Chapter – IV

The Anti-imperialist Struggle: Anglo-Kuki War or ‘Kuki Rebellion’ – 1917-19, and the Kukis and the Indian National Army (INA)
CHAPTER - IV

THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLE:

ANGLO-KUKI WAR OR "KUKI REBELLION" OF 1917-19

1. INTRODUCTION

The war waged by the Kukis against the British is the one indigenous major armed uprising. Robert Reid, the former Governor of Assam said that the Anglo-Kuki war was the most serious incident in the history of Manipur and its relation with its Hill subjects.\(^1\) It is a combination of both opposition and confrontation posed by the Kukis against the onslaught of the mighty British imperialists. It gets the distinction of being an important historical event in as far as the British relationship with Manipur in particular, and the Kukis of North Eastern States of India and Myanmar (Burma) in general, is concerned. Of course, throughout the British period, the frequent revolts of Indians almost in all parts of India took place since 1857 in different degrees and magnitudes against the British imperialism against the latter’s encroachment of their land and in fringement of their independence. Among them the revolt of peasants and tribals in different parts of India were most significant in the history of anti-imperialist movement.\(^2\)

The anti-imperialist struggle of the Kukis against the British had of course, begun since 1777 A.D. when the Raja of Chittagong sought the protection of the British authority from the occasional raids, atrocities etc. on the British subjects by the Kukis.\(^3\) The Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19 is a historically indelible and incontrovertible event fought between a world power and a little backward ethnic communities which the world hardly knew. Yet it did happen. The brave and concerted fight against the British imperialists has been vicariously known as “Khongjai Laan” by the Meities, “Thadou Gaal” by the Thadous,\(^4\) “Chalisat (Chassad) Gaal”\(^5\)

---

1. op. cit. p. 79.
3. B.C. Chakravarty; op cit. p. 53.
4. K. Kippen (1982:33), maintains that the “Thadou Gaal” is the more appropriate term to be applied in view of the fact that all the non-Thadous and old Kuki tribes as well as the Nagas remain loyal to the British during the war. This is not true as the minor tribes especially the Zous too indeed took part in the war. Of course, the fact remains that the organized leadership confined to the Thadou Kukis alone. The term GAAL literally means war in the language of Kuki tribes. In local Manipuri it is called LAAN.
5. Quoted in the SOUVENIR of “85th Anniversary day celebration of the Kuki Rebellion 2002” – KUKI INPI p.12.
by a few section of Thadou-Kukis and “Zou Gaal” or “Haka Resistance Movement” by the Zous and Chin groups respectively, who are mainly from Churachandpur district and Chin State of Myanmar (Burma). This shows that the war waged against the British was not confined only to the Thadou Kukis but the Zou Kukis as well. In Manipur, it was officially recorded as the “Kuki Punitive Measures” and subsequently as the ‘Kuki Rebellion’ and besides as “the Kuki Rising, 1917-1919”.* It shows that it is not merely a rebellion but more than that L.W. Shakespear maintained that, “The Kuki Rebellion was more in the nature of a tribal outburst against oppressive measures than a ‘rebellion’.” 7 The event was called ‘GAAL’ which literally means ‘war’ and hence, it is more appropriate to call it as ‘Anglo-Kuki War’.

It may be noted here that though the Kukis did not have an organized army as such, but they certainly had organized armed contingents like the Chassad militiamen commanded and controlled by their chieftains. The so-called ‘Kuki Rebellion’ cannot be of course, be conceived to be an organized attack in a formal war on to an objective but on the strategy of hit and run tactics in which the Kukis were experienced and were good at it. 8

In spite of that, the true nature of the event cannot be concealed. In the heart of their hearts the British officials also admitted that ‘it was neither rebellion nor a large scale murder but purely a modern warfare’. This is verified in an official telegram sent to the Chief Commissioner, Assam, by the Secretary to the Govt. of India as “it was surely, rather barbarous acts of war than ordinary murders.” 9 It was also recorded as ‘Another little war’ in a Press Communiqué on May 3rd 1918. 10

---

7. ‘Souvenir’ of the Kuki Inpi – 2002, p. 3.
9. It is also written as “Another little war” on May 3, 1918, Press Communiqué in “Notes and News” – Ed. INDIA, Sec. Dept. Reg.No. 1880 5115.
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CAUSES

The outbreak of the Anglo-Kuki War ‘Kuki Rebellion’ of 1917-19 was the result of the culmination of a deep-rooted discontent that had been accumulating over a long period of time against the policies of the British towards the Kukis. The extension of political power by the British in the Kuki inhabited areas of Manipur and other parts of north eastern states created dissatisfaction and distrust which often resulted in several local uprisings prior to the outbreak of the so called ‘Kuki Rebellion’ of 1917-19. Such events of hostile relationship between the Kukis on the one hand, and the British on the other, is evidently manifested in the Military Report on the Chin-Lushai country by E.B. Elly as –

“In 1845, 1847-1848, 1849-1850 and 1850-1851 there were raids culminating in what is called the Great Invasion of 1860s where 15 villages were burnt or plundered, 188 British subjects killed and 100 carried into captivity.”

The raids continued even after these incidents with unceasing violence. Thus, the Kukis of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong both of which are in Assam, Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts became weak and so gradually dispersed in many plain areas. The discontented Kukis especially the Chassads and the Aisan Kukis looked out for an opportunity to fight the British.

The already accumulated grievances sparked off when the colonial authorities and the native Raja begun raising labour corps. It added salt to the wounds. The Kukis felt that it was a golden opportunity to drive the ‘the Whitemen’ out of their land. The Kukis had reasons to be upset. The factors, which contributed for the outbreak of Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19 can be studied under several headings:

A. Political: The insatiable colonial thirst and the subsequent territorial expansion of the British and their policy created distrust among the Kukis. The independent kingdom of Manipur too

became a victim to the onslaught of British imperialism after the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891\textsuperscript{13} though it was not annexed. However, to bring Manipur under their complete subjugation and control, the British colonialists had to fight another war against the independent and powerful Kukis\textsuperscript{14} who were ruled by their own well organized chiefs and were treated as allies of Manipur State.\textsuperscript{15} It is to be noted here that the Kuki chiefs resisted the expansionist designs of the British colonials and also opposed the Maharaja of Manipur’s decision to invite them in Manipur.\textsuperscript{16} The hostile relationship between the Kukis and the British from the very beginning of their contact was a clear manifestation of their policy of opposition to alien domination. Loyalty to the land of their forefathers and freedom loving nature are their inborn character.\textsuperscript{17}

The Kukis were strong allies of the Meitei Kings\textsuperscript{18} helping each other in times of internal threat and external aggression. The Kuki chiefs ruled independently the hill territory surrounding the valley of Manipur without any fear of outside interference. With the imposition of the British rule in Manipur, the Kukis were politically subjugated by the British imperialism along with other ethnic communities.\textsuperscript{19} Whether the Kukis liked it or not they had to carry the yoke of foreign domination which they had never experienced before. Consequently, the British domination and policies threatened the authority of the chiefs as also the independence of the Kukis. And so the resentment continued to accumulate. Moreover, with the establishment and assertion of authority by the British, the institution of Chieftainship was undermined. The importance and effectiveness of the institution of Chieftainship gradually got more eroded. The

\textsuperscript{13} Dena, Modern Manipur, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{14} T.H. Lewin, op. cit. p. 130.
\textsuperscript{15} Shaw, op. cit. p. 3.
\textsuperscript{16} T.S. Gangoe, The Kukis, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{17} See Sheikholhau Kipgen “Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19 as part of India’s Freedom Struggle”, a paper presented on the occasion of the 85th octogenarian Anniversary of Anglo-Kuki War “Kuki Rebellion” of 1917-19 at Kuka Inn, Imphal on March 17th 2002. (Hereafter cited as S.Kipgen Anglo-Kuki)
\textsuperscript{18} Shaw, op. cit. p. 3.
\textsuperscript{19} Souvenir of Kuki Rebellion; 1985 p. 6.
continuance of British hegemony in Manipur displaced the age-old tradition of friendly ties between the Kuki chiefs and the Raja of Manipur. It antagonized the Kuki chiefs as the comfort of their self-esteem outweighed the inconveniences of subordination under an alien power. Thus the Kuki chiefs strongly resented the presence of British in Manipur as it severed their relationship with the Raja. However, the Meitei kings soon developed close ties with the British, became their protectorate and so were always anxious to please them because the latter exercised extensive powers in the state. Of course, out of political expediency, it became necessary for the kings of Manipur to look forward for British help in order to keep the kingdom intact and to ward off hostile elements. As such, with the outbreak of the First World War, the Raja, Churachandra Singh gave extensive co-operation to the British for which he was awarded the hereditary title – Maharaja. The Kings of Manipur thus shifted their loyalty to the British.

It therefore, appeared that the Raja of Manipur was like an ally-turned-traitor to the Kukis the Kukis felt betrayed as their friendly ties and understanding, which had existed for ages prior to the advent of the British in Manipur had disappeared. To the Kukis the very presence of the British on the soil of Manipur was considered as a symbol of colonial subjugation for they had always considered them a threat to their independence, freedom and existence. In this connection William Shaw’s writings are quite revealing -

"The unprepared Kukis could not however, openly challenge the Britishers but had to wait for an opportune time when they could re-assert their freedom."

So their inherent instinct for a fight to free themselves from the yoke of foreign domination got strengthened. The urge to attain freedom never died in them. And so turbulent times were ahead.

B. Social: The society of Manipur underwent a rapid change with new ideas arising mainly

20. T. S. Gange’s unpublished thesis on “Anglo-Kuki War 1917-19” p. 27. (Hereafter cited as Gange; Anglo-Kuki)
from Hinduism, Christianity, modern education and British administrative policy. These changes brought social gap among the people whose past social life was marked by its solidarity and cordiality. The impact of Hinduism was not felt among the hill people of Manipur. While the British authorities were not willing to antagonize the orthodox Hindu Meities they at the same time for that matter did not permit missionary activities among them. As such the mission work shifted over to the hill areas which were also placed under British administration. The contribution of Christian missionaries was tremendous and consequently changes in the social life of the people became noticeable. Thus, the societies in the central valley and that of the hill areas presented a contrasting picture. This sort of artificial difference in their social set-up tended the people to form a wall of social incommunicability largely due to the impact of Hinduism. And due to the burdensome restrictions of caste and ritual, the Hindu Manipuris (Meiteis) began to adopt a ‘holier-than-thou’ attitude towards the hill communities. This repulsive attitude towards the hill people naturally embittered the social relations or the intercourse which suited the convenience of the imperial power.

While the British authorities ran the administration of the hill territory and the valley on different lines, the efforts of Christian missionaries had largely proved counter-productive in those days due to the conservative and traditionalist conciousness of the Kukis. The introduction of western ideas and Christianity had made a dent and shook the existence of the culture, tradition and indigenous forms of religion of the Kukis. It also threatened the social hierarchy of the Kukis of which the chiefs were the effective custodians and enduring sources of all customs, culture and tradition. This rich heritage had been handed down through several generations together.

24. F.S. Downs, op. cit. p. 76.
25. Dena, op. cit. p. 36.
26. T.C. Hodson, Meiteis Preface p – XVIII.
27. Dena, Ibid.
28. Informations were collected during consultation of Ventobi Hangshing aged 70 IAS (Retd.) Govt. of Nagaland, presently residing at Motbung – one of the most populated Thadou-Kuki villages in Sadar Hills - Senapati Dist. In Oct 2002.
Thus, the introduction of British rule and its subsequent administration in the hill areas shook the established institution of Chieftainship. Consequently, the anti-British feeling got heightened and widespread among the Kukis. They preferred to stick to their age-old traditional way of living independently without any outside interference to being under the domination and subjugation of alien power. It appears that the Kukis became apprehensive of the intentions of the British concerning their society and religion, which would attack and overrun the very fabric of the institution of Chieftainship. It is to be noted that the attack on Chieftainship meant the attack on their freedom, independence, customs and culture, religion, tradition etc. Naturally, the feeling of animosity was bound to increase against the colonial authorities. Such discontentment and apprehensions had therefore, prepared the social background for an armed confrontation against the British.

C. Culture and Traditional: The Thadou-Kukis believed that they are destined to rule their land by themselves. They thought that they own the land they inhabit and regard others as inferior who have no right to rule over them.\textsuperscript{29} Apart from such mentality and mindset, it was also significant to note that their social structure was deep-rooted in emotion, culture and tradition.\textsuperscript{30} The emotion was that they did not like the foreigners to infringe upon their right of living independently.\textsuperscript{31} And the tradition was that with the imposition of British rule, their culture, tradition and social values were undermined to the extent that the institution of Chieftainship was shaken.\textsuperscript{32} Having confined to within their own world and with little or no contact with the outside world, they were constrained to think that 'there was no country like theirs', no chiefs greater than theirs, no religion better than theirs, and no tradition and social values higher and ethical than theirs, nothing to match whatsoever. It was community centric.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{29} Shaw, op. cit. p. 50.  
\textsuperscript{30} Gangte, Anglo-Kuki, p. 1.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.}
The same was of course, the case with that of ethnic communities spread all across the country.

While critically analyzing the cultural and traditional factors behind the causes of the war, it should also be noted here that being a martial race, the Kuki warriors coupled with their ferocious nature could never settle for anything less than combat armed equipments. In this connection, Jamkithang Sitlhou asserted that the Kukis were martial tribe who knew how to fight wars and did no menial work as labourers.³³ Traditionally, men go to war and to jungle for wild games among the Kukis while menial labour falls within the realm of women’s domain. Therefore, asking them to go to France simply as labourers in the war fronts was considered an insult of the highest degree.³⁴ As such they flatly refused to be sent overseas as mere labourers which proved too much for them as it hurt their pride and prestige of homely Kukis.³⁵ This shows that their age-old tradition, emotion and mindset, carried more weightage than anything else and then swayed by these thoughts and beliefs in determining their destiny. Thus, the cultural and traditional ties gave them the courage to challenge the mighty British in the world of warfare at a time when the sun never set in the British Empire.

D. Colonial system of administration: The colonial system of administration in the hill areas of Manipur was in no small measures responsible for the outbreak of the ‘Kuki Rebellion’ of 1917-19. The general policy pursued by the British towards the hill people from the very beginning of their contact was to refrain from any direct control over the tribe in the management of their internal affairs. The colonial system of indirect rule under which the British governed the people through the Maharaja and the tribal chiefs largely suited the convenience of British imperialism.³⁶ However, this system of colonial administration had exploited and victimized

---

³³ Jamkithang Sitlhou, Thadou Puchon Pachon, p. 49.
³⁴ Ibid.
³⁵ Quoted from an article, “The factual history of the Great Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19”, written by Donn Morgan Kipgen, a columnist of The Sangai Express on Jan. 10th 2004 Imphal.
³⁶ Dena, Modern Manipur, p. 87.
the masses by depriving them of the fruit of their labour. 37

It is to be noted here that when Churachand Singh became the King of Manipur in 1908 38 the scheme for the future administration of the state was also framed by which the Vice-President of the reconstituted Manipur State Durbar was entrusted the administration of the entire hill territory. 39 Here again, the British played the policy of "divide and rule" largely to suit their convenience by excluding the hill tribes from the control of the Durbar and entrusted the hill administration entirely to a single officer (Vice-President) of the Durbar who was an English man drawn from Assam Provincial Service. 40 Surprisingly, the scheme did not provide any sort of representation of the hill people in the Durbar. 41 This was perhaps one of the greatest defect in the scheme for administration of hill tribes which became evidently clear when it was impossible for a single officer to tour satisfactorily the huge hill territory under his control. 42

In 1902, the Governor-General in council in exercise of the powers conferred by Sec. 3 and 4 of the Indian (Foreign Jurisdiction) order in Council introduced again another scheme with a view to attain "good governance" and "contentment of the tribes". 43 Despite the introduction of several schemes, the system failed to ameliorate the plight of the hillmen since the colonial exploitation of the hill people continued in various forms such as a) imposition of land revenue, b) house tax, and c) the obnoxious law of free and force labour known as Pothang system. While the Pothang system had been abolished in the valley towards the end of 1913 due to widespread agitation against the system it was however, vigorously enforced in the hill territory. 44

37. Ibid.
38. J. Roy, op. cit. p. 137.
39. Scheme for the future Administration of Manipur.
40. Denz, Ibid., p. 80.
41. Denz, British Policy; p. 28.
42. R. Reid, op. cit. p. 79.
43. Foreign Dept. Extl. A Pros. August 1907, No. 18-23
44. Denz, British Policy, p. 32.
In 1916, Rules for administration of the hill areas were modified but these rules did not improve the administration as the single officer continued to operate from Imphal. Quite naturally a tight administration in the hill areas was not possible even after effecting changes in the Rules. It was the professed policy of the British administrators to create a ‘barrier of wall’ not only between the hill men and plainsmen but even among the hill people themselves. In this connection, Dena writes, “regarding the administration of the hill people, the British assumed the role of a ‘saviour’ minus a redeeming power.”

With regard to payment of House taxes every house hold had to pay a sum of Rs. 3 per annum and any slight protest on the part of tax payers had to face retaliation in the form of punitive expeditions. Such payment were not only an extra burden on the part of the villages but it had also come to affect the customary and the tributary privileges of the chiefs which was a basis of the legitimacy of their authority structure. It is to be noted here that the imposition of the White Man’s laws was contradicting the existing culture and traditional laws of the native tribes.

As a result, the discontentment of the Kukis against the colonial system of administration increased so much so that some of them decided to move into the interior parts of the hills and even into Burma in the hope of freeing themselves from the burden of Pothang. Moreover, between the hill men and the British officers there intervened a most unsatisfactory and repulsive intermediary in the form of a petty Manipuri officers called ‘Lambus’ who were appointed by the British. The ‘Lambus’ were a product of colonial administration created by the British themselves as a sort of privilege class. Under the system, the colonial authorities kept contact

45. Foreign and Political Dept. 27th June, 8th July 1919, - Report of Webster, Secy. To the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secy. Govt. of India.
46. The Jadonang Death Anniversary Committee, op. cit. p-VI.
47. Dena; Ibid.
48. Foreign Dept. Extt A. Pros July 1892, Nos. 240-244
49. K. Kipgen, op. cit. p. 35.
50. R. Reid; op. cit. p.79.
with the hill people through ‘Lambus’, who acted in various capacities as hill peons, interpreter, messengers and sometimes as adviser to the British officials. Backed by the Britisht, the ‘Lambus’ took advantage of their position and misused it for their nefarious gains. Even the colonial authorities also admitted that the so called ‘Lambus’ were solely responsible for the genuine grievances and abuses of the people which led to the outbreak of the ‘Kuki Rebellion’. They collected money from the hill people with the false promise that on such payment they would not be called for enrolment as coolies. Such undue collection of money from the hill villagers exposed gross corruption and failure of the administrative system.

While analyzing critically, it should be noted here that the emergence of ‘Lambus’ as an important official in the colonial system of administration in the hills is something like imposing a new regime, which in the process led to serious infringement upon the chiefs’ authority. The system shook the power and prestige of the chiefs so much so that they resented the employment of Lambus as intermediaries. Therefore, the chiefs who always maintained high status and good relationship with the Kings of Manipur resented the concept of the Lambus’ superiority over them because they frequently overruled their judgement of cases. As such the Lambus were also responsible in no small measure for the outbreak of ‘Kuki Rebellion’.

Behind all these factors there still lies economic disparity between the hill territory and the central valley. The latter was getting richer largely as a result of superior techniques of production and increased rate of economic activities but the colonial authorities did nothing to improve the primitive form of cultivation in the hills. But they remained contented with mere collection of revenue from the people. Thus, the hard-pressed village economy remained stagnant.

51. Dena, Modern Manipur, p.82
52. R. Reid, Ibid.
56. Report of Webster, For & Poll Dept. 27th June, 8th July 1919.
The forest policy of the Government to exploit its natural resources, also became a source of anxiety to the hill people who practiced shifting cultivation. The state monopoly of forest prohibiting the hill people from clearing it for cultivation became one of the source of constant clashes between the hill people and the British colonialists. From all the above factors it can be derived that the general defect on the part of British in the administration of the hill people on the one hand and the uncompromising stand on the part of the Kuki chiefs upon the infringement of their authority and independent way of living on the other, constitute an important factor behind the deep rooted discontentment against the British.

E. Policy of disarmament: In order to prevent the constant lawless raids and inter and intra-tribal warfare on the one hand and to bring the hill people under complete subjugation and control on the other, the British authorities were inclined to think for the enforcement of the policy of disarmament. On the recommendation of the officiating Political Agent, Mr. Porteous in July 1898, the Chief Commissioner of Assam had agreed to adopt the rules which prevailed in the Chin Hills with regard to disarmament. Hereafter, the general policy laid down was that one gun only should be allowed for every ten (10) houses and that all guns in excess of this number should be gradually confiscated. As per the rules the villagers were asked to surrender their unlicensed guns and in the event of not fulfilling the condition, they were threatened and had to face punitive action of state police, imposition of fines and even imprisonment.

However, all these measures, instead of doing good had a boomerang-effect and made the people more hostile against the British. The colonial authorities faced a great difficulty in the task of disarming the hill people. It fanned the flame of discontent against the British. In the case of Kukis who liked their guns more than anything else resented it. This is proved by the

57. Manipur Administration Report, 1913-1914, p. 10.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Dena, British Policy, p. 20.
fact that the Kuki youths preferred their choice of guns to their girl-friends as guns were their best companions.\textsuperscript{62} It is to be noted here that before the establishment of the British authorities in Manipur, almost all the Kuki males used to hold a gun each which they used in the way they liked, mostly in hunting the wild games. Therefore, disarming the Kukis by the Government with whatever good intentions it might have been there invited hatred, enmity and the subsequent strong protests of the Kukis.

The policy of disarmament was translated into action and initially got some success if not the desired objectives. Shortly after 1891, the Government confiscated at least 1,195 guns during the period of ten years from 1907 to 1917 and during the rebellion more than 1000 guns more from the Kukis.\textsuperscript{63} Thus, many guns got confiscated mostly from the Kukis no doubt but inspite of that they were not cowed down to fight against the British. This shows that they are still in possession of sufficient number of guns, which they might have possibly hidden during the search which had been carried out. Besides, they were also believed to have enough confidence of their own capacity to manufacture weapons in waging war against the British. Thus, the ruthless policy of subjugation on the part of the British, with a view to strengthen and consolidate their rule was a constant reminder to the Kukis that the British were ‘exploiters’.

