Chapter 5.

Changes in Socio-Political Life

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CHANGES IN SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE

In this chapter, discussion focuses on gradual changes in the field of socio-political life of the Tiwas. There are different types of traditional social and political organizations based on traditional laws and customs which provide self-sufficiency and unity. Some of the institutions are based on clan lineage and others are based on group of the villagers. They signify the general characteristics of tribal political system. Different village level social organizations have different structures and functions. Besides providing unity, self-sufficiency in the lives of the Tiwas, these organizations play a vital role in village level judiciary, cultural, religious and economic life. Some of these institutions are political and religious nature and some are both cultural & economic in character. These organizations are the important part of tribal life. Every village has its own such organizations. The tribal political structure can be divided into two types: Traditional political field and Contemporary political field. The Tiwas too have these traditional and contemporary political structures. These two types have different sub types. Due to the changes in culture and modern democratic set up their traditional socio-political structures are changing along with their growing political consciousness.

5.1. Changes in Social Life:

5.1.1. The Traditional Village Level Organizations of the Tiwas:

The traditional village level organizations of the Tiwas are: (a) Deka-khel or Chamadi (the council of youth or bachelor's dormitory), (b) Burha-khel (the council of elders), (c) Doloi or Gaonburha (the traditional village chief), (d) Borkhel-bichar (a judicial council) and (e) Hadari khel (a working group).
These are secular in nature. These organizations are run by many office bearers selected from among the villagers.

The *Deka-khel or Chamadi* is an organization of all young men above fourteen years of age. Regarding the meaning of the word *Chamadi*, cha means 'boys' and madi means 'enjoyment'. The officials of the *Chamadi* are selected by the *Burha-khel*.

The *Doloi or Gaonburha* is the head of the village. He is selected by the villagers on the basis of organizing capabilities and community wisdom. He presides over the *Mel* (meeting) of the village elders held to try the pretty cases. The *Mel* can inflict punishment on the offenders.

The *Burha-khel* consists of eight members and is a higher judicial authority in the village. The members are selected from the *Deka-khel* who enjoys life-membership in the *Burha-khel*.

The *Borkhel-bichar* is the most popular and prominent rural judicial institution prevalent among the plain Tiwas. They are governed by the customary laws.

Before the advent of the British the Tiwas had their own independent *Rajas* (king) who enjoyed the highest judicial authority. The *Raja* was helped in exercising his judicial power by his subordinate officers such as *Bardololi, Konwar, Patar, Barbarua, Dhaliya, Dalia* and *Paik*. All these ranks were hereditary.

The *Hadari-khel* is a group of young girls in a village. The assistance of *Hadari-khel* is generally sought in agricultural operations. Community feeling and mutual co-operation are the two guiding factors behind the *Hadari-khel*. 
Besides these secular organizations, non-secular organizations too can be found in Tiwa villages. They are run by three office bearers; namely, Loro, Ghorburha or Borjela and Hari kunwari. Loro is the priest of the village. The Ghorburha or Borjela is a religious head of Borghar or head of the clan. This post of Borjela is hereditary. Hari kunwari is a lady religious head. She may be either a married or an unmarried woman.

5.1.2. Structures and Functions of the Traditional Village Level Organizations and the Changing Trends:

The functions of the traditional village level organizations can be classified into categories like (a) Judiciary (b) Economic (c) Cultural & (d) Religious. The traditional structure and functions of the traditional village level social organizations of the Tiwas can be arranged in following ways (Fig. 8:). Among these institutions, some institutions play economic role, some play both judiciary and economic roles and some play socio-religious & socio-cultural functions.

![Fig. 8: Traditional Structures and Functions of the Village Level Organisations of the Tiwas](image)
(a) Judicial Functions: The traditional social organizations of the Tiwas play a vital role in the village judiciary system. The traditional judiciary system is quite effective and powerful among them. This can be arranged in ascending order of importance: Deka-khel or Chamadi, Doloi or Gaonburha, Burhakhel, Borkhel-bichar and Raja.

