Chapter – II

Traditional Culture, Political System and Early contacts with the British with special reference to ‘Thadou-Kukis’
CHAPTER II
TRADITIONAL CULTURE, POLITICAL SYSTEM AND EARLY CONTACTS WITH THE BRITISH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ‘THADOU-KUKIS’

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last part of the 18th century, the Kuki-Chin-Mizo people were generally identified as “Kukis”. This word was described in many terms, often in a derogatory sense such as ‘nomadic tribe’, ‘war-like people’, ‘headhunters’, ‘blood-thirsty’, ‘wild people’, ‘Lunctas’ (naked-people) or ‘wild savages’, the least civilized people who are a little advanced than the animals with which they share jungles as their abode. Such was the impression on the people by the outside world. This was true in some respects as they continued a semi-nomadic life even after the establishment of the British rule over them in 1890.1 They also took the heads of their enemy like the Nagas2 as trophies of war. Under the circumstances, it is of course, not surprising that positive attitude towards their neighbourhood and their culture were not formed. And that the pre-colonial life of the tribal people is generally termed as the dark period in their history due to their isolation for centuries together in their own world.3 Nevertheless, the Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups were found to be highly intelligent, perceptive, adaptable and disciplined.4 Anthropologist like J.H. Hutton also surmise that the ‘Kukis’ once “possessed a higher culture than they have now”.5 However it still remains enigmatic as to which culture they had belonged in the past. in ancient Indian terminology they were identified as jana and the kiratas. They had their own culture, language, religious activities and world view.

Therefore, it was during the colonial period that the hill people were called as wild tribes which carried a biased meaning of ‘primitivity’. In fact there is a presence of many positive

1. Shakespear, Lushai-Kuki, op. cit. pp. 22-23
3. Quoted in S. Kippen’s “Cultural Unity of the Tribals - A Historical Approach” a seminar paper presented on the occasion of a three day state level seminar on History and Culture of the tribals, organized by Manipur University Tribal students dated Friday 27th April - 1st May 2002.
5. Shaw, : p. 17 (Fn)
qualities which is proved by the fact that once their area opened up and became accessible, more could be learned about their highly developed culture and tradition, and social ethics within their regional ethos.

The ‘Thadou-Kukis’ who reside mostly in the surrounding hills live within the geographical area of Manipur and are also found settled in parts of Myanmar (Burma) Tripura, Assam and other North East states. They are the most numerous group among the Kuki tribes living in Manipur and speak the same dialect (See Appendix-XII). The name Thadou, the forefather or eponymous ancestor and a descendant under the genealogical line from a legendary progenitor Chongthu, is adopted by all clans due to the fact that Thadou was a great warrior and killed more men. That Thadou was great in council and war, and that he retrieved the fortunes of the family; has commonly been accepted as a legend and projected as the progenitor of the Thadou group. They are better identified as Thadou-Kukis. Hence, the nomenclature ‘Thadou-Kukis’

A. Physique: The Thadou-Kukis, both men and women, are physically muscular and well-built. Soppitt writes about their physiques that, “they are sturdily built, short and squat as a rule with high cheek bones, flat noses with very rare well cut features, and their appearance, on the whole is very effeminate. Little or no hair is grown in the face.” Steward has also noted that, “the Kukis are a short sturdy race of men with a goodly development of muscle. Their legs are generally speaking, short in comparison with the length of their bodies, and their arms long. The face is nearly as broad as it is long and is generally round or square, the cheek bones high, broad and prominent, eyes small and almond shaped, the nose short and flat, with wide nostrils. The women appear more squat than the men even, but are strong and lusty.” Reynolds also observed that the Thadou-Kukis are like the Manipuris in physiognomy, but the greater part bear more resemblance.
to the Khasis, having strongly marked Mongolian features with flat faces and thick lips.9

The ‘Thadou-Kukis’ and their cognate tribes such as Paite, Gangte, Chiru, etc. resemble each other in appearance and physical characteristics with moderate stature representing unique Mongoloid characteristics. The Mongoloid spots of blue marks can be seen on the back and buttock in every newborn child. The colour of their skin has different shades varying between dark yellow-brown, dark olive copper and yellow olive.10 The hair of the male folk is traditionally worn long and combed back from the forehead and tied up in a knot called tuucha kisom, at the back of the head, which is greased with pig’s fat at frequent intervals.11 The hair of women is also kept long and parted in the centre of the head and plaited into two strands. When this grows longer, the two portions are plaited, cross behind and brought round the head where the meeting ends are tied together. The favourite ear ornament of the women is a large disc of silver 12 peculiar to the Thadou-Kukis. Necklaces of beads, leaden or shoulder armlet in the upper arm and bracelets of thick brass wire on the wrists and fore-arms are worn by the women.13 They are in the habit of chewing tobacco in great quantities which made them filthy in person to an inconceivable degree.14

B. Dresses: In terms of dresses the traditional Thadou-Kukis wear clothes simply enough to cover their body. The male folks wear head-dresses or turbans of cotton cloth or silk in which they are adept in tying.15 To cover the lower part of their body, the men wear a loin-cloth which looks like a dhothi and is called pheichom and have one or more clothes to wrap around themselves over one shoulder or both. The male in Thadou-Kuki tribe wear a cloth as a ‘pugree’.16

9. E.T. Dalton, op. cit. p. 45
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
which is tied around the head with the ends sticking up in front with a small red feather attached on it. The dress of the women consists of a loin cloth which is wrapped around their waist. It consists of a kilt-shaped piece of coloured cloth wrapped around their waist reaching from below the navel to half way down over their thigh. Besides, to cover up the upper part of the body, another piece of cloth is wrapped tightly around the torso sufficient enough to prevent from being called naked. Some young ladies also wrap the cloth around their body under the arm-pits. The men folk also frequently wear another coat-shirt or a half-sleeve jacket called Bottong-Sangkhola. (See Fig. 1, p. 48)

As noted earlier the daily dress were simple but on festive occasions, the people attired themselves in a comparatively colourful costume. Footwear was generally unknown and so they went about barefooted. The colourful costume among the ‘Thadou-Kuki’ society includes different kinds of clothes, such as: Thangnangpon, Saipkhup (traditional shawls meant for men), Ponmongvum (a traditional shawl for women), Khamtang (a lungi for women) etc. (See Fig. 2, p. 52)

The Thadou-Kuki costumes has also a lot of similarities with their cognate groups. Paite and Zou tribe has also Pondum but with a little addition of colours and designs. Among the Paites, Ngoute Khelh (a combination of black and white colour) and Pon Laisan (a combination of green, white and red colours) are the important costumes worn on festive occasions. (See Fig. 3, p. 53 - 55) The Zous and other minor tribes has also more or less the same colourful costumes of different kinds. The traditional dresses of the Koms is also more or less the same with that of the Thadou-Kukis. (See Fig. 4, p. 56)

Like Lushais, the Thadou-Kukis or ‘Khongsais’ carries a netted bag, which contains his tobacco flint and steel, a small knife and other odds and ends which is worn on the hips.18

17. Sitalou Mangel Paokai in Sanajaoba’s Manipur, ed. pp. 240-241
Fig. 1. Traditional dresses of Kuki tribes

Fig. 1 (a) Gangte lad wearing traditional Boitong Sangkhoh

Fig. 1 (b) Thadou-Kuki traditional dress
Fig. 1 (c). Chothe traditional dress

Fig. 1 (d). Gangle traditional dress
Fig. 1 (e). Hmar traditional dress

Fig. 1 (f). Simte traditional dress
Fig. 1 (g). Khiba/Khichong (Necklaces of rare beads which is very much indispensable in the socio-cultural life of the Thadou Kuki society)
Fig. 2. Traditional shawls and *Lungi* of Thadou-Kukis
(i) Saipikhup (for men) (ii) Saipikhup (for women)
(iii) Thangnang (common for both men and women)
(iv) Khamtang (*Lungi* for women) and (v) Ponmangvoms
Fig. 3 (a). Paite cultural dance

Fig. 3 (b). Hmar cultural dance
Fig. 3. (c) Cultural dance by Tiddim-Chin in Kut Festival

Fig. 3 (d). Gangle cultural dance
Fig. 3 (e). Vaiphei cultural dance

Fig. 3 (f). Maring cultural dance
Fig. 4 (a). Mizo cultural dance

Fig. 4. (b) Kom cultural Dance
In addition to that whenever they go out to the jungle or to their ‘jhumland’ they carried a knife called *Chempong* tied around their waist and a spear called *Tengcha* or muzzle-loading gun called *Thihng meipum*.  

(See Fig. 5, p. 58)

While at their homes they love to sit on high platforms and pass the day in conversation and smoking. The Kukis are hardly ever without a pipe in their mouth and one of their few means of calculating time and distance is by the number of pipes they smoked. Both the sexes enjoy smoking pipes. The pipe is made of different materials like wood, bamboo, earthen ware, brass or metal. Besides, both sexes are also fond of tobacco juice called *Tuibuh* which is kept traditionally inside a small bamboo tube or gourd. They keep the fluid in their mouths, until its invigorative properties have been absorbed and then they spit it out again. The strenuous jungle life has endowed the Thadou-Kukis with a well-built and fine physique no doubt, but their lack of interest in taking bath after a days work, the combined smell of pig’s fat applied on the hair, the state tobacco and filthy garments produce a high degree of repulsive odour. This practise however is changing now and lots of attention is being given to personal hygeine.

In character, the Thadous are not dishonest people although the Kuki-Chin generally are not nearly as honest as the *Kacha Nagas*. Among the hill Kacharis, lying is looked upon as a science worthy of everyman’s study. Deceit and deception are instilled into the child at the mother’s breast. Being a bigot to tradition, the Thadous are slow but deep thinkers. The average Kuki has a very obstinate and wilful mentality. Besides, honest dealings among themselves, loyalty to their friends, gullible nature within them, they are also arrogant and truculent by nature. In the midst of vast differences in terms of their manners and customs of the

22. C.A. Sopitt, op. cit. p. 4.
Fig. 5.(a) Traditional weapons used by Thadou-Kukis: Chempong (Knife), Tengcha (Spear), Thihang Meipum (Muzzle Loading Gun), Ompho (Shield), Thalpi (Bow)
Kuki-Chin tribes, the main characteristics of these ethnic families as given by Carey and Tuck may be universally accepted as given below:

"The slow speech, the serious manner, the respect for birth and the knowledge of pedigree..... the duty of revenge, the taste for and the treacherous method of warfare, the curse of drink, the virtue of hospitality, the clannish feeling, the vice of avarice, the filthy state of the body, mutual distrust, impatience under control, the want of power of combination and of continued effort, arrogance in victory, speedy discouragement and panic in defeat are common traits throughout the hills."\(^24\)

C. Socio-cultural life: With regard to the social system of the Thadou-Kukis in particular and the tribals in general, the practice of patriarchal family system, community divided several clans which are again divided into lineages or sub-clans with no social hierarchical structure are some of the common characteristics. Besides, the practice of head-hunting inter-tribal and inter-clan marriages observance of ‘genna’ or Social taboos, maintenance of youth dormitory, practice of indigenous festivals, music and dance are all an intrinsic part of the tribal culture. The performance of the Feast of Merit, the housing system, weapons, utensils used by them, dress and ornaments, food and drinks on ceremonial occasions etc. are all similar and reveal a common practice.

In so far as the Thadou-Kuki socio-cultural practices are concerned, they have their own pattern of social system, economy and polity. Of course, though the tribal people of the North East differ among themselves in many ways, linguistically, culturally, ethnically and they also have in common many structural and cultural characteristics\(^25\) which are noteworthy.

\(^24\) Carey & Tuck : op. cit. p. 165.
\(^25\) S. Fuchs – Races of North-East India – (Indian Missiological Review) quoted in Dr. Sahim Irne’s “Social and cultural life of the Tribals before the advent of Christianity,” a seminar paper published by Manipur University Tribal students Union p. 15
2. ASPECTS OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE: PATRIARCHAL SOCIAL SYSTEM

Patriarchal and patrilineal is the basis of the social structure of the Thadou-Kukis. Hence, only the males especially, the eldest son called Mi-u-pa who lives with the parents permanently unlike his younger brothers Neojo and sisters Numei, can inherit the parental or the family properties. On the other hand women who are generally thought to be inferior and subordinate to men have customarily no share in the property of her father. Her responsibility is to become a true and faithful housewife. Among the Mizos, the right of inheritance goes mostly to the youngest son of the family, contrary to that are the Thadous and cognate clans who inspite of that fact give the right of inheritance to the male line.

Speaking further with regard to the position of women in the society, Kipgen writes that women were considered as mere halves of men and to men of high vanity they were no more than a property particularly when her price was fully paid. She was treated as a commodity. Such practice is as old as their culture, they were considered as member of the family only when they had produced a male issue or heir. Therefore, they have keen interest in having a baby son without which it was deplored as a curse called Chapa-gam. This shows that a woman’s status in her husband’s household amounted little until she had given birth to a male child. The society is thus, undoubtedly male dominated.

A. Family life: Among the various social institutions of the Thadou-Kukis there is nothing more important than the institution of family. Although its organization, composition and specific functions have varied greatly with time and place, some of its features are remarkably uniform and resistant of change. The society is organized on the basis of the family as a unit whereby the father who is the head of the family controlled the other members. The family included the


27. K. Kipgen, op. cit. p. 84
father, his wife and children living together under the same roof who are related by blood, marriage or by adoption. The members of the family work co-operatively with other family members to fulfill the purposes for which the family exists. (See diagram)

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Father (PA)          Mother (NU)
     |                       |
  Son (CHAPA)        Daughter (CHANU)
     |                       |
Grandson (TUPA)
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The social life is basically a casteless society. There is no social stratification like the Hindu caste system. The villagers at large are a closely knit and have mutually dependent number of families. It is also found that there is a close tie between the religious, cultural, social and political institutions. As far as the family life is concerned they practice both joint and nuclear types of family. Every existing family in the society is a piece broken off from a larger unit. It is because of marriage children are born and the family gives a daughter in marriage to another family and also receive brides. The practise of cross-cousin marriage is also common among the Kuki tribes and the Tangkhul Naga. (See diagram)

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Father
     |                       |
  Sister                                Brother
     |                       |
Son (I)               Daughter (II)   Son (III)   Daughter (IV)
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a. **III and II (marriage prohibited)**
b. **I and IV (NEI marriage)**

The brother’s son (III) cannot marry sister’s daughter (II) but the sister’s son (I) can marry brother’s daughter (IV), who is the preferential bride called NEI for the sister’s family.

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28. T.S. Gangte. The Kukis; op. cit. p. 66
The family system has a life-cycle of its own. In this life-cycle from birth to death, it contains a series of rites, rituals, ceremonies and restrictions which are considered obligatory for the growth and well-being of a person in his present life and also in life after death. The fact about it is that when the brothers of a joint family sub-divided their fathers property or estate they established independent nuclear families of their own. With the passage of time, these newly independent nuclear family units acquired new members by way of birth and marriage and eventually formed a new joint family which in turn dissolved by the death of the family founder and the subsequent partitioning of the property by his heirs.

**B. Marriages:** Customary laws and obligation with regard to the birth of a child and marriage in their society are extensive. The family life rest upon the sacred ties of marriage. Customary wedding are celebrated in the house of the groom or the boy’s parents. The society was primarily monogamic though there were instances of men having more than one wife at the same time. Traditionally, polygamy was not permissible. In the society of Thadou-Kukis and their cognate tribes, the boy could marry any girl within or outside the clan except his own sister. In marriage therefore, the society is exogamous. The preferential marriage was however, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. (See table). In a society where free mixing of the boys and girls is permitted there are a lot of opportunities for the boys to initiate courtship with the girls of their choice. However, there were few parents who imposed certain restrictions on marriage despite freedom of choice enjoyed by the boys in their mate-selection. Arranged marriages were also not uncommon feature but it does not mean that individual choice was not respected. Selection of the bride was the prerogative of the parents, especially those of the boy.
Types of marriages: It is found that marriage among the Thadou-Kuki society involves hectic customary procedures and obligations whether the form of marriage is that of CHONG-MOU HAILAM or SAHAPSAT 31 (A typical marriage based on arrangement or negotiation by parents of both sides) or KIJAM MANG (marriage by elopement) or JOLGAI-KICHEK (marriage by impregnating a girl). Still further, there is another type of marriage by way of GOLGUH-KICHEN (clandestine marriage) and JOLLHAH-KICHEN32 (marriage by enticement) in the social circle where the same customary laws could be applied to some extent. The amount of customary bride price is not definite and varied from one clan to another clan. In spite of that the normal bride price generally consists of seven Mithuns, one DAHPI (large-gong), one KHICHONG (necklace), one pair khichong (Rare bead used as earring representing precious stones)33 and alongwith LUTOM and LAISUI,34 both of which were clothes for the brides father and mother respectively.

In spite of marriage, solemnization rite and the sanctity of ceremonies performed by the THEMPU (Priest), KIDA (Divorce) is not uncommon. It is permissible under certain circumstances which may on account of lunacy, cruelty, adultery, repeated unfaithfulness, barreness etc. The husband and wife would be equally liable to fines depending on who was judged to be at fault. If it was the fault of the husband he forfeited all the paid bride-price and in addition to that he was penalized to pay mithun as JI-DAMAN (divorce price).35 All the SUMKEN-THILKEN (property gift) brought by his wife was also to be returned. Whereas, if the fault lay with the wife without sufficient cause, all marriage-price was to be returned to the aggrieved husband.36 In Thadou-Kuki society divorce was quite common but unless the wife committed a fault of her own she was free to go in for a re-marriage, she was protected by the customary law provided that she had a new suitor.

31. H.Doungel, op. cit. p. 54
32. Ibid., p. 62
33. T.S. Gangte, The Kukis; op. cit. p. 94
34. Shaw, op. cit. p. 63
35. Ibid., pp. 62-63
36. C.G. Crawford, op. cit. p. 7
Nevertheless it was found that in their society that the standard of sexual morality was very high though there were few instances of extra-marital affairs and pre-marital sex. Sex is not a taboo among the Kukis.

3. THE VILLAGE SETTLEMENT

From time immemorial, the traditional village of the Thadou-Kukis is an indispensable unit from socio-economic and political point of view. For the establishment of a village in a particular area, the Thadou-Kukis normally selected the dense jungle, either on the top of a ridge or on the slope just below.37 There were also instances of selecting a village site on hill tops which commanded an extensive view of all the approaches to the village. In some case the villages were protected with ditches, stone walls or thorny fencing etc. the reason might be attributed to the prevalence of the practice of head-hunting38 where the heads of their enemy were taken as a trophy of their war commensurate with a high deal of heroism and chivalry. The size of the villages varied from very small, average to big villages. While an average size may consist of thirty to sixty houses, the big size village consisted sometimes over one hundred fifty houses39 or above.

A. Type of Houses: Thadou-Kuki houses are generally grass thatched roofing house with split bamboo frame walls which is thinly mud-plastered. Traditionally, their houses are built on raised platforms with a floor of either wooden planks or split bamboos. This type of housing pattern had developed mainly because it was congenial to shifting habitation40 a result of the practice of shifting cultivation. In a large village of mixed population, the locality is divided into several quarters called VENG which are generally inhabited by the people of the same clan and each will have its “SHOM” in (Thadou-Kuki) or “Zawlbuk” in (Lushai),41 which means

37. Shaw, op. cit. p. 83
38. Ibid., p. 78
40. Ibid.
41. Shakespeare, Lushai-Kuki; op. cit. p. 21
dormitory. So on the whole, they built and lived in simple houses but contented themselves for the tendency to migrate whenever their whim takes or dissuades them from wasting their energies on a house. In spite of that their houses were decorated with the skulls of wild games hunted including that of human skulls.

B. Youth dormitory/Shom: In pre-colonial days, dormitories were one of the most important social and cultural institution which met the socio-educational and the charitable needs of the community. In this Shom or the bachelor’s dormitory young boys slept together at night and learnt all the art of warfare or other fundamental practices for healthy living and taking up social responsibilities. The nature of inter-tribal hostility and feuds necessitated the existence of this institution so that necessary manpower or fighters might be readily available in times of emergency. The Shom members performed different kinds of functions such as defending the village, organizing recreational activities, a centre for information for the village, apart from serving as an educational or learning centre for the whole village. However, among the Thadou-kukis after the attack of the ferocious Pawis,* the Shom which was once centralized took the character of ‘scattered’ form due to the defensive strategy and continued to exist on a small scale at different houses of the village where there were young ladies who serve the Shom members. For the smooth running of the institution of Shom there were certain rules and regulations established by a set of norms and anybody who violated them was liable to be punished or imposed fines. Therefore, the administration of the Shom was said to have been left to the SHOM-UPA (Shom elders). Their acceptance was based on qualities like efficiency, courage, expertise as a successful hunter. The

42. Shov, op. cit. p. 85
43. Ng. Mataisang, M. Phil; “Pre-colonial Tribal Society in Manipur” p. 3. A seminar paper presented on the occasion
organized by manipur University Tribal students’ Union dated
44. T.S. Gangte, The Kukis, op. cit. p. 135

* Pawis were a powerful branch of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes. The Palams, Hakias and Sukies of Chin Hills are collectively called Pawis.
SHOM-UPA is also recognized by the Chief. The SHOM-NU (Shom-girls) after a day's work had to perform many other duties like combing of the boys hair, washing and stitching of their garments, making beds etc. The best student or member of the dormitory would eventually become one of the functionaries of the Chief as SEMANG and PACHONG (Ministers in the court of Chief) or GAL-LAMKAI (Generals) in the Chief's army. So 'Shom' played an important role in shaping the future of the Kuki community and meeting the immediate manpower requirement of the community.

C. Festivals: The agro-based economy of the tribal life among the Thadou-Kukis became obviously monotonous on account of short periods of activities in the realm of agriculture and so had enough leisure time. They indulged themselves in those activities which were manifested in the various forms of social celebrations to give vent to their yearning for a life away from sacrosanct. These festivals did not cause much economic hindrances. They had many indigenous festivals most of which were connected with agriculture and also were associated with prayers of offering to gods. From among the many festivals they celebrated some of which are discussed below:

i) Lawm Selneh: It is the celebration by the village community especially meant for the members of LAWM (i.e. village labour organization) after the completion of the seasons work. The customary games and sports were conducted as part of the celebration which included – Selkhom (pillar erected for the purpose of tying the mithun). Selbonchou (wrestling with the mithun) and Selkal (jumping over the mithun) after which the mithun was killed for the feast and everybody enjoyed it together. The indigenous made liquor from rice 'Ju' or 'Zu' was also served. The mode of celebration also included dancing and singing – Li...li...li...li...li............. ha...ha...ha...ha...ha............. in merriment.

46. H. Doungel. op. cit. p. 89
Shom Kivah (feast of the Shom) was also an occasion of merry-making, organised by the Shom members.

**ii) Hun:** This is also another festival held in connection with the crop. It is an occasion of worship in which a religious rite is performed mainly by the respective heads of every household when the paddy is about knee-high to worship their god called NUN-JAI. On this occasion a white spotless cock is sacrificed without breaking its bones to propitiate their god through DOIBOM (magic basket) placed within the courtyard of their house (See Fig. 6. p. 68). And then they offered prayers for a prosperous year.

Besides, there are three other notable festivals called KUT which were connected with cultivation and harvesting of the crops. The first one CHAPPHOU KUT, was held after clearing the jhumlands. It was like a seed sowing festival as prayer was offered to God for abundant harvest. Another festival is called MIM-KUT* related to the first harvesting of the crop. The celebration of which is similar in content with the other Kuts. The last and the most important festival at the closing part of the year is CHANG-KUT or CHANGPOL KUT in which the celebration is held by the whole community after harvesting and gathering of rice from their jhum fields. In this festival mithuns and pigs are slaughtered for the community’s lavish feasting. The festivals were made more lively with the beating of drums, chiming of gongs accompanied by songs and dances. After the performance of necessary rites and offering of thanksgiving prayers to PATHEN (God), the community enjoyed the feast along with various kinds of ‘JU’ such as Juting, Jukha etc. prepared by themselves. The festivals which served as a means of amusement were celebrated enthusiastically day and night which continued for about a week.

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47. D.L. Hoekip, *THEMPU HO THU* (Magical Verses of the Priest)
    1st Ed. May 2000 A.D.
    Maranatha Offset Printers, Churachandpur.

48. N. Hangshing, op. cit. p. 38

* Botanical name for ‘Mim is ‘Rye’.
Fig. 6. Doibom (Magic Basket) containing seven sacred objects
iii) Feast of Merit: The notable feature in the socio-cultural life of the tribal Thadou-Kukis is the performance of the Feasts of Merit. It was a lavish and expensive feast given to the whole village population by an individual. The performance of such ceremonies in the traditional society are called as SA-AI, CHANG-AI and GAL-AI.

a) Sa-ai: Literally, ‘SA’ - means ‘animal’ and ‘AI’ - means ‘ceremony’. It is successful hunters ritual. The SA-AI rituals are performed by a great hunter after acquiring the heads of five or more wild games hunt usually of tiger, bear, elephant etc. The performance of such ceremony involves a number of customary obligations. A Mithun is killed for the feast and enjoyed by all. The holding of this feast was associated with the erection of stone monoliths or a memorial pillars of a square wooden block, while on all sides of the wooden block lines are chiseled out in geometrical designs which represent the number of animals killed by the hunter. 49 The performer of such feast was honoured and respected while alive and even after death. It brought religious merit to the individual.

b) Chang-ai: It is a ceremony for attaining abundant harvest. The celebration was the outcome of a bounteous rice harvest in which the lady of the particular household was honoured in the society. It is the only ceremony in which Thadou-Kuki woman plays the leading part. 50 It is believed to be a very expensive affair as the entire village has to take part in the feast. The complete performance of the mode of ceremony involves a day long process and a number of customary obligations. It has a similar content with that of Sa-ai which included distribution of traditional wine, dancing and singing as part of the celebrations.

50. Shaw, op. cit. p. 74
c) Gal-ai: It means the great hunters or warriors ritual. The practice of Gal-ju-lah (head hunting) and collection of the heads of their defeated enemies as the trophies of prowess necessitated the performance of this ritual which had a religious significance. It is the belief of the Thadou-Kukis that the souls of the person whom a warrior killed will become his slave in the next world if the ‘Al’ is performed by the warrior. On the contrary, if the ritual is not performed the souls of the killed will always haunt and trouble his life now and in the after-death of the mortal body. Thus, Gal-ai is performed to gain complete dominance over the souls of the persons killed and subjugate it forever.

Besides, the above mentioned three, a ceremony of prosperity called CHON PL is held by a person who ably performed Sa-ai three times. This is another lavish and expensive feast provided to the village community which the celebration continued for seven days consequently. The days are associated to worship their only God called ‘Pathen’. During the seven days ceremony, one animal each from all kinds was killed for a grand feast. The traditional games and sports mentioned earlier were conducted during these days.

It is seen that in all these occasion or ceremonies, the involvement of the Hansa (Chief of the village) concerned and the Thempu (Priest) who performed the rites and rituals was necessary in accordance with their culture and tradition. For the Kukis there was no virtue greater than an act of bravery or generosity that serves the welfare of his community, as it did in the Sa-ai ceremonies. It was for this reason that the community accorded him great respect and honour. The above discussion on the socio-cultural and religious practices of the Kukis in the pre-Christian and pre-British period indicates the extend to which they lived in fear of the spiritual world.

51. H. Doungel, op. cit. p. 94
53. H. Doungel, op. cit. p. 95
54. T. Goswami, op. cit. p. 320
However, it is to note that it was not simply a fear of evil forces or spirits but also a reflection of the underlying principle of social and ethical values and provided means of ensuring their maintenance in the community.

**Sports, Dances and Musical Instruments**: In addition to the above mentioned games and sports, there were also other items such as Javelin throw, wrestling, pole twisting, top and most popularly the high jump.\(^5^5\) Besides, KANGKAP\(^*\) competition was also very popular among ladies. It is a game in which a disc-like seed is rolled. A competitive spirit prevailed. Discipline was highly pervasive in all these events.

**Lam (Dances)**: The traditional dances performed by all the Kuki tribes during their festivals were all similar. It is simple and nice to look at,\(^5^6\) and not strenuous in comparison with those of the Nagas. There are many traditional dances notably, i) SAIPI KHUPSUH ii) SAGOLPHEIKAI iii) JANGCHALAM and iv) LAKOILALAM. The first two traditional dances are performed during the occasion of CHON festival. It is believed that SAIPIKHUPSUH is a form of dance copied from the nature of the ‘march of the elephants’ and similarly SAGOLPHEIKAI is copied from the manner in which the wild boar walks.\(^5^7\) While JANGCHALAM is believed to have been copied from the people of the valley. LAKOILALAM is a typical Thadou-Kuki dance. Besides, SUHTAH-LAM (bamboo-dance) is also a typical traditional dance of the people practiced from time immemorial. About their traditional songs called PULA-PALA or LAKOILA of the Thadou-Kuki, Lt. Dun writes, “Their songs are mournful but harmonious chants, sung in parts, sometimes by as many as a hundred men together.

\(^5^5\) P.S. Haokip, op. cit. p. 6

\(^*\) KANGKAP: It is also a popular game among the Meitei (Manipuris) and whether the game originally belongs to Meitei or Kukis is obscure.

\(^5^6\) Quoted in V. Kipgen’s “Slight Aspect of the Thadou Culture and Language” in Thadou Students Association (Manipur) Magazine 1973-74. Vol. 1 p. 10 (Hereafter cited as TSA Magazine)

\(^5^7\) K. Kipgen. op. cit. p. 89
Only the lowest bass notes are employed and these are prolonged and long drawn out. The effect is most weird and impressive.” The songs and dances are a reflection of their sentiments and the various aspects of their social life, which has its own significant meaning and values.

**Musical Instruments:** It consisted of different kinds. Some of which are KHONGPI (big leather-made drum), KHONGCHA - (small drum), DAH-PI (gong), DAH-CHA (small gong), GOSEM (bagpipe made of bamboo and gowed), PENGKUL (trumpet), THEILE (flute), THEIPHIT (whistle), SELKI (Mithun’s horn) and LHEMLHEI - (a peculiar mouth instrument made of bamboo splits with brass plate *(See Fig. 7. p. 73 - 74)*). The presence of these musical instrument and their use during the social functions or celebrations enhanced the festivities and their solemnity. All the Kuki tribes have the same kind of instruments.

**E. Food and Drinks:** Primarily an agrarian society, the staple food is nothing but rice. There is, of course, supplementary food crops like maize, corn, millet, pumkin, yam, potatoes, cucumbers etc. Sometimes maize is taken as substitute for rice. They also rely on natural herbs and vegetables available in the jungle. *Sizou-Mepoh* and *Thinghupi* is a very popular typical dish of the Thadous and their cognate tribes. They are evergreen tropical plants growing all over the North-Eastern region. The Thadou-Kukis were fond of meat. Their animal foods consisted of mithuns, prigs, fowls, cows etc. The rooster constitutes a special dish which was used to serve to the guests and visitors. Dogs and goats meat also appears to have been a very important dish on the auspicious occasion.

