

## **Culture Change among the Kuki: A Case Study of Chalva Village in Manipur**

Lalgin Chongloi

Culture is the unique quality of a social group which reflects their identity. Different societies all over the world have different culture. The Kuki of Manipur is blessed with unique and vibrant culture which they have been preserving and upholding without any outside influence for very long decades. However, culture is not something static but is dynamic and rapidly changing. The culture of Kuki society also witnessed a wind of change mainly due to outside influence. Since then their culture is in the process of flux and change. Therefore, this article attempts to explore some aspects of cultural changes, both material and non-material, among the Kuki of Manipur as observed in Chalva Village.

**Keywords:** Culture change, Kuki, Chalva, Manipur.

### **Introduction**

Culture is the socially acquired way of life and styles of a group of people. It consists of pattern of thinking, feeling and acting that are characteristics of the members of a particular segment of society (Harris, 1986: 144). Culture determines how members of a society think and feel, it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life. Members of society usually take their culture for granted. It has become so much a part of them that they are often unaware of its existence. Culture has two essential qualities: firstly it is learned, secondly it is shared. Without it there would be no human society (Haralambos and Heald, 1980: 3). Culture is what the human species have and the other species lack. This would include speech, knowledge, belief, customs, art and technology, learned from other men, from our elders or the past including what we may add to it (Kroeber, 1983).

Edward B. Taylor (1958) defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, moral, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. According to Malinowski (1926) culture is the total way of life and it includes the entire mental, social and physical means which make life run its course. Radcliffe Brown (1952) opines that culture is a process by which a person acquires from contact with other person or from such things like books or works of art, knowledge, skill, idea, beliefs, sentiment etc.

Two of the most basic components of culture are material and non-material culture

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Dr. Lalgin Chongloi teaches Sociology at Raid Laban College, Shillong, India.

(Scupin, 1995: 36). Material culture is the generic term that summarises and identifies all kinds of tangible things manufactured and modified by human beings, differentiated on their functions, uses, modes of production, materials, and consumption patterns. At times the term art, artefact, commodity, craft, decorative art, domestic art, material history, museum specimen, object, plastic arts, physical history, specimen, and technology have been substituted for material culture; at other times they have been differentiated. Over the years the definition of material culture has expanded and contracted depending on research goal (Levinson and Ember, 1996: 747). In non-material culture we can deal with knowledge, beliefs, value, custom, traditions, law, war etc. But these two aspects of culture are complementary to each other (Upadhyay and Pandey, 1993).

Change is basic feature of everyday human life. Change can have a significant effect upon a culture and may lead to a profound impact upon the lives of individuals in a culture undergoing change. Change in culture also can lead to different styles of life that may be healthier, safer and more personally satisfying for individuals experiencing change. Exact predictions of the course of cultural change are difficult to make because many of the factors involved in change are complexly interconnected. A general knowledge change processes can be very helpful in dealing effectively with some of the major consequences of change, both for entire populations and individuals (Williams, 1990: 344). According to Ong (1987) “cultural change is not understood as unfolding according to some predetermined logic of development, modernisation or capitalism but as the disrupted, contradictory and different outcomes which involve changes in identity, relations of struggle and dependence, including the experience of reality itself” (Quoted in Levinson and Ember, 1996: 302).

The term culture change has now assumed a very broad based scope. It is the conceptual formulation that refers to culture process such as growth, integration and acculturation. Culture change is any modification in the way of life of a people, material and non material whether consequent of innovation, invention and acculturation (Thakro, 2002: 4). According to Kingsley Davis “cultural change embraces all changes occurring in any branch of culture including art, science, technology, philosophy etc as well as changes in the forms and rules of social organisation” (Quoted in Rao, 2001: 201).

Manipur has three major ethnic groups: the Meiteis of the valley, the Kukis and Nagas of the surrounding hills. They are predominantly Mongoloid, with strains of the other non-Mongoloids elements who from the pre-historic times till today speak Tibeto-Burman language. Historical reasons greatly influenced the independent growth of these social groups with varying degrees of cultural development and civilization, of which Meiteis among these are the most dominant and advanced community (Kabui, 1988: 12). The Kukis are an ethnic group that spread throughout the North-eastern region of India, Northwest Burma and Chittagong Hill tracts in Bangladesh. In North-eastern India they are present in all the states except Arunachal Pradesh. This dispersal across international border is mainly attributed to the British colonial policy (Haokip, 2013: 85). This article uses the term ‘Kuki’ to signify the Thadou dialect speaking community of the Kukis.

