

CHAPTER V

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Introduction

Human beings always have some problems in life. When problems of birth and death are not solved local traditional experts are consulted. True, these experts are not always successful in giving prescriptions but there is some articulation towards the solution of the problem. Thus, there is a definite place for rituals in primitive society. Infact there is no escape from the performance of rituals in the primitive society (Doshi 2002:297). Ritual defined in the most general and basic terms is a performance, planned or improvised, that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday life is transformed (Alexander 1997:139).

Rituals have a specific role to play in society. Here, we will discuss the various forms of rituals which are part and parcel of the tribal religious life and the various rituals concerning to rites de passage, physical phenomena, economic activities, and social structure.

V. 1. Forms of Rituals

Ritual is an art performed repeatedly and according to custom. It is ceremonial and formal. Most often rituals are invested with specific purposes. Rituals are series of symbolic actions which have a specific meaning in relation to religious beliefs. Rituals tend to be standardized repeated and condensed. In pre-modern societies, rituals tend to be very elaborate and even minute details are observed carefully, in order to get full benefit. Rituals may be performed collectively, or individually, where rituals are performed collectively, either every one performs or only the specialists perform while the believers participate (ESO-15 2004:17). Rituals are offered by the ritual experts on behalf of the person by whom he is being hired. With the variance in beliefs the ritual experts also differ. They are called shaman, pujari or priest. They recite or chant mantras, invoke the deity or the supernatural beings and perform the ritual act.

The various forms of rituals are prayer, oracles, gestures, ordeal, oath, dreams, divination, offering, feasts, fables, etc. According to Durkheim, ritual was that human behavior that takes place in the domain of the sacred (1912-1954). Malinowski, Radcliffe Brown, Evans-Pritchard and others all studied the religious beliefs and practices of various societies with a view to further examining the interrelationship between society and religion.

Ritual provides an occasion for group assembly reaffirms social value (ESO 15 (1) 2004:68). According to Wallace (1968), the primary component of religion is the use of ritual to mobilize supernatural power. Rituals commonly portray or act out important aspects of religious myths and cosmology of a group adhering to a religion (ESO-15(1) 2004:68). Religious rituals are made overt in rituals.

V. 1. a. Prayer

Prayer implies the existence of some supernatural being (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951:184). Prayer is an effort to communicate with deity or spirit, including a monotheist God, Saints, Gods within a pantheon, or others; either to offer praise, to make a request, or simply to express one's thought and emotions. The words of the prayer may either be a set of hymn or incantations, or a spontaneous utterance in the devotee's own words.

The great spiritual traditions offer a veritable treasure trove of devotional acts. There are morning and evening prayers, graces said over the meals, and reverent physical gestures. Christians bow their heads and fold their hands. Native Americans dance, Sufis whirl. Hindus chant. Orthodox Jews sway their body back and forth. The existence of prayer is attested in written sources as early as 5000 years ago. Anthropologists believe that the earliest intelligent modern humans practiced something that we would recognize today as prayer¹.

The traditional Kukis prayed to the spirits, Indoi, their household God to cure sickness, for cultivation, prosperity etc. The spirits were thought to be the cause of many diseases, illness or anything which happened in their daily life, the reasons of which they did not know. To offer a prayer an officiant who knows how to control and interact with the spirits, with the knowledge of ritual words, formulas for appeasing the spirits and knows how and what had to be offered to a particular spirit was hired. The officiant had to do it for he was the representative of the village and could interact with the spirits. The officiant was also believed to be the messenger, representative of the village.

These prayers were offered outside the village, in the house or where the concerned spirit was believed to dwell. The prayer was offered to the spirits whenever the need was felt or to appease the spirits which caused harm to humans. Prayer to Indoi was offered annually in the house. Prayer was not accompanied by special posture, or music or prostration or by special movement. They also believed that everything was caused by spirits and could do anything. So to please them they offered sacrifices to the spirits. Even before they knew what or who a God was they prayed to Chungmaipa or Chung-Pathien and Noimangpa. The concept of Chung-Pathien or the source of All Creations' that is considered to be the highest benevolent God who lives in heaven or sky, is abstract and thus it has no anthropomorphic form or a permanent place or residence. The nomenclature of Chung-Pathien signifies an honorific term used addressing a male person with respect and veneration. Dichotomy prevails while conceptualizing Chung-Pathien, viz, the benevolent with also evil or bad power having the forces of destruction, and all other forms of evil activities. He is supposed to live in the underworld and is called Noimangpa. He is believed to have been sent by Chung-Pathien from the heaven or the sky to dwell at Kholmun (Kipgen Paomilien).

Now the Kukis pray to Jesus, the True God. Probably the most common and universal prayer among Christians is the Lord's Prayer. They pray to Jesus to enable them to go in the right path, to enable them to meet their daily needs. They also pray for spirituality, good health, for their families, work, crop, well-being and coexistence in their society, for peace and harmony in the community, and for Salvation, to save their soul, for their parents, for guidance, confessing about anything they did wrong, to be able to forgive and forget others, to have patience, courage, goodwill, etc. They also pray for other things from time to time. They also thank Jesus for all the things He had done for them. Their prayer to Jesus implied that their faith on Jesus is very strong. They believed that Jesus was the only True God and also believed that it was the only way to save their souls from sins. They also thought that if they confide to God, He will save them from everything. They believed that Jesus was the only Savior, who had died for their sins, who will save them from all evils. Jesus was the only Living God who protects them, who will give salvation, the creator without whom none would have been here. Faith in Jesus can save them from their sins is their belief.

Now, according to the 98.33% respondents, prayer can be done by everybody and anybody for there was no need for any mediator to communicate with the God, who is the Father of all. Everyone can speak to his own God. He is the father of all and does not need any officiants to bring the children's words to Him. Every individual is accountable to God and He can understand each of their problems. There is no specific time and place for prayer for it is to be done in mind and soul. But usually prayer is done by them in the morning, afternoon, evening on Sundays especially with the pastor preaching the sermon. Otherwise prayer is also done before lunch, dinner, sometimes thanksgiving prayers are also done at home with the family members. Prayer is usually done at home and in the church on Sundays. For them prayer is not accompanied by

special posture, by prostration or by special movement. But when they pray they raise their hands, kneel down and also sing the hymns and songs in praise of Lord Jesus during the service in the church with closed eyes. As for the 2% non-convert respondents, they still make prayer to the spirits and Indoi.

V. 1. b. Offerings

An offering is a collection of donations during worship, like alms, tithe, charity, gift and virtue. Offering can also mean a religious sacrifice of animal or human life². Sacrifices of animals or human life are actually the practice of offering food as an act of propitiation or worship. The term is also used metaphorically to describe selfless good deeds for others.

Animal sacrifices or the ritual killing of an animal is a part of a religion. It is practiced by many religions as a means of appeasing a God or Gods or changing the course of nature. Animal sacrifice has turned up in almost all countries, from the Hebrews to the Greeks and Romans and from the Aztecs to the Yoruba. However, such practice was a taboo among the Ancient Egyptians. Human sacrifices were practiced by many ancient cultures. People would be ritually killed in a manner that was supposed to please or appease some God or spirit³.

Tithe is a word from the English teogatha "tenth", meaning one-tenth part of something, paid as a voluntary contribution or as a tax or levy, usually to support a Jewish or Christian religious organization. Today, tithes (or tithing) are normally voluntary and paid in cash, cheques or stocks, whereas historically tithes could be paid in kind, such as agricultural products⁴.

Among the Kuki tribes killing for offering was a ritual in olden days. Traditionally only animals were sacrificed for different occasions. These sacrifices were offered to the spirits to cure sickness, to give good harvest, good hunt. It was also done to

free the soul of which was under the spirits possession, for appeasing the household spirits, purifying the house where one committed suicide, etc. The ways and forms of sacrifices differed from occasion to occasion according to the prescription of the thiempu, keeping in view the magnitude of the problem. Sacrifices were made of pigs, fowls by killing or setting free the animals. First the thiempu checks for the causes and asks what the particular spirit would take to leave the body or cure the sickness. The following are the traditional offerings given to the spirits by Kukis.

In another case, a bamboo branch is cut and basket is hanged. A white hen would be killed with its two wings put inside the basket saying your favorite white horse with wings has been brought for you. The hen was then cooked at the ritual place, even if they could not finish eating up all they had to bury the leftover on the left hand side so that the spirit may think they ate it all. After that again a small bamboo branch was cut off and put a spider web and covered it with a cotton ball. After that they would bring it and it was cut open over the sick person's body. After this the person gets well. It was believed the spider web was the soul captured by the spirit.

V. 1.b. (i) *Atamlam (offering to the Pathen)*

Nakethom (a kind of tree which has three branches), Heibamana (leaves of Ficus palmate) leaves were laid on the rack and some blood of the animal were put. The three heads of the animals were placed in the name of Pathen. When a member of a family was sick the whole family sat together and the thiempu sprinkled water on all of them signifying that the Manmasi was sick and checking out what was causing it. So, they asked the Pathen to find out and as a gift the Atamlam i.e. the three animals consisting of dog, pig and goat was to be offered.

V. 1.b. (ii) *Achanglam (offering to the outside spirit)*

When the person is attacked by the outside spirit, it causes. In the case of Gamkihtoi, in which the pulse rate slows down, can not even open the eyes, would feel burning sensation within the body. People were sent out to find a tree which has two roots and single trunk. Such tree was uprooted for they believed it caused the sickness. Then thiempu commands that the person to be dipped into the water.

In another case, a bamboo branch was cut and a basket was hung. A white hen would be killed with its two wings put inside the basket saying that the favorite white

horse with wings has been brought for it. The hen was then cooked at the ritual place, and the thiempu and his assistants will eat up. If they could not finish eating up all, they had to bury the leftover on the left hand side so that the spirit may think they ate it all. After that, again a small bamboo branch was cut off and a spider web was put and covered into it and covered it with a cotton ball. Then they brought it to house and it was cut open over the sick person's body. After this the person gets well. It was believed that the spider web was the soul captured by the spirit.

Tombil is another sickness, allegedly caused by spirits in which the sick person loses all his senses of shame and has no idea or consciousness of clothes, pulse rate would become very high, and breathing becomes fast. All these symptoms were considered to be due to pre-marital sex. For such cases, Leichou (ant hill) mud was used to make nude figures of a man and woman and tips of hay were put on the heads of the mud figures. A maicham (altar) or the holy platform was made of bamboo of four feet tall above the ground. On this maicham the Nake (Photo V.1) (a kind of plant which has long leaves whose one side would be white and another side green) leaves were placed and the sacrificed animal's blood was sprinkled. The meat of the sacrificed animal was also placed on it. Phelep, which was made of thin bamboo spilt, wrapped with threads of white, black and red colors. This phelep was quadrangular in shape.

For this sickness they cut the head of hen or pig. For paddy harvesting, white hen's neck was cut and made to jump on the thrashing mat. On the other hand, at the time of harvesting the thiempu sacrificed a pig and the blood was offered to the spirit and then they start the harvesting in the whole village.

The Hmar respondents added that there were three kinds of rituals in their tribe related to offerings. They are- (1) Khawtlang Inthawi, (2) Siengbing Inthawi, and (3) Mimal Inthawi.

(1) Khawtlang Inthawi (offering meant for the whole community)

In this ritual, the whole village would go to the river at the end of the year annually. Each household would make a figure of mithun (the *bos frontalis*, a species of Indian bison) with mud and take it to the riverbank at the altar made of stone which they have amassed. The altar is as high as a man's height. They placed the figure on the altar and worshipped Pathien (omnipotent God). They killed a male pig and sincerely prayed, confessed their sins and took fire from the chief's house with a Sairam tree. This would be the new fire for the house and they would start the fire place again. Before this every household had to put off their fire in their fireplace. Nothing could be cooked or boiled. Cocks were tied so as not to make noise. This ritual was performed for their well being and prosperity of the village. This ritual was performed for the community as a whole. Each village had their own thiempu. But on this day the eldest male of the family would act as a thiempu.



Photo V.1. Nake

(2) *Seingbing Inthawi (offering meant for the family)*

This ritual was done for the family in order to cure a sick person, for blessing and to appease the spirits of their ancestors and to please Pathien. There were two kinds of Seingbing Inthawi.

(a). *Sakhawlmang*

A male pig would be sacrificed for this ritual. The priest would pierce the pig with a spear on its axilla and all the members of the family, at the same time would rest their hands on the pig's head. By doing this, they believed that the sacrificed pig would carry all their infirmities away. In addition, a cock would be sacrificed as well.

(b). *Sesun Inchawng*

A male mithun (the *bos frontalis*, a species of Indian bison) would be sacrificed for this ritual. The eldest male of the family does the killing of the mithun. This ritual was a burdensome one because for the whole village participates in the rite. This ritual was performed for their well being and also to appease the spirits of their ancestors and Pathien, so that they would be granted a place in the Peilral.

(3) *Mimal Inthawi (offering meant for the individual)*

There are different kinds of 'Mimal Inthawi'. But most of them were performed for the health and well being of the persons concerned. This rite was done for Pathien, and not for the evil spirits. This ritual was for the individual only.

(a). *Ram Tinga Inthawidam (appeasing the jungle spirits)*

This ritual was performed in the jungle. An altar was made above which a banana leaf (new one) was placed and sprinkled the grounded rice and blood of the sacrificed animal. The killed animal's meat was placed at the four comers of the banana leaf. A torch made of dried bamboo, tied seven times, which symbolizes the God who has seven heads, by the thin strips of bamboo is kept near the altar. The four pieces of meat symbolizes the ruling of God of the four directions-East, West, North and South. Seven figures of human beings were also made both in small and big sizes and were kept around the altar signifying the seven headed God they believed in. Above the altar, a triangle shaped Phelep, made of red, white and black cotton thread was hung.

(b). *Tharlak (thanksgiving ceremony)*

This was the thanks giving ceremony for the new harvest and domesticated animals. The sacrificed animal was placed on a maicham (altar) and blood was offered. This maicham was usually three to four feet above the ground and made of bamboo. On the third day after the sacrificial ritual was performed, the bones were purified and buried in a safe place, by digging deeper so that dogs and other animals could not find them. If the cooked meat was left it was buried as it could not be taken inside the house. Or it should be kept hung in front of the house but no one should touch it except the thiempu and those who went along with him. In case of ancestor worship the sacrificed animal was consumed by the clan members also. The sacrificed animal was not left to decay anywhere

but was consumed though not secretly. Or sometimes the thiempu gets a portion of the meat of the sacrificed animal. The dedication of the animal to the spirits was usually done when an individual comes back from another place and seems to act in a different way. The individual's soul was believed to be stayed back with the spirit of that place or on the way. So to call back his soul, an animal, generally a hen or a goat was dedicated. This was known as Yenlingthaba. The dedicated animal was then set free in the jungle after the thiempu finished with the prayer. No one should catch and eat or rear such animals. If someone does so he/she would be inflicted with the illness with which the animal was exchanged for.

There has been no incident of any humans being sacrificed or dedicated to a spirit in their society even in their ancient history.

The Kuki Christian believers support their church and pastors with monetary contributions of one sort or another which are called tithes (usually calculated at 10 percent of all gross income from all sources) whether or not they actually represent the ten percent of anything. But nowadays killing for offering is no more in practice. No human sacrifices are performed in the Kuki society. Even animal sacrifices are no more in practice except killing for food which forms a major course for the food habit of the Kukis. The present Kuki society does not anymore worship spirits of any kind for anything.

The detail information about the sacrificial rituals was provided by 33.33% urban and 34.67% rural respondents who had knowledge about these various forms of sacrificial rituals practiced among the various groups of Kuki tribes. Another 66.67% urban and 63.33% rural respondents knew about the sacrificial rituals which were performed in the olden days. But they were not aware about the details of the rituals. 2% rural respondents said that they did not have any idea about any sacrifices which were practiced in olden days.

Regarding the left out bones, skin and entrails of the sacrificial animal, 16% rural and 3.33% urban respondents conformed the ceremonial ritual treatment given to them whereas 59.33% rural and 76.67% urban respondents firmly denied to perform

any such rituals and 24.67% rural and 20% urban respondents expressed absolutely no knowledge about such rituals.

The sacrificed animal's meat was not eaten by the community but it was cooked and consumed by the thiempu and his associates after the sacrifice according to 58.67% mostly from the old aged group including the three non-Christian respondents from rural areas and 73.33% urban respondents. The sacrificed animal's meat was eaten only when the ritual was for the well being of the village according to 32% rural respondents. And 9.33% rural and 26.67% urban respondents had no knowledge whether the sacrificed meat was eaten by the community or not.

81.33% rural and 73.33% urban respondents knew where the sacrificed animal was placed after the ritual. But 18.67% rural and 36.67% urban respondents were of the opinion that the sacrificed animal was not offered or put on a maicham. Just after sacrifice blood was offered and the meat was consumed. There was no specific place to preserve the sacrificed animal.

According to 80% rural and 96.67% urban respondents the animal which was dedicated to a spirit was kept alive. While 20% rural and 3.33% urban respondents did not have any knowledge of this and so they could not explain what actually happened to the dedicated animal. The low percentages of respondents who knew the ritual processes clearly indicate the lack of interest to know their traditional practices for they have been converted to Christianity long time back. The church has an important role in the lives of the Kukis. The responses of the Kuki tribes regarding the offerings of the sacrificed animals are given below (TableV.1).

In the Kuki society prayer was once offered to the household God, Indoi, seeking its blessings and requesting for prosperity in the family. Other than this form of prayer, they only offered rituals and sacrifices to the spirits who were believed to be the

cause of illness, diseases, death, etc. The knowledge about the various rituals performed for different spirits and purpose are not known to majority of the respondents i.e. 63.33% rural and 66.67% urban while 2% rural had no idea about any rituals at all. Majority of the respondents also lack the knowledge about the treatment of the sacrificial animal.

V.1. c. Feasts

Feasts were offered in every occasion among the Kuki society. It was not necessary that feasts be offered only to the spirits. Feasts were also offered at the time of birth of a child and death; weddings; after harvesting; for the youths organized by those who used to stay in the Sawm (youth dormitory); for merit; etc. According to 46.67% rural and 30% urban respondents the feasts for merit were of two kinds: (i) Chang-ai, (ii) Sa-ai and (iii) Chon.

Table V.1
Offerings of the sacrificed animals

Offerings of the sacrificed animals	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Details about all the rituals	52	34.67	10	33.33	62
Knew about the sacrifices but couldn't give details	95	63.33	20	66.67	115
No idea	3	2	0	0	3
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Sacrificed animals are treated ceremonially	24	16	1	3.33	25
Not treated ceremonially	89	59.33	23	76.67	112
No idea	37	24.67	6	20	43
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Sacrificed animals are not eaten by the community	88	58.67	22	73.33	110
Eaten by the community sometimes	48	32	0	0	48
No idea	14	9.33	8	26.67	22
Total	150	100	30	100	180

(i) Chang-ai

This was a celebration of bountiful paddy cultivation by a family. This is a feast of the whole village and could only be performed by the wives of the chiefs of the villages or of few rich men. When a family had a good harvest of paddy for three consecutive years, the family performed the Chang-ai. This was to thank the respective spirits for the good harvest by the woman of the family. The thiempu conducted this ritual. On the first celebration it was to be celebrated by a jar of zu, on the second time with a cow and on the last celebration with a big mithun. Youths that were to help in the harvest of the paddy then go towards the field. The tucha (son-in-law of the family) and the becha (best friend of the family) of the woman cooked zu and chahou (a kind of rice) to be given to the villagers. The youth, after the harvest would purposely make some paddy fall on their way back to the woman's house. They come shouting and cheering the woman about the good harvest. When the entire harvested paddy from the field reaches the house of the woman, the youth shake the house standing on the roof top to mark the coming of the paddy and end of the ritual. This was celebrated with lots of zu and by sacrificing a mithun.

(ii) Sa-ai

This was a feast celebrated for a good hunter. The person can celebrate only when he had a great hunting experience throughout his life, for example, if he had killed animals which could attack and kill human beings like the tiger, wild boar, bear, wild mithun, male pig, elephants, eagle, etc. The person has to offer the feast thrice during his lifetime to the whole village to get the title of 'Thangsuah'. In the first ceremony he had to celebrate this ritual with a jar of zu, second time with a female pig and on the third or the last celebration with a mithun. Such man was greatly respected in the village and believed that after death also, he will not be troubled by Kulsamnu (a woman, apparently a giantess, who sits by the path of Mithikho) on his way to heaven. His wife was also addressed by the same title and enjoyed the same amount of respect as her husband.

Persons who performed these feasts were believed to have reserved a place in Mithikho. On the death of a man or a woman who has performed the Sa-ai and the Chang-ai thrice during their lifetime, the dead body has to be laid on a wooden plank. Then the dead body along with the wooden plank was taken to and fro thrice from the door to the graveyard. The Songgoul (sort of memorial stone) was placed with one stone horizontally and one stone vertically for about 1 to 2 ft. at one of their favorite places, which may even be at the roadside. This implied that the person has performed all the customs of being a perfect man or woman.

