

# EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG INDIAN TRIBES

## THE KOMS OF MANIPUR

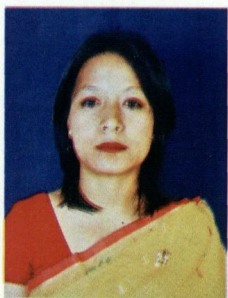


MANILEI SERTO

With an innate urge to ascertain the progress of the Kom society and to construct a vision for a better change, the author who is a Kom by birth and married to a Meitei family studied the traditional Kom society and changes that has been occurring continuously in the education, social and economic aspects. Influences made by modern education, Christianity and other informal agencies of education have also been studied.

The multi-factors that have been responsible in causing changes in the traditions, customs, economic and educational aspects are studied. While examining the various formal and informal agencies of education which are responsible for bringing changes in the field of education, the study makes analysis on the introduction and the contributions made by western education among this tribe. The study also delves into the various factors that hinder the progress in various aspects of life of Kom tribe of Manipur.

**Rs. 650/-**



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**EDUCATION AND SOCIAL  
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THE KOMS OF MANIPUR**



**Manilei Serto**

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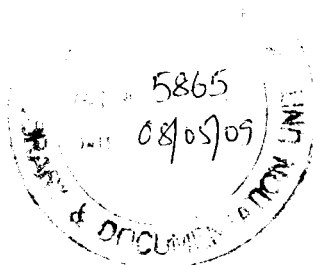
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# 1

## Introduction

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Mankind has had its unique culture and traditional practices within the structure of the society. These practices somehow disturbed and influenced by many forces, change took place in the society. Accordingly changes had taken place in the social sphere also. Progress as there either good or bad when the society remained dynamic and not static. Changes also occurred among the Kom tribe of Manipur particularly in the "Education and Social Practices". For, education is one of the instruments of social development and change and the "national system of education is the only instrument that can reach all the people."<sup>1</sup> The forces that has successfully influenced in the traditional life, the degree of alteration, its nature and the system of bridging up the old and new generation, etc. need to be investigated and studied.

### Land and the People

The state, Manipur which is populated by various groups of people, is situated on the Eastern Frontier Region of India. It has an area of 22,327 square kilometers.<sup>2</sup> Physically the state is divided into two parts — the hills and the valley. The valley occupied an area of approximately one-tenth of the total area. The valley is at the center surrounded by hills on all sides. The hills occupy an area of about

# MANIPUR

(Not to Scale)



Fig. 1

Note: This map is used only for illustration purpose.



three-fourth of the total area of the state. The state is bounded on the North by Nagaland, on the North-East and South by the Kabaw valley and the upper Chindwin areas of Burma (Myanmar), on the South-West by the neighbouring state Assam. A map of the state is given as Figure 1, for purpose of easy reference.

Manipur is divided into nine districts for the purpose of administrative convenience. Imphal district is bifurcated into two districts, namely, Imphal West and Imphal East during 2001. Out of the nine districts five are hill districts and four are valley districts. The five districts in the hills are: Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul. In all the five districts the Koms had been populated except the hill district of Ukhrul. They also had been populated in Imphal East district which is one of the capital districts of the state. Brief structure of these districts is given below for purpose of easy references:

### **Chandel District**

This district is on the south-eastern side, having international border with the union of Myannar. It is a hill district, on the north of the district it stretched upto the boundary of the Ukhrul district. The National Highway No.39 known as Indo-Burma road passes through this district. Important villages of this region are Sugnu, Chandel, Chakpikarong, Komlathabi, Sinam, Saivon, etcetera. The district is populated by various tribes such as Kom, Anal, Maring, Monsang, Aimol, Khoibu, Chothe, Moyon, Lamkang, etc.

### **Churachandpur District**

The district is situated at the south-western side of the state. It is a hill district. It lied between the Manipur river on the east and Barak river on the west. The district

had two main roads — Tiddim road and another road from Churachandpur-Tipaimuk. The second road could link with Mizoram. The district is second largest town next to the state capital. The district is populated by a number of tribes, mostly of Kuki-Chin origins, such as, Paite, Kom, Gangte, Ralte, Zou, Mizo, Simte, Hmar, Thadou, Nokte, Vaiphei, Kabui, etcetera.

#### **Senapati District**

The district is situated at the northern hills covering Sadar Hills. The district headquarter is on the way to the National Highway No. 39, commonly known as Imphal Dimapur Road. Mao in Senapati district area remained as the last village of Manipur bordering the state of Nagaland. The district has a mixed population of tribes like Kuki, Hmar, Kom, Mao, Purum, Thangal, Kharam, Maram, Sema, etc.

#### **Tamenglong District**

This district covers the entire north-western hills of Manipur. In the north of the district it stretched upto Nagaland borders, on the west it is bounded by Jiribam-river, on the east extended to the Sadar Hills, and on the south extended upto the boundary of the Churachandpur district. The New Cachar road connecting Manipur valley and Cachar plain in Assam has been passing through this district, touching the villages like, Noneh, Lukhumbi, Rengkung, Awangkhum, Taobam, Nungba and Jiribam, etcetera. The district was populated by various tribes such as Kabui, Zomi, Kom, Koireng, Rongmei, Jemei, Paomei, Lengmei, Inpuimei, etcetera.

