



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)
Volume-I, Issue-VI, May 2015, Page No. 104-108
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

An Important Aspect of Material Culture of the Kukis of Manipur: Agriculture Implements

Carolyn Niengneihmoi

Research Scholar, Dept. of History, Manipur University, Canchipur, Manipur, India

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to throw lights and describe the agriculture tools and implements of the Kukis of Manipur. Most tribal in the world in general and the north-eastern India in particular had agriculture practised since time immemorial. The Kukis of Manipur are no exception. The Kukis have practised the method of Jhuming cultivation. The area of the Jhum land ranges from one acre to five acres or more depending on the working force or size of a family. Due to the nature of cultivation, the locations of the Jhums are changed every year from place to place. The age-old mode of production of the Kukis is called Shifting Cultivation. There are varieties of tools and Implements associated with agriculture practised. These tools and implements are an integral part and it reflects every aspect of their culture. They are made of simple materials like wood, bamboo etc. and though they are not designed in an attractive manner, they are known for their ethnic authenticity. Apart from being an agricultural tool, they are also used as a weapon of defence in times of attacks by the neighbouring tribes and also used as an implement for building homes and hearth. This article focuses on the process of cultivation and elaborate the various tools and implements associated with it. It also highlights the uses of the various tools and implements.

Key Words: *Agriculture, Implements, Jhuming, Tools, Kuki.*

Introduction: During the time of their forefathers and up to the coming of the British in NE India, the Kukis were a nomadic tribe, moving from one place to another, within short intervals. They generally did not stay in a place for more than three or four years. The reason for their semi-nomadic life was searching for fertile land for cultivation. The main activity of the Kukis centre around food-production and many of their festivals are also linked with it. Their method of cultivation is called Jhumming. This age-old mode of production is also called Shifting Cultivation. Cultivation of land has been not only the main traditional occupation but a cultural activity. All the cultivable land is a common property of the villagers. The village council has a session at the beginning of every year and opened a certain region of land for cultivation. The most fertile part of the land is first allotted to the Councillors and the remaining land to the Commoners by lot. The area of the Jhum land ranges from one acre to five acres or more depending on the working force or size of a family. Due to the nature of cultivation, the locations of the Jhums are changed every year from place to place. No individual has separate or personal holdings of land but only for a period of one calendar year. The land ceased to be his as soon as the harvest is over.

Jhuming method of cultivation is widely practised from tropical to temperate latitudes where sufficient land and water are available. Jhuming is the local term for slash and burn or shifting cultivation which is practised by most of the hill tribes of north-east India. Shifting cultivation is an agricultural system in which plots of land are cultivated temporarily, and then abandoned. It involves clearing of a piece of land followed by several years of crop production. It is left to be reclaimed by natural vegetation or sometimes converted to a different long-term cyclical farming. In Manipur, about one lakh hectare area of hills is under Jhum cultivation of which 60,000 hectares are estimated to be under Jhuming every year involving 55,000 tribal families. Assuch, every tribal family owns 1.2 hectares of on an average. Jhuming method of agriculture is not only practised by the Kukis in Manipur but also in many parts of the world. According to FAO 's estimate (in the IVth World Forestry Congress)the actual area under shifting cultivation in the world was reported to be about 36

million square kilometres inhabited by some 200 million people. The pattern of shifting cultivation is known in different terms by different people in many parts of the world. It is known as 'Ladong' in Indonesia and Malaysia, 'Milpa' in Mexico, 'Roca' in Brazil, 'Masole' in Congo, 'Coingin' in Phillipines etc. In India many terms like 'Adi-arik'(Meghalaya), 'Hookinsmono'(Tripura) , 'Tekhonghs' (Nagaland), 'Konda' paddy (A.P), 'Kurwa', 'Kallu' and 'Bewars' (Bihar), 'Rema', 'Podu', 'Dahi', 'Kaman,' 'Bringa', 'Gudia', 'Donghas' (Orissa) , 'Penda,' 'Dahia', 'Bewar,' 'Guharh,' 'Farhha,' 'Dippa,' 'Marhap' and 'Erka'(M.P) 'Kumri'(Kerela) and so on.

Process of Cultivation: In Manipur, the Kukis practised Jhum cultivation heavily in areas where they inhabited predominantly because it is an upland state with almost 92 per cent of its total area inhabited by the different tribes who practise the age old shifting cultivation for their livelihood. They adopted the following stages of Jhum cultivation;

- 1. Selection of forest hilly land:** In selecting a site for jhuming cultivation known as '*Thlhangleihoing*', the village council selects a large area of land for the year's cultivation after judging the fertility of the land by the colour of the soil and its texture, which is then opened only to the villagers. Selecting of jhumland is done by lot. The area of the jhum ranges from one acre or more depending on the working force or size of a family.
- 2. Cleaning of the forest tract:** All the bamboo trees and other forest growth are cut down and spread in the sun for drying. Felling of trees and clearing of scrubs and bushes is called '*Lovat*'.
- 3. Burning dried forest woods into ashes:** When all the forest cuts are completely dried, it is then burned in the dry season normally in the month of March every year. In this way, the field is cleared and the ashes are used as manure spread all over. Burning of the field is known as '*Lohal*'.
- 4. Dibbling and sowing of seeds:** With the first sign of rain, Kukis go to the Jhumland with bags of seeds. At the crack of dawn, the Kuki men and women reach the jhumland. They dig holes with a hoe called *Tuhcha* and drop a few grains in each hole and seal it. This process goes on till they cover the whole burnt area and it usually takes two months to complete.
- 5. Weeding:** Weeding is done three to four times a year. The first weeding starts in the month of May when the rice is 20-30 cm and lasts for two weeks. The second weeding starts at the beginning of June. The last weeding starts in July. The paddy is ripe in September. The first round of weeding is called '*Changham*' and the second is known as '*Buthai*' and the third '*Thingdomal*' in Thado- Kuki. Weeding is done mainly by women with a little hoe called '*Tuhcha*', looped bamboo and small spade for the maize field.
- 6. Watching and protecting the crops:** Very often the Jhumfields are miles away from the villages, so the jhumingas build tiny Jhum huts called '*Thlam*' or '*Loubuk*' or a substantially built well thatched house and stayed there caring and guarding the crops from damage.
- 7. Harvesting and Threshing:** Harvesting is done between October and November. Before the paddy is harvested, large woven mats(phek) are brought in and spread out over the floor and on the lower parts of the side walls and the back walls, and the paddy is piled up on these mats. During this period, several families again join together in groups. They reside in the fields and work together ripping and collecting the crops. Threshing is done by throwing corn on the threshing floor which is trodden by persons dancing up on them or by holding a temporary tied bundle of paddy hitting on wooden log, around 3-4 times on the wooden log or on the grain itself. This is called '*Changpal*'. The obtained grain are then stored in the shape of a pyramid and the height of it is measured by a gun or well-marked bamboo pole. A good harvest is generally between two to three fathoms (a unit of length equal to six feet), which is usually celebrated with different types of ritualistic *Kut*.
- 8. Performance of ritualistic Kuts:** This is an occasion for celebrating the whole year's work after reaping the harvest and also before the start of the New Year's work. The village priest (*thiempu*) officiates at the ritualistic *Kut*. The *Kuts* were celebrated with pomp and grandeur as it is the only time of complete relaxation for the people who have been toiling from early morning till evening throughout the year. Some common *Kut* festivals associated with Jhum cultivation are *PawlKut* (Gourd or Harvesting *Kut*, observed in November when the harvest is over) *ChapcharKut* (In November when cutting down of Jhum trees are completed), *MimKut* (*Kut* of Job's tear), *ChangKut* (Paddy *Kut*), *Thai Thak Lop* (*Kut* of new crops) etc. One of the most striking features of the Kukis economic activity was corporate labour called '*Lawm*' (reciprocal labour contract system) in which all the boys and girls of the village engage in social activities. P.S.Haokip states '*Lawm* was an