The common drink is distilled from rice. It is called ‘Zu’ or ‘Ju’. There are different kinds of ‘Ju’ which are all indigenous products like *Zakha, Zu-Pi, Zu-ngou, Vaiju, Anthom* etc.

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58. Dun, op. cit. Chapter 11
60. Sanajaoba’s, Manipur, (Ed.) p. 239
61. Lien, Z.Z., op. cit. p. 31
Fig. 7. (a) Lhelimhei (Peculiar mouth instrument made of bamboo splits)

Fig. 7. (b) Khongcha (Small drums)

Fig. 7. (c) Goshem (Bagpipe made of Bamboo and Gourd).
Theile (Flute), Theiphit (Whistle)
Fig. 7. (d) Dahpi and Dahcha (Big and Small Gongs)
On top is (String instrument)

Fig. 7. (e) Dahpi and Dahcha (Big and Small Gongs of another kind)

Fig. 7. (f)
Pengkul (Trumpet)
When it is new they are very intoxicating but gradually becoming less and less powerful the longer it is kept. In colour it somewhat resembles dark brandy. On the ceremonial occasions like funeral, marriage and other events when feasts are held large quantities of liquor are heavily consumed. It was their tradition to offer their guest and visitors with liquor which is stirred in their earthen pots.

Lastly, the Thadou-Kukis are blessed with rich custom and tradition. The customs and social values of the people was transmitted from one generation to the next through the mouth of the elders and eventually in the process a rich cultural heritage of folk tales had got accumulated. The folklore of the people abound with the heroic adventures of Galngam le Hangsai, Changkhat pu le Ahsijolneng, Khalvompu le Lenchonghoi, and the seven Thadou’s folk tales such as:


There are still more innumerable folk-songs and lyrics which reflect a deep attachment to the land and people (See Appendix- II & III). The folk songs which were pregnant with meanings has a deep sentimental value, and is the hallmark of tradition. They were composed out of the lyricist’s personal experience of concrete life-situations which reveal their thoughts, emotions and actions in a simple style.

63. C.A. Sopitt, op. cit. p. 9
64. Paokhohang Haokip, “THUSIM THUM” (Three-folk tale)
65. Shaw, op. cit. p. 107
4. POLITICAL SYSTEM

The socio-cultural, political and economic life of the Thadou-Kukis and allied tribes are determined by the institutionalized political system which had its own set of norms of governance. It is imperative to bring the essential features of the political systems in its traditional form where the society evolved its own course of history and ethics.

According to Morgan and Henry Maine, the kinship is 'the foundation of tribal society as contrast to the territorial foundation of modern state'. But the absence of the state in the traditional society does not necessarily mean that there is absence of political system.

The political institution of the Thadou-Kukis is closely intertwined with the institution of socio-cultural, religious and economic life etc. as their political system and institution are based on kinship relations. In this regard Tom Bottomore opines that, “stateless societies have existed, in which political conflicts and decisions are bound up with kinship relations, or with religious conceptions and rituals, and all or most adult members of society may participate in these activities without any specialized group of people being able to claim a particular responsibility for carrying them out.” In order to understand the basis of chieftainship organization of the Thadou-Kukis in its right perspective it is imperative to have critical analysis of the traditional social-structure.

In the social structure, a group of families, usually of one clan and ranging from ten to three hundred people, constituted a village having its own government whereby the head of the clan functioned as administrator for the village. Later on, the head of the clan who ruled the village came to be known as “Haosa” (chief). It is to be noted here that the nature of

68. A. K. Ray, op. cit. p. 37
69. T.S. Gangte, The Kukis; op. cit. p. 123
70. Tom Bottomore, Political Sociology, B-1 Publication, Delhi 1979. P. 69-70
71. Vumson, op. cit. p. 8
constant inter-tribal feuds had made them fatigued and politically insecure. This made them to shift their settlement frequently from one place to another thereby threatening the integrity and stability of the village community. Such circumstances obviously created the need for a centralized authority and competent men who would be responsible for protecting the people and organize them against the onslaught of their enemies. This responsibility, as such, ultimately devolved upon headman or chief of the tribe. And their chieftainship was handed down to the senior man of the clan or the headman called ‘Mi-upa’. In this connection T.S. Gangte writes that chieftainship among the Kukis is associated with the concept of ‘Upa’ or senior man to whom a great deal of veneration is attached. ‘Upa’ is the only person who can become “Haosa”, which is established by the fact that in a very Thadou-Kuki village when the chief died his eldest son inherited the position of chiefship and the subsequent line of succession went to his eldest male descendants. The laws of primogeniture were adhered to unlike the Meiteis of the past.

A. Types of Chieftainship: The Chieftainship system of the Thadou-Kukis consisted of mainly two types viz . i) the village chief and ii) the hereditary chief. Of course in both types, the chieftainship system was hereditary. The hereditary chiefs are also called Clan chiefs or (Mi-upa) being the head of the clan while the traditional village chiefs are the younger branches of the family clan chief. With regard to the hereditary clan chief Shakespear writes, “each of the clan has one great Rajah, supposed to be the main branch of the original stock to whom although immediately beyond his own village owe him no obedience, great respect is shown by all, and the acknowledgement of the superior title given, although, in power and wealth he may be much poorer than others of the tribe”. Similarly, referring to the Kukis of Cachar district of Assam.

72. T.S. Gangte, The Kukis; op. cit. p. 124
74. : op. cit. p. 193
W.W. Hunter writes,

"they are divided into numerous petty clans, each of which has its own Rajah, who rules over one or more villages within which his power is never curtailed". 75

The hereditary clan chief are, therefore, the product of tradition and are looked upon with the greatest respect and almost superstitious venerations and their commands are in every case, law. 76

The Thadou-Kuki chieftainship system is invariably hereditary, as noted earlier. The senior man of the clan called ‘Upas or Mi-upas’ inherit their position by the right of birth and take the initiative in all matters concerning the administration of their clansmen by whom they are respected and feared. 77 It is clear that the dogma of descent determines the legal rules of inheritance which goes on to the male line which according to Asok Kumar Ray is a subjective basis of authority structure. 78 These principles are strictly adhered to by the chiefs because they give stability and legitimacy to the chieftainship system itself. 79 It is to be noted here that the hereditary clan Chieftainship of the Thadou-Kukis got a special traditional feature as they are the product of genealogical-lineal descent. This reflects the rule of primogeniture in which the continuance of hereditary clan chief is found in all the succeeding generation. In this regard Mc Culloch noted that, “they pay much attention to their geneology and profess to know the names of their chiefs in succession from their leaders and of the bowels of the earth up to the present time”. 80 The maintenance of long genealogies was of course, their customary tradition which enabled the clan chief to sustain their position of authority and legitimacy over their clansmen.

76. Shakespear, Lushai-Kuki; op. cit. p. 191
77. Carey & Tuck, op. cit. p. 3
79. Ibid.
80. M. Mc Culloch, Valley of Manipur, Gian Publication, Delhi, 1980 (Reprint) p. 57
Thus, in all questions of geneology, the Kukis are very particular and the hereditary succession of their chiefs is strictly observed. The rule of primogeniture is strictly followed by the succeeding clan chief right from their progenitor - CHONGTHU in their genealogical descent. It is the hereditary privileges to the eldest male descendant as the line of succession descended from him. In the event of death of the clan Chief his eldest son inherited the position. But if the chief dies without any issue then the next eldest kin had to shoulder all the responsibility and authority. He assumed the title ‘Mi-upa’ and then the line of succession continued in conformity with the law of primogeniture. The Meiteis adopted this procedure much later.

From the progenitor or forebears Chongthu and Lunkim it is believed that many clan chiefs descended and so also from the progenitor “Thadou” many other younger clans have descended like Hangshing, Chongloi, Kipgen, Haokip, Sithhou, Lhouvum etc. It is found that many of the clans maintain a separate clan geneology tree which remains a valid basis of legitimacy to the chiefs of these clans. Some of the prominent clan chief among the Thadou-Kukis who are better known by the name of their villages are Jampi-pa (Sithhou clan), Aisan-pa (Doungel clan), Tujang-pa (Kipgen), Chassad-pa (Haokip clan), Vongjiang-pa (Hangshing clan), Jangnoi-pa (Chongloi clan) (See Appendix-IV, V & VI). The house of Kipgen clans are given as a model for illustrations as there is no controversy over the genealogical descent unlike the other cognate clans. The custom of identifying people/settlers with territory was a phenomenon of the mainland tradition e.g., Magadha, Kasi, Kosala,etc.

82. Quoted from the book of KUKI INPI (Kuki Government) pp. 12-13 authored by Dr. T. Lunkim – one of the most prominent person in the Thadou-Kuki society. He translated HOLY BIBLE in Kuki. He is presently the head of Kuki Christian Church (KCC)
83. On referring of the records maintained by Pu Ngulseh Hangshing – one of the authority of the history of the Kukis; to his credit he has written many books in local dialect; dated 8/10/99 at his residence at Motbung, Sadar Hills Manipur.
84. Information about the geneology tree of the KIPGEN clan was collected from Clan Chief – Tujangpa – Mr. Ngulenchung the contemporary head of the Kipgen clan at Tujang. Sadar Hills Manipur in Nov. 1998. He died in Feb. 2003
GENEALOGICAL TREE OF THE KIPGEN CLAN
(In chronological sequences)

KIPGEN H.C.C

KHONGUL H.C.C.

SINGCHANG H.C.C.

SEUCHUNG H.C.C. (Migrated to Burma) DOUSEI (Chief of Tuhumun Village)

HUNKHUP H.C.C.

HANGSONG C.V.C. (Phasilongot Chief)

GOLLUT C.V.C. (Khokhong Chief)

SINGKIL H.C.C.

KHUPRING H.C.C.

KHUPUNG C.V.C. (Sesi Chief)

SONGLOU C.V.C. (Tujang Waichong Chief)

SEUGHUT H.C.C.

SEHVUH C.V.C. (Sesi Chief)

SEHJEM C.V.C. (Voueng Chief)

SONGTOH H.C.C.

LUNGHURUT H.C.C.

PHUTNO H.C.C.

PHUTOOU C.V.C. (Bolung Chief)

VUHHAH C.V.C. (Kholaung Chief)

KHUNJUL H.C.C.

HILBEL C.V.C. (Sajang Chief)

SUTNGAM H.C.C.

NGULENG H.C.C.

THOSON C.V.C. (Tualwajiang Village)

THOKHOL

THANGJA C.V.C. (Phuijjang Chief)

NGAMSO H.C.C.

NGAMLAM C.V.C. (Tuoda Chief)

NEHVUH H.C.C.

JADONU

LMULEN H.C.C.