#### **Ukhrul District**

The district covers the eastern hills of the state. It stretches upto the Burma border. Imphal-Ukhrul Road is

the main road for this area. The Ukhrul district is extended upto Jessami near the Nagaland border. The district headquarter of Ukhrul is populated by such tribes as, Tangkhul and Kuki.

In all these five districts all the tribes whether recognised or non-recognised has been populated. Although other communities has been populated in these five districts the majority were the scheduled tribes. However, in Churachandpur district the majority are Thadou-Kuki while in Chandel it was Naga, in Senapati it is Kuki, in Tamenglong are Zeliangrong Naga, and in Ukhrul it is Tangkhul Naga.

The four remaining districts of the state are in the valley. They are—Bishenpur district, Thoubal district, Imphal East district and Imphal West district.<sup>3</sup> These four valley districts has a mixed population representing different communities. The majority of the population in these valley districts is Meiteis.

According to 2001 census, the state is populated by 23,88,634 persons with 12,07,338 male and 11,81,296 female. The number of persons in each district are 3,93,780 in Imphal East District of which 1,97,710 are males and 1,96,070 are female; 4,39,532 are in Imphal West District of which 2,18,947 are male and 2,20,585 are female; 2,05,907 are in Bishnupur district of which 1,02,772 are male and 1,03,135 are female; 3,66,341 persons in Thoubal district of which 1,83,338 are male and 1,83,003 are female; 1,22,714 persons are in Chandel District of which 61,778 are male and 60,936 are female; 2,28,707 persons in Churachandpur district of which 1,14,7450 are male and 1,13,967 are female; 23,79,214 in Senapati district of which 1,96,646 are male and 1,82, 568 are female; 1,11,493 persons in Tamenglong district of which 57,994 are male and 53,499 are female; 1,40,946 in Ukhrul district of which 73,413 are male and

67,533 are female.<sup>4</sup> The population growth from 1901-2001 is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

**Population Figure of Manipur from 1901-2001<sup>5</sup>**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total Decimal Percentage</i>
1901	1,39,632	1,44,833	2,84,465	-
1911	1,70,666	1,75,556	3,46,222	21.71
1921	1,88,119	1,95,897	3,84,016	10.92
1931	2,15,815	2,29,791	4,45,606	16.04
1941	2,49,183	2,62,882	5,12,069	14.92
1951	2,83,058	2,93,950	5,77,635	12.80
1961	3,87,058	3,92,979	7,80,037	85.04
1971	5,41,675	5,31,078	10,72,758	37.53
1981	7,21,006	6,99,947	14,20,958	32.43
1991	9,39,359	8,98,790	18,37,149	29.29
2001	12,07,338	11,81,296	23,88,634	30.02

The district-wise population of Manipur by 2001 is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

**District-wise Population of Manipur by 2001 Census<sup>6</sup>**

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Population</i>		
		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
1.	Imphal East	1,97,710	1,96,070	3,39,780
2.	Imphal West	2,18,947	2,20,585	4,39,532
3.	Bishnupur	1,02,772	1,03,135	2,05,907
4.	Thoubal	1,83,338	1,83,003	3,66,341
5.	Chandel	61,778	60,936	1,22,714
6.	Churachandpur	1,14,740	1,13,967	2,28,707
7.	Senapati	1,96,646	1,82,568	3,79,214
8.	Tamenglong	57,994	53,499	1,11,493
9.	Ukhrul	73,413	67,533	1,40,946

## **The People**

Manipur has been a land of many ethnic groups with colourful cultures. This unique state, Manipur with rich cultural diversity is not less than in any other country of the world. Manipur has been a land of bewildering variety of people, kindred tribes and languages.<sup>7</sup>

The people of Manipur are predominantly Mongoloid with some non-Mongoloid or Aryan elements. Manipur is one of the routes between ethnic groups belonging to southern Mongoloid; the Tibeto-Burman, the Indian Aryan and the sizeable section of people who came to Manipur from Pre-historian times till date. The present ethnic groups of Manipur like the Naga tribes, the Kuki-Chin tribes and the Manipuri Muslims are the descendants of these migrating people.<sup>8</sup>

The population of Manipur is heterogeneous consisting of the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis, the Manipuri Muslims and other communities like Assamese, Bengalies, Beharis, Marawaries, Nepales, Punjabis, etcetera.

