

Thanglenmang Chongloi PhD Research Scholar Department of History North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

Abstract

In the traditional Kuki society, a wide range of items were produced locally for household and agricultural purposes. Different bamboo plant species were used to make these goods. This paper will discuss and highlight the cultural value that these products supplement in addition to its material function. The custom of using bamboo tray during traditional marriages, as well as its significance in the Kuki women's bride price will be emphasized. This concise monograph will emphasize how they are produced, their applications, and their importance in social and cultural activities.

Methodologically, both primary and secondary data has been deployed in this paper. It is also supplemented with oral sources, interviews of key resource selected persons. The work is divided into three parts, the first part introduces about the people under study. Second, the paper presented the types of items used in the traditional Kuki society, how they are manufactured, the raw materials and specialization. In the third part, the significance of these items in the socio-cultural events are discussed. The article aims to study the significance of materials and its social relation in the Kuki society.

Key Words:

Manufacture, Traditional, Kuki, Marriage, Culture, bamboo.

Introduction:

The term 'Kuki' refers to an ethnic group who spread out in a non-contiguous region in Northeast India, Northwest Burma, and the Chittagong Hill tracts in Bangladesh. In Manipur, the Kuki tribes are dispersed over the hill districts of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Tengnoupal, Pherzawl, and Chandel district. The Thadous are the sub-group of the Kuki community of Manipur. (Sitlhou, 2018:31) They are the most numerous branches of the Kuki group and as per 2011 census, there are 2,15,913 speakers of the language in Manipur. Thadou-Kuki will be used in this work to refer the Thadou language speaking group of the Kuki community. (*Ibid*)

This paper study the various manufactures, their utilities, how they are made, material used, the cultural value related to the manufactures. It will also examine how certain item plays important role in the marriage system. Some manufactures such as *nam*, *longkai*, *thul*, etc. were considered as gift item of high value during the traditional society. Methodologically, both primary and secondary data has been deployed in this paper. It is also supplemented with oral sources, interviews of key resource selected persons.

The Kuki in the traditional period make varieties of items for different purposes. As agriculture is the main economy for them, which also requires tools and implements from clearing the forest till the harvesting season and more. Therefore, every household in the village must have the skill to make the required household materials such as baskets for storing, carrying, *dao*-handle, sheaths, pottery, weaving, etc. Bamboo and cane were mainly used for manufacturing essential items such as baskets, head strap, containers, bamboo tray, etc. Some materials are made of wood such as mortar and pestle, rice-pounder, wooden-plates, etc. These are general manufactures which required simple tools and skills. There are specialized and semi-specialized manufactures as well. The village blacksmith was a fulltime specialized on whom the villagers depended for making their iron tools and weaponry. The villagers in return offered one day labour annually for his service.

"Except for various tools and weaponry which needed the specialization of the blacksmith with his bellows forge, the rudimentary and necessary requirements to cope up with day-to-day life had to be met by each family. It was mandatory that each member of the family, according to age and sex, learn and master all the necessary arts needed for subsistence and social existence." (Rengsi, 1991:85) Dormitory system (*Som*) play very important role where young people spend time in learning all the

required skills such as basketry, war tactics, weapon making, etc. Manufacture items such as bamboo tray plays important role in marriages which will be discussed in detail in this work.

Each artistic expresses something of his own personality in what he does, but the major form of artistic expression is dictated by the culture. People in this world produce his own artistic design for his domestic use. Right from the time of hunting and food gathering to civilization men have established their basic needs such as food, cloths and shelter and came to develop and manufactured various artistic designs and patterns in their leisure hours. (Tuboi, 2005:150)

The Kukis like other neighbouring tribes introduced various artistic designs in different patterns in the form of arts and crafts from forest materials such as cane, bamboo, and wood. The *dao* (machete) is used as the main implement to cut article of fashion and art. (*Ibid*,151).

General manufactures Kukis manufactured varieties of essential household items they require for storing, drying, serving food items, etc. They are generally made of bamboo, cane, and wood locally found in their surroundings. Household items such as *sum*, *suhtum*, *kangpot*, *bukong*, etc. are made of wood. While items such as *thul*, *beng*, *godal*, *pucha*, *paipah*, etc. are made of bamboo and cane. Basketry was a part of the material culture of the Kukis which has become an integral and inseparable part of his culture. Agricultural implements were also made by village blacksmith (*thihkheng*). Metal and brass work are also done by him. Manufacturing activities are generally done by men. Some common type of household items of the Kukis are discussed below:

Design of the manufactures The design and patterns of the materials manufactured differ from tribe to tribe. According to their own taste and utility, these items were manufactured. They might be made of same materials, but they have different shape and size depending upon their own aesthetic value. Related to this, Nugene Nida states that, 'The particular manner in which one express these aesthetic tastes is determined largely by the culture he belongs to, which has already established the major pattern of aesthetic expression. However, individuals may make some changes and adaptations, depending upon their originality and skill.' (Eugene, 1954: 182-183).

WOOD-WORK

Troughs Like that of the mortar, the Kuki also made troughs for containers for feeding the pigs and other animals. A tree trunk about four to five feet was whittled and flattened out on one side for the bottom. The other side was scooped out to a dept of about 8 to 10-inch. All around the hollow portion about two inches thick from outer layer of the wood is left to act as walls. There are small size troughs which were sometimes used for storing water for domestic animals such as dogs, fowls, pigs, etc.

Sum (Mortar) and Pestle System *Sum* means Mortar and *Suhtum* means Pestle in Kuki. It is used for pounding paddy and other food items such as turmeric, si (Sesame), fruits, etc. It is made of hard wood locally known as *Khengthing*. Sometimes it is also made of oak (*Gangpi*) which is considered as first-class tree (*thingpha*) among the Kukis. Sum is made of a sizeable tree trunk with one side of the trunk hollowed out for keeping the grains. The other side is cut in such a way that the middle portion is left to be buried firmly on the ground. The pestle (*Suhtum*) is a straight hardwood rounded to about 3 inch in diameter and 5 to 6 feet long narrowed at the middle to about 2 inch in diameter for good grip while pounding. Sum is covered with a bamboo tray when not in use. The small sized sum is put upside-down during the night or when not in use to prevent from domestic animals such as dog, duck, chickens, goats, and pigs.

A separate hut for Sum is made which is known as *Sum-In/Sum-phol*. *Sum-In* is a simple structure with thatch roof, four posts without a proper wall except two lines made of wrist sized wooden bar. This structure has just a pestle leaning on the side of the frame of the hut.

Mailang-kong (wooden plate) It is a large round sizes wooden plate with a raised rim handcrafted from high quality wood called *Wong* tree. It is made by menfolk alone while women cooked food and served for the whole family in this plate. The size varies depending upon the size of the family who

uses. Generally, the medium size had a dimension of about 36 Inches (3 Feet). The larger one would measure about 48 to 60 Inches. The plate is about 3 inches thick at the middle and slightly smaller towards its rim. The natural color of the wood is brownish, but it depends on the age of the tree and the location where the tree grows. It is durable and does not break easily. In the past time, it was used for serving food for the whole family. Rice is served spread across the whole surface of the plate, curry served at the middle which was designed by the server. It is believed that dining meal together makes the family bond stronger. In the traditional period, every household own such plates, every visitor also got their food served on such plates which was kept reserved particularly for them.

BAMBOO WORK Varieties of items were made from bamboo such as cup, baskets, thul, etc. They have their own uses depending upon the size. Few of them are discussed under:

Cups There were two types of cups – those made of bamboo and those made of the horns of *mithun* (selki). Those cups which are made of bamboo were called *go-khon*, and those made of *mithun* horn were known as *selki-khon* or *Tui-pai*. The size of the cup depends on the type of the bamboo used. Two types of bamboo are used for making these cups, such as *go-mi* bamboo (large bamboo) for big cup and *mao* bamboo (garden bamboo) for smaller cup.

