

TRIBE, CLASS, STATUS AND POWER: DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND CHANGE AMONG THE KUKIS IN MANIPUR

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Tribe, Class, Status and Power: Dynamics of Social Stratification and Change among the Kukis in Manipur**” is the result of research work carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr. Ngamjahao Kipgen. The present thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted in whole or in part to any other university/institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Tribe, Class, Status and Power: Dynamics of Social Stratification and Change among the Kukis in Manipur**” submitted by Savio Hollienthang Touthang, Roll No. 146141015, for the award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, embody bonafide record of research work carried out under my supervision. It is the result of his investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati
September 2020

Ngamjahao Kipgen
Supervisor

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Abstract

Tribal societies are often described as having collective conscience and representations, group solidarity, communal ownership of property and egalitarianism, thereby maintaining social equality rather than social inequality and differentiation. Such a depiction of tribal society is a clear indication of a lack of understanding of the existing social structure prevalent among the tribals that deviates from the reality. No doubt, social relationship is determined by a strong sense of collective consciousness and based on kinships relations. In this context, the present study is an attempt to bring out the fact that social inequality or differentiation has been part and parcel of the Kuki tribal society, even in the traditional past. Existing scholarship hardly addresses social inequality resulting from such differentiation in status, economic endowments and power relations. A thorough examination of tribal community like the Kuki tribe depicts that differences operate in the economy, social and political milieus. Perhaps, the overemphasis in portraying tribals as an egalitarian community may purposefully lead to overlook the presence of social stratification based on class, status and power.

This study also attempts to contest the general understanding that tribal society is perceived to be static or unchanging. The colonial encounter, Christian missionaries, modernisation processes, Western education and inroads of market economy have influenced tribal societies in Northeast India and the Kukis are no exception to this. To what extent has change or modernisation process influenced the overall social structure of the community particularly in transforming the social values and ways of life? The study argues that social stratification is not a new phenomenon for the Kukis rather it is as old as the traditional and customary practices themselves. Tribe in general and the Kuki in particular though decorated with the concept of egalitarianism is rather debatable, be it in the past traditional social setting or in the present modern domain. In fact, social stratification based on status, power and class is the core social reality of the community and the backbone of the system through which the social system operates. However, the significance and inevitability of social stratification has been neglected as in the case of studying the Kukis where the existing social stratification and inequality are suppressed while synonymously labelling it as to egalitarian community. Based on historical-sociological perspectives, the thesis foregrounds the problematic of social stratification and change in terms of tribe, class, status and power.

CONTENTS

Contents	Page No.
Declaration	
Certificate	
Acknowledgments	
Abstract	
List of Plates	v
List of Maps	vi
List of Tables	vi
Glossary (Thadou-Kuki to English)	viii
Abbreviations	xv
I. Chapter 1 – Introduction	1-31
1.1 Background to the Study	
1.2 Review of Literature	
1.2.1 Social Change	
1.2.2 Social Change and Middle Class	
1.2.3 Social Stratification	
1.2.4 Class and Social Inequality	
1.2.5 Social Stratification among the Tribals in India	
1.2.6 On the Kukis	
1.3 Research Gaps	
1.4 Rationale for the Study	
1.5 Research Questions	
1.6 Objectives of the Study	
1.7 Methodology	
1.8 Introducing the Field	
II. Chapter 2 – Ethnohistory of the Kukis: Origin, Socio-Cultures and Economic Organisation	32-57
2.1 Etymology of the Term ‘Kuki’	
2.2 Theories of Origin	
2.2.1 Creation Theory	
2.2.2 <i>Khul</i> Theory	
2.2.3 <i>Chhinglung/Sinlung</i> Theory	
2.2.4 Israel/Jewish Theory	

- 2.3 Settlement
- 2.4 Social Organisation
 - 2.4.1 Family
 - 2.4.2 Kinship
 - 2.4.3 Marriage
- 2.5 Dresses
- 2.6 Economic Organisation
 - 2.6.1 Work Culture
 - 2.6.2 *Lom* (Corporate Labour Corps)
 - 2.6.3 *Som* (Bachelors Dormitory)
- 2.7 Mores and Values
 - 2.7.1 *Khankho*
 - 2.7.2 Ethos of Communitarianism

III. Chapter 3 – Colonialism, Christianity and Social Change among the Kukis 33-91

- 3.1 Evangelisation and Colonialism
- 3.2 Missionisation Process
 - 3.2.1 Attitude on Native Religion
- 3.3 Implications of Mission(aries)/Colonialists on Kuki Culture and Traditions
 - 3.3.1 Missionary Ethos and Discourse
 - 3.3.2 Traditional and Customary Values and Practices
 - 3.3.3 Headhunting
- 3.4 Chieftainship and Colonial Missionary
- 3.5 Impact on the Youth
- 3.6 Impact of Western Education
- 3.7 Tradition and Modernity
- 3.8 Perceptions on Impact of Change on Religion
- 3.9 Women Status and Position

IV. Chapter 4 – Status, Wealth and Prestige in the Traditional Domain and Modern Context 92-127

- 4.1 ‘Feasting’ in Feast of Merit
- 4.2 Meriting the Feast of Merit
- 4.3 Cultural Context of the Feast of Merit
- 4.4 Types of Feast of Merit
 - 4.4.1 *Chang-Ai*
 - 4.4.2 *Sa-Ai*
 - 4.4.3 *Gal-Ai*
 - 4.4.4 *Chon*
- 4.5 Feasts of Merit in the Modern Context
 - 4.5.1 *Kipana Maicham* (Thanks Giving Ceremony)
 - 4.5.2 *Jaila-Ai* of Ncy DOUNgel
 - 4.5.3 Materiality of Weddings: Markers of Status and Power

V.	Chapter 5 – Political Structure, Stratification and the Dynamics of Power Relations	128-168
5.1	Chieftainship System	
5.2	Power and Functions of the Chief	
5.3	Village Administration and its Functionaries	
5.3.1	<i>Semang</i> (Village Council Members)	
5.3.2	<i>Pachong</i> (Head of Defence)	
5.3.3	<i>Lhangsam</i> (Village Crier)	
5.3.4	<i>Thempu</i> (Village Priest)	
5.3.5	<i>Thih-Khengpa</i> (Village Smithy)	
5.4	Importance of the Institution of Chieftainship	
5.5	Locating the Institution of Chieftainship in Modern Context	
5.6	Law of Inheritance	
5.7	Decline of Traditional Authority in Urban Setting	
5.8	Land-Power Relations	
5.9	Land Use System	
5.10	Case Study in Teiseng Village	
5.10.1	Kinship and Power Relations	
5.11	Case Study in Bijang Village	
5.12	Landholding Pattern and Power Relations	
5.13	Evolution of Power System	
VI.	Chapter 6 – Locating Class and Social Inequality in Rural and Urban Settings in Manipur	169-222
6.1	Social Inequality	
6.2	Emergence of Tribal Middle Class in Manipur	
6.3	Locating the Middle Class in Kuki Society	
6.4	Kuki Village	
6.5	Factors Contributing to Social Inequality	
6.5.1	Occupation	
6.5.2	Material Well-Being	
6.5.3	Educational Qualifications	
6.6	Comparing Rural and Urban Settlement	
6.7	Teiseng Village (Rural Settings)	
6.7.1	Occupation	
6.7.2	Housing and Household Assets Owned	
6.7.3	Commercialization of Crops	
6.7.4	Landless Agricultural Labourer	
6.7.5	Income	
6.8	Bijang Village (Urban Settings)	
6.8.1	Occupation	
6.8.2	Availability of Household Assets	
6.8.3	Land Ownership	

6.9	Comparing Rural and Urban Household Landholdings	
6.9.1	Commercialization of Land	
6.10	Church, Materialism and the Elite/Middle Class	
6.10.1	Economic and Power Relation in the Church	
6.11	Transition from Traditional to Modern Ways of Life	
VII.	Conclusion	223
	Summing Up	
	Overview of the Chapters	
	Limitations of the Study	
	Scope for Future Research	
	Bibliography	131
	Annexures	



List of Plates

Plates	Description	Page No.
1	Display of head of animals as trophies in a Kuki house	104
2	Felicitation of Ncy DOUNGEL in the <i>Jaila-Ai</i> ceremony at Kholmun	117
3	<i>Jaila Ai</i> ceremony in full swing	118
4	Various timeless singers in the <i>Jaila-Ai</i> ceremony	118
5	Exquisite hall decor by the wedding planner	119
6	A luxurious wedding hall decoration	120
7a & 7b	Western culture wedding dresses in Christian marriage	122
8	Land ownership certificate	163
9	Expensive pucca building, Bijang village	164
10	Bungalow building, Bijang village	165
11	Pitiable condition of the road in Teiseng village	188
12	Goods carrier truck used for transportation by the villagers of Teiseng	188
13	People working in the stone quarry site in Teiseng village	189
14	Mustard leaves and maize from the jhum field	190
15	Pumpkins from the jhum field	190
16	House made of thatch and bamboo in Teiseng village	192
17	Tin roof with bricked wall, residence of Teiseng village Chief	193
18	Tin roof with wooden wall in Teiseng village	193
19	A vehicle owned by a Teiseng household	195
20	Pucca building in Bijang village	201
21	Tin roof with bricked wall in Bijang village	202
22	Tin roof with wooden wall in Bijang village	202
23	Tin roof with mud wall in Bijang village	203
24	Individual land title or ownership certified by the Sub-Divisional Office	204
25	Church building of Evangelical Churches Association (ECA), Bijang	214
26	Church building of Teiseng Assembly of God church	215

List of Maps

Maps	Description	Page No.
1.1	Location of the Study Area	25

List of Tables

Table No.	Description	Page No.
1.1	Distribution of Population in Churachandpur District	24
1.2	Rural-Urban Distribution of Sample Households	26
1.3	Occupational-wise categorisation of respondents	27
1.4	Respondents from the Church workers	27
1.5	List of elite respondents	28
3.1	Impact of change on the traditional and customary practices and etiquettes	70
3.2	Opinion on the general pattern of change of religious practice	84
3.3	Respondents valuation of change in general	87
3.4	The overall women condition in the community	89
5.1	Respondents' view on continuity of primogeniture	131
5.2	Opinion on the impact of change on traditional authority	142
5.3	Competency of chieftainship system in the functioning of village	143
5.4	Manner of village chief exerting power in the village	144
5.5	Power wielders in the contemporary context	166
6.1	Respondents perception towards 'upper class' category	179
6.2	List of occupational choice/preference	181
6.3	Perception towards modern education and indigenous knowledge	185
6.4	Criteria determining elite category	185
6.5	Occupation of head of the household in Teiseng village	191
6.6	Types of house building in Teiseng village	194
6.7	Household assets owned in rural village (Teiseng village)	194
6.8	Landholdings in Teiseng village	197
6.9	Monthly income in Teiseng Village	198
6.10	Occupation in urban setting (Bijang village)	200

6.11	Household assets in urban village (Bijang village)	200
6.12	House building types in urban village (Bijang village)	201
6.13	Household landholding in urban village	206
6.14	Household landholding in rural village	206
6.15	Type of residential landholding in urban village (Bijang village)	207
6.16	Notion of appraising land in the urban context	209
6.17	Does favouritism and preferential treatment exist in the church?	212
6.18	Payment of Tithe to church in urban village (Bijang Village)	213
6.19	Payment of Tithe to church in rural village (Teiseng Village)	214



Glossary (Thadou-Kuki to English)

<i>Ai:</i>	The word 'Ai' in common parlance is translated as a celebration or a ritualistic ceremony over a victory or achievement.
<i>Aw kahinkhuo:</i>	Literally translation 'Oh My life'- One of the famous Kuki melancholy songs composed by Ms. Ncy Doungel.
<i>Becha:</i>	Every family in the Kuki society has practically 'Bepa' or 'Becha', literally 'becha' means relative, often of the same clan; which means household helpers or spokesman of the family. In other words, it is 'an officiating man in one's family'. By extension of the terminology, it can include a wide range of people, including good and reliable friends of non-consanguinal relatives. A person whom an ego considers well, who can go along with him and can stand by him in times of joy and sorrow, may be chosen as a <i>becha</i> relative.
<i>Beng:</i>	Basket.
<i>Chapa-gam:</i>	Barren of son.
<i>Chang-Ai:</i>	Chang' is paddy and 'Ai' is seen as celebration or victory, a ritualistic feast of merits for abundant harvest.
<i>Changseo:</i>	A basket of paddy paid as a tribute to Village chief.
<i>Chempong:</i>	Machete/ Chopper.
<i>Chipeh-inn:</i>	House made of thatch roof and bamboo wall.
<i>Chon:</i>	A ceremony honouring someone for his great deeds or worthy achievements. It is a form of feast of merit ceremony in the Kuki traditional social system.
<i>Chon Bulhit:</i>	One who has fulfilled the norms to host the <i>Chon</i> .
<i>Chongthu:</i>	Chongthu is the mythical progenitor or ancestor believed to be the ruler of the underworld called <i>Nuoigam</i> .
<i>Bondal:</i>	Wrestling.
<i>Becha:</i>	Clan based relative/Kinsman.
<i>Bulpipa:</i>	The senior most in clan lineage.
<i>Doibom:</i>	A Magic basket/case/container.
<i>Chavang:</i>	Autumn/fall.

<i>Chongmou:</i>	A typical marriage based on arrangement or negotiation by parents of both sides (in a esteem and lavish).
<i>Chung Pathien:</i>	God almighty/God above.
<i>Dahpi:</i>	Gong (large).
<i>Dahbu:</i>	Gong (small).
<i>Gaal/gal:</i>	War/ conflict.
<i>Gal-Ai:</i>	Feast of merit performed at the instance of war victory.
<i>Gaal-Lamkai:</i>	General/head in the Chief's army.
<i>Gal-lu-lah:</i>	Capturing the decapitated foe heads.
<i>Gamhoise:</i>	Spirit of the jungle.
<i>Gamlahlen & Gamkao:</i>	Spirits of the jungle that cause serious sickness to persons they meet.
<i>Hailam:</i>	A typical marriage based on arrangement or negotiation by parents of both sides.
<i>Haosa:</i>	Chief.
<i>Hinkhuo Ipi-ham:</i>	Literally translation 'What is life' – A famous Thadou-Kuki melancholy songs composed by Ms. Ncy DOUNGEL.
<i>Indoi:</i>	House magic.
<i>Inmunse:</i>	Evil spirit of the house/ A curse dwelling place.
<i>Haosa Inpi:</i>	The apex body and court of justice in the traditional Thadou-Kuki society where cases were decided and settled as per the traditional customary laws.
<i>Jaila:</i>	Ode/song.
<i>Ji-Daman:</i>	Price for divorce.
<i>Jollha:</i>	Marriage owing to impregnate.
<i>Joumi:</i>	Spirit of densely forested region.
<i>Juphi:</i>	The sprinkling of wine by priest as part of rituals.
<i>Kaomei:</i>	Spirit in the form of a firefly.

<i>Kemchon:</i>	Raise platform (usually make of bamboo).
<i>Khamtang:</i>	Traditional Kuki attire. It is a 'lungi' for women. It is originally black with a striking yellow band at the bottom line pattern with a striking yellow band at the bottom line pattern with a serpentine design. Intricate wearing designs can be seen on their products.
<i>Khankho:</i>	Ethical moral principles of socialization and interaction.
<i>Khichong:</i>	Beaded necklace.
<i>Khomol:</i>	Outskirts of the village uphill area.
<i>Khopel:</i>	Smaller village established within the chiefdom of parent village.
<i>Khul:</i>	Literally, it means bowels of the earth or cave (an enclosure or fortress). A mythical place believes to be where the Kukis originated.
<i>Kom leh heng:</i>	Near and dear ones.
<i>Kulsamnu:</i>	Female spirits believe to be overseeing the soul of a person after death.
<i>Kichen:</i>	Marriage.
<i>Kida:</i>	Divorce.
<i>Kijammang:</i>	Elope.
<i>Kipana Maicham:</i>	Thanks giving ceremony.
<i>Kut:</i>	Harvesting festival.
<i>Laisui:</i>	Cloth given to bride's mother by groom's family as part of the bride price.
<i>Lamka:</i>	Local name for Churachandpur town.
<i>Lamkai:</i>	Leader.
<i>Lamhil:</i>	Guidance.
<i>Lel:</i>	Storing basket.
<i>Lhangnel:</i>	Spirit capable of transforming into a big serpent, a small snake, a wild cock, elk, etc.

<i>Lhangsam:</i>	Village crier.
<i>Lhonglaisat:</i>	Synonymous to the most commonly used word <i>becha</i> .
<i>Lom:</i>	Village labour corps organisations.
<i>Lom-tha-hu:</i>	Rendering voluntary services.
<i>Lompi:</i>	Village labour corps organisations of the grown up.
<i>Longkai:</i>	Haversack.
<i>Lumsong:</i>	Monument stone.
<i>Lutom:</i>	A headgear or turban given to bride's father as part of bride price by the groom's family.
<i>Makai:</i>	Leading/spearheading.
<i>Mangvom:</i>	A Traditional Kuki shawl. Literally, it means a 'black border' in 'Thadou-Kuki' term. The black colour is a sign of royalty. The shawl is meant for a man of royal birth.
<i>Mithikho:</i>	Abode of dead.
<i>Mi-upa:</i>	Eldest brother among sibling.
<i>Man-le-Mol:</i>	Compensation.
<i>Moljo:</i>	Overcome or success.
<i>Mou:</i>	Bride.
<i>Naopa:</i>	Younger brother.
<i>Naopui:</i>	Traditional ceremony of Christening of child.
<i>Neojo:</i>	Younger or smaller.
<i>Nulam-sunggao:</i>	A relation builds on matrimonial and its subsets.
<i>Numei:</i>	Female/Woman/Girl.
<i>Nuoigam:</i>	Subterranean region.
<i>Nuoimangpa:</i>	Ruler/Chief of Subterranean region.
<i>Nupa- tucha:</i>	A relation builds on matrimonial and its subsets.
<i>Pachong:</i>	The office the village council entrusted with responsibility of village defence and security.
<i>Pathen:</i>	God.

<i>Peogal:</i>	Paradise.
<i>Pipa:</i>	The senior most in clan lineage.
<i>Pon:</i>	Clothes.
<i>Puhou–Pa hou:</i>	Literally ‘ <i>Puhou</i> ’ mean Worshipped by the grandfather, ‘ <i>pahou</i> ’ worshipped by the father. It refers to the God or Deity worshipped by the ancestors or the ancestor belief system.
<i>Sa-Ai:</i>	Feast of merit performed by decorated hunter.
<i>Sadawt:</i>	Felicitations in honour of the great warrior and hunters.
<i>Sahapsat:</i> (<i>Sa-haapsa</i>)	A typical marriage based on arrangement or negotiation by parents of both sides.
<i>Sagol Kengkhai:</i>	Kuki traditional dance.
<i>Saipi Khupsuh:</i>	Kuki traditional dance.
<i>Saipikhup:</i>	Kuki Traditional cloth. Literally, it means ‘elephant’s knee’ in ‘Thadou-Kuki’ term because of its design on both the edge. The design is said to have been acquired during their wandering in the south East Asian forests, where they encountered herds of elephants.
<i>Semang:</i>	A very important official position in the village council to whom many official duties of the chief is also entrusted. Ideally a person from the minor clan in the village is given this position, as way of maintaining goodwill among all clan in the village.
<i>Semang Pachong:</i>	Council of village elder/ village council.
<i>Shongmol:</i>	Spirit stones.
<i>Siel:</i>	The Asian wild ox (<i>Bos frontalis</i>), popularly known as <i>Siel/Sel</i> among the Kukis. It is a semi-domestic animal, a prized possession for its utility in major ceremonial sacrifices and festive occasions.
<i>Siel-kal:</i>	A high jump competition where mithun is jumper over as demonstration of strength and agility.
<i>Siel buon-chou:</i>	Wrestling Mithun.
<i>Selkhom:</i>	Posts where mithun is tightened.
<i>Seldinglauh:</i>	Felling of mithun with blow or piercing.

<i>selding kilhu teitei:</i>	A must striking-down of mithun.
<i>Siel-todal:</i>	Chasing mithun.
<i>Singlung:</i>	Mythical place (cave) believes to be origin of the Kukis.
<i>Solle:</i>	Errand.
<i>Sollham:</i>	A preliminary ceremony performed before the actual performing of feast of merit ceremony is entitled.
<i>Som:</i>	Bachelor's dormitory.
<i>Som-Upa:</i>	Leader/elder of Bachelor's dormitory.
<i>Songpi:</i>	Rock.
<i>Sumken-Thilken:</i>	Property gifted to daughter at the time of her marriage.
<i>Sunggao:</i>	Bride giver family line.
<i>Sunglho:</i>	A preliminary ceremony performed before the actual performing of feast of merit ceremony is entitled.
<i>suong-inn:</i>	House made of stone.
<i>Thadou:</i>	One of the Clan of Kuki (also claim to be one of the spoken dialects of the Kukis).
<i>Tengcha:</i>	Spear.
<i>Thalpi:</i>	Bow and arrow.
<i>Thangsuo Pon:</i>	A Kuki traditional cloth designed purposely for the merit feast performer.
<i>Thanso:</i>	The term <i>Thanso</i> derived from 'Thang' meaning fame and 'Sho' is outburst. Literally, the word <i>Thanso</i> according to the Kuki terminology is 'outburst of fame'.
<i>Thempu:</i>	Village Priest/ Priest.
<i>Them-thu:</i>	Incantations or Secret magical words.
<i>Them-sha or Thih Kheng-Sha:</i>	Meat-share received by village black smith from village hunters when animals are killed in wild games, as in reciprocity to metal and weaponry service.
<i>Thih-Khengpa:</i>	A Blacksmith.
<i>Thihngang-Meipum:</i>	Muzzle-loading gun.
<i>Thikholmun:</i>	The abode of dead.
<i>Thilbu:</i>	Weaving implement.
<i>Thilhas:</i>	Evil spirits of different types.

<i>Thingpeh/khunlhong</i>	House made of wood.
<i>Tomngaina:</i>	The perseverance and spirit of free service to the community.
<i>Toi:</i>	The term is labelled to man who fail to exhibits or lack the quality of masculinity.
<i>Tolmonglam:</i>	Tip or edge of courtyard or lawn.
<i>Tolso:</i>	A feast of merit.
<i>Tucha:</i>	A small hand Hoe.
<i>Tucha-sunggao:</i>	Relationships build on matrimonial alliances.
<i>Ujok:</i>	Village Chief's Reserve forest (village can forage and collect forest products but prohibited from cutting tree).
<i>Upa:</i>	Elder/ Elder brother.
<i>Upa-Naopa:</i>	Elder-Younger (brother).
<i>Veng:</i>	Locality/colony.
<i>Zu/Ju:</i>	Wine.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full form
ADC	Autonomous District Council
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
KWHRO	Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization
KWU	Kuki Women's Union
MA	Master of Arts
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MDC	Member of District Council
MIL	Major Indian Language
NREGS	National Rural Employment Generation Scheme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Most studies (Risley, 1892; Bailey, 1961; Ghurye, 1963; Elwin, 1964) on tribal societies describe 'tribes' as representing the epitome of undifferentiated and egalitarian form of society. Generally, almost all the studies on the traditional Kuki society depict it as an egalitarian society characterised by social equality rather than by social inequality. Most of the colonial writers and regional scholars maintain that traditional Kuki society was marked by collective conscience and group solidarity. Furthermore, they emphasise that the Kukis are a close-knit homogeneous society with no class differentiation or rank differentiation and with no discrimination. They thus postulate that the traditional Kuki society was characterised by homogeneity and communal ownership of property. The importance of private property and individual ownership of things did not arise. Accordingly, there is social equality rather than social inequality and differentiation.

Such a depiction of traditional Kuki society by different writers whether colonial or regional scholars (Soppitt, 1887; Shakespear, 1912; Shaw, 1929; Vumson, 1986; Ray, 1990; Gangte, 1993,) is a clear indication of their lack of understanding the true picture of social structure prevalent in the Kuki society. Such notion of understanding and perspective depicts serious distortion of true reality. No doubt, social relationship is determined by a strong sense of collective consciousness and based on kinships relations. However, such a fallacious view about the homogeneity of the Kuki and the absence of conflicts, schisms, cleavages, segments and differentiation about the traditional Kuki society requires repudiation. In this context, the present study is an attempt to bring out the fact that social inequality or differentiation based on power, status and prestige has been part and parcel of the Kuki society even in the traditional past.

A thorough examination of tribal community like the Kuki tribe depicts that differences operates in the economy, social and political milieus. Perhaps, the over emphasis in portraying tribals as an egalitarian community may purposefully lead to overlook the presence of social stratification based on class, status and power. Despite of the fact that statuses and powers are based on individual role and position which constitute the Kuki social structure. Tribals have their own unique ways of assigning meanings, values, attachment and

logic in the everyday life activities and action that differs from the ‘non-tribe community’ does not necessarily justify the prevalence of inequality in tribal community as insignificant.

This study attempts to contest the general understanding that tribal society is perceived to be static/unchanging and has the characteristics of communitarianism and egalitarianism. A closer investigation of the Kuki community on the basis of their economy, occupation and power has depicted a different picture that there is a presence of social stratification in both traditional and modern contexts. No doubt, the form of social stratification that existed in the traditional settings has undergone a discontinuous rupture, albeit different from the advance industrial societies.

The colonial encounter, Christian missionaries, modernization processes, inroads of market economy, and various development programmes initiated after India’s independence have influenced tribal societies in Northeast India and the Kukis are no exception to this. Moreover, it is important to note that the Kuki society could not remain unaffected by the exogenous forces, viz. colonialism, Christianity and modernity. To what extent has change or modernization process impacted the overall social structure of the community particularly in transforming the social values and ways of life? For instance, wealth is determined by the possession of goods in the market rather than goods that are traditionally treasured and valued. In recent times, they witness status differentiation on the basis of achievement in regard to education, occupation, income and political power, accumulation of property (including landholdings), wealth and income. Through these variables individual/s derive power within the community’s social structure in determining one’s status and prestige.

Traditional institutions such as *Som* (youth dormitory), *Lom* (corporate labour), *Khankho* (ethical moral principles of socialization and interaction), festival celebrations (such as *Kut*), feast of merit (such as *Ai* and *Chon*), traditional governance (under Chieftainship) and customary laws are replaced/modified and put into oblivion today. Despite the ethos and values are sustained, the mode of practicing in the everyday life indicates more of economic concern. In other words, the manner of traditional and customary practices is aggrandised so as to display one’s economic position (class/status) also to insinuate access to social influence (power), rather than for the sake of maintaining the communitarian life. Because one’s social status is evaluated primarily based on economic, occupation and income, while the traditional statuses or sanctioning are conceived as secondary attribution.

Moreover, the study attempts to argue that social stratification is not a new social phenomenon for the Kukis rather it is as old as the tradition and customs since it came into being. On the one hand, with the experience of social change or the permeating process of

modernisation, factors in asserting strata and power predominantly featured modern elements and values. On the other hand, instead of being obliterated, traditional elements resort to the process of modernisation to sustain the core value of tradition and customs. Therefore, tribe in general and the Kuki in particular though decorated with the concept of egalitarianism is rather debatable, be it in the past traditional social setting or in the present modern domain.

The main sociological concepts used in the thesis pertain to social change, social stratification, social inequality, class, status and power.

1.2 Review of Literature

1.2.1 Social Change

In Durkheimian sense, society is a composite product of more than the sum of its parts, including human beings (Durkheim, 1982 [1895]). Human constituted society and by nature man is dynamic, and as a result society never ceased to be in dynamic or hardly in static milieu (Sharma, 2007). Since the prehistoric time men have been intrigued by the changing environment, as change is not a new concept or phenomena. The ancient Greece, philosophers have been striving to find the meanings and answers to the pattern of social change (Mercer, 1958). For change implies the holistic transformation of the social system meanwhile conserving the larger social spectrum (Desai, 1979). Therefore, in simple term social change can be understood as the change in social structure and its organization at the same time it also demands the change in social attitudes and beliefs. For the 'mental process' it entails to certain stimulus within the internal existential or from the pressure external to the society (Ginsberg, 1958).

According to Merrill and Eldredge (1952), social change means that large numbers of persons are engaging in activities that differ from those which they or their immediate (forefathers) engaged in some time before. Hertzler (1954) explain that social change consists in alteration of social structures, patterns of behaviour, and the functions carried on by different societal elements and in the transformations in the arrangement and functional interrelatedness of all parts to each other. For Ginsberg (1958), social change is a change in social structure – the size of a society, the composition or balance of its parts or type of its organization. Srinivas (1964) asserts social change means change in the structural pattern. In modern society the dissemination of social knowledge among members is itself a factor making of change. Bottomore (1970) defines social change as a change in social structure

(including here changes in the size of a society), or in particular social institutions, or in the relationships between institutions.

Change, according to Desai (1979) is to understand the transformation of the system or subsystem i.e. 'the whole' or 'part of it'. Davis (2009) assert social change meant only such alteration as secures in social organization, that is, the structure and functions of society. MacIver and Page (2009) views 'Social change is a process responsive to many types of change, to change in the man-made conditions of living, to changes in the attitudes and beliefs of men and changes that go beyond human control to the biological and physical nature of things'. Abraham (2010) contends that social change refers to modifications of social structures and processes over time. Social change refers to changes that are significant – that is, changes which alter the 'underlying structure of an object or situation over a period of time' (Giddens, 2005: 42). Thus social change does not refer to any and all changes but only such changes which transform things fundamentally.

1.2.2 Social Change and Middle Class

Mukherjee while examining social change that led to the emergence of the elite group in *Study of Social Change and Social Development in the Developing Societies* states that social change indicates the 'alteration' of the 'economic, technological, demographical, political, cultural, and psycho-logical' aspect of the society (1970: 1159). In *Changing Patterns of Social Mobility: Some Trends over Time*, Kumar et al. (2002) noted the shifting in occupation from agriculture to service sector, impact class structure in India. This occupational change elevates one's class position and simultaneously it is perceived as a sign of better life chance for the individual. Likewise, in *Middle Class in India*, Singh (2014) expounds that class structured around political power and monetary accumulation through occupation, either in services or businesses. Kamat (1981) in his article *Education and Social Change Amongst the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes* asserts that, with the independent of India, the tribal started to experience 'capitalist development' in a more pervasive manner, which led to an extensive interaction and communication beyond the tribal communities and region. Some of the changes ensue with the outset of modern education, which facilitate in shifting of occupation and mobility. Politically, the promulgation of constitutional special provision for the tribal in education, politics, occupation and development programmes serve the tribal to gain 'political-economic' momentum. The role of the elites in utilizing the provisions is also equally crucial for the outcome of change. In addition, the introduction of western education, modern health care and also religious belief since 1840s among the tribals by the Christian

missionaries, cannot be neglected as long as social change is referred. Lateef's (1980) *Ethnicity and Social Change* opines that ethnicity gain momentum in many of the societies on account of changes in the economic, social and political sphere. Though the basis of ethnicity derived from the historical account, in the midst of change, the primary concern is to form group that are cohesive and responsive.

D.P. Makerji (1955) examined about tradition and change in *Indian Tradition and Social Change* finds that the intensity of tradition relies on its efficacy to resist and adapt to change. Tradition remained defying to changes unless the force of change vividly interferes with the 'mode of production'. Sharma (2008: 308) in his book *Indian Social Structure and Change* propounds that social change is of two kinds of processes namely, a) those changes that are able to affirm the 'social system', and b) changes that modify the 'social system'. "Social change occurs in the structure and culture of a society through internal and external factors. Since tradition and modernity co-exist, continuity and change are empirical facets of social life. Tradition and continuity co-exist because all societies need a certain amount of stability and social checks. Modernity and change are required to attain new levels of knowledge and technical know-how to meet the changing demands and challenges" (Sharma 2008: 339). In viewing change, Shills (1970) in *Political Development in the New States-The Will to be Modern* reckons education as the only means that disseminate 'the scientific spirit' in the society, particularly 'among the new generation'. And this transition in the social settings is accomplished by breaching those formerly held notions of traditions and privileges.

Martin (1987) in *Concept of Class* elaborates that society is often differentiated in various ways, among them class distinction in terms of economic aspect is one of the alternate way to understand the structure of society. Economic change, according to Baru and Dasgupta (1981) in *Studying Society and Social Change* state that it cannot be study by solely engaging in economic facet, but it requires to consider and analyse other variables that contributes directly or indirect to changes. And in doing so, the economic facet can be more intelligently understood by considering the 'historical' and 'socio-political' factors, and not only the 'exchange system'.

As Blau (1967) exposts in *Exchange and Power in Social Life* that power is the control or influence a person can inflict to another person either with a reward for obliging or a punishment for opposing to the given command. 'Power' according to Weber (1953: 64) in *Class, Status, Party* is the chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.

Economic power or social honour may or may not be necessarily construe power but, likely to be the result of other existing power. The individual ambition to gain power in order to elevate social status or economic propensity is not always deliberate; but it can also be either of them or both. Political and economic influence might contribute in defining individual social honour, but they are not the sole determinants of social honour. Power as a notion is concern 'legal order' also has its own importance part in power attribution, in that it is not absolute rather as a part of the causal factor that intensifies power acquisition.

1.2.3 Social Stratification

In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim (1964) put forwards theoretical framework for reciprocity of social change and stratification based on two types of social solidarity namely mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. In mechanical solidarity a society is governed by sense of commonness and oneness, implicates that individuals are more or less in the same strata or less differentiated. Whereas, in organic solidarity a society manage to individuals are bonded by differences in roles and activities. And the contribution of each individual led to inter-dependent of one another and as a mechanism to sustaining necessities of the society. For Marx (1963) the essentiality in understanding a society is to analyse class struggle. And no society is in a classless situation and class exists in any society at any given period. The classes can be in different form such as master and slave, lord and serf, bourgeois and proletariat, owner and worker or the upper-class (capitalist) and lower-class. And the distinction between the two classes is based on the economic conditions. While for Weber (1968 [1922]) social stratification is based on class (economy), status, and party. All these attributions led to the formation of stratification, although the relationship between the three is complex and intertwine. In short, class is defined by the individual life chance while the life chance is determined by market situation. Status, on the other hand is a social prestige or honours a person receives as a result of social conditionings. And party is the political power an individual access as a result of affiliating to a particular party.

Social differentiation is the 'division of labor' or the 'existence of specialised role' (Wong, 1953: 773). And this differentiation led to the unequal distribution of resources and privileges that led to the emergence of social stratification (Goode, 1977: 269). Further, social differentiation based on economic purposes gradually structured the social system into another form of non-economic social structures (Giddens, 1982). Therefore, social stratifications refer to the analysis of the various forms of social arrangement or 'groupings' or 'strata' in a given society. The pattern where various forms of social positions are taken

into consideration based upon 'social assets' economic, status and power (McKee, 1981). Furthermore, it is to understand the existing 'inequalities' that undergo changes and the consequence that influences social experiences (Saunders, 1990: 2). It is to observe and analyses the inequality based on unequal distribution and accessibility to resources. The permeating inequality is the consequence of unequal distribution of resources that are virtuously instituted and perceived as imperative to the societal needs (Tumin, 2008: 41). And depending upon individual social position privileges are either enjoyed or deprived. It is contingent upon the manner in which an individual receives privileges and on this social situation classes are form (Goode, 1977).

Certain social positions, works and responsibilities are given prestigious recognition accompanied by lucrative reward so that it is skilfully carried-out in order to maintain and manage the stability and functioning of the society (McKee, 1981). In the functional perspective social stratification operates in advance societies and, at the same time, inequality that exists is the act of collectively (consensus) that predetermined it as a requisite (value) to the needs of the social system. The validity of inequality egresses as a result of collectivity or consensus that evaluates inequality and establishes 'value' consequently. And for this reason, different work positions are graded with rewards, incentives and prestige that supposedly believe to be fulfilling the needs of the society (Crompton, 2013; Singh, 2014). While, stratification is based upon 'symbolic' and economic rewards' that is 'prestige' and rewards' and it is socially construe (Lopreato and Lionel, 1963). The valuing of differentiation is mainly imposed by the elite and often resulted to social instability and conflicts (Singh, 2014).

1.2.4 Class and Social Inequality

Marx is usually considered the founder of modern class theories and dates to Marx and Engels' 'The Communist Manifesto' (Engels and Marx, 2004) which predicted the emergence of a visible class through capitalism, dividing society into the capital-owning bourgeoisie and the proletariat, whose only capital is their own labour power. Despite the prominence of this statement, it is often overlooked that Marx did not really develop a concise class theory. In his later work 'capital' (Marx and Engels, 1981), Marx was more concerned with the working of capitalism and used the term 'class' in a structural meaning rather than dealing with its empirical instantiations as actual social phenomena. Though coming from a Marxian background of class analysis that privileged ownership of the means of production, stratification theories later turned more towards a Weberian, market-based

understanding of class. Unlike Marx, Weber distinguished more clearly between economically defined property and income classes on one side and social classes on the other side. Weber saw that *social* classes were constituted by many factors besides economic criteria, e.g. the possibility of intra and intergenerational mobility and a common life style. He combined the rather heterogenous economic classes into four basic social classes: working class, petite bourgeoisie, property-less educated and the owning and educationally privileged class (Weber, 1922: 177ff.). Unlike Marx, Weber saw economic classes as a structure of purely economic opportunities and restrictions that were regulated in the market sphere. In contrast, social ‘stands’, or status groups based on differentiated social prestige, consisted of empirically observable communities based on life-style, connubiality, commensality and other criteria.

The Weberian influence on later stratification theory is reflected in their use of legal and market-related indicators like wealth, income and occupation or combinations of them to differentiate society into different layers (Goldthorpe, 1980; Wright, 1997). Social inequality in this tradition refers to the distribution of economic resources and occupational positions in a society, and people in a society, and people (or the ‘heads of the family’ as representatives) can be attributed to them in a straightforward manner.

In relation to class, MacIver and Page define it as “... any categories or type within which individuals or units fall” (1998: 348). They saw ‘status’ as the criterion for social class and said, ‘It is the sense of status, sustained by economic, political, or ecclesiastical power, and by the distinctive modes of life and cultural expressions corresponding to them, that draws class apart from class, gives cohesion to each class, and stratifies a whole society’. Though the term ‘class’ will be used to refer to the division of the Kuki society but it will be determined by ‘status’ as in class concept of MacIver and Page.

Anja Weiß argues social classifications like age, gender and ethnicity and racism are not only an effect, but a cause of (economic) social inequality as well (Weiß et al., 2001).

Any given society, at any given time, inequality exists and evolves within the given social structure (Davis and Moore, 1945; Tumin, 1953; Haralambos and Heald, 2010 [2004]). But studies of tribal villages before or during the colonial period fallaciously described tribe as an egalitarian society, while ignoring the ‘complex social formations’ of inequality (Kuchle, 2016). Inequality is conceptualised as social stratification when the existing social inequality in the social system becomes structural and interfered in the everyday social interaction, thereby forming a ‘hierarchical relation’ (Scott, 1996:191). It is no exceptional in

the case of the Kukis community that social stratification exists prior to experiencing modernity.

1.2.5 Social Stratification among the Tribals in India

There have been many misconstructions and misinterpretations regarding the analysis of tribal societies. A majority of the classical studies on tribal societies maintain that tribal societies are more or less egalitarian in nature, characterised by collective conscience and communal ownership of land and the questions of differentiation and inequality do not arise. The social life is basically a casteless society. There is no social stratification like the Hindu caste system. S.L. Sharma argues,

Several studies of social stratification, ranking systems and class formation among the tribes all over the world have reported absence of social differentiation in tribal societies. For centuries tribal people were seen as undifferentiated (1996: 4).

Yet, existing studies conducted by some scholars such as K.L. Sharma (1974), Ghanshyam Shah (1976), A.R. Desai (1977), P.K. Bose (1981), S.L. Doshi (1990), amongst others reveal that Indian tribes are not egalitarian and homogeneous as claimed by the earlier writers. Some forms of differentiation and social ranking have always existed among the tribals even in the past. Ranked position or distinction on the basis of age, sex, family and kinship was very much present among the tribals. K.L. Sharma argue that “For a long time tribal people were seen as undifferentiated lot. However, they have/had gradations based on age-sets, sex and kinship which did not form the basis of social stratification as found among the non-tribal like property, wealth, power and authority” (1997: 164).

Rao vehemently repudiates the postulation that tribal society is characterised by social equality. He argues that tribal society like any other society is not homogeneous. The view that tribals have been an egalitarian society is only a myth. The colonial anthropologists propagated the tribal groups as small, self-contained, self-sufficient communities practicing subsistence economy in which exploitation and social conflict did not have any place. Such a depiction of the tribal led some social anthropologists to say that there are no classes among the tribals (Rao, 1988: 1). He maintains that rank differentiation or inequality has been a significant characteristic attribute of the tribal community in India,

Accordingly, the tribes are not homogeneous communities as it was conceptualised earlier. Social stratification on the basis of status and power is very much present in tribal societies just as it is in non-tribal societies, albeit differently.

As K.L. Sharma (1997) observes, social stratification, as an existential phenomenon among the tribes, is, however, different from that of the advanced agricultural and industrial societies. It is not unique as it is generally considered. The principle of social stratification such as ethnicity, class and power are the same everywhere. The differences lie in the operationalization and actual functioning of these principles due to structural differences in various tribal societies in regard to their history, level of economic development, nature of colonial impact and exposure to modern forces of social transformation. Thus, to the extent the tribal people are different in terms of these criteria social stratification and class formation are also different among them in comparison to non-tribal societies.

The patterns and forms of social stratification among the tribes are distinct from the caste form of stratification. In the caste stratification one considers and examines the position of the group (*jati*) and ranks it in relation to other groups in the caste system, but in tribal social stratification one considers the position of the clan, families and individuals and ranks them in relation to others in the same tribal group. Further, Rao (1988) notes that in caste stratification we look for hierarchy among hundreds of castes in terms of purity and pollution of occupations, dietary, dress, house, rituals and every other things of the members of the caste. The hierarchy in the caste system is sought for or identified not within the caste but among the castes. In fact, in the caste stratification we inquire about the rank of a caste in terms of the castes found in a region. Ranking is never made within a caste and among the members of the caste. There is nothing like tribal system as we say caste system. Each tribal group is endogamous. It is a whole society. Thus, a tribal group is not related to other tribal groups in a region in terms of a system. One would not find a tribal related to other tribal group organically.

Thus, one differentiating feature of a tribal group is that nowhere a tribal constitutes a system. For all empirical considerations, a tribe is an autonomous, endogamous whole society, not forming any system within the tribal groups found in a particular region or a caste in a state or at the plane of inter-state level. Tribal stratification assumes a set of perspectives, which are different from caste stratification. In the tribal stratification, ranks are not differentiated at the level of two or more tribal groups. Contrariwise in the caste system rank differentiation is observed not at the level of one caste but at the level of caste system (Rao, 1988: 52-53). Therefore, it is apparent that social stratification among tribes acquires specific aspects which, can be differentiated from the context of caste stratification. Unlike caste, a tribe is a whole society. Varied and diverse groups of tribals who live in different provinces do not constitute a system on the basis of functional relationship or a set of social

hierarchy based on a specific ideology. Being endogamous, each tribal group can be regarded as a separate entity. There is no social ranking across various autonomous tribal groups in different parts of a region. Consequently, in such conditions, investigations and analysis of social differentiation, inequality and stratification among various endogamous tribal groups should be observed with standard criteria derived from within the independent and self-determining tribal group itself.

In contrast to caste stratification in which ranked distinction is formulated on the basis of inter-caste correlation, in tribal social stratification ranks and positions are not distinguished on the line of inter-tribal group interactions. The fundamental and underlying distinction between caste and tribal stratification is that in the former one looks for the properties of the group (*jati*) and rank it in relations to the caste system, and in the latter case, one makes a shift from the system and instead rank the individual standing positions in relations to others. Therefore, in caste stratification, a hierarchy of *jatis* within the system of caste can be seen, while in tribal stratification there is no such system at all, but simply a hierarchy of positions attained by individual members. D'Souza resolutely upheld this argument and succinctly asserts that "Groups (caste groups or *jatis*) are ranked in the caste system, whereas positions are ranked in social stratification (particularly with reference to class stratification). The ranking of endogamous groups and not endogamy as the rule of marriage, is the hallmark of the caste system" (1967). Thus to D'Souza, in caste analysis we rank the *jatis* or caste groups as an integral part of the caste system itself. Ranking accordingly is invariably concerning the caste system.

We can thus infer that in the analysis of tribal stratification it is imperative to observe that endogamous and independent tribal community does not compose a separate distinct social system, in the sense that each tribal group can be regarded as a part of the whole. To be specific there is no exclusive and distinct tribal system as such where the component parts operates as an organic whole. Each tribal group devices its own system of functioning and hence is a self-contained and independent society in itself with its own specific cultural, political, social, economic, kinship and family systems.

Correspondingly, respective tribal group may be distinguished in its own life-styles, nature, custom, conduct and practices. The Indian constitution compositely defined all the tribal groups in the country as scheduled tribes; however, their singleness remains in theory only. In existential level, each tribal group (community) continues to be a distinct social entity. Because of this autonomous character of tribal societies, the empirical studies and analysis of the forms, types, systems and dimensions of social stratification among them are

extremely complex and complicated. In order to study and interpret tribal stratification vividly one has to follow and maintain a set of perspectives and objectives that are distinct from those employed in the study of caste stratification.

Social stratification among the tribals may function within the microcosm of a tribe or at the plane of two or more tribal groups. Tribal stratification is usually viewed in terms of internal distinction of the individual in accordance with their control over natural resources or the ranking of Individuals based on their hereditary or material and divine capabilities. In India, the questions and problems of inter-tribal groups did not occur. Perhaps, this may be because each tribal group settled in isolation from each other. However, empirical data show that contemporary system of tribal stratification has metamorphosed or transformed and comparatively different from those forms of stratification, which existed in earlier times. Recent studies and literature on various tribes indicate and prove that the courses and patterns of tribal stratification have been transformed over time. In the course of time, several factors had appeared to perform in determining the paradigm of social stratification in their community.

Thus, the nature and pattern of tribal social stratification is rather intricate as each tribal group has its own distinct socio-economic, political and cultural systems, which are different from other tribal groups. Owing to this, the paradigm and dimensions of tribal stratification cannot be the same over the country. But it should be recognised that the tribal societies whether large or small have their own internal differentiation. K.L. Sharma observes that there is more or less unanimity among the students of tribal social life in India regarding the presence of social stratification. Tribes are highly differentiated lot ethnically and culturally. Some adhere to 'tribalism', others have converted to Christianity by rejecting tribal pantheon, and some have taken up Hinduism by adopting vegetarianism, teetotalism and other Brahminic ideals and practices. Tribes are also differentiated based on landholdings, rural-urban background, education, occupation, income and political power. Tribes have been granted special treatment under the constitution of India. They have also many attributes, practices and styles of life that distinguish them from the non-tribal people. Ethnic and cultural differentiation can be seen in terms of tribal identities and religious pursuits. Thus, the nature of social stratification is also quite complex corresponding with the heterogeneity of their socio-cultural and economic structure... Social stratification among the tribal people is, therefore, neither simply based on criteria like age and kinship nor it can be characterised by property, education, occupation, income and power. A semblance of the two

sets of criteria may distinguish the tribal people from the non-tribal population (Sharma, op. cit.: 167-8.)

Ghanshyam Shah in his *Stratification among Schedule Tribes in the Bharuch and Panchmahals Districts of Gujarat* (1986) argues that because of the impact of modernization and various developmental programmes initiated by the government of India, tribal society is no longer homogeneous and egalitarian. At present, each tribal group is segmented on the basis of interests. He maintains that based on the size or extent and possession of land, tribal communities is divided into rich, middle and lower (peasants). The life-style and educational attainment too differ. Both the rich and middle peasants generate surplus resources and have become aware of the market economy. He claims that the rich as well as middle class peasants emerge as the new elite and by and large obtain advantage of the subsidies, grants, aids and assistance provided by the government. Consequently, the situation and living standard of the poor peasants has degenerated. Eventually most of them become landless labourers. According to Shah status differentiation on the basis of achievement in matters of property, wealth, income, occupation, education and power are appearing among the tribes. Furthermore, he contends that the status determination grounded on ethnicity aspect has been imperceptibly superseded by the new and novel criteria viz., power, occupation, education, wealth, and income. He asserts that the economic standing, educational achievements, and the style of life are the main bases of the emerging stratification system (Shah, 1979: 149-83).

Further, in his study of Chaudhri tribe Shah concludes that economic strata have been developed amongst the tribals based on occupation and ownership of land. Following are the main strata as perceived by Shah, (i) Agricultural labourers and poor cultivators, (ii) Middle cultivators, (iii) Rich cultivators, and (iv) White-collar employees. This kind of economic stratification in a tribal society is similar to socio-economic distinctions found in the non-tribal societies. He demonstrates that the first three strata comprised of 93 per cent of the entire total working population whereas the fourth strata constitute 7 per cent of the population. Expounding the course of the development of tribe-class stratification. Shah argues that the labourers and poor cultivators are at the bottom rung of the occupational hierarchy (Shah, 1979: 459-69).

R.K. Prasad's study of the Parahiya of Palamau shows that they have evolved social stratification corresponding to the system of caste stratification. This may be due to their close proximity and acquaintance with the caste Hindus. He claims that the tribal groups have taken up the *jajmani* system of the caste Hindus. Thus, according to Prasad's observation, the

Parahiyas have developed a kind of caste-like stratification because of their familiarity with the Hindus (Prasad, 1975: 59-65).

Based on the studies of the tribals of West Bengal and Bihar, K.S. Singh admonished the existence of social stratification among them. He holds that tribal stratification has emerged due to colonial transformation. His contention is that tribal society has been developing from its tribal status to caste status. At the times of feudal and colonial era, the tribal communities witnessed a razor-sharp social distinction. He comments thus: "The colonial system created and strengthened a three-fold division with the feudatory chiefs/ Zamindars at the top, the well-to-do headmen in the middle and the general masses at the bottom. A class of inside Diku and professional tribal money lenders also grew up as the unintended result of anti-land alienation laws which restricted transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals. A rich stratum of tribal buyers of land emerged as suggested by the data on transactions in land and money lending in the district settlement reports. There were also reports of conflicts between the secular and religious leaderships though these did not seem to have any enduring consequences" (Singh, 1985: 14). Thus the economic and political systems of tribal transmutation get exhibited in social stratification. He advocates that tribal social stratification has been prevailed in diverse types and natures such as prestige and status, social and physical distance, concept of pollution-purity and so on. Moreover, he presumes that the process of tribal stratification had obviously begun before the forties. To quote him "A rigorous analysis of the census reports of the pre-1941 period at the district level, unfortunately most of them have perished, would show the extent of the success achieved by various communities seeking higher status and the reflection of it in the accretion of strength to higher castes" (Singh, 1979: 21-32).

P. K. Bose in his evaluation of emerging pattern of social stratification among the tribals in Gujarat finds four different classes of peasant-tribals viz., (i) rich peasants, (ii) middle peasants, (iii) poor peasants and, (iv) agricultural labourers (1981: 191-96). Such kind of hierarchy can be seen in all spheres of existence encompassing economic, education and political power. According to him tribals are evenly impinged upon, like the non-tribals by the process of planned and unplanned changed and by the constant institutional and structural alterations in rural society.

Jaganath Pathy in his studies in five tribal villages in Gujarat employing Marxian perspectives classified five agrarian classes, (i) rich peasant, (ii) middle peasant, (iii) small peasant, (iv), landless, and (v) farm worker (Pathy, 1984: 143). Here Pathy considers tribals as a peasantry. To him the mode of production is the main basis of tribal differentiation and

inequality. Regarding the constitution of class distinctions amongst the tribals Pathy remarks: “The so-called tribes of India are not homogeneous wholes. There are antagonistic classes and powerful reactionary forces which are allied with the capitalist classes in the hope of maintenance of their privileges” (Pathy, 1984: 214). He identified labour, income and land as the distinct criteria to appraise the consequences of development schemes among them. He insists that the tribal group or community is going in the direction of a class society.

S.P. Punalekar based on his research investigation on tribal social stratification among the Dhodias in Surat City points out that the process of social distinction, which is emerging among the Dhodias tribes, is from tribe to class. Tribal ethnicity is not of much significance in the City. He makes a distinction among the migrated Dhodias into two strata: (i) upper strata of white-collar employees and (ii) lower strata of factory workers, casual labourers and self-employed (1980: 160). According to Sachchidananda’s observations, tribal social stratification had existed even in the pre-colonial and colonial India. It developed in the patterns of quasi-feudal agrarian set up. He classified the tribal people into two classes, namely, (i) the upper classes and (ii) the commoners. He argues that the upper class commanded comparatively more land, monopolised leadership positions by virtue of which they possessed higher status. Since the advent of moneylenders in the tribal society, the process of social stratification accelerated and became more clear-cut and complex (1990: 278-320).

Adityendra Rao has conducted another in-depth study on tribal stratification among the Bhil tribes of Rajasthan. He asserts that social stratification among the tribe is based on class instead of caste. The emerging system of social stratification among the tribals according to him rests on a new form of values such as democracy, socialism and secularism. Rao observes that “Those who argue tribal transformation and the resulting social differentiation in terms of caste hierarchy are obsessed by caste ethnocentrism. Our hypothesis is that the increasing inequality among the Bhils shows their crossing the tribal line for the class hierarchy. It is prejudicial to say that the direction of tribal change is from tribe to caste. There is enough empirical evidence to lead us to generalise that the tribal social differentiation is towards class struggle” (Rao, op. cit.: 180).

Social stratification among tribes can as well be analysed in the following three phases: ancient, medieval and post-independence. During the ancient periods, R.S Sharma argues that tribal social stratification had progressed from chiefdom to state and class. He emphasises that ancient Indian tribals constituted a class society rather than a caste society. Class to him is a group of people who either owns the means of production or are deprived of

it. In the initial stages of social development, dispossession from the fruits of production becomes a prelude to class formation (1983: xvi).

Thapar and Siddique find that the trend regarding social stratification which had previously emerged with the *Khut-Katti* system (an arrangement for the management of land resources on a communal basis, mainly confined to the Munda tribe). The *Khut-katti* not only became acute under the state, but also became more complex and complicated with the introduction of various levels of intermediaries (1991: 419-30). To Sharma, in medieval period, “the process of tribal integration in the wider society began with the introduction of tribals to the caste Hindus” (Sharma, op. cit., 35). Sachchidananda views that social stratification in the pre-colonial time can be perceived on the basis of ranks, viz., the *Khut-kattidars*, the village headman and the masses. Subsequently some artisan castes like weavers, blacksmiths and potters furthermore differentiated the tribal society (Sharma, op. cit., 280-82). Moreover, he states that from class perspective the village society was classified into two. i.e., the *Khut-kattidars* and the masses. The *Khut-kattidars* belongs to the real owners' class of the village land.

Rao while analysing the process of stratification amongst the Bhils in medieval periods points out that: “The intervention made by the rulers of the princely state thus created a new stratification among the Bhils. Those people who got recognition at the hands of the Rajput rulers occupied higher status and rank in the society. The tribal social differentiation began to assign ranking to their claims because of the political differentiation made by the princely state. With the entry made by the government princely state officials, traders and Christian missions, the Bhil tribes still residing in the hills and forests got some economic differentiation also. The clan who provided shelter to these state representatives also got their status enhanced. The status differentiation which the tribal society received at the hands of princely rulers provided a new dimension to the tribal society... the social differentiation that we find among the Bhils during this period is conspicuous” (Rao, op. cit., 21-22). On the other hand, K.S. Singh advocates that at the time of the colonial era, a three-fold distinction among the tribes can be witnessed. The Jagir occupied the top rung, Headman the middle and the general masses at the lower levels. He argues that tribal society is gradually moving closer to caste society.

The pattern of social stratification among the tribe has changed since independence. This is mainly because of the combination of various factors. Perhaps the most important and significant factor is the various programmes and policies undertaken by the Government of India with a view to uplift and ameliorate the living conditions of the tribals. However, these

policies have had a negative implication on the egalitarianism among the tribals. Rao maintains that after independence development programmes have accelerated the process of social differentiation. According to him: "In the post-independence period, with the promulgation of constitution, the tribals received a new phase of development programmes, which improved their status. Besides being benefited by the programmes, they got exposed to the new forces of market economy, industrialisation and education. This set into motion the process of wide social differentiation. It is found that more the development of the tribals, the greater are the forces of social differentiation" (Rao, op. cit.: 50-1). Likewise, Sachchidananda views that "a significant impact of politico-economic change in independent India is the accentuation of social inequalities in tribal society... the outside moneylenders were a third notable class which has now been replaced by the inside 'dikus' after independence" (op. cit.: 305).

Thus, a class of professional tribal moneylender has emerged in the post-independence period due to the anti-land alienation laws. A small section of the tribals has gone up in the socio-economic hierarchy; they are engaged in money lending. The Indian State has provisions in the constitution with regard to the upliftment of the tribal people living in different parts of India by reducing the age old socio-economic inequality. An anticipated consequence of these provisions can be seen in new forms of socio-economic and political inequality between different tribal communities. Industrialisation has displaced the tribals as their land has been taken over by the state. The emergence of elites among the tribals is largely due to inequalities resulting from the planned development. The process of depeasantization has brought into operation new forces of class formation (Sharma, op. cit.: 40).

While interpreting the emerging pattern of social stratification among the tribals A.R. Desai maintains that the processes unleashed right from the British days to the aftermath of the independence have constituted two main classes such as (a) the privileged class and (b) the exploited class. A small section of the tribals who have gained from the privileges have occupied a higher status. Generally, they are better educated and better placed in government service as well as in agriculture. On the other hand, the masses of the tribals who compose the exploited class occupy the lowest rank. Usually the social segments of the well-to-do tribals initiated different programmes and movements in the name of the whole tribal people, which in actuality provide only their interest and benefit (Desai, 1977: 6).

To recapitulate, like non-tribal people the tribals have had always some kind of social stratification. Nevertheless, social stratification among the tribes is distinct from that of the

developed industrial complex societies. Social stratification in one form or another has invariably existed amongst the tribes of India. By and large tribal stratification is usually based on age, sex, family and kinship. Different strata among them are characterised by habits and customs, notion of pollution and purity, economic resources, political power, education, occupation and so on.

Though tribe and caste are two important facets of social stratification in India, yet the forms and types of tribal stratification are different from the caste system of stratification. In other words, tribal social stratification acquires a set of perspectives, which are distinct from that of caste stratification. In caste stratification various caste groups are assumed as a system functionally correlated. Accordingly, ranking amongst different castes is executed to assess caste stratification. On the other hand, tribal groups do not constitute a system on the basis of functional relationship. Each tribal group is autonomous. Consequently, ranking in the tribal groups is done within the tribal group itself. Thus each tribal group in a region is a whole society in itself; one tribal group does not have any forms of relationship to other tribal groups in terms of a system. This connotes that it is not possible to study tribal stratification as a distinct and exclusive system. That is, social stratification among one tribal group cannot be analysed in relations to other tribal groups. Due to this independent and autonomous character of a tribe, the study and analysis of social stratification in their society becomes acutely problematic and perplexing. Thus, one has to espouse a number of perspectives.

Tribal social stratification can be traced or studied from the following three phases: ancient, medieval, and post-independent. Most of the empirical studies on tribal stratification reveal that after independence the implementation of various developmental schemes as part of protective discrimination policy has resulted in social differentiation amongst tribes. The consequences of this development programme could be observed in the emergence of new forms of political power, education, and socio-economic inequality within tribal communities. The provisions of protective discrimination have engendered a new class of tribal elite rather than generating social mobility and thus uplifting socio-economic conditions among the tribals. Only a new elite class of tribal could avail the benefits and interests of protective measures. In this regard K.L. Sharma comments: "After independence education, employment and political power, though these are in a certain way interrelated phenomena, have become the main bases of social stratification among the tribal people...a large number of tribals still remain unbenefited from these scarce resources like education, white-collar jobs and positions and offices of power. Class distinctions have crystallised among the tribals like the non-tribal people in terms of upper, middle and lower classes

because all the people have not been benefited in equal measure, and it is hard to believe that a majority of the tribals have been harmed by the development process in the post-independence period” (Sharma, op. cit.: 177).

Therefore, social stratification among the tribe undergoes different phases. After independence, the realisation of developmental schemes as a part of reservation policy has hastened the process of social distinctions amongst the tribal groups. Subsequently the post-independence periods generate a new form of social stratification based on political power, socio- economic, education, new occupation and employment and a new structure of values - socialism, secularism, and democracy amongst the tribal in India. Thus, it is clear that the phenomenon of social stratification has existed in tribal society of India, even though in diverse forms and dimensions. This has been demonstrated and proved by several empirical studies on tribal society in India.

1.2.6 On the Kukis

Almost exclusively westerners produced the earliest historical and anthropological works, such as, C.A. Soppit’s *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier* (1893), the Deputy commissioner of the Hill Tracts, T.H. Lewin’s *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein* (1869), and *Wild races of South-Eastern India* (1870) provide substantial information about the social and political life of the Chin-Kuki-Mizos. Different forms of writing by the military officers had given detailed accounts of their military operations. L.W. Shakespear’s *History of the Assam Rifles* (1929), and A.S. Reid’s *Chin-Lushai Land Including a Description of various Expedition into the Chin-Lushai Hills and the Final Annexation of the country, with Maps and Illustrations* (1893).

Besides, British administrators have provided us unprecedented historical and anthropological insights about the people viz. Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck’s *The Chin Hills: A History of the people, British dealings with them, their Customs and Manners, and Gazetteer of their Country*, Vol. I 1896 (reprinted 1976), and John Shakespear’s *The Lushei Kuki Clans, Part I and Part II* (1912). These books were of immense information to researchers and scholars of the region. Sir James Johnstone’s *Manipur and the Naga Hills* provided us the authentic facts of historical events connected with Manipur and Naga Hills with substantial information about their relationship with the Kukis as well.

Another monumental work by G.A Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India, III, 3* (1904) has given some anthropological analysis of the people at the time when Kukis were brought under the British colonial administration. William Shaw’s *Notes on the Thadou Kukis* (1929)

has become the most controversial book among the Kukis. In this book the various sub-clans and tribes of Kukis like Changsan, Lhangum, Lenthang, Lunkim, Kom Gangte, Waiphei (Vaiphei), Kholhang, Chiru and those of inferior lineage, who were not the descendants of Thadou (supposedly the name of a progenitor) were wrongly clubbed together or included under the wings of *Thadou*. This being the reason, clans like *Lunkim*, *Changsan* and others who are senior than *Thadou* in terms of genealogy or lineal descent could not accept it. Nevertheless, the book has made a very great contribution to our understanding of the historical and anthropological studies and provides valuable insights of the traditional Thadou-Kuki culture and society.

Another writing concerning the Government's dealing of the Kukis with the subsequent establishment of colonial administration is found in the book of Alexander Mackenzie's *The North-East Frontier of India* (1884), in which reports of several British administrators and military officials about the Kukis, such as, Major McCulloch, Capt. Butler (1873), Col. Lister, J. Ware Edgar (1871), etc. were incorporated in the books. Sir Robert Reid's *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941* (1983) and D.K Palit's *The Sentinel of the North-East, The Assam Rifles* (1984), has provided substantial facts about the Kukis of "unadministered tracts" and the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-19.

A group of Indian writers and their works like, T.C. Das's *The Purum – An Old Kuki Tribe of Manipur* (1945), and more recent works of Tarun Goswami's *Kuki Life and Lore* (1985) and A.K. Ray's *Authority and Legitimacy: A study on the Thadou-Kukis of Manipur* (1990) has provided us with historical and anthropological insights of the people concerned.

The following books provide deeper anthropological insights and the socio-cultural changes as a result of the impact of western culture through the activities of governmental administrative machineries and the Christian missions. Besides, writers like P.C. Misao's *History and Custom of the Thadou-Kuki*, and Khaikhonthang Kipgen's *The Thadou Kukis: A Brief Account of History and Culture* (1982) helped us to understand better about the history and culture of the Kukis right from their migration. The socio-cultural study made by the above scholars contains more of authentic facts, as they understand better than outsiders.

Today a number of books have been written by the regional scholars themselves. Mention may be made of some of the works. They are – T.S. Gangte: *The Kukis of Manipur: A Historical Analysis* (1993), H. Kamkhenthang: *The Paite: A Transborder Tribe of India and Burma* (1988), Lal Dena: *Christian Mission and Colonialism* (1988), T. Neihsial: *History of the Zomis*, unpublished PhD thesis, Manipur University (1993), T.T. Haokip: *The Kuki Chiefship and Its Changing Dimensions*, Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to North Eastern

Hill University, Shillong (1995), H. Chongloi's *Indoi: A Study of Primal Kuki Religious Symbolism in the Hermeneutical Framework of Mircea Eliade* (2008), N. Kipgen: *Kuki Identity, Land-Use, Authority, and Ethnic-Nationalism in Manipur*, unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Indian institute of Technology Delhi (2012), and several others. Their study makes important contribution to the understanding of different aspects of the socio-religio, cultural and political life afresh.

Lastly, a very recent publication of books viz. *Kuki Uprising in Manipur 1919-1920* (2004) by S.M.A.W Chisti, and *The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919: A Frontier Uprising against Imperialism during the First World War* (2018) edited by J. Guite and T. Haokip (2019) was a good academic exercise with valuable insights about the military operation of the British forces against the Kukis and the latter's subsequent trial and punishment. These works are mainly based on the archival materials by taking into account the Kukis' perspectives.

1.3 Research Gap

The traditional Kuki society, in general, is depicted as egalitarian characterised by social equality rather than social inequality. Existing scholarship hardly addresses social inequality resulting from the differentiation in status, economic endowments and power. The topic of class formation has been almost absent in the literature on the Kukis. Available studies have been mainly concerned with describing specific traditions analysing the political scenario or portraying the dynamics of Christianity. While these topics are certainly relevant for understanding the current social configuration among the Kukis, they neglect the growing importance of economic factors and the resulting social inequality amongst them. Many of the described changes are more visible in terms of valuing status, power and wealth that have been largely neglected by previous research.

1.4 Rationale for the Study

The present study attempts to deal with the gaps that the process of change is simultaneously accompanied by the changing pattern of valuing status, power and wealth. Also, 'social stratification' is often neglected or in fact not given much heed in studying the Kuki community. Therefore, the study puts forward that social stratification is the basic social phenomenon in forging the pattern of social relations, conducts, and ideology, critically or otherwise. In fact, social stratification based on status, power and class is the core social reality of the community and the backbone of the system through which the social system

operates. However, the significance and inevitability of social stratification has been neglected as in the case of studying the Kukis where the existing social stratification and inequality are suppressed while synonymously labelling it as to egalitarian community.

This study does not aim to cover the whole field of social structure and social change in Kuki society but is concerned only briefly, with one aspect of social structure, viz., social stratification. We shall first begin with an analysis of the social structure and the factors making for social change, and their implications, and then proceed with discussing the forms of social stratification amongst the Kukis.

The present research follows a historical sociological approach and is guided by theoretical premises that are drawn from an extended review of relevant theories on social change and social stratification and engage with the relevant ethnographic literature on the Kuki's of Northeast India and Manipur. Thus, the present study centres around the following research questions and objectives:

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do agencies such as modern market-economy, Christianity, modern/western education, and market economy impacts the socio-cultures and change the Kuki society?
2. Is Kuki society an egalitarian society and devoid of stratification or how have the pattern of stratification changed from the traditional past?
3. What are the implications of stratification on the social structure and value systems of the Kuki society in the modern context?

1.6 Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the direction and scale of change happening in the Kuki society with the inroads of exogenous forces such as Christianity, modern/western education and market economy.
2. To examine the historicity and nature/forms of social stratification based on economic (class), social (status/prestige and honour), and political (power) etc. in the Kuki society.
3. It tries to see the implication of stratification on various traditional socio-political institutions, religious systems and on social structure and value systems today when the Kuki society is passing through a crucial phase of transition.

1.7 Methodology

The empirical research was a multi-sited field study conducted in several villages in the hill areas of Manipur during the period 2016 to 2018. Multiple data-collection methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, household survey from selected villages located within Churachandpur districts of Manipur is used. And these villages are further categorised into urban and rural village (see Table 1.1) based on location and accessibility to urban facilities, population density and economic conditions.

Extended personal interviews were conducted among village inhabitants of other villages, select number of respondents. As the researcher belong to a Thadou-Kuki tribe from Manipur, he has the opportunity to interact freely with elders of various communities and was also in a position to utilise all these materials written in various local dialects of the Chin-Kuki community. The similarities between the custom and culture of my own clan and that of the other cognate clans and tribes was also a great privilege to me as it provided valuable insights. Besides, another advantage to me was that communication is not a problem among the various Kuki tribes though there are some negligible language barriers. And for the sake of convenience in the study, mostly we used the term Thadou or Thadou-Kuki dialect, as it is one of the largest spoken dialects among the Kuki tribes in Manipur.

Data for the research is drawn upon extended fieldwork where information is collected through interviews, household surveys, and relate these to relevant secondary literature. The primary data collected is relate with the theoretical literature on social change, social stratification, social inequality, class, status, and power.

1.8 Introducing the Field

The state of Manipur in Northeast India contains a mosaic of tribal communities in the surrounding hill areas, apart from the Meitei (non-tribal) of the central valley districts. Churachandpur is one of the hill districts in Manipur. Churachandpur (see Map 1.1) district is chosen for the study as more than ninety percent of Kuki tribes of Manipur resides in the district. Churachandpur town is locally known as ‘Lamka’, ‘Lam’ meaning ‘road’ or ‘path’ and ‘ka’, meaning ‘diverge’. Thus, ‘Lamka’ simply mean ‘road diverge’ or ‘crossroad’; tri-junction of Imphal-Churachandpur Road, Lamka-Behiang Road and Tipaimukh Road near Churachandpur Police Station at the heart of the town.

The district occupies an area of 4,570 square kms. According to 2011 census, the district has a population of 2,74,143, which constitutes 9.59% of the state total population. In the present study area, i.e. Churachandpur district, the main ethnic communities inhabiting

the district are the Kuki-Chin group, viz. Paite, Hmar, Zou, Vaiphei, Thadou, Simte and Gangte, etc. Churachandpur town is multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan in nature where each tribe could converge in their own dialect.

In 2006, Churachandpur was declared as urban area with 28 localities/villages without assigning any specific urban local body as a purely administrative action.¹ The list of localities included in the town census are Tuibuong, Bijang, Sielmat, Zenhang Lamka, Rengkai, Luoia Veng, Nehru Marg, New Lamka, Salem Veng, Hill town, Upper Lamka (Hiangtam Lamka), Chapel Lane, Headquarter Veng, Chiengkawnpang, D. Phailien, Bungmual, Pearsonmun, Thingkangphai, Ngathal, Kawnpui, Mualkoi, Gangpimuol, Mission Veng, Lhangnem, Gangte Veng, Zellang Veng, Pangzawl, and Lanva.

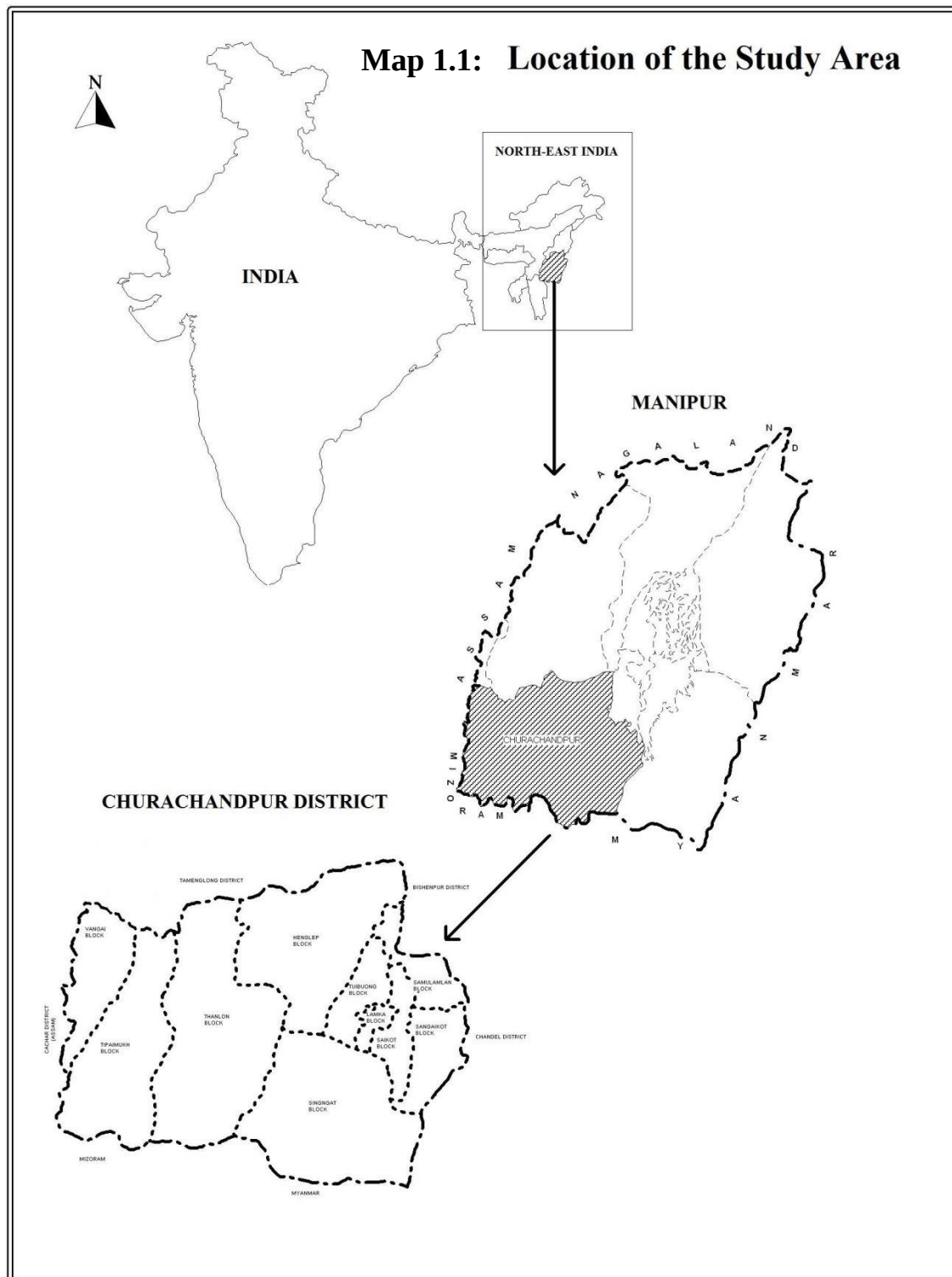
Out of the total population of Churachandpur only 6.40 per cent lived in urban areas of the district in 2011 as compared to the State average (32.45 per cent) and therefore is predominantly a rural district. In absolute numbers, the population figure for the only town, Churachandpur is 17, 373 in 2011, (48.77 per cent male and 51.23 per cent and female). As per 2011 census, 93.60 per cent of the population of Churachandpur district resides in rural areas. The literacy rate of the district as per census 2011 is 82.78 percent which is the second highest among the districts of Manipur.

Table 1.1
Distribution of Population in Churachandpur District

Census Year	Persons	Male (%)	Female (%)	Sex- Ratio	Density	Literacy (%)
1971	98,114	50.60	49.40	976	21	-
1981	1,34,776	51.85	48.15	929	29	-
1991	1,76,184	51.77	48.23	931	39	-
2001	2,27,905	51.44	48.56	944	50	70.60
2011	2,71,274	50.78	49.22	969	59	84.29

Source: Total population of Manipur, 2011, (http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov_data_products__manipur.html)

¹ On 11th July, 2006 vide order no. 8/31/ADCO/99 of the Deputy Commissioner-cum-Chairman Autonomous District Council of Churachandpur,



Data are chiefly drawn from Teiseng village (rural), Bijang village (urban), and Ngahmunnom and other villages in Churachandpur district. Teiseng is a village situated in Churachandpur sub-division of Churachandpur district in Manipur. As per the Population Census 2011, there are total 245 families residing in the village Teiseng. The total population of Teiseng is 1,375 out of which 693 are males and 682 are females thus the Average Sex

Ratio of Teiseng is 984. The population of Children of age 0-6 years in Teiseng village is 245 which is 18% of the total population. There are 123 male children and 122 female children between the age 0-6 years. Thus as per the Census 2011 the Child Sex Ratio of Teiseng is 992 which is greater than Average Sex Ratio (984) of Teiseng village. As per the Census 2011, the literacy rate of Teiseng is 80.7%. Thus Teiseng village has higher literacy rate compared to 71.5% of Churachandpur district. The male literacy rate is 88.95% and the female literacy rate is 72.32% in Teiseng village.

Bijang is a village situated in Churachandpur sub-division of Churachandpur district in Manipur. As per the Population Census 2011, there are total 909 families residing in the village Bijang. The total population of Bijang is 5,020 out of which 2,439 are males and 2,581 are females thus the Average Sex Ratio of Bijang is 1,058. The population of Children of age 0-6 years in Bijang village is 731 which is 15% of the total population. There are 382 male children and 349 female children between the age 0-6 years. Thus as per the Census 2011 the Child Sex Ratio of Bijang is 914 which is less than Average Sex Ratio (1,058) of Bijang village. As per the Census 2011, the literacy rate of Bijang is 70.5%. Thus Bijang village has lower literacy rate compared to 71.5% of Churachandpur district. The male literacy rate is 75.4% and the female literacy rate is 66.04% in Bijang village.

1.8.1 General Background of Sample Households

The study covers 260 households out of the total 325 households (80 per cent) of the selected villages, and out of which 77 households (29.61 per cent) are rural households and the remaining 183 households (70.38 per cent) belong to the urban areas.

Table 1.2

Rural-Urban Distribution of Sample Households

Sl. No.	Name of village	Status	Total household	Household survey conducted	No. of interviews conducted
1	Teiseng	Rural	59	59	30
2	Ngahmunnom	Rural	18	18	10
3	Bijang	Urban	248	183	40
4	Others	Urban & Rural	*	0	140
Total			325	260	220

Source: Based on Field Data, 2016-2018

* No household survey was conducted. Only key informants/individuals were interviewed.

Table 1.3

Occupational-wise categorisation of respondents

Occupation	No. of respondents
Student	22
Government employees	54
Private school Teacher	11
Politician and leaders	12
Pastors	12
Entrepreneur and contractors	24
Pensioner	17
Home maker	20
Self-employed	24
Cultivator	11
Unemployed	13
Total	220

The table above highlights the total number of respondents which are categorised based on occupational activities. Whereas, Table 4 and 5 below shows separately the total number of respondents from church workers and from traditional elite respondents from the total number of respondent.

Table 1.4

Respondents from the Church workers

Position and role in the Church	Number of Respondents
Pastors	10
Ordained church elder /Deacon	11
Church Executive Members (including former members)	25
Total	46

Table 1.5
List of elite respondents

Status	Number of Respondents
Village chief	9
Village chief's family members	25
Village council/authority members	19
Total	53

According to 1981 Census, out of the 56,964 working population in the district, 78.31 percent are cultivators. The total land under jhum cultivation during 1987-1988 was 58 percent (Devi, 2006: 7). This has declined to 34 percent in 2008. The district is 62 kilometres away from Imphal. Most of the important business centers, government offices and institutions are located within the district headquarters. Roadways are the only means of transport in the district. The district is connected with Imphal by Tedim road (National Highway 150). Tipaimukh road that connects the district headquarters with Mizoram state is also one important road in the district. Another important road that connects Lamka with Mizoram is the Guite road.

More than 90 per cent of the inhabitants of the district are Christians. Majority of the Christians in the district are Baptist. The district headquarters house several of the important educational institutions of learning. There are two government colleges, five private colleges, five higher secondary, and quite a number of government and private schools. Compared to the government high schools in the district, private educational institutions offer quality education. Some of the private schools which have made excellent contribution to the educational standards of Churachandpur districts are Donbosco School, St. Mary's School, Sielmat Christian Hr. Sec. School, St. Paul's Institute, Salt Brook school, Blue Star Academy, Rayburn School, Radhakrishnan Foundation School, Lalpuithluaii Foundation School, Young Learners School, and Ebenezer Academy. The district has one government hospital, one private hospital and a number of care centers and rehabilitation centers.

The other significant development that has taken place in the district is in the field of press and media. Since 1970s, vernacular daily newspapers are published from the district. Another important development in the district is the introduction of information and broadcasting network. The gradual expansion of markets during the 1980s led to increase in

private investment. Two-movie theatres (cinema halls) were established during the 1980s.² But the coming of video and cable networks during the latter part of 1980s saw the decline of movie theatres in the district. At present five private / local cable networks are operating from Lamka town viz. Hornbill Cable Network, Laizom, Angel's Vision, Thangboi Cable Network, Zasanga Recording Studio, and Uptovra. News reading, religious programmes, songs and other entertainment items are the regular features of the TV cable networks.³ The inauguration of local radio station of Churachandpur with Paite as the link language on April 13, 2010 has been another important development in the district.

The growth of urbanization led to expansion of communication network, modern facilities, modern political system, and market economy. All these opened up new opportunities and avenues for employment at the district, state, and beyond the state boundaries of the country. As more and more persons became educated among the Thadou-Kuki community, vernacular newspapers, magazines, and books in Thadou-Kuki language began to flourish.

As the Kuki society gradually progressed in the economic, political and educational aspects, the Kuki people began to get employment in various fields of administration and trades in the state and beyond. All these have facilitated the growth of modern Kuki elites. It resulted in the emergence of tribal Kuki elites viz. intellectuals, bureaucrats and businessmen.

Organisation of Thesis

The thesis will consist of six chapters with conclusion which are organised as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the various facets of the study, viz. review of literature – social change, middle class, social stratification, class, social inequality, social stratification among the tribals in India, the Kuki society/community – research gap, rationale for the study, research questions, objectives of the study, methodology and organization of the thesis.

Chapter 2 explores the genesis ethnohistory of the Kukis – the origin of the word 'Kuki' based on the writings of the colonial ethnographers and regional scholars. It also attempts to locate the various theories of the history of origin, migration and settlement of the Kuki ethnic group. The chapter discusses the socio-cultures – family, kinship and marriage system;

² The two movie houses in the district are no longer functioning today.

³ For further reading refer, '*Crossroads*' A Document of Churachandpur, A Publication of District Administration, Churachandpur, 2008.

and economic organisation – work culture, village labour system, bachelor's dormitory; moral ethics and values, and the principle of communitarianism in the traditional society.

Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6 constitute the data chapters. In **chapter 3**, we examine the emergence, rise and growth of colonialism, influence of Christianity on the region as well as the inhabitants, and the influence of social change on religious practices and world view, educational attainment, women, youth and so on. In this chapter, we attempt to foreground the mutual or conflicting relationship between traditional and modern institution.

Buttressing the mutual or conflicting relationship between tradition and modernity from chapter 3, **chapter 4** explores how social ranking and position are practiced in the traditional and Kuki society. Also, the parameters of how one's wealth, status and prestige is measured. Taking the 'feast of merit' as a case in point, the chapter attempts to contextualise the rituals and ceremony that bestow a certain status based one's achievement, success and victory. The chapter further looks into modern forms of 'feast of merit' is performed. Feast of merit has also transformed with the inroads of Christianity and western materialist culture. As a consequence of which wealth, status and prestige too changed and take a different form altogether.

Chapter 5 discusses the socio-cultural, political and economic life of the Kukis are determined by institutionalised political system which had its own set of norms of governance. The life of the Kuki people is exclusively influenced by traditions and thereby the concepts of rights on land and forest are governed by customary laws. The chapter explains the origin and evolution of chieftainship system, the village council and its components. Further, it analyses the Kuki traditional governance under chieftainship system – its authority, powers and functions. Evident from the village administration and functionaries, the socio-political life of the Kukis were stratified. The chapter also discusses how the institution of chieftainship have evolved over time and to what extent the power and authority of the village chief diminishes, and who are the power wielders in the contemporary period. It further situates the dynamics of land use and ownership system, landholding, land-power relations both in the rural and urban settings.

Within the larger transformation of the Kukis, **chapter 6** attempts to understand modernity in the Kuki society particularly regarding class formation. It traces the origin of the emergence

of middle class among the tribals in Manipur. This chapter attempts to understand the implication of material as well as economic life and the factors contributing to stratification within the Kuki society. Some variables like occupation, income, housing, household assets, residence, landholding, religious institution are drawn from two villages (rural and urban settings) to situate socio-economic inequality and class formation.

The concluding chapter summarises the findings of this ethnographic study and situates the interrelationships of status, power and class in the Kuki society. This study fills a significant gap in understanding Kuki society, the social change, socio-economic inequality in the past (traditional) and present (modern) context. The study correlates ethnographic data with social change and social stratification among the tribals in India. In the end, the thesis outlines the limitations and the possible directions of the future research.



Chapter 2

Ethnohistory of the Kukis: Origin, Socio-Cultures and Economic Organisation

Having introduced the field in chapter 1, we describe the ethnohistory of the Kukis in this chapter. The origin, settlement and socio-economic organisation are included in the ethnohistory of the Kukis.

2.1 Etymology of the Term ‘Kuki’

The origin and meaning of the word Kuki⁴ is shrouded in mystery. Different writers present diverse views and opinions. However, no one has come up with a satisfactory interpretation of the origin or the etymology of the term ‘Kuki’, which can be accepted universally. It is believed that the word Kuki is of foreign derivation in its origin with derogatory meaning thereof. Evidently, it is found in the writing of John Macrae Esq. (1799) in ‘Account of the Kookies or Lunctas’ communicated by J. H. Harington, Esq., in *Asiatic Researches* Vol. II (1800: 141-146). Besides, in H. B. Rowney’s *Wild Tribes of India* (1882: 179-197); Walter Hamilton’s ‘Kukis, Kungkis, or Lunctas’ in *East India Gazetteer*, Vol. II (1828: 92-93), etc.

The word ‘Kuki’ is said to have first been used by the Bengalis to signify dwellers of interior hills. Evidently, the earliest historical reference or notices of these tribes, as they were then known as Kukis, was made in 1777 in the record of about the ‘Kookies’ in the Chittagong Frontier, when Ramookhan, probably a Chakma chief, rebelled against the authority of a cotton farmer employed by the East India Company. The chief called in to his assistance, “large bodies of Kookie men, who lived far in the interior parts of the hills, who have not known the use of firearms, and whose bodies go unclothed”.⁵ It was believed that the British colonials borrowed and used it in the sense as was used by the Bengalis for their own convenience. Besides, according to J. H. Hutton, the name ‘Kuki’ first appeared in the writings of Rawlins on ‘the Cucis or Mountaineers of Tipra’ in *Asiatic Researches* (II, XII) in

⁴ The term ‘Kuki’ is of Assamese or Bengali origin and of some antiquity as found in the writings of G.A. Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* Vol. III, Part 3 (1904: 1); Capt. T.H. Lewin’s *Wild Races of South-Eastern India* 1978 p.130; Gautam Bhadra’s, *The Kuki Uprising 1917-1919*, 1975 p.11; C.A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki Lushai-Tribes*, 1976- pp.1-2; B.N. Bordoloi and Sharma Thakur’s *Tribes of Assam*, Part II, 1988, p.44.

⁵ “Letter from the Chief of Chittagong to the Governor-General, the Hon’ble Warren Hastings, Esq., dated 10 April, 1777”, cited in Lewin *Wild Races*, pp.31-32. See also A. Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of Bengal*, 1884, pp. 332- 348, and A.S. Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land*, 1893, Tribal Research Institute – Aizawl, p.5.

1792 (Shaw, 1929: 11 [fn.] applied to various hill tribes, such as the Lushais, Rangkhols, Thadous, Paite, etc. (Grierson, 1904: 1).⁶

Soppitt suggested the etymology of the term 'Kuki' as 'Luahai' meaning 'Lua people'⁷ and is derived thus Kuki....Kukai....Lukai....Luahai which is today identified to Lushai. In support of this theory Soppitt traced the history of the Lua People as "In some accounts of Burma mention is made of traces having been found of a people (who were) ruled over by the Lua kings or king in days gone by" (Soppitt, 1976: 1-2). Another version claims that the word 'Kuki' has originated from a Chinese word. The literal meaning of 'Ku' is lake, that 'Ku' is accepted to be the name of a lake in China and 'Ki' means the people. Therefore, according to this view, the Kukis are believed to be the original inhabitants of the tracts around the 'Ku' – a lake in China (Bordoloi and Thakur, 1988: 44).

Contemplating on the given versions of the word 'Kuki', it is felt that it is an appellation given to them by the other people of this region. The word Kuki has actually no meaning locally for the people to whom it is applied but it is used as they are identified by it. The term 'Kuki' was however, at one point of time not recognised by the people to whom it is applied (Shakespeare, 1982: 1). At first the name sounded incongruous or absurd but when they were continually called by this name they began to identify with it. The names which have only 'denotation' in the beginning later on acquire 'connotation'.⁸

Thus, as per the above version, Kuki does not signify a particular tribe and no single tribe ever called itself by this foreign name. On the naming of the whole tribe as Kuki, Dun writes,

The origin of the term 'Kuki' is not certainly known; but it is said to be derived from a word applied to a system of cultivation by the Bengalis. The whole of the wild tribe who dwell in the mountain district contained between Bengal and Burma, Cachar and Manipur and Arakan have received this designation (Dun, 1891: 18).

The word Kuki is a generic term which includes a number of tribes and clans (Bhadra, 1975: 11). The Kukis are also classified as either 'Old' or 'New' according to the date when

⁶ See also 'The Tribes of Brahmaputra Valley', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXIX, 1990.

⁷ Lua people: In as far as the terminology is concerned, there is a similarity of the term Lua, Lai, and Loi or Lois. The Pawi (Pois) call themselves 'Lai' which is commonly known as Chins in the Chin Hills district of Burma. The Pawis and the Chins are the same people. The Pawis and the Lushais have also similar customs and ways of life (Sipra Sen, 1992: 85-88). And whereas the Lois are an ethnic group of Manipur classified as Schedule Caste. There are no traces or nothing as such that the Lai people of Chintuipui area in South Mizoram can be identified with the 'Lois' of Manipur.

⁸ The 69th Anniversary of the Kuki Rebellion, 1917-19, *Souvenir*, 1985, p. 10.

they settled down in Manipur. The ‘Old Kukis’ in the case of Manipur as categorised by Col. Shakespear consists of tribes like Anal, Aimol, Kom, Purum, etc. and the ‘New Kukis’ are synonymous with the single tribe – Thadous (Shakespear, 1912: 147; Das, 1947: 19). However, such classification except for its time elements has no significance.

The Kuki and Chin are synonymous (Grierson, 1904: 2), as such ‘Kuki’ is the term applied in India and ‘Chin’ is applied in Burma for the same nationality (Doungel, 1992: 2). The Kukis are described as a ‘nation of hunters and warriors’ ruled as a nation by their principal hereditary chief of rajahs, but divided into clans, each under its own chief (Dalton, 1973: 44). They are known to their neighbours by different names. The British knew them by Kookies, Lushais, Pois, Sindus and Chins. The plains people call these tribes ‘Kukis’ or ‘Kuki-Chin’, whereas the Dimasa Kacharis call them *Thanggumsa* and in Manipur the Meitei name for the Kukis is *Khonjai* or *Khongsai* (Bordoloi and Thakur, 1988: 44). As such, R.B. Pemberton also refers to them as *Khongjuees*.⁹ The word *Khongjai* was perhaps a tonal corruption of *Khongsai* which is one of the ancestral lineages of the Kukis (Goswami, 1985: 295). According to Goswami, the family lines of the Kukis are broadly placed under two ancestral lines of descent, namely Khongsais and Chongthus (Ibid.). In like manner Lt. Col. Shakespear also writes about the Kukis as,

...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 ...in Chin Hills and generally on the Burma border these clans are called Chins...that these Kukis are also closely allied to the Chakmahs’, 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 China (Shakespeare, 1912: 1-2).

He concluded that “there was no doubt that the Kukis, Chins and Lushais are all of the same race” (Shakespeare, 1912: 1-2).

The Kuki-Chin is both a linguistic group and an ethnocultural entity. On the basis of the linguistic classification adopted by G.A. Grierson, the Kuki-Chin is a linguistic sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman group comprising of Kuki-Chin-Mizo (Zo) and the Meitei

⁹ *The Report on the Eastern Frontier of British*. Guwahati, 1966, p.6 (Khongjuos generally known as Kookies, Koochungs and Kuki.)

(Manipuri speakers).¹⁰ Both by language and race, there is no doubt that the Manipuris (Meitei) are closely related with their neighbours and form part of the Tibeto-Burman family.

With regard to the racial stock of the Kukis, different views and opinions have been put forth by a number of scholars and British administrators. In spite of that, through linguistic affinities and ethnic relationships the Kukis are identified with the Mongoloid racial stock of the Austro-Asiatic group of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family (Vumson, 1986: 26). Another authority on the Kukis, Capt. T.H. Lewin said “The Loosei (Lushai) commonly called the Kookie are powerful and independent people who are known to the Bengalese by the name of Kookie and the Burmese as the Lankhe” (Lewin, 1870: 130; Gangte, 1985: 36). As regards to the tribal ethnic composition, William Shaw wrote, the Kom, Aimols, Khawtlangs, Thadous, Lushais, Chins, Pois 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” (Shaw, 1929: 16). On the original place of habitat and racial traits, the latest authorities on the Kukis, Carey and Tuck have maintained that,

Without pretending to speak with authority on the subject, we may reasonably accept the theory that the Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam and the Chins originally live in what we know as Thibet [Tibet] and are of the same stock, their form of government and method of cultivation, manners and customs, beliefs and traditions all point to one common origin (Carey and Tuck, 1896: 2).

Robert Reid pronounced that the Kukis form mingling of clans, speaking dialects of the same language who are known to us by various names, such as Kookies, Lushais, Pois, Shendus, Chins, etc. (Reid, 1942: 2-3).

It is clear from the above facts, that the Mizos or Lushai are none other than the people known as Kuki in India and Bangladesh and Chin in Myanmar (Burma). The name ‘Kookie’ was given to the tribes inhabiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is also written in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, that “the first dwellers in Lushai Hills were Kookies” (Vol. I, 13: 613). It can therefore be said that the Lushais are Kookies/Kukis or vice-versa.

Shakespear’s *Lushai-Kuki Clans* further claimed that the following ethnic groups or clans belonged to Kuki nomenclature:

¹⁰ According to Grierson, the appropriate term would have been ‘Kuki-Chin-Meitei’ sub-family, see G. A. Grierson, *The Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. 3 Part. II & III.

i) All Lushai clans (Rokhum, Zadong, Thangluah, Pallian, Rivung and Sailo), ii) Chawthe (Chothe), iii) Chawngthu, iv) Hnamte, v) Kawlnei, vi) Khawlhing, vii) Khiangte, viii) Ngente, ix) Pautu, x) Rentloi, xi) Vanchiah, xii) Zawngte, xiii) Fanai, xiv) Ralte, xv) Paihte or Vuhte, xvi) Rangte, xvii) Aimol, xviii) Anal, xix) Chiru, xx) Kolhen, xxi) Kom, xxii) Lamgang, xxiii) Purum, xxiv) Tikhup (Tukhup), xxv) Vaiphei, xxvi) Khawthlang, xxvii) Khawchhak, xxviii) Thado, and xxix) Lakher or Mara (Maring) (Shakespeare, 1912, Part I).

Under the Independent India, (the modification Order Nos. S.R.O. 2477, A. dated New Delhi, the 29 October, 1956 of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India) in the Scheduled tribes lists, in the case of Manipur's Kuki-Chin groups we find the following ethnic groups as listed – i) Aimol, ii) Hmar iii) Lamkang, iv) Mazon, v) Gangte, vi) Monsang, vii) Ralte, viii) Shahte, ix) Thadou, x) Chothe, xi) Koirang, xii) Chiru, xiii) Kom, xiv) Paite, xv) Vaiphei, xvi) Simte, xvii) Zou, xviii) Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes, xix) Purum, xx) Koirao, and xxi) Anal.

2.2 Theories of Origin

The frontier tribes of Northeast India have generally rich oral traditions, which play an important role in the history of many tribal societies. Usually history is based on written records or documents or archaeological evidence, which normally do not give first-hand account of the illiterate masses or societies who normally form the bulk of the society. Consequently, therefore history has been the history of the few (at best the elite class). Therefore, anthropologist as well as historians generally accept oral history to be a valuable source, though it is a sensitive source for reconstructing the past. As many tribal communities have no written records of the past, their origin and history can be reconstructed with the help of oral traditions (Beidelman, 1974: 153). In the absence of written records, the oral tradition provided source of information in the research (Tonkin, 1986: 205). One cannot ignore oral traditions because it forms the raw materials from which true history may be derived and sometimes picturised.

Like other tribes, the Kuki tribes have a rich repository of oral traditions. Oral tradition is a distinctive feature of the Kukis in the forms of folk tales and songs, legends, poems, etc. Their origin is shrouded in myths and mythologies. This section attempts to go through the possible sources of this tribe, associated with interesting legends and theories put forth by regional scholars and elders about the history and origin of the Kukis.

2.2.1 Creation Theory

The legend undercurrent among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo people is that of the creation story in which *Chhura* is said to have shaped the world, beating it out flat with his mallet (Shakespeare, 1912: 91). There is another legend which explains why the God's creation of flat land was reshaped. Shakespeare recounts it as follows:

There is a legend that the king of water *Huai* fell in love with *Ngai-ti* (loved one) and, as she rejected his advances and ran away, he pursued her and surrounded the whole human race on the top of a hill called *Phun-lu-buk* said to be far away to the north-east. As the water kept on rising, to save themselves the people threw *Ngai-ti* into the flood, which thereupon receded. It was the running off of this water which cut up the surface of the earth which *Chhura* had leveled, into the deep valleys and high hill ranges of which the world as known to the ancestors of the Lushais consisted (Shakespeare, 1912: 94).

Further, with regard to the creation story, the Kuki-Chin-Mizos have another interesting legend which tells about 'a great darkness' called *Thimzing* caused by a solar eclipse (Shaw, 1929: 24). The eclipse was believed to have been caused by a demonic creature called *Awk* who was believed to have swallowed the sun for seven days and seven nights. During this time many awful things happened, such as the skulls of animals killed in wild games became alive; dry woods also revived; even stones became alive and produced leaves; and at last man had nothing to burn. In that dreadful darkness all, except those whose descendants are now known as *Milui Khongsai*, had undergone a general transformation, some into various types of animals, others into birds and even flies, thereby depleting the human population (Shakespeare, 1912: 92). After the terrible catastrophe of *Thimzing* the world was once again re-peopled by men and women issuing from a hole with a covering-rock (Kipgen, 1997: 32).

2.2.2 Khul Theory

According to this version the legend asserts that the Kuki-Chin-Mizos are originally from the mythological cave called 'Khul' which is equally known to Thadous, Paites, Gangtes, Vaipheis, etc. (Shaw 1929: 25). The name 'Khul' or 'Khur' as a place of origin is also acknowledged by Anals, Moyon and other cognate tribes. In Mizoram they call it 'Chhinlung' or 'Sinlung' (Shakespeare, 1912: 92). The Chhinlung or Sinlung theory is also a legend current amongst the clans inhabiting the Falam area in the Chin State of Burma

(Kipgen, 1997: 34). However, the most common and popular legendary stories relating to the emergence of their progenitors is the cave 'Khul'. Among the interpretation of the legendary stories with slight difference, the one told by the 'Thadou-Kukis' seems to contain the most details. They believed that their progenitors originated from the bowels of the earth and they give an account as to how they arrived on the surface of the Earth. There was a village in the subterranean region called 'Nuoigam' which was ruled by a Chief called 'Nuoimangpa' (ruler of subterranean region) who had a relative, named as Chongthu.¹¹

K. Kipgen writes (1982: 10) that the emergence of Chongthu from Khul cannot simply be taken as a myth because it is very much related to *Themthu* (magical charm) chanted by the 'Thadou-Kuki' physicians, which was verbally handed down to their sons from generation to generation to appease the curse of Nemneh (Ibid.). In case a person is sick, the medicine man makes sacrifice in the name of Nemneh in the hope of appeasing her wrath. So, whenever a 'Thadou-Kuki' physician attends a sick person, he recites the lengthy magical charm, the first three lines of which go thus:

Khulla kapen, Sheenga kakal, Jonna kakum,

Chopeu kachuh

Free translation:

Born at Khul, climbed the Sheeng (hills), proceeded down the Jon and settled down at Chopeu...

From the literal reading of the above quoted lines, the progenitor of the Kukis have come from Khul. From the first four words of the sentences, it is clear that the spot where the progenitors of Kukis migrated was a hilly region. K. Kipgen (1982) mentions that not very far from the place called Khul there was a brook with pebbles on its beds and by the side of it the progenitors of the Thadous established their first village called *Chopeu*.

The *Chhinlung* legend current in Mizoram adds another interesting piece of information i.e., that the last to emerge was a Ralte couple whose loud chattering made *Pathian* (God) shut down the covering stone for fear of over-populating the upper world (Shakespeare, 1912: 93).

Further, another interesting legendary story emanated from a Burmese priest of Mandalay, who explained to Pu. Thangvunga, a Zo historian who went there to trace the history of the origin and migration of these people in 1941, as follows:

¹¹ In some accounts 'Chongthu' is also spelled as Tangthu, Songthu, etc., a dialectical geographical variation.

The ancestors of the Mizos came from Sanghai, sent out by a Chinese king to be the followers of his son who was to establish himself. But without following the prince, they cast lots according to which they proceeded in two groups; one group towards the South-West and the other to the South. The number of years they spent between Shanghai and Burma is not known, but the one in 1941 was counted as the 47th generation. When the group came to Burma the Burmese said, “The Chinlu¹² are coming” (Kipgen, 1997: 33-34).

Thus, it is believed that ‘Chinlu’ came to be known as ‘Chhinlung’ in course of time (Zawla, 1964: 6-7). As this information is received from a neutral person, this explanation has nothing but the advantage of being readily accepted as the belief of the people that their origin which has been held for long goes back to ‘Khul’ or ‘cave’ which the Mizos call ‘Chhinlung’.

2.2.3 *Chhinglung/Sinlung Theory*

In recent years another theory put forth by some writers is that their forefathers came out of a big cave called ‘Chhinlung’, which literally when translated means ‘Closed Stone’. It was suggested that Chhinlung or Ch’en Lung is said to mean a Chinese prince rather than a covering stone to whom the Great Wall was closed; and who revolted against his father Shih Huangtai of the Chin dynasty (Thanga, 1977: 1-3). During his reign, (221 B.C. – 207 B.C.), the Great Wall of China along the northern frontier was strengthened and completed. It can be mentioned here that several hundred thousand men and women adults were forced to work for the construction jobs (Zawla, 1964: 2). As a result, many people fled from the kingdom and migrated to the South-West and South-East direction, and it is believed that the Kukis might have joined the group that moved to South-East (Doungel, 1992: 32-33). This appears to be a conjecture as no solid proof is found.

And with regard to the movement of the Prince, as the legend goes, after incurring the wrath of his father, he is said to have left the kingdom and established himself in the Himalayan mountains and then migrated down to the present Shan state of Burma.¹³ The Kukis are believed to be a part of the subject of Chin-Lung whose name they continue to

¹² The word ‘Chinlu’ is abbreviated form for Chinese, and ‘Lu’ means people in Burmese. Thus, it is believed that *Chinlu* came to be known as *Chhinlung* in course of time.

¹³ Quoted in P. Misao’s *The early life of Kuki-Chins*, in N. Sanajaoba’s *Manipur Past and Present*, Ed. Vol. 3. p. 136

retain as Chhinlung, believing it to be connected with their origin (Zawla, 1964: 6-7). This legend is also current among the people in the Falam area of the Chin state in Burma who trace their origin not from the Chhinlung of the covering rock, but to the Chhinlung itself (Kipgen, 1997: 34).

There is still another theory advanced in this connection. The advocates of this theory believed that the Kukis were originally from a city-state settlement called Sinlung, believed to be somewhere in Central China. Rohauvung noted that Singlung is a fortress of rocks from which few could escape (Sonpate, 1977: 13-14). There are some historians who suggest that the present Singlung or Tailling in South-West China is the place of its location. Whereas Singlung is to be somewhere in Central China, the exact location of Singlung seems to be between *Chando* and *Szeduan* on the bank of *Yalung* river.¹⁴ The Singlung tradition has been popularised in one of the Hmar folk songs as:¹⁵

Khaw Sinlungah

Khaw siel ang ka Zuong suok-a

Mile nelle tam-e

Hriemi hrai-a

2.2.4 Israel/Jewish Theory

This is yet another theory which has been advanced in connection with the origin of the Kukis. In recent years some of the local writers¹⁶ from the Kuki-Chin groups claimed that they were the Mongolian Jews. Some elders among the Kukis had a local tradition that they were originally one of the lost tribes of Israel. They believe that a man called Manmasi was their ancestor-father. One tradition maintains that *Manmasi* could perhaps be one of the children of Joseph (Israelite) son of Jacob found in the Bible named Manasseh. It is therefore, quite possible that the word Manasseh was taken wrongly as Manmasi (Pudaite, op. cit.: 21). If so, they could be one of the missing tribes of Israel of the Old Testament. It is to be noted that many ethnic tribal groups in Mizoram, such as, Lushais, 'Thadou-Kukis', Hmars, etc.

¹⁴ Rosiem Pudaite, Oral Tradition – *A study of the Genesis of some Frontier tribes between Burma and North-East India*, Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, Manipur University, p. 21.

¹⁵ Quoted in Lalngawtian, *Who are we?* In the Souvenir of Kut Festival, Imphal, 1990, p. 5

¹⁶ There are many local writers among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups claiming descent of the Ancient Jews or Israelites in their writings such as – H. Shonthong's *Thugil Bu – Kuki te Danpi* (Custom Book of the Kukis), 1996; R. Pudaite's *The Education of the Hmar people*, Churachandpur, 1963; Jimmy Jamkhomang Haokip's *The Thadou Chronicle*, Part I 1994, published by T.T.C.; Lal Dena's *The Hmars Through the Ages in N. Sanajaoba's Manipur – Past and Present* (Ed.) Vol. 3, 1995.

believed that their ancestors migrated from Assyria thus claiming themselves to be one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

According to N. Lhungdim, the folklores and folktales of the Kukis reveal that they have descended from an ethnic group linked with the Jews in the second half of the first century A.D. after the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.¹⁷ In this regard Khuplam¹⁸ claims that he had sufficient data and information at his command to prove that they are originally from one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. In connection with the Jewish theory of origin there has been claims and counter-claims between the pro-Jewish groups on the one hand and the Christian groups on the other. In Manipur's south district of Churachandpur, several Synagogues are also established. The rise in the number of the Synagogue and the spread of Judaism families among the Kukis is rampant today.

With regard to the old pre-Christian culture of the Kukis in Manipur and other neighbouring parts of the state, its survival and continuity suffered a serious setback, which eventually, lead to perpetual disappearance although the Hindu Meiteis in the valley were capable of holding its embraced Hindu religion of a great civilised nation, against the colonial faith. It is to be noted here that despite the acceptance of Christianity for material and cultural advancement in the beginning by the Kukis, the old socio-cultural practices were so deep rooted in the social system that its practices were still retained within the memory of the few elders in the form of oral tradition.

2.3 Settlement

The settlement of the Kukis is found scattered now in most of the north-eastern state of India, parts of Burma and Bangladesh i.e. the three contiguous independent countries which became the land of their permanent home. The largest chunk of its population is heavily concentrated in the surrounding hills of Manipur. To ascertain where the Kukis are settled, Captain Pemberton, Joint Commissioner, in Manipur in his report on the Eastern Frontiers of British India wrote:

¹⁷ Quoted in N. Lhungdim's *The Kuki Economy since 1780 A.D.*, in Sanajaoba's *Manipur: Past and Present*, 1995, p.151.

¹⁸ Dr. Khuplam is the founder of National Research Laboratory for conservation of Chin-Kuki-Mizo cultural properties. Since his childhood days his favourite past time had been listening to the old stories passed down from generation to generation. In 1949, he gave up his medical practice and devoted his life entirely towards collection of Kuki folklores. Regarding his life and work, he had written, *The Revelation of Ancient Times*, *The Mythical Heaven*, the English translated version of *The Wonderful Genealogical Tales of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo*, etc. Further, Khuplam said they had their own writing script termed as *Bulpizem* consisting of (32) alphabet, which he claims to have discovered through miraculous visions.

The Khongjuees [Khongsais] who under the more generally known names of Kookies [Kukis], Koochungs and Kuci stretch from the southern borders of Muneepoor [Manipur] valley to the Northern limit of the Province of Arracan that the Kookies have been gradually advancing for years in a northern direction and have hitherto established themselves on the rages which were originally occupied by more northernly tribes committed such fearful aggression upon the latter, as to compel them to retire and leave an unoccupied tract between themselves and these formidable opponents” (Pemberton, 1835: 15-17).

In this connection E.T. Dalton in the Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal also observed that:

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 they touch on the Khumis, to Northern Kachar and Manipur, a distance of about 300 miles (Dalton, 1973: 44).

Similarly, William Shaw also writes about the places of their settlement in Manipur as:

The Kukis lived in a large area of hilly country bounded by the Angami Naga of the 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 the Imphal valley (Shaw, 1929: 11).

With regard to the general population movement and their final settlement, Carey and Tuck also observed that the drift of migration has changed and towards the North, The Nwite (Gwite), Vaiphe (Vaiphei) and Yo (Zou) Chins, who within the memory of man 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 (Carey and Tuck, 1896: 2).

Based on the study of the Andamanese, Nicobarese and Hill Tribes of Assam, A.M. Meerward, too, mentioned the territories inhabited by the Kukis that 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 also further mentioned that the Kukis are very migratory, and their settlement can be found dispersed among other

tribes, such as the Nagas, the Cacharis etc. They are split up into a great number of tribes (Meerwarth, 1919: 129).

Thus, considering about the places of settlement as noted above, the territories inhabited by the Thadou-Kukis in particular and the Kuki-Chin ethnic families in general are found to have scattered widely covering the Western part of Burma and the Eastern range of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet region of the present Bangladesh. In India, the scattered settlement of the Kuki-Chin or the Kuki-Chin-Mizo is found almost in all the North Eastern states of India. Therefore, being so widely scattered, they have the privilege of occupying the strategic locations involving political implication in the history of the Kukis.

2.4 Social Organisation

The tribal people of the Northeast differ among themselves in many ways, linguistically, culturally, ethnically and they also have in common many structural and cultural characteristics (Fuchs, 1990) which are noteworthy. The Kukis have their own pattern of social system and institutions – family, kinship and marriage. The term ‘institution’ has no precise and uniform usage. It is generally applied to aspects of social behaviour regulated by well-established and relatively stable norms, values and laws. MacIver and Page used the term ‘institution’ as an established form or condition of procedure characteristics of group activity (Hamilton, 1935: 84-89). Malinowski uses the term ‘institution’, which implies an agreement on the set of traditional values as a result of which human beings come together. This ‘institution’ satisfies various sets of needs by fulfilling a function (1944: 39). Talcott Parson states that, ‘institution’ is an organised pattern of norms which define categories of relationship permitted and prohibited behaviour in social interaction of members of the society and its various sub-system and groups (cited in Rao, 1986: 25).

2.4.1 Family

The Kukis follow the patriarchal system of family structure. As a result, the line of descent is traced through the male line only and the children follow the clan name of the father. The patriarchal family is also known as father-centered or male dominated families. Authority over property passes on to the sons when the father dies. Only the males especially, the eldest son called *Mi-upa* who lives with the parents permanently unlike his younger brothers *Neajo* and sisters *Numei*, can inherit the parental or the family properties. Women are generally assumed to be inferior and subordinate to men and customarily no share in the family

property. Among the Mizos, the right of inheritance goes mostly to the youngest son of the family,¹⁹ whereas among the Kuki clans the right of inheritance is based on primogeniture.

With regard to the position of women in the society, they are considered as mere halves of men and to men of high vanity they were no more than a property particularly when her price was fully paid. She was treated as a commodity. Such practice is as old as their culture, they were considered as member of the family only when they had produced a male issue or heir (Kipgen, 1982: 84). Therefore, they have keen interest in having a baby son without which it was deplored as a curse called *Chapa-gam*. This shows that a woman's status in her husband's household amounted little until she had given birth to a male child. The society is thus, undoubtedly male dominated.

2.4.2 Kinship

David Mandelbaum (1972) points out that in tribal life the principal links for the whole society are based on kinship. Kinship is not simply a principle of social organization; it is also a principle of inheritance, division of labour and distribution of power and privileges. They possess a morality, religion and world view of their own, corresponding to their social relations.

Institutions of *Tucha*, *Becha*, *Nulam* and *Sunggao* are one of the most important characteristic features of the Kuki family structure, both in the past and the present society. It is through these institutions that the family relationship is maintained. T. S. Gangte (1993), a Kuki historian has explained that the *tucha-sunggao* relationship maybe explained in terms of 'patron-client' relationship, though the principles of the two relationships are different. While *tucha-sunggao* relationships are purely based on blood connections, which express loyalty and solidarity of the blood relationship and mutual voluntary obligation; 'patron-client' relationships are based on economic consideration, which is of community nature, but without profit motive, as against the motive of individual consideration in the 'patron-client' relationship. *Tucha-sunggao* relationships are a by-product of matrimonial alliances. Thus, while *tucha-sunggao* relationship is of permanent and primary importance, manifesting social structure with certain social obligation, the 'patron client' relationship is of temporary and secondary significance which comes to an end as the purpose for which such relationship is formed is accomplished (Gangte, 1993: 48).

¹⁹ Lalremsiem, 'Position of women in Mizo society. A Historical study', Unpublished M. Phil Thesis. Manipur University, p. 65

The term *becha*, unlike *tucha* and *sunggao* terms of relationship is not necessarily a product of marriage alliance. The *becha* (literal meaning ‘be’ means relative, often of the same clan; and ‘cha’ means son) relatives are basically exogamous or collateral male relatives of an ego. By extension of the terminology, it can include a wide range of people, including good and reliable friends of non-consanguinal relatives. A person whom an ego considers good, who can go along with him and can stand by him in times of joy and sorrow, may be chosen as a *becha* relative. Also, a man of wisdom, versed in customary laws and traditions, and also expert in interpreting culture and social values may be also selected (Gangte, 1993: 53). The *bechas* are taken from any clan, but usually from the egos clan members, especially the head *becha* becomes the spokesman for the ego in all his religio-social undertakings and decision making (Chongloi, 2008: 131). The *becha* is the person upon whom a family has absolute confidence and to whom all the social obligations of the family are entrusted. Without the *becha*, the performance of any Kuki social function is incomplete. The importance of the *becha* in Kuki society can be gauged from the very significance of the word *lhonglaisat* which is another word for the most commonly used word *becha*. The word *lhonglaisat* signifies the exclusive and most honourable privilege of the *becha*, that is to give order for killing of any account of any animal of the family (Goswami, 1985: 19).

Thus the three sets of relatives – *tucha*, *sunggao* and *becha* form an indispensable part of the Kuki kinship. Through these (*tucha*, *sunggao* and *becha*) system, every household in a village are connected through the network of relationships. Sometimes the network crosses village boundary, especially *tucha-sunggao* relationship. For the Kuki people, to abide by and function through *khankho* – this system are the norms by which a person abides and therefore ultimately the principle on which the world is founded. *Khankho* is conduct required of an individual at various moments and stages in life – to act as *tucha* (as bride receiver family line), as *sunggao* (as bride giver family line), as *nu’pa* (immediate in-laws) and so on in the social ambience of the community.

2.4.3 Marriage

Customary laws and obligation with regard to the birth of a child and marriage in Kuki society are extensive. Marriage, birth and death are integral parts of one’s life and the span of life is ridden with anxiety and tension (Gangte, 1993: 78). The Kuki clans are related by traditional ties of affinity. The clan is exogamous and follows a system of asymmetric alliance that is an alliance based on prescribes marriage with the matrilineal cross-cousin,

also known as marriage to mother's brother's daughter. In the society of Thadou-Kukis and their cognate tribes, the boy could marry any girl within or outside the clan except his own sister.

The British administrator William Shaw mentioned four types of marriage practices among the Thadou Kuki: *Chongmu (mou)*, *Sahapsat (sa-haapsa)*, *Jollha(h)* and *Kijammang* (Shaw, 1929: 57). It is found that marriage among the Thadou-Kuki society involves hectic customary procedures and obligations whether the form of marriage is that of *Chong-Mou Hailam* or *Sahapsat* (A typical marriage based on arrangement or negotiation by parents of both sides) or *Kijam Mang* (marriage by elopement) or *Jol-lhai* or *Jolgai Kichen* (marriage by impregnating a girl). Still further, there is another type of marriage by way of *Golguh-Kichen* (clandestine marriage) and *Jollhah-Kichen* (marriage by enticement) in the social circle, where the same customary laws could be applied to some extent. The amount of customary bride price is not definite and varied from one clan to another clan. In spite of that the normal bride price generally consists of seven Mithuns, one *Dahpi* (large-gong), one *Khichong* (necklace), one pair *khichong* (rare bead used as earring representing precious stones) and along with Lutom and Laisui, both of which were clothes for the bride's father and mother respectively (Gangte, 1993: 94).

In spite of marriage, solemnization rite and the sanctity of ceremonies performed by the *Thempu* (priest), *Kida* (divorce) is not uncommon. It is permissible under certain circumstances which may on account of lunacy, cruelty, adultery, repeated unfaithfulness, barrenness etc. The husband and wife would be equally liable to fines depending on who was judged to be at fault. If it was the fault of the husband he forfeited all the paid bride-price and in addition to that he was penalised to pay *mithun* as *Ji-Daman* (divorce price). All the *Sumken-Thilken* (property gift) brought by his wife was also to be returned. In Thadou-Kuki society divorce was quite common but unless the wife committed a fault of her own she was free to go in for a re-marriage, she was protected by the customary law provided that she had a new suitor. Nevertheless, it was found that in their society the standard of sexual morality was very high though there were few instances of extra-marital affairs and pre-marital sex.

2.5 Dresses

Clothes of different kinds were indigenously produced and worn on different occasions and festivals. A Kuki woman would ply loin looms and could manufacture all kinds of clothing with the help of needles. Every Kuki women was expected to know the art of weaving in the traditional past. In fact, women who were proficient in the art of weaving were sought after

brides in those days, as her services and the products strengthened the domestic economic condition. Among all the Kuki tribes every traditional cloth had embroidery marks. Women who were expert in embroidery techniques had a high reputation in the society. Women really contributed substantially towards stabilising their domestic economy.

Dresses in general are the identity of a nation or a tribe. Dresses are like the unwritten code where by a man's social status and culture can be determined.²⁰ The Kuki ways of dressing are often artistic, well adapted to the working condition in the hills. Not only the Kukis but the different tribes of the Nagas also have special shawls with symbols of animals, objects etc. for their festive occasions.²¹ It is a critical appreciation and expression of their culture. To exploit their talents, the Kukis did careful handicraft work and artistic embroideries all over the shawls for the warriors. It reflected a manual involvement of love, affection and recognition of their belief and deeds. It was a reflection of forms of tribal worship. Hence, the design of the textiles, the arrangement of looms, the meaning of the used symbols help us to determine that the Kuki women had a high degree of expertise and had made advancement in their technique. For instance, a 'Thadou-Kuki' women could make shawls like *Saipikhup*,²² *Mangvom*,²³ and *Khamtang*²⁴ (women's lungi) within a few weeks which is a proof of their high artistic skill. In a small Kuki family, the presence of one talented and skilful woman could extend support to the whole family and strengthen their economic position. Thus, the Kuki women learnt the art of running the textile or loom machines by themselves to sustain their economic life without any formal education and their economic contribution is well recognised.

2.6 Economic Organisation

In the hoary past the Kukis cultivated land in the most simple form and they practiced shifting cultivation also known as *jhumming*,²⁵ which is perceived as 'nomadic cultivation'²⁶

²⁰ In the contemporary period, attires and shawls have lost their meaning as status markers to expressions of common heritage and tribal identity within the larger realm of the entire Kuki community.

²¹ See Sina Khayi, "Cultural significance of tribal costumes in modern times," a paper presented in a seminar organised by MUTSU at Senate Hall, Manipur University from 29-30 March 1996.

²² *Saipikhup* means 'elephant's knee' in 'Thadou-Kuki' term because of its design on both the edge. The design is said to have been acquired during their wandering in the south East Asian forests, where they encountered hordes of elephants.

²³ *Mangvom* means a 'black border' in 'Thadou-Kuki' term. The black colour is a sign of royalty. The shawl is meant for a man of royal birth.

²⁴ *Khamtang* is a 'lungi' for women. It is originally black with a striking yellow band at the bottom line pattern with a striking yellow band at the bottom line pattern with a serpentine design. Intricate wearing designs can be seen on their products.

²⁵ In Thadou-Kuki dialect 'jhumming' is called *Thinglhang-lei* or *Jou-lei*.

²⁶ See Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. III, p.24.

by the colonialist because of its unsettled nature of cultivation. Shifting Cultivation is the most primitive form of agricultural practices and is basically labour-intensive.²⁷ It is a rain fed agricultural practice for economic sustenance to which the Kukis are adapted. It is a cyclic cultivation in which a patch of land is selected in the dense jungle full of trees or bamboos. The felled and dried jungle trees and vegetations are reduced to ashes. In doing so, the upper surface soil is also thoroughly burnt up to an inch or more. This enhances the fertility status. When the land is considered exhausted, jungle is allowed to recover, the bamboo again springs up in its old locality, and in the course of between seven and ten years, the soil is once more fit to be brought under cultivation (Stewart, 1855: 604). Then having scratched up with the little hoes called *tucha* (a small hand hoe) the soil gets mixed with the ashes and the soil gradually becomes ready for the reception of seed. However, the leftover debris is also cleared to make the land fit for sowing seed. It may be pointed out here that the Kukis do not sow their seeds 'broadcast' like the Nagas (Hodson, 1911: 52), but dig the soil with *tucha* and put in a few seeds and cover them up (Shaw, 1929: 57). All cultivation is done by manual labour.

Jhum cultivation is a system of mixed cropping. They produced everything they needed. The jhumias will try to cultivate as many crops as possible in the same field. As such variety of crops are sowed under the rain fed condition just after the pre-monsoon showers and the Kuki jhumias would reap or harvest as the case maybe depending upon the ripening of the crops. Stewart writes about the superior quality of the rice produced by the Kukis and attributed this to their technique of abandoning the site of cultivation after the first and second crops (1855: 604). They started the practice of permanent cultivation alongside jhumming only after the 19th century. Other than rice, the Kukis cultivate a variety of seeds and produce different varieties of crops such as cucumbers, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, jams, water melons, millets, job tear, sesame, maize, chilly, gourd, pumpkin, ginger, turmeric, onion, brinjal, cabbage, bitter herbs etc. Despite the cultivation of varieties of crops in the jhumfield, the primary or staple food item of the Kukis among others has always been rice. Maize crop may be taken as secondary but for a poor Kuki household, it is consumed as a primary food item as it can substitute rice. Thus, it shows that cultivation of paddy is the most important part in the economic life of the Kukis in Manipur.

Evidently, the main activity of the Kuki tribes center around food production to which their economy is based mainly on agriculture. It is the most important socio-economic

²⁷ See B.S.K. Sharma; Shifting Cultivation (Manipur and Nagaland region) National Agro Forestry Seminar, Imphal (Quoted in K. Kipgen's *The Thadou Kukis*, 1982: 113).

activity among the Kukis and is the only means to meet their essential economic requirement and sustenance. Normally it is an important factor of tribal life style in respect of their 'land use system'. Jhumming is not only a means for sustenance, but also constitutes the socio-cultural lore of the people. Being primarily a subsistence economy, what can be called household property was therefore, very less and limited. Some of their permanent household properties consisted of few agricultural implements like hoes, axes, cooking pot etc. Their weapons of war included *daos*, spears, guns etc. Besides, one or two gongs, a few necklaces and a few heirlooms constituted their household properties. Their domestic animals such as fowls, dogs, goats, pigs, cats, *mithun* also shifted along with the owner. The *mithun* was the most valued domestic animal and those Kuki households, which possessed several number of *siel* (*mithun*) were considered rich. Possession of cattle as a wealth was cherished. Moreover, the process of distribution or appropriation of products involved channelling the products upward to socially determined allocative centres such as the chief, the priest and the blacksmith.

2.6.1 Work Culture

Work-culture in the traditional Kuki society is quite elaborately detailed. Generally, an individual or collective, irrespective of male or female except children, are engaged in agricultural activities, which is their main occupation. This shows that in agriculture, they spend much more time and labour comparatively, than any other works. Production of goods is essentially the work of men assisted by their son which is also the case of women assisted by their daughter under 'self-domestic'. The intensity of labour-inputs and the time spent by the son and daughter under 'other activities' is comparatively the same with that of agricultural activities. Children looked after babies while their parents were at work. This helped the parents especially the mother to engage themselves in more productive works. Thus, in certain Kuki families, the birth of a new child is welcomed as it adds to the numerical strength of the labour-force within the family by inheriting the duties of their parents automatically. The community is heavily engaged in agricultural activities. They work collectively in the form of labour-corps known as *Lom*.

2.6.2 Lom (Corporate Labour Corps)

Lom is an important organisation of the Kukis. It is an organisation which concerned chiefly with the economic aspect of the Kuki society. The word *Lom* signifies an informal labour organization in a simple and agrarian traditional village life of the Kukis. The motive behind

the formation of *Lom* was to accomplish the *jhum* cultivation work of each household in a village at the allotted time frame. In other words, this peculiar cultivation needs the right manual labour at the right time. This can be attributed to the constrained period of time in *jhum* cultivation i.e. individually faced by every Kuki villagers as this peculiar cultivation needs the right manual at the right time. In this organization, every youth members of *Lom* would work collectively in every individual's field reciprocally. The institution of *Lom* in the traditional Kuki society occupies an intrinsic part as it helped in the proper functioning of all round village socio-economic sustenance. They are strongly guided by the principle of subsistence economy.

The *Lom* also rendered benevolent services to the poor and needy villagers who could not finish their cultivation works on time due to illness or other unavoidable circumstances. Rendering free services by them is known as 'Lom-tha-hu' (rendering voluntary services). Hence, in this way the *Lom* members reciprocated in helping each other and thereby keeping the entire village self-sufficient in matters of physical labour and work force. The year round agro-based economy of the Kukis revolves within the ambit of earning foodstuff for survival and merry making and festivities. The members sustained and perpetuated the village society through a uniform code of conduct and discipline for it was the potential source of strength in the proper functioning of a traditional Kuki society. *Lom* is an agro-based institution that imparts a sense of duty and dignity to the younger ones and also served as the training centre for leadership.

Lom is thus an institution which teaches the Kukis a corporate feeling at a very young and tender age. It instils in them the importance and strength of a united body. The spirit of oneness and the sharing of common goal which he learns from the *Lom* make him see the whole society as one with different parts of the same purpose. It helps the members fit in the society and fulfill his parts for the higher objective of the society's existence. The *Lom* as an institution has disciplined, guided and trained the young people in such a way that through their common work and corporation political organization could be stabilised.²⁸

2.6.3 *Som* (Bachelors Dormitory)

Mention may be made that the male *Lom* members also served as the Kuki warrior (military) and they would stay together at the *Som* (bachelor's dormitory) after their daily chores of

²⁸ Also see T. Goswami, *Kuki Life and Lore* (1985); T.S. Gangte, *The Kukis of Manipur...* (1993).

works which was constructed adjacent to the chief's house.²⁹ They thus represented the potent force for the chief's power and pride. Apart from defending the village, all those who were to sustain and perpetuate the village society were required to work under *Som* system through a uniform code of conduct and discipline. It was a potential source of strength for maintaining the health and vitality of the village society, maintenance of social coherence and loyalty to cultural values were considered to be of immense importance.³⁰ Equality, self-sacrifice, group dynamics and group solidarity were regarded as important for the sustenance of society. Thus, the institution of *Som* also acted as the cementing force towards the community based organisation of the traditional Kuki village.

They contributed invaluable services to the traditional Kuki society in political, military and economic matters. Politically, these were the backbone of the chief; militarily, the youth power acted the defence force and a standing voluntary force of the village, and ethically, such organizations were the centre of moral and psychological training. Thus, *Som* organisation formed an important mechanism around which the village social life revolved.

The leader of the *Som* often consulted the chief and his *Semang Pachong* of the village. Life in the *Som* was associated with customs and observances, some of which had a traditional antiquity. Maintenance of social coherence and loyalty to cultural values were of immense value. Basically, it was an institution where physical education, martial arts and handicrafts are practiced and taught in which an elder call the *Som-Upa* supervised. These youths are ready to face any eventualities which are likely to take place in the village such as emergencies of war, fire, murder, disputes, theft, etc. In course of time, this institution could produce brilliant students who would attained the status of an influential person in the chief's village court (Goswami, 1985: 97).

Sociologically speaking, *Som* is the key institution of the Kukis especially in the traditional society. It was an important constituent of the socio-cultural and political life. The *Som* serves as the nerve centre of traditional Kuki village life. It is also a storehouse of Kukis socio-cultural activities. In the absence of any formal educational system, a *Som* is a youth organisational set up which concerns only able-bodied young boys of the village. It is a bachelor dormitory in which all-young boys of the village sleep together at night (see Gangte, 1993). During this period a boy has to work under strict supervision of the senior boys. *Som* was a place where young boys were trained in the Kuki way of life, such as the art of warfare, code of conduct, traditional values, arts and crafts, singing, dancing etc. It also imparted

²⁹ For details on Kuki 'military' and 'som' institution, see N. Kipgen 'Revisiting the Military'... (2019).

³⁰ For details, see Haokip (1991).

education among the youths for their future life in household affairs and management of social life.

Traditionally the members were to sustain and perpetuate the village society through a uniform code of conduct and discipline, for it was the potential source of strength for maintaining the well-being and vitality of the society. The entire fabric of a Kuki life in the village, social, cultural and even religious revolved around the *Som* life.

By entering the *Som* a boy gains admission to the society of men. All members of a *Som* house have obligations and rights determined by age and the time of initiation into the *Som* community. *Som* is linked with an elaborate system of age groups. Each age-group discharge prescribed duties and enjoys definite privileges, and in the course of his life a man passes automatically from one age group to the other. The members of the dormitory are divided into two groups according to age—seniors and juniors. The head of the dormitory (*Som Upa*) is selected from the senior group. It is his job to take care of all the members of the dormitory and maintain discipline among them. The juniors follow the commands of the *Som Upas* and receive different types of education from them. Thus, all the fundamental practices of healthy social living were inculcated among the boys in the *Som*.

2.7 Mores and Values

2.7.1 *Khankho*

Khankho is a term that neatly encapsulates all the religious, social, and political dimensions of the Kuki people. The breakup of its etymology is *khan* = to cultivate and grow, behaviour, deal; *kho* = village, land, lifetime, to concern, etc. The two syllables of *khankho* in their separate entities have different yet not much coherent meanings. But when the two words are integrated in one word the resultant meaning undergoes a transformative change, surpassing the meanings in their separate entities.³¹ It can also mean ‘the way a person should grow up in the village or land’ or ‘the manner in which a person should conduct himself/herself in life’, or ‘the norms one adheres to while living in the village or land’ and others. Thus the term *khankho* is a behaviour by which a person is identified as a dignified individual. It is also the social behaviour and ways by which groups organise themselves in day-to-day life guided by customs and practices. A Kuki individual is bound with societal obligations and customary

³¹ For further discussions on *khankho*, see Hemkhochon Chongloi, *Indoi: A Study of primal Kuki Religious Symbolism in the hermeneutical framework of Mircea Eliade*, 2008.

laws that evolved around the system of *khankho*. For the Kuki people, to abide by and function through this system is *khankho*, that is, religion (Chongloi, 2008: 132).

The Kuki term *khankho* is similar to the African concept of 'Ubuntu'. Ubuntu lies at the heart of the African way of life and impacts on every aspect of people's well-being - it is seen as the act of being human, caring, sympathy, empathy, forgiveness or any values of humanness towards others. Ubuntu is a capacity in South African culture that expresses compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring (Mnyaka and Motlhabi. 2005).

Khankho is in a nutshell 'the life principle' of the Kuki people. As we can observe, the term in its original vision escapes dogmatism in that a set of norms established at one point of time can be revised to suit the present without violating its original intention. The intention is that of retrospection about one's conduct in the interest of the wider community, progressively taken to different levels of relationships which can be seen from two sets of relationships: *Upa-Naopa* (genealogy based on blood relations and 'vertical' in nature) and *Nupa-tucha*; and *Nulam-sunggao* (matrimonial and its subsets) is 'horizontal'. The vertical relationship remains fixed by nature (based on lineage), while, the horizontal relationships are flexible and can be change over successive generations.

Khankho is the social heritage and customary way by which groups organise their way of working, thinking and feeling. The customary laws or ethical principles of the Kukis evolved around the system of *khankho* by which a Kuki is bound with societal obligations. In the *khankho* system, a Kuki individual learns all what he ought to do or ought not to do. Apparently, the chief rules under the system of *khankho* and he is the custodian of the *khankho* system and punishes a villager whoever violates the system according to the customary law of the Kukis (Chongloi, 2009: 16).

Therefore, *khankho* is acting according to what is required of you at various moments in life – to act as *tucha* (bride receiver), *sunggao* (bride provider family line), as *nupa* (immediate in-laws) etc. in the social ambience of the community; as an individual at various positions in relation to the other – as father, as elder, as younger person, as mother, as grandfather, as chief, as *upa* etc. in conformity with kinship solidarity. As a person of this clan certain obligations are there in relation to other clan members; so also as a Kuki in relation to other tribal groups. The ambit extends to being a human person as creature in

relation to God, and finally, as *Homo sapiens* in relation to nature.³² Each of these varied levels of relationships needs elaboration, which we have no space to undertake now. We simply note here that *khankho* is a life of an integral harmony with fellow human beings.

The historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1971) made a very illuminating observation that every religious tradition has a ‘centre’, a central conception which informs the entire gamut of the believers’ religiosities (Eliade, 1971: 10). This observation is helpful not only in the study of religious tradition but also of the whole life of a primal community. With the Kuki people, we made the observation that religion and other concerns of life are integrally related. The philosophical dimension of their religiosities is informed by the religious symbol called *Indoi*,³³ and the social, cultural and political dimension is informed by the study of *khankho*. To understand the mindset of the Kuki people is to grasp this central conception called *khankho* which determined their position against colonialism. The British incursion into the areas ruled by the Kuki chiefs was looked upon as a direct assault on the Kuki people and their *khankho* because it threatened everything the Kuki people stood for – justice, equality, human rights, harmonious coexistence, freedom, etc.

2.7.2 Ethos of Communitarianism

The traditional Kuki society was largely characterised by the principles of cooperation and communitarianism rather than individual interest and individualism. The Kukis are a community-oriented people and are known to be very industrious. In the past, all the services rendered by the *Som* members towards the welfare of the village and in times of need were made voluntarily. Through these services, the young people developed a sense of discipline, responsibilities and duty towards their fellowmen and their community. The *Som* member had a moral obligation to ensure that every family in the village was cared for, whether they were orphans, poor or widows. Therefore, compassion, valour and discipline were the key words that defined the *Som*.

A Kuki theologian maintains: “Prior to the introduction of modern education, youth dormitory was the leading traditional institution of learning and the foundation of Kuki culture”.³⁴ Traditional education thus appears like a broad process of socialisation in the indigenous traditions through what the *Som* imparted to the youth. The *Som* institution

³² This relation of human and creation as part of *khankho* needs further elaboration, especially with concerns on environmental crisis. There are enough resources in primal tradition to help tackle ecological problem.

³³ On this religious symbol see Hemkhochon Chongloi, *Indoi: A study of primal Kuki religious symbolism in the hermeneutical framework of Mircea Eliade*, 2008.

³⁴ Interview at Guwahati, dated 15 March 2017.

ultimately promoted the maintenance of social cohesion and group solidarity within the village. The *Som* is therefore, both a training school in the arts of life and war, and a club for entertainment and fun.

The clan and not the family was the real binding factor in the Kuki village. It was obligatory for the individual to obey the elders and more essentially the clan elders. In a sense the principle of gerontocracy is strictly followed. The individuals had no other way than to put up with all the curbs imposed on them by the clan elders. This accounted for the stern discipline and unity within the clan. With the growing individualism, placing personal interests over those of the clan has resulted in disintegration and indiscipline. The spirit of sacrifice and unity at all costs has disappeared and with those are vanishing some of the noblest traits of Kuki character. Individual differences melted away in the common cause for defence of the village through the easy contact provided by the *Som* institutions.

Leadership in traditional Kuki society rested largely upon age and seniority. Elders were respected and their advice commonly heeded. Respect for elders and parents were held to be sacred duty in the Kuki society.³⁵ Being a society based on gerontocracy (Weber, 1989), age among the Kukis has both prestige and power because it is the older people who know and pass on to the younger generations the ways of society to which they are expected to conform. The *rite de passage* of the young people within the *Som* was a continuous and long process of testing till they get married and accepted family responsibility. The young men became more self-reliant, with common sense and better discipline. Their loyalty and sense of service to the corporate body is well developed in the *Som*.

Som as an institution mobilise the service of the young men to meet the needs of the society. The service rendered to the society was obligatory and spontaneous. It manifests the spirit of free service that is *Tomngaina*. The members of *Som* do not expect to receive any reward for the help they rendered. The *Som* members were guided by the principle of *Tomngaina* by which one was duty bound to help others possessing the qualities of unselfishness and cooperation. This was an excellent custom in the daily life of a Kuki. 'Tomngaina permeated all spheres of life by extending help to the fellow members of the society in carrying out different tasks during any ritual, ceremonies and during natural calamities', said an elderly Kuki man. This was the guiding principle in the everyday life of a Kuki.

³⁵ Apart from the commoners, even the Kuki chiefs respected the word of their *Piba* or *Bulpipa* (the senior most in clan lineage). The decision of the *Bulpipa* in any matter is final and binding and not question.

A person who possesses *Tomngaina* must be courteous, considerate, unselfish, courageous and industrious. In a sense, the main feature of the *Som* atmosphere was to eliminate jealousy and possessiveness, to inculcate the sense of communal property and action – ‘everyone belonged to everyone else’. It serves to bind together the men of a compact social unit, and counteracts such centrifugal forces as rivalry, jealousy and hatred by the strictly enforced demand for co-operation and loyalty of all members of a *Som*. This loyalty and the need for discipline are instilled into the boys from an early age. A Kuki octogenarian asserts, “The fear of outside aggression, latent in any society of headhunters, strengthens the feeling of mutual dependence of the *Som* members and adds to its vital role in Kuki society”.³⁶ Strict disciplines were maintained in every *Som* members and the leaders (*Som Upa*) are empowered to punish and fine offenders against the *Som* code. The leaders appointed amongst them were vested with the authority to discipline. *Som* is an institution where all leadership qualities can be cultivated with the help and guidance of the senior officials.

In the hoary past, this strong community feeling had enabled them to survive for long as there seemed to be but little room for any individualistic tendencies and almost everything was done in groups. The strenuous task of cultivation was minimised and made immensely amusing by groups of friends or families getting together—transplanting and harvesting one field at a time by sequence. In such a society of strong community feelings, one had to be part and parcel of the village and one is expected to be faithful to all the community activities. Durkheim emphasises the integrative functions that such performance aims at revitalising shared sentiments and beliefs of members of the society. It serves to sustain the vitality of [common] beliefs to keep them from being effaced from memory and, in sum, to revive the most essential elements of the collective consciousness.³⁷

The sense of fraternity is deeply entrenched among the Kukis. The feeling of fraternalism is expressed especially at times of adversity or tragedy when the fellow villagers give a helping hand. For instance, a man who has finished transplantation or harvesting would help his neighbours, and if anybody had a good harvest, they were expected to give a feast to their friends or even the villagers.

Thus, the principle of cohesion and adherence prevailed in the hoary past. The traditional Kuki society was largely characterised by the principles of co-operation and

³⁶ Interview at Haijang village, dated 30 April 2017.

³⁷ See Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1912, p. 420.

communitarianism rather than by individual interest and individualism. Thus, a good Kuki should be courteous, selfless, dauntless and diligent.

In this chapter, we have provided a detailed ethnographical sketch of the Kukis in terms of their origin, settlement and social and economic organisation. Against this backdrop, the next chapter is going to dwell upon colonialism, Christianity and social change among the Kukis.



Chapter 3

Colonialism, Christianity and Social Change among the Kukis

In chapter 2, we have captured the ethnohistorical sketch of the Kukis. And, in this chapter, we attempt to examine the intrusion of colonialism, embracing or encounter with Christianity and associated social change in terms of western education, religion and status of women among the Kukis.

Society is dynamic, it is never static. Human groups change slowly or rapidly under the pressure of internal and/or external forces (Das, 1962). Change is ubiquitous and continuous phenomenon and the tribes of Northeast India cannot but be affected by it (Oommen, 2009: 3). Their traditions and customary practices underwent drastic changes since the colonial period. While many of them are lost today, many of the existing ones are used in a modified form. Among the Kukis, there were two main agents or forces of changes—colonialism and Christianity. For instance, as the newly converted Kuki thought that their tribal culture was inconsistent to Christian practices and they opted for abolitions.

The traditional social structure, which was mostly intact for centuries, began to experience a steady change under the influence of the Christian missionaries and the progress of evangelization and modern education. The inroads of Christianity, modern education and market system since the colonial time ushered in a substantial change in the Kuki society. With the percolating of modern education system, the old traditional way of learning institution such as *Som* (bachelors' dormitory) and *Lom* (corporate labour) (as discussed in chapter 2) becomes less significant and discontinued. Similarly, the traditional barter system becomes impractical as the colonial introduces cash-based exchange and market system. Cash as a medium of transaction become much convenience and ameliorating rather than taking the burden of goods exchange in kind. Ever since then cash based exchange and modern market system are adopted and it replaces the practice of barter system. The introduction of money system changes the value system in the society which in turn changes the socio-economic value system.

This chapter attempts to measure the nature and extent of change of social structure. It discusses the various agents of change and thereafter continuity in shaping and in promoting change in the community. Based on secondary literature and field data it examines the overall

impact of social change and transformation on the Kukis' social structure with the inroads of Christianity and the process of modernization.

3.1 Evangelisation and Colonialism

Colonialism exhibits 'an expansionist and proselytizing ethos' based on a sense of both 'duty and domination' and manifested in a policy of paternal guardianship (Beidelman, 1982: 4). This involves an attempt at transforming a subject people who are judged inferior to the colonial rule yet capable of conversion to a 'higher' level, albeit one judged unequal to that of their masters and teachers. These notions are intensified in a religious mission and appear in all such colonialist endeavours. By 'colonialism', we mean cultural domination with enforced social change. In the colonial past, we find grandiose attempts by a small group of innovators such as missionaries and administrators, to implement radical changes upon a massive and often unwilling or uncomprehending population (Ibid.: 1982).

After the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, the hill areas of Manipur in the Northeastern part of India were brought under the British rule. Missionary movement also became more prominent after the introduction of the Charter Act of 1813 which permitted Christian missionaries to propagate English and preach their religion. In 1894, William Pettigrew, a British missionary of the Arthington Aborigines Mission,³⁸ came to Imphal and started missionary work among the people of the plains, who were largely Meiteis. William Pettigrew established a mission station at Ukhrul in 1895 and began work among the Tangkhuls at the behest of the Political Agent Colonel Maxwell (Singh, 1991: 57). Watkin Roberts, the founder of 'Kuki Mission 1910'³⁹ in Southern Manipur was one such. Massive conversion to Christianity occurred amongst the Kukis⁴⁰ only after the defeat of this tribe in the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-1919 or the Kuki Rebellion.⁴¹ A large number of them began to

³⁸ This was a missionary society started by a millionaire at Leeds, near London, named Robert Arthington. He pronounced the idea of a mobile missionary movement, wherein if a Christian beginning was made in any country, the missionary would then move on to another country, and the newly converted Christian in the country would be encouraged to do likewise. The idea was to equip people with Gospel and then move on, so that missionary work would not be confined to any single region. Robert Arthington funded the entire missionary society, determined its policy and recruited the missionaries (see Dena 1988: 31-2).

³⁹ In 1910, Watkin Roberts came to Senvon at the invitation of the village chief Kamkholun Singson and started his mission 'Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission.' For further discussion, see, Jangkhoham Haokip, *Can God Save My Village* (2014).

⁴⁰ By Kuki or Thadou Kuki, the study is referring to the Thadou dialect-speaking group of the Kuki community. The Thadou dialect speaking group amongst the Kukis (and their co-tribes) who arrived in the middle of the nineteenth century are called the new Kukis, owing to the fact that they came later than the other hill tribes (old Kukis).

⁴¹ For further details on Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919, see Jangkhomang Guite and Thongkhohal Haokip (eds.). 2019. *The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919: A Frontier Uprising against Imperialism during World War I*. London: Routledge.

profess Christianity and move away from their old belief systems. A possible reason could be the fact that Christianity was the religion of their conquerors and thus considered superior to their own (Downs, 1971: 169).

After the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-1919, consolidation of colonial power and more organised missionary work had propelled vast social, economic and political changes in and around the Kuki Hills. For instance, the religious consciousness that the missionaries instituted and communicated was also insistent on prioritising the individual over community.⁴² In the existing socio-cultural life of the Kukis, the role of the individual was defined and made meaningful by the communities he or she was a part of, whether it be his or her age group, clan or village. It was the community that gave the individual an identity, sustaining him or her and giving a meaning to his or her existence. The missionary religion was also one that insisted on prioritising temporality over spatiality. The existing moral and spiritual universe of the Kukis was very much centred on land and how a balance was to be maintained among all those who shared that land through principles of reciprocity and respect. The Kuki cosmology was primarily based on fulfilling the commitment towards the various constituents of a given space, which had its own significance and history. Further, the government appointed officials such as *Lambus* (hill peons) as the real wielders of political power in the hills and the *Gaonburas* (headmen) at the village level gradually undermine the traditional authority. In the context of these, significant changes are apparent at the community structures and traditional institutions. The new religion altered various aspects of the existing social structure, traditional leadership, and community life.

The early twentieth century was marked by a resistance against conversion attempt by Christian missionaries as the new religion was unwelcomed in the Kuki areas. Christianity was perceived to be against the existing socio-cultural and religious ethos of the communities. The Christian cosmology was made to fit into traditional religious system and hence, altering the people worldview (Eaton, 1984). Missionaries and church leaders of the converts would be seen pacifying and destabilising the social and political institutions at different intervals, while covertly plotting with the colonial administrators. This they did by effecting vast changes in the community life and ways of being, wherein the local people came to be de-rooted from their culture and history. The missionaries taught newly convert

⁴² Native American theologian George Tinker, locates the focus of the individual within the larger theoretical and intellectual commitments to individualism that the western world professed right from the Hellenistic period continuing on through the European reformations to modern notions of American hegemony in the new world order (Tinker 2008: 77).

Kukis to leave behind and abhor their cultural practices and adopt a new one in its place that was more in tune with the civilisational standards set by them.

Alongside the religious consciousness, the missionaries also introduced new values that prioritise the individual over community. In the existing socio-cultural life of the Kukis, the role of the individual was defined and made meaningful by the communities he or she was a part of, whether it be his or her age group, clan or village. It was the community that gave the individual an identity, sustaining him or her and giving a meaning to his or her existence. In return, the individual was obliged to ensure that the integrity and well-being of his or her community was always maintained, and his or her relation with the other individual and constituents of the created world was always acknowledged. Most of the existing ceremonial practices functioned to meet this obligation and, therefore, elicited the active participation of every individual in a community. If an individual did not participate, the ceremonial practices would become ineffective and fail to provide the desired results. In short, the existing belief system prioritised the life and well-being of the community at large rather than that of the individual.

Having come from a cultural and political background that legitimised political conquest and propagation of a particular understanding of Christianity, wedded to colonial ideology and practice, it is argued that missionaries were keen to support the colonial occupation and subjugation of the Kukis and gradually work towards replacing the existing religious and cultural self with what they deemed to be 'civilised' and righteous (Dena, 1988). This section attempts to understand the missionary agenda and practice, its interventions in socio-cultures, especially within a colonial context that paved the way for suppression of Kuki cultural identity.

The larger concern of the new religion (Christianity) was with questions of an individual being convicted of his or her personal sin; an individual encountering the supreme reality; an individual making a decision to convert; an individual aspiring for his or her personal redemption and the need for an individual to maintain purity in his or her personal life so that eternal life after death may be achieved. This focus on the individual prioritised the interests, experiences, feelings, interpretations, and actions of the individual over and above that of the community. It extracted the individual out of the community. Native American theologian George Tinker, locates the focus of the individual within the larger theoretical and intellectual commitments to individualism that the western world professed right from the Hellenistic period continuing on through the European reformations to modern notions of American hegemony in the new world order (Tinker, 2008: 77).

Their religious identity was embedded with ‘tamed’, ‘pacify’, ‘civilised’ and therein subjugate the native tribes to meet the needs of their national interest. As such, since the arrival of missionaries concurred with that of the British and missionaries did not hesitate to offer their services towards the colonial pacification and rule of the Kuki Hills, on the one hand. On the other hand, for the local converts, religious conversion included a change of loyalty to the colonial rule and it was considered as changed for betterment – perceived to be modern.

3.2 Missionisation Process

The work among the Kukis had commenced in 1912 and resulted in a large number of baptisms in 1914. However, massive conversion to Christianity occurred only after the defeat of in the Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919) or the Kuki War of Independence (Downs, 1971). Dena had rightly said that the missionary movement was seen as the most effective force of colonisation, not only because it did not use force, but especially as it penetrated more deeply into the life of the people (Dena 1988: 8). The missionaries aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonisation of heart and mind as well as body (Beidelman, 1982: 6).

Church planting was done at a rapid rate as a part of the missionary’s project. Whenever there were converts in a village, the Christian church in a nearby village sends a teacher to organise a church (Vaiphei, 1986: 57). Initiatives were also taken up by local Christians themselves to erect permanent church buildings in the villages. The first Kuki Baptist church was established at Tujang Vaichong village in 1916, largely through the work of Ngulhao Thomsong (see Downs, 1971). Ngulhao, the evangelist looked after the interest of this community.

The Thadou dialect speaking group of the Kukis were receptive of education even before a mission station was established in their area. The Ukhrul Field Report for 1916 recorded that of the 87 boys in the Ukhrul station school, 36 of these were Kuki young men from the western hills (Zeliang, 2005: 48).⁴³ This must have encouraged Pettigrew to set up a mission station among them as soon as he got the chance to do so. In the educational report for 1921, Crozier wrote that the Kangpokpi station school was started on December 9, 1919, with boys and girls just 32 days after they set the site (Zeliang, 2005).⁴⁴ ‘The field report in the North-West of Manipur said that the state had ten schools in these areas and the Mission

⁴³ ABMC of the ABFMS, 1916, pp. 45-48, as compiled by Zeliang (2005).

⁴⁴ Also see Crozier, Educational Report for 1921, as compiled by Zeliang (2005).

seven, two of the latter being Night schools. They had about 80 boys and 40 girls' (Sangma, 1987: 239).

The girls' school at Kangpokpi continued during 1927, despite the lack of enthusiasm among the Christian parents as they preferred to keep young girls at home for housework and fieldwork (Ibid.). This was under the supervision of Mrs. Pettigrew. In 1935, under the Missionary Mr. and Mrs. J.E. Tanquist, there were 35 schools, besides the Mission Middle English School in Kangpokpi with a total enrolment of 191, of whom 130 were girls. The government Mission educational grant to school outside Kangpokpi was entirely withdrawn from 1st January 1940 (Ibid.: 240). The statistics for 1950 show the Kangpokpi field as having 234 churches, 1295 baptised members and a total church membership of 10,725. There were 124 primary schools and one Middle English school (Zeliang, 2005).⁴⁵ All schools except the one in the main mission centre were entirely self-supporting. The mission school was accepted with positive response from the local population.

3.2.1 Attitude on Native Religion

Traditionally the Kuki are firm in their indigenous belief. From birth to death the everyday life revolves around performing ritual and confirming to the belief system. Ritual are orchestrated by the *Thempu* (priest) and carried out in each episode of life cycle. Rituals are performed in the events of birth, death, sickness, to appease forest spirits, to protect from natural calamities, for productive harvest and after harvest as gesture of gratitude, etc. In addition to the ritualistic practices, they strictly adhered to taboos and restriction as directed by the belief system. Believe in the power of various incantations, in one God, existence of "Mithikho" (spirit realm after death) etc. Today, all this indigenous belief system is completely discarded and the practices are nowhere visible anymore. Every belief and practices that are associated to the indigenous belief system are replaced and Christianised. For example, the traditional religious priest is replaced by Christian Pastors, Reverends, and Deacons. Ritual and incantation are substituted by scriptures, Christian prayer and hymns. The indigenous religious belief system is replaced with Christian doctrine of monotheism. Similarly, the existence of single hades is replaced by believe in 'heaven and hell'. The indigenous religion covenant symbol called 'Doibom' is disposed and replaced with the Christian symbol of cross. However, the recent trend adopted by the educated tribal elites

⁴⁵ See Brock, E.E., CBCA, *Kangpokpi Field Report for 1951-1952*, as compiled by Zeliang (2005).

reflects an attempt to revive the 'traditional cultural element' in order to strengthen identity (Burman, 2013: 93-94).

Being an agricultural society, agricultural processes and practices were highly ritualised in the Thadou-Kuki society and this was done under the guidance of the village priest called *Thempu*. They had a rite for setting up of a new village, purification of forest when choosing a site, purification of soil after slashing and burning down the forest, dedication of seeds just before sowing them and during the weeding season. They also had labour ritual and thanksgiving or the harvesting festival.

Even before the advent of the missionaries who came in the 1900s, the worldview of the Thadous was a religious one. They believe that god (Pathien) who rules the universe, gives life to everything (Shaw, Notes on the Thadou Kukis, 71). For them, *Indoi* (house magic) usually kept in one corner of the house is the symbolism that affirms the ever presence of *Pathen* (God) at all times (Chongloi, 2008: 14). This belief in the existence of one Supreme Being as the creator and sustainer of all called, 'Chung Pathien' or 'Holy Father of above' is the core of the primal religion (Ibid.: 134).

This worldview associates nature, human, and a supreme being as connected in a system and attributes the existence of the cosmos to the supernatural. The feeling of supremacy over nature, hierarchy, centrality or anthropocentric attitude, which is so familiar in modern day, was not evident in the past.⁴⁶ They also perform rituals for appeasing evil spirits of numerous types, not out of reverence for them as is the case of the *Pathien*, but for fear of the evil they can inflict on them. Some of the spirits that are connected to the forest were: *Gamhoise* (spirit of the jungle) and his wife *Inmunse* (evil spirit of the house), *Joumi* (spirit of densely forested region), *Gamlahlen* and *Gamkao* (spirits of the jungle that cause serious sickness to persons they meet), *Kaomei* (spirit in the form of a firefly) and *Lhangnel* (spirit capable of transforming into a big serpent, a small snake, a wild cock, elk, etc.).⁴⁷ The new religion impacts the worldview of the Thadou (Kukis) and causes a re-definition of their identity which was earlier defined by their close relation to the other creations in the cosmos.

The coming of Christian missionaries into the land of the Kuki marked a turning point in the socio-cultural, political and religious life of the Kukis. It touched every aspect of their lives. Christianity made a departure of the Kukis from their traditional religion. Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the Kukis too have their own primal religion, a 'nameless', traditional

⁴⁶ See Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty*.

⁴⁷ See H. Sitlhou, *Land and Identity: A Sociological Study of the Thadou-Kukis of Manipur*, unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

religion which might once have been called ‘animism’.⁴⁸ The Kuki simply uses the term ‘*Puhou–Pa hou*’⁴⁹ meaning ‘that which the forebears or ancestors worshipped’. They also believed in the existence of a supreme being, the ruler, creator and sustainer of all humankind. This being was addressed as *Pathen* (Holy Father) or *Chung Pathen* (Holy Father of above), the latter denoting the abode of *Pathen* as situated high up in the sky (Chongloi, 2008: 134). They also believed in the existence of *thilhas* (evil spirits of different types) who inflicted disease and misfortune. Though such spirits were to be appeased, unlike the *Pathen* they were not revered or worshipped (Stewart, 1855: 629). Their belief and practices were abandoned as they were considered pagan and evil in the light of Christian principles and practices (Chongloi, 2013). The sacrifices and offerings made by the Kukis were thought of to be strictly against the Christianity.

Colonial ethnography also reflects both missionaries and administrator’s attitude on native religion. According to Durkheim, the simplest form of religious life provides the purest examples of the essential elements of religious life (Durkheim, 1915). A. G. McCall stated that before the occupation of their land by the British the Lushais were wholly animists (McCall, 1949: 67). While not disputing that the primal religion of the natives’ involved a strong emphasis upon dealing with the spirits, there was more to the religion than this ‘animism’. The basic difference between the traditional religion and sacrifices offered to the jungle spirits have not been taken sufficiently into account by early writers.

The introduction of Christianity among the Kuki exercised a profound impact in their traditional tribal society. Singh (1989) wrote, the Thadou (a clan of Kuki tribe) regard Christianity as their own religion and turn aside from anything that is connected with their religion. The new religion which was preached and carried on the wings of culture had its own impact, values and prejudices. Before the advent of Christianity in the Kuki areas *Ju* (liquor) was considered as one of the unavoidable items in all the important feasts, festivals and ceremonies. What Mrs. Grimwood says is true: “*They have a beverage of their own which they make of fermented rice water they called this liquor ‘Zu’* (Grimwood, 1891: 15). With the coming of Christianity, the missionaries, simultaneously with their evangelical task, took steps for social reformation in the Kuki society by prohibiting consumption of *Ju* to the

⁴⁸ To Durkheim, the religion of spirits is called animism – they have spiritual beings as its object, spirits, souls, geniuses, demons, and divinities properly so-called, animated and conscious agents like man (1915: 48).

⁴⁹ While some other Kuki-Chin groups also called it *sakho* or *sakhua*. *Sakhua* among the Mizo group denotes the ritual performed in family or sub-clan circles.

new converts since *Ju* as a common drink was very closely linked with the animistic sacrifices and other customs which belonged to their old pagan life.

Rev. S. Prim Vaiphei maintained that, “there was a time when there was diminishing importance of *Kut* (harvesting festival) from the collective or the individual psyche. With the advent of the Christian gospel, some of the Christian conservatives objected to the observation of *Kut* or singing of folksongs or traditional songs. It was forbidden to even mention *Kut* in the society. When I was the Youth Secretary in the year 1978–79, some leaders including one by the name Major Pagin tried to revive the observation of *Kut* as it was a unifying symbol of the Kuki Chin group. So it was revived since the year 1979”.⁵⁰ Nowadays, the state-level *Kut* Celebration held in Imphal for the year 2016 begins with the singing of Christian hymnal by a Church choir group. Similarly, the opening hymn for the *Chavang Kut* celebration of 2016 was a Christian song ‘God most High’. They both begin with invocation prayers delivered by senior pastors. The highest honour of the state-level *Kut* celebration of 2016, ‘Kut-Pa’ (Father of *Kut* celebration) was given to Rev. Prim Vaiphei Suantak.⁵¹

Christianity has a far reaching impact on Kuki culture and tradition. The advent of Christianity brought a cultural conflict that affected social transformation. The Missionaries and the new converts felt that most of the cultural traditions of the early Kuki people were profusely connected with old religious practices and considered *Ju* as unbecoming of Christian living. Consumption of *Ju* (rice beer) which were very much part and parcel of *Lom* and *Som* was also strongly opposed by the Christian missionaries. As such these two institutions were seen as being unethical and the Christian youth were discouraged from attending such institutions. The newly converted Christians were therefore strongly discouraged to participate and indulge in any of the festivals and cultural ceremonies like *Kuts* and other cultural activities as they thought such activities would hold them and pull them back to their old pagan ways. Slowly and steadily, with the growth of Christianity, the traditional youth organisations began to lose its significance.

Thus, Christianity has changed the village organisation. Though the traditional village system manages to functioned, the center of life and activities for the Christians was the church. Again, before the advent of Christianity, the Kukis did not observe Sunday in any special, manner. Their everyday life was occupied with work, except in the case of certain

⁵⁰ Cf. Sitlhou, 2018.

⁵¹ Rev. Prim Vaiphei Suantak is the President of All Manipur Christian Organization, and a retired Director of Gospel for Asia (a Christian organisation).

community festivals or death as such. With the coming of the Gospel, the Church was organised, and converted Christians started observing Sunday by attending church services. The Holy Scriptures are selected and preached through Sunday-School, which is considered a must for the young and old. Today, even in the rural areas if villagers spent a week in the agricultural fields, they never failed to return home on Saturday for Sunday Worship-Service.

3.3 Implications of Mission(aries)/Colonialists on Kuki Culture and Traditions

As observed in many societies, the coming of the British colonialist-vis-à-vis mission has ruined the rich local cultures and tradition of the Kuki tribals. While there are very many positive impacts of the western-cultured Christianity vis-a-vis colonialism, it is not without problem whatsoever. This may be explained from political, social, economic and religious factors. Politically, it brought a wider nation-state political dimension which contributed to the erosion of traditional customary laws and norms.⁵²

In the socio-cultural aspect, it is felt that the spread of the gospel was accompanied by a certain unhealthy individualism that is insensitive to *Tomngaina*⁵³ principles expressed in social concern and justice. Also, though Christianity helped the tribal to cope with the process of modernization, it is at the same time, one of the factors responsible for the alienation of Kuki tribal from their culture (Thanzauva, 1997: 85). Moreover, Kuki culture still has its roots in the customs and practices of marriage, inheritance and land ownership. Yet with the process of globalization, a significant shift is taking place in the perception of tribal culture. The Western-cultured Christianity has wiped out a whole way of life, erasing centuries of tradition, customs and wisdom. It has caused people to hold their own religion in contempt and look westwards to an alien culture. Modernity has brought in a new form of culture. People no longer sing traditional songs or dance since they are considered to be primitive and belong to an uncultured way of life.⁵⁴ Economically, it is followed by westernization in almost all areas such as dress, food, technology, medical etc., which are not only new but also foreign. As such it has destroyed their spirit of self-dependence as it has to look always for

⁵² A. Wati Longchar, "Gospel and Culture: A Tribal Perspective," in National Consultation on Gospel and Culture (Bangalore: 1996) Cited in M. Thongkhosei Haokip, 'The Impact of Christian mission and British Colonialism among the Kuki People in North East India', March 4, 2012'. < http://kukiforum.com/2012/03/the-impact-of-christian-mission-and-british-colonialism-among-the-kuki-people-in-north-east-india/#_edn16>

⁵³ 'Tomngaina' manifests the spirit of free service to the community. *Tomngaina* has been detail at length in chapter 2.

⁵⁴ "Gospel and Tribal Culture: Naga Perspective," in Good News for North East India: A Theological Reader, ed. Renthly Keitzeer (Guwahati: Christian Literature Centre, 1995: 164.

support from the west or elsewhere to sustain their newfound culture in all respects and thus suffered from economic exploitation and deterioration.

Whatever the colonialists failed to erase in the political, social and economic realm, the missionaries picked up and seemed to make sure that all that are left of the Kuki culture are ruined through the newfound religion. They did this through their otherworldly theological perspectives. The missionaries' strong insistence on personal conversion unduly enhanced the value of humanity above creation. They perceived the salvation of human as the central theme of Christian mission and theology. Many evangelicals recognised God's revelation only in the word of God and not in the total creation of God (Longchar, 2000). This theology undermined the land-centred tribal religion, culture and ethics. Also, the salvific work of Christ is viewed from the anthropocentric perspective. It was God who loved His people, not the world, that, He incarnated in Jesus Christ to save and give power to the helpless. This understanding indirectly supports the view that regards nature without any religious significance. It promoted dualism between the spiritual and the material, heaven and earth, giving so little importance to the thing of this material world or even regarding it as evil (Ibid.).

Also, the belief that this world is not our home and is perishable led to the question "why should we take care of it?" In this way the tribal Christians (including Kukis) were slowly alienated from their soil-centred worldview through the introduction of evangelical theology (Ibid.). Moreover, the Evangelicals came with the strong belief that God is self-sufficient and transcendent from the physical world, causing tribals to perceive a God apart from the soil; and strong belief on 'the second coming of Christ' thinking that this world is coming to an end, all materials will be destroyed, but only those who believe in Christ will be saved eternally.

On the whole, it failed to meet the deepest needs of the tribal people. The Gospel that missionaries brought during the 18th and 19th centuries was otherworldly, anthropocentric and detached from the soil. It was a spirituality mainly centred on humanity and their salvation. Acceptance of new faith was understood as rejection of the traditional festivals, songs, dances, sacrifices; the western norm of Christianity was condemned as evil and thus abandoned many valid traditional values. Thus the soil-centred spirituality of the tribal people was gradually replaced by western oriented values that ruined the local cultures and traditions.

The mission compound had both educational and health-care amenities available, besides the Church. People moved closer towards mission centres and built their homes and

villages around it. The converts were part of the paternalistic economy that developed around the Missionary and the Mission station. Education gave an alternative means of livelihood other than agriculture through the jobs provided by the mission stations, which diminished the dependency and pressure on land. Land was no longer the only determinant of one's status or the only means of livelihood in the village.

Missionaries demand that converts reject cultural forms in no way opposed to Christian tenets: traditional dress, grooming, music, diet, and naming (Beidelman, 1982: 11). Christianity often requires that the converts be in denial of their former world and worldview in order to conform to the coloniser's understanding of the world. Throughout the readings of colonial ethnography, in whatever form, we find that the discourse of colonialism is frequently populated with terrifying stereotypes on the natives as 'savages', 'wild', 'untamable' and 'heathen tribe'. The comments by a Mizo native convert about his own people that 'the Mizos were nothing but vicious marauders and head hunters' (as cited in Lloyd, 1991: 1), shows that the Mizos seem to have internalized the colonisers' description that they were 'nothing' but 'vicious marauders and head hunters'. Their customs, their way of living do not correspond to the concept of the missionaries or the colonial administrators. They began to inculcate into the minds of the Mizos what they think about them. This in turn makes the Mizos look upon themselves through the lens of the colonisers. Rev. V.L. Zaithanga in his writing gave credit to the missionaries for transforming them from 'head-hunters' to 'soul-hunters' (Zaithanga, 1981).

3.3.1 Missionary Ethos and Discourse

Baptist discourse introduced important classification pattern into the Kuki society, which were linked to colonial situation rather than to the belief system as such. Important were the superiority of Western style dress and of 'sitting and eating' jobs over manual labour (Smith, 2009: 196). Similarly, abstaining from alcohol was introduced as a marker of Christian identity. According to Mills, Christian converts were called 'non-drinkers' or 'madhu' (Mills, 1926: 416).

The ethos of 'communitisation', of decentralizing the church administration and giving first-most importance to the local congregation. Among the Kuki Christian (except the Catholic church) finance their churches autonomously by paying the tithe (1/10) of their income or harvest to the church. It is almost natural then that the churches are not only dependent on the respective communities, but similarly on their well-earning members.

Redistribution of resources to the community, an ethos rooted in the pre-colonial village culture, is until today very important for gaining social esteem.

Another important feature in the historical connection between Christianity and formal education among the Kukis, which persists today despite the introduction of government schools in majority of the Kuki inhabited areas in Manipur. Education in general is given very high importance. 'Education' is sometimes regarded as a moral quality: being a 'good Christian' is often equated with being an 'educated person'. Being educated is often expressed by wearing formal (Western) clothes. In a sense, Christianity is the basis of legitimate culture today, and it was frequently pointed out that denomination, along with tribe, is an important criterion for determining eligible spouses.

3.3.2 Traditional and Customary Values and Practices

Contrary to the least impact of change on traditional institution of chieftainship, change is felt or assume to impact the most in traditional way of life, attitude and principles, customary practices and conducts. The undergoing change in traditions and customs is associated with the manner of manipulatively upholding and iterating it.

Table 3.1
Impact of change on the traditional and customary practices and etiquettes

Degree of impact	No. of respondents	Percentage
Very much	215	98
Average	5	2
Least	0	0
Total	220	100

The table 3.1 highlight about the degree of change in affecting the old age traditions and customs of the Kukis community. Almost every respondent that is 98 per cent are convinced that with the changing environment, tradition and customs are profoundly altered. About 2 per cent are of the opinion that change in traditions and customs is necessary in order to preserve and for its survival. Whereas, none of the respondents denied that change impact the traditions and customs of the society.

Having mentioned that, it is the traditionally prescribe etiquette and customary practices that are heavily affected by change. Such opinion is mainly drawn from the evolving traditional ways of community feeling and solidarity that are gradually replaced by idiosyncratic concern. In which the social life is becoming characterised by western conduct, ideology and attitudes that reflects individualistic and toward personal welfare and benefits more than the community feelings. Mr. Haokip, a middle-aged man, running a tea stall at Tuibong, expresses: *“In the past, the social demeanour of the old or young is guided by our traditions and customs. Socialization was fostered with utmost respect to each other, particularly elders. And not to forget, the beauty of our traditional milieu is to voluntarily assist each other whenever needed and without any exception or reward. Such kind of attitudes and feeling is nurtured by our traditions and customs. Sadly, this beautiful and valuable traditionally guided moral principle and conduct are mess-up with the sense of individual-centric and self-benefit attitude today”*.⁵⁵ With reference to the mode of practices and in performing traditional and customary practice, Mrs. Touthang, a graduate and homemaker from Bijang village feel that all these practices are primarily carry out to befit individual conveniences. And in her words, *“the manner of performing our traditional and customary practices is manipulated accordingly to suit one’s immediate interest”*.⁵⁶ The traditional principle is muddled with the idea of personal contrivances as people are socially incline to act more liberally according to personal impulse rather than guided by a more restricting traditional moral guidance.

On the other hand, certain elements which are unknown before or alien to the community are inserted and imbibe and are meaningfully linked as part of the customary practice. For example, in the case of ‘Naopui’ (Christening of child) the parent along with the child goes to child maternal grandparent or maternal uncle to perform a blessing ritual (Gangte, 2013: 106-107). The practice is symbolical and performed for the child to receive blessing from the maternal family for well-being. The ceremony involves a simple feasting and an exchange of ‘Zu’ and animal.⁵⁷ Beyond such exchange no other luxurious items or ornament is required or gifted. Now-a-days, such practice is performed in an extravaganza manner where expensive and valuable items are exchange as part of the customary practice and become a trend. According to Mr. Baite, an elderly villager from Bijang village states that: *“Look at the way Naopui [child christening] is done these days, it is no more a simple*

⁵⁵ Mr. Nguljalal Haokip (age 47), interviewed on 24 December 2017 at Pisgah Village.

⁵⁶ Mrs. Jenny Touthang (age 42), interviewed on 10 August 2016 at Bijang village.

⁵⁷ Usually the child family receives a rooster and a shawl for the comfort of the child.

*affair as it becomes an expensive affair where gift or token of gratitude are exchange in terms of gold ornaments, television, refrigerator etc. instead of simple gift [symbolic value]. Even for the blessing, which is vital part of the ceremony is carried out by pastors or deacons. And this pastor and deacon are given incentive for it, which is not necessary. Because, in actual sense the blessing from the maternal grandparent is utmost important and that's the intention of the ceremony".*⁵⁸ Hence, the simple gift exchange of goods is usually associated and replaced by expensive items.

3.3.3 Headhunting

Headhunting⁵⁹ as a discourse unravelled different perceptions and perspectives in projecting a community or tribe as 'raiders, slave-hunters, head-hunters or human-sacrificing tribes'. The violent means of imperial pacification was however 'no less violent than native headhunting'.⁶⁰ 'Savage' and 'barbaric' were the categories through which the hillmen were largely viewed, and as such it became 'the white-man's burden' to tame and civilise them. In this regard, Guite (2011) made a remark that 'the hospitality in question is not so much the white magic of kindness but to tame the barbarian with an equally barbaric expedition into the hills, a quite regular hill pilgrimage'. The expanding colonial authority made all efforts in eliminating traditional raiding and headhunting in order to advance the colonial civilising project.

Bringing out the difference between raiding and headhunting practices of the hill tribes, Zou (2005) points out that 'the motive of raiding was supposed to be obtaining slaves and booty; the purpose of headhunting was claimed to be non-materialistic considerations like gaining social prestige and spiritual benefits in the other world (Zou, 2005: 80). In his critical engagement and analysis of colonial writings such as Mackenzie (1884), J. Shakespear (1912), William Shaw (1929), Furer-Haimendorf (1939), on the definition, usage, differentiation of raiding and headhunting, or tribes who can be constituted as raiders or head-hunters, Zou observes that 'most colonial authorities arrived at a consensus that the Nagas were 'genuine' headhunting tribes, the Lushai and Thadou-Kukis were represented as fully 'confirmed' head-hunters, though some preferred to use euphemisms like 'raider' or 'slave-hunters' (Zou, 2005: 84).

⁵⁸ Pu (L) Zamngam Baite (Age 80), interviewed in 11 July 2016 at Bijang village

⁵⁹ We will elaborate the social and cultural significance of headhunting (*Gal-lu-lah*) in Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ See Zou, 'Raiding the Dreaded Past'.

Headhunting which was 'barbaric for the colonisers was for the colonised subject a contest for masculinity. It was associated with ultimate heroism and manhood, which were highly valued in most traditional societies in North East India. The principal role of the men and the basic social institution of the village were closely related to raiding and headhunting. For instance, the defeat of the Kukis of Manipur in the uprising of 1917-1919 marked the surrender of this tribe to both the colonial rule and Christianity. Colonial version of the cause of the uprising was the forcible recruitment of volunteers in the Labour corps. However, Gautam Bhadra argued that the imposition of the colonial bureaucratic structure upon the traditional tribal administration greatly undermined the authority of the Kuki chieftainship system. The forcible recruitment of the Kukis for the second Labour Corps served as an occasion rather than as the cause of an uprising (Bhadra, 1975). The Missionary enterprise was received with mixed response from the Kuki chiefs. Some chiefs sensed it as a threat to their space or domain of territory and authority that they had thought to be exclusively their own.

The advent of colonialism and introduction of Christianity undermined the authority of the chief largely. The chief had to share his rights to authority with the colonial administrator and the missionary. Many chiefs also had serious issues against the new religion, which they felt was a threat to the village community life and besides his influence.

3.4 Chieftainship and Colonial Missionary

The Chieftainship system weaved around the concept of privileges and obligations of the chief towards the subjects and vice versa. The Kuki chiefs have the responsibility for maintenance of public order and representation of the body politic. The obligations of citizenship include obedience to the law of the land and payment of tributes called 'changseo' or basketful of paddy to the chief. The rights of citizenship have been held to include care in sickness and old age; assistance in time of famine and disaster; protection by the courts of life, land and property (Firth, 1959: 254).

The missionary enterprise was received with mixed response from the Kuki chiefs. Some chiefs sensed it as a threat to their space or domain of territory and authority that they had thought to be exclusively their own. Even in Mizoram the chiefs and the elders were the main opponents of Christianity for a period of time. It was only in 1910-11 that they started responding to the gospel in a positive light and got involved with Christianity. In 1909, the chief Khawvelthanga, freed his slaves on account of his conversion to Christianity (as documented in Thanzauva 1997).

The advent of colonialism and introduction of Christianity largely undermined the authority of the chief. The chief had to share his rights to authority with the colonial administrator and the missionary. Many chiefs also had serious issues against the new religion, which they felt was a threat to the village community life and besides his influence. Christianity was considered as the white man's religion. With this comes the pre-conceived notion that the white man who preached was no different from the white men who ruled. Subsequently, some groups of chiefs were involved in persecuting the early converts, who were beaten, tortured and driven out of their villages (Downs, 1971: 181).

According to Padel, the missionary church built a system of authority, which contradicted and deferred fundamentally from traditional (Kond) authority. The church undermined the chief's authority in many areas (Padel, 1995: 235). 'Missionary therefore created a new kind of community superimposed on the old village and clan-based community' (Ibid.: 236). When the new Christian convert refused to participate in the old ways of life like raids, their reluctance to do so made them the object of persecution. The degree of persecution they suffered was extreme. In many instances, they lost everything (Ibid.: 235-236). Persecution occurred in different ways in different places. However, there was one thing that was common. The preaching of the Gospel was regarded as an encroachment to the age-old customs and religion (Vaiphei, 1986: 68).