VUMGUL H.C.C.

THANGJA

SEMKHOMAM

KHAMJHO

VUMKHOLAM

TINTHANG H.C.C.

JANJHOMANG

LUNJANGUL H.C.C.

TIKHOSEI

LEUKHOPAO

MANGPITHLAM

MANGKHOYUM

NGULCHUNG H.C.C. (died recently) PAOKHOTINLEN

H.C.C : Head Clan Chief
C.V.C : Collateral Village Chief
↓ : Clan Line

Source: - Ngulchung Kipgen, Chief of Tujang
As noted earlier from the original progenitor ‘THADOU’ many other clans have descended. In confirmation or otherwise of what Mackenzie said of the Chassad Thadou as Piba of Haokip, the information of their clan geneology as supplied by PACHE, chief of Chassad on 20th June, 1926 in Uhkrul to LL Peter, the first sub-divisional officer, Government of Manipur in which SEHTHA begets Thadou, Chongloi and Hangshing; THADOU begets Thalhun; THALHUN begets Elmun (by first wife), KIPGEN and HAOKIP (by second wife)\(^8\)

A study of the genealogical tree of the KIPGEN’s reflects the rule of Primogeniture. In the Kipgen clan tree the head of the Kipgen clan SEHCHUNG migrated to Burma (Myanmar) and settled in Dimjang village where he became the chief. In this case the clan chieftainship could not be handed down directly. So, the clan headship was taken over by DOUSEI, chief of Tuhmun village. From him the counting of the genealogical line of the Head clan chief (H.C.C.) resumed and also the rule of primogeniture had devolved on LHUNKHUP the first son of DOUSEI, though he was not a direct lineal descent. Then genealogical tree shows the importance given to genealogical descent of clan chief. The maintenance of such long genealogies among the Thadou-Kukis is not only the product of culture and tradition but also adds prestige to the royal line.

It is clear from the given genealogical tree of the Kipgen clan that apart from the head clan chief, the collateral village chiefs are the younger branches of clan chief. As has been stated earlier that it is the custom of the Thadou-Kukis for the eldest son to remain with his father and inherit his position, while the younger sons who have a part of their fathers subjects made over to him are allowed to set up establishments for themselves.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) Quoted in Dr. T.S. Gangte’s “Structure of the Thadou Society” published in the “Imphal Free Press” Imphal 31st Jan. 2003
\(^9\) M. McCulloch, op. cit. p. 59

[There are, of course, some people among the elders of Haokip clans who disapproved of the above genealogical descent. But the fact remains that KIPGEN and HAOKIP are closely related with the progenitor — THADOU]
The recognition for establishing a new village by the younger branches of the clan chief, involves customary procedures and obligations. The would be new village chief offer SELUBEL-PENG (head of an animal with a jar of wine) to the Head clan chief after which they are given the chieftainship-right called ‘HAOSAT-KILAH’ and allowed to form a new village of their own. This is in complete contrast with that of Lushais of the Kuki-Chin family, where the youngest son remains with his father and succeeds him not only to the village headship but also inherits his father’s property while the other sons are given a number of households from his father’s village and sent forth to a village of their own.

Thus, as far as the authority-structure is concerned it is found that the status of chieftainship is very much desired. The fact is proved with the outcome of collateral Chiefs such as Hansong chief, GOLLUT chief, KHUPLUNG chief, SONGLHU chiefs etc. and their eventual establishment of their own villages. Thus, by referring to KIPGEN Clan Tree many collateral village chiefs came to be established. This gives us the working picture of the traditional chieftainships evolution and formation of the respective villages among the Thadou-Kuki society and their cognate tribes in Manipur. And in course of time these village chiefs, though initially connected with three respective Head clans, they themselves became progenitor of new clans by their names. The practices of such chieftainship formation and the principle involve therein is still relevant and functional. In this connection Asok Kumar Ray writes, “In fact in their society there is no other so viable a basis of authority other than that of geneology.”

In whatever be the case, either in clan Chieftainship or village Chieftainship their eldest son inherited the position of chieftainship which was a hereditary privilege. But this customary privilege could not be shared with the younger sons of the chief unless specifically desired by UPA (eldest son or seniorman) to develop and groom his NAOPA (younger son or juniorman) for leadership.

87. Shakespeare, Lushai-Kuki; op. cit. p. 42
88. A.K. Ray, op. cit. p. 42
89. op. cit. pp. 124-125
Therefore, this hereditary privilege was handed down for generation after generation and socially institutionalized into the Chieftainship system. Referring to the Chieftainship institution, Gangte writes, "Chieftainship has come to stay as an institution which is the perennial source of customary laws and the mechanism by which such laws are interpreted in the social system that makes them a living force enabling to maintain their separate identity inheriting a rich cultural heritage." 

B. Territorial Village Chief: Apart from the two types of chieftainship discussed above, there is yet another type of chief called territorial chief, who are the creation of recent years. This type of chief is very uncommon in the society. The chiefs in these type of village enjoyed power and privileges similar but comparatively lesser to that of traditional village chief. The causes for the emergence of this type of village chieftainships are due to inherent subjective power structure in the Thadou-Kuki society where the traditional chieftainship system remained a privilege of the few. As such, the common people had no right to become a chief. Under such circumstances a power hungry and power-seeking adventurous people among the commoners who feared of being suppressed, migrated out of the original village and set up a new village of their own along with some of their followers. In this case customary obligation need not be fulfilled. This type of chieftainship is not a traditional phenomenon but a modern practice specifically more so after 1947.

It is to be noted that under the traditional system of chieftainship, there is no room for the common man to have access to the rank of chieftainship until and unless he leaves the village and sets up a new village at his own efforts. In this connection Ray is contended that, the emergence of the territorial chieftainship has averted the potential contradiction that is variably inherent in the Thadou-Kuki authority-structure. With regard to their village administration the chief also adopted all the customary laws which are also operating in the traditional Thadou-Kuki village.

90. Ibid.
91. A.K. Ray, op. cit. p. 51
92. Ibid., p. 52
As they are simply from the common stock, it is not mandatory on their part to fulfill all the customary obligations in relation for their clan chief. The chief in this type of village ruled as he wished as they were free from any sort of traditional control. Their operational area is confined within the territorial jurisdiction of the village. Therefore, they enjoyed considerable amount of autonomy.

C. The Chief - Power and Functions: The polity of the Thadou-Kukis is village-based. The village is a grassroots level political unit. The institution of chieftainship is the highest socio-cultural and political cum economic institution whereby the chiefs wielded a great deal of authority over the village community. The chief ruled independently in all spheres of life without any external interference within the jurisdiction of their chiefdom. In other words, the local chiefdoms have been able to retain political autonomy and rule with a centralized polity. For instance, the Chiefs of Aisan, Jampi, Chassad, Tujang, Lonpi (Mombi), and some other chiefs among the Thadou-Kukis established themselves as the principal chiefs in their respective regions and gained the position of dominance over the lesser chiefs till the advent of the British in the subsequent establishment of Political Agency in 1835 A.D.

With regard to the power of the chief W.W. Hunter has noted, “the village system among the Kukis is best described as a series of petty states each under a president or dictator.” 93 Similarly, John Macrae has also written that “each tribe is under the immediate command of its own particular chief, whose word is law, in peace and war and who has the power of life and death”. 94 The chief own the village and its land. As the guardian of the village he was responsible for defending the village community from the danger of external enemies. This was his primary concern especially during the days when head-hunting was practiced. In other words the village chief is to protect the lives of the villagers in times of war.

94. op. cit. p. 185
The chiefs being senior man, elder, of the clan, were generally broad minded having enough patience to control the recalcitrant villagers. They were generally wise, experienced, intelligent and practically knew how to make their people loyal to themselves. This made the people work and fight willingly for the chief and carry out his errands. The loyalty was absolute. The attitude of the chief towards his village community was paternalistic.\(^{95}\) He considered all the villagers as his own family members and treated them with equal love and affection. He lent a helping hand in times of their need and trouble. The chief was respected, admired and loved by his subjects. The Chiefs’ subjects seldom disobeyed his commands and disregard his rulings. The villagers normally looked upon the Chief as an object of intense devotion and respect though he was not considered to be divine.

The traditional chief was normally at the helm of village government as far as the administration was concerned. He had to work for the common interests of the people. Being the administrative head of the village, he governed in accordance with the inherited customary laws and traditional practices. The Chief enjoyed and exercised enormous powers. He summoned and presided over the meetings of the village council and gave the final decision on all matters.

The Chief who exercised enormous powers and functions, controlled all the three organs of government in as far as the administration of the village is concerned. The Chief performed judiciary, executive and legislative functions in the day to day administration of the village in consultation with his council of ministers. The Chief was the dispenser of justice. Serious cases like murder, theft, adultery etc. were decided by him with the assistance of his council of ministers called ‘SEMANG PACHONG’\(^{96}\) in local term. Since the inhabitants of the village were his subjects they were implicitly bound by customary laws to obey and execute his commands.

\(^{95}\) N. Hangshing, op. cit. Vol. 3. p. 1

\(^{96}\) H. Doungel, op. cit. p. 80 (also see A.K. Ray p. 52)
The Chief's house generally served as the court of the village. "HAOSA" is the office of village chief. It had all the powers to decide any case and the chiefs verdict is final and binding. For instance, the guilty man could be penalized according to the extent of his guilt or crime committed by him. The fine could be wide ranging from a jar of rice-beer, either a pig or mithun or a combination of those articles or a cash amount of money equivalent to the kind, or expulsion from the village and death sentence in rare cases.97 In case of theft, burglary and arson the criminal could lose his independence and become a bonded man of the chief.98 In the Thadou-Kuki society punishment inflicted on a person for charges of alleged murder may amount to confiscation of property and goods and then subjected to perpetual bondage of the murderer or payment of a heavy fine imposed upon him in accordance with the customary laws. The accused had to kill a pig in the Chief's house for just decision and to obtain the good faith of the Chief.99 Capital punishment was very rare or almost never in practice. Even if such situation occurred it might be due to high treason or treacherous commerce with the enemies of the clans.

Unlike the collateral village Chief, who were of the younger branches, the clan Chief had considerable amount of power. While his normal functions may be similar to that village chief, he had, in addition, certain functions towards his own clansmen. Though the clan Chief did not interfere in the day-to-day administration of the village of younger chiefs, he was required to intervene in grave and critical situations. Being the clan Chief he had the power to impose even penalty for doing any wrong by his clansmen. He could also pardon the guilty provided that he came forward for submission. In such cases, the person concerned had to kill a pig in the house of the clan head or Chief and give a feast. Thus, it shows that every such chief.

97. H. Doungel, op. cit. p. 80
98. A.K. Ray, op. cit. p. 52
99. Ibid.
was partly responsible to his clan chief for committing anything which contravened administrative rules of the village notwithstanding the customary rules.

D. Tithes and Tributary Privileges: In the traditional Thadou-Kuki society the formal ownership of the land and its control remained exclusively with the chief. The chiefs being the lords of the soil within their boundaries were entitled to receive customary tithes and tributes from the village community. Normally tithes and tributes were paid for the following reasons:

i) in due recognition of the chief’s authority and legitimacy over the land ownership;\textsuperscript{100}

ii) in due recognition of the services rendered by the chief to the village community:

iii) in gratification for which they got the privileges of enjoying the amenities of village life;

iv) as a mark of respect to him;\textsuperscript{102} and

v) to honour the head of the clans especially by the younger chiefs in case of the clan chiefs.

For all the above reasons, the villagers were supposed to contribute for the welfare of their respective chiefs in the form of payment of tithes and tributes which commonly consisted of the followings:

CHANGSEO (\textit{CHANG} – Rice paddy, \textit{SEO} tax or an owe of allegiances): Yearly payment of a basketful of rice (almost equivalent to 1 mounds) by every family in the village for cultivation of the land.

CHAOMAN (\textit{CHAO}– migrate, \textit{MAN}– price): Any villager who intended to migrate to another village had to seek the consent of the chief without which his properties, including his house, may be either confiscated or retained by the chief.

\textsuperscript{100} Carey & Tuck, op. cit. p. 201
\textsuperscript{101} A.K. Ray, op. cit. p. 43
\textsuperscript{102} T.S. Gangte, The Kukis, op. cit. p. 135
SELKOTKAI (SELKOT- cattle, KAI- tax): It is a tax paid to the chief amounting to Re. 1 per head of the cattle sold outside the village.

LAMKAI (Export-tax): Payment of Re. 1 by the purchaser of each head of cattle when the purchaser belonged to another village. A jar of wine could also be offered to the chief to substitute the monetary payment of tax.

LOUMAN (LOU- land, MAN- price): A tax relating to a periodic payment to the chief by an outsider for cultivation of the chief’s land.

GAMSAN (GAM- land, SAN- lease): It is a payment connected to the chief for the lease of the land.

JINEIMAN (JINEI- marriage, MAN- price): It is a marriage-tax paid to the chief by a villager on his marriage. Besides ‘bride-price’ is also paid by the bridegroom family to the chief when the bride is to leave the village in marriage of a person belonging to another village.

TOLTHEH (TOL- ground, THEH- cleaning): It is a fine imposed by the chief on one or more persons for committing a serious crime like shedding of human bloods, homicide etc. Along with a jar of rice beer, a pig could be killed at the chief’s house to bring forth with a compromising solution.

KIHABHSEL: It means ‘oath taking’. There are different forms of ‘oath taking’ by the villagers such as biting of tiger’s or bear’s tooth, drinking water from the barrel of the guns etc. to show their allegiance or acknowledgement of being subject to the ruler.103 Besides, the village community had to contribute in the following different ways for the welfare of the chief in particular and the villager’s community in general.

KHUOITHA (KHOU- village, THA- labour): It means the able-bodied villagers had to contribute their one day or more free-labour for the chief as and when required by the chief.

103. P.C. Misao. History and Custom of the Thadou-Kuki, Imphal. p. 9
KHUOMUOL (KHUO- village, MUOL- outskirt): It was like a resting place built by the villagers at the outskirts near the entrance road of the village. It served the following purposes:

1) It was used for keeping the heads of the killed enemies.

2) It was a place for performing all sorts of rites like ‘kithoi’ (appeasement of evil spirit) by the ‘thempu’ (priest),

3) It was also a place for welcoming the incoming people and seeing off the outgoing guests. The place had a very important place in the traditional life of the Thadou-Kukis in view of the political, social, economic, religious, significance being attached to it.¹⁰⁴

KHUOJEH/UMNIT/SAHNIT: These are all associated with social taboos similar to that of genna system (a system of social conducts practiced by the Nagas).¹⁰⁵ In the Thadou-Kuki society there were many do’s and don’t’s as people were ignorant and superstitious. KHUOJEH is a preventive measure to fight against the outbreak of epidemics in or around the neighbouring villages.¹⁰⁶ Whereas UMNIT or SAHNIT means simply prohibited or forbidden. In this connection a particular day is observed and villagers are confined to their homes in events such as occurrence of unnatural death; like death caused by an accidental gun-fire, death during child birth, death by a tiger, homicide etc. In all cases of the above mentioned deaths, one day mourning was observed. Besides, there were several occasions to which the villagers contributed their free labour for the welfare of the village community as a whole.

E. Nature of Thadou -Kuki Chieftainship: As far as the authority structure is concerned the traditional village chief enjoyed enormous powers and privileges which made the chieftainship-organization to become authoritarian in nature. The position of chieftainship being

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¹⁰⁴ T.S. Gangte. The Kukis. op. cit. p. 137
¹⁰⁵ Quoted from a Seminar paper on “Pre-colonial Tribal Society in manipur” presented by Ng. Mutaisang, M. Phil (Hist.) Manipur University on the occasion of State-level Seminar organized by Manipur University Tribal Students’ Union (MUTSU) in 1996 at M.U. Campus p. 2
the payment of tributes is the manifestation of their obedience and loyalty to the centralized authority. Thus, the essence of tributary privileges enjoyed by the chief in their traditional society is nothing but an exaction of obedience and loyalty which Ray also termed as "material ethics of obedience". ¹¹¹

The authoritarian character of the chief was not a harsh reality in the true sense of the term. Of course, the office of chieftainship "HAOSA" is vested with so much of power and authority that a person in that capacity is often prone to abuse his power and thus turn himself into a 'despot'.¹¹² But the village polity of the Thadou-Kuki is such that the presence of the council of minister provided some sort of decentralization of power and authority. In the event of the chief becoming cruel and despotic, the villagers were at liberty to leave the village and settle elsewhere to become a subject of another chief. But, this rarely happened because interaction of forces within the system of chieftainship could avert such situations.¹¹³ The village community is the product of a larger expansion of their family system claiming blood relationship. In other words the village community is a family of relatives living together. The relationship of one family to another is mutual and cordial and the chief and the villagers are duty-bound to fulfil their rights and obligations towards one another.

**F. Village Administration and its Functionaries:** The functional system of administration in all the Thadou-Kuki village is an age-old institution based on their inherited customs and traditions. Each village has its own separate administrative unit, which functions independently. The office of "Haosa" cannot function without the council of ministers despite so much of power and authority is vested with the chief. In discharging of his duties connected to day-to-

¹¹¹ A.K. Ray's, 'Land and land Reforms - A study of the Kukis in Manipur', A Seminar paper on impact of land Reforms on North east India, organized by the North East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong, Meghalaya dated 24-25 April 1987
¹¹² T.S. Gangte. The Kukis: op. cit. p. 125
¹¹³ Ibid., p. 127
day administration, the chief work in close co-operation with the council, consisting of a group
of elders from the stock of village community itself. This council is composed of persons of
wisdom, integrity, knowledge of customary law etc.

Regarding the members of the council, the chief has a group of elders nominated and
retained by him at his pleasure though in this selection he gives a fair representation to the
various clans in his village. In recognition of the services rendered for the welfare of the
village, the council members are exempted from the payment of tributes to the chief. The
privileges of being an official of the chief, perhaps, was the exemption from payment of revenues.
The members remained during the pleasure of the chief and they could be re-appointed even
after the completion of the term. The council had to deal various issues relating to social,
economic, political, judicial matters etc.

The village, as a political unit consists of ‘Haosa’ (the Chief) and his ‘Semang Pachong’
(Council of Ministers) who are the political leaders. The number of the council varies from
village to village depending on the size and work load of the village concerned. Although the
chiefs are all-in-all powerful in theoretical terms, in fact the government of the villages had
democratic elements. This was due to the appointment of officials (members of the council) to
assist him in the administration. Thus, the participation of the elders who are the officials to the
core of village administration, whether it be decision-making process or discharging various
functions, the system provided broader representation of the interest of the people. While in
theory the chief could bypass the council and give order without consulting them, and the
people would not dare disobey his order, in practice such things were rare happenings because
of democratic traditions. The other components of the council of ministers are as follow:-

114. Verrier Elvin. Democracy in NEFA; Shillong 1965, p. 15
115. K. Kipgen, op. cit. p. 76
Khosung Semang - The words are a local term which means Mantris at the village level. In other words he is one of the most important member in the council of ministers. It is a great privileges for the village chief to have a man of wisdom and integrity to be SEMANG. 116 Though the office of SEMANG is not hereditary, he can be re-appointed for this coveted post provided that his presence and participation in governing the village is essential. In the event of the death of the chief leaving a minor son, the Semang governs the village till he becomes major. According to P.C. Misao, Semang is generally chosen from a minority clan in the village, the intention probably is to establish goodwill among all clans of the village who are well versed in customary laws and the sole spokesman of the chief. 117 In this connection, Stewart has also written that.

"This office is not strictly speaking hereditary though in most cases except when thoroughly in competent, the son succeeds the father but is given to those qualified for it, as being men of property and influence as well as of ability and good spokesman". 118

Thus, Semang is a very important official of the chief to whom many official duties of the chief is also entrusted. 119 In fact, he plays the role of the real executive. All the short comings and limitation of the chief are covered up by him and he may also be asked to act in his capacity on behalf of the chief. He has or should posses the qualities of leadership, honesty, dedication, sacrifice with a sense of love for the village community. He has to look after the all-round development of the village and the wellbeing of the people.

Pachong: - Pachong is another official and one of the important functionaries of the council. The office of Pachong is concerned with the defence of the village and the security of life and properties within his jurisdiction. He is also the leader in the village labour organization. It is

116. T. Lunkim, op. cit. p. 59
117. : op. cit. pp. 11-12
118. Stewart, Lushai Kuki Clans P. 192. Quoted from K. Kipgen, The Thadou-Kukis, p. 76
119. T. Lunkim, op. cit. p. 59
his bounden duty to maintain order, discipline and social ethics among the members of labour organization called “LAWMPI”. Under his leadership and instructions the able bodied youths were trained according to their capacity and talent and were utilized to serve for the defence of the village. It is the responsibility of Pachong to oversee that the villagers live in peace and harmony. He trained the youths in the art of warfare, prepared and equipped them with weapons in times of external threats. Pachong is like an Army General whose main concern is defence of the village, of course, with the assistance of the youths.

The person who occupy this office posses qualities such as self sacrificing, bravery, strong-hearted and remain always alert and be ready to do whatever the occasion demanded. It is his duty and responsibility to maintain law and order and to ensure all-round safety and security of life and properties. The office of Pachong is in fact, similar to that of Defence and Home department of modern day administration.

Besides, there is a separate administrative structure within the village Labour Organisation (Lawmpi) which contain persons in-charge of different work under the overall leadership and supervision of Pachong. E.g., LAMHIL, SOLLE, TOLLAPAO, MAKAI, LAIKAM, UPA etc. They were responsible for the progress and smooth functioning of the organization, maintaining order and discipline within the members of village labour organization (corps). As Lawmpi is mainly concerned with economic life of the village, they kept the village self-sufficient as far as possible in matters of physical labour.

Lhangsam: - The literal meaning of Lhangsam is ‘Villager crier’ who usually shout at the top of his voice from a raised platform, called KEMCHON, built purposely near the chief’s courtyard. He is another important official who assists the chief in governing the village. He is one

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120. T. Lunkim, op. cit. p. 62
121. Ibid., pp. 62-63
122. L. T. Gangte. The Kukis: op. cit. p. 132
123. T. Lunkim, op. cit. pp. 64-65
of the council member in charge of the Secretary – Information and Publicity. In fact, he proclaims to the village about the chief’s order. In addition to this, he is also supposed to convene a meeting of the councilors. In this connection Gangte has written that, “In actual fact he holds a far wider scope of responsibility than the designation indicate. He convenes meeting of the council, conveys decisions of the council to the general public.”

Thus, in the absence of modern communication systems, information is spread through the words of the mouth.

Other village officials: – Besides, the members or functionaries of the council mentioned above, there are i) Thempu (the village priest) and ii) Thih-Khangpa (the black-smith) who play important role in the socio-economic structure of the Thadou-Kuki society. Unlike the councilors who have a definite term, the office of Thempu and Thih-K Hung is almost hereditary due to the continuance of the profession by their offspring in most cases. These were hereditary in nature.

The Thempu serves as the official priest for the entire village. He also plays the role of medicine man. Among most of the cognate tribes of the Thadou-Kuki the village priest is appointed by the chief. There maybe other priests also in the village but they cannot enjoy the same privileges as enjoyed by the official priest. There are some local historians who write that the village priest held high office next to the chief.

The priest combined in himself the qualities of a physician and leader in the religious life of the people. With his magical incantation, he allegedly cured various diseases and he also performed all sorts of rites and rituals in the village and when needed. In return, he received a bucketful of paddy, a meat-share of hunted wild game as tributes from the villagers annually, in token acknowledgement of his service to the village community. The village priest (thiempu) is, in fact, a very important official who is in charge of the community’s health. He attended all

124. T. S. Gangte, The Kukis; op. cit. p. 130
125. Z.Z. Lien, M.A., op. cit. p. 44
the villagers in times of their sickness and also officiated over social and religious ceremonies. The traditional villager believed superstitiously that illness was the work of evils for which necessary sacrifices were to be offered. Therefore, to win over the evils, sacrificial rites had to be arranged by the priest. He served as both healer and leader of the village in all matters pertaining to religion. He performed all kinds of sacrifices which may require animals—spotless white cock, mithuns, pigs and other materials. The priest is both a psychologist and a physiologist, who could tell the symptoms of illness from the pulse of the person and the way for recovery. He directed order in regard to sacrificial offerings and the ceremonial performance there of.

The priest was supposed to know/possesses knowledge of medicinal herbs. To learn this secrets of medicine cost a lot of money and time. Thus, it were the privileges of a few persons. They were therefore respected by the people. In the culture and history of the Kuki people, there has been never a priestess* or a woman performing such priestly duties. Being a respected person of the chief in the society the thiempu was exempted from paying all kinds of taxes which were levied on the common villagers.

The office of ‘Thih-Khengpa’ went to the person who had the highest dexterity in blacksmithy, whose duty in repairing of various agricultural implements or tools of the villagers was excellent. Agricultural implements like hoes, axes, spades, swords, knives etc are manufactured and repairing of the worn out tools was done by Thih-Khengpa. Weapons or armaments were also manufactured by him. As he was the authorized and officially recognized blacksmith of the village, so whatever he did was free of cost. But in recognition of his service, he was entitled a basket-full** of

126. The Kukis were superstitious by nature. Being myself a ‘Thadou-Kuki’. I had personally seen the priest offering sacrifices and reciting magical chants while attending the sick people in our village – Tuipajang, during my school days. Till the 1980’s, there were many non-Christian families in our village even after majority of us had become Christian.
*Though there are Priest and priestess (Maibas and Maibeess) in the Meiteis society, no such woman performing priestly duties did exist in the Kuki Society.
127. T.S. Gangte, op cit. p. 131
128. Z.Z. Lien, MA, op. cit. p. 77
** the traditional basket-full of rice is equivalent – to almost 1 maund or 40 Kgs.
rice from each family annually, the share of which could be lower than what the chief received. The Blacksmith was also entitled a meat-share in animals killed in wild games called ‘Thiem-sha’ or ‘Thih Kheng-Sha’ just like that of thempu (the priest). The Blacksmith was also exempted from payment of taxes to the chief like the official priest.

In conclusion it can be said that the office of thempu and thih-khengpa was coveted in the traditional society of the Thadou-Kuki culture of all the Kuki tribes because quite a few could be appointed to it. They were experts in their respective professions which was almost impossible for an ordinary villager. As such they were rare and highly respected persons and friends of the chief. So they were given special privileges in the society. In fact they deserved it.

G. Importance of the Institution of Chieftainship: The system of chieftainship was the main reason behind the preservation and retention of customs and tradition. The chief was the fountain head of justice and retainer of customs.129 As noted earlier, the village councillors and the chief constituted what is known as the village court, Haosa Inpi – the highest Court of Justice in the traditional Thadou-Kuki society where cases were decided and settled as per the traditional customary laws.

It is found that customs play a crucial role in all walks of life be it on matters relating to social, economic, political, religion, judiciary etc. In spite of many defects in the practice of systems of chieftainship, the system could not be abolished and it remained functional. The fundamental character of the institution of chieftainship among the Kukis as a whole, is clearly depicted in the writings of Carey and Tuck that, “The Chief may be wanting in qualifications and there may be many of other families his superior in ability but unless he is physically or mentally quite unfit for his position there is no danger of his being supplanted and the usual course is for elders and advisers to assist him in his rule”.130

129. During consultation of Mr. Vomboi Hangshing (IAS Rtd.) aged 65 yrs at New Lambulane on 29/7/03
130. Carey and Tuck, op. cit. pp. 200-201
These being the characteristic features, the same old system of the chieftainship descending to the eldest male issue is still continuing and even today it remains as the recognizable basis of the chieftainship organization.

When empirical facts are examined, we find that wherever they migrated and settled down they went along with their cultural thoughts like the name of the place and later identified the new area of their settlement or village with such names.* The institution of chieftainship, based on the clan genealogy gives a clear picture of the evolution of traditional chieftainship which at present is based on the same principle and is quite relevant and valid. That is why the system of ‘Haosa’ could not be given a go-by, despite varied changes all around. Thus, despite many defects in the system, the rich culture and their traditional heritage could very well serve in bringing together the chiefs of the head clans and the younger branches, in the face of external threats. The system could effectively create a sense of unity and loyalty to each other by expressing their kinship solidarity. As such the British authorities were also surprised to find how the Kuki chiefs could mobilize their strength and unity at a very short notice to face the might of the British Government, despite their thinly scattered settlement in almost all the surrounding hills of Manipur.

Their polity had a distinctive character which was inborn and inherited from their forefathers. The initiative and leadership to fight against the British came from within the authoritative structure in which the clan heads and the collateral chiefs reaffirmed the value structure of the customs and traditions. Such traditional organizations of the chieftainship could successfully bring the masses to participate and allow them to get involved in the war against the British to protect their dignity, culture and freedom. According to T. Lunkim, it was nothing but chieftainship which fought against the British.132

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*The present village of Chassad in Ukhrul district and villages PHAILENGKOT, BUNNING, HAJANG, SONGLUNG etc. which were all within Sadar Hills of Senapati district served as a living examples.

131. T.S. Gangte. The Kukis; op. cit. p. 128
132. T. Lunkim, op. cit. p. 57
Thus, the chieftainship system was really vital, and also important in the traditional life of the Thadou-Kukis and their cognate tribes so much so that it stood as the main reason behind their unity and strength.

**H. An Overview:** It is to be noted here that though the Thadou-Kukis suffered a setback in the war with British, the chieftainship-institution which is their ancient heritage, served as the spinal cord of their unity and integrity. The institution even survives today. It has still remained a functional system despite various legislative measures which have been taken for abolition. Thus, the Kuki-Chin tribes as a whole, who are distinctive for their homogeneity unlike the Nagas who are distinctively known for their heterogeneity, has inherited a unique traditional government. Inspite of various changes and emerging new forces brought about by the modern civilization the institution remains deep rooted in the social structure. The attempt to abolish chieftainship was far more counter-productive and more harmful. The chieftainship system was shaken by the forces of imperialism no doubt, yet it remained intact and withstood the test of times. Based on the institution of chieftainship as the core of foundation to their power and strength, customs and culture, the traditional government at the village level and then to higher hierarchical levels – district and state level, the INPI or the traditional government remained established.

Chieftainship system being deeply rooted in their social structure served as the basis of their polity. It is this institution of chieftainship which preserve their distinctive identity and their power base polity. Since the Thadou-Kukis are brought up commensurately under the individual authoritarian type of administration, their mindset cannot be adapted to the changed circumstances. By contrast in Mizo society due to the abolition of chieftainship by an Act of the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chief Rights) Act. 1954,\(^{133}\) the old era of the chiefs who were considered to be the fountain-head of customs and retainer of tradition, ended, and thereafter

\(^{133}\) Thanga, op. cit. p. 171
began a new era of government by the people. However, it is to be noted here that the abolition of chieftainship in the Mizo society meant the erosion of their own power base of customs, culture and tradition. As a result of the above circumstances they could not hold on to their old customs and traditions. Their attempt to revive the cultural institution like Zawlbuk* also failed because of the disappearance of chieftainship which was its patron institution. It is found that no area of life was left unaffected and untouched by the winds of change. Their acceptance of Christianity as the new faith had successfully transformed the entire social life and thought of the people to an extent which is amazing. It also drastically changed their sense of values. The most important thing which the Mizos learnt from Christianity was perhaps the equality of man before God. According to Lalremsiem this egalitarianism led to the abolition of the traditional institution of chieftainship.

