# Socio-political Formation in the Post- colonial Assam: A Study of the Identity Consciousness and Transformation of Tiwa Community

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Three major categories of discontent, namely ethnic discontent, linguistic discontent, and discontent, which evolved out of the concern over the loss of Assamese identity due to migration, can best be used to understand the postcolonial narrative of Assam. Every social and political development during the post-colonial period is, in one way or another, a continuation of these discontents. The colonial legacy of divisive politics, the flexibility in Indian federalism and the provisions in the Indian constitution further fuelled the situation. In the midst of political modernisation and democratisation, ethnic communities of various sizes began to assert their distinctiveness and demand recognition and preservation. The Tiwas are likewise not an exception. Throughout the pre-colonial, colonial, and post- colonial periods, the traditional society of the Tiwas underwent numerous changes. Through revivalism and reconstruction, they were able to adopt a new model of socio-political formation of their identity. Therefore, the present work is aimed at studying the changing narrative of identity construction among Tiwas in Assam in the Postcolonial period. It also discusses the changing socio-political order and its implication among the Tiwas from the Colonial to the Post-colonial period. The study was primarily qualitative in nature, and a historical and analytical methodology was adopted while preparing the article. Collection of data have been made from various secondary sources such as – articles published in books, journals and other published vernacular records.

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The growth of tribal aspirations in the post-colonial Assamese society has been rooted in historical and colonial construction. The British, for their administrative requirement, divided the north-eastern region. These divisions created ethnic enclaves. Due to these emerging enclaves and the administrative division, it was inevitable for the tribal people to demand a separate homeland within the British Indian Territory. Thus, in the constituent Assembly, the Bordoloi sub-committee approved the necessary constitutional provision in the interest of the social, cultural, and economic security of the tribal people(Chaube, 2012, P. 98). Significantly, the influence of hill tribal aspirations, plain tribal groups, and ethnic groups in Assam developed into a desire for self-determination in Assam's post-colonial socio-political formation. The colonial socio-political set-up of Assam has some distinguishing

features. Similarly, the post-colonial socio-political set-up in terms of identity construction of Assamese society has gone through many leaps and bounds movements till the late post-colonial period.

However, we discovered a subaltern narrative of ethnic groups in the northeastern region in the late post-colonial period, particularly after the Assam movement, that brought ethnic identity aspirations to Assam's ethnic pluralism(Talukdar, 2019, p.36). It also contributed to the rise of ethnic consciousness in post-colonial Assam. The state language act of Assam is another responsible cause of ethnic mobilisation to preserve their socio-political rights. As a result, the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) has spoken out against the chauvinism of an elite Assamese group of people, demanding self-determination rights in a multicultural society such as Assam. By addressing the subaltern narrative, it is to be argued that the unique history, socio-cultural composition, and British administration policy of separating North East India are a few leading causes of ethnic aspiration. The peripheral demand of the ethnic groups of Assam to the core Indian government is considered a subaltern claim which can be seen in the responses by the Pataskar Commission to demarcate the boundary (Talukdar, 2019, p. 51). It resulted in the creation of a state reorganisation commission for the formation of new states such as Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur in the subsequent period (Talukdar, 2019, p. 53). The post-colonial Assam movement manifests Assamese nationalism in constructing a collective identity. However, tribal aspiration led to a self-determination movement amongst the Assamese tribal and ethnic groups. This self-determination aspiration first started among the Bodos and next among the other plain tribal groups such as Deori, Sonowal Kachari, Mising, Thengal kachari, Tiwa and other such plain tribes of Assam.

Colonial roots and allied tribal movements influenced the Tiwa ethnic group's aspirations in post-colonial Assam. Unlike the Tiwa ethnic group's pre-colonial concern, the Sanskritisation process has changed the socio-political culture and led to the dysfunctioning of traditional institutions. Transformation of the Tiwa community is inevitable according to the needs of the present socio-political formation of Assam. It was the traditional socio-political aspects of Tiwa that practised customary law in the traditional society. However, after the influence of British administrative policy, the whole of north-east India and equally the Tiwa community have been influenced. The post-colonial socio-political transformations are interrelated and interdependent.

Moreover, such ethnic transformation associated with the Tiwa community has pre-colonial and colonial roots. Sharp ethnic differences manifest the heterogeneous nature of the state whereas the neo-socio-political formation in Assamese society shows sub-national autonomy. The Tiwa community has such an autonomy demand influenced by the post-colonial narrative of Assamese identity consciousness. Significantly, the aspiration of the colonial laws, unlike the other tribes of the northeastern states, was confined to a contested culture among the tribes. It further inspired the making of a separate identity by the Tiwa community within the multicultural domain. However, post-colonial political modernisation and development enabled tribal and ethnic groups to implement personal, social, and structural change. Changes in occupational structure, social mobility, the development of a modern education system, and political changes from the absolute institutions of the state are all necessary outcomes of modernity in the Tiwa community.

## Post-Colonial Socio-Political Formation In Assam: Genesis From Pre-Colonial and Colonial Period

Assam's post-colonial socio-political formation is confined to the heterogeneous nature that has existed since the pre-colonial and colonial periods. However, the colonial approach to Assam highlighted the injustice, dominance, and resistance to colonial subjugation. The post-colonial approach toward Assam has developed an indigenous discourse by recognising that colonialism did not exist. It developed a new socio-political narrative through indigenous identity consciousness. The predominance of colonial historical consciousness among ethnic groups encouraged the revival of identity consciousness in the post-colonial socio-political milieu. Assam has been a melting pot of different ethnic groups since the pre-colonial period, indicating the state's unique pluralism. This unique plurality in Assam contributed to forming a multicultural state in the social structure. However, in terms of multicultural policy implementation, the state has failed to recognise the unique identity of each ethnic group (Hausing, 2016, p.416).

