Chapter I

Introduction

The Tiwas are regarded as a major tribe of Assam. They are also known as Lalungs. Their population in Assam is 1,70,622, according to the Census Report, Govt. of India, 2001. The Tiwas reside in the plains of the Nagaon and Marigaon districts primarily but concentrations of Tiwas or Lalungs living in community form are found in the Dimoria region of Kamrup district, in Titabor of Jorhat district and in Dhemaji of Dhemaji district. There is a large population of Tiwas living in the hills of Hamren sub-division of Karbi Anglong district of Assam and in the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. According to the eminent cultural historian B. K. Baruah, the Tiwas belong to the Bodo group of tribes of the Indo-Chinese family. The Tiwas or Lalungs, henceforth referred to as ‘Tiwas’, are the speakers of the Bodo group of languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family. (Barua:1986).

Origin and Migration of the Tiwas: Scholarly and Historical Reference:-

The origin of the Tiwas can be traced back to the river valleys of western China region. According to B. K. Baruah, “The original home of these speakers was in western China near the Yang-tse-kiang and the
Hwang-ho rivers” (Barua:1986:6). They came down the course of the Brahmaputra and settled in the Brahmaputra valley. There is no way to ascertain as to how Tiwas settled in Assam. It is possible that along with the other Indo- Mongoloid tribes, they came down to the Brahmaputra valley, and in course of time settled in the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Historical evidence suggests that the Ahom King Jaydhwaja Singha assisted the Gobha king at Khagarijan in a consolidation of power (C E 1648-1663). Sir Edward Gait has made specific mention of this historical fact. According to Gait, “In 1658 Pramata Rai rebelled against his grandfather Jasa Manta Rai, the Raja of Jayantia, 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 the help to the Kacharis, who were preparing to come to his assistance, when the local Ahom officials intervened and said that, as Ahom were the paramount power, it was they whose protection should be sought. The Gobha chief accordingly went with seven hundred men to Jayadhvaj Singh and begged for help. Orders were issued to the Bar Phukan to establish him in Khagarijan, corresponding more or less to the modern Nowgong, and this was accordingly done,” (Gait:1997:119). Gait further states that in 1832 the king of Gobha, in the west of Nagaon, seized four British subjects and burnt three of them alive at the shrine of Goddess Kali. He committed this gruesome act at the behest of his suzerain, the king of Jayantia. The fourth escaped and gave information of the occurrence (Gait:1997:291). As a result of this outrage, Gobha was taken over by a detachment of the Assam Light Infantry, after a lapse of about three years, It was a part of the larger design of annexation of Jayantia kingdom by Captain Lister in 1835 (Gait:1997:291).

The Datiyalia Buranji included in the Deodhai Asom Buranji (Bhuyan:2001) compiled from old Assamese Buranjis and edited by Dr. S K Bhuyan, significantly describes the initial relationship between the Ahoms
and the Tiwas and the subsequent Tiwa settlement on the north bank of the Kapili and the Kolong in different periods of time ranging from the reign of king Jayadhwaja Singha to Rajeswar Singha (C.E. 1751-1769). Paragraph 221-257 of the Buranji, exclusively deal with the relationship of the Ahom Government with the kings of Kachar and Jayantia, and the chieftains of Gobha, Neli, Sara, Khaigarh; Topakuchi, Barapujia, Dandua and Mikir. Interestingly, the manuscript of this text was obtained by Bhuyan from one Moharsing Deka of Barkala village of Nagaon district. Deka was a descendant of the royal family of Topakuchi. From this, it can be surmised that some of the royal houses of the Tiwas had the practice of recording their history in the written form.

