



Traditional Village Industries and Craft Production System of the Kukis of Manipur

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Abstract

The economic life of the Kukis in general was conditioned by geographical and physical factors on the one hand and by political and socio-cultural institutions on the other. These institutions are closely intertwined with one another since the pre-colonial days. The gift of nature has played the dominant role in shaping and fostering the basis of all economic activities of the people. As the early Kuki settlement in Manipur took place in the remote corner of the surrounding hills of Imphal valley, there was a limited scope of contact with the outside world in as far as the economic activities are concerned. No wonder, primitive form of agricultural practices, traditional industry, handicrafts and trade characterizes the economic life of the people. It appears that the availability of the forest resources abundantly contributed to the economic prosperity and wealth of the people. Bamboo was a source of food, house building materials, household utensils and furniture, fencing and handicrafts. Agricultural products, artisanal and handicrafts production system help to sustain their self sufficiency economy and livelihoods. Every Kuki village is a self governed and a self administered community. In the light of these, this paper proposes to study some of these issues related to indigenous industrial and craft production system.

Keywords: *Traditional, Handicrafts, Trade, Craftsmen, Jhumias, Economy.*

Introduction

Manipur is a miniature world with so many languages, dialects, ethnic tribal communities, and cultural trends. In this regard the history of Kukis is one of importance in as far as the annals of Manipur is concerned. They are composed of various and diverse ethnic community living in different parts of northeastern states of India, Burma and Bangladesh. The economic life of the Kukis is not only characterised by the agricultural activities but also by traditional cottage industries and the craft production systems. The non-agricultural products help to sustain their self-sufficiency in economy. Agricultural products

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were thus supplemented by the artisanal and handicraft production. In the whole of Manipur, the indigenous cottage industries and handicraft products are dependent upon the availability of natural resources to suit the taste, colour and customs¹. In the indigenous industrial sector, carpentry, basketry, cane and bamboo works, loin loom, metallurgy and metal works, rice-beer preparation, etc. represented the traditional economy of the Kukis. In this sector, the goods are produced by the village artisans to meet mostly the needs of the local population. There were also local craftsmen and artisans who produced goods and services under the support and encouragement of the chief for the community. They also procured their iron tools through barter trade from Manipur and Burma (Myanmar). The craft production system of the Kukis is characterized by skilled work force, knowledge of the design, machining and fitting through apprenticeship making it to the finest finished goods. It is really an art and a source of pride in the Kuki society.

Evidently, the main activity of the Kuki tribes center around food production to which their economy is based mainly on agriculture. It was a subsistence economy. Their agriculture system of jhuming, though destructive, gives the cultivator a reasonable return even without the use of chemical fertilizers. However, as it was unprofitable to cultivate the same site repeatedly, a new plot of land was looked in for. This practice of shifting land for cultivation after every one or two years and then clearing new sites meant that after about five years or more all the land near their habitat had been used. This leads to erosion of the soil and loss of its fertility. But, since there was availability of unoccupied vast tracts of land, the entire village would be tempted to shift to a new site for better economic prospects. This was responsible for the nomadic pattern of their life. This type of nomadic life continued to exist among some of the Thadou Kukis and other tribal groups till the outbreak of the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-18. Apart from this, inter-clan feuds were also responsible for their migratory habits. This was one of the reasons why they were found settled in different parts of Manipur in particular and northeast Indian states in general.

As a result of their constant shifting, it was almost impossible to amass wealth either in the form of immovable or even substantial moveable property. They shifted to new sites with their belongings, which they could carry on their backs. What can be called household property was therefore, very less and limited. Some of their permanent household properties consisted of few agricultural implements like hoes, axes, cooking pot etc. Their weapons of war included *daos*, spears, guns etc. Besides, one or two gongs, a few necklaces and a few heirlooms constituted their household properties. Their domestic animals such as fowls, dogs, goats, pigs, cats, *mithun* also shifted along with the owner. The *mithun* was the most valued domestic animal and those Kuki households, which possessed several number of *Sel* (*mithun*) were considered rich. Cattle wealth was cherished. The old tradition of the Kukis continued to govern agricultural practices in the remote villages. Moreover, the process of distribution or appropriation of products involved channelling the products upward to socially determined allocative centres such as the chief, the priest and the blacksmith. In fact, the traditional society of all the tribals was marked by a constant or mutual 'give and take', the culture, which has been practised till today.

