



KING'S MARTS AND MELAS: A PRESENT TIWA ETHNOGRAPHY

Political Science

**Dr. Lakhinanda
Bordoloi**

Associate professor, Department of Political Science, Dhing College, Nagaon

ABSTRACT

The Tiwas are one of the major tribes of North East India. They had several kingdoms (principalities) known as Datialia, Sato-rajya and Pacho-rajya kingdoms and had marts where they exchanged goods in the absence of coins or currency. They had the barter system in those marts and with the system they fulfilled necessities of all products and amenities to run their day to day life. This tradition has been since the 16th and 17th century in the foothills and plains of middle Assam to the known sources. The tradition turned to 'Mela' (fair) form in transition and still it takes place under the auspices of present ceremonial kings of Gobha and Khola kingdoms of Datialia kingdoms and in many by the celebration committees of the areas. With the emergence of the modern concept of marts and markets the Tiwas had been indoctrinated to the Mela tradition, means the festival of public outing for shops or markets in the winter season along the celebration of Magh Pisu and the Mela Uliuwa tradition during the spring season with the celebration of Bisag Pisu. Tiwa kings and the office bearers of 'Rajane Munthiraw' (King's Council of Ministers) participate together in both the Melas of winter and spring season. The Mela traditions have further been changed with modernity in the passage of time. This paper tries to find the continuity and changes in Tiwa king's marts and Melas and its significance in present day Tiwa traditional way of life.

KEYWORDS

King, Mart, Mela, Tiwa

INTRODUCTION:

Regarding the origin of the Mela Uliuwa tradition among the Tiwas, there are mainly three legends. The first one tells that Silarai was defeated once by Goura raja. Hearing the defeat of his brother Silarai, Naranarayan invited the kings of Sato-rajya and Pacho-rajya for help and the kings of Sato-rajya and Pacho-rajya offered their help for the Koch king Naranarayan. Later on, Silarai was freed by Goura-raj as Naranarayan cured mother of Goura-raj from snake bite. The war preparations ended then. Pleased with the cooperation of Satorajya and pacho-rajya, Naranarayan by giving kinds and in respect of honour celebrated a festival known as Gosai Uliuwa mela. Since then, the Melas has been celebrated among the Tiwas in those areas. The second legend is that- the Melas were observed like Phakuwa (the festival of colour) on the basis of Ghunusa Kirton of Sridhar Kandali. During the closing ceremony of the Mela in the Manikut of Gosai Khatula is established as Gohai after the Mela. He faces the questions about the existence of Gosai or his going off. These scenes of celebrations look quite comedic and dramatic and that is why it creates amusement among the viewers. To note that the Ghunusa Kirton was written on the basis of Rath Yatra of Jagannath on Utkal story of Skandha Puran. The third legend of the origin of Gosai Mela Uliuwa is that Damudar Atta, one of the priests of Vaishnavism travelled across society of cross culture like other travelers for the propagation of Vaishnavism. Once he moved along with Saturbhuj Thakurdev to recover Borduwa. Next year Thakur Atta came to the Mikir-rajya of the east during the month of Bahag. Then he came to know that there was no celebration of Deli Utsav. On the anger of Thakur Atta the Mikir king in his presence moved the village with Gosai Satulla and Murti (deity) and since then the Gosai Uliuwa Mela was celebrated.

The legends proved that it was under the auspices of Poowali rajas of Sato-rajya and Pacho-rajya the Mela was celebrated. Tiwa rajas had pioneered the tradition of Mela Uliuwa. The tradition marked the Tiwa socio-cultural identity. With the passage of time the tradition has been changing, yet the Tiwas practice it till date. It is important to know more about the traditions of an ethnic group for socio-cultural preservation in a multicultural society like in India so that there should not be any identity crisis of a tribe.

METHODOLOGY:

The method of data collection for the present study has been from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources have been the observation and field visits on the days of Mela and marts. The secondary sources have been the historical study on marts and Melas from the sources- published books, articles and journals.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the study have been to know the continuity and changes on marts and Melas of the Tiwa king's; to find significance of the Melas in traditional and cultural life of the Tiwas; to know the present Tiwa ethnographic regions of traditional marts and markets.

RESULTS:

There are 3 (three) distinct ethnographic regions found among the Tiwas now. These are (i) hill (ii) foothill and (iii) plain regions. The people of hill and foothill regions are more tradition bound than the Tiwa people of plain regions. Tiwa cultural variations are found region to region. Now the Mela or Gosai Uliuwa is the most significant culture of middle Assam which is mainly a heritage of the Tiwas. The traditional Tiwa kings and their offspring observe Mela or Gosai Uliuwa throughout the whole of the month of Bahag and Jeth of the Assamese calendar. Simply speaking it is a religious occasion where the idol of God is brought out from the Namghar and makes a procession. But the process of observation and participation of particular traditional office holders clearly testify its political and economic characteristics.

Whatever it is, the kingdom of Gobha and other smaller kingdoms of the Tiwas have also the tradition of commencing Melas of different characteristics. The people of kingdoms are ceaselessly continuing their traditional culture. Gobha kingdom deserves the credit of observing four Melas of different characters in different times and places.

Gobha Mela:

Gobha Mela is held on the sixth day of Gobha Bihu. Gobha Bihu is celebrated after one of general Assamese Bihu. The day of Gobha Mela is Friday as the Bihu starts on Sunday. Hari Khunguri plays an important part on Mela, performing worship at Namghar and Barghar (a small house where traditional worship is done). On the previous day of the Mela war, weapons were bathed by the royal officers of Gobha king. The officers carry the weapons away and smear with the blood of fowls, come back with dance and music and approach Hari Khunguri. She questions the blood of the weapons and reasons for their rejoining. The officers' answer then that they victoriously come back from the war and the blood is the proof. Hari Khunguri honour them with rice bear, betel nut and leaves. As a part of rejoicing, order is given to roam about the idol of Lord Krishna in the locality. Holy water is distributed among the subordinate Dolois. A huge Mela is organized in an open field and an idol of Lord is established there where people in great numbers assemble to celebrate the occasion.

Nokhola Mela:

Nokhola is the last capital of Gobha Kingdom. Here a Mela takes place on the 7th day of Bohag Bihu of Gobha kingdom. The day is Saturday, just following the day of Gobha Mela. In this Mela Gobha king plays a predominant role instead of Hari Khunguri (the princess that relates to the religious matters). On the proceeding day the king performs worship at Namghar, war weapons are cleaned, and the idol of Lord Krishna is carried on to the Mela spot with a procession where the king himself and his office bearers take part. The king and his officers' seat on the mela spot according to their position and the soldiers of the king show their drill with shield, sword and spears. The playing with shields

and swords testify that it was originally an annual day of coronation ceremony of the king. It is a huge gathering of people, shops and markets, drums, music of war and other amusement create a tremendous scene.

Kharbil Mela:

Kharbil mela is another mela that is held under the auspices of Gobha king. It is held on the eve of Bohag Bihu on the bank of the Bil named as Kharbil. The Bils were played very important role in the socio-economic and political aspects of traditional Tiwa kingdoms. There are a large number of Bils in the south bank of Kolong and Kopili River under Gobha, Nellie, Khola, Sohori and Dimoria kingdom. Many interesting legends of warriors and kings were created by these Bils of the kingdoms. The days of observation of Kharbil mela was on Friday and Saturdays; i.e. Saturday is the 'Uruka' day of Gobha Bihu. Community fishing is important feature of Kharbil Mela, the people offer fish as tax to the Gobha king and arrange a feast on the house of Doloi an officer of the king. A mart is held where people from plains and hills came and exchanges goods by barter. The Mela thus has an economic character.

Jonbil Mela:

Sources reveal that during the time of Ahom Swargadeo Pratap Singha there had been rivalry between Jayantia and Ahoms. In 1606 Jayantia King Josh Narayan proposed marriage of his daughter with Pratap Singh for establishing peaceful relations with Ahoms. Thereafter the kings of Gobha, Jayantia and Ahom entered an agreement for trade and marts in the borderlands of their territory. Finally a mart was established at Phuloguri. That was the start of marts and markets in Tiwa kingdoms. In spite of having conflict relations the mart was to continue till Ahom Swargadeo Sakradhwaj Singha. Later on, gradually the mart at Phuloguri was stopped due to growing conflicts between the Jayantia and Ahoms. After Chakradhwaj Singha Siva Singha became the Swargadeo of Ahom dynasty (1714-1744 A. D.). He tried to hold the mart at Phuloguri once again on 27 July 1729 on the plea made by Gobha king. But on failure to reach agreement the place was shifted from Phuloguri to Tatiarmukhu (Hat tuwa khu) 2 km north to the present Junbil Mela place in the same year. Since then the mart of Gobha had been continuing at Hatiaimukh. But most probably during 1826 to 1835 under the reign of Gobha king Junsing, the mart place was shifted to present Junbil Mela.

Now, Junbil Mela is the most famous and glamorous Mela of Gobha kingdom which is held on the eve of Magh Bihu festival on the bank of Junbil with 3 to 4 day long programmes on Wednesday to Saturday. Sunday is Bohag Bihu day of Gobha king. On Wednesday and Thursday people from hills come with their jhum products and make small huts with bamboo and straw to pass their nights. On Friday people from the plains come with fish, dry fish, rice beer etc. they exchange those articles. On the same day a community fishing is done on the Bil by the subjects and a feast is arranged on the bank of it where the king and his officers participate. On Saturday the Bil is kept open for general people for fishing irrespective of caste, community, creed and religion. On the same day the king adorns his temporary Dorbar where the kings of other kingdoms are also invited. The king Khyrim and Narteng used to give their visit in the Mela. The Gobha king collects taxes from the traders and shopkeepers that participated in the Mela.

In the context of Mela tradition it can be said that the religious and cultural synchronism is not clear for the case of Tiwa tribe. On other hand, a distinct cultural growth was inevitable between the hilly and the plain Tiwas. The hilly Tiwas are different from the rest in respect to the celebration of certain festivals. For example they perform festivals like Mela Uliuwa, Borot, Pisu etc. only in Plain areas and Sagra, Yangli, Langkhon, Wansuwa etc. only in the hilly areas. The songs like Khelchawa, Magromisawa Panthairojawa etc. are there only in hilly areas and Godalboria, Pisu, Borot etc. are only there in certain plain areas. There are formations of another tribe folded among the Tiwas.

DISCUSSION:

In plain Sato-rajya and Pacho-rajya village areas conversion and assimilation took place rapidly in lieu of cultural exchange. Foothill and some isolated village areas like Kathiatoli, Kaki, Bhoksong, Amsoi, Silchang, Jagiroad, Dimoria etc. areas are keeping the tempo of Tiwa culture of both hills and plains. According to their own tradition, celebrations of three Pisu festivals by the Tiwas in the plains are observed. But still there are variations. In 1980's even the Tiwa people

observed Pisu as Uruka by Tuesday and Pisu at Sangkranti with other Non-Tiwas. Mela Utsav is the most popular festival of the plains Tiwas after a week of Bisag Pisu. Borot Utsav is observed in Tetelia, where all Sato-rajya subjects assemble together to enjoy the festival. The Patidhol culture of the plain Tiwas is not found in the hills. Therefore the cultural milieu of the Tiwas cannot be confirmed to a particular place. The hill Tiwas believe Marjong-paro (Bormarjong) as the centre of art and culture, where from all culture and traditions of the Tiwas stretched to other parts.

The Tiwa culture and traditions change in evolution from generation to generation, due to the admixture of peoples of different areas. Customary practices are not universal in character, observed in all societies. Traditional marts, markets or Melas are practices with the extent they understand the significance of culture for self identity. In contrast to the written or codified rules of personal or public conduct passed by the government, the traditions still play a role in their way of life.

The ethnographic situation is unique; where the Tiwas among others do not possess any codified law for social control is significant. The state and local self-government institutions both in the hilly and plain areas have been empowered to make laws with respect to land, forest, canal, water course, shifting cultivation, establishment of towns and village and its administration, appointment of, or succession to, chiefs or headman, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce and matters relating to any other social customs. Even then, the Tiwas are governed by norms based on customary laws, socio-cultural and ritual tradition. The Tiwas have perennial customs supported by effective social sanctions. But the traditions are different in different areas depending on situations and environment. They often vary even among the same tribe of different regions.

CONCLUSION:

Socio-cultural change is a very complex process. Various processes relate to the process. Dysfunctional consequences have also been there in ethnographic changes among the Tiwas particularly in the process of sanskritization. The questions of acceptance of new traditions or undesirable elements in their way of life have always been there. The king's marts and markets and the Mela Uliuwa tradition also signify ethnographic variations becoming ceremonial only in plain areas. It is very difficult for socialization of a complex tradition towards the undesired direction as exemplified among the Tiwas in their multiple traditions. The changing process resulted in dichotomy in ethnic cultural identity. Because of the multiplicity, complexity and dysfunctional nature of certain processes of social change resulting in socio-cultural extinction, the Tiwas could manage in keeping their own cultural identity with changes in them. These have been reflected in their traditional marts, markets and Melas.

REFERENCES:

1. Amsih, Rimal, 2018, *Koba Rajane Junbil Hat*, in Rupkrishna Pator (ed) *Junbil*, Gobha Deoraja Junbil Mela Unnayan Samiti, Jagiroad, p.27
2. Barooah, Jeuti in Girindra Nath Das (ed), *Tribal Tradition and Development in the Hill Areas of Assam*, p. 75
3. Bordoloi, Bhaskar, 2016, *Tiwa: Oitihahik Anusandhan*, Tiwa Sahitya Sabha, Jagiroad, p.221
4. Baruah, Bandana, 2015, *Society, Economy, Religion and Festivals of Tiwas in Assam*, New Delhi. p. 138
5. Dewri, Maneswar, 2010, *Socio-cultural Milieu of the Tiwas*, in Deben Ch Kalita & Himangsu Sarmah (ed) *The Tiwas (Lalungs): A Profile of a Tribe*, Morigaon College, p.57
6. Dewri, Maneswar in Krishnaram Mili (ed), 2009, *Tiwa Sanskritir Reh-rup*, Hills View Publications, Gauhati. p.125
7. Kakati, Dhanada, 2015, *Melas of Gobha Kingdom*, in Hareswar Bordoloi (ed) *Sograsal*, Sograsal Festival Celebration Committee, Jagiroad, pp. 269-273
8. Kalita, Ramesh Chandra, 2023, Maneswar Dewri et.al *Lalung (Tiwa Buranji)*, Tiwa Autonomous Council, Morigaon. p.131
9. Maslai, Upping, 2015, *Koba: The Ancient Tiwa State*, in Hareswar Bordoloi (Ed) *Sograsal*, p.32
10. Patar, Mileswar, 2018, *Tiwa Jonogusthi: Samajik Ruprekha*, Tiwa Autonomous Council, Morigaon. p. 65
11. Patar, Raktim, 2021, *The Tiwa Ethnography*, Notion Press, Chennai, Tamilnadu, pp. 181-193
12. Pator, Kaberi, 2015, *Modhya Asomor Gosai Uliuwa Mela aru Tiwa Sokolor Bhumika*, in the Hareswar Bordoloi (ed), *Sograsal*, Jagiroad, pp. 150-152
13. Radu Kakati, Narayan Kumar, 2016, *History of Tiwa Kingdom*, Morigaon. p.45