CHAPTER- VIII

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages I have discussed the textile tradition of the people of the Tiwa tribe of Assam. The study covers both the section of people who have resided in the hills of Karbi Anglong and the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley. The study reveals that weaving as a cottage industry developed along two lines among them due to the impact of the differences in ecological and geographical situations between the hills and the plains. The difference is noticed in terms of clothes and clothing, texture and colour, the art of decoration in the medium of colour threads and loom and loom accessories. The Tiwas of the plains have embraced the great tradition of their non-tribal neighbours and developed their own costume not different from the latter. Of course, they have created a tradition in eri-culture and earned loud praise in recognition for their craftsmanship. Recently, cultural awakening has swept over the plains among the Tiwas for resuscitation of traditional dresses. The present chapter is devoted to a study on the persistence and change in textile both in the hills and the plains.

No society is static and so is culture. The first instance of change which affected the Tiwa society in the remote past was a historical necessity as a section of people decided to discard the operation of matriarchy. As a sequel to this, they left their traditional home in the Jaintia hills and migrated to the foothills and began to settle there. Later on, some of them migrated further to the east and founded several small principalities under
the overlordship of the Ahom King, Jayadhvaja Simha, in the mid-17th century A.D. The section of people who stayed in the foothills and founded the provinces of Gobha, Neli and Khola was constantly exposed to the power conflicts that took place among the Ahoms, the Kacharis, the Koches and the Jaintias. The power conflict affected in disorganising the social structure of those who lived in these provinces.

Balairam Senapati has opined that the effects of migration was overwhelming in the sphere of socio-cultural level of the plains Tiwas. He narrates the situation as follows:

The Lalungs of the five provinces founded under the Ahom out-post at Raha lost many old customs with which they were familiar when they lived in Jaintia and Khairam with their Jaintia brethren. They were, therefore, compelled to borrow many new customs from their non-tribal neighbours in order to regulate different socio-cultural transactions.

The state of affairs grew bigger and bigger and a time came when the identity of the tribe was at stake. Therefore, the people of the tribe irrespective of age and pedigree, assembled at a place to compile the ancient codes. But they failed in this respect even after a long debate. The deliberation continued for long seven days and seven nights. Lastly, a cowherd boy gave a solution to the problem. He made his submission by stating that the office of the *ghorburha* could be bestowed on a person who belonged to that family which had the tradition of holding it in the past. Similarly the problem of the *hari-kunwari* could be resolved in the same manner. All men including the aged were happy at the submission of the cowherd boy. Subsequently the people developed a new set of codes.

Senapati has observed that the codes so framed underwent many changes again in course of time. This time, the people incorporated some

1. Panco-rajiya-anchalar Lalungor loka-geet etc. pp.-1-2
Hindu customs. According to Senapati, the new incorporations were made on economic consideration. He states that the Hindu religious practices are less expensive than those of their practices. He has gone further to comment that the present day Tiwa culture is on the verge of collapse in the plains.

The Tiwas living in the hills of Karbi Anglong have a different story to tell about the dimension of change in non-material and material culture. It is a fact that "present day tribal cultures, however isolated and remotely situated they might be, are constantly subjected to on-coming stresses and strains in the form of myriads of alien norms, practices and ways of life that are invariably accompanied with numerous material gadgets with extraordinary devices for manipulation and labour saving utility". The effect of the "on-coming stresses and strains" are visible in various domestic practices like weaving, dress and patterns of personal decoration and other material cultures. Dr. P.C. Phangcho has enumerated the factors responsible for social changes among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong District. According to him new religious faiths and practices, modern education, transport and communication as well as other infrastructure of development, specially after the creation of the Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution are some of the factors responsible for bringing about changes among the Karbis. Dr. Phangcho has also observed that the changes have exercised serious effects on the way of living, food and dress habit, language and culture and socio-political behaviour of the Karbis.

