CHAPTER TWO
CHIEF LAND OWNERSHIP SYSTEM OF THE KUKIS

Kukis followed chieftainship as their political form in which the village chief is not only the administrative head but also absolute owner of the village land. His power on critical analysis is derived from his control over the land which is legitimized by the community customs. The rule of Kuki chief politically, is more or the less define by many as autocratic in nature as ‘one-man-rule’ is the norm.\(^1\) But, there are also writers who define him as ‘noble’ who play ‘father role’ in the village. He however, is the masterand villagers are tenants.

Land ownership right resting with the village chief is a common custom among the Kuki tribes. Therefore, it is not necessary to study each tribe in separate. But, the case is different with the Nagas which have different land system between tribe to tribe and village to village. Wherever there is Kuki villageland by tradition belongs to the chief. He controls all the landed properties such as agricultural land, terrace land, reserve land, village land, land cultivated or waste land. He also controls the forests, mine, rivers and spring. They belong to him and his heirs\(^2\). He is the proprietor of the whole village land in his chiefdom. Example to his land ownership can be seen from the taxes he received from the villagers every year for using the land which belong him. The chief even had collected taxes on bees and salt not only from his subject but also from other villages, if it was within his jurisdiction.\(^3\) In the Lushai (Mizoram) and Chin Hills (Myanmar) the chief claimed that all land (\textit{ram}) belong to him.

\(^3\) Questionnaire respondent Lhouvum, Nenglthing of Langol, Imphal West district, Manipur, dated 30 July 2010.
Kuki chief's control over the land as owner is seen everywhere. One need to study the community land use, land holding system, customary ritual and ceremonies, shifting cultivation, etc to understand the chief position as head of the village and owner of the land. He as controller of the village land has so many important role in village life which makes him respect and honors by his subjects.

Ownership and Legitimacy

Dictionary of Social Science has defined legitimacy as “denoting a condition of positive valuation, validity and acceptance enjoyed by the individual rulers, political institutions, and movement, and by system of authority, by reason of the accordance of such rules, institution, movements and system of authority with some law, principle or sources of authorization”. Thus, legitimacy strictly taken provides a moral property to power which transform into authority.

According to S.M Lipset,

“Legitimacy includes the capacity to produce and maintain a belief that existing political institutions or forms are the most appropriate for the society”.

Further Robert Dahl defined it as,

“Belief that the structure, procedures, acts, decision, policies, officials or leaders of government possess the quality or ‘rightness’ propriety or moral goodness and should be accepted because of these quality irrespective of the specified content of the particular act in question is what we mean by legitimacy.”

6. ibid p 140


1. Legitimacy by Customs:

The Kuki chief as owner of the land is legitimate by tradition. Tradition as such is the source of legitimacy in their society which the legitimacy resting upon the established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of the status of those exercising authority under their traditional authority. The chief has the legitimate authority over the villagers and this authority came from the established custom of the tribe and the latter as such naturally show obedience to such authority. Bekker on the tradition stated,

"... as established system of immemorial rules which had evolved from the way of life and natural wants of the people, the general context of which was a matter of common knowledge, coupled with precedents applying to special cases, which were retained in memories of the chief and his counselors, their sons and their sons (sic) until forgotten, or until they become part of the immemorial rules..."7

Chief ownership right has been sanctioned by customary law of the community. Land ownership thus, is the exclusive right and prerogative of the chief. In Kuki society he is also traditionally the repositories of powers of administration dealing with the village.

2. Legitimacy by Genealogy:

The customary law of the Kuki governs inheritance, community relations such as tenure rights over forests, land, water bodies and other natural resources. They are essentially a patriarchal and hierarchy in nature, the rule of descend is strictly based on the male line only. Kinship is the basis of social structure, and a man is identified by the clan to which he belongs. The social system is based on family with the

father as its head. Most of the families are nuclear and extended family norms are unnoticed in the society. The eldest son has to take all the responsibility of the father and the younger one has to find a new place of dwelling after his married and the eldest brother is to assist the younger ones with a small gift to establish his own family.

The genealogical record\textsuperscript{8} maintain by the tribe remain as one of the strong basis of legitimacy. They have maintained long genealogist which is a customary practice. This not only gives prestige to the royal line but has given the real basis for their right and legitimacy to become a chief and control the village land. Thus, genealogy is one of the bases of chief authority in Kuki society.\textsuperscript{9} It is necessary to understand Kukis genealogical law to understand the land ownership rights of Kuki chief.

**Origin of Kuki Chieftainship**

Our study has found that the origin of chieftainship in Kuki society was attributed to various reasons which were necessary for the development and security of the tribal life.

1. **Need for Strong Authoritative Figure:**

The urge to solve socio-political and economic problems has given birth to the institution of chieftainship in Kuki society.\textsuperscript{10} It has taken place long ago in the history of evolution of group life. Thomas Hobbes\textsuperscript{11} an exponent of ‘Contract Theory’ establishes the thesis that the condition of man in the ‘State of Nature’ was deplorable. It was the

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\textsuperscript{8} Means of verification, indicators of legitimacy, hierarchy/heriteditary system
\textsuperscript{9} Ray, Ashok Kumar *Authority and Legitimacy*, Delhi: Renaissance Publishing House, 1990, p.40
\textsuperscript{10} Guite, Ginkhanlian *Political-Economic Development of the Mizo of Manipur since Statehood*, Unpublished Ph.D thesis submitted to Manipur University, 1995, p.55
\textsuperscript{11} Once a tutor of Charles II of England, a great English philosopher and author of Leviathan.
state of wild savagery which the guiding principle was "might is right" and man's life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". Life hence, was not secure. The stronger rule over the weak and each one was enemy to each others. There were tribal's villages ruling over the weak villages and impose tax from them. In such a situation there aroused the need for having a strong authoritative figure who will lead them in the defense of their village and protect them from threat. It was also needed to enable to have a sound administration and to establish customs base on justice.

In political sociology the need for consensus on authority to avoid any occurrence of anarchy is feels needed. Much against the rational legal authority, in the tribal society the backing of the institutional force is not known. R.H Lowie (1953), explained tribe in terms of absence of political organization founded upon territorial contiguity. But, the existence of well-organized tribal society today has proved that they in the course of time gradually learn to organize themselves through various institutions notably the institution of chieftainship.

2. Customary Law:

Durkheim (1915) expresses the view that authority on the primitive people is undisputed. They contended that primitive State was not tyrannical, as is supposed to be, to its subjects because they were always a body of people related by bonds of kinship and

14. Personal interview with Hanghal, Thangkhochons (Age about 90) at Thingkam village, Churachandpur district, Manipur on 23 May 2009
relationship, by clanship and age grades and that they spoke of themselves as a group where practically everybody was related, in reality or fictitiously, to everybody else. Customary laws governed and regulated these relationships and ties of fraternity which emerged thereof. This is also true to the Kukis whose traditional political life is deeply rooted to their customary laws in their society. Their system of political institution is based on kinship relations. Such relationship was the basis of hereditary system of Chiefship. The genealogical line through the eldest son was strictly followed.\(^{17}\)

3. Historical and Political Necessity:

Chieftainship for the Kukis was a historical and political necessity in the course of their territorial migration. This gave them an effective leadership. It also provide them safety and security and was a great help during their hour of crisis caused by the enemy clans. Ashok Kumar Ray (1990) observed that, without this effective leadership (chief) the whole race would merge into the oblivion of history and today they can never survive as a homogenous race.\(^{18}\)

4. Need for Land and Political Safety:

Kukis were by nature migratory peoples. They move from one place to another under the slightest circumstances due to their practice of jhum (shifting) cultivation. The search for fertile land made them move from one place to another.\(^{19}\) This can be found in one of their folk song given below:

"A khupsonte, khupsontes cheloijo
A lialangte, Lialengte cheloijo;
Amuol O Ihidemdem,

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Anuija i-um eimo?
Thangpom chacha,
Leilen cha cha aume²⁰

Free translation:
"Rush forth, bending your knee
Ventures, rush forth,
Distant fading mountains
What does lie beyond?
Choicest Crown,
Choicest freedom."

The Kuki people migrated from Sinlung in South West China to
the Chin Hills of Burma (Myanmar) and from the Chin Hills of Burma
(Myanmar) to the different parts of Manipur, Tripura, New Cachar Hills
(Assam) and Naga Hills. They leaved Sinlung when threaten by famine
and moved towards Chin Hills of Burma. The Lushai tribe has already
occupied the Chin Hills with an effective consolidation of power under
an organized chieftainship. At this point of time Kukis were in need of
land for cultivation and political safety.²¹

5. Need for Centralized Authority:

Besides, the need for strong leader during the course of
migration, constant inter-tribal feud had also made them fatigue and
politically insecure. Thus, the entire population was at the point of
disintegration and destabilization due to the feuds. As such they were
in need of a centralized authority by a person who would lead them to
and take the responsibility for protecting their masses and for

²⁰ Lenthang, Khuplam Milui, National Research Laboratory for Conservation of
²¹ Dasgupta, M Impact of Land Reform in North East India, New Delhi: Omsons
consolidating and organizing the mass against the enemy tribe. M. Dasgupta (1991) on the historical requirement of Kuki chieftainship thus, wrote as follow:

"The evolution of a strong and authoritarian chieftainship system of the Kukis was a historical requirement for the survival of the stock at this hour of crisis. Basically they had to depend on upon muscle power for their survival. The responsibility of consolidating and organizing this muscle power devolved upon the chiefs." 22

6. Sakesphere-Zawla View:

There are other writers who have written on the origin of the Kukis Chieftainship. J. Sakesphere (1977) has written that, a footprint of a child on the jungle was detected by a group of Thadou - a Kuki tribe of Manipur while hunting who were chasing a deer. They upon encircling the deer found the deer sucking the child. The child later became Thangura a famous chief. It is believed that Tangma chiefs are his descendents. 23 According to K. Zawla (1986) a Mizo writer, having no chief by the Hnamtes a clan of the Lusahais at Thlangkhua and Khrwu, they requested some Lushais to be their leader which was not accepted by the latter. Instead they were advised to approach Zahmuaka from a Paite tribe (Kuki). On the insistence of his wife Zahmuka accepted when he was requested to become the chief. Zamukas thus, became the first chief of Lushai which became the ancestor of Sailo Mizo chief. 24

Origin of Kuki's Custom and Law

22. Ibid.
23. Shakespeare, J Col. The Lushai-Kuki Clans, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, Mizoram, (Reprint)1977,p.2
The habitual course of conduct accepted by the people during the early period was translated into custom and it becomes a guiding factor in their society. Later it regulates the social, cultural and religious aspect of the individual and family. Acceptance by the community is basic to law. Such law begin as custom with localize application but are accepted slowly by the rest of the community through a gradual process over a long period if it feel that its introduction is good for it. They are mandatory and enforceable by the tribal chiefs.

