

CLOTHING AND ITS SOCIAL LIFE: A STUDY ON KUKI SOCIETY DURING COLONIAL RULE

Dissertation submitted to University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the requirement for
the award of the degree of

Master of Philosophy

In

HISTORY

Submitted by:

Nengneilam Kipgen

19SHHL04

Under the supervision of

PROF. REKHA PANDE



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

PROF. C. R. RAO ROAD, GACHIBOWLI, HYDERABAD, TELENGANA, 500046, INDIA

May, 2022



DECLARATION

I, **Nengneilam Kipgen**, Enrolment Number **19SHHL04**, hereby declare that the research work in this dissertation, titled as “**Clothing and its Social Life: A Study on Kuki Society during the Colonial Rule**” submitted by me to the Department of History, University of Hyderabad, India, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil), is an original research work done by me under the supervision of Professor Rekha Pande. This is a bona fide research work and has not been submitted in part or in full for the award of any degree or diploma at this or any other University or Institution.

Additionally, this work has cleared the plagiarism Check at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Library, University of Hyderabad, India. A report bearing the plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed.

Student: Nengneilam Kipgen

Registration No.: 19SHHL04

Date:

//Countersigned//

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rekha Pande".

Supervisor: Prof. Rekha Pande

Date: 25th May, 2022



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Clothing and its Social Life: A Study on Kuki Society during the Colonial Rule**” submitted by Nengneilam Kipgen, bearing registration number 19SHHL04, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil), to the Department of History, University of Hyderabad, India is a bona fide work carried out by her. This dissertation is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rekha Pande".

Prof. Rekha Pande

(Supervisor)

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have rendered their valuable time and energy during my study of this research.

First and foremost, a special note of thanks to my supervisor Prof. Rekha Pande. I consider it my privilege to have had the opportunity to work under her guidance. I am sincerely thankful for her constant support, motivation and invaluable guidance throughout my research. Her experiences as supervisor and renowned research scholar have not only motivated me but also helped me in writing this dissertation. She has selflessly assisted me to review authentic literature, accessing online resources, development of a suitable research methodology. She has always helped me in critical evaluating books and articles and in writing techniques. Therefore, I am extremely grateful to her and for having been always ready to help whenever I needed her.

I also would like to express my immense gratitude towards my Co-Advisor, Dr. M. N. Rajesh to whom I am equally grateful for his patience, motivation, enthusiasm and insightful comments. His wide knowledge in various fields of history had always worked as a fuel for my exhaustive research enquiry and in information of various arguments. I am extremely thankful for being always ready to provide me with ideas and suggestions during the course of writing this dissertation.

Further, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the faculty members of the Department of History for giving me space and opportunities to enable me to widen the horizons of my knowledge and experience. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the office-staff of the department for patiently listening to my queries over the period of my Course. There are no proper words to convey my deep gratitude to University of Hyderabad for the wonderful opportunity given to me during my course. Well-equipped Library and Reading Room with 24/7 access gives me the comfort of working on my thesis in my own time.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Library staff of Indira Gandhi Memorial Library, Hyderabad, Library of the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Hyderabad; Library of the Evangelical College of Theology, Churachandpur and the Library

of Discipleship Training School of Churachandpur, Manipur for allowing me unhindered access to their Libraries and offering me enthusiastic assistance in finding necessary materials for my study.

I would also like to take this opportunity to render my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Prof. Radhika Singha (retd.) Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, for her invaluable suggestions, keen interest and encouragement at various stages of my research work. She has tirelessly rendered her help in suggesting and finding me any related informations about my research work and for that I pay my deep sense of gratitude.

I would like to thank my friends, Tingbem, Ulalboi and Thangboi for being there for me throughout the rough times, encouraging and motivating me whenever I was down or needed audience or evaluation for my rough ideas. I am hugely indebted and grateful to Anjali for her kindness and generosity during the writings of this dissertation. A note of thanks to all the HU Laijon family members, it was a great joy to have met and known you all. The random get-together for chai, the walks and the talks about different issues or nonsensical stuff was always a great stress reliever and educational at the same time. Your presences made this campus' life more fulfilling, exciting and enjoyable.

Words do not suffice to express how much grateful I am to my family: to my father, who has always been my support system and source of encouragement, to my mother, who bears every difficulties and hardships just so I could fulfil and achieve my dreams and to my dear sisters and brother who always stood by me and supported me and sharing the burdens and responsibilities that should have been mine to bear. Without their constant support, motivation and boundless patience, neither this journey nor these experiences would have been possible. I am sincerely and truthfully grateful.

Last, but not the least, I thank Lord Almighty for answering the prayers of all my loved ones who prayed steadfastly for my health, strength, and presence of mind all these years.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION	1-17
--------------	------

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KUKI TRADITIONAL SOCIETY	18-38
---	-------

Chapter 3

TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES OF WEAVING	39-54
-----------------------------------	-------

Chapter 4

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF DRESS IN KUKI SOCIETY	55-81
--	-------

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION	82-86
------------	-------

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All human societies, during the long course of evolution adapted to specific eco-zones and thus successfully reproduced not only their societies but also the associated cultural traits over generations. However, this adaptation and acquisition and transmission of cultural traits was conditioned by a complex set of factors that were ever changing. One such adaption to the environment and the successful preservation of a cultural trait is available in sartorial make-up of the society. It also reveals the gender and other hierarchies and also acts as a marker for ritual, ceremonial and everyday activities.

Thus, the study of dress also involves the study of the changing contexts. In this case, we have taken the study of Kuki society, in particular the Thadou-Kuki society, and try to understand historical change over a period of time using dress as a marker of change. Thus, the study of dress and clothing is a meeting point between the tangible and intangible heritage of any society and in this case the Kuki society and brings about new findings. We therefore can understand not only the material culture but its social and cultural locations. This dissertation is divided into a set of themes that are organised in five chapters on the basis of thematic unity.

1.1. Introduction to the Study

The present study which is entitled *Clothing and its social life: A study on the Kuki society during the Colonial Rule* is an attempt to study the clothing culture of the Kuki people with particular reference to the Thadou-Kuki community of Manipur. Transcending beyond its association with the naked body, clothing performed a range of social and cultural functions in various aspects such as individual, occupation, gender differences and social status. In Kuki society also, the norms about clothing and its culture found references and meanings in the concept of the status of modesty, religion, gender and social status that prevails among the people. With the onset of Colonialism and the encounter with the Western people and their culture, gradual but extensive

transformation began to ensue among the people which correspondingly affected the hitherto nature of existence of clothing norms among the Kukis.

Colonialism, it has been asserted, is not only an economic exploitation, but also a cultural exploitation as well. It has been almost a century since India got its Independence from the British Colonial rule, but its legacy is still palpable in every aspect of institutions from social to political and most vividly in the cultural sphere. Owing to the West's preconceived notions about indigenous people, the hill tribes of Northeast India, like other colonised people has been ascribed with several derogatory terms such as wild, sadistic, barbaric, primitive, uncivilized so on and so forth as observed from the various literatures and discourses produced.

The nature of the colonial rule over the North-eastern region has been often portrayed as benevolent, as “governed by motives of humanity”¹. Colonisation, it was supposed, was “not meant to be exploitative and enslaving”² but “the most precious gift for all those caught in a state of barbarous disorder”³. Subsequently colonialism in the North-eastern hill regions was veiled under the project of “civilising mission” which was operated through different agencies but mainly through the missionaries. Henrika Kuklicka opines that a society becomes a “civilised” society only when it is ruled by reason rather than emotion, by distinct legal code and most importantly when it is Christianised.⁴ The inclusion of Christianity as a criteria is quite profound in its implications. The missionaries put much emphasis on the improvement of the temporal backwardness of the people. They essentially engaged in transforming the people not only of their heart and soul but also of their behaviours and practices. The argument being that as much as doctrine is important, it is meaningless if not associated with transformed life. Consequently, it is observed among the North-East hill tribes during the 19th century that, Christianity began to be understood to mean a new way of life, demanding therefore, of the converts to renounce any association with their ancestral cultures both in terms of religion and other social and cultural practices. Clothing which is also a form of cultural expression bearing social and cultural significance of its own, henceforth, loses its meanings.

The Kukis of Manipur came into direct encounter with the missionaries only towards the end of the twentieth century, when the Colonial State permitted entry of missionaries in Manipur in 1894. However, cultural changes among the people became more rapid after the Anglo-Kuki War. In the

Anglo Kuki War of 1917-1919, Kukis were defeated and due to their antagonistic attitudes towards British imperialism, the erstwhile Kuki country was trifurcated among three independent countries after Independence, namely India, Myanmar and Bangladesh erstwhile Eastern Pakistan. It subsequently affected their collective experiences depriving them of their cultural unity. Several factors like employment opportunities, political agenda, contact with the outside world etc., often served as catalysts of change, however among the Kukis, the arrival of Western missionaries and their professed Christian belief seems to exert much more influence over the process of change in the society. By establishing contact, both in a direct and indirect means, the colonial agents and Christian missionaries became an instrumental tool in bringing social and cultural changes in the Kuki society of the time. The worldview of the Kukis were thus, irreversibly affected condemning their ancestral culture and practices on the brink of oblivion. The present study is therefore undertaken to understand the social and cultural functions of clothes in the early Kuki society.

Clothes, falling in line with the more recent anthropologists, is not only a material to cover one's nudity or physical protection, rather it is a medium that is rendered a site of expression. Clothing and by extension its functions are the "bearers of cultural information"⁵ that "includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society"⁶. In short, it implies the learned behaviour of man in contrast to the genetically endowed behaviour. However, no society is ever completely static throughout the course of its historical evolution and so is their culture. Clothes of the Kukis as an exhibitor of change underwent several transformations over the period, prompted by different factors, like socio-political, religious, and economic which influence the individual self. If we are to abide by the theory of Cohn that, "traditional" is not something that found its origins from time immemorial but rather a recent creation, then the individual self could be said to have played a massive role in the creation of it. This act of creation, Pravina Shukla argues, could be understood only by "attending at once to individuals and their circumstances, paying attention to standards, to acts of desire, and to the forces of consumption and social response."⁷ Today, the Kukis have incessantly made attempts to revive the authentic meanings and values attached to clothes in their primal days. In a traditional society like the Kukis, their worldview hardly transcends beyond their community and environment. Customs and cultures guided by their belief systems dictate their everyday lifestyles and was rigidly followed. It was, as it still is, a closely knitted community. Systematic institutions and structures of governance for every crime and punishments, detail procedures of

rituals etc., was established to sustain the community. It was an intimate society with unique systems of marriage practices that ensures a long-lasting relations between families. Their Customary practices acted as a guidance in maintaining the structures of their society. And clothes and ornaments which were considered a valued material assets was highly important in performing such customary practices. It was these institutions, beliefs and practices that were attacked by the onslaught of Colonialism under the guise of “civilizing mission”. The project was purported as benevolent, to tame the “wildness” of the people by transplanting the native’s principles, laws, institutions and manners. The present study will, however, not look into how colonial state or missionaries had transformed the structures of the society. It will rather briefly describes the various institutions and practices to better grasp the reason why clothing materials were exceptionally important to the Kukis.

Clothes in early Kuki society was mainly confined to the woven cloth and is known as *pon* in general. It was worn roughly in a similar manner irrespective of gender; draping and tucking, and accessorised with ornaments. Self-sufficient in their means of livelihood, Kukis produced their own garments and every girl was educated from childhood to learn the skill. Weaving among the Kuki people is performed using local tools and implements. Loin-looms, which was locally made was used by the weavers. Knowledge and skills in weaving was highly sought-after in a women. Apart from its daily necessities, the importance of learning the technique was also heightened by the social and cultural importance of *pon* in the society.

The role of dress in both the personal and social life of a person is phenomenal. Apart from providing protection to the body, it also has the potential to give certain kinds of identity to the wearers such as individual identity, social identity, and political identity among others. The notion of the term “dress” applied here is all encompassing, in that it includes everything that was used to adorn or cover the body. Even during the pre-colonial days, the tribals in the hill districts of Assam such as the Nagas, Lushais, Khasis, Garos etc., have their own distinct ways of identification through their dressing either through the patterns or styles of clothes, their hairstyles, tattoos and so on. Every distinct design and patterns in their clothes, tattoos or hairs were noted to have had their own symbolic significance.

During the pre-colonial period, the dressing styles of the hill tribes was far from uniform, not in terms of patterns nor designs yet it exhibited definite forms and styles of each own. Not only were there distinct dressing styles between the numerous existing tribes of the hills but there were also distinctive symbolic values and differences even within a particular community. For instance, the dress of a warrior has its own distinct mark from a non-warrior or distinct patterns between married and unmarried women etc. In addition to being a bearer of distinct social status, dresses or clothes were also used to express and signify a certain occasions or festivity or death as well like the “military costumes” which constantly recur in Mary Mead Clark’s work, or the “gala dress” of Hutton’s or the others worn on the occasion of labour, or at home. This symbolic meaning and values attached to the dress shows that it was not only a means of covering but an element which was intricately woven within the socio-cultural fabric of the society

The word Kuki here is taken as a generic term, which includes a number of tribes, sub-tribes or clans with slight variations in customs and manners, however with certain common characteristics that marked them off from other people such as the Meiteis, the Garos, the Khasis and the Nagas.⁸ The Kukis, comprising these various tribes and sub-tribes occupy a major chunk of north eastern terrain (in India), upper Chindwin and the chin hills of Myanmar, and the Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh. The present study focuses primarily on the Thadou Kuki dialect speaking community of the Kukis in Manipur state. Thadou is one of the recognized tribes in Manipur, which according to the 2011 census of the Kuki population of Manipur is the largest population of the Kukis.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The Kukis are of rich traditional heritage; the richness of this is often displayed in their numerous traditional materials such as dress and ornaments, arts and crafts which includes the various designs of weaponry, agricultural implements and various others as well. These materials are the living testimonies of aesthetic values inherited from their predecessors bearing great cultural significance to the society. But, the advent of colonialism and Christianity into the region had tremendously transformed them, a society which was extremely adherent towards following its ancestral ways of life. Clothing is one such aspects of the change.

Regardless of its supposed intention, the Christian missionaries who subsequently followed the British colonial administration had strove to eliminate much of the traditional practices and

material heritage of the people. Today, the Kuki people made a conscious effort to preserve and protect the traditional materials through multiple agencies. But, it's open to see that apart from special festivals, social functions and other formal occasions or events, the people were already accustomed to western styles both in dresses and lifestyles. As a consequence of this venture, the traditional materials and the meanings and values associated with, is on the verge of disappearance and disused.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The objective of the present study is basically a humble attempt to revisit the social and cultural significance of clothing in the traditional Thadou-Kuki society. It seek to understand the nature of consumption of dress in the early Kuki society and how that was affected by the wide spreading Western culture over the region of their geographical settlement.

1. To understand the socio-cultural relevance of dress in the early Kuki society.
2. Understanding what “civilised” clothes meant to the missionaries and how that contrasts the existent nature of consumption among the Kukis.
3. How did the people negotiate their existing values and significance to the new “civilised” clothes?
4. Examine whether the hitherto existing ancestral values and significance attached to dress perpetuated after the appearance of a standardised traditional dress.

1.4. Research questions

The Kuki society in the post-Colonial period is marked with new beliefs and practices which were significantly distinct from its pre-colonial period. This tremendous change was most visible in the changes of its material culture mainly in their clothing appearance and choices. Thus, to study the socio-cultural relevance of dress in the Kuki society and the subsequent change over the course of the period, the following questions will be the guiding principles:

1. What were the social and cultural conditions of the society under which a new form of culture got itself assimilated to?
2. How was weaving as a means of clothing production engaged and performed in the society.

3. In what ways was clothing consumed and what were its symbolic cultural significances were?
4. To what extent does the alien Western culture transformed the society itself—in terms of its social and cultural relations.
5. How far and how much of the old traditions and cultures got itself carried over into the new transformed society.

1.5. Methodology

The study is based on examination and analysis of data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are obtained from government records such as ethnographic and administrative reports and writings, missionary accounts, censuses etc, which are available digitally or in institutional libraries. State archival sources, however, could not be accessed as it was closed due to the pandemic. As the necessary materials are not found adequately from books alone, oral in the form of informal discussions, conversation with knowledgeable persons who are well versed in the area of the study are also considered, which are of immense help for the study. Recorded oral traditions of the Kukis are also considered. Collection of pictures and photographs are taken into consideration within the sources of the study.

Secondary sources are obtained from books which have little or direct bearing on the study area for which access to libraries is employed along with books obtained by present researchers. Journals, souvenirs, unpublished books/booklets, dissertations etc, written in both English and vernacular languages and also electronic sources which have little or direct bearing on the area of the study are also collected. Secondary sources, which itself is dependent on primary sources, serve as the major references for quotations, citations, and to drive new interpretations and hypotheses. The findings of others are brought together in support of the researcher's own hypothesis.

1.6. Scope of Study

The present study covers the various types of dress and ornaments of the Kukis during the colonial period. Traditional institutions and customary practices are also mentioned in order to understand the nature of importance of clothing to the people. Weaving as a traditional mode of clothing

production is also included as part of the study. The study is limited to the Thadou-Kuki dialect speaking group of the Kukis of Manipur.

1.7. Review of Literature

The Kukis of Manipur: A historical analysis by T.S. Gangte provides an elaborate and descriptive study of the social and political structure of the Kuki society as well as religion. It elucidated the everyday lives of the people as he analysed the various operating forces that efficiently runs and operates the society such as the institutions of chieftainship and village council, the institutions of *Som* and *Lom* which were essentially an educational as well as basic economic life giving system and the religious belief systems that acted as the guiding principles in their day-to-day life. He also deals in great details about the marriage institutions that were practiced and observed in the society, the familial relationship created thus strengthened the essence of their traditional society, a closely knitted one. These institutions, according to Gangte, maintains orderliness and propriety within the society. He also describes the numerous ritual ceremonies of the Kukis which he deemed were significant in upholding the traditional cultural and social practices of the Kukis. Gangte is also of the opinion, that the introduction of western education through the Christian missionaries has moulded the lifestyle and the worldview of the people which got reflected in several ways. The study is extremely informative in understanding the social, political as well as religious lifestyle of the Kukis, but it has limited input on the material culture of the people.

Relevance of Thempu in Pastoral Ministry: A Socio-theological Perspective by Paul Lelen Haokip deals with the concept of priesthood or *thempu* and Christian beliefs. It is an intensive study which juxtapose traditional *thempus* against the institution of Catholic Priest. It deals with the multifaceted roles and duties *thempu* assumed within the community, in the various aspects of their traditional lifestyle from being a medicine man treating illnesses to performing ritual and ceremonial sacrifices. As religious life in the society is deeply enmeshed with the social, political, economic and even cultural life of the people, the book is instrumental in relooking the historical past of the people.

Christian missions and colonialism: In this book, Lal Dena looks into the role of Christian missions viz-a-viz the colonial state in the North-East. By tracing the course of arrival of the missions into the region, Dena provides insights into the nature of the relationship between the missionaries and the colonial state regarding the subject people. However, the incapability of the people to differentiate between the two, he argued, made the native saw the European rule as beneficial. Dena also seems to agree with the perception that missionary work in the region brought development in the region. While navigating the nature of the relationship between the two, Dena argues that the colonial state exploited the missionaries for their own interest which eventually draws the impression of collaboration between the two.

Weaving and Dyeing in Highland Ecuador edited by Ann Pollard Rowe is an explorative study on the evolution of weaving and its techniques and dyeing of fabrics over the course of time in the Highland Ecuador. It asserts that as much as weaving represents indigenous body of knowledge, it is also a creative outlets of the weavers. The authors shows how shifts in the geo-political environment affected the making and consumption of clothing materials by the people. The shift are reflected in the tools and techniques used and the designs and patterns woven on the cloths. The book provides insights into the technical aspects of the production of cloths using traditional looms.

Patterns of Culture: Decorative Weaving Techniques is a book co-authored by M. A Hann and B. G Thomas. The book attempts to provide an explanation on why there are similar cultural traits such as weavings among different groups of people and whether this similarities were a product of independent invention or a parallel development or a product of diffusion of the knowledge and skills associated with weaving and its decorative techniques. The diffusion, they observed could have occurred through trades or socio-political changes or through religious proselytization over period of encounter between different cultural groups.

Clothing through American History: The British Colonial Era is a descriptive coverage of the change in clothing among the Americans during the colonial era. Co-authored by Kathleen A. Staples and Madelyn Shaw, the book is based on the conception that clothing is not socially neutral but always under the influence of several factors meant to convey information about the social, economic and legal status, ethnicity and religious affiliation of its wearers. They noted that dress

is an outward and visible sign of a person's place in society. Before the rampage of manufactured clothes, clothing were made by the individual self which consumed ample amount of time and resources. This, they argued made clothing more valuable. The observation is imperative in understanding why *pon* (woven cloth) was considered a valued assets among the Kukis. The authors also looked into the various social significances of dress; from defining social status, gender, religion, age, ethnicity and race, by looking into the various sumptuary laws introduced both in Britain and British Colonial America.

Peter Corrigan, in his book *The dressed society*, has explored the various ways dress made its impact in the social life of man, touching upon topics like dress as an object that is capable of reading a particular society and of its individual. He observed that during pre-romantic areas, people acting as groups or communities try to conform to one particular ideal of life which displays them as one and equal. In short, the pre-romantic individual emphasised the commonality of mankind. However, contrary to the pre romantic individual with the onset of the romantic period, such ideologies became outdated with man becoming purely individualistic, this romantic individual saw individual as a distinct and autonomous being.

In the book *An Encounter of Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries, and their Changing Worlds, 1867-1900*, Marrine Carrin and T. L Harald tries to illustrated the fact that the encounter between the missionaries and the tribal people was not in fact, an encounter of the central and the periphery but rather an encounter of two peripheries. They argued that these missionaries who have set out to preach the gospel were themselves emerging largely from the neglected society of the "civilised" world of the West. With some growing up from a rural countryside or in the industrial slump as industrial workers, whose life had been regulated by the industrial machine clock, with no special regards for kinship or family. Self-reliance became the norm of their life. So, they noted that, having grown up from such lifestyles, the missionaries tries to impart the same principles to the people they intend to "civilize" and proselytize.

Terence Turner in his article *The Social Skin* explores the idea that dress are like a social skin of a person. He argues that dress and bodily adornments are like a cultural medium that shaped and communicate both personal as well as social identity. By looking into the life of the Kayapo tribes

of the Southern parts of the Amazon forests, he observed that although the dress of the Kayapo tribes looked peculiar and unusual as they wear no fabrics as coverings but the artistic designs and patterns tattooed on their body possessed symbolic significance of its own which found relevance to the people.

In the book entitled *Understanding Media, The extensions of man* under the chapter *Clothing: Our extended skin* Marshall McLuhan stated that clothing is a direct extension of skin, and of the wearers. Since seeing is the first necessity to identify and associate a certain kind of standards or identity to a person, the outer skin or the social skin of a person becomes an important element of a social life of an individual. He argues that if not seen or noticed by the observers, dress possessed no significance to a person, for it is like a medium of communication through which messages are constructed and sent. By looking into the English feudal period, he showed how clothes projected the identity of its wearers as the people were dressed according to the way they spoke which differed on their status and position in the society.

Nirad Chaudhuri's work *Culture in the Vanity Bag*, 1976 is a perfect elucidation of the various relationships clothes have with society and the world. Written in the context of India, Chaudhuri was an apologist of the aesthetic values of the "traditional" Hindu clothes. He writes that the evolution of clothes is correspondent to the historical evolution of the peoples. He touches upon several kinds of issues concerning it. Clothing and the various kinds of adornments exhibited on the body of a person, he argues, are an expression of the nature of things that the individual lives in. Chaudhuri was a fervent apologist of the "fixed" Hindu costumes. He completely rejects the questions of morality attached to clothes, of choosing Muslim costumes over Hindu costumes. Challenging such notions, he argues that the moral question is nothing but an "association of ideas" and thus a matter of opinion. He also further argues that clothes, especially in the context of Indian women, cannot be associated with the idea of being an "inter-sexual affair", it was not to please the eyes of the opposite gender but rather an "asset" just as money, property, land etc., are to man.

Clothing Matters is a book written by Emma Tarlo. Tarlo writes that clothes not only convey messages but also construct identity. According to her, clothes have the potential to reveal much about a particular society, history, politics and most importantly it plays an active role in signifying one's own identity or at least how they wished to express it. Clothes, she remarked, have the

potentiality of framing and shaping perceptions and opinions of the people about the wearer or wearers. Apart from this, she laid much stress on the role of the individual as an agency in the framing of identity, especially that of the individual.

In an article entitled *Sainghinga and His Times: Codifying Mizo Attire*, Joy Pachuau explored the various ways in which people negotiated their identity during the colonial period, a period when there was much cultural innovations especially on clothing. By trying to look through the eyes of Sainghinga, a Mizo who went to France as a Labour Corps and later served as an interpreters and an Office Clerk in the colonial administrative office, Pachuau shows that despite the various criticisms and recommendations for a certain styles of clothing, the ultimate decision lies with the individuals and that it was through this agency that a condition of hybridization emerged in the clothing styles of the people. Apart from the importance of such agency, she also explored the various ways in which the new sets of culture values have replaced the various symbolic significances of old styles of clothing. She noted that with new styles of clothing was attached new significances, for instance, the quality of the clothes became a signifier of status rather than the various decorative items like before.

Joy Pachuau and Willem van Schendel, in the book *The Camera as Witness*, attempts to understand the history of the Lushai Hills people mainly through the lens of the photographs. They showed from the various photographs produced during the colonial period that the incorporation of the hill tribes within the administration of British India in the late 19th century, has brought serious self-reflection and reorientation of their worldview among the people. They argued that the cultural innovations that emerged following colonisation was certainly not westernisation because these innovations, Pachuau and Schendel asserts, does not make the Mizos any less Mizo. In fact, they further traced how these cultural encounters inspired the people to explore the various possibilities of expressing their identities through clothing, both of their individual and collective identities, especially by the eve of the Independence.