In recent times the Kukis were classified into two groups, namely the Old Kuki and the New Kuki. There are as many as 29 recognised scheduled tribes. They are the Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui (Pannei and Rongmei), Kacha Naga (Zemi and Liangmei), Koirao, Koireng, Kom, Lamkang, Mizo, Maram, Maring, Mao, Monsang, Simte, Ralte, Sema, Tangkhul, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou, Moyon, Soktes, Paites, Purum, etcetera. There are some more tribes who claim for recognition as schedule tribes in the state. Those tribes were, Rongmei, Zemei, Lengmei, Inpuimei, Tarao, Thangal, Paomei, Quite, and some other Kuki tribes — Haokip, Khongsai, Baite, Chongloi, Manlun — Manchong, Mate, Milhem and Kipgen. Thus,

there are as many as about 40 tribes both recognized and unrecognized by the constitution of the government of Manipur.

A vast area of the land is occupied by hill tribes. The eastern, northern and the western hills in the state are predominantly occupied by the Nagas like Tangkhuls occupying the eastern hills, Maos in the northern hills, and Kabuis in the western hills, etcetera. Whereas the southern, south-western part known as the Churachandpur district and the Sadar hills were dominantly occupied by the Chin-Kuki tribes.

The people of Manipur depended largely on agriculture. The net land area used for agricultural purpose in respect of the Manipur valley alone account for 93,526 hectares, that is, about 65 percent of the total geographical area. But in the hills agriculture is supplemented by terrace cultivation and jhum-cultivation. Terrace cultivation has been adopted to the maximum possibly in the northern, north-eastern, and north-western hills.

The list of the tribes of Manipur was shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

**List of the Scheduled Tribes of Manipur**

NAGA		SL.NO.	KUKI	
TRIBES	SUB-TRIBES		TRIBES	SUB-TRIBES
ANAL		1.	AIMOL	
ANGAMI		2.	CHIRU	
CHOTHE		3.	GANGTE	
KOIRAO		4.	HMAR	
LAMKANG		5.	KOM	
MAO		6.	MIZO	

NAGA		SL.NO.	KUKI	
TRIBES	SUB-TRIBES		TRIBES	SUB-TRIBES
MARAM	*THANGAL	7.	PAITE	
MARING		8.	PURUM	
MOYON		9.	*TARAO	SIMTE
SEMA		10.	THADOU	*RALTE
TANGKHUL		11.	VAIPHEI	*SOKTE
		12.	ZOU	
ZELIANGRONG	*PUMEI, *RONGMEI, *ZEMI, *LIANGMEI	13.		

\* Are the Sub-tribes of the Left Boxes.

The tribe-wise population of tribals of Manipur according to 2001 census is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4

**Tribe-wise Population of the Tribals of Manipur by 2001 Census (Provisional).<sup>9</sup>**

Sl. No.	Name of Tribes	Population
1.	Aimol	2,643
2.	Anal	13,853
3.	Angami	650
4.	Chiru	5,487
5.	Chothe	2,675
6.	Gangte	15,100
7.	Hmar	42,690
8.	Kabui	62,216
9.	Kacha naga	20,328
10.	Koirao	1,200
11.	Koireng	1,056

contd...

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Tribes</i>	<i>Population</i>
12.	Kom	15,467
13.	Lamkang	4,524
14.	Mao	80,568
15.	Maram	10,510
16.	Maring	17,361
17.	Mizo (Lushai)	10,620
18.	Monsang	1,635
19.	Moyon	1,710
20.	Paite	44,861
21.	Purum	503
22.	Ralte	110
23.	Sema	25
24.	Simte	7,150
25.	Tangkhul	1,12,940
26.	Thadou	1,15,045
27.	Vaiphei	27,791
28.	Zou	19,112
29.	Sahte	311
30.	Unrecognised	75,768
Total:		6,69,474

The tribes of Manipur might be classified into two major groups, the Nagas and the Kukis as under:

### **Kuki Tribe**

The Kukis are classified into two groups as the Old-Kukis and New-Kukis. The old Kukis are Aimol, Anal, Chothe, Chiru, Kalhen, Kom, Lamkang, Purum, Vaiphei,<sup>10</sup> Paite, Hmar, Simte, Zou, Gangte, Koirao and Koirang. The New Kukis included Thadou, and the other kin groups, such as Dongel, Misao, Lumpheng, Lumpho, Ngaite, Lamhao, Thungro, Touthang, etcetera.<sup>11</sup> The Old Kuki group settled first and the New Kuki group came later in the state.



The Kukis were first heard of as Kukis, in Manipur, between 1830 and 1840 when the Kukis entered Manipur in about eighteenth century. Manipur the princely state was under the reign of Maharaja Nara Singh. The then political Agent W. McCulloch set them settled by allotting them lands and in different places according to their numbers. They were also helped with money from his own pocket, and recruited them into different duties, like army, carrying loads according to the custom of the state.<sup>12</sup>

The Kukis are short, sturdy race of men with a good developed muscle. Their legs are shorter in comparison with the length of their bodies and had long arms. The face structure is generally round or square, having high broad and prominent cheek bones. Their eyes are small, the nose short and flat nostrils. The Kukis lived in a mud house, having a thatched roof, wood post and the floor elevated by bamboo. The house had a single large room and an open space in front of the house. The Kukis migrated from place to place very often, in looking for a suitable cultivable land. Thus their houses are not properly constructed in those days.

