Chapter 3.

The Ethnographic Profile of the Tiwas

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CHAPTER 3

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE TIWAS

The Tiwas, a scheduled tribe of India, are formerly and constitutionally known as “Lalungs”. The name Lalung was given by the neighboring ethnic group Karbis. The Karbis gave this name to denote those people who were living in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. The meaning is: La means water and Lung means rescued. As the river Brahmaputra gave shelter to these people, hence they were known as Lalung. But this ethnic group introduces themselves as “Tiwa”. The meaning is: Ti means water and Wa means superior. There are many myths and legends related to these issues which have been discussed in Chapter 8.

Tiwas are one of the prominent scheduled tribe of Assam living in both hill and plains. Racially, they belong to the great Mongoloid stock. The tribal people of Himalayan region especially of north Himalaya come under this category. The Mongoloids of India are referred to as the Indo-Mongoloids. The major portions of the tribal people of Assam are basically Indo-Mongoloids who came to this place in successive waves at different intervals of time from different directions- north, north-east and south-east. Linguistically, the Tiwas belong to one of the language/dialects of the Bodo group, where the Kacharis, the Dimasas, the Garos, the Tripuras etc. are also included. The Bodos are one of the groups of languages belonging to the Assamese-Burmese Branch of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family falling under great Tibeto-Chinese Family of languages.¹

3.1. Settlement and Population:

Their main settlement found in Middle Assam, particularly in Nagaon and Morigaon districts. Moreover, some of them are resided in Karbi Anglong,
Kamrup, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Jorhat Districts too. The hill Tiwas are generally found in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, particularly in the Amri Development Block, Chinthong Development Block of Hamren Sub-Division and Jayantia Hills district of Meghalaya. The plain Tiwas are mainly inhabit in the Morigaon Sub-Division; Nagaon Sadar Revenue Circle, Kaliabor Revenue Circle, Raha Revenue Circle, Lanka Revenue Circle, Kampur Revenue Circle of the district of Nagaon; South Tribal Belt of Sunapur Revenue Circle of Kamrup district; Demaji Civil Sub-Division of Demaji district and in Titabor areas of Jorhat District of Assam. The topography and ecology have a noticeable influence on the life and culture of this ethnic group. Hence, there are socio cultural variations among the Tiwas living in the hills and those living in the plains. These variations can be visible in the case of dress pattern, agricultural pattern and food habit etc. Moreover, the people living in the hills are somewhat isolated from the contact of other groups of people. But those living in the plains are in long contact with the other neighbouring tribal and non tribal groups.

According to the census of 2001 the total tribal population of Assam is 3,308,570 which constitute 12.4% of the total population. The Tiwa population is 1,70,622, which constitute 5.2% of the total scheduled tribe population of the state. As per the census of 2001 the literacy rate of the all scheduled tribe population of Assam is 62.5%, among them the literacy of the Tiwas is 61.8%. Major concentrations of the Tiwa people are found in Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam, which constitute 92.79% of total Tiwa population. The Tiwa have a unique and distinct social characteristic. They have still by and large retained their cultural identity as a tribal ethnic group in the plains.

3.2. Migration and History:

Although there is no any written history available on the Tiwas of Assam, yet the early references are found in R. M. Nath’s The Background of Assamese
Culture and Sir Edward Gait's *A History of Assam* about their migration to the plains of Assam and the role played by the Tiwa kings of the principality of Gobha, Neli, Khola and Sahari etc. R. M. Nath mentioned about the original abode and the migration of the Tiwas to the plains in his book *The Background of Assamese Culture*. He said that, the Tipperahs had their original homeland near Allahabad and Baranasi in Uttar Pradesh. They preferred to call themselves as the children of water goddess and were therefore known as the Tiphrsas or the Tippras. Due to the onslaught of the Aryans they migrated to the East and settled at the Pragjyotisha. These people migrated to the Kapili valley of Nagaon district, which is then known as Trivega. They established their principality there around 1900 B.C. and ruled for sixteen generation. Probably the Tiwas are earlier known as Tipperahs. He wrote:

Whatever might have been the origin of the royal dynasty, it traditionally believed that one Protardon came over to Assam and established a kingdom named Trivega in about 1900 B.C. with his headquarters on the banks of the Kapili river in the present Nowgaon district and the dynasty ruled for full fourteen generations. What relations the kings had with the king of the Naraka dynasty, is not known. Chitra-Ratha — the twelfth king of the line is said to have attended the royal convention invited by Yudhisthira — the king of the lunar dynasty at Delhi.⁵

To maintain a friendly relation with the Kacharis, Trilochan, the sixteenth ruler of Trivega married a Kachari princess. He had two sons Drikpati and Dakshin. Drikpati become the king of Kachari kingdom as the Kachari king was issueless. Dakshin become the king of Trivega Trivega after his father death. Subsequently there was a battle between Drikpati and Dakshin for the throne of Trivega, where Dakshin was defeated. Along with the royal subjects Dakshin proceeded towards southern direction and after crossing the Barail range he established a kingdom at Tippera or Tripura.⁶

Some of the Tipperahs did not follow Dakshin and hid themselves in the hilly areas and their descendents were later known as Tiwas (Lalungs).⁷
The Jayantia kings established the Lalung principalities out of these people on the foothill as a buffer among the Jayantia kingdom and the Kachari and Ahom kingdoms. These principalities included Gobha, Neli, Sahari, Khola commonly known as Dantir Charibhai.  

R. M. Nath also stated that the Tiwas have twelve small principalities under the suzerainty of the ruler of Jaintia. The king of Gobha Panteswar stood against the Koch general Chila Rai in 1564 A.D. He wrote:

From earliest time, there appear to have been twelve states within a small area under the suzerainty of the ruler of Jaintia. Gobha was the biggest state, and then there were Nelly, Khola, Tapakuchi, Roha, Baropujia, Rani, Luki, Beltola &c.

... In 1564, Panteswar, the king of Gobha stood successfully against the Koch general Chila Rai. During the Ahom rule some Lalung Chiefs near Roha were alienated by the Ahom chief stationed at Roha from the suzerainty of Jaintia.

Arimatta was identified as a Lalung (Tiwa) king who established his kingdom in Brahmaputar valley. The dynasty established by the king Arimatta and his son Jongal Balahu, remained in power for about six decades from 1138 A.D. E. A. Gait also wrote that the site containing the remains of a old fort with a high embankment called Jongal Balahu Garh situated in Sahari mauza in Nagaon district was the capital of king Jongal Balahu. During this period, the Tiwas are living in the Brahmaputra valley on the both banks of the river. Their main concentration was at Helem in Sonitpur district. Later on they left Halem and settled in KarbiAnglong hills, Khasi and Jayantia hills. Their main settlement was at Khyrim. Later on they came to the plains.

E. A. Gait wrote about the migration of the Tiwas to the plain areas particularly to the Nagaon district as follows:

In 1658 Pramatta Rai rebelled against his grand father Jasa Manta Rai, Raja of Jaintia, and called on the tributary chief of Gobha to help him. The latter refused, and Pramata Rai thereupon destroyed four of his villages. He appealed for help to the Kacharis, who were
preparing to come to his assistance, when the local Ahom officials intervened and said that, as the Ahom were the paramount power, it was they whose protection should be sought. The Gobha chief accordingly went with seven hundred men to Jayadhvaj Singha and begged for help. Orders were issued to the Bor Phukan to establish him in Khagorjan, corresponding more or less to the modern Nowgaon, and this was accordingly done.\textsuperscript{14}

The \textit{Linguistic Survey of India} of G. A. Grierson also bears historical facts of the Tiwas. Though Grierson did not mention about the date of the migration of the Tiwas to the plain areas, yet he mentioned that they came from the Jaintia hills. He wrote:

How the Lalungs came to their present site or when is not known. They are not mentioned by the Ahom historians nor in the accounts of the Koch kingdom. In Nowgaon they are said to have a tradition that they came from the Jaintia Hills while some of the Lalungs in the latter district say that their ancestors immigrated thither in the reign of the Jaintia Raja U Mon Gohain. Another account, however, says that the Lalungs claim to be the autochthones of the Jaintia Hills. [quoted in Sarma Thakur, \textit{The Lalungs (Tiwas)}, 8]\textsuperscript{15}

The Tiwas used to practise human sacrifices till the advent of British rule in Assam. Chatra Singha, the Tiwa king of Gobha have had sacrificed three British people too. Probably this made the downfall of the Tiwa kingdoms during the British period. R. M. Nath wrote thus:

Chatra Singh, the Lalung chief of the Gobha state near Nowgaon, who was a vassal to the ruler of Jaintia was alleged to have had sacrificed three human beings who were the British subjects of Guwahati before his tutelar deity Kali according to his time-honoured religious custom. The ruler of Jaintia was asked to account for this and hand over the culprits, though the culprit who had killed three officer and 150 followers were dealt with directly.

... In 1834, Chatra Singha, the ruler of Gobha was alleged to have sacrificed several persons Kamarupa before the Goddess Kali and this made the British interfere, and ultimately resulted in the annexation of Jaintia and thereby of the Lalung States to the British Empire.\textsuperscript{16}

After the coming of British, the Tiwas had come under the subjugation of British administrators with the rest of the population of Assam. After the
revolt of 1857 when the government contemplated to impose tax on their poppy cultivation, the Lalung peasants of Phulaguri area of Nagaon district made a bold protest against it. This armed conflict with the British authority is known as Phulaguri Dhewa.

From the above short historical description, it is noticed that the Tiwas had been in long contact with other communities from the pre-historic times. Notable among them are the Jayantias, the Koches, the Kacharis, the Ahoms and the Chutiyas etc. The Tiwas living in the plains of Assam were influenced by the Hinduism since the pre-British period, as the above mentioned communities were also Hinduised community. In the Plains they come under the influence of the Neo-Vasnavism of Sankardeva. In later years some other religious faiths have also influenced their culture.

3.3. Socio-Cultural Background:

Any kind of discussion on cultural background of a group of people is incomplete without referring to the rites and ceremonies related to the life cycle of human being. The Tiwas have multifarious socio-cultural rites and ceremonies related to their birth, marriage and death, which depict the background of their cultural life.

A Tiwa expectant mother is generally kept in a separate temporary room. Here only the Ojani (care taker) can enter, but in special cases the husband and select close relative can enter. Two or three women are appointed for taking care of the expectant mother and baby. In the plains they are known as Ojani and in the hills they are known as Giyati. After the birth of the baby the Ojani cuts the umbilical cord with a very thin bamboo slice. Mother takes rest in a bed made of dry paddy stalk. A special curry made of chicken and arum leaves (generally the black variety) mixed with spices is given to the mother after the child birth. They believe that this enable the
mother to recoup quickly. A drop of this curry is also dropped in the mouth of
the baby.

There are two types of birth related ceremonies prevalent among the
plain Tiwas. Those are - the household purification and name giving
ceremony known as Aus Gara and the community purification ceremony
known as Manashwa. The Aus Gara ceremony is celebrated just after the fall
of the naval cord of the baby. After receiving this news, Hari kunwari (lady
religious head of Borghar) places an altar at the threshold of the particular
room of the mother. Borjela (religious head of Borghar) worships the deity
and sacrifices a cock. After observing this ritual, the hair of the baby is shaved
by the father. In his absence close relatives does this task. Thereafter the Hari
kunwari places another altar in the courtyard and the Borjela offers another
prayer there. If the baby is male, then the mother takes a bow and shoots six
arrows towards six directions. She makes some fake attempt with the seventh
arrow and places the bow and arrow in the hand of the baby. If the baby is
female, then she places a sickle, a cotton processing device known as Dhuna,
some devices of loom are places in the hand of the baby. These tasks have
some symbolic meaning. The bow and arrow symbolizes heroism while the
devices of loom and sickle symbolize efficiency in weaving and agricultural
operations.

The Hari Kuwanri then draws seven vertical lines near the altar of the
courtyard. She takes some earth from the middle line and with her middle
finger she gives imprint (Tilak) in the forehead, chest, and both the ears and
shoulders of the baby. The Borjela utters prays some mantras for the
wellbeing of the child. Then the Borjela gives name to the child. The parents
of the child bow before him by offering a pair of battle leaves and nuts.
Earlier, at least till the 1970s, the elderly people used to sing the Lali Hillali
songs in this ceremony.
The community purification ceremony, i.e. *Manashwa* is celebrated in clan basis. *Manashwa* in one clan is celebrated once a year in *Borghar*. When there is more than one new born baby in a *Bangsha* or *Khuta* (a group of families of same clan) the families decide a stipulated date for the celebration of this ceremony. They request the *Borjela* to arrange this ceremony in their *Borghar*. Once the date is decided, the *Borjelas* of different clan and the families of the particular *Bangsha* are invited for it. On the stipulated day of this ceremony, the *Borjela* offers a cock to the God on the threshold of the *Borghar*. The families who join the *Manashwa* offer a cock if the baby is male and if the baby is female, they offer a hen. The *Borjela* sacrifices the birds in the name of God and forecasts the future of the babies by observing the manner of death of the sacrificed bird. It is considered as ominous, if the bird dies facing north east direction. They arrange a feast with these sacrificed birds. All guests are entertained with this curry and Zu (Rice beer). Then the children are taken before the altar of the *Borghar*. The *Hari Kuwanri* smears mustard oil over the bodies of the children. The elderly women wrap the children with new clothes. Then all the children are made to bow before the altar. The *Borjela* prays to God for the welfare of the children and bless them. Then the children are brought outside the courtyard before the invited *Borjelas* of different clan. The *Borjelas* bless them for happy future.

Marriage is the accepted form of union between a man and woman among the Tiwas. Boys usually marry around of 25 to 30 years of age and girls 20 to 25. No illegal union especially incestuous relations get social recognition; rather these types of relations are very much hated by the people. Clan exogamy is strictly adhered to. They are generally monogamous although cases of polygamy cannot be ruled out. Preferential marriage including cross cousin marriages are not in vogue. The cases of widow remarriage and divorce are few and far between, although there is no bar for a widow and a divorcee to enter into marriage.
Different types of traditional marriage systems are prevalent among them. These are: (a) Bor biya (marriage by negotiation), (b) Joron biya (marriage by negotiation), (c) Gobhia rakha biya (marriage by service), (d) Poluai ana biya (marriage by elopement), (e) Soali dhari rakha or Balpurbak biya (marriage by capture), (f) Soali dhari bandhi diya biya (marriage by imposition) and (g) Dhum biya (marriage by imposition). These days, out of the above traditional marriages, only the marriage by negotiation and elopement are popular among them. Rests are totally gone out of place due to socio-economic changes.

Monogamy is socially and legally recognized among them. Levirate is not socially accepted while sorrorate is socially accepted but examples are very few. Both the nuclear and extended families are found, though the instances of extended family are less. Patriliny has gained importance even in the Gobhiya rakha system of marriage. The issues related to marriage system have been discussed elaborately in the chapter related to Social Institution.

Earlier, both cremation and burial are practiced by the Tiwas. Now, cremation is the general practice among them. There are different exclusive areas for different clans (khuta or Bangsha) in the cremation ground (Mangkhor). They use those specific areas Hatham to cremate the dead bodies of their clan members. Two officials known as Giyati (both male and female) are selected by the Borjela of the concerned clan. They take all the responsibility of the cremation rites. The male Giyati performs all tasks related to cremation rites. He goes to cremation ground and breaks an egg and worships in the Hatham. The Tiwas believe that the Hatham unites the soul of the deceased with ancestors. Female Giyati takes all the responsibilities of tasks of preparing and offering the Pinda (food) to the deceased. The period from the death of a person till the seventh day is recognized as unclean period. During this period no can enter the Borghar and granary. This impure period ends with the Tamol Bata Phurua ceremony, a ceremony of offering prayers to ancestors. It is organized on the seventh day inside the Borghar.
Karam a community purification ceremony after death is solemnized after one year. Here the pending death ceremonies of the other deceased person of the same Bangsha (clan) are solemnized jointly in the Borghar. Earlier this function was held for seven days but now it is three days function. Even in some places it is one day function. Every family of the Bangsha contributes to the common fund of Karam. One pig, five fowls and Zu is essential item for this ceremony. The Borjela take out the Zela (arrow) of Borghar and places it in the courtyard. The female Giyati sprinkles purified water (water mixed with basil leaf, Dubari Grass and copper) on the ground. The pig and fowls are sacrificed in the courtyard, where the Zela is placed. The female Giyati takes some meat of the sacrificed pig and prepares Pinda (food) inside the Borghar. She offers this Pinda in the name of the deceased person on whose behalf the Karam is held. The food for the feast is prepared by the elderly villagers.

Nuclear and joint or extended families are found in Tiwa society. The instances of joint family are lesser in comparison to the nuclear family. In extended family, other than a man, his wife and unmarried children, the same homestead may also be occupied by the married sons. Moreover, if their son-in-law is a Gobhia, then the same homestead is occupied by their married daughters too. Families are of mainly Patrilocal. Tiwa society had followed a matrilineal system of inheritance in the past decades which, however, is not practiced now a days.

The Tiwas have twelve exogamous clans which have different sub clans. Clan exogamy is still maintained by them. The main clans found among them are as follows: (i) Macharang, (ii) Madur, (iii) Maloi, (iv) Dafor, (v) Sukai, (vi) Amfli, (vii) Lasa, (viii) Chalang, (ix) Amchong, (x) Kakhor, (xi) Darnong and (xii) Lorom. These clans are further divided into sub clans. Cognates families of same clan are united in one cluster known as Bangsha or Khuta. The Borghar and Khuta system play a vital role in cultivating and regulating the domestic and social sphere of culture of the cognate families of
same clan. There is another institution made by different Bangsha or Khuta (clan) is known as Khel system. One village may have different Khels. Generally village level ceremonies, festivals are organized by the Khels. Deka, Raja, Deka raja, Bordoloi, Doloi, Deuri, Senapati, Pator, Konwar, Bharali etc. are some of the surnames used by the Tiwas.

The traditional village level social organizations of the Tiwas are well structured, which provide them unity, self-sufficiency in the lives of the members and play a vital role in village level judiciary, socio-cultural, socio-religious and economic life. Some of these institutions are socio-political, socio-religious in nature and some are both socio-cultural & economic in character. These organizations are important part of their tribal life and the jurisdiction of these organizations is a single village. The village level social organization of the Tiwas can be divided into two categories. Those are secular and non secular or religious organizations. The secular village organizations are: (a) Deka-khel or Deka-xari or Chamadi (the council of youth or bachelor's dormitory), (b) Bura-khel or Bura-xari (the council of elders), (c) Doli or Gaonburha (the traditional village chief), (d) Borkhel-bichar (a judicial council), (e) Hadari khel (a working group) etc. The non-secular or religious organizations are run by the three office bearers namely Lora (village priest), Ghorbura or Borjela (head of Bangsha or Borghar or Clan) and Hari-Kunwari (leady head of Borghar).

The Deka-khel or Deka-xari or Chamadi is an organization of all young men above fourteen years of age. The Doli or Gaonburha is the head of the village. He decides petty cases in a Mel (meeting) of the village elders and inflicts punishment on the offenders. The Bura-khel or Bura-xari consists of eight members and is a higher judicial body. The members are appointed for life and are selected from the Deka-khel. The Borkhel-bichar is the predominant rural judicial institution prevalent among the plain Tiwas. Before the advent of the British the Tiwas had their own independent Rajas (king). He enjoyed the highest judicial authority. The institution of kingship is still in
vogue. The Raja is assisted by such office bearers as: Bordololi, Konwar, Patar, Barbarua, Dhaliya, Dalia and Paik. The Hadari-khel is a group of young girls in a village. The help of Hadari-khel is generally sought at the time of agricultural operations. The function of this institution is based on fellow feeling ness and co-operation.

Amongst the office bearers of the non secular or religious organizations, the Loro is the village priest. He presides over all of the village level religious ceremonies and festivals. The Ghorbura or Borjela is a religious head of Borghar (a prayer hall of every clan). This post is hereditary and he is also a head of the clans. Hari kunwari is a lady religious head. She may be married or unmarried. If she is married, she must remain in the same Bangsha even after the marriage. Every clan has their separate Borghars. No religious ceremony can be held in the clan without the presence of Borjela and Hari-kuwanri.

The traditional Tiwa religious beliefs and practices are based on animism or polydemonism. The religious practices are based on a belief in some deities. Lord Mahadeo is their supreme God and He is symbolized and represented by the Zela or sacred arrow in the places of worship. All worships begin with a prayer to Lord Mahadeo. 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 grove as well as the spring festival. Apart from these main deities, many others are also worshiped in Borghars and Thaanghars. The Borghar, Thaanghar and Namghar are three religious places of worship. Borghar is a prayer hall consisting of two rooms; one for household deities and the other is a cooking room used for religious purpose only. Thaanghar and Namghar are the places of community worship in a village. The Tiwas worship many deities in Borghar, Thaanghar and Namghar. Among them Ganesh and Parameswar are their benevolent male deities while Aai Gosani, Lakhmi, Padumi, Kalika, Kamakhya, Saru Aai, Bor Aai, Kani Andheli are the
important benevolent female deities. Certain *pujas* and ceremonies are also held in the *Borghar*. *Deo Sewa, Kalika puja, Bhakat sewa* and *Rati Sewa* etc. are some of them. Now, the Tiwa have been initiated into various religious faiths as Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva, Christianity and very recently the religious faith of Krishna Guru and Anukul Thakur.

The *Jongkhong Puja, Chagra Michawa, Bihu, Gosain Uliwa Utsav, Barat-utchava, Wancawa, Lankhun Puja* and *Kheljawa* etc. are some of the festivals of the Tiwas. These festivals are observed with songs and dances. The *Jonbil Mela* is a traditional periodical market or fair of the Tiwas which is held once in a year. It is held after the *Magh Bihu* (in the month of January) at the bank of *Jonbil* lake which is 2 k.m away from Jagiroad of Marigaon district. The fair is known for the barter system.

The mainstay of the economy of the Tiwas is agriculture. Sifting cultivation is practiced on the hills and the settled cultivation is the main agricultural practice in the plains. Cultivation of variety *Sali* (wet cultivation) is the major crop of the plains Tiwas. *Boro, Ahu* and *Bao* varieties of paddy are also grown. Other crops such as vegetables, fruits, coconuts, areca nuts, sesame, mustard, turmeric, ginger etc. are also cultivated in the homestead lands.

Besides rice, horticultural cash crops such as banana, betel, areca nut and seasonal vegetables like gourd, pumpkin, brinjal, radish, chilli etc. are also grown by them. The most popular horticultural crop is areca nut, which is produced for home consumption as well as for sale in the market. Bamboo is also grown by them. Bamboos are used for making baskets and fencing, construction of the dwelling house, granaries, cattle-sheds etc. In plains all agricultural works are done by ploughing. Besides cultivation; fishery, piggery, poultry are other economic activities of the Tiwas. Moreover, basketry and weaving are other popular activities.
The traditional Tiwa homestead consists of four parts, such as: *Majghar, Choraghar, Borghar* and Granary. *Majghar* consists of kitchen, dining room and bed rooms as per requirement of the family. *Majghar* is constructed in between the *Borghar* and *Charaghar*. *Choraghar* is an outhouse generally consisting of two rooms and it is constructed a few yards away from the main house where the guests received and unmarried young boys sleep at night. The traditional Tiwa homestead also has a granary. The granary and cattle-sheds are constructed in the backyard. Houses are generally built by bamboos, wood, thatch etc.

The traditional dress of Tiwa women consists of three pieces of clothes: *kasang, jaskai or phaskai* and *thongali.* *Kasang* is use to cover the lower portion of the body, It is an unstitched garment like *mekhela* (lower garment of Assamese womenfolk) with horizontal stripes. *Jaskai or Phaskai* is worn to cover the upper portion of the body from the breast to the waist. Earlier this was used as a blouse. Now a days they wear both the blouse and *Jaskai. Thongali* is used to wear over *Kasang* like a waistband because earlier they did not use under garment like petticoat along with traditional dress. The traditional dress in the case of men folk consists of five pieces of clothes. Those are *Tagla-* a jacket like traditional shirt. *Dhoti* can be of *Muga* or cotton, which is used to cover the lower portion of the body. The *Kamasa or Seleng* is placed on upper portion of the body over two shoulders like an ‘X’. *Thangali* is a waistband; *Phaga* is a turban.

Rice is the staple food of the Tiwas. Their traditional food consists of rice, wild vegetables like *Mayong masua* (fern like vegetables), *Samsui* (wild vegetable), *Tumru fai* (fig leaf) and indigenous alkali or *khar* prepared from banana stem. *Laflang* (dry fish) is also a traditional food of Tiwas. 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, Xokota tita, Bahak tita* (Adhatoda vasica, phlogocanthis) etc. are their traditional items for preparing food. *Tamlong or*
*Kharisa* (a mixture prepared of tender bamboo shoot) is also a favourite and traditional item of food. They use *Kharisa* in all kinds of preparation. Generally it is used and eaten with fish. Pork, chicken, fish are non-vegetarian items. *Zu* is drink which is used in both social and religious ceremonies. *Zu* (rice beer) is taken by all irrespective of age and no religious and cultural ceremony can be celebrated without using *Zu*. They use indigenously produced *Zu* in their everyday life. It is prepared from *Bora rice* (a special variety of summer rice) or from *Sali* rice grown in winter.

The Tiwas have their own language. Tiwa language belongs to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. It is spoken by all in the hills. But in the plains, majority of the Tiwa population cannot speak Tiwa, instead they speak Assamese language. Tiwas are more or less bilingual. Even some people have forgotten their language and speak only Assamese. Both the Assamese and Roman scripts are used to write the language.
Notes:


2 Binendra Kumar Gohain, Continuity & Change in the Hills of Assam (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1994), 34.


6 Ibid., 77-78.

7 Ganesh Chandra Sarma Thakur, The Lalungs (Tiwas) (Guwahati: The Director, Tribal research Institute, 1985), 2.


9 Rajmohan Nath, op.cit., 112-113.

10 Binendra Kumar Gohain, op.cit., 57.


13 Sailendra Kumar Agnihotri, op.cit.

14 Edward Gait, op.cit., 119.


Photo 1:
Main Gate of the Jongal Balahu Garh Fish Seed Farm

Photo 2:
Remaining of Jongal Balahu Garh Embankments (1)

Photo 3: Remaining of Jongal Balahu Garh Embankments (2)
THESE HIGH EMBANKMENTS ARE REMAINS OF AN OLD FORT, CALLED JONGAL BALAHU GARH. THIS SITE IS SAI'D TO HAVE BEEN THE CAPITAL OF JONGAL BALAHU GARH. HE WAS A SON OF ARIMATTA, WHO RULED IN LOWER ASSAM WITH HIS CAPITAL OF BAIHYA GARH. JONGAL BALAHU WAS DEFEATED BY THE KACHARIS AND KILLED DURING HIS ESCAPE. THE PLACE WHERE HE STOPPED TO DRINK WATER DURING HIS ESCAPE IS NOW CALLED 'RAHA' THEN HE JUMPED INTO THE KOLONG, THE PLACE WHERE HE APPEARED ABOVE THE WATER SURFACE IS NOW CALLED 'VAGI' AND WHERE HE WAS PIERCED TO DEATH WITH A KATLI BAMBOO IS KNOWN AS 'RAJALIMUKH'. THE NAME KOLONG IS DERIVED FROM 'KALANKA' (STAIN) AS ARIMATTA STAINED HIMSELF BY KILLING HIS FATHER ON THE BANK OF THAT RIVER AT ARIKATAMUKH.

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Photo 4: Map of Jongal Balahu Garh Fish Seed Farm

Photo 5: Archeological Evidence of Jongal Balahu Garh (English)
Photo 6: Archeological Evidence of Jongal Balahu Garh (Assamese)

Photo 7: Land Area of the Jongal Balahu Garh Fish Farm