



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS**

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Programme of Study : Ph.D.

Thesis Title: "Tribe, Class, Status and Power: Dynamics of Social Stratification and Change among the Kukis in Manipur"

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Thesis Submitted to the Department/ Center : Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Date of completion of Thesis Viva-Voce Exam : December 21, 2020

Keywords for description of Thesis Work : Kuki tribe, Manipur, Social stratification, Social change

SHORT ABSTRACT

Tribal societies are often described as having collective conscience and representations, group solidarity, communal ownership of property and egalitarianism, thereby maintaining social equality rather than social inequality and differentiation. Such a depiction of tribal society is a clear indication of a lack of understanding of the existing social structure prevalent among the tribals that deviates from the reality. No doubt, social relationship is determined by a strong sense of collective consciousness and based on kinships relations. In this context, the present study is an attempt to bring out the fact that social inequality or differentiation has been part and parcel of the Kuki tribal society, even in the traditional past. Existing scholarship hardly addresses social inequality resulting from such differentiation in status, economic endowments and power relations. A thorough examination of tribal community like the Kuki tribe depicts that differences operate in the economy, social and political milieus. Perhaps, the overemphasis in portraying tribals as an egalitarian community may purposefully lead to overlook the presence of social stratification based on class, status and power. This study also attempts to contest the general understanding that tribal society is perceived to be static or unchanging. The colonial encounter, Christian missionaries, modernisation processes, Western education and inroads of market economy have influenced tribal societies in Northeast India and the Kukis are no exception to this. To what extent has change or modernisation process influenced the overall social structure of the community particularly in transforming the social values and ways of life? The study argues that social stratification is not a new phenomenon for the Kukis rather it is as old as the traditional and customary practices themselves. Tribe in general and the Kuki in particular though decorated with the concept of egalitarianism is rather debatable, be it in the past traditional social setting or in the present modern domain. In fact, social stratification based on status, power and class is the core social reality of the community and the backbone of the system through which the social system operates. However, the significance and inevitability of social stratification has been neglected as in the case of studying the Kukis where the existing social stratification and inequality are suppressed while synonymously labelling it as to egalitarian community. Based on historical-sociological perspectives, the thesis foregrounds the problematic of social stratification and change in terms of tribe, class, status and power.