

The Three Schools of Thought on Kuki Chieftainship: A Theoretical Approach

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KEYWORDS Chieftainship. Colonialism. Evolutionists. Historiography. Modernists. Traditionalists

ABSTRACT The Kukis practise the traditional institution called Chieftainship, which is still in existence today. Every village is governed under such an institution headed by a chief called Haosa. The chief along with his councilmen, who are elected on tenure basis, works for the welfare of the villagers. In return the villagers have the obligation of paying tributes to the chief, which is purely voluntary in nature. However, there are continuing debates among the younger generation over its continuity in the advent of democracy. This paper will discuss the different schools of thought on Kuki chieftainship and thereafter suggest what possibly could be the most appropriate approach to the debate on Kuki Chieftainship.

INTRODUCTION

‘Kukis’ are an indigenous ethnic group found spreading in the now adjoining geographical regions of three independent Third World countries, namely, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. In the accounts of Lama Taranatha, a Tibetan Buddhist monk during the 16th-17th century CE and GA Grierson, Superintendent of Linguistic Survey of British-India, this physical expanse is called as the “Kuki Country” (Taranatha 1990; Grierson 1904). Scholars such as Lala (2002) and Haokip (2017) estimated the extent of Kuki Country to be in hundreds of square miles. In Lala’s most realistic estimation, the present population of the Kukis (inclusive of Chin, Zo, etc.) can be estimated to be around 2-3 million covering an area of about 50,000 square miles.

In the course of history they come to be known by different names in different parts of their ancestral land. They are called ‘Chin’ in the southeast (now Chin State in western Myanmar), ‘Kuki’, ‘Khumi’, ‘Pangkhua’, ‘Bawn’, etc in the west (now Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh and Tripura in northeast India), ‘Mizo’ in the south central region (Mizoram in northeast India) and ‘Kuki’, in the north (Manipur and Assam’s Cachar district) and in other parts of northeast Indian states, namely, Meghalaya and Nagaland. A cluster of certain dialectal groups also called themselves ‘Zomi’. Linguists of the Sino-Tibeto-Burman study listed their languages among the sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman family and classified them as ‘Kuki-Chin’ with minor variations among each other (Chongloi 2020).

One unique feature of the Kukis is the practice of the chieftainship institution. While all dialectal groups within Kukis practice a certain set of chieftainship, it is not the same for the whole population. Some groups have “modified”, while others have “given up” and some groups still use it as a means of self governance at the local level. In this paper, a theoretical framework is being initiated owing to the continuing debates over the applicability of the institution. However, this theoretical analysis will be confined and limited to a certain dialectal group called Thadou-Khongsai who are a dominant group within Kukis, and presently settled in the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam in India.

OBSERVATIONS

Kuki Chieftainship: A Review

Kukis settle in villages. Each of these villages is headed by “Haosa” (or chief) or “Inpipu” (used to refer or address the chief). The village administration is governed by the chief and his council members. These members are elected on a periodical or tenure basis. It is the duty of the village administration to ensure rule of law, deliver justice and provide security to the villagers. The chief administers and commands the settlement through the advice of the council of ministers. In return for his service, every household pays tributes as a mark of due recognition to the chief as a legal inheritor and protector of the village (Gangte 1993).

While councilmen are elected from time to time, the position of the chief is hereditary in nature. The position is inherited down the generations, passed on from the father-chief to the eldest son, called the 'law of primogeniture'. Until the chief dies or is incapable of administering the village, there is no question of replacement. The chief treats all villagers, irrespective of clans, as his own kinsmen. Equality, an intrinsic character of democracy, is deeply guarded by the chief in the administration and delivery of justice. The chief is theoretically the head of the village, yet matters of importance are decided together with his councillors (Dev and Lahiri 1983).

