Kukis, the facts or findings written here do not mean the effect the religion has only on the tribe in question. When minutely looked, the impact of Christianity on the tribes of Manipur or for that matter the other tribes of the whole N.E. India, have many effects common to those of the other tribals of other regions in India. The impact of Christianity on the tribals of Manipur are on their Religious, Social, Economic and Cultural life. In the other regions of India where caste system predominantly prevails, Christianity "gave the tribals a unique social position in relation to their neighbours. They were freed from forced labour and other economic injustices

16. This is unconfirmed information.

previously done to them (having become owners of land)".¹⁷ They were also "freed from inferiority complexes. They began to be literate and in their academic achievements were able to compete with their non-tribal neighbours. This gave them self-confidence".¹⁸ And it is also recorded that they "got spiritual freedom".¹⁹

With the coming of Christianity, the Kukis and other tribals of Manipur benefitted in many ways. In the earlier days, cleanliness or hygienic way of living was not known to them nor its usefulness considered. Since the coming of Christianity and its missionaries, the once dirty and filthy tribals began to be clean and improved hygienically. The old religion of the tribals demanded sacrifice of animals in sicknesses and misfortunes befalling them. But the new faith forbade such practice. This helped them economically, because, the sacrifice of animals greatly affected their economy which was mainly based on agriculture (Jhooming) and rearing of livestock in a limited form. Protestant Christianity forbade the use of intoxicating drinks (Ju), and this meant the saving of paddy (used in making Ju) either for food or for sale. The advent of the British and

17. Tribal Awakening, A Group Study. Published by the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1965, p.172.

18. Ibid., p.173.

19. Ibid., p.173.

Christianity gave them "light from darkness, peace from chaos and money from destitution".²⁰ In short, Christianity has succeeded in modernising the tribal people of Manipur, and it has "unlocked and opened up the closed doors of those primitive villages to the light of the modern world".²¹ Again, it has also "earned for them (tribals of Manipur) prestige and regard from others which they never had before".²²

However, inspite of these good results of the coming of Christianity, its coming also has one great impact on the demerit side. The coming of Christianity has practically closed down the chapter of the social and cultural life of the Kuki tribe and other tribes of Manipur. If the modern tribal youths continue to remain indifferent to the fading cultural and traditional life of the tribes, it will not be a wonder to find a tribal youth not even using a tribal name and other customs of his tribe after some decades. But fortunately, of late, the modern tribal youths have realised the possibility and started cultural revivalist movements.

THE KUKI REBELLION (1917-1919)

The first World War had a great impact on the Kukis or the Kuki-Chin race as a whole. Through the Maharaja of Manipur,

20. Mc Call, A.G. Lushai Chrysalis, Published by LUZAC & Co. Ltd., 1949, London, p.288.

21. Roy, J. op. cit., p.200.

22. Ibid., p.200.

the British Government ordered every able-bodied hillman for conscription to the Manipur Labour Corps (the Chin Labour Corps in the Chin Hills, Burma). In spite of the protest raised by the Kuki-Chin race (mainly by the Kukis and Zous), about 2,000 strong Nagas and Kukis were sent to France in May 1917 to serve as porters of the British army. This group returned after a hard year's labour in June 1918; while at home, the Kuki-Chins revolted in what is now known as the 'Kuki Rebellion' (the 'KHONGJAI LAN to the Meiteis and 'Zou Gal' to some tribes). In other words, "the irrepressible Kuki-Chin spirit of independence and resistance"²³ which had so far been lying dormant but waiting for an opportunity was hurt by this drive for recruitment of every able-bodied hillman of Manipur and Chin Hills and consequently the Kuki-Chins "flared up in rebellion".²⁴

The Kuki Rebellion (the 'Khongjal Lan' to the Meiteis) was fought mainly by the Zous and Thadous (Kukis) of the Kuki-Chin race, and was led on the Thadou (Kuki) side by veterans like Tintong Haokip of Laijang village, Fasei of Chah Sat village, Khotin thang Sitihou of Jampi village, and others; while Langjachin of Behiang village, Gou Lun of Hengtam village, and others led the Zou group. The battles of

23. ASMI, *The Chins Fight Back* (Published in the Guardian, Rangoon, in 1955).

24. *Ibid.*

Hengtam and Goteng Kot are equally important and worth remembering among the eventful battles in which the Zous actively fought "shoulder to shoulder"²⁵ with the British troops. At Hiangtam fort, the fighting did not last for more than 3 days and one night and came to a stop after that because of the "double sidedness of some Chiefs",²⁶ At Gotengkot battle, in his book, A Brief History of Zou (in Zoudialect), T. Gougin says, the Zous and Haokips (a Kuki clan) fought together their common enemy under the leadership of Ngulkhup Haokip, Vummang Zou and the Zou Chief of Khau Kual village. With the increasing reinforcement of the British troops from different directions (some from Chin Hills in Burma, some from Lushai Hills, and still more from the Manipur valley - the combined force of the Maharaja (7) and the faithful British Gurkha troops, the defeat of the rebels was inevitable as can be well imagined (being the case of a 'giant and a dwarf', and a primitive tribe's undeveloped weapons with a still more outdated method of warfare against that of the then most advanced race's most developed weapons). With this defeat, some leaders like Pu Ngulkhup Haokip and others fled to Tamu in Burma but were soon captured and imprisoned. Apart from the primitive weapons like Daos,

25. Gougin, T. Discovery of Zoland, p.52.

26. Gougin, T. A Brief History of Zou, p.41.

spears and arrows, the natives also used "home made gun powder"²⁷ for their muzzleloading guns, and "Suangthang/Song Thang (stone trap)".²⁸ The home made gun-powder was also used in a "curious sort of leather cannon made from buffalo's hide rolled into a compact tube and tightly bound with strips of leather".²⁹ Despite their primitive warfare and defeat, the Kukis believed that "the British were frightened to fight the Kukis (or Kuki-Chin troops) because of their daring courage and spirit which they never saw elsewhere though they had superior weapons".³⁰ Though questionable, it deserves justification to a certain extent, because the hill tracts, which formed the only means of communication routes available were in no way comparable to the present improved (but still unthinkable for easy and safe use) roads of the hills. On these steep and dangerous narrow tracts the British soldiers could not move about freely and also fell an easy target for the hill rebels who were expert in sudden attacks and setting traps, and who also knew the region like 'the back of their hands'. In all the fights that took place in the hilly regions, the rebels poured down stones and made good their target and vanished before the enemy realised what

27. Gougin, T. op. cit., p.52.

28. Ibid., p.52.

29. Shakespeare, L.W. (Colonel) History of Assam Rifles, London, 1929, p.215.

30. Gougin, T. op. cit., p.52.

hit them and before it could re-organise.

Although the Kuki-Chin rebellion was one and the same war fought by the race in general and the Kukis and Zous in particular, many opinions are still raised as to their fighting the war together or side by side in a combined effort. It is true that Zou Chiefs did not participate at the final meeting of the Kuki Chiefs at Jampi village where the war was finally declared, and the Zous did not take part in all the battle fields where the Kukis fought (specially in the North, East, and West regions of Manipur). Their absence in these regions was because of their small population. The Zou who still do not cross 20,000 in Manipur cannot be expected to be active and found everywhere. The population in Burma being many times that of their number in Manipur, their movement was concentrated mainly in the southern Manipur and the Chin Hills (Burma). However, unknown to the Thadou-Kuki Chiefs or leaders and participants of the rebellion in other regions, the Zous fought side by side or in a combined force in the southern region as was at Gotengkot battle (described earlier). Moreover, being of the same origin, and having no great differences in all aspects of life, and fighting the same enemy for the same cause, there cannot be any doubt that they fought the war together.

However brave and courageous the Kuki-Chin race might have been, their belief to conquer the British Government

with their primitive weapons and the much more outdated warfare is beyond any man's imagination. But when the rebellion was finally subdued, the loss incurred in the war was heavier on the British side than the Kukis' for whom war or no war, life had always been as it was during the war. No detail about the loss of property and life in the war has so far been brought forward by any Kuki-Chin, and there is no source to supply such exact information. Nevertheless, it is a fact that after the subjugation of the rebellion, the rebels were faced with the sort of difficulties and hardship never faced by them before and during the rebellion. Just after the war, many concentration camps were opened by the British Government at various rebel areas and after capturing suspects, they were "imprisoned in these camps and given the most inhuman torture".³¹ In India alone, the British Government's loss was, "killed in action - 1 Indian Officer and 47 Riflemen; Died of disease contracted on service - 84 riflemen of the transport-followers, 7 were killed 393 died of disease".³² But some are of the opinion that, "the number of casualties given in this extract does not tally with facts", and are of the view that, "actually, many more officers and sepoy on the British side were killed".³³ In the Chin Hills or

31. Memorandum of the Kuki Political Sufferers' Association, Manipur, December, 1958, p.30.

32. Shakespear op. cit., pp.238-39.

33. K.P.S.A. Memorandum, op. cit., p.27.

Burma, "the casualties were: killed in action 1 British Officer and 38 Sepoys",³⁴ and "a large number of followers also succumbed to disease",³⁵

As far as the causes of the war was concerned, it is generally believed that the main cause was the conscription of hillmen to the Labour Corps. But when examined minutely, though the conscription order of the Labour Corps was the cause for the immediate outbreak of the war, other deep-rooted causes were also responsible for the outbreak. Before the British came to Manipur and consolidated their position in 1891, the possession of guns in the hills was not restricted by the Maharaja of Manipur nor any other authority. But with their coming, in the name of safeguarding and protecting the hillmen from entering into inter-tribe or clan feuds, and the guns being unlicensed by them, the British Government proclaimed an order for the confiscation of guns if beyond one for every ten houses from the hill men as implemented in the Chin Hills. In the actual sense, it had been meant for effective control of the hill people in Manipur and the Chin Hills. Consequently, from 1907 to 1917, "at least 1,195 guns were confiscated by the British Government"³⁶ from the hills

34. Ibid., p.28.

35. Ibid., p.28.

36. Manipur Administration Report, 1918-1919, p.2.

or the Kukis who had by then acquired the knowledge of gun manufacture, and "during the rebellion, 1,000 more were also confiscated or otherwise collected from the Kukis".³⁷ This order was effective only in the administered areas; but in the unadministered lands, as in the interior village of the hills, in addition to their own, their friends and relatives living in the administered areas gave them their guns for hiding to escape the disarmament operation. This action of the British Government imbibed a sense of alienation to the Kukis and "fanned the flame of discontent",³⁸ and "they anxiously waited for a golden chance of revolt".³⁹ With the outbreak of the war, the unification of the discontented Kukis against the British for any cause was not a difficult question.

Another possible cause of the war was the increasing popularity and influence of the hill peons or Lambus. With the coming of the British, the once popular and despotic Chiefs who could "murder or sell their subjects into slavery without a murmur of dissent"⁴⁰ and who thought himself to be of equal status with the Meitei king began to lose their influence over the Government. This can be confirmed by the

37. Ibid., p.2.

38. Memorandum of K.P.S.A., p.24.

39. Ibid., p.24.

40. Johnstone, James Manipur and Naga Hills, reprinted in India, 1971, p.26.

President of the Manipur Durbar who said, "the Manipur Hills covering an area of more than 7,000 sq. miles, with a population of 1½ lakhs are administered by me through a staff of 4 Lamsubedars and 37 interpreters and Lambus (hill peon) without any military, police, guards or outposts".⁴¹ It can further be supported by a record which states "These men... are responsible in no small measure for the rebellion".⁴² In the midst of all these, the rumour that the Raja, Political Agent and the Vice President were murdered, and the British Empire had been "defeated by their enemies in Europe"⁴³ gave the Kuki-Chin race a hope to be able to oust the imperialist rulers for good. Moreover, the Kukis never knew nor believed the British to be as they were, but rather, they took the few British posted/stationed in Manipur and Assam to be the whole race constituting the British empire. Together with these causes of the Kuki Rebellion/War, it will be noteworthy to mention the arguments employed by the Kukis as far as their resentment to the conscription order of the Labour Corps and the British rule in Manipur was concerned. These arguments were: "(1) we cannot join the Labour Corps and go to France in as much as the great War I is not our

41. Foreign and Political Department External A, 1915, Prog. No.12, p.7.

42. No.37 in I.A. April, 1916 Nos. dy. Corrs, 11.

43. Foreign & Political Deptt. Secret 1, 1920 Prog No.4, p.2.

national and forefathers' war.

"(ii) The levy of the Hill House Tax of Rs. 3.00 per house per annum is unjust, for we were not conquered by the British in course of war, also the British Government has done nothing for the development of the Hills in respect of education, agriculture, communication, etc.

"(iii) No change has been brought about regarding the administration of justice in the Hills. Hitherto, both the civil and criminal cases of the hill people have been settled exclusively by the leading Chiefs in conformity with their customary law, and the British Government have done little in this connection.

