



MAXFORD DYNAMIC SERIES OF TRIBAL STUDIES

The Tribes of MANIPUR



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The Tribes of MANIPUR

The different tribal communities of Manipur share a beautiful relationship of living together by mingling among the cultures, food and festivals. The major tribal communities of Manipur like Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Koirao, Koireng, Kom, Lamgang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Tangkhul, Tarao, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zeliangrong (Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei) and Zou etc are all in this book with selected photographs.

From this book, readers will find many interesting things, like all tribes have their own distinct languages but in conversing with others they speak Meiteilon. Rice is the staple food for all tribal and ethnic groups of Manipur and meat, fish and seasonal vegetables are favourites.

Editors:



Dr. M.C. Arunkumar is not only known of his critical observation of the North East Societies but also of his creative works expressing his ideas of the people of this region. During his long career of anthropologist in Manipur University, he carried out many projects ranging from tribal studies to social problems relating with political culture and HIV/AIDS. His political plays are staged at state and national festivals by different theater groups. His doctoral work on Women's Crime in Manipur opens a new insight to the women's studies in the region. He is teaching Social Anthropology at present. To his credit, there are a number of academic papers as well as popular articles, number of books.



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VOLUME III
THE TRIBES OF MANIPUR



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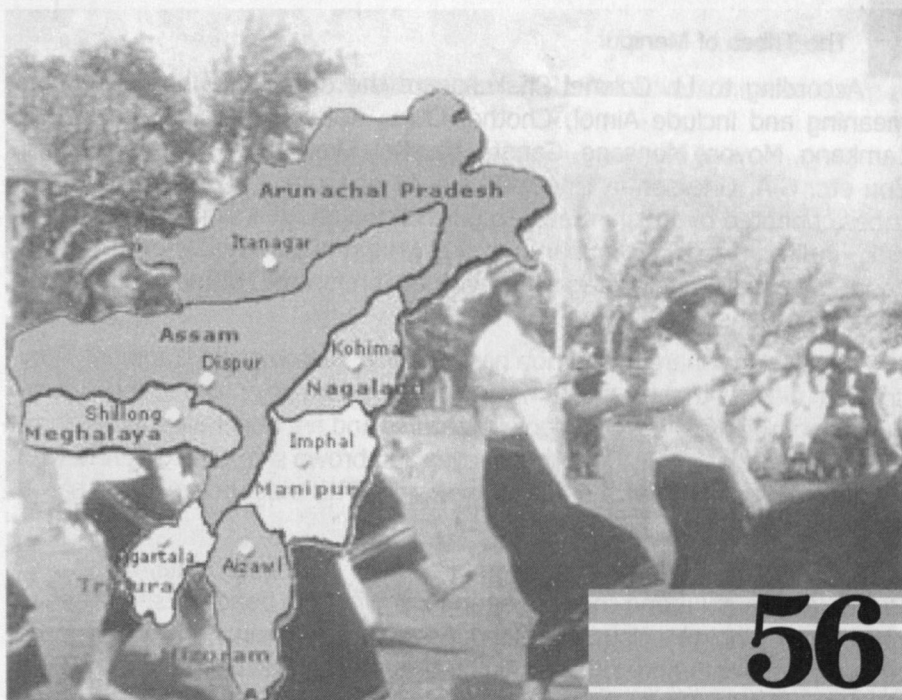
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INTRODUCTION

With its capital at Imphal, the state Manipur has Tribes which are one of the most distinctive features of the state which covers an area of 22,347 sq kilometres, surrounded by Nagaland in the north, Mizoram in the south, Assam in the west and Myanmar in the west. The state includes a wide area of 14, 365 sq kilometres of area under natural vegetation which is about 64% of total geographical area. Broadly this area covers four types of forest which provide livelihood to its local tribal community.

Tribes of Manipur which represent a unique feature of the land include communities that originated from Tibeto-Burmese tribal group of Mongoloids. The tribal community of Manipur is quite enriched that has travelled from all the surrounding areas of Assam and Meghalaya. Since there were no written histories of the tribes, their oral tradition, dances, songs, culture, etc. tell of their history, migration, culture, tradition, etc. The Meiteis had their own script, history, tradition, etc. recorded in many scriptures; hence, the reconstruction of the Meitei history is not sensible although modern research tools will be needed.

The Kukis are ethnic group that spread throughout the Northeastern region of India, Northwest Burma and Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. In Northeast India they are present in all the states except Arunachal Pradesh. This dispersal across international borders is mainly attributed to the British colonial policy.

According to Lt. Colonel Shakespeare the term 'Kuki' has a definite meaning and include Aimol, Chothe, Chiru, Koireng, Kom, Purum, Anal, Lamkang, Moyon, Monsang, Gangte, Vaiphei, Simte, Paite, Thadou, Hmar, Zou etc. G.A. Grierson in Linguistic Survey of India, 1967 stated that the tribes connoted by Kuki are able to understand another's dialect. The term Kuki, in literature, first appeared in the writing of Rawlins when he wrote about the tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It refers to "Hillsmen" comprising numerous clans.

These clans share a common past, culture, customs and tradition. They speak in dialects that have a common root language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group. Kuki have Mongoloid features and are generally short-stature with straight black hair, Dark brown eyes and brown skin. The different kuki clans are recognised as schedule tribe of India. This tribe recognition is based on dialect spoken and region.