Basketry, Bamboo and Cane Works

Some scholars maintain that the economic life of the Kukis is also in fact a 'Bamboo and cane' based economy. It is true that bamboo is one of the most important elements in their economy as it not only provides but also meets many of their essential needs. While the new bamboo shoots provided food, the young bamboos provided materials for making baskets and house and household furniture. Similarly, cane also met many of their essential needs from providing food to making different kinds of baskets or furniture. Matured bamboos and canes provided the primary building materials for houses and barns. Bamboo was the main material for wood substitution.

The craftsmen in the village produced baskets of different types by using splitted cane and bamboo materials after turning it into a fine rope. They are used for collecting firewood and carrying other goods for domestic purposes, such as *Beng* (carrying basket of open hexagonal shape), *Paipéh* (carrying basket), *Longkai* (Female carrying basket), *Pocha* (storing basket), *Hahvang* (Sieves), *Godal* (Tray), *Sinkhup* (storing box), etc. Another important storing basket is called *Thul* or *Lel* with four short legs and about 12 inches square at the bottom. It starts widening from the bottom till the mouth circle with a diameter of about 30 inches. Its outer layer is closely woven with fine splitted bamboo or cane, which are held in their place by an inner layer of bamboo more loosely woven. These baskets are water proof². Besides, household furnitures like arm chair, stool, table, etc. were also manufactured by the craftsmen. All these art of making basketry and furniture products were mastered by sheer hard work. Intricate designs are a testimony to their skill, which made products, which were need based. Some baskets and mats were partially coloured with intricate designs. The art of making traditional Kuki mats with complex design require a lot of skills and craftsmanship.

Carpentry Works

Carpentry is not a new thing to the Kukis dwelling in the abode of nature. They collected any kind of raw material such as wood or bamboo from the forest for carpentry and other allied works. With the use of primitive instruments such as dao, axe (*Heicha*), a hoe-like spade specially designed for carpentry works called *Heikhup* etc. the Kuki craftsmen produced impressive household properties and furniture such as drinking wooden cups, drinking mugs of buffalo, bamboo tube for storing water (*Tuithei*), wooden plates, bamboo spoons (*guokhe*), spear handle, stool hewn from solid log, and many other essential requirements of domestic importance. All these products helped in strengthening one's economic status as the product could be bartered for food grains, or even livestock. Those who had abundant food grains could have the craft products in exchange for their food by means of barter system which was quite prevalent.

Village Smithy

The village blacksmith is mainly responsible for manufacturing weapons of war, agricultural and household implements and tools which required strenuous labour. Every Kuki village has its own blacksmith whose service is indispensable for the sustenance of the village economy. To forge iron, a separate shed for the blacksmith is constructed in which

two hollowed wooden cylinders are buried in the ground standing upright. Two bamboo tubes fitted to the cylinders are placed just below the charcoal fire. And when the pistons which is made up of bamboo and cock's feather is worked by hand, it moves up and down. Charcoal is used in the furnace. Thus, agricultural or household tools like spades, hoes, knives, sickles, dibble, etc. and weapons of war were manufactured. The science of melting brass is also known as is evident with the manufacture of brass hair-pins, bangles, armlets, metals beads etc. by pouring the molten metal into moulds made of a mixture of paddy husk, clay and sand. Indigenous method of smelting ores has been known to them since time immemorial.

