Chapter V

Introductory Remarks:-

A society that depends on agrarian economics lives close to nature. The organic relationship that the society enjoys with the habitat it dwells on also shapes much of its world view and way of life. The toil and hardship that the members of such a community have to exert on nature on the daily level are rewarded by a good crop. This ensures goodness in the family all around. The grateful community members offer thanksgiving worship to nature in return. Sometimes, nature can be unkind to men. Attack of pests or wild animals on crops may bring in despair and doom. Nature is worshipped once again for blessings and removal of the bad spell. The one way in which the members of a subsistence-level community can approach nature in a structured way is through the cycle of worships, festivals and fairs corresponding with the cycle of the seasonal calendar. Fairs and festivals mark the primordial urge of a community’s response to changing season in nature. These fairs and festivals bring the community together in expressing its joy and celebration through offerings to gods, community feast and a common sharing of traditions. These fairs and festivals are also way of channelizing fear and apprehension regarding nature’s strange turns through humility and gratitude.

The Tiwa way of life is characterized by a traditional belief system consisting of a pantheon of gods, goddesses, deities as well as ancestral worship and the worship and celebration of nature. Unlike many primary cultures, the Tiwa religious beliefs get expressed through certain shrines
which are called *thans*. It is believed that the symbolic, customary kingdoms existing in the Tiwa habitat were created around the shrines. There are a number of shrines where regular pujas are offered. One of the bounden duties of the traditional kings of the Tiwa people is to safeguard and maintain these shrines. Apart from this, the seasonal festivals also feature in the cultural activities of the Tiwa people. These festivals are mainly related to agricultural activities like sowing of seeds and saplings as well as harvesting. Finally, there are certain fairs which the Tiwa people have been organizing as part of their common heritage. The discussion in this chapter is aimed at describing the cultural facets of fairs and festivals of the Tiwa community.

There have been a couple of scholarly works which have thrown light on the fairs and festivals of the Tiwa people. Sharma Thakur’s work (1985) offers detailed description of the Tiwa festivals (Sharma Thakur.1985:Chapter vii). Sharma Thakur identifies the three Bihus, Barat, Sagra misawa, Wanshua, and Jonbeel Mela as the major festivals of the Tiwa people. It is noteworthy that Sharma Thakur concentrated mainly on the plains habitat of the Tiwa people living in the South bank of the Brahmaputra valley and left out the Tiwas living in the hills. Besides, his is an anthropological approach not much concerned with the oral historical elements. The other important work is by Gohain (1992) entitled *The Hill Lalungs*. As the title itself suggests, Gohain clearly separates the Tiwa people living in the hill regions of Karbi Anglong and Meghalaya from those living in the plains and conducts an ethnographic study. Although, fairs and festivals are not his primary focus, Gohain touches upon the cultural aspects of the Tiwas living in the hills which also include the pujas and festivals. However, just like Sharma Thakur’s work, Gohain leaves out large part of Tiwa cultural aspect as this falls outside the scope of his study. Tiwa scholar Ganesh Senapati has collected, complied, and published a book on the songs

As far as secondary sources are concerned, the most valuable information is provided by the numerous magazines and souvenirs that the Tiwa cultural leaders and activists have brought out from time to time. The interesting point about these cultural outputs is that many lost details have come out with distinct local colour with regards to Tiwa fairs and festivals. It is significant that the Tiwa community is traditionally orientated towards the very many symbolic kingdoms which govern their cultural life as do the local level social organizations like clans, clusters and other kinship formations. Therefore, there is always a wide variance of data with regard to fairs and festivals celebrated from place to place. These secondary data are helpful in leading one to the field with a definite design in terms of extracting primary data from the field. The cultural activists and local researchers of the Tiwa community have also contributed to the scholarship on Tiwa way of life.

**Festivals of the Tiwa People:-**

**Jongkhong Puja:**

Jongkhong is a major festival of the Tiwa people living in the Gobha, Tetelia, Sonapur, Mokoria, Maanipur, Dahali and Kargaon areas of Neli and Morigaon. It is performed before going to the cultivation of kharif crops. Informant Phunasing Chomchal pointed out that there is a dedicated shrine in each of the villages where the festival is celebrated which is called the *Jongkhong than*. All the families of the village have to make the rice and fowl contribution for the puja but the puja is started with the contributory rice from the houses of Harikunwari, Loro and Changdoloi. The rice is screened very carefully so that not a single husk
of paddy is present there, which is considered to be a bad sign. Apart from the offering of rice, the puja also involves a sacrifice. All the families of the village have to make the rice and fowl contribution for the puja. The loro and the doloi then make the sacrifice of the birds and place the heads of sacrificial birds on top of the heap of contributory rice of the respective families. After that, one bahar aag (the upper top part of a bamboo plant) is fixed there. An offering of betel nuts and leaves are essential in the puja. Another essential offering is the zu, the traditional rice beer, which is ritually served among the participants at the completion of the puja. The meat of the sacrificed birds is cooked and served.

It was informed by informant Kolakachu Pator and Mahendra Pator that there are two types of Jongkhong puja in the Maanipur village called Singal and Mui. In the Singal Jongkhong there is no animal sacrifice. Ritual incantation or geete-mate of sat-dak or baro-dak (seven round or twelve rounds of incantatory propitiation) has to be performed. In the Mui Jongkhong Puja, the ritual sacrifice of a tortoise is mandatory besides goats, cocks, hen and pigeons. It is observed in the month of Asara (June-July).

As informed by Guneswar Khelma and Paddeswar Kunwar, there are some variations regarding the time of the celebration of the Jangkhang puja. In the villages of Mokoria, Dahali and Kargaon in the Neli kingdom, it is performed in the months of Bohag-Jeth (April-May-June). According to the informants, there is no custom of animal sacrifice in the area for the performance of Jongkhong. In the puja at Kothiatoli, as recollected by Jeton Deuri, six fowls are sacrificed in the name of God Charibhai, and seven fowls are offered in the name of God
Bakraja (also call Khelcha, Bonocha). Jongkhong here is worshiped in the month of Asara.

Informant Jursing Bordoloi reported that the Jongkhong puja in Gobha differs from other places. It is held at the interval of five years. One doloi as extra deuri is assigned for conducting the puja here. This puja is performed in the month of Phagun-Chot (March-April) and on Tuesday or Saturday. The pigs, goats and the birds are the sacrificial animals. The deuri conducts the rituals and does the sacrifices.

Ratneswar Bordoloi, an informant told that Jongkhong puja at Tetelia is restricted to the level of the dominant khel of the locality. Only fowls are sacrificed in the puja. Each household contributes rice and hen in the ritual. The puja is held on a Sunday in the month of Chot and is performed at an open space adjacent to the village. Unlike the Jongkhong pujas held in other places, there is no specific shrine for the performance of the puja at Tetelia.

Informant Sidu Hukai opined that the Jongkhong at Amswai is performed after the Sagara misawa is allowed to be taken to the field. New agricultural season begins with the puja. On the day of puja, there is no animal sacrifice. They perform another Jongkhong called Phitri Jongsong to worship fathers of the twelve clans of the Tiwas. Three pigs are sacrificed in the puja, but the sacrifice is done not in the than, but in front of the Samadi. After sacrifice they carry the meat and cook it in the than for consumption after the worship. The puja is performed in the month of Jeth. Hukai informed that there is a custom of fixing a monolith of about 2 feet height in the premises of the than after the puja. Alltogether, 1049 pieces of such monoliths have been discovered so far. As said by the informant, they perform another puja at the end of the cultivation called Pahukara, to leave the spade.
Yangli/Lakhoumi/Lakhimi/Puja:

Yangli puja is centrally performed at Gobha. However, it is also celebrated as Lakhoumi or Lakhimi Puja all throughout the Tiwa habitat at the village level. As recounted by informant Jursing Bordoloi, Yangli is observed at Gobha at the interval of five years. This puja is performed on the very next day of the Jongkhong puja. The Yangli festival at Gobha is celebrated with the customary participation of the people from hills, especially from Bar-Rongkhoi and Amswai. It is an agricultural festival in which the Tiwa people share paddy seeds after performing the puja. The puja is performed in the month of Chot (March-April) on a Wednesday. The community members initiate the ritual from the house of the Harikunwari at Komarkunchi. A procession of participants starts from the house of the Harikunwari and assembles at the paddy field near the Gobha river. The Puja is ritually conducted by the Barbarua, a high ranking customary officer of the Gobha kingdom. It is noteworthy that the Yangli puja at Gobha is attended by the king and his council in full ceremony. The loro of Bar-Rongkhoi and Amswai also attend and supervise the rituals of the puja. Pigs, goats and birds are sacrificed by the Barbarua. Dance performance with accompaniment of ritual drumbeating is an integral part of the puja. A young boy is dressed up in woman's costume to represent Yangli. He is made to dance with a group of boys all throughout the procession from the residence of the Harikunwari to the site of the Puja near the Gobha river. Korai (flour of parched rice) and pitha (rice cake) are offered along with betel-nuts and leaves and zu (rice beer). Zu is served at the beginning and the conclusion. After the animal sacrifice and the offerings, a community feast is organized. The roasted meat of sacrificial animals is shared by
the community members along with the other items of feast. Women are not allowed in the venue of the Yangli but their participation is allowed only to arrange and provide the food. The puja concluded with the feast and the participants return home with their share of seeds. The puja is made colourful by the costumes of the dancers. (The present writer had the opportunity in year 2010 to be present and participate in the colourful festival.)

Informant Phulsing Maloi Kunwar said that in the Jongkhong and the Yangli at Gobha, the Karbis of Gorongkuchi village have to supply uthora kuri (eighteen scores, i.e. 360) pieces of plantain leaves, the Xamchuri and Gorongchuwa leaves of vegetables available in the hills and carry water from the hills in decorated bamboo pipes for use in the puja. The Agolipat (the top part of the plantain leaf) is to be separated by the Loro, Doloi and Hadari for use in the puja.

The present researcher found out that there are many variants of the Yangli puja across the Tiwa habitat. Here is a description of some of these variations:

**Lokhumi Phuja:**

According to informants Babul Pator and Lakhikanta Deuri, Lokhumi puja is observed in the Bherakunchi village, which is generally celebrated in the months of Magh (January-February) or Phagun (February-March). In this Puja, pigs, goats and fowl are sacrificed along with the offerings of flour of parched rice and rice cakes. Song and dance performances are organized with dhal-toruwal (ceremonial sword and shield). It is an agricultural festival. A local legend is associated with the celebration of Lakhoumi puja at Bherakuchi. The legend as narrated by the informants is as follows: “There is a low lying area in the midst of
the Dumura hill known as Jakhoisila, as the shape of it is like a jakhoi a fising implement made out of bamboo and used by the womenfolk. In the low lying area, it is claimed that the water never dry up. In Jakhoisila wild paddy grows in abundance. This patch of paddy is owned by the community. When harvesting time arrives, it is harvested collectively with full observance of rituals. After harvesting the paddy at Jakhoisila the community members perform the Lokhumi puja. In this puja, there is no place for women. After the puja, the paddy distributed among the villagers as seeds for regeneration.”

**Bishongkunwari Puja:**

The Lakhumi puja celebrated at the Tetelia village is called the Bishongkunwari puja. It is observed annually unlike the Yangli at Gobha on the next day of the Jongkhong puja. The villagers contribute one fowl from each household for the ritual sacrifice. The song and dance performances are also done. The puja is completed with the community feast. The above mentioned account of Bishongkunwari puja is narrated by informant Ratneswar bordoloi.

**Lakhimi Puja:**

According to our informant Baliram Bordoloi, there is a different kind of Lakhumi puja called Lakhumi puja observed at the level of households. This puja is performed by the families individually before the tilling of land, sowing of seeds and at the end of harvesting. The night ahead of the first tilling of the land for the year, the head of the family prays and chants incantations in the name of god Mahadeva and goddess Parvati and seeks blessings for tilling. Lao mod (rice beer) is prepared and poured in the field and served to the tillers. On the first day
of harvesting again, the zela or the family priest cuts eggs contributed from each household and cuts handful of the stalk of paddy corresponding to the number of ‘Bhani’ in the village as a mode of divination. The small parts of the eggs and the poured mod from the lao are to be left out there in the field to be consumed by creatures other than human being like rats etc. The initial pre-harvesting rite is called Mai Aag Lagani and the post-harvesting rite is called Motha Kuri Lagani. The Motha Kuri Lagani is celebrated with songs when the farmers carry bundles of paddy from the field on their shoulders. The song is as follows:

“Ei Sagra Sawe, Mathi Sawa,
Mothozewa, Ei Edong---Edong,
Oh Phidone Oh Phido.”

(Meaning: Oh eater of rats, eater of squirrel, eater of bota charai, are you all coming with your weight load of paddy..........Oh yes, we are coming).

**Sagara Misawa:**

Informant Maheswar Pator described that Sagara Misawa is a major festival of the Tiwa people. It is a dance festival celebrated during the spring. It centres round the institution of the Samadi or youth dormitory. Literally speaking, Sagara is a 3-5 arch crown of floral motif made out of the soft thin, long and white kernel of dolghanh (an aquatic grass). A light, thin and small bamboo splice is used as holder for the flower and it is fixed atop the turban of the male dancers who are called Misawa. The celebration of this festival is not possible without the Sagara adorned on the turbans of the dancers. There is a general fear in
the minds of the people, particularly among the people of Amswai, that the *Sagara* may be stolen by rival cluster of clans, as it had got stolen long time ago. Therefore, the *banthais* or the young males of the village keep a strict vigil of the *Samadi*, where the *Sagara* is kept from the days of its making to the day of the celebrations. The youths guard the site by making huge noise to shy away possible thefts throughout the nights."

Informant Baliram Bordoloi pointed out that for the celebration of the dance festival of *Sagara Misawa* certain essential items need to be collected. These are as follows:

Firstly, the Khumptai or Khumblai (the puffy soft white kernel of a plant locally called *khump* or *khum*) are collected, the leaves of which are to be sprayed with pithaguri (rice powder). These painted leaves are woven to make garlands which are placed on the altar of the puja prior to the festivities.

Secondly, a wild grass called *toronshi* or *harkaita* with multiple edges is collected from swampy areas.

Thirdly, *bulunshi*, a locally available herb is collected.

Fourthly, a pair of multi-pronged decorative piece of bamboo work called *kakobahar jeng* (twigs of the bamboo species known as *kako*), is arranged.

Next, leaves of *taralai* (wild cardamom) and castor are collected.

Finally, gourdful of *mod* in odd numbers like seven or nine is arranged together with *pohan mod* (fermented rice beer) in equal number of guorshells.

Lastly, equal number of betel leaves and nut are arranged.
Once, the arrangement of the essential items is made, the Khunzela-Ojah, or the head priest for the ritual collects flowers to be offered in the puja. He wraps the flowers inside a red gamocha (traditional towel) and initiates the puja. It is the Khunzela-Ojah who extracts the khumplai kernel from inside the trunk of the plant very carefully so that not a single shred of the khumplai kernel gets dropped from the hands of the young males waiting to collect it. If, in the process, a kernel of khumplai drops on to the ground, it is considered to be an ill omen. It is from the khumplai that the crown worn by the Sagara dancers is made. Therefore, it is called Sagarane khum (the khum of the Sagara).

To prepare the dancer's crown, the khum is to be cut into pieces and fixed to a bamboo frame on a cross. Then it takes the shape of a turban. This turban itself is called Sagara and therefore, without it Sagara celebration is not possible. This turban is again decorated by thuna (a cluster of flower). It is noteworthy that it is the dancers who wear the Sagara, the dhulia (drum beater) and the flute players do not wear the turban of Sagara. After ceremonially adorning the dancers complete with the Sagara headgear, the Loro serves a round of pohan mod to the dancers and thereby permits them to dance and celebrate the festivals. The festival starts from the house of the Loro. This festival is celebrated in time of modar phular mahat (in the month of the blooming of the coral tree), which is generally March-April. There is no role for the women in the festival except providing food items including rice beer in the houses that the dancers visit to perform the dance.

Informants Narayan Bordoloi, Jeton Deuri and Pintu Bordoloi stated that the preparation of Sagara misawa dance can be undertaken only after the performance of the Sanipuja in the month of Aghon (Dec-Jan). On a given Wednesday of the appointed month, the khram (drum), panshi (flute) and other musical instruments are taken out of the ceiling.
of the *Samadi* where these were kept after the completion of the previous year's festival. The youths of the village then begin the rehearsal for the festivities. The rehearsal is carried on every Wednesday till the final festival is celebrated on *modar phular dinat* (In the days of blooming of *coral* tree) which is seen in the month of *Phagun-Chot* (March-April). The informants said that earlier the villagers collected costumes of *Sagara misawa* from a nearby *than* called Kamala *than*, believed to be woven by divine weavers.

There is an anecdote narrated by Rabindra Bordoloi, popular in the Thengkuchi village of Kandali, connected to the costume that is adorned by the dancers of the *Sagara misawa*. The anecdote is as follows:

"Few days before *Sagara* festival, the villagers of Thengkuchi went to Baduli Khurung. It was believed that the costumes were preserved by the divine family of weavers. The villagers prayed before the gods and offered gourd-ful of *mod* (rice beer) along with *kwai phan* (betel-nut and leaves) and sang the following prayer song:

"Sade nachonine raja,
Sade nachonine raja de,
Aio sone sade phagunine raja,
Aio sone sade phagunine raja
Nago asparidon sune lau,
Naja asparidon kwai phan
Sade nachonine raja,
Sade phagunine raja”.

(Meaning: Oh gods of dance and Phagun (spring)! we are offering you *lau* (gourd with rice beer inside it) and betel nut and leaves. Please give us dresses to perform the festival with dance and songs.)
The gods were pleased with the prayers and the offerings. They blessed the villagers with pairs of costumes stacked neatly upon a huge rock beneath a tree on the premises of the *khurung* one day prior to the main festivities. The villagers came back happily with the costumes and performed the dances in full ceremonial dress. After the conclusion of the festivals the people returned the costumes and other items with the same offerings and the following prayer song:

"Sade nachonine raja,
Yane asthong yaw sedareng,
Yane pakhor yaw, sadiyan melare,
Kachon sadtyang aio,
Sone sade nachonine raja,
Aio sone sade phagunine raja.

(Meaning: Oh gods! we are returning you the costumes given to us and pray that you would grace us by giving the same beautiful costumes next year).

Over the years, it became customary for the people to go and pray for the costumes in the *khurung* and perform the dances and return the costumes without cleaning and washing. But on one occasion, the villagers washed the dresses before returning them. Next year, at the advent of spring, the villagers went to the *khurung* and offered their prayers to please the gods so that the costumes could be collected. However, after the completion of the prayers they failed to locate the stack of costumes which used to be neatly piled beneath a tree. Instead, they heard a voice saying that the gods were displeased. The voice also revealed that a wicked woman had stolen the motifs and the designs of the costume. So from next year, they would have to go and find the costume from the wicked woman. The villagers could not, however, locate the wicked woman and so could not get the divine costumes. From that year, the gods discontinued providing the divine
costumes for the dancers of the *Sagara* festival. The voices of men and children and the sound of weaving looms can still be heard during nights in the premises of the *khurung*.

According to Baliram Bordoloi and Harsing Amchong, the *Sagara* dance is performed first at the front court yard of the houses of the *Loro* and the *Doloi* for the whole day. After taking rest for the night, the dancers resume again, by first performing at the houses of the respectable customary officers of the village and then in each of the households. The dance troupe is welcomed in each of the households with the offer of *zu* and betel nut and leaves. This continues for three days and three nights after which the *Sagara* dance troupe returns to the *Samadi*. The musical instruments are kept back in the ceilings of the *Samadi* in their assigned places. The costumes are kept within the premises of the *Samadi*. The dance troupe members keep a strict vigil on the costumes for seven days and nights. On the eighth day, the dance troupe members put on the costumes again and march towards the *than* with dance recitals. The costumes are removed and kept beneath the tree. A *Sani puja* is performed in the *than* marking the completion of the rituals. The youths return to their *Samadi* after this and a community feast is organized in which the entire village takes part. It is necessary to observe that the *Sagara Misawa* festival excludes women in its celebrations.

It was recounted by informant Babul Pator and Lakhikanta Deuri that there are several variants of the observance of the *Sagara Misawa* in the Tiwa habitat. At Libira village, near Bherakuchi, *Sagara* is celebrated in the month of *Phagun* (February-March). They celebrate the festival in two forms: with and without the *Sagara*. It is said that originally they did not have the *Sagara*. While the villagers went to Amswai to participate in the merriment of the *Sagara Misawa*, some of their adventurous friends stole the *Sagara* from the villagers of Amswai. It is said that the youth of Libira stole
the *Sagara* under the influence of the intoxicating *zu*. They then started the practice of dancing with the *Sagara* placed atop their turbans.

Informant Sidu Hukai narrated that the *Sagara* at Amswai is celebrated in the month of March on a Wednesday. On the day, the *panthais* slash firewood and the *Toloi* moves to Nakhala to bring the turban of the king. The motif of the *Sagara* (already described by informant, Moheswar Pator), called *kumkhati* is of two types known as *tengore*, meant for male dancer's turban, with five knots to the bamboo splice. The other type of the *khumkhati*, meant for symbolic female dancers (females are prohibited from participation) is called *muthi mosuwa musling* which has four knots. The ordinary dancers are called *moh*, and are allowed to fix only the flower of *kohuwa* (elephant grass). The turban of the king that is brought from Nakhala is kept in the house of the *Toloi* for the night with proper rituals. On Thursday, it is brought out to the house of the *Loro*. The celebration is started from his house with dance. The dance troupe visits the house of the other officials like *Toloi, Chandoloi, Changmajhi* and so on. The final celebration is performed at the premise of the *Samadi*, where the dancers sing and dance for the whole day with rejoice. Reportedly, the contents of the songs are erotic, aimed at the Amri villagers of Bhoksong as a protective measure to save the *khumkhati* from being stolen again by them. The turban of the king is returned on the next Wednesday.

*Langkhon Puja:*

It was recounted by informant Phunasing that the *Langkhon* puja is a kind of a curtain raiser of *Sagara Misawa*. However, the puja has its own independent relevance as well. *Langkhon* puja is performed in order to initiate the sowing activities on top of the agricultural season. Cutting and gathering of thatch as a house building material used for roofing, use of some seasonal vegetables, use of immature raw betel-nuts etc. can be done
only after performing *Lankhon* puja. In this puja, the presiding ritual conductors like the *Loro* and the *Doloi* perform the rituals for *phunahara* (to remove the effects of evil eyes) and also observe the *mongolsuwa* (divination) for calculating the probable good and evil impacts from the deceased priests of the community. Sacrifice of pigeon, duck and goat are made to offset evil spirits. Betel-nuts and leaves are compulsory offerings in the puja. This puja is observed during the time of Durga puja.

As opined by informant Guneswar Khelma, *Lankhon* puja observed in the Neli area is also known as *Kher* puja. Without performing the *Kher* puja nobody is allowed to go to cut *kher* (thatch) for roofing of their house. Fowl is the sacrificial animal here, and each family of the *khel* has to provide at least one hen for the purpose.

*Washi Rawa or the Bahoni Kota Puja:*

Baliram Bordoloi and Jeton Deuri, the informants, said that *Washi Rawa* is performed in the month of *Kati* (November-December). After performing the puja, people are allowed to go to the hills to collect *bah* (bamboo) for different needs, both personal and community. Animal sacrifice involving pigs, goats and fowl is conducted by the *Loro* of the community in the puja. This puja is performed in the *Jongkhong than.*

*Sani Puja:*

It was reported by Jursing Bordoloi that the *Sani* puja is the concluding puja of the year which is performed at the designated *Sani than* of Gobha after completing the performance of all the Pujas of the year. *Sani* puja is performed on a Saturday of the month of March-April. Pigs and hens are sacrificed here by the *Barbarua.* Beginning of new cultivation or harvesting can be started after performing the *Sani* puja. All the pending rituals of purification, penalties and fines are required to be completed by
accused khel members in the puja. Since Sani or the evil spirit is the most feared of all the deities, the puja is taken seriously by the faithful.

Informant Kolakachu Pator said that the Sani puja is an important puja in the village of Maanipur of Morigaon district. This puja is performed in order to dispel the evil impact of Sani from the village. There is no fixed time for its performance, but it must be on a sanibar (Saturday). Fowl and pigs are sacrificed in the Sani puja. The following is a part of the incantation chanted in the Sani puja:

"Mindai nagore bhag dug asong dei,
Ali bali asong, ei ali bali lai;
Ai samajak unu
Thela thadu nai."
(Meaning: Oh reigning deity! We are offering you your share; accept it, we pray to you! Do not disturb our family and community)

As recalled by Khagen Pator, there are two types of Sani puja known as Talsoni and Barsani. It is worshipped every year praying for all kinds of welfare and removal of all evils from villagers and the locality. The Loro is the presiding priest of the Sani puja. Pig, goat and fowl are the animals of sacrifice of the puja.

Informant Jeton Deuri and Pintoo Bordoloi were of the opinion that in some localities, the Sani puja is also known as Sani Peluwa. It is performed on a Truesday of the month of Kati-Aghon in the assigned than known as Sani Rawane than. The performance of this puja is compulsory after the Jongkhong puja and the Washi Rawa or the Bahoni Kota puja. Those are known as Jongkhongar Sani Peluwa and Washi Rawar Sani Peluwa. By performing this Puja, members of the village community remove all the gramchuwa (impurities afflicting the village) which may have affected them, before going to start a new work. Without the Sani Peluwa or
the purification of village, the harvesting work for the next agricultural season is not possible. Jongkhong is performed to start the tilling of land for paddy cultivation. Likewise, before the beginning of harvesting or collection of house materials from the hill, the Tiwa people perform the Washi Rawa or the Bahoni Kota puja. They can go to the field to harvest their crop only after having the village purified through the Sani Peluwa of Washi Rawa or Bahoni Kota puja. All the accumulated udharkuwa for gramchuwa or impurities have to be cast aside and removed in the Sani puja as per the commitment made by the accused. If a villager, who is found guilty and fined with penalties, fails to clear the customary dues, the village court sits instantly in the premises of the puja site. The guilty party is given some more time to atone for his sins. If the guilty family fails to come up with the fine, extreme form of punishment is meted out to him. In olden days, the punishment amounted to excommunication.

The spring festival Sagara is started from the very next day of the Sani puja i. e. the Wednesday. The Sani puja is also expensive one. As many as six fowl (three cocks and three hens) of red colour and two pigs are to be sacrificed. Mongalchuwa or divination is done by examining the entrails of the sacrificial fowl. A community feast follows the worship of the Sani puja where the offerings are par taken of by the members of the community.