Today critically, one can say that the long and deep-rooted discontent was as a result of the very foreign character of British rule and was one of the major causes of the war. These feelings of hurt pride inspired them to challenge the mighty British in the world of warfare and to expel them from their land.

**F. Immediate causes:** Against all these background of mass discontent the labour corps recruitment, which became more a question of compulsion constituted the immediate cause of the outbreak of Anglo-Kuki war. In this connection, a summon was issued to the Kuki chiefs in

\textsuperscript{62} Souvenir of Kuki Rebellion, 1985, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{63} Manipur Administration Report, 1918-19, p. 2.
March 1917, to contribute recruits to serve in a labour corps destined for France, which His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur had undertaken to raise.\textsuperscript{64} It is important to note here that with the outbreak of the World War I in 1914, Britain sought assistance in its war effort from India as it was a part of the British Empire. India contributed 50,000 non-combatant force in order to augment combatant force by those employed in labour battalions for construction of roads, railways, supply of ammunitions etc. in France and to garner as much man power as possible in France and England. Manipur contributed 2000 non-combatant force.\textsuperscript{65} The efforts on the part of the Raja of Manipur and the British authorities asking the Kukis to join as recruits, produced sharp reaction\textsuperscript{66} and ignited all the latent and accumulated grievances.\textsuperscript{67} The minds of the Kukis for the war was in ferment and while the other causes of the war goes back to some years, the labour recruitment episodes decided the timing of the outbreak.\textsuperscript{68} It had not been appreciated by the Kukis in general and their chiefs at large. (See Fig. 8. p. 165 - 168)

3. PERFORMANCE OF WAR RITES / CEREMONY

While the British authorities and the Maharaja continued their efforts of raising the labour corps in the beginning of 1917, the Kukis remained mentally alert and physically prepared for the showdown against the British colonialists and their armed forces.* They had also not appreciated the role of the Maharaja who was in league with the British. Disgusted, the Kuki chiefs performed a war-rite ceremony by killing Mithuns and cutting off their tail. The ceremony called \textit{Sajamlhah} \textsuperscript{69} also involved oath taking by the chiefs and leaders. In another ceremony called the \textit{Hansaneh}, the chiefs and leaders ate the meat together as a token expression of unity.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Extract from the proceeding of the Chief Commissioner of Assam in the Political Department Sec. Resolution on the LATE KUKI RISING No. 8856 P. dated 27th Sept. 1920. See also (The Indian Year Book 1922- Sir Stanley Reed, F.d.)
\item Telegram – from, The Secretary of State for India, London addressed to the Army Headquarters, Delhi 28\textsuperscript{th} Jan. wired to the Government of Assam, Shillong 28\textsuperscript{th} Jan 1917. See also B.C. Allen Special Officer, Assam, Shillong Letter’s No. 110-14, dated 31\textsuperscript{st} Jan. 1917 addressed to Hezzlett, Cosgrave, Burnes, Dundas, & Dentith.
\item D.K. Palti; op. cit. p. 62.
\item K. Kippen; op. cit.p. 42.
\item Goutam Bhadra; op. cit.p.30.
\item K.Kippen Ibid. p.42. See also (Souvenir – Kuki Rebellion 2002, p. 8) and also see (P.S. Haokip; p. 78).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Fig. 8. (a) Bust of Pu Chengiapao Dourgel, Chief of Aishan
(Piba of Thadou-Kuki chiefs) erected at Moreh Town
Fig. 8 (b) Pu Tintong, Chief of Laijang

Fig. 8 (c) Pu Khotinthang Siltou, Chief of Jampi
Fig. 8 (d) Pu Lhukhomang (Pache), Chief of Chassud

Fig. 8 (e) Pu Pasut, Chief of Kanjang
Fig. 8 (f) Pu Chengjapao, Chief of Aishan

Fig. 8 (g) Pu Enjakhup Kholhou, Chief of Thenjang
and solidarity to fight against the common enemy. Besides, each and every Chief got a share of the piece of the flesh called Sachan. The token-piece of flesh was again distributed by the chief to every household in their respective village to assure their commitment to the common cause. Then a notice was served thereof in all their villages in the form of traditional method by sending a piece of smoldering firewood called THINKKHO, tied with a big red and hot chilly called MALCHAPOM, signifying the eminence of war. In fact all the above ceremonies and relaying of THINKKHO LE MALCHAPOM, which was resorted to in the absence of modern means of communication, signalled the declaration of war against the British. It was indeed a courageous defiance of the British policies and an open declaration of their dislike to the British forces and attitudes. Subsequent developments are noteworthy.

A. Jampi Meeting: The Chief of Jampi, Khotinhatang Sitlhou convened a meeting of almost all the leading Kuki chiefs at his village and formed a powerful confederacy. The chiefs who attended the meeting were:- i) Tintong Haokip, Chief of Laijang ii) Songchung Sitlhou, Chief of Sangnão iii) Lunholal Sitlhou, Chief of Chongjang iv) Letkhothang Haokip, Chief of Loikhai v) Vumngul Kipgen, Chief of Tujang and his son Lhungjangul Kipgen vi) Enjakhup Kholhou, Chief of Thenjang vii) Leothang Haokip, Chief of Goboh viii) Mangkho-on Haokip, Chief of Tingkai and ix) Heljason Haokip, Chief of Loibol.

The meeting was marked by heated exchange of words among the chiefs when Vumngul Kipgen expressed his unwillingness to wage war at such a critical juncture when number of arms and ammunitions were inadequate. His discouraging but realistic assessment in speech.

70. Souvenir – Kuki Rebellion 2002;op. cit. p.78.
71. P.S. Haokip; op. cit.p.79.
72. See S.Kipgen’s, “Reaction of the Kukis to British Colonialism”, A paper presented on the occasion of North East India History Association (NEIHA) XXII Session, Darrang College, Tezpur, 30th Nov – 2nd Dec. 2001.p.5 (Hereafter cited as S.Kipgen, Colonialism) Similar steps has been taken by ethnic communities in the mainland during the Revolt of 1857. Solidarity had been expressed.
73. K.Kipgen; op. cit.p.42, See also (P.S. Haokip; pp.88-89.)
75. P.S. Haokip; p.89.
however, did not deter the other chiefs who were already prepared both mentally and physically. Subsequently, the Chief of Laijang, Tintong Haokip who was annoyed by such a speech replied encouragingly, “If ever there was a time to fight the ‘whitemen’, now is the opportune time.”

Tintong Haokip also made a heroic gesture of bravery and valour by cutting off the tail of the Mithun which was sacrificed for the war-rite ceremony. The heroic war-cry of Tintong reverberated in the minds of the Kukis and they agreed to go for war.

Tah chapa!
Haokip chapa, Lunkhel chapa,
Laijang Tintong kahi;
    Kachang seh hijong leng,
    Kameilou, kameichang,
    Kanmani jouse abei masangsea,
    Mikangte kakap ding ahi.  

Free translation: -

True son of my father,
Son of Haokip, Son of Lunkhel,
I am Tintong of Laijang,
    Even if I am alone,
    With all my ammunition and bullets,
    Until and unless they got exhausted,
    I’ll fight against the ‘white men’

It is alleged that with his war-cry, Tintong blank-fired his gun, one round. Tintong was in high spirit and in emotionally charged state of mind. This act of valour and heroic gesture surprised the entire gathering. Subsequently, Tintong became the best choice as ‘the General of the tenacious Kuki militiamen during the war against the British.’ A series of summits followed:

B. Sangnao Summit: Enjakhup Kholhou, Chief of Thenjang convened the second summit at SANGNAO village. The prominent chiefs such as Chengiapao Doungel of Aisan, I. Hukhoumang

77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid; p.25 See also (Imphal FREE PRESS, 19 Dec 2000 Vol. V/32p.2.)
81. Ibid.
82. K. Kipgen; op.cit. p.43.
(PACHE) of Chassad and Sutmang Singson of Kanjang who were absent earlier, etc. participated.\textsuperscript{83} The Chief of Kanjang had this time cut the tail of a mithun in proclamation of his clan.\textsuperscript{84} and this declaration was followed by a war-rite ceremony uniting the Kukis once again, against the British. Another notable meeting was held under the leadership of the Chassad chiefs.

C. Chassad Conclave: Lhukhomang (PACHE) of Chassad also killed a Mithun in March and performed a war-rite ceremony before he was called on to send coolies.\textsuperscript{85} He convened a large gathering of twenty-two (22) chiefs most of whom were in the Eastern and North-Eastern hills and neighbouring chiefs of Chassad.\textsuperscript{86} They ate the heart and liver of the sacrificed mithun as a sign of their vow to fight the British unitedly. The eating of the heart and liver attributes a significance of great moral accountability as per the custom and tradition of the Kukis. It is used as a ‘seal’ to a commitment of a particular cause. It symbolizes the ‘heart of the matter’ or ‘the core’ of the issue at hand. The Chassad Chief also sent the token piece of flesh to other chiefs who could not attend meeting, urging them to refuse to recruit men for the labour corps.

On one such occasion of the meeting of the Kuki chiefs, a song was composed to describe the situation, which speaks volumes of their firmness and determination in their stand to wage war against the British:

\begin{quote}
\emph{Phai Chungnung,}
\emph{Kol kim velle,}
\emph{Koiman Tolkon,}
\emph{Ikal Lhanghai thin,}
\emph{Eisen gom maj me,}
\emph{Phai tissem gom,}
\emph{Lhepon bang kitho-tin,}
\emph{Nam chem, Khat in,}
\emph{Vabang pao tadiu-te.}\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

\textit{Free translation:} -
All the Chiefs living around Imphal,
And those coming from Burma plains.
Despite distances, how swiftly we meet here.
As if blown together by a strong wind,
Those of us blown together by a strong wind,
Let us be united as layers of clothes,
That spread together firmly,
United, let us defeat our foes.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} P.S. Haokip, op.cit. p. 85.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Sources: Thangkhosei Chongloi, chief of Khengiang village and confirmed by Chunglal Haokip, Chief of Teijiang village. See also (P.S. Haokip, P. 87) and T.S. Gante, \textit{Anglo-Kuki War (Imphal Archipelago) in 18}. 
The Kuki unity that was being forged through the conclaves and meetings was indeed a big blow to the British who started smarting under their pressure.

Such traditional system of performing war-rite ceremonies by the Kuki chiefs had unnerved the British in various places which can be assessed from the Confidential letter No. 5C, dated March 17th 1917 of the Political Agent of Manipur, H.G.W. Cole addressed to B.C. Allen, the Special Officer, Assam that the Kuki Chief of Aisan, Chassad, Jampi and Ngullen,(Chief of Khongjang) had killed a mithun and performed their traditional and customary war-rites in the month of March,88 1917 to formally declare war against the British. He further said that they were the most ‘truculent’ Kuki chiefs to have taken oath after killing a mithun and determined that none of them should go to France or send any of their people there.89 The activities of the four leading Kuki chiefs in connection with the performance of the war-rite ceremony was confirmed by H.W.G. Cole in a letter addressed to J.E. Webster, Chief Secretary. Government of Assam, on March 19th 1917. Besides, in September 1917, when Higgins succeeded Cole as the Political Agent of Manipur, he again confirmed about the performance of war-rite ceremonies by the leading Kuki chiefs.90 The British had begun to dread the Kukis.

As such with the declaration of war, the Kukis were immediately on the war path. The reaction of the Kukis was so strong and spontaneous that it reached a crescendo and developed into violent confrontation with the British authority. The attacks, threats, raids, intimidation etc. all over the hill areas had begun in varying degrees. The war theatre also got established at different places and locations.91 The British divided the whole region as ‘disturbed country’ and

88. H.W.G. Cole Political Agent, Manipur Confidential D.O. No. 5C dated 17-3-1917 to B.C. Allen Chief Secy. Govt. of Assam Shillong.
89. Ibid; para 2.
90. J.C.Higgins Letter’s No. 705 M.S. dated the 24/25th Nov. 1917 addressed to the Chief Secretary, Assam. See also (Dispatch on the Operation against the Kuki tribes of Assam and Burma Nov. 1917-19, political Department, Poll. Br. No. 6310 P. P.6.) Hereafter, cited as "Despatch on the Operation...."
91. S.Kippen, Colonialism, p. 6.
the Kukis into the following areas 92:-

a. North-East  — (Somra and North Chassad)
b. East  — (Chassad)
c. South-East  — (Lonpi(Mombi) and Longya)
d. South  — (Manhulong) areas.
e. South-West  — (Henglep and Ukha)
f. North-West  — (Silchar Road and Jampi)

But for the convenience of operations the hill areas were divided into the following divisions and its respective areas were put under the command of different Military Officers detailed as below: - (See Map-IV and V)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Officers-in-Charge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ii) Henglep Area (South-Western Hills)</td>
<td>Capt. Goodal, Capt. Fox, Lt. Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Lonpi Area (South-East)</td>
<td>Capt. Coote and Lt. Askwith, Capt. Parry and Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Tangkhul and Somra Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. COMMENCEMENT OF WAR THEATRES

It may be noted here that the British policy of conciliatory approaches and persuasion adopted towards the Kuki chiefs in order to convince them for sending recruits yielded angry refusals.94 Finding no alternative, the officiating Political Agent sent Capt. Coote of the 4th Assam Rifles with a hundred Rifles to Lonpi in September 1917, where there were open hostility.95 Despite initial reverses, Coote succeeded in burning down Lonpi village on Oct. 17th 1917.96 This imprudent act became an object of vital importance in provoking a war. The Kuki chiefs of Lonpi and Longya got infuriated at such incidents and declared that they had "closed the country to the British."97 Once the hardening of stands taken by both the sides had been displayed very

93. Despatch on the Operation, pp. 11-22. See also (Shakespear, p. 233 )
96. Ibid.
97. D.K. Palit; op. cit. p.62. See also (Shakespear P. 211)
Map - IV

Present political map of Manipur showing the principal areas connected with Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19. Incidentally Aishan is located outside the boundary. The Chief of Aishan - CHENGJAPAO DOUNGEL is the head (Piba) of all the Thadou-Kukis.

Map not to scale

LEGENDS

+++ AISHAN AREA
+++ (North Eastern Hills)
++ CHASSAD AREA
++ (Eastern Hills)
--- LONPI/MOMBI AREA
--- (South Eastern Hills)
--- HENGLEP AREA
--- (South Western Hills)
+++ JAMPI AREA
+++ (North Western Hills)
effort and attempt on the part of the British authorities for a compromise failed. It is significant to be noted here that of the attempts for peace made by Mrs. Cole in September 1917 and Mr. Higgins himself at Oktan on 12th Oct. 1917 to convince the Kuki chiefs of Lonpi and Longya indicates the myriad activities launched by the government to avert the war, conflict seemed inevitable.

In Dec. 1917, the chiefs of Lonpi and Longya started raiding the Police Thanases in their area and they were soon joined by the chiefs of Henglep and Ukha. Consequently two detachments of 4th Assam Rifles were dispatched. While Lt. Halliday marched to Lonpi with 80 Rifles, another group of the same number marched to Henglep under the command of Captain Coote and Lt. Hooper. The first battle occurred after they had crossed the Chakpi river near Sugnu, one mile before Lonpi, where a strong stockade was constructed. In the fierce fighting that ensued between the Lonpi warriors and the Assam Rifles, three British soldiers were killed. Their dead bodies were left behind when the British force retreated to Imphal along with several wounded soldiers. The Kukis had gained appreciably a victory in this battle.

During this period, Chinga Khamba Sanajaoba, a Manipuri claimer to the throne of Manipur, also came into lime light. He raided the Forest Tool station at Ithai on 19th Dec. 1917 along with the Kukis of Ukha, Henglep and the neighbouring villages. Indeed, December 1917 has been reportedly one of the most tension-ridden period for both the British authorities and the people of Imphal, with a number of intelligence reports that the Kukis were swarming with 2000 strong army to invade Imphal.

98. P.S. Haojip; op. cit. p.83. See also (Kuki Rebellion, Kuki Inpi – 1985, Souvenir p.4.)
99. Shakespear; op. cit. p.211.
100. Ibid; p.213.
101. Ibid;
102. Ibid;
104. Ibid, p.1 See also Kuki Rebellion(Souvenir) – 2002, pp.3-4.
The defeat of the British soldiers at the hands of the Kuki warriors at the initial stage of the battle spread like wild fire. This encouraged the Kukis and emboldened them all the more.\textsuperscript{105} The Anglo-Kuki war being the most formidable which, the British authorities themselves admitted, was interspersed in all the hill areas of Manipur valley extending in the un-administrative Somra Tract, Thaungdut state of Burma, North Cachar Hills and Naga Hills district of Assam, covering more than 6,000 square miles of rugged hills affecting more than 40,000 Kuki population.\textsuperscript{106}

Then, as the situation did not improve, despite intensive operation, the British authorities made suggestions to use aircraft as a means of bringing the Kukis into subjugation at the earliest. However, the plan was later abandoned due to the problem of landing facilities or places in the hills.\textsuperscript{107}

In the historic war, the British suffered overwhelming losses in resources militarily and financially in addition to the loss of their pride. Their gross under-estimation of the Kukis who could unite themselves under the face of common enemy, was a wrong judgement and a wrong analysis which embarrassingly brought them to two full years of ignominious political quagmire, military agonies and total administrative chaos. In order to bring the Kukis to a forceful subjugation the British Government spent more than 20 lakhs of rupees.\textsuperscript{108} In this war, the British authorities under the direct and overall command of Brigadier General Macquoid and General Sir. H.Keary pressed into service the strength 2,400 Riflemen in addition to 3,000 Riflemen of Burma Military Police (BMP) in different areas or sector of the war.\textsuperscript{109} There were also 8,300 transport coolies and other non-combatants engaged in the war.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{105} Shakespear; op. cit. p.213.
\textsuperscript{106} Despatch on the Operation, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{107} Memorandum of Proceedings of a Conference held at Government House, Shillong. on the 28th Dec. 1917. Assam Secretariat No. 1432-W. 1918. See also (Lal Dena’s Modern Manipur, p.130.)
\textsuperscript{108} R. Reid; op.cit. p. 88.
\textsuperscript{109} Shakespear. ibid, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{110} Political Department - 1917 “Burma-Assam Frontier” – Disturbances among Kuki tribesmen in Manipur. pp 1-4
As noted earlier the areas occupied by the Kukis are widely scattered all over Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram etc. in India and beyond its frontiers in Bangladesh and Myanmar (Chin Hills). Each area is under the control of respective chiefs who were the senior clan head among the tribesmen of the Kukis.

A. The Eastern Sector or Chassad Area: In this area, the Kuki warriors were placed under the command of Pache, chief of Chassad, assisted by Paokholen Chief of Bongbal Khullen and Paboi, Chief of Sita.111 Besides, the Chief of Molvailup, Khotuh, Phaisat (Phunygar) and Maokot and Bongbal were the other important leaders in the area112 (See Map-VI).

As a challenge to the British troops they used to sing:

"Phaipi tuol kon Sapsepai,
Atui Nganam dung kuna,
Huonthing jian senge" 113

Free translation: -
Saheb’s army from Imphal,
Nganam river source,
I’ll pile you up as stacks!

Sheer bravery and fortitude is displayed here in this song. Then, in the middle of March 1918, a 150 strong force of Assam Rifles under the command of Capt. Coote along with Lt. Parry and Mr. Higgins and a column of Burma Military Police under the command of Captam Patricot marched together to attack Chassad (Kamjong), which was the principal fort of Pache114 called Chassad Kulpi. Along with the other chiefs, Pache put a stiff resistance against the invading forces. During the fierce fighting that ensued, several casualties were inflicted and resulted in the killing of Lt. Molesworth.115 The British strategy had failed and the column had suffered losses, which compelled them from retreating from the Chassad Stockade, the British Column proceeded to Chattik and Maokot, where Capt. Coote had one man killed and six

---

112. Ibid.
114. Shakespear; op. cit. p.225.
115. Ib. i.
CHASSAD AREA / EASTERN SECTOR (Now Ukhrul District)
Showing the places connected with this history

Map - VI

Map not to scale

- Movement of British Forces
- Villages of Kuki Chiefs actively involved
- Places where fighting occurred
wounded including Lt. Kay Mauyat who was inflicted seriously. The attempt to capture Pache failed and he made his escape to the Somra hills.

With this failure on the one hand and the Kuki warriors gaining strength on the other, the situation became very tense. Suspense, fear psychosis, tensions and rumours of attack and war were afloat. Panic, unrest and nervousness reigned in Imphal. Anarchy existed in the hill areas. The Maharaja of Manipur Churachand Singh on May 22nd 1918 sent a letter to W.A. Cosgrave, the Political Agent of Manipur. The state of anarchy got extended in the neighbouring Hills beyond Manipur and even to the unadministered areas of Somra Tracts. And as the civil administration could not cope up with the situation the Army took over (the war) in Nov. 1918. Brigadier General Machquoid and Gen. Sir Keary commanded with a 5,400 strong force from British Burma and India.

Though the Kukis fought hard they could not withstand the combined forces of the British and their superior weapons. Thus, they were ultimately overrun by the British forces.

**B. North Eastern Hills:** These areas were commanded by Chengjapao, Chief of Aisan village covering the north eastern areas of Manipur, parts of Naga Hills and Somra Tracts (See Map-V) He was assisted by Nguljalen Singson, Chief of Kanjang and Sumang Singson of the same village. Aisan was well fortified and a good number of arms and ammunitions was also stored. Having learnt that Chengjapao was taking shelter at Kanjang his neighbouring village, the 3rd Assam Rifles under Col. Burrow marched to Kanjang Camp. The Kuki warriors under the command of Haolun Lotjem laid ambush to the contingent in which the British Officer

---

117. 'The Sangai Express' - March 18th 2004 issue, p. 2.
118. Ibid.
120. *Chengjapao was born on 4th March, 1865 at AISHAN LOKCHAO located at Saikul sub-division. Senapati Dist, Manipur. Much before the war with the British, Chengjapao migrated and established a village called Aishan located in the Somra Tract. After the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-19 he shifted again to his native and original village - where he died in 28th August 1928.
121. K. Kipgen, op.cit. p. 62.
was killed. The forces then retreated and encamped at Kharasom. To commemorate the
incident Haolun composed a song which became very popular –

"Kawkeipa bang tonglama,
Chawi gong khaving veicha mangpa lhang bongnang
Kasielle, Gamsihwi bang kale lonsah ngawn ne."

_Free translation:_
Like a lion I hold a gun and block the path,
As I lay down the glorious foreigners,
Like water his troops flow back.

This song speaks volumes about the heroic deeds of individuals who attained mythical
heights and awesome respect for their bravery in the Kuki community.

After re-enforcements, later the Assam Rifles resumed their attack and captured Kanjang.
Chengiapao however, made his escape to Vahong. There were also fierce-fighting in other Kuki
villages including Aisan. But owing to shortage of ammunitions and hardships faced by the
people, who were greatly terrorized by the enemy troops, their leader Chengiapao was compelled
to surrender to Lt. Parry on the 23rd of August, 1918.

**C. Lonpi Area or South Eastern Hills:** For operation in this area, the British made Pallel and
Sugnu its supply base. These two places were strongly stockaded and provisions and other
necessities for the soldiers were stored sufficiently. The prominent Kuki chiefs who led the war
against the British in this area are (See Map- VII): - i) Ngulkhup, Chief of Lonpi, ii) Ngulbul,
Chief of Longya iii) Tunjang of Mueltom, iv) Toitung-Semkhothong and his cousin
Thongkhopao, Chief of Aibol v) Doungul Taithul, Chief of Gotengkot, and vi) Mansom Baite.
Chief of Maipi. The British military officers who were actively involved in this sector were

---

122. Thangkhochon; op. cit. pp. 91-92.
123. Political Department, Poll. Br. No. 6310P, 1919 in a letter from J.E. Webster I.C.S. Secy. to the Commissioner of
Assuam; to Secretary to the Government of India. p.6.
124. _Despatch on the operation_, p.15.
125. Ibid., p.16.
Map - VII
LONPI AREA (Chandel District)
Showing the places connected with this history

Map not to scale
notably Capt. Coote, Capt. Steadman, Lt. Tuker and and few others.

Beginning from September 1917, the British continued their operation at different intervals up to the end of April 1919 till the surrender and final confiscation of their guns. The Kuki warriors put a stiff resistance against the British forces. Even after an extremely hard and difficult operation for five weeks the British could not subdued the Kukis. As such joint operation with the assistance of Burma’s Military Police was called in to fight against them. The prolonged fighting in this area led the war spread to Kabaw valley and Chin Hills. Ultimately the British forces gained the upper hand. They destroyed and burnt down Lonpi, Longya, Aihang, Khengnoi, Somtal and several other villages. The Kuki warriors laid ambushed to the British forces commanded by Capt. Coote at Letkholen and Khailet village. Serious fighting also ensued in Haika and Tolbung with Burma Military Police entering Lanacot base (See Map-VII). During the course of war, Ngulbul the Chief of Longya was killed in action. With his death the strength of the Kukis was greatly reduced and their morale was severely affected. Later in March 1919, Capt. Coote led a large contingent of British forces for the third time. Consequently, many of the leaders were captured and disarmed. Lt. Rundle, who always maintained a close vigil on the movements of Ngulkhup, the most prominent leader in the area, eventually brought him to a forceful surrender in Burmese (Myanmar) territory of Tamu. It was a pyrrhic victory for the British forces against incessant Kuki guerilla warfare. Both sides suffered heavy casualties as the battles were fought in full intensity.

D. Henglep Area (The Southern Sector): As in the other parts, the war spread in this area covering the whole of the present day Churachandpur district of Manipur. In this area, the

129. Ibid.
130. Ibid, p.65.
132. Despatch on the operation, p.16.
133. Despatch on the operation, p.16.
Map-VIII

HENGLEP AREA
(Presently Churachandpur District)
Showing the places connected with this history

Map not to scale

- Boundary International
- State
- District
- Sub-Division
- District Headquarters
- Sub-Divisional Headquarters
- Road
- River

Movement of British Forces

○ Villages of Kuki Chiefs actively involved
★ Places where fighting occurred
Kukis were led by their chiefs notably – i) Pakang Haokip, Chief of Henglep, ii) Semchung Haokip, Chief of Ukha, iii) Semkholun Haokip, Chief of Loikhai, iv) Goulun Manlun, Chief of Hengtam, v) Langjachin Manlun, Chief of Behiang, vi) Tongjalet Haokip, Chief of Teiseng, vii) Semthong Haokip, Chief of Songpi, viii) Vungjalen Hangshing, Chief of Mongken, ix) Haoneh Haokip, Chief of Nabil and x) Paosum, Chief of Songphu (See Map-VIII).

In this area, the Zous and the Thadou Kukis fought unitedly in defence of their freedom and territory. They successfully kept the British forces at bay as long as their supply could last. At Ukha, where it was strongly stockaded by the Kukis, there were twelve hours of continuous fighting between the Kuki warriors under the command and leadership of Pakang and Semchung and the British column under Maj. Coote. The advances of the British Column was effectively checked by the Kuki warriors. In this desperate situation, a large military contingent was sent under Capt. Goodal and Lt. Carter in Feb. 1918. Thereafter, the stronghold of the Kuki fighting militias such as Henglep, Ukha, Hengtam and Chongjang was overrun by the British Column. After a few days of Pakang’s surrender, Semchung was also captured and and their strongholds were reduced to ashes by the British forces.

E. North-West Area: This area was sub-divided into two political zones of a) Jampi Area and b) North-Silchar Road Area. While the former was put under the command of Capt. C.E. Montefiore, the latter was put under the command of Maj. H.D. Marshal with the assistance of Lt. Walker and Capt. Copeland with their respective Columns entering the area from different directions. As in other parts of the hills, the ‘Thadou-Kuki’ well armed militias put forth a

134. Ibid., p. 17.
136. T.S. Gangte, Anglo-Kuki War, Ibid;
137. K.Kipgen, op.cit. p. 57.
139. Despatch on the Operation, p. 17
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid., pp. 17-18
strong resistance against the British forces. In many places serious fighting ensued of which mention may be made of Loibol, Leimatak, Khoupum, Khimuching, Laijang, Dulen, Kanakin, Sangnao and Zoupi\textsuperscript{143} (See Map-IX). Both sides seemingly suffered in terms of men and property. With the successful breaking up of the ‘rebel’ concentration at Kolkang by the four Columns of the British soldiers the defeat of the Kukis appeared imminent.\textsuperscript{144} The Chief of Jampi were also captured.

Towards the end of a long drawn battle, the weary and exhausted Kuki militiamen could not check the perennial inflow of the British troops. Thereafter, almost all the rebel villages of importance like Dulen, Bunning, Taloulong, Somapuram, Laijang (Tamenglong Hqr.) etc. were burnt down by the British. And with the capture of the three most wanted chiefs namely Tintong of Laiyang, Enjaklhop Kholhou of Thenjang, and Heljashon of Loibol\textsuperscript{145} by the British forces under the command Lt. Walker and Capt. Copeland, along sustained war came to an end in this area. Consequently, the Western hills of Manipur were thoroughly brought into forceful subjugation. Despite their defeat the Kukis were exploiting positively their talents and expertise with a sense of patriotism and absolute dedication.

Amid extensive loss and suffering on the part of the entire Kuki community as well as on the side of the British, the Anglo-Kuki war came to an official close on the 20\textsuperscript{th} May 1919.\textsuperscript{146} It was an event of historical significance not only for the Kukis but also for the people of Manipur and British Burma as well. It was the finest hours for the Kukis because of the very fact that the military might of the British Empire was kept at bay for two full years by the Kuki militiamen.

\textsuperscript{143} Sanajaoba’s Manipur; op. cit. p. 121.
\textsuperscript{144} Despatch on the operation, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{145} Despatch on the Operation, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{146} See “Sangai Express”, Dec. 20\textsuperscript{th} 2003, p. 2.
JAMPI AREA
(Presently Tamenglong Dist.)
Showing the places connected with this history

Map not to scale

- Movement of British Forces
- Villages of Kuki Chiefs actively involved
- Places where fighting occurred
In retrospect we find that the Kukis had resorted to attacking the British expeditionary troops in different forms such as fighting enemy in open battle, laying ambuses, stone or booby-traps and of course, most often guerrilla tactics. They had always attacked their enemy in small numbers but with stunning outputs. They always spread their warriors to a greater logistical field of operations, thereby confusing the war-office of the British as to the real number of Kuki militias and therein successfully stretching the limited resources and man power. The manner in which the Kukis countered the approaching British Columns at various places were at most the same. They would snarl the unwary British Columns into a narrow pass and cut loose the netted big stones called SONGKHAI along the steep rocky hill, thereby surprising them with deadly enterprising tactics. The Columns were then made to face a well-directed volleys of incessant gun shots forcing them to run helter-skelter. Most often, the British Columns faced the attack from Kuki Militiamen with their own homemade leather canons called PUMPI. Therefore, the Kuki musketeers would pick them off methodically from vantage position with maximum returns. These Kuki warriors were arguably the first regular snipers in the history of Manipur. One of the remarkable military tactics was that the Kuki militias would always either pick off or target the British and Indian Officers commanding the troops so as to demoralize the army who invariably would remain leaderless and confused.

It is significant to note here that the fight against the Kuki militias was an absolute and logistical nightmare for the British and Indian field commanders and inexperienced officers. In spite of that the British won victory over the ill-equipped Kuki tribesmen who challenged the

147. Ibid.
148. SONGKHAI: - Literally ‘SONG’ means ‘stone’ and ‘KHAI’ means ‘hanging’. It is a trap device of hanging a big basketful of stones by means of cane or ropes tied on a big tree and placed on the slope of a steep hill where a small footpath is leading up. When the enemy was approaching the narrow pass or ascending the steep hill, the rope of ‘Songkhri’ was cut so that it killed the persons as the big stone rolled down over them.
149. Shakespere, op. cit. p.25.
former in the world of warfare. Certainly, it was a pyrrhic victory for the British who paid a heavy price for that. Evidently, it was best recorded by W.J. Shakespear who himself was directly involved in the overall military operation, which nothing could be truer than this description as,

“It (Anglo-Kuki War) grew therefore into the largest series of military operations conducted on this side of India since the old expeditionary days of Generals Penn and Symonds and Tregear in the late eighties, or the futile Abor Expedition of 1911-12, eclipsing them all in casualties and arduousness of active service. During these operations all the advantage lay with the active scantily-clad Kukis,… who are adept at guerrilla and jungle warfare.”

Besides, the Anglo-Kuki war was perhaps the longest, largest and costliest military operation in the whole of India since the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The British Indian government threw in all their resources to finally bring the resilient and martial race - Kukis, to forceful subjugation. Thus, an attempt to belittle such great historical event in as far as the military history of British India and Burma is concerned, it would tantamount to committing a serious mistake leading to non-recognition of a truly great moment in the history of British India.

5. TOWARDS THE CLOSE OF THE WAR:

The Kukis fought the war bravely and endured numerous and untold sufferings, miseries and repression before, during and after the war. The Kuki chiefs and the leaders of the war were imprisoned and punished. Though they were subjected to painful repression it was not the end. In the aftermath of the war, all their guns were seized and those villages suspected to have been involved in abetting and sheltering the so-called ‘Rebels’ during the war were burnt down. The
destruction of property was extended to grains and livestock as well.\textsuperscript{153} (See table) Consequently people suffered stoically and endured.

A. War trials: While some of the Kuki chiefs and commanders were killed in action some of them were either captured or forced to surrender.\textsuperscript{154} They were put under trial for waging war against the British by an Advisory Tribunal under Regulation III of 1818.\textsuperscript{155} Twelve leading Kuki chiefs, who were earlier detained in Kohima Jail were later sent to SADIYA Jail in Assam with prison sentence ranging from 5 to 20 years.\textsuperscript{156} While another eleven Kuki chiefs who were earlier detained in Homalin Jail were sent to TAUNGGYI Jail in Burma (Myanmar) under the same terms and conditions as those of the former. But with the restoration of peace and normalcy in the state and due to the Government of India’s decision of “Policy of Clemency” which was “both called for and justified,” they were released after three years.\textsuperscript{157} In this way, the captured or surrendered Kuki chiefs and their leaders were put on trial for waging war against the British Emperor.

B. The Aftermath: We find some data regarding the casualties among the troops and ‘Transport carriers’ quite significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The casualties in Assam Rifles were:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Killed in action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded in action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died of disease contracted on service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On the Burma side, the casualties were:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Killed in action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded in action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above tables shows that the total number of British soldiers and ‘Transport carriers’

\textsuperscript{153} Shakespear, op. cit. p. 236.
\textsuperscript{154} SOUVENIR of ‘KUKI REBELLION’ – 1985, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{155} Letter No. 5019 1/A From Deputy Secy. to the Govt. of India to Hon.’ble Mr.J.E. Webster. C.I.EChief Secy. To the Hon’ble Chief Commissioner of Assam. Poll. Deptt. Sec. Dated 11-02-1920.
\textsuperscript{156} For & Poll. Deptt. Sec. 1. 1920. Pros. 4-12, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{157} S. Kipgen, Colonialism, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{158} Shakespear, op. cit. p. 237.
Total troops employed on “Kuki Punitive Measures”. (See table)

The table shows that about 14,580 persons including combatants, non-combatants and ‘Transport carriers’ were employed by the British on the so-called “Kuki Punitive Measures”. The break-up of which are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Combatants</th>
<th>British Officers</th>
<th>British other ranks</th>
<th>Indian Officers</th>
<th>Indian other ranks</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>677</strong></td>
<td><strong>696</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transport Carriers</th>
<th>British Officers</th>
<th>British other ranks</th>
<th>Indian Officers</th>
<th>Indian other ranks</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3,050</td>
<td>3,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>4,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td><strong>7,650</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,650</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result achieved by troops employed on “Kuki Punitive Measures”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A) Villages:</th>
<th>Surrendered</th>
<th>140</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnt</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deserterd</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>282</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) Guns obtained</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Kukis killed</td>
<td></td>
<td>120 (This is an estimated figure. Details of killed or wounded are not obtainable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Mithuns destroyed</td>
<td></td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(E) Permanent posts established</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 (Including 1 reserve base)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F) Miles of track prepared</td>
<td></td>
<td>752</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

159. Despatch on the Operation, in Appendix I, p.23
160. Despatch on the Operation – in Appendix III, p.26
who died due to wounds, injuries and other war related deaths during the course of the operation was thus recorded officially as 468 and with 151 wounded soldiers. Besides, the military operations on the Kukis have shown that hundreds of British Military Officers from the lowest rank officer to the rank of Brigadier General were involved actively.

It is significant to note here that while the British paid a terrible price for their victory, the Kukis too suffered a great loss in terms of men and property. The Kukis realized that the war was an inevitable outcome of their deeds and therefore, had to pay the price honourably for the protection of their freedom and their prestige. During and after the war, the British behaved in the most vindictive manner and let loose a reign of terror on the Kukis. For years together they had to face a sort of concentration camp-like life at Ningal, Tengnoupal, Bongmol, Lonpi and Nungba, where they were heavily repressed.\(^{161}\) They were subjected to free and forced labour and tortured at will. As a result many men both young and old became susceptible and succumbed to diseases. In every respect, the loss of life on the part of the Kukis might perhaps be no less than that of the government, though the exact figure of dead and wounded on the side of the Kukis are not available.

About the confiscation of guns the above figures do not tally with the records of Shakespear, who gave 970 in case of Manipur and 600 in case of Burma (Total =1500).\(^{162}\) In any case the figure was expected to be much more than this. The British also set up permanent posts at various strategic places in the hills. Besides, roads were constructed and opened for traffic within and outside Manipur. In this construction work too, the Kuki villagers were subjected to free and forced labour by the colonial authorities much against their will \(^{163}\) This shows of the continued and relentless repression even after the war.

---

162. Shakespear, op.cit. p.236.
163. Ibid.
C. Reasons for the defeat of the Kukis: The defeat of the Kukis is attributed mainly to the following reasons:-

a) The combined forces of British India and British Burma proved too strong for the Kukis.

b) Unlike the Kukis, the British forces had the advantage of superior weapons and abundant manpower. The Kukis depended on their own country-made weapons, which were not only insufficient but also proved ineffective when it was needed most.

c) The British military contingents enjoyed supply of rations without any interruption during the course of the war; whereas the warring Kukis who depended for consumption only on their own local products. As such they often ran short of food supply when the war was extended beyond two cropping seasons.

d) The Kukis fought the war alone without the support of their fellow countrymen. Had they got support from their Naga and Meitei counter parts and launched a joint opposition as planned in the beginning, the result of the war would have been different and quite consequential; and

e) Lastly, there were few people among the Kukis and the Nagas who had served as informers and guides to the British warring troops. This was tantamount to serious acts of betraying one’s own countrymen. Even the role of the people of Manipur at large appeared not favourable towards the movement. They had sided with the British forces in subjugating the Kukis. It was the politics of self-aggrandisement.

Brave as they were, the Kukis remained steadfast to their decision and fought the war valiantly by themselves without any assistance from others. They went through all the sufferings

164. In the initial stage all tribals of Manipur irrespective of Kukis and Nagas made efforts for opposition to the British. Eventually, the Nagas also held a meeting at HUINING, a Tangkhul village in Ukhrul district on 21st March 1917 and decided not to oblige the British’s request for sending recruits for a labour corps. However, most Nagas developed cold feet and thereafter, the main burden fell on the Kuki chiefs who remained steadfast to their decision of waging war against the British. See also (A.K. Ray, p.71.)

of the war and lost honourably. They stood for the honour of the country and not just for local considerations like some other communities who could not rise to the needs of the country.

6. IMPACT ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF MANIPUR

The Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19 was a watershed in the administration of Manipur. The administration of the hill areas was transformed. The British authority started taking more vigorous administrative steps in the hills. A policy of ‘administrative decentralisation’ was adopted. The hill areas of Manipur were consequently divided into four sub-divisions, one being directly administered by the President of Manipur State Durbar.\textsuperscript{166} The other three sub-divisions which was opened after the war were manned by European or \textit{quasi}-European officers mostly drawn from Assam Civil Service (ACS) cadre. They were as follows: -

i) The South-West area with headquarter at Churachandpur was left to the charge of B.C. Gasper. It covers the areas west of the Manipur river and includes the Manhlun Manchong, Ukha and all areas stretching southwards from Silchar bridle path to the Lushai Hill border, for checking free mobility of the Kuki’s to avoid recurrence of the Kuki movement.

ii) The North-West area with headquarter at Tamenglong was left to the charge of William Shaw for better control of the Kukis against the Kabuis and other Nagas;

iii) The North-East area with headquarter at Ukhrul was left to the charge of Lt. Peters with a view to intercepting free mobility of the Kukis in the area; and

iv) besides, a large area comprising north of Manipur State including the Mao and Maram Naga groups, the whole of Mombi (Lonpi) areas in the South-East and the various tribes of hills bordering the valley continued to be administered directly from Imphal under the President of the State Durbar.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{166} Administrative Report of Manipur State, 1919-20, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{167} Administrative Report of Manipur State, 1919-20, p. 2.
Under the new rules it was laid down that the President of Manipur State Durbar had the power equivalent to the District magistrate and so also the Sub-divisional officers (SDO) had powers equivalent to the sub-divisional Magistrates. Appeals in the civil and criminal cases against the order of SDOs would lie with the Political Agent. In civil cases no appeal was allowed against the order of the President of Manipur State Durbar.  

Thus, the Maharaja and the State Durbar were completely practically eliminated in the administration of the hill areas. It is clear that the Durbar exercised no direct control but from time to time it tried to claim their indirect control through its power over the budget. It shows that only in theory that the tribal people were under the Government of Maharajah. The exclusion of the Maharaja’s authority was so complete and thorough that the tribal people tended to forget that they were the subjects of the State of Manipur. In short, the hill people were given separate status though they were theoretically within the political state boundaries of Manipur. This was done in order to prevent the rise of any movement like the ‘Kuki Rebellion’ or the like in future. A long tradition of friendship and allies between the Manipuris and the Kukis also came to an end due to British intervention in their relationship. The policy of ‘Divide and rule’ had been once again enforced.

It may be noted here that the Anglo-Kuki war brought to light the defects of existing system of administration. It must also be noted that the relationship of the Meiteis with that of the tribals who lived in the surrounding hills of the valley was punctuated by periodical outrage, massacre and exaction of tributes. In such situations, there was no question of extending or establishing modern system of administration in the hill areas either by the Maharaja or the British. The Maharaja of Manipur was rightly blamed for neglecting development in the

169. T. Neihssial; op. cit, p. 66.
171. R. Reid, op. cit. p.88.
hill areas. In this connection the Governor of Assam, Reid, observed that, “Even after 1891 there was no proper administration of the hill tribes and no provision for them in the budget.”

Further, Reid observed that the outbreak of Anglo-Kuki war was due to the indifferent attitude of Maharaja of Manipur towards the Kukis and contended that,

“Neglect of their interest and lack of touch between them and the administration came to a head in the Kuki Rebellion of 1918, which cost the Government of India nearly twenty lakhs of rupees, and the hill tribes and forces engaged a large number of lives.”

The British authorities assumed the administration of the hill tribes after the Anglo-Kuki war and established their direct control over the latter. They justified their action on the ground that only by maintaining a decent standard of administration can peace be preserved. The British knew that there were certainly genuine grievances and abuse behind the immediate cause of the war. Consequently, the Kukis in particular and the hill tribes in general were brought under intensified administrative and political control of British Imperial power. However, it is apparently absurd to say that despite fighting war with the Kukis, the British championed the cause of the former and established their direct administration over the tribals by opening three more sub-divisional offices in hills on the plea that,

“History shows that Manipuris cannot and will not give the hills an administration of the standard to which they are both entitled and now accustomed.”

