

F239  
1258

# THE KUKIS OF MANIPUR

A Historical Analysis

Thangkhomang S. Gangte



**GYAN PUBLISHING HOUSE**

NEW DELHI-110 002



---

## PREFACE

---

The purpose of this Thesis is to focus on the unexplored wealth of Anthropological and Sociological potentials that are available which have not yet been given proper empirical studies to the extent modern scientific knowledge would have achieved. The present study relates to a microscopic aspect of a vast perspective.

This piece of work tries to project that every walk of life of the Kukis, be it social, economic, political, religious, etc., is a manifestation of their social structure based on cultural heritage. Changes have been brought about in their social matrix by modernism, western education, Christianity, etc.. Notwithstanding, some aspects of their social institutions withstand the onslaught of such changes, of course, not without conflict between traditionalism and modernity.

Such a study as could be seen in the pages that follow herein was possible with the kind permission of the University of Calcutta. I am indeed thankful to the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta, for the same. I owe immensely Prof. P.K.Bhowmick, Head of the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta, for having accepted me to work under his supervision. His visits to my field braving all the discomforts and inconveniences were of great help that made my work easier than would have otherwise been. Words fail me to express my indebtedness and gratitude to Prof. Bhowmick in commensural terms. I will ever remain grateful to him.

I am indebted to Thangkhoisei Chongloi, Chief of Khengjang village, without whose help, initiative, knowledge and insight on the subject, my task would have been much more formidable. My thanks are also due to

all the villagers under study for their affection and co-operation extended to me during my field-work.

I greatly appreciate the critical appreciation, reviews and corrections on my manuscripts by my younger brother, P. Gangte, IPS, Deputy Inspector General of police, Manipur, which had given a qualitative lift to my dissertation.

Without requisite maps, illustrative plates, binding, photographs, etc., this dissertation would not, indeed, have the look of authenticity and reliability. For this, the credit entirely goes to Dr. M. Balam Singh, Vice-Principal, Y.K.College, Manipur. I cherish such help and contribution immensely.

The added works of making the dissertation more attractive and informative with photographs during the field visits were mainly the contribution of N. Surendra, Vice-Principal, Liberal College, Luwangangbam, Manipur, for which I am much indebted. My thanks are also due to Dr. R.K.Ranjit Singh, Sr. Lecturer, D.M.College of Science, for his help in preparing the final plates of the photographs that added to the authenticity of the materials.

Had it not been for diligence, unstinted support and excellence of work given by N.Nobinchandra Singh in typing out this dissertation many times over, it would have taken me much longer time for materialising this in its present form. My confidence in his capability in giving me an attractive and typed out dissertation has been commensurated. I am indebted to him very much.

For all said and done, it may be incomplete if mention is not made of my mother and my wife without whose loving hand and care, understanding and encouragement, this piece of work would not have seen light of the day.

THANGKHOMANG S. GANGTE.

---

## CONTENTS

---

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>List of Maps and Illustrations</i>	x
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>List of Charts</i>	xii
1. Introduction	1
2. Fact and Fables	14
3. The Setting	28
4. Institutions and Formalities	46
5. Life Cycle Ceremonies	78
6. Political Organisation	123
7. Social Celebrations	140
8. Supernaturals: Rituals and Ceremonies	160
9. Conclusion	221
<i>Index</i>	236
<i>Figures, Maps and Photographs</i>	

## LIST OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATION

### LIST OF MAPS

- Fig. 1.1. Map of North-East India showing location of Manipur  
Fig. 1.2. Map of Manipur showing location of Churachandpur Sub-Division of Churachandpur District and Sadar Hills Sub-Division of Senapati District.  
Fig. 1.3. Map of Churachandpur Sub-Division of Churachandpur District showing location of the four villages under study.  
Fig. 1.4. Map of Sadar Hills Sub-Division of Senapati District showing location of the four villages under study.

### ILLUSTRATION

- Illus. 1. Mithun showing distribution of meat to relatives.

## LIST OF TABLES

	Pages.
1.1 Showing areas and population of Seven States of North-East India.	2
2.1 Showing the Tribal Communities inhabiting Manipur and their population.	31
2.2 Showing number in thousands for major Scheduled tribes of Manipur.	33
3.1 Showing Territorial distribution of Scheduled Tribes in the District of Manipur.	34
3.2 Showing Division of Kukis on the basis of arrival.	35
3.3 Showing population distribution as per age-group and sex of the villages studied.	42
3.4 Showing marital status of the villages studied.	43
3.5 Showing literacy level of the villages studied.	43
3.6 Showing family size of the villages studied.	44
3.7 Showing Labour force, non-labour force and Working force	

## LIST OF CHARTS

	Pages
4.1 Genealogical Chart showing two sets of relatives - 'Tucha' and 'Songgao'	47
4.2 Genealogical Chart showing Tucha-Songgao relationship.	56
4.3 Genealogical Chart showing change of Songgao relatives due to diviation from MBD marriage.	57
4.4 Genealogical Chart showing 'Tucha-Songgao' reciprocal relationship as could be seen vertically in respect of Nguljapao Hangsing's family.	67
4.5 Genealogical tree of Thongkhosei Gangte - showing the clans to which his children are married to.	71
4.6 Genealogical Chart showing that strengthens institution of 'Tucha-Songgao' relationship.	73
4.7 Genealogical Chart showing indispensability of Mother's Brother's Daughter's Marriage.	75
5.1 Genealogical Chart showing imposition of one 'Mithun' fine for non-observance of MBD marriage.	90
5.2 Genealogical Chart showing Alternate Generation naming system.	104
6.1 Genealogical Chart showing Administrative Structure of the Kuki Chieftainship.	126
7.1 Chart showing months in Kuki with English equivalence.	165

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

### I North-East India

The North-Eastern territory of India comprising Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh was carved out gradually from the original Assam Province of British India except the Princely States of Tripura and Manipur. It had been termed as the 'Land of Seven Sisters'. This region covers an area of approximately 2,55,000 square Kilometres with a population of 2,65,13,685 as per Census of India, 1981.<sup>1</sup>

Its geomorphological location offers three distinctly different regions, viz., (1) hills and valleys of the North and North-East, (2) plateau in the South and (3) the plains in between (1) & (2) above. Practically, the Great Himalayan Range runs towards and continues through Patkoi, erstwhile Naga and Lushai Hills to the further South in Burma. The Brahmaputra valley is the Easternmost extension of the Great Plains of the Ganga of North India. There are also some dwarf hills here and there. China lies to its North, Burma to the East, Bangladesh to the South, and Bhutan to the North West. A narrow corridor from Siliguri in Darjeeling district of West Bengal opens up to negotiate this region with the mainland of India.

Ample evidences of stone-age implements found in this region, specially in Meghalaya and other adjoining areas, signify existence of the earliest human civilization. These have resemblance with those of the tool

1. Detailed figures of population of the states including the size of each state are shown in Table 1:1.

types unearthed in Burma and other nearby areas. The find of a typical example of shouldered celt (T-shaped) indicates that there was the beginning of agriculture here in human history. Use of this type of tools extended even upto Bihar-Orissa border suggesting the probability of movements or migration of people from one place to another, from the hoary past traversing this obscure and tortuous path of protohistory and history. We find its vibrating corroboration reflected in various ways. The *Purana* (scriptures) refers to Kamarupa *Janapada* having its capital at Pragjyotispur. Kalidasa and Kautilya referred to all-these places in their writings. We also come across the name of *Nagakanya* 'Ulupi' in the Mahabharata, the great epic literature of India. The famous Chinese traveller, Hi-eun T sang, also visited Kamrupa in 640 A.D. Of course, infiltration of Brahmanical system with waving varnas penetrated into some of the areas of North-East India which moulded the life-style of the people. A good number of principalities ruled by the autochthonese - derivative communities of which the Chuta, Koch, Kachar, etc. are significant. Invasion of the Ahoms from Shan tribal groups of Burma on this land approximates to the 13th Century and their continuity was disturbed only during the 18th Century (sometime in 1772) when the British stepped into this tract. The British colonial administration encouraged the Assamese to form a province with their administrative Headquarters at Shillong. But before Independence, Sylhet, a populous district of Assam, was ceded to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, due to its Muslim Majority residents and afterwards the Union territories and States were reorganised to satisfy emotion and sentiment of the local people as well as to have a strongly built administrative units as shown in Table 1 :1 below :

TABLE 1.1  
Area and Population

Sl.No.	Name of State	Areas	Population (1981 Census)
1	Assam	78,523Sq.Kms.	1,99,02,826
2	Manipur	22,346 "	14,33,681
3	Nagaland	16,488 "	7,73,381
4	Meghalaya	22,489 "	13,27,874
5	Tripura	10,477 "	20,60,189
6	Mizoram	20,090 "	4,87,774
7	Arunachal Pradesh	83,578 "	6,28,050
TOTAL		2,54,991Sq.Kms.	2,65,13,685

## II The People :

The entire North-East India is populated by variegated groups of people. Migration of people from Burma to these areas was very common and, as such, we find people of Mongoloid strains in respect of their physical features, culture and language. The autochthones who settled in the hill tracts were subsequently identified and differentiated one from the other based on various historical processes of stress and strains; communication difficulties, to a great degree, had contributed to their being in isolation for a number of generations. These adjustmental processes, in course of time alienated some groups from the bigger ones, while other groups found themselves in aligned condition with some groups to compose a larger social identity or aggregate. Such alienation and alignment of different groups came to bear various ethnic appellations identifying themselves as distinct tribes. This is a common feature in many places, but this is very significant to this tract of land.

Academically speaking, there are a number of definitions about the word 'tribe'. The Dictionary of Anthropology (Charles Winick : 1957) describes a 'tribe' as -

A social group, usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organisation. It may include several sub-groups as 'Sibs' or villages.

It is true that they are not a permanent crystal line structure in the stage of historical and social development and all the time, due to interaction and adjustments, these groups of people are found to accommodate themselves in different degrees to varied situations. It is also expected that their society has less and less of hierarchy and less and less of economic specialisation. Thus we find :

In course of such travels and shifting for security following clashes with other groups have been transformed to a considerable extent or blended according to the demands of the situation or circumstantial exigencies. As a result, present day culture of these groups bear such mark of incorporation into the core of their cultural matrix (Bhowmick : 1980)

But in order to make them eligible to merit the constitutional benefits from our Welfare State, which has been declared after the Independence, these groups have generally been capsulized as 'Weaker Sections' and listed separately as 'Scheduled'. In this part of India, there are altogether

131 Scheduled Tribes with identifiable characteristics and traits, distributed in different areas of this region (Sharma :1978).

These groups of people have different economy, agriculture (Swiden, terraced and plough), industries and some of them, having received higher education, are competing with their neighbours in white collar jobs. In respect of social organisations there are matrilineal tribes, like Khasi, Garo and Rabha, and Double-discent tribes, like Dimasa and Semasa. The others are patrilineal tribes. Owing to the change in religion through conversion, these groups are changing in different degrees. As regards language, Chatterji (1943:4) says :

Particularly when we talk to her (India) languages and dialects - 179 and 544 respectively, according to the *Linguistic Survey of India* - these have to be taken with a good deal of reservation. For, of these 179, 'Languages' (the separate enumeration of 'dialects' is irrelevant as they come under 'Languages'), 116 are small tribal speeches belonging to Tibeto-Chinese speech family which are found only in North-Eastern fringe of India.

It is true that the enchanting land known as the North-East Region of India attracted waves of diverse racial groups through ages. It has come to stay as the confluence of the most colourful mosaic of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity (Govt. of Assam, 1976:30).

The culture and tradition of the people often overlap the man-made political units of the region. Political loyalty mostly transcends the boundary of each political unit. The Kukis living in Nagaland, Assam, Tripura and Manipur have closer cultural, traditional and ethnic affinity with the people of Mizoram, Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh and the Chins of Chin-hills in Burma, rather than with their immediate neighbours. They yearn to remain under a single political unit. Sometime ago movements with this end in view were started in Chin Hills of Burma under the leadership of Vumkhohau on the eve of Independence of Burma from the yoke of the British rule and for the unification of Zomi (Gougin, 1984:180) under the banner of Zomi Revolutionary Army covering the areas now inhabited by the Kukis and the Mizos in Manipur, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Mizoram.

The same holds good with the Nagas. Despite conspicuous nature at the height of diversity in ethnicity, culture, tradition, language, their peculiar emotional upsurge to integrate themselves, burying their hatchet

of age-old war of attrition, under the nomenclature of 'Naga' and a language called 'Nagamese', which is pidgin Assamese, is indeed exemplary. This is solely due to the belief in the myth that all the Nagas have a common origin. This encouraged them to demand for a separate State for Nagas which eventually materialised.

With the exception of the Khasi and the Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya, who belong to the 'Mon-Khmer' culture with their Austric dialect, all other tribal ethnic groups of the region are basically Mongoloid in their ethnic origin belonging to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese linguistic group.

The Kuki-Chin speech of Manipur, Mizoram and the adjoining areas of Tripura and the North-Cachar hills of Assam, the Bodo Non-Aryan language spoken in the Brahmaputra valley and the Garo hills of Meghalaya and a host of dialects spoken by the numerous tribes in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family. The Indo-Aryan language of the Brahmaputra valley, known as Assamese, is also distinguished by its pronounced Mongoloid bias.

These groups of people came to the region at different periods of history. Some of them came in the prehistoric days and the others came at different point of time of history. Thus, even though some of them belong to the same ethnic group, time-gap in the waves of migration between different groups contributed greatly to their present wide-range of divergence and multiplicity, as mentioned earlier.

In Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, the tribal dialects are so numerous that one tribe cannot understand the dialect of his neighbouring tribe. Assamese (pidgin) has, therefore, been adopted as a language of communication among themselves, and they are called 'Nagamese' and 'Nafamese' in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh respectively. Comparatively, the language diversity in Meghalaya is far less pronounced than in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Though the Khasis and the Jaintias, with their Austric speech, do not speak the same dialect, the Khasi dialect has emerged as a more dynamic and acceptable one. Both the Khasis and the Jaintias use it as their common language. In fact, Khasi language has become sufficiently developed. It has been accepted as one of the major Indian languages in almost all the Boards of Secondary Education and regional Universities, upto the first degree examinations. The other major tribe in Meghalaya is the Garo. Their dialect is 'Bodo' which is exclusively used in the Garo Hills of the State. Interestingly, these tribes of

Meghalaya are identified by their distinctive matrilineal system prevailing in the society of the entire region.

In Mizoram, with the exception of a few tribes, like the Chakmas and the Lakhers, there appears to have no diversity in use of language among them and it is *known* there as the Mizo language. This language is not only used in Mizoram, but is also widely used in Chin-Hills of Burma, Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh, Tripura and Manipur in India. The Kukis of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Tripura, Chin Hills of Burma, Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh also use it progressively as a medium of communication amongst themselves as well as between them and the Mizos.

It may be mentioned here that the most contrasting nature between the Nagas on the one hand and the Chinkuki-Mizos on the other, is the fact that despite diversity in language among the Nagas, their sense of unity and solidarity in the name of Naga is spectacular, whereas the Chin-Kuki-Mizos could not have a common political platform like the Nagas, despite advantage of the language at their command. As a matter of fact, the Mizo literature has been so highly advanced that it has been recognised as one of the major Indian languages both at the Boards of Secondary Education level and upto the first degree standard at the Universities of the region.

In Manipur, the Meiteis and the Muslims generally use 'Meitei-lon' as their language. The Naga tribes of Manipur can be broadly divided into the Tangkhul Naga, the Kabui Naga<sup>2</sup>, and the Mao Naga. These Naga tribes do not have a common language for their benefit through which they can communicate among themselves and also identify themselves exclusively different from the others. They have to communicate among themselves in "Meitei-lon" alone. There is no other language for their common use. In case of the Kukis, however, despite divisions into many tribes and sub-tribes, they have no language barrier. They are able to communicate in their respective dialects, or use one of the dialects of any tribe depending on the person who uses the dialect.

2. In recent past the Kabui Nagas attempted to change their nomenclature by an acronym, ZALIENGRONG-ZA for Zaliang tribe, LIENG for Leingmei tribe and Rong for Rongmei tribe, which was considered more respectable. However, of late there arose controversy amongst them in that Zaliangrong was not extensive enough to cover all tribes, and the nomenclature 'HAOMEL' was considered to give sufficient coverage.

As for the religion of the State, while the Meiteis, living in the valley, are predominantly Hindu Vaishnavites, the tribals in the hills are increasingly embracing Christianity.

In Tripura, the aboriginal Tripuri tribals, who are divided into as many as eighteen groups, preponderated over the non-tribal population till 1947 (Sarin, 1980 :126). These tribal groups have identical ethnic affinity. They inhabit not only in Tripura, but also are found to settle in areas covering the North spurs of the Patkoi range upto the Southernmost part of the Chin Hills of Burma. The major tribes that occupy the areas are the Kukis, the Chins, the Lushais, the aboriginal Tripuris, the Chakmas and the Mugha. Through constant social contacts, these groups have influenced one another despite mutual estrangement in diverse ways.

The aboriginal Tripuris belong to the Bodo groups of Indo-Mongoloids, which form a solid block. They occupy the whole of Brahmaputra Valley, North Bengal, Tripura and East Bengal (now Bangladesh). But due to heavy influx of Bengali migrants, the indigenous inhabitants of Tripura were reduced to an insignificant minority of 29 per cent of the total population of the State.

The class composition of the population of Assam still continues to be the most colourful in all the seven units of the region. The Kukis, the Cacharis, the Dimasas and the other tribes inhabit the North-Cachar Hills District. The Karbis, the Kukis and other minor tribes live in the Karbi Anglong Hill District. There are also numerous other plains - living-tribals who inhabit in some pockets of Brahmaputra valley. The Bengalis are the most predominantly large group in Cachar District adjoining Mizoram. There are many Muslim strongholds in the Districts of the Brahmaputra valley. Most of the Muslim population in Assam are immigrants from the erstwhile East-Pakistan (now Bangladesh). A host of people of other castes and creeds mingle with the Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley. Thus, Assam becomes virtually an unrivalled state in regard to demographic diversity.

Notwithstanding the numerous dialects and spoken languages in the State, Assamese is the lingua-franca of the people there. Even the indigenous and the immigrant Bengalis have taken to speaking Assamese which closely resembles Bengali.

Arunachal Pradesh is very much known for its backwardness and isolation from the outside world until the Chinese aggression into the

8 *The Kukis of Manipur*

Indian territory upto the foothills of Assam in 1962. A large number of tribes of different socio-cultural and religious sects inhabit the Union Territory. There are Buddhist tribes in Kameng, North Siang and Lohit Districts, Hindu Vaishnavite Noctes in Tirap District, who live along with other tribals belonging to indigenous tribal religions (Sarin, 1980-167).

The Mijis, the Sherdukpens, the Khowas, the Akas, the Solungs, the Bangais and the Monpas, who are divided into the Dirang Monpas, Tawang Monpas and Kalaktung Monpas, live in the Kameng District. In Sibansiri District, the Apatanis, the Daflas, the Hill Miris, the Nisla and the Tegins live. In Siang District, besides the two Buddhist tribes of Khambas and Mombas, the Adis, who are divided into Padams Bokers, Pailibos, Ashings, Rangams, Shimongs, also inhabit. In Lohit District the Khamptis, the Shingphos, the Jakhrings live along with a small group of the Padams of Siang District and the Mishmis, who are divided into Idu, Digaru and Mizu., Tirap District is inhabited by the Tangsas, the Noctes, the Wanchos and the Singphos of the Lohit District.

All these tribes have their own dialects, customs, dresses, manners, religions, ornaments and traditions; and together they contribute to the varied culture and religion of the region. With the exception of the Buddhist tribes, they have some common traits in domestic types, agricultural practices, observances of taboos and other socio-cultural rites. The composition of religious groups is as much diverse as their ethnic composition in the region. There are Buddhists in Arunachal Pradesh, and Hindus in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, Tripura and Cachar Districts of Assam, the Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh, and the centrally located Imphal Valley of Manipur. The Hill areas of Manipur constituting nine-tenth of the total areas, where tribal people inhabit, are the homelands of various denominations among the followers of Christianity. The States of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram are Christian dominated areas among the tribals. There are a large number of Muslim pockets in Assam, Manipur and Tripura, living mixed-up with the Hindus in the plains. The Nepali Hindu infiltrators from the bordering areas of Nepal have cooked up various problems in some hill regions, particularly in Manipur, and more so, of late, in Meghalaya.

### III Introducing the Research Topic

Attempts have been made in this section to introduce the research hypotheses which have manifested by field work and through in-depth study in some villages. The life-style of the Kukis has been examined with a view to grasping the operating forces playing in their day-to-day living,

with special reference to the Kukis of Manipur. Their institutions-economic, political, social and religious-in the face of the changing pattern of life with the introduction of modern education system, spread of Christianity and onslaughts of various other changes brought about by the developmental programmes of the Government, present significant materials for study.

The Kukis here had been the dominant tribe spreading their authority over a wide range of hill areas surrounding the valley of Imphal during the hey-day of the Maharajah of Manipur and subsequently during the British period. The Kuki Chiefs were in supreme command over their respective domains in the hills. This was specially so with the Thadou Kuki Chiefs. The Hao-kip Thadou Chief, under the leadership of their senior most clan, known as the Chahsad Haokip, was the overlord of the hills to the East of Imphal valley exercising his power and authority on the Tangkhul Nagas, and his influence was extended upto the Burma Border, contiguous to the Thongdut State and part of the Somra Tract. The Doungei Kuki chief was the monarch of the North-East of Imphal valley extending his area of influence to the unadministered areas of Somre which lie in between the Naga Hills of the erstwhile Assam Province and the Burmese territory, which later became a bone of contention between the Doungei Chief, better known as the Aishan Chief, and the British Raj resulting in a protracted war that ended in 1919, after the subjugation of the areas concerned by the British who placed the same partly under the then Naga Hills of Assam and partly under Burma.

Likewise, the Sithou Thadou Chief, known as the Chief of Jampi, ruled the Western and North-Western part of Imphal valley bordering the Angami country. The Singson Thadou Chief ruled the areas contiguous to the Sithou country and the Lushai Hills of Assam. Pulverised in between the Sithou in the North-West and the Imphal valley in the North-East was the country of the junior clans of the Haokip Thadous, belonging to the Lunkhel, Songthat and Telngoh clans where they ruled the roost. To the South of them, bordering the Tiddim of Chin Hills of Burma, the areas were occupied by the Manluns (Zou), while the South-East of Imphal Valley extending up to the areas of Kobo valley and Sakte country, were ruled by the Mangvung Haokip Thadous.

Thus, the hill areas of Manipur were the domain and the head-hunting ground of the Thadou Kukis until they were subjugated and controlled by the British in 1917-19 Anglo-Kuki War. The most permanent and lasting effect of this war of Independence by the Kukis was not only the suppression of the Kukis, but marking of permanent boundaries of Manipur,

which exists till today. Prior to this, there was no boundary of Manipur as such. The Maharajahs of Manipur were contented with periodical massacre and extension of their influence for specific purposes. The Kuki Chiefs were their allies. After 1919, however, the British assumed direct administration over the hill tribes in general and on the Kuki Chiefs, in particular. The opening of the first sub-divisional offices in Tamenglong, Ukhrul and Churachandpur was made with the sole object of checkmating the Kuki Chiefs and also to avoid recurrence of their insurgency against the British rule. This apart, the British rulers ruled the hill areas through the effective machinery of the Chieftainship and its Council of Ministers. This helped the Chiefs to maintain their authority and hold over the people, thereby, unifying the clans that composed the Kuki Tribes called KUKIS, and to express their identity as such. The authority of the Chiefs also greatly enhanced the strength of their custom, for they were the perennial sources of the Kuki custom, tradition, culture, language, etc.

In contrast with the introduction of western education through the Christian missionaries, spreading from the Lushai hills, the idea of being dominated by the Chiefs and being identified as 'KUKI' were considered as a derogatory foreign design. The authority and leadership of the Chiefs thus began to erode gradually. Ultimately, with the advent of independence of India, the idea of Chieftainship being thrown out of power was supplanted by a new set-up of administration known as 'democracy' which in a resurgent India was spontaneously accepted by the leaders and the commoners. Besides this, the term 'KUKI' was rejected mainly in the previously known Lushai hills and Manipur. Recognition of tribes as listed in the 'Scheduled Tribes' in various states hastened the process of disintegration among the Kukis, for the new Constitution of India accorded special privileges to such recognised tribes. Along with this, tension, enmity, conflict, factionalism between and among the erstwhile Kukis became the common feature of their life. The people became crazy for being listed as a Scheduled Tribe so as to be able to enjoy the fruits of the Constitutional privileges. Indeed, the immediate adverse effect of all this was telling heavily on the unity and solidarity of the Kukis. The seeds of disintegration thus burgeoned among them. Therefore, in a system of administration where counting of heads and majority rule prevail, the Kukis were the worst sufferers. They are now in a minority wherever they live, because they have become very badly divided and too widely scattered in different administrative units in the entire North-East region of the country.

The empirical study of such people would no doubt open up a new

vista leading to the store-house of knowledge for the Social Anthropologists and Sociologists. Many aspects of life of the Kukis which could not be easily uncovered or appreciated with a superficial knowledge of their social system would aptly have misled an outsider. An in-depth study of their life would not only enrich knowledge but also help the people concerned understand them in a better way.

The villages under study were inhabited by the Chongloi, the Sitlhou, the Kipgen, the Haokip, the Singson, the Gangte and the Lhungdim clans. They provide both similarities and diversities and reflect ethnic relationship or otherwise. The areas covered in the selected villages are mainly within the Churachandpur District and the Sadar Hill sub-division of Senapati District of Manipur. The locations of the villages<sup>3</sup> afford accessibility from the National and State Highways. These are not, however, within the areas that can be considered as urbanised or at the outskirts of the growing towns of different Districts. Nevertheless, the villages are not absolutely without the touch of modernity, albeit modern amenities and avenues of modern employment etc. are scarcely available. Though urbanisation is a part of inevitable result of civilization and planned development requiring bringing in of all facilities of upto-date living at the door-step of rural population, and despite changes in the matter of administration with the introduction of Village Authority Act, 1956 coupled with negation of the authority of the KUKI Chiefs, the traditional system of village administration continues to hold stage.

The institution of 'Tucha-Songgao' and 'Becha' is the basis on which study of the Kuki society can be made. This institution is vital to a Kuki family, being the nucleus unit, in as much as to the whole social system. Perhaps, this can be said as one of the excellent arrangements of division of labour, responsibility and an extension of public relation in an egalitarian society where the golden rule of the olden days still prevailing. For the study of any aspect of life of the Kukis, this institution is inevitable, be it their social life, or political life, or economic life or religious life. The institution of 'Tucha-Songgao' and 'Becha' is a projection of a typical Kuki institution for their love of orderliness and propriety without which no life appears possible among the Kukis.

3. The villages studied in the Churachandpur, district are, 'Chengkonpang' a Gangte village, 'Lhangjol' a Haokip village, 'Songgel' a Lhungdim village and 'Bethel' a Singson village and that of Sadar Hills are, 'Khengjang', a Chongloi village, 'Motbung' a Sitlhou (Lhouvum) village, 'Seloi' a Kipgen village and 'Gelbung' a Haokip village.