"(iv) The enforcement of the duty of serving in the Labour Corps on the Hill tribes by the British Government is a discriminatory treatment in as much as our fellow plainsmen are exempted from the same. Those few of the plainsmen who were sent to France were not as members of the Labour Corps but in some more honourable capacity. We, therefore, deeply resent this unjust demand of the British".⁴⁴

When the rebellion or war was finally subdued in 1919, the British Government realised that the Kuki rebellion was the "most serious problem to the authority in Assam since

44. Memorandum of K.F.S.A. op. cit., p.20.

the uprising of Tikendrajit at Manipur".⁴⁵ This can be supported by Col. LW Shakespeare's book 'History of Assam Rifles' which states, "It grew therefore into the largest series of military operations conducted on this side of India since the old expeditionary days of Generals Penn Symonds and Treggear in the late eighties or the futile Abor Expedition of 1911-1912, eclipsing them all in casualties and arduousness of active service. During these operations all the advantage lay with the active scantily-clad Kukis, armed certainly only with the old 'brown Bess', but who know their hills and forest, carry no packs, do not bother themselves over supplies, who are rarely seen in their forests, and who are adepts at guerilla and jungle warfare".⁴⁶ In comparing the Kuki-Chin rebellion with other expeditions in the Manipur and neighbouring hills, Shakespeare also wrote, "we find that General Penn Symond's columns in the Chin Hills during 1889-90 had 66 casualties all told, these of Treggear's in the same period barely reached 30, while of General Bower's force in the Abor Expedition, 1911-12 which was greatly written up in the newspapers, 4 were killed, 7 wounded, and 54 died of disease. The operations in Kuki and Chin Hills were included in the grant of the British General

45. Reid, Robert History of the areas bordering on Assam, Shillong, 1942, p.79.

46. ~~Shakespeare~~ Shakespeare, L.W. (Colonel) op. cit., pp.238-39.

service and victory Medals and clasp for the N.E. Frontier".⁴⁷ In other words, "Those who took part in the suppression of these Rebellions were awarded the same British War Medal of 1914-20 and the Victory Medal as those who saw active service in France from 1914-18"⁴⁸ and Uvumko Hau (author of 'Profile of a Burma Frontier Man') further records that, "there are Siyins (Chins or Kukis) in the Blargies Cemetery near Dieppe in France".⁴⁹ But having occurred at the same time with the First World War, the Kuki-Chin rebellion "was taken as a part of the World War I".⁵⁰

In spite of its short period and little recognition, the Kuki Rebellion had a great impact on the social and economic life of the Kuki-Chin race and the tribals of Manipur in general. One important change brought about by the war was the opening of hill subdivisions in the state in 1920,⁵¹ and "Due to this rebellion the Kukis have been recruited in Assam Rifles and Police, which had hitherto been denied to any other tribes of Manipur".⁵² With the end of the war, western education gained ground in the hills followed by their

47. Ibid., pp.238-39.

48. Dr. W. Vumko Hau op. cit., p.XII.

49. Ibid., p.XII.

50. Gangte, T.S. A Rethinking on the Kuki Rebellion, The Hill Monitor, vol.I, No.21, p.4.

51. Kuki State, Memorandum to the P.M., 1960, p.19.

52. Ibid., p.20.

religion, which abolished the cultural and traditional life of the tribals. And above all, "The suppression of the Kuki Rebellion had caused the disintegration of the Kukis, the Chapter of Kuki prowess has been closed since then"⁵³ and "ended the reign of the Kukis in the Manipur hills".⁵⁴

53. Ibid., p.20.

54. Ibid., p.20.

CHAPTER V

THEORIES OF ORIGIN

To a non-Kuki (for that matter the whole Kuki-Chin-Mizo race), to be still bothered about one's place of origin in this supersonic-thermo-nuclear age would sound ridiculous. But surprisingly, the Kuki-Chin-Mizos are not only bothered about it, but are anxious to trace it out for reasons even they do not know. It must have possibly developed from their extreme clannishness and great concern for the knowledge of pedigrees. But, despite the excellent maintenance of the genealogical tree of the tribes by some of the elders from the present generation to the inhabitants of 'KHUL' (believed to be a subterranean land, the exact location of which still remains obscure), in the absence of authentic literature so far, its whereabouts, what it might have actually been, still remains unknown.

In discussing the theories of origin, it will be improper to discuss only of the Kikis as the problem concerns all the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes. In the same way as they are identified by different names despite their being of the same stock in different places of their settlement by others neighbouring them, in the origin, too, the names used also differ, but all suggest one and the same thing, place or direction - the north - and all believing it to be somewhere in China. To

begin with, excepting the Hmars and Lushais (Mizos), the other tribes coming under Kuki-Chin hold their origin to be from Khul, the obscurity of its exact location or what it might have actually been remaining equally unknown to all. The Hmars and Lushais (Mizos) call the place of origin 'SINLUNG' and 'CHHINLUNG' respectively. Some writers have dealt with KHUL, SINLUNG and CHHINLUNG to hold slightly different theories, but at the same time conclude the three to be one and the same. As the three do not differ much in the location, it would suffice to make a brief mention of Sinlung and Chhinlung, and to combine them under the Khul theory and proceed on to present the findings of some local researchers in the latest and the most controversial theory of origin - the Israel or Jewish theory.

The KHUL (Pronounced as Khool) Theory

The Khul theory believes that they lived under the earth ruled by one NOIMANGPA. One day, while hunting for porcupines, Chongthu, who was a relative of the chief found a large hole leading to the outside world unknown to them till then. Finding the new found land to be uninhabited but filled with darkness which lasted seven days and seven nights (known as the 'THIMZIN' (Great Darkness) believed to have been caused by an eclipse in which, "Everything except the skulls of animals killed in the chase became alive, dry wood revived,

even stones became alive and produced leaves, and so men had nothing to burn¹). He gave up the chase but formed ideas of forming his own village-state in his new found land. An excuse to fulfil his plans came soon. Nomangpa performed the 'CHON' feast and this necessitated the attendance of everyone in the Kingdom. Soon after the feast started, Chongthu started waving his sharp sword about so vigorously that he injured some of the folks present and the people gathered became angry. Chongthu's action was a pre-meditated one as he thought that by doing so he would be turned out from the under-world and thus have an excuse for going out to the upper-world to form a village of his own. On learning of Chongthu's behaviour the ruler suggested Chongthu to be killed. Therefore, a feast was prepared by Chongthu, his brother CHONGJA and some other followers in preparation for the departure to the outside world. On their move Chongja and his party were left behind, while Chongthu's group reached the outlet of the subterranean land which was blocked by a serpent. The serpent having killed some of his group members, Chongthu, wrapped himself with clothes and his head with a thick cotton-woven cloth called 'Phoipi', attacked and killed the serpent which "he cut into seven pieces".² Further on, they were obstructed again by a Lion. Outwitting it, they

1. Shakespeare, J. op. cit., p.91.

2. Shaw, William op. cit., p.25.

finally reached the orifice which was also covered with a stone. One of Chongthu's group by the name of Vangalpa lifted it up and only seven people managed to pass through as he was unable to hold longer and all subsequent efforts to lift it again failed. When Chongja's party reached the spot they could not proceed on, so returned. But Chongja's wife cursed Chongthu's party saying that "they should suffer from all kinds of sicknesses, deaths, troubles, evil spirits and bad luck".³ The curse was heard by Chongthu's party on the other side of the stone and so, "in cases of serious illnesses, etc. sacrifices are always made in the name of Nemneh, wife of Chongja, in hopes of appeasing her wrath".⁴ Nemneh's appeasement was done to the extent of always repeating "the name of seven of the most important villages of Noimangpa under the earth (1. Noimang, 2. Kholoichal, 3. Khopalva, 4. Khothip, 5. Khomang, 6. Khokanglai and 7. Khokisupi) in one of which Nemneh is sure to be at the time so that she may hear his (Thempu - the village Priest) solicitations".⁵ Another version is that on reaching the orifice by which they were to emerge, they found "a great stone kept open merely by the support a bird gave it with its legs. On seeing this the people of the village began to abuse the