Thul (quadri-conical shaped basket) Generally, men do the works of basketry out of cane and bamboo. They made beautiful baskets which has special use such as *Thul*, which was used for storing clothes and an important item in olden days. It is made of cane which is time consuming work as it is made of fine splits of cane known as *Tingpi*. It is usually around 1 foot square at the base with four bamboo feet. It has a height of about 2 to 3 feet from foot to the top of the cover. The basket is covered with a conical lid made of cane as well. *Thul* was generally used and maintained by women in traditional period. *Thul* was always kept safe near the bedroom which suggest that it has valuable things in it.

Lei (Bridges) The Kukis also made simple bamboo bridge called *Go-Lei* over rivers. However, the bridge made by the Kukis are generally small compared to that of the Lakhers who made a long suspension bridge over a big river. (Parry, 1976). A spot is selected, preferably with suitable trees on both sides of the riverbank. Sometime, wooden posts are erected in case if there are no trees around on the side of the river. It is made before the start of the monsoon rain as it requires movement of the people from side to side in tightening the bamboo pieces. Generally, bamboo species known as *Go-tang* is used in making such bridge as this bamboo has thick culm wall. Around 4 – 5 pieces of bamboo are bent from each side of the river where each tip is tied together at the middle with a *ting-nang* (cane ropes). With a gap of about 1 foot, few wooden sticks are attached to the bamboo pieces from one end to the other forming the floor. On both side of the bridge, wooden stairs are made for better gripping while walking on it. To prevent the bridge from swaying, about 2 cane ropes are run up from each side of the bridge.

Bengbit *Beng-bit* is a basket for carrying rice, maize, millet, etc. in other words, it is regarded as a means of carrying seeds and comes. *Bengbit* is made similar in shape, but smaller in size to that of *thul* basket, without the lid. Various sizes have been wrought for the use of children and adults. It is also used for carrying articles and goods for long-distance journey. *Bengbit* along with *nam* (head-strap) was presented to a girl when she got married. In the olden days, women were chosen for wife based on their hard work and sincerity. Therefore, when they were given *bengbit* and *nam*, it signifies that she will use them to carry firewood, grains, etc. in her husband's house. In the traditional Kuki society, such was the custom which involved a simple present such as *Bengbit*, *Nam* and *Khichong* (Necklace made of beads brought from Burma). However, with the coming of the colonial rule, such customary practice lost its significance and now it is replaced by wearing western dress such as gown and coat suit for marriage. Today, *Bengbit*, *Nam*, and *Khichong* is replaced by expensive items such as gold ornaments, bed, wardrobe, almirah, etc. Some family could not support all these materials which becomes a worrisome for them to send off their daughters for marriage.

Bem (drum-shaped) It is a drum-shaped basket used to preserve food grains and sometimes maize. It is made of bamboo and cane slats of barrel shape, curving at the base with an open circular mouth equal to the base. The size of the container *Bem* is of four to five feet high and three to four feet wide. *Pang* is granary basket, woven with bamboo and cane in a rectangular shape like that of mat/carpet, which is design mainly for storing and drying grains. In olden days the amount of paddy collection in each household was measured by the size of *pang*.

Nam (head strap) It is a head-strap woven with a thin cane slat of about 3 to 4 inches in width and 24 – 25 inches long, which has rope on both ends. There were two types of Nam – *Namtai* was used by women and *Nam-kol* made of wood plank joined with rope designed for men.

Pucha (Bamboo tray) It is a rectangle shaped wicker tray made of bamboo and cane slat. Various types of design are made, such as *Sinkhup*, which has a height of 12 to 13 inches. It is used for keeping weaving equipment. *Tengsa* is another wicker container woven with four corners without the lid used for drying vegetables in *gaplheng*.

Godal (Bamboo Tray) *Godal* is a round bamboo tray used for winnowing and drying grains under the sun. It is made of a particular bamboo known as *go-ngal*¹. This type of bamboo has longer internode which Another round tray bigger in size is known as *Dop* which is generally used for drying grains in *gap-lheng*² or sometimes under the heat of the sun.

