Chapter 8.

Socio-Cultural Life as Reflected in Folklore

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CHAPTER 8

SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE AS REFLECTED IN FOLKLORE

Culture is a total way of life and every human construct is a part of culture. Hence culture comprises all aspects of life within a given society including material and non-material aspects. It includes all the conscious and unconscious creations of human beings. Accordingly, folklore is a part of culture that consists of four fields viz. Oral literature or Verbal art, Material culture, Social folk customs and Folk performing arts which are shared by every member of a society and survives by experience and words of mouth. Folklore is such a field of culture which reflects the happiness, grief, habits, behaviours, mental agony and tensions of a group of people. The worldview and the native wisdom of a society are manifested in folklore. Every conscious and unconscious creation of men convey their creativity, mental state and aesthetic sense. Moreover, these things also convey the habits, belief system and social situation of the past and present. In this way folklore reveals many aspects of a society or culture. William Bascom opines that folklore has many cultural aspects, such as allowing for escape from societal consequences. Moreover, it can also serve to validate a culture as well as transmit a culture’s morals and values. It can also be used to assert social pressure, or relieve them. The definition given by him is:

Folklore means “folk learning”; it comprehends all knowledge that is transmitted by word of mouth and all crafts and other techniques that are learned by imitation or example, as well as the products of these crafts.... Folklore includes folk art, folk craft, folk tools, folk costume, folk custom, folk belief, folk medicine, folk recipes, folk music, folk dance, folk games, folk gestures, and folk speech, as well as hose verbal forms of expression which have been called folk literature but which are better described as verbal art.¹
Another definition given by Marius Barbeau and accepted by Bascom in his paper “Folklore, Verbal Art and Culture” (1973) is as follows:

Folklore is handed down by example or spoken word, by the older to the new generations, without reference to book, print, or school teacher and it is born opponent of the serial number, the stamped product, and the patented standard.2

Folklore belongs to all members of a society. Its value is no way less than that of the history and heritage. Hence it deserves to be documented and preserved as a legacy for the future. All the four fields of folklore consist of different sub-fields. Oral literature comprises of analytical categories and ethnic genres. Analytical categories aim at classifying various sub groups of oral literature in accordance with the classification accepted internationally by the scholars. Examples of Analytical categories are: Folk song, Prose narrative, Proverbs and Riddles; and Folk Speech. Ethnic genres aim at classifying the oral literature according to the cultural reality of different ethnic groups.3 Ethnic genres are also known as Native genre as these are culture specific. Material culture consists of five sub-fields. Those are Folk art, Folk craft, Folk architecture, Folk costume and Folk cookery. Here the discussion focuses on Folk songs, Prose narratives i.e. Myths and Legends, the Folk architecture, Folk costume and Folk cookery of the Tiwas. The Oral literatures of the Tiwas can reveal many facts about their ancestors, history, and their migration to this place. The architectural designs, dress pattern and food habit convey the beliefs, social systems and habits of their past and present. Several changes are taking place in their society and culture. Many factors are responsible for the changes. The following discussion focuses on such issues.

8.1. Observations on Folk Literature:

Every community of the world has their own cultural heritage. The Tiwas of Assam have not been an exception. They have their own distinctive folkloric items which convey some facts about their society and culture. Oral literature is a form of communication that uses words to express ideas, values, beliefs,
native wisdom and world views of a particular group of people, which can provide an insight into their socio-cultural life. Here the discussion focuses on Folk songs, Myths and Legendry beliefs of the Tiwas.

Folk songs are verse narratives which more often than not depict the way of life of people. Folk songs have cultural and social meaning as these are generally created in a particular social-cultural environment. Hence it can provide us knowledge about a particular period of time. Moreover, Folk song often speaks on particular social and political issues such as work, war and popular opinion. According to Phillips Barry,

Folk song is a treasure-house of the events of human experience in all possible phrases, of all the lights and shadows of human fancy, and furthermore, of all that by common consent of all the folk is beautiful.\(^4\)

Myths, one of the branches of prose narrative that are generally stories found in prose forms. Myths tell about the origin or creation of natural, supernatural, or cultural phenomena of universe. The mythical characters are generally from supernatural world. Men generally perceive the world in symbolic form and the myth is only one of the many forms. According to William Bascom

Myths are the tales believed as true, usually sacred, set in the distant past or other worlds or parts of the world, and with extra-human, inhuman, or heroic characters.\(^5\)

Myths are defined differently by different scholars in many times. Mary Magoullick has opined that the definitions of myth given by different scholars can be summarized as thus:

Myths are symbolic tales of the distant past (often primordial times) that concern cosmogony and cosmology (the origin and nature of the universe), may be connected to belief systems or rituals, and may serve to direct social action and values.\(^6\)

Legends, another branch of prose narrative are generally stories found in prose form. Legends tell about events of human history. The characters of legends
are generally historical figures. A professional definition of legend was proposed by Timothy R. Tangherlini in 1990:

Legend, typically, is a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified (specifically located in place and time) historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs. 

These analytical categories are the part of a socio-cultural identity of any community. Some times these are also accepted as the source of history. These oral literatures can help to explore the missing history of a group of people. Thomas Wright admitted that

There is no subject of inquiry relating to the history of a people more interesting than its popular mythology and superstitions... In these we trace the early formations of nations, their identity or analogy, their changes as well as the inner texture of the national character, more deeply than in any other circumstances, even in language itself. [qtd. in Georges and Jones, 1995]

Here discussion focuses on some of the folk songs, myths and legends of the Tiwa community. They have folk songs, myths and legends which convey facts about their origin, habitats, cultural continuity and change.