The Kukis cultivated rice and maize for their subsistence. They ate any kinds of meat. They planted various crops, vegetables and fruits. For carrying water they cut the large variety of bamboo. This bamboo cuts was also used for drinking water and rice-bear at home and in festivals and celebrations.

This tribe was fond of hunting. The Kukis made spear, bows and arrows and also they knew the use of guns. When a man go for a work in the forest chempong (knife) arrow, and spear were his important instruments that he carried.<sup>13</sup>

The Kuki girls adorned themselves with a piece of thread of any colour just about their ankle to make them look attractive. For the young man tiger tooth, fowls feather and horn peak, were made as necklace and put on their neck. The beauty behind in using the tiger teeth and feather was that seeing these things evils might not make any attempt on them, which meant a life free from suffering and unfortunate life.

The young girls of Kuki tribe were fond of wearing spiral brass for armband which goes up to elbow. Blue or red beads of necklace were their taste of style, besides hollowing around her ear. Boys also worn carnelian beads in each ear tied with a piece of cotton to the earlobe.<sup>14</sup>

The Kukis practiced both joint and nuclear types of family. Joint family is a type of family in which the eldest married son of a man having three or four generation lived together. Thus, the Kuki family is the smallest social unit of a joint family. The family is patriarchal system. The mother is a good partner to her husband in work and at home.

The village is the highest political unit among the Kukis, the chief and his council of ministers had political authority over the villagers and had been the supreme political power. The chief is the head of the local government, and only by moving away from the village they could escape his power of control over them. Chieftainship called "Haosa" is the perennial source of customary laws and the mechanism by which such laws were interpreted in the social system that made them a living force enabling to maintain their separate identity inheriting a rich cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup> The chief enjoyed every authority over the people. The Kuki Chief must be the head of a clan or sub-clan.

The main system of cultivation was 'jhum' or slash and burn system. Hence, the Kukis, at the coming of the season of cultivation, every man of each family in the village work in the jungle to look for a site for cultivation within the area or cultivable land marked by the chief and his ministers of the village for that particular year.<sup>16</sup> Besides cultivation the Kuki tribe also engaged themselves in carpentry work, handicraft, weaving and bamboo works. But their worldview is extended, new jobs came their way. Thus, this group of people became a part of the bigger economic system.

### **The Kom Tribe**

The Kom tribe which is one of the sub groups of the Kuki tribe is reported to have been migrated from the land between North-Eastern Frontier area and the Shan-State of Burma sometime in 200 A.D. The Kom was said to have moved towards the Arakan Hills and Bay of Bengal. The Kom people proceeded into the land known as Tripura under their Chief-Nei-That-Hla, a rich man in those days among this tribe,<sup>17</sup> which finally led them into Manipur.

The Kom tribe entered into Manipur during the reign of Maharaja Gambhir Singh sometime in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their total population was 2000 only at the time of entering into Manipur.<sup>18</sup> Now, the population is increased to 15,467. During the reign of Gambhir Singh, they suffered so much from the aggression of the Khongjai and Lushai tribes that they left their place in a body and sought refuge in other parts of the hill belonging to Manipur. They were found scattered in the hills near the valley of Manipur.<sup>19</sup>

The Kom at the time of entering Manipur made their first settlements in the places like Senvon, Jaithu,

Lengthulon, Parbung, Petpuibung, Vangailon, Thanlon, Kairam Tlangbung in the south-western area of Manipur. From these places they shifted to places as Thing-Kangphai, Lokliphai, Kapeitangbung. From these areas they again scattered in different corners of the state.

The word 'Kom' was literally derived from the word 'Lukakom' which meant 'Turban' from 'Lukakom' or 'Kakom' and Kakom to 'Kom' which meant 'Turban People'. There were different versions regarding the descendant or ancestral report. Some used to say that the Kom people were the descendents of 'Puhring and Pudam' who kept long hair and wore turban. A folk song supported the translation -

Tena Umin Sharsam Kanjok.  
 Thlung lu kan Kom eya.  
 Kharbom tipun Sharsam jaklei  
 Thing lu Kandeï eya.

It meant that, our ancestors used to grow long hair and wore turban and whereas Kharbom tipun, a kind of half man, half beast did not grow long hair and wore no turban.<sup>20</sup>

There is yet another version which interpreted the meaning of the word 'Kom' as 'cave'. The Kom's believed that their ancestors emerged from a cave, and so they called themselves the 'Kom' which meant 'the people who came out of a cave'. The Kom tribe has a legend that proved their emergence from the cave. This version is further strengthened by a Kom folksong -

Kan hong sok eh, kanhong sok eh  
 Khurpui a Kan hong sok ah;  
 Kansak rong in kho lei eh roh

Kantimser in kho lei eh roh  
 Kanthle Pon in kho lei eh roh  
 Kan bomhar in kho lei roh”

The free translation of the song is that,

“We came out of the Khurpui (cave) strong and  
 stout,  
 We came out of the cave with shining dress  
 Let our physique shine the world,  
 Let our necklace shine the world,  
 Let our striped cloth shine the world  
 Let our armlet shine the world”<sup>21</sup>