Role of godal in Kuki marriage system *Godal* (bamboo tray) plays very important role in marriage system among the Kukis. In Kuki marriages, *godal* is placed on the floor when the bride price is handover to the *bepu*³ of the bride's side. There are four types of marriage system among the Kukis such as *Kijammang* (elopement), *Chongmou* (ideal marriage), *Sahapsat* and *Jollha*. (Shaw, 1929:157). The bride price is taken in all these marriages. A day is fixed by the bride's representatives⁴ to visit the bride's family to discuss about the bride price. This day is known as *Sumtan-Sathani* which means feast for fixing the bride price. On this day, the groom's *bepu* and his company were told to bring some amount of money depending upon the clan of the girl.⁵ On marriage day, the *bepu*'s of both sides sat together over the bride's price. In this meeting, the *bepu* of the girl placed *godal* upside-down on the floor generally at the middle portion of the house. The groom's *bepu* then place the money, and *lutom-laisu*⁶ on top of *godal* for verification. Then, the bride's *bepu* and his team takes the gifts brought by the groom's side and check both the money and *lutom-laisu* (consist of *Khichong* – necklace made of beads) and the *Pon* (*Saipikhup* and *Khamtang*). If they are satisfied with the gifts brought, *godal* is put in an upright position to show that they have accepted. However, if they are not satisfied, they put them back on top of *godal* like before which shows their dissatisfaction over the gifts. In such cases, the groom's *bepu* and his representatives discusses on the matter outside the house about what must be done to pacify the bride's party. Generally, these problems are solved by adding more money on the gift. Sometimes, *lutom-laisu* got rejected if the items have any defects like hole in the shawls. Such cases are also solved by replacement with new one. In fact, gifts material brought for bride price are generally chosen by the elders who are cultural and custom experts. Thus, only the best materials are taken along for bride's price. If the amount submitted is too less or *Lutum-laisu* has any defect, it is considered as an insult for the bride's family. However, this incident is quite rare in the Kuki marriage system. In this manner, the bride price was settled, and marriage takes place in the traditional Kuki society.

Bride price of women differs from clan to clan in Kuki society, for example Haokip clan put 10 *Mithuns* as their daughter's *man* (bride price) but Chongloi clan demands only 7 *mithuns* as bride price. This tradition is sometime relaxed in some marriage's ceremony on ground of *Khankho*⁷ among the Kukis. Bride price is generally paid less than the actual amount which was announced in the day of fixing the amount (*sumtansatha*). This practice is assumed as a sign of respect for the bride's representative (*Bepu* and *Tubul*). While giving out the price, the groom's *bepu* request the bride's *bepu* to accept their gifts

by mentioning the amount ask and the amount brought for the bride price. If full amount ask for bride price is given, the bride relatives take it as an act of pride on the side of the groom. Only in certain condition such as anger of the bride relatives over those marriages will accept the full amount.

Vessels and containers The Kukis did not make any vessel himself except to adapt with the ones readymade by nature. For use as vessels, there was large use made of bamboo and gourd. A bamboo species (*go-mi*) is cut to about three to four feet long and their nodes broken inside to be used for carrying water. These were called *tui-thei*, (water container). Gourds are known as *um* in Kuki. Gourds with round bodies and flat bottoms were used largely for carrying drinking water or *zu*. These were meant to serve the purpose of bottles. They had a small hole at the neck form which liquid was poured out to drink and a stopper plugged in the hole to spill while carrying it. Gourds were also used extensively like a modern mug for drinking water by cutting off one side of the body and the tapered neck for its handle. Gourds are also used for storing seeds and other small things. The neck portion is tight with rope and hung on *gaplheng* for future use.

LEATHER WORK

The Kukis made various things out of leather. Different methods were applied to the hides of different animals. We may describe the method in relation to the use items that were manufactured.

Sheaths Sheaths were made for knives and *daos* (machete). They were made in very much the same way as with the quivers and pouches. Two strips of leather are cut oversized to the shape of the weapon. The strips are coupled together, and holes made all over the sides except where the blade was to be inserted in. These holes are used for inserting of thongs to tie two straps together.

Backstrap A simple belt was made for giving support and tension to the handloom warp while weaving. For this rawhide was used. Even the hairs of the animal were not even shaved for this warp belt. The hide was cut into a strip of about 5 inches broad and long enough to curve round the waist and over.

Drums Drums (*Khong*) are simple hollowed out wood. The rawhide is stretched on both sides stitched to each other with rawhide strips or vine. Pegs are inserted between the hide strips and the drum. Tightening the strips of rawhide by giving more tension through the pegs or loosening them controls the pitch of the drum. There were big drum known as *Khongpi*, and small ones known as *Khongcha*. The drums made from the skin of serow (William Shaw, 1929:149), *sa-san* (*capricornis sumatrensis rubidus*) is preferred by the Kukis. Kuki drums were generally made of cowhide with its natural colour. These drums were played by drumstick (*Khong-mol*) with open hand.

Tobacco Tobacco is smoked by the Kukis. It is not known when they had started to acquire this knowledge and habit. By the second half of the 18th century the habit had been strongly interwoven with their culture. There was no discrimination in smoking based on sex and very little on age, as their ethical value was related to it. There were three main ways by which the Kuki consumed tobacco. Two were by smoking. One was the use of pipes and the other by rolling the tobacco in leaves. A bamboo pipe is used for smoking by allowing the tobacco smoke to pass through the water contained in a small gourd. The water which was impregnated with the smoke had very high nicotine content. This is known as '*Tuibuh*' and put inside a separate container. This container was a small little gourd with the top neck cut and provided with a wooden bung for a lid. The liquid was poured into the mouth and kept there till the nicotine had lost its tang or freshness and then spitted out by the consumers.

Ginning Cotton, one major crop cultivated by the Kukis was an essential raw material for manufacturing traditional cloths. Cotton is cultivated in jhum field along with other crops and harvested in the month of January and February. It is cleansed with the help of hand-made local gin known as *Pat-heh*, made of wooden plank consisting two wooden rollers, one end of each being carved

for a few inches of its length into a screw, grooved in the opposite way to the other, so that on the handle being turned the rollers revolve in the opposite direction and the cotton is drawn between them and the seed left behind. The soft cotton is then dried for carding which is carried out by the improvised carding machine called *Pat-heh/Patsai*. *Pat-heh* is a simple and small bow consisting of bamboo sticks to which a string is fixed to give it a shape of bow. The dry cotton is kept inside a basket, and the operator cleanses or softens the cotton on contact by flicking the string with a wooden stick. Then the cotton is rolled with a bamboo stick for spinning. (Paochon, Op.cit., 156).

The Kuki spinning machine known as Mui made of wooden plant and bamboo sticks consisting of four parts such as base, stand, wheel and spindle. The wheel is put on the arm of the T-shaped stand. The spindle is fixed on the shorter stand which is placed opposite to the wheel. The spindle is turned by a belt running around the wheel. The revolving wheel will cause rotation in the spindle. Which fixed on the shorter stand. The rolled cotton is then attached with the rotating spindle rod to transform soft cotton into a simple yarn. The fiber or yarn is transformed from spinning spike to a reel thread by using a hand-made machine called *Patlam* (winding machine). After transformation into a real thread, it is prepared for dyeing. Natural herbs collected from the jungle are used for dyeing the thread into various colors such as *Mupi* leaves and fruits used for producing black color, while *Khaosan* was used for the red color. These herbs are grinded and mixed with warm water and soda extracted from ashes it is then dry on bamboo tube for weaving. The method of cotton manufacture follows a long process to bring out cotton into fiber thread. Notwithstanding the process carried out is the skill and talent of the past generation. (*Ibid.*, 157)

Weaving Before the introduction of the cotton thread, weaving patterns and design of various attires were first produced in the form of weaving a particular plant fiber known as *Ai-ge*. Weaving is entirely done by womenfolk and was considered as part of their domestic duties. Weaving started with by weaving *Ai-ge* plant and when she grows up, she started weaving cotton yarn. Thus, every woman in the olden days, practiced the art of weaving right from her tender age. In fact, weaving was the primary qualification for girls to attain marriageable age as basketry works was for men. Women, from their childhood, started developing the skill of weaving from her mother. Mothers are considered as the instructors to their daughters in this matter.

Cotton products of various kinds are the sole manufacture of women folk. If one must extend the description of women in tribal life, it cannot ignore the manufacture of different attires by women which is regarded as one of the most important reasons for pride and dignity of their fold. Clothing is important attire considered to be a mark of identification symbol of one tribe from another. In other words, clothes reflect identity, self-esteem, status, and background. The Kuki women produced various designs of clothes taken out from the pattern of different objects. In the traditional period, each cloth has its value and uniqueness, shawl such as *Saipi-khup*, *Thangnang* were wore and owned by village chief (*Haosa*) and clan chief (*Phung-upa*). These are one of the most important and valuable articles connected with tradition and custom in the tradition Kuki society. Shawl like *Pondum*, *Ponlhe*, *Saipikhup*, etc were regarded as the most important items used in measuring bridal value. *Mongvom*, *Chon-pon*, *Thangnang*, etc are also worn depending on the occasions.

Zu 'Zu' is a generic name in Kuki for all fermented drinks. Fermented beverages depend on yeast for the fermentation. Yeast, known commonly as *Chol* by the Kukis, is known as *dawidim* in Mizo. There is no clear evidence of how the Kuki derived the knowledge of making yeast. In view of this we may present the belief that surrounds the advent of this beverage in relation to the cultural expression of this item that played such an important role in the social fabric of the society; it also had far reached consequences in its relation to the drive for surplus production of rice.

Zu was the main beverage of the Kuki people and its use in social functions and ceremonies made it a necessary item to be prepared by every family. *Zu* is a very important article with these people. It is required for the due observance of every ceremony; a child's birth is an occasion for entertaining its relations, no marriage can be celebrated without the consumption of *zu*, while after his death a Lushai's (Kuki) friends and relatives drown their sorrow in all the *zu* they can obtain. Has a demon to be

propitiated, the return of a raiding or hunting party to be celebrated or a friend to be welcomed, in every case *zu* is indispensable.⁸ There were three main categories of *zu* in pre-colonial Kuki society – *Vaizu*, *Zuting*, *Anthom*, and *Zukha*. There are many different types of beverages differing from each other based on the ingredient used for making the beverage. Each had a specific role and relevance. The method of preparation the potency of the drink was also different.

BRASS AND METAL WORK

The general character of the Kuki village was non-specialization, there were few areas of labour which had developed into skills. As a full-time specialist, we have only the blacksmith, on whom the villagers depended for making of their iron tools and weaponry. The blacksmith was compensated with a basket of paddy and rendering one day free labour from each household. The common folk also depended on the blacksmith for making of certain items. Pottery had reached a certain amount of skill, but potters did not make pots fulltime and was not as specialized as smithing.

Blacksmith As far as production is concerned, the blacksmith was the only person specialized and working fulltime. He was given a basket full of rice (*changseo*) from every household annually. Whenever a hunter is lucky enough to kill a game, a portion of the killed animal is shared to the blacksmith. This meat due to him was called *Thihkheng-sa*, *thih* means Iron, *sa* means meat. *Thihkheng-sa* is a piece of meat which is taken out from the back of the animal killed.

For forging metal, the blacksmiths of the entire northeast were dependent upon the piston bellow for the constant supply of a good draft of air to heat the iron to make it malleable. Lehman refers to it as “Malyan” pistons bellow forge. (F.K. Lehman, 1963)⁹ Since the main component of the forge (the pistons) depends on the availability of a good-sized bamboo, this is a very sensible use of local material to serve important and necessary equipment at a very low cost of labour. It is very tempting to suggest that the very idea of the bellows be prompted by the readily available cylindrical bamboo. (Shaw, 1929:92-93).

Their *daos* (machete) and spearheads are made by the *thishu* (thihkheng) of the village out of scraps of iron got from bazaars or stolen.¹⁰ All the metal work in the village is the responsibility of the village blacksmith. When he is not well, one male member from the family substitutes him. His role is very important as agriculture is an intensive work. Moreover, the availability of tools and implements will allow good amount of harvest from the *jhum* field.

Brass products were quite popular within the Kukis culture. William Shaw in his work ‘Notes on Thadou Kukis’ mentioned two places where brass items were manufactured. They are *Thijonbung* and *Lhanpelkot*. He went on to state that, Tamlopa (Thadou-Kuki) made varieties of brass items such as – *Dahpi* (large Kuki gongs), *Tuidol* (Large basin), *Lumdal* (Brass plates placed on shields), *Chaldep* (Brass dao-shaped plate worn upright on head in full dress).

Gun Powder The Kukis had access to flintlocks and muskets during the 18th century. The Kukis though skilled at the use of guns and the manufacture of gunpowder, did not manufacture any guns. But they were able to use the technology as they could make repairs on the guns and even make their own gunpowder by using indigenous material. According to Lewin the *Lakher* had been able to manufacture gunpowder when he was in their country in 1865, (TH Lewin, 1869:113) and this probably applies to all the Kuki sub-tribes. Hodson has suggested that the Kukis learnt it from the Meiteis who had learned it from Chinese merchants as far back as 1630. (Hudson, 1911:38).

The Kuki word for gunpowder is *meilou*. Each village manufactured its own gunpowder, the three components of which were obtained in the following manner. To produce saltpeter, dung, or the filth, which collects under the houses, is placed in a large kind of cradle or basket, and through its water is slowly filtered, the resulting liquor being collected in a pan underneath. The liquid that is collected is boiled for two to three hours and is then poured off into a wooden trough to cool and is left till it crystallizes. (Perry, 1976:135). The salt thus crystallized out was necessarily an impure one but served the necessary purpose well. The nitrate crystals are dried in the sun and then mixed with charcoal. Charcoal was mixed with *gacha-mu* (the seed of black beans) and nitrate crystal. The mixture was in

proportion of one seer of crystals to two seers of charcoal. This mixture is thoroughly pounded in a mortar, and a little water and spirit are added. When it has been sufficiently pounded, it is dried in the sun, and can then be used as gunpowder.

According to Parry, the powder made by this process is quite powerful, but gives out a lot of smoke. This, according to Parry, was a tedious way of manufacturing, as from about twenty seers of nitrate water only about a quarter of a seer of gunpowder could be obtained. A carefully sifted portion was always carried in a small powder horn for the purpose of priming. It seems that the making of gunpowder was done with such care that a misfire was of rare occurrence with the first shots, from a hidden ambush and after a long and steady aim, almost invariably hit their mark. The powder for loading was carried in a large horn made from that of the *mithun*, and highly ornamented. From this it was poured into a measure neatly shaped out of a piece of bamboo. to facilitate rapid reloading a number of these ready filled, with the bullet wrapped in a rag acting as a cork, were often carried in the person. The blacksmith made the bullets from all scraps of iron that they could lay their hands on. (*Ibid.*,135)

Pottery In olden days there were no major industries among the hill tribes. Most of their day-to-day domestic needs were not met by themselves. Pottery making was considered as the work of the womenfolk among the Kukis. Shakespeare observed two kinds of pots in use among the Lushai community as, 'a small circular pot with a mouth of 6 to 8 inches in diameter used for cooking, and a large jar, about 24 inches high and 15 inches in diameter, tapering to about 9 inches at the mouth, which is used for brewing beer. Pudaite stated that, 'when the village site was selected, great importance was attached to the availability of the bubel khuh's pit. A limited variety like *Bubel* (rice cooking pot), *Nganbel* (pot for distillation of rice beer), and *Zubel* (rice beer pot) were made.

The main economy of the Kukis was based on *Jhum* and terrace form of agriculture in which varieties of crops are cultivated. *Lom* which was labour group consisting of all abled-bodied individual members works in the agricultural and other domestic activities. There were three types of *lom* in the traditional period. *Lom* members celebrate festivals such as *Lom-zuneh*, *Lom-kivah*, etc. where *zu* is consumed in large amount. Festivals appeared to be most important and essential part of their socio-economic life. Manufacture of *zu* was essential since in every festival *zu* is served. *Kut*, the post-harvest festival is celebrated by the Kukis to give thanks to Almighty God. Those family who could produce maximum harvest for the year from the *jhun* field perform agricultural rite known as *Sa-Ai*. Rice was the main ingredients for making *zu*, where every household planted in the *Jhum* field.

Apart from agricultural work, the Kukis were also engaged in other occupation such as hunting, trapping, fishing, and basketry works to meet their basic needs. Bachelor's Dormitory served as the training center for young boys and girls. They learnt different kind of skills and technique which are considered important at that time. There is *Lom-upa* who is the mentor of the *som* members. He is responsible in guiding the members about disciples, he taught them the technique of war, basketry works, hunting, etc. Girls also learnt about weaving and other important matters relating to female gender.

Specialized related work such as iron work, brass work was done by village blacksmith. All the important agricultural tools are made by blacksmith, in return he was given one day labour by one member from each household. Pottery was generally the work of women during the traditional periods.

Conclusion:

With the introduction of modern education and acceptance of a new faith, the Kuki world view is greatly broadened and their approach to life enhanced. As a necessary consequence, they begin to develop in all spheres of life and work. The machine-made goods become more popular than the traditional ones. The use of *mithun* is substituted with money in the bride price. It is universally accepted within the Kuki community as a new tradition in the present time. Young people also began to marry girls outside the tribe (inter-tribe marriage) which mostly does not require bride price. Dormitory system was replaced by modern institutions. Manufacture of traditional basketry become

less popular; people prefer to buy ready-made plastic materials. However, the role of *godal* in marriage system is still practice and relevant among the Kukis.

Now a-days the use of brass gong also become unpopular among the Kukis. None of these things are made and the art itself has been lost. Burmese gongs are bought whenever they are required. In marriage too, brass made items such as gongs are replaced with money which become common in the modern day. These brass items also become quite difficult to procure which compel the people to look for alternatives.

Bamboo made items such as *godal*, *dop*, *hahvang*, *nam*, *pucha*, etc. got decreases in their demand. With the introduction of western education and Christianity, good number of the Kukis began to settle down in the urban areas for better facilities. Some people began to change their profession by serving as teacher in government schools, and clerks in government offices. As their profession changed, they no longer needed the traditional household items since they now fully depend on ready-to-cook rice. This rice does not need to be winnowed again once milled in the rice mill. Hence, the use of *godal* which is used for winnowing became less important. Only few people continue to keep and use *godal* particularly in marriage events.

Shawl such as *Phoipi*, *Phoichal*, and *Ponlhe* (traditional cotton cloth) were the clothes produced and used by the Kukis during the traditional period. Later, better shawls such as *Saipi-khup*, *thangnang*, *khamtang*, etc. were made with some designs copied from Python skin, hornbill, crab, cucumber seed, etc. However, with the cultural assimilation of different tribes in the modern period, these shawls began to change in styles and designs in modern fashion. One shawl now began to have the design of two to three shawls. Fashion dress of western styles become more popular than the traditional one. Traditional dresses are worn only during cultural events. In other occasions, western dress is much preferred by both young and old people in the society.

Notes:

¹ This bamboo species has long internode which is most suitable for making *nang* for tightening things.

² *Gap-lhengis* is a hanging platform fixed above the hearth which has four layers for storing different types of household tools.

³ The representative of the bride's family, he will decide matters related to the family he is responsible for. Every family had their own *Bepu* who is the closest friend of the family head. He oversees that family in both good and hard times.

⁴ It includes *Bepu* and the girl's father to say the final word about the price.

⁵ Every clan has their own price tag in Kuki society, it was strictly followed during the traditional days.

⁶ *Lutom-laisu* consist of necklace made of beads and *Saipikhup* (shawl), necklace for the girl's mother and shawl for the girl's father. This is given to thank them for raising their daughters with all the pains and hardships.

⁷ It means compromise or consideration out of love, there is no exact translation for this term in English. The Kuki society was filled with such tradition during the olden days, though it becomes less known in the present day's society, the reason probably could be out of jealousy and selfishness.

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