1.1. INTRODUCTION

Originally the Kukis include *Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Koireng, Kom, Lamgang, Maring, Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Simte, Suhte, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou, Tarao, Kharam* and *Any Kuki* Tribes. Ethnically, culturally, linguistically these people have common history, customs and cultural practices. The *Kuki* group of people have a unique identity found in their everyday traditions, festivals, customs, culture, art and crafts. Their folklores, folktales, phrases, idioms, parables and proverbs handed down orally through generations are one of the resources to study their past as they do not have any written record of their own.

The Kukis had different types of God in their world. Among them (gods) *Chung-Pathen* or *Chung-Mangpa* was the supreme God. As they cited different natural gods in their incantations, some historians or scholars argue that the *Kukis* were animists and worshipped nature in the form of spirit. In performing the rituals and rites, incantation like *"Bless me as You blessed....* [refer the objects name]", *"Heavenly God and earth god...",* "Heavenly God" was always mentioned in the beginning and the end showed that the Kukis had one Supreme God who could bless them. The Kukis accepted Christianity from the preaching of Western Christian Missionaries.

The *Kuki* artists in early periods were traditional or hereditary artists. Their art and craft was highly based on traditional form of art guided by customs, culture, belief and strong foundation of social life. After the coming of Christianity, growing westernization has influenced their traditional art forms. Many of their artefacts are disappearing mainly due to lack of preservation and ethnic clashes. Besides, easy availability of a number of manufactured artefacts (especially plastic) has profoundly affected these cottage industries adversely and in turn, livelihood of the artisans.

The rituals they practice, the customs they follow and the religion they believe in are the main cultural characteristics where art and craft takes the most important role. The study draws serious attention to the present generation to make every effort to preserve their indigenous culture. It also attempts to identify and aims to explore the factors of these materials, objects and the cultural artifacts which are of primary importance today.

1.2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The primary motive and purpose of the research are stated below:

a) To make a detailed study and analysis of the art and crafts of the *Kukis* in Manipur.

b) To highlight the importance of these art and crafts for preservation of its unique values.

c) To re-discover, revive and reinterpret the concepts and the importance of these materials and use them relevantly in the context of the *Kuki* Christian society today for the well being of the society.

d) To make a comparative study of the art and craft, aesthetic values of different ethnic groups.

1.3. HYPOTHESIS

The hypotheses of the study are prepared methodically to guide the course of the research work for the present study as under:

a) That, art and craft of the *Kukis* is distinct from the art and crafts of other ethnic groups.

b) Borrowing and sharing of culture with neighboring countries and between different ethnic groups may take place.

c) The problem of preserving and conserving the unique material culture of the *Kukis* may be due to various factors.

1.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data are collected from both primary and secondary sources by using different tools like interview schedule, self participation, museums, library and various secondary sources such as the internet etc. by the used of various technology like computer, camera, voice recorder, mobile telephone and papers.

1.4.1. Primary Data

Primary sources like interview schedule, self-participation among the artisans and experts, field research and experiments, visit to museums, gallery and village industries have been employed according to the objectives.

1.4.2. Secondary Data

The secondary data are collected and compiled from a variety of books, international and national journals, websites, news-papers, local papers and publications.

1.4.3. Tools of Data Collection

Keeping in mind the objectives and hypotheses, various tools and means of data collection are used to suit the representatives. Since the issue is untouched by any artist background, due care has been taken to cover all aspects of the subject in the most comprehensive way possible. By the help of electronics like camera, voice recorder, mobile phone, laptop and writing materials, all the primary and secondary sources are collected. The interview structure is prepared by a rigid procedure for the senior experts and field workers, interaction and explanation system, some time a tea party system of interview are carried out so that the interviewees can give more time to the interview so as to get accurate responses.

1.5. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

1.5.1. Kuki Traditional House

The Kukis selected a site where there was proper wind movement for village by performing a ritual of burning of egg. *Ai,* a rhizome which has medicinal value was also planted at the village gate. The Kukis selected a place where there were less insects like ants and termites by placing rice (*Anchang)* for a night. The Kuki traditional house was constructed according to the region, climate, economical status and materials available. The protruded semi-circle front roofing and one storey structure both in the hills and the valley were the distinct features of Kuki traditional house externally and single room structure and hearth were the uniqueness internally.

The single room without partition was meant for gathering of large number of people. The two doors without windows were for security measurement, which was impossible for the thieves and enemies to attack the occupants within few seconds of time. One storey house having back platform for urinating was the best method of acquiring gunpowder. The dried firewood kept in the lower verandah enabled the occupants to avoid going outside at night or on rainy days. Again for emergency like attack of wild animals or enemies, everyone used the firewood as the first protective weapon.

