CHAPTER II

CUSTOM AND MANNER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
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Custom refers to usual way of believing, behaving or acting in a particular established pattern. It moulds convictions and loyalties of the members collectively governed by it, thereby creating common tendencies in disposition and character, motivating at the same time the people to cherish fundamental values embodying the solidarity of the group. As such, it is a veritable index of oneness of a group of people or diversity of identities of varied peoples. The Kuki-Chins, who look superficially to be one group of people, have in reality internal diverse customs and manners; they call themselves by various and different names, claim distinctly varied origins, and follow remarkably varying customs and manners. The present chapter delves into the same state of internal diversities in customs and manners as to which the said peoples have so far been disposed.

As regards differences of their origin myths and variety of their tribal nomenclatures, repetition is necessarily avoided here as the matter only needs a flash-back upon the first Chapter of this piece of work where the points stand in full relief (vide supra: 13, 15, 16 and 23). Here below are arrayed their customs and manners of several counts chequered by variegations:
2. Polity

Chieftainship among the Khongjai Kukis is hereditary with considerable degree of power. They received revenue from their subjects in kind and service. Though similar practice is found among the Siyins and the Soktes, they are not as powerful as the Khongjai chiefs. The common character of the Kukis is their respect for birth, and a natural reverence for him who by virtue of his birth is a chief of the tribe, or clan, or family. The chief may be not that much of influential person, and there may be many other persons superior in ability among the members of the clan; yet, except for physical and mental abnormalities, there is no chance of being substituted. The chief is the lord of the soil and his subjects hold it as his tenants and he receives tithes from them. They, along with the slaves, are bound to defend against the attack of the chief’s enemies. The Sokte chiefs ruled their tenants, received their tithes, and fought their own private quarrels. Besides receiving the tithes as lord of the land, he also receives tributes from tribes that are under his domination. The Tashon chiefs receive yearly tithes from their tenants and triennial tribute from the conquered aliens. Custom demands that all immigrants should continue to recognize the head of the clan by paying him tributes, and at the same time should pay tithes to the lord of the soil. When Siyang and Tedim Chins were destroyed by the British in 1889, many Soktes migrated to the Tashon territory, becoming the subjects of the two overlords, the
Tashon chief, whose soil they cultivate, and their original chief or the head of family of the Soktes or Kamhows. When a chief accepts tributes and tithes, he in return guarantees protection to his subjects.

Howchinkhup, the Kamhow chief, receives tithes from clan members and tributes from the Thadous, who are alien tributaries. It is a customary in north Haka to pay tributes triennially and tithes yearly. Tribute usually takes the form of a little of pig, two puppies yearly and sometimes a mithun. In some parts a hind leg of every animal, either shot or trapped, is paid as tithes in addition to grains and live-stocks. In the Sokte tracts the villagers often pay tithes not to the chief but to the brother of the chief. The brother in turn pays the same to the chief in recognition of his over lordship. This custom is often misused by the relatives of the chief and many weaker people in the village become victims of the illegal demands. The Siyin tribe has a single chief in each village, and he is fully entitled to receive tithes, and administers his clan. But at Haka and in the south an intricate state of affairs exists, for a chief of several clans, presumably for the sake of strengthening his position and controlling powerful dependents, founds a new village and lives there with his several families and many other tribes. The result is that there is no unity at all in the village, which is divided into different quarters, each controlled by one or more chiefs, all distantly connected by each other with private interests. In the north and at Falam tribute and tithes are paid to the chiefs
at their headquarters; at Haka and in the south, however, a chief must collect
tributes by himself. Tributes demanded by the Haka chiefs are much heavier than
those of the northern chiefs.

The position of the Hakas and other southern chiefs in common with that of
the northern chiefs is that of hereditary and lawful rulers. Falam (Tashon) chiefs
pretend that all on the council are hereditary chiefs; such is, however, not always
strictly the case. The system has a semblance of election. The chiefs are elected by
the people, but as a general rule they belong to the old established families. A
common man may become a member of the council only when he is conspicuous
as a soldier, a diplomat or a rich merchant or he must have slain another before he
can become a member of the same. And a Tashon of common extract who
becomes a member of the Council in this way get promoted to the rank of chief on
the condition of his connection with the hereditary chief by marriage. A man of
strong character can set himself up as a chief, and hold his own for a time, but at
his death and in old age unless his descendants are of equally fine character, the
village will dwindle away, the people settling down under other chiefs.

In the Northern Chin Hills when a chief becomes too old to lead the clan on
all affairs of the village administration, leaves the arduous duties to his sons, but
not abdicate fully in his son's favour and continues to be a true head until his
death. It is a custom for a man in the north not to eat the liver of the animals whilst
his father is alive as a mark of showing respect to him. However, the Hakas lack in
this act of respect for age; young chiefs oust their fathers as soon as they have
reached manhood and small boys mock and spit at the old without shame or fear
of repercussion.

2. 2 Inheritance

With regard to inheritance the Khongjai Kukis follow the law of
primogeniture, the eldest son on his marriage remains with his father; a younger
son has a part of his father’s subjects made over to him. Whereas, the Siyins and
the Soktes adopt the rule of ultimogeniture; the elder sons go out of the father’s
home and found their own villages, whilst the youngest stays at home with his
father and help him, and at his death the youngest son inherits almost all the
father’s property and chieftainship of the tribe or clan. His elder brothers
becoming subordinate to him have to pay tributes to him just to acknowledge his
position as the head of the tribe or clan.

Among the Old-Kukis there is prevalence of a peculiar type of inheritance.
The Anals, Purums, and Lamkangs equally divide the property of the deceased
father among the sons, but the youngest son takes the house and supports the
widow, their mother. The Aimol village administration is run by six offices,
namely Khullakpa, Lulakpa, Kamzakhoi, Zakachhung, Zupalba and
Pakhanglakpa. Khullakpa is the head of the council. The office of the Khullakpa is hereditary in the sense that only a man of Chongom clan of this people can be Khullakpa. The Aimol chief, however, does not hold much power except receiving a portion of every animal killed in the chase. Among the Lamkang there are seven such hereditary posts. In Chiru, Khullakpa, besides receiving a portion of each animal killed, also gets his house built by the villagers. Among the Koirengs, the posts of Khullakpa and Luplakpa are not hereditary. They are chosen by the village elders. The new chief has to offer feast by killing a pig which is enjoyed by the whole community.

Every Lushai village is considered a separate state ruled over by its chief, called Lal. Each son of a chief, at their marriageable age, is provided with a wife at his father’s expense, and given a certain number of households from his father’s village and sent forth to a village of his own. Henceforth, he rules as an independent chief and his success or failure depends on his own talents for ruling. He pays no tribute to his father, but is expected to help him in his quarrels with neighboring chiefs. The youngest son remains in his father’s village and inherits not only the village, but also all the property. The chief was, in theory at least, a despot, but the nomadic instinct of the people is so strong that any chief whose rule was unduly harsh soon found his subjects leaving him, and he was therefore constrained to govern according to custom (Shakespear, op. cit: 42).
The Old-Kuki clans are organized far more democratically than the Lushais and the Thadous. Shakespear's (ibid: 146-147) reproduces Lieut. Steward's report on the picture as "...There is no regular system of government among the Old Kukis and they have no hereditary chiefs as among the new ones. A headman called the *ghalim* is appointed by themselves over each village, but he is much more a priest than a potentate, and his temporal power is much limited. Internal administration among them always takes a provisional form. When any party considers himself aggrieved, he makes an appeal to the elders or the most powerful householders in the village, by inviting them to dinner and playing them with visuals and wine."

In case of the Hakas, it is customary for the young branches of the chiefly families to leave the mother villages and found villages in the newly acquired territory under the protection of, and paying tribute to, the parent village. While in the case of Yokwas (Lais), the members of the chief's families do not leave the mother villages, and the newly founded hamlets were placed under the charge of trustworthy free-men. Hereditary principle is almost absent amongst the Yokwa, and on several occasions people, unconnected with them, have led the tribe. During the British time the Kapi and Thetta chiefs were short of power of organization and were not of the kind which established tribes. In the south the eldest son inherits the house and the fields; in case his father was a chief, all the
tithes which his father received are transferred to him. The cattle are divided amongst all sons, the eldest taking the major portion as he is responsible for managing all affairs of the family. Women receive the share of necklaces in common with all the brothers. The heir-looms are given to the eldest brothers, and necklaces are divided among the younger brothers and sisters. The slaves are divided among all the siblings; but, the eldest brother receives the largest number of slaves to till the inherited field, the produces from which are equitably distributed among the other brothers and sisters. There is always a strong resentment for women inheriting any property of his father. The younger brothers live with the elder brother and assist him in collecting his tithes or in managing other activities of the family. He is in return supported by his brothers. The children of the concubines and lesser wives have no claim to any estate.

The Soktes and Siyins customs ordain that the youngest son shall inherit all the property of his father: land, household property, cattle, slaves, etc. The eldest son in common with other sons and daughters receive nothing. However, the youngest son has to provide his brothers, lands to cultivate. He is responsible for the welfare of his mother and his unmarried sisters. If a man marries a wife and she dies with an issue, and then he marries again and has issue by the second wife. On his death his property is divided between the youngest sons of the two wives in such away that the son of the first wife receives all the property which the father
was supposed to have possessed until he married the second wife, and the son of the second wife gets property acquired thereafter. In the north the issue belongs to the father in case of separation or divorce; the mother is not entitled to claim any children in such case. But in the south the custom is reversed; the divorced woman can take any children. Woman is considered lawful guardian of the child in the south. The husband, however, can claim the children after making adequate compensations.

2. 3 General Characteristics.

General characteristics of the Kuki-Chins are slow speech, the serious manner, the respect for birth and acknowledgement of pedigrees, the duty of revenge, the taste of the treacherous method of warfare, the curse of drink, the virtue of hospitality, the clannish feeling, the rise of avarice, the filthy state of the body, mutual distrust, impatience under control, want of power of combination and continued effort, arrogance in victory, speedy discouragement and panic in defeat. Exceptionally, however, the manner of the Tashons is more quiet than that of other tribes. They soberly and quietly resolve all matters on the Falam Council. This shows that they owe more to the brains of their chiefs than to the prowess of their braves. Diplomacy, love of intrigue, and shrewdness are the characteristics of the Tashons. These characters are expressed in their wars waged against their neighbors. When they attacked the Siyins they always had the Burmans as their
allies; when they attacked Kwunghi they evoked the aid of the Hakas; but when the
British troupes entered the hill, they encouraged the Siyins to fight and to prolong
the futile struggle; but when the troops arrived at Falam the only weapons they
used were their tongues, which poured forth a stream of expositions, excuses, and
promises. When the Siyins and the Nwengals rebelled, the Tashons gave them
every encouragement, except assistance in men, and when their own border
villages were disarmed, the Tashons allowed them to suffer in peace. Diplomacy is
the only word which describes the character of the Tashons (Carey and Tuck, op.
cit: 168). Thieving is a common trait of this people. The most accomplished
thieves in the hills are the Siyin.

2. 4 Hair Style

The coiffure of the Kuki-Chins is divided into two major distinct fashions,
the top-knot on the top of the head and the chignon on the nape of the neck. The
Siyins, Soktes, Thados, Yos, and the Whenohs are the chignon wearers, whilst the
southerners are the top-knot men. The Siyins do their hair in three plaits; the
middle plait is composed of the hair on the crown of the head and the other two
plaits include the hair on either temple. The three plaits meet on the nape of the
neck and are twisted with the loose hair into a ball, which is kept from unrolling
by being tied. The Soktes and Yos method of doing the hair is more or less similar
to that of the others except that they have one plait, the centre or crown one,
instead of three. The Thadous do their hair like the Soktes, but with no plait at all. The Whenohe, undoubtedly, the Lushais do their hair precisely in the same manner as the chignon-wearing clans of the Lushais. The top-knot wearing Kuki-Chins coil the whole hair of the head into one ball, in forward position on the crown of the head and almost on the forehead. A common rag is bound round the head and top-knot. But on special occasion a large white cloth turban with a blue stripe is wound round the head and then is carefully wrapped round and round the elongated ball of hair which looks white bushy and handsome at the sametime adds a foot to the height of the wearer. The chignon-wearing people either wrap a rag round the hair or wear an ample cloth coil round the temple, which rather covers neither the ears nor the top of the head.

The Hakas and the southerners like the Whenohe, and Yahows wear large brass skewers, iron pins, bamboo spikes, and porcupine quills in their hair; these hair pins are not only used to scratch the head and as ornament, but also used as weapon in quarrels. It is often seen that the hair pins are used in stabbing the opponent during a fight causing death in several instances. The southerner usually carries a wooden comb with bamboo teeth in the hair on the back of the head, and at all leisure times he lets down his hair and combs it out carefully and fondly, which act is considered a matter of pride. A chief will take an hour together to comb and grease his hair when he gets leisure. The Siyins and Soktes do not take
the same pride in their hair as the southerners do; neither do they spend anything like the span of time and materials in dressing their hairs. The reason may be that a Siyins cannot plait his own hair himself and if he intends to do so, he will certainly have to engage some one or totally depends on his wife for it. Bald headed man is very rare; more are found among the Siyins than elsewhere. It is seen that both men and women prick lice out of each other’s hair (vide infra: 260, fig. 24) and killing them by crunching them between the teeth which is a loathsome practice and a common sight in all southern villages.

The Hakas and all southern women wear their hair in a ball low down on the nape of the neck. The ball is produced by coiling the hair round two-prong skewer. The hair is kept from becoming unwound by means of a bamboo spike which acts as an ordinary hair-pin. These bamboo spikes are often lacquered and prettily engraved and are a favorite gift of young men to their sweethearts. The southern women are very proud of their hair, which is considered the chief point of beauty in woman. It is, however, supposed to be unlucky to compliment a woman on her hair, and for the same reason flowers are never worn in the hair. The Siyin and Sokte women do their hair in two different ways, the maidens adopting a different style from that of the mothers of children. The former have three coils. One coil consists of the black hair plaited or rolled in a coil and falls down behind, tightly bound at the end with a cord or roll of a rag; the hair on either ear, and the ends are
bound with a coil of rag to keep the form becoming unrolled. After becoming a
mother the Siyin woman does her hair in two plaits, the hair being parted in the
middle and that on the right side is plaited into a coil and falls over the right ear
and in the same way the other coil falls on the left side of the ear.

2. 5 Textile and Dress

The Kuki-Chins adopt two distinct fashions in dress before the introduction
of improved clothes, one being a mantle only and the other a loin cloth. The Siyins
and Soktes always had a mantle with them. They often carry it rolled round the
waist or in a coil round the shoulders, and it was used for the sole purpose of
keeping the body warm and not required as a covering of nakedness. In the field
the men were seen working naked among the women, and even in the village the
insufficient covering would often slip off the shoulders and remain unnoticed on
the ground. The custom of the southerners were very different from those of the
northerners, for they always wore a loin cloth in additions to the mantle mainly to
protect themselves from cold and heat. The mantles used commonly in the hills are
home made white and rough cotton.

The Tashons, Whenoohs, and the Hakas in common with the southerners
each wear a distinctive tartan, which is worn over the white mantle, but usually
only on special occasions. The Shunklas wear broad red bands separated by black
and green bars and crossed with two narrow red, or red and yellow bars. The
colour mixing looks quite harmonized and the material used is cotton. The cloths
are cheap but handsome and are indigenous products. A Whenohs plaid comprise
a coarsely made blue cotton mantle with one or two cross bars of red or white, and
a white cloth with cross bars of blue or red while that of the Hakas and southerners
is predominantly of red, blue, and green colour with a much fine ornamentations
in it. Besides the expensiveness of the materials, weaving the plaid by hand is
exhaustive daily work. Even the quickest and the most experienced Haka woman
took a year to complete weaving of a single plaid. Another very handsome mantle
which is woven in the south is a dark blue or black back-ground relieved by broad
white bars and white, green, yellow, blue and red ornamentation. The mantle and
the plaid are usually worn like the toga. It passes over the left shoulder, under the
right arm and across the chest, and thrown over the right shoulder.

The Siyins and Soktes, when marching roll their mantle round their waists
with a flap in front. While the southerners pass two corners under either arm and
two corners over either shoulder and tie the floor corners together in front of the
body and thus leave the arm free. In the south weaving of plaid for men and skirts
of similar design is the daily labour performed by the wives of the chiefs and other
well-to-do families. The Siyins and Soktes possess no distinctive tartan as their
women are not expert in weaving it. They weave only plain cotton cloths which,
with blankets raided from Burma, form the covering. Weaving is predominantly women’s work, although proscriptions vary. Among the Hakas, few men weave but there is no prohibition against it. A man may spin casually. Among the Maras, it is ana (forbidden) for men to weave or dye, but dying with indigo is allowed. Hmar man may not touch a loom set, though they are responsible for making it.

The Ashos warp on stakes planted on the ground. Here the weaver sets out the wrap by first driving into the ground two sticks separated by the desired distance between the breast beam and the warp beam. The Hmars wrap the loom in place, with two loops of bark string holding the breast beam and warp beam the proper distance apart. While the Mizos are also found wrapping the loom in place, with the breast beam tied to the chair in which the weaver sits at the opposite distance from the warp beam. The Thados insert the breast beam, shed rod, heddle rod, lease rods and warp beam half their length into holes cut at the opposite interval and then carried beneath the sticks around the breast beam and back to the warp beam interlacing the shed rod and lease rod as necessary. The Yahows use an inclined pair of notched bamboo for warping, leaning on a railing, to stabilize the ends of the same loom part. Warping of the Mara loom clearly indicates that warping is done directly on the loom, not on the ground.

The traditional upper body garment worn with ceremonial skirts by the Hakas and culturally related groups and by women in the Falam area is the kor.
The Maras call *kaohrei*. It is a simple two-piece tunic with holes for arms created where the side seams are unsewn, and open or loosely tied in front. As worn, there is a gap between the bottom of the *kor* and the top of the skirt. Prior to the arrival of the British, Mizo women wore only a blanket on their upper body. Therefore, they adopt a separate upper body garment. In tune with the evolving pattern, the Mizo, Hualngo and Hmar women wear a short white jacket with a stand-up black collar (which the Mizo call *kwar* while the Hmar call it *zakuolaisen*) with *puan laisen*. Women in Tedim area wear a similar garment. A Thadou woman’s tunic is similar to that of the man which is shorter and lacking the diamond tetrad patterns.

Traditionally, Northern Chin women wear short blue wrap skirts around the hip, overlapping a bit at the left hip, held in place with a series of belts. The skirts of Falam and Haka area women are a combined patterning in a variety of distinctive ways. Wrapped ceremonial skirts with overall patterning may be of a single loom width, such as a skirt of the Tashons, people of the Falam Township. Example of skirts for a high status woman is all black field colour, worn by women in Zahow chief’s family. The prototypical Haka skirt worn widely in the area is the Haka *huidial*, spotted skirt which the Tlangtlangs call *khaga hni*; and the Maras call *vaihnang*. Many wrapped skirts of the Northern Chin are patterned in the lower but not the upper portion. The colour of skirts varies with the tribes. Red, grey and olive green predominate in Haka Township, purples and bright
green in Falam Township, and pink and orange predominate among the Maras. The Bawms of Chittagong Hills wear a dress skirt similar to that of the Chin Hills; they also wear skirts of Falam and vaipuan stripes.

A contrast to Northern Chin skirts is the Zuniath skirt which is a product of complex weaving with often elaborate designs. Women in the Tedim area of the Chin Hills wear short wrap skirts, and the young girls wear string skirts. The dress skirts of the Mizo, Hualngo and Hmar women differ strikingly in patterns from those of the Northern Chin women further east. The Old-Kuki groups, including the Aimols, Koms, Koirens, and Purums, along with the Khongsais or Thadou-Kukis wear saipikhup and khamtang. The snake pattern along the top and bottom borders in khamtang is done in alternating float weave, called ajem; it is a weaving structure among the Northern Chins which is widely found among the Thadous, Chirus, Kharams, Koms, and Purums. Purum and Vaiphei women wear a skirt (which they called chalakok, golluipon respectively) decorated with narrow red and black stripes. The Gangte, Hmar, Mizo, Simte, Sukte, and Zou women wear puanlaisen (vide infra: 270, fig. 66) as lower body garment.

2. 6 Body Decoration

Both men and women bear earrings. A hole is made on the lower loof of the ear by punching it with a needle or porcupine quill. The earrings worn are
cornelian solitaire threaded on string. Besides earrings the men wear necklaces of cornelian, which are brought from the Lushais. The cornelian is the most prized ornament of the Soktes, Siyins, and Tashons. Although the Hakas collect and preserve these necklaces, they do not bear them as generally as is the fashion in the north. They do not value them like the sacred *pumtek*, which was once the most prized and most costly possession of the northern, and is always readily exchangeable for any other valuable, such as cattle, guns and slaves. In the north the teeth and claws of tiger and bear are often worn round the neck of children, and the long tooth of the barking deer and other varied collections are hanged around the neck of the women. Every female, child or adult throughout the hills wears necklaces. These may be five to fifty in number, according to her ability to purchase them. They consist chiefly of cornelian strung on string, shells, and Indian copper and silver coins, metal and silver beads. The stone necklaces and solitaires are often heirlooms and are regarded with veneration.

The southern women bear bangles of beads; those on the western and northern borders wear heavy brass bangles; and the Siyin, Sokte, and other northern women not only wear a heavy brass coil which winds round and round the wrist half a dozen times, but also metal armlets of brass, iron, and melted telegraph wire. These armlets are the ornaments of the women in times of peace and are chopped up and used as bullets in times of war. The northern women wear
also one or more large white polished shells which are brought from the western coast. No anklets are worn by men and women. The Soktes and also the Southern Chins tie a piece of string round the leg above the calf and below the knee, which they say supports the muscles in long marches and occasionally a tiger’s claw or a bunch of cock feathers are found attached to these garters. Children are often seen decorated with strips of the skins of wild animals tied in the same place. In the south a string of small bells are often tied around the stomach of small children and similar bells are tied round the ankles of babies.

2. 7 Houses

In the hills the finest houses are found in the areas of Haka jurisdiction. The houses are considerably larger than those of the Tashons and their tributaries. Individual houses in Siyin-Sokte tract were also very large, but they have all been destroyed during the various expeditions by the British. All the houses of Haka are built on the same general principles. The house is one-storied, built of plank, with a thatch roof; it has no windows or chimneys and the smoke escapes at random. The ground and underneath of the Haka house is the pig cattle pen. In front is a long platform and the house is divided into a front verandah, front room, a closet and a back verandah. A raised platform is constructed in the front side of the house. This platform is used by the men to sit, lull about and drink when they are not engaged in works, and by the women to weave on during the dry season. The
floor of this platform is made of pine planking; the boards being inferior to those used in the flooring of the house, but are skillfully fitted together without nails and other fastening ropes. The roof of the house protrudes or overhangs the front verandah, which is enclosed on three sides and decorated with the skulls of animals hung in rows on the walls and piled up on the ground. Sometimes many hundreds of skulls are found in this verandah. These are the trophies of the games killed by the owner of the house and also those killed by his father and even grand father. The heads of human beings are never brought inside the village and hung among these trophies. They are, however, stuck on post outside the village.

In the south the heads of tigers and panthers are not placed in the collection in the verandah and are not brought into the village, whereas the northern Chins hang up these heads in common with the others. Along with the heads of wild animals and birds the skulls of domestic animals like mithun, buffalo, pig, goats and dogs are also hung up. Inside of the house is so dark that it is hard to identify a person and object just at a moment of entering. The Southerners explain that wind enters the apertures, as if there be any, and they prefer warmth and darkness to light and wind. The northern people, however, confess that even with only one entrance to their houses they find it hard to keep out themselves, against thieves and that if they had more openings in it, they would have no property left in their house.
The front room of the house is reserved for the main fire place, sleeping place of the chief and his wife, storage of family trinkets and cooking. The back room contains one or two fire places. This is the room usually occupied by other members of the family including the slaves, and in it the slaves cook their food; it is also a guest chamber. On one side of the room the girls of the house sleep, and on the other side sleep slaves and the sweet hearts of the girls, whom custom allows to sleep in the same room as the maiden of their affections, but always on the opposite side of the room. In case of the Siyins and the Soktes, the slaves as a rule sleep in the same house of the girl whom they admire. A bachelor repairs alone the house in which lives the girl of his choice, and he does not, as is the custom among the Hakas, sleep with her openly and without reproach of either party. In the same room is stored the food supply of the household, which are kept in huge baskets and large utensils. The verandah is used in much the same manner as the platform in front of the house, but the men do not frequently use the place. It is chiefly used by women when weaving or performing their toilet. The thatch of the house is laid on a foot thick and is often not removed; when the house is re-thatched, the new thatch is piled over the old one. The houses smell disgustingly, as it is a combined dwelling, storage and pig pen. Vermins of all kinds infest the house.
2.8 Food and Drink

The Siyins, Soktes and many of the southern tribes eat the domestic animals which include mithuns, pigs, and goats, dogs, cats and fowls. The Tashons, however, refrain themselves from eating dog. The Hakas eat neither dog nor goat, giving the reason that the flesh of these animals has the same smells. The pigs are scavengers of the village and are considered the greatest delicacy as food. The highest compliment which can be offered to a guest is to serve him with pig’s flesh. They killed the pig while lying on its side and a bamboo spike or skewer is driven through its side and into the heart which is stirred ups and down. The blood is carefully collected in a tray and is cooked as blood sauce. There is only one method of measuring the size of the pig, that is a piece of cane or creeper passed round the body immediately behind the fore legs and a pig are always described as so much in girth, using palm as unit of measuring. Goats and mithun are never milked by the Chin. They do not ever drink milk as they consider it unclean. They are afraid of drinking the milk of an animal for fear of becoming like them. Dogs are kept in the South as watching and for sacrificial uses whereas in the North the dog not only guards the house and is sacrificed to the spirits, but it is also devoured with more relish than any other animals except the pig. A pure white cock is used in the north as sacrificial fowl. The egg is also used in the priest’s
chanting for the fortune telling rituals. Sometimes a chick is sacrificed to the spirits in exchange of the soul of the ailing person.

**Mithun** (*Garaeus frontalis*) is one of the most important domestic animals of this people. It is obtained out of the crossed breed between wild bison bull and the common cow. The half breed is considered a poor animal and it is not until the fourth generation that the animal has reached the stage of the mithun. Mithun plays an important part in sacrifices, feast, and the price paid for a wife. For sacrificial purposes the animal should be purely black and should complete the fourth breeding removed from the common cow. In buying or selling mithun the size of the animal and the age count little; what is mostly considered is the length of the horns. Whenever a mithun is paid as compensation or fine, there is difficulty in sorting out the exact length of the horns. The mithuns are tamed ordinarily and herded near the villages and brought home easily. However, at Hakas and some other villages there is a large semi-wild herd of mithun. The common cow and the buffalo of the plains are occasionally found in the village. Sagyilian has a small herd of cows while the Haka own a large herd of buffaloes, which, like their herd of mithun, are allowed to wander freely and occasionally rounded up.

Whenever they kill an animal they eat the flesh ravenously. The Siyin eat raw meat with relish. They follow a uniform method of cookery, and food, whether flesh or cereal is always boiled. When there is a superabundance of meat,
strips of flesh are boiled over the fire and are thus preserved, but roasting and firing are quite unknown and unpracticed.

The Kuki-Chins are fond of drink; ju or zu is the name given to the country liquor; it is prepared out of rice or, millet, or Indian corn. Rice liquor is highly valued and is found amongst the Hakas, on the immediate south of Manipur and also on the Lushai border of the Chin Hills. In other places liquor is prepared out of millet and occasionally of Indian-corn.

2. 9 Use of Tobacco

The Kuki-Chins are universally associated with tobacco and its products. They are planted in the kitchen gardens in the village and along the bank and stream of the field. Throughout the Chinland women smoke unceasingly not only for their own pleasure but also for supplying the men with nicotine water which they call ‘twibuk’. The pipes of the women are hubble-bubbles with a clay bowl, a bamboo or gourd water receptacle and metal stem. The smoke passes from the bowl into the gourd or bamboo receptacle and impregnates the water with nicotine. Every man sips this nicotine and then spits it out. The nicotine gourds of the men are often very beautifully ornamented with ivory stoppers and painted with pretty polish. The Thado and Sokte men are great smokers; the Siyins used English pipes but they were non smokers until the advent of the British in their
land. The Shunkla and their tributaries are good smokers, however, in the south only the elderly men smoke regularly, and it is uncommon to see youths smoking. The practice of spitting on the tobacco to reduce the speed of burning is found in all tribes. However, the style of pipes varies; the Thados smoke in a short metal pipe with both stem and bowl made of brass or iron, while the Yahows and Shunklas use a heavy bamboo bowl with a comparatively long stem for smoking. The Soktes smoking bowl is made preferably of metal to prevent it from burning, and the bamboo stem is a foot long. In Tashon country, especially in the west, curious brass pipes are cast in moulds. The stems of these pipes are often ornamented with the figures of man, horse, elephant, hornbill, bison, etc.

2. 10 Marriage Customs

The custom of marriage in the north differs from that in the south. In the Siyins and the Soktes tract female virtue is not expected, and the young man openly cohabits with his lover in the house of the girl's parent. However, it is improper to become a mother before marriage. This idea originated owing to the boys sleeping with their female relations, and the Chins understood that it is unwise for those too closely related to marry. When an unmarried girl becomes pregnant she has recourse to abortion. Arranged marriage is preferable. The girl is judged by the proficiency of her work in the field and the house. After the choice is made a go-between is sent to the parents of the girl with liquor, and he broaches
the matter. The price of the girl is discussed over the liquor; if the proposal is rejected, the girl’s parents return the same quantity of liquor received during the course of negotiation. Parents practically sell their daughters to be wives, and they demand a certain price on them. Love is not taken into consideration for marriage. The fact is that the girl cultivates her parents’ fields and performs the household duties, and if any man wants her to do the same for him, he must compensate the parents for the loss of her service.

Mithun, gongs, beads, guns, slaves and grains usually figure in the price list of a bride. After both sides agree upon, the bride is then brought to their house, and the priest of the village, who has been summoned, kills a fowl to examine the liver, and pronounces to the parties regarding the approval or disapproval of the spirits on the marriage proposal. The omen and the decision are mostly favourable. The wise old women watch her entrance into the house and carefully note which foot enters first, the first word she speaks and the first action she does, thereby predicting her fate and fortune in the married life. Then the girl lives with her husband as his wife. She brings no dowry but her wardrobe (the clothes she stands up in) and the beads that she wears from her parent’s home. The price of the girl is divided amongst her relations; the eldest brother takes the largest share and the remainder is divided amongst the parents, sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts and the chiefs of the tribe, even the slaves of the house expect presents.
The Siyin tribe has four clans and marriages take place within these clans only. It is considered disrespectful for the younger to marry before the elder brother. The Soktes, Kamhows, and Yos intermarry; however, among the Sukte the chiefs are as a custom required marrying women of the true Sukte stock. In the south the slaves are not married or given in marriage, but cohabit with other slaves or sometimes treated as concubines by the chiefs. If a youngman wishes to marry the daughter of a Haka chief, he has to arrange ten mithuns, fifty pigs, ten guns, a similar number of gongs, several slaves, and a large quantity of grain, and also to be in a position to provide several score of pots of liquor to be drunk at the marriage feast. The Haka chiefs boast that no other tribe has such strict marriage laws as they do, and this shows their superiority to others. The pedigree of the suitor of the chief’s daughter must be good, and his means ample otherwise he could never pay the fabulous amount demanded by the relations. It is a customary to distribute the bride price to all relations of the girl and the chiefs of various Haka families. But in the north the parents alone are entitled to receive the price.

In the Northern Chin Hills the parents of a youngman simply ask about the girl’s ability of clearing weeds and the time consumed in planting a patch of millet. In the south marriage involves more elaborate form and is usually arranged with the diplomatic aspect of strengthening the position of chiefs and the power of clans. They encourage intermarriage with the view to ensure friendship of rival
villages. Thus most villages in the south are connected themselves to the families of Haka chiefs only through the bond of marriage alliance. Child marriages with the same objective are often occurring. In the Southern Chin Hills, the eldest brother is considered the guardian of his sisters, and if a man aspires to the hand of a woman, he must address himself to the brother but not to the parents. It is difficult for a man to pay the full bride price on the day of marriage, thus he promises to pay the balance by installment basis. Sometimes this debt hangs over him all his life and it is often seen that men quarrel over the due portion of the bride price of even their grand mothers and other female ancestors. More feuds have origins in the issue of payment for wife prices rather than in the killing of men (Carey and Tuck, *ibid*: 191).

In the south the period of engagement sometimes lasts for years as the man is engaged in saving up the amount required to pay to the parents for bride price. Half the chieflings in the Hakas admit that they are anxious to marry, but unable to do so owing to the demand of excessive bride price. Custom deserves that a Haka chief’s daughter shall die as spinster rather than she be sold for a less sum than that of the daughters of other chiefs.

The Kuki-Chins have a custom of boring the ears of a new born child. After a child attains one month its head is shaved and then kept so for the first few years of its life. In the Northern Chin Hills, it is customary to give the eldest boy a part
of the name of the paternal grandfather and the eldest daughter a part of the name of the maternal grandmother. In the Southern Chin Hills there is no such rule which guides the naming of a child and the family chooses the name in as much as they wish.

2. 11 Treatment of the Dead Body

There are different methods of disposing of the dead body which in common are connected to the belief that the spirit lives even after the death of the person. Hence, it is obligatory on the part of the deceased family to perform necessary ritual process for the death to start a new life in the next world. Hence, the dead body is brought from a great distance to his village and buried among his tribesmen. It is a belief that a spirit cannot be at rest whilst his body lies in a foreign grave. Thus, the funeral rites are attended with great pomp. Based on this fact the Suktes and the Guites in 1871 begged the bones of Nokatung (Kakatung), who died of smallpox in the Manipur jail, for burial at his native village Mwelpi. The dead bodies of slaves are treated like animal carcass. A man who dies outside the village or of epidemic is buried outside the village without usual ceremonies.

The Hakas, and the southerners, Tashons and their tributaries bury the dead body inside the village whereas the Siyins, Soktes, and Thadous bury outside village. Unlike others the Rangkhols and a sect closely allied to them, in fact an
offshoot, the Sakajaibs, burn the dead body. The Southern Chins dress the dead body in his silk tartan, his hair combed and greased and his best head dress is bound on his head. He is then made to sit by leaning against a post and lying with it in the centre of the large room of the house. All his worldly goods are kept around him, spear and gun in his hand. The relations and friends pay him the last visit by bringing gift of tobacco, food and liquor and place them in front of the corpse. The guest is entertained, and the men sit and drink whilst the women stoke the face and body of the corpse with loud lamentation and wailing. After three days the corpse is taken down and buried in a grave ten feet deep with stone-lined vault branching off at right angle to the grave. The chief's corpse is clothed in a silk mantle and placed in the vault together with the bones of his ancestors. Spears and dao are laid beside him.

The Soktes wash the dead body and dress the hair, do up with clothes, gun and spear in his hand, powder flasks and haversacks slung over the shoulder. The corpse is placed in sitting position outside and in front of the house for a day. The relatives and friends pay their last homage to the dead body. After one day the body is taken into the house, the body is kept for two days inside the house with the visitors, feasting, drinking, and firing off guns. Cemetery is usually constructed outside the village. The funeral procession accompanied by a huge crowd of people who perform a typical dance, fire off guns and beat gongs. Then
the corpse is laid to rest inside a box raised about four feet off the ground so supported by posts. The body is heated to dry by burning fire from below. Fire is kept on burning till the corpse in the coffin became fully dried; it is then exposed to the air with the coffin. The remains are taken out from the coffin after one year and are placed in a vault built on the surface of the soil with mud and stones. The grave is provided with a wooden door to enable relatives’ periodical visit to mourn for the deceased. Chiefs are not buried in the common cemetery, but on the roadside leading to the village.

When Siyins die the corpse is made to sit in upright position, dressed and fully armed, whilst his relatives and friends dance and drink around him, firing off their guns, and singing songs which set forth the number of raids the deceased has successfully taken part in, the number of slaves he captured, and the number of heads he chopped up. The body is taken outside the house and placed on a board and then is heated with fire till it becomes dry. The dried body is rolled up in rags and placed on a shelf in the house or in a coffin under the floor of the house. It remains there until the last funeral feast is performed which usually takes place after a year or two from the death of the person. The relatives are bound to collect as many as possible the heads of both human beings and the animals for the final feast. On this occasion, the body is taken off from the shelf or from the coffin and fastened to a bamboo frame and is carried to the cemetery by swaying ups and
down which appear to be dancing. The corpse is then exposed to air in an open coffin raised above the ground on a platform, till only skeletons are remained. The method of disposing of the dead in the south is clean and satisfactory, while that of the northerners, particularly of the Siyins, is most loathsome in all respects.

2. 12 Memorial Epithet

The memorial to the departed chief in the north consists of a thick plank of hard wood. Usually the head of a man is carved on the top, from which a spike protrudes. The head represents the deceased, and on the plank is carved men, women, children, animals, enemies and all slaves, also all sorts of gongs, beads, guns, etc. of the chief's family. The animals represent not only those killed by him in the jungle but also those he killed at feasts. The departed chief is often shown as shooting an elephant or a tiger or carrying a gun in one hand and a human head in the other, all assuming heroic expressions. The wood used for memorial carving is so hard that it resists the weather for over half a century. Thus the great grand children still could point out the memorial pillar of their dead ancestors.

The Tashons also set up wooden memorials which consist of a long pole some fifteen feet high; the bottom with five feet of the pole is carved to represent a man, his face and limbs being clearly shown; the remaining upper ten feet of the pole is carved to represent the turban of the chief. Other smaller monuments,
representing the wives and the children of the chief are planted around this great monument. The carvings of the Tashon monument bear more primitive character than that of the Siyins.

2. 13 Supreme Being and Supernatural Power

Coming over to their belief systems, the northerners believe that there is no supreme being. But the southerners believe that there is a supreme God known as *kozin* living in the heaven. Except for some sacrifices, they did not worship him and never think of asking him for any grace or mercy. The sacrifice is just to evoke him to uphold the plagues and misfortunes which he is capable of inflicting on the person who offends him. They believe more in omens and witchcraft.

The differences amongst them in respect of customs and manners in certain areas of their socio-cultural life induce attitudes of suspicion in the minds of some of them against the others. Thus, for instance, the Hakas and other southerners believed that many among the Siyins, Yahows and Lushais are wizards whose single glance at somebody can bewitch him or her, cause lizards and rats enter the body of the victim, balls of string to form in the stomach, and any other magical afflictions.