In the book *Clothes and its form of Knowledge*, Cohn talks of how the “wild” Nagas tribesmen and women were brought down to Calcutta with their “traditional dress”, on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales, mainly to show their wild and barbarous dances which were anything but Victorian. By illustrating the incidents of the Naga Tribesmen on the occasion of Princes of

Wales visits, Cohn depicts how clothes was used as an instrument to project a certain kinds of narratives. He further argues that parading the Nagas with all their cultural paraphernalia was mainly an attempt of the administrators to project as well as draw a certain kinds of perceptions to and from its audience respectively. Cohn also further examined how over the course of the period, the meanings attached to clothes for certain societies has become transformed and took on altogether different meanings in terms of its relationships with the outside world. His observation on the experience of Mr. M.G Sagar and the history of how Sikh turban became a symbol of religious beliefs and a traditional signifier is illuminating in two broad aspects. On the one hand, Mr. Sagar's refusal to discard his turban for the uniform shows how individual choice is instrumental in deciding the significance of clothes. Cohn shows that, while the administration insisted on uniformity, it was however dependent on the choice of the individual whether to adopt and incorporate such diktats. Cohn also further explored another interesting realm of clothes, citing F.W Buckler's take on the significance of the Mughal Khilat in the 16th century. According to this practice, the king, as a special honour, took off his robes and put it on his favoured subject, thus transmitting his power. Although this latter take on the significance of clothes is not particularly relevant to the hill tribes of northeast India, its implications are insightful. From Cohn's various analysis, it can be seen how the idea of "social skin" as coined by Turner is negotiated.

Vibha Joshi's article called *Dynamics of Warp and Weft: Contemporary trends in Naga textiles and the Naga collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford* (2000), is also quite instrumental in understanding what is called today as traditional dresses. Through his observance of the various historical and archival collections and its captioned remarks, he notes that the various clothing styles that have become an identity signifier of the community as a whole, especially after Independence, was not in fact that same tradition that has been passed down from generations but a cultural innovations that took shaped over time. Regardless of the originality of these so-called traditional dresses, what can be noted here is the conscious effort that the local people have made regarding their identity and its projection through certain kinds of clothes.

Tezenlo Thong, whose article *To raise the Savage to a higher level*, is also quite important in studying how the impact of the colonial and missionary period were felt by the people of today. In the article, Thong states that the incursion of the Western agents such as the Colonial agents and the missionaries into the Naga soil, left an indelible mark on the culture and lifestyles of the people

which he conveniently acknowledged as westernisation. This readily-subscription of the terminology by Thong, who himself is a Naga is reminiscent of what the Comaroffs had observed whereby the ex-colonial subjects used the terms and understanding of the colonial rulers while trying to fight for their own place. In a way, Thong's writing can also be considered as the pinnacle of the Western influence which continues to have a resounding echoes in the life of the people. In this article, Thong himself is trying to explore the extent of the effect of colonisation upon the culture of the people both by the colonial states and the missionaries, which for some purpose has been continued to be understood as the civilising mission.

Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient by Edward W. Said is about the western attitudes and conceptions towards the Orient, which essentially consists of the Middle Eastern, Asian and African societies. In this book Said analyses how the West considered themselves as both racially and culturally superior over the Oriental societies who were essentially described as static and undeveloped. Said also remarked that in the production of knowledge, a scholar cannot remain uninfluenced and detached from the circumstances of life or of his involvement with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. He argues that in the production of knowledge, one comes up against the Orient as European or American first, and an individual second and hence one cannot be non-political. This book is crucial for the present study to understand the Western attitudes and perceptions of the hill people which consequently affected their modes of operations among the natives.

Missionary and colonial writings on the native subjects

The book *A Corner in India*, written by Mary Mead Clark is a narrative account by the author of her experience with the Ao Nagas in the Naga Hills. In the book she describes the various characteristics of the people ranging from their untidy appearance to their beliefs and practices. The importance of education as the only means to educate the civilised way of life such as cleanliness, discipline, self-reliance etc., was highly stressed in the work. Clark's work, like their modus operandi for the region is essentially founded on the basis of the perception that the natives were primitive and uncivilized. It is informative for the study as it throws light into the nature of relationship between the missionaries and the natives during the period.

Linguistic Survey of India by G. A Grierson provides a broad description on the origin and characteristic behaviours of the Kukis while also briefly discussing their traditional social and political institutions. He also discussed about the appearance of the people like the ways they wear their hairs and dress. His description of their clothing patterns implies of the absence of morality associated to nudity. However, he hardly discussed about the social and cultural significance attributed to clothing by the people.

Forty Years in Manipur by William Pettigrew is a collection of his contribution in the Baptist Missionary Magazine ranging over a period of several years. It mainly deals with his journeys in establishing mission schools and his proselytizing activities. He also briefly recount how the Kukis requested for teachers and pastors to come and help them. Even though his reports barely concerns the Kukis, it is nevertheless instrumental in understanding the attitudes and perceptions of the missionaries about the people they ventured to “civilise”.

Ethnographical Gallery by A. M Meerwarth briefly discussed the commonalities of tribals, their religious beliefs and socio-cultural practices as well. She briefly enumerated the flourishing cottage industry of the Kuki people. According to her, the knowledge of the technique of weaving emerged from making bamboo baskets of various patterns. She also asserted that both cotton and dyes which were the primary elements in traditional weaving were locally grown and produced. Her description of the dress of Kukis is instrumental as she provides elaborate descriptions on how it was worn while also discussing about its social and cultural significance.

A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes by C. A Soppit is a broad description of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes. Based on their slight differences, he classified Kuki as Rangkhoh and Jansen wherein he put Thadous as belonging to the Jansens who were ruled over by hereditary rajahs. He provides a range of descriptive details about the Kukis which could mostly be interpreted as antagonistic in its evaluation by calling them as effeminate or ascribing derogatory terms to the people. But his contributions in the clothing aspects of the people is quite elaborative and insightful. His accounts mentioned about the social and cultural functions of clothes in the society, stating for instance that married women gave up their ornaments after their marriage or that on the death of a rajah, each funeral guest are expected to give one cloth for the use of the corpse. He also briefly mentioned on the weaving of cloth by the people.

1.8. Organisation of the study

The present study has been arranged into five chapters which are as follows:

The first chapter is an introductory chapter and it deals with the introduction of the study, of the research title, about the study and its objectives and questions, the methods approach to perform this study and its scope of study. It also deals with reviewing the kinds of literature that has been done on the field.

The second chapter will be about the traditional society of the Kuki, the socio-political as well as religion and economic lifestyles of the people. It is considered imperative to understand the people and their lifestyle to understand the nature of consumption of dress during the period.

The third chapter deals with the weaving techniques of the Kukis in producing their clothes. Prior to the influx of manufactured products, clothes, which were largely drapes of different shapes and sizes were woven locally by the womenfolk. nature of the encounter of the Kuki society and the alien Western culture.

The fourth chapter will focus on the socio-cultural relevance of dress in the early Kuki society. Dress embodies both fabrics and other decorative ornaments relevant to the people. Far from being a simple protective mechanism, dress functioned intricately within the socio-cultural relationship of the people. Thus, the chapter will look into the nature of consumption of dress during the period and how it was affected by their encounter with Western culture. It has to be noted here that the term Western here is meant to denote both the Americans and the Europeans, generalising them while considering their little differences as minor and focusing more on their similarities.

The fifth chapter is the conclusion, which summarises the whole chapter with the major findings of the study drawn in the light of the discussions in each chapter of the dissertation.

This chapter has outlined the plan of the thesis and in doing so examined the research questions and scope of the study. One may therefore argue that there is a case for the study of dress in Kuki society based on the same materials.

¹ Sanghamitra Misra, "The nature of colonial intervention in the Naga Hills, 1840-1880, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 51 (Dec. 19-25, 1998), pp. 3273-3279, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4407496> Accessed: 28-03-2019 06:13 UTC, p. 3273

² Ibid, p. 3274.

³ Ibid,

⁴ Henrika Kuklick, 1991. *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

⁵ N.I. Vukvukai, "Chukchi traditional clothing as historical source of cultural transformation", *Études/Inuit/Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1/2, Tchoukotka / Chukotka (2007), pp. 311-315, Université Laval, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42870248> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:07 UTC

⁶ Peter Haokip, "Cultural Tradition, Renewal and Modernity: A Challenge to all Cultures", in Joy Thomas & George Keduolhou Angami (eds.) *India's Northeast: A Celebration of Cultures*. ISPCCK: Delhi(2019), p.22

⁷ Pravina Shukla, 1995. *Costume: Performing identities through dress*, Indiana University Press, 2015. p.3

⁸ P. Misao, "The Early Life of the Kuki-Chins," in Sanajaoba (ed.), *Manipur Past and Present*, Vol. 3, Mittal publications: New Delhi, p. 136. (Hereafter cited as Misao, The Early Life of the Kuki-Chins)

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KUKI TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

2. 1. Introduction

History is usually based on written records or documents, or archaeological evidence. As Ashis Nandy writes, historical mode occupies the most dominant mode of reconstructing the past because of the links the idea of history has established with the modern nation-state, modern science, secular worldview, development etc., which legitimized and authorized it to reconstruct one's past¹. Therefore, the concept of history, in general is accepted as a period when there exists written record, which consequently leaves millions within the ambit of what Nandy called "ahistorical society", who lived in the "periphery and interstices of the historic society"². Nandy went on to argue that, the main reason behind the attribution as ahistorical is the embodying of the concept of mythology, which is regarded as "irrational, retrogressive, unnatural, and fundamentally incompatible with historical sensitivities"³. Prior to the domination of the Kukis by the British Colonial State, the Kukis possessed no written records, which by previous arguments, has thus becomes "ahistoric society" according to the mainstream historians. However, it would be grievously disastrous to assume that the people had no historical past or denies the oral traditions as mythology with no grain of truth simply because of its absence in written forms. As Portelli writes, Oral sources are credible with a different credibility.⁴ Oral sources, mainly as a narrative, poetry, song, dance, myths and fables, and sacrificial chants etc., portrayed the meaning of life as experienced by the society at its particular time and place. Oral traditions encapsulates the traditional beliefs and customary practice, and of their ways of life as well⁵, which essentially includes their material cultural practices too. Thus, oral history has become a generally accepted method and primary source of reconstructing the historical past of a non-literate society. The Kuki society, with no written records about their historical past, tracing and reconstruction of the origin of the Kukis as well as their socio-economic, political, religious and cultural past, one has to rely largely upon the oral tradition. Oral tradition here means messages, which are passed on from one generation to another in the form of folk songs or tales which are told and retold in the society in which they have lived. It cannot be denied however, that although the Thadou-Kuki people

possessed a rich collection of folk literature, certain limitations continue to perpetuate while reconstructing their historical past. In particular, while writing on the history of the material culture of the Kuki people, oral narratives alone does not suffice. However, by understanding the nature of the society and its structure, the close inter-relationship of the various institutions and practices could contribute in understanding the relevance of material cultural practices within the society, in this case the socio-cultural relevance of clothes in a society. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the traditional lifestyle of the Kukis which perpetuate over the course of time guided by their oral traditions transmitted through the various institutions and practices to establish the close inter-relationships retained for efficient functioning of the structures of the society.

2. 2. Origin of the Kukis

Various conjectures and theories emerged regarding the origin of the term Kuki. The origin of the word is shrouded in ambiguity, however, it is believed to have first appeared in 1794 in a writing “*On the Manners, Religion, and Laws of the Cuci’s, or Mountaineers of Tippra*” by John Rawlins in Asiatic Researches, where he describes about the social and cultural characteristics of the people in brief.⁶ Several indigenous writers opined that the word, ‘Kuki’ draws its derivation from the language, custom, culture and tradition of the people themselves. According to L. Kaikhomang Khongsai, the words, ‘ku’ and ‘ki’ were words frequently used by the primal Kukis. The word ‘ku’ signified a joyous sound made during celebrations of victory in war or hunt, while ‘ki’ means the horn of an animal which they used as a drinking cup of traditional wine. Khongsai, therefore opined that the neighboring plains people may have, as a result, called them as Kuki, to identify the primal Kukis.⁷ Jamkhomang Haokip writes that the term is derived from a Bengali word, ‘cuci’ which means “who behave as they like”.⁸ Several other narratives also emerged on the question of the origin of the term Kuki. Another such narratives claim that the word “*Kuki*” originated from a Chinese word, *Ku* which means lake, and *Ki* means the people. Therefore, according to this view, *Kukis* are believed to be the original inhabitants of the land around the “*Ku*”, a lake in China.

However, it has been largely accepted that the term Kuki is a generic term or nomenclature which covers and includes a number of tribes, sub-tribes, and clans with varying customs and manners, with certain common characteristics that distinguish them from other people. According to J. H. Hutton, the Kukis were known and identified differently by their neighbours. He writes that some

of the Thadous, he believed to be the Haokips in particular, refer to the Kukis as Khongshai in general and also by the Meiteis as well.⁹ C. A Soppit writes that the designation “Kuki” is never used by the tribes themselves, however, they answered to it when addressed by the same “knowing it be the Bengali or plains terms for their people”¹⁰. Soppit, however claims that it was probably a result of differences in dialect in pronunciation, from the word “*Luahai*” which means Lua people, the people ruled by the Lua King. He theorized that perhaps the name was given by the few traders who crossed paths with the people. According to him, the term “*Luahai*”, becomes “*Lukai*”, then “*Kukai*” and ultimately becomes “*Kuki*”.¹¹ Considering the fact that the term was unfamiliar and not recognised by the people themselves, the conjecture that it was an appellation given to them by the inhabitants of the erstwhile East Bengal to identify “the uncivilized, migratory and headhunting tribes of the highlands” is considered to be more probable. However, as stated in the beginning, the origin and meaning of the term is still shrouded in obscurity and hence could not be ascertained.

Several theories have been developed regarding the origin of the Kuki people. According to legends and traditional accounts, the Kukis are said to have originally lived and came out of a place called *Khul*, which literally translates as cave or bowels of the earth, which was believed to be somewhere in China. This theory is acknowledged by major tribes such as the Thadou, Paites, Gangtes, Vaipheis, etc., with slight variation in the interpretation of the legendary stories. According to L. Ngulkhon Khongsai¹² in the long past, there was a big, tall and strong man who lived at the hill-top in the highland of Mongolia. Over the course of time after his death his descendants had forgotten his name and hence decided to name him *Zoumipa*, a term which was coined from his own words “*zoulanga kacheding ahi*”, literally translated as I shall go to the jungle or forest (*zou*). His descendants who had already multiplied migrated and built a mansion within the Great Wall of China which they called *Khul* which in previous arguments is taken as cave or bowel of the earth. Aside from these several other theories have also been propounded such as the theory of Jewish connection where proponents claim to have been the lost tribe of “Manmasi” which is perceived to be a corrupted version of Manasseh, while others contended to have originated from China as stated at the beginning of the chapter.

The Kukis, scattered over the Northeast frontier regions, are people of rich traditional heritage. According to western writers, they have been studied as primitive, savage and static. However, as

A. L Basham has remarked about India¹³, the Kukis, contrary to the Western theory, was far from static. The society has been steadily changing, but some traces of cultural values and practices continue to persist till today. However, it is not to say, many more disappeared as a result of their encounter with the Western people particularly the missionaries who came along with the British colonial regime.

2. 3. Settlement Pattern

The North-Eastern territory of India comprising Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh and recently added Sikkim was carved out gradually from the original Assam Province of British India. The entire region was under British domination from 1823 after the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo till India got Independence in 1947. The entire region is populated by variegated groups of people belonging to different tribes, sub-tribes and clans. As T S Gangte has noted, migration of people from Burma to this region was very common and hence people of Mongoloid strains in respect of their physical features, culture and language are majorly found.¹⁴ The Kukis, as stated above, comprising various tribes and sub-tribes, occupied a vast area of the north eastern terrains. Meerwath observed that the Kukis occupied Hill ranges south of the Naga Hills. They were surrounded on the north by the Nagas and the Manipuris on the east, on the south by the tribes living on the hill tracts of Chittagong, while on the west by the plains of Sylhet and the North cachar hills.¹⁵

However, since the scope of study undertaken for this research is mainly on the Kukis of Manipur particularly the Thadou Kukis. It will try to limit its field of study within this region. Manipur, located approximately between 23°50'N latitude and longitudes 93°10' and 94°30'E, occupies a total area of approximately 8628 Square Miles (22,326 Square Kilometres) out of which nearly 8000 Square Miles are covered with hills.¹⁶ It is bounded by Nagaland on the north, Myanmar on the northeast and south; Mizoram on the southwest; and Assam on the west and northwest. It is a beautiful small state even described by the former prime minister of India as the “Jewel of the country”. It consists of a central valley called the Manipur valley and ranges of surrounding hills. Today, a lot of the Kukis also settled in the valley, however, the majority continues to inhabit the hilly region. In this regard, William Shaw puts –

“The Thadou Kukis live in a large area of hill country bounded by the Angami Nagas 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 family.”¹⁷

The hill areas of Manipur, according to Gangte “were the domain and headhunting ground of the Thadou Kukis”¹⁸ until they were subjugated and put under the control of the British after the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-1919. Prior to their subjugation, the Thadou Kukis lived in a village under chieftainship system where the Chiefs exercised complete authority over the administration and protection of his villagers. However, after the Anglo-Kuki War, the British assumed direct administration and ruled over the hill areas inhabited by the Kukis through the effective machinery of the Chieftainship and its Council of Ministers. The impact of this new ruler-ship and the numerous aspects of changes encountered in the society will be discussed in the later chapters. In this chapter, it is deemed imperative to understand some of the important institutions – political, economic, social and religious – that were intrinsic to the traditional life of the Kuki people.

2. 4. The characteristics of the Kukis

In Carey and Tuck’s *The Chin Hills*, the main characteristics of the Kukis are described as slow speech, serious manners, knowledge of pedigrees, clannish feeling, filthy state of body, want of power and continuous effort. They are a short sturdy race with good development of muscle. Their legs, generally, are short in comparison with the length of their bodies, and their arms long. The face is nearly as broad as it is long and is generally round or square, the cheekbones high, broad and prominent, eyes small and almond shaped, the nose short and flat, with wide nostrils. The women appear squatter than the men even, but are strong and lusty.¹⁹

Soppit also made similar observations regarding them, he states that they are sturdily built “short and squat as a rule with high cheekbones, flat noses with very rare cut features, and their appearance, on the whole, is very effeminate. Little or no hair is grown in the face”²⁰. William Shaw noted that although all the Thadous resemble each other very closely in appearance and have Mongolian type of countenance, they differ in terms of complexion, which he observed could be due to the miscegenation with the captives and neighbouring tribes. Among the Thadous, he further observed, beards and whiskers are uncommon among the men although “there is a distinct liking

for a few hairs at the corners of the mouth on the upper lip”.²¹ Absence of body hair is argued as a sign of femininity in their physical demeanour. Stressing on the peculiarities of their physical appearance, the colonial agents effectively described them as uncivilized thus providing necessary impetus to initiate their “benevolent” civilizing mission among the people through the employment of various agencies. Legitimation for their projects were extended towards the hitherto existing traditional beliefs and practices which were collectively perceived as primitive practices but were in fact systematic and efficient in the proper administration of the primal Kuki society.

2. 5. Traditional life of the Kukis

The Kukis, according to colonial discourses are stereotyped as savage, barbaric, head-hunters, etc., with no distinct legal code to govern themselves. However, oral traditions proved that systems of governance, which were indeed limited within the boundary of their geographical settlement and community, were very systematic with proper customary rules and guidelines to ensure the peaceful existence of the people. From village governance to how the people in the community are expected to live their life, customary codes called *Chondan khandan* was inherent and prevailing. This ensures the proper functioning of the various institutions that guide and dictates the lifestyle of the people. The oral traditions of the Kukis which provided insights to the structure of early Kuki society have been communicated and transmitted, in the form of *Chondan khandan*, through the various traditional customary institutions and practices. The material assets of the people were instrumental in the functioning of the various customary practices relating to the traditional institutions. So, in order to understand the values of the material assets of the people, it is thus imperative to learn about the several traditional institutions viz., – social, political, economic and religious, through which its importance were displayed. None of these institutions operate in isolation but are all intertwined with each other. Traditional clothing materials viz., *ponve*, *ponsil*, *khi*, *bilkam*, *bilba*, *chau* etc., which are considered part of the valued material assets by the people, finds significance in the functionalization of the various traditional institutions.

2.5.1. Political Institutions

The Kukis lived in villages with the administration under chieftainship. In the primal Kuki society, chieftainship, which was associated with the ‘*Upa*’ or senior man of the clan was relegated to the role of “Chief” and only ‘*Upas*’ can be a Chief of a village.²² The term is conferred upon the first

born son of a family or a clan and a great deal of veneration is attached to it. A village is an independent political unit among the Kukis and the Chief of the village and his Council of Ministers are the administrative leaders. The chief, addressed locally as *HAosa* is the head of the village wielding absolute authority over the administration of the village. Administration of justice, enforcement of executive function, maintenance of social practices and customary laws including religious rites and rituals are performed by the Chief with the assistance of his Council of Ministers²³ known as the “*waihomte*”²⁴ although the final say in the decision making lay solely on the Chief himself. Therefore, the role of the council ministers for the most part is confined to being advisors to the chief on matters regarding the overall administration of the village. On this matter Paokhohao Haokip gives elaborate description, according to him, the *semang-pachong* depending on their role are known separately as *kho-semang*, the person responsible for the whole village administration on behalf of the chief while the chief plays the judicial role. He acted as the representative of the Chief. On the other is the *kho-pachong*, who is responsible for the village, individual as well as collective. Another important position in the village administration is the *lhangsampa/lhangsam* which literally means the Spokesperson, he is mainly responsible for information and broadcasting regarding issues relating to the people and the village. Apart from these positions several other positions are also formed for the efficiency in the administration, such as *Thih kheng pa* or *Thihsupu* (Blacksmith), *Thiempu/ Khothempu* or Village priest. Institutions like *lawm* and *sawm* also actively contributed in the efficient administration of the village as well. All these components together constitute the Council of Ministers and assist the Chief in the proper functioning of the village.

2.5.2. Religious life

There is no definite or precise term known to call the ancestral religion of the Kukis. Later generations simply use the term ‘*pu hou – pa hou*’ to signify their ancestral form of worship. It is what anthropologists would call “animism”, a belief that all nature is animated and has a soul. The primal Kukis “belief in the existence of soul in a human body and other animate and inanimate things”²⁵ which greatly influences their rituals and practices.

It has been contended by Paul Haokip, among various others, that perhaps the similarities in the belief system of the pre-colonial Kukis and the newly introduced Christianity that made the Kuki

acceptance of the new religion relatively easier. The primal Kukis believed in the existence of one Supreme Being who creates and sustains all beings on earth, living and non-living, visible and invisible, including powers and gods.²⁶ This Being is addressed as *Chung Pathen*, or Almighty God. All kinds of goodness and blessings were attributed to *Chung Pathen*. Paul Lelen Haokip writes that God among the indigenous Kukis “was also thought to possess femininity and masculinity”. Hence, during rituals God was addressed as *Pathennu*, *Pathenpa* which means *Mother God*, *Father God*.²⁷ This is to assume that God was considered gender neutral, revealing in itself regarding the worldview of the people. The primeval beliefs of the Kukis was that God is the one who lives high in heaven, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, an all-powerful Being. They believed that this good God does not interfere in the daily affairs of human beings nor demand sacrifices from people.”²⁸, and hence no elaborate forms of worshipping the *Chung Pathen* existed. Paokhohao writes that, this Being is believed by the Kukis to be all powerful who does not want any propitiation or appeasement and therefore did not offer any sacrifices or construct any place of worship for the Supreme Being. Because, to them, God was “full of goodness, kindness, mercy, love, meekness and endurance.

However, apart from the Supreme Being, the Kukis also believed in the existence of Spirits both the good spirit and the evil spirit. Paokhohao also made further study on the matter, where he writes that all kinds of goodness are associated with the benevolent spirit while all misfortunes, diseases and death are associated with the malevolent spirit which therefore needs to be appeased in order to live peaceful, healthy and wealthy. As the malicious spirits continuously disturbs the daily lives of the people, the Kukis were constantly preoccupied with appeasing evil spirits. Due to this, village priests became intrinsic in the life of the traditional Kuki society. Their primary duty was to appease or ward off these evil spirits. In the Traditional Kuki society, life seems to revolve around their belief system as their every action regarding, social, political, and economic, etc., were all propitiated by the priests. Hence, life without *Thempu* or priest was unimaginable in their historical past, however, with the arrival the significant position occupied by the priest disappeared gradually along with several institutions that were previously instrumental.

Village priests, *Thempu*(male priest) and *Thempi*(female priest) hold an important position in the religious life of the traditional society. The word *Thempu* is a combination of two words, *Them-* which means an expert in something specific and *Pu-* a masculine suffix, which is often

synonymously used as Master. As such, in the traditional society of the Kukis, *Thempus* are people expert in religious concerns as well as a ritual expert. Paul Haokip, talks in length about *Thempus* in his book *Relevance of Thempu*. According to him, “The *Thempu* of the village was someone considered trustworthy, honest, and interested in the welfare of the people. He had the additional knowledge of the minds of spirits and *Pathen*. He was a mediator between the human world and the spirit world..... He was held with regard, awe and fear”²⁹.

The role of *Thempu* in the Kuki society was multifarious, as life’s centred round their religious beliefs. As already stated, every form of illness was taken as a punishment due to the wrath of the evil spirits who needed to be propitiated and appeased. Modern medicine of today was unknown to the people. Hence, to treat sickness of a person, elaborate details of offerings and sacrifices are made and rituals are performed by the *Thempu*. It was due to this that *Thempu*, in certain context are regarded as a “medicine man or soothsayer”³⁰. In most cases, rituals performed on a day-to-day basis are concerned with health related issues. Some of the rituals that *Thempus* performed are *Gamlahlang*, *Kholailang*, *Lhakou*, *Khopi Kilhaina*, *Kithoina kin*, *Kholhim*, *Chang Lhakou*, *Sa Lhakou*., where *Gamlah lang*, *Kholai Lang* and *Kithoina kin* among others are related to illnesses. During this rituals, as Haokip noted, the *Thempu* “had to recommend the village people to God, spirits or perhaps request the spirits to enter into peace with humans”³¹. N. Haokip mentioned that while surveying a new village site, a new cock was brought to stay overnight and if the cock crows in appropriate timing, it was considered a good sign and believed that they will be blessed with health, and only then the settlement process begins.³² William Shaw in his monologue, *Notes on the Thadou Kukis* noted of the Kukis that, “They specifically pride themselves on genealogical trees which play importance in some of their rituals and festivities”³³. Thus, besides its religious purpose, it can be noted that rituals also served importance in the primal Kuki society as the occasions also helped the people in remembering their ancestral names.³⁴ The role of *Thempus* in the traditional Kuki society is extremely extensive.

It has been remarked by many scholars that the primal Kuki belief in the existence of life after death, which stem from their animistic beliefs that every being possessed souls, was vital in providing access to the people for the missionaries. The term soul, according to Haokip, in Kuki language means *Lha* or *Thilha*, which he further remarked, were also called as *Lhagao* in the poetical form. *Thilha*, in other words, could also mean ghosts. So, soul being neutral in its context,

Lhagao is more commonly used to speak of the soul of beings. They believed that there is a place called ‘*mithikho*’ or the village of the dead. The Kukis believed that after death, the soul was to pass through a place called *Lhanpelkot* and *Thijonbung*, while on their way to *Mithikho*. *Mithikho* also found its presence in one of the legendary stories called *Galnam le Khupting*. In it, the two lovers, *Galngam* and *Khupting* after their death met again in the after-life (*mithikho*) and continued their love for each other and it tells how they happily lived together in the afterlife. It is believed to be a place where dead people live together and continue their normal life. However, there seems to be some discrepancy regarding the matter. According to some scholars, heavens could only be attained by some selected few. Individuals who achieved great things in life, who held huge status in their social and political life only are qualified to enter heaven such as those who performed *Sa-ai* or *Chang-ai*. As a result, one scholar writes, Christianity as a religion was more appealing to the people for its lack of discrimination of the eligibility to enter heaven.

The primal Kukis are also described by British writers as mostly superstitious. Such observations were probably not unfounded. The earlier Kukis had meticulously observed omen, divination, dream and Taboo. It was mainly to protect themselves from loss, illnesses and misfortunes.

Another important element in the traditional belief system of the Kukis was the keeping of *Indoi* which literally means House deity. Every household in the traditional society were expected to have an *indoi*, and it was worshiped for richness pro-creativity, protection of the family from illness and grant luck to the family.

2.5.3. Economic life

Agriculture was the main occupation in the economic life of the Kukis. Shifting forms of cultivation (*jhumming*) was the main, which purportedly was impelled by their “migratory” habit of the primal Kuki and their inability to settle permanently in one particular place. Aside from this is fishing and hunting with the latter given much more prominence and intrinsic in their social-cultural life.

Cottage industry also played an important role. Every Kuki women were expected to know how to weave cloth. It was a subsistence form of lifestyle where every cloth that they wore were produced by the women population of the society. It is not to say that men were completely absent

in such production. The menfolk were responsible for making the tools necessary in the process of weaving. Pottery was also a common practice among the women. They make pottery of different designs, shapes and sizes, although their artistic knowledge is not mentioned. Apart from making weaving tools, men were also responsible for making agricultural implements like dAo, hoe, axe, spade, basket etc., in every Kuki village, there was a professional blacksmith who make and repairs all tools and received in return a basket of paddy from every household as a form of payment.

2.5.4. Social life

Kuki society, like most tribal societies, practices a patriarchal family system. As often claimed, even though it was a patriarchal society, the Kuki women relatively held better status and position within the society as compared to its counterparts in the mainland of India. However, it does not negate the nature of existence of the system itself. Apart from the observances of numerous taboos, there was also the practice of headhunting, maintenance of youth dormitories, specific forms of marriages etc., celebrations of indigenous festivals, music and dances were also intrinsic in the tribal culture. The Kuki life was a community-based life, which modern scholars on civilization often deemed as a primitive society. It was a casteless and classless society, classless in the sense that there was no social discrimination or ostracization based on one's wealth. The institution of *sawm* and *lawm* helps in maintaining it. The villages at large are closely knit and have mutually dependent numbers of families. In the Kuki society, there are close linkages between the religious, cultural, social and political institutions.

2.5.4.1. Marriage Institutions:

Marriage constitutes one of the important life cycle ceremonies in the Kuki society. In society, a person occupies a position of honour and is allowed to participate in all functions, while the unmarried man and women are considered not qualified. Cross-cousin marriage was commonly practiced in the society, called locally as *pute chanu Kichenpi*, which means marrying maternal uncle's daughter. This form of practice accounts for the continuity of relationships between related groups. There are commonly three forms of marriage in the primal Kuki society. The first being arranged marriage, and it was the most popular form of marriage in the society. Cross-cousin marriage commonly occurs in arranged marriages. Although, some cross-cousin marriages could also occur in love marriages as well. In this type of marriage there is a mutual consent of love

between the lovers and married with their parent's consent. However, when lovers get no parental consent, they elope. This type of marriage occurs usually when there is strong objection against the relationship, or when a third party is involved or when the woman is impregnated. Marriage, apart from being a basic step to forming a family, also has another purpose of building relationships between different family units.

Another unique yet important aspect of the marriage system practiced was the remarriage of a widow with one of her dead husband's brothers. The practice was known as *U-thi nao dana*, *Naothi u-dana*. It was a properly deliberated decision undertaken by the family to ensure that the children of the dead man do not become an orphan. On such occasions, the natal family of the widow are not allowed to demand bride price for the remarriage.³⁵ On the occasions of divorce, the husband is obligated as per Customs to divorce her by giving a *mithun*, which served as a form of alimony, but he is not compelled to give back the gift gifted by the women's family on their marriage.³⁶

Marriage, in Kuki society, was instrumental in maintaining close relationships between families. TS Gangte elaborate in great detail on how Kuki's life vested around certain sets of relatives such as *tucha-songgao*, *tucha-becha* etc., in their socio-economics, political and religious spheres of their life. Such relatives are framed on 'reciprocal' basis and 'self-reciprocal' nature.³⁷ He asserts that such relationships are possible largely because of the practice of marriage of mother's brother's daughter by way of preference. In his study, he mentions three sets of relatives. The first set of relatives are called *tucha-songgao*. It is purely the by-product of marriage which is of 'reciprocal' basis. Thus, when a person or ego marries the daughter, sister or aunt of a man, he earns the relationship of his children and becomes the *tutes* of his in-laws, who in turn becomes the *putes* or maternal kin. Thus, the *pute* automatically becomes the *Songgao* relative to the ego and his children.³⁸

The second set of relatives instrumental in the social life of a Kuki is the institution of *Tucha-Becha*. These sets of relatives are institutional because of its systematic nature of operation and functioning. This institution plays an important role in the functioning of the social relations within the society. Every household has a set of *Tucha* and *Becha* and are indispensable parts of social life and the family system. It is through this institution that the family units maintain close relationships between families belonging to different clans or sub-clans. The *tucha* and *becha* of a

family are carefully selected by the family themselves, albeit, by way of preference. It is also representative in nature. They are vested with the full power and authority of an ego to function and act on behalf of the ego, in consultation with the ego.³⁹ While Tucha, as stated above, is a by-product of marriage alliance, Becha on the other hand is selected from a wide range of people, “including good and reliable friends of non-consanguineal relatives”⁴⁰. *Bepa/Becha* is the spokesman of the family. He speaks on behalf of the family in various family occasions and activities, like in times of death or marriage in the family. He also acts as the advisor of the family in times of decision-making processes. Hence, the role is cautiously selected and is usually the best friend of the ego.

The third set of relatives is through the marriage of an aunt (*Ni*, addressed as *Heni*), father’s sister. The husband of one’s *Ni* (aunt) is called in the Kuki language as *Gang*. The aunt’s husband (addressed as *Hegang*) could be father’s sister son, in which case, it’s within the ambit of marriage of mother’s brother daughter. However, like in any other cases, marriage could also develop between non-consanguineal families. In a Kuki society, marriage is not restricted to clans as long as prospective partners are not related by blood with exceptions in the cross-cousin marriage of *neinu kichenpi*, where *neinu* means mother’s brother’s daughter and *kichenpi* means marrying (free translation) or outside their ethnic community (*jatdang/namdang*). If the aunt’s husband belongs to a non-consanguineal family, then the children become a relative to two sets of different families. In such a way, the villagers become a body of people related by bonds of kinship and relationship.

2.5.4.2. Institutions of *lom* and *som*

In the traditional Kuki society, *lom* and *som* are two remarkable social institutions. These institutions played a significant role in the Kuki traditional life in terms of socio-economic developments.

According to T. S Gangte, the word *lom*, loosely translated as Village Labour Corps, means an informal labour organisation set up in the village life of the Kukis, wherein all the able-bodied young men and women, mostly unmarried, were members.⁴¹ It was an institution that concerned mainly with the economic life of the village. It is a reciprocal labour institution, for the labour spent on one’s field was repaid on a rotational basis set up for the system. Gangte called it an agro-based economic institution and such practice reveals the basic concept of community based

economic system of the Kukis. It was also a traditional form of youth club. It was an institution in which young people were engaged in social activities for the welfare of individuals as well as the community. In contrast to the Nagas' Morungs which serves as the traditional forms of educational institution, in the Kuki society, *lom* as a traditional social institution acts as a source of traditional learning. It was an agency through which the primal Kukis imparts technical and practical knowledge to its members, an institution where young people learnt discipline and obedience, a social etiquette. There were several different types of *Lom* in the traditional Kuki society-

1. *Lompi* - This was the biggest *Lom* with a large number of members. Its members are not confined to only unmarried young men and women. Rather, it consisted of any able-bodied person of the village.
2. *Lomlai* - *Lomlai*, is a combination of two words *Lom* and *Lai*, where the latter means middle or in-between. Hence, the term is itself self-explanatory. Its members consist of junior unmarried boys and girls who are yet to enter the *Lompi* organization.
3. *Lomneo* – Here, the word *Neo* means small. Its members are composed of young boys and girls who are not yet qualified to be in the *Lomlai* and *Lompi*. It is a group where the third brother and sister of a family and other teenagers are the members.⁴²

The segregation in the *Lom* institution was largely based on age-group, where qualifications of its members are dependent upon their experience in the various social activities of the village which usually was collective.

Som, or bachelor's dormitory on the other hand, was another remarkable traditional social institution of the Kuki society and its practice was known as *Somge*. It is to be noted here that the system of dormitory in the Kuki society is unlike that of its counterpart Naga society, wherein a dormitory is specifically built to host young unmarried boys. William Shaw observed that while in the Naga society, there is a recognised house where the young men sleep at night and where they keep their guns, spears, daos, shields and other weapons of attack and defence. However, this form of recognised house does not exist. Among the Thadou Kukis, *Som*, is understood as a form of tradition whereby suitors came to stay, by way of preference, at an unmarried girl's house to formally court her. The girl is then responsible for looking after them, until she decides on choosing

one among them. Right after dark, according to Shaw, was regarded as a “*shom leng phat*”, which means “going to the young women’s house”.⁴³

Gangte argued that initially, the institution was established out of necessity for security. The nature of hostility and raids by other villages necessitate the existence of this organization, so that in times of emergency the able-bodied men could be gathered within a short time.⁴⁴

2.5.4.3. Rituals, Feasts and festivals

As stated in the beginning of the chapter, every social customary practices of the Kukis are deeply intertwined with every aspects of their lifestyle. Rituals, feasts and festivals constitute one of the most important elements in society, and cannot be segregated one from the other in most cases. Although, the primary purpose of it was to celebrate occasions in a family or in the village. It also helps in maintaining closer relationships and understanding between members of the village. *Kut*, a post-harvest festival, *Sa-ai*, *Chang-ai*, *Chon*, etc. are some of the important feasts and festivals observed and practiced in the society. These occasions are often accompanied by rituals.

Festivals and dances in the primal Kuki society are mostly agriculture oriented. Celebrations of different festivals became part and parcel of the tribal lives. Dance, Jayaseelan writes, is an earliest form of expression of man’s moods.⁴⁵ Several types of dances were practiced in a tribal society, mostly during festivals and ceremonies like *Sa-ai* and *Chang-ai*, for instance. Several types of dances were performed during the celebration of the *kut* festivals. During this traditional festival, the Kukis performed several dances such as ‘*sagol keng khai*’ (a type of dance resembling wild pig raising one of its legs), ‘*suhta lam*’ (bamboo dance), ‘*phit lam*’ (dance with blowing a short bamboo flute), ‘*lamkol*’ (group dance forming circle by joining hands), etc. Apart from these dances, several traditional games and sports were also played on this day such as ‘*suhtum kho*’ (a form of javelin throw), ‘*kungkal*’ (high jump), ‘*selkal*’ (jumping over a standing mithun), ‘*kibot/bontol*’ (wrestling), etc. likewise several musical instruments were also played on the occasion. In its pristine form however, Paokhohao remarked that, the *kut* celebration was more of a religious ceremony performed by the priest of the time to give thanks to the almighty for the bountiful harvest. It was a ritualistic ceremony along with celebrations and merry making.

Sa-ai was a ceremony of feast hosted by a skilful hunter after killing a number of ferocious and dangerous wild animals. It implies a feast to the entire village for a day. The intending host of both *Sa-ai* and *Chang-ai*, were obliged according to the custom to go through vigorous and elaborate tests to be eligible for the ceremony. They were called *Tuolso Ding Kigo* or *Tuolso Kigo* and must complete the *Tuolso* ritual before hosting the ceremony. In the case of *Sa-ai*, the eligibility to host such a prestigious ceremony of great accomplishment was that “a person must have killed at least a tiger (*Humpi*), vulture (*Muvanlai*), wild boar, ‘*thoche*’ and ‘*vengke*’”. The person who could achieve such hunts and perform such ceremonies are greatly honoured and respected by the people in the society.

The *Sa-ai* is performed by a great hunter to gain complete dominance over the spirits of the killed animals. It was the belief that if he did not perform *Sa-ai*, the spirits of the killed animals might afflict the hunter’s spirits during his lifetime and even after his death. Therefore, it was considered essential for the hunter to achieve total subjugation of the spirits of the dead animals by performing the *Sa-ai*. By performing the ritual of *Sa-ai*, during his lifetime, the hunter gains absolute control over the spirits of the killed animals. They also believed that it will affect his fertility and would not be blessed with child if he failed to perform the ritual.⁴⁶

One distinctive act performed during the ceremony is regarding the dress code of the host on the day. An insightful observation is noted by TS Gangte, on the day of the ceremony, “the performer of the *Sa-ai* is dressed in a woman’s attire. He wears a lady’s Lungi called *Puonve*, his hair plaited into two and crossed in front above the forehead through the sides above the ears and given a double knot called ‘*Samkop*’. He wears a chain of beads called ‘*Khi*’ etc.”⁴⁷ With this attire, the performer proceeds towards the outskirts of the village called *Khomol* along with the priest, his wife, the chief of the village and other members of the village and perform a ritual. After which the performer returned and changed his attire into the traditional man outfit with all its paraphernalia, taking his gun on his shoulders and the bow and arrow on his back with the customary head gear. With this outfit, TS Gangte noted that the man, contrary to his previous outfit, is now seen as a “new brave man”.⁴⁸

Chang-ai, is also one of the most prestigious forms of ceremony like that of *Sa-ai*. Like *Sa-ai*, the intended performer of *Chang-ai* must accomplish the *Tuolso* ritual to be eligible for the ceremony.

The ceremony is associated with the woman of the family. While the duty of the man in the society was primarily associated with hunting, or going to war etc., the woman's duty was associated with the responsibility to procure enough grains for the family. So when surplus is accumulated for several consecutive years, "she was entitled to perform '*Chang-ai*'". As such, this ceremony of feast was connected with a bountiful harvest of paddy and it was performed by a woman who was considered as the owner of the paddy because of her hard work and luck. Like other feasts, this feast was also celebrated with much festivity by killing *mithun*, feasting, dancing and singing in the house of the one who hosted the feast. Women were most honoured and respected on the day of *Chang-ai*.

Another important celebration practiced in the Kuki society was *Chon*. *Chon* was a feast performed in commemoration of the accomplishment of a man's strength, capability, diligence and faithfulness in doing things. William Shaw observed that, among the Thadous was considered as the most highly prized feast of the lot and can only be performed by those who have done *Sa-ai* three times. In this feast, everything has to be done seven times. Seven *mithuns* are to be killed for the occasion and every other thing must also be in the multiple of sevens. Even the songs and genealogical trees must also be repeated seven times.⁴⁹ As the whole ceremony takes days to complete, the expenses incurred were also big. As a result, *Chon* could be performed only by the wealthiest and affluent people of the community.

As stated above, '*Chon*' was the highest and most expensive feast in the life of the Kukis. It was said that the progenitors of the whole tribe who were called '*Chongthupa*' and '*Noimangpa*' could only host the '*Chon*'; and no other persons could ever perform it⁵⁰. During this feast, all kinds of domestic animals were slaughtered in sevens. S.M. Paokai puts, "*Noimangpa* with his might performed the '*Chon*' festival killing seven each of different kinds of domestic animals,"⁵¹ A Person who could be eligible to host '*Chon*' feast must have hosted a smaller feast called '*Sa-ai*', and *Chang-ai* three times each and also must be the richest in the society. In other words, a person who had completed '*tolso*' and '*Sa-ai*' or '*Chang-ai*' was regarded as *Chon-gel lhit*/ '*Chon bulhit*' (one who has fulfilled the norms). But one can also perform a ritual to mark all that has been fulfilled with a grand celebration of '*Chon*'. Since the celebration lasted for several days costing quite a lot of wealth, only few people could actually performed it. Therefore, the celebration of *Chon* was very rare. However, the beliefs was that individual who performed *Chon* would have a

smooth passage to heaven in their after-life because, *Kulsamnu* who sat on the way at *Thijinmol* would not dare to disturb their journey

2. 6. Head Hunting

Another important form of practice that was significant in the traditional Kuki society was the practice of head hunting. A man who hunts more heads than the others were considered brave and were honoured. Initially, according to John Rawlins, it was not a custom of the Kukis to take the heads of women. He explained the reason as such,

“In ancient times it was not a custom among them to cut off the heads of the women, whom they found in the habitation of the enemies; but it happened once, that a woman asked another why she came so late to her business of sowing grain: she answered that her husband was gone to battle, and that the necessity of preparing food and other things for him had occasioned her delay.”⁵²

It was because of this that women's heads were not spared during raids or battles, to prevent them from aiding their husbands on their head-hunting expedition in the future. Thus, he further commented it became a constant practice to cut off the enemy women's heads, better yet, if they were pregnant. Person who takes such heads, he went on, “acquires honours and celebrity in his tribe, as the destroyer of two foes at once”⁵³, and “were sure to be distinguished and exalted in his nation”⁵⁴.

William Shaw, who is supposedly the most notable and knowledgeable about the Kukis writes on the matter that “the Thadous considered themselves great head-hunters”. However, this observation was refuted by Hutton who argues that it would be an error to regard the Thadou as a typical or even a bona fide head hunter. Rather, Hutton observed, “the Kuki is really a slave hunter, who also takes heads”, who he noted, could have acquired the practice by contact with genuine head hunters.⁵⁵ Regardless of how the practice got its inception within the society, the Kukis, according to Shaw, place great values on a head because each head means an additional slave for the soul at *Mithikho*.⁵⁶ To the Kukis, head-hunting as observed was not a sport. In fact, heads taken were called *gallu* (*gal*: war or battle; *lu*: head) which indicates that heads were taken during a battle or feuds with their enemies. Therefore, man who is capable of subduing or overthrowing an adversary like their enemies or wild animals while hunting or in battle is highly regarded. It is safe to assume that in early Kuki society, bravery in man was revered and timidity was contempt and

thus treated the same in times of celebrations during when a song called *han lapi* was dedicated to them.⁵⁷

William Shaw has noted in great length about the various customary practices performed and observed within the Kuki society such as practices during childbirths, the various kinds of rites and rituals performed on the occasion of deaths, taking of oaths etc., which are very informative in studying about the historical past of the Kuki society, in particular. All these forms of practices and performances, beliefs and observances, shows that the Kukis were a deeply enmeshed and closed-knit society existing in a self-subsistence way of life. Everybody was expected to adhere to their traditional beliefs and ways of life and any sort of deviation was considered unacceptable and frowned upon. However, with the arrival of the western people, in particular, the missionaries, these traditional beliefs and practices, and worldview of the people were totally transformed creating a whole new society. In the following chapters, it is intended to study the kinds of dresses and apparels that existed prior to the change and the subsequent course of change that ensued the arrival of the new culture.

2. 7. Conclusion

Essentially an egalitarian patriarchal society, the traditional life of the Kukis ranging from their political, social to religions, had all accorded space for the functionality of their traditional *pon*. It can be noted from above, that the society was a perfectly close-knitted society, where members of the villagers were not only bound and related by their socio-cultural beliefs and practices but were also dependent upon one another to survive. In the process of maintaining an amicable and long-lasting inter-relationship, dress with all its composite elements are essential in building and strengthening and also maintaining the existing forms of practices.

The variety of social and cultural patterns found in the Kuki society influenced the institution like marriage and other rituals and feasts, some of which are calendric whereas other are occasional. The peculiarities of each of this is the different presentation in/of the prescribed attire. Thus, making a case for the study of the dress in Kuki society from multiple perspective. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on the production of *pon*(woven cloth) in the traditional Kuki society.

¹ Ashis Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles", *History and Theory*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Theme Issue 34: World Historians and their Critics (May, 1995), Blackwell Publishing for Wesleyan University, p.44.

-
- ² Ibid, p.44
- ³ Ibid, p.47
- ⁴ Alessandro Portelli, 1990. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York Press: New York. p.51
- ⁵ D. Mary Kim Haokip, "The Role of Oral Tradition with Special Reference to the Thadou-Kuki Society", *Journal of North east India Societies*, vol. 6(1), Jan.-Jun., 2016, p.63
- ⁶ John Rawlins, 1794. "On the Manners, Religion, and Laws of the Cuci's, or Mountaineers of Tippra" in *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 2, pp. 141-146, Cosmo Publications: New Delhi.
- ⁷ L. Kaikhomang Haokip, "Kuki Thucheng Kholgilna", in *Kuki students Organisation Journal*, June 1993, pp.8-9 (hereafter cited as Khongsai, "Kuki Thucheng Kholgilna")
- ⁸ Jimmy J. Jamkhomang Haokip, *The Thadou Chronicles*, vol. 1, (Deptt. of Culture, Customs & Geneological Research Orgn, Indo-Burma TTC: Churachandpur, 1994), p.42. (Hereafter cited as Haokip, *The Thadou Chronicles*)
- ⁹ William Shaw, 1929. *Notes on the Thadou Kukis*, J. H. Hutton's edition, (published on behalf of the Government of Assam), p. 11.
- ¹⁰ C. A. Soppit, *A Short Account of the Kuki – Lushai Tribes of the North-East Frontier*, (Assam Secretariat Press:Shillong, 1887), 2.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² L. Ngulkholum Khongsai, 1994. *The Kukis*, n.p Author.
- ¹³ A. L Basham(ed.), 1975. *A Cultural History of India*, Vol.15. Clarendon Press.
- ¹⁴ T. S. Gangte, *The Kukis of Manipur: A Historical Analysis* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2003), 3. Hereafter, Haokip, *The Kukis of Manipur*.
- ¹⁵ A. M. Meerwarth, "The Andamese, Nicobarese and Hill Tribes of Assam", *Ethnographical Gallery Guide Book* No.2, (Superintendent government Printing: Calcutta, 1919), p.29.
- ¹⁶ Gangte, *The Kukis of Manipur*, p.28.
- ¹⁷ William Shaw, *Notes on the Thadou Kukis*, J. H. Hutton(ed.), (Published on behalf of the Government of Assam: 1929), p.11.
- ¹⁸ Gangte, *The Kukis of Manipur*, p.9.
- ¹⁹ Bertram S. Carey and H. N. Tuck, 1896(reprinted 1983). *The Chin Hills: A History of the people, British dealings with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country*, Vol. 1, Cultural Publishing House: Delhi, p.183
- ²⁰ C. A. Soppit, *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes*, p.4
- ²¹ Shaw, p.12
- ²² Nehmang Haokip, 2009. *Kukite Chondan leh Khandan*, Nehmang Haokip: Imphal, p.1
- ²³ Gangte, *The Kukis of Manipur*, p. 125
- ²⁴ Nehmang Haokip, 2009.- there are six council of ministers viz., 1) *Semangpu*, 2) *Pachongpu*, 3) *Lhangvapu*, 4) *Thuchingpu*, 5) *Gou Chingpu*, 6) *Changloipu*. The council was further assisted by other members like *Khothempu*, *Thihsupu* and *Khotucha* (consisting of two widows).
- ²⁵ Paul Lelen Haokip, 2020. *Relevance of Thempu in Pastoral Ministry: A Socio-theological Perspective*, Bethesda Khankho Institute: Churachandpur & Christian World Imprints: Delhi, p.22
- ²⁶ Ibid, p.1.
- ²⁷ Ibid, p.2
- ²⁸ Ibid, p.2
- ²⁹ Ibid, pp.24-25
- ³⁰ Ibid, 25.
- ³¹ Ibid, 25
- ³² Nehmang Haokip, *Kuki Chondan leh Khandan*, p.1
- ³³ William Shaw, *Notes on Thadou Kuki*, p.22.
- ³⁴ Paul Haokip, *Relevance of Thempu*, p.28.
- ³⁵ Nehmang Haokip, pp.32-33.
- ³⁶ Haokip, p.34.
- ³⁷ T. S. Gangte, p.46.
- ³⁸ Ibid, p.46

-
- ³⁹ Ibid, p.52.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, p.52.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 132.
- ⁴² Ibid, p.133
- ⁴³ Shaw, p.70
- ⁴⁴ T. S. Gangte, p.133.
- ⁴⁵ L. Jayaseelan, *Christianity and its Impacts: Socio-Political and Economic With Special Reference to Churachandpur District of Manipur*. Thesis submitted to Manipur University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, November 1993.
- ⁴⁶ Nehmang Haokip, p.61
- ⁴⁷ T. S. Gangte, p.181.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, p.182.
- ⁴⁹ Shaw, p.76.
- ⁵⁰ Ngulseh Hangsing, 1978. *Khul Kuonho Thusim*, (n.p), p. 8.
- ⁵¹ S.M. Paokai, 1995. "A Brief Account of the Thadous," in Naorem Sanajaoba (Ed.), *Manipur Past and Present*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 233.
- ⁵² John Rawlins, "On the Manners, Religion, and Laws of the Cuci's or the Mountaineers of Tipra."(pp.141-146) in *Asiatic Researches Comprising History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia, Vol 2*. 1794(reprint, 1979). Cosmo Publications: New Delhi, p.141.
- ⁵³ Ibid, 142.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid, 143.
- ⁵⁵ Shaw, p.78.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, 79
- ⁵⁷ Dr. Khuplam Milui Lenthang, 2005. *Manmasi Chate (Kuki-Chin-Mizo) thulhun kidang masa*. p.74

CHAPTER 3

TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES OF WEAVING IN KUKI SOCIETY

3. 1 Introduction

The concept of weaving has been known to humankind for over 8000 years. Over the course of time different techniques of weaving from producing simple plain weave to fabrics of intricate designs and patterns had emerged and along with it the different kinds of apparatus that facilitated it. Hann and Thomas stated that, basketry and mat-making in the earlier society may have stimulated the invention of thread interlacement¹. The plainer the cloth is, it is simpler to weave and the more intricate and decorative, the more difficult it is to weave.² Hence, the decorative technique of weaving probably appeared much later as it demands progressively increased control of the warp threads. Several debates centred round the approaches to the spread of decorative weaving. While the evolutionist or inventionist believed in autonomous local cultural development, the diffusionist on the other hand stresses that changes in culture were almost totally as a result of diffusion of ideas, artefacts or cultural traits from other geographical areas.³ However, as Hann and Thomas noted, precise chronology of invention and development is not possible owing to lack of clear and unambiguous evidence.

It has been a general conception that in primitive society, clothing made its appearance as a protective mechanism, essentially for its practical utilities. For Isaac walker, mankind started clothing themselves not as a protection from weather, but were instead inspired by the varying colours in the skin of the animal, from which hides they subsequently made their own garments.⁴ Paokhohao Haokip in his unpublished doctoral thesis observes that depending on the environmental condition, humankind has been concerned with the making of utilitarian fabrics and overtime began to discover its other significances such as its ability to serve as medium of expression to express aesthetic genius. The earliest forms of systematic attire constitutes a “linen cloth around the loins, with a skin of a leopard worn on the shoulders” which then gradually becomes fuller and more elaborate and “the distinctions of social position, marked in the earlier times by so simple a device as the doubling of the linen folds about the middle, are shown by richer

stuffs, by various colours, by added skirts and collars”.⁵ For instance, in classical Greece and Rome, the adornment of the flowing robe by the *citizens* who were only the nobles was symbolic of the privilege and their noble status.⁶

3. 2 Overview of the changing patterns of dress among the Kukis

During the late 18th century, J. Rennel in his account of the ‘Cucis’ of Tipperah in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, writes that the Kukis were “men who live far in the interior parts of the hills, who have not the use of firearms, and whose bodies go unclothed”⁷. C.A Soppit, with regards to the dress of the Kukis briefly mentions about the dress of the Kukis. In the late 19th century, he wrote that the Kukis (*Jansen* and *Tadoi*) males wore a strip of cloth tied round the waist and a loose cloth which they used as a shawl. The women, on the other, wore a kilt of blue cloth hanging from the waist to above the knee and another cloth from the breasts to waist.⁸ Then, in 1912, in J. Shakespeare’s account, it is observed that more colours were added into their dress and a new style of dressing seems to appear among the people. Among the Kuki-Lushai men “a white coat, reaching well down the thigh but only fastened at the throat” became an item of winter wear.⁹ These coats, he further recounted were ornamented on the sleeves with bands of red and white of various patterns. This shows that by the time of the arrival of the British or at least by the time of the recorded encounter, weaving as a means of producing cloth was already in vogue. The dress as recorded were simple and no distinct designs and motifs except the stripes of various colours, seems to have been included which over the course of the encounter is visibly transforming. Varying colours like red, white, dark blue, black etc., came into the picture to decorate the dress. Some of which were locally produced and some obtained from the markets. It will be further discussed in the chapter.

Western accounts credited their presence for the rapid transformation of the dress of the natives and claims to introduce the knowledge of stitching, sewing etc., among the “wild tribes” as Laura Hardin copiously elucidated on the Chins, a consanguine tribes of Kukis in the Burma frontier. In the late 19th century, according to the reports of EW Dun, techniques of stitching had already been employed to make clothes among the Meiteis, a geographical neighbours of the Kukis.¹⁰ As for the Kukis, indeed, the appearance of the forms of dress were rapidly transforming as observed from the scattered photographic evidence thus recorded, from scantily clad to western wear over the course of British occupation. However, it is difficult to determine whether the knowledge of

clothing production and its techniques developed within the society or adopted from others as claimed. Scattered throughout the frontier regions and also lack of documented records, tracing the inceptions of traditional weaving techniques is difficult. Manufactured clothes were very much prevalent across the region by the beginning of the twentieth century. It became very popular among the indigenous Kuki community as well where it found a place within the social structure of the society with new meanings and values. Despite its popularity, however, it could not, as Ann Pillard Rowe stated, completely displaced the existing tradition but could only supplement the existing ones. The weaving industry, although its importance within the society has significantly lessened, continues to thrive till today because of its perpetuating importance in the functioning of the customary practices. The present chapter will therefore, focused on the mode of production of clothing in traditional society using traditional weaving tools and techniques.

3. 3 Weaving Industry within Kuki society

The primal Kukis were essentially self-sufficient as their daily necessities were largely produced locally except for items which were not available locally or could not be produced sufficiently, such as salts, metallic tools like bell metal gongs and kurtals, which were Yunnan manufactures.¹¹ According to Pemberton, the principle artefacts of manufacture in ‘Munneepoor’ was cloths of varying fabric materials like muslins, cotton and silk, and even embroidery was highly prized among the rich.¹² Like its neighbouring communities and tribes, Kukis also produced their own clothes. Weaving was a part of household duties, with its work solely left to the responsibility of the womenfolk. Clothes were woven, not for commercial purposes but for domestic use. Loin looms were the main tool of production of clothes worn in the traditional Kuki society. Early works by the Wests - colonial as well as missionary agents such as A.G. McCall, McCulloch, Laura Hardin, Lt. Colonel John Shakespeare etc., made a brief mentions of their observations on the techniques of production of clothes within the Kuki-Chin-Mizo society, which otherwise were also collectively referred to as simply Kuki. In the later works, it is observed that certain factory manufactured products like coloured yarns for instance, find its way in the process of weaving as well. This experimentation with new colours and designs, according to Joshi, was a result of the social and cultural change that envelopes the region. The changes loosened the previous restrictions, allowing space for experimentation with new designs, colours etc.¹³ Their traditional lifestyle of being a cultivator and a warrior and head-hunter, according to Joshi, inspired the vibrant

nature of their textiles. According to their traditions, the techniques of weaving was rather a creative inventions of *Tachin* and *Taneng*, a traditional legends, who adopted it from a spider weaving its web, to produce pieces of cloths using the cotton threads they made. Goswami further narrated that the method of weaving colourful floral designs was obtained from the skin of python which possessed many coloured designs on its surface. From it, *Tachin* and *Taneng* wove out three pieces of cloths with different coloured floral designs on each piece of cloth which were called *Thangnang*, *Saipikhup* and *Khamtang*.¹⁴

Simplicity and comfort, efficacy for their day-to-day lifestyle was the primary focus in weaving. Their everyday dress, therefore, was mainly a plain blue, black or white cloth and both man and woman wore almost the same cloth in a similar fashion. In the Lushai Hills, from where some Kukis were recorded to have settled during the late 18th century, clothing among the people essentially constitute a wrapper for the upper body, which was also used as a sheet to sleep on or cover their body during cold weather.¹⁵ By the first quarter of the twentieth century, the dress of the Kuki society had become much polarised. Down in the south, in the Lushai Hills, McCall noted that men's workaday dress is "never free from the exotic influence of the textile mills of japan or elsewhere..."¹⁶ while women try to retain their tradition from completely disappearing. With the increased imports on dress, the cottage industry of the society began to lose its charm with women preferring to buy cheap manufactured cloths than to labour and toil for days on end to produce a piece of cloth. Subsequently, production of *pon* is confined to certain varieties which are considered culturally important while the day-to-day clothes are rapidly replaced with imported clothes. As previously stated, the dress of the Kuki people included both textile and non-textile which are perfectly combined to effect efficiency and beauty. Today, most of the woven products which are locally produced include shawls and wrap-around with intricate motifs and designs which are a modified version of what it used to be with its identity element intact.

3.3.1 Traditional mode of Clothing production.

In the traditional Kuki society, woollen textiles, if not limited, are null in their usage or existence. Largely agriculturalist, the only natural fibre obtained for textile production was only through home-grown cotton. The actual variety of cotton is unknown, perhaps, it is the short staple variety which is considered ideal for hand spinning. In the Kukis traditional society, cotton seeds were

sown during the month of May and the flowers plucked in December. As soon as the cotton is gathered, it is spread to dry in the sun for about three or four days until it is completely dried. This is done as it is very difficult to separate the seeds from the flowers unless it is quite dry. The cotton is next gleaned in a wooden gin called “*pat-heh*” which is rather like a small mangle with two rollers geared to revolve in opposite directions. The unseeded cotton is then produced onto a smooth plank and rolled with a piece of the bamboo reed, about one foot long and the breadth of a pencil. The cotton is rolled around the stick, and when the stick is covered with cotton it is pulled out. The cotton rolls are about eight inches long and are ready for spinning into threads on the spinning wheel. Spinning is an important stage, because it requires skills to get the desired fineness of the yarn.

The tools which were employed in the production process of the clothes were usually made by the husband of the household or bought from the local professional makers. In fact, this is the only active role that men contributed in the process of clothing production. Sometimes weaving tools were borrowed from one another among the weaving women folk. Due to the varying styles, designs and patterns, the tools used in the process of weaving also varied and accordingly the nature of the weave as well. After the cottons are converted into threads, it is subjected to the spinning wheel. The spinning wheel locally known as *mui* is made from wood and cane and the actual spindle is made of iron. The main function of the *mui* is to spin the cotton yarn into a thread and is meticulously regulated lest they are uneven in texture. The thread thus produced is then removed and wound on a thread holder called *khao kon banna*.

The equipment of loom-frames consists of a number of pieces of stout bamboo and timber rods of varying thickness and length depending on its utilitarian purposes. Three out of these rods, are used for fixing the loom in a stable position maintaining desired tension on the threads of the warp, while the others are used to facilitate different operations on the initially fixed loom with its warps arranged thereon. Another instrumental item among others is the *lhem* or *lhempeh*. It is a flat piece of wood made from a certain type of tree preferably *thingsan* and it's about three inches wide and about three feet long. When the sword is turned up on to the edge, it leaves ample room between the warp threads and through which the weft thread is then inserted. The sword is then moved down. The main purpose of the *lhempeh* is to make sure the shed is clear and to bring the cross evenly against the woven edge.¹⁷ Other items used in weaving also included the *saku ling* or

porcupine quill, and lenget, a bamboo stick with the edge evenly notched, numerous cut out minutely to make small grooves and crests in the shaped of a prism. The function of the lenget is to ensure that the even distribution of the warp threads and to prevent unevenness in the texture of the cloth woven. On the occasion of producing an embroidered cloth, the number of sticks used increases. Another important stage in the process of weaving is the starching of the threads before they are subjected for weaving, and it is done only with the warp threads to make it durable and also to avoid its stickiness throughout the process of the act of weaving which includes a lot of beating the wefts between the two rows of warps. Unless properly starched, the threads are incapable of withstanding the pressure and tension generated while weaving.

3.3.2 Process of Dyeing by the Kuki weavers.

According to N Chatterjee, the Kuki's clothes were initially white in colour until they discovered that "certain barks, roots, herbs and leaves could yield fast black colour"¹⁸, which is then followed by other colours. In general, textiles can be dyed in the yarn form or in the fabric or garment stages. Oftentimes weavers dyed the yarn after starching it in order to ensure the uniformity of the colour and its sturdiness. Natural dyes were most commonly used by Kuki women. These were extracted from natural materials such as the bark of trees, flowers, leaves and sometimes minerals, but most commonly mentioned was the indigo dye to produce dark blue coloured cloths.

Several indigenous dyes, before they started importing manufactured products, provided colour of different variations to the *pon* which were woven. "Powder horns, scabbards, wood combs, and other articles, were covered by lacquer.....and found expression in black and red". Blue indigo, the *strobilanthes flaccidifolia*, provides the dark blue and as for the colour green and red, according to Mccall were imported. Arguably, it would mean that green and red dyes started appearing in their clothing only after the initiation of inter-trade with neighbouring regions. This could also indirectly allow us to retrace when inter-trade and exchanges had started.

By early 20th century, Shakespear writes, "the commonest dye is obtained by boiling the leaves of the Assam indigo (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolia*). Many immersions are required to render the colour permanent, and as the plant, which is cultivated near the villages or in the gardens, does not grow luxuriantly, it is seldom possible to obtain enough leaves in any one year for more than two immersions, so that the whole process may take two or three years"¹⁹. Several red and yellow dyes

were also recorded to have been known, but they were little used, and most of the thread, excepting the blue and white were obtained from the bazars.²⁰

3.3.3 The actual process of Weaving in the Kuki society

Weaving is a process of interlacing two series of threads, warp and weft, interlaced at right angles to each other, which in the primal Kuki society is processed through the handlooms. The warp threads run the length of the fabric and the weft threads run across the width of the fabric. The fabrics thus produced were directly used as clothes with no stitching or sewing required in the early Kuki society. The fabric woven on the back strap loom is thick. Its thickness is particularly due to the dense warp which covers the weft. Also the thickness of the woven fabric depends on the thickness of the yarn. The width of the fabric is narrow to enable the weaving of the cloth without any technical difficulty. Both the shawls and sarongs or puonve are made of two separate pieces stitched along the length of the fabric.²¹

No record mentioned the existence of any kind of knitted fabric or woollen fabric in the clothing forms of Kukis. Therefore, it can be assumed that these forms of clothing appeared in a much later period. The weaving techniques are similar in most part, owing perhaps to the “hill tribe culture” as Vibha Joshi noted.²²

Warping the yarns on the loom is the first stage in the actual process of weaving. In Kuki traditional society, warping is done on a horizontal bar laid parallel to each other with the help of a long beam with holes for the bar. These long beam serves to keep rod bar of the loom stable and parallel which also ensures the consistency of the length, to “produce a rectangular rather than a trapezoidal textile”²³ as Rowe puts it. Yarn for warping is usually wound into a ball, kept in a basket from rolling about and sometimes left on the spindle for warping.

The warp is a set of threads attached to the loom lengthwise before weaving begins, it is the base yarn that runs along the length of fabric through which the “weft” yarns are filled in to make the fabric. Traditionally warp length and width varied depending on whose it was intended for. The warps are stretched out onto two beams and spread evenly depending on the thickness desired, and then it is lubricated using wax or some other natural products to ensure that the yarns do not get entangled with each other.

The Kuki people use the “back strap or body tension” loom for weaving fabric, it was generally more favoured because of its portability according to Joshi. While weaving, the weavers usually used a mat or a blanket as a cushion to sit on the ground with their legs straight out in front of them. The weavers brace their feet against something, mainly to obtain greater tension with less back strain. Rowe writes that the foot brace is often built against the framework supporting the far loom bar. The weaver then places their feet directly against the brace or may set other items between his feet and the brace.²⁴

In the early months of the year when weather is dry and sunny, the women prepare their cotton which were harvested in December or January by “ginning, teasing, spinning and making skeins”²⁵. The materials were kept ready for the occasion that during the free season, they could make yarn for weaving. Weaving, in the Kuki society, was the sole responsibility of the women in the house. It was considered her responsibility to clothed her family and to make sure that each member of the household has enough cloth for every occasion of their life. However, their functions were not confined only to clothes production, rather weaving or making of clothes was for many of the women their “leisure” since they also “figure prominently in the routine of cultivation, by their part of sowing of the seeds, the three or four seasonal weeding, and the harvesting”²⁶ besides their household chores.

A.G McCall observed that the weaving among the Kukis was excellent, and done on complicated indigenous hand looms with home-grown cotton processed into yarns. The whole process, he noted, requires patience and time. The cotton is seeded by means of a small, locally made ginning machine, crude wood moving parts operating reversely, which, with the help of pig’s fat grease, slowly spit out the seeds. The cotton is then carded by means of a bow composed of a tight curved piece of cane connected at both ends by a thin cane string. The fluffy cotton is then spun by hand, a feat which can only become easy after considerable practice, the cotton finally being into skeins.²⁷

Even though the whole process seems relatively easy to handle, the operation of the looms necessitate considerable practice to ensure equality in dimensions and regularity of design. “The warp is bound over a fixed beam of wood or bamboo, and the other end is tautened by the weaver wearing, round the hollow of her back, a leather strap to which is attached the other end of the

loom. The weaver sits between this leather and the loom, adjusting her position to suit the warp length. The woof is passed through by means of prepared spindles and is battened firmly down by the size of a smooth, and comparatively weighty, blade of polished wood, usually of sago palm”²⁸.

The industrial revolution, which essentially covered all colonial countries with manufactured clothes, had an immense and drastic impact on Kuki society. Western clothing introduction in the society had dented the cottage industry with people clamouring to wear the “civilized” western clothing instead of draping themselves with the “primitive” dress. In recent years, conscientious efforts have been made from different sides to promote the “traditional” dress, to revitalize their cultural and ethnic identity.

Rowe summarization of the complete weaving sequence for a plain weave on a backstrap loom is particularly relevant to the techniques of weaving employed by the Kuki weavers. Below is an excerpt of her description,

1. Open the shed rod shed by moving the shed rod forward close to the heddle loops and strumming the warp crosswise with a pick or the tip of the sword above or below the shed rod while holding the warp tension firm.
2. Insert the sword into the shed in front of the heddle rod and beat against the woven edge.
3. Release the tension enough to turn the sword on edge and pass the shuttle through the open shed.
4. Increase the warp tension, turn the sword flat, and beat sharply against the woven edge, afterward removing it from the shed.
5. Open the heddle rod shed by lifting the heddle rod with the left hand. To facilitate this process, lean forward slightly to release tension on the warp, place the sword on top of the shed rod with the right hand, and press the shed rod down and back.
6. While holding the heddle rod up, insert the sword into the shed formed.
7. Release the heddle rod and bring the sword forward against the woven edge of the fabric, first gently, then sharply, simultaneously leaning back to increase warp tension.
8. Release the tension enough to turn the sword on edge to hold the shed open and pass the shuttle through the shed.

9. Increase tension, turn the sword flat again, and beat it against the woven edge. Begin again at step 1.²⁹

3.3.4 Designs and patterns: Embroidery on the woven cloths

Designs and patterns like any other dress history of any culture are a later addition in the evolutions of dress. However, it is difficult to claim in certainty at what period of time this additions appeared in the tribal dress or among any other communities. Wettstein, in her study of the “traditional” dress of the Nagas elucidated the various kinds of designs and patterns inscribed on the Naga dress and how these designs came into vogue within the society. The shawls of men in the Ao society, with all its variants are stated to be largely determined by social status, where its wearers always hold a dignified position through their wealth or heroism. For instance, Emblems on the shawl suggest that the characteristic of the depicted animal is the characteristic of the wearers and hence careful deliberation and consent must be given by the community to grant an individual the right to wear a certain emblematic animal.³⁰ The limited accessibility has made the desire to achieve a full set of “prestigious symbols and emblems on his shawl”³¹ ensued active competition among the able bodied men. Wettstein adds on to the observation that, besides social status, Ao men's shawls also imbued in it the idea of what a man ideally should be.³²

Wettstein described in great length the various elements of identity enmeshed in the weave while studying the Ao Naga shawls. According to her, even the names accorded to the various types of shawls had no linkage with myths or the likes but simply a result of its visuals for instance, the tiger cloths. The tiger cloths of the Ao Naga apparently had no link with tigers or lycanthropy but simply because the designs which are a mixed stripes of red and black likened that of the tiger. What is problematic and not completely applicable in the current study of the Kuki society, however, is that it wipes out the process of the design creation. Design, in most cases, is inspired by something, and artwork is seldom just random or accidental. If we are to subscribe to Wettstein observation, names to which the clothes or the shawls are referred to, it would mean that the designs and patterns of the weave are simply a creative work of the designer or the weaver.

The designs of the Kuki dresses, according to McCall were “simple, but regular, varied and symbolic, denoting the walk of lovers along a village path, the cucumber seed, the tiger’s tooth, a cluster of mithun’s eyes, or the notes of a musical xylophone”, in which he went on to claim that

design in the southern part of the settlement is much more exquisite and intricate than those in the north. Writing on the Lushai-Kukis of the southern regions, Shakespear recounts that the cloths were ornamented almost entirely by lines of different colours, with white cloths having blue and red stripes down the centre and sometimes one transversely about a foot from either end and zigzags patterns.³³ It has been briefly elucidated the changing patterns in the forms of dress over the course of time, but the above two observations also brings to light that designs and patterns among a particular ethnic group was hardly symmetric or uniform, it differs on both space and time.

The most common motifs observed among the Lushai-Kukis are the geometric designs- “zigzags formed by alternate upright and pendant triangles, lozenges and diamonds”³⁴. According to Goswami, the clothes Kuki women wove in the past had designs copied from the skins of snake viz., *thangnang pon*, *saipikhup*, *khamtang*, *pon mangvom*. He also further noted that in olden times, commoners were not allowed to weave such pons except the chiefs and officials. Copied from snake, it was forbidden to wear or carry such cloths while going down into a river or crossing a big river lest it attracts the snake towards the wearers. To prevent any misfortune, it was customary to perform a rite called *lhalho* in which the priest sacrificed a hen and utter incantations to safeguard the weavers. The incantations as cited by Goswami goes,

(the name of the weaver) ama hin apon khon hi Taneng, Tachin, Neichong amaho khon patna akhon ahi. Ati alun dam lo hen amit ahan phatle ben

*This woman (the name of the weaver is mentioned) has woven this piece of cloth. In the past such cloths were woven by Taneng, Tachin and Neichong. May the weavers head and body remain hale and hearty. May her eyes and teeth remain sound.*³⁵

In the twentieth century, it has been increasingly observed that the designs and patterns of the dress were significant in identifying gender distinction as well as social status of its wearers. Along with it, restrictions on wearing certain dresses were also modified with the changing styles of dress. For instance, in Naga society, only those men who had shown bravery in war, could wear the warrior’s cloth, and even the patterns on the women and men garments cannot be interchanged. Conversions to Christianity discontinued and prohibited individuals to indulge in anything associated with traditional religious beliefs. These sanctions, like other aspects of their life, incurred tremendous

impacts on the style of clothing of the people. This is mainly due to the fact that some of the cloths, could be worn only by those who had acquired the status by showing prowess in war, head-hunting, or by giving feasts of merit- all activities associated with the heathen way of life which required performance of rituals related to the native religious beliefs.³⁶ Increasingly, textiles that were traditionally associated with varying social statuses are now associated with achievement in various other spheres such as education, thus different meanings and values over the old ones. Weaving, therefore, Joshi observes is “reflective of the changes that have occurred in different spheres”³⁷.

3.4 Weaving and its manifestation of gendered spaces in the Kuki society

Ann Pollard Rowe, rightly commented in the preface of her edited book that weaving represents a significant indigenous body of knowledge and creative outlet, as well as providing a prominent ethnic marker that still has value among indigenous people. Hand textiles, she further noted, are highly sensitive to cultural influences of all kinds and therefore allows us to see not only the present but also the past. Further stating thus that “Indigenous costume in highland Ecuador combines elements from pre-Inca, Inca, Spanish colonial, and modern times”³⁸. Therefore, she suggested that in order to understand other cultures, it is necessary to take notice of the things that are important within those cultures’ own context. Because, even things that are seemingly too ancient or primitive or unattractive could represent values different from those who identified with other cultures.

C.S Mullan, in his Census reports of 1931 writes about the “occupation of dependants” which essentially denotes the women-folk of Assam, which to a certain extent is also found applicable and relevant to all hill tribes as well. He aptly describes thus that “a cultivator’ wife in Assam has generally so many occupations that it is almost impossible to say which is her principal one: she helps her husband to transplant his rice seedling; she helps him to reap his crop; she looks after his house; cooks his meals; rears his children, and devotes her spare time to weaving”. He therefore enumerates the varying roles women in the society plays depending on its different observers. In the light of this he noted that “from the point of view of the future of the race her principal occupation would be ‘motherhood’, from the agricultural point of view it would be ‘helps in cultivation’ and from the point of view of an exponent of cottage industries it would be ‘weaving’.

From the enumerators' point of view it was generally blank"³⁹. Women, according to it, represent no major occupation, even weaving, which is largely her field of domain. Yet, even though it was her sole responsibility to clothed the body, her contribution is still considered insignificant and "blank" as stated above. It can be concluded that women's role was basically to aid her husband in running the family, an indispensable accessory but never the main actor.

In almost all societies, clothes and its associated designing or production is considered feminine unless it is for commercial activities by which it is no longer confined solely to the domain of women. For instance, in Highland Ecuador, where it is predominantly men's work. For them, rather than being a hobby, it is a means of livelihood, a commercial activity. In the Kuki society, where patriarchal forms of the family system are deeply ingrained and functioning, cloth production is completely confined within the workloads of women alone. However, as elucidated earlier, weaving was not their sole occupation unlike women from Kamrup⁴⁰, instead, in the Kuki society women were also expected to contribute in various other activities of the households like doing the household chores, working in the field etc. They aptly fit the role of the "beasts of burden" in society. Men's contribution in weaving is negligible except in crafting the tools necessary for weaving. In earlier times, according to Wettstein, among the Ao, when warriors and brave men were glorified, men handled "solid objects of any kind used for jewelry making such as beads, feathers, bones, claws, animal teeth, as well as basketry..."⁴¹. On the other hand all textile techniques, such as spinning, weaving, and embroidery, are performed solely by women. While painting was the only work men did on textiles. However, such records of men participating in the process of weaving is unheard of in the Kuki society except in making the tools or aiding their wives in ginning or spinning.

Prior to the arrival of the British and its associated "civilization", C.A Soppit, in his monograph "A short account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribe", remarked that the Kuki had few needs. Their practices of *Jhum* cultivation, hunting and fishing with the women weaving the few clothes required in the way of clothing⁴², salt and iron objects like daos were the only necessities obtained from the markets in the plains through a barter system. Therefore, he noted, the Kukis have no need for money. However with the advance in "civilization", their needs and tastes increase and are expensive and so thus trades. The Kukis, who initially were "content to wander about with little to no clothing, finds it suddenly necessary to array himself in cloths of many colour"⁴³. Such changes

in the society, enhances the workloads of the already heavy workloads of the women, both in producing various clothes as well as in the agricultural fields.

Man engaging in weaving is unheard of. Shakespear offers a lengthy and detailed description on the domestic life of the Kuki people, where works were divided between the genders. “Weaving is in the domain of women. Spinning, dyeing and weaving are exclusively undertaken by women. The contribution of men is limited to the making of the weaving instruments, although, sometimes men may help women to warp the thread”⁴⁴. Among the Nagas, traditionally men contributed to the completed textile by decorating the “men’s kilts and body cloth with cowry shells and jobs’ tear seeds and the decorative plate made of wood, cowry shells, plaited cane, and goats hair stitched at one corner of the rich man’s cloth as among the Sema Nagas”⁴⁵. However, apart from the noble descriptions of the division of labour with which each gender were to be confined, there was also the associated taboos and sayings about man engaging in weaving among the Kuki society. It was beliefs in the Kuki community that man who weave will not be able to shoot straight while hunting. Men who weave are also subjected to social stigmatisation as being feminine, which further discourage them in any form of participation in the process of weaving except in the creation of its tools. However, their participation could not be completely negated, because while it was not prominent their contributions were indispensable. They helped in making the tools for the ginning machine, spinning and also of the looms. They also helped in the process of ginning, spinning and winnowing to produce the yarn. Although the cloth itself was produced by the womenfolk, the whole process of the creation was in some ways a collective effort of the whole family.

3.5 Conclusion

Clothes are what differentiated man from animal and therefore has always been the concern of every human being. The theory of origin of clothes, of what exactly inspired and motivated mankind to start clothing their body is very much debatable. Yet, its values and significance within society is indisputable, because it affects human dignity and self-respect, thus influencing and reflecting his place in society. However, every culture is dominated by their own perceptions and worldview, therefore, their attitudes towards their concept of clothes or nudity also varies accordingly, for instance, for certain societies the art of dressing could be completely devoid of any fabric but an art on their skin itself which is regarded as effective as clothes. The history of

the origin of clothes among the Kukis, according to the western accounts, is traced to a very recent past, perhaps late 18th century or early 19th century. Due to the absence of written records or any archaeological material evidence, it is hard to tell the kinds of clothes early Kuki people of the pre-colonial era used to wear. In the late 18th century, the Kukis were recorded to have worn clothes albeit scantily clad. This shows that the concept of weaving and its practice was already known to them. The tools and techniques used in the process of weaving varies according to the necessity of the designs and patterns desired to produce. It is thus observed that designs and patterns were inspired by their social and cultural practices and beliefs or at times influenced by the creativity of the weaver. In the next chapter, I will look into the various ways society consumes clothes and the values and meanings attached to their clothes.

¹ Michael A. Hann & B.G Thomas, 2005. *Patterns of Culture: Decorative Weaving Techniques*, University of Leeds, p.69

² Carolyn Niengneihmoi, “Cultural Significance of Chin-Kuki-Mizo Dresses in Manipur”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Vol. 4 (4) (April. 2015) pp. 59-62. p.59

³ Hann & Thomas, p.43

⁴ Isaac Walker, 1885. *Dress: As it has been, Is, and will be*, New York: Isaac Walker, p.22

⁵ Walker, p.23

⁶ Walker, p.30

⁷ Lt. Col. J. Shakespear, 1912. *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., p.7

⁸ C. A. Soppit, 1887. *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the Northeast Frontier*, Shillong: Assam Secretariat Press, p.6

⁹ Shakespear, p.9

¹⁰ E. W. Dun, 1992(reprint). *Gazetteer of Manipur*, Delhi: Manas Publications, p.19

¹¹ R. B. Pemberton, 1835. *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, p.16

¹² Pemberton, p.33

¹³ Vibha Joshi, 2000. “Dynamics of Warp and Weft: Contemporary trends in Naga textiles and the Naga collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford”, *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, 786. p.378.

¹⁴ Tarun Goswami, *Kuki Life and Lore*. North Cachar Hills District Council, p.316

¹⁵ N. Chatterjee, 1979. *Puan The Pride of Mizoram*, Tribal Research Institute: Mizoram, p.21

¹⁶ A.G. McCall, 1949. *Lushai Chrysalis*, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute. p.27

¹⁷ A.P. Rowe. L. M. Miller, L. A. Meisch (eds.) 2007. *Weaving and Dyeing in Highland Ecuador*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 19

¹⁸ N. Chatterjee. *Puan*. p.21

¹⁹ Shakespear, p.31

²⁰ Shakespear, p.31

²¹ Joshi, p.379

²² Joshi, p.377

²³ Rowe, p.23

²⁴ Rowe, p.29

²⁵ McCall, p.172

²⁶ McCall, p.172

²⁷ McCall, p.182

²⁸ McCall, p.183

-
- ²⁹ Rowe, p.20
- ³⁰ Marion Wettstein, “Defeated Warriors, Successful Weavers: Or how Men’s Dress Reveals Shifts of Male Identity among the Ao Nagas”, In Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban von Stockhausen, and Marion Wettstein (eds.) *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India*. Gent: Snoeck: 129-145. p.138
- ³¹ Wettstein, p.139
- ³² Wettstein, p.135
- ³³ Shakespear, p.31
- ³⁴ Ibid
- ³⁵ Tarun Goswami, p.453
- ³⁶ Joshi, p.380
- ³⁷ Joshi, p.383
- ³⁸ Rowe, p.9
- ³⁹ C.S. Mullan, 1932. *Census of India, 1931: Volume III, Assam Part I.- Report*, Shillong: Assam Government Press, p.116
- ⁴⁰ Mullan, p.118
- ⁴¹ Mullan, p.141
- ⁴² Sopbit, p.23
- ⁴³ Ibid
- ⁴⁴ Wettstein, p.379
- ⁴⁵ Ibid

CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF CLOTHING IN TRADITIONAL KUKI SOCIETY

4.1. Introduction

Culture is essentially understood as a sum total of ideas, images, myths, language, laws, values and institutions that expresses a given society's analysis of itself and of the world as it knows.¹ It is an expression of worldview. Distinct cultural identity is what differentiate communities apart from each other. It is thus a fundamental aspect in the making of one's socio-political identities. Clothes as a medium of expression, a social skin² as Terence Turner rightly ascribed, acts as a tangible medium of expressing such cultural identity. This is based upon the conception that as social skin, clothes expresses the changing perceptions, attitudes and values that prevails among the people which also implies that it is subjected to constant modification and re-modification along with the changing society.

Colonial period and its aftermath witnessed the most rapid socio-cultural transformation of the Kukis. It is most vivid in the clothing practices of the people. *Ponve*(sarong) and *ponsil*(shawl), which used to be the only style of dressing is substantiated by various other factory manufactured garments. Moreover, immense development in terms of designs and patterns is also witnessed today. However, despite the altered appearance of the *pons* today in comparison to that during or prior the colonial period, its traditional socio-cultural importance continued. Indeed, certain meanings and values existent in the primal society has lost its meanings and values, as its associated social, cultural and religious practices were discontinued and abandoned. In such a state, it is of utmost urgency to study its traditional values and meanings lest it completely disappeared in the face of rapid changes. Therefore, the present chapter is dedicated to examine how clothes as a valued assets was consumed in the primal Thadou-Kuki. The chapter also intends to show, albeit rather briefly, how the encounter with the West had reshaped the worldview of the Kuki people

which in turn found expression in their choice of dress which eventually led to the mushrooming of a standardized and uniform identity signifying “traditional” dress of their own.

Clothes possess multiple functional properties within and beyond one’s socio-cultural environment to which a person belongs. It is understood as a badge of identity, a medium which could either construct or interpret the identity of its wearers. The understanding being that adornments of the body emanate and exhibit certain characteristics of the individual. It could therefore, aptly make statements about the economic status, occupational roles, affiliations with other people, differentiation from others, and also about the individual itself as Patricia Hunt noted.³ Studying the dress pattern of African-American women of Georgia between 1880 -1915, she enumerated the different kinds of messages dress transmitted about the wearers’ social status and positions, whether they were elite women or domestic workers. Emmanuele Coccia also writes that besides satisfying its biological necessities and cultural importance, clothing also provides identity by marking social and spiritual differences from other people. She also remarked that clothing could also raise an individual symbolically above or below all other individuals.⁴ These external elements of the body, clothes and ornaments, is more able to “convey and express our soul, its psychology, its character, more than our anatomical body could ever”⁵.

This perception is notable in the writings of the colonial period. For instance, the colonial agents described and categorized the indigenous hill tribes of northeast India as primitive, occupying the basis of the civilization scale modelled with the West at its pinnacle. To the West, the dresses of pre-colonial Kukis, which were described as scanty and barely covering the body, sufficiently substantiated their preconceptions of the indigenous as “primitive”. Resultantly, as later observed, the Kukis like other colonized people began to imitate the clothing culture of the West, despite the latter's deliberate attempt to distinguish themselves through various measures of regulations on clothes. Scholars argued that the imitation was hardly about its aesthetic appeal but rather a product of what Western-wear represents, the messages it transmits to its audience.

In studying the nature of consumption of dress among the tribal Kukis, it is imperative to understand that “symbols of dress are always contingent upon a specific community”⁶ and that social codes are often expressed through the cultural specificities of dress. The historical evolution of mankind shows that ornamenting the body comes in various forms and shapes over different

space and time. What is outdated and primitive for one culture could be socially, culturally or religiously symbolic and intrinsic to the existence of the other. The different styles of clothing adopted within a particular community is often symbolic of the varying cultural and social norms which the society adheres to. Clothes, therefore, are not just a necessity against the weather, but are also an expression of prevailing perceptions and attitudes of a given society.

In the traditional Kuki society, the social, religious and economic and even climatic conditions are critical in shaping the notion of dress and its purposes in the society. No society is static in its essence, it is dynamic and constantly changing. Changes in the worldview which guided their actions and attitudes reflects in the choice of dress of the people, thus expressing the prevailing thoughts and practices of the individual and by extension the community. Unfortunately, however, the majority of the writings both of the colonial period and contemporary writings often depicted the change of the Kuki society prior to the pre-colonial period as fixed with little change over the course of time until the arrival of the British and the missionaries. Works of colonial and missionary which for the lack of any other sources, are treated as primary, provides little help in tracing the dress of the Kuki society prior to their arrival. Subsequently, most historians are compelled to rely on the folktales and oral traditions to learn how dresses were produced, consumed and circulated within the society of the Kukis.

There is an uncertainty as to when and why the Kukis started making and using clothes to cover and adorn themselves. In the earliest available records which is dated to the last decade of the 18th century⁷, Kukis were already found to be clothed albeit “scantly”. Kuki men were said to have been naked or half-naked while the women were recorded to have clothed their body “enough to be called not naked”. Evaluation of the various reports showed that the near nakedness had nothing to do with lack of knowledge regarding its production but a wilful and conscious choice adopted by the community which is traced to their ancient historical past. Meerwarth noted that three main factors which dictate the making of clothing in early society, namely, climate, the ideas of decency and the desire to attract.⁸ In other words protection, communication and decoration were the primary reasons which inspired man to start wearing clothes.

Initially, *puan* or *pon* which was their only garments was only one-piece which was wrapped around their body or thrown over their shoulders. Both men and women dressed in a similar

manner despite the absence of any formal guidelines, which Jenkins argued as an act of “unconscious predisposition” not a “conscious decision to conform”.⁹ It was produced by the years of socialization in which society has come to “perceive and obey the injunctions”¹⁰ already located within the society. People adhered to the unwritten rules to not disregard the reasons behind the distinctions made on the patterns, colours or items which were meant to classify and categorize social status and positions. This was possible because of the socially constructed collective expectations and beliefs that guided them.

4.2. Clothes and Clothing in the early Kuki society

The worldview of the primal Kuki society was exclusively confined within their village. Due to the relatively isolated way of living except occasional trades, the social beliefs and practices were limited and bound within the confinement of their community and geographical settlements. Meanings attached to their dress, although essentially irrelevant to the outside world, had much relevance to the people and were practiced most rigidly. No diversion was tolerated in all matters of its existence and outsider’s beliefs and practices had no significant influence upon their society even though interactions with their neighbouring tribes albeit in a limited way was also traced. For instance, both McCulloch and EW Dun made a mention of how the Manipuri king organized an annual event in the Manipur valley called *Hauchongba* wherein various hill tribes surrounding the valley attended the event where gifts were exchanged.¹¹ Indeed, apart from the differences in functions and significance, considerable similarities existed in the apparels and styles of wearing among the people of the regions. It can be thus observed that on occasion of interactions and encounters over a period of time, exchange and assimilations of cultures could have occurred. Perishable as it is, it is difficult to trace the reason behind the numerous similarities of the clothing materials which is extended over the various South East Asian countries as well. The current concern of the study is therefore, primarily confined to the socio-cultural significance of dress as it exists in the early Kuki society.

The attire of the early Kukis was described as being “extremely simple” by Meerwarth. At some point of their historical evolution, Kuki men were said to have been going naked. In the 18th century, Kuki men were still seen naked in the Chin Hills as well as in the Cachar where they had

settled. Surgeon MacRae, who writes on the Kukis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1799 may be quoted here-¹²

“The tradition of the Kookies reflecting their origin, is that they, and the Mugs, are the offspring of the same progenitor, who had two sons, by different mothers. The Mugs, they say, are the descendants of the older, and the Kookies of the younger son. The mother of the younger having died during his infancy, he was neglected by his step-mother, who, while clothed her own son, allowed him to go naked, and this partial distinction being observed, as he grew up, he went by the name Luncta or naked. Upon the death of their father, a quarrel broke between the brothers, which induced the Luncta to betake himself to the hills, and there pass the remainder of his days. His descendants have continued there ever since, and still go by the name. Lunctas, though properly speaking, the term is only applicable to the male part of them, as the female wear a short apron before, made of cloth of their own manufacture, and which falls down from the loins to the middle of the thigh; and both sexes occasionally throw aloof sheet of cloth over their bodies to defend from cold.”

4.2.1. Men's attire

Over the course of time, Kuki men started wearing clothes. In general, the Kuki men wore a loin-cloth called *Khaipeleng* or *delchen*, worn somewhat like dhoti and a larger cloth wrapped around the body depending on the weather and circumstances. According to Soppit, it was a strip of cloth which is tied round the waist and left its end falling down in front to about a foot or more above the knee while the backside was left naked.¹³ Meerwarth writes that the dress of the Kuki men consists of a single cloth about seven feet in length and five in width. One corner of the cloth is “grasped in the left hand and the cloth is passed over the left shoulder behind the back, then under the right arm across the chest and the end thrown over the left shoulder”¹⁴. During winter several such cloths are worn in the same manner. She also mentioned the existence of a certain type of white coat which reached down the thigh and only fastened at the throat as part of the attire.

Kuki men also commonly wore a turban like headgear which is tied round the head with the ends or one end sticking up front. On auspicious occasions, they tied round their heads sash of goat's hair called *jouchal* with the steel blades called *chaldep* tucked in the folds along with the feathers of the jungle crow.¹⁵ It was called *tuhpah*. The men also wore a sleeveless shirt called *boitong sangkhol*, a collar shirt with buttons. Their overall outfit also includes a sheath called *chempai* and a shoulder bag like basket called *paipah* used as odds and ends. A composite of such, completed the outfit of the Kukis, which understandably was not worn on every occasion as is substantiated

by the various recorded observations. Even such forms of clothing were not the same everywhere. In unfrequented villages which is situated beyond the beaten tracks, Kuki men still “go about entirely naked, with the exception of the shawl thrown over the shoulders”¹⁶.

Apart from garments, Soppit also recorded that earrings and necklaces of various, often bearing social, cultural and religious significance were also commonly worn.

4.2.2. Women's attire

Kuki women wore a knee-length loin-cloth called *ponve*, which is wrapped round their waist or above the chest. It is fastened with a string around the waist to hold it tight. Like the men, an additional wrapper was thrown over the shoulder, depending on the weather or in the presence of outsiders. According to Meerwarth, Kuki women usually adorned a blue loin cloth which reaches down the knees and is worn like a petticoat and held up by a girdle of brass wire or string. She also mentioned the use of a white jacket like that of the men which she opines to have been a product of their encounter with the outside people.¹⁷ Soppit also stated that the women of the Kukis, in general, “wear a kilt of blue cloth, extending from the waist to just above the knees, another cloth from the breasts to the waist. Bracelets and earrings are worn in great profusion”¹⁸. Their hair was decorated with long brass hair pins. He further mentioned that most ornaments were given up after marriage.¹⁹ The eradication could have been necessitated by the profusion of their workload after marriage, nevertheless, it eventually becomes a mark of distinction between married women and unmarried women.

Also significant is the remark of GA Grierson who writes that when the hills were first occupied by the British, some of the Kukis wore a rough white cotton blanket or mantle only while others wore a loincloth in addition. Even these were claimed to be discarded while working in the agricultural field. Women, Grierson further recounted, wore a skirt which is wound once and a half round the body and hitched in like the “Burmese women's petticoats”.²⁰ Grierson's observation found resonance in the works of Major McCulloch, who also mentioned the use of a coarse sheet as the only form of covering of the body. According to McCulloch, a cloth round the body waist is worn by the individuals and a head-dress or turban like head dress of cotton or silk were also worn by all albeit in a different manner. The woman on the other hand wraps a scanty strip of cloth round their persons sufficient to prevent them from being called naked. In addition

they throw a sheet over their shoulder or wrap it round their bodies under their armpits. Unlike men, women wear no headdress but instead wear their hair in a beautiful and stylistic way adorned with various ornaments.²¹

4.2.3. Ornaments

Wearing of earrings and necklaces was common for both genders. Children's earlobes were pierced at birth and in each ear a cornelian bead was worn fastened by a piece of cotton string.²² Beads of blue, black and red colour were very popular for use as both necklaces and earrings. It was of their beliefs that a person whose earlobes had not been pierced are more stubborn and hot-headed, so, parents at the time of their children's birth made sure to have the child's earlobes pierced. The lobes were pierced when they were children which were then inserted with wooden plugs, replaced gradually until the real earring could be inserted.²³ Cornelian beads as compared to glass beads were highly favoured and revered. In fact, bridal gifts usually consist of beads and dresses apart from other various kinds of agricultural implements. This implies that to the primal Kuki women, clothes were not only a protective mechanism but an asset or property. On this note, Chaudhuri's assertion is worth mentioning where he stated that, "clothing was never a simple affair of ensuring protection against the weather and climate", nor an inter-sexual affairs but rather an asset.²⁴ Bracelets and armlets were worn profusely during auspicious occasions. Women wore bracelets called *chao* which they coiled round their hands from the wrists upward to the elbows and above their elbows they wore metal armlets round their arms.²⁵ Ornaments were less definitive about gender distinction in terms of wearing except the slight variations in the materials used. For instance, both men and women wear necklaces, usually with ordinary strings of brass and glass beads but women wear it with big ivory or wooden discs with a hole in the centre.

4.2.4. Tattoos

Unlike the Nagas, tattoos did not seem to find much attraction nor significance in their life. However, it was observed that some young boys and girls tattooed a small circle or dot between the thumb and the pointing finger.

4.3. Clothing and its social life within the primal Kuki society

To the western observers, indigenous dresses which were a complete contrast to their warm-weathered clothes were peculiar and unsightly, for its minimalism which was considered indecent and uncivilized. S. N Das writes, “There are three stages in the history of dress - nakedness, covering, clothes, and they are three stages in civilization. It is good as any; man naked, man covered, man clothed - nature, decency, art, nothing, something and beauty”²⁶. It could be inferred from Das’ statements that how a person adorned his/her body could make statements about his/her position in the civilization parameter, where Western society is at its pinnacle. Visual representation is what defined a person, Carol Mattingly had observed. She stated that American women in the 19th century were defined based on her visual representation.²⁷ Such being the perception of the Colonial West also, the hill tribes of Northeast India were categorized as primitive and savage, in which the “near-nakedness” contributed immensely in its conviction of their civilization status.

However, as scholars had observed, the question of what civilized means differ upon culture to culture. For instance, to the early African tribes, clothing was not important because of the hot climatic condition of their environment, instead they decorated their body with artistic designs and patterns which symbolizes and expresses the social standings of the individual. Likewise, in the northeast, where climate is relatively warmer than the West, layers of clothes to cover their body were not as important as it was in the West. Moreover, the society was dependent largely on agriculture and hunting, to which draping with full-body clothing could have been a hassle. Climatic conditions may have, to conclude, played a major role in deciding the outfit of the people. However little and scanty their dress was, it was not without meanings and ascriptions. As Meerwarth noted, there are three primary reasons that motivated man to start wearing clothes viz., protection, communication and decoration. Despite its minimalistic existence, Kuki dresses were imbued with meanings and values which were socially and culturally relevant providing much valued informations on the social beliefs and practices of the people. The functionality of garments of the Kukis was not solely motivated by its protective relevance. Its relevance was more associated with the meanings and significance which found relevance in the socio-cultural and to certain extent the religious practices of the people as well.

4.3.1. Significance of clothing in their social and cultural practices

Clothes among the Kukis, as already noted above, were essentially drapes of various sizes with varying designs and patterns. Certain shawls like *ponlhe* and *pondum* were irreplaceable to the people. Throughout the stages of the lifecycle, from birth to marriage to death, several kinds of *pon* were utilized as gifts of exchange besides its practical utilities; celebratory or mourning gifts. Through this exchanges, relationships were either established or strengthened.

On the occasion of the death of a Chief or influential man of the village, guests who came for the condolence were expected to bring *Pondum*. According to tradition, after dead bodies are decomposed they disjointed the skull and wrapped it with *pondum* which was then put in a brass urn and placed it inside a cave.²⁸ It was for this purpose that brides were expected to bring *pondum* on their wedding day. In fact, it was considered extremely disgraceful if a bride failed to bring one. She was expected to weave one as soon as she can. During the course of the event, it was also customary of the family of the dead to give *pon* of varying types to near and dear ones of the dead. As much as it was for memorabilia, it was also intended to strengthen and restated the familial bonds through these gifts.

Similarly, on the occasion of a wedding, the bride who is not only expected to be skilled in weaving was also expected to bring along *ponsil* and *ponve* of various kinds as part of her bridal gifts. As mentioned above, it was considered extremely disgraceful if a bride failed to bring *puanpui* (cotton blanket) and *zawlpuan/ pondum* (same cloth bearing different names depending on its context of usages). As a *zawlpuan* where *zawl* means friends, it is often presented as tokens of affection and love or to establish cordial relationship with someone.²⁹ Moreover, the bride is given several varieties of *pon* and weaving tools as part of her bridal gifts. This shows the extent of importance they pay over their *pon* and its production.³⁰ Besides this, it was also customary for the groom's family to give one *pon*, later changed into *Khamtang*, to the elder sister of the bride, to show gratitude for her contribution in nurturing the bride from her young age. *Man-le-mol*, the customary bride price also mandate the presentation of two *pon* called *lutomlaisui pon* along with others which the groom's family was obligated to fulfil by Customs.³¹

Another important ritualistic ceremonies where *pon* played significant role is the practice of *Naopui*. It is customary among the Kukis to bring the new born baby to its maternal uncle's family

for the blessing ceremony of the baby by the parents. The ritual was called *Naopui* and was observed and celebrated with much fanfare. On the day, the baby's parents bring with them a woven piece of cloth with designs on it for presentation to the maternal family. Goswami elaborated that if the baby is a boy the cloth is presented to the maternal uncle and if it is a girl, it is presented to the maternal aunt. Exchanges of *pon* as gifts occurred on every auspicious occasions. During *Naopui*, the baby's maternal uncle and aunt give a piece of cloth called *Pondum* to their family Becha who in turn presents the *Pondum* to the Becha of the baby's family. Goswami clarified that the *Pondum* cloth is presented if the baby happens to be a boy and if it is a girl, *ponlhe* is presented.³² The piece of cloth so presented by the maternal uncle's family to the baby is nicely preserved and never gifted away. It can never be used as a shroud to wrap or cover a dead body.

In a similar manner, clothing in Kuki society assumed different roles and functions throughout the various stages of their life, viz., birth, adulthood, marriage, death and so on and so forth. Several customary practices of the Kuki people provided space for the manifestations of the social role and significance of the various types of *pon* owned by the people. Since dress can mean different things in different situations. It assumed significant position in a close-knit community like the Thadou-Kukis as a tangible symbolism of personal and familial relationships. Thus it can be observed that clothing is understood not just as a protective tool but rather as an object that hold significant position in the functioning of the society. As stated clothing includes not only garments but accessories as well which collectively operates as a form of visual communication and hence capable of communicating wealth of information as Joanne Eicher noted³³, for instance, as an insignia bearing metaphysical properties.

4.3.2. Functions and significance in ritual Ceremonies

Believers of animism, the Kukis believed in the existence of malevolent spirits which needs consistent appeasement to lead a better and fulfilling life. So, during the ritual of *Thingkhosuh* performed by the priest during *Naopui*, essentially a blessing ceremony performed in the baby's maternal uncle's family, the priest puts around the neck of the baby boy a cotton string with a locket of stone bead along with a feather of a jungle cock and domestic cock tied to the locket. For the girl, the locket and the feathers are not needed. The priest invoked the protections and blessings of the Supreme Being by chanting incantations. For instance, the feathers taken from a sacrificed

healthy cock was meant to drive away the evil spirits while the cotton string was to make the boy strong and brave and attain manhood.³⁴

4.3.3. Clothing and its Symbolic significance as indicators of social status and positions within the society

Stitched and unstitched clothes separated Muslims from Hindus; draped clothes for Hindus and stitched clothes for Muslims. According to the Hindus, stitched clothes were viewed as ritually defying. So, despite regarding it as superior and advanced, the orthodox Hindus refused to permit its introduction within the community.³⁵ Such association of a certain clothes to a particular community was restricted not only to few, even the *solari topi* which was introduced in India in the 1890s was associated particularly with the Western people in general. Indians started referring to them as the *topi walas* or the hat wearing people.³⁶ It identifies one group from other. However, dress does not identify only differing communities. Its identity significance is pertinent even within a society.

Dresses, which include both clothes and ornaments, were significant in identifying the social position and status of an individual within the Kuki society. For instance, young men and women of marriageable age wear a piece of thread tied just above their ankle to signify that they are of marriageable age. Women also wear bracelets and armlets of spiral brass which starts at the wrist up to 4 inches or so of the elbow to signify that they are unmarried. Married women and men are not allowed to wear such. Earrings and necklaces were commonly worn among both genders and were in fact highly favoured to complete their wardrobe. However, widows who abandoned all thoughts of remarrying slit through their earlobes to indicate their stance on issues of remarriage.³⁷ Hence, like many other signifying elements it served as an indication to thwart any possible suitors for her hands. Strings with tiger's teeth or fowl's feathers were also worn, which they believe could warn of evils and prevent them from suffering any misfortune.

Ceremonial apparels are the most distinct status signifying forms of dress adopted by the Kukis. According to traditions, as illustrated by Goswami, *Dapa* and his wife performed *Chon* ritual while dressed in their ceremonial apparels prepared solely for the occasion. On the occasion, *Dapa* wore a piece of black cloth that reached down to his ankles. The cloth had woven motifs of different types of animals and heroic figures like figures of fighting warriors or lions etc. For the upper part,

he wore piece of cloth with woven motifs of fighting scenes and figures of dancers which symbolizes the need to fight, win and then performed celebratory dancing. Hornbill feathers were also used as decorative headgears especially on ceremonial events like dances and rituals.³⁸

On the occasion of the death of *Chon-gel lhit* (someone who performed *Sa-ai* or *Chang-ai* three times) their corpses are dressed with *ponloup*i or glorious dress. The man is made to wear *delpi* other associated paraphernalia that is worthy of its status.

Headgears worn as part of ceremonial apparels is significant in its social and cultural implications. Performers of *Chon* on the event could also be identified by the distinct headgear he wore. Goswami writes that on the occasion of *Chon*, only the *Chon* performer twined round his head a multi-coloured sash made of goat's hair (*jouchal*). In the folds of the sash another piece called *chaldep* was tucked which is a piece of very thin metal plate of about two feet in length and ten inches broad at the top, tapered off to four inches at the bottom. It was worn just above the forehead. At the back of his head he tucked in black feathers of the bird called *vahong* and other coloured flowers made of thread and cotton. These ensemble was called *tuhpah*. A strip of cowries that covered his chin and part of his head was also worn by the *Chon* performer, which was a symbolic representation of a warrior outfit meant to serve as a protective armour of the face against any arrows of the enemies.³⁹

Over his dress, he wore a specifically woven piece of ceremonial shawl called *thangsuojoupon* which was embroidered all over with various motifs. Wearing of this shawl signified the successful completion of the *Chon* ritual for the third time. *Thangsuo pon* could be worn only by person who killed the maximum number of enemies in a war.

Ability to perform *Chon* ritual was the grandest achievements anybody could in their lifetime. *Dapa's* wife on the occasion had worn a specifically made ceremonial dress. She wrapped round her waist a knee-length piece of woven cloth with striped designs of red and black. The wrapper was called *nihsan*. She wore round her breast a piece of woven black cloth called *pongeisan*. It had red border lines and reached a little below the waist. Over her shoulders she wore a woven black cloth that had multi-coloured geometrical designs on the two hems. This shawl was called *thangnang pon*. She also wore types of round copper trinkets in the holes of her earlaps, called *bilkam* along with beautiful necklaces made of stone beads called *khichang vui*, *palthi vui*, *khimu*

lhop, *khisan*, etc., and armlets and bracelets as well.⁴⁰ Goswami further mentioned that while the wearing of these specific ceremonial dresses were confined to *Chon* performers only, on the second day of *Chon*, the warriors who accompanied him in the hunts were feasted. They were specially honoured by presenting them *tuhpah*, *chaldeps* and long swords.⁴¹

In the recent past, according to Goswami, Mangjahao Changsan who was a rich, prosperous and powerful Kuki chief was gifted *lengpon* or royal cloth. By presenting him with a royal piece of cloth, the British government showed recognition of his status as the king of Kukis.⁴²

4.3.4. Clothing and the Concepts of modesty and morality as

Nirad Chaudhuri rejected the moral arguments on clothes and claims that moral associations to clothes is rather an afterthought. He argued that in its initial stage, morality was not a prime concern in the making of clothes. Instead, factors like climate and weather operate decisively on clothing in the earliest stages of the formation of costumes which after given a specific form become impossible to change. After the development of familiarity, he writes, “we look upon a particular kind of clothing as moral and modest, because we are used to wearing it” and that “the moral connexion is a secondary relationship, a matter of associated ideas”.⁴³ Having said that, the attire of the indigenous people which were often described as naked, half-naked, unclothed, and wretchedly clad or as wearing filthy rags were not viewed as immoral or indecent by the people themselves. But it was abhorrent for its indecency to Western audiences who were used to wearing full clothes possibly because of their cold climate.

This nakedness or almost nakedness was, to the western agents, as abhorrent as any other primitive practices of the people and it eventually served as another reason in condemning them as uncivilized. British imperial, as Tarlo noted, subsequently introduced on top of many others a “criteria of civilization with a new set of clothes to go with it”⁴⁴. William Thomas argued that nakedness or scantiness of clothes are not always shameful to everybody. And modesty is not primarily associated with clothing and nor is immorality.⁴⁵ In the Kanyakumari lower caste society, women were required to remain bare-breasts while in the presence of higher caste men as a symbol of respect.⁴⁶ William Steward, as cited by McCulloch, had observed that Kuki men were mostly naked while the women were clothed enough to not be called as naked. As Thomas writes, such

sights were definitely peculiar and unusual to the Western observers who had been brought up in a land where it was relatively much colder, and people always needed to stay warm.

It is also imperative to understand the way western agents perceive and provide explanation to the attitudes and behaviours of the indigenous people. Bearing in mind that any form of diversion from the habitual acts causes an emotion as William Thomas noted. The primal Kuki way of dressing, which was essentially different from the West, demanded a reaction which, substantiated by their existing prejudices of the West being civilized and the non-west as uncivilized, were quick to categorize the indigenous society as uncivilized, indecent and immoral. Earlier writings of the Western agents resonated with these prejudices in their descriptions of the people. For instance, CA Soppit in his monologues writes how the Kukis had no concept of cleanliness which makes it difficult to ascertain their true complexion. He further stated, “ their true colour is rarely seen owing to the thick coating of dirt it is considered fashionable to wear”⁴⁷, embellishing it further on how no record of a Kuki indulging in a bath of his own free will was never seen.⁴⁸ Such were the kinds of observations and recordings made about the people. Indeed no records were maintained on how a certain groups of community take their bath or how they eat for that matter, this implicitly shows how the natives were nothing more than a specimen that needs to be dissected and studied like a zoo animal.

4.4. Cultural encounter of Kukis and the West: An Overview

4.4.1 Western attitudes towards the early forms of dress of the Kukis

Judith Brown⁴⁹ noted that agents of the colonial state as well as the missionary agents were “informed” about the nature and life of the people in the colonized state to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge for better execution of their roles. The knowledge so consumed were obtained from the varying reports and ethnological works of the pioneer colonial and missionary agents. The produced works being essentially for the western audience and their supporters, embellishments and romanticizing became one of the commonality of all productions. As a result, these students of Balliol College, from where most of the administrators of British India were educated developed preconceived notions about India and its people. Being already “informed”, most of these people were keen to confirm their preconceptions which itself got reflected in their works.

The common perceptions and understanding that dresses are not only expressions but also extensions of the people who wear them influenced the western observers tremendously in terms of their attitudes towards the people of the hill tribes. Their attitude is reflected on the way they interpret and scrutinize the indigenous people and their customs and practices. In this regard, Tarlo has rightly pointed out that, regardless of the people ticking any other civilization criteria, “adhering still to old customary dress made them primitive”⁵⁰. Subsequently, fervent attempts had been made to replace this customary dress of the indigenous people with the “civilized” western dress. The fact that the British took it for granted that their customs and lifestyle were part and proof of their superior place⁵¹ substantiates the way they perceive the people. However, what evades the western’s cognition was the fact that India is located in a tropical zone and that climatic conditions of the region they inhabit is conducive in the making of their dress. So, they saw the everyday dress of the people which were mostly in the form of draping and tucking, and half-naked as they arbitrarily called, were unfathomable and unimaginable to what they considered as proper and moral. By 20th century, some administrators began to look indigenous clothing as picturesque and aesthetic that needs to be preserved and second. However, the missionary agents who actively engaged and interact with the native people continues to think that the scantiness of the native dresses were disgraceful and indecent which needs to be replaced with a more decent and moral western dress. The subsequent transformations shows that the missionary agents who settled and integrated themselves within the indigenous societies were more effective in achieving their objective which is to replace the indigenous dress with western dress.

Peter Corrigan observation on dress, particularly those associated with religion are noteworthy in this context. He writes that this dress “..... are in themselves proselytizing or discriminatory elements”⁵². In other words, these dresses which are specific to a particular religion have exercised soft power where a person feels obligated to conform to it to show his or her allegiance to the community which otherwise is frowned upon. As Dena previously argued, the inability of the natives to disassociate the British colonial agents and the missionaries which substantiated by the sense of superiority or more civilized attached to them made their clothing culture among others appeared more attractive and desirable to the natives. In the Kuki society, perhaps these in-depth knowledge about its intricacies may or may not have been known but even if it does it would have been to an extent confined only to those who associate with the western people. What is observed in this society is that people began to assimilate the dress culture of the western people for reasons

which will be insufficient to confine only to one reason. However, attempts will be made in this chapter to narrow down the several reasons that could probably be the driving factor behind such assimilations.

4.4.2. Impact of British Colonialism: Transformation in the socio-cultural practices particularly on clothes

The introduction of western education or abolishing of tribal beliefs and practices is treated as a linear transition from primitive to civilize.⁵³ Representation in the colonial discourse had legitimized their presence and nature of interference in the region, which is also how they justify their actions of abolishing certain practices of the people. Educated and conditioned to accept the Western occupation as beneficial, most people, even academicians, willingly participate in such a range of discourse. Cultural practices of the existing numerous societies suffered greatly as a result of the encounter. Religion is intrinsic in the study of change of a society. Its area of work being more psychological and spiritual, which are prime factors in shaping the outlook of life, religion has garnered major influence over the lifestyle of the man. The impact on the social and cultural lives of the people is largely a consequence of the nature and concept of the conversion to Christianity. One aspect of its understanding being its perception as a “divine grace” alongside the most prominent one which is the concept of “born again”. It demands the converts to transform totally from their old self in every aspect of life. According to the missionary, conversion must be religious, psychological, and spiritual⁵⁴ and must be notably distinct from the status quo.

On the matter, David Syiemlieh noted that the flag which symbolizes the British imperial rule and the bible went almost together in the northeast. The American Baptist mission first came into the region in 1836. David Scott requested to invite missionaries into the region in 1819, however in 1825, since the professed policy was religious neutrality, the British government of Bengal stated that they could be invited and paid salary only if they come as school headmasters. Eventually, school began to play a critical role in the proselytization movement of the missionary. It has been observed by scholars that Christianity spread faster in the region after the colonial incorporation of these territories. Mission activity picked up momentum towards the turn of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, mainly due to two natural occurrences, the 1897 earthquake and the *mautum*, the famine followed by the flowering of the bamboo.⁵⁵ Christianity became the preferred agent of acculturation as the help rendered to the people made their heart fond of the

missionaries, and thus developed a sense of admiration about them and their cultures. Besides, the training in medical sciences provided to all the missionaries before their departure for the mission rendered great deal of assistance in their proselytizing mission. However, some Colonial Officials were against the activity of the missionaries among the hill tribes, like Hutton and Mills, which they argued will demoralize the people by losing their long lasting customs and traditions. An American Baptist missionary is claim to have noted that transition from one religion to other was easy because it was a transition among “a people already guided by their own taboos came Christianity with its own sets of taboos”⁵⁶. As observed from the various historical accounts, the hill tribes of the colonial northeast frontier were often portrayed as savages with no traces of “civilization” exhibited in any forms of their habits and practices. Yet, they also described them as a “noble savage” people who are wild but still possessed humanity’s innate goodness, and hence salvageable and “civilized”. Henceforth, after the annexation of Assam in 1826, they ventured into the project of civilizing the “primitive” indigenous tribes of the frontier region.

Later Colonial officials were extremely against the missionary attempt to change the dress of the people, where missionary agents made as observed from the instances in the Naga Hills where it was reported that “Naga boys going to the mission schools had to dress up in the fashion of the Assamese boys with dhoti and shirt. Their girls too had to dress in saris.”⁵⁷ They were against such methods of missionary approaches and rather preferred the native to wear their own attire to preserve their culture and tradition. Officials were also concerned about the missionary prohibition of converts participating in traditional festivals or maintenance of morungs etc., and wanted the indigenous people to continue participating and celebrating their traditional rituals and observances. For instance, Hutton and Mills who served as colonial officials in the Naga Hills for a relatively long period of time, were vehemently against the missionaries’ restrictions of the converts to participate in their traditional festivals and other various practices. This, they argued, would demoralize the people rather than civilize them. Nevertheless, the project of civilizing mission which involves “attack after attack on tradition”⁵⁸ by the Christian Missions continues to perpetuate in the region resulting in changes that completely transforms the social fabric of the hill tribes. The missionaries who were relatively often more in direct touch with the people exert much more influence over the people. Missionary control over education gave them a considerable instrument of influence over the lives of the people. The initial and primary objectives were to make good preachers out of their brighter converts. It was the most convenient and yet powerful

agent of social change. Nevertheless, it would be an awful misconception to accept that the colonial state and the missionaries were against each other. As Syiemleh observes, the colonial masters and the missionaries benefited from each other's presence in the region. They took support from each other.⁵⁹

Dena suggested several theory over why the natives decided to adopt the new religion and simultaneously inculcate the culture of the West's. Firstly, he argued, that the concept of the Supreme Being of Christianity was thought by the people to be that Supreme Being of their animistic religion. Secondly, it was the promised of a better future in the afterlife heaven regardless of one's position or status in a society which their animism could not provide as it allows only certain persons to enter "*pielral*" or heaven. Thirdly, Dena also suggested that it was the assumption that the new faith is equivalent to the modern world, of being modern. However, most importantly, it was the educational institution and medical works in the region was what opens up the hearts and minds of the people for a possible change.⁶⁰ Syiemleh also stated that Christianity was the preferred agent of acculturation among the people. Rather than Christianity as a religion, what was more effective and influential was the missionaries who lived and settled with the people, rendering aid and support at times of crisis and hardships. He further noted that the pace of change became rapid after the two natural disasters that hit the region; the earthquake of 1897 and the *mautam*(flowering of bamboo), which caused famine in the region especially in the Lushai Hills. Indeed these natural occurrences had quickened the acculturation process in the region.

According to N. Chatterjee, participation of the people in the Great War contributed immensely in transforming their worldview, through the experience of the war returnees. The experience generated a snowball effect in equating Christianity with material prosperity. He writes that the desire to acquire functional literacy by the people brought in a "wave of decrying 'all that was Mizos'", everything that used to be associated with their "primitive" past. Eventually, they try to imitate the western ways of life as communicated by the foreign missionaries.⁶¹ As attitudes towards their ancestral ways of life changed, so did their dedication towards the observance of the moral codes necessary to maintain it. The degeneration of the enormous psychological and sociological effect unhinged the structure of the society and as Chatterjee argued, it was increasingly replaced by "self-centered individualistic ways"⁶² which significantly transformed the society. Self-centric nature of the people was further enhanced among the people with the

increasing importance of money. Most of the regional hilly society were initially self-sufficient except few necessities like salt which are not locally available. However, over the course of the period, trade enhanced making commodities from various other parts of the world become available even to those in the remotest corner of the globe. With it, currency became an essential medium of exchange and driving force of life in the region.⁶³ Therefore, education and Christianity increasingly began to be considered a passport to "salaried jobs", as it also means availability of steady income besides the status and privileges that accompanied it. With the enhancement of monetary functions, import materials also increased and manufactured clothes became one of the most sought after products of imports. While money provides them the means to execute it, the desire to imitate was however derived, according to Chaudhuri, from the glimpses of the fuller, richer and more living civilization of the west. It was a promise of release for them from the prison of their high-bound and primitive existence.⁶⁴ In fact, western wear was not always admired. Emma Tarlo recount how Western clothes were perceived within the Indian traditional societies, stating that they were considered "peculiar, exotic, ugly, smart, funny, sacrilegious and unclean", while some others saw it as civilized, but this fascination towards European dress is "more to what they represented than to either their practicality or aesthetic appeal".⁶⁵ Chaudhuri noted that clothes might go through modifications and changes but does not lose its individuality and distinctiveness. Dressing in European clothes is associated with the affluent-ness of the person, which consequently raises the importance of the individual among the audience or onlookers. Thus gradually traditional wear gave way to European dress. Adoption of western dress occurs mainly in two forms: western elements added to the indigenous dress; secondly, adding indigenous elements on the western outfits. Increasing adoption of western wear delineates the importance of traditional ways of dressing among the masses.⁶⁶ O.L Snaitang writes that the regions of Northeast Frontier in the pre-British period, were periods of isolation, illiteracy, fragmentation and lack of communication. While, originally fragmented both geographically and ethnically, British power "brought these disconnected people regions and people to a solidified political unity"⁶⁷ which subsequently introduced tremendous changes not only in terms of political administration but also the social, religious, economic and cultural aspects of their life. Accordingly, after Indian Independence in 1947, partly motivated by vested political interest a uniformed traditional attire gradually emerged, to establish one's sartorial affiliation which corresponds to their cultural identity as well.

4.5. Traditional dresses of the Kukis

According to Eric Hobsbawm, “‘traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in their origin and sometimes invented” which includes those that are consciously and formally instituted and the others which evolved in a less easily traceable manner. The main purpose of the invention was to structure at least some parts of social life as “unchanging and invariant” and by seeking to establish continuity with a historical past. Hobsbawm further noted that, “the past real or invented, to which they refer imposes fixed practices, such as repetition”.⁶⁸ The “traditional” dress of the Kukis has been a conscious and deliberate invention during the process of their historical evolution. Till about the end of the 18th century, records about the near nakedness of the body are noted. However, by the eve of Independence certain dresses began to be regarded as traditional dress. As Hobsbawm noted, it is difficult to trace the exact time period of its emergence. Yet, these dresses sought certain connections with a historical past either in its appearance or in its functional role within the society.

Traditional attire of the Kukis comprised not only of the fabric or garments that covers the body, but also several other additional elements like hair-dresses, anklets, bangles, earrings etc. Contrary to popular beliefs not every items are imbedded with symbols and significances, but adopted only for its aesthetic appeal. The traditional dress of the Kuki people, that is maintained today, was and has never been constant, it was always susceptible to change and modification with time and space. However, the essence that makes it specific to the Kuki people has always been static with little change overtime. The overall designs and way of wearing bears much similarities with its neighbouring people like the Nagas and the Manipuris or the Meiteis. However, in terms of its designs and patterns, each has their own unique sets of weaving and styling that makes them separate from each other. The term traditional as Bernard Cohn had noted, is a modern creation when people from each nook and corner of the world become interconnected in many ways. The dresses that are today understood as traditional dresses were at most occasional dresses, which were not essentially the work-dress of the people but which is worn on auspicious occasions. The traditional dresses of the Kuki man consist of *Saipikhup*, *Thangnang*, *Khaipeleng*, *Lukop*, and *Boitong*. Ornaments like earrings were also worn by the man. Women’s attire consists of *Khamtang*, *Numei Saipikhup*, *Nihsan*, *Bilba*, *Chao/Khutbu*, etc. Shoes or any other form of footwear is not recognized as part of the attire and no record has been maintained about its use, so

it is uncertain about its existence in the primal Kuki society. *Pon* of various shapes and sizes, bearing varying motifs and designs essentially constitute the traditional apparels of the Kukis. It is usually woven in two pieces lengthwise and are sewn together in the middle to produce a complete *pon*. Both *ponsil* (shawls) and *ponve* (wrap-around) are made this way.

Saipikhup: It is a piece of woven cloth with woven geometrical designs. It is worn commonly by both men and women as an outer garment particularly on meritorious occasions. It is black in color as a whole with both ends embroidered in a four side's angle like designs. It is claimed to be inspired by the shape and pattern of elephant's knee, from which it got the name. Here *Saipi* means elephant and *Khup* means Knee. Initially it was claimed to be worn only by important persons of the village, but today it becomes a common wear, worn by all men regardless of status or position.

Thangnang: It is also a shawl for both men and women, worn as outer garments during auspicious occasions. Its body is black in colour like Saipikhup, with both ends embroidered. It is designed mostly in white, red and yellow.

Khamtang: it is the wrap-around cloth worn by women of the society. It is locally known as *ponve* or *khamtang ponve*. Its body is usually black in colour with two sides of the borders having a strip of different colours which depends on the choice of the weaver. The length of the third side is decorated or designed with the *gulpi jem* which is the upper belly portion of a python. Here *gulpi* means python and *jem* means designs. The woven *gulpi jem* also resembles the shape of cucumber seeds called *changmai mu*; *changmai* means cucumber and *mu* means seeds. *Khamtang* is said to be *ponjem hom* which literally implies the originator of cloths with different designs and patterns. According to tradition, as narrated by Niengneihmoi, somewhere during 500 B. C, in a place called *Khovandar* lived a lady by the name Chawngnu who fell in love with a python-god. Chawngnu was believed to have copied the markings of her lover's body while he laid down as she sang a song⁶⁹,

As for the *changmaimu*, traditions narrated that in the long past, there were two brothers who sowed cucumber seed on a clay mound. When the cucumber of the younger brother's grew big, the two brothers divided it among themselves and ate it but the elder brother finished his share

quickly and started demanding more from his little brother who refused. The elder brother then threatened to drown himself on the mound which he did as the younger brother refused. However, after their parents arrived, the younger brother assured him to give his shares if he come out to which he accede.⁷⁰ The story remains a moral till today, in that the Kukis hardly agrees to share or divide anything if it is the last piece, lest it caused disagreement between those who did.

Pondum and Ponlhe: *Pondum* is a dark coloured cloth, which is used to cover the dead bodies. During an occasion of death, guests were expected to bring pondum as a form of condolence gift to the mourning family. In earlier days, every girl was invariably required to weave at least one *pondum* so that she may bring along to her husband's home after their marriage. It was considered her sacred duty to own one, as it would be used to cover the dead body of her husband on an unfortunate occasion of his death. Failure for a married woman to own one was considered highly disgraceful in the society.⁷¹ It largely is associated with mourning at a funeral. It is forbidden to wear *pondum* as ordinary garment except on occasion of death. It is also given as a token of affection on occasions like *Naopui* as mentioned previously. *Ponlhe* is a white piece of cloth made of hand-spun yarn on the loin loom. It is often given as gifts on auspicious events performed and observed by a family like *naopui*.

Pon mangvum: It is also a shawl worn commonly by both men and women of the community. It has white as its background with one black strip running along both sides of its vertical edges. It was worn by women on meritorious occasions like *Chang-ai*, a feast which is associated particularly with women. Kuki women like other tribal societies are claimed to have exercised substantial freedom as compared to her sisters from mainland India. However, there was and still is a pervasive patrilineal tradition that is very profound within the society. Following the patriarchal system of a family structure, laws of primogeniture operate within the society. Therefore a son is preferred over a daughter. Daughters possess no inheritance rights even when she is the only child of her parents. Her only property is the gifts given to her on the occasion of her marriage and if divorced and the bride price is reduced to half if she remarried. As Arfina Haokip⁷² rightly noted, women in the Kuki society are in constant ward-ship, first as a daughter, then as a wife and as a widow under the ward-ship of her son. The status of the Kuki women is vividly different in their public and private sphere, wherein, in the latter, her voice and participations are curtailed and limited if not negligible. According to Haokip, there are only a few

times where women were given importance such as on the occasion of *neinu* marriage, *luongman* or corpse price etc. *Chang-ai* was one such occasion where women were visibly honoured and celebrated publicly. It was a glorious day for women. As a host, the performer of the *Chang-ai* wears *pon mangvom* as an insignia of the occasion. But, due to difficult eligibility criteria to host the event, performers were limited to only a few of the villagers, which in most cases is the chief's wife. As a result, *pon mangvom* was mostly inaccessible to the ordinary women who cannot perform *Chang-ai*.

There are also several other traditional attires of the Kukis like, *delkop*, *lukop* etc and other ornaments of various types also consisted part of the traditional attire worn depending on occasion.

War dresses: It has been observed from the various ethnographic reports that to the primal Thadou Kuki people, ease of movement and functionality was of primary importance in choosing and designing their apparels while its aesthetic appeal was treated as secondary. Being a manly man, in traditional Kuki society essentially implied a strong and brave man. Bamfylde Fuller in the foreword of the History of Assam Rifles, writes that to the tribesmen, war was viewed more of a sport than a tragedy. He writes, "Tribesmen who are still inspired by the ancient ideas that war is one of the most exhilarating of life's experiences, and its commemoration, in war-dress and war dances, the most enjoyable of amusements."⁷³ War, contrary to Bamfylde's assertion, was not a sporting event but an act pursued to protect their land and people as Jangkhomang Guite had noted in one of his articles. As often recurred, hunting did not only subsist their diet but was also a very enjoyable activities the Kuki men indulge with. Be it in the battle with men or animals, a brave and courageous man was highly revered. It was a "necessary passport of good fortune in courtship"⁷⁴ to use Bamfylde's words, albeit in a totally different context.

Having said that, it could be observed that to the hill people, bravery in man was the most coveted virtue that every man aspired to possess. There was hardly any place for a cowardly man in the society and were often condescendingly described as being feminine that ought to wear a skirt. When in war or a battle or any sporting event, men are being encouraged with the catch-phrases like, *tahchapa*, *hat in lang hang-in*. In fact, several items of their games and sports are often about competition of the strongest and the bravest among men. In order to commemorate and honor such

brave and strong men, a specific dress and accessories were awarded. As stated by Fuller, cowardice men, on the other hand, have no place of pride within the society.

Major M.G McCall writes that the war dresses of the early Kukis were “if not specially spectacular, is pleasing and efficient and is a cultural contrast to the splendiferous war dresses of the Nagas and kindred clans”⁷⁵. It was essentially designed for ease of movement and agility during hunting and raiding. It signifies that the Kukis were pragmatic and rational in their decision. Even the highly warrior’s dress was designed to represent practical utilities of a warrior. For instance, on the occasion of *Chon* rituals, the warriors “put over his shoulder a baldric like shawl with its ends knotted over the breast. They also wore the feathers of the jungle crow and the *tuhpahs*, the quivers with arrows, the bracelets, the arm plates and carried bows. They also carried with them the *sou* (very sharp and pointed spikes made from bamboo splits and dry bones)”⁷⁶.

Thus, it can be noted that to the primal Kukis, the aesthetic appeal of certain clothes was more concerned with what it represents and signified and was less superficial. It shows that while war dresses were concerned more with its functionality, the warrior dress focused more on its symbolic representation and aesthetic appeal indicating that great hunters were highly regarded in the society.

In the Kuki society, a great hunter was recognized if he is capable of performing the *Sa-ai* rituals and preferably *Chon* as well. Only such individuals were allowed to wear *ponloup*i and *tuhpah* and even their corpse after their death is dressed with it to signify his status. However, on the occasion of a battle, there is no mention of a distinct ceremonial attire worn. Agility being their primary concern, it was recorded that their clothes were rather plain and simple.

4.5. Conclusion

Dress in early Kuki society as noted from above, is unlike that of the “civilized” Wests, both in forms and meanings of its social life. Minimalism and differing appearance made its form “uncivilized” to the Wests, however, as shown from above, its relevance and social significance did not minimize. Despite its unusual form and appearance, the various styles of *pon* were intricately woven into the socio-cultural fabric of the Kuki society. After the arrival of the British colonial state and the Missionary organization, definitive transformation appeared in all aspects of

their lifestyle which were simultaneously reflected in the choice of dress adopted by the people. Changes in the worldview rendered the people to disregard their past traditions and beliefs. Early colonial ethnographers and administrators often describes the Kukis as a wild tribes whose bodies go “unclothed”, which then changed to people who either wears nothing but a blanket or else a “dhoti” like that of the regular Indians. The change reflects the impact of the cultural encounters which was forcefully imposed on the indigenous Kuki people. Post the Independence in 1947, gradual but conscious efforts were taken to establish a uniform and standardized attire of the people. The “traditional” attire which eventually found its solid existence was not an invention from scratch, rather, it was a creative modification overtime, possessing values and significance which were itself refined over the course of time.

Thus, we understand that the history of clothing in Kuki society has undergone lots of changes that are a result of the large scale changes in the transition from pre-modern to modern. Most of this changes are encoded in the dress code that are also in tandem with the social codes.

¹ Peter Haokip, “Cultural Tradition, Renewal and Modernity: A Challenge to all Cultures”, p.22

² Terence S. Turner, “The Social Skin”, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2012.(p.486-504), p.486

³ Patricia K. Hunt, “Clothing as an Expression of History: The Dress of African-American Women in Georgia, 1880-1915”, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2, THE DIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN GENDER AND RACE: WOMEN IN GEORGIA AND THE SOUTH (Summer 1992), pp. 459-471. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40582547> Accessed: 26-04-2020 09:52 UTC. p.460

⁴ Emmanuele Coccia, “Metaphysics of clothing”, in Coccia’s *A Micro-ontology of the Image*. Fordham University Press (2006) Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19rm9hz.30> p.84

⁵ Coccia, p.85

⁶ Aisha L. F. Shaheed, “Dress Codes and Modes: How Islamic is the Veil?” in Jennifer Heath’s (ed) *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore and Politics*. University of California Press (2008) p.294

⁷ John Rawlins, *Mountaineers of tippra*, pp.141-146

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Tania M Jenkins, “Clothing norms as marker of status in a hospital setting: A Bourdieusian analysis”, in *Health*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (September 2014) Sage Publications, Ltd. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26650407> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:08 UTC p.538

¹⁰ Jenkins, p.535

¹¹ E.W Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipur*.

¹² John MacRae (1801, reprinted 1919). “Account of the Kookies or Lunctas,” in *Asiatic Researches: Comprising History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia*, Vol. Vii. New Delhi: Cosmos Publications, pp.184-185

¹³ Soppit, p.6

¹⁴ Meerwarth, p.30

¹⁵ Tarun Goswami, p.273

¹⁶ Ibid,

¹⁷ Meerwarth, p.30

-
- ¹⁸ Soppit. p.6
- ¹⁹ Ibid
- ²⁰ G. A Grierson, 1904. *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. 3 Tibeto-Burman Family, Part 3, Specimens of the Kuki-Chin and the Burman Groups*. Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing: Calcutta. p.56
- ²¹ Grierson, p.60
- ²² Shaw, pp.20-21
- ²³ Meerwarth, p.30
- ²⁴ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 2008. *Culture in The Vanity Bag*, Jaico Publishing House. pp.31-32
- ²⁵ Tarun Goswami, p.274
- ²⁶ S. N Das, 1969. *Costumes of Rajasthan and India*. Teraporevala Sons & Co. Pvt. Ltd.: Bombay, p. 1
- ²⁷ Carol Mattingly, 2002. *Appropriate[ing] dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth Century America*, Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale and Edwardsville. p.5
- ²⁸ Tarun Goswami, p. 319.
- ²⁹ Carolyn Niengneihmoi, p.60
- ³⁰ Hoipi Haokip, 2019. *Integration of ethnic fashion and entrepreneurship for economic empowerment of Kuki women*. www.academia.edu accessed 20/12/21
- ³¹ Nehmang Haokip, *Kukite Chondan leh Khandan*, p.48-49
- ³² Ibid, p.15
- ³³ Eicher, pp.17-18
- ³⁴ Tarun Goswami, pp.6-10
- ³⁵ Chaudhuri, pp.28-29
- ³⁶ Tarlo, p.32
- ³⁷ Meerwarth, p.30
- ³⁸ Tarun Goswami, p.327
- ³⁹ Goswami, p.327
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, p.337-338
- ⁴¹ Ibid, p.343
- ⁴² Ibid, p.347
- ⁴³ Chaudhuri, p.7[check]
- ⁴⁴ Tarlo
- ⁴⁵ William Thomas, "The Psychology of Modesty and Clothing", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Sep., 1899), pp. 246-262, The University of Chicago Press. p.246
- ⁴⁶ Dr. A. Vanaja, "Role of missionaries in upper cloth riot in Kanyakumari District", *Paripex Indian Journal of Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, Feb, 2015, p.73
- ⁴⁷ Soppit, p.4
- ⁴⁸ Soppit, p.5
- ⁴⁹ Judith M Brown, 2009. *Windows Into the Past: Life Histories and the Historian of South Asia*. University of Notre Dame Press: Indiana, p.10-29
- ⁵⁰ Tarlo, p.23
- ⁵¹ Tarlo, p.45
- ⁵² Peter Corrigan, 2008. *The Dressed Society: Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World*, Sage Publications : London, p.8
- ⁵³ Sanghamitra Misra, p.3273
- ⁵⁴ Lal Dena, 1988. *Christian Missions and Colonialism: A study of Missionary Movement in Northeast India with particular reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills, 1894-1947*. Vendrame Institute: Shillong, p.86
- ⁵⁵ David R. Syiemlieh, "Sectional President's Address: Colonial Encounter and Christian Missions in North East India", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 2012, Vol. 73(2012), pp. 509-527. Indian History Congress, p.515
- ⁵⁶ Syiemlieh, p.517
- ⁵⁷ Syiemlieh, p.517
- ⁵⁸ Lushai Chrysalis, p.199
- ⁵⁹ Syiemlieh, pp.522-523

-
- ⁶⁰ Dena, p.88
- ⁶¹ N. Chatterjee, *Puan*, p.11
- ⁶² Ibid,
- ⁶³ Kyle Jackson, “Globalizing an Indian Borderland Environment: Aijal, Mizoram, 1890-1919”. *Studies in History*, 32(1) 39-71, pp.48-52
- ⁶⁴ Chaudhuri, p.58
- ⁶⁵ Tarlo, p.44
- ⁶⁶ Chaudhuri, p.27
- ⁶⁷ O. L. Snaitang, 2018. *Christianity and National Integration in Northeast India*. Christian World Imprints: New Delhi, p.7
- ⁶⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, 1992. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge,UK. pp.1-2
- ⁶⁹ C. Niengneihmoi, pp. 60-61
- ⁷⁰ N. Chatterjee, *Puan*
- ⁷¹ N. Chatterjee, *Puan*, p.33
- ⁷² Arfina Haokip, “Position of Women in the Kuki Society: A critical Analysis”. In Ngamkhohao Haokip and Michael Lunminthang (eds.) *Kuki Society: Past, Present and Future*, Maxford Books: New Delhi, 2011.
- ⁷³ Bamfylde Fuller, “Foreword: History of Assam Rifles, preface (v)”, in Col. L.W. Shakespear’s *History of the Assam Rifles*. Naval & Military Press, 2006.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid
- ⁷⁵ McCall, p.26
- ⁷⁶ Tarun Goswami, *Kuki Life and Lore*, p.270

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The present study looks into the close inter-relationship between clothing and its social and cultural environment in the Thadou-Kuki society during colonial rule. Understood as a social skin, clothing holds immeasurable importance in the social life of the Thadou-Kuki people. When it comes to traditional Kuki people, the term clothes is mainly associated with the woven cloth or *Pon* as locally known. *Pon* was worn differently and was accordingly named, viz., *ponsil*: shawl for the upper body; *ponve*: wrap-around cloth; cloth for head wear: *del*; lungi or dhoti: *delchen* etc., which are also named differently depending on the designs and patterns embroidered on it. However, the function of clothes is not confined to physical protection or nudist's coverings, but was intricately woven with the socio-cultural fabric of the people right from the moment of their birth. It was considered a valued material asset of a person, and sometimes, an heirloom of a family. It is also an important material element in the execution of their customs and traditions. Particularly, in a period where manufactured clothes are yet to make its appearance, *pon* in its varying forms of existence and the craftsmanship associated with its production was highly valued among the people.

Despite its importance in the social life of the people, attempts for an in depth study is hampered by the lack of availability of sources both primary and secondary. Analysis of the British ethnographic and administrative records, provided insights, albeit rather limited, into the socio-cultural life of clothing in traditional Kuki society. While more often than not, the records were observed to describe and portray the people to fit the “primitive” character that they were already “informed” of, it nevertheless provides a significant contribution in retracing the social and cultural life of the people. It has been observed from the study that in the Thadou-Kuki society, stages of physical and social maturity were marked by their certain characteristic features of bodily appearance like hairdo, clothes and ornaments. It is also observed that any forms of footwear or body tattoos hardly appeal to the people as aesthetic beauty nor bear any relevance or importance in their social and cultural life. Multiple functional purposes of the various clothing materials, such as the woven cloth or *pons* of varying types and ornaments, has been noted. Therefore, it is

imperative to understand that what is considered outdated and primitive for one culture could still be socially, culturally or religiously symbolic and intrinsic to the existence of the other. Thus, with this understanding the present study was undertaken.

Weaving the *Pon* and its crafts have always been an integral part of the life of the Kukis, playing a central role in the social fabric of the Kukis. The importance of *pon* in Kuki society transcends its physical utilities and plays a crucial role in the socio-cultural and beliefs systems of the people, exerting its influence in every stage of their life; from birth to death to everything in between. To the primal Kukis, following the footsteps of their ancestors, abiding the existing customs and culture was a guidebook to life, both personal and public. Examination of the nature of the traditional society of the Kuki by looking into the various forms of institutions and practices provides insights into the reason why *pon* was important to the Kuki people. It is thus observed that *Pon*, bearing both physical and cultural necessities, was crucial material in the performance and functioning of their beliefs and practices in the society.

Accordingly, the socio-cultural significance of dress prompted the active craftsmanship of weaving. Weaving was a craft that every girl was expected to know and girls who excelled in the crafts were highly regarded and sought-after for marriage as well. In the third chapter, traditional techniques of weaving as practised in the society have been discussed. There have been no substantive findings about the origin of the art of weaving among the Kukis. While it failed to provide chronological records of its origins; of both weaving and its decorative aspects, it however, provides a glimpse to the beginnings of decorative weavings. Designs and patterns, it is inferred from the study, were rather a pure exercise of intuition by a rare genius, someone who has remarkable knowledge of the skill. Neither oral traditions nor any available records provides any concrete ideas on how the knowledge of the techniques of weaving, both the decorative and plain, actually came about among the Kukis. The legends of the two women who acquired the art of decorative technique from a snake skin is rather abstract. But, possession of deep knowledge about weaving and skills, could enable proper imitations of the designs and patterns which they observed on the snake skin. It is also observed that the instruments of weaving, which till today are largely loin-looms, barely undergo any transformative changes except the addition of few more tools meant to produce and create creative stylistic designs. *Pon* or woven cloths were named on the basis of the designs like *Changmaimu jem*(cucumber seed design), *saipikhup*(elephant's knee) etc..

It is also observed that colours in the cloth appeared with the gradual experimentations with certain barks, herbs and leaves which were locally available until synthetics were imported.

Prided with a rich heritage of cultures and traditions, in the Kuki society, the socio-cultural relevance of the clothes far outweigh its physical necessities but were more abstract and metaphysical. It was more psychological than physical. Art is often a reflection of the everyday preoccupations of the people. The meanings and values thus attached to *pon* in traditional Kuki society reflected their everyday preoccupations like *khamtang* with *changmaimujem* (cucumber seed). The symbolic significance of the varying *pons*, it is observed, is not derived from the motifs and designs but rather in its relevance to the socio-cultural practices of the people. As studied in the previous chapters, the Kukis living in a closed knit community with everyone having blood ties one way or the other, were guided by their traditional customary rules over a long period of time, from their political, social, economic and even religious life that are completely intertwined with each other in its execution and function. In such a community, clothing materials which are considered a material asset had multiple functional purposes. On the occasion of death, it served as a mourning gift to the mourning family which were then distributed to the close relatives of the corpse. Royal apparel, also called *delpi* or *ponloui* and *tuhpah* were necessitated to dress the corpse of a person who in his lifetime had completed *Chon*. During a marriage event, it served as a bridal gift or as part of the bride price. Even necklace of cornelian beads are highly valued and also contributed as part of the bride price. As much as it was indispensable for its utilitarian purposes, clothing of its various kinds are also invaluable for its identifying ability of certain status and positions within the society.

However, after the invasion of the British and its civilising mission project through the agency of Christian missionaries, the Clothes which marked the man of property and prestige declined, fast-falling into disuse. In the process of representing a cohesive society, clothing acted as an instrumental element in the context of nation building. This is so, because motifs and designs, functions and purposes associated with the several types of their clothing materials found relevance and importance in the socio-cultural practices of the people. In the primal Kuki society, as noted from the early colonial records, the identity signifying elements in the dress that is seen today hardly figured into the dress of the people. Over the course of the period, with the onslaught of British colonial administration and of Western culture to which the people were exposed to, the

worldview of the people towards every aspect of their lifestyle significantly transformed. Some argue that besides colonial domination, conversion to Christianity was also responsible for creating a cultural disconnection which subsequently resulted in creating identity crisis and cultural alienation among the people. It is also argued that Christianity have instilled negative attitudes towards their old culture and practices. Eventually, irreversible changes took form among the people in particular over their clothing and over its socio-cultural relevance as well. Thus, after Independence in 1947, conscientious efforts had been made to create a uniform attire that became synonymous with cultural identity. Yet, over the course of the period with rapid globalization, the standardized traditional attire has gradually lost its meanings and values in the society and efforts were made to revitalize the significance of traditional attire within the society.

Owing to the absence of any written historical records, folk tales and oral traditions remain the sole links between the past and present for the Kukis. It has been imparted mostly in informal settings for instance while sitting around a bonfire or while at work as *Lom*. It has also been imparted through the unbroken chain of customary traditional practices such as feasts and festivals or ceremonies which had been continuously followed by the people as a social and moral code to guide them in their ways of life. Under the circumstances of rapid globalisation with which the people were indiscriminately exposed to, with new and stylistic fashions every second, traditional clothes are in constant danger of disappearing. However, in Thadou-Kuki society, its significance in their socio-cultural practices ensures its continual sustenance and prevalence within the society. Indeed, several aspects of its forms of existence and functional purposes in the early days failed to retain its relevance and have therefore disappeared. It can, thus, be stated that it is their pride in their socio-cultural heritage and persistence to retain it that prevents and protects it from complete disappearance in the Kuki society of today.

After surveying the different forms of dress in the Kuki society over a period, one can be convinced that it is possible to essay a narratives that is on strong historical ground. The study of motifs is also tied up with the study of a larger history and events which are accessible to us in the form of written records. We are on strong historical ground when we study the material culture and at the same time it is also an extension that one may employ oral history to recover the history of many aspects of Kuki society. As one understands that the presentation of the self is encoded by the sartorial presentation of the person. Oral history elaborate this concept. Therefore, we get a more

comprehensive and richer perspectives through the study of the dress. This thesis has understood that most of the elements of presentation in cultural life can be studied by a combination of reading the material and oral history along with the other historical materials to get a richer and enabling narratives of a history.

APPENDIX

1. Map of Manipur

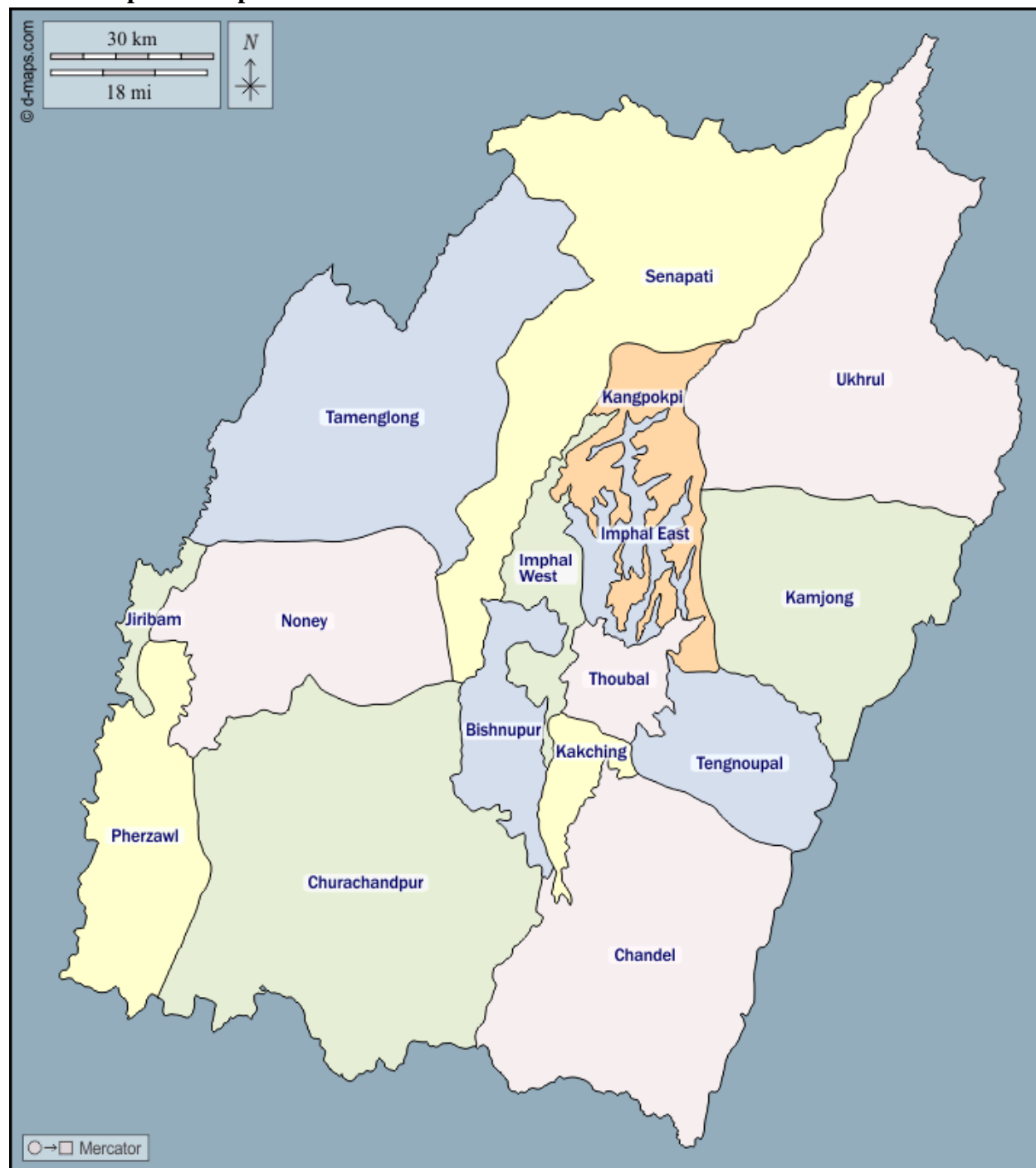


Fig. 1 Map of Manipur

2. Loin Looms



Fig. 2 Kuki women weaving cloth using traditional looms.(via Youtube : Thadou-Kuki traditional weaving by Sylvia Chongloi). Accessed 23/03/2022

3. Male's Traditional Attire



Fig. 3 Delkop



Fig. 4 Tuhpah

Fig. 3 & 4: (Picture taken on 2/5/2017) (Courtesy Paokhohao Haokip)



Fig. 5 *Boitong Sangkhol* (Picture taken on 2/5/2017)(Courtesy Paokhohao Haokip)



Fig. 6 *Pasal(Male) Saipikhup*



Fig. 7 *Thangnang*

Fig. 6 & 7: (Picture taken on 2/5/2017) (Courtesy J.C Misao)



Fig. 8 A man wearing *Delkop*, *Saipikhup Muffer* with *Boitong Sangkhol* and *Delchen*.
(Courtesy J. C Misao via Paokhohao Haokip)

4. Female's Traditional Attire



Fig. 9 *Khamtang ponve*

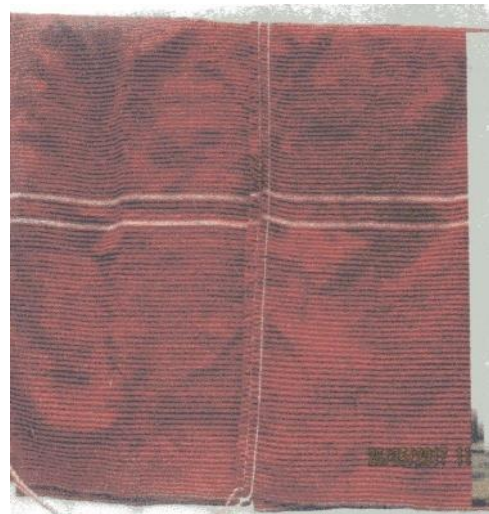


Fig. 10 *Nih*



Fig. 11 *Pon Geisan*



Fig. 12 *Numei Saipikhup*

(Fig. 9-12: Picture Courtesy Paokhohao Haokip)



Fig. 13 A woman wearing modified Khamtang with Khi(necklace), bilkam/bilba(earrings), hah(armlets) and Chao(bracelets/bangles). (Courtesy- Internet)

5. Common traditional pon.



Fig. 14. *Pon mangvom*(shawl)(Courtesy: Internet)



Fig. 15 *Pondum*

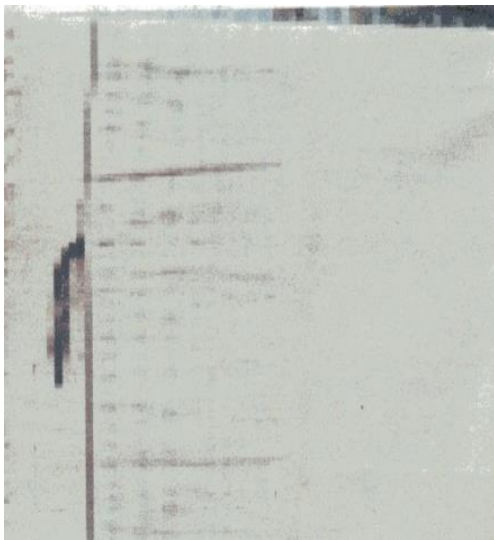


Fig. 16 *Ponlhe*



Fig. 17 *Phoipi/Ponphoh* (Night Clothes)

6. Ornaments



Fig. 18 *Bilba/ Bilkam*

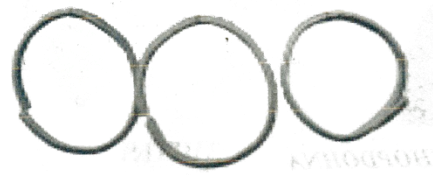


Fig. 19 *Hah*



Fig. 20 *Chao*

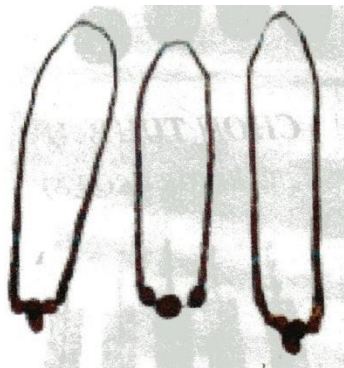


Fig. 21 *Khichang*

(Fig. 15-21: Courtesy of Paokhohao Haokip, Picture Credit: J. C Misao)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

- Balfour, Henry. 1923. "Presidential Address: The Welfare of Primitive Peoples". *Folklore*, Vol.34, No. 1(March 31, 1923), pp.12-24. Taylor & Francis Ltd., Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1255857> Accessed: 27-04-2019
- Brown, R., 1873. *Statistical Account of the Native State of Manipur: The Hill Territory under its Rule*. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing: Calcutta.
- Carey, Bertram S. & H. N. Tuck, (1896, reprint 1983). *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, British dealings with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country*. Volume 1. Cultural Publishing House: Delhi.
- Carson, Laura Hardin. 1927. *Pioneer Trails, Trials and Triumphs*. Baptist Board of Education, Dept. of Missionary Education: New York.
- Clark, Mary M., 1907. *A Corner in India*. American Baptist Publication Society: Philadelphia.
- Dalton, Edward T., 1872. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing: Calcutta.
- Dun, Capt. E. W., (1886, Reprint 1992). *Gazetteer of Manpur*. Manas Publications: Delhi.
- *Forty Years Mission in Manipur: Mission Reports of Rev. William Pettigrew*. Compiled by Rev. Jonah M. Solo & Rev. K. Mahangthei. Christian Literature Centre: Imphal
- Grierson, G. A., 1904. *Linguistic Survey of India Vol.III Tibeto Burman Family Part III - Specimens of the Kuki-Chin and Burma Groups*. Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India: Calcutta.

- Hodson, T. C., 1910. "Some Naga Customs and Superstitions", *Folklore*, Vol. 21(3)(Sep.): 296-312. Taylor & Francis Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1253858> Accessed: 24-09-2019 06:46 UTC
- Hogarth, D. G., F. Kingdon Ward and J. P. Mills, 1926. "The Assam-Burma Frontier: Discussion", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 67(4)(Apr.): 299-301. The Royal Geographical Society. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1782825> Accessed: 24-01-2020 05:44 UTC
- Hutton, J.H., 1921. *The Angami Nagas: With Some Notes on Neighbouring Tribes*. MacMillan & Co.: London.
- _____, 1929. "Diaries of two tours in the unadministered area east of the Naga Hills". In *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, XI(I)1-72. The Asiatic Society of Bengal: Calcutta.
- Lewin, Capt. Thomas Herbert. 1870. *Wild Races of South Eastern India*. W. H. Allen & Co.: London.
- _____, 1874. *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in the Lushai Dialect of the 'Dzo' or Kuki Language with Vocabularies and Popular Tales (notated)*. Calcutta Central Press Company, Ltd.,: Calcutta.
- McCall, Major A. G., 1949 (reprint 1977). *Lushai Chrysalis*. Tribal Research Institute: Aizawl, Mizoram.
- McCulloch, Major W., 1859. *Account of the Valley of Munnipore and of The Hill Tribes*. Bengal Printing Co. Ltd.: Calcutta.
- Meerwarth, Dr. A. M., 1919(reprint 1980). *The Andamese, Nicobarese and Hill Tribes of Assam*. Spectrum Publications: Guwahati.

- Merriam, Edmund F., 1897. *The American Baptist Missionary Union and its Missions*. American Baptist Missionary Union: Boston.
- Mills, J. P., 1922. *The Lhota Nagas*. MacMillan & Co. Ltd., London.
- _____, 1926. "The Assam- Burma Frontier". *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (April 1926), pp. 289-299. The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1782824> Accessed: 24-01-2020 05:18 UTC
- _____, 1935. "The Effect of Ritual Upon Industries and Arts in the Naga Hills", *Man*, Vol.35 (Sep., 1935): 132-135. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2789672> Accessed: 24-01-2020 05:46 UTC
- *Minutes, Resolutions and Historical of the Fifth Triennial Conference held in Dibrugarh, February 11-19, 1889 of The Assam Mission of The American Baptist Missionary Union*. The Baptist Mission Press: Calcutta, 1899.
- Mullan, C. S., 1932. *Census of India 1931, Vol. III, Assam Part 1-Report*. The Government of India Central Publication Branch: Calcutta.
- *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference, held in Nowgong Dec. 18-29, 1886 of The Assam Mission of The American Baptist Missionary Union*. The Baptist Mission Press: Calcutta, 1887.
- Parry, N. E., 1928 (reprint, 1976). *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*. Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd.
- Pemberton, Capt. R. Boileau, 1835. *Report on The Eastern Frontier of British India*. The Baptist Mission Press: Calcutta.

- Rawlins, John. “On the Manners, Religion, and Laws of the Cuci’s or the Mountaineers of Tipra.”(pp.141-146) in *Asiatic Researches Comprising History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia, Vol 2.* 1794(reprint, 1979). Cosmo Publications: New Delhi
- Shakespear, Col. L. W., 1929 (Reprint 1983). *History of The Assam Rifles*. Cultural Publishing House: Delhi.
- Shakespear, J., 1912. *The Lushai-Kuki Clans Book 1, Introduction*. Cultural Publishing House: New Delhi.
- Shaw, William, 1929 (reprint 1983). *Notes on the Thadou Kukis with an Introduction by J. H. Hutton*. Cultural Publishing House: Delhi.
- Soppit, C. A., 1887. *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier*. The Assam Secretariat Press: Shillong.
- Woodthorpe, R. G., 1882. “Notes on the Wild Tribes Inhabiting the So-Called Naga Hills, on Our North-East Frontier of India. Part-1”. *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol.11: 56-73. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2841500> Accessed: 24-01-2020 05:44 UTC

Secondary Sources:

1. Books

- Andrews, Janet, 2005. *Bodywork, Dress as Cultural Tool: Dress and Demeanor in the South of Senegal*. African Social Studies Series, Vol. 7. Koninklijke Brill NV: Leiden.
- Basham, A. L. (ed.), 1975. *A Cultural History of India*, Vol. 15. Clarendon Press.
- Brown, Judith M. & Robert Frykenberg (ed), 2002. *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India's Religious Traditions*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Michigan & Routledge Curzon: London.
- Carrin, Marrine, 2008. *An Encounter of Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries, and their Changing Worlds, 1867-1900*. Manohar Publications: New Delhi.
- Challamel, M. Augustin, translated by Mrs. Cashel Hoey and Mr. John Lillie, 1882. *The History of Fashion in France*. Scribner and Welford: New York.
- Chaudhuri, Nirad C., 2008. *Culture in The Vanity Bag*, Jaico Publishing House: Ahmedabad.
- Chatterjee, N., 1975. *Zawluk as a Social Institution in the Mizo Society*. Tribal Research Institute: Aizawl.
- _____, 1979. *Puan, The Pride of Mizoram*, Tribal Research Institute: Mizoram
- Chongloi, Haoginlen, 2020. *History, Identity and Polity of the Kukis: Negating Colonial History and Historiography*. Hornbill Press: Guwahati.

- Comaroff, Jean & John Comaroff, 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol. 1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Corrigan, Peter, 2008. *The Dressed Society: Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World*. Sage Publications: London.
- Elwin, Verrier, 1959. *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India*. North-East Frontier Agency: Shillong.
- Entwistle, Joanne and Elizabeth Wilson(eds.), 2001. *Body Dressing*. Berg: Oxford.
- Ewing, Elizabeth, 1984. *Everyday Dress, 1650-1900*. Chelsea House Publishers: New York.
- Fairholt, F. W., 1909. *Costume in England: A History of Dress to the end of the Eighteenth Century*. Vol 1- History. George Bell and Sons: London.
- Gangte, Thangkhomang S., 2003. *The Kukis of Manipur: A Historical Analysis*. Gyan Publishing House: New Delhi.
- Goswami, Tarun. 1985. *Kuki Life and Lore*. North Cachar Hills District Council.
- Hann, Michael A. & B. G. Thomas, 2005. *Patterns of Culture: Decorative Weaving Techniques*. University of Leeds.
- Haokip, D. Sonkhojang, 2019. *Traditional Beliefs and Practices of the Kukis: Before the advent of Christianity*. Mittal Publications: New Delhi.
- Haokip, Jimmy J. Jamkhomang. *The Thadou Chronicles, Vol. 1*. Dept. of Culture, Customs & Geneological Research Orgn. Indo-Burma TTC: Churachandpur, 1994.

- Haokip, Paul L., 2020. *Relevance of Thempu in Pastoral Ministry: A Socio-theological Perspective*. Bethesda Khankho Institute & Christian World Imprints: Delhi.
- Haokip, P. S., 1998. *Zale'n Gam: The Kuki Nation*, Kuki National Organization: Zale'n Gam.
- Haokip, Thongkholal (ed), 2013. *The Kukis of North East India: Politic and Culture*. Bookwell: Delhi.
- Haokip, M. Thongkhosei, 2016. *Ecumenism Among the Kukis of North East India*. M. Thongkhosei Haokip: Secunderabad.
- Heath Jennifer (ed), 2008. *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore and Politics*. University of California Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, 1992. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.
- I. Ben Wati, 2008. *My Early Years in Nagaland 1920-1935: an Autobiography* Vol.1. Council of Baptist Churches in North East India, Board of International Missionaries, ABC-USA: Guwahati.
- Kalman, Bobbie, 1993. *19th Century Clothing: Historic Communities*. Crabtree Publishing Company: New York.
- Khongsai, L. Ngulkhon, 1994. *The Kukis*. N.p. Author.
- Kipgen, Mangkhosat. 1997. *Christianity & Mizo Culture*, Mizo Theological Conference: Aizawl.
- Kuklick, Henrika. 1993. *The Savage Within: The Socio history of British Anthropology, 1885-1945*. Cambridge University Press: New York.

- Kumar, M. C and Helkhomang Touthang, 2003. *The Chongthus of Manipur*. The Anthropological Society of Manipur: Imphal.
- Lehman, F. K., 1980. *The Structure of Chin Society*. Tribal Research Institute of Aizawl: Calcutta.
- Lenthang, Dr. Khuplam Milui. 2005. *Manmasi Chate (Kuki-Chin-Mizo) thulhun kidang masa*. Hill Tribals' Council(HTC) Moreh, Manipur, India: Imphal
- Loncheu, Nathan (ed. Lal Dena). *Bawmzos: A Study of Chin-Kuki-Zo Tribe of Chittagong*. Akansha Publishing House: New Delhi.
- Maisels, Charles Keith, 1990. *The Emergence of Civilization: From hunting and gathering to agriculture, cities, and the state in the Near East*. Routledge, London.
- Mattingly, Carol, 2002. *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America*. Southern Illinois University Press: United States of America.
- Misra, Sanghamitra, 2011. *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India*. Routledge: New Delhi.
- Musser, Joe & James & Marti Hefley, 1998. *Fire on the Hills: The Rochunga Pudaite Story*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.,: Illinois.
- Pachuau, Joy L.K and Schendel, Willem van, 2015. *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India*. Cambridge University Press, Delhi.
- Pakhuongte, Rev. Ruolneikhum, 1983. *The Power of The Gospel: Among the Hmar Tribe*. The Evangelical Free Church of India: Shillong.
- Parkins, Wendy,(ed) 2002. *Fashioning the Body Politic: Dress, Gender, and Citizenship*. Berg, Oxford.

- Ponraj, S. Devasagayam, 1993(reprint 1997). *An Introduction to Missionary Anthropology: The Principles and Practices of Communication of the Gospel in Cross-Cultural Contexts of India*. Mission Educational Books: Chennai.
- Portelli, Alessandro, 1990. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York Press: New York.
- Rowe, Ann Pollard, Laura M. Miller, and Lynn. A. Meisch (eds.), 2007. *Weaving and Dyeing in Highland Ecuador*. University of Texas Press: Austin.
- Shukla, Pravina, 2015. *Costume: Performing Identities through dress*. Indiana University Press.
- Snaitang, O. L., 2018. *Christianity and National Integration in Northeast India*. Christian World Imprints: New Delhi.
- SVD, Dr. Joy Thomas & Dr. George Keduolhou Angami, 2019. *India's Northeast: A Celebration of Cultures*. ISPCK: New Delhi.
- SVD, S. M. Michael, 2010. *Dalits' Encounter With Christianity: A case Study of Mahars in Maharashtra*. ISPCK: Pune.
- Syed Hutchinson, R. H., 1978. *Chittagong Hill Tracts*. Vivek Publishing Co.: Delhi.
- Tarlo, Emma, 1996. *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*. University of Chicago, Chicago Press.
- *The Lushais, 1878-1889*. Tribal Research Institute, Deptt. Of Art & Culture, Aizawl, Mizoram: New Delhi.
- Walker, Issac, 1885. *Dress: As it has been, Is and will be*. Issac Walker: New York.

- Wasserstein, Bernard, 2007. *Barbarism and Civilization: A history of Europe in our time*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Wickramasinghe, Nira, 2003. *Dressing the colonised body: politics, clothing, and identity in Sri Lanka*. Orient Longman.
- Z. Z. Lien, 1981. *The U-Now People: An Ethnological Survey of the people viz. Mizo, Zomi, Kuki, Chin and the Allied Tribes of North-East India & Burma*. Z.Z. Lien: Churachandpur.

2. Chapters in Books

- Changsan, Rev. Douminthang, “The Idea of Creation in the Traditions of the Kukis”, in L. Seikholen (ed.) *An Emerging Tribal Theology from Kuki Perspective*, Manipur.
- Coccia, Emanuele. “Metaphysics of Clothing”, in Emanuele Coccia’s *A Micro-ontology of the Image*. Fordham University Press, 2016. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19rm9hz.30>
- Cohn, Bernard S., 1989. “Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century”, in Weiner A. B. & Schneider, J. (ed.) *Cloth and Human Experience*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Hall, Judy. “‘Following the Traditions of Our Ancestors’: Inuit Clothing Designs”, in Judy Thompson, Judy Hall, Leslie Tepper and Dorothy K. Burnham’s (ed.) *Fascinating Challenges*. University of Ottawa Press, 2001. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv170p6.15>

- Haokip, Letkthothang, “An Interaction Between the Kuki Religion and Christianity in North East India”, in L. Seikholen (ed.) *An Emerging Tribal Theology from Kuki Perspective*, Manipur.
- Haokip, Arfina. “Position of Women in the Kuki Society: A critical Analysis”. In NgamkhohAo Haokip and Michael Lunminthang (eds.) *Kuki Society: Past, Present and Future*, Maxford Books: New Delhi, 2011. Pp.101-110.
- Jackson, Kyle, 2015. “Hearing images, tasting pictures: making sense of Christian mission photography in the Lushai Hills district, Northeast India” (1870-1920), Maja Kominko (ed.), *From Dust to Digital Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, Open Book Publishers.
- Labelle, Marie-Louise. “Materials of Early Ornament and Clothing”, in Marie-Louise Labelle’s *Beads of Life*. University of Ottawa Press, 2005. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16t9t.9>
- Misao, P., “The Early Life of the Kuki-Chins”, in SanajAoba (ed.) *Manipur Past and Present, Volume 3*. Mittal Publications: New Delhi, 1995.
- S. M Paokai, 1995. “A Brief Account of the Thadous”, in NAorem SanajAoba (ed) *Manipur Past and Present*, Mittal Publications: Delhi.
- Shaheed, Aisha L. F., “Dress Codes and Modes: How Islamic is the Veil?” in Jennifer Heath’s (ed) *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore and Politics*. University of California Press (2008)
- Stone, Janferie. “Clothing the Body in Otherness”, in Jean-Guy A. Goulet, Bruce Granville Miller (eds.) *ExtraOrdinary Anthropology*. University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1djmc3c.22>

- Voss, Barbara L. “Fashioning the Colonial Subject: Clothing” in Barbara L. Voss’ *Race and Sexuality in Colonial San Francisco*. Univeristy of California Press, 2008. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp52b.16>
- Wettstein, Marion, “Defeated Warriors, Successful Weavers: Or how Men’s Dress Reveals Shifts of Male Identity among the Ao Nagas”. In Michael Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban von Stockhausen, and Marion Wettstein (eds.) *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India*. Gent: Snoeck, pp.129-145.

3. Articles in Journals

- Barpujari, S. K., 1971. “Miles Bronson: His Mission of Civilization in the Naga Hills”. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 33(1971), pp. 522-629. Indian History Congress Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44145394>. Accessed: 28-03-2019
- Carolyn Niengneihmoi, “Cultural Significance of Chin-Kuki-Mizo Dresses in Manipur”. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Vol. 4, Issue 4 April, 2015. pp.59-62.
- Carothers, Courtney, Mark Moritz and Rebecca Zarger. “Introduction: conceptual, methodological, practical, and ethical challenges in studying indigenous knowledge”. *Ecology and Society*, Dec 2014, Vol. 19, No. 4(Dec 2014). Resilience Alliance Inc. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26269650>
- Castro, Wendy Lucas, 2008. “Stripped: Clothing and Identity in Colonial Captivity Narratives”. *Early American Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 104-136.

University of Pennsylvania Press. Stable URL:
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23546568> Accessed: 24-03-2019 17:10 UTC

- Chongloi, Lalgin, 2012. “Som: A decaying Traditional Institutions of the Thadou”, *Journal of North East India Studies* Vol. 2(1)(Jan-Jun): 13-21.
- Creed, W. E. D., Scully, M. A. and Austin, J. R., 2002. “Clothes Make the Person? The Tailoring of Legitimizing Accounts and the Social Construction of Identity”. *Organization Science*, Vol. 13, No. 5 (Sep. - Oct., 2002), pp. 475-496. INFORMS. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3086073> Accessed: 24-03-2019 17:01 UTC
- Eicher, Joanne B., 2000. “The Anthropology of Dress”. *DRESS*, Vol. 27, 2000. pp. 59-70.
- Engelstad, Bernadette Driscoll, “Dance of the Loon: Symbolism and Continuity in Copper Inuit Ceremonial Clothing”, *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 42, No. 1(2005), pp.33-46. University of Wisconsin Press. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40316636> Accessed: 26-04-2020 09:22 UTC
- Ewers, John C. “Climate, Acculturation, and Costume: A History of Women’s Clothing among the Indians of the Southern Plains”. *Plains Anthropologist*, Vol. 25, No. 87 (Feb., 1980), pp.63-82. Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25667588> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:42 UTC
- Fowles, Jib, 1974. “Why we wear clothes” *A review of General Semantics*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Dec.), Published by: Institute of General Semantics Stable. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42576473> Accessed: 24 03 2019. pp . 345 -352.

- Fraser, Barbara G. and David W. Fraser, “Thangchhuah Puan: The Highest Status Mantle among the Mizo People of Northeastern India”(2012). *Textile Society of America*
- Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph von., 1971. “Comparisons between the Mountain Peoples of the Philippines and Some Tribes of North-East India”, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 137(3)(Sep.): 339-348. The Royal Geographical Society. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1797271> Accessed: 23-01-2020 17:30 UTC
- Guite, Jangkhomang, “Colonialism and Its Unruly?- The Colonial State and Kuki Raids in Nineteenth Century Northeast India”, in *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 48, 5 (2014). Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Haokip, D. Mary Kim, “The Role of Oral Tradition with special reference to the Thadou Kuki Society”, *Journal of Northeast India Societies*, Vol. 6(1), Jan-Jun, 2016.
- Hunt, Patricia K. “Clothing as an Expression of History: The Dress of African-American Women in Georgia, 1880-1915”. *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2, The Diversity of Southern Gender and Race: Women in Georgia and the South (Summer 1993), pp.459-471. Georgia Historical Society. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40582547> Accessed: 26-04-2020 09:52 UTC
- Inglehart, Ronald & Wayne E. Baker. “Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values”. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1, Looking Forward, Looking Back: Continuity and Change at the Turn of the

Millennium (Feb., 2000), pp.19-51. American Sociological Association. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2657288> Accessed: 29-08-2019.

- Johnson, Ryan. “European Cloth and ‘Tropical’ Skin: Clothing Material and British Ideas of Health and Hygiene in Tropical Climates”. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 83, No. 3(Fall 2009), pp. 530-560. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44448799> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:09 UTC
- Joshi, Vibha, 2000. “Dynamics of Warp and Weft: Contemporary trends in Naga textiles and the Naga collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford” (2000). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/786>
- Khongsai, L. Kaikhomang. “Kuki Thucheng Kholgilna”, in *Kuki Students Organisation Journal*, June 1993, pp. 8-9.
- Lane, Paul J. “The Social Production and Symbolism of Cloth and Clothing among the Dogon of Mali”. *Anthropos*, Bd. 103, H. 1.(2008), PP. 77-98. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40466866> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:30 UTC
- Lenz, Elsa. “Instructional Resources: Dressing Up: Clothing as a Visible Expression of Identity”. *Art Education*, Vol. 55, No. 5, A New Start (Sept., 2002), pp. 25-32. National Art Education Association. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3193955> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:14 UTC
- Lynn, Hyung Gu. “Fashioning Modernity: Changing Meanings of Clothing in Colonial Korea”. *Journal of International and Area Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Special

Issue: Modernity in Korea (2004), pp. 75-93. Institute of International Affairs, Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University. Stable URL:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43107104> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:08 UTC

- Misra, Sanghamitra, “The nature of colonial intervention in the Naga Hills, 1840-1880”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33 No. 51 (Dec. 19-25, 1998), pp. 3273-3279.
- Nag, Sajal and Kumar, M. Satish, 2002. “Noble Savage to Gentlemen: Discourses of Civilisation and Missionary Modernity in Northeast India”. *Contemporary India; A Northeast Special*. Vol. 1, No. 4(Oct Nov, 2002).17 Nehru Memorial Museum & Library.
- Nandy, Ashis, “History’s Forgotten Doubles”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 34(2), (May, 1995) Blackwell Publishing for Wesleyan University.
- Ningmuanching, 2017. “Converting the Nagas and Kukis: Missionary Representations”, *Journal of North East India Studies* Vol. 7(1):71-92.
- Robb, Peter, 1997. “The Colonial State and Constructions of Indian Identity: An Example on the Northeast Frontier in the 1880s”. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (May, 1997), pp. 245-283. Cambridge University Press. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/313030> Accessed: 24-03-2019 17:18 UTC
- Pachuau, Joy L.K., 2015. “Sainghinga and his times: Codifying Mizo attire,” *Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies*, An annual referred journal. Vol ii Issue ii March, 2015. Department of English, Mizoram University: Mizoram.
- Panmei, Sodolakpou, 2016. “State and Indigenous Intermediaries: Aspects of administrative arrangement in British India’s Naga Hills, 1881-1945”. *NMML*

OCCASIONAL PAPER History and Society, New Series 85. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2016.

- Pongen, Sashinungla, 2016. “‘I Perceive that in Every Way You Are Very Religious’ (Acts 17:22): Naga Spirituality and Baptist Mission”, *Journal of World Christianity*, Vol. 6(2): 291-310. Penn State University Press.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jworldchri.6.2.0291>
- Pum Khan Pau, 2012. “Rethinking Religious Conversion: Missionary Endeavor and Indigenous Response among the Zo (Chin) of the India-Burma Borderland”, in *Journal of Religion & Society* The Kripke Center Vol. 14 (2012).
- Schendel, Willem van, 2002. “A Politics of Nudity: Photographs of the 'Naked Mru' of Bangladesh”. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May, 2002), pp. 341-374. Cambridge University Press. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3876659>
Accessed: 24-09-2019 06:38 UTC.
- Sitlhou, Hoineilhing. 2009. “Straying beyond Conquest and Emancipation: Exploring the fault lines of Missionary Education in Northeast India”. *Indian Anthropological Association*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41920091> Accessed 28-03-2019.
- Songate, Rev. Lalrosiem. “Christianity in Churachandpur”, in *Southern Manipur Gospel Centenary Celebration: Compendium*. Gospel Centenary Celebration Committee: Churachandpur.
- Suriano, Maria. “Clothing and the Changing Identities of Tanganyikan Urban Youths, 1920s-1950s”. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, East African Culture, Language and Society (Jun., 2008), pp. 95-115. Taylor & Francis,

Ltd., Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25473401> Accessed: 26-04-2020 11:39 UTC

- Thomas, William I. “The Psychology of Modesty and Clothing”, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Sep., 1899), pp. 246-262. The University of Chicago Press. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2761551> Accessed: 26-04-2020 17:04 UTC
- Thong, Tezenlo, 2012. “To Raise the Savage to a Higher Level: The Westernization of Nagas and their Culture”. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, No . 4 (JULY 2012), pp. 893-918. Cambridge University Press. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41478422> Accessed: 28 03 2019.
- Turner, Terence S., 2012. “The Social Skin”, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2012.(p.486-504)
- Vanaja, Dr. A. “Role of Missionaries in Upper Cloth Riot in Kanyakumari District”. *Pariplex- Indian Journal of Research*, Vol. 4(2) Feb, 2015.
- Vukvukai, N. I., “Chukchi traditional Clothing as historical source of cultural transformation”. *Etudes/ Inuit/ Studies*, Vol. 31, No. ½ Tchoukotka/ Chukotka, 2007. Pp.311-315, Universite Laval.

4. Web Sources

- *Symposium Proceedings*.683. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/683>
- McLuhan, Marshall, 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.(ONLINE VERSION)
- Rosenfels, Paul. *Psychoanalysis and Civilization*. Downloaded from www.Abika.com
- Singha, Radhika, “The recruiter’s eye on ‘the primitive’: to France in the Indian Labour Corps - and back, 1917-1918.” accessed www.academia.edu
- Government of India Geographical Indications Journal No. 119, April 05, 2019/ CHAITRA 15, SAKA 1940
- Chhangte, Dr. Cherrie L., “ Textiles of Mizoram: The Puan” at www.mizothujiak.blogspot.com

5. *Unpublished Thesis*

- Jeyaseelan, L., *Christianity and its Impacts: Socio-Political and Economic With Special Reference to Churachandpur District of Manipur*. Thesis submitted to Manipur University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, November 1993.
- Lawmsanga, *A Critical Study on Christian Mission with Special Reference to Presbyterian Church of Mizoram*. Thesis submitted to the Dept. of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham, January 2010.
- Malsawmdawngliana, *Aspects in the Cultural History of the Mizos during the pre-British Period*. Thesis submitted to University of Hyderabad for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, 2012.
- Haokip, Paokhohao, *Material Culture of the Kukis of Manipur during Colonial period: A historical study*. Thesis submitted to Assam University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Dept. of History, School of Social Sciences, September 2012.
- Zamminlien, *On Interpreting Music: The PerformativenTraditions of the Kukis*. Thesis submitted to University of Hyderabad for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication, February 2020.

**National Webinar on
Women, Gender and Intersectionality: Issues and Concerns**

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF KERALA

KARIYATTOM CAMPUS, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM-695581

Certificate of Appreciation

This certificate is awarded to....*Nengneilam Kipgen (MPHil Scholar, University of Hyderabad)* in grateful recognition and appreciation for presenting a paper titled '*what to wear*': *women's dilemma in a tribal society* in National Webinar on Women, Gender and Intersectionality: Issues and Concerns organized by Dept of Sociology, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram held from 10 to 13 January, 2022.

Sandhya. R. S

Patron
Dr. Sandhya RS
Professor and Head

Bushra

Organizing Secretary
Dr. Bushra Beegom RK
Assistant Professor

Clothing and its Social Life: A Study on the Kuki Society during Colonial Rule

by Nengneilam Kipgen

Submission date: 24-May-2022 10:58AM (UTC+0530)

Submission ID: 1843048669

File name: Nengneilam_Kipgen.docx (124.69K)

Word count: 33158

Character count: 170629

Clothing and its Social Life: A Study on the Kuki Society during Colonial Rule

ORIGINALITY REPORT

6%

SIMILARITY INDEX

5%

INTERNET SOURCES

1%

PUBLICATIONS

1%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	archive.org Internet Source	1%
2	mirror.ufs.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
3	mzuir.inflibnet.ac.in:8080 Internet Source	<1%
4	ebin.pub Internet Source	<1%
5	www.chai-online.net Internet Source	<1%
6	www.origin-gi.com Internet Source	<1%
7	idr.aus.ac.in Internet Source	<1%
8	digitalcommons.unl.edu Internet Source	<1%
9	24a4d116-c229-4f7d-b2f7-708b1bc74c54.filesusr.com	<1%

10

Submitted to IIT Delhi

Student Paper

<1 %

11

www.iccoindia.org

Internet Source

<1 %

12

dokumen.pub

Internet Source

<1 %

13

kukiforum.com

Internet Source

<1 %

14

textileapex.blogspot.com

Internet Source

<1 %

15

www.exoticindiaart.com

Internet Source

<1 %

16

repositories.lib.utexas.edu

Internet Source

<1 %

17

eprints.soas.ac.uk

Internet Source

<1 %

18

www.iosrjournals.org

Internet Source

<1 %

19

digitalcommons.du.edu

Internet Source

<1 %

20

Submitted to Liberty University

Student Paper

<1 %

21

zalengam.org

<1 %

22

Hoineilhing Sitlhou. "Patriarchal Bargains and Paradoxical Emancipation: Issues in the Politics of Land Rights of Kuki Women", Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 2015

Publication

<1 %

23

Submitted to Uganda Christian University

Student Paper

<1 %

24

ia801407.us.archive.org

Internet Source

<1 %

25

zougam.wordpress.com

Internet Source

<1 %

26

Submitted to CEPT University

Student Paper

<1 %

27

secure.ocms.ac.uk

Internet Source

<1 %

28

Emanuele Coccia. "Sensible Life", Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020

Publication

<1 %

29

Hoineilhing Sitlhou. " The shifting 'stages' of performance: a study of festival in Manipur ", Asian Ethnicity, 2018

Publication

<1 %

30 K.R. Dikshit, Jutta K Dikshit. "North-East India: Land, People and Economy", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2014 $<1\%$
Publication

31 Submitted to Middlesex University $<1\%$
Student Paper

32 baadalsg.inflibnet.ac.in $<1\%$
Internet Source

33 idoc.pub $<1\%$
Internet Source

34 jcdurbant.wordpress.com $<1\%$
Internet Source

35 Arif Dirlik. "Confounding Metaphors, Inventions of the World: What is World History For?", Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 2006 $<1\%$
Publication

36 Submitted to Northcentral $<1\%$
Student Paper

Exclude quotes On
Exclude bibliography On

Exclude matches < 14 words