Writer like N. Chatterjee also believe that the institution of chieftainship originated out of the collective needs of the tribal life. It originates in the early stage of evolution of their group life. Example of this can be found among Kuki groups which have a running village administration independently. Ashok Kumar Ray (1990) wrote,

"...the inheritance rules and the succession norms became routinised in favor of such chieftains, and produce a myth around the chieftainship organization itself."\(^{27}\)

Kuki Chieftainship

Every Kuki village has a chief called ‘Haosa’\(^{28}\) the Mizo called it ‘lal’.\(^{29}\) He is the source and symbol of traditional custom.\(^{30}\) Kukis land ownership system is identical with the institution of chieftainship. The chief has the supreme authority over the land. This institution is a very powerful secular Institution based on kinship structure for the purpose

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28. Meaning rich-man
29. Meaning great-man
30. In traditional customs Haosa(Chief) relates to Phungupa/Insungupa (Clan/family head) in Kuki society. No Naoopa (younger clan or brother) can become Chief how strong and wise he might be.
of village administration which is the highest and independent political unit. Satkai Chongloi (2009) a Kuki scholar wrote,

"The institution of Kuki chieftainship begins at home. Each set of rule applied to the household is also applied to the Village, Area, State and National Level governance. No Kukis can be isolated from the village community. The village administration is the larger unit of each family's governance."  

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Schapera (1967) contended that, political system among primitive societies was based on kinship relation and that each tribe claimed exclusive rights to the land it occupied. The tribal areas are often governed for all practical purposes by the customary laws which Chief of the village is the custodian. Normally, a customary law had jurisdiction over the village administration, village officials and ever the village boundary. The authorities therefore, exercised their customary laws over the villagers or their kinship based society whenever disputes arose or in due course of performing rites and rituals. One of the elder among the clan has to become a chief. All the people living in the village are his subjects. No villagers by moving away or migration could they escape his control. Outsiders might not settle in his territory without chiefs' permission that rehabilitated them wherever he wished. Once outsiders settle in the village they became chief's subjects. In case, they disobeyed him they were liable to expel or has to settle the disputes through his bepa and tupā by offering traditional zubel (rice)

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33. One’s family friend who will help each other in times of family occasion and alike. Bennu if it is a female.
34. Grand son and daughter. If male tupā and female tunu.
beer).\textsuperscript{35} He not only regulated the distribution and use of the land but also decided the fate of his subjects on the basis of customary laws.\textsuperscript{36}

In a large village among the Mizo in Lushai Hills there were small divisions known as veng. The chief or headman appointed another headman to such veng by transferring all his rights to such headman of the veng. This depends on the amount of assistance received from the veng headman. The veng headman thus has all the power and functions of the larger village headman. This veng headman generally enjoyed the concessions of free house. He collected the headman dues from the villagers.\textsuperscript{37} Such was not known among the Kukis of Manipur whose villages were generally small in size or less populous.

1. Kuki Chief: A Despotic Ruler

Traditionally the Kuki chief was despotic and tyrannical; one can live in the village only as the chief pleases. All the plots for agricultural land and household belong to the village chief. As long as the villagers please him, they are justified. The moment the villagers incur the displeasure of him, he is alienated. W.W Hunter (1973) made note of the nature of Kuki chief:

"The village system among the Kukis is best described as a series of petty states each under a president or dictator".\textsuperscript{38}

John Mc Rae also wrote on the same line,

"Each tribe is under the immediate command of its own particular chief, whose word is law, in peace and in war and who has the power of life and death."\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} Indigenous Rice Beer
\textsuperscript{39} Quoted in Ray, Ashok Kumar Op.Cit,p.65
Kuki chief has so much power to exercise on the village. Therefore, the villagers have nothing to say, they are equated as orphans without parent.\textsuperscript{40} The villagers are landless as they do not have permanent ownership of land for shifting cultivation and homestead. This result into the villagers cannot work with real interest. They have no peace of mind. The villagers have no right to possess land, except for temporary cultivation purposes. Even a piece of land cannot be registered in the villager's name. The villagers stay in the village and use the land so long as they maintain good relationship with the chief.\textsuperscript{41} The chief was all powerful and his word was law. He has the power to give capital punishment.\textsuperscript{42}

2. Kuki Chief: A Noble Ruler

There are however, scholars who have contended that Kuki chief was not autocratic nor was despotic in his rule. T.T Haokip observed that the chief does not rule but guide. His authority was given by custom. Thus, he was only a custodian of the traditional custom of the Kukis who was assisted and advised by a group of counselors. He became chief by birth that he belongs to the elder clan or sons (Mi Upa). Therefore, the chief was thus, generally well verse in the custom and leadership. He is patience and intelligent. He considers the entire village member as his own family member and treated them equally. He was the guardian of law.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Neisal, Satkholal Reformation of Chieftainship, Imphal: Directorate for Development of Tribals\& Backward Classes, Manipur, 1995, p.1
\textsuperscript{41} Personal interview with Chonglou, Jangseh at Saikul Bazar, Senapati district, Manipur on 7 August 2009.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
The Kuki chief in practice never denies any resident member of his village a fair share of plot for settlement and cultivation according to the need and size of the family. The chief protect the interest of the villagers by providing them security - socially, politically and economically. He settled disputes provide care and protection. In the traditional Kuki social organization, the people owed allegiance to the chief who in turn was obliged to give protection to his people. Thus, the relationship between the chief and his subjects was of mutual cooperation. There is no record so far of the Kuki chief giving capital punishment to his subject. Although the chief is theoretically all powerful, in practical exercise of their authority, they were assisted, aided, and advised by a group of elders called ‘Semang’ or ‘Upas’.

J. Shakespeare (1977) had made an interesting note as early as 1901 in the following way:

“The people live in villages, each of which is ruled by a chief, who is entirely independent. Even a young son will not admit his father’s right to influence him, after he has once established a separate village. The chief is supreme in his own village, but the people are very democratic, and have a very simple remedy if a chief oppresses them, viz., to remove to another village. The chief settles all disputes in the village, arranges where the jhum are to be, and when and where a village is to move. His house is the poor house of the village, and all orphans and other who has no means of support is received there, and gets food in return for their labour”.

44. Ibid.
J. Sakesphere (1977) also contended that the Kuki chief was the father figure as well as the king of the village. His powers and status was sanctioned by the customary law of the people. But his rule was not autocratic. He was just a benevolent ruler.47 On the relation between the chief and the villagers Chatterjee (1975) wrote,

"All those who live in the village were looked upon as his children. He was bound to keep them in their adversaries, counsel them in their difficulties, reward them in their achievements and punish when they are found guilty of misdeeds or infringements of establish customs. The villagers on their turn were to obey his order implicitly, carry out errands assigned to them individually and collectively and help the chief in all possible way."48

Powers and Functions

The Kukis chief was the authority in his chiefdom. He was 'sovereign' in his little realm. G.D Patel (1971) on the power and function of the Kuki's chief have mentioned that, the entire land of the village used to belong to the chief and when there was migration of a family the immovable properties such as land used, trees, etc are surrendered to the chief.49 But, the power of the chief to control the village sometimes depends on his charismatic personality. Such charismatic leaders yield much power in the exercise of his function. His land was demarcated and he makes sure that outsider did not encroach the land. As owner of the village land, the chief preserved the land from wasteful use and fire. He was not only the owner of the village land but also was the traditional legal authority and administrative head. The chief rule independently on the land they own

in the pre colonial day and their ownerships still continued in modern times.\textsuperscript{50}

The administration of the village, in short, the chief have enormous power and he acts as the controller of all the three organs of the government – executive, legislative and judiciary. He performs these functions in consultation with his councils. The council of ministers executes functions in different spheres

1. Executive Powers:

The chief is the administrative head of the village. He appoints all important post in the village like the council’s members, priest, blacksmith, etc and was also responsible to defense, justice and other department of the village administration. All decisions are taken by him. Without the consent of chief the decision of the counselors could not take decision. He was the owner of the land and issued an order in regard to cultivation and site selection.\textsuperscript{51}

2. Legislative Powers:

The Kukis chief framed rules and regulations, presides council’s meeting, issues ordinances. He carefully sees the need for any new legislation. Whatever decision taken is base on and in compromise to the customs of the people. They are good rule to benefit the villagers as a whole. As such, the villagers main duty was to obey to the rules and regulations of the laid down in custom of the village.

The chief possess absolute power who can give capital punishment to the offender but in practice such thing never happened.


\textsuperscript{51} Personal interview with Touthang, Haolal at Sugnu, Chandel district, Manipur on 5 May 2009.
Any member of the villagers who breaks the laws were expelled from the village or were given others punishments. The chief's house can be called as Parliament in modern sense for all legislation regarding the village are decided and passed in the meeting or assembly which was held in the house of the chief.

The chief has the power to order for selection and distribution of jhum land to the villagers. In his direction the village cleans the footpath of the village jhum land. The chief also fixed the date for celebrating ceremonies and festival. He ordered the villagers to construct and maintain village water tank, etc.

3. Judicial Powers:

The Chief was the supreme judicial head of the Village Court in deciding all civil and criminal cases in accordance with the customary laws. He was considered to be the lord of the soil. The Village Court of Justice consists of the chief and his council's members. He used to nominate man of tact and wisdom from the village as council's member who used to advice the chief to carry out judgments. The chief's residence was the court of justice. The words of the chief become laws of his village. Besides, he also acts as a supreme administrative head of his village. His house can be used as a shelter place for the criminals to investigate the crime and judged accordingly on the condition that he should avail justice.

The chief and his Council of Ministers of the village settle all the civil and criminal cases. As a custom, both the parties will bring jars of

52. Personal interview with Haokip, Chunglet, (Chief of K. Songlung), at K. Songlung, Senapati district, Manipur on 5 October 2009.
Ju⁵⁴ to the chief’s house before the trial is started. When a matter of dispute is put on trail, the elder men Haosa- Upa⁵⁵ of the village are usually invited to help him (Chief) in deciding the cases. In fact, the advices of the elders are taken into consideration. If anybody is found guilty, he will be fined accordingly. The fine may be in the form of a Vohpi⁶⁶. Another form is hiamkham (cease fire) or salamsat⁵⁷ which is imposed upon the offender who commits any crime such as adultery, rape, thief, bloodshed or offence to others. Here a fine of vohpi is imposed after which the chief and the Council of Ministers will settle the matter. The final amount of fine is to be paid by the offenders. However, the amount of fine depends on the degree of crime. Salamsat, penalty and toltheh (village sanctification) are compulsory to the culprits. Hiamkham is practiced as a preventive measure and was followed by judgments; levied fine and Toltheh are performed by the culprits.⁵⁸

4. Other Powers:

The chief as already stated above was the absolute owners of the village and head of all the administration in the village. He was also responsible to the defense of the village. He acts as Commander-in-Chief and act as supreme command but his counselors (Semang-Pachong) are on the forefront of the village army. His duty and responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief of the village were described by W.W Hunter (1973):

"He shall direct in war, he is last in the advance and rear most in the retreat. The messages and errands of Lal are done by his favorite slaves; they are his ambassador in war. To collect his

54. Traditional beer made of rice
55. Counselors in the village who assist the chief in his administration.
56. Pig or boar
57. A fine for offence to reach cease fire
58. Personal interview with Haokip, Jamkholet (Chief of Laimapat) at Laimapat, Churachandpur district, Manipur on 4 Oct 2010.
people or, in fact to authenticate any order, the chief spear is sent by a messenger from village to village. Should the message be a hostile one, the messenger carries a fighting daos to which a piece of red cloth is attached.  

The Kuki chief was also responsible to external affair. He visits another village for political reasons or for any other reasons. He tries to establish a friendly and progressive relation with other villages. He acts as a shrew ambassador. All the legal authorizing power was traditionally attached to the chief. The chief was the secular head of the village. He however was not a ritual head although he had some ritual importance by virtue of his secular power.

Village Council

The traditional Kuki village was a ‘village state’ governed by the traditional village chief and his chosen counselors. The chief rules from Village Council known as Haosa Inpi. The existence of Village Council is an important aspect under the Kuki chieftainship. The Council is composing of the chief and counselors. It is the highest courts of justice where cases were tried according to customary laws. The chief in council consist of Semang, (Village Prime Minister) Pachong(Defense Minister), Chaangloii (Finance and Food), Lhangsam (Broadcaster), Thiihkheng (Blacksmithy), Thiempu(priest)and Lawmupa (Youths, Education and Defense). The village cabinets are responsible for the welfare of the village and represent the village chief and its people in conflict resolutions and in other matter within and outside the village.

60. Personal interview with Kuki, Jamhem at National Games Village, Imphal West district, Manipur on 23 October 2010.
The chief and counselors were vested with all the political, military and judicial power. The important qualifications for counselors are:

1. Tact and wisdom and should be well verse in customs and traditions of the people.
2. They are selected from different clans of the village making every section representing the council. The council is the centre of administration headed by the village chief.  

The size of the Council's member depends on the size or population of the village. Small villages have few members while larger villages have larger council's member. There tenure of office is generally not fixed. Their main duty was to assist and advice the chief in the discharge of his functions in the village. Helping the chief in the selection of the land for cultivation of the villagers is one of the important duties performed by the council's members. The member enjoyed the privileged such as selection of the site for cultivation before the others. They also enjoy respect from the villagers and favor by the chief.

1. **Semang:**

The word "Semang" is a local term which means head of ministers or Prime Minister at the village level. In other words, he is one of the most important members in the Village Council. He has to look after all-round development of the village and the well-being of the people. In fact, he plays the real executive link between the chief and administration. All the limitations and short comings of the chiefs may

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be covered up by him. Sometimes, he can act as an administrator on behalf of the chief.\textsuperscript{63}

2.\textit{Pachong:}

Maintaining peace and harmony and defending the village from external aggression are the main responsibility of the \textit{Pachong} in exercise of his functions. \textit{Pachong} is another official and one of the important functionaries of the council. Security of life and properties are within his jurisdiction. Maintaining order, discipline and social ethics of the labor organization are his major function. It is the responsibility of \textit{Pachong} to oversee that the villagers live in peace and harmony.\textsuperscript{64}

3.\textit{Chaangloi:}

He is responsible to the village finance and food. The economic realm of societal welfare is concentrated into the hands of the \textit{Chaangloi} who in exercise of his functions annually collects \textit{Changsheo}(rice taxes) from the village on behalf of the chief. The village councilors and the relatives (near one) of the Chief are exempted from such direct taxes.

4.\textit{Lhaangsam:}

\textit{Lhaangsam} has a literal meaning which means, village crier or broadcaster. Among these council of ministers, the \textit{Lhaangsam} or broadcaster, who is responsible for the information and communication whereby as a messenger of peace or alert. He convenes meeting of the council, convey decisions of the council to the general public, and enforces or implements the decisions of the council. The task given to

\textsuperscript{63} Haokip, Chunglet, Personal interview, \textit{Op. Cit}
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
him is not specific. He may be asked to act in any capacity, such as, emissary, negotiator, mediator, depending upon his personal talent. 65

5. **Thihkhengpa** (Village Blacksmith):

The duty of village blacksmith was to look after the tools and implement of the villagers. He is also an important official in Village Council. He generally manufactures agricultural implement like knives, axes, spears, or war weapons etc. He has the highest dexterity in blacksmith. As he is an authorized and officially recognizes blacksmith of the village, he receives honors and respect in the society. He also makes agricultural implement, such as, hoes, axes, spades etc. In recognition of his services, he is also given *Changsheo* (a bucket of paddy) by all the villagers annually, but the rate will be lower than that is received by the *Haosa*. 66

6. **Thiempu** (Village Priest):

This office is very often regarded as hereditary. The secrets of the medicines will not be revealed to anyone. *Thiempu* generally prefers to teach their sons and grandsons the secrets of the words. Moreover, to learn this secret costs a lot of money and time. Therefore, very few persons bother to learn this knowledge.

Religion and culture are part and parcel of Kuki community. The role of *Thiempu* 67 is necessary to mention in Kuki jhum cultivation. *Thiempu* serve as the official priest for the entire village, he also plays the role of a medicine man. The priest combined in himself the qualities of a physician and leader in the religious life of the people. The village *Thiempu* is in fact a very important official who is in charge of the

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65. Ibid.
66. Questionnaire respondent Kuki, Lenminlun of Semol, Ukhrul district, Manipur on 7 September 2010.
67. Every Kuki village has a priest *Thiempu* who is a ritual specialist. Their position and status has come to be less significant with the advent of Christianity.
community's health. He manages rituals and ceremonial affairs of the village. He looks after the ailing villages and receives Changsheo (a bucket of paddy) in kind according to the cases of the diseases.

In traditional Kuki society without a ritual performed by Thiempu shifting cultivation cannot begin to take place. If a person has got a newly chosen plot he would perform ritual to see if the land is good for cultivation. Cultivation related rituals were performed by the priest for the successful in the shifting cultivation.

In Kuki society swearing oath taking is considered to be very serious and is avoided as far as possible. It is used only if a case has proved to be very difficult. The decisions thus made by taking an oath are conventionally accepted by the judges and both the parties with different ways. These rite and rituals of judgments are performed by the village priest, when the cases are very serious and the culprits are untraceable, lack of witnesses and evidence, depending on the judgment of nature.68

7. Lawm Upa:

Lawm Upa is another important official in the village. He is responsible to youth organizations and education. He looks after the activities, administration and well being of the youth in the village like modern minster of Education, Youth and Sports department.

U-pa Inpi (House of Elders)

Patriarch custom of Kuki paterfamilias relationship is known as U-pa – Naopa.69 Its system of male kin circle is headed by the eldest

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68. Personal interview with Misao, Lhunkholet at Thinglei Village, Senapati district, Manipur on 27 October 2010.
69. U-pa means elder and naopa means younger.
man called *U-Pa*\(^70\). Administration is established with the existing house of the genealogically known eldest ‘Head’ is known as *Sating Lhunna*.\(^71\) Traditionally known authority of the ‘House of Eldest’ is called *U-pa Inpi* and its authority is not of mere power but it has responsibility and ethical obligation according to custom and culture. The various level of *U-pa Inpi* is to take care at family, progressively moves to the levels of sub-clans, clan and eventually to the whole tribe confederation. The authority of the House of *U-pa* is traditionally honored as decision making body of the clan men’s family issue. There is one *U-pa* for one section of Kuki clans e.g. Chengjapao Doungel, Chief of Aisan village, who, in that capacity of people’s behalf, served longer imprisonment under British regime after Anglo- Kuki war 1917-191929.\(^72\)

**Upa (Eldest)**

The foremost political organization of the Kukis is the village chieftainship. Chieftainship among the Kukis is associated with the *U-Pa*\(^73\) or Eldest of the family and eldest of the clan is the only persons who become the village chief. Hence Kuki chiefs are synonymous with the eldest. The chieftainship could not be achieved by any ordinary person other than the *Upa* of the clan, even if the younger become stronger and wealthier in the society, the poorer and the weaker *Upa* was always kept as the head or chief of the village.\(^74\)

The position and status of *Upa* cannot be substitutive. The epithet ‘*Upa*’ is conferred on a person by way of reverence, and a great

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70. Meaning the Almighty God in Kuki.  
71. Backbone of animal is given to the eldest or genealogically known head of the family entitled him as *Mi'upa* of being the backbone of a clan family.  
73. *Upa* is the eldest son in a family or eldest man in clan.  
deal of veneration is attached to it. Upa is the only person who can become chief. Chieftainship manifests, therefore, in the rights and privileges handed down to the Upa and these prerogatives are institutionalized in village organization and the customary laws, through the system of chieftainship.\textsuperscript{75}

Thus, chieftainship has come to stay as an institution which is the perennial source of customary laws, and the mechanism by which such laws are interpreted in the social system that makes them a living force enabling to maintain their identity inheriting a rich cultural heritage\textsuperscript{76} Thus, chief is synonymous with Upa. But not all the Upas are chief. Such Upas however, still are the destination to their clansmen.

According to custom chieftainship is hereditary\textsuperscript{77} passing from father to eldest son among the Kukis and to the Lushais is the youngest.\textsuperscript{78} In the case of Lushai, however, it has been changed from youngest to eldest in recent times. It was salutary as the process of fragmentation continued to erode not only the material possessions of the chief but also the viability of his position as a chief It is associated with the concept of Upa or man on the direct line of the senior descent.\textsuperscript{79}

Corresponding to Upa is Naopa\textsuperscript{80} which means younger brother. Naopa cannot in the normal course of the customary law become the chief. In case one who is not Upa has found a new village he has to

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, p.127.
\textsuperscript{80} ‘Naopa’ stands for the junior man or younger brother who cannot in the normal course of the customary law become the Chief.
handover Chiefship to the Upa. In the same manner if Phungkhai-Upa happen to desert his chiefdom due to various factor such as tribal feuds, etc his nearest junior chief has to offer him his Chiefship in his village. In case the Upa decline to become chief only then one of the junior or Naopa can become chief. Before a Naopa can become the chief, certain formalities and obligations are to be gone through as per customary law. It is true that Chiefship in Kuki society is the birth right of Upas. Upa-Naopa (elder-younger) relationship has various level, beginning at family level, it progressively moves to levels of subs clan, clan and eventually to the whole tribal confederation.

There are different layers of Upas. A collection of families have their own Upa called Inkon Upa. Again a number of Inkon Upa has Phungkhai Upa. The Upas of Inkon Upa are Phungbul Upas which again has one Bulpi who is the most superior. But the number of Upas is different among clans. This clan base organization is still practice in Kuki society. The history of the Kukis witness controversy over Bulpi between the Lunkim Phungbul and the Dougel head clans (Aisan), Phungpi Upa of the Haokip Chassad and the Sithou Bulpi (Jampi). There are claims and counter claim for the position of Upas among the Kuki society.

The different layers of Upas make different layers of chiefship. This reveal that the land belongs to the chief until he dies and passed on to his eldest son or nearest of kin. The tradition of land holding and ownership cannot be easily passed on by choice. And the chief has no

right to disposed off his land out of vested interest. It can only be passed on to his successor. In this case the genealogical tree is strictly followed.\footnote{84}

P.C Misao (1979) has opined that there is nothing at present that can easily replace the land ownership system. This very system maintained by the community is their identity.\footnote{85}

D. Letkhojam Haokip (2009) a Kuki scholar wrote,
"... it was the traditional land custom that regulates and preserved the land holding system through the ages for the posterity of the people. Proper regulation and utilization of the land make them survived from natural and made calamities. Such a unique land ownership system protects them from the outside threats and also lessens dispute over land ownership and property(s).\footnote{86}"

\textbf{Establishment of Village}

The reasons for the establishment of new village in Kuki society was mainly due to their nature of cultivation, opposition to despotic chief and the need for new village when the village become too big to administer efficiently.

1. The Kukis were in frequent migration which was mainly due to their practice of shifting cultivation. A particular patch of land when become less productive the villagers leaved the place and settle in a new village they found suitable for cultivation.\footnote{87}

\footnote{86} Haokip, D. Letkhojam \textit{Op. Cit.}, p. 367
\footnote{87} Ray, Ashok Kumar \textit{Op. Cit.}, p. 25
2. Another reason for the establishment of new village was the despotic and undemocratic nature of the chieftainship system. Sometimes commoners in the village are frustrated of chief control over the village land and that his position is permanent, they have to please the chief all the years. Ashok Kumar Ray (1990) wrote,

   "In course of time therefore, this authoritarian power of the chiefs created a popular distification and over frustration with the organization so much so that no commoner had any accusations to the Chieftainship organization either by election or selection. But very interestingly this did not lead to the formation of a strong opposition against the immutable traditional structure. Rather the dissident group started deserting the despot and forms another village under the leadership of an adventurous man who in turn became the chief of the village." 

3. The third form of establishment of Kuki village is that if the chief felt the village has become big and populated enough, a new village is established and his elder son would become the chief in the new village. The younger sons will live in the same village of his father and be treated as a kho-chaga of the village. Traditionally the commoner cannot become the chief. There is a dichotomy between the chief family and the villagers or commoner. The son of the chief should marry only the daughter of another chief’s daughter or Raja.

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88. Ibid., p.26
90. A member of the village other than the Chief.
91. Personal interview with Haokip, Chunglet (Chief of K. Songlung) at K. Songlung, Senapati district, Manipur on 12 February 2009
Privilege and Entitlement of the Chief

According to the established custom the Kuki chief has received certain tributary privilege. The main reasons for such payment are as follows:

1. Kuki chief is owner of the land within his boundaries and were entitle to received customary tithe and tributary privileges.
2. In due recognition of the chief authority and legitimacy over the land ownership,
3. In recognition of the service render by the chief such as providing land to the villagers.
4. In gratification for which they got the privileges of enjoying the amenities of village life,
5. As a mark of respect, and
6. To honors the head of the clans by the younger chiefs in case of the clan chief.\(^93\)

A payment of tributaries to the chief is a manifestation of their obedience and loyalty to the centralized authority (authority over village administration, land control and management). It is the mechanism in which the chief legally gets obedience and loyalty. It is a material ethic of obedience as well as gratification shown by the villagers. It has legal sanction by customary law and thus cannot be objected. It is their culture, the same as their life.\(^94\)

In the village territory the villagers had the right to hunt wild animals on condition laid down by the chief. For the service and facilities used by the villagers, the villagers in return paid taxes to the

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93. Personal interview with Lhouvum, Demseh at Motbung, Senapati district Manipur on 11 April 2010.
chief. Payment of taxes had variation in each village. Each chief has its own rule on the nature and amount of tax to be paid. It was a customary right of the chief to enjoy such privileges and was the customary duty for the villagers to pay such taxes and privileges to the owner of the land. The villagers thus, for using the chief’s land were obliged to pay certain tax and tributaries.\(^95\)

P. Binodini Devi (2006) has mention the following tributary paid to the chief by virtue of being owner of the land.

1. The hind leg of the animal killed by the hunters in his chiefdom.
2. Force labour from the villagers. It is a free 1-4 days free labour of the villagers.
4. Sales levy.
5. A levy on a wild honey in the forest.
6. Each house in the village contributes its share of any expense incurred.\(^96\)

The recorded and known taxes, tributaries and privileges (beside the above six tributaries) paid to the chief of the Kuki village are as follow:

1. **Changsheo:**

   *Chang* = paddy rice and *sheo* = tax. The chief has overriding power over the utilization of the village land. The system is somewhat similar to semi-feudal type. A villager is given a plot of land for cultivation.\(^97\) But, this does not constitute permanent individual

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ownership of land. The villager or the tenant-at-will as a customary rule pays to the chief a yearly tributaries called Changsheo.\textsuperscript{98} It was paid at the end of each harvest to the chief. The subscription was like a kind of agricultural tax or fees for cultivating the chief land and it range from payment of 1 to 5 baskets of paddy by every family for cultivation of the land. The chief however has the right to exempt any village from the payment. \textsuperscript{99} The chief exempted household whose harvest are too bad to pay the Changsheo.

2. Gamshan-man:

It is a payment to the chief for the lease of the land. The villagers upon the cultivation of the chief land pay annually to the latter.\textsuperscript{100} The chief is responsible for the security, development and maintenance of his village. The villagers in return render absolute loyalty and allegiance to the chief.\textsuperscript{101}

In the past among some tribe of the Kukis, their chief had agreed to share of land for cultivation. Under this system the chief have little control over the land. The villagers also did not pay the traditional tax such as Changsheo to the chiefs. The Gamshan-man system however in course of time has become obsolete due to various reasons such as increase in population in the villages. The chief started to control establish complete control over the land with clearly demarcated boundaries on the basis of natural courses of rivers, mountains and hill ranges, stone, etc.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{98} Meaning Rice-Price
\textsuperscript{100} Questionnaire respondent Khongsai, Janglun of Tuibuong Bazar, Churachandpur district, Manipur, dated 8 August 2009.
\textsuperscript{101} Memorandum ‘Kuki Hills District’ to Shrimati Indira Gandhi Prime Minister of India, A booklet by the Kuki Chief Zonal Council, Manipur, N.p., p. 6
3. Lou man:

Lou=cultivation land and Man=price is another payment made by any outsiders cultivating in the chief’s land. Such a cultivator from outside the village has to pay louman periodically. 103 As has already mention above the Kuki chief receives certain taxes and tributaries even from outside the village if it is within the territory of the chief.

4. SelgamPotman:

In Kuki village the grass eaten by Mithun or other domestic animals was imposed a penalty to the owner by the land cultivator as compensation. 104 Similar to this a tax is given to the chief when a Mithun is sold. The owners of Mithun give a jar of wine to the chief.

5. Samal:

Samal the hind leg of the wild animal and salu the head of the wild animal killed by the villagers are paid to the chief. It was customary to do this obligation by every hunter even if the animal killed is in outside the chief territory. Anyone who failed to do this obligation was seriously view as indisipline and shame to the village. 105 I still remember as young boy my father paying salu to the chief of our village whenever he killed animal such as deer, etc.

6. Lamkai:

It is an export tax. On purchasing a head of cattle and if the purchase happen to belong to another villagersthe exporter has to pay a sum of Rupee 1. Sometime this payment is substituted by offering a jar of wine to the chief. 106

103. Personal interview with Kipgen, Demsei at Kangpokpi, Senapati district, Manipur on 3 August 2008.
106. Ibid.
7. Chao-man or Khochou:

When a villager is to migrate he has to pay the migration tax, to the chief. A jar of wine has to be offer to the chief making permission to the chief. After obtaining permission the villager can take all their property to his newly migrated place. But, such facility was denied to persons of illegal migrants. If a villager migrates without prior consent of the chief, the crops standing or reaped and the house go to the chief. In some cases his property or housework are confiscated.\textsuperscript{107} The chief in some cases informs his counterparts of the village to which the villager migrate. Refusal to such request often resulted into inter village feud and conflict. In the same if a new member wish to migrate to a new village he has to offer a jar of wine to the chief of the new village.\textsuperscript{108}

8. Khothakon:

\textit{Khuo} means village and \textit{thakon} means labour. \textit{Khothakon} thus is a labour given by the villagers to the chief. It is a customary obligation that the villagers once in a year provide a free labour to the village chief on a certain fixed day. On such day the chief in returned would offer a mid-day meal to the laborers of boiled rice, pork and rice-beer.\textsuperscript{109}

9. InpiKisa:

The villagers join the construction of the village chief's house. The chief's house was usually big in size than the villager. In the event of the house require to be repaired the villager do the same. On the

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, p. 5
\textsuperscript{108} Personal interview with Lhouvum, Chongkhokim at K. Chingkong, Senapati district, Manipur on 9 September 2010.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
day the chief would arrange rice beer to the laborer. Evening part of the day filled with joy and merry making.\textsuperscript{110}

10.\textit{Selkotkai}:

When a villager sold his cattle outside the village he has to pay the chief a tax of Re 1. It was customary to pay such taxes to the chief as a mark of honor to the owner of the village land. In case of failure to pay such taxes the chief did not give punishment to the defaulter but the person was remark as uncultured and uncalled for.\textsuperscript{111}

11.\textit{Nungatheng Kai}:

A female pig is contributed to the chief by the bridegroom’s family when \textit{chongmou} (plan marriage) marriage is performed. The flesh of the head and the body part of the pig killed is cooked for the \textit{Semang Pachong} (Village Council members) of the village. The practice is still in practice but certain amount of money is given replacing the tradition of contributing a pig.\textsuperscript{112}

12.\textit{Chikhuh}:

A Kuki chief has his share on salt spring. Salt was valuable resources in the land. Anyone who discovers salt spring in the village or outside it would give at least small amount to the village chief as custom.\textsuperscript{113}

12.\textit{Vohkai}:

\textit{Vohkai} meaning \textit{Voh=}pig \textit{Kai=} lease. The chief in the past keep pigs of good pedigree to lease out to the villager for breeding purposes.

