

# KUKI SOCIETY

Past, Present, Future

Kuki Research Forum's Publication



*Edited by:*  
*Ngamkhohao Haokip*  
*Michael Lunminthang*

This volume is the outcome of the 2 Day National Seminar on Kuki Society; Past, Present and Future, held on Feb 19th – 20th, 2010 at Sielmat Christian College, Lamka, Organised and Sponsored by the Kuki Research Forum in collaboration with the Kuki Students' Organisation.

It gives a comprehensive understanding of the people, history, culture, identity, nomenclature, language, religion, literature, agriculture, women status of the people in the erstwhile Kuki country which has hitherto slip into oblivion.

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# INTRODUCTION

Trailing the glory past of the Kukis we came across the existence of *Kukistan* in 1195 A. D. and *Ko-ki* country in the year 1608 A. D. The British writers supported to its existence. This independent country was ruled by egalitarian chiefs following indigenous religion and emancipating justice through traditional customs. However, the coming of British in the 18<sup>th</sup> century brought Christianity and also trifurcate their country. The Kukis are today a global people settling in Myanmar, India and Bangladesh. Within India, they are found in six out of eight provinces in North East region of the country.

'Kuki' synonymous with 'Chin' in Myanmar is used as a generic terminology, but highly subjected to etymological dispute among scholars of the world. However many writers, scholars and social scientist continued to use the term to designate the people occupying *Kukistan/Kuki* country which has hitherto made to slip into oblivion.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century has brought the concept of *Nation states* which is the defining hallmark of the contemporary world politics. The concept of 'nation state' has been interpreted in the third world countries as a call of struggle against the colonial rule to replace it by 'self-rule'. Today, this concept beacons amongst the contemporary indigenous people around the world as the ethnic communities felt threatened of being merged or submerged within sovereign nation states. The ethnic conscious environment compels the tribes to assert their own identity which invariably leads to violence, conflicts and civil wars within the neighbouring indigenous tribes.

With the belief that, chaos and conflicts happen when people lose their history, culture and tradition, this compilation, a common endeavour, is a humble approach for deeper understanding of Kukis of the world, within the ambit of academic and intellectual discourse. It is with this background an attempt is made to investigate and bring out a comprehensive understanding of the people, history, culture, identity, nomenclature, language, religion, literature, agriculture, women status of the Kukis. This volume is the outcome of the 2 Day National Seminar on Kuki Society; Past, Present and Future, held on Feb 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at Sielmat Christian College, Lamka, Organised and Sponsored by the Kuki Research Forum in collaboration with the Kuki Students' Organisation. The articles are arranged on the basis of seminar scheduled.

H. Kamkhenthang after decades of experiencing and observing the changes in the Kuki society, discuss in detail the occasions and incidents that brought division into the Kuki society. He asserts that, Kuki is a term applied by foreigners for a community comprising ethnic groups but it is not penetrating into the social and cultural tissues of the concern ethnic groups. In any study on Kukis, we cannot isolate Chins, Mizos and Zomis and *vice versa*. Kuki in isolation and in combination with Chin-Kuki has a linguistic connotation. The author is of the opinion that, disunity among the Kuki-Chin tribes started with the formation of KNA (Kuki National Assembly) by Thadou speaking group of people. Disgruntled with the organization, many new

organizations sprang-up and became active. He also gave a detailed account on the imbroglio created by 'tribe recognition' and its politics in the Kuki society.

*The Erstwhile Territorial Domain of the Kukis* by Sonthang Haokip argues the existence of many British documents which acknowledge the dominance of Kukis. The author's compilation covers territory of the Kukis during and after the British. He critically observes the shrinking nature of Kuki in the present day.

Joseph Suantak in his work *'Inferences from Analyzing the Traditional and Scientific Data in the process of Tracing our Genesis'*, argues that the Kuki-Chin are one of the biological branch of people known as 'Di Qiang, Ch'iang, Chi'Ang, Chiang, Kiang, or Khyang' who are said to be the ancestors of Tibeto-Burman people. In his scientific approach, he compares the genetics, linguists, archeologist and anthropologist findings with traditional sources. The author's hypothesis of the past juxtapose with the annals of the Chinese, Tibetan and all the Tibeto-Burman.

An elaborate attempt is made by Seikhohao Kipgen to brief the history of Thadou-Kuki language which started with the advent of Christianity and spread of education. He points out that historically Thadou was accorded official language during the British Government, now it is studied till Class XII as MIL in Manipur. He attributes the development of Thadou literature to Som institution and poetic nature of the people. Roman script is the official script of Thadou and its cognate tribes, further in Thadou- Kuki style of writing the alphabets F Q R W Y Z are hardly in use. The author argues that Pu Ngulhao Thomsong contributed a lot with the translation of Holy Bible and other literary works and deserves to be called 'Father of Thadou – Kuki' literature.

Alfina Haokip assessing on women empowerment says, of the many festivals of Kukis, the only occasion where women plays a leading role is during '*Chang-Ai*'. The author investigates the social, cultural, political and economic status of Kuki women of the past and present. She is of the view that, *longman* or 'corpse price' indicates the importance as well as downgrading of women at the same time, as it depends on fertility of women. With the success of prominent ladies in the political field, she argues that, on the surface it would appear that Kuki women are empowered but women are yet to be accepted in the decision making body.

Holkhongam Haokip in his work *'Religious Rites and Ceremonies of the Kukis: With special focus on Shifting Cultivation*

of the *Thadou Tribe*', claims that the rich culture and tradition have come under heavy spell of Christianity and modernism. Jhum cultivation or *Thinglhanglou* sustains culture of village governance and the various festivals like '*Hun*' and '*Kuts*'. The author invariably aware the sudden change with the coming of Christianity which gives no space for exercising the rich culture.

The historical evolution from household chores to professional careers and their status in the society forms the basis of Hoipi Haokip's work '*Women in Kuki Society: Study on Working Women in Imphal Valley (East and West), Manipur*'. Tracing the reasons how women choose professional fields, she attributes it to education with the coming of Christianity but argues that Churches still ignores women in leadership and religious duties. With specific charts and rare collection of opinions, she attempts to answer the prevailing socio economic and religious position of women, the obstacles that confront working women and recognition of their professional career in the Kuki society

In '*Evolution of Kuki Chieftainship through Customary Laws – its modern conceptuality*' Priyadarshni M. Gangte attempts to address the reasons for survival of traditional Chieftainship among the Kukis. Pointing out the quandary she is of the opinion that Chieftainship is responsible to the extent of creating new identity amongst the Kukis. While analyzing the role of Chiefs, she observes similarity with the Social Contract Theory of Rousseau but argues that '*Haosa*' and '*Zamindar*' are completely different. The author admits Chieftainship should be modified to contain democratic principles.

George T. Haokip attempts to discuss land ownership system of Kukis which got manipulated after the British rule. Examining new governance system under democratic India on the one hand and socio-economic transition and internal transformation on the other, he is of the opinion that, it leads for the decline of traditional system on land. The author contested the idea of women chiefs in recent years, with the age old tradition of elder clan chronology.

Mr. Haokip critically assesses the Government Acts on Chiefs, Hills, Forests and utilization of government schemes in the villages.

Paolenthang Khongsai in *'Dynamics of Coalition for Social Change,'* emphasize on how, why and what benefitted in coalition politics. The author basically distinguishes Coalition theory into Policy-based and Rationalist theories but predictive success is modest on both theories. In the Indian context, the author opines that Coalition system of politics will stay longer than expected. Narrowing down to Manipur politics, he says out of 60 seats in the State Assembly, Tribals share is 20 and out of this Kukis can get credit in 10 – 12 seats hence the need to form a political party to speak-up the aspirations of the ethnic tribe.

Thongkholal Haokip probes the importance of India's Look East policy in transforming the North East region and how it can be an opportunity for India to play a bigger role in ASEAN countries and beyond. The author argues that Moreh town, inhabited by the Kuki ethnic groups, has a special place as the first and only thriving trading point in the region. However, with a lukewarm response from the Indian government, supplemented with developments in Africa and North America, the author is skeptical about the success of the Look East policy if ethnic factors of the region are taken into account.

Based on decades of deep historical research and analysis, Lal Denna tested the theory of ethnicity in the context of Kukis. Outlining the characteristics as common name, nomenclature, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, common culture, define by language or religion or custom, link with a geographical homeland and a sense of common cause or solidarity among the members of the ethnic group. He says, Kuki possess all the basic ingredients of ethnicity and is in the active process of nationality formation. However he cautions that, the Kuki society should mend the past mistakes to bring unity.

Seilen Haokip argues that clan-centrism is the root of Kuki disunity. He stated his premise on identity and nationalism. With

regard to Kuki, 'nation' stands for the people and nationalism is referred to 'conceive' identity. As an advocator of Kuki, the author elaborates on the misconceptions prevailing amongst the Kukis and hopes for an objective approach towards identity. According to Haokip, the re-introduction of 'any Kuki tribes' is a timely development fomenting unification. He vehemently asserts the necessity for a different and new identity 'Khochung te' in lieu of Thadou. After establishing the internecine conflicts among the kindred tribes over generic names, the author highlights how the Kukis have become soft targets from neighboring tribes in their own land.

*Looking to the future: Creating vibrant community, Peace and sustainable development*, Dr. Leban Serto attempts to address in general, the issues of violence in North East India. Having witness the unending conflicts among the fragile communities, he strongly advocates community based peace actions, human rights education and unity of the churches for future peace and harmony. Stressing on India's look east policy and vision 2020, the author says, the Ministry of Home Affairs follows an integrated and multi-faceted strategy in trying to contain the regional aspirations of over 200 ethnic groups.

Jangkhongam Doungel makes an in-dept study and critically examines the evolving Kuki identity which has been subjected to misconception and internal feuds. The author tends to argue the inclusive and exclusive nature of Kuki in pre and post British era. The author priorities Thadou-Kukis objectively for the dilution of Kuki identity and lost of Kuki inclusive behavior. According to him, lack of professionalism in tackling issues and ignorance of the people, parochial clannish feelings, involvement of church leaders in politics, mushrooming of many associations without purpose are some of the challenges of the contemporary period.

Letkhojam Haokip begins his argument by stating that, the ancient Chinese Chroniclers and historians used the term 'Chin' as an ethnic name or nomenclature for foreigners, way back in

the 6th and 5th century B.C. Further he states, the earliest references to the word Chins occur in the Sabha Parva volume of the Mahabharat. Quoting Hathigumpha cave inscriptions of King Kharvela (Orissa) and Pali texts, he says Chin and Kirata have been used conjunctly, and these Kiratas are none other than the Kukis. He emphasizes 'economic prosperity' behind the legacy and success of Chins in China and the world.

In his work, *'An outline of the evolution of dialects and languages among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo or Zo group of people'* Philip Thanglienmang traces the reign of Pu Zo, progenitor of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo-Zo to 2000 B.C. He empirically investigates the origin, migration and evolution of the dialects corroborating strongly with folk songs and field knowledge. He examines the oral traditions of the Zo people, assembles in detail the chronology and origin of the different dialects, which according to him are Teizang, Sihzang, Dulien, Thado, Vang Teh, Saizaang, Dim, Tedim, Khuano, Paite, Khuongnung, Thangkhal respectively. Confirmed by myriads of cultural resemblance of their cohesion and commonalities, the author states that, all these dialects are one single Mother language or Proto-language.

Hoinu Haokip emphasizes the need for a civil society working across ethnic boundaries, to fight injustice and human rights violations, raise the voice of the disadvantage and be a watchdog of democracy. She highlights major incidents in Chandel and Churachandpur Districts where all the civil societies of the country stood as mere spectators and Kukis suffer as 'untarget victims' between militants and security forces. The author strongly objects planting IEDs in civilian areas as it violates the Ottawa Convention and the Geneva Calls Deed of Commitment.

According to Lianboi Vaiphei the generic names like Chin, Kuki, Mizo and Zomi is not an administrative error but rather a classic case of a rose being called by too many names, for the people has close ethnic relation with each other. The author based her premise on Modern Nation States which ultimately victimize

and trifurcate the Kuki Mizo Chin tribes into Myanmar, India and Bangladesh countries. This ethnic group is rendered into minorities in the world of democracy where majority always counts. They are in peril of being assimilated into the domain of mainstream society. The author opines that, with globalization providing both malady and panacea, the Kuki Mizo Chin has a unique role to play of building relations within the ethnic communities in particular and the region at large.

Ngamjahao Kipgen argues that, true image and identity of a society can be achieved and asserted through folktale which is purely based on oral discourse. Following the Western academic tradition that prioritises artifactual character for historical facts hidden in folktales, the author cites the mythical legend of Pu 'Galgam' or 'Ralgam' or 'Rengngam' of the Kuki-Chin tribes. Briefing his field visits to the various imprints attributed to Gaalgam he says, some are found on rocks and stone slabs, some in the form of sculptures. The author justifies that the geographical landscapes where all these artifacts are located are a living testimony of the territory inhabited by the Kuki-Chin groups since time immemorial.

Hoineilhing Sitlhou in her work '*Continuity and Change: The settings of a customary court amongst the Kukis,*' focuses on Thadou dialect speakers of the Kukis living in Motbung (under chiefship) and Kangpokpi (District Council) towns. With a case study on each town, she attempts to address the reasons why, customary courts survived the onslaught of external agencies like, colonialism and the democratic set-up of Indian Nation State. However, she is of the opinion that, government policies like Manipur (Village Authority in Hill Areas) Act 1956 and the Manipur Hill Areas Acquisition of Chief's Rights Act, 1967 have both direct and indirect implications on the customary court. The author contents the fact that, customary courts which follow the unwritten traditional customary laws as its constitution are still relevant to the people, even in the presence of modern legal systems.