This article is based on both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary data were collected by undertaking field work at Chalva village of Sadar Hills in Manipur. Household census, interview scheduled and observation method were applied

in collecting primary data. On the other, secondary data related to this article were collected from various sources like published and un-published books etc. Chalva village is located on the state highway connecting Imphal and Tamei, popularly known as IT Road which is about 90 Km from the state capital. It is the largest village in Twilang area of Manipur with 174 household and established in the year 1881. It has one Government Junior High School under the Department of Education, Government of Manipur. The influenced of Christianity tends to be slower in this village as the Church was established only in 1951 in comparison to some of its neighbouring villages like Tujang Vaichong and Chaljang where the Church were established in the year 1916 and 1922 respectively. It is now a whole Christian village belonging to Kuki Christian Church (KCC) which is one of the various associations of the Kukis. Agriculture is the main occupation of the village and they practice both shifting and settled cultivations.

The waves of changes in the world today has left no community unaffected for good or evil, even the Kuki society is no exception to this. In line with the fast changing world the age old custom and culture has been undergoing a process leading to the emergence of a new dynamic society (Doungel, 1992). Therefore, this article attempts to explore some aspects of cultural changes i.e. material and non-material among the Kuki of Manipur.

### **Changing of Culture among the Kuki**

Change is the law of nature, like most things in this world, society also undergoes changes of various types and seldom remains static in a fast moving universe (Mibang, 1994: 87). The main reason that leads the tribals to change their way of life is due to the advent of the British rulers in the country. The Britishers exploited the tribals of India to their own advantage and convinced them the need to reject the old and to follow the new which accounted to an aping of the west. They also started the study of the tribal ways of life for their own benefits. They did this not do for strengthening tribal culture, but rather they simply tried to understand their modes of life so that they could be dominated and governed (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1977: 36). In the nineteenth century, a significant landmark of changes has been noticed in the life of the tribal people of North-Eastern part of India. It witnessed a change from traditional to modernity. Such changes taking place in the socio-cultural life are clearly noticeable in their attitudes of life, family life, social life, customs and tradition, religious beliefs and practices, marriage etc (Kikon, 2002). Cultural changes of the Thadou-Kuki is mainly due to their exposure of the external influence which may be extensively noted from the time of British advent in Manipur and it was intensified by Christian missionaries and the development programme of the independent India (Sitlhou, 1982). The study reveals the following material and non-material cultural changes among the Kuki of Manipur.

### **Material culture**

#### *Dress*

Dress reflects culture of the people. The Kuki men wear loin cloth worn somewhat like 'dhoti' and have one or more cloths to wrap around themselves over one shoulder or both. They also wear a cloth as a 'pugri' or turban about a metre or just a little longer. It

is tied around the head with the ends or one end sticking up in front. On the other, the women wear a loin cloth which is wrapped around their waist and reaches a little over half way down their thighs. Attached to the cloth, sometimes separately is a string which is passed around the waist and so holds it up. In addition they also wear a breast cloth which is wrapped tight around their torso, the outer corner being tucked in at the top at a spot between the breast and armpit. Sometime an additional wrapper is used thrown over the shoulders, thus, completing their wardrobes. All these cloths are woven from cotton which is grown on their land and spun by the women (Shaw, 1929: 18-19).

The Kuki has been deviating from their traditional sense of dressing to that of modern style due to the influence of Christianity along with formal education, westernisation and modernisation. Of all the factors Christianity has a deep impact in every field of the life of the Kuki. The Christian missionaries who came to them as bread and butter do not only preach the gospel but also earnestly imparted education to them. Besides these, they taught them the importance of cleanliness and also inculcated the way of dressing. It is the Christian missionaries who sowed the seeds to modern patterns of dressing which has a far reaching consequence as a result a sweeping and major transformation on dress has taken place among them. This is true in the case of Chalva village where field work was conducted though located in one of the interior areas of Manipur.

It is observed from Chalva village that the young as well as old generation prefer modern dresses against traditional ones which immensely affect traditional cloth and its way of dressing. Wearing of modern dresses with latest styles of design has become a common trend among them. They therefore, wear latest design like jeans, pants, skirts, mini-skirts, shirts, braziers, coats, shoes etc. New way of dressing does not only have its impact among the youths, it also equally affects elderly persons which is clearly evident from the cloth they wear. It is a rare thing to see a man wearing *Tuhcha* (turban) which signifies a dignity of man in society as the tradition of cultivating long hair by the male is no longer endorsed. In doing so they ignore the cultural significance associated with it. Similarly wearing of *Pheichom* (dhoti) is also a rare thing in this village as even elderly men prefer to wear pants against *Pheichom*. However, despite changes, the study explored among women that traditional *Ponve* (wrap around) is sustaining and continued which could be observed at the time of socio-cultural events or church services. They wear it pleasingly and charmingly together with modern shoes, shirt, braziers and other accessories for adornment. It is further observed that for few sections of women, traditional *ponve* is first choice of their daily wears. Ironically, for majority of women except on socio-cultural events they prefer modern dresses which are apparent in their daily attire. The changing pattern of dressing from traditional to modernity deeply affects the skills of weaving and spinning among women which in the traditional period is considered as one of the essential qualities that every woman should possessed. In this regard Ghosh (1992) opines that “the knowledge of spinning, dyeing and weaving among the Kuki are a thing of forgotten past now as they are no longer self reliant as they used be. Though weaving is still continued among them but not from the cotton they once grow from their jhum field, but with the help of mill yarn imported from outside”.

### *Ornaments*

Ornaments are deeply associated with the life of traditional Kuki for adornment which is

constantly in use by men and women in completing their outfits. According to Shaw (1929) “the women, if unmarried, wears spiral brass fore-armlet which starts at the wrist and goes up within four inches or so of the elbow. The spirals are flat internally on the flesh and are convex outside with a breadth of half an inch roughly. Just above the elbow an armlet of bell metal is worn. Necklaces of blue or red beads are worn and a hollow ring about two inches in diameter in the lobe of the ear. This latter is very like a napkin-ring, but has an out turned rim in front about one by fourth inch wide. To make the ear capable of carrying these rings they pierce their lobes and extend them by putting in rolled leaves of gradually increasing dimensions. The ring is of bright metal or silver”. The men wear a cornelian bead in each ear tied with a piece of cotton to the lobe of the ear which is pierced to admit it. The beads are much treasured by them and often form items in prices paid for brides (ibid: 20).

The importance of traditional ornaments used to complete daily wears among the Kuki are disappearing gradually. Acceptance of western values is increasingly high among the youths which are commonly observed to an ornament they use for embellishment. They have almost discarded and abandoned traditional ornaments yielding to fresh costume of modern influences. Thus, unusual and peculiar ways of arraying themselves by wearing modern accessories is no longer a rare thing among them today which is apparent to ornaments they used. Traditional ornaments which they wear gracefully and elegantly also indicate enduring principles in which their rich vibrant culture is build and which is now a thing forgotten in the present society, as the younger generation shy away towards a blend of modern ornaments which came in latest styles and designs. Therefore, the significance of traditional ornaments has almost died down. This is true in the case of Chalva village. They decline to use traditional ornaments for trimming as it is judged to be off trend in contemporary society. They rather prefer modern accessories which is apparent in their daily wears. Though few old ladies are still seen wearing *Kichong* (beads) and *Bilkam* (big earring) as a part of their daily attire. Nevertheless, one could still observe the traditional beautiful ornaments which came fully alive during the festivals as these are still in use for beautification. Ironically, the transformation of ornaments from traditional to modernity is so enormous that except on cultural events it is seldom in use.

### *Household items*

Traditional household items of the Kuki were simple yet elegant. They are used in daily household chores, hunting, fishing and jhum cultivation. Household items are deeply associated with their daily life enabling them to proceed in making them a fresh to start their daily activities. The highly treasured household items which are also a part of their customs and cultures include earthen pots, wooden plates, bamboo cups, wooden or bamboo spoons, *Twithei* (bamboo pipe), *Twidol* (wooden tub), *Mui* (spinning wheel), *Beng* (hat basket made of bamboo or cane for carrying grains, vegetables and others), *Kongvang* (hat basket made of cane and bamboo for carrying fire woods and others), *Nam* (hat sheath which is made of bamboo or cane for carrying *Beng* and *Kongvang*), *Phoi* (white blanket), *Sinkhup* (small container made of cane), *Pucha* (average container made of bamboo or cane), *Lel* (cane basket with cover for storing clothes), *Godal* (bam-

boo sieve to sift rice and others), *Dop* (a large sieve made of bamboo or cane for drying grains and others), *Dah* (gongs), *Khichong* (beads), *Thingkhong* (wooden box), *Koh* (a large containers for storing grains), *Lhem*, *Thilbu* (instrument which is in use for weaving), *Meipum* (gun), *Tengcha* (spear), *Thel* (bow and arrow) *Leen* (fishing net), *Ngakoi* (fishing hook), *Bom/Loung* (fish trap made of bamboo), *Koite* (sickle), *Chempong* (dao), *Chemjam* (sword), *Chempai* (sheath) *Nang* (bamboo or cane lash), *Tuhcha/Tuhpheng* (hoe) and others.

Though, life of contemporary Kuki society is still associated with their traditional household items, nevertheless many new things has been added and a number of them has been dropped. The use of wooden plates, earthen pots, bamboo cups, *twithei*, *twidol*, *lel*, *sinkhup*, etc. is a rare thing among them today as they prefer to use melamine plates or Chinese plates, glass cups and other modern items which came in latest styles and attractive designs. Similarly, the use of all kinds of household items such as modern furnitures, utensils, refrigerators, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) stove, pressure cooker, frying pan, hot cases, water filter, grinder, sofa, curtains, blankets, mattresses, lantern, battery torches, solar lamp, wall clock, sewing machines, umbrella, bicycle, cars, mobile phone, television, compact disc player, computer and many more has become a common trend among them. Therefore, they paid no consideration to their traditional household possessions as it is measured to be of old fashion to treasure and the importance of it has been declining. This creates a space to the importance of modern household objects to which people were fascinated, thereby undermining cultural significance connected with their traditional household items.

A change is also observed in Chalva village with regard to the possessions of household items. The people in this village, particularly women folks, have been deeply influenced by changing environment as a result they are conscious of the household items possessed by them and also of others possessions. They have developed a strong sense of passion and desire to acquired different styles and varieties of housing equipments. In connection with a strong passion and desire it is observed and found that women of Chalva village mobilised and organised themselves into a group called *Sum Lom* and whosoever wish can become a member of the group. In this *Sum Lom* a fixed amount of money, which is unanimously fixed by group members, is collected within the group after every one or two weeks or a month depending on the agreement they had made mainly for the purpose of acquiring modern household items which they could not afford individually. *Sum Lom* is of different types. For instances it can be formed with a motive for acquiring foreign blankets, dinner sets, utensils, wooden arm bench and wooden cupboards of latest design, water filter, LPG, aluminium tin for roofing the house and so on. Similarly, in line of *Sum Lom* they also have *Lom* (labour corps) in which they sold their *Lom* to anyone who is in need in returns for money. The money which they receive is utilised again for acquiring new household items.

However, it is pertinent to note that all the *Sum Lom* and *Lom* are not necessarily meant for acquiring modern household items as it can also be meant for various purposes such as saving of income or to complete their agricultural works in time. Similarly, it is equally important to note that *Lom* and *Sum Lom* are not the only two ways of acquiring modern household items in this village. Nevertheless, the outcomes of *Lom*

and *Sum Lom* are tremendous and have significant impact with regard to household items of Chalva village. Therefore, it is not a peculiar thing to see different kinds of modern household items thereby increasingly replacing the traditional treasures.