institution in which boys and girls engaged in social activities, for the benefit of the individual and the community. It was also another learning institution. Every *Lawm* has a *Lawm -'upa'* (senior member), to 'llai-pao' (overseer or superintendent) and '*Lawm-tangvo*' (Assistant Superintendent) Besides a source of traditional learning, *Lawm* was also useful for imparting technical and practical knowledge to its members with regards to farming methods, hunting, fishing and sporting activities'. According to Lianhmingthanga, 'The agricultural work partnership largely confines itself to the unmarried young men and women and it does not in any way reflect the status of the members of the working party. It is a reciprocal give- and - take form of agricultural work. Young men and women paired themselves in such a way that the jhum works would be performed reciprocally on two or more plots of land at alternate days' (Lianhmingthanga, 1998). They work together in every stages of paddy cultivation. The various stages of food production which normally involved Corporate labour are ; clearing the forest track by cutting down the jungle, dibbling and sowing of seeds, weeding, harvesting, thrashing and storing. In all these stages, the entire village join in corporate labour and help each other. Any individual lagging behind is helped by the whole community in completing the work. The whole village will join together in corporate labour from one Jhum to another and sowed five to six fields a day. For harvesting too, several families again join together in groups. They prefer working together in fields than to work as single family, the reason being, in the past when Wars were a common feature, large villages defended themselves better when jhuming together. After Harvesting, '*Lawm meet*' is celebrated with a feast of *Lawm-se'l* (slaughtered Mithun) and as a commemoration, a pillar is erected and accompanied by dance and merry making and drinking '*Zu*' (rice beer). Sometimes, the event goes on for days and nights. Although paddy cultivation is given primary emphasis, the Kukis also adopted mixed cropping to enrich the soil and as such a variety of crops are sowed under the rain fed condition just after the pre-monsoon showers and harvesting begins depending upon the ripening of the crops. They also grow cotton in the same jhum field for weaving (cloths) only for their requirements. The cotton grown are of two colours, white and light brown. In addition, fruit trees like Mango, Peach, Pine, Apple, Banana, Orange, Jackfruit and different types of Beans are also supplemented by jhumfields. Apart from rice, they also grew crops like Maize, Oil seeds, Chillies, Pumpkin, Cucumber, Potato, Turmeric, Ginger, Water melon, Ladies finger and various kinds of herbs and vegetables available in the forests. In the earlier times, they depend on Maize, Millets, Sweet potatoes, yams and a variety of Cereals. Despite, the cultivation of various types of crops, the primary or staple food item of the Kukis is always rice. Thus, it shows that Paddy cultivation constitutes an important part in the economic life of the Kukis. However, other crops substituted rice when '*MAUTAM*' visits the Hill people. ('*MAUTAM*' literally means a 'bamboo famine'). Though the bamboo plant has a high degree of utility it also has its share of disadvantages which becomes a source of great misery for the people. The Kukis believed that flowering of the bamboo plant is a bad omen, that devastating famines occurs when bamboo (*Melocanna Bambusoides*) flowers and fruits grow approximately every 50 years. The large increase in bamboo fruits leads to rapid increase in rodent population. As the number of rodents increases, they attack and devour the standing crops leading to famine.

The system of Jhum cultivation has come under severe criticism and had been characterised as inefficient, uneconomic, wasteful and responsible for land degradation, soil erosion, soil degradation and Global warming (due to cutting of trees). The Jhumingas of Manipur are also quite conscious of the laborious and wasteful method of cultivation. But they are tradition bounded and Jhum is a way of life for them, and if prevented from practising jhum, they will face the threat of starvation. Further an alternative of sustenance from shifting to any other system cannot take place suddenly since the deep-rooted economic structure is woven inextricably within the total social ethos. It has a deep significance and its function is always indispensable to the society. Besides, a number of festivals like *Chapchar Kut*, *Pawl Kut* (Gourd or Harvesting Kut) *Mim Kut* (Kut of Job's tear) *Chang Kut* (Kut of Paddy) etc. are all associated with crops and linked with shifting cultivation.