The front wall of the house decorated with animal heads and skulls became a trophy and gave message to the visitors about the status of the man of the family. Likewise, storing and displaying of food-supply like maize, corns, millet, beans, pumpkin etc. inside the house showed the status of women members of the house and served as a trophy. The works carried out to construct the main door of Kuki traditional house showed the skill and advancement of the Kukis in woodcraft.

1.5.2. Sculptures and Monuments

The Kuki traditional sculptures and monuments gave messages about their customs, culture, religion, economy and politics. They erected stones or wooden totems to commemorate historic events, departed family or community members, honourable persons in the society and even to demarcate land and important places. The Kukis also traditionally had knowledge of various techniques of art like modelling, carving, casting and construction. Across time, they also acquired various modern techniques in their sculptures and monuments. Some of the Kuki traditional monuments and monoliths like *Lhansong* (memorial stone), *Gamgi Song* (border pillars), *Kho song* (village stone); *Molsong* (achievement stone) can be seen in every old Kuki village. However, only a few standing Kuki traditional monuments and sculptures can be seen now due to various factors like lack of proper preservation, frequent shifting of village, short lifespan of materials like wood and destruction of properties by ethnic clashes are some of the most common factors.

The erection of simple stone or wood was the first monumental piece of the Kukis, the second stage was the carving of various images like animals, human and texture, and the third development stage was the use of scripts or alphabets. The use of scripts or

alphabets could be termed as a benchmark in the history of the Kukis as it was the transition period (coming of Christianity and modern education). Engraving of scripts with portraits and lifesize sculptures became the fourth and latest development stage of Kuki monuments and sculptures.

The skill and advancement of the Kukis in woodcraft could be seen in the making of *Doikhom* (totem), *Thikong* (coffin) and *Kotpi* (door). Making of *Doikhom* for hanging *Inn-Doi* was the duty of the *Tucha*. If making of *Doikhom* was the duty of *Tucha*, it meant that all married men who had a Kuki foremother or mother was skilled in making *Doikhom*. The making of traditional coffin from single large tree not only showed their ability but this was also due to their lack of experience in getting thinner plank from a large timber and non-availability of saw for cutting wood.

The sculptures and monuments of the Kukis can be divided into traditional and academic style. The traditional styles of sculptures are tradition-based in respect of technique, material and concepts like sculpted animal heads and horns for house decorations, totems, designs of pillar etc. The modern or academic styles are made by the use of modern equipments and materials. The statue of *Pu Ngulkhup* at *Lonpi* Village, *Pu Tintong Haokip* statue made by *Mangcha Neishiel* and "Traditional Tune" in bronze (Manipur State Kala Akademi Art Award-2011) and fiberglass work like *Hunter* and *Hunting* by *Ngamkholen Haokip* (self) are some of the examples of modern and academic sculptures.

The best known Kuki traditional installation art was found in *Inndoi*. The components of different materials *(Vohpi dehkon, Kelchal kiheh, Um, Gopi chem, Gopi teng, Chaokol, Khaopi Lam-koh, Ahkang mul, Shithing, Vomgui, Thinghe, Gopi Pocha, and Gopi Tul)* have different meanings or symbolism in the Kuki religious perspective. The installation in *Kithoi* ritual was one of the most interesting installations. The installed items in a macaque type were pig, mithun, cow, man or woman and flags made from different colours of thread.

The monuments of the past are crumbling due to prolonged heat or rain, lack of conservation, destruction of one's material culture in ethnic politics/clash. The coming of Christianity and the 1990s ethnic clashes are two milestones in the history of Kuki

traditional monuments. The monuments to remember their dear ones or socio-cultural events are made from stone and wood. *Shithing* is used for different ritual monuments for being the most durable wood available in their locality. That means, if more durable wood than *Shithing* is available in their surrounding it will be preferred over the latter.

1.5.3. Crafts

As the Kukis have no written records of their past, it is difficult to mention the origin and initial period of cane and bamboo crafts in their society. In craft, the time when every male from adolescent age knew the skill of making simple carrying basket called *"Kongvong"* was the initial developing stage. Types of bamboo, naturally soft and difficult to break like *Gova, Golhang, Gomi, Gopi* of one or two year old was used for crafts like basket. The three different size of Longkai, measuring basket found in every Kuki household had the same capacity with the measuring baskets of the neighbouring states. This practice was passed on from generation to generation and is still followed today. Besides different bamboo baskets, the Kuki also had traditional bamboo crafts like *Twithei, Thei-khong, Lheng/Me-kong, Me-khe/Go-khe, Touna, Sa-tul, Ah-bom* etc.