8.1.1. Observations on Folk Songs:

Folk songs can be classified into many sub-genres and the sub-genres are connected with: (i) the seasonal or agricultural festivals, (ii) rites and ceremonies, i.e., songs associated with *rite-de-passage*, (iii) worship, (iv) incantations, (v) philosophical idea, (vi) ballads, (vii) children, (viii) work songs and (ix) love songs. Though the Tiwas have songs related with all these sub-genres, here the discussion focuses on the songs associated with seasonal festivals only. Because the seasonal festivals are frequently celebrated by
them and the songs connected with the festivals can better express their culture contact with neighbouring communities.

**Songs Associated with Seasonal Festivals**: The Tiwas celebrate seasonal festivals such as Bihu, Chagra Michawa, Barat-uchava, Wancawa and Lankhun Puja. There are many folk songs found amongst them which are related to seasonal festivals. Here some specimens of their folk song have been selected for discussion which can better express their culture contact, continuity as well change.

In the context of *Magh-bihu* they observe fire worship and they sing songs called the *Jhuna* song to the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments along with appropriate dance-movement. Here is an example:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
Ai mindai la cinjiga nithawa ei phirdimi
Phir dimo danaga ai dharma
Ai libingla libin bujil manana
Antar acaga ai maram
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

*The God has created this beautiful earth, and has set up religion. He has given love in the hearts of the men to understand each other. Oh my brothers, 'We should live with love and should die with love. How should we save ourselves if there is no love in the heart of the human beings? There is none in this earth except man. Man is the only God, he is the creator. If man does not love man, nobody will survive in the earth.*

The song is replete with the idea of humanism, since the song gives emphasis on the values of humanity, brotherhood as well as love. It signifies the existence of humanitarian and simple outlook of this ethnic group in ancient time as compared to the present position. As far as the history of the Tiwas is concerned, there is no reference to any conflict between the kings of different Tiwa principalities in the name of power. This type of songs signifies
the authenticity of these types of historical information and existence of humanitarian ideologies amongst them.

Another important seasonal festival of the Tiwas is Wancawa. It is observed in the village dormitory, i.e. Chamadi. The festival is observed for the welfare of the cultivators. One of the important features of this festival is the ceremonies of preparing of rice powder. In this festival songs are sung by the bachelors. Here is an example:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ai \ s' \ war \ cari \ bhai \\
Lampha \ rajane \ nem \ karajang \\
Lampha \ phawane \ nem \ karajang \\
Jine \ gurune \ dakhra \ karajang^{10}
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{We are four brothers; we have not abandoned the tradition of the Lampha. We have been carrying on the tradition of pounding rice-powder in the mortar for 1000 years. Let us have many children. The king of our land was born in the hills and the queen was born in the land of the Missings. All of our customs have been prescribed from that land.}^{1}

From this song, it is revealed that the Tiwas have strong adherence to their tradition. Both the Mising and the Tiwas have a strong cultural and historical relation and they have been maintaining it from a reasonable past. Moreover, they belong to the same human family i.e. Mongoloid.\textsuperscript{11} Again, a wish to have more children is also evident from this folk song. Existence of kin based economic system has infused this kind of wish in the minds of rural people in ancient times. But this kind of wish is still found among them along with the kin based economic system. (See Chapter: 7)

The \textit{Barat} is another popular festival of the Tiwas. The word \textit{Barat} originated from the Assamese word \textit{Brat} (fasting). \textit{Barat} festival is celebrated
in order to get relief from epidemic or danger of wild animal. A specimen of *Barat* song is given bellow:

*Tetelia Paharar bhaiamor datit*
*Tate Barat kore Puhar purnima ratit*
*Shakalu jatitkoi Lalung jati besi*
*Bahibi nukulai jagibohe hesa-hesi.*

*The Barat festival was celebrated in the foothill areas of Tetelia hill during the full moon night of the month of December-January. Population of the Tiwas is more than the other communities, hence they sit densely.*

This song provides us information on the origin of the *Barat* festival. As per the information provided by this song, this festival was at first celebrated by the king of Tetelia in the full moon night during the months of December-January. Still this festival is celebrated by the descendents of *Saturaja* (Seven kings) in the Tetelia area. It is also evident from this song that the Tiwas were the populous community in earlier times. Moreover, this song itself provides us example of culture change as the language of the song is Assamese.

8.1.2. Observations on Prose Narratives:

**Myths of the Tiwas:**
There are different myths found among them which reveal some facts about their origin and migration. Three randomly selected myths have been discussed below:

The story of one of the myths narrates that, a God namely *Lungla Mahadeo* was created by lord Siva. Lord Siva was one of the great Hindu Trinity. In fact it was Lord Shiva’s saliva that gave birth to *Lungla Mahadeo*. Here *lung* in Tiwa language means saliva of Lord Siva and *la* signifies
creation of living beings out of saliva. The union of Lord Lungla and Jayanti Devi (Goddess Durga) produced three daughters. The Karbis, The Bodo-Kacharis and the Tiwas are supposed to be descended from the first, the second and the third daughter respectively.13

Scholars are of opinion that, the Bodos, the Rabhas, the Karbis, the Misings, the Dimasas, the Tiwas, the Deuri-Chutiyas, the Hazongs all are the direct descendents of the common racial family, namely, Indo-Mongoloid group.14 The myth under consideration too corroborates to the same theory although in a symbolic manner. Another significant thing that can be mentioned here is that the myth is a conscious attempt to trace the origin of this Mongoloid group (i.e. Tiwas) to a Hindu God (i.e. Lord Siva). This is an example of what is called in Sociology, Hinduization or Aryanization process.

Another popular myth on creation is as follows: Once Lord Siva drank rice beer heavily and become intoxicated. He was lying unconscious on a road and in that condition a stream of saliva (lal) came out from the mouth of Lord Siva. The Lord created two human beings out of his saliva and they came to be known as ‘Lalung’ (so called, because they were created out of Lord’s Lal).15

From this myth it is evident that they like to introduce themselves as the descendents of Lord Siva, a popular God of the Hindus.

