2. ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF DWELLING HOUSE

2.1. INTRODUCTIOAN

The Illustrated Oxford Dictionary defines “Dwelling” as “a house or other place where someone live” and “House” as “a building for people to live”. The Cambridge School Dictionary defines “House” as “a building where people live, usually one family or group”. From the above definitions, it has come to light that human beings live in a dwelling house in group or family with the existence of their culture and state. Art and architecture of dwelling house is also one of the cultural activities of human life. The dwelling house protects the occupants from heat, cold, rain, wild animals and even from the evil spirit and enemies. It is a great necessity for living inside a formally constructed proper house. The technique and style of constructing a dwelling house is different depending on the region, climate and materials locally available and also reflects the concept of the ethnic group.

North-East India, a land of cultural diversity, has its unique and multifarious traditional practices. Art and craft comes to the people of this region instinctively. Every ethnic group has a unique way of living. The artifacts they use, the culture they practise, the customs they follow are all sample tools to learn about their distinct customs and culture. They follow certain rules or norms in constructing a house, guided by their customs and culture. The tradition of living in a proper house was highly important for the *Kukis* too, to protect them from heat, cold, and wild animals and even from the evil spirit and enemies. To build the traditional dwelling house, they needed special planning, technique, skill and a creative mind.

The technique and style of traditional tribal house is recollected or collected through interviews, related literature and study of a few available standing houses. So the study on the remains of artifacts would be a great help for studying the past history of culture, especially in cases where there are few written records available. Like the study of Indus Valley Civilization, culture wholly depends on the artifacts excavated; the study of material culture becomes one of the primary tools to have in-depth knowledge of the culture of any tribe. Therefore, the study of the *Kuki* traditional house can contribute a great deal to its approach in understanding of the *Kuki* culture in a better way. And the *Kukis*, one of the ethnic groups settled in Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland and

also in Myanmar (Burma) and Bangladesh have their own indigenous art of constructing a house, in a very systematic way

The concept of traditional dwelling house of the *Kukis* is as old as their culture. The basic pattern of construction and the interior lay-out of a traditional Kuki house are in keeping with the age-old pattern of the dwelling-house of the other hill-tribes of the entire region of North-East India with certain inevitable and distinctive deviations (Goswami 76). The traditional *Kukis* had no written script to write their traditional histories. Due to the non-availability of written records, most of the *Kuki* Ethnography was based on the oral tradition passed on from generation to generation, in the form of folktales and folklores. Therefore, it is difficult to study the origin and types of the traditional *Kuki* house. The best known and existing *Kuki* traditional house was built in the form of a one-storey, continuous room.

The houses of the Kukis were traditionally built on a slope and hilly site. This is because the Kukis are indigenous tribes that largely inhabit the hills. They had only one storey underneath which was generally used as cattle pen. The house was a spacious continuous room, with no window and the front wall decorated with animal heads and skulls was the most interesting part of the house. A long platform existed in-front of the house in the form of verandah known as 'Huongcha'. They used materials like grass thatch, timber, bamboo and other locally available materials for building the house. However, the advent of Christianity and growing westernization gradually diluted the local culture. Moreover, lack of preservation, ethnic clashes and easy availability of a number of manufactured artifacts (especially plastic) may also be one of the factors why varied material cultures of the *Kukis* are fast disappearing.

With the advancement of techniques and civilization, the *Kuki* traditional house gradually underwent transformation in design, pattern, material used and concept. The present day *Kuki* dwelling houses are constructed with modern and better materials like timber, bricks, stones and corrugated iron sheets for roofing. The household wooden furniture like benches, tables, chairs gradually became a part and parcel of their modern lifestyle.

2.2. GENERAL STRUCTURE OF KUKI HOUSE

The traditional Kuki house was built in one storey. The ground or underneath was for domestic animal like pig, goat, cow, buffalo, mithun etc. A long platform was built in front side of the house with a flat yard. The house had a front verandah, a room and a back verandah. One could not identify persons and objects for the initial moments when entering inside the house at day time as it was by and large dark. In some part, they had only one entrance to their house as a safeguard from thieves. The structure of the room was single, but the front portion contained the main fireplace and the sleeping places. The married couples of the family sometimes had separate room for sleeping.

The *Kukis* generally built their village on the side of a hill. In the hill side, they constructed their houses some 3 (three) feet off the ground on the up-hill side and about 15 to 20 feet off the ground on the down-hill side. The houses were also supported by long posts on the down-hill side (Tuck 177) Bertram S. Carey and HN Tuck's statement about this is only for the village house built on the hill side. There were also some *Kuki* villages where houses were built in the plain areas. In such areas, the floor of a house was just 3 to 5 feet above the ground level. The thatching was about a foot thick and was often not removed when the house required re-thatching; rather the new thatch was piled on over the old one. No matter whether the houses were built in the plain areas or on the hill side, these were all in one-storied pattern and structure, built of plank, with thatch roof, and approximately 20 feet high by 50 to 200 feet long and some 30 feet broad, according to the position and affluence of the owner (Tuck 177).

Though there was no restriction, the traditional Kuki house was generally built facing the East, like the Meiteis of Manipur. There was hardly any variation in the types of the houses. The variations of the house depended solely on the economic condition of the household. *Mutua Bhadur* gives a short and clear description (skeletal structure) of a typical Kuki house which was built in his own museum at *Andro*, 18 km from *Imphal*. By seeing this, one can study the complete traditional house of the *Kukis*. *Mutua Bhadur* has done great works not only for the Museum, but has also published a number of books on Art and Material Culture of Manipur. His statement "….typical house of *Kuki* tribes of Manipur, who are inhabited in the districts of *Churachandpur* and *Sadar Hills*, is known as *Malai Kuki Inn*" (Bhadur 40). Here, *"Malai Kuki Inn"*

literally means Traditional *Kuki* House. The *Kukis* not only inhabit the districts of *Churachandpur* and *Sadar Hills*, but they are also found in all other Hill Districts of Manipur at large, and in small numbers in Valley Districts. This type of traditional *Kuki* house is also found in all *Kuki*-inhabited areas outside Manipur. But, today, due to *Naga-Kuki* ethnic clash in 1990s and the modernization process, the traditional *Kuki* house has undergone a lot of changes and has shed most of its traditional features.

A short and brief general description of traditional Kuki house was also articulated by Goswami in his book "Kuki Life and Lore" (Goswami 76-77) as

> "The main frame-work of the house is supported on round wooden-posts called *chokhom* which are about fifteen feet in height. The highest posts that support the roof-tree are called *sutkhom.* The house is covered with two angularly slanting thatched roofs for rain water to drain out easily. The floor of a Kuki house unlike the houses in the plains is laid on a raised platform by spreading bamboo poles on upright wooden posts and horizontal beams. The height of the floor from ground level is approximately three feet below the front fable and about seven feet towards the back gable.… The raised bamboo floor of a Kuki house is called *Chungchoi-inn*. The maximum covered area of a Kuki house is sixty feet in length and twenty feet in breadth. This size is called *Lamsom*. One *lam* denotes the measurement from the tips of the left hand fingers to the tips of the right-hand fingers when extended fully in line with the shoulders. The accepted standard measurement of one *lam* is five feet."

There was a room for storing food-supply of the household (Tuck 178) like corns, millet, beans etc. The utensils, implements, weapons, valuable cultural materials such as gongs, rice-beer pots were also kept in that room.

The *Kukis* also had space in their houses for domestic animals. The basement of a house was a place for the pigs, cows, mithuns, buffalos and so many other domesticated animals. As all the sides of the house compound were usually fenced with timbers or bamboo, this served as a wall for the domesticated animals. The chickens occupied the upper portion of verandah, but if the number of chickens were large, a separate house for the chicken called *Ah-inn* or *Ah-gil* was constructed about six feet high, so that the chickens were out of danger. A separate house for storing the paddy rice called *Chang-inn* or *Chang-sal* was also built by wealthy and big families. A small family stored their paddy rice in storing basket called *Chang-pang* inside the house itself.

2.3. SOCIO-POLITICS

The Kukis constructed their house according to their socio-economic condition, religious and cultural base and size of the family. The house of the Chief or a well-known village elder's house were larger in size and court yards were bigger than others. The main purpose was to accommodate large family members and for gathering of people for festivals and meeting. From selection of the house site to the house warming ceremony, different activities and condition of the house structures were all based on their religious belief and custom-culture.

There was a saying related with the house of Jampi village chief "*Jampite inkah kisei hileh; navah khat ahi*". In a free translation, "the burning down of Jampi Chiefs house was better than to tear down". There were two versions about the saying. One version goes like this, *Tongkholam Singson's* statement says, '*Jampi,* a *Thadou Kuki* village chief was told by a soothsayer that "his house will be burned or he will die". After two-three years, while everyone was talking about what the soothsayer had said, his house was burned down by wild fire (Singson).' Another version was that 'the chief's house, which was a century old and big in size, the villagers even the chief himself, had no means to tear down and construct a new one. In this juncture, the soothsayer told the chief that either he or his house would be damned. After a few years, the chief's house caught fire and was burned down. A new and better house was set-up within a few days for their chief (U. J. Haokip).' Thus, this saying still goes whenever long awaited fretful things pass and better things happen.

2.4. GROUND LEVELING

Ground leveling was the first starting work for constructing a traditional Kuki house. After performing all the traditional rites for selection of house site, leveling work was done according to the slope level of the site. There was also another way of doing ground leveling that is after completion of the house construction, ground leveling works were carried out. The whole area for construction needs no leveling. Only the yard and earthen part of the verandah was leveled.