3. Ibid., p.25.

4. Ibid., p.26.

5. Ibid., p.26.

King's brother, accusing him of having deceived them, and having brought them from their burrow to deliver them to the serpent. Stung with reproaches the King's brother attacked and killed the snake, and he and the greater portion of the village emerged into the light. Meanwhile the king having discovered that a wooden dish or bowl which had the magical property of always being full of meat and some other articles of a similar magical description, were not amongst his effects, returned to fetch them. Before he got back, the bird having got tired of supporting the stone had let it fall, and unable to raise it, he and his wife had to remain below. Attributing the close of the orifice to the ambition of her brother-in-law to become King, Nemnik (Nemneh), the King's wife, cursed him and those who had gone up with him to suffer from diseases hitherto unknown, to them. This curse they say is still upon them and when disease presses them sorely they sacrifice to Nemnik (Nemneh) a mithun in mitigation of her wrath".⁶

Soon after reaching the new found land Chongthu came into contact with Lenghang and Lunkim - the two brothers - who had survived the aforementioned 'This Jin' "by making a fire of the skulls and bones of all the game they had killed

6. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.135.
 (The writers had also reproduced from Colonel Mc Culloh's "An Account of the Valley of Manipore and of the Hill Tribes" written in 1859).

as they were great hunters".⁷ It is said the two brothers were 'captured' by Chongthu (but they might have possibly been befriended also) and used as guides in search of a better place as the two were familiar to the land.⁸ William Shaw writes that, "the hole in the earth called "KHUL" is said to be at the source of the "GUN" river (pronounced as GOON) which I find to be definitely identified with the Imphal river in the Manipur state, 'Gun' being the Thadou (Kuki) for the "Imphal" river. In all the old stories and legends of the Thadous (Kikis) the river 'Gun' is frequently mentioned and is of great fame".⁹ But J.H. Hutton, who edited Shaw's book remarks in the footnote, "I cannot help suspecting that this GUN-TUI was originally the Chin or Khyeng-d Win River, into which, of course, the Imphal River runs".¹⁰ He further referred to his earlier footnote on page

7. Shaw, William op. cit., p.26.

8. It may be noted here as now claimed by Lunkim and Lenthang clans that besides them at that time there were also other people like the progenitor of the Lhungadim clan - Phut hil, and a few others, who, they further claim to be of their family. These clans now call themselves 'KHONGSAI' (earlier the Meiteis identified all the Kukis as 'KHONGJAI'). Whatever be, therefore, as mentioned earlier (Introduction) there are some clans who can never be included in Thadou (the eight descendant of Chongthu) or CHONGTHU to include them some more clans of the lineage.

9. Ibid., p.26.

10. Ibid., p.26 (Footnote no.2).

17 of the same book which suggest that the Kukis had migrated to Manipur through Burma. He writes, "Major Fryer (on the Khyeng People of the Sandoway District, Arakan, J.A.S.B., No.1 of 1878) convincingly traces the Chin migration to the upper sources of the Chindwin, in which case the Kuki race has first migrated from North to South down the valley of that river, and then stopped by the Bay of Bengal, turned north again up the ranges forming the watershed to the west of it (cf. Lewin, Wild Races of South-Eastern India, pp.138, 173). Thrown off during the long course of the southward migration, offshoots of the Kuki stock undoubtedly penetrated the western watershed of the Chindwin valley long before the Thadou (Kuki) came up the watershed from the south again. Thus the Maring tribe includes a village, Khoibu, which will not intermarry with other villages, and which has a tradition of a common origin with the Poi of Falam, having migrated to the Manipur valley from the Kabaw valley (near the Chindwin) apparently with the genuine Maring villages ("Man in India", VI, No.4, Notes on the Marings, by Mr. Gimson)..... The Ao tribe, in the north of the Naga Hills district (present day Nagaland state) shows entirely unexpected traces of Kuki influences, and the Sema tribe in whom the dominant element is derived from a migration from the south-west in the Manipur, has its whole social and political system clearly modelled on a Kuki pattern".¹¹

11. Ibid., p.17 (Footnote of Editor).

As to the location of Khul, while some believe it to be somewhere beyond the Great Wall of China, some other writers also suspect it to be in Tibet, that is, even if they had sojourned there for some years or centuries enroute to Burma in search of a better place to settle down. Carey and Tuck write, "We may reasonably accept the theory that the Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam, and the Chins of Burma originally lived in what we now know as Thibet and are of one and the same stock; their form of government, method of cultivation, manners and customs, beliefs and traditions all point to one origin".¹² J. Gingatuang, a Tedim-Chin historian of Burma, also views it to be in Tibet. He suggests that "when the Zomis¹³ moved to eastern Tibet from Central China they were hiding in caves to escape from their enemies. Those who were born in the caves were believed to have claimed that they were born of Khul".¹⁴ It appears that, "with the passage of time when their ancestors talked of the caves, they eventually attributed Khul to be their original place and claimed to have come from there. They were believed to have proceeded from Tibet towards the Irrawady and the Chindwin rivers and at last they arrived at Kowiphai, the Burma plains".¹⁵

12. Carey, S. Bertram and Tuck, H.N. op. cit., p.2.

13. As mentioned earlier (Introduction) the movement for unification or re-unification under ZOMI, of late, has started.

14. Gingatuang, J. History of the Zomi Family, Tedim, Burma, 1973, p.5.

15. Ibid., p.5.

It is certain that the route followed from Tibet to Burma must have taken them some centuries.

As mentioned earlier, for the sake of a deeper understanding on the origin of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of tribes, it would be worth mentioning briefly the SINLUNG and CHHINLUNG Versions of origin. Although "the term sinlung is analogous to Chhinlung and Khul",¹⁶ there is a slight of difference in the description. While "Chhinlung and Khul are said to be a cave or an orifice",¹⁷ Sinlung is believed to be a "rock fortress from which no one could escape".¹⁸ According to this Version, the inhabitants began to move out soon after there was light after the lapse of time (clearly suggesting the THIMZIN mentioned earlier). The place is believed to be in central China and they might have been "pushed out of China along with several other groups during the Chi'n dynasty of 221-208 B.C.",¹⁹ In this, some historians suggest "the present Tailing or Silung in south-west China".²⁰ Again,²¹ some are tempted to view Sinlung to be "SINING in central China"

16. Gangte, L.S. Zomi Polity in Transition: A Case Study in Manipur (M.Phil. dissertation submitted to J.N.U., New Delhi), 1982, p.16.

17. Ibid., p.16.

18. Songate, Hranglien, L. Hmar History, Churachandpur, 1977, p.13.

19. Puddite, Rochunga op. cit., p.21.

20. Ibid., p.21.

21. Gangte, L.S. op. cit., p.17.

To conclude on Sinlung version, it is again clear that although the exact location of Sinlung is not known, it is certain from repeated mentions that whatever or wherever Sinlung might have been, it was located in the north of the region the tribes now occupy.

The 'Chhinlung' version of origin is that, these people "came out of China during the reign of Chinlung or Chie'nlung (Chinese emperor) in about 200 B.C.",²² However, its similarity with the 'Khal theory' is that at the time of coming out from Chhinlung the guard closed the gate of the passage as some people chatted noisily which made him to believe that many persons had come out of it, thereby preventing further exit. According to K. Zawla, a Mizo historian in Mizoram, "When Shih Huangti, the first Emperor of China reigned in about 228 B.C., the Great Wall of China was built for which almost all male adults were engaged in the work".²³ The cruel and inhuman treatment they received made them escape when a chance appeared on the death of the emperor. These forced labourers escaped in groups to different directions. The ancestors of the present Kiki-Chin-Mizo tribes being believed to have been among those that followed the south of the wall,

22. Ibid., p.11.

23. Zawla, K. Mizo Pi Pute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin (History of Mizo forefathers and their Descendants), Hmar Arsi Press, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1976, p.2.

their descendants now believe that directions to be their place of origin.

From the theory of versions of the theory discussed above, it may rightly be concluded despite the inaccuracy and absence of authentic literature, that, the presently scattered and dis-united Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of tribes originate from the same place and are therefore of the same stock and one people.

(2) Israel/Jewish Theory

The advent of Christianity and its acceptance by the Kuki-Chin-Mizos have gradually evolved a controversial theory of their origin. Surprisingly, the study of the Holy Bible (the Old Testament) reveal similarities in the social and cultural life of the Kuki-Chin-Mizos and that of the Jews²⁴ (who are also to be known as Israels²⁴). But, still new as it is, an intensive study on the subject has not been done by any reliable researcher apart from Daniel Thangkhohun Lhungdim and his colleagues, who, people suspect to be doing so with a religious motive (of spreading Judaism - which itself undoubtedly resembles the traditional religion followed by the Kuki-Chin-Mizos before the coming of Christianity). Be it whatever it would, in the midst of curiosity and obscurity of origin, their finding or belief has contributed to be a

24. The Holy Bible (Genesis 32:24-32).

theory of their origin. Again, it is also stranger than fiction that, at this time of the century, when nations of the world (including other tribes of North-East India) are deadly against the Jews of Israel, a negligible community tries and wants to be identified with it.

In discussing this theory, besides the inavailability of authentic documents to prove or disprove, the time allotted for the study does not enable me to make a thorough study beyond consulting the research papers or findings of Daniel Than/Tho lun Lhungdim, based on oral traditions and rare books, most of which I could not find in Manipur and Delhi (the books he referred are to be found in the Jewish consulate library in Bombay). But, in the light of this short and limited study on the theory, I have realised that for an in-depth study on the problem, archaeological surveys (to study the major old sites of settlement on their migratory move) and field work (for collection of data from oral traditions) need to be undertaken. Besides, a thorough study of the Jewish culture and history will also be required. In doing so, it becomes inevitable to refer to the Bible, particularly the Old Testament portion. Even for the present study a brief mention of Jewish history is necessary for an easier understanding of similarities the two possess which have led to the development of a theory.

It is clear from the Bible that the Jewish history or

genealogy of the Jews started properly from Abraham. The Bible records that, "Abraham begat Isaac. The sons of Isaac, Esau and Israel (Jacob)",²⁵ Jacob had twelve sons who later on became the Twelve Tribes of Israel or the Jews. These twelve sons of Jacob were: "Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, and Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher",²⁶ These tribes lived together peacefully for many years under one ruler. But when Rehoboam (son of Solomon) became King, instead of heeding the counsels of the Elders he turned to the youngmen that were brought up with him, and that resulted in the outbreak of rebellions in the Kingdom of the twelve tribes (Ten tribes rebelled against the King and the other two tribes Judah and Benjamin). These ten tribes then moved to the North of Palestine where they called the land 'SAMARIA' and themselves 'ISRAELS'. The other two tribes remained in the south and called their land 'JUDEAN HILLS' and themselves 'JUDAH', and their city 'JERUSALEM' (CECIL ROTH, History of the Jews, p.31.).²⁷

For fear of distortion in meaning on the findings and lack of relevant literature on the subject, I hereby reproduce the findings of Daniel Thangkholun and Y. Stephen (with due

25. The Holy Bible (I Chronicles 1:34).

26. Ibid., 2:1 & 2.

27. As referred in Mongoloid Israels of Manipur State, Published by the Manipur Jewish Organisation, August, 1972, p.3.

permission).

"ASSYRIA INVADED SAMARIA, DIASPORA BEGAN:"

In B.C. 722, the children of Israel (the ten tribes) dwelling in Samaria were led captive into Assyria by the King Shalmanezar of Assyria (II Kings, 17:3, 6, 18, 20 & 23). This was the beginning of the dispersion of the ten tribes among heathen nations of the world. In Assyria they were treated mercilessly and were deported and put unto Halah and Habor, and Hara to the river Gozan and in the cities of the Medes, and later to Persia (The Ten Tribes of Israel by A.N. Dugger, p.3. and II Kings, 18:11). In B.C. 457 they were under the rules of Medes and Persia by the Kings Darius and Cyrus. Some of the ten tribes and the Jews met here and lived together with the same religion and the same fate (Ibid., p.3.).

"In 331 B.C., Alexander the great of Macedonia defeated Persian monarch Darius at Arbella (Erbil) and annexed Afghanistan and India (The Middle East, by W.B. Fisher, p.147). At the same time Persian Jews migrated to Afghanistan or Paktoons among the Pakthuns and Moslems (200 B.C.). In Afghanistan the Jews as slaves and servants were employed to watch the herds and earned their living by hardworks among the native peoples. Here the Jews built one stone upon another and offered animals which caused them to be called 'Pagan People'. As they mingled with the Moslems at the same

time, they were forced to be converted to Moslem religion resulting to the lost of their identities (Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol.I, pp.238-39). As they spoke Hebrew, they were known as "Nomadic tribe of the Semitic speaking People" (Outline of History by H.G. Wells, p.165). They chose to live in hills rather than live in towns and plains, for this cause (reason) they were called "Kuchis" (pronounced as Kukis) meaning 'wandering people' (Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol.II, p.514). This name Kuchis was heard from the English historian for the first time in Manipur in 1830 A.D. (Manipur and the Naga Hills by Sir James Johnstone, p.25).

"According to a Historian Josephus, the Jews in their dispersion kept the scroll and the religions of Judaism under the care of Priests and Elders (Haar Chanchin by H. Lien and K.K. Kung, p.4; and The Ten Tribes of Israel by A.N. Dugger, p.3).

"AT KAIFUNG IN CHINA

From Afghanistan through the Hindu Kush valley they moved towards the negligible further east passing through rivers and mountains in the Hilly region of Tibet, they happened to arrive at the Chinese border (History of the Jews by Cecil Roth, pp.166 & 168). From there they moved on and arrived in central China, then crossed the Wei river and arrived at Kaifung (Kaifeng or Laifung as some say) where they established

their colony and ghettos (231 A.D.) (University of Rangoon, Chin Literature by U Van Kyi B.A. (Ed.) Dip. T.E.F.L., p.72 ("What they now called Mizo and Zomi are the descendants of Kaifeng jews in China", "they came from Laifang or Kaifeng" - Columbia Encyclopaedia, p.1107 and History of Bene Israel of Maharashtra State by Shellim Samale, p.18). They settled there peacefully under their leaders for many years. Fulfilling Deuteronomy 28:63-66 ("Continued disobedience to be punished by a world-wide dispersion (63). And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to naught; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. (64). And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. (65). And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind; (66). And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: (67). In the morning thou shalt say, would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the

sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see"),²⁸ at length the Jews could not live in peace due to the repeated aggression of China by the Mongols and that resulted to the breakdown of the Jewish colony and ghettos. As a result of the Mongol invasion everyone fled for their lives, where as some of them surrendered to the Chinese King as hostages and servants.

"But the Jewish religion was no longer practised and their identities gradually lost from that time (History of the Jews by Cecil Roth, p.103, and the Mount Zion Reporter, vols 13 & 15, p.10). As a result of this many of them got Gentile wives, changed their names, and surrendered to the native King for servants and hostages (Mount Zion Reporter, vol.15, pp.5 & 12). Due to intermarriage with the Chinese for fear of death, they changed their names and surrendered to them which resulted to the lost of their true identity.

ARRIVAL AT CAVE VALLEY

Everyone fled for safety and sought shelter and could not take the parchment. Many found shelter mainly in the dense of rocks, caves and in the hilly region. They were therefore called by the native people according to the different climates of their habitation as "cave-dwellers; Mountainers or Hillmen" and no longer Jews or Israel as they concealed their identity among the native people for fear of death (Encyclo-

28. The Holy Bible (Deuteronomy 29: 63 to 66).

paedia Britannica, vol.5, pp.166-17; Church History by Jones, p.208; and History of the True Religion by A.N. Digger, pp.27 & 107).

"A group arrived in Indo-China (Hill Peoples' History by Vungdou Thong, p.3) where they found the well known cave and took shelter there (Chin Re-unification, p.6). Tradition and legends claim that the fore-fathers' sojourn in the cave valley was about two generations (Ibid., p.3 and Hill Peoples' History by Vungdouthong, p.3) hiding themselves in the cave for fear of enemies as historians claim. At length, the prince of China drove them out of the cave resulting in the lost of Scroll and Parchment ('Mizo Titi' by Lalmana, p.21) but the Priest got them memorised and followed till the beginning of the 19th century. Many of them supposed themselves as original gentiles (History of the Jews by the Cecil Roth, pp.36 & 103; The Mount Zion Reporter, vol.13, p.10, and vol.13, p.10; vol.15, pp.5 & 12). By that time also the parchment was lost along with the Hebrew script.

"During their sojourn in the cave valley, due to poverty and fear of enemies they put on animal's skins and lived on fruits (Hill Peoples' History by Vung dou thong, pp.16 & 17). By that time they were given the name 'cave-dwellers' by the natives and not as Israels anymore (History of the True Religion by A.N. Digger, pp.27 & 107) and unable to observe the sabbath due to fear and poverty.

"LOSS OF THE PARCHMENT

There was a special family to maintain the Parchment. When their hiding place was publicly disclosed "the Chinese Prince with his army were sent to drive them out of their hiding place as the religions practised by the Jews and Chinese differed and against each other - the Chinese followed Taoism and the Jews Judaism (Mizo Titi by Lalmama, p.18).

"Tradition claims that the Chinese prince and his army seized their properties including the Parchment of Torah, but they could not read the script as it was written in Hebrew script. So they tore them into pieces and gave it to dogs. Another tradition says that this Parchment was lost when the people including the family of the Priest fled for their lives.

"The Priesthood had been preserved till the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was terminated by the foreign Christian Missionaries. Till this time the Levitical priesthood and the service was endlessly continued through by-hearted (memorised) words of priests from Leviticus of Torah (Jewish Holy book). All the vessels of the ministry of the Priest were thrown away and burnt down by the forceful powers of Christian missionaries who came from Britain and U.S.A. (1854-1910).

FROM CAVE VALLEY (KHUL OR CHHINLUNG) TO MANIPUR

"As Chinese prince drove them out of their hiding place

they migrated towards the west passing through Thailand (Siam) Kale valley, Mount Kennedy, Natchuang ranges and Shan, and then to Burma (Foreword of Zomi Genealogy by Dr. Vum Ko Kao/Vum Kho Hao). In Burma they followed Irrawaddy river (Hmar History by L. Hranglien Songate) and settled at a village called Aupatusang near the city of Mandalay where Chinlung was the chief of the village (Mizo Titi by Lalmama, pp.18 to 20). History records that they were forcibly employed to build the palace of Thebaw with Teak woods only, and this palace was destroyed in the world war.

"As a result of a great famine that broke out in Mandalay and Aupatusang area, they had to seek where there was abundant food for their living. In course of time they happened to find the Chindwin river which they followed and arrived at Kalemye where they took shelter for some years. Then later, many arrived in Chin Hills and Khampat Valley (Tribes of Assam, 1851, by S. Barkataki, pp.71 & 74).

"Since the time of their settlement in central Burma they were called 'LUSI' by the native people (Kachins) which is interpreted as "of the Ten Tribes" (LU means Tribe and 'SI' 'Ten'); therefore it means "of the Ten Tribes" or "descendants of the ten tribes" (Mizo Thawnthu/Mizo History by V.L. Siama, pp.6 & 8) and were also called CHIN-LUSI. The natives meant ARK CARRIERS of the Ten tribes, for they carried an ark with

them (THOOL?) (Origin of Zomi by Prof. Haogo, M.A.) from Indo-China (Tribes of Assam, 1851, by S. Barkatoki, pp.71 & 74; and Hill Peoples' History by Vung dou thong, pp.3 & 4). Now we are falsely called Chin-Kuchis, Chin-Paite, etc., like "Chin-Cholkar of Bombay, which simply means 'coming from China'. Truly these people are not Chin in origin, they were simply called by the native people for they speak sometimes the language of Indo-China which is Chin" (The Jews of India by M.D. Japhet).