They spread out in a contiguous region in Northeast India, Northwest Burma (Myanmar), and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. They are most prominent in Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram. Kuki is composed of many different entities/Clans: Aimol, Baite, Biate, Bawn, Changsan, Chiru, Chongloi, Chothe, Darlawng, Doungel, Guite, Halam, Haokip, Haolai, Hangsing, Hauzel, Hmar, Hrangkhawl, Kilong, Kipgen, Koireng, Khelma / Sakachep, Kolhen, Kom, Lamkang, Lenthang, Lhanghal/Hanghal, Lhouvum, Lungdim, Lunkim, Lupho/Milhiem, Lupheng, Thangeo, Lhangum, Maring, Mate, Misao, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purum, Simte, Singsit, Singson, Sitlhou, Tarao, Tuboi, Tonsing, Touthang, Vaiphei, Vaulnam, Zou etc.

Though the term Kuki can be thought of as been synonymous with Mizo and Chin tribes, predominantly all Zo groups other than those who are in Mizoram and Chin refer to themselves as Kukis.

EARLY HISTORY

The presence of Mongoloid groups in North-East India had been attested as early as *circa* 500 BC in ancient Indian literature, such as the *Vedas* and *Mahabharata*, and many of these Mongoloid groups are believed to be indigenous to the region. Some believe that the Kuki people, however, may have made a southwesterly migration to the sub-Himalayan region of north-eastern India and north-western Myanmar. These tribes speak Tibeto-Burman dialects. Today the Kukis are dispersed in northeast India, northwest Burma and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.

With regard to Kuki identity, Prof JN Phukan writes, If we are to accept Ptolemy's "Tiladae" as the Kuki people, as identified by Gerini, the settlement of the Kuki in the North-East India would go back to a very long time in the past. Prof Gangumei kabui states, 'Some kuki tribes migrated to Manipur Hills

in the pre-historic times along with or after the meitei advent into the Manipur valley'.



Fig. 56.1: Kids in traditional dress

This hypothesis will take us to the theory that the Kukis, for that matter, The Mizos, at least some of their tribes, have been living in North-East India since prehistoric time. In the second century (AD 90-168), Claudius Ptolemy, the geographer, identified the kukis with Tiladai, who are associated with Tilabharas and place them "to the north of Maiandros, that is about the Garo Hills and Silhet". Stevenson's reference to Kuki in relation to Ptolemy's also bears critical significance to its existence in this period.

The Rajmala or Annals of Tripura refers to Shiva falling in love with a kuki woman around AD 1512. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* records, "Kukis, a name given to a group of tribes inhabiting both sides of the mountains dividing Assam and Bengal from Burma, South of the Namtaleik River". Concerning the origins of kuki, in 1893, EB Elly, a British official, wrote, the terminology 'kuki', meaning 'hill people' originated in Sylhet, in former East Bengal

Historian such as Majumdar and Bhattasali refer to the kukis as the earliest people known to have lived in prehistory India, preceding 'the "Dravidians" who now live in south India.' The Aryans, who drove the Dravidians towards the south, arrived in the Indian sub-continent around BC 1500.

In the Pooyas, the traditional literature of the meitei people of Manipur, 'two kuki chiefs named kuki Ahongba and kuki Achouba were allies to Nongba Lairen Pakhangba, the first historically recorded king of the meithis[Meiteis], in the latter's mobilisation for the throne in 33 AD'. Cheitharol kumaba (Royal chronicles of the Meitei kings) record that in the year 186 Sakabda (AD 264) Meidungu Taothingmang, a kuki became king.

The origin of Kuki is shrouded with myths and mythologies. One such myth includes the traditional account handed down from centuries. According to it, the Kukis came out of the bowels of the earth or a cave called Chinlung or Shionlung or Khul, the location of which was believed to be somewhere in China, whereas others claimed it to be in Tibet. (Ginzatuang, 1973:5) Mc. Culloch (1857:55).

The Kukis are also known as Khongsai in Manipur, and that they bring their progenitors from the bowels of the earth, and they relate the manner of their reaching its surface. The story goes like this: A king's brother was hunting hedgehogs. In the meantime, the dog in pursuit entered the cavern. The master who was waiting for its return remained at the mouth of the cave.

After a lapse of time, the dog not having returned, its master determined to go in and see what had become of it. He did not find the dog, but as he followed its tracks, he suddenly found the surface of the earth. The scene presented to his view both pleased and astonished him. Returning to his brother he related his adventures and asked him to annex the new country to his territory, which the king did.

A story that speaks about the amalgamation of tribes with different tongues, goes like this: one day the three grandsons of the chief, who were playing together in their house, were told by their father to catch a rat. When they were busy in catching rat they suddenly got struck with a confusion of tongue: they were unable to achieve their object.

The eldest son spoke Lamyang, the second the Thado, the Third, some say the Vaiphei and some the Manipore language. Thus, they broke into distinct tribes. Shaw's (1929: 24) description about the origin of Kuki's is recorded from his collected verbal information.

The story concerned with the origin of the Kuki's states that they used to live under the earth, or rather inside it. The story goes like this: Noimangpa was the chief of subterranean region. Chongthu, a relative of Noimangpa, while hunting porcupine in the jungle with his dog, discovered a large hole. He perceived through this that the upper crust of the earth was un-inhabited and there was a great darkness.

This darkness, which lasted for seven days and nights, is called "Thimzin" by the Thadou's. Chongthu, rejoiced at this discovery, gave up his hunt and went back to his house. He conjured up ideas of forming his own village on the earth. Meanwhile, Noimangpa the chief of the underworld was performing the 'chon' festival, in which everyone including chongja, elder brother of Chongthu, Noimangpa's son Chonkim participated.

During this feast Chongthu started waving his sharp sword so vigorously that he injured some of the folks present, at which all were annoyed. This action of Chongthu was premeditated as he thought that by doing so he would be expelled from the underworld and thus can find an excuse for going out to the upper world and forming a village of his own.

When Noimangpa came to know this he said: Chongthu can better live in heaven, meaning that he better be killed. Chongthu hearing of Noimangpa's wrath, prepared to migrate to the uninhabited earth he saw and which is spoken of as 'khul' by the Thadous. So, Chongja and Chongthu killed many pigs, fowls etc. and feasted in preparation for their departure.

There are many more stories about this incident. The story further relates that Chongja's party delayed in moving, but Chongthu's party moved on followed by Chongthu himself. On reaching 'Khul', the leaders found that a great snake called Gulheipi was in possession of it and when they attempted to pass over it, the snake killed them with its tail. Chongthu, on reaching the spot, was not thwarted in his ambition.

He tightened his cloth around him and placed a 'phoipi', a thick cotton cloth, over his head and attacked the great snake and sliced it into seven pieces. At the same time, Lhaw, a lion also attempted to block the way of

Chongthu's egress. The lion withdrew and Chongthu's party moved up to the 'Khul'.

They founded that it was covered with stone and one man from Chongthu's party, named Vangalpa, lifted it up. Hence only seven persons were able to get out and then the stone dropped and all further attempts to raise it ended in a fiasco. The seven persons who thus emerged were Chongthu, Vangalpa, the stone lifter, Khupngam, said to be the progenitors of Manipuri, the Naga, the foreigner and the Burmese.

However, they are not definite about the last three, although they are quite emphatic about the numbers being seven. The genealogical tree from Chongthu to Thadou consists of mythical persons and therefore the festivities entailing repetition of the genealogical tree of the Thadou became necessary claiming that the Thempu starts from Thadou and not from Chongthu. Further, from Chongthu to Thadou there were no differences in languages. Animals, spirits as well as mythical ancestors lived in peaceful co-existence.

'Khul', the hole in the earth is said to be at the source of the 'Gun' river which seems to be identical with the Imphal River in the Manipur state. Etymologically, the word 'gun' in Thadou means the Imphal River and hence in all the stories and legends of the Thadou, the name 'gun' is of great fame (Shaw, 1929: 24-26). Hutton (1929:14) said: the story of Thimjin with slight variation is found in Shakespeare's Lushai-Kuki clans, Chapter V, Mills'-The Ao Nagas, p314, the Lotha Nagas, pp 176, 193. Molola, in Man in India, 11,100 has similar story of the Chang Nagas, and versions are found among the Hos and Santhalas of Bengal, the Shans, and the Ami of Formosa, while similar stories pervade the Indian Archipelago generally in Frazer's Folk-lore in the Old Testament, 1, iv, which said that the Thadou version of Thimjin story is "he knew of was that"....The great darkness was preceded by fire and accompanied by flood, and it was this flood which drove the ancestors of the Thado proper to take refuge in the hills, where they found Lethang, whom they forbore to kill as he knew the gods of the country accordingly, it was Lenthang who caused a white cock detainer of the sun to come and look, whereby the sun escaped and came out again restoring like to the darkened world.

The story is obviously suggestive of a separate racial origin for the Thadou proper, the Changsan and allied clans, presumably were in occupation when the Thadou arrived in the hills. Hutton further contended that such cultural version of the Kuki affinity was found among the Sema tribe in Naga Hills, who speak a Naga language which is something of a 'Pidgin type', lacking the inclusive and exclusive duals and plural and similar subtleties of most Naga languages.

It was a political system turning on an automatic secular chief, with followers who were guards, serfs or similarly bound retainers, known as

'Mughemi' (literally, orphans). It has other cultural items strongly suggestive of Kuki affinities and has lost the institution of the bachelor house. It lacks in for the most part the sentiment which binds most Naga villagers so strongly to some particular site, or at least to stones, earth or water brought from that site.

LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION

There are several linguistic classifications by different linguists. The following are some of the classifications showing the branch of the Tibeto-Burman languages in common and Kuki-chin in particular.

Bradley (1997:29-30) gives a more detailed picture of Chin languages at a lower level as shown:

The Old Kuki varieties are mainly spoken in India. Lushei (Ngente) is the archaic name of Mizo, and the speakers live both in Myanmar and India. Grierson's (1904) classification of Chin languages.

Peiros (1998:180) Kuki-Chin languages may fall into two sub groups. Luhupa (including Tangkhur and other languages) and Chin, which includes at least four sub branches: southern, Lakher, old Kuki and Lusheis as shown in figure.

Peterson (2000) proposes that there are two main Chin groups: Central and peripheral. The Central group includes the traditional central Chin, and probably old Kuki, but possibly not Mara as shown in figure.

A language status of Thadou in India

Population: 125,100 in India. Total Population of all countries: 151,300.

The number of Thadou speakers according to the census of 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 & 2001 of Manipur is as follows:

Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Thadou	47,998	59,955	56,466	103,667	115,045

But "Languages of India 1991 Census has given the number as 107,992. Region Assam; Manipur, Chandel District; Nagaland, Kohima District; Mizoram, northeast; Tripura. Also spoken in Myanmar. Alternate names: Thadou, Thado-Ubiphei, Thado-Pao, Kuki, Kuki-Thado, Thaadou Kuki. Reports for 2011 is coming next year.

Dialects

Baite, Changsen, Jangshen, Kaokeep, Khongzai, Kipgen, Langiung, Sairang, Thangngen, Hawkip, Shithlou, Singson (Shingsol). Related to Kamhau, Ralte, Paite, Zo.

Classification Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Kuki-Chin-Naga, Kuki-Chin, Northern Other language use: Speakers also use Meitei or Nepali.

Language development Literacy rate in second language: 24% (1971). Literacy is low among older people and in villages. Taught in schools in Manipur. Magazines. Radio programs. Dictionary. Grammar. Bible: 1971–1994. Comments: A Scheduled Tribe in India. Some of those listed, as dialects are separate languages.