The leveling work for the yard could be done before or after the construction of the house. The size depended upon the size of the house. The ground leveling work of the

house was not a part of the activities to be done on construction day. The owner of the house invited his relatives or friends for the leveling work. On the leveling day, the owner served a feast and rice-beer for the workers.

2.5. PREPARATION

Preparation of house material is the first and foremost work. The families who are going to construct a new house or repairing first prepare every needed item for the house. The male members of the house are engaged in preparation for all necessary materials related with wood and bamboo. The females arrange the thatches for roofing. Preparation of house material has a season. Traditionally, the Kukis start cutting and preparing of wooden materials from November to February of the year. The belief that, trees which are cut before or after this period easily get eaten by worms locally called *'nget".* The description of preparing the wooden planks was mentioned in Chin Hills by (Tuck 178-179)

> The labour of building a house is enormous and a house is not satisfactorily completed before three to ten years, for not only is the amount of material used very large, but also poles and planks have to be felled and dragged some miles to the village after they are properly seasoned. A tree usually produces but two planks. When it is felled it is split in half and both halves are dressed and trimmed until two flat planks and piles of chips alone remain of the original trunk. A small heavy-headed axe is used, and is usually considered by the Kukis as an inferior tool. However, this is not the case in respect of the Chins as its lightness combined with its balance and sharpness enables the Chin to fell a huge number of trees of moderate girth in the day. For moderate-sized timber, the Chin axe is superior to that of the Kukis, though for heavy timber our heavy axes are by far the superior implement. The axe handle is not fitted into the head as is customary with the Kukis, but has a hole bored or burned through its end, into which fitted the axe-head, which tapers into a four-sided shank. After the tree is split into two the axe-head is taken out of the handle and replaced with the face at right-angles to the handle and is thus transformed into an adz with which to chip, trim, and smooth the planks. The labour of bringing the plank to the village is so great that the people have to help each other to drag them to the village, and it has become a regular custom for the man who brings planks to the village to provide his neighbours with liquor even when they do not assist in the work. When a chief builds a house all his subordinate villagers have to assist in cutting and dragging timber free of all cost.

2.6. CONSTRUCTION METHOD

To establish a village and to construct a house, the Kukis performed a ritual for selection of village as well as house location. Doungel had described in detailed how the village, village-gate as well as house-sites were chosen with the performance of rituals. The ritual to choose the village site was performed with the help of "Egg". Accordingly, the "egg" was holed and held-up on three wooden pegs posted in triangular position like tripod called *Lungthu*[3] (Doungel). The priest sprinkles drops of wine on the egg and chants the following words: (Goswami 74-95)

> Nang ka tuilung theng, Ka tuilung vah, Ka doh ngai nahi, Ka hou ngai nahi, Ka pu'n nadoh ngai, Ka pa'n nadoh ngai nahi, Hiche min hi ka lou jou nah, Ding le na phul hung pha hen, Lo jou ponte nate, nati leh hung poh jah jeng in

Translation

> O holy egg and shining egg! I always worship you and seek advice from you. My father and my grandfather also seek advice from you. May all your albumen and a little of your yolk ooze out if I am at all fated to settle here permanently and if not may everything inside of you burst out.

The Kuki villages were not found in low lying lands. They mostly preferred hilly or high altitudes, but located above or below a streamlet. For village, they chose places where there was a water source which did not run dry in the dry season. The Kukis chose hilly regions for their village because materials like timber, bamboo and thatch were readily and abundantly available in the hilly forest. All these materials were also simpler and easier to transport and maintain or rebuild in case of damage and due to rains and fire (Loncheu 192).

A new village was mostly built on a fairly spacious and level piece of ground on the higher slope of a hill upon which the sun shone well. The statement of (Goswami 74) clearly gives that,

> "…The stretch of land is sufficiently big to accomodate fifty to hundred households. The author was told that in olden times such a village had six to seven hundred households. Even today there are some very big Kuki Villages having more than four hundred families. Keithelmanbi which is within thirty kilometres from Imphal in

[3] *Lungthu* is a Kuki traditional cooking stove post erected on the hearth or fireplace. It is of three posts in stone with equal height in which different sizes of pots can be placed for cooking.

> Manipur is one such large village. Some of the present-day Kuki village in Burma have more than a thousand households…. The Kukis, however, like to build their villages somewhere in the middlemost height of the hills nearer to the water sources."

According to the result of the ritual, they selected the site for the village. Once the site was selected for the village, then, the priest would go and sacrifice a mature Cock at the site. After selecting the village site, selection of village-gate site, was also done by the process of ritual performance. To select the village-gate site, (S. Haokip) said that a kind of rhizome, which had medicinal value called *"Ai",* was used. A piece of *Ai* was divided into two by the use of dao over podhole made nearby. According to their belief, it is good if the two pieces of *Ai* faced downwards. The Ai would be burried at same place in which they also erected a stone. The erection of stone in village-gate was also performed in a ritualistic way. Thus, all the Kuki villages had village-gate called *"Khomol* or *Dongkot"* with big stones erected at the site. (H. Haokip) Most of the Kuki Villages were fenced with split logs for secutity purposes.

Like the selection of village site and village-gate site, a ritual was also performed to select the site for constructing a dwelling house. To select the site for construction, a space was cleaned up and a small quantity of rice (*Anchang)* was kept there for a night. If at the place all the rice were not disturbed, they chose that very site for construction (Doungel 4), then only necessary works for construction began.

After the house owner collected all the materials needed from the village forest, owned by the chief, "*Becha*[4]" a traditional family relative of the *Kukis* informed all the villagers for construction. Both males and females came together and worked in their respective ability or creativity generously. Errection of house pillars was the foremost work of Kuki community (or any tribal community). The *Becha* leds the gents for thatching the roof, the elders with the help of the womenfolk worked on the ground for constructing the floors and walls (Lenthang 52).

[4] *Becha* is the family relative in the village who can assist or help the family in all sorts of traditional activities. Every household has *Be* or *Becha* which is chose within the village. *Be* or *Becha* played the next greatest role in the family. Each of the household have *Becha*, therefore, every household is *Be* or *Becha* to his *Be* or *Becha* family.

Some of the main parts of a traditional Kuki house are: - *Sambuh* (Verandah), *Kotpi* (Main door), *Shutkhom* (Main pillar), *Khangphei* (Dormitory), *Lhongpeh* (Floor), *Kem* (raised Platform/Stage), *Gaplheng* (Hanging Shelve).

2.6.1. *Tho* (fencing)

For protection, fence is very much necessary in the house both in the old practices and the modern house as well. The traditional Kuki house also had fencing around the house. Fencing the compound of a house with proper gate kept the occupants and domestic animals safe. Fencing also served as protection from thieves and enemies. I can visualize the house and its fencing of *Phoilen* Chief, which I had seen during my childhood days in the 1980s. It was four to five feet high and carved from solid wood. There were only two cross-beams; its post gaping two to three inches made the fence a complete one. The gate had three or four bamboo or wooden logs; its base was fenced one to two feet high. Goswami described, "The setting up of the carved posts of the compound fence in front of the house is always an important ceremony in the southern Hills and only the rich can afford this dignity, as a feast has to be given to the entire village by the person who sets up an ornamental entrance to his compound. The carved posts are usually of oak" (Goswami 80).

2.6.2. *Tapkong* (hearth)

Lungthu is a fireplace of the traditional Kuki house. Normally the Kuki traditional house has one hearth in the middle of the house. Big families have two hearths which they call *Tapsah* and *Taplhang* in the house. In case there are two hearths, one is for the youths and the other is for family elders. It is used for cooking of food and rice beer. It also serves as sitting room or common room. The general description of hearth is given in (Goswami 80-81)

> A square area of 20 square feet is marked out for making the hearth. The area is bordered on all the four sides by four pieces of wooden planks, each about six inches thick. The square hollow is filled up with loose earth. The surface is plastered with mud.… Three pieces of stones of about four to five inches diameter are placed on the mud plastered surface of the raised bed of the hearth in the form of a tripod for holding the cooking utensils above the fire. These three pieces of hearth-stones are chiseled out to the required proportion. The plastered bed of the hearth is called *Tapkong*. The three chiseled heart-stone pieces are called *Lungthu*. The four wooden planks that bind the four edges of

> the square area of the hearth are called *Taplheng*. If some cracks appear on the plastered bed of the hearth these are filled up with new earth by an old lady who has passed the age of child-bearing. If, however, the oven is to be made anew all the members of the family render help in the work.

The Kuki traditional hearth is always burning with firewood. To keep on burning, a big firewood called *Thuhlukhap* or *Thingkhokhap* with smaller firewood are put continuously without total consumption. The Kukis belief that totally consumed firewood in the hearth is a sign of bad omen and the continuity of big firewood signifies long life and continuity of the family head (Thomsong).

2.6.3. *Sambuh* (Varandah)

Generally the houses had broad verandah in the front. The front verandah was divided into two equal parts. The upper part/floor consisted of a raised platform called *Kem* made of bamboo or wood and floor of the house and lower part was called *Sumphol*[5] in earthen floor. The roof of the house extended over the front verandah, which was enclosed on three sides and decorated with the skulls of animals hung in rows on the wall. Above the lower verandah on the roof, a sacred traditional ritual box called *Doi-Bom/Inn-doi* (sacred basket/house-god) was hung (Neijalhing). Mortar, the rice-pounding mill with pounding stick and dry firewood were also kept on the floor of the verandah.

The verandah was decorated with the skull of animals and birds hung in rows on the wall. All the heads of animals killed by the house owner were considered as trophies and exhibited there. Anyone who wished to know about the class of game which was played in any particular neighborhood had only to have a look at the collection of skulls in the verandahs of the houses (Tuck 177). The verandah was relatively small and used mainly by the women for weaving and doing other household chores. The members of the household used to sit together, worked and drank in the raised platform in front of the house. This also served as a place where visitors were welcomed. During day time, it was used for drying crops. All types of animal heads/skulls killed by the house owner

[5] *Sum* means mortar and *Phol* means place. This is the place where mortar and dried fire woods are kept in Kuki traditional house.

as well as traditional artifacts were displayed there. The decorated front wall was described by (Tuck 177-178),

> "The roof of the house protrudes or overhangs the front verandah, which is enclosed on three sides and decorated with the skulls of animals hung in rows on the walls and piled up on the ground. Sometimes as many as 300 skulls are found in this verandah and represent not necessarily the game killed by the owner of the house, but also that killed by his father and even his grandfather before him. Amongst these trophies are found the skulls of elephants, rhinoceros, bison, goral, serrao, deer of several kinds, bear, boar, monkeys, also head of large cat-fish and mahseer, skulls of hornbill, vulture, and eagle, and odds and ends, such as the gall-bags of animals, honey-combs and feathers…. Besides the heads of wild animals the skulls of domestic mithun, buffalo, pigs, goats, and dogs which have been killed at feasts are included in the collection of skulls….Anyone wishing to be informed of the class of game which is found in any particular neighborhood has only to pay a visit to the collection of skulls in the verandahs of the houses in the village."

In "The Tribes of Mizoram" (Sen) states that the trophies, skulls and horns of animals which they killed are proudly displayed by them in the main front portion of their house. Ethnographically, the *Chins* in Myanmar, *Kukis* in all parts of North-Eastern Indian States except Mizoram and *Mizos* or *Lushais* in Mizoram are of the same race. According to the geographical area, materials available and due to influence by other ethnic groups their material cultures are different, but, structure and concepts are all the same. So, the statement of Sipra Sen "….they had no habituation to repair old and broken houses…and they had to leave that old house to be demolished….", in this case, the *Chin-Kuki* ethnic groups shifted the site of their houses for different reasons. However, repairing of their houses and building a new one at the same site was also practised. And Ncy Doungel argue that, "….they chose the location of the house from downhill side post/pillar so as to avoid the practice of moving downhill side or forward and turning of the direction" (Doungel 4). It means the Kukis repaired their old houses and did not leave the site without proper reason.

Another small verandah was also constructed at the back side of the house, called *Kemcha* (small platform) with a small door *Kotcha* (small door). The statement given by Tuck about the back verandah "….above the pig pen and is entered through a hole in the wall….referred to further on when the subject of gunpowder is dealt with…." (Tuck 178). Actually, the entrance through it was not a hole in the wall. It was a door, small in

size, called *Kotcha*. *Kemcha* was used for urinal purpose by the whole family. So, after many decades of urinating at the same place, they extracted gunpowder from that urine mixed with clay because it contained a chemical which could produce gunpowder. However, there is no scientific proof to this claim. In this regard, scientific chemical test is required to prove whether the urine mixed clay could have been used as gunpowder or not. As back verandah was small in size, womenfolk preferred to use the front verandah than the back verandah for performing the household chores.

2.6.4. *Kotpi* (Main Door)

The main door of the traditional *Kuki* house had two wooden planks. The making of main door needed a skilled man. A big tree, about 30 inches diameter was divided into two pieces. Both the planks were hewn out from a large timber till the desired shape and size was achieved. It was usually 4 to 5 feet in length and 1½ to 2 feet in width and 2 to 3 inches thick (Dongjakai). The bolt hinge for locking was hewn out called *"Kotbil"* on both sides. A cylindrical shape of rice pounding stick, locally called *"Suh"* measuring about 4-5 feet was inserted to the bolt hinge to lock the door. Everyone respected a closed door and there were no reports of robbery or theft. The main door of the house was called *Kotpi* and the other back door of the house was called *Kotcha.* Though the western styles of building have become popular today, the term *Kotpi* and *Kotcha* nevertheless still exist in the modern houses too (H. Haokip).

Another Kuki traditional door is of sliding type. It is made of bamboo or wood. This sliding door was fixed on a rail slot made of bamboo or wood. In case of bamboo slot, the required stem was partially sliced off along the length. For wooden slot, the required length of wood was hewn out by the use of adzes or axe. The door was shut and opened by sliding.

The Kukis used two wooden rods or simply crossing of two pieces of firewood as a locking system in their traditional house. About the locking system of the door (Goswami 77-78) also gives that,

> "… One interesting thing is that in the past the Kukis did not use any locking system on their doors as is done nowadays. This speaks for the very high standard of law and order that prevailed in the Kuki villages in those days. Instead of putting on a lock, the owner of a house simply used to keep two pieces of

> firewood in a criss-crossing manner in front of the door signifying thereby that the inmates were out. This method of indicating the absence of the inmates was known as Kot-kam."

2.6.5. *Shutkhom* (Main Pillar)

There were many pillars in the structure of the house. *Shutkhom*-the main pillar in the middle of the house was bigger in size and double in length than the other pillars. According to *Pu Shokhai,* the interviewee, (S. Haokip) it also had a small protruding structure for hanging men's equipments and also elongated texture like other pillars. It was the most important post in the entire structure. The front side of the pillar was decorated with heads of big animals or skulls killed by the house owner while baskets or bags were hung in the backside. The post was erected in the middle of the house. Depending upon the size of the house, there were two or four other posts. The centre post of the main pillar called *Shutlai-khom* (main and centre pillar) also played a crucial role in the custom and culture of the *Kukis*. It was a sacred ritual place and was termed Sacred Pillar. Rituals like *Saneng Het*[6], *Jubel*[7], *Shutlai–Selpi*[8] were performed traditionally on this pillar. Different ceremonies, festive occasions and customary rites were also performed here. At the base of *Shutlai-khom* a rice-beer pot called *Jubel* was kept for a drink whenever there were customary practices. In fact, every verdict/decision in the Kuki custom was taken along with consumption of rice-beer.

2.6.6. *Khangphei* (Dormitory)

Khangphei was a long platform at a level little higher than that of the main floor, which was meant as a seating cum sleeping place (H. Haokip). Depending upon the availability of materials, it was made of either wooden planks or flattened bamboo matting. Holkhongam Haokip further states that *Khangphei* was the only sleeping place

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[6] A ritual performed in the beginning of a year. The literal meaning of *Saneng-het* is offering of animal (chicken) without breaking the bones. The flesh of the chicken was taken out without breaking the bones, and then the bones are kept in their ritual container called *Doibom* or *Inn-doi.*

[7] In every customary court and tradition, *Jubel* (*Ju*=rice beer, *Bel*=pot) takes the most important part. It was same as the "Court Fee" paid in today's government court. In this Christian Era, the actual rice beer are no more in used, it has been replace by Tea but the name *Jubel* still exist.

[8] According to the *Kuki* customary practiced, *Shutlai-Selpi* (*Shutlai*=main pillar in the middle of a house, *Selpi*=mithun) takes the main role in judiciary system. In every traditional judiciary, either the party or one of the parties should produce *Shutlai-selpi* in the form of *Jubel.* And then, the case should be settled down by the elders of the family or village authority.

for the whole family. Even guests and youths slept at the *Khangphei*. Holkhongam Haokip further states that, "the beds of the members of the family were placed on both sides of the fireplace where cooking was done". In olden days, there were no beds for the family members; *Khangphei* was the only sleeping place for both family members and guests. But, there were separate places for sleeping for elders and young girls of the household as well as for youths and guests. Big families had two dormitories, one for the youths and one for the married couples and family elders.

2.6.7. *Lhongpeh* (Floor)

Traditionally, the floor of the house was made of flattened bamboo splits or wooden plank. A bamboo called *Gopi* or *Gomi* of same size was used. A wooden plank hewn from a large timber by the use of *Heicha* (Axe) measuring 2-4 feet flat surface and 10-15 feet in length of solid trees were used. The floor of typical Kuki traditional house is made of pine planking and which are fitted together with skill and without the assistance of nails (Tuck 177). The statement was however confined only to a particular area therefore the use of pine planking was mentioned. But, there were also some particular places where pine trees were not available. Depending on the availability of materials, they were very much aware of using the best materials available in their location. They also had the knowledge and skill to fit them without the assistance of nails. Red wood, which resembled mahogany, was greatly used for the floor of the Chief's house. Poor families used splits of bamboo locally called *Gopi* or *Gomi* on their floor. It had its own traditional beauty. Other wooden planks used for floor were locally named *Uningthou, Leihao-thing, Chal-thing, Kha-thing, Banlhang-thing, Vong-thing, Khanglha-thing, Jangngou-thing, Chah-thing etc.* A tree was split in half by the use of small heavy-headed axe. In his book *"Kum Som-nga Kahinkho"* (Haolai) described the floor of the Kuki traditional house "….bamboo slice called *Gomi-Lhong*, measuring three cubits was the floor of a house…"

2.6.8. *Kem* (Stage or Platform)

A raised platform in front of the house was also one of the traditional architectural structures of a traditional *Kuki* dwelling house. It was built 5 to 7 feet high above the ground level in bamboo or wood, depending on the materials available. The platform from 20 to 100 feet in length occupies the whole length of the lower side and was

supported by long posts like lower side of the house (Tuck 177). The members of the household used to sit together, work or drink in the platform. This also served as a place where visitors were welcomed and during day time crops were dried over it. Young men used to sit here with their traditional musical instrument called *Goshem* under the moonlight and played it for their loved ones.

2.6.9. *Gaplheng* (shelves)

Gaplheng was another striking architectural feature of the house. It was a hanging three-tier bamboo mat just above the fireplace or furnace. The *Gaplheng* was primarily used for drying firewood or grains. It was also used to prepare and store dry foodstuffs, dried meat, dried fish, fermented fish, fermented soyabean, chilli, corn & vegetables for sowing in the next season , newly-woven baskets etc. Besides, it served as a shield to prevent the sparks from fire from touching the roof. All these preserving and storing items made it more decorative. So, there was a saying *"A gaplheng a saphe kikhailou"* meaning 'a hanging mat without dry meat' (Neijalhing). The literal meaning was that, the family without decorated hanging mat with dry meat was an idle or incomplete family i.e. without a man/hunter. Therefore, a house with dry meat on the hanging mat was suggestive of having a manly and honorable man in the family.

The third shelf of *Gaplheng* was the biggest in size and upper most layer of hanging mat. It was used for storing and preserving bigger baskets and good grains which were used occasionally. The second and middle one was used for storage of woven baskets small in size, and also dried food items for preservation. The first tier or shelf being the lowest which received the direct heat from the fire was used for drying food items. It was also decorated with a smoked or dried meat.

2.6.10. *Jal and Genggel* (Loft)

Jal is the upper loft in traditional Kuki house. It is constructed just below the roof from the upper end of the front door in lengthwise. This loft was made by fixing of long bamboos across the crossbeams. It was about four feet in breadth. Baskets, farming articles, and some household materials were kept here.

Another loft like *Jal* was made on another side of the house called *Genggel. Genggel* was smaller and shorter than *Jal.* It was used for keeping of weaving looms (Goswami

78), accessories which were purely used by females of the house. All the articles kept in *Genggel* were prohibited to keep together with hunting equipments or articles purely used by male members of the household.

2.6.11. Roofing

Traditionally, a Kuki house had thatched roofing. Grass for thatching was collected from forest, abundantly available in their locality. The front section of the house was thatched in a semi-circle shape. The house was covered with two angularly slanting thatched roof for rain water to drain out easily (Goswami 76). The thatch of the house is often 5 or 6 feet long; it is laid on a foot thick and is often not removed when the house requires re-thatching, the new thatch being piled on over the old (Tuck 178). Competent youths of the village led by the *Bepa* were engaged in roofing. Thatching process was begun after all major process of post *(khom),* main-beams *(lhungpi),* crossbeams *(insun)* and mini-beams *(hegol)* were completed.

Generally, the process went from left to right and one after another. Normally, row thatching was done by alternately crossing each mini-beam called *Hegol*. Thatch grass was bound-tied with another mini-beam in the upper side. The binding wire traditionally called *Bichi-nang* was used for binding. Female workers from below would pass the thatching grass to the men. The ladies also helped in ensuring the proper volume of the thickness of thatching from below and gave suggestions where necessary. After the skilled youths and *Bepa* completed normal thatching, another process traditionally called *Lhungkhu* and *Bigol* was the duty of *Tucha*[9]. The family treated the persons who were engaged in thatching grass with traditional rice beer called *Ju.* And the *Tucha* who took part in *Lhungkhu* and *Bigol* were treated with special treatment traditionally called *Lhungkhu-zu.*

Studying the work process and their respective activities, it is observed that all of them were skilled builders. Their capacity to do all technical works was very necessary. According to the Kuki custom and culture, every family has *Tucha*, also everyone is *Tucha* in at least one family of the village. Moreover, every head of the family or married man has Bepa, which means every one of them takes the responsibility of *Bepa*

[9] In a Kuki traditional relationship, *Tucha* is a son or grandson of his mother's family.

in at least one family. By critically analyzing the technical works they perform, if *Bepa* leads the youths in general thatching and the *Tucha* is fully responsible for *Lhungkhu* and *Bigol*, it can be said that every Kuki male is obligated to know the technique of house construction. Thus, this duty makes them technically artists and craftsmen.

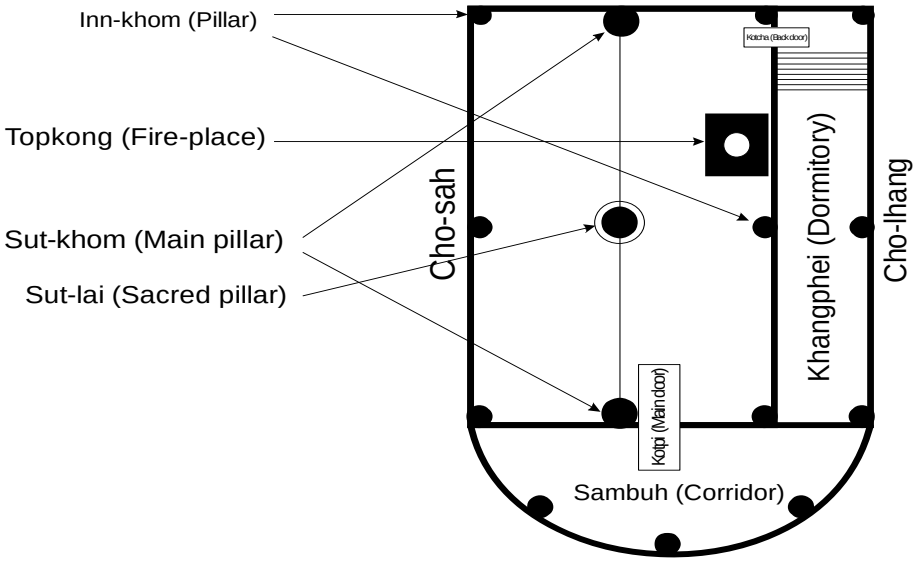
2.7. HOUSE-WARMING

After completion, they performed a ritual called *Inn-lut* (house warming). It was necessary to perform the *Inn-lut* ritual before the family occupied the new house. It was observed by the house owner with their maternal relatives. The house warming was also a family feast to celebrate the newly constructed house with meat and rice beer. A ritual was performed by the village priest called *Kho Thiempu* mentioned by (Lenthang 144) by chanting the incantation

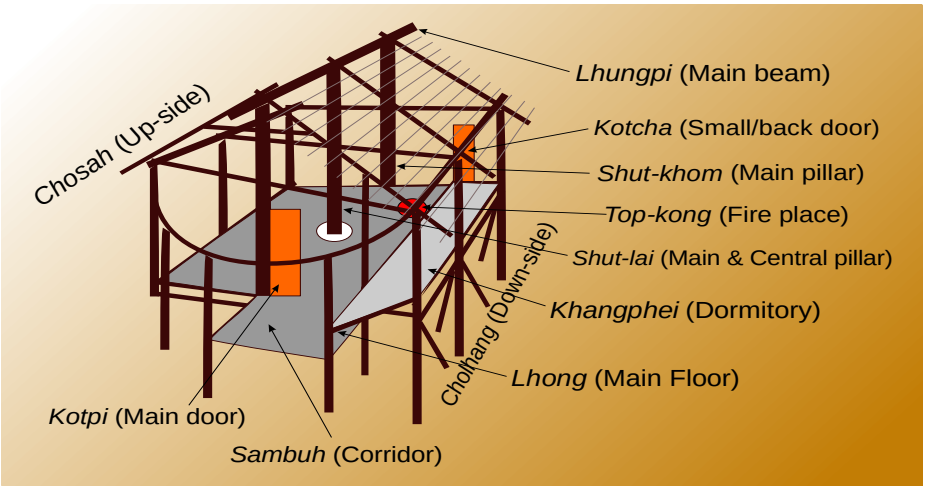
Chunga pathen noija pathen neihin veuvin
Manmasi chate khum lhan jalhan namun na
Jinglam chapa (Lushipher) in
Khan hinbol thei pon nate
Phi phi pho, Leithoulpi chunga konin
Kitol doh in kitoldoh in
Veiset aiset jouse kitol doh in
Muthei lou thilse bol jouse kitol doh in
Manmasi chate pathen khut kingapna mun ding in
Chunga pathen nin athenso a asuhtheng ahi tai
Hijeh chun tidam ludam hunglhung hen
Mitphat haphat hung lhung hen
Manmasi chate dingin.

Free translation

God of heaven and earth, look upon us
be sound here



Visual 2. 1: Ground layout of Kuki traditional house



Visual 2. 2: Architectural structural of Kuki Traditional House

Visual 2. 3: Construction of Kuki Traditional House

Visual 2. 4: *Malai Kuki Inn* (Kuki Traditional House) (Bhadur)

Visual 2. 5: Front view of Kuki traditional house

Visual 2. 6: Decorated front wall of a house with animal heads and skulls

Visual 2. 7: *Gaplheng,* suspended shelve for drying above the fire place

Visual 2. 8: Kuki Traditional hearth

Visual 2. 9: Kuki traditional Hearth (Bhadur)

Visual 2. 10: *Kotpi*, Kuki traditional main door (Dongjakai)

Visual 2. 11: *Inndoi:* A Kuki ritual charm or sacred components

Visual 2. 12: Contemporary traditional Kuki house