Agriculture tools and Implements: The agricultural implements used by the Kukis are very simple, since their cultivation system is confined to cutting down the jungle, burning it and dibbling the seeds among the ashes. They do not used sophisticated implements but a Dao, Axe, Hoe, and Sickle made

by the village Blacksmith. Reginald A Lorraine states 'Their farming implements were exceedingly primitive, the 'Tako' being a weapon of defence as well as their implement for building their houses and their plough' (R. A. Lorraine, 1912). Besides this instrument they have a little Hoe, and these two articles with a few bamboo baskets form all that is necessary for cultivating the ground. The main agriculture tools and implements used by the Kukis of Manipur may be described in detail below.

1. **Dao (Chempong):** The Dao is a knife with a triangular blade three inches wide at the end and half an inch at the handle. It is ground with a chisel edge, the broad end being also sharpened. This is used for clearing the jungle and the broad end is used for grubbing the holes in which the seed are placed. The handle is made of bamboo. During weeding season, the Dao is bent at its middle part. This makes the Dao very convenient for speedy weeding.
2. **Axe (Heicha):** This is used for cutting wood and felling trees and also for cutting logs for firewood. The axe's head is made of iron about one and half inches and tapers to a pointed end. The handle is made with a piece of bamboo (*Melocanna bambusoides*).
3. **Hoe (Tucha):** It is a small Hoe used for weeding, digging holes etc. It resembles an axe, but the head is a little lighter and broader. The head is made of iron and the handle is made of bamboo (*Melocanna bambusoides*).
4. **Sickle (Koite):** It is a reaping tool and mainly used for reaping paddy at the time of harvesting. Sickle is made by a village blacksmith.

Besides the above mentioned Iron implements, the Kukis also use other materials which are indispensable for the discharge of their Jhum work such as;

- (i) *Sakhau /Kawlzal*: A bag made of coarse cloth used by men for carrying Dao and other tools as well as Jhum products. It is a multipurpose bag.
- (ii) *Kawngvaw/Bawmpi*: Also a bag used for carrying paddy for sowing. It is made of bamboo and cane and mostly used by men.
- (iii) *Bawmta /Paipah*: A small version of *Bawmpi* and used by women in the fields.
- (iv) *Lawhpi/Gawdal*: A round shape tray or sieve made of bamboo (*Melocanna bambusoides*). It has no holes in it and is used for separating husked rice from un-husked and broken pieces of grain.
- (v) *Dawrawn*: A truncated cone shaped basket used especially for carrying un-husked rice and for measuring the same both when selling and when paying a Chief's share. These are of different sizes. A large *Dawrawn* full of grain generally weighs about a *Maund*. It is 31" in height with a 6" bottom and 40" opening diameter.
- (vi) *Hahvang/Chiang*: A big size bamboo sieve or tray in which the unwanted grains falls while cleaning. This is square in shape and 3' into 3' in size. It is also used for drying tobacco and spices.
- (vii) *Sengzin/Lawngkai/Paikawng*: This is made out of *gawva* (*Dendrocalaus Hamiltoni*) used for carrying paddy and other articles from jhum fields. It is available in various sizes but the most commonly used basket is one foot eight inches in height with 6" bottom diameter and 1.5" diameter at the top. It is a rectangular bottomed basket.
- (viii) *Sengvang/Bengvang*: This too is made of *gawva* (*Dendrocalaus Hamiltoni*) It is used for carrying water tubes (*tuithei*) and firewood from the jhum fields.
- (ix) *Nam / Namkol*: A cane rope used by women as a brow-band when carrying Paikawng/Lawngkai. The brow-band is made of *Tieng* (*Calamus erectus*) and the rope is made of *Khautang* (*Sterculia alata*).
- (x) *Lawh/Leikawr*: A basket used for storing rice or vegetables. It is made of *Tieng* (*Calamus Erectus*).
- (xi) *Buhhak/Duop*: A large bamboo tray with a mat like structure of 3' X 3' size without holes. It is used for spreading out paddy in the sun or on top of the fireplace.
- (xii) *Meh Chiang*: A small bamboo basket, round in shape and used for storing vegetables. It is made of *Tieng* (*Calamus erectus*).
- (xiii) *Lawihai*: A large bamboo tray mainly used for keeping un-husked rice. The sizes may vary according to the quantity of paddy.
- (xiv) *AnchangThull*: A basket with a lid to store rice. They vary in sizes. It is made of *Tieng* (*Calamus erectus*).

- (xv) *Kolnam/Kawrhnam*: A cane rope used by men as a brow-band when carrying *Sengzing/Lawngkai* from the paddy fields.
- (xvi) *Zem/Buhpang*: This is a large bamboo basket usually kept on the veranda and used for storing paddy. It is made of Mau (*melocanna bambusoides*).
- (xvii) *Sum/Sum-sutum* (Pestle and Mortar): The pestle is made of a long piece of hardwood about six feet in length and the mortar is the trunk of a tree hollowed out at one end to receive the grain. It is used for pounding un-husked grain. Sizes and designs may vary. There are square, rectangle and round in shape.
- (xviii) *Tuithei* (Bamboo Tubes): A tube made out of *Gawva* (*Dendrocalamus Hamiltoni*) about three to five feet made out of two sections of bamboo. A hole is bored upside down i.e. opposite to the growth as it lasts longer. It is used for carrying drinking water.

Conclusion: The study shows that the Kukis of Manipur have a variety of tools and implements associated with agriculture practised. These implements are important during the course of seasonal cultivation. These tools and implements have been used since time immemorial. Advancement of science and technology has brought many changes today. There are varieties of agriculture implements like Tractor, Grinder, Saw, etc. However, these scientifically invented or made agriculture implements are available; most of such agriculture implements are not applicable in the hill areas. As such traditional agriculture tools and implements are still important and used by the Kukis of Manipur in the process of cultivation even today.

References:

- Gangte M Priyadarshini, "*Tribal land, History and Culture and other Essays*", New Delhi: Ruby Press and Co (2013)
- Gangte T.S, "*Understanding Kuki since Primordial Times*", New Delhi: Maxford Books. (2010)
- Haokip. D.L "*Historical Traditions and Customary Laws of the Chassad*", Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal. , (2006)
- Kipgen Sheikhoaho, "*Political and Economic History of the Kukis of Manipur*", Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal. (2005)
- Laldena, "*The Hmars through the ages*", New Delhi: Mittal Mittal Publications. (1995)
- Lianhmingthanga, "*Material Culture of the Mizo*", Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd. (1998)
- Loncheu Nathan, "*Bawmzo: A study of the Chin-Kuki-Zo Tribes of Chittagong*", New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House. (2013)
- L. A Reginald, "*Five years in Unknown Jungles*", Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute. (1912)
- Mani Babu Mayanglambam, "*Anthropology of Manipur; Archaeological, Biological and Cultural Dimensions*", Imphal: Momothayai Books. (2006)
- Mate D Langsun, "*The Mate Tribe of Manipur*", New Delhi: Omsons Publications. (2000)
- P.S Haokip, "*Zalengam: The Kuki Nation*", Churachandpur: KNO Publication. (1998)
- Shakespeare J, "*The Lushei Kuki Clans*". Delhi: Mittal Publications. (1912)
- Sharma VP, "*The Hmars of Manipur: An Anthropological Exploration*", New Delhi: Anmol Publications. (1992)
- Sen Sipra, "*Tribes of Mizoram: Description, Ethnology and Bibliography*", New Delhi: Gian Publishing House. (1992)
