Chapter 9.

Conclusion
CONCLUSION

Change is a universal factor and human mind is prone to change. In nature change is inevitable and in no condition, it can be stalled. Again, culture is by nature dynamic. Culture goes on changing itself in synchronizing with the change of time. This project is an attempt to observe the trends of changes on the plain Tiwas of Assam in their various spheres of life and society. It also tries to locate the factors responsible for the changes. To have a clear picture of the changes in their society spheres like social institution, religion, socio-political life, economic life and folklore have been observed from a comparative point of view. When changes are discussed, continuities are also not left out. Some of the folkloric items related to these spheres have been studied mainly to observe the change and continuity factor amongst the Tiwas. The study is not only a synchronic one; it takes into consideration the diachronic aspect of the culture of the Tiwas. Here an attempt has been made to address questions such as: Is there any particular factor, besides the general factors, responsible for the changes in all spheres of their culture? Do the changes in one particular field affect the other spheres of their culture too?

After examining the task from different angles in the present research project, several changes have been noticed amongst the Tiwas. It is observed that certain traditions and rituals have remained intact and some others have changed along with the changing of time. In the sphere of social institution, it is observed that matriliny has lost its ground and pratriliny has gained importance. Patriarchy has become a prominent feature in the Tiwa society now. Even the Gobhia enjoys the right of the inheritance of property. Marriage alliances have not confined to their own community only. Alliances
have taken place with other tribal communities as well as the Assamese caste Hindus. As both the Tiwa and non Tiwa villages are influenced by each other, the syncretic process is well and truly underway. They are losing their matrilineal system of descent, inheritance and succession and matrilocal residence. Instances of both the nuclear and joint families have been found amongst them. However, the instances of nuclear families are more than the joint families. Clan exogamy is still maintained but with some relaxation.

In the socio-political sphere the structures and functions of the traditional social organizations have been changed. Here, the existence of a well organized republican type of administration in earlier times could be observed. It had contributed towards the jurisprudence as well as to the cultural, religious and economic life. Amongst the village level social organizations dormitory (Chamadi) used to function as a centre for non-formal education in earlier times as the dormitory inmates used to stay in the dormitory for a particular period of time. But now due to the advancement of modern education the boys hardly get time to spend time in dormitory. However, dormitory is still functioning as a centre for training in various handicrafts, dance and music to some extent. The dormitory and other traditional village level social organizations are still continuing along with the modern democratic setup in many Tiwa villages. These organizations had contributed a lot in preservation of their rich cultural heritage.

In the religious sphere transformations have been widely noticed amongst the Tiwas. In contemporary times, the Tiwas follow five religious patterns as follows: (a) The followers of Traditional religious faith, who have retained dual form of religious beliefs-Animisim and Vaisnavism, (b) The converted Vaisnavite, who organized themselves into Janajati Sankar Sangha, (c) The followers of Krishna Guru, (d) The followers of Anukul Thakur, and (e) The Christians. The religious changes can be examined in the framework of the concepts like Sanskritization, tribe-caste-continuum and proselytization. Sirinivas defines Sanskritization as the process by which a low caste or tribe
or other group takes over the customs, rituals, beliefs, ideology and style of
life of a high and, in particular, a twice-born (dwij) caste.1 In Assam, tribe
caste dichotomy is not so rigid and both the twice born castes and tribes have
been influenced mutually. Non vegetarian habit and consumption of rice beer
by the twice born castes are examples of this fact. In other words there is are
not such hard and fast rules followed by the twice born castes of Assam as
compared to the twice born castes of the South India. However, there are
differences in case of customs, rituals and ideology followed by the twice
born castes and that of tribes in Assam. Hence, we can not say that the
sanskritization is a total phenomenon in case of the Tiwas of Assam. Rather
we can say that a distinct mode of proslytization occurred here. Because the
plain Tiwas have accepted the paths of Sankardeva, Anukul Thakur, Krishna
Guru and Christianity being attracted by the liberal norms and ideologies of
these religious practices. In Assam, the twice born castes are more liberal and
unorthodox. Flexibility in the strict rules that are subscribed for them has
become a common factor now-a-days. Yet they are recognized as higher
castes in Assamese-context. The mobility towards caste system from the tribal
strata is note-worthy factor in Assam. Being attracted towards the status of
twice born castes in the Assamese society the Tiwas purified and elevated
their lifestyle and deliberately got converted into Assamese Hindu castes to be
known as Saru-koch, and accepted caste surname like Laskar instead of Doloi,
Deka and Deori. This had resulted in the situation of tribe-caste-continuum
process in Assamese society.

In the economic sphere it has been observed that their economy is still
in subsistence level. Agriculture and animal husbandry are their main sources
of livelihood though the educated Tiwas are engaged in service sectors. Kin-
based economy is still going on in their society. The problems faced by them
in the economic spheres are landlessness, flood and backward agricultural
practices. Culture and economy have close interrelationship since remote past.
It is evident from the existence of traditional celebrations associated with
agricultural activities, proverbial expressions and traditional periodical market
like Jonbil Mela. Every kind of agricultural operation is associated with cultural and religious celebrations. Moreover, circulation of proverbs replete with agricultural knowledge and existence of traditional periodical markets are evidence of these facts. But the converted Tiwas do not follow the traditional ceremonies associated with the agricultural practices. It can be also added here that economic condition of the people has influenced the cultural continuity and change. Hence, the relationship between culture and economy can be described as a two-way process and each one is influenced by the other.

In the field of folklore no noticeable changes have been observed in oral literature. But the oral literatures are good means to study their socio-cultural life. The contextual study of the texts of these oral literatures can provide a clear picture about the social and cultural situations where they are created. The folk songs, myths and legends have relation with their cultural practices and history. On the contrary, the changes are prominent in case of material culture as compared to the oral literature. Again, in material culture, the extent of change is relatively more in case of the folk architecture and the folk costume than the folk cookery. Their contact with different neighbouring groups can be discernable in the case of the traditional dress pattern. At first their traditional dress has been influenced by that of the Jaintias and Karbis and very recently, by the Bodos and Assamese. Folk architecture has also been influenced by the Assamese Hindus. The food habit has been influenced by the religious practices they follow. Nevertheless, these fields of folklore have maintained some continuity within it. And both oral literature and material culture provide information about their socio-cultural continuity and change.

The findings of the work can be sum-up as follows:

(a) Assamese culture has many sub-cultures as many diverse communities living in Assam. Most of the communities have maintained their separate
ethnic identities and cultures. It is after the independence of India that a deep sense of self consciousness has been observed amongst the tribes of Assam. The recent movements by different ethnic communities are the results of that sense of consciousness. The Tiwas have been living side by side with other non-tribals as well as tribal groups since long time. Therefore, both the tribal and non-tribal groups of Assam have had a great impact upon the cultural and social life of the Tiwas. Mainly, they have been influenced by the Jaintias, the Karbis, Misings and the Bodos. The neighboring tribes of the Tiwas mainly the Bodos, the Karbis, the Missings, the Rabhas, the Dimasas, the Deuri-Chutiyas, the Hazongs all are the direct descendents of the same racial group, i.e. the Indo-Mongoloid group. Naturally there are some affinities in cultural traits amongst these ethnic groups. Most of the prevailing oral literatures of the Tiwas provide us information on their cultural affinities. (See Chapter 8) Moreover, influence of these ethnic groups can be noticed in the case of ethnic assertion, dress pattern and food habit and of the Tiwas. The autonomy movement started mainly by the Bodos and Karbis has a great impact upon the ethnic assertion of the Tiwas. (See Chapter 5 and Chapter 8)

On the other hand, among the non tribal groups, the Assamese caste Hindus are the main group with whom the Tiwas are living in close proximity. Therefore, different spheres of the Tiwa culture have been influenced by the culture of the Assamese caste Hindus. Their socio-religious life and daily life is particularly influenced by the Assamese caste Hindus. (See Chapter 6)

(b) All spheres of their culture have been influenced by various trends of changes. However, one finds a streak of continuity amidst the changing patterns. Changes have taken place mainly after the independence of India. Democratic set up of the nation, modernization in education, introduction of tribal development and community development schemes by the government have influenced a lot the life and culture of the Tiwas.
(c) The transacculturation process is going on in Assam as both the tribal and non-tribal groups have been influenced by each other. Examples of this process are prominent in the cases of dress pattern, food habit and language. The influence of Assamese culture on their dress pattern is evident in case of the designs and colours of their traditional dress and casual attire. Influence in case of food habit is evident in religious practices they follow. In the case of language the plain Tiwas use Assamese language in their day-to-day life. Most of them have even forgotten their Tiwa language. Those who use Tiwa language have incorporated many Assamese words in day-to-day conversation. Similarly the Assamese Hindus, who have come in contact with the Tiwas, have incorporated many Tiwa words in their language. Each of these languages has been greatly influenced by the other not only in words, syntax but also the tone. Assamese food habit and dress pattern have also been influenced by the neighbouring Tiwas. Nowadays, Assamese people do not hesitate to eat pork and drink rice beer, although habitually these were once considered as taboos. Moreover, influence in the case of textile design can be seen too. The red, black and yellow are three main colours of the Tiwa traditional dress. But these colours are now used by the Assamese women as prime colours in the case of Assamese cotton *Chadar-Mekhela* (traditional costume of Assamese women).

(d) Different spheres of culture are interrelated and changes in one sphere can influence another. Here the five spheres of their culture such as social institutions, socio-political life, religious life, economic life and folklore are closely related to each other. Hence, a holistic approach is needed for study of culture change. Study of an individual sphere is quite impossible without referring to the other spheres of culture. This fact can be understood from the following figure:
(e) In the five spheres of their culture under study, the changes in religious sphere are more prominent and the rate is faster. Now, there are five religious groups amongst the Tiwas. This situation has created intra-tribal tension amongst them. Religion has validating functions. Religions legitimatize the social order in a society. It has relation to other spheres of culture like political, social, economic and education. Hence, changes in this sphere have influenced the other spheres of their culture. Durkheim too believed that the social, political, and kinship organization of a society are reflected in its religion. In other words, all the institutions of a society are related to one another.²

(f) In contemporary times, the rate of change is faster in all spheres of their culture. Due to the changes in their culture, a strong ethnic consciousness has been generated amongst the Tiwas and a revivalist movement has been started amongst them. Revivalism always tries to search for roots. Revivalist movement amongst the Tiwas can be noticed in the form of movement for resurrection of their language and literature and culture. The establishment of The Tiwa Sahitya Sabha (The Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra) in 1981, the demand
for immediate introduction of the Tiwa language and appointment of teachers in the schools of Tiwa dominated areas in the State and formation of Tiwa Autonomous Council are some of the demands of their revivalist movement. This phenomenon has vindicated the observation of Herskovits:

If the culture stresses change, there is a tendency to slight the vast body of stabilizing elements that, lying beneath the changes that are actually in the process gives continuity in the way of life.3

(g) Both the change and the continuity are area-specific. The rate of change and the rate of continuity vary depending on the areas the people have been living in. In the Nambor village and Banpar kisam of Silsang area, the extent of continuity is more as compared to other villages under study. On the contrary the extent of change is relatively more in Bundua, Butikura and Jarabari villages. The changes as well as the continuity are subject to the influence of adjacent communities.

(h) Same culture has different manifestations in different areas. The Tiwa culture has provided different facet of their culture in different areas. One particular area is unable to provide the universal pattern of their culture. Hence, it can be concluded that culture too is area specific.

To sum up what have been discussed in the previous chapters, several factors are responsible for culture change. Some are internal factors and some are external. There are three general sources of influence or pressures that are responsible for both change and resistance to change. Those are – (i) forces at work within a society, (ii) contact between societies, and (iii) changes in natural environment. Here the factors responsible for resulting in change in their culture can be divided into five categories:

(a) Forces that work within a society: cultural loss, innovation and changes in ideology have resulted in proselytization in the religious
spheres of the Tiwas which is also accelerated by the contact between societies.

(b) Contact between societies: processes of assimilation, transculturation, diffusion, transacculturation and syncretism are resulted due to the contact with neighbouring tribal and non-tribal communities.

(c) Changes in natural environment: Frequent flood during last two decades affected the life and economy of the Tiwas. The floods of 1989 and 2004 in Assam have badly affected the economic life of the Tiwas. The Tiwas living in Nagaon and Morigaon districts are badly affected by the floods of Kapili, Hariya, Barapani and Brahmaputra rivers. Some of the Tiwas have even lost their agricultural land due to the land erosion in flood. This situation has compelled them to work in the unorganized sector as manual workers or fourth grade employees.

(d) Constitutional provisions and safeguards: Constitutional provision and safeguards for the Scheduled Tribes have provided opportunities in case of education and self employment. The Sarva Shiksha Mission has a strong influence on their society. It has increased the literacy rate amongst them. The Sarva Shiksha Mission wants to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the 5+ to 13+ age group by 2010. It is an effort to universalize elementary education by community ownership of the school system. The Sarva Shiksha Mission has enabled the poor Tiwa families to provide institutional education to their children. Moreover, Govt. of India reservation policy for Scheduled Tribes has definitely produced positive result among the tribal people particularly in enhancement of literacy and employment rate.

(e) Technological advancement: Technological changes alienate the Tiwas from their traditional practices and people are moving towards a
new lifestyle. Presently in the wake of the process of globalization, the technological changes have become all the more conspicuous. The situation has subjected smaller societies to experience a sense of loss of tradition and identity leading to the emergence of identity consciousness among them. Technological advancement in the forms of television, print media and cinema takes this group more close to a global culture which has affected their daily life.

In contrast to change, some factors help to maintain a changeless stability in their society and culture. In-group out-group dynamics are the social and psychological forces operate in the interaction between groups of people and societies. These in-group out-group dynamics are responsible for maintaining continuity in their society. In interaction between groups of people, ethnocentrism plays the main role to resist change. For the feelings of ethnocentrism the Tiwas view their own culture as the best. The competitive feeling of 'us versus them' leads to ethnocentrism. Habits also reject alien culture as unnatural and even immoral. Habits have stuck the Tiwas to their traditional practices. Hence, it has helped them to maintain continuity in their culture. Revivalism and in-group out-group dynamics commonly result in resistance to the dynamics of change and are able to maintain equilibrium between change and continuity.
Notes:


Photo 94: Main Entrance of 8th Session of the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha (Dec. 2008)

Photo 95: Cultural Procession of 8th Session of the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha

Photo 96: The Lai Khuta of 8th Session of the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha