CHAPTER-III
SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOMS OF THE TIWAS

3.1 Customs and traditions:

Customs, as defined by Advance Oxford Dictionary is-

*a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place or time.*

In this sense custom means some laws or rules that a society is bounded by. They also integrate the members of a society within themselves. Every society differs from the others in terms of their inherited customs. Customs are closely associated with the tradition.

Tradition, on the other hand is the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation. Dorson defines tradition as—

...........*it is now well established that the most civilized races have all fought their way slowly upwards from a condition of savagery. Now savages can neither read nor write, yet they manage to collect and store up a considerable amount of knowledge of a certain kind.....The knowledge, organization and rules thus gathered and formulated are preserved in the memory, and communicated by word of mouth and by action of various kinds. To this mode of preservation and communication, as well as to the things thus preserved and communicated, the name of tradition is given.*
Tradition does not confine to a particular timeframe since it is a time non-restraint entity. It, thus, keeps on renewing its inclusions over time. Hartland has his own comment in this regards—

*I contend that tradition is always being created anew and those traditions of modern origin wherever found are as much within our province as ancient ones.*

Customs and traditions of a community never form instantly. It is the result of years of testing experiences of the ancestors. The conclusion achieved finally takes the shape of customs and finally with passage of time it becomes tradition. Most of them are seen sometimes as scientific and realistic. Customs in a society act as the bond of social belongingness. Upholding of customs by somebody means his worldly desires are sanctified and he thus becomes civilized. However, all type of customs and traditions of a society are not sound or well enough to reflect the level of welfare of the society. The brighter sides of the customs are also followed by some dark corners that sometimes restrict a society to cope with the changes of the dynamic world. The justification here is to accept those customs which offsets the negative sides.

The Tiwas are a small ethnic group in the north-east India’s perspective, but they have some well defined age-old customs and traditions. Their unique pattern of social system, i.e formation of the society, observance of rituals, different taboos, cultures make them different in look. Tiwas of Assam are of two distinct types—

i. Hill Tiwa (also includes the datiyolia Tiwas) and

ii. Plain Tiwa.
The hill Tiwas are much more conservative in observing their age-old customs and traditions. But the plain Tiwas, in many occasions, have lost most of their inherited customs due to the process of assimilation with their co-existing neighbours. They are improvised either by the Neo-Vaishnavism or by the surrounding mainland Assamese people. On the other hand, people living in the hills and foothills are still struggling to survive with their culture amongst the inter-cultural conflict.

3.2 Structure of family, clan and society:

Family can be regarded as one of the universal and permanent institutions of mankind. Majumdar calls it a ‘Biological matrix’. Murdock opines as—

*The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually co-habiting adults.*

The Tiwas living in the plains have the family pattern similar to that of surrounding Aryan Families. It consists of father, mother, and their unmarried children. They have a nuclear or primary type of family which is, by and large, a universal human social grouping. Sharma Thakur observes the lineal joint family among the Tiwas with old father, old mother of the existing head of the family living with wife and children together. In such families, he observes that the unmarried brothers and sisters of the head of the family, that is, family of orientation also live together. Among the Tiwas residing
in the plains, after the death of the father, the unmarried brother gets his share of the landed property by inheritance which he cultivates jointly with his brothers. The Tiwas of the plains also have a *khuta* system of social grouping which can be called extension of a family.⁷ In general each family of a certain clan forms a social group known as *bangsa or khuta*. The members of two or more such *bangsa or khuta* constitute a *khel*. A *khel* has the highest socio-religious significance in the Tiwa society. In a single village, there may be several clans. It may be noted that every family in a village must be affiliated to a *khuta* as well as to a *khel*. In case of observing marriage ceremony, in observing death rites, the *khuta* plays an important role on the life of the Tiwas of the plains. But, in case of the hill Lalungs, a *khul* plays the most important role in society. However, unlike the Tiwas of the plains, the *khul* of the Hill Lalungs is an exogamous matrilineal descent group. Children take the clan of the mother side and the clan traces out its descent from a female ancestress.

A clan, popularly termed by Tiwas as *wali or kul (Khul)* is the unavoidable part of all socio-religious phenomenon. A clan consists of blood relation of one side only who are grouped together into one exogamous entity.⁸ According to Lowie, *The exogamous character of clan makes is distinctive group.*⁹ Mudract viewed that residential unity is essential to form a clan.¹⁰ B. K. Gohain observes in case of the hill Lalungs—

*The clan or kul is an exogamous matrilineal descent group. The clan are grouped into some clusters called ‘Maharsa’, one*
particular clan in its cluster is regarded no special position of the clan in the said cluster and all are treated equality.\textsuperscript{11}

The Tiwas of the plains are divided into a number of exogamous patrilineal clans or \textit{kul}. According to Sharma Thakur, originally, they had only twelve clans sub-divided into a number of sub-clans.\textsuperscript{12}

The basic clan system of the Tiwas are as follows--

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<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>Macharang</td>
<td>Machereng, Magor</td>
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<td>ii)</td>
<td>Madur</td>
<td>Ladur, Pura, Sagara</td>
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<td>iii)</td>
<td>Maloi</td>
<td>Fangsong, Pumbe (Puma)</td>
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<td>Dafor</td>
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<td>vii)</td>
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<td>viii)</td>
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Table 3.1: Tiwa clan and sub-clan.

Besides these clans, the overall clan system among the Tiwas as per popular beliefs adds up to more than sixty clans, as stated-

The extension of family and *khel* form the Tiwa society. A three tier system forms the Tiwa society.\textsuperscript{13} The family is in the first layers of the society. The family is the backbone to all the layers. For Tiwas, several families including all kin group with common blood relations form the clan popularly known as *kul* or *wali*. In every *kul* there is a customary chief known as *gharbura* followed by *majubura* and *sarubura* among the male members of the clan.\textsuperscript{14} The *gharbura* performs all religious activities or rituals relating the clan who, in turn, is helped by the *harikuwari*. She is the customary head from the females of the same clan. Tiwas perform their rituals in a specific house known as *borghar* or *nubar*. A traditional Tiwa house has a barghar with two rooms, one for the household deity, and the other for cooking purposes. Generally, there is a small verandah in front and inside, there are two large rooms. The front room is called *nomaji*, and the second room is called *nukathi*. In the front verandah the weaving looms and the bamboo container for water are kept. The *nomaji* is treated as the guest room and also the place where paddy is kept. The *nukthi* combines the functions of a living-room, kitchen as well as store-room. In the *nomaji*, rituals are
to be performed by the gharbura and harikuwari. Harikuwari has to prepare the nubar for worship or ritual by plastering its floor with clay and cow dung. All the rituals of a clan are to be performed under the headship of the gharbura. The gharbura is also responsible in intervening or solving the problems arose out of the breakups of any law or rituals within the clan by any member of the clan.

The second layer in the society is the khel. A khel comprises of several different clans, i.e., walis or kuls with their respective gharburas. The gharburas representing from different clans, also known as the zela are the regular members of the khel. The khel takes the major decisions regarding the customs relating birth, marriage, death and other social occasions. Problems, arising out of the violence of social customs or laws by a member of any clan that appear to remain unsolved within the kul is to be justified and solved by the zelas in the khel.

The third layer in the society is the barokhel comprising out of several khels. This is the highest form of social union of a typical Tiwa society. Originally, there were twelve khels in a barokhel. But now a days, it is not necessary that the requirement should be exactly the twelve numbers of khels to form a barokhel; today, several numbers of khel consists of the barokhel. The barokhel is responsible for major decisions regarding the customs, rituals and social observances which are fairly big and hence goes beyond the control of a single khel. Similarly, serious issues regarding the violation of social customs or laws by any members from a khel
which cannot be solved by the *khel* within, is solved by the *zelas* in the *barokhel* who are the representatives of different *khels*.

### 3.3 Customs reflected in *rites de passages*:

Customs are closely associated with different phases of a life cycle. Starting from the birth, human life passes through some taboos fixed and predefined by the society. Tiwa society is based on the limit line of some unique procedures.

#### 3.3.1 Birth rites:

*Birth is the first crucial transition the individual makes as a living being; and all the rites, magic ceremonies, observances taboos associated with childbirth are *rites de passage*.*

and—

*Birth is the act or process of bearing or bringing forth offspring.* Before giving birth, a Tiwa woman follows certain beliefs or taboos during her gestation period. Such beliefs are-

- An expecting mother is barred from visiting a family where death has occurred to a member recently. Such family is considered to be impure. Paying visit to such a family by a pregnant woman is considered to lengthen her delivery time.
- The child expectant woman does not laugh at the blinds or lames as this may increase her labour pain at time of delivery of the baby.
- Killing animals and snakes is prohibited during the pregnant period.
- Unfinished weaving work is not good for health and it should be finished before delivery.
The pregnant woman should not stay idle during her pregnancy period, instead, she must do the primary household works as it lessens her labour pain and health of the baby will also remain sound.

Among the Tiwas, an expectant mother is helped by the two or three female helpers from the village known as ojani or giyati in delivering the child. After the birth, the mother takes rest in a bed of dried paddy stalks known as suti. There are certain taboos observed soon after the delivery of the baby.

- If she rises placing her weight on the hand over the earth, she is supposed to suffer from abdominal disorder, a kind of pain which is called as adala kamora by the Tiwas.
- If the mother falls on the earth while delivering the baby, she may suffer from disease known as prosuti rog.
- If the baby is senseless then bellmetal plates or bowl is rang in order to regain senses of the baby.
- If the mother suffers from any post natal problems, the husband or any close relative may enter into the room where delivery takes place for help but other persons are strictly prohibited to enter into the room.

One of our informants, Mrs. Phulmati Bardoloi from Bormanipur shares with the researcher an experience of her own—

_I have given birth my the two children at own residence quite comfortably without going to hospital. My neighbouring midwives took my care with love and affection in such a way that I even forget my pain. I cannot forget them in life time._
The new born baby is laid on a plaintain leaf and the mother washes him or her with tepid water. The umbilical cord is cut by a bamboo slice taken from a bamboo post of the house where the mother takes refuge. The umbilical cord is placed in a deep pit dug at a considerable distance from the house where the delivery took place. It is believed that if the umbilical cord is placed at a considerable distance, then the mother’s child bearing capacity increases. Till the naval cord has fallen off, the mother is not supposed to sleep with her back to the child. After the naval cord has fallen, the name giving ceremony is observed. Among the Tiwas of the plains, the impurity arising out of childbirth is known as kecha sua. The period extends from the date of birth till the date of aausgara or what is known to be manshwa or name-giving ceremony. During this period, the clan members observe certain taboos.

- They do not take out paddy from the granary.
- No ceremony can be observed during this period nor can any member of the clan enter the barghar.
- The clan members cannot take part in any social events during the impurity prevails in their clan because of child birth.

If the new born baby does not take mother’s milk or keeps on crying then Tiwas believe this as the result of rebirth of an expired soul of the clan. In such a case, the Tiwas take help of mangala and detect the person of the soul. According to the mangala, by whom the soul demands man (respect), the person concerned should pay the pair of pant and shirt to the baby. The attending midwives or the giyatis cannot come out of the delivery room without a ceremony.
at the threshold of the room is performed. The barozela takes Tulsi leaves, *dubori* (a kind of grass) and rice in banana leaf and offer prayer to God. A chicken or egg is sacrificed to finish a small ceremony. On the day of the *aaus gara* ceremony, the barozela sacrifices a cock and worships the deities. Hair of the child is then shaved. Sometimes the plain Tiwas are seen to hold another naming ceremony after one year or so when there are more new born babies in the clan which is held in the *baroghar* of the clan. Cock or hen is sacrificed by the barozela in the *baroghar* and it is customary to determine the future of the babies by observing the manner of death of the birds sacrificed. There is no purification ceremony in case of hill Lalungs. The hill Tiwas observe the name-giving ceremony in the presence of the *barozelas* of different clans. In this ceremony twelve pairs of cocks are sacrificed in case the child is a male and six pairs for a female child. Normally, hill Lalungs name a child after the grandparents or dead kin.

### 3.3.2 Customs of marriage:

According to SDFML—

*Marriage in another important transition in the life and status of the individual accompanied by a legion of rites, ceremonies, and symbolic regalia of which the bridal veil and wedding ring are the most familiar marriage rites also include, however, various observances to protect the groom against the dangerous power inherent in virgins, to protect the new couple from evil spirits, from the evil eye, etc. to secure the fruitful fulfillment of the union, to secure and enhance the safely and prosperity of the new home.*
Again—

*Marriage is a ritual which is the prescribe order for performing a series of rites.*

Marriage is the accepted form of union between a man and a woman. William A. Haviland *et al* defines marriage as,

*Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a socially or ritually recognised union between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between those spouses, as well as between them and any resulting biological or adopted children and affinity (in-laws and other family through marriage).*

Tiwas believe that marriage is a spiritual form union of two souls, hence, illegal unions, especially incestuous relations, are very much hated and in no circumstances, social recognition is given to such a union. Certain taboos relating to the marriage in the Tiwa society are-

- Marriage is strictly prohibited within the same clan or *kul*.
- There should not be marriage between step brother or step sister.
- Marriage from father’s clan or mother’s is restricted.
- Widow marriage is accepted.
- Monogamy is the socially recognized type of marriage although polygamy cannot be ruled out.
- Preferential marriage including cross-cousin marriages are not in vogue.
- Tiwas sometime accept the levirate but there is no space for sororarte in the society.
A marriage of a non-Tiwa girl by a Tiwa male is not discouraged but in that case the girl has to be given a clan or kul. Marriages are solemnized after the attainment of puberty as in general case. Clan exogamy is strictly adhered to. Cases of divorce are few and far between. A token bride price is paid.

Sharma Thakur broadly mentions four forms of marriage among the Tiwas.  

3.3.2.a Bar Biya:

The rich Tiwas prefer to this type of marriage which entails significant expenditure and some long drawn formalities. The guardians of the prospective couple take the initiative, with zelas has the chief role acting as the priest between them. barbiya continues for three days. A couple of days before the marriage, the groom and the bride are ceremonially inundated in their respective houses. The marriage rituals are practiced at the house of the bride on the third day. On the particular day, handsome feasts are arranged for the villagers in both the households. ju or zu, the rice beer is performed customarily. In the evening of the marriage day, the groom along with his friends and the zelas proceed to the bride’s house. The marriage procession is lead by a bhar. There are several types of bhar for different occasions of marriage ceremony among the Tiwas.

Kherumoni pindhua bhar is sent to the bride’s house with some delegates from the boy’s end on the eve of marriage to ascertain the marriage. This contains ju, betel nuts etc.
• The *borbhar* is sent 2/3 weeks before marriage. The *bhar* contains a pot of *ju*, 5 fowls, betel nuts, two pairs of clothes, a basket of *pithas*. The *bhar* is accompanied by 8-10 elderly members from the society of the boy’s side. The significance of the *bhar* is that the core discussion regarding the marriage between the parties takes place accompanied a good feast.

• The *khatira bhar* has much significance and it is sent to the bride’s on the day of marriage. The *bhar* contains one stack of banana, one pot of milk, three pots of rice and some betel leaves and nuts. There is a rich feast and elderly villagers from both the parties gathered at the girl’s house bless the couple for their prosperity.

An important part of the marriage ritual is the *kulsinga* ceremony, whereby the girl’s ties with her father’s *kul* or *bangsa* are ceremonially detached and she is given the status of a new member in her husband’s *kul*. Towards end, the newly married couple returns to the groom’s house.

### 3.3.2.b Joron Biya :

This type marriage is preferred form of marriage among Tiwas who are not economically sound. When the parents of both the family agree to the marriage, a date is set for the *joron* ceremony. The groom’s party comprising of elderly relatives comes to the bride’s house with ornaments, dresses and three *bhars* with different items and *ju*. The aged people of the girl’s village bless the couple with a small feast with *ju*. The couple then proceeds to the groom’s house,
marking the completion of the marriage rituals. It is a simple form of marriage.

3.3.2.c Paluai Ana Biya:

_Paluai ana biya_ or marriage by elopement is popular among the Tiwas and is prevalent in the Tiwa society and it is not considered as a crime. Being unsure of the family sanction for a union, a couple in love, often resort to such a marriage. The boy takes away his beloved to his residence with the help of friends. Two or three relatives of the boy go to report to the girl’s family members about the issue in the next day. The parents of the girl keep themselves away of this union normally even if this is within the acceptable social norm. On the seventh day of the elopement, a small ceremony is observed in the _barghar_ of the boy’s clan, with aged people of the clan and the village is invited. Two of the relatives of the groom’s family and the _zela_ goes to negotiate with the girl’s parents and finalize a date for the couple’s visit to the girl’s house. The couple along with some associates arrives at the girl’s house with _bhars_ comprising of _ju, pitha_, betel nut and leaf on the specific day. The people of the girl’s village are entertained with the _ju_ brought from the groom’s house and afterwards, the couple and their friends return to the boy’s house. Few days later, a ceremony called _bharsinga_ is held as per convenience in the girl’s house. A cock is sacrificed on this occasion and the girl’s father arranges a feast in this occasion.
One, Mrs. Malati Konwar from Jorabor stated the researcher a story relating her marriage—

_I and my husband Rupeswar Doli were in an affair. As our caste were different, my father in law did not agree us to stay at his home as I came running away to his son. It is just last month that he invited after our first child turns to the age of one year. Now we are living happily and I am now quite comfortable with the family._25

### 3.3.2.d Gobhia Rakha or Gharjiya:

_Gobhiya_ is a form of marriage when a groom gets married with a bride and used to stay at bride’s home after marriage. The Tiwas seem to have follow this trait of their old matriarchal system, in the form of the _gobhiya_ system of marriage. In this system, a Tiwa groom comes to live in the girl’s house. Generally, parents having a single daughter prefer to this form of marriage. There are very few formalities and rituals regarding this type of marriage. The only celebration in the name of community festival occurs is holding of a small community feast by the girl’s father on the specific day. The couple is taken inside the _barghar_ of the girl’s clan and the elderly relatives, aged person from the village bless the new couple to stay united for the whole life as ‘ek swami ek patni’.26 In such a marriage, _kulsinga_ ritual is not performed and a _gobhia_ may retain his right to be cremated in the _hatam_ of his original clan, if his father’s clan members and village elderly people so agree.

According to B. K. Gohain, there are three types of marriage in the Lalung society of the hills, which are as follows:27
3.3.2.e Marriage through negotiation:

According to consent of the couple, negotiations are done by the prospective groom and bride’s families in this type of marriage. The maternal uncle of the groom goes to the house of the bride with the gifts of *ju* and betel nut to fix the date of marriage. When the date of marriage is fixed, the groom along with his maternal uncle, other relatives and friends go to the bride’s house. A simple ceremony takes place there. The groom’s party is entertained with a splendid feast. The bride price is to be paid to the girl’s mother before the girl is taken away to stay in the house of bridegroom. When the groom returns with the bride to his residence, the maternal uncle or elder brother of the groom worship the clan gods and explains the bride in details about the rituals of different clan gods and deities.

3.3.2.f Marriage by mutual consent:

This is a highly preferred form of marriage among the hill Tiwas. The boy and girl after long term closeness comes into the decision to get married. This happens when one night, the boy sleeps with the girl in her house. The fact that the boy has married the girl is made known to the villagers and the parents of the boy next day. The villagers and friends of the groom come to the bride’s house and they are entertained with *ju*. Thereafter, the couple resides in the parental house of the bride following the matrilineal system.
3.3.2.g Marriage by force:

This is a special kind of marriage and in such a kind of marriage, the boy is taken forcefully by the young men of the girl’s village and compelled to enter into the marriage with the girl and become a resident in the girl’s house. This is usually seen when the young men of a girl’s village notice that a boy, in spite of being intimate with a girl is not sure of entering into marriage with the girl. The boy has to agree to his fate and the parents of the boy are informed about the marriage.

The Tiwas are very honest and simple people. Their society is running on the deep sense of belief to each other. They have enough respect to the girls get married into their caste from the other caste. The researcher has one such experience. It was noon in a hot day of summer. A midwife widow named Sumitra Senapati aged about 55 years from Tetelia was waiting for vehicles at Kumoi stoppage for her return journey after shopping. As our journey was also to Tetelia village for an interview about barat festival, she was picked up in the car. In the road we had some conversation and, in between, it was known that she was actually from a non-Tiwa community. She belonged to a kalita family and her father’s house was at Palashbari, Guwahati. This increased our inquisitiveness about their marriage and her position in the society. She narrated her experience as—

I used to stay at Maligaon working as house maid in a family but, later on, I built a good relationship with that family and they considered me as one of their family members. My husband was a shop keeper and stayed in their house in rent. He too
has a good relationship with the family. He was a very polite man. They arranged my marriage with Mr. Senapati. We decided to stay at Guwahati. When we came to this village for first time after marriage, all the elderly people of the village gathered in my husband’s house. They asked me about my clan, address and all basic information. They did some rituals and adopted me in their kul. During first few days, I had a bit of hesitations in adjustment as it was whole new environment for me. But the villagers gave so much love, affection and belief that I forgot myself within them. I could not even imagine going back to Guwahati for the purpose of residing. Later on, one of my brothers also used to stay here for several years. He too was very happy. I have one son and it is now ten years my husband departed but still I get the equal love and affection from all. Among the woman society I get a pioneer role in all respects.28

3.3.3 Death rites :

According to SDFML—

*Death is the last great transition and change : Rites for the dying and for the dead overlap into certain rites performed for the living kin of the recently dead. Purification from contact with the corpse or his belongings after must be accomplished before the living can resume his place in community life.*29

Funeral ceremony is connected to cremation, burial or disposal of the dead bodies. It is one of the oldest ceremonies connected to human life. Pettitt Paul observes this as—

*Funeral rites are as old as human culture itself, pre-dating modern Homo sapiens and dated to at least 300,000 years ago.*30
Disposal of the dead is different as per the difference in religion and caste. The Hindus believe that the soul is immortal and the body is transitory. The body is the vehicle of the soul in its journey towards eternity. Hence, after death, the soul mingles to great five great elements known *pancha Bhut* (Five matters - air, water, fire, earth and space). Carl Olson states, *The last rite of passage returns the body to the five elements and origins.*

Tiwas also have their own procedure in the disposal of the dead bodies. Certain taboos they follow during death are:

- Tiwas prefer dying inside the house; for them it is not portentous.
- Both cremation and burial are practiced.
- Dead bodies of minor, accident cases, pregnant woman, drowned person, epidemic cases etc. are buried.

The cremation or burial ground is known as the *mangkhor*, within which there are exclusive areas for each clan known as *hatam*. As soon the death occurs in a family, the news is circulated among the various clan members living in the villages. The *giyati* both male and female, belonging to different clans arrive at deceased person’s home as they have to perform important roles in the death ceremonies. As the dead body is prepared for the last rites, food for the deceased is cooked with rice, egg and brinjal. A part of the food thus cooked is put in the mouth of the dead person and another is kept in a bamboo plate. After then the vessels used for cooking are destroyed in public place. The elderly members of various clans assemble in the courtyard of the deceased. The *giyati* takes all the
responsibility for observing the cremation rites. Each khuta selects one giyati for observing the cremation rites and for this; he has to be formally invited. The giyati mel entrusts the giyati with the duty to carry out the death rites. One or two members of each khuta advance to the cremation ground having bamboos and firewood. As soon as the making of the pyre is finished, the giyati informs the villagers to carry the dead body to the mangkhor. The dead body is brought by the villagers to the mangkhor on a bamboo bier made of seven long bamboo pieces. The female giyati also accompanies the march carrying the uncooked rice offered by the relatives, which is left at the mangkhor. At the cremation ground, the body is positioned on the already made pyre and the giyati first applies fire over the face of the dead body. After then, others may apply the same on the face of the dead body. In the case of burial, a roomy hole, about seven or nine feet long, five feet deep and two or three feet broad is dug and some leaves and grass are sited. The dead body is located in the hole laying the head in the north-east direction. The Tiwas believe in the existence of evil spirits and take precautions in their return from the cremation ground. Arriving at the village, a few elderly members of the khuta arrange a mixture of water, tulsi (basil) leaves, dubari (a kind of grass) and cow dung in a pot spray the mixture over the persons. A fire is lit at the entrance of the village and the participants of the funeral procession need to cross over it. It is believed that evil spirits, if any will automatically leave then. The participants take bath before entering into their respective homes and they again purify themselves by the same rituals. After
some time, the *giyati* and the other attended persons congregate at the courtyard of the family of the deceased. The heir of the deceased keeps one pot of special *ju* known as the *pan han mad*, some salt, betel and nut, some clothes and ornaments on a banana leaf and are distributed among the male and female *giyati*. The *pan han mad* is offered to all.

*Karam* or the death ceremony is observed jointly by the *bangsa* and this may be kept on waiting for five or six years as it is an expensive matter. At the decision to observe this ceremony is taken, all the members of the clan as well as members of other clans are informed at least ten or fifteen days ahead. All the families of the *bangsa* have to donate to the common fund of the *karam*. Earlier, five pigs were essential for this ceremony to be sacrificed but now a days, *karam* is observed with one pig and five cocks only. The pig is sacrificed ceremonially and offerings of cooked food are placed at the *manghkhor*. Then all the villagers participate in the community feast. The *giyatis* are honoured for their services of help and support in terms of both cash and kind. The entire process comes to an end with the *sumsira pansira* ritual. Here, each of the elderly members gathered is given a piece of betel nut. This ceremony is observed to escape from the disturbances of the evil spirits. The hills Tiwas observe *phidri jongkhong* ceremony annually for the whole village to offer their prayer to the departed souls so that no harm is caused to the living members.
Babul Bordoloi, Bor Manipur informed that his family has been maintaining the custom to worship their forefathers before any pujas or festivals they want to celebrate as a mark of respect.

3.4 Customs in festivals:

3.4.1 Seasonal festivals:

Celebration of Bihu:

Bihu is the prime festival of Assamese society. It is observed thrice a year. D. Roshen writes about it as—

_Bihu is the chief festival in the Assam state of India. It refers to a set of three different festivals: Rongali or Bohag Bihu observed in April, Kongali or Kati Bihu observed in October, and Bhogali or Magh Bihu observed in January._⁴²

The festival, Bihu associates closely with the rural life of farmers through different stages of their harvest. The various cycles of crops of an agro-based society reflected by the celebration of Bihu festival. According to S. D Sharma—

_Bohag Bihu is a sowing festival, Kati Bihu is associated with crop protection and worship of plants and crops and is an animistic form of festival, while Bhogali Bihu is a harvest festival._⁴³

Traditionally, the Tiwas have been celebrating the Bihus in the days fixed by the kings and royal members of different kingdoms of the community. The Tiwas used to observe the Bihu as the _pachoraja_ converted to koch at the ‘domain’ with other Assamese communities. According to Jonaram Nath—
Tiwa people of Pachoraja Kingdoms observed their Bihu on Tuesday and Wednesday. In this area they changed it this ritual only 25-26 years ago. The Tiwa people of Barapujia area of Morigaon district have been observing the Bihu festival at domahi since 1962.34

People observe their Bihu festivals on Tuesday and Wednesday in the villages of foothill areas of Khola. In the datiyalia kingdom areas like Gobha and Nellie of Morigaon district, the villagers observe Magh Bihu and Bohag Bihu on any of the Saturday and Sunday of that specified month. The Tiwas of Gobha observe Bihu after it is observed at Nellie. In the chahori area also, people observe Magh Bihu on Tuesday and Wednesday and Bohag Bihu on Saturday and Sunday of particular month. It is observed-

Since 1974 onwards the Tiwas of Chahari area have also been observing Bihu festivals at domahi. In the hill side villages of karbi Anglong and in the border areas of Morigaon district, observance of Bihu festivals depend upon the completion of the worship of their deities in the thans.35

Bohag Bihu:

In the morning the members of the family gather in the borghar and arrange pieces of fruits like bottle gourd, brinjal, turmeric thekera and keep them fixed on some bamboo sticks. In the morning the cattle, especially the cows are taken for bath. In some villages, the Tiwa people worship their deities in that morning in the courtyard in front of the borghar for well being of their household animals, properties, crop grown etc. They also worship baghraja for the protection of their animals and properties. Fowls are sacrificed
and ju is taken in all the pujas. After the puja the cows are imprinted of a mixture of ashes and mustard oil by the pieces of bottle gourd and bamboo rings. The youths start singing playing pepa, dhol (drum) etc. The animals are thrown the pieces of gourd, binjal etc. Then the animals are given the ritualistic bath and as this process is over, the young boys indulge in spare throw competition among themselves. In the areas of Nellie, Khola, Gobha, Chahari, the contest of different sports are held among different clans. At the end of these games, in some villages the participants ritually take chilly chicken curry with pot herb. In the midday and afternoon the zela and harikuvari offer sandah, pithas of rice powder and ju or zu to the deities, ancestors and to the seniors of the family wishing their blessings.

The cowherds assemble the bunches of makhiyati and dighlati to use on the day whips to their cattle. In the evening the cattle return home, the owners of the cattle blow gentle breeze with a hand fan. Each clan gathers the weaving tools and cultivation tools in the courtyard of borghar and a customary worship is observed. Rice powder mixing water is sprinkled in the agricultural and weaving tools. After this, people show respects to their elders, seniors and are given new cloths. They do not take meal without showing respects to the elderly people. From the day of Bohag Bihu, the Tiwas perform huchari in the houses of the villagers and this continues for several days. The young boys and girls play dhop in the day of Bihu. Some of the rituals observed in Bohag Bihu are-

- In the day eve of the Bohag Bihu coconut, betel, nut trees are tied with straw so that it will increase fertility of fruits of the trees in the season.
In the day of the Bihu, branches of *bhang tree* or *pachatia tree* are dug as if they were planted, in the paddy field so that the crops are protected from the attack of the agricultural pests as they believe.

In the day of Bihu, heaps of soil are mounted around the root of the bamboo tree. They believe, if they do so it will increase new plants.

In the evening of Bihu, a fire is lit and different herbs such as *bihlongi, bhang* are burnt to spread the smog to the cattle with a hand fan.

Cattle are sprinkled with divine water composed of milk, water, uncooked rice, *dubori* leaves, *tulsi* leaves etc.

Cattle are tied by new ropes.

New cloths are ritually offered to the cattle and then those are used by man.

Cattle legs are washed with sacred water.

Cattle worship is performed in the evening.

Seniors and elders are shown respect by bowing down by young and junior ones.

*pithas, ju,* and other traditional cuisines are shared by the community members in this Bihu.

*Huchari* is performed and youngsters shares lots of merriment among themselves.
Kati Bihu:

The Lalungs also celebrate Kati Bihu on the day of *makar sankranti* in month of Ahin like other Assamese communities. In the morning the Tiwa people go to their paddy field. They plant bamboo thorns and the scales of *rabab tenga* are spread in the paddy fields. In the evening they burn the earthen lamp of mustard oil in their paddy fields. They sacrifice fowl to satisfy Lord Biswakarma gathering all in agricultural plot. A small worshipping ceremony is observed and offer *naibedya*.(mugs, banana etc.) Tiwa people worship the deities offering new betel-nut and betel leaf in the *borghar* and *thans*. The *zela* offers the betel nut and betel leaf and worship the deities in the *borghar*. The *harikuwari*, king, royal officials and the *deuris* of different *thans* never eat new betel nut of the season without offering it to the deities in the *borghar*.

Magh Bihu:

Magh Bihu is celebrated at the end of the harvesting season. It is the festival of eating and enjoyment. The Tiwas of Morigaon district observe Magh Bihu in the *domahi* of the month of *Puh* along with the other Assamese communities. In the hillside areas, people make high *mejis* in the name of their king, *kunwari* and *senapati* but the plain Tiwas do not make such *mejis* in the name of kings or other officials. In the early morning of the day of Bihu, at first, the king and the *senapati* burn the *mejis* while taking their bath in the nearby pond. After burning *mejis* the King comes to *patchora* where he changes his dresses.
Tiwa people offer pitha, laru, sandah, ju to their deities and ancestors in the borghars on the day of Magh Bihu. In the evening the juniors and the younger people offer respect to the senior and elders of their family and take dinner. Ju and rice are given on the banana leaf to the senior and parents. In the areas of Gubha kingdom, the Tiwa people celebrate Magh Bihu festival soon after the celebration the Jonbeel mela. Jonbeel mela starts on the first Thursday of the month of Magh and lasts till the Saturday. They commemorate the Saturday as uruka and observe their Magh Bihu on the Sunday.

3.4.2 Celebration other festivals:

Besides Bihu, Tiwas also celebrate some other festivals, Fairs and pujas. Some of such festivals are briefly discussed below-

Jonbeel Mela:

This mela has a long history of its origin and growth. It was first structured several centuries ago by the Ahom kings to discuss the existing political situations. Jonbeel mela is one of the most eye-catching and unique festivals of Assam where the age old barter system is still alive. It is a three day long community fair held the weekend of Magh Bihu at a historic place known as Dayang Belguri at Jonbeel, 5 km north from Jagiroad in the Morigaon district of Assam. The tribes like Tiwa, Karbi, Khasi and Jayantia from the different parts of north east come down from the hilly areas with their products and exchange their merchandise with the local people
in a direct barter system. This three day long festival gets its name from the lake next to which it is celebrated, the ‘Jonbeel’. The Jonbeel, the term has two parts ‘Jon’ means moon and ‘Beel’ means large tank of water or wetland. The shape of the wetland is like the crescent moon. Hence, the name of the place is known as the ‘Jonbeel’

The Jonbeel Mela is organized under the patronage of the Gobha kingdom. Agni puja (fire worshipping) is performed before the start of Jonbeel mela as a mark to pray for the well being of the mankind. A community fishing in the Jonbeel wetland symbols the beginning of the fair which is accompanied by a huge and vibrant bazaar. Superb traditional dance and music are performed by the various tribes. The Gobha king with the other kings of Tiwa tribes, along with their courtiers comes to the mela. They have their dorbar in the mela and collect taxes from the subjects. A day before the fair, a community feast is set by the king with his officers on the bank of the Jonbeel. The main focus of the Jonbeel mela is to promote the harmony and brotherhood among the different communities and tribes dwelling in the north-east India. An atmosphere of fun and joviality can be experienced in the fair. Apart from the barter system, exchange via money is also now prevalent in the fair. Goods like wooden rice pounder, wooden furniture, mattress, fishing equipment, quilt, bamboo and cane products, wooden of plastic toys and craft works, agricultural apparatus, utensils are bought and sold in the mela. Community fishing in the mela where many people take part from different places itself is fun at the Jonbeel.
In the *mela*, herbs, spices, fruits, ginger, etc. are brought by the people of the hills called as *mama and mami* to interchange them with rice, *pithas*, *sandoth* and other food materials that cannot be grown on hills. Many tribal villagers from the diverse parts of Assam appear in this beautiful place to meet the people of the plains for exchanging their goods.

**Barat festival:**

Barat utsav is a community utsav of Tiwa Tribes, which bears a traditional religious-cultural character. Brata festival is celebrated in the full moon day called Purnima of the month of Puha. The Barat Festival is observed by the plain Tiwas of the Tetelia area of Morigaon district. The festival has been celebrating by the people since long. This festival is also known as the Usha Barat or Uwa Barat. According to a belief this festival is gifted by the Dimoria king as a dowry with his daughter who got her married to the king of Tetelia.

The legend behind the festival is that the Demoria king had two daughters named as Bhadia and Usha respectively. The younger girl Usha was very kind and she requested her father to make a stool for worshipping the gods and goddesses. The king accordingly made a wooden stool named as *sungari* which was shaped with the mark of flower. When both of the princess grew younger, the king of Kumoi married bhadia, the elder daughter and the king of Tetelia married the younger daughter, Usha. The king of Dimoria gifted the Barat Festival as dowry to his daughters and said to celebrate the
festival every year. Thus the Barat festival is known as Bhadia and Usha Barat. But somebody says it as Uwa Barat which means the best in Tiwa language. Usha was gifted with various ferocious animals of jungle and a dola (cradle) but without the sungari stool where she worshiped. Both the king and queen drifted the sungari stool in a string of the hillside keeping a flower on it. The string flows it to another string, itila. The strong current of the itila string flows it to the river Kapili. But the stool sungari floated and started to flow towards the opposite direction against the river flow and the stool stopped in the river bank near the Tetelia king’s home. The queen dreamt in her dream that her sungari stool arrived and waiting for her. Next morning the queen with the king brought the sungari stool and placed in their place of worship. After a year, the queen got a child. The queen could remember about the festival and hence one night she went out to the back side of their residence and cleaned a place for worship. She burnt three hundred and sixty flames of mustard oil in the husk of outenga. The queen secretly worshipped for several days beyond the knowledge of the king. The king searched her at her baby’s cry one night and saw that she was worshiping the deities. When she returned, the king asked her the about this. The queen told the king about the festival that at her marriage her father gifted her and asked her to observe it every year. But she could not express it to her father-in-law and the king so she was observing it by herself. The king heard her and in the next day, he discussed the matter with his officers where the queen was also invited. But the queen ignored them and she
was worshiping singing *naam* (devotional songs). Through *naam* she demanded for new dresses and other ornaments and the king and the counselors agreed for that. The very next day all the villagers decided to observe the Barat festival according to the advice of the queen. This festival becomes popular as the Barat festival or *barat puja* and also called the *brateswar* or *sita puja*. Since then, the people had been celebrating the Barat festival for several years. Many people died of epidemic in a year. The king with his royal family was also infected and died. Many people left the village and those who were still living gradually avoided the festival.

After a long gap the festival has reappeared. This time, the legend is related to a girl who was abandoned and the villagers ordered her to leave the village. Being helpless she took shelter in the nearby Tetelia hill. The ferocious animals became her companion. After this, the Barat God possessed her. One day she was worshipping the deities singing *naam* and cried out loudly and then some people who came to jungle for fire wood saw her. They rushed back to the village and informed the villagers. The villagers came and saw the girl was crying alone in the jungle. The people of the village brought the girl to their village and a few days later the village head dreamt a dream regarding the Barat festival and the rituals behind it from its beginning to the end and also could know the reason behind fact why the girl was crying and singing alone *naam* in the jungle. Since then, people of the village decided to resume the festival taking the girl as the main *naamati* (devotional singer). The Barat festival is started by ceremony of Saraswati puja
from the day of the Kati Bihu and ended with celebration of the main puja at the fullmoon night of the month puh.\textsuperscript{37}

In the festival, one girl of tender age who has not still reached her puberty is selected as princess and is bathed by the village woman on every Saturday from the day they observed the Saraswati puja. She is accompanied by other four girls and namati to bring water from seven different places (Ghats) of the river Kolong. For this the girls have to be in fasting (brat), bring water from different places (Ghats) of the river and worship in the sungari stool for seven Saturday during this period \textit{i.e.}, Kati Bihu to the fullmoon night of the month puh. The Baratani (the princess) has to observe same ritual of bringing water and worship in the sungari stool. The \textit{loro} of the village also offer puja in the kalika than wishing the success of the Festival. For the main Barat Festival the symbols and masks of different wild animals like tiger, dear, bear, horn bill, Mahadeo, Parbati and some other deities are replicated and readied for dance performance. Near the bongshibadan than of Tetelia hillside, the Barat puja is observed on the full moon night of the month of puh. To the west of the than, an alter is arranged where a wooden stool is kept to sit the princess of Barat. The chairs are reserved in the right side of baratani’s seat. The songs sung in this festivals are unique. There are a total of 120 verses of songs sung in the festival. Of that, the first twenty verses are sung on the day of the Saraswati puja. Every verse is sung for seven times. The village youths dance with fire sticks using the drum, and flute. There are several types of songs. A special kind of dance are performed in the
midst of the songs is called *jakoiya charai lou*. Another form of songs that the young boys and girls also sing is *jura naam*. People dance with the masks of different birds and animals in the rhythm of the Barat songs in that night. The dance performance is ended by the dance wearing the masks of lord *Mahadeo and Parbati*. The night is enlightened with flames of vessel pots. At this time mustard oil polished stool of the main *baratani* is forwarded to the four girls or *ayatis* to occupy it by their force. Among them, the one who becomes eligible capturing it, is rewarded by the king. Thereafter, the officials bring a kind of chair full of *mah-prasad* and other fruits, flower, betel nut and place it in the specified spot; worship lord Mahadeo in presence of the *baratani*. The *baratani* moves round the puja of the festival for seven times and declares the end of the festival. Then the *mah-prasad* and the fruits are all distributed among the participants.38

In context of *barat puja* following elements are used-

- **Mask**: Barat is a festival of mask. Different birds and animals are replicated by their mask in the festival. At present participants prepare these at their home with bamboos, clay, woods and colours differently. The researcher met one Mr. Sarbeswar Bordoloi in Tetelia who is expert in making masks.

- **Straight lamp wick**: Straight lampwicks are prepared of four-five inches long bamboo stricks with the wheels of cotton thread. In every stand, known as *chatbari*, hundreds of lampwicks are arranged.
• Gadaliparia song: This song has similarities to that of the Assamese Bihu songs which differs with the reference of the sato raja and pacho raja kingdoms. The people from different Tiwa villages come with pati dhol (a kind of drum), pipes of buffalo horn etc. and keep singing these songs. These songs convey a message of love among the youths.

• Charai lou: Charai lou is one of the beautiful musical instruments which is of two kinds such as, charai lou and jakoiya charai lou. The charai lou is made of bamboo thread and with a dove made of wood. The jakoiya charai lou is also made of same items but it differs in structure and size. It is performed by three persons in the Barat festival.

• Dola: This is a bamboo made pot. Every official and clan of Tetelia king offer two dolas full of rice, corn and rice powder. The dolas are placed with ‘chatbari’.

• Chatbari: This is like the trishul, the weapon of Lord Siva which are made of bamboo. Some round lemons or acid fruits (rabab tenga) are composed in this chatbari in the shape of lotus and use as vessel to lighten. Flowers like gendhali, rangchi, babori etc also added in this chatbari for decoration.

• Bordhol and patidhol: Bordhol and patidhol are two musical instruments. Bardhol is round in shape with seven-eight inches radious and about two feet in length. It is made of wood and skin of goat. Bordhol is used in some social and holy functions of the Tiwa Society.
Pipe of the buffalo horn: It is a special type of flute (pepa) made of dead buffalo horn. Most of the tribes of Assam use this pipe. The Tiwa youth play it in the agricultural fields in the time of their leisure (in the month of Aghun and Puh). This pipe is played by the performers in the external Barat stage.

Singal Puja festival:

It is an Agricultural festival celebrated among the Tiwas. The people of the village of Manipur generally observe it. But at present, the villagers lost their age old rituals to perform it. There is a legend behind the observance of this festival. It goes like this-

There were three statues of stone named as Balakongar, Langtakangar and Panikangar and a pond known as Thinamkhalang in Amswai area of West Karbi Anglong. The Tiwa people believed that this was place of residence of lord pha-Mahadeo who first created a lord Balakongar. When lord Balakongar touched his head with hand, soon then, two horns appeared on his head. His son Matharwali also got two horns by birth which he kept by covering with cloths. At that time, the king Ruphang ruled in Amswai who had a strong zela named Agarwali. Regarding the worship of lord Mahadeo, a debate arose between Matjarwali and Agarwali that who will lead the puja. Agarwali challenged Matharwali for wrestling and strong Agarwali up rooted the horns of Matharwali who complained about the incident to the king Ruphang. At this crime, Agarwali was imprisoned to a cottage in a remote area. He worshiped
lord Mahadeo for his release. Lord Mahadeo came to his dream and advised to make two instruments. In the next day, when he saw that the princess of the kingdom had come there to collect banana leaves, he asked for her bamboo sticks and cutters. He cut a bamboo and made seven holes and known as thurang (flute). There was heavy rainfall and storm for the entire next week. After then, he went out to the king’s paddy field and could find a piece of wooden log and a skin of dead animal. With these items, he made a khrum (drum). When he played the thurang, all the trees of the Amswai kingdom started trembling. The king knew this and called him; made him assistant zela. Following this incident, a puja is used to hold thereafter. This is known as singal puja.

For singal puja, the Tiwa people arrange tortoise, birds, vegetables of different kind, rice, betel-nut and betel leaf, wine, bamboo with leaves, bamboo pots to drink wine and cages to keep the birds. The loro, changdoloi, changmaji and other people of the village go to the jungle to gather bijuli bamboo to build flute. Stones are brought from the Baghara hill and set up altar in the chamadi as symbols of the dead loris. The villagers remain fasting on the day before the puja. Females go to the forest to collect pot-herbs and are fried and enjoyed to break the fasting in the evening.

It is customary that each clan of the village should donate one bird for the Singal Puja. The cages of the birds are pre arranged with two horns which are symboling the Singal deity. On the banana log, a tortoise is kept heading east for worship. In this puja ju is essential but the the participation of women are restricted. A kitchen
is arranged in the place of worship. The loro dedicates the tortoise with chant of the mantras. In the puja, the birds are worshiped and the entrails are offered to the deities in the name of respect. Two pots with equal quantity of water and rice are placed in two pits near the bamboo. After the cooking is finished they dedicate to their deities and then enjoy the food. Using khrum and thurang, they start to dance and in the evening. The youth also dances in the chamadies. In the next morning they plough their paddy field and again dance. Towards afternoon of the day, they bring out the pots of water and rice that was placed in two pits on the previous day. They believe that there will be drought if the volume of water decreases in the pot than the quantity of rice and it will be flood if the volume of water in the pot increases than that of the rice. They end this festival in the chamadi and in the evening of that day there is an worship of their deities.

Gosai Uliuwa mela:

Initially these melas were organized by the Tiwa kings. Now a days the descendants are observing these melas as the mark of glory and pride of the age old tradition. The rituals observed in such melas reflect the existance of royal dynasties of the Tiwas.

• Gobha mela:

The most powerful and ancient kingdom among the datiyolia Rajya is Gobha kingdom. The all other small Tiwas principalities grew centering this kingdom. Gobha king deserves four melas of different distinctiveness on different times and place of the kingdom.
The first mela is Gobha mela. It is celebrated at Gobha on the sixth day of ‘Gobha Bihu’. In Gobha Kingdom’s ‘Bohag Bihu’ is celebrated one week after general ‘Bohag Bihu’ festival of Assam. harikuwari plays an important role in this mela.42

On the previous day of the mela the officers of the king bathed and clean the war weapons. On the day of the mela harikuwari observes worship at barghar in the morning. Then the officers including with the weapons go out of the village and smeared the armaments with blood of fowls; the drum beaters play drums, they enter the village with music and dance and come to the king’s residence. harikuwari then asks the group about the blood of the weapons and reasons of their triumph. The officers answer that they have jubilantly come back from war win and blood of weapons is its proof. harikuwari invites all the officers and honours to them. As a part of pride and honour, order is given to roam about the idol of lord Krishna in the locality aroung the kingdom. A huge mela is designed in an open field and the idol of lord is established there. A number of people assemble there to celebrate the occasion.

• Nakhola mela:

Nakhola is situated at Jagiroad of Morigaon district. This place used to be the head quarter of the Gobha king. The king had chosen this place for suitable to rule over his large kingdom. As it is newly established court yard, hence, it is named as Na-Khola. A mela takes place at the presence of the king on the 7th day of the Bohag Bihu of Gobha. The day is Saturday and is just the following day of
Gobha *mela*. In this *mela*, the king plays the major role instead of *harikuwari*. On the day before the *mela*, the war weapons are cleared up, cleaned and bathed. On the *mela* day, the king observes worship at his *barghar*. The *mela* is celebrated in an open field at Nakhola. The idol of lord Krishna is carried on to the *mela* spot and the king with his officials follows the procession. The king proceeds followed by the idol of lord Krishna. At the *mela*, the king and the officers accept their seats according to position. Then the soldiers of the king demonstrate their military exercises in front of the king. Huge congregation of people, shops and markets, drums, music and other amusements creates a tremendous scene.

• **Kharbeel mela**

*Kharbeel Mela* is another *mela* that has been observed under the patronage of Gobha king. It is held on the day before the Bohag Bihu of Gobha kingdom on the bank of ‘Kharbeel’ (A wetland area). Gobha king claim his taxes from his subjects here. This *mela* is held on Friday and Saturday as the Gobha Bihu is on Sunday. These day is regarded as *uruka* of Gobha Bihu. Fishes are calmed as tax from the people on Friday after the community fishing at the ‘beel’. On Saturday goods are exchanged by barter system. Hill people come down to the market place with their agricultural products and exchanged to other necessary things. A sense of love and brotherhood is reflacted among the people in the *mela*. 
• **Nellie mela :**

The *Nellie mela* is held one week after of the Bohag Bihu festival of Assam on Saturday. On the preceding day, all the required deals are done for *mela*. Age old war weapons are bathed and cleaned to display on the *mela day*. On the day, the idol of Lakshmi-Narayan is carried to *mela* spot which is followed by the king, the officials, drum beaters, dancers and other subjects. On the *mela*, the king takes his honourable position and enjoy the exercise and war-techniques displayed by his subjects. At the evening the lord’s idol is carried back to the *namghar* and resettle there. After that, the officers’ gather in king’s residence and discuss on their administrative matters.

• **Khola mela :**

The mela is held for two days on Sunday and Monday three days after Bohag Bihu celebration. The first day of the *mela* is called, *bheti karha*, an ocassion of collection of taxes. On the day before the mela, the hill Tiwas living in different hills come-down to the plains with their musical instruments and take shelter in the locality in groups. At night, they traditionally set a fire; around this all groups discuss for arrangement of the next day, take meal and make amusements by singing and dancing. They take the packets of brinjal, rice, chilies etc. in a *hora* (a kind of busket) and march to the king’s house. The second day is observed as *mela*. On that day, music and dance parties admirably escort the king and other officials, homes to the *bihutoli*. 
• **Chahari mela**:

This *mela* is observed in Chahari kingdom of the Tiwas. Long after the king Jongal Balahu’s death, Chahari came under the regime of Gobha. Chahari was established by Gobha king mainly to observe religious rites and rituals. Thus, there are several worships associated with the bihu and *mela* of Chahari. The king of Chahari was liable to observe four worships—*kalikha puja*, *bauli puja*, *basundhari puja* and *mahadeo puja* on four different *thans* before celebrating Bohag Bihu and *mela*. On first day of Bihu, the *basundhari puja* is observed by the king. One day later *mahadeo puja* is observed. The next day is observed as *rajar bheti luwa* and the following day is *mela* day. The process of the *mela* is the same to the other *melas*.

**3.4.3 Customs reflected in seasonal observance**:

The Tiwas follow numerous occasions throughout the year. The *bangsa or khuta* observes a number of community rituals in a year. Besides the *bangsa or khuta* worships, the whole village observes certain rituals and customs during a year. Such community rituals are carried out to satisfy the *than* deities. Such *thans* deities are established in a village or common to a cluster of villages. The Tiwas believe the *Mahadeosal than* of *Khala* and *Basundhari than* of chahari Mauza of Nagaon district is very blessed, where annual rituals are held. Principal pujas held among the Tiwas are mentioned below:
• Deo-sewa:

This festival is usually observed in Kati-Aghon (October-November) when the first betel nuts of the season are ready to eat. harikuwari clean the barghar in the morning, gharbura takes out the last years basket which is hanged in the corner of the barghar. This contains last year’s offering such as betel nuts, packed rice etc. This is replaced by a new one. The worship is done to satisfy the deities, ancestors. Offering of packed rice, betel nuts are made and put the baskets. After such offering they eat betel nut. It is observed in order to make the villagers self-reliant for the year.

• Kalika puja:

This puja is held in the month of Kati (October-November) In this puja goddess Kamakhya is worshipped. At first, the barghar is cleaned and made ready for the worship. In the corner of the barghar an altar is made and earthen lamps are flamed. Tortoise and white fowls are sacrificed and the worship is done. This worship is done in order to get an augmented yield of the crop as well as improved health of the people.

• Bhakat Sewa:

Among the Tiwas of the plains, every khuta observes Bhakat Sewa normally in the month of Aghon (December-January). In this ceremony, the gharbura make a prayer to the presiding deities in the early morning. After then, all elderly clan members come and sit in the courtyard facing round heading towards west keeping a
bota (plate) of betel and nut in front of them. All worships and ju is shared among themselves. Here, prayers and offerings are made to the ancestors and the deities of the bangsa (clan).

- **Bhagawati puja:**

  Some Tiwas, known as the Pachorajia Lalungs, celebrate Ai Bhagawati worship during the month of Jeth (May-June) every year. The women folk makes a raft with banana stems, on which they make offerings of mah prasad (ceremonial submission of soaked gram, pigeon peas, banana etc.) and let it floating on a river. The main aim of this puja is to satisfy the deity Ai Bhagawati through worship for the peace and prosperity of the villagers.

- **Sani puja:**

  Sani puja is observed in the month of Jeth (May-June) outside the village especially in jungles to drive away evil spirits from the village. A place is selected and cleaned. At that specified place people come with different items for offering to the deities. A pig and several cock (black, red and mixed colour) are sacrifice in the name of satbuni, barobuni, baghdeu, gobha raja etc. (all are their deities). A Total eighteen gods and goddess are worshipped in this puja. After the sacrifice, the participants take a feasts out of the sacrificed animals. Ju is shared by the members. Only males participate in this puja. At the return after puja , they ritually do and another small pija before entering the village.
• **Hogra puja:**

Hogra puja is mainly observed by the Tiwas living in the foothill areas such as Deosal, Kathitatali, Kandali and Manipur as an annual religious festival in the *chamadi.*49 The ritual is practiced for the well-being of the crops and the same is finished by planting trees. Besides the annual rites and rituals, the Tiwas of both the hills and plains carry out a number of occasional rites.

• **Rati sewa:**

Rati sewa is another significant ritual which is observed frequently (half yearly or annually) for the welfare of the villagers. But as per demands of individual households, it may be observed several times in a year.50 When there is any severe illness in a family, the head of the household takes oath in front of the deities to offer one pig or fowl at the Rati Sewa.

• **Yangli Misawa:**

Yangli, the festival is similar to the Lakhmi puja of neighbouring Assamese community. It is observed to worship Goddess ‘Lakshmi’, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity.51 The main purpose of the festival is to acquire the welfare of both private and public life as well as for good harvest of crops. The Yangli festival is observed by the Hill Tiwas by tradition. But in the plian, this festival is about to be extinction. This festival is seen be observed in the house of the village heads of *Datiyolia* villages of Tiwa inhabiting areas at one point of time. At the evening on the day of the
festival, the religious priests like the doloi, maji, fador reach the home of loro, the head priest. Each of the priests brings with them one pair of hen and the loro, blesses them to bring hens in their next three generations. On the occasion of the festival the penthai (Young boys) wear new traditional garments as thenga, togla, thenas, tangali, turban etc., adorned with feathers of bird and different ornaments and performs the ritual dance. In the evening the loro orders four of his priests, experts and the cooks to make ready a spot of worship for offering of betel-nut in the respect of the deities. Then the loro offers a separate worship of betel-nut and betel-leaf for satbuni, Barobuni and for their eighteen deities. After completion of the preliminary work the pangchi experts (flute experts) play their flutes for seven times in memory of their deity and forefathersn as per the instruction of the loro. After then, the doloi, maji and the experts dance and move for seven times around the fire at the rhythm of the long drum and flute. One of the young guys is dressed like Godess Lakshmi, the others sing and dance moving around the fire for seven times. The girls present ju to the young dancers time to time in between the dance. This colourful dance programme continues for the entire night.

In the next day the loro and the other priests start to the Yangli field in fasting which is prepared previously for the festival under a big tree. A small hut with bamboo and tree leaves is also made and readied for the pre scheduled dance where the young guys dance with whistle and the local people of the area and their relatives offer them ju. On that day, the loro sacrifice seven goats,
three pigs, two hens, one duck and one pigeon in the name of the respective deities. They also sacrifice three black goats to *pha Mahadeo, satbuni* and God *Nara singh* and also sacrifice three white goats to their God *badal maji*. One female goat for *changpali* is also sacrificed followed by a prayer for peach and for increasing agricultural production. The *loro* also sacrifices pigs for ghosts, evils spirits and witches. Bunches of new rice is also kept in the worship. Before evening, they welcome Lakshmi, the symbolic guy, with drum, flute to the bank of a pool from the place where he was kept in the yangli yard. Then they ride a representative boat in the water of the pool and sing explaining the story how goddess Lakshmi was brought to the world. Then they sacrifice two hens and compute their luck and make prediction. Thereafter, they return to the yangli yard, their spot of worship where the rice bunches were kept and worship one duck and one pigeon. Towards the evening, they gather in the dance yard and dance in circle for seven times with Laxmi and ends the dance programme. The participants take their dinners with the fried meats of the sacrificed pig, goat, hens that they worshiped in the puja. After the dinner they bring the Laxmi (the symbolic guy) to the house of the *loro* by a march. Coming to the *loro’s* residence and entering to the Laxmi house, they kept the bunches of rice on a raised stage and worship a black goat. The young guys dance till the midnight and take rest thereafter.

In the next day morning again a yangli dance programme is arranged in the yard of loro’s home without the observance of any puja or worship or any worship. In the evening the yangli guys
come to their chamadi and dance for sometime and the festival ends formally.

• **Wansuwa or wanzua:**

This is chiefly an agriculture related festival. *Wan* means rice powder or cake; *suwa* means to grind. Wansuwa means to ‘grind rice powder’. This festival is also celebrated to satisfy Lakshmi, the prime Goddess of wealth. *Wansuwa* is generally celebrated in the month of September of November by different clans of the Tiwas. Since celebration of this festival is expensive hence, normally, people observe it once in five years. But they kept on grounding for the whole year making of *ural* (mortar), the main instrument to grind rice powder. The very first day of the festival, on Monday, the villagers greet the young boys in chamadi. New chamadi members are selected among the younger for which the dekatola function is started by changdoloi. Singing and dancing in conventional rhythm takes place in wansuwa. On Wednesday urals are kept circularly. Once the loro starts adore to saribhai charikuri (deities), the musical instrument are played collectively and then young boys and girls starts grinding rice powder in the ural.\(^5^4\) One jocker called sakala taking a thokari (stick) used to make people laugh singing comical songs. All these things happen in a very sweet tuneful and musical ambiance. Rice powder thus prepared is distributed among the girls to make cake at home which in turnn, is cooked in steam. In the evening the steamed cakes are brought to the home of changdoloi. The changdoloi, changmaji, suruma and other officials
come and take their seat in a circle. The young girls offer them ju with the cakes and curry of chamchuri (a kind of herb.) Before eating the cakes, they dedicate and offer some cakes to their forefathers and Lampha king, Chatanga king and Maldeo king. They dance after taking cakes and ju in that evening. Next morning, the young panthais dance in the yard of changdoloi and they take cake, wine and curry just as the previous day, after devotion to their deities. After this programme, the youngstars dance and sing with khrum-pangsir. Some youths also dance with jatar (a spinning wheel) and some with fruits. There is a total merriment in this programme.

On Friday, the old members are bade farewell and are offered packets of gift containing pork, ju, betel nuts and other food stuffs. At the same time the newly selected members of chamadi take oath to work together for the forth coming session. Thus, this festival runs for a week. This festival is celebrated in the village of West Karbi Anglong and in some parts of foothill area near Gobha. In the midst of the plain Tiwas, it is seen to be rarely observed at present.

- **Sagra misawa**:

This is one of the main festivals celebrated specially by the hill Tiwas. The different clans of the hill Lalungs such as Amswai, Marjong, Lumphuni, Amri, Amleha of west Karbi Anglong are seen to have celebrated this festival. In Tiwa dialect, Sagra means all together and Misawa means to dance together. It is a spring festival which the Tiwas have been celebrating since the time
immemorial. *Sagra misawa* is observed in the month of *Falgun* (February-March).

*Langtha sagra*, an another form of festival is generally observed in that time when the people do not able to earn more or when they are in needy situation because of the idle season. They celebrate this festival in brief. Every family of the village sacrifices a pair of fowl in the *sagra than*, the worshipping place. This festival is observed in one day only. It is called *langtha sagra*, means barely because it is observed in the needy season.

*Tora sagra* means the big *sagra* which is observed generally in every five years as it is costly and time consuming. Ignoring their socio-economic status, Tiwa people take part in this festival. This festival starts on Wednesday and completes on the next Monday. During this time, Tiwa people are bound to obey some predefined rules such as killing animals or birds, stealing, smoking and quarrelling etc. to maintain the purity of the festival. There is penalty for one who breaks the rule is that he is bound to perform some strict social custom on the day of the very commencement. People with the *changdoloi, changmaji and loro* bring a flower and branches from the hill and they keep it in the place of worship. They make some crown and mask from these through some traditional procedure in the *chamadi*. The youngers learn these rules from the olders in the *chamadi*. From the next day onwards they start their dance programme for the next three days. The long flute prepared from bamboo is played in the *sagra* festival which is called *thurang*. They also play the *bordhol* called *khrumbaro* in the festival.
• **Khaplang Rawa**: 

It is a specific festival connecting to the country life of the Tiwas. The Tiwa word ‘Khaplang’ means ‘Straw’ and ‘Rawa’ means ‘cutting’. This festival, *Khaplang Rawa* is observed on the occasion of cutting of straw to make the new house and other household works. In the month of September-October, the hill Tiwas cut straw in the purpose of building or repairing of their houses. Cutting of straw is prohibited without observing some rituals and hence this festival is celebrated. The Tiwas believe that if they do not worship the tiger *bahgdeu*, the king then he will disturb the villagers. The *loro* informs the villagers to prepare *ju*, cakes etc for the week he defines of cutting straw. They also bring a pig with seven red cocks to sacrifice. Every household also offer a cock for puja. The *Khaplang Rawa* festival is observed normally on Sunday for which they make ready all the materials in the previous day. In the puja, seven birds, seven eggs of red cock are freed. Eight bamboo twigs with leaves, chaplets of khumla flower and a bamboo framework made of reed are needed for worship. Then, rice, rice powder, betel nut and betel leaf, lamp wick rice beer, leaves of banana tree, leaves of the wild cardamom, rice dal, white gourd, etc. are prepared for the feast. In the evening the youths of the village dance in the court yard of the *loro* and he offers rice beer to the youths present. From the next day onwards, the villagers can cut the straws as per their need. To repair and build the cottages of all the families on time and to collect the straws from the forests, this *Khaplang Rawa*
festival is celebrated with a collaboration of the families of the villagers of the hill Tiwas of west Karbi Anglong and Jayantia hills.

• **Jongkhang puja:**

  This is an agro based festival. *Jangkhang* means indulging in cultivation by cutting and cleaning jungles. *Jangkhang puja* is generally celebrated in the month of March before the start of the agricultural season. Nobody can plough for farming without observing this puja by their ritual. Violation of this rule by somebody is subjected to pay the penalty of *ju* with two red cocks. The *loro* conducts *jangkhang puja* who uses bamboo twigs, leaves of wild cardamom, rice, eggs in the puja. The worship of different deities are done. The *loro* calculate and predict the prospects of the harvest at the end of the puja by keeping an egg on the finger ring and then breaking it. Fowls are sacrificed and the bloods of them are showered to the wild cardamom leaves. The worshipped fowls are roasted and they take these with *ju*. After a week, the main *jangkhang puja* holds. They collect one tortoise or one pig, cock, rice, rice beer, eggs, betel nut and betel leaf, tulsi-dubori (a grass), one bamboo twig with leaves, wild cardamom leaves, ring of silver for puja. On the eve of the day of puja they go for a community fishing and fishes from there they collect are distributed among themselves in *loro’s house*.

  On the specific day of puja, *the loro, changdoloi, changmaji* along with the villagers reach the pre determined place for puja, most likely in the jungles. On that place they again prepare for puja and make a sacrificial platform. In the left of the main platform
a separate one is made for baghdeu and the bamboo twig is kept in front of the main platform where the garland of mango leaves is also hanged. Loro keeps rice, betel nut, betel leaf on banana leaves in seven separate parts for different deities. On the main platform and the egg on silver ring with rice are kept in the platform for tiger king. Betel nuts, betel leaf, a rice beer full of a gourd shell are kept in the right side for pha Mahadeu. Next to the platform, a separate altar is readied where full of rice on wild cardamom leaves are offered for lords charaibhai charikora. An egg on a ring is kept on the rice offered and then the loro sacrifices all the materials chanting mantras. The bloods of the cocks are showered in the altars and the sacrificed cocks are roasted to eat.

After puja the youths dance with walking sticks surrounding the puja altars in different gestures of cultivation and again take part in a dance in the evening in the court yard of Loro. Loro offers them rice beer and thus the puja is ended.

• **Langkhun Puja or Malthakur puja :**

This is also an agricultural festival. Langkhu means long walking sticks also called Malbari. The plain Tiwas called it as Melthakur puja. Mal means animal and Thakur means deities. So this Malthakur refers deities of animal or jungles. People worship their deities and sing songs. The rituals of this Malthakur puja is similar to that of the sagramishawa festival. At the finish of their worship the people of the village move from the east to the west singing songs in groups so as to kick off the ghosts, evils from their village and they customarily throw out their walking sticks or the
malbari in that particular place they have been traditionally using. The hill Tiwas celebrate this puja in their chamadi and on driving off the ghost and evils, they return to the chamadi and dance at the court-yard of loro, changdoloi and changmaji. The ritual heads refresh them with ju. In the next day, the villagers gather in the chamadi and young people sing and dance. At the end, they submit the musical instruments to the deuri (one of the priests) with a tray of betel nut and betel leaf as a token of homage.

3.4.4 Some beliefs of the Tiwas:

The Tiwas have numerous beliefs and practices in their daily life. Some of them are enlisted below:

- **Beliefs regarding human behavior:**

  Looking at the human behavior, the Tiwas believe a lot more things. Some of them are mentioned below:

  a) A junior cannot sit in a high seat in front of a senior.
  b) It is out of custom to spit upon the people.
  c) Exchange of lime hand to hand is a social taboo.
  d) Betel leaf is not torn by holding hands together.
  e) A hand to hand detachment of betel leaf is prohibited.
  f) Lending money to other people, cutting nail or hair at the birthday is not good.
  g) Sitting upon a handfan and pillow is prohibited.
  h) It is bad to sleep alone in a big house at night.
  i) Writing on soil is considered taboo.
In the Nakhula *mela* at Jagiroad, an aged person named as Khalama informed the researcher that at his young age, he was punished by his father as he was involved into a quarrel with his senior neighbour and rebuked the person with slang language.\(^{60}\) His father gave him three slaps, for he misbehaved his senior fellow. With a remembrance to his father he said the researcher these heart touching words.

- **Beliefs regarding birds and animals:**

  Birds, animals and insects sometimes show some important symptoms which are to be noticeable as the sixth sense of these creatures are said to be very strong. Tiwas also observe some important behaviours from birds and animals.

  a) Cows are sacred animals for the Tiwas. Never should it be kicked upon by anybody. It is considered as a sin.

  b) If cows twist the post of the house by its trail where it is tied, it causes evil to the family.

  c) If the stray dogs use to stay at house of someone, it signals out certain unforeseen adversities to the family.

  d) Black cat has its relation to the ghosts so it should be avoided.

  e) Cat slaughter is a sin. If it is done, a same size of golden cat should be made and donated to the public.

  f) If fox sounds are imitated by a person when it screams, it causes the diseases of swelling of check.
g) Raucous call of a crow within the boundary of a household is considered to have two fold expectation--coming of guest and advent of evils.

h) If a vulture or an owl sits on the house or make a call within the boundary, it signals a harm to happen to the family.

• **Beliefs regarding food:**

  Tiwas have believe regarding taking of food-

  1. They do not take food on broken disk.
  2. Food is not taken while sitting in the threshold and bed.
  3. Food should be taken at sitting position.
  4. Stretching hands or legs while eating is prohibited.
  5. Taking food in early evening is not good.
  6. Food should never be ignored and neglected if it is already prepared.
  7. Guests should not be given sour or acrimonious things for food.
  8. Screen less fishes should be burnt for eating.

• **Beliefs regarding weather:**

  Regarding weather the Tiwas have some of their own and special beliefs-

  Rain is the important factor for a rural and country life. It is necessary to be rain at a specified interval. During the drought the Tiwas assume rain depending on the following conditions:
1. If the fogs call.
2. If the peacock expands its fan.
3. If the cows look at the sky.
4. If the ants march in large numbers.
5. If there is itching in the ears.
6. If fogs marriage are performed

Again, if there are rains by cats and dogs for several days; it is believed that rain stops

1. If the sweeping tool in tied with firingi chilly (*a kind of chilly found in the hills*) and it is dug in just outside the threshold of the entrance of the house.
2. If a person slips during the rain and if he looks at the sky it may cause to stop the rain.
3. If there is over blooming of a mango tree in the season, it indicates that the season is likely to be followed by heavy rainfall.

**Beliefs regarding harvest:**

Tiwa people are mostly agriculture dependent. Regarding harvest of the season they have a number of beliefs—

1. Tiwa people believed that Wednesday of the week is the holy day so most of the agriculture related activities are done in this day.
2. Sowing seeds in *Ahu rice* (*A rice variety*) in Tuesday and Saturday the *Sali* varieties are to be spread in other days of the week are to be initiated
3. Returning from the paddy field after sowing seeds, the seed pot is to be keep sinking in the water; it is believed that there the seeds will grow in masses in the season.

4. A betel plant should be grown by unearthing it at least three times.

5. If betel plants are grown while eating coconut, the fruits from beetle will be as like as coconut inside.

6. In growing the fruit plant, a baby is be lifted in the back of the planter; it will increase fruits productivity.

7. It is believed that if a coconut tree is fruitless then a hole in the tree should made or a pin should be injected in the tree to gain its fruits.

• **Beliefs regarding time:**

There are so many beliefs regarding time while in doing farming activities or in perusing any journey or doing daily deeds.

1. Cutting bamboos, hair, nail, weaving of cloth are prohibited on Tuesday and Saturday as Tiwa people believe these two days are not good to initiate any good works.

2. It is not good to take lime, salt, turmeric and beetle nut an loan from other families at night.

3. Cleaning house or room, throwing garbage at night is a prohibited social norm of the Tiwas.

4. Dreaming a white fish at night means there must be inflow of money or property into the family.

5. Selling rice, donating beggars is harmful in Thursday.
6. House top should not be repaired at month of Sot (March-April). If it is done there is the fear of burning the house.

7. At the time of journey if someone calls from the back, the journey is supposed to be wasted.

8. It is bad to observe some things at the start of journey such as the empty vessels, crow rolling in a branch, man with cow like face and empty boat.

9. Journey at evening is not fair.

10. Looking at the widows, beggars, cats at the start of the journey are bad symptoms.

3.5 Games and pastime:

The dictionary meaning of game is, *Activity engaged in for diversion or amusement.*

or-

*A physical or mental competition conducted according to rules with the participants in direct opposition to each other.*

Thus, game is an activity where physical strength plays a dominant role than the mental activities. Game is also termed as an exercise, a competition between different opponents. *Elliot Avedon and Brian Sutton-Smith* game states —

*At its most elementary level then we can define game as an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequilibrial outcome.*

Folk games or traditional games are those games that have been running since long with no strict rules and minimum equipments.
This games generally popular among the children. According to J. Sierra and R. Kaminski, traditional children’s games are—

*those that are played informally with minimal equipment, that children learn by example from other children, and that can be played without reference to written rules. These games are usually played by children between the ages of 7 and 12, with some latitude on both ends of the age range.*

The Tiwa people also have many folk games. They love playing and watching games. They use muscular power in their games. Most of their games are related to their folk customs and traditions. Besides human games, they also haul out merriment from animal fight in different religious occasions. Some of the Tiwa games are stated below-

- **Jathi khel**: It is similar to the modern javelin throw competition. Researcher observes this in *Tetelia* village in the Magh Bihu. After the traditional cow bath, the cowboys dig a banana tree on the bank of the river. From a specified distance spears are thrown to pin the bamboo tree. He who can pin the banana is the winner. This game represents the tradition of hunting among the Tiwas.

- **Latum khel**: This is a type traditional game where an wooden spinning wheel is tied by rope and displayed in circle of radius 1- 1.5 miter. He is considered the winner whose wheel last spinning for longer period. Once, this was one of the popular games among the Tiwas. But, today it is rarely found in the villages.
**Wrestling:** In the festivals, it is a commonly seen game. Wrestling takes place between two muscular youths. This wild game is held in the open fields among a large number of spectators. This game reflects their the muscle power of the Tiwa youth.

**Three leg race:** It is one of the most popular traditional games of the Tiwas. In this game two players become one competitor. One’s right leg and other one’s left leg are tied together. All competitors are readied in a row. The race starts with two boys keeping their hands on shoulders while one leg is tied with the other and it is seemed as if they are running with three legs. The players who first touch the reach line are the winners.

**Pengbari khel:** It is a special type of game. There is no specified number of players in this game. Two bamboos of size 8-10 feet with a tied knot on knee height are prepared. Riding on it, a race is performed. As other race, player who is able to reach the touch line first is the winner. This game is celebrated as competition among the youths.

