CHAPTER - 2

1. Distribution of the Thadou-Kuki population in Manipur.
2. Historical Background - Origin, Migration.
3. Settlement of the Thadou-Kukis in Manipur.
4. Summary.

Distribution of Thadou-Kuki Population in Manipur

The land of Manipur is an ethnic mosaic. All the hill tribes of Manipur can be roughly placed under two sections - the Kukis and the Nagas. The term Kuki is a canopy term covering a large number of tribes and sub-tribes other than the Nagas. It refers "to those tribes whose home is in the mountainous tract lying between Burma, Manipur, Cachar and Arakan."\(^1\) Also under this term, "there are a number of clans which live in the hill ranges south of Naga hills. Their neighbours to the north are the Nagas and Manipuris, to the east the tribes of upper Chindwin and the Chin Hills, on the south, those living on the hill tracts of Chittagong, while on the west they are bounded by the plains of shylhet and hills of North Cachar."\(^2\)

---

DISTRICT-WISE THADOU POPULATION - 1971

- Manipur North: 21096
- Manipur West: 3367
- Manipur South: 16320
- Manipur East: 7301
- Temengopal Dist: 38723
- Central District: 3517

TOTAL: 591751
The Thadous are one of the major groups of the Kuki tribe. They are a very much scattered tribe and are dispersed over different parts of North-Eastern India. In Manipur also, they are scattered over different parts. They are found to inhabit in all the five districts of Manipur. According to 1971 census the total number of Thadou-Kuki population in Manipur was 59,955, the total number of males being 30,572 and females 29,383. In Manipur North District the Thadou-Kukis comprise 15.56% of the total population. In the west district, 10.20%, in the South District 13.78%, in Manipur Central District 1.41% and in Manipur East District they comprise 5.53% of the total population. In Manipur Central District the Thadou-speaking population takes Third position, and so also in the North District, In the West and the East Districts they are, second in position while in the South District again they take third position. 3

It may again be mentioned that although the Thadou-Kukis do not inhabit in a compact or single area of Manipur, they are the most numerous tribe there. 4 Usually they select the hill slopes as their villages depending mainly upon the subsistence economy based upon shifting cultivation and partly upon wet cultivation. Many Thadou-Kuki villages can

be seen also by the roadside where they get a better facility of communication. The size of the villages vary from very small, average to big. The small villages may consist of even less than twenty houses. An average size of village may consist of thirty to sixty houses. Big size villages consist of sometimes upto one hundred fifty houses. While the people are basically agrarian, a good number of them are in petty business and service. The practice of "Jhoom" cultivation (slash and burn type of cultivation), has a bearing upon their social life. It is a practice among them to shift their villages whenever they shift their cultivation. Here, it may be mentioned as a contrast, their practice differs from that of the Kabui Nagas who, though have the practice of jhoom cultivation, are nevertheless, a stationary tribe. Referring to the Kabuis, Macculloch had written, "The spot of cultivation being determined on, he must clear it of a jungle of ten years' growth; If the spot happens to be near the village, he can return in the evening after a full day's work, but if at a great distance, as it often is, he must give up the work early to enable him to get back to his village by night-fall, or working late, remain there."5

The Thadou houses are generally Kachha type thatched houses. The walls are thinly mud-plastered over bamboo frames

or over grass frames. Those who can afford, make wooden floor slightly elevated from the ground and with CIC roofing. This type of housing is due to their scare economy and is also congenial to shifting habitation. Recently however, the practice of shifting the village has been considerably abandoned due to government efforts.

Historical Background:

Origin

It is characteristic of a tribe that its sense of history is shallow. Naturally the original habitat of the tribe in question is shrouded in obscurity. We are to depend upon their mythology and folklores in order to get the idea of their historical background. According to a popular mythology, the race has come out from 'khul' - the subterranean region of the earth. There are two opinions about the location of the place called 'khul'. One opinion holds that it was situated in the bank of Mekowng river in South-West China. Many of the North-Eastern tribes for example, the Tai, Tai-Pakhes, Mizo etc, have a history of Chinese origin.

S. Barkataki has noted that the Kukis originally belonged to the place called Sinlung in South-West China. Their Chinese

origin may also be supported by their "common musical instruments". A great famine (according to some, a great flood) forced them to leave China and to search for a new land down the Chindwin Valley to the Chin Hills of Burma. S. Barkataki in support of this legend quoted an old folk song:

"My Chin land of old
My grandfather's land Himalei (the Himalayas)
My grandfather's way excells
Chinlung's way excells",".

The new habital chinlung may be after the name of their original home Sinlung in China. There is a great similarity here with the history of origin of the Mizos. Lalbiak Thanga has written that "the Mizos have come up from within the earth. There was a big stone called chinlung which literally means "closed stone". Their forefathers have come out of this cave which is supposed to be situated in the Mizoram country itself. A more rational interpretation is that this Chinlung is the name of a great province of China". If therefore, may be that the Thadous and the Mizos originated from the same racial stock.

It is a common practice among the Chin, Lushai and Kuki tribes, wrote Barkataki, to call their new settlement after the name of their former ones. So also many villages of the Thadou-Kukis in Manipur are of the same names of the villages in the Chin Hills of Burma, namely Khongjang village (Singson clan's village), Lhungjang, Lhanjang and Jampi villages (Sitlhou clan's villages), Lhungting, Khovmg and Vungjang villages (Hangsing clan's villages), Lajang village (Haokip clan's village), Tuhmun village (Kipgen clan's village), Jangnoi village (Chongloi clan's village), Asian village (Dungel clan's village), Thungjang village (Lunkim clan's village), Maijang and Bombol villages (Singsit clan's villages), Aithun and Thungvawn villages (Thomsons' village) and so on.  

Moreover, the name Thadou is a Burmese word denoting courage and ability. Even Mandalaya is supposed to be formerly a Thadou-Kuki village. There is a legend in support of it. There was a village inhabited by the Chowte people. They were attacked by an enormous eagle. They sought help from Thadous of Jampi village (in Burma). The later saved

11. Similarly in North Cachar, Barkataki has mentioned many villages have the same names as their villages in the Lushai Hills. Such as Biate, Thiak, Khovvung, Zote, Dargaan etc. Barkataki. Op.cit.

them by killing the eagle. So when they performed the "chon" festival (a traditional festival of the Thadou-Kukis), they erected a stone and engraved on it a picture of an eagle and their own scripts. The same stone could perhaps be found in Mandalaya. 13

Curey and Tuck observed that: "The Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam and the Chins originally lived in what we know as Thibet and are one and the same stock; their forms of Government method of cultivation, manners and customs, beliefs and traditions, all point to one origin." 14 This position has also been confirmed by A.M. Meerworth when he said that, "both by language and race, they are closely connected with their eastern neighbours, the Chins, and form a part of the Tibeto-Burman family". 15 But the international border between the Chin Hills and Manipur settled in 1804, geographically and politically separated the Thadous from the Chins. Since then the Thadous are divided into two: those who had remained in the Chin Hills of Burma continued as Chins and those in Manipur who came to be known as Thadou-Kukis.

This indicates a close past relation of the Thadou-Kukis with the Chins of Burma. The Chins too, as Curey and Tuck wrote, know them by the name of their original progenitor, Thadou. 16

The other view is that the 'Khul' is the source of Gun river in Manipur, (Imphal river). As a result of a mythical flood, the Thadous took refuge in Kaithelmangpi in North Manipur in the right bank of the Imphal river. 17 In the absence of any archaeological evidence one has to depend on folklore as the only source of history of their origin. The historical evidence and the cultural affinities of the Thadous with the Chins point towards a plausible Chinese and Burmese origin. So far as the second opinion that the Thadou-Kukis are originated in Manipur, remains yet to be supported by proper historical evidence.

Migration:

Almost all the hill tribes of North-Eastern India have a history of migration. The Thadou-Kukis are not an exception. Several factors have contributed to this process of migration.

1. Inter-tribal feuds: The Thadou Kukis have moved from one place to another. But this movement has never been smooth. It was in most cases followed by inter-tribal feuds. If the opponent was stronger, they were driven out by them. In addition, the Thadou Kuki practice of shifting cultivation impelled them to move from one place to another. Shakespeare has noted: "They seldom cultivate the same piece of land for more than two years in succession. They therefore, need much room, and the desire for new land, coupled with the fear of stronger clans, has led the whole race in adopting a more or less vagabond mode of life." 

In the Chin Hills of Burma the Thadous were at constant feud with the Lushais particularly. Macculloch has observed: "They caused fear from their number and the bloody attacks they sometimes made upon their neighbours. South of them lay the Poi, Soote', Taute, Loosei and other tribes, better armed than they were, and of the same genus as themselves, but at feud with them".


C.A. Soppit had classified four tribes among the Kukis. Rangkhol, Bêté, Jansen and Tadoi (Thadou) regarded these four as belonging to one main race existing in former years in the country known to us as Lushai land. Among these four again Rangkhol and Bêté were having closer affinities in speech and customs than the jansen and Tadoi. About the middle of sixteenth century, the Rangkhols inhabited the country now inhabited by the Lushais, bordering Cachar and their neighbours were Bêté. The Jansens living in the hills immediately at the back of Rangkhols started oppressing the latter and pushed them nearer and nearer to plains and ultimately out of the country across Cachar into the North-Cachar Hills and Manipur and a small body took refuge in Tipperrah. The Bêtés also faced the oppression of the Jansens and following the footsteps of their friends, crossed into Cachar. Soppit further continued, "now the Jansens found themselves occupying the Cachar frontier with their friendly neighbour, the Tadoi. But the Lushais also were gradually extending from further back towards Cachar. These Lushais soon began to make their power felt and after struggling for many years in vain, the Jansens and Tadois were driven out and found themselves

20. C.A. Soppit - "A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes of the North-East Frontier, Assam Secretariat. Press - 1887 - P.2."
following the footsteps of their conqueror foes, the Rangkhol. This second exodus of the Jansens and Tadoi took place in the early part of the present century.  

The highest need at this hour of crisis was to protect the community and their harvest from their enemy clans in the Lushai hills. In the Lushai hills, therefore, they needed a strongman. Hence the chiefs- tainship organisation of the Thadou-Kukis moulded into a strong and powerful organisation. The land under cultivation and habitation under such circumstance came under the virtual control of the chief and the power of the chief was further augmented by his control over the land. But the Lushais were also getting stronger and stronger. As a result the enmity between the two communities became very sharp. Lt. Col. Shakespeare notes: "at the close of seventeenth century what is now the eastern part of Lushai hills and southern part of Manipur, was occupied by the Thado and Vuite clans under powerful chiefs. And in the Lushai hills, the Sailo family became very strong and had crushed all their rivals; developing such a talent of governing that now they hold undisputed sway over representatives of all sorts of clans.

C.A. Soppit - Ibid. P.7.
throughout the greater part of the Lushai hills". 22
As a result many of the clans joined the Thangurs
(Sailo chiefs), some under compulsion and others simply
because food was always plentiful and property fairly
secure under the rule of the prosperous new comers ....
Some clans again known as Khawtlang and Khawchhak in
western and eastern villages refused to join the Than-
gurs. Majority of them fled, one party going round the
flank of the Thadou village, or passing between them
into Cachar where they were named as old-Kukis, another
becoming tributary to certain chiefs of Thadou extrac-
tion situated in the southern border of Manipur".
Shakespeare emphasising the inter-tribal feuds between
the Sailo chiefs and the Thadous, has further stated :
"By the middle of the nineteenth century the western
Sailo chiefs had become strong enough to try a conclu-
sion with the Thadous. The Sailos triumphed and hence,
the second incursion of the Kukis into Cachar in 1848.
Another wing of fugitive entered Manipur territory and
was settled in the western border by the Political
Agent, Colonel Macculloch, the third party flying from
the Northern Chins after a sojourn in the Kubaw Valley
appeared in the eastern border of Manipur". 23

It may be noted that as in the case of the Thadou-Kukis, population Pressure on limited resources and inter-tribal feuds had forced the Lushais as well to move out of Burma to different parts of India. But there was a time gap between the Thadou entrants and the Lushai entrants. The Thadous had entered Manipur area before the Lushais. There were five successive waves of migration into Manipur. The first group was the Khongjais (Thadou-Kukis), the second group, the Kom Kukis, the third group, the Suktes or Kamhaus, the forth group, the Chassads, a branch of Suktes and the fifth group was the Lushais. The hills of Manipur were an uninhabited region that could easily provide sustainance to their economy. For both the Lushais and the Thadou-Kukis the material conditions under which they had to migrate were the same, though at two different points of time. The enmity between them never-theless was sharpened because of the numerical strength of the Thadou-Kukis and their authoritarian Political system. So their absorption into Lushai Clan as claimed by D.N. Mazumdar has never been possible,

inspite of the fact that the Thadou-Kukis had acknowledged the superior strength of the Lushais. A Thadou-folksong goes in this connection.

'In the land surrounded by plain river

and Barak river

The fame of Lushai is well-known to

the people of the west,

When he shouts, it sounds like a

big landslide.

As a big landslide, they forced my brothers

'Abound to the plains of Manipur and

other places". 26

But their early migration to Manipur gave them

an escape channel by which they could successfully

avert any more confrontation with the Lushais in the

Lushai hills.

In the long course of migration of the Thadou-

Kukis from the Lushai hills to the north-eastern

parts of India, their racial composition also has

undergone a process of change. Lt. Col. Steward has

classified two types of the Kuki race - Old Kukis

and the New Kukis, Who had migrated from the jungle

of Tipperah, The hilly country, south of Cachar

around the year 1800 to North Cachar Hills and into


India Council For Social

Science Research, Shillong,

November-1982.
Manipur and the New Kukis immigrating to North Cachar Hills and into Manipur around the year 1848. E.W. Dun has mentioned the names of the clans of the Kukis. Among them the best known clans are Thado, Vungson, Changsen, Shimsgol, Mangvung, Khlangam, Chongloi, Changput, Haokib, Simmle and Kamhau in the New Kuki group.

Lt. Col. Steward's classification of the Kukis into Old and New was based on the fact that the New Kukis had migrated from the Lushai hills to India at a later date than the Old Kukis. And the New Kukis, as stated by Shakespeare, are synonymous with the Thadous. Lt. Steward's classification is based on time scale, and T.S. Gangte, one local thinker, found no reason for such a classification of the Kukis and opined that the old and New Kukis are culturally the same.

This assertion appears to be quite understandable. History also gives evidence in favour of it. As for example, the Chiru people claims their descent from

---

30. T.S. Gangte - op.cit.
Chongthu. The same Chongthu appears in the Thadou mythological pedegree. Again the Mizos claim that they had come from the 'Khul'. The same 'Khul' is supposed to be the place of origin of the Thadous also. George Watt states that "the Kukis and the Lushais close in the southern extremity of Manipur, and it is perhaps safe to asset that these southern tribes, broken into their respective clans, are the two branches of the same great family". 31

It has been stated that in the long course of their migration their racial and cultural composition had undergone a change. They could not remain in the same cohesive group as they originally were. Forces of time and circumstance in the mid-nineteenth century migration of the Thadous were definitely different from that of the Old-Kukis. As for the Old-Kukis, the Lushai impact was great probably in view of the fact that the Old-Kukis were numerically small and were having democratic village government, 32 and because of these factors, the Old-Kukis were

32. Referring to the Old-Kukis, W.W. Hunter has observed: "their system of village government is democratic, and this in strong contrast with that of other tribes to which the name of Kuki is applied", Statistical Account of Assam, London, 1879, P.385.
assimilated into the Lushais easily. Shakespeare has written, "While the Old-Kukis have been much influenced by the Lushias, many of the Old-Kukis clans, like the Chowte, Chongthu, Hnamte, Kawang, Kiangte, Ngente etc. absorbed to Lushai clans". 33

Referring to the Thadous Dr. Grierson, in his Linguistic Survey of India writes: "Not only do their customs and institutions differ considerably, but their languages are separated by a large group of dialects in the Lushai and Chin Hills. The so-called New Kukis are so far as we see, a Chin tribe, most closely related to the inhabitants of the Northern Chin Hills, while the Old-Kukis are related to the tribes more to the South". 34 Even when the language of the Thadou-Kukis falls under the Chin - Kuki group of the Tibeto-Burman sub family in the Thadou language there is no use of 'R'. 35

It may be noted that both for the Lushais and for the Thadou-Kukis the material condition was the same.

Both the communities were facing the pressure of subsistence and the need for more land for cultivation was acutely felt and these communities were moving towards Cachar and Manipur in search of new land. Moreover, both the communities were wielding a powerful political organisation. This factor has always encouraged enmity between them. By way of contrast, the old Kukis had migrated at least half – a century ago when subsistence pressure was not likely to be so acute.

No while the inter-tribal feud between the Lushais and the Thadou-Kukis made them separate from each other, the latter had developed a new cohesive group with other clans like the Lengthang and Lunkim. These two clans were never connected with the Thadou-Kukis before. A folktale goes that the Lengthang and Lunkim were great hunters on the earth even before the Great Chongthupa, the mythological ancestor of the Kukis, appeared from the underworld. There is a hunting song of Lengthang:

"When there was a big darkness
I used the animal - skulls as torch.
I look upon the plateau where darkness prevails,
I could escape a lion
In the Southern side of my house
There is a high tree
The hairs of the enemy's head
are hanging down the tree" 36

As such these two clans as noted by W. Shaw had no village of their own, nor did they possess any hereditary chiefs as the Thadou-Kukis. When Chongthu came out of the underworld, Lengthang and Lunkim were arrested by him and were used as guides during his wanderings on the earth. 37

These two clans however, are now so much a part and parcel of the Thadou-Kuki race that we can hardly make any distinction between them and the Thadou-Kukis. The former have been completely assimilated into the Thadou-Kukis. Referring to them William Shaw writes:

"They speak themselves as Thadous and though the term may be taken to cover only the descendants of that eponymous ancestor, it is generally used to cover also dependant clans now intermingled with and closely associated with those descendants, though not claiming Thadou as an ancestor, such in particular are the descendants of Lengthang and Lunkim ......"
for whom if they are not to be called Thadous, there is no other distinctive term".  

The Thadou group was not only numerically dominant but were also politically a much stronger group as compared to the Lengthang and Lunkim clans. That is why the assimilation of the small groups like them was very easy.

2. **Other factors of migration**:

Inter-tribal feud led to a new tribal metamorphosis and all these took place in course of their territorial migration from one country to another. But besides territorial migration there took place in the Thadou-Kuki society, local migration which is no less important an aspect in their society and politics. The factor causing local migration lies within the political structure of the Thadou-Kuki society itself. It is a peculiarity of the tribe that their practice of shifting cultivation is accompanied by their shifting habitation. A particular patch of the hill, after being jhoomed can remain productive for a few years after which another virgin patch is required. Demographic expansion of a community is a big factor for this subsistence pressure because with

---

38. Ibid. P.11.
demographic expansion, the land-man ratio goes adverse. But a large size of the village on the other hand, may also accommodate increased population and may avoid shifting to and making a new village. And it is probably because of this that the Kabui Nagas do not shift their village even though they practice jhoom cultivation. Their old villages were of considerable size. It is only recently because of the attacks of the enemy, many Kabui villages however, have reduced in size. The specific reason of shifting habitation of the Thadou-Kukis therefore, is likely to be found in the nature of their chieftainship system.

The authoritarian chieftainship system of the Thadou Kukis was no doubt a historical and political necessity in the course of their territorial migration. It gave them an effective leadership, provided safety and security and acted as a cementing factor in the hour of crisis caused by enemy clans. It is also sure that without this effective leadership the whole race would merge in the oblivion of history and would today, never survive as a homogeneous community. But in course of time, this authoritarian chieftainship became a vested organisation. This had logically led to the monopolisation of all other resources including the economic resources by it. And by virtue of this, it is quite natural that the inheritance rules and succession
norms became routinised in favour of such chieftains, and produced a myth around the chieftainship organisation itself. In course of time therefore, this authoritarian power of the chiefs created a popular dissatisfaction and over-frustration with the organisation so much so that no commoner had any accession to the organisation. But this did not lead to the formation of a strong opposition against the vested traditional structure. Rather the dissident groups started deserting the despot and form another village with a headman. Local migration and shifting the villages went hand in hand. Macculloch wrote: "Originally they were not migratory but have assumed this character laterly. Since their expulsion from their own hills, the different tribes have become mixed up together in villages situated in position selected with reference to convenience of cultivation; but with little regard to healthyness. A village having around it plenty of land suited for cultivation and a popular chief is sure soon by accession from less favoured ones to become large, but its inhabitants will remain in it is uncertain, for the ties by which they were held together in their native hills, have been so rudely broken, that they have scarcely existence and any whim may lead them to another village." \(^{39}\)

---

The mushroom-growth of Thadou hamlets consisting sometimes of seven or eight houses, and sometimes even less, was started. In the matter of local migration, the question of political safety, that was once with them, no longer was there. From this standpoint the whole community got certain degree of stability. Now the question was rather that of self-assertion. The factor which gave local migration an additional philip was the inbuilt weakness in their customary law which left no serious provision against any outgoing person. Local migration in Thadou-Kuki society was definitely a result of the internal lacune of the autocratic chieftainship system.

**Settlement of the Thadou-Kukis in Manipur:**

The official settlement of the Thadou-Kukis was made by the British authority with an ulterior motive. But the immediate reason, as noted by Macculloch, seems to be to save the tribe from their helpless condition prompted by the Lushai incursions into their territory. Johnstone notes that: "recently they were driven north by the Kindered but more powerful tribes and their first object was to secure land for cultivation". 40

Johnstone further notes that "they were first heard of as Kukis in Manipur between 1830 and 1840 though the tribes of the same race had long been subject to the Rajah of Manipur. The new immigrants (mainly the Thadous) begun to cause anxiety in the year 1845, and soon they poured into the hill tracts of Manipur in such numbers as to drive away many of the older inhabitants."  

The migratory habit of the Thadou-Kukis was a positive bar to the British administrative policy of integration. Referring to the Thadou-Kukis William Shaw has written, "his inclination to form small villages anywhere and everywhere with no respect to others' land is a source of trouble administratively." J. H. Hutton says that "when I first made the Thadou's acquaintance and for years after, I regard him merely as an administrative nuisance. His habit of splitting up his village into scattered hamlets of two or three houses in the jungle, so that this year's village is never where you expected to find it."  

The British administration wanted to give a check to this habit of migration which made it almost impossible

41. Johnstone, - "My Experience in Manipur And Naga Hills" - etc. P.25.  
42. William Shaw - op.cit. P.23.  
for administration to deal with them effectively. Edgar has pointed out "The state of law and the ease with which these people move from one jurisdiction to another make it almost impossible to deal with them effectively. I think that the wandering tribes like the Kookis should be exempted from the operation of sections 25 and 26 of the criminal Procedure Code and Section 4 of the Act VII of 1859, and that the jurisdiction over them should be made to depend on their race not on their geographical position, at any given time. In other words, I should propose to treat them on somewhat the same principle as that theoretically adopted by the Government of United States in dealing with Indian tribes". ...... The above remarks apply to the district of sylhet and Cachar. The Rajahs of Tipperrah and Manipur should be pressed to put all matters connected with management of their subject Kookies into the hands of the political Agent in each state". 44

On the eve of British intervention in the Kuki affairs, the latter was maintaining an antagonistic relation with the Angami Nagas and Kabui Nagas as well as with the Lushais. There were mutual raids of

44. 'Edgar's Note' to Mackenzie. Mackenzie : 'the North East Frontier of India"- Mittal Publication, Delhi 1979 (Reprint), P.428.
many Naga and Kuki villages. As a result many of the villages were burnt or deserted. Besides the antagonism with the Lushais was already there. This antagonistic relation was exploited by the British in their frontier policy of peace and defence, and they used the Kukis against the Nagas and the Lushais for this purpose. In this connection Prof. Gautam Bhadra writes, "the policy of the officials at Manipur was to settle the warlike Kukis among the Kabuis and to use them for the maintenance of law and order". In fact to depend upon the Thadou-Kukis against the other tribes specially against the Nagas was the cornerstone of the policy of the Government and the use of the Kukis against the Nagas for the purpose of frontier defence had already been recommended by Jenkins in explicit terms: "our hopes of reclaiming this country appear to rest on these Kookies. They are already sufficiently numerous to delay the Nagas if they can be united for the purpose of defence".

