

Jun Beel Mela- a heritage fair and Traditional Kingship Institution of the Tiwa Tribes of Assam

Introduction:

The Jun Beel Mela is a centuries-old traditional fair which seems to be a virtual wonder in its own right. The most striking feature of this historic fair is that it has been keeping alive the age-old barter system as a means procuring goods. This Jun Beel Mela is organised every year in the month of Magh of Assamese calendar, that falls in the mid January, near the highway town Jagiroad in the Marigaon District of Assam. The three day annual event is being organized under the traditional king of the Tiwa tribes called ‘Gobha Deoraja’ that once ruled the area. The fair has been organized on the occasion of Magh Bihu, a traditional festival, of the King and a wide range of pristine customs and practices are associated with the fair.

In this fair, the different hill tribes like Tiwa, Karbi, khasi, Garo and others from the neighbouring West Karbianglong and Meghalaya and their counterparts from the plains exchange products directly without the involvement of money. Barter turns out in this unique fair in such a natural and spontaneous way, as if the ancient practice has been fossilised here in a living state. The fair is also considered very important instance of maintaining cordial relations between the hills and the plains as well as among the tribes and non-tribes.

The Tiwas, also known as Lalungs, are one of the oldest but underdeveloped tribal communities of Assam that are mostly found in the plains and hills of the central part of Assam. Apart from the village and clan level socio-political organizations, existence of some self-governing social institutions headed by a chief called ‘*Raja*’, means king, are found among these Indo-Mongoloid people. Besides being a traditional judiciary head of the areas and the community, with a council of Ministers (Darbar) and office-bearers, these chieftains are often regarded as *Deoraja* means- a religious king or a religious head. Apart from the Jun Beel Mela, a wide range of intangible cultural elements are found associated with these kingship institutions that includes social folk customs, believes, oral history, legends, folk practices, artifacts, historical objects, festivals and

ceremonies, judiciary procedures, management systems, inheritance regulations etc.

There are more than a dozen of such traditional Tiwa kings with their organized kingship institutions that are maintaining their existence till date. The kingship institution of Gobha is considered most significant and important as it was the paramount province among all. The Jun Beel Mela was organized under this Gobha king or Gobha Deoraja to felicitate trade among the hills and the plains as well as among the tribal and non-tribal.

Documentation and research work are the need of the hour for the preservation, promotion and exposure of this interesting and unique fair as well as the tribal kingship institution of the Tiwa community which has not yet done comprehensively in any form. Moreover it is also considered very important to include Jun Beel Mela in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage as it is the one of the rarest instances of practicing the most pristine mode of trade in the history of human civilization in a living state.

Objectives the Project:

The proposed project would be a comprehensive research and documentation work on the heritage fair 'June Beel Mela' as well as on the tradition of the Kingship Institutions of the Tiwas of Assam for its preservation, promotion, protection and exposure. With this study and documentation, research-based data would be created to establish the historic fair as a Heritage Faire. For this, different significant aspects of the fair would be studied, analyzed and documented through audio-visual means.

Implementation of the project:

The research and documentation project would be carried out with the following tools and means –

- a) Textual Documentation
- b) Audio Recording System
- c) Still Photography
- d) Video Photography

The study would mainly cover the following aspects of the fair and the kingship institutions of the Tiwas -

- Origin and historic courses, present status, changing trends, traditional management system, customs, practices and beliefs, oral history, people's participation in general,
- Social Folk Customs and Folk Practices, Worships, Festivals & Ceremonies, Traditional Judiciary, responsibilities and functions of the kingship institutions.
- Impact and role of the fair in the present day context, Jun beel Mela as a site of communal harmony and integration among different communities. Its role in maintaining congenial relation between hill dwellers and plain-dwellers.
- Significance of Barter System of the fair, Products exchanged in the fair, The reasons behind the existence of age-old Barter System in this day of modern way of life and convenient means of economy.
- Impact of modernity and other new developments, Threats to this fair and needs and means of preservation

Time frame of the project:

Commencement of the project	:	April 2014
Duration of the Project	:	one and half year (18 Months)
Completion of the Project	:	September 2015

Geographical Area:

The Tiwa chiefdoms are found in the Morigaon, Nagaon and Kamrup districts of Assam that are the geographical area where the highest concentration of the Tiwas are found. The **Jun Beel Mela** is held near the highway town Jagiroad in the Marigaon District. Thus the study has to be carried out mainly in these areas.

Conclusion

A final report will be prepared on the findings of the entire research and documentation work that will contain the textual part of the documentation as well as the records on audio visual format.

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PROGRESS REPORT

For the Project Sanctioned under the scheme of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India, 2013 -14

1. Title of the Project:

Jun Beel Mela- a heritage fair and Traditional Kingship Institution of the Tiwa Tribes of Assam- Documentation, Research, Preservation.

2. Name of the Grantee:

Mr. Arup Bordoloi, Guwahati, (Assam)

3. Date of Commencement of the Project:

1st April 2014

4. Introduction:

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In this fair, the different hill tribes like Tiwa, Karbi, khasi, Garo and others from the neighbouring West Karbianglong and Meghalaya and their counterparts from the plains exchange products directly without the involvement of money. Barter turns out in this unique fair in such a natural and spontaneous way, as if the ancient practice has been fossilised here in a living state. The fair is also considered very important instance of maintaining cordial relations between the hills and the plains as well as among the tribes and non-tribes.

The Tiwas, also known as Lalungs, are one of the oldest but underdeveloped tribal communities of Assam that are mostly found in the plains and hills of the central

part of Assam. Apart from the village and clan level socio-political organizations, existence of some self-governing social institutions headed by a chief called '*Raja*', means king, are found among these Indo-Mongoloid people. Besides being a traditional judiciary head of the areas and the community, with a council of Ministers (Darbar) and office-bearers, these chieftains are often regarded as *Deoraja* means- a religious king or a religious head. Apart from the Jun Beel Mela, a wide range of intangible cultural elements are found associated with these kingship institutions that includes social folk customs, believes, oral history, legends, folk practices, artifacts, historical objects, festivals and ceremonies, judiciary procedures, management systems, inheritance regulations etc.

There are more than a dozen of such traditional Tiwa kings with their organized kingship institutions that are maintaining their existence till date. The kingship institution of Gobha is considered most significant and important as it was the paramount province among all. The Jun Beel Mela was organized under this Gobha king or Gobha Deoraja to felicitate trade among the hills and the plains as well as among the tribal and non-tribal.

Documentation and research work are the need of the hour for the preservation, promotion and exposure of this interesting and unique fair as well as the tribal kingship institution of the Tiwa community and the same has already been carried out with the financial assistance received from the Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi, Govt of India under the scheme of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India. Moreover it is also considered very important to include Jun Beel Mela in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage as it is the one of the rarest instances of practicing the most pristine mode of trade in the history of human civilization in a living state.

The Documentation and research work have been carried out systematically to achieve the objectives of the project. The Progress of the work have been stated in this report and the same have been substantiated with documentation materials such as video footage and still photography enclosed herewith in DVDs.

5. Methodology:

A detailed work plane has been prepared for execution of the project immediately after its selection. Field works for the research and documentation have been carried out as per the work plan for achieving the objectives of the project. The contact persons, resource persons, events, locations, etc have been indentified and communication and other pre- field related works have been carried out systematically for smooth execution of the research and documentation.

The sources of data for the study are basically the primary sources. There are a very few secondary sources such as published book, article or research paper on the topic. Information have been collected mainly from the field after discussion with the villagers as well as with firsthand observations. The most widely used methods during the field-study were the interview and observation methods for research, documentation and data collection. In most of the times the non-directive interview method has been adopted to overcome the possible barrier due to lack of understanding on the part of informants on specific questions. The observation method was strictly no-participatory one.

For the authenticity of the information as well as for additions and rectification of data, some special aspects of the study have been crossed discussed with different village elders accompanying by the contact persons.

The research and documentation project would be carried out with the following tools and means –

- a) Textual Documentation
- b) Audio Recording System
- c) Still Photography
- d) Video Photography

All the information received from the field work has been recorded in the textual format apart from audio visual format for record and analysis. However some elements such as songs and music, performances, beliefs, etc has been recorded separately by the concerned scholars in audio visual format depending upon their subject of study.

This Progress Report has been prepared on the basis of the findings of the research and documentation work that contain the textual information of the study

substantiated with documentation materials such as video footage and still photography enclosed herewith in DVDs.

6. Progress of the work:

The Jun Beel Mela is a fair organised on a certain day of the year. This event is organised every year in the month of Magh of Assamese calendar that falls in the mid January. Therefore the Mela has not been covered yet for documentation as because the same has not been organised after commencement of the project (i.e. 1st April 2014). The fair is scheduled to be happed on the January 2015. However study have been made on Jun Beel Mela on the basis of discussion, interview, etc and a tentative note has been prepared on the event as follows:

i) The Jun Beel Mela : The Site of Living Fossil

(A tentative note)

The Jun Beel Mela is actually a historic market and the thrill about this traditional mart is that the system of procuring items here is the ‘barter’. Yes, money is not at all required here to obtain goods, however you need to have certain products with you to exchange with others.

The Jun Bil Mela is organised every year in January near the highway town Jagiroad at Marigaon District, where the hill dwellers from the neighbouring West Karbianglong and Meghalaya and their plains counterparts of the locality exchange their products directly without the involvement of the medium of money. In this days of plastic money and e-treading, when you even need not have to carry money with you, barter turns out in this unique tread fair in such a natural and spontaneous way as if the ancient practice turned here fossil in a living state.

The origin of this rare event has an affinity to the Tiwa Kingship institution found in the area. The hills and plains of the locality was once said to have ruled by the tributary kings belongs to the Tiwa community and the Kingdom was known as Gobha. This Jun Beel Mela was organised by this Gobhadeuraja for the exchange of products among his subjects from both the terrains.

Surprisingly enough, this Gobha king is still maintain its existence and the socio-cultural customs associated with kingship institution are still in force, although

the political powers and activities ceased to practice now. The king still draws tremendous respect from his community and there are a range of responsibilities that have to manage by the king along with his council even today. Jun Bil Mela, Gosain Uliuwa Mela, Than Pujas, etc. are some of the occasions organised under this tribal chieftain.

The Jun Beel Mela is a three day affair organised on the occasion of Magh Bihu of the Gobha king. Interestingly, the Bihu of the Tiwa people is day specific and hence not organised in the juncture of months called *Sangkranti*. The Magh Bihu of the Gobha King is generally observed on the first Sunday next to the *Makar Sangkranti* that generally comes to the third week of January.

The century old fair commences on a Thursday to conclude on the eve of the *Uruka* of the King's Bihu that observed on the Saturday. The fair is organised on the bank of a wetland called Jun Beel, which attributed its name, about four km away from Jagiroad town. On the starting day the king and his council organised a feast in the bank of the wetland and it is customary to have fishes from the marsh on the occasion.

The hill tribes started reaching the Mela ground from Thursday onwards. In earlier days most of them use to come on foot and reached the place by Thursday evening or on Friday morning. Some of the distant dweller even halted a night on their way to this market. Now many of them come by a hired mini truck, trekker or by an auto. The presence of the hill people makes the environment quite different as they mostly come in their colourful hand-woven traditional attires carrying their products in bamboo baskets. Although, Tiwas, Karbis, Khasis, Garos, Boros all come down from the hills to be the part of the event, the Hill Tiwas dominates the number. They prepare temporary sheds with the bamboo and straw at the open fairground for their stay and rest during the Mela days.

The prime attraction, the exchange of products, starts right from the dawn, on the second day of the event, i.e. on Friday. The people from the surrounding villages also started appearing in the fair site with their goods for barter with hill people right from the early morning. The Hill people bring ginger, turmeric, potato, roots, corms, chillies, etc. and exchange those with dry and raw fish, *Sandah* (fried rice powder), rice cakes, etc. of the plains.

To initiate the trade of exchange, generally a plain dweller ask for the respond of the hill counterpart like this - *Oi Maami, Xalaabinike* (Oh aunt, are you interested in barter with me)? If the hill woman is willing for the exchange, a query will be followed regarding the goods. If items are not in open then either party may indulge in peeping the others sac. A bargain is not uncommon on the quantity and quality of

items. If all not goes well a deal may break midway also. For exchange, items are measured in small curry bowls, in bunches, in packets of leaves, or in grips of hand and arranged in the ground on a sac or a cloth to compare before final exchanging and taking over. A community fishing on the *Beel* on Friday is also an important feature of the event. Cock-fighting is also organised to add to the flurry of happenings. The barter gets thinner with the rolling of the day and by evening most of the highlander leaves the site. Some of the hill people also offer some presentation as tribute to the king.

Parallel to this unique occurrence there also held a big commercial market which is common to any general fair with vendors of sweets, ornaments, cloths, fruits, etc. that sprout in every corners. And to buy something here one has to take his purse in hand as nothing gets here in barter. Fish market, pork vendors, cottage industry products along with a huge furniture market draw thousands of visitors to this historic event to make it a huge affair.

The Gobha king visits the fair in royal attire along with his council on Saturday after observing certain ritual in his residence at Nakhola. His officials collect tax from the commercial vendors on the same day. The fair come to an end on the Saturday evening and *Uruka* feast is organised at the residence of the king. On Sunday morning *Megis* are set in to fire to mark the celebration of Bihu in Gobhadeuraja's kingdom.

With the unique characteristics, the fair inclined to the status of a tourist destination and people belongs to different communities throng here with great enthusiasm making ant-line to the fairground. Above all, this is a site that is standing as the symbol of unity, brotherhood and bond among the hills and plains as well as tribal and non-tribal for last hundreds of years and deserve due attention to follow as a role model to uphold peace and harmony in the region.

Detail documentation and study of the fair would be carried out during the event to be held on 2nd week of January 2015 and details would be submitted in the final report.

ii) About the Traditional Kingship Institutions of the Tiwa Tribes:

A note has been prepared on the Traditional Kingship Institutions of the Tiwas on the basis of the research and documentation work carried out under the project -

The Tiwas also known as Lalungs are one of the oldest tribal groups of Assam. Racially they are Indomongoloid people and fall under the Tibetoburman language family. The main concentrations of the Tiwas are found in the central Assam spreading over mainly in three districts, viz- Morigaon, Nagaon and Karbianglong of Assam and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya. According to geographical distribution, cultural distinctiveness and linguistic features the Tiwas can be divided in three groups viz- the Hill Tiwas , Plain Tiwas and the Tiwas found adjacent to the Hill Tiwas

Apart from the village and clan level socio-political organisations, existence of some tributary heads called '*Raja*' means king are found in some parts of the Tiwa inhabitation, mainly near the foot hills of Karbianglong District. Besides being a traditional judiciary head of the area and the community with a council of ministers and officials these chieftains are often regarded as '*Deoraja*' means a religious king or a religious head of the community. It is apparent from the multi-tier organisational structure of these kingship institutions, their mentions in the historical chronicles and ramification in the cultural milieu, that these institutions were once highly flourished and were the main guiding force of the socio-political and cultural activities of the area and the community. Although the political status, once enjoyed by these kings has been reduced in due course of time, interestingly enough, the kingship institutions of the Tiwas survived the stress and strains of the changing time and circumstances and are still playing a vital role in the respective societies. In spite of the present day modern world with high authoritarian district administration and democratic Government and modern way of life which have a remarkable impact on the Tiwa societies these Rajas are treated as head so far as social stratification, religious and cultural activities, traditional judiciary system and social recognition are concerned.

The dozens of such principalities that maintain their existence can be divided in to two lines depending upon their subjugation to the paramount medieval Ahom rulers and the matrilineal Jaintia kingdom. *Kumoi, Tarani, Baghara, Tetelia, Kacharigaya, Suknagog* and *Ghagua* are the seven principalities known as *Satu Raja* and the *Topakuchi, Barapujia, Mikirganya, Phulaguri* and *Khaigoria* are the five principalities called *Pachu Raja*, which were once, administered under two different Ahom administrative circles. But in due course of time most of them converted in to

Vaishnavite cult and the tribal customs ceased to be practiced. Their kingship institutions too are not prominent though not totally extinct.

The provinces of Gobha of Jagiroad, Nellie of Nellie, Khola of Silsung and Sahari of Amsoi of Morigaon district come under the other group of principalities. These were once the tributaries of the erstwhile Jaintia kingdom and are marked by the Tiwa chiefs and maintenance of their distinctive traditional customs till date. The discussions here will be confined only to the kingship institutions of this prominent group of kingdoms.

Although due to lack of historical records it is difficult to trace their actual time of origin, there are evidences of existence of the provinces of Gobha, Nellie and Khola from 17 Century onwards.

In successive periods, these tributary heads of Jaintias had made their time-to-time sub- mission to the Ahom monarch and were referred as *datiyaliyas* means (the chieftains) of the border by the Ahom chronicles. The Gobha province has maintained her existence in full force till 1833 when it was finally took over by the British. Although they were subjugated to British province their affairs were left to themselves and allowed to handle the petty cases by their chiefs.

The kingship institutions of the Tiwas consist of a council of ministers and officials with the Raja at the apex as the paramount. The traditional institutions were and are still responsible for some of their day-to-day affair of administration in a democratic manner and in accordance to the general will of the people based on their traditions and customs. The chiefs though occupy the highest hierarchy, cannot go against the popular will of their people. The king exercises civil and judiciary power in conformity with the resolution of the *Darbar* (council). The verdict taken by the king is actually a resolution and agreement of the *Darbar* in presence of the chief. The Chieftain in presence of the *Darbar* settles the social disputes like sex outside social norms, marriage disputes, misbehaviours of the member of the community, fixation of fine etc. Apart from these secular activities another big responsibility of the king is to perform the role of the head of the sacred and religions functions. The *Raja* is offered the respect of a deity by his community and he has to act as a head priest in some religious occasions.

The kingships as well as the other offices are hereditary in nature. However, if the king is found inefficient in running his duty or found guilty of incest he could be disposed of or dismissed by the people. In such cases or in case when there is no issue

of a king for inheritance of the kingdom the council may select a person from other family which must be from the same clan of the king. That shows that the kingship of the Tiwas is clan-specific. The king of the Gobha must be from *Maloi* clan, Nellie must be from *Muniwali* clan and Khola must be from *Masrang* clan.

The number of ministers and officials of the council of the king vary from 40 to 55 in different territories and have different designations, stratification and responsibilities. Some of the ministers and officials of the council are like *Barbarua*, chief minister; *Patra Mantri*, minister; *Senapati*, Chief of the army; *Deka Raja*, assistant to the king; *Lora*, regional head; *Deuri*, priest; *Hatari*, assistant to *Deuri*, *Doloi*, *Patar*, *Deka Doloi*, *Arandhara*, *Gar Bhetera*, *Dhulia*, *Bordoloi*, *Langthia*, *Mutha Bhari*, *Bhitar Maji*, *Tamuli*, *Barika*, *Medhi*, *Khelma*, *Bisani Dhara*, *Pat Doloi*, *Kumar*, *Sunamati* etc. Allotment of land and other facilities are common in the name of the institution and even in the names of some principal functionaries.

Each territory is comprised of a number of villages. Among these principalities Gobha was the most prominent and it is said that the others *viz*-Nellie and Khola were its subordinate provinces though they at present do not maintain any customary relation with Gobha. Gobha has its one immediate subordinate province namely Pachim Nagaon. Like wise the Khola chieftain had its two subordinate provinces-*viz* : Sahari and Uttar Khola. Though Uttar Khola ceased to exist the Sahari is maintaining its presence till date.

The death of a king is never made public till the inheritance of the kingdom by his successor. Following the death of a king the *Rajchara* (Royal Council) select the successor and after a ceremonial bath the king is adorned with Royal attire before declaring him as king. The king is prohibited to attend a funeral ceremony and it is a taboo for him even to look at the face of a dead person. Therefore a son cannot see the body of his dead father after his coronation as a king. The expected person should be an unmarried at the time of attaining kingship. Though the Hill Tiwas are matrilineal and kingship of these provinces too once on the same line, in course of time they might adopted patrilineal inheritance.

As a head of the religious activities the *Raja* with his council has to organise and manage various worships and festivals. All decisions regarding religious activities are taken by the council in presence of the king as per their tradition. Among the various obligation of the king, he has to make arrangement for worship of certain '*Thans*' a special place of worship, within his territory in certain periods or days of the

year. These *Thans* are sacred places of worship of certain deities generally demarked with a bamboo fencing with or without a thatchor CGI shed. There are separate *Deuris* (priest) for worship of these *Thans*. On the day of the worship of the *Thans*, they are purified by spreading *Santiani*, special holy water, taken from the house of the king. The *Thans* or *Than* gods worshiped under Gobha are *Ranchali* or *Ranthali*, *Deusal*, *Alulia Than*, *Jathisal*, *Gosain Uliwa Than*, *Dholiyai*, *Bamun Duwar*, *Sani Puja*, *Jangkhang Puja*, under Nellie are *Kher Puja*, *Bhagawati*, *Simapuja*, *Jadawa*, *Barpuja*, *Mahadeu puja*, *Mahamaya*, under Khola are *Pancha Devata Than*, *Bura Amcha*, *Kesaikhati*, *Ma Kalika* and under Sahari are *Basundhari* and *Mahadeusal*.

Human sacrifice was a part of the rituals of certain *Than* worship. Interestingly, in all the provinces the kings avoid the worship of that particular *Thans* where once the human sacrifice was a rite. There are found different versions of a story where the son of the king had to be sacrificed as per precondition of selecting a subject for human sacrifice. And since then, it is said that, the king has been avoiding the worship of that particular deity. The *Than* gods are worshiped in their traditional ways and sacrifice of animals like goat, hen, pig etc are common. In certain *Thans* like the *Ma-Bhagawati* of Nellie the king himself has to play the role of the priest.

One of the legends associated with these *Thans* reveals that the Goddess *Ma-Bhagawati* discloses her desire of replacement of her abode from a jungle to the present location to the king of Nellie *Nara Sing Deoraja* in dream. Accordingly the king tried his best but failed to bring the stone image of the deity even after deploying elephants. *Ma-Bhagawati* appeared in the dream of the king again and said that She will come on his lap. The king, who was the father of the present king of Nellie *Ram Sing Deoraja*, was successful in bringing the idol to its present location as per the words of the deity.

There are organized systems including taxation for meeting the expenditures of worships under kingship institutions. Tax is paid to the king in certain occasions generally in terms of agricultural products. Allotted *Bils*, a kind of wetland, are there in the names of kingship institutions where community-fishing are organized in certain occasions of the year. Fish of particular *Bils* are a must for some rites in the house of the king.

Festivals like *Raja Meja* or *Gosain Uliwa Mela*, *Jun Bil Mela* are the popular events of the area under the kingship institution of the Tiwas. The *Gosai Uliwa Mela* is organized in the month of April at the time of *Bahag Bihu*, a National Festival of

Assam. The *Bihu* of the Tiwas is not celebrated on the day of the *Bihu* of the Assamese calendar. They celebrate it in particular days of the week, which is on Saturday and Sunday. After seven days of the *Bihu*, on next Saturday and Sunday the *Gosain Uliwa Mela* is organized under the Tiwa chieftains of the area. This is organised under all Tiwa Chieftains on different days. On the day of the Mela the king and his council dressed in royal attire seat in the royal *Darbar*. The idol of the Lord Krishna, whom they called '*Jadua Gosain*' is taken out of the *Than* also called *Namghar*, to an open area in a procession along with the king. Tributes and respect are offered to the king in the open field apart from prayer to the Lord *Jadua*. A fair is also organized in this annual occasion. The officials and also the king display their skills in the rhythm of drum and other musical instruments.

The *Jun Bil Mela* is a fair organized by the Gobha King, which is mainly an annual occasion of exchanging products from hills and plains. Organised on the occasion of *Bihu* of Gobha Raja on the bank of the *Jun Bil* (a wetland) the fair have been keeping alive the age-old barter system. A feast on the bank of the *Bil* by the king with his officials on Thursday marked the initiation of the 3 day affair. A community fishing on the *Bil* on Friday is also an important feature of the occasion. The Hill people bring ginger, turmeric, potato, roots, chilies and exchange those with dry and raw fish, *Sandah* (a kind of processed rice powder), rice cakes, etc. of the plains. The Gobha king visits the fair in royal attire on Saturday and his officials collect tax from the commercial vendors. The Hill dwellers, who use the items collected from the *Mela* in their rituals, also offer some presentation to the king.

There is a story, which tells that once the Gobha king was on a visit to the villages of his kingdom with the queen. On their way they came across a *Bil* in the shape of a *Jun* (new moon). The beauty of the water body attracted them and when they were on a boat the *Junbiri* (a necklace with a locket in the shape of a new moon) fell on the water. By this time it was already dark and they could not find the ornament instead they saw only the reflection of the new moon on the water. Thus the water body came to known as *Jun Bil*.

In the recent days the *Rajas* of the Tiwas become significant due to its role played as an identity marker. Although, in fact, they are tribal chiefs only, the term king has been used since the people call and treat them as Raja, means king. *Gosain Uliwa Mela* implies their adherence to the Vaisnavism, the leading faith of the region, though comparatively their traditional religious practices are more prominent among them. The traits and the designations of the principal functionaries suggest the impact

of both Ahom as well as Jaintia monarchy and their folktales and beliefs indicate their proximity to the Hill Tiwas and Jaintias.

iii) Some of the Events of the Kingship Institutions of the Tiwas covered under the project:

A. Event : The Gosain Mela of Gobha King:

Date : 24/ 04/ 2014

Location: Gobha and Nokhola, Jagirod, Marigaon, Assam

Description:

Come the spring and it's all the festival time. In this juncture of the seasons all the groups of people from this region celebrate a festival of some kind or other. Among them Bihu is the most prominent. However, Bihu is sometimes been pronounced a bit differently among some ethnic groups and thus the celebration too differ a little. The Tiwas too have their own spring time celebrations. The *Sagra Misawa* is observed in the hill areas, in this time, with great pomp and gaiety whereas the plain dwellers celebrate mainly the *Bahag Bihu*. Some of the Tiwas pronounce the *Bihu* as *Bisu* and the day of observing the occasion, which is not on the day of *sankranti*, is differ from place to place.

A good number of festivals and rituals are associated with the Tiwa kingship institutions. And as a spring-time celebration they also observe *Bihu* and organise a fair called *Gosain Mela* in their respective territories.

The spring time affair at Gobha starts on a Saturday in the month of *Bahag* of Assamese calendar. Normally this day is fixed by the council of the king in a discussion. In this day a fair is organised in the bank of a water body called Khar Bil and the fair is known as Khar bil Mela after the name of the wetland. This fair starts right in the daybreak and continues only to the morning hours. Fishing in the water body and exchange of goods in the age-old barter-system are the main features of the event. The Mela is not visited by the king, however his minister is to be present in the occasion where the newly woven royal fane of the king called *Dwar Bisani* is exhibited.

The next day is the Bihu of the Gobha King. Be it observed in the month of *Magh* or in *Bahag*, all the *Bihus* of Gobha king is celebrated on a Sunday. On the day of *Bihu*, worship of traditional deities of the Tiwas is organised in the residence of the king and the *Badalmazi*, a household deity, is fanned with the *Dwar Bisoni* that was exhibited in the Khar Bil Mela. On this day the villagers, who were once the subjects of the kingdom, take their cattle for a ceremonial wash. They also gather to stab banana tree with the accompaniment of drums which symbolised the elimination of the evil powers. Worship is also organised in the respective households of the village on the occasion of Bihu on Sunday or Monday. On the Wednesday, the officials of the Gobha king collect tax in terms of agricultural products as well as livestock from the Pachim Nagaon, a subordinate province nearby under the Gobha king. The same is repeated in Gobha on Thursday. Goods thus collected are used for the Gosain Mela that is to be organised in next two days.

The Gosain Mela of Gobha king is a two day affair and organised in two different locations. On the Friday the Mela is organised in Kamarkusi village which is said to be the residence of the king. On the other hand Nakhola, which is just near the Jagiroad town, is the capital of Gobha kingdom and Gosain Mela is organised there on the Saturday. The king along with his members of council and office bearers proceeds from Nakhola to the Kamarkusi, at a distance of around 8 km on Thursday evening. In Kamarkuchi, they organise worship for their *Saribhai Than* on Friday. *Saribhai* is considered as one of the prime deities of their autochthonous religion. The *Dholes* (Drum) and the weapons of the war are worshiped in the occasion in the traditional ways where sacrifices of fowl and use of alcoholic beverage are inevitable practice. Followed by certain rituals at the house of king, the idol of Lord Krishna, whom they called *Jaduwa Gosain*, is taken out of the Namghar in a procession along with the king to an open field nearby. The procession is heralded by flag bearers that attribute the royal identity to the event.