The Deka-khel or Chamadi holds the lowest position in the ascending order of the organizational structure of the village judicial system having different responsibilities. Chamadi is a large house situated in a village which is constructed on posts about two meters above the ground. It is an open house that is constructed by bamboos, canes and woods (Photo: 8). A festival Kheljawa is celebrated in the Chamadi during the time of the entry of new boys and exit of the old boys. Normally, after every six years a new dormitory is constructed with the celebration of Kheljawa festival. But presently it is celebrated almost after every thirty or forty years when the dormitory needs to be reconstructed. The organization of Deka-khel exists among both the hill and plain Tiwas and is manifest in the form of bachelors' dormitory. Earlier, the officials of the Deka-khel or Chamadi were divided into three distinct groups: the (i) Kharkia-panthai (the junior group), (ii) Panthai (the middle group), and the (iii) Khra-panthai (the senior group). The junior group was expected to follow a strict code of conduct and performed all the work under the directions of Changdoloi (the head of the Deka-khel or Chamadi) while the senior group supervised both the junior groups and played music. The main duty of the junior group was to keep an eye on the conduct of both the senior groups and also of the villagers. If anybody did something wrong in or outside the village then the members of junior group used to inform it to the Changdoloi.

These structures of the dormitory and officials are still being maintained in the hills but in the plain areas they have been changed. Changes have taken place in both the structure of the dormitory and the functions of officials. All the Tiwa villages may not have dormitories. Even where there
are dormitories, they are with changed pattern and functions. They construct it on the ground with the help of bamboo, wood, brick, sand and cement. These types of dormitory houses have been seen in three villages Nambor Lalung gaon, Gurigaon-Banpar Kisam and Silsang during the field study (Photo: 9, 10 & 11). They call it as Xa-Chamadi (xa means land and Chamadi means dormitory). In Silsang area the dormitory house is made in modern style though it is constructed above the ground with help of brick and cement etc. (Photo: 11 & 12). The Thuna khuta (the middle post of the Chamadi) is also found in different shapes. It is a symbol of a phallus, which represents power and fertility. The dormitory officials worship it as a Sivalinga (Photo: 12 & 13). Another change that can be noticed in the dormitory is its officials. The dormitories of the plains have only one group now and that group performs the role of all the three groups that are seen in the dormitories of the hills. Earlier, the council of elder or Burha-khel and the village chief selected the members of the Deka-khel (which is now known as Deka-xari) on the day of Kheljawa festival. But now any one can be a member of Chamadi or Deka-xari at any time by offering a Manoni (an amount of fee offered with betel nut and betel leaf) to the Changdoloi. The leaders Changdoloi and Changmajhi (the assistant of Changdoloi) exercise full control over the boys of the village. Besides other responsibilities, the officials of this institution have to keep an eye on all the villagers and they need to keep the Changdoloi informed from time to time of everything that happens in the village. Generally the officials of the dormitory settle the small disputes or other misconducts of the dormitory inmates. If they fail to settle a case then they refer it to the village chief or Doloi or Gaonburha.

The position of Doloi or Gaonburha is one step higher then the Changdoloi and Changmajhi. The position of Gaonburha is coveted and prestigious one. In each village there is a Gaonburha and he is selected by the villagers. He has the authority to settle intra-village disputes such as conflicts among individuals and give punishment for any socially prohibited act as per the provision of customary laws. He takes decision after discussing the matter
with the council of village elders or *Burha-khel*. Earlier, the Tiwa kings depended heavily on the *Gaonburha* for internal administration of the villages and used to consult with him on all important matters. But nowadays this advantage is enjoyed by both the *Gaonburha* and *Loro*. The *Loro* takes part in the meetings of the *Burha-khel* for settling disputes, announces the punishment.