In Manipur, until 1923, the chiefs and elders in all areas were up in arms against the mission work more intensely than ever.⁶¹ Some Thadou-Kuki chiefs vehemently opposed their people going to schools because they were suspicious of the Missionaries' education system as a cover for proselytisation. Every village under chieftainship system has a day for community work in the village. The village chiefs intentionally set the day of community on a Sunday because he knew that Sunday was the day of worship for the Christians. The villagers who failed to abide by it were expelled from the village (Vaiphei, 1986: 68). There were instances in which the Sub Divisional Officer sides with the village Chief and elders in ordering the Christians to leave the village within a week, forfeiting all their belongings (Ibid.: 69). Prim Suantak Vaiphei narrates his own experiences, '...when we first constructed our church building in my village, the chief came inside the church one day while we had our service and he scolded my father calling him dirty names. He kicked the wall, the post and said, these wood posts, this thatch, these wood (benches) are from my land, from my forest' (Ibid).

⁶¹ A report by William Pettigrew, *Evangelistic Report for 1923*, p. 88.

However, if a missionary is able to convert a chief, it is a great advantage. If an influential chief has professed conversion, many will follow him. Pettigrew says, ‘...the fact of the Thados [Thadous] having a chief in each village with absolute authority is a great advantage, compared to the democratic Nagas, where everyone has his say in matters that come before the village courts’ (as cited in Sangma, 1987: 278). So, on the other end were a group of chiefs who were enthusiastic about the new religion and enterprises of the missionaries. At the Nowgong conference of 1916, William Pettigrew narrated a story of an influential Thadou chief asking for Pettigrew’s presence at his village of Shangnao, and of the gift by him of a cornelian stone, which denoted an act of friendship and the appeal for help. In the writings of Pettigrew, ‘the authorities at that time opposed our visiting the North-West area, and so we were not able to respond to his call. The beginning of this year saw us there for the first time. The chief died a few years back, but his wife is acting as the Chieftess, and she was anxious to carry out her late husband’s wish for the Christian teaching, and on her request being made to and granted by the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), we opened a school there last April’.⁶² The oppositions by the Chiefs and elders continued with great intensity till 1925, but by the next year, such oppositions had died down and the non-converts started enquiring about the new religion (Sangma, 1987: 282). On a holistic aspect, there was a change in the power structure of the villages.

3.5 Impact on the Youth

In pre-colonial days, the concept of *Lom* (corporate labour) and *Som* (bachelor’s dormitory) are the key facets of traditional social engineering among the Kukis. Primordially institutionalised, both these practices constitute a social synergy-co-efficient resulting in economic and social dividends for the traditional Kuki village communities, till about the early twentieth century. The twin impact of modernism and Christianity, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, had a transforming effect on these institutions. With the growing rhetoric for social transformation and proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries, these institutions were increasingly frowned upon as visage of the puerile past. Thus, caught in a vortex of modernity against the indigenous, counter balanced by the imperative for continuity, these institutions increasingly found itself on the brink of disintegration – propelling inevitable adaptation to the changed environment.

⁶² Pettigrew, Evangelistic Report for 1923, compiled by Elungkiebe (2005).

Lom when literally interpreted meant ‘corporate labour’ (Gangte, 1993:132) or ‘Labour in rotation’ (Pudaite, 1963: 45) engaged in meeting the productive necessities of earliest agro-based economic system; as an institution, imparting non-farming skills and traditional knowledge; as a social welfare agency, in upliftment of the weaker section of the village community and; as a force multiplier, in maintaining the peace and unity in the village. Thus, *Lom* was an important tradition around which the village social life revolved (Doungel, 1982). It also means team work.

Taking the concept deeper into the core component of the Kuki economic tradition, Gangte observed: “It is a reciprocal labour institution, and is mainly concerned with the economic activities of the village” (Gangte, 1993: 132). *Lom* consisted generally of representatives, both male and female from each household and they worked by turn; from one field to the other, regardless of the man days or physical limitation of each. *Lom*, in this sense, signify a strong communal bond and gender-equity, in particular. According to Haokip “*Lom* was a traditional form of youth club. It was an institution in which young people were engaged in social activities for the welfare of the individual as well as the community” (1998: 7). Even to this day, *Lom* as practiced in all Kuki villages contemplates usage of this tradition as a means of rendering assistance to the weaker member of the village. It was a sort of collective service that developed a sense of responsibility among the youths which in turn contributed to the social upliftment of the village. *Lom* as a part of the life of the young people served as one of the most important factors of unity in the village.

Essentially, a village based organization, *Lom* differ very little from modern day youth organization or youth club. The difference, if any, is limited to the formal structure, system and processes. The concept of *Lom*, shorn of underlying ‘hiatus’ and rigidity of membership, can be construed as the precursor to the present day youth organization or youth club.

The concept of *Som* (bachelor’s dormitory), on the other hand, is built around traditional understanding of a ‘threshold’ or ‘heuristic’ stage in pre-adult life of man. These Dormitories serve as rudimentary institutions where the pupil mingled with his peer group and picked up different skills sets under relative freedom. The village economy was primarily elemental, organised around production and consumption of food grains, domestication of livestock, hunting, fishing and food gathering. Consequently, the level of wisdom and skill sets necessary for survival was rudimentary, easier learned in relative freedom through adaptation with his social environment.

Another important youth organization of the Kukis is the institution of *Som*. *Som* literally means dormitory. It is a bachelor's dormitory in which all able-bodied young boys of the village sleep together at night (Gangte, 1993: 133). According to Haokip (1998: 7), *Som* was a community centre/house for boys; a centre of traditional learning wherein an elder (*Som-Upa*) teach the young boys.

Interneine warfare and consequent destabilizing effect on the security and safety of the inhabitants of villages were common occurrence with the result that each able bodied youth were expected to master the art of warfare for the defence of the village. The *Som* members performed different kinds of functions such as defending the village, organizing recreational activities, a centre for information for the village, apart from serving as an educational or learning centre for the whole village. In the context of such inherent fragility of social, economic and security ecology, the Kukis evolved a unique system, *Som* or Bachelors Dormitory, wherein inmates acquire basic acumen, social etiquettes or *khankho*, and life skills especially art of warfare in relative freedom. The system of learning was based on imitation of peers and elders, trial and error, leading to habituation or adaptive behaviour.

The Kukis were master craftsman, who made firearms, gun powder and explosive devices etc., besides being marksman and valiant fighters. This knowledge and skills were similarly passed on to the youth by elders. For the smooth running of the institution of *Som* there were certain rules and regulations established by a set of norms and anybody who violated them was liable to be punished or imposed fines. Therefore, the administration of the *Som* was said to have been left to the *Som-Upa* (*Som* elders). Their acceptance was based on qualities like efficiency, courage, expertise as a successful hunter.

Each village had one or more *Som* and it was usually attached to the chief's house or not very far away from it. It was here that all kinds of lives and good values were imparted. The chief acted as the head of the *Som*, assisted by the *Som Upa* or his head cabinet as commander-in-chief. The *Som-Nu* (*Som* girls) after a day's work, had to perform many other duties like combing of the boy's hair, washing and stitching of their garments, making beds etc. The best student or member of the dormitory would eventually become one of the functionaries of the Chief as *Semang* and *Pachong* (Ministers in the court of Chief) or *Gaal-Lamkai* (Generals) in the Chief's army (Haokip, 1998: 7). So 'Som' played an important role in shaping the future of the Kuki community and meeting the immediate manpower requirement of the community.

Christian missionaries took the initiative of setting up schools and dispensaries. With the introduction of the western education, the number of students enrolled in the mission

schools began to increase. As the education is now being provided by schools, the children do not go to the dormitory to receive education anymore. The spread of Christianity among the tribal and the presence of missionaries among them have adversely affected their youth cultural set up. It had been said that, the practice of *Som* was totally discontinued as it was seen as a 'heathen institution'. But *Lom* was carried on for quite some by the Christians youth endeavours and *Ju* was replaced by tea. However, this too could not be continued for long owing to impact of modern education. Thus, with the dawn of British imperialism in India, the entire body of traditions; social, economic, religious, aesthetic and linguistic heritage either got dismantled or underwent changes. Christianity, followed by western culture and lifestyle led to the disintegration of traditional ways of life. Inevitably, this external acculturation led the tribal into thinking, rationalizing and reacting in typical western notion.

The traditional youth organisation of the Kukis namely *Lom* and *Som* disappear from the society and there is no such report in the present times regarding their existence in its most traditional form. However, it is found that *Lom* exist, but in different other forms among small group, families and friends. Today, if one walks across any Kuki village, one may come across mention of youth clubs at the village level and Christian youth fellowship at the church level. They performed all the activities related to youths in particular and the village in general. But the question remains, do they still act as the reservoir of culture and tradition? Are they able to mould and shaped the lives of the youth? In the olden days, the traditional youth organisation was not meant only for achieving economic prosperity (*Lom*) or protection of the village from external and internal dangers (*Som*). Both were also an important institution of learning various forms of arts, folklores, folktales, custom and moral lessons. They act as a channel through which knowledge of the past are handed down orally from generation to generation. However, when Christian missionaries came into contact with the people, they fail to see the deep meaning and role played by these institutions. Rather, they too quick in judging them and simply terming them as unethical or heathen institutions. The transformation of these institutions from its pristine form to a modernised structure with definite system and process has affected the social matrix of the village life. The void so created could not be adequately addressed by a highly formalised structure of modern youth clubs; the recruitment and training of the youths away from their families to enable them to take up responsible adult role later in life.

A very important social change in the Kuki society was the decline of *Som*, an important social institution. *Som* was an alternative to modern schooling. After the coming of Christianity and modern educational practices, *Som* was replaced by the Christian Youth

Society, Sunday School, Women's Society, and Youth Club (Lolly, 1985: 74). Thus, the social and student organizations were germinated among the Kukis in a great number.⁶³ Despite its advantages, the *Som* gave way to new social, educational, religious and cultural values associated with the British administrators and missionaries. The most important reasons for the disuse and decline of the *Som* system were:

- (i) Reduction of the chiefs' powers under the colonial regime.
- (ii) The role and impact of Christianity.
- (iii) The introduction of modern formal education.
- (iv) Modern outlook and Western approach of living adopted by the Kukis.
- (vi) Abolition of head hunting which eliminated the need to deliberate on raids and counter raids.
- (vii) The apparent and complete deterioration of the *Som* discipline at latter times.
- (viii) The system had lost its status and importance by the turn of the twentieth century.

Consequences of *Som* dissolution:

- (i) The disappearance of the *Som* resulted in the extinction of a unique indigenous cultural practice.
- (ii) It deprived the youth of learning from oral tradition about their history and culture.
- (iii) Although modern education, way of life and Christian ethical values brought many benefits to the Kukis, it also resulted in an almost complete disregard and discreditation of the old values and traditional practices by the young people.

⁶³ Some of the student organizations formed in the post Christian dispensation are: Gangte Students' Organization (GSO), Hmar Students' Organization (HAS), Kom-Rem Students' Organization (KRSO), Kuki Students' Organization (KSO), Paite Students' Association – Siamsinpawlp (SSPP), Simte Students' Association – Khangthah Zun Pawl (KZP), Thadou Students' Association (TSA), Vaiphei Students' Association (VSA) Zillai, Zou Students' Association/Zomi Sangnaupang Pawlp (ZSP), etc. These student organizations primarily focused on the educational uplifting of the Kukis.

(iv) However, male heads of families were now free to devote more time to their individual families and assist in bringing up their children and sharing household responsibilities. This had a rippling effect- ties within the family became stronger.

However, with the percolating of modern education system, the old traditional way of learning and education system becoming less significant and discontinued. Schools, colleges, Sunday school (Bible learning) superseded the important of youth dormitory, and youth club or association in village level are formed to perform social responsibilities.

3.6 Impact of Western Education

Education system is another aspect of the community that has undergone tremendous change presumably improved – the increasing literacy rate and graduate population in the community. Also, another sign of that indicates the educational improvement is the increasing number of schools, colleges, educated individuals. Most of the elderly interviewees opine that in their younger days, only a handful of people completed or obtain matriculation and above degree and they are held very high and respected. They are admired and treated with honour. But at the present time, almost every senior youngster is BA (graduate) or MA (post-graduate). Further, elaborating that hardly few schools and colleges were available in locality or town in those days. The increasing number of either government or private schools and colleges are instances for the improvement in education sector of the community. On the other hand, increasing number of educationists and academicians, also transforms the oral tradition of preserving folklores, songs, traditions and customs regulation. Which are now retained and preserved in written form. At the same time, it also ensues in controversial, misinterpretation and oblivion of many of the tradition, history and political aspect of the community. The literature compilation often involved a manipulative narrative of the writer perspective and viewed.

Education qualification and graduation is perceived as a means that wrought individuals a respectable position or at least acquire admirable personal quality. Therefore, educational change, according to respondents is the result of unceasing financial or economic endurance at the expense of giving importance to educational pursuit and attainment. For instances, some respondents express that despite being poor and struggling to finance their children education, they readily support and bear the hardship. Because they anticipated and are optimistic about providing education to their child or children for the future prospers, plausibly for job opportunity. Besides providing education for occupational prospect, it is also assumed as a requisite to develop personality and to obtain knowledge. The process of

attaining academic degree is to enabling a person to counter any form of competitive circumstances effectively. According to Mr. Haokip, a social worker and activist, *“We give our heart and soul for our children’s education, so that even if they are unable to get government job, their education will be handy in pursuing any kind of occupation and work. On top of that, being educated they will have the confidence to socialised and take any kinds of responsibility, as well as receives favour from other because of their educational qualification”*.⁶⁴ Most parent respondents’ reckoned that furnishing educational privilege to their children is a parental duty i.e. to equip them for future challenges and opportunity.

Educational improvement is projected not only toward the chances of obtaining lucrative job opportunity but also the gradual improvement in the community literature. Mr. Baite, a former MDC, illustrates about the improvement in educational sector includes the literature aspect too. *“In the past we hardly have the opportunity to access books about our society, and often it is orally transmitted. Today we have wider access to books about our society be it religious or secular, also, the number of magazines and newspapers in our vernacular language. Introduction of our vernacular literature in school and college curriculums is a progressive sign with regards to educational aspect, although we still have plenty of room to improve”*.⁶⁵ The numbers of publishes literature either for academic or religious purposes written in English or vernacular has increased which is the result of educational improvement. Introduction of Thadou-Kuki (MIL) subject in schools’ curriculum and syllabus is cited as an example of the much-improved education measure of the community by respondents. Today, students of high school standard nine onwards till higher secondary level have the privilege to offer Thadou-Kuki as a MIL subject.

On the other hand, the drawback of the changing or the progressing direction of educational improvement is the emergence of polemic discourse on the historical, traditional and customary literature writings. On specific discourse or topics, not absolutely but slightly differs from person to person. This minor differences in writing to an extend stir up controversy and debates among scholars and the general public as well. Inciting the sense of differences and divergence among the cognate clan and tribe. Where the differences are made in reference to the written literature and records. About the controversial and debatable literature, Mr. Haokip, a retired horticulture officer, narrates that: *“The problem in improvement of education is that we do not have uniformity in our literature writings, particularly the written record on genealogical order or customary practices. Whoever think*

⁶⁴ Mr. Jangkholam Haokip (age 62), interviewed on 1 August 2016 at Bijang village.

⁶⁵ Pu (L) Zamngam Baite (age 80), interviewed on 11 July 2016 at Bijang village.

*themselves as educated published books in their own without much consultation and scrutinising for the validity of the writing. Take the case of Hmar as an example, they are educationally advance like us. But in case of any dispute or doubt of certain traditional and customary practices, and unlike us, they refer to written record and accordingly decision is made uncontestably. Because their historical and customary records are written in unvarying manner. Whereas our written literature on the same is filled with controversy and differ from author to authors. Otherwise, no doubt our education level has improved”.*⁶⁶ Despite of the demerits, it relatively contributed and rejuvenates the rich indigenous knowledge, history, folklore and songs to a new level more extensively. Moreover, it promotes and divulged much of the ignored or hidden social, political, historical and cultural aspect of the Kuki community in to the larger outside world.

3.7 Tradition and Modernity

The spread of Christianity and formal education initiated new changes in the Kuki society. The attitudes and ethos of the people came to be moulded by the ideas and beliefs of the church. The church became the centre of social gathering for the newly converted Christians. Persons connected with the mission emerged as a new elite in the Kuki society. Some of these emerging elites were even employed by the British to help in their administrative activities. By the time of India's independence, the emerging Kuki leaders / elites were convinced about the need for western education for the uplift of their community.

The spread of Christianity and modern ideas had far-reaching impact on social interactions and power relations within the Kuki tribe. The emergence of a new group of people created dual leadership situations: the traditional elites represented by the chiefs and his council of elders on the one side and the newly emerging Christianised modern elites on the other side. In other words, missionary activities created a definite rift between the newly converted Christians and non-Christians. To put it in the words of J.H. Hutton, the evangelizing process essentially drove a ‘sword of dissension’ (Hutton, 1931: viii). In such a social situation, it was but natural that the converts met stiff resistance especially from the influential traditional chiefs. As the traditional elites saw a threat to their authority and status they were determined to stop their villagers from becoming Christians. The traditional elites stood for maintaining the status quo as far as traditional socio-political structure was concerned.

⁶⁶ Pu Thenkhomang Haokip (age 67), interviewed on 2 October 2017 at District Headquarter, Tuibuong.

For the church and the newly converted Christians, everything that was associated with traditional practices was viewed as something opposed to Christianity. The Christians believed that they had nothing to lose, and that they would only gain from the rejection of traditional practices. As such, the newly converted Christians began viewing drinking rice beer, worshiping of evil spirits, performing sacrifices and rituals, etc. as taboos. Even though there was stiff resistance from the chiefs and elders to the new faith and modern ideas, the traditional forces could not stand against the new forces in the long run. With the fast growth in number of Christians converts, the non-Christians had become minority in most of the Kuki villages. The gradual increase of the number of Christians discouraged the traditional chiefs from openly opposing Christianity. Moreover, with the emergence of new institutions and leaders some of the erstwhile traditional tribal leaders chose to swim with the new current. It was a painful experience especially for the chiefs and elders as it affected their traditional status and authority. Nevertheless, the traditional chiefs continued to enjoy the privileges that the institution of chieftainship bestowed on them. Despite the challenges that the new forces posed to traditions and customs of Kuki, there appears to be some kind of compromise between tradition and modernity, with chiefs themselves converting to Christianity in course of time. Yet, it needs to say that the growth of modern forces could not completely eliminate customary practices.

Of these invasive factors, modern education and Christianity had a transforming effect on the institution of *Lom* and *Som* as it did with other body of traditions of the Kukis. The modern youth club/organization still imbibes facets of the traditional institutions. But to what extent and which features of the traditional have seeped into the modern? Whether acceptance of Christianity marks a complete departure from the custom and tradition of the Kukis? How far has modern education, modernization and globalization destroyed the traditional ways of life among the Kukis and how has it reconstructed or deconstructed the concept of *Lom* and *Som*? These are critical questions the understanding of which is essential to the proper deconstruction of essential features of the traditional to establish a positive convergence with the modern?

3.8 Perceptions on Impact of Change on Religion

The significant impact of change on religion is seen from both positive and negative aspect. The positive impact is more of focusing on the quantitative aspect of change, whereas the negativity is closely linked with the qualitative change. To be more precisely, negative impact of change is understood from the changing pattern of religious practice and religious

zeal approach. Religious or Christians faith is predominantly permeating, but the manner of expressing the strong religious faith in the social and religious domain. In short, most respondents see the negative outcome of change on religion is the questionable mode of religious practice whether justifiable to the objective of attaining spiritual goal and in exerting the gist of doctrinal teaching and intention.

Table 3.2
Opinion on the general pattern of change of religious practice

Direction of change	No. of responses	Percentage
Positively	90	41
Negatively	130	59
Total respondent	220	100

Table 3.2 highlights religious practice has undergone tremendous change. According to 41 per cent, the undergoing change in the religious practice is conceived more of in a favourable direction. According to their perspective the positive outcome of change is viewed in a quantitative aspect. For instances, the recently commemoration of hundred years of Christianity, the increasing numbers of Pastors, Evangelist, Deacons, Preachers, Churches and Christian population as a positive side of change in religious domain. Rev. Chongloi, retired pastor, states, *“Currently we all are believer (Christianity), however, during my childhood days there are people who still practiced the indigenous belief system, indulging in drinking and superstitious ritual and sacrifices. This is not a noble way to attained salvation. There was limited number of pastors and evangelist to spread the gospel and few churches existed where we can actually worship”*.⁶⁷ By and large, majority of the Kukis are today Christianised and the number of Pastor has increase manifold, and almost every village have their own pastors. Also, the numbers of Evangelists are sent and sponsored who are working among non-Christians or in Christian minority region as missionaries. On the contrary, about 59 per cent shared their opinion otherwise. In their opinion they agreed that wider evangelisation and improved work-power as a positive outcome. But the negative aspect is viewed from the way in which religious zeal and practices are mobilised by questioning the

⁶⁷ Rev. Lamkhosei Chongloi (age 78), interviewed on 28 March 2018 at Bijang village.

religious practice, devotedness and fervency resembling a mere public display rather than for the spiritual need.

The negative impact is chiefly focused on the qualitative aspect of change, especially the manner of religious practices is put into practical implementation. For instance, religious practices and orientation virtually become a public impression rather than a matter of personal zeal or relationship with the divine. In this perspective, Mr. Khongsai, army personnel articulate that: *“To my observation it is the way our religious practice that has tremendously changed. Today, many of us portray ourselves to be godly and virtuous. But speaking frankly many of us are hypocrite. And this people who claimed to be devoted are worse than whom they label against as nonreligious person. In fact, like the Pharisees in the Bible, they are more sincere in their religious devotion than social commitment”*.⁶⁸

Change in the religious domain is viewed in response to the questionable interpretation of religious devotedness and practice by church members. The religious practice and devotedness like being prayerful, regular church attendance, sermonically and preaching are intense and firmly followed. However, on pragmatic ground, implementing the religious teaching, principles and ethics in the day to day activities are merely reflected nor implicated. For example, the scripture advocates about loving neighbours, the poor, widow and orphans, to be forgiving, to be helpful and aid others without any exceptional reason, to be patience and avoids angers etc. All these religious principles and teachings in spite of constantly preached are hardly realised or witnessed in the reality. In the words of Mr. Haokip, a truck driver, *“Instead of loving one another we hate each other. Instead of caring the poor, widow and orphan, they are being despised and discriminated and take advantage of their situation for personal gain. Rather than helping others we only care ourselves and help only those who can be useful (in terms of material gains) in the future”*.⁶⁹ Perhaps, one of the main reasons for compromising religious practice is the social conditioning. Wherein, individual endeavours and impulses contradict religious instruction in the given social sphere, or lack proving religious certitude in day to day interaction and socialization.

Various circumstances involve in shaping and altering the way people manifest their religious practices or devotion. However, one of the vital motivating impulses for religious zeal is to religiously wield distinct social status. That is religious orientation act as expression of devote distinctiveness through which admirable status is attainment or maintained. However, respondents often shared the perplexity in the manner of worshiping and exercising

⁶⁸ Mr. L. Khongsai (age 40), interviewed on 27 December 2017 at Tuibong.

⁶⁹ Mr. Seijang Haokip (age 40), interviewed on 25 August 2017 at Teiseng village.

religious practice, ‘either to worship God by its own right or to worship so as to impress people in the name of worshipping God’. Religious devotedness is utilised as a mechanism to testify personal sanctities and social purity. Such religious gesture is to enhance individual social position while asserting status through public display and impression. Because religion or more specifically Christianity has infiltrated so much into the social sphere. That apart from other social attribution, the intensity of religious ardours contributes in consolidating individual social esteem status. Mr. Simte, a carpenter by profession, expresses that, *“Nowadays, the wealthy people are admired but among them those who are godly and devoted are much more admired”*.⁷⁰ Religious zeal becomes more of an affirmative act to substantiating one social admiration and standing as well. Similarly, the degree of religious zeal is to indemnify and prove one esteem social status.

Fervently performing religious obligation and responsibility enticed a person as religiously, socially and economically valued. For instances, in giving Tithe or any kind of contribution to church are part of religious obligation. Simultaneously, it becomes a way of connoting economic potential (income), as the quantity or amount of tithe or contribution given determine the degree of social admiration. Therefore, rather than a religious affair, it becomes a means to garner social appreciation. Mr. Lhungdim, a government employee asserts that: *“Whenever they attended church service, they make sure that people notice them whatever they do in order to show that how much devoted they are, for example by praying and sobbing where everyone can see them or giving tithe or contribution where more people will be aware about their service”*.⁷¹ The notion of religious practice and devotion are basically for personal spiritual need, as well as in maintaining individual relation with God and sanctity. Nonetheless, the impact of change on religious aspects, either accidentally or deliberately develop religious zeal as a tacit way to deem oneself to a respectable position. And the mode of religious practice and devotion become instrumental in rating religious worthiness. Through this religious evaluation, a person status is valued, either to an esteemed status or in a lesser position. Consequently, religious worthiness is tagged or merged along with the other socially conferred statuses.

Based on the field study, the direction of social change among the Kuki community can be hypothetically viewed as either positive or negative or a complementary process of both. Perspective on progressive aspect is primarily related to the economic and occupational aspect of the community, where economic condition is regarded much improved and

⁷⁰ Lun Simte (age 43), interviewed on 20 August 2017 at Pisgah village.

⁷¹ Haominthang Lhungdim (age 35), interviewed on 2 October 2017 at Molnom village.

occupational shift from agricultural to non-agricultural is conceived as sign of advancement. On the other hand, a negating view of change is the devaluation of traditional and customary value including social conducts and behaviours. However, as a complementary procedure, change is considered ineluctable accompanied by a merits and demerit outcome.

An improved economic condition is viewed as one of the favourable outcome of change, despite, the fact that disparity between the rich and poor are becoming more sharps. Here, most informants viewed the level of the overall economic progress of both the rich and poor is assumed as a positive process of change. Although acknowledging the consequent that impairs the way of apprising traditional and customary value, norms, conduct and practices. Mr. Baite, an elderly and former Member of District Council, opine that: *“The nature of change happening in our community is the elevation of one’s economic and living standard. On the other hand, our response toward traditional sanctioned norm, principle and social conducts are gradually deteriorating, especially among the younger generation”*.⁷² The positive impact of change is mainly projected towards the materialistic or economic leverage. But, the corresponding setback that is morally deviating and demeaning with regards to social courtesy and attitudes, which are also considered traditionally prescript principle.

Table 3.3

Respondents valuation of change in general		
Outcome	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Positively	36	16
Negatively	43	20
Both (Complementary)	141	64
Total	220	100

Table 3.3 highlights the various opinion of respondent about the outcome of change or the impact of change in the community. About 64 per cent agreed that the outcome of change features both merits and demerit consequence. And 20 per cent are more incline to admit that the ensuing change is reasonably positive. Whereas 16 per cent considered that change generate more negative impact than a positive result.

⁷² Pu (L) Zamngam Baite (age 80), interviewed on 11 July 2016 at Bijang village.

On the other hand, some informants are of the opinion of change as having a complementary characteristic of both positive and negative consequence on the social process. An informant Mr. Gangte, a retired government school teacher and currently an executive member of village authority, expresses that, *“It is not that I am unaware about the impact and consequences of change on our traditions and morality, but every change has its own advantage and disadvantages. Similarly, change cannot happen unless we are able to compromise certain things with the changing environment”*.⁷³ Likewise, other interviewees also, hinted that in any form of change – positive and negative affect is an inevitable features. In their opinion, progress cannot happen unless some of the traditional elements that impeded to a meaningful and purposeful progress is altered, refined or replaced. Similarly, according to some informant, change is to be viewed in pragmatic perspective. In the contemporary time, amidst the forces of globalization and modernization, it is unfeasible to retain tradition and customs without undergoing change and modifying certain aspect of it. At the same time, it is imperative to uphold tradition and customs wherever it is required but given the scope to modification while its essentiality is maintained.

Taking note of such tremendous changes happening in the Kuki society today, an elder argued that with the impact of modern life and culture, there is a strong trend for the Kuki people to become more and more individualistic. He is, further of the opinion that the average Kuki is more concerned about his individual advancement and welfare which was not so in the past as earlier the Kuki villages were well knit units with strong social cohesion. Today there is loosening of the community bonds and the individual is more and more in their own. In certain respect this is a healthy development because to be a prisoner of the powerful collectivity of a clan or the village was not as good as it is constricting upon the independent development of an individual. But on the other hand, the old values of community solidarity and corporate actions are disappearing

3.9 Women Status and Position

Women status is another aspect of the community that has undergo change. In the past and according to the traditions and customs, women are usually designated to engage within the household affairs and are compelled to refrain from indulging in social affairs except for work-related activities. Their participation in the decision-making in the family or in public sphere is out of question and curtailed. According to a retired pastor, *“women have equal*

⁷³ Interviewed on 21 March 2018 at Bijang village

capability like men, the only hurdle upon women's status is that we are traditionally ingrained with patriarchal attitude and mentality. For instance, women becoming more eminence become a matter of questioning men's dignity and pride, and traditionally perceive as a taboo." Along with the changing environment, the valued patriarchal sentiment though still dominates the social milieu, but the dynamic of restriction impose on women has become less intense than before. Despite many areas of gender inequality still needed to be reconsidered so that women status is elevated to the same level as men. However, the overall women condition is improving to an extent.

Table 3.4
The overall women condition in the community

Present women situation	Nos. of responses	Percentage
Improving	187	85
Average	17	8
Not much improve	16	7
Total Respondents	220	100

The table 3.4 highlights that the overall improvement of women status and position in the Kuki community. Despite there are certain features, mostly traditionally sanctioned constraints and limits women emancipation and equal rights. About 85 per cent of respondents agreed that unlike in the past decades' women are given much liberty and rights. Whereas, 16 per cent though agreed with the general assumption that women status has improved, but felt that many aspects are still needed to be amended. And 17 per cent are of the opinion that women status is simultaneously improve on side and not on the other side.

Regarding personal choice like choosing life partner, educational and occupational pursuit and way of dressing are few instances that imply the recent improvement of women status. On societal level, it is best exemplified by the formation of women's association or organization like Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO), Kuki Women's Union (KWU). These women organizations are the mouthpiece that addresses various social issues and atrocities toward the human rights, and in particularly against women. Also, spearheaded in promoting gender equality and women rights awareness. These organizations also keep in check of certain socially considered illegal activities such as drug smuggling and alcohol selling in their respective locality. In sensitive situation like protest or rally they take

initiative role for the social cause. And in any grand social events or programs, women are assigned or volunteered to control and to maintain the crowd. Employing women in such social gathering or event is because they are much efficient than man in handling when crisis arises or in any hostile situation. This is one of the reason women folks are gradually admitted to social participation. Respect and regard shown to women at least in the public space. But to clarify the respect given to women in public space is because of the patriarchy attitude of man. For example, Mr. Chongloi, a social worker, states that, *“It is not that we respect women for being a woman. But for men to interfere in women activities or business especially in public places is conceived as indignity to manhood”*.⁷⁴ Therefore, on individual level they are not given the same privilege like man particularly in the decision-making body. But as an organization or as an association, their consent and opinion are consulted by the community at large.

Despite of certain social taboo are still attached with women; women today in general received almost the same privileges and favour like men. For instances, the free will to pursuit personal inspiration and interest, like choosing of dress and style, educational and occupational interest and relinquishing from parental or customary imposition in choosing life partner, which are not the situation of women folk in the past. According to a senior village council member: *“In the past, women are conventionally engaged in household related chores and routine. They must follow certain dressing code and demeanours. Their life is confined within the household and cultivated land. And certain responsibility and code of conduct is strictly maintained for women. In case of breaching certain conducts, they are socially disgraced. Today women can pursue their desire occupation, dresses according to their own liking and comfort and choosing life partner is no more enforced by customs nor by family but according to their whims and fancies”*.⁷⁵ All these improvement or changes are the transitional phase of women’s status and the rise of gender equality awareness among the folks. In fact, most respondents are of the viewed that in any kind of a given responsibility or privilege, it’s a matter of efficiency in performing the task regardless of gender differences and individual performing it. Because, according to them, now-a-days, there is no question of female or male, everyone deserved equal opportunity and rights. Whatever men can accomplished so do women who are in fact proving their calibre beyond the patriarchal construct of female as inferior or lagging the prospect to that of men can achieved. And the only thing that constrain is the socially and traditionally construct insecure ego of men over

⁷⁴ Pu Lamkhopao Chongloi (age 70), interviewed on 28 March 2018 at Bijang village.

⁷⁵ Pu Lhungkholet Baite (age 70), interviewed on 30 March 2018 at Bijang village.

women becoming in par with them. But, comparing the given chance more than men, women are more efficient and reliable most of the time.

As of the present context, women privilege in terms of inheritance and gender equality has shown a relative improvement. For instances in regards to property, women are getting(given) certain amount of parent's property in the form of movable and immovable property like land, furniture, gold ornaments, etc. at the time of her marriage as a gift-giving (Sitlhou, 2018: 44). According to a respondent from Bijang village remarks, "*Property in the form of land or kind or both is given to a woman, apparently at the time of marriage, and depending on parent's economic status*".⁷⁶ Many are aware of the unjust situation of women in the society, expressing concern about it particularly household willingness (particularly from male counterpart who patronised patriarchal attitude as part of traditions norms) and in giving equal share of property. On the other hand, some are critical of the view of improving concern over women inheriting parents' property. Although, admitting the need of reconsidering women status, but are apprehensive of the outcome of developing women status and rights through 'gift-giving' or property sharing. In their opinion, this equal treatment on economic matters had an adverse impact in the larger societal level. Because such gesture becomes a demonstration of disparity between the rich and poor families. If the parent is in position to share property among their children, the girl's child is also considered and shared. But only the few affluent can accomplished it. And for those who are not in the position to do so, the question of sharing property or inheritance to daughter remain out of consideration. Otherwise, they must remain contend with a simple gifting of standardised basic household items. The trend initiated by the affluent left an impression to perceive sharing or gifting of property to women as a kind of social traits. And, it set a challenging task for economically struggling families. The parent endured the struggles just to avoid the humiliation of failing to fulfill parental obligation, as well as to avoid public embarrassment.

In this chapter, we have critically examined the colonial expansion in the region, the influence of Christianity on educational attainment, religious ethos, and status and position of women among the Kukis. And, in the next chapter, we are going to situate social stratification in terms of status, wealth and prestige among the Kukis in Manipur. It is important to examine social stratification in the changing times because of the fluidity in the conceptualisation of 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

⁷⁶ Pu Tilmang Touthang (age 57), interviewed on 21 February 2018 aa Bijang village.

Chapter 4

Status, Wealth and Prestige in the Traditional Domain and Modern Context

In chapter 3, we analysed the mutual or conflicting relationship between tradition and modernity by taking western education, religion, and women status and position into consideration in the context of colonialism and Christianity. And, in this chapter, we examine status, wealth and prestige as some of the parameters of social stratification among the Kukis.

All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of inequality. M. Sahlins (1985) recognised the fact that truly egalitarian societies simply did not exist. Sahlins contends that “theoretically, an egalitarian society would be one in which every individual is of equal status, a society in which no one outranks anyone. But even the most primitive societies could not be described as egalitarian in this sense” (1958: 1). For instance, prestige relates to the amount of esteem or honour associated with social positions, qualities of individuals and styles of life. And wealth refers to material possessions defined as valuable in particular societies. It may include land, livestock, buildings, money and many other forms of property owned by individuals or social groups (Haralambos and Heald, 2004: 24).

Fairchild’s *Dictionary of Sociology* defines ‘prestige’ as “social position or status in public esteem, attained by the social recognition one receives in his associations, or perhaps in the press” (Fairchild, 1955: 230). Prestige refers to the reputation or esteem associated with one’s position in society. A person can earn prestige by his or her own achievements, which is known as ‘achieved status’, or they can be placed in the stratification system by their inherited position, which is called ‘ascribed status’. The concepts ascribed status and achieved status, developed by Ralph Linton, have located properties of social systems which have given sociologists valuable insights into the nature of social structure (Linton, 1936: 115-31). Linton defined ‘ascribed status’ as “assigned to individuals without reference to their innate differences or abilities” and ‘achieved status’ as “requiring special qualities” and “open to individual achievement” (1936: 115, 128). This conception of the nature of ascribed status and achieved status can be seen in such treatments of the concepts as found in the works of Robert Bierstedt (1963), Arnold W. Green (1960), Arnold M. Rose (1965), and Elgin F. Hunt (1961). ‘Ascribed statuses’ are those in categories of statuses which the society expects individuals not to change except as predetermined by that society (as in the case of

age). ‘Achieved statuses’ are those in categories of statuses for which the society accepts change by individuals and, in many cases, expects efforts toward change in given directions (as in the case of efforts to increase income).⁷⁷

Giddens and Sutton (2017: 113) define status as ‘people’s standing in society, based on the esteem or prestige in which individuals or groups are held by other members of society.’ According to Weber (1946: 186) status is assigned to individuals’ destiny ‘determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honour.’ And according to Linton (1936: 113) ‘a status, in the abstract, is a position in a particular pattern.’ Further he distinguishes status into two type namely ‘ascribed status’ and ‘achieved status.’ In the former type of status that is ascribed status, it is inherited or transmitted through by birth. Whereas in the latter type of status, it is not by birth but attained through ‘competition and individual effort’.

This chapter gives emphasis on social stratification based on open type social mobility, i.e. individual talent, qualities, qualification, hard work etc. are the main determinants of acquiring possession and status in Kuki society. The chapter attempts to address some of these questions: Does feasting establish a rank order? How is one’s status evaluated in the traditional past—what are the criteria defining one’s position; for example, in the traditional society a family or a persons’ position is gauge with the number of ‘merit feast’ organised during one’s lifetime—how does such perception changes or takes place in the modern context? Or, in terms of possession of wealth, those who possesses great size of granary (*changpang*) and maximum number of cattle (e.g. mithun was a priced possession) or was perceived to be a wealthy person and what does it meant to be wealthy? Next, is the skill sets based status that includes hunters who hunted various kinds of price wild animals, and the warrior—who have shown valour in warfare (read as headhunting or raiding) or in time of conflicts. Though, in time of conflict every able man is engaged in the conflict, but those who shown exceptional bravery and surpass the other in warfare skill in bring victory to the village. Equally important is to capture the changes taking place – what it was in the past and now. Thus, this chapter attempts to understand how status, wealth, and prestige defines the level of social position one occupies in the social standing. The feast of merit is one factor, which creates differentiation in the society and hierarchy.

As discussed (in chapter 3), the economy of a traditional Kuki village was fostered and strengthened by their cooperative spirit and effort. As such personal wealth was often

⁷⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achieved_status

utilised for public development and thus a sharing economy is prevalent where the resources of a wealthy few are used for the common folk. The idea of personal greed was limited in prevalence and wealth tended to be more evenly distributed amongst the villagers. The feast of merit is an example of this wealth sharing economy as it existed then. The wealthy would gain social status and honour by sharing their wealth with the whole village and especially those less fortunate than them. It was believed that the host would only gain in all aspects of life by providing such feast because in doing so they would earn the gratitude, goodwill and blessing of the villagers. This was paramount in the belief that it would bring better harvests and makes their livestock produce more abundantly. Such a profuse outpouring of community goodwill gesture towards the host was an important reason that the wealth and difficulty involved in hosting the feast of merit was not questioned rather more people aspired to host the feasts provided they could do so.

The wealthy/rich people often share their wealth with the village by giving merit feasts and gain their status from the public. Status in society was not conferred by wealth but by giving feasts. The social status of a wealthy or noble family in the traditional Kuki society was decided merely not by the accumulation of wealth but in terms of an effective use and disposal of the wealth for the cause of their society. The prominent features to exhibit one's riches/wealth was by way of giving the 'feast of merit' which reflects magnificence, elegance and lavish Kuki way of life. It was the custom of the traditional Kukis for sharing one's wealth by offering feast to the village community. Kukis believe that wealth is not merely the work of men but given from God. Thus, 'feast of merit' is a way of thanksgiving to acknowledge the blessings of the almighty to a particular person. This is a feast hosted by an individual for the entire community in declaration of being a rich person in the village. The feast of merit is considered the highest social status and has the deepest expression of religious sacrifice. The giver of the feast was honoured for s/he was rich, generous and resourceful. Therefore, this act becomes an integral part of the social life of the Kukis.

The grand feast of merit was a significant cultural feature of pre-Christian Kuki practices which conferred social status to a person. In fact, "merit feast performer had become a member of the elite group in the society from the inception of it until the pre-colonial period. So, merit feast as a social gathering or feast is directly or indirectly related to elite society" (Haokip, 2013: 232). The feast in fact requires a series of ritual in one's life. The practice, which took years or almost a lifetime to complete, was a series of feasts, each one more lavish and socially important. Each performance of feast is relatively more elaborate and costlier than the previous one. This is to state that, one performs the whole

series in order to gain honour both in life and after death as it is so believed. The last feast in the cycle of feast of merit, which only a few persons reach, is said to assure honour for the promoter in this lifetime and in the afterworld. Through performing this feast, he gains for his clan and village the favour of the spirits and the prosperity of great men of the future.

After performing a series of rituals for such feast, a domestic animal *mithun* is sacrificed.⁷⁸ The villagers are served with wine (rice beer) and food, thus strengthening the ties of kinship, and their wealth in the form of rice and meat, which is distributed and shared with all the classes of people. The feast endows the donor with great honour and by virtue of this, becoming a leading celebrity, he can wear special attires and ornaments, and he can adorn and beautify his house in special styles obtaining a high dignity and status in social life (Jadav, 1998: 110).

The feast⁷⁹ of merit was an expensive affair, as it was a social reciprocal system manifesting generosity,⁸⁰ compassion and concern for the community, and sustenance of communitarian feeling. Irrespective of any person's social status among the community, the Feast of Merit was an invitation to all. Organising the Feast of Merit also implied that a family had gathered prestige through the merit of sweat and labour, a signifier of a good harvest. The ceremonies required the killing of a large number of cattle and pigs for feasting the village community. Rice, rice-wine/beer, cattle, pigs and mithuns were slaughtered to feed the community as part of the feasts. For instance, the number of traditional wine/beer prescribes for the preliminary ceremony called *Sollham* is 20 big earthen pots. One can imagine the quantity of rice, meat and wine consume on the final ceremony called *Seldinglauh*, *Khongchoi* or *Moljo*.

4.1 'Feasting' in Feast of Merit

Feasting is an integral part of any society and is mostly a community activity cantered on commemorating significant events. Feast of merit have been described in many areas of South East Asia such as Central Nias, an Island in west coast of Sumatra where feast of merit is still regularly performed. Feasting for them is a means of advancement. The feast givers (*ovasa*) speak with authority in customary matters and rule the village along with the chief and the consent of ordinary villagers with economic and political advantages. The host of

⁷⁸ Animal sacrifice, mostly of the *mithun* was considered the most valuable animal, almost in the entire region.

⁷⁹ The literal meaning of 'Feast' in Thadou-Kuki dialect is called *Golvah*, meaning to invite and treat everyone with food and wine.

⁸⁰ The notion of generosity can be understood as the socio-economic medium of 'wealth' accumulation in the sense that in the absence of money it (generosity) becomes the most practical means of 'buying' prestige and honour and hoarding it.

ovasa is mainly to win prestige in the society or name and to obtain blessing or status as a whole (Beathy, 1991).

Feasting for obtaining merit-prestige and honour is a common practice inculcated by the older generation of the Kuki community. Especially the wealthy in the village are encouraged and expected to give feast to the entire village, culminating into becoming eligible to wear certain shawl and display their house with symbols displaying their valour etc. feasting is still an integral part of the community, however the idea of the 'feast of merit' and its symbolic significance no longer has meanings attached. Feasting across the cultures especially in terms of its underlying relationship with prestige and status have been found in works done by anthropologist and sociologist. Rosenwig (2006) studied the culture of feasting among the Enga to identify the elites in the society from the archaeological records. He examined food and status as inextricably linked. Veen (2003) discussed the role of food in the traditional and modern society. She examines the luxury food and the shifting of social status within the society where feasting is seen as an aspect of luxury. She discussed about the use of food for social stratification by certain communities in European countries and Africa.

Katherine A. Spielmann (2002) has highlighted the need for continuous economic activities among the small-scale societies. It is important in the ritual performance and ceremonial which help an individual attain prestige and status within the society. She added that feasting and exchanging of 'socially valued goods' are one aspect of gaining prestige as well as "functioning adults within the small-scale societies" (Spielmann, 2002: 202). The socially valued goods refer to the very nature of the goods value and quality influenced by the ritual context and the scale of demand in their production. She further states, "small-scale society's ritual and belief define the rules, practices, and rationale for much of the production, allocation, and consumption in an individual's life" (Spielmann, 2002: 203).

Feasting is not simply about the surplus food and drinks and accompanied merriment rather it is a strategic planning over the years to hold the feast.⁸¹ Feasting is an important element in the feast of merit. It is through feasting a large share of their wealth is distributed

⁸¹ Any form of 'feast' involves a long duration of preparation. For instance, in the Tsembega community only when an individual/community possess adequate number of pigs to be slaughtered or sacrificed they venture out for warfare (see Rappaport, *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People* (1968).

to the community. Food and drink is considered as an essential ingredient of achieving the status. Fermented rice drink is one of the main food ingredients in every feast.

Feast of merit among the Kuki provides an incentive to accumulate wealth and feast out to gain social recognition. For instance, the livestock is slaughtered and distributed to all the village community, and the paddy are shared among all the villages. Feasting is a mechanism of levelling society with economic redistribution (Parkes, 1992). Feasting is thus a social practice, which has political, religious and economic factors. It promotes 'social integration' and interdependency in the community (Potter, 2000). It is also a political practice of friendship, business, power and status and representation of social order (Dietler, 2001; Bray, 2003; Mills, 2007). The feasts showcase the harmony and happiness of the villagers.

4.2 Meriting the Feast of Merit

Agriculture is the main occupation and the main source of sustenance for the family among the Kukis. It is natural for every adult to work in the field. Hard work is promoted and encouraged. A person is often subjected to be ridicule if they lack the skills and strengths to do any work.

Feast of merit involves a sharing of wealth to gain social respect and prestige. As feasting is an important element in the feast of merit, that it is through feasting a large share of their wealth is distributed to the community. Wealth refers to the accumulation of the agriculture produce and cattle over the years and given away to beget honour and status. The feast is also an important event in the feast as it is this feast that culminates the stage and also legitimises the status in front of the village community. The village is given feast and fresh meat is distributed to all as a symbol of good will and sharing.

Food and drink is considered an essential ingredient of achieving the status. Food has played an essential function across culture. It is a showcase of status and wealth, a demarcation of the rich and the poor. It is a ritual of thanksgiving for the wealth and an offering to get the same in the future. Fermented drink is one of the main food ingredients in every feast. It is an important food supplement for the community. It is used for various occasions like feast, rituals and everyday life. The best rice beer is kept for the houseguest and also for feasting. It gives reputation of women in if the beer is delectable. There are various types of preparation for rice beer. Women usually come together and help in the preparation of rice beer by pounding the rice, carrying the water and cooking the rice during the preparation of the rice beer for the feast of the feast of merit. The feast transformed the

food into a permanent status of wealth and rank within the community. It is also a sign of fertility, a symbol which is remembered for generations to come.

4.3 Cultural Context of the Feast of Merit

Feast of merit is considered as the central feature of traditional Kuki life. The feast is given to the whole village. It is also attached to socio cultures and religious significance to the people concern. The feast exhibits the belief systems, moral and ethics of the tribes which in terms give way to its identity. The existence of life after death is the common beliefs of the Kukis. According to their belief there are two stages of spiritual realm/world, namely: a) *Mithikho* or *Thikholmun* (the abode of dead), and b) *Peogal* (the land of eternal bliss or paradise). Traditional beliefs asserts that the direct entrance or elevation to the heavenly abode of bliss or *Peogal* can only be achieved by those persons who have distinctive qualities while on earth. They are known in the society as ‘Thanso’. The term *Thanso* derived from ‘Thang’ meaning fame and ‘Sho’ is outburst. Literally, the word *Thanso* according to the Kuki terminology is ‘outburst of fame’.

In order to elevate the social position and also to get blessings from the elders the feast is hosted by the rich man of the village. The feast of merit played a very important part in the religious and social life of the Kukis. When one was fortunate to become rich, he was never selfish to keep the fruits of his blessings to himself or to his own children but he sought to share the entire population by performing the feast of merit. “Sharing of wealth with the whole population through a public distribution system such as ‘feast of merit’ has been the most important factor of the Kuki system before they were fully Christianised”, said a Kuki pastor.⁸²

The feast of merit is one of the traditional features among the Kuki tribe. The feast can be given by any married couple in the village. One of the deep desires of every married couple in their life is to perform the feast of merit such as *Chang-Ai*, *Sa-Ai* and *Chon* ceremony. The married couple who is to perform the ceremony work hard to generate the paddy produce to feast the people for attaining status and prestige. They work hard, earn and collect and as a sign of wealth they offer and share generously their goods to the whole village to elevate their social status. In celebration of their feat, they also erect memorial monuments to propagate their name and their memory to the future generations and descendants. The wife/hostess of the feast giver has a great role to perform while preparing

⁸² Interview held at Lamka during July 2018.

for the feast of merit. So, only a married man with a living wife can give such an elaborate feast since the wife played an honourable and important role throughout the ceremonies. She has to oversee the various works connected with the sacrificial feast like brewing of rice beer, bringing firewood from the jungle etc.

The feast of merit is an important social activity to attain social status practiced commonly among Kuki communities. The feast is one of the ways of gaining status and recognition in the village. In the Kuki society, an upward rise in social status and recognition was from feasts of valour performed in battle, head hunting or through economic means by celebrating the Feast of Merit. For instance, in *Chang-Ai* ceremony, a wealthy married couple has to perform which culminates in feasting of the whole village.⁸³ The feasting activity involving the entire villages and beyond indicates the capacity of the host which is also regarded as a divine blessing! In addition to the feast, it is an occasion which brings together the whole village where there is sharing of food and goodwill gesture.

It is important to understand the symbolic significance embedded in the rituals, roles and activities in the feast of merit. Rituals are an important part of the traditional Kuki community. They performed rituals and sacrificial rites through the season for thanksgiving and appease gods for a fruitful harvest, fertility, for good health and more. Thus it is a significant part of the cultural life of the Kuki tribes. It is part of a culture which embodies the ethics, the virtue, the moral, the belief systems, the rituals, the economic system, and the social history of the people. This traditional practice of feasting is the symbolic representation of a cooperative and communitarian society where individual resources are managed not for a mutual benefit but shared between the communities by the host (the one giving the feast). Thus the feast of merit is a symbolic representation of wealth distribution.

The feast of merit as a symbol of ‘prestige and status’ is the cultural value of collective intelligence. It symbolises the essence of material world of the traditional Kuki community. Feast of merit, as a ‘sign’ is a symbol of an abstract idea of honour. The ideals of communal labour and sharing of wealth culminating in the attainment of social prestige of the giver is discussed in the following section.

4.4 Types of Feast of Merit

The notable feature in the socio-cultural life of the tribal the Kuki tribes is the performance of the ‘feast of merit’. As discussed, it was a lavish and expensive feast given to the whole

⁸³ An individual performing the feast of merit has to invite all his clansmen and other social relative particularly maternal uncle/s (*Pute*) and son-in-law’s (*Tute*) family.

village population by an individual. The performance of such ceremonies in the traditional society are called *Chang-Ai*, *Sa-Ai*, *Gal-Ai* and *Chon*. The following section will discuss the traditional feast of merit in details.

4.4.1 *Chang-Ai*

‘Chang’ is paddy and ‘Ai’ is seen as celebration or victory.⁸⁴ Thus *Chang-Ai* is thanksgiving for the victory over the soul of paddy or abundant harvest. It is a ceremony performed by a woman who has harvested paddy beyond her family’s requirements for more than a decade. *Chang-Ai* initiated by the women of the household to commemorate their handwork that led to producing substantial amount of paddy. In this ceremony butchering of mithun is compulsory (‘*selding kilhu teitei*’). It is the only ceremony in which a Kuki woman plays the leading part (Shaw, 1929: 74). She expresses her gratitude to *Pathen* (supreme God) for the bountiful harvest during this ritual. So when surplus is accumulated for procuring abundant grain for consecutive years, she is considered fulfilling her duty, thus entitled to perform *Chang-Ai* (Gangte, 1993: 185). It is a festival performed by a person who harvest paddy much above his/her requirements for more than adequate and expresses thanks to God for the bountiful harvest (Gangte, 1993: 185). This is a feast to the entire village and is the only known ceremony in which a Thadou-Kuki women played the leading part. The women who performed the *Chang-Ai* has to feed the whole village for one day and she puts up a platform (about 6 inches from the ground level) which is held in position by a border of small stones placed upright. Within this border small upright stones are placed and represent the number of *beng* (basket) of paddy which is being consumed on the day. In the centre are two stones upright with one larger than the other known as *shongmol* (spirit stones) which are the sign for *Pathen* (God) to know where *Chang-Ai* ritual has been performed before selecting a good place at *Mithikho* for that person (Shaw, 1929: 74).

The *Chang-Ai* festival is filled with merriment, such as singing, feasting, dancing which goes on the whole day and night in the house of the performer. Traditional dance like *Sagol Kengkhai*, *Saipi Khupsuh* were performed accompanied by bamboo pipe music called *Pheiphit*. Other entertainment like *Siel-todal* (chasing mithun) and *Bondal* (wrestling) were performed by young boys of the village as a part of the occasion.

⁸⁴ The literal meaning of ‘Ai’ in Thadou-Kuki dialect means *Lopna*, i.e. to celebrate one’s achievement or feat.

The following songs are sung in group both by the men and women (verses were recited by Pu Hemjang Haokip):⁸⁵

- i) *Pupa min phan*
Buhtoul khoum luo dim dem
Tuoingei jatam chunnu khavang houlna
Changsiel deilou, lungmuong puong
Lamtuol changsiel dellou, lungmoung pong'e!

(Free translation):

The names of great ancestors have filled the courtyard
I cannot therefore rest in content my fellow brethren
Until I kill a mithun⁸⁶ in honour of my mother!

- ii) *Jacha'ng thang kadei luot, Gam vengke bang*
Setlei thaini vuongie, Sum tinthang kadei luot
Kalhaw lamma, Kawai ngeitil ngawnnie

(Free translation):

Seeking wealth and prosperity in grain
I labour and till the soil all day long like a quail seeking riches in wealth and money
I urge my offspring on to the fields

- iii) *Simbeng cha chan, chang hin puon*
Chaang luong noi a chang, chaang in eijon'e
Chaang jang pha bolpieh nang'e
Houng joul pha boulpeh nang'e
Siel in eijon in, Chaang tam'in, chaang tam in
Chang-si vangin chang tam in
Kho atam in, Meithai vang in kho atam in

(Free translation):

Crops that bear fruits from the south
Every grain beneath the stalks also approached me

⁸⁵ Cited from the works of N. Kipgen, *Kuki Identity, Land-Use, Authority, and Ethnical Nationalism in Manipur, India*, Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, 2012.

⁸⁶ Mithun is regarded as the status symbol for the owner family.

I will arrange a comfortable barn for you
I will build a beautiful stable for thee, come ye mithuns
Let the grains multiply, multiply
The presence of husk also multiplies the quantity of the grains
Presence of widow house too multiplies the number of houses in village

The person who performed *Sa-Ai* and *Chang-Ai* ceremonies is believed to have earned uninterrupted passage to the heaven. According to the Kuki mythology, it is believed that a certain female devil called *kulsamnu* dwells on a path leading to *mithikho* (village of the death) who harasses everyone passing through. But she dares not touch the souls of those who have performed *Sa-Ai* and *Chang-Ai*. Thus the celebrations are not mere show of extravaganzas or wealth or skill but a preparation to enter a different mode of existence, and also a celebration through which the individuals would overcome a 'difficult passage'. Such persons when they die their bodies are accorded honorable disposal different from the ordinary mortals (Chongloi, 2010: 141). An elder woman (aged about 76 years) stated:

This auspicious occasion (*chang-ai*) used to be celebrated with pomp and grandeur by slaughtering mithuns for the public feast, because from that day onwards the performer and her family would be accorded the privilege to enter 'peogal', the land of eternal bliss after death.

At the last stage of the ceremony, the women who performed the *Chang-Ai* was publicly conferred the coveted title 'Thansuo' and was honoured with highly rated traditional cloth called *Thangsuo Pon*⁸⁷ (cloth designed purposely for the merit feast performer) is quite unique and different from the cloth worn by the common men. Traditionally speaking, social stratification among the Kukis was manifestly observable. This means to state that, people's rank and status could easily be distinguished from their daily dress, especially distinction between the ordinary people and the wealthy class of people. It was possible to identify, by simply looking at the shawl of the wearer, his clan, his status and the number of gennas he had performed which is not possible in the present society. Men's identity was depicted in the shawls s/he wore.⁸⁸ Thus, there are certain shawls in every

⁸⁷ *Thangsuo Pon* is a dark blue in colour with embroidery at the two ends in red and white cotton of special design). Society attributes symbolic meaning to such object (cloth) so that the wearer also feels the same power and status.

⁸⁸ Besides, woven clothes such as *Thangnangpon*, *Saipikhup* and *Khamtang* also play a very significant role in the cultural lore and customary practice of the Kukis.

Kuki tribes which imply rank and status. Such important status shawls have special embroidered designs⁸⁹ varying from person to person depending on their success in life.

4.4.2 *Sa-Ai*

Hunting among the Kukis is of two kinds viz. individual and group hunting. In the case of individual hunting, the portions of the meat of the animal killed are meticulously cut and distributed among the members of the household.⁹⁰ The fore-leg of the animals killed is shared with the chief as a mark of his status and authority in the village. It signifies that the chief is the precursor in establishing a village. However, in case of group hunting, the flesh of the animal is equally distributed among those who participate in the game. Besides being a status symbol, hunting also is linked with economic structure. The system of sharing and distributing portions of meat among limited members of the village sets a foundation on which relationships, kinship ties and obligatory functions are built. In the past, an individual who kills all the different kinds of animals such as tiger, elephant, bison, etc., used to perform *Sa-Ai*. ‘Sa’ means animal and ‘Ai’ in this context can be translated as ‘subjugation’, thereby denoting a ceremony of subjugating or having complete dominance over the spirits of the killed animal.

The traditional Kukis believe that if a man could kill a required number of wild animals in hunting, and also perform the highest degree of feast called ‘chon’ during his lifetime, his soul occupies a paramount seat in the land/abode of the dead, i.e., *mithikho*,⁹¹ and is ensured eternal happiness and spiritual life after death. The traditional Kukis believe that if a man could kill a required number of wild animals in hunting, and also performs the highest degree of feast called chon during his lifetime, his soul will occupy a paramount seat in the land of the dead that is *mithikho*, and it gets ensured eternal happiness and spiritual life after death. The performer of such feast was honoured and respected while alive and even after death. It brought religious merit to the individual. The holding of this feast was

⁸⁹ For example, textile decorations were therefore strongly related to the feasting status of both the husband and wife.

⁹⁰ In the past, it is said that whatever a person killed in a hunt big or small, is distributed to the relatives and neighbours. Usually the distribution is like the head of the animal, say a deer, to the eldest surviving family head, the neck to the in-laws, the hind leg to the village Chief and so on. Those households who do not have active members are usually given a portion of the cooked meal.

⁹¹ Traditionally, the Kuki people conceive of two kinds of deaths, namely *thipha* (normal dead) and *thise* (abnormal/unnatural dead). The former is death due to illness and dying at home. The latter is due to accidents, killed by enemy or wild animals etc. Dying at foreign land without knowing the cause of death would amount to *thise*. Whenever there is the occurrence of *thise*, the corpse is not taken inside the house but inter in a separate place without proper rituals. The next day is observed as *sahnit* where everyone abstained from daily works. All these are elaborately observed so as to discourage the recurrence of *thise* in the community.

associated with the erection of stone monoliths or a memorial pillars of a square wooden block, while on all sides of the wooden block lines are chiselled out in geometrical designs which represent the number of animals killed by the hunter (Shonthong, 1978: 18-19).



Plate 1: Display of head of animals as trophies in a Kuki house is still a common practice today (Photo: Author)

Hunting is normally carried out by only the male members and therefore, those who killed more numbers of wild animals are accorded a high status in the Kuki society. It is some kind of a prestige for the male members. Elevation of one's status through tradition by acknowledgement to the general public become methodical in the pre-colonial society of the Kukis. The great hunters were accorded a higher social status in the society. The custom of reception ceremony called *Sadawt* or felicitation in honour of the great warrior and hunters give us this clue (Parry, 1986: 8). A man who intends to do so has certain preconditions apart from the vigorous ritual tests already gone through by him. For example, he must have killed wild animals (*sa-pi*) such as tiger, bear, eagle, other small animals and birds are excluded from this (Doungel, 2007). This shows that hunters whose objective is to perform *Ai*, ceremony had to killed animals that are not easily caught or hunt by common men. Sometimes, when the intending performer of *Sa-Ai* does not kill the kinds/varieties of the required number of animals, he can add the animals hunted by his kinsmen to his credit in order to fulfill the preconditions.

Sa-Ai is a ritual performed by a great hunter. The word hunter signifies a man who is highly skillful in the technique of hunting. To be accepted as a hunter of great eminence one should have the distinction of killing during his life-time a large number of animals, particularly, elephants and tigers beside other small and big animals. Only a hunter of such high calibre can perform the ritual of *Sa-Ai* (Goswami, 1985: 115-116). It is, therefore, performed by a man who hunts a good number of wild animals. *Sa-Ai* is also a festival performed by a man who killed a good number of wild in the chase.⁹²

Remarkably, the wife must be given room to performed *Sa-Ai*. He who was incapable of giving support to his wife for this rite, how great hunter he may be could not complete the series of ceremony. The shortest time frame for a man to performed *Sa-Ai* took not less than three years (Haokip, 2000: 84). To complete the whole ceremony sometimes it took nine to ten years. Thus, a family, particularly, a newly established – family needs to cultivate a big jhum and killed different types of animals to be eligible for a member and enter the hades after worldly life and a supportive wife is inevitable.

On the day of the ceremony of *Sa-Ai*, the priest (*thempu*) call upon the *Chung Pathen* (Mighty God above), to permit the *selkhom* post of the mithun to be erected. The *Pathen* is supposed to tell the *Thempu* that he has left the charge of the earth to Noimangpa, so in turn the *Thempu* asks the later where the post may be erected. The mithun is killed by a senior member (*mi-upa*) of the performer's family for the feast. On the occasion, the genealogical tree from the progenitor down to the person who performed the *Sa-Ai* was chanted and repeated by the *Thempu* while the sacrificial animal was slaughtered by the *mi-upa*.

The *Sa-Ai* ceremony is accompanied with feasts and dance. On the day, the host of the ceremonies offers a jar of *ju* the villagers. He would be assisted by members of his own *tucha* and *becha* to prepare one tree trunk called *siel-khom*, meaning post of the mithun. Another tree is erected at the corner opposite to the *siel-khom*, called *nungbem jel na khom*. This is particularly erected on the far end of the family courtyard (*tolmonglam*).

After erecting all the posts, the performer proceeds towards the outskirts of the village uphill area *khomol*. He performs a drama 'an act of jumping over the dead tiger 'made out of its skin' three times lengthwise and breadth wise. As he jumps, he states (Gangte 1993: 182):

Nadung kachop chop khop lou

Navai kachop chop khop lou

⁹² Though hunting has declined with the loss of forests, it is still a common practice till the present day.

(Free translation):

I can jump across your body lengthways at ease

I jump across your body breadth wise at ease

He then stops and says the following stanza as he jumps again

Nangla billou nanuoi nungin

Keila vanpi kachung nunge

(Free translation):

You are the vanquished

While I am the victor and high as the sky above you

After this, the *Thempu* invokes with *juphi* and then the entire congregation proceeds towards the village. On their return to their home, the *becha* and *tucha* relatives of the performer welcome them with *ju*. Thereafter, a ceremony called *siel buon-chou* starts. This involves wrestling between the able-bodied young boys with a mithun followed by high jump that is jumping over the mithun (*siel-kal*). In many of the villages, *siel buon-chou* and *siel-kal* are still performed by the youth during festivals and other social gatherings. This *Sa-Ai* ceremony also involves some singing and dancing, some of the songs sung during *Sa-Ai* are:

- i) *Sha lang'e, sha tin lu lang'e,*
pheigo veiteng nga kachoi satin lu lang'e.

(Free translation):

Let me slaughter animals, every head of the animals

Bow and arrow in my hand, let me take the head of every animal.

- ii) *Mi-lu lang'e, mitin lu lang'e,*
Namchem jieteng nga kachoi mitin lu lang'e.

(Free translation):

Let me behead the head of everyone

Knife in my hand, let me behead and take the head

- iii) *Thalpi le tengcha kajet a kachoi, chempong kajet a kadop,*
kasatha jouse hichang kaleitol ah kalam'e, sumbupi tha jong ken kaki ai je,
kasatha kavel'a kithang nam me, sa kaneh nom'e, sa kaneh nom'e,
chuhchu pa bangin ju kachep nom'e!

(Free translation):

I hold bow and spear in my right arm

I hold knife (*dao*) in my right arm

For every animal I had killed, am dancing in my courtyard

Even the energy of an owl, I do possessed

My fame reach far and wide for the animals I killed

I would savour the dish of a flesh, dish of a flesh

Like the chuhchu, I crave to sip the wine.

Thus people who have killed more numbers of wild animals are accorded a high status in the Kuki society. It is some kind of a prestige for the male members. The traditional Kukis believe that if a man could kill a required number of wild animals in hunting, and also performs the highest degree of feast called *chon* during his lifetime, his soul will occupy a paramount seat in the land of the dead that is *mithikho*, and it gets ensured eternal happiness and spiritual life after death.

4.4.3 *Gal-Ai*

It means the great hunters or warriors ritual. The warriors were the backbone of any tribal villages. The villages that produce a great number of skilled hunters or warriors earn respect and reverence from other villages. In other words, they were in a position to dominate more land resources. As such there was room for development of elite villages. Naturally, the great warriors do emerge as the elite group of the Kuki communities.

The practice of *Gal-lu-lah* (taking the enemy's head or headhunting) and collection of the heads of their defeated enemies as the trophies of prowess necessitated the performance of this ritual which had a religious significance. It is the belief of the Thadou-Kukis that the souls of the person whom a warrior killed will become his slave in the next world if the 'AI' is performed by the warrior. On the contrary, if the ritual is not performed the souls of the killed will always haunt and trouble his life now and in the after-death of the mortal body. Thus, *Gal-Ai* is performed to gain complete dominance over the souls of the persons killed and subjugate it forever (Doungel, 1992: 94).

Headhunting was seen as an 'enormous cultural importance' of a community or tribe for 'numerous and often overlapping reasons' (Andaya, 2004) and thus in a way is a 'dynamic element of a community's social and political culture' (Junker, 1990, cited in Andaya, 2004). While colonial interdictions resulted in bringing an end to headhunting till

today, headhunting has its historical and symbolic representation of the past – of a family, community, society, tribe or a nation. Headhunting is “an organised, coherent form of violence in which the severed head is given a specific ritual meaning and the act of head-taking is consecrated and commemorated”.⁹³

Military force or warrior is an important instrument of a patrimonial rule. In 1872 Col. Dalton observes that the Kukis are ‘a nation of hunters and warriors’ (Dalton, 1960 [1872]). The organisation of the warrior is determined by the social, economic, and political structure on which it is built up. The military served as a means of maintaining or establishing a social order. Externally it was used against other societies in order to maintain the balance of power or to create a new centre of political power.⁹⁴

The traditional Kuki society was a patriarchal society with a strong warrior tradition. In common parlance, a warrior society is a group organised to defend their people, territory and way of life. The Kuki tribes practiced *gal-lu-lah* (headhunting, also commonly known as raiding) and preserved the heads of enemies as trophies.⁹⁵ Traditionally, one who brought home the head of an enemy was admired and respected as a ‘warrior’. Headhunting practice was assertion of manhood and masculinity.⁹⁶ A successful raiding expedition was associated with the establishment of one’s character as a ‘hunter and warrior’ in the tribe.⁹⁷ Those who could bring good numbers of human heads (as trophies), captives and plunder were ‘publicly decorated, each man’s hair being bound with a thick white cord, at the ends of which knots of black and red thread were fastened’. This thread, called ‘arkezen’ in Lushei, were highly prized, carefully preserved and transmitted to descendants as “proofs of the prowess of their ancestors”.⁹⁸ Headhunting also has an intrinsic connection with violence and fertility, as in the case of a man gaining manhood and his readiness for marriage.

In this way one could become a celebrated ‘warrior’ in the local society, which was sure to follow him with other benefits such as a suitable marriage partner. Closely related to the novel concept of ‘warrior’ was the conceptualisation of a rather contradictory one called

⁹³ See Andaya, ‘History, Headhunting and Gender in Monsoon Asia’, cited in Hoskins, *Introduction*, p. 2.

⁹⁴ For further explanation on military in traditional society, see Fortes, M. and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, 1940, p. xiv.

⁹⁵ Shaw observes, “They [Thadou-Kuki] built and lived in simple houses but contented themselves for the tendency to migrate whenever their whim takes or dissuades them from wasting their energies on a house. In spite of that their houses were decorated with the skulls of wild games hunted including that of human skulls (1929, p.85).

⁹⁶ See David V. Zou. 2005. ‘Raiding the dreaded past: Representations of headhunting and human sacrifice in north-east India,’ *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 39(1): 75-105.

⁹⁷ For details, see Macrae, ‘Account of the Kookies’, pp. 188, 195–96.

⁹⁸ As cited in Mackenzie, *North-East Frontier*, p. 325. For a similar account, see Soppit, *Kuki-Lushai Tribes*, p. 20; Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, pp. 57–58; Shaw, *Thadou Kukis*, pp. 78–81.

Toi. If a man, noted Lewin, either through laziness, cowardice or bodily incapacity, was unable to do his work, that is, establish himself as a ‘warrior’, he was condemned into a *Toi*: “he is dressed in women’s clothes, and consorts and works with the women” (Lewin, 1870: 134). This amounted to compelling all the men to take the path of a celebrated ‘warrior’. Lewin asserted that among “the Lhoosai it is customary for a young warrior to eat a piece of the liver of the first man he kills; this, it is said, strengthens the heart and gives courage” (Lewin, 1870: 141).

The culture of headhunting is directly related to the ‘status’ and ‘position’ of a person among the Kuki tribes. Indeed, head taking has been practiced by numerous people throughout the world from ancient times. The term describes the practice of cutting off and preserving the head or skull of a fallen enemy. In many headhunting societies taking a head is considered as a rite of manhood, denoting the transition from childhood to adulthood, and young man may not marry until they have taken one. Usually, the warriors claim the head as trophies and display them prominently to increase their personal reputation and that of their tribes as a whole, with the added bonus of helping to intimate current and future enemies.

The custom of headhunting has been a very important factor in the social life of many primitive societies. In Kuki society, headhunting was associated with bravery and manhood. It is believed to have a link between killing and agriculture by ensuring a good harvest. Headhunting means cutting off the head of the enemies, the enemy is killed by throwing spears at them or shooting the arrow and then the victim is beheaded with *dao* (knife) or the enemy may also be killed with *dao* alone. Among the New Guinea, head hunting is the most important event in the life of the community. Women also join the men folk. Only the old, children and the invalid stayed back in the village. The basic cause of headhunting is the need for names in a community, something that holds true uniformity for many of the New Guinea tribes that engaged in it.⁹⁹ According to Hose and Mc Dougall, the Dyaks was “passionately fond of headhunting: headhunting is part and parcel of their religious rites. When a dyak wants to marry, he must show himself a hero to his intended, and the more heads he has, the more honour he receives from the tribe, and the more she admires him” (Smith, 2002: 155).

The important reason for the practice of headhunting was the desire of the young men as yet untried to prove their manhood and gain the right of wearing warrior’s gauntlets.¹⁰⁰ Among the men, the only way to outshine each other was through the war path and he could

⁹⁹ See Stephen W. Reed, 1952. ‘Head hunting in New Guinea’. *American Anthropologist*. 54(4), pp. 576-577.

¹⁰⁰ See David Vumlallian Zou, ‘Raiding the dreaded past: representations of headhunting and human sacrifice in North East India’. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 39 (1): 75-105.

wish for nothing more in life than to have his success first recognised, then praised, and finally rewarded by his group. So the young man of the village, eager to prove his prowess would long to take a head, bring it home in triumph, to be feted as a warrior, gain the privilege of wearing the coveted warrior's ornaments and having proved his worth and manhood, acquire a bride. When a man desired to marry he must show himself a hero to his bride-to-be and the more heads he had to his credits, he gets more advantages than his friends by attracting the most beautiful girl from his village. Women urged men to take heads and they mock these men who doesn't possess or wear these symbols of bravery. It was also said that a young man who had not taken a head, found it difficult to find a bride.

Headhunting was based on the belief that the soul-matter or vital power resided in the human head. By bringing a new head to the village create energy from that particular village from where the head was brought. This was essential for both human and animal fertility. It also stimulates the crops to grow better, especially when the head was that of women with long hair. When the fertility of the village was diminishing or the economy was deteriorating the people believed that it was the right time to go for head hunting in order to increase population and also to bring luck during fishing, hunting and for general prosperity of the villagers as a whole.

4.4.4 Chon

Of all the household ceremonial rites of the traditional Kukis, the *Chon* ceremony can be considered as the greatest one. The Kuki term 'Chong' means feasting and 'Chon' is a sacrificial feast or feast of merit. 'Chon' is performed as the greatest feast of merit by the traditional Kukis. Unlike the communal sacrifice, the *Chon* feast is a household ceremony where the three descent groups of relatives in the household are by virtue of familiar relationship involved. As the ceremonial rite of *Chon* is not a regular sacrifice, tradition does not fix any particular day or month for the ceremony. *Chon* is considered as the highest celebrated feast of merits among the Kuki society. *Chon* can only be performed by those persons who have done *Chang-Ai* (feasting on the occasion of abundant rice harvest) or *Sa-Ai* (feasting on the occasion of killing a require number animals in the game) three time each. In this festival everything has to be done seven times as it is the highest celebrated festival of the Kukis. The *Chon* feast is the longest and the most expensive festival of the traditional Kukis. The whole ceremony taking days to complete and the expenses incurred being fabulous. Even after the death of such persons who have performed *Chon* ceremony during

his lifetime, his corpse had to be carried round seven times and everything pertaining to burial rites had to be done seven times.

Chon is performed by a person who has completed *Tolso* and *Sa-Ai* or *Chang Ai* ritual is regarded as *Chon Bulhit* (one who has fulfilled the norms to host the *Chon*). After performing 'Ai' three times or the three ceremonies finally come 'Chon' the grandest and most eminent ceremony of all the 'Ai'. Person that already performed 'Chon' is regarded as individual that have excelled in their endeavour that not every man can achieve in the same manner. It signifies epitome of excellence and socially conferred with esteem status and respect by folks. The adage '*Chon-pite le Li'pite, koima'n adeh jouji poi*' (nobody can withstand against or compete with individuals who already performed 'Chon' and the spirit living in 'Li', reflects the pinnacle state of 'Chon' in the hierarchical order of 'Ai' or any form of status achievement and for those who performed) signifies a prominent social status.

Chon celebration may go on for several days, requiring an investment of quite a wealth. Therefore, celebration of *chon* is very rare and it is regarded with high esteem; the whole villagers took part in merry making- dancing and singing throughout the seven long days. *Chon* is the highest feast and takes seven continuous days. Before the actual day was started, the man who could perform *Chon* had to prepare everything, brewing *Zu*, storing of rice or millet, firewood for cooking etc., well ahead. Three stones for erection on the day had also to be collected and all the near relatives (*kom leh heng*) had to assemble a day before the ceremony. The first day: early in the morning, the owner selected eight men to help the party of stone dressers to carry the three stones. The biggest stone known as *Songpi* was erected at the middle of the owner's courtyard. The other one called *Lumsong* was erected at the side of the gate.

In this festival everything has to be done seven times as it is the highest celebrated festival of the Kukis. The *Chon* feast is the longest and the most expensive festival of the traditional Kukis. During this period a number of domestic animals of various kinds are killed and various rites and rituals are also performed. Seven mithuns are to be slaughtered and everything else must be in multiples of seven. Even the songs and genealogical trees had to be repeated seven times. The whole ceremony taking days to complete and the expenses incurred being fabulous. Even after the death of such persons who have performed *Chon* ceremony during his lifetime, his corpse had to be carried round seven times and everything pertaining to burial rites had to be done seven times.

As discussed, in the *Ai* ceremonies, a member who has completed all the ceremonies enjoyed the highest privileges and status. He, who completed *Sollham* and *Sunglho* can share the *Ai* performer to limited privileges. For instance, those who have done the *Sa-Ai* three times perform ‘Chon’.¹⁰¹ Seven Mithun are to be killed and everything else must be in multiples of seven. Even the songs, dances and genealogical trees had to be repeated seven times. Even after the death of such persons who performed Chon the corpse had to be carried around in, *Shang-Lai* (a litter constructed with bamboos bound together to a kind of make-shift platform on which the deceased could be laid) for seven times and everything pertaining to burial rites had to be done seven times. Thus, the performance of the *Chon* gave the soul of that person a paramount seat in *Mithikho* and ensured eternal happiness.

So far, in the preceding sections, we discussed that the feast of merit ceremonies allows all members irrespective of class, clan to climb up the social status. The ceremonies mark and create distinctions in social status. The feast converts material wealth into social status. A man who has enough wealth to give a feast was regarded as a man possessing fertility and his wealth is a sign of this. The feast is therefore, recognition of his ritual status and, a mechanism for spreading his fertility among his fellow villagers. Thus it marked an achieved status. It was for this reason that the community accorded him great respect and honour.

4.5 Feasts of Merit in the Modern Context

From a modern capitalist perspective, merit feasts could be viewed as a wasteful practice and going against the norms of economic growth. Wealth/money spent without any profit and expectation of future growth can be considered a ‘waste’. The yardsticks of modern economics today are increment, investment and multipliers which generate profit at the end. Contrary to this, as we have seen the feasts of merit would not be judged as profitable by any of these benchmarks however the patrons of the feasts understood the importance of sharing and wealth division against the backdrop of a self-sustaining village economy. They saw the immense potential that could be achieved by equitable economic distribution and networking thereby converting it into goodwill and prestige for the hosts through which all parties – the hosts and the villagers would be in a mutually beneficial relationship.

The modern ideology that personal/singular economic growth be pursued at the cost of everything else has the whole idea backwards. The increase in wealth is not the end but

¹⁰¹ Festival which is considered the most highly prized feast and everything has to be done seven times each.

rather the means to enable the fostering of necessities for nurturing and thriving good societies. The feasts of merit showed that it is not the amount or quantum of wealth which determined the status of a person but rather their willingness to use it for building conditions conducive for the growth of their less fortunate neighbours too. In a sense, wealth is spent to gain social status but it was a self-contained and self-sustaining economy since the selling of land was allowed only within the villagers themselves.

As discussed (in chapter 3), the culture of the Kukis have changed so much in present times. Various feasts and festivals, which functions to strengthen the group solidarity in the past, are now being neglected. The role of Christian missionaries and the attendant world view or the 'Christian way of life' is primarily responsible for undermining the importance of feasts and festivals in ensuring that marked division between the poor and the rich do not arise through wealth redistribution; that group solidarity and networks are enhanced and strengthened; such festivities and celebrations also provided the occasion for expressing and reinforcing the sense of belongingness to the village among its members. The Christian ways of life based on the scripture become the yardstick to determine what traditions of the Kukis should survive and what should not. In this way many of the traditional practices and world views were undermined or relegated to the past while new ones were created or invented to suit the new world view. Festivals like Christmas, Easter, New Year etc. are something which was introduced with Christianity which does not have root in the Kuki traditional society. Therefore, the decadence of the traditional ways of life and the emergence of new ones which are far removed from the local context not only led to the growth of a new group of power brokers but also undermined many of the bases which cemented the social political relations in the village.

Feasting no doubt is still an important event in the present day among the Kuki community. It is significantly present in both the secular and religious celebration like jubilee commemoration, Christmas, New Years, birthdays, weddings, etc. However, in the present day, when one mention about food, it does not include fermented rice drink. The consumption of food has changed over the years. Rice beer drink is not the delicacy served in events and occasions, rather it is strictly banned in all the communities by different frontal bodies.

With the introduction of new culture and religion, people begin to question the old traditional practices. The feast of merit is exhibited in the contemporary times through Christmas, New Year, or when an individual or a family announce that they will sponsor the feast on a count of getting a job or scoring high percentage in competitive exams.

As Christianity swept over the Kuki areas, it came into conflict with indigenous religion and its many rituals, values and lifestyle. The old way of life of pre-Christian days underwent immense change guided by values of the new religion. Values of Christianity prohibited performing ceremonies such as the 'Feast of Merit'. "Our forefathers performed rituals, and strictly observed *khankho* [ethics and values] while hosting the feast, but as I am a Christian; I did not organise the rituals that are associated with the event. However, the idea behind the Christmas feast was similar to the 'feast of merit'. It was my way of evoking the old way of life as followed by my father and those before him who held such customs very sacred" narrates a villager of Teiseng.¹⁰² Recalling the feast organised by his father, another respondent narrated an anecdote: "Our village pastor offered Christmas feast on December 25 1973 and my father organised the traditional feast of merit in January 1974. My father and the village pastor were friends, and they had gone together to another village to purchase Mithuns".¹⁰³

Commenting on the paradigm shift from traditional way of life with the onset of modernisation, and the disappearing traditions of Kuki people, Kuki Inpi (apex body of the Kukis) President of Churachandpur District categorically said, "While there is nothing wrong in forging ahead with changing times, there is also the ardent need to sustain our original tradition and culture as otherwise we shall suffer from identity crisis".¹⁰⁴

Feasting in modern context is also limited to selective few and no longer a community affair. Feast of merit in the past is symbols of status and dignity, respect earned on the occasion of feasting. However, the codes change and develop with time. Therefore, in the contemporary time we find that feasting is still relevant but in different social context.

4.5.1 *Kipana Maicham* (Thanks Giving Ceremony)

Kipana Maicham is a form of thanksgiving prayer ceremony usually organised by households whose member/s are successful in personal endeavour. For example, in clearing competitive exams, getting a job or promotion, or in accruing any valuable property like car, scooters, new house etc. And the manner of organising the ceremony either grandly or in simple event depends upon the household. By grandly it means an inclusive event where larger number of people are invited to attend the events and huge expenses is incurred in hosting a feast. And in simple ceremony, it is more of an exclusive event, where only few people are summoned,

¹⁰² Interview held on 25 June 2017. Moreover, these days it is observable that there is some wealthy individual who organised a Christmas feast for their community

¹⁰³ Interview held during December 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Mrs. Hatkhonieng Touthang (age 56), interviewed on 17 January 2019 at Moreh.

and usually instead of feasting the ceremony is concluded by serving tea and snack. The thanksgiving is observed with prayers and sermon led by pastor, attended by church dignitaries, relatives and family's close acquaintances and others who are invited. Such observation is regarded as a gesture of thanking God for the blessing. Otherwise, failing to perform such thanksgiving is perceived as the failure to acknowledge the God's blessing. On the other hand, it is commonly believed that by not organising a thanksgiving ceremony could reverse one's success or bring uncertainty in the future.

Case 1: While enquiring the reason behind organising 'thanksgiving prayer' ceremony, Mrs. Touthang (a resident of Moreh) explained: *"It is to show gratitude and to thank God for the blessings. Though not compulsory but entirely depends upon the individual – how much they want to share the goodness of God and to inspire others. And not being thankful or grateful to God for the success today can be taken away in the future."* She and her husband organised a grand thanks giving ceremony for the success of their two daughters. The first daughter got a nurse job in United Kingdom, the second daughter who recently receives a gold medallist in university exam (Master of Business Administration) and the eldest son is selected for the post of Forest Ranger officer. The ceremony was felicitated by dignitaries of Pentecostal church leaders, church members and immediate kin. The programme mostly involves hymns, sermons, inspirational speeches, pastoral prayers etc. and the ceremony concluded with a grand feasting. Besides, as a gesture of gratitude to God, it also widely believes that performing the ceremony further enhances the individual's prosperity and secures a successful life. Such an event is not a matter of individual family alone but also the church and the congregation. The church members too involved and contribute to the event as part of the church obligatory event believing in sharing the happiness and blessings along with the family. Hence, it is observable that being part of the same church is more binding and important than being a member of the same clan or village.

Individual's success like getting a job or clearing an exam or in any other form of success and progress in personal endeavours are interpreted as a result of individual dutifulness and sincerity toward religious practices. A woman from S. Haijang comments that *"only those who regularly attend church services, read Bible verse and pray before studying or before engaging in any form of work are the one who successfully achieve their ambition"*.¹⁰⁵ It is to be noted that individual's fate particularly the future prosperity is

¹⁰⁵ Interview conducted during July 2017.

assumed to be determined by the degree of one's religiosity. The more religious vibrancy, the more chances of fulfilling personal aspiration and goal. Every socially admired outcome is considered as the divine manifestation of faithfulness to one's belief. In their everyday life, religion is considered to be significant to their social and personal wellbeing. Therefore, in every household, village or in community level, no social events are observed without inserting and inclusion of religious elements or rituals or say religion component.

4.5.2 *Jaila-Ai of Ncy DOUNGEL*

Case 2: Ms. Kholnei or Neicha DOUNGEL, popularly known as Ncy DOUNGEL, is one of the renowned and decorated lyricist and song composers in the Kuki society. 'Ai' as discussed in the preceding sections, is a Kuki traditional festive rite performed to honour individual's extraordinary achievement while 'Jaila' signifies song.¹⁰⁶ 'Jaila-Ai' was performed in 13 March 2019 to commemorate her feat as a lyricist and composer of completing composing five hundred songs.

'Ai' according to Ncy DOUNGEL is a commemoration that embodied two meanings, firstly, as a gesture to show that one has accomplished or achieved or shown excellence in the engaging activities. Secondly, it is a way of expressing and sharing jubilation with others, for the remarkable accomplishment. Therefore, it can be also performed in the case of songs – a person completing composing hundred and more songs. Overall, it is a ceremony to show gratitude to God for the gift of talent and therefore solemnise in sharing the joy for the unique ability with folk. Otherwise, a person is believed to experience hardship particularly of bad health as a consequence of being ungrateful. And the consequence is further experience in afterlife too. When a person dies the spirit of animals (*Sa-Ai*) or enemy killed (*Gal-Ai*) would trouble the spirit of the person journey to 'Mithikho'. However, if the ceremony is performed those animals and enemy spirits would bow down to the person souls as a sign of respect and honour the person spirit journey to 'mithikho' without troubling him or her.

Initially the idea was solely of Ncy DOUNGEL to celebrate her feats but later on coordinated by a group of people who form an organising committee (comprises of politician, leaders of civil society organizations, businessmen, contractors and clan chiefs). According to her, the reason that inspire her to performed the ceremony is that 'our forefather believes that not to perform 'Ai' for accomplishing a feat (in here case having composed more than hundred songs) led to a deteriorating health as well as it is customary unethical that such feat

¹⁰⁶ Although it is based on the old Kuki tradition of *Ai* (public festivity) to celebrate the prowess of distinguished hunters and cultivators.

should remained without performing ‘Ai’. Upon sharing her thoughts, the organising committee has shown their keen interest and in fact they assert that “she had been delaying it for long”! Ever since she completed composing 200-300 songs she has aspired to perform ‘Ai’ ceremony, which finally came into reality with a grand ceremony held on 13 March 2013 at Kholmun village in Churachandpur District. And by the time ‘Jaila-Ai’ ceremony is celebrated to her credit she had penned 540 songs¹⁰⁷ and 8 books (in vernacular language). Ncy DOUNGEL was presented a Maruti Alto Car by the Autonomous District Council (ADC) members while the organisers handed over to her a housing plot they have acquired earlier. They have also presented her a cash reward of Rs. 3.5 lakhs. Jacintha Lazarus, Deputy Commissioner of Churachandpur District inaugurated the *Jaila-Ai*’s souvenir while executive member of the District Council, M. Gouzamang Guite launched a special album recorded to mark the day.¹⁰⁸



Plate 2: Felicitation of Ncy DOUNGEL in the *Jaila-Ai* ceremony at Kholmun village, Churachandpur (Photo: Author)

¹⁰⁷ The songs comprise patriotic, romantic, country and devotional songs – covering a wide range of socio-cultural, history, love-saga and politics.

¹⁰⁸ See ‘Lyricist bestowed with car, plot, cash: Hundreds turn up at Ncy DOUNGEL Jaila Ai’, *The Sangai Express*, March 14, 2013. <http://www.manipur.org/news/2013/03/14/lyricist-bestowed-with-car-plot-cash-hundreds-turnup-at-ncy-doungel-jaila-ai/>

Some of Ncy Doungel's immortal works such as 'Hinkhuo Ipi-ham' and 'Aw kahinkhuo' have for decades dominated the top chart on All India Radio's Thadou-Kuki programme from various stations in the region. Her achievements, the milestone she created, and her prowess remains unsung.



Plate 3: *Jaila Ai* ceremony in full swing (Photo: Author)



Plate 4: Various timeless singers, young and old, mesmerised the crowds in the *Jaila-Ai* ceremony (Photo: Author)

4.5.3 Materiality of Weddings: Markers of Status and Power

Christianity and western education have brought about a tremendous change among the Kuki society. In marriage there is a shift from traditional marriage to the western practices of wedding in the church. Like any other society which has been swept by the wave of

westernization, the Kuki society now is fully blended with western ideals and traditional institution. Kuki society now is fully blended with western ideals and traditional institution. The forms of marriage mostly practised are both the Christian principles and the traditional rituals and practices running parallel with each other in the Kuki marriages today. Marriages are conducted in the church with the priest giving the vows and solemnizing the marriage, the women wearing a white wedding dress and man in suits which is purely an adoption of western tradition. Western culture wedding dresses are customary parts of the modern Christian marriage (see Plate 7a & 7b). People are becoming more lavish while celebrating their wedding, though it varies from person to person, depending on their families' financial position a luxurious show is often put on during the time of marriage.

Introduction of market in the society also had a great impact by the introduction of many products in the society which were earlier unknown to them for which they had to depend on outside agencies. For instance, the marriage market has become a booming industry which is free from any economic meltdown. The new class of entrepreneurs such as the wedding photographers, wedding singers, makeup artist, wedding planners and wedding caterers are flourishing, the concept which was not known a decade or two back.



Plate 5: Exquisite hall decor by the wedding planner in Haijang village, March 2019 (Photo: Author)

Consumerist culture imbibed by the society has both manifest and latent function, either ways it positions the individual's social standing at stake. How the bride is attired and adorned and the kind and quantum of gifts exchanged become symbols of status and style statement. How and where wedding is celebrated becomes equally important because it conveys the message about the aspirations, tastes and social position of the person involved. With the exposure to the forces of globalization, weddings are celebrated, conducted, and understood almost methodologically/devotedly to the new aspects of consumerism. There is an interface between tradition and Christianity where traditional practices and rituals and influence of Christian principles co-exist conveniently. In the process, the traditional practices and beliefs associated with fertility, wealth, long life and things considered to be auspicious to marriage are attached to the Christian belief giving new meanings to the aesthetics and taste of modern day weddings. This consumerist consciousness is being promoted by the emergent middle class whereby new values are being assimilated capturing the imaginations and aspirations of the common man.



Plate 6: A luxurious wedding hall decoration are expensive and part of the consumerist culture, Haijang village, March 2019 (Photo: Author)

With exposure to the forces of globalization, new dimensions have been added with respect to the manner and fashion in which weddings are celebrated, conducted and

understood. There is an interface between tradition and modernity especially at weddings, where both the traditional practices and rituals and the Christian principles co-exist. The aesthetics and taste of weddings have changed and people are becoming more consumerist with the emergent middle class and the incursion of new values. Consumerist culture that is imbibed by the society has manifest as well as latent functions, putting the individual's social standing at stake. How the bride is attired and adorned and the kind and quantum of gifts exchanged become symbols of status and style statement. How and where weddings are celebrated is also important because these convey strong messages about the aspirations, tastes and social positions of the persons involved. Hence modern day Kuki weddings need to be explored not as mere rites of passage but social events with high symbolic content.

Case 3: Mr. Francis Haokip¹⁰⁹ (age 38) is the eldest son among the male siblings of S. Haijang village chief. Mr. Haokip is a graduate from the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (New Delhi) and went on to earned his MBA degree from the Indian Institute of Management Bengaluru. Currently he is serving as CEO of Pragnya Advisor Pvt. Ltd. at Hyderabad. He got married on 5 march 2019. According to him, the wedding expenditure is estimated in the range of rupees 10-15 lakhs.¹¹⁰ The expenses include feasting, hall decorations, dresses, gift exchange, video coverage and photography, and for lodging and transportation of friends and colleagues who are specially invited for the event from different places (outside the state as well). Regarding his views in regards to marriage or feast of merit ceremony, he said, On the social tradition perspective, feast of merit is an age-old practice of celebrating all joyous occasions – be it marriage, educational success, etc. within the closely knitted community wherein, all members of the village and near-by villages as well as relatives from even far-flung places come together for a day or two to attend the event. From the religious perspective, these occasions take the form of a thanksgiving feast and offering special thanks/prayers. Historically, the key focus was on the community feasting and offering of thanks/prayers with not much emphasis on the décors and other spent to make it a spectacle event. Therefore, the usual spent or cost incurred was usually relatively much lower. However, with the advent of social media, the focus of all such events have now become more on decoration, photography, videography, dressings, etc. to make them as spectacular as possible rather than the social or religious aspects.

¹⁰⁹ I had an extended discussion with Mr. Francis Haokip (the groom) was held and also attended his wedding ceremony.

¹¹⁰ Such an exorbitant amount of expenses in the event like wedding in semi-urban locality is rare and considered as an expensive affair.

Taking instances of his wedding as a case of the modern form of marriages practice as a way of maintaining and expression of status and prestige. He said, “For my own wedding, I ended up spending quite a huge amount of money. This has various reasons: One, personally, the feeling that ‘you only get married once’, and therefore, I should try and have the best wedding possible! Secondly, being the eldest son in the family and our family also being the chief of the village and my recent promotion as the CEO of my company meant I couldn’t get away with a too low-key wedding. Thirdly, this was also compounded by the fact that I had all my office and college colleagues coming in from various cities”.



Plate 7a (left) and 7b (right): Western culture wedding dresses in Christian marriage (Photo: Author)

Case 4: Mr. Letkhotinthang Haokip (age 30) of S. Haijang village, a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel took leave to attend his elder sister’s (age 32, working in the Manipur Police Department) marriage. Unfortunately, the schedule marriage plan was deferred due to the rising covid-19 pandemic. Although, there are instances of marriage happening in the midst of the crisis, it is organised in a simple way with lesser people attending the event. However, in Haokip’s sister case, the ceremony was supposed to be held

in a grand manner as the 'groom-to-be' belongs to a village chief's family from Tengnoupal district of Manipur. Also, by clan lineage order the household belong to 'Upa' (Head of the Telsing clan. Perhaps, owing to the pride of maintaining the honour of clan chief lineage, the bridegroom household and relatives wanted the event to be solemnised with larger number of people participation. As Haokip narrates that, "Although the marriage could be done in a simple and with fewer participants, but since they (sister fiancé family) belongs to Telsing clan and chief's descent, they wanted to make it a grand event. In fact, being a clan chief descent and since it is an occasion once in a life time, such occasion (marriage) is a matter of dignity and honour to celebrate in a grandeur manner not only for the sake of the person's getting married but also for the whole clan".

Nowadays, even among youngster the common trend that they weighted the grandness of wedding ceremony by numbers of animals killed for the mass feasting, numbers of people or size of crowd attending the ceremony including dignitaries, the style and luxury of hall decors and beautification, quality and fashion style of attire of groom and bride, also their relatives too. For example, Mr. Nohgoulun maintains that "*a wedding in the neighbouring village was magnificent because lots of people attended and large numbers of animals were slaughtered for the mass feasting*". Whereas, Ms. Tinneichong expressed that "*the impressive and expensive hall decors and wedding gown and suit of the couple speaks about the volume of her friend's relative weddings*". A grandeur wedding according to the respondents' opinion is endured by household motives to preserve social and economic status by maintaining certain level of standard of any events organised by the household, most importantly marriage event.

While conversing with respondents about marriage happening around, two informants discuss about a schedule marriage happening shortly in a nearby village. One of the respondent mentioned that "*I heard that it has been almost a month that the groom-to-be family are intensely and continuously preparing in purchasing expensive stuffs for the wedding and spend quite a lot of money*". The other respondents added that "*their family are quite influential*". And the former respondent further informed me that the groom-to-be is unemployed but his father is a well-known businessman (contractor) and very influential and well known person. Therefore, it is a trend to expect and determine the grand level of wedding ceremony given the household socio-economic condition. For those wealthy and influential households, a ceremony is anticipated to be undoubtedly grand. Whereas, for the less wealthy household expectation is less.

Another important aspect of marriage that inherently implicates status and class situation is ‘*Man-le-Mol*’, meaning ‘bride wealth’ and ‘gift-giving’. In regards to bride wealth, it is in contrast to the dowry practice, wherein bride wealth is the customary practice of giving prescribes items to bride’s family by the groom’s family. In fact, it is integral part of the Kukis customary marriage system and practice. According to the custom of giving bride wealth, it ideally consists of ‘*Mithuns*, *Dah* (copper gongs), *Khiba* (silver earring) and *Khichong* (cornelian beaded necklace), *Lutom* (clothes for the bride’s father), and *Laisui* (clothes for the bride’s mother). The quantity of each items differs and varies from clan to clan however, the prescribed items remain specific and the same. All these items are attached with a symbolic meaning and social value, therefore none of the item can be replaced with items other than that are in the prescribe item list. For example, *Khichong* represent precious stones and ornaments, and *Dahpi* and *Dahbu* represent valuable assets which are not within the reach of man’s capacity to acquire and giving such valuable item as bride wealth is a reminder and indication that women value is beyond man’s potential and grasp (Gangte, 2012: 95). Therefore, except in the instance of unavailability of any of the prescribe item at the time of marriage arrangement, it is quantified or replaced with cash or money appropriating it to market value of the said item.

On the other hand, ‘gift-giving’ is father’s gift to the daughter (bride) certain property in time of her marriage has much divulge evidence and demonstration of household economic status and class maintenance in the contemporary. Traditionally, items given to daughter at the time of her marriage are – i) *Phoipi* (a thick cotton mattress), ii) *Sin-khup* (a basket made of cane with cover), iii) *Lel* (a big haversack with a cover which is used like a portable mini-closet for keeping cloths), iv) *Tucha* (hoe), v) *Heicha* (axe), vi) *Longkai* (haversack), vii) *Kong-vo* – (a small bag made of bamboo cane for carrying seeds and usually tied around the waist when sowing in the field), viii) *Khiba* (silver earring), ix) *Khichong* (necklace made of cornelian beads), x) *Khamtaang Ponve* (traditional wrap-around), xi) *Saipikhup Shawl* (traditional shawl), and xii) *Thangnang Shawl* (traditional shawl)” (Sitlhou, 2018: 37). All these items, except for the agricultural tools, that symbolically conveyed “the newly wedded couple can start a new life” (Ibid: 39) have less indication of bride’s household status. On the other hand, with modernization and westernization ‘gift-giving’ has becomes a blending gesture of showing affection toward daughters as well as indication of economic competence. A notion that implicate that their daughters should be well received and given a special regards and treatment in her in-law’s family (Ibid.). On the other hand, the extravagant gift-giving practice has adverse impact on the poorer family economy as they are inspired to do

the same which led to incurring expenses beyond their potential and leading to economic crisis.

With the coming of Christianity and consequently the introduction of formal education by Christian missionaries, the traditional marriage customs could not retain some of the traditional characteristics. Changes were affected to fit the marriage customs in such a way that it had become a mixture of traditional and modern Christian marriage. The new religion has little effect upon the basic structure of the traditional nuptial rites, except that the marriage was solemnised in the Church where an authorised church leader, usually a pastor conducted the oath of allegiance according to Christian customs and practices in place of traditional village *Thiempu* (priest). The part once played by *Ju* during marriage negotiation and on the wedding day was now replaced by a simple marriage-feast and tea drinking. However, even after full conversion into the new faith the services of the *Tucha* (collectively applied to all the son-in-laws' of ego's clan) known as *Becha* (mediators) in the bride-price negotiations are the pre-requisites before anything is done in the Church. Therefore, the traditional norms and social obligations still have some weight in matter relating to the marriage ceremony.

The traditional marriage system along with the socially prescribed formalities has undergone significant changes. The advent of Christianity and introduction of education contributed to these changes. For instance, the jar of rice beer / wine has been replaced by a tea pot (*Chabel*) and the 'priest' (*Thempu*) by the 'Church pastor' during the marriage negotiation and the marriage ritual that follows afterward. Western wedding gowns and suits (see plate 7a & 7b above) have also replaced the traditional hand woven garments.

Amongst the Kukis, the bride wealth demanded and the gifts given to a daughter at the time of marriage are elements that are highly valued in the society. The customary bride price where the actual price is traditionally given in term of Mithun (*bos frontalis*), *khiba* (necklace), *dahpi* (gongs), etc. But today, with the scarcity of *Mithun*, *khiba*, *dahpi*, and for pragmatic reason it is replaced or converted in cash. It becomes convenience and a viable solution. "A careful analysis of the material objects used in marriage prestation reflects the underlying value system of the Kuki society. It automatically unveils the sociological questions of identity, hierarchy, property, inheritance, status, kinship network, gender relations and of how patriarchy operates in society through different institutions, one of which is marriage. A person's status or identity in the society is often determined by his family background. Not only were the gifted articles, objects of great utility, they also were

items that had an important place in the history, cultural lore and identity of the Kuki society” (Sitlhou, 2018: 43).

The bride wealth and gift-giving as it is practised today is different as compared to the normative tradition that was prescribed by the customary laws of the traditional Kuki society. ‘Agricultural implements¹¹¹ like *Tucha* (Hoe), *Thilbu* (weaving implement) and canned basket like *Lel* (storing basket) and *longkai* (haversack) are no longer valued and have to a certain extent lost their significance in the face and demands of a globalised society. The reason could be that agriculture is no longer the main source of livelihood and there is the possibility of occupational diversification” (Ibid).

Today, wealthy parents give items facilitating modern amenities like cot, almirah, vehicles, gold jewellery, utensils, television, household furniture, house and land etc. Well-to-do families are fond of giving lavish gifts to their daughters in order to show their wealth, opulence and status. The intention is also to assure that the daughter is respected and treated well in her husband’s family. This has affected the economy of poor families who want to ensure the same outcome for their daughters.

Therefore, the value and sentiment associated with the traditionally prescribed objects of gift are no longer present in the new articles that are transacted today. They have no essence of the history or identity of the people. They are gifts given as a means to an end, like the exchange in industrial societies for a mere show of opulence and shorn of any symbolic meaning. The result of the transaction is not one that binds the giver and the recipient, but rather alienates both of them from the object that is exchanged.

Concluding Remarks

It is vital to understand the contemporary traditional sentiments and the manner of valuing it from personal aspect and in the community level. The consciousness in asserting oneself as part of the community and as a community. Based on this understanding the chapter will deal with the form of social stratification, grounded on traditionally sanctioned hierarchical order. Concurrently, it will consider the impact of modernity in redefining status, power and class. In short, the chapter will be to analyse how stratification is viewed in both traditional and in modern domain.

In case of class, it is a different entity that emanated from economic situation, occupation engaged, educational achievement and the lifestyle an individual is maintaining.

¹¹¹ All these are inevitable tools for the newly married couple in the traditional agricultural society.

In short, tradition and customs are part of individual cultural awareness while class is a modern social consciousness.

Social relations and interactions demonstrate class-based enthusiasm and demarcation. Marriages are happening between family of similar economic situation. A woman from well to do family would not be favoured by her family to marry a man from economically poorer family background. Family would not decline daughters marrying to a working man particularly government employee, regardless of family economic condition. A young man from different village and from a poorer economic background was denied of his marriage proposal to a woman from a well to do family from Bijang village. The woman's mother bluntly replied to the man by saying "one should seek or proposed from same ranking".

Although traditional and customary practices are the same for the whole community, the manner of practicing and enforcing reveals gap between the haves and have-nots. For the well to do family, traditions and customs are implemented according to personal conveniences and incline to more or less economic showcase. On the other hand, and despite of financial hardship, the have-nots put effort to maintain tradition in the simplest way in order to fulfilled, sustained and obligate traditions and customs practices.

Another fact that divulge class differentiation in the community is the number of people participating in time of household events or occasions. Depending upon family or individuals economic background the number of people turn out for the household's event determined family economic status. One of Bijang youth club leader expresses that 'it is most apparent during funeral ceremony in the village, where many will turn out for the condolence, while for the poor family a handful of people will be seen in the funeral ceremony, and it is a sad sight the manner how people response even during bereaving situation, the rich and poor are openly delimiting.

In this chapter, we have analysed feats of merit, thanksgiving ceremony, etc. constitutive of changing patterns of status, wealth and prestige. Changing life chances and causal components not only determine class situation but also status, prestige and power. In the next chapter, we are going to foreground the political structure and dynamics of power relations among the Kukis.

Chapter 5

Political Structure, Stratification and the Dynamics of Power Relations

In the last chapter, we analysed status, wealth and prestige as parameters of social stratification in changing Kuki society. And, this chapter attempts to examine the political structure and dynamics of power relations in the Kuki society.

To understand the morphology of Kuki social organisation, understanding the Kuki village system is essential. It is because the village maintains the integrity of the socio-religious and cultural practices. The Kuki village represents a social, political and cultural unit and each village is an independent unit. Its population in the village is a closely knit families and clans, promoting common sentiment and under a single chieftain.¹¹² Each Kuki village is by nature a distinct political and administrative unit. It is theoretically a 'separate state', ruled by its own *haosa* or chief on hereditary line (Shakespeare, 1912: 42). Kuki society consists of politically autonomous village segments linked by common agnatic descent. Villages are related to each other on the basis of lineage groups that are by common descent. Each clan and sub-clan settles in a well-demarcated independent (a form of self-government) village rule by the village chief. Kuki communities are split into segments, usually clans and sub-clans having distinctive name and members share a common attachment to a territory.

The village territory, having a clearly demarcated boundary with other villages, also theoretically belongs to the *haosa*. He was the political and administrative head of the village and the final arbiter in all matters. He was supreme head of the village within the limits of his territory, and the villagers were bound by custom to obey him (Chatterjee, 1975: 14). Apart from the commoners, even the Kuki chiefs respected the word of their *Pipa* or *Bulpipa* (the senior most in clan lineage).

According to Morgan and Henry Maine, "kinship is the foundation of tribal society as contrast to the territorial foundation of modern state" (cited in Lowie, 1949: 317). But the absence of the state in the traditional society does not necessarily mean that there is absence of political system (Ray, 1990: 37). Tom Bottomore opines that, "stateless societies have existed, in which political conflicts and decisions are bound up with kinship relations, or with religious conceptions and rituals, and all or most adult members of society may participate in

¹¹² In 1872 [1973] Col. Dalton observes that the Kukis are 'a nation of hunters and warriors, ruled as a nation by their principal hereditary chiefs or rajahs, but divided into clans, each under its own chiefs'.

these activities without any specialized group of people being able to claim a particular responsibility for carrying them out” (Bottomore, 1979: 69-70). Similarly, the political institution of the Kukis is closely intertwined with the institution of socio-cultural, religious and economic life, as their political system and institution are based on kinship relations (Gangte, 1993: 123). The socio-cultural, political and economic life of the Kukis are determined by the institutionalised political system which had its own set of norms of governance. In order to understand the basis of chieftainship organization of the Kukis in its right perspective it is imperative to have critical analysis of the traditional social-structure, governance system and inherited inequalities or distribution of power.

In the social structure, a group of families, usually of one clan and ranging from ten to three hundred people constituted a village having its own government whereby the head of the clan functioned as administrator for the village (Vumson, 1986: 8). Later on, the head of the clan who ruled the village came to be known as ‘Haosa’ (chief). It is to be noted here that the nature of constant inter-tribal feuds had made them fatigued and politically insecure. This made them to shift their settlement frequently from one place to another thereby threatening the integrity and stability of the village community. Such circumstances obviously created the need for a centralised authority and competent men who would be responsible for protecting the people and organise them against the onslaught of their enemies. This responsibility, as such, ultimately devolved upon headman or chief of the tribe. And their chieftainship was handed down to the senior man of the clan or the headman called ‘Mi-upa’. In this connection T.S. Gangte writes that chieftainship among the Kukis is associated with the concept of ‘Upa’ or senior man to whom a great deal of veneration is attached. ‘Upa’ is the only person who can become *Haosa* (Gangte, 1993: 124), which is established by the fact that in a very Thadou-Kuki village when the chief died his eldest son inherited the position of chiefship and the subsequent line of succession went to his eldest male descendants.

5.1 Chieftainship System

The chieftainship system of the Thadou-Kukis consisted of mainly two types viz. i) the village chief, and ii) the hereditary chief.¹¹³ Both the types of chieftainship system was hereditary in nature. The hereditary chiefs are also called clan chiefs or *Mi-upa* being the head of the clan while the traditional village chiefs are the younger branches of the family clan chief. With regard to the hereditary clan chief Shakespear writes, “each of the clan has

¹¹³ See John Macrae: ‘Kukis or Lunctas’, in *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. VII p. 49. Also, see Robert Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur*.

one great Rajah, supposed to be the main branch of the original stock to whom although immediately beyond his own village owe him no obedience, great respect is shown by all, and the acknowledgement of the superior title given, although, in power and wealth he may be much poorer than others of the tribe” (Shakespeare, 1912: 193). Similarly, referring to the Kukis of Cachar district of Assam, W.W. Hunter writes, “they are divided into numerous petty clans, each of which has its own Rajah [Chief], who rules over one or more villages within which his power is never curtailed” (Hunter, 1879: 385). The hereditary clan Chief are, therefore, the product of tradition and are looked upon with the greatest respect and almost superstitious veneration and their commands are in every case, law (Shakespeare, 1912).

As discussed, the Thadou-Kuki chieftainship system is invariably hereditary. The senior man of the clan called *Upas* or *Mi-Upas* inherit their position by the right of birth and take the initiative in all matters concerning the administration of their clansmen by whom they are respected and feared (Carey and Tuck, 1976 [1896]: 3). It is clear that the dogma of descent determines the legal rules of inheritance which goes on to the male line which according to Asok Kumar Ray is a subjective basis of authority structure (Ray, 1990: 38-39). These principles are strictly adhered to by the chiefs because they give stability and legitimacy to the chieftainship system itself (Ibid.). It is to be noted here that the hereditary clan chieftainship of the Thadou-Kukis got a special traditional feature as they are the product of genealogical-lineal descent. This reflects the rule of primogeniture in which the continuance of hereditary clan Chief is found in all the succeeding generation. In this regard McCulloch noted that, “they pay much attention to their genealogy and profess to know the names of their chiefs in succession from their leaders and of the bowels of the earth up to the present time” (McCulloch, 1859: 57). The maintenance of long genealogies was of course, their customary tradition which enabled the clan chief to sustain their position of authority and legitimacy over their clansmen.

Thus, in all questions of genealogy, the Kukis are very particular and the hereditary succession of their chiefs is strictly observed (Damant, 1880: 239). The rule of primogeniture is strictly followed by the succeeding clan chief. It is the hereditary privileges to the eldest male descendant as the line of succession descended from him. In the event of death of the clan chief his eldest son inherited the position. But if the chief dies without any issue then the next eldest kin had to shoulder all the responsibility and authority. He assumed the title ‘Mi-upa’ and then the line of succession continued in conformity with the law of primogeniture.

In the Thadou-Kuki society, the elder brother or *Upa*, has the right to enjoy certain privileges over the younger brother or *Naopa* (Das 1985:46). The elder brother and his descendants occupy a higher status than the younger brother and his descendants. The lineal segments of the kinship system also follow the same principle (Ibid.). The rule of primogeniture governs the system of inheritance among Thadou Kukis. The eldest son of the family inherits property of the father. Inheritance goes by the male line only. In the absence of a male issue, inheritance will go to the sons of the eldest brother, and if there is no elder brother then to the younger brother, or sons. If there is no brother, the property goes to the nearest male line (Das, 1985: 66).

As far as the authority-structure is concerned it is found that the status of chieftainship is very much desired. A.K. Ray writes, “In fact in their society there is no other so viable a basis of authority other than that of genealogy” (Ray, 1990: 42). In whatever be the case, either in clan chieftainship or village chieftainship their eldest son inherited the position of ‘chieftainship’ which was a hereditary privilege. But this customary privilege could not be shared with the younger sons of the chief unless specifically desired by *Upa* (eldest son or senior-man) to develop and groom his *Naopa* (younger son or junior-man) for leadership. This hereditary privilege was handed down for generation after generation and socially institutionalised into the chieftainship system.

Thus the traditional chieftainship system remained a privilege of the few. As such, the common people had no right to become a chief. Under such circumstances a power hungry and power-seeking adventurous people among the commoners who feared of being suppressed, migrated out of the original village and set up a new village of their own along with some of their followers.

Table 5.1
Respondents’ view on continuity of primogeniture

Opinion	Nos. of respondent	Percentage
In favour	87	40
Not in favour	101	45
No opinion	32	15
Total	220	100

Table 5.1 reveals that 40 per cent agreed with the tradition of primogeniture of inheriting parent property. On the other side 45 per cent are against such traditional practices. It shows that the old age tradition of primogeniture is gradually doubted and question of its bias nature. Mrs. Vaiphei, argues that each child deserves equal shared and right over parents' property, regardless of elder or younger. But then, there are others who are of the opinion that the feasibility of equal distribution of parent property depend upon the economic potential or the quantity of property.¹¹⁴ For instance, for the affluent distributing of property among their children is not a problem. Whereas, for those of the poor households it's a great concern and worry. Because, firstly, with a meagre property it is literally impractical to do so as there is not much to be shared. Secondly, in sharing a meagre property none will benefit nor will be much helpful to each of them unlike in the case of wealthy household.

Apart from the two types of chieftainship discussed above, there is yet another type of chief called 'territorial chief' (Ray, 1990: 51), who are the creation of recent years. This type of chief is very uncommon in the society. The chiefs in these type of village enjoyed power and privileges similar but comparatively lesser to that of traditional village chief. The causes for the emergence of this type of village chieftainships are due to inherent subjective power structure in the Thadou-Kuki society where the traditional chieftainship system remained a privilege of the few. As such, the common people had no right to become a chief. Under such circumstances a power hungry and power-seeking adventurous people among the commoners who feared of being suppressed, migrated out of the original village and set up a new village of their own along with some of their followers. In this case customary obligation need not be fulfilled. This type of chieftainship is not a traditional phenomenon but a modern practice specifically more so after 1947.

It is to be noted that under the traditional system of chieftainship, there is no room for the common man to have access to the rank of chieftainship until and unless he leaves the village and sets up a new village at his own efforts. In this connection Ray contended that, the emergence of the territorial chieftainship has averted the potential contradiction that is variably inherent in the Thadou-Kuki authority-structure (Ray, Ibid.). With regard to their village administration the chief also adopted all the customary laws which are also operating in the traditional Thadou-Kuki village.

As they are simply from the common stock, it is not mandatory on their part to fulfill all the customary obligations in relation for their clan chief. The chief in this type of village

¹¹⁴ Mrs. Lhingboithem Viaphei (age 35), interviewed on 20 December 2017 at Teiseng village.

ruled as he wished as they were free from any sort of traditional control. Their operational area is confined within the territorial jurisdiction of the village. Therefore, they enjoyed considerable amount of autonomy.

5.2 Power and Functions of the Chief

The polity of the Thadou-Kukis is village-based. The village is a grassroots level political unit. The institution of chieftainship is the highest socio-cultural and political cum economic institution whereby the chiefs wielded a great deal of authority over the village community. The chief ruled independently in all spheres of life without any external interference within the jurisdiction of their chiefdom. In other words, the local chiefdoms have been able to retain political autonomy and rule with a centralised polity.

With regard to the power of the chief W.W. Hunter has noted, “the village system among the Kukis is best described as a series of petty states each under a president or dictator” (Hunter, 1973: 60). Similarly, John Macrae has also written that “each tribe is under the immediate command of its own particular chief, whose word is law, in peace and war and who has the power of life and death” (Op. cit.: 185). The chief owns the village and its land. As the guardian of the village he was responsible for defending the village community from the danger of external enemies. This was his primary concern especially during the days when head-hunting was practiced. In other words, the village chief is to protect the lives of the villagers in times of war. The chiefs being senior man, elder, of the clan, were generally broad minded having enough patience to control the recalcitrant villagers. They were generally wise, experienced, and intelligent and practically knew how to make their people loyal to themselves. This made the people work and fight willingly for the chief and carry out his errands. The loyalty was absolute. The attitude of the chief towards his village community was paternalistic (Hangshing, op. cit.: 1). He considered all the villagers as his own family members and treated them with equal love and affection. He lent a helping hand in times of their need and trouble. The chief was respected, admired and loved by his subjects. The chiefs’ subjects seldom disobeyed his commands and disregard his rulings. The villagers normally looked upon the Chief as an object of intense devotion and respect though he was not considered to be divine.