However, since the close of the 19th century, the institution of chieftainship slowly began to erode. The prime factor is the advent of the British Empire in the region. As a means of checking colonial influence in their territory, Kuki chiefs invoke certain forms of 'martial laws' in their governance. Councilmen who used to be elected by the public on any "eventful" day were gradually handpicked by the chief. In fact this was done by the chief to appoint the most trustworthy and reliable partners in the administration. Gradually, the authority and legitimacy of the chiefs began to evolve stronger and wider. Besides, death sentences against crimes committed were never punishable to death under Kuki civil authority. However, even those changed. Treason or an assault on the persons of the chief and treacherous commerce with the enemies of the clans became punishable by death (Ray 1990).

Through the prism of colonial authority, this particular institution of the Kukis exhibits the character of being despotic, feudal and autocratic. In fact, colonial writers were first-timers to the land and have the least understanding of how the institution evolved to be stronger. With the strained relationship it maintains with the Kuki chiefs, colonial ethnographers portrayed the institution in the most damaging ways without taking into consideration the circumstances leading to the adoption of such measures. In the absence of any other accounts to counter colonial writings, sadly, these writings appear true and infallible to modern day scholars (Chongloi 2018).

As a result of such one-sided presentation, the public is left confused over the institution as to whether it really serves a purpose or not. Colonial writings are so divisive in the long run, to this day, that it managed to create division specifically based

on two different sets of class, the "chiefs" and the "public". In this paper, an attempt has been made to present Kuki chieftainship from varying perspectives and thereafter suggest what possibly could be the most appropriate approach to the debate on Kuki Chieftainship. For this matter, a review of literature and comments by eminent personalities are taken into account, as they have presented a certain school of thought on the chieftainship.

The Three Schools of Thought

Every social institution comes with its merits and demerits. Even democracy comes with flaws and room for abuse of power. Kuki chieftainship is too not free from such character. However, the understanding of tribal cultures from the lens of colonialists always proves fatal. Kuki chieftainship is rather related to the 'Social Contract Theory' of Thomas Hobbes, where the chief and the villagers are duty-bound to fulfil their rights as an obligation towards each other (Gangte 1993). The description of being tyrannical, monarchical and authoritarian in colonial literatures needs further examination.

Thoughts on Kuki chieftainship can be broadly divided into two groups, that is, traditionalists and modernists. The traditionalists are those that accept and profess the established ways as legitimate and argue its continuity with little or no modification. This school of thought argues that until a suitable alternative is arrived, it must continue. On the other hand, modernists argue that chieftainship of the Kuki's is undemocratic and irrelevant. To survive along the democratic processes, they argue, chieftainship has to undergo necessary modification.

While the above two schools of thought are equally well grounded, the author would like to establish the third school of thought called the evolutionist or post-modernist school of thought. The evolutionist school of thought does not base its arguments on colonial writings nor any byproduct of colonial arguments, as was done in the two former schools of thought. It explores cultures in their epistemic settings and relates their applicability to modern day democracy.

Traditionalist School of Thought

One of the largest and the most influential groups belong to the traditional school. This group believes that chieftainship as an institution

must continue as it is practised now. To them, replacement is not as demanding as assumed, as the institution is adaptive to change. The proponents of the schools believe that the institution is largely democratic in nature and hence it finds its relevance to democratic society. It accepts that the chief is the head of the village and all resources belong either directly or indirectly to him. He takes part in decision making and implementation with his councilmen. In fact, the chief can represent his villagers in deciding the fate of his villages. In this school, certain kinds of absolutism are not questioned. Rather it is believed that such assertion of authority happens to be an outcome of situations. It is further argued that a blanket description of such character to represent the whole institution is misleading.

Proponents of the traditionalist group are largely drawn from chiefs, close kin to chiefs and aspiring chiefs. As they represent each village they wield enormous power when it comes to decision making at societal level. They literally command Kuki Inpi, the apex body of the Kukis. Therefore, any views and motion that can affect their position is not encouraged. Proponents of the thought believed that legitimacy of Kuki chieftainship is ascribed by birth and is part of culture. Another circumstance that proves advantageous for this school is the availability of dozens of colonial accounts that describe them to enjoy absolute authority over natural resources and the villagers.