The council of elders or *Burha-khel* is a higher judicial body in a village. Earlier it consisted of eight members, but now there is no hard and fast rule as to the number of members. But the members must be a *Borjela*. The main function of this council is to settle intra-village disputes and to look after the general welfare of the village. The council takes cognizance of a wrong done in the village when complaint is received through the traditional village chief. The village priest (*Loro*) announces the decision of the council. In this connection mention may be made to S. K. Agnihotri’s comment given in his book *The Lalungs* (1996). He writes:

The cases usually submitted for decision to the council are minor sexual offences, offences relating to property, defamation etc. Through its decisions in such cases, the council will considerable influence over the inter-personal relationships in the village. But such influence is not all pervasive; it works as a check and balance in the institution of village chief.

While the council of the elders is highest secular authority in the village with judicial powers, the executive powers are vested in the village chief aided by the officials of the deka-khel wherever necessary. Although decision on disputes are taken by the council of elders, such disputes are brought to the notice of the council by the village chief who is also responsible for implementing the decisions taken. The Chief is also responsible for releasing and maintaining an account of fines imposed by the council.¹

The council of the elder still functions as a higher judicial body in a village. Although it is now known as *Burha-xari*, but the functions are same as cited above.
Another rural judicial institution is *Borkhel-bichar*. This body is now on the verge of extinction. In earlier days when this institution was in practice, it was constituted by the elderly people of different *Khels*. This institution used to settle disputes in a meeting of the *Borjelas* of various clans. The decision of *Borkhel-bichar* was announced by the *Bichar-majhi* (chief judge). This organization was similar to the *Baro-goya-bichar* (a judicial council) existing in Assamese villages. It is a council of elderly people of different villages. Generally inter village problems are discussed in *Borkhel-bichar*. The function of this organization can easily be understood from the comment of S. K. Agnihotri. He writes:

...anybody contravening the *Borkhel-bichar* is ex-communicated from the village. There are very few cases of disobedience of the orders of *Borkhel-bichar*. There is no system of appeal against this decision. The cases decided upon the *Borkhel-bichar* includes misbehavior, the violation of any social norm by the priest or an officer of the king, laxity in offering to duties on the part of persons who are assigned such duty, and other activities against the interest of the village. The *Borkhel-bichar* also decides upon cases of narrating not approved by the custom. The fine imposed on a boy for marrying a lower caste girl belonging to kaiborta, hari and bania is also finalized in a *Borkhel-bichar*.5

But now the function of this organization is played by the *Burha-xari*. Before the advent of the British, the erstwhile Tiwa Kings used to enjoy the highest judicial power. He was responsible for administering justice according to the traditional system. Khola, Neli, Sahari, Gobha are some of the small principalities where there were Kings. When all the above institutions failed to settle cases, then the matters were brought to the King who gave the final verdict. The duty of the King was to settle disputes between villages. But now the Tiwa kings have ceased to enjoy the judicial power. This is due to the expansion of modern democratic system of administration. Though there are still Tiwa kings in some ancient Tiwa-inhabited areas like Gobha and West Nagaon they enjoy only symbolic status and power. The King of Gobha and West Nagaon themselves admitted that they are now King only in name and
thus have become cultural symbol of their society. Now, they are honoured as kings during the Jonbil mela. (See photos of Chapter: 7)

At present, Deka-xari or Chamadi, Loro, Gaonburha and Burha-xari are to be found in the Tiwa villages of the plains. Among these, the Burha-xari enjoys the highest position in the village judiciary system. Now the hierarchy of these organizations in the village judiciary system can be arranged in ascending order as Deka-xari or Chamadi, Doloi or Gaonburha, Loro and Burha-xari. Tiwas are found to attach much adherence to their socially accepted customary laws and the decisions of the juries of the traditional social institutions are followed in right earnest. Many of such disputes are found to be disposed of without referring to the civil judiciary. This reflects the existence of a well-organized judicial system among the Tiwas. During the field visits, present researcher had come to know that a property dispute of Nambor village was settled in the village. A plot of land was bought by a villager, but the plot was illegally occupied by a non tribal villager. The tribal villager lodged an FIR to the nearest police Thaana. But the police referred the case to the Burha-xari. The Burha-xari recovered the plot from the illegal occupant and thus settled the case.

(b) Economic Functions: On the other hand the Chamadi or Deka-xari and the Hadari-khel play an important role in the economic activities of the village.

The dormitory inmates are responsible for rendering help in agricultural activities to any family of the village at the time of need. Any villager may seek the help of Changdoloi for cultivation of his land. The members of dormitory help the villager in cultivating his paddy field. For this, the dormitory inmates take a nominal charge from the villager. Money collected in this manner will be kept deposited to organize the next Kheljawa festival. Moreover, manual labour is offered by the members of the dormitory on occasions like community pujas and marriage ceremonies in the village.
The dormitory offered opportunity to its members to learn about the skills of the community thus passing the traditional knowledge from earlier generation to the next generation. In the dormitory the boys use to learn how to construct a house and to carve designs and figures on it. They learn to make different types of traditional wooden, cane and bamboo crafts like mat, baskets, furniture. This way they not only earn their livelihood but also contribute to the dormitory fund.

In some places there are separate paddy fields for dormitory inmates. The harvest is stored in a separate granary at the disposal of the Changdoloi. The product belongs to all and is used in the common festivals of the village. The product is consumed on festive occasions. The produce is also given on loan to the needy villagers. During the field work, examples of this kind were experienced in Guri gaon-Banpar kisam. The Chamadi of this village has a separate granary. (Photo: 10)

Another institution that helps in economic activities of the villagers is Hadari-khel. It is a working group of young girls and young boys. The assistance of the Hadari-khel of girls is generally sought in agricultural operations like sowing, planting and harvesting of paddy and for plastering of walls of new houses. Moreover, they render help in making traditional textiles in their looms. The girls who need not attend to domestic chores constitute this group. Generally, the duty is shared equally by all member of the group. Any girl of that group can receive a request from a household. Earlier, the Changdoloi used to receive the request for rendering help in the households and he himself used to select the girls for Hadari-khel of the girls and boys for the Hadari-khel of the boys. The assistance of the Hadari-khel of the boys is generally sought in agricultural operations like ploughing the paddy field, harvesting the paddy and carrying the paddy to household. Earlier, help was rendered to the needy villagers without taking money. But the villagers had to offer rice beer and feast to them. This tradition is known as Haori-mata. This practice is still prevalent. Nowadays, both boys and girls of the Hadari-khels
charge some amount from the villagers in lieu of their help. Both the groups consist of six to eight members.

(c) Religious Functions: Besides these functions, the traditional village level organizations of the Tiwas function over religious matters too.

The Loro, Ghorburha or Borjela and Hari-kunwari are the three religious heads, without which there cannot be any religious ceremony in the village and Borghar. The Loro presides over all of the religious functions of the village. He is assisted by Hadari and Changdoloi. The Ghorburha or Borjela presides over the Pujas held in Borghars and offers oblations to the ancestors of a Bargsha or Khuta. They take part in all types of religious ceremonies with the help of selected official from Burha-xari and Deka-xari. Hari-kunwari renders help in all of the pujas celebrated in the Borghars. Generally, she prepares all the offerings for the deities and ancestors in the Borghar.

The officials of Deka-xari or Chamadi, Burha-xari and also the Doloi render help to the villagers in all types of ceremonies and function related to birth, death and marriage. They also render help to the village people in household Pujas and ceremonies. Nowadays some changes have taken place in the plain Tiwa villages.

There is a group of six elderly persons called Oja-khel. All the members of this group are supposed to be good singers as well as experts in playing musical instruments. The main duty of this group is to play music and dance during festivals and religious ceremonies. The boys of Deka-xari learn music, songs and dance from the members of Oja-khel in the Chamadi during festival season. The chief of this group is known as Oja-khel-baro.

(d) Cultural Functions: The officials of Chamadi the officials of Burha-xari and Doloi play an important role in Socio-cultural activities. The officials of
village institutions play important roles in organizing festivals. Some of the important festivals are: *Kheljawa*, *Jongkhong* (a festival related to agriculture), *Sagra-mechewa* (a spring festival) and *Bisu or Bihu* etc. The *Deka-xari*, under the leadership of *Changdoloi* has an important role in the festivals in providing music & dance. The members of *Burha-xari* also perform music and dances in festivals. In the *Sagra-mechewa* festival the members of *Burha-xari* perform a peculiar type of dance and music. The members of *Deka-xari* have to learn it only during the time of performance at the festival. Normally, they can learn or rehearse other dances or music in any time and at any place. The members of the dormitory have different responsibilities in different festivals. Moreover, boys learn different types of dances, music, songs, related to their culture in the dormitory. This function of the dormitory is found to be more prevalent in the plain Tiwa villages.

Among all these social institutions *Chamadi* plays a vital role in the life of the Tiwas. The contribution of *Chamadi* can be noticed in every sphere of their life viz. village judiciary, cultural life, economic life and religious life. Moreover, *Chamadi* functions as a centre of non-formal education in earlier times. Boys get vocational training, agricultural knowledge, knowledge about community life, economic activities and everything necessary for their future from the senior members of the *Chamadi*.

Nowadays the dormitory seems to be a pale shadow of its past glory. Now, in the plains boys do not stay in dormitory, because they have to go to the schools and colleges. They assemble in the dormitory only during a festival. Moreover, the new generation has lost their interest to spend time in *Chamadi*.

After verifying the historical data, collected from different sources with the primary data collected from fields, it is found that changes have taken place in both the structure and functions of the village level social organizations. Hence, the structure and the functions can be divided into two
categories the **traditional structure and functions** and **modern structure and functions**. The Fig. 8: shows traditional structures and functions of village level organizations. The modern structures and their functions are shown in Fig. 9: bellow:

![Diagram of Modern Structures and Functions of the Village Level Organisations](image)

**Fig. 9**: Modern Structures and Functions of the Village Level Organisations of the Tiwas

### 5.2. Political Organization and Changes:

There are different types of tribal political associations. L. P. Vidyarthi and B. K. Rai stated in their book *The Tribal Culture of India* that the political characteristics of tribals may broadly be looked at through their social organizations viz. (i) political association based on their clan lineage, (ii) political association based on the village and (iii) political association of a group of villagers or territory. According to them the political structure of the tribal people can be divided into two types: Traditional Political Field and Contemporary Political Field. The Traditional Political Field is the product of their traditional political life where political affairs are combined with social and religious affair. The Contemporary Political Field has emerged out of culture changes, culture contact, and the mode of electing the village chief...
under the existing democratic set up. These two types have sub types. These socio-political characteristics can be found in case of the Tiwas also.

5.2.1. The Traditional Political Field of the Tiwas:

It is a general fact that every tribal village has its own village council consisting of members selected from among the elderly villagers. Tiwa villages also have village council and officials of different status outside the purview of the civil judiciary of the state, which are the part of their traditional political system. These types of village councils and officials play a vital role in the village judiciary system. Makhan Jha has described these institutions as ‘Judicial machinery’ of tribal people.

The traditional political institutions of the Tiwas can be divided into following ways that are based on clan, village and group villagers or territory.

(i) Institutions based on clan/lineage: Raja, Loro, Doloi and Borjela or Ghorburha.

(ii) Institutions based on village: Chamadi or Deka-xari and Bura-xari.

(iii) Institutions based on group of villagers or territory: Borkhel-bichar.

The Tiwa king was the highest judicial authority in traditional political system based on the first category- clan/lineage. But he enjoyed highest position amongst all institutions based on above three categories. The king was responsible for administering justice in the traditional system. The function of king was to settle the cases relating to disputes among the villages and other inter-village problems. But now king is a titular one and he has nothing to do with judicial system. The king is now only a cultural icon. Earlier, the Tiwas have small principalities ruled by their Satu-raja (seven kings) and Pasu-raja (five kings) within the state of Assam.
Another political institution based on the clan/ lineage is *Doloi* or *Gaonburha*. He is selected by the villagers. He has the authority to settle different intra-village disputes such as conflicts among individuals, any illegal act and relationship etc. by applying customary laws. He takes decision in consultation with the council of village elders (*Burha-khel or Burha-xari*). Earlier, the Tiwa king was used to depend heavily on the village chiefs for internal administration.