CONTACT WITH OUTSIDE WORLD AND RESISTANCE

An important landmark in the history of the Kuki people with considerable social, cultural and political ramifications is the arrival of missionaries and the spread of Christianity among the Kuki's. The acceptance of Christianity marks a departure from their many tribal customs and traditions, and along with the spread of English education, heralds the arrival of modernity within the Kuki People.

The first foreign missionary ever to have landed on the soil of Manipur on the 6th February 1894 was William Pettigrew, sponsored by the American Baptist Mission Union. He, together with Dr. Crozier, worked together in the North and the Northeast of Manipur. In the south, Watkins Robert of the Welsh Presbytery mission organized the Indo-Burma Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission in 1913. To have a broader scope, the mission's name was changed to North East India General Mission (NEIGM).

The first Resistance movement by the kuki People was the kuki Rebellion of 1917-19. Which was against the British hegemony? Kuki country was subjugated by the British and divided between British India and British Burma administrations following the 'Kuki Uprising of 1917-19'.

Up until the fateful defeat in 1919, the Kukis were an independent people ruled by their chieftains. During WWII, seizing the opportunity to regain independence, Kuki fought with the Imperial Japanese Army and the Indian National Army led by Subhas Chandra Bose. The success of the Allied forces over the Axis group dashed the aspiration of the Kuki people.

Clannism and Factions

The Kukis in particular were widely known as "war-mongers". Which can be attributing to clan centric asperation? This has led to minor ethnic wars within the kuki clans and subclan, Hmars fought with Singson (Thadou) in 1960s, This was a result of social change among the Hmar people, whose Chiefs were Singson one of the Kuki clan. The factional clashes between PRA/ZRA dominated by paites/Zomi and KNF(P) which is dominated by Kipgen's in 1997 on the ground of suspicion that PRA/ZRA is the handiwork Of NSCN(IM).

The factional clash led to the lost of many innocent kuki civilian life mostly from the Paite and Thadou tribe, while other related kuki's joined in the fray. The Kuki had an ethnic war with the Nagas in the early 1990s which predominantly was due to the ethnic cleansing propaganda of the NSCN (IM) militants. The Kuki share the same culture, traditions, and genealogical affinity with their brethren of the Chin state in Burma and the Lushei or Mizo of Mizoram.

Culture

The Kukis have a rich culture and numerous tradition that are unique, interesting, and impressive.

Daily life

Rice is their staple food. They domesticated a number of animals. Of these, Se'l(mithun) is the most prized possession, while a dog is considered a faithful animal.

Festivals

Kuki festivals include:

- Lawm Se'l Neh (a celebration by young people of the community after the season's work is over)
- Chavang Kut (a celebration by the whole community after rice harvest)
- Mim Kut (related to maize harvest and similar in content to Cha'ng Kut)
- Sa-Ai (a celebration of a successful big game hunt of big animals)
- Chaang-Ai (a celebration of bounteous rice harvest)
- Hun (an occasion of worship in ancient times)
- Chawn le Han (hosting of this occasion involved feasting and holding of sporting events)
- Ka'ng ka'p (a game in which disc-liked seed is rolled) besides many others.

Music

There are different musical instruments to enhance these festivities.

- Kho'ng-pi (big drum)
- Kho'ng-cha (small drum)
- Dah-pi (gong)
- Pe'ngkul (trumpet)
- Gosem (bagpipe)

- Theile (flute)
- Theiphi't (whistle)
- Se'lki (horn)
- Lhe'mlhei (a peculiar mouth instrument)

These instruments were useful not only for raising the festival spirit, but also for adding solemnity to certain serious occasions.

Folklore

The folklore of the people abounds with the heroic adventures of Galngam le Hangsai, Chemtatpa, Lengbante, Jamdil, Sangah le Ahpi etc. The poignant romances of Khupting le Ngambom, Jonlhing le Nanglhun, Changkhatpu le Ahshijolneng, Khalvompu le Lenchonghoi; and folktales, such as Chipinthei le Mailangkoh, Lhangeineng and others, represent the rich variety of the Kuki culture.

Ngambom & Khupting

The folklores of the mighty Kukis are unmatched in its own genuineness and decency. If comparison be made in the intensity of lovebarometer (Loborometer), Ngambom & Khupting romance would have surpassed that of the degree of Greek's "Odyssey" or Hindus' "Rama & Sita", which ended in happy reunion and at best be depicted equally the desperado in Shakespear famous play of "Romeo & Juliet", which ended in remorse tragedy.

The Kukis history is deeply rooted with valor, integrity, sanctity and unrelenting commitment to the cause of integral relationship. One such relationship of 'Romance' had existed, as legend passed down through to date, between Ngambom and Khupting. Young and Old irrespective of social positions shed tears uncontrollably when the Epic Love story is ever retold in the hearths, workplaces (fields), or even in the sojourn trip, in and around the abode of the mighty Kuki in their Zale'n Gam.

The evergreen story usually commence, once there lived two friendly women, who married with a fine grooms in the same month at the same hamlet in Zale'n Gam. They were friend since their childhood. They had practiced the age old traditional "Lawmcha" working one day at one's field another day at the other person's field.

Tradition like friendship, fellowship, sportsmanship and occasional festive activities were part of their lives and it only bloom in the land of Benglam, Galngam & Hangsai, Lengchonghoi & Khalvomtepu, Nanglhun & Jonlhing, Jamdil, Ahsijolneng, and et al., which we now known as Kuki Zale'n Gam (The fatherland of Kuki).