As they are independent by nature and live in jungles in the midst of hostile animals, they made weapons both for offensive and defensive purposes, eg. such as spears (*Tengcha*), muzzle-loading gun (*Thihnang-Meipum*) in the later periods, daos (*Chempong*), bows and arrows (*Thalpi*), leather shields (*Ompho*) etc. In fact, in manufacturing all these implements and weapons of war, not only the village black smith but also the village artisans contributed laboriously. It was not known when the first gun was made indigenously but the legends have revealed to us that they had acquired these talents much before the coming of the British. However, some historians have suggested that the first guns were available in Manipur sector by 1728 A.D. In spite of that, there is still skepticism as the Kuki people have learnt the knowledge of manufacturing local made guns long before they occupy their present habitat.

Manufacturing of Gunpowder

The Kukis had acquired the knowledge of producing gunpowder locally long before they came into contact with the British. They could manufacture gunpowder for their own use. Reid says, "Each (Kuki) village manufactures its own gun powder..."³. The Kukis had also used their locally made gun powder during the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-19. Where, when and how they learnt the art is not known. The art of making gunpowder was also, of course, known to the Chins, Burmese⁴, and Meiteis through Chinese merchants who visited the Kingdom of Manipur on account of their trade relationship which continued as late as 1813⁵.

The process of making gunpowder by the Kukis is the same as the Chins did. This shows that they share the same knowledge. In preparing the gunpowder, a good thick crust of excrement is taken out from where the pigpen is built as it contains nitrate. Traditionally, the Kukis used to build pigpen just beneath their house. The excrement and the urine-impregnated deposit on the surface of the soil is then trowelled up and placed in a basket. Water is poured inside the basket and allowed to filter through into the receptacle (a large wooden basin), which is placed below the basket.⁶ After this process, the deposit looks reddish in colour. Then, the same water is poured again and again until all the nitrates (*Meilou*) get dissolved. When the deposit becomes clear the water also looks reddish and the same is boiled until most of it has evaporated. Then, when the remainder is put into the sieve or a large tray, the water drains off into another receptacle (made of a large wooden plate) and the nitrate crystals remain. The nitrates are then taken out from the tray and mixed with an equal weight of charcoal*. For charcoal firewood *Khongmathing* (*Rhus Censis*) and *Sehting* (a large yellow citrus fruit plant) is specifically used because of its lightness and

ignition power. The mixture is pounded in a mortar until it becomes dust or powdery. The process is then completed and the powder is ready for the gun. The Kuki hunters used to keep the powder in a small bamboo container and take with them along with the bullets when they went for hunting.⁷ The Kukis in past did not purchase any ammunition in the local market as they could manufacture by themselves.

Other Indigenous Products

Among the Kuki tribes, the ThadouKukis appear to be the most advanced comparatively with the other tribes in terms of manufacturers as is evident from their household properties. They manufactured *Dahpi* (large gongs), *Dah thibu* (set of three gongs), *Tuidol* (large basin), *Lumdal* (Brass plates placed on shield), *Chaldep* (Brass dao shape plate) etc. This shows that they acquired the art of metallurgy and metal works to run their own cottage industries. Later, the indigenous product was replaced by the Burmese or foreign made gongs⁸. Besides, clay pots of various kinds for household utensils had also been manufactured by themselves for storing water and other liquid foods. As of now in order to meet the global taste, the Manipur artisans are making suitable adjustments to the traditional toys. Local dresses have been modified with various decorative items to attract customers. This may not be called losing local culture, but adjusting to or modification of local culture.

Salt Production

Though the Kukis obtained salt as one of the essential items from the Valley⁹, in some places they manufactured salt for their own use in a very limited scale. The Tolphei Kuki areas in the south¹⁰ of Manipur state and the Tangkhul Naga areas in the north of Manipur manufactured salt for their own consumption. Besides, the Kukis living near Jessami, bordering Manipur and Nagaland had their own product until the recent past. In Tangkhul areas, Kharasom and its neighbouring villages such as, Luchai, Challou, Namli, Kongai, Nungai, etc. manufactured salt. In fact, the presence of brine wells in the area provides employment for a number of villagers. Some of these brine wells were shared some time by the Kukis as well. The Kukis of course, had their own brine wells in the nearby Kanjang villages especially in the neighbouring Nagaland-Manipur border areas called *Phougam Phailei*. It appears that the tribes of Manipur like the Meiteis had the knowledge of producing salt from brine wells only. They seldom produced salt from salt mines or by extracting it from plants gathered or cultivated in the bush, because of lack of knowledge of salt mines¹¹.

The Kukis were able to determine the existence of brine well by watching the movement of cattle and by the footprints of wild animals called *Sakhoni*, which provided clues due to their fondness for salt. When its existence was confirmed by testing the water with their fingertip, those areas having salty flavour were separated from the nearby flowing water. Then fencing was constructed round the well to protect them from domestic and wild animals. The brine wells were close to the riverbeds and were considerably deep.

Salt Production and Division of Labour

The traditional method of producing salt among the Kukis was simple. Mostly it was the work of men whose technical know-how was turned to good use. As brine wells were far

from their homes, they set up a temporary thatched hut near the brine wells and stayed for weeks together until they manufacture the required quantity of salt for the annual consumption of their respective family households. The Kukis set out for this work normally during dry or winter season to avoid rains. The table¹² below shows the whole process of production and the nature of operation as well.

Process of Production: Salt Manufacture

I	II	III	IV
*Collecting firewood and transporting it to the fireplace **collective work (whole day)	*Preparing oven of requisite number, boiling and supply of the burning firewood. **collective work (day and night)	*collecting fresh salty water and filling the boiling pot or bowl **collective work performed during day time	*to oversee evaporation process **individual work (day time)

*Nature of operation

**Forms of work & time taken

The table above reveals that in the process of salt production, there was a clear cut division of labour among the group right from the gathering of fire wood to overseeing evaporation and crystallisation. Of course, it was not a complicated process as can be seen in the nature of operation. The table shows that collective work prevailed over the individual work, though individual could also perform collective works. It required a participation of 6 to 10 men, divided among themselves where in each group there should be 3 men or more depending upon the nature of work and requirement of labour. While the nature of operation remained the same, work allotment among the groups could also be inter changed. As the work of felling dry trees, cutting into pieces and transportation was tiresome other men drawn from either of the other two groups often replaced them. The quantity of products was also determined.

Tuisum/Tui-Changsu

The Kukis with the help of water had developed this traditional rice-mill. It used to be constructed near or a little far from the house where flowing water was available. Even when they went to work in the fields, the water rice mill kept on pounding the rice provided that there was an uninterrupted flow or supply of water. The water rice-mill not only helped in saving time for the busy hard-working *jhumias* but also helped to avoid strenuous manual pounding of rice. Normally, the rice mill took almost one day and one night to complete the work after which the rice was taken out and separated from the husk. *Tuisum* had thatched roof and split bamboo walls to protect the rice from domestic fowls and rain. It was indigenously designed and skillfully utilised. In many areas it is still used. This primitive technology has no modern tools and materials. It doesn't cost anything but was very helpful for economic sustenance.

Chotlep

Besides, there was another traditional pounding mortar called *Chotlep*. It was a simple means of pounding rice-paddy by foot in which the wooden bowl or mortar moved up and down on exerting pressure. It helped to avoid strenuous labour though it took a little bit of more time. It was constructed near the portico or at the entrance of the house or could be within the courtyard with a roof. This primitive technology is nothing but just a survival skill. This kind of practices still continued in the remote and interior far flung hilly areas of Kuki villages where there is no modern rice mill machine.