However, the Hindu society of the Tiwas in the hills of Karbi-Anglong has been able to withstand the changes and retain its basic structure inspired by the force of religion. It is true that the Tiwas have been maintaining religious conservatism in their traditional villages. Each family has been
contributing much to the continuity of the socio-religious institutions of the past. It is discussed in the body of this thesis that the numerous dances of the Tiwas are believed to be the god's gift. Not only the dances but also the dance costumes and different motifs and patterns in their costumes are the gifts of god. The beliefs and the religious practices associated with them lend them strength to perpetuate through the ages. The instance of sagramisawa can be cited as example in this regard. The plantain robes have continued to be the costume of the four traditional leaders of the samadi since time immemorial in the sagra dance observed in Bar Marjong. Although there are differences among the clans in costume and observances and also in spoken form of the language, the general belief underlying the dance form was not affected by any external stress. The sagra and other dance-forms, and for that matter the traditional costumes, perpetuate with the exercise of religious practices by the clans. This shows that religion has its own part to play in the persistence of dress.

The development of roads and communications in the hills has brought about changes in the society in a number of ways. In the first place, the change is observed in the self-sufficient economy of the people. Formerly, the economy of the people has its concern with the fulfillment of the basic needs—food, shelter and clothing. In the changing situation, the dependence of the people on cash economy is increasing gradually. The broom cultivation has emerged as a major source of cash money. The money earned from selling of brooms has inspired many to spend money on non-profitable consumer goods like the radio, T.V. set, battery operated lamps and several other things. The people of the village like Tharakhunji who do not possess arable land for wet cultivation have spent a higher percentage of earning on buying lands in Neli, Gobha and Amsoi and other places in the plains for conducting wet cultivation in order to compensate food shortage in the hills.
The authors of the book, the Lalung Society\(^4\) have commented that "the growing dependence on cash economy, certain changes have taken place in the cultural sphere specially in the mode of making and using of dress." Formerly all clothes were woven both in the hills and the plains from home-spun cotton yarns. But women no longer spin cotton. All cotton yarns required for making cloths of different nomenclature are purchased. Of late, acrylic yarn popularly known as *thailand-suta* (not necessarily the threads are imported from Thailand) has become extremely popular among the weavers of the hills and the plains. Side by side with one-ply acrylic yarns, the mercerized yarn of both the categories of 2/60 and 2/40 counts, *kecha-suta* of the counts of 40, 40XX (also called the *japani-suta*, of course, not imported from Japan), 60 and 80 have been used in weaving. The manufacturing process has also underwent changes with the introduction of the throw-shuttle loom fitted with fly-shuttle sley. The primitive loom known as *asomiya-sal* or the *hat-sal* which is a family heirloom in an Assamese peasantry has almost disappeared. The traditional floor loom *re-thad* and the *kari-sal* (floor-loom with warp-yarn wrapped in *gari*-the beams) are also not available in plenty in the hills. The present researcher has come across few such looms in Tharaklundji, a village famous for handloom weaving in the entire hills of Karbi Anglong. The counter effect of new implements in the texture of cloth is substantial in mill-made threads. The new cloths weaved of colour threads appear excessively shining. They have lost the soothing nature of natural-dye of the past.

The making of male dress, the *tagla*, continues both in its modernized and traditional form. But its weaving in a traditional *re-thad* has become rare and is confined to some aged women. However, in the absence of homespun cotton they weave it in one-ply acrylic yarns or one ply or two ply

\(^4\) P. 131.
wool. Home spun cotton is rarely used even in the male lower garment, the *thana*. Floral motifs and patterns have persisted in the fabrics of the hill Tiwas. But certain modifications have crept into the making of the *tagla* of old tradition. Plate 9-i presents a *tagla* of old tradition. Plate 9-ii presents another *tagla* of old tradition. But the latter *tagla* presents modifications in the design. The modernized *tagla* in the plains is changed in its look.

The emergence of the middle-class elite in the sixties of the 20th century brought about cultural awakening among the people of the Tiwa tribe. Rimol Amchi⁵ has commented that the movement for a cultural awakening assumed new dimension with the birth of All Tiwa Students Union (ATSU) in the late-eighties. A mass-movement was organized demanding the creation of Autonomous Tiwa District under the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The movement got immense support from the people. One of the constituents of the movement was All Tiwa Women’s Association (ATWA). It was founded in 1990 with its head office in Morigaon. ATWA extended unflinching support to the movement launched by ATSU and became instrumental in leading a cultural movement among the women in the plains. ATWA’s concern for cultural resuscitation in terms of traditional dress gained popularity and support from the people. As a sequel to it, weaving of traditional dresses of the tribe received great impetus. Many young girls were attracted to the charms of the textile tradition of their compatriots in the hills. Few of them attired themselves in traditional costume in order to create a sense of belonging around the culture of traditional robes among the people especially among the fair sex irrespective of old and young. Many young weavers took up the production of *tagla, jaskai, kasong* and *phaskai* etc. in their looms Some of them visited the house of their compatriots in the hills for learning the craft of handloom. Coming to the plains, they modernized