The two women continued their lawmcha even after their married life. They both realized that they were with baby in their wombs. One day they

both felt excruciating pain in their abdomens. They were still working in the field, there was no one to help them.

Out of apathy and partly because they suffer the same nauseating pain, both embraced each other and tried to console one another. Strangely as they rub their bulging stomach, they felt relieved, another time the pain strike, they rubbed their belly; it was a new panacea. They never told this event to any body even their spouses.

Nine months has passed and the ensuing month sparked off the Kukis' Love Epic Hero and Heroine. One woman gave birth to a baby boy and the parent gave his name Ngambom. The other woman gave to a baby girl and the parent name her Khupting. The two mothers laid their babies, one above the banana trunk another below of it.

Whenever they took off to rest and fed their respective baby, to their amazement they found Ngambom and khupting lying side by side not a distance away. This was the strange destiny of Love beneath the skin-every fibers and gems of blood in the body metabolism had acknowledged the predestined "theisen neo kilungset."

Ngambom and Khupting and their romantic glitz was the talk of the entire Zale'n Gam. The quality and dignity of Ngambom was beyond expression. His talent in the lyrical Gosem music was known in the entire world. Beside this, he was the most handsome person, having the distinctive quality of nobility, courteous, prowess, sportsmanship, integrity and truthfulness in all his works.

Khupting proved to be the icon of her days. She was ornately beauty, lovely and excelled other in her musical masterpiece of Lhemlhai lyric. Above all, she was modest, virtuous, lovely, hospitable, meek, kind, and superb in shawl weaving. The expression of every November full moon (Lhalih Jan) and their love legend couldn't be rejected or hid. People of Zale'n Gam came to learn the genuine meaning and ideal love from Ngambom-Khupting love living world. Old folks were eager to cast their eyes on the two duo.

Young folks peeped beneath and below their rank and file to cast a glimpse of the duo epic lyrical performances. As always was the case of the epic love stories in Odyssey, Rama-sita, and Romeo-Juliet, the bliss of romance between Ngambom and Khupting were short live.

The maxim of full bloom tender-love turned sour when Khupting's health began to deteriorate day by days. Khupting body shrunk away, yet her beauty never faded. The Parents, Priests (thiempu) and many physicians couldn't preserve the tenderous beauty life of Khupting.

Ngambom had tried day after days, and year after years following the "Apeu Vadung" (Apeu river- known to be present Irrawaddy river in

Myanmar), to find the drifting hair of Khupting. The village priest advice Ngambom to get Khupting hair and put khoigip attach to stone in the middle of Apeu River, hoping the running water might healed the ailment of his darling.

But the sudden storm and heavy torrential rain in the night flooded the river basin, eroding away including the big stone to which khupting hair was stamped with khoigip. This worsens the lingering health of Khupting. Her health was beyond repair and she eventually succumbed to death leaving the entire Kuki Nation shock and sorrow.

The pain of separation from Khupting due to the untimely demise, in Ngambom life was beyond human strength to bear. He was driven half mad and no one can replaced his darling in life but only Khupting. To find solace, peace and restrain, Ngambom snatched his Gosem and played the sweet lyrical music by blowing gently. He was amazed to find another companion whenever he played his tunes-the Whizzing bee (khoiva) whirled around the organ pipes, seemingly dancing in tune with the heartbeats of the blower.

Khupting parent invited Ngambom to cut the branches of Thingzabuong in the central of their field (Legend depicts that this tree can be seen on the moon at every full moon night). Selneng who was the younger sister of Khupting attempted to appease Ngambom and appeal for his love by offering sweets and gifts. Yet Ngambom had one love in life though his love bird had been taken mercilessly by the stink of sickness and death.

The day in which he was asked to cut the branches of Thingzabuong, Ngambom prepared with his sharp knife, *tuibuh* (podium of *apiate*), and his Gosem musical instrument. He climbed up the big bushel trees and began to cut off the wild flourishing branches. Ngambom felt the buzzing sweet tune around him and sensed the present of Khupting Lhaulha (spirit). Ngambom then took a short break, pulled out his Gosem and composed his great Love-song. The tune came through the bamboo pipes of Gosem:

“Abah langkhat kalham leh sim’a mal’a toingei kisai kisai’e.”

The nearest English translation would be: As I cut the branch off, my destined love in the east and west dances gently and mildly in the air. Ngambom was overjoyed having consoled by Khupting’s spirit and he continued to talk through his musical pipes;

“Khupting Lhaulha nahi leh, simlang nga in kisai kisai `e.”

(If you are the spirit of Khupting, turn east and show your gracefully flying dance). The Whizzing bee responded the melodious love mantras from Ngambom and turned east and splatters its wings and responded with sweet buzzing sound similar to Lhemlhai.

Ngambom spoke to Khupting again through his musical tune;

"Khupting Lhaulha nahi leh, mal lam nga in kisai kisai 'e."

(If you are the spirit of Khupting, turn west and show your gracefully flying dance). The bee heartily followed the rhythmic thumping musical notes. When the music stop, the bee disappeared. It appeared again when the Gosem music is aired melodiously.

How did Ngambom passed his last days? Did he marry Selneng the younger sister of Khupting? Those story, who would bother, when Ngambom played his Gosem and Khupting Lhaulha (spirit) in a form of Whizzing bee came to appear to be with him. The Kuki folklore of Ngambom and Khupting deserved world recognition. It is an epic preserved in the muzzles of Gosem -the Kuki traditional musical instrument.

Philosophical insight:

Love seems to have no barrier. Even death can't separate the fibers of love. Two different and opposite worlds have no panacea to control over Love. People say, "love is blind," yet this Epic Love story says "Love never dies."

Customs and traditions

The land of the Kukis is blessed with rich customs and traditions.

Sawm

Sawm, a community center for boys – was the center of learning in which Sawm-upa (an elder) did the teaching, while Sawm-nu took care of chores, such as combing of the boy's hair, washing of the garments and making the beds, etc. The best students were recommended to the King's or the Chief's service, and eventually would become as Semang & Pachong (ministers) in the courts, or gal –lamkai (leaders/ warriors) in the army.

Lawm

Lawm (a traditional form of youth club) was an institution in which, boys and girls engaged in social activities, for the benefit of the individual and the community. It was also another learning institution. Every Lawm has lawm-upa (a senior member), To'l'ai-pao (overseer or superintendent), and Lawm-tangvo (assistant superintendent).

Besides being a source of traditional learning, Lawm was also useful for imparting technical and practical knowledge to its members, especially with regard to farming methods, hunting, fishing, and sporting activities such as Kung – Kal (high jump, especially over a choice mithum), Ka'ng Ka'p, Ka'ngchoi Ka'p (top game), Suhtumkhaw (javelin throw using the heavy wooden implement for pounding-de-husking-paddy) and So'ngse (shot put).

The Lawm was also a center where the young people learned discipline and social etiquette. After harvest season, 'Lawm meet' is celebrated with a

Lawm-se'l (on the occasion, a mithun is slaughtered for the feast) and, as a commemoration, a pillar is erected. The event is accompanied by dance and drinking rice-beer, which sometimes continues for days and nights.

Male Characteristics

The Kuki male traditionally wore his hair in the form of a Tuhcha (long hair rolled up in a bunch at the nape). His clothing consisted of a Boitong-Sangkhol (a half-sleeve jacket) and a Pheichawm (short lungi). They are renowned hunters and reputable warriors. Their hunting kit consists of Se'llung-bawm (a leather waist-pouch for pellets), Se'lki meiloupai (an animal's horn for storing gunpowder) and a knife.

Watchful waiting on a machaan for the game also did a favorite past time hunting. Often, many kinds of traps and snares are also set. The fishing equipment consists of Len (fishing net), Bawm (basket trap), Ngakoi (fishing hooks). Ngoituh (a method of using dams and baskets in a flowing river), Ngalhei (draining out water) and Gusuh (a method of temporally stunning fish by using toxic herbs) were also common methods of catching fish in small streams.

The Kuki men took great pride in big-game hunting and a killing of big animals was followed by somber celebration. The Kukis believed that the big game hunted in a man's lifetime would accompany him in his after-life journey—the spirits of animals would clear the onward path for him. It was therefore believed that a man was not complete unless he was also successful in big game hunting; he would not be entitled to partake in Lalju, a special drink meant for those who have killed big game.

Women Characteristics

The Kuki women traditionally wore their hair in two plaits braided around the head. They wore a Nih-San (a red slip) underneath a Po'nve (a wrap-around), which was worn from above the chest. The ornaments included Bilba (earrings), Hah le Chao (bracelets and bangles), Khi (necklace), and occasionally Bilkam (a type of ring-shaped earring worn to stretch the earlobes). Cha'ngsuh (grain-pounding), Cha'ngse'p (winnowing), Ponkhon (cloth-weaving) and looking after domestic animals were some of the daily chores of the women folk.

The woven designs of the Kuki women are unique and appreciated the world over. Cha'ng-ai, the place of honor for a good harvest was given to the lady of the house. This formed the highest honor accorded to the Kuki woman. The men folk occupied themselves with cane and bamboo crafts and house building.

They were blacksmiths and also engaged in carpentry and other such like jobs. The manufacture of guns and gunpowder were a very specialized profession among the men. *Twi-cha'ngsu* (water mill)' and *Chotle'p* (a sea-saw mechanism), are some of the ingenious methods used for pounding rice with minimum use of human energy.

Sawh and *Ke'ngke* (noise creating instruments) functioned as the scarecrow and were placed in the cultivated fields. *Twisawh* was another inventive contraption, which used running water from a stream making continual sounds to scare away birds and pests from standing crops.

LAWS AND GOVERNMENT

Governance

With regard to governance, *Semang* (cabinet) is the annual assembly of a Kuki village community held at the Chief's residence represents the *Inpi* (Assembly). In such an assembly, the Chief and his *Semang* and *Pachong* (cabinet members and auxiliary of *Inpi*) and all the household heads of the village congregate to discuss and resolve matters relating to the village and the community.

Legal system

The legal system – arrangement of a girl's marriage, bride-price, and the Chief's administrative system, relief for widows and orphans – are elaborately and systematically defined in the Kukis' way-of-life. Traditionally, polygamy is not permissible. Capital punishment was never in practice. The maximum penalty was '*bultuh*' (stockade in which the guilty was kept outside the village and provided food until death). This reflects the high ethics of the Kuki people.

Judicial process

The Kukis also practiced *Twilut*, a judicial process of judgment by going under water. *Twilut* is a phenomenon in which the litigants are subjected to go under water to determine the culprit. It is an ultimate and decisive recourse for cases where the normal processes of trial by court does not reach a conclusive end.

In the event of resorting to *twilut*, certain customs are strictly adhered to. The chief and elders of the community call upon the *thempu* (magic-medicine man/priest) to conduct the proceedings. For instance, in a boundary dispute, the two litigants are brought into the presence of the public. The '*thempu*' then recites rituals, which includes the invocation of '*Pathen*' (God), followed by the litigants being submerged in the water.

The culprit becomes immediately apparent because she/he cannot remain underwater at all. Of the two litigants, the defaulter would be in absolute agony, experiencing extreme sensations of being inflamed from within, and

therefore emerge to the surface. In contrast, the innocent person able to remain under water, quite normally.

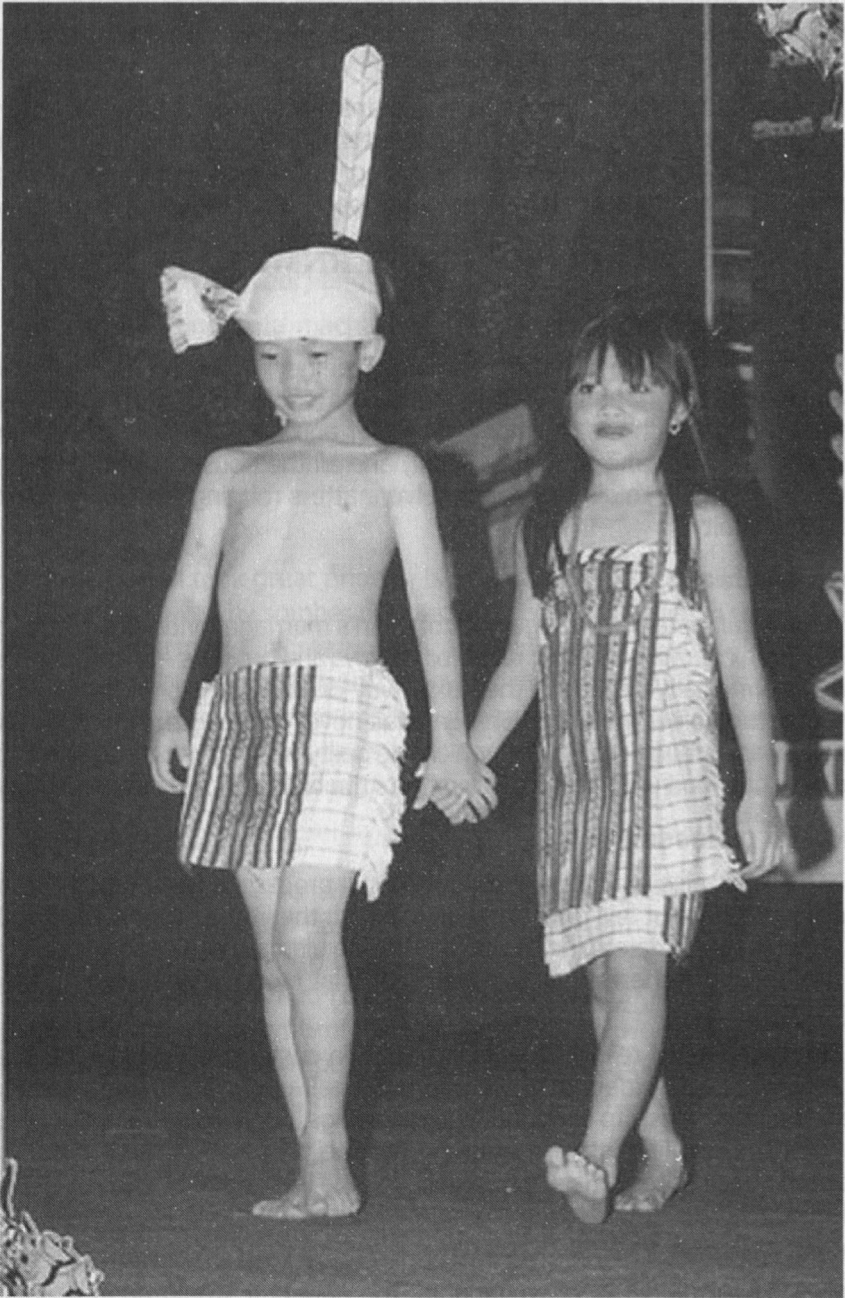


Fig. 56.2: Kids with Modern design of Kuki Traditional clothes

LANGUAGE

Kuki People speak multiple dialect under the Kuki Chin languages, all denoted under the group or tribe name. All these dialects are spoken mainly in Manipur Hills, and closely related speech varieties is found in adjoining states of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, parts of Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, across the Indo-Myanmar border and chittagong hills district of Bangladesh. The dialects spoken by the various clans and tribes can be broadly categorise into "L" and "R" Group.

Writing

It is known that the Kukis were in possession of some documents, inscribed on leather, known as *Savun Lekhajo* (scroll). These scrolls were lost in the passage of time and along with this, the Kukis also lost their script. Therefore, there is no known Kuki script. Today, the Roman script forms the basis for Kuki literature.

Literature

The academic and Kuki National Organisation spokesman Seilen Haokip has written a number of articles and books about the Kuki and tribal relations in northeastern India. The Bible has been translated in all tribes dialect of the kuki Society.

Education

Although the existence of formal learning institutions is not available, the Kukis were not unfamiliar with astronomy and astrology. They were able to study the stars and the phases of the moon and could forecast for themselves certain aspects of nature, particularly rainfall, drought and the seasons.

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo society, like most tribal societies, is segmentary. It has different clans, which followed different system of dialects, sacrificial rites, priest (thiempu) and chief. Their social life during the pre-British was bounded by many fears arising out of their animistic belief. Inter-clan feuds had also been a common feature among them in the early period. As a result many people were made captive who became to be known as `SOH le `Koi (slaver).

Family

Family occupies the most important and prominent place in the history of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo. Their family is a nuclear family which ultimately becomes a joint family. In the Chin-Kuki-Mizo family the father exercise all supreme authority over matters pertaining to the family and the women folk have no significance roles in decision making.

Traditionally the wife is a subordinate to the husband in the household management. A wife never called her husband by his name. But when a son or daughter is born she addressed him as the father of the child. On the death of a father the eldest son is all responsible who like the father exercise the same nature of power.

Marriage

The form of marriage in the Chin-Kuki-Mizo right from its inception was a marriage by purchase. The price of a bride varies from clan to clan. However, if both the two parties mutually agreed the price may not be required at all. A bride's price is determined in terms of 'Se/ (Mithun). For instance the price of my wife who is from Khongsai (Lunkim) clan is eight se/(mithun) (though I was not required to pay at all then).

There are also some clans who charged up to ten mithuns. The price can also be paid in certain articles or goods which were equivalent to mithun. It is also customary for a man to marry his mother's brother's daughter (cousin) which in local term is called 'Neitel'. But today this practice is hardly seen and parents preferred marriage outside the family.

There's a marriage by arrangement, marriage by mutual love. Inter clan marriage was never allowed in the past. But, in the present day such practices have been observed without any nullification. There is also no restriction with regard to marriage between different linguistic groups of tribe.

Usually marriage involves a series of three visits by the groom's party to the bride's party at the end of which marriage ceremony is performed. This visits and marriage is possible only if the to be bride's parents consented. Other than the Church the marriage is not bound by any court or authority to register.

Divorce

There are certain recognised reasons under which divorce could be claimed. Such as adultery, issueless, imperforated vagina etc. A mithun is given to the wife if divorce is due to the husband breach of marriage vows. If the divorce is caused by the wife, the bride price is returned to the husband.

Chief

Every village has its own chief who in theory is despot within his jurisdiction. His words are law in his own village. All disputes and cases have to be decided by him. He is also assisted by his Council of Advisors. He imposed customary punishment to the erring subjects.

In the modern administration, justice is carried out by the village authority with chief as the chairman. Dispute which could not be settled by the village

authority are usually referred to the area court (Area Kuki Inpi). If the Area Court fails to settle the disputes, it is then referred to Kuki Inpi (apex body) for final settlement.

Land and mode of inheritance

Land can be owned by an individual if it is in the area where the MLR and LR Act 1960 is extended. But in the hill areas where the said Act does not extend it belongs to the chief. Transfer of land in the hill areas is not possible as it entirely belongs to the chief. But land where MLR and LR Act of 1960 was extended can be transferred and inherited by the eldest son if the father died.

The mode of inheritance among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo is counted in the male line. It is their custom and tradition that all the parental properties are inherited by the eldest son of the family. In the absence of male heir, the nearest kin inherit the deceased's properties.

Settlement area (KHO)

In the pre-British period, the Chin-Kuki-Mizo lived in one spot for not more than 7-10 years. Because, they were in search of more productive land and their life was much migratory in nature.

For selecting a village site the eldest would first sleep one night at the proposed site by taking with them a cock. If the cock did not crow before dawn the site would be considered not suitable. On abandoning the old village, the old hearth would be doused with water so that none of the misfortunes and curse of the abandoned village should follow them.

Type of houses

Houses of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo in the early days were not built strong and durable. Bamboo and thatches were usually used for building. Houses were raised 4-5 feet high from the ground. The floors were usually made of splitting bamboos. Except the main doors, they did not have windows or ventilations.

Som Inn (Bachelors Dormitory)

Som inn or the bachelors' dormitory is one of the institutions of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo which fostered and nurtured the youths into a responsible and matured person in the society. The bachelors choose a leader from amongst them and it was customary for the inmates to obey their chosen leader.

The dormitory leader mobilized the youth and rendered free and compulsory services to the society. All the male youths of the village who had attained the age of puberty were made to sleep in the dormitory in the

night. The village dormitory served as a sleeping place, recreational centre for unmarried. It was also used for imparting and training the young boys. It also served as an inn for a man from another village.



Fig. 56.3: Kut celebration

Musical instruments

It is rather abstruse to ascertain the year as to when the Chin-Kuki-Mizo started using musical instruments, but it has been used by them from time immemorial. They had different kinds of musical instruments.

To name a few their instruments include *Khuong* or drum, *Goshem* (bamboo pipe) which is made of dry gourd and dry bamboo pipe, *Dahpl* (big gong) and *Dah Cha* (Small gong), *Selkl* (mithun's horn), *Theild* (Flute) which is made of dry bamboo pipe, Harps, cymbals etc.

Dances

By nature the Chin-Kuki-Mizo love social bustles, singing, dancing and drinking are ingrediently blended forming a common feature of life. They have various types of dances which have their own uniqueness.

The dances are generally performed by both men and women with elegancy and affinity. Their music and songs are classical melancholic and sentimental. Most of the songs are sung with the accompaniment of drums and music.

Games and sports

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo are sport loving and competitive minded people. One of their common games is wrestling. This game was occasionally done in the bachelors' dormitory as a routine exercise. Visitors to a village were usually challenged by the local youth and a fair competition was fought till one become the winner.

Weight lifting was another popular game. In the early days in every village of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo, there would be one or two stone used for weight lifting. Young men competed among themselves either in the morning or in the evening. There are different games played by man, women and children.

Economic life

In the early period, jhuming constituted the main basis of the economy of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo and it still remains. The people could managed themselves with the kind of food they produced from the jhum. They had limited wants and were contented with their economic life. Their staple food was rice.

Besides paddy, maize, millet, yams, sweet potatoes etc were also grown. Buying and selling were most counted much, business was transacted through barter system. Cottons were grown and yearned into thread. They knew how to dye their clothes by using a species of dwarf indigo grown in their village.

Goats, cows, buffaloes, dogs, pigs, mithuns etc were domesticated by them. Mithun occupied a key role in the social as well as in the economic life of their early life. They kept them for trading and for festival purpose. Rice beer was very common and no ceremony was performed without rice beer. Nevertheless young men and women hardly drank as drinking in the presence of elders by young men and women was considered unseemly.

