

Received on: 14 June 2024

Revised on: 21 June 2024

Accepted on: 28 June 2024

Decolonising History: Kukis' indigeneity and territoriality through the lens of Academic Domino

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Abstract

Narratives on any society are largely based on the premise set forward by outsiders. Those remains the most authentic work in the understanding of the people until a differing perspective crept in the academic domain. Northeast India is not an exception. Colonial writing unquestionably remains the basis in the explanation of ethnic groups and their cultures. However, the emergence of literatures from different sources, conflicting reports, and methodological errors has started casting doubts on the infallibility of colonial writings. Through rigorous reconstruction, it came into light that many of such colonial writings, the basis of narratives, do not have solid grounds for serious academic treatment.

The narrative that Kukis were later immigrants to the present region they settle has been a fine example in this regard. Rather than questioning the methodological flaws and the underlying inconsistencies, scholars have the habit of relying on colonial works as true and valid which eventually validates and solidifies colonial narratives. This paper will discuss how narratives are built through repetitive citations by scholars and academicians which in fact has become a trend in academia. It tries to develop a concept which will help explain other narratives which are unjustly built through repetitive assertions.

Keyword

Kukis, Indigeneity, Colonial Writings, Academic Domino, Academic Integrity

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Introduction

The well known adage of Winston Churchill that 'histories are written by victors'² appears to holds true to this day. The narratives which we understand today are in fact written by a certain winners of a certain period: the educated, influential and those controlling the source of power. Under such circumstances, historical writings are 'illusory' and total fairness in the presentation is always hard to expect. All other narratives which do not serve those in power got sidelined and are left behind in oblivion as time pass.³ However, this is totally against the integrity of any academic discourse in a free and independent research.

One of the biggest challenges in academia is its huge reliance on secondary sources to construct theories and narratives based on a certain version of history. By heavily relying on such sources, it promotes a certain narrative and thereafter denies the rightful place of the other.⁴ The resultant effect is that perspectives which deserve recognition have been summarily and conveniently replaced by not-so deserving ones. Furthermore, the habitual reliance on secondary information has made the existing narratives appear infallible. As there is less or no stories which can present the other side of the story as explained by 'Dependency Theory', the existing narratives will feature more prominently in any discourse.⁵

In fact, it will be a mistake to put the whole blame to scholars relying on such documents. With limited time and resources, the task of ascertaining the veracity of each and every works of the past is almost impracticable, thus leaving scholars hapless but relies on it. Thus, stories, ideas or values presented more frequently are likely to receive acceptance to a higher degree without any hesitation. This is because with the continual exposure, the 'Agenda Setting' function comes into play and the human mind cannot resist such idea without any alternative viewpoints.⁶ Therefore, certain narratives, however questionable it might be, receive better treatment in academic and scholastic works.

This paper will look into the question on 'Kuki indigeneity' and discuss why colonial writings predominantly feature in academic domain amidst the varying and conflicting accounts. It will also discuss how such narrative built on unsound premise gets accepted by the general population in the course of time. Through this, the paper also tries to develop a model

² See Darren Parry, "Efforts to Change the Culture of Columbus Day", *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 2021, pp. 113.

³ EO Adeoti and JO Adeyeri, "History, the Historian and His Work: Issues, Challenges and Prospects", *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology*. Vol. 3 No.4, December 2012, pp.36 -41.

⁴ T Chandola and C Booker (2021). *Archival and Secondary Data*. Sage: Los Angeles.

⁵ SJ Ball-Rokeach and ML DeFleur, "A Dependency Model of Mass-Media Effects". *Communication Research*, Vol 3 No 1, 1976, pp. 3-21.

⁶ ME McCombs and DL Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer, 1972), pp. 176-187.

which can help explain why certain narratives predominantly feature while other reasonable arguments got sidelined in academic and social domain.

Kukis: the 'most misunderstood' ethnic group

Kukis, also known as Mizo and Chin, are an ethnic group found in India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Their present settlement covers an area of approximately 50,000 square miles with an estimated population of about 2.5-3 million.⁷ There is no solid evidence to suggest as to when Kuki tribes moved into these territories. According to historians such as Majumdar and Bhattasali⁸ and local scholar Gangmumei Kamei⁹, Kukis were the earliest settlers in Manipur. However, their presence in the region and Manipur in particular came to be known better with British stretching their influence in the region.

The Kukis who constitute a dominant community in the regions are opposed British influence in the region. Numerous accounts mentioned of Kukis attacking British establishments since the middle of the 19th century. The 'Great Kuki invasion of the 1860s'¹⁰, the 'Kuki Rising (Anglo-Kuki War) 1917-19'¹¹, and the mass participation of Kukis in the Subhas Chandra Bose's 'Azad Hind Fauz (1940-1944)'¹² are testimonies of Kukis fight for their independence in the region. In terms of their anti-colonial stance, no other communities matched their patriotism in protecting their land and freedom as Kukis does in Manipur.¹³

After all these sacrifices made for themselves and the country, they are reduced to minorities in three countries - India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. In the words of Prof. Lal Dena, the Kukis are the 'least understood' ethnic group in the northeast.¹⁴ They became the victim of abuse by governments from time to time. Furthermore, they were discriminated with terms such as foreigners, immigrants and illegal immigrants to lands which they defended. In this regard, it has become an interesting subject as what makes Kukis being targeted as foreigners and non-indigenous in the region. Nevertheless, colonial writings in

⁷ Jangkhongam Dounel (2015): "Impact of Colonialism among the Zo ethnic vis-à-vis the emergence of different autonomy movements", *Historical Journal of Mizoram*, <https://scholar.google.co.in/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=RN1Cl9wAAAAJ&citation_for_view=RN1Cl9wAAAAJ:bEWYMUwI8FkC> Last Accessed on 23 June 2023.

⁸ RC Majumdar and N Bhattasali, *History of India*, Shyam Chandra Dutta, Dacca, 1930.

⁹ Gangmumei Kamei, *History of Manipur*, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 2003.

¹⁰ Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1884.

¹¹ Jangkhomang Guite and Thongkhohal Haokip, *The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919*, Routledge, London and New York, 2019.

¹² Jangkhomang Guite, "Representing Local Participation in INA-Japanese Campaign: The Case of the Kukis in Manipur, 1943-45", *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No.2, December 2010, pp. 291-310.

¹³ See Vijay Chenji, *The Anglo-Kuki War 1917-19 : Victory in Defeat | A Military Perspective*, Notion Press, New Delhi, 2022.

¹⁴ Lal Dena, "Nationality formation: The case of Kuki", in N. Haokip and M. Lunminthang (eds.), *Kuki Society: Past Present and Future*, Maxford Books, New Delhi, 2011.

no small measure contributed to such prejudice. The whole narrative of Kukis ancestry and territoriality is based on colonial writings. However, when one closely looks into such writings there are numerous instances and accounts which run contravene against each other.

British accounts on Kukis Ancestrality

The earliest known record of the British dealings with the Kuki tribes in the northeast India was in 1777, when the Chief of Chittagong writes to the Governor General Warren Hastings raising complaints against the tribes for the alleged aggression.¹⁵ The second such accounts appeared 1790 under the title 'On the manners, Religion, and laws of the Cucis, or Mountaineers of Tipra', written by John Rawlins.¹⁶ About a decade later, another account on Kuki entitled 'Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas', by John Macrae appeared in the Asiatic Researches in 1799.¹⁷ In 1800, the Chief Engineer of Bengal, James Rennell wrote 'The Cucis or the inhabitants of Tipperah Mountains.'¹⁸

The first four accounts neither mentioned the origin of the tribe nor about the settlement patterns. The Kukis were simply described as the inhabitants of the hills to the east of Bengal and nothing more indicative of nomadic or migratory that is worth quoting or questioning.

The earliest description of Kukis as 'migrants' appeared in the work of Captain RB Pemberton in his work entitled 'Eastern Frontier of India'. Pemberton wrote:

The Kookies have been gradually advancing for years in a northerly direction, and have hitherto established themselves on the ranges which were originally occupied by more northern tribes, or committed such fearful aggressions upon the latter, as to compel them to retire and leave an unoccupied tract between themselves and these formidable opponents.¹⁹

In 1850, Col. Lister in his report agrees that Kukis are "migratory in their habits"²⁰ without emphasizing any further details. The third and a more detailed account on the Kukis emerged in the diary of Captain Butler, entitled 'Travels and Adventure in the Province of Assam'. He wrote:

¹⁵ See TH Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, Bengal Printing Company, Calcutta, 1869.

¹⁶ John Rawlins, *On the manners, Religion, and laws of the Cucis, or Mountaineers of Tipra*, Asiatic Researches, XII, 1790.

¹⁷ John Macrae, *Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas*, Asiatic Researches, 1799. <

https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.39503/2015.39503.Asiatic-Researches--Vol-7_djvu.txt> Last accessed on 3 November 2023.

¹⁸ See TH Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, Bengal Printing Company, Calcutta, 1869.

¹⁹ Robert B Pemberton, *Eastern Frontier of India*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 1835.

²⁰ See Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1884.

The Kukis aver, that they emigrated from Tiperrah to North Cachar, in the reign of Kishan Chunder, sixty years ago,...in the year 1840-47, several colonies of new Kookies immigrated from Tipperah, via the bed of the Barak river, and joined their brethren in North Cachar...they live on the most friendly terms with the Kachang Nagah and the Meeker tribes, and are greatly respected by them for their known martial character. The marauding Angahmee Nagahs look on the Kookies with awe or respect, and have, in consequence, never dared to attack them.²¹

Similarly, Alexander Mackenzie, in his 'The North-East Frontier of India' described:

The Kookies are all immigrants from the south, and formerly inhabited the hills south of Cachar, from which they were driven by the advanced northward of a more powerful people from the unexplored country between British territory and Burma. They are a hardworking, self-reliant race and the only hillmen in this quarter who can hold their own against the Angamis... came north according to their own accounts about 85 years ago.²²

In 1896, Major-General James Johnstone, in his 'My Experience in Manipur and the Naga Hills' noted:

They were first heard of as Kukis in Manipur between 1830 and 1840 through the tribes of the same race had long been subjected to the Rajah of Manipur. The new immigrants begun to cause anxiety in the year 1845, as soon as they poured in the hill tracts of Manipur in such numbers as to drive away many of the older inhabitants.²³

Johnstone in his work further blamed certain administrative policies of the British authority, especially that of Col. McCulloch. He wrote that McCulloch:

...settled them down, allotting to them lands in different places according to their numbers, and where their presence would be useful on exposed frontiers. He advanced them large sums from his own pocket, assigning different duties to each chief's followers. Some were made into irregular troops, others were-told off to carry loads according to the customs of the state. Thus, in time, many thousands of fierce Kukis were settled down as peaceful subjects of Manipur, and colonial McCulloch retained supreme control over them to the last. ²⁴

²¹ John Butler, *Travels and Adventure in the Province of Assam*, Smith, Elder and Co, London, 1854.

²² Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1884.

²³ James Johnstone, *My Experience in Manipur and the Naga Hills*, Sampson Low, Marston and Company, London, 1896.

²⁴ William McCulloch, *Valley of Manipur*, Gyan Publication, Delhi, 1856.

Contestations to dominant narratives

The narratives that Kukis were immigrants or non-indigenous to the state of Manipur appears to have been based on colonial accounts as stated above. In the absence of written records of their own, Kuki history and their territoriality remains to be understood through the lens of colonial writings. It is rare to see historians questioning the fairness and authenticity of those accounts if it deserves serious academic treatment, or was it a collection of hearsay. Nevertheless, there are a number of conflicting reports over the degree of knowledge colonial writers had with people in the interior hilly regions of the time.

Captain John Butler who claimed that Kukis emigrated from the south noted that a Kuki village is headed by a team of village leaders by the title 'Ghalim, Gaboor, Burchapea, Chota Chapea and Tangba.'²⁵ However, such words and meanings are yet to be discovered among multiple Kuki tribes with varying dialects. It appears that the respondents to Captain Butler survey are non-Kuki but either Assamese or Bengali. Worst case scenario, the people whom Butler called Kukis might never belong to Kukis.

CA Soppitt in 'A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes' regretted about his writings on Kukis and stated: "the writer unfortunately has not had the same personal acquaintance with these four tribes [Rangkhoh, Bete, Changsan, Thadou] as he had with the others [tribes], and has had, therefore, to trust a great deal of hearsay."²⁶

In 1856, Col. William McCulloch, whom Jonhstone accused to importing Kukis, is reported to have clearly written on the degree of authority over the tribes of Kukis in the south. He noted: "the southern portion of Manipur territory [Kuki territory] had never been explored, and that the Manipur authorities had never tried to bring the tribes inhabiting it into subjection."²⁷ Again, on the influence of Manipur kings over the Hill tribes, Col. McCulloch further stated:

"Before the connection of the British government with that of Manipur took place, the latter, not to speak of exerting influence over the tribes, was unable to protect the inhabitants of the valley from their exaction and blackmail, and even after the conclusion of peace with Burma, and fixation of boundary of Manipur, the majority of the tribes were independent, and known to us little more than by name."²⁸

²⁵ John Butler, *Travels and Adventure in the Province of Assam*, Smith, Elder and Co, London, 1854.

²⁶ CA Soppitt, *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes of Northeast Frontier*, Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong, 1887.

²⁷ William McCulloch, *Valley of Manipur*, Gyan Publication, Delhi, 1856.

²⁸ William McCulloch, *Valley of Manipur*, Gyan Publication, Delhi, 1856.

On the account of Kukis in the northeast of Imphal, Alexander Mackenzie admitted that the Kukis were largely unknown till the close of the 20th century. Mackenzie thus wrote:

"The tribe of the Chahsads (Kukis) has only recently brought itself to notice. No mention of these Kookies can be traced in any correspondence previous to 1878. They are not mentioned in Dr. Brown's account of the hill country and tribes under the rule of Manipur, contained in the administrative report for 1868-69, nor in any of the subsequent administrative reports."²⁹

The latest of colonial account on the above subject was that of William Shaw's 'Notes on Thadou Kukis' published in 1929. J Hutton in introduction to Shaw's work thus remarked:

"Before the Kuki Rising of 1918-1919, the administration in the hill areas of the Manipur state was not very close, and the Thadous, ruled as they were by their own well-organised chiefs, and treated, as they had been in the past at any rate, by the Manipur state as allies almost as much as subjects, managed their own affairs in their own way and had recourse to the courts only in exceptional case."³⁰

The above accounts indicate that the hill areas of Manipur were largely un-administered and the existences of villages in far and interior hills are not taken into account when colonial writers describe the Kukis. The existence of such villages came into notice when blunders and raids were carried out among each other. Furthermore, many of the description made by colonial officers were taken from communities who live alongside with them, not the Kukis themselves. Therefore, the blanked description of Kuki and their settlement solely based on what is conveniently observable for them deserve adequate scrutiny and not jump into hasty conclusions.

Kukis in varying accounts

The near absence of traditional and ancient accounts has been another factor behind all wrong trendsetting. In this regard, Francis Wilford noted that: "real geographical treatises do exist: but they are very scarce, and the owners unwilling, either to part with them, or to allow any copy to be made, particularly for strangers,"³¹ rendering scholars helpless in understanding the past. While availability of the materials is another issue, chronicles are largely written either in languages unknown to the tribes. This itself sets a limit in the search for better understanding of one's past, especially among small communities and tribes.

²⁹ Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1884.

³⁰ William Shaw, *Notes on the Thadou Kukis*, Published on behalf of the Government of Assam, 1929.

³¹ Francis Wilford, "On the Ancient Geography of India", in Sir William Jones, *Asiatic Researches; Comprising History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia*, Vol. 14, New Delhi, 1980.

While detail descriptions are not immediately available, several chronicles does mention Kukis in their accounts hundreds of years ahead of British colonialism. 'Rajmala' (the Royal Chronicles of the Tripura Kings), 'Buranji' (the Chronicle of Ahom/ Assam Kingdom) and the 'Glass Palace Chronicles of Burma' recorded its dealings with the Kukis. Rajmala mentioned Tripura king Shiva falling in love with a Kuki woman in 1512. During his reign, King Rudra Singha of Assam (AD 1696- 1714) sent his envoys three times to Tripura and the account of envoys described, "the hills on both sides of the Barak River are inhabited by a tribe called the Kuki who are like Daflas and Nagas here. There will be about three hundred men at that place; their weapons are arrows, bows, shields and Naga spears."³²

One of the most detailed accounts of Kukis is found in the work of Lama Tarantha, a Buddhist monk, which runs several centuries ahead to that of colonialism. In his 'Account of the Spread of Buddhism in India' (1608), Lama Taranatha, described the role and position of Kuki country during the period in the spread of Buddhism. He wrote:

Eastern India consists of three parts. Of these, Bhamgala and Odivisa belong to Aparantaka and are hence called the eastern Aparantaka. In the north-east, Kamaru (-pa), Tripura, Hasama are called Girivarta, i.e., surrounded by mountains. Proceeding further east from this region, (one reaches) Namga-ta on the slopes of the northern mountains. Bordering on the sea are Pukan, Balaku, etc.,—the country of Munans. Further, Cakma, Kamboja etc. All these are collectively called Ko-ki. From the time of Ashoka, Samghas were established in these Ko-ki countries. Later on, these gradually grew large in number. Before the time of Vasubandhu, these were only of Sravakas. However, from the time of King Dharmapala on, there were in Madhyadesa many students from these places. Their number went on increasing so that during the time of four Senas, about half of the monks of Magadha were from Ko-ki.³³

In his foreword to Taranatha's work, Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche described the account as the most authentic as it was written by the most suitable person of his age. Rinpoche noted that Taranatha was vitally interested in writing about the past and had mastery over Sanskrit and also knew some of the Indian dialects prevalent at that time which other writers lacked. Another advantage Taranatha enjoyed is that he had the access to the authentic works of Pandits, viz. Ksemendrabhadra, Indradatta and Bhataghati.' Rinpoche's description can be taken as an affirmation that mastery in Sanskrit and the incorporation of different available accounts makes any writing on Indian history inclusive and objective.

³² Haoginlen Chongloi, *History, Identity and Polity of the Kukis*, Hornbill Press, Imphal, 2021, pp. 8-31.

³³ Taranatha, "History of Buddhism in India" (L. Chimpa & A Chatopadhyaya, Trans.), Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1990.

Similarly, GA Grierson, the linguistic survey superintendent of India in his work *Linguistic Survey of India* wrote:

Territory inhabited by the Kuki-Chin tribes extends from the Naga Hills in the North down into the Sandoway District of Burma in the South; from the Myattha River in the East, almost to the Bay of Bengal in the West. It is almost entirely filled up by hills and mountain ridges, separated by deep valleys.

... It then runs almost due north and south, with cross ridges of smaller elevation through the districts known as the Chin Hills, the Lushai Hills, Hill Tipperah, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Farther south the mountainous region continues, through the Arakan Hill tracts, and the Arakan Yoma, until it finally sinks into the sea at Cape Negrais...³⁴

Grierson presents Kukis territory to have covered the Chin Hills, Lushai Hills, Hill Tipperah, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Arakan Hill Tracts including Manipur and extended to the Jiantia, Garo and Naga Hills in the north; with an east-west extend of 220 miles and north-south extend of 700 miles. Grierson account again solidifies the above claim that Kuki settlement in the region have lasted for generations. Eminent academicians such as Prof. JN Phukan³⁵ and Prof. Gangmumei Kamei made similar observations that some Kukis, if not wholly, have settled in Manipur way back in the pre-historic period or have arrived in Manipur along with the Meiteis.³⁶

Academic Domino in academia

The narrative set forward by colonial writings also exposed the abject failure of scholars and the academic community to decolonize written histories. Without ascertaining the veracity of those accounts, scholars and writers would adopt it as valid, authentic and indispensable. In the process, a certain narrative dominated the discourse on Kuki identity and indigeneity. The repetitive citation of previously existing works without engaging them with serious validation have become a trend in academic domain. In a hugely diverse region such as the northeast India where communities fight for dominancy through discrediting the other, colonial writings became a canon in their pursuit.

Now, when one deeply deconstruct colonial writings on Kuki history and identity, it can be pointed out without hesitation that accounts maintained on Kukis appears to have a

³⁴ George Abraham Grierson, "Tibet- Burman Family: Specimens of the Kuki-Chin and Burma Groups", *Linguistic Survey of India*, Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, Calcutta, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1904.

³⁵ JN Phukan, "The Late Home of the Migration of the Mizos: Minority Nationalities of Northeast India", Presented at International Seminar, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1992.

³⁶ Gangmumei Kamei, *History of Manipur*, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 2003.

common point of source. It appears that colonial officers from time to time indulged in repetitive citation of previously existing works rather than engaging themselves in collecting firsthand account from the people themselves.

In fact, Captain Pemberton was the first to open the theory that Kukis were immigrants from the south in his account of 1835. This was followed by Col. Lister who described Kukis as "migratory in their habits" in 1850. Captain Butler made the same comment in 1854 as Pemberton and Lister did. In 1884, Mackenzie reproduced the versions of Lister and Butler. In 1896, Johnstone cited the work of Butler and reproduced it as if his own independent works. Beginning from Pemberton till Johnstone, it is evident that the works of each were but a reproduction of existing literatures from previously existing ones, thereby pointing toward a common source. While many agrees that Kukis migrate none of them have the clue as to when, where and how does it migrate. Descriptions happen in few lines and most in a paragraph.

However, narrative in multitudes has convinced many modern-day scholars that colonial accounts are valid and unquestionable. In the absence of any other narratives, it assumes dominant. This in fact is a challenge to the academic community, especially historians in the reconstruction of the past. The practice of repetitive citations and referencing of previously existing literatures by academicians without undergoing necessary review which in the course of time makes it appear incontrovertible to the general populace through continuous use exhibit a certain character of Domino. In this work, such a practice of developing a narrative through continuous citations in academia is hereby termed as Academic Domino.

As mentioned earlier, Capt. RB Pemberton was the first to claim Kukis migrates from the south of Manipur. In his account, however, he clearly mentioned that the accounts on the Kukis are not from the Kukis themselves but neighbouring tribes. He mentioned "fetching the version of the Koupooees"³⁷ and describes Kukis to have gradually advanced to the north from the south. By "Koupooees", Pemberton denotes the Kabuis who are concentrated in the Western and North-western region of the state of Manipur. Interestingly, the Kabuis are another community who settle alongside the Kukis. Understandably, communities who settle alongside each other had bitter experiences against each other. Therefore, it will be premature to treat the account taken from Koupooees on the Kukis to be free from subjectivity and distortions. The whole question of Kuki indigeneity which dominates the present discourse had its origin with the version of Koupooees (Kabuis), not the Kukis themselves.

³⁷ Robert B Pemberton, *Eastern Frontier of India*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 1835.

Conclusion

Colonial writings on Kuki identity and indigeneity are largely based on hearsay from other communities who live alongside Kukis. Again, when collected from Kukis themselves, the subject normally belongs to the microscopic-obedient and accessible population close to the colonial authority. Under such circumstances the real picture of Kukis and their authority deep in the interior areas are hardly seen in colonial writings. Therefore, the narratives that Kukis are foreigners, non-indigenous or implanted by colonial authorities into the soil of Manipur is wholly subjective and does not provide a justifying ground to charge-sheet the whole Kuki population as such.

In fact, till the first half of the 20th century, the idea of Manipur or being under a common administrative unit was largely unknown in the far and interior regions of the hills. The state administrative machinery wields little or no influence in the region. It does not have any accurate picture as to who are the inhabitants in the hills with exception to few reports made by colonial officers.

There are sufficient accounts mentioning that Kuki areas were largely unexplored even after it comes under the British control. The narrative such as illegal immigrants or non-indigenous is purely a colonial creation limited to their own understanding. It got validated by an academic practice called the academic domino, a repetitive citation of a previously existing work making it appear infallible to the common masses in the course of time. These are partly the failure of the academic community to undergo rigorous scrutiny over methodology employed by colonial writers, and partly a selective adoption of the narrative by rival groups of communities who have contested claims over lands inhabited by Kukis. This is one of the many challenges to historians and scholars in their effort to decolonize northeast history.