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⁵ Sonaine-tihand, Souvenir, 4th annual session of Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra, 2000, p. 25.
the dresses to suit the taste of the young boys and the girls. The sleeveless *tagla* of the males was heavily amended in form and design. It has now become a jacket open at the front. Its length is increased to reach little below the buttock. The hanging fringes have either disappeared or shortened. Changes are also noticed in decorative motifs which exhibit deviation from the original.

Some significant changes have also been made in the dress of the fair sex. The *jaskai kasong* is made into two pieces of cloth—the *jaskai* being the long and the *kasong* the short one. A *churni* called *phaga* is added to the dress in order to cover the breast. The *phaskai* as breast garment is made long and wide. The problem of covering the bare shoulders is overcome by the introduction of a shirt or blouse which completes the shirt-*kasong-phaga* or shirt-*jaskai-phaga* ensemble of women draperies in the plains.

The persistence level of traditional costume is higher in the hills. But recently the elite section of the people feels that handloom weaving is deteriorating slowly and gradually even in the traditional villages in the hills. The reason may be attributed, to some extent, to the "mobility of men and material, concepts and ideologies, norms and values, influx of non-tribal traders and businessmen" into the secluded precincts of the hill coves. As a result, the nondescript garment of the plains, particularly the male dresses, have become popular with the male Tiwas of the hills. A bigger section of them accepts ready-made garments for everyday use and also as festive wears. Actually, the males, except a few old people, wear mill-made or ready-made garments in preference to the traditional dresses. This growing tendency for new dress other than traditional cannot, however, be attributed to the fall of production in the context of male dress. We know that the traditional dress of a Tiwa male is a *tagla* and a *thana*. The cloth mentioned
latter has almost lost its relevance in the society. It is considered sacred as a piece of antique dress for holding religious worship. Therefore, the cloth needs replacement. Whether a pant, long or short, could be forwarded to replace the thana would be a matter of debate. My observation is that the sentiment of the youths is obviously with the pant. But the demand for festival dresses, like the thenas, the tagla and kamcha, kasong and jaskai does not wane at all compared to the dresses of everyday use.

The women weavers in the hills do not weave cloth for commercial purpose. They weave cloths for domestic consumption. Each household in the hills has been maintaining more than one loom. The operation of loom is the duty of the women. However the operation is seasonal as the women get little leisure during the period of agricultural operation. In the hills it is the womenfolk who shoulder the major responsibility of tilling in the field. They organise hadari for this purpose. The present researcher has come across several such hadari groups busy in tilling land with hoe. Weaving of cloth for commercial purpose does not seem possible for the womenfolk. The collapse of the Thirima self-help group some few months ago indicates that weaving on co-operative basis is hardly possible in the hills. On enquiry, the present reasarcher have come to know that the women members of the group have different household activities to discharge and as such there is the dearth of artisans to run the looms together or in a group.

V. Elwin has pointed out to a pertinent problem of dress.\(^6\) He says that “dress is only part of a much bigger problem, the problem of detribalization as a whole. It is no good trying to preserve and develop tribal dress unless we are going to do the same for tribal institutions, tribal religion and tribal dance, song and art.” According to him these are all good things

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of a tribal society. The persistence of tribal costume depends on the persistence of the above named good things. We have discussed this aspect in several places in the body of this thesis. We have also observed that the traditional villages in the hills have retained the good things in order till today through the practice of different religious rites and observances. But the fear of detribalization cannot be overlooked at all. In this context, the "curious phenomenon" arising out of allowing the married daughters and sons to inherit mother's land can be cited as example. This is a deviation from the matrilineal inheritance of property and a step forward to the foundation of patrilineal family. The impact of modern education also cannot be overlooked in the context of detribalization. The impact of education is felt in the existence of the *samadi*, as the school going boys are not involved in it. It is a known fact that the *samadi* was the fountain head of the Tiwa culture and its dissolution will be disastrous to the culture. □

7. Dr. B.K. Gohain: *The Hill Lalunes*, p. 101