Another dilapidated manuscript of the same chronicle was obtained from one Bhumidhar Kakati of village Baligaon, district Nagaon. Paragraphs 228-233 of the book are dealing with an anecdote concerning the search of fugitive Tiwas during Jayadhwaja Singha’s time by Teleka Sandikai, the Rahiyal Barua. According to the anecdote contained in the book, the Ahom officer Rahiyal Baruah one day saw fire on the top of a neighbouring hill. He dispatched his officers to survey the place. The officers came upon Tiwa villages with active settlement. The inhabitants fled to different quarters at the sight of the Ahom army, and the Ahom soldiers lived on the food they plundered from the deserted houses. The old and decrepit frontiersmen who were left behind at home on account of their infirmity were extremely relieved to see that the Ahom soldiers had eaten the same food that the Tiwas traditionally consumed. From this they concluded that they were of the same caste or fold as the Tiwas. The Ahom officers procured the return of the fugitives, and asked them about the custom of their country. The frontiersmen reported that, according to their custom, a son was debarred from succession, and an estate was inherited by the son of a daughter, and that the son of a chief had to earn his bread by serving under another person.
The Ahom officials were exposed to the iniquity of the matriarchal custom followed by the Tiwas and assured them of a more convenient mode of inheritance if they placed themselves under the domination of the Ahoms. As a result of this negotiation, twelve families of the Mikirs (Karbis) and twelve families of Tiwas migrated to the Ahom territories. The leaders were taken for an audience with the Ahom king Jayadhwaja Singha, who promised them protection and the benefit of the equitable usage of custom according to which a son could inherit his father's property.

Paragraph 233 of the book deals with the establishment of three kingdoms, namely, Mikir, Topakuchi and Barapujia by the Ahoms. The Mikirs had their own prince from the royal clan of Rangkhangpo. For Topakuchi and Barapujia kingdoms, the Tiwas brought two young princes from Khala. Paragraph 248 of the book deals with the foundation of a market at Gobha and paragraph 249 deals with the establishment of the Dandua kingdom by King Rudra Singha. Paragraphs 250-253 are devoted to the relationship between the Ahoms and the Tiwas during the reign of King Rajeswar Singha materialized largely because of the efforts of his minister Kirtichandra Barbarua.

Paragraph 250 of the Datiyalia Buranji describes the strategy of the Ahoms towards four kingdoms, i.e. Takeni, Khala, Neli and Sahara. Paragraphs 251 and 252 narrate the Ahom initiative of setting up a market at Raha. The two paragraphs also narrate the revenue-sharing arrangements. Paragraph 253 is devoted to the creation of seven states at Jagi, under Jagial Gohain and the reorganization of the kingdoms under Raha outpost. The same paragraph also describes the creation of two more kingdoms known as Khaigarh and Sara on the east of Topakuchi and the redefinition of the boundaries of Mikir and Barapujia. The seven kingdoms of Jagi are called Sato Raj whereas the five kingdoms at Raha are called Pancho Raj. During the reign of Ahom king Rudra Singha (1696-1714), the Ahoms utilized
Gobha as the route of communication with the Jayantia kingdom (Bhuyan:1933:35). The *Datiyalia Buranji* further indicates that the Gobha Raja of the Tiwas had extended his rule to the erstwhile Nagaon region for a considerable period of time.

The eminent cultural historian Raj Mohan Nath has offered significant insights into the relationship that the Lalungs had with the Jayantia kings. Nath mentions that the Lalungs had been ruling over Gobha, Neli, Khala, Topakuchi, Raha, Barapujia, Rani, Luki and Beltola under the suzerainty of the Jayantias. In 1564, the Gobha king, Panteswar 'successfully stood against the Koch General Chila Rai' (Nath:1978:113). Nath further mentions that 'Gobha king Chhatra Sing is alleged to have sacrificed several people of Kamrupa before the Goddess Kali' (Nath:1978:113). According to him, The British took this incident as a pretext and captured several parts under his kingdom. This incident ultimately led to the annexation of the Jayantia kingdom along with the Lalung dominated states into the British Empire.

**Meaning and Origin of Tiwa(Lalung):**

The term *Lalung* is believed to be a Karbi word which literally means rescued water (*la* means water and *lu* means rescued or secured). It is said that there was a branch of the river Daiyang in Karbi Anglong called Nilalung. During the reign of Kamata kings, the *Lalungs* had to leave their original habitat and establish their settlement on the bank of the Nilalung river. Thereafter, they were called *Lalungs* (Sharma Thakur:1985:74). The *Lalungs* prefer to call themselves as Tiwa, in which *ti* means water and *wa* means superior (Sharma Thakur:1985:75).
It is important to note that the Tiwas do not have a recorded history of their origin and migration to the present habitat. Whatever sketchy details we have of their past, is contained in their oral traditions. These oral traditions are rooted in their folk forms of expressive behavior, in their customs, manners, myths and rituals. These traditions have been handed down to the Tiwas from generation to generation. In a myth recounts the sad story of *Hora* and *Tongora*, collected by Moneswar Deuri, there are references to the migration of the Tiwas within their habitat (Deuri:2011:38-40). According to the myth, the name *Lalung* was given to them by the Karbis. Long ago, the Tiwas had to bear the brunt of atrocity meted out to them by the Barahi Kacharis. They fled from their habitat to the Jayantia hills. They lived under the Jayantia king for many centuries. They adopted the matriarchal system prevalent in the Jayantia hills. However, many among the Tiwas were averse to the matriarchal system. Once, a dispute arose regarding the selection of a customary official called the *Zela* among the Tiwas. According to one faction, ‘the son of a *Zela* must inherit the post of *Zela*. The other faction held the view that ‘the son of a *Harikunwari* must inherit the post of a *Zela*. The leaders of the two factions were officers under the Jayantia king. They were known by the names of *Hora* and *Tongora*. *Hora* was an advocate of matriarchy and *Tongora* was a supporter of the patriarchal system of inheritance. The two factions were ready for a fight to settle the dispute. Wiser counsel prevailed and it was decided that the two leaders would engage in a duel of shield-and-sword. Whoever wins the duel would settle the dispute in his favour. In the fight, *Hora* was able to behead *Tongora* but he was heart-broken to see his colleague’s severed head. He took the severed head of *Tongora* in his hands and started crying and declaring that he was a sinner since he killed his own friend. *Tongora*’s supporters fled the venue of the fight, caught hold of whatever they could lay their hands on, in terms of the effects of their property, and left the Jayantia kingdom forever. They came to the plains and settled down. *Hora*
and his supporters came running to their migrating brothers and pleaded to them to return to their native place. However, the supporters of Tongora refused to return. As a mark of their separation from their brethren in the Jayantia hills, the migrating Tiwas dug a hole in a place called Tiwa Jongthong and installed a rock to commemorate their separation and flight from their native place. They also took a vow never to return by sacrificing water gourd to their deities. This myth graphically depicts the act of internal migration that dispersed the Tiwa population in the Jayantia and Karbi Anglong hills as well as the plains of the Brahmaputra valley.

As time has progressed, the oral traditions have also undergone changes. However, the central role of customs and manners, myths and rituals in defining the Tiwa culture still remains deep within their consciousness. Memory is the crucial factor in linking the present consciousness of the Tiwas to the collective consciousness of the past.

**Oral History as an Academic Discipline: An Overview:-**

The Oral history method was started in 1948 as a modern technique for historical documentation when Allan Nevins, a Professor of History at the University of Columbia, began recording the memoirs of persons "significant" in American Life (Thomson:1998:581). According to Trevor Lummis, oral history in its present form allows historians to collect data which will illuminate particular subjects or groups about which too little information has survived from other sources. ("Oral History" in R. Bauman ed. *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments*, Lummis in Bauman:1992:). For Ronald J. Grele, oral history is a democratized tool to study history (Grele:1991:87). In the preface of his book, Ronald states that, "Oral history should be a way to get a better history, a more critical history, a more conscious history which involves members of the public in the
creation of their own history.” (Grele:1991:87). What this implies is that oral history allows ordinary people to participate in the process of historiography with their personal perspectives which are born out of the interviews done as a tool of the study of their lives. Michael Frisch opines that oral history creates its own documents, that are by definition explicit dialogues about the past with the ‘subjects’ necessarily triangulated between the past experience and the present context of remembering (Frisch:1990:188)

Oral history employs memory as a source of historical research. The use of oral history in historiography is nothing new. Historians have been dependent upon eyewitness accounts of important turns of events in the history of human civilization. Scholar Paul Thompson identifies the development of an ancient history discipline in the 19th Century as the prime reason for the neglect of oral history in favour of archival research and documentary evidence (Thompson:2000:25). However, as time passed by, people began again to accept oral evidence as valid and useful source of historical research. Advancements in the technology of oral record keeping also helped establish oral history. Tape recorders, voice recorders, digital recording devices and gadgets of telecommunication like cell phones with inbuilt voice and video recorders facilitated a large-scale accommodation of oral evidence as source of oral history. These technological aids have allowed historians to go closest to individuals within a society in order to establish link between biographical details and their relationship with community experiences. Oral historian and theorist Alessandro Portelli opines that oral history stands apart from other disciplines. According to him: “One of the two things that distinguishes oral history from other disciplines is the search for connection between biography and history, between individual experience and the transformations of society” (Portelli: 1997:6).
As oral historians chose to include personal accounts of a historical event seen through the prism of individuals, the method of interviewing people became a standard protocol. As eminent oral history theoretician Grele states, "...The focus of oral history is to record as complete an interview as possible – an interview which contains, within itself, its own system of structures, not a system derived from the narrow conventions of history" (Grele:1991:135).

It is held in the academic circles of oral history discipline that oral history allows for true democratization of the study of history. Grele is a strong advocate of this view. "Because oral history is a way of involving people heretofore uninvolved in the creation of documents of their past, it is an opportunity to democratize the nature of history not simply by interviewing them but by seeing that involvement as a prelude to a method which allows people to formulate their own meanings of their past experiences in a structured manner in response to informed criticism" (Grele: 1991: viii).

Oral history has close affinity with folklore studies. Both the disciplines share the common grounds of interest in the ordinary, lay people. People's memory can be an important tool for constructing narratives of both history as well as consciousness. Both disciplines seek to represent the undocumented, scattered and dispersed oral narratives to frame structures of representation. According to one of the chief proponents of oral history Jan Vansina, the discipline of oral history has a great role to play in terms of people who do not have recorded history. According to him, "In those parts of the world inhabited by the peoples without writing, oral tradition forms the main available source for a reconstruction of the past, and even among peoples who have writing, many historical sources, including the most ancient ones, are based on oral traditions."
Vansina further states, "Oral traditions are alive among people without writing and it preserves the essential nature of oral tradition better than traditions found in literate societies. It continues to exist in the heart of the environment and gave rise to it, nor yet being supplemented, nor the main functions taken over by writings, nor has it yet being torn from its natural context, as happens once it has been committed to writing." (Vansina:2009:1).

Vansina further discusses certain practical problems faced by the fieldworker of oral history in the concluding chapter of his celebrated book. The first problem identified by Vansina is with regard to the research concerning traditions. He states "A tradition is of very little use as a historical source unless all the relevant preliminary investigations have been carried out and the testimonies collected systematically, since otherwise there are no proper means available for testing its reliability. Too often in the past people have been content to collect traditions at random, record them carelessly, and study them out of context, although it is only in their context that they can be fully understood." (Vansina:2009: 187-204).

It is important to understand Vansina's insistence on the context of a particular tradition under study. The key tool of methodology that he identifies in pursuing context happens to be 'testimony' which he defines in clear terms with regard to the authenticity of data. Vansina defines testimony in the following way: "Oral traditions consist of all verbal testimonies which are reported statements concerning the past." The definition implies that nothing but oral traditions – that is to say, statements either spoken or sung – enter into considerations. These must not only be distinguished from written statements, but also from material objects that might be used as a source of knowledge about the past.
Vansina advises future researchers of oral history to rely on testimonies whose characteristics are laid down in the following terms: “The relation between fact and event observed and the final testimony describing it, or to go a step further, the first written record of it may be described in the following manner. An observer reports whatever it is he has observed in a testimony which might be called the initial or proto-testimony. This testimony is heard by someone who repeats it to a second person who in turn passes on the information by telling it to a third person etc. Thus a chain of transmission comes into being in which each successive informant forms a link and in which every testimony is a hearsay account. The final informant communicates the final testimony in the chain to someone who records it in writing.” (Vansina:2009:19-21).

From Vansina’s elucidation quoted above, it is quite clear that a testimony in oral history is the final outcome of a fact or event after it gets transmitted through a series of informants and becomes a solid historical or cultural fact. Considering the open-endedness of the methods of oral history, Vansina lays the groundwork of systematic sourcing of historical facts or events into what he calls testimony.

One of the seminal influences on oral history came from the writings of the Black American writer Alex Haley (Haley: 1997). Haley’s book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* became a rallying point for advocates of oral history. Haley traced his African roots through the use of songs and oral narratives. One of the methods used by Haley was to record the oral narratives of the *griot*, the traditional story-teller of the West African tribal community. Through the narrative line signalled by the *griot*, the Black American writer was able to establish his links with a distant past. But more than that, he was able to project a narrative that was both seductive and compelling for all those who wanted to use memory as a source of presenting oral history.
Haley's use of oral history was structurally orientated. He used mnemonic devices to capture life histories and family histories. These mnemonic devices were in the form of songs handed down by generations of griots or the institution of historical singers. In that sense, he was following a set method, although the method may not have been academically authentic. Critics of oral history levied charges of utter subjectivity and fictional account rather than objective and factual recalling of memory. Questions were raised about the relationship between individual and collective memory, between past and present and between memory and personal bias. The advocates of oral history braced themselves with safeguards such as internal consistency of their sources in terms of reliability.

It is true that oral history per se cannot match the rigour, discipline and structure of traditional archival and documentary historiography. Nor can it overthrow the hegemony that historiography and archival history enjoy in academic circles and popular imagination. But that does not take away oral history's relevance in accommodating memory as a source of understanding undocumented and unrepresented history. At best, oral history can be considered as being bound in a complementary role with traditional archival and documentary history. Wherever traditional history fails, in terms of lapse of collective memory, oral history can step in and illumine the dark tunnels of history.

**Oral History and Folklore:**

The role of oral history in folklore has to be underlined in the perspective of folklore research. Folklore studies as a discipline underlines the need to understand ordinary people's traditions, customs and behaviour. It can be an important source of alternative knowledge. For oral cultures,
folklore is the most important source of history. As an alternative source, folklore can offer important perspectives in order to explain and understand societies in the context of preserving the distinctive nature of the culture of the unlettered people, especially the indigenous people and marginalized social groups like peasants, farmhands, common folk as well as ethnic tribes and women. As a repository of cultural values and wisdom, folklore can become a key element in understanding the heritage of people and tribes. It can also be a great element in understanding the history of the said people or tribe.

Eminent folklorist Richard Dorson in his discussion of the current theories of folklore mentions the Historical-Reconstructional method in his classification of current theories of folklore. In this method, folklore and folk life materials are used to recapture the 'vanished historical periods' for which evidence is insufficient (Dorson:1972).

Birendranath Datta, who is an eminent folklorist of the North East, is of the view that folklore has a deep association with history. Datta quotes eminent historian E. H. Carr to further his point:

"The function of historians is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from it but to master and understand it as the key to understanding of the present." (Datta:2002:29). According to Datta, it is the business of the historian not only to look back to the past but to illuminate the present with her findings of the mysteries of the past. In a more or less similar manner, the oral historian is also engaged in lighting up the present with reconstruction of the past with the tools of oral history.

Datta goes on to invoke Redfield who insists on tradition in order to understand history. Redfield avers that "...tradition carries with it the sense of age, long continuity and stability." From the elucidation of the concept of
tradition, Datta suggests that the interpretation of tradition implies its involvement with the past and with history.

What Datta, in fact, is insistent on, is the role tradition plays in understanding history. One of the key features of folklore is that its central concern is with tradition. In this way, one can surmise that history and folklore studies have a common ground, that of tradition, which make the two disciplines complementary to each other. (Datta:2002:29)

Scholars of oral history, however, lay emphasis on the relationship between oral history and oral tradition. As Wilson states, the subtle difference between oral history and oral tradition must be born in mind. Oral Tradition is the umbrella in which oral history method can be placed.(Wilson:1996:8)