\textsuperscript{110} Personal interview with Haokip, Chinkholing Haokip (Researcher mother) at Lailampat, Churachandpur district, Manipur on 6 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}
The villagers in return gave a piglet to the chief for this service he provided to the villagers.\(^\text{114}\)

13. *Ahkai:*

*Ah*=cock *kai*=lease/hire for breeding purposes. Like *Vohkai*, in *Ahkaia* healthy good cock belonging to the chief is utilized by the villagers for breeding purposes. The chief in return gets a cock from each villager every time.\(^\text{115}\)

14. *Toltheh:*

Anyone who commits serious crime was fine a jar of rice beer and a pig is killed at the chief’s house. No villagers can escape the fine. In case of any disagreement from the person or family that commit crime can amount to leaving the village by force. The pig killed is enjoyed by the chief and his Councilors.\(^\text{116}\)

15. *Samel:*

Villagers gave to the village chief the hind leg of the animal killed in hunting. The animal includes any wild animal like deer, tiger, bear, etc. However birds are exempted from *samel*. The practice of it shows courtesy given to the village chief who takes care of the whole village and the land.\(^\text{117}\)

17. *Selu-bel-peng:*

The head of an animal and a jar of rice beer is brought to the chief by one who established a new village. On payment of it the latter gets the right to Chiefship in a new village which is called ‘*Haosakilah*’.

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\(^{114}\) Questionnaire respondent Kuki, Nengchuon of Molnom village, Churachandpur district, Manipur on 5 June 2010.
\(^{115}\) Ibid.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Ibid.
It is to note that such right are usually given by the clan chief to the village chief who control over his clans man's^{118}

**Disposal Rights of the Village Chief**

In Kuki society the village chief has rights to division, disposal and redistribution of land within his territory. His power to control land was absolute but generally the chief act to provide maximum welfare to the community. In common the chief seldom sell the land or rent.^{119}

Disposal rights of land by village chief can be divided as follow:

a. The right of distribution of unoccupied plots.

b. The right to split up large occupied plots into smaller units if and when increase of population or shortage of land required such action.

c. The right of partitioning and alteration of the boundaries of rotational fields.

d. The right of granting permission to cultivate specially reserved areas.

e. Right to direct construction of village communal works such as aqueducts, roads and bridges, the building of new houses for new immigrants.^{120}

**Inheritance**

In traditional system the Kukis acquired membership in their father's clan group, which might be a localized group or might spread horizontally over many villages. They could never acquire membership in their mother's clan group except by a kind of adoption in which case they would not attain true membership in politico-jural field. Their

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118. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
system of inheritance, rules of succession and occupancy of residence closely followed the system of descend.

Some anthropologists limit the term kinship of consanguine relationship, i.e., relationship based on ties of blood relationship and marriage, which forms an essential part of any kinship system. All types of kinship—primarily, secondary, tertiary and consanguineous are found in the social institution system of Kukis.

The Kuki village belongs to the chief and his legal heirs and not to the people who live in it. He is not an elected person, but as the eldest son, he has inherited the position from his father. The position is passed down from generation to generation from eldest son to eldest son. He is the Upa of the family and has absolute right of ownership over the entire land of the village. Even his younger brothers who made him Chief do not have the right to claim ownership over the land of the village. Curey (1976) thus wrote:

"The Kuki chief invariably inherits their position by the right of birth and takes the initiative in all matter concerning the administration of the clansmen."  

Chieftainship by birth is also followed among the Chin of Burma who is one of the same ethnic group with Kuki. The chief is by birth, only a person from the genealogical line to become chief automatically takes the post. The chief may be wanting in qualification and there may be many other qualify person for the post of chief in skill and in others talent but they cannot supplaned unless he is physically or mentally quite unfit for the position.  

123. Ibid, Pp. 200-201
The Kukis political structure has been built and institutionalized in chief. It is based on kinship and the hierarchical order of the clan. Col. Dalton (1872) observes the Kukis as below:

"a nation of hunters and warriors, ruled as a nation by their principal hereditary chiefs or rajahs, but divided into clans, each under its own Chiefs."\(^{124}\)

Gangte (1993) mentions that the authority of the chiefs greatly enhanced the strength of their custom, for they were the perennial resource of the Kuki custom, tradition, culture, language etc. Law of succession is strictly observed. The first born child \(mi-upa\)\(^{125}\) succeeded his after and became the chief. Such \(mi-upa\) also inherited his father property\(^{126}\). In case, the eldest son is incapable the next eldest son would automatically succeed\(^{127}\). In case the father has no son the eldest son of his eldest surviving son will succeed him. In another case if the chief's sons are still minor a male next to the kin of the chief runs the village administration till the minor son become mature to heir his father.\(^{128}\) G.H Domant (1880) on the hereditary succession of the Kuki wrote,

"In all question of genealogy, the Kukis are very particular, and the hereditary succession of their chief is strictly observed."\(^{129}\)

Succession by youngest son however is practiced among the Lushai and Hmar Kuki tribes.\(^{130}\)

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125. First born son of the father if dies the second son become a new Mi-Upa
127. Soppit, C.A A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes, Assam Secretariat Press, 1887, Pp. 5-6.
128. Elvin, V Democracy in NEFA, Shillong 1865,p.5
Carey and Tuck (1976) wrote,

"The chief invariably inherit their position by the right of birth and take the initiative in all matters concerning the administration of their clansman."\textsuperscript{131}

Except on condition that the person to heir the chief is mentally unsound or physically unfit the Kuki system of succession was strictly followed. Carey and Tuck (1976) also wrote,

"We find in them a natural reverence for him who by right of birth is the chief of the tribe or clans or family. The chief may be wanting in qualification and there may be many of other families superior in ability but, unless he is physically or mentally quite unfit for his position, there is no danger of his being supplanted."\textsuperscript{132}

The chieftainship and in that case the title are hereditary which succeeded him go from father to son in the Kuki society which is legitimated by the traditional custom of the tribe.\textsuperscript{133} W.W Hunter (1950) wrote that,

"the Chieftainship and title are hereditary honors descending from father to son."\textsuperscript{134}

Ashok Kumar Ray (1990) stated that, chieftainship organization had logically led to the monopolization of all other resources including the economic resources by it. And by virtue of this it is quite natural that the inheritance rules and the succession norms became routinised in favor of such chieftains.\textsuperscript{135} He also stated the inheritance rules and the

\textsuperscript{131} Carey, B.S and Tuck, H.N Chin Hills Vol.1, Calcutta: Firma KLM,1976,p.3  
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid,p.201  
\textsuperscript{133}Robert Brown, Statistical account of Manipur, Delhi: Sanskran Parakshak,1950,p.50  
\textsuperscript{134} Quoted in Brown, Robert, Ibid. p. 50.  
\textsuperscript{135} Ray, Ashok Kumar Op.Cit., p. 26
succession norms became routinised when chieftainship became an immutable organization.\textsuperscript{136}

\textbf{Women’s Inheritance}

Socially and legitimately, the Kukis follow the system of patriarchal structure. When a man dies without having a son, his property including the land will devolve to his (brother’s) eldest son. If his brother has no son the said property goes to the nearest male line.\textsuperscript{137} The line of descent, law of inheritance and law of residence is appointed to male line only and the children follow the clan’s name of the father. The eldest son of the family remains with the parental house to look after his parents. Women folks move to their husbands at the time of marriage.

In case of ‘\textit{Chapagam}\textsuperscript{138} the law of inheritance is passed on to the nearest male relative of the family. No woman has any right to heir her father. A traditional Kuki woman thus sang:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
\textit{Munzang saupha kazua’nawmching a abawl,}
\textit{Taang hi le’ngkhuan bang kaluah ding hi e;}
\textit{Taang hi le’ng khuambang kaluah ding hi e,}
\textit{Lianuhi’ng a gal sial bang dongs ngawning.}\textsuperscript{139}
\end{center}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Free Translation}

The beautiful mansion of my father firmly bound with cane,

I would have inherited it if I were a man;

I would have inherited it if I were a man,

I am a woman only to have a distant view.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid}, p.30
\textsuperscript{137} Misao, P.C \textit{History and Custom of the Thadou Kuki}, Imphal: Author, 1970, p.39
\textsuperscript{138} Barren fatherhood
It is worth mentioning that the Kuki law of inheritance does not allowed any person from mother’s side to claim property like land of the deceased person. In case, if a person has no son all his property including the ownership of land will go to the eldest brother’s son, again if the eldest brother’s son is dead, to the eldest of the nearest male line. Therefore a male child is always preferred to a female child to continued and preserve the lineage. The inheritance of landed property by the eldest brother however does not mean that other sons are denied of any share. Unfortunately, the daughter has no share. The only things they are entitled was at the time of her marriage, which include Tumpheng, Longkai Thilbu and other such domestic necessity.

The female slaves of the Kukis of Lushai and Chin hills are treated as concubines with respect to their masters. The lack of concubines and other lesser illegitimate wives have disgrace impact on the children in regard to the inheritance of the father’s property. Legitimization of concubine is intimately connected with the social placement of her children in the kinship system. Thus, the children of true and legitimate wife can only inherited property and become heirs. However, in case the child of concubine is made legitimate in case there are no lawful descendents. Among Siyin tribe in Chin Hills concubine children cannot claim to any estate. In case the chief’s wife has no children the properties goes to the brother of the deceased.

141. Hoe, an agricultural implement
142. Basket with a cover on it
143. Implement for weaving
Among the Vaiphei Kuki, the properties of parents belong to the eldest son who can distribute the same to his younger brothers.

The rights of the women are primarily governed by customary laws. But in the valley as far as inheritance is concerned there is no such distinction as ancestral or self acquired property. The father is the absolute owner of all the property in his possession. After his death, sons inherit the property left by him. The widow succeeds to the property of her husband as long as she is alive without any legal authority. Provision is made for the unmarried daughters. Dues and debts incurred by the deceased father is the first priority before any division amongst the successors.

A son enjoys unfettered right to sell homestead as well as his house, but he is bound to accommodate his divorced sister, if any, at his new residence. Even though there is law for giving properties to daughters in practice, they do not get it. As per the customary laws of tribals in Manipur women are deprived of family right of inheritance which goes to either the eldest son or the youngest son in the family. Generally amongst the rural communities women do not enjoy property rights.\textsuperscript{147}

The case is not only to the tribal communities but in the valley too no right to inherit property is given to women. In the hills, rights of the women are primarily governed by customary laws. But in the valley as far as inheritance is concerned there is no such distinction as ancestral or self acquired property. The widow succeeds to the property of her husband as long as she is alive without any legal

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
authority and debts incurred by the deceased father are the first priority before any division amongst the successors.\(^{148}\)

**Land Use and Holding**

Land use can be best defined as making certain areas of the land into productive purposes which served as the main economic sources for the community. The use of land for cultivation and for other purposes in Kuki society reflects the areas of land holding by the chief and his authority over it. Cambridge Dictionary defined land holding as "an area of land that someone owns or rents"\(^{149}\). Thus, land holding is an ownership of land; the state or fact of owning land which is a holding in the form of land. The Kuki chief as has been already pointed out owns the village land (territory) which was used by the whole village members under his supervisor.

In Manipur the tribal communities practiced different land use system. They depend mainly on agricultural production. *Jhum* cultivation however is predominantly practiced in the Kuki areas than that of the Nagas areas. The whole village land was large and the natural resources were made freely available to the villagersas Community Property Control (CPR) under the supervisor of the village chief. The tribal people both Kukis and Nagas have depended practically on *jhum* base cultivation which is the main stay of their economy. Thus, *jhuming* remain as one of the most extensive method of cultivation in the hills since the past. It was the foundation of their culture and controlling force of their economy.\(^{150}\)

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\(^{148}\) Ibid.


much a part of their life. Their settlement in the past was base on cultivation conveniences with little regard to healthiness.151

In Kuki village, the villagers only did the actual cultivation. A village member has to leave the village and his cultivation field when he begins to have difference with the chief who is the owner of the land. Village homestead, jhum fields, wet paddy field all belong to the chief. The chief of Kuki village is something like a permanent power and the village land is his private property in one sense.

The chief was assisted by his counsellors who controlled the land, earmark land for the years cultivation and distribute jhum field to the villagers. The land is set apart for different purposes. All the cultivable land is reserved to meet the foodstuff of the villagers. Every household is given a piece of land for his settlement and for agricultural purposes. No village member or household is deprived of using the village land. The land uses by the villagers however are temporary and once its use is stopped the land or plot revert back to the chief. Justice and fairness is maintained by the chief in his administration in the village who act upon the established custom of the Kukis. The chief supervised and transact all business related to land and land cultivation, measurement, taxation, etc.

Kuki scholar like Chinakham Ngaihte (1991) has equated Kuki agrarian’s economy with semi-feudalism as the chief have overriding power on land. He is the master and villagers are tenant at will. The villagers paid tributaries to the chief for cultivating the chief land.152

1. Classification of Chief’s Land Holding

Land is classified into different areas according to its purposes. Among some Nagas, land is classified into clans land, lineage land, individual land, community land, the village reserve area and the open reserve area.\textsuperscript{153} The Kuki land system in general can be divided as below:

\textbf{a) Gamkhat:}

It is a reserved area which is not suitable for jhum cultivation but provides materials like bamboo, fiber, thatch and other which is commonly used for construction of houses. \textit{Gamkhat} land like other land belongs to the chief but the villagers can use the product like their own. Wild vegetables also are found in this area.\textsuperscript{154}

\textbf{b) Ujoh:}

It is a village reserved area where trees are cut down in the surrounding village which is made to protect themselves from wild fire. In modern time \textit{Ujoh} is a reserve area where the villager cut down tree every year in the beginning of the year for used in firewood for every village household. The whole process from cutting down of the tree to taking them home take about a month. Firstly, an area is selected by a group of appointed persons who are responsible for \textit{Ujoh}. Then the villagers usually one male member each from a household, (widow are exception) has to attend the labour of cutting the tree. When this is finished the tree are dried for a week or two before they are burned. The burned trees are properly distributed according to the number of village household. The last stage in the process is drawing of lottery by

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid.}, Pp. 63-69

\textsuperscript{154} Personal interview with Haokip, Chunglet (Chief of K. Songlung) at K. Songlung, Senapati district, Manipur on 7 September 2009 and 3 December 2009.
the villager. Once lottery is done and the village household knew their share, each family carried home.\textsuperscript{155}

c) \textit{Luikuhkim:}

This is another forest reserved where water is available. Water from natural tank or spring flow and is available throughout the year in \textit{Luikuhkim}. The place is neatly clean with fencing the water tank. The villagers throughout the year depend on this for water. The water is clean and fresh. But it is mainly used for dirking and cooking. For bathing, washing and for other, water in the villager site such as pond, etc is used. One of the village council responsible for village water looks after these natural tanks and spring.

d) \textbf{Village Homestead:}

The village site is maintained for the expansion of future use. The new immigrants, for instance, are given this reserved site for the construction of house and for kitchen garden. No villagers can occupy this site except new immigrant. The site is maintained by the councilors of the chief.\textsuperscript{156}

e) \textit{The Village Community Forest:}

The chief and his councilors earmarked the village community forest for the use of villagers in future especially for use of material purposes like construction of houses, etc. A heavy fine is imposed by the Council in case of any individual exploiting the forest without prior permission.\textsuperscript{157}

f) \textbf{Grazing Site:}

\textsuperscript{155. Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{156. Ibid}
\textsuperscript{157. Ibid}
This site is reserved for grazing domestic animal such as cow, Mithun, buffalo, goat, etc of the villagers. This prevent animal from entering into kitchen gardens and other places. If a Mithun encroached or eaten a cultivation site the Mithun owner is given penalty for that and he has to compensate the loss of cultivator.\textsuperscript{158}

g) Cemetery Site:

It is a place where the dead bodies of the villager are buried. Every village has a cemetery and this site is preserved mainly for burial purposes. The site is usually far away from the village. A stone was erected in every burial site. In modern time with majority of the Kuki population converted to Christianity in place of stone, cross is erected in the burial site and the deceased name, date of birth, etc are inscribed on it.\textsuperscript{159}

h) The cultivation Site:

Every Kuki village has a cultivation site. It is the area where jhuming cultivation is done every year by the villagers. Generally after every two to five year the cultivation site is change to new area. Jhum site is usually located far away from the village.\textsuperscript{160}

Land Boundary

The village land was demarcated and the chief makes sure that outsider did not encroach the land. As owner of the village land the chief preserved the land from wasteful use and fire. In the past land were demarcated to mark the boundary. Stone, ridge, mountain, rivulet trees were used as mark that demarcated the boundaries of village,
In the past land dispute was a common occurrence by encroachment of the land by others. Such encroachment often leads to war. Tribal head hunting and raid are many a time the end result of land dispute between village to village and people to people. Thus, boundaries of the land were properly demarcated and any encroachment to the land of others often invites war and conflict.\textsuperscript{162}

Lunminthang Haokip a Kuki writer and government officer has wrote,

\textit{“The demarcation of possession by natural boundaries like rivers, ridges, gorges and footpaths serve the short-cut choosing community right.”}\textsuperscript{163}

**Land Measurement**

Traditionally, the Kukis have their own land measurement system. They used one’s arm or \textit{khao} to measure land. The Kukis use two commonly use land measuring units i.e. \textit{Lamkhat} and \textit{Khaokhat}.

1. \textit{Lamkhat} is the smallest unit for measuring land. One lam is equal to five- half feet of measurement. Sometime the tallest man in the village stretched his arm and measured the land. In general, the chief measured the land by stretching his arm.

2. Another important unit of measurement is \textit{khaokhat}. It was used mainly for measuring the food grains like paddy, maize, etc. Three to five \textit{khao} is calculated to meet the food grain requirement of a medium family. Ten \textit{khao} square are usually considered good for maize and other crops. \textit{Khao} is called \textit{Sanalamjei} in Meitei.

\textsuperscript{161} Questionnaire respondent Changsan, Manglen, Chief of Sadar Joute, Senapati district, Manipur, dated 5 January 2010
\textsuperscript{162} Questionnaire respondent Haokip, Onkhogin of Thadou Veng, Churachandpur, district, Manipur, dated 4 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{163} Haokip, Lunminthang, ‘Kuki Chief-Ship: Looking East or West?’ \textit{The Gosem}, 27 July 2010,p.2
**Jhum Cultivation**

The method of cultivation in the hill areas is the system most known as *jhum* (shifting) cultivation. The jungle on the hill side is cut-down/slashes and left for few weeks to dry, then burned between January and March. The boughs and any rubbish are collected and burned follow by hoeing up of the ground. Crop seed such as job tear, hill rice, millet are scattered among the ashes and the field carefully raked over. The field is weeded once or twice when the crops are growing up. The millet is generally harvested in the month of July, rice in November and job tears in the following month.\(^{164}\)

The tribal of Manipur are totally dependent on *jhum* cultivation for survival. It is found that tribal natural resources management was by and large geared to their need. It is also widely practiced in other hill areas of the Northeastern states of India. In India about 10 million hectares of tribal land stretched across 16 states is under *jhum* cultivation. Base on satellite image, Forest Survey of India estimate 1.73 million hectares of land is affected by *jhum* cultivation. *Jhum* cultivation is deeply rooted in the tribal psyche, having evolved through the year, and being rooted in customs, belief and folklore.

1. **Area under Jhum Cultivation:**

The area under *jhum* cultivation is roughly half that of under permanent cultivation. It supports 34 per cent of the state's population. The highest percentage of geographical area where *jhuming* cultivation is practiced is recorded in Tamenglong and Churachandpur (accounting for 45 per cent of the total area under jhum cultivation in the state) and the lowest in Senapati district (even though Senapati has the highest proportion of forest area degraded by *jhum*). It is also

practiced in the southern and eastern parts of Ukhrul district. In Churachandpur district, about 84.6 per cent of the population depends on jhum cultivation. Overall, the area and production of jhum rice in Manipur has remained more or less constant. Much of the permanent cultivation in the hills is in Senapati district, followed by Ukhrul. The precariousness of production through shifting cultivation is clear from both the low levels of yield as well as its unreliability.\footnote{165}

Estimates for the area under jhum vary widely. The Registrar General of India and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Manipur, reported an average 40,000 hectares in the 1990s, while the Agricultural Census, Department of Agriculture, Government of Manipur, reported an average of 90,000 hectares and the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Government of Manipur reported around 44,000 hectares in the same period. The most widely quoted estimate is that of the study by the ‘Task Force on Shifting Cultivation’, Ministry of Agriculture, according to which, 90,000 ha are cultivated by 70,000 families in the state.\footnote{166}

2. KukiJhum Cultivation

The Kukis of Manipur practiced jhum cultivation which is their main source of livelihood.\footnote{167} A portion of land is slash and burn for jhum purposes. The chief through his Council of Ministers allocated a plot of land to each family for jhum cultivation. The villagers in recognition of the service render by their chief paid certain tributaries and privileges. In the tribal areas wet-paddy cultivation and terrace farming are also

practiced and this practice is common to all the tribal in Manipur. Kukis groups are the first known wet-rice cultivator in Manipur.\textsuperscript{168}

The chief earmarked the site for jhum cultivation for that year. Everything is decided first such as, which areas to be cultivated that year, which family was to get how much land according the number of members to feed, which family with excess labor would help which one with every few adults and the day before which cultivation would begin. After which the man of the house chose the plot and performed the ritual to mark the beginning of cultivation.\textsuperscript{169}

Every year, cultivation begins in the month of Tolbol-Lhakhao (January-March). On a fixed date the villagers go to the forest and locate a site and each family would mark by cutting portion of its trunk or tied bunches of grasses in the border of his fields making ‘Louchari’.\textsuperscript{170} The area of jhum site is carefully set apart. Climate condition and soil formation determine what crop is planted on certain areas. They cultivated only upto 20 degree slopes and planted root crops before the rains to ensure soil protection. Then followed other crops harvested in different months in order to ensure food supply for most of the year till fruits, edible leaves and roots became available.\textsuperscript{171} The filed is leave fallow for 18 years after cultivating it for 3 years in order to let forest regenerate. But it varies among tribes on account of differences in climatic condition and crops. The bamboo growing region in Tripura for example followed a five years cycle suited for to the

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\textsuperscript{168} Tour Diary of the President of Manipur Durbar dated 21-4-1924 \\
\textsuperscript{169} Questionnaire respondent Lhungdim, Jamto of Phailen village, Churachandpur district, Manipur, dated 25 June 2009 \\
\textsuperscript{170} Demarcation of allotted plot for cultivation \\
\textsuperscript{171} Das, Girindra Nath \textit{Widden Cultivation and Development Programmes in North East India, A Study among the Karbis of Assam}, New Delhi: Akansas Publishing House, 2001, Pp. 8-10
\end{flushright}
crop.\textsuperscript{172} Even if the \textit{jhum} circle is larger sufficiently full growth of vegetation does not take place for which there is decline in fertility leading to a very poor yield. P.D Saikia (1979) observed that because of pressure of population and progressive deterioration of soil in the hill slopes, \textit{jhum}land is gradually becoming scare and as a result the \textit{jhum}is shorter.\textsuperscript{173}

Every household is given enough land for cultivation. Such distribution of \textit{jhum} site to the villagers was one of the most important as well as toughest of the village authority. There were fights among the villager in many occasions over the distribution of \textit{jhum}field.\textsuperscript{174} Householders had each share but such is not in the shape of ancestral or customary share of the field round the hamlet but rather in the shape of arbitrary allotment from arable land of the whole country. Such arable are divided into lots; each lot was presumably equal value which was sufficient to provide subsistence for a household.\textsuperscript{175} The entire arable land was divided into nine to ten units. It depends on the availability of the land and population density of the village. The village chief has the privileged to select \textit{jhum} field of his choice. In the case of new immigrant from other village, they are given as same to one of the old village household. In modern time however, distribution of \textit{jhum} field is done through lottery to avoid feud and conflict among the villagers.

Their traditional way of living and the tribal mindset have given respect for environment. Jhum for the Kukis is more than sustenance; it reflects the reason for existence. S. Kipgen (2009) wrote,

\textsuperscript{172} Questionnaire respondent Debarma, Sukho and Darlong, Kim of Ambassa, Dhaili district, Tripura, dated 11 January 2011 and 17 January 2011 respectively.
\textsuperscript{173} Saikia, P.D \textit{Agricultural Production on Land and Labour Utilization in Hill Areas of N.E India}, Jorhat: Agro-Economic Research Centre,1979, p.32.
\textsuperscript{174} Hackip, D. Lekthojam \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.368.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid}, p. 368.
"The most important factor of tribal life-style in respect of land use system is to maintain subsistence of their life base on jhuming or shifting system of cultivation. It is a rain fed agricultural practice for economic sustenance to which they are adapted. They produced almost everything they needed from jhum land. Normally it is an important factor of tribal lifestyle in respect of their 'land use' system. It served as the economic main stay. Traditionally the tribal were totally dependent on it for survival."

Kukis of Manipur are not exception among the tribals in North East India in case of shifting cultivation. Jhumcultivation is practiced throughout the hills of Kuki region and their village economy too is more or the less depend on it. It is a well organized and regulated social system of cultivation in their region. The following stages are adopted in jhumcultivation.

1. Selection of land with ceremonies
2. Jungle is felled spreading out the cutting and drying.
3. Burning of the dried forest
4. Dabbling and sowing of seeds/crops
5. Weeding the crops
6. Watching and protecting the crops
7. Harvesting and threshing the crops
8. Village celebration
9. Following the land

Women play an important role in shifting cultivation. It was the women force that took charges of production and organized work. As a result gender base division of work was more gender friendly among the jhum cultivators. In settle agricultural pattern the men do what is considered difficult work such as ploughing and digging. Back breaking work like transplantation and harvesting that involves long hours of standing in wet fields is left to women. In jhum, on the contrary, hoeing, digging and other difficult work is shared among man. Sometime the whole family shifts to the cultivation site to keep watch of the field by temporary living in Loubuh.178

Jhum cultivation as well as uneven nature of land surface of Manipur itself is a problem in planning to utilize suitable land in a better way. It has created a problem of soil erosion. In the hills of Manipur, primitive method of cultivation like jhuming has aggravated soil erosion and caused floods in the plain. Flood problems in the plains cannot be controlled in the hills.179 Top soiled is washed away due to shifting cultivation. No attempt has been made to have soil map of the state base on studies on soil in different natural and agro-climate gap.

3. Agricultural Implements

In this modern society, scientific methods, modern techniques and tools are used for agricultural purposes with different high yielding crops supplemented by different types of fertilizers. Tools and implements used for cultivation by the Kuki communities of the hill areas of Manipur are simple and required a small numbers. Chempong (A knife of bigger size), heicha (Axe), tupeh (Spade) and tucha (Small

spade)are commonly used implements. They have clearance, weeding and harvesting tools. They did not have any idea of scientific technologies. Women are involved in almost all important activities of jhum cultivation. The following are the list of jhuming implement commonly used:

1. A short handle hoe,
2. A dao or bill hook,
3. Wooden mallet to break up the clods,
4. Sickle,
5. A bamboo flail,
6. An Axe

4. Manure:

The Kukis have their traditional manure of burn ashes. When jhum cultivation is to begin the first step taken was burning the jhum field. This served as manure to the land. Sometime jhum land areas are sown without digging. Digging is done in less fertile land. Two to three inches deep are dug on the earth for cultivation. The stalks and the straws of paddy are spray on the field and burn which served as manure and also lessens weed in the next season. At the time of weeding the jhum the weeds are left in the jhum field. These weeds become dried and again serve as manure for next jhum season. In order to gain fertility of the soil the jhum land is cultivated for 2 to 3 years in continuous and then left the site for about 5 to 10 years for the jhum land to regain its fertility.

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181. Personal interview with Gangle, Konkhojang at Khoustabiung village, Churachandpur district, Manipur on 5 July 2010.
Land Rites and Rituals

Agricultural related land rites and ritual were performed to invoke blessing and also to foresee their fates in terms of prosperity. Ritual was also performed for other reasons to see the suitability of the field, etc. Following are important ritual practices by the Kukis.

1. Khelei Khei:

The ritual is also known as Khe-Lhei-Khai ceremony. It is a test for suitability of land and took place before cultivation begins with rice ladder. It is the first test in the new field and performed by the priest Thiempu. In case if the ritual performed by the priest found the land unsuitable, the plot is immediately abandoned and he will search for a new place with the help of the chief and his Council. But, if the allotted site happens to be a plot used by him in the previous circle of jhuming, a simple ritual will suffice.

2. Ahtuisan Ritual:

It is done to ascertain if the propose cultivation land would yield good harvest. In case, the omen is bad the propose cultivation is abandoned. It is usually done during night time. The Khe-Lhei-Khai and Ahtuisan rituals are done to test if the land would yield good harvest.\textsuperscript{184}

3. Tuilutna:

This ceremony was done to appease the water god if there was spring or rivulet within the site of the cleared land, requesting the god who is the owner of the site, to descend seven layer of the earth and the cultivators shall be on the surface so that cultivation can be carried on. After the ceremony sowing of the seed begins.

\textsuperscript{184} Questionnaire respondent Haokip, Jangneh of Selsi village, Senapati district, Manipur, dated 2 May 2008.
The villagers go to the field after demarcation of the land and would start clearing the site by cutting down trees, bamboo and bushes. After clearing the ground field, house for shelter ‘Lou-buh’\textsuperscript{185} is build for resting during the week of toil. Sometime the lou-buh consists of two or more families. The next to these was the field left to expose to the sun for about one to three months. When everything on the field was dry enough to burn the village priest using a pair of leaves known as daikham will perform a ritual to ascertain the right time for burning the field. If the two leaves burned completely it shows that the field is fit for burning. But, it do not burn properly it is up to the villagers to burned it or leaved for some time for the right time. On the burning day of the jhum field the villagers as a custom stay at home to show homage paid to the animals, birds’, insects killed by the jhum file. Traditionally the Kuki people believed that anyone violating this custom will be killed by thilhas (devils) who are believed to be the owner of the organism killed.\textsuperscript{186}

4. Daiphu Dahi Ritual:

Daiphu ritual is performed on the third day. Every households for the purpose will bring item such as egg, leaves of plant daikham and Loudai, nine small bead and one big bead of clay called khichang, one piece of banana leaf called Nalaiji, a clay figure of a type of squirrel, a clay figure of Vengke, nine small and big clay figure of sel (mithun), a clay figure of dead body called Sahlong, a small clay model of an elephant-tusk called Saiha, a piece of root-stock of plant called Daibel, a piece of Dai-ai, a kind of wild turmeric and a piece of Langbel, a swab of cotton and rice called Phaidam. The priest then should visit every plot of land and uttered the following incantation:

\textsuperscript{185}. A small hut in the jhum site for the cultivators or a base camp. It is for resting and for defending against wild animals and other evil of the forest.
\textsuperscript{186}. Questionnaire respondent Haokip, Sholhun, Kholep, Churachandpur district, Manipur, dated 5 October 2010.
Nang kamimpi junang kachangpiju
Chaunga pathen nung jinalaijin
Pam jetamidalin, pamveijah midalin
Thingse dalin, songse dalin Kachang
Dalinkhamin, dallin hechea lungdamlou
Nahileh, khisomah kalhatai, selsomah kalhetai
Sahlong saiha akalhatahi
Thoche, Vengke a kalhatahi
Chungha a simkakouahi. 187

Free translation:
O! Wine, prepared from paddy and mimmu seed;
May you propitiate the god of heaven and Nungjai188;
May all the evil doers who might be residing on the left and right of this plot of land be pacified;
May you get as cool as the new banana leaf and the blade of the loudai shrub;
O! Daikham, may you prevent the evil doers from doing harm;
If evil doers are not satisfied may they know that I have acquired this plot of land.189

On the completion of this process the priest would do egg chanting as follow:

"Nang Katuilung theng katuilungvah,
Kapun nadoh ngeija kadohnahi
Kapanna dohngeija kadohnahi

188. The god of the sphere.
189. Acquired the plot of land at the cost of ten valuable stone beads, ten Mithun, one Sohlong, one elephant tusk, one clay figure of squirrel and one clay model of
Tukum hindam ponatep haponnate, natileh,
Tomsan tomvom hinsepghan.
Dam nanate phanannate natileh,
Kaahtui chihhinletin lung thengsellin.\textsuperscript{190}

Free Translation:
O! You egg your heart is clean and shining,
As my grandfather used to asked you
As my father used to asked you
If the owner of this land will be bless with disease and death,
May the liquid inside turn black and red.
But if the owner will be bless with abundant harvest,
May the liquid inside ooze out in its fullness.

The \textit{Thiempu} breaks a small part of the egg and sees if the liquid of the egg inside is fresh, shining and full. If it does gives signal that the land will yield good harvest and is fit for cultivation. But, it is black or red it signaled bad harvest and thus the land is unsuitable for cultivation by the owner. The owner in case of bad omen would abandon the land.

The next step is that the priest placed the egg on top of a bamboo pole called \textit{Gotul} which was planted in the centre of the jhum. He picked up piece of \textit{Dai-ai} and chant-

"Kamim piju kachangpiju katinahi
Tunin hichelou munnahin thingphunga mi sonin
Songphunga mi sonin
Pamjepa mi sonin kaaison insonin"\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{190} Singh, W. Nabakumar \textit{Op.Cit}, p.82
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Ibid}.
Free translation:

O! You Dai-ai I offer you paddy and mimmu wine,
Drive away the evil from right and left side of the plot;
May you also drive away the devil on trees and in stones,
Our real name is Aison and Thingson.

The priest planted the Daiaion the soil along with Daibal roots
and sprinkle drops of wine into it and chant-

"Hiche loumun hi boltheiponate natileh’
Bolnahjong lechun mangthei ponate tiaumleh
Hiche Daihi anakipelha hen
Tongthe inanante nannate leh
Abangabang in hinumsah in”\(^{192}\).

Free translation:

If you restricted cultivation in this field,
If cultivation in this field will be useless,
May this Daihi fall down on the ground.
But if you accepted cultivation in this field,
May it remain intact.

Ceremonies

Various ceremonies and festivals of the Kukis not only reflect
their jhum cultivation but also their land ownership system. Such
ceremonies are usually celebrated at the beginning or in the end of
their jhum cultivation with merriment. The villager had never forgotten
to praise the chief for his leadership and for providing land to everyone
for cultivation.

\(^{192}\). Personal interview with Haokip, Letsuon (Kuki Priest) at Phaimol, village in
Churachandpur district, Manipur on 3 June 2010.
1. **Muchitu:**

The village chief and villagers would go to the site and inaugurate the year jhum cultivation. The chief’s wife would sow the seed first, followed by the ministers and the villagers. Rice is their staple food, from it reckoned wealth besides food and drink. Among the Kuki, a farmer is a careless shower and weedier, but the long gentle slopes with their thick covering of soil gives him excellent crops, famine is rare. The cultivator use the land for 2 or 3 years and then leave the site with enough trees standing to regenerate the jungle and the land is cultivated at the interval of about 7-10 years, the jungle then grow up on the abandoned Jhum’s, preventing the soil from denoted by rained.

Jhum cultivation influences the tribe mindset. It also influences the cultural ethos of its agrarian’s society and social fabric. Their observation of various ceremonies/festivals is related to jhum cultivation and land. They have given due respect and appreciation from the dwellers for it is the provider of their sustenance and livelihood.

2. **Chang –Ai:**

It is one of the ceremonial feasts attended by the entire village for abundant harvest. It is also a ceremony where women play an important role. It is believed to be a very expensive affair as the entire village has to take part in the feasts. This feast can only be organized three times. During this festival, singing, eating and drinking go on the whole day and night in the house of the person performing it. It is done to celebrate a family or individual over their enormous success in harvesting paddy.¹⁹³

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¹⁹³. Questionnaire respondent Chongloi, Henkholet of Keithelman, Senapati, district, Manipur, dated 5 August 2010.
3. Sa–Ai:

This ceremony is performed by men and implied a feast to the entire village. The literal meaning of “Sa-Ai” “means Sa= animal and Ai=ceremony or animal ceremony. A great hunters who has killed all the different kinds of dangerous animals like Tiger, Lion, and Bear, etc. are allowed to perform the ceremony. However, a person killing not only wild animals but a larger number of forest animals can also perform sa-ai. Usually a Mithun is killed for the feast to celebrate this ceremony.\(^\text{194}\)

4. Chon:

Chon’ is performed by those who have done the Sa-ai three times, in which everything has to be done seven times. Seven Mithun are to be killed and everything else must be in multiples of seven. On this occasion, animals, especially the Mithun is killed by ‘Chontul’, the only weapon used in killing the animal. Even the songs and genealogical trees had to be repeated seven times.\(^\text{195}\)

The whole ceremony takes days to complete and the expense incurred is enormous. Even after the death of such persons the corpse had to be carried round seven times and everything pertaining to burial had to be done seven times, so that they resorted to smoking the bodies of such persons to avoid decomposition before the entire rites were completed.

Among the Haokip clan, ‘Chon’ is performed after celebrating thrice the ‘ai’s of one of the followings—Tiger, Bear, Elephant or Hornbill. ‘Langla’ is the only song sung by the Thadous at the burial of

\(^{194}\) Ibid.
\(^{195}\) Ibid.
those who have performed the Chon festival. The Thadous believe that performance of chon gave the soul of a person a paramount seat in Mithikho and ensured eternal happiness.

5. Kuts:

Kuts are associated with the various stages of shifting cultivation. The purposes are to herald the arrival of bountiful crops after harvesting. The ceremonies are marked by rejoicing through drinking, dancing, sporting, feasting in unity spirit. Common Kut festivals are Chavang Kut, Mim Kut, Pawl Kut, Ga Masa Kut, Lom Kut and Chap char Kut. They have special relation with land cultivation. 196

On every Kut day the village priest would intercedes for the villagers to the deities of the Kut concerned. In the early hour of the morning of Kut, however the man in charge of the information of the village called “Lhangsampa” or “Tangsampa” would herald the advent of Kut, Shouting aloud through the village land with the word:

“Nisasohdoh ta, nisasohdoh ta.
Khophata, khophata”197

Translation

“The sun rises, the sun rises
The sky is clear, the sky is clear”

He would enter every household in the village arming himself with a flaming torch made of fire wood in the left hand and a hammer in his right hand, saying as he walks along the village lane:

“Lhagaoboh nangphat kichaita, kichaita!

Keiho akonchedohtan, kajikachate utoh lungmongin neiumsahun, kahinchimtauve” 198

Translation

"Your days are over, you evil spirit!
Be gone from our midst and let us be with wife and children,
We are sick of your filthy waste”

Having performed his part, he will hand over the proceeding to the Village Priest. The village priest shall arrange jar of ‘Ju” (rice beer) for all the villagers to sip and shall intercede for all the villagers to the deities of harvests. 199 On Kut day the village chief was a dignitary. He was highly celebrated as much as the harvest was. He has provided each family a plot of land for cultivation. Thus, on Kut day which is the celebration day of year harvest the chief was gratified. 200

*Chapchar Kut* is the most important festival held in between the cutting of jungle and jhum land usually in the last part of February and first part of March every year. *Pawl Kut* is celebrated when rice harvest is almost reaped. This festival is mainly for the children who are dressed in their best attire and are fed with rice, meat and boil eggs. *Mim Kut* is observed during August and September when maize harvest is reaped. This festival is celebrated with feasting, singing and dancing.

*Mimkut* 201 is the harvest festival of the Kukis. In Manipur the festival is celebrate on 17th Kuki month of *Tolbol* (January) every year.

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199. Ibid.
200. Personal interview with Khong sai, Doulet (Chief of Loisem village, Ukhrul district on 17 October 2009.
201. *Mim*-Grain and *Kut*-festival or ritual of after harvest
The celebration lasts one week. It is believed that Mim Kut and other festivals came into being from the fact that in order to appease Thilha\textsuperscript{202} the people sacrifice and at the same time they also believed in the existence of a Supreme God whom they call “Chung Pathen”\textsuperscript{203}. To get the blessings of such gods the village Thempu\textsuperscript{204} would sacrifice fowls to propitiate the spirit of the Demon-god by performing a series of rituals and prayer.

Tradition handed down orally from generation to generation says that the Kukis originated from subterranean underworld. They came out from this underworld in search of better land. They brought with them a number of cereals such as millet, tapioca, beans, yam etc. After they came over ground they found paddy and job’s tear together, which were brought across a river called Twinanhem by a pair of wild rat on a bamboo sheath (Stipule) tucked to their mouths. Gradually they found Mithun from a place called Sisep, pig from Bonnol, fowl from Molkon which they domesticated. They would lavishly use these animals during such festivals. Thus the cultivation of this job’s tear started. They found that, it was more productive and yielded a better harvest.

A simple translation of one of the songs sung during the celebration of Mimkut is as follows:

\begin{quote}
“Mimle changkilata,
Kumlhunga lana jousekileta,
Juleviten mimleilaija lailengta,
Vangah chunvan eukhatlihohta
Metpha in umtalou.”
\end{quote}

\textbf{Free Translation:}

\begin{quote}
202. Demon
203. Heavenly God.
204. Village priest or medicine man.
\end{quote}
Job's tear is harvested and gathered.  
Time to wrap up the year's toil and relax;  
Countless birds encircle the job's tear field.  
Suddenly one Kite swoop down and away it carries off one;  
Before a stone could be pelted at.

Conclusion

The studies indicate that the institution of chieftainship in Kuki society was more of a political necessity through which the chief gives to his subjects, leadership and provides safety and security. The needs for a strong authoritative leader to lead them remain to be the main factor for the tribe to adopt an authoritarian system. Such development in the beginning of their community life was transform into custom which then, validated and legitimate the chief claim for such power over the land and people. His power as chief is legitimated by the customs of the community through the law of inheritance and genealogical line.

The enormous power of the chief is reflected in his relationship with his land ownership right. While Kuki chieftainship is found to be autocratic in nature it also has the feature of both republican and Zamindary. Theoretically, Kuki chieftainship is autocratic, but in practice it is not exploitative nor can it be equated with democracy. The chief rule with love and just. The people were happy all thought the years. He regulates land law; provide sufficient land for cultivation and for settlement to the villagers. The village counselors assist him and they play the role of advisor. Thus, in practice the chief always takes the advice of his councilors. The people views and wishes were respected by him.

All the Kuki tribes in Manipur have the same custom of chief land ownership. The chief controls and manage the village land. He is given
various taxes and tributaries by the villagers. The tributaries and taxes paid to the chief by villager is more an obligation to the customary laws rather than an exploitative demand. The chief in short, own, possesses and control the village and all the territory in his chiefdom. The villagers are seen as mere tenant that totally rely on the chief. But, he (chief) is noble and never denied land for cultivation, settlement and for other purposed to the villagers.

In regard to the community law of inheritance, the Kukis adopted patristic inheritance. The position of women's in the traditional society was high who was respected but she was denied of land ownership right. She cannot inherit her father and become the chief. She also cannot inherit property except few necessary articles like pot, hoe, etc at the time of her marriage. Only male members of the family can become a successor and inherited his father.

The community has more or the less depends on land base resources. Jhum cultivation was the main source not only of their livelihood but was also one of the sources of their customs from where sprang out the community festival, ritual and various ceremonial practices. The society has more an egalitarian economy. They have well defined land use and holding system upon which the chief guide the people and owned the land as well.