However, preserving sociocultural identity is the fundamental demand of the ethnic groups among ethnic pluralism. These socio-cultural identities of ethnic groups try to preserve themselves through the demand for autonomy. Although these demands for autonomy have a colonial administrative legacy, during the post-colonial period, it has transformed from a demand for an autonomous district to a separate state for the Hill Tribal people of the northeast. All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) and All Tribal Organisation (ATO) voice against implementing the Assamese language as a state language. They considered that the sole cause of the demand for a separate state started with the implementation of the Assamese language as an official language. This created a threat to the languages of the non-Assamese-speaking people. The tribal alienation and assertion by the imposition of the Assamese language in the post-colonial period created objection among the tribes to be called an *Asamiya* (Dasgupta, 2000).

Moreover, the rising migration cases have also contributed to the creation of identity consciousness among the tribes of Assam. During the colonial period, largescale immigration changed the demographic structure in the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley of Assam. Eventually, the migrated people were assimilated into the Assamese society and called *Na-Asamiya*. Such demographic transformation created the fear of losing identity and tribal occupancy over the land in the tribal-dominated areas. It demanded Autonomous Governance to regulate their people and the tribal land in their inhabited areas. Even during the post-colonial period, the unprecedented illegal migration to Assam because of the political violence in Bangladesh also resulted in anti-immigrant sentiments among the native Assamese-speaking people and the tribals. One can, however, interpret the demand for autonomy as a subaltern narrative of the ethnic group of Assam that resulted in a historical consciousness connecting the pre-colonial and colonial socio-political formation. It was noticed that the British, through several administrative policies, tried to create a systematic division among the tribals and non-tribals in Assam by demarcating them into Excluded and Non-excluded areas. It also encouraged the tribals to maintain their traditional and hereditary system of governance. This colonial history of division extended the demand for autonomy among tribals in the Hills and subsequently among tribals of the plains based on their customs and traditions (Loomba,Kaul,Bunzl, Burton & Esty, 2005, p p.9-10 ).

Although the colonial administration encouraged self-determination aspiration among the hill tribal people, by and large, the question of autonomy among the plain tribal people is a post-colonial construction. Therefore, it manifested in the identity assertion or consciousness among the plain tribal groups in the post-colonial period. That extended the plain tribal identity revivalism as a popular discourse in Assam. Plain tribal identity revivalism in the post-colonial period started after the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was formed. The PTCA of Assam submitted a memorandum to the president of India on 20th May 1967, demanding a separate homeland, namely *"Udayachal"*, which would include the areas which are predominantly of plain tribes of Brahmaputra Valley, i.e. Lakhimpur, Darrang, Goalpara, Kamrup and Sibsagor (currently Sivasagar) area. However, the demand for a separate *'Udayachal"* got set back due to the formation of the All Bodo Student Union and their demand for a separate *Bodoland*. In reference to the demand for Bodoland, other forms of autonomy demand were realised by other plain tribals of Assam. For example, the Tiwas, Rabhas, Mising, Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis etc., are prominent among the plain tribes demanding a separate political arrangement. This demand for the political arrangement for Plain Tribes was multi-dimensional. For example, the Bodos demanded a separate independent state supported by the Bodo people with the help of a militant organisation like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Tiwas, Mising, and Rabhas demanded autonomy under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution, and the Deoris and Sonowal Kacharis demanded autonomy limited within the autonomous council (Konwar, 2005, pp.86-87).

It is known to us that Assam has been predominantly diverse, and this diversity in the post-colonial period became fragmented. It was so fragmented that the trajectory of assertion has resulted in the demand for separate statehood among the tribes. This sub-national trajectory of assertion was contrary to the core pan-Indian character of the northeastern states. It was to generate socio-political benefits for the tribal people of Assam (Das, 2015, p. 5). The tribes hence initiated popular resistance movements to achieve the assertion. The trajectory of ethnic identity assertions in Assam also turned violent and led to insurgency problems. In many cases, the extremists challenge the Indian state and their repression and exploitation of the common masses. For example, the demand led by insurgents groups such as NDFB, Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF), and Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) for the creation of a separate homeland has the traits of ethnonationalism (Baruah, 2012, p. 6). The ethno-nationalist sentiments of insurgent groups encouraged them to form a separate homeland with an active violence strategy. As a result, the state was pressured to initiate peace-building by extending autonomy to the tribals. However, in some instances, the Indian state's repressive attitude towards extremist groups further complicated the situation. Hence, peacebuilding becomes inescapable, and it shapes and reshapes the socio-political formation of Assam. This demand for autonomy also encouraged the subaltern ethnic groups to elevate their sociopolitical awareness. The socio- political awareness among the ethnic groups encouraged preserving the ethnic identity in the heterogeneous Assamese society. At the same time, the diversity of interests represented by ethnic groups counters Assamese nationalism. However, Assamese nationalism has an ideological paradox in terms of electoral representation. In such cases, the political alliance in the last assembly election turns to the *saffron in the rainbow* (Dutta, 2021, p. 181).

It made a significant electoral change through hyper-nationalism, populism, and

dream selling via budgets and policies. Nowadays, the growth of Hindu nationalism in Assam identifies several racial, cultural, and political influences on the identity and self-hood of ethnic groups. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the navigation of Hindu nationalism in the social and political realm of Assam in the postcolonial context. Hindu nationalism is gaining ground importance in India's national and local politics. Since the anti-foreigner movement of Assam, Hindu nationalism has existed against the illegal Muslim immigrants to Assam. However, nowadays, they attempt to glorify history in the name of Hindutva ideology. After gaining political power in Assam, organising the events like *Namami Brahmaputra, and Luitpriya Hindu Samavesh* attempted to fold the local culture into the ideology of greater Hindutva ideology. The gaining of local support by the BJP from the regional forces like Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Bodoland People's Front, Tiwa, Rabha, Thengal Kachari, Sonowal Kachari and other plain tribal organisations point out the rising of Hindu nationalism (Saikia, 2020, pp.73-74). Simultaneously, Assam's complex demography, with various ethnicities, races, faith, customs, culture and multiple issues, makes identity politics strong in the socio-political formation (Bhattacharjee, 2016, pp.81-82). Significantly, the rise of right-wing forces at the grassroots level in late post-colonial socio-political formation has transformed the very nature of Assamese assimilation and thus led to ideal national worship by alienating the indigenousness in the recent political phenomenon. In such a case, the Assamese people have a political commitment to the national political party instead of a regional political party. Therefore it is necessary to have an indigenous outlook against multiple responses to the social, political, economic, and philosophical legacies of neo colonialism in socio-political formation (Baruah, 2012).

Paradoxically, Assamese people initially have a less ideological commitment to the collective idea of Assamese. The anti-foreigner struggle in the post- colonial socio-political context of Assam has generated a collective identity mobilisation for the protection of the idea of Assamese. Thus migration to Assam contributed to the ever-existing debate on Assamese and non-Assamese identity in the name of citizenship identification. Hence, the national interest of post-colonial Assamese society is to protect the idea of Assamese under the constitutional and legal framework (Dasgupta, 2000). The anti-British political projects of the Assamese people produced the imagined collective idea of Assamese for the coexistence of the indigenous identity. Nevertheless, such an anti-colonial imagined collective sense of Assamese identity does not exist in the post-colonial socio-political formation due to the sense of cultural belongingness and separate identity. Thus, the society of Assam does not have a homogeneous formation, and it has contested unresolved disputes between the ethnic groups which are yet to be resolved.

In such a context, there is unfinished business in the socio-political formation because of migration, resulting in an excessive demographic transformation in the lower and upper parts of Assam. In other words, colonial and post-colonial Assam has several cases of resistance in the case of using land without the people's consent due to migration. Since the colonial period, the fundamental recognised provincial problem of the Assamese people has been the protection of immigration from the neighbouring countries, especially from Bangladesh.

Therefore, the most prevailing debates in Assam nowadays are the Hindu - Muslim and indigenous-non-indigenous debates. So far, as the Assamese Muslims are concerned, history identifies about five Muslim communities, i.e. *Goriya, Moriya,*

*Julha, Syed, and Deshi* who may be called "indigenous" to Assam. However, it was noticed that this indigenous Assamese Muslim term does not include the Bengali Muslims who migrated from Bangladesh. The reason why they are not accepted is that the Assamese society was organised on the basis of ethnicity and language. However, the recent narratives of the political history of Assam substituted language and ethnicity-based Assamese socio-political formation with religion (Saikia, 2017).

Apart from that, the post-colonial socio-political formation of Assam has ethnic discontent. The proposed tribal autonomy through regional and district councils could not end the emerging ethnic discontent. The situation worsened after the language movement when the common forum for the hill tribes was formed under the banner of APHLC. The APHLC started to demand a separate state for the hill tribes. This demand for a separate state was given to the Nagas in 1963. In 1958 the Lushai Hills was struck by a devastating rate of famine. However, despite the appeal of the People from the Lushai hills, no pre-emptive grants were made to save the Lushais from starvation and death. A fraction of alienated Lushais demanded separation from Assam, while another faction of the Lushais led by the Mizo National Front (MNF) demanded secession from India. The other tribes like the Garos, Jaintias, and Khasis wanted separation from Assam. The post-colonial Assamese hegemony and growing chauvinism further encouraged the demand for separate autonomy of Bodos, Karbis and Dimasas in post-colonial Assam. These post-colonial growing concerns about the autonomy between the hill tribes and plain tribes balkanised the Assamese nationality, creating fragmentation in the name of identity formation. The aspiration for identity among other plain tribal groups was also gaining momentum. We have seen the demand for separate autonomy among the plain tribes such as Mising, Thengal Kachari, Sonowal kachari, Deori, and Tiwa, to name a few. Unlike the other tribes, the Tiwa aspiration for autonomy concerns identity consciousness regarding political modernisation and development. The Tiwas' political modernisation and formation of identity consciousness have been aided by newly formed organisations such as the Lalung Darbar, the Lalung Dorbar Youth Front, the autonomous Lalung District Demand Committee, the All Tiwa Student Union, the All Tiwa Women's Association, the Autonomy Demand Struggle Forum, the United People's Front, and the Tiwa National Solidarity Forum. Therefore in post-colonial Assam, the Tiwa identity consciousness can be discussed through the activities of these organisations.