(iii) Chon

This feast was considered to be the most important one and can only be performed by those who have done the Sa-ai ritual three times. In this ritual every thing has to be done seven times. Seven mithuns were to be killed and everything else was to be in multiples of seven. This was not done for long time so the exact rites were not clearly known. None of the respondents mentioned about this ritual process, except mentioning the name of the ritual by a non-convert and three other old aged men from rural areas.

All types of food can be offered in all the feasts. There were no inhibitions of any item to be offered during feasts. The difference of food offered to spirits and to



Photo V.6 Items used by a thiempu for making medicine

people was that the heart and liver of the animals were generally offered to the spirits while the rest of the meat was cooked and ate by people. Rich people also offered feasts so as to remain like that in the coming years too.

Feasts are still offered on the occasions of weddings, death, child-birth, during Christmas, after harvest, during the Kut festival, etc. The feasts for merit are no more performed by the Kukis. Now the Kukis offer feasts on the inauguration of a church and there are no restrictions on what to be offered and what not to be offered.

The celebration of a good hunt was popular since hunting was considered as a brave game when the person hunt wildest of the wild animals. The ceremony of Chang-ai was usually associated with the woman of the house since most of the agricultural activities were undertaken by the women in the Kuki society. The display of the heads if animals can still be seen in some Kuki houses (Photo V.3). These animals may not be the ones which they have hunted for hunting has been restricted by the Government and is punishable. But those animals were the ones which they killed for the community feast.

V.1.d. Bodily Gestures and Other Activities

Every ritual involves a range of bodily actions from kneeling down, bowing, etc. to verbal responses like mere recitation of prayers or the chanting and singing of hymns. The significance of these body actions and oral incantations is that they follow a definite pattern or sequence, and the adherence to such a pattern or sequence is quite rigidly maintained.



Photo V.2. A Model of the Traditional Kuki House

of religious experience i.e. not only does it pattern itself in terms of movements and gestures within a given religious practice but it also becomes the subject of internalizing the experience contained in the given religious practices (ESO-15 (2) 2004: 9&10).

The experts, special groups or the whole community do not perform any actions which may have any function in the social life in addition to rituality. They only perform their traditional dance when the festival of harvest was celebrated. This way they express their thankfulness to the God for giving a good harvest.

The participation and attendance in rituals depended on age and sex. Women and children were not allowed to attend in any ritual of sacrificial offerings held outside the house. They believed that the spirits that were causing sickness or harm would again attack someone who was weak and vulnerable. When the priest prayed for sickness which was by Seildo (household spirit) no one was allowed to go out of the house where the ritual was performed for two to three days. They used to hang a branch of leaves on the house which indicated that no outsider should go to that house. If some one from that house has to leave the house for some urgent work, a piece of his clothes would be cut and retained signifying the presence of that individual. Even guest of that house should not leave the house during these days. Nothing from the house should be taken out. Tairen (Toona ciliata) leaves were hung on the verandah implying the house was under ritual observance for sickness and others should not enter the house until it is not taken down. In case of epidemic in the village, the village gate would be stained with blood of animal which indicates that outsiders are not allowed to enter the village.

Besides these, during the preparation period of Chang-ai and Sa-ai ceremony the new rice beer jar should not be defiled even by the touch of a widow, a murderer, etc. Traditionally, among the Kukis no ritual purification ceremonies were performed for removing the taboo. They just removed the taboo signs when the thiempu

asked to. The taboo signs which were used in respect of certain purposes are given in Appendices p. xx.

According to 64.67% rural and 50% urban respondents' women and children were not allowed to attend sacrificial rituals. Among this group of respondents according to an old aged Thadou woman, the evil sprits which they were driving out during sacrificial rituals may attack the weak and the vulnerable. A middle aged Thadou man who follows Judaism said women and children were not counted even in the village meeting. He said they are like the Israelites where women and children were not counted. But 35.33% rural and 50% urban respondents had no idea whether women and children were permitted to attend rituals or not. 88.67% rural and 93.33% urban respondents had no idea about the ritual taboos and the associated rituals. Since the women and children of the Kuki society were considered weak and vulnerable, were not allowed to attend such rituals. Beer jar touched by widow was considered to be defiled for only widows were allowed to touch the dead bodies of unnatural deaths. The details of the responses are enlisted in the (Table V.2).

Table V.2
Feast of merits, Bodily gestures and other activities

Knowledge about the different feasts	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Feasts for merits	70	46.67	9	30	79
No idea	80	53.33	21	70	101
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Participation depended on age & sex	97	64.67	15	50	112
No idea	53	35.33	15	50	68
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Certain ritual taboos	17	11.33	2	6.67	19
No ritual taboos	133	88.67	28	93.33	161
Total	150	100	30	100	180

V.1. e. Oracles

An oracle is a person or agency considered to be a source of wise counsel or prophetic opinion; an infallible authority, usually spiritual in nature. It can be prediction of the future, from the Gods, that is spoken through another object or life form. In the ancient world many sites gained a reputation for the dispensing of oracular wisdom; they too become known as "Oracles", as did the oracular utterances themselves, whose very name is derived from the Latin verb *Orare*, to speak⁵.

In the traditional Kuki society oracles were read by the *thiempu* and also by some elder villagers. Oracles were mainly to forecast their future about-diseases or epidemic; calamities; misfortune; forthcoming death in the village; harvesting; plantation; animals, which were rarely seen, coming into the village; deer crossing the village; etc. So to know the reasons, to protect from it, to take up necessary precaution, to prevent any untoward happenings in their lives, etc. oracles were read. Most of these oracles were associated with certain impending danger, mishap, accident, disasters, deaths, etc. If the sun was encircled at day time by red rings, it was generally believed that a great man or a king would die. If a deer enters a village in broad day light it signified that enemies will enter into the village or attack the village. If bees or wasps or hornets form a temporary bivouac in one's homestead it was considered fortuitous and good. When one heard strange sounds, unnatural quacking of birds or animals, and beating of drums while one was in the jungle or field, it was considered bad and meant the death knell of one's dear one. While going to the field or hunting, if one's path was crossed by animals and snake it signified bad luck.

With their experience and wisdom, the elder members of the Kuki society even today can still predict certain epidemics, and calamities.

Only 49.33% rural and 43.33% urban respondents knew about the types of oracles and their purpose which were believed in their society. The purpose was mainly to

know the indication given by nature which an ordinary man can not decipher and to take precaution. But 47.33% rural and 53.33% urban respondents had no knowledge about the types of oracles believed and their purpose in their society. And 3.33% rural and 3.33% urban respondents asserted they do not believe at all in oracles.

V.1. f. Divination

Divination is the practice of ascertaining information from supernatural sources. If a distinction is to be made with fortune-telling, divination has a formal or ritual and often social character, usually in a religious context. Divination is a universal cultural phenomenon which anthropologists have observed as being present in many religions and cultures at all ages up to the present day.

Divination assumes the influence of some supernatural force of forte which is not bound by known empirical laws. Divination would be all methods of prognostication that can not be reduced to models of predictable causal processes⁶. Divination is a religious ritual to obtain hidden knowledge. It is a process of discovering the cause or agent of misfortune by decoding a communication from supernatural beings and forces (ESO-15(1) 2004:68).

In the old Kuki society divination was performed by the thiempu. The practice of divination was known as Phoitan. The thiempu used to invoke the spirits and asked them to come in his dreams. By divination the thiempu manipulated the nature. A method of performing divination was that the thiempu would leave behind a few rice grains in a cleaned up agricultural plot. He would come to the same place the next morning. If he found the rice grains in the same position as they were left the night before, then he announced that the plot would be good for cultivation and no spirits would hamper the labor of the farmers. If the rice grains were moved from where they were placed then it was believed that in that plot some spirits dwelled and it did not liked the cultivation work

to be undertaken. The person who would be tilling the plot would face problems if cultivated in that plot. So usually after the divination such plots were abandoned.

In the present Kuki society divination is no more practiced and believed.

The knowledge of divination being practiced in the society was acknowledged only by a few respondents. Only 26% rural and 23.33% urban old aged group could explain about divination, its various methods and practices. In the book 'The Kukis of Manipur', Gangte has also cited that divination was performed by the thiempu prior to the celebration of Lawm-siel-kai. "The thiempu cuts the leg of a chick which was kept covered with a kind of grass turf called 'phoipi'. If the proceedings were good the cleansing rites of the village were considered to have been gone through properly". Further, he also explained about the divination which was done with eggs known as "Ahtuisaan".

While 74% rural and 76.67% urban respondents said it was not practiced or either had an idea about it. One middle aged man of the Paite tribe, believed that the diviner manipulates sometimes by telling lies. The diviner may also say all such results from what he felt.

V.1.g. Ordeal

Ordeal is a method of invoking the aid of supernatural powers to settle disputes or to test the truth of an accusation. It usually consists of severe and possibly dangerous tests to which the parties to the disputes are subjected. Ritual precautions are taken to prevent blame falling in those administering the ordeal. Innocence is proved by coming through the ordeal unscathed. Sometimes the ordeal is administered to an animal in place of the human subject (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951:186).

A trial or judgment of the truth of some claim or accusation by various means based on the belief that the outcome will reflect the judgment of supernatural powers and that these powers will ensure the triumph of righteousness. Although fatal

consequences often attend an ordeal, its purpose is not punitive. The main types of ordeals are ordeals by divination, physical test, and battle⁷. Trial by ordeal is a judicial practice by which the guilt or innocence of the accused is determined by subjecting them to a painful task. If either the task is completed without injury, or the injuries sustained are healed quickly, the accused is considered innocent.

Traditionally, ordeals were used in the Kuki society to settle cases which could not be decided by the council of villagers due to lack of evidence and of the incomprehensiveness of the case. It was also used to find out the truth, the real culprit in time of confusion or lack of evidence, in extreme cases when both sides stood firmly on their grounds and the judgment given was not accepted by any of the party. Ordeal was used to find out the culprit in an instant through supernatural powers. Ordeal was also used to give natural punishments, to find out who the culprit was. This was usually conducted under the observation of the village chief, the village thiempu and the whole village. Ordeal which was practiced in olden days was dipping the alleged culprit into the water. This ordeal was used in case of stealing, cheating, fighting or in case of suspicion, disputes, quarrelling, etc.

Ordeal of dipping into the water was the most famous and commonly used for its spontaneity in judgment. This is called "Tuilup" (Tui=water; Lup=dip). When the matter could not be brought to a conclusion the village council along with both the parties decides to perform Tuilup. So a day would be fixed and every single person in the village would come to the spot on the specified date. Both the parties have to bring a mithun (nowadays buffalo) and tie it on their sides.

The thiempu, after both the parties have assembled at the said place, usually near the water, would say some incantations on a raw egg. The raw egg would then be cut into two pieces, which does not spill at all. The thiempu asked the water spirit

to give judgment by taking in the innocent one and may the guilty one not be able to stay in the water even for a second. After this the thiempu would signal both the persons to jump into the water. The innocent and righteous person could dip himself into the water hence, he/she can take back the buffalo he/she had brought. Whereas, the guilty person will lose his/her buffalo as he could dip into the water.

There were no ritual precautions undertaken to prevent the ordeal. There were no fixed ordeals for any particular accusation. Ordeals were administered only on human beings.

Tuilup seem to be the most famous and commonly used ordeal for it is still in practice though in a modified form for its spontaneity in getting justice by dipping into the water. Now instead of asking the supernatural powers to give judgment to the innocent by the thiempu, the church pastor reads the Bible and conducts the ordeal. For instance, the respondents narrated some incidents which have been quoted in Appendices p.xix.

66.67% from rural and 70% urban areas who were mostly old and middle aged respondents knew about the purpose and types of ordeals practiced in their traditional society. The purpose of ordeals being used was that disputes could be solved without taking the matter to police or court. People preferred to get justice instantly so Tuilup has been commonly used in generally used. The other 33.33% rural and 30% urban respondents mostly the younger age groups had no knowledge or not commented on the issue of ordeal. The responses of the subjects were given below (Table V.3).

Table V.3
Oracles, Divinations and Ordeals

Respondents' believe in oracles, divinations and ordeals	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Types of oracles & purposes	74	49.33	13	43.33	87
Does not believe	5	3.33	1	3.33	6
No idea	71	47.33	16	53.33	87
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Knowledge about divinations	39	26	7	23.33	46
No idea about divinations	111	74	23	76.67	134
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Knowledge about ordeals	100	66.67	21	70	121
No idea	50	33.33	9	30	59
Total	150	100	30	100	180

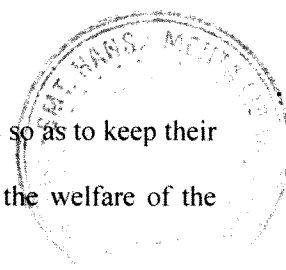
Oracles were used to predict certain impending things like natural calamities, death, etc. Since oracles are still used and predicted by the village elders with their wisdom and experience majority of them seem to be aware about it. Majority of them are not aware of divination as understood from their responses. The reason may be because divination was mainly performed by the thiempu privately. And as for the ordeal, even in the present society, it seems to be practicing though in a modified form. Instead of the invocation done by the thiempu in the pre-Christian period, the pastor substitute the thiempu and reads the Bible asking God to pass the judgment.

V.1.h. Oath

An oath is an invocation to a supernatural being or agency; punishment for an infringement of an oath falls automatically (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951:186).

Traditionally, oath was generally invoked to the God and deity or supernatural element to give proper judgment. Oath was invoked to the suspected persons or the concerned persons who were involved in a dispute. Oath was generally taken in such cases to prove one's innocence. Oath was also invoked in olden days when

chiefs were sworn in along with his council of ministers. This was done so as to keep their words, give judgment justly due to the fear of oath and to work for the welfare of the people. And people do not repeat the crime again in the society.



Biting tiger nail or teeth, biting a sword or dao, drinking water from the gun barrel, swearing by a spear, drink the bullets' liquid, boil some rice in different colors of clothes (especially among the Kom, etc) were some forms of oaths practiced among the Kukis. While taking such ordeal the person has to give a specific duration within which if nothing happened to the person, he would be considered as innocent. Such oaths were a kind of promise which implied that the person undertaking the oath, if guilty, may his death come through the oath he had taken. If the person bites the tiger nail, it meant his death would be caused by a tiger in any way. If he bite a spear or dao or a sword death would come because of these weapons. So in order to avoid the impending fear people used to swear by the name of the mildest animal like a rabbit, but even after taking the ordeal on this animal if the person was guilty, he could not be escaped from the ordeal he had undertaken. Even the mildest animal became the cause of his death in one or the other way.

There were instances of people taking oath in the name of small red ants or in the name of an animal called Sachen (Sajuk in Kuki) which was known for its mildness. This animal was used to run away from the smell of humans. People thought they would never be harmed by these animals. But they were wrong if they were guilty. Some even took a strand of hair, dip it in water and drink it promising if he was guilty then within a certain period of time death would come to him.

The ordeal of boiling the rice was also done by tying the rice in different colored clothes for the disputing parties and it will be cooked. The rice of the guilty person would not be cooked properly.

In case, if one cannot enter into an oath proposed, the person was declared defeated or guilty as the case may be.

In the present Kuki society oath is being taken by the Kukis by the name of Jesus. Taking oath with animals, spear, sword, etc. are no more believed or practiced. But still taking an oath is considered to be very serious.

48.67% rural and 16.67% urban respondents could give information regarding oath, its various types, etc. While 51.33% rural and 83.33% urban respondents had no clear knowledge about the oaths believed or undertaken in their traditional society. 66% rural and 66.67% urban respondents said that they do not believe in taking an oath as it is no more believed by the people and people can take oath to any extent for selfish motive without caring for the results. And 34% rural and 33.33% urban still believe in oath for taking oath is a direct way of proving faith and gives good result. Some Christian believers also added that if one takes oath in the name of the Lord one can never lie or cheat. So it is very effective and widely believed.

Mostly the older generations were aware of the beliefs their society had traditionally. The younger and the middle aged group irrespective of male and female had vague or no ideas about the tradition of taking oath. Not just the lack of knowledge, the younger lot seemed to have no interest in the traditional beliefs of their society. The responses of the sample regarding the oath are given below (Table V.4).

Table V. 4
Types of Oath & % of believers

Oath and its belief	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Knew about invocatin of Oath	73	48.67	5	16.67	78
No idea	77	51.33	25	83.33	102
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Believe in taking Oath	51	34	10	33.33	61
Do not believe in taking Oath	99	66	20	66.67	119
Total	150	100	30	100	180

V.1.i. Dreams

All through history dreams have been associated with death, the dead, the future and omens. It is believed that the barrier between the living and the dead which can be crossed during sleep, allowing the deceased to come back and visit us. Sometimes it comes to say goodbye, while other times it's to bring a warning. Some believe that every dream has a meaning. Different things mean different to different people.

In the traditional Kuki society dreams were taken seriously. Dreams were regarded as sign and signals that depict the past and the future. The results of the dream also depend upon at what time the dream was dreamt: at midnight or dawn. Dreams dreamt in winter were not treated seriously unlike dreams of summer. Dreams are believed to be caused by spirits because if someone dreams something which meant bad omens, the next day the thiempu would be consulted and a prayer was offered. Dreams were believed to be the communication from the dead. Dreams were also treated as omen in their society. And these dreams let them know what would be happening in the near future. The list of dreams which were recognized and interpreted int heir society were given below (Table V.5).

Table V.5
List of dreams and their meaning

DREAMS	MEANING/S
If someone dies	That person ate too much
House on fire	Misfortune in the family; sorrow; someone will die from the house
Eat food/pork; crab or buffalo; bath or swimming	Cough, cold
Elephant (Sai)	Death of elders in the village or relatives; people will die; dig grave or stepping on a grave
Red cloth, or police	Danger, bad, unfortunate happenings
Take bath	Get cold, fever or flu
Chief wooing woman	Kill tiger
Laughed	Cry
Cry	Laugh
Sepoy	Disease in the village, cold, cough
Catch snake	Disease in the family
Drainage through the house	Money will come in that house
If a house is blown by wind	That family won't be leading a happy life
If a woman sees herself marrying	She won't be living for long
Sees a grave dug around the house	Someone will surely die from that house
If a person killed an unknown person/stranger	He will kill an animal
Festivities/merrymaking	Someone will die from that house
Kill an animal, digging of earth, dead ancestors	Death in the family
Bring girl as wife/elope	Go for hunting
If the person dies in his own dream	Get money
If upper molar teeth fall	Parents or elders die, Male line may fall sick or die
If lower molar teeth fall	Grandchildren or younger to the dreamer will die Female line may be affected
If front teeth fall	Daughter's husband or her children will die
If wild pig killed and its meat brought home	Get money
Hunt monkey	Family members or someone in the village will die
Tree cut down or fell down because of strong wind/biggest one among the trees fall	A relative or elder of the village or the person is sure to die/the village chief or leader will die
If one killed a hen or a pig in dream, saw a coffin, see landslides, climb down a hill	Bad omen
Climb up a hill, bath in a clear river water, cross a river	Good omen, prosperity, success
When a dead person comes frequently in dream	Something bad is sure to happen, Bad luck in the direction in which one would be going
Elephant surrounded by people and watched	Some kind of disease will come
Fish picked or caught by the villagers	Money will come to the villagers
If one sees oneself nude	Shame

Bath properly and oil the hair	Peace of mind happy mood
Get ashamed	Sickness, shame
Praised, cry, laugh	Good things in life/reality
If elders come in dream	Death, sickness in the family
Kill animal fire, wind	Death in the village
Drive a vehicle or see white fish	Get money
Singing in dream	Lucky
Riding an elephant	Death
If people bring a hunted animal in a house	A person from that house is sure to die soon
If worm bites and go out of your body	Get well soon from the sickness
Fire; dirty water; river flooded; cooing of deer; people gathering in courtyard; cow, mithun, elephant; get money in coins; monkey	Bad omens
While climbing up a hill, some birds, insects go down; clear water; buffalo; flowers	Good omens
Any kind of fruits	Misfortune; hardships
Snake	Unlucky; wish unfulfilled
Good harvest	Get money
Catch fish; holding the capsule of pig	Get money
Board an aeroplane or bid farewell to the family	Bad things may happen
Big gathering may happen	Bad things or even death may come in that family
A person dying	Die in reality
Rabbit (Sazupi)	Happens what one has planned
Father (Pa)	Prosperity, happiness, fame
Book (Lekhabu)	Study hard, happiness
Pig (Vawk)	Effort would all be in vain; no benefit
Drinking zu	Rain will come
Star (Aksi)	Get money
Upper teeth (Hapi)	Elder members of the family may die
Baby (Naungek)	Good omen, good health
Chicken taken from one's house	Children may die
Hen taken	Wife may die
Cock taken	Husband may die
Deer, antelope	Sickness
If acquainted or were with a person of good name	Good, lucky

One old aged Thadou man from Senapati district narrated one of his dream which he felt was an omen. It was in 1992. In his dream he saw that in a long way among the middle of the paddy field he saw people gathering at the other end and in the middle a coffin covered with a white cloth was being carried by people. On the white cloth was written in Thadou-“I LEN LAINI APAAM MAI NGEI”, which means our happy ancestral

land will be lost soon. After that the 1993 ethnic cleansing riot broke out in which thousands of people died and thousands more were displaced and left landless.

48% rural and 40% urban respondents said dreams are taken seriously in their society. According to 29.33% rural and 40% urban respondents' opinion dreams are not taken seriously in their society. According to them dreams was just the visualization of their thoughts. And they do not have any meaning. But, the remaining 22.67% rural and 20% urban respondents have altogether a different approach towards dreams. They believe that it all depends on the individual whether the person should take the dream seriously or not.

While 37.33% rural and 36.67% urban respondents believed that dreams are communications from the dead. The 62.67% rural and 63.33% urban respondents do not believe them so. While 48% rural and 53.33% urban respondents said that dreams are treated as omen in their society, the other 52% rural and 46.67% urban respondents do not believe in dreams as omens. The responses are presented below (Table V.6).

Dreams are still taken seriously in the Kuki society. Till now there are some elders who still hold dreams as seriously as it to be a prediction of the future. Dreams are regarded as sign and signals that will depict the past and the future. Dreams are not believed to be a means of communication from the dead. They also believed in dreams because they themselves have experienced with incidents which are believed to be the result of meaning of certain dreams.

Table V.6
Dreams and the beliefs of the respondents

Dreams	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Dreams are seriously taken	72	48	12	40	84
Depends on the individual	34	22.67	6	20	40
Not seriously taken	44	29.33	12	40	56
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Believed to be communication from the dead	56	37.33	11	36.67	67
No communication from dead	94	62.67	19	63.33	113
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Dreams treated as omens	72	48	16	53.33	88
Not considered as omen	78	52	14	46.67	92
Total	150	100	30	100	180

V. 1. j. Ritual Language

The dialects of their own particular groups were used by the officiants in the rituals. Among the Kom, Kharam, Aimol, Chiru, and Koireng, Kom dialect is spoken. So the thiempu used Kom dialects only while conducting rituals. There was no particular language for performing the rituals. The archaic dialects were used as ritual language. The tone was also different. The officiants understood the words used and knew the meaning. The actual words used in officiating a ritual when a person was all due to the cause of water spirit, in Thadou is given by a Thadou respondent. He also added that for this ritual, the thiempu has to take a pig or any animal to the place where the spirit was believed to be dwelling and given it as an offering.

The words are as under-

*"Dakimnu Dakimpa
Nanu Napa Hoija Chiahm. Twilong alah
Hoelin a Chei, Kate Keiman Twi Long Daoh
Tampi KAhein Poi, Agin Nisagi Lasna Kija
A Bieng Bieng Som Kahin Poi"*

The above given ritual words are a dialogue between the thiempu and the children of the spirits.

Translation –

“Thiempu – Where are your mother and father?

Spirit’s children – they have gone to look for Barak’s Sembung (Gong)

Thiempu – Why they had to go to look for it? I have brought a lot of it.

Then the thiempu keeps the gong under a stone so as not to float away”.

Another one is when the spirits take away the soul. In Thadou –

*“Tuni a lhaha, jun leh eh ajicheto unpou hite, waagu jien, nangu eh, kei jun neng Kating.
Keizei jun, kei ju eh, nang agun neovin, tun hiche nu, sukhel toh khel sa aum gong leh,
ngaidam mun tia taona, a kelcha (goat) khat Kahenpouve, hizeh hin ama khel lin nei lah
pieh un a tia, hungin cheta hite ati – a hungding ahitai”.*

Translation-

“In place of the woman’s soul that you have captured we have brought a pure white goat (a hen can also be offered). Even if a child spoiled the place, let’s live in peace and please let her soul come with me”.

Then the thiempu calls out to the soul “Come, Come, Lets go Home!” After this the thiempu can never turn back or look until he reaches the home. On the way if there is a bridge then a thread is tied from one end to the other so as to let the soul cross the bridge. Other party members can turn and look back. When they left the house with the goat for offering, the doors of the house should be closed until they come back. Thiempu will shout at the courtyard, “Have we reached the house?” Then the members of the family will answer, “Yes, you have reached”.

According to another respondent, the actual words for ritual for all kinds of sickness, cure for witchcraft, encounter with the spirits are as under. In Thadou-

*“Wanthanjol piakon hangkhe chun
Leidup pia hung chu chun
Sunin phechun pheneilhun chun
Jan nin phe chun phekuva chun
Hanta thangnga sona tilla kapu
Khupngam min nahin mangchan
Tunin kin jong kamang chai
Adam moru adam mopa
Tidam hinpen, ludam hinpen
Phe”*

After saying these words the thiempu will bite the ai (white mustard) and spray them on the victim.

Presently, the ritual language is either in Kuki dialects or even in English. They now have the Bible where the words of Jesus are written. The officiator understands the ritual language and so do the common people.

The old archaic dialects of the Kukis were used as their ritual language in their traditional belief. The dialects used were understood only by the thiempu. The present generation hardly understands and is not used in daily life. One old man who is a non-convert and other four old aged men and two middle aged men said that the thiempu knew the meaning of the words used. The thiempu just cannot say anything. He has to be careful with what he says to the spirits or else the spirits may attack him. So they had to understand everything before practicing.

V.1.1.k. Fables

Fable is a short story or folk tale embodying a moral, which maybe expressed explicitly at the end as a maxim. Fable comes from the Latin Fabula (meaning 'conversation', 'narrative', 'tale') and shares a root with fabre, "maker, artificer". Thus, though a fable may be conversational in tone, the understanding from the outset is that it is an invention, a fiction. A fable may be set in verse, though it is usually prose. In its pejorative sense, a fable is a deliberately invented or falsified account.

A fable often, but not necessarily, makes metaphorical use of an animal as its central character. But the device of personification may be extended to anything inanimate, such as trees, flowers, stones, streams and winds. In some usage, 'fable' has been extended to include stories with mythical or legendary elements. The word 'fabulous' strictly means 'pertaining to fables' although in recent decades its metaphorical meanings

have been taken to be literal meanings, i.e. 'legendary', 'mythical', 'exaggerated', 'incredible'. In modern times fables have been trivialized in children's books⁸.

The traditional Kuki society had folk stories related to their history. No one was appointed for telling folk stories. Usually folk stories were told to the children by elders, parents, grandparents or those who have interest and have quite a good knowledge about them. Folk stories were narrated by the said persons in leisure time, in the evening, social gatherings, at night, during festivals, etc. These stories were generally told in the kitchen, near the fireplace. There were no stories with special themes for definite occasions like festivities, wedding, etc. The general contents do not vary when the gatherings were of persons of both sexes and of men or women.

The people themselves classified stories as stories of heroes, famous deeds and wonders, legendary, fabulous, topical, moral stories and stories for amusement. The most popular ones are the romantic story of Khupting and Ngambom; Chamthatpa (the dao sharpener); man and spirit; Benglam; Ashi Jolneng; Lendonte; Man and Thilha (Spirit); Pubeng about a person who is sometimes very clever, sometimes stupid very courageous, hunted all the wildest animals but at last was killed by a squirrel; about the brave warriors Rengngam-Rangsai; story about step-mother, war, robbery, Jonlhing, Nganglhein, Gallengam Le hangsai, for valor and strength. And for heart throbbing story they have "Mneitang Jai". Some of these fables which were narrated by the respondents are given below in Appendices p. xviii.

In the present Kuki society also there are no particularly appointed story tellers. Only the grandparents sometimes tell the stories to their grandchildren by citing some of the folk stories which they seemed to relate to the present situation. There are no stories for any particular festival in their society. The story of Khupting and Ngambom,

Benglam, Jonlhing, Ashi Johleng, etc. are still the famous and favorite ones among the Kukis.

There were no particular places for telling the folk stories. But during their leisure and festive times the stories were mostly narrated in the kitchen near the fire place. Reason for this is mainly because among the Kukis, kitchen was the common room. Relatives, neighbors or closely acquainted people generally come to the kitchen and sit. This shows their closeness with the family. The tradition of story telling and listening decreased according to 2.78% respondents. It is because nowadays no one is interested to listen to these aged old folk stories. Another reason is that since the children have to do their school homework and other studies, they have no time for the folk stories, thus drifting away from their tradition.

V. 2. Rituals Concerning With the Life of Man

Health cannot be isolated from social context. Social and economic factors have as much influence on health as medical interventions. They also have an important effect on the provision of health care to all strata of society (WHO 1976:337-9).

Poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of education, inadequate housing, unemployment, poor working conditions, cultural and behavioral factors all predispose to ill health. Successful application of medicine to individuals and groups involves more than mere scientific or biological knowledge; it involves an understanding of the behavior of the individuals and groups who live together and also share certain values of life (Park, K. 2002:459).

Traditionally, in the Kuki society, ill-health, accident and death were believed to be due to harassment of evil spirits who were present everywhere around. Diseases or sickness were believed to be inflicted when they were angry or unhappy with the individual. Or the individual might have visited a prohibited area inhabited by the

spirits. Regarding death also they believed that the individual might have done something which offended the spirit or must have been given the persons name first by the spirit. These were all considered to be caused by unnatural power. The various methods of treatment were either with the medicines given by a thiempu which were made from certain ingredients, or by prayers and offerings made to the spirits to leave the soul or by making sacrifices of animals to appease the spirits causing illness/disease.

Some deaths such as death due to accidents, or due to suicide were considered to be unnatural whereas death of old folks was considered natural. The most popular treatment for illness/diseases, which was performed by the thiempu, were by making ritualistic sacrifices by killing fowls, dogs, pigs, mithuns, etc. The reasons for ill-health which were usually attributed to various different spirits were given in the (Table V.7).

Table V.7
Illnesses believed to be due to spirits

Illnesses	Believed Causes Of The Illnesses
Stomach ache, chest pain	Bitten by kao i.e. evil spirits with multiple personality or witch. If we eat something that kao wants to have but we did not give it, then stomach ache or chest pain will be occur.
Hysterical talks	Caused by jungle spirits
Itching/allergic	Licked by kao
Fits/epilepsy	If the individual is a male then it is believed to be caused by a female spirit of the 'Thilapi' and if the victim is a female, believed to be caused by male spirit or 'Thilapu'.
Muscle pain	Beaten up by jungle thilha/spirits

The above sicknesses were attributed mostly due to incurring the anger of the evil spirits in some way or the other. In case of children suffering from any of these illnesses the thiempu checks the pulse of the patient and then he performs rituals according

to his findings by offering either fowls or animals as he thought fit. Usually the thiempu performs such rituals by binding cotton strings around the neck of the patient. Fasten it by knots and at the end of the string the crest of the fowls or teeth of the animal killed was buried which acts as ritualistic spell. Herbal medicines prepared by the thiempu were the only means of treatment in olden days. Massage was also widely used. Manipulations with offerings to the spirit by making sacrifices were the various methods of treatment which were performed. For instance daikham was burnt and grounded between the palms and applied on the head, body and face of the person who has cough.

Nowadays the belief of attributing the reasons of ill-health, accident and death to spirits are not accepted or believed. Everything is believed to be done by God. He has planned everything for everyone. So ill-health, accident and death are now considered to be the work of Jesus. According to God's will such things will happen in human lives. It is one's faith and is a unfortunate incident for the person or the family. The reasons the present Kuki society attributed for ill-health and accident were carelessness, unhygienic living conditions, ignorance of sickness, food habits of the person, etc. While death has been destined at a particular time and no one can change it.

63.33% urban and 62% rural respondents do not believe in spirits and believe that ill health, accident, etc. to be the work of Jesus. 36.67% urban and 38% rural including the non-converts respondents believed in the traditional belief which regarded the spirits to be powerful enough to give illnesses to the people and even death.

V. 2. a. Diagnosis

The Oxford Dictionary (Xth edition) defines diagnosis as the identification of the nature of an illness or other problem by examination of the symptoms. In the primitive society, diagnosis of illness was done by the traditional priest of that society. Although the nature of the belief in causation directly determines the mode of treatment,

the discovery of the cause usually needs special rites. It is inferred immediately by the patient or his friends from their knowledge of arts, on the part of the patient, which would have offended a man or spirit believed to have the power of inflicting disease (Rivers 1924:27).

There were no customs indicating the knowledge of diseases even in the traditional Kuki society. But usually the thiempu exorcises the patient by checking the pulse of the patient and by doing this he could diagnose the sickness and perform rituals accordingly. The common villagers did not come in touch with the spirits causing disease. But the thiempu got in touch with the spirit in his dreams or when he performed rituals. He also got in touch with the spirits through invocation and divination. Before going to sleep the thiempu asked the concerned spirits to come in his dream or called upon through incantations. When the spirits came they were asked what should be offered to cure the individual and why the spirit had attacked the person. But no one had any idea how the thiempu operated.

All the respondents said that there were no customs which indicate the knowledge of diseases. Only the thiempu had knowledge about it. The spirits were considered to be powerful that only the thiempu was consulted to encounter any spirits. Even the thiempu needed protection for which in his gift items an iron knife or any iron implement was a must. So the villagers were kept away from the spirits as they were not allowed to witness most of the rituals. And with the development and changes in the society the job of these priests has now been taken over by the modern doctors. Now, in the diagnosis of any illness no belief to any innate object or supernatural power are related unlike in the primitive society, where people believed that even a mild headache was due to evil spirit or supernatural power.

The present Kuki society does not believe in or consult any thiempu or the traditional medicine man. Now, for any problem they go to a modern medical doctor.

According to 63.33% rural and 70 % urban respondents the thiempu had no knowledge or idea about the diseases. While 36.67% rural and 30% urban respondents believed that the thiempu had a good knowledge about the various diseases which affected the villagers. For the thiempu not only performed sacrifices which could be said as manipulated or coincidence of the cure of the sick person, but the knowledge of certain herbs and medicines made out of it are used even today in the society.

V. 2. b. Treatment

From time immemorial man has been interested in trying to control disease. The medicine man, the priest, the herbalist and the magicians, all undertook in various ways to cure man's disease and/or to bring relief to sick. In an almost complete absence of scientific medical knowledge, it would not be fair to say that the early practitioner of medicine contributed nothing to the alleviation of man's suffering from disease. Medical knowledge in fact has been derived, to a great degree, from the intuitive and observational propositions and cumulative experiences gleaned from others (Park, K. 2002:1).

In ancient times health and illness were interpreted in a cosmological and anthropological perspective. Medicine was dominated by magic and religious beliefs which were an integral part of ancient cultures and civilizations. Siegerist, the medical historian has stated that every culture had developed a system of medicine, and medical history is but one aspect of the history of culture (Siegerist 1951).

Traditionally in the Kuki society the villagers used to call upon the village medicine man. Sickness got cured after praying to the respective spirits or appeasing them with sacrifices. They believed in the thiempu so they went to him. The thiempu was their only means. He was the only help available to them. The offended spirits were treated

accordingly by the thiempu by offering sacrifices, giving them what they want and asked to leave the body. Sometimes beaten up or pierced with horn of Sachan to take out the evil wish or magic. Another way was, the thiempu called the soul of the witch; asked what it wanted, why it entered the body, etc. Then after giving their demands like if the spirit asked for a hen, it would be cooked and the sick person has to eat it making sure that some of it was left. Then the leftover is thrown far away from the house or village. Treatment was also done privately or publicly according to the spirit causing the sickness. The thiempu had to deal with the spirit, make sacrifices and say incantations; he sometimes had to do it privately especially when the spirit was believed to be possessed. They closed the door and prayed with fire and smoke and treatment was done. Sometimes the thiempu made mud figures of animals or birds or of human beings and pierced them with a needle as if inflicting the spirits and appeased or treated the offended spirits.

At times of special occasions or epidemic or diseases the medicine man cum priest was contacted. In times of an epidemic, a dog was cut lengthwise and hung on a stick which was spelled by the thiempu. Whenever one goes out the fluid of it has to be smeared on the forehead and neck. While coming back into the village one's hand and leg has to face fire. During this time outsiders are not allowed to enter into the village. If entered, the person had to pay a fine of Dangkabel, a kind of wine brewed from rice. Even if he was hungry the gatekeeper had to get food from the village for the stranger.

The methods of appeasement or coercion of the third party to make him remove the evil wishes or magic the thiempu calls the soul of the witch and asked what he/she wants in return of leaving the body. When that is given to the witch the evil wishes are removed. Another way was that the affected person was covered with a "Len" (fishing net) and asked why he has attacked the person, what he would like to take in return, etc.

The thiempu may also pierce the stomach of the infected person with a horn of Sajal (a kind of deer) which will hurt the real witch.

If the victim did not speak up who the real person was, the thiempu, after much coaxing and threatening, used to torture the victim in the above mentioned ways. Then the victim would tell the real person's name and the reason why he/she had sent the evil wishes to the victim. The reason may be of simplest one-like for not inviting to a feast; for not giving food item which the witch must have liked, etc. Then the thiempu asked whether he or she will leave the victim if his demands were given. Then, usually after this the witch left the victim. Another way was by beating the victim. The victim will not be hurt in this process but the real witch will feel the blows and get marks or scars. The thiempu and kins of the victim will then go to the suspected person's whom the victim had named to see whether anything had happened to the person, whether he belonged from the same village or to a different village. If they find proof of the blows or scars on the person then they warned him/her and sometimes even banished from the village. These were the methods of appeasement or coercion to remove the evil wishes.

Nowadays the Kukis go to doctors in time of emergency. They no more practice any kind of ritual for the recovery of a person. If at all it is to be called ritualism, it is only prayer for the sick by the pastor of the church, elders, etc. in today's times. In the present Kuki society, treatments are not done by any thiempu.

The reason of existence of a thiempu in olden Kuki society was that they treated people well and there were no modern provisions for health facility. They did not have much knowledge about modern medicines also. Now, the Kukis have realized that rituals and modern practical methods do not go together. Besides the 2% non-convert, another 2.67% rural respondents who themselves were thiempus said that in dire cases still they practiced the traditional rituals secretly. Still now, some people do come to them for

treatment. They make their own medicines and treat their own family. But nowadays this 2.67% of the respondents do not practice it frequently since they have converted into Christianity or Judaism and feel that they have to abide the rule of their new faith.

The 2% non-converts usually do not go to a doctor in emergency. Among them is a thiempu who prepares medicines for all illnesses. They still use their own herbal medicines. People rarely go to these thiempus. The reasons for these were that people thought such practices to be outdated and not approved by Christianity. "We call a village medicine man or the thiempu because their treatment is natural, used by our forefathers, so why go to some other alien method leaving behind our own tradition", said the middle aged non-convert woman.

Another Vaiphei old man who was a thiempu by himself said that people told him that his work was against Christianity and for which he was warned by the church authority. He practices it because it was there since his forefathers' time and he was taught by his father, and he feels peaceful. But he knows his son would not practice it nor would think even of learning it. But he does not accept the restrictions put forward by the church for he has cured many people and Bible also does not restrict.

Another 13.33% rural and 13.33% urban respondents said that they used to go to a thiempu. While 82% rural and 86.67% urban respondents said that since there was no medicine or a doctor in those days, contacting a thiempu was the only easy means of treatment. But now, since medicines and doctors and hospitals are available, people go to the doctors in emergency. Now they felt and realized that they have all discarded their old beliefs and practices and feel they should not return back to the old beliefs for small selfish matters. And such practices are totally against the belief of Christianity and also of Judaism. The church also does not allow any person to follow such practices as it does not believe in superstitions. Nowadays treatments are no more done ceremonially in public or

in privacy like before. But till now there are some villages which are very much in the interior has problems in availing medical facilities.

V. 2. c. Preventive Medicine

Generally, preventive medicine is that part of medicine engaged with preventing disease rather than curing it. It can be contrasted not only with curative medicines, but also with public methods⁹. Preventive medicine often includes magical measures to ward off evil influences, e.g. evil eye. For this charms may be used, or means may be taken not to arouse envy (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 190).

It has been truly said that medicine was conceived in sympathy and born out of necessity; and that the first doctor was the first man, and the first woman, the first nurse. The prehistoric man, motivated by feelings of sympathy and kindness, was always at the behest of his kindred, trying to provide relief, in times of sickness and suffering (Park, K. 2002:1). Since his knowledge was limited, the primitive man attributed disease and infact all human sufferings and other calamities, to the wrath of Gods, the invasion of body by the “evil spirits” and the malevolent influence of the stars and the planets. The concept of disease in which the ancient man believed is known as the “supernatural theory of disease”. As a logical sequence the medicine he practiced consisted in appeasing Gods by prayers, rituals and sacrifices, driving out “evil spirits” from the human body by witchcraft and other crude means and using charms and amulets to protect himself against the influence of evil spirits. The administration of certain herbs and drugs whose effect is doubtful for nil, but hopefully harmless may be likened to a kind of magic ritual associated with the need to “do something”. There is also evidence that prehistoric man improvised stone and flint instrument with which he performed circumcisions, amputations and trephining of skulls. It is thus obvious that medicine in the prehistoric times (about 5000B.C.) was intermingled with superstition, religion, magic and witchcraft. Primitive

medicine is timeless. If we look around the world, we find that the rudiments of primitive medicines still persists in many parts of the world-in Asia, Africa, South America, Australia and the Pacific Islands. The supernatural thesis of disease in which the primitive man believed is as new as today. For example, in India, one may still hear the talk of curing snake bites by 'mantras'. Diseases such as leprosy are interpreted as being punishment for one's past sins in some cultures. Although primitive man may be extinct, his progeny-the so-called "traditional healers" are found everywhere. They lived close to the people and their treatments are based on various combinations of religion, magic and empiricism (ibid: 1).

There were some rituals performed to ward off evil influences. When a child was born, after a few months the parents took the child to her natal home to get blessings from the child's maternal uncle and grandparents. When they reached the house the Becha (best friend) of the grandparents or uncle, the priest or thiempu performs purification rite after cutting ginger into pieces and then they were allowed to enter into the house signifying that the child was spotless and pure when they took him/her to the maternal uncle or grandparents' house. All kinds of evil influences and bad things that may befall on the child were then warded off by performances of the purifying rite at the door with the ginger. Then a white hen was sacrificed and its feather was tied with red, white and black thread and tied it on the child's arm or around the neck. This is called "Sah'O".

The 12.78% converted Christian and non-convert respondents gave information of the traditional rituals which were performed to ward off evil spirits. They also added that "Kurao" twig was also tied with the thread and worn. Other than this they also worshipped their household God 'Indoi' for protection from evil things and for

prosperity. According to the 20% urban respondents and 84.67% rural respondents, no rituals were performed to ward off evil influences.

Nowadays, no rituals are performed to ward off evil influences. In the present Kuki society, they go to the church and a naming ceremony was performed after the birth of a child said all the urban and 98% rural respondents. While the 2% non-convert respondents still continue to believe in the traditional rituals and practices.

Majority of the respondents no more believe in the traditional beliefs of spirits to be the cause of ill health, disease, death or accident. In case of illness or disease they no more consult the thiempu for diagnosis, treatment or to prevent the illness, etc. They now go only to a medical doctor. The reasons for preferring medical doctors rather than the thiempus are-(i) in the present Kuki society thiempus are no more recognized as healers unlike before; (ii) with the help of modern education, people have started reasoning the things out by themselves; (iii) for fear of expulsion from the church, as it does not approve of thiempus, and their superstitious acts. The responses regarding the rituals concerning with life of man are given in (Table V.

Table V.8
Rituals concerning with the life of man

Rituals concerning with the life of man	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Believed that ill health, diseases were caused by spirits	57	38	11	36.67	68
Modern beliefs regarding diseases	93	62	19	63.33	112
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Thiempu had knowledge about diseases	55	36.67	9	30	64
No idea	95	63.33	21	70	116
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Treatment done privately/publicly	43	28.67	5	16.67	48
Publicly	107	71.33	25	83.33	132
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Charms were worn	23	15.33	0	0	23
No rituals or charms were worn	127	84.67	30	100	157
Total	150	100	30	100	180

V. 3. RITUALS AND BELIEFS CONCERNING PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

Magico-religious beliefs concerning the earth, water, fire, the heavenly bodies, etc., with accompanying ritual to ensure normality in their manifestations, are very common. Seasonal rites and festivals are correlated with the geographical and climatic conditions and the economic activities of the people. The earth and heaven and any of the heavenly bodies may be personified, and may be of either sex; each "element" may have its particular sphere of influence and corresponding cult and officiants. The earth and fire may be considered as sacred with rituals connected with taking a sod of earth or lighting or extinguishing fires both on ceremonial occasions, seasonal festivals, initiation ceremonies, or in daily life (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 190-91).

V. 3. a. Water, Earth, Moon, Sun, Eclipses

In the traditional Kuki society water was worshipped believing spirits to be dwelling there. It was also used for giving judgment. So before conducting any ritual the thiempu always took permission of Noimangpa, the God which dwells under the earth.

Whenever the Kukis shifted or changed their place of settlement they took a sod of earth to a fresh locality. The stone, of the three stone tripods used for cooking, which was nearest to the wall, was broken and a piece of it was also taken along. A man was not believed to be associated with the fertility of the soil where he dwells. There were some rituals performed for the sacredness of earth. The thiempu asked for permission before any propitiation or sacrifices were made to Noimangpa, the God believed to dwell below the earth. In case of blood spill due to fighting, the thiempu would offer a prayer and plough the land properly so that it was free from evil spirits and become fertile as before.

The mark on the moon was believed to be Thingjabong, a tree believed to be planted by Nganbom (a hero of a folk story). The Thadous believed that

madness/lunatic had a bearing with the cycle of the moon. They also believed that sun and the earth were God's gifts. The sun was personified as male and the moon to be female. Epilepsy was believed to be caused by water and fire. So the Kukis did not use to go swimming at twelve o' clock in the afternoon.

V. 3. b. Eclipse

It was believed that Voh (a kind of mythical animal) has swallowed the sun/moon. After some time it slowly releases the sun or the moon. During eclipse they were not allowed to go out. To release the sun or moon they shout "Thadawk in Thadawk in" thrice.

For the normalcy of the eclipses the thiempu used to spit ginger. Besides, when eclipses were there the Kukis used to put some water in a tumbler and kept, then the thiempu used to ask to free the sun or the moon. Another way was the pig's food box was lifted with a stick and shouted to let the sun or the moon go. No one used to go out; even if the villagers were in the field they would come home running. For it was believed that if anybody went out he/she may fall sick. People used to beat the dahpi (gong) at the chief's house. They thought an eclipse was caused by the spirits so with the sound of gongs they believed the spirits would be driven away. Eclipses were also thought to be because the sun or the moon was considered to be devoured by a female dog. The elders also shouted- "Kaphalpoi" three times, meaning "Don't want to give our daughter to the sun or the moon", by beating the gong.

V. 3. c. Earthquake and Storms

The traditional Kuki society believed that there was a man who created the world. It was believed that the Kuki came out of the Khul, a cave. Pathien, the cave God has been told that his creations i.e. the Kukis are all dead on earth. He asked how he can know that they are dead or alive. So the God shook the earth to check whether His

children were alive on earth or not. And to control the earthquake, an elder member of the family used to shout-“Kadam Naove Kadam Naove, Manmasi Te Kadam Naove”, meaning “We are alive! We are alive! Manmasi’s children are alive!” When storm comes, if Daikham and cotton seeds were burnt in the house, the house was believed to be protected from the storm. Even if it is affected, the intensity would be much less.

V. 3. d. Fire

Regarding the beliefs of fire, it was not given to others or taken out of the house after the sunset. When there was a threat of a disease, all the fire of the village were put off. The thiempu would put on fire and everyone would take fire from there. During the incubation period of the hen’s eggs the family was not allowed to take out fire from the house. In their society people used to take firewood along with them when they went out in the night because of the belief that it was feared by evil spirits.

Among the Hmars, during the Khawtlang Inthawi which was a sacrificial ritual for the whole community, fire was put off in their fire places. No one cooked or boiled anything, every individual confessed their sins and took fire from the chief’s house and then lighted the fireplace in their houses. Traditionally fire was made in the following two ways: (i) by striking two granite stones wrapped with fine dry fiber of banana leaf till it catches fire, (ii) by turning a string of cane on a dry wood left and right till specks of the sparks fall on the piece of dry cloth kept under.

V. 3. e. Seasonal Festivals

A religious festival is a kind of social get-together wherein people observe some rituals collectively. It may consists of prayers, processions, feasting or fasting, chanting of hymns and singing devotional songs, etc. festivals reaffirms the faith and fidelity of the people into the principles and practices of religion. Festivals promote emotional integration and social harmony (Rao 1997: 474).

Among the various seasonal festivals of the Kukis, Chavang Kut was the most popular one. This was celebrated as the day of offering to God of the season's first harvest and praying for giving them prosperity. This festival was usually held during the month of October or November indicating the harvest of new crops. Another seasonal festival is the Belphun usually celebrated in the month of October. For this, the youth of the sawm (youth dormitory) tied a mithun and made a platform and dance on it and again come down. The heimang tree (*Rhus hokerii*) was made in the form of bird and they tried to shoot it. The person who hits the target was given an award of special traditional Kom shawl. After this they ate the meat and throughout the night they drank, dance and kept merry making.

Another festival is Hun. Hun was mostly celebrated around the end of May or first week of June when paddy plants grew upto 5-6 inches. For this festival every household brewed big vessels of 'Vaizu' (rice beer which is made from the rice with the husk) before a month. They killed a white hen. The Sahi tree would be posted which would be about six feet high. On the tree sam (basket made of cane) (Photo V.3) containing goat's horn, white hen's feather, female pig's skull tied with a rope was hung. At night every household boiled a white hen without breaking any of its bones or joints.

This white hen was to be killed outside the house in the presence of everyone. No members of the family could stay back in the house. While going out of the house for work the left leg was to be placed first and while coming back into the house the right leg was to be placed first which was to be done only after the thiempu's instruction.



Photo V.3. Sam (a basket made of cane)

This white hen was to be killed outside the house in the presence of everyone. No members of the family could stay back in the house. While going out of the house for work the left leg was to be placed first and while coming back into the house the right leg was to be placed first which was to be done only after the thiempu's instruction.

The next day the meat would be taken out carefully which has to be done only by the male head of the family. The rest of the left over was thrown away. The bone of the hen was again put back into the basket without breaking it by the thiempu. Those families who do not have any elder male members or who have but are unmarried can not perform this festival. The main purpose of this festival was to see whether the harvest would be good or not. In this festival, the thiempu pressed a hen's tail with his left foot, the wings with his left hand and the neck with his right hand and according to the movement of the hen he predicted whether the harvest of that year would be good or bad.

The third one was Sawm-siel kai festival celebrated after the harvest during December to January. This meant fetching of the mithun for the sawm festival. It was decided by the sawm members for the purpose of having a feast of all the members in a year for the work they have done for the village.

In time of death there were separate ways of performing the burial rites for those who achieved fame and status during their life time, for being a good hunter or a wealthy person or for being a brave warrior. Such special burial was known as "Lang Lap Ma Vui". Another one "Khunsum Ma Kihei" which was performed for those who has killed three mithuns during his lifetime. They also performed a funeral rite called "Kitom" when someone died. They put a log in front of the main door and the thiempu and elder male members of the family and relatives jumped with swords or knives and attacked the log challenging the spirit whoever had killed the deceased to come out.

Deaths due to storm were treated as Thisei or unnatural death. Such dead bodies were not brought inside the village or were buried in the village. Among the Kukis if they died outside the village the dead was not buried or brought into the village. They were buried at the spot where they died. Youngsters were not allowed to attend the burial. Only the elder members of the villagers attended the funeral. Such deaths were not entitled to be buried in their own courtyard.

The present Kuki society is not aware of any magico-religious beliefs regarding the water, earth, fire and the heavenly bodies. They do not believe in the personification of the earth or the sun. They do not take any sod of soil while shifting to another place from their previous settlement. According to them they do not believe or never heard of taking a sod of earth to a new locality/settlement. The initiation ceremony, Naopui or christening of the child, after being taken to the maternal grandparents' house for getting their blessings with a cock is no more in practice in the present Kuki society. Regarding the belief in earthquakes or eclipses presently they no more shout or beat the dahpi.

Chavang Kut is the most popular seasonal festival which is celebrated as the first offering of the season's first harvest. This is the common festival among the Kukis. This festival is usually held during the month of October or November indicating the harvest of new crops. The harvested crop of the season is first offered to Jesus. Nowadays they only pray to Jesus and no other ceremonies are performed regarding the selection of the place to build a house, before digging a foundation, while putting up pillars or poles, etc. there is also no difference in the treatment of death by suicide or natural deaths. They are also buried and given proper services according to the church. Nowadays, the dead are buried in the common cemetery irrespective of the nature or cause of death.

80% urban and 72% rural respondents said that they are not aware of any magico-religious beliefs regarding the water, earth, fire and the heavenly bodies. But 2% non-convert and other 20% urban and 26% rural respondents were aware and gave the magico-religious beliefs concerning earth, water, fire and the heavenly bodies in their society. This group of respondents said that the sun was believed to be personified as male and the moon to be female. Water, fire or the heavenly bodies are not personified or given sex. Of these groups of respondents, 6.67 % of them gave the reasons for taking the sod of earth was because of the belief that the spirit who was in guard of that area has protected them for such a long time. So they took it believing that the spirits would continue to give prosperity and protection. Another reason was to be in close contact with the forefathers who were buried in that soil. This was also taken as a means to know in their dreams whether the new house would be a good place or not and prayed it to be the same as before. They are taking their God who has been looking after them to continue to do the same.

But all the urban including the 20% respondents who knew about the magico religious beliefs of the earth, fire, water, etc. And 92% rural respondents said that they do not believe or never heard of taking a sod of earth to a new locality/settlement. The reason for not taking the sod of earth was because the Kukis used to change their house once their old house started deteriorating. So it was a normal thing for them to change their settlement every now and then.

They beat the dahpi (gong) believing that eclipses were caused by the spirits so that with the sound of dahpi they were driving away the spirits. The Kukis believe that they originated from the Khul, a cave. They shouted thrice that they are alive because of the belief that the creator was checking whether His children were alive on earth or not for He was told that all His children were dead. Death by suicide or any

unnatural death were considered impure and was not buried even in the village. Though this practice is claimed by 66.67% urban and 5.33% rural respondents to be not in practice any more, but somewhere it could be sensed that they are still following and believing it. This can be said from an instance which was narrated by a Vaiphei respondent that happened in Kangchup area of Senapati district. An elderly man who was a social worker and a well known person, died in a hospital while undergoing his treatment. When he was brought from the hospital the dead body was not allowed into the village by the villagers as he met his death outside the village. According to 33.33% urban and 46.67% rural respondents these are still strongly believed by some elders in the community. While 48% rural respondents said that nowadays any dead person is buried in the common cemetery irrespective of the nature or cause of death. The details of the responses are given in (Table V.9).

TableV.9
Beliefs regarding physical phenomena

Beliefs regarding physical phenomena	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Knew about magico-religious beliefs	42	28	6	20	48
No idea	108	72	24	80	132
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Sod of earth taken when shifted a place	12	8	0	0	12
Not believed	138	92	30	100	168
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Death due to storm treated as suicidal death	80	53.33	20	66.67	100
Treated normally	70	46.67	10	33.33	80
Total	150	100	30	100	180

The Kuki rituals and beliefs regarding the physical phenomenon of water, fire, earth, sun, moon, eclipse, etc. are changed now and no more practiced. Deaths due to storm or fishing seem to still consider as unnatural and not given proper funeral. This can be said from recent instances. Early humans generally did not accept death as due to natural causes. Death was either the result of acts of violence caused by human or animal enemies, or it was caused by evil and unseen demons. To the primitive mind, if a man or a woman, without wound or injury, fell silently asleep and never awakened, they had to have been the victim of malevolent spirits¹⁰.

V.4. RITUALS AND BELIEFS CONCERNING ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Ritual is usually considered necessary for the success in agricultural, pastoral, hunting or fishing pursuits, especially with regard to the fertility of the earth and the succession of the seasons (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 191).

For success in agricultural and hunting pursuits certain rituals were performed by the thiempu in olden days. For success in agricultural pursuits three rice grains were kept in the particular field for a night. If the rice were found as it was placed even in the next day then only the thiempu asked to cultivate in that field. If the rice was found to be moved then they would not cultivate in that field as it would be an unfruitful venture. Before planting, the thiempu checks whether that particular area would be suitable or not by putting two poles tied with a thread and a water container was tied to the thread. The next day, if the water container was found on the ground or any insects or lizards, were found near the water container or on the thread, that place was not considered to be cultivable. It was believed that the jungle spirits inhabit that particular area.

Another ritual for success in agriculture was performed after the plantation of paddy. This was done to worship the paddy goddess Chang Nungah kitem or lady or girl of the paddy. In a paddy field when the whole field starts to give fruits and starts

ripening and in the midst of this ripening paddy plants, if a plant which does not bloom or bear fruit comes up it was preserved and worshipped. It was also believed that this plant helps increase fertility of the field and hence production. If this Goddess was worshipped by the owner of the field he would have a good and bountiful harvest year after year. For worshipping this deity they construct a small field-shed close to the green paddy plant, where they would also keep a comb, one um (made of dried gourd) of pig's oil to oil the Goddess' hair, one water container made of bamboo called Tuithei, and rice beer for her were placed and a black hen for inviting the soul of the paddy. This was performed by the thiempu. The tucha has to bring all the items to the field where the ritual was to be performed. Then the thiempu pretends a conversation with the paddy lady by speaking in this way-

Thiempu- *Hepi, chang nei pe-O!*

Oh! Lady, give me some paddy

The paddy Lady (for whom the thiempu speaks)

Chang deija cahng pedi Ahi.

He who wants paddy shall be given

Sumdeija Sum Pedi Ahi!

He who wants money shall be given

Thiempu-*Tidam-Ludam*

Phat theina tincheng kape

I blessed with good health with all blessings.

The thiempu then puts three bunches of paddy in the tucha's basket (sam). After this the tucha says to the becha who is in the field-

Tucha: *Hepu, na in na lhung nging-e*

Sir, let me be your guest today

Becha: *In a selle. I po nahim?*

You can't be my guest since it's not customary.

What is there in your basket?

Tucha-*Mimja-Chaangja, sumja-seya,*

Tidam-tudam, phatlheina haothuina

Jouse kapoi

I carry with me hundreds/lots of rice-barley, lots of money-mithuns, health-vitality and all sorts of blessings.

Becha-Hichu po bouchu ba hiholachu; hung lheng tang, hungchung tang!
That's what we have been looking for. Come into the house.

This process was done three times. Then the thiempu cuts the hen at neck. If the hen jumps high, the paddy will raise that high. If the hen goes round the paddy will cover that much area. And again starts thrashing the paddy. The others will follow the thiempu. Make fire in the thrashing place and calls the spirit of paddy saying-

"Hear my cry; look into the smokes of the fire I lit; O spirits from the right and left, from the North and the South come and join. Also come, field mouse from across the jets of flowing water in stream, and the spirits of the old woman sitting under the shade of leafy leaves of Nake. Let the harvest multiply like building ant-hills and come, all the spirits and multiply the harvest".

For hunting pursuits the thiempu called the jungle spirits and prayed asking for protection of the hunter and to give a good hunt. For this the thiempu offered a fowl and with his incantations called the animals towards the hunter.

The Kukis believed in auspicious day and time and usually checked before starting any work. Some days were not considered auspicious and no important works were undertaken. For instance-Monday, Wednesday and Friday were considered to be auspicious days. Tuesday was believed to be a weak day, Thursday was not considered lucky for going out, and Saturday was considered to be a heavy day may even get hurt or harmed. The day an individual was born was not considered to be auspicious. The day, on which an individual was to go out of the house for few days, no other person should go towards a different direction on the same day because it was also considered inauspicious. If they are going together to the same place then it was fine. On Thursday if a male child was born, it was believed that the boy would be a good hunter. If a participant of the

agricultural activities saw a monkey around the field the word monkey should not be said since it will not give good harvest. Another was if a pregnant woman was there among the participants of the agricultural activities, she should be served twice whatever was served for the participants for her and the child in her womb.

Harvesting and planting of crops were done on specific auspicious days. Wednesday was believed to be good, during new moon, the birth month and day of a person were considered good for such work. The thiempu selects the auspicious day for seedling, sowing and harvesting. Thursday was mostly chosen for thrashing. The rituals associated with harvesting and planting of crops were performed by the thiempu. The thiempu killed a hen by cutting the neck on a thrashing mat and saw how high or how far the hen jumps before it died. From this the thiempu could say how much crop would be harvested from that field.

There were no specific or different songs for different groups or clans except the song for bidding farewell to the dead. Certain ceremonies were observed before selecting a site for house. The thiempu used to see whether a particular place was free from spirits, after settling whether the people who would be living in that place would have good or bad life, etc. If there were any spirits found the thiempu used to purify the place and asked the spirit to leave the place or asked to see another place for their settlement.

The thiempu used to take some rice according to the number of the members of the family. The rice is then dropped into a glass of water. If the rice falls straight then it was considered to be a good omen, can build a house in that place. Even if any rice does not fall straight then the man or woman would become a bad character. If all the rice grains did not fall straight then they should not even think of building a house in that spot for it was considered to be a very bad omen.

Auspicious days were checked by the thiempu. An egg was cut at the tip after saying the incantations. After cutting the egg if the yolk comes out under the heat of fire before being cooked properly it was considered a bad omen. If the egg was properly cooked then the house could be built on the spot.

The present Kuki society does not believe in any auspicious or inauspicious days or times for beginning any work. According to them each day was good for they have been created by God. They do not have any preference of a day for starting any new work or for trading operations or going out. The respondents said if one believes in Jesus everyday was an auspicious day. No rituals are performed for harvesting or planting of crops. There were no taboos or regulations to be carried out by the participants in the agricultural activities. Harvesting and planting of crops can be carried out on any normal day. Nowadays, they prefer to do on Sunday because Sunday being a holiday for everyone and if they could not complete it on Saturday, the harvesting or plantation would be able to complete on Sunday. No ceremonies are observed now for selecting a site for house, digging foundation, laying the first stone or post. If the family wants then the pastor of the church reads the Bible and makes a prayer to the Lord by conducting thanks giving ceremony, for the safety of the family.

83.33% urban and 67.33% rural respondents do not have any preference for them as every day is equally auspicious. Some preferred to start any venture on the day they were born. For some Monday was lucky. So it all depended on the individual or the family to decide which day was auspicious or not for any kind of work. Auspicious days were preferred to be in a safe side. For instance, Thursday is considered good for hunting, Wednesday for going out. They do continue to believe that no two persons should go out from the same family on the same day to different directions or places. This was believed to be inauspicious. 32.67% rural and 16.67% urban respondents believed in auspicious day

and time and usually checks before starting any work. It depends on the family and the individual but not a general practice. Though some elders still have hesitation to start a particular work on certain days the younger generation because of their work schedule, prefers to do their various chores according to their working schedules. Of the 16.67% urban respondents, 3.33% of them preferred various days for they feel it suited them, and according to 4% of the 32.67% rural respondents it was their birth day, etc.

98.67% rural and 93.33% urban respondents said there were no taboos or regulations to be carried out by the participants in the agricultural activities. 1.33% rural and 6.67% urban respondents said that there were certain the taboos for the agricultural participants.

According to 76% rural respondents and 70% urban respondents they are not aware of any rituals for all these activities. While 30% urban and 24% rural respondents including the non-convert believers for success in agricultural and hunting pursuit certain rituals were performed by the thiempu in olden days. The responses of the respondents towards the rituals and beliefs concerning economic activities are given in Table V.10.

Table V.10
Ritual and beliefs concerning economic activities

Rituals and beliefs for economic activities	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Rituals were performed	36	24	9	30	45
No idea	114	76	21	70	135
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Believe in auspicious days	49	32.67	5	16.67	54
All days are same	101	67.33	25	83.33	126
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Ceremonies were observed	39	26	7	23.33	46
No ceremonies	111	74	23	76.67	134
Total	150	100	30	100	180

Since traditionally Kukis were dependent on agricultural economy and hunting, certain rituals were performed to safeguard their fields and their produce. In the Kuki society traditionally and presently also women play an important part in agricultural activities. Only the hard laborious work of cutting, slashing are generally done by men. And the rest of the procedures are carried out by women. So to invoke the field spirit/Goddess for a good harvest Chang-ai ritual was performed. Thiempu prayed for the hunter (hunting is generally a man's activities) before setting out for the hunt which was mainly to be protected and secondly to get good hunt. This ritual was performed thrice and those who were able to do so were believed to have reserved a place in heaven (Mithikhul). But, presently, along with the change in religion from indigenous to Christianity, there are also changes in their beliefs and rituals concerning economic activities. Majority of the respondents are no more practicing the rituals, no more consulting the thiempus, and no more feeling insecure for not following the traditional rituals.

V. 5. RITUALS CONCERNED WITH SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Social structure is the total pattern of social organization produced by a cultural group's social practices. The elements of social structure include patterns of kinship, descent, and affiliation, forms of the family, residence practices, marriage patterns, inheritance rules, and other institutions (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974:274). Along with the concept of culture, social structure is a crucial defining concept for sociology as a way of thinking about social life. Every social system has a structure, and it is this that accounts for much of the differences between systems and the patterns of human experience and behavior that constitute what we know as social life (Johnson 2000: 265).

It is commonly found that the most important social and political relationships recognized in a society between individuals or groups have a magico-religious aspect. This applies also to leading positions and offices. The rituals connected with birth, naming, puberty, marriage, and death commonly give expression to the social structure. Beliefs that certain modes of behavior are ordained by spiritual agencies, or that infringement of certain rules brings automatic punishment on the wrongdoers or misfortune on the whole group, are commonly held (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 191).

Saraswati (1984:98-104) has stated that ritual is the core component of all religions. The rules of rituals are transmitted either orally or through the written text. Saraswati also pointed out that through ritual actions flow the well being not only of the performer but also of the performing society. He also points out that ritual is by definition "an obligatory social behavior prescribed for occasions that have reference to belief system". The societal functions of rituals as provided by Saraswati indicate that ritual has a specific role to play. This role as Radcliffe Brown (1966) has said, to make the society cohere and to rejuvenate all the values and ideals society is comprised of. It involves a socializing aspect too. Life crisis rituals have an effect on society of rejuvenating its 'sentiments'. Van Gennep found (1966) that these ceremonies which he called rites de passage were to be found in all societies. He felt that the three types of major phases could be distinguished as: i) separation, ii) transition, iii) incorporation. These phases could be found in birth, marriage and death (ESO-15, 2004).

V. 5. a. Birth

When a child was born it was considered as a gift of God and ancestral spirit. The first born is considered to be the gift of God, second as the parent's gift and if a child had any special mark or black spot it was believed that it was the return of ancestral

spirits. Male child was preferred because of social reasons. Chapakab, which means who does not have a son, was used to taunt, this word was even used as an insult. Man may even remarry if the first wife was a Chapakab. If a woman does not or until she gives birth to a son, she was considered incomplete, unmarried or not a part of her husband's clan. Only after a son she was counted in the husband's clan. Those who do not have a son were called Ingap (family extinct). If the woman does not give birth to a male child she may even be sent back to her parents' home by compensating a mere sum of Rs.40/- and the man would be remarried to another woman. The girl's parents accepted their daughter before thinking that it was their daughter's fault for not bearing a male child, a descendent of the family. The husband's side may consult with the girl's parents before. But if she continues to be with her husband even without a male child, she will be in her husband's clan. Once she goes back to her parents' she loses the husband clan name. The elders will not take wives from a particular clan again if the women of that clan were not giving birth to a male child. The woman would use her maternal title until a male child was born to her. The woman may even be divorced by the husband. But girl child was also preferred if the family did not have a girl child.

The birth of a child was celebrated by killing fowls, pigs or mithuns according to the economic status of the family. The child's grandfather or grandmother or anyone from whom the child's name has taken should kill an animal and offer in the feasts. Naodapun, i.e. the birth feast, given to the elder women who helped in delivery of the child. If the family was rich or if the child was the first child of the family then out of happiness they even give feast to friends, relatives and villagers. Traditionally there were no special celebrations except giving the feasts to the elder women who helped in the delivery which could not be done by youngsters. This was given on the delivery day itself, but if one cannot afford, it can be done afterwards.

On the delivery day the zu prepared by the pregnant woman was uncorked and was taken by her and served to those attending her. After the delivery a cock/hen was killed and the soup as well as the meat was given to the new mother. Traditionally birth took place at home with the help of the midwives. No males were allowed in during delivery time. Chicken soup, lots of vaiju, good and soft food were also given. Chicken soups and zu were given just after birth to regain her strength. Sour things, mustard leaves, etc. were not given. To have free flow and abundant breast milk banana tree dishes were given. The chicken soup was to be made without water and the soup of the steam cooked chicken was given to the woman. The mother was subjugated to special treatment, rest or diet depending on who looks after the house. No special treatment or rest was there for other woman. At the most the woman may take rest for a week or a month, if the family does not have anyone to look after the house, and she may start doing the household chores after two or three days. If there was someone to look after the house the woman may take rest for some time. In olden days if a woman goes out to inform the birth of the child, invited elders to have zu, goes to work just after giving birth to a child she was known far and wide as a brave, healthy, strong and courageous woman. If the child was a male the woman can not cook for thirty three days and for sixty days if the child was a female.

When a female baby was born, the grandmother's house was purified with liquor and then they kill a pig. No ritual purification was there except physical purification for hygienic reasons. Nao-lha-lho i.e. the place, the mother was to be washed with hot water, on the seventh day she takes bath and the water used in bathing was thrown away around the house to drive away those spirits which can not be overcome by thiempu.

The infants can be first taken out of the house just after the umbilical cord falls down. Before taking out the child the hair was shaved off so as to ward off the bad

spirits. There were no rituals for taking out the child. But if the father takes the child out the child's forehead was painted with smoked shoots from the hearth. The child should not be carried on the back for the evil spirits will check what the mother was carrying. There were no rituals celebrated or performed when the infant was first taken out of the house.

If a woman died in labor every possible means to save the child was taken up. The child was fed with any relative's breast milk who could breastfeed. And the woman was treated with love and buried as any normal death. She was considered unfortunate who could not even see her child.

The ceremonies and rituals celebrated after the birth of a child were the ceremony of taking blessings from the maternal uncle and grandparents. After four or five days or after a week the parents take the child to the maternal grandparents or maternal uncle's house to take their blessings. The parents take one jar of rice beer called Zubel and Puondum i.e. cloth. The christening party goes with their Bechas and Tuchas. On their arrival they are stopped at the portico by the thiempu and performed purification rites by cutting some ginger into pieces. After this they were allowed to enter the house of the maternal uncle. The thiempu or the grandfather performs the blessing ritual of the child called Lha-Lhaw by presenting a cock which was taken by the child's parents.

In performing the Lha-Lhaw rites of purification with the cock, the priest tied one string called Sa-oh around the neck of the child. In the middle of the string, which was made of plaited cotton thread, are tied with some of the feathers of the cock. The child can put this sa'o as long as she/he wishes. The grandparents according to one's status even present a cow or dahpi (gong) or Khichong to the child. Some even give a cock or hen whatever one can afford. Then the thiempu prayed for the child and tied saleng i.e. seven threads with white hen's feathers. This was a way of blessing the child and warding off from evil spirits. They also pierced the child's ear which was called Naobilbu.

Just after birth of the child the father cuts the umbilical cord saying 'this is my son/daughter' and gives a name to the child either temporary or permanent. Once the sex of the child was determined the grandparents gave a name to the child. If the parents are not happy with the name it could be changed later.

Among the Kukis there is a system of naming the child in alternate generations. The last syllable of the grandparents' name was to be taken to form a new name for the child. If the first child was a son then the last syllable of the paternal grandfather's name would be taken to start the name of the child. For example, if the grandfather's name was Hemkhopao, then the child's name can be Paomelien, Paokhogen, etc. If the first child was a daughter then the last syllable of the grandmother's name would be used to make a name for the child. For example, if the grandmother's name was Nengboi, the child's name has to start with 'Boi' and the name may be Boichan or Boinu, etc.

If the second child was a son, the second son's name would be taken from the maternal grandfather's name in the above mentioned manner. If the second child was a daughter then the last syllable of the maternal grandmother's name would be taken. If a couple had a third child or more then the other children's names were to be taken from the names of parents' maternal uncles, paternal uncles, etc. If no relatives were left then they used to choose from any of their close friends who were of good character and nature. The mother was not prohibited to do or eat certain things after child birth. Except that the woman should drink a glass of zu.

In the present Kuki society the birth of a child is considered to be a gift of God. There is not much rigidity regarding the priority given for a male child. There were no celebrations or rituals except for giving a feast. They only pray to Jesus nowadays and relatives and friends are invited for a feast at home. Then after a month the child will be

taken to the church for blessings. Nowadays women are taken to hospitals for delivery. Midwives are no more called upon for deliveries. Generally the mother is not subjected to special treatment, rest, diet or purification after child birth. According to 30% urban and 66% rural respondents the child can be taken out anytime without any ritual accompaniment. According to 40% urban and 17.33% rural respondents they take out the child to the church for the first time when it is a month old. The child may be taken to the maternal grandparents' house but no rituals are performed for this occasion according to 30% urban and 16.67% rural respondents. They make a prayer thanking Jesus and asking for good health and long life for the child. The infant is named just after birth or even after a week or so. Woman who could not survive the deliveries are treated with love and given proper funeral. The Kukis name the new born child starting with the last syllable of their grandparents' name.

According to 90% urban and 72.67% rural respondents, the Kuki society being a patriarchal society male child was a necessity for the society to carry on the family lineage. Any woman who could not bear a male child was even sent back to her parents' home. In such cases the woman's parents also could not say anything since they thought it was their daughter's fault for not bearing a male child, a descent of the family. While 10% urban and 27.33% rural respondents said that there is not much rigidity regarding the priority given for a male child. Nowadays, there are families who even want girl child if they do not have any female child in the family. Another reason was that when they trace their genealogy family without a male child was not counted. The child's grandfather or grandmother or anyone from whom the child's name has taken should kill an animal and offer in the birth feasts. If this was not done the child will always be hungry. The meat of the chicken soup was also given to the mother to give her strength and for quick recovery.

The reasons the Kukis believed for naming the child just after birth are if the child was named first by the spirit which maybe hovering around then it may claim the child to be of the spirits and take away which may even result in an early death of the child. Or the spirits may even make the child according to the spirits' wishes. They also believed that since one is born as a human being one should have a name. Another reason is to save from the sun, water, trees, wind, etc. They said if the child was not named any demons may come and name the child. If it happens then they will claim the child, bad things may happen to the child, spoil his life or even take the child's life whenever they want.

A significant custom of the Kukis which is still followed by all the urban and rural respondents irrespective of their religion is the naming pattern of a child. Though they have all been converted and following Christianity since more than hundred years very few Christian names were used by them. As far as possible they prefer to name their children with the last syllable of their grandparents' names. This pattern is popular for it helps to trace their genealogy easily. The responses of the Kukis regarding the beliefs concerning to child birth are given in Table V.11.

Preference for a male child is still there in the Kuki society for the Kuki have a system of patrilineal descent. Besides this, a woman who could not bear a male child was not counted in the husband's clan. And in olden days such women could easily be divorced by the husband with a compensation of a mithun or a pig. The importance of a male child can also be clearly seen when a man who has paid all the bride-price during marriage, on the wife's death and the death of her sons, he has to pay further sum called Longman (payment made towards her bones) to her nearest male relative (Das 1985: 48).

Table V.11
Beliefs and celebration after the birth of a child

Beliefs regarding child birth	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Preference of male child	109	72.67	27	90	136
No preference of male child	41	27.33	3	10	44
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Knowledge about traditional celebrations	112	74.67	16	53.33	128
Only pray to Jesus	38	25.33	14	46.67	52
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Child can be taken out anytime	99	66	9	30	108
After a week/2 days	25	16.67	9	30	34
After a month taken to the church	26	17.33	12	40	38
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Celebrate after the birth of a child	38	25.33	8	26.67	46
No celebration after the child's birth	112	74.67	22	73.33	134
Total	150	100	30	100	180

V. 5. b. Puberty

Puberty refers to the process of physical changes by which a child's body becomes an adult body capable of reproduction. Growth accelerates in the first half of puberty, reaches completion by the end. Body difference between boys and girls before puberty are almost entirely restricted to the genitalia, major difference of size, shape, composition and function develop in many body structures and systems. In a strict sense, the term puberty refers to the bodily changes of sexual maturation rather than the psychosocial and cultural aspects of adolescents' development¹¹.

In the traditional Kuki society there were no ceremonies performed when a boy or girl entered puberty or adulthood. The boy or the girl did not receive any restriction or treatment when they entered puberty. There were also no signs which marked their being a teenager. Except for the boys, who used to keep their hair on the back of their

skulls after shaving off their heads. And these hairs they used to tie at the back high on their head. During this stage they were not allowed to cut the hair.

In the present Kuki society also there are no rituals or ceremonies performed to mark the adulthood or puberty of a boy or a girl. Even the custom of growing hair by the boys at the back of their heads is no more in practice.

V. 5.c. Incest

Incest is sexual intercourse between individuals related in certain prohibited degrees of kinship. In every society there are rules prohibiting incestuous unions, both as to sexual intercourse and recognized marriage. The regulation of incest is usually based on the belief in supernatural disapproval (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951:113 & 191).

Incest is sexual activity between close family members. Incest is taboo, and forbidden in the majority of current and historical cultures. It was condemned and usually viewed as gross by almost all cultures today. However, the precise meaning of the word varies widely, because different cultures have differing notions of 'sexual activity' and 'close family members'. Some cultures considered only those related by birth, while others include those related by adoption or marriage. Some prohibit sexual relations between people who grew up in the same household, while others prohibit sexual relations between people who grew up in related households.

Incest can occur between same sexes as well as opposite sex relatives. It can also occur between related children as well as between parents and their children. In addition, there have been cases of incest between adult relatives.

Incest between close blood relations is a crime in most western nations, as well as in those nations that were colonized by the west, although again the extent of the definitions of 'close' varies. There are wide differences between nations as to how serious

the crime of incest is. In some countries such as Australia, incest is a serious indictable offence, while in others it is a minor crime with much less serious consequences¹².

Incest was believed to be bad, against God, considered as a shameful sin, an immoral act. It was prohibited and was a taboo in the society. They believed that their future generation would not prosper; the children born of this relation would not be normal mentally or physically and was also considered to be very inauspicious. It was considered as a careless life. The children usually would be deformed. It was considered to be the worst act any human could commit, impure, bad, black sheep in the family, etc. Incest was a social prohibition even to think or talk about.

There were no fixed rules and regulations or written code of conduct for incest. Traditionally it was avoided (Ajik). It was condemned but no harsh penalty was there. At the most the individual involved may be banished from the village, excommunicated by the family, relatives or compensate a pig to the village. Only elders counseled them as it was an understood taboo. First they tried to separate by every possible means. If it was not successful they were even killed. The accused were also made to pay a fine of one mithun.

The children born out of incestuous relation were teased, called bastards, not given any clan name. The parents request the eldest male of the clan to take the child into their clan and the Sah'O was performed. Such children were looked down in the village. Khuplit as they were called brought bad name to the village. They were also known as Bolam (Bo-semen; lam-tease). They were even given to the midwives to dispose off.

Incest is considered to be an immoral act even in the present Kuki society. Incest is still prohibited for they believe that the child born to them would be deformed. Now it has also been scientifically proved. Nowadays the children of such union are no

more teased or called bad names though it is always in the mind of the people about the child's origin. According to the 16.67% urban and 77.78% rural respondents said that children born out of incestuous union were treated normally as the children are innocent. But the remaining 5.56% rural respondents said that such children are still looked down and not given respect.

The disapproval of incest in the society was due to the fear of God according to 13.33% urban and 25.33% rural respondents. While 33.33% urban and 27.33% rural respondents believed that it was due to the fear of society. Another 53.33% urban and 44.67% rural respondents said the disapproval of incest was mainly due to the fear of society and God. And 2.67% respondents believed that it was because of biological reasons.

V. 5. d. Bestiality

Bestiality refers to bestial sign i.e. astrological signs that represent animals. Bestial instinct means the instinct of animals¹³. Bestiality was known and believed to be there in traditional Kuki society but mainly referred to folk stories. Bestiality was known as lho in Thadou. They were believed to be animals. Once people came to know that so and so person is a bestial the individual was not married by anyone.

They narrated a story of bestiality in which the Lhomi (Lho=bestial; mi=man) married an ordinary woman. When they went to the field they saw a deer. Then after some time the man turned into a tiger and again into a deer. Seeing this, the woman got scared. She made a plan and said she was not feeling well and so wanted to go back home. When the man was winding up the things the wife sharpened a bamboo stick like a spear. On their way she planted it facing upward the pointed bamboo and covered it with her cloth. The husband fell on the stick and died. Another story is of Galngam, a Hmar, who was famous for being lazy, met the man who can be a tiger or a human being at his wish. This man gave Galngam the um.

Bestiality is not believed in the present Kuki society. Except the 2% rural respondents, all the urban and the remaining 98% rural respondents said bestiality was not

known in their society. They do not have any idea whether it was magic or not. They have heard about bestiality only in folk stories.

V. 5. e. Marriage

Marriage is a socially supported union involving two or more individuals in what is regarded as a stable, enduring arrangement based at least in part on a sexual bond of some kind. Depending on the society, marriage may require religious or civil sanction (or both), although some couples may come to be considered married simply by living together for a prescribed period. Most important, it is the basis for the institution of the family (Johnson 2000: 165). Because marriage is culturally defined by each society, the functions it serves, the roles it spells out for the husbands and wives, and the number of spouses one can have are among the many facets that can differ from culture to culture. However, a key social function of marriage in almost all societies is to legitimate parenthood, not sexuality. In primitive societies marriage was under the control of kin; in modern societies it is generally under the control of the state (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974: 166).

