CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Prelude:

The social folk customs and economy have always been vital parts of any society for they hold society in a solid bond of togetherness. The dictionary meaning of tradition:

A traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place, or time.\(^1\)

and

A custom is an activity, a way of behaving, or an event which is usual or traditional in a particular society or in particular circumstances.\(^2\)

Thus the essence of the word ‘custom’ means the way of behaving that can be treated as usual or prevalence in a society. It is intensely associated with people or to the word ‘Folk’. Folk means people in general or a nation. According to Alan Dundes, Folk is a flexible concept which can refer to a nation as in American folklore or to a single family.\(^3\)

Folk custom is thus a way of behaving or doing something associated to people or to a society or a nation. In broader sense, social folk custom deals with group interaction instead of an individual and is, in fact, an investigative area of folklore as acknowledged by Richard M. Dorson:
In between oral literature and material culture lie areas of traditional life facing in both directions. One such area we may call social folk custom. Here the emphasis is on group interaction rather than on individual skills and performance.¹

Dorson mentions different types of social folk customs such as rites de passage as birth, initiation, marriage and death.⁵ In social folk customs, he includes the folk beliefs, festivals and celebrations within which music, dance, costume, floats, and procession based on both religious and secular traditions may enter, certain games and recreation or pastime etc., mode of worship, folk religion and folk medicines.⁶

Sweterlitsch divides custom into several different categories.⁷ They may be seasonal celebrations, life cycle celebration, community festivals, folk beliefs.

Thus, social folk customs can be found out from the perspective of a community. When talked to the social folk customs of a particular community, it basically takes into account the aspects like festivals and ceremonies, beliefs and practices, games and pastimes, folk religions and folk medicines.

An economy covers all those agents like producers, consumers, distributors of goods and services of a community. Economist like P. James, L. Magee, A. Scerri, M.B. Steger defines economy as:

The economy is defined as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses, and material expressions associated with the production, use, and management of resources.⁸
Economy on the other hand means a large set of activities related to production and consumption that determines how the scarce resources are allocated within a certain region. The business dictionary defines economy as:

*An entire network of producers, distributors, and consumers of goods and services in a local, regional, or national community.*

Overall, an economy expresses the status of affluence or paucity of community from the material belongingness.

Both social folk customs and economy are interrelated to each other. A sound economy of a society always helps in performing folk customs in more privileged way and *vice versa*. Most of the traditional fairs and festivals are seen to have revived from the mouth of extinction because of its economic benefits. Again, the abundance of extraction of economic benefits may lead some customs to deteriorate over time. Economy is, thus, a sword blade with sharpness in both the edges in performing the social folk customs.

1.2. Statement of the problem:

The social folk customs and economy of a small ethnic group have immense impact on building the contour stone of a greater community. At the same time folk customs and traditions, to some extent may stand as the domain behind the socio-economic and cultural image of a community. Folk customs and traditions are practiced primarily by small ethnic groups normally living in the remote and isolated areas. The most cultured and civilized society today also carries its current status reflected traits from its root of origin after stages of evolution and transformation.
The Tiwa Tribe, also known as the Lalung is one of the oldest tribes of Assam. It is an ethnic group inhabiting normally in the states of Assam and Meghalaya in north eastern part of India. The Tiwas have been enlisted as one of the schedule tribes. 

*They are recognized as a Scheduled tribe within the State of Assam. They were known as Lalungs in the Assamese Buranjis, Colonial literature.*

They have a brief history of migration. According to a belief among the Tiwas, their forefathers have come down from Tibet region. But according to some of the historians their habitats was somewhere near Allahabad on the bank of the river Yamuna. They were pushed out by the Aryan invasion and forced them to leave Allahabad, and took shelter in the Himalayan passes in the distant past. Details about the history and migration of the Tiwas are discussed in the subsequent sections of the study.