This version is supported by a folktale which stated that while passing out through ‘Khurpui’ (cave) the Kom people were trying to come out of the cave. Their journey was obstructed by a tiger (sahumpui). Nobody could come out of the cave, since the tiger ate every person who came out of the cave. Among them a man called ‘Karungpu’ dressed in a stripped cloth like the stripped skin of the tiger came out and solemnly asked the tiger to spare his life and the rest, because they were of the same stripped skin and so from the same family. By that moment a man called Parangpa shot at the tiger with an arrow (Leeva-sai). Finally, the Kom tribe made their way out of the cave and made their settlement and called the place of their first settlement ‘Chungkhopui’ which means up-land.<sup>22</sup>

The population of the Kom tribe of Manipur according to the census of 1981 was 9,830 of which 4,992 male and 4,838 females.<sup>23</sup> According to 2001 Census the Kom tribe population is increased to 15,467 including male and female.

### Areas Inhabited

The Kom tribe, one of the chin-Kuki or old-Kuki group of Manipur was found scattered in four districts of the state, as in Churachandpur district, Chandel district, Senapati district, and Tamenglong district. The Koms occupied mostly the foothills or slope of the hills. Their living standard is mostly influenced by geographical situations. In the entire state there are 44 Kom villages, of which four in Chandel district, 24 in Churachandpur district and 15 villages in Senapati districts. A small locality called Kom Rem Lane is also found in and around the Imphal East district, one of the capital district of the state. The number of Kom villages in each of the four districts were shown in Table 5.

**TABLE 5**  
**Districts and Villages of Kom Tribes<sup>24</sup>**

<i>District</i>	<i>Name of the Villages</i>	
Chandel	a) Walemp hai	b) Mahaotera
	c) Tonsen	d) Kakching Mantak
	<hr/>	
Churachandpur	a) Sagang	b) Lukhumbi
	c) Ralumbung	d) Thampilen
	e) Samulamlan	f) Malamphai
	g) Zangthingphai	h) Bungshanglen
	i) Langsei Tampak	j) Songphel
	k) Theikhakbi	l) Tui rengpha isem
	m) Canaanphai	n) Seng pangjar
	o) Chinglangmei	p) Kangathe i
	q) Vangtharok	r) Hermountlang
	s) Khoirent rak Khumar u	t) Khoirent ak Khuther
	u) Keirap Upper	v) Keirap-Lower
	w) Keirap Haotak	
	x) Ichum.	

<i>District</i>	<i>Name of the Villages</i>		
Senapati	a) Saikul	b) Makokching	
	c) Maibung	d) Utong Lok	
	e) Khongnangpokpi	f) Laikot	
	g) Laikot Phaizol	h) Hlungkot	
	i) Thajong	j) Tuisenphai	
	k) Tepui	l) Sinamkom	
	m) Ngakha pat	n) Teraphai	
	o) Lairok.		
	Imphal East	a) K.R. Lane	

The Kom tribe was migratory, but now they resided permanently in a proper village. The dispersal into the present areas of settlement might be due to epidemics, famine or poor conditions of living and in search for food and better living. Sometimes it was due to the attack by the stronger tribes or armies who were more forceful or better equipped.

In 1990 there was an ethnic clash between the Naga tribe and Kuki tribe. It continued for about one year. During the period tension was very high and some of the hill district became highly sensitive. The smaller village took shelter in larger villages where it was found safe and secure. The two Kom villages called Taita and Mongkotjang in Tamenglong district were disturbed by the neighbouring bigger tribe. Accordingly, the two villages made their destiny at Ichumkeirap, a Kom village at Senapati district and at Samulamlan village at Churachandpur district. Hence, the supported reason of their dispersal was in looking for a better, secured and more fertile land for cultivation.

The researcher also found out that the reason of their settlement in different places is because, when section of

the people in a village could not tolerate or unite with the other section or group of the same village they made their settlement to another place by appointing a chief of their choice. Conflicts and the urge for power and popularity let the Kom to look for another settlement.

The Koms settled mostly in plain areas of the hills, the climatic condition in Kom village were same as in the valley. However, the slight difference is in the winter season the sun rises late because of thick clouds. This happened in the south-western and northwestern region.

The Koms settled in groups. The houses are built close to one another. The houses are built on either side of the road facing generally to the east or either side for proper sunlight, depending on the pattern of the village. There is no hard and fast rule in choosing the direction in making a house, convenience was their concern. However, before the construction of a house at the chosen site a simple ritual function was performed as dedicating the site to god.

In the Kom village two types of house construction had been prevailed. One is constructed with timber, bamboo and thatch roofing. The walls are plastered with a mixture of straw and mud. Houses with corrugated roofing are more popular at present. The other type of house is pucca which is constructed with sand, stone, and cement.