A fair is held in the field and people from the locality gather there to attend the occasion as well as to see and pay tribute to the king who comes in full royal gear. A student Sri Deepsing Deoraja is the present king of Gobha who along with his officials display warrior skills to the rhythm of drum in a playful manner. In the evening idol of *Jaduwa* is taken back to the Namghar. But before entering the deity to the Namghar a group of people resist the entry with a

bamboo strip. A mock conversation is organised in this process between Krishna and his consort Rukmini that shortly describe the episode of *Ghonosa Jatra* where Rukmini enquire the whereabouts of her husband during the visit. This is known as *Gad Bhanga*. Finally, after seven rounds of rotations around the *Namghar* the idol is kept at the sanctum.

On the next day the same festivity is repeated in Nakhola barring the worship of the *Saribhai Than*. Here the Jajuwa Gosain is taken from the Nakhula Barnamghar to the Barpam Thali where the king of Pachim Nagaon is also joined the fair with the idol of Jaguwa of his province. Casual dancing and merrymaking also go simultaneously by a section of villagers in the Mela. The villager offers prayer to the Lord in their respective courtyards during the arrival of the procession of the Jaduwa Gosain and along with the king.

The next day is called *Thol Jurani* and the villagers go for a customary hunting in the forest. On the same day the different *khels*, a kind of grouping, of the village assembled to observe *Nimakh khowa* in which the *Khels* distribute salt among themselves.

With this, the more than a week long annual celebrations in the wake of spring in Gobha kingdom come to an end. Rejuvenating with the festivities they get themselves ready for their avocation in the coming year.

B. Event : The Gosain Mela of Kumoi King:

Date : 20 / 04/ 2014

Location : Kumoi, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description:

Kumai comes under the group of seven principalities called 'Satu Raja' means 'the seven kings'. Sri Susen Bordoloi is the present king of Kumoi. Like the Gobha and other Tiwa principalities the Kumoi king also organised the *Gosain Mela*, also known as *Gosain Uliuwa Mela*, in the Month of Bahag. Here in the Kumoi the *Gosain Mela* is organised on the 6th day of Bahag. The main festivity of the *Gosain Mela* is to bring the idol of the Lord Krishna, whom they called '*Jadua Gosain*' out of the Namghar, the prayer hall, to an open field. On the day of the Mela the 'Kalia', the player of the wing instrument called Kali, is being escorted to the king's palace with drummers and other officials. The king

and his council dressed in royal attire seat in the royal Darbar and then proceed to the Namghar in a procession along with drummers and other performers. The idol of the Lord Krishna, is taken out of the *Than* also called *Namghar*, to an open area in a procession along with the king. Tributes and respect are offered to the king in the open field apart from prayer to the Lord *Jadua*. A fair is also organized in this annual occasion. The officials display their fighting and acrobatic skills to the tune of drum and other musical instruments like Kali and cymbals. The performances of traditional dance forms are also organised in the occasion.

C. Event : The Gosain Mela of Khola King:

Date : 21 / 04/ 2014

Location : Silsung, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description

The Khola kingdom comes under the group of kingdoms that are generally known as Datiolia Raja, means the kings of the borders. Gobha and Nellie principalities are belong to the same group. Here in Khola, the *Gosain Mela* is organised on a Monday after the Bahag Bihu, the national festival of Assam. On the previous day of the Mela that is on the Sunday a performance called ‘Bheti Karha’ is organised. ‘Bheti Karha’ is like a game where playful scuffle take place between two groups to snatch goods that are carried by one of the groups. On the day of *Gosain Mela*, the idol of the Lord Krishna, whom they called '*Jadua Gosain*' is taken out of the Namghar to an open field that has a number of age-old stone seats for the king and his council members. This open field with stone seats is known as Silsung which literally means platform of stones (‘Sil’ means stone and ‘Sung’ means platform). For the presence of this age-old field with stone seats, the place is came to be known as Silsung. Prayer is offered to the God apart from the tribute to the king by the public with great enthusiasm. A fair is also organized in this annual occasion which comprises mainly of food stalls, craft stalls, etc and vendors of modern toys and cosmetics. The officials along with the king display their skills in the rhythm of drum and other musical instruments. People take part in the event with prom and gaiety and merrymaking is a part and parcel of the event.

In the evening idol of Jaduwa is taken back to the Namghar. But before entering the deity to the Namghar a group of people resist the entry with barricade. A mock conversation is organised in this process between Krishna and his consort Rukmini that shortly describe the episode of *Ghonosa Jatra* where Rukmini enquire the whereabouts of her husband during the visit. This is known as *Gad Bhanga*. Finally, after seven rounds of rotations around the *Namghar* the idol is reinstalled at the sanctum.

D. Event : The Gosain Mela of Tupakochi King:

Date : 22 / 04/ 2014

Location : Barapujia, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description

The Tupakochi belong to the group of Tiwa principalities called 'Pachu Raja' means the group of five kings. The other kingdoms of this group are *Barapujia*, *Mikirganya*, *Phulaguri* and *Khaigoria*. The spring time festival *Gosain Mela* is also celebrated in the Tupakochi in almost same manner like the other States already mentioned above. Here is also the idol of Lord Krishna is taken out of the shrine to an open field accompanied by the King and his officials. On the day of the Mela the office bearers and the members of the council of the king are escorted to the king's house with drummers and the performers that dance with shields and swords. The officials of the king proceed to the event after offering ceremonial prayer in their respective households. They gathered themselves by moving from one house to another house of the officials to finally assemble in the house of the king. From there they proceed to the shrine of Jada Gosain. The King, the officials and the villagers offers prayer to the God in the shrine and then the idol of the lord is taken out to an open field located around a kilometre away from the shrine. The other festivities are more or less similar to the celebration in the other kingdoms already mentioned in the report.

The other kings belong to the group called 'Pachu Raja' also observed this *Gosain Mela* in similar manner which are located in the same locality. Therefore they have not been covered through audio-visual documentation.

E. Event : *The Gosain Mela of Nellie King:*

Date : 26 / 04/ 2014

Location : Nellie, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description:

The Nellie kingdom is belong to the group of Tiwa kings called 'Datiolia', means the king of the frontiers. Here also the springtime festival *Gosain Mela* is organised in more or less similar ways with that of other Tiwa kings. Here also the central theme of the festival is to bring the idol of lord Krishna, known as Jaduwa Gosain, from the permanent shrine to an open field for ceremonial prayer. The event is organised on a Saturday in Nellie in the month of Bahag after seven days from the celebration of Bihu. The king visits the house of Kuwari on the day of the Mela and he dressed up for the event in her house. From the house of the Kuwari the king march to the Rajchora where he sits with his council members in royal attire. Presently villagers from 18 villages take part in the event. Apart from the Tiwas, these villages are also inhabited by a few Koch and Karbi people. The Karbi (another tribe) people from Baulagog village also take part in the event with great enthusiasm. The idol of Jadua is taken out of the Namghar (prayer hall) to the Rajchora where the king and his family offer prayer to the lord. From there the idol of lord is taken to a nearby open field in a procession accompanied by the King, his officials and villagers. Singing of devotional songs called Naam is very common during this march throughout the village. The most striking feature of the event is that the villagers offer prayer to the lord in front of their household with great devotion. Apart from the offerings, they spread new clothe in the road and pour water on the foot of the devotees with great respect while the idol of the lord is carried through the village.

F. Event : The Barat Utshab of Tetelia King:

Date : 18 / 04/ 2014 (Date of field visit)

Location : Tetelia, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description

The *Barat Utshab* is a festival organised in the Tetelia kingdom of the Tiwas. The Tetelia is come under the group of seven principalities known as Satu Raja. The festival is organised on a full moon night in the month of Puh or Magh (December/January) of Assamese calendar. 'Barat' is the simplified term of the word 'Brat' that means fasting. Strict fasting is observed by a few girls or women in order to appease God and at the end of the fasting a festival is arranged to celebrate the occasion. Generally Barat is celebrated to get rid of from epidemics and attack of wild beasts. As per the custom Barat is organised in a interval of five years. From the commencement of this project Barat has not been organised in Tetelia. A good numbers of songs and dances are associated with the festival that are performed during the night of the occasion. Masks constitute an integral part of some of these dance forms. As these masks are very significant they have been documented through still photography. Sri Khargeswar Bordoloi is the artist that prepares the masks of Barat Utshav. Discussions have been made with Sri Bordoloi regarding the festival and the tradition of the masks of the Tiwas during the field visit.

7. Audio Visual Documentation:

The events mentioned in the report have been documented through still and video photography which are enclosed with the report in DVDs. To maintain the originality and resolution, the video clips have been submitted in original files and format without editing.

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FINAL REPORT

For the Project Sanctioned under the scheme of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India, 2013 -14

1. Title of the Project:

Jun Beel Mela- a heritage fair and Traditional Kingship Institution of the Tiwa Tribes of Assam- Documentation, Research, Preservation.

2. Name of the Grantee:

Mr. Arup Bordoloi, Guwahati, (Assam)

3. Date of Commencement & Completion of the Project:

Date of commencement : 1st April 2014

Date of completion : 31st March 2015

4. Introduction:

The Jun Beel Mela is a centuries-old traditional fair which seems to be a virtual wonder in its own right. The most striking feature of this historic fair is that it has been keeping alive the age-old barter system as a means procuring goods. This Jun Beel Mela is organised every year in the month of Magh of Assamese calendar, that falls in the mid January, near the highway town Jagiroad in the Marigaon District of Assam. The three day annual event is being organized under the traditional king of the Tiwa tribes called ‘Gobha Deoraja’ that once ruled the area. The fair has been organized on the occasion of Magh Bihu, a traditional festival, of the King and a wide range of pristine customs and practices are associated with the fair.

In this fair, the different hill tribes like Tiwa, Karbi, khasi, Garo and others from the neighbouring West Karbianglong and Meghalaya and their counterparts from the plains exchange products directly without the involvement of money. Barter turns out in this unique fair in such a natural and spontaneous way, as if the ancient practice has been fossilised here in a living state. The fair is also considered very important instance of maintaining cordial relations between the hills and the plains as well as among the tribes and non-tribes.

The Tiwas, also known as Lalungs, are one of the oldest but underdeveloped tribal communities of Assam that are mostly found in the plains and hills of the central part of Assam. Apart from the village and clan level socio-political organizations, existence of some self-governing social institutions headed by a chief called '*Raja*', means king, are found among these Indo-Mongoloid people. Besides being a traditional judiciary head of the areas and the community, with a council of Ministers (Darbar) and office-bearers, these chieftains are often regarded as *Deoraja* means- a religious king or a religious head. Apart from the Jun Beel Mela, a wide range of intangible cultural elements are found associated with these kingship institutions that includes social folk customs, believes, oral history, legends, folk practices, artifacts, historical objects, festivals and ceremonies, judiciary procedures, management systems, inheritance regulations etc.

There are more than a dozen of such traditional Tiwa kings with their organized kingship institutions that are maintaining their existence till date. The kingship institution of Gobha is considered most significant and important as it was the paramount province among all. The Jun Beel Mela was organized under this Gobha king or Gobha Deoraja to felicitate trade among the hills and the plains as well as among the tribal and non-tribal.

Documentation and research work are the need of the hour for the preservation, promotion and exposure of this interesting and unique fair as well as the tribal kingship institution of the Tiwa community. With the financial support received from the Sangeet Natak Akademy, New Delhi, Govt of India under the scheme of Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India, documentation and research has already been carried out up to some extent. Moreover it is also considered very important to include Jun Beel Mela in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage as it is one of the rarest instances of continuous practice of a most pristine mode of trade in the history of human civilization. The existing of the old practice of barter in the living state is a real wonder.

The Documentation and the Research work have been carried out systematically and the objectives of the project have been achieved with successful completion of the project. The findings of the project work have been stated in this report and the same have been substantiated with documentation materials such as video footage and still photography enclosed herewith in DVDs.

5. Methodology:

A detailed work plan has been prepared for execution of the project immediately after its selection. Field works for the research and documentation have been carried out as per the work plan for achieving the objectives of the project. The contact persons, resource persons, events, locations, etc have been indentified and communication and other pre- field related works have been carried out systematically for smooth execution of the research and documentation.

The sources of data for the study are basically the primary sources. There are a very few secondary sources such as published book, article or research paper on the topic. Information have been collected mainly from the field after discussion with the villagers as well as with firsthand observations. The most widely used methods during the field-study were the interview and observation methods for research, documentation and data collection. In most of the times the non-directive interview method has been adopted to overcome the possible barrier due to lack of understanding on the part of informants on specific questions. The observation method was strictly no-participatory one.

For the authenticity of the information as well as for additions and rectification of data, some special aspects of the study have been crossed discussed with different village elders accompanying by the contact persons.

The research and documentation project is being carried out with the following tools and means –

- a) Textual Documentation
- b) Audio Recording System
- c) Still Photography
- d) Video Photography

All the information received from the field work has been recorded in the textual format apart from audio visual format for record and analysis. However some elements such as songs and music, performances, beliefs, etc has been recorded separately in audio visual format depending upon their subject of study.

This Final Report has been prepared on the basis of the findings of the research and documentation work that contain the textual information of the study substantiated with documentation materials such as video footage and still photography enclosed herewith in DVDs.

6. The Tiwas: A General Discussion:

The Tiwas, also known as Lalungs, are one of the significant tribal communities of Assam. Racially the Tiwas are Indo-Mongoloid people and fall under the Tibetoburman language family. They come under the great Bodo race in to which tribes like Boro-kachari, Rabha, Garo, Deori, Chutia, Tipra, etc. are included. The main concentrations of the Tiwas are found in the central part of Assam spreading over mainly in three districts, viz- Morigaon, Nagaon and Karbianglong and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya. According to geographical distribution, cultural distinctiveness and linguistic features the Tiwas can be divided in to three groups viz- the Hill Tiwas, the Plain Tiwas and the Tiwas found adjacent to the Hill Tiwas. The Tiwas of the plains speaks mainly Assamese language and their hill counterpart speaks Tiwa language, while the Tiwas found adjacent to the Hill Tiwas are mostly bilingual- they can speak both Tiwa and Assamese. The cultural traits of the Hill Tiwas are quite distinctive and thus are maintain a separate identity. However, the Tiwas of the plains are found to be similar to that of the Assamese people which might have the result of the assimilation process.

According to Tiwa language 'Ti' means water and 'Wa' means superior. There are various connotations and interpretations for both the names Lalung and Tiwa. Although the Tibet region is believed to be the original homeland of the Tiwas, yet their time and details of migration to the plains is not clearly known. Rice is the staple food of the Tiwas. Meat, especially chicken and pork, are their preferred item of food. Fish, egg, vegetables are also abundantly used. The use of locally made rice-beer called Zu is a significant trait of the community and Zu is attached to their day to day life. Zu, pork and chicken are the main and essential constituents of their socio-religious life. The Tiwas are mainly agrarian people. The Hill Tiwas practice shifting cultivation known as 'Jhum' cultivation in North East India. The Plain Tiwas use settled plough cultivation. Paddy, millet, cotton, vegetables, etc. are the main crops that the community cultivates. Various Socio-religious ceremonies are associated with the harvesting of paddy crop. Although cultivation happens to be their main course of

life, they are now gradually adopting other means of occupations like govt. service, small scale entrepreneurship, business, etc.

The houses of the Tiwas are constructed on earthen plinth. The house pattern of the hill Tiwas and plain Tiwas are not the same. The houses of the Hill Tiwas generally have two large rooms along with a small front veranda. The front room called Nomaji is treated as guest room. The second room is called Nukthi and is the living room as well as the kitchen. The houses are constructed with material available in the nature like bamboo and wood having thatch roof and bamboo, reed walls plastered with mud. Assam type hose with GCI sheet are also common now- a-days in villages of Plain Lalungs. The dresses of the Plain Tiwas are similar to that of the Assamese community. The dresses of the woman folk of plain consist of Mekhela and Chadar. The hill man wears a sleeveless striped jacket called Tagla and a loin cloth constitutes his lower garment. The hill women wear upper garment in the form of phaskai. The new generation Tiwas also wears trousers, shirts, sporting, etc apart from their traditional dresses.

The religion of the tribe is quite significant. Their religion is based on belief in some deities. They do not have idol or temple; there are only Thans, i.e. sacred place or shrine for worship. Fa-Mahadeu is considered as their supreme deity. The officials entrusted for religious activities are called as Loro, Deori, Changmaji, Zela, etc.

7. The Jun Beel Mela :

The Jun Beel Mela is actually a historic market and the thrill about this traditional mart is that the system of procuring items here is the 'barter'. Yes, money is not at all required here to obtain goods, however you need to have certain products with you to exchange with others.

The Jon Beel Mela is a centuries-old traditional fair which seems to be a virtual wonder in its own right. The most striking feature of this historic fair is that it has been keeping alive the age-old barter system as a means procuring goods. This Jun Beel Mela is organised every year near the highway town Jagiroad in the Marigaon District of Assam in the month of Magh of Assamese calendar which falls in the mid January. The three day annual event is being organized under the traditional king of the Tiwa tribes called 'Gobha Deoraja' that once ruled the area. The fair has been organized on the occasion of Magh Bihu, the traditional harvesting festival, of

the Gobha King and a wide range of pristine customs and practices are associated with the event.

In this fair, the different hill tribes like Tiwa, Karbi, Khasi, Garo and others from the neighbouring West Karbianglong and Meghalaya and their counterparts from the plains exchange products directly without the involvement of the money. Barter turns out in this unique fair in such a natural and spontaneous way, as if the ancient practice of exchanging products has been fossilised here in a living state. The fair is also considered as an exemplary instance of maintaining unity and harmony among the hills and the plains as well as with the tribes and non-tribes.

Although the time of origin of this rare event could not be ascertained due to the lack of record, its origin has the affinity to the Tiwa Kingship institutions found in the area. The hills and plains of the locality was once said to have been ruled by the tributary kings belongs to the Tiwa community and the Kingdom was known as Gobha. This Jon Beel Mela was organised by this Gobha Deoraja for the exchange of products among his subjects from both the terrains.

Surprisingly enough, this Gobha king is still maintaining its existence and the socio-cultural customs associated with kingship institution are still in vogue. Although the political powers and activities have ceased to be in practice now, the king still draws tremendous respect from his community and there are a range of responsibilities that have to be managed by the king along with his council even today. Jon Beel Mela, Gosain Uliuwa Mela, Than Pujas, etc. are some of the events organised under this tribal chieftain regularly with due involvement of his community.

At present the Jon Beel Mela is a three day affair organised on the occasion of Magh Bihu of the Gobha king. Interestingly, the Bihu of the Tiwa people is day specific and hence not organised in the juncture of months called *Sangkranti*. The Magh Bihu of the Gobha King is generally observed on the first Sunday next to the *Makar Sangkranti*.

The fair commences on a Thursday to conclude on the day of the *Uruka* of the Gobha King that observed on the Saturday. The fair is organised on the bank of a wetland called Jon Beel, which has attributed its name, about four km away from Jagiroad town. On the starting day the king and his council organised a feast on the bank of the wetland and it is customary to have fishes from the marsh on the occasion.

The hill tribes start reaching the Mela ground from Thursday onwards. In earlier days most of them used to come on foot and reached the place by Thursday

evening or on Friday morning. Some of the distant dweller even halted a night on their way. Now most of them come by a hired mini truck, trekker or by an auto. The presence of the hill people makes the environment quite different as they mostly come in their colourful hand-woven traditional attires carrying their products in bamboo baskets. Although, tribes like Tiwas, Karbis, Khasis, Garos and Bodos come down from the hills to be the part of the event, the Hill Tiwas dominates the number. They camp in temporary sheds made of bamboo and straw during the Mela days at the open fairground. The hill people come prepared with the required articles such as the bamboos, implements, utensils, cloths, etc for erection of the sheds as well as for the stay.

The prime attraction, i.e. the exchange of products, starts right from the daybreak on Friday, that is the second day of the event. The villagers from the surrounding areas start gathering in the fair right from the dawn with their products to involve in barter with the hill people. The Hill people bring ginger, turmeric, roots, corms, chillies, etc. and exchange those with dry and raw fish, *Sandah* (fried rice powder), rice cakes, etc. of the plains.

To initiate the trade of exchange, generally a plain dweller ask for the response of their hill counterparts like this - *Oi Maami, Xalaabi niki* (Oh aunt, are you interested in barter with me)? If the hill woman is willing for the exchange, a query will follow regarding the goods. If items are not in open then either party may indulge in peeping the other's sack. A bargain is not uncommon on the quantity and quality of items. If all does not go well, a deal may break midway. For exchange, items are measured in small curry bowls, or in packets of leaves, in bunches, or in grips of hand and arranged on the ground on a sack or a cloth for comparison before final exchanging and take-over.

A community fishing in the *Beel* (wetland) on Friday is also an important feature of the event. The villagers from the different villages of the locality come with their fishing implements and gathered in the bank of the Beel on the first half of the day. After a ceremonial opening the villagers start fishing in the water of the wetland together in great enthusiasm. Apart from catching fishes this event is also significant as a source of amusement for the villagers which looks not less than a sport in catching fish in groups. Cock-fighting is also organised to add to the flurry of happenings. Villagers come and gather in the fair with their respective cocks for fight. Metal blades are tied and fixed in the legs of the cock to make the fight fatal and decisive. However cock-fight has been discontinued in recent year due to the

prohibition imposed on animal cruelty by the judiciary. The barter gets thinner with the rolling of the day and by evening most of the highlander leaves the site. Some of the hill people also offer some presentations to the king as tribute.

Parallel to this unique occurrence a big commercial market is also held which is common to any general fair with vendors of sweets, foods, ornaments, cloths, fruits, etc. sprouting in every corner. And to get something here one has to take his purse in hand as nothing gets here in barter. Fish market, pork vendors, cottage industry products along with a huge furniture market draw thousands of visitors to this historic occasion to make it a mega event.

The Gobha king visits the fair in royal attire along with his council on Saturday after observing certain ritual in his residence at Nakhola, Jagiroad. His officials collect tax from the commercial vendors on the same day. The fair come to an end on the Saturday evening and *Uruga* feast is organised at the *Bhela Ghar*, a temporary hut made for the feast, in the paddy field near the residence of the king. On Sunday morning *Megis* and the *Bhela Ghar* are set in to fire to mark the celebration of Bihu in Gobha Deoraja's kingdom.

There are various instances of customs and practices that once initiated with a purpose mainly to cater certain needs which with passing of time gradually take the forms of deep-rooted traditions embedded with strong emotions and feelings. The Jon Beel Mela is such an instance, which was once organized mainly to facilitate exchange of products among the hills and the plains dwellers, has now transformed in to a practice bonded with socio-cultural as well as emotional attachment. During the search for the reasons behind the barter being practiced even today, the emotional drive of the people to take part in the fair of their own King has emerged as the prime reason. The people, mainly the different ethnic groups from the hill area, reveal that they come to the fair just to maintain their age-old practice of attending the annual event as well as to take part in barter, to enjoy the occasion and also to fulfill their emotional bonding with the tradition. Moreover the age-old lifestyle still practised by the hill dweller has also added to the survival of the old system of market.

It is a general notion of the people from the plains that the hill people come to this Mela to collect the ingredient like the Pitha (cake) and others which they need to offer to their deities during worship. Many would opine that the hill people have to observe Bihu in hill with Pitha collected from the fair. It is a fact that some Tiwa people have to offer the products collected from the Jun Bill Mela to their deities, but

from the discussion with many hill people it has been come in to fore that this is not the only reason for survival of the age old practice (bartar) and the fair. It becomes more prominent from the fact that people from different community including those who have adopted Christianity as their religion also take part in the fair with equal enthusiasm.

Up to a few decades back there was a practice of camping of some of the hill dwellers in the residence of the villagers of Jagiroad on their way to the Mela. They cook their won food during the stay and leave some of their product that they bring with them for the host family. However with passing of time this practice has been disappeared.

Some of the villages from where the hill people come to this fair are-Mobai village of Ulukunsi, Murman, Umbarman, Silikhaguri, Rongkhushi, Maslai Khunsi, Makhakuri, Khiapat, Sinani, Gagori, Khumrai Kara, Amdaba, Amnisa, Amsai Binung, Amkhalam,

With the unique characteristics, the fair has gained the status of an important tourist destination and people of different communities throng there with great enthusiasm making ant-line to the fairground. In recent years the fair has gained more popularity mainly due to the publicity made by the electronic and print media. Thus with each passing years the number of visitors are increasing and the fair is also developing as well.

Most importantly, this is a site that is standing as the symbol of unity, brotherhood and bond among the hills and plains as well as tribes and non-tribes for last hundreds of years and so, the Mela deserve due attention to highlight as a role model to uphold peace and harmony in the region.

8. About the Traditional Kingship Institutions of the Tiwa Tribes:

A note has been prepared on the Traditional Kingship Institutions of the Tiwas on the basis of on research and documentation work carried out under the project -

Apart from the village and clan level socio-political organisations, existence of some tributary heads called '*Raja*' means king are found in some parts of the Tiwa inhabitation, mainly near the foot hills of Karbianglong District. Besides being a traditional judiciary head of the area and the community with a council of ministers and officials these chieftains are often regarded as '*Deoraja*' means a religious king or

a religious head of the community. It is apparent from the multi-tier organisational structure of these kingship institutions, their mentions in the historical chronicles and ramification in the cultural milieu, that these institutions were once highly flourished and were the main guiding force of the socio-political and cultural activities of the area and the community. Although the political status, once enjoyed by these kings has been reduced in due course of time, interestingly enough, the kingship institutions of the Tiwas survived the stress and strains of the changing time and circumstances and are still playing a vital role in the respective societies. In spite of the present day modern world with high authoritarian district administration and democratic Government and modern way of life which have a remarkable impact on the Tiwa societies these Rajas are treated as head so far as social stratification, religious and cultural activities, traditional judiciary system and social recognition are concerned.

The dozens of such principalities that maintain their existence can be divided in to two lines depending upon their subjugation to the paramount medieval Ahom rulers and the matrilineal Jaintia kingdom. *Kumoi, Tarani, Baghara, Tetelia, Kacharigaya, Suknagog* and *Ghagua* are the seven principalities known as *Satu Raja* and the *Topakuchi, Barapujia, Mikirganya, Phulaguri* and *Khaigoria* are the five principalities called *Pachu Raja*, which were once, administered under two different Ahom administrative circles. But in due course of time most of them converted in to Vaishnavite cult and the tribal customs ceased to be practiced. Their kingship institutions too are not prominent though not totally extinct.

The provinces of Gobha of Jagiroad, Nellie of Nellie, Khola of Silsung and Sahari of Amsoi of Morigaon district come under the other group of principalities. These were once the tributaries of the erstwhile Jaintia kingdom and are marked by the Tiwa chiefs and maintenance of their distinctive traditional customs till date. The discussions here will be confined only to the kingship institutions of this prominent group of kingdoms.

Although due to lack of historical records it is difficult to trace their actual time of origin, there are evidences of existence of the provinces of Gobha, Nellie and Khola from 17 Century onwards.

In successive periods, these tributary heads of Jaintias had made their time-to-time sub- mission to the Ahom monarch and were referred as *datiyaliyas* means (the chieftains) of the border by the Ahom chronicles. The Gobha province has maintained her existence in full force till 1833 when it was finally took over by the

British. Although they were subjugated to British province their affairs were left to themselves and allowed to handle the petty cases by their chiefs.

The kingship institutions of the Tiwas consist of a council of ministers and officials with the Raja at the apex as the paramount. The traditional institutions were and are still responsible for some of their day-to-day affair of administration in a democratic manner and in accordance to the general will of the people based on their traditions and customs. The chiefs though occupy the highest hierarchy, cannot go against the popular will of their people. The king exercises civil and judiciary power in conformity with the resolution of the *Darbar* (council). The verdict taken by the king is actually a resolution and agreement of the *Darbar* in presence of the chief. The Chieftain in presence of the *Darbar* settles the social disputes like sex outside social norms, marriage disputes, misbehaviours of the member of the community, fixation of fine etc. Apart from these secular activities another big responsibility of the king is to perform the role of the head of the sacred and religions functions. The *Raja* is offered the respect of a deity by his community and he has to act as a head priest in some religious occasions.

The kingships as well as the other offices are hereditary in nature. However, if the king is found inefficient in running his duty or found guilty of incest he could be disposed of or dismissed by the people. In such cases or in case when there is no issue of a king for inheritance of the kingdom the council may select a person from other family which must be from the same clan of the king. That shows that the kingship of the Tiwas is clan-specific. The king of the Gobha must be from *Maloi* clan, Nellie must be from *Muniwali* clan and Khola must be from *Masrang* clan.

The number of ministers and officials of the council of the king vary from 40 to 55 in different territories and have different designations, stratification and responsibilities. Some of the ministers and officials of the council are like *Barbarua*, chief minister; *Patra Mantri*, minister; *Senapati*, Chief of the army; *Deka Raja*, assistant to the king; *Lora*, regional head; *Deuri*, priest; *Hatari*, assistant to *Deuri*, *Doloi*, *Patar*, *Deka Doloi*, *Arandhara*, *Gar Bhetera*, *Dhulia*, *Bordoloi*, *Langthia*, *Mutha Bhari*, *Bhitar Maji*, *Tamuli*, *Barika*, *Medhi*, *Khelma*, *Bisani Dhara*, *Pat Doloi*, *Kumar*, *Sunamati* etc. Allotment of land and other facilities are common in the name of the institution and even in the names of some principal functionaries.

Each territory is comprised of a number of villages. Among these principalities Gobha was the most prominent and it is said that the others viz-Nellie and Khola were

its subordinate provinces though they at present do not maintain any customary relation with Gobha. Gobha has its one immediate subordinate province namely Pachim Nagaon. Like wise the Khola chieftain had its two subordinate provinces-viz : Sahari and Uttar Khola. Though Uttar Khola ceased to exist the Sahari is maintaining its presence till date.

The death of a king is never made public till the inheritance of the kingdom by his successor. Following the death of a king the *Rajchara* (Royal Council) select the successor and after a ceremonial bath the king is adorned with Royal attire before declaring him as king. The king is prohibited to attend a funeral ceremony and it is a taboo for him even to look at the face of a dead person. Therefore a son cannot see the body of his dead father after his coronation as a king. The expected person should be an unmarried at the time of attaining kingship. Though the Hill Tiwas are matrilineal and kingship of these provinces too once on the same line, in course of time they might adopted patrilineal inheritance.

As a head of the religious activities the *Raja* with his council has to organise and manage various worships and festivals. All decisions regarding religious activities are taken by the council in presence of the king as per their tradition. Among the various obligation of the king, he has to make arrangement for worship of certain '*Thans*' a special place of worship, within his territory in certain periods or days of the year. These *Thans* are sacred places of worship of certain deities generally demarked with a bamboo fencing with or without a thatchor CGI shed. There are separate *Deuris* (priest) for worship of these *Thans*. On the day of the worship of the *Thans*, they are purified by spreading *Santiani*, special holy water, taken from the house of the king. The *Thans* or *Than* gods worshiped under Gobha are *Ranchali* or *Ranthali*, *Deusal*, *Alulia Than*, *Jathisal*, *Gosain Uliwa Than*, *Dholiyai*, *Bamun Duwar*, *Sani Puja*, *Jangkhang Puja*, under Nellie are *Kher Puja*, *Bhagawati*, *Simapuja*, *Jadawa*, *Barpuja*, *Mahadeu puja*, *Mahamaya*, under Khola are *Pancha Devata Than*, *Bura Amcha*, *Kesaikhati*, *Ma Kalika* and under Sahari are *Basundhari* and *Mahadeusal*.

Human sacrifice was a part of the rituals of certain *Than* worship. Interestingly, in all the provinces the kings avoid the worship of that particular *Thans* where once the human sacrifice was a rite. There are found different versions of a story where the son of the king had to be sacrificed as per precondition of selecting a subject for human sacrifice. And since then, it is said that, the king has been avoiding the worship of that particular deity. The *Than* gods are worshiped in their traditional ways and

sacrifice of animals like goat, hen, pig etc are common. In certain *Thans* like the *Ma-Bhagawati* of Nellie the king himself has to play the role of the priest.

One of the legends associated with these *Thans* reveals that the Goddess *Ma-Bhagawati* discloses her desire of replacement of her abode from a jungle to the present location to the king of Nellie *Nara Sing Deoraja* in dream. Accordingly the king tried his best but failed to bring the stone image of the deity even after deploying elephants. *Ma-Bhagawati* appeared in the dream of the king again and said that She will come on his lap. The king, who was the father of the present king of Nellie *Ram Sing Deoraja*, was successful in bringing the idol to its present location as per the words of the deity.

There are organized systems including taxation for meeting the expenditures of worships under kingship institutions. Tax is paid to the king in certain occasions generally in terms of agricultural products. Allotted *Bils*, a kind of wetland, are there in the names of kingship institutions where community-fishing are organized in certain occasions of the year. Fish of particular *Bils* are a must for some rites in the house of the king.

Festivals like *Raja Meja* or *Gosain Uliwa Mela*, *Jun Beel Mela* are the popular events of the area under the kingship institution of the Tiwas. The *Gosai Uliwa Mela* is organized in the month of April at the time of *Bahag Bihu*, a National Festival of Assam. The *Bihu* of the Tiwas is not celebrated on the day of the *Bihu* of the Assamese calendar. They celebrate it in particular days of the week, which is on Saturday and Sunday. After seven days of the *Bihu*, on next Saturday and Sunday the *Gosain Uliwa Mela* is organized under the Tiwa chieftains of the area. This is organised under all Tiwa Chieftains on different days. On the day of the Mela the king and his council dressed in royal attire seat in the royal *Darbar*. The idol of the Lord Krishna, whom they called '*Jadua Gosain*' is taken out of the *Than* also called *Namghar*, to an open area in a procession along with the king. Tributes and respect are offered to the king in the open field apart from prayer to the Lord *Jadua*. A fair is also organized in this annual occasion. The officials and also the king display their skills in the rhythm of drum and other musical instruments.

The *Jun Beel Mela* is a fair organized by the Gobha King, which is mainly an annual occasion of exchanging products from hills and plains. Organised on the occasion of *Bihu* of Gobha Raja on the bank of the *Jun Beel* (a wetland) the fair have been keeping alive the age-old barter system. A feast on the bank of the *Bil* by the

king with his officials on Thursday marked the initiation of the 3 day affair. A community fishing on the *Beel* on Friday is also an important feature of the occasion. The Hill people bring ginger, turmeric, potato, roots, chillies and exchange those with dry and raw fish, *Sandah* (a kind of processed rice powder), rice cakes, etc. of the plains. The Gobha king visits the fair in royal attire on Saturday and his officials collect tax from the commercial vendors. The Hill dwellers, who use the items collected from the *Mela* in their rituals, also offer some presentation to the king.

There is a story, which tells that once the Gobha king was on a visit to the villages of his kingdom with the queen. On their way they came across a *Bil* in the shape of a *Jun* (new moon). The beauty of the water body attracted them and when they were on a boat the *Junbiri* (a necklace with a locket in the shape of a new moon) fell on the water. By this time it was already dark and they could not find the ornament instead they saw only the reflection of the new moon on the water. Thus the water body came to known as *Jun Beel*.

In the recent days the *Rajas* of the Tiwas become significant due to its role played as an identity marker. Although, in fact, they are tribal chiefs only, the term king has been used since the people call and treat them as Raja, means king. *Gosain Uliwa Mela* implies their adherence to the Vaisnavism, the leading faith of the region, though comparatively their traditional religious practices are more prominent among them. The traits and the designations of the principal functionaries suggest the impact of both Ahom as well as Jaintia monarchy and their folktales and beliefs indicate their proximity to the Hill Tiwas and Jaintias.

9. Some of the Events of the Kingship Institutions of the Tiwas covered under the project:

(I) Event : The Gosain Mela of Gobha King:

Date : 24/ 04/ 2014

Location: Gobha and Nokhola, Jagirod, Marigaon, Assam

Description:

Come the spring and it's all the festival time. In this juncture of the seasons all the groups of people from this region celebrate a festival of some kind or other. Among them Bihu is the most prominent. However, Bihu is sometimes been pronounced a bit differently among some ethnic groups and thus the celebration too differ a little. The Tiwas too have their own spring time celebrations. The *Sagra Misawa* is observed in the hill areas, in this time, with great pomp and gaiety whereas the plain dwellers celebrate mainly the *Bahag Bihu*. Some of the Tiwas pronounce the *Bihu* as *Bisu* and the day of observing the occasion, which is not on the day of *sankranti*, is differ from place to place.

A good number of festivals and rituals are associated with the Tiwa kingship institutions. And as a spring-time celebration they also observe *Bihu* and organise a fair called *Gosain Mela* in their respective territories.

The spring time affair at Gobha starts on a Saturday in the month of *Bahag* of Assamese calendar. Normally this day is fixed by the council of the king in a discussion. In this day a fair is organised in the bank of a water body called Khar Bil and the fair is known as Khar bil Mela after the name of the wetland. This fair starts right in the daybreak and continues only to the morning hours. Fishing in the water body and exchange of goods in the age-old barter-system are the main features of the event. The Mela is not visited by the king, however his minister is to be present in the occasion where the newly woven royal fane of the king called *Dwar Bisani* is exhibited.

The next day is the Bihu of the Gobha King. Be it observed in the month of *Magh* or in *Bahag*, all the *Bihus* of Gobha king is celebrated on a Sunday. On the day of *Bihu*, worship of traditional deities of the Tiwas is organise in the residence of the king and the *Badalmazi*, a household deity, is fanned with the *Dwar Bisoni* that was exhibited in the Khar Bil Mela. On this day the villagers,

who were once the subjects of the kingdom, take their cattle for a ceremonial wash. They also gather to stab banana tree with the accompaniment of drums which symbolised the elimination of the evil powers. Worship is also organised in the respective households of the village on the occasion of Bihu on Sunday or Monday. On the Wednesday, the officials of the Gobha king collect tax in terms of agricultural products as well as livestock from the Pachim Nagaon, a subordinate province nearby under the Gobha king. The same is repeated in Gobha on Thursday. Goods thus collected are used for the Gosain Mela that is to be organised in next two days.

The Gosain Mela of Gobha king is a two day affair and organised in two different locations. On the Friday the Mela is organised in Kamarkusi village which is said to be the residence of the king. On the other hand Nakhola, which is just near the Jagiroad town, is the capital of Gobha kingdom and Gosain Mela is organised there on the Saturday. The king along with his members of council and office bearers proceeds from Nakhola to the Kamarkusi, at a distance of around 8 km on Thursday evening. In Kamarkuchi, they organise worship for their *Saribhai Than* on Friday. *Saribhai* is considered as one of the prime deities of their autochthonous religion. The *Dholes* (Drum) and the weapons of the war are worshiped in the occasion in the traditional ways where sacrifices of fowl and use of alcoholic beverage are inevitable practice. Followed by certain rituals at the house of king, the idol of Lord Krishna, whom they called *Jaduwa Gosain*, is taken out of the *Namghar* in a procession along with the king to an open field nearby. The procession is heralded by flag bearers that attribute the royal identity to the event.

A fair is held in the field and people from the locality gather there to attend the occasion as well as to see and pay tribute to the king who comes in full royal gear. A student Sri Deepsing Deoraja is the present king of Gobha who along with his officials display warrior skills to the rhythm of drum in a playful manner. In the evening idol of *Jaduwa* is taken back to the *Namghar*. But before entering the deity to the *Namghar* a group of people resist the entry with a bamboo strip. A mock conversation is organised in this process between Krishna and his consort Rukmini that shortly describe the episode of *Ghonosa Jatra* where Rukmini enquire the whereabouts of her husband during the visit. This is known as *Gad Bhang*. Finally, after seven rounds of rotations around the *Namghar* the idol is kept at the sanctum.

On the next day the same festivity is repeated in Nakhola barring the worship of the *Saribhai Than*. Here the Jajuwa Gosain is taken from the Nakhula Barnamghar to the Barpam Thali where the king of Pachim Nagaon is also joined the fair with the idol of Jaguwa of his province. Casual dancing and merrymaking also go simultaneously by a section of villagers in the Mela. The villager offers prayer to the Lord in their respective courtyards during the arrival of the procession of the Jaduwa Gosain and along with the king.

The next day is called *Thol Jurani* and the villagers go for a customary hunting in the forest. On the same day the different *khels*, a kind of grouping, of the village assembled to observe *Nimakh khowa* in which the *Khels* distribute salt among themselves.

With this, the more than a week long annual celebrations in the wake of spring in Gobha kingdom come to an end. Rejuvenating with the festivities they get themselves ready for their avocation in the coming year.

A. Event : The Gosain Mela of Kumoi King:

Date : 20 / 04/ 2014

Location : Kumoi, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description:

Kumai comes under the group of seven principalities called 'Satu Raja' means 'the seven kings'. Sri Susen Bordoloi is the present king of Kumoi. Like the Gobha and other Tiwa principalities the Kumoi king also organise the *Gosain Mela*, also known as *Gosain Uliuwa Mela*, in the Month of Bahag. Here in the Kumoi the *Gosain Mela* is organised on the 6th day of Bahag. The main festivity of the *Gosain Mela* is to bring the idol of the Lord Krishna, whom they called '*Jadua Gosain*' out of the Namghar, the prayer hall, to an open field. On the day of the Mela the 'Kalia', the player of the wing instrument called Kali, is being escorted to the king's palace with drummers and other officials. The king and his council dressed in royal attire seat in the royal Darbar and then proceed to the Namghar in a procession along with drummers and other performers. The idol of the Lord Krishna, is taken out of the *Than* also called *Namghar*, to an open area in a procession along with the king. Tributes and respect are offered to the king in the open field apart from prayer to the Lord *Jadua*. A fair is also

organized in this annual occasion. The officials display their fighting and acrobatic skills to the tune of drum and other musical instruments like Kali and cymbals. The performances of traditional dance forms are also organised on the occasion.

(II) Event : The Gosain Mela of Khola King:

Date : 21 / 04/ 2014

Location : Silsung, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description

The Khola kingdom comes under the group of kingdoms that are generally known as Datiolia Raja, means the kings of the borders. Gobha and Nellie principalities are belong to the same group. Here in Khola, the *Gosain Mela* is organised on a Monday after the Bahag Bihu, the national festival of Assam. On the previous day of the Mela that is on the Sunday a performance called ‘Bheti Karha’ is organised. ‘Bheti Karha’ is like a game where playful scuffle take place between two groups to snatch goods that are carried by one of the groups. On the day of *Gosain Mela*, the idol of the Lord Krishna, whom they called '*Jadua Gosain*' is taken out of the Namghar to an open field that has a number of age-old stone seats for the king and his council members. This open field with stone seats is known as Silsung which literally means platform of stones (‘Sil’ means stone and ‘Sung’ means platform). For the presence of this age-old field with stone seats, the place is came to be known as Silsung. Prayer is offered to the God apart from the tribute to the king by the public with great enthusiasm. A fair is also organized in this annual occasion which comprises mainly of food stalls, craft stalls, etc and vendors of modern toys and cosmetics. The officials along with the king display their skills in the rhythm of drum and other musical instruments. People take part in the event with prom and gaiety and merrymaking is a part and parcel of the event.

In the evening idol of Jaduwa is taken back to the Namghar. But before entering the deity to the Namghar a group of people resist the entry with barricade. A mock conversation is organised in this process between Krishna and his consort Rukmini that shortly describe the episode of *Ghonosa Jatra* where Rukmini enquire the whereabouts of her husband during the visit. This is known

as *Gad Bhanga*. Finally, after seven rounds of rotations around the *Namghar* the idol is reinstalled at the sanctum.

(III) **Event** : **The *Gosain Mela* of Tupakochi King:**

Date : 22 / 04/ 2014

Location : Barapujia, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description

The Tupakochi belong to the group of Tiwa principalities called ‘Pachu Raja’ means the group of five kings. The other kingdoms of this group are *Barapujia*, *Mikirganya*, *Phulaguri* and *Khaigoria*. The spring time festival *Gosain Mela* is also celebrated in the Tupakochi in almost same manner like the other States already mentioned above. Here is also the idol of Lord Krishna is taken out of the shrine to an open field accompanied by the King and his officials. On the day of the Mela the office bearers and the members of the council of the king are escorted to the king’s house with drummers and the performers that dance with shields and swords. The officials of the king proceed to the event after offering ceremonial prayer in their respective households. They gathered themselves by moving from one house to another house of the officials to finally assemble in the house of the king. From there they proceed to the shrine of Jada Gosain. The King, the officials and the villagers offers prayer to the God in the shrine and then the idol of the lord is taken out to an open field located around a kilometre away from the shrine. The other festivities are more or less similar to the celebration in the other kingdoms already mentioned in the report.

The other kings belong to the group called ‘Pachu Raja’ also observed this *Gosain Mela* in similar manner which are located in the same locality. Therefore they have not been covered through audio-visual documentation.

(IV) Event : The Gosain Mela of Nellie King:

Date : 26 / 04/ 2014

Location : Nellie, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description:

The Nellie kingdom is belong to the group of Tiwa kings called 'Datiolia', means the king of the frontiers. Here also the springtime festival *Gosain Mela* is organised in more or less similar ways with that of other Tiwa kings. Here also the central theme of the festival is to bring the idol of lord Krishna, known as Jaduwa Gosain, from the permanent shrine to an open field for ceremonial prayer. The event is organised on a Saturday in Nellie in the month of Bahag after seven days from the celebration of Bihu. The king visits the house of Kuwari on the day of the Mela and he dressed up for the event in her house. From the house of the Kuwari the king march to the Rajchora where he sits with his council members in royal attire. Presently villagers from 18 villages take part in the event. Apart from the Tiwas, these villages are also inhabited by a few Koch and Karbi people. The Karbi (another tribe) people from Baulagog village also take part in the event with great enthusiasm. The idol of Jadua is taken out of the Namghar (prayer hall) to the Rajchora where the king and his family offer prayer to the lord. From there the idol of lord is taken to a nearby open field in a procession accompanied by the King, his officials and villagers. Singing of devotional songs called Naam is very common during this march throughout the village. The most striking feature of the event is that the villagers offer prayer to the lord in front of their household with great devotion. Apart from the offerings, they spread new clothe in the road and pour water on the foot of the devotees with great respect while the idol of the lord is carried through the village.

(V) Event : The Barat Utshab of Tetelia King:

Date : 18 / 04/ 2014 (Date of field visit)

Location : Tetelia, District- Marigaon, Assam

Description

The *Barat Utshab* is a festival organised in the Tetelia kingdom of the Tiwas. The Tetelia is come under the group of seven principalities known as Satu Raja. The festival is organised on a full moon night in the month of Puh or Magh (December/January) of Assamese calendar. 'Barat' is the simplified term of the word 'Brat' that means fasting. Strict fasting is observed by a few girls or women in order to appease God and at the end of the fasting a festival is arranged to celebrate the occasion. Generally Barat is celebrated to get rid of from epidemics and attack of wild beasts. As per the custom Barat is organised in a interval of five years. From the commencement of this project Barat has not been organised in Tetelia. A good numbers of songs and dances are associated with the festival that are performed during the night of the occasion. Masks constitute an integral part of some of these dance forms. As these masks are very significant they have been documented through still photography. Sri Khargeswar Bordoloi is the artist that prepares the masks of Barat Utshav. Discussions have been made with Sri Bordoloi regarding the festival and the tradition of the masks of the Tiwas during the field visit.

Audio Visual Documentation:

The events mentioned in the report have been documented through still and video photography which are enclosed with the report in DVDs. To maintain the originality and resolution, the video clips have been submitted in original files and format without editing.

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