CHAPTER - 4

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1. Historical background

From the time of settlement of the Thadou-Kukis in Manipur by Colonel MacCulloch in 1845, the general policy followed by the British was to refrain from any direct control over the tribe. The Thadou-Kukis became the subject of Manipur king but was controlled by the Manipur State Darbar only nominally. When Churachand Singh was crowned as the king of Manipur in 1908¹, it was thought necessary by the British to exclude the hill tribes from the control of the Darbar and to entrust the hill administration to the Vice-President, later termed as President of the Manipur State Darbar.

Consequently the rules for the administration of the

hill tribes were framed in 1908\textsuperscript{2}. The period from 1891 to 1908 was a period of British regency in Manipur in view of Churachand's minority. But in 1891 the Manipur War was declared against the British and a few British officers were executed. It was quite likely that after such an event, the British authority wanted a tighter control over Manipur. King Churachand's minority in such a situation was only a plea for British regency. The long period of British regency was not uneventful in the hill area. The British levied forced labour and free labour and collected House Tax at the rate of Rs. 3/- per house from the hill people. While the British was exploiting the hill people, the nature of the events that took place during that time was not at all oriented against the British. Rather in most cases, it was diverted in inter-tribal warfare and mutual attacks. Thus in 1894 a Tangkhul Naga village was attacked by the Kukis which was lulled by punitive measures; in 1896, the Tangkhuls of Somra basin beyond the frontier of Manipur attacked Shoraphungbi village which too, was countered by an expeditionary force in 1897.\textsuperscript{3} On the point of land problem

\textsuperscript{2} Report of Webster, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary of the Govt. of India, Foreign & Political Department 27th June, 8th July, 1919.

the Kukis also raided three Naga villages - Kongal, Temini and Rachai which was also quelled by punitive expedition. Moreover the Chassad-Kukis under the protection of Sumjok Tsauba of Burma carried on attacks on the Manipur territory as a revenge against the killing of the Chassad Kuki chief by a high Manipuri official, the brother-in-law of Nur Singh, the then Raja of Manipur. 

In short, things were not going normal in the hill areas of Manipur. But none of the events in the hills had a broad base and a clear national purpose. Rather they exhibited the parochial forces in the hill areas. Naturally a conscientious mass background of the war of the Thadou-Kukis was not generated.

In 1916, the rules for administration of the hills were modified by which the hill areas were brought under the control of a single officer operating from Imphal. Quite naturally a tight administration in the hill areas was not possible even after this modification. At this period they did not, however, get any hint of a tribal warfare from the hills. The hill areas and the hill people naturally continued to enjoy much independence and the villages were

4. Ibid. P.35.
5. Summarised from Johnstone's Account of the Chassad Kukis - in A. Mackenzie's The North East Frontier of India, Mittal Publication Delhi (Reprint) 1979 - P.211.
administered by the village chiefs without any direct interference of the British authority. The British control was only nominal or marginal so far as the hill areas were concerned. A direct confrontation between the British authority and the tribal authority was not at all thought of and the former well carried on their exploitation in the hill areas without any resistance so far.

Causes of the war

In the meantime the First World War broke out. The British government asked the province of Assam for furnishing a quota of labourers for employment with the army in France during the war. The Maharaja of Manipur raised a labour corp of 2000 people consisting of Nagas and Kukis living in the Manipur hills, in the 22nd Manipur Labour Corp and the same was despatched to France. 7

But the storm was now gathering in the hills. Neither the Maharaja of Manipur nor the British administrators appeared to have anticipated any difficulty in raising the labour required. 8 They realised it when the majority of the Kuki tribes, mainly the Thadou-Kukis opposed this recruitment and came out into an open armed rebellion against the British government. 9

8. Webster's Report. op.cit.
Secondly, a special class of privileged people was created by the British. They were called as "Lambus" appointed by the British who acted as go-between of the hill tribes and British administration and would convey the directives of the Government from time to time. As noted by Webster in his report to the Secretary of the Government of India, "while in the neighbouring districts, it was customary for the British administrators to deal directly with the hillmen and to employ when necessary, as interpreters and go-betweens, selected men of the hill tribes, the practice in Manipur was to employ as intermediaries, petty Manipuri officers termed Lambus. These men, it is to be feared, are responsible in no small measure for the rebellion". 10

The Lambus were emerging as a new middle class which was resented by the chiefs who had noticed an erosion of their own power under the new regime. 11 In fact these Lambus were backed by the British authority who was also not very much satisfied with them. It was reported that "the Lam Subadars carried out their ordinary duties well, but with the exception of Maibam Samdel Singh, Lam Subadars of Awang

10. Webster's Report. op.cit.
(north) Lam and one or two Lambus, the work of Manipuri hill staff in connection with the recruiting of labour Corps was far from satisfactory". 12

Actually these Lambus with one Nithor Nath Babu started taking money from the hill people with the false promise that on such payment, they would not be called for enrolment as coolies. It was made clear in an appeal made by the political prisoners from the Jail of Kohima. The political Agent of Manipur had ordered in 1917 that each village of Kukis should supply one coolie for each two houses. Thus the appeal states, "the Manipuri Lambus came to inform us the above orders, at the same time they told us that if we pay some money to them and Nithor Babu ......... they will tell Sahib something so that Sahib will not call coolies again from us for France-Service. They also told us that all men are dying who went to France. So some of us paid some money to Manipuri Lambus and Nithor Babu". 13

But the British officers had to rely upon them more in the matter of collecting labour than for any other work. Too much reliance upon them gave them the opportunity to take undue payments from the hill villages. The Kuki chiefs

resented such payments so much so that the British authority had to admit at last that "the disturbance arose but of the mismanagement of the local authorities".\textsuperscript{14}

The tribal villages had to pay a sum of Rs. 3/- per annum to the British as House Tax. This was a big burden to each household. As such in the Thadou-Kuki society an ordinary subject had to pay a variety to tributes to the chief. The payment of an additional amount of money as House Tax had affected the tributary privileges of the chiefs. This factor therefore, contributed to a large extent the resentment of the chiefs.

\textbf{The chiefs' offensive}

In this rebellion the chieftainship organisation of the Thadou Kukis took the leadership role. Soon after the recruitment of labour corp begun, the first person to adopt an obstructive attitude was a Thadou-chief, Mr. Chengjapao of Asian Village. Who had "sent order to all the leading Thadou chiefs to resist recruiting with force if necessary. Other influential chiefs also were reported to have taken similar steps, and opposition was met with by the messengers sent to several villages".\textsuperscript{15} The Chief Commissioner categorically

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\textsuperscript{14} Foreign and Political Department Notes Secret - I, 1920 - Prog - 4-12.
\textsuperscript{15} Webster's Report - op. cit.
\end{flushright}
stated the fact that "the rebellion was confined almost entirely to a section of the New Kukis comprising most of the Thadous with Mainhlm Kamhau clans of the Northern Hills and a few Baite' villages, among the Mangvung Haokip clans in the South East of the Manipur State. With these exception almost all the non-Thadou and non-Kuki tribes as well as the Nagas remained loyal".16

The British authority was also very much determined to raise the labour corps. Under the leadership of Mr. Higgins, Political Agent of Manipur, an arrangement was made to meet a deputation of chief and to discuss the question of recruiting with them. "After a prolonged discussion and taking time for consideration, the chiefs declined to give coolies but offered to give money instead". Naturally this offer was refused and "the chief were told that they must supply recruits within a fixed period or submit to punishment".17

The chief of Mombi, Ngulkhup send the message to the Old-Kuki tribes living in the North East of Mangvum village of Mombi, who had agreed to raise a number of coolies, that if they sent coolies, their villages would be burnt and their women and children killed". As against this the Political Agent Mr. Higgins with an escort of 50 Riflemen under

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
a British officer proceeded to Mombi to arrest Ngulkhup. But
found the village deserted and could find neither Ngulkhup nor any of his men. Consequently the village was burnt
in October 17, 1917. But still the resistance of the Thadou
chief did not stop. "Soon after this information was receiv-
ed showing that the Kuki chiefs were showing a still more
contumacious attitude". 18 Many of the other tribes were
ready to supply labour and remained loyal to the British.
Under such circumstances the Thadou-Kukis had maintained a
docile attitude and those tribes which were ready to supply
labourer were raided by them. The situation became grave
when at the close of 1917, "more than 200 state subjects
including Manipuris, Manipuri Mohamedans, Thangkhul Nagas,
Chirus, Analis, Kabui Nagas who were well disposed towards
the British and His Highness, the Maharaja, have been killed
in the raids". 19

The Thadou-Kuki chiefs who had led the rebellion were,
Ms. Chengjapao, chief of Asian; Khutingmang, chief of Jampi;
Pachei, chief of Chassad; Pakang, chief of Henglip; Tingtong;
chief of Laiyong; Samchung, chief of Ukha; Ngulkhup, chief
of Mombi; Leothang, chief of Gobok; Haljason, chief of Laibol;
Lunkholal, chief of Chongjang; Songchung, chief of Sangnao;
Letkhothang Haokip, chief of Loikhai; Vumungul Kipgen; chief
of Tujang; Thangkhothang, chief of Mookot; Sootmang Singson,

chief of Khaijang etc.

Besides the names of Enjakhup and Ngulkho Kai may be mentioned although they were not chiefs. Enjakhup was a Sepoy of Naga Hill Battalion. He came in contact with the chiefs of Jampi and Laiyong and was later converted into a rebel. Ngulkhokai had murdered four Manipuris near Kangum. This murder was committed in course of the rebellion but was an outcome of a blood feud due to the killing of one Netlam, grandfather of Pachei, the present chief of Chassad under the order of the Maharaja of Manipur. 20

There was a Manipuri patron to the rebellion, Chingakhamba Sanachauba Singh, who claimed to be from the Royal Family. He could mobilise the chiefs of Laiyang, Jampi, Longya, Chassad and Gobok. Beyond all these he had an axe to grind. He spread the rumour that the British days were over and he wanted to kill the Raja of Manipur at the same place with the British. He told the Kukis that he had got his own milhila, and when he would become the Raja he would charge only Re. 1/- as House Tax. 21 He had the motive to dethrone the Raja, and he took the best chance of the troubled situation. Consequently in the month of December 1917, the Kuki from Ukha, Henglip and neighbouring villages headed

21. Foreign & Political Department - I - 1920, Prog. no - 4.
by four or five Manipuris raided the forest toll office at Itahi. The raid was found to have planned by Chingakhamba Sanachauba Singh.22

Chengjapao started raiding in the neighbouring Naga villages as the latter were supplying labourers to the British. In course of this he also helped Tongkhulan of Chassad to carry out a horrid massacre at the Tangkhul village of Kosom and burnt Challou Khunnou,23 a Naga village. During the rebellion of the Thadou-Kukis, the Kabui Nagas also suffered very badly in the hands of the Kukis.24

But it may be mentioned, the Thadou-Kuki chief first wanted to obtain the cooperation of the Nagas as well. Khutingthang one of the members of the confederacy of Jampi where as many as eight chiefs participated,25 had a plan for an organised attack on the British. And as a gesture of coordination he also killed a "mithun" and distributed its flesh to all parts of Naga Hills, both to Kukis there and Khonoma village relying on their support to prevent recruitment. Tingtong, chief of Laiyong also came over to Naga hills

23. Webster's Report. Ibid.
25. They are Khotingthang of Jampi, Tingtong of Laiyong, Songchung of Singnao, Lunkhalal of chongjang, Latkhothang Haokip of Leikot, Vumungul Kipgen of Tujang, Lhungjangul, S/o Vumuagal and Enjahlup of Thengjang.
with Enjakhp (mentioned above) to see what could be done thereby way of getting help from the Kukis there and the Nagas. 

If it is not, therefore, sufficient a fact that in the rebellion of the Thadou-Kukis, certain sections of Nagas were the sufferers. At the initial stage an effort was made to develop a common cause with the Nagas in the revolt against the British. But it seems that this coordination effort was only marginal in nature. Whereas both the Nagas and the Kukis were suffering under the similar condition, the Nagas could not forget their past hostilities with the Kukis, and, as has been stated, a conscientious mass background was not created, the Nagas did not positively respond to the rebellion, and as it has been pointed out by B.C. Chakraborti, "the labour force which went from this frontier to France during the Great War was largely recruited from independent trans-frontier Nagas". 

Consequently the rebellion was confined in the Thadou-Kuki areas in different parts of Manipur-Jampi, Mombi, Henglip, Ukha, Naga hills of Assam (Thadou-Kuki areas), chassad and the Thangdut state of Burma. A second meeting of the Thadou-Kuki chief was held at Taluilong in connection with

27. B.C. Chakraborti. op.cit. P.190.
with the rebellion. Khutingthang, chief of Jampi and Tingtong, chief of Laiyang opposed the idea of making peace with the British and proposed to fight against them.

Chengjapao, chief of Aisan and one of the most prominent rebel chief had to leave his village and take shelter at Haijang near Lapvomi in Naga hills from where he was ejected by the Deputer Commissioner of Naga hills. He then fled to Vahong from where he continued his raid on the Tangkhuls.\textsuperscript{28} Khutingthang took part in the opposition to the Henima-Jampi column in 1918 and compelled various villages to give him supplies and provide guns. He also burnt the Senting village in revenge to the chief for not having joined the rebellion. Pachei of chassad while organising opposition to recruitment for the labour corp killed a Mithun and sent round the flesh with this intention and threatened the villages willing to send coolies, while Pakang chief of Henglep raised in the way of organised opposition, men from the surrounding villages to take part in raids north of Silchar road. Tingtong chief of Laiyong led the rebellion against the British in chongjang, Tatuilong, Haipe, Jampi, Dulin and Tama villages and passed on a 'Dao' as a sign for cutting telephone wires. He collected guns for the war from the villages west of Barak river. Afterwards he also raided and

\textsuperscript{28} Webster's Report - \textit{op.cit.}
burnt Naga villages to revenge their destruction at Notjang village. Ngulkhup, chief of Mombi, Leothang chief of Gobok, Haljason chief of Laibol - all had organised opposition to recruitment for Manipur Labour Corps, took part in armed rebellion, collected arms and prevented all other villages willing to send coolies. In the Chassad village across the border of Thangdut state one Tonghu was the chief who carried out raids from Chassad, the unadministered tract. One Komyang, relative of Tonghu settled in the upper drainage of Namkha Stream, subdued the Nagas and made them pay tributes to him. After his death, his son Tonglun succeeded him. But his nephew, Pase who had settled in Somra tract, after the death of Komyang usurped his Naga conquests. Tonglun wanted to defend his possession against Pase. This developed to a preparation of war between Tonglun and Pase. Tonglun sought the protection the Government of Burma while Pase was championing the Chassad cause and was trying to mobilise the support from the villages of Manipur and Tangdut state in Burma in his fight against with Tonglun. Pase and his family also intended to attack the plains of Burma. A rumour was spread that if the Kukis of Burma join Pase against Tonglun,

29. Webster’s Report.
they need have no fear of any subsequent punishment from the government of Burma. 31

Two significant things developed subsequently. Pase accompanied by one Hawlakip, nephew of the deceased Tonghu, who had settled in the Thangdut state of Burma, made an attack on the Naga villages in the Somra tract. Secondly, a small Naga village in Thangdut state was suddenly deserted by the villagers on the apprehension of Thadon-Kuki attack. 32

In the Thangdut state, it was the family feud between Tonglun and Pase which had called for British intervention. Pase wanted a real control over the Nagas while Tonglun as the descendant of his father Tonghu, wanted to be the chief of Thangdut and hence to control the Naga subjects. This factor brought them into opposition. It seems however, that family feuds and internecine quarrels found expressions in the Thadou Kuki war. One group had sided with the British in order to teach a lesson to the other, which they could never do alone.

The British offensive

At the time of outbreak of the rebellion, the British officers had no complete knowledge about these people. The

32. Ibid.
administration of the British was remote in the hill areas and the chieftains would enjoy a considerable autonomy in their hills. The remoteness was admitted by the British officers. "In the foreign section of British Government there was absence of more exact knowledge of the condition on the North East Frontier". 33

At the very outbreak of the rebellion the British authority was of opinion that only serious punitive measure would mitigate the rebels. But this view was frustrated when the actual problem arose. Thus the British authorities expressed: "The general impression founded on experience on other part of the frontier was that when the Kukis realised their inability to withstand the column sent against them and found their villages and property destroyed and themselves harried from pillar to post, opposition would collapse and their submission would be only a question of days. These expectations were, however, falsified". 34

But inspite of the lack of knowledge about the tribe in question, they did not give up their basic approach of taking resort to force to subdue the rebels, which is the ulterior character of a colonial authority. The latter started direct action against the rebels.

34. Webster's Report - op. cit.
Orders were issued through the messangers to the rebel chiefs to appear before the president of Manipur State Darbar and discuss the matter relating to the recruitment of labour corps. But no chief actually came to attend the Darbar. It has been pointed out by Webster "certain section of the hill tribes had not contributed at all and several of the leading chiefs had both prevented their tribesmen from enlisting and had refused to come and see the President of the Darbar in compliance with his order". 35

After this the Political Agent of Manipur, Mr. Higgins, met a deputation of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs in oktan village in September 1917. In this meeting it was agreed upon by the chiefs that they would not stop any Kuki or other Naga who was willing to join the labour corps. 36 But on the eve of the same meeting certain uneasy things developed. Enjakhup and Tingtong opposed the Oktan meeting. In the same meeting the Political Agent wanted to offer 'Rum' to the chiefs, but some of them ran away thinking that if anyone drink 'Rum' he would be compelled to go to France. Seeing this the Political Agent became very angry and adjourned the meeting setting another date for consultation after two months. 37

35. Webster's Report.
37. Ibid.
But the proposed meeting never took place. The meetings with the chiefs for discussion the question of recruitment was simply an act of equivocation. So, the Political Agent himself with an escort of army went to Mombi and burnt down the village in October, 1917, thus stopping the last chance for reconciliation with the chiefs.

The rebellion quickly spread out and the forest toll of Itahi was looted in December, 1917. There was also apprehension of attack on Imphal in December with the active cooperations of Chingkhamba Sanachauba Singh, the rebel scion of the royal family. Two things were done at this hour. Columns of Assam Rifles were despatched against the rebel at the end of the year, and notices were served to the rebel chiefs to submit for punishment.

Serious encounters followed. In the first part of 1918 a large number of brutal raids were committed by the rebel Kukis on the friendly loyal villages. "In three months 19 villages were raided, with the loss of 193 persons killed and 21 missing." Sir Nicholas Beacham Bell, chief commissioner of Assam paid several visits to Imphal principally to supervise the measures taken to suppress the rebellion.

41. Ibid.
After discussion with the local officers he agreed that the punitive measures be suspended during the rainy season of 1918 and that it would suffice to keep a few outposts along the border of the hills to prevent reprisals. But hostilities went on despite, and consequently the outposts were strengthened and orders were given for them to patrol actively the country in their neighbourhood. Plan was adopted for complete subjugation and disarmament by a large-scale military operation. Consequently "a network of block houses was placed throughout the hills for the purpose of patrolling while a stronger force moved through the country in order to disarm all hostile villages and endeavouring to capture all the leading rebels. Brigadier General E.E. Macquoid was in the state as General Officer commending the Kuki punitive measures from November 1918 till the rebellion was quelled after the close of the financial year".

In a military operation under Sir Henry Keavy ten rebels were arrested. One chief, Mr. Ngulbul of Longya was killed in action. The hostile chiefs in Manipur territory were detained under Regulation III of 1818. The Arm Police of Burma arrested the rebels in Burmese territory after a fierce battle at Molvailup village in Burma. Those arrested

42. Webster's Report - Ibid.
43. Webster's Report.
from Burmese territory were dealt with under Sec - 16 of the Chin Hills Regulation 1896.45

The war of the Thadou-Kuki virtually came into an end after the arrest of the rebel leaders. In the subsequent Administrative Reports of Manipur the conduct of the hill people was found good.46 But the British authority after the rebellion, started taking more vigourous administrative steps in the hills of Manipur.

It was proposed to adopt a policy of administrative decentralisation in the hill areas. It has been mentioned that before the rebellion the British would control the hills only nominally by a single officer from Imphal. In order to maintain order in the hills and prevent any more raiding thirteen outposts each garrisoned by an Indian officer and 40 men of Assam Rifles were set up in the hills inside Manipur State.47 By the end of 1919 these were reduced to seven48 and in 1920 one more outpost was withdrawn.49 The administrative decentralisation as proposed in the Administrative Report of 1918 - 19 was brought into

45. Foreign & Political Dept. Secret - I - 1920 Prog no - 4-12.
operation. The hill areas were divided into four subdivisions, one being directly administered by the President of Manipur State Darbur. The three Sub-Divisions were as follows:

1. The South West area with headquarter at Churachandpur. This area is inhabited by the Kuki tribes and was left to the charge of B.C. Gasper.

2. The North-West area with headquarter at Tamenglong. This is inhabited by Kukis, Kabui Nagas and Kachha Nagas. This area was left to the charge of W. Shaw.

3. The North East area with headquarter at Ukhrul which is inhabited by the Tangkhul Nagas and the Kukis. This was left to the charge of L.L. Peters.

Besides a large area in the north of the state including the Mao and Maram Naga group, the whole of the Mombi area in the South East and the various tribes of the hills bordering the valley continued to be administered directly from Imphal under the President of the State Darbar. Under the new rules the President of the Manipur State Darbar had power equivalent to the District Magistrate and the Sub-Divisional officers had power equivalent to the Sub-Divisional Magistrates. Appeals in civil and criminal cases against the order of the Sub-Divisional officer would lie
to the Political Agent. In civil cases there was no appeal against the order of the president. 50

Implications of the Thadou-war

The general policy followed by the British towards the Thadou Kukis in Manipur was that of non-interference. This policy as adopted from the very beginning of their settlement by col. Macculloch in the mid 19th century. 51 The British policy of non-interference with the Nagas was abandoned long before in 1861 in view of protecting the British subjects from the Naga raids. 52 In relation to the Lushais too, the initial policy was to refrain from the direct administration and giving the chiefs full independence in the administration of the hills. 53 This policy was abandoned afterwards when Lushai Expedition started under the leadership of colonel Lister in 1850, in view of the many outrages committed in the British territory, Cachor and Sylhet. 54 This culminated in the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72. In comparison to these two immediate neighbouring tribes, the Thadou-Kuki chiefs enjoyed laissez-faire for a relatively longer period of time.

51. Edgars Note to Mackenzie in Mackenzie - The North East Frontier of India - etc. P.428.
52. B.C. Chakrabarti, op.cit. - P.84.
53. B.C. Chakrabarti - P.50.
J.H. Hutton had mentioned that: "Before the Kuki rising of 1918-19, the administration of the hill areas of Manipur was not very close, and the Thadous ruled as they were by their well organised chiefs and treated, as they had been in the past at any rate, by the Manipur state as allies almost as much as subjects, managed their own affairs in their own way and had recourse to the courts only in exceptional cases". But this independence was not a blessing by itself. It was adopted only as a tactic of divide and rule. At the time of settlement of the Thadou-Kukis, the Lushais and the Nagas were the main enemy of the British. In order to subdue them the Thadou-Kuki chief were given the special benefit of autonomy so that they may not only take the British authority as a saviour and friend but also organise their tribal subjects against the neighbouring recalcitrant tribes under the protection and directive of the colonial authority. But when the rebellion of the Thadou-Kukis took its shape, the British authority directly took resort to institutionalised force inspite of the fact that the Thadou-Kuki chiefs actively helped the British "against the war with Cachar, Khonoma, Manipur, Sukle, Poi, Lushai and Abor". 56

As a result of the closer administration in the hills, the powers of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs were considerably reduced. The President of the Manipur State Darbar was made the custodian of hill administration. It may be the fact that when the rebellion was completely within control and normalcy was returning, the rebel chiefs who were detained, were released and they were allowed to go back to their own people and their villages as chiefs. But they lost their traditional autonomy and had to function under the wing of new bureaucratic administration. The chiefs became tributaries to the British government. Hutton had further written that: "with the suppression of Kuki rebellion the confiscation of all guns and punishment of several of the leading chiefs, an era of much closer administration set in and the Thadou have had to put up with a great deal of administrative interference ...... The result of all this must have been to loosen old ties and to weaken tribal sanctions so that the Thadou society is at present in the process of adapting itself to greatly changed condition".57

The inter-tribal animosity is the most weak point in the tribal organisations of this area. As a result all the tribes could practically never make a common forum against

57. Hutton's Note in W. Shaw's Notes on Thadou Kukis, P.3-4.
the British although all of them were sufferers in the hands of the British in some way or other. The relationship between the Kabui Nagas and the Thadou-chiefs remained strained although. This made the cause of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs weak, because this type of relation ultimately affected the two communities. Much of their attacks were directed against the Nagas so that one is easily led to confusion as to whether the war of the Thadou Kukis was against the British or against the Nagas. Now after their arrest when the question of surrendering the guns came up the Thadou-Kuki chief who possessed more guns than the Nagas, were not willing to surrender more because of the fact that on such a surrender of guns the Kabui Nagas would take the chance of revenge than because of using the arms against the British. Mr. Higgins has noted that: "some who were inclined to surrender and bring in their guns were afraid to do so because they would have left their tribesmen defenseless against reprisals of Kabui Nagas infuriated by the Kuki raids from which they had suffered". 58

During the war of the Thadou-Kukis, therefore, the Kabui Nagas did not support them. And quite ironically when after a decade when one Jadonang proclaimed a "Kabui Naga Raj" 59 the Thadou-Kukis did not support the Kabuis. The

58. Webster's Report. op.cit.
latter was regarded as one of their enemies. Jadonang dreamt of a 'Free Naga Raj' which could come into existence following the destruction of all outside influences, specifically the British, Kuki and the Christians. 60

It is quite natural that both the Thadou-Kukis and the Kabui Nagas, having a background of petty inter-tribal warfare could not oscillate towards a more common cause. The anti-British spirit of both the tribes was overshadowed by the inter-tribal animosity.

Even among them, the Thadou-Kuki chiefs had a mixed reaction. There was lack of understanding among the rebels. All the chiefs interned, at Kohima jail unanimously made the statement against Chingkhambé Sanachauba Singh that "we wrongfully fought with the Government on account of deceitful conduct of Manipuri Lambus and Chingkhambé Sanachauba Singh". This statement on the part of the rebel chief gave an impression of utter frustration of the revolutionaries. The statement further continued: "we request the mercy of the Government to forgive us this time. We affirm that we will never do like this in future. We are ready to go anywhere to help our government with our men or money in any way whenever government needs." 61


Enjakhup the ex-Sepoy and one of the rebels further confounded the standpoint of the rebellion by his insidious statement that "he had not taken any active part in the opposition but had merely been present with the rebels under compulsion". The following conversation between William Shaw and Enjakhup deserves attention:

"Is it not true that you drilled the men of rebellious chiefs and taught them how to shoot? 'I did', said he ......." and why wouldn't I? It was the best I could do to help you all.

How so? ........

"why": the more powder and shot they would be wasting on their targets, the less they would have for shooting at your soldiers with". 62

Hence the basic anti-British attitude which spurred the rebellion of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs took the shape of a compromise and brought them to an equivocal position. The compromising tone of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs exposed a vital weakness of their rebellious stand against the British. It also broke down the spirit of the chiefs and made them frustrated. Thus Tingtong, one of the rebel chief, when captured and imprisoned in Sadia Jail, composed the following song which runs:

"My own home's love attracts me more
I shall go to the land of powerful man.

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I shall go
My mother will cry every day for me
The son of the chief I am, melted down
in the land of the powerful man". 63

Here the 'land of powerful man' implies the European
country, where they were now ready to go, because they were
no longer able to hold their own against the British might.
This was an indication of completely run down state of the
Thadou-Kuki chieftains. The struggle for power of the
Thadou-Kuki chiefs in the Tangdut state became so prominent
that even in the days of rebellion against the British, they
could not keep aside this silly thing and strengthen and
coordinate a centralised authority for an effective fight.
The British authority naturally got a chance to cash in on
this and legitimised its intervention in the internal affairs
of the Thadou-Kuki society. It seems that in the Thangdut
state of Burma the skirmishes between the two parties, one
led by Tonglun and the other by Pase had little plebeian
connection with the revolt.

On the basis of scope and nature, tribal revolts can
be viewed into two dimensions.

1. Those tribal revolts in which the initiative came from
without with a clear socio-economic visions. We can give

63. Free Translation made by T.H. Thonkochon, of Motbung
village.
here the examples of Santhal revolt of 1855-56 and the Worli revolt in Maharastra in 1945-47. The Santhal rebellion exhibited a characteristic of transtribalism and also included non-Santhal Bengali and Behari Hindus and poor Muslim peasants at the instance of the Krishak Sabha. In the Worli revolt again the Adivasis rose against the gross socio-economic exploitation as class conscious peasants under the auspices of the Maharastra Krishak Sabha which "transformed the otherwise docile Worlis into conscious and determined fighters". 64

2. Those revolts in which the initiative came from within the tribal structure and was meant to reaffirm the value-structure of the society. Generally in these types of revolt revivalism is revealed. The Jayantia rebellion, the Kampai Cult movement of the Kabuis, the Thadou-Kuki revolt etc. fall in this category. In the Jayantia rebellion the Dolois and Sardars took the leadership role. 65 They found that their powers and privileges had steadily declined during the British rule. Without the restoration of the old regime it was felt that they had no future. 66 Jadonang in the same way fought against any outside influences.

The chiefs' offensive in the Thadou-Kuki war shows that the initiative came from within the tribal structure itself. It was not instanced by any outside influence. The Thadou-Kuki society is essentially agrarian. Recruitment of labourer for shipment to Europe would cause a positive threat to the tribal economy. This was a very sensitive point to the chiefs. The drainage of able-bodied persons for labour corps would create a crisis in the number of labourers needed for cultivation.  

The Thadou-Kuki chief have been enjoying a kind of primordial privilege from the community which was not only an economic privilege in the form of one day free labour given by a person from each household, but it also gave legitimacy to the chieftainship organisation itself. In such circumstance, the recruitment of labour corps would break the concept of labour upon which the legitimacy of the Thadou-Kuki chief rested. This reminds us of the Bemba chiefs in North Rhodesia where the European rule had altered the people's conception of authority, destroyed the whole basis of labour on which the power of the chief depended, and the old correlation between political authority, economic

privilege, and military strength. 68

Hence the Thadou-Kuki War was basically status - quest in nature. It has been rightly pointed out by Goutam Bhadra: "The war was meant to preserve the condition in which the political structure and economic basis of chieftainship might survive". 69

Another dimension of the rebellion centered round land problem. The Thadou-Kuki chiefs were apprehensive of being alienated from their land. In the Chassad meeting of the Kuki chiefs, Paseeone of the chiefs who took a leading role in the rebellion was "convinced to believe that the British had encroached upon the land of the Kukis thereby jeopardising their age - old independence and so also their very survival". "The Haokip Kukis from Ukha rose to fight for the protection of their land from being annexed by an alien power". 70

In the Thadou-Kuki society the land and land relationship bears a special significance on the authority structure. The chiefs are virtually the owners of land, specially jhoom land. The ordinary subjects enjoying only usufructuary rights over it. The unbridled access to the forest patches which


69. Goutam Bhadra - op.cit.tP.37.

would accommodate the migrated population would also provide a scope to the territorial chiefs to establish a new village with the migrated population. In Thadou-Kuki society territorial chieftainship and local migration went hand in hand. Without the free access to land it could never have been possible. Under such circumstance when the British authority grabbed or threatened to grab their land, it went against the traditional authority structure of the Thadou-Kuki society as well as jeopardised their age-old independence on land and consequently their very survival.

The chieftainship organisation of the Thadou-Kuki society acted as the great mobilising force in the rebellion and it was successful in doing so because the power structure of it was authoritarian. By virtue of it the chieftainship organisation could successfully bring the Thadou-Kuki mass to the side of the conservative cause of the rebellion. But in course of the rebellion. The chieftainship organisation exhibited a mixed reaction. Their activities ranged from 'extreme reaction to compromise'. While the accumulated grievances against the British caused the chieftains to act as the catalyst of the movement, such movement by its very nature, provided an inbuilt rationale to the authority structure of the chieftains. Any relaxation of this original stand would jeopardise the rationale of the struggle and would logically invite legitimacy crisis of the chieftainship.
organisation. The rebel leaders interned at Kohima Jail clearly showed a gesture of compromise by their insidious statements. This was a great anti-climax to the rebellion.
Summary

In this chapter the war of the Thadou-Kukis has been discussed in its various dimensions. The conflict between colonial authority and traditional authority took the shape of an armed confrontation. The general causes of such confrontation were the exploitation of manpower from the hill tribes for employment in France as coolies during the First World War, imposition of hill House Tax and the equivocal role of the Lambus.

Against these the Thadou-Kuki chiefs came up with an open revolt against the British. Though this was known as Kuki war it would in fact be more correct to refer it as a Thadou war as only the Thadou-Kukis and not other old-Kukis were involved in this war. As many as fifteen Thadou-Kuki chiefs and a Manipuri patron Chingkhamba Sanachauba Singh, from the Royal family started sporadic raids in different parts of the hills. The latter being as aspirant of the royal position, took the chance of the troubled situation and tried to direct it to dethrone the Maharaja of Manipur. The loyalty of the Naga group towards the British at this hour had turned the former as an enemy of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs. In the two consecutive chief's confederacy one in Jampi and the other in Taluilong village, it was decided to carry on open violence against the British. The wave of the rebellion spread out in different parts of Manipur hills.
and in the unadministered Somra tract and Thangdut state of Burma. In the Thangdut state of Burma it was a family rivalry between one Pase and one Touglun, two the Thadou contenders over the control of the Naga tributories that ultimately invited British intervention in the internal affairs of the Thadou-Kukis.

The combined forces of Assam Rifles and Burmese Police deployed by the British quickly put down the fire of revolt and the Thadou-Kuki chiefs were put to prison. By the year 1919 the entire rebellion was suppressed. After the rebellion the independence and autonomy enjoyed by the chiefs in the hill areas was curtailed to a great extent and administrative control was tightened in the hills. The traditional powers of the Thadou chiefs were reduced and they became answerable to the British authority.

At the analytical level the Thadou-Kuki rebellion reveals certain features.

1. Inter-tribal animosity particularly between the Kukis and the Nagas could never bring the two communities to a common platform and make a common cause against the British. Because of this a coordinated and concerted anti-British background was not generated. Rather the parochial ethnic recriminations were let loose, which helped the British rulers to successfully implement the policy of divide-and-rule.
2. The chieftainship organisation exhibited a mixed reaction after the rebellion. All the revolutionary spirit of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs was diverted towards blaming each other and most anachronistically, the rebel leaders made most insidious statements from the jail. This reveals an inherent weakness in the amorphous nature of Thadou-Kuki chieftainship organisation. Each chief was more or less independent of others chiefs and there was no centralised authority to coordinate and direct their activities at the time of crisis.

3. The anti-British attitude of the Thadou-Kuki chiefs was ultimately drowned in the icy water of compromise with the British authority, which took away the rationale behind the rebellion. When the chief made the statement that 'we now request the mercy of the Government' not only their frustration but also hopelessness of their stand was revealed.

4. Unlike the tribal revolts of the Santals and the Worlis, the Thadou-Kuki revolt was directed towards reaffirming the value-structure of the traditional society and was restorative in nature. The leadership initiative came exclusively from the tribal organisation itself, and it was meant to maintain the political and economic basis of the chief-centered Thadou-Kuki society against the encroachment of an alien authority.
The rebellion of the Thadou-Kukis provided an inbuilt rationale to the chieftainship organisation, and was meant to uphold the legitimacy of the chieftainship organisation. But the mixed reaction of the chiefs and specially their compromising attitude not only weakened the rebellion but also down-graded the position of the chiefs as the traditional leaders.