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Way of Life of the Tiwas Living in the Hills of Karbi Anglong of Assam, India

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Abstract:

The Tiwas are one of the major tribes of North East India living both in the hills and plains. Known as 'Lalungs' throughout the courses of history they are concentrating mainly in the districts of middle Assam. In the Duwar Amla and Amri Mouza of Karbi Anglong district the hill Tiwas are living in majority. The hill Tiwas are tradition bound, known for their language and culture that evolved a distinct way of life different from the Tiwas of plain areas. Their socio-economy, politics, material and cultural life are distinct which gives them a separate identity. The impact of processes of socio-cultural changes is less on them and they are successful in keeping distinct identity as a tribe. In a view to know the variations of culture of the Tiwas living in the hills and plains a study has been conducted. This paper is an attempt to know the present way of life including the culture, social life, economy, food and dresses and major practices of the Tiwas living in the hills of Karbi Anglong district of Assam.

Keywords: Way of Life, Living, Tiwas, Hills of Karbi Anglong

1. Introduction

The tribe Tiwas (Lalungs) lives both in the hills and plains of Assam and Meghalaya state. A section of Tiwas live in the hills of Karbi Anglong. Except very few still the Tiwas living in the hills follow the traditional way of life. They evolved a distinct socio-cultural and material way of life. They speak in their own language; their food, dress habits and performing rituals and festivals are quite different. The majority of the plain Tiwas lost their own language and culture in the changing processes. The impact of the process of sanskritization is more in the plains. It is mainly due to the demographic factor of surrounding environment and the influence of dominant caste, culture and ways of life of the plains.

2. Materials and Methods

It is a socio-economic and political study based on ethnography from both primary and secondary data. The primary data are mainly of oral history and observation in the field. The folklores, views and opinions of knowledgeable persons are provided the primary data. The secondary sources are of written/printed books and records of individuals/ institutes, including official and non-official.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

- i. To know the way of life in terms socio-cultural, political and economic practices of the Tiwas living in hills of Karbi Anglong of Assam
- ii. To find the variation of way of life of the Tiwas living in hills and plains.

4.1. The Habitation

The Tiwas are living both in the hills and the plains. The general density of population in the hilly Tiwa villages is very low than the plain Tiwa villages. The density seems to have steadily growing day by day. Some hill Tiwa villages recorded comparatively few scattered population, mainly due to the problem of cultivation and low agricultural production.

The villages show the presence of main road touching the village. In some Tiwa villages shoe-string roads in the hills and the household's layout in scattered and disperse settlement have been found. In very few hill Tiwa villages' spacious playgrounds are found. The settlement pattern between the hills and plains differs in terms of their household pattern, homestead settlement and population composition.

4.2. Homesteads

The homesteads are constructed on both sides of a road in majority of the hill Tiwa villages. It is simple; mostly a typical hut of clay and straw having fencing to demarcate the compound. Majority have only a single structure, rarely do they have more than two. The number is usually more in the cases of joint families. They construct houses on plinths. Straw is used for roofing. Walls are made of clay, reeds and bamboos. They don't generally built house on stilts. Generally, the wooden posts are used to construct the house.

Generally, there is a small *Varandah* in front of the house and inside there are two large rooms. The front room is called *Nomaji* and the second room is called *Nukthi*. In the front of the *Varandah* loin-loom, bamboo container for water and in the *Nomaji* the fire place is situated. *Nomaji* is also treated as a guest room and the bundle of Paddy *Maipur* or *Maishi* are also kept there. The *Nukthi* is the living room as well as the kitchen and it also serves as a store room. The construction materials are bamboo and jungle wood with clay plastering on the bamboo walls. There is a plain courtyard in front which is used for threshing of paddy and for dancing on ceremonial occasions. A raised platform of bamboo serves as a bed. Baskets made of bamboo and canes are used to store household goods, paddy and clothes.

The hut is very common in the hill villages mainly because of economic reason. Its construction is very easy; normally require only the straw and bamboo which is available in the area. But deforestation in the area made it difficult and the people are constructing the house normally of asbestos sheets (tin). It is notice that day by day the house type is changing in general rural house type in the hilly villages.