According to the difference in terrain, ecology and physiology and geo-atmospheric set up of their abode, the Tiwas possess and enjoy slightly deviated customs finally identifying and quantifying themselves in a different look. As such, the group that resides to the extreme hilly end is called as ‘Hajuali Tiwa’. This group is seen to have been adhered to maintain their conservative customs. On the contrary, the other group living in the plains is almost out of track in pursuing its identity of origin. They are known as ‘Tholuali Tiwa’. They are liberal enough to imitate the cultures from the contemporary coexisting neighbours and converted themselves into the mainland Assamese. A third group having the trait from aborigine
root and also mingles with the people of plains are familiar to be as ‘Datiolia Tiwa’. They live up to their requirement by ‘Give and take policy’. Generally, The Hajuali lives in the Hills, Tholuali in the plains while the Datiolalia in the foothills; altogether they form the Tiwa society. In some occasions, they are sometime referred ‘Hill Tiwa’ and ‘Plain Tiwa’. People who reside in the hill or the Hajualis are termed simply as ‘Hill Tiwa’ and submerging both Datiolia and Tholuali in a single pot termed as ‘plain Tiwa’. The abode of Tiwas is scattered in the districts of Dhemaji, Karbi Anglong, Morigaon, Nagaon and in some parts of Kamrup district of Assam. In the Morigaon District Tiwas basically live in the areas like Baghara, Bangphou, Barapujia, Beltola, Bengenabari, Bhomoraguri, Bonpora, Charaibahi, Dabarghat, Darapani, Deosal, Dharamtul, Dohali, Garam kusi, Gobha, Jagibhakatgaon, Kumarbari, Kumoi, Makrang kusi, Manipur, Mokaria, Nabheti, Nakhola, Natungaon, Nellie, Palashguri, Pashim Nagaon, Phakalihabi, Sahari, Sarang kusi, Silsang, Sindhisar, Tarani, Tetelia. Tiwas living here are Plain Tiwas or Tholuali Tiwas.

The present study is highly confined to the Tiwas living in the Morigaon district of Assam. An attempt has been made in the study to analyse the community from the perspective of the observances of social folk customs and construction of the economy. Hence, study is entitled as, **Social Folk Customs and Economy of the Tiwas of Morigaon district of Assam.**
1.3 Objectives of the study:

This study has the following objectives:

- To explore and investigate the social folk customs of the Tiwas and to illuminate these in the light of academic pursuit.
- To find out the economic condition of the community and to prescribe policy for uplifting the weak and deprived groups.
- To bring into light the hidden and extinct rituals of the community so as to make them conscious about the sense of originality.
- To revive and reorganize scientifically the genuine and beneficial folk customs in the society for the well-being of the human community, if any, within themselves.
- To find out the taboos of customs and superstitions and to redefine these in the context of tradition and change.
- To analyse the trends of change and continuity of rituals and customs of the tribe and its assimilation with other tribes, castes and community.
- To find out the causes of stagnation of the community and to prescribe the measures to break those stagnation.
- To highlight the changing contours of the folk habits, religion and superstitions and customs as well as traditional games of the Tiwas and analyse these in terms of globalization and modernity.
1.4. Methodology:

Research is a subjective and objective effort of attaining in some hypothesis that requires careful and thorough deliberation and entails meaning it methodical by source materials.

Research Methodology is set of ways to systematically solve the research problem. According to C.R. Kothari,

    When we talk of research methodology we not only talk of the research methods but also consider the logic behind the methods we use in the contexts of our research study and explain why we are using a particular method or technique and why we are not using others so that research results are capable of being evaluated either by researcher himself or by others.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus methodology encompasses all the methods, tools, techniques, logics and justifications to solve a research problem. According to Sokratis K. Katsicas,

    When proper to a study of methodology, such processes constitute a constructive generic framework, and may therefore be broken down into sub-processes, combined, or their sequence changed.\textsuperscript{13}

For the particular study we are using different tools and procedures as enlisted below:

1.4.1 Collection of primary data:

Primary data are given more emphasis in the study. Primary data collected from the study area by using different methods.

- **Interview**: Both direct personal and indirect oral interview methods, whenever and wherever required according to the
circumstances in the field are applied to collect the relevant information from the informants. Inconvenience in physical appearance with the informants sometime leads to telephonic interviews to be applied to collect the requisite information.

• **Schedule and questionnaire:** A set of predesigned schedules and questionnaires are arranged and used to collect the information in the field.

**1.4.2 Collection of secondary data:**

Secondary sources of data are also used in the study. Secondary data used in the study are collected from various official records such as district commissioner’s office, Morigaon, Directorate of Assam institute of research for tribals and schedule castes, District election commissioner’s office, Morigaon, Assam State Archives, Archeological department of Assam, Statistical handbook of Assam, District census report, published and unpublished works such as Bulletin, Books, theses, journals etc.

**1.4.3 Statistical tools:**

Various statistical tools such as figures, tables, graphs, maps, diagrams are used as and when necessary during the analysis of the data collected from the field.
1.4.4 Selection of samples:

Morigaon district has the total population of 957,423 from 598 inhabited villages of 5 CD blocks, 85 Gaon panchayats and 5 revenue circles according to census report 2011. There are a total of 184602 number of households in the district. Out of this the schedule tribes in Morigaon district counts as 1,36,777, which is 14.27% of the total population of the district. Again, almost 76.6% of the schedule tribes in the district are the Tiwas. Tiwa households in the district are about 19150. From the universe, households are categorized according to their socio-economic status and then 32 households are selected for sample by using stratified random sampling technique.

1.5 Hypothesis:

The following hypotheses are found to be attained in our study:

- Social folk customs of Assam on the Tiwas have some impact.
- Structure and contexts of the festivals and celebration are not veriable.
- Economic conditions of the Tiwas are similar to other tribes.
- Financial mobility of Tiwas vis-à-vis social framework is usual
- Change and continuity in basic aspect of the Tiwas is normal.

1.6 Significance of the study:

The study has a very important significance. The great Assamese culture and community has been composed of the contributions of all the small tribes and ethnic groups living in this
land since the time immemorial. It would be easy to understand the great Assamese culture, customs and traditions and economy once it is intelligible to access the all underlying vivid and colourful facts, the feelings and emotions, inherited traits, fairs and festivals, rituals etc. of all small communities. Besides this, the advent of the Aryans and how they mingled with the non-Aryan people formed a common society although both of them had completely opposite settings in terms of customs, culture and traditions. This study probably satisfies a bird’s eye view in this regard.

1.7 **Scope of the study:**

The scope of the study is limited in the Tiwa inhabited areas of Nagaon and Morigaon Districts along with the western part of Karbi Anlong District of Assam in search of the different customs and traditions among various festivals of the Tiwas. However, to make our study precise, we are taking the main references from the Tiwas living in Morigaon district.

1.8 **Limitations of the study:**

As is the case with any research work, the study is to be projected within certain limitations. First of all the study is oriented on two core aspects—(1) Social folk custom of the Tiwas and (2) Economy of the Tiwas. Hence, it is itself a broad one. To determine the economy of a particular ethnic group in context of this folk cultural paradigm requires two fold investigation. Though the concept of economic condition of the various ethnic groups is being analysed from different perspective of our present study is relatively new. The
methodological limitation to ascertain the economic study vis-à-vis folk-cultural perspective is noticed in our study.

Our approach to a certain district only, has put folk some limitations. Assam is a vast land of ethnic composition of which the Tiwas form a prime group. Though they are actually found to inhibit in pocket-areas of the district, a sizeable part of their people are living in the neighbouring districts, not to speak of the hill areas. Though they are representatives of the composite ethnic group, scope of differences as regard their and economy and customs may be found to vary in some cases.

Social folk customs are pan-Assamese and Pan-ethnic in character. Though care has been taken to not to overgeneralise this aspect, a few limitations may have crept into our observatory notes.

1.9 Review of related literature:


It was also found that some published works such as- *Morigaon Zilar Loka Sanskriti* by Maneswar Deuri, *Jagi Bhakat Gaon Anchalar Loka Sanskriti* by Sahitya Sabha, Bhakatgaon Branch, *Shangkhorla Souvenir* published by Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra, *Tiwa Janajati Aru Bhakhar Etihas* by Maneswar Deuri, *Asamor Janagusthir Chandubaddha Parichay* by Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur etc. surveys, seminar papers are influencing directly or indirectly with different aspects of Tiwas of Assam. The scope of these studies ranges from a social anthropological study of a single tribe or a tribal village to large scale sample survey covering the entire tribal region or even the state. Some of the eminent books those have been gone surveyed thoroughly are to be cited in the following.

1.9.1 Vernacular books and theses:

**Books:**

- **Tiwa Sampradayar Parichay:**

  This book is the collection of essays on different aspects of life of the Tiwa people compiled by *All Assam Tiwa Yuva Satra*
Sanmilan and published by Nagen Saikia, General Secretary, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat in the year 1975. Several eminent Tiwa authors like Dharam Bordoloi, Ganesh Chandra Senapati, Bitupan Deuri, Maneswar Deuri and Budhiman Bordoloi contributed in the book with their scholarly articles.

- **Tiwa Samaj Aru Sanskriti**: A book on Tiwa community written by Balai Ram Senapati, 2010. The book contains several articles of the author covering the comprehensive aspects of the community from literature to rituals and customs to culture.

- **Tiwa Janajati Aru Bhashar Itihas**: This book is written by Maneswar Deuri, 1988. This book tries to trace out the origin of the Tiwas from the prospects of linguistic and literary survey.

- **Asamia Jati Aru Sanskriti Gathanat Lalung (Tiwa) Sakalar Abadan**: This book is written by Maneswar Deuri, 2011. This book highlights the contributions made by the Tiwa community in building the greater Assamese Community from the prospects of language, festivals, customs and tradition, culture and socio-religious beliefs.

- **Tiwa Sanskritir Ruprekha (Part I)**: This book gives an outline of cultural History of the Tiwas of Assam written by Sri Lokeswar Gogoi, 1986. This book also highlights the information relating different to aspects of social life, festivals
and rituals regarding the various occasions of the Tiwa community.

- **Tiwa Sanaskritir Ruprekha (Part II):** This book is an extension of the previous book written by Sri Lokeswar Gogoi 1987. Besides highlighting information relating to different aspects of social life, festivals and rituals regarding the various occasions of the Tiwa community, this book encompasses the kingdoms of the Tiwas in socio-political aspects.

- **Tiwa Samaj Aru Sanskritir Acherenga:** This is also another important book relating to Tiwa culture and social system written Dr. Rupa Deka Pator, 2007. This book has a good emphasis on social and cultural aspects of the community.

- **Tiwa Janagosthir Bhasa-Sahitya-Sanskriti:** A book edited by Pankaj Kumar Deka on the different aspects of the Tiwa Community. A number of Scholars like Maneswar Deuri, Upen Rabha Hakasam, Angshuman Das, Jyotirekha Hazarika, Hatem Ali, Thunu Kalita, Padma Patar and many other renowned authors contributed their valued research articles on the Tiwas in this book analyzing the community from various angles.
Vernacular theses (unpublished):

- *Tiwa Aru Dimasa Lokautsav Eti Tulanamulak Adhyayan*, (2017) by Pranjumoni Saikia, Gauhati University. It was a comparative study between two tribes – Tiwa and Dimasa in their folk festivals.

- *Morigaon Jilar Utsav Anushthan Ek Samikshatmak Adhyayan*, (2013), by Dhiraj Patar, Gauhati University. In this thesis the attempt was made to analyse the festivals of Morigaon District including the festivals of the Tiwa Community.

- *Tiwa Janagosthir Samaj Aru Sanskriti*, 2004, by Rupa Deka Patar, Gauhati University. Here, the study was conducted to see different aspects of the society, customs and tradition.

- *Tiwa aru Karbi Sakalar Samajik Lokapratha: Ek Tulanamulak Adhyyan*, 2017 by Pankaj Shyam, Gauhati University. This thesis has made a comparative study between two tribes viz. Karbi and Tiwas on some core issues such as language, culture, customs, traditions etc.

1.9.2 National/international books and theses:

Books:

- *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*: *The Aboriginal Tribes of India* (1973), was written by Stephen Fuchs, Acting Director, Institute of Indian Culture, Bombay. It is a comprehensive account of the aboriginal tribes of the Indian sub-continent.
The book is about different tribes in each region and the common features of their economy, their social structure, their political organizations, beliefs, customs etc. The book also describes the dealings of Hindus as a result of which tribes fall under the influence of the caste system.

- **The Lalungs (Tiwas)**: G. C. Sharma Thakur from Tribal Research Institute has prepared a monograph on the Tiwas known as *The Lalungs (Tiwas)* (1985). In his book he has made an attempt to study the Tiwa Community systematically on a scientific basis covering their various aspects of life, culture, economy etc.

- **The Lalung Society: A Theme for Analytical Ethnography**: This book is an outstanding work of N.K. Syamchudhury and M.M Das published by Anthropological Survey of India, Government of India, 1973. Here, an early attempt was made to have a systematic study of the Tiwas from the socio-religious angle.

- **The Lalungs (Tiwas)**: Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, located at Jawahamagar, Guwahati, initiated in publishing the book *Lalungs (Tiwas)* (1989) by Anil Kumar Baruah. In this book, Mr. Baruah describes the socio-economic life and culture of the Tiwa people residing at hills as well as the plains
as a whole. Tiwa origin, history and migration, different customs and rituals, housing pattern, dress habit and food habit etc. are described in this book.

- **The Hill Lalungs**: Birendra Kumar Gohain in his book *The Hill Lalungs* (1993) has described the Tiwa community living in the hilly regions, especially, in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. This book touches the domestic, economic life, social and religious life of the hill Tiwas. He also prepared a chapter on the political life of hill Tiwas and its organization, known as Lalung Darbar. The book also provides numerous information regarding religion of the Tiwas which indicate that the plain Lalungs may be regarded as one of the branches of the greater Hindu religion.

- **History and culture of the Tiwa people**: This book is written by Dimbeswar Bordoloi and published by *Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra, Morigaon*, 2013. Mr. Bordoloi tries to conduct a historical survey of the origin of the Tiwas in his book. He also, highlights the socio-political life of the Tiwa Community.

**Theses (unpublished):**

• *Festivals of the Tiwas and Their Relation with Indigenous Traditions of Morigaon District*, 2013, by Trailokya Borkotoky, Gauhati University.

• *Costumes Cosmetics and Ornaments of the Tiwa Tribe of Assam*, 2007, by Thunu Saikia, Gauhati University.

• *A Study of the History of the Vassal Kingdoms under the Ahoms* by Hatem Ali, 2003, Gauhati University.


• *Socio Economic Status and Social Awareness of the Tiwas and Their Attitude Towards Compulsory Primary Education with Special Reference to the District of Morigaon*, 2017, by Kalyan Das, Gauhati University.

• *Impact of Modern Education on the Traditional Life of the Tiwas of Morigaon District of Assam*, 2010, by Hem Kanta Chutia Gauhati University.

• *An Investigation into the Problems of Enrolment and Retention of Children at Elementary Stage Belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with Special Reference to Morigaon District Assam*, 2000, by Phunu Das, Gauhati University.

**1.10 Chapterization:**

The chapters chosen to conduct the study are endeavored to encompass the issues from every corner relating to the subject matter to the maximum extent possible. Starting from the origin and the
history of the Tiwas, the study discusses and analyses the Tiwa community from the perspective of society, religion, economy, polity, socio-demography, culture, customs and tradition. We summarily categorize our study into the following comprehensive chapterization:

- **Introduction**
- **Background of the Tiwas**
- **Social Folk Customs of the Tiwas**
- **Economy the Tiwas**
- **Findings and Conclusion**

Besides the preliminaries and introductory part of the study to begin with, the thesis also covers all the related trimmings of the study in terms of appendix, bibliography, glossary etc. towards the end. In between these, the first chapter sketches the entire road map of the study. The second chapter tries to find out the origin of the search of the Tiwas and other socio-religious and demographic aspects. The third chapter describes the social folk customs of the Tiwas in detail analysis. The fourth chapter takes into account the economic condition of the community. The last chapter takes a comprehensive assessment of the study where the results and policy prescription for the dark and weak sides of the tribe is attached.
**References:**

5. ibid.
6. ibid.
11. Bhuyan S.K. (ed.): op-cit., p.32