The *Loro* and the *Gharburha or Borjela* are the two religious heads. But they take part in the judicial matters of the village too. Particularly the *Loro* has a special place in village judiciary system. He announces the award of punishment to the offenders in a meeting. The trial is based on the Tiwas' traditional laws and customs which are unwritten and related to their religious beliefs.

The *Chamadi* and the *Burha-xari* are two traditional political institutions which are based on the second category- **village**. The members of *Chamadi* are a group of young boys and the *Burha-xari* is a group of elders. The leaders *Changdoloi* and *Changmajhi* exercise full control over the youths of the village. Generally the officials of the dormitory settle the small disputes or other misconducts of the officials of the dormitory and the villagers. The council of elders or *Burha-xari* is a higher judicial authority in the village. The main function of this council is to settle intra village disputes and to look after the general welfare.

The traditional political institution based on the third category- **group of the villagers or territory** is *Borkhel-bichar*. It is constituted by the elderly people of different *khels*. It settles the disputes in a meeting of the village elders mostly *Borjelas* of various clans. The functions of this organization now play by the *Burha-xari*. It is a council of elderly people of different clans. Generally inter village problems are discussed here.
Historically the king was at the highest position of the hierarchy. But now kings do not play any role in political field. As discussed earlier, the position and function of a king is now cultural. Now the highest position is held by the *Burha-xari*. The hierarchy of the traditional political institutions of the past and present can be arranged in ascending order as follows in Fig. 10: and Fig. 11: respectively.

Fig. 10: Hierarchy of the Traditional Political Field of the Past

Fig. 11: Hierarchy of the Traditional Political Field of the Present
5.2.2. The Contemporary Political Field of the Tiwas:

It is a phenomenon to be observed generally that the contemporary political field is growing fast in all the tribal areas and is replacing the traditional political set up of the tribes. In India the traditional political field of the tribals is affected since the time of British rule and the replacement of the traditional political field with modern democratic setup has been started from the time of independence. In some areas, with the establishment of modern democratic setup, the traditional tribal political system gradually entered into the fold of contemporary political fields of the concerned state government. In the case of Tiwas their traditional political fields still remain intact along with the contemporary political fields.

The contemporary political fields constitute competing village leaders, the statutory panchayat and emergent regional and district councils that have a direct relation to the state government.

In the Tiwa inhabited areas, the Sorkari gaon-burha (gvt. village headman) is a statutory officer. In one statutory panchayat there are many villages. The Sorkari gaon-burha is different from the traditional village chief of the Tiwas (Doloi or Gaon-burha). The Sorkari gaon-burha plays a part in respect of settling the village problems. He is the link to the district council and also to the Block Development Officer and the Gram sevak. The member of District council of the area contacts the village headman for developmental works in the village as well as for helping him during election. The Sorkari Gaon-burha plays role in matters related to election to the local bodies. The district council appoints the Sorkari gaon-burha to liaison between the administration and the villagers.
5.2.3. Changing Scenario: From the Traditional to Contemporary Political Field:

Gobha was known to be the ancient principality of the Tiwas. The Gobha ‘king’ is the king of the Tiwas. There have been twenty five ‘kings’ known to have ruled over Gobha till date. Gobha is situated at the east of Nokhula hill. The word ‘Gobha’ might have come from the word ‘Guha’ (cave). There is a myth which reveals the fact about their ancient kings. The story had it that in ancient time, the Tiwas were living in the Khaurang region of Jaintia hill. The capital of the Tiwa king Arimatta was in Gobha. The story had it that he killed his father by mistake. He became very upset and left his principality and leaving the reign in the hands of minister Samudra. He started to live at Kumdang hill. The Tiwas living in the Kumdang region (Kumai) introduced themselves as the descendents of Satoraja (seven kings). Those are (1) Kumai (2) Tarani (3) Bagara (4) Telelia (5) Kachari Goan (6) Sukhnaggia (7) Ghaghewa raja. Later on, the kings of these seven small principalities were known as Puwali raja. After the death of the king Arimatta, his two sons Gajanka and Mriganka become kings. In course of time, Gajanka accepted a new name i.e. Jongalbalahu and established his capital at Jongal Gar, near Raha. Mriganka came to be known as Ratna Singha. He established his kingdom at Dimoria. The myth had it that Jongal Balahu killed his father Arimatta. Tiwa are still to be found in great number around the embankment known as ‘Jongal Balahu Gar’. The Pasuraja (five kings) also inhabit the vicinity of this place. They are the kings of Tupakusia, Barapujia, Mikir Gaya, Phulaguria and Khaigoria.

There is a myth which reveals the fact that when they came down from Khaurang to the plains of Assam they had 12 clans. King Arimatta also appointed 12 officials in his kingdom for the smooth functioning of his administration. On the other hand he also engaged 12 priests (Doloi) for purifying his sin of killing his father. These Doloi are the representatives of the common people. Thus a republican type of administration has been
maintained till sixteenth century. The Kingdom came under the reign of Ahoms in sixteenth century. Moneswar Deuri, a Tiwa writer, commented in his writings that the ruling system of the Tiwas before the rise of Ahom kingdom was republican type. Not only the Tiwas but also every Mongolian tribes of Assam had a republican type of administration under a chief. Regarding this Sir Edwar Gait commented as follows:

...There was no strong national spirit or other cohesive element among the Mongolian tribes of Assam, and their natural condition was probably that of a number of small communities, each under its own chief or headman, and independent of its neighbours; a state of things, in fact very similar to that which existed at the time of the British conquest among the Garos, Khasis and Nagas, whose organization in many cases was of a distinctly republican type. From time to time a local chief of unusual enterprise and ambition, or possibly some Kshatriya adventurer, would reduce these petty states and make himself master of the whole country.

At the time of the down fall of Ahom kingdom the British came to India. The first king under the British rule was Dakhar Singh. Latter on, Rai Sing, Rup Sing and Kumal Sing etc. were appointed respectively as the king of Gobha. After India became independent, all of the small principalities of the Tiwas have been dissolved under the contemporary political system. In the constitution of India, the Tiwas and many other tribal groups like Bodo, Kachari, Mising etc, have been listed as scheduled tribe of Assam.

Towards the Autonomy Movement:
The tribal communities of Assam took part in the freedom movement of India. The non-violence movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi became successful in attaining the independence of India in 1947. There was high hope that the independence would bring all kinds of development into the educational, economic and political spheres. But in reality that did not happen. The tribal communities of Assam too did not make any considerable progress in educational, economic and socio-political spheres of their life after independence. Earlier, the tribal communities were not politically conscious. They were the part of the larger Assamese society. All of the castes and tribes
of Assam were known as Assamese. Most of the Tiwas of the plains of Assam were assimilated with the Assamese caste Hindus. They are mainly influenced by the Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva and accepted his religious philosophy. But gradually they become conscious about their cultural and political identity.

Almost all the tribal communities of Assam have been continuing a struggle for the demand of their self control after independence of India. The Bodos, the Karbis, Missings, Rabhas and the Kuch Rajbanshis are the main groups amongst them. These tribal communities have started autonomy movements for their self control in the form of protest against the administration of Assam. Since 1980s the revival of these tribal communities has influenced the social, political and economic life of Assam. The Tiwas too started a strong democratic movement in central Assam for their autonomy. The Tiwas represented by the Lalung Darbar and Lalung Youth Front have been demanding creation of an autonomous district within Assam since 1967. The All Tiwa Students Union (ATSU) joined the movement for creation of an autonomous district within Assam in 1989. The Autonomous Lalung District Demand Committee (ALDDC) representing various Lalung organizations- the Lalung Darbar, The All Assam Tiwa Samrnilan and Lalung Youth Front submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam on 10 May 1993 for creation of an autonomous Lalung District Council for the Tiwas. The demand was made for proper and all round development of the Tiwas in order to protect and maintain their separate identity, and to obtain political and administrative powers for fulfillment of their genuine aspirations.

On 10 December 1993, the All Tiwa Students Union, the All Tiwa Women’s Association, The Tiwa Cultural Society and Tiwa Sahitya Sabha submitted separate memoranda to the Chief Minister of Assam demanding creation of a Tiwa Autonomous District under the provision of sixth schedule of the constitution of India. Their other demands include recognition of the Tiwa language and acceptance of Roman script for writing the language and
introduction of Tiwa language at school level in Tiwa dominated areas. A memorandum of settlement regarding the demand of autonomy of the Tiwas was signed on 13th April, 1995 at Guwahati between the Chief Secretary of the Government of Assam and the authorized representatives of the Autonomous Lalung District demand committee.\textsuperscript{12}

5.3. Conclusion:

Before the British annexed this part of the country into their empire, the Tiwas had their own separate small principalities and kings. Though they were initially indifferent towards politics or political rights, but later on they became conscious about their political right. Tiwas became organized among themselves and started demanding for political autonomy. Earlier, they liked to introduce themselves as Assamese though they had their unique tribal culture and political system based on traditional laws and customs. Gradually they became self-conscious and the ongoing assimilation process with Assamese is interrupted. They are now trying to establish themselves as culturally and politically separate entity within the greater Assamese fold.

\textit{Tiwas had well organized traditional political system based on local customs and traditions which had been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Their traditional administrative system was based on village level organizations. It reflected the existence of a well organized republican type of administration in earlier times. This system is by and large still prevailing in the villages. These organizations provide them unity, self sufficiency in all aspects of their life. These organizations had not only contributed towards judicial field but also to the cultural, religious and economic spheres. These organizations were instrumental in preservation of their rich cultural heritage. For example \textit{Chamadi} is still functioning as a centre for training in handicrafts, dance and music. All welfare works involving the entire village community are still taken up by the members of \textit{Chamadi}. The main purpose of the \textit{Chamadi} is to ensure that boys understand and follow the organized}
system of the tribal society and the community life of a village. But a trend of change has been occurring in their society. The developmental activities including spread of education and proselytization may be seen as some of the reasons for decline of the colorful and glorious traditional organizations. Though it becomes increasingly difficult for the traditional institutions to withstand the pressure of the changing situation, even then Chamadi is still capable of maintaining the law and order within the village, in preserving traditional culture and in keeping up the spirit of co-operation among its members. This is possible due to the adherence and reliance of the Tiwas to their traditions and customary laws. The efficiency of these systems reflects the inherent strength of the village community. But by the influence and entrance of modern democratic ruling system, this type of well organized traditional ruling system is almost vanishing out from many Tiwa villages. However, many villages are still maintaining their traditional social organizations along with modern democratic set up.
Notes:


2 *Loro* is the priest of the village. The *Gharburha or Borjela* is a religious head of the *Borghar*, *Bangsha* or *khuta* and the *Bangsha* or *Khuta* consists of many families of same clan. The *Hari-kunwari* is also a lady head of *Borghar*. *Borghar* is a religious praying hall of a *Bangsha or khuta*. Every clan has their separate *Borghars*.

3 Sailendra Kumar Agnihotri, op.cit. 15.

4 *Khel* consists of the members of different *bangsha or khuta*. And *bangsha or khuta* consists of many families of same clan.


7 Ibid. 201.


10 Ibid. 77.


12 Sailendra Kumar Agnihotri, op.cit. 115.
Photo 8: Traditional Pattern of Chamadi

Photo 9: Changing Pattern of Chamadi or Xa-Chamadi

Photo 10: Changing Pattern of Chamadi with Granary
Photo 11: 
A modern Chamadi

Photo 12: 
Shape and Design of Thuna Khuta (1)

Photo 13: 
Shape and Design of Thuna Khuta (2)
Photo 14: Inmates of Chamadi during Chagra Misawa Festival

Photo 15: Inmates of Chamadi in an Occasion of Festival

Photo 16: A meeting of a Burha-xari