Thus, the motive of the British administration to keep the tribes divided and to create “a barrier of wall” between the hill men and the plainsmen was achieved. The Kukis were then

175. R. Reid, Ibid.
177. Secretary to the Governor of Assam’s Letter No. 93 dt. 22 April 1919 to the Government of India. See also (R. Reid op. cit. p. 89.)
brought into closer observation. Their chiefs had to function under the wings of the new bureaucratic administration machinery. In short, the chiefs became tributaries to the British system of administration. However, in doing so, the traditional right of the chiefs and the customary laws were protected as far as the village administration is concerned. Thus, the strong hill administration became the visible impact of the Anglo-Kuki War. British policy also revealed that the Maharaja of Manipur had neither the will nor any inclination for the development of hills. In fact the Maharaja had been silenced into acquisition with the conferment of the title of Maharaja. They also did not have enough forces or strategy to bring the people of the hill to a negotiating table and solve the issues arising as aftermath of the Anglo-Kuki war. The integrated social fabric of Manipur thus got fractured and fractionalised. A frustrated and outmanouvered society remained no match for the cunning and cleverly executed policies of the British. It was indeed a sad state of affairs in Manipur, which did not auger well for the coming years. The politics in Manipur got manipulated ever since the Anglo-Kuki war. A section of the common masses always remained suppressed and deprived of welfare measures and any State’s help.

7. BRIEF ANALYSIS

While reviewing the Anglo-Kuki war in its right perspective one cannot overemphasise their unity and solidarity due to influence of their cultures and tradition. While giving comments, Higgins\(^\text{178}\) himself admitted his own miscalculation in underestimating the Kukis and apologised for his lack of understanding of their social system which enabled the Kukis to combine and fight their enemies in such a manner of patriotism proving themselves to be what Captain Lewin described as “powerful and independent” people. D.K. Palit has also commented that, “the Kukis proved a formidable foe” as staunch in battle as “the British themselves could be.”\(^\text{179}\)

---

179. Palit, op. cit. p. 82.
During the war the Kuki chiefs in great sense of unity exhibited courage, wisdom and virtues of unity despite many odds. The cultural and traditional ties were so strong that by burying their petty differences they could face the might of the British in the world of warfare that surprised all concerned despite suffering a humiliating defeat and subsequent subjugation. They proved that they could stand united to a challenge posed by the British. The Anglo-Kuki war cannot be portrayed as insignificant nor played down in the History of India's freedom struggle. It is not simply a war fought against Assam Rifles and Burmese Military Police but against the British colonialism and imperialism. It cannot be dismissed as mere 'skirmish' or a 'sporadic uprising' by a section of tribesmen inhabiting the eastern corner of India. It was in fact a full-fledged war with the involvement of soldiers of British India, British Burma and of the Maharaja of Manipur. When the civil administration failed to control the Kuki menace, the colonial authority decided to tackle them militarily and handed over the entire operation to the army. However, the British Government tried to belittle and portray it as a mere rebellion and not a war. The true accounts of the war was successfully suppressed from the public, which has been clearly revealed in the writings of Shakespeare as,

"Very little was known to the public of these operations; one or two Calcutta papers published short and erroneous account of what they wrote of as outings of political officers and their escorts' and generally belittling a long, hard 'show' carried through eventually to a successful issue by the combined military police force of Assam & Burma."\textsuperscript{180}

It is to be noted here that the Anglo-Kuki war was the result of the highest political decision taken by the forefathers of the Kukis to wage war against the British. It was the culminating event of their opposition to British Government for the protection of their freedom.

\textsuperscript{180} Shakespeare: op. cit. p.235.
and independence. It is also erroneous to assume that the Anglo-Kuki war or the "Khongjai Laan" was a war waged against the Nagas as projected by some unfriendly critics.\textsuperscript{181} Needless to say that in the beginning it was a joint effort of all tribals of Manipur irrespective of Naga or Kuki affiliations to protest against the forcible enrolment of tribals by colonial authorities for a Labour Corps. Even the chief of Jampi had succeeded in getting the help of Naga chieftains of Tanning and Khonoma respectively.\textsuperscript{182} However, when things started unfolding, the 'elements of Naga' for some reasons or the other backed out from the venture and the Kuki chiefs found themselves alone high and dry to face the might of the British. Hence "Kuki Rebellion" or "Kuki Punitive Action," terms were used.

Thus, it is quite clear that the Kukis aimed only at the British Indian Government and determined enough to push through their programme of waging war against the latter. This shows that their prime and only objective was to fight against the British and had nothing to do with the Nagas as such. Of course, unfortunately there were incidents of alleged atrocities meted out to the Kabuis (now Zeliangrong) in the West of Manipur by the Kukis during the course of the war as a result of their past inter-tribal animosity.\textsuperscript{183}

The Anglo-Kuki war had also developed a linkage with Indian National movement. It was suspected that the Bengali seditionist from Sylhet and Cachar sent their emissaries to the Kuki chiefs of the southern clans encouraging them to resist the high handed methods of the British.\textsuperscript{184} It must be noted that after the partition of Bengal, the Bengali nationalists intensified the freedom struggle against the British. The mobilisation of the Kuki chiefs for a war against the British was an extension of National Freedom Struggle of the mainland. Besides, after the

\textsuperscript{181} Source: An article on "INDIAN-BACKED KUKI AND THE NAGA PUBLIC CLASHES", issued by National Socialist Council of Nagaland NSCN (I-M) leaders Isak Chishi Swu - Chairman, and Th. Muivah - Gen. See: (www.nscnonline.org)
\textsuperscript{183} K. Kipgen; op. cit. pp. 52-53, See also (Dena, Modern Manipur: p.131.)
\textsuperscript{184} D.K. Palt; op. cit. p. 62.
first phase of operation against the Kukis, one medical officer at Tamu (Burma) in May 1918, came upon some Sikhs of Burma Military Police in a hut tearing up some papers, which they said, ‘they did not want’. On picking up some of the papers, the Medical Officer found among others, photos of two German, one in uniform. On the back of the photo, these words were written, “If you fall into rebel hands show these and they will not harm you.” This is to imply that the German Intelligence was in contact with the Kuki chiefs, otherwise they could not have written such words. In this connection Lal Dena has observed that, “It is quite possible that the German Intelligence might have infiltrated into the Chindwin valley in Burma and perhaps had some understanding with the Kuki leadership there.”

Similarly, Borpujari has also observed that, “... The German spies had a secret hand in fomenting the rebellion.” This possibility cannot be negated. However, it must have been at low scale since we do not get moe such instances. It can be said with certainty that the Anglo-Kuki war had been an outburst against the British policies and a long drawn deliberate apathetic attitude of the Maharaja of Manipur and his ministers.

Though the Kukis were defeated in the Anglo-Kuki war their discontent against the British did not cow them down. In spite of their untold sufferings during and after the war, their love for freedom and the instinct to fight for it never died in them. Nationalists as they were, they extended unflinching sacrifice for the country. They never lost sight of Indian struggle for freedom and independence that was going on in the mainland, and for that matter the Kukis also contributed their might to it. Thus, the Anglo-Kuki war being a product and effect of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialistic policies, it can also be viewed as making a great contribution.

185. Shakespear; op. cit. p. 236.
188. S.Kipgen, Anglo-Kuki, p.5
to Indian Freedom Struggle. The historical significance of the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-19 lies in the fact that it established strong and valuable local tradition of resistance to the British rule. Later, the freedom struggle of the Kukis drew inspiration from this historic and consequential war. It became a singular opposition to have been raised in the Manipur sector. Anglo-Kuki war gave the Kukis a pride place in the National Freedom Struggle.

Thus, the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19 had marked a critically important stage and undoubtedly would be one of the most remarkable experience in the history and progress of anti-imperialist struggle in Manipur. We feel, it is, in essence, a true war of freedom. And it was fought against the British imperialists, the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-19 has been rightly termed as a war for India’s Independence.\textsuperscript{189} It is also a war for Manipur’s Independence as it was fought by one of its three indigenous groups. It is to be noted that although some historians may like to maintain that the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891 was the last major fight against the British for the independence of Manipur, historical facts reveal another story. It is the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-1919, which ought to be the last war fought against the British for restraining them and driving them out of the country. In retrospect we would like to suggest if only the Nagas and the Meiteis had supported the Kukis in their struggle the story would have been different. But perhaps they didn’t have the political farsightedness to adapt to the National need of the country or for that matter, that of the region itself.

From all the above collaborating facts, it would be unfair to belittle the Anglo-Kuki war (Kuki Rebellion) as a mere rebellion. It would remain as a struggle against the forces of imperialism for upholding one’s political birthright and the assertion of freedom. The Kuki Inn which stands in the heart of Imphal city is a living testimony of brave Kuki warriors (See Fig. 9, p. 202 - 203).

\textsuperscript{189} S. Kipgen, \textit{British Colonialism}, p. 8.
KUKI-INN

MEMORIAL TO OUR FATHERS

WE SOLEMNLY DEDICATE THIS INN TO THE MEMORY OF
THE GALLANT AND PATRIOTIC KUKI FIGHTERS OF THE PRESENT
INDIA AND BURMA, CHIEFS AND COMMONERS, KNOWN AND
UNKNOWN WHO SACRIFICED THEIR ALL AND SUFFERED IMMENSELY
BOTH DURING AND AFTER THEIR WAR FOR FREEDOM FROM THE
BRITISH RULE DURING 1917-19.

WE ARE DEEPLY INDEBTED AND GRATEFUL TO THE
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF
MANIPUR SHRI J. M. RAINA I.A.S. FOR THEIR HELP AND
GUIDANCE IN FULFILLING OUR OBJECTIVE OF RAISING THIS
MEMORIAL.

WE FURTHER PLEDGE OURSELVES TO PRESERVE
FREEDOM, UNITY AND WELL-BEING OF ALL LIVING WITHIN
THIS GREAT COUNTRY OF OURS.

IMPHAL:
17TH NOVEMBER 1963.
THE KUKI TRIBES OF MANIPUR

Fig. 9. (a). A plaque engraved in memory of brave Kuki warriors who fell in
the Anglo-Kuki War (1917-19) at Kuki Inn, Imphal, Manipur
Fig. 9. (b). The Kuki Inn, situated in the heart of the capital of Manipur State, built in honour of the Kuki warriors by the Government of India in 1963.
THE KUKIS AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY (INA)

The struggle of the Kukis for freedom and independence under the British rule in Manipur continued even after their defeat in the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-19. Thus, the Kukis did not change their avowed anti-imperialist stand. They remained on the lookout for opportunities to drive out the British. After the ‘Quit India Movement’ launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1942, the battle for the freedom of India got a new impetus and the fight was now carried beyond its frontiers. It was led by the Indian National Army (INA) and its chief Subhash Chandra Bose who fought together with the Japanese troops against the British.¹⁹⁰

With the outbreak of the World War II in the year 1939, Japan had also joined the war in favour of Germany. By 1942, Japan had occupied almost all areas of South-East Asia and eventually made their advances into the soil of Indo-Burma Frontiers. This situation caused feverish activity among the ‘Chin-Kuki-Mizo’ or ‘Zomi’ population because through their inhabited territories the INA and the Japanese forces were to invade the British power.¹⁹¹

Subhas Chandra Bose sought collaboration with the Axis Powers (the Japanese) in pursuit of his goal for the liberation of India.¹⁹² Significantly, the Kukis too, quickly responded to his call. The Kukis had then found a common cause and a goal. So, they extended unflinching support to the INA and the Japanese forces.¹⁹³ They considered the opportunity as a great challenge for another war against the British. In fact, the very mention of the name of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, the INA and the Japanese forces was enough to electrify the Kukis who had so long been smarting under a sense of revenge.¹⁹⁴ Besides, the appealing words of the air-dropped INA pamphlets signed by Netaji spread all over the hills of Manipur was a welcome

¹⁹¹ T. Neilssad, op.cit. p. 67.
¹⁹² Dena, Modern Manipur, p.174.
¹⁹⁴ Ibid.
development for the Kukis.\textsuperscript{195}

The Kukis welcomed the arrival of the Japanese and the INA troops. They eventually joined the rest of India in the struggle against the British. The accorded welcome shown to the INA and the Japanese forces is evidently reflected in an immensely popular song, called LAKOIL-\textit{LA}, which came into currency since 1942. It reflects the sentiments of the Kukis then. It resounds the sense of freedom and liberty and the unlimited happiness, boundless as the skies reverberating the sound of the planes. The joyous mood, the indomitable spirit, the love and respect are all reflected in the song.

\begin{verbatim}
Thellou koljiang toni lep banna,
Ging deng deng' e Japan lenna huilen kong.