The life-cycle of a Kuki, beginning from birth to death, is nothing but a manifestation of the social structure. The alternate-generation naming system is basic and conspicuous in its singular system in all the societies of the world. This system has greatly helped the Kukis maintain their tradition and in reckoning their genealogy. It also shows how important is the relationship between a grandfather and a grandson in manifesting the easy manner of joking relationship. Likewise, the practice of mother's brother's marriage, known as 'Neinu', has a role to play in building the institution of 'Tucha-Songgao and 'Becha' as a living organ. The peculiar joint family system of the Kukis is also another revealing singular aspect in the study of social life of the numerous communities and tribes all over the world. The family of the eldest son of the Kuki parents called UPA, which must necessarily have a joint family comprising his parents, unmarried brothers and sisters, and sometimes with married brothers, who have yet to establish themselves, is called 'Inherent Joint Family', consisting of vertical generations. The other joint family system is that of the younger brothers of the UPA, which is known as the family of NAOPA. It forms the nuclear family of his own. This family ultimately becomes a joint family of UPA when his first son is married and lives with him. This kind of joint family is called 'Earned Joint Family'.

'Luongman' or Corpse Price is another peculiar system of the Kukis. This is the price for a woman when she dies, and also for her sons. The price is claimed by her father, or elder/younger sons, in father's absence, as a token of love and affection between the uterine kinsmen. This also reveals the important position held by a woman in a family life, and the weightage given to propagation of the descent through male line. If a woman does not give birth to a son or sons, as her spring promises, it is considered a disgrace to her father and brothers and, as such, here 'Luongman' cannot be claimed.

The institution of 'Sawm' as the dormitory of the able-bodied youngmen of the village as the primary means of initiation and education plays a significant role among the Kukis, and it is the manifestation of the style of life they lead. Subsequent changes of the 'Sawm' system in a decentralised form speak more about its importance. In the like manner, the 'Lawm' institution, as the basic economic life-giving system, is a revelation of the basic concept of community-base economic system of the Kukis. In other words, 'SAWM' is a socio-agro bias social institution whereas 'LAWM' is basically agro-bias institution.

The 'Chang-Ai' festival of the Kukis speaks volumes of the important part played by the women of the family. It is also indicative of the nature of division of labour. 'Sa-Ai' festival is another such example, because of its association exclusively with a man who claims to have achieved fame and bravery in life. The festivals of 'Chang-Ai' and 'Sa-Ai' also reveal lack of conception of saving in the economic life of the Kukis. Consumption is community oriented, and is, therefore, very conspicuous. The distribution system of the Kukis is based on a certain set pattern of social hierarchy. Giving of the 'Salu', head of the games, brought by an individual villager, to the Chief is the manifestation of the position of the receiver as the head of the village community and also an expression of the giver's attitude of loyalty towards the Chief. Similarly, 'Sating', the topmost portion of a hunted animal, which is carved out of the backbone of the kill, known as the 'Ating-Sa', Spinal Flesh, indicates that the man who receives such a portion of meat from a person is senior to him and is his elder or UPA. The share of TUCHA is taken from the waist portion of the prize, 'Sakong', indicating that the person who receives such meat marries a woman from the ego's family or clan or from his exogamous group. It is also indicative of the fact of survival of the system of marriage by service which is called Kong-Lo, i.e. earning the waist of a woman. The receiver is 'TUCHA', relative of the giver who is 'SONGGAO' to the former. In the like manner, a man who is a 'Becha' of an ego receives the rib portion, 'Anah', of the hunted animal indicating thereby that the man represents the ego. The rib is closest to the heart of the animal and, therefore, it is meant that the man who receives the 'rib' portion is the closest to the man who gives him the rib portion.

Similarly, among the Thadous and their cognates, 'SANGONG', the neck portion of the animal killed is given to the SONGGAO, mother's brother. Though it is the chest portion, called SA-AWM, given to the SONGGAO relative among the Gangte and Vaiphei Tribes.

A door-to-door study of some villages by participant observation covering 236 families, substantiated with case history reveals various life-style of the Kukis. Some of the genealogies clearly show how they have adhered to their traditional systems, and, also, in many ways, deviated from them. These are very helpful in analysing their social system. This study is expected to enhance a great deal of new knowledge in the social systems operating in the life of the Kukis of Manipur in North-East India.