The traditional chief was normally at the helm of village government as far as the administration was concerned. He had to work for the common interests of the people. Being the administrative head of the village, he governed in accordance with the inherited customary laws and traditional practices. The chief enjoyed and exercised enormous powers.

He summoned and presided over the meetings of the village council and gave the final decision on all matters.

The chief who exercised enormous powers and functions, controlled all the three organs of government in as far as the administration of the village is concerned. The chief performed judiciary, executive and legislative functions in the day to day administration of the village in consultation with his council of ministers. The chief was the dispenser of justice. Serious cases like murder, theft, adultery etc. were decided by him with the assistance of his council of ministers called *Semang Pachong* (Doungel, op. cit.: 80). Since the inhabitants of the village were his subjects they were implicitly bound by customary laws to obey and execute his commands.

The chiefs being the senior men or elder of the clan, were generally broad minded having enough patience to control the recalcitrant villagers. They were generally wise, experienced, intelligent and practically knew how to make their people loyal to themselves. This made the people work and fight willingly for the chief and carry out his errands. The loyalty was absolute. The attitude of the chief towards his village community was paternalistic (Doungel, op. cit.: 80). He considered all the villagers as his own family members and treated them with equal love and affection. He lent a helping hand in times of their need and trouble. The chief was respected, admired and loved by his subjects. The chiefs' subjects seldom disobeyed his commands and disregard his rulings. The villagers normally looked upon the chief as an object of intense devotion and respect though he was not considered to be divine.

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The chief's house generally served as the court of the village. *Haosa* is the office of village chief. It had all the powers to decide any case and the chief's verdict is final and binding. For instance, the guilty man could be penalised according to the extent of his guilt or crime committed by him. The fine could be wide ranging from a jar of rice-beer, either a pig or mithun or a combination of those articles or a cash amount of money equivalent to the kind, or expulsion from the village and death sentence in rare cases. In case of theft, burglary and arson the criminal could lose his independence and become a bonded man of the chief. In

the Thadou-Kuki society punishment inflicted on a person for charges of alleged murder may amount to confiscation of property and goods and then subjected to perpetual bondage of the murderer or payment of a heavy fine imposed upon him in accordance with the customary laws. The accused had to kill a pig in the chief's house for just decision and to obtain the good faith of the chief. Capital punishment was very rare or almost never in practice. Even if such situation occurred it might be due to high treason or treacherous commerce with the enemies of the clans.

Unlike the collateral village chief, who were of the younger branches, the clan chiefs had considerable amount of power. While his normal functions may be similar to that village chief, he had, in addition, certain functions towards his own clansmen. Though the clan chief did not interfere in the day-to-day administration of the village of younger chiefs, he was required to intervene in grave and critical situations. Being the clan chief he had the power to impose even penalty for doing any wrong by his clansmen. He could also pardon the guilty provided that he came forward for submission. In such cases, the person concerned had to kill a pig in the house of the clan head or chief and give a feast. Thus, it shows that every such chief was partly responsible to his clan chief for committing anything which contravened administrative rules of the village notwithstanding the customary rules.

In the traditional Thadou-Kuki society the formal title of the land and its control remained exclusively with the chief. The chiefs being the lords of the soil within their boundaries were entitled to receive customary tithes and tributes from the village community (Carey and Tuck, 1976 [1896]: 201). Some of them are as follows:

- i) *Louman* (land price): A tax relating to a periodic payment to the chief by an outsider for cultivation of the chief's land;
- ii) *Gamsan* (land lease): It is a payment connected to the chief for the lease of the land;
- iii) *Jineiman* (marriage price): It is a marriage-tax paid to the chief by a villager on his marriage. Besides 'bride-price' is also paid by the bridegroom family to the Chief when the bride is to leave the village in marriage of a person belonging to another village;
- iv) *Toltheh* (ground cleaning): It is a fine imposed by the chief on one or more persons for committing a serious crime like shedding of human bloods, homicide etc. Along with a jar of rice beer, a pig could be killed at the chief's house to bring forth with a compromising solution; and
- v) *Khotha* (village labour): It means the able-bodied villagers had to contribute their one day or more free-labour for the chief as and when required by the chief.

5.3 Village Administration and its Functionaries

The functional system of administration in the entire Thadou-Kuki village is an age-old institution based on their inherited customs and traditions. Each village has its own separate administrative unit, which functions independently. The office of 'Haosa' cannot function without the council of ministers despite so much of power and authority is vested with the chief. In discharging of his duties connected to day-to-day administration, the chief work in close co-operation with the council, consisting of a group of elders from the stock of village community itself. This council is composed of persons of wisdom, integrity, knowledge of customary law etc.

Regarding the members of the council, the chief has a group of elders nominated and retained by him at his pleasure though in this selection he gives a fair representation to the various clans in his village (Elwin, 1965: 15). In recognition of the services rendered for the welfare of the village, the council members are exempted from the payment of tributes to the Chief. The privileges of being an official of the Chief, perhaps, were the exemption from payment of revenues. The members remained during the pleasure of the Chief and they could be re-appointed even after the completion of the term. The council had to deal various issues relating to social, economic, political, judicial matters etc.

The village, as a political unit consists of *Haosa* and his *Semang Pachong*. The number of the council varies from village to village depending on the size and work load of the village concerned. Although the chiefs are all-in-all powerful in theoretical terms, in fact the government of the villages had democratic elements. This was due to the appointment of officials (members of the council) to assist him in the administration. Thus, the participation of the elders who are the officials to the core of village administration, whether it is decision-making process or discharging various functions, the system provided broader representation of the interest of the people. While in theory the Chief could bypass the council and give order without consulting them, and the people would not dare disobey his order, in practice such things were rare happenings because of democratic traditions. The other components of the council of ministers are as follow:

5.3.1 *Semang* (Village Council Members)

In order to ameliorate village administration, chief selects council men (*Semang*) from villager whom he finds eligible, capable and suitable for the office or as proposed by the villagers (Gangte, 2012: 130). Based on their overall efficiency and chief entrusting responsibility they not only play crucial role in the village administration, but also occupy a

respectable position. For example, while selection of land for cultivation they are given the privilege to choose before others. They are men with profound knowledge of traditions and customs, and administrative skills. It is a great privilege for the village chief to have a man of wisdom and integrity to be *Semang*. On the other hand, their position as a council man is not permanent, and they can be removed anytime by chief on his own will or decision. Though the office of *Semang* is not hereditary, he can be re-appointed for this coveted post provided that his presence and participation in governing the village is essential. In the event of the death of the chief leaving a minor son, the *Semang* governs the village till he becomes major. According to P.C. Misao, *Semang* is generally chosen from a minority clan in the village, the intention probably is to establish goodwill among all clans of the village who are well versed in customary laws and the sole spokesman of the chief (Misao, Op. cit.: 11-12). In this connection, Stewart has also written that,

This office is not strictly speaking hereditary though in most cases except when thoroughly in competent, the son succeeds the father but is given to those qualified for it, as being men of property and influence as well as of ability and good spokesman.¹¹⁵

Thus, *Semang* is a very important official of the chief to whom many official duties of the chief are also entrusted. In fact, he plays the role of the real executive. All the shortcomings and limitations of the chief are covered up by him and he may also be asked to act in his capacity on behalf of the chief. He has or should possess the qualities of leadership, honesty, dedication, and sacrifice with a sense of love for the village community. He has to look after the all-round development of the village and the wellbeing of the people.

5.3.2 *Pachong* (Head of Defence)

Pachong is another official and one of the important functionaries of the council. The office of *Pachong* is concerned with the defence of the village and the security of life and properties within his jurisdiction. He is also the leader in the village labour organization. It is his bounden duty to maintain order, discipline and social ethics among the members of labour organization called *Lompi*. Under his leadership and instructions, the able bodied youths were trained according to their capacity and talent and were utilised to serve for the defence of the village. It is the responsibility of *Pachong* to oversee that the villagers live in peace and harmony. He trained the youths in the art of warfare, prepared and equipped them with

¹¹⁵ Stewart, *Lushai-Kuki Clans*, p. 192, Quoted from K. Kipgen, *The Thadou-Kukis* p. 76.

weapons in times of external threats. *Pachong* is like an Army General whose main concern is defence of the village, of course, with the assistance of the youths.

The person who occupy this office possess qualities such as self-sacrificing, bravery, strong-hearted and remain always alert and be ready to do whatever the occasion demanded. It is his duty and responsibility to maintain law and order and to ensure all-round safety and security of life and properties. The office of *Pachong* is in fact, similar to that of Defence and Home department of modern day administration.

Besides, there is a separate administrative structure within the village Labour Organisation (*Lompi*) which contains person's in-charge of different work under the overall leadership and supervision of *Pachong*, such as *Lamhil*, *Solle*, *Tollaipao*, *Makai*, *Laikam*, *Upa* etc. They were responsible for the progress and smooth functioning of the organization, maintaining order and discipline within the members of village labour organization (corps). As *Lompi* is mainly concerned with economic life of the village, they kept the village self-sufficient as far as possible in matters of physical labour.

5.3.3 *Lhangsam* (Village Crier)

The literal meaning of *Lhangsam* is 'villager crier' who usually shout at the top of his voice from a raised platform, called *Kemchon*, built purposely near the Chief's courtyard. He is another important official who assists the chief in governing the village. He is one of the council member in-charge of the Secretary – Information and Publicity. In fact, he proclaims to the village about the Chief's order. In addition to this, he is also supposed to convene a meeting of the councillors. In this connection T.S. Gangte has written that, "In actual fact he [*Lhangsam*] holds a far wider scope of responsibility than the designation indicates. He convenes meeting of the council, conveys decisions of the council to the general public" (Gangte, 1993: 130). Thus, in the absence of modern communication systems, information is spread through the words of mouth.

Besides, the members or functionaries of the council mentioned above, other village officials who play important role in the socio-economic structure of the Thadou-Kuki society are i) *Thempu* (the village priest) and ii) *Thih-Khengpa* (the black-smith) Unlike the councilors who have a definite term, the office of *Thempu* and *Thih-Kheng* is almost hereditary due to the continuance of the profession by their offspring in most cases. These were hereditary in nature.

5.3.4 *Thempu* (Village Priest)

Another important position in traditional setting is village priest (*Thempu*). The ineluctable role of belief system and medicinal need in the everyday life makes the role of *Thempu* highly honourable. As a priest his roles and responsibilities includes performing all the rituals and rites whenever necessary such as administering medicine to the ill person. Generally, priest is selected among villagers who are well versed with the various incantation i.e. '*Themthu*' meaning 'the secret words and knowledge of medicine'. But due to secrecy of medicine and incantation that involves rigorous process of training, exposure and experiences it becomes a hereditary position (Gangte, 2012: 131). It requires profound knowledge of various incantation, chanting and performance that are carried out in specific pattern according to demand of the circumstances and rituals. Although it is not necessarily an inherited position, in most cases the male sons of the priest inherit priesthood position. Because the knowledge and learning need constant interaction, practice and experience. The feasibility of such learning and exposure is preferably shared within the household members, particularly sons (Gangte, 2012: 131).

The priest combined in himself the qualities of a physician and leader in the religious life of the people. With his magical incantation, he allegedly cured various diseases and he also performed all sorts of rites and rituals in the village as and when needed. In return, he received a bucketful of paddy, a meat-share of hunted wild game as tributes from the villagers annually, in token acknowledgement of his service to the village community. The village priest is, in fact, a very important official who is in-charge of the community's health. He attended all the villagers in times of their sickness and also officiated over social and religious ceremonies. He performed all kinds of sacrifices which may require animals-spotless white cock, *mithuns*, pigs and other materials. The priest is both a psychologist and a physiologist, who could tell the symptoms of illness from the pulse of the person and the way for recovery. He directed order in regard to sacrificial offerings and the ceremonial performance thereof.

The priest was supposed to know/possesses knowledge of medicinal herbs. Thus, it was the privileges of a few persons. They were therefore respected by the people. The village priest is also regarded to hold a high office next to the chief. Being a respected person of the Chief in the society the *Thempu* was exempted from paying all kinds of taxes which were levied on the common villagers.

5.3.5 *Thih-Khengpa* (Village Smithy)

The village blacksmith is mainly responsible for manufacturing weapons of war, agricultural and household implements which required strenuous labour. Every Kuki village has its own blacksmith whose service is indispensable for the sustenance of the village economy. To forge iron, a separate shed for the blacksmith is constructed in which two hollowed wooden cylinders are buried in the ground standing upright. Two bamboo tubes fitted to the cylinders are placed just below the charcoal fire. And when the piston which is made up of bamboo and cock's feather is worked by hand, it moves up and down.¹¹⁶ Charcoal is used in the furnace. Thus, agricultural or household tools like spades, hoes, knives, sickles, dibble, etc. and weapons of war were manufactured. The science of melting brass is also known as is evident with the manufacture of brass hair-pins, bangles, armlets, metals beads etc. by pouring the molten metal into moulds made of a mixture of paddy husk, clay and sand. Indigenous method of smelting ores has been known to them since time immemorial.

As they are independent by nature and live in jungles in the midst of hostile animals, they made weapons both for offensive and defensive purposes, e.g. such as spears (*Tengcha*), muzzle-loading gun (*Thihnang-Meipum*) in the later periods, *daos* (*Chempong*), bows and arrows (*Thalpi*), leather shields (*Om-Pho*) etc. In fact, in manufacturing all these implements and weapons of war, not only the village black smith but also the village artisans contributed laboriously. We do not know when the first gun was made indigenously but the legends have revealed to us that they had acquired these talents much before the coming of the British.¹¹⁷

The office of 'Thih-Khengpa' went to the person who had the highest dexterity in blacksmithy (Gangte, 1993: 131), whose duty in repairing of various agricultural implements or tools of the villagers was excellent. Agricultural implements like hoes, axes, spades, swords, knives etc. are manufactured and repairing of the worn out tools was done by *Thih-Khengpa*. Weapons or armaments were also manufactured by him. As he was the authorised and officially recognised blacksmith of the village, so whatever he did was free of cost. But in recognition of his service, he was entitled a basket-full of rice from each family annually, the share of which could be lower than what the chief received. The Blacksmith was also entitled a meat-share in animals killed in wild games called *Them-sha* or *Thih Kheng-Sha* just like that of *Thempu*. The Blacksmith was also exempted from payment of taxes to the Chief like the official priest.

¹¹⁶ As explained by a village elder at Teiseng, aged 70.

¹¹⁷ However, some historians have suggested that the first guns were available in Manipur Sector by 1728 A.D.

In conclusion it can be said that the office of *Thempu* and *Thih-khengpa* was coveted in the traditional society of the Thadou-Kuki culture of all the Kuki tribes because quite a few could be appointed to it. They were experts in their respective professions which was almost impossible for an ordinary villager. As such they were rare and highly respected persons and friends of the Chief. So they were given special privileges in the society.

5.4 Importance of the Institution of Chieftainship

The system of chieftainship was the main reason behind the preservation and retention of customs and tradition. The Chief was the fountain head of justice and retainer of customs. As noted earlier, the village councillors and the Chief constituted what is known as the village court called *Haosa Inpi* – the highest court of justice in the traditional Thadou-Kuki society where cases were decided and settled as per the traditional customary laws.

It is found that customs play a crucial role in all walks of life be it on matters relating to social, economic, political, religion, judiciary etc. In spite of many defects in the practice of systems of chieftainship, the system could not be abolished and it remained functional. The fundamental character of the institution of chieftainship among the Kukis as a whole, is clearly depicted in the writings of Carey and Tuck that, “The Chief may be wanting in qualifications and there may be many of other families his superior in ability but unless he is physically or mentally quite unfit for his position there is no danger of his being supplanted and the usual course is for elders and advisers to assist him in his rule” (Carey and Tuck, 1976 [1896]: 200-201).

These being the characteristic features the same old system of the chieftainship descending to the eldest male issue is still continuing and even today it remains as the recognizable basis of the chieftainship organization. When empirical facts are examined, we find that wherever they migrated and settled down they went along with their cultural thoughts like the name of the place and later identified the new area of their settlement or village with such names. The institution of chieftainship, based on the clan genealogy gives a clear picture of the evolution of traditional chieftainship which at present is based on the same principle and is quite relevant and valid. That is why the system of ‘Haosa’ could not be given a go-by, despite varied changes all around (Gangte, 1993: 128). Despite many defects in the system, the rich culture and their traditional heritage could very well serve in bringing together the chiefs of the head clans and the younger branches, in the face of external threats. The system could effectively create a sense of unity and loyalty to each other by expressing their kinship solidarity. As such the British authorities were also surprised to find how the

Kuki chiefs could mobilise their strength and unity at a very short notice to face the might of the British Government, despite their thinly scattered settlement in almost all the surrounding hills of Manipur.

Their polity had a distinctive character which was inborn and inherited from their forefathers. The initiative and leadership to fight against the British came from within the authoritative structure in which the clan heads and the collateral chiefs re-affirmed the value structure of the customs and traditions. Such traditional organizations of the chieftainship could successfully bring the masses to participate and allow them to get involved in the war against the British to protect their dignity, culture and freedom. Thus, the chieftainship system was really vital and also important in the traditional life of the Thadou-Kukis and their cognate tribes so much so that it stood as the main reason behind their unity and strength.

5.5 Locating the Institution of Chieftainship in Modern Context

The chieftainship institution is ideally considered as the least affected by wind of change. Though irrefutable that certain characteristic and mechanism of chieftainship functioning undergo change. Despite of it, the degree of change is comparative considered lesser than change in other aspects of the community. Nevertheless, it is viewed as the only traditional institution that literally and correspondently managed to sustain and retained its characteristics and mode of functioning though in a different form.

Table 5.2

Opinion on the impact of change on traditional authority

Degree of impact	No. of response	Percentage
Very much	78	35
Average (normal)	30	14
Comparatively less	112	51
Total	220	100

Table 5.2 shows that 51 per cent agreed that the old age traditional form of village administration system or chieftainship is relatively less affected by change. And 35 per cent are convinced that it changes the most. Whereas, 14 per cent of the respondents viewed the

impact of change on chieftainship system as an evenly process that neither intensely nor mildly manner. Rather, adapting to the compelling circumstances and with the direction of change, in order to retain its traditional and historical legacy.

Although the general functioning of village administration under chieftainship is seen as the least affected by change, ironically the way chief exerts its authority and administration differ from villagers (as expressed by interviewees) expectation and level of satisfaction. It is noteworthy that, most respondents recount dissatisfaction over the way chiefs are administering villages. According to their opinion the traditionally legitimised power of chief is often zealously misused to utilise for personal benefits while neglecting or at the expense of the village welfare. Whereas, some expressed that chieftainship is still effective in the overall village administration, despite of the setback in curtailing certain potential progress of village and the community that could have possibly be accomplished otherwise. For example, proper distribution and implementation of social welfare schemes and fund meant for village development.

Table 5.3

Competency of chieftainship system in the functioning of village

Satisfactory Level	No. of respondents	Percentage
Satisfied	37	17
Unsatisfied	143	65
Uncertain	40	18
Total	220	100

The table 5.3 shows that about 65 per cent of respondents are discontent with the way chiefs are administering their respective villages. Whereas, 17 per cent of respondents express that they are satisfied over village chief mode of administration, and 18 per cent are ambivalent (of neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) the way chief administering the village.

One of the main reasons for the dissatisfaction over traditional form of administration in the village is the sceptical view on village chief accountability in administering the village and its prospect. In the village, villagers under the traditional form of administration normally kept their hopes and expectation on village chief to at least maintain certain standard in

justifying his power and status while governing the village. Respondents viewed that, most of the time village chief fails to fulfil even the minimal expectation of villagers. Despite knowing that village chief employed his chieftainship privilege for personal gain, but villager somehow anticipate that at least at the minimum or in case of basic or minor matters, chief is expected to be more sensible or to be more justifying at this junction. However, Mrs. Haokip, a widow, said: *“As village chief I can understand and endure that chief’s power and privilege, but for minor issues such as discriminating and prejudice attitude towards widow, orphans and poorer section of villagers and siphoning those meagre funds allotted by government from poor villagers is too cheap for a chief”*.¹¹⁸

Table 5.4
Manner of village chief exerting power in the village

Indicators	No. of respondents	Percentage
Self-centred	193	88
Considerate	12	5
No opinion	15	7
Total	220	100

In the table 5.4 it shows that most of the time the chief exercise his responsibility for self-benefit, rather than for the welfare of the villager. About 88 per cent expresses that chiefs are becoming more egocentric. Economically, socially and politically concern about his own welfare and gaining. Chief are more interested in benefiting or extracting fund in the name of village or funds meant for villager for his own personal benefit. Socially, at the expense of justice and equality, would often give preference or priority to his own kin or relative more than the others. Politically, village chief wanted his decision and authority to remain unchallenged or free from criticism. And power to remain confined within the vested few individual who endorse him and his chiefship. While 5 per cent are of the viewed that village chief is still performing their responsibility fairly. And 7 per cent are either ignoring or reluctant to share their perspective about chief administration.

¹¹⁸ Interviewed on 18 July 2016, S. Haijang village.

Discontentment over chieftainship is also partially related to questioning the legitimacy of chief's power and the pragmatic of traditional authority in the contemporary time. The polemic issues of chiefship power are further intensified by personality and calibre of chief in exerting power as head of the village. Chief aptness in exerting and implementing chiefship authority appropriately according to its intended purpose and design. For example, Mr. Khongsai, a government school teacher, question about village under chief authority as he stated that *"what is the benefit of having a village chief when he cannot govern the village with justice and fair"*.¹¹⁹ Also, villager mainly disgruntles over the tendency of chief to engage in personal benefits more than villager and village welfare. It is manifested by the manner chief claim over the land as his sole property which in fact is undoubtedly belongs to him. But the way chief promotes his leadership skill and diplomacy over village have changes from a broader interest to narrow self-interest. According to a senior villager *"In the past, we find solace in chief's words. For example, in any situation or circumstance, chief always say 'our land or our village'! Nowadays, on the contrary, chiefs would always assert the village as 'my land or my village'"*.¹²⁰ Such statement of village chief in addressing about village land is taken as a sign of chief becoming more incline in egoistic interest in his outlook and in administering the village.

Villagers on the other hand, lost their trust and sentiment toward village chief and his authority. Most respondent express strong disapproval of chief becoming more and more egocentric in every opportunity. Because, they are quite aware of chief attitude is increasingly self-centred. Mrs. Kipgen, a government employee states that *"It is disheartening to see that our chiefs are becoming greedier day by day. Instead of showing concern for the village welfare, they are more concern of themselves and in only accruing wealth"*.¹²¹ The discontentment invokes individualism among village and in the village social life, thereby weakens the social bondages and affection towards the village and chief as well. In the words of Mr. Touthang, a government school teacher, *"If village chief is unconcern or care less for the village, naturally villager will do the same. Even those villager/s who show intense care for the village are ridicule, especially village chief will critically be suspicious of that person"*.¹²² In some critical instances, and based on endorsing or as against the village chief, the village usually disintegrated into many splinter villages or village. The

¹¹⁹ Mr. MangminKhongsai (age 40), interviewed on 21 July 2017 at Bijang village.

¹²⁰ Pu Paolet Haokip (age 78), interviewed on 20 August 2017 at Pisgah village.

¹²¹ Mrs. Shishi Kipgen (age 54), interviewed on 2 September 2016 at B. Vengnom village.

¹²² Mr. Thangjamang Touthang (age 44), interviewed on 21 September 2017 at Teiseng village.

economically potential individual who is against the village chief would often initiate the separation by establishing new village, where villagers unhappy with chief would shift to the new village. The person establishing a new village becomes chief of the village. Although it manipulatively affecting the traditional procedure to become chief and impact the ultimate power chief, but the way chieftainship operates and function as a village administration is retained and reiterated.

5.6 Law of Inheritance

The chieftainship system plays a pivotal role in the socio-political life of the Kuki. It governs land relationships in villages. Chiefs were revered as gods and were believed to have a direct connection with the gods themselves. Viewed with the utmost respect and almost superstitious veneration, the chiefs' commands were in every case law (Stewart, 1855: 625). The chieftainship system, therefore, provided the power for patriarchal domination. The chief and his council of ministers constitute the customary court of a Kuki village. The customary court is a traditional law-enforcing body and is the highest body of law in any village dominated by the Kuki. Under this system, all lands are in the name of the chief, who owns it on behalf of the villagers. The land within the chiefdom is distributed to the villagers for cultivation and homesteads.

Law of inheritance is given to the male lines only. On the death of the father, the sons inherit the rights and properties of the family. In the case of 'Chapagam' (barren fatherhood) law of inheritance is passed-on through the next closest or nearest male relative of the family, which is the reason that a male child is preferred. For the purpose of individual inheritance, a man's kin is divided into his cognate-kin through any link and his agnatic-kin through male links only.

When a man dies, his property goes to the Primus agnates; his nearest living agnatic relative (son, brother, father's brother's son, etc.). If he had no near agnates, then his nearest cognate could inherit the rights and properties of the family (Fox, 1967: 51). No female line is given a chance to inherit the rights and properties of the deceased man. The eldest son who inherits the paternal properties continues to stay in the natal house with the paternal group even after marriage. It is his duty to take care of his aged parents till they die, and also bear all the cost for his sisters and brothers marriage.¹²³ The eldest son of the family inherits all the properties of the family possessed by the father. For the other sons, separated from the family

¹²³ See Paokai, *Sociological Study of the customary Laws of the Thadou Kukis*, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of Philosophy, NEHU, 1992, p, 84.

following marriage and having children are also provided property by the eldest son for bond of fraternal unity. Even sisters can be included. But they cannot claim any property of the family as per customary practices.

5.7 Decline of Traditional Authority in Urban Setting

Based on the field study, we proposed two important factors that is discuss in the following section. In the first place, the chief's limited power in urban villages, and in the second, the subsequent result of power struggle within the church administration.

Firstly, almost every Kuki village are under the administration of chieftainship and the backbone of the chief's power lies upon land ownership. That is chief is powerful due to ownership of the entire village land. And villagers who are comparatively powerless settled in the village having no legitimacy on land but more-or-less like a temporal settler. This pattern of settlement, administration and village setting is a traditional Kuki village establishment and system. The typical pattern of Kuki village establishments is still relevant in most rural villages. However, in urban villages, the village chief unlike his fellow rural village chief is relatively less powerful. In fact, landholdings in urban villages are either privatised or semi-privatised,¹²⁴ and majority of urban village households settled in their own landholding. As the traditional system of landholding is altered so does it affects village chief powers and potential to an extent. Since, the power of village chief is primarily derived from the ownership of the entire village land.

Therefore, the power of village chief over land becomes casual, indicating the same in term of chief's power in the village. Although, for administration purposes chief's traditional authority is regarded and respected. According to Mr. Touthang, chief of Bijang, *"Nowadays, village chiefs exist as a nominal head. Except for resolving few cases of crime or offences, as a chief we cannot dictate like a supreme authority. Everyone settled in their own land and whatever they [villagers] decide good for themselves is up to them and I have not object nor intervene in this regard"*.¹²⁵ Due to privatization of land, chief's power is weakened while villager gains more power as their land and settlement are secured. Meanwhile, the chief is no longer able to exert power through ownership of landholding, but compelled to be more resilience toward villagers' wants and opinion. As a result of alteration and weakening of

¹²⁴ Land is purchased from the village chief and a formal land ownership document is issued. However, the official land document is not released to purchaser, but the landholders have every right to do with the land like selling it to others.

¹²⁵ Interviewed on 28 December 2017.

village chief, it also paves way for villagers to subscribe to church of their choice without must resistance from the village authority.

Urban villagers/residents are more or less economically well-off and some are very wealthy. Economically they no longer depend on chief's land for survival, because most of them are either government employee or self-employed. And non-agriculture occupations are much desirable than agricultural activities, that even for basic income villagers rarely depend on chief's land for survival. With the privatisation of landholding and the overall villagers' economic efficiency and independent form chief land for survival further de-escalate the power of chief over the villagers. The ultimate authority of chief on account of land ownership and villager dependent on his land for survival or sustenance is undermined. According to Mr. Mate, chief of Tuibuong, "*The weakening of chief is mainly because of villagers' confidence in their economic power, and often indirectly expresses that they are above customary laws or village authority*".¹²⁶ As a result, the traditional forms of administration that is chiefship although preserved, its authority and power is exercised in a limited social domain. And the relationship between village chief and villager is visibly less bonded by the formal traditional law of chiefship system, but rather in a democratic manner. In that, with the limitation in exerting chief powers and the democratic way of village governance naturally force chief to reconsider the expectation and opinion of villagers in various matter.

Firstly, the change in landholding (privatisation) and distribution and the improved economic situation of the villager directly impact the intensity of chief power in the village setting and administration. Secondly and subsequently, the villagers became more conscious of their liberty and potential. And it motivates them to react or act according to their reasoning of their desired without much fearing or considering the village authority responses. On the contrary, the village authority becomes more democratic and accommodative while enacted any kind of village ordinance or regulation.

5.8 Land-Power Relations

Considering the manner how power exists, it remains the same everywhere but depending on the context and places it differed from one place to another. As one can observe the type of power prevailing in in rural villages differ from that of in urban villages. That is to say that in rural villages power is synonyms to chieftainship, as chief is the supreme authority in the

¹²⁶ Interviewed on 5 March 2018 at Tuibuong.

village domain and no other individuals can oppose the authority chief enjoyed. The overall village environment depends upon chief's administration and aptness. While in urban villages, power is not only confined to village chief but also shared by the privilege villagers particularly those who are educated, wealthy and employed. In other words, power in urban villages is determined by economic, status and politics.

It is undeniable fact that, the fundamental source of chief power egresses from land ownership. In the meantime, and in order to counterbalance his power obtain through land ownership with the other social sphere, village chief keep vigils on the village social environment. Solely land ownership cannot make him powerful as desired unless if he (chief) is unable to exert his power in the social domain too. The extent of chief power is determined or graded accordingly to the manner village chief is able to convince and control the villager and to remain compliance to his integrity. That is why village chief and his family are well informed about gossiping and other information that persist among villager lots regarding how villager talk and think about them.

During the fieldwork in rural village, visiting certain household would often make the village chief's family to jestingly remark of certain family that are visited as a friendly household, or remark how is your friends. A tacit way to extract information who are taking which sides and to make sure that certain families are unfriendly to the chief and his family. In fact, those family happen to be the one that clandestinely expressed dissent over the mode of chief administration, and this attitude is known to the village chief and his family. Therefore, village chief in order to insure as well as sustain his power in the village, and after carefully observing the village situation, selects village council men who can support him and also able to tackle threats and challenges from villagers.

5.9 Land Use System

The term 'land-use' may be broadly defined as the putting up of a parcel of land into productive purposes.¹²⁷ The study of such land use system is as old as agriculture itself. For generations, the hill tribes of Manipur both Nagas and Kukis practised different land use system in their domain. Among the Nagas, land was under the management of the Village Council or *Gaonbura* (Village elders). With regard to the traditional land use system in the valley R. Brown writes, "The whole land system of the valley starts with the assumption that all land belongs to the Maharaja and in his, to give away or retain it as he pleases" (Brown,

¹²⁷ See R.K. Ranjan Singh; *The Pattern of land use in the Manipur valley: A geographical Analysis*: Unpublished Thesis submitted to Manipur University, 1981.

1950 [1874]: 58). Similarly, among the Kukis the Chief was the custodian and owned the land, which was the primary source of agricultural production. Under the chieftainship of the Kukis, land ownership is the exclusive right and prerogatives of the chief in absolute terms. As such individual villagers have no right over the land whatsoever. The Kuki villagers were in complete subservience to their respective chiefs unlike the system prevalent among the Nagas where landownership are allowed to individuals, the collective and to groups etc. with equal rights. Thus, the Kuki Chief reigned supreme with absolutism in contrast to the democratically oriented systems of the Nagas in as far as the land use and ownership system is concerned. The maintenance of the Chief's power in the case of Kukis would seem to involve economic control over people's everyday lives. With regard to land ownership among the Kukis, K. Kipgen writes, "All the lands belong to the Chief, whether it be a homestead, a jhum field or a wet-paddy field" (Kipgen, op. cit.: 112). The Chief was all in all in the affairs of the village as has been categorical outlined in the preceding chapters.

Though the entire land of the village theoretically belonged to the Chief, the village community who shared the land among themselves did the actual cultivation. The general condition, which prevailed among the Kukis from the earliest times, is that the land within the Chieftainship is distributed to the villagers for cultivation. The member of the Chief's council with the approval of the Chief superintend and transact all business matters in connection with the land cultivation, measurement, collection of tax etc.

In the Thadou-Kuki society, land signifies 'security', 'investment capital' and a 'status symbol/marker' (Sitlhou, 2011). It has economic as well as political and symbolic importance. It is a productive wealth creating and livelihood- sustaining asset. Traditionally, land has been considered the basis of political power and social status. It also provides a sense of identity and rootedness within the village, and consequently, in people's minds land often has a durability and permanence, which no other asset possesses (Agarwal, 1998: 17). The Thadou Kuki society also ascribes similar importance to land. In fact, until today it still has the highest prestige among all forms of immovable property. Broadly categorised, individual household-owned land falls under two types: ancestral land and acquired land. Ancestral land, as the name suggests, is passed down the male line from generation to generation. Acquired land, on the other hand, is land obtained on purchase by an individual. In the process, land can be reclassified as ancestral land when it is passed down to the children of the one who has acquired it.

The fundamental source of chief power egresses from landholding, safeguarded by the tradition as chief prerogative right. In the meantime, and in order to counterbalance his power

obtain through land ownership with the socio-political aspect, village chief keep vigils on the village social environment. For instances, according to Mr. Hangsing (a former village council member), *“Ideally the power of village chief emerges from three factors or sources: Firstly, as a traditional head of a village, secondly the pattern of land ownership system in the chieftainship institution. Thirdly, and the decisive factors is the acknowledgeable power from the two factors is proportionally defined in the social political sphere”*.¹²⁸ It implicates that the degree of chief power is determined or graded accordingly to ability of village chief to convince and control the villager and to remain compliance to his social integrity as head of the village.

In rural village power mostly revolves around chiefship system, where chief is the lone person who enjoyed power. Within the ambit of chiefship system, power relation depends upon personal attribution such as income, wealth, age, and gender and kinship situation. But overall, chief power predominates the power structure in the village set up. It can be best exemplifier from the effectiveness of chief command and decision in impacting the village affairs and in the decision making body. Also, the prevailing land ownership system in rural village is such that no individual can privatise land that clearly highlights competence of chief powers. The stringent land ownership system is followed at the interest of chiefship authority and a manifestation of chief power over his land. On the other hand, and except for the case of chief family, specifically among male siblings’ land are shared to maintain the family legacy.

In rural village, land is considered as a community land by virtue of communitarian principle. As a matter of fact, land is considered as a common-land to facilitate villagers’ sustenance and resources, though as a property it belongs to village chief. At the same time, no villagers have the right to claim any part of village land as personal property or intent to privatising it. But it can only be happened if chief permitted it to be purchase from him, which rarely happens in the case of rural villages. On the other hand, part of the village land is avail to villagers for cultivation, foraging and hunting purposes. However, before initiating any activities in the village land prior consent and direction of chief is to be taken. For instance, a specific portion of land is permitted to villagers to cultivate, while other parts are forbidden to carry out any activities. Restriction is imposed by village chief purposely to preserves tree and land (for conserving soil fertility) or to lease out only to those who can pay to cultivate in specific portion of the village land. For instance, if any villager or individual

¹²⁸ Interviewed on 3 March 2018 at Teiseng village.

carried out activities without the knowledge of village chief, the person is/are liable to heavy fine and penalty, according to the rules and regulation applied and made by village chief and village council.

5.10 Case Study in Teiseng Village

In rural context, village chief is the wealthiest among the villagers. The source of village chief income is mostly generated from leasing out land, government funding and scheme, forest and land resources etc. For instance, chief household of Teiseng village generates income mainly from lease-out land for cultivation and farming, from stone mining, road and transportation taxed from truck owners whose transportation and travel pass the village road while carrying out timber or stone trading. For example, in 2018 during the monsoon season (during fieldwork), Teiseng village chief decided to stop vehicle plying or passing through a specific village road.¹²⁹ The road was the only route for trucks transporting stone from the stone quarry located somewhere in the interior part of the village to town and other places. And since the road is slope and passes through the village, it poses risky and dangerous for the villager as the road is muddy and in hazardous condition during rainy season. With the village chief decisions, the rich and well to do businessmen and truck owners pleaded to the village chief to reconsidered his decision upon their willing to pay more for road tax. After a long discussion, village chief decided to allow them to continue their trade passing through the village by constructing different route of safer, longer and away from the residential area. Without much hesitation truck owners agreed to it and to bear all the expenses in constructing new route after paying certain amount of money as a contract and an increased road tax as well. The advantage of owning a vast land is the available of ample of land and forest resources that contribute to chief economic condition also mean that enable chief to exercise his power.

Beside land resources, outside agencies like government or NGO's that intended to sponsor funding or to give financial aid to the village development or scheme must firstly contact chief and often managed by village chief before any initiation. One best example that are widely known and villagers are critical about village chief source of income is Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NRGES) launch by government of India. Village chief often deducts certain amount from the propose wage or share of villager from the said scheme. Village chief able to manipulate such schemes or developmental aid

¹²⁹ For details on the condition of Teiseng village road, see chapter 6.

because he is the head of the village and it is his prerogative authority and disposition to decide matter related to village to which villager's despite of doubting chief act have not much say against him.

Dependency on village land or chief's land for residential as well as for livelihood is one of the factors that suppress conflict between chief and villagers, at the same it also assures village chief to exert power over the villager. Apart from availing land for cultivation, residential land also belongs to chief. It is a common practice in every village establishment to enforce traditional and customary laws and norm as a medium of social control and administration. Any household wanted to reside in village are conditioned to abide by and honour chief authority and village laws and order. And chief with his authority and as the head of the village is to ensure that villagers follow and live accordingly to the prescribed traditional and customary laws, norms and morality. Indispensable dependence on village land for livelihood and for residential, villager folks are conditioned to acquiescence to chief authority and command.

The prevailing land ownership system in rural village is also a tacit way chief demonstrates the ability to exert power. From villager point of view on humanity ground, chief sole ownership of village land is perceived in a positive approval. Village chief influence over the villagers may have certain constraints to individual liberty and right. But on the positive notes, land ownership under chieftainship villager are able to enjoyed the privilege to reside or dwell in the village without any monetary pressure or the burden of renting (or purchasing) land or place to settle. An elderly villager who has been living in the village for more than 70 years' comments: *"My family have neither money nor land, but it is because of chief understanding and compassion towards us that we survive and live in this village. And to go against chief is a self-destruction"*.¹³⁰ Land being a prerogative property of chief, it ultimately implies his actions and decisions as unequivocal. For instance, no villager can question (at least openly) chief action against any household, even to the extent of expelling from village at any time. Particularly, in case any individuals stood against chief authority and village laws or commit a grievous crime. At the same, no individual doubted chief decision, if individual is pardoned after paying fine or penalty, given that the same mistake is not repeated or committed again. If the land ownership system in rural village become like in urban village, those who cannot afford to own land have to rent houses or land to dwell, which is not the case in rural village.

¹³⁰ Pu Thangkhotinlam Chongloi (age – 72), interviewed on 18 October 2017 at Teiseng village.

Land may be interpreted with various meaning and means, for village chief land is conceived as a symbol of pride and reputation. Whereas, for non-chief it is exhibition of economic power also sources of power. In general understanding, imposition or restriction to privatised land in rural village is an advantage to village chief – the potentiality to control over villager and at the same time, if necessary, dictates. On the hand, and from chief point of view land has greater significant than being a mere symbol of power. It has emotion attachment that connotes the valuing of community-land, cherishing the historical legacy of previous chiefs and for the benefit of villagers. All these reasoning are embodied with strong sentiments that not only illustrate the past glory but also to maintain the continuity of the same affection. For example, according to Teiseng chief's mother comments that *“part of the land (chief's land) could have been sold owing to economic compulsion. Many wealthy people from the town and urban villages try to convince me to sell part of the village land to them. Thinking that I would fall for their monetary offer being in a harsh economic condition and being a widow. Money may come and go, but the sacrifices made by our forefather to safeguard the village land cannot be compromise with the temporal luxury of money”*.¹³¹ In short, chief's concern over land is determined by emotion over property or land, dignity of maintaining the prerogative of land and affection for villagers to settle without any hindrance of renting or leasing.

Another interesting aspect of power structure in rural village is kinship relation. The similar economic condition in rural village ensues that power is less structured by economic interest but rather by kinship. Households having close kinship relation to chief are the influential individuals in the village. A village usually consists of different clans and those household belonging to same clan with chief, particularly those having close kinship ties are more privilege than the others belonging to different clan from chief. For instance, a man in his late 70's belonging to particular clan remarks *“different clans live in this village, although favouritism is not apparent overall, but sometime in crucial issues and situations, chief clansmen or close kin have better advantage than the other clan”*.¹³² Various factors may contribute in choosing a village for residence, and one among them is kinship relation. It is one of the crucial factors that determine decision or choice made by household. The choice made is often accountable to having close affinity with village chief.

¹³¹ Interviewed on 18 August 2017 at Teiseng village.

¹³² Interviewed on 20 August 2017 at Teiseng village.

5.10.1 Kinship and Power Relations

Belonging to chief clan or sub-clan, the chances of receiving privilege in the village have better prospect than residing in a village where chief belonging to different clan. At the same time, chief also acquires more supporting kin or clansman that subsequently enhances its authority and influence over the village. And within the clan, sub-clan relation or division also played crucial role in the village power relation. For example, in the case of Teiseng village, chief clan (Haokip) form majority of the households, but the bonding that prevail among the other minority clan¹³³ sometime made chief uncomfortable, particularly in regards to social and political atmosphere of the village. The bonding between the same sub-clan is relatively stronger than within the same clan. On the other hand, other minority clans and as a minority have stronger relationship and sometime receives support from chief clansman who are not within the fold of chief sub-clan. Even though chief is head of the village, the degree of his influence and authority in the village also rely upon the support and cooperation from village council men. For this very fact, village council men mostly comprise of individuals belonging to chief clan or of close kin, although other are also included, but only a handful of them. As a result of the criticality of kinship relation in the village power structure, majority of the household in village usually comprises of chief clan.

5.11 Case Study in Bijang Village

Power structure in urban village can be understood from two aspects. Firstly, power that prevail through tradition institution of chieftainship. Secondly, power that are endorsed and emanated from modern institution such as occupation, market oriented economic and political and social status reputation. As mention earlier, chiefship is a traditional form of administration system, enforced for the overall smooth functioning of village. And within the realm of chieftainship institution, village chief enjoyed power and rights that are traditionally legitimated and socially accepted. A traditional way and a mechanism meant for societal control, to maintain solidarity and to protect and supervise over the well-being of villagers and the village establishments. Concurrently, and on the other hand, the everyday life in urban village is marked by the ever-permeating economic competition, strata based on occupational assessment, socially and politically establishment statuses. Among the various personal entity, the degree of occupational prestige is the main determinant of individual reputation and status. Political aspiration and interest among villagers also evolve beyond the

¹³³ Other minority (in terms of number of households) clans include Chongloi, Kipgen, Hangsing, Vaiphei, Gangte, etc.

village perimeter and the traditional domain. All these changes have immediate or indirectly affected the traditional power structure in general and the potentiality of chiefship power in particular.

Ideally, villages under chieftainship, power is mostly hold by chief and village council men, but in the case of urban villages it evolves around chief and the affluent villager. Unlike in rural villages, chief power is comparatively limited and not exclusively in his hand or disposal. There are many factors that undermine chief authority in urban villages. Firstly, lack of strong traditional sentiments among the villagers. Secondly, land in urban area is privatised. Thirdly, the economic condition of the villager is better and only a handful of them depend on chief land for survival. Fourthly, power lies not in traditional sanctioning but on the market-economy and modern social influences. Fifthly, most of the village affairs are handle by the village authority, village youth club, and women organization whereas the consent and acknowledgement of chief is perhaps performed as a formality.

The preoccupied individualistic life styles in urban village, to a degree lessen the intensity of traditional sentiments. Though it is retained and preserve, mostly for the sake of exhibiting it. Otherwise it is not much considered as pragmatic or visible in the urban village social life. Mr. Haokip, a senior school teacher, opine that: *“Especially those who live mainly in urban villages, practiced and uphold tradition and customs merely for the sake of practicing it. Not because they are concerned for its meaning and intention, but in their convenient way and means to serve their personal interest and their endeavour are not compromised nor questioned. Further, whatever they performed, it is either altered or westernised”*.¹³⁴

Similarly, Mr. Gangte¹³⁵ believes that though the sentiment of upholding and practicing traditions and customs emanate from its value, meaning and in cherishing it. However, the manner of presenting has become more of delivery identity and cultural traits for political benefits and sympathy.’ That is to say that subject to political motivation, traditional sentiments are restricted to cultural and identity assertion. And beyond the political purview the importance of traditions and customs are uphold in a minimal or in an altered manner. In similar pattern, and in urban villages, the sense of traditional ethics is nominally realised for the sake of preserving it without much practicality or to it actual essentiality practice. Resulting to conceive in maintaining traditional sentiment beyond the village horizon is believed to be of greater cause than maintaining in the village level or local.

¹³⁴ Interviewed on 28 July 2017 at Tuibuong.

¹³⁵ Interviewed on 18 March 2018 at Bijang village.

Likewise, it entails to putting pragmatic effort of tradition mannerism and sentiments in village locality as less valued and crucial. Thereby, conceptualising, the interest of cultural valuing is greater in broader sense and minimising in the local level. In that, the role of village chief in the village is adversely seen less important than in the larger picture of identity based political interest.

In urban village, the elite villager interference and role in the village political and social domain, limits chief power and sometime virtually superseding it. The economically established or the elite are those in potential position to utilise their achieved resources and equivalently are given special attention and status publicly. For example, more than chief, it is the elite that dominates or influences the church¹³⁶ administration and affair. In time of selecting church leaders, church members usually prefer the elite member to be church leader. The church members' opinion is inexplicitly shaped and influenced by the economic status and prospect. In similar manner, at the time of decision making the weightage of chief opinion and decision is significantly relied upon the number and the degree of the elite supporting him. As a matter of fact, chief decision is often allusively manipulated by the elite. A person from Bijang comments that, *"Whenever a problem or issue is taken to the traditional court of law or customary law is applied, the chief often sided with the rich over the poor, if the case is between the rich and poor"*.¹³⁷ Because these rich [elite] sections are in advantage position to bargain the chief in their favour, whereas the poorer section solely relied and anticipated justice from the existing traditional authority that supposedly obligated to adjudicates fairness and justice in any situation and circumstances. According to Mr. Khongsai, an elderly villager opines that, *"today everything can be resolved with money, whether a person is right or wrong his/her money immune him/her from any sort of injustice. In short, justice comes at the expense of money"*.¹³⁸ Referring to manipulative condition of chief power in urban villages, where the wealthy employed their economic power and status to influence chief decision.

As mentioned earlier, chief's power is mainly derived from the prerogative right of land ownership of chiefdom. In urban village, such land ownership styles are no longer pragmatically enforced but for the interest of preserving traditional land ownership system and meanings, it is nominally acknowledged that village lands belong to chief. Only few plots of land are under the property right of chief, whereas much of the portion of village lands are

¹³⁶ Church is taken as an example because it is one of the predominating institutions that can be perhaps compared equivalent to the tradition in term of its social substantiality.

¹³⁷ Interviewed on 20 February 2018 at Bijang village.

¹³⁸ Interviewed on 22 February 2018 at Bijang village.

legally own and distributed among villagers. Since, chief ownership of village land is a titular credence it also greatly affected chief's power making him to continued occupying chieftainship office resembling that of a titular head. As landholding system under chieftainship experience changes, villagers' mobility to access powers in the village become effective particularly the well-to-do households.

It is a common assumption that money and wealth symbolised individual status and power. *"At the present era, it is the wealthy that have power and their words are respected. But without wealth, even the word of an elderly men though appreciated are ineffective and discarded"*, stated a villager from Bijang.¹³⁹ More than the traditionally sanctioned status or other personal quality and charisma, it is individual wealth, income and occupation situation that facilitate in defining the esteem level of social status and being in influential position. Perhaps, the inclination to adopt western culture and appreciating modern outlook among urban villagers led to occupation and monetary situation as a significant indicator in determining individual status and power. According to a respondent: *"Today, both poor and rich try to replicates the living standard of western society in whatever possible means. This not only changes our behaviour and life style but our attitude and appreciation"*.¹⁴⁰ In other sense, both western culture and modern outlook are valued more than the traditions however, not totally debarring the characteristics of tradition and customs aspect. In that, it eventually affects the power of chief which is primary based on traditional value and customary conducts.

Occupational wise, villagers in urban villages are generally a government employee, running business and other non-agricultural occupation. Demonstrating that most of the villager are efficient and self-reliant in term of income and sustenance. No more the burden of relying on village chief for income and provision. At the same time, being self-dependent, urban villagers are overall in better economic position than those of rural villagers. And the lesser villagers engage in agriculture activities, the lesser dependent on chief's land for survival. This entails to villagers becoming less submissive to chief authority and power.

In urban villages, the meaning of esteem status and power is more-or-less synonymous to economically competence. Those in better economic condition are given utmost regards and in most circumstances given preferences over the other because of the accomplished monetary status and potential. This is possible due to the efficacy of economic

¹³⁹ Interviewed on 17 September 2016 at Bijang village.

¹⁴⁰ Pastor L. Jamkhothang (age 64), interviewed on 25 March 2018 at Bijang village.

power to manipulate and influence any sort of social affairs and in decision making, in which economic status impression play crucial to negotiates in the power distribution. It is clearly visible by the trend of maintaining a VIP culture. In any social events, the well to do or any individual with the prospect of monetary contribution are given special treatment and special seat arrangement in the publics gathering. And these people are usually invited to grace the events or occasion as chief guest, functional president, guest of honours and several others as VIP's. In return of given a special platform, the invitees are to reciprocate by giving or donating certain amount of money to the organisers. There are instances where the organiser/s are discontent over the donated amount, while expecting larger sum to receive from the special invitees or VIPs. Observing VIPs culture is one of the obvious ways to realise the level of monetary power and potential is equivalent to individual social status. A respondent Mr. Mate, a retired government employee, comments that *"only those who are wealthy are considered and treated as superior man. Not because of who he or she is, but for what she or he have. Since, money to an extent can buy and fulfil a person wants in his/her life. For example, good education, government job, esteem status and power are all bought or gain through money and wealth. Which many of us cannot do the same but to admired and acknowledges it"*.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Mr. Haokip, a young businessman suggests: *"In the contemporary time everything is priced, even clean water are now purchased which was not the case in the past in the locality. This indicates the privilege position of the rich where everything has its cost and only those who have money easily enjoyed the best of all both in terms of materialistic accessibility and possession as well as social respect"*.¹⁴²

Within the village establishment, villages under chieftainship are governed by the traditional way of administration and regulation, and the chief is supposedly to be most power individual in handling village affairs. However, more than chief, village authority members, youth club and women association are overshadowing or are more effective in term of regularising social control and management. And the power of chief is almost reduced to represent a titular head and authority, whereas his concern is sought as a protocol to keep the legacy of traditional authority is retained or maintained. An urban village chief Mr Touthang expresses his doubts over the way villager are concerned about the necessities and important of traditional authority. *"It is out of courtesy and formalities that chiefs are said to be powerful. But the fact is that chiefs are becoming much less powerful than as said and believe to be so. Many are more capable intellectually, economically and politically more influential*

¹⁴¹ Pu Thangmang Mate (age 66), interviewed on 17 October 2017 at Tuibuong.

¹⁴² Mr. Seijang Haokip (age 40), interviewed on 25 August 2017 at Teiseng village.

than us [chief]. In addition to that these people indirectly and frequently condescended chief and its power while they elicited themselves as more capable and superior.”¹⁴³ The village authority members comprise of individual from different economic, education and occupational background. Some of them are much influential and respected by villagers owing to economic, education and occupation attribution. And they selected by the chief as member of village authority to sustain stability and tranquillity in the village and to retain status and dignity. As these elite in the village possess the propensity to inflict and create issues in the village affairs, to which villagers are likely to interpret as an indication of chief feeble power and authority. However, as member of village authority, they are compelled maintain an etiquette and to give certain degree regards to chiefship system in the village and the authority of chiefs.

On the other hand, and the view of villagers, mostly from the elite disagreed about being influential in the village affairs. In fact, majority of them admit that village chief is powerful and influential at least in the village context. For instances, village chief has more advantage than those of the elite in the village, because chief handled all the village related documents, files and responsible and to authorise either to disapprove or approve certain permits in the village. Constitutionally as well as traditionally, chief is legally recognised as the only individual in the village that can authorise specific demands, legality and processes in the government office. Village development schemes, funding and other related welfare scheme cannot be executed without the acknowledgment and permission from village chief.

Also, any events in the village cannot be organised without the consent of village chief. According to Mr. Haokip, a first-class contractor opines that, *“It is a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the act of contesting the insensible or unfair decision of chief at a time, as a gesture of underestimating the authority of village chief. In fact, a person speaks out for the good of villager and chief himself. However, in such situation it is usually a person that are educationally and economically better than others have the courage to approach village chief. And because of this reason, including some villager who unanimously support chief often label such individuals as arrogantly undervaluing chief authority”*.¹⁴⁴ This social phenomenon is almost the same in every villages where chief is not in affluent position and highly educated or having villager/s in similar economic and educational situation. Similar opinion is shared by a respondent of different village that ‘villages chiefs are overwhelm to prove their supreme authority that even for minor debates or suggestion is

¹⁴³ Mr. Holsei Touthang, Chief of Bijang village, interviewed on 28 December 2017 at Bijang village.

¹⁴⁴ Interviewed on 3 December 2017 at Tuibuong.

often taken as otherwise'. In the affluent and educated villager's perspective, most village chief fail to acknowledge the larger issues and prospect of the village because of zealously concern about sustaining power and authority. It limits them in understanding situation and interpret the goodwill gesture of villager as a threat to his authority.

Despite of the varying version of power structure and relation, symbolically a village chief represent village and villagers within and outside of the village. And for this reason and in any dispute or issues those arise among the villagers or between with other villagers are adjudicated in a customary way of diplomatic approach, with due initiation and in the presence of village chief and his council men. In such situation, nobody can neither object nor denounce the final decision made by chiefs and his council men. If any individuals fail to comply, the penalty is become more intense and stringent, including such as social boycott, ostracise from village and heavy fine. Though the elite in the village sometime clashes with the decision and policy of chief, they are unable to neither implicate nor replace the authority of chief in such situation, as they are obliged to confine within the traditional principles. They can be a threat to chief power and authority but no matter how much they are in advantages social position; they cannot replace chief power merely on account of their economic propensity.

For instance, Mr. Haokip, an entrepreneur and a social worker evinces: *"Everyone knows that, if I wanted to suppress or demean my village chief, I can do it without much problem. But that is not the way we live in a village and under chieftainship. Respect and importance are given to head of household so that in good time and in bad time, family members help and support each other and the role of head of the household is crucial, ineluctable, binding and sacrificial. Likewise, village chief is analogous to head of the household as in village context"*.¹⁴⁵ In the affluent and elite view, regardless of any circumstance, traditional authority of chiefship remains eminent. On the contrary, most chiefs are of the perspective that as villagers are becoming more educationally qualified and economically well-established, it adversely affects and weaken the authority and power of chiefs. And from the villager's point of viewed, power is structured and revolved around the traditional authority and the affluent. Either both associates to consolidate their respective privilege situation or individually strive to established supremacy in their personal and social arena.

¹⁴⁵ Interviewed on 3 April 2020 at S. Haijang village.

5.12 Landholding Pattern and Power Relations

Case 1: In urban villages almost every household reside in their own land, that are purchased from the village chief. The change in landholding or the traditional chieftainship land ownership system affects the traditionally structured power distribution in the village. Land is inherent integral to the establishment of chiefship institution. And subject to the need of protecting, retaining, and valuing land, chieftainship is instituted along with the formation of power structured. Therefore, with change and manipulation of the traditional land ownership system, it tacitly implies the vulnerability of traditional power structure and the possibilities to reconstruct power relation. This is the reason why villagers residing in urban village are relatively less confined and affected by the power structure of chiefship system. For example, in a village, a household was involved in selling drugs. And since it is an illegal enterprise, it becomes a matter of concern for both villager and outsiders. Accordingly and as a responsible head of the village, the village chief serves a warning to the household to stop continuing the business. But was least bothered by the chief's orders and warning. Being approached by the village chief and his warning, one of the household members responded that *"they are living in their own land and house. So, it is their own will and desire to carry out whatever they wanted in their house, in order to survive and to sustain household needs"*. As a matter of fact, the family assumes that village chief is unnecessary meddling in personal enterprise and need not to interfere further, and instead should mind his own business. It was only when 'women organisation' initiates drive against drugs peddling in the locality and in the village, that the household finally agreed to discontinued the business. In such situation, the chief is unable to exert or enforce his power even at the cost of eradicating certain unwanted social activities in the village. But only through the help of other form of power such as civil organisation or association, able to channelised his power. It is mainly because with the pervasive privatisation of land, it enhances villager the confidence to carried out any kind business, on the ground that it is a matter of activities in one legally own private property registered with the revenue department popularly known as *Jamabandi*.¹⁴⁶ An advertisement of selling property (plot of land) is a common state of affairs (see Plate 8 below).

¹⁴⁶ 'Jamabandi' or 'Land Ownership Certificate' is one of the most crucial documents of revenue record. The Mandal Revenue Officer issues this document to the owner of the registered land as proof of ownership with no mortgage on it. *Jamabandi* is the prima facie evidence of the truth of the matters contained in the land records. The certificate includes a description of the property with details of boundaries, name and address of the owner and the covenants affecting it. In this article, we will look at the procedure to obtain Manipur Land Ownership Certificate in detail.

JAMABANDI

M.L.R. FORM &
(SEE RULE 57)

ইউনিট

খুলগী মামিঃ অম্বর নম্বর... ১০০... ১০/০৬/১১

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Sub-Deputy Collector/Settler,
Churachandpur

2020.06.29 22:41

Plate 8: Land ownership certificate (Excerpt from an advertisement: ‘Plot on emergency sell, located at Neishiel Veng, Churachandpur [beside Khuga River] – Area 45x140 @ Rs. 10,00,000/- (Rupees Ten Lakhs only) [price negotiable]’).

Another outcome of privatising of land is it gives security and assurance in constructing building and houses of one own desire. If the land is not privatised, no villagers are willing or in position to take risk in constructing good and expensive houses. Because, it is like building houses on chief property (land), and the chances of being expelled or evacuated is no less than living in the village. Chief may not have authority over the houses, but over the land. And in case of migrating, land automatically belong to village chief, but considering the expenses in building houses and dismantling it will be of great loss. In one incidence, a household settled in chief land for about six to seven years. By the time they shifted their settlement to another place, the house though small but in good condition. The head of the household Mr. Haokip, a school office assistant said: “Initially we don’t have land of our own and knowing our condition the village chief agreed to let us settle in his land. We start from scratch to build the house, where lots of money are spent on the process. By the time we bought our own land, we had to resettle in our landholding. Initially I thought it will

not cost much to build house because we already had almost every house material for the construction from the previous house. Surprisingly, beyond my expectation it is expensive and costly".¹⁴⁷ So, in urban villages, residences are mostly on private landholding with less worried for resettlement or in case lands are to be sold it include the constructed house.

As land are privatise, owning an expensive and good house is no more a matter of worries. In fact, the type or the grandness of house is one of the conspicuous ways that demonstrates economic disparity condition and class situation. It is the easiest way to assert as an evidence of individual or household social standing. A few financially sound families used to have the pucca buildings. For instance, most of the elite and affluent in the village have expensive and grand house or building (see Plates 9 & 10 below). And this section of elite villager shared similar lifestyle and mindset. They played crucial role in the village power relation primarily because of their advantages in economic and occupational position. Mr. Haokip, a school teacher claim that *"In every village without much needed to prove or say, it is evident that only those individuals who are affluent and the influential that owned good houses"*.¹⁴⁸ It may not be necessarily but it is likely intended to display economic or occupational calibre.



Plate 9: Expensive pucca building, Bijang village

¹⁴⁷ Mr. Sumlam Haokip (age 52), interviewed on 21 July 2016 at S. Haijang village.

¹⁴⁸ Mrs. Chachan Haokip (age 36), interviewed on 30 December 2017 at Molnom village.



Plate 10: Bungalow building, Bijang village

The simplest evidence of materialistic improvement or opulence is house-type particularly in urban village. It is socially perceived as an indication of an overall individual competence. Lands in urban village are privatised and in that it encourages villagers to construct expensive houses according to their economic status without being affected or worried by the possibility of evicting from the village by village chief command. Therefore, on account of being economical well-established the affluent sections in the village are able to make their presence in the village administrative affairs through the perceived position as a competence villager among villagers.

On the other hand, the affluent sections of the village are no less interested to be persuasive in the decision making. In addition to getting regards from villager, village chief reserve the attitude of showing respect to them as they are the economically privilege villager. Besides already getting socio-economic recognition, the affluent further wanted to elaborates their competence by politically involving in the village political affairs as well. This instils in them the impulse to effectively partake in the village affairs both for personal and public welfare as way of contributing to the village well-being.

5.13 Evolution of Power System

There are two ways of analysing power distribution among the Kuki community. Firstly, in a more exclusive manner that is in villages setting, power structured around the traditional institution of chieftainship. Secondly, and in a more inclusively dimension, power structure evolves around the community level. Where power is determined mainly by social, political,

education and economic attribution. In the former case, chief remains the unabated authority in the village. His/her economic, political and economic situation may hardly entertain the degree of power exertion. Regardless of his/her villager/s are more influential or in a more socially, politically and economically advantageous position. Any issues related to village are decided and authorised by chief discretion. And in the latter case, individual economic, political, educational and social standing determined individual position in the power structure. In the community level of power structure, it includes both chief and non-chief individuals as well. Though, village chief may receive certain regards and status recognition as a head of the village but not necessarily the same privilege of power and authorization as in village. In the study, power is analysed based on one's ability to influence policy and decision-making system in the community's social affairs, accompanied by the higher indices in receiving regards and respects in the public sphere. Reasonably owning to attributional qualities such as education, wealth and income, occupation, and leadership put them in an advantage position more than those who do not. Possessing all the attributional qualities or any one or two of it situates individuals in an influential category. And it is clearly depicted during decision making process in the community socio-political matters, church and village affairs, and during clan and family issues arises.

Table 5.5
Power wielders in the contemporary context

Status	No. of respondents	Percentage
Village chief	27	12
Civil organization leaders (including church leaders)	62	28
Politician	48	22
Affluent (Business man, bureaucrats and contractors)	83	38
Total	220	100

The table 5.5 highlights the various social statuses that are effective in wielding power in the community level power distribution. Accordingly, 12 per cent of respondents are of the view that village chiefs are part of the power wielders in the community. Whereas, about 38 per

cent acknowledge the economic condition of being affluent (includes business men, bureaucrats and contractors) as the main factor that led to occupying an influential social position. About 22 per cent believe that politicians are the powerful individual and 28 per cent believes that it is the civil organization leader that mostly enjoyed the privilege of occupying a powerful position in the community.

Power is determined on the criteria of 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, 2012), income and wealth, occupation and leadership positioning. That is to say that, at the inclusive community level, power is structured by more of modern institutions and accolade and less by traditions elements. The traditional institutions of chieftainship and its potential power are engulfed within the ambit of modern attribution, and to an extent it also regulates chief position in the community and in the village. For example, a chiefship without possessing higher education qualification, salaried job and wealth do not necessarily lead to an influential position in the community. However, among chiefs, those who are privilege to have regular income, higher education qualification and wealthier and are in better position to exert power in the community level and they are the elite among the chiefs. Take example of the dichotomy of urban and rural villages' chief power in village and in community level. In rural village chiefs are powerful in the village but not much in the community level. On contrary, urban village chief are less powerful in the village whereas in most cases they are more influential in the community level. Mainly because most urban village chief in average are in better position in education, economic, politically and socially.

In recent time many new villages emerge, and these villages are established by the richer individuals of the community. They are neither from the chief lineage nor family, but through improved economic condition and accumulated property, they are motivated to established new village. It is possible because of change in land distribution and landholding-privatisation of land. And through occupation that is in business or working in well paid job for years elevate the economic condition enable them in position to accrue large patches of land. The motivation and interest in becoming chief may varied from person to person but in general it is to enjoyed statuses in both the traditional domain through economic achievement. *"These days it is a trend among the rich and wealthy to become village chief by purchasing huge land and establishing a new village. They wanted to implement wealth to garner and enhance power by becoming at least a village chief"*, stated Mr. Mate, a village chief.¹⁴⁹ The emerging new village chief, come into possession of the traditional status of

¹⁴⁹ Pu Thomas Paominlian Mate, Chief of Tuibuong, interviewed on 5 March 2017 at Tuibuong.

chiefship as well as status founded on economic factor. In fact, they are more powerful and influential than those of the chief from older or from generation of chiefship lineage. In other word, chiefship becomes more of commercially achievable status.

It is a common tradition followed by chiefs who are descended from generation of chiefship lineage to sternly uphold the principles of preserving forefather land. And by preserving vast village land is to remain rigid with the manner of chieftainship landholding system particularly for economic gaining of privatising or selling it to other. Thereby, entailing to the poorer economic condition, putting them in position unable to enjoyed the established status. Particularly, the principle is commonly practice among rural village chief. Even though they owned vast land in comparison to the newly emerging chief, they are persistently more incline in retaining land which they inherited from their forefathers, rather than compromising it for profit making (selling). However, they generate enough income form land leasing and other few government schemes and funding mean for the village development to sustain the family expenses. Though the income or resources generated is unlikely to leverage their economic standing but suffice to maintain the household needs. Mrs. Haokip, wife of late and former chief of Teiseng expresses that, *“It’s better to live in poverty than sell part of our chieftom land for a mere monetary gain”*. Further in her views, *“preserving land is not a matter for personal or family-oriented benefits, but for the larger cause of conserving the community land and our forefather’s land”*.¹⁵⁰ It is possible because most part of the land is in hilly and remote distance from urban locality. But land which are suitably close to urban and town setting locality are highly in demand and recently this portion of land are sold wherein new villages are established. A clear evident that shows the emergence of new villages in the urban village periphery.

In this chapter, we have discussed chieftainship system, power and functions of the chief functionaries of the village administration, inheritance law, decline of traditional authority in urban settings, land-power relations, and so on. And, in the next chapter, we are going to situate class and social inequality in rural as well as urban settings in Manipur.

¹⁵⁰ Interviewed on 18 August 2017 at Teiseng village.

Chapter 6

Locating Class and Social Inequality in Rural and Urban Settings in Manipur

In chapter 5, we have dwelt upon the political structure and dynamics of power relations among the Kukis in Manipur. And, this chapter attempts to situate class and social inequality in rural and urban settings in Manipur.

In the Kuki traditional settings, class can be vaguely categorised due to the absence of modern capitalism or structured market-economy, isolation and less exposure to the outside world beyond their village life. In the traditional milieu power is determined by status. As discussed in the preceding chapters (4 and 5), more than class it is status that defined power in the traditional domain. For instance, the traditional political affairs are primarily based within the vicinity of village, and in that the village chief is the head of the administration assisted by village council men (Gangte, 2012: 125). In the hierarchical order, the chief occupies the highest position, followed by village council men, the affluent section and skilled individuals. The commoner that is the villagers are at the lower order, widows and orphans are at the lowest rank.

With the permeating of modernization process and more precisely since the colonial time, changes occurred in various field such as social structure, political system, and religio-belief system. Subsequently, the old traditional way of status and power assertion has also gradually changed and modernised (Haokip, 2013: 121). For example, bureaucrats, politician, businessmen, clergy and intelligentsia are becoming a predominant esteem status rather than that of traditionally sanctioned status or statuses of the elites. The changing trend of statuses assertion also consequently affects power structure of the community. The intensity of undoubted traditional authority is weakening and paves the way for the emergence of class system. Since, traditions and customs are intrinsic of the community, it is still deeply acculturated. However, projecting it in the everyday social domain is virtually decaying. Whereas modern outlook and lifestyle are presumed as pragmatic, admired and valued.

The process of modernisation in the Kuki community is a historically defined cultural change, alteration of basic social, economic and political aspiration and world view. Consequently, the impact unshackles and weakens the rigidity of the old tradition legitimacy and attached elements. For example, changes brought about opening door to individuals to venture outside the traditional confinement for better opportunity and lifestyle. That

consequently led to the shifting of status and power interpretation from traditional to modern form. For instance, status and power are no longer restricted to traditional sanctioning, but it is gradually determined by personal calibre and achievement in the modern context. This resulted to redefining the way status and power are conceptualised and perceived in traditional domain. As a matter of fact, modern attributions are becoming a predominant feature in asserting status and power rather than the old traditional way of evaluation. And the impact of modernization in the Kuki community can be deduced from the emergence of 'class' – where class is basically based on individual 'economic interest' corresponding to 'the existence of the market' (Giddens and Held, 1982: 62). And this class formation is conceptualised based on various determinants such as educational qualification, occupational esteem, income and wealth. For the intended study of classes in the community, the combination of the proposed determinants is taken as the parameters of class categorization.

In the context of increasing urbanization and inroads of market economy, the chapter deals with the larger modern transformation of the Kukis. It attempts to understand modernity in the Kuki society particularly regarding class formation. This chapter attempts to understand the implication of material as well as economic life on stratification within the Kuki society. The class categories in the Kuki society can be classified on attributional criteria of sources of income, occupational choice, housing and household assets, landholdings and land ownership system, village governance, and church organizations. Cases from two villages viz. Teiseng and Bijang has been undertaken to understand these criteria in the rural and urban settings, but also include certain inputs and data collected from the neighbouring villages as well.

6.1 Social Inequality

Sociologists have distinguished different abstract mechanisms of inequality, most famously exploitation (Marx, 1909) and social closure (exclusion/inclusion) (Weber, 1978), as well as hierarchisation and distantiation (Therborn, 2006). Hierarchisation refers to inequalities generated by a system of ranked positions, while distantiation relates to the production of winners and losers by competitive systems among formal equals. Social inequality is different from economic inequality but the two inequalities are often linked. Economic inequality refers to disparities in the distribution of assets and income. While economic inequality is caused by the unequal distribution of wealth, social inequality exists because the lack of wealth in certain areas prohibits these people from obtaining the same housing, health care, etc. as the wealthy societies where access to these social goods depends on wealth. The

degree of inequality in a given reward or asset depends, of course on its dispersion or concentration across the individuals in the population (Payne, 2000).

Tribal villages are usually perceived to be the egalitarian counterparts to villages in India that are ruled by hierarchical caste structures. Taking the case of Kuki villages, status, power and class are found to be important for understanding the changing structures of inequality. Today, these villages are deeply integrated into the larger milieu: politics, administration, education and the market economy. The social mechanisms responsible for inequality are now to a large degree centred outside the village, and living in a village has become almost identical with a lower social status. One result of this process is that instead of age and rank, the access to outside resources forms the basis of social inequality within the village. Based on empirical study, an account of how this integration leads to class differentiations at the village level is presented.

Social inequality today is characterised by an emerging class structure that increasingly includes the villages where cultivation is seen as a residual occupation for 'non-jobholder' families. When sociologists talk about social inequality, they usually mean those unequal affairs that are socially structured, rather than idiosyncratic differences in appearance, taste or ability. The concept of social structure denotes relatively stable patterns of social inequalities that are often defined according to the differential distributions of resources like wealth, income or educational titles (Bourdieu, 2012 [1984]); Sen, 1992). In capitalism, social inequality is to a high degree based on positions within the division of labour (Goldthorpe, 1980), but is not reducible to them. Other factors like education, gender, ethnicity, inherited social status or political influence also play an important role as resources for social action. From this perspective, resources only gain significance within institutional realms that Durkheim (1972) called 'social milieu'.

Social inequality is the expression of lack of access to housing, health care, education, employment opportunities, politics, and status. It is the exclusion of people from full and equal participation in what we, the members of society, perceive as being valuable, important, personally worthwhile and socially desirable.

6.2 Emergence of Tribal Middle Class in Manipur

The emergence of tribal middle class was a colonial creation. The formal contact between the British colonial rule and the hill peoples can be said to begin at the beginning of the 19th century. In the wake of colonial administration, there came the opportunity of government services and small contract works and of course earning as labourer was already there. The

subsistence [barter] economy was gradually replaced by monetised economy. To serve the needs of colonial establishment, recruitment of petty clerks, interpreters/translators, vaccinators, and *Lambus*¹⁵¹ were being made. The 'Lambus' were a product of colonial administration created by the British themselves as a sort of privilege class. Under the system, the colonial authorities kept contact with the hill people through 'Lambus' who acted in various capacities as hill peons, interpreter, messengers and sometimes as adviser to the British officials (Dena, 1991: 82). Thus the colonial period saw the beginning of some people becoming rich and the introduction and extension of colonial administration in the hill areas of Manipur is the precursor for the emergence of tribal middle class in the hitherto classless tribal society.

The Christian missionary played a very important role in the establishment of schools which provided a material basis for the emergence of a new western-educated group. Education being the most powerful instrument of Christian proselytism, almost everywhere there had been mushroom growth of schools and the once isolated tribal masses also had begun to taste the fruit of the tree of knowledge (good and evil of western civilization). Opportunity for education and earning money was open for all in the hills. Out of this emerged the newly educated group of teachers, evangelists, new church leaders (pastors) and political leaders. Some scholars question the categorization of the newly emergent educated group as a middle class. They suggest that the newly emergent group may be identified as an 'elite class'. The term 'elite', according to them, suggests the superior status of its members. It also connotes positions of influence which the newly educated tribal leaders certainly held in redefining traditional values. Moreover, an 'elite' is an open group, access to which is not restricted by birth or family antecedents and modern education provides social mobility through which any one can rise up in the social ladder of tribal society.¹⁵²

Another view contends that the newly western-educated group may be more appropriately called a 'middle class' because it occupied an intermediate position between the ruling colonial officials and the mass of the tribal population during the colonial period. The question then is: Which of the two concepts viz. 'elites' or 'middle class' – would best represent the situation of the Kuki society today? As pointed out, the emergence and the use

¹⁵¹ The 'Lambus' were a petty Manipuri officers appointed by the British (Reid, 1983: 79), who were in charge of collecting hill house tax on behalf of the Political Agent in Manipur.

¹⁵² As discussed in chapter 4, in the traditional Kuki society, those who are capable of holding the feast of merit were accorded a high status. Therefore, it is by means of one's feat or capability such status is achieved irrespective of which clan or family s/he belongs to.

of the concept of 'elite' implies a close link between the natural division of those who possesses or inherits wealth, power or other determinants of authority and command in the society and the rest of the population who do not possess such qualities or assets by birth or inheritance. The existence of different categories of people in the society with unequal access to power is supposedly seen as natural and inevitable from the perspective of elite. On the contrary, the concept of middle class apparently emerges and develops simultaneously with the transformation of the old structures of the society as modern capitalism advances. 'Middle class' implies a process which is ongoing and therefore is better suited to represent the situation of the contemporary Kuki society. However, it is important to note that notwithstanding the advantage mentioned above the use of middle class to explain the social reality is questionable because capitalism is absent in the Kuki society. Even otherwise in the contemporary Kuki society the middle class have ceased to occupy the intermediary position they used to during the British rule. The limitations of employing the category of middle class while explaining the Kuki society in general since there is no landed aristocracy in Manipur, technically the term middle class is wrong, because there is no other class above it, although there is one lower. But sociologically it is correct, because nowadays by 'middle class' we understand a certain educated class of people who earn their bread by themselves by brainwork, and do not depend on the interest of the money invested or other's labour, neither on physical labour as most of the lower class people depend on (cited in Ray, 1983: 219).

The problem of ambiguity in the use of the concept of middle class is further compounded because in the recent years, even in the wider context, the size and composition of the middle class has grown rapidly becoming more heterogeneous with the transformation of the capitalist societies that it is doubtful of calling it a single class. Bhatia has pointed out the exasperating task of defining the middle class in concrete terms for the sociologists because it has come to represent so great a diversity in terms of income, status, vocations, skills and educational qualifications. "It has practically become meaningless", he argued, and "to group them together and designate them as a single social class" (Bhatia, 1994: 5-6). Significantly, he explained the development of the middle class in the recent times in the context of the transformation that capitalist societies in particular and the rest of the world in general have undergone. He further noted: "[T]his century has witnessed rapid advances in science and technology; managerial revolution in the conduct of business and industry; rise of the state planning and growing governmental intervention in the operation of the market forces; widespread fervour for democracy and egalitarianism; growing sex equality and the entry of women into professions that were earlier regarded an exclusive preserves of man;

rapid spread of higher, including technical education; the emergence of high degree of specialization affecting all professions and various walks of life that had led to multiplication of experts, specialists, and service personnel of all types. This has meant enormous increase in the numbers along with growing heterogeneity and diversity of elements included in the middle class” (Ibid.).

The middle class is used more as a heuristic device or framework of analysis as it is such a widely diffused set of category. Anyone with a modicum of sustainable income or with a certain level of education would claim that he is a middle class. What adds to the complexity of the middle class among the tribes is that any salaried/government employee would claim that they are middle class and that may not be wrong. However, the problem with the middle class among the tribes is that they are actually the middle class elite or rather the ‘super elite’ of their society. For instance, a class I or Group A officer/public representatives from a tribal community, if s/he is placed in the pan Indian context would fall either at the lower middle or at the most middle-middle class category. But in their own tribal contexts, s/he would be the middle-class elite or the ‘super elite’ because there is no one above her/him as the tribes do not have ‘upper class’ as such in the form of industrialists, feudal lords or landed aristocracy—the bourgeoisie. Placed in such an advantageous position, the tribal middle class behaves more like an elite in their overall value orientations, ethos and practices in everyday life. Hence, instead of living out the true creed of being a middle Class, the middle class elite weave narratives, discourses, etc. around social issues that suit their vested interests and ends up manipulating all forms of public discourses so as to ‘manufacture consent’ which ultimately leads to their hegemony.

Despite the above mentioned complexities social scientists have retained the concept of middle class because of the usefulness to explain social change in India particularly after independence. Similarly, the present chapter in particular and the work here in general have used the ‘middle class’ because it provides a better perspective of representing the empirical situation of the Kuki society than the related concept of elite. However, this should not imply that the separation is always neat and rigid. On the contrary, there is always constant overlapping in the use of any one of these concepts. It also needs to be noted at the outset that the group categorised as the middle class in the present context is an offshoot of western education, employment opportunities and other avenues that develop with modernity and growth of bureaucracy. From such a perspective it is argue that middle class, at least in the context of the present study has no allegiance or bases on tradition. For the sake of

convenience, I will employ both the concept 'elite' and 'tribal middle class' and used them interchangeably throughout in this chapter.

6.3 Locating the Middle Class in Kuki Society

Application of class in the Kuki traditional settings is vaguely present or can be dismissed due to the absence of industries and factories. Rather it is more closely related to feudal system because agriculture is the only main occupation and sustenance for the community. Also, the concept of class emanated from industrial society where the central ideology of class is derived from the different economic situation. The differences arise between owners of industries or factories as the 'upper class' while the work force labourers or workers as the 'lower class'. But in the case of non-industrial society class concept can be analyse through market valued labours and economic situation obtain through business or as a contractor. Business includes from small grocery shop to huge capital invested shop such as restaurant, hardware, or motor franchise shop, quarrying business, timber business, poppy farming business, and schools and colleges.

The emerging middle class in Kuki society are mostly the first and second generation western educated villagers and their offspring. In general, they do not have much stake in the traditional scheme of things in the village in terms of traditional rights over certain portion of the land. They are generally the 'landless' section of the village population. However, with the acquisition of education, wider exposure and pursuit of non-traditional occupation and also to a certain extent through petty political connections this class of people in the village has established themselves as the emerging leaders within the structure of the village.

One area where the role and importance of the middle class in the Kuki society is clearly visible is in the functioning and the growing influence of the Church in opposition to the traditional village council including the village chief's office. One important indication that the church is becoming more dominant and its influence is spanning over the other traditional village institutions is found in the nature of its composition and its function in the village. For instance, the church is headed by the church pastor and his board of deacons who are appointed on criteria other than the tradition like education and charisma besides the spirituality matter. Unlike the traditional past (as discussed in chapter 5), the village chief is just a member within the church structure today, if he is not in the board of deacon or is the pastor.¹⁵³ The growing importance and influence of church in the affairs of the village, on the

¹⁵³ The pastor in general is 'employed' by the villagers for a regular pay and some other incentives in kind.

one hand, and the gradual recession of the traditional institutions of the village council and office is significant to note.

Though it is too early to maintain that the church has completely undermined the role and position of the traditional village in Kuki village it can nevertheless be reiterated that the former has made significant inroads into the domain of the latter. What is especially interesting in this particular context is the close association of the rise of the church and the middle class on the one hand, and the fading in significance and role of the traditional institutions in the village. It is tempting to look for the reason of such a trend in Kuki village in the spiritual realm dissociated from the secular domain. In this way the role and function of the emerging middle class in the village is glossed over. But when the role of the middle class of the village is taken into account while analysing the growing influence and importance of the church within the socio-political structure of the village it become more sociologically significant in explaining the processes of change in Kuki village.

As noted above the institution of church in Kuki village is emerging as an alternative site which manifestly opposed the traditional institutions in the village. For instance, in terms of organization and functioning – the church is more bureaucratic and formal. At least for some of the positions in the structure of the church certain qualifications are necessary as well as essential.¹⁵⁴ Notwithstanding these characteristics which points to the departure from the traditional institutions in the village, it can be substantially argued that the church, and thus the middle class occupying the various position and performing diverse roles within the church in practice reinforces many of the practices and values that characterises the traditional institutions.

Furthermore, the gradual waning of the traditional institutions on the one hand, and the emergence of the church as an important institution in the village, on the other, has also affected the social differentiation that exists in the village. In place of the traditional markers of social differentiation, like age, sex, rank and status in the village etc. there is now differentiation between the villagers on grounds like employed versus non-employed, nature of employment, income, educational achievement, landholdings, household assets, etc. Similarly, change is also visible in the values held by the villagers. For example, ‘wealth’ which used to be defined by distribution (like in the ‘feast of merit’ as discussed in chapter 4) now has undergone value change. Nowadays wealth is something which one accumulates and keep for themselves rather than distribute. Closely following this kind of change in the value

¹⁵⁴ Notably, theologians who earned their degree from outside the state and abroad are often given the key positions in most of the church organisations.

attributed to wealth, it can be argued that there is a transition from the communitarian to the capitalist or individualistic type of society. In the past, the spirit of the community was very pronounced.

6.4 Kuki Village

A Kuki village is the basis of socio-economic organisation. The nature of social systems is based on *Gemeinschaft* (communal society).¹⁵⁵ In a strictly economic sense, the village has been termed as the village community. The village being self-dependent economic unit, normally enjoyed a self-sufficing existence. Inter-village contacts led the villages to satisfy the mutual needs despite their isolation from the rest of the world. In as far as the conditions and organisation of economy is concerned, the village labour corps organisations (*Lom*)¹⁵⁶ kept the village economy self-sufficient and maintained the community life as dynamic. From time immemorial, the traditional village of the Thadou-Kukis is an indispensable unit from socio-economic and political point of view.

In the pre-colonial village culture subsistence was not a matter of choice but of tradition, the modern division of work brings along the need to make choices and develop preferences regarding which practice milieu one wants to work in and rely on for subsistence. In the present day, the dependence on agriculture and the pressure on land are lessened by occupational diversification even in villages. There is a move towards the tertiary sector or white collar jobs. Most households in contemporary rural societies adopt a mixture of livelihood strategies. There is a shift towards non-farm enterprises in villages, including villagers moving out of the villages to urban town to seek better employment prospects.

Traditionally, the Kukis mainly indulged in agriculture for their livelihood besides hunting, fishing and gathering. A change, not only in the agricultural practice¹⁵⁷ can be seen but also in the occupational shifts. The shift in the occupation is due to the modern education system which provides an opportunity for every one to get absorbed in different governmental agencies. With the coming up of new administrative set ups, the people are going for work in the government offices. The scarcity of government jobs has strengthened the competitive

¹⁵⁵ Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) in his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (translated as *Community and Society*), sought to explain all major social problems in the West as the consequence of the West's historical transition from the communal, status-based, concentric society of the Middle Ages to the more individualistic, impersonal, and large-scale society of the democratic-industrial period.

¹⁵⁶ I have already detailed *Lom* in chapter 2.

¹⁵⁷ In recent decades there is a shift from jhumming to a more settled agriculture such as wet-rice or terrace cultivation.

culture – as for many parents a government job is the only legitimate future employment for their children. There is an occupational shift though a good number of people are still engaged in agriculture. Some become daily wage earners, some became contractors, some involved in supply of vegetables, some are running shops, etc.

The traditional agriculture practice has been replaced by modern agricultural methods to compete in the market with a motive to earn good returns of profit. Though cultivation and other remunerative occupations go hand in hand in Kuki villages, commercialization of agriculture is still at a low level. Initiation of cultivating cash-crops has mainly supplemented subsistence-based cultivation rather than replacing it. Changes also came in plantation of products and its quantity. Now many people have engaged themselves in cultivation of tomatoes, cabbage, ginger, turmeric which carries prospects of huge profits. The products grown in the field keep changing according to the market demand and profit.

In the post-independence period, relative advantage in the capitalist economy, or power, is the abstract that underlies most class analyses, though they greatly differ in how this relative advantage is operationalised and measured. It is more appropriate to use market values of occupations measured by income rather than occupational categories themselves as criteria of relative advantages in capitalism. Income is more general than ownership of means of production and theoretically better suited to the functional division of labour in global capitalism that abstracts from the actual content of labour. In addition to income, educational level is taken as secondary principle of vertical differentiation.

6.5 Factors Contributing to Social Inequality

The notion of stratification to a great extent means relation between the economic system and material life within the society. For instance, the Hindu caste system is mainly based on occupation which is not achieved but is determined by the birth of the individual in a specific stratum. The individual inherits that occupational frame automatically. But in the context of class, such occupational fixities are not found. This occupation reflects their status or rank within that society. It can be said that the work is given priority to determine the individual status. Among the Kuki the upper-class positioning is mainly determined by occupation, education, social status and economic conditioning. This is to say that it comprises of mostly bureaucrats, politician, business and contractors and intelligentsia.

Table 6.1
Respondents perception towards ‘upper class’ category

Criteria	No. of respondent	Percentage
Occupation, income and property	39	46
Social status, education	35	41
Traditional sanctioning status	11	13
Total	85	100

The table 6.1 reveals that the 46 per cent of the respondents viewed that individuals’ occupation, income and property are the determining factors for social standing in the community. And 41 per cent believes that social status and education are the factors that positioned individual in the upper-class category. Only 11 per cent agreed that chief (traditional authority) is in the upper-class.

As mentioned earlier, middle class is assumed on the line of occupation and economic condition and the traditionally inherited status. Owing to being in esteem occupation and job, economically affluent, they are the elite section in the middle class, whereas for the traditional status – chief, even though they are placed as middle class only those who are economically sound and in esteem occupation are in the elite group. An elderly respondent from Tuibuong justifies: *“Both economic power and status are complementary but those with more wealth are more influential. Although social status is also received by chiefs and elders, and among them those who are well to do in terms of economic [material well-being] are much more regarded and recognised than the poorer fellow”*.¹⁵⁸

Despite of maintaining the deeply rooted traditional sentiments and ethics, class consciousness among Kukis is emerging. Competitive and profit-making market economy as well as the ever-increasing extensive dependent on market for daily needs, makes people prefer to engage in their occupation and earning rather than sticking stiffly to traditional ways of life and livelihoods. That is to say that people are no more willing to compromise their earning for traditional practices and responsibilities.

¹⁵⁸ Pu Jacob Haokip (age 71), interviewed on 20 February 2018, at Tuibuong, District Head Quarter.

6.5.1 Occupation

In modern societies, occupation is usually thought of as the main determinant of achieved status.¹⁵⁹ An occupation is a social role that is determined by the general division of labour within a society. As a specialization of an individual's function in society, it is an important factor defining a person's prestige, class position, and style of life (Barber, 1957: 24).

In the traditional milieu, the community economy is mainly based on agriculture and it was considered as an esteemed and primary source of sustenance. In the last decades there is a major shift in occupational preference that is from agricultural to non-agricultural occupation; the importance of agricultural occupation is gradually becoming insignificant. Rather, it is often labelled as an occupation exclusively for the poor and the uneducated, who are neither in position to exercise educational or economic potential to pursue non-agriculture occupation. Mr. Mate (a retired government employee), shared his opinion about the manner the community in general conceives agriculture activities in the current scenario is mostly attach in demeaning manner. *“In the past people who work hard and cultivates more land are admired whereas those who are into government job are considered lazy. On the contrary, today a person engaging in agricultural activities are regarded as lazy (lack of educational interest) and less regarded in the society”*, said Mate.¹⁶⁰ It is irrefutable that engaging in agricultural occupation is both a demanding task and exhausting activities. On the contrary, the non-agricultural occupations and its working modes is comparatively assumed and interpreted as a much dignifying and comfortable activities. Even though both are means of survival but the valuing of agricultural activities is given less importance today. Meanwhile, it is considered as a residual occupation of the past. As a result of occupational shift, that is from agricultural to non-agriculture occupation, individual statuses and ranking is valued according to the type of occupational activities, also an entity that accorded part and partial in estimating social status position.

Notably, there are three main reasons for the occupational shift. Firstly, income generated from agricultural and its allied activities are less and often the profit is minimal. As a matter of fact, the expenditure and time spend is approximately equivalent or sometime more than the profit extracted from it. While enquiring about the profit derived from cultivation, Mr. Haokip (a retire army and a cultivator) says: *“[D]on't asked me about the*

¹⁵⁹ Achieved status is when people are placed in the stratification structure based on their individual merits or achievements.

¹⁶⁰ Interviewed on 17 October 2017, at Tuibuong.

profit, since it is my own paddy field and do not want to let it stayed barren that's why I am cultivating it. Otherwise, considering the labour force and expenditure such as fertilizer, pesticides, etc. it is a huge loss".¹⁶¹ Also, the only time profit or income is generated is during harvesting season, that is the paddy which lasted for few months. Secondly, it is both risky affairs because there is no guarantee of yielding a good produce as it entirely depends on the weather and other natural factors, which remain unpredictable.

Table 6.2
List of occupational choice/preference

Prefer occupation	Nos. of response	Percentage
Government or white-collar job	205	93
Business or self-employment	15	7
Agriculture or farming	0	0
Total	220	100

Table 6.2 shows the list of occupational preference of respondents. It shows that Government job or white-collar occupation is given the first choice as 93 per cent of the respondent preferred it more than any other type of occupation. And 7 per cent are rather interested in entrepreneurship or setting up their own business establishment. This few section who are incline to pursue their earning as an entrepreneur are mostly from those educated individuals or have the capital potential to venture into enterprise. Whereas, no respondents are interested in pursuing agriculture as an occupation nor mode of earning. Government jobs are still aspired by many and the qualitative interviews similarly revealed the importance of the attached benefits, but this preference is not unchallenged anymore.

6.5.2 Material Well-Being

Material life is also an important aspect to look into the issue of stratification. The ranking within the society also came with the notion of the possession of material life. The person possessing more wealth possesses more day-to-day comforts and materials of priced value. Hence, the economic systems and the material life determine the issue of stratification

¹⁶¹ Interviewed on 1 December 2017, at S. Molcham village.

system. It is through the well-being of the family from where they acquire their comfort. So there is no restriction on the possession of property.

The economic situation is another crucial determinant that represents one social standing as well as the chances to influence others. The economic condition includes 'income' and 'wealth' of individuals. Income is essentially determined by individual occupation and profession, which is closely related to the outcome of occupational shift and pursuit. However, wealth is primarily based on inherited or achieved property or both. Wealth is normally estimated by the possession of property in both kind and cash, which is marked by distinctive features such as house type and decors, landholding, vehicle, household item and electronic appliances, etc. That is economic condition is determined by the possession of goods valued according to the market situation.

Similarly, in every village, regardless of economic condition almost every household possesses either four-wheeler or two-wheeler vehicles. Depending on the household economic condition, the numbers of vehicles are in possession. The richer households usually have one or more cars along with two-wheeler. And the poorer households usually possess two-wheeler at least. Likewise, other noticeable property includes better house type, owning of expensive electronic gadgets and appliances and costly apparel.

Transition in the economy condition is mainly due to the shifting of occupation from agriculture to non-agriculture occupation. Lessening dependent on low income generated agricultural occupation while increasing numbers of white-collar job holders (both in government or private sectors), self-made entrepreneurs, and pervasive form of capitalist market system impulses economic endeavour for better and modernised living condition and lifestyle. This led to the dependency on market for almost every kind of household need that gradually become ineluctably more demanding. The changes brought by external agency, of improved and efficient market system and occupational opportunity are induced internally and ineluctably. In that, it relatively improves the average economic condition of the community. As the market system changes, it become imperative for individuals to adjust and adapt accordingly to the best possible means to maintain household needs and expenses. Mr. Touthang of Bijang village said, *"Unlike in the past where basic needs of household, say for food, most of the times we make used of kitchen garden or cultivable land to supply our subsistence, but today even for such things we rely on market supply and availability"*.¹⁶² It becomes indispensable to sustain and manage household need with the flow of marketing

¹⁶² Interviewed on 30 March 2018.

trends. Mainly because of adapting, adjusting and exposure to the new ways of economic enterprise, dependency and change, shape individual mind-set and the everyday need. The transitions from community-based economy dependency to a market oriented individual benefits.

The relatively improved educational and economy sector entails to more job and employment opportunity. Shifting of occupational pursuit is also compelled by the availability of job opportunity in both government and private sector on one hand. On the other hand, the privatizations of landholdings, where agriculture lands are decreasing as more villages are established. Availability of job and employment opportunity is chiefly emphasised on the prospect of non-agriculture occupation. Mr. Haokip, a government school teacher, from Tuibuong has the view that, *“unless one is willing and not idle, there are ample avenues to get work. A government job is always preferred but recruitment and vacant post is limited. One can even earn by working in private schools and colleges, establish a petty business like running shop, restaurants, etc., or take up carpentry, masonry etc.”*¹⁶³ Vacancy and recruitment in Government job particularly state government job are few and to get it even for lower post needed capital and political connection.

6.5.3 Educational Qualifications

Education contributes an important role in the transition of the society. Education system is another aspect of the community that has undergone tremendous change presumably improved – the increasing literacy rate and graduate population in the community. Also, another sign of that indicates the educational improvement is the increasing number of schools, colleges, educated individuals. It gives better opportunity to rise in the modern society and to achieve a social status in the modern administrative system irrespective of the class differences within the society. The distances in social space (Bourdieu, 2012 [1984]: 725), are, like in the stratification models, based on the relative distribution of economic and educational qualification, or rather cultural capital.¹⁶⁴ The notion of ‘cultural capital’, Bourdieu assumes that the education system works according to the same accumulative logic like the economic field. Modern education qualification and white collar jobs enhance an individual status.

In addition to educational qualification and accomplishment also accredited a person social standing. Individual obtaining higher education are respected as they are perceived as

¹⁶³ Interviewed on 18 September 2017.

¹⁶⁴ Bourdieu regards a third important capital, social capital, but does not elaborate on it in his statistical analysis, as it is more difficult to measure (Bourdieu, 1984).

the intellectual and learned person. According to Mrs. Haokip, mother of a village chief, *“If a person is highly educated, it does not matter whether s/he is either rich or poor, chief or villager, employed or not, the person is at least socially respected to an extent”*.¹⁶⁵ The statement she made is in reference to her son who is currently serving as the village chief but due to his educational qualification that is secondary level, he is unable to experience chiefship recognition as expected and the confidence to socially assert status. According to her opinion, educational qualification is also integral to individual status assertion even among the village chiefs. In the case of the traditional authority that is among chief, stratification or status position is conferred according to educational achievement and economic potential. In similar fashion, among the affluent and social leader, the same traits of status determinant are crucial. Higher educational qualification enhances person status even when other aspect of personal attribution is similar with others. Mr. Vaiphei, a self-employed, put forward: *“Each person may be wealthy but among them those who are well-educated or highly educated are respect and regarded in a preponderant manner than the other wealthy fellow who are of less educated”*.¹⁶⁶ Economic potential is not an absolute determinant of status evaluation and position. Even though it impacts endorse to better social status and position as in comparison to others who are economically poorer.

Most of the elderly interviewees opine that in their younger days, hardly few schools and colleges were available in their locality or nearby town and only a handful of people could obtain matriculation and above degrees. And these individuals are admired and treated with respect as progressive and modern. But at the present time and relatively almost every senior youngster is graduate or post-graduate.

As discussed, in the past, chiefs and priests’ status are highly respected as qualified person who are well versed with various customary laws, ritual incantation, genealogy which can be broadly encapsulate within ‘traditional or indigenes knowledge’ system. Traditionally, possessing such types of knowledge is also an indicator of being in higher status and position. Today, more than the indigenous knowledge, it is the modern western knowledge that are valued. For example, a person fluent in speaking and writing in English is admired and respected than the person who are more well versed with traditional knowledge but unable to write and speak in English properly. Mr. Touthang, a retire police and village authority member, stated: *“Nowadays, people like us are becoming obsolete amid people who are fluent in English and educationally much qualified. Only these kinds of people are admired*

¹⁶⁵ Interviewed on 18 August 2017, at Teiseng village.

¹⁶⁶ Interviewed on 15 July 2016, at B. Aijalon village.

*and people incline to listen to them than us. Despite that we are much knowledgeable in our tradition and custom”.*¹⁶⁷ Indigenous knowledge though treasured, the impact toward in apprising status, modern education or educational qualification is much esteem and exhaustive. It becomes a marker of superior personal traits and social status.

Table 6.3
Perception towards modern education and indigenous knowledge vis-à-vis status

Preferences	Nos. of response	Percentage
Modern education	116	53
Indigenous/traditional knowledge	17	8
Both are essential	87	39
Total	220	100

Table 6.3 reveals the various opinions on the status assertion through modern educational qualification, indigenous knowledge or both. According to 53 per cent, modern education is perceived as the major factors of in determining higher status rather than 8 per cent who believe that indigenous knowledge is equally important in status assertion. Whereas 39 per cent suggest that both modern educational qualification and indigenous knowledge are equally important in affirming one social position. The transition and preference in valuing from indigenous knowledge to modern educational qualification suggest that traditional form of status appraisal in term of knowledge is shifting to traditional to modern. But it is not to confirm that the traditional knowledge is totally discarded or devalued. Rather, it is cherished and valued as part of knowledge but not in status elaboration.

Table 6.4
Criteria determining elite category

Criteria	No. of respondent	Percentage
Occupation, income and property	101	46
Education qualification and political capital	90	41
Traditional sanctioning status of chiefship	29	13
Total	220	100

¹⁶⁷ Interviewed on 30 March 2018, at Bijang village.

Table 6.4 reveals that 46 per cent are of the opinion that occupation, income and property are the determining criteria for elite status. Similarly, about 41 per cent suggests education qualification and political capital as the main factor for individual included in the elite group. And 13 per cent of respondents confirmed traditional authority or chiefship status as a form of elite status.

The usage of 'status' is also inferred from the traditional perspective of traditionally sanctioned esteem position that is chieftainship as well. Because chieftainship as an institution, a traditionally sanctioned inherited position and it is still enforced and play a vital role in the community social life, particularly in the village setting. At the same time, and for the interest of the study in understanding how this traditional status is retained and negotiated with the changing environment amid modernization process. Therefore, the question arises about the correlation of traditional status with modern form of status accretion- which is basically determined by the modern elements such as level of educational qualification, form of socio-political power, occupational esteem and the volume of income and wealth. Similarly, for analytical purpose of the study the middle class among the Kuki are based on occupation-level of working in esteem jobs, the educated, active and predominant politicians and civil organization leaders. Including individuals who are wealthy and with high income and possessing profound resources through business or as a first-class contractor.

6.6 Comparing Rural and Urban Settlement

Since education has already been strongly associated with class, this section looks at the influence of the current place of residence. During the fieldwork, I got the impression of social position that the place of residence is indeed perceived as a strong indicator of social position, and migration to the towns and cities was often seen as a social and economic upliftment. In a study on highly qualified international migrants, Anja Weiß had shown that geographic location and the possibility for mobility can be considered as new important structuring aspects of class formation in the global economy (2005). Here in this section, I look the division between urban and rural areas within the same district, a division that equally reveals differences in the valuation of arrangements and environments in a certain area. The geographical factor 'place of residence' provides the strongest relation with class, followed by educational level and income.

To understand the prevailing power structure in the Kuki community it is important to analyse both the rural (Teiseng) and urban (Bijang) village context. Particularly, the role and

functioning of the traditional political institution – chieftainship institution within it owns given ‘geographical, social and cultural environment’ (Doshi and Jain, 2017: 102). Despite of the fact that modernization in many ways has altered the functioning of chieftainship system, it still operates through imbibing and inserting certain modern elements. However, its significance remains integral to village establishment and administration. And as a matter of fact, no Kuki villages are established without chiefship system as the mode of village political and administration system. According to chieftainship system, village chief is the head of the village administration, responsible to look after almost every social and political aspect of the village. One of the major impacts of social changes in village is the way chieftainship institution function and retain. It undergoes changes and alteration only to adapt with the changing environment and in order to maintain its traditional power and status. Therefore, the relationship between chief and villagers is based on reciprocity within the ambit of traditional principle of ethics, norms, humanity and effective governance.

6.7 Teiseng Village (Rural Settings)

The traditional Kuki village is characterised by certain features such as remoteness, poor economic condition, low income or manual based agricultural practices, less population density and rigidity in village administration and authority. Geographical location is a vital determinant of rural village or rural life (Doshi and Jain, 2017: 104). In the present study, Teiseng village is represented as a Kuki rural village and locating in a remote distance. Virtually, indicating that rural villages mostly locate in a remote distance from town and urban settings. The fact that rural village located in remote locality add up to a challenging accessibility to modern facilities such as schools, colleges, hospitals and health centre, market, government or any other offices. Besides located in remote distance, the road condition is usually in bad condition. It becomes worse and hazardous during monsoon season. The remote distance as well as bad road condition further fuel hardship to villager to a limited availability of public transportation or vehicle plying in rural village.



Plate 11: Pitiable condition of the road in Teiseng village (Photo: Author)



Plate 12: Goods carrier truck used for transportation by the villagers of Teiseng (Photo: Author)

Vehicle count in the village is less with a handful of them own four-wheeler vehicle while the rest are of two-wheeler. This few households are the one that have the privilege of better transportation and accessibility to town and other places in convenience. And among the four-wheeler vehicle in the village, it can be categorised into two type, namely non-commercial and commercial vehicle. The non-commercial are usually for household mobility

while the commercial vehicle trucks are mainly employed for trading timber or stone transportation. Also, the number of vehicles in the village has increases in the recent time.



Plate 13: People working in the stone quarry site in Teiseng village (Photo: Author)

6.7.1 Occupation

Agriculture and farming are the main occupation of rural villagers, although some engaged in non-agricultural work like carpentry, charcoal making, quarrying (see plate 13 above) as truck or auto rickshaw driver, handloom and weaving, etc. The primary source of income is agricultural products that are either supply to town or individually sold by villager themselves in market (see plate 14 and 15 below). Depending on season various type of vegetables are cultivated. Lack of proper transportation system added great challenges to the laborious agricultural activity. At the same time, the profit obtain is usually meagre and hardly suffice household needs and expenditures. A middle-aged widow from Teiseng village, whose main source of livelihood is cultivating and supplying vegetables to town comments that “*Nisih a kimaan chahnading le neh din kham kham akimu ji ham ham e!*” (It barely fulfill our everyday expenses and foods).¹⁶⁸ Low income is one of the reasons for the poor economic condition of rural villagers. Apart from the meagre income, larger family size or large number of household members depending on agricultural activities as source of income make the economic condition remain unstable and poor. In similar tone, the sole bread earner of a

¹⁶⁸ Interviewed on 20 December 2017.

head of household from Teiseng village expresses that “*Apart from charcoal making and supply, I work as a manual labourer in my spare time. But still I am unable to provide adequate provision to my family. Forget about saving, the worse is in time when one of my family members is sick. I hardly manage both medicine and transportation expenses*”.¹⁶⁹ The hard-earned incomes obtained from agricultural activities are usually meager and not stable and the earning are expend within a short time. It gets even worse in the event when larger sum of money is required for medical treatment, school fees, marriages, etc., as saving are barely done and at one dispose.



Plate 14: Mustard leaves and maize from the jhum field (Photo: Author)



Plate 15: Pumpkins from the jhum field (Photo: Author)

¹⁶⁹ Interviewed on 20 December 2017.

Table 6.5

Occupation of head of the household in Teiseng village

Type of occupation	No. of person (Head of the household)	Percentage
Government employee	2	3.4
Business	4	7
Agriculture	33	56
Self employed	9	15
Unemployed or dependent on other family members	11	18.6
Total	59	100

Table 6.5 shows that in Teiseng village majority (56 per cent) of the head of the household occupation involve in agriculture activities. And the least number of occupations that is 3.4 per cent are in government services. Meanwhile, 18.6 per cent of the head of the household depends on family members. It reveals that the overall household economic condition in rural village is in the same situation. One can conclude that in rural village the overall economic condition of households is fairly the same. And this similar economic situation makes village life challenging at the same time affordable too. The well to do section of the village comprises of those households whose member is/are in government service like low-grade post, police, army, school teacher and small business.

6.7.2 Housing and Household Assets Owned

The traditional houses of the Kuki are made of wood post with wooden rafters. Thatching grass is used for the roof which is held in place by split bamboos and bamboo or cane lashings. The whole structure is raised about four to six feet at the back depending on the nature of the ground surface, while the front rests on the ground. The house contains one large room and a veranda in the front. In the veranda the mortar for pounding paddy is placed on one side. About the middle of the room a hearth is made, where all the cooking is done, with three stones of conical shape are placed slanting inwards so as to hold the utensil for cooking and the fire is placed between the stones. Over this cooking place there are two or more platform hanging from the roof upon which things are dried (Shaw, 1929: 84). The

average size of the Kuki house is about 20 feet long by 14 feet broad. The chief and the wealthy villagers indulge in much larger ones. These larger one too consists of only one large room, as the smaller ones, but inside cubicles are sometimes found for the slaves or servants to sleep (Ibid.: 85). Traditionally, there were three types of houses:

- 1) House made of thatch roof and bamboo wall (*chipeh-inn*) (see picture 6.6)
- 2) House made of wood (*thingpeh/khunlhong-inn*)
- 3) House made of stone (*suong-inn*)



Plate 16: House made of thatch and bamboo in Teiseng village (Photo: Author)

As change is universal phenomena, great changes have taken place in the field of constructing/building a house among the Kukis today. The lifestyle and habits in villages are fast changing and so also, the physical outlook such as houses. This is mainly due to the improvement of their economic condition, road communication and transportation along with modern techniques which are apparent to the materials they used in constructing a house as most of the houses are in modern pattern of structure (more durable and attractive) which incurred a huge amount of expenditures. The houses normally include one large room which is for multipurpose use, bed rooms, kitchen and dining room and also attached sanitary latrines and bathroom with western styles of designing. Moreover, construction of modern brick houses has become a common trend among well to do family. However, it is to be noted that as construction of a house is mainly associated with economic position of the family concern, poor families who are unable to incur such huge amount are still confined to simple design house.



Plate 17: Tin roof with bricked wall, residence of Teiseng village Chief (Photo: Author)



Plate 18: Tin roof with wooden wall in Teiseng village (Photo: Author)

Changes are also visible in Teiseng village with regard to the construction of a house though enormous amount of development and transformation is still required. The housing style varies from one house to the other. Though modern buildings and brick houses are not a part in housing construction of the village, nevertheless, styles and structures of houses are different from traditional shapes and designs. Houses are still a blend of thatching grass and aluminium tin roofing with simple styles of construction. Despite a number of houses being thatching grass roofing, styles and structure of a houses is no longer in line with traditional

ones as it is more attractive and durable at the same time it has a spacious room for kitchen, living room, bed room and others.

Table 6.6
Types of house building in Teiseng village

House type	No. of Houses	Percentage
Thatched roof with mud wall	0	0
Thatched roof with bamboo wall	1	1
Tin roof with mud wall	52	89
Tin roof with wooden wall	3	5
Tin roof with bricked wall	3	5
Pucca building	0	0
Total	59	100

Table 6.6 reveals the various house types in rural village. Most of the rural village households that is 90 per cent of them live in a tin roofed with mud wall, a common house structure or type in rural village, that villager are able to manage according to household economic condition as well as providing safer and durable as in comparison to thatched roof with mud wall. While tin roofed with wooden wall and tin roofed with bricked wall are of 5 per cent each of the total village household population. It also reveals from the table indicating the house type that the overall economic situation of rural village is comparatively similar where only few sections of the villager are in better economic condition than much of the villager.

Table 6.7
Household assets owned in rural village (Teiseng village)

Total households = 59		
Type of Assets owned	No. of households	Percentage
Television	42	71.18
Washing machine	8	13.55
Computer/laptop	4	6.77
Refrigerator	3	5.08
Two-wheelers/three-wheeler	14	23.72
Four-wheelers	11	18.64



Plate 19: A four wheelers (Mahindra Scorpio) vehicle owned by a Teiseng household (Photo: Author)

Table 6.7 above shows the kind of modern assets owned by households in rural village. More half of the village household that is 71 per cent owned Television, 14 per cent owned washing machine and about 7 per cent owned laptop or computer and 5 per cent manage to owned refrigerator. Whereas the combination of two-wheeler and three-wheeler ownership constitute 24 per cent which include bike, scotty. And 19 per cent owned four-wheeler that includes cars, jeeps and trucks.

6.7.3 Commercialization of Crops

Important crops like potato, pea, soybean, ginger, cotton, etc., which are sustainable and recommended for their good taste are today commercialised. The local produces also include lemon, orange, guava, papaya, banana, pineapple, etc. which were marketed at the local trade centres. It is planted almost in every Kuki village, as it has become a good source of income. It may be pointed out that horticulture and cash crop plantation provides an alternative to shifting cultivation.¹⁷⁰ However, due to unavailability of capital with the Kuki cultivators

¹⁷⁰ Sayasaachi (2001) in *Forest Dwellers and Tribals in India* argues that “[a]s forests dwellers depend more and more on the market for their livelihood, they acquire values alien to their way of life. These values create a discontinuity between generations. The market also generates a demand for bio-diversity resources that is insensitive to the rate at which these resources are reproduced in nature. Most importantly, it undermines those social and culture that bring forests dwellers in close proximity with nature and thereby prepares the ground for studying and generating knowledge about its biodiversity” (2001: 83).

they found difficult to translate their deeds into action¹⁷¹ even if they were willing to do so. In spite of that, cultivation of horticulture and cash crops were taken up in small scale in some parts of the hill areas.

Commercialization of agriculture and other products among the Kukis, arguably gained momentum in the second half of the 20th century. As the barter system was fading out, the need for money or cash naturally began to be felt. Thus, a Kuki household switched over to the production of agricultural commodities for markets rather than for the sake of meeting the needs of the family. It was a significant transformation. Besides, the activities of agricultural labourers were further accelerated with the growing class of commercial people flocking to the rural villages to collect different agricultural products for trade. Thus, a Kuki household was induced to grow more commercial crops for sale. It acted as a catalyst in their economic status and income. It became more advantageous for the cultivators to grow crops for the market and purchase market items of their choice such as food grains, with the cash collected by them by selling their crops.

Thus, it is important to mention here that marketing of cash-crops and horticulture products was not much a problem due to nearness of local markets (bazaar) but the poor Kuki cultivators were not fetching profitable price for their hard toiled products due to the middlemen locally called *Mahajans*¹⁷² as they are in a hurry to return home soon for work. Very often, the so-called *Mahajans* or middlemen used to take undue advantage of the ignorance of cultivators. Sometimes, the commercial middlemen advanced money to grow particular prospective commercial crops in the years to come. Thus, the tribals generally continued to suffer from this sort of economic exploitation.

6.7.4 Landless Agriculture Labour

The increased pressure of population on land over the several decades resulted in the corresponding increase in the number of landless agriculture-labourers in the Kuki society. Various other factors can also be attributed to the rise of agricultural landless labourers hitherto unknown in the traditional past of the Kuki society. Some of them can be looked into the following factors:

- i) Demographic: The site of jhumland fit for paddy cultivation is now available only in the interior highlands where there is low population density. Increase in landless

¹⁷¹ See G. Kabui, *Problems of Development of Tribal Areas of Manipur*, in M. Horam (ed.), p. 70.

¹⁷² Literally the term 'Mahajan' means 'moneylender'. Typically, the *Mahajans* or middle-businessmen have emerged as a new class in the rural tribal economy of the Kukis.

labourers can be seen among those large chunks of Kuki population, which remain confined to the foothills and the nearby hill ranges surrounding the broad central lowland of Manipur. In these areas, lands are very limited either for jhum or terrace to meet the demands of ever growing population.

ii) Social structure: Reduction in the size of land holdings because of the laws of inheritance which provided all male members equal share in the property of their father contributed to the further division of ancestor property and growth of landless agricultural labourers. Besides in some poor families, the sons had nothing to inherit from their respective parents, which further resulted in increasing the numbers of landless agricultural labourers.

Table: 6.8
Landholdings in Teiseng village

Land ownership	No. of households	Percentage
Landholders	2	3.4
Landless or non-landholders	57	96.6
Total	59	100

The table 6.8 shows the mode of landholding, where majority that is 96.6 per cent of the household are landless. They reside in the land that belong to the village chief and they availed certain portion of the cultivable land as well. And 3.4 per cent of the household live in owned land. It includes village chief and his paternal uncle. It happens that part of the village land was shared among the former chief (presently chief father) male sibling by his father who was his predecessor.

Life in rural villages has undergoes tremendous change with respect to attachment to land. Moreover, the Kuki society has in fact witnessed a sharp increase in the number of landless labourers in recent years owing to different reasons. Besides labourers, there are also people that do not own their own land, either because they sold it or because they migrated from other villages and hence have no inherited land in the village. It was in this context that an old man from Teiseng reportedly said that the younger generation are least bothered about land now. They do not want to work on the land but spend time in the cities and towns.

6.7.5 Income

The richer section being relatively in better economic condition than the other villager, are in position to readily contribute to the village if situation compel pecuniary aid for the village affairs. For example, in organising village's rising day, youth club's rising day or any events related to village, the richer villager are fore-mostly approach to donate larger amount of money than the other villagers for the expenses in organising a village event. Also, when chief needs monetary assistance, preferentially seek help from the richer section. And they are usually among the villager that able to take lease land from chief to cultivate and farming. In one way or the other chief generate income through the richer section activities and work. In fact, having an affluent household in the village is conceived as representing village progress and reputation. They migrated to urban village as they are already in the economic position to sustain in urban village or in town as the affluent section are in economic potential to meet any challenges in every aspects of life.

Table 6.9
Monthly income in Teiseng Village

Income per month	No. of Household	Percentage
>5,000	14	23.72
>10,000	40	67.8
>15,000	3	5.08
>20,000	1	1.7
< 20,000	1	1.7
Total	59	100

The table 6.9 highlights range of household monthly income in Teiseng village. About 23.72 per cent of the village households generate income below rupees five thousand per month, and majority of the households that is 67.8 per cent manage below rupees ten thousand but above five thousand rupees in a month. About 5.08 per cent households are generating monthly income of above rupees ten thousand but below rupees fifteen thousand. And, 1.7 per cent is in the range of below twenty thousand and above. The richer households in the village are those that have or generate income above ten thousand rupees monthly. In total the richer household in the village sum up to four households, while fourteen households are

in the poorer section and forty households are the average economical households of the village.

As time went by, more and more families practised commercialised agriculture and found their condition increasingly dependent on the market. With this changed economic environment many of them can no longer contract their market participation as in the past because it is increasingly more difficult for them to revert to subsistence farming. In varying degrees, they have traded the security of growing staples for the greater return of cash crops. In periods of crisis, the only solution to their problem is to sell labour and from that point their market participation may be solely in the form of wage labour. Under the impact of the forces of such change the village community becomes less and less inward oriented because more and more people gain the primary source of their income from the larger economic hierarchy.

6.8 Bijang Village (Urban Settings)

The main features of urban village are proximity to town, good connectivity and larger population density. Proximity and well connectivity to town ameliorates accessibility to hospital and health centre, various educational institution, market and banks, government offices, etc. Having the advantage of easier accessibility to modern facilities attract people from various place and different economic background, particularly from rural villages. At the same time, it also avails to various non-agriculture occupation activities like teaching in privates' schools, running shops.

The primary pull factor to urban areas is job opportunity and educational pursuit. And migration from rural villages to urban villages is one of the main reasons for the increasing population in urban village population and larger number of households.

6.8.1 Occupation

Economically, most of the urban villagers are in stable condition. But, economic disparity between the rich and poor is quite visible and acute. Despite of the huge economic gap, the overall villagers' lifestyle is westernised. Because every household in urban villages has at least a member or more earning by engaging in non-agricultural occupation, self-employed or work in a private institution or in government sector. The variation in earning and the availability of different sources of income contributes to urban village to maintain a certain living standard. Self-employed includes carpentry, builders or masonry worker, contractors, drivers (private public transportation), etc.

Table: 6.10
Occupation in urban setting (Bijang village)

Occupation	No. of person	Percentage
Government employee	67	37
Business	6	3
Agriculture	4	2
Church worker and social worker	7	4
Pensioner	12	6.5
Self employed	75	41
Unemployed or dependent on other family members	12	6.5
Total	183	100

Table 6.10 shows that 41 per cent of the head of households are self-employed, whereas 37 per cent are government employees. Agriculture as head of household occupation is about 2 per cent and 3 per cent as a businessman. The combination of church workers and social worker constitute 4 per cent, while 6.5 per cent are pensioners. Unemployed or dependent on household members is 6.5 per cent. It highlights that in urban village, self-employed and government jobs are the key source of income.

6.8.2 Availability of Household Assets

In order to have a better understanding of the standard and its linkages with urban development, the study of the availability of few basic household assets is necessary. Therefore, in this section the household variations of certain assets had been considered. There is a significant disparity in the possession of household assets. It is also important to note that within the village assets were unequally distributed among the households.

Table 6.11
Household assets in urban village (Bijang village)

Total households = 183		
Type of Assets owned	No. of households	Percentage
Television	167	91
Washing machine	132	72
Computer/laptop	55	30
Refrigerator	95	52
Two-wheelers (bike and scotty)/three-wheeler (autorickshaws)	45	25
Four-wheelers (cars, jeeps, trucks and busses)	51	28

Table 6.11 highlight some of the common household assets in urban village. About 91 per cent of the total household owned television and 72 per cent of them owned washing machine. Computer (desktop/laptop) are owned by 30 per cent of the village households, and 52 per cent possesses refrigerator. And 25 per cent of the household owned either two-wheeler or three-wheeler and 28 per cent own four-wheeler.

Table 6.12

House building types in urban village (Bijang village)

House type	No. of Houses	Percentage
Thatched roof with mud wall	1	0.5
Tin roof with mud wall	84	46
Tin roof with wooden wall	55	30
Tin roof with bricked wall	24	13.1
Pucca building	19	10.4
Total	183	100

Table 6.12 reveals the various house types in urban village, which also reveal the disparity of villager economic condition. There is only one house with thatched roofed with mud wall that is about 0.5 per cent of the total household in the village. Tin roofed with mud wall house type comprises of 46 per cent and Tin roofed with wooden wall house type is 30 per cent. About 13 per cent of the household live in tin roofed with bricked wall house type and 10 per cent of the household live in pucca building house type.



Plate 20: Pucca building in Bijang village (Photo: Author)



Plate 21: Tin roof with bricked wall in Bijang village (Photo: Author)



Plate 22: Tin roof with wooden wall in Bijang village (Photo: Author)



Plate 23: Tin roof with mud wall in Bijang village (Photo: Author)

It is evident from the context of Bijang village that there is a variation in terms of housing constructions patterns. There is a marked contrast between the houses of the elite (middle class) and lower classes. Only rich people are able to build such houses as they are expensive. The type of houses gives an accurate idea of the economic status of the community. The size of the house is primarily determined by factors such as economic conditions, the size of the family, etc. and more importantly, it is indicative of the class they belong to. These houses are constructed in wood, stone, bricks. On an average such houses contain two/three big rooms depending on the size of the family.

6.8.3 Land Ownership

Traditionally, the entire village land or community land belongs to chief. But, traditional mode of landholding is another aspect of the community that experiences a steady change, transformation of landholding system from community to privatised land. In that, land is perceived either as a property or as a source of income, and the impact in landholding is mostly witnessed in urban villages or locality more than in rural villages.

New land relations are not only an economic measure but also the beginning of new power equations among tribes. The first is class formation in otherwise usually [perceived] egalitarian societies and the second is strengthening of patriarchy because it usually transfers power over land from the community to a few men, usually the elite. The first steps towards it were taken in the colonial age with the enactment of individual ownership based land laws

that turned the CPRs into state property. Their basis is the colonial principle of the eminent domain. Its first facet is that land without an individual *patta* is state property. The second is that the state alone has the right to define a public purpose and deprive even individual owners of their assets.¹⁷³

The first result of the changeover without adequate preparation of the community is a transition from their culture of equity to class formation. Individual *pattas*¹⁷⁴ (private land title) are a tool of this transition. Land ownership is transformed into *patta* land (see plate 24 below) with secure land titles. In other words, what changes their culture is not individual ownership in itself but imposition of the formal law without adequate cultural preparation of the communities. The failure to prepare them for this interface results in class formation in otherwise egalitarian societies.

JAMABANDI

M.L.R. FORM 8
(See Rule 57)

Sub-Divisional Office, Haijang village, District of Imphal, Manipur

Area: 10.00 Bighas

Owner: [Handwritten Name]

Date: 07/04/2014

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Plate 24: Individual land title or ownership certified by the Sub-Divisional Office (Procured from a household in Haijang village during field work)

¹⁷³ See Usha Ramanathan, 'Public Purpose: points for Discussion', in Walter Fernandes (ed.), *The Land Acquisition (Amendment) Bill 1998: For liberalization or for the Poor?* Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 19-20.

¹⁷⁴ Technically, the *patta* lands in Manipur are called *dak chitha* or *jamabandi*.

6.9 Comparing Rural and Urban Household Landholdings

In urban locality context, the traditional landholding system is gradually declining as respondents from urban village share their view that the traditional landholding system in urban village or locality is significantly changed and commercialised. Also, traditional system of land ownership is no more a barrier for any individuals to either buy or sell land. Chiefship prerogative of landholding is substituted by individual acquiring chances of land through economic potential. According to Mrs. Touthang,¹⁷⁵ a graduate and entrepreneur from Bijang, people mostly purchase land as investment purpose. In that, it encourages and circulates the desire to privatise land. Similarly, Mr. Vaiphei,¹⁷⁶ members of village authority, cited that the increasing numbers of villages in urban or semi-urban area as an example of the simultaneous process of commercializing land and weakening of traditional way of landholding system.

Another important feature of urban village is land ownership system. Like the outcome of change in land ownership system in Meghalaya Since, twentieth century, where the ‘communal ownership of land’ is gradually replaced by privatisation, that intensifies with the emergence of ‘an educated Christian elite’ (Gupta, 2013: 81-82). Similarly, in most Kuki urban villages it is casually acknowledge that the village land belongs to chief, whereas almost every residential land is purchased from the village chief and owned as a private property. Purchasing and selling of land is no longer an issue that involves chief restriction or consent. But unless issue related to boundary dispute are at stake between land owners, village chief and village authority interfere by adjudicating the matter. Because every individual land owned detail such as location and size are recorded and maintained by village chief. It is to be noted that the differences in land ownership system in urban village and rural village is an important factor that determines urban and rural. It implicates the underlying differences rural and urban where traditionally valuing of land and the extent of rigidity in traditional authority are in existence. In urban village, the value and power of traditional authority is cherished and respected but the manner how it implements is lenient than in rural village.

¹⁷⁵ Interviewed on 10 July 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Interviewed on 5 March 2018, at Bijang village.

Table 6.13
Household landholding in urban village

	No. of households	Percentage
Landholders	161	88
Non-landholders	22	12
Total	183	100

Table 6.13 reveals that 88 per cent of the urban village households resided in their own land. Though the village is under the administration of chieftainship, residential land belongs to individual. It indicates that the owner/s can sold their land as desire, or by any interested individual can purchase straight from the owner without the consent or interfere of village chief in this concern. Whereas, 12 per cent of the villager are living in Chief's land. They resided in chief's land or privately owned land as tenants or without giving rent depending upon the sympathy of chief or the understanding between them and chief or the landholder/s.

6.14
Household landholding in rural village

	No. of household	Percentage
No. of landholder's household (including chief and his relatives)	2	4
No. of non-landholders' household	57	96
Total	59	100

Table 6.14 shows that 96 per cent of rural village households live in chief's land. And by no means these household have the right to neither sell nor claim the land but can reside and live in the village as long as they wanted to live in the village. Unless they are compelled to evacuate or forced to migrate to other village by the village chief command or by will. Whereas 4 per cent comprising of village chief and relative live in their own landholding, which include the whole the chieftom of both residential and non-residential land. Comparing both the tables it discloses that landholding in urban village experience significant change while in rural village it is merely affected. In fact, it is solely the individual discretion in regards to land matter, perhaps, mostly maneuvered by economic aspiration of most chiefs.

Table 6.15

Type of residential landholding in urban village (Bijang village)

Residential type	No. of households	Percentage
Owned land and house	161	88
Rented house or lease land	22	12
Total	183	100

Table 6.15 reveals that 88 per cent of the lands are privately owned by individuals, while 22 per cent live in a rented house. And these rented houses are privately owned by villagers or village chief that are rented out to households who do not have landholding or houses. It is a clear indication that villagers are the sole owner of their land in the village, although village land is ideally considered as belonging to village chief.

In a Kuki village, the village community-lands are those lands belonging to village chief but make avail to villagers for cultivation and for residence. But such traditional landholding system is absent in most urban villages, because land in urban villages including residential land are privatised. Even than the village chief is ideally considered as head of the village purported to village or local administration. However, in regards to landholding the village chief has no not much control or command over the land in case if individual wanted to either sell or purchase land in the village and from villager. Another, dissimilarity between rural and urban villages is reservation of village forest (locally known as *Ujok*) for villager to make used forest products. This form of forestry and utilization is absence in urban villages. In fact, the village itself is confined within the residential areas only. Initially when urban village is established, the whole village land belongs to chief. The impact of market as well as depending on chief volition land are privatise in numbers of patches with a specific breath and width. And individuals who are interested and having the economic potential to purchase brought land from village chief. Also, most of urban villages are previously belong to older village chief land. And these types of villages are locally known as '*Khopel*'. For example, there are 12 villages¹⁷⁷ established that are originally part of Bijang village land.

Social life in urban village is relatively individualistic. Perhaps, events or occasions in the village like marriages, church services, village functions and funeral are the only time that shows sign of community feeling or interaction. Participant in all these events are perceived

¹⁷⁷ The villages are: 1. Bijang Vengnom 2. Bijang Buite veng 3. Bijang Aijalon 4. Bijang Singcha kothah 5. Bijang Phaicham 6. Bijang Ebenezer 7. Bijang C. Phailal 8. Bijang S. Theimol 9. Bijang HB Phaicham 10. Bijang L. Gamnomjang 11. Bijang Moltuh kothah 12. Bijang Phainom.

as part and parcel of socio-religious duty. And a social gesture significant to being part of village and as a villager. But in the day to day social life the manner of interaction among villagers are dictated mostly by individualism or among limited circle of people of similar taste and interest group, based on economic activities and political motive. Otherwise, interaction as leisure is in few instances or uncommon sight unlike in the case of rural village. One of the reasons for such social environment is the competitive and engaging urban way of life.

Another important feature of urban village is the leniency of village authority over personal interest and enterprise, for instance choice of denomination and church. There are three churches¹⁷⁸ in Bijang village, while in term of denominations¹⁷⁹ there are more than five denominations or religious faith among villagers. Having mentioned about the land ownership system in urban village, it is an indication of village authority or traditional authority leniency over the village administration, particularly in regards to land ownership system. In other word, the relaxation of village administration in the village or village affairs is in response to the weakening of stringent landholding system under chieftainship in urban villages.

6.9.1 Commercialization of Land

The significant consequence of commercializing landholding is the evolution of emotional attachment toward land and village. Senior respondents recounted, before the permeating of land commercialization or landholding, a handful of people owned land as a private property, and usually happen to be from chief family. The masses, in general, depend on chief land for residence and for cultivation. Even then, masses or villager or the community in those days have strong alliance among themselves and with the community land. Way of fostering emotional attachment to their land is undiluted and certitude admirably differ from the emotional attachment developed recently. People in those days are passionate in cherishing and valuing the effort of forefathers who fearlessly and proudly protected land with sweat and blood against any kind of threat and hostility. Unfortunately, today, valuing of land is prompted by the desired to acquire it, as an individual property and at the same time based on its worth and profit to market it. The meaningful relation between the community and land shaped by historical and cultural significant is rather substituted by historical and economic

¹⁷⁸ The three churches are: 1. Chongthu Baptist Church 2. Evangelical Churches Association 3. Evangelical Synod Church.

¹⁷⁹ Namely, 1. Chongthu Baptist Church 2. Evangelical Churches Association 3. Evangelical Synod Church 4. Kuki Christian Church 5. Catholic 6. Judaism 7. Local Christian sect.

significant. Mr. Haokip (a retired government employee) stated, “*All of us are aware of our history especially history of our land. On the other hand, the affection that we developed towards land is prominently to extract or exploit remunerative benefits from it*”.¹⁸⁰

Table 6.16

Notion of appraising land in the urban context

Mode of valuing land	No. of response	Percentage
As cultural heritage	29	13
As commercial assets	111	51
On both perspectives	80	36
Total respondents	220	100

Table 6.16 reveals that 51 per cent viewed that presently the mode of valuing land is mainly determined by its commercial benefits. And 13 per cent still believe that despite of the permeating commercialization of land, the mode of upholding and valuing of land is still strongly drawn from the culturally embedded meaning and significant. About 36 per cent are of the opinion of land valuing is defined by its commercial worth and cultural legacy and importance. Thus, it can be put forward that, with the gradual modernization of tradition the manner of estimating the value of land based on tradition landholding system undergoes change. That is the steady commodifying of land, wherein more than the cultural significance market determined the way of estimating the value of land.

The emergence of part-time farming among the salaried village folk and the businessmen have led to extensive land speculation. Most of the fertile and flat lands have been either bought up or possessed by the elite class who has better access to government. Villages within the easy reach of the urban elites now face serious *jhum* land shortage because of the rapid encroachment of private holdings. Though the land market has not yet developed fully yet freely negotiable without administrative sanction, the powerful class are often able to evade the porous rules of the government. This changing pattern of landownership has deprived the rural community in some parts of the state of their only

¹⁸⁰ Interviewed on 2 October 2017, at Tuibuong.

productive resources. If this trend is allowed to continue unabated, the land resources will be owned by the few and peasants may be reduced to tenancy or marginal cultivators.

6.10 Church, Materialism and the Elite/Middle Class

An interesting aspect that resulted from churches competitiveness is the complementarity of materialistic progress and religious zeal. That is to say that the materialistic concern within each respective churches or denominations also intensifies the religious persuasion of its members. It enlivens church members to deeply engross in religious matters, and concurrently prompt church members to voluntarily or involuntarily contribute. The church convincingly regulates and advocates to its members of the perception that for the cause of church one must be prepared or in positioned to contribute in any possible mean and alternative. And the driving force behind the impulsion is the indoctrination with biblical interpretation regarding materialistic contribution by merging with the motivation to excel in religious morality and obligation.

In principle, the church preaches and advocates against any form of anti-social practices, including social discrimination based on economic situation or status, illegal and unfair means of earning etc. On the other hand, matter related to monetary contribution to church is visibly flexible and compromising. For instance, the acceptance of donation coming from individual whose sources or means are socially and religiously despised. Like, money generated through illegal businesses and trading (banned drugs or commodities smugglings), bribery and corruption, etc. However, churches although are concerned of individual/s sources of earning, but when the same individuals contribute to church, the critical stand of church on such sources is merely reflected. For instances, in Mr. Lhungdim words, *“Nowadays church is no more a religious or spiritual church rather it has become money oriented”*. On one hand, church demanded members to refrain from such activities or income generation. On the other hand, and at the same, church is susceptible in accepting when contributed for the church.

In recent years, Churachandpur district is thriving in ‘poppy farming’ or opium as a lucrative business. Although it is a very profitable business as compared to other form of farming or business, it is socially and constitutionally banned and illegalised. Likewise, the church also strongly stood against it and discourage individuals to engage in such illegal and malpractice business. However, it fails to refrain from accepting or receiving contribution

from rich businessmen particularly those who are engaged in ‘*kani*’¹⁸¹ (poppy) business. A pastor working in a village church states: “Yes, the church opposes it, but what it matters the most in the eye of God is a person aptness to give and not the source it comes from”. Thus, an individual contribution to church is attributed as an act of individual’s religious zeal. And these people get more attention and respect in the church more than the others who earn less but in a conventional and judicious way.

Seemingly, church on its own set up experience inequality and competitive mindset among the church members. And this inequality that amidst the church members is mainly oriented towards economic and occupational aspect. Subsequently, it entails to rising favouritism or preferential treatment among church members. For example, those individuals or family who are able to contribute large sum of money to the church as part of fulfilling religious duty often receive regards and are usually given an influential position in the church affairs. Mr. Haokip, truck driver and a trader by profession from Teiseng village opines that “Church itself is advocating inequality although not openly. Everything is based on economic conditioning, where the rich who gives more amount of tithe to the church are often chosen as church leaders and given honour while the poor and widow are side-line in the decision making and deprive of the chance of occupying leadership position”. Although, the intensity of favouritism depends upon churches and its locality. But overall, the trend exists in similar pattern as a result of highly valued of economic potential over the religious virtues.

For an instance, while enquiring opinion about the contribution from the well to do household or individuals to church, a senior man from Bijang village responded by citing from Bible verse: “It is more blessed to give than to receive”.¹⁸² According to the common believe and assumption, the act of contribution to church is a human act embedded with divine meanings. Since church is considered as divine institution and any form of giving or contribution to church is construed as equivalent to a performing a divine gesture and integral to maintaining a religious and virtuous life.

¹⁸¹ Fluid extracted from the seed pod of poppy plant and dried, used as a main raw ingredient to produce opium.

¹⁸² Extracted from the book of Acts, chapter 20 verse 35 from the New Testament Bible.

Table 6.17
Does favouritism and preferential treatment exist in the church?

Responses	No. of respondent	Percentage
Yes	137	62
No	83	38
Total	220	100

From the table 6.17, it shows that 62 per cent agreed that favouritism or preferential treatment exist in the church. Whereas, 38 per cent suggests that within the church no act or gesture of preferential treatment prevail in the church. Instead, each church members by virtue of their potential and ability, by monetary and talent contribute toward the church. And accordingly, the church valued every member as a faithful member without and discrepancy.

Although preferential treatment and favouritism evolve on individual scale relation, but those who are in better economic class have the tendency to replicates or accustoms to conceptualise economic-power relation as an ultimate way of expressing and maintaining one's status in the religious realm. That afterward, effectuating inequality and favouritism to persist in the church. For example, at the time of church service, name of the individual/s and amount offered and contributed to the church are disclosed for the whole congregation to know and acknowledge.¹⁸³

6.10.1 Economic and Power Relations in the Church

As mentioned earlier, and although the pecuniary contribution toward the church is motivated by religious determination, it is basically mean for administrative purposes. In a more concrete understanding, every kind of contribution toward the church in general is used for church functioning and management. At the same time, the imperativeness of monetary contribution toward the church functioning prompt individual economic background as a determinant factor in deserving a privilege status and powerful position in the church affairs.

¹⁸³ Recorded while attending the Sunday church service during field visit in 2018.

Table 6.18
Payment of Tithe¹⁸⁴ to church in Urban village (Bijang)

Amount	No. of person	Percentage
>1,500	83	45
>2,500	53	29
>3,500	35	20
>4,500	8	4
<4,500	4	2
Total	183	100

The table 6.18 shows the variation of tithe amount given to respective churches by individual respondents in Bijang village. About 45 per cent give less than Rs. 1,499 per month as a monthly tithe. Similarly, 29 per cent and 20 per cent of the respondents gave tithe at the range of between the minimum of Rs. 1500 to the maximum of Rs. 2,499 and between Rs. 2,500 to Rs. 3,499 respectively. Whereas 4 per cent give tithe of Rs. 3,500 above but not crossing Rs. 4,499, and 2 per cent are at the range of giving tithe of more than Rs. 4,500 per month. Indicating the gaps between the maximum givers and minimum givers are almost fourfold whereas those maximum givers comprises of 2 per cent of the total tithe givers and they are undeniably the influential individuals in the church (reasonably owing to their larger contribution to the church). But they do not necessarily occupy the church administrative position or offices. However, because of their exceptional amount of tithe denote monetarily established status, they are influential in the overall church functioning, particularly in regards to the impacting the policy making and in the functioning of the church administration affairs. While most individuals who occupied the administrative position usually fall within the group of those of 4.37 per cent and 19.13 per cent of tithe givers.

¹⁸⁴ A tithe is 10% of your income given specifically to your local church. One tenth of annual produce or earnings, formerly taken as a tax for the support of the Church and clergy.



Plate 25: Church building of Evangelical Churches Association (ECA), Bijang (Photo: Author)

Table 6.19

Payment of Tithe to church in rural village (Teiseng Village)

Amount	No. of person	Percentage
>500	14	23.72
>1,000	40	67.80
>1,500	3	5.08
>2,000	1	1.70
< 2,000	1	1.70
Total	59	100

Table 6.19 demonstrates that in rural village that is in Teiseng village, 23.72 per cent give a monthly tithe of Rs. 499 and below, whereas 67.8 per cent manage to give at the range of Rs. 500 to Rs. 900. Similarly, about 5.08 per cent give a monthly tithe of Rs. 1500 and below but

not lesser than Rs. 1,001. And 1 per cent each give a monthly tithe at the range of the maximum Rs. 2,000 to minimum of Rs. 1,501 and Rs. 2,001 and above. From the table it can be deducted that in the case of rural village the amount of tithe given is comparatively lesser than that of in urban village. However, it depends on the locality and economic condition of the village household, where the affluent manage to give more than Rs. 2000 and above, even than they comprised of the affluent section of the village as well in the church.



Plate 26: Church building of Teiseng Assembly of God church (Photo: Author)

The tables (6.18 and 6.19) above highlights church member's economic situation both in urban and rural villages and it is observable that majority of the church member's contribution is relatively much lesser than that of the economically rich or well-off church members section. Depending on the variance in the contribution amount, influential position in the church is hierarchically arranged. That is to say that, power distribution is primarily based on individual monetary potential, determined by the amount contributed or given to the church. Upon enquiring about the significance of individual economic standings during church decision making, Mr. Khongsai, an elderly church member expresses: *"Whether within the church or outside the church people take the word of moneyed individual. Whenever a poor person shares reasonable opinion, beyond publicly applaud no impact nor no word is taken into consideration in the decision-making process. Whereas, no matter how*

unfit or good suggestion put forward by rich person eventually becomes the final decision or at least it determine the decision made.” The relation of economic and power in structuring and effectuating the process of decision making is not only confine to secular domain but also applicable in the religious or church affairs too. That is to say that, the manner of status and power appraisal in the secular purview is reiterated in the church and among church member’s mentality while concerning for the religious purposes too. Those who enjoyed power and status outside the church settings, emulates the same privileges even in religious affairs or in church environment. For example, during religious ceremony or services special seat arrangement are made for those who are in are in a prestigious occupation (VIPs)¹⁸⁵ or the affluent church members. A pensioner from Bijang village explain that, *“Being poor, the disadvantage extended from the secular space to religious domain. According to him, it is the moneyed that have advantages in every social aspect. Be it in politics, social, religious/church and even in kinship relationship. As much of the economic condition determines the degree of individual social and political advantages or disadvantage”*. Therefore, these influential sections of the church member usually had politically, socially and economically established esteem status and position. In a sense, their participation and activities in the church is highly valued and treasure.

For the elite and influential individuals interfering in church matters is considered as an imperative and initiative action in order to maintain better church functioning, intended for the welfare of the church members as well as a gesture of honouring religious principle. With the notion that their participation and deed to the church is held with the aim of accomplishing religious responsibility and to self-justify as a true practicing Christian. A village church secretary Mr. Haokip, shared an allusive displeasure experience about the way in which church administration often operates under manipulation. Further, he expresses that many among the church administrators take side with them [economically well-off] and endorse their opinion without much hesitation. Because, their suggestion and attitude cannot be ignored as they are individuals with profound contribution or are giving more than the other church members. Considerably impacting the church financial condition and budgets. According to him many of churches are control by those who have money and power. It is the affluent church members and those who are closely associated with them get better opportunity in occupying higher position and power, or nominate person of their close

¹⁸⁵ Bureaucrats (IAS, IPS, MCS, MPS etc. or any high-ranking government employees), Politician (MP, MLA, MDC), and first class contractors and big businessmen, etc.

association either through kinship or individual who can be easily influence and dictate upon by them.

Notably, differences in opinion and ideology frequently entails to affecting the smooth functioning of the church. According to Mr. Kipgen, a retired government employee, *“with the increasing number of wealthy church members, more problem, more controversy, and more differences and stain relationship amid the church environment”*. Power struggle in the church mainly happened among the affluent and influential section of the church member. Disposition to manipulate, alter and influence the decision-making process is in favour of individual who persuade to demonstrate superiority and status-based power exertion. Interviewed church members in general argue that most of the contestation among the rich section is driven by personal and idiosyncratic motive, with an attempt to prove one’s superior capability in the religious platform too. An informant shared his view that *“although they are wealthy, their out-look are narrow-minded and exclusive. Seemingly they enacted their action and opinion for all but, it hardly concerns for the future nor for the common good”*. One of the simple and conspicuous way to realise that a church is undergoing an intense power struggle is manifested by the way church member interact or avoid each other even while attending worship or church service together under the same roof. For example, whenever an individual is given in-charge of church activities like sermon or any other, the other person who have problem with the person often show disinterest either by sleeping or standing outside the church. In some serious cases, a person may not even turn out for the church services or activities in case if the person with whom she/he had problem is included in the church activities or schedule.

The form of inequality that exist among the church members can be categorise into three groups which is basically based on economic disparity. Firstly, a handful of affluent church members who are influential in the church affairs although not necessarily occupying the administrative position. However, they are capable and contribute monetary and logistic support to the church that are effective in making them and putting them in an influential and prioritise position in the church. They are often preferred to be selected as ordained church elders or in case of necessity, and administrative posts are offered to them. In the second category, those in between the affluent and the poor church members, they are mostly engaging or are elected for church administrative position and other church related offices. Their influence in the church is usually limited to the administrative roles and office. Sometime their administration responsibility is carried out under the supervise or as suggested or dictated by the affluent section. The third group comprises of the church

members who are neither in the above two groups nor included in the other two group too but majority of the group includes those who belong to the poorer economic section.

Although the church is a religious institution, inequality and power relation are build based on economic situation, occupation, esteem position and social status which are not part or relates to the religious doctrine, sanctioning and valuing. But on account of the ineluctability to church functioning and stability, it is assigned a religious meaning and interpretation so that it benefits both ends i.e. the church and the members.

6.11 Transition from Traditional to Modern Ways of Life

As discussed, achieved status – occupation, material well-being, educational qualification is the marker of the middle-class category. The introduction of modern educational and political system, proselytization to Christianity, profits oriented market-economy, impulses the community to become more of a modern oriented community rather than being a rigidly structured traditional community. Ideally it led to the emergence of class consciousness among the Kukis in a modern prospect. Likewise, the disposition toward modernization and westernization affects the traditions adversely. People no longer desire to be bonded with tradition in a rigid manner, but only to be preserved and maintain it in order to assert political identity or to obtain privilege under the political concession as a tribal community. An elderly respondent from Tuibuong justifies by stating that, *“Both economic power and status are complementary but those with more wealth are more influential. Although social status is also received by chiefs and social leaders, and among them those who are well to do in term of economic are much more regarded and recognised than the poorer fellow”*.¹⁸⁶ In the same vein, an elderly individual from Bijang opines, *“Our everyday conduct, attitude and interest is mostly determined by modern concern, thinking it as a progressive and admirable etiquette. While the merits aspect of our traditions are gradually depleted and discarded. On the contrary, we are dying to take advantage of being a traditional or a tribe community”*.¹⁸⁷ Traditional and customary practices and principles are carefully retained and valued without much causing impediment in the day to day activities as well as in the personal pursuit endeavour. Likewise, chiefship is preserved in the same manner, without much effectuating status assertion by itself, unless modern form of accolades is accomplished by a chief to support and substantiate the traditionally sanctioned status and power of chiefship.

¹⁸⁶ Pu Yammang Haokip (age 77), interviewed on 17 October 2017, at Tuibuong.

¹⁸⁷ Pu L. Baite (age 75), interviewed on 16 February 2018, at Bijang village.

Despite of maintaining the traditional sentiments and ethics, class consciousness among Kukis is emerging. The sense of adhering traditional principles such as respecting elders, ‘*khankho*’, partaking in the community’s social gathering be it in time of festivals, funerals, marriages and other are either waning or comply nominally or the event is responded according to matter of class and status. In the meantime, various factors such as competitive and profit-making market economy as well as the ever-increasing price of commodities and extensive dependent on market for daily needs, makes people prefer to engage in their own occupation and earning rather than sticking stiffly to tradition norms and ethics. That is to say that people are becoming more calculative and conscious of time utilization that unless necessary no more willing to compromise their earning enterprise for traditional practices and responsibilities. Mr. Timothy, a primary school teacher, expresses that, “*Everyone minds their own business and work that unless it is utmost necessary neither we wanted other to be burden nor to our-self by other. Gone are those days, visiting of neighbours or relatives frequently in leisure time as a sign of concern and obligations. And attending every household event are no more a vogue unless in exceptional situation*”.¹⁸⁸ In fact, the traditional way of local and casual or formal way of interaction are slowly becoming out of practice, mainly because these practices are perceived as wasting of times. Where, one could furnish it for purposeful personal benefits and the same for the others. In addition to it, the manner or disposition to interact with others are gradually shaped and delineated similar class situation of similar economic condition, political and lifestyle interest.

The changing social relations and interactions implicate the rise in class-based enthusiasm and demarcation. For example, marriages are happening between family of similar economic situation or potential. Rather than following the traditional imposition of choosing partnership, it becomes more of individual discretion. Where choosing of spouse is become sole personal affairs and determined by individual and family status, instead of the customary practice of taking spouse from Fathers’ sister son or mother’s brother daughter (Gangte, 2012: 78-79). For instance, a woman from economically well-off family would not be favoured by her family to marry a man from economically poorer family background. Family would not decline daughters marrying to a working man preferably government employee, regardless of family economic condition. An incident happens in the village wherein a young man from different village and from a poorer economic background was denied of his marriage proposal to a woman from a well to do family from Bijang village.

¹⁸⁸ Interviewed on 18 September 2017, at Tuibuong.

The woman's mother bluntly replied to the man by saying 'one should seek or proposed a girl from same ranking and position'! Such type of relationship building and interaction are becoming a common social phenomenon. In another incident, a marriage arrangement was made between a man who is a gazetted officer (a Manipur state government employee) and a girl, despite huge age gaps. According to informants, both families agreed with the arrangement because the man is working and the girls is currently pursuing a medical study with future potential of salaried employment. Thus, everyone or families wanted both the spouse to be a salaried employee.

Another probable factor that led to dwindling of tradition is the ingrained modern influence in shaping people's outlook and approach to life. Unlike in the past, establishing one's reputation is no more strictly based on traditionally sanctioned nor by inheritance, but mostly by achieves economic situation and occupational esteem. Besides the economic and occupational prospects, the other major factor is religious conduct and participation that serves as a mechanism to status establishment. For example, individuals who actively involved in religious obligation and in church activities are admired and regarded. And those who already attained a respectable status further garner esteem status by involving or engaging in religious activities. Perhaps, religious activities are performed out of personal volition and religious zeal. However, either intentional or not, such religious activities produce a social admiration and respect. Apart from the layman, pastors, deacons and evangelist are in privilege position in receiving high regards and honours. On the contrary, and in secular aspect, a traditionalistic personality is perceived as a sign of lagging in the modern realm. Although, traditions and customary practices are the same for the whole community, but the manner of practicing it reveals disparity between the haves and haves-not's. According to Mr. Singson (a government employee): "*The way traditional and customary practices are performed depict inequality in public space. Because, for the well to do family, traditions and customs are implemented according to personal conveniences and ostensibly oriented to economic showcase*".¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, despite of financial hardship, the haves-not's put effort to maintain tradition in the simplest way to at least fulfill the obligated traditions and customs practices in the best possible mean. Even though both the wealthy and poor are equally bonded and obliged to perform certain unelectable traditional practices. However, in doing so, economic situation plays a vital role in determining the grandness of performing it. And this grandness is manifested by the level of

¹⁸⁹ Interviewed on 3 December 2017, at Tuibuong.

expenditure on material used and by the number of people participating and responding to the events.

Further, depending upon or individual's family economic background the number of people turn out for the household's event determined family economic status. *"It is most apparent during funeral ceremony in the village, where many will turn out for the condolence, while for the poorer family, usually a handful of people will be seen in the same events, and it is a sad sight the manner how people response even during bereaving situation, where the rich and poor are openly delimiting"*, expresses a youth club leader of Bijang.¹⁹⁰ Subsequently, it become a manifestation of class and status where households who can do in a grandeur manner are look upon as belonging to higher class, whereas those who are unable as a lower class or economic status. The traditional ethos of social responsibility and cooperation¹⁹¹ is gradually subsumed by modern and individualistic priority and reaction.

In the classless or casteless society of tribal, a new trend of social inequality is emerging gradually. Most of the modern elite who settled in the cities began to have a feeling of superiority over the rural inhabitants. Thus a psychological and mental gap begins to creep in among the Kukis. Most of them are well educated, and have good knowledge about the modern world. Also, the educated that got good position and proper settlement in towns are not willing to go back to their original village. Their children are well educated. Some of them responded that their material possession and education are the reason behind their social status in society.

Concluding Remarks

The study shows that one's educational and occupation status plays an important role in the making of tribal middle class. Another relevant development is the slow but steady emergence of an educated middle class among tribal communities. The growth of middle class, at the Kuki community level is a direct product of the introduction of Christianity, western education, and new job and occupation opportunities along with the 'introduction of money economy' in the Kuki society. The nature of the middle class that emerged with the introduction of money economy, has primarily led the new middle class composed of 'salaried bureaucracy, businessmen ranging from affluent government contractors to petty shopkeepers, man belonging to the various professions such as medicine and teaching as well

¹⁹⁰ Mr. Willian Baite (age 35), interviewed on 5 August 2016, at Bijang village

¹⁹¹ Such as Kuki *khankho* (moral ethics and principles) has already been discussed in chapter 2.

as owner of urban property. Together they roughly represent the urban-based, salaried, modernised, mobile, politically active and enterprising section of the Kuki population.

In the present days most middle class households among the Kuki community espouse new values and lifestyles that often and virtually negate the traditional values. For instance, the middle class households of Bijang are urban in their living standard. They go to private English schools and have relatively better education; they reside mostly outside the village due to their employment or other engagements and are also more politically more involved and aware. Some of them own lands and houses in towns and the state capital, Imphal. Many of them also have houses and own lands especially terrace fields, and more recently farms in the village. Taking up of new and modern occupations in urban areas not only lead to the slackening hold of kinship obligations and the related growing disparity between the haves and have-nots it also undermines the traditional collective values that had evolved from close physical existence in the village.

In this chapter, we have captured social inequality, emergence of tribal middle class, elite/middle class in Kuki society, economic practices, etc. Changes in occupation, material wellbeing, educational attainment, landholding pattern, etc. have widened the scope and ambit of social differentiation and social stratification. And, the next chapter provides a summary of the findings of the study, limitations of the study and scope for further research.

Conclusion

Summing Up

The present study correlates ethnographic data with current debates on social change and stratification among the tribals in India. This thesis began by tracing the ethnogenesis of Kuki people, their socio-cultures and economic organisation. Like many other tribes, Kukis are passing through the phase of transition and are marked by various changes in their way of life, socio-economic relations and cultural patterns. Multiple forces are operating under the grand narratives of modernization and obviously, colonialism, Christianity and western education remains one of the prime movers of the changes that have gain momentum. No doubt, the Christian milieu is one of the most intergrading forces of the Kukis and controls public discourse to a large degree.

Based on a review of both historical and secondary sources and empirical study on Kuki villages in Manipur, two related arguments emerged. First, the aim is to challenge the hitherto existing perception that tribal Kuki villages were historically ‘egalitarian’ in nature, which is based on modernisation discourses that have been powerful in shaping general public perceptions of tribal villages – precolonial tribal villages in India as ‘egalitarian’, concluding wrongly that the absence of caste in Kuki villages is equal to the absence of inequality altogether. We argue instead that Kuki villages were rather complex social formations with mechanisms and structures of inequality similar to those that anthropologists described in other Highland Asian societies.

Second, although, most academic discourse ideally presented the past or the traditional tribal community as a classless or egalitarian community, contrary to the prevailing intricate and indicating social strata even in the traditional domain. And one among them is the Kuki community where the political, economic and social aspect distinctively entertained and accredited social stratification, but portrayed as an egalitarian community. For instance, disparity in economic conditions based on occupation, income and wealth are prominently displayed.

Against classical theories, the findings in this study indicate that the dual processes of class formation and cultural differentiation do not lead to distinct ‘class milieus’ or an outright ‘class society’, but to a configuration of cultural milieus and classes that depend heavily on the degree of urbanization and the location within or outside the state. Social stratification rests on differentiation of roles and differentiation of status. Each individual is

with a particular rank and particular work. In simple social structures, this differentiation is reflected in terms of age, sex and physical power. Besides, in same societies differentiation rests on political and economic grounds. But in modern industrial societies, stratification is almost complex. It is derived from variable complementary criteria.

During the course of the research, both the official depiction of tribal societies as fundamentally ‘equal’ or ‘egalitarian’ – a relic of colonial ethnography – as well as the depiction of classes as self-replicating structures – dominant in Western sociology – had to be given up. Instead, the findings show that class structure among the Kuki is the result of complex interactions between spatial criteria and mobility, education, work (occupation) milieus, income, that ushered in inequalities.

The synopsis of ethnographic and historical sources presented in the preceding chapters shows that the attribution of ‘equality’ to precolonial Kuki villages is misplaced. Rather than being a uniform/homogenous group, Kuki villages were complex social formations, exhibiting segmentary and ranked divisions into clans, and a division of work according to age, gender and skill that allowed competitive status differentiations between men. However, status differences were always balanced with the subsistence needs and welfare of the village, which was achieved either through material redistribution in the feast of merit, clan and family solidarity and, if necessary, ‘compulsory loans in rice to the poor’ (Mills, 1926: 107). Though class structures existed probably to a certain degree, accumulation of wealth was not an aim in itself as in modern capitalism, and labour relations were not the dominant form of social relations: inequality among Kuki villagers consisted mainly of symbolic expressions of status. The absence of caste did not make Kuki villages ‘egalitarian’ or ‘democratic’ in the modern sense. Because social change is always based on existing social forms (Saalmann, 2016), colonial and postcolonial social changes took on a different flavour amongst the Kuki tribes than in the rest of India.

We will sum up the argument here and highlight the main findings and observations. We will point out the relevance of the research for tribal community studies.

Overview of the Chapters

We begin with the summary of Chapter 2 as Chapter 1 is an introduction presenting the background of the research plan – the objectives and problems of the research, review of relevant literature, the lacunae in existing knowledge and the central themes and arguments of the thesis and outlines the methodology followed.

In Chapter Two, entitled ‘Ethnohistory of the Kukis: Origin, Socio-Cultures and Economic Organisation’, we explore the ethnohistory of the Kukis – genesis of the origin of ‘Kuki’ based on the writings of the colonial ethnographers and regional scholars. It also attempts to locate the various theories of the history of origin, migration and settlement of the Kuki ethnic group relying on regional scholars, folklores and oral history. The chapter further discusses the socio-cultures – family, kinship and marriage system; economic organisation – work culture, village labour system, bachelor’s dormitory; norms and values, and the principle of communitarianism in the traditional society.

In Chapter Three, entitled ‘Colonialism, Christianity and Social Change among the Kukis’, an attempt has been made to locate the history of colonialism and Christianity (missionaries) and its impact on the socio-religious and cultural life of the Kukis, particularly in Manipur. Like Christianity brought great changes in the socio-cultural life of the Kuki society. It changed their belief and their worldview. Christianity had given them a new sense of identity which had not prevailed among them before their conversion. It provided an ideology in accepting a new life style in the event of disappearing primitive religions, social and political institutions. Christianity has led to the decline of number of institutions that have prevailed among them before conversion. One such institution was the *thempu* (village priest) whose role is replaced by the Christian pastors. The pastors of the church have a predominant influence over the people and this influence is more or less based on ethical obligations rather than the obligation of well-being of the villagers. Previously, in case of any health issues in the village, the people used to consult the *thempu*, and today they consult the pastor. In all festivals and functions the role played by the pastor is very prominent. In a sense, their duty is to see the religious need of the people thus forming as new ‘priestly class’.

The colonial regime introduced and imposed new form of political administration system which was neither known nor experienced before. The missionary introduces modern education system alongside carrying out proselytisation to Christianity. The pressure of new political system, new religion and modern education left thin chances for tradition to survive, although the alien change was resisted but short lived. The colonial implement force and violence while the missionary utilised religion sentiments and western education to bring change and transformation.

The impact of colonial rule in the Kuki society is still felt today. The British rule brought about Western education and Christian religion. One of the most important impacts made by the Christian Mission is the unique contribution in the field of education. These agents were mainly responsible for social changes in the Kuki society. The changes led to

demoralisation of the Kuki people to a great extent till today. It also resulted into imitation and adoption of the Western culture. This led to relegation of their aged old traditions and values. These are also due to the early abolition of *Som* system. It was here that young boys learnt every type of informal education, arts and history, folktales and songs which shaped their moral and ethical conducts. When it was abolished, there was no other alternative as formal education introduced by Christian missionaries could not adequately fill the gap. Women status is another aspect of the community that has undergone change

In Chapter Four, entitled ‘Status, Wealth and Prestige in the Traditional Domain and Modern Context’, we have discussed social inequality in terms of wealth, status and prestige existed among the Kukis in pre-colonial times – in contrast to the ill-founded claim to ‘tribal equality’ in present public discourse. The transition of statuses among the Kukis from traditionally sanctioned to modern characters is a historical process. The stratification system, which is the system of distributing rewards to the members of society, determines social status. Social status, the position or rank of a person or group within the stratification system, can be determined in two ways. One can earn their social status by their own feats and skills, which is known as achieved status, or one can be placed in the social hierarchy by their inherited position, which is called ascribed status. As a tradition, ceremonies are opened to all. There was a space for everybody to make its citizen shine according to their ability. The weak, the strong, the wise, etc. have all the same opportunity to avail their strength within the societies. In a sense, social mobility was not rigid. The feast of merit was thrown open to all, though few of the population could actually achieved it, becoming an exclusive area. Therefore, categorization of society into higher or lower status had received a social cognizance from the early times.

Traditionally, the Kuki society is agrarian and they are a self-sufficient group. There is no accumulation of wealth in the society as it is decentralised through the culture of sharing through ‘feast of merit’. Notably, one of the most prominent features to exhibit one’s riches/wealth was by way of giving the ‘feast of merit’ which reflects magnificence, elegance and lavish Kuki way of life. The merit feast enhance some individuals or groups of people possesses certain power and authority in the society thereby laying the foundation for the elite class to emerge. It was the custom of the traditional Kukis for sharing one’s wealth by offering feast to the village community. Therefore, this act becomes an integral part of the social life of the Kukis. It seems that most feasts were, as they still are, clearly linked to a particular occasion, typically a rite of passage, such as a wedding or celebration of one’s feat etc.

In Chapter Five, entitled ‘Political Structure, Stratification and Dynamics of Power Relationship’, we critically examined how land has been the source of political power and authority in Kuki communities till the present time. The chapter explained the Kuki traditional governance systems under ‘chieftainship’ which is based on political authority derived from the control of land and resources for the past many generations. Moreover, the chiefs through their control over land, often project themselves as a living symbol of a common heritage, identity and sense of belongingness for the people. Despite the inroads of democratic system and the chiefs’ participation in democratic politics of Manipur state, the Kuki people are still guided by their traditional values and customary laws. I argue how ‘chieftainship’ has turned out to be a debatable issue in democratic governance under the Indian constitution. Despite all these, the Kuki elites and the chiefs continue to emphasise the indispensability of these traditional political institutions for the survival of their traditions and customary laws.

With the arrival of the British, the introduction of money system changes the value system in the society which in turn changes the socio-economic values system. Moreover, the inroads of modernization alter and modifies statuses from the past statuses, that is possession of large granary, mithun or belonging to chief family are no longer necessitate in determining one’s status. Modern assets and market valued property such as income and bank account, modern tools and appliances, vehicles, house type and land are gradually replacing wealth in the form of granary and cattle. Achieve status like education qualification, white collar job and successful business and enterprise are becoming more preponderant than the inherited status (such as chiefship). Not only in term of status but also in the materialistic valuing, social conduct and behaviour and worldly outlook. Although the traditional way is valued it is now substituted and embellish in modern form. People are no longer enchanted in taking the trouble of following tradition and custom in rigidity, when option is easily available to one disposition.

In Chapter Six, entitled ‘Locating Inequality and Class Formation’, we explained the transition of the tribal social system that is from traditional to modern led to the emergence of ‘modern elite’. They comprised of individuals attaining an esteem and superior social position by means of achieving or resourcing modern attribution and distinction. Their status and power are ideally derived by educational qualification, wealth/property, esteem and admirable occupation and political power. Basically, change brought by modernization or ‘intercultural contact on a worldwide basis’ gradually transform the traditional way of evaluating status and the structure of power distribution (Weinstein, 2011). In fact, the

emergence of modern elite or the elite and their predominant role indicates what Eisenstadt (1970) refers as 'ideological or value transformation'. The old traditional way becomes less effective and irrelevant in most cases where every aspect of the social system and its functioning is shaped by modern value, ideology and approaches. For example, barter system is replaced by capitalist form of market system, wealth is determined by the possession of property valued in the market and not by cultural and symbolical valuing. More than agriculture and allied occupation, white-collar job is desired and strive for. Power is no more an inherited privilege but gain through individual calibre and potential.

Along with the rise of the elite or tribal middle class many values and ideals that characterised traditional Kuki society are redefined. For instance, one such redefinition is with regard to wealth. It needs to be noted that in the past it was not the accumulation or possession of wealth per se but generosity in sharing or distribution of the wealth to the community was given the ultimate prestige and honour. Generosity, rather than thriftiness, was the norm accorded with importance by the Kuki in the recent past. Material wealth or riches are only the means, through social distribution, to acquisition of social prestige and positions in the society. The 'feast of merit' is a good example of this tradition. Thus, the notion of wealth amongst the Kuki was predicated upon generosity rather than hoarding.

Such beliefs acted prudently in mitigating the emergence of wide disparity between the rich and the poor in the remote past. Equally important is transformation at the cognitive and the attitudinal, level. The middle class being the product of Western education created new cognitive values, practices, thought categories and knowledge in direct opposition to the traditional values and practices, for instance, new notions of hygiene, beauty, and new leisure activities completely dissociated from the immediate Kuki way of life. Whosoever possesses such standards and cognitive values gained prestige and come to be accorded higher honour thereby ushering in new principles or bases for social differentiation.

In traditional Kuki society, the material riches of a person are calculated by giving merit feasts and gain their status from the public. Status in society was not conferred by wealth but by giving feasts. The social status of a wealthy or noble family in the traditional Kuki society was decided merely not by the accumulation of wealth but in terms of an effective use and disposal of the wealth for the cause of their society. The philosophy behind the performance of feast of merit is that the performer is honoured when he is alive and remembered after death. The deeper philosophy involved is, however, the sense of generosity and the warm heartedness towards the poor people who are fed on the occasion, said a Kuki elder.

However, the introduction of British administration and education system brought by Christian Missionaries the grouping of different people under different classes emerged. The advent of modern education revolutionises the membership of elite gradually. The neo-social elite group began to influence the working system of the administration at the village level as well as in the wider areas of society. It also led to decline the functions of traditional village chief, priest, and those who are considered as rich and wealthy persons (based on modes of agricultural production and number of land possessed). As a result, new classes such as bureaucrats, intellectuals/educated, business men, politicians, etc. emerged that makes the society under different strata or position. New administrative system changes the traditional system of classification. It gave away the social ranking and privilege class with new class coming to take place.

The cumulative effects of the spread of western education that leads to the growth of new occupations, growth of urban centres, commercialization of forests and agricultural products. During the fieldwork, it is observed that as the Kuki society emerges from the traditional tribal form and moves into modern industrial phase, we visibly see disparities between different sections of the population and between the rural and rural, rural and urban, and urban and urban areas. There is no doubt that during the recent years some have become very rich whereas the bulk of the population is still on the old standard of living. With educated Kukis holding important administrative positions and other prestigious and remunerative job the gap between the educated section and the uneducated section is widening. Not only in matters of financial emoluments and physical facilities but in other respects also, such as way of life and standards of living, great disparities are developing.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited in terms of its scope and ambit, various historical-sociological accounts are available in oral tradition, and are not properly documented for posterity. For instance, not all rites and rituals are included while discussing the traditional Kuki society. This study is limited to a particular tribal group (as it focuses only with the Thadou-Kuki speaking community within the Kukis) in a particular district in Manipur, and hence may not be applied to all tribal groups elsewhere since we all know that the Northeastern region in India is a mosaic of various tribes. Each tribe is unique and should not be treated as a homogenous category. Further, this thesis is limited to the ways in which social stratification has been examined. Social stratification has been examined in terms of parameters such as status and class, and how they exert power and forge power relations in the economy, culture

and polity. We are aware of the limitations of the study, but the present study may be taken as an example to interrogate the hitherto existing stereotype or preconceived notion of the Kuki community in Manipur.

Scope for Further Research

There is ample scope for the expansion of such analysis to other social groups and regions. Different sub-tribes and clans within the Kuki community may be studied for larger historical generalisations. The concept of social stratification and change may be widened; in other words, different parameters of social stratification and change may be examined within the matrix of a stratified Kuki society.



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Annexures

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Tribe, Class, Status and Power: Dynamics of Social Stratification and Change among the Kukis of Manipur

(Data obtained through the questionnaire will be used for research purpose only. Strict confidentiality will be made. Name will be used with prior permission.)

Household Survey

Sl. No.:

Date:

Profile of respondent:

1. Name of respondent
2. Sex: Male/Female
3. Age:
4. Name of village/ locality:
5. District
6. Assembly Constituency:
7. Name of the head of the household (*if not self*):
8. Relation with the head of household (*if not self*):
9. Marital status of respondent: a) Single b) Married c) Widow d) divorcee
10. Name of respondent's clan/ sub-tribe:
11. Family type: a) Nuclear b) Joint
12. Respondent relation with the village chief/elected head or village chairman:
13. Household profile:

Sl. No.	Name of the family members	Age	Gender	Relation with head of the family	Educational Qualification	Occupation
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						

Consumption Pattern

14. Respondent monthly income (in Rs.):
15. Total income of the family per annum (*in cash or in kind*): Expenditure of the family mostly incurred on:
16. Total expenditure of the family per month:
17. Number of dependent/s (*members without income*):
18. Types of meal consumed in a day: a) Breakfast (cost) b) Lunch (cost) c) Supper (cost) d) Dinner (cost)
19. Assets owned

A.

Sl. No.	Household items	Yes	No	Total	Remarks
1	Telephone				
2	Mobile				
3	Inverter				
4	Television				
5	Generator				
6	Washing Machine				
7	Computer				
8	Refrigerator				
9	Animal/s			Types of animals	

B.

Sl. No.	Vehicle/s	Yes	No	Purpose of use		Total	Remarks
				Private	Commercial		
1	Cycle						
2	Scooter						
3	Bike						
4	Auto rickshaw						
5	Car						
6	Jeep						
7	Truck						
8	Bus						
9	Any other						

Religion

19. Christian by birth? If no, since when have you converted

20. Which denomination do you belong to: Protestant b) Catholic c) Judaism d) Other

21. Practice of traditional beliefs: If yes, in what form

Social participation

22. Participation of respondent in the village administration: a) Yes b) No

23. Role in the village administration (if yes):

24. Any Organizations/Groups associated with: a) Yes b) No

25. Please mention the following details (if yes):

Name of Org/Group:

Your role/position in the Orgn. /Group: *(Also please mention the tenure of your position/role in the Org/group)*

Type of the Orgn. /Group: *(Example: Philanthropic, NGO, Human Rights, Local, Self Help Group, Student, Women, Political)*

25. Involvement in the Organisation/Group: a) Community b) Clan c) Tribe d) Village e) Town f) District g) State h) National i) International

Living Standard

26. Type of House:

- a) Kaccha house: Mud/Thatch/Bamboo
- b) Pucca house: Wooden/Tin roof/ Brick
- c) Any other type:

27. Sanitation:

- a) No latrine b) Sanitary latrine c) Non sanitary latrine
- b) Water facility:
 - a) PHE supply b) Well c) River d) Pond e) Reservoir f) Rain

28. Fuel used for cooking: a) Firewood b) Charcoal c) LPG d) Any other

Profile of Village/ Locality:

- 1. Number of households: 2. Year of establishment:
- 2. Clan/ sub-tribe of the village chief/elected head:
- 3. Type of administration: a) Chieftainship b) Elected council c) Any other
- 4. Number of schools in the village/ locality:
- 5. Types of school/s: a) Private b) Mission c) Government d) Other
- 6. Level of the school: a) Primary b) Intermediary c) High school d) above
- 7. Number of health care centre: a) Government b) Private
- 8. Community hall/centre constructed by: a) Government b) Community c) NGO d) Any other
- 9. Electricity: Yes/ No. If yes, how regular: a) Hours b) Day/s c) Weekly
- 10. Type of shops available: a) Grocery (Nos.) b) Vegetable (Nos.) c) Meat (Nos.)

- d) Pan Shop (Nos.) e) Other (Nos.)
13. Type of road in the village: a) Gravel road b) Bituminous road c) Earth road
d) Any other
14. Type of mass media available: a) TV (language) b) Radio (language) c) Newspapers (language) d) Any other
15. Mode of transport/vehicle used: a) Individual b) Private c) Government

Additional information:

Interview Schedule I (Internal)

Sl. No.:

Date:

1. Name of the respondent: 2. Age: 3. Sex: M/ F
4. Village/ locality: 5. Educational Qualification:
6. How many members are there in your household?
7. What is your main source of income?
8. How many members contribute to the household income?
9. Is/are there any school going member/s in your household? Nos.
10. How much do you spend on your children education?
11. What is your opinion about spending on your children's education?
12. Do you feel that times have changed? If yes, how?

13. Is/are there any aspects of the village/ locality life that you think is still untouched by change?

14. What are the aspects that you think has changed the most? 15. What is/are the major forces of change?

a) Endogenous (that is internally generated):

b) Exogenous (that is externally induced):

16. What do you think is the effect of change on tradition?

17. How strong is the hold of tradition over the members of the village/ locality today?

18. Do you agree that all the traditions that exist now are deeply rooted in the past?

19. What does one need to do or possess to 'belong' to the village?

20. Has the sense of belonging undergone change? If yes, in what sense?

21. Is there a change in the traditional land ownership system? If yes, how?

22. Does the changing nature of land use and land ownership pattern affect the sense of belonging?

23. How is land perceived today (as a commodity/property or means of livelihoods)?

Explain:

24. Do you think everyone get equal access to government development funds? If not, who get the most?

25. What is the position of women in the society in terms of inheritance (land/ property)?

26. Why do you think that people are becoming more conscious of one's identity in recent times?

27. What does being a Kuki/Chin/Zomi mean to you?

28. Do you assert a separate ethnic identity other than Kuki/Chin/Zomi? Yes/ No. If yes, how?

29. In your opinion, what is the reason behind the recent increase in conflict within the state based on identity claims?

30. The church is evidently becoming more prominent in the recent times. What could be the reason for these?

31. Do you think that the church will ultimately take over the roles and functions of traditional village institutions like the village council and the office of the headman?

32. How is the leadership style of the church different from the traditional village leaders (like the headman or the council of village elders)?

33. Looking at the present situation of the village do you notice any hint of how the coming years would be like living in the village?

34. How is the younger generation in the village responding to the changing scenario?
 35. How would you, as a youth, respond to the present circumstance of rapid change and conflict?
 36. How do you as a parent respond to the behaviour of the youth?
 37. How is the Korean culture impacting the society? Explain:
 38. Are you apprehensive that your tradition would be swept away by the forces of changes?
- Can it happen? How?
39. These day people talk about globalization and technological revolutions and so on, where do you think your village stands in the picture?

Additional information:

Interview Schedule II (External)

Sl. No.:

Date:

1. Name of the respondent:
2. Sex: M/ F
3. Age:
4. Village:
5. District:
6. Tribe/clan belongs to:
7. Occupation: Income (in Rs.): (monthly).
8. Are you familiar with change in Kuki society? Yes/ No. If yes, according to you what/which aspect of the society is greatly influenced by change?
9. Do you agree that change in the Kuki society is/ are influenced by external forces? If yes, can you recount any events/ factors which is responsible for social change among the Kukis?
10. Do you think Christian religion is responsible for change in Kuki society? If yes, how?
11. Do you think Western education is responsible for change in Kuki society? If yes,

how?

12. Do you think education has fragmented the Kuki society? If yes, how?

13. What defines a status? a) Income b) Government job c) Wealth d) Any other

14. Do you think the educational qualification determines one's status in the society?

15. Do you think the village social life is changing? If so, how

16. Do you think there is a change in the Kukis way of life (that is from agriculture to other forms of occupation)? If yes, explain:

What is your opinion about the changes in the society?

17. Do you think the meanings and values of tradition have eroded today? If yes, how

18. Do you think market economy (money) have impacted the social structure/relations?

If yes, how

19. To what extent the social change has affected the younger generation?

20. Do you think 'detribalization' is taking place among the Kuki people? If so, how

21. Do you think that Kuki society is classless and egalitarian? If no, please explain:

22. Do you think a new class is in emergence? If yes, who represent this new class?

a) Educated elites b) Contractors c) Businessman d) Any other

23. Do you think there is existence of inequality among the Kukis? If yes, how is it expressed?

24. Do you think there is a widening gap between the rich and the poor? If yes, how has it affect the social fabric?

25. How do you explain the economic disparities among different sections of the Kuki community?

26. What is your opinion about the newly emerging class?

27. To what extent the elite/middle class interfere with the traditions, customs and cultures, and in the church?

28. In your understanding what are the contribution of the emerging class in the society?

29. Is the newly emerging class responsible for widening the social gap?

30. Is there any partiality in the church or in any religious related affairs?

31. How is the church responding to division based on class and power?

32. Do you think the church has done enough to influence on this division?

33. How will you explain the interplay of power and class in Kuki society?

34. Who are the power wielders in the society today?

35. Is power vested to any particular individual/ group in the society?

36. How will you explain the relationship between economic power and social status in

the Kuki society?

37. What is your opinion about the prevalence of VIP culture in Kuki society?
38. Do you think striving for power led to less bonding and fragmentation in the society?
39. Do you think customary laws still plays a significant role today?
40. What is your view about the status of women in the contemporary Kuki society?
41. Can you elaborate your viewpoint on the positive and negative notes of change?

Additional information:

