Chapter 6.

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CHANGES IN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

The trend of religious transformation has been noticed amongst the tribes of India since the first half of twentieth century. Since the pre-British period, the tribes of India have been showing a tendency of going over to the fold of Hinduism. With the Britishers in our country, the dynamics of religious transformation changed with the addition of Christianity in socio-religious dimension. This happened in Assam too. Like other tribes, traditionally the Tiwas were also animistic. But gradually, in the plains of Assam they had been absorbed into the fold of Hinduism, particularly the Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva. Likewise they came under the influence of other religions too. Such conversions into other religious faiths were accompanied with certain changes in their socio-cultural life such as food habit, ceremonial observances and daily household activities. It is not that all the tribes have accepted one or the other formal religions. Some of the tribes of Assam still have retained their tribal identity to some extent. But it is also a fact that they are attracted towards the liberal philosophy and relatively easy norms and practices of other religious traditions. The extent of acceptance of new religious philosophy and ideas has led the people to a state of social environment that stands out due to its uniqueness. The newly initiated tribal people have not been given a relatively high position in their accepted religious spheres. Again, on the other hand the tribes have not totally given up their age old traditions. Thus, simultaneously they have traditional as well as newer dispensation. This situation seems to have created intra-tribal tension. The present discussion focuses on the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Tiwas and the changes that have taken place.
6.1. Religion: The Concept:

Religion is a socio-cultural system which is based on beliefs and practices. Religion is a universal feature of human culture that helps man to overcome the tensions of life. But the religious practices of different society are not universally the same. They vary from society to society. As such, religion can never be fully understood in isolation from a society. Any study of religion must begin by observing and describing beliefs and behavioural patterns, but such study will become significant only when it is related to their social meaning and functions. Religion has a significant influence upon economic, politics, family pattern and modernization amongst other facets of life. The influence is always mutual; secular institutions in turn affect the religious forms, values and beliefs. William A. Haviland says that:

Religion may be regarded as the beliefs and patterns of behaviour by which humans try to deal with what they view as important problems that cannot be solved through the application of known technology or technique of organization. To overcome these limitations people turn to the manipulation of supernatural being and powers.\(^1\)

Religion may thus be understood as a system of attitudes, behaviour patterns, beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people attempt to cope with the ultimate problem of human life.

In every religious system, there are three parts. First, there is the philosophy, which presents the whole scope of that religion, setting forth its basic principles, the goal and the means of achieving the goal. The second part is mythology, which is philosophy made concrete. It is the abstraction of philosophy concretized in the more or less imaginary lives of men and supernatural beings. Third is the ritualistic part. This is still more concrete and is made up of forms and ceremonies, various physical attitudes etc. Radcliffe Brown gave more emphasis on studying rites while studying religion. The same view has also been expressed by Loisy and opined that rites are the most stable and lasting elements in religion.\(^2\)
6.2. Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Tiwas:

Animistic beliefs and practices involving the worships and propitiation of various Gods and Goddesses have since time immemorial formed the core of the religious ideology among the Tiwas. Most of these beliefs and practices are based on the worship of nature and offering sacrifices. They worship and propitiate for personal as well as group welfare and to secure success, mental and physical wellbeing in life. The religious beliefs and practices of the Tiwas are an integral part of the overall pattern of social conduct in all spheres. Sacrificial practices, ancestor worship and the use of rice beer in every religious occasion are the main characteristics of their religious practices.

Lord Mahadeo (Siva) is the supreme God of the Tiwas and He is symbolized by the zela or sacred arrow in the place of worship. He is the protector of crops, of agricultural fields and human beings. He is the presiding deity of Borghar, Thaanghar and the bachelors’ dormitory in the village. All worships begin with a prayer to Lord Mahadeo.