The traditional house of the Kom tribe was explicitly of the kutchahouse type. It had a small window, and a verandah. The house had two doors, the main door was in the front, and the second door was at the backside of the house. No separate kitchen was necessary. The house was partitioned with bamboo mat. Fireplace for cooking was



usually made in the southern corner of the house. For storing paddy and grains a small thatch house was built nearby the house. Some of the houses hang a bamboo basket over the enclosed wall of the verandah in which hens laid eggs for hatching. But this practice is no more continued in the present Kom society. The pattern of construction of house had been renovated and modernized with the change of time. Some of the houses had been conducted with modern facilities including proper lavatories and also with partitions.

### **Physical Structure and Ornaments**

The Kom people are normally slim and dark in complexion. Girls divided their hair equally into two and bind it lightly and let it hang on both side of their red cheeks up to their neck. Girls were lovely and attractive in their facial structure, graceful and charming in appearance.

The other hairstyle which was mostly used by older women was that their hair was knotted at the extreme end and round it with thick-black cord or thread about two inches deep into this was stuck a bailkin shape piece of brass and another of steel colored porcupine quills (porcupine spine) were used.<sup>25</sup>

The traditional Kom women usually wore 'Ponkokhoi' (wnaparound) a phanek like that of the Meitei women, and a red bordered white scarf called 'Mukhamjar' was worn over the shoulders (sometimes older women used this scarf for tying on their waist on top of the phanek). In the ears they wore small skeins of black-thread. The neck was decorated by a number of colourful strings of beach called 'Thichong'. On the upper-arm they wore armlets of metal, called 'Her' and on the fingers they wore brass rings.

The Kom malefolk used to wear a small bruch cloth locally called 'dirche' fastened at their waist, like that of a 'dhote'. They also covered their body with an embroidered border, black shawl called 'Pase-Pon'. Men also wore Pungri around their temples and back of their head.

Men also wore ornaments on the lobes of their ears, the large wheel-like discs of silver. The hole of this ornament were bored in the male child's ear ten days after birth. The holes were first slightly distended with the ornament then inserted the row cotton, then pierced the piece of bamboo in a ring like form. Measuring the ring about over and a half inches, it took a year to make the hole large enough to fit in the discs. Round the neck the Kom men before marriage wore strings of red beads which were removed after marriage and replaced by a thread which was usually fastened with a charm consisting of a piece of dog's jaw with two or three teeth in it.<sup>26</sup>

### **Related Tribes with the Kom**

The Kom tribe is closely related with Aimol, Chiru, Kharam, Purum and Koireng tribes. They spoke similar language and have similar traditions, culture and customs with the Koms. R. Brown in his *Statistical Account of the Native State of Manipur and the Hill Territory under its Rule* stated that these four tribes, that is, the Aimol, Chiru, Purum and Koireng were the sub-divisions of the Kom tribe. For the purpose of thorough and comprehensive study a brief reference to each of these tribes is given below.

#### **(i) The Aimol**

The word Aimol literally meant 'mountain of crabs', 'ai' meant crab, and 'mol' meant mountain. Thus, it could be translated as the man who came like a crab from the

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hole of a mountain. The Aimols also believed that they came out of a cave called as 'khur'.<sup>27</sup>

According to the traditional folktale of the Aimol when they came out of the cave many people were killed by a tiger. At last a man called 'Kharethanga' wearing a striped cloth that looks like the tiger's stripped skin came out of the cave. The tiger seeing the cloth thought that they have the same stripped skin spare this life and became friends. The Aimol made their first settlement at a place called Ringkebung near Mizoram, and Manipur border. They stayed there for some years and dispersed to different places. A group made their settlement at Aimol Khullen in Chandel district of Manipur, and another at a Kha-Aimol near Loktak lake and Moirang-Mantak in Bishnupur district.

The Aimols physically resembled the Indo-Mongoloids in structure. They had Chinese eyes, prominent chickbone, medium to low structure, merociphalic head, brownish yellow to dark colour skin and stain appearance.<sup>28</sup>

The Aimol's were non-vegetarians. Rice was their principal food. Besides vegetables they ate, pork, fowls and sometimes fish. Both men and women consumed alcohol in social gatherings or festivals. But this practice is not continued anymore.

The Aimol family has patrilineal continuity. Each generation being linked to the next generation in a genealogical succession through males. A wife is sought within the village itself. Marriage within the clan is prohibited. After marriage the boy stayed in the house of the girl for three years to serve his in-laws. Marriage with the father's sister's daughter is discouraged. The youngest son lived with his parents in the house throughout

his life and served as head and connecting link between his predecessor and successor whereas other sons had to construct their own house after they got married. The daughters used to stay with the parents before marriage. The daughters had no share in immovable properties like land, house site reserved forest land and cultivable-both with field and jhum land, etcetera. Man enjoyed absolute ownership over any property.

The Aimols believed in village deity or god. They worshipped just at the outskirts of the village in the month of July. This ritual or sacrifice was made to the village deity so that the villagers might be successful in agricultural activities. On this day no one could go out of the village and no guest was allowed.

Like any other tribes of Manipur the Aimol village is governed by the chief 'Kamnsakai' who is the head of the village. He and his ministers called 'Pasha-Kariat' administered the village. Chieftainship among the Aimol tribes is attained by promotion. The sincere most minister is later elected as the Chief of a village after the death of the chief.<sup>29</sup>

### **(ii) *The Chiru***

The Chiru tribe belonged to old Kuki group. They are found settling in the hill districts like Senapati and Tamenglong and also in the valley district Bishnupur district of Manipur. They spoke the Chiru language and used the Devanagri script.

The Chirus part their hair in the middle and brush it down straight and trim it at the bottom of the ear. They bound their hair with a thin and narrow cane round the head slightly above the eyes.<sup>30</sup> They bound it passing through the back side of the head and reaching to the forehead.

The Chirus are non-vegetarians. They took fish and any type of meat. Rice was their common food. Sometimes maize was cooked with rice. They also took bajra, oat, pumpkin, yam, sweet potato, tapioca etcetera as supplementary to food.

They had five exogamous groups or clans. Marriage with a man's mother's brother's daughter is obligatory or generally preferred. Marriage with the father's sister's daughter is not permissible. In case of marriage, formal proposal by the boy's parents to the girl's parents is usually traditional system. At the time of marriage negotiation, the boy's parents go with ajar of ju (rice bear). If the girl's party agreed the proposal, the boy had to stay with the girl's family for a period of three years. After three years the marriage is taken place at the girl's residence. After the marriage ceremony the boy came back with his wife to his house. Like in any other tribal social scene divorce on reasonable reason was allowed but this type of case hardly happened among the Chiru tribe. Widow and Widower's remarriage was not restricted.<sup>31</sup>

The Chiru household consisted of a man, his wife, unmarried son and daughters. The eldest son inherited the father's property after the death of the father. Women had no share in the family. However, in modern times it depended on the wish of the parents in distributing the family property.

At the time of birth, the mother must confine inside the house for three days. However, visiting by the relatives and others was not restricted. The child is named by the parents after the name of the maternal grand-father on the day of birth itself. After ten days, 'Thempu' the village priest visited the house to perform a ritual. For this ritual

a tree called 'rakeng' was planted in front of the house. The Thempu would sacrifice a cock or a hen on behalf of the family. In case of a baby boy a cock was sacrificed and if the baby was a girl, a hen was sacrificed. The parents ate the flesh of the bird and the 'sherh' and the bones were buried inside the house.<sup>32</sup>

The thempu with some ju or wine in his mouth, go round inside the house, blowing it out on the walls and muttered charm. The mother could leave the house only after this ceremony or ritual but not outside of the village. It was also one of the traditional practices that the maternal grandfather gave the child a pair of brass-earrings, bracelets, leg-ornaments and a string of glass beads.<sup>33</sup>

On the death of a Chiru, it was announced by beating a drum. A fowl, pig and goat were killed for funeral feast. His personal things including comb and cloths were buried with him in the grave. Their house was 'Sher' which means the family was not to do any work or go for journey for three days. In other words, the family had to observe for three days. During this three days rice was placed in a small basket, (made for the purpose) in the house and was thrown to the grave on the third day. The house was cleaned on the third day by the 'thempu' or priest by sacrificing a cock.

The Chiru village is governed by the chief 'Khohpah' and his council of members.<sup>34</sup> The chief is the head and his council of members assisted the chief in the administration of the village. They supervised developmental activities related to the village. Any disputes within the village are solved by the chief and his ministers. The chief is highly regarded. Any decision taken up by him is final. However, he never take up any decision without consulting his council of ministers. Whenever an animal is killed in the village,

the chief is presented a portion of the animal killed as a mark of respect and love. This is done in honour of his chieftainship. He is also given the highest authority to punish anyone who was found violating the village norms and land rules. The father of an illegitimate child was fined a pig and mithun along with two brass gongs. The whole fine was consumed by the people of the village.

The Chiru believed in the local gods, called 'Rampur'. It was their belief that there were four gods living at Koubru, Kangchupkhul, Makong hills and in the valley of Manipur. Twice a year the Chirus made sacrifice to the Koubru god by sacrificing a dog, wild pig, fowls or goats or an offering.

### *(iii) The Koireng*

The word 'Koireng' is derived from "koren' or 'Kalren' which meant 'man' or 'people' of the east. They believed to be originated from a cave. The Koirengs were known by the British writers who were the administrators under the colonial British rule, T.C. Hodson (1911) as Quireng whereas John Shakespeare (1913) called them Kalhen. They lived in four districts of the state. They are scattered over eleven villages.

The Koirengs were agriculturists. They are non-vegetarians and ate all kinds of meat and are fond of dry fish. Home made alcoholic drinks was popular among them, Rice is the staple food of the Koirengs. It is supplemented by vegetables such as cabbage, mustard leaf, yam, potato and pumpkin.<sup>35</sup>

The Koirengs usual marriageable age is 20-25 years for a boy and 18-20 years for a girl. There are three common modes of acquiring a partner. These are by negotiation (Moiruoi), elpement (kadeitan) and by force marriage

(Rankang). Negotiation is the popular form of marriage where the parents of the groom with their son-in-law and other relatives approached the parents of the bride for negotiation. When there is agreement between the two parents marriage is performed. The couple who eloped also performed a ceremony which is similar to that of negotiable marriage. However, in the force marriage, if mutual agreement is not reached, the boy is punished by the village authority with many fines.<sup>36</sup>

Every Koireng village is governed by a Chief and his ministers. Each village has a traditional system of administration. The office of the chief called Khullakpa is hereditary. It could be inherited only by the sons of the chief within the shong clan. It is not necessarily the succession through the sons of the chief. Other clans had accepted this high status for the shong clan. As for actual succession to the chieftainship, the eldest male member of the family of the chief is elected.<sup>37</sup>

In the case of religious worship, the Koirengs believed in the supreme god, though they had no idea of the form or image of this god. They also worshipped other village deities. They believed in evil spirits, and is worshipped by making offerings and sacrifices. This religious practice had various beliefs, superstitions and practices. They believed that all kinds of richness are caused due to the evil spirits like Khari (devil possessed person), Khur-chou (half-deity possessed, thing chou possessed by three spirit, Lai-Ok (evil spirit posses). Every rites and rituals were practiced in relevant with the type of sickness.<sup>38</sup>

The Koirengs also practiced bride-payment. The amount of payment varied according to the economic condition of the girl's parents. If the girls parents are economically



weak, lesser amount is given. Besides bride price, the payment of a buffalo was another payment given during marriage.

The rule of residence after marriage is patrilocal. Earlier after marriage the bride used to stay for one year in her parents house. After a year she is brought back to her husbands house.

At the time of childbirth the child's father is forbidden from using any axe or iron-blade. The child could be taken out of the house only after two-days of confinement.

After three days the naming ceremony is performed. The child is given a name by using the last word of the grandfather or grandmother's name and prefix it with the personal name.

The Koirengs believe that after death, the spirit go to the dead man's abode. So, the body is bathed properly with boiled water in which a silver-coin is placed which is believed to cleanse it from diseases. The corpse is dressed in ceremonial attire and kept overnight in the sleeping posture within the house, keeping its head in contact with the main post of the house.<sup>39</sup>

#### ***(iv) The Purum Tribe***

The Purum tribe belonged to the old-Kuki group of Manipur. The persons claimed to be the descendants of Toring and Tonshu who came out from the earth. They believed that Toring and Tonshu were the past man and woman that came out from the underworld.<sup>40</sup> The Purum tribe are settled in Saikul area in Senapati district in a village called Purum Likli and in other parts of the state.

The Purums are monogamous, where man is the head

of the family. The Purum customs are simple. On the day of a childbirth, a birth ceremony is performed by a village priest by muttering charms. On the third day the priest visited the family again. He offered 'ju' or wine to the god. However, sacrifices are not practiced in such occasions. On the second day of a child birth the mid-wife named the child and on the seventh day the child's ear is pierced, without any formal ceremony.

Marriage by negotiation is followed by bride-payment is the custom of this tribe. Divorce was permitted, but is not common. When it happened, the reason was due to the infidelity of the wife, bad temperament and harshness. However, the mistake committed by the husband is ignored.

The father is the head of the family. He is always assisted by the mother. The mother carried the entire burden of household work. She always believed in the managerial authority. She also guided and looked after the children in all their ways of life.

The Purum village is headed and ruled over by the village chief. He is assisted by other selected persons who worked as functionaries for the village. He finalized and settled any disputes or case with the assistance of his functionaries. Actions are taken against the villagers who dishonoured the customary law or law of the village.

The Purums enjoyed celebrations occasionally in a year. In the month of February they celebrate 'Yarn' for seven days. From evening till night they dance and drank with a grand-feast. In March they had a celebration called 'Kum Yai'. On this celebration young men and women drink rice-bear and performed dances.

The five tribes, that is, the Kom tribe, Aimol tribe, Purum tribe, Chiru tribe, and Koireng tribe were under the umbrella of 'Kom Rem'. They are similar in many aspects. The Sadar Hills Kom students' conference which was organized in 1927, at Kangpokpi paved a way for the Kom Rem people to come together and to publish literature. The first Kom Rem primer was published by Mr. Teba Kilong. The Kom Rem Literature Association later on was converted into religious organization since April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1957, with its head quarters at Nungsai, in Bishnupur district under the recommendation of the Manipur Baptist Churches in North-east India.

The Kom-Rem Union Manipur was established in 1947, under the name of Sadar Hills Kom Union. Though it was not declared officially the union was working sincerely with the objective to bring unity and all round development among the five related tribes. But according to a report the Sadar Hills Kom Union was not successful with its objectives till 1947-1956.<sup>41</sup>

In 1956 the union was formally declared under the presidency of Mr. Ephraim in a meeting at Khoirentak village in Churachandpur district. In the proceeding year Mr. Songkhup Koireng contested for the presidency and was elected. Under the constitution of India 1950, the Kom Rem People had been taking part in the political process of the state in every election.