CHAPTER- VII

Cosmetic Tradition, Hair-dos and Jewellery

The investigations reveal that a strong cosmetic tradition is conspicuous by its absence in the traditional society of the hill Tiwas. It is due to the life-style, which revolves round hard work in the agricultural fields or any other work-place, that hardly inspires the people to taste the life of luxury. But the present day perception of cosmetics is somewhat different from the past. The establishment of markets in different places in the habitats of the hill Tiwas and the availability of cosmetic and luxury articles in plenty in these markets increased the interests of women towards them. As such, different articles of luxury have, of late, occupied a significant place in their toilets. The situation is different in the plains. The womenfolk in the plains are already acquainted with numerous articles of luxury available in the markets as well as in the village shops. Young girls have earned considerable knowledge about different cosmetic goods since early age. They have developed systematic practice of anointing, shampooing and perfuming etc. with articles of modern days. Now, all sorts of cosmetic articles are readily available also in the hills. As a matter of fact, cosmetic goods of various types have found their living presence in many households in the hills.

Bathing is a pre-condition of all cosmetic practices. The people generally take daily bath if not the cosmetics regularly. An attempt is made here to derive an idea of the cosmetic practices followed by the Tiwa people in old days when modern cosmetic tradition was not known to them.
All available information reveal that alkali potash called *khar* was used to wash hair. The hill people derived this substance from burning bamboo of soft quality. On the other hand, the people in the plains derived it from burning straws of mustard plants or some other materials. Alkali potash was also derived from plantain trees. Its use was very much popular also among the non-tribals of Assam. It is considered a best detergent for clean wash of *eri* cloth.

The black gram called *mati-mah* in Assamese along with the pounded leaves of *mati-khosora* was considered effective for hair growth. Our informant, Sashiprabha Deori of Bherakuchi village, told the researcher that she had lost her hair and became bald headed in her tender age. The use of black gram and the plant-leaves together stopped hair falling and effectively acted upon hair growth. Now she is a proud owner of a beautiful tuft of hair. She has also let the researcher know that the paste of black gram is effective in removing dirt. It is also effective in keeping the head cool.

The jelli-like substance derived from the acid fruit called *au-tenga* (elephant’s fruit) was used to wash hairs. The use of the substance for washing hair is still popular among some women particularly in the countryside. In the hills, a wild fruit called *sit-khong* was applied to keep hair free from dandruff. The result of using the vegetable wash was that of shampooing. On the other hand, the jelli of *au-tenga* was considered effective in making hairs smooth and slippery, glittering and glossy. Sometimes the pulp of soap-nut fruit was used to wash hairs. Soap-nut fruit is known as *khobor-khuti* among the Tiwas. It is *monichal* in Assamese. Root of the soap-nut tree is a good hair tonic, for it promotes hair growth.1 The fruit pulp is a significant detergent used by every goldsmith to clean the effects of tarnish in silver wares and also for brightening gold ornaments.2

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1. A.C. Dutta: Op-cit, p.-194, entry 1009
2. Ibid.
Drying and tending follow shampooing, cleaning and washing of hair. Preliminary drying is done with a cloth which removes water from the hairs. Thereafter hairs can be kept open allowing to dangle behind the back for drying in air naturally. Hairs are also tucked separately into two or more small knots for a comfortable dry. Scented oil finds mention in the oral songs. (Balairam, *op-cit.* pp 26 & 36) Some of the ingredients, as mentioned in the songs, are gandhbiringa, gathiyan and mutha.

Combs used to remove the tangles in hair were made of bamboo. The comb called jekhat-pari was similar to that of the Assamese kakoi, the redding comb made of bamboo. Jekhat means tangle, while pari denotes the prongs. The tangles in hairs are also called sekat by some (for instance in Bherakuchi). On the other hand, the comb is also called a khojong which stands for the redding comb.

Combing of hairs into some beautiful knots or coiffures is a practice that all women follow for beautification of head. Actually hairs are the sex-symbols of all women. It is most gratifying to them to decorate their hairs and the hair knots with flowers, wild or orchard growing. Folk songs of the Tiwas (those composed in Tiwa language) are some good repositories of names of varieties of flowers. It is said that a young boy entreats his beloved in the name of a flower. The flowers incorporated in the songs were available in the surroundings. Most of the flowers grew wild, only a few were orchard growing. The word khum denotes a flower in Tiwa language. The common flowers were khum-thayung, khum-orlang, khum-tamlong, khum-tilung, khum-parong, khumailuri, khum-thara (only the white variety), khum-jil (tushudi-khum) and khum-dela etc. It is also reported that an artificial flower was made of fibre drawn very carefully from soft bamboo. The fibres so derived were tied together to look like flower. The artificial flower made in this way was called wathi-puma meaning fibres. Lasti Mithi
of Amkhalam village told the investigator that the Tiwa girls were very fond of *keteki* flowers grown wild in their surroundings. The flower did not ripe when it was collected. The process of ripening a *keteki* flower was somewhat different. A wild flower is kept in a heap of paddy husks for as many days it takes to ripe. The flower becomes reddish in colour when it ripens. Its fragrance is exciting as well as alluring. The young girls used to carry a slice of it on their chignons when they attended festivals. In old days, clothes were also perfumed with a slice of it. It was kept on the basket along with the clothes and the clothes were perfumed.

Hair styles were not many among the women of the hills and the plains. The common practice was tucking and binding hairs into a knot. Popular nomenclature of this type of hair dressing is *khopa* in Assamese and *khuni-thung* in Tiwa language. In Tiwa language the word *khuni* denotes hair and *thung* a tuft. Our informant, Lasti Mithi, demonstrated two more forms of hair-dressing known to the women in the past. One of the styles was called *oraw-pakhli-khrana*. The other form was called *khuni-shuba* similar to the one which was popular as *ganthi-khopa* among some non-tribal Assamese. The style of *oraw-pakhli-khrana* was believed to have its resemblance with the scale of elephant fruit (*oraw* = *au* in Assamese, *pakhli* = scale or peel and *khrana* = combing). In this style of hair dressing hairs were set close to the ears on either side of the forepart of the head. Plate-44-i, ii. The settings made the hairs striped on the head. In the second style of hair-dressing, the top part of the tuft of hair was allowed to pass through a knot so that it dangled at the back. Plate - 44-iii

Some of male Tiwas who are stewards of different royal families of the old provinces now dispersed in many localities in the plains, wear flower garlands when they pay public appearances in festivals and on other occasions. But wearing of flower garlands is not customary for them.
In old days people had coloured their teeth. The substance with which they coloured their teeth was sticky and black. It was known as *kaji-la* in the plains and *porang* in the hills. Blackening of teeth was called *khujurlang-hasa* in the hills. The word denotes the teeth of a kind of grasshopper. *Porang* like *kajila* was believed to have prevented damage or decay in the teeth. It was derived from smoke gathered in *harting-khona*. *Harting-khona* is a device which help smoke colouring on the surface of bitter gourds. Plate-51 presents the device. It functions as a colouring device on the surface of a gourd which is placed atop the contrivance.

In old days, the hill women stained their hands and feet with the leaves of *jotoka* plant mixed with the leaves of another plant called *khusum*. Leaves of both the plants were pounded for squeezing and rubbing in the palms. Continuous squeezing and rubbing could give the desired effect of colour. The leaves of the plants were believed to have medicinal properties for curing itching or irritations in the sole caused by earth contact. The *jotoka* plant referred to above was not the Indian henna or the Assamese *jetuka*.

Formerly the Tiwa women in the hills did not wear any sacred mark on their forehead. Dr. Gohain\(^3\) has let us know that they do not wear vermilion or any mark on their forehead after marriage. Wearing of any mark (vermilion or otherwise) on the forehead was a taboo and violation of it could bring mischief leading to death of the woman at the hands of tiger.\(^4\) Now-a-days the women do not hesitate to wear vermilion mark, although the statistics shows a negligible number of wearers. In the plains, however the young girls wear vermilion marks on their forehead to appear in dance recitals.

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3. *The Hill Laiungs*, p-44
4. Ibid, p.55
In the hills, the jewelleries of females are not many. Gold and silver ornaments are known to them, although they have no goldsmiths of their own. All ornaments of old days now available with them were bought from the Khasi hills. Women jewelleries consist of khaitong, khoria, sikini-lo, singli-lo, shab-lo and the strings of beads. Almost all ornaments are exclusive of women except the singli-lo (Singli=chain, lo=garland), which is an ornament of both male and female. Since the hill Tiwas have got no goldsmith, the jewelleries they wear do not present regionality in design as well as in the formation of motifs. As such, the jewelleries are not aesthetically specific of their culture.

Oral songs of the plains Tiwas have furnished us with the names of a good number of jewelleries. Mention may be made of kham-kharu (gam-kharu), gold earnings, silver jewellery, finger ring, har and necklace, diamond jewellery, sona for the ears and neckware studded with jems.\(^5\)

All jewelleries are valuable and as such they are not meant for daily use. On festive occasions, the Tiwa girls in the plains display an ensemble of jewelleries in their hands and neck. Their neckwares consist of a bena, a dholbiri and a galpata Plate-52.

The chiefs of the old provinces of the Tiwas wear majestic ornament as neckware at the time of paying public appearance on special occasions. Plate-18 is a picture of a young king of one of the old principalities. He is accompanied by a host of royal retinues. One of the retinues is holding an arowan, a royal symbol, behind his back. His neckware is a garland studded with mota-moni of the red variety and beads of gold. Plate-37 presents the neckware of the Gobha King.

A description of various ornaments of the hill Tiwas is given below:

1. **Shab-lo**: *Shab* means belt and *lo* is the garland. It is a silver garland made of several strings. There is a locket called *kunthuni* at the centre of the garland. Both male and female wear it. The garland symbolizes the prosperity of the wearer. Plate 38.

2. **Singli-lo**: *Singli* means a chain. Several pieces of chains made of silver are fastened to some silver beads to make the ornament. Plate-39.

3. **Sikini-lo**: The ornament is made of red beads interspersed with silver coins of the denomination of 4 anna. The beads used to make the garland are called *lo-koja* (*lo-* means garland; *koja* denotes red). Plate- 40.

4. **Thoga-lo**: *Thoga* denotes one rupee coin. The garland is made of one rupee coin. Plate- 40.

5. **kolponda**: Several strings made of red or blue or white beads smaller in size are gathered together to make the necklace called *kolponda* (Asamese *golpota*) Plate-39.

6. **Laphalia**: Four strings made of red beads taken together make the ornament.

7. **Lo-phab**: Nine strings made of blue beads interspersed with red beads make the ornament.

8. **Kaliya**: Ear ornament of the fair sex.

9. **Khaidong**: Ear ornament of the fair sex. It is also called *ruphani khaidong* for it is made of silver. Plate-41.


12. Monai-suri: Made of cotton thread. The garland is quite long and is interspersed with bunches of flowers made of threads. The jaskai (cord or lace) attached to it is fastened to the jaskai of the kasong. In old days, the woman who wore it fastened to it a small wallet containing betel-nuts. (Plate-12-ii the thread is partly visible on the right buttock of the wearer).

Plate 38—Shab-lo

Plate-39—From left: Singli-lo, shab-lo, kolponda.

Plate-40—From left: Sikini-lo, thoga-lo, shab-lo

Plate-41: Khaidong

Plate-42: Khoriya

Plate-43: Kundal.