

T.S. Gangte



THE KUKIS
OF MANIPUR

A Historical Analysis

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Thangkhomang S. Gangte



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(*Anthropology, Tribal Studies*)

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PREFACE

The purpose of this Thesis is to focus on the unexplored wealth of Anthropological and Sociological potentials that are available which have not yet been given proper empirical studies to the extent modern scientific knowledge would have achieved. The present study relates to a microscopic aspect of a vast perspective.

This piece of work tries to project that every walk of life of the Kukis, be it social, economic, political, religious, etc., is a manifestation of their social structure based on cultural heritage. Changes have been brought about in their social matrix by modernism, western education, Christianity, etc.. Notwithstanding, some aspects of their social institutions withstand the onslaught of such changes, of course, not without conflict between traditionalism and modernity.

Such a study as could be seen in the pages that follow herein was possible with the kind permission of the University of Calcutta. I am indeed thankful to the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta, for the same. I owe immensely Prof. P.K.Bhowmick, Head of the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta, for having accepted me to work under his supervision. His visits to my field braving all the discomforts and inconveniences were of great help that made my work easier than would have otherwise been. Words fail me to express my indebtedness and gratitude to Prof. Bhowmick in commensural terms. I will ever remain grateful to him.

I am indebted to Thangkhoisei Chongloi, Chief of Khengjang village, without whose help, initiative, knowledge and insight on the subject, my task would have been much more formidable. My thanks are also due to

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I greatly appreciate the critical appreciation, reviews and corrections on my manuscripts by my younger brother, P.Gangte, IPS, Deputy Inspector General of police, Manipur, which had given a qualitative lift to my dissertation.

Without requisite maps, illustrative plates, binding, photographs, etc., this dissertation would not, indeed, have the look of authenticity and reliability. For this, the credit entirely goes to Dr. M. Balaram Singh, Vice-Principal, Y.K.College, Manipur. I cherish such help and contribution immensely.

The added works of making the dissertation more attractive and informative with photographs during the field visits were mainly the contribution of N. Surendra, Vice-Principal, Liberal College, Luwangsangbam, Manipur, for which I am much indebted. My thanks are also due to Dr. R.K.Ranjit Singh, Sr. Lecturer, D.M.College of Science for his help in preparing the final plates of the photographs that added to the authenticity of the materials.

Had it not been for diligence, unstinted support and excellence of work given by N.Nobinchandra Singh in typing out this dissertation many times over, it would have taken me much longer time for materialising this in its present form. My confidence in his capability in giving me an attractive and typed out dissertation has been commensurated. I am indebted to him very much.

For all said and done, it may be incomplete if mention is not made of my mother and my wife without whose loving hand and care, understanding and encouragement, this piece of work would not have seen light of the day.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I North-East India

The North-Eastern territory of India comprising Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh was carved out gradually from the original Assam Province of British India except the Princely States of Tripura and Manipur. It had been termed as the 'Land of Seven Sisters'. This region covers an area of approximately 2,55,000 square Kilometres with a population of 2,65,13,685 as per Census of India, 1981.¹

Its geomorphological location offers three distinctly different regions, viz., (1) hills and valleys of the North and North-East, (2) plateau in the South and (3) the plains in between (1) & (2) above. Practically, the Great Himalayan Range runs towards and continues through Patkoi, erstwhile Naga and Lushai Hills to the further South in Burma. The Brahmaputra valley is the Easternmost extension of the Great Plains of the Ganga of North India. There are also some dwarf hills here and there. China lies to its North, Burma to the East, Bangladesh to the South, and Bhutan to the North West. A narrow corridor from Siliguri in Darjeeling district of West Bengal opens up to negotiate this region with the mainland of India.

Ample evidences of stone-age implements found in this region, specially in Meghalaya and other adjoining areas, signify existence of the earliest human civilization. These have resemblance with those of the tool

1. Detailed figures of population of the states including the size of each state are shown in Table 1:1.

types unearthed in Burma and other nearby areas. The find of a typical example of shouldered celt (T-shaped) indicates that there was the beginning of agriculture here in human history. Use of this type of tools extended even upto Bihar-Orissa border suggesting the probability of movements or migration of people from one place to another, from the hoary past traversing this obscure and tortuous path of protohistory and history. We find its vibrating corroboration reflected in various ways. The *Purana* (scriptures) refers to Kamarupa *Janapada* having its capital at Pragjyotispur. Kalidasa and Kautilya referred to all-these places in their writings. We also come across the name of *Nagakanya* 'Ulupi' in the Mahabharata, the great epic literature of India. The famous Chinese traveller, Hi-eun T sang, also visited Kamrupa in 640 A.D. Of course, infiltration of Brahmanical system with waving varnas penetrated into some of the areas of North-East India which moulded the life-style of the people. A good number of principalities ruled by the autochthonese - derivative communities of which the Chuta, Koch, Kachar, etc. are significant. Invasion of the Ahoms from Shan tribal groups of Burma on this land approximates to the 13th Century and their continuity was disturbed only during the 18th Century (sometime in 1772) when the British stepped into this tract. The British colonial administration encouraged the Assamese to form a province with their administrative Headquarters at Shillong. But before Independence, Sylhet, a populous district of Assam, was ceded to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, due to its Muslim Majority residents and afterwards the Union territories and States were reorganised to satisfy emotion and sentiment of the local people as well as to have a strongly built administrative units as shown in Table 1 :1 below :

TABLE 1.1
Area and Population:

Sl.No.	Name of State	Areas	Population (1981 Census)
1	Assam	78,523Sq.Kms.	1,99,02,826
2	Manipur	22,346 "	14,33,681
3	Nagaland	16,488 "	7,73,381
4	Meghalaya	22,489 "	13,27,874
5	Tripura	10,477 "	20,60,189
6	Mizoram	20,090 "	4,87,774
7	Arunachal Pradesh	83,578 "	6,28,050
TOTAL		2,54,991Sq.Kms.	2,65,13,685

II The People :

The entire North-East India is populated by variegated groups of people. Migration of people from Burma to these areas was very common and, as such, we find people of Mongoloid strains in respect of their physical features, culture and language. The autochthones who settled in the hill tracts were subsequently identified and differentiated one from the other based on various historical processes of stress and strains; communication difficulties, to a great degree, had contributed to their being in isolation for a number of generations. These adjustmental processes, in course of time alienated some groups from the bigger ones, while other groups found themselves in aligned condition with some groups to compose a larger social identity or aggregate. Such alienation and alignment of different groups came to bear various ethnic appellations identifying themselves as distinct tribes. This is a common feature in many places, but this is very significant to this tract of land.

Academically speaking, there are a number of definitions about the word 'tribe'. The Dictionary of Anthropology (Charles Winick : 1957) describes a 'tribe' as -

A social group, usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organisation. It may include several sub-groups as 'Sibs' or villages.

It is true that they are not a permanent crystal line structure in the stage of historical and social development and all the time, due to interaction and adjustments, these groups of people are found to accommodate themselves in different degrees to varied situations. It is also expected that their society has less and less of hierarchy and less and less of economic specialisation. Thus we find :

In course of such travels and shifting for security following clashes with other groups have been transformed to a considerable extent or blended according to the demands of the situation or circumstantial exigencies. As a result, present day culture of these groups bear such mark of incorporation into the core of their cultural matrix (Bhowmick : 1980)

But in order to make them eligible to merit the constitutional benefits from our Welfare State, which has been declared after the Independence, these groups have generally been capsulized as 'Weaker Sections' and listed separately as 'Scheduled'. In this part of India, there are altogether

131 Scheduled Tribes with identifiable characteristics and traits, distributed in different areas of this region (Sharma :1978).

These groups of people have different economy, agriculture (Swiden, terraced and plough), industries and some of them, having received higher education, are competing with their neighbours in white collar jobs. In respect of social organisations there are matrilineal tribes, like Khasi, Garo and Rabha, and Double-discent tribes, like Dimasa and Semasa. The others are patrilineal tribes. Owing to the change in religion through conversion, these groups are changing in different degrees. As regards language, Chatterji (1943:4) says :

Particularly when we talk to her (India) languages and dialects - 179 and 544 respectively, according to the *Linguistic Survey of India* - these have to be taken with a good deal of reservation. For, of these 179, 'Languages' (the separate enumeration of 'dialects' is irrelevant as they come under 'Languages'), 116 are small tribal speeches belonging to Tibeto-Chinese speech family which are found only in North-Eastern fringe of India.

It is true that the enchanting land known as the North-East Region of India attracted waves of diverse racial groups through ages. It has come to stay as the confluence of the most colourful mosaic of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity (Govt. of Assam, 1976:30).

The culture and tradition of the people often overlap the man-made political units of the region. Political loyalty mostly transcends the boundary of each political unit. The Kukis living in Nagaland, Assam, Tripura and Manipur have closer cultural, traditional and ethnic affinity with the people of Mizoram, Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh and the Chins of Chin-hills in Burma, rather than with their immediate neighbours. They yearn to remain under a single political unit. Sometime ago movements with this end in view were started in Chin Hills of Burma under the leadership of Vumkhohau on the eve of Independence of Burma from the yoke of the British rule and for the unification of Zomi (Gougin, 1984:180) under the banner of Zomi Revolutionary Army covering the areas now inhabited by the Kukis and the Mizos in Manipur, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Mizoram.

The same holds good with the Nagas. Despite conspicuous nature at the height of diversity in ethnicity, culture, tradition, language, their peculiar emotional upsurge to integrate themselves, burying their hatchet

of age-old war of attrition, under the nomenclature of 'Naga' and a language called 'Nagamese', which is pidgin Assamese, is indeed exemplary. This is solely due to the belief in the myth that all the Nagas have a common origin. This encouraged them to demand for a separate State for Nagas which eventually materialised.

With the exception of the Khasi and the Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya, who belong to the 'Mon-Khmer' culture with their Austric dialect, all other tribal ethnic groups of the region are basically Mongoloid in their ethnic origin belonging to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese linguistic group.

The Kuki-Chin speech of Manipur, Mizoram and the adjoining areas of Tripura and the North-Cachar hills of Assam, the Bodo Non-Aryan language spoken in the Brahmaputra valley and the Garo hills of Meghalaya and a host of dialects spoken by the numerous tribes in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family. The Indo-Aryan language of the Brahmaputra valley, known as Assamese, is also distinguished by its pronounced Mongoloid bias.

These groups of people came to the region at different periods of history. Some of them came in the prehistoric days and the others came at different point of time of history. Thus, even though some of them belong to the same ethnic group, time-gap in the waves of migration between different groups contributed greatly to their present wide-range of divergence and multiplicity, as mentioned earlier.

In Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, the tribal dialects are so numerous that one tribe cannot understand the dialect of his neighbouring tribe. Assamese (pidgin) has, therefore, been adopted as a language of communication among themselves, and they are called 'Nagamese' and 'Nafamese' in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh respectively. Comparatively, the language diversity in Meghalaya is far less pronounced than in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Though the Khasis and the Jaintias, with their Austric speech, do not speak the same dialect, the Khasi dialect has emerged as a more dynamic and acceptable one. Both the Khasis and the Jaintias use it as their common language. In fact, Khasi language has become sufficiently developed. It has been accepted as one of the major Indian languages in almost all the Boards of Secondary Education and regional Universities, upto the first degree examinations. The other major tribe in Meghalaya is the Garo. Their dialect is 'Bodo' which is exclusively used in the Garo Hills of the State. Interestingly, these tribes of

6 *The Kukis of Manipur*

Meghalaya are identified by their distinctive matrilineal system prevailing in the society of the entire region.

In Mizoram, with the exception of a few tribes, like the Chakmas and the Lakhers, there appears to have no diversity in use of language among them and it is *known* there as the Mizo language. This language is not only used in Mizoram, but is also widely used in Chin-Hills of Burma, Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh, Tripura and Manipur in India. The Kukis of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Tripura, Chin Hills of Burma, Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh also use it progressively as a medium of communication amongst themselves as well as between them and the Mizos.

It may be mentioned here that the most contrasting nature between the Nagas on the one hand and the Chinkuki-Mizos on the other, is the fact that despite diversity in language among the Nagas, their sense of unity and solidarity in the name of Naga is spectacular, whereas the Chin-Kuki-Mizos could not have a common political platform like the Nagas, despite advantage of the language at their command. As a matter of fact, the Mizo literature has been so highly advanced that it has been recognised as one of the major Indian languages both at the Boards of Secondary Education level and upto the first degree standard at the Universities of the region.

In Manipur, the Meiteis and the Muslims generally use 'Meitei-lon' as their language. The Naga tribes of Manipur can be broadly divided into the Tangkhul Naga, the Kabui Naga², and the Mao Naga. These Naga tribes do not have a common language for their benefit through which they can communicate among themselves and also identify themselves exclusively different from the others. They have to communicate among themselves in "Meitei-lon" alone. There is no other language for their common use. In case of the Kukis, however, despite divisions into many tribes and sub-tribes, they have no language barrier. They are able to communicate in their respective dialects, or use one of the dialects of any tribe depending on the person who uses the dialect.

2. In recent past the Kabui Nagas attempted to change their nomenclature by an acronym, ZALIENGRONG-ZA for Zaliang tribe, LIENG for Leingmei tribe and Rong for Rongmei tribe, which was considered more respectable. However, of late there arose controversy amongst them in that Zaliangrong was not extensive enough to cover all tribes, and the nomenclature 'HAOMEI' was considered to give sufficient coverage.

As for the religion of the State, while the Meiteis, living in the valley, are predominantly Hindu Vaishnavites, the tribals in the hills are increasingly embracing Christianity.

In Tripura, the aboriginal Tripuri tribals, who are divided into as many as eighteen groups, preponderated over the non-tribal population till 1947 (Sarin, 1980 :126). These tribal groups have identical ethnic affinity. They inhabit not only in Tripura, but also are found to settle in areas covering the North spurs of the Patkoi range upto the Southernmost part of the Chin Hills of Burma. The major tribes that occupy the areas are the Kukis, the Chins, the Lushais, the aboriginal Tripuris, the Chakmas and the Mughha. Through constant social contacts, these groups have influenced one another despite mutual estrangement in diverse ways.

The aboriginal Tripuris belong to the Bodo groups of Indo-Mongoloids, which form a solid block. They occupy the whole of Brahmaputra Valley, North Bengal, Tripura and East Bengal (now Bangladesh). But due to heavy influx of Bengali migrants, the indigenous inhabitants of Tripura were reduced to an insignificant minority of 29 per cent of the total population of the State.

The class composition of the population of Assam still continues to be the most colourful in all the seven units of the region. The Kukis, the Cacharis, the Dimasas and the other tribes inhabit the North-Cachar Hills District. The Karbis, the Kukis and other minor tribes live in the Karbi Anglong Hill District. There are also numerous other plains-living-tribals who inhabit in some pockets of Brahmaputra valley. The Bengalis are the most predominantly large group in Cachar District adjoining Mizoram. There are many Muslim strongholds in the Districts of the Brahmaputra valley. Most of the Muslim population in Assam are immigrants from the erstwhile East-Pakistan (now Bangladesh). A host of people of other castes and creeds mingle with the Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley. Thus, Assam becomes virtually an unrivalled state in regard to demographic diversity.

Notwithstanding the numerous dialects and spoken languages in the State, Assamese is the lingua-franca of the people there. Even the indigenous and the immigrant Bengalis have taken to speaking Assamese which closely resembles Bengali.

Arunachal Pradesh is very much known for its backwardness and isolation from the outside world until the Chinese aggression into the

Indian territory upto the foothills of Assam in 1962. A large number of tribes of different socio-cultural and religious sects inhabit the Union Territory. There are Buddhist tribes in Kameng, North Siang and Lohit Districts, Hindu Vaishnavite Noctes in Tirap District, who live along with other tribals belonging to indigenous tribal religions (Sarin, 1980-167).

The Mijis, the Sherdukpens, the Khowas, the Akas, the Solungs, the Bangais and the Monpas, who are divided into the Dirang Monpas, Tawang Monpas and Kalaktung Monpas, live in the Kameng District. In Sibansiri District, the Apatanis, the Daflas, the Hill Miris, the Nisla and the Tegins live. In Siang District, besides the two Buddhist tribes of Khambas and Mombas, the Adis, who are divided into Padams Bokers, Pailibos, Ashings, Rangams, Shimongs, also inhabit. In Lohit District the Khamptis, the Shingphos, the Jakhrings live along with a small group of the Padams of Siang District and the Mishmis, who are divided into Idu, Digaru and Mizu., Tirap District is inhabited by the Tangsas, the Noctes, the Wanchos and the Singphos of the Lohit District.

All these tribes have their own dialects, customs, dresses, manners, religions, ornaments and traditions; and together they contribute to the varied culture and religion of the region. With the exception of the Buddhist tribes, they have some common traits in domestic types, agricultural practices, observances of taboos and other socio-cultural rites. The composition of religious groups is as much diverse as their ethnic composition in the region. There are Buddhists in Arunachal Pradesh, and Hindus in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, Tripura and Cachar Districts of Assam, the Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh, and the centrally located Imphal Valley of Manipur. The Hill areas of Manipur constituting nine-tenth of the total areas, where tribal people inhabit, are the homelands of various denominations among the followers of Christianity. The States of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram are Christian dominated areas among the tribals. There are a large number of Muslim pockets in Assam, Manipur and Tripura, living mixed-up with the Hindus in the plains. The Nepali Hindu infiltrators from the bordering areas of Nepal have cooked up various problems in some hill regions, particularly in Manipur, and more so, of late, in Meghalaya.

III Introducing the Research Topic

Attempts have been made in this section to introduce the research hypotheses which have manifested by field work and through in-depth study in some villages. The life-style of the Kukis has been examined with a view to grasping the operating forces playing in their day-to-day living,

with special reference to the Kukis of Manipur. Their institutions-economic, political, social and religious-in the face of the changing pattern of life with the introduction of modern education system, spread of Christianity and onslaughts of various other changes brought about by the developmental programmes of the Government, present significant materials for study.

The Kukis here had been the dominant tribe spreading their authority over a wide range of hill areas surrounding the valley of Imphal during the hey-day of the Maharajah of Manipur and subsequently during the British period. The Kuki Chiefs were in supreme command over their respective domains in the hills. This was specially so with the Thadou Kuki Chiefs. The Hao-kip Thadou Chief, under the leadership of their senior most clan, known as the Chahsad Haokip, was the overlord of the hills to the East of Imphal valley exercising his power and authority on the Tangkhul Nagas, and his influence was extended upto the Burma Border, contiguous to the Thongdut State and part of the Somra Tract. The Doungel Kuki chief was the monarch of the North-East of Imphal valley extending his area of influence to the unadministered areas of Somre which lie in between the Naga Hills of the erstwhile Assam Province and the Burmese territory, which later became a bone of contention between the Doungel Chief, better known as the Aishan Chief, and the British Raj resulting in a protracted war that ended in 1919, after the subjugation of the areas concerned by the British who placed the same partly under the then Naga Hills of Assam and partly under Burma.

Likewise, the Sitlhou Thadou Chief, known as the Chief of Jampi, ruled the Western and North-Western part of Imphal valley bordering the Angami country. The Singson Thadou Chief ruled the areas contiguous to the Sitlhou country and the Lushai Hills of Assam. Pulverised in between the Sitlhou in the North- West and the Imphal valley in the North-East was the country of the junior clans of the Haokip Thadous, belonging to the Lunkhel, Songthat and Telngoh clans where they ruled the roost. To the South of them, bordering the Tiddim of Chin Hills of Burma, the areas were occupied by the Manluns (Zou), while the South-East of Imphal Valley extending up to the areas of Kabo valley and Sakte country, were ruled by the Mangvung Haokip Thadous.

Thus, the hill areas of Manipur were the domain and the head-hunting ground of the Thadou Kukis until they were subjugated and controlled by the British in 1917-19 Anglo-Kuki War. The most permanent and lasting effect of this war of Independence by the Kukis was not only the suppression of the Kukis, but marking of permanent boundaries of Manipur,

which exists till today. Prior to this, there was no boundary of Manipur as such. The Maharajahs of Manipur were contented with periodical massacre and extension of their influence for specific purposes. The Kuki Chiefs were their allies. After 1919, however, the British assumed direct administration over the hill tribes in general and on the Kuki Chiefs, in particular. The opening of the first sub-divisional offices in Tamenglong, Ukhrul and Churachandpur was made with the sole object of checkmating the Kuki Chiefs and also to avoid recurrence of their insurgency against the British rule. This apart, the British rulers ruled the hill areas through the effective machinery of the Chieftainship and its Council of Ministers. This helped the Chiefs to maintain their authority and hold over the people, thereby, unifying the clans that composed the Kuki Tribes called KUKIS, and to express their identity as such. The authority of the Chiefs also greatly enhanced the strength of their custom, for they were the perennial sources of the Kuki custom, tradition, culture, language, etc.

In contrast with the introduction of western education through the Christian missionaries, spreading from the Lushai hills, the idea of being dominated by the Chiefs and being identified as 'KUKI' were considered as a derogatory foreign design. The authority and leadership of the Chiefs thus began to erode gradually. Ultimately, with the advent of Independence of India, the idea of Chieftainship being thrown out of power was supplanted by a new set-up of administration known as 'democracy' which in a resurgent India was spontaneously accepted by the leaders and the commoners. Besides this, the term 'KUKI' was rejected mainly in the previously known Lushai hills and Manipur. Recognition of tribes as listed in the 'Scheduled Tribes' in various states hastened the process of disintegration among the Kukis, for the new Constitution of India accorded special privileges to such recognised tribes. Along with this, tension, enmity, conflict, factionalism between and among the erstwhile Kukis became the common feature of their life. The people became crazy for being listed as a Scheduled Tribe so as to be able to enjoy the fruits of the Constitutional privileges. Indeed, the immediate adverse effect of all this was telling heavily on the unity and solidarity of the Kukis. The seeds of disintegration thus burgeoned among them. Therefore, in a system of administration where counting of heads and majority rule prevail, the Kukis were the worst sufferers. They are now in a minority wherever they live, because they have become very badly divided and too widely scattered in different administrative units in the entire North-East region of the country.

The empirical study of such people would no doubt open up a new

vista leading to the store-house of knowledge for the Social Anthropologists and Sociologists. Many aspects of life of the Kukis which could not be easily uncovered or appreciated with a superficial knowledge of their social system would aptly have misled an outsider. An in-depth study of their life would not only enrich knowledge but also help the people concerned understand them in a better way.

The villages under study were inhabited by the Chongloi, the Sitlhou, the Kipgen, the Haokip, the Singson, the Gangte and the Lungdim clans. They provide both similarities and diversities and reflect ethnic relationship or otherwise. The areas covered in the selected villages are mainly within the Churachandpur District and the Sadar Hill sub-division of Senapati District of Manipur. The locations of the villages³ afford accessibility from the National and State Highways. These are not, however, within the areas that can be considered as urbanised or at the outskirts of the growing towns of different Districts. Nevertheless, the villages are not absolutely without the touch of modernity, albeit modern amenities and avenues of modern employment etc. are scarcely available. Though urbanisation is a part of inevitable result of civilization and planned development requiring bringing in of all facilities of upto-date living at the door-step of rural population, and despite changes in the matter of administration with the introduction of Village Authority Act, 1956 coupled with negation of the authority of the KUKI Chiefs, the traditional system of village administration continues to hold stage.

The institution of 'Tucha-Songgao' and 'Becha' is the basis on which study of the Kuki society can be made. This institution is vital to a Kuki family, being the nucleus unit, in as much as to the whole social system. Perhaps, this can be said as one of the excellent arrangements of division of labour, responsibility and an extension of public relation in an egalitarian society where the golden rule of the olden days still prevailing. For the study of any aspect of life of the Kukis, this institution is inevitable, be it their social life, or political life, or economic life or religious life. The institution of 'Tucha-Songgao' and 'Becha' is a projection of a typical Kuki institution for their love of orderliness and propriety without which no life appears possible among the Kukis.

3. The villages studied in the Churachandpur, district are, 'Chengkonpang' a Gangte village, 'Lhangjol' a Haokip village, 'Songgel' a Lungdim village and 'Bethel' a Singson village and that of Sadar Hills are, 'Khengjang', a Chongloi village, 'Motbung' a Sitlhou (Lhouvum) village, 'Seloi' a Kipgen village and 'Gelbung' a Haokip village.

The life-cycle of a Kuki, beginning from birth to death, is nothing but a manifestation of the social structure. The alternate-generation naming system is basic and conspicuous in its singular system in all the societies of the world. This system has greatly helped the Kukis maintain their tradition and in reckoning their genealogy. It also shows how important is the relationship between a grandfather and a grandson in manifesting the easy manner of joking relationship. Likewise, the practice of mother's brother's marriage, known as 'Neinu', has a role to play in building the institution of 'Tucha-Songgao and 'Becha' as a living organ. The peculiar joint family system of the Kukis is also another revealing singular aspect in the study of social life of the numerous communities and tribes all over the world. The family of the eldest son of the Kuki parents called UPA, which must necessarily have a joint family comprising his parents, unmarried brothers and sisters, and sometimes with married brothers, who have yet to establish themselves, is called 'Inherent Joint Family', consisting of vertical generations. The other joint family system is that of the younger brothers of the UPA, which is known as the family of NAOPA. It forms the nuclear family of his own. This family ultimately becomes a joint family of UPA when his first son is married and lives with him. This kind of joint family is called 'Earned Joint Family'.

'Luongman' or Corpse Price is another peculiar system of the Kukis. This is the price for a woman when she dies, and also for her sons. The price is claimed by her father, or elder/younger sons, in father's absence, as a token of love and affection between the uterine kinsmen. This also reveals the important position held by a women in a family life, and the weightage given to propagation of the descent through male line. If a woman does not give birth to a son or sons, as her spring promises, it is considered a disgrace to her father and brothers and, as such, here 'Luongman' cannot be claimed.

The institution of 'Sawm' as the dormitory of the ablebodied youngmen of the village as the primary means of initiation and education plays a significant role among the Kukis, and it is the manifestation of the style of life they lead. Subsequent changes of the 'Sawm' system in a decentralised form speak more about its importance. In the like manner, the 'Lawm' institution, as the basic economic life-giving system, is a revelation of the basic concept of community-base economic system of *the Kukis*. In other words, 'SAWM' is a socio-agro bias social institution whereas 'LAWM' is basically agro-bias institution.

The 'Chang-Ai' festival of the Kukis speaks volumes of the important part played by the women of the family. It is also indicative of the nature of division of labour. 'Sa-Ai' festival is another such example, because of its association exclusively with a man who claims to have achieved fame and bravery in life. The festivals of 'Chang-Ai' and 'Sa-Ai' also reveal lack of conception of saving in the economic life of the Kukis. Consumption is community oriented, and is, therefore, very conspicuous. The distribution system of the Kukis is based on a certain set pattern of social hierarchy. Giving of the 'Salu', head of the games, brought by an individual villager, to the Chief is the manifestation of the position of the receiver as the head of the village community and also an expression of the giver's attitude of loyalty towards the Chief. Similarly, 'Sating', the topmost portion of a hunted animal, which is carved out of the backbone of the kill, known as the 'Ating-Sa', Spinal Flesh, indicates that the man who receives such a portion of meat from a person is senior to him and is his elder or UPA. The share of TUCHA is taken from the waist portion of the prize, 'Sakong', indicating that the person who receives such meat marries a woman from the ego's family or clan or from his exogamous group. It is also indicative of the fact of survival of the system of marriage by service which is called Kong-Lo, i.e. earning the waist of a women. The receiver is 'TUCHA', relative of the giver who is 'SONGGAO' to the former. In the like manner, a man who is a 'Becha' of an ego receives the rib portion, 'Anah', of the hunted animal indicating thereby that the man represents the ego. The rib is closest to the heart of the animal and, therefore, it is meant that the man who receives the 'rib' portion is the closest to the man who gives him the rib portion.

Similarly, among the Thadous and their cognates, 'SANGONG', the neck portion of the animal killed is given to the SONGGAO, mother's brother. Though it is the chest portion, called SA-AWM, given to the SONGGAO relative among the Gangte and Vaiphei Tribes.

A door-to-door study of some villages by participant observation covering 236 families, substantiated with case history reveals various life-style of the Kukis. Some of the genealogies clearly show how they have adhered to their traditional systems, and, also, in many ways, deviated from them. These are very helpful in analysing their social system. This study is expected to enhance a great deal of new knowledge in the social systems operating in the life of the Kukis of Manipur in North-East India.

CHAPTER 2

FACTS AND FABLES

I Origin

The origin of this group of people is shrouded with myths and mythologies. One of such was the traditional accounts that had been handed down through generations in that the Kukis came out of the bowels of the earth or a cave called Chinlung or Sinlung or Khul, the location of which was believed by some to be somewhere in China. But others claimed it to be in Tibet (Ginzatuang, 1973 : 5).

McCulloch (1959:55) contended that the Kukis were known as Khongjai also in Manipur, and that they :

... bring their progenitors from the bowels of the earth, and they relate the manner of their reaching its surface thus : One day their King's brother was hunting hedgehogs, when his dog in pursuit of one, entered a cavern, and he waiting for its return remained at the mouth. After lapse of sometime, the dog not having returned, its master determined to go in and see what had become of it. He did not find the dog, but observing its tracks and following them, she found himself suddenly on the surface of the earth. The scene presented to his view both pleased and astonished him. Returning to his brother, he related about his adventure, and counselled him to annex the new country to his territory, which the king did.

By way of explanation of their amalgamation with the tribes who speak different languages, they relate :

... the three grandsons of the chief, while one day all playing together in their house, were told by their father to catch a rat. They

were busy about it when, being suddenly struck with a confusion of tongues, they were unable to achieve their object. The eldest son spoke the Lamyang, the Second the Thado, the third, some say, the Vaiphei and some the Manipore language. Thus, they broke into distinct tribes.

Shaw (1929:24) had his own version of the origin of the Kukis which he recorded from the collected verbal information as follows :

The story of their origin is that they used to live under the earth, or rather inside it. Noimangpa was the Chief of this subterranean region. One Chongthu, a relative of Noimangpa, went a hunting porcupines in the jungle with his dog and discovered a large hole. He perceived through this that the upper crust of the earth was un-inhabited and there was a great darkness. This darkness, which lasted for seven days and seven nights is called "Thimzin" by the Thádous. Chongthu so rejoiced at this discovery that he gave up his hunt and went back to his house. He conjured up ideas of forming a village of his own on the earth and planned accordingly. Just about then, Noimangpa, the Chief of the underworld was performing the 'Chon' festival in which everyone had to attend, including Chongja, elder brother of Chongthu. Noimangpa's son, Chonkim, was also present. During this feast Chongthu started waving his sharp sword so vigorously that he injured some of the folks present, at which all became angered. This action of Chongthu was premeditated as he thought that by doing so he would be turned out from the underworld and thus have an excuse for going out to the upperworld and forming a village of his own. The news of Chongthu's behaviour became known to Noimangpa who said : *Chongthu had better live in Heaven*, meaning thereby that he better be killed. Chongthu hearing of Noimangpa's wrath at once prepared to migrate out of the hole in the earth which he saw and which is spoken of as 'Khul' by the Thadous. So, Chongja and Chongthu killed many pigs, fowls, etc. and feasted in preparation for their departure.

There are many more stories about it. The above story further relates that somehow Chongja's party was delayed, but Chongthu's party moved on followed by Chongthu himself. On reaching the 'Khul', the leaders found that a great snake called Gulheipi was in possession of it and when they endeavored to pass over it, the snake killed them with its tail. Chongthu, on reaching the spot, was not to be thwarted in his ambition. He tied his cloth around him and placed a Phoipi, a thick cotton cloth,

over his head and attacked the great snake which he cut into seven pieces. At the same time, a Lhaw, a lion also attempted to block the way of Chongthu's egress. The lion withdrew and Chongthu's party moved upto the 'Khul'. They found that it was covered with a stone and one of Chongthu's party, called Vangalpa, lifted it up. While he could do so, only seven persons were able to get out and then the stone dropped and all further attempts to raise it ended in a fiasco. The seven persons who thus emerged were Chongthu, Vangalpa, the stone-lifter, Khupngam, the keeper of the dog, and four others whose names are not known. These four persons are said to be the progenitors of the Manipuri, the Naga, the foreigner and the Burmese. However, they are not definite about the last three although they are quite emphatic about the number being seven.

In the genealogical tree from Chongthu to Thadou, the persons are mythical and, therefore, when festivities entailing repetition of the genealogical tree of the Thadous became necessary, the Thempu starts from Thadou and not from Chongthu.

Further, from Chongthu to Thadou there were no different languages, and animals and spirits, as well as the mythical ancestors lived in peaceful co-existence.

The hole in the earth called 'Khul' is said to be at the source of the 'Gun' river which seems to be identical with the Imphal river in Manipur State. Etymologically, the word 'Gun' in the Thadou means the 'Imphal river'. In all the stories and legends of the Thadous, the river 'Gun' is frequently mentioned and is of great fame (Shaw, 1929:24-26).

Hutton (1929:14) said:

.... the story of Thimzin with slight variation is found in Shakespear's Lushai-Kuki clans, Chapter V, Mills'-The Ao Nagas, p.314. The Lhota Nagas, pp 176, 193. Molola, in *Man in India*, 11,100 had similar story of the Chang Nagas, and versions are found among the Hos and Santals of Bengal, the Shans, and the Ami of Formosa, while similar stories pervade the Indian Archipelago generally in Frazer's Folk-lore in the Old Testament, I, iv, which said that the Thadou version of Thimzin story is- "he knew of was that" ...the great darkness was preceded by fire and accompanied by flood, and it was this flood which drove the ancestors of the Thado proper to take refuge in the hills, where they found Lenthang, whom they forbore to kill as he, and his, knew the gods of the country : accordingly, it was Lenthang who

caused a white cock detainer of the sun to come and look, whereby the sun escaped and came out again restoring light to the darkened world.

The story is obviously suggestive of a separate racial origin for the Thadou proper, the Changsan and allied clans, who presumably were in occupation when the Thadou arrived in the hills. Hutton further contended that such cultural diversion of the Kuki affinity was found in Naga Hills among the Sema tribe who "speaks a Naga language which is something of a 'pidgin type', lacking the inclusive and exclusive duals and plurals and similar subtleties of most Naga languages". It has a political system turning on an automatic secular chief, with followers, who are houseguards, serfs or similarly bound retainers, known as 'Mughemi' (literally, Orphans). It has other cultural items strongly suggestive of Kuki affinities and has lost the institution of the bachelor's house. It lacks in for the most part the sentiment which binds most Naga villagers so strongly to some particular site, or at least to stones, earth or water brought from that site.

II Migration

It was generally believed that the Kukis came out of China during the reign of Chinese Emperor Chinglung or Chie'nlung, around 200 B.C. Zawla (1976 :2), a Mizo historian, claimed that the Kukis came out of the Great Wall of China in about 225 B.C., during the reign of Shih Hungti whose cruelty was then at its height. A number of other theories have been advanced in this connection. But in the absence of any written corroboration of existence of historical evidence to support them, such hypothetical theories are considered as highly subjective and conjectural. These are, therefore, taken with a pinch of salt. They remained only as legends.

Nevertheless, Enriquez (1932:7-8) was emphatic in his claim, in that : he thought he had ample scientific data at his command to prove that Mongolian races, who now occupy South-East Asia, and also the North-East India, originated from the Western China lying between the sources of the Yangtze and the Hoang-Ho rivers, and migrated in three waves as follows :

1. The Mon-Khmer (Talaing, Pa Lung, En Riang, Ma, Pale, Khais and Annimite) which included Khasis.
2. The Tibeto-Burman comprising Pyu-Burmese-Kachin, Kuki-Chin and Lolo :

3. The Tai-Chinese which included Shan, Siamese and Karen.

The route-chart of the Mon-Khmer group was that they followed the Mekong valley towards South into Campuchea and Thailand until they reached Burma wherefrom some of them went further Westward upto Bay of Bengal and then turned towards North. It is believed that the Khasis are the remnants of the Mon-Khmer group.

The Tibeto-Burman group initially moved towards the West and thereafter subdivided themselves into several groups. They followed different routes, one group reaching Tibet on the North where some of them stayed behind, while others moved on Northwards until they reached Burma in three waves. These people were the Kuki-chin and the Pyu-Burmese-Kachin groups. While the latter stuck to this place, the Kuki-Chin group moved further towards South-West following the Irrawady and the Chindwin rivers and continued to do so till they reached the shores of the Bay of Bengal. From here they turned back North and eventually fanned out along the mountains down the whole length and breadth of the hilly region, on either side of the existing Indo Burma boundary lines. Thus, when the British came here in the eighteenth century, they found the groups scattered about, and the British officers started keeping records of the various clans or groups of Kukis at different places wherever they were found to have settled.

Hutton (1929) in one of his monographs described the migratory routes of the Kukis in a lucid manner, and was more specific in regard to the scattered settlements of the Kukis.

For a very long time the Kuki-Chin groups of tribes, pressed from behind Kachins moving Southwards from Chins, and been migrating down the course of the Chindwin River, and some turned back perhaps by the Bay of Bengal, had then moved slowly North-West and North wards again, driving out or incorporating previous inhabitants of what are now parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan, the Chin Hills of Burma, the Lushai Hills of Assam, parts of the areas of Manipur State of the North Cachar Hills and the South of the Naga Hills.

Lehman (1963 :11) observed :

History shows, however, that both hills and plains peoples have moved about within the general region of South-West China and

South-East Asia over considerable distances for many centuries until the recent past.

III

Speaking further about the Kukis, different scholars and British administrators unanimously described them as belonging to the Mongolian stock, but they did not specify to which particular Mongolian group they belonged. While Yule (1855), Col. Phayre (1866) and Mc. Cabe concluded that the Kukis belonged to the Indo-Chinese family, Captain Forbes and Dr. Grierson differed and called them as a part of Tibeto-Burman group. Taw Sien Kho, a Burmese lecturer at Cambridge classified the Kukis as Turanean (Carey & Tuck, 1932:2) which included the Chinese, Manchus, Japanese, Annamese, Sianese, Burmese, Turks, etc. and further said that their habitat included the whole of North Eastern India before the Aryan conquest.

Regarding the term 'Kuki', which denotes a particular type of people, Lieut. Col. Reid (1893 :5) said :

Previous to the expedition of 1871-72 the wild tribes, which had been in the habit of raiding our North-Eastern Frontier, were generally spoken of as 'Kukis', a Bengali word meaning hillmen or highlanders. The word was originally applied to the tribe or tribes occupying the tract immediately to the South of Cachar. It is now employed, in a comprehensive sense, to indicate all those living to the West of the Kaladyne river, while those to the West are designated Shendus. On the other hand, to anyone approaching them from the Burma side the Shendus would be known as China, ... of Col Woodthorpe, synonymous with Khyen and pronounced as 'Chin'.¹

He further propounded that the Chins called themselves as 'Lai'. Considering their distinctive characteristics in dress and dialects, there can be little doubt that the Chins, the Kukis, the Lushais, and the various tribes are practically of one and the same race and were included under the term 'Kuki' since the days of Warren Hastings. It is further learnt that their first attack against the British and their subjects dated as far back as 1777. "When the Chief of Chittagong a district which had been ceded to the British under Clive by Mir Kasim in 1760, applied for a detachment

1. It may be noted that in Burmese a combination of alphabets 'Kh' is pronounced as 'CH'

of sepoy to protect the inhabitants against the incursions of the Kukis as they were then called" (Reid, 1893 :6-7).

Lalthangliana (1975:69) claimed that the word 'Chin' in Burma was synonymous to the word 'Kuki' and 'Mizo' in India. He further contended that though the reason was not known, the Burmese called the people living in the North-West Burma and the North- East India as 'Chin'. In explaining the reason why the Burmese called the Kukis as Chins he inferred:

Perhaps they were always found carrying on their backs bamboo baskets called Chin by the Burmese. But this particular Burmese word also means friendship and by a stress of imagination one could say that once these two people live very closely together. Since there were relations not pertaining strictly to friendliness, I think the explanation "Man with the basket" is most reasonable.

Captain Lewin (1970:130) said that on the Chittagong side the Kukis were described as:

... men who live far in the interior parts of the hills, and have not the use of fire arms, and whose bodies go unclothed.

Later, when he became the Deputy Commissioner of Hill Tracts in 1870, he described :

The Loosei, commonly called the Kookies, are a powerful and independent people, who touch the borders of Chittagong Hill Tracts. They extend in numberless hardes in North and North-East, until they reach Cachar on the one hand, and the frontiers of Burma on the other, ... They are known to the Bengalees by the name of Kookie, and the Burmese as the Lankhe.

Col. Dalton (1872 :44), Commissioner, Chutis Nagpur (Chotanagpur) and a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in 1872, said that the Kukis were first known from an article which appeared in the Asiatic Researcher's journal, volume VII, 1799 contributed by Superintendent McCres wherein he described the Kukis as :

... a nation of hunters and warriors, rules as a nation by their principal hereditary chiefs or rajahs, but divided into clans, each under its own chiefs.

Soppit (1893 :2), who was Assistant Commissioner, Burma and later Sub-Divisional officer, North Cachar Hills, Assam, in his study of the Lushai Kukis remarked :

The designation of 'Kuki' is never used by the tribes themselves, though many of them answer to it when addressed, from knowing it to be the Bengali or plains term for their people.

Lt. Col. Shakespear (1912 :Pt.I,7), who was one of the authorities on the Kukis, said that the term 'Kuki'

... has come to have a fairly definite meaning, and we now understand by it certain closely allied clans, with well marked characteristics, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman stock. On the Chittagong border, the term is loosely applied to most of the inhabitants of the interior hills beyond the Chittagong Hill Tracts; in Cachar it generally means some family of Thado or Khawtlang clan, locally distinguished as new Kuki and old Kuki. Now-a-days, the term is hardly ever employed, having been superseded by Lushai, in the Chin Hills and generally on the Burma border all these clans are called Chins... that these Kukis are also closely allied to the 'Chukmahs', and that the Lushais are more closely allied to the Chiru, Kom, Khawtlang families and are also related to their eastern neighbours who are known as Chins.

He concluded by saying :

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Kukis, Chins and Lushais are all of the same race.

Meerwarth (1919 :29), a noted Ethnologist from Russia, while giving an instructive illustration on the civilisation of the tribes in his comprehensive work on the Andamanese, Nicobarese and Hill Tribes of Assam, observed :

... under the term 'Kuki' we comprise a great number of clans ... the most important of which are those which inhabit the mountain ranges known as the Lushai Hills.

Both by language and race they are closely connected with their Eastern neighbours, the Chins, and form a part of the Tibeto-Burman family. There is no doubt also that the Manipuris are closely related to them.

Carey and Tuck (1932 :2) while dealing with the Chin tribes of Burma said :

Without pretending to speak with authorities on the subjects, we think we may reasonably accept the theory that the Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam, and the Chins, originally lived in what is now known as Tibet and are of one and the same stock; their form of government, method of collection, manners and customs, beliefs and traditions, all point to one origin.

Hutton (1928 :24) while describing on the work of Shaw on the Thadou Kukis said that the origin of the word Kuki is not known, "but it first appeared in 'Bengal'," in the *Asiatic Researcher* journal, Vol.II, 1872. Likewise, Maj. Gen. Sir Johnstone (1971 :25), the then Political Agent, Manipur, gave his findings from a different angle wherein he observed :

The Kukis are a wandering race consisting of several tribes who have long been walking up from the south. They were first heard of as Kukis, in Manipur, between 1830 and 1840.

Shaw (1929 :16), a Civil Servant, whose work on the Thadou Kukis became the most controversial one that led to the disintegration of the Kukis in modern day stated :

The Koms, Aimols, Khawtlangs, Thadous, Lushais, Chins, Pois, Siktes, Paites, Gangtes, etc. are undoubtedly all connected and are Kukis, and that the language alone has many similarities and the syntax is not dissimilar. Again, there are their customs which have a common principle running through them all.

Majumdar (1944 :127), in dealing with the cultures of India concluded that the Lushais are Kukis and are of Mongoloid stock. He also recorded:

The Kukis are known by various clan names. Those of the North Cachar Hills are called Biete Kukis and Khelma Kukis. To the North of the Lushai range in the forest-clad hills dwell the Darlung.

IV Where the Kukis Settled :

It has been amply described in the foregoing section as to who are the 'Kukis'. It is now to be ascertained where they settled or are living presently. Captain Pemberton (1835 :15), Joint Commissioner in Manipur in his report on the Eastern Frontiers of British India wrote ;

... The Khongjuees, who under the more generally known names of Kookies, Koo-chungs and Kuci, stretch from the Southern borders of the Muneepoor valley to the Northern limit of the province of Arracan, ... that the Kookies have been gradually advancing for years in a northerly direction, and have hitherto established themselves on the ranges which are originally occupied by more northerly tribes or committed such fearful aggressions upon the latter, as to compel them to retire and leave an unoccupied tract between themselves and these formidable opponents.

In this connection Dalton (1872 :44) observed :

... The Kukis are now found as neighbours of the Nagas in Assam and in contiguity with the Mugs of Arracan. The hill country occupied by them extends from the valley of the Koladyne, where it touches on the Khumis, to Northern Cachar and Manipur, a distance of about 300 miles.

But studying the Kukis, from their experience, mainly in Burma, in the Chin Hills, Carey and Tuch (1932 :2) remarked :

As far as the Chins are concerned, we know from our own experience, that the drift of migration has changed and is now towards the North, The Nwite (Gwite), Vaiphe (Vaiphei), and Yo (Zou) Chins, who within the memory of men resided in the Northern Chin Hills, have now almost entirely recrossed the Northern border, either into the hills belonging to Manipur or to the South of Cachar and their old village sites are now being occupied by the Kanhow (Kamhow) clan of Sakte Chins, which also is steadily moving Northwards.

Maj. Gen. Johnstone (1871 :25) said :

The Kukis were now immigrants and were believed to have caused a great deal of anxiety about the year 1845, and soon poured

into the hill tracts of Manipur in such number as to drive away many of the older inhabitants.

Col. McCullah (1859 :55), the then Political Agent, Manipur, prior to Sir Johnstone, whom the later described as a tactful and generous officer and who often went out of his way to help the Kukis at his own expense said :

The Khongjais or Kookis until lately occupied the hills to the South of the Koupooes (Kabuis). Whilst in this position, little or nothing of them was known, but they caused fear from their numbers and the bloody attacks they sometimes made upon their neighbours.

Similarly, Shaw (1929 : 11) found that the Kukis of Manipur as having lived :

.... in a large area of hilly country bounded by the Angami Nagas of Naga Hills District in the North, the Province of Burma in the East, the Chin Hills and Lushai Hills in the South and the District of Cachar in the West. Mainly, it may be said, they occupy the Hills of the State of Manipur on all sides of Imphal valley.

Meerwarth (1919 :29) in his study on the Andamanese, Nicobarese and Hill Tribes of Assam observed that the Kukis occupied :

... hill ranges South of the Naga Hills. Their neighbours to the North are the Nagas and the Manipuris, to the East the tribes of the 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 Sylhet and the hills of North Cachar.

He went on to remark :

The Kukis are very migratory, and their settlement can be found dispersed among other tribes, such as, the Nagas, the Cacharies etc. They are split up into a great number of tribes.

Majumdar (1944 : 127) demonstrated that the Kuki Chiefs :

... rule over the country between the Karnafuli river and its main tributary, Tuilampai, on the West, and the Tyao and the Koladyne rivers on the East. While their Southern boundary is roughly a line

drawn East and West through the junction of the Mat and Koladyne rivers and their most Northerly villages, are found on the borders of the Silchar district. The Lushai and others with distinct Lushai affiliates are found scattered over wide areas : they are found in the Southern borders of Sylhet, in Tipperah and in the North of the Cachar Hills, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts also contain some Lushai villages.

V Disintegrated Kukis

From the facts stated above we have an idea about the Kukis, their origin and where they live in. With the advent of Indian Independence, however, the situation has taken a sea- change among the Kukis and nobody can differentiate for sure between a Kuki and a Manipuri. These people have now become more politically conscious and socially sensitive. The new Constitution of India ensures an individual the right to equal opportunity for all citizens, along with all other fundamental rights etc. with special provision for safeguarding the interest of the Backward classes, including the people who have been listed as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Thus, in accordance with the Notification of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, published in the Extra -Ordinary Gazette of India, there are 29 recognised tribes in Manipur. But not a group designated as 'Kuki' is listed there. Therefore, in so far as official matters are concerned, after the publication of the above mentioned orders of the Government of India, no tribe could be referred to officially as 'Kuki' in Manipur, nor, the nomenclature 'Kuki' is recognised for all practical purposes.

It may be said here and now that the Kukis were the monarch in the hills surrounding the valley of Imphal and their relationship with the Raja of Manipur till the outbreak of Anglo- Kuki war in 1917 was one of mutual respect and understanding on equal terms which was well depicted by Hutton (1928 :3) in the following words :

.... the administration in the hill areas of Manipur State is not very close, and ... as they (Kuki) were ruled by their own organised chiefs and treated as they had been in the past, at any rate, by the Manipur State as allies

All the same, the contribution of the Kukis, who were hand in gloves with Juvaraj Tikendrajit Singh, in the uprising of 1891, was great. The

changes brought about by the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-19, formed a watershed for modern Manipur with a permanent territory that still exists. Their virtue of sacrificial spirit probably prompted them to join the Indian National Army in hundreds in response to the call given by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose of the INA. They were a gallant and martial lot who, among the people of the North-East India, could challenge the invincible power of the British empire then.

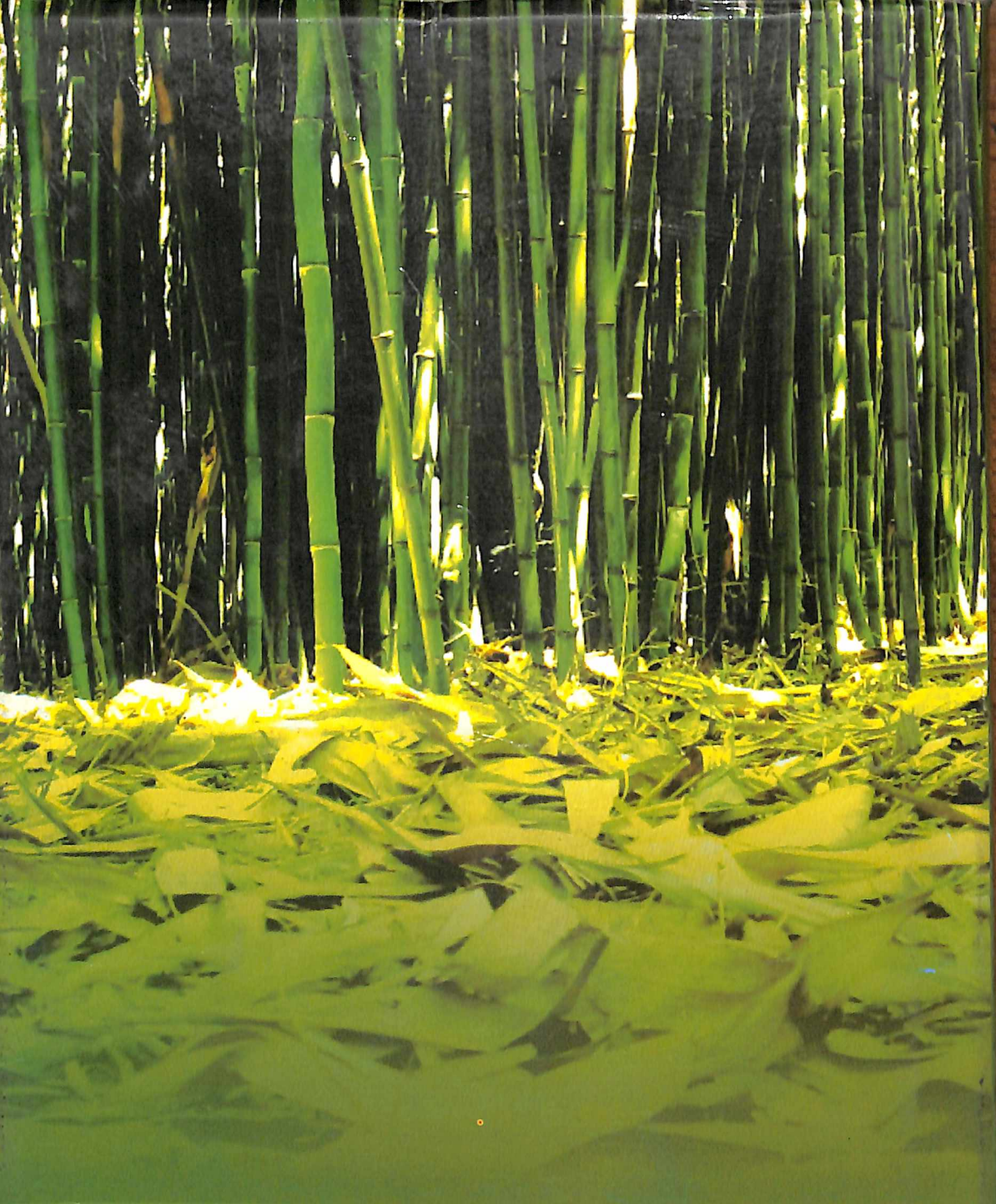
But, alas, those glorious days of the Kukis are gone, and gone with them are the existence of these brave tribesmen now. The main factor leading to their extinction was political. The class composition of the Kukis and their political organisation were so independent of each other that the Kukis were obsessed with the idea of inter-clan rivalries, being helped and fomented by the designing political organisation. As a consequence, despite their being one and the same, clan-rivalries for supremacy over each other strained their relationship. But such polemic could not raise its ugly head during the British administration which recognised the Kuki Chieftainship and administered the hill people through these efficient functionaries. However, after Independence of India, when the public in general had become conscious of the modern political trend that espoused the principles of democracy, the inherent but hitherto latent clan-rivalries began to manifest themselves among the Kukis with the result that the process of their disintegration came to a head. This process occurred in quick succession among the Kukis.

Another important factor leading to this disintegration was social which was inextricably inter-twined with the political factor mentioned above. According to their culture and tradition, the social system of the Kukis' was so segmentary that every individual was made consciously aware that he or she belonged to a particular clan or sub-clan. Thus, a Kuki cannot be free from such idiosyncrasy, be an educated person or not. Obviously, this became a fertile breeding-ground for discontentment, competition, jealousy, hatred, factionalism, etc. When afterwards, the Government of India started preparing the list of Scheduled Tribes in Manipur, every imaginable group or clan aspired to get the recognition by inclusion in the list as a separate tribe. In the process, no one appeared to have claimed, consciously or unconsciously, to belong to the Kuki tribe and, as a result, no Kuki as such had been Scheduled in Manipur. Surprisingly, however, in Meghalaya, Assam and Mizoram, there are

Kukis² who have been included in the recognised list of Scheduled Tribes.

Despite the terminology 'Kuki' having not been scheduled listed in Manipur, the same is being employed for the purpose of this work, meaning thereby the people who claim to belong to the 'Chin', 'Kuki' and 'Mizo' groups.

2. Fourth Schedule Section 26(1) of the Amendments to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 Part XIV for Manipur and Part XV for Meghalaya as amended under clause (b) of section 2 of the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971 and under the fifth Schedule Section 26(2) of the amendments to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Union Territories Order 1951 as amended under clause (b) of Section 2 of the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971, Part II- Mizoram.



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