It is important to note that the Thadou-Kuki Society could not remain unaffected by the two powerful forces - British Imperialism and Christianity. But the degree of changes effected in the Kuki society was not the same as that of the Mizos. With the survival of Chieftainship among the Thadou-Kukis and their cognate tribes in Manipur, it was not as highly detrimental to custom and culture as in that of Mizo society. The survival of the institution of chieftainship ensured the preservation of their culture and identity. Of course, among the Kuki society of Manipur too, many of their age-old traditional and cultural practices disappeared but they also continued in different modified forms but in conformity with the Christian principles and ethics. Due to the continuance of chieftainship, the society did not feel any sort of vacuum despite the disappearance and crumbling down of some of the age-old cultural institutions especially in the realm of religious faith. Even after the end of the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-1919 and their

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* Zawlbuk is equivalent to Thadou-Kuki's 'SAWM' (dormitory)
134. M. Kippen, op. cit. p. 182
137. Lalremsiem, op. cit. p. 202
subsequent control of administration in the hill areas of Manipur, the British Political Agents or authorities recognised and utilised the institution of ‘Haosa’ as part of their administrative machinery.\textsuperscript{138} to serve the interest of the state in general and the tribe in particular. It was done to win over tribal discontentment and any hostility that may arise on account of the abolition of the post chieftainship. Moreover the chiefs had played useful role in the past. So their office was retained as part of an administrative empowerment.

5. TRIBAL DISPERSION: AREA OF SETTLEMENT

We shall now examine the nature of the demographic distribution and the area of tribal settlement in Manipur as a whole. It is believed that the migration of different tribal groups continued throughout the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. Their migration could have been as a result of their struggle for survival from the attacks of powerful and aggressive tribal counterparts, their search for a prospective agricultural land and the need for peaceful and secured settlements.

The hills of Manipur surrounding the valley are obviously the abode of the different tribal ethnic groups. The process that activated the nature of the movement of different tribes with the resultant outcome of displacing each other could be seen in the light of the inter-tribal warfare, feuds, epidemics, natural calamities and shifting cultivation. To identify the process that involved in displacing one group of tribals from one place to another is of course not difficult. Presumably, there are phases in the history of local migration whereby smaller groups were displaced time and again by population from more prolific centers. It always happened that the less powerful ones preferred to move elsewhere at the slightest opportunity rather than to live as slaves or captives of the powerful tribes.\textsuperscript{139} As such, there were many instances of local migration within the state as the hills of Manipur were an uninhabited region that could

\textsuperscript{138} Quoted in T.S. Gangte’s paper “Effect of the World Wars to the Kuki Chieftainship” a paper presented on the occasion of a Seminar on “Resurgence and Reformation” organised by Kuki Students’ Organisation, held at Moreh Dec. 9-12, 1998

\textsuperscript{139} Rajat Kanti Das, \textit{Manipur Tribal Scene: Studies in Society and Change}, Inter India Publications new Delhi p. 79 (Hereafter cited as R.K. Das)
easily provide sustenance to their sustenance and economy. It is to be noted here that the Thadou-Kukis were numerically big, comparatively then to their tribal counterparts and their authoritarian chiefs were powerful, hostile and aggressive which resulted in the occupation of large hilly tracts of Manipur. Apart from their territorial migration from one country to another, the local migration was also the outcome of the nature of their chieftainship system. The peculiarity of the tribe is that their practice of shifting cultivation is accompanied by their shifting habitation.

The nature of the tribal dispersal and the area of settlement shows that the Thadou-Kuki and its cognate tribes are placed in between the Meities in the valley and the Naga tribes in the hills of the Northeast and Northwest of Manipur. (See Appendix-IX and X) While majority of the Thadou-Kuki occupy the hill territory alongwith their Naga counterparts, they are also found along the fringes of the valley. Though some of them are also found in the valley proper, where they lived under the shadow of the Meiteis it was obviously never their forte. The fact remains that the smaller tribes of Manipur irrespective of Nagas and Kukis were pressurized by the powerful ones who were almost instantaneously drawn towards the Meitei community in the valley and also sought protective cover of their king. But the bigger tribes did not surrender to the Meitei kings and continued with their independent way although there were some cases of subjugation.\textsuperscript{140} The more defiant tribal chieftains who enjoyed political autonomy could be brought under full control only during the British period. It is found that to subjugate some of the tribes, the British Indian Government had to collaborate with the Meitei Kings. In this regard McCulloch states, “with the assistance of the arms and ammunition given to ‘Munipore’ by the British Government, some of the Tribes have been thoroughly, the northern ones partially, reduced....”\textsuperscript{141}

Speaking to tribal dispersion in the case of Nagas, Das writes, “Generally the Naga tribes

\textsuperscript{140} R. K. Das, op. cit. pp. 79-80

\textsuperscript{141} Quoted from McCulloch, W. Accounts of the valley of Munipore, Calcutta 1859 in R.K. Das's "Manipur Tribal Scene", op. cit. p. 80
live in compact big sized villages in east, north and west districts of Manipur”.142 The Kabuis (Ruongmei) occupy the hills between Cachar and the valley of Manipur on the west. The Ruongmeis are widely dispersed community. According to Gangmumei Kabui, the Ruongmeis had settled down in Imphal valley since the eighteenth century and in the Cachar District of Assam.145 He further writes that the Zeme and Liangmei are found in Nagaland and some Ruongmeis had recently migrated to the state. The Zemeis are also found in North Cachar hills of Assam.144 The Kachha Nagas have a wider distribution in Nagaland and North Cachar hills of Assam.145 It is found that the Mao, Paomei, Maram and Thangal inhabit the Northern parts of Manipur Hills which has now came to be known as Senapati district. The Tangkhuls another populous Naga tribe occupy the North Eastern hills of Ukhrul District. They were one of the powerful tribes of the hills as far as the Chindwin.146

The Tangkhuls’ habitat spreads beyond the Indian border into Upper Burma in Somra tract.147 Among the Naga tribe it was believed that there were several occasions of inter-tribal feuds. In this connection, Das observes that, “West of Tangkhuls are the Mao and Maram tribes. They might have belonged to the same stock but they were deadly against one another for a long time”.148 With regard to the so called Kuki tribes of Manipur they are as noted earlier concentrated in the Sadar Hills sub-division and Chandel district. They initially occupied Southern hills of Manipur from where they spread in different directions. Allied to them are smaller tribes like Paite, Gangte, Ralte149 and several other cognate tribes. The Chandel district has however a distinct characteristic in its ethnic composition. In this area the Thadou-Kuki

142. R. K. Das, op. cit. p. 6
143. G. Kabui, Genesis of the Ethnoses of Nagas and Kuki-Chin Published by N.S.F. (Naga Students’ Federation)
144. Ibid.
145. R.K. Das, Ibid.
146. Ibid.
147. G. Kabui, Ethnoses. p. 11
149. Ibid.
preponderate over their cognate tribes such as Anal, Mayon, Kom, Lamkang etc. With regard to
the pattern of settlement and distribution of population small Kuki tribes such as Chiru, Koireng, Koirao, Kom, Chothe etc. are found to have occupied the intermediate positions between the
Hills and the valley or to be more precise, the last stretch of hills or the foot hills where it meets the valley. Thus, the nature of their settlement pattern and dispersion shows that they were
widely spread over in all the hill areas of Manipur. And those villages situated near the valley
were more exposed to Meitei interference and influence but in spite of that they were able to
maintain and preserve their culture and retain their distinctive identity. However, the Meitei
influence had effects due to the exposure of some smaller Kuki tribal groups. As such, they had
to live under the shadow of the dominant Meitei people or remain appendage to it. The extension
of such socio-cultural relationship and interaction had a significant change bearing far reaching
consequences. Cultural elements were borrowed out of social interaction. So in living together
for centuries, absorption of the tribals into Meitei Society was always a possibility. It is believed
that many of tribal communities were absorbed and assimilated into the society and culture of
the Hinduised Meitei community of the valley. Thus, people in the early centuries were interacting
with each other. It is only a later development where segregation and individual identity was
stressed and common factors were suppressed between the hill and the valley people.

6. EARLY CONTACTS WITH THE BRITISH

The early contacts of the Kukis with the British in Manipur can be seen in the context of
the relation between the Kings of Manipur and the British authorities. The latter’s relation with
the government of Manipur came into formal contact only on 14th September 1762 when the
Raja Gambhir Singh solicited British aid to repel Burmese invasion. However, the British

150. R. K. Das, op. cit. p. 6
151. Lal Dena, British policy towards Manipur (1891-1919) Unpublished M. Phil Thesis Introduction. IV (Hereafter
cited as Dena’s British policy) also Encyclopaedia Brittanica Vol. 14
first tried to become better and well acquainted with the political condition of Manipur only in the Pre Burmese war of 1824-26 and the subsequent signing of the treaty of Yandabo on 24th Feb. 1826 which closed the war in which Gambhir Singh’s title to the throne was recognized. 152 After the signing of the treaty, the British Indian Government regarded Manipur as a protected state. 153 Manipur was thus liberated from the Burmese occupation by Gambhir Singh with the assistance of the British. But as Manipur was still considered totally incompetent to defend itself against Burmese invasions, the British Government was “compelled to guard against such chance”. 154 The frontiers of Manipur were not safe. There was sufficient apprehension of Burmese invasions. Under such circumstances the support of a superior power was a necessity. Hence, though Manipur re-gained her independence after the war, virtually it came under the British control through the Political Agent established in 1835.

The main reasons behind the establishment of the office of Political Agency was to communicate with the Burmese authorities on the frontier areas and to prevent the disturbances in the border and the neighbouring areas. 155 However, due to chaotic political condition of the state as a result of internecine quarrel among the Princes of Manipur and the war of succession thereof, the power and responsibilities of the Political Agents increased tremendously in the later years. But, it should be noted that during this period of political uncertainty, majority of the hill tribes were enjoying relative independence from the control of Manipuri kings residing in the valley. Even after the signing of the treaty most of the Hill tribes were “known to the British little than by name”. 156 Many ethnic communities had started relishing their autonomous status.

152. Lal Dena, British Policy. See Introduction p. V
153. A. Mackenzie, History of the Relations of the Government within the Hill Tribes of North-East Frontier of Bengal, Calcutta, 1884, p. 149
154. McCulloch, op. cit. p. 75
156. McCulloch, op. cit. p. 38