### *Housing*

The traditional houses of the Kuki are made of wood post with wooden rafters. Thatching grass is used for the roof which is held in place by split bamboos and bamboo or cane lashings. The walls are bamboo mating. The whole structure is raised about four to six feet at the back depending on the nature of the ground surface, while the front rests on the ground. The house contains one large room and a veranda in the front. In the veranda the mortar for pounding paddy is placed on one side. About the middle of the room a hearth is made, where all the cooking is done, with three stones of conical shape are placed slanting inwards so as to hold the utensil for cooking and the fire is placed between the stones. Over this cooking place there are two or more platform hanging from the roof upon which things are dried (Shaw, 1929: 84). The average size of the Kuki house is about 20 feet long by 14 feet broad. The chief and the wealthy villagers indulge in much larger ones. These larger one too consists of only one large room, as the smaller ones, but inside cubicles are sometimes found for the slaves or servants to sleep (ibid: 85).

As change is universal phenomena, therefore, great changes have taken place in the field of constructing a house among the Kuki today. This is mainly due to the improvement of their economic condition, road communication and transportation along with modern techniques which are apparent to the materials they used in constructing a house as most of the houses are in modern pattern of structure with modern amenities which costs a huge amount of expenses resulting a house to more complex at the same time more durable and attractive. The houses normally include one large room which is for multipurpose use, bed rooms, kitchen and dining room and also attached sanitary latrines and bathroom with western styles of designing. Moreover, construction of modern brick houses has become a common trend among well to do family. However, it is to be noted that as construction of a house is mainly associated with economic position of family concern, poor families who are unable to incur such huge amount are still confined to simple design house.

Changes are also visible in Chalva village with regard to the construction of a house though enormous amount of development and transformation is still required. The housing style varies from one house to the other. Though modern buildings and brick houses are not a part in housing construction of the village, nevertheless, styles and structures of houses are different from traditional shapes and designs. Houses are still a blend of thatching grass and aluminium tin roofing with simple styles of construction. Despite a number of houses being thatching grass roofing, styles and structure of a houses is no longer in line with traditional ones as it is more attractive and durable at the same time it has a spacious room for kitchen, living room, bed room and others.

## Non-Material Culture

### *Religion*

The Kuki believes that life is given to every living being by *Pathen* (God) who rules the universe. He has the power to subdue the evil influences of *Thilha* and it is to him that they do their sacrifices in order to regain health or escape any adversity that may befall on them. He is supposed to have made the heavens and earth and is all powerful (Shaw, 1929: 71). The traditional religion of the Kuki is said to be animism in which all objects like animals, plants, mountains, etc. are believed to have souls. The Kuki in their beliefs and practices are understood to have blended animistic and monotheistic religion. They believed in the existence of supernatural power God called *Chung Pathen* meaning 'God of all, God of Heaven' who is believed to have made everything in this universe and who is believed to live in heaven (Tuboi, 2005: 243). Each household has *Indoi* which is the symbolism that affirms the ever presence of *Pathen* at all times, who is also guardian of the house (Chongloi, 2008: 5). They also believed that the universe is permeated with the multitudes of supernatural beings who take abode in forest, rocks, rivers, lakes etc. They are therefore, classified into those that are harmless if not benevolent and those that are malevolent. All of them are commonly known as *Thilha* meaning evil spirits (Sitlhou, 1982: 27). According to their beliefs these spirits are extremely selfish, vicious and devoid of all higher qualities like mercy, justice and thus they do need excuse to harm men. They also believed that these spirits had been working to harm men in the form of diseases, madness and all kinds of misfortune emanate from them (Das, 1985: 431). Therefore, prayers and sacrificial offerings, animal sacrifices with magical charm are performed to appease these deities of malevolent nature. *Kithoi* or ceremonial sacrifice and *Kilha Lo* or special sacrifice i.e. to retain the spirits or souls are the two most important sacrifice performed occasionally by them (Vumson, 1972).

However today, the Kuki are drifting away from their traditional religion due to influence of Christianity. With the coming of Christianity old beliefs and practices were totally abandoned and discarded as it becomes a taboo in ethics and principles of their new religion. The coming of Christianity is also considered to be exit point in their religious field which brought radical changes transforming their world view. Through the hard works of the Christian missionaries and the early Christians among them almost cent percent of the population today is converted into Christianity.

Therefore, Christianity has removed the fear for evil spirits and give a spirit of liberation leading to joy and hope for the future. Under a new Christian life all the customs based on animistic beliefs, practices as well as superstitions and taboos are replaced by the Christian practices and worship. The office of the village priest or *Thempu* is replaced by the church pastors and deacons (Doungel, 1992: 117)

The coming of Christianity among the Kukis is reformatory in nature removing unnecessary and meaningless rites and rituals which were embedded in their day to day life. Therefore, after the shift of their religion, animal sacrifices with magical charm performed to appease deities of malevolent nature as well as *Kithoi* or ceremonial sacrifices and *Kilha Lho* or special sacrifices are totally discarded. They realise the insignificance of such religious rites they performed in order to be liberated from malevolent



spirits and to get good health and wealth. This is apparent in Chalva village in which no such sacrifices have taken place. They rather participated actively and meaningfully in Church activities. One of the various church activities which plays a significant role in bringing the 'we-feeling' among them and closeness to *Pathen* (God) is the voluntary and enthusiastic house visit called *Inchot* performed by *Nupi Lamkaite* (women's leaders) every evening after evening meal. In this *Inchot*, the words of gospel is spread among the household and a special prayer is held for the family whom they visit to seek abundant blessings from God. Besides this, prayer meetings are held regularly in almost every household and also in the Church. The acceptance of Christianity has great impact on their outlook and as a result there is a transformation in their approach and thinking which leads to the abandonment of their traditional religious deeds. Thus, belief of living with evil spirits is minimise and eventually disappeared with the acceptance of Christianity.

### *Festivals*

India is the land of festivals. There is no month of the year in which some festivals does not fall. All these are celebrated with full vigour all over the country. Each festival is a joyous occasion and the children as well as the young and old are equal participants in that (Raj, 2005: 133). So as the Kuki society of Manipur also have a number of festivals and occasions.

The traditional festivals of the Kukis can broadly be group into two i.e. community and individual festivals. The community festivals were *Chang Kut* (paddy festival), *Mim Kut* (millet festival), *Pawl Kut* (general harvest festival), *Chapchar/Chapphou Kut* (festivals before jhums are burn) and *Ahkhangtha* (festival celebrated after planting of grains and vegetables and lasted for seven days) (Haokip, 1991). Beside the above five community festivals, *Chavang Kut* (autumn festival or post harvest festival) was also observed and celebrated with immense enthusiasms and gaiety. It was predominantly a festival of merry making, singing of a folk song, drinking of *Ju* (rice beer) and dancing. They also display their ability in playing traditional musical instruments like *Goshem* (musical instrument made out of gourd along with bamboo), *Khong* (drum), *Selki* (musical instrument which is made from the horn of mithun), *Theiphit* (bamboo whistle), *Dahpi* (gong), *Kuli* (flute) and others that mesmerise the heart and soul of people who participated in the festival. The traditional dances like *Sagol Pheikhai* (animal dance), *Lom lam* (corps dance), *Vakol lam* (hornbill dance), *Theiphit lam* (whistle dance), *Gal lam* (war dance), *Suhta lam* (bamboo dance) and others were performed in accordance with musical rhythm played out of traditional musical instruments. Besides, in this festival a friendly competition is also held in the events of traditional sports like climbing greased pole, high jump, long jump, wrestling and others which were performed with much traditional fanfare.

Almost all the community festivals were celebrated to show their happiness and gratification and to that of thanksgiving to *Pathen* who has blessed them once again with bountiful and good harvest. One of the greatest significance of these festivals is that people belonging to various sections of society be it *Meithai* (widow), *Chaga* (orphan/ commoner), and *Haosa* (chief) participated together whole heartedly thereby diminish-

ing social barriers and thus equality prevails among them on these auspicious occasions. These festivals exhibit the unique and vibrant colourful culture they possess thereby upholding rich cultural heritage. It has also able to inculcate a sense of 'we-feeling' and unity among them.