Mortar and Pestle

It is a durable bowl commonly made of wood and sometimes made of stone. The pestle is also a rounded grinding tool or handle most often made of the same material as mortar. The mortar and pestle is the first means known for grinding grain and other paddy rice items. The grain was put in a shallow depression or little depth in a stone and pounded with a rodlike stone or wooden which is called *Suh* - the pestle. Small refined version of mortar and hand tool pestle made of wood have been continued to be use till today almost in every Kuki kitchen despite the availability of modern machine made mortar and pestle in the market. In fact almost every Kuki household has a bamboo or wooden grinder bowl for making chutnis (*malchame*) or for grinding garlic, herbs, spices, peppers, chilies etc. It is ideal for cooking and cocktail parties. This polished mortar and pestle are durable, environmentally friendly and easy to clean after use.

Leather Works

The Kukis made use of the skins of domestic and wild animals when they were killed. The animal hide was processed and used for making drums, shields, ropes, basket, mats and other household materials. The Kukis used animal hide even for weapons of war which is proved by the fact that during the Anglo-Kuki War of 1917-19, leather cannon called *Pumpi* was used.¹³ The Kukis used to make leather cannon either by using buffalo's or mithun's skin. In preparing for the making of *Pumpi*, the animal skin was soaked in water till it becomes soft. Then, it was rolled in such a way that it becomes like a compact tube and the strips of leather were tightly bound. The leather tube was then folded and closed at the one end tightly. Then, using cane ropes the outer part of the tube was encircled round tightly in order to prevent bursting when it was fired. It was indeed a novel way of using gunpowder making weaponry for self-defence.

Textile Manufactures

One of the indigenous occupations of Manipur lay in the field of textile manufacture. It may be noted here that Handloom or Loin loom needed skill in hands. The people particularly of both the valley and hills demonstrate it effectively in their products. It is an interesting feature in as far as the traditional economy of Manipur is concerned.¹⁴

The handloom industry still occupies an important place among the hill tribes. Among the various economic activities, the traditional loom industry plays an important factor in maintaining their economic sustenance. As cotton being one of the important commercial

crops, it was grown in the jhum field. The work of plucking or reaping the matured cotton from its plant in the field to the stage of weaving was all done by women. The seeds were extracted through wooden cotton machines made by Kukis themselves after which the cotton was ginned with a bow.¹⁵ Thus, cotton became their main source of income among the other cash crops. The Thadou Kukis and their cognate tribes had, learnt the art of running cottage industries by themselves in their own houses. Looking at their expertise it may be concluded that the Kukis had been exposed to cotton technology and they had imbibed it thoroughly. Cotton or “*Kapase*” has been an indigenous plant grown in the country since the remotest past.

Clothes of different kinds were indigenously produced and worn on different occasions and festivals. A Kuki woman would ply looms at daytime and nightfall and could manufacture all kinds of clothings with the help of needles. Every Kuki women was expected to know the art of weaving in the traditional past. In fact, women who were expert in the art of weaving were considered to be better brides in those days, as her services and the products strengthened the domestic economic condition. Among the Kuki society, right after the end of harvesting season and before the start of the next year cultivation, women busied themselves in weaving. Thadou Kuki women who were expert in embroidery techniques had a high reputation in the society. It is so even today. It is seen that among all the Kuki tribes every traditional cloth had embroidery marks. Plain clothes without any embroidery are rarely seen. Women really contributed substantially towards stabilizing their domestic economy.

Dresses in general are the identity of a nation or a tribe. Dresses are like the unwritten code where by a man’s social status and culture can be determined. The Kuki ways of dressing are often artistic, well adapted to the working condition in the hills. Not only the Kukis but the different tribes of the Nagas also have special shawls with symbols of animals, objects etc. for their festive occasions.¹⁶ It is a critical appreciation and expression of their culture. To exploit their talents, the Kukis did careful handicraft work and artistic embroideries all over the shawls for the warriors. It reflected a manual involvement of love, affection and recognition of their belief and deeds. It was a reflection of forms of tribal worship. Hence, the design of the textiles, the arrangement of looms, the meaning of the used symbols help us to determine that the Kuki women had a high degree of expertise and had made advancement in their technique. For instance, Thadou Kuki women make shawls like *Saipikhup*. Literally, it means ‘elephant’s (Saipi) – knee (khup) because of its design on both the edge. The design is said to have been acquired during their wandering in the south East Asian forests, where they encountered hordes of elephants. Another important shawl is *Mangvom*. Literally, it means a ‘black (vom) – border (mang)’ in Thadou Kuki term. The black colour is a sign of royalty. The shawl is meant for a man of royal birth. *Khamtang* is another important shawl for a women’s lungi with a beautiful artistic design of different colours. It is originally black with a striking yellow band at the bottom-line pattern with serpentine design. Intricate designs can be seen on their products. All this shawls could be made within a few weeks which is a proof of their high artistic skill. In a small Kuki family, the presence of one talented and skilful woman could extend support to the whole family and

strengthen their economic position. Thus, the Kuki women learnt the art of running the textile or loom machines by themselves to sustain their economic life without any formal education. For this economic contribution Kuki women were respected by every community. Practically every household in rural Manipur has a loom. In the tribal inhabited hills, it is a household activity for every female to spend some time in weaving clothes.

Dyeing

There is no much account about the art of dyeing among the Kuki society in the traditional past. In spite of that the hill tribes especially the Kukis generally used different kinds of dyeing substances. The commonest dye was obtained by boiling the leaves of the Assam indigo (*stabilanthes flaccindi-folia*) grown by them¹⁷. Small quantities of Indigo, Bixa and Alba etc. used for dyeing was also cultivated by the peasants in Manipur within the vicinity of their villages and homesteads. In as far as the art of dyeing is concerned, the process of preparation, method and its style of weaving adopted by the tribal women are not different from the Meitei women in the valley. The Kuki women could hardly obtain the leaves just enough to immerse for not more than twice a year¹⁸. In the hills, the Kuki and Naga women commonly dye yellow colours¹⁹, but it is not known as to how and from which plant the yellow pigments were extracted. In preparing for the dyeing the leaves are plucked and boiled in a pot in which yarn or cloth is immersed and after some few minutes, the cloth or yarn is taken out to dry in the sun. Thus, all works of dyeing, its preparation of cotton yarn, weaving etc. was traditionally done by women. It also shows of the scope for vocational mobility.

Rice-beer Products

The Kukis prepared a variety of drinks in the traditional past such as rice-beer, strong rice-beer, liquor, etc. The common drinks prepared by them are distilled from rice. Though there are variety of drinks, the method of preparation is however almost the same. (See table)

Time taken	1 hrs	2-3 hrs	1 hrs	2 hrs	4-5 days
Father	X	X	X	X	fermentation process
Mother	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Son	✓	X	✓	X	
Daughter	✓	✓	✓	✓	

- 1 hours – Pounding of rice and removing of husk
- 2-3 hours – Soaking of rice and drying
- 1 hours – Pounding of rice to powder
- 2 hours – Final preparation

Note: 'X' indicates non-involvement in the process, '✓' indicate involvement

Table showing man-hours in preparing Rice-beer ingredients etc. and the involvement of families thereof. The Table above shows the whole process of preparing rice-beer and the

involvement of family members in each stage right from the pounding of rice to the final preparation. The whole family is not necessarily involved in the preparation. The ‘father’ does not take part and even the ‘son’ join his mother and sister only when it requires strenuous manual labour. This shows that making of rice-beer is largely the work of women though not exclusively, since the ‘father’ and ‘son’ are pre-occupied with other self-domestic works. However, in some families all the household members get involved in every stage of preparation.

In preparing the above drinks, it involves some process. When rice has been clearly separated from its husk, it is soaked in water for about 2 to 3 hours and then the soaked rice is put in a large bamboo or cane tray in order to drain off the water from it. When it becomes dry the rice is then pounded with a mortar and crushed it into powder. The fine powder is then put in the pot of boiling water and is steered properly till it becomes sticky liquid. Then when it gets cold two or three small pots of cold water is poured into the sticky rice powder in a container- basin and is steered again. Then, finally the container is stored in different pots for about 4 to 5 days for fermentation, after which the stuff is ready for drinking. This kind of drink is quite nutritious. The tribals in Manipur are used to it. Besides, the Kukis are also used to making rice beer called *Vai-ju*, by mixing the cooked rice and the husk and then putting yeast called *Chol* for quick fermentation. It is the work of women. It takes hardly two to three days for fermentation after which the stuff is ready for drinking. Some of the indigenous drinks are also highly intoxicating. Preparation of rice-beer and its consumption is an indispensable part of the culture and socio-economic life of the Kukis. It is used at times of religious ceremonies and social functions.

Work Pattern

The culture of working pattern in the traditional Kuki society is quite elaborately detailed. The following table shows –

Daily routine of labour inputs in terms of man-hours on different professions
(Work-pattern in man-hours daily)

Individual/ collective	Agriculture	Production of goods	**Self domestic	*** other activities
Men	5-6 hrs	1-2 hrs	1-2 hrs	-
Women	5-6 hrs	-	2-3 hrs	-
Son	2-3 hrs	1-2 hrs	-	-
Daughter	2-3 hrs	-	1-2 hrs	-
Children	-	-	-	2-3 hrs
Community	6-7 hrs	-	-	-

Note: **self domestic includes the work of rice beer making, manufacturing gun powder, weaving, dyeing, etc.
***other activities include collection of fodder, collection of firewood, fetching water, looking after babies etc.

The Table above reveals that whether individual or collective, male or female except children, are engaged in agricultural activities, which is their main occupation. This shows that in ‘Agriculture’, they spend much more time and labour comparatively, than any other

works. Production of goods is essentially the work of men assisted by their son which is also the case of women assisted by their daughter under 'self domestic'. It shows the social division of labour on different profession. Rice-beer making is still practised among some tribes especially the Zous living in Churachandpur district. The intensity of labour-inputs and the time spent by the son and daughter under 'other activities' is comparatively the same with that of agricultural activities. Children looked after babies while their parents were at work. This helped the parents especially the mother to engage themselves in more productive works. Thus, in certain Kuki families, the birth of a new child is welcomed as it adds to the numerical strength of the labour-force within the family by inheriting the duties of their parents automatically. The 'Community' is heavily engaged in agricultural activities. They work collectively in the form of Labour-corps (*Lawm*). The Table also shows that any work of complexity is done essentially by 'Men' and 'Women'. It is also clear that the intensity of labour-inputs in terms of man-hours on 'Agriculture' prevails unequalled than any other or its allied activities. Thus, it can be concluded beyond doubt that more time and more labour-inputs are needed under 'Agriculture' to sustain the self-economic sufficiency on which it solely depends.

Thus, most of the Kuki craft goods were produced to meet the household needs and for the requirement of the village community until the recent past. These handicraft products have now high demand in local market which may require full-time specialization of the skill for more production and sale. Even Indian handicraft exports have much scope of growth in future global markets as they have the potential to grow fast at the international level. The Kuki indigenous cultural items are still in great demand and may continue to do so within the social circle of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo community and even in the global markets.

Conclusion

Within the last fifty years, the economic condition of the Kukis has undergone significant changes. The dawn of political stability ultimately brought security to their lives and property. The Kuki ethnoses are now poised for moving ahead in the search for better amenities of life in sharp contrast to the primitive, savage and wretch lives they lived in the past. The socio-economic and political changes of the Kukis as a result of their conversion to Christianity, the spread of modern education, science and technology has had tremendous impact and has subsequently changed their attitude and approach in matters related to the art of living. With the passage of time and the pace of civilisation advancing, trade and commerce began to increase by leaps and bounds. The Kukis in the hills of Manipur state became the chief suppliers of various types of wood, bamboo and cane products. The craftspeople in the Kuki society continued to produce goods in low volume but with a high degree of variety. The existence of such trade relationship with the neighbouring people even across the border assumed increasing importance in commercial activities. The introduction of new colonial currency in Manipur with the advent of British administration had tremendous impact on the subsistence economy of the Kukis. Process of monetisation had created the self-sufficiency in the economy of the hill people. This new development became a great determining factor in as far as their economic transition was concerned. The traditional economy of the Kukis was integrated with the colonial economy gradually. They

were also taught a better trade within themselves and to others. The process of manufacturing indigenous products received a new impetus. Traditional form of production in the field of carpentry work, handloom industries etc. were modernized to suit local and global market. Affected by the progress of education and modernization, the Kuki society has now changed in the field of small-scale skilled and craft production system to meet the requirements of increasing population and made themselves fit to meet the competitive global market. As such, in order to meet the requirements of globalization, imparting entrepreneurship training is required and should be given top priority. Entrepreneurship in areas like Tailoring and Cutting, Carpentry, Foundry, Blacksmith, Weaving, Cane and Bamboo, Carpet weaving and Doll & Toys making etc. are provided by the Government of Manipur. To meet the challenge of globalization indigenous resource management should be streamlined. Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) and Skill Development Programmes should also be promoted. As Manipur has a huge stock of natural, material and human resources, the Kuki people could exploit their strength and potentiality fully for maximum benefit.

Endnotes

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- ⁴Carey & Tuck., The Chin Hills Vol. 1 (A History of the people...their country), Delhi.1987, p.225.
- ⁵Sanajaoba, Naorem., Manipur-Past and Present.,1988, Vol. I. Delhi. p.11.
- ⁶Carey & Tuck; Ibid.
- *For charcoal, firewood is collected from a specific tree such as Khongmathing (*Rhus Cenesis*), Sehthing (*citrus*) plants - the citrus fruit with acid juice, or even from the trunk of the chilly plant called Malchapom thing, etc.
- ⁷The art of making gunpowder is of course, still known among many Kuki elders. Its practice is not completely given up. Besides, during my young age, I personally saw the elders of my village making gunpowder, which was used for hunting wild games.
- ⁸Shaw, William.,Notes on the Thadou Kukis. Delhi, 1929, pp.90-91. Cited as Shaw hereafter.
- ⁹cited from K. Ruhini Kumar Sharma's paper on-*Economic factor in social formation in Pre-colonial Manipur* in a seminar on the "Medieval and Modern History of North East India", from 23-24 Oct. 2003, organised by Dept. of Art & Culture. Govt. of Manipur. Imphal, p.22.
- ¹⁰Personal interface with Tolphei Kukis of Manipur's Churachandpur district at my residence at National Games village, Imphal way back in Dec. 2017.

- ¹¹Meggitt, Cf. J.M., ‘*Salt Manufacture and Trading in the Western Highlands of New Guinea*;
The Australian Museum Magazine, XII, 10th, 1958, pp.309-13.
- ¹²The table above is based on the model of Maurice Godelier in “*Perspective in Marxist Anthropology*” Cambridge University Press, London 1978 p.135.
- ¹³J. Shakespear, op. cit. p. 215
- ¹⁴Gailangam, K; op.cit. p.50.
- ¹⁵Shaw, op.cit. p.92.
- ¹⁶Cited from Sina Khayi’s, “*Cultural significance of tribal costumes in modern times*,” a paper presented in a seminar organised by MUTSU at Senate Hall, Manipur University from 29-30 March 1996.
- ¹⁷.Shaw, op.cit. p.19.
- ¹⁸Shakespear, J. op.cit. p.31.
- ¹⁹Dun, E.W.,Gazetter of Manipur, Delhi, Vikas Publishing House -Simla 1891,1975, p.63.