Traditionally, locally available wood like *Vongthing, Thinghe, Shething, Gelthing, Phunchongthing, Gangpithing, Leihaothing, Teithing, Laithing, Chehnouthing, Dolthing, Kheuthing* etc. are used for craft. The Kuki traditional mortar called *Chotlep* and *Twi-changsu* which mechanically consume less human energy are typical ones. They also have wooden crafts like tub, drum, coffin, *Chempai* (case for Dao) and Pumjap (air blower) which shows the advancement and innovative ideas of the Kukis mechanically, technically and materially.

The first traditional education imparted to the Kuki girl is the learning of weaving skills. The *Kukis* are not only advanced in loin-loom, they are also good in application of embroidery works. The latest development of weaving among the *Kukis* is the use of Computer Aided Textile Designing technology by *Ms. Roslyn Khongsai* and *Vahneithem Haokip* who have introduced the novel concept of computer technology to the *Kuki* textiles. The different cloth designs of *Kukis* are copied from snakes, animals, birds, landscapes, flowers, stars, agricultural products etc. The origin of every design and pattern shows their love for their natural surroundings.

The Kuki traditional musical instruments like *Goshem, Dah, Pheiphit, Pengkul, Khongpi, Lhemlhei, Theile, Selki, Pehkhong, Kengkle* etc. are used for different occasions. As drum is an integral part of their music of all time, they cannot sing a song without it. *Goshem* is the most popular one. It has six or seven different sound notes identical to *Do Ray Me Fa So La Te Do* of Staff notation. Other musical instruments used by the Kukis are almost same with other ethnic groups. The most valuable musical instrument and core cultural material of the Kukis is Gong. Among the capital assets of the Kukis like mithun, gong, necklace and rice, gongs are highly valued and it is the most valuable. It is not only used as a musical instrument for all occasions but also used as bride-price and *Longman* (ex-gratia or compensation paid to family of deceased).

Among the ornaments of the Kukis, necklace in red beads or dark amber is the most valuable one. It is used as an ornament, *Longman, Numei man* (bride price) and highest gift in their culture. The use of headdress by Kuki women in Christian culture called "*Ponlukhuh"* is according to the First Corinthians chapter eleven of the Bible. The Kuki traditional crown called *"Longchang"* is made from threading of a white mollusca shell. The bracelet called *"Chao"* and armlet called "*Hah"* are also ornaments worn by Kuki women.

1.5.4. Symbolism: Meaning and Concept

The Kuki traditional art and crafts have various forms of symbolism. In respect of signs, meanings and concepts, their art and crafts are bounded by their rich customs and culture. They have certain things to do or not to do, symbols or signs to represent the good and the bad, a message with signs and symbols. All their beliefs and interpretations are associated with their social, cultural, customary, economic and political perspective. Some of their beliefs seem superstitious but not without scientific symbolic explanation.

The socio-economy of the Kukis depends on hunting and cultivation. Therefore, celebration pillars, animal heads, skulls and horns, bird's feathers and agriculture products symbolize the social and economic status of the family, especially the husband and wife.

The Kukis choose best quality articles from their surroundings for invoking the blessings of their God. Each of the installation components in *Indoi* and *Kithoi* has its own symbolism. *Vohpi dehkon* symbolizes long life and fertility, *Kelchal kiheh* symbolizes long life, judgement and protection, *Um* symbolizes bountiful harvest, *Gopi chemkol & Gopi teng* symbolize war and security, *Gopi chaothen* symbolizes the rich music and dances, *Khaopi* symbolizes the richness of their custom, culture and administration, *Pocha* symbolizes household management.

The Kukis erect traditional memorial stones to symbolize personal status and for remembrance. The pillars of success celebration like *Chon-khom, Sa-ai* and *Chang-ai* symbolize the socio-cultural value, status and ability of the host. The symbolism of the present day sculptures becomes socio-political and religious monumental piece.

The Kuki traditional cloth designs and patterns with beautiful shades and colours of snakes, animals, birds, landscapes, flowers, stars, atmosphere and agricultural products symbolize their love of nature and creativeness in craft. Their musical instruments, songs and dances indicate their fondness for music. The Kuki traditional musical instruments *Gong* and *Goshem* are the core of their material culture.