The individual festivals signify the achievement of an individual in social ladder. The *Chang-Ai* festival is a celebration of good harvest where a feast is given to the entire village and is the only known ceremony in which the Kuki woman plays the leading part. This festival is a sign for *Pathen* to know where the *Chang-Ai* has been performed before he selects a good place at *Mithiko* (land of the deaths) for that person. *Sa-Ai* is another individual festival performed by men giving feast to the entire village for a day. In this those who have killed all the different kinds of dangerous animals were allowed to perform this festival. The last individual festival is *Chon*. This is considered the most highly prized feast of the lots and can only be performed by those who have done the *Sa-Ai* three times. In this everything has to be done seven times. Seven Mithuns are to be killed and everything must be multiples of seven (Shaw, 1929: 74-76). Ironically, it is observed from Chalva village that many of these festivals are no longer celebrated particularly with regard to individual festivals which once signify achievement of individuals in social ladder. These individual festivals are on the verge of extinction as no cases of such celebration were found during this course of field work. However, it is interesting to note that their unique dances like *Suhta lam*, *Theiphit lam*, *Sagol Pheikhai* and others are still observed and performed in socio-cultural extravaganza of the village. It is also observed that instead of traditional festivals, New Year celebration and other Christian festivals like Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are devotedly observed and celebrated.

In spite of discontinuing a number of traditional festivals by contemporary Kuki society, *Chavang Kut* is still celebrated in the Village, Block, District and State level every year on 1st November. It has been regarded as one of the most highly esteemed and popular festivals of Manipur resulting in the declaration of the day as state holiday by the State government. In this festival beautiful traditional dances continues to be displayed. One of the cultural significance of the present day *Chavang Kut* festival is that it brings cultures of different communities together under one platform thereby cementing their cultural bonding and cohesion of their culture continues to grow despite their diversities. Nevertheless, the present *Chavang Kut* festival tends to lose its poise and aesthetic in which 'Miss Kut' Contest becomes the most important event of the festival, the subduing significance of cultural ambit which signify and epitomise their rich cultural heritage and identity which make them unique. Thus, today the Kukis celebrated *Chavang Kut* just as a reminiscent of the past prosperity.

### *Marriage*

Marriage is one of the universal social institutions which upholds customs and traditions of society. Though universal institutions, it varies from one society to another in the form of rules and practices. To the Kuki marriage is known as *Kichen* which occupies an important place in their society.

Traditionally among the Kuki marriage is deeply associated with family which is

relentlessly considered to be its affairs. Thus in selecting a life partner, rights of individual concern were subjugated and alienated as the choice was made by parents with an intention of avoiding impurity of lineage as they believe in existence of *Kaose* (a family or lineage which posses evil spirits which can harm fellow human being) in society, for they seek only *Lubuhtheng* (purity of lineage from *Kaose*) as a result *Neinu* (mother's brother's daughter) is first choice of the parents. However, today such rule is no longer followed by the youths.

A great change has been observable with regards to the selection of life partner. This is true in case of Chalva village where field work was conducted. During this course of field work it was found and observed among married men and women that in selecting life partners consent of their parents was not necessarily taken rather it depends on the choice of individual's concern. Today in selecting a life partner people acquired a freedom to choose of their own choice which is normally based on physical and external attraction. Hence, self selection has become most prevalent for selecting a life partner in contemporary Kuki society although few cases were there in which parents, relatives and friends continues to play a role. It should however be noted that parent's has indirectly a role i.e. with the consent of their daughters and sons. This transition of selecting a life partner from parents to individual's has greatly affected the once significant of kinship in contracting marriage alliance i.e. *Neinu Kichen* (mother's brother's daughter marriage or cross cousin marriage) as the present youths does not hesitate to deviate from the traditional forms of marital alliance.

### **Conclusion**

As change is the law of nature, the Kuki society who has been upholding and preserving their rich vibrant cultural heritage without any outside influenced for a very long decade has now witnessed the wind of changes mainly due to the onslaught of the external influence such as the advent of British Colonial administration in Manipur, Christian missionaries, improvement of road communication and transportation, spread of formal education, modernisation and others. Since then, their culture is in constant changes as a result many traditional observances have been abolished while preserving a number of them and at the same time absorbing numerous elements which in one way supplement to the richness of their culture and on the other a menace for traditional culture.

Many of the traditional old values are still vital and active and many of the new values are also equally vital and of immense significance to the development of the individual as well as of the society (Mibang, 1994:197). However, the Kuki society should ensure that the element of changes in their culture is in no way surpass the traditional culture. Furthermore, there should be a cautious alteration and assimilation with the new elements and at the same time ensuring the preservation of traditional culture and upholding them. Thus, fusion of traditional and modernity is apparent in the contemporary Kuki culture.

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