

## **PART – II**

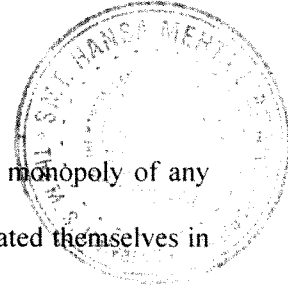
**CHAPTER IV: MAIN ASPECTS OF BELIEFS**

**CHAPTER V: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **MAIN ASPECTS OF BELIEFS**

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## **Introduction**

Religious sentiments and practices have never been the monopoly of any particular clan, tribe or nation. People whether primitive or not; culminated themselves in some sort of religious practice or atleast had a semblance of a religious practice. Religion also becomes very important to tribal people because of their closeness to nature and the force of nature compels them to look for someone beyond. And in course of their history, they have given expression to sentiments that which may be termed as primitive religion (Jeyasleen 1993: 59).

Beliefs that presume the existence of spiritual beings are commonly described as religious, while those referring to powers that do not presuppose the existence of such beings are called magical. As a rule every culture has a definite body of beliefs correlated with distinct observances and ritual practices. The connection between religion and ethics varies in different cultures. In general, there is a very close connection between the religious system of people and their social organization. Beliefs can be distinguished into three main aspects viz.–religious beliefs and practices, magical beliefs and practices, and witchcraft and sorcery (Notes and Queries On anthropology 1951:174). The above mentioned aspects of beliefs will be discussed as regard to the Kuki traditional present society in this chapter.

### **IV.1. Religious Beliefs and Practices**

Every society has their own different beliefs in supernatural powers of some kind or the other. However, technologically or scientifically advanced a society is, there is always an insecure thought in their minds. This is when they take resort to supernatural power to support or to boost up their inner strength. It can be often observed or seen in their various beliefs and practices regarding their life and the natural surroundings. Religion is characterized by a belief in, and an emotional attitude towards,

the supernatural being or beings, and a formal mode of approach towards them. Various kinds of belief may be held in one society at the same time, like; belief in a High God may coexist with belief in numerous other spiritual agencies, as well as ancestor cult or totemism (ibid: 174-176).

All religious system has in common the embodiment of sacred beliefs. Religion provides explanations and assigns values to otherwise inexplicable phenomena without an ordered system of beliefs religious behavior would be irrational and unmotivated (Malefijt 1968:145). Beliefs and practices are complimentary to each other. Evan Pritchard criticized specially the analysis of beliefs in isolation from practice, and emphasized the importance of analyzing religious facts as a whole and in relation to other institutional system of society (Evans Pritchard 1937). There are usually myths connected with the body of belief. It must be noted that various kinds of beliefs may be held in one society, according to the different groups or section of population, at the same time. The beliefs and practices which they have regarding beliefs concerning man, beliefs concerning supernatural beings and agencies and the forms of rituals are to be studied. In the beliefs concerning man what we would be discussing mainly are the society's belief regarding soul and soul substance, ghost, after life, abode of the dead, fate of the dead and reincarnation. Here, we would be discussing the religious beliefs and practices; what the respondents think and understand about them; the present situation of each of these issues; and finally some appropriate interpretations of the findings.

Religious belief is a system of knowledge about the divine and its relationship with the human. It is simply not enough to believe in the existence of a supernatural force. The knowledge of its existence must be explained to people and to generations to come. Beliefs serve this purpose of revealing the existence of the nature of the divine, the deeds, actions or words of the divine and prescribe ways in which human

beings can communicate with the divine. Beliefs necessarily involve a sense of the past and speak about a tradition, in the sense of a custom followed for a long time. It narrates the history of communication between the divine and the human (ESO-15 2004: 16-17).

#### **IV.1.a. *Soul and Soul Substance***

According to E.B. Tylor (1871) soul is a thin unsubstantial human image, in its nature a sort of vapor, film or shadow; the cause of life and thought in the individual it animates; independently possessing the personal consciousness and volition of its corporeal owner past or present; capable of leaving the body far behind, to flash swiftly from place to place, mostly impalpable and invisible, yet also manifesting physical power and especially appearing to men walking or asleep as a phantasm separate from the body of which it bears the likeness, continuing to exist and appear to men after the death of that body; able to enter into, possess, and act in the bodies of other men, of animals and even of things (Jense 1951:267).

The most conspicuous aspects of man's religious self-image are his concept of the soul. Man realized that the soul, the principle of life, survives the body and has physical power. The soul is believed to survive the body, but it often plays a significant role during life as well (Malefijt 1968:166). Soul is an immaterial aspect of human personality (Notes and Queries On anthropology 1951:176).

The location of the soul in the body is associated with head, heart, liver, breath (ibid: 76). This is a reference to the life-force within a living creature. Many beliefs usually restrict this reference to humans, not to animals. In most religions, the soul is immortal and cannot be destroyed. Although the soul is eternal, it is believed to have several physical bodies, through reincarnation. In Christianity, the soul is created by God at the beginning of life. After the death of the physical body, the souls reside in an afterlife<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of soul was believed by Kukis. It was believed as an incorporeal, immortal being embodied in the physical bodies within themselves. The soul was neither personified into different sex nor categorized into certain social classes. The soul leaves the body after one dies and goes to an eternal abode or heaven also known as Mithikhua in Thadou, Van-gam in Kom, Peilral in Hmar or it goes to hell or Mithikhuo (valley of the dead); Chomleibak in Kom; Gotmun in Thadou. The soul was categorized into good or bad souls on the basis of one's deeds. Soul substance was not believed in their society.

Reasons for the soul leaving the body after one dies is that it has to go back to God from where it had come. The 62% rural and 76.67% urban respondents explained that soul was categorized on the basis of one's deeds, behavior, character, etc. Souls of the persons, who did good for others, who did not do any bad things in life, who died a natural and peaceful death, for whom rituals were performed accordingly, who killed wild animals, gave feasts to the village thrice during their life time, who abide and lead a life of morality, were categorized as good souls and are believed to go to Mithikhul or heaven. Such souls were also believed to enjoy a good stay in the heaven. While those souls which went against the wish of God, who did not believe in God, which hurts other people, commit crime, stolen things, sent evil spirits or spells to others, who died an accidental death or committed suicide were considered as bad souls and were believed to go Mithikhua or hell,

On the contrary to the above belief and explanation given by the one hundred and sixteen respondents the following respondents i.e.38% rural and 23.33% urban respondents hold the opinion that soul is not categorized into good or bad. All souls are same and after death they go to heaven.

Soul is still believed in the Kuki society. It is their life, their conscience, a being embodied in the physical bodies. It is immortal and invisible and incorporeal. They also believe that the soul lives within them in their body. The soul leaves the body after one dies and goes to heaven or paradise. They do not believe the soul to be personified of any sex or categorized into any type of social classes, but souls are categorized into good and bad according to the deeds of the person during his lifetime. Souls which go against the wish of God, who do not believe in God, which hurt other people, committed crimes, stolen things, etc., were considered as bad souls. While the souls who do good things for others, go according to the wish of God, who do not indulge in any bad things in life are considered as good souls. Kukis do not believe in soul substance. The responses of the subjects regarding their beliefs in soul have been presented in (Table IV.1).

**Table IV.1**  
**Soul was categorized into good and bad souls according to the respondents**

Soul was categorized into good and bad	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Yes	93	62	23	76.67	116
No	57	38	7	23.33	64
Total	150	100	30	100	180

#### **IV.1. b. Ghosts**

Ghosts have been defined as the souls of the dead which, in spite of precaution return to the living, usually to disturb them (Malefijt 1968:161). In the book "Notes and Queries on Anthropology" also ghosts have been defined as a term used for the soul of the dead if it is believed that it can be perceived by human beings (1951:178).

Ghost's lore has a long and colorful history. The word ghost has been in use since the last sixteenth century. It derives from an ancient term 'Gast' (in the sense spirit or soul), in the language that evolved into modern German. For some time ghost has usually signified the disembodied spirit of a deceased person. Earlier meanings still cling

to this word, however, Gast originally referred to a terrifying rage. A person who experienced shock and terror can still be described as ghastr (i.e. frightened by an angry ghost)<sup>2</sup>.

According to the tribal lore there is more than one way in which a ghost can present itself. The visible ghosts are often elusive, appearing only in glimpses, but some linger. Specialists in folklore and paranormal phenomena tend to speak instead of apparitions (from the Latin for "appearances" or "presentations"). Apparitions include ghosts of deceased persons but can also represent animals, objects and unusual beings that resist classifications<sup>2</sup>.

Some ghosts are heard rather than seen. Poltergeists (noisy ghosts) are notorious for dragging their chains, dropping dishes from shelf, or even hurling objects across the room. A more subtle type of ghost is neither seen nor heard. One 'feels' its presence. This sense of presence is the most common type of ghost-related experience reported<sup>2</sup>.

Ghost is also known as an apparition, specter. A ghost is believed to be the energy or soul of a living person. When the living die, this energy is released from the physical body and is believed to do one of the two things-i) go on to a higher spiritual place described by one's religious beliefs or ii) stays behind and lingers on for an unspecified time. But why they stay behind no one knows for sure<sup>1</sup>. A ghost, then, might either be a blessed spirit on a mission of mercy, or the tortured and malevolent image of a body that suffered an anguished death<sup>2</sup>.

The concept of ghost was very popular in the Kuki traditional society. Ghosts were believed to be the souls of those who died an unnatural death. The Kukis believed ghosts could be seen in certain forms, scared and harmed them. While souls, which were believed to go to heaven or hell after death did not, scared or harmed them.

Ghosts were believed to destroy things, haunt, gave sickness, and roamed around in the village, hills, etc. during the night. They are a form of evil spirits which are not accepted by God. Ghosts were also believed to be in the middle i.e. neither in the heaven nor in the hell, as they cannot go to heaven or hell. They no longer can stay in the house. They were the sinner's souls. They were not worshipped or regarded by people. Some names of ghosts which were common are 'Zoumi', a kind of ghost which can even kill men and animals. It was believed to be tall, black and can also become very small. 'Pheisam', was believed to be the ghost with broken limbs and walk on single leg. 'Misao', believed to be the black and very tall ghost. 'Chomnu', is a female ghost which has reversed feet and believed to give company to male hunters in the jungle. 'Gamkoapi', was considered to be the huge one in size. 'Nelhauh' comes whenever death occurs. 'Gamshoie' can become as tall as a tree or small and short as an ant as they wished and carried a lamp. They looked like a dwarf. Kullonu, Khosemu, Maltong, Tanungok, etc. are the other few. On the other hand soul can get free and live eternally in the land of God, it lives within human beings, the heart, the conscience. It does not harm people. Souls can go to heaven and were born again. Souls do not scare people; they will go to either heaven or hell without disturbing others. In the traditional Kuki society no one in the village was believed to keep ghosts.

According to the present Christian belief there exists the substance of Ghost which represents Jesus in his righteous and holiest form (Holy Ghost). Every believing Christian acknowledges these phenomena. Ghost represents the spirit of God as God Himself whereas soul is a human concept wherein God dwells His sovereign will upon his chosen ones. It is not perceived rather it is the very essence of Christian faith. There are no different types of ghosts. Christians may vary in their opinion about ghost keeping in view of the modern technology and scientific advancement. Nevertheless, any believing Christian will never believe on ghost other than the Holy one, Jesus Himself. There is a

concept of ghost in Christianity as Jesus Himself represents in the form of Holy Ghost (after resurrection).

In spite of conversion to Christianity, some of the respondents do still believe in the concept and existence of ghost in their society. These ghosts are believed to reside in rivers, roam around the village, hills, at the entrance of the village gate, trees, jungles, thick bushes, caves, rocks, etc. They are also believed to be present around the house. Ghosts neither live in heaven nor in hell. Ghosts do scare people. Some ghosts are found to be big black things which could grow bigger and bigger as one looks up and can even be very tiny. Ghosts can be seen at night, and are not real; they live anywhere and everywhere. They are considered to be the workers of Satan, who work against God. On the other hand soul can get free and live eternally in the land of God, it lives within us, in the heart, the conscience. It does not harm people. Soul does not scare people; they will go to either heaven or hell without disturbing others. Soul is the life given by God, and goes to God. Soul is the inner conscience of humans which goes to God after death.

The concept of ghost is believed to be there among the nine sub-groups of the Kuki tribe irrespective of their being in the rural or urban setting. 64% rural and 60% urban respondents from the converts strongly believe in Holy Ghost but not the ghost traditionally thought of. However, 33.33% rural and 30% urban respondents of the remaining converted Christian subjects, even though they believed in 'Holy Ghost', still they believe in the traditional 'ghost'. While the 2% rural non-converts still believe and fear the traditional ghosts. And the 0.67% rural and 10% urban Judaism follower did not comment.

The contrasting beliefs about ghost have long co-existed, sometimes in the same society. The reasons which they gave for believing in ghost are their first-hand experiences. They said that they have felt the presence and seen ghosts with their own

eyes. Among this group of respondents one old man very solemnly said that it has nothing to do with science and technology or Christianity. He had seen the ghost when he and his friends went for hunting in the forest. Over and above one middle aged man said ghosts used to come in his dream everyday. He saw them cooking on the roof of the thatched house of his neighbor but the house would not catch fire. Then his grandfather made him to eat hen's raw egg which was about to hatch. After that it stopped coming in his dreams.

The concept of ghost is there in Christianity in the form of Satan. According to 18% rural and 30% urban respondents believed that bad thoughts are given to man by ghosts. Whereas 79.33% rural and 66.67% urban respondents said that there is no concept of ghost in Christianity. While the 2% non-converts and 0.67% rural and 3.33% urban respondents who were believers of Judaism said that they had no idea about ghosts in Christianity.

Nowadays, among the Kukis the number of people who believe in ghosts and have encountered or seen ghosts are very low. Only 24% rural and 23.33% urban respondents said that ghosts are visible to them, it is not only perceived. While 76% rural and 76.67% urban respondents strongly denied any belief in any kind of ghosts. This belief of ghost, being visible is not acceptable for the younger generation. The reasons may be because of education, their change in religious beliefs, contacts with the outside world thus broadening their thinking and making them reason out things. The various beliefs and concepts regarding ghosts by the respondents is presented in (Table IV.2)

**Table IV.2**  
**Beliefs of the Respondents regarding Ghosts**

Beliefs and knowledge regarding Ghosts	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Who strongly believe in Holy Ghost	96	64	18	60	114
Who believe in the Holy Ghost as well as the traditional Ghost	50	33.33	9	30	59
Who still fear and believe only the traditional Ghost	3	2	0	0	5
No comment	1	0.67	3	10	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	
Concept of Ghost in Christianity	119	79.33	20	66.67	139
No concept of Ghost in Christianity	27	18	9	30	26
No idea about ghost in Christianity	4	2.67	1	3.33	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>
Who believe in Ghosts	36	24	7	23.33	43
Ghosts are not believed	114	76	23	76.67	137
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>

#### **IV.1. c. Abode of the Dead**

The abode of the dead may be located geographically and/or mythologically, and may be correlated with the traditional home of the people. It may be underground in the sea, or in the sky.

The Kukis believed the abode of the dead to be in the sky known as heaven or paradise (in different dialects they refer them as Kholmun, Van-gam, Thikhholm, Pielral, Misikhua, Mithigam) and hell (in different dialects Mithikhua). There were no special abodes of the dead for certain social classes. The soul was believed to visit the abode of the dead during life according to the Kuki mythological story of "Khupting and Ngangbom". In this famous love story, Ngangbom, the lover of lady Khupting visited the abode of the dead in search of his fiancée after her death, according to 30 % rural and 16.67% urban respondents. But for the remaining 70% and 83.33% urban respondents the soul does not visit the abode of the dead during life (Table IV.3).

The present Kuki society does believe in the abode of the dead either in heaven or hell. But they believe that there is no special abode of the dead for different classes or clans. Christian converts believe that the soul after death returns to God and stays with Him until the Day of Judgment.

**Table IV.3**  
**Beliefs Regarding Abode of the Dead**

Soul visited the abode of the dead during life	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Yes	45	30	5	1.67	50
No	105	70	25	83.33	130
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>

#### **IV.1. d. Reincarnation**

Reincarnation, literally means "to be made flesh again", as a doctrine or mystical belief, holds the notion that some essential part of a human being (or in some interpretations, any living being) can survive death in some form, with its integrity partly or wholly retained, to be reborn in a new body. This part is often referred to as the Spirit or Soul, the 'Higher or True Self', 'Divine Spark', 'I' or the 'Ego'<sup>3</sup>.

Reincarnation or rebirths were believed in the Kuki traditional society. The reasons for reincarnation were believed to be because the deceased was wanted to come back into the family again. So, those who died young and unmarried or infants were asked to come back again since their wishes were unfulfilled as they died an untimely death. They were believed to be reborn or reincarnated in the form of human beings only. To know where the deceased has been reborn, a black mark was applied on the body of the deceased. No ceremonies were performed to the person who has been reincarnated. And also no rituals or rites were performed to mark the reincarnation or rebirth. Reincarnation or rebirth in the form of animal was not believed among the Kukis.

The present Kuki society does not believe in the concept of reincarnation or rebirth since there are no phenomena of reincarnation in Christianity. But 69.44 % of the

total respondents no more believe in the concept of reincarnation while 30.56 % including the non-converts still believe in this old belief based on the black spot present on the body of some persons and children.

#### **IV.1. e. *Afterlife***

Afterlife is known as the Other Side, the Great Beyond, Heaven, Hell as well as many other names. Basically it's the life after that we are in now. Every culture in the planet has some belief in an afterlife, and what it is like. Some believe that we are reborn, to lead out another form of life on the planet. Others believe that the next life is much the same as it is now, with the same family life and there enough for all. In the tribal system there is a belief of the underworld. The place is under the earth and there spirits of the dead live together in villages. Even though there are many different ideas, theories and beliefs about where we go and what we become when we die<sup>1</sup>.

In some or the other form every society or culture have belief in some kind of life after death. This can be said after analyzing the burial, cremation and the funeral rites. It can be clearly seen in the traditional as well as modern practices.

After the death of a person the soul goes to heaven. There is no traditional belief about why the soul leaves the body after death. The Kukis also believe in a life after death. It was believed that the soul will meet with the soul of their ancestors. In time of burial certain things were buried along with the deceased body. But in general cloth was a must i.e. the traditional shawl of the Kuki called "Saipikhup" (Photo IV.1.a) (shawl for the males) and "Khamtang" (Photo IV.1.b) (shawl for the females). Generally, when a person is dead his relatives, especially the family's daughter's in-law/family should present clothes to the dead family. So from among all the presented shawls one, three, or more in odd numbers were buried along with the deceased. Usually, the things buried were the coins, weapons, tobacco leaves, *tuibuh* (hookah) (Photo IV.2), *dahpi* (gongs) (Photo IV.3), heads of the killed animals hunted by the deceased during his lifetime or the heads of the

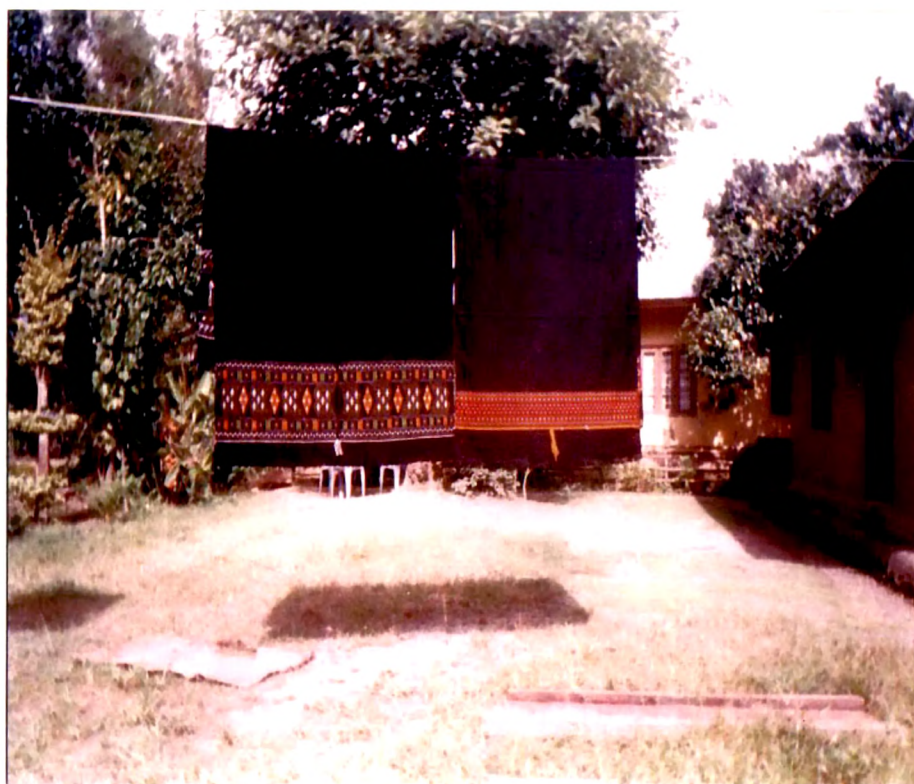


Photo IV.1 a. Saipikhup (Shawl for the males)



Photo IV.1.b. Khamtang (Shawl for the females)



Photo IV.2. Tuibuh (Hookah)



Photo IV.3. Dahpi (Gongs)



Photo IV.4. Khichong (Necklaces of stones and semi-precious stones and beads)

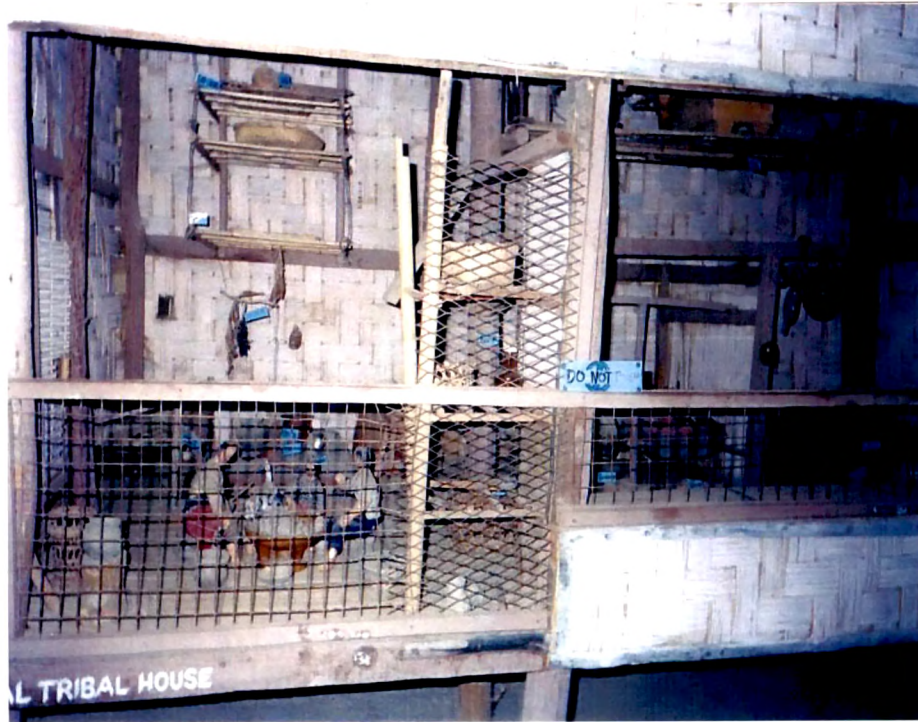


Photo IV.5 Lap (Hanging rack in the kitchen)

domesticated animals generally belonged to the deceased. The animals' heads were buried to guide the deceased on the way to Thikhokhul (Heaven). Besides these, priced articles, zu (rice wine) meat, bullet case made of leather, Khichong (necklaces of semi-precious stones and beads) (Photo IV.4), spear, dao, gun, chao (brass armlets), swords, hen, etc. were buried. The coins, gongs, necklaces, bullet case made of leather, spear, sword, dao, gun, and armlets were mostly buried when a chief or a rich man died. These things were buried along with the dead for his use in the other world. In case of death of a child tobacco leaves were buried to give to his grandparents who were already dead. If the child was still breastfeeding then the mother's milk was put in a container and buried so as to drink on its way to Mithikhul. Clothes used by the deceased were also buried by the females of the family or parents since they were considered to be bad. The Thagao (soul) will look for it and if the soul can not find the clothes, it will feel bad.

After the funeral, the deceased family killed a cow which was called "Tomsa". A piece of meat has to be given to the relatives of the deceased who covered the body with a cloth. Those relatives who did not cover the dead with a cloth were not presented the meat. Food was also given/buried along with the dead so that the dead may not be hungry on the way to paradise, Thikhokhul. Those who have performed sai-ai (ceremony for good harvest) or chang-ai (ceremony for good hunting) were believed to go to the heaven and those who did not perform these rituals or any good deeds were believed to go to hell. When a person dies, the relatives kill a dog or a pig or any other animal and bury them along with the dead body. By doing so, they believe that the soul will be accompanied to the abode of the dead. Sometimes, depending upon their riches or availability they even bury the swords, coins, necklaces, skulls of the hunted animals, wine, etc. along with the dead body.

In the Kuki society, a small mark was put on the dead body with smoked powder or charcoal or black shoots from the kitchen fireplace. The reasons for putting this mark was mainly to see whether the deceased's soul took rebirth in the same family or even in the neighbor's house. Black marks were put on the dead body of infant too. This was done mainly when a woman gives birth and the babies keep on dying after every birth. Then the black mark is put so as to see whether the same souls of the dead infants were coming to the womb repeatedly or not. When a child was born with the similar mark which they have put on the deceased, then it was believed that the child was the rebirth of the deceased. They put the mark especially when a child, some young married or unmarried youth died. This indicated that they were wanted back in the family again. Black mark was also put not only at the time of death but also when children went out of the house or to another place. Black mark from the tripod was put on the forehead to ward off any evil spirits or ghosts which were believed to be always around.

After the burial of the dead, to let the soul rest in peace, certain rituals are performed. These rituals were basically to give food for the soul. This is called Ankongphelpai (last food for the soul). The soul leaves for heavenly abode only after Ankongphelpai was performed. If this was not performed, it was believed that the soul of the deceased will be strayed and make noise around the house making its presence felt to the family members. This was performed by killing a mithun (a *bos frontalis*, a species of Indian bison) or a pig. The thiempu (priest) prays for the soul to leave for the heavenly abode. This was the ceremony for giving food for the last time to the soul. Those bereaved family who can afford, gave a feast to the whole village or just to the relatives and near and dear ones. Rich families performed the rituals on the day of the death itself. Or it could be done on any odd day counting from the day the person passed away i.e. for example, on the day itself, or on the third or fifth or seventh day. It could also be done

after a year or whenever the family could afford. Depending upon their economic status some families even killed a mithun(s) or a cow or a pig. The animal killed on this day is called "Kosa" (killing such animals on the day of burial or after the burial was an expression of the status and prestige of the deceased and his family). The village elders and those whoever came to condole the demise in the family have the feast. There were no compulsions that this has to be performed on a specific time. This was done only for a day and whatever the deceased liked was cooked for the feast. The day of giving food to the soul is called Lhaldam. On this day the thiempu makes a prayer saying, "Now you are no more a human being. So go peacefully to where you belong now." A cock and a goat were killed believing that the cock would guide the way and the goat would be a vehicle in the form of a horse for the soul. For one or two weeks food cooked in the house were offered to the soul on the top of the "lap" ( a hanging rack above the kitchen fireplace which is usually made of bamboo and used for keeping food, drying meat, etc.) (Photo IV.5).

The Kukis also performed a ritual known as Thantop which starts from the second week after the death. In this ritual, above the bed a bamboo rack was made and on a dish some rice and curry were kept for the Thagao (soul). This was made by the tucha (son-in-law). For a month, day and night, food to the soul was to be offered first before anyone in the family had it or the soul will feel neglected and would be unhappy because his share of food was not given. If his living descendants did not perform any funeral rites the deceased's soul also feels that no one of his living descendants cared for him. They also believed that the soul may come in search for food.

Another ritual was Kithen sak. On this day zu (rice beer) is brought to the deceased house by relatives and they drank it together. A cock with the long feather was then sacrificed by the thiempu for the family. This indicated the purifying of the house so that the soul does not come back again to the family. The soul was believed to make the

living relatives felt its presence by roaming around the house, making the sound of sand or pebbles being dropped on the roof of the house, coming in the dreams of the living relatives, make noise of the utensils, etc. in case the last rites were not performed within the stipulated time, the soul becomes unhappy and attacks the living relatives. The most dangerous way of attacking the living relatives is by giving sickness, misfortune to the family.

Traditionally, people believed that untimely death of a person was due to evil spirits. The evil spirits which were believed to be everywhere was thought to be the cause of all unnatural death. Such deaths, called Adonthi in Kuki, were also considered bad for the whole village. As these souls were considered bad they prayed that such souls should not come back again among them. The thiempu used to purify the house and the village after such unnatural death. If a person committed suicide it was believed in general that the deceased soul would not reach heaven. The body of the person who committed suicide was not brought inside the house or even to the village. The body was buried outside the village and not in the courtyard as done traditionally. The tucha (son-in-law) or becha (best friend) of the family will not dig the grave as they do in other cases. But some village elders will dig it. Kukis believe that such deaths were not liked by the creator. And the spirit was believed to roam in the middle unable to reach heaven or hell. If the deceased hung himself then a grave was dug just under the body and then the rope or the cloth with which he had hanged was cut. Thus, making the body directly fall into the grave.

Again, if a person committed suicide in another person's house, the body was taken out. The deceased's family had to compensate a pig to that family in whose house suicide was committed. This house was also purified by the thiempu. These were done because the Kukis believed that the deceased's soul may still roam in the house and

bring harm to the members of the family. Some chiefs even used to drive away the deceased's family from the village so that others do not imitate and repeat such acts. In such cases, the body was buried without any rituals outside the village by the village thiempu and elders only. Youths were not allowed to attend the funeral of such deaths. The body was offered to the creator by the thiempu before burying outside the village. He takes some charcoal, water and then buries the body. The thiempu digs the soil thrice taking the names of Leidupi, Leithaopi, Leishanpi and says that the stone or trees should go away in order to give place to the Manmasi's children. This way, the thiempu prayed that such deaths should not repeat again in the village and the villagers do not mourn. Those people who died by drowning or killed or murdered or murderers are not entitled to get a proper ritual funeral/burial. All such deaths come under Thi-sie (unwanted death).

According to the Kuki custom the grave was to be dug by the tucha. The tucha initiates the digging, after which the village youth may take up the job of digging the grave. The thiempu used to perform the last rites by propitiating and chanting incantations. The dead were buried in the courtyard of the family. They believe in the existence of a link between the living and the dead because the souls of the dead family members come in the dreams of the living descendants, and when a living descendant is going to die the soul comes to take him.

The Kukis' general belief is that the human body is temporal, made of mud and which has to be left on the earth and get mixed with the soil. Death marks the end of man's earthly life after which life in the form of spirit treads another journey. God has given limited time or period to live on earth and do one's duties. After which the body will perish in its original form i.e. by mixing with soil. But the soul had to go back to the creator again after performing its duty on earth, assigned to us by God. It was believed that the soul of the deceased will meet with the souls of his/her ancestors. The soul returns to

the God and stays with him until the Day of Judgment, wherein God Himself judges the place of soul according to its deeds on the earth, categorized as good or evil. Every believing Christian advocates the concept of life after death for the soul that departs from man's life after death returns to God wherein it is placed in Heaven if it is found righteous and noble in the sight of God. The soul is believed to live an eternal life with God. It would be a life of comfort and happiness in heaven.

Traditional shawl is presented and used in the time of burial. Odd numbers of shawls are buried along with the deceased. The clothes buried are usually presented by friends or relatives. But now, the cross itself is buried as a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection. Some also do bury the Hymn books, flowers, etc. The burying of certain things was merely to honor the deceased and show their love and respect. Spencer points out that among many primitive people there is a belief in an after-life. Having this conception the Kukis placed with the deceased not only his inanimate possessions like weapons and implements, clothing, ornaments and other movables but also sacrifice his domestic animals and servants, so that he may enjoy them in his after-life. The belief of burying these inanimate and prized possessions is still believed by 27.22 % respondents. The burying of certain things along with the dead body is merely to honor the deceased and show their love and respect. Things which belonged to the deceased person before his death are no more buried, for the Christian religion itself does not sanction to such beliefs and cults. His belongings are either donated or kept at home. Some of them are generally kept for remembrance in the family or distributed among the relatives and close friends of the deceased. Nowadays killing of animals and burying along with the deceased is no more in practice. But the family still kills an animal called the Tomsa, pieces of which are to be presented to those relatives who covered the deceased with a cloth.

Putting some black marks on the body of the deceased is not in practice anymore. Now the Kuki do not perform any rituals for the dead but pray only to Jesus. Usually the practice last for three days and prayers are offered. Usually services are held and intercessory prayers are offered for the soul to rest in peace. In the church or at home the Pastor and some church members come and they offer prayer service for the deceased's soul to be rested in peace. They put a memorial stone inscribed with quotation from the Bible. Social gathering for two or three days is organized in which friends and relatives come to give their condolence to the bereaved family. Relatives from far off places come and may stay. The soul is not believed to attack the living relatives.

Untimely deaths are no more believed to be caused by evil spirits. Such deaths are considered as the sovereign will of God. Instead they take it in a very practical way and consider it to be a heavy loss for the bereaved family. But in a lighter way, it is considered good since his last rites would be performed properly by his family members. The spirits of those who committed suicide will not go to heaven but are still buried in the common cemetery with proper rites. They also believed that the soul will not get any salvation, for taking one's own life is equal to murder. The cemeteries are not that far from the village maybe just a kilometer or a half. Relatives and friends do help in the last rite in which the presence of church head is a must and the graveyard is usually denominational. Pastor performs the last rite by praying for the soul to rest in peace.

57.22% respondents, both male and female from urban and rural area were not clear about the traditional beliefs of their society. While the remaining 42.78% respondents both males and females including the non-converts from rural and urban areas had knowledge about their ancient traditional practices. This difference indicates that the traditional practices are not much in practice in their society. Among this group the non-convert respondents were still practicing the indigenous religion.

#### **IV. 1. f. *Fate of the Dead***

The Kuki tribes believed that the fate of the soul of the dead person depended on the giant witch known as Kulsamnu who guarded the path to Mithikho (valley of the dead). It was believed that after death the soul has to cross a river to reach the Mithikho. On this way, Kulsamnu waits for the dead persons and judge for their sins. She gave troubles, harassed them, scared them and also asked to pick lice from her head. These lice were in the form of different types of terrifying animals. So, when a small child died, his/her parents used to put black sesame seeds under their finger nails. This was to pretend that the kids were picking the lice from her head. Until and unless she was pleased with the soul, she would not allow them to go to heaven or hell. She was also believed to take away the food carried by the dead.

“Thangsuo” i.e. those persons or souls who had performed Sai-ai or Chang-ai and those who were renowned for being a good hunters or who had hunted many a wild and rare animals were not troubled by Kulsamnu. She harassed the ones who were not brave and who did not perform any functions of merit during their lifetime. It was also believed that Kulsamnu was afraid of the successful hunters and those who performed Chang-ai and Sai-ai. Like this she judged the fate of the dead persons whether to be in heaven or hell. They also believed that the souls wait for his/her relatives in Thikholmul. Until Ankongphelpai i.e. the ritual for giving the last food to the soul by the family, was performed, the soul was believed to be roaming around the house.

Afterlife on earth, when the soul leaves the body it looks after and takes care of the living descendants on earth. The souls are also believed to meet and stay together with the spirits of his clan’s ancestors. After death the soul was believed to be reborn but usually in the form of human beings only. Traditionally also the Kuki tribes did not believe in the soul of the dead possessing the living.

50.67 % rural and 30 % urban respondents believed that the soul after death exists until the last ritual for giving food was performed. While 49.33% rural respondents and 70% urban respondents believed that the soul, after the Lord's judgment go to heaven forever.

61.33% rural and 43.33% urban respondents had knowledge about their traditional beliefs and customs in spite of being believers of Christianity. 38.67% and 56.67% urban respondents do not believe or knew about their traditional beliefs. They said that what they believe about after life is that the soul leads an eternal life in heaven. 2% non-converts said they are still believing and following their traditional religion and have not converted to Christianity.

About 55.33% rural and 43.33% urban respondents believed that after death the soul is again reborn but usually in the form of human beings only. While the remaining 44.67% rural and 56.67% urban respondents do not believe in rebirth at all. This group of respondent comprises mostly young and middle aged respondents who are educated and strongly believe in Christianity. The responses of the subjects regarding fate of the dead have been presented in (Table IV.4 & 5).

**Table IV.4**  
**Beliefs Regarding Fate of the Dead and the Traditional Beliefs**

Beliefs Regarding Fate of the Dead	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Soul exist even after death	76	50.67	9	30	85
After judgement go to heaven	74	49.33	21	70	95
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>
Soul is Reborn	83	55.33	13	43.33	96
Not believe in Rebirth	67	44.67	17	56.67	84
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>

**Table IV.5**  
**Respondents' Belief and Knowledge about their Traditional Beliefs**

Belief and Knowledge about their Traditional Beliefs	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Yes	92	61.33	13	43.33	105
No	58	38.67	17	56.67	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>

Majority of the respondents believe that the soul is categorized into good and bad which is very much similar to their traditional belief. This similarity may probably be due to the philosophy that one should be true to God, should lead a righteous path so that one gets salvation and be in heaven without any trouble. The only difference in thought is that traditionally one performed meritorious feasts thrice during one's lifetime to reserve a place and go to heaven without any trouble from Kulsamnu. The table also clearly shows that majority of the respondents no more believe in ghosts of any kind for they now have realized that ghost is just the perception of the mind. The abode of the dead as believed in the present society is heaven above and their belief in afterlife has been changed. Majority of the respondents now believe that they only hope for salvation after death. This may be the reason for the Kukis not burying any material things which used to be buried along with the death. And, since 96.11 % and 2.22 % of the respondents are Christian and Judaism believers respectively, the philosophy of rebirth is non-existent and they do not believe in reincarnation. The fate of the dead after death is to wait for the Lord's final judgment.

#### **IV.2. Beliefs Concerning Supernatural Beings and Agencies**

Supernatural is a term referring to a nonempirical realm beyond the forces of nature and outside the ordinary operation of physical laws. The distinction between the natural and supernatural is not recognized by many people in small scale preliterate

communities (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974:290). To many primitive people, their world was full of play and counterplay of mystic powers which supposedly influenced the shape and destiny of men. It is true that some groups of people, being confronted with problems and having failed to grapple with them, try to attribute the cause of these problems to some unknown and unseen forces (Gangte 1993:160). The unknown forces which hindered their daily lives were given some relation to various natural phenomenon and these forces were appeased in varied manners by the indigenous people.

#### **IV. 2. a. *Spirits***

Spirits are believed to exist in an invisible realm that can only be seen under certain circumstances or by people with special abilities. Unlike ghosts, the term “spirit” is used for demons, angels, fairies, elves and even places. Mountains, woods, lakes, trees and sacred sites are all said to possess a spirit and in many ancient and Indian cultures, there is a living spirit.

“Some may consider this possession, but in effect, actually is more like an “add on”. A spirit attaches itself to a living person and travel with them from place to place”<sup>1</sup>. The possession of spirit is usually associated with ill-health, misfortune and weird behavior. There are certain people who claim to cure such spirit possession. “This refers to an exorcism performed without any religious elements. These are performed by people who are not clergy. It seems that most of the individuals performing these rituals have some level of psychic power. They make mental contact with the entity and convince it to go on its way”<sup>1</sup>.

‘Belief in supernatural beings’ was the definition for religion offered by Tylor (1871), a famous anthropologist. Belief in the supernatural beings might also include belief in other kind of beings like magic forces, angels or souls of dead ancestors. Believers might arrange the supernatural beings in a hierarchy according to their power or they may differentiate the supernatural beings in terms of their functions.

All supernatural beings are not 'sacred'. There are categories of supernatural beings, like devils, evil spirits, etc. which are considered as 'evil', are also powerful. For example, it can be pointed out from the Bible that Satan (devil) was powerful enough to tempt even Jesus, when he was doing penance in the desert. Certain other categories of supernatural beings are considered to be neutral-neither good nor evil. All categories of supernatural beings create, in the minds of human being, a sense of 'fear' and 'respect' (ESO-15: 2004:15-16).

Among the Kukis spirits were believed to be evil and agents of the devil. The spirits were also believed to be the shadows of souls which were invisible to the human. Spirits were believed to be present everywhere with them and have certain supernatural powers. Any unnatural thing which was beyond their understanding, undetectable disease, misfortune or any sickness was thought to be caused by the spirits. When angry or instigated, spirits were believed to take even the life of people. So to keep them in good mood propitiation and sacrifices were generally performed. Spirits were known as Thilha (Themgao among the Kuki). Among the Kom it is known as Rampi-Rampu and Huais or evil spirit in Mizo. Spirits were believed and worshipped in olden days by the Kukis.

In the Kuki society there were named and unnamed spirits. The named ones were those which were more commonly interacted in the society and considered as important or major ones. While the unnamed spirits were the smaller ones which had less importance in their society. Some of the common names of the spirits given by the 53.33% rural and 46.67% urban respondents in general by most of the tribes are as given below (Table IV.6).

Single spirits are Zoumi, Gamthilha, Gam-nupi, San-chel, Chom-nu, Pheisa, Thangbong-telbong (usually residing in the swamp). Spirits that are in groups are

Kelkang te (residing in Kelkang precipice), Koubru te (residing in Koubru hills), Molpheliete (residing in Milphei range) and Khubonte, Lunglen te, etc. Single spirits do not have a fixed place; they go from one place to another. While group spirits were bounded in one particular place.

**Table IV.6**  
**List of Spirits believed in Kuki society**

<b>Name of spirits</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Tui Vamit	the spirit of the banyan tree
Gamhoise	devil of the forest or jungle
Inmunse	devil of the house
Khukseko	devil of the swampy areas
Thingbulacheng	devil of the tree
Thinglushung	spirit of the tree which is neither alive nor totally dried and which is just four feet tall above the ground (Photo IV.6)
Thing gophel	spirit of a tree which has been separated in the middle and the two parts are joined again forming a hollow in the middle (Photo IV.7).
Sih	where animals drink water from
Gam lah len	a male spirit which causes sickness or diseases to the people and also found in the jungle
Dawp	dried patch in the river
Tuilah	water spirit
Meltong	when it walks blood spills on the way, if it is worshipped, it will bless with richness, if not worshipped it can even wipe off the whole family
Khawchawm	a spirit that visits or shows its presence in the village at dusk, the spirit, <i>Khawchawm</i> , was considered to be an evil one that torments domesticated animals
Khuovang	a guardian spirit that exists in numerous groups, it was supposedly a good spirit, which is divine in nature
Zasam	a spirit that has its dwellings in the forests or jungles, and death was supposed to be caused by Zasam
Khawhri	a spirit considered being dreadful, causing miserable illness or sickness.
Phung	a daylight spirit that causes sudden dizziness and miserable sickness
Lasi	a beautiful feminine spirit who dwells in the forest or woods and beside rivers, this spirit was considered as a blessing to the hunters and often provided company to men who excel in hunting, thus Lasi was also known as the spirit of Hunting
Nelhau a rawi	spirits that play jokes or pranks on people, they were believed to be in large numbers

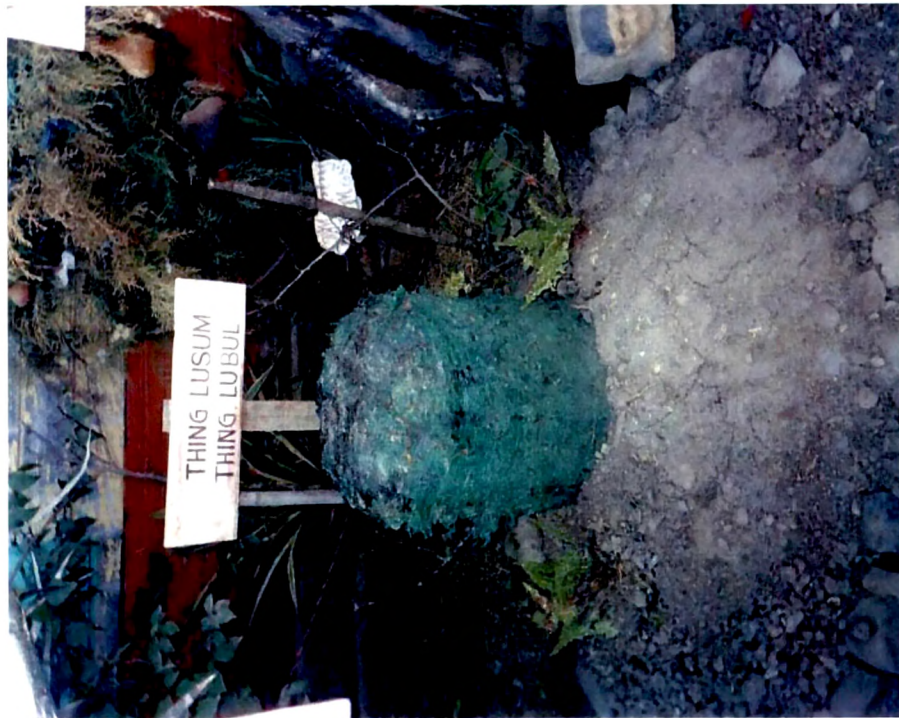


Photo IV.6. Thing lusum



Photo IV.7. Thing-Gophel

Regarding the places of worshipping and officiating, the dwelling of a particular spirit was the place of worship. And the objects associated depended on the dream of the priest in which the spirit would come and ask the particular things it would like to offer. Generally for the household spirits, mithun or pig or goat was sacrificed. For outside spirits hen was offered. For the water spirits white cock was offered. And for Maltong the offering was done with heart, liver of the animal sacrifice along with zu. Even food was also offered, before the family has their share, to Maltong. The Thilha or the spirits were believed to reside within the village generally in the swampy areas, streams, rivers, woods, jungles, trees, hills, foothills, thick bushes, precipices, springs, graveyards, lakes, etc.

Traditionally it was believed that God does everything good for all but spirits get angry and does bad things for humans. According to the Kuki society the actions of the spirits were to give sickness, diseases, calamities, misfortune, evil deeds, and scaring people in lonely places, etc. The named spirits, as their names suggested, were named according to their dwellings. But the Kukis did not believe in any specific abode for the unnamed spirits. They do not have any knowledge about the ways of interaction among the spirits themselves. The actions of the ancestral spirits were to give them signs of the future in the dreams of the living descendants and give their blessings if they were pleased with the living descendants. The ancestral spirits caused trouble if they are not pleased with the living descendants. But the Kukis do not have any beliefs regarding the spirits of cultural heroes.

The present Kuki society believes that spirits are the manifestations of man's deeds on earth. They are named as good and evil spirits. Good spirits are the spirits of Lord Jesus and the evil spirits are the followers of Satan. Spirits reside in the hearts of men. The action of the spirit is believed to shape the life of an individual during his

lifetime. The spirit can either be harmful or blissful, only if it is in accord with Godly faith. If the spirits are good and righteous then they are the manifestations of God Himself. Spirits are not associated with objects and places of worship. But rather spirits are an individual identity with ones own life.

53.33% rural and 46.67% urban respondents knew about the named and unnamed spirits. Spirits were considered always as mischief mongers. Spirits possessed human beings and gave sickness, misfortune, etc. So individuals can only relate with the spirits as the one who is being possessed. So, people always took care not to offend the spirits as they can not be dealt by themselves. The spirits could only be dealt by the thiempu who in turn asked the particular spirit to leave the individual who was being possessed or the victim. This was done by the thiempu by calling the spirit in his dream and asks what it wants in the offering. The individual who has been possessed by a particular spirit would not like to see or eat the particular thing which is related to the possessing spirit. While 39.33% rural and 53.33% urban areas have vague knowledge about the names and unnamed spirits. But they are not sure which spirits were given name or not and why. The remaining 7.33% rural respondents said that the spirits were not given any names. The reason for this is mainly their because of their lost contacts with their traditions and lack of interest in their beliefs which are no more in practice as they are least bothered about them.

According to 26.67 % from both rural and urban areas the actions of the spirits of their ancestors is to give them signs of the future in the dreams of the living descendants, give them their blessings if they are pleased with the living descendants. If they are not pleased with the living descendants the ancestral spirits may also cause trouble for them. While the remaining 73.33% respondents from both rural and urban areas do not have any idea about the actions of the spirits. They also do not believe in the

spirits of the ancestors or cultural heroes. Though this groups of respondents differed in their knowledge about spirits and their actions. They unanimously said that they do not have any beliefs regarding the spirits of cultural heroes.

**Table IV.7**  
**Respondents' Belief in Spirits**

Respondents beliefs in spirits	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Believes in ancestral spirits	44	29.33	4	13.33	48
Does not believe in spirits of ancestral or cultural heroes	106	70.67	26	86.67	132
Total	150	100	30	100	180

Anything which was beyond their understanding was thought to be the work of malevolent spirits for which the village priest was always consulted. Since they believed in one omnipotent God who was thought to be their creator, so they did not think that their creator could give them diseases. So the spirits became the evil doers of the people may probably the reason for accusing the spirits of any unfortunate happenings. And they started offering according to the dwellings of the spirits. But the Kukis belief in such spirits has been changed and now they believe only in one spirit, the Holy Spirit. The reason for this could be due to the Christian belief of Trinity-Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

#### **IV.2. b. *Individual Cult***

In the Anthropological meaning, a cult is a set of practices and beliefs of a group, in relation to a local God. In Sociology it's a small group of religious activities, whose beliefs are typically syncretic, esoteric, and individualistic (Gordan 1998:133).

The meaning "devotion to a person or thing" has been in use from 1829, and from that connotation comes the modern meaning of "Cult" as in a 'Cultist' or a 'cult

following'. In the Roman Catholicism, cultus is the technical term for the following and devotion or veneration extended to a particular saint<sup>4</sup>.

None of the subjects believed in individual cult traditionally and in present also.

#### **IV.2. c. *Officiants and the Ritual Experts***

A priest or priestess is a person having authority to perform and administer religious rites. Their office or position is the priesthood, a term which may also apply to such persons collectively. Priest and associated organizations are found in both simple and modern societies. The rise of priests is associated with the need felt by primitive man to come to terms with supernatural world. In simpler societies one find not just the priests but also magicians are associated with the ability to communicate with the divine world. It is believed as such that priesthood is as old as religion itself. In both primitive and advanced societies priests and magicians are functionaries who through their specialized knowledge and powers, are associated with and overcome malevolent and benevolent forces (ESO-15 (3) 2004: 26).

They are the persons who, because of certain charismatic qualities they possess, are accorded the status of being intermediaries of mediators between the world of the human and that of the divine or magical. The act of mediation may either be performed by a single individual or a group of individuals, where each performs a separate task. Such performance may occur on special ritual occasions, as a matter of daily routine, or during illness (ESO-15, 2004: 23-24).

Priests have been known since the earliest times and even in the simplest societies. There are priests in Christianity, Shintoism, Buddhism, Hinduism and many other religions, though each culture has a local denomination for the priestly office. Priests are generally regarded as having good contact with the deities of the religion to which he or she ascribes, and other believers will often turn to a priest for advice on spiritual

matters. In many (but not all) religions, being a priest is a full time assignment, ruling out any other career. In some religions it is a position inherited in familial line. The term 'priestess' is often used for female priest in historical, and modern paganism, neopagan religions such as Wicca and various reconstructionist faiths. However, in Christian churches such as those of the Anglican Communion, female priests are simply called priests without regard for gender<sup>5</sup>.

There was no special class or caste of priests in the Kuki society. The ritual experts and officiants of the village were selected by the chief of the village; the priest of the village and with or without the ministers of the village council. This profession was hereditary. Usually the second son of becomes the thiempu after being trained by the thiempu himself. If none of his sons were interested in the profession or if the thiempu could not bear any male child then he would select someone from his close relatives. Or he may also select and train his sister's son. He also preferred to teach the secret ritual words only to his son as it cost a lot and also took long time. If the thiempu had no male descendants, then those individuals who showed an inclination towards the ritualistic services and who had good will towards the village were selected. The thiempu could know the interest and potential of the person for the profession.

The prospective thiempu has to be trained by the senior thiempu for about two or three years, and accompany the senior thiempu wherever, whenever he went for officiating. There were no written materials of ritual words for them to study. They had to learn the ritual words orally. Only when the thiempu thought that the person has properly acquired the ritualistic knowledge, he announces to the whole village that the particular person has been trained and can officiate and would be the thiempu of the villages from that day onwards. In the Kuki society the ritual experts and officiants were not chosen by any spirit or any incident happened which could be said to be an indicator that the person

should be a priest. But it was generally through training the aspirants become priests in their community. In their society no class or clan was believed to hold or enjoy any supernatural powers. The priest also does not have any such power or interact with any supernatural beings. They only officiate and offer certain things to the spirits so as to appease the angry spirits. The supernatural beings do not have any importance in their society. In olden days anything which was unknown to them, which could not be controlled by them were feared and appeased.

In the present Kuki society, the pastor of the church has taken the place of the traditional medicine man, thiempu. This is not a hereditary position. But a person has to learn and get training to become a pastor.

The profession of thiempu was a hereditary one according to 53.33% rural and 53.33% urban respondents. While another 46.67% rural and 46.67% urban respondents said that they were not hereditary but if the thiempu's son is interested and wants to learn then he would be taught. Otherwise there were no hard and fast rules that thiempu's son should only become a thiempu.

An old aged man from Kom tribe said that he started going along with his father when he was ten or eleven years of age only. So he could learn some from his father. But now since he got converted to Christianity he no longer practices the trait. Another Hmar old aged man said that the Ngurte clan monopolized the craft specifically among their tribe. An urban middle aged Vaiphei woman believed that in the thiempu's family something unnatural would always be there. Either he would have only female children or any of the children would be a handicapped or disabled.

#### **IV. 2. d. *Divine Kings, Rain Makers, Sacred Chiefs***

The Kukis did not believe in any divine king, rain maker or sacred chiefs. All they had was the village priest. But the priest would see a dream before a day of

officiation in which the particular spirit which was troubling a person would come. He would ask the spirit to come in their dream and let them know what has to be offered or sacrificed for it. Like this if the spirit came and told what it wanted then the thiempu would let the family know what they have to offer to the spirit. The priest was the medicine man of the whole village and he practiced herbal medicines which were given to the bewitched. They made medicines from trees and plants and practice herbal medicine. But the priest was also not possessed by any spirit or so. Nor did they take any rigorous training, fasting or mutilations.

This response was given only by 1.33% non-convert and 1.33% converted Christians who were thiempus. The remaining 97.33% rural respondents and 100% urban respondents had no knowledge about the procedures. This was mainly because the common people were in direct contact with the spirits. The thiempu was the mediator between the spirits and the villagers. Above this, the traditional practices are no more in practice as a result, especially, most of the middle aged and young aged respondents lack the traditional knowledge of their beliefs.

#### ***IV. 2. e. Expert for Supernatural Control of Special Activities***

Any activity of life-hunting, fishing, agriculture, gardening, building, warfare, etc.-may have experts who are responsible for the ritual deemed necessary for success in that activity. Such experts may appeal to spirits, become possessed by spirits, or use of magical rituals (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 182).

There were no experts particularly for hunting, fishing, agriculture, gardening, building, warfare, etc. Whatever rituals and sacrifices performed in regard to these activities in the village were performed by the village priest only. Whenever they had any problem and believed that certain spirit needs to be pacified, the priest appealed to the spirit by making sacrifice of the animal which the spirit wanted. This, the priest comes

to know when he talked with the spirit in his dream. First he asked who the spirit was, what it wanted and the reason for harming the individual. Then the priest would ask what the spirit would take to return the individual's soul and make his life normal. Then, the next day the priest offers the desired animal of the spirit at its associated place. After invoking the creator of the universe and the father of the earth, the priest made the sacrifice of the animal.

Traditionally the ritual experts or the priest of the Kuki society were very much respected, and regarded and feared by the common people. In those days he was treated as next to the chief of the village, for whatever given to the chief was also given to the thiempu. The thiempu can not charge money for what he practices. It was against their profession to take money for it was like selling their art and power. So the thiempu's service was regarded by paying him in kind like clothes, meat, or whatever one could afford. He was also given the best kind of zu (rice beer). His gift items generally included an iron implement or usually a small knife which he uses to save himself from the spirits and the meat of the sacrificed animal. In case of Achanglam (offering of a pig to jungle spirit to cure illness) in which a pig has to be killed for sacrifice to appease the spirit, a bottle of zu and the thigh portion of the pig were given to the thiempu. Only in case of Atamlam (a gift of three animals i.e. a dog, a pig, a goat offered to supernatural beings to cure sickness), where three different animals like dog, pig and goat have to be sacrificed, he was paid money and the thighs of the sacrificed animals.

The thiempu was exempted from the annual contribution of paddy to the village chief. Every household had to give free labor and serve for a day in his field, for he did not have time to do his own cultivation. He received Changseo, a bucket or tin of paddy, from every household of the village. He was also exempted from the village taxes to be given to the chief of the village. He also got a share of the hunted animal brought by

the villagers. This share is called 'Thiem-sha' (thiempu's meat). If a pig was sacrificed the leg portion was given to the thiempu. All these he enjoyed because he does everything for the villagers without charging anything. He treated the sick and the ailing. He would be available for help anytime throughout the year. He was considered as life saver, who was close to spirits. He knew all types of medicines and ritual words. In any social occasion or function the thiempu would be allowed to sip the zu from the zibel (wine jar) first (Photo IV.8). This was how the thiempu was treated and respected, traditionally.

The sex of the experts had relation to different services or tasks of the rituals. Women were not allowed to become a thiempu, because as a priest she has to interact and face the spirits of different kinds; has to go to the jungle at night; make sacrifices of animals; and face the spirits which would have been difficult to handle. Besides, a thiempu could be called at anytime or go to attend to people at any hour of the day or night. Some believed that women priests were also there. In this case the wife assisted her husband who is a thiempu. So they also learnt some of the traits informally. The thiempu used to wear a short dhoti, a white turban on his head and a waist coat (Photo IV.9). In short he wore the traditional dress of the Kuki tribe. The thiempu can not eat food cooked by anybody. Only the expert's wife has to cook the food. He should not walk under the rope or bamboo used for hanging clothes to dry since women's clothes are also hung to dry. If he does, they believe, it may minimize his power or strength. He should not fast while officiating.

The experts observed some special customs regarding themselves. When the thiempu went to jungle to officiate and sets free a small chick, at this time no one should touch the thiempu. The cut nail and hair should be smelled and thrown away in a place where they can not be retrieved again. Three days before the actual day of ritual the



Photo IV.8. Zubel (Wine Jar)



Photo IV. 9. A man in the traditional thiempu's dress

expert should not have sexual intercourse and expected to keep himself clean. Regarding the daily life of the experts, they carried out it normally as any other villagers.

In the present Kuki society, the Christian pastor has taken up the place of the traditional thiempu. The pastor prays for the well being; prosperity in the economical activities and social life of the community. The pastor is respected and rewarded for his services by giving him an honorarium every month. The traditional medicine men are no more consulted in the present Kuki society. The dual purpose of the thiempu as the officiator and the medicine man has been taken over by the pastor and the modern medical doctors respectively.

According to the non-convert Kukis (2%), their traditional beliefs and their religion were no less than any other form of beliefs and religions. What their forefathers used to believe was also as good as any beliefs of any other religion. To them Christianity is an alien religion. One old man who follows Judaism also has the same opinion. Folk songs that cannot be sung in church in any form are still sung in traditional functions. All cannot be avoided as we are all human beings and something just cannot be discarded at once. But 100% urban and 89.33% rural respondents do not believe in their traditional beliefs anymore. While 8.67% of the total respondents still believe in what their forefathers believed in. But the customary laws, the folk dances and songs are still in vogue because they want to preserve them for their cultural identity and not for a religious purpose.

**Table IV.8****Expert's activities, status, & mode of payment in the traditional Kuki society**

How the experts were regarded & paid	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Appealed to spirits, talked in dreams	94	62.67	18	60	112
Appealed by offering	46	30.67	12	40	58
No idea	10	6.67	0	0	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>
Special treatment	128	85.33	26	86.67	154
No special treatment	22	14.67	4	13.33	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>83.33</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16.67</b>	<b>180</b>
Paid in kind for their service	119	79.33	22	73.33	141
No idea	31	20.67	8	26.67	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>

**Table IV.9****Responses towards their traditional beliefs**

Responses towards their traditional beliefs	Rural		Urban		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Who still believe in traditional beliefs	16	10.67	0	0	16
Who no more believe in traditional beliefs	134	89.33	30	100	164
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>

An officiant or a mediator, in any form of organized or unorganized religion, is existed. The unorganized traditional religion's officiant, the thiempu's, role has been taken over by the pastor, of the organized Christian religion, with certain changes. The traditional ritual expert has been replaced by the pastors of the church. The traditional ritual experts who also acted as the village medicine men are no more consulted in the present Kuki society because the people after being educated started reasoning things. They now consider the ritual expert's activities as unscientific and irrational and against the doctrine of Christianity. Troisi in his study of the Santals' (1979) found that the Christian households in Pangro, like in their places, were forbidden to have any recourse

to any ojha (the village medicine man among the Sanatals) in case of sickness or any other misfortune. The people of Pangro have been taught that the ojha's work is the work of the devil.

The percentages of respondents who still belief in the traditional beliefs are very insignificant as compared to those respondents who no more have faith in their traditional beliefs. Among the respondents who still have faith in the traditional beliefs only 2% of them are non-converts practicing the indigenous religion. But 7.22% of them who have converted to Christianity and Judaism believe in the indigenous beliefs. This group of respondents mainly belongs to the old age group who got converted at a later period of their life and rural background. So, they must have very closely associated with the rituals and practices which were followed at that period of time. Among this group, 1.11% of them were practicing as the village medicine men or the thiempu. Hence, they must be having a very close affinity with the traditional belief.

#### **IV. 2. f. *Sacred Places***

The word sacred is derived from the Latin word 'Sacrum' meaning 'sacrifice'. In various religions, sacred or holy objects, places or concepts are believed by followers to be intimately connected with the supernatural, or divinity, and are thus greatly revered. Analogously, the word "sacred" is also sometimes used in regard to items highly esteemed by secular institutions or individuals<sup>8</sup>. A sacred place may be the abode or temporary resting place, during ritual, of spirits. Such places may be hills or mountain peaks, rocks, groves, single trees, rivers or special pools in river (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951:183).

Khuomol was the sacred place in Kuki society. This place was built at the entrance of the village. This place was used for making sacrifices, performing rituals and keeping the hunted animals' skulls and enemies' heads from war. Other than these no

place in the house are reserved for keeping sacred objects except for the front portico where the Indoi was to be hung (Photo IV.10). Such places were not frequented for fear of the spirits attacking them. Only the thiempu and some of his assistants would visit such places. The sacred complex (Vidyarthi 1962) as found elsewhere is not pronounced in the life of the Kukis, while dealing with the super naturals. The idea of a sanctuary is absent among them. As we find elsewhere, certain specific site, either fixed traditionally or finalized by the people, is conspicuous by their absence. It is done or finalized by the priest, Thiempu.

Since the present Kuki tribes are believers of Christianity and Judaism the church and the synagogue are the only sacred places they have in their society. It is usually the house of the god. They imply the permanence of the God in this place. It can be located anywhere. People enter with allegiance towards God and maintain silence in his House. The church and the synagogue are associated with Jesus Christ and were considered the house of the Savior. Permanence of Jesus is believed in the church. Generally, a church could be seen in every locality and of every denomination. They visit the church regularly, though some of them do not. Whenever they visit or pass the church they pray to God thanking for everything and for being with them, and bow their heads in obeisance. Even in the house too, no place is reserved or used for keeping sacred objects. The site for the church is usually selected by the elders considering accessibility of the villagers. It is also kept in mind where most of the members could attend the church, old and young, how many people could be accommodated, etc. People make regular visits, the importance though attached to Sundays for the Christian followers and Saturdays for the followers of Judaism. Prayers are held and the word of God is taught from the Bible by the pastor. The pulpit is sacred wherein the preacher preaches the weekly sermon on Sundays. Youth are usually seen very enthusiastic in becoming the church choir.



Photo IV.10. Indoi (Shot from different angle)

Nowadays the Kuki do not believe in the inhabitation of the spirits in certain areas. They no more have the Khuomol, which was an important place for sacrifices, rituals, etc. It has also been observed that, they now decorate the entrance of the village with huge wooden or bamboo pillars with carvings of the Kuki traditional clothes, spears, feather decorated crowns, figures of traditional folk dancers, etc. The verandah's roofs are no more found with feathers of birds or with Indoi except in the house of the 2% non-convert Kukis.

**Table IV.10**

**Places regarded as sacred by the respondents**

Sacred places believed by the respondents	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Church is the sacred place	115	76.67	25	83.33	140
Khuomol	10	6.67	0	0	10
Swampy areas, jungle, etc	25	16.67	5	16.67	30
Total	150	100	30	100	180

**Table IV.11**

**Respondents who frequently go for Church/Synagogue Services**

Frequency of attending Church/Synagogue services	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Go to Church/ Synagogue regularly	139	92.67	25	83.33	164
Occasionally	8	5.33	5	16.67	13
Not at all	3	2	0	0	3
Total	150	100	30	100	180

The absence of any spot in the village which could be believed as sacred place confirms the non-existent of a sacred place. They did not have any set of place or constructed area depicting any relation to any spirit or God. The church is the only sacred place which was established. They did not have any fixed place of worship and never worshipped idols. Offerings were made in any place in the house, at the roads, under the tree, upon a rock, by the river side, at the paddy field and other places where spirits were expected to visit (Lolly 1985:8).

According 92.67% rural and 83.33% urban respondents (Table IV.11) they visit the church or the synagogue regularly. The church is now the place of worship, for prayer, marriages, etc. A true Christian believer is expected to attend the church every Sunday. Irregularity in attending the church services is not because of not believing in Jesus. It may be because of old age and even some youth who are not that spiritual may not go giving the excuse of their work or education. Youths of the locality seem to support the church in every possible way. Especially during Christmas, it is really a good time for them to enjoy and stay late for practice. Besides these they also have certain youths' association, youths' forum, youths' camps, etc. where young boys and girls are taught different extra curricular activities, social services, the Bible, etc. 53.33% rural and 16.67% urban occasionally visited the church or the synagogue while the 2% non-converts have never visited a church.

#### **IV. 2. g. *Prophets***

Prophets are individuals of outstanding personality, either officiants of a particular cult or initiators of new cults. They may instigate new cults or revivals of old ones (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951:184). According to Weber, prophet is an individual who is capable of proclaiming a religious doctrine or a divine commandment because of his charismatic qualities. Prophet is absent in India's indigenous religious tradition. In fact, there is no concept of prophet in the Indian tribal context (as we find the traditional priest). While a priest, he writes is always associated with the functioning of regularly organized and permanent enterprise concerned with influencing the Gods. In Weber's view the prophet is distinguished from the priest by personal call (ESO-15 (3) 2004: 25, 35&36).

In the Kuki society there are no prophets, neither in the old tradition nor in Christianity. The indigenous religious culture now seems to be less powerful. The

traditional form of religion is no more in practice. Appeasing the spirits, offering blood by making animal sacrifices for any occasion, praying to anything and everything has been stopped. Head hunting, blood shedding, believing in ghosts and evil spirits, magical medicines, sacrifices have lost all its prominence from the society. They have even stopped brewing and offering of zu to the guest. Now, instead they offer tea, offer prayer to the Savior, the Christ and read the Bible.

The objects which were believed and regarded as the supreme power or God were either burnt or thrown into the river. And the remaining customs which are still in vogue, though vaguely has been modified to be in accordance with the modern times. 98% rural and 100% urban respondents, except the 2% rural non-converts, think that it has been for their good, for the upliftment of the people, spiritually and corporeally. One middle aged man affirmed that even if fifty percent of the Meities adopted Christianity as their religion, Manipur, as a state would develop. Those who follow Judaism also hold the same opinion.

But these cannot be generalized as differences in opinion could be found even among the Kuki groups. Though, Christianity has brought all positive effects to the society 2.22 % of the respondents (including the non-converts) averred that because of this change the respect for the elders in the society has been diminishing. In olden days a thiempu would officiate and see the omen before cultivation and building of a house. If the omen was interpreted to be bad, cultivation may start late or they may not even construct their house at a particular place. But nowadays people are not bothered about all these and just start anything according to their convenience.

According to the 2% non-convert respondents Christianity has changed their customs. It has changed their Indoi and made people to throw away. Those who got converted thought that the traditional beliefs of their forefathers were not good. But,

nowadays, even their own children are not staying with them added the non-convert respondents.

#### **IV. 2. h. *Shrines***

A shrine, from the Latin *scrinium* ('box'; also used as a desk, like the French *bureau*) is originally a container, usually in precious materials, especially for a relic and often a cult image, and/or holy or sacred place containing the same, dedicated towards a certain deity, saint, or similar religious figure. Secular meanings have also developed by association<sup>7</sup>. Any structure sacred to a cult where ritual is performed may be called a shrine. It may be a temple, cenotaph, household shrine, a tree, or in some cases merely a pot or potsherd in which some sacred object is kept. They may be the shelters where the spirits reside or rest temporarily, or the shelter for an "external soul" (Notes and Queries 1951:183).

As distinguished from a temple, a shrine usually houses a particular relic or cult image, which is the object of worship or veneration, or is constructed on a site which is thought to be particularly holy, as opposed to being placed for the convenience of worshippers. As such, shrines are associated with the practice of pilgrimage.

Traditionally, the Kukis did not have the practice of constructing a permanent abode of the spirits or their creator. So there were no shrines in their villages. In olden days they used to just worship in the open or where the spirits were believed to dwell, either in the mountain, steep rock cliffs, groves, water, jungle, etc. sometimes they would perform rituals for evil spirits or 'Kithoi' in the Khuomoul which was at the entrance of the village.

But now, the only permanent place for their God, Jesus, is the Church. Since most of the Kukis are protestant Christians they do not believe in shrines. They do not have any household shrines or temples for performing any sacred rituals. A prayer

service is held in the church. And the Church committees are responsible for the upkeep of the Church.

#### **IV. 2. i. *Sacred Objects***

Sacred objects refer to a range of objects that are used during any ritual or which are related to ones' beliefs. As objects whose meaning is basically centered on the fact that they exist in the domain of the sacred, these objects also come to acquire a sacred character about them (ESO-15 (1) 2004:68).

Traditionally the Kukis did not have any objects of cults or of ritual. There were no such things which were particularly forbidden to be touched or spoken of in their religion. Inrei, the middle pillar of the house, which was believed to have some power, one should not sit or keep foot there. In the middle post of the house, a chick was tied and the thiempu performed the ritual. Until a purification rite was performed that place could not be touched by anyone. Again, according to the traditional belief, the sacrificed animals can not be touched by the common people. Hunting guns were not allowed to be touched by womenfolk as it was believed to be unlucky.

Today, the only sacred objects of the Kukis are the Bible and the cross. They do not have any thing which could not be touched or forbidden to speak about in their present faith.

95.56 % total respondents said that they are not aware of any sacred objects of their traditional society.

#### **IV. 2. j. *Ancestor Worship***

Ancestor worship is worshipping the ancestors of one's clan. They are worshipped as deities. Basically, family will offer food and drink for the dead in the belief that the ancestral spirits will bring good fortune to the family and will protect them from evil<sup>1</sup>.

Among the South African Swazi, each family propitiates its own ancestors at birth, marriages, deaths and the building of new huts. The dead are not otherwise addressed, except when calamities befall the family (Kuper 1988). Ancestor worship is the root of every religion (Spencer 1876-96: 440).

Among the Kukis ancestor worship was generally done to gain the blessings and favors of the ancestral spirits. The ancestral spirits were believed to be the ones who could bless or curse the living descendants. If the ancestors were not kept in a good mood they will not be prosperous and may face many hardships. The Kukis believed the ancestors' spirits can see his or her descendants and the village of the living world. They also worshipped it as respecting their ancestors, asking them for help in cultivation, prosperity, for health and wealth, to cure illness, to ward off ill wishes, to be peaceful. The importance of worshipping the ancestors was to show respect to their ancestral spirits and also for blessings. It was important for it was a function of the family and the clan. Again it was mainly for the organization of the clans where the male head of the clan conducted the ritual with the aid of a thiempu. It had to be performed with a pig and no one should drink or smoke until the sacrifice was over. In this function, only the members of the clan could participate and have the sacrificial meat too. All the names of their ancestors were taken during the ritual. The ritual food was to be cooked only by a married woman of the clan. No unmarried girl or any woman who was married to another clan was allowed to cook the food.

In the present Kuki society ancestor worship is not done any more.

**Table IV.12**  
**Knowledge regarding Ancestral Worship**

Knowledge regarding Ancestral Worship	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Yes	57	38	7	23.33	64
No	93	62	23	76.67	116
Total	150	100	30	100	180

According to the above table majority of the respondents said that ancestors were not worshipped by them. The responses were mostly given by the middle aged and young aged respondents who are born in the converted Christian families where the traditional beliefs were no more in practice. And as for the present scenario, the practice has altogether been become obsolete for none of them except the 2% rural non-converts, practice it.

#### **IV. 3. Magical Beliefs and Practices**

Magic is a body of purely practical acts, performed as a means to an end (Malinowski 1948). It is the technique of coercion by making use of belief in supernatural power. Sympathetic or imitative magic supposes that an action committed upon something that stands for a person or a thing will have the desired effect upon the actual person or thing (Lewis 1982).

Magic is a term that denotes a special kind of behavior, not necessarily religious, which follows from the acceptance of beliefs in one or another type of supernaturalism. Religion and magic are alternative techniques. Sometimes, one is supplementary to another. Magic is an art. The practitioner has to work hard to develop the skills of magic (Doshi 2002: 304-305).

Magic is also known as conjuring. Magic was practiced by many ancient and tribal cultures. Modern day Wicca followers use spells much like Christians use prayer. Both play on the idea of an alteration of events by paranormal means. Magic is thought to be an energy that can be manipulated to do one's bidding. In most cases, this is more trickery than anything else<sup>1</sup>.

According to Weber, magician is the one who deals with evil spirits on an individual level. His efforts may have both positive and negative consequences. The magician is usually self-employed though he may be the member of a hereditary caste or an organized guild. Rather than using a specialized doctrine of knowledge, the magician may derive his influence by virtue of personal gifts and knowledge of the supernatural world. The magician can have considerable power among his community and may be respected more out of fear than faith. He does not necessarily have a following as the priests do (ESO 15 (3) 2004:31).

The distinction between magic and religion comes with more or less personified beings, but most religious rites contain examples of magical symbolism, and a good deal of magic includes reference to spirits. In fact, it is not really possible to distinguish clearly between magic and religion. The rituals of religion are public and collective. They affect the people as a whole, absorbing all its energies for the period of magico-religious activity. This gathering of large numbers of people for sowing, harvest feasts and similar celebrations unites the whole community in a mood of happiness and harmony. It gives solemn and collective expression to the social sentiments of an organized community, on which the constitution of a society depends (Doshi 2002:312-313). However, magic is often regarded as a form of religion (Rao 1997:473).

Magic or in the Kuki word 'Doi', was believed to be the power to make or happen whatever one wanted. Mitphidoi (Mit-eye, phil-wrong, doi-mantra) was what was

seen but does not exist, created a false atmosphere around. Mitphildoï was to stop the eye from seeing what was in real. It was just for the moment, temporary. Magic was the manipulation done by the thiempu. It was the thing which was not common, which seemed extraordinary to the common people. It was a power in the form of spell which made others do what one wanted, or harmed others. Magic was believed to be miracles, work of spirit and used by thiempu. Magic to them, was something which is not ordinary, what the priest used to perform during the ritual ceremonies. Magic was used to appease or pacify the unknown supernatural phenomenon.

Magic was used to cure sickness; to appease the spirits; to give good harvest; to call the animals towards the hunters while they went for hunting; during war they made the whole village of the enemy sleep including their dogs and then they attacked upon easily; used in medicine; used in treatment of illness; used as love charm; for taking revenge; murder; used in game; to woo boys/girls; to make quarrels-like between husband and wife; personal gain; stealing; to ward off evil spirits; selfish motivation; etc. "During war, a way for casting the magical spell to the enemy was to take a handful of soil on which the enemy had trodden. The thiempu then said the ritual words and cast the spell in the soil. This way the enemy used to get inflicted", said an old aged non-convert man.

Magic was believed to be the work of spirits of lower domain, unreal in a way. Actions, formulas, or words used in magic were not known by the commoners. Formulas and spells were used in magic. Rituals contained magical elements of invocation, ritual words chanted by the thiempu. Magic was religion and religion magic in certain sense as the thiempu would make some sacrifices and say some words. Religion and magic are related to each other since magic has come from religion. Religion and magic are not different from each other.

Magic was related to economic activities, law and justice, medicines and to many other things. For success in whatever a person does, before every work was to be started, magical words were used in the rituals for appeasing or to take permission from the concerned spirits. To know how much crop would be harvested or to have a good hunt the priest used to offer prayer and sacrifices. To know the guilty person and give judgment magical words were used to invoke the spirits. When a person goes for hunting they used some magical spell and made the animals come towards the hunter on their own.

In time of cultivation, harvesting, the thiempu asked for the permission of the spirit of that particular field by keeping few rice grains. If these rice grains were still found, in the same place and in the same position as they were left, in the next morning then that place was thought to be suitable for cultivation. Even before harvesting, the thiempu asked the spirit of crop for a bountiful harvest. In case of law and justice there are different types like 'tuilup' (ordeal by dipping into water) for a quick and natural justice. As for medicines, the thiempu prepared medicines by mixing certain herbs, animals' organs and even make sacrifices to cure the sickness.

They did not use or practice spells or carried any objects while going out for some important work or economic pursuits. The roles of magicians or magical experts were to offer prayers, sacrifices, or invoke and appease the spirits. The magician was believed to gain power after learning from a senior person. The magical experts did not observe any special taboo or restrictions on account of his magic. There were no magical beliefs regarding sex. There were no beliefs of any ritual abstinence or ritual union a magician had to observe.

There were no ritual acts of incest followed by the magical experts to gain certain magical powers in the Kuki society. Magic was not believed to affect impotence, nor do the people seek magical protection for fear of impotence. Magic was used to harm

enemy usually during war time. Another way is to take the soil on which the enemy has trodden and cast the spell in the soil, the enemy will get inflicted. Magic was mostly used to harm the enemy during the tribal war to distract the enemy's attention.

There were no taboos on women and girls in regard to food, cooking, association with male activities during menstruation, pregnancy, childhood, menopause, etc. The women can cook food, serve food, and were not separately given food. There was no pollution and purity concept among the Kukis. But regarding intake of food, there were some taboos for a pregnant woman. A pregnant woman was not allowed to have bee hive, crabs, snail, bear, Langhei meat, Changeng (crab), Zuchou (a kind of rat which lives under the earth and found mostly in the paddy fields), cannot kill snakes, chicken, should not also eat bitter things, snakes, Yongchak (*Parkia javanica*). The reasons for prohibiting certain things from eating by the pregnant woman were to avoid any untoward incidents like miscarriage, deformity in the child, but to have a smooth delivery. If the woman ate snake it was believed that the child will keep hissing; bee-the child will make buzzing sound; crab-the child may keep holding things like crab does; Langhei meat-the child may bite others or the child's teeth may not grow properly; Yongchak-for its foul smell during child birth.

Presently, Kukis do not carry any magical spell or objects while going out for any kind of work. They consult the pastor and make a prayer, depending on the individual, before cultivation or harvesting of crops. Law and justice are also not related to magic anymore. They read the Bible in time of conducting an ordeal nowadays. Now they consult a medical doctor for any kind of illness. A middle aged Christian believer respondent said that, "Religion and magic are different from each other. Religion is having faith in God, believing in the words of God. Religion is truth, believing on the creation, savior, it is a vast aspect of God. Religion is forever, while magic is not lasting, it is man's

work; no one has faith in magic. Religion gives a new birth even after death. It is natural, love for our creator, savior. Religion is belief in God, Almighty and teaches to love one another as one loves oneself. Religion does not ask to take revenge or cause harm. No harm can be there in religion. Magic is Satan's work, used to harm others. Magic is just the work of some people who are trained in it".

According to 55.33% rural and 43.33% urban respondent magic was believed and practiced in their society and was known as 'Doi' in Kuki. This group of respondents believed in magic because whatever rituals and sacrifices made by their village thiempu were nothing but magic. So it was related to every aspect of their life for it was believed to be a part of their faith and took favor for their well being. While for 44.67% rural and 56.67% urban respondents who are believers of Christianity and Judaism felt magic is not related to any aspect of their life, for magic is just a trick of hand. These respondents' views seem to be influenced by education and faith in an established world religion, which has brought to them a change in their traditional belief system. 72% rural and 80% urban respondents did not believe that magic was related to economic activities, medicines, law and justice, etc. While only 28% rural and 20% urban respondents had knowledge about the magical activities and magical rituals for cultivation and harvesting.

Among the total respondents only 18% rural including the 2% non-converts and 16.67% urban old aged group respondents are aware that formulas and spells were used in magic. Rituals contained magical elements of invocation and ritual words chanted by the thiempu. But none of them had any knowledge about the actual words used in magic.

55.33% rural and 43.33% urban respondents said magic was mostly used to harm enemy usually during the tribal war to distract the enemy's attention, by casting the

spell on the soil trodden by the enemy, etc. While 44.67% rural and 56.67% urban respondents said magic was not used to harm enemy (Table IV.13).

According to 91.33% rural and 96.67% urban respondents asserted that religion is different from magic. Religion differs from magic in that it involves the belief in some power in the universe greater than that of man himself. Magic and religion are thus differentiated from one another by their attitude towards the means by which man seeks to influence the universe around him (Rivers 1924: 4). Whereas 8.67% rural including the 2% non-converts and 3.33% urban respondents mainly comprising the old aged respondents still believe that religion and magic are interrelated.

**Table IV.13**  
**Magical beliefs and practices**

Magic and its activities	Rural (150)		Urban(30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Knew about magic in traditional context	83	53.33	13	43.33	96
Magic is not related to religion	67	44.67	17	56.67	84
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Formulas and spells were used	27	18	5	16.67	32
No idea	123	82	25	83.33	148
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Magic related to economic activities	42	28	6	20	48
Not related	108	72	24	80	132
Total	150	100	30	100	180

#### **IV. 3. a. Charms**

Charms are made up of just about anything one believes will ward off a ghost or evil spirits. Some are simple movements while others are complicated. Amulets may be used to or required in charms. Things such as throwing salt over your shoulder or hanging a horseshoe over a doorway are all charms. Amulets refer to just about anything

one believes to hold some magical power for protection against things like ghosts, demons, or just about any evil. Most are made of jewelry, gold, silver or gems. Necklaces with runes carved into them and religious items are considered amulets<sup>1</sup>. Charms can have the following meanings in paranormal magic-An amulet or talisman; a spell, when a charm is a spell, it is usually traditional in form and often in verse<sup>8</sup>.

Charms were usually worn around the neck, waist, arm, leg, etc. to ward off evil spells and spirits, for prosperity, long life, victory in war, if a girl saw herself marrying in her dream, she would be made to wear a charm to ward off its bad consequences. Besides using charms on their body, they keep in their houses and on the roofs were all full of bird feathers, dried daikham (a kind of plant), animal bones, etc. The various forms of charms were white or red hen/cock's feather tied on a string woolen thread of white, red and black for long and prosperous life of the child. Hen's feather tied in a thread of white color was worn around the neck to protect from Gamhoise i.e. spirits of forest, jungle, etc.; around the waist to protect from illness and spell from others. White, black and red threads were tied on the left wrist by the thiempu to protect from evil things. The cock's feather tied with white, red and black thread was usually worn by children with the blessing from their grandparents for a long and prosperous life. This is called "Sah' O". Animal teeth, Hai-a bangle type made of iron, and the "Sah' O" were worn around the neck to cure sickness, the soul was also believed to free from any bonds, will be settled, calling back the souls from the clutches of the evil spirits. The twig of white 'Kurao' (a throng big tree) was tied with thread and worn; bones of tiger and wild pig, dried kidney of tiger, etc. were also worn.

Nowadays charms and amulets are no more in use among the Kukis except by the three non-converts.

From the available data, the percentage of respondents who had knowledge of charms and its association with magical power in the traditional Kuki society is very meager. Only 36.67% rural and 33.33% urban respondents had an idea about the types of charms and their uses prevalent in their society. More interestingly, these groups of respondents are mainly old aged subjects. The remaining majority of the respondents i.e. 63.33% rural and 66.67% urban respondents who belong to mostly middle aged and young aged groups, had no idea about charms and amulets; types and their purpose.

**Table IV.14**  
**Knowledge about Charms and Amulets**

Knowledge about charms and amulets	Rural (150)		Urban(30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Charms and amulets were used	55	36.67	10	33.33	65
No idea	95	63.33	20	66.67	115
Total	150	100	30	100	180

In the traditional Kuki society formulas and spells were used for prosperity and success in their economic activities. Since the mind of the people was always occupied with the fear of the spirits harming them in any manner, they always thought of taking precautions which were less expensive as compared to the rituals performed for the cure or pacification of the spirits which usually incurred sacrifices of their domestic animals. Charms and spells were used as preventative measures for all these possible reasons.

#### **IV.4. Witchcraft and Sorcery**

Sociologists have spoken of two types of magic, i) White magic i.e. magic which is never used to harm within the magician's society. White magic is perhaps most

commonly practiced in fields such as agriculture, hunting, warfare, health, etc. and ii) Black magic consists of sorcery and witchcraft. The distinction between the two does not always correspond to the distinction “approved” and “disapproved” or between “legitimate” and “illegitimate”. White magic is normally approved of; but black magic is sometimes approved of, while some other times disapproved of (Rao 1997: 474).

Witchcraft denotes a mystical power or esoteric skill that is believed to cause harm, usually through magically effective means such as spells and the performance of a rite. A belief in some form of witchcraft probably exists in all societies. Witchcraft tenets impute meaning to suffering and misfortune, express hostility in surreptitious fashion-thus reflecting tensions and conflicts that cannot otherwise be resolved-and reaffirm basic values by stigmatizing members of the society whose conduct violates social norms. Depending upon the cosmology and morality from which these tenets emanate and the social context of accusation and persecution, they serve a cathartic function for the individual and help regulate and adjust interpersonal conflicts (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974: 311). Witchcraft is black magic that is thought to depend upon the supernatural power of the magician. Thus it cannot be transmitted, except possibly by heredity (Rao 1997: 475).

Sorcery consists of rites and spells, the efficacy of which does not depend upon the supernatural power vested in the magician himself. Hence sorcery can be learnt and practiced with efficacy by any one. It only requires that the ritual is correctly performed and that the victim or his protector does not use magic of greater power (ibid: 475). Sorcery is a conscious and overt interaction to injure through the use of magical power. It involves the manipulation of special words or materials to cause harm. It is least likely to be found in those societies which are politically developed (ESO 15 (1) 2004:68).

Witchcraft was known as 'Kaosei' in Kuki and was believed to be the work of evil. It was also called 'Sajikharangyai' (using supernatural means to get one's desire from the others). Witchcraft was the power given by some spirits which were used to take revenge, diseases, ill health, etc. The witch possessed an individual and makes the individual woo the opposite sex, take revenge, make quarrel between families or husband and wife. It was also a means through which people tried to get what they wanted from other.

Sorcery was the power which was used mostly for good reasons. It was the trait to guard from witchcraft, a means to protect from evil spirit-Khojeh. Sorcery warded evil spirits, cured diseases through medicines and propitiation. With the use of magical words by the medicine man or the thiempu, sorcery helped to find out who had sent the spell. Sorcery was generally what the thiempu practiced for curing illness and calling the soul of the witch and made it take back the spell. Sorcery also helped to predict whether the sick person will be well again or not.

There was not much difference between sorcery and witchcraft since both traits were considered art of the same field. But the significant difference was only in their purpose. Witchcraft was mainly an art of using spells, formulas and harmed other. While, sorcery did not harm others but prevented the evil spells from entering the body and find out who had sent the spell. Witchcraft and sorcery were practice in the Kuki society. It was practiced secretly and even for petty matters.

A witch was known by everybody in the village. When they attacked, the witch could be known after asking and insisting the affected person. The thiempu asked who has sent it. After much persuasion the victim tells the name of the witch. Then the reason for attacking the person was asked which may even be for a simple reason as for not asking for food by the victim which the witch wanted to have. In case of jealousy and

revenge also witchcraft were used. After knowing the reasons the thiempu asked what the witch wanted to have to free the victim. After given what the witch wanted to have, the witch leaved the body. If it does not leave the body even after this then the thiempu called the witch's soul which may come in any form, even in the form of a fly or insect or worm. Then the thiempu killed the creature which may give tremors and instantly the real witch also dies. Another way of catching the witch was by covering the affected person with a len (fishing net). Then the thiempu holds the thumbs of both the hands and feet and the head. After much torture to the victim, comes out with the reason for attacking and what it wanted to have to leave the body which it had possessed.

Witchcraft was either inherited or acquired. Hence, witches can be known from their behavior or symptoms. The witch, who acquired witchcraft, develops altogether new habits like eating something which he never ate before. Some also had fits. When the infected person was covered with the len (fishing net) and was pierced with a porcupine stick or horn (Photo IV.11) of Sajal (a kind of deer), the victim will then tell who the witch was and why the witch had sent to harm the person. The inflicted person will even speak the language of the witch, no matter what type of language, until that witch leaves the person. To drive away the witch, the sorcerer or the thiempu even pretend to shoot or with the pointed horn of Sajal pierce the stomach of the inflicted person. The inflicted person will get up and go out and fall. Once fallen, the witch leaves the body.

It was believed that the witch generally inherited the art from their parents or grandparents. If both parents were witches and have five children, the first child would not be a witch. If they have ten children then the second child would not be a witch. And if a man was a witch and had a son, the son acquired the father's quality. But if he had a daughter then the chances are less. This was vice-versa if the mother was a witch.



Photo IV.11. Sajal's (a kind of deer) Horn

the thiempu or the one who practices it has to again offer prayer to God after doing all these. Otherwise it may revert and attack him.

If the inflicted person dies due to witchcraft the thiempu waits in the graveyard and just after burial black sesame seeds were sowed and wood was put over the grave, asking the seeds to grow like a forest. The thiempu or any of the kinsmen of the victim will hide and wait. Afterwards, in the form of dog or pig or eagle the soul of the witch may come and put its mouth in the grave. Then the person who has been hiding will shoot it with a gun. Then the witch will die if the animal or bird in whose form the witch's soul had come dies.

One way of punishing the witch was ostracizing the witch and his/her family. The proved witches were warned first to stop harming people and disturbing the society. If the witch continued to do the tricks again and again or in case of serious problems the chief of the village after discussing the matter asked the person to leave the village once for all. This was done by cutting the 'Gaplhang' (Lap) i.e. a kind of kitchen rack over the fireplace in which meat, maize and other things were kept to dry. This rack has three to four layers. Once it was cut it was understood without a word that they have to leave the village. Not only in case of witch, but for any case if the village chief cuts the Gaplhang the family had to leave the village immediately.

Another way of punishing the witch was that the thiempu used to call the soul of the witch. A tree was cut in arm's length and put under the ground. The tree was taken out leaving its mark in the ground. The hole made with the tree trunk was filled up with leaves and some meat and the calling the witch's soul to have it. The soul may come in the form of a big fly or black insect, something like the one found in cow dung. Once the soul comes in any form and starts eating the meat the thiempu recognized the witch's soul, instantly he pressed it with a stone because the insect would be very strong and may

give tremors. So, even some strong youth may be needed to help the thiempu in pressing the stone. Then the thiempu pierced the whole tree trunk into the insect which caused its death. Then the witch will also die physically wherever he/she may be. Still another way to punish the witch was that the thiempu used to dig a hole and put a tree into it. Then he called the soul and cut the ai (white mustard) and cut the effigy of the witch with a knife. If the witch was not coming, even after a long wait, they take her hair or piece of cloth and call the soul. If the witches can not be killed by the sorcerers or the thiempu, the witches can be killed by her husband by drowning her. No one was ready to marry them. If the witch goes to the extent of taking life then the thiempu even kill the witch. The people were afraid that if the witch was annoyed, the witch may inflict them in return and harm more seriously. So in most cases they were just warned and left.

Traditionally people believed that witchcraft may mainly cause stomach aches, headaches, vomiting, chronic pain, etc. And these problems would start all of a sudden and in no time the person becomes unconscious and any medication was ineffective. Generally, the primary treatment was usually with physical torture by binding the victim, piercing with porcupine thorn, sajal horn, etc. After much torture to the victim the witch confessed the reason for possessing the victim and what it would take to leave the person. The second popular treatment was by applying one herbal antidote known as 'Songke-kaang' which was always grown in the villages for such purposes. When someone was affected, the thiempu who was the sorcerer cut a hen in the middle. Then the blood was put on the back and chest of the patient implying as putting the blood on the witch itself. After this the patient got cured. The chick or hen was then thrown away by the thiempu.

There were no special diseases or misfortunes believed to be due to witchcraft. Witchcraft was not socially approved for it was used to harm others and mostly

for personal gain only. The witch or the sorcerers do not undergo any kind of rites. They learnt from a senior witch or sorcerer. The sorcerers were respected and consulted with whenever the people needed. They were the only means to save from the witches for they knew how to treat the witches. They were not given any special status to enjoy. The sorcerer's power was used to cure the sickness or spell of the witch to find out who the witch was, who had stolen things, etc. Sorcery was also considered anti-social for it was against the nature. Beliefs regarding witchcraft and sorcery are listed below (Table IV.15).

Out of the one hundred and fifty rural respondents only 60.67% and out of the thirty urban respondents 56.67% could give information regarding witchcraft and sorcery practiced and believed in their society. The other remaining 39.33% rural and 43.33% urban respondents did not give any comment or neither had any knowledge about the topic. The reason they gave is that witchcraft and sorcery are not believed or practice in their society. So they have no knowledge about it. It is not approved by the church. The respondents believed it was black magic.

The 1.33% non-convert men and 1.33% Christian and Judaism follower respondents said witchcraft and sorcery are still practiced in the group though small in number and very secretly. 58% rural and the 56.67% urban respondents said that witchcraft and sorcery are not practiced in their society nowadays. The church does not approve it and those who are found are suspended from the church. Since both of the art forms use unnatural source to control the nature which is against the doctrine of Christianity and not acceptable to the church.

30% rural and 30% urban respondents believed that the witches generally inherited the art from their parents or grandparents. While 12% rural and 10% urban respondents believed that the witches acquired the qualities or art from the partners. And 0.67% rural and 0.67 % urban respondents said that some witches are inborn with the

qualities while 18% rural and 13.33% urban respondents said that the art form can both be a quality which is inborn and acquired.

44% rural and 40% urban respondents said that the proved witches were warned first to stop harming people and disturbing the society. While 16.67% rural and 16.67% urban respondents believed that no punishments were given to the witches even if they were proved for fear of revenge. And 39.33% rural and 43.33% urban respondents had no idea how the witches were punished.

47.22 % respondents said witchcraft did not cause any special diseases or misfortune. The other only 12.78 % including the non-converts believed that witchcraft mainly causes severe stomach aches, headaches, vomiting, chronic pain, etc.

According to 36% rural and 40% urban respondents, the sorcerer were respected and consulted in the society. They were like the thiempu only. They were the sole saviors from the spell of witches. They could counter and find out the witch hence they were treated like doctors in the society. They also believed that the power of the sorcerer was used for good purpose only. But no special status was ascribed to them. But 24.67% rural and 16.67% urban respondents have different opinions. They believed that the sorcerers were not respected but feared, treated as pariahs for they also knew witchcraft. This group of respondents said that their powers were not used for any good purpose for the society other than treating the victim of witchcraft. The remaining respondents i.e. 39.33% rural and 43.33% urban had no idea about the issue.

All the respondents said witchcraft and sorcery are not socially approved except the 2% non-Christians who said that sorcery was socially approved as it helps people to cure pain and troubles caused by witchcraft. Another middle aged male Christian believer also added that before sorcery was socially approved as it was the only means and facility for the public health and is also practiced secretly till now.

According to all the respondents, witchcraft and sorcery are considered to be anti-social magic because they are against nature, it is just a manipulation of the natural course, does not have any foundation, considered to be unscientific. They are regarded as non-believers of Christianity and their practice mislead people from evil spells; they use the same spell and manipulate the nature. So it is considered anti-social and not approved by the church. "According to the Bible we should not do all these. The pastor, church members does not allow to practice. If someone is proved to have consulted such things his/her membership from the church would be cancelled. But if they confessed and accepted their wrong deeds in front of the Lord they are again accepted and given a chance", said an old aged Kom man. He also thinks that this should be there. He has known and practices it even though the indigenous religion has been discarded.

Though the 2% non-convert respondents and 1.33% Christian believers also felt the same but explained from a different point. To them also they are anti- social for it is against nature and used to harm others and mostly for personal gain only. And sorcery is also anti-social because to track down the witch they have to torture the victim to any level which may sometime be inhuman and laborious. "Something is there which can not be discarded at all though we want to and I won't stop believing in my religion", said one old aged non-convert man. He said that he has not stopped or discarded his indigenous beliefs and he will continue to follow.

**Table IV.15**  
**Beliefs about witchcraft and sorcery**

Witchcraft and sorcery	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Knew about witchcraft and sorcery	91	60.67	17	56.67	108
No idea	59	39.33	13	43.33	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>
Witches are inborn and acquired	27	18	4	13.33	31
Acquired	18	12	3	10	21
Inborn	1	0.67	1	3.33	2
Inherited	45	30	9	30	54
No idea	59	39.33	13	43.33	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>132</b>
Punished by banishing from village	66	44	12	40	78
No punishment, just warned	25	16.67	5	16.67	30
No idea	59	39.33	13	43.33	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>
Sorcerers were respected	54	36	12	40	66
Sorcerers were feared	37	24.67	5	16.67	42
No idea	59	39.33	13	43.33	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>

One old aged man Thadou, one old aged Kom man, one middle aged Thadou man from rural area and one middle aged man from Vaiphei tribe said that they used to practiced the art few years before.

Traditionally also witchcraft was considered as an evil work but there were no stringent laws to curb the practice. Witches are believed to be inherited. The most extreme form of punishment for practicing witchcraft seems to be expulsion or banishment from the village.

## **CASE STUDY**

### **RURAL**

Dempao Kipgen

62 years

Male

VI<sup>th</sup> Std.

Taphou Kuki Village, Senapati District

Mr. Dempao is presently working as a teacher in the Government Primary School of the village. He is also a leader of his synagogue. He speaks fluent Manipuri (Meitielon), Hindi and a bit of English. He has eight sons and two daughters. He wanted to have more daughters after his first daughter, but unluckily got only one more daughter after six sons. His eldest son is working in a company based in Kolkatta and is settled there with his own family. The second son is a teacher in a private school. He is not worried about his children's future since he has a big land holding which can be distributed among them. But presently, he was not cultivating the land and hence he was facing financial problems. Being a school teacher, he was not financially sound and it became a big problem in maintaining his family of eight children and his wife. So, to assist him in some way his wife grows seasonal vegetables and crops besides taking care of the children and the house. His eldest daughter is married to a Meitei and has a son who is of the same age as his youngest son. His grown-up children are ashamed of their young and small siblings said Mr. Dempao.

He re-converted to Judaism in 1995. Before he was a believer of Christianity but after reading the Old Testament he understood that the Kukis are originated from Israel and gradually migrated to Manipur and other places. Hence, he became a staunch follower of Judaism. He has done everything which a Judaist should do and follow. His sons have also been circumcised. In his village only eight families are there who have re-converted to Judaism. And their Church is working hard to make people realize that they are the children of Israel Messianic.

Mr. Dempao still now practices his tribal indigenous practices and medicines and has also treated many people. But his practices are not approved by the Christian followers. For practicing the traditional traits people mocked at him by calling names like "Mana masingna laiyengba" (in Manipuri it means-person who treats people with leaves). But he is not bothered with all these and continues to practice his trait. He even had a Meitie orphan disciple whom he adopted. He taught the Meitie boy all the spells and tricks of "Mitrang" (magic). This boy is now working in Delhi and has settled down there with his wife.

Mr. Dempao said that he also knows about Meitie traditional way of treating and ritual words. He and some of his Meitie friends in Imphal sometimes gather together and discuss about the works. So he has good contacts with the Meitie community though his lifestyle and that of the Meities are very different. His daughter also did not have any problem with her in-laws for she knew their customs and norms. The only difference was in food i.e. her in-laws did not take meat, but she likes to have it.

Nowadays clients/patients also rarely come for treatment for the Christian church does not approve going to a medicine man and performing rituals. He feels that even though one follows any kind of religion it should not be a cause to stop practicing the

traditional medicine and treatment. So inspite of the Church's objection when he was a Christian follower he continued with his practice. But now in Judaism the objection is not that much.

## **CASE STUDY**

### **RURAL**

Yangkhothang Haokip

80 years, Male

III<sup>rd</sup> Std.

Non-convert follows the indigenous religion

Tengkonphai village of Saikul block

Senapati District

Mr. Yangkhothang Haokip is a non-Christian, follows and practices the animistic belief till date. But till date he and his wife have been able to keep their faith in their forefather's religion and traditional belief. He was a school drop-out after completing III<sup>rd</sup> standard. In his village all are Christian families except two other households who are non-converts like him. But the other villagers do not have any problem though from time to time they come to preach them. His traditional occupation was thiempu or the medicine man and he is still practicing it for himself and for his few relatives who are non-converts. He speaks Manipuri language fluently. He had migrated from Ukhrul in the year 1967. He lives with his wife, Dinkhuling, who is 68 years old. His son who got converted to Christianity requested them to get baptized. The son tried all possible ways to convince his father but Yangkhothang and his wife did not agree. Unsuccessful in his attempt to convince his parents, his son and daughter-in-law left the house and are settled in another village.

He showed the Indoi which was hanging from the roof of their verandah. He prays to the Indoi annually. No one calls them now for praying or sacrificing, since all the villagers are believers of Christianity. So they no more consult Mr. Yangkhothang, whose profession is a thiempu. Consequently, his income has come down and after the harvesting seasons are over he has no other work to do. He told that, some American researchers have even come to meet him, interviewed and took his photographs in the traditional dress. While recalling and narrating that experience he became emotional and said, "See, outsiders are coming from all over the world to learn about our ancestral religious beliefs. But our sons and daughters are running after other's religious beliefs". He also expressed his worry about the gradual lose of their traditional beliefs and customs. Reasons for his worry were that these beliefs and customs which give their tribe a unique identity has gone now. He also confided, "People think that I use black magic and do evil things. Their God does not accept or allow such practices so they believe that it is evil for them but they also forget that their ancestors did and believed in the same which I believe in and still practicing".

## **CASE STUDY**

### **URBAN**

Sholun Baite

49 years, Male

X<sup>th</sup> Std.

Moreh, Ward No. 8

## Chandel District

Sholun Baite, a Vaiphei, speaks Thadou Kuki and Meitei language. He has three sons and two daughters. Traditional occupation was cultivation. He is working as a Grade IV in the Forest Department, Moreh, Manipur. His wife and mother are illiterate and do only household work and cultivation. All his children go to school an English medium school. He said due to financial problem he could not study beyond secondary but he will make his children study whatever they want and up to University level.

According to him they have originated from Chin-Hills. His forefathers have migrated from Sinam then to Phalbung. After that they reached Burma and in 1967 came to Moreh, which he likes a lot. He got converted to Christianity when he was just ten years old. During that time, his uncle used to practice the traditional rituals some of which he used to watch very interestingly. When they have settled down in Moreh he used to have frightful dreams which haunted him almost everyday. This was when his uncle was alive. He discussed the matter with his uncle and his uncle asked him to eat a hen's egg which was about to be hatch. After that those frightful dreams stop coming and did not disturb him again.

Since he saw how his uncle treated things he learnt some traits about the traditional ways though people laugh at it now. But still some people who believe in it or could not find any other alternatives approach him. He narrated an incident which happened during the late 80s when he was called at midnight in a nearby locality. On reaching there, he found that a lady was writhing with pain and no one could help her. She would demand for good food and dresses. After fulfilling her demands too the lady was still writhing. When he reached the house, the lady cried and asked him to go away. But he asked the people present over there to stand behind him so that they could help him in identifying and driving out the witch. He then stealthily took out the pelkai's (a kind of deer) horn and pierce with it the naval of the lady and asked her who was inside her body and the reason for captivating her. Then the witch told that she is so and so through the victim's mouth. The reason for captivating the lady was that the victim was having chicken curry which the witch was tempted to but was not offered. So she came into her. After that the witch was asked to leave the lady and never to do such things. But nowadays he does not have time and people also do rarely come.

Though he is a believer of Christianity, he still thinks that bride-price should be there in their society since it has been there from their forefather's time. But he is not very traditional regarding the marriage of his daughters. According to their tradition they have to be married with their aunt's sons. He said, "I have kept it open for them with whomever they would like to lead their life. They are free to choose and let me know. If their aunt's sons are not good then I can not bind my daughters to such a married life".

#### **IV.5. Conclusions**

The legends of the dead told by ancient people are perhaps the most accurate indicators of their religious thought. And from what can be assumed from the burial rites of early human, they pondered the same kinds of questions concerning the afterlife as humans do today. Early humans could not answer these great questions, and so, to temper their fear of death, they created rituals rites, and religions to comfort them<sup>5</sup>.

The Kuki indigenous religion was a religion of belief in spirits, soul, making sacrifices, etc. Soul is still believed in the Kuki society though in a different form for it is the immortal, incorporeal which lives within our body. The soul leaves the body after death depending upon one's deed during his lifetime, was categorized into good and bad. The Kukis believed in a common abode of the dead, irrespective of any social classes, to be in the sky. But now the concept has changed to heaven and hell where the good soul will go to heaven and the bad one to hell. Putting a black mark on the dead body to see its return in the family proves the belief in reincarnation. But now the Kuki Christian believers do not have faith in this old belief of reincarnation since there is no phenomenon of rebirth or reincarnation in Christianity. Ghosts were believed to be the souls of those who died an unnatural death. Various forms of ghosts were believed to be a form of evil spirits; could destroy things; give sickness; haunt; etc. The reasons for not believing in ghosts in the present Kuki society may be because of modern western education, their change in religious beliefs, contacts with the outside world thus broadening their thinking and making them to reason out things, though, some still believe in the existence of ghosts because of their personal experiences. Nowadays nothing is buried along with the dead except for flowers, a traditional shawl, etc. In the present Kuki society all kinds of deaths are buried in the common cemetery of the locality.

In the Kuki traditional society whatever happened in their lives was related to one or other kinds of spirits. For this the thiempu or the village priest who was believed to be able to communicate in his dream with the spirits performed rituals to ward off the evil spirits, followed by sacrifices of animals. Thiempuship was a hereditary position. But now, the dual purpose of a priest as the officiator and the village medicine man has been taken over by the church pastor and the modern medical doctors. The reason for not allowing women and children in rituals was to avoid the spirits from attacking them for they were considered to be weak. But the actual reason seems to keep them away from witnessing the killing of animals. Ancestral spirits are no more worshipped or appeased. Since they now follow the organized religion of Christianity, they have a fixed sacred place, the church, unlike the traditional belief in swampy waters, hills, rocks, etc. they no more sacrifice their domestic animals for ritual practices. In the church and at home prayers are offered by the pastor and even by the commoners as well. Feasting together is still a common practice on every social occasion as well as during Christmas, not for a religious ritual requirement, but for strengthening love, peace, trust and bonding of groups together.

Realizing that belief in mundane things like magic, using charms and amulets do not have any effect directly or indirectly on their life, they discarded rationalizing the positive and negative aspects of these beliefs. Absence of restrictions of any kind during menstruation, pregnancy, childhood, menopause, etc. such as eating with others, cooking food, association with male activities, reflect the free style of life among the Kukis. In order to avoid 'dirty foul smell delivery' or for the welfare of the new born baby, pregnant women are restricted to eat certain food items. Witchcraft and sorcery were feared by the people for they had the power to destroy a person and his life. Since it is not approved by the church it is no more in practice.

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