**Bhotaguti khel:** This game has been running among the Tiwas since distant past especially among the cow boys. It is played by 6-10 players. A bamboo slice of about 6 inches long, half inch thick and 1 inch breadth are used as the bhota. A small hole in the earth is dug. The bhota is kept on the top of the hole. A boy lifts the bhota into the air by a handle (a type of bamboo slice of 4-5 feet long) towards his mates who
are waiting in around 25 feet distant with a similar handle in each boy’s hand. He who can touch the bhota is considered as winner and gets the chance to through the bhota.

- **Gudu khel:** Players divide in two groups. Two circles are drawn in the earth to perform this game; one is known as gudughar and the other as boughar. A team of 6-8 players enters into the circle, one member in boughar others in the gudughar. The other team stand surrounding them. There are two moves of the game. Firstly, one player from the team within the circle i.e from the gudughar will chase the members of the other team. If he can touch any of them, the boy will be eliminated from the game and the opponents get a point. But during the chase, the follower cannot loss his breath. If he does he has to return back to his original place untouched by others. But if he is touched by the opponents during this time he will be out of the game; the opponent gets point. Secondly, during the chase time the members of the team within the gudughar will have to alternate their position to boughar. For each member they get one point. But in between the transfer, if he is touched by the opponents, he will be eliminated from the game; the opponents get point. A team wins with elimination of each opponents’ members from the game.

- **Egg fight:** Two players with their egg participate in the game. An egg to egg hitting between the players take place. In this game he is winner whose egg remains unbroken in the fight.
As reward, the winner gets the broken egg. This game is observed in the *mela* of Bohag bihu and in Ahatguri, Morigaon in the Magh Bihu.

- **Cock (hen) fight**: This is ceremonial game and seen in the Bihu festivals of the Tiwas. Cocks are trained for this fight for several months. People will display their cocks to the fight in the *mela* or festival. Cocks are tied with very sharp knife in its leg and then let it fight with others. It is fight between two and during fight one cock kills the other. The owner of the winner get the loser’s cock. This fight is seen in Ahatguri, Morigaon in the Magh Bihu.

- **Buffalo fight**: This a common festival observed in the second day of Maghbihu specially in Ahatguri of Morigaon district. Buffalos are taken to the fighting place with ceremonial march with drum beat, Bihu dance and song. In an open field the fight between two big buffalos are held. The owner of the winning buffalo is rewarded.

### 3.6 Folk medicine:

The traditional medicine or folk medicine is the type medicine which emerges out of traditional knowledge of people. These medicines have been in the use in healing the diseases of the people in the society since time immemorial. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as —

*The sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different*
cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.\textsuperscript{65}

Tiwa community has many different kind of folk medicine in their use. The Tiwas worship many deities such as satbuni, barobuni, badalmaji, baghdeu, furimos etc. Tiwas of Assam have a traditional belief that every disease is the results of anger and dissatisfaction of the gods and the devils. The healing system of the Tiwas is of two dimensions. One, Healing of the diseases through some rituals of worships and sacrifice to satisfy the gods and the deities. Two, Healing of diseases by rural healer using herb and plants.

According to Don Yoder folk medicine is connected to three other levels or types of medicine practiced in the world.

He classifies this type of medicine into two varieties--1) natural folk medicine, and the other is magico religious folk medicine. Which is also called occult medicine.\textsuperscript{66}

Tiwas, like other ethnic groups of the state practice these two types of folk medicine.

\textbf{• Beliefs regarding folk medicine:}

Tiwas believe in the devils and the evil spirits. They believe that the ghosts live in the places like cremation ground, mango tree, ponds, wetlands etc. Hence visiting these places alone may cause disease because of the influence of evil spirits. Visiting these places in early evening, mid night, mid noon is just worse of fortune. Moreover, violation of norms by someone in the deity worshipped
than may affect him. It may be due the dissatisfaction of the gods or goddess. In such cases some believes are enlisted below-

1. They hold *sani puja, kalika puja, Bhugawati puja* to satisfy the deities as a measure to protect the disease. The researcher witnessed in such a *sani puja* at *Tetelia* village of Morigaon and also participated in the feast held therefore. The participants were devoted in the name of their gods and goddess.

2. Some clanwise worshipping such as *Deusewa, Bhakatsewa* ceremonies are held to protect the families from the wrath of the deities.

3. The Tiwas also worship forefathers and for this, a special disk of sacrifice is forwarded in their name to save the living persons from illness.

4. *Batnam*, a kind of procession singing and dancing in the name of God surrounding the village, is observed in the villages Kumoi, Kacharigaon, Barokata and Kalbari. When the researcher asked them, a person named Subhen Deuri stated, “We observe this every year and this nam save us from the disease.”

5. The Tiwas believed that chanting of *mantra* can easily heal the disease. They strongly believe on the *Tantra – Mantra* even today.

6. A Tiwa man also believes that the enemy or man having dispute with him can use *mantra* and may affect him. In such case, he takes the help of ritual *Mangal suwa*, (foreseen) to detect the person behind his illness and accordingly the break of
the affect is found out with the help of bez or kabiraj (the rural heelers); and to some extent they also retaliate in the same way to his enemy.

- **Role of Kabiraj:**

  *Kabiraj or the bez*, who is a village medicineman, plays an impotent role in heeling the disease of the rural people. They sometimes appear to be God for them. The rural areas are still not abundant with modern heeling facilities. Even if to some extent it is available, it is beyond the affordability of the poor villagers. A significant number of people still depend on the rural heelers. Some of the information relating the folk medicines that the researcher experienced from the father of customary king of Kumoi, Sushen Deuraja are enlisted below-

1. Stomach pain: 7/8 new leaves from Amrut tree with *tal michiri* (a kind of sugar) mixed with water; serving this causes immediate cure from stomach pain.
2. Headache: 3 leaf of *barmanimuni* to be pasted after grinding and mixing it with water.
3. Pain: 1 hen egg and mixed with turmeric and making juice should be served.
4. Krimi: Root of pineapple mixed with *tal michiri*; a paste to be made and eat. It kills the Krimi.
5. Fever: Juice from the leaf of Papaya tree or Jasmine should be drunk.

6. Dhai (noticeably thin because of cough): Root from *digholoti* (*herb used in Magh bihu*), piper, water and are mixed and served.

The area of folk medicine is a huge one. The *bez* and the *kabiraj* do not say so much about herbs in detail for they believe that if they do so, the power of the herds to cure disease is lost. Because of this limitation this section could not be elaborated.

### 3.7 Religion and belief:

The Tiwas are religiously very devoted folk. By religion they are mostly Hindus. Among the Hindus they accepted different cult of worship at different point of time. A recent trend has been observed to convert to *Vaishanivism*. However, it is also observed that a part of the Tiwas, especially in the hill areas have accepted the
Christianity. According to their religion, they follow the rituals and beliefs. A brief account has been highlighted below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No</th>
<th>Religious stream</th>
<th>Household from the district</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sri Sankardeva Sangha, Morigaon</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>2690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Janajati Sanskari Sangha, Nagoan</td>
<td>1584</td>
<td>7736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sankarguru Namghar Janajati Samaj</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>3700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eksaran Namdharma (Janajati)Samaj Samiti</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>2660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Govinda Bhawan Gita Satra, Morigaon</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>5700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Krishnaguru Sewashram, Nasatra, Barpeta1</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sri Satyanna</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Anukul Thaur</td>
<td>Few numbers in villages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Batbari Manipur, Dhupguri,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Charaibahi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Eksaran Bhagawati Samaj</td>
<td>Very few number of household</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from different parts of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mahapurushia samaj</td>
<td>Very few number of household</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from different parts of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>20 household in the Silsang area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table showing distribution of household according to religion.

For the Tiwas the religion is the first and foremost thing and total life cycle, all good and worse effect to life arise out of the religion. Tiwa people always fear the religious sprits, deities, gods and goddess. That is why they observe each and every rituals with full of
devotion. Some of the areas that the Tiwa people are bounded by the belief are pointed out below:

a) Tiwas believe Pha Mahadeu is the supreme God and everything in this world happens at his will. Deusal than at Jagiroad and Mahadeusal at Khairgarh are their holy places. So every puja or worship are done heading towards Deusal.

b) Tiwas also believe lots of gods and goddess such as Badalmai, furimach, balakongar, saribhai, changpali, satbuni, barobuni, baghdeu etc. They worship them in different places by different manners. Satisfaction of these gods and goddess is good for the society. Misfortune in the society is caused because of their anger or dissatisfaction.

c) Tiwas do not worship any physical matter such as tree, animals, birds etc. Even if they sometime worship under tree, but they worship certain deities only.

d) Tiwas believe in rebirth. They believe a person can have his rebirth to a royal clan with the power of his good work in the eternal life.

e) Tiwa people also worship ancestors. That is why before some religious occasion they forward meal to the departed souls first and then only, they eat.

f) They believe in animal sacrifices. Sacrifice of fowl, pig and egg are common rituals in the Tiwa ceremonies.
g) *Borhor or nubar* is the holy place for all the family. Household ceremonies and pujas are held in the borghar. It is as like as a Mandir of Assamese community.

h) *chamadi* or dormitory is like a religious institution. It is an unavoidable part of Tiwa youth.

i) Some people of Tiwa community are given almost equal status of God. Among them Mohan Phadar, Nursing, Kamthabari, are treated as legendary person and worshipped as God.

The researcher got an experience in *Nellie* area, when there was a *soni puja*, under the observance of the village people. They forwarded different *naibyadas* (offering of banana, mugs etc. in a banana leaf) to the gods and goddess. When it was enquired about the *nabyadas*, they told the names of the gods and goddess for whom these offerings were done. Within the names they mentioned the names of some elderly people who recently expired. In between, one, Phanindra Bordoloi informed that they worship their ancestors as gods and goddess; hence the offerings were done.⁶⁹
References:

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37. Informant : Debo Bordoloi, Tetelia.
38. Informant : Uttam Bordoloi, Tetelia.
39. Informant : Ramen Bordoloi, Manipur.
40. Informant : Hemeswar Patar, Manipur.
41. Informant : Rupen Patar, Manipur.
42. Informant : Deep Sing Deu Raja (Gobha King), Gobha
43. Informant : Jursingh Bordoloi, Jagiroad.
44. Informant : Subhen Bordoloi, Silchang.
45. Informant : Moheswar Patar, Amsoi.
46. Informant : Mihiram Patar, Dharamtul .
47. Informant : Phuleswar Bordoloi, Dharamtul.
50. Informant : Tiluttama Konwar, Ghagua.
51. Informant : Nilima Konwar, Kalbari.
52. Informant : Khargeswar Bordoloi, Tetelia.
53. Informant : Bhimbar Bordoloi, Baghara.
54. Informant : Prabha Patar, Baghara.
55. Informant : Bhuagai Fansho, Jurgaon.
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