The Tiwas (previously known as the Lalungs) constitute a scheduled tribe (plains) of Assam, concentrated mostly in the districts of Nagaon, Morigaon, the Nartiang Elaka of Jowai sub-division of Jaintia district of Meghalaya, Dhemaji sub-division of Lakhimpur district, Titabar area of Jorhat district and Sonapur area of Guwahati sub-division of Kamrup district. A section of them, known as the Hill Tiwas, resides in the foothills and hilly areas of Karbi Anglong district. Autonomy within the constitutional framework of India has been granted to the Tiwas (living in the plains) with the passing of the Tiwa Autonomous Council Act, 1995 in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Hill Tiwas, who continue to live in the Karbi Anglong district, are under the jurisdiction of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. Both sections of the Tiwas have their own customary laws governing all aspects of their lives, which are administered by organisations and institutions of two categories: the secular and the religious.

The present research is an endeavour to study the customary laws and practices of the Tiwas, of both the hills and the plains, and the present day role and relevance of these laws and practices and of the traditional institutions administering these. The study of the customary laws of the Tiwas assumes particular relevance in the legally pluralist arena in which they reside, characterised by overlapping between the laws imposed by the state, the administration of the newly constituted Tiwa Autonomous Council and the age-old customary laws, administered by traditional institutions emanating from within the community.

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