It may be noted that while the British authority utilised the Thadou-Kukis "who moved up west to Barak river against the Angamis, those who came up along the hills between Barak river and the valley of Manipur.

were similarly used by the Rajah of Manipur by placing them among the Kachha Nagas and those on the west were used as a barrier against the Burmese.\textsuperscript{47} Again Mackenzie observed that: "before the establishment of Naga Hill District proposals were frequently made to utilise these Kookies as a buffer or screen between our more timid subject and the Angamis. In 1856-57 lands were assigned rent free for 10 and afterwards for 25 years to any Kookie who would settle to the east of North Cachar and beyond the Langting river.\textsuperscript{48} "In 1880 a Kuki militia of 100 strong was raised as a protection against the Angami raids\textsuperscript{49} in North Cachar. But the Kuki Militia didnnot do any good when Sambhudan's Insurrection took place in Cachar in 1881-82. But the overall usefulness of the Kukis for the defensive purpose was nevertheless not ruled out.\textsuperscript{50}

In Manipur the picture was strenuous. Not only the early history of Manipur was a history of war with Burma "but the hill tribes consisting of numerous Naga and Kuki clans also lived in constant feud.\textsuperscript{51} The

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{47. William Shaw, op.cit. P.46.}
\footnote{48. Mackenzie op.cit. P.146.}
\footnote{49. Ibid - P.147.}
\footnote{50. Ibid (Sambhudan's Insurrection)= P.147-148.}
\footnote{51. Ibid - P.150.}
\end{footnotes}
first Burmese war caused devastation to Manipur. The British Government came to help the Raja of Manipur and through the Treaty of Yandaboo 1826, Manipur was declared independent. But Manipur was too weak from military point of view and there was sufficient apprehension of Burmese attack. Hence the British Government was "compelled to guard against such chance". But the majority of the hill tribes were independent of Manipur King and even after the conclusion of peace with Burma majority of the tribes were "known to the British little more than by name".

During the reign of Nur Singh in Manipur there was a heavy influx of the Thadou-Kukis. The Raja had handed over the superintendence of this tribe to Colonel Macculloch "who settled them down by allotting land in different places according to their numbers, and where their presence would be useful on exposed frontier". His purpose was "the establishment of a line of villages to the South of Koupooees".

The Thadou-Kukis were used also against Sóóte and Lushai tribes. Edgar points out: "In connection with these people and as a protection of the south

52. Macculloch - op.cit. P.38.
53. Ibid - P.75.
of the valley the Rajah and I have established on the
south villages of Kookies, to whom are given arms, and
whom we call Sepoy villages. Almost all the British
officers were keeping constant watch over Kookies in
our territory and Manipur. The object was to get correct
information about their dealings with the Lushais and
about what was going beyond the frontier. This was one
of the chief object of Kuki Levy and leading principle
of Col. Macculloch's 'Kuki Policy'. 56 For the purpose
of Frontier Defence, Edgar has said, "we should have
taken the first step towards protecting our cultivated
frontier from the Kookies external to it by getting a
real control over the Kookies settled in our districts
of Manipur and Tipperrah". 57

But the Kuki policy of the British could not as
such be successful without divide - and-rule. The
Lushais were to be subjugated after obtaining successful
control over the Kukis. Naturally the British authority
relied heavily on the age old Lushai - Kuki animosity
to achieve this end. This is clear from Edgar's note
to Mackenzie. "Any measure of this nature would have no
effect by themselves, and it is of more immediate

importance to settle on the direct action to be taken with regard to the Lushai chiefs and their villages".\textsuperscript{58} Edgar classifies the policy of Frontier Defence under three heads:

(i) Policy of Pure defence; (ii) Policy of permanent occupation of the Lushai hills and more or less complete subjugation of their inhabitants; and (iii) the policy of refraining from occupation of the country or excercising any direct control over the people, and to attempt to gain effectual influence over them by conciliatory measures by doing all in their power to extend trade and other humanising influences while making the chiefs and their followers clearly understand that they had both power and determination to inflict severe punishment for any misbehaviour on their part.\textsuperscript{59}

The first policy was the principal policy and the main objective of the British authority. The second policy exposes the latent designs of the British authority in two ways. First, it was really a policy of divide-and-rule setting one tribe against the other and secondly, it gave a naive rationalisation that such a policy would be able to channellize the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid - P.428.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid - P.428.
war-like propensities of the Kukis. The idea behind raising the Kuki Levy in 1850 makes the intentions behind this policy more clear. In his note to Mackenzie, Edgar again writes - "the Kookie levy was raised in 1850 at the recommendations of General Lister, partly as a force to be used against the Lushais and partly to give employment to the youth of the Kookie tribes whose love for fighting, it was hoped, would then be legitimately gratified in defending our frontier instead of in murdering their neighbours". 60

The third policy also indicates two things:
(i) adoption of some conciliatory measures which would induce the tribes to accept the British policy as legitimate; (ii) use of force if the colonial legitimacy is questioned by recalcitrant members of a tribe. Naturally the colonial authority was at an advantageous position. The built-in legitimacy of the new rulers in their imposed authority structure is reflected in the words of Edgar: "I believe that

60. Edgar's Note : Ibid. P.434. Mr. Edgar however wanted to reform the Levy so that the Lushais, Angamis and other neighbouring tribes be enlisted in the Levy as a token of friendship and loyalty. But this Levy was amalgamated in the New Police in 1863. R.G. Woodthorpe has given a good account of Kuki Levy during Lushai expedition in his "Lushai Expedition" 1871-72, Spectrum Publication, Gauhati (Reprint) Ch.I.
by a just and prudent course of action we could bind the Kookies to us by ties so strong and lasting that the tribe, instead of being a source of difficulties and danger to us, would become our strongest frontier defence. But while I think that this can be done by conciliatory measures, I am convinced that we can not hope to succeed unless we make the tribe feel that we can, and when occasion requires shall, not hesitate to punish for misbehaviours with inflicting severity. There would be no need of adopting a policy of reprisals in order to bring this home to the minds of the hill-men, and nothing but absolute necessity would justify such a policy. 61

But implementation of the British policy of frontier defence by using the Thadou-Kukis as a defence-wall against the neighbouring fissiparous tribes like the Nagas and Lushais, can not be fully understood unless it is seen in the light of the structural nature of the Thadou - Chieftainship organisation prevailing at that time. Among the Thadou Kukis the chieftainship organisation was very strong. Even now inspite of heavy erosions in the powers and privileges of the chiefs it is a force to reckon with.

61. Edgar's Note - P.430.
The British authority knew that the easy way to draw the support of the people and to legitimise British policy was to control the chiefs of the tribes since the voice of the chief was the voice of the people. Thus "while establishing and maintaining frontier guards to check any outrage as far as possible, annual payments are made to the chief of the tribes, or in case of a democracy, to the community - not in order to enable them to organise themselves a force for the preservation of order, but that the well-disposed among them may influence the more turbulent spirits to the preservation of any infringement of treaties or agreements made with them on granting the annual allowances".62

Logically the moment the chiefs had succumbed to such payments, they were reduced into a paid group of special people and their interest became different. The chiefs wanted to maintain the status-quo of their organisation since loss of such status-quo would have been disastrous and would bring them to direct confrontation with the British power, and if so happened, the very existence of the chieftainship system would

have been at stake. In such a situation, they had two options; either to yield to the British policy or to face the harsh reality of reprisal. Yielding to the British policy would automatically assure them income, safety and status. Woodthorpe has categorically mentioned that "the allowances to those over whom we do not assume government, are supposed, in the words of Indian Government itself, 'to be sufficient to compensate the tribes in their own estimation for the advantage they might gain by the occasional plunder of a border village - an advantage they knew is materially qualified by the risk of reprisals'. But this yielding to the British authority automatically weakened the chieftainship organisation. The other alternative open was to risk a reprisal from a powerful ruler which the chiefs did not think judicious to do. The chiefs were in a state of confusion. The heavy pressure on subsistence resources caused by scarcity of land and mutual attacks and raids made them fatigued and resulted in the loss of many lives. These were the attenuating circumstances which made the Thadou-Kuki chiefs to accept the British policy of settlement in the uncultivated and uninhabited hill tracts of Manipur. They had to desert their

native hills because "the hills have been over jhoomed, and no more land fit for cultivation left; that for the last few years, since the younger chiefs have been able to, what they like, there had been nothing but raidings, and that they are tired of it........ while their chiefs were engaged in making raids in Manipur and Cachar, in course of which lives of many of their people were lost".64

But the British administration did not touch the authority structure of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs. As such the British authority was a rational - legal authority backed by force. It could have easily destroyed the traditional authority structure. But this was never their purpose. The Kuki settlement policy enforced by the British had two effects. First, it helped the administrators to control these people through their chiefs as and when needed. Secondly, as the internal affairs of the tribe was left in the hands of the chiefs, they became more powerful and dictatorial but at the same time could muster the people under their command at a short notice to serve their British masters.

Captain Lewin classified the north-eastern tribes into three categories: (1) those who paid tribute to the government and subject to the latter's control; (2) those who paid no revenue but were subject to the

64. Edgar's Note to Mackenzie, op.cit. P.460.
British control; (3) the independent tribes. The Lushai-Kuki tribes were in the third category. But this independence was not enjoyed by the Lushai tribe afterwards. On the ground of their raids in the British territory heavy punitive measures were taken against them and they were subjugated. The Kuki group was however left internally independent as part of the policy of divide-and-rule and their chiefs could enjoy their position and power relatively independently. The impact of colonial authority upon them at this stage was, therefore, indirect.

What actually happened as a consequence of the British contact with the chieftainship organisation of the Thadou-Kukis was that the latter was thrown in an equivocal position - as a representative of their community and as an instrument of British administration. The policy of preservation of tribal authority was also a general policy of the European administrators in dealing with the African natives, specially the Ngwato of Bechuanaland protectorate. But the net result of the indirect rule of the European was that it diminished the authority of the paramount rulers. While discussing the effects of colonial rule on the

chieftainship system of Bechuanaland, Fortes and Evans Pritchard have noted that, "he no longer rules of his own right, but as the Agent of the colonial government. The pyramidal structure of the state is now maintained by the latter's taking his place as paramount. If he capitulates entirely, he may become a mere puppet of the colonial government. He loses the support of his people because the pattern of reciprocal rights and duties which bound him to them is destroyed. Alternatively, he may be able to safeguard his former status, to some extent, by openly or covertly leading the opposition which his people invariably feel towards alien rule. Very often he is in the equivocal position of having to reconcile his contradictory roles as representative of his people against the colonial government and of the latter against his people". 66

Indirect rule of the British Government over Thadou-Kuki was mechanism through which the other groups of the tribes like the Lushais and the Nagas could be kept under subjugation thereby stabilising British administration in the hills. The Thadou-Kuki chieftainship organisation was invariably thrown to

an equivocal position. The threat of British reprisal was standing over its head and instances of direct action against the Lushais in the Lushai Expedition of 1871 acted as a constant reminder of the British power. It is no doubt that colonial government had protected the Thadou-Kukis from the stronger and dominating tribes like the Lushais of the Chin Hills of Burma, and allowed them to carry on with their traditional rule in their villages. But the real basis of autonomy was robbed off by the colonials.
Summary:

The Thadou-Kukis are the most populous tribe living in Manipur. But unlike the Nagas, Mizos and Khasis, they do not have a compact home in any part of the country, rather they are dispersed over wide areas in the North-Eastern regions of India. Culturally and ethnically there exists a similarity of this tribe with the Chins, Mizos and other Kukis in the Assam-Burma frontier. Historically there may be elements of truth in the theory of their common racial origin. But in course of their wanderings, great differences cropped up among the different tribes so much so that now they are treated as a different tribe with considerable differences in their manners, customs and languages. So far folkloric and historical evidences are available, the Thadou-Kukis are likely to be from Chinese origin. Their migration started from there to the Chin Hills of Burma and from there again to different parts of north-eastern India - Manipur, Naga hills, North Cachar hills and Tripura. The general reasons behind such migration were pressure on land due to population increase. As supply of free land was limited it often led to inter-tribal hostilities. By this process they were pushed out from their original home in Singlung in China to the Chin Hills in Burma and from there to the different parts of India. The Lushais of the Chin Hills were however more powerful than the Thadou-Kukis. Hence the latter was
easily pushed out by the former to different parts of northeastern India. As inter-tribal feud was very common, there was great political necessity of having a strongman who could give not only an effective leadership in the face of inter-tribal hostilities but also organise the whole community as a homogeneous group. It is particularly because of this that the political structure of the Thadou-Kukis became authoritarian.

It may be noted that the Kukis had entered into India in two major waves, one around 1800 and the other around 1845. The early arrivals are designated as Old Kukis and the new arrivals, as New Kukis who are mostly the Thadou Kukis. Because of the difference of times of two arrivals there developed a sociological, cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences between the Thadou-Kukis and the Old-Kukis. It appears that the Lushai impact is more deeprooted among the Old-Kukis who, by and large, had maintained their separate cultural and political characteristics. Politically and numerically the Thadou-Kukis are stronger than the Old-Kukis. That is why the Thadou-Kuki could still maintain their own against the Lushais. And it is for this strength the Thadou-Kukis could bring the other minor clans like the Lenthang, Lunkim, etc. into their fold. All these took place in course of their inter-state migration.
In due course of time, the authoritarian character of the Thadou-Kuki chieftains started to reveal its pathological consequences. People started becoming dissatisfied with such chieftains. The position of chieftainship became a kinship privilege so that no commoner had any access to the organisation. This led to the disertion of such chiefs and migration to a new place under the leadership of another ambitious and competent man. This man became the chief of newly established village. Local migration only could justify such new chiefs. Hence local migration started. In Thadou-Kuki custom, there is no strong sanction against migration. This inbuilt lacune of the custom further encouraged local migration.

In course of time, inter-tribal feuds, which was the immediate cause of their inter-state migration, had made them insecure and helpless. They needed a land that would give them not only subsistence but also a secured shelter. At this hour of crisis the British authority came forward with a plan to settle them in uninhabited hill areas of Manipur. Otherwise it could have been that the whole Thadou-Kuki race would ever suffer in the hands of the stronger Lushai tribe. But the ulterior motive of the British authority was to stop local migration and implement a policy of administrative centralisation towards the Thadou-Kukis and secondly, to settle them amidst the Kabui, Angamese and the Lushai tribes who, in the eyes of the British Government, were recalcitrant tribes disturbing and attacking the British
areas. The Thadou-Kukis under the strong vigilance of the British authority, were used as a buffer against these tribes.

Behind the British settlement of the Thadou-Kukis there were three clear policies. Policy of pure defence, permanent occupation of the Lushai hills and giving the Thadou-Kuki chiefs relative independence in matters of internal management of the tribe and winning their support by fox-policy. The British authority subjugated the Lushai tribe on the one hand and gave relative freedom to the Thadou-Kukis on the other. One group was given privilege in order to suppress the other group. This clearly reflects a policy of divide-and-rule. While the Thadou-chieftainship organisation got the benefit of independence, it would be wrong to conclude that this independence was unconditional.

In fact the threat of reprisal was hanging over Thadou-Kuki chieftainship organisation for any misbehaviour on their part. The British authority time and again reminded the chiefs that they had both the capacity and determination to inflict severe punishment in case the chiefs do not fall in line with this policy.

Our understanding of the policy of settlement of the Thadou-Kukis remains incomplete if we fail to take into account the nature of their chieftainship organisation existing at that time. The Thadou-chiefs had to accept the annual payment from the British and in return, they were
expected to control the people against any act of hostility
towards the British authority. The threat of severe reprisals
in case of failure undoubtedly helped to stabilise the
situation but left the chieftainship organisation in an
equivocal position and thereby certainly weakened the tribal
authority structure.