In fact, no other document describes the power structure of Kukis as colonial authorities did. In a certain way, this became a legitimate evidence to assert absolute right over villagers and its resources. Carey and Tuck (1896) (1976) wrote, *"We find in them a natural reverence for him who by right of birth is the chief of the tribe or clan or family. The chief may be wanting in qualification and there may be many other families superior in ability, but unless he is physically or mentally unfit for his position, there is no danger of him being supplemented."*

Hunter (1879) describes chieftainship of the Kuki as a *"series of petty states each under a president or dictator"*. He further said, *"They are divided into numerous petty clans, each of which has its own rajah, who rule over one or more villages within which his power is never curtailed"*. Soppitt (1887) described Kukis as *"a despotic government and in the hands of the rajah were*

the lives of the people", and further stated the decision of the chief was *"final in all matters and was never questioned"*. In Brown's 'Statistical Account' (1874), Macrae noted, *"Each tribe is under the immediate control of its own particular chief, whose word is law, in peace and war, and who has the power of life and death"*.

From the account maintained by Carey and Tuck (1932), power and authority appears to have its divine origin. On the other hand, descriptions by Hunter (1879), Soppitt (1887) and Brown (1874) appear to have a clear indication that the chief enjoys enormous power under his jurisdiction and the public has little say over the decision of the chief.

The traditionalist school of thought does not necessarily uphold absolute power as was described in colonial accounts. All it accepts, professes and wishes is its continuity over a period of time. Proponents of the thought agree to the continuity of the system until a suitable law and governance is introduced. It believes that chieftainship as an institution has been the most potent tool in protecting the people and land, and thus any sudden, deliberate and abrupt change in the local governance will bring unnecessary chaos within the Kukis. Vocal proponents in that line of thought include Lunkim (2013), Haokip (2009) and Chongloi (2010).

Modernist School of Thought

The modernist school of thought is drawn mostly from the young and educated sections of the Kukis. They are the general public and the villagers who do not have much voice when it comes to decision making at the village and society as a whole. If they were to be represented as a class, they occupy the lower strata in the social stratification. To this group, respect and recognition in the society is achieved, not ascribed.

Against the traditionalist school, the modernist charges that the institution of chieftainship has lost its relevance in the face of democracy. To this school, Kuki chieftainship exhibits the character of authoritarianism to a great degree, if not totally. They argued that Kuki chiefs owned village land and decisions taken by the chief were considered final and binding. The extent to which the chief wields power on village land and law reduced the general public to the level of what is

called 'subjects'. As long as the chief is pleased, the villagers settle and cultivate crops.

Drawn mostly from the educated class, proponents of this school take references to the colonial accounts further to validate their position. Scholarly works from this school cited colonial writings and presented it as dictatorial, monarchical and despotic. With the adage, 'beauty lies on the beholder', colonial accounts began to serve as a double-edge weapon. While the traditionalist school adopts colonial writings to legitimise its claims, it happens to be an opportunity to trade sharp criticisms against the traditionalists by the modernist school.

The modernist school does not always share a common goal of driving the institution in a certain-specific way. All it believes is that the very practice, as it happens now, needs modification to suit the changing needs of time. Proponents accused the traditionalist style as the most important reason why land gets transferred to private and government entities. It believes that villagers are at the mercy of the chief all the time and promise no permanence of settlement in the village. This, they argue, led to the rapid emergence of "Patta", a legal document issued by the government in recognition of one's exclusive possession of land. A possession of immovable property may be dated back to hundreds of years, however, until it is a registered possession, it risks being claimed by anyone in authority. This is the reason why village land increasingly becomes "Patta land" in Kuki areas. The primary reason for government registration is to ward off undue influence by the chief and those in authority. The proponents observe that if a villager does not have a say in the decision making and does not get themselves attached to a certain degree of permanence, it became idiotic to settle in villages. This possibly could be the reason why people leave villages and flock to towns and cities.

Similar is the case with decision making in village administration. In the chieftainship institution, the chief represents the voice of the villagers. Modernists argue that consensus in decision making is almost nonexistent. Thus when important matters arise, it is the voice of the chief that reigns, and the public is made to follow without resistance. Proponents of the modernist school consider such arbitrary decisions of the chief as an insult to the rights and responsibilities of the citizens. Thus, it argued for change in the role, function and jurisdiction

so that it accommodates the varying degrees of opinion in all decision making processes.

The intention of the modernist school is nothing but to give more power to villagers and the general public. They argued that without adapting to changes, the survival of the institution is argued that the continuity of the institution without changes will leave the Kukis in a more disadvantageous position in the near future. Yet it is difficult to clearly specify which directions it wants to change in. Some sections within the modernist school wanted complete abolition and replacement with a more up-to-date law of the land. However one differs to the degree of changes. This group primarily feels that the chieftainship as practised today is outdated and needs revamping. Haokip (2017) and Kipgen (2012) are two researchers belonging to this school.

Evolutionist School of Thought: A Postmodernist View

Every society exhibits a certain form of governance in its past. To this day, certain institutions serve an equally effective purpose as democracy does. The institution of Kuki chieftainship is a fine example in this regard. The argument of primitive institutions as being contrary to modern ideas of democracy can be wholly misleading. Just as the majority adopts certain institutions, it does not guarantee its applicability to all societies. In fact, institutions are the byproduct of cultures and ways of life, attuned to best suit the society. Therefore, it will find its applicability some way or the other. However, since the past many decades the 'continuity' and 'applicability' of Kuki chieftainship began to be hotly debated. That gives rise to the two schools of thought, namely, the traditionalists and the modernists, as discussed previously. However, the end of the debate is nowhere in sight.

In light of the ongoing debate, which is centred around its continuity and change, another thought emerges, called the evolutionist or post-modernist school of thought. Unlike the previous two, this school is still in a nascent stage. The thought is based on the premise that institutions such as the chieftainship are a part of culture and any discourse on the subject has to be carried out through reengineering and reconstruction. This school of thought is strongly against the heavy reliance over colonial writings on Kuki chieftainship. It argues

that the longer one relies on colonial accounts to describe chieftainship, the better it serves its purpose of creating confusion and rift between chiefs and the public.

In fact, according to the evolutionist group, the other two schools, namely traditionalist and modernist, are nothing but a byproduct of colonial writings. The traditionalists' treatment of all power and privilege of the chiefs as something divine is an oversight. No one, from the traditionalists, ever seriously looked into the circumstances as to how such authority came into being, or questions its applicability of those wide ranges of power it acquired at trying times. Many within the group took the privilege for granted and failed to act responsibly. They assumed that power over natural resources and authority in decision making was divine in origin. Besides, the school took pride in the recognition it acquired from colonial authorities with scant regard to the recognition it received from the kinsmen and villagers. Moreover, the traditionalist school never contemplates how the present practices are hugely a deviation from its original ones. In other words, the present chieftainship functions as much exactly as colonial writings presents, with exception of few. Therefore, according to the evolutionist school of thought, the traditionalists' worldview on Kuki chieftainship is but a byproduct of colonial literatures.

On the other hand, the modernist school of thought is said to have evolved out of the eagerness to bring Kuki chieftainship to a more public-villager friendly institution. According to the evolutionist school of thought, the modernist thought is equally a byproduct of colonial writings and nothing independent comes along the scene. Drawn mostly from the educated and younger generation, the modernists want a reformed institution so that everyone enjoys equal shares and responsibilities to the society. The modernist argument is that the present system provides no guarantee of permanence in settlement, and no independence in decision making when it comes to choices. All it wants is a more democratic style of governance in the village, limiting the role and responsibilities of the chiefs and a certain degree of permanence in settlement. The modernists claimed that the absence of these rights amongst the population makes chieftains tyrannical and despotic. Modernist accusations, according to evolutionists, perfectly depict how colonial accounts describe Kuki chiefs in their writings. Thus, according to the evolutionist

school of thought, the conflict between the two former schools is nothing but a result of colonial manipulation to keep Kukis divided.

According to the evolutionist thought, the fight between groups over the chieftainship institution is simply a result of its heavy reliance on colonial writings. The fight is staged and is meant to continue until the chiefs, intelligentsia and the public are awake and have the courage to go beyond colonial writings. One of the biggest challenges faced by the evolutionists is the absence of any materials to reconstruct the Kuki past. However, that does not daunt the prospect of reconstructing its past, especially the chieftainship system.

DISCUSSION

Folklore in Reconstructing Chieftainship: An Evolutionist's Perspective

In the Kuki social system, a village exists as a unit of governance. Once a village grows big enough, a new settlement is usually contemplated by the individuals with strong kinsmen. If the chief agrees to the motives in establishing a new village, a new village comes into being. Sometimes land is donated by the chief from the former village or is acquired by different means. One peculiar trait of the ancient Kuki settlement is that whosoever took the initiatives in establishing the village, a leader of the clan or eldest brothers in the family of main partakers is invited and called upon to be the head of the village. There is little certainty as to why the position of "chiefship" used to be given to elder clan members or elders in the family.

According to the evolutionist school, the way a new settlement comes into being indicates something which is yet to be taken seriously in the academic domain. In setting up villages, individuals or groups of individuals may take part in the process. However, none of them would personally claim himself the position of a chief, unless the head of the clan or eldest member in the family himself is the one initiating the settlement. When the primary task of establishing a new village is complete, a head of the clan or an elder member of the family who initiates the settlement may be persuaded to come and look after the village. The head of the clan or the elder may be residing in a different place, but once it is approached by his juniors he does not deny the call.

From the above, it is clearly evident that the institution of chieftainship was basically democratic in nature. Unlike the legitimacy of the monarchical system of governance, which is normally acquired through force, the position of the chief in the Kuki society is offered by his kinsmen. The evolutionist school of thought, as such, believes that chiefs in Kuki villages are a position offered by his kinsmen or the public and therefore has no room for abuse of power. The position is rather a responsibility given to him. Thus absolute power is nonexistent. Proponents of the theory further argued that certain Kuki chiefs maintaining its position as if it belongs privately with total permanence is a huge mistake. It is also argued that just as the position of chiefs are given by his kinsmen or villagers, the public theoretically has the right to replace if the said chief failed to serve the interest of the kinsmen and villagers. This in fact is a democratic character, which the Kukis failed to recognise.

Now, it becomes more interesting as to what constitutes his “public” to the chief. As mentioned above, the public constitutes the villagers who settle under his guardianship. They all become the stakeholders in the village administration and are thus held accountable to the chief. Another confusion is whether there exists any classification among the stakeholders. In the traditionalist and modernist schools, such issues are not discussed. According to the evolutionist school, everyone settling in the village shares equal responsibility and are accountable to the collective good. There is no distinction such as “founder” or “commoner”. Everyone is equal in the eyes of the law and the chief.

For instance, when a family from another village wishes to settle at such a village, it undergoes a formality requiring the consent of the chief. The new family could be of the same clan or of another clan. It is customary for all that any intending settler brings a clay pot of ‘Ju’, a rice-beer or a wine made of fermented rice, to the chief of the village and his councilmen followed by a humble and sincere pleading-cum-pledging before them, usually in this tone:

*“...allow me to be with you and treat me as one of yours,
and I shall remain loyal to you in action and spirit...”*

If the chief grants the sincere prayer, the family resides in the village and enjoys equal privilege

as other villagers do. The prayer translated above does not just seek approval to settle in the village. The plea “treat me as one of yours” speaks volumes on the need of being treated equally in the eyes of the law. Thus once the chief approves the settlement the citizen should enjoy equal treatment in all respects. The differences in the treatment of villagers, according to evolutionists, would be “unchiefly” and are contrary to the principles of Kuki chieftainship. According to the school, the notion of inferiority and superiority among villagers are but a colonial creation.

Colonialism and the Era of Absolutism

The modernist school of thought has the habit of questioning the absolute authority of the chiefs. Before getting answers to some complex issues, certain groups contemplate options, which can replace chieftainship. Modernists as thought failed to reason why and how such absolute authority surfaces. It did not raise reasonable questions as to whether such absolute power comes along with the institution. According to the evolutionist school of thought, the present crisis of chieftainship exists because modernists take so much interest in replacing rather than addressing the core problems it faces. If this approach persists, modernists will have little to achieve in the future.

The evolutionist school believes that absolute authority that-certain chiefs wrest is a recent phenomena. It believes that chieftainship in its original form does in no way exhibit the character of authoritarianism or tyranny as described by many colonial writers. If one has to relate, it would best look like a ‘monarchy’ taking into consideration the hereditary position of the chief. However, as explained above, it normally is an offered position as head of the kinsmen, against the monarchical system, which happens to be acquired by brute force in the past. Therefore in no way does Kuki chieftainship appear monarchical when one finely examines its origins. However, it is without doubt that chieftainship as an institution is rapidly losing its evolutionary character. Sadly, no one from the academics or the intellectual circle has the audacity to raise harsh questions against the deviance from its originality. The idea of individual ownership of land, natural resources, election of councilmen and individual decisions are something that needs serious deliberation.

According to the evolutionist school of thought, the idea of individual ownership of land and other 'absolute authority' as experienced today seems to have evolved a few hundred years ago. Though there is no proven record on how things changed over time or what factors shaped this change, it is believed that the notion matured gradually during the 'martial period' lasting over a hundred years. In fact, martial laws were sanctioned and enforced by Kuki chiefs, to effectively resist colonial influences in the region. Introduction of capital punishment for treachery, and nomination of council members by the chief himself are worth mentioning.

Further, as per the evolutionist thought, the allocation of suitable land for cultivation by chiefs is becoming a necessity from a security point of view, as the relationship between colonial government on one hand and other rival tribes on the other seemingly gets tense since the 19th century. Therefore, the involvement of the chief over 'land' becomes increasingly important. Without any authorisation from the chief, clearing of forest for cultivation began to be viewed as an act bypassing security clearance and authority of the chieftain. Therefore, when a villager wishes to clear forest for cultivation, it requires the consent of the chief. Thus the authority of the chief over land tacitly increased. It can fairly be concluded that over a long period of time, the continuous practice of requiring security clearance from 'him' for cultivation has made the chief appear to be the rightful owner of village lands.

Proponents of the evolutionary school strongly believe that absolute authority of chiefs in Kuki villages was nonexistent in its evolutionary past. In Lewin's *Wild Races of Southeastern India*, J Rennel, Chief Engineer of Bengal, wrote in 1800, "*If a man of this nation should happen to slay another; neither the chief nor any of the relations of the deceased have the right of vengeance; but if his brother or other near relation chooses to kill the murderer, none has the right to prevent them*". This is one such instance of describing Kuki chiefs about their power and jurisdiction about a century before colonialism took over the country. Absolute authority as practised today is in fact a continuity of martial laws imposed during colonial times.

The evolutionist's school of thought does neither necessitate its continuity or change. The

main goal of the school is to present, in the best possible way, the evolutionary context for the better understanding of the chieftainship in its "unadulterated" form. The school believes that once the character in its essence is understood, the fight over its continuity or change, between traditionalist and modernist, will cease immediately. The school believes that the conflict over chieftainship exists because instead of relying on other sources it relies on documents of the arch rival, namely, the British Empire.

CONCLUSION

Social institutions experience change and evolve to a more complex form to suit the demand of the ever increasing complex social system. Without change it is bound to suffer and face ultimate death. This is the guiding principle behind the modernist school of thought. The case of Kuki chieftainship is a fine example exhibiting the character of "change" according to the circumstances. The move from nominal to a more "absolute" position during its resistance against the British has proven to be beneficial and effective. However, the dangers come when adaptation to change exhibits the character of authoritarianism.

While the push for further change continues, the traditionalists are not really adamant to change. What concerns them is whether such change could really be an effective solution against the age-old practices. It posits that chieftainship can only be replaced by a more "public-centric" law. This can either be through the attainment of separate Kuki statehood or a provision similar to the Sixth Schedule as per the Constitution of India. Until a more honourable provision is promised, it does not necessitate modification.

So, where does conflict lie? Modernists are concerned about the rights of the people whereas the traditionalists are preoccupied with protecting certain sets of the institution, that is, the chief and the land. The intentions of the two schools are honest and pure. In fact, the two schools aim to strengthen the three elements, that is, the chief, public and the land, without which Kuki as an identity faces an existential threat. So what fuels the conflict between the two schools of thought when their intentions are but to serve the interest of the people?

According to the evolutionist school, conflict arises from the difference in the mechanism adopted to solve the common problem. Leaving aside the protective traditionalist, the intention of modernists that power, function and jurisdiction of chiefs be limited to favour public participation in local administration is pure and encouraging. While change from within is not expected soon by the modernists, the only option would be the introduction of laws framed by the government such as the “Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956”. It also wanted democratic election of village authority members and councilmen, delegation of power enjoyed by the chief, decision making to be inclusive and above all the right to a certain degree of permanence in settlement and common ownership of village resources.

With regard to the above wishes of the modernists, the evolutionist contended that the admiration of “others” or such wishes is but a result of one’s ignorance to their own culture. The evolutionist school is of the opinion that the laws framed by the government do not promise anything substantial from the evolutionary laws. The basic difference being traditional laws comes with the law of ‘primogeniture’ deserving protection and continuity, whereas legally framed acts come with election of councilmen, including the chairman. All other provisions in matters of election, decision making and ownership of other resources exist as well in the evolutionary chieftainship system. The evolutionist feels that this beautiful institution and its practices are becoming redundant solely because the level of awareness of its existence is surprisingly low and as such it fails to assert accordingly.

Unlike the previous schools of thought, which aim for “continuity” and “change” respectively, the evolutionists do not side with any of the previous two. The school is not seriously concerned about its change or continuity as an institution. The more concerning subject, according to the evolutionists, is how deeply the people engage themselves in understanding the Kuki chieftainship institution in its pure form. It asks the proponents of continuity (traditionalist) whether there exists any deviance from its original practices, which makes it despotic and feudal at present times. On the other hand, it poses a question to the modernist whether it has carried out enough studies on chieftainship in its primordial settings and does enough comparison with the laws they intend to replace it with. Any

mad race to replace chieftainship with acts coming from somewhere else could be disastrous. It is therefore the responsibility of the stakeholders to consider the matter seriously and derive common grounds at the earliest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While a healthy debate for change or continuity continues, scholars, intellectuals and the younger generation should not be swayed by such thoughts alone. Judging the institution of chieftainship as professed today, which is understandably corrupt, will be irresponsible on one’s part. Such blanket descriptions will threaten the existence of this beautiful institution. To avoid such a situation, it is the prime duty of every Kuki to look into the institution in its original and evolutionary setting. Once the institution is understood in its essence, the whole debate on its continuity or change will end.

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Paper received for publication in August, 2022
Paper accepted for publication in August, 2022