A similar mythical story with slight variation is also prevalent among them. The story goes like this: once upon a time Lord Siva and his consort Parvati were enjoying the scenic beauty of the Manas Sarovar Lake. The soothing beauty of the lake and its adjoining area enchanted the Lord so much so that he soon fell asleep on the bank of the lake. When he woke up he saw five drops of saliva at the place where he was taking rest. The Lord created five human beings out of the five drops of saliva (lal). As these five human beings were created out of the divine saliva, they came to be known as
Lalungs. These five original Lalungs had the unique privilege of seeing the creator in the form of human being and therefore the Lalungs call Lord Siva as *Manus Mohadeo*. (*Manus* means human being and *Mahadeo* is another name of Lord Siva)\(^{16}\)

Tiwas have the tradition to offer five oblations to Lord Siva as a part of their religious practice. The myth mentioned above must have something to do with this religious practice. As per the myth, five original Tiwa people were born out of the five drops of saliva of the Lord Siva that is why they offer five oblations (*Naibadya*) to the God. The five human beings in course of time might have become five kings of the Tiwas who are called *Pachu Raja* (five kings). This myth signifies the existence of these five original kings in earlier times.

**Legends of the Tiwas:**

There are legends that try to explain the origin of the words ‘Lalung’ and ‘Tiwa’.\(^{17}\) Again there are legends on the questions of the Lalungs original place of inhabitation and causes of migration. Some of them are describe as below:

One popular legend goes like this: originally the Lalungs were ruled by the Demon king Bali who was a faithful devotee of Lord Vishnu. The king wanted that all his subjects should adhere to the royal religion. A section of the Lalungs refused to accept that religion and as a result the king’s fury fell heavily upon them. The entire populace was being punished by the dictate of the king. A red mark in everybody’s forehead was put as a part of the punishment and the people were made to leave their own country. And those people with red mark on their forehead were known to be Lalungs (Tiwas).\(^{17}\)

Another legend narrates that it were the Karbis who called those people living on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra as Lalungs. The word Lalung comprises of two parts, ‘La’ and ‘Lung’. The first part signifies
‘water’ and the latter part signifies ‘rescue’. Together, the word means that the river i.e. the Brahmaputra rescued or gave shelter to the people who resided on its banks. That is why the people were called Lalung.\textsuperscript{18}

Another belief tells that there was a branch of the river Daiyang in the Karbi Anglong called ‘Nilalung’. During the reign of Kamata kings, the Lalung had to leave their original habitat and established villages on the bank of the river ‘Nilalung’. In course of time the people living on the banks of the river were known as Lalungs.\textsuperscript{19}

Another popular legend tells about the origin of the word Tiwa. The word ‘Tiwa’ a synonym of ‘Lalung’ has two parts- ‘Ti’ means ‘water’ and ‘Wa’ means ‘superior’. The Lalungs themselves introduced as ‘Tiwa’ to other because they considered themselves to be superior people who came down along with the river Brahmaputra.\textsuperscript{20}

A legend prevalent among the certain section of the Lalungs of Nagaon district reveals a different meaning of the word ‘Tiwa’. According to the legend ‘Ti’ means ‘water’ and ‘Wa’ means ‘pig’. The Lalungs believe that originally the earth was lying under a vast body of water. Then the God appeared in the form of a pig and lifted the earth from that expanse of water. The Tiwas believe themselves to be the descendents of the ‘pig’ which is in fact the almighty God.\textsuperscript{21}

This belief has some thing to do with the Hindu religious belief of \textit{Dasa Avatar} (Ten Incarnations) of Lord Vishnu. The ten incarnation of Vishnu is a theoretical concept in Vedic history. According to Hindu religious belief Lord Vishnu is the supreme God and creator of the Universe. He enters and descends to our world in the form of \textit{Avatar} (incarnation) whenever his presence is needed. According to the belief almighty Vishnu took ten incarnations to rescue the earth or his creatures from different calamities in different times. Pig is one of his ten incarnations known as \textit{Varaha}. Once
almighty Vishnu appeared in the form of a *Varaha* and rescues the earth from expanse of water.

Other beliefs regarding the original abode of the Tiwas are found mixed with the folk songs related to harvesting and purification ceremonies after child birth. Regarding this fact G. C. Sarma Thakur wrote:

> The folk songs during harvesting and purification ceremonies after child birth reveal that Lalungs once lived in the ‘Hillali’ kingdom, the boundaries of which extended the whole of present Nagaon and eastern Darrang districts. At first they were residing on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra but later on their habitations spread to the other bank also. As time passed the people preferred to call themselves as subjects of ‘Lali’, an abbreviated form of ‘Hillali’. On the northern side of Nagaon district there is dead branch of the river called ‘Lali’. Probably the capital of the ‘Hillali’ Kingdom was on the north western side of the present Nagaon district.  

The above cited fact is found to be somewhat true as majority of the Tiwas are now living in present Morigaon and Nagaon districts.

### 8.1.3. Analysis of these Oral literatures:

The present socio-cultural condition of a community is invariably conditioned by its past. Past is in fact the history. History is based on facts but myths and legends are far from the true ‘stories’. The folk believe them to be true and thus they have great impact on their mind. Myths and legends may sometimes give clue to history. In people’s mind a myth is a divine story, they have hardly any doubt in their mind regarding the veracity of those stories. Sometimes people believe it to be true more than the history. Because history is generally written under royal patronage, hence history may not provide the real information about royal families and rulers. But folk literatures are created by the common people and they always carry definite meaning. Folk literatures can not be understood without referring to their context. Texts and contexts both are equally important. The text of the folk literature without context is like a body without life. The contextual study of folklore can
provide data about the situation they represent. Thus, it is comprehensible that the above cited folk literatures have a definite social situation where these literatures are created. Hence, these literatures have a definite social meaning. Sometimes the apparent meaning of any genre of folk literature is not the all that it represents, since it contains inner meaning. As such, it is said that what is not said is more important than what is said in folklore. Contextual study can reveal the inner meaning.

The inner meaning is generally conveyed with the help of metaphor. As a social phenomenon any genre of the folk literature can furnish ethnographic information of a particular tribe or community. It is a known fact that folk literature is a kind of reflection or native ethnography of the society in which it is prevalent. So the relation between the society and its folk literature is quite evident. Society being the primary factor in the relationship and folk literature appears to be the secondary factor. As such, folk literature can furnish us direct information about a society in which it exists. Regarding this fact Malinowaski has commented as follows:

> Myth serves as warrant, a charter and often even practical guide. Myth can strengthen a tradition……. The function of myth, briefly is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial event.” [quoted in Sarma, 1997].

The above specimen of the folk literatures of the Tiwas can furnish us some direct information about their socio-cultural life, tradition, migration and creation. From these folk literatures we can make some assumption that most of the communities feel proud to have mythical origin related to some deities. It is also evident from the story of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In both the scriptures all of the royal dynasties have originated from some deities like Surya, Chandra and Indra. The descendents of these deities are known as Suryavanshi, Chandavanshi and Indravanshi. The Tiwas too have myths to show that they are the descendents of Lord Siva. It reveals that they like to introduce themselves as the descendents of a Hindu deity i.e. Lord Siva. The
legends also tries to establish their relationship with Lord Vishnu, he too is a Hindu God. It can be explained that, these myths are created to attain a higher status in existing caste hierarchy.

Secondly, these oral literatures contain the genuine fact that, not only the Tiwa community but also most of the tribal communities of Assam belong to the Mongoloid family and they have cultural and social relations amongst themselves.

Thirdly, from the legendry beliefs cited above the Tiwas once lived in the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. Tibbet is not far away from this region. Belief has it that the Tiwas originally migrated from Tibbet. Probably the word ‘Tiwa’ derives it origin to the term ‘Tibetia’ meaning people hailing from Tibbet. In course of time ‘Tibbetia’ might have changed into Tiwa. The above legends reveal that the original habitats of the Tiwas were on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra.

Fourthly, food, cloth and shelter are three primary needs of people. People had always migrated from one place to another in search of these needs. We can assume that the Tiwas also migrated to this region in search of food and shelter. Some of them scattered to the hill areas of this region and later on they scattered in the plains of Assam.

Fifthly, the folk literatures prevalent amongst the Tiwas are mostly common with the folk literatures found in written form. No new or uncommon folk literatures have been found among them during the field work. It is hard to trace that whether the written literatures are circulated amongst them or the oral literatures are compiled in written form. However, these folk literatures can reveal facts on their culture, their origin, tradition and migration.
8.2. Observations on Material Culture:

All visual and physical aspects of Folklore are called Material culture. According to Richard M. Dorson,

Material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art. How men and women in tradition-oriented societies build their homes, make their clothes, prepare their food, farm and fish, process the earth's bounty, fashion their tools and implements, and design their furniture and utensils are questions that concern the student of material culture.  

In tribal societies all these processes are generally traditional and products are hand made. Material culture can be divided into five categories. Those are folk art, folk craft, folk architecture, folk costume and folk cookery. This discussion focuses on the folk architecture, folk costume and folk cookery of the Tiwas as food, cloth and shelter are the primary needs of any group of people. The study on these aspects can provide a clear picture of socio-cultural life along with the change and continuity. The architectural design, dress pattern and food habit convey the beliefs, social systems and habits of their past and present. Several changes are taking place in their society and culture and many factors are responsible for it. Here an attempt has been made to study the tradition and change of their society through material culture.

Jawarharlal Handoo is of the opinion that folklorists have always been warning about the disappearance of folklore items with time without leaving a trace behind. This warning is more relevant to material culture today than ever before. Because in this present era of globalization people are more in comfort and busy with the modern scientific creations. As a developing country, the Indian society is undergoing rapid transformation in its all spheres since the past three decades. For example the structure of the Indian joint family is breaking down. Folk media is being replaced by modern mass media, folk housing pattern in the villages is disappearing fast, and the
traditional folk decorative designs that once adorned the domestic surroundings have disappeared. Folk jewellery, which India has traditionally been proud of and through which Indian folk mind has for centuries been expressing the artistic genius of Indian mind in the form of most popular motifs of Indian art, is fast disappearing and unfortunately a good part of it has found its way into the foreign museums. So are our traditional modes of transportation, architectural design, food habit, dress pattern, etc. vanishing or undergoing changes. Accordingly the above scene has relevance for all tribal societies of our country and more so for Tiwas of Assam. Several forces have been influencing their material culture to the direction of change. With the faster growth in the processes of development, these transformations are going to be more rapid in the near future. Hence, the study of the change in these fields can help to understand their changing socio-cultural life.

8.2.1. Observations on Folk Architecture:

Folk architecture is different from academic architecture; it is traditional and much more significant vis-a-vis academic architecture. According to Warren R. Roberts,

Folk architecture is concerned with all traditional aspects of building; the shapes, sizes and layouts of buildings of all kinds, such as dwellings, barns, sheds, and craft shops; the material used and the tools and techniques of building; the sites chosen and the placement of various buildings on the site; and the use to which buildings and various parts of buildings were put.

The traditional Tiwa homestead consists of four parts, Barghar, Majghar, Choraghar and Granary. Borghar is a praying hall consisting of two rooms; one for household deities and another is cooking room used for religious purpose only. Majghar consists of kitchen, dining room and bed rooms as per requirement of the family. This is the main part used for sleeping purpose and it is constructed in between the Borghar and Charaghgar. Choraghar is an outhouse generally consisting of two rooms and it is constructed a few yards
away from the main house where the guests are entertained and unmarried young boys sleep at night. But presently no Charaghar is found in the Tiwa homestead. Now Majghar plays the role of Charaghar. The traditional Tiwa homestead also consists of a cow-shed within their boundary which is constructed a few yards away from the main house.

The plinth of the Borghar is raised about two feet above the ground in order to distinguish it from other apartments. The main post of the Borghar called Thunakhuta does not touch the beam. It is fixed only after the completion of the house which is made of gamari timber. The head of the family, the Borjela (head of clan) and the Hari-kunwari (leady head of Borghar or clan) only go to the Thunakhuta. A socio religious ceremony is performed at the time of first occupation of the house in the presence of Loro (the priest of the village) and Borjela.

The Granary is constructed on the east of the compound and in absence of the granary, a corner of the living room is used for this purpose. Certain taboos are observed in connection with the granary. Nobody can keep paddies in granary before celebrating the Dhanor Aag Aana or Cholia Peluwa ceremony. This ceremony is observed in the month of Aghon (November-December). In this ceremony, six branches of Aaka Sali paddy are brought in the auspicious night of a Wednesday and are kept on the Thuna khuta of Borghar. Moreover, no one is allowed to enter into the granary in the month of Magh (January-February).

Cow-shed is constructed near the granary. Every Tiwa household consists of a big courtyard in front of their main house which is used for threshing, winnowing and drying the paddies. Houses are constructed facing the village road. East and south directions are regarded as auspicious. Every homestead consists of two porches. One is in the front side and another is in the back side of the house. The front porch is used for weaving purpose and the back porch is used for husking paddies in traditional husking machine
Every household consists of one pit latrine and bathroom made of bamboo and thatch in a corner of the compound. They fence their compounds with bamboo fencing.

The Chamadi is an identity marker of Tiwa community. It is a large open house constructed on posts about two meters above the ground. It is constructed by thatch, bamboo, cane and wood. A festival Kheljawa is celebrated while they construct a new dormitory. 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. These traditional structures of the dormitory house and officials are still maintaining in the hills but in the plains it has been changed. Changes have taken place in respect of the structure of the dormitory house as well as the selection of the office bearers (See Chapter: 5). Here the discussion focuses on the changes taking place in its structure. Now all the Tiwa villages do not have a dormitory. The villages which have a dormitory shows a changed pattern. They construct it on the ground with the help of bamboo, wood and cement. This type of dormitory is seen in three villages Nambor Lalung gaon, Gurigaon-Banpar Kisam and Silsang during the field study. 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. The Thuna khuta (the middle post of the Chamadi from the front side) also found in different shape and design. It is a symbol of phallus, which represent the power and fertility. The dormitory officials worship it as a Sivalinga.

Presently, Tiwa villages of plains consist of Naamghar and Thanghar as community prayer hall. These two religious prayer halls consist of two parts. The main part is known as Monikut, where images of deities are kept. The second part does not have any specific name, it is a big hall where the villagers sit for prayer.
A traditional Tiwa homestead is constructed with bamboo, wood and thatch. Walls are made of reeds, bamboos and wood. A paste of clay and cow dung is used for plastering the walls. But now the rich families use bricks and cement for the construction of their house.

The noticeable thing observed in case of folk architecture of the Tiwa people is that their houses are made of wood, bamboo and thatch etc. Majority of them depend on the natural things available in their surroundings. Only the rich families use brick, cement, iron rods and corrugated iron sheets for constructing their houses. Moreover, the co-operative helps are still provided by the villagers in the form of Senehua Mata and Hadari khel or single labour to every household during the construction of their houses. In the Senehua Mata system one villager can invite many co-villagers to help him constructing the house; in return the co-villagers are entertained with food, Zu and tea. In Hadari- khel system help is offered for many days and there are six to eight members in the group and help is offered in rotation.

8.2.2. Observations on Folk Costume:

Every community has their distinctive folk costume. Don Yoder tried to give a definition of folk costume which is based on the functionalist viewpoint. The definition is goes like thus:

Folk costume is that form of dress which (1) outwardly symbolizes the identity of a folk community and (2) express the individual’s manifold relationships to and within that community.

Weaving is the exclusive domain of the Tiwa women. The textile designs of the Tiwas express their creativity, native wisdom, beliefs and even the social situation of the past and the present. The designs and colours used by Tiwa women have their significance. The traditional dress of Tiwa women consist of three pieces of clothes. Those are kasang, jaskai or phaskai and thongali. Kasong with horizontal stripes is used to cover the lower portion of the body.
Jaskai or Phaskai is used to cover the upper portion of the body from the breast to the waist. Thongali used to wear over Kasang like a waistband. The traditional dress in the case of men consists of five pieces of clothes. Those are Tagla a jacket like traditional shirt. Dhoti can be of Muga (traditional silk of Assamese people) or cotton, which is used to cover the lower portion of the body. Kamasa or Seleng is used to wear like a Seleng (a traditional cloth of Assamese people used to wear on upper portion of the body). They put on this cloth over the two shoulders like an ‘X’. Thangali is a waistband; Phaga is a turban.

The Tiwa kings have their own traditional dress, which they wear on specific occasions and it is some what different from the traditional dress of common people. The dress of kings constitutes a Muga Dhoti a Muga Sola (shirt), one Muga Phaga (Turban), one Cotton Sadar, one silver necklace, two Gam Kharu (bracelets) and two ear rings (siha). It is reported that in the past headman, officers of the king and king himself used to wear gold earrings. Turban was a part of dress for the king and the officers. On special occasions like annual festivals, they wore Silk & Muga dresses.

