Chapter II

History of the Origin and Migration of the Tiwa People:

This chapter deals with the history of the origin and migration of the Tiwa people. It is noteworthy that the Tiwas do not have a recorded history. What is known of their origin and migration to the present habitat is based on secondary data which rely on linguistic and anthropological evidence. This chapter attempts to incorporate numerous myths of the origin of the Tiwas and their migration. The Tiwas seem to have experienced a lot of internal migration within their habitat as well. The informants' versions of the narrative of internal migration suggest that many sections of Tiwas must have left the Kolong- Kapili valley to settle in the Jayantia and Karbi hills for numerous reasons. Among these reasons, the prevailing uncertainty of the socio-political in the valley seems to be the prominent one. There is uniformity in the data to suggest that the Burmese incursion into the plains of the southern bank of the Brahmaputra valley in the 18th century was one of the main reasons for the Tiwa population to disperse to the hills. Again, the stringent societal norms in the hills which followed matrilineal culture coupled with the practice of human sacrifice made a large section of the Tiwa population to migrate to the plains. In all these migrations, it is noteworthy that the Tiwas moved from one place to another as one homogenous group of exogamic clans and settled in small clusters of villages. Later when the settlements became more or less permanent, the Tiwas consolidated the clan dynamics and founded kingdoms based on the clan hierarchies. All these issues have been addressed by collecting and collating data from the field.
Introductory Remarks:

The history of the Tiwa people is woven around myths. These myths are handed down from one generation to the next by tradition-bearers and cultural activists down the ages. Apart from these mythological accounts, there is no way to ascertain either the origin or the migration of the Tiwas to the habitat of their current location. One of the earliest historical accounts of the Tiwas is contained in an Ahom chronicle called the Deodhai Buranji. This chronicle narrates the meeting that took place in the seventeenth century between Ahom soldiers and the people from datiyaliya region. Datiyalia means foothills people or people from the fringe. In the incident narrated in the Buranji, a section of the people complain to the Ahom soldiers that in their country, authority is passed down on the female line, that the king's son does not become king. Filled with pity for them, the Ahom officers persuaded two dozen families belonging to the Tiwa and the Karbi community to come and settle in the plains. Accordingly, a sizable number of people came down to the plains of the Brahmaputra and became the ancestors of today's Plains Tiwas and Plains Karbis. (Bhuyan :2001:97-99)

Neither the colonial report writers and historians nor the Ahom chroniclers seem to have appreciated the presence of the many principalities of Tiwa rulers. There is a tendency in both Ahom and colonial history to represent the most prominent of these kingdoms, namely, the Gobha kingdom, to be the over-all kingdom of the Tiwas. However, Tiwa oral traditions suggest the existence of many small kingdoms within the Tiwa habitat. Tiwa oral traditions are replete with terms like Sato Raja, Pancho Raja, Datiyalia Raja and Powali Raja. These terms indicate a tradition of governance to which the Tiwas may have subscribed. It is true that the Gobha kingdom shot to prominence because it was a principality under the Jayantia King. The Ahoms had a troubled relationship with the Jayantias. Many a times, the two were engaged in skirmishes. Since the Ahom strategy
was to ward off the Mughals from entering middle and upper Assam, the Jayantia issue was a thorn in the side for the Ahoms. So the Ahoms set up outposts at Raha and Jagi in order to put the Jayantias in place. The Tiwas at that time had migrated in large numbers from the foothills of Jayantia and Khasi hills and founded settlements in places like Khala, Neli and Sahari. After the setting up of the Raha outpost by the Ahoms, the Tiwas founded few more principalities in Topakuchi, Barapujia and Mikirgaon. (Bhuyan:2001:99) Later, the Tiwas added two more principalities in Saragaon and Khaigarh.(Bhuyan:2001:105). In another wave of migration, the Tiwas set up seven more small principalities apart from the ones mentioned above. These were as follows: Tetelia, Kumoi, Boghora, Sukhanagog, Tarani-Kalbari, Ghogua and Kacharigaon (Bhuyan:2001:105). It is noteworthy that these small principalities owed their customary allegiance to the Gobha kingdom, but it was the Rahial Baruah, the Ahom political officer stationed at the Raha outpost, that they looked up to in matters of exigency like running the day-to-day affairs of revenue collection and internal and external security (Bhuyan:2001:104).

The Tiwa principalities were sustained under Ahom protection well into the 18th century but in the 19th century, the Gobha king was involved in a conflict with the British. This conflict and its outcome had far-reaching consequences for the Gobha kingdom in particular and the Tiwa community in general. Sir Edward Gait mentions this incident in Tiwa history in some detail, "In 1832, the Raja of Gobha in the west of Nowgong, one of the petty chieftains dependent upon Jayantia, acting under the orders of his suzerain, seized four British subjects, three of whom were afterwards immolated at the shrine of the goddess Kali. The fourth escaped and gave information of the occurrence...On the 15th March, 1835, Captain Lister with two companies of the Sylhet Light Infantry, took formal possession of Jayantiapur and issued a proclamation announcing the annexation of the Jayantia Parganas to British Territory. A few weeks later, Gobha, in the Nowgong District was similarly
taken over by a detachment of the Assam Light Infantry". (Gait: 1997:291)
With the fall of the Gobha kingdom, the traditional administrative structure of the Tiwas centering around Gobha also lost much of its dynamism. According to informant Phulsing Maloi Kunwar, the British adopted a formula of accommodating the smaller principalities by offering them the title of the *Mauzadar* or the revenue in-charge of the respective principality, thereby bringing the Tiwas under direct British control.

From linguistic evidence and anthropomorphic features, it has been widely held that the Tiwas are descendants of the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Chinese group of Mongoloid stock. Tiwa oral traditions indicate that the original abode of the Tiwas was Tibet from where they descended on the Brahmaputra valley. From there, the Tiwas are supposed to have dispersed to the hills of the present Indian state of Meghalaya and to the hills of Karbi Anglong. Some oral traditions also suggest a considerable migration of the Tiwas back to the plains of the Brahmaputra. There are a large number of Tiwa people still eking out their livelihood in the hills. Tiwa settlements in the plains and the hills indicate sharp differentiation and distinctiveness in terms of settlement pattern, community life and way of living, pointing out to different historical process of evolution as a society. This is reflected in the structure of the social administrative system, traditional way of life in terms of kinship formation, in cultural orientation and even in the way the two entities speak the language. While the hills Tiwas still retain their language, the plains Tiwas have adopted the Assamese language as their medium of communication. This differentiation and distinctiveness will be born in mind while attempting to construct their narrative in terms of oral history.

The earliest references to the Tiwas are to be found in the Ahom chronicles called the *Buranjis* and colonial texts written by British
administrators, report writers, linguists and historians. These references are mostly from the 19th century colonial times when the British were grappling with problems of administering the difficult terrains of the North East of India. Following the British, a corpus of indigenous scholarship also grew subsequently throwing light on the Tiwas as a distinctive ethnic community. Towards the second half of the 20th century, we also see a number of anthropological works concerning the Tiwas. Besides these administrative and academic enterprises, effort has also been made by Tiwa scholars and cultural activists who are constantly engaged in defining a space for themselves in today’s identity politics.

As far as the origin or migration of the Tiwas is concerned, G. A. Grierson’s proposition still holds true: “How the Lalungs came to their present site or when is not known. They are not mentioned by the Ahom historians nor in the accounts of the Koch kingdoms. In Nowgong, they are said to have a tradition that came from the Jayantia Hills while some of the Lalungs say that their ancestors immigrated thither in the reign of the Jayantia Raja U. Mon Gohain” (Grierson: 1903:49). Edward Gait, the colonial historian, also does not throw much light on the matter of the origin or migration of the Tiwas, Gait only says “.....and Bodo, which claims practically all the surviving non-Aryan languages of the Brahmaputra valley, Garo Hills and North Cachar; it includes among others, Kachari or Mech, Garo, Lalung, Rabha and Chutiya.”(Gait: 1997:5).

In the ‘Assam Census Report, 1881’ Wadell makes a significant proposition about the Tiwas, “The Lalungs got mixed up with the Garos and the Mikirs. They have numerous exogamous clans”. This could be one of the reasons as to why even the Ahom chroniclers could not differentiate between the Tiwas and the other tribes of the hills. Wadell articulated his findings in a book form later where he deals with the historical confusion
regarding the Tiwas, “This is a small semi-Hinduised tribe in the plains skirting the Mikir country at the foot of the Jayantia Hills. No mention is made of them in the earlier historical accounts of plains in Ahom histories. They seem to be a branch of the Kacharis, though they are less robust. They appear to be mixed up with Mikir or Garo blood accordingly as they adjoin one or other of those tribes. The few I have seen had fairly good long noses with somewhat prominent bridges.” (Wadell: 1903:84).

The anthropological studies conducted on the Tiwas were attempted by scholars like G. C. Sharma Thakur and B.K. Gohain among others. G. C. Sharma Thakur’s monograph, *The Lalungs (Tiwas)* offers a vivid account of the Tiwa people from the perspective of anthropology. Sharma penetrated deep into the Tiwa way of life, recording most significant aspects of the Tiwa people living in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. What the monograph does not include is the study of the Tiwa people living in the hills.

On the other hand, Gohain’s work *The Hill Lalungs’* in its title itself establishes the focus of the study. Gohain’s is an excellent work on the Tiwa people living in the hills. It is also an anthropological enterprise which captures the nuances of the way of life of the Tiwa people whom the author chooses to categorize as *Hill Lalungs*. However, the work totally excludes the Tiwa people of the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. From the point of view of history, such exclusions do not help matters. Concerning the origin of the words *Lalung* and *Tiwa* Gohain says “The Hill Lalungs hold that the word Lalung is derived from the word *libing* or *libung* or *labung* which, over the years, got phonetically changed to Lalung. The word *libung* means men. “The word Tiwa has its origin in the words *ti-phar-wali* meaning ‘a clan living near water’. *Ti-phar-wali* became *ti-wali*, meaning ‘a tribe born out of water’, which later became Tiwa. According to the Hill Lalungs,
the first Lalung, Sotonga Raja, was born out of water and hence the entire Lalung tribe is called Tiwa. It is noteworthy that Sotonga is a place in the Jaintia area” (Gohain:1993:2).

Apart from these academic enterprises, the folkloristic research done on the Tiwas is also considerable. Datta et al have made frequent references to the Tiwas in their *Handbook of Folklore Material of the North East*.

**Origin of the Tiwa People:**

Of the 150 plus informants interviewed during field study, there was almost invariable opinion regarding the place of origin of the Tiwas. All interviews pointed towards Tibet. References to Tibet were marked by vagueness but generally all accepted the Himalayas to be their abode of origin. The present researcher, however, came upon a particular incantation which mentions Tibet. This incantation is called *stuti*. Some called it *solok* also. This *stuti* or *solok* is chanted during festivities with utmost reverence. The full version of the *stuti* collected from the field in Gandhibari, from an informant named Sarat Pator is presented below:

The *stuti* of Bhakatsewa at Gandhibari begin with the word Tibet where the priest gives complete description of the route of migration till they finally settled in the present location. It is sung by the *Zela* or priest of the family:

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“Hoi ami agote asilu Tibetot;
Tibetor pora ahi ami ei thaite thakilu.
Iyatu amar bahut dukh kosta hol;
Ami Jayantialoi gusi golu;
Tatu ami thakiba nuwarilu,
Tar pora ahi ami Gobha Nellit thakilu;
Kintu tatu ami thakiba nuwarilu,
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Akou ami Arikati Arimukh palu,
Kintu tar porau ami gusi ahilu opai omangal huwar babe;
Aru ahi Topakuchi Barapujia palu,
Tar pora ahi ami ei Gandhibarit bartamanoloike iyate thakilu”
(Meaning: Oh well, earlier we had been in Tibet, from Tibet we came over to this place, from here we left for Jayantia due to manifold hardness and pain; but we failed to stay there too and hence we came over to Gobha Neli but again we had to leave those and reached Arikati- Arimukh (the originating point of Kolong from the river Brahmaputra, the location is near Burapahar of Nagaon district); but our hardship never lessened, we faced number of misfortunes and that made us to came over to Topakuchi- Barapujia, and from there to Gandhibari, where we are presently living).

According to a commonly held belief, as stated by informant Mileswar Pator, the Tiwas were one of the groups coming from Tibet. This group was called Tibbetia. From Tibbetia it was pronounced Tipera and then Tipra. Afterwards it was pronounced Tiwa. The Tiwa people were also called as Libing and from Libing it became Lalung. In Tiwa language la stands for human being and lung for course of water, thus Lalung stands for people living by the water bodies, (the word lung is used by some Assamese to mean small water course other than rivers). According to him, the Karbis called the Tiwas Lungla which means men of water. The meaning of Tiwa is similar, where ti means water and wa means lifted or rescued from water or living on the bank of water course. The Tiwas are believed to have taken the river course to come down from the hills to the plains.

Some Tiwa tradition-bearers like Chanakya Kunwar and Ramesh Kunwar held the view that the Tiwas are a part of the Ahom. They were originally coming from the plateau of Tibet via Burma. The Ahom settled at upper Assam whereas the Tiwas came down to lower parts of Assam. To enter Assam, they took the route of Lunglei hills. “Ami Lunglei paharedi
ahishu, sei karane amak Lalung buli kai” (Meaning: We came through the hills of Lunglei, and that is why we were called Lalung). Reportedly, the word Lalung was not given by the Karbis as it is popularly believed.

Regarding the origin of the Tiwas, informant Nadiram Deuri narrated another incantation that points towards the Northern Himalayas as their abode: Tripod Tripod, chenge age adine, khorola machunane thai (Meaning: Tripod Tripod, the place of our ancient movements). The Tiwas were originally from Tibet. The Tiwa word is the convert of Tibbet to Tifra, Tifra to Tiwa. There is a tribe in Tripura who speak the Kok Borok language. The tribe is very similar to the Tiwas both in language and physical features. It is believed that the tribe of Tripura called Tia disappeared and it could not be traced thereafter. It is doubted that this Tia of Tripura was the Tiwa that came down to the north and settled down in Khasi-Jayantia hills. From there they came down to the foot-hills and plains of Assam.

As mentioned earlier, Tibet as the mythical place of origin of the Tiwas is invoked in incantations. Tiwa legends also hint towards Tibet as the place of origin of the Tiwa people. In some such legends, collected from informants Chatrasing Darpang and others, where the visit of Motemraja and Mohon Phador to the kingdom of Gobha is described as going to the Himalayas. The term Himalayas, in all probabilities, means Tibet. In some mantras that they chanted the Himalayas are mentioned as the shining place where the gods play children’s game of latum (Top). In another legend, the gods once competed in a game of throwing doli chopora (clod of earth) aimed at a target. In this case, the ultimate target was the Himalayas. The legend has it that the competition was won by Bodolmaji who threw a gubaruah (beetle) so accurately that it effortlessly flew into the target. The other gods recognized him as champion and blessed him to be revered by more and more people.
There is another school of thought which posits the Tiwa place of origin at Tibet but charts a different route of migration than most other versions of the narrative. According to this narrative recounted to the present writer by informant Suren Kunwar, the Tiwa people originally lived in Tibet. From there they came to Allahabad where they lived for some time and then they started their eastward journey and reached a place known as Hajo. The word Hajo is a Tiwa word and the meaning is *ha* for land and *jo* for high. So, Hajo means high land. They stayed there for some time and then left it due to clashes with the local people and crossed the mighty river Brahmaputra and came over to a place which was in the midst of three rivers called *Tribeg*. That place was none other than the doab of Jamuna, Kapili and the Barapani in the southeastern part of present Nagaon district.

**Tiwa Myths of Origin:-**

Although many tradition-bearers and cultural activists seek to chart out a long route of migration originating from Tibet, the myths recounted by informants conjure up extremely localized places. The mythical origins never seem to go beyond the Khasi, Jaintia and Karbi Hills. In fact, most of the myths of origin and migration contain within their narrative the mention of Khasi, Jaintia and Karbi affinity. One such myth which is recorded from the informants Phulsing Maloi Kunwar, Suhansing Maloi Kunwar, Jursing Bordoloi and Sidu Hukai is the myth of the origin of the Gobha King:

The Gobha king was born at *Tin-Mokhlong* along with the *Khemraja* and *Jetharaja*. *Khemraja* is the king of the Khasis and the *Jetharaja* is that of the Jaintias. *Tin-Mokhlong* was a cave-like lake in the hills. All three brothers grew up playing with each other. In course of time they were tired of staying there and decided to come out from the cave through the three exit doors. The *Khemraja* took the western door; the *Jetharaja* took the southern door whereas the Gobharaja, the eldest of them, took the eastern door.
Before leaving Tin-Mokhlong, there was an agreement among them according to which no one could look back. Because if any one of them did so, he would become subordinate to the others. Being the eldest, the Gobharaja could not control his patience. Out of his affection for his brothers, he looked back to know their whereabouts. This was a breach of agreement. And for this violation of the agreement he had to pay the price of being subordinate to his brothers. This subjugation of the Gobha king to the Khasi and Jaintia king is described by the Tiwas as ‘Gobha mati joba hoi’ (Meaning: the earth of Gobha is sinking down).

The most commonly held myth recounted by informant Phulsing Maloi Kunwar is that the Tiwas were born out of water and they were naïve and simple. So they left only a piece of warrandal (a thin bamboo twig) in the area as boundary marker for their land of settlement. Bamboo is basically a species of grass and does not last long. It can get decomposed in a short span of time. The Karbis were born much after the Tiwas in the same area. They left modar, (The coral tree) simalu (Silk cotton tree) and stone as the sign of their place of possession. Since these objects were stronger in terms of endurance, the Karbis could lay claim to the place as their place of origin. Because of this, the Tiwas had to abandon their original place of birth which was then occupied by the Karbis.

Another myth that relates to the origin of the Tiwas was narrated by informant Sarudhan Bordoloi. According to the myth: Tiwas are a group of the people who originated from the lelat or lelavati of the devarudeva (The god of the gods) Fa-Mahadev. There is a popular saying, ‘lelatat Lalung’, ‘kochat Kachari and ‘nakat Napit’. (Meaning: Lalung originates from saliva, Kachari originates at lap and Napit originates from nose). Regarding the meaning of the word Tiwa Sarudhan Bordoloi said that the word Tiwa means sweet (tiu means sweet and to mean the sweetness of the people the word is pronounced as Tiwa). The meaning of the word Tiwa and Lalung
are same. The saliva is sweet and therefore Lalung which is created from saliva is also sweet. He says that the Tiwas originally lived in the hills. From there, some of them came down to the plains.

Another informant named Rabindra Bordoloi gave a more detailed account of the myth regarding saliva and how the Tiwas were born out of it. Once, Fa Mahadev was busy cultivating a plot of land. He was so engrossed in his work that he forgot to come home and take rest. He was tired and so he slept in the field on a stone under a tree. His sleep was so sound that streams of lalvij or lelavati (saliva) came out of his mouth and started to run like a river. Kalikha (Parvati), the wife of Fa Mahadev, was worried that her husband had not shown up at home and therefore, she stepped out of her home in search of him. Finally she found him sleeping on the stone under the tree and saw the saliva from his mouth which was by then flowing like a river. She woke up her husband and showed the saliva running from his mouth. Then Fa Mahadev told Kalikha that his lelat would not go in vain. A great human race would be created from this. Accordingly, three sisters were born out of the lelat (saliva) and they were Lali, Hilali and Lai. From Lali the Mikir or Karbi was born. From Hilali, the Kachari or Bodo was born and from Lai, the Tiwa was born. As the origin of the Tiwa is believed to be from the lelavati, they were called Lalung.

The informant, when asked, breaks into a song in order to narrate the myth of origin and migration: “Luittor pharar Asome khaidong, khaidong simelon, lo samaye lagat komai, ligai mohanu Tiwa ru”. It means that once the Tiwas used to play on the banks of river Brahmaputra with rejoice but are now through the vagaries of time are pushed back into the plains and the foothills. But he says that before coming to the Brahmaputra valley by different routes, the Tiwa ancestors lived in the hilly areas of present day Meghalaya. There were two different groups of them who came to the east through two different routes in different points of time. One group came
down via Jagiroad area and spread over the entire Morigan district. From there the group then headed to the sides of Barapujia, Raha, Sutipar and upto Juria. Another group first came to Hamren and from there a section of them descended to the sides of Sahari, Basundhari, Jarabar, Singimari, Bandua, Batikor, Tetelisora, Barghat and Nambar Lalunggaon. A splinter group broke away in search of nga (fish), as they were fond of fish. Some from this group came to the sides of swamps and beel and settled in places like Bilsaati and Teponiati etc. The other section stayed at Hamren. Some from this group went up to Ulukunchi area and from there they spread over huge hilly tracts in the present Karbi-Anglong district. It was during the Burmese incursions in the 19th century that another wave of internal migration of the Tiwas took place. Some Tiwa people were forced to take shelter in the Baduli Khurung area.

Another version of the Myth of origin was recounted by informant Sarat Pator. According to him, “Tiwas orginally came from Tibet. They are of Austric origin of the great Bodo branch of languages, like the other branch of it which are known as Dimasa. Rabha, Garo etc. The Bodo is in proximity with the Tiwa from the linguistic point of view rather than the Karbi, though we live in close touch with them. The Tiwa has close relation with the Karbis just like the Kacharis as testified from the oral lore popular among the Lalungs: "Lalungar lelepang, Kocharir kelepang, Mikirar ghane ghane gathi, eriu nidiye, dhariu nathake, dhoute puwai jai rati". The lore was sung in the session of drinks that indicated the drinking habit of the three tribes, where the Lalung (Tiwa) was slow, Kachari was easily inebriated and the Mikir (Karbi) was inconsistent but never parted company till morning. Concerning the origin from Tibet, informant Pator refers to the stuti (prayer song) which they sing in the beginning of the Bhakatsewa (discussed in Chapter V) that a family performs on certain occasions for the well being of the family. In the stuti of this Bhitorsewa the family which
convenes the *Bhakatsewa* recite the history of the migration of the family where it starts with the name of a place called Tibet. The *stuti* refers to the fact that the Tiwas settled on the banks of *leuti* (the Brahmaputra). *Leu* means long and *ti* means water. According to the incantation of the *stuti* the Tiwas gradually crossed over to the south bank and settled in an area called Titaimari (the confluence of three channels) near Raha and this is the place of meeting of boundaries of Ahoms, Kacharis and Jayantias.

**Internal Migration of the Tiwas:**

For historical and socio-cultural reasons, large-scale migration has happened among the Tiwas over the centuries even within their own habitat. Pestilence, war, feud within the various clans, search for a new cultivation for the jhum may have forced people to migrate to places within their own habitat. The concentration of Tiwa people living in the kingdoms of Gobha, Neli, Sahari and Khala in the Marigaon district of Assam suggests sustained waves of migration to these places from the neighbouring hills of Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong overlooking these plain areas. Here is a narrative backed up by a myth about the migration of the Gobha king to his present settlement, and was told by Phulsing Maloi Kunwar-

"The royal family of the Gobha kingdom had its seat at Amswai in the Karbi-Anglog district. It came down to Gobha and then to Nakhala on the foot hills. Here is a myth on that migration of the Gobha king from hills to plains. The hill people eat crab and the people of plains eat rohu fish. It needs the use of both hands to eat a crab, whereas the rohu fish can be consume with single hand only. Perhaps at the time some sort of hardship was going on in the hills. There was a debate among the people of Amswai. A section of the people wanted the king to go down to escape that hardship. They in their argument advanced this myth of eating crab and rohu fish. The king failed to take decision on his own part and referred it to the council of
the courtiers. After long deliberations, the council came to the decision in favour of coming down to the foot hills. Accordingly, the king with a group of followers came down and arrived at a place called Amjong. Here he saw blood flowing in the nearby stream. He inquired about the matter when he was informed that that was the blood of his kinsmen who were killed by the mlan (Burmese). Hence, the place became prohibited to the Gobha king since it was customary not to visit the place of blood stain of its own kinsmen.”

Here is another narration which was narrated by informant Suhansing Maloi Kunwar that is related to the migration of a royal personage with his retinue from Gobha to Meghalaya: “Long ago there was a wicked king at Gobha, who was very greedy and atrocious by nature. He wanted to grab and possess everything that was attractive and beautiful. Beautiful textile, utensils and most interestingly, beautiful girls never escaped his lusty eyes. He did not spare even married women. Whenever he found any such items or persons, he smeared those with lime and thereby reserved them as his personal property. The people became annoyed and scared at this act of the king. The officers realized the gravity of the situation. They convened a secret meeting of the council on the bank of the Rajapukhuri. It was planned in the meeting of the council to set ablaze the King’s house the following night. But the Barmaji who attended the meeting secretly warned the king about the plan. He advised the king to run away from Gobha along with his family. Accordingly, the king with his family and followers escaped that night and traversed places in the hills called Kohiguri, Belguri and then Moronga. As the king found it difficult to trek in the hills, he was escorted to Moronga by a kunguti garu (lame calf).” All those places are now in Meghalaya.

According to informant Rabindra Bordoloi, there were many migration routes through which the Tiwas came down from the hills and
settled on the plains of the Brahmaputra on the southern bank. Before coming to the Brahmaputra valley by different routes, the Tiwa ancestors lived in the hilly areas of present Meghalaya. From there they came over to Hamren. There were two different groups of them who came to the north and east through two different routes in different points of time. One such route was through Jagiroad in the Gobha kingdom and the other was through Amsoi in the Sahari kingdom.

Informant Guneswar Khelma informed that each of the habitats of the Tiwas has a lore connecting its past in the hills of Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong through migration to the present location. The people of Bargaon, Sar-Rangkhoi and some other villages of Neli are believed to have come down from Bar-Rangkhoi of Karbi hills. It is testified from a custom of the Yangli puja held in Gobha near Jagiroad. The people of Bar-Rangkhoi came down with their customary officials and dancers to perform the Yangli festival at Gobha. They were accompanied by the womenfolk for some specific service to be provided to them during the puja. These services were connected with preparation of ritual food and serving meals. The people on their way to Gobha halted and took rest in the nabara or the borghar of the Baragaon khel located in the Saru-Rongkhoi village situated on the roadside of Neli-Ulukunchi road at Neli. According to the prevailing traditional custom, these people were to be hosted by the villagers of Baragaon, who had to serve them with some ritualistic items in seven rounds which was called sat phuron. Those items consisted of ada (ginger), puhon mod (fermented rice beer), barabhat (bara rice, a species of red rice red, sweet in taste) and chena mach (small fish). Apart from these ritual items, the villagers of Baragaon had to give them a ceremonious escort to Gobha. Most of the people of the village belonged to the kul of Khorowali of Bar Ronkhoi, along with three of its sub-clans known as Rodorwali, Purowali and Madorwali. The meaning of Bar-Rongkhoi is a ‘group of kul’. In
Mokoria of Neli, people migrated from Laopani of Bhakshong and Magrow of Meghalaya, besides from Bar-Rankhoi.

In the Neli kingdom in a village called Dahali, as told by informant Paddeswar Kunwar, the migration took place from Cherachiri Makha hills near Amswai. The reason of the migration was reportedly shortage of food and the fear of witchcraft.

Informant Jursing Bordoloi narrated that the Tiwas of Gobha and Jagiroad were immigrants from the hills of Meghalaya and the present day Karbi Anglong. In the *tuti* (prayer song) which they sung in all the spiritual and customary occasions, mention is made of a number of places and the god that they worship. The god *Charibhai* (Mahadeva in the shape of four directions i.e. East, West, North and South) is still worshipped at Amswai, Balikhunji and Gumnasal in the hills of Karbi-Anglong and Meghalaya. The *tuti* chanted in the area is as follows:

"Gobharajne Maharajane, Deosal than,
Bamun Duwar than, Sonaikuchi than,
Khagra Puja, Khagra than,
Howlabura Howlaburi,
Aburlamba Saburlamba, Bokhane Thungane,
Thole Nogare, Choye Nogare,
Sakha Bone Ronge Agar Thinga,
Oi Charibhai Mahadeo."

(Meaning: The places and *thans* (shrines) in the area under Gobharaja are Deosal, Bamun Duwar Than, Khagara Than, Aburlamb Saburlamb, in the plains or in the towns or in the hills, in the jungle, the places in front or in behind, *Oi Charibhai Mahadeo.*) Importantly, there is no mention of any place from hills in the *tuti* except *Charibhai*, which was originally in the hills by the names of Amswai, Balikhunji and Gumnasal. In Gobha, the main shrine for worshiping the *Charibhai* is at *Deosal*. The participation of
the people of the three places mentioned above in the functions of the Gobha including that of Deosal is compulsory. According to informant Harsing Amsong and Sidu Hukai, the deuri or the chief priest of Deosal was customarily appointed only from the Kholar clan by the Lororaja of Amswai. There are three Lororajas who presided over the coronation ceremony of the Gobha king. They are the Lororaja of Amkha Khel of Bar-Marjong and the Lororaja of Magrowali Khel of Fat-Magrow along with the Lororaja of Amswai. This continuity of relationship and participation of the people of the three places Gobha kingdom sustained the root of the people of Gobha to those hilly places. The migration took place in different points of time and for different reasons. Many people from Tharakhunji migrated to Gobha to get rid of the extreme weather in the winter season. Many descended the plains of Gobha, reportedly, for their love and affection towards their king and settled down in Gobha.

As recalled by informant Subhen Bordoloi, most of the Tiwa people living in the Silchang area migrated from the hilly areas of Karbi-Anglong district. The prayer songs, popularly known as soloks sung in the barghar of the clans in rituals have mention of the names of the different places of Karbi hills. The places of the hills from where the Tiwas migrated to the Silchang areas find mention in the tuti. Apart from place names, the names of shrines, gods and goddesses are also chanted in the solok thus signifying the cultural moorings of the places of their original inhabitation. The primary place name chanted in these solok is Bar-Amli and hence the Tiwas of Silchang are called Amliwali. The name of different gods and goddesses found mention in the solok are Hebe Mathine, Hebe Amli Mathine, Thalia Nogoria, Ma Kesaikhaiti, Bhagawati, Sat Bhani Nachoni Bagoni, Fa Mahadev, Mohan Phador, Bodolmaji, Raje Mindai, Bura Dangaria etc. The original locations of the shrines of those gods and goddesses are in different hills of Bar-Amli area. According to the solok, the route of migration or
mobility is from Bar-Amli to Bulani Gog, Bulani Gog to Kolbari and Kolbari to Khala or Silchang. The presence of the traditional office bearers and people of Bar-Amli is compulsory in the customary function. Their presence is also essential in the new agricultural season where certain food items are ritually offered to the gods. These items include betel-nut, ginger, citric fruits like the elephant fruit, gamboges fruit etc first time in the year.

According to informant Hadon Maslai, the Tiwas of Ulukunchi migrated from Fat-Magrow of Meghalaya. There are five villages in Ulukunchi with predominantly Tiwa population. Even when they were at Fat-Magrow the Tiwas were under the customary rule of the Jayantia and Nortiang Raja. Therefore, they paid nominal taxes to the Gobha king. From Fat-Magrow, they came to Mokoria of Neli, and from Mokoria they came to Ulukunchi. The reason of leaving Mokoria was reportedly to search for herbs, tubers and vegetables like sweet yam, arum, fern etc. They were quite fond of the tubers, herbs and vegetables. In the solok that they sing at the time of Kheljewa festival, there is mention of Fat-Magrow under the Jayantia customary king. They have to go to Fat-Magrow even today for the performance of some dances in the festivals there.

Informant Babul Pator informed that as per the mention of places in the tuti of Bherakunchi, the people of Lumphoi kul are believed to have migrated from the Lumphoi hills of Meghalaya, The Mithiwali kul is said to be the immigrant of Kumoi. The reasons for coming from the hills were matriarchal society and the prevalence of the custom of human sacrifice.

Similarly, as narrated by Harsing Amchong and Dipsing Maslai, the Tiwas of Bar-Marjong area were culturally closer to the Jayantias. There is no mention of Tibet in their solok. The Tiwas of Bar-Marjong believed that as they were in Jayantia, hence they must have come to Bar-Marjong from the Jayantia kingdom. According to a prevalent lore, there were nakuri (nine...

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scores i.e.180) kunjis (villages) of the Tiwas in the Bar-Marjong area and they were all identified as Amkha khel or faid (cluster). In course of time, the population increased so much that it became impossible for a single Loro (traditional chieftain) to control them. Moreover, it gave rise to some other problems like epidemic, shortage of food, cultivable land and infighting among the inhabitants. All these problems compelled a section of the Tiwas to leave the place in search of a better place. This dispersion of the Tiwa population opened up new habitation for the Amkha group not only in the hills but also in the foot hills. However, the Tiwas of the Amkha group never severed their ties with the roots in Bar-Marjong area. During the time of Yangli all the dispersed villagers customarily went to Bar-Marjong to participate in the festival. The officials of Bar-Marjong could realize contributions from them for such purposes. In case of any social crime in those villages the customary officials of Bar-Marjong had to go there without even waiting for formal invitation and preside over the adjudication. The villagers, out of respect for the customary officials of Bar-Marjong, would select the prize pig of the village, and offer it as penalty to be paid by the accused family.

It was recounted by the informants Chatrasing Darpang, Jursing Maslai and Sorbosing Maslai, the Tiwas of Maslaikhunji village in the Mortem area migrated to the present habitat from different directions. A section of them came from Mindaimara near Bhakshong. But the majority of them came from Mokoria of Neli. To Mokoria they might have been come from Bar-Rangkhoi of Karbi Anglong and Fat-Magrow of Meghalaya. Their main deities here are Mahamaya and Bura Mahadev, which can be seen at Mokoria as well. But the importance of the shrines is more in Mokoria than in Mortem. Therefore, one can deduce that the Tiwas of Mortem may have migrated back from the Mokoria area.
Tiwa migration from the hills to the foothills and plains of Assam may have also been caused by cultural reasons. The Tiwa spring festival, famously called Sagara misawa was not allowed to be celebrated by some clans of the Tiwas. So there was a myth regarding the festival which compelled a section of them to leave the place and to migrate to another place. In this regard, informant Phunasing Chomchal explained: "The Tiwa people of Amswai celebrate the Sagara misawa with pomp and grandeur. But the festival is not open for all the Tiwas who live there. It is believed that, in the olden days, the celebration of different Tiwa festivals like Sagara, Wanchuwa, Yangli, Jongkhong etc. were assigned to different Tiwa clans and khels (cluster). The Tiwas of Bar-Amri (A Tiwa village in the Amswai area) were not allowed to perform the Sagara celebration and not even allowed to watch it. If they went to watch it they were reprimanded by the customary officers of the celebration like Changdoloi, Changmaji etc. The villagers of Bar-Amri felt slighted by this cultural isolation and exclusion. Therefore, out of grave resentment, the villagers of Bar-Amri discussed the matter seriously and resolved to steal the Sagara, (Sagara has been discussed in detail in Chapter V). The people of Bar-Amri now stole the Sagara, according to their plan on the day before its celebration from the Samadi of the Amswai village. When the villagers of Amswai came to know about the stealing, they gave a hot chase of the thieves, moving eastward to recover the stolen Sagara. The thieves (villagers of Bar-Amri) after crossing the Amri Ganga, a river flowing east of Ulukunchi, arrived to a paddy field which is called Amriphadar. The host villagers of Amswai also reached the river but could not go beyond Amriphadar because the place was covered by dense fog and everything had become invisible. So they returned home. The Amri people now got divided into three groups. One group reached Nambar Gaon at Kothiatoli, in Nagaon district. Remaining two groups settled in the Karbi-Anglong district, one at Jakhongnola Gaon and the other at Bhakshong area. The people of new settlement area now celebrate the
Sagara regularly. The settlement at Bhakshong took place prior to the Burmese invasion, because during that time the people had taken shelter in a place called Dhanputa.

**Concluding Remarks:**

The discussion on the origin and migration of the Tiwa people brings up many important points. Based on the observation during the field study and the interviews conducted among informants as sources of oral history the findings are listed below:

1) The place of origin of the Tiwa people, as indicated by the prevalent myths, lore and customary belief systems, could be the Tibet region of the Himalayas. How the race descended on the plains of the Brahmaputra and then traversed to the hills overlooking the plains cannot be ascertained. Linguistic and anthropomorphic evidence suggest that the migration of the Tiwas to their present habitat was part of a larger migration of the Tibeto-Burmese group of Mongoloid people. However, the time and period of the migration is a matter of conjecture.

2) The settlement of the Tiwa people in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra as well as in foothills and in the Khasi-Jaintia and Karbi hills did not take place in a single wave of migration. There is oral historical evidence to suggest that the Tiwa people in different locations of their habitat went through various phases of internal migration. This internal migration within the Tiwa habitat was driven by a number of reasons. These are as follows:

Firstly, the search for a productive agricultural land was a primary concern for the shift in settlement.
Secondly, adverse social and political situation may have forced the migration from the plains to the hills. For example, the Burmese incursions and the consequent atrocities perpetrated by the Myanmaries soldiers over the population in southern bank of the Brahmaputra did disperse the Tiwas to take shelter on the hills.

Thirdly, stringent cultural practices and customs of the Tiwa people in the hills may have caused internal migration back into the plains of the Tiwa habitat. Two main aspects of stringent customs were cited in the field by informants. These are as follows: a) the matrilineal system which deprived the right to property of the male lineage was something that the plains Tiwa migrants to the hills found difficult to accommodate; b) the custom of human sacrifice as part of *shakti* worship among the Tiwa people in the hills may have caused plains Tiwa migrants to descend back to their more liberal climes in the plains.

3) Customary laws and practices also seem to be instrumental in causing migration of the Tiwa people from one place to another within the habitat. The Tiwas customarily owe their allegiance to a hierarchical system in which the formation of the clan and the fraternity of the exogamic clans called the *khel* has a large role to play. On top of the *khel* happens to be the traditional Tiwa ruler called the *Deoraja*. In case after case, among the Tiwa settlements in the plains particularly, it was observed that most of the migration happened in terms of the safety and security of the Raja and by extension, of the *khel*. If a particular *khel* of the Tiwa people perceived a threat or an opportunity to move from one place to another, then the
entire exogamic fraternity moved to a new place. The settlement patterns in most kingdoms or customary clusters of exogamic clans strongly suggest this cultural phenomenon in terms of Tiwa settlement and migration.

4) Many settlements in the plains also strongly suggest a remodeling of the customary laws and customs after the pristine model of customs and traditions that were left behind in the hills when a section of the Tiwa people migrated back from their habitat in the hills. However, in majority of the settlements the conversion to religions like Hinduism and Christianity has slackened the hold of the traditional way of life resulting in the loss of the dialect, food habit, costume and other spheres of traditional life.

5) With the advent of modernity, the Tiwa people have become conscious of their identity resulting in the search for their roots. The reservations offered by the Indian constitution also have contributed towards this. A reclaiming of the lost traditions, lost language and lost ways of life seems to be visible in their articulations in recent times. Sharp cultural and traditional boundaries are being redrawn today which may allow for more space to reinvent their past, including their migration and its different routes.