## The Post-Coloniality and The Identity Consciousness of The Tiwa Community

The Tiwa kingdoms, such as Gobha, Nellie, Khola, and Sohori were under the suzerainty of the Jayantia kingdom, and Pachorajya and Satorajya were under the Ahom Kingdom during the pre-colonial period. Though the Tiwa kingdoms were under the control of Jayantia and Ahom, the kings were allowed to follow the traditional social customary laws, rules, rituals, ceremonies etc. However, before the colonial invasion of Assam, the Jayantia kingdom had signed a treaty with the British, which made it easier to annex the Gobha Kingdom. Significantly, the Tiwa anti-British uprising in response to the prohibition of opium cultivation at Phulguri in the Nagaon district resulted in British interference in their traditional socio-political practices. The imposition of tax on their houses, betel nut [Tamul] and betel leaf [Pan] were the fundamental causes of the anti-British uprising. Such anti-British

uprisings caused a collective identity consciousness against colonial oppression and encouraged the Tiwa people to participate in the Indian freedom movement (Barpujari,Barpujari & Bhuyan 2014, pp.93-94).

However, the non-tribal religion, culture, and customary practices influenced the Tiwa community. The migrations from the hills to the plains assimilate the Tiwa [Lalung] community into Assamese society. Such assimilation extended the loss of identity to a greater extent in the Post-colonial period. The acculturation process of the Tiwa community has a negative impact on the socio- political aspect, especially with the plain Tiwa of Assam. In such a situation, the Tiwas begin to assert the revival of the lost culture, custom, tradition, language and way of life in the present socio-political milieu. This acculturation process has begun through the Sanskritisation process, which influenced the religious and cultural aspects of Tiwa in the pre-colonial period. The Brahminic culture and Vaishnavism of Assam, which *Sankardeva* (great saint of Assam) popularised, typically influenced them in the medieval period. However, in the colonial period, they were influenced by Christianity. Many were converted to Christianity, especially the Hill Tiwa in Meghalaya and Assam (Kachari, 2020, P.998). However, the political identity consciousness of the Tiwa community emerged after they joined the Tribal League in 1923. They have actively participated in the freedom movement of India. Participation in the freedom movement led to the arrest of several people. Similarly, the identity consciousness was heightened after the submission of the memorandum by the Tribal League before the Constituent Assembly in 1947 to create a separate scheduled area for Plain tribal people. Later the compulsory Assamese language policy of the state in post-colonial Assam brought a sense of alienation and a feeling of insecurity to the socio-cultural aspects of ethnic groups.

Hence, the subaltern narrative of the Tiwa community constructed a collective consciousness that put forward the thought of the formation of Lalung Darbar as a political organisation in 1967. The Lalung Darbar's fundamental demand was to create a separate autonomous district council for the Tiwa people. To achieve this demand, they submitted a memorandum to the central and state government. For their economic and social development, another Tiwa organisation was formed in 1971, namely the Sodou Asom Tiwa (Lalung) Yuba Chatra Sanmillan (later, the organisation is known as Sodou Asom Tiwa (Lalung) Sanmillan). This student organisation tried to unify the hill Tiwa and plain Tiwa people and asked for the preservation of their culture and identity. However, the Lalung Darbar mobilised the identity movement in reference to the post-colonial socio-political influence of the ethnic groups of Assam.

The organised socio-political mobilisation by the All Tiwa Student Union (ATSU) led to a new dimension in the autonomy movement. First, it organised the creation of the separate autonomous district council under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. Second, the Tiwa people, who live in the hill district of Karbi Anglong in Assam and Meghalaya, have been added to the list of hill tribes. The third is introducing the Tiwa language as a primary school subject. Also, the ATSU further enlarged the socio-political consciousness by forming the All Tiwa Women Association (ATWA) in 1990, followed by the Autonomy Demand Struggle Forum (ADSF) in 1994 under the leadership of ATSU (Kakati, 2019). Amidst the demand for autonomy among the Tiwa community, the formation of a Tiwa autonomous council in the subsequent period is a successful autonomy-demand struggle in the post-

colonial socio- political formation. Two organisations, i.e., the Autonomous District Demand Committee (ADDC) and ATSU, worked together to form a separate autonomous council. In the autonomous district demand struggle, the ATSU has a significant role in persuading the government. As a result, the Autonomous Lalung District Demand Committee and the other allied organisations signed the Tiwa Accord with the Assam government in 1995 to form a separate autonomous district council.It is noteworthy that based on the self-determination struggle, the Tiwa and other ethnic groups such as Rabha and Mising bought autonomy to their peripheral land. Meanwhile, some organisations have worked to mobilise identity consciousness during the post-colonial period. The role of post-colonial Tiwa social and political organisations in shaping the collective identity consciousness have been discussed below:

*The Lalung Dorbar:* The Lalung Dorbar was formed in 1967 to work for the identity consciousness of the Tiwa people who lived in both plain and hill areas of Assam and Meghalaya. The post-colonial socio-political formation in Assam generated the identity consciousness under the Lalung Dorbar. The Lalung Dorbar organised a special convention to promote the collective mobilisation of identity consciousness for the Tiwa people to establish an autonomous council under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution in 1984. They decided to work with the All Assam Bodo Student Union (ABSU) and the United Tribal Liberation Front (UTLF). Meanwhile, during the Assam movement, the Lalung Darbar and Lalung Darbar Youth Front (LDYF) jointly submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi, to establish an Autonomous Hill District comprising the Tiwa people of the hill areas in Assam and Meghalaya. Simultaneously, the memorandum also demanded special initiatives for the development of the Tiwa people. In order to protect their identity, the Lalung Dorbar proposed a boundary line to the Indian government in this memorandum covering the Tiwa people living in the southern part of Nagaon district, the southwestern part of Karbi Anglong, the southern-eastern part of Kamrup District and the eastern part of the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya (Bordoloi, 2021, pp. 161-162).

Furthermore, due to the post-colonial socio-political consequences, the Tiwa people were encouraged to form an autonomous council for self-determination rights and identity consciousness. The North Eastern Tribal Youth Festival was organised in 1985 by the All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) in the Udalguri district, which submitted a memorandum to both the state and central governments incorporating Tiwa autonomous district's demand. Followed by the Lalung Dorbar, ABSU and UTLF, comprising 2000 members, went to New Delhi to demand the autonomous council on November 6th, 1987. The agitation on November 26th and 28th, 1987, at Lucknow by blocking the railway station and in Assam by blocking the Chaparmukh Rail Junction under the leadership of Lalung Dorbar further emphasised the demand for identity recognition in Assam. The leaders of Lalung Dorbar also started a series of protests by blocking the highway on December 9th 1987 (Bordoloi, 2021, P.162).

Despite the police atrocities during protests, the demand for an autonomous district in the post-colonial period got strengthened. Subsequently, the Lalung Darbar submitted two memorandums to the government of India. On February 5th, 1991, a memorandum was submitted to the then Prime Minister of India, Chandra Shekhar. On October 14th, 1992, another memorandum was submitted to the then Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, demanding the creation of an autonomous district by

carving out the areas of Tiwa and other tribes inhabited in the Assam districts of Nagaon, Morigaon, Karbi Anglong, and Kamrup. The memorandum also highlighted historical backwardness, lags in education, agriculture, language, culture, road communication, and economic backwardness, all of which are characteristics of the Autonomous Lalung District. Such post-colonial identity consciousnesses initiated by the Lalung Dorbar to preserve identity are notable until the formation of an autonomous council (Kimura, 2003, p.236).

*The Lalung Dorbar Youth Front (LDYF):* The Lalung Dorbar Youth Front is a youth organisation of the Lalung Darbar, formed in 1977 (Bordoloi, 2015, p.560). The fundamental function of the youth organisation is to pressure the state and central government to create a Lalung Hill Autonomous District Council based on the other tribal people's demands in the post-colonial socio- political formation of Assam. The youth wing of the Lalung Darbar, in particular, is responsible for organising public meetings to unite the Tiwa people living in North-Eastern India for a collective Tiwa identity, as other tribes do base on socio-cultural distinguishing features. Although the Lalung Darbar initiated the identity mobilisation process among the Tiwa community and demanded the formation of a separate autonomous district, the methods they followed, i.e., traditional and non-violent, were not supported by the Youth Wing. Thus, the youth wing leaders came out of the Darbar and formed a new organisation called the Lalung Youth Front in 1980. The Lalung Youth Front strengthened the demand of the autonomous district and organised the common masses to meet the demand from the government. During the anti-foreigner movement in Assam, however, the leaders of Lalung Dorbar and Lalung Youth Front gathered together to accomplish the peripheral demands of the tribe. They submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, requesting the establishment of the Lalung Autonomous District Council in India's North East (Bordoloi, 2021,p.164). The Tiwa Youth Front also played an active role in the Tiwa youth's educational demand and other issues of Tiwa youth empowerment.

*The Autonomous Lalung District Demand Committee (ALDDC):* With the association of Tiwa leaders from the different organisations in the Kilingporia High School in 1988, they resolved the formation of the Autonomous Lalung District Demand Committee (ALDDC). Soon after the formation of this political organisation, which laid down the plan for the achievement of autonomy, The Lalung Dorbar and Tiwa Sanmillan became the branches of the ALDDC to mobilise the idea of self-determination within the periphery of Assam. By taking the objective of forming an autonomous district, the ALDDC organised a cultural convention on May 6th, 1989, to revive Tiwa culture and language(Baruah, 2001). It is to ascertain the cultures and language of the Tribe in the post-colonial scenario. Another cultural convention organised under the banner of ALDDC on May 30th, 1990, to discuss tribal people's problems contributed more explicitly to forming identity consciousness. In other words, the series of protests organised by ALDDC to the formation of an autonomous council has a significant role in the mobilisation of identity consciousness followed by all these cultural conventions(Bordoloi, 2021 p.168). On October 3rd, 1991, a three-member expert committee headed by Bhupendra Sing discussed the demand for a separate Bodoland Autonomous district. The three expert committees also meet with the leaders of ALDDC to look at the demands of the autonomous district council. The leaders of ALDDC submitted a memorandum to them to create an autonomous district (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 168). The following year, on May 10th, 1992,

they submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam. They requested the government take immediate steps to resolve the long-standing demand for self-determination. However, the issue continues. At the second biennial conference of the ALDDC on May 14th, 1993, the leaders discussed the autonomy issue with political parties such as Congress, AGP, BJP, CPI (ML), etc. The ALDDC submitted numerous memorandums to both governments of Assam and India. However, the episode of autonomy began after the formation of the Bodoland autonomous council (BAC) in 1993. Subsequently, the Mising, Tiwa, and Rabha autonomous councils were formed in 1995(Chamsal, 2020, p. 30708).

