Chapter – V

Economic life
CHAPTER V

ECONOMIC LIFE

1. INTRODUCTION

The economic life of the Kukis in general was conditioned by geographical and physical factors on the one hand and by political and socio-cultural institutions on the other. These institutions are closely intertwined with one another since the pre-colonial days. The gift of nature has played the dominant role in shaping and festering the basis of all economic activities of the people. As the early Kuki settlement in Manipur took place in the remote corner of the surrounding hills of Imphal valley, there was a limited scope of contact with the outside world in as far as the economic activities is concerned. No wonder, primitive form of agricultural practices, traditional industry, handicrafts and trade characterises the economic life of the people. It appears that the availability of the forest resources abundantly contributed to the economic prosperity and wealth of the people.

The primitive Kukis earned their living by working hard. In agricultural sector, despite weather uncertainties, almost all the Kuki villages were self-sufficient. As such famines and scarcities of food were believed to be unusual phenomenon. In this background, aspects of their economic life may be considered.

A. The Village Community: A Kuki village is the basis of socio-economic organisation. In a strictly economic sense, the village has been termed as the village community. Through the ages the basic ways of living among the Kuki society is more or less the same. Thus, the village community maintained a continuity of its basic-structure assiduously. The village being self-dependent economic unit, normally enjoyed a self-sufficing existence. Inter-village contacts led the villages to satisfy the mutual needs despite their isolation from the rest of the world. In as far as the conditions and organisation of economy is concerned, the village labour corps organisations kept the village economy self-sufficient and maintained the community life as
dynamic. They also uplifted the economically weak families.

**B. Land use system:** The term ‘land-use’ may be broadly defined as the putting up of a parcel of land into productive purposes. The study of such land use system is as old as agriculture itself. From the earliest times, the hill tribes both Nagas and Kukis practised different land use system in their domain.

In the valley, land belonged to the King and it was under his direct management, whereas the land in the hills belonged to the village Chiefs in the case of Kukis and to the community, in the case of Nagas. Besides, among the Nagas, land was under the management of the Village Council or “Gaon bura” (Village elders).

With regard to the traditional land use system in the valley R. Brown writes,

“the whole land system of the valley starts with the assumption that all land belongs to the Raja and in his, to give away or retain it as he pleases”.

Similarly, among the Kukis the Chief owned the land, which was the primary source of agricultural production and his villagers were on his mercy. Under the chieftainship of the Kukis, land ownership is the exclusive right and prerogatives of the chief in absolute terms. As such individual villagers have no right over the land whatsoever. The Kuki villagers were in complete subservience to their respective chiefs unlike the system prevalent among the Nagas where landownership are allowed to individuals, the collective and to groups etc. with equal rights. Thus, the Kuki Chief reigned supreme with absolutism in contrast to the democratically oriented systems of the Nagas in as far as the land use and ownership system is concerned. The maintenance of the Chief’s power in the case of Kukis would seem to involve economic control

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2. * This term has a historical legacy. It is a distorted form of ‘Gaon Budha’ meaning ‘village elders’ who had wisdom and experience.

over people's everyday lives. With regard to land ownership among the Kukis, Khaikhotnuthang Kipgen writes,

"All the lands belong to the Chief; whether it be a homestead, a jhum field or a wet-paddy field".3

The Chief was all in all in the affairs of the village as has been categorical outlined in the previous chapter of our thesis.

Though the entire land of the village theoretically belonged to the Chief, the village community who shared the land among themselves did the actual cultivation. The general condition, which prevailed among the Kukis from the earliest times, is that the land within the Chiefdom is distributed to the villagers for cultivation. The member of the Chief's council with the approval of the Chief superintend and transact all business matters in connection with the land cultivation, measurement, collection of tax etc.

2. AGRICULTURE

Being hill dwellers the Kukis live in the midst of forest products with abundant blessings of nature. They enjoy natural foods, which are supplemented by agricultural products. In the traditional past they cultivated land in the most primitive form and the only cultivation system practised by them was 'shifting cultivation', which is also known as 'nomadic cultivation', because of its unsettled nature of cultivation. The Kukis were both food gatherers and food producers till recent past. Even today the food gathering aspects have not been totally given up. They are dependent upon natural products for their livelihood.

The culture of Jhum cultivation, has a long historical tradition and antiquity throughout the world. In Manipur Jhum is heavily practised in the areas where the Kukis inhabited

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3. op. cit. p.112.
predominantly than the areas inhabited by their Naga or Meitei counterparts. However, Jhum cultivation is still practised in the hill areas of Manipur primarily because it is predominantly an upland state with almost 92 percent of its total area inhabited by the different tribes who practice the age old “shifting cultivation” for their livelihood. Traditionally, the Kukis were totally dependent on it for their survival.

A. Shifting Cultivation: This traditional system of cultivation is also known as ‘jhuming’ in Assam and Tripura. Anthropologists called the system as “slash and burn” cultivation system. It is also practised in tropical and sub-tropical countries like the tribes in Africa, Indonesia, Philippines etc. Shifting Cultivation is the most primitive form of agricultural practices and is basically labour-intensive. It is a rain fed agricultural practice for economic sustenance to which the Kukis are adapted. They produced everything they needed. It is the most important socio-economic activity among the Kukis and is the only means to meet their essential economic requirement and sustenance. Normally it is an important factor of tribal life style in respect of their ‘land use system’. It served as the economic mainstay. In mainland India Jhum cultivation is now-a-days confined to Uttaranchal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. It is the main occupation of almost all the tribes of the region.

B. Mode of cultivation: It is a cyclic cultivation in which a patch of land is selected in the dense jungle full of trees or bamboos. The Kuki family alone or with the help of labour corps (LAWMPI) used to clear the slope of hills by felling the trees and other vegetations within the specific area. This was done normally during the winter season between November and February.

5. T.S. Gangte’s Seminar paper MUTSU 2001; p.2.
7. B.S.K. Sharma, Shifting Cultivation (Manipur and Nagaland region) National Agro Forestry Seminar, Imphal (Quoted in K. Kipgen’s The Thadou Kukis, p. 113.)
8. Quoted in Dr. D.D. Haokip, I.F.S. ’s seminar paper “Shifting Cultivation and the Tribes of Manipur”, a state level seminar organised by Manipur University Tribal Students’ Union (MUTSU) at M.U. Campus from 27th –28th Feb 2001 (Hereafter, cited as D.D. Haokip’s, MUTSU, 2001)
After having cut all the vegetations down, the debris were allowed to dry for a month or more depending upon the weather conditions and the degree of its dryness. Then the land was cleared by setting fire on it, which burnt off all the debris. It took place in the month of March and April. The felled and dried jungle trees and vegetations are reduced to ashes. In doing so, the upper surface soil is also thoroughly burnt up to an inch or more. This enhances the fertility status. Then having scratched up with the little hoes called TUCHA* (See Fig. 10. p. 216) the soil gets mixed with the ashes, thus, gradually the soil becomes ready for the reception of seed. However, the leftover debris is also cleared to make the land fit for sowing seed. All cultivation is done by manual labour. Cattle are not used in preparing the soil and bringing the products to the village.

It may be pointed out here that the Kukis do not sow their seeds ‘broadcast’ like the Nagas,9 but dig the soil with TUCHA and put in a few seeds and cover them up.10 In as far as the Jhumming cultivation is concerned majority of the Kuki tribes sow their seeds without up-turning the soil.11 After a few days the seeds germinate and during the growing stage of the paddy seedlings, the weeds are removed. Weed cleaning is regular sometimes to the extent of three times before the final harvest.

C. Harvesting system: With the arrival of the harvest season mostly in the month of September and early part of October, the rice crop is then cut down with a sickle and is tied it into bundles with its leaves, and is laid on its stem for a few days. In doing so the paddy bundles get dried up which is then carried to the thrashing-floor especially made for the purpose. Some people even place ‘mat’ made of split canes and bamboos locally. On the thrashing floor, to cover the ground so as to enable easy and speedy collections of the scattered grains. The grains be

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* TUCHA: Tur=hoe, chur=small. It is a ‘Thadou-Kuki’ term for a small hoe. This same terminology is also used socially for individual families at times of death ceremonies etc.
10. Shaw; op.cit. p.57.
Fig. 10 (a). Tucha (Hoe)
come separated when it is threshed on the floor. The system with slight regional variations remain the same all over the country.

However, the technique of harvesting may be different from those of the Nagas. The Kukis sometimes used to cut the crops with sickle just below the neck of the paddy crop and then put them in the basket carried on their back. The rice paddy is separated by trampling it with their feet. Sometimes, the paddy rice lay trampled underfoot with their feet. When the paddy rice gets separated from its straw, all the other dirt, chaff and weeds are also removed simply by winnowing with a lady’s ‘Lungi’ called ‘Puonve’ or with their locally made winnowing fan, especially made to serve the purpose. Then it is taken to the hut of the field (LOUBUH)* which is a temporary godown for storing grains and other Jhum products, which will be finally carried home to be stored in the granary.

D. Varieties of crops: Although primary emphasis is given to the cultivation of paddy, jhumming cultivation is a system of mixed cropping. The jhumias will try to cultivate as many crops as possible in the same field. As such variety of crops are sowed under the rain fed condition just after the pre-monsoon showers and the Kuki jhumias would reap or harvest as the case maybe depending upon the ripening of the crops. Other than rice, the Kukis cultivate a variety of seeds and produce different varieties of crops such as cucumbers, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, jams, water melons, millets, job tear, sesame, maize, chilly, gourd, pumkin, ginger, turmeric, onion, brinjal, cabbage, bitter herbs etc. Although some of these crops can also be grown in the kitchen garden, most of the Kuki household in early days did not cultivate for fear of domestic animals especially fowls. These crops are grown in the jhum fields in small chunks of land and

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* LOUBUH is a “Thadou-Kuki” term and other Kuki tribes also use the same.
often at clumsy places. The Kuki jhumias would visit the field even after paddy harvest to procure maturing crops that the jhum products alone are sufficient enough for the annual consumption of Kuki households, one cannot be certain but besides, the above crops, oilseeds, tobacco and pepper, vegetables of various kinds are grown in the jhumfield.

The Naga and Kuki tribals also cultivate cotton in large quantities in various parts of hill areas, which were sold in several urban centres including Imphal. It may be mentioned here that after the Sutke war of 1855, there was abundance of raw cotton in many of the Kuki village of Khauchangbung, Jampi, Maokot, Chassad and Phaisat areas. Manipur’s south of Vangai range and the neighbouring areas are all cotton producing zones where luxuriant growth of cotton is very much evident cotton became the main source of income for many Kuki households as a cash crop.

Despite the cultivation of varieties of crops in the jhumfield, the primary or staple food item of the Kukis among others has always been rice. Maize crop may be taken as secondary but for a poor Kuki household, it is consumed as a primary food item as it can substitute rice. Thus, it shows that cultivation of paddy is the most important part in the economic life of the Kukis in Manipur. However, in times of famine called ‘Maotam’, several crops substituted rice.

E. Occurrence of Maotam: Literally, it means a ‘bamboo famine’. Despite its high degree of utility for the people in general and the tribals in particular, the bamboo is sometimes a source of great misery for the people. People believe that the flowering of certain species of bamboo has often resulted in famine, which may occur approximately at fifty years intervals.

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15. K. Gailangjam, op. cit. p. See also (Sanajaoba’s Manipur vol. 3, p. 155.)
17. Ibid;
18. Ibid, p. 239

* MAOTAM: Literally ‘MAO’ means ‘bamboo’ and ‘Tam’ means ‘famine’ so, it means ‘bamboo famine’. This type of endemic menace has also been occurred in Manipur’s Tamenglong district in the later part of the year 2003. See also ‘Sangai Express’ March and April issue 2004. The All Tribal Student Union – Manipur has also expressed its deep concern for the victim. See “Sangai Express” 25th July 2004.
The multiplication of rodent population, especially rats, which feeds on the bamboo seeds, is the cause of famine. The rodents attack and devour the standing crops causing famines. This type of famine as a result of rodent menace also occur in the neighbouring Mizoram, Tripura and interior parts of Assam and Nagaland. In the past several such famines have forced the local population to migrate and settle down in other parts of the states. 19

F. Cycle of cultivation: In the traditional jhuming system of the Kukis, the site once cultivated is not generally repeated for the next years cultivation on the presumption that it has lost its fertility. Thus, the land is abandoned or left fallow for recuperation of the soils fertility. The jhumias shift to the new site for cultivation. The cyclical rotation of such practices takes generally ten (10) years after which the same old site may be cultivated again. But in limited jhumland, the same site is repeatedly used which the ‘Thadou-Kukis’ call “Lou-chul-thot”*. This type of repeated cultivation is adopted where the soil is exceptionally good. In some areas this cycle of cultivation goes on for 16 years.

Thus, the Kukis traditionally practise jhuming mostly on dense forestland where there is low population density and sufficient slope land for cultivation. In the interior highlands except for self-consumption, the Kuki jhumias neglected cash crops due to lack of transport, roads and marketing facilities.

G. Jhuming on degraded forestland: - With the passage of time, the Kukis migrated locally and settled along the fringes or the surrounding foot hills of Manipur valley. They practised jhuming on degraded forestland. This type of cultivation is a bit different from the traditional jhuming system. It is mostly confined to the foothills and the nearby hill ranges surrounding the broad central lowland of Manipur. Some tribes like Monsang, Kom, Kharam, etc. also practise

19. M. Kippen, op cit. p 77. See also (Zawla pp. 345-6).
this type of cultivation.20

The typical characteristic of this practice is the heavy soil working, i.e., spading and crushing the top soil for proper sowing condition which is back-breaking labour and energy-intensive*. The land is cultivated for few years, three to four years, with paddy in the beginning and later with maize or other cash crops and finally vegetables with decrease of its soil fertility. Then the land is left fallow for almost the same period until the sequence repeats again21, when it regains fertility. Unlike jhuming in dense forest, marketing of cash crops is not much of a problem due to the nearness of markets in adjoining lowland areas. In this type of cultivation the amount of labour is reduced, as they do not have to fell the jungle trees every year.

H. Retrospection: Evidently, the main activity of the Kuki tribes center around food production to which their economy is based mainly on agriculture. It was a subsistence economy. Their agriculture system of jhuming, though destructive, gives the cultivator a reasonable return even without the use of chemical fertilizers. However, as it was unprofitable to cultivate the same site repeatedly, a new plot of land was looked in for. This practice of shifting land for cultivation after every one or two years and then clearing new sites meant that after about five years or more all the land near their habitat had been used. This leads to erosion of the soil and loss of its fertility. But, since there was availability of unoccupied vast tracts of land, the entire village would be tempted to shift to a new site for better economic prospects. This was responsible for the nomadic pattern of their life. This type of nomadic life continued to exist among some of the ‘Thadou-Kukis’ and other tribal groups till the outbreak of the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-18. Apart from this, inter-clan feuds were also responsible for their migratory habits. This was one of the reasons why they were

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20. K. Gailangam, op. cit. p. 47. This type of cultivation is found practices in Sadar Hills, Churachandpur. Chandel etc. where people live along the fringes of the valley or the foothills of the lowland areas.

* During consultation of Shri. Paolam Kipgen aged 75 of Tuipajang village Senapati District.

found settled in different parts of Manipur in particular and N.E. in general.

As a result of their constant shifting, it was almost impossible to amass wealth either in the form of immovable or even substantial moveable property. They shifted to new sites with their belongings, which they could carry on their backs. What can be called household property was therefore, very less and limited. Some of their permanent household properties consisted of few agricultural implements like hoes, axes, cooking pot etc. Their weapons of war included *daos*, spears, guns etc. Besides, one or two gongs, a few necklaces and a few heirlooms constituted their household properties. Their domestic animals such as fowls, dogs, goats, pigs, cats, *mithun* also shifted along with the owner. The *mithun* was the most valued domestic animal and those Kuki households, which possessed several number of SEL (mithun) were considered rich. Cattle wealth was cherished.

The old tradition of the Kukis continued to govern agricultural practices in the remote villages. Moreover, the process of distribution or appropriation of products involved channelling the products upward to socially determined allocative centres such as the chief, the priest and the blacksmith. In fact, the traditional society of all the tribals was marked by a constant or mutual ‘give and take’, the culture, which has been practised till today.

3. TRADITIONAL VILLAGE INDUSTRIES AND CRAFT PRODUCTION

The economic life of the Kukis is not only characterised by the agricultural activities but also by traditional cottage industries and the craft production systems. The non-agricultural products help to sustain their self-sufficiency in economy. Agricultural products were thus supplemented by the artisanal and handicraft production. In the whole of Manipur, the indigenous cottage industries and handicraft products are dependent upon the availability of natural resources to suit the taste, colour and customs.\(^{22}\)

\(^{22}\) K. Gailangam: op.cit. p. 48.
In the indigenous industrial sector, carpentry, basketry, cane and bamboo works, loin loom, metallurgy and metal works, rice-beer preparation etc. represented the traditional economy of the Kukis. In this sector, the goods are produced by the village artisans to meet mostly the needs of the local population. There were also local craftsmen and artisans who produced goods and services under the support and encouragement of the chief for the community.

**A. Basketry, Bamboo and cane works:** Some scholars maintain that the economic life of the Kukis is also in fact a ‘Bamboo and cane’ based economy. It is true that bamboo is one of the most important elements in their economy as it not only provides but also meets many of their essential needs. While the new bamboo shoots provided food, the young bamboos provided materials for making baskets and house and household furniture. Similarly, cane also met many of their essential needs from providing food to making different kinds of baskets or furniture. Matured bamboos and canes provided the primary building materials for houses and barns.

The craftsmen in the village produced baskets of different types by using splitted cane and bamboo materials after turning it into a fine rope. They are used for collecting firewood and carrying other goods for domestic purposes, such as BENG (carrying basket of open hexagonal shape), PAIPEH (carrying basket), LONGKAI (Female carrying basket), POCHA (storing basket), HAHVANG (Sieves), GODAL (Tray), SINKHUP (storing box) etc. (See Fig. 10, p. 223 - 225). Another important storing basket is called THUL or LEL in “Thadou-Kuki.” with four short legs and about 12 inches square at the bottom (see figures). It starts widening from the bottom till the mouth circle with a diameter of about 30 inches. Its outer layer is closely woven with fine splitted bamboo or cane, which are held in their place by an inner layer of bamboo more loosely woven. These baskets are water proof.²³ Besides, household furnishings like arm chair, stool, table, etc. were also manufactured by the craftsmen. All these basketry and furniture

Fig. 10 (b) Beng (Carrying Basket)

Fig. 10 (c) Namkol (Harness used for carrying basket)

Fig. 10 (d) Longkai (Carrying basket exclusively used by women)
Fig. 10 (e). Hahung (Sieve)

Fig. 10 (f). (i) Godal (a kind of tray made from bamboo)
(ii) Bem (Large storage made from bamboo splits)
Fig. 10 (g). Thul' Lel (a kind of basket having conical cap)

Fig. 10 (h). Traditional mat made of cane

*Fig. 10 (i). Sinkhup (storing box)*
works involved skill and intellect and the Kuki craftsmen learnt and mastered the art by sheer hard work. Intricate designs are a testimony to their skill, which made products, which were need based. Some baskets and mats were partially coloured also with intricate designs.

B. Carpentry works: Carpentry is not a new thing to the Kukis dwelling in the abode of nature. They collected any kind of raw material such as wood or bamboo from the forest for carpentry and other allied works. With the use of primitive instruments such as dao, axe (Heicha), a hoe-like spade specially designed for carpentry works called Heikhup etc. the Kuki craftsmen produced impressive household properties and furniture such as drinking wooden cups, drinking mugs of buffalo, bamboo tube for storing water (Tuithei), wooden plates, bamboo spoons, spear handle, (See Fig. 11. p. 227 - 228 ) stool hewn from solid log, and many other essential requirements of domestic importance. All these products helped in strengthening one’s economic status as the product could be bartered for food grains, or even livestock. Those who had abundant food grains could have the craft products in exchange for their food by means of barter system which was quite prevalent.

C. Village smithy: The village blacksmith is mainly responsible for manufacturing weapons of war, agricultural and household implements which required strenuous labour. Every Kuki village has its own blacksmith whose service is indispensable for the sustenance of the village economy. To forge iron, a separate shed for the blacksmith is constructed in which two hollowed wooden cylinders are buried in the ground standing upright. Two bamboo tubes fitted to the cylinders are placed just below the charcoal fire. And when the pistons which is made up of bamboo and cock’s feather is worked by hand, it moves up and down. Charcoal is used in the furnace. Thus, agricultural or household tools like spades, hoes, knives, sickles, dibble, etc. and weapons of war were manufactured. The science of melting brass is also known as is

24. As told by Deukam Kipgen aged 70, a village elder during consultation.
Fig. 11 (a). Tuithei (Cylindrical water container made of bamboo)

Fig. 11 (b) Traditional household containers: Leibel (Clay pot), Tuithei (Gourd), Theikhong (Bamboo container having cap made of animal hide)
Fig. 11 (c). Thingkong (Wooden plate)

Fig. 11 (d). Gokhe (Large spoons made of bamboo)
evident with the manufacture of brass hair-pins, bangles, armlets, metals beads etc. by pouring the molten metal into moulds made of a mixture of paddy husk, clay and sand. Indigenous method of smelting ores has been known to them since time immemorial.

As they are independent by nature and live in jungles in the midst of hostile animals, they made weapons both for offensive and defensive purposes, eg. such as spears (TENGCHA), muzzle-loading gun (THIHNANG-MEIPUM) in the later periods, daos (CHEMPONG), bows and arrows (THALPI), leather shields (OM-PHO) etc (See Fig. 5. p. 58). In fact, in manufacturing all these implements and weapons of war, not only the village black smith but also the village artisans contributed laboriously. We do not know when the first gun was made indigenously but the legends have revealed to us that they had acquired these talents much before the coming of the British. *

D. Manufacturing of gunpowder: The Kukis had acquired the knowledge of producing gunpowder locally long before they came into contact with the British. They could manufacture gunpowder for their own use. Reid says, “Each (Kuki) village manufactures its own gun powder....”. 26 The Kukis had also used their locally made gun powder during the Anglo-Kuki War. Where, when and how they learnt the art is not known. The art of making gunpowder was also, of course, known to the Chins, Burmese, 27 and Meiteis through Chinese merchants who visited the Kingdom of Manipur on account of their trade relationship which continued as late as 1813. 28

The process of making gunpowder by the Kukis is the same as the Chins did. This shows that they share the same knowledge. In preparing the gunpowder, a good thick crust of excrement is taken out from where the pigpen is built as it contains nitrate. Traditionally, the Kukis used to built pigpen just beneath their house. The excrement and the urine-impregnated deposit on the surface of the soil is then trowelled up and placed in a basket. Water is poured

* However, some historians have suggested that the first guns were available in Manipur Sector by 1728 A.D.
inside the basket and allowed to filter through into the receptacle (a large wooden basin), which is placed below the basket. After this process, the deposit looks reddish in colour. Then, the same water is poured again and again until all the nitrates (MEI-LOU) get dissolved. When the deposit becomes clear the water also looks reddish and the same is boiled until most of it has evaporated. Then, when the remainder is put into the sieve or a large tray, the water drains off into another receptacle (made of a large wooden plate) and the nitrate crystals remain. The nitrates are then taken out from the tray and mixed with an equal weight of charcoal.* For charcoal firewood KHONGMATHING (Rhus Cenesis) and SEHTHING (a large yellow citrus fruit plant. See Fig. 12, p. 231) is specifically used because of its lightness and ignition power. The mixture is pounded in a mortar until it becomes dust or powdery. The process is then completed and the powder is ready for the gun. The Kuki hunters used to keep the powder in a small bamboo container and take with them along with the bullets when they went for hunting.30

E. Other manufacture goods: Among the Kuki tribes, the “Thadou-Kukis” appear to be the most advanced comparatively with the other tribes in terms of manufacturers as is evident from their household properties. They manufactured DAHPI (large gongs), DAH THIBU (set of three gongs), TUIDOL (large basin), LUMDAL (Brass plates placed on shield), CHALEP (Brass dao shape plate) etc.31 This shows that they acquired the art of metallurgy and metal works to run their own cottage industries. Later the indigenous product was replaced by the Burmese or foreign made gongs.32 Besides, clay pots of various kinds for household utensils.

29. Carey & Tuck. Ibid.
30. *For charcoal, firewood is collected from a specific tree such as KHONGMATHING (Rhus Cenesis), SEHTHING (citrus) plants - the citrus fruit with acid juice, or even from the trunk of the chili plant called MALCHAPNATHING, etc.
31. Interview with SEMJALET HAOKIP on 12th July 2004 at his residence Games village. Impal. The art of making gunpowder is of course, still known among many Kuki elders. Its practice is not completely given up (Henceforth cited as S. Haokip.)
32. Besides, when I was 15, I have personally seen the elders of my village making gunpowder which they said was only used for hunting wild animals.
Fig. 12. Khongma thang (Rhus cencesis)
had also been manufactured by themselves.  

F. Salt Production: Though the Kukis obtained salt as one of the essential items from the Valley, in some places they manufactured salt for their own use in a very limited scale. The TOLPHEI Kuki areas in the south and the Tangkhul Naga areas in the north of Manipur manufactured salt for their own consumption. Besides the Kukis living near Jessami, bordering Manipur and Nagaland had their own product until the recent past. In Tangkhul areas, Kharasom and its neighbouring villages such as, Luchai, Challou, Namli, Kongai, Nungai etc. manufactured salt. In fact, the presence of brine wells in the area provide employment for a number of villagers. Some of these brine wells were shared some time by the Kukis as well. The Kukis of course, had their own brine wells in the nearby Kanjang villages especially in the neighbouring Phougam Phai lei areas. (See map) It appears that the tribes of Manipur like the Meiteis had the knowledge of producing salt from brine wells only. They seldom produced salt from salt mines or by extracting it from plants gathered or cultivated in the bush, because of lack of knowledge of salt mines. 

The Kukis were able to determine the existence of brine well by watching the movement of Cattle and by the footprints of wild animals called SAKHONI, which provided clues due to their fondness for salt. When its existence was confirmed by testing the water with their fingertip, those areas having salty flavour were separated from the nearby flowing water. Then fencing was constructed round the well to protect them from domestic and wild animals. The brine wells were close to the riverbeds and were considerably deep.

33. Interview with S. Haokip, (in fn. no. 1).
35. Personal interview with Tolphei Kukis.
36. Interview with S. Haokip.
37. Ibid.
Salt production and Division of labour: The traditional method of producing salt among the Kukis was simple. Mostly it was the work of men whose technical know-how was turned to good use. As brine wells were far from their homes, they set up a temporary thatched hut near the brine wells and stayed for weeks together until they manufacture the required quantity of salt for the annual consumption of their respective family households. The Kukis set out for this work normally during dry or winter season to avoid rains. The table below shows the whole process of production and the nature of operation as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of Production: Salt manufacture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Collecting firewood and transporting it to the fire place** Collective (whole day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Preparing oven of requisite number, boiling and supply of the burning firewood** Collective (boiling day &amp; night)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Collecting fresh salty water and filling the boiling pot or bowl ** Collective (day time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* To oversee evaporation process ** Individual (day time)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above reveals that in the process of salt production, there was a clear cut division of labour among the group right from the gathering of firewood to overseeing evaporation and crystallisation. Of course, it was not a complicated process as can be seen in the nature of operation. The table shows that collective work prevailed over the individual work, though individual could also perform collective works. It required a participation of 6 to 10 men divided among themselves where in each group there should be 3 men or more depending upon the nature of work and requirement of labour. While the nature of operation remained the same, work allotment among the groups could also be interchanged. As the work of felling dry trees, cutting into pieces and transportation was tiresome other men drawn from either of the other two groups often replaced them. It is to be noted here that the quantity of products was determined

40. The table above is based on the model of Maurice Godelier in “Perspective in Marxist Anthropology” Cambridge University Press, London 1978 p.135.
by the quantity of labour inputs involved therein. Whatever quantity of salt thus manufactured, was shared among themselves. Though the Kukis acquired the technology of manufacturing salt, however, they were not in a position to produce sufficiently for the whole village community due to limited brine wells. Salt became an object of distance trade as well.

G. Tuisum/Tui-Changsu: The Kukis with the help of water had developed this traditional rice-mill (See Fig. 13. p. 235). It used to be constructed near or a little far from the house where flowing water was available. Even when they went to work in the fields, the water rice mill kept on pounding the rice provided that there was an uninterrupted flow or supply of water. The water rice-mill not only helped in saving time for the busy hard-working jhumias but also helped to avoid strenuous manual pounding of rice. Normally, the rice mill took almost one day and one night to complete the work after which the rice was taken out and separated from the husk. TUISUM had thatched roof and split bamboo walls to protect the rice from domestic fowls and rain. It was indigenously designed and skilfully utilised. In many areas it is still used.

H. Chotlep: Besides, there was another traditional pounding mortar called CHOTLEP. It was a simple means of pounding rice-paddy by foot in which the wooden bowl or mortar moved up and down on exerting pressure (See Fig. 14. p. 236). It helped to avoid strenuous labour though it took a little bit of more time. It was constructed near the portico or at the entrance of the house or could be within the courtyard with a roof.

I. Leather works: The Kukis made use of the skins of domestic and wild animals when they were killed. The animal hide was processed and used for making drums, shields, ropes, basket, mats and other household materials. The Kukis used animal hide even for weapons of war which is proved by the fact that during the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19, leather cannon called PUMPI* was used. 41

41. Shakespear, p. 215
* A specimen of PUMPI could be seen in the culture museum run by J.C. Misao at his residence at Kangpokpi. Presently it is in the process of making.
Fig. 13. Tuichangsu / Tuisum (Traditional water rice mill)
Fig. 14 (a). Chotlep (Traditional foot pounding mortar)

Fig. 14 (b). (i) Suh (ii) Sum (Traditional hand pounding mortar)
The Kukis used to make leather cannon either by using buffalo’s or mithun’s skin. In preparing for the making of PUMPI, the animal skin was soaked in water till it becomes soft. Then, it was rolled in such a way that it becomes like a compact tube and the strips of leather were tightly bound. The leather tube was then folded and closed at the one end tightly. Then, using cane ropes the outer part of the tube was encircled round tightly in order to prevent bursting when it was fired. It was indeed a novel way of using gunpowder for self-defence.

**J. Textile manufactures:** One of the indigenous occupations of Manipur lay in the field of textile manufacture. It may be noted here that Handloom or Loin loom needed skill in hands. The people particularly of both the valley and hills demonstrate it effectively in their products. It is an interesting feature in as far as the traditional economy of Manipur is concerned. 42

The handloom industry still occupies an important place among the hill tribes. Among the various economic activities, the traditional loom industry plays an important factor in maintaining their economic sustenance. As cotton being one of the important commercial crops, it was grown in the jhum field. The work of plucking or reaping the matured cotton from its plant in the field to the stage of weaving was all done by women. 43 The seeds were extracted through wooden cotton machines made by Kukis themselves (See Fig.15. p. 238) after which the cotton was ginned with a bow. 44 Thus, cotton became their main source of income among the other cash crops. The Thadou-Kukis and their cognate tribes had, learnt the art of running cottage industries by themselves in their own houses. Looking at their expertise it may be concluded that the Kukis had been exposed to cotton technology and they had imbibed it thoroughly. Cotton or “Kapase” has been an indigenous plant grown in our country since the remotest past.

Clothes of different kinds were indigenously produced and worn on different occasions.

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42. K. Galangam; op.cit. p. 30.
43. Shaw, op.cit. p. 92.
44. Ibid.
Fig. 15 (a). Pat-heh (Cottonspinner and allied tools)

Fig. 15 (b). Thilbu (Weaving tools)
and festivals. A Kuki women would ply loom looms at daytime and nightfall and could manufacture all kinds of clothings with the help of needles. Every Kuki women was expected to know the art of weaving in the traditional past. In fact, women who were expert in the art of weaving were considered to be better brides in those days, as her services and the products strengthened the domestic economic condition. Among the Kuki society, right after the end of harvesting season and before the start of the next years cultivation, women busied themselves in weaving. ‘Thadou-Kuki’ women who were expert in embroidery techniques had a high reputation in the society. It is so even today. It is seen that among all the Kuki tribes every traditional cloth had embroidery marks. Plain cloths without any embroidery are rarely seen. Women really contributed substantially towards stabilising their domestic economy.

Dresses in general are the identity of a nation or a tribe. Dresses are like the unwritten code where by a man’s social status and culture can be determined. The Kuki ways of dressing are often artistic, well adapted to the working condition in the hills. Not only the Kukis but the different tribes of the Nagas also have special shawls with symbols of animals, objects etc. for their festive occasions. It is a critical appreciation and expression of their culture. To exploit their talents, the Kukis did careful handicraft work and artistic embroideries all over the shawls for the warriors. It reflected a manual involvement of love, affection and recognition of their belief and deeds. It was a reflection of forms of tribal worship. Hence, the design of the textiles, the arrangement of looms, the meaning of the used symbols help us to determine that the Kuki women had a high degree of expertise and had made advancement in their technique. For instance a ‘Thadou-Kuki’ women could make shawls like SAIPIKHUP*, MANGVOM**

46. Sina Khayi, “Cultural significance of tribal costumes in modern times,” a paper presented in a seminar organised by MUTSU at Senate Hall, Manipur University from 29-30 March 1996.
* SAIPIKHUP: Literally, it means ‘elephant’s knee’ or ‘Thadou-Kuki’ term because of its design on both the edge. The design is said to have been acquired during their wandering in the south East Asian forests where they encountered hordes of elephants.
** MANGVOM: Literally, it means a ‘black border’ in ‘Thadou-Kuki’ term. The black colour is a sign of royalty. The shawl is meant for a man of royal birth.
and KHAMTANG* (women’s lungi) within a few weeks which is a proof of their high artistic skill (See Fig. 2, p. 52). In a small Kuki family, the presence of one talented and skilful woman could extend support to the whole family and strengthen their economic position. Thus, the Kuki women learnt the art of running the textile or loom machines by themselves to sustain their economic life without any formal education. For this economic contribution Kuki women were respected by every community.

K. Dyeing: There is no much account about the art of dyeing among the Kuki society in the traditional past. In spite of that the hill tribes especially the Kukis generally used different kinds of dyeing substances. The commonest dye was obtained by boiling the leaves of the Assam indigo (*Stabilanthes flaccindi-folia*) grown by them. Small quantities of Indigo, Bixa and Alba etc. used for dyeing was also cultivated by the peasants in Manipur within the vicinity of their villages and homesteads. In as far as the art of dyeing is concerned, the process of preparation, method and its style of weaving adopted by the tribal women are not different from the women in the valley. The Kuki women could hardly obtain the leaves just enough to immerse for not more than twice a year. In the hills, the Kuki and Naga women commonly dye yellow colours, but it is not known as to how and from which plant the yellow pigments were extracted. In preparing for the dyeing the leaves are plucked and boiled in a pot in which yarn or cloth is immersed and after some few minutes, the cloth or yarn is taken out to dry in the sun. Thus, all works of dyeing, its preparation of cotton yarn, weaving etc. was traditionally done by women. It also shows of the scope for vocational mobility.

I. Rice-beer products: The Kukis prepared a variety of drinks in the traditional past

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* KHAMTANG: It is a ‘lungi’ for women. It is originally black with a striking yellow band at the bottom line pattern with a serpentine design. Intricate weaving designs can be seen on their products.
47. Shaw, op.cit. p.19.
as rice-beer, strong rice-beer, liquor etc. The common drinks prepared by them are distilled from rice. Though there are variety of drinks, the method of preparation is however almost the same. (See table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time taken</th>
<th>1 Hour</th>
<th>2 - 3 Hours</th>
<th>1 Hour</th>
<th>2 Hours</th>
<th>4 - 5 Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fermenta-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>tion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Hours: Pounding of rice and removing of husk
2-3 hours: Soaking of rice and drying
1 hours: Pounding of rice to powder
2 hours: Final preparation

Note: - 'X' indicates non-involvement in the process
'- ' indicate involvement

Fig.: Table showing man-hours in preparing Rice-beer ingredients etc. and the involvement of families thereof.

The Table above shows the whole process of preparing rice-beer and the involvement of family members in each stage right from the pounding of rice to the final preparation. The whole family is not necessarily involved in the preparation. The 'father' does not take part and even the 'son' join his mother and sister only when it requires strenuous manual labour. This shows that making of rice-beer is largely the work of women though not exclusively, since the 'father' and 'son' are pre-occupied with other self-domestic works. However, in some families all the household members get involved in every stage of preparation.

In preparing the above drinks, it involve some process. When rice has been clearly separated from its husk, it is soaked in water for about 2 to 3 hours and then the soaked rice is put in a large bamboo or cane tray in order to drain off the water from it. When it becomes dry the rice is then pounded with a mortar and crushed it into powder. The fine powder is then put in the pot of boiling water and is steered properly till it becomes sticky liquid. Then when it gets cold two or three small pots of cold water is poured into the sticky rice powder in a container-basin and is steered again. Then, finally the container is stored in different pots for about 4 to 5
days for fermentation, after which the stuff is ready for drinking. This kind of drink is quite nutritious. The tribals in Manipur are used to it.

Besides, the Kukis are also used to making rice beer called VAI-JU, by mixing the cooked rice and the husk and then putting yeast called CHOL for quick fermentation. It is the work of women. It takes hardly two to three days for fermentation after which the stuff is ready for drinking. It may be noted here that some of the indigenous drinks are also highly intoxicating. Preparation of rice-beer and its consumption is an indispensable part of the culture and socio-economic life of the Kukis.* It is used at times of religious ceremonies and social functions.

**M. Work culture:** Work-culture in the traditional Kuki society is quite elaborately detailed. The following table shows that -

*Daily routine of labour inputs in terms of man-hours on different professions (Work-pattern in man-hours daily)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual/Collective</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Production of Goods</th>
<th><strong>Self Domestic</strong></th>
<th><em><strong>Other activities</strong></em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>5-6 hours</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>5-6 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>6-7 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: - **‘Self domestic’** includes the work of rice-beer making, manufacturing gun powder, weaving, dyeing etc.

**‘Other activities’** includes collection of fodder, collection of firewood, fetching water, looking after babies etc.

The Table above reveals that whether individual or collective, *male* or female except children, are engaged in agricultural activities, which is their main occupation. This shows that in ‘Agriculture’, they spend much more time and labour comparatively, than any other works. Production of goods is essentially the work of men assisted by their son which is also the case of women assisted by their daughter under ‘self domestic’. It shows the social division of

* Rice-beer making is still practised among some tribes especially the Zous living in Charachandpur district
labour on different profession.

The intensity of labour-inputs and the time spent by the son and daughter under ‘other activities’ is comparatively the same with that of agricultural activities. Children looked after babies while their parents were at work. This helped the parents especially the mother to engage themselves in more productive works. Thus, in certain Kuki families, the birth of a new child is welcomed as it adds to the numerical strength of the labour-force within the family by inheriting the duties of their parents automatically. The ‘Community’ is heavily engaged in agricultural activities. They work collectively in the form of Labour-corps (LAWM).

The Table also shows that any work of complexity is done essentially by ‘Men’ and ‘Women’. It is also clear that the intensity of labour-inputs in terms of man-hours on ‘Agriculture’ prevails unequalled than any other or its allied activities. Thus, it can be concluded beyond doubt that more time and more labour-inputs are needed under ‘Agriculture’ to sustain the self-economic sufficiency on which it solely depends.

4. LIVESTOCK

Live stock render valuable help in the consolidation of weak economic status of certain families. The domesticated animals of the Kukis include SEL (Mithun), cows, oxen, pony, buffalo, pigs, goats, poultry, dogs, cats etc. They were all economically beneficial to the owners. Among the domestic animals SEL is the most valuable and priced possession. It improves one’s economic status with the fact that a person’s wealth is judged by the number of SEL he possessed. It was still used in the payment of tributes and bride price. While some of the animals are domesticated for its meat, animals like oxen and buffaloes are used for help in cultivation. Animals like goats, poultry, dogs and pigs are used mostly for domestic consumption and for ritualistic sacrifices.
5. HUNTING PROFESSION AND OTHERS

The Kukis by nature are very hard working people. They rise up at early dawn and set out for jungle. The prevailing thought in the minds of the Kukis, as elsewhere, is that everything good would accrue from early endeavour or ventures. They love hunting wild games. The ‘Thadou-Kukis’ are particularly experts in the field. They never part with their gun while going to the jungle and shoot animals and birds for family consumption. On many occasions we know they killed tigers, bears, deer’s and smaller animals on their way to jhum field when they passed through dense forests. They are expert trackers and some have clear knowledge of the ways and habits of all the games. They shoot with a high degree of accuracy. Some of the animals are hunted for their medicinal value. The meat provides food in addition to cultivated food grains.

A. Hunting and Trapping: The Kukis go out hunting alone mostly, and sometimes in groups of twos or threes. Community hunting called ‘KHO-CHANGVAL’ is also known in which all the able bodied men of the village have to participate. Apart from hunting wild games, the Kukis tribesmen set up traps called (THANG) to snare wild animals and birds. There are different trapping systems for both animals and birds. These are made meticulously for the purpose then to be used e.g.

i. SAKHUM: For large animals the Kukis dig a pit called, SAKHUM on the path through which the animal are supposed to come. Sharp pointed bamboos are placed firmly upright inside the pit, so that when the approaching animals fall in, they are pinned to death.

ii. PEL: The other trapping system common to Kukis is PEL. A large falling log of wood is hanged with a rope. To attract the animals a smelly piece of decomposing flesh is placed right below the log. When the beast touches it, the trigger is released and the log falls within fraction of seconds and eventually crushes the animal.

iii. KAL: It is a spring trap with an arrow or spear used as a missile. A large bamboo bow is set in the jungle 3 to 10 feet back aligned with the animal path.

51. Shaw, op. cit. p.88. See also (Stewart (LKC) p.194.)
iv. SAKHI THANG: It is a deer traps, which is laid in the games path. In preparing this trap, about 6” round 6”-12” deep, hole is made in which is laid a noose of tough cord, creeper or cane by which the creeper or cane rope is attached to a strong sapling bent over to the required height. The hole is covered with small bamboo slivers and earth. Piece of woods are set to support ‘the placing of a foot on it.’ When the animal walks and tramples in the hole, the force of the sapling, which pulls it up, yanks off the balance. The animal is thus strangled in the air and becomes helpless. Besides, by applying the same method traps were also laid to snare tigers (HUMPI), wild boars (NGALCHANG), bears (VOMPI), deers (SAKHI/SAJUH) etc. Skeletons of these animals are preserved at home as marks of prowess and bravery (See Fig.16, p. 246).

B. Bird Traps (Va-Thang): For catching birds, variety of traps both on the ground and on the trees are used. Some of these were:

ME-CHANG-THANG: -* This kind of trap system is common among the ‘Thadou-Kukis’. A cord noose made up of strings of rope is attached to a sapling of required height near the place where the trap is to be laid. The rope is placed on the ground in a circular or squarish shape supported by split bamboos. The ‘Mechang’ is also placed at the centre as a bait supported by split bamboo. When the bird pecks the ‘Mechang’ through their beak, the force of the sapling yanks off the balance. The bird is thus strangled in the neck and rendered helpless. As the trapped bird remains hanging in the air, it suffocates and dies within a short time.

THOM-THANG: -** This trap is set on the following branches of a tree. In preparing it, cord nooses are set on the branches of a tree or tracks the birds habitually use in which a single bean is placed as a bait to attract the birds. 53 Some people also use “bow” spring traps for birds and

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* 'Mechang-Thang' still a practice in the remote Kuki villages. See also (K.Kippen, p. 81) About ME-CHANG, it is a very smooth typical seed of a jungle plant, which look reddish in colour and appears attractive to birds. It is almost the size of the seed of bean.

** 'THOM-THANG' - It is "Thadou-Kuki" term of bird trap practised till today in remote villages.
Fig. 16 (a). Sajuhki (Antler of hunted deers being preserved in traditional Kuki homes)

Fig. 16 (b). Selki (Horn of Mithun)
even for smaller birds. In fact, small kinds of every bird are also not spared that comes to their bow and catapult.

Different types of birds like hornbill, kite, pigeon, parrots, mammals etc. are hunted not only for domestic consumption but also for sale. The bird's feather and skins of animals also fetch a good price. This type of profession is, of course, wild but adventurous and it is not confined to the tribals alone. 54

C. Fishing: Fishing gave the Kukis good sport, which also required skill. It is an indispensable part of their economic activities. They adopted different tactics and methods to catch fish in the river streams, ponds, pools etc. Some of these methods are:

i) LEN (Fishing net): Catching fish by LEN is one of the easiest but interesting way though it requires skill and experience. The thread for the net is also locally made by the Kuki villagers themselves. The net is made of cotton threads.

ii) NGOI: According to this method, the Kukis make a bamboo weir across a river with a platform run at one. When the fish makes frantic efforts to go down along with the river stream, it jumps into this run, which is high and dry. Thus, the people catch the fish easily. Normally, this method is carried out in the month of October when the fish began going down the stream.

iii) NGA BAWM*: It has a huge-bottle shape and is used for catching small fish (See Fig. 17, p. 249). The basket with its face open is placed down the stream in the spring and upstream in the autumn. It is also laid in the terrace field where the fish swim through to be trapped ultimately.

iv) GU-SUH**: According to this method, the river streams are poisoned with various

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54 Chopra, Puri & Das (Ed.): A Social, Cultural and Economic History of India Vol. 1 Ancient India Macmillan, 1996, p.126.

* NGA BAWM: literally, 'NGA' means 'fish' and 'BAWM' means 'basket'. So, it means a 'fish basket'.

** GU-SUH: Literally, 'GU' means 'poison' and 'SUH' means 'pounding'. So, GUSUH means 'pounding of poisonous herbs'.
kind of seeds, leaves and bark poisons which are found abundantly in the jungle e.g. JOUKHENG, PHOH-GUI LINGNEI, GU-CHO, GU-KANG roots etc. (See Fig. 17. p. 249 - 251). All these poisonous herbs are also very allergic to human being and sometimes it could be fatal also. In the case of the first two systems, the whole village and sometimes in a combination of two or three villages are involved as it is used to be applied in big river streams. Whereas in the last two systems especially in the case of ‘Gukang’ it does not require many people as it is difficult to procure the roots. Thus, it is applied in small river streams or ponds, which can be done by two or three persons. 55

Except JOUKHENG tree, all the other plants are jungle creepers, which grow along the ground, up the walls etc. and often winding themselves round other plants. They are cut into pieces of about two feet and then pounded with a long pestle or beaten with a hard object. In doing so the pieces are crushed and then thrown into stream.

In the preparation of the first one, there is a division of work allotment. While the first group will go on felling the trees, the second group will cut the trunk into pieces of about three feet or more. The third and last group will collect and take out the trunk cover and keep pounding the same with a long pestle on the mortar or on the stony ground near the river stream. When it becomes sufficiently enough, the stuff is then thrown into the pools and the streams. In doing so, within a short time, the fish are rendered insensible and lie floating on the surface of the water. The fishes are then grabbed and put into baskets. In this type of fish poisoning game, all able-bodied men and women of the village participate with a lot of excitement.

Apart from these methods of poisoning streams, there are still several other ways like diverting channels and baling out the pools, tickling the fish etc. to catch fish, which gives them good sport and quench their insatiable thirst for fishing. This fishing game are carried out during off-season in such a way that it does not collide with the normal agricultural activities.

Fig. 17. Pieces of bark of different trees and wild creeper used as poison in fishing

Fig. 17 (a). Gucho

Fig. 17 (b). Gukang

Fig. 17 (c). Phohgui Linghei
Fig. 17 (d). Joukheng tree (Which bark is used for poisoning fishes)

Fig. 17 (e). Ngahom (Funnel shaped fishing baskets used for trapping fishes)
Fig. 17 (f) & (g). Longja villagers engaged in fishing using poisonous barks along the river streams.
It is a sort of sharing of time between various activities. It is developed as hobby as well.

Thus, in the traditional past the practice of hunting and fishing contributed a lot to the strengthening of the economic condition. From such activities one can infer that any Kuki village would be deemed to have suffered no insufficiency as far as foodstuff is concerned as they are blessed with all sorts of food by nature. Agricultural and forest products are therefore, the main resources of their economic development and serve as the backbone to the society.

6. TRADE AND TRANSACTION

Not much is known about the existence of lucrative trade or long distance in the traditional Kuki society. They traded among themselves and with the Nagas as well as the Meitiks areas. Trade relationship existed between the hills and the valley of Manipur since the earliest times. The degree of relationship through trade is obscure. Generally, the Kukis in the past had limited needs and wants and were contented with what ever little they had. As such importance was not given much to trade and commerce. However, trade relationship between the Meiteis and hill traders were well developed who traded in plaintain leaves, cotton, cane, bamboo goods, beads charcoal products, etc.

With the passage of time and the pace of civilisation advancing, trade and commerce began to increase by leaps and bounds. The Kukis in the hills became the chief suppliers of various types of wood, bamboo, cane, ginger, fruits, chilly and other commercial crops to their neighbouring people in the valley. In this regard, N. Lhundim writes,

“The Kuki women would ask their men to fetch fruits of various kinds.... for sale at township markets like Waikhong, Lamka or Lamlong Bazar, Sugunu, Moirang, Khopava, Haomang Keithel; and such fruits were in pretty demand among the valley people”.

56. Sopitt, op. cit. p.23.
57. Political Agents Tour Diary No. 10th Feb 1896 (State Archives)
Even in the whole of Manipur, trade in the pre-colonial days was carried on internally and externally, on a limited scale. Native currency called ‘Sel’ was, of course in circulation but in a limited area of the valley only. It was believed to have come into use for day to day business transaction allegedly since the time of King Ura Konthouba 568-658 A.D. The ‘Sel’ was not acceptable beyond the administrative territory of the Raja of Manipur which compelled the external trade to be conducted mainly through barter. Thus, the exchange of goods and services in the valley and hills was mainly conducted through barter system till the introduction of British Indian currency in the state in 1891. Thus, with the limited circulation of ‘Sel’, commercial interaction between the hills and the valley and among the hill people themselves was done through barter system.

The trade with the neighbouring Lushai Hills was mostly carried on by the Kukis of Manipur. They took iron from the valley and bartered it for guns and clothes with the people of Lushai Hills. The existence of such trade relationship with the neighbouring people even across the border assumed increasing importance in commercial activities in the economic life of the Kukis.

In day to day business transactions, standardised measurement such as a small flat basket, gourds, large or small bamboo spoons, bamboo mugs of varying sizes etc. were used in retail dealings of the commodities. The number of loads counted and confirmed by pebbles recorded measured large quantities of goods or articles. The Kukis measured the quantities of rice crops with the height of one’s hand or hoe held up perpendicular or vertical against the crops, which was used to pile up in a pyramided shape. Measurement of length is also expressed in terms of extending fingertips. Sometimes, the Kukis used beads or mithuns as a medium of exchange.

60. Ibid;
7. TRANSPORT AND INTER-VILLAGE COMMUNICATION

The routes connecting different places of Kuki settlement areas facilitating inter-village communication should be seen in the context of land routes in the whole of Manipur. The surface road network of Manipur was controlled traditionally by the physio-topographic distinctions between the flat central valley and the surrounding hill areas. It is significant to note that in every level of civilisation the composite culture gained by the people of Manipur were all through this hilly terrain inhabited by the hill tribes – Kukis and Nagas.

The land route of Manipur connecting with the neighbouring countries were known to the civilised world since the pre-historic times. Traders, merchants, pilgrims and even invaders travelled all along as it located between India and Burma. Mention can be made of the historic routes like Tongjei Maril (Old Cachar Road) – starting from Bishenpur it passed through various hill ranges and places like Nungba and reached Baskandi in Cachar. The Khongjai or Kuki route – starting from Torbung in the south-western part of Manipur passing through the great western bend of the Barak leading to Baskandi. Besides, there is another route which connects Assam which passes through the western ranges of Manipur at Tholung village and leading to the north-west direction, up to the Dunsiri river and further proceeded to Jorhat (See Map XI).

In the south-eastern side Manipur is connected with Burma by Heirok and Imole route, each has a total length of about 75-80 km. It passed through the hill ranges inhabited by Marings and reached Kabaw valley in Burma. Manipur is also connected with Burma by the northern route which starts from Sekmai – passes through the Tangkuls and the Kuki (Khongjai) areas and reaches Kabaw valley at its north-western extremity. All these routes passed

63. R.K. Ranjan: Transport and communication system in the hill districts of Manipur: A paper presented in the Two day MUNIX seminar, 2001 Canchipur M.U.
64. R.B. Pemberton, op. cit. p.51.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
LAND ROUTES OF MANIPUR
(PAST AND PRESENT)
through the hill territories inhabited by Nagas and Kukis who were also benefited by it.

Various Kuki villages in the hills were inter-connected by means of footpath, which were also used for trade. Even minimum requirement for transport and communication facilities were not attended right from the earliest times.

There was no constructed road to facilitate general travelling or for convenience of communication between villages. As Kukis are strong enough to carry their jhum products on their back in cane and bamboo baskets they hardly took circuitous roads. Not only the Kukis, but the hill people in general go by stiff ascending and descending foot paths. Their footpaths were muddy during rainy days and full of dust during dry season. They selected their footpaths in the jungle no matter how stiff it might be, in order to reach their destination in the shortest possible time. They themselves were the means of transportation. Heavy loads were often carried by themselves between their jhum fields and villages and from one village to another following the shortest path. It is the practice even today in the hills.

The chief means of transport on land for longer distance is carried by loaded beasts like oxen, pony, horses etc. A sledge pulled by buffaloes was also common in the past. The chief means of transport in the river is raft. Thus, transport and communication system was primitive. It was only after the arrival of the British that new routes were constructed in the hills and the existing routes in the hills and valley were improved.

8. COLONIAL ECONOMY

After the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, the British became the virtual ruler of Manipur. During their rule, the Meiteis and the hill tribes experienced changes in their socio-economic life. The British took up drastic policy in matters of land settlement. As a step toward this

68. Ibid.
policy, Maxwell abolished the Lallup system which was a feudal system, and in lieu of it introduced a house tax of Rs.2/- per homestead in the valley and Rs.3/- per house per annum in the hill areas. While this transformation affected the traditional land use system under the Maharaja, it did not affect the tribal land holding system in the hills.

As the economic motives of the British were certainly supreme, the immediate task ahead for the British officers was the placing of administration of the state on a firm footing. The colonial movement in its later phase, combined in itself both economic exploitation and political interest. As such political security became very crucial for the British without which their economic exploitation could not flourish.

The hill territory was separated from the general administration and the hill chiefs continued to enjoy considerable power and privileges within their respective chiefdoms. However, the collection of hill house-tax and the system of forced labour affected the economic life of the people. The latter compelled the hill people to carry goods, bags and baggage’s, to make bridges and construction of roads and to build new bungalows for the touring officials without receiving any payment for their labour. Besides, every household in the hill villages were made to subscribe money, chicken, eggs or other domestic animals to feed the touring officials free of cost. Thus, the enforcement of the system which was economically exploitative in character had affected the hard-pressed village economy so much so that some Kukis moved into Burma (Myanmar) and the unadministered Territory which they called MAAP-GAM*, to escape from this extra burden. Among others, the present TOLPHEI** village of the HAOKIPs situated in

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69. Dena’s Modern Manipur (Ed.) P.77.
70. Ibid.
72. Dena; op.cit. p. 81.
* MAAP-GAM: ‘MAAP’ means a land where there is no governmental authority/control. ‘GAM’ literally means ‘land’ or ‘territory’. Hence, “Unadministered Territory”
** TOLPHEI: The village belongs to Telsing Haokip clan of the “Thadou-Kuki” tribes. As all the knowledgeable elders have died, informations were collected from the younger generation. The present Chief Ngulkhomang is a youngmen of only 30.
the hill ranges between HENGLEP and CHURACHANDPUR town is one such example of the victims of colonial exploitation (See Map-XI). It is significant to note that the village was established in 1909 and owing to Pothang system, they migrated to MAAP GAM. TOLPHEI was re-settled in the later part of 1919. In this regard the people of the valley had also faced equally oppressive measures and economic exploitation that subsequently led to the outbreak of anti-British movements in 190473 and 1939.74 It was against such oppressive rule that the Zeliangrong people also rose in revolt under Jadonang and Gaidinliu in 1930-32.75

As such it became evident that the British were not interested in the development and progress of the tribes but were mainly concerned with collecting house-tax after their arrival in Manipur. Thus, exploitation took place in different forms and no effective measures were introduced to ease or remove economic backwardness. Even after the British arrival, the Kukis continued practising ‘shifting cultivation’ and produced only the bare necessities at the subsistence level. They had almost no surplus to supplement their deficit quantities of food grain. This was a situation in which there was no economic inter-dependence and specialisation in any trade.

The economic plight of the Kukis was further aggravated by the state’s monopoly over the forests and the so called “Lambus” who indulged in corruption much to the detriment of the economic prosperity of the Kukis. K.S. Bimola writes, “the ‘lambus’ plundered and pillaged the common villagers”.76 As such in this state of affairs the Kukis led a miserable socio-economic life more so during and after the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19. They felt the pinch of British administration heavily when the latter started exploiting their manpower and resources for

73. Denz, op. cit.129.
74. ibid., p.145.
shipment to Europe during the First World War 1914-1917. The Kukis were not in a position to consolidate their economic resources to fight against the British. Hence, they paid a heavy price for their anti-British adventures. The continuance of the war for more than two years meant complete draining away of their economic resources when cultivation could not take place beyond two cropping seasons. As the entire economy depended upon the annual produces of the paddy, its complete breakdown brought starvation to the Kuki warriors who were fighting the British at different battlefronts. Thus, the starving Kuki warriors could not fight for a longer period and eventually surrendered. The British knew that hunger and deficient economy would force the Kukis to surrender and capitulate. They were right.

A. Expanding trade: In first half of the 20th century under colonial economy rice became a prospective commercial crop in Manipur, consequently the British authorities began to take interest in expanding terrace cultivation. It may be noted here that colonial economy was a market economy and things produced were for sale in the market with profit motive. As such under colonial economy rice cultivation was encouraged by the colonial authorities. During this period the Kukis had also started wet-rice cultivation in the Lewapokpi valley in the North West area where there was ample field for such cultivation. Besides, potato cultivation by Kukis and Nagas in the hills being successful, was encouraged by the British. This shows that traditional food crops were turned into more or less cash crop. Thus, the Kuki cultivators increasingly switched over to the production of commercial crops in large quantities even though they continued to grow variety of crops for self-consumption.

The British rule in Manipur witnessed the improvement of road communications, as stated early, for they wanted to provide better and easier communication to the colonial officers.

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79. Manipur Administration Report 1913-14
touring the hill areas for collection of taxes from the villages. The British constructed roads in the hills connecting the administrative headquarters, which was established after the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19.

Even before the Anglo-Kuki War, the road from Imphal to Moreh was constructed under the supervision of Lt. Raban and it was completed in 1881.80 The 28th Bombay Pioneers were employed in this work of construction.81 Thus, efforts were made to construct new roads and repair the existing ones for which the Government of India also supplied necessary materials eg. tools including wire ropes to make bridges etc.82 The construction of the road connecting Manipur and Assam which passed through Naga Hills began during the time of Gambhir Singh. It was opened to traffic in February 1895.83

The new roads constructed in the hills connects Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Thanlon, Nungba (Tamenglong), Churachandpur (Lamka) and Tamenglong to Kangpokpi.84 The total amount spent on construction of roads both in the valley and the hills was Rs.50,848 + Rs.23,719=Rs.74,567 in 1924-25.85 The significant changes brought by this improved communication system was the growth of markets in these administrative centres due to gradual concentration of the people. As a result trading activity was on the rise in the hills and the barter system was slowly dying out with the introduction of money as a medium of exchange. Thus, the introduction of British currency in Manipur had tremendous impact on the subsistence economy of the Kukis. Process of monetisation had created the self-sufficiency in the economy of the hill people.86 This new development became a great determining factor in as far as their

86. K. Gailangam; op. cit. p.158.
economic transition was concerned. The traditional economy of the Kukis was integrated with the colonial economy gradually.

B. Impact of money-economy: The introduction of money economy and the expansion of markets had a far-reaching impact upon the socio-economic life of the Kukis. There had been an increasing consciousness about the importance of money-economy as the Kukis could buy and sell things through British currency system being as medium of exchange. After the introduction and acceptance of the coinage/British and currency system even the hill house-tax was also demanded in that medium. As such, the people began to think of producing goods to sell in the markets and earn money and profit. This sort of development has changed the attitude and mental outlook of the people. In order to get cash, they began to grow cash crops such as chilly, potato, brinjal, raw-cotton etc. and sell them in the market both in the hills and valley. The Hmars living in the Tipaimukh area (south-western border of Manipur) had also traded with the merchants from Cachar and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) in various perishable and non perishable commodities like cotton, rice, chilly, orange, vegetables etc.

Thus, the introduction of money had tremendously increased the volumes and the quantum of trade among the people. The degree and differentiation of the people in terms of wealth today has also greatly increased. These sorts of changes as result of money economy was hitherto unknown in the traditional society of the Kuki tribes. In fact, it was a new phenomenon for these people who were deep-rooted in their age-old practices.

9. IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY

The British administration and its colonial economy had also far reaching consequences positively upon the traditional socio-economic life of the Kukis in particular and the tribals in

88. Ibid.
general. The colonial authorities and the Christian missionaries introduced some innovations, which led them to march from the traditional way of life to modernity. Compelled by the changing scenario, there grew economic interaction among the Kukis themselves and with the people of the valley. Consequently, trade and commerce greatly increased which eventually changed their way of life.

According to Roy Burman, there was a high probability of the tribal cultures being swamped by the predominant Hindu and Muslim cultures of the neighbourhood and of their resources being usurped by state and private institutions. Intuitively as reflex, the tribal sought for a religion which provided them a better economic leverage. Such interests were thus the overriding factors for rapid acceptance of Christianity rather than to attractions to missionaries. 89

There is no denying of the fact that the Christian missionaries in Manipur like Pettigrew, Crozier and Watkin Roberts 90 were the first to bring welfare programmes. The Christian missionaries set an example of social service with high spirit of enthusiasm, which was later followed by others. The welfare activities particularly known as the work of mercy are considered as inseparable part of their mission-work 91 which had an increasingly strong impact upon the simple minds of the tribals.

For the first time the missionaries introduced the Kukis to modern economy and facilities that helped them to avoid wasteful expenditures as it affected their subsistence economy. They were in fact, the first ones to decry the 'slash and burn' method of shifting cultivation, which was largely practised by the people. As alternative, the Kukis were introduced to the sound practice of wet cultivation. The missionaries encouraged afforestation programmes to avoid th

89. B.K. Roy Burman; Christianity and Development among the Hill Tribes of Northeast India. J. Indian Anthro
90. F.S. Downs; op. cit. pp.158-166.
ecological imbalances and degradation due to the destruction of forests for cultivation and timber trade.

The culture of propitiating the evil spirits by way of sacrificing livestock had drained the economy of the people. With their exposure to Christianity, the belief in the multifarious spirits ended and the people began to understand that their new God was less expensive which helped to salvage their economy.

The Kukis in the past had conducted their social festivals and ceremonies with unlimited supply of locally brewed rice beer. As such practice was uneconomic which also made them lazy and lethargic, the missionaries waged a war against it. They even went to the extend of preaching that drinking is a sin with a view to change their age-old habits. Although its practice could not be totally wiped out, however its usage had been curtailed and controlled.

With the establishment of Churches and schools, the Kukis began to receive salaries for the first time. It was a novel thing which they had never experienced before. With further qualifications in different fields, the Kukis got white-collared jobs. This had really improved their economic position and their social status. The Churches treat every member of the Church as equals whether one is rich or poor. Although in some cases well-to-do persons tried to exert their influences, still the status quo remained. The Churches also worked for economic equality among its members by way of sharing the surplus wealth to help the poor people in the society. Christianity respected every one as equals in dignity, honour and prestige. Thus, Christianity had brought a sea change and created tremendous impact on the socio-economic life of the Kukis.
10. POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Within the last fifty years, the economic condition of the Kukis has undergone significant changes. The dawn of political stability ultimately brought security to their lives and property. The Kuki ethnoses are now poised for moving ahead in the search for better amenities of life in sharp contrast to the barbaric and wretch lives they lived in the past. The socio-economic and political changes of the Kukis as a result of their conversion to Christianity, the spread of modern education, science and technology has had tremendous impact and has subsequently changed their attitude and approach in matters related to the art of living. In spite of that, the isolation of hundreds of Kuki villages have not changed since the means of transport and communication have not been adequately developed and so the remote corners of the State remain still relatively untouched by the winds of change. Many villages still lie scattered, perched amid thick forests, on hilltops and lowlands, some of which are not easily accessible. The mode of agricultural production is still primitive and is carried on in a simple and traditional way (See Fig. 18. p. 266 - 269).

In course of time in various places of the hills of Manipur where the Kukis settled, big village and semi-urban settlements developed. As a result, school, churches, hotels, shops, market places etc. came into existence.

The Kukis in the post-independent period also witnessed the emergence of middle class in their society whose power base was deep rooted in their traditional society. Their (middle class) motive was to make way for political career and to establish themselves in the political scenario of the hills of Manipur in particular and in the state in general.

The increasing neo-population exerted pressure on land for settlement area and also cultivable land. Besides, owing to the expansion of the district administrative machinery in the hills, structural changes took place in the thinking pattern of the Kukis. Money based activities
replaced traditional community based economic activities by producing more agro-products to meet the ever-increasing daily demands. As the pressure of population on land increased, the jhum cycle also got gradually reduced to three or four years. With limited land available only for terrace farming method of cultivation, it became very difficult for the Kukis to give up the culture of shifting cultivation despite knowing all its antecedent evils. Thus, in the post-independent period the traditional agricultural practices of the tribals especially the Kukis largely continued to dominate their economy. This shows that a symbiotic relationship between the tribals and the forest existed. Slowly the importance of preserving the floral and the faunal environment dawnd upon the Kuki intelligentsia and the new middle class.

A. Terrace cultivation: In the post-independent period, the Kukis adopted the system of terrace method of wet-rice cultivation in large scale on the slopes of the hills where it is not very steep. It is also found in practice in the foothills of the low land areas where the valley of Manipur is extended. Though the initial labour requirement to make the terrace field fit for cultivation was labour-intensive especially in those stony soil areas, which give less trouble than jhum cultivation once made. The mode of cultivation is almost the same as in the valley areas, except that the enclosures in the terrace fields are usually small hardly extending to about one metre in width (See Fig. 18, p. 266). This is the only alternative in as far as the wet-rice cultivation is concerned because of the non-availability of flat land. Although, in some cases, this type of cultivation depended on rainfall, spring and stream water are generally diverted for such purposes. Being hilly areas double-cropping system cannot be taken up successfully as is practised in the valley at some places.

Maize continues to be one of the staple foods of the Kukis. It is grown in the field both on dense and degraded forestland covering a large portion of their cultivated area. Besides a wide range of edible vegetables are grown in their jhum fields.
Fig. 18 (a) & (b). Terraced paddy fields along the hill slope near N.H.39 in Sadar Hills

Fig. 18 (a)

Fig. 18 (b)
Fig. 18 (c) & (d). Terrace Cultivation practised along the foothills of Koubru Range in Sadar Hills

Fig. 18 (c) Primitive method of ploughing using bullock

Fig. 18 (d). Transfer of young paddy from the nursery for transplantation
Fig. 18 (e). Transplantation of paddy

Fig. 18 (f). Bundles of paddy being carried to the threshing floor during harvesting.
B. Commercialisation of crops: Important commercial crops like potato, pea, soyabean, ginger, cotton, etc., which are highly recommended for their good taste are today exported outside the State. They are mostly cultivated in the degraded forestland. The tree bean called Yongchak in local (Manipuri) term is one of the important vegetables of the Kukis, which serves the purposes of commercial and local consumption. It is planted almost in every Kuki villages, as it has become a good source of income.

The local produces also include lime, lemon, orange, guava, papaya, banana, amla, charcoal, etc. which were marketed at the local trade centres. It may be pointed out that horticulture and cash crop plantation provides an alternative to shifting cultivation. But due to unavailability of capital with the Kuki cultivators they found difficult to translate their deeds into action even if they were willing to do so. Inspite of that, cultivation of horticulture and cash crops were taken up in small scale in some parts of the hills especially in Churachandpur. Due to poor road communications these fruits were mostly exported to Silchar and adjoining areas by boat through the Barak river.

Commercialisation of agriculture and other products among the Kukis, arguably gained momentum in the second half of the 20th century. As the barter system was fading out, the need for money or cash naturally began to be felt. Thus, a Kuki household switched over to the production of agricultural commodities for markets rather than for the sake of meeting the needs of the family. It was a significant transformation. Besides, the activities of agricultural labourers were further accelerated with the growing class of commercial people flocking to the village to collect different agricultural products for trade. Thus, a Kuki household was induced to grow more commercial crops for sale. It acted as a catalyst in their economic status and

92. G.Kabui ; Problems of Development of Tribal Areas of Manipur, in M. Huram; ed. p. 70
income. Sometimes, the commercial middlemen advanced money to grow particular prospective commercial crops in the years to come. This type of activities took place especially in those Kuki villages, which were situated, along the foothills where the National Highway runs, and those villages situated in and near the local trade centres. It became more advantageous for the cultivators to grow crops for the market and purchase market items of their choice such as food grains, with the cash collected by them by selling their crops.

Thus, it is important to mention here that marketing of cash-crops and horticulture products was not much a problem due to nearness of local markets (bazaar) but the poor Kuki cultivators were not fetching profitable price for their hard toiled products due to the middlemen-business (Mahajans) as they are in a hurry to return home soon for work. Very often, the so-called Mahajans or middlemen used to take undue advantage of the ignorance of cultivators. Thus, the tribals generally continued to suffer from this sort of economic exploitation even after the departure of the British from Manipur.

C. Landless agriculture labour: The increased pressure of population on land over the several decades resulted in the corresponding increase in the number of landless agriculture-labourers in the Kuki society. Various other factors can also be attributed to the rise of agricultural landless labourers hitherto unknown in the traditional past of the Kuki society. Some of them can be looked into the following factors:

i) Demographic: - The site of jhumland fit for paddy cultivation is now available only in the interior highlands where there is low population density. Increase in landless labourers can be seen among those large chunks of Kuki population, which remain confined to the foothills and the nearby hill ranges surrounding the broad central lowland of Manipur, especially in the Sadar Hills sub-division. In these areas, lands are very limited either for jhum or terrace to meet the demands of ever growing population.
ii) Social: - Reduction in the size of land holdings because of the laws of inheritance which provided all male members equal share in the property of their father contributed to the further division of ancestor property and growth of landless agricultural labourers. Besides in some poor families, the sons had nothing to inherit from their respective parents, which further resulted in increasing the numbers of landless agricultural labourers.

Moreover, the Kuki society has in fact witnessed a sharp increase in the number of landless labourers in recent years mainly due to political reasons.

D. Different agricultural practices: - Different systems have been adopted in respect of cultivation among agricultural household family and community of the Kukis. Some of them are:

i) Lou-san (Share-croppership):

A landless person who works on another person’s paddy field (Lou) for share of the produces after harvesting (generally on equal basis). In this system, the tenants have to bear all the risk in the cultivation (San). This kind of sharecropper system is normally taken up for a period of one year or more depending upon the agreement between the landowner and the tenant. The latter has no right of lease or contract on land on which he or she works. There are also agricultural landless labourers who merely work on another person’s land for wages. In this case he or she has no risk in the cultivation or bears no responsibility for the failure or success of the crops. Our field research has revealed that this system is on the increase.

ii) Chang-thoi:

It means the system of lending paddy CHANG to a person on the condition of paying it back within a specific period normally after harvesting along with interest, that too in the form of paddy call THOI. For e.g. a person who took 2 (kerosene) tins of paddy from a wealthy owner may reward him with 4 tins of paddy after harvesting.
iii) Phoutamsen*: It is a system of lending money on the condition of paying it back in the form of paddy. It is like an advance payment of money for the rice or paddy, which is supposedly to be given back by the cultivator after harvesting.

**E. Transport and communication:** On account of our research we strongly feel that the presence of a good means of road-transport and communication system is very essential for the overall economic development of hilly district of Manipur. In 1988-89, Churachandpur district had a total length of 625.12 km roads connecting sub-divisional centres like Henglep, Thanlon, Parbung and Singhat.94 The National Highway 39 passes through the district of Chandel till it ends at Moreh, a border town of Manipur.95 A new jeepable road was constructed to connect the remote village of Sita from Tengnoupal Kongkhanthana also connects New Somtal at a distance of 180 km. In this district.96 A regular bus service also connects Imphal and Mombi (Lonpi) via Chakpikarong road in 1989-90.97 Churachandpur – Sugnu Road also connects the two district in the south of Manipur (See Map - XI).

A total length of 668.60 km road is maintained in Ukhrul district by the State Government which includes state highways, district roads and inter-village roads.98 Bus services from Imphal connects all places of importance including Kamjong – Chassad sub-division largely inhabited by the Kukis (See Map - XI).

In Tamenglong, the National Highway 53, runs from Imphal to Jiribam.99 Roads were inter-connected and pass through Senapati district inhabited by Nagas, Kukis, and other communities. Sadar Hills, with its two important sub-divisional centres – Kangpokpi and Saikul.

* A local Manipuri term for lending money called (*sen*) on the condition of paying it back with paddy called "Phou" or 'phoutam'.
95. District Census Book-Chandel, Manipur, p.7.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. District Census Book-Ukhrul, p.6.
is predominantly inhabited by the Kukis. Saikul is connected through district roads from Imphal. 

*(See Map - XI)*

**F. Trade and commerce:** In the post-independent period the volumes of trade in this region has increased by leaps and bounds as a result of the improved means of transport and communication. The important centres for trade and commerce for the “Thadou-Kukis” and the other tribes in the hills are Singhat, Thanlon, Parbung, Henglep, Churachandpur, Chandel, Pallel, Sugnu, Chakpikarong bazaar, Moreh, etc. in the South and South-East of Manipur.

Besides Kangpokpi, Motbung, Kaithelmanbi,Senapati, Saikul, Tamei,Kamjong-Chassad, etc. are the noteworthy trade and commerce centres for the Kukis in the north and north-eastern hills of Manipur. The local population in these centres transact their business and sell away their local and forest produces such as, honey hide, bamboo, cane, timber etc. Buses and trucks are the chief means of carriage throughout the districts and state highways. In the southwest of Churachandpur district, the Barak Rivers handles a significant portion of goods traffic for village situated along the river *(See Map - XI)*.

Thus, we feel that the increase in the volume of trade as a result of the improved means of transport and communication system was the natural outcome of the policies pursued in the post-independent period. The spread of Christianity, modern education and the establishment of democratic rule and its administration, creation of new job opportunities, extended their world view. The Kukis, then, became a part of the bigger economic system of the State. Their attempt to strive for better civilisation, consequently, brought structural changes in their socio-economic life. 

**G. Causes of poverty:** In an attempt to reduce and ameliorate the economic backwardness of the tribals various development programmes like District Rural Development Authority (DRDA), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) etc. have been taken up by the respective district planning
authorities in the 1980s. Though some farmers have benefited, the so-called development schemes adopted by the state government does not percolate to the masses. Hence, poverty continues to dog the tribal mass in general and the Kukis in particular mainly for the following reasons:

i) Absence of modern methods of cultivation and technology: - The absence of modern method and technology has forced the Kukis to continue the old ways of cultivation. Land is still ploughed by oxen and buffaloes that too, were sometimes not possible in terrace field. The terrace cultivation is also largely depended upon the mercy of the monsoon. Except few people who use fertilizers the common people do not use fertilizers. No modern and scientific technology is applied in the mode of cultivation. Thus failure in one cropping season meant tragedy, as there is no other alternative means of subsistence.

ii) Absence of good and motorable roads: - Though there is general improvement in the network of roads linking the district and sub-divisional centres the remote tribal villages cannot be reached by buses and other vehicles. During rainy season most of the roads and paths are muddy and suffer from frequent land and mudslides. Therefore, it became very difficult to the remote inhabitants for transportation of their agricultural products for marketing.

iii) Destruction of cottage industries: - Failure to compete with the cheap qualities of goods produced in the Imphal valley and the inflow of foreign goods, the traditional Kuki industries and craft production are dying out. Lack of capital and uneconomical mode of production are the two reasons behind this apart from numerous man-hours needed for the work to be executed.

iv) Continuance of jhuming culture: - The traditional means of eking out their livelihood by labour-intensive jhum cultivation has not been given up. They were forced to do so as

100. See all District Census Handbook of Manipur; Census of India 1991. Diector of Census operation, Manipur
101. M. Horam; ed; op. cit. p.86
102. Ibid.; pp.86-87
there is no sufficient level land for terrace cultivation. The jhuming culture is still a necessary evil, which has to be addressed to. Jhuming on degraded forestland is highly unproductive. Our field research has revealed that to this age old practice we have to find some better economic alternatives.

v) Absence of individual ownership on land: - The continuance of traditional land use and ownership system constituted one of the main reasons for the mass economic backwardness. Under this system there is no individual ownership or holding rights of land. Though most of the Kuki chiefs no longer enjoy the traditional privilege and customary entitlement, however in matters of land ownership he is the sole authority. The chief continues to control the affairs of land and politics103, in the Kuki society.

It is found that the weak economic base of the Kukis and their fragile nature of its subsistence is due to the existing systems of land use and ownership pattern which needs serious introspection and experimentation with the system of individual holding or ownership of land104. The villagers are landless even though he has an annual lease for jhuming purposes. Since the Kuki villages have no permanent ownership of land in a village he has no sense of belonging to. He cultivates the land but the land does not belong to him. He has no permanent rights over the land he cultivates. Unless he buys a new land and establishes himself as a chief or private of that land, he has nowhere to claim permanent ownership of his own. It is also important to note that if a particular villager found his chief tyrannical or indifferent to his needs and conveniences, and migrated to another village, he would be certainly under the control of another chief again. Although the system is tolerable in the hands of a good chief it allows a cruel chief to oppress the villagers. But it is also important to note that there were also many chiefs who played the

103. P. T. Yamthang Haokip; in M.Horam; ed.; op. cit. p.228.
role of the fatherly figure with moral responsibility towards his villagers. The chief helped them in their adversities, advised them in their difficulties, rewarded them in their achievement and punished them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or infringement of established customs. We strongly feel that the whole matter requires a retrospection.

Under the system a Kuki villager cannot develop a piece of land for the purpose of permanent cultivation. These types of practices affect the will to improve the land. It also offers no incentive. As such credit facilities and other financial assistance either from the government or from other financial institution is hard to come owing to the absence of individual rights over the land.

Thus land ownership system itself as a hindrance to socio-economic development to most of the Kukis. Over the years it was found that the system was not desirably effective for boosting economic activity. In this regard, we agree with Kamkhenthang who writes, “They (Kukis) are bound to become poorer unless the traditional economic system is modified to suit the changing situation.” The resultant outcome in the long run was poverty in which the signs loomed large as one enters a Kuki village in the hill areas of Manipur. To sum up, with the change of time the mindset of the people has also to change. The age-old system of land ownership in which the Kuki chief enjoyed exclusive rights over it, no longer holds good for the people in the present society. Every one wants to own a piece of land, which they can call as their own. Thus the traditional institution of chieftainship needs to be reformed by doing away with the practises detrimental to growth and development of the society thereby retaining those traditional value system and adopting certain measures to preserve the culture and identity.

vi) Political: - While the other causes of poverty among the Kuki society is inherent in nature, the increase of poverty manifold among the Kukis in recent times should also be seen in

the context of the changing political scenario in the hills of Manipur.

The Kuki society has witnessed the sharp increase in the number of landless labourers or wage earners more so during the early 1990s on account of the so-called "ethnic cleansing" violent campaign mounted by the combined NSCN-IM and Naga Limguards on the former. It is significant to note that, 62 Kuki villages were allegedly uprooted in between 1956 – 1986\textsuperscript{108}, and again during the most tremulous period i.e. between 1992 and 1996, more than 300 villages were allegedly uprooted further\textsuperscript{109}. Then with over 580 Kukis mostly men becoming the victims, and over 3000 houses burnt since the beginning of the depredation in mid-1992, and over 50,000 people were rendered homeless and displaced\textsuperscript{110}. Till today tens of thousands of Kukis are still stranded and remain un-rehabilitated in various towns and villages. Thus, it involve serious socio-economic and political questions which require immediate attention (See Appendix- IX).

Without pretending to speak with exaggeration and authority the apathy of the government to pay attention towards the economic plight of the Kukis led to worsening of all sorts of miseries. The extent of loss in terms of men and properties speaks volumes of how their miseries and sufferings would be liked. Thus today a fairly large proportion of working force in agriculture is forced to lead a life of an extremely difficult situation, leading to increased poverty, militancy, drug trafficking and vices in the Kuki society. It needs immediate and urgent redressal if the Kuki society has to survive. Besides many Kuki women had been widowed and large number of children orphaned and rendered homeless. Their untold sufferings were further compounded with the failure of the government to rehabilitate and resettled them. In this connection, S. Sinha writes, "Their (Kukis) plight is too pitiable and deserves Government of India's help.

\textsuperscript{108} Jangkhosat C.Misao ; \textbf{Kukite Choudan} (Custom and Culture), Sadar Hills, Kangpokpi-Manipur. Pp 117-119.
\textsuperscript{110} Souvenir - \textbf{KUKI INPI}, 2001,pp.16-18. see also, T. S. Gangle’s booklet, "Naga-Kuki Relationship needs strengthening". Also see P.S. Haokip, pp 209-258.
protection and care”. The role of the state government is still more controversial and pitiable. In the context of this grave situation to which the Kukis are being drawn, the apex body – Kuki Inpi, organised a rally in Delhi on 19th January 2001 to highlight their plight and press home its demands for:

- Constitution of High Powered Commission to assess the extent of loss and damages cause to the Kukis by NSCN-IM,
- Rehabilitation of displaced Kukis in their respective villages before 2001 Census,
- Compensation of Kuki victims of NSCN –IM’s atrocities,
- Satisfactory solution on Kuki problem112.

The cry of the Kukis for paternal generosity, however did not receive any proper attention as could be evidenced from the fact that the matter remains unattended till date. Thus, the Kukis faced innumerable hardships of all sorts. Their economy was seriously affected. They became landless and were reduced to a mere wage earner or hire-labourer, which was hitherto unknown in the past. This shows that they had no other source of income other than land, as land is the only means of eking out their livelihood. In fact, the increasing landless labourers are closely connected with poverty. Therefore, economic instability is finally leading to mass impoverisation of the Kuki society.

The Kukis who had settled in the interior part of the hills were the most affected in this so-called “ethnic cleansing war” mounted by the NSCN (I-M) in collusion with other organisation already mentioned. With the attack on their villages, and the subsequent gruesome killing and loss of precious lives, Kukis had to vacate their villages. In such fallen state their life became very threatened. Due to the prevailing fear psychosis and a feeling of insecurity in

111. The Indian Express, Feb. 2001. See also, (Souvenir, 2001, p.19)
the hills even smaller villages could not survive. They had to leave, however hard they had been. Thus, the Kukis became refugees in their own land. Politics of the lowest kind and primitive in nature had once again dawned.

During this period, the age-old relationship had completely shattered. Despite the fact that both communities are professed Christian, Christianity has completely failed to restrain them from doing something evil of the kind, which they were about to carry out. Their plight knew no bounds. They sought shelter and protection among their brethren living in big villages, small townships, Grouping Centres, etc. For instance, the Kukis of Tamei sub-division such as Zoupi, Dulon, Buning, etc. took refuge at Kangpokpi, Keithelmanbi, Phaijang, Saparmeina-Tuipajang, Haipi, etc. which are situated along the National Highway-39. The refugees established new villages and began to settle in or around the vicinity of these big villages and small townships. In course of time, these big villages and townships began to develop into important centres for trade and commerce.

The recent development of Saparmeina area into a small township is a case in point. With the settlement of Buning-Kukis numbering 40-50 households, in the vicinity of Saparmeina-Tuipajang, with more refugees coming forth, the area is beginning to develop into a small township. A new urbanism has emerged in the hills.

**H. Changing phase (Recent trends):** Thus, significantly the Kukis had begun to prefer living in big villages where there is greater security of life in the event of external threat to life and property, rather than remain scattered in small pockets in the hills as in the past. The Kukis are convinced with this sort of mentality particularly after the outbreak of the Kuki-Naga ethnic tension. It appears that such thoughts had never occurred in the past. In our field research we strongly felt as advocated by the people that the development of such mentality was rather a significant transition in the socio-economic life of the Kukis today. Even after the return of
normalcy in those areas where they had settled earlier, many of them, if not all, were reluctant
to go back due to their terrible and horrifying experiences in their age old habitations. The new
settlers face a new hard-life and difficult situation. To sustain their household economy they
took up different occupations of skilled and unskilled-labour not by choice but out of necessity.
Their new life situation is something different from what it was in the interior parts of the hills.
They took up different types of work – carpentry, house – construction, manual agricultural
labour for wages, share-croppership, jhuming on degraded land even if it was highly unproductive.
small business like opening of shops, hotels, etc. Moreover, the flaring up of communal clashes
in Churachandpur district way back in 1997, mainly between the Thadou-Kuki speaking and
Paite communities further inflicted more sorrow and sufferings. It had drained the economic
resources on both sides for which they gained nothing.

Thus, in the post-independent period and even today the broad framework of the Kuki
socio-economic structure remains the same. The immediate economic consequences of ethnic-
tension in the hills were disastrous. This kind of ethnic tension led to local migration, which
finally resulted in economic instability. Even for the Government it created problem of
rehabilitation to the victims. The economic backwardness of the Kukis can be solve by bringing
economic development in the hills on the principles of social and economic justice within the
broad Indian democratic framework. Being deprived of their due share, over the years, the
progress of economic development is so slow that it may take several decades or even a century
for the majority of the Kukis to reach to the standard of living as enjoyed now by the advanced
communities or Indian citizen living in different parts of the country.

Recent development also shows the movement of significant number of Kuki population
from rural areas of agricultural activities to towns and cities like Moreh, Churachandpur, Saikul,
Kangpokpi, Imphal etc. for political and government service activities, business and
others. In spite of having their own respective villages in the interior hills, they began to live and settle permanently. These chiefs and villagers could be consider Non-Resident Chief (NRC) and Non-Resident Villagers (NRV) respectively. As they hardly or never went to the village the chief often entrusted their closest relative or next of their kin to look after the administration of the village.

For instance, tribal settlement can be seen today at different places in the capital- Imphal. Of course, places like Keisamthong, Kakhulong and Old Lamlulane were established during the colonial period. In the post-colonial period, many Kuki localities grew up in different places like Haokip Veng, Khongsa Veng, Cannan Veng, Zomi Villa, Dewalahland, Tribal Colony, etc. With the advent of modernisation and their contact with the people of advanced communities, their social, economic and political institution gave a new lease of life under different pattern. They have adopted the value of new pattern associated with capitalistic civilisation which replaced the community value. The middle class Kukis are now, of course, transformed, dynamic and vibrant having bigger role to play in the politics of the hills in particular and the state in general.

I. Administrative changes in the hills: After the end of colonial rule in Manipur, the administration of the hill areas was placed in the hands of the Maharaja of Manipur. After this a series of Acts were passed regarding the improvement of the administration in the hill areas. These were -

i) “The Manipur State Hill Peoples (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947,” which introduced democratic system of election;

ii) “The Manipur (Village Authority in Hill Areas) Act, 1956” passed by the Parliament to initiate people’s representation at the grass root level. According to this Act, the village

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113. The Manipur Valley Tribal Development Council; Memorandum submitted to Shri. Rishang Keishing, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Manipur, 1995.
chief became the ex-officio chairman of the village authorities and its members were elected on the basis franchise. 116

iii) "The Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief’s Rights) Act, 1967," passed by the Legislative Assembly on 10th Jan. 1967.117 It was an attempt to abolish chieftainship in the hill areas of Manipur by paying land compensation. However, the Act could not be implemented due to a difference of opinion between the Hill Areas Committee and the Legislative Assembly; and lastly,

iv) "The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971," which the Parliament passed on the eve of Manipur attainment of statehood in 1971, to establish Autonomous District Councils in the hill areas of Manipur with a view to decentralisation of power.

There are six Autonomous District Councils for five districts – two in Senapati and one each in Ukhrul, Churachanpur, Chandel, and Tamenglong. However all the six Autonomous District Councils had been kept under suspension even after the lapse of fifteen years. Our research has reveal that the autonomy granted to the district council under the Act is only in name. The survival and working of the district councils greatly depends on the government of Manipur through the district administration. As of now neither the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971, is no longer in operation nor the demand for the extension of provisions of the Sixth Schedule under Article 244(2) of the constitution in the Tribal Areas of Manipur is conceded. Economic backwardness, lack of development infrastructure, poverty and shortage of educational facilities in the hill areas of Manipur have greatly enhanced the sense of alienation among the tribals from the political mainstream of Manipur. The Kukis and Nagas feel that they were deprived of their right to economic development for which plight the

Meiteis are solely blamed. The non-constitution of the District Councils for many years is a glaring example of wanton violation of the statutory Act and “rape of district autonomy and democracy” leading to a sort of political vacuum, which trampled the interest and legitimate aspiration of the tribal people. It appears that as of now nothing short of the extension of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule will satisfy the interest and aspiration of the tribal people of Manipur. Thus, in conformity with the principle of genuine democracy and federation, the Sixth Schedule if extended would serve as a basis for working out the principle of internal self-determination of the tribals, which in turn will serve further as the cementing force or the integrity of Manipur. Probably, it will also help to arrest the fissiparous tendencies and the mushrooming of different tribal movements for separate homeland in Manipur.

11. ETHNICITY AND GROPING FOR IDENTITY

Here we discuss some aspects of Kuki politics in the modern day context and its effects. The post-independent period witnessed the identity of the Kukis of Manipur in a state of confusion. While the Naga identity was being nationalised, the identity of the Kukis was getting fragmented and tribalised. The common identity of the latter got dwindled which also spelt a direct co-relation with a diminishing sense of nationalism.

The term KUKI existed as a cohesive identity prior to India’s independence during the colonial phase. But in the post-independent period it suffered from having a common identity among the erstwhile Kuki people. Kuki as a common identity has been contested today by several alternative identities, irrespective of its feasibility and acceptance, such as CHIN, MIZO, ZOMI/ZOUMI, ZO, KHUL/KHUR, CHIKIM, CHHINLUNG/SINLUNG, and even MANMASI. However, every effort to bring all the erstwhile Kukis under one common and

118. Sanatomba Kangjam; An Analytical Perspective of Manipur’s Territorial Question. Sangai express, May, 08, 2003, p.2.
119. Memorandum submitted to Dr. Manmohan Singh, Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, by the Sixth Schedule Demand Committee, Manipur, dated the 20th August. 2004.
acceptable nomenclature for all has failed, and the nomenclature-war of supremacy continued to inflict them. Arguably in the post-independent period, the term ‘Kuki’ in Manipur has been put to various tests for acceptance but in vain.\textsuperscript{120}

It is important to note here that, till the departure of British from India, they did not object to being identified as Kukis when inter-tribal feuds were practice of the time.\textsuperscript{121} The term KUKI gave security and protection, and was an expression of solidarity, prestige and national ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{122} Evidently, in this connection Seilen Haokip, writes,

"As recent as the early part of nineteenth-century, the brave and concerted opposition to the British imperialists marks the peak of Kuki nationalism"\textsuperscript{123}

But today such spirit of nationalism is at its lowest ebb. Divisive forces have crept in for which the so-called politicians and social leaders need introspection. The chauvinism of the ‘Thadou’ speaking Kukis vis-à-vis their minor ethnic tribal counterparts contributed in no small measures in creating disunity and a sense of alienation.

After India’s independence, the introduction of the Constitution Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes Lists, (Modification) Order,1956, segmented the Kukis into different groups of ‘tribe’ where each of the tribes were made up of a combination of clans and sub-clans. This kind of segmentation led the common identity developing into a complex fractured issue. By this Order both the ‘Old Kukis’ and ‘New Kukis’ got recognition. The Government intended it for administrative purposes, but it has baffled the Kukis and their sense of identity. The political consequences of this recognition was that the tribe identity appears to have increasingly taking precedence over ‘national’ identity which is highly detrimental to their unity and oneness unlike

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{121} T.S. Gangte, \textit{The Kukis}, p. 233.
\bibitem{122} Ibid.
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their Naga counterpart. Today each and every tribe thinks itself as a nation. This fact was proved in their socio-political organisation such as – Paite National Council (PNC), Vaiphei National Organisation (VNO), Simte National Council, etc. Of course, recently some of them have changed the term ‘National’ into ‘Tribe’ as – Paite Tribe Council, Simte Tribe Council, etc.

It has been observed that among the tribes of Manipur there has been a growing consciousness of separate identity in recent times. As a result of this their social boundaries are also changing fast and consequently many tribal ethnic groups have also shifted their political loyalties as well. The process of trans association in which some tribes sided with other to form a separate ethnic national entity has a political overtone. The Tengnoupal area of Chandel district were largely occupied by the anthropological old Kukis such as Anals, Lamkang, Maring, Mayon and some smaller tribes who recently sided with the Nagas either by will or by coercion for the reason best known to them after the post independent India.\(^{124}\) As mentioned above these smaller tribal groups have shifted their political loyalties despite their close affinity with the Kuki-Chin in terms of their mythological origin theory, linguistically and culturally as well. In this regard R. K. Das writes, “Tribe, such as the Anal, Aimol who now prefer to call themselves Naga originally belonged to Kuki group”.\(^{125}\) Marings are of course regarded as independent tribe but shown inclination to be affiliated to Naga.\(^{126}\) Further, Gangumei has also written in the same manner as “Now with the entry of a few more tribes of Manipur into Naga constellation, a few Kuki-Chin speakers are now among the Naga tribes”\(^{127}\). Thus, with a view to gain political advantage the above mentioned tribal groups can even change their ethnic identities by shifting their political loyalties as well.

\(^{124}\) From a Memorandum submitted to the Hon’ble Prime Minster of India, New Delhi by the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) requesting immediate withdrawal of Cease-fire Agreement between Indo-NSCN (IM) dated 14.6.2001

\(^{125}\) Das, R.K, op. cit. p. 15

\(^{126}\) R. K. Das, op. cit. pp. 5-6

\(^{127}\) G. Kabui, Ethnoses, op. cit. p. 10
In one of the seminars held recently in Manipur University, T.S. Gangte referred to the process of tribalisation of the Kukis as against the unification of the heterogeneous tribal ethnic groups in the Naga fold. Following are some of the factors, which drove the homogeneous Kukis into divergent ethnic groups:

i) Usage of the term THADOU is not acceptable to all those who speak the so-called “Thadou language”. Since the term THADOU is a personal name of a certain forbearer meant for his descendants alone, it couldn’t cover all the people speaking a common dialect.

ii) Controversy follows on naming the language as to whether it should be ‘Thadou language’ or ‘Kuki language’.

iii) After getting recognition from the Government of India, the erstwhile Kuki tribes, except a few, disown the term KUKI as they got the much-desired privileges of security and protection granted by the Constitution. These groups feel no longer the necessity of being called ‘KUKI’. And so the Thadou group stand fragmented.

The recognition of ‘Thadou’ as a tribe cannot cover all those speaking the same dialect, despite the fact that the descendents of Thadou being preponderant over the others as also being famous in reputation.

The language controversy shows that Thadous has no exclusive rights to call the common dialect after their ancestor’s name. If they insist on doing so, they will alienate all other clans who have equal rights to call the same mother-tongue after their own ancestor’s name. At the same, calling the so-called ‘Thadou language’ as ‘Kuki language’ is tantamount to committing a bigger mistake, as the term KUKI is a generic name denoting all other ethnic groups who do not speak ‘Thadou language’. In the event of ‘Thadou language’ being called ‘Kuki language’

128. T.S. Gangte; “Ethnicity and Identity management in Manipur”; a paper presented in a seminar held in Manipur University. pp.11-13. (Hereafter, cited as Ethnicity)
129. Ibid.
the term KUKI automatically excludes the other erstwhile Kukis, and would, therefore, relegate the Kuki ethnicity to the level of group appellation, which constitute the term ‘KUKI.’ Thus, the scope and coverage of the nomenclature KUKI must on no account be made narrow and limited.

The Kukis got themselves fragmented further into groups of insignificant few hundreds after getting recognition of their own tribes separately. Only the Thadous and their cognates stick to their traditional nomenclature ‘Kuki.’

It is a matter of concern that while the Kukis got fragmented and tribalised, the Nagas were enthused to maintain and uphold the nomenclature NAGA with a spirit of nationalism despite the fact they were a combination of heterogeneous tribal groups. The dynamics of Naga polity is strong, attractive and politically gainful. As such, even some of the categorised ‘Old Kukis’ such as Anals, Marings, Moyons, etc. who felt the pinch of not being treated at par with the rest opted to identify themselves as ‘Neo Nagas’ despite the fact that there is nothing common in their physical demeanour to socio-cultural affinity.

**Thadou and non-Thadou:** Earlier the term ‘NEW KUKI’ as categorised by Shakespear was synonymous with Thadou and the same had been used colloquially to denote all the groups like Kipgen, Haokip, Singsit, Singson, Chongloi, Hangsing, Doungel, Lunkim, etc.

Significantly, under the name of the recognised tribe ‘THADOU’, the Thadous and their cognates (non-Thadou) constitute the most numerous and single largest tribe of all the erstwhile Kukis and even in the whole of Manipur as per the census of 1961, 1991 and 2001. (See Appendix)

Thus, the recognition of the Kukis tribes into different groups and the unending Thadou-Kuki controversy on linguistic issue put them in a state of flux. This controversy is a sort of ethnic identity crisis, which is very sensitive. The linguistic issue has not been solved as the

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130. Ibid.

groups of people who have a stake in the issue have often taken divergent views and uncompromising stands. Presently the problem seems to have found somehow a solution with both the words ‘Thadou’ and ‘Kuki’ incorporated in the nomenclature as ‘Thadou-Kuki’. But even then due to fanaticism and narrow parochial thoughts among them, all is not well.

Close affinity of erstwhile Kukis: Further with regard to the erstwhile Kuki tribes, though they got recognition as different tribes, they share the same and related ancestry, folklore, culture, history, etc. we find clans having the same name in various other tribes. For instance, Hangsing clan people can be found among the Paite tribe as well as the ‘Thadou’. Also Neihsiel clan people can be found speaking Vaiphei dialect as well as Gangte. Another example that could be given is that of the Lhungerdim/Tungdim, whose clan members can be found in both the linguistic tribes of Zou and ‘Thadou-Kuki’. Besides, Haokip clansmen can also be found speaking Paite, Simte, Chin, Mizo and ‘Thadou-Kuki’ dialects. Thus, their common history speaks volumes of their common origin, ancestry and culture whose forefathers were a group of elatives.

‘Any Kuki Tribes’; The constitutional schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 2002 No.10 of 2003, (f) in part X entry 33 has re-introduced ‘Any Kuki Tribes’ in Manipur which had been earlier deleted from the tribe lists in 1956. The same had been in the recognised Scheduled Tribe of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland. It can revert the processes of sectarianism and schism among the Kuki society and strengthen their identity. And at the same time it can also lead to further split or division of the Kuki people especially among the ‘Thadou’ speaking groups. Had ‘Any Kuki Tribes’ been successfully introduced earlier as in the above-mentioned states before the recognition of Kuki people into different tribes the situation today would have been different. But, unfortunately they are now at the cross roads.

132. Thadou Versus Kuki (A study of Thadou Kuki controversy on linguistic issue) by Th. Thangkhocng Medziphima (Town Nagaland 4-4-1993, p. 11).
133. Relationship between Linguistic Tribal Groups and Clan Groups by Lekhotinlhang Haokip. (Via e-mail)
134. The Gazette of India- Ministry of Law and Justice (Legislative Department) New Delhi, the 8th Jan. 2003/Pauasa, 8,1924, (Saka), The Schedule Cast and Schedule Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 2002, No.10 of 2003, p. 6.
with 'Any Kuki Tribes', 'Thadou' and others recognised as tribes. And in the context of the erstwhile Kukis, the problem is that, having got themselves recognised into different tribes, they are unlikely to come back to Kuki fold, which they have disowned and rejected on the ground that the term KUKI is obsolete and foreign in its origin. Thus, it appears that at the moment only the non-Thadous speaking 'Thadou language' would perhaps benefit the recognition of 'Any Kuki Tribes.'

With the change of the whole picture, the non-Thadou groups can now claim equal right to call their identity as well as their dialect or the 'Thadou language' (Thadou pao) after each of their clan or ancestor's name as for instance – Doungel-Kuki, Misao-Kuki, Lunkim-Kuki, etc. and Doungel-pao, Misao-pao, Lunkim-pao, etc. respectively.

Thus, it is seen that haphazard categorisation caused ethnic divergence among the Kukis resulting in conflict, tension, disunity and even enmity among themselves. In this regard Gangte writes,

"This type of listing had in no small measure, contributed to the crises in the ethnic identity of the Kukis in Manipur"\(^\text{135}\)

Therefore, a fresh look on scheduling the tribes by the Government could either solve or lessen the controversy. Whatever be the case, even while maintaining their separate identity: with open heart and mind the Kuki people should think for the future of their posterity and nurture the positive aspect of unity and nationalism for their survival, in the context of changing geo-politics. Clannish feeling is not an ideal theory to be propounded or professed in the contemporary world politics. Adhering to such politics of clannism would be digging one's own grave, as it is nothing but a reflection of political immaturity.

One cannot ignore the fact that they are one and the same people. It was during their

\(^{135}\) T.S. Gangte; *Ethnicity*, p.14.
migratory movement that the process of clan formation or lineage segmentation began when they settled in different parts. In course of time, the leading clans had been transformed into tribes and out of clans, many sub-clans and lineage segments emerged. On closer scrutiny of the clan's structures, cultural traits including folktales, legends and languages we cannot but conclude that they are one and the same people. The division of these people by state boundaries is their inherited colonial past. This makes them weak more particularly in the context of ethnic conflicts and sub-nationalism that are going around them which, call for reinforcement of emotional and cultural unity among them.