Statement of the Research Problem:-

The term ‘oral history’, when applied to an oral society like the Tiwas, is bound to raise a number of issues. Firstly, all throughout medieval, pre-colonial and colonial times, historiography in Assam has neglected the Tiwas. Secondly, unlike the Ahoms who were subjugators of the Tiwas to a large extent, the Tiwas were primarily an oral culture. Thirdly, the Ahoms had an extremely rich tradition of writing history by designated historiographers called the buranjis. In spite of the fact that these buranjis offer narratives of kings and their reigns, there is a chronological written record of a culture that was rich in statecraft, agricultural innovation and martial skills. When modern history was being written in the late 18th and 19th century by British colonial historians, oral societies like the Tiwas were naturally left out. As a result, the Tiwas have no recorded history. It was only during the later half of the 20th century that cultural historians and
anthropologists began to show some interest in the Tiwas. As a result, some important works were compiled on the origin, migration and settlement of the Tiwas. Mention may be made of a brief account by Sarbananda Rajkumar which brings the Tiwas to the attention of scholars and readers in general (Rajkumar:2000). In this regard mention may also be made of anthropologists like G. C. Sharma Thakur and B K Gohain. Sharma Thakur successfully presents a discussion of the Tiwa population living in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley in the south bank in his book The Lalungs (Tiwas). Sharma Thakur collects many myths of origin and migration based on his fieldwork and offers a full-length study of the Tiwa people in strict academic terms. Gohain’s work is entitled The Hill Lalungs which offers a dependable anthropological account of the Tiwas living in the hills. To Gohain’s credit, one can say that his work also describes the various historical perspectives concerning the migration, settlement and interrelation between the Ahoms and the Tiwas. L. Gogoi, a free-lance researcher has a work on the Tiwas which highlights the cultural aspects of the Tiwa people living in the plains. His work is entitled Tiwa Sanskritir Ruprekha which is characterized by his focus on certain place names, fairs and festivals and their origin.

Young researchers from the Tiwa community have been displaying a new-found interest in their own culture and way of life. As a result, a fresh crop of scholars has emerged. Of this lot of scholars, the pioneering name has been that of Bolairam Senapati. He has contributed a number of books, important among these are Pancho Rajia Onchorlar Lalungar Lokageetar Uporot Samanya Alukpat, published in the year 1995 from Morigaon, by Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra. Senapati deals with folksongs of the Tiwas of the Raha area. His other book is Tiwa Samaj Aru Sanskriti, published in 2010 by the Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for Tribal and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati. This book deals with different aspects of Tiwa social and
cultural life. Another eminent writer of the community is Moneswar Deuri who has an important book entitled *Asomiya Jati Aru Sanskriti Gathanat Lalung (Tiwa) Sakalar Abadan* (Deuri:2011) published by the Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for Tribal and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati. Deuri’s work tries to highlight the contribution of the Tiwas in the formation of the greater Assamese national identity. Another writer who has contributed to the cause of the Tiwas is Maheswar Pator whose work entitled *Paharor Tiwa Utsavar Loka Kahini* (2000), brings in fresh input of the oral traditions of Tiwas living in the hills. Mention must also be made of the untiring efforts of another cultural specialist, Ganesh Senapati, whose work *Tetelia Rairjor Borot Utsav* (1995) brings out the essence of the oral tradition, including a collection of songs, associated with the Borot Utsav celebrated in the plains of the Tiwa habitat around the Tetelia area.

It must be mentioned that the late 1970s saw an upsurge among young scholars and cultural specialists of the Tiwa community in terms of political and cultural organization. A number of socio-cultural organizations came into being as a result of this sociopolitical awakening with written and published journals of their own. These journals and souvenirs started recording the local myths and legends contributed by their newly emerging writers. Some of these writers are Ganesh Senapati, Budhiman Bordoloi, Naren Bordoloi, Maheswar Pator, Narayan Radu Kakati, Jursing Bordoloi, Nadiram Deuri, Mileswar Pator, Tulsi Bordoloi, Ramuthi Amshi, L. V. Kholar, Khodorsing Kholar, Dhanada Kakati, Sarat Pator, Padma Pator, Lalsing Madar and Bidyut Senapati among a host of young talents. The leading journals of the Tiwas during this time are *Thurang*; the mouthpiece of the Tiwa literary organization called *Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra* (Tiwa Language Society); *Ring-Chhang*, (Echo), the compilation of five issues with the same title, edited by Ganesh Senapati, first published in 2004, reprinted in 2008.
Although there has been an upsurge in the narratives of the Tiwa people as discussed above, the Tiwas present a curious problem of their own in terms of an undifferentiated approach at studying them as a homogenous group. First of all, majority of the Tiwa population living in the plains came under the great influence of enculturation vis-à-vis the neighbouring and dominant Assamese community. In the process, the Tiwas lost touch with their ethnic culture including their own dialect. The problem with the Tiwas in the hills was that they were being marginalized by the way of life of the plains counterparts in terms of social dynamics. Therefore, anthropological and linguistic approaches with reference to the Tiwas would leave large part of their cultural experience out of bound of academic research. It is in this context that the present research is conducted. The idea is to cover all the aspects of dispersed Tiwa community within the umbrella of an academic discipline that would search out for those lost strands. Oral history with its insistence on marginalized personal and collective memories to be recorded and collated into a narrative could offer some insights into the problem. Moreover, the methods of folklore research reliant on folk people's mores and manners, customs and behavior would be able to fill in the gaps left by traditional narratives of anthropology.

Objectives of the Study:-

The present study aims at accomplishing two basic objectives: 1) to collect data through intensive interviews with a wide range of informants by using the methods of oral history, and 2) to arrange the data into the main areas of search or inquiry employing the standard methods of folklore research. The collection of data will be mainly drawn through interviews but the folkloristic method of participant-observation shall also be taken recourse to, in order to achieve reliability. Since the open-ended interviews
may contain data which overlap the main areas of search, the chapters have been designed keeping in view the folkloristic divisions of history of the origin and migration, history and tradition of the social administrative organization, history of place names, and history of the various fairs and festivals.

Motivation for the Study:

The present researcher belongs to the discipline of history with specialization in medieval and colonial history of Assam. The academic discipline of Assam history has been totally silent on the ethnic tribal community of the Tiwas. Even during the medieval times, the histories written by the Ahoms did not mention the Tiwas nor was there any space given to their way of life. The closest the Ahom buranjis came to describing them was in relation to the Gobha kingdom. Whether the Gobha principality was ruled by the Tiwas or not has not been described in the Buranjis. This negligence of the historians towards the Tiwas has been particularly striking to the present researcher. Since the Tiwa habitat is close to the place of residence of the present researcher, it provided the motivation to pursue Tiwa way of life. When the opportunity came to carry out research on oral history, it was but natural for the present researcher to choose the Tiwa community as his area of research.

Methodology:

The participant-observation method of folklore research based on intensive fieldwork is combined with the interview method of oral history in order to achieve the objectives of the research. Elaborate field trips were organized, meetings with a large number of tradition-bearers as informants
arranged, and prolonged interviews were conducted and recorded on a pool of data. This pool of data was structured mainly into four areas of enquiry vis-à-vis the Tiwas: history of the origin and migration, history and tradition of the social administrative organization, history of toponymy or place names and history of the various fairs and festivals. Most of the times, it was important to match the narratives of the interviews with observation gained from the field. This was necessary because there was always a danger of the personal interview getting too subjective to be of any great value to the research project. The interviews were mostly unstructured because the lay informant would prefer to speak on his own rather than respond to lead questions.

The present writer covered four districts of Assam and these include Nagaon, Morigaon, Kamrup Metro and Karbi-Anglong for the purpose of field work to collect data. In the process of fieldwork, about 150 informants either in the form of individuals or of groups was appointed. The writer made rapport with various contacts who led the present writer to different locations. Attempt was made by the writer through the contact persons to come across as many tradition bearers as possible. Lengthy, open-ended interview sessions were held. The interviews conducted in the field were mostly unstructured and conversational. The language of the interviews was Assamese in the plains of Nagaon and Morigaon, largely in the area of Pancho Raj and Sato Raj. The local dialect is no longer in use in these areas. In the Datiyalia and foot hills areas of Kathiatioli and Kandali of Nagaon, and in the Dimoria and Bherakuchi areas of Kamrup Metro, both the Assamese and the local Tiwa dialect were used as the medium of interviews. In some cases, the interviewee himself/herself translated the dialects into the Assamese language. In some areas both the languages are in use and the informants communicate in their own dialect when at home or in the community meetings, but use Assamese in public. So, the present researcher
did not face any problem in conducting the interviewees. In the above mentioned fields, the interviews were recorded from individual informants.

The informants belonging to Karbi-Anglong district are not comfortable in the use of Assamese in their public communication. These informants made the conversations in the Tiwa dialect for communicative and expressive purposes. Therefore, the present writer had to take the assistance of a mediator to conduct the interviews there. Accordingly, one Maheswar Pator was engaged as mediator to conduct the interviews in the field in the Karbi hills. Pator is a resident of the village of Marjong (Amsoi). He is serving as the Head Master of Ulukunchi High School, located in the field of the above mentioned district. He is a reputed writer in Assamese and has a considerable reputation of being a cultural activist and scholar. He also happens to be the ex-president of the Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra. Pator speaks the Tiwa dialect at home and Assamese in public. He naturally became the chief informant in the fieldwork for the present project. The interviews were conducted in a number of stages, beginning with queries in Assamese from the interviewer, translation of it into the dialect by the mediator, reply in the dialect by the interviewee and translation of the reply of the interviewee into Assamese by the mediator. The interviews conducted in the hills were done in a group of interviewees or informants, the number of the members of the groups varied from 2 to 6. The English translation of the lores given place in the dissertation is done by the writer himself.

Most of the interviews were prolonged and the extent of the time of record of a single interview in some instances reached about three hours. The total length of the recording time of the interviewees is around 105 hours. The interviews are recorded in a digital voice recorder, with a back up in a cell phone. The recordings are then transferred and stored in a personal computer and then accessed for their transcription into English. The transcription is scrutinized carefully to find out the oral testimonies relevant
to the purpose of the study. These testimonies are again cross-checked by adopting the standard methods of oral history which include corroboration of the testimonies with other available historical evidence. Finally, the authenticity of the testimonies is examined before incorporating it to the specific chapter of the dissertation. The researcher participated as participant-observer in the Yangli puja at Gobha, in 2010, Jonbeel Mela in 2012 &2014, Sanipuja at Nambar Lalung Gaon in 2013 and ‘Mitir Pota’ ritual at Thengkuchi in 2014.

As far as the data related to myths, legends, incantations, songs and anecdotes are concerned; the standard methods of folklore research have been employed. In other words, the verbal art forms and expressive genres collected during the interviews have been carefully collated with the relevant historical sources. It must be borne in mind that the aim of the present study has been to identify the sources of oral history in terms of the origin and migration, traditional social administration, place names and legendary heroes and fairs and festivals of the Tiwa people. The twin methods of oral history and folklore research have been sincerely intertwined to achieve the avowed objectives.

Concluding Remarks

The primary objective of this research project is to identify the sources of oral history of the Tiwa people and to attempt a narrative based on the sources. It is hoped that the discussion that ensues in the following chapters will help one achieve the objective. It must be added that the Tiwa people do not have a historical tradition mainly because they happen to be a oral society. The oral traditions ingrained in their culture also do not betray a sense of continuity. In fact, there is much breach in the narratives of their migration, settlement, further internal migration and the evolution of the
society as it has come to be recognized today. Therefore, the act of identifying and structuring of the sources of oral history is a challenge. In that sense, the Tiwa history is always going to be a ‘history from below’. It is true that much of the oral history of the Tiwa people revolves round the numerous kingdoms which are the customary administrative units of the Tiwa society. However, we should not be misled by the fact that royalty in the Tiwa historical experiment is by any stretch of imagination an elitist construction. It is not. The traditional Tiwa kingdoms were, historically speaking, petty units reflective more of a village-level administration with rudimentary forms of administrative and judicial systems. The kings were intimate clan members, only hoisted to the top of the hierarchy by the force of custom and tradition. This fact has a telling effect on how history was recorded in the memory of the people. Unlike the more complex and structured layers of history of royal or feudal systems in complex societies, the royal administrative system was monolithic and essentially primitive. This fact alone should indicate how difficult it is to carve out a narrative of a people’s interaction with nature and with the changing times in historical terms.

The present study purports to offer a potential narrative of the Tiwa people based on the techniques of the discipline of oral history combined with the methods of folklore research. The interviews conducted during field study amount to a copious corpus of the lay man’s account of how the Tiwa people have evolved as a nation. The body of interviews promises a sound narrative from which the sources of history can be identified. This dissertation, it is hoped, will help materialize that narrative in black and white.