**Thol Puja or Tholuwa Puja:**

Informant Ramesh Kunwar recollected that Thol puja or Tholuwa puja is another festival observed by the Tiwa people corresponding to an important agricultural activity. The puja is celebrated in the month of Chot-Bohag (March-April) before the Tholjaronidin (the day of community hunting). This puja is performed at the Apati than where pigs, goats, white and pokhara (multi coloured) hen are offered to the gods. These gods include Baghdeo, Pharameswar, Devpitri, Gobhia, and Jiwari-Buwari etc.
In the Baghdeo puja (bagh or tiger worship) goats and pakhara (spotted) and white hen are sacrificed. The Pharameswar puja is dedicated to Suryadeo to whom one white hen is sacrified. For the Debapitri which is for the ancestors, one pair of ranga-rangi (red) hen is sacrificed. The puja starts with the Devpitr puja. If it is attended by a gobhia, he has to offer one red hen. If a gobhia couple attends the puja, then the couple has to offer one pair of red fowl. The one pair of fowl offered by the gobhia couple is called Jiwari-Buwari, kursinga (delinking the clan). The Loro of the community conducts the puja. At the completion of the puja, the villagers prepare to proceed to the hills to go for hunting. The game collected in the community hunting is shared by the villagers in a community feast. It is noteworthy that this puja is a dying custom among the Tiwa people.

**Mar Puja:**

It was recollected by Paddeswar Kunwar that the Mar puja is performed in the Samadi of Dahali village. It is not a puja to be monitored by the king or his official. This puja is performed one day ahead of the Jongkhong, Jongkhong puja, Sima puja and Baghdeo puja. The youth of the village spend the night in the Samadi on the eve of the puja day. They cut seven branches of trees and plant them so that their tips point towards the Thunkhuta of the Samadi. The pointed branches are called marbari, and they are believed to represent the gods Jongkhong, Sima and Baghdeo. Birds are sacrificed in the Mar puja.

**Sima Puja:**

It was narrated by informants Guneswar Khe;ma, Sigrab Pator and Paddeswar Kunwar that the puja is performed in the village of Dahali lying of on the eastern border of Neli with the Khala kingdom. The presiding priests for the puja are not Tiwa but Karbi Deuri of Poshalaghat village. The puja is held on any week days except Tuesdays. The Karbi priests come on a
given Friday or Saturday and stay in the house of the Loro of the village. They collect plantain leaves and other essential items required for the puja. They are ceremonially served zu and proper meals of rice during their stay there. They never visit the king. On Sunday they perform the puja. The villagers participate in the rituals where a pig and a goat are sacrificed in respect of the deity of the Sima or the border. The puja comes to an end with a community feast.

**Buraramcha Puja:**

Informant Subhen Bordoloi stated that the puja directed to the tiger is called the Buraramcha puja in which the tiger is worshipped as Bonraja. This puja is performed at the Buraramcha than located in the Karbi Anglong district. The puja is held during the time of natun tamulpeluwar dinat (when the fresh harvest of betel nut is ritually partaken of) or in the month of Aghon (Nov-Dec). The puja is performed on Tuesdays. Animal sacrifice involving a black goat and a pair of red hen is the hall mark of the puja.

According to Ramesh Kunwar and Khagen Pator Buraramcha puja is also performed by the Loro of the Bherakunchi. Here, Lord Mahadev is worshiped in the shape of a tiger in the puja, one white hen is sacrificed. If the family is gobhia, red hen is to be sacrificed. It is a family puja as well.

**Malgusain Puja:**

It was recounted by informants Ramesh Kunwar and Babul Pator that Malgusain phuja is performed at Malgusain than in the Bherakunchi village since the days of king Khersing. It is observed in the month of Sravan (July-August) in the interval of five years. The puja is arranged by the king where beside the Tiwa people, all other communities of the area (Dimoria) participate with equal enthusiasm. In other words, it can be said as the puja of the King and hence puja of all, but performed purely on the Tiwa format
of rituals. *Malgusain* is another form of Mahadeva or *Fa-Mahadeva*. There is no *bali-bidhan* (animal sacrifice) in the puja, the priest chants mantra only. Feast is also arranged on the occasion. It is said that in the marriage of Bengkoli with the Tetelia king, the Tiwa people exchanged their local god *Barat* with Maldeo of Tetelia, and it went on to become the main deity of Dimoria. The portrayal of the local god is quaintly captured in local folklore:

"*Bar beya bastu akora,*
*Bhalu nejane bevyayu najane;*
*Bhaniyu najane kokatiyu najane;*
*Kechahe koi, kechahe khai;*
*De mur bainaituke de"

(Meaning: It does not know how to assess what is good and bad; cannot identify sister and brother; everything he does is raw and crude; give it to my brother-in-law)

It is also worshiped in the Jerenga Gaon of Tetelia jointly with the villages of Ezarbari, Tetelia and Koroibari. According to a myth it is exchanged with the Kumoiraja. One Dimoria princess was given in marriage to Kumoiraja, when it was exchanged with the Dimoria Raja for its *Barat* puja, as the dowry.

**Barat:**

According to informant Ratneswar Bordoloi, *Barat* puja is connected to the *Malgussain* puja. *Barat* is a major festival of the Tiwa people living in the plains, particularly of the Tetelia area. There are two types of *Barat*, namely, the *Usha Barat* and the *Bhadiya Barat*. The informant narrated a myth on the origin of *Barat* as follows: "The *Barat* festival is a dowry given by the Kumoi king to the people of Tetelia when he had to marry his daughter to the son of the Tetelia king. The *Bhadiya Barat* is believed to be
celebrated by the Dimoria king but when he had to marry his daughter to the son of the Kumoi king, he gifted it as a dowry to the people of the Kumoi kingdom. It must be noted that the Bhadiya Barat is now defunct and the Usha Barat is celebrated as the Barat festival in places like Tetelia, Karoibari, Jerenga Gaon and Ezarbari.

The word barat is a simplified form of the Assamese brat and it literally means penance or fast. The women and young girls of the community observe the fast in order to release the fear of the spell of evil spirits. These evil spirits could be responsible for the outbreak of pestilence and epidemic or the attack of wild animals. The fast is observed prior to the purnima (full moon) of Puh or Magh (December/January). The fast is broken on the full moon day of either of the two months of Puh and Magh. A festival is organized to mark the completion of the fast which is called the Barat festival. Community members pour into the venue of the fast in great numbers. Young boys carry decorated bamboo or wooden pipes with carved birds fixed atop the pipes called sarailou. A rope is attached to the sarailou, which is tugged by a youth while the dance performance gets going. When the young girls and boys dance, the wooden bird keeps dancing with the group as well. There is merriment, feast and singing and dancing involving the young and the old. There is a rich body of songs celebrating the spirit of the Barat festival. These songs are marked by erotic suggestions and loaded innuendoes of youthful amorousness:

"Aji jang Baratok oi
Kali jang Baratok oi
Barator dhepela oi pat
Baratok jangte oi
Sorate Dakile oi
Riha nai etia gat"

(Meaning: Oh! We will go to Barat today

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Oh! We will go to Barat tomorrow

Barat contains ugly leaves

While on the way to Barat

We are struck by the poisonous and itchy Sorat (fever and devil nettle) leaves. We have our lower garments removed now!)

One of the interesting features of the Barat as pointed out by Bordoloi is the song and dance tradition. In the dance performances, the youth use masks in order to portray the range of emotions expressed through the songs. The mask dances used be hand-held performances in the past. Now-a-days, the masks have evolved into a full-grown face masks which give out attractive recitals.

The informant reported that the most integral per formative aspect of the Barat puja is the sporting act called the Pira Juj (fight of the wooden stool with small-legged, squat stool). Four young girls are chosen to take part in the fight. They have to undergo a day-long fast before they are allowed to fight for the Sungari pira or the seat of the princess. Before the fight commences, there is an elaborate ritual of worshipping the pira which is installed on a thapana (altar) called the Saraswati thapana. After a lengthy recital of song and dance towards the wee hours of the morning, the four fasting competitors are allowed to hold the four short legs of the Sungari pira. To make matters difficult for the competitors, the girls are made to apply handful of mustard oil on their palms so that their grip on the legs of the Sungari pira gets slippery. The four fasting girls tug and pull the Sungari pira in order to grab it to win the contest. In the tug and pull applied by the girls, the pira slowly begins to rise above their height. The four girls again struggle to push it down, much to the merriment of the eager audience assembled to witness the contest. Finally, when one of the girls wins the
contest by holding the *pira* aloft, there is a prayer that follows and the festival comes to an end.

**Bihu or Bisu:**

Informant Sarat Ch. Pator was of the opinion that the major seasonal festivals of Assam called the *Bihu* have had their impact on the Tiwa culture. The Tiwa *Bisu* is limited to the plain habitat of the Tiwa people but the observance betrays a distinct stamp of Tiwa rituals and customs. Unlike the Assamese *Bohag Bihu*, the Tiwa *Baisak Bisu* is observed not necessarily on the *Chaitra Sankranti* day. In fact, the day of the festival may begin on the first Wednesday of the month of *Bohag*. Even on this, there is much variance. In some places, Tuesday is chosen as the auspicious day for the celebration of the spring festival. For example, in the Barapujia area, *Bihu* is observed as the major festival and after *Bihu* the *Gosain Uluwa Mela* is considered as the principal festival of the area in *Pancho Rajya* of Raha. *Mela* is started at Topakuchi on the Sunday after the *Bihu*. On Tuesday it is observed at Barapujia, and on Thursday at Mikirgaon. It is organized on the next Sunday at Saragaon and on Tuesday at Khaigarh.

Informant Mahendra Manta recalled that on the day of the *Garu Bihu*, the Tiwa people belonging to the *Mashreng kul* clean their ploughs and other farming implements and place them in front of the *bharal* (barn/granary) and sacrifice a red hen. On the first day of *Bohag*, they observe the *Mahadeosali* puja which involves the sacrifice of a white cock along with the offerings of rice beer and betel nut and leaves. The *Mashreng* clan has nine deities and hence they offer nine betel-nuts and nine betel-leaves, nine plantain leaves. Nine lamps are lit in the honour of *Kubera*, the deity of wealth in the *Kubera* puja. *Barajonia Bhakat* puja is another puja performed by the *Mashreng* in every five years to honor the souls of the deceased of the *kul* in the last five years. Special meals are prepared for nine *Bhakats* besides meals to all
present. Bhitor Sewa puja is there performed by each family as the annual karam. There is a Barzela in every kul who directs and performs all the rites of passage from birth to death during the Bisu.

Informant Phunasing said that Pitri puja, Dev puja and Garakhia puja are performed in the bargha, during the days of Bohag Bihu. The barguwal (chief cowherd) blesses the people in the Garakhia puja.

According to informant Subhen Bordoloi, Khala area presents an interesting custom unique to it. In the Bohag Bihu the house of Bargarakhia has to perform an important duty. He have to collect new pogha (rope meant to tie cow) two in numbers from each family of every khels. He is assisted by the Sarugarakhia another official to assist the former one. The Bargarakhia keeps one rope for himself and the other piece is ritualistically placed before the king in the Rajchora by chanting name of different gods and offered to those. The king then presents some food items to the garakhia and then the Sarugarakhia goes to the house of the Bargarakhia to perform dances there.

Informant Sukhen Bordoloi recounted that a dance festival called Paru Misawa is observed on the day of Bohag Bihu in the Habigaon area. It is a festival of dance of dhal and tarowal (shield and sword). The shields are believed to be made out of the skin of one-horned rhinoceros. The size of the shield is about 2 meters in its circumference, very heavy, hard and dark in colour. These are the shields of olden days believed to be used by Budhhar, the lieutenant of Jongal Balahu. These shields are now kept in the nabara of the Thengkuchi village. There is another kind of shield made out of the barks of a tree which is kept in the Samadi of Habigaon. Prior to the celebration of the Sagara Misawa, it is customary for the youth of Habigaon to approach the people Thengkuchi with formal offering of zu lau (gourdfull of zu or rice beer) and betel-nuts and leaves so that the shields kept in the
Thengkuchi *nabara* could be lent over to them for the Misawa celebrations. The ritual language in which the request is made is as follows:

"*Parugo newas tao ching ka*

*Hati ka re misawa kushuwa*."

(Meaning: Please give us the shields for the dance so that we can have fun out of it).

After receiving the shield from the Thengkuchi village the youth of Habigaon come to the front yard of the *Samadi* of Habigaon and start dancing with the beats of *khram*. In the dance they use sword and *achari* (a thin bamboo twig). The dancers have to hide themselves with the shields as much as possible. The shield of the Thengkuchi is returned with due honour after the dance.

*Bisu:*

Informants Sarat ch. Pator, Bolairam Senapati and Bhadreswar Pator were of the opinion that the various clans or *kuls* of the Tiwa people have their own guardian deities whom they propitiate in the *Bisu* festival. These deities include etc *Mahadeo, Mahamaya, Jongkhong, Bhagawati, Kalika, Kesaikhaiti, Buraramcha, Charibhai, Charideo, Basundhari, Ganesh, Kuber etc*. It is generally observed that on the eve of the *Baisak Bisu*, the Tiwa people worship fertility in plants. All trees bearing fruits are tied around with stalks of paddy on that day. The worship also includes the sacrifice of fowls and offerings of rice beer and betel nut and leaves. On the following day, the community members gather in the *barghar* and cut vegetables like gourd and brinjal and feed the cows. The cattle are taken to the nearby watering hole or water body and bathed. In the evening, new ropes are given and rice cakes are offered to the cattle. A sacrifice of fowls is followed which is either conducted by the *Loro* or the village headman. All the reigning deities of the clan along with the ancestors are remembered and
worshipped with animal sacrifice and customary offerings of rice beer and betel nuts wrapped around betel leaves. People exchange traditional towels and pleasantries as mark of respect to each other. An act of divination follows where the community is informed about the fortune of the coming year regarding crop, prosperity and community feast of with special dishes of chicken, dry fish, vegetables and liberal distribution of rice beer. The *Bisu* formally comes to an end with the *Gosain Uliowa Utsav*.

**Gosain Uliowa Utsav:**

It was collected from Guneswar Khelma and Sigrab Pator, the informants, that the *Gosain Uluwa Utsav* is also called the *Raja Uluwa Mela* prevalent in the Neli area of the Tiwa habitat. The initial rites of the festival are performed in the house of the *Harikunwari* who lives at Mokoria village. The costumes and jewelries of the king are kept in her house. The *axonon chuwali* (a girl who has not attained puberty) brings the royal costume from the *Harikunwari*’s place to the king’s house at Neli. The Neli king is ritualistically bathed by the *axonon chuwali* (girls who have yet to attain puberty) on the day of the *mela*. Attired with royal costume, the king comes out ceremonially to the place of *mela* at Neli in a procession. All the responsible officials accompany him to the venue of the festival. The *Jaduwa Gossain* (a statue of Lord Bisnu with Radha) is taken out in the procession with the beats of drum and other musical instruments. Prayer songs are sung during the procession of the deity to the beating of drums. A fair is held in at the site of the ceremony where the reigning deity of *Jaduwa Gossain* is held up for audience of the community members who cheer with the shouts of *haridhwani* (concerted shout to propitiate Lord Hari). After completion of the *mela*, the costumes and jewelries are returned to the *Harikunwari* again. The *mela* comes to an end with lusty shouts of *Haridhwani*.
Bhetikoha Utsav:

*Bhetikoha Utsav* is part of the *Bisu* festival among the people in the Khala area. Informant Subhen Bordoloi narrated the genesis of the festival as follows: “In olden times, the Khala king had to pay tribute to the Gobha king. To make the payment, the king’s men had to cross over the Neli Kingdom to reach Gobha. Once when the king’s men were on their way to Gobha to pay the tribute, they were waylaid by miscreants. The valuables of the tribute were snatched away from them and they were stranded with no help coming from the local people. The Khala king’s men came back and informed the matter to the king. The king of Khala initially did not believe the subjects and their explanation of robbery at Neli. He asked them to display the scene of robbery. The people now displayed the scene of robbery that took place at Neli through the performance of a dance in order to demonstrate the sequence of the events of the robbery. The dance demonstration was so fascinating that the Khala king was quite impressed by the performance. Next year, at the approach of the spring festival, he asked the men to perform the dance again. Over the years, the dance performance enacting the scene of the robbery became a regular and integral part of the *Bisu* festival in the Khala area. This festival came to be known as called *Bhetikoha Utsav* (*bheti* means tribute and *koha* means to snatch) means festival of snatching of tribute. To perform the dance, the king customarily assigned the duty to two *khels* which are *Uporgaon khel* and *Kurigaon Khel*. These two *khels* perform the dance during the festival.

Jonbeel Mela:

According to informant Mileswar Pator the *Jonbeel Mela* is held on the bank of the Jonbeel, a swamp on the Jagiroad- Morigaon Road, from the first Wednesday after the *Magh Bihu* in the month of January. It was customarily initiated at the *Raj* darbar to collect taxes by the king from his subjects of the subservient kingdoms. There is a history regarding the
Jonbeel Mela and how it came into being. The Gobha kingdom was under the Jayantias. Very often the Gobha king came into conflicts with the Jayantia king. Once, in such a conflict the Rahiyal Barua (an officer under Barphukon of the Ahom king posted at Raha) interfered and mediated to settle long-standing dispute between the two kingdoms. It was under his mediation that a market was fixed at a place called Phuloguri, near Karbi-Anglong of the Neli area. The idea was to allow the Tiwas and Jayantias to come together at a venue where they could exchange essential commodities. Through the promotion of trade relations the Ahoms sought to settle the dispute between the Tiwas and the Jayantias. The Ahoms also devised to receive tributes out of the profit of this exchange in the market. It was also decided that the tribute was to be officially received at Jonbeel. To celebrate the tribute-paying occasion, the Gobha king organized a festival there with fishing, feast and traditional exchange or barter of essential commodities. The Gobha king also used to collect tribute from his tributaries and hold a darbar (Council). The Gobha king invited all the kings of the surrounding kingdoms which included the Khasi and Jayantia kings besides his tributaries. The first barter system was practiced in Phuloguri near Neli. It is believed that the Gobha king who initiated the fair of exchanging goods with the accompanying feast and merriment was called Jonsing. It was after him that the fair or mela came to be known as Jonbeel Mela.

Informant Jursing Bordoloi, Bolairam Senapati added to the previous account on Jonbeel Mela as follows: The king of Gobha organised a feast and invited rulers of the neighboring kingdoms. Fishing was done and barter was performed by the participants from hills with the local people. They exchanged their agro products, medicinal herbs and spices from the hill with the prepared portable food items like different rice cakes, chira (flattened rice) korai (grinded parch rice) etc. of the local people. They paid their taxes in kind and paid homage to the king before leaving the mela. The mela has
continued till date. People from the hills bring sesame, ginger, pineapple, gourds, arum, potato, lac, chillies, cotton, brinjal, cane and bamboo and exchange these with dry and raw fish, rice cakes and rice powder from the plains. The Tiwa people from the hills, the Jayantias, the Karbis and the Khasis – all descend to the Gobha plains to participate in a rare camaraderie of inter-tribal co-operation, bonhomie and community sharing in the *Jonbeel Mela*. It is a historical fact that the Gobha kingdom was under the Jayantias. Very often the Gobha king came into conflicts with the Jayantia king. Once in such a conflict the Rahiyal Barua (an officer under Barphukon of the Ahom king posted at Raha) interfered and mediated to settle long-standing dispute between the two kingdoms. It was under his mediation that a market was fixed at a place called Phuloguri, near Karbi-Anglong of the Neli area. The idea was to allow the Tiwas and Jayantias to come together at a venue where they could exchange essential commodities.

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Khorsong or Ratisewa or Bhitorsewa:

Informant Bolairam Senapati gave a narration on Khorsong (also known as Ratisewa or Bhitorsewa) as follows: “The occult practice of Khorsong or Ratisewa or Bhitosewa is very powerfully prevalent in the Barapujia area. It is performed at night, therefore it is called Ratisewa. It is held inside the Khorsong house therefore it is called Khorsong. It is held in the inner sanctum of the individual house of the villagers, therefore it is also called Bhitorsewa. It is believed that the Tiwas adopted it after their settlements made here in the area of Raha-Barapujia. This puja is believed to have evolved out of the necessity to offset the impact of other tribes like the Nagas of the hills and the Ahom of the plains in terms of the occult practices prevalent among these tribes. Even the impact of the Muslim practitioners is not ruled out. The sewa or the worship is done secretly, among a certain number of male devotees. The worship is headed by the Khorsong Gharor Burhabhakat (the Burahbhakat of Khorsong Ghar). The devotees of the puja pay their obeisance to the Purna Sankar (the complete Sankar), where Siba and Parbati are worshipped in the form of the linga and yoni. This worship of Khorsong or Bhitosewa, is confined to the Tiwas of the tholuwa (plains) only. No hajowali (people of high hills) and pahari (people of the hills) has been reported to have observed the sewa.

Bhakatsewa:

The following narration on the Bhakatsewa or Barbhakatsewa was collected by the writer from his informant Sarat Ch, Pator. According to Pator, it is a major religious practice of the Tiwas of Raha- Barapujia area in general and of the Gandhibari village in particular. There are two types of Bhakatsewa known as Bhitorsewa and the Jolpaniasewa. Bhakatsewa is a family-oriented religious practice where the spiritual disciples from the community are invited over to the household. The puja is organized for the well-being of the host family. The Bhitorsewa is generally observed in the
barghar of the bangsha or the kul. In the stuti of this Bhitorsewa, the family which convenes this Bhakatsewa narrates the history of the migration of the family in which it recounts the name of a place called Tibbet. Then the narrative unfolds as to how the family settled on the banks of leuti (Brahmaputra). In the narrative, leu means long and ti means water. The narrative also recounts as to how the family gradually crossed over to the south bank and settled in an area called Titaimari, near Raha. This is also the place of meeting of boundaries of Ahoms, Kocharis and Jayantias.

The informant said that stuti is sung in the form of a conversation in between the Zela of the community and the Zela of the family. The sitting arrangement for the invitees inside the barghar is a circular one. At the centre of the sitting arena, a fire is lit representing Brahma. An altar called ason is erected at the top end of the sitting arena where the ritual conductor installs the deities of Charibhai and Charikora (forms of Mahadeva). The Barzela, Zela, Gharburah and the Harikumwari sit on the east and the others, particularly the hosts, sit towards the western side. Then the conversation in the form of struti begins and that is initiated by the Barzela of the samaj or khel (cluster) as follows:

**Barzela (Samaj):**

'Bhal oi mur barzela guru, aage dine ahu, dupore ahu; pale tamul ekhon khao; rong koru dhemali koru, ghoroloi guchi jao; aji dekhum burah pasi-deka pasi, sakoluke mati ani babaleku Ssunar ason dice, mukhatu moinar mat dice, logote majote hazar tokar bota di, nijeyu piche gole boste ori ache. Apunar dukh ba ki, sukh ba ki, seya kole bhal Pam oi prabhu"

(Meaning: Well my Zela guru, earlier we come in the day light and take betel-nut if available, make merry and return home; but today we all have been invited sending old as well as young, providing us seats of gold and given us sweet words, along with this there is thousand Rupees in the bota
Barzela (kul or family):

"Bhal oi mur khelor barzela guru; bhal khel bhal gonga, bhal kotha sudhiche; aniba lagichil kandhe, ahiche pawe, baike bachane asone bashane mur onek dush kruti hoiche, take jate apuni amak khoma Karibo hcai bichare"

(Meaning: Well, my Zela guru of the khel, it is a good khel like good Gonga, we have to carry you on shoulders but you are coming on your feet, there may be many mistakes in our words, seats etc. So, please consider those and pardon us for all those shortcomings).

Then the Zela of the khel informs all the matter to the samaj assembled there as follows:

"Bhal oi mur khelkhon, dhankhon, grihosthi prabhuk sudhi chalu, grihosthi prabhuye koiche aji teoluke amak mati buli ani bohiboloi diche, tothapi ami abar udhi cham"

(Meaning: Oh my khel which is like as valuable as money, I asked the Lord of the host, who informs us about the invitation and provided seats to sit, however, I will ask him again).

The khel Zela to host Zela:

"Hol oi mur grihosthi prabhu, bhal khel, bhal Gonga koiche bhal paichu; etiya apuni apunar nu ki letha ache, ki kam ache, jarkarone aji din duporate mati aniche, seiya amak koba lage".

(Meaning: We are happy to hear good khel and good Gonga, but now tell us the reasons of calling us and the problems that you are facing)
The host Zela:

"Hol oi khelkhon dhankhon, ot lukam tot lukam. Tholote gatu theoinu lukam; mur pariyalor anek dush kruti ache, gotike ei dush kruti khini niramoy karibar babe apunar ashirvad lobor karone apunalukok ei thanoloi mati anichu".

(Meaning: Oh my khel, we cannot hide ourselves either here or there. We cannot hide us anywhere. My family has committed innumerable mistakes, and hence we are inviting you here to get rid of all those by your gracious blessings.)

This is the ritual conversation to be observed by the khel as well as by the host in a 'Bhakatsewa' in the Gandhibari area of Barapujia. The informant said that after this formality the khel Zela asks the ghar Zela to perform the next formality with the following words:

"Thik ache, apunalukor nija niti niyam thakile seiya niti niyam kariba lage"

(Meaning: Alright, If you have your own principles then observe those). It is a permission to serve mod or zu by the host to the samaj, and accordingly mod is served by the host in a pot made out of the banana barks called thola (boat shape pot of banana barks). The Zelas got preference in this regard who are given first and also given in a comparatively bigger thola than the others. After the completion of the distribution the khel Zela asks "Hoi etiya apunar ki dush kruti ache, gun ache, take koba lage" (Now tell what mistakes or merrits you have in your family).

In reply the ghar Zela says:

"Hoi ami agote achilu tibetot, tibetor pora ahi ami ei thaite thakilu; iyatu amar bahut dukh kosta hol, ami Jayantiyalo guchi golu; tatu thakibo nuwarilu; tar para ahi ami Gobha Nellit thakilu; kintu tatu ami thakibo nuwarilu; aakou ami Arikati Arimukh palu, kintu tarporayu ami guchi ahilu opai amaongal huwar babe aru ahi
Topakuchi Barapujia palu, tar pora ahi ami ei Gadhibarit bartomanalyoke iyate thakilu. Kintu amar dukh kosta ekei ache. Seyehe ami dukh koster karon bichari amar pariyalor logot alochona kari amar ajhak (baid) dekhwabar karone thik karilu, aru gom palu amar baid Mayongat ache, seyehe edin tamul panor bota loi mayongar baidar ghar palu, kintu baid tetiya nachile. Ami tamul panor botatu burhik aagbohai dilu, burhiye amak rati tate thakiba dile, pichdina burhai burhik kole, “ja kali Gandhibarir jijon libing ahichile aru jitu tamul panor bota anichile seitu an logote sukuri changor uparat thaka Sita Aai mongalmuthi aan”. Burhiye seiyani dile aru burhai mongalmuthi hatot loi kole “ Mongalmuthi Chandra, Surya, Bayu Barunak saxhi kari tur dhal marichu, Gandhibarir libingtur ki opai amangol ache kobi, sacha kobi micha nokobi”. 


(Meaning: Oh well, earlier we had been in Tibbet, from Tibbet we came over this place, from here we left for Jayantia due to manyfold hardness and pain, but we failed to stay there too and hence we came over to Gobha and Neli and again we had to leave those and reached Arikati- Arimukh but our
hardship never lessened, we faced number of misfortunes and that compelled us to came over to Topakuchi then to Barapujia and from there to Gandhibari, and presently we are living here. But the hardship of our life remained same and therefore, after discussing with our family we decided to go to our Ojha (witch doctor) to find out the reasons of our sorrowful state of life. Next morning, I went with a bota of betel-nut and leaf to Mayong, where our Ojha or Baid is living. The Baid was not present at home at that day and hence we offered the bota of betel-nut and leaf to the old woman, the wife of the old ojha.

Next morning, the baid asked his wife to call the man from Gandhibari and to bring the bota along with the Sita ai mongalmuthi, (cowries) from above the sukurichang (the hanging ceiling over furnace of the kitchen). The old woman gave the bota and also the mongamuthi to the Ojha who after witnessing the gods Chandra, Surya Bayu and Barun played the Cowries over the dice and said "Tell only the truth, do not lie, tell what misfortunes do the man from Gandhibari have with his family". In the third turn of the play he could see the reason and said that all the misfortunes are due to non-observance of the ancestral Bhakatsewa which had been forgotten and re-observation of the same would remove all the misfortunes from the family. But the Bhakatsewa involves a good amount of expenditure, and so, when asked if delayed due to scarcity how to get rid of its misfortunes, he gave back me the bota of betel-nut and leaves and asked to place it over the sukurichang till the good days to come and perform the sewa. Accordingly, today by beating the stint of gourd and tukari we begged something to perform the sewa. So, it would be in use if taken by the khel or to throw if not taken by them. It is our request to accept by judging those but not to waste. Considering all those, hope our Zela guru would lift us from those misfortunes by planting sujuki-dubari (a kind of grass), and that would give us immense pleasure.)
After hearing those the *khel Zela* says to his *khel*:

"Hoi oi mur khelkhon dhankhon, grihosthi prabhuk sudhi chalu, tekhetor bule purbadinia niyom akonman achile, seikhini nokorar babe opai amongal hoiche, gotike seikhini kariba ulaiche, apunalluke chaokchun, teolukor kiba samajik dai jagar acheneki, Jadi ache apunalluke tar ata bichar mimangsha dibo lage".

(Meaning: Oh my khel I asked the host Lord and it is said that they had an old days custom and non-observance of the same is the reason of their ongoing family misfortunes, and now they are going to perform the same, and hence now you investigate if the family is accused of any social crime and if so, you have to do something and dispense the justice.)

**The host Zela:**

"Ami kona manuhkhiniye dekha napao, kintu pothali chakuwa noramoniche baihyu dekha pai thiohoiye dekha pai, gotike apunalluke amar samajat jadi tenekiuwa kunuba ache mukolikoi koba lage"

(Meaning: As blind we never see anything, but as pothalichakuwa (man with spirited eyes) you people can see everything either in sitting or on standing, so, if there is any such in our family tell us frankly.)

If there is any such finding the hosts have to perform a rituals called *Roi-Bondha*, and after that the host is allowed to perform the *Bhakatsewa*.)

Informant Pator recalled that in the Barbhakatsewa, the performance lies there in the different phrases of *ashirvad* (blessings) which starts from the human members of the family to the crops in the field of the family. Some examples of *ashirvad* or blessings of the *Barbhakatsewa* as narrated by the informant are as follows:

"Tekhetluke aagbohaiche, bule pokhiyu pokhire jura pate; tekhtlukor gharaloi buwari aniche, makor gharat thakute dhunia sundar achile,
gharaloi ahutehe aji bule kah, aji bule petor bish, athu tengena, muror tengena....................etc. Seikhini bhakator dush hobo pare; gotike bhal hobo lage"

(Meaning: Copulation is there with the birds, likewise they brought the daughter-in-law, who was beautiful and charming while in her parent's house, but after coming here she has complains everyday of cough, pain on stomach etc. All these may be due to some mistakes with the Bhakat (The devotee) and hence they should got rid of all those).

The blessing is sung in a long tune and a long haridhvani is given after the blessing prayer.

"Chakurir choihal aneyu bai, amiyu kheti pothar koru, kintu korileyu oinar potharat sajal sabal dekha pai; kintu amar potharat rong-rong, dhong-dhong, eiya jadi kiba amar ali olabor dush, bhakator dush ache tene hole amak iyar babeo ashirvad akon diyok"

(Meaning: We also cultivate like others, but our cultivation is unproductive, at the same time others have good crops. All these may be due to mistake with our Bhakat, therefore, give one blessing for it also.)

It is a prayer by the host and then the khel Zela gives the blessing. At last after blessing on different aspects the khel Zela asks the ghar Zela:

"Bhal oi grihosti prabhu, etiya jadi aru kiba niyom ba dush kruti ache kobo lage"

(Meaning: Oh host Lord tell us if you have any more principle or mistakes)

In reply the host Zela says:

"Bhal oi mur khelkhon dhankhon, aru akonman dush ache; amar uporipurush behestoloi guchi golgoi, kintu teolukok ami mat ashar logabo pora nai; jadi khale kati bandi hoi ache, korbat jadi narakat pari ache; teolukor muktir babeo ashirvad akon diyok"
(Meaning: Oh my khelkhon, yes we have a small mistake, our forefathers has gone to behest (Islamic concept of heaven) where they may be confined to the ditch or may be in the hell; therefore give one blessing for their salvation too.)

Pator said that this is all about the prayers and blessings in the Barbhakatsewa that include from the human members of the family to crops, animal husbandry, and also the dead of the family, which gives some valuable historical materials regarding their origin and route of migration and cultural practice. Informant Ratneswar Bordoloi reminded that the practice of Bhakatsewa, Bhitarsewa and Ratisewa are performed in the Tetelia kingdom.

Quite apart from the celebration of seasonal festivals and pujas, the Tiwa people across the habitat have a custom of offering puja on appointed days of the year to their ancestors and deities in certain shrines which have evolved over the course of time. The shrines are called thans and there are specific customs and rituals associated with the thans. It may be noted that the thans have come into being through the active involvement, patronage and encouragement of the ruling king of a particular kingdom among the Tiwas. Most of these thans practice rudimentary form of shaivik cult. Some elderly people interviewed during fieldwork vouched for the fact that there was a custom of human sacrifice in order to please the gods and goddesses in the thans. During fieldwork, it was observed that in the precinct of many of the thans, there are rock slabs which are believed to be chopping-boards on which the human sacrifice would be beheaded. Old informants also showed sacrificial swords (Narabali Dia Da) preserved within the premises of the thans. The custom of human sacrifice came to a stop as late as late 1890s. Now, same thans practice animal sacrifice instead of the gruesome human sacrifice. It must also be added that the shaivik cult of human
sacrifice was a far more palpable reality in the hills of Jaintiya where the practice was stringently followed. It was, in fact, one of the reasons for the flight of the Tiwas from the hills to the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. The other reason of the migration, of course, was matrilineal system of inheritance which the Tiwas found difficult to adopt into their custom. The Thans and the various deities associated with them are discussed below.

**Aulia Than:**
Informant Jursing Bordoloi recounted that Aulia is the than of the *Lankhia khel* who are believed to have performed their worships in full nudity. Lord *Mahadeo, Pharameswar* (sun-God) and *Baghdeo* are worshiped here. The priest is called *deuri* or *thakur*. The regular annual puja is offered in the month of Phagun-Chot (February-March-April) and on either Tuesday or Saturday. Apart from the regular annual performance of worship, the special pujas are performed by the *Lankhia* at the time of drought. In the past, when the warriors from the fearless *Lankhia* clan members were drafted into the king's army, special puja was offered in the than for success. Duck, pigeon and goat are sacrificed for the puja meant for removing the evil spell of drought.

**Kalikha Than:**
It was reported by informant Mahendra Manta, that the *Kalikha than*, situated at Balisara Mikir Gaon in the Sahari kingdom is dedicated to the popular goddess *Kalikha*. The Sahari kings are the protectors and patron of the than. The Puja is performed on a Tuesday in the month of Chot, before the *Bohog Bihu*. The arrangement of puja is made by the Sahari Raja under the supervision of the *Doloi* but the puja is performed by the Mikir (Karbi) *Loro* (priest) assisted by their *Hodar* and *Hadari* (helping persons of the
chief priests). Sacrifice of a turtle is made along with other animals like goats, hen, pigs, pigeons etc.

**Basundhari Than:**

Informant Surendra Nath Kunwar recalled that the *Basundhari than* is located on the foot hill near Amsoi. The annual *Kesaikhaiti* (which literally means goddess who drinks fresh, raw blood) puja is performed on the first day of *Bohog Bihu at Basundhari than*. The puja is called the 'Kesai Khaiti Kalikha puja' in which five goats and a tortoise are sacrificed. The presiding priest in the pujas of *Basundhari than* is a Karbi priest or *loro*. *Kesai Khaiti Kalikha* puja is also called *Bonpuja*.

Informant Mahendra Manta told on Basundha than as follows: “The next Sunday after the *Kesaikhaiti* puja, the *Basndhari* puja at *Basundhari than* is performed where similar sacrifices are made and the puja is organized under the supervision of the *Doloi* of the area, who on the standing order of the king of Sahari, has to supply all the provisions for the puja.”

**Bauli Than or Jayanti Than:**

Informant Mahendra Manta reported that the *Bauli than* is situated in the Sahari kingdom. The word *bauli* is derived from *bagawali* and then *bahawali*. It is equivalent to *bhagawati* that represents *Jayanti Devi* of Jayantia kingdom at Sahari. Earlier human sacrifice was practised here but later on it was replaced by the sacrifice of a black goat to be provided by the king of Sahari along with four other white goats and other animals like pigs, fowl, pigeons etc. The presiding priest of this puja is a Tiwa *Loro*. The informant told that there is a myth regarding the discontinuation of the
narabali (human sacrifice) in the Bauli than. The myth known as bhakaya, narrated by Manta as follows: “In Tiwa custom, a person goes bhakaya when he is chosen by the king’s men to be the sacrifice in the next Bauli puja. In the Tiwa dialect, the term bhakaya hol or bhakaya gol has deeply tragic connotations. It is like a death warrant issued by the king. The Gobha king was the patron of the practice of human sacrifice in the thans of the kingdom in the hills. The Jayantiya king also used to practice human sacrifice in the Jayanti Devi than. It is customary to for the people of the kingdom to provide the bali or the person chosen for the sacrifice from each family on a rotation basis once in a year. Nobody actually wants voluntarily to give a member of its family for sacrifice. Therefore, the family escapes the hills before its turn comes. To counter the flight of the person to be sacrificed, the councilors discussed the matter and introduced a secret system to select the victim. The system is called bhakaya hol or huwa or bhakaya gol or juwa. According to the system a silver coin is placed after praying the goddess on the wayside which people cross for their errands and chores. The king’s men would secretly watch the coin and whoever picks up the coin is immediately detained by the king’s men and handed over to king. The king then offers him to sacrifice before the devi. The man is called bhakaya and the system is known as bhakayat juwa.

According to the myth, as ill luck would have it, the king’s own son happened to cross the road on which the fateful coin was secretly placed. The king’s son sighted the coin and picked it up. The king’s men apprehended the prince and took him to the king. The king was caught in a dilemma as to what to do with his own son. The matter was referred to the king’s council which was immediately convened. After much deliberation it was decided in the council that the king is to provide a black goat to represent his son as a bali along with four other white goats provided by the people. With the abolition of human sacrifice at Jayanti than, the Sahari
Tiwas stopped the practice of human sacrifice in the Bauli than as well. From then on, it became a custom for the king to provide a black goat to represent the human victim. The term bhakaya gol, however, is still widely used by Tiwas of Sahari to mean a destitute person of disgrace or distress.

**Mahamaya Than:**

According to informant Sigrab Pator, Mahamaya than is located in the village of Mokoria, east of Neli Bazar, where human sacrifice used to be made in the olden days. Even now-a-day the practice of sacrifice of a motif of human being made out of pithaguri (rice powder). The human sacrifice is replaced by a black goat. Beside the goat, one pair of birds is also scarificied. The human replica is sacrificed inside the house of the than, whereas the goat is sacrificed outside in the precinct.

Pator also said that human sacrifice was practised in three thans of Neli kingdom. Those were Bardeosal, Bhagawati, and Mahamaya than. One person in each than in a year was sacrificed. There is an iron chain in a peepal tree near the Bhagawati than, which is said to be used to bind the person for the bali (victim). He said that there is no trace of human sacrifice in the last 60 years. The human sacrifice in the thans of Neli was replaced by sacrifice of goat provided by the king.

Here is an oral account recounted by informant Guneswar Khelma regarding the replacement of goat for human as victim to be sacrificed which is as follows: “The practice of human sacrifice was there in the Mahamaya than of Mokoria village once in a year. The person to be bali was captured before-hand. The puja and the sacrifice were maintained by the king himself.
Once, the officers and their followers responsible for capturing the bali failed as they did not find anybody on the road. It was just one night ahead of the sacrifice. So, the matter was instantly intimated to the king. Then the king ordered the officials to capture anyone for that purpose whoever might be found. But to the consternation of the officers and their assistants, they did not find any one coming out to the road, except the son of the king who was passing by. To oblige the order of the king, the officials had to report the matter to the king. The king was a forthright ruler. He was heartbroken as a father but as a king he had to pass the order to sacrifice his own son. Without batting an eyelid, he instructed the Deuri to do sacrifice his own son in the puja. After the sacrifice was over, the royal council took the matter seriously. It was decided to stop the practice of human sacrifice in the Mahamaya than so that such tragic situations could be avoided. It was also decided to replace the human as bali by a black goat to be provided by the king." Neither the the king of Neli nor any member of the Muniwali kul, which is the clan of the royal family, even today do not visit the Mahamaya or attend any puja there.

**Bhagawati Than:**

Informants Guneswar Khelma and Sigrab Pator recollected that the than for the Bhagawati puja is near Neli Bazar on the side of the hill. It is one of three thans where narbali was practised. Now it is replaced by one black goat to be provided by the king. There is an iron chain in a peepal tree, near the Bhagawati than, which is said to be used to bind the person selected as bali. Beside the goat provided by the king other animals of sacrifice are one tortoise, one magur fish, one pair of pigeon, one kumura (white gourd melon) and one piece of sugarcane , which to be sacrificed by the king himself.
Beside bali, the prasad of raw pulses and fruit is to be offered compulsorily.

**Bardeosal:**

It was recounted by informant Sigrab Pator, that the Bordeosal shrine is located at Neli on the Neli-Shillong road. There is no definite day for the worship and no animal sacrifice is observed. Only prasad of raw pulses and fruit is offered. Puja is performed on Tuesdays of the week except for the Sima puja, which is held on a Sunday. Except the Kher puja, which is performed in the month of Ahin (September-October), all other pujas are performed in the months of Phgun and Chot.

**Deosal Than:**

It was collected from informant Jursing Bordoloi that the Deosal is the principal shrine in the Gobha kingdom. The deity of Charibhai is worshiped in the Deosal than which lies between Amlighat and Jagirroad in the Morigaon district. Charibhai is a manifestation of Lord Mahadeva. The deity symbolizes the four directions of East, West, North and South. Once narabali (human sacrifice) was practised here which was later shifted to Joynagar, a place located in the nearby hill. The victim selected and caught for this sacrifice was called Bhakaya (bhakayane nina, means to eat the human being) The narabali was replaced at Deosal with a black he-goat. Ducks and hens are also sacrificed here. Barbarua is the presiding priest of the shrine and he is appointed by the king. Earlier the Loro of Amswai appointed the Deuri or the priest from the Kholar kul of Amswai. He was assisted by the Zela of Gobha and the Barika. The Barbrua had to sacrifice the animals and in his absence the Zela or the barika had to perform the same duty.
The annual puja and sacrifice was held in the month of *Phagun-Chot* on either Tuesday or Saturday.

**Fa-Mahadeosal:**

*Fa-Mahadeosal* shrine is located at Bagariguri in the kingdom of Sahari, on the north bank of river Kapili near the bank of river Kolong. According to informant Probesh Dekaraja, the shrine was believed to be established by legendary Tiwa king Jongal Balahu near his capital fort at Bagariguri. The presiding deity of the shrine is Fa Mahadeo (the word *fa* means father in the Tiwa language). This is the only shrine where deities in the visible form of idols are worshiped. A *mela* is organized by the Sahari king, as *Roja Mela*, each year on the 1st of *Bohag*. The elder *Dekaraja* of Sahari kingdom is in-charge of the shrine. He is also the presiding priest of the shrine, assisted by a *Hadari*.

**Concluding Remarks:-**

Tiwa fairs and festivals contain within their narrative, significant resources in terms of the oral history of the Tiwa people. The great range of diversity of the various clans and clan clusters gets full cultural expression through their religious and cultural beliefs through the fairs and festivals discussed above. The fairs and festivals have evolved over a long period of time, accumulating and shedding of elements of the Tiwa culture as the Tiwa people negotiated with the changes taking place in their day-to-day struggle as well as in their participation in the twists and turns of history. The key areas which emerge from the discussion are identified below:

1) Tiwa forms of worship are characterized largely by the faith of nature gods combined with ancestral worships. During every important event in the agrarian life cycle, the Tiwa people worship their deities and spirits and seek their blessings for a good and prosperous life. However, the forms of worship vary greatly.
2) The Tiwa cultural life is full of energy and vigour. The primordial Tiwa consciousness responds to the glory and bounty of nature and captures the energy of nature through its own energy of expression by way of festivities where songs and dances are integral.

3) For the Tiwa people living in the hills, nature presents itself as a spiritual entity. In other words, the animism practised in the hills is of an unmixed variety where the influence of more structured and complex religious faith like Hinduism has little impact.

4) For the Tiwa people living in the plains, the form of animism undergoes a synthetic experimentation. The finest example of such synthesis is the Bhakatsewa form of worship in which Vaishnavite influence is clearly identifiable. However, there is no central consciousness at work in the formation of religious belief across the numerous clans and clan clusters which have cultural allegiance to their traditional kingdoms.

5) The rootedness to the tradition of the orientation of clan and cluster of clans is a rare and unique phenomenon of the Tiwa cultural life. The difference in the observance of customs and rituals among the various clans and clan-clusters is extremely sharp. This also explains the existence of numerous rites, rituals and customs among the Tiwa people.

6) There is a process of evolution taking place in the religious and cultural belief system among the Tiwa people across the board. Practices which seem outmoded and unhealthy to the full expression of human potential based on justice and individual freedom have slowly been discarded by the Tiwa people.

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