**Designs:**
The Tiwa women can express their artistic tendencies and skill in their textile designs. The Tiwa textile designs are of mainly geometrical. These designs look like some geometric forms such as triangle, cube and strait lines. Tiwa women weave cubic design. This design is very simple in the shape of cube and is a combination of some straight lines. Formerly they also use to weave the animal motif in their traditional dress. It signifies that they tried to express things from nature. Animal motifs such as deer, lion, tiger, bird etc. are taken from the nature. They are also used to weave the kingkhap design (Paisley design), diamond motif in their traditional dress. The diamond motif in red, yellow or green on black surface is typical of tribal textiles. Another ancient motif is bhat phutuki phul. As this design is a combination of many small round shapes like rice (Bhat), this design is known as bhat phutuki phul.
Nowadays Tiwa women weave many designs and motifs which have similarities with the designs of Assamese women, those are *floral design*, *tree motif* and *running motif* (like creeper). Now, they weave Assamese traditional tree motif like *padum gach* (latus plant), *kadam gach* (Kadamba tree) and *aam gach* (mango tree). The running motif is known as *lata* (Creeper). Women of present generation weave all types of Assamese *lata* design like *panch kahir lata*, *sat kahir lata*, and *nai kahir lata*. Generally they weave these running motifs on *kamsa* and *thongali*. Now a days they weave this design in *kasong* also. Now they generally weave *cubic design* and *diamond motif* on *kasong*. Originally on *kasong* there did not have any design. Originally they used to weave three groups of red and yellow horizontal stripes on black surface. In case of *tagala*, *phaskai* or *jaskai*, *thongali* of men and *phaga* they weave *diamond motif*, *cubic design* and *tree motif*. They do not weave any design on *dhoti* and *seleng*. Presently, the influences of Assamese textile designs are fully evident in Tiwa textile designs.

**Colours:**

It was observed that the major colours used by Tiwa people are red, black and yellow. They believe that these three colours are their identity. Initially they used black colour for *kasong* with red and yellow stripes; yellow colour with red stripes and design for *kamsa* and *thongali* of women; yellow, black, red and white colour combination for *jaskai* or *phaskai*; red, black and yellow for *tagla*. *Seleng*, *phaga* and *thongali* of men are of white colour. But presently, due to the influence of other culture they weave the blue, green, orange and maroon in their traditional costumes. Earlier, colours are prepared by using various indigenous dyes. In the hills even today most of the Tiwa people use such dyes. For example, indigo is cultivated to prepare blue dye and different varieties of herbs to produce different types of colours. But with the availabilities artificially coloured yarns in the market the Tiwa weaver go for colours available in the market. They give up their traditional practices of dying a cloth.
**The Loom:**

The art of weaving was handed down from generation to generation by practice on their traditional loom. The Tiwas generally use thick cotton yarns for their traditional costumes. Personality of the weaver, her hereditary skill, her innate sense of colour and balance all help to create a unique product. Their traditional loom is known as *Re-xal*. It is a *loin* and also known as *Mati-xal*. This loom consists of two posts and weaver sits on the earth and wraps the loom around their waist with a belt. But gradually they started to use *throw-shuttle loom*. This loom consists of four stout posts, which are driven into the ground so as to make a rectangular and joined together at the top by cross beams. These four posts are connected with two wrap and cloth beams. Now this type of loom is used by almost every household. Presently they also use the *fly-shuttle loom*. This loom is same with the *throw-shuttle loom*; the only difference is that the shuttle is throwing with the help of a mechanism.

**Ornaments:**

Ornaments are the important parts of their traditional dress. Different types of ornaments are used by the Tiwa women more as a sign of femininity than for enhancing the effectiveness of the personal appearance of the wearer. Formerly, the Tiwa women wore silver or gold made *gamkharu* (bracelet), *sipatmoni* (necklace), *gota kharu* (bracelet), *sunpatia angathi* (a specially designed ring), but today these are not used by the women. Some elderly women wear silver, bead or stone necklaces and ear-rings. The men used to wear *siha* (ear-ring) made of gold and silver.

*Khram* (their traditional drum) and *Singai* (Flute) is closely related to their culture. These two are the symbols of their culture. Therefore, *dholbiri* (a necklace like a drum) signifies their culture. *Dholbiri & Sasharua Kharu* (Gamkharu or bracelet) are used by both men and women. The people of Nambar village believe that *dholbiri & sasharua kharu* are the item of their traditional culture and they believe that Assamese people have borrowed these
items from them. It is an interesting case, because the Assamese people also believe that gamkharu and dholbiri are their traditional ornaments. Normal ornaments worn generally by women elsewhere are now a days used by the Tiwa women whereas men wear only rings.

The noticeable changes have taken place in the case of folk costume is that presently the Tiwas use to weave different types of designs and colous in their traditional costume. Traditional loom Mati-xal is almost vanished from every village. They weave in Assamese traditional loom and the technology of weaving and the traditional designs are preserved by the word of mouth and practice by providing good example of enculturation process.

8.2.3. Observations on Folk Cookery:

According to Don Yoder the folk cookery is the traditional domestic cookery marked by regional variation. He says that the study of folk cookery includes the study of foods themselves, their morphology, their preparation, their preservation, their social and psychological functions, and their ramifications into all other aspects of folk-culture.29

Different types of regional traditional foods constitute the Tiwa folk cookery. Like other communities of North- East India, rice is the staple food of Tiwas. A traditional meal consists of rice, vegetables, fish, pork, chicken and Zu (rice bear). Meat, fish, eggs are included in their delicacies. The breakfast consists of a pot of Zu (traditional rice beer) followed by boiled rice, salt, green chilli and onion. The mid day & evening meals consists of boiled rice without straining, fish and vegetables. One kind of common broth posola is also taken depending upon the seasons. Fish cooked with the slices of tender banana stem constitutes posola. Dal is rarely taken and mustard oil is rarely used as cooking medium. Generally they prefer boiled rice and boiled vegetables. Seasonal vegetables like beans, radish and lady’s finger, gourd, pumpkin are part of their everyday meals.
Other favourite traditional foods of the Tiwas are indigenous alkali or *khar* prepared from banana stem, some wild vegetables like *Mayong masua* (fern like vegetables), *Samsui* (wild vegetable), *Tumru lai* (fig leaf) and *Laflang* (like dry fish). *Laflang* is also taken as a medicine for malaria in Nambar village. Besides these the *Poita bhat* (boiled rice soaked in water) is a favourite item of food of the Tiwas. It is generally taken in summer season. Moreover, the arum roots, bitter medicinal plant locally known as *Bhekuri tita, Xukuta tita, Bahaka tita* (Adhatoda vasica, phlogocanthus) and *Xukoti mash* (dry fish) are their traditional item of food. *Tamlong or Kharisa* (a mixture prepared out of bamboo shoots) is also a favourite and traditional item of food. They use *Kharisa* in any kind of preparation. Mainly they prefer it with fish.

Pork, chicken and *Zu* are essential items in their socio religious ceremonies, Pigs and fowls are reared by almost all the Tiwas. *Zu* is taken by almost all of the Tiwa people and no religious and cultural ceremony and ritual can be celebrated without *Zu*. They use *Zu* in their day today life. It is prepared from *Bora rice* (a special variety of summer rice) or from *Sali rice* grown in winter. Broken rice grains are mixed with yeast cake (*Bakhor*) and then boiled. Yeast is prepared locally from a certain kind of leaves *viz.* Melia indica leaves (*nim tree*), fern leaves (*dhekia*), leaves of jackfruit, leaves of shrub (*makhiloti*) and leaves of horse-radish: moringa pterygosperma (*Chajina tree*). Yeast cakes are prepared by drying these green leaves in the sun in winter and dried leaved are powdered with rice gruel and made into cakes. Dried mixture is stored in narrow necked jars for brewing beer for a period of two-three days. For making beer, water is added to the fermented rice. Water is slowly mixed with the fermented rice with the help of along straw and the jar is thoroughly shaken. Beer is taken out of the jar by slightly tilting it so that fermented rice remains within the jar. It brewed everyday and is important item of food which is consumed by them everyday. It has socio-religio-economic significance. *Zu* is an essential item in almost every religious and cultural ceremony.
Nowadays it is replaced by another type of rice bear known as Photika. Photika is more refined than Zu and it is taken casually. Photika is in fact steam of the zu. A common thing observed during the field work in different Tiwa villages is that they are indifferent towards milk. But they offer tea and betel nut and betel leaf to every casual guest.

The Tiwa people use various apparatus for preparation, consumption and storing of food. Generally big earthen pots are used for preservation of food and also for the preparation of Zu. The traditional refreshment prepared by the rice powder is preserved in earthen pots. They also use the earthen pot for keeping water cool in summer season. Bell metal utensils are used for taking meals and Zu. Bamboo pipe are also used as a means for the storage of food like Zu and water.

8.2.4. Present Scenario:

Though the Tiwa people are maintaining continuity in their tradition of material culture, yet they have not been able to resist the change. Several changes have taken place in their material culture. For example in case of folk architecture several changes have been noticed in the structure and designs of their houses. Now they do not necessarily follow their traditional architectural structure and designs of Borghar, Majghar and Charaghar. Moreover, they do not necessarily use the locally available materials for making of their houses. Charaghok is totally absent from their architectural designs. The structure of Chamadi has also changed. Nevertheless the structure of Thanghar and Namghar remains same. But the existence of Namghar in Tiwa villages itself is an example of change.

In case of folk costume also changes are prominent. Several changes have been noticed in the structure, design and colour of their dress. It is presently observed that, the new generation, weave and wear their traditional dress in a peculiar pattern in case of women where they have only one piece
of long cloth which plays the role of kasang, jaskai or phaskai and thongali altogether. This piece of cloth is also known as phaskai or jaskai. It is something like the Bodo traditional dress known as Dakhana, a long piece of cloth that can cover the whole body. The Tiwa women wear this piece of cloth with kamsa over the body and also without kamas. They do not use waist belt (Thongali) here. It is a markable change in the case of traditional dress pattern.

In the case of colour also formerly the Tiwas use only the red, black and yellow. But now they use all the colours used available in the market viz. maroon, orange, green, blue and so forth.

Now, the Tiwa women weave the many designs in their textile designs. For example, cubic design and bhat phutuki phul were their traditional designs in earlier times but now they weave floral designs, tree motif, running motif and animal motif in their traditional dresses. Human psyche or aesthetic sense of people is reflected in textile designs. Initially Tiwa textile designs were simple and are based on some straight lines. But now interactions are made among many neighboring communities and they entered into a complex socio-cultural environment. Hence, this way their designs were also assimilated with other communities and have become complex.

They have been influenced by the neighboring Assamese caste Hindus in the case of dress pattern. Generally the followers of Sankardeva's Vaisnavism dress like Assamese caste Hindus. Their food habits are also like the Assamese caste Hindus. These are the examples of Assimilation. Assimilation is a process where a minority culture merges into the dominant cultures to the point that it no longer exists as a separate identity. Changes in designs and colours of dress are example of syncretism. On the other hand abandonment of some exiting event is the process of cultural loss. Therefore, abandonment of the use of Lengti (a small piece of lower garment used by man folk) is the example of cultural loss.
In the case of folk cookery also, changes have taken place. Use of Dal, mustard oil and spices are very common and they have learned the art of frying the item of food. Different types of eatable are brought from the shops in the towns or from the market. Items like tea, milk and betel nuts are new additions in the present settings. Moreover, the educated sections of the Tiwas discourage the rice beer consumption due to the cultural contacts with some neighbouring high caste communities. They take tea as beverage. Now a days guests are entertained not with ‘Zu’ and Photika, rather a cup of tea and betel leaves and nuts are the items of reception of casual guests. Previously the casual guests are entertained with the offerings of Zu and refusal to taking Zu was considered as the disrespect to the family.

8.3. Conclusion:

In the field of oral literature no noticeable changes have been observed. But they are good means to study their socio-cultural life as the context of these literatures can provide a clear picture about the social and cultural situations where it was created. It is observed in the folk songs of the Tiwas that their worldview is replete with the idea of humanism, since the songs give emphasis on the values of humanity, brotherhood as well as love. It signifies the existence of humanitarian and simple worldview of them as compared to the present, as they now have lost these qualities in the name of autonomy or revivalist movement.

The myths and legends have a relation with their cultural practices and history. When we throw light on the myths of the Tiwas, we can assume that Lord Siva is their main deity. But we see that the Aryan people also worship Lord Siva. Moreover, he is one of the great Hindu Trinity known as Maheswar (Siva). The “Great trinity” in Hinduism is Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. From ancient time different communities have been living here. Intermixing has been taking place among them from the remote past. The existence of Lord Siva in both Aryan and non-Aryan cultures is a good
example of culture contact from the ancient time. Changes have been taking place in both of the tribal and non tribal cultures.

On the contrary the changes are prominent in the case of material culture as compared to the oral literature. In the case of folk architecture, they no longer follow the traditional architectural design while constructing a house. The structure of youth dormitory and community prayer hall has also been changed.

In the case of folk costume also the changes are prominent. Their folk costumes have symbolic meanings. The dress differentiates the person who wears it in respect of following factors: (i) sex (ii) social status, and (iii) work/leisure. In contrast to the modern dress, the common thing about the folk costume is that it rigidly separates the sexes. Tiwa folk costumes differentiate the person in respect of gender. Secondly, their dress itself symbolizes the social and political status. For example, the dress of the king and the officials and the dress of common people are not same. The white color symbolizes the widowhood of women in their society too. Presently a Tiwa widow generally wears white cloth like Hindu women which was not prevalent in previous times. Thirdly, their day-to-day dress and festival dress are also different. They wear complete traditional dress while attending cultural and religious ceremonies, festivals and political meetings. In the case of their traditional costumes and ornaments, markable changes have been noticed. The old style is now giving way to new style. The modern traditional costume of women that consists of only one piece of cloth known as Phaskai or Jaskai is a result of culture contact with the Bodos. The continuity observed in the case of folk costume is that they are still preserving the skill and knowledge of weaving.

In the case of folk cookery degree of change as well as continuity is different according to the religious practices followed by them. The followers of Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva have given up their traditional food habit like eating pork and drinking rice beer. Their dress patterns also have
changed. They casually wear *Chadar, Mekhela, Dhuti* and *Kurta* like neighboring Assamese caste Hindus. The followers of Anukul Thakur and Krishna Guru have also given up the traditional food habit like eating pork and drinking rice beer. The followers of traditional religious practices and Christianity have still maintained their traditional food habit.

New mass media has also influenced their culture in cases of casual attire, food habit and ornaments. Members of new generation have started using modern garments, ornaments and foods popularized by the mass media. The folk costume is used as an identity marker only. Education is another factor for which they discard some existing practice. For example, educated portion of them discourage rice beer consumption. They realize that too much rice beer consumption is not good to health.

Change is inevitable in any society. The study of a society is not complete without a study of changes that have taken place in it. It is generally held that whenever changes are taking place in a culture the material aspects of life change at faster rate than the non material aspects. In the case of Tiwas also it is observed that the material culture have changed in faster rate, as compared to the oral literature. Again, amongst the material culture, the extent of change is relatively more in case of folk architecture and folk costume then folk cookery. Nevertheless, these fields of folklore have maintained some amount of continuity within it. And both of these two aspects- oral literature and material culture provide information about their socio-cultural continuity and change.
Notes:


2 Ibid.

3 Nabin Chandra Sarma, Oral Songs of the Tribal Communities of Assam (Guwahati: Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, 2006), 61-62.


6 Ibid.


9 Nabin Chandra Sarma, op.cit. 145.


11 Nabin Chandra Sarma, op.cit. 12.

12 This song was collected from Ratnakanta Bordoloi of Silsang area, Morigaon. Similar song is also available in Lokeswar Gogoi, Tiwa Sanskriti Ruprekha (part II) (Silchang: Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra, 1987), 182.

13 This myth was collected from Chitra Ram Deori of Bundura village, Nagaon and it is similar with a myth found in Ganesh Chandra Sarma Thakur, The Lalungs (Tiwas) (Guwahati: Tribal Research Institute, 1985), 9.

14 Nabin Chandra Sarma, op.cit.

15 This myth was collected from a villager of Nambor village, Nagaon, named Bibhu Bordoloi which is similar with a myth found in Ganesh Chandra Sarma Thakur, op.cit., 9-10.

16 Ganesh Chandra Sharma Thakur, Ibid.
17 Ibid. 9.

18 Ibid. 8-9.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid. This legend is still popular among the Tiwas.

21 Ibid. 10.

22 Ibid. 4-5.


26 Ibid.


28 Don Yoder, “Folk Costume,” Ibid. 296.

29 —. “Folk Cookery,” Ibid. 325.

Photo 73: A Hill Tiwa in Traditional attire

Photo 74: A Plain Tiwa in Traditional attire

Photo 75: A Plain Tiwa Woman in Traditional Dress

Photo 76: Changing Dress Pattern of Plain Tiwa Women
Photo 77: The Tagla of Hill Tiwa Men

Photo 78: The Tagla of Plain Tiwa Men

Photo 79: The Changing Pattern of a Tagla

Photo 80: The Geometrical design on a Jaskai or Paskai
Photo 81: The Floral design on a Jaskai or Phaskai

Photo 82: The Pattern and Design of Kasang

Photo 83: The Changing Pattern and Design of Kasang

Photo 84: A Tiwa Boy and a Girl in Their Traditional Dress
Photo 85: Tiwa Girls taking part in Tiwa Sahitya Sabha by wearing their Changing Traditional Dress

Photo 86: A Tiwa woman with Throw-Shuttle Loom

Photo 87: A Tiwa woman with Fly-Shuttle Loom
Photo 88:
Preparation of Steamed Fish (1)

Photo 89:
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Photo 90:
Preparation of Boiled Curry
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Pounding of Rice Powder and Tree Leaves for Yeast Cake

Photo 92:  
Preparation of Yeast Cake

Photo 93:  
Preparation of Rice Beer