*All Tiwa Student Union (ATSU):* By realising the necessity of a student organisation for the Tiwas, it was decided to form a student organisation in January 1989 with the presence of three members, namely; Madan Bordoloi, Bhupendra Kholar, and Sadhuman Pator (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 170). The following month, on February 25th, 1989, a meeting at Tribal Rest House in Nagaon unanimously formed a student organisation for Tiwa students. Soon after, the ATSU organised the first conference on March 17th and 18th, 1990; the first conference set three main agendas. Firstly, the formation of an autonomous district by incorporating legislative, administrative, and financial power. Secondly, recognise the Tiwa language in Roman script under the Indian constitution. Thirdly, to allot Schedule Tribe status to the Tiwa people living in the twin hill districts of Assam, namely the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill districts (Bordoloi, 2021, pp.171-172). The conference also discussed the protection of socioeconomic and political rights. The masses were mobilised in the name of self-determination, and several democratic movements were organised to get the status of the autonomous district to protect identity. They played the most active role in the identity consciousness of the Tiwa community. Several agitations were carried out, including mass rallies, bandhs, strikes, bicycle processions, and public meetings, to extend Tiwa autonomous district's claim. The tactics used by the ATSU to mobilise the demand in the Tiwa Autonomous District were path-breaking to the achievement of demand, particularly the mass rally and the mobilisation of the common masses, which ensured the demand for them.

Significantly, the memorandum submitted to the government by other Tiwa organisations since the beginning of the identity consciousness movement and the ATSU's constant pressure on the government resulted in the success of their postcolonial ethnic aspiration for socio-political protection. In reference to the memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister of Assam, Late Hiteswar Saikia, on June 8th, 1993, put forward the fundamental demands of Tiwas in front of the government of Assam (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 172). These are the creation of an autonomous Tiwa district in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution; the reorganisation of the Tiwa language at primary level schools; ensuring the ST status of Hill Tiwa living in both Assam and Meghalaya; and finally, launching talks between the central, state, and ATSU for the recognition of such demand. For these demands, the ATSU also held talks with the political parties of Assam and tried to mobilise them to ensure their demands(Bordoloi, 2021, p. 172). Therefore, in the post- colonial socio-political identity revival struggle, the role of ATSU is monumental.

*All Tiwa Women Association (ATWA):* The Tiwa Women's Association was formed on July 24th, 1990, on the initiation of ATSU leaders to emancipate the Tiwa women from socio-economic and educational backwardness. In terms of the social

mobilisation of identity consciousness done by ATSU, the women's wing also played a pivotal role in the mass mobilisation of this self- determination movement(Bordoloi, 2021, p. 179). The ATWA and ATSU jointly worked to achieve the demand and carried out several agitation programmes. On July 22nd, 1994, the All Tiwa Women's Association (ATWA) organised a mass rally at the premises of Gopinath Bordoloi Bidyapith, Raha, where more than 5000 women actively participated(Bordoloi, 2021, p. 180). In particular, this women's organisation is an outcome of the self-determination movement of Tiwa. Equally, the women's organisation represented the feminist and gender justice idea by fighting against the oppression and exploitation of the post- colonial socio-political formation. The demand for autonomy for the Tiwa people is inclusive by showing the women's participation in the self-determination struggle of the autonomous district. Hence, the identity consciousness among Tiwa has feministic support through this women's organisation.

*Autonomy Demand Struggle Forum (ADSF):* The autonomy demand struggle forum was one of the political organisations of the Tiwa people, which was formed on July 30th, 1994, with the initiative of the Lalung Dorbar, Lalung Youth Front (LYF), ATSU, and ATWA to strengthen mainly the demand for autonomy in the post-colonial socio-political formation of the  self- determination movement. The  primary demand of the ADSF was the creation of the Autonomous District by incorporating legislative, administrative, and financial power. They also agitated against the government and other organisations of the Tiwa community. The members of the ATWA and LYF automatically become members of the ADSF (Bordoloi, 2021, pp. 180-181). Following democratic principles, the leaders of the ADSF took a step toward the inclusion of members from other castes and attempted to open membership to other communities. Meanwhile, the ADSF assisted the ATSU and other organisations in the creation of political awareness. However,  to shape the Tiwa community's identity, the ADSF became a Tiwa political party, and some of its members ran in the election. The leaders were defeated in the election because they failed to win the support of the common masses. However, the ADSF played a significant role in the identity consciousness among the Tiwa community based on the post-colonial socio-political formation( Bordoloi, 2021, p. 181).

*Sanmilito Gana Mancha (United People's Front):* The United People's Front is a political organisation of the Tiwa founded on May 15th, 2010 and claims to be the original organisation out of the factional groups (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 180). The organisation's fundamental demand is the recognition of the Tiwa autonomous council under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. This political platform for the Tiwa community has the vision to win the election. Therefore, the candidates of this visionary organisation contested the election as independent candidates. Significantly, to win the election, this organisation made secret alliances  with  the other political parties in some constituencies inhabited by the Tiwa people in 2010(Bordoloi, 2021, p. 180). The political factions between ATSU, ADSF, ATWA, and TCS in the Tiwa organisations failed to achieve a good result. They failed in terms of collective ethnic sentiment to win in  electoral  politics. However,  the Sanmilita Gana Mancha and Oikya Mancha were satisfied by winning three seats in the election. By realising the political factions within them, the other organisations of Tiwa come together. However, the credibility and acceptance of Gana Mancha and Oikya Mancha as Tiwa alternative parties were not fully realised afterwards and further led to the formation of another political organisation, namely the Tiwa National Solidarity

Forum(Bordoloi, 2021, p. 180).

*The Tiwa Jatiya Oikya Mancha (Tiwa National Solidarity Forum):* Since the Oikya Mancha and Sanmilito Gana Mancha failed to gain the support of the people in electoral politics, They decided to form another party, namely the Tiwa Jatiya Oikya Mancha, on August 18th, 2013, and finally it was formed at Marigaon Gandhi Bhaban (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 182). The well-organised political platform of the Tiwa Jatiya Oikya Mancha is laid down by the various objectives of the Tiwa organisation. The organisation was able to gain the attention of the common masses, and the Tiwa people supported it enthusiastically based on their national importance to fully fulfilling the aspirations of Tiwa. Some congressmen were also influenced by this organisation and joined the organisation at the initial stage. For the first time, the party contested the Tiwa Autonomous Council elections in 2015 (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 182). In some constituencies, they signed pre-poll alliances and secret alliances to win the election. However, the party was able to get 10 seats out of 30 seats in the constituencies of the Tiwa Autonomous Council. Just after the election of the Autonomous Council election, an alliance was formed with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the assembly election in April 2016. From the Tiwa Jatiya Oikya Mancha side, Mr. Ramakanta Dewri contested the Assembly Election from the Morigaon Constituency on a BJP ticket and won the election. Nevertheless, the organisation got split into two fractions, and Ramakanata Dewri formed another Jatiya Oikya Manch instead of the Tiwa Jatiya Oikya Mancha. The faction led by Ramakanta Dewri merged with the BJP in 2018 (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 182). On the other hand, the Tiwa Jatiya Oikya Mancha loses the support of the people. However, they contested the election of the Tiwa autonomous council held in December 2021 and failed to manage to get a single seat.

### Tiwa Community's Post-Colonial Identity Transformation

From the colonial to the post-colonial period of the socio-political formation of Assam, the state has witnessed several socio-political changes. In particular, during the colonial period, the divisive policies of the British towards the North Eastern region changed the socio-political composition of the region. However, to establish democratic principles after Independence, the modernisation process took place in the social institutions. In the post-colonial enterprise of nation-building, every society, including tribal societies and backward communities, has gone through a tremendous democratisation process at the grassroots level with the help of welfare policies and programmes. Also, new modern democratic institutions emerged based on the socio-political makeup of the current context. The modern mechanism of tribal development, i.e. local self-government institutions, autonomous councils and various traditional institutions, made the traditional institutions subordinate. The Tiwa community of Assam has undergone several post-colonial transformations, which are discussed below.

*Practising modern political professionalism:* The transformations in the Tiwa community have contributed to several factors. There exists a traditional and modernity dilemma among the Tiwas as the Tiwa traditional polity has undergone tremendous changes in power, structure and functions. As a result of the current processes of globalisation, modernisation, and democratisation, traditional Tiwa institutions were losing their original structure. Nevertheless, modern and traditional institutions' core goals are to bring prosperity, harmony, sustainability, peace and responsibility to the whole community.

Practising political professionalism, the hill Tiwas were brought under the autonomous hill districts (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 216). On the other hand, the plain Tiwas were brought under the Panchayati raj system and other departments and administrative set up of the government. However, the rising consciousness movement over Tiwa identity heightened political professionalism in post-colonial socio-political formations. The traditional customs, religious practices, and social practise of Tiwa in the traditional administration have been extensively replaced by the Sixth Schedule Autonomous Council, the Panchayati raj system, and the autonomous council.

*Hinduisation and Christianisation of religion:* The religious conversion of the Tiwa was found in the pre-colonial period, especially the conversion to Hinduism. They converted to Hinduism due to the tribe's widespread inferiority complex and prevalent social practices that promoted untouchability. Moreover, they were influenced by the Neo-Vaishnavism movement, which *Sankardeva* and *Madhabdeva* popularised (Patar, 2021, pp. 198-199). Although Hinduism has given the flexibility to the tribe, the plain Tiwa got alienated from its traditional religious practice of Animism. Christianity influenced such religious transformations in the colonial period. In particular, the Hill Tiwa has been highly influenced by the Christian religion. The religious conversion to Christianity in the colonial period continued till the late post-colonial period. When the Plain Tiwa religious conversion patterns are compared to the Hill Tiwa conversion patterns, it is clear that the Hill Tiwa retain their mother tongue, traditional dress, and practices. Beef consumption is common among the converted Tiwas. While Plain Tiwa has lost its language, consuming beef is forbidden by the Hindu religion. However, selling pork and taking it as food often prevails among them (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 207).

*Ethnic identity to tribal identity conversion:* There is a tendency to change tribal affiliation among Tiwas. The social situation compelled the Tiwa community to convert to other tribes to gain more privileges. There are cases of conversion reported in the Umswai area of the Assam-Meghalaya border, where some Tiwas converted to Karbis and Khasis to get more social and government privileges (Bordoloi, 2021 p. 205). Furthermore, religion is another factor which influenced them to convert to other tribal communities. For instance, some villages of the Diphu District, such as Hongkram, Umru, Chu-Cha, Khandajan, Purana Ghilani, Sat Mail, etc., converted to Karbi (Bordoloi, 2021, p. 205). The Tiwa and Karbi have some similarities in their social institutions and practices. Many Tiwas also converted to the Garos living in Joyota Khoiram. Similarly, the Christian Tiwa of Meghalaya converted to the Khasis to get government benefits and social recognition in the area. So one can say that Tiwa's socio-political formation of identity has undergone several changes in both the colonial and post-colonial periods.

