

CHAPTER 7

REVIVALISM AMONG THE TAI KHAMYANGS OF ASSAM

As discussed in the previous Chapter, it is seen that a lot of the socio - cultural practices of the Tai Khamyang people are either extinct, or on the verge of extinction. Assimilation with the native populace is one of the main reasons for that. Too much of assimilation and the extinction of the traditional practices created a sense of identity crisis and ethnic consciousness among them, particularly the young generation. This Chapter discusses how the issues of identity crisis and ethnic consciousness led to the revivalist tendencies among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam.

7.1 SOCIO-CULTURAL REVIVALISM AMONG THE TAI KHAMYANGS OF ASSAM

The researcher is trying to trace the revivalist tendencies among the Tai Khamyangs with the help of the information collected during the field study. Different aspects of socio-cultural revivalism among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam are been discussed below-

7.1.1 Language

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Tai Khamyang language is almost on the verge of extinction. The researcher found only two fluent speakers of the Tai Khamyang

language (one each) in both the villages. They are - Meuhum Chowlu (Female, 70) from Chalapather Shyam Gaon and Junbala Shyam (Female, 82) from Rohon Shyam Gaon. UNESCO has also kept the Tai Khamyang language in the list of endangered languages. The present generation has realized that it is high time that the indigenous language should be revived. Attempts are being made to revive the Tai Khamyang language. Language workshops are being organized in different Tai Khamyang villages from time to time. International Mother tongue day was observed by *Phung Lai Khamyang* (Khamyang cultural society with head office at Chalapather Shyam Gaon) and the people of Powaimukh Khamyang village in Tinsukia district, Assam on 21st February 2018. A four day Workshop on Tai Khamyang language under Assam Paramita's (Branch of South Korea's Sejong Paramita) Identity Development Project (Under Endangered language programme) in Pawoimukh Khamyang village in Tinsukia district from 9th to 12th July, 2019. As mentioned earlier the highest number of Tai Khamyang language speakers are from Pawoimukh Khamyang village. Students from different Tai Khamyang villages participated in the programme where they were taught to read and write the Tai Khamyang language. The programme was coordinated by Pyoseng Chowlu of Chalapather Shyam Gaon. Besides, the '*Phung Lai Khamyang*' has taken initiatives in organizing language workshops in many villages from time to time. Details about its activities have been discussed in the Tai - Khamyang organizations heading below in Tai Khamyang Organization heading. The Tai Khamyang people are making individual efforts to revive the language. Most of the young generation children address their relatives in their native tongue i.e. *Mei* - Mother, *Pou* – Father, *Luk Chai* - Son, *Chai*- Elder Brother, *Luk Sao*- Daughter, *Pi*- Elder Sister etcetera.



Figure 7.1 and 7. 2 - Language Workshop held at Powaimukh Shyam village

7.1.2 Festivals

Poi Pee Mau- In the Khamyang society, the Buddhist calendar is generally used to calculate the important dates in case of religious matters. The Gregorian calendar is followed in day to day practice. However, to calculate the auspicious days like marriage and festivals still the old Tai calendar is occasionally followed, though it is losing its relevance with the passage of time. The Tai people follow the lunar calendar and the Tai year consists of twelve months. The Tai people all around the world celebrate the first day of the first month of their calendar year as *Poi Pee Mau*. *Poi* means festival and *Pee* means New Year. It is celebrated in the month of November-December, though the dates can vary according to the lunar calendar. Fairs are organized in the Khamyang villages during this time and people are involved in merry making and celebrations. In the morning of the first day of the New Year, a ritual known as *Tang Som* is performed. This ritual is performed in gratitude and memory of their ancestors. Cooked rice and vegetable is given to the ancestors as offering (Gohain, 2014). Khamyang delicacies are prepared and distributed among the relatives and vice a versa. Traditional Khamyang song and dance is performed by the young people and the evening is spent in joyful activities and merry making.

Though the *Poi Pee Mau* festival was celebrated locally in the villages, it started being celebrated as a community festival for the first time in Baliyan Shyam Gaon in Jorhat district in the year 2013. In the next year too it was celebrated as a community festival in Chalapather Shyam Gaon in Charaideo district. The festival is generally celebrated with an aim of showcasing Tai Khamyang culture. Programs such as Tai Khamyang folk song and dance, Khamyang ethnic food competition, exhibition highlighting items used in day to day life, traditional fashion show highlighting traditional Khamyang dresses and elocution competition in Tai Khamyang language is organized with a view to promote the nearly extinct Tai Khamyang dialect. Meetings are held where discussions are held regarding the preservation of Tai Khamyang language and culture. A colorful cultural procession is taken out in which different groups from all the Khamyang villages take part. It could thus be said that the *Poi Pee Mau* festival serves as a melting point of different Khamyang villages of Assam and it can work as a unifying factor of a microscopic minority like them. It is to be mentioned here that the celebration of *Poi Pee Mau* as a cultural festival discontinued in 2015 though it was celebrated in the villages locally. It is noteworthy that

Poi Pee Mau is the festival which is indigenous to all the people of the Tai community of Assam and South East Asia. It was celebrated by the Tai people even before they accepted Buddhism. That is why it is considered as the original new year of the Tai people. All the six Tai communities of Assam celebrate it including the Ahoms who have converted into Hinduism.



Figure 7.3 Poi Pee Mau Festival celebrated in Chalapather Shyam village

One of the most important factors behind the celebration of Poi Pee Mau as a community festival is that it can serve as a common platform for the Khamyang people of different villages; where they can assemble together and share their views. Such platform is the need of the hour as it can assist in a great deal to promote Tai Khamyang language and culture. According to Gohain (2014), the Tai calendar still holds relevance in the Khamyang society as auspicious dates and occasions are selected as per the Tai calendar. It would thus be easier for the Tai Khamyang youths to associate themselves with this festival and thereby uphold and develop a propensity for Tai culture, identity, language and values, so that they mature up in wisdom possessing authentic ideas and love for their own culture. It is promoted as a cultural festival as it can serve as a merging point of not only the Khamyangs but also of the other six Tai communities of Assam. According to an informant, promoting the Tai New Year as a cultural festival can further boost the tourism sector as tourists will cherish finding about a lesser known community with such a rich culture and history. Poi Pee Mau as a community festival can thus play a significant role not only in imbibing a sense of belongingness and pride among the Khamyangs but also reviving the old socio cultural practices which are in danger of going into oblivion if not preserved properly. 'Poi Sangken' or Buddhist New Year is also celebrated with much fanfare these days.



Figure 7.4 Tai Khamyang maiden participating in traditional fashion show

7.1.3 Names and Surnames

As discussed in Chapter 4, naming of the newborn child is an important custom among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. Traditionally, the name of a Khamyang child was given ceremonially and is done generally after about a month from the date of birth. The date of naming the child was traditionally selected in consultation with the monk of the village monastery. The order of birth and sex of the child was always taken into consideration in choosing the name of the new born. This practice of giving traditional Tai Khamyang names to the new born was discontinued or was not much in practice after the third and fourth generations. Hindu names such as Rudra, Sabitri, Tuladhar, Padmavati, Indrajit were common among the middle aged and old people in the surveyed villages. However this trend is changing and almost all of the new born babies and most of the people in their thirties have traditional Tai Khamyang names such as Pyoseng, Munseng, Aikham, Hompya, Yehom etcetera .Table 7.1 shows that Chalapather Shyam Gaon has 68.4 percent of people below the age of thirty who have traditional Tai Khamyang names. