CHAPTER II

1. The Tiwas among the tribes of Assam:

Assam and the surrounding hill States like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland and others fringing her have been the home of many tribes belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid stock of the Tibeto-Chinese and Tibeto-Burman speech families. The Tiwa tribe of Assam is one among those ethnic communities who constituted the Tibeto-Burman language-culture group in the North-East of India. The people of the tribe are also popular as the Lalungs in the plains as well as in the hills. They were known by this appellation in all British accounts written and compiled on Assam in the 19th century A.D. and also in different other forms of transactions.

Racially the Lalungs (i.e. the Tiwas) belong to the great Bodo race, a sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman speech family. The Bodos settled over the entire Brahmaputra Valley and formed Bodo-speaking blocks at different places. They also extended their settlement into North and East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and North Bihar. S. Endle advocated for the use of the term Kachari to denote the Bodo race. He had mentioned as many as

1. Noted anthropologist, Dr. D.N. Majumdar has recorded an experience of his calling the Hill Lalungs as Tiwa which was promptly reacted upon by those assembled in the gathering of the Hill Lalungs and corrected him to call them Lalungs instead of Tiwa. See his forward note attached to Dr. B.K. Gohain's monograph, The Hill Lalungs, 1993, p. viii
2. The appellation Tiwa is also found in British records. L.A. waddell (1854-1938) of Indian Medical Service was perhaps the first British writer to use the term Tiwa side by side with the term Lalung to denote the people in his monograph on the tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley published first in the J.A.S.B. in 1900.
3. The British writers used the term Kachari to designate the great Bodo race. See S. Endle: The Kachari, pp. 4-5; E. Gait: History of Assam, pp. 299-300; Waddell: The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley, p. 44.
fifteen and few more tribes in the group of the great Kachari race. The Lalung was one of them. The people of the tribe dwelt in South-West of Nagaon and the adjoining districts. Gait has suggested affinities of the Lalungs, so far as language is concerned, with the Kacharis, Koches, Chutiyas, Garos and Tipperas. L.A. Wadell, who studied the physical types and affinities over thirty different tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley, observed mixing of Mikir and Garo blood in some of the Lalungs. It is worthmentioning that a substantial number of Lalung people have been residing till to-day in the same ecological habitat with the Mikir’s (present day Karbis) in the hill district of Karbi Anglong. Charles Lyall has pointed out that the Lalungs have their habitat in the Khasi Hills and they lived with the Mikirs as their neighbours along the Nagaon and Kamrup borders. Inspite of being close to each other in terms of habitat, the Mikirs and the Lalungs notably differ from each other in language and social organization.

2. Meaning of the words Tiwa and Lalung:

The words Lalung and Tiwa are variously interpreted. The interpretations are pointer to the association of the people with water, although their habitats do not suggest that they dwelt on the river banks nor did they hold the rivers or a particular river with special regards in their religious beliefs and practices. Only the popular legends and old traditions handed through the ages speak for the element of water in giving meaning to the words. Lalung is a Karbi word formed of two words lang and lung both carrying separate meaning. The word lang means water in Karbi, while lung denotes sinking on it. It is said that the appellation Lalung was given by the Karbis to a group of people whom they rescued.

8. The Mikirs, p. 3
9. The Lalung Society, p. 8
from being drowned in water while they were crossing over a river during the course of their migration from Jaintia. Some scholars believe that the appellation Lalung to denote a group of people is not very old. The Karbis are also said to have called the people living on the south of the river Bramhamputra as the Lalungs. In support of this, Dr. B.K. Gohain informs us that the Lalungs of the plains believe that the wandering people whom the river Brahmaputra gave shelter came to be known as the Lalungs.

Some of the hill Tiwas give a separate meaning to the word Lalung. According to them, lang denotes water in Karbi language. But lu is a Tiwa word for plantain leaf. Lu or plantain leaf bears a strong social significance in the life of the hill Tiwas. The practice of spreading a piece of plantain leaf over an ornamental mat (called amsa) to make the royal seat for the Gobha king continues among the people of Amswai since time immemorial.

Another interpretation goes to suggest that the word Lalung is a phonetical change of the word libing / libung or labung which means man. This interpretation is held by the Hill Lalungs. The hill Lalungs also give a distinct interpretation of the word Tiwa. According to them ti means water and wa means superior. In Tiwa language, the word Tiwa denotes a place being watered by rivers.

The word Tiwa is also connotated in a different way by some people of the village Amswai. They are experts in their traditional lore. They

---

12. B.K. Gohain: The Hill Lalungs, p. 1
13. Ibid, p. 1
15. Ibid, p. 2
16. M. Deori, op. cit, p. 11
maintain that *ti* is a word for water but *wah* is a particle which represents the sound when a man comes out abruptly from the depth of water. They say that the kings of the Jaintias and the Tiwas were born on the same day out of water of the pond *Thini Maslong* (the pond lies in the Meghalaya border). The sound *wah* was released from their mouth at the time of coming out of submerge state. The Tiwas believe that the Jaintia and the Tiwa kings were brothers. The story is a pointer to the intimate relations that existed among the Jaintias and the Tiwas in the past. Till to-day, the sword and other implements related to sacrifice in Amswai are bought from Norteng, a place in Meghalaya.

Another connotation of the word suggests that the word Tiwa is shortened from *ti-phar-wali*, which means “a clan living in water”. In *Tiwa* language the word *wali* denotes a clan. *Ti-phar-wali* is shortened to *ti-wali* to mean a tribe born out of water. Dr. G.C. Sarma Thakur is of the opinion that the probable source of origin of the word *Tiwa* could have in the term ‘Tibbatia’ meaning people hailing from Tibbet. According to M. Deori, the existence of quite a few numbers of Tiwa villages in Sadiya, Dhemaji and Helem is a pointer to the original abode of the Tiwas in the Tibbet plateau wherefrom they migrated and settled in different localities along the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. There is another myth among the Hill Lalungs which links the birth of the first Lalung, Sotonga Raja, to water. It is believed that Satonga was born out of water and hence the entire tribe is called Tiwa. The *Jaintia Buranji*, an Assamese chronicle, relates that a Garo, Suttanga by name, resided on the bank of a stream. He caught a fish in the stream. A girl named Matsyodari came

---

17. B.K. Gohain : op. cit, p. 2
18. The Lalungs, pp. 10-11
21. P
out of the belly of the fish. She gave birth to a son named Bargohain who
inaugurated the Jaintia line of kings in the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Whether
we can equate Sotonga Raja, the first Tiwa man born on earth out of
water with the Garo Suttanga would be a matter of conjecture. But it is
a fact that sometimes the Tiwa people living in the hills and in the
foothills as well were mistaken for the Garos.²²

The myth of the birth of Sotonga Raja and the Garo Suttanga suggest
connection of both with water and substantiates the meaning of the word
Tiwa in which the prefix \textit{ti} is linguistically relevant as it denotes water.²³

3. Places with concentration of the Tiwas:

The Tiwas dwell in two different ecological situations distinguished
by the hills and the plains. In the hills their principal habitats are chiefly
in two revenue mauzas of Duwar Amla and Amri of Karbi Anglong. There
are more than forty hamlets in the hills. Silaguri, Kramkhunji, Maslaikhunji,
Makhaguri, Mugaguri, Kengabat, Khumrai-khura, Amdaba, Bar Amni, Saru
Amni, Tharakhunji, Udhangkhunji, Silangkhunji, Komnasal, Bar-rangkhoi,
Khaplangkhunji, Bar Marjang, Amswai Lalung gaon, Moro Lalung gaon,
Khawra gaon, Hadao, Pangraguri, Natral, Mobai, Umbarman Lalung gaon,
Singkum, Ulukhunji, Lalung Arcan are some villages where the Tiwas live.

The district of Morigaon presents a significant concentration of Tiwa
people in the plains. The presence of Tiwa people are significant in the
western and south-western part of the district of Nagaon. Barapujia in the
Raha revenue circle, Kathiatoli in the Kampur revenue circle are two major

²² G. Senapati: \textit{Rahar Rahiyal Barua Aru Panc Raja-powali}, p. 17
²³ Sotonga, also variously spelt, viz. Suttanga, Sutanga and Suttanga, is a village in the Naritang
region of the Jaintia Hills. The place is an important center of early Synteng culture with the
largest known megalithic monuments, originally numbering 30 stones erected to commemorate
an exceptionally large family. Local people say that the place was the original capital of the
Jaintia kings. Dr. N. Sadap-Sen: \textit{Origin and Early History of the Khasi Synteng People}. P. 27
and 84
pockets of the people of the tribe in Nagaon. There are few other villages, viz. Daborghat, Gobha-gaon, Beltola, Pumakuci, Amsoi Marjong-gaon, and Rangkhoi-ca in the foothills called Dantipar. On the north bank of the Brahmaputra, there are Tiwa population in the western part of Lakhimpur district. Similarly, on its southern bank in the district of Sibasagar, there is a settlement of the Tiwas near Titabar. Shyamchoudhuri and Das have observed that the Ahoms came in conflict with the Lalungs in course of their territorial expansion for control over central Assam which eventually led to the foundation of several settlements of the latter in distant localities away from their principal habitat.\footnote{The Lalung Society, p. 1}

Villages with Tiwa speaking population are also found in the district of Kamrup. M. Deori has let us know that the district of Kamrup has 18 villages where the people speak their mother tongue. The villages are Kahikuchi, Bherakuchi, Bangphor, Nibira, Dhupguri, Bahtola, Ksetri, Bonda, Rangdoloi, Lengtagog, Khorikata, Baragaon, Barekuliya, Dgaru, Bamunkhat, Dhoumara, Jalukbari and Satgaon.\footnote{Tiwa Janajati Aru Bhasar Itihas, pp. 16-17} It may be mentioned here that the people of the above named villages speak Assamese besides their mother tongue. They also read in Assamese medium schools and as such, they may be incorporated in the bi-lingual category.

There are few hamlets of the tribe in the State of Meghalaya. Phadomagro, Mayang, Amjong-ghat and Sonaikuci are some of the villages with distinctively Tiwa population in Meghalaya which is the abode of the Khasi-Synteng people.

4. Tiwa Provinces:

Historically, it was true that the Tiwas for long time in the past were close neighbours with the Jaintias both politically, socially and culturally.
It was also historically true that the Jaintia king founded the principalities of Gobha, Nelie, Khola and Sahari and appointed the stewards one in each state. Each steward was called the Deoraja meaning the chief priest. The Tiwas practise animism and the deoraja was to organize and regulate the worship of the spirits in his state. The deoraja appointed the priests from among his office-holders to propitiate the deities. The stewards of the provinces of Gobha, Nelie, Khola and Sahari were known as the Dantir-cari-bhai meaning the four brothers of the foothills. The foundation of the provinces of the Dantir-chari-bhai by the Jaintia king was a historical necessity both politically and economically. The above named provinces still exist in their old names in the form of some revenue mauzas or as important historical places. Gobha, Nelie and Khola were known for being located at strategic positions at the entrances of the three passes of the same name leading to the Jaintia kingdom, which exercised considerable influence in shaping the cultural traits of the people of the provinces. The age-old relations between the Jaintias and the Tiwa chiefs of the foot hills did not dwindle to exist. The great grandsons of the rulers of the provinces still maintain cordial relation with the Jaintias of Meghalaya. On the other hand, the Jaintias also reciprocate the same by attending annual religious festivals held in some of the royal families of the foot hills.26

It is mentioned in the Ahom chronicle that the formation of the five tribal provinces at Barapujia, Mikirgaon, Topakuchi, Khaigarh and Sara in the western part of Nagaon was made possible by some people who migrated from the foothills during the reign of the Ahom king, Jayadhvaja Simha (1648-1663 A.D.)27

26. Dr. G.C.S. Thakur: The Lalungs (Tiwas), p. 3
27. Dr. S.K. Bhuyan (Ed.): Dantiyaliya Buranji incorporated in the Deodhai Asom Buranji, pp.130-135.
The chronicle has also stated the reason of migration. According to the chronicle, the Tiwa people who migrated for the establishment of their kingdom in the Ahom territory under the frontier Governor of the Ahom King at Raha lived in the Khasi-Jaintia hills before their migration to the foothills. They informed the Ahom officers stationed at the Raha out-post that they left the Khasi-Jaintia territory in order to escape from the operation of the matrilineal law of inheritance of the Khasis. According to the matrilineal customs, the succession to inherit an estate was allowed to the daughter and not to the son, who inspite of being the son of a chief, had to earn his bread by rendering personal services under another person. Knowing this, the Ahoms realized their plight and assured them of a better mode of inheritance in accordance with the rules of patriarchy on condition that they would accept suzerainty of the Ahom kings. As a result of negotiations, twelve families of the Mikirs and twelve families of the Lalungs migrated to the Ahom territory.

The Mikir province was first established followed by the foundation of the provinces of Barapujia and Topakuchi. The provinces of Khaigarh and Sara were established during the reign of the Ahom King, Rajeswar Simha (1751-1769 A.D.) The chiefs of the five principalities of Mikirgaya, Barapujia, Topakuchi, Khaigarh and Sara constituted a group and became popular as *panc-raja-powali*. They ruled over their territories as tutelage of the Ahom kings throughout the historical periods. They were said to have enjoyed some sort of jural authority also during the British domination.

---

28. Dr. P.C. Phangcho gives a different version of the story of migration of the Mikirs (the Karbis) from the Jaintia territory. According to the story, the Jaintias killed the Karbi leader and great warrior, Thong Nokbe, treacherously and attempted at imposing matriarchal norms on the Karbis destroying their patriarchal identity. As a result many Karbi families migrated to the Ahom territory to live in the Nagaon plains across the Kapili river. The Ahom king rehabilitated them and provided safeguard to their traditional practices. *Tribal Tradition and Development*, pp.2-3.
During the historical period, Kirti Chandra Barbarua of the Ahom royal hierarchy confirmed the territorial jurisdiction of the five chieftians of Barapujia, Topakuchi, Mikirgaon, Khaigarh and Sara besides establishing another group of seven chiefdoms under the Jagi outpost during the reign of Rajeswar Simha (1751-1769 A.D.)

One of the old principalities ruled by a Tiwa chief was Dimorua. It was more or less independent till the 15th century A.D. But later on, the kingdom lost independence and had to accept the domination of the Kacharis for sometime and for sometime of the Koches and the Jaintias. From 1616 A.D., the province of Dimorua became a protectorate of the Ahoms.

The provinces of Gobha, Nelie, Khola and Dimorua were the agents responsible for transmitting Khasi-Jaintia culture to the foothills and the plains through the trade routes of the same name. Hats or markets were established at places like Nelie and Phulaguri for mercantile transaction of business with the Jaintias and other hill people. The hat at Nelie, long since has been an important center of business between the people of the hills and the plains. Since the opening of the market, Nelie has remained to be the meeting ground of the people of the hills and the plains.

The province of Gobha emerged as a force to be reckoned with against the British regime when Sobha Singh, the Lalung chief of the province seized four British subjects from the plains and immolated three of them at the shrine of Kali in the year 1832. The British annexed the province in the year 1835 just few weeks after the annexation of Jaintiapur. After the annexation, the province of Gobha was reduced to a mauza. Raising, the last ruler of Gobha, was made the mauzadar.

29. Dantiyalia Buranj incorporated in the Deodhai Asom Buranj, P. 143
30. Dr. Lakhimi Devi: Ahom-Tribal Relations, p.-135
31. The Lalung Society, p. 114. Gait: History of Assam, p. 358. There is difference of opinion as regards the shrine which, according to some other authority, was the shrine of god, Pala Khongar.
According to the folk tradition of the Tiwas, the original home of the Gobha king was located in the hills of Karbi Anglong. The name of the village was Marjong. It is located at a distance of 35-40 k.ms south of Jagiroad. Jagiroad also known as Na-Khola is presently the place of residence of the Gobha royal family. However, the house of the kunwari (youngest female sibling in the generation) of Gobha is located at Komarkuci, a village lying at a distance of 6 k.m. south/west of Jagiroad.

The reason of residing in a separate hamlet by the king is attributed to the operation of matriarchal custom of the Tiwas. According to the custom, the son of the reigning king was debarred from succession to the throne. It was the son of the kunwari, who was either the elder or the younger sister of the king, was allowed to succeed the ruling king. But he was not allowed according to the custom, to regulate the administrative affairs of the state from the same place where his mother kunwari resided. It is believed that discharge of administration from the place of residence of the kunwari brings misfortune to the royal family. The old practice of succession to the throne has since abandoned and it has become hereditary.

The above study reveals that the Tiwas were closely associated with the Mon-Khmer culture practised by the Khasi-Jaintias. Those people who did not come down to the plains and preferred to stay in the hills retained many facets of matrilineal practices in various socio-religious cultural expressions. On the other hand, those who came down to the plains accepted patriarchy to regulate all sorts of social transactions. The Tiwas founded several provinces in Dantipar areas and also in the plains of undivided Nagaon. The foundation of considerable number of small kingdoms led to the highest concentration of the Tiwas on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The Tiwa scholar intellectual, Budhiman Bordoloi, has attributed the credit of giving birth to the Tiwa culture to the provinces.
which were founded along the rivers in the foothills.\textsuperscript{32} He has gone to the extent of naming the culture of the tribe after the Tiwa domicile locality called the \textit{Dantipar}.\textsuperscript{33}

5. Residential place and Huts :

The Tiwas live in two different geographical situations – the hills and the plains. Their villages in the hills are situated on elevations ranging between six and nine hundred meters. Generally the high knolls are selected for construction of dwelling houses in the hills. In this context, open hill tops are preferred in order to find uninterrupted light of the Sun so that the effect of high humidity and rainfall could be avoided. A typical house in the hills has a small patch of kitchen garden and a courtyard well protected on all sides with bamboo stakes. Majority of the houses are built on raised plinths with thatched gabbled roof on the top. The roof is made extraordinarily slanting allowing it to reach the plinth surface. It is slanting like the roof in the \textit{samadi}. Slanting roof prevents wind from passing through the small holes of the walls which are knitly woven with split bamboos. It also prevents damages in the plinth due to the downpour of rains.

Every residential hut is divided into three compartments. Entry to the house is made through a door erected at the first compartment overlooking the courtyard which normally lies at the east. This compartment is called the \textit{no-maji}. It is meant for the male folk to sleep and rest around a fire-place. The compartment also serves the purpose of store room where baskets of twisted straw called \textit{mai-padi} (\textit{mai} means paddy) for holding grains are kept systematically along the walls in a row and small bottle gourds to be used at the time of worshipping the deity. The compartment is also the place where the \textit{thuna-khuta}, the sacred post, is erected and the deities are wor-

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Tiwa Sampadayar Parichay} (ed.) pp. 93-94.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p, 93.
shipped. The second compartment is called the *nukthi* followed by the third one called the *tingkhi-sal* meaning the place for husking rice.

The second compartment is exclusively for the use of the womenfolk who retire to it at night. This compartment is also used as the cooking-shed. There is another door in the *tingkhi-sal* which provides passage to the back side of the house. It is observed in most of the major villages that every household erects a separate house which is different from the traditional one in terms of space organization and design. Wooden frame, mud plastered walls and CI sheet roofing are used in the construction of the house.

In the plains, the domicile consisting of two or three huts is built flanking a wide path. The principles of construction of huts by the hill Tiwas are not followed in the plains. In the plains each household has separate huts for living, cooking and storing. The practice of erecting door at the ridge of the hut is a tribal culture. The hill Tiwas follow this practice in building their traditional huts. Close application of the practice is not seen in the plains.

6. Economy:

The economy of the people is, however dependent basically on agriculture. The Tiwas in the plains practise wet cultivation while the hill Tiwas practise both wet and shifting. These two types of cultivations differ both technically and ecologically. In case of wet cultivation in the hills ploughs and cattle are nowhere employed. Smoothing as well as levelling of soil is done manually with a harrow drawn either by a man or by a buffalo. In order to carry out the process of loosening of soil thoroughly the field is divided into small plots, each plot being enclosed by embankments for holding rain water or water taped from the streams. Both men and women extend all human efforts equally to the agricultural practices.
Shifting cultivation is done only in the hill slopes. It is done on lands left fallow for three successive years after one harvest in reaped. Four separate plots are successively used in a cycle of four years one after another.

Shifting cultivation is beneficial in terms of growing a number of other crops, viz. cotton, millet, chilli and different types of vegetables. Separate plots are developed for paddy, millet and cotton. Formerly cotton was cultivated not as a cash-crop; it was cultivated for domestic use only. At present, the cultivation of cotton is abandoned. The spinning of cotton has become a practice to be recollected from the past. Formerly cotton was spun by every family at home. Abandoning of the cultivation of cotton can be attributed to the loss of fertility of soil and the changing attitude of the people for mill spun threads which are readily available in all local markets and can be bought on payment of money. So spinning of cotton is abandoned by the womenfolk altogether. The same situation also prevails in the plains, where cotton cultivation did not attract the farmers at all.

Eri-culture consisting of rearing of the non-mulberry silkworms was a flourishing practice among the hill Tiwas. The practice flourished equally among their compatriots in the plains. In the past, one could not think of weaving the woman’s wrapper called kasong and the male turban and thana and tagla with threads other than the eri. The Tiwa women in the plains earned great appreciations in weaving eri-chadar, a warm cloth used as wrapper to prevent cold.

The hill Tiwas developed an ecological pattern around the culture of eri. Eri larvae were fed mostly on the castor plants. This plant was also the host of lac insects. It was grown extensively in the hills by shifting cultivation along with vegetables and cereals. As a result, the production of lac was bound up in an eco-cultural complex with weaving in eri threads.\(^4\)

\(^4\) The Lalung Society, p. 122.
On the other hand, there did not develop similar eco-cultural complex in the plains. The people in the plains depended mainly on the hills for the amount of lac they wanted.

The cultivation of castor plants or other plants in which the *eri* larvae are fed dwindles gradually both in the hills and in the plains. The present researcher has met people in the hills who sold several bags of *eri*-cocoons in the market at Amswai.

On enquiry, it has come to light that the cocoons are collected in small quantity from different households and brought to the market for sale to the plains traders. It has also come to her knowledge that some small traders used to frequent the villages in the hills to collect one kg or two of *eri* cocoons which the householders harvest from rearing. They exchange any quantity of tea presumed to be equal in worth with the amount of cocoons.

Among the vegetables, the bottle gourd called *tita-lao* (meaning bitter gourd) is also grown in the fields as well as in the kitchen gardens. This gourd is inseparably associated with the life and culture of the hill people. It is used in the invocation of deities to whom they offer country liquor. Its shell is used in drinking wine on all social functions. A gourd shell of liquor is considered to be a prestigious homage to the families of either side of the bride and the groom in fixing matrimonial relationship. Gourd shells of diminutive size and shape are used in exorcism. Formerly the plains Tiwas used to bring gourd shells from the hills for use. At present earthen pots or vessels are used replacing the traditional ones.

The hill Tiwas are basically dependent on their economic relations with the people of the plains. But the original pattern of economic relations maintained since time immemorial in terms of exchange of hill produce has undergone considerable changes in the recent past.
The desire for earning more cash by selling indigenous produce has increased. In this scenario, the broom-cultivation and the cultivation of betel-vine and bamboo have come up as alternative means of earning cash money. Particularly the broom-cultivation has assumed greater significance in the economy of the hill Tiwas.

The broom called wasi is made of the twigs of the reed called wasi-phang in Tiwa language. The reed is planted side by side with rice grains in the same plot of land cleared for the latter by shifting method. In shifting method, the land used for cultivation of paddy has to be left fallow for three successive years after the crop is reaped. But the lands used in broom-cultivation need not be left fallow for years together in order to renew cultivation. After reaping of paddy, the broom-roots will grow up taller to yield the twigs atop. After two years of plantation the twigs become mature for earning cash. The twigs continue to mature every year after the first plucking. The process continues for years together till the reeds require to be uprooted for new plantation after a gap of six years or so. The loss in paddy cultivation by shifting method, which requires the lands to be left fallow for years together, is heavily compensated by broom-cultivation. So, all farmers are interested in the cultivation. There are some farmers who even go to the extent of undertaking broom cultivation in quite a big area comprising four to five acres of land.

Brooms are sold in the markets through some middle men. Nelie is the principal market for selling of articles produced in the hills. Formerly barter was the only system of economic relation between the plains and the hill people. The hill Tiwas brought cotton, eri-cocoons, lac and other vegetable produce for exchange with dry-fish, essential commodities like salt and others and iron implements and pottery. The old practice does not exist to-day except on the day of celebration of the Jonbil-mela, a fair of
great cultural importance, held at Jagiroad annually in the month of January just after the Assamese Bihu. Since time immemorial; the king of erstwhile province of Gobha is giving his public appearance in the fair for receiving homage from his subjects. According to one tradition the fair is held commemorating the coronation of the Gobha king, who, coming down from Marjong, founded the first kingdom at the border.

According to another tradition the fair was organized to celebrate the nowan-khowa (community participation in dining of newly harvested rice) festival in which the ancestors were invoked first with new rice and curry. Since time immemorial the hill Tiwas have been frequenting the fair carrying varieties of agricultural produce in the hills for exchange for cakes and parched rice, dry fish etc. with their compatriots in the plains. The cakes and parched rice are said to have used by them in invoking the ancestors in borgor.

Shyamchoudhury and Das\textsuperscript{35} and Dr. Gohain\textsuperscript{36} have studied the impact of market economy on the indigenous production in the hills. The inventory of commodities enumerated by the scholars shows a changing outlook of the hill people who have utilized their purchasing power more for non-productive consumers' goods than on essential necessities. Many crops and products formerly retained as a surplus stock are now sold for cash. “Since the indigenous system of production has not changed at the same rate as the utilization of crops, it has technologically reached a point of saturation”\textsuperscript{37}.

7. Structure of Society of the Tiwas:

Shyamchoudhury and Das\textsuperscript{38} have observed that the “Lalung Society has its own structure and in group consciousness or corporateness”. They

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Op. cit., pp. 125-127
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Op. cit, p. 40
  \item \textsuperscript{37} The Lalung Society, p. 126
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Op.cit., Introduction
\end{itemize}
have maintained a "distinct existence as a distinct society through all the varied historical situations" with a strong feeling of cohesion. They were open for induction of people from outside into their own society. This cohesion developed into a philosophy of continuity of life which was reflected in their social structure and village organization.

The Tiwas are grouped into a number of exogamous clans. Initially the number of major clans were five, which later on increased to seven. The number increased again and became twelve. At present the number of individual clan is not less than thirtyone. The word khul is used to denote each individual clan.

The clans are grouped into some clusters called maharis in the plains and maharshas in the hills. In the plains the clusters are enumerated to be twelve, while in the hills their number is seven. The words mahari and maharsha are synonymous: ma denotes the meaning of mother while hari or harsha means the female descent. Thus the words refer to those lines who consider themselves matrilineally consanguinous. “Initially a mahari consists of those kin who can trace consanguinity through the female line. But in a more comprehensive sense it also means a single clan or a cluster having more than one clan on it. The bonds that binds a cluster lies in the belief that all its clans descended from different female collaterals of the same womb.”

The Tiwas also maintain a concept of traditional groups of sisters called the bunis (Assamese equivalent is bhani meaning sister). The number of bunis are twelve, nine and five. The numbers play significant role only when the question of figure arises in holding socio-religious ceremo-

nies. As a matter of fact, the clans who are affiliated to nine bunis or nine
sister group are considered superior in the class hierarchy.

The Tiwas in the plains have been maintaining a *khuta* system of
social grouping. The word *khuta* is synonymous with the Assamese word
*bamsa* which is an extension of a family. A *khuta* or *bamsa* is formed
taking together the families belonging to the same sept or clan.\(^4\)\(^4\) Therefore, it is uni-lined. Several *khutas* constitute a *khel*, which is a primary
unit in the corporate life of the village. The council of *khel* maintains
social discipline and settles disputes. The presence of the *khel* members in
all socio-religious ceremonies right from the birth-rites to the obsequies of
the deceased is unavoidable.\(^4\)\(^5\) Apart from the functions as regulatory
and jural authority the *khel* in the past also discharged some responsibili-
ties as an economic unit in the village.\(^4\)\(^6\)

In the plains, every *khuta* or *bamsa* has a house to worship the deities.
The plains Tiwas call it *borghor* or the *nu-baro*, meaning the abode of god.
In the hills, each dwelling house is a *nu-baro*. The compartment at its front
is the place of worship of the deities besides being the store-house of
paddy for the family.

Almost all villages in the hills possess a unique organization called
*samadi*\(^4\)\(^7\) (Plate-1), the dormitory of the boys. Literally, *samadi* means the
place of enjoyment for the boys (*sa = boys, madi = enjoyment*)\(^4\)\(^8\). The boys
use to live in *samadi* till marriage. They learn dance and music, and all
valuable principles of reciprocal help in their corporate life during the

\(^{44}\) *Ring-Chang*, vol. 1. No., 1, p.99
\(^{45}\) Ibid, p. 102
\(^{46}\) Ibid, pp. 102-103
\(^{47}\) The Lalung Society, p. 22
\(^{48}\) The following villages in the hills possess *samadi*: Silaguri, Kromkhunji, Maslaikhunji, Makhaguri,
Mugaguri, Kengabat, Khumaikhora, Amdaba, Bar Amni, Saru Amni, Amswai, Tharakhunji,
Udhankhunji, Silankhunji, Kumnahal, Bar Rongkhoi, Khamlangkunji, Bar Marjong, Umswai,
Lalung Gaon, Thaora Gaon, Ha-Dao, Pongraguri, Mobai, Ubarman Lalung Gaon, Ulukhunji,
Lalung Arcan.
period of their stay in the *samadi*. From architectural point of view, the *samadi* is very much imposing and majestic in its construction. It displays folk aesthetics of the tribe developed in a hilly ecological situation. It is erected over a raised platform supported by large number of stilts. Entry of female into the *samadi* is prohibited. However carvings of developed female breasts called *chujhu*⁴⁹ are used to decorate the beams. Each dormitory has its own hierarchy of functionaries with Sangdoloi and Sangmaj as two superior leaders. The *samadi* lads render community services to any household of the village which needs their help in agricultural work.

The plains Tiwas have lost the tradition of dormitory construction for their boys. However the village at Nambor in the plains of Kathiatoli under Kampur revenue circle and few other villages in the foot-hills possess dormitories. The dormitory at Nambor is different from its counterpart in the hills in terms of constructional pattern and also in terms of its function. The inhabitants of the village call it *ha-samadi* as it is built on *ha* meaning earth, the ground, instead of building on a raised platform.

At its functional level, the *ha-samadi* is never used as the sleeping place for the village lads. Sacrifice of animals is conducted in the *ha-samadi*, but it is forbidden in the *chang-samadi* of the hills.

The three principal columns at the ridge in case of the *samadi* in the hills are known as *thom-thuna*. But in the case of *ha-samadi*, the principal columns are attributed to *hari*, *kabi* and *chala*. There is no need of using a ladder in a *ha-samadi*. But a ladder with nine steps is integrally associated with the construction of a *samadi* in the hills. The nine steps symbolically represent the age of nine for the boys to enter into the dormitory life. The customary number nine is not everywhere followed. The sitting arrangements around the fire-place in the *samadi* are strictly regulated in accordance with the positions of the boys in the hierarchy of dormitory

⁴⁹. *The Lalung Society*, p. 51
society. In Bheraknchi, the three columns of the *samadi* are assigned to Sukai, Mithi and Amchi clans.

*Samadi* is the fountainhead of Tiwa culture. Different festivals of the Tiwas are associated with different agricultural practices of the year. The importance of *samadi* from the point of agriculture is, indeed, great. The *samadi* lads organize *sagra* festival at the beginning of agricultural operation for the year. They are taught singing and dancing in the *samadi* itself.

The traditional functionaries of the *samadi* who are senior in the hierarchy impart lessons on social behaviour besides the performing arts and crafts to the lads who enter into its society. The age of new entry to the dormitory society of the *samadi* is nine. However, the cycle of entry into it is at an interval of five or six years. The new entry is marked by the observance of a festival called the *kheljawa*. The festival also marks the exit of old boys who have completed their period of stay in the *samadi*. It also marks the construction of a new dormitory building when the old one is dismantled. Generally a period of twelve years takes for a reconstruction.

The organization of *samadi* is responsible for creating a strong bond of community living. It builds not only in-group consciousness among the people but also help perpetuation of culture through observances of different socio-religious festivals.