6.1. Introduction

This chapter proposes to look into the traditional system of administration of the customary laws among the Tiwas, as administered by their traditional institutions. The objective will be to document the changes over time, in their jurisdiction and powers, and examine the role and relevance of these institutions in the modern day. It cannot be overlooked that the Tiwas live in a legally pluralist regime, under the jurisdiction of state administered laws and institutions. The overlappings and possible conflicts of the traditional institutions with these modern or state-imposed institutions will be a key focus in this chapter.

As mentioned in chapter I, Tiwa customary laws and practices are traditionally administered by institutions and organisations, which are of two kinds: secular (for administration of personal, civil and criminal matters) and socio-religious (for administration of matters having social and religious significance). According to Syamchaudhuri (1990), the Tiwas traditionally had a four-tiered administrative set-up, the most important feature of which was that it was built up from the level of the village. At the top of the administrative structure, was the Tiwa king or raja, followed by a council of village chiefs, composed of the village chiefs or headmen of all Tiwa villages under the suzerainty of the king. Next in line was the village council with the gaonburha (headman). The village council was composed of the elders of an individual village which was given leadership by a headman. Next in the rung was the organisation of bachelors or members of the samadi of every Tiwa village, which discharged some of the executive functions of the village council under its direction. Thus, following
Syamchaudhuri, the traditional power structure in the Tiwa state can be represented as follows:

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The King
  ↓
Council of Village Chiefs
  ↓
Village Council with Headman
  ↓
Organisation of Bachelors
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Syamchaudhuri opines that the main feature of this system was its grassroots level democratic nature, which was built up from the level of the village. Although the *gaonburha* of a village was selected from an important clan which was numerically dominant, he could not of his own supersede decisions of the council of elders composed of members of all the clans of his village. The *gaonburha*, under the traditional system, was to represent his village to the *raja*. Thus, from the bottom, administration was built up in such a manner that the king was dependent on the headmen of important villages who formed informal councils. Such a council was in turn dependent on the council of village elders who represented the different clans in the different villages. The king, according to Syamchaudhuri, was only a symbolic ruler, who consulted his village chiefs on policy decisions and on important issues like warfare and defense. This has led to the existence of a system of political organisation that emerged from the grassroots level of the village organisation but at the same time was not dependent on any kind of land revenue system, where intra-tribal bonds were the main stay of the system. This traditional system of administration is still prevalent in recent times in its broad form among the Tiwas.

The religious administration in the village has, traditionally, been vested in the *deori* (head priest of the village), with the *gaonburha* and the council of village elders having an important say. The *bar zela* (clan head) was responsible for the members of his
clans. The supreme religious authority of the Tiwas, in matters of religion, was the king. The traditional religious administration was never totally separated from the secular administration in water-tight categories and there were considerable overlapping in jurisdiction. This is evident in Pumakuchi even today, where the social and the religious administration merge with each other effortlessly. Here, the gaon sabha (having as its members both the gaonburha and the deori, along with others) has jurisdiction over both secular and religious matters. Then again, certain offence such as intra-clan marriage is both a social and religious offence among the Tiwas; hence a subject matter of both the secular and religious administration. Overlapping between the two kinds of traditional administrative structures has, however, become considerably limited in Manipur I, as we shall see later. This is probably due to the fact that the Tiwas of Manipur I are broadly divided into two groups: the adherents of the traditional religion and the adherents of Assamese Vaishnavism, each with its own socio-religious administration. According to Lambudar Bordoloi, the gaonburha of Manipur I, the village council or the mel, in which is vested the secular administration, prefers not to interfere in religious matters and even in social matters, unless expressly called for, in order to retain its neutrality and so that all villagers, irrespective of religious affiliation, can keep faith in it as a source of fair and equitable justice.

Numerous changes have also come about in the powers and authority of the traditional leaders and functionaries and in many cases, their functions has undergone transformations in recent times. The most important reason for this is the imposition of the modern legal system and administrative structures, which have come about in the wake of the Panchayati Raj system (in case of Manipur I) and the setting up of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council (in the case of Pumakuchi). The formation of the Tiwa Autonomous Council is expected to complicate the situation further. The institution of kingship has lost much of its former glory with the imposition of the modern legal system, and the king has been reduced to a nominal figure, though commanding continued respect and authority in the socio-religious arena. Hence, any discussion on the traditional institutions administering customary laws among the Tiwas cannot be held in isolation, but must be viewed in the context of these overlapping administrative and legal jurisdictions.
6.2. The Tiwa Institution of Kingship

Among the Tiwas, the ultimate traditional authority in all matters civil, criminal, personal and religious is the king, who is a hereditary ruler. The Tiwas have a number of kings, all of whom acknowledge the supremacy of the Gobha Raja (Tiwa king of the kingdom of Gobha), in all matters pertaining to the Tiwa tribe. The Tiwa kings were originally the vassals of the Jaintia kings of Meghalaya, against whom they rebelled from time to time. According to Tiwa folklore, as narrated to the researcher by key interviewees in the field, the centre of the Gobha kingdom was located in the region bounded by hills and water bodies situated at the juncture of the present Morigaon and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. The reason for choosing this particular site was the fact that it was bounded by hills and water bodies, which offered some protection against the invasion of the powerful Jaintia kings. According to Jur Singh Bordoloi, a close associate of the present king, who also works as a lecturer at the Jagiroad College, 'the legend goes that when the Tiwa king was contemplating the selection of this particular place as the centre of his kingdom, a couple of crows were continuously calling out 'Kowa Kowa', the echoes of which sounded to the king like 'Gowa Gowa'. The king decided to name his kingdom 'Gowa', which later became 'Gobha'. Kamal Pator of Manipur I village narrated a different version as to the origin of the name Gobha. According to him, 'there are a large number of beels (water bodies) in the area, which are also referred to as 'Dowa' by the local Assamese people. 'Dowa' subsequently became 'Gowa' and then 'Gobha'"

References to the Gobha kingdom are also contained in many chronicles of the medieval period. According to Gait (1963: 19), the 'Lalung' principalities had to contend with two powerful ethnic groups- the Ahoms in the plains and the Jaintias in the hills during the medieval period. In 1658, the Jaintia prince Pramotha Rai sought help from the Gobha king for organising a revolt but was refused. This enraged the prince who attacked the Gobha kingdom. The attack was thwarted with help from the Ahom king Jayadhawaja Singha who defended the king of Gobha with men and materials. The Ahom chronicles mention that the Tiwa kings joined the Ahom army that was sent to subdue the Jaintias. The Tiwa chiefdoms survived during the time of the Burmese invasion in early 19th
In 1832, Shobha Singh, the Gobha king, captured four British subjects and put them to death. This provoked the British Government to send an expedition to the Jaintia state in 1835, which brought it to surrender with all the dependencies including Gobha.

Following the imposition of the British rule and the modern legal system, and subsequently following independence, the authority of the Tiwa king, particularly in the realm of administration of justice, has reduced. Traditional village level authorities found some amount of recognition in the new administrative structure, but not the Tiwa institution of kingship. Despite this fact, the institution has survived and in the present day, it can be observed that the Gobha Raja, while being a nominal head, enjoys considerable moral and socio-religious authority over his tribesmen and enjoys their allegiance. According to Syamchaudhuri \( \textit{op.cit.} \), the main reason for survival of the Tiwa institution of kingship from the medieval to the modern times is the fact that the kings derived their power more from their ethnic organisation than any impersonal land-based feudalism. The villages of Manipur I and Pumakuchi, both of which are situated close to the centre of the Gobha kingdom, owe allegiance to the Gobha king. In the present day, the Gobha king presides over the members of his tribe from his village-Kumarkuchi Gaon near Jagiroad town. The present king is Sri Deep Sing Deo Raja, who is sixteen years old and is currently studying at a boarding school in the state of Meghalaya. As the king is away at his school for most part of the year, the researcher did not get the opportunity to meet him personally. Hence, information about the Tiwa institution of kingship could be basically gleaned through interviews with Jur Singh Bordoloi, who has close ties with the royal family and is also the Secretary of the \textit{Jonbeel Mela} Celebration Committee, held under the auspices of the Gobha Raja.

\subsection*{6.2.1. Executive Body of the King}

The \textit{Gobha Raja} rules over his kingdom, with the aid of an executive body composed of the following primary officials, whose appointment takes place in a hereditary manner:
Barbarua: The Barbarua serves as the second in command, next to the king and has considerable administrative and religious powers in the traditional order of things. Traditionally, he is also the Commander-in-Chief of the king's forces (though in recent times, the king has no soldiers at his disposal).

Presently, as the king is a minor and resides away from his kingdom in a boarding school, the Barbarua performs all the duties of the king. In the king's absence, it is he who adjudicates disputes brought to the king's court and listens to problems of his tribesmen, as well as performs the religious obligations of the king.

Pator: Serves as the secretary to the king assisting him in the discharge of all his duties and functions.

Garbheta: It is the duty of the Garbheta to give timely warnings to the king, in case of any danger befalling the kingdom and its people.

Arandhara: The Arandhara is responsible for holding the umbrella over the king, wherever the king goes in his kingdom, particularly when he attends religious and social events such as the Jonbeel Mela.

Dar Bichoni: Dar Bichoni is the person who fans the king with the help of a traditional hand fan whenever the king holds court.

Barika: The main function of the Barika is to collect information on the happenings in the kingdom from the subjects and inform the king accordingly.

Medhi: The Medhi serves as the chief priest of the king and helps the king in the discharge of his religious obligations.

In addition to the above, the king also has a number of other officials like Bhitor Majhi, Doloi, Deka Doloi, Tamuli Doloi, Khatoniya Doloi, Manta, Banthai, Borogoriya etc.
6.2.2. Present Day Functions

The present day functions of the Gobha Raja can be broadly categorized into the following categories:

6.2.2.1. Judicial Functions

According to Jur Singh Bordoloi, 'in the early times, the Tiwa king enjoyed supreme judicial authority over his subjects, with the power to banish a serious offender away from his kingdom as well as to impose the penalty of death. Normally, justice was dispensed at the village level itself; it was only in extreme cases that appeals lay to the king. However, following the imposition of the British rule in Assam following the treaty of Yandabo in 1826 and the subsequent imposition of the colonial system of administration, the Tiwa king's authority has steadily declined. Post-independence, justice became a matter of the modern law courts, with traditional systems of justice increasingly being displaced'. Thus, in the present day, it is seen that the Gobha Raja's judicial authority has been reduced to a fraction of what it was earlier, with the king adjudicating only in the case of petty crimes. However, the king's authority in case of socio-religious disputes and offences has remained intact over the centuries and remains unchallenged for the most part. In the present day, appeals lie to the king when a villager is not happy with the decision given by a village council or mel. Also, any member of the Tiwa tribe who feels that his case merits a decision from the king can approach the king's court for justice. When such an appeal is preferred, the king along with his group of officials sits in an open court conducted in the courtyard of his house (known as rajchora or royal court). As the king is away for most of the time, presently, in the absence of the king, the Barbarua sits in judgement. He gives a patient hearing to both the appellant and the defendant, also hearing the witnesses and evidence from both sides and gives a verdict. It is part of normal procedure to hear the opinions of the king's officials on the dispute before the king pronounces his verdict. In the modern day, the punishments which are usually imposed by the king take the following forms:
(i) Fine, which is paid to the king and/or compensation paid to the aggrieved party;

(ii) Social boycott or ex-communication from the tribe (though rarely resorted to nowadays);

(iii) Porachit or penance and ritual purification (in case of religious offences);

(iv) Providing a community feast

6.2.2.2. Pardoning Socio-Religious Offences

Among the Tiwas, it is only the king who can offer pardon to people, who have offended religious or social norms. When a couple commits the crime of marrying within the same clan, the usual practice is to the excommunicate the couple from the village, following a decision of the mel. In recent times, though, this is avoided with the girl being adopted by another clan and given away in marriage from the new clan. Nevertheless, it is still considered a crime against God as well as society and such a couple has to pay a visit to the king’s court to seek his pardon. The king usually accepts a token fine and asks the couple to give a feast to the community. He sprinkles santi pani (holy water with sacred basil leaves) on the couple who bow at his feet and invokes the Tiwa deities to pardon them of the sin.

The king’s pardon is also sought by a person who has committed, intentionally or unintentionally, the sin of killing a cow or eating its meat. It is believed that only the king’s pardon will free the person of this sin. Here also, the offender confesses his sin, bowing at the king’s feet who sprinkles santi pani on the offender and asks him to pay a fine, depending on his economic condition. Jur Singh Bordoloi narrated to the investigator an instance when a few Tiwa people from a village near Jagiroad had earlier converted to Christianity and wanted to come back to the Tiwa fold again. They sought pardon from the king who purified them and after paying a hefty fine and throwing a community feast, they could re-convert back to their traditional religion.
6.2.2.3. Presiding over the Jonbeel Mela and Receiving Tax

*Jonbeel Mela,* held under the auspices of the *Gobha Raja,* is an annual fair, which has great significance for the Tiwas and other neighbouring people of the hills and the plains. Held every year at Jonbeel, about 3 kms away from Jagiroad town, during the month of *Magh* (January-February), it coincides with the Bihu festivities of the *Gobha Raja* (the Tiwas celebrate Bihu a few days after the Assamese Bihu). The site Jonbeel derives its name from the *beel* named *jon* (*jon* literally meaning moon), located in the vicinity. According to Robert Lumphoi, the general secretary of the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha (literary organisation of the Tiwas), *'the Tiwa folklore goes that one day, the Gobha Raja Pranteshwar Singh was returning to his village from his travels one particular full moon night and happened to pass by the particular beel. He was so captivated by the beauty of the beel, with the full moon being reflected on it, that he named the beel Jonbeel and decided that his annual fair should be held from then onwards on its banks'*.  

The *Jonbeel Mela* which goes on for three to four days serves as the meeting point for the Tiwas of both the hills and the plains as well as for neighbouring tribes like the Karbis, Khasis, and Jaintias from the hills, all of who bring with them their various indigenous products for trade at the *Mela*. The most important aspect of the *Mela* is that it is taboo to have monetary transactions; goods are exchanged through the traditional barter system. The Hill Tiwas and the other neighbouring tribes generally bring with them ginger, bamboo shoots, turmeric, pumpkin and medicinal herbs, which they trade for dried fish and *pitha* (rice cake made during the Magh Bihu festival), which are brought by the Plains Tiwas. The Hill Tiwas, on returning home to the hills, commence their Bihu celebrations by making a ritual offering of the *pithas* brought from the plains to their household deities.

The *Jonbeel Mela* commences with the *Gobha Raja* coming to it in a royal procession dressed in his traditional finery and carrying his royal sword, and accompanied by the royal officials. Along with the *Gobha Raja,* the other Tiwa kings like the *Nellie Raja, Silsang Raja, Dimoria Raja* etc. also attend the *Mela.* The other Tiwa kings acknowledge their allegiance to the *Gobha Raja* by offering him tax, which is collected on his behalf by the royal officials. A nominal tax in the form of goods is
collected by the royal officials from all the people belonging to the different tribes who have come with goods to trade. On the day of *Uruka* (eve of the Tiwa Bihu festivities), community fishing is practiced in the Jonbeel and it is a customary practice to offer a portion of the fish to the king as tax. The Tiwas residing in the villages surrounding the king's village customarily pay a visit to the king's residence and make a ceremonial offering of the fish gathered from community fishing, cooked with bamboo shoot to the deity at the King's palace. Thus, it can be observed that the *Jonbeel Mela* held annually offers a chance to the *Gobha Raja* to bring his subjects together. The receipt of tax (which is nominal) from the other Tiwa kings as well as the Tiwas residing in the hills is symbolic of his authority over all members of the Tiwa tribe. Recognition of his authority is also implicit in the act of the offering of tax by the members of the neighbouring tribes.

In recent times, the *Jonbeel Mela*, apart from its traditional significance, also affords an opportunity to the Tiwa tribe to showcase its culture and traditions and reinforce its connections with the rest of the world. It receives considerable coverage in the media and is widely attended by political leaders and state government ministers. In fact, in the *Mela* held in 2009, the chief minister of Assam Sri Tarun Gogoi had attended and announced an allowance for the Tiwa kings. He made the announcement that the kings would receive monetary allowance of something between rupees three thousand and ten thousand depending on the population count under them. According to Jur Singh Bordoloi, 'though it has come quite late, this is a welcome move by the government of Assam. We have been demanding this for a long time as the economic condition of all these customary kings is going down. If we do not receive any assistance from the government, it would be difficult to maintain even the tradition of hosting the annual Jonbeel Mela, and the Tiwa traditional institutions would die a gradual death'.
6.3. Administration in the Tiwa Villages

6.3.1. Manipur I

6.3.1.1. The Mel

In Manipur I, at the level of the village, the traditional secular administration is vested in the mel which is composed of the senior male members of the village and headed by the gaonburha. Although all the senior male members of the village are considered to be the members of the mel, in reality, the administrative authority rests in a handful of persons (numbering about ten). The gaonburha is assisted by three other traditional administrative functionaries—namely the gaonburhi, laro, and barika. Cases are decided in open proceedings by the mel in a central area of the village where both parties are heard and witnesses from both sides are presented. This is referred to as rajahua bichar (justice by the people). The parties deposing in the proceedings take oath in the name of God. From the researcher’s interactions with elderly villagers, it could be known that earlier, oaths were taken by both parties as well as by witnesses. Libor Pator, an eighty year old man of the village told the researcher that earlier, elephant’s tusk, tiger’s teeth, bear’s teeth were put in water and kept in front and one had to swear by touching such water saying that ‘if I am lying, I will be dead’ etc. After hearing both parties, the witnesses and the evidence produced by the parties, the gaonburha has a consultation with the key members of the mel and pronounces judgement.

The powers, functions and duties of the main functionaries of the mel are as follows:

(i) Gaonburha

The people of Manipur I select a gaonburha from among themselves in order to conduct the administration of the village. The post is not hereditary and any efficient person, who has a sterling reputation and has displayed leadership skills in the past could
be chosen as the *gaonburha*. The other qualities which the villagers look for in a prospective *gaonburha* are an impartial nature, honesty and integrity, a strong sense of responsibility, selflessness etc. In Manipur I, there is no hard and fast rule regarding the tenure of this post and a capable and efficient headman may continue in the post for years together. The present *gaonburha* Lambodar Bordoloi has been continuing in this post since the last ten years.

The primary function of the *gaonburha* is to convene the *mel*, either in response to a call for decision by any villager or *suo moto* (on its own initiative) taking cognizance of a problem or matter which needs attention. Apart from this, meetings of the *mel* are also convened regularly (almost once a month) in order to discuss welfare and developmental activities of the village. While the *gaonburha* presides over the *mel*, his decisions in any matter are not taken independently but in consultation with the other office-bearers and village elders. While the *mel* is usually convened in an open field, sometimes the *gaonburha’s* house also serves as the place for urgent decisions. While most proceedings are held in the open, in the presence of all villagers, the *gaonburha* has the authority to convene a smaller group composed of the other office bearers and a select few in order to discuss sensitive matters which may call for some privacy. Apart from administering justice in personal, civil and criminal matters, the *gaonburha* also has an important role in many socio-religious ceremonies. When death occurs in a family of the village, it is the duty of the family members to inform him, who then issues instructions and delegates duties to the other villagers in order to aid the bereaved family in arranging for the funeral ceremonies and cope with the tragedy. He also has an important role in adoption, name-giving and marriage ceremonies. The *gaonburha* traditionally has served as the spokesman for his village and in the traditional Tiwa set up, he is the representative of his village at the Tiwa king’s court, in all dealings with the Tiwas outside the village, and also with non-Tiwas. While the *gaonburha’s* decision is usually unchallenged, a higher court of appeal lies with the Tiwa king and a villager not happy with the decision could approach the king for justice.
(ii) Gaonburhi

The gaonburhi is the second in command to the gaonburha and is a respected figure in the village. He is selected by the villagers from amongst the members of the village. His main function is to assist the gaonburha in the conduct of the mel. Moreover, in the absence of the gaonburha from the village or in case of sickness or sudden death, he takes over the charge from the gaonburha.

(iii) Laro

The laro or the secretary collects the fines and the arrears due from offenders, pronounced guilty by the mel and serves as the treasurer of the mel. The laro is generally selected by the gaonburha from the members of the village.

(iv) Barika

The barika or the messenger plays the role of informing villagers about a mel to be convened on a certain date, and other events in the village, as per the direction of the gaonburha. He is selected by the gaonburha.

6.3.1.2. Overlapppings in Jurisdiction with State Imposed Administrative Structures and Institutions

(i) Panchayati Raj Institutions

Manipur I village falls under the jurisdiction of the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, though this situation is expected to change soon, with the Tiwa Autonomous Council already being in place and with work going on for delimitation of its territory and that of village councils under it. In fact, Tiwa students’ and political organisations launched numerous protests and demonstrations against the holding of the last panchayat elections in the Tiwa dominated regions of Morigaon district in 2008, deeming it
'unconstitutional' (The Assam Tribune, December 12, 2007). At present, Manipur I village along with twelve other villages-Natuagaon Ahatguri, Ghuramara Pathar, Basanaghat, part of Rajagaoon, Manipur II, Barmanipur, Ulubari, Aujarigaon, Jarabari, Katolamarabori, Bahakajari Pathar, and Pakamura together constitute the Manipur Gaon Panchayat under Bhurbhandha Development Block of Morigaon district. The Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 provides for a three-tier system of local self-government or Panchayati Raj in the state: at the village, intermediate and district level. Accordingly, the panchayat body at the village level is the Gaon Panchayat, at the intermediate level is the Anchalik Parishad and the Zila Parishad at the district level. According to the provisions of the Act, the State Government, may, by notification, declare any local area comprising a revenue village or a group of revenue villages as a Gaon Panchayat, with population of its territory not less than six thousand and not more than ten thousand. The Gaon Panchayat, elected for a term of five years, is composed of ten members directly elected by the people within its territory, headed by a President. The President is responsible for convening the meeting of the Gaon Sabha and bears the general responsibility for the financial and executive administration of the Gaon Panchayat. The functions of the Gaon Panchayat include preparation of annual plans for the development of its area, preparation of the annual budget, implementation of government schemes, mobilization of relief in natural calamities, removal of encroachments on public properties, organising voluntary labours and contribution of community works, maintenance of essential statistics of the village, agriculture development activities (including agriculture extension), animal husbandry, dairy development and poultry, fishery, social and farm forestry, khadi, village and cottage industries, rural housing, drinking water, roads, bridges, waterways and other means of communication, rural electrification, poverty alleviation, education, cultural activities, fairs and markets, public health and family welfare, public distribution system etc. The Gaon Panchayat has the power to impose tax on houses and structures, on trades and calling, levy fees for different purposes etc.

The other important village level organisation, under the Assam Panchayati Raj system, is the Gaon Sabha, which is composed of the persons registered in the electoral rolls of the village or group of villages, which together constitute the Gaon Panchayat. The Gaon Sabha offers suggestions and recommendations to the Gaon Panchayat, with
respect to the development programme for the area, promotion of unity and harmony among the people, and other matters, which are given due consideration by the Gaon Panchayat. The Gaon Sabha convenes from time to time (with not more than three months gap between two meetings), with the meeting presided over by the President of the Gaon Panchayat and convened by its secretary, with approval of the President and in consultation with the Block Development Officer, with wide publicity given fifteen days before the meeting.

At the level of the block, the chief functionary under the Panchayati Raj system is the Block Development Officer. His role becomes more immediate in the context of the particular Gram Panchayats under the block, in the interim stage when the panchayat has been dissolved and elections are yet to be held. For instance, during the year 2007 and also some part of 2008, after the panchayat was dissolved, the Manipur Gaon Panchayat was directly under the charge of the Block Development Officer. The BDO is responsible for the overall developmental administration of his block, preparing schemes and plans for development and poverty alleviation as well as implementing government schemes such as Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) etc. and facilitating the setting up of self help groups (SHGs) under the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGRY) to alleviate poverty and bring about rural development. In fact, the present BDO of Bhurbandha, Nakul Saikia also holds charge as the Programme Officer responsible for the implementation of the newly enacted National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

From the above description, it emerges that the Panchayati Raj institutions in Assam such as the Gaon Sabha, the Gaon Panchayat as well as the block level institutions are primarily vested with developmental administration and serve as a medium through which government schemes for rural development and poverty alleviation are implemented. According to an ex-member of the Manipur Gaon Panchayat (under the jurisdiction of which falls Manipur I village), Pushpa Singh Raja residing in neighbouring Basnaghat region, 'the Gaon Panchayat does not in any way encroach upon the territory of traditional administrative structures of the tribal villages in its territory. A number of tribal and caste Assamese communities inhabit the territory of the Manipur Gaon Panchayat area and the Panchayat serves as a place where all these
communities could come together on a common platform, in order to implement developmental activities for the area as a whole and to ensure that the poor people in the region, irrespective of tribe or caste, can take advantage of government schemes’. As the legal and police administration is not vested with the Panchayati Raj institutions, the latter, according to him, have no authority to interfere in the administration of justice among the different communities according to their customary laws, or even to solve problems of this nature between different tribes and/or castes. He further stated that it was not the Panchayati Raj institutions, but the state imposed legal and police administration which was curbing the powers of traditional institutions like the mel.

(ii) The Office of the Charkari Gaonburha

In Assam as in other states of India, it has been the practice generally of the district governmental authorities to appoint a village headman for a revenue village or a number of revenue villages. This post is referred to as that of the charkari gaonburha (literally meaning government village headman) in order to distinguish it from the office of the traditional village headman, appointed by a community as per their customary laws. In most cases, as observed in both Manipur I village as well as in Pumakuchi, the government usually appoints the traditional gaonburha as the charkari gaonburha, in order to avoid a conflict with the traditional system of administration and to ensure the cooperation of the community. Thus, in Manipur I, it is found that Lambudar Bordoloi is both the traditional gaonburha (elected by common consensus of the villagers) as well as the government appointed charkari gaonburha. However, with Manipur I being the largest village among the four contiguous villages (including Bormanipur, Manipur II and Nuagaon), he has been appointed as the charkari gaonburha of all these villages.

The charkari gaonburha in Assam is the principal official of the state in a village, with his powers and duties falling under the heads of revenue, quasi-judicial and administrative. His main function is to keep the accounts of births and deaths in the area under his jurisdiction. He is to provide assistance to government functionaries in collecting the dues, due to government from the defaulters. It is his responsibility to safeguard the government property (which includes lands, trees, etc.) and prevent
encroachments upon it. He is also to execute the orders received from the higher officers in connection with the recovery of land revenue and other matter. He is also to serve as the eyes and ears of the state administration in the village and it is his duty to inform the higher authorities about urgent matters. According to Lambudar Bordoloi, the gaonburha of Manipur I, 'I am required to offer updates from time to time to the police station about suspicious activities and individuals in the vicinity. I am responsible for the maintenance of peace and order in my area and it is my duty to inform the police when offences are committed in the village. I, however, have the discretion not to inform the police and let the matter be settled in the traditional mel in case of petty offences'.

Lambudar Bordoloi narrated to the researcher a case of petty theft in the village, when he, as the char kari gaonburah, exercised the discretion of not informing the police. A young man of the village (whom the gaonburha did not wish to name) was caught in the act of stealing fish from the pond of a neighbour during the late hours of the night. He was caught by the owner of the pond, who along with a few other villages beat him up, shaved his head and then brought him to the gaonburha's house that night itself. The crowd insisted that this young man deserved to be taught a lesson and that he should be reported to the police immediately. The young man pleaded with the crowd and fell at the gaonburha's feet asking forgiveness and also promised that he will never commit the crime again. The gaonburha requested the 'offended against party' to forgive the offender this time, considering his age, the fact that he was a first time offender and also the reputation of the village. The gaonburha, while requesting, stressed that it was, however, the injured party's decision and he would respect whatever decision the latter took. The injured party decided to forgive the boy and the matter was not reported to the police.

Then again, the police before entering the village have a duty to inform the gaonburha and it is generally only with his permission that they enter the village. He obeys and executes all orders and warrants issued to him and prevents criminal offences within the limits of his village and detects and brings offenders to court for trial with the help of police. If the crime is committed within the limits of the village and the criminal escapes or absconds, he has to report to the police officer-in-charge immediately. He has
matter had to be reported to the police, as in case anything serious happened in the future, the mel would be held responsible by the police. So, the matter was reported to the police who came to the village and took him away. The man was let off with some beatings in the police lock-up with the wife deciding to drop charges against him. After this incident almost a year ago, the man has not repeated his bad behaviour against his wife.

In the opinion of Lambudar Bordoloi, it is not only the less powers given to the gaonburha and the mel, but also the fact that the villagers themselves, particularly the younger generation, has stopped giving it the respect it deserves, is the reason for the decline of the power of the traditional institutions and the customary laws. He also said that in recent times, there have been instances when people have taken recourse to both the customary system as well the formal legal system, depending upon what is more advantageous for them. In the earlier chapter, reference has been made to a case of divorce (the case of Bhanita Pator vs. her husband Chandan Pator), where the husband, in order to avoid payment of the maintenance ordered by the mel, refused to abide by its order. On the contrary, he registered a false F.I.R. (first information report) at the police station that his estranged wife had assaulted his mother. Cases like these contribute towards undermining the authority of the mel over its own people.

6.3.1.3. Socio-Religious Administration

As already mentioned earlier, a large section of the people of Manipur I village are followers of Assamese Vaishnavism while the rest are followers of the traditional tribal religion, based largely on worship of nature and natural objects. Investigations in the field revealed that these religious fractions existing within the community have an impact upon the administration of justice in social and religious matters. In case of socio-religious and ritual offences as well as violation of family rules in Manipur I village, it is the namghars of different khels in case of Tiwas who adhere to Vaishnavism, which decides cases. The khel is a unique social grouping associated with the Assamese social structure, limited to life within a village, cutting across the castes in a village and the
to proceed to investigate the matter and obtain all procurable evidence and forward it to
the police officer concerned.

As regards the administrative duties of the *gaonburha*, he is expected to look after
the sanitation and public health of the village. He has to report promptly the outbreak of
any epidemic diseases in the village to the concerned district officers. He is also to render
every possible assistance to government officials visiting the village.

From the above discussion, it emerges that the traditional Tiwa institution of the
village *gaonburha* and the *mel* continue to exercise authority in Manipur I village. This
has become possible through the indirect recognition given by the government, which has
chosen to nominate the *gaonburha*, traditionally selected by the people, as the *charkari
gaonburha*, thereby avoiding the creation of two parallel authorities with overlapping
powers. However, the imposition of the formal legal regime has led to considerable
dilution of the powers and has restricted the jurisdiction of the *gaonburha* and the *mel,*
with respect to civil and criminal matters. Though not clearly spelled out through formal
legislation and rules as in the case of the autonomous districts created under the Sixth
Schedule (Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills district), the jurisdiction of these
authorities are confined to petty crimes and civil offences and disputes of a minor nature.
While earlier, the traditional institutions could impose punishment to the extent of ex-
communication and sometimes even death, today, the penalties imposed by the *mel* are
restricted to fines or holding of community feast. Earlier, the village organisation could
try serious offences as well, nowadays; this is beyond its jurisdiction. When a serious
offence like murder, homicide, rape etc. is committed (such instances are very rare in the
history of the village), the matter is to be decided by the modern law courts. However,
even in such a case, the *charkari gaonburha* is called if the accused is caught by the
villagers and it is his duty to hand over the accused to the police. The *gaonburha* of
Manipur I, Lambudar Bordoloi narrated a few cases, where the matter went to the police,
which would earlier have been resolved by the *mel* itself.

☐ Akon Pator was an alcoholic who used to beat his wife regularly. The *mel* had reprimanded him a number of times for this
but to no effect. One day, when he had beaten up his wife very badly, and she was bleeding from the nose, the *mel* decided that the
members of which are subject to certain rules and restrictions (Goswami, 1954). Non-adherence to these could lead to exclusion from the group unless one re-enters by atoning for the sin or by paying a fine. One main feature of a *khel* grouping is that in the entire crisis in a person's life such as birth, marriage and death, fellow members are to be entertained to a feast or prayer assembly (*nam-prasanga*) (*ibid.*). In Manipur I, according to information from villagers, it could be understood that the institution of *khel* is absent in the traditional Tiwa structure and that it has come about with the adoption of Assamese Vaisnnavism and a strong desire to emulate the traditions of their Assamese neighbours. In Manipur I, one thus finds the existence of two major *khels* (each composed of more than 20 families) each with its own *namghar*. There are also three other smaller *khels*, which do not have their own *namghars*. Socio-religious matters are heard in an assembly of the *khel* members at the *namghar* and the punishment prescribed usually involves payment of a token fee, holding of *nam-prasanga* or throwing a community feast.

☐ The *pathak* (priest) of one *namghar* Dhiren Bordoloi narrated to the researcher one instance of a ritual offence committed by a young man of the particular *khel*. Nomal Bordoloi, aged about twenty five years was seen by two fellow villagers accepting tea and other eatables at a Muslim household in Morigaon town. The two villagers, who did not wish to be named, reported the matter to the *pathak*. The *pathak* summoned Nomal to a meeting of the *khel* elders at the *namghar*, where he was asked whether he had committed the offence. Nomal admitted to the act arguing that he had only taken *jal-paan* at a Muslim household (which entails lesser ritual impurity than food like boiled rice) and hence, his offence was not that severe. The *pathak* cautioned that in future he should desist from eating at non-Hindu households and asked him to pay a fine of fifty one rupees. Nomal placed the money along with with *tamul paan* (betel nut and leaf) on a *sarai* (a shallow bowl on a stand with dome-like cover, used in Assamese rituals) and bowed before the elders asking pardon. The *pathak* also sprinkled *santi-paani* (water with sacred basil) to purify him. ☐

In case of Tiwas following the traditional religion, the *bar zela* or the clan head usually resolves most of the disputes. Generally, it is only when the *bar zela* feels that the matter has become quite serious or the appellant desires to have his problem heard by a
higher body is recourse taken to a higher court. This higher court is largely an informal body composed of the *bar zelas* of the different clans, the *deori* (priest) and elderly male members (who are adherents of the traditional religion) and also the leaders of the *samadi*.

6.3.2. Pumakuchi

**6.3.2.1. Traditional Village Administration in the Context of the Sixth Schedule**

The Hill Tiwa village of Pumakuchi constitutes one of the thirty-three traditional village councils (or village courts) under the Amri Block of the Karbi Anglong district. As already mentioned in the preceding chapters, Karbi Anglong constitutes one of the autonomous districts constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and hence, enjoys a different kind of system for administration of justice, more attuned to ensuring the self-rule of the tribal communities. Under the Sixth Schedule, according to Para 4 and 5, the District Council may constitute village councils or courts for the trial of civil and criminal disputes between parties both of whom are tribals. The power of the village council or court to try criminal cases is limited to offences which are not punishable with death, transportation or imprisonment for five years or more. It is this constitutional provision which gives sanction to the traditional village councils and the tribal leadership in Karbi Anglong district. The provisions of the Sixth Schedule are being implemented through specific procedure laid down for each of the areas under the Sixth Schedule, which are referred to as the Rules for Administration of Justice (Para 4(4) of Sixth Schedule). The district of Karbi Anglong is still governed by the Rules for Administration of Justice, 1937 framed in the British period, though very recently, a new Bill to lay down Rules for the Administration of Justice in Karbi Anglong has been drafted in 2009, though still remaining in draft stage. These Rules enacted during the British times were devised by the colonial rules who did not want to interfere with the normal functioning of the traditional authorities which they wanted to go on according to customary laws and hence, sought to give them some kind of legitimacy under these Rules. The British, while extending their administration to the tribal areas, sought to
divide offences into two categories—heinous and non-heinous (Law Research Institute, Gauhati High Court, 1990). Heinous offences included murder, homicide, adultery, grievous hurt, dacoity, robbery, arson, etc., which were made non-triable by the traditional village councils and courts, and triable only by magistrates, sub-divisional officers and the Deputy Commissioner (D.C.). The magistrates and the other higher judicial officers imposed penalties prescribed by the Indian Penal Code, so that the traditional system of compensation, according to customary law, did not apply to such cases and the punishments had a deterrent effect. It is basically the same categorization, which has been maintained in present day Karbi Anglong. Thus, in Karbi Anglong in the present day, we find a four tier system of administration of justice, which may be diagrammatically represented as follows:

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High Court
↓
Deputy Commissioner (including Additional Deputy Commissioner) with power of District and Sessions Court
↓
Assistant to Deputy Commissioner (Including Sub-Divisional Officer)
↓
Village authorities with power to try petty offences, according to customary laws
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At present, the District Council of Karbi Anglong is supposed to appoint the village authorities, especially the *charkari gaonburha*. However, in actual practice, the traditional *gaonburha* is generally appointed as the *charkari gaonburha*, and the traditional village councils have received official recognition.

Thus, in Karbi Anglong, as per Rule 17 of the Rules for the Administration of Justice, 1937, the village authorities are entitled to try petty offences like theft, injury to property, injury to person not endangering life or limb, house trespass, affront, in accordance with their customary laws. A village authority can impose penalty of fine
only and that too upto Rs. 50, but it can award compensation to the extent of injury suffered (Rule 17). The village authorities are to decide all cases in open darbar in presence of the parties and at least three witnesses. The village authorities can, for compelling attendance, impose fine upto Rs. 50/-. No written proceeding needs to be kept (Rule 17, 19). Appeal against the decision of a village authority could be preferred before the Asstt. to Deputy Commissioner (D.C.). In civil cases, the village authorities can try suits of any value when the parties are indigenous. All cases not triable by village authorities are to be tried by Asstt. to D.C. or D.C or additional D.C.. The D.C. has the power of a court of sessions and the Assistants to the D.C. are invested with powers of Magistrates under the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code. The Criminal Procedure Code and the Civil Procedure Code are, however, not in force in Karbi Anglong and the magistrates are required to follow their spirit only (LRI, op.cit.).

6.3.2.2. Traditional Secular and Religious Administration

6.3.2.2.1. The Gaon Sabha

In Pumakuchi village, we thus find a system of village administration rooted in the customary laws and traditions of the Hill Tiwas, which also find recognition under the modern legal system, owing to the special constitutional provisions applicable to the Karbi Anglong district. Traditional administration has always been comprehensive in nature, embracing both the secular and the religious. Hence, in Pumakuchi village, we still find the existence of a single body-the gaon sabha, with multifarious activities of settling civil, personal and religious disputes; maintenance of rules and regulations- both civil and religious; and welfare and ritual functions. The holistic nature of this institution is clearly evident in its composition, which is as follows:

(a) Gaonburha

The gaonburha or the village headman presides over the meetings of the gaon sabha. Meetings of the gaon sabha are convened by the gaonburha, on a complaint filed by a villager or when a particular matter is brought to his attention by a member of the
gaon sabha or suo moto, on his own initiative. The gaonburha, according to customary laws, need not belong to a particular clan but can come from any clan, provided he has the necessary qualifications and enjoys the confidence of the villagers. However, it is a matter of customary procedure to give preference to the son of a previous gaonburha, provided he displays the requisite qualities. A gaonburha is generally selected at a meeting of all the villagers at the samadi (women are not allowed inside the samadi and hence, excluded in this very important decision of the village), where the elderly men play a key role. In Pumakuchi, we find that the post of gaonburha has for the past fifty years remained with a particular family of the Mithi clan, with the present gaonburha Phul Singh Mithi inheriting the post from his grandfather Lakhan Singh Mithi.

(b) Deori

After the gaonburha, the deori or the chief priest of the village constitutes one of the most influential members of the gaon sabha. In the words of Ram Mallang, the chief priest of Pumakuchi, the deori plays an even more important role than any authority selected by human beings. According to him, 'the gaonburha guides the villagers and helps them abide by the laws of man; on the other hand, the deori helps divine the will of the creator and ensures that the villagers do not break the law of the Tiwa gods, which is more important than any man-made law'. The post of deori is not subject to hereditary succession and the requirements for selection to the office are an untainted character and expertise in traditional religious practices. The deori is selected at a meeting of the elderly male members of the village at the samadi and on selection, he is offered one juluao (container made by drying a gourd, containing ju) and five pairs of koi-phan (betel nut and leaf) inviting him to discharge all religious obligations on behalf of the village.

In proceedings of the gaon sabha, the deori plays a very important role. When any case is brought for decision, the deori tries to judge the offence in terms of what wrong has been committed against the gods and what religious measure could be adopted to free the offender of the sin. According to Ram Mallang, 'measures to appease the deities are very important, as in most cases, an offence committed by a single human being could anger the gods and incur divine wrath upon the entire village, as for
instance, an intra-clan marriage, a mistake (maybe even unintentional in performing a ritual etc.). Apart from adjudicating in disputes as a member of the gaon sabha, his most important duties are to offer phuja (ritual performance to appease deities) at the village thans on behalf of the whole village and conduct community as well as individual and family rituals.

(c) Hadari

The hadari serves as the assistant to the deori. Apart from duties as member of the gaon sabha, his responsibilities include cleaning the thans for worship, supervising and making arrangements for performance of rituals and assisting the deori in performing the rituals. His selection process is similar to that of the deori.

(d) Barika

The barika is the messenger of the village, whose duty it is to give intimation to every household about a meeting of the gaon sabha to be convened to decide a particular issue, and about a date when a ritual is to be performed and also summon the villagers to all meetings to be held in the village.

(e) Maisakar Sowa

The maisakar sowa officiates as the village cook who prepares the community feast, which is indispensable to all religious functions and also constitutes an important way for an offender to atone for his offence. At present, there are four persons in Pumakuchi officiating as maisakar sowa and all of them are members of the gaon sabha. For selection to this post, the desirable qualifications are expertise in preparing traditional delicacies, efficiency and clean habits.

The gaon sabha, composed of the above members, decides personal, civil, socio-religious disputes as well as petty crimes, in public proceedings in the village. On the instructions of the gaonburha, the barika summons all villagers to the hearing. As most
of the proceedings are held in the *samadi*, women technically become barred from participating as religious taboo is attached to their entering the *samadi*. Thus, in cases involving women, the usual procedure is to have the meeting in a field in the village, with special summons being sent to the members of the *mahila samiti* to participate in the proceedings and give their opinions on the issue. This, according to Devimaya Malang, the president of the *mahila samiti* is actually a modern practice. In earlier times, such disputes were unilaterally decided in all male gatherings by the *gaon sabha*, without participation of the women of the village and even in the absence of a female party to the dispute. However, she clarified that this does not mean that the decisions taken were biased against women. In her view, ‘the Hill Tiwa society is a matrilineal society and traditionally, offences against women, both in the social and domestic context, are treated as grave offences. Also, a woman party to the dispute could always be represented in the proceedings by the male members of her family (father or brother), which ensured that her side of the story was heard and an unbiased decision taken’. Alternatively, such matters were not brought to the *gaon sabha* and resolved by the *bar zela* (clan head), taking in some instances, the advise of the elderly women of the family or clan.

As already mentioned in chapter V, the punishments imposed by the *gaon sabha* on the offender include fines and compensation, social boycott, holding a particular ritual to propitiate a deity who might have been angered by a particular act of the offender and holding a community feast. For first time offences or offences of a petty nature, the *gaon sabha* may let off the offender with a warning. The following are two instances of decisions by the *gaon sabha*:

□ Two teenaged boys of the village- Gunabir and Rabi were caught by the *deori* in the act of stealing mangoes from the Andhari than. He also found them smoking beedis in the than premises. The *deori* summoned a meeting of the *gaon sabha* and also summoned the parents of the two boys at this violation of religious customs which forbid desecration of the sacred spaces in the village. In Pumakuchi, religious customs dictate that the first fruit of the season (from the trees of the than must be offered first to the presiding deity of the than and then only, can be partaken of by people. The act of smoking was also considered to be showing
disrespect to the deity. The deori rebuked the two boys saying that they might be going to an English medium school but they cannot ever violate the sanctity of the deities and their abodes. He further chided them saying that this will incur divine retribution not only upon themselves but also on their families and the whole village. The gaonburha rebuked the parents of the boys saying that they should keep better watch over the activities of their growing sons and try harder to inculcate the fear of offending the deities in the young generation. Considering their age, the gaon sabha did not punish them. The deori, however, ordered them to come to the than the next day and seek pardon from the deity by offering a pair of koi phan (betel nut and leaf) and a ju-lao (gourd container filled with ju) at the shrine. The boys complied with the order.

An interesting case which came up for decision in the gaon sabha was when a villager Anjan Puma accused a neighbour of casting an evil spell through black magic on him and his family. According to Anjan, it was due to the evil spell cast by his neighbour that his family has been suffering from continuous illness and accidents. The reason for this, as alleged by the appellant, was a property dispute between the two. The gaonburha sought the advice of the deuri as how to ascertain proof for this offence. The deuri suggested that Manbar Puma, one of the expert ojhas (diviner) of the village should be called, in order to ascertain the guilt of the accused. In an assembly of the gaon sabha at the samadi, Manbar puma performed ghati soma (soma or divination performed using a ghati or bell metal bowl) to ascertain the guilt of the accused. Only the members of the gaon sabha, the accused and the appellant were present here; as black magic is considered a very serious matter with ill-effects. The divination commenced with the ojha first placing a bell-metal bowl on the ground and keeping an upside-down khamli (low wooden stool) on top of it. The accused was made to sit on it with his hands in front of him on the ground. Sprinkling a few grains of rice on him, Manbar Puma uttered some manthras (incantations) commanding the khamli to rotate if he was the culprit. The khamli did not rotate which convinced the ojha that the accused was innocent. He then commanded the khamli to rotate on its own if anybody has performed black magic. The khamli moved this time convincing the ojha that somebody has indeed performed black magic but not the accused. As the identity of the offender could not be determined, the ojha uttered some manthras to free the family from the evil spell. According to the gaonburha, cases of black
magic, if proved are treated as a serious issue and the offender might even be subject to social boycott or a very heavy fine and compensation to the aggrieved party.

6.3.2.2. Modern Functions of Traditional Authorities (the Gaonburha)

As we have seen in the case of Manipur I too, the traditional village headman or gaonburha has been appointed as the charkari gaonburha, with the result that the traditional leadership has been invested with new functions, in addition to the traditional duties and functions. In the case of Pumakuchi, in Karbi Anglong district, this is more so, with constitutional recognition being provided to the traditional village councils. The gaonburha, as in Manipur I, has some police functions as well, with his duty being to report any criminal offence like murder, assaults, grievous hurt in the village to the police authorities. He is also the President of the Village Defense Party for village protection. It is composed of thirteen members of the village and hands over thieves, illegal timber loggers and other culprits to the police and where not possible alerts the police when such offences are being committed. It receives meager aid from the government in the form of blankets, torches etc. required to keep vigil at night.

While earlier, the gaonburha was the link between the king and the people, in recent times, he also serves as the linkman of the Government and also of Block functionaries like the Block Development Officer, the Gram Sevak etc. The member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) of the area contacts the gaonburha for both developmental work in the village, as well as for mustering support of the voters during the elections to the Council. But not everything is well with these village institutions in particular and the Hill Tiwa community in general residing in Karbi Anglong, where they are numerically inferior to Karbis. According to the gaonburha, there is only one Hill Tiwa member out of thirty members of the Autonomous District Council for Karbi Anglong and he, too, is nominated by the government. The Hill Tiwa charkari gaonburha, being the linkman of the District Council for the villagers, arranges

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1 Village Defence Parties are voluntary organisations, working in the rural areas under the supervision of the local police, to aid the policy in the detection and prevention of crimes and maintenance of law and order. They have received legal recognition under the Assam Village Defence Organisation Act, 1966.
for the food and stay of a dignitary or government officer visiting his village and in
return, gets some monetary assistance from the District Council. But while a Karbi
cha_ka_ri_ga_on_burha has scope for obtaining monetary sanctions with the help of the
District Council Officials for construction of village developmental works, a Tiwa
cha_ka_ri_ga_on_burha cannot exercise similar influence over the District Council as there
are few Tiwa officials in the District Council. Whatever power he yields is at the village
level only.

6.4. Role of other Organisations and Institutions in Tiwa Villages

Tiwa villages customarily had other institutions and organisations, which while
having no direct role in the administration of justice, contributed to maintaining social
order and helped discharge some of the welfare and development functions vested in the
village council. One such institution is the samadi, or the bachelors’ dormitory, which is
basically an association of all the young men of a village. Under the onslaught of
modernity and particularly, the adoption of Assamese Vaishnavism, this institution
gradually declined, particularly among the Plains Tiwas. Thus, according to Kamal Pator
of Manipur I village, there was a time when this institution became non-existent here.
However, in recent times, villagers who have reverted back to the traditional Tiwa
religion have tried to revive this Tiwa tradition, with the result that Manipur I has a
samadi, with the young boys and men (whose parents follow the traditional religion) as
its members. Since they do not have a traditional building solely for their own use, they
congregate after school hours at the village school and disperse after dusk. Customarily,
samadi members spend the night at the samadi premises, which is not feasible in this
case. The samadi as existing in Manipur I is serving basically as a platform for young
men and boys to meet. This group has tried to master the traditional Tiwa dances and
play the traditional musical instruments, for performances outside the village. On the
other hand, among the Hill Tiwas of Pumakuchi, there is full-fledged samadi in
existence, with the samadi having its own plot of land and a building, erected in the
traditional style. The building is a huge hall constructed on wooden posts raised a few
feet above the ground. There are no walls on the side, with the roof supported by bamboo
posts. The samadi is constituted of all the unmarried male youths of the village divided into three categories—surumai banthai (senior most), kra khura banthai (middle level) and sokhasa banthai (youngest recruits). It has a number of leaders namely the Changdoloi (head of the samadi), Changmaji (second in command) followed by the Surumaboro, Khuramul, Khurumaboro, Khurumaboro Sakoria, in order of hierarchy. These leaders are selected by the gaonburha taking the opinion of other members of the gaon sabha. The samadi is responsible for development and welfare activities of the village, taken up on the order of the gaon sabha. They basically provide free agricultural labour to villagers in need of extra hands on their fields, in building and maintaining roads, cleaning the than premises etc. The only obligation upon the family seeking their services is a mid-day meal to the boys and a token remuneration of koi-phan and ju lao to the Changdoloi. Apart from the samadi, in Pumakuchi, we have the Deka Hadari (composed of youths) and Burha Hadari (composed of senior male members) groups in Pumakuchi. These are traditional labour groups which offer free agricultural labour to anyone in need during the harvesting season. The only remuneration these groups expect are a mid-day meal and ju.

In both Manipur I and Pumakuchi, we find that apart from the traditional institutions, the villagers have also organised themselves under modern organisations in response to the changing needs of the times. Thus, in both villages, we find that the women have organised themselves into mahila samitis, which apart from welfare and income-generating activities, have started to assume a key role in settlement of disputes involving women, as seen early on in the chapter. Another interesting development is the growth of SHGs (self-help groups) in the two villages, most of which are managed by women. While the SHG movement is limited in Pumakuchi, in Manipur I, there are as many as eleven SHGs in the village, most of them organised by women in order to generate income through activities like weaving, piggery etc. While not directly responsible for administration of justice, these organisations have played a major role in taking advantage of government welfare schemes to bring about all-round development of the village.