4.3. Cultivations

The hill Tiwa villagers are habitual to the Jhum cultivation, horticulture, vegetables and the crops which are cultivable in the area. They have been fully utilized the free land resources for cultivation. When the family member increased the scarcity of food and other amenities bound them to use all forms of land. The method and quality of agriculture is different in between the hills and plains. The hill villager adopts traditional agriculture having no irrigation facility. In some part they make irrigation from the streams flown to the crop field; but these too depend on rainfall. The villagers in certain area construct small dam on the seasonal streams and irrigate their field. The scanty and erratic nature of rainfall affects the proper growth and harvest of crops. When compare the agricultural life and economic standard, the hill Tiwas find not much better than the plain Tiwas. The majority villagers remain below the substances level for the greater part of the year. Nevertheless, the agriculture economy considered to be the mainstay economy. The agriculture production is made mainly for the local consumption. A little amount of surplus of vegetable and horticultural production enters to the market.

4.4. Harvesting Ceremonies & Dances

During the harvesting of paddy, the participants, especially the young boys and girls dance with the *Mairawa* song in rhythmic way. This is called *Mairawa Misawa*. The young carry bundles of the harvesting crops by singing songs and dances. The community harvesting of crops is always associated with the dances, merriment and songs among the hill Tiwas. Separation of the grains from the stalks is performed by two methods. One is the bullock round method where the bundles of paddies is spread in the courtyard and two or more bullock are allowed to make rounds over it. The second method of separation of grain from the stalk is commonly known as *Mai Pothala*. It is generally performed by the young people. A group of young men dances over the paddies spread in the courtyard with the rhythmic tune of *Thurang*, *Khram* and songs. This is called *Mai Pathala* dance. The hill tiwa villagers perform another festival of sowing in the month of June July which is known as *Pakhu Pawa*. The villagers come out to prepare the land of shifting cultivation in the hills with hoe and dances and songs in a rhythmic way. After the spring festival in the March/April the hill Tiwas celebrates the *Chongkhong* festival and pray for god offering *Khaju*, *Tutangra*, *Prun* etc, before starting going to paddy field for cultivation. By celebrating the *Chongkhong* by offering deities they try to satisfy the god of crops and takes his permission to go for cultivation. The entire hill Tiwas villagers do not perform the occasion *Muthi lowa* for sowing as which is very common among the plain Tiwas. On the other hand, *Kodal Mai Chawa* is common among the Amkha-wali Tiwas of the hills. Amkhawali are a section of the hill Tiwas. In the *Kodal Mai Chawa* occasion the newly harvested paddy is cooked as rice and taken as food. In this festival all the relatives and nearby villagers are invited. Before taking the rice as food they pray for god offering the god rice beer called *Chu*, meat, and other feeding items.

4.5. Small Scale Industries

Among the small scale industries in the area the handloom and textile industry is most common. The Tiwa women in the villages are expert weavers. They are the born expert artistic weaver who can make wonderful designs of clothes and garments for their family. Knowledge of weaving is considered as an essential qualification for marriage of the girls.

The hill Tiwas can express their artistic tendencies in the express of textile designs. Both the floral and geometrical design is popular among them. Cane baskets of various designs are used by the womenfolk. Bamboo and cane products like *Japha*, (suitcase) *Pera* (big suitcase) *Petari* (a small suitcase) *Sarai*, *Bota*, *Japhi*, and various elephant designs of comb are made by them. The canoes, spinning wheel etc. are common among the men folk. In the *Barat* festival, *Sogra Misawa* festival the Tiwas use varieties of mask made of bamboo slice and clothes. It is to mention here that wood carving is not done as a profession nor there is a set of people called wood carvers.

4.6. The Loros in the Hill Tiwa Villages

There are presently ten Loros in the hills Tiwa living in Karbi Anglong, but earlier seven Loros of the clustering villages were there. The present Loros of the Tiwas in the hills are (i) Amsai Loro (ii) Marjong Loro (iii) Rongkhoi Loro (iv) Amni Loro (v) Makro Loro (vi)Malang Loro (vii) Sogra Loro (viii) Lumphin Loro (ix) Amjong Loro and (x) Amri Loro; assisted by *Doloi*, *Pator*, *Hadari*, *sangot*, *Maji*, and *Parikha* in performing the duties and responsibilities. These functionaries have higher social status as they regulate the social, religious and political rules of the Tiwa society. They still exercise powers in the specified regions of the hill Tiwa villages.

4.7. *The Shamadi*

The Shamadi (Dekasang) (The village dormitory) is the learning academy in the hill Tiwa villages where the boys, who had reached adolescence, were required to join and learn, entertains, sleep and protects the village as using it as the village port. In the field visit Shamadi is found in majority hill Tiwa villages. But as observed the hill Tiwas who converted their religion into Christianity are not indoctrinated to it; especially in some hill Tiwa villages of Umswai valley and Ulukhunji area. In some Tiwa villages Shamadi is constructed in concrete which lost its traditional beauty. In places the Shamadi as an institution of the Tiwas changed both in structure and uses.

4.8. *Nobaro*

Every clan or Khul people in the hills have its *Nobaro*, which is a place for community worship. Nobaro gets an important place in the material cultural life of the Tiwas. It is a holy house constructed in the campus of a respectable clan member of the village. The rules and procedure of the clan Nobaro is same as those prescribed for family Nobaro. For the Tiwas each and every family had Nobaro along the kitchen. It is observed today even in the hill Tiwa families for majority house holders Nobaro is there. The family Nobaro is use as to worship the family deity. In the Nobaro of the clan there is no room for alter.

4.9. *The Clan System*

In the hill Tiwa villages the villagers are divided into clans and each clan have their respective unit made up of clan people and is assigned certain jobs. According to their clan way of practices they occupy the position. Each clan has *Jela Hari* who performs certain functions in the clan affiliation. Some major clans found among the hill Tiwas of Karbi Anglong are - *Maslai, Malang, Madar, Amshi, Amsong, Kholar, Khorai, Pumah, Amphi, Hukai, Muni, Mithi, Darphng, Chamsal, Karkho, Lumphuid, Sogra, Phamjong* etc. There are altogether 32 clans of the Tiwas living both in hills and plains. The marriage among the members of same clan is strictly prohibited. The clan and kinship regulates social behaviors to a large extent. Till today clans are principal unit for social performing, funeral works, mutual support and defense.

A particular clan in the cluster treated as the principal or dominant clan on consideration of its social position in the past. Most of the clans however got their names from the places in Karbi Angling, where they had the first settlement after migrating from the Joyanta Khoiram of the Jayantia hills. The number of clan in a cluster ranges from two to six in some places of the hills. Among the hill Tiwas there is *Buni* (sisters) system among the clans. The clans which clustered together claim affiliation to a common traditional group of sisters. The traditional Maharsa is losing its importance in the cultural sphere and now the same function has more or less shifted to the local affiliations.

4.10. *The Marriage System*

Among the hill Tiwas marriage is not allowed between the members of the same clan or between the members of the same clans groups. In the hills after marriage the boys are to reside in the home of parents in law after marriage. But this practice has changed now. Earlier the boys of the family are often go and stay in the perennial houses of their wives after marriage. In case his house is inheritress he constructs a new house in the lands of his parents in law as his wife gets a share of her perennial lands. Like the husband of the inheritress who is a resident son-in-law called *Gobhia*, such a son in law is also called *Gobhia* although he does not stay in the same house which is parents in law. As a result of this system of resident husbands the inheritress daughter stays in the perennial house and in the village of her birth while her husband leaves his village. Thus the inheritress daughter shares a perennial house property in the Tiwa society.

Among the Tiwas as the age is usually from eighteen to twenty-five for men and fourteen to twenty for the girls for marriage. Child marriage is not practiced among them. There is no bar to widow re-marriage in the hill Tiwa society. But such cases are few and far between. There are four ways of marriage for acquiring wife in the hill Tiwa society. These are: (i) marriage through negotiation (ii) marriage by fled (iii) marriage for service (iv) marriage by force.

4.11. *Funeral Works*

When a Tiwa people dies in a village the information is given to one of each family and then at least one from each family household go to the family where death occurred. When the villagers assemble the head of the deceased family is asked, whether the death body is to be buried or burnt. The head of the deceased family can take decision on the basis of the economic condition of the family. But if the death is of very good person or person of name the death body is cremated. The villagers help for wire woods etc. for the purpose. In the meantime, some villagers go to the cremation place/ burial ground of the village. The womenfolk prepare an egg, cakes, and rice for the death and arrange some liquor – all these for offering for the deceased. There articles are kept in a banana leaf and two women belonging to different clan to that of the deceased carry these to the burial/cremation place. The funeral party carries one bundle of straw for lighting it as well as some eggs and rice. On way to the burial/cremation place the funeral party leaves the marks of rice or thread on the way. Sometime fire woods are collected from the nearby jungles. *Goya Gyati* (women) including the relatives of the deceased goes behind the bier of the death body. They sing the good deeds of the death and sing songs of lamentation as they proceed ahead of the death. Every time they are to cross a channel or stream or river so that the deceased cross with the spirit with the bridge of thread. The pall-bears are generally men of the family of the deceased or kin and kiths of the deceased. When the party leaves the house of the deceased they leave some ashes on front of the entrance of the house and cover the ashes with the bamboo basket. No one should go to the house on that entrance. The funeral party on reaching the burial/cremation place constructs a funeral pyre with bamboo of seven stacks or nine stacks depending on the clan tradition of fire wood on it. Before the burial or cremation

work is done the foods/ liquor is offered to the deceased. After offering of foods/liquor etc. the son/daughter or close relative starts burning first on the mouth of the deceased rounding seven around the pyre. When the fire sets easily it is believed that it is good omen for the family members of the deceased. But when the body is not burning easily or not burnt it is believed that the deceased want to eat something, and accordingly the food items are to be offered for the deceased so that the burning or cremation takes place easily. After the burning of death body is over the cremation party throw rice and with water in a leaf, then returns to the home of the deceased. When the funeral party returns to home they are sprinkled with water, *Tulsi* leaf on silver/gold utensils for purifications of the funeral party members. It is customary for the hill Tiwa villagers that for the purification of pall bearers the ceremony of offering flowers is arranged within the two weeks.

4.12. Food Habits

Rice is the staple food of the Tiwas and chicken and pork are their special delicacies. Fried fish is also a favourite dish. Homemade rice bear is essential item and no social function or private feast is complete without it. In religious festivals also rice bear is a must. Generally, the hill Tiwas of Karbi Anglong don't grow white rice in the shifting cultivation and the brown rice grown in the shifting cultivation is used to prepare the rice bear. Each and every household of the Tiwas; who follow the tradition, those who does not converted in other religion use to prepare the rice bear either for religious rituals/ceremonies or festivals or for general domestic use. Rice bear is the national drink of the Tiwas. To prepare bear rice is cooked and lumps are well broken up on a mat. It is then mixed with the yeast; the boiled rice is heaped with up and covered with leaves and put inside the house. Generally, in the hot season fermentation is complete in three days and in the cold season it takes little longer. It is then put into an earthen jar and water is added to it. Contain are then emptied into a pot whence it is allowed to strain through a bamboo strainer into another pot below. It is seen among the Tiwa villagers that the jar of rice bear kept near the Thom Thuna of the house is very sacred place and a bush knife is also kept hanging there.

The Tiwas don't take beef or buffalo meat. They are fond of pork and pork reached in every household. They consume lot of chicken on all occasions and when available they relish venison. The Tiwas started to take tea, but mostly they don't take milk. They rear cow and buffalo and the milk they produce is sold. But now a day they started to consume milk as well.

The spirit is distilled from the fermented rice mixed with water. The still is a crude one of earthen pots connected by a bamboo. Areca-nut is very often chewed with lime and betel leaf. Betel nut and betel leaf are very often used in the ceremonies, rituals or festivals of the Tiwas. In day-to-day life betel nut and betel leaf is essential part of the Tiwas. Any comers to the house are hosted by betel nut and betel leaf. Men and women take meals together within the house. Now a day's aluminum plates and bowls from the market are use. Crabs, meat, fish also make popular dishes among the Tiwas. They are fond of smoked fish which they use to preserve for long. Sun dried fish is consumed in various ways. By making a sauce with chilies and other vegetables or eaten with salt after baking over charcoals. It is interesting to note that the hill Tiwas don't prepare sun dried fish themselves. The sun dried fish use by the Tiwa people are come from many places' especially from the Jagiroad and Nellie market they use to bring the sun dried fish. The Tiwas also consume fermented fish which is prepared by pounding dry fish, sometimes with the stems of Arum and stuffing it in the bamboo tubes kept air tight for a month or so.

4.13. Dress & Ornaments

Among the hill Tiwas weaving is done by the womenfolk in the wooden loom. It is of two types- *Matir-sal* and *Tator-sal*. *Tator-sal* is something different than the *Matir-sal* where a weaver can weave speedily. But the *Matir-sal* is old type of weaving, it consumes much time. Now-a-day majority weavers of the villages of hills of Karbi Anglong use *Tator-sal*. They also produce *Eri* silk and cotton yarn. The hill Tiwa women are very adept in weaving and rearing silk as other tribal women of the region. In dress the Tiwa male follows the Jayantias and it is because of their long association with the Jayantias in the past. On his head he wears a turban and in his loin a loin cloth or a cotton *Dhoti* (*Suriya*). His coat is a sleeveless stripped jacket with long fringes covering the buttocks and coming around in front. The legs are uncovered and shoes are not worn.

The Tiwa women wear upper garment in the form of *Phaskai*, the lower garment in the form of *Kachong* and tied belt like small piece of cloth called *Nara*. The lower garment of the Tiwas has a similarity with the Bodo skirt which is generally coloured and with a border of flowery design. Women and men wear thick wrappers in the cold season.

The women wear skirts and now-a-days wear blouses also. The head is not covered and the hair is drawn back and tied in a knot behind. Of course the new boy and girls who have seen the people of other caste/community in the plains now-a-days follows the dress habits of other people, especially the common Assamese people.

The ordinary hanging ear ring and necklaces usually of silver and sometimes of gold are worn by women and girls. Like the Assamese women the Tiwa women also a tubular ornament in the earlobes.

4.14. Animal Husbandry

The rearing of livestock plays a vital role in the hill Tiwa family life. Rearing of pigs, goats, poultry either for traditional habit or for income generation plays an important part. It does not constitute only the important part of hill Tiwas economic life; it is also regarded the easy and conducive way for removal of poverty. But still rearing is limited to as daily household activity. They don't show any commercial. Though both male and female engaged in other household activities the females are predominant, which in addition to daily household activities use their leisure time in poultry, piggery. With the help of their traditionally inherited knowledge earns something to run their daily life.

4.15. Fishery-Culture

Hunting and gathering practices are a tradition of the hill Tiwas. Among the hill Tiwas still community hunting plays a significant material culture. Bow and arrow, Dao and fire arms are used in the hunting. Fish catching is much popular among the Tiwas. It is very frequently witnessed during the summer season. In the group fishing the Tiwas adopts the method of bare hand method as well as *Pholo, Chakhui, Chal, Khugi, Tingkhri*, etc. are some instruments of fishing. The hill Tiwa villages seems less scope particularly for rearing fish.

4.16. Musical Instruments

The Tiwas are lovers of music and dance. They observe innumerable religious ceremonies throughout the year and musical instruments are essential in those ceremonies. Musical instruments which are necessary for observing ceremonies/festivals/Phujas/occasions are kept generally in the *Shamadi*. There are varieties of *Khram* (Drum) used by the Tiwas. These are- *Khrambaro*, (big drum), *Pisukhram* (small drum), *Ludang khram* (long drum) and *Khram* of general size. Flute made of bamboos are along with drums which are also kept at the *Shamadi*. *Kali*, (pipe) *Tandrang* (violin), *Thogari* (string instruments), *Tumbangetc.* are other musical instruments of the Tiwas.

4.17. Festivals

The hill Tiwas are rich in festivals. The Sogra festival along the offerings of Puja is celebrated in the Tiwa villages annually. It is spring festival generally performed during the February/March to start the cultivation, so that the paddy grows up, ripens, men and animals are safe from any kind of diseases. The *Pisai Pakhona* office bearers of the village and the village headmen worship Lord Podolmajiby offering Puja in the festival days. In the front of every house an earthen platform is made and fowls are sacrificed. In the villages of the hills like Umswai, Bormarjong etc. where the regional heads (Loros) are there the boys dance for the Sogra with flowers on their heads. The flowers are produced from the particular grasses generally found in the wetlands. Sometime the flowers are made of the slices of the small woods and bamboos. So the flowers are not worn. The dance is performed first in the house of Loro, and then they go to the houses of *Doloi, Hadari, Pator, Sangot, Parikha*, and so on.

Another festival of the hill Tiwas is Langkhon festival which has two parts is *Chokha Langkhon* and *Tora Langkhon*. The *Chokha Langkhon* is observed in the month of Kati. The *Loro & Doloi* takes leading part in the celebration. In some Tiwa villages *Shangdoloi* and *Shangmaji* offer the Puja. An altar is made where six folds of *Tharalai* (Tora leaf) and five pieces of *Warang* (end of *Kako* bamboo) and five pieces of *Khumta* are tied with threads. Black goat, duck, and pigeons are sacrificed before the deity.

Yangli festival is celebrated in every three years in the month of March earlier but now in four years among the hill Tiwas. It is celebrated in the *Yangli Sal* where goats, ducks, pigeons, fowls are sacrificed, but here no pigs are offered. There is no specified priest assigned for the Lukhumi Than and the Loro and the regional heads does the worship. The worship of *Lukhumi* is done in chanting sacred incantations which the knowledgeable persons refused to chant in normal times. Along the worship the villager dance called Yangli Misawa dance. The *Panthai* (young lads) with sword (*Langkhui*) in the right hand and shields (*Paru*) in the left hand perform dance in circle, the *Shangdoloi* and *Shangmaji* leading the group. The young volunteers control the people so that the dance becomes orderly. The people offer bundles of paddy, ducks, and pigeons for *Maiphur* and *Posmoda* and *Posmudi* (meaning the earth) they offer goats as sacrificed.

Wanshua is the rice grinding festival of the hill Tiwas. In some foothill areas like in the Daborghat, Silchang, Nellie area the celebration is going on. It is series of four-day festival and the main day of the festival Wanshuwa falls in the third day. Mainly the Marjongwali and Amkhawali villager celebrates the festival separately after every five years. Marjongwali villager celebrates the festival in which the Panthais (Youngs) grind rice grains in mortars with pestles. With the process of grinding rice, the Panthais perform Wanshuwa *Misawa* and *Rojawa* (dance and song). In Tiwa myth 12 god and goddess are associated with this tradition and the festival tells the legends of Guru Charibhai, Maldeo Raja, Lampha Raja, and Sotonga Raja.

The differences have been revealed between the hill and plain Tiwas in respect of festivals. In the hills *Sogra, Yangli Langkhon, Wansuwa* etc. festivals are celebrated. But in the plains; *Jhangkhong, Borot, Mela Uliuwa, Pishu* etc. festivals are celebrated in certain areas. The songs like *Khelchawa, Magromisawa, Panthairojawa* etc. are sung only in hills; but *Godalboria, Pishu-Borot* are only there in certain areas of plains.

5. Conclusion

The way of life of the hill Tiwas of Karbi Anglong differs in certain aspects of the Plain Tiwas. They evolved a distinct pattern of socio-cultural and material way of life; its own code of laws, by and large succeeded in observing the traditional way of life. But day by day due to the impact of surrounding environment, changes occur that degraded the traditional and sustained way of life. Still the hill Tiwas are rich in culture but the lack of basic amenities and developments hailed them to remain isolated. The traditional taboos, beliefs, faiths, habits are responsible in certain extent responsible for the cause. The lack of consciousness, education and training, agricultural facilities, marketing etc. are some common problems of the hill villager. these greatly hampers the development of the hill Tiwas.

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