In the traditional Kuki society marriage could be done in any month of the year except in the month of February. The months from November to March (during winter season) were considered good and propitious and generally preferred for marriage in their society. Marriage between members of a local group was permitted in their society. In the Kuki society there are two types of marriages which were commonly followed i.e. arranged and eloped marriages. Arranged marriages were more common than marriage by elopement.

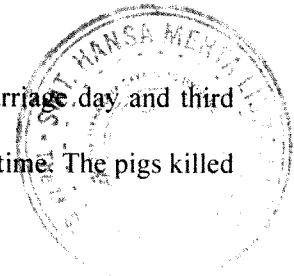
Even in the present society, the most common and usually practiced forms of marriages are arranged and elopement.

i. Arranged Marriage

‘Chongmou hailam dom mai kipui’, means the rightful marriage was the usual practice in the Kuki traditional society. In the arranged marriage Neilah or the rightful marriage, a man married his mother’s brother’s daughter. There was a belief that since the girl was like her daughter the boy’s mother would be able to take good care of the girl. If the boy liked another girl then the boy’s family had to pay a fine of one mithun to the maternal uncle’s family for not marrying her and vice-versa. In any case the groom’s parents along with their tucha and becha would take a jar of zu to the girl’s house and ask for her hand. The girl’s parents would give another date to decide the matter over.

In the second visit the boy’s party insists on asking the girl’s hand as a proof to show that they really liked the girl. If the girl’s parents accepted the proposal they served the zu and then decided a day which would mark the engagement of the boy and the girl. If the girl’s parents did not accept the proposal on the second day they just gave back the jar of zu which was brought by the boy’s party without saying a word. This was the last and final indication of denying their proposal after which the boy’s party cannot initiate the matter again. If the proposal was accepted then both the parties meet for third time. On the third visit a pig was killed and on that day they decide the day of marriage and the amount of bride price to be given. After the date of marriage was fixed, at the most any party could postpone the marriage upto three years. Once it was fixed the boy or the girl has to keep their words. If either side could not keep their words, say for example, either of the boy or the girl eloped with another girl or boy, their respective families have to compensate a cow or mithun or a buffalo to the other party. This compensation could not be given in terms of money. And if the neipa (uncle’s son) does not want to marry the neinu (aunt’s daughter), then the neipa had to pay a penalty called Neichanman of mithun or in terms of cash to the neinu’s family. Pig had to be killed three times which was a must

by the girl's parents. One on the engagement day, second on the marriage day and third one has to be killed after marriage when she comes home for the first time. The pigs killed on these occasions are called Kaptansa.



If within the fixed date of marriage no untoward incident occurs then marriage was performed at the bridegroom's place. On the fixed day the bridegroom and the party comes to the girl's village to take the girl. On this day the youth of the girl's village will challenge the youth of the boy's village for wrestling. This would be a mock wrestling in which the bridegroom's party purposely sent persons who were not trained in wrestling. If the bridegroom's party falls it is considered good. Another contest was for how long a man can stand holding up the gong until the echo dies off.

A headless pig of 4/5 wai (fist length) was cut lengthwise by the bride's father, its entrails properly cleaned and half the meat was eaten by both the parties and half was kept aside to be given to the girl. This was called Sa-hab. The thiempu puts hair oil (pig's fat/any animal's fat) in an um which was called hailam um and a comb. These were given to bless her with lots of children and live happily. A sam was also given in which the meat or sa-hab was put and carried by the tucha, a small basket which was tied at the waist for keeping paddy seeds, a small spade was also given to the bride. This implies that she should work hard and live happily. The meat, covered with a cloth, was to be taken by the tucha. The girl then crossed the door with her left foot. The phanek (women's wrap around worn around the waist up to the ankle) was worn in opposite direction i.e. tucked in at the left hand side and it was tied with a bamboo strap serving the purpose of a pin by the thiempu. This signified that she was dead and no more belonged to the maternal family.

For the Sitlhou clan, though similar with others, they have a procedure, strictly followed traditionally. Parents arranged the marriage, the girl which the parents

look for their son and married accordingly was called Chongmou (the girl which is pure virgin) or in other words pure daughter-in-law. Those who marry after eloping were not given the name. Tucha-becha have to make all arrangements for the family. Becha would be the spokesperson from the bridegroom's side. They play a greater role in both bad and good times. They took a jar of zu when they go for initiating a proposal. The girl's parents and their tucha-becha will keep the jar. If they accept the proposal the jar was not given back when the bridegroom's party comes for the second time. On the third visit they will kill a pig or mihtun to mark the agreement and fixed a day for marriage and when the mangkat (bride-price) should be given. If after the agreement either party fails to keep their words, the other can claim their rights. The other (the guilty) party has to repay the Sumtansa expenditure.

The boy's party took the girl to their place and the marriage was conducted by the thiempu. A thiempu was called upon to pray for the couple's happy long life, for their prosperity, good children, etc. The thiempu then killed a cock and sees what it tells about the future of the couple. According to the thiempu if the cock's position was not favorable, then it was repeatedly checked and the cock which showed good results would be killed and cooked and had by the bride and the bridegroom and the thiempu. Next day they called their group from the sawm (youth dormitory) and have feasts with a big jar of zu.

If a woman after marriage comes back to her natal home, elders/people asked whether she has brought the hailam um or not. If she has brought it then she meant that she would go back to the husband's family again, and if she has not brought it meant she won't go back to her husband again.

ii. Elopement (Saibawkpua)

In case of elopement, the customary procedures followed in case of arranged marriage were not taken care of. When a boy and a girl eloped the boy's party come to the girl's house the very next day and accepts the guilt in place of their son. If the girl's parents do not have any problem then not much problem was created for the bridegroom's parents. But if the girl's parents were angry then they may ask for anything, at anytime. They may even ask to bring more than the actual bride-price to be given to a girl of that clan and that too at that moment or within a very limited period. The girl married after elopement did not wear the phanek in opposite direction while leaving her natal home. The bride-price was usually higher in case of elopement as a form of punishment. Only when the parents negotiated, the girl's family celebrate sending off ceremony thereafter the boy's parents could celebrate the wedding officially.

In olden days they got married with a cock and officiated by a thiempu. The girl was brought from her home a day before marriage to the bridegroom's house and got married the next day. There were no more celebrations after the marriage and the send off ceremony was performed by the girl's family just before the marriage.

Remarriages were allowed in the Kuki society. Both the sex could remarry and how it was considered depended on the circumstances and the concerned individuals. If either partner was dead then it was considered natural and normal. In such cases if the individual does not think of remarriage the parents of both sides and the relatives initiate and even arrange for it. But if both the partners were alive and divorced then it was not considered natural and usually not remarried.

When a woman comes back after the death of her husband, she cannot remarry and was known as Nungkih and was also not allowed in her sawm group. If she was to be remarried again one mithun would be less from her bride price as compared to

the actual bride-price of the girls of her clan or from what she got in her first marriage for she now comes under *Lamlhngho lha* (once fallen). The husband can remarry after a year of the wife's death. But women cannot marry and if married she had to pay compensation which was known as *Naotuchanman*.

Marriage can be done in any month of the year except in the month of February. For marriage there are no propitious seasons. It can be performed anytime throughout the year except during the rainy seasons. Marriage with the local groups was also allowed and practiced since ancient days. Bride-price was fixed for every clan and it has to be given in parts. But in case of marriage by elopement the whole bride-price has to be given at the time of marriage and more than the actual bride-price of the girl. But nowadays, even in cases of elopement, some parents do not demand for more bride-price as their daughter would be living and starting a new life happily. Instead of *zu*, tea is served and the *thiempu*'s position has been replaced by the pastor and marriages are performed at the church. Nowadays, the girl no more stays at the bridegroom's house before the marriage day. The arrangement has been made at the church's pastor's or the church Secretary's house for the day before marriage and next day the girl's party goes to the marriage venue. After this there were no more celebrations. According to 23.33% urban and 25.33% rural respondents nowadays they take oath and accept each other as husband and wife in the presence of the pastor in the church. They do not have any further ceremony after the marriage. The send off ceremony sponsored by the girl's parents a day before marriage day was the only celebration for marriage among the Kukis. In the present Kuki society remarriages are allowed. Both the sex can remarry and how it was considered totally depended on the circumstances and the concerned individuals. If either partner was dead then it was considered natural and normal.

According to 63.33% urban and 31.33% rural respondents the reason for not conducting marriages during February in the Kuki community was that it was considered as an incomplete month and bad for the newly wed couple to start a new life. 16.67% rural respondents considered and preferred winter season than rainy season. The reasons for opting winter months of the year as given by the different groups of the Kuki tribes was that during these months most of the villagers were free from agricultural work, things were available easily after harvesting, etc. They don't prefer rainy season for marriages simply because, during this season pigs roam around dirtying and leave their foot marks everywhere. So just to avoid the bride from slipping down, marriage was not done during this season. But 36.67% urban and 52% rural respondents said that except rainy season all the seasons are propitious for marriage. The reason for intentionally loosing in the wrestling competition by the bridegroom's party was because of the belief that if the bridegroom's party loses to the bride's village youth, then the bride would be very obedient and good; if her village youth loses then she would be disobedient and the family will not be at peace.

Marriage between members of a local group is permitted in their society. According to 53.33% urban and 62% rural respondents marriage with other local groups was also allowed and practiced since ancient days. Among the Thadous they usually marry with Paite, Gangte, Vaiphei, Kom, Zou because they are all Kuki. Nowadays marriages are performed even with the Meities, Nepalese and even with Nagas. But marriages were not arranged with other groups. Only if eloped they can marry with another group but the actual marriage was not performed. The reasons for allowing marriage with the local groups were for cooperation, co-existence and respect. They also practiced it because they considered each other of the same group and of the same progenitor. While 46.67% urban and 38% rural respondents said that, marriage with other communities like the Meities and

the Nepalese has been started only recently. Another reason for this was because people from different groups have started settling in the same or nearby villages. The societal norms have become more flexible. Before in a village or in a locality only one group of tribe used to stay, love marriages are now increasing, opting for bigger clan in other villages also resulted to inter and intra group marriages. They also added that nowadays people are more liberalized. Among the three hundred respondents one Nepali respondent's sister got married to a Kom man, a Christian non-Manipuri man got married to a Hmar woman, a Meitie got married to a Thadou woman, a Paite respondent's daughter got married to a Naga, a Thadou respondent's daughter got married to a Meitie.

The Koms have marriage alliance with the Thadous, Vaipheis, and also with other Kuki sub-groups too. Among the Paite's marriage alliance can be arranged with the Gangtes, Vaipheis, Zous, Koms, and Thadous, etc. Among the Hmars marriage is commonly done with the Gangte, Paite and Zou, etc. The Gangtes mostly marry with the Vaiphei, Thadou, Zou, Hmar, Paite, etc. The Vaipheis mostly have marriage alliance with the Thadou, Zou, Gangte, Paite, etc and even with the Meities too. The Raltes and the Simtes permit marriage with any local group because they belong to the same group. In addition to the above, marriages with the Meities and Nepalese are also there.

Arranged marriages were common and more in practice than love marriages in the Kuki society. But nowadays the cases of elopement have been increasing. The punishment by imposing the bride-price at a time in case of elopement has stopped as the parents seem to have realized that after the marriage their daughter only would be in that house. So they think why they should give burden to their daughter's family. The Table V. 12 shows the responses regarding the ritual beliefs in marriage.

Marriages were both exogamous and endogamous. A young man was supposed to marry the daughter of his maternal uncle. Marrying mother's brother's

daughter (neinu) is supposed to be the most preferred union among the Kukis. The practice is more or less an obligation on both sides (Das 1985:47). The reason which Das gave for the prevalence of mother's brother's daughter marriage was because it considerably reduces the chance of conflict. Conflicts arise from failure to abide by obligations involved in affinal kinship. Such obligations are more likely to be observed by consanguineal kin who are also related through affinal kinship ties. Evidently, an asymmetrical exchange system, which does not favor direct exchange relationship, is a feature common to all the tribes of Manipur (ibid: 53).

Though the cross-cousin marriage was an obligatory regulation, majority of the respondents said that was the practice in their society. But, if the boy or the girl does not want to go for such kind of marriage then all they had to do was to compensate a mithun to the neinu for not wanting him/her. The percentage of respondents who said that intra-group marriages are recent trends indicates that cross-cousin marriages are in the decline. It clearly means that people are opting for partners from other clans or groups. The reason for this probably must be the interaction among the different communities and groups due to education, service sector, etc. According to Das, the reason may be clear emphasis on personal attachment with almost complete disregard for the traditional type of relationship. There is no denying the fact that by raising their economic and educational levels the younger generation is moving away from their age-old pattern of life. Not much importance is also given by the elders of the village. Irregular marriages signify that choice now shapes individual behavior and conditions and its activities (1985: 54).

Table V.12
System of Marriage

Ritual Beleifs in Marriage	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Except the month of February	47		19		66
During winter season (Nov.-March)	25		0		25
Any month of the year	78		11		89
Total	150		30		180
Knew the customary procedures	87		18		105
Responded only the Christian way of marriage	63		12		75
Total	150		30		180
Inter-group marriages were practiced	93		16		109
Intra-group marriages are due to recent trends	57		14		71
Total	150		30		180

V. 5. f. Bride Price

Bride-price is also sometimes spoken of as bride-wealth. It is more common than dowry in many societies, particularly in Africa and among tribals of India. Defining the practice Eriksen writes (1955), "In the bride-price the groom's kin is obliged to transfer resources to the bride's kin in return for her rights to her labor and reproductive powers. The payment of bride-price establishes the rights of the man over the woman and her children. If the bride-price is not paid, the marriage may be void. And disagreement over bride-price payments is traditionally a common cause of feuds among many peoples".

Bride-price or bride wealth are the terms used for the goods, gifts or payments transferred by the bridegroom or his family to the bride or her family on the occasion of marriage. The payment may consist of (a) livestock; (b) objects of daily use, e.g., hoes, fish spears, pots, weapons, especially spears, etc.; (c) valuables and objects of ceremonial use; (d) recognized currency; (e) gifts of food or service; service may take the

form of the periodic supply of food and household necessities, or in its more complete forms, the suitor may live in and work for the benefit of the bride's household (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 116).

The Kukis have long standing practice of taking mangkat or bride-price since time immemorial and each sub-group of the tribe has got a fixed bride-price. The custom of bride-price originated with their culture and has been practicing since their forefather's time. The normal bride-price of the Kukis ranged from seven mithuns to ten mithuns along with dhapi (gongs), beads necklace, clothes, etc. Usually 90% of the bride-price was to be cleared when the girl was sent off. The rest was claimed after the death of the girl which was called Long-man (meaning the price of the dead).

Traditionally, a pair of mithun was given. Eight to ten mithuns were to be given which may be around Rs.8000/-. Each animal which could crush grass has to lead the bride-price and it was compulsory. Three dahpi (gong) of different sizes; two necklaces-one Khichong i.e. only of beads and another one has only two beads; one pondum (a black cloth); a ponthe (a white chaddar-traditional quilt type Photo V.4); lutom (turban) for the father, laisu (women dress) for the mother; one small basket to keep paddy seedlings in time of plantation; one sam (basket made of bamboo which was hung from the head); one Kawngvar (small spade used for ploughing) (Photo V. 5); two brass bracelets (misi-heavy and soft iron) or bangles for arm and wrist were all included in gifts given to the girl's family. The girl will also be given puonpi/puonchil (blankets), Hreipui (axe), Drawrawn; Kawngvar (small spade), wooden trunk or cane basket; aluminum pot; spinning wheel and any gift for the bridegroom's sisters like clothes or utensils, etc. by her parents when she leaves to her husband's house.

For giving bride price there was no fixed time. Even if one could afford to give the whole bride price it was neither accepted nor given. The leading bride-price i.e. a



Photo V.4. Ponthe (Traditional Quilt)



Photo V.5. Kawngvar (A small spade used in jhum cultivation especially by women)

mithun or a pair of cow has to be given on or before the decided day of marriage. The rest could be given after the woman's death also. Only few important things mentioned before were given for the sake of giving before the marriage. The rest were given whenever the other party could afford or in certain occasions. If one was very rich and can afford to give the whole bride-price in a day before the actual fixed day the girl's parents will not accept the bride-price. If one gives more than the actual bride-price also it will not be accepted. And if the bride-price reaches the girl's house after a day then it will have to be doubled. So whatever was asked by the girl's parents have to be given on the fixed day itself. If the boy's side requested or asked to reduce some of the bride-price they may reduce on mutual understanding otherwise there were no means for reducing the bride-price. If the mother was of different clan say a Haokip and had two or three daughters one of the daughters had to take the mother's clan bride price.

First a pair of mithun or cow/buffaloes led the bride price along with two or three gongs, two necklaces, sam, etc. The first mithun was to be given while the other remaining can be given in cash later. The sam was used to carry half of the pig which was cut lengthwise by the girl's father. The youngest brother of the bride would be given Rs.5/-. This was called Neojosumsan. Thaman of Rs.2/- was also given at the time of engagement for the sweat of the parents which they have spared in bringing up the girl and for the four legged animals. The iron implements and the small basket was included so that the woman would be hard working, prosperity be there for the couple and also for protection. It was called Thiradam.

If the girl's parents killed a pig on the day of engagement they have take Rs.1500/- and if they were not able to kill a pig then they return Rs.500/- to the boy's party. If at all the pig was killed then the intestines were all washed and half of the animal

which was cut lengthwise was given without the head to the girl when she was sent off. The other half was to be eaten by both the parties at the bride's place.

The clan's or the family or any person whom the father of the girl has close relation or his best friend i.e. the bechas act as second father. So a cow was also to be given to the becha by the girl's father from the bride-price he got. This signifies that the becha was also like a father to her. And in return the becha would look after the girl to make her happy and stand by her through thick and thin. This was called Mankang. So the bride-price cannot be enjoyed only by the father himself. This mankang was given to strengthen the bond with the second father. Actually, the girl's party goes to the boy's house for taking the bride price. Food was served, to the girl's party who has come to collect the bride-price, starting from the head/eldest male member of the girl's clan. The Palia (mediator) puts the winnowing fan in the middle and the money, which would be in the denominations of coins only, was placed on it. Different coins would be kept together separately. Then the mediator would request the girl's clan members to accept the money and then wrapped it for them. While having zu the palia decides about the marriage programme.

A month later after the marriage, when the bride comes to her natal home for the first time a pig would be killed and half of it would be given to her to be taken to her in-laws. If she can afford she may bring some of the mangkat which were left, though it was not a compulsion. And if she has not brought anything no one would discuss about it. When the woman dies her children would have to pay the mangkat to the maternal grandparents. When she is alive the mangkat should not be given totally because of the belief that if they were paid the life of the woman would be shortened. So when she gives birth or when she goes to her natal home some of it was given.

So the rest of the bride price was claimed only after the death of the girl which was called Long-man (price of the dead). When a niece died the maternal uncle has to kill a pig, head and intestines were taken out and hung upside down. If grandparents were not there, uncle has to do and if the uncle was also not there then his sons had to do it. It is still in practice. If a grandson i.e. a daughter's son die after marriage, the maternal uncle of the dead person will get a cow. If the grandson was unmarried then the cow would not be given to the uncle. In the above case the maternal uncle had to kill a pig or hen and ask for the cow. If a daughter's son marries his maternal uncle's daughter then one mithun or cow would be deducted from the bride price of the particular clan.

The custom of bride-price has been continuing since ancient times. Each group of Kuki tribes has a fixed item and amount of bride-price and the timing for giving it. A pair of cow or buffaloes or an ox has to lead the bride-price. But no one could give the bride-price at a time. It is given part by part. This was just to keep the link with the coming generations or maybe a human being's price can not be completed just like that. It could be left for two-three generations also. After the coming of Christianity tea has taken the place of zu and is served in every occasion. Nowadays modern technical household accessories are also presented to the girl. The bechas also get the mankang of the bride-price. It can not be discarded even after following Christianity because even in the Bible it has been said that there is a price for virgin and those who comes back and remarry again. Nowadays, the Young Mizo Association has fixed the amount of Rs.450/- each for a mithun. Among the Vaiphei they have fixed that every clan should give the amount equal to the cost of 10 mithuns.

Traditionally though mithuns were given as a main item of bride-price among the Kukis, now cow, buffaloes or oxen have taken up the place of mithun. Mithuns are no more given in bride-price for it is very expensive and also not available easily.

The Kukis have a belief regarding the origin of the bride-price. According to their belief a Hansing chief had a very beautiful daughter. She was known far and wide for her beauty. One day she went to the field and never returned home. Search teams were sent to all directions by the chief. They searched for her in the fields, jungle, high and low but could not be found anywhere. The chief kept on worrying and remembering his daughter. But one day, in the chief's dream a king came and asked the chief not to worry anymore about his lost daughter. Then he narrated how he took the chief's daughter along with him as he liked her very much and wanted her to be his daughter-in-law. So to pay back for taking his daughter the king told the chief to get up in the morning and he will find a bunch hanging on the tree. This bunch will contain a pig's head, a goat's head, an um (dried gourd), white cock's feather at the chief's courtyard. The king then instructed the father to worship it for wealth, health and prosperity. When the chief woke up and found the bunch, he started worshipping the bunch as told by the king. After that prosperity never left the chief. Everyone came to know about it and started to make as the bunch and worship it. It was the Indoi which the king gave to the chief and so they started worshipping the Indoi. From this incident they have started giving something to the wife giver by the wife taker which came to be known as the bride-price.

According to 66.67% urban and 56.67% rural respondents including the non-converts bride-price should continue to be there in their society. The reasons they gave are since the boy's side have taken their daughter/sister it is a kind of token of love and respect to her parents. This also helps to maintain a good relationship. If it was not there peace and love would not be there. Customs and traditional values should be maintained. It helps to strengthen the relationship of the two families indirectly. They are also humans so their value should be evaluated. They also have a belief that if it was not done some one from the family may even die. Bride-price should be there even for namesake. Christians or non-Christians, it should be there. It was a part of identity of their culture. If it was not there, their tradition would have vanished. There was no hard and fast rule that the actual bride-price has to be given at a time. Part of it could be given even after her death. This gives a status to the woman. At the time of her marriage only the main things and a pair of mithun leads the bride-price. Others were given when the woman gives birth and at her death. Until she dies the bride-price was not completely given. Its continuation would also help in continuing their tradition and gives at least a vague knowledge about their customs and traditions to the younger and the coming generation. It

also shows the value of a clan. Accepting bride-price does not mean that one will get rich by it but tradition, custom should be there. The older generation felt bad at the negligence of the present generation towards bride-price. The Christian believers also felt that they should keep up and continue good things from their culture but if one feels that the other community's culture is good one can learn and acculturate it too. If such traditional customs are not being upgraded the future generation won't know their clan and respect for the girl's parents. And now it has been modified a lot so that even the poor parents can afford according to the consent and cooperation of the other party. Until the woman dies the bride-price was not completely given. The following Table V.13 shows the opinion of the respondents towards the bride-price.

Table V.13
Respondents' opinion of bride-price

Opinion of bride-price	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Bride-price should continue	85	56.67	20	66.67	105
It should be stopped	65	43.33	10	33.33	75
Total	150	100	30	100	180

The respondents who are believers of Christianity and Judaism felt that bride-price custom should be discontinued and abolished from their society totally. The reasons they gave were those who have many sons were facing problems since different clans/groups have fixed bride-price. It would be like imposing on you to give that fixed bride-price. They said that the customs must have started with some meaning but now they feel it is like taking their whole wealth. God created humans without any cost. God must not have started the system of bride-price. We humans have only started it. It has become a competition among relatives and a fashion of showing how much they can afford. It is like giving a price for the woman. And if the price could not be completely given during

one's lifetime it becomes a problem for the family. It is also considered as an unnecessary expenditure and for those who can not afford it is a burden for them in the name of custom as they also want to come up to the social expectation. Generation has changed, so we should also change with the changing time. No true meaning is considered to be attached with the custom of bride-price. So it would be better to abolish such custom before it becomes a vice in the society. And it was also against the norms of Christianity. There can not be any price for love. So such practice should be stopped which is increasing everyday and becoming a competition in the society.

In the name of custom and tradition the practice of bride-price is preferred by 70% rural and urban respondents. Though Christianity does not preach to take price for a person, this custom is still in practice and also preferred to be continued. The only reason for this could be a form of compensation or financial gain to the bride's family. This could be assumed keeping in mind the important part played by a Kuki woman in the contribution of the family's income by taking care of the animal husbandry or by weaving traditional clothes.

V. 5. g. Divorce

According to the Encyclopedia of Sociology (1974: 83) divorce is the legal dissolution of a legally valid marriage. Although societies generally try to protect the family, most also have some arrangement for divorce. The procedure may be very simple- as in the ancient Middle East or in Athens, where a husband could divorce a wife simply by giving notice that he was doing so. On the other hand, divorce in modern society may be a costly legal process. Divorce is the socially recognized dissolution of a marriage. Like marriage, it is governed by a variety of cultural rules that govern how difficult it is to accomplish and the social and personal consequences it produces (Johnson 2000: 165).

The custom of divorce was there in the traditional Kuki society. It was very hard to get a divorce and rarely got one, that too only if the matter was genuine. In the Kuki society one could get divorce only on the ground of infidelity, barrenness, etc.

If a man wanted divorce from his wife without any reason the bride-price will not be returned. One buffalo has to be given by the man to the woman and her parents and a pig for the village. This pig was killed as purification of the village in the chief's house and was had only by the elders of the village. If the girl's parents have not killed a pig at the time of marriage the bride-price have to be refunded to the husband irrespective of him leaving the wife.

If the woman initiated the divorce, she had to return the bride-price. Even if the wife ran away to her parents the husband has to come to take her back at least once. Even after that if she does not come back then the man will get the bride-price back. If he did not call her back even once then he will not get the bride-price back. If the man left then he was not given back the bride-price and also has to give a mithun or cow as the price for not wanting the woman.

If the woman was infertile and they still wanted to be together but have to divorce due to family problems then the husband has to take the wife to her parents with a mithun or cow or buffalo. No woman after divorce can have the custody of the child. The child will be with the father. If the woman was lactating during the period of divorce the man has to pay one more cow for it and for the shame she has to face in the society. Afterwards the child has to be returned to its father. Up to three years of age a child will be with the mother. After that the father will give one mithun to the mother and take back the child. If the father does not want the child back then the mother gets the custody of the child.

Single women and widows were treated normally, respected, helped, and exempted from taxes and contributions to be made by the villagers in the Kuki society. The chiefs considered them in certain cases. They were extended help by the sawm members in their agricultural works, were invited in every feast. Traditionally also, after divorce the divorcees were allowed to remarry in their society.

Custom of divorce is still prevalent in the present Kuki society. But getting a divorce is still a difficult task. The custom of giving a cow or a mithun for leaving the woman is still in practice. Nowadays respect for single women mainly depends on their character. If they are of good character then the church extends its help to them and provides certain provisions. Remarriages of the widow and divorcees were still allowed in the present Kuki society. But no holy marriage was performed. And since it was not allowed in Christianity they do not prefer and has stopped practicing it. If either partner was dead, then only Holy marriage could be performed for the remarriage.

All the respondents said that the custom of divorce is there in their society. But getting a divorce is difficult and one could rarely get one. An old aged man quoted a saying in their society which goes as, "Marrying a woman is easy, but divorcing a woman is not that easy". 33.33% urban and 4.67% rural respondents said that divorce is still practiced. But 66.67% urban and 95.33% rural respondents said that since divorce was not allowed in Christianity they do not prefer and has stopped practicing it.

In the traditional society divorce was given mainly on ground of barrenness, infidelity, unable to bear a male child which forms an important aspect of the society for inheriting the property and to carry forward the lineage. At present the rate of divorce has been very low and none of the respondents were divorcee or had any case of divorce in the family, even if the women could give birth to any child.

V. 5. h. Conception

In the traditional Kuki society there were no myths or rituals associated with conceiving. They also did not have any belief regarding conceiving of a male or female baby or specific time and day for conceiving it. In rare cases when a woman gets older and could not conceive, the thiempu used to perform some rituals. Other than this there were no other rituals or myths.

In the present Kuki society also there are no beliefs or myths regarding conceiving, conceiving of a male or female child, or specific time for conceiving a baby. But they believed that no one can conceive without the will of God.

V. 5. i. Contraception

The use of contraception was not popular among the traditional Kuki society. Even when contraception was introduced the people of that time considered it to be anti-social for they believed that the child was a gift of God. Without the will of God no one can conceive. A woman who could not bear a child was looked down upon in their traditional society. But the present scenario is not like before anymore and one can observe an emerging new society. Contraception is used and seems to be quite popular among the educated population. One of the reasons for using contraception was due to the low income of the family. The respondents opined that the usage of contraception should be encouraged. According to 58% rural and 46.67% urban respondents the use of contraceptives was for the welfare of the family too. Most of the respondents accepted the use of it. Another motive according to the respondents was to help in minimizing the increasing population. It is socially accepted and approved but added that it mainly depends on the individual and the family too. While 42% rural and 53.33% urban respondents who are mostly from the older age group including the non-convert still consider the use of contraception to be anti social.

V. 5. j. Abortion

Abortion is the removal or expulsion of fetus from the uterus, resulting in its death. This can occur spontaneously as miscarriage, or be artificially induced through chemical, surgical or other means. Commonly, 'abortion' refers to an induced abortion procedure at any point in the pregnancy; medically, it is defined as a miscarriage or induced termination before twenty weeks gestation, which is considered nonviable. There have been various methods of inducing abortion throughout history. The moral and legal aspects of abortion are the subject of intense debate in many parts of the world. In common parlance, the term 'abortion' is synonymous with induced abortion of a human fetus. However, in medical texts the word 'abortion' can also refer to spontaneous abortion (miscarriage)¹⁴.

Abortion was practiced in Kuki society though very rarely in olden days. If the child was an illegitimate one then abortion was done for it was considered a sin and disliked by the society. The reason for abortion varied from person to person. Abortion was done mainly because of health and social reasons. It was also done to escape from economic imbalance, responsibility or if someone conceived outside wedlock. It was done due to the fear of the society or social circumstances. The traditional method used for abortion was by taking some herbal medicines, by eating some bitter things, etc. Some elder women who also acted as the mid wives assisted them in doing the abortion.

In the present Kuki society abortion is quite prevalent and the doctors do it though secretly since it is not legalized by the law. Nowadays, scientific methods have been adopted. But it is usually not socially approved for religion and customs disapprove it and it is considered as an act against God's will.

The main reason for undergoing abortion seems to cover-up the shame the family has to face. And also in the Kuki society any illegitimate child was not included in the genealogy of the clan.

V. 5. k. Pregnancy

Special observance regarding diet and restrictions for a pregnant woman are there. A pregnant woman cannot eat the pupae of the bee believing that if she does then the child may shiver like the fluttering of the wings of the bee. She should not eat mushrooms of a different variety, Changeng or crabs for the child may keep holding things. Raw egg was not to be touched by a pregnant woman. The white liquid of an egg was believed to have transformed into the membrane of the child in the womb. So she may have problems during child birth. But the pregnant woman could eat cooked, fried or boiled egg. Chicken or egg and ginger chutney was given by the mother to the pregnant daughter to get relief from pre-delivery pains called Thusing.

Deer and Langhei, a kind of animal, meat was not to be eaten because of the belief that the child may bite others. Or in a way it is mainly because the teeth may not grow properly. The pregnant woman also should not eat Zuchon, a kind of rat, which lives in the field. The pregnant woman also should not eat snake as the tongue of the child will always be outside as the fang of the snake. Yongchak (*Parkia Javanica*) also should not be eaten for it gives foul smell during delivery. A pregnant woman was restricted from closing rat holes in the house; when the labor pain starts the closet, door, all her boxes including the cane container or box, baskets; lel, a type of basket made of cane; Sinkhup, etc. were to be opened. Everything connected with the act of opening on the part of the pregnant woman should be left open for an easy delivery. The pregnant woman should not be pulled by her hair. The do's and don'ts of a pregnant woman also included that the soil burrowed by Sabi (Vole) should not be touched.

The prospective father was restricted from starting any kind of new business or work; he should not go on a journey, as it would be unlucky and unfruitful for him; he should not cut a bamboo shoot; should not go for hunting or kill any living being- snake, rat, etc.; should not even dress a chicken for eating at home for it was believed that the same act may happen to his woman. Other members of the family helped him out in such works. The man should not fill up or cover any rat hole in the house as it is similar to closing the woman's opening during child birth. If at all he has to go out anywhere he should keep a thing in his place symbolizing his presence in the house. He also should not go for fishing, or involve in any fights or get angry. The man should not go to war, beat people, cut the forest or indulge in any court cases for it will be unsuccessful.

According to 62.67% rural and 70% urban respondents, in the present Kuki society the pregnant woman is not allowed to eat the pupae of the bee. Pregnant women were restricted from having Khoigip (honey comb); eat mushrooms of a different variety; Changeng or crabs for the child may keep holding things. Yongchak (*Parkia Javanica*) also should not be eaten for it gives foul smell during delivery. Closing of rat holes, any act of brutality towards any living beings is prohibited. The prospective father is also forbidden to do any killing of animals even for household eating, to start a new business or to set out on a journey. While 30% urban and 37.33% rural respondents said they are not aware of any restrictions for a pregnant woman or the prospective father.

Certain restrictions could be seen even in the present Kuki society in regard to the pregnancy of a woman and the prospective father of the child. Restrictions on food and activities of a pregnant woman seems to have become little flexible as compared to their traditional society.

V. 5. 1. Death

Among the Kukis the sick or aged persons are allowed to die in the house only. There was no question of pollution or defiling the house. Among the Kukis dying

outside the house was considered to be suicidal death. If the old and the dying person was taken out, he was considered insignificant or a man without respect. Those who die outside the house were considered Gamthi (dying outside) which was considered and treated as death by suicide. They have a belief that house was for enjoyment, living together and at death also they should be together. Those who die outside the house were also not given proper funeral rites. Among the Kukis the dead was disposed off by burying in the courtyard.

The dead body was washed properly, dressed and buried in the courtyard. Dead family members were laid down on a single grave, one above the other especially among the Koms. So if within a year another person from the same family died, they buried it in the same place over the previous one. In an old man's and brave hunter's grave Rake, a bamboo pole, was put up. Heimang (*Rhus hokerii*, *Rhus succedanea*-a tree which bears sour fruits) was cut for the number of animals he killed and the heads of the animals were put on it. Before, they used to bury the heads of the enemies also. This signifies his power over the animals and his enemies. A small pot with different types of curry, rice and a bottle of zu were also buried.

On the third day of the death there was a ceremony of giving food to the dead called Buchumthak. Chicken and rice were tied, yenthow (*Arundo donax*, a bamboo like tree) was cut and vaiju, a kind of rice beer was poured. If the dead body was buried there would be a hole just beside the head and these things were kept and the hole was covered with a stone. After a year, in the month of Wakching, i.e. January which was considered an impure month Luchun was performed. Luchun was a ritual in which the son-in-law of the family dug up the grave and see whether the head still had hair or not. If the head still had hair then the son-in-law had to remove the hair without the family's knowledge. Actually it was not the hair that was to be removed but the head had to be

broken. After this the skull was washed with zu and wrapped with Khamtang or Mukhamyal, Amte or Chibusa and again buried. If the head had no hair or was already broken then it was considered lucky for the son-in-law for he would not have to clean or break the skull. If the son-in-law could not do this he was beaten up a lot and asked whether the deceased had killed his animals or his father. The son-in-law had to find out if any teeth were lost or not. So they keep an account of the teeth. A pig was killed on the day and the meat was wrapped for the number of dead persons buried in that grave.

Just after the death, relatives and youth were sent to give the message of the death to all the near and dear ones and close relatives. After all the messengers come back from their duty they performed Kitom, an act of challenging the spirit who was thought to be the cause of the death. The dead body was bathed with leaves of a tree called Chonbek and Nahkei from the jungle with broom's leaves. This bunch of leaves along with Daikham leaves brushed the dead body from head to the toe. The daughter or sister of the family applied oil of pig on the head of the dead person. Then the deceased was made to sit in the middle of the house. The dead was bathed and decorated and made to sit on a palanquin type and carrying it they moved around in the house. Leading this procession some relatives take spear, dao or sword and danced and shouted challenging who has killed their so and so. They shouted and called out to come out in front and challenged that they will kill and cut whoever it was like the way they are now cutting the door frames and other wooden things. But to avoid destroying the door frames and other things from the mourning relatives they kept logs of woods ready for this so that the relatives can cut them. Some even shot guns to kill the killer spirits.

The deceased was decorated and on the head feathers of Langmeidong (horn bill), a bird, cock's feather, goat's fur dyed red in color was put before the burial. If the deceased was a female her hair was oiled and then plaited. The bird's feather and

goat's fur were kept on the branch of a tree after burial. Along with it the domesticated animals' heads were also hung along the Akgesawm. In case of female-Tongkon, a small basket used for keeping fish by fisherwoman was placed over the grave. Up to the burial place everyone had to cry. They also sang their clan songs. Kitom was not performed when a woman died. If the dead person was heirless, the dead body was buried along with material property like money, tuibuh (hookah), clothes, etc. They used to bury the dead at dusk because they used to have zu and did not have any idea about the time.

If the deceased was a male then Aknisawn was given. On the branches of Thankhom, a tree which has many branches, the heads of the animals that the deceased had hunted during his life time were hung on. The more the heads of the animals' hung, more the animals were killed for feast on that day which was called Kosa, the richer the family was considered. Along with this a packet of rice was also hung on the branch. The grandfather made a rope with a bunch of hay called Lawntamhek and it was placed on the middle over the grave as a sign of saying not to be afraid.

On the second week after death the Thantop ritual was celebrated. Above the bed a bamboo rack was made and on a dish some rice and curry were kept for the Thagao (soul). This had to be made by the tucha. For a month, day and night, before anyone have their meal, it had to be offered to the Thanchatut i.e. birds and animals. After Thantop nothing can be given to the soul of the death.

Another was Kithensak or shraddha in which the relatives, friends have to take zu in the name of the deceased. A cock with long feathers was killed and the feathers were made to wear by the thiempu tied with a thread. It was like purifying the house so that the soul does not come back again to divide the dead and alive.

After seven days of the burial of the dead a ceremony known as Ankong Phel Pai was held by killing a pig or mithun to have the last supper with the deceased. The

choicest portion of the cooked meat was offered to the dead on the grave. This ceremony was accompanied with feasting, drinking rice beer, singing elegies composed for their particular clan, etc. It may be for one day or even for two days. At this time the maternal uncle's family performed a ceremony which was called Sakeng-Khai. In case the deceased was a woman, her father or brother killed a pig which meant donning the reserved bride-price which usually remained unpaid at the time of marriage. If Sakeng-Khai ceremony was held, then the deceased family had to clear the last bride-price which was due. Until this ceremony of giving food was performed the soul was around the house and gave signs by making noise of utensils, invisible touch, etc. If this ceremony was not done the soul can not go to heaven.

There was difference in the procedure of the disposal of the dead according to rank, sex, age and social position of the deceased. According to their rank and social position the procedure of the disposal of the dead were different. It may be because of their bravery, wealth, skill in hunting or war, number of wild games the person hunted, etc. The various types of burial of the dead according to the status of the deceased were: (a) Lang-Lap, (b) Khun-Suma Kihei, (c) Thi-Vui.

i) *Lang-Lap (burial given especially to brave males)*

This type of funeral was performed when the chief, warriors who were well known for their bravery or those who performed Chon sacrifices died. Chon sacrifices were usually performed by chiefs unrivalled in power, in valor, in richness and in war. In case of Lang Lap the deceased was shifted on a make shift chariot and made to sit at the middle post of the house. Four men along with the tucha and becha will beat their feet and go to and fro seven times for seven days around the house accompanied by drinking, feasting, weeping, mourning throughout the ritual.

ii) *Khun-Suma Kihei (burial given only to the brave and rich persons)*

This death ritual was performed in case of outstanding personality of the village who performed Sa-ai or Chang-ai during his lifetime. When some chief or well known person who performed Sa-ai or Chang-ai was dead, the deceased was tied on a plank and turn it three times and dance till all the relatives come. The dead body was kept for three to four months in the forest in a special hut made for it and it was guarded by the son-in-law. Just below where the coffin was kept, an area of 3-4 ft. deep pit was dug and a pipe was put in the coffin to pass the waste and below it a fire was burnt. A small door was

made so that when it was dried properly it could be brought from that special hut and then buried in the courtyard. This process signified gallantry, valor, and honor to the deceased which was done by way of paying homage.

iii) Thi-Vui(common burial)

Thivui was a common type of funeral where no special ritual was performed except mourning and crying. In all these funeral procedures Kitom, in which the relative or kin (males only) holds axe, sword and challenge the spirit or anything which killed the person.

Another difference in the funeral procedure according to age was only when infants died. It was called Senhut Thi in Thadou. Such funeral was also given in case of adult death in whose family or house death had never visited. An infant was buried in the home yard without much formality. Traditionally, the Kukis built their houses a few feet above the ground with wooden or bamboo planks. So, when an infant died in the house the wooden or bamboo floor was pulled up. The dead body was not taken from the main door but through the windows and then buried under the house. The corpse of an infant died at birth is called Lamzil and two three months old baby was called Naotilthi. In such cases no one was informed about the dead or for the funeral. The mother of the deceased infant was dressed as a girl. This kind of funeral was also given only to the eldest child. And such deaths were feared much by people. Deaths which followed this were buried normally. Among the Kukis after marriage, the sons start a new family separately. The first death in a family either old people or any adult or even those who performed chang-ai or sa-ai, would be buried in the same manner as an infant was buried. Such deaths which are buried under the house are called Chalampei. Even if the deceased was the oldest one in the village, the deceased will not get a burial of the normal procedures which were performed in natural deaths. In such cases the deceased will not be put in a coffin but on a plank and wrapped only with the father's cloth and put down under the wooden floor. No one should be informed about the dead. No one was allowed to cry.

Untimely deaths were considered to be caused by evil spirits. Death by suicide was a taboo. It was unwanted and not allowed to be brought into the house or the village. Such deaths were not treated properly or buried in the courtyard. Suicidal death was considered impure. Those murdered, drowned, fell down from tree, death due to storm, wild fire, hanged, etc, were considered as Thise. Such deaths were brought and kept at the Khumol which was at the entrance or border of the village. Even if some one died on a journey his body was not brought in the village. And if he died at his friend's or relatives house that house was to be purified by giving a pig to the family by the deceased's family. If this was not done the family may not prosper, will not be good for that house where death occurred. The deceased's family also had to purify the village by killing a pig.

If the deceased hanged himself then the elders of the village go to the spot, dug a grave just below the body so that when the rope was cut the body falls into the grave. Such dead bodies were not even touched by the family members. Only the methei i.e. the widow or the widower or those who do not have children (inkap) could touch them.

If some one hanged himself in the village the chief announced that no one in the village should come out of the house or go to work. They were not buried ritually in the courtyard or in the village. The thiempu offered the dead to the God first before burying, by taking some water, charcoal and puts it in the grave. "Thanchang Leidupi

Leithaopi Leishanpi” saying these words the thiempu digs the earth thrice and says that the children of Manmasi have to live here. So stones and trees should go away and give place to the Manmasi’s children. After this a tree was put at the site where the death happened. The thiempu also prayed that such death be the last one and never repeat again in the house or in the village. In funeral of such deaths youngsters, women were not allowed. Only the elder villagers could attend these kinds of funerals.

In the present Kuki society too, the old and the sick are allowed to die in the house. The dead are buried in the common graveyard which is denominational. The pastor comes to the house and prays to Jesus for a peaceful life in Heaven of the deceased. Prayers are performed, Bible hymns are sung. Infants died at birth are also buried in the cemetery. There is no difference in the procedure of the disposal of the dead according to rank, sex, age and social position of the deceased. Deaths by accident or suicide are no more treated differently. They are buried in the common cemetery, brought in the house, village and not treated as like before and buried according to the Christian burial norms. They now consider all types of death as the will of Jesus and hence they be treated equally.

The reasons they gave were that they had lived their whole life in the house and the last moment why should they be taken outside. One should be allowed to breathe his last where he had spent his life. The dead body was buried in the courtyard since there were no cemeteries before. Coffins were not used. The mother of the infant was dressed as a girl at the time of burying the infant so that the soul of the child does not come back again which may again die as before. So as not to be recognized by the soul of the infant the mother was dressed as an unmarried girl. Unnatural or suicidal deaths were not brought inside the house or in the village so that such deaths may not repeated again in the village. Respondnets’ opinion regarding death rituals and beliefs are given in Table V.14.

Table V.14
Death rituals and beliefs

Respondents' opinion	Rural (150)		Urban (30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Who had knowledge about traditional burials	86	57.33	15	50	101
Who said only buried normally	64	42.67	15	50	79
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Difference in burial according to sex, age, social position	38	25.33	6	20	44
No special burial for anyone	112	74.67	24	80	136
Total	150	100	30	100	180
Suicidal deaths treated normally	76	50.67	15	50	91
Suicidal deaths were not given proper ritual	74	49.33	15	50	89
Total	150	100	30	100	180

V. 5. m. Totem

Totemism is a form of religion found in preliterate societies that focuses on some natural object (usually an animal or plant) that is regarded as an emblem of a clan and its individual members. A totem pole is a post which images of the totem are hung, painted, or carved. Representations of the totemic object are commonly regarded as being more sacred than the object itself (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974: 296). A totem is a class of material objects which a savage regards with superstitious respect believing that there exists between him and every member of the clan an intimate and altogether a special relation (Frazer 1950).

Totems are regarded with great awe and respect since it is believed that any misbehavior in regard to a totem -- such as touching it, looking upon it, or, in the case of living totems, harming or killing it--will have disastrous consequences (Johnson 2000: 299).

The term totemism is used for a form of social organization and magico-religious practice, of which the central feature is the association of certain groups (usually clans or lineages) within a tribe with certain classes of animate or inanimate things, the several groups being associated with distinct classes. Totem relationship implies that every member of the species shares the totemic relationship with every member of the totem group. As a result members of a totem group may not intermarry (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 192). In India many tribes and castes are found to claim mystic ties with some material objects, animals or plant species. They are the totemistic people, though many have either forgotten their totem or do not attach much importance to such mystic connection (Majumdar 1973:326).

Traditionally also, according to the respondents there were no totemic groups in their society. They also do not have any myths regarding a group and its totem. They also did not perform any ceremonies regarding the totem of the group. Traces of totemism among the Nagas, Kukis and the Meitie people are extremely scarce (Ferreira 1965).

V. 5. n. Dual Organization

Systems of kinship are associated with a division of society into two exogamous halves or moities, usually known as a dual organization. Clan descent is recognized by both sexes in the same line, patrilineal or matrilineal, and this may be called the dominant or overt line; the opposite line is recognized also by the sex that is not dominant, and it is accordingly traced only through members of that sex. This may be

called the submerged line, e.g. the submerged line may be kept secret. With exogamy and asymmetric descent, a brother and a sister cannot marry with a sister and a brother, and where cross-cousin marriage is allowed this too is asymmetrical, i.e. if marriage with mother's brother's daughter is prohibited (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 79 & 93).

According to all the respondents, the occupants of the village are related by kinship and other ties. The core of their social structure is kin-based, which shows itself in all the structural constituents. These ties are, however, strongest within the local group or village, mainly formed around a core of agnatically related males, their wives and children. Moreover, through affinal links with neighboring groups derived from the practice of local lineage exogamy, relations with them could also be regulated (Das 1985:46). Though the Kuki society has a system of dual organization they do not have any beliefs associated with this form of social organization. Since the Kukis do not have any totemistic beliefs, their seasonal activities are not regulated by ceremonies based on belief in a dual organization of man, nature, and cosmic processes. No rituals were carried out by any moiety said all the respondents.

V. 5. o. Cultural Heroes

The cult of a hero or heroes may be a central feature of some social group, clan, or tribe. The hero may have led the people to its present habitation, or have introduced new arts or crafts. His spirits may be reincarnated in successive rulers, he may be Lord of the Dead, or worshipped as a God. It is common for the birth and death of the hero to be miraculous, as well as some of his exploits. A chief may not have authority until the correct rites are performed. There may be special sacred objects-spears, drums, stools, thrones, insignia, or regalia-whose possession is necessary for a reigning chief. The

position and authority of a chief frequently rest on religious sanctions (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 193).

Other forms of rituals which may be essential to social structure are those of peace-making and ceremonial exchange of feasts between different communities (ibid. 192-93).

According to the traditional Kuki belief cultural heroes are the ones who were full of patriotism and altruism. Cultural heroes are those who were brave, who hunted wild animals, fought well, who were leaders of the youths' dormitory, people who upheld the culture and died for it. Their responsibilities were to look after inmates of the dormitory, lead the hunting troops in war. They were adored, respected and regarded by everyone. Some were trained, practiced and also gifted ones. Other responsibilities included were motivating the youths in the youths' dormitory, motivating the youths for hunting or in war. There were no rites performed or related beliefs when a chief was made. The chief's authority and position did not rest on religious sanctions. Usually peace making was conducted between the parties by way of exchange of gifts such as valuables like gong, beads, spears, daos, animals, clothes, land, fields, etc. and also by killing pigs or mithuns with feasting and drinking and dancing, singing, etc. For peace making a pig was to be cut lengthwise. It was called "Humkham" (stop using weapons). This would be organized by both the parties and the priest would pray for peace. The two parties look up to the God of Heaven and promise not to attack on each other. And whoever fails to keep the promise may meet death as the pig by cutting lengthwise. The pig was kept facing the sky and then its heart was cut.

Only 4.67% rural respondents knew about cultural heroes. Among this group a middle aged Paite man said that the birth of the cultural heroes was highly regarded. All the urban and 95.33% rural respondents said they do not have any idea about

cultural heroes. The birth and death of the cultural heroes were treated as any normal death or birth. Nor are they considered or treated specially. No rites were performed or related beliefs when a chief was made. The reasons being chieftainship was a hereditary post.

Now, the Indian Constitutional law governs Kuki villages. Still, the chiefs do have much power and authority though a bit modified according to the Indian Constitution. In the hills the chief's power are still there. For instance, when someone disobeys rules and customs the chief can banish that person or even his family from the village. The chief still can allot land to whoever wants to settle in his village. He does not enjoy taxes for the land given to the villagers now, though he has control over the hills under his jurisdiction. If any villager wants some wood or tree they take the chief's permission by having tea together. In certain cases like small disputes among the villagers or regarding family, the case would be consulted first with the chief. If the chief was unable to solve the problem then it was taken to the police. When some fighting happens in the village the chief gives judgment. And the villagers have to abide by whatever the chief decides and impose fine said all the respondents except 2.67% rural respondents. One old man even asserted that the police and the government regard their customary laws. The best known peace-making conducted was between the Kuki chief Khotinmang Sitlhou, and the chief of Jampi village with then Angamis of Khonoma village sometime in 1870's where in both parties entered a "Gun-barrel truce" by drinking water from the barrel of gun accompanied by feasting, drinking and dancing.

3.33% urban and 16.67% rural respondents had idea about the forms and rituals of peacemaking in the Kuki society. The other 96.67% urban and 83.33% rural respondents had no idea about the forms and rituals of peace making in their society.

All the urban and rural respondents said there are no rituals performed when feasts were exchanged between different clans.

The Manipur Hill Authority Act of 1956 greatly reduced the power of the traditional authorities. However, complete abolition of chieftainship is not possible because of its value as a symbol of established authority and its ritual function as interpreter of customary laws (Sarkar & Ray 1990:143). The chief still holds powers and privileges as the entire village land still belongs to him. He is the ex-officio-Chairman of the village authority¹⁵.

V. 5. p. Secret Society

Secret societies often are part of the organization of religious life. Secret societies in various cultural groups perform a number of political functions. These include the staging of initiation ceremonies and certain socialization functions, such as the organization of the West African “bush schools” (Encyclopedia of Sociology 1974: 254).

Secret societies may be recognized parts of the social structure, or they may form organizations working in opposition to social order. They usually consist of one sex only, male societies being more common, but female societies existing in some localities. A secret society is an association, membership of which is usually selective and attained either by purchase or by a ceremony of initiation, or both. It is sometimes public as regards membership, ceremonies, etc., but generally knowledge of its purpose and main proceedings is withheld from non-members. Secret societies may have great influence, owing to the general belief in their magical powers (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 194).

There were no secret societies in the Kuki community. But in olden days they had youth dormitory known as sawm or Zawlbuk. This youth dormitory was only for the male members of the village. Each village had their own youth dormitory. No rituals were performed when a member was initiated into the youth dormitory. Any male member of the village could be a member of a sawm. These youth dormitories were located in the

chief's house or in any house of the village that has girls who could help the boys in the dormitory. If the house has big rooms and spacious then the owner volunteered to house the youth dormitory. The girls washed their clothes. In any situation or happening of the family where the sawm was housed the dormitory members would help the family. Whenever one wants to join a sawm they asked the seniors of the dormitory. Sometimes, even the members also asked the boys to join. They had their food at their own houses. The girl of the house where the sawm was established is called Kasawmnu. She gave tobacco leaves tied to the sawm youths. If the sawm girl loves any member of the sawm, then she will tie his tobacco leaves with a red thread. The other tobacco leaves would be tied with a white thread. In case if a sawm member wants to propose the Kasawmnu, then he would propose by giving her a comb made of bamboo, made by the boy himself along with a small basket and a musical instrument. If she accepts these gifts, she no longer can take gifts from other sawm members. In response to the proposal, if the girl tied the gifts with a black thread and returns back then it means "Let's end up the relationship, don't come to our house".

These youth dormitories served the purpose of economic, social, political, educational, co-existence, military organization, etc. In times of emergency the youths could be called and collected for war. The youths were trained in military art, discipline, morality, dances, wrestling, ceremonial functions, arts and crafts, handicrafts, etc. The youths helped the family in whose house they have their sawm in agriculture, hunting, at the time of marriage of the sawm girl (s), etc. The leaders of the dormitory had power and responsibility and had to manage the dormitory. Even the village chief took the help of the youths in time of war and decision making. They did not have any magical powers.

Sawms or youth dormitories are no more present in their community. Now the youths of the village have association in their denominational church. 53.33% urban

and 47.33% rural respondents had knowledge about the existence of youth dormitory. While the remaining 46.67% urban and 52.67% rural respondents had no idea about the functions and responsibility of the youth dormitory. Secret societies which played a significant role in shaping the life of a youth in warfare, agricultural work, brotherhood and vocational activities find no place in the present Kuki society since education and professional work and other activities have taken their place.

V. 5. q. Warfare

The conduct of war is almost always accompanied by numerous ritual activities and observances. The leaders often have to observe special taboos before and during hostilities. Protective and aggressive magical actions may be taken on the outbreak of war, medicines prepared by specialists, and offerings given to ancestor spirits or Gods. The conclusion of peace generally involves ritual acts as well, which are designed to extinguish blood guilt, or bring together erstwhile enemies in peace, or restore the normal order of life (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 194).

Among the Kukis in olden days people went for war for head-hunting, to exploit or to take revenge. Some even went to war just to exhibit tribal valor, to subdue the neighboring village. People went to war for leadership, power, and territory. It was a tradition in olden days, as it was also considered an act of bravery. The leader in war was the chief of the village. There was no selection of leaders as the chief's post was a hereditary one. The leader of the youth dormitory also sometimes led the war. Rituals were observed before going for war. The thiempu performed some rituals praying for the warriors, wishing them luck and blessing by the king to return victorious and safely.

23.33% urban and 52.67% rural respondents said that going for war and head-hunting was a tradition among the Kukis. This also became an important aspect of the tribal life to conquer the neighboring village, protect their village, to show their valor,

etc. The heads of the enemies brought from war were buried along with the dead at the time of burial. The Kachin of Burma is reputed to bring back the head merely as evidence of success, while the Kuki-Chin tribes do so in order that the ghost may attend a dead chief as a slave (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 144). While 76.67% urban and 47.33% rural respondents said that people go for war because of greed, for power, dominance over the other, for territory, revenge, authority, etc. Two old aged Thadou respondents from rural areas added that in time of war if a chief was killed by the enemy, his subordinate should kill ten enemies and bring their heads.

According to 20% urban and 36.67% rural respondents, rituals were observed before going for war. While the other 80% urban and 63.33% rural respondents said that ritual activity and observances did not accompany war (Table V.15).

Table V.15
Rituals in youth dormitory and warfare

Rituals in youth dormitory and warfare	Rural		Urban		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Youth dormitory were there	71	47.33	16	53.33	87
No idea	79	52.67	14	46.67	93
Total	150	100	30	100	180
People went to war for traditional reasons	79	52.67	7	23.33	86
For power	71	47.33	23	76.67	94
Total	150	100	30	100	180
War accompanied ritual activity	55	36.67	6	20	61
No idea about nay rituals	95	63.33	24	80	119
Total	150	100	30	100	180

CASE STUDY

RURAL

Tinkhothang Gangte

65 years, Male

VIIIth Std.

Churachandpur

Mr. Tinkhothang got converted in 1951. He works as a grade IV employee in the Civil Supply Department of Churachandpur, Manipur. He stays with his wife who is illiterate and is a housewife. All his children got married and now they live separately. According to him, they have migrated from Gallon to Churachandpur in 1947. Mr. Tinkhothang, though is an educated man and a converted Christian has knowledge about the indigenous religion which he consider was not that bad or obsolete as being portrayed. He feels that every coin has two sides so one must see its two facets to understand it. He said that though Christianity has brought for them a new life, with modern Western education, made his community more cultured and changed their attitude towards life, diverted from being going against the right path. According to him, Christianity has also brought along with it many demerits too. It has taken away his people from their traditional beliefs. "The younger generation has become more carefree and irresponsible. They are trying to imbibe the Western culture in their life in the name of Christianity, which would make them repent one day" he opined. Atleast in the traditional society they had the authority under the chief but nowadays the chiefs are only for name sake. He was glad that, he along with some of his friends, has decided and are trying to conserve the culture of their tribe by establishing a museum at his house. He also had the knowledge of traditional rituals performed during certain ceremonies and even made the miniature set of the elements required in a ritual.

CASE STUDY

RURAL

Ngul Kam Lhovum

50 years, Male

Illiterate

Motbung village, Sardar Hills West block

Senapati District

Ngul Kam Lhovum of Sithlou clan, an illiterate, has knowledge of Hindi and can speak Manipuri language vaguely. He was a truck driver carrying fire woods from the village. Traditionally, his occupation was thiempu and he himself was one until he got converted to Christianity. His wife is no more and he lives with his three unmarried daughters, four sons, a daughter-in-law and a grandson. He believed they originated from Burma. He migrated to this Motbung village in Saparmeina block of Senapati district, from a village dominated by the Nagas in Ukhrul district. In the year 1993, when ethnic cleansing riots broke out in Manipur between the Nagas and the Kukis, he and his family escaped to this place. In the riot his truck and his house were all burnt down by the mob leaving him with nothing. He came to Motbung empty handed. After putting up in the rehabilitation camp the village chief allotted him a piece of land. Now he is working as a sweeper in the weekly market which is held every Tuesday and Friday at Motbung bazaar, besides working in the field. Before, he used to practice the art of thiempu even after being converted to Christianity. He was warned many a times by the Church for practicing it. He

was very sad when he had to throw away the Indoi into the water. At that time he thought he would make another one again but due to financial problems he could not make it till now. He got converted in the year 1966 after a Thadou Pastor preached him. Everybody in the village was admitted to the church and they tried to influence him in many ways but somehow he restrained from all that. Until, his late wife threatened to divorce him. Then he decided to get admitted to the Church which would please everyone in his family, especially his wife. So he got converted. For a year he was confused as he did not know what it was all about and what he was doing there.

Till date he possesses all the elements which are necessary for a thiempu. He does not allow them to touch it by anyone. So sometimes, he practices his old profession though, secretly, as the Church does not permit such practices. He said, "Since my forefathers taught me I practiced and felt peaceful. But, I know, my son will not continue this occupation after me". If the Church comes to know about his practice he feared the church may even restructure him. He further expressed that in actual no one is professing true Christianity which they claim to. But since he is a poor man the authority can do anything with him. He also had experienced many church members whom he does not want to divulge the details, asking for his favor wooing women. He still possesses the items used which are by a thiempu (Photo V.6).

V. 6. CONCLUSIONS

The elderly people with their experience and wisdom sometimes help in predicting certain epidemics and natural calamities to come in the village. The age old tradition of judgment by ordeal helps the Kukis to settle down their interpersonal and intra village disputes. This practice also helps in giving instant justice to both the sides without much expenditure and time. Dreams are still believed in the Kuki society for it gave to many of them certain hints of the impending dangers or of good times. For easy understanding of the common people the Bible has been translated into different Kuki dialects and this has indeed helped the older primary educated people to know the words of Jesus clearly without depending on others.

For any illness or disease the thiempu or the village medicine man was their only help. Everything unknown to them was feared and appeased. But after believing in the True God and after knowing all his creation they bow their heads before Lord Jesus only. Now the medical doctors are there for their help. Seasonal festivals are celebrated now in the village church. They offer whatever they can in the name of Jesus to help others. Since the present Kuki society is more occupied with their business or the government services they do not have ample time, they harvest the crops preferably on Saturdays so that they can complete the remaining work on Sunday.

Abortion and infanticide was not uncommon when the pregnancy is attended by any circumstances causing shame to the woman (Shaw 1929:15). Certain restrictions on food and activities of a pregnant woman and the prospective father of the child could be seen even now. The birth of a child is considered as a gift of God and hence time for celebration. Naming the child just after birth somehow gives a glimpse of the ongoing traditions among the Kukis. Though every aspect of Christianity has been adopted by the Kukis, Christian names are not common in their society. The naming pattern among the Kuki helps in tracing the genealogical history of the family. The month of February is

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