The Kuki traditional necklace of red beads called *"Khichong"* is not only used as ornament, it is also used as *Numei man* (bride price), *Longman* (ex-gratia or compensation paid to family of deceased), *Upa-naopa kilutna, Unu lutna* and *Nule pa lutna*. Therefore, the application of necklace in Kuki society symbolizes wealth, and is also the core cultural material as well as the most valuable fashion piece. The practice of headdress before Christianity symbolized their social and economical status but tenderness, dutifulness and submissiveness of women for Christ to her man after Christianity. The Kuki hair dress symbolized beauty, health and holiness of the person.

The Kuki traditional war equipments like spear, sword, bow & arrow, cannon, gun, shield and symbol of emergency *Thingkho & Malcha* have generic symbolism of bravery, warrior, hunter and freedom fighter. The combination of *"Thingkho-le-Malcha"* (firewood and king chilli) is very typical and symbolised the unity to fight every war by every Kuki village.

1.5.5. Sharing and Borrowing of Art and Crafts

Everything in this world is subject to change and no culture is no exception. Even the most conservative society's cultures also change by way of sharing or borrowing of new and developed cultures. Sharing and borrowing takes place for the development of individual or society. Development takes place when we learn new things from schools, we share experiences at the workplace, exchange our daily life among the community and neighbours and from the media.

The Kukis have some sharing and borrowing of art and crafts. The main factors of these sharing and borrowing are nature, political administration, topography and modernisation. Sharing and borrowing can occur naturally and is the most common factor. The political administration like British colonial rule, various acts and provisions of the state and central governments are other factors. The geographical or political boundary also serves as a factor of Sharing and borrowing in culture. The North East region of India shares more common culture with the neighbouring countries like Myanmar, China, Bangladesh and Nepal than with other parts of India. Sharing and borrowing of art and crafts also takes place in Kuki culture due to modernization of their living standard. Their traditional practices become out dated such as those related to construction of house, craft, art, education, religion and every day culture which have come to be replaced by the new and developed ones.

Besides the common materials, the traditional house of the Kukis has some sharing and borrowing structure with the Meiteis and Nagas of Manipur. The protruded roofing of Kuki traditional house is semi-circle and rounded and that of the Meiteis is straight. The front wall of the Kukis is decorated with animal heads and skulls and that of the Nagas is decorated with carved animal heads and human images. The most common structure they have is the practice of fencing to protect the occupants and their domestic animals from any attack.

All ethnic groups of Manipur except Meitei-Muslims practice construction of memorial stones in the form of monument to commemorate their great leaders in their society. Erection of border pillar is also practiced by all to demarcate land. All ethnic groups used wood and bamboo in their traditional totems according to their belief and ritual.

The Kukis, Meiteis and Nagas have a monument for remembering historic events, persons and ritual ceremonies in stone, wood, fibreglass and cement.

Among the various cane and bamboo crafts, carrying basket, measuring basket and a basket called *Thul/Lel* by Kuki, *Phingailuk* by Meiteis and *Tabu* by Tangkhul *are* all adopted through sharing and borrowing among them. The measuring baskets used by them have a capacity of 30 Kg, 20 Kg and 10 Kg. In woodcraft, mortars in flat and rounded are used by all ethnic groups. Some of the most shared and borrowed musical instruments are drum, string and mouth or wind instruments like trumpet and flute. Not very common but a very old practice of wooden craft is utensils and tub used in kitchen by the Kukis and the Nagas.

In Manipur, loin loom and throw fly shuttle loom are used both in the valley and the hills for weaving. The tools, methods, techniques, designs and patterns are all shared and borrowed directly or indirectly among them. They also have some similar designs and patterns on their cloths like triangle and diamond shapes or geometrical designs, patterns of flora and fauna, land and mountain. The general costumes and ornaments like necklace, headdress, hand-band, earring, hair-dress, garments and footwear are all shared and borrowed within and outside the state.

Some earthen pots used by the Kukis are borrowed from others. In Manipur, the earthen pots of *Thongjao*, *Andro* and *Longpi* are all popular and used by different ethnic groups. Weapons like gun, spear, bow and arrow, sword and shield are one of the most shared and borrowed material cultures of the world. The use of all these war implements becomes sharing and borrowing to every ethnic group by the process of contact between societies through war or friendship.

1.5.6. Contemporary Kuki Artists

For the Kukis, contemporary art or artist can be categorised as traditional and academic art/artist which can be traced to the 1980s. The contemporary Kuki artists, both traditional and academic, are practising commercial art to meet their everyday needs. Only a few young and innovative artists practice the modern art style like other artists. It is a belief prevalent in the Kuki society that their concern with commercial art is due to the setback of trade system for the artist.