*Change in the Traditional Economy:* In the traditional economy, Jhum cultivation is a significant source of income for the Hill Tiwa. However, the Hill Tiwa has gone through some changes in cultivation. They used to cultivate paddy and other food crops along with cotton, but after the economic liberalisation process of India, the Tiwa community also changed its cultivation pattern. One of the significant changes in Jhum cultivation was the introduction of Bamboo and broom along with other corps. Hill Tiwa first introduced broom cultivation with the help of some student leaders of ATSU in the early 1990s (Patar, 2021, pp.163-164). This cultivation was successful due to the demand for brooms outside North East India, which encouraged

them to take up commercial cultivation. The demand for bamboo cultivation by Hill Tiwa picked up after the establishment of Hindustan Paper Corporation at Jagirod.

Along with them, other tribes also supplied the Bamboo to the Hindustan Paper Corporation. So, bamboo and broom cultivation provided better economic support to Hill Tiwa. Similarly, the barter system based on mutual consent was changed due to the entry of the market economy among them. The modern market economy does not follow the traditional barter system. Therefore, globalisation affects the local aspects found in terms of Tiwa barter practices.

*Ethnic revivalism and the establishment of identity consciousness:* Based on the post-colonial socio-political formation of Assam, the tribal society of Tiwas was reorganised. The Tiwa community revitalised their culture and identity in the postcolonial context through political modernisation and new behavioural changes. The visible pattern of tribal cultural change encouraged the Tiwa community to preserve its socio-cultural heritage while adapting to modern elements. In such a situation, the post-colonial identity revivalism through organisations such as the Lalung Darbar, Sadow Asom Tiwa (Lalung) Sanmillan, Autonomy Demand Struggle Forum, United People's Front, and All Tiwa Student Organisation played a significant role in the protection of culture, identity, and language. These Tiwa organisations are extending support to the common masses through a common platform and trying to revive the tradition, culture, and language to protect identity. Hence, the autonomy movement brought changes to their sociocultural life.

In recent times, globalisation has had an overreaching impact on the socio-cultural lives of the tribes of Assam in general and the Tiwa community in particular. The impact is both positive and negative at the same time. Globalisation has developed a modern ethos in the traditional social and cultural lives of the tribes. It brought a qualitative change in the practices of tribes in the private and public spheres. The adoption of modern lifestyles along with the traditional lifestyle has been quite common among the tribes of Assam. It includes assimilation and accommodation of modern traits such as western food habits, adoption of the English language and western education, proliferation of Christianity, different dress codes for private and public occasions, acceptance of modern belief patterns, housing, etc. The Tiwa community also adheres to these changes brought about by globalisation. As observed, globalisation has brought a tremendous change in the socio-cultural life of Tiwas. There emerged a massive change in their food habits, use of day-to-day commodities, acceptance of a modern lifestyle, and acceptance of modern dress codes along with traditional. It is also evident that the traditional language of Tiwa has been abandoned by the youths. Plain Tiwas got merged into the mainstream Assamese society, so they mostly speak Assamese. However, the hill Tiwa still speaks Tiwa at home, but they have also adopted English. It is mainly due to the proliferation of Christian missionaries and English-medium schools in the Hills that they have adopted English.

## Conclusion

The post-colonial socio-political formation of Assam influences the identity consciousness of the Tiwa community. Notably, the dysfunction of the Tiwa community's traditional institutions encourages the use of modern political professionalism in identity construction. The government's modernisation and development policies aided in the transformation of the traditional institution. The

Tiwa ethnic group emerged as a subaltern group due to their demand for self-determination and the identity revival movement among them, which was encouraged by various organisations. In the current globalised context, however, the Tiwa community's socio-political transformation is inalienable.

Furthermore, the sankritisation of Plain Tiwa assimilation into colonial and postcolonial socio-political frameworks encouraged the emergence of a new political culture. Significantly, the heterogeneous makeup of North Eastern society reflects the assertion of minority rights among many ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the Tiwa sub-national narrative and the strong desire for self- determination in the peripheral territory witnessed ambitions for ethnic revivalism in post-colonial Assam by demanding the autonomous district council. As a result, Tiwa tribalism contributes to the preservation of identity. Tiwas, a post-colonial indigenous organisation, promoted the resurgence of ethnic aspirations to preserve language and culture. However, they encapsulated identity protection by addressing these challenges in their post- colonial socio-political construction. Their interrelated and interdependent socio-political compositions from pre-colonial to post-colonial times continue to have a role in identity construction. The status of the North-Eastern region as a multicultural polyglot reflects the region's diverse political perspectives. The diverse perspective of North East India has shaped Tiwa identity and awareness. However, cultural absorption and transformation do lead to the emergence of a new social structure. Political modernisation and democratisation in post- colonial sociopolitical formations systematically strengthened the professionalism of ethnic groups' political activity, including the Tiwas. As a result, political professionalism and post behavioural social transformation influence the Tiwa community's post-colonial identity constructions.

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