Pego Lhemhei saigin bang,
Mao ding deng' e van thanjol Japan lena.

Anao deng deng' e Japan lenna mongmo,
Vailou kon sunsot selung hem tante.

Atwi theikhong tabang ging ding deng,
Gin deng deng' e Japan lenna huilen konggin.\textsuperscript{196}
\end{verbatim}

Free translation: -

Beyond the hills from an unknown land,
floats the sweet humming sound of Japanese planes.

Like the musical notes of the ‘lute’,
Flying high in the blue sky.

The sweet melodic hum of the Japanese planes,
Sets the lone farmer’s heart at melancholy.

Like the sweet melody of the water-mill,
Floats the sweet humming sound of the Japanese planes.

In this regard Paokhohang writes, “This song was so popular amongst the Kukis that

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{196} P.S. Haokip, pp.198-199, See also (Kuki Rebellion, Souvenir, 1985 p 30.)
almost all of them irrespective of age or sex used to sing it, particularly the youths used to spend
their days, humming this sweet note”. The song got so deeply rooted in their spirit that threats
of bitter punishment or intimidation by the Britishers to those who sang the song failed to
produce any effect.197 The action reminds us of the ban imposed on singing “Bande Mataram ...”
by the nationalist and patriotic Indians. It was a reunion of the spirit, which had found echo in
the hearts of millions and millions of people across India.

As early as in May 1943, the invading Japanese forces entered into the Chin Hills and
eventually occupied the area despite strong resistance from the local people. Then after crushing
the 17th Division of the British army, the Japanese forces pushed through in three directions:

i) Towards the west bank of Chindwin river;

ii) The Tamu area; and

iii) Midway between Imphal-Kohima roads (See Map-X).

The focal objective of the Japanese forces was to beleaguer Imphal and gain mastery
over the Imphal plains.198 When the INA soldiers arrived at the frontiers of Manipur in 1944
some of the Kukis joined hands with them and served in intelligence as reporters, guides,
sepoys and others. The knowledge of the topography of the area by the Kukis was of great help
to the INA and Japanese forces, during the crossing of the inhospitable jungle terrain especially
in Manipur and Naga Hills.199

Netaji and his INA with the slogan “Chalo Delhi” marched towards Delhi from Singapore
by crossing Burma border. On the 14th April 1944, the INA under the leadership of Col. S.A.
Malik hoisted the Tri-colour flag for the first time on the sacred soil of liberated area at Moirang
(Manipur).200 In fact the soil of “Moirang” was sanctified by the blood and tears of the

---
198. Vamkhohau; op. cit. p. 28.
199. P.S. Haokip; op. cit. p. 196.
Map - X
War Operation (1943 - 44) in Burma and Assam
(From Slim)

Courtesy: Suhas Chatterjee
Indo-Japanese forces. A fierce battle was fought between the combined INA-Japanese forces and the British at Moirang, Bishnupur and other places. The local people had also voluntarily extended their support and assistance to the Indo-Japanese forces in terms of food supply and other essential materials. They even worked in the intelligence group to collect and pass on information’s of war which was the need of the hour. Thus, a large number of Manipuris were also involved on the side of Indo-Japanese forces.

The Kukis put their whole lot with the Japanese. Palit maintains that some Gorkhas disguised as Kukis were successful in returning from their confinements successfully. He informs us:

“Typical of these returning parties (of Gurkhas) was one under N.K. Kalur Gurung. who returned with four riflemen all disguised as Kukis. The NCO and his four men had been captured by the Japanese at the start of the offensive but managed to escape.... They then brought Kuki clothes from the villagers and once in disguise tried to make their way back through the Japanese lines....”

The Japanese and the INA troops fought the war at different fronts but as the war went on the tide of the war turned against the Axis Power in Europe and in the Pacific. They began retreating. In fact, the Japanese forces lost the war to the British forces in India and British Burmese forces. The failure of the Japanese army at Imphal to make any headway ruled out all possibilities of success for the INA. It also decisively gave a set back to Bose’s plan of liberating India. Being hard-pressed, everywhere, by the war situation, the INA Regiments retreated towards Chindwin (Burma). But in its retreat the hope of the Kukis also ebbed. It gave rise to a difficult situation. The Kukis were in dilemma.

201. Ibid, p. 65.
203. Palit, op. cit. p. 143.
204. K.K. Ghosh; op. cit. p. 181
The retreat has been described as “one of the most difficult retreats that any army in the world had to face.” The Kukis who preferred to retreat along with INA followed them as far as Burma where many of them died of disease, hunger and in action. Many of them were also arrested by the British troops and were sent to INA Prisoners’ Jail in Calcutta. Among the list of prisoners we find the names of some brave Kukis. They were - (i) Lamkhothang Haokip of Vajang, (ii) Lekhthothingh Lhundim of Dampi, (INA No. AZ85132 Sepoy), (iii) Semkhothao Haokip of Ukha (Loikhai) (INA No. 5174 Rank Civilian movement order No. I.A.O. 67/45 arrested in Rangoon and imprisoned at EAGLE KACHA STAGING CAMP CALCUTTA, till the end of the war), (iv) Palet Mate of Lamjang, (v) Lekhthothingh Lhantung of Joupi, (vi) Paokhamang Haokip of Chahsai (Chassad), (vii) Jangkholet Haokip of Na-ang, (viii) Tunghao Haokip of Joujag (Burma), (ix) Onkhamang Haokip of Hengjang (Burma), (x) Toljasei Haokip of Maku, (xi) Jamkholun Haokip of Khengjoi, (xii) Nungkhogin Singson of Songsang, (xiii) Mangkhokai Sithou of Jampi, (xiv) Mangsho Sithou of Dulun, (xv) Thangsavung Neihsiel of Songpjiang, (xvi) Paokholal Tuboi of Kangchup, (xvii) Nungkhupao Neihsiel of Gangpimol, (xviii) Paokhothang Haokip of Phunchong.

With the defeat of the INA and the Japanese forces, the Kukis suffered another setback in their anti-imperialist struggle. They were left high and dry to fend for themselves. The Kuki soldiers and their leaders felt humiliated. Onkholet Haokip (Japan Pakang) retreated along with the Japanese and preferred to follow them even up to Japan, as he could not bear to stay in his own land in the face of enemy’s domination.

205 K.K. Ghosh, op. cit. p. 188. See also Shah Nawaz Khan to Bose, April 1944. The papers of the Defence Counsel of the first INA Court-martial, All India INA Relief and Enquiry Committee, Delhi. According to the official figures of the Indian Army G.H.Q. about 400 INA men were killed in the Imphal Campaign and fifteen hundred died of disease and starvation.


207 Memorandum of the Kuki Political Sufferers Association, Manipur submitted to the Prime Minister of India in December 1958. See also (Souvenir of Kuki Rebellion, 1985 pp.31-32.)

208 Onkholet Haokip was a Kuki chief who developed love and affection with the Japanese soldiers for which he was nicknamed as Japan Pakang. The affix Japan in his nickname Pakang itself suggests a strong bond of relationship or connection with the Japanese. His name is still widely known among elders of the Thadou-Kukis. He followed the Japanese up to Japan during their retreat and refused to come back to his father’s land till its liberation. The story about Japan Pakang is collected from Pu. Mangshipthang Kipgen and confirmed by Pu. Seikho Kipgen on 25th June, 2004. See also (P.S Haokip, p.201).
Though some section of the Kukis had shown loyalty to the British during the war, it was clear enough that the Kuki leadership in Manipur and Burma (Myanmar) gave unflinching support to the INA and the Japanese with the desire of freeing themselves from the yoke of British colonialism. It may also be noted that the Government of Independent India decided to honour the Kuki warriors who had taken part in the war with the title of “Freedom Fighter”. This could also be evidenced from the significant fact that they were the largest group in number in the whole of North East India who were in receipt of “Tamra Pattra” in recognition to their sacrifice as freedom fighter.

The brave Kukis awarded with the honour were - i) Jamthang Haokip, ii) Ot khoesi Haokip, iii) Haojathang Haokip, iv) Jamkhothang Kuki, vi) Semkhopao Haokip, vii) Helkhopao Guite, viii) Ngulkhohem Kuki, ix) Lunhem Kuki, x) Jangkholun Kuki, xi) Achung Kom, xii) Ampu Kom, xiii) Rengba Kom, xiv) Vumkhothang Haokip, xv) Lamkhothang Haokip, xvi) Henjakup Haokip, xvii) Konkhothang Kuki, xviii) Kamhang Mate, xix) Letlun Chongloi, xx) Holkhothang Kuki, xxi) Nguljangam Haokip etc. etc. The participation in the freedom struggle was indeed a magnificent contribution and is recorded in golden letters. Their sacrifice was a supreme sacrifice. Thus, as far as the political history of the Kukis is concerned they must be given their rightful place in India’s freedom struggle for they had contributed their might in no small measure and unequivocal terms for the attainment of India’s independence like any other community in India.

209. The participation of the Kukis in the World War II was due to political reasons, but some section of the Kukis who accepted Christianity remained loyal to their colonial masters. Even they were also influenced by the fact that Christianity was the religion of their conquerors. But to most of the conservative and traditional minded Kuki chiefs and warriors the preaching of a religion of love so far at this stage was anathema to them. This new religion was introduced at a time when the traditional and age-old culture was threatened by the British administration. No wonder, after World War II and by 1950, the Kukis had become one of the major Christian groups in Manipur (F S Down 1971:172) The Kukis accepted Christianity for economic reasons in the beginning.

210. Freedom Fighters Cell/Dept. of Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee MPCC (I) has published a booklet entitled BANDE MATARAM - Freedom Fighters of Manipur who’s who in its Congress Centenary year 1985. Among the 120 JNA pensioners (With their photographs), 75 of them were Kukis. Besides, a booklet was also issued by the JNA Committee in which the names of the recipients were given.

211. Ibid, See also - Memorandum submitted to the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India Shri P V Narasimha Rao by the All India Kuki Women Organisation on Human Rights in the early 1990s, during the Naga-Kuki ethnic tension in Manipur. See also LHANGSAM, June, 2004, Vol. II No.6 p.18 (The monthly bilingual Newsmagazine ed. by Paotinthei Lumpheng.)