"Then they settled near Kalemyo coming from Aupatuang village (Mizo Titi by Lalmama, pp.16-20). In the Chin Hills (as it is now called), they had their names of corrupted nomenclature such as Chin in the central parts, in the south 'LAI', in the West 'Mizo', in the North 'Zomi' (Zomi Genealogy by Dr. Van Ko hau - Foreword). Besides, "no one person in the Chin Hills is Chink, Lai, Zomi, Mizo, but they are the scattered people, and these names are the corrupted nomenclature given by other people who first came in contact with them" (Prof. Haogo).

"In the eighteenth century, some migrated to Manipur and Lushai hills (present Mizoram) from Chin Hills, Kalemyo and Khampat valley (Hill Peoples' History by Vungdouthong, p.4)"²⁹

29. Mongoloid Israels of Manipur State, A Memorandum submitted by the Manipur Jewish organisation to the Jewish Agency in Bombay, for the Recognition and Safeguarding of the Rights of every one of the Tribal Jews of Manipur, Dated the 15th August 1972, pp.5-11.

Together with this historical finding by the two main researchers of this controversial theory - Mr. Daniel Thang Kho lun Lhungdim and Y. Stephen (keeping the question of its historicity for later researchers), they have also brought out similarities in culture and traditions. Interestingly enough, the culture and traditions, practised by the Kuki-Chin-Mizos prior to the coming of Christianity were similar to those of the Jews.

To begin with, Circumcision, which distinctly characterises the Jews and Muslims from other communities of the world was present among the Kuki-Chin-Mizos in the form of boring a child's ears exactly on the same day (the Eighth day) a male Jewish child would be circumcised. This difference in the mode of performance is attributed to Antiochus IV of Epiphanes who in 157 B.C. "tortured the Jews in this Kingdom and banned the practice of circumcision, abstention from the taking of Pork and observation of the Sabath, the penalty for the violation of which was death".³⁰ Besides this, similarities are pointed out in marriage (the compulsion of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, the practice of the Levirate marriage), Inheritance, Ghetto or Village and its administration, Feasts or Festivals, Divorce and Punishment for Adultery, Burials,

30. Lhungdim, Daniel Thang Kho Lun ISRAEL IHIUVE (We are Israels - in Kuki); Churachanapur, 1974, p.10.


Women's Position, Religion and the Ministry or Functions of the Priest, and the mention of the Crossing of Red Sea and the repeated use of Manasseh (Manmasi or Manmasseh to the Kuki-Chin-Mizos) in the traditional songs and sacrifices (which itself also does not differ much from the Jewish religion and religious rites as found in the Bible).

Whatever the motive, this finding has contributed to be a theory of origin for which the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race have long been curious of. From this finding a group of people have been fully convinced that the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes are the descendants of the 'Ten Lost Tribes' of Israel. Although Daniel Thangkholun Lhungdim is known to be the pioneer researcher of this theory, interestingly, some writers like Rev. Liang Khaia had written in 1938 that these people must have descended from Japheth (one of the sons of Noah).³¹ Lalzawna, another writer, suggests the ancestry to be from Ephraim (one of the sons of Joseph).³² Thangkholun, however, believes it to be from Shem (the eldest of the three sons of Noah).³³

The theory being still new, one may not be completely

31. Liang Khaia, Rev. MIZO CHANCHIN (History of Mizo), published by the Mizo Academy of Letters, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1976, p.1. (First Edition published in June 1938).

32. Lalzawna, K.V. MIZORAM EXODUS, Aizawl, Mizoram (n.d.), p.30.

33. Lhungdim, Daniel  Thang Kho Lun op. cit., p.21.

wrong in calling it a mere conjectural and superficial theory "in the absence of a well-knit evidence and historical authenticity".³⁴ One could even argue that the theory must have developed from the influence of Christianity, which has now become the religion of these tribes, and thereby assume the theory to be a made-up story. But, before making such a hasty conclusion of the theory, it would be worth-while to consider or examine the traditional songs and prayer used by the tribes from the ancient times.

A Kuki traditional song which has got mention of the Red Sea being crossed (also found in the Bible—Moses Crossing the Red Sea with other Israelites, the Egyptians behind them in hot pursuit)³⁵ is:

"Kitpi mangpa Chon lai a;
 Thintuipi Senpa hung Kangel
 Sunpi meilom, Jankho meikong in pai e,
 Sunsat jankhoa mel a mah,
 Vallhame gampuisa bang tuipi in/
 Mim Vagoite mano; condong lhang tuitheng
 Song Chunga hung longdoh ikhai e".³⁶

Its free translation runs:

34. Gangte, L.S. op. cit., p.18.

35. The Holy Bible (Exodus 14: 1 to 30).

36. Lhungdim, Daniel Theng Kho Lun op. cit., p.17.

"In the festive days of the lord of Feast,
 Dried up the Red Deer
 Guided by cloud during day and by
 flame at night,
 Wonderful was the sight day and night,
 Engulfed by the Sea as a vulture doth,
 Being relied upon quails for food and
 Fresh water we fetched to drink out of
 the rock"³⁷

A similar tale is also told by the Hmars (a tribe of the
 Kuki-Chin-Mizo race). It runs as:

"Sikpui inthangKan ur lai a,
 Chang tui pui aw sen ma hrill Kang intan,
 Ke ra lawna Ka lei do aw,
 Sunah Sun eng, Zannah mei lawn invak e,
 Sun ra zula Ka lei do aw,
 Laimi Sa ang Chang tui pui in lemzo Va.
 A Va ruol aw la ta che,
 Suonglung chung a tui zuong put kha la ta che".³⁸

Translation

"At the peak of Sikpui (winter) Festival,

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37. Gangte, L.S. op. cit., p.9 (Appendix-B.1). It is also as translated by him.
38. Hmar, V. Vara Hmar Hla Hlui Bu (Hmar Traditional Song Book), L&R Printing Press, Churachandpur, Manipur, 1967, p.4.

Became parted the Red Sea,
 Striding were the enemies,
 But guided us by cloud by day and
 at night by fire.
 Turbulent and howling enemies of ours,
 Engulfed by the Sea as Vulture doth,
 Fetch and drink oh, multitude,
 Water from the rock, fetch and drink it".

Among the Kukis, "The mythical ancestors were known as Manmasinao".³⁹ Manmasinao or "Manmashi which means a human as distinct from a spirit and is generally used with reference to the legendary epoch when the distinction was less marked than it is now",⁴⁰ was always referred on sacrifices. He is also linked with 'Manasseh' of the Bible (Ichronicle, 5:18). When praying for forgiveness of Sins the Priest used to pray with the following words: "Chung Pathen, Pathen nu le Pathenpa Chuleh noi Pathenin Kasukhelna ngaidam thumman Sathin, Salung Kahin choi uve Manmashi (Manasseh) chaten"⁴¹ (The free translation would be - Lord of Heaven and earth, we the descendants of Manmashi (Manasseh) hereby offer the liver and heart of animals for our wrong doings, hearken). In the

39. Shaw, William op. cit., p.28.

40. Ibid., p.131 (footnote).

41. Lhunzdim, Daniel Thang Kho Lun op. cit., p.12.

same way thanks-giving were also done in his name or with a mention of him.

These few traditional songs and prayers mentioned had been practised from time immemorial and so it can never be said to have been influenced by the new religion. If they were to have been influenced at all by another religion, it would rather have been either Buddhism or Hinduism⁴² which were pervading south-east countries".⁴² As a matter of fact "none of them ever had embraced anyone of the religions".⁴³ But, at the same time, it cannot be denied that the realisation of similarities possessed would not have come to light if Christianity had not penetrated to the regions inhabited by the Kuki-Chin-Mizos.

To sum up on the two theories of origin, it is quite clear that these migratory or nomadic tribes have come from the North of the regions they now inhabit (Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, Tripura, Burma and Bangladesh). But, despite the effort put by the present study and from the few existing literature on the community, it can be pointed out by that inspite of their curiosity and anxiousness, a thorough study is required to bring about a tangible outcome. The second theory of origin, particularly, needs a careful and mature

42. Gangte, L.S. op. cit., p.20.

43. Ibid., p.20.

handling by the researchers as it is still new to the people and suspected to be religiously motivated. But, at the same time, a hasty conclusion should not be reached at without proper investigation; because, the findings do not appear to be a made-up story as far as the similarities brought out and the reference referred to are concerned.

Whatever and wherever the origin of the Kuki-Chin-Mizos might have been, I am fully convinced, without any exaggeration and leaning, on the remark given by J.H. Hutton while editing William Shaw's 'NOTES ON THE THADOU KUKIS'. He wrote: "The Chin tradition, quoted by him (Major Fryer) from a Chin ballad, of the brick walled city of their forefathers, suggests that the Kukis may have once possessed a higher culture than they have now. If so, this would perhaps account for exceptional readiness to which he adopts the strange culture offered to him by the American Missionaries, a characteristic in which he differs from all Nagas that I know, except the Ao, and possibly the Sema".⁴⁴

44. Shaw, William op. cit., p.17.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

As repeatedly mentioned, having been undertaken amidst inavailability of much reliable literature and a short span of time, the present study cannot be expected to bring about novel ideas on the Kukis, especially on the theories of origin. But, it is certain that a reader of this work, by now, must have come to know that, besides being settled in other states of India and the neighbouring countries, the Kukis form a component tribe of the tribals or hill dwellers in Manipur. Till the early part of 1940s (specifically 1956), Kuki was used to identify the non-Naga hill men in Manipur. But, due to the suppressive and oppressive mode of the earlier leaders, the term has come to connote the so-called 'Thadous'. Thadou has been recognised as a Scheduled Tribe by the Government of India, but developments in the Social, Religious and Political life of the people clearly show that Kuki is accepted more and acceptable to many than Thadou. With the recognition of tribes, the unity of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo race loosened. The culture and tradition of the people, however, was unaffected.

The advent of Christianity in Manipur greatly changed the lives of the Kukis and other tribals. The present state of tribals in Manipur owes its credit to the Missionaries. Had it not been for their sacrificing efforts, the tribals

of Manipur would not have been what they are today. But, the coming of Christianity and its gradual acceptance by the majority has also left behind it an impact on the social and cultural life of the people. Today, the modern youth does not keep much interest in the culture of his tribe and also they do not have much interest in bringing to light the past cultural glories of his tribe. In the midst of negligence and indifference, however, a tendency to revive the culture of the tribes have sprang up (for example, the revival of the CHAVANG KUT (Autumn Festival) since 1979). If it had not been for them, the fading culture of the Kukis and other tribals' would have remained in oblivion. Even today, it can be rightly said that most of their culture and tradition remains in obscurity; because, in the last few decades, some important culture and tradition of the tribe (like the consumption of 'JU', the celebration of traditional festivals and feasts, etc.) have remained concealed and forbidden by the Church elders who believe the practice to be anti-Christian (but interestingly enough, the people are surprised to find similarities in the abandoned culture and the culture mentioned in the Bible).

The Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919) broke out as the independence of the Kukis was affected by the British Government's order for compulsory enrolment to the 'Manipur Labour Corps' to serve as porters of the British army in Europe during the

First World War. Besides this enrolment the Kukis had been discontented with the British and this order brought an immediate unity among the people. Its suppression, however, brought about many changes in the state, particularly the opening of hill sub-divisions in the state in 1920. It also enabled the recruitment in the Assam Rifles and Police, which had hitherto been denied to any tribe of Manipur. The end of the war also paved a way for education in the hills. Christianity also followed or spreaded soon. The suppression of the rebellion also caused the dis-integration of the Kukis, and 'the chapter of Kuki Prowess have been closed since then' and also 'ended the reign of the Kukis in the Manipur hills'.

In the theories of origin, going beyond the existing literature would have greatly helped. But, due to the limited time available for the assignment, the great task remains practically undone as it was. Nevertheless, from this study it is clear that whatever the motive of the earlier researchers, the theory cannot be discarded until further in-depth research has been done and proved or disproved. Again, interestingly enough, the belief that 'Kuki must have come from the Persian word 'KUCHI' also holds some truth in it. My un-confirmed information from Afghan and Iranian fellow-students is that there is indeed a nomadic tribe called 'Kuchi' (which itself also, I am told, means 'nomadic') in Afghanistan and Iran. They further claim that they do not know how this group have

come to be in their country. They suspect them (the nomadic tribes) to have migrated from somewhere in Palestine. Therefore, starting from the 'KHUL' theory, a deeper study is required to come to a concrete conclusion.

To sum up, with the fading culture and tradition of the Kikis and the obscurity of their origin, the rapid progress the Kikis (and other tribals of Manipur) have undergone since the last two-three decades is something praiseworthy. It is taken to be the blessing of the almighty God. Soon after the foreign missionaries left for their native land their work was continued by the local converts who received the light of education from them. The developmental schemes undertaken by the Indian Government also speeded the development. If the state Government functionaries had functioned as they should have, the development in the hills and the whole state would have been even more.

However, inspite of the rapid progress the Kikis and other tribals are undergoing, when the evolution of their civilization is looked at, it can rightly be said that they have submerged their pre-historic culture together with them in the ocean of the twentieth century's Supersonic Thermo-nuclear age. As far as I can see it, there is often difficulty in the adjustment of their pre-historic culture with the twentieth century's civilization. But, it can be hopefully envisaged that, with the concern of the Government and the awareness for the urgency of development among the younger generation of hill people, better times will follow.

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.....it is true office of history to represent the events themselves, together with the counsels, and to leave the observations and conclusions thereupon to the liberty and faculty of every man's judgement - (Francis Bacon (1561-1626).