Besides Lord Siva, the Tiwas worship many deities in Borghar, Thaanghar and Namghar. The Borghar is a place of worship for each clan while the Thaanghar and the Namghar are the places for community worship. The Borghar has two altars: one for the presiding deity and other for the ancestors. They place a pot and a Lang-khui (sword) in the Borghar (Photo 19: ). Near the altar, there is a Thuna khuta (sacred wooden post) and a figure made of four bamboo post. It is known as Rangdoswari. Rongdo means rice. Every year freshly harvested rice is kept in a pot near this altar and it is called Rangdaswori. This rice pot is to be substituted by a new pot in the next year. The old one is used in the feast of taking new rice known as Na-khua. Before harvesting the new Sali paddy every year, a heap of Sali paddy is collected at one auspicious night of a Wednesday and binds it with the Thuna khuta inside the Borghar. The Borghar is considered as a very sacred place by the Tiwas.
Unlike Namghar, the Borghar can not be used for holding any Mel or discussion.

The hill: Tiwas worship stone images of deities in the Barghar, while their counterparts in plains do not install any image on the altar. Of course the Zela or Tripod is found in their altar which is a symbol of lord Siva. Another important God worshiped by the Tiwas is Jal-thal-devata who as his name signifies, is the presiding deity of land and water. Another deity is Charibhai chari kora who is the presiding deity of bamboo and grove and the spring festival. Apart from these main deities many others are also worshiped in Borghars and Thaanghars. Among them Ganesh, Parameswar etc. are their benevolent male deities while Aai Gosani, Lakham, Padumi, Kalika, Kamakhya, Saru Aai, Bor Aai, Kani Andheli are the important benevolent Goddesses. Besides these, certain puja and ceremonies are also held in the Borghar. Deo Sewa, Kalika puja, Bhakat sewa and Rati Sewa are some of them.

There are separate Thaans for individual god or goddess like Mahadeo, Sani, Kalika and Kesaikhati. Though the sacrificial practices were prevalent in ancient time, presently no sacrifice is offered in Thaanghar and Namghar worship. Gram, banana, betel nuts and leaves are offered as offerings. Basundhari Thaan, Mahadeosal Thaan and Deosal Thaan are some famous Thaans of Tiwa people. Namghar is a new edition to their culture. Generally each village has one Namghar. But having more than one Namghar in a single village is also not rare.

The Loro, the Ghorburha or Borjela and the Hari kunwari are the three religious heads. The village priest or the Loro performs all the religious functions in a village. He is not a preceptor, but a specialist in the traditional priestly functions. His position is not hereditary. He has an assistant known as Hadari whom he selects himself. The Loro exercises important power in the matters of religious and social law. He is only a priest of the village but he
does not have to lead an extraordinarily sanctimonious life. Another religious head, the Gharbura utters Mantras in their prayers in the Borghar. Mantras are differing from clan to clan. The mantras are unwritten and the Ghorbura learns these from his predecessors. The Tiwas call the ‘Mantras’ as Bedang. The Hari kuwanri helps the Ghorbura in performing religious functions in Borghars.

Besides worshiping above deities in the Borghar Thaanghar and Namghar, the Tiwas observe some other important religious ceremonies. Those are Jongkhong puja, Dew sewa, Bhakat sewa, Bhitor sewa and Sani puja. In an agrarian society, the communication between the human beings and supernatural world is made due to secure protection from the supernatural beings for the agricultural field and household activities. Shyam Choudhury and M. M. Dasarof opinion that

The intercourse of the Tiwas with the supernatural world of the deities is characterized by a desire to secure their livelihood, specially agriculture. There is a systematic order of rationalization, in which the deities are propitiated. Rituals are the means to establish a link with the deities, but it is not an end in itself. The importance of the priest is that he is specialized in the technicalities and knows the incantations. Naturally he makes them into a secret of trade, and is very wary in letting others into it. This enables him to monopolize the intermediation between them and the Gods, so that the supernatural help can be sought only through him.4

6.3. Continuity and Change:

Continuity is holding on to the legacy of cultural heritage handed down through generations. Change is usually construed as being adaptation by which a society faced with evolving paradigm ‘adopts’ to the changing expectations. Though changes in religion may occur in any of its three elements, yet more often than not, an understanding of change and continuity is limited to the more concrete aspects of religion viz. forms, rituals and ceremonies. Change in the rituals and ceremonies affect its appearance- the ‘form’, the essence or ‘spirit’ of religion remaining intact. However, if there
were a significant shift in its philosophy, the religion would lose its 'spirit', clinging to dead appearances, but having lost the very core of its cultural heritage.

Now-a-days considerable changes have taken place among the Tiwas in the mode of worship. Sacrifices are rarely resorted to. The offering constitutes pulses like phaseolus mungo - a kind of bean, gram and banana in the Namghar and the Thaanghar. Here, the influence of Neo-vaishnavism of Sankardeva can be seen. Changes have taken place in their Borghar worship, community worship, and house hold activities and most importantly in the case of their religious ideology.

6.3.1. Observations on Borghar, Thaanghar and Namghar Worship:

Generally, Deo-sewa, Bhakat sewa, Kalika puja are observed in a Barghar but now the mode of worship in the Barghar is changed. Now, there are two types of Barghars: Kesa Borghar and Poka Borghar. Along with above mentioned pujas the Tiwas celebrate Bhitor sewa puja inside the Poka Borghar which is similar to the Rati sewa puja. The Bhitor sewa puja is celebrated during the month of February and March. The actual time of celebration differs from clan to clan. It is celebrated at night. The door of the Borghar should be closed from inside during the puja. The main deity of this puja is Badal Maji, which is another name of Lord Siva. Most significant thing of this puja is the sacrifice of pig and fowl but the procedure of sacrifice is different from other sacrificial practice.

Informant Nandi Pator and Jageswar Bordoloi of Jorabari gaon and Chitraram Deori of Bundura gaon informed the Bhakatas chant mantras from a manuscript known as Digambori puthi invoking God to kill the pig and the fowl. This process is known as Jiva-uruwa. While chanting the mantras, the Bhakatas keep their hands on the pig or fowl and thus the creatures die. But another informant Gakul Bordoloi informed that animals die because of
suffocation put by the Bhakatas. Rice, pork and chicken curry, rice beer, banana and rice powder are offered to the deity during this Puja.

In the Kesa Borghor they observe some Pujas like Na-axusia sabah for the purification and wellbeing of the new born babies of a Bangsha, Pritimatri matrir sewa for their ancestors, Dhanor gush lua puja before going for agricultural work and Dhanor muthi lua puja before harvesting the paddy. During the field work it is observed that the Pujas celebrated inside the Borghar is somewhat different from clan to clan and village to village.

Most of the Tiwas of Jarabari village observes Satya Narayan Puja (a religious ceremony of the Hindus) inside the Borghar which is a religious practice of the Hindus. Only banana and rice powder are used in this Puja.

Thaan worship is prevalent among the Tiwas from earlier times. Though Thaan worship is mainly concerned with the worship of Lord Siva, they have different Thaans for different Gods and Goddesses like Kalika, Durga, Lakshmi, Kesaikhati, Bhagawati and Sani. Earlier, sacrifices were a must during the puja. But at present offerings which contain banana, gram, betel leaves and nuts are used in the place of sacrifices.

Same situation is also observed in case of Namghar worship. The mode of Namghar worship is different from village to village. There are pictures or images of various Gods and Goddesses in one Namghar. In the Nambor village the Tiwas do not follow the Vaisnava rituals like celebrating the Janmastomi (birth anniversary of Lord Krishna), the Tithi of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva (birth/death anniversary of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva) and the daily congregation in the holy month of Bhada (August-September). But the whole village celebrates a religious ceremony once a year inside the Namghar which is known as Bor-Sabah. This ceremony has the elements of both traditional and Vaisnava worship systems. Seven Axonas (temporary image for prayer) inside the Manikut (Sanctum sanctorum) are installed for
worshiping in this ceremony. At the end of this ceremony the Axonas are kept in a Nauka (boat) made of the bark of banana tree. Some people holding the Nauka move around the Namghar seven times. The women sing the Namkirtan (religious chorus of Sankardeva's Neo-vaishnavism) while they move around the Namghar. After that, they let the boat float in a river. It is a belief among them that all evil spirit of the village will flow along with this Nauka. Besides this celebration, the Kirtana, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are also recited here. The Ainam (prayer for chicken pox) is also observed in Namghar.

6.3.2. Observations on Jongkhong Puja as a Traditional Village Level Worship:

Jongkhong puja is a community religious ceremony and is related to agricultural activities, celebrated in the month of May-June before the paddy fields are ploughed for next plantation. The village priest Loro performs all the necessary rituals in this ceremony and he is assisted by Hadari and Ojha. The purpose of this puja is to pray for good harvest, to read the omens to determine whether the crops will be bountiful or not and also to protect the villagers from the evil spirit. The villagers select a place in the paddy field for this puja. Then they make a small altar of mud and seven bamboo stems are planted in front of the altar. The main puja is performed by sacrificing pig, goat and fowl. The village priest reads omen by cutting eggs. If the egg is clean it is good omen and if it contains spots then it is a bad omen. He also reads omen by examining the internal organ of the sacrificed pig and fowl. There after the meat is cooked and offered to the deities. The cooked food is consumed with rice beer (zu). The main deities of this ceremony are Mahadeo, Jal-thal-devata, Bagh raja and Chari-bhai chari-kora. Specific items are offered to each deity. Mahadeo is offered a pot of zu (rice beer) and areca nuts; Jal-thal-devata is offered areca and betel nuts, rice and basil leaves. Bagh raja is offered a heap of rice topped by an egg on banana leaves and the Chari-bhai chari-kora is also offered the same thing of Bagh raja. There is
tradition of taking a pot of rice beer and a fowl to the puja whoever comes to join. After performing this puja they are free to start work at paddy field for the next cycle of crops. The Nambor village of Nagaon District still celebrates this ceremony every year (Photo: 25, 26 and 27). The use of basil leaves is a noticeable change in this religious ceremony.

6.3.3. Impact of the Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva:

Caste system is not that rigid in Assam. Sankardeva’s teachings have contributed a lot towards this. Neo Vaisnavism introduced by him is monotheistic in nature and does not subscribe to caste rigidity. He was a great socio-religious and socio-cultural reformer of Assam as his advent gave a new shape to Assamese society. He had not only contributed to the field of religion but also to literature, music and theatre of Assam. Assam has been the meeting ground of different races and cultures. Sankardeva’s Neo-Vaisnavism was instrumental in binding these people within the fold of one religion i.e. Ekaxaran nam-dharma. Unlike Polytheism, Animism, Trantricism and Saktism consisting of animal sacrifice, Sankardeva’s religious philosophy is based on monotheistic Bhakti cult. Here devotion is centered only on the Lord Krishna. He introduced a simple mode of worship consisting of prayers, hymns and Nam kirtana (religious chorus) composed in simple language. The essence of Sankardevas Vaisnavite philosophy was derived from the Srimadbhagavata Puran, the holy scripture of the Hindus. He introduced two religious institutions the Namghar and the Satra, which control the morality and ethics of the Assamese Hindus. Namghar is a village level community prayer hall. But the Satras are monasteries, seat of a religious head (the Satradhikara), where the Assamese culture is cultivated by the devotees of Satras. The Satras came into existence in the first part of sixteenth century which eventually became an indispensable part of the Assamese socio-cultural life.
Sankardeva’s Neo-Vaisnava philosophy has contributed a lot to abolish the age old social discriminations like castes that prevailed in the greater orthodox Hindu society. His philosophical ideology was based on Humanism and Liberalism which are manifested in his writings:

\[
\begin{align*}
  & \textbf{Brahmanar Chandalara Nibichari Kul} \\
  & \textbf{Datata Chorata Jen Dristi Samatul} \\
  & \textbf{Nicata Sadhuta jar bhaila ekgyan} \\
  & \textbf{Tahakese pandito bulo sharbajan}^5
\end{align*}
\]

(A high born, a low born, a rich, a poor, a wise or a thief - consider all as equal). Another similar humanitarian epithet is as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
  & \textbf{Kukura Chandala Gardabharo Atma Ram} \\
  & \textbf{Janiya Savako Pari Kariba Pronama}^6
\end{align*}
\]

(God is in everywhere. Gog is in a dog, an ass and a scavenger. So, respect them all). It is manifest in the other work of Sankardeva that his Vaisnava faith has no caste and race distinction:

\[
\begin{align*}
  & \textbf{Kirata kachari khasi garo miri} \\
  & \textbf{yavana kanka goala} \\
  & \textbf{asama muluka rajaka turuka} \\
  & \textbf{kuvacha mlechcha chandala} \\
  & \textbf{ano jata nara Krishna sevakara} \\
  & \textbf{sangata pavitra haya}^7
\end{align*}
\]

The Kirata, the Kacharis, the Garos, the Miris, the Javanas, the Kankas, the Goalas, the Assamas (Ahoms), the Mlechas, the Rajakas, the Turukas (Muslims), the Kuvachas, the Mechas, the chandalas, and other become pure in the company of the devotees of Krishna. May be, so, a large section of people living in Assamese and neighboring states, regardless of caste, creed or
language attracted towards this type of religious ideology of Sankardeva and got converted into the Neo-Vaisnava faith. Sankardeva himself also took initiative in this matter. He accepted a large number of Brahmins and Sudras including Kaibarttas and Other Backward Classes (OBC) besides a Muslim, a Garo, a Bhutiya, a Mising, a Naga, a Kachari and an Ahom as his disciple. Dr. Birendra Nath Dutta has written that Govinda, a Garo who had risen to be an atai (a devotee of high status) was a favourite disciple of Sankardeva. 8

Initially Madhabdeva, the great disciple of Sankardeva was known to be a follower of Saktism. But he was attracted to the fold of Sankardeva’s Neo-Vaisnavism and soon became an ardent follower principal disciple of Sankardeva. He holds the next position to spread Neo- Vaisnavism in Assam after Sankardeva. During their lifetime the Eka saran nam dharma flourished in Assam and remained intact.

The tribal communities of Assam have been influenced a lot by the liberal philosophy of Sankardeva’s Neo-Vaisnavism. Similarly, most of the Tiwas of plains have also embraced the neo Vaisnavism of Sankardeva. Some of the Tiwas are totally converted into the fold of Neo-Vaisnava faith and some others while following Vaisnavism, retain traditional religious faith as well. As a result of the influence of Vaisnavism the Namghar becomes an important place of worship. To some extent, it takes the place of youth dormitory in all the plain Tiwa villages. The followers of Neo- vaisnavism of Sankardeva do not eat pork or rice bear, nor do they maintain a Borghar. Many of the Hindu religious ceremonies are observed in the Namghars such as celebration of Janmastomi, Raas Leela and Tithi of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva. They do not now follow many of their traditional Pujas. Instead of worshipping Maldaka and Sanidaka by offering sacrifices, the Tiwas prefer to propitiate these deities by reading Sani-charit in the Namghars. Expensive and elaborate formalities of traditional worship are another reason for embracing Vaisnavism. Most of them have even given up their age old traditions and tried to follow the life style of a Vaisnava. In this case, the
Satras offer a means of purification to the tribal people. The novice had to abstain from drinking rice beer and eating pork or other things accepted as impure by Vaisnavism and had to follow the rules of Vaisnavism to attain a higher status in the society they purified and elevated their lifestyle and deliberately got converted into Assamese, and accepted caste surname like Laskar instead of Doloī, Deka, Deori etc. This had resulted in the situation of tribe-caste-continuum process in Assamase Hindu Society. Thus, here we find two types of Vaisnava followers. One is converted Vaisnava follower and other is the traditionalist retained the dual form of religious beliefs – Vaisnavism and Animism.

6.3.4. Impact of the Religious faith of Krishna Guru:

Krishna Guru was born in Nasatra village of Barpeta District, Assam in the year 1934. His father Ravi Deva and mother Maya Devi was vaishnavite devotional persons. Krishnaguru has established Krishnaguru Sewashram at Nasatra in Barpeta district of Assam, in the year of 1974. This Krishnaguru Sewashram has since become a holy place for congregation of all devotees coming from all over the world. The religious scripture is *Krishnaguru Tatwaxar* written by Krishna Guru himself, adopted from the *Srimadbhagwat Purana*. Krishna Guru expresses his philosophy in the form of *Amritbani*. Some of those are as follows:

... Since God is present in all human beings in the form of a soul, if we insult a man, we insult God; if we get jealous of a man's success, we show jealousy towards God. This kind of actions generates unrest in the world........ Truth, cleanliness, forgiving, tenderness, simplicity, love, patience, contentment, non attachment etc are essential for human life. To keep alive these qualities in mind, you will have to take initiation from Satguru and accept the Krishnaguru Ek Naam. With chanting of the Krishnaguru Ek Naam, impurities from the heart will vanish, and you will be blessed by Krishnaguru, only then you will be able to attain heights. The aim and duty of human life is the chanting of Krishnaguru Ek Naam and love and devotion.
According to the philosophy of Krishna Guru, it is the God who as infinite soul is omni-present in this Universe. It is He who infuses life into living beings. He said that the worship of imaginary gods and goddesses by offering pujas, performing yagnas, going for pilgrimages etc. are meaningless. Gods and goddesses are imaginary concepts only. In fact, idol worshipping and sacrificing animals to appease them cause more harm. The Almighty is Nirgun (formless). However, He becomes Sagun (a definite form) when He takes birth in the form of Satgurus in this world. The Satguru is knowledge incarnate. Only the Satguru can remove the ills plaguing mankind. Only Satguru can make his devotees feel the presence of God in this world and even makes it possible to have visions of Him and attain wisdom. He Himself as God incarnates on earth and through various expressions of his supreme powers arouses wisdom in his devotees. He bestows on his devotees the Ek Naam and through this Naam, He enters into the heart of His devotee and expresses his mysteries... By taking the Satguru’s EK Naam and heeding all His advices, man can behold supernatural experiences and powers.10

The philosophy of Krishna Guru is also monotheistic in nature and does not subscribe to caste rigidity. For this reason, many people of Assam irrespective of caste and creed have accepted the religious path of Krishna Guru. Even the many plain Tiwas have accepted his path. In this regard a case study can be placed here which can give a clear picture of how some people of Assam have accepted the path of Krishna Guru during last three decades. Gakul Bordoli, a plain Tiwa, was a follower of their traditional religious practices during his young age. He did not like their traditional sacrificial practices. He wondered how these sacrificial practices can be beneficial for someone or how someone can get the blessings of God by killing other creatures of God. Moreover, according to him their traditional sacrificial practices are more expensive. It was not possible for the poor people to meet the expenses of Pig, Fowl and Goat for sacrifice in various pujas. Later on, he became a follower of Sankardeva’s Neo Vaisnavism. But in this practice also he experienced problem from the vaisnavite Assamese caste Hindus. He faced
the problem of untouchability with the followers of Sankar Sangha. He did not enjoy the same social status enjoyed by the Assamese caste Hindus. Gradually he was attracted towards the liberal philosophy of the religious practice introduced by Krishna Guru. According to this philosophy, all followers have same social status, all are equally treated and all have the equal right to pray God. He was most attracted by the behaviour and attitude of the followers of Krishna Guru. According to him they do not practically maintain any distinction amongst them. Now, from the last seventeen years he has been following the religious philosophy of Krishna Guru.\(^{11}\) The followers of Krishna Guru recite only the *Krishnaguru Tatwaxar* (the religious scripture of the followers of Krishna Guru) in their household prayer hall and *Ashrams* (community prayer hall of the Krishna Guru followers). There is a picture of *Xorai* in front side of every household prayer hall (Photo: 31). The follower of Krishna Guru can be identified from the *Gamocha* (bath towel) they use which has green border. This group does not take part in any traditional religious practices of the Tiwas.

6.3.5. Impact of other Religious Trends:

Besides the influence of Sankardeva's Neo-vaishnavism and Krishnaguru's philosophy, the Tiwas have been influenced by the other branches of Hinduism too. It is evident from the worship of *Mahadeo*. Use of basil leaves in the worship of Mahadeo and *Jongkhong* puja is definitely a Hindu influence. The purification practice after returning from the cremation ground is like taking bath with water mixed with sacred basil leaves in which copper, gold, and silver are also dipped, touching fire after taking bath etc. These are apparently the results of cultural contact with Hindu society. The use of banana leaves on ceremonial occasions also resembles Hindu customs. The Tiwas use to give offerings to Gods on banana leaves. They generally sacrifice fowls, pigs and goats but they never sacrifice or kill a cow or an ox. This indicates Hindu influence.
The religious philosophy of Sri Sri Anukul Thakur has also had an impact on Tiwa people. Sri Sri Thakur said that the Supreme Being is one. All the Prophets are same and there is no difference. His ideology is based on some concepts like God is one and all prophets are the same. All prophets such as Krishna, Jesus Christ, Mohammad and others related to different religion like Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam etc. are the same. So, everyone should respect them all. Secondly, he said that the Gurus are living ideal of God. So everyone should take the path of the Sad-Guru. Thirdly, he believes in varna system in case of marriage. He said that man should marry a girl of his own varna and one can marry females from lower varna. But he was against of marring a female of the higher varna. Fourthly, he believes in cause effect relationship etc.\(^{12}\)

The religious philosophy of Anukul Thakur is based on *Veda*. The followers of this philosophy are found in Nambor village of Nagaon district. The followers have separate prayer hall in their household. However, the Tiwas, who have taken the religious practices of Anukul Thakur; they take part in all traditional religious ceremonies.

Besides accepting the faith of different branches of Hinduism, most of the Tiwas have accepted Christianity too. Most of the Tiwas living in Silsang area have accepted Christianity. One remarkable thing was observed in the Christian influenced area was that the Christians who came to spread Christianity, always try to establish schools in those areas where they want to spread their religious faith. This initiative is not observed in the places influenced by other religious faith. Christ Jyoti School of Silsang area was established in 1995 by the Christian people, who came there to spread Christianity. This initiative of Christian people has attracted the local tribal people towards Christianity.

There are three types of Tiwa religious groups found in the Jorabari village of Nagaon district. One group observes the traditional religious practices of the Tiwas along with the rituals in a *Namghar*. The second are the
followers of Sankardeva’s Neo-Vaisnavism; but they have organized themselves into *Janajati Sankar Sangha*. This group does not maintain any relation with the *Sankar Sangha* of the Assamese caste Hindus and in traditional religious practice of the Tiwas. They celebrate all religious practices sanctioned by the Neo-Vaisnavism of Srimanta Sankar Deva. They have *Gosaighars* in their home and read *Bhagavata* regularly. Both these groups have separate *Namghars* in the village. The third type is the followers of Krishna Guru. This group too does not maintain any relationship with the traditional religious practices of the Tiwas. They have separate household prayer halls and community prayer halls.

### 6.4. Conclusion:

The systems and institutions embedded in the idea of a specific religion are essentially a product of time and space. As the group advances in time or moves in space, it undergoes change. This modification is a response towards adoption to changed circumstances; though certain traits are preserved to retain identity with original patterns. The Tiwas have been in long contact with the neighboring people of different religious ideologies and practices. Their religious change towards Hinduism, particularly towards the *Neo­vaishnavism* of Sankardeva and other faith is due to long contact with other religious practices. The educated sections, by and large, do not participate actively in the traditional religious practices. They believe that it is the necessity of time to reform traditional sacrificial practices, because, they think that, it is too hard to meet the expenses of sacrificial practices for the poor people and it is an absurd belief that one can please the God by killing animals. Thus, the instances of ideological changes have been noticed amongst them. Now, from the point of view of religion practiced by the Tiwas, following five categories or groups can be mentioned. These are:

(a) The followers of Traditional religions, who have retained dual form of religious beliefs-Animisim and Vaisnavism.
(b) The Vaisnavas, who have organized themselves into *Janajati Sankar Sangha*.

c) The followers of Krishna Guru.

d) The followers of Anukul Thakur.

e) The Christians.

The Tiwas converted after being attracted by the liberal and easy norms of other religious philosophy. Hence, we can say that a distinct mode of proselytisation occurred here. On the other hand though they accepted various religious faiths, they were not ready to detach themselves from tribal identity and sentiment. Nor did they totally forego their traditional religious practices. Acceptance of other religious has faiths resulted in identity crisis amongst them. This has resulted in a situation of intra-tribal tension. Hence, one kind of consciousness about their own social status and cultural distinctiveness is arising among them like other tribal groups of Assam. In this way a revivalist movement has started among them. A large section of the Tiwa population had embraced the Neo-vaishnavism of Sankardeva and entered into the Assamese caste fold. The followers of Sankardeva’s Vaisnavism in Assam had organized themselves into *Sankar Sangha*. But the converted Tiwas had not been given the same social status like other Assamese caste Hindus who were included in *Sankar Sangha*. Hence, the tribal Vaisnava followers have organized themselves in *Janajati Sankar Sangha*. Sankardeva started the process of greater Assamese society formation through his Neo-vaishnavism. Having a *Namghar* in every plain-Tiwa village is a good evidence of this fact. But this process has been immensely interrupted during the last two decades of twentieth century. Of late, acceptance of the religious faith of Kishna Guru has dramatically increased. But one noticeable thing is that, irrespective of religious beliefs and practices, all the Tiwas unite together in social and political issues under a single umbrella.
Notes:


3 The Tiwas do not permit other people to enter their Barghars. This photograph was taken after the Barghar was broken open in a thunderstorm.


5 Board of Editors, *Kirtana-Ghosa Aru Nam-Ghosa* 3rd Ed. (Nagaon: Srimanta Sankardeva Sangha, 1999), 462.

6 Ibid.


9 See official website of Krishnaguru Sewashram http://www.krishnaguru.org.in.

10 Ibid.

11 This case was collected from Gakul Bordoloi. Sex: Male, Age: 70, Marital Status: Married, Educational Qualification: Higher Secondary, Place: Jorabari Gaon, Nagaon, Date: 16-11-07.

12 See http://srisrithakuranukulchandra.com/data/.
Photo 17:
A Hari-Kunwari in front of a Kesa-Borghar

Photo 18:
A Borjela or Gharburha in front of a Poka-Borghar

Photo 19:
A Borjela or Gharburha showing the place where there was a Barghar
Photo 20:
A Inside View of a Borghar

Photo 21:
A Village Thaanghar

Photo 22:
A Village Namghar
Photo 23:
Entrance of the Kirtan-Ghar of Khola Deo-Raja

Photo 24:
The Kirtan-Ghar of Khola Deo-Raja

Photo 25:
Jongkhong Puja (1)
Photo 26:
Jongkhong Puja (2)

Photo 27:
Jongkhong Puja (3)

Photo 28:
A Follower of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva in his Household Prayer Hall
Photo 29:
*Srimadbhagavata* - the Scripture of the Followers of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva

Photo 30:
A Follower of Krishna Guru in his Household Prayer Hall

Photo 31:
A Household Prayer Hall of the Followers of Krishna Guru
Photo 32:  *Krishnaguru Tavvavar*- the Scripture of the Followers of Krishna Guru

Photo 33:  An *Ashram* - The Community Prayer hall of the Followers of Krishna Guru is under Construction

Photo 34:  Followers of Krishna Guru Taking Part in Religious Congregation
Photo 35: A Household Prayer Hall of the Followers of Anukul Thakur

Photo 36: A Church - the Community Prayer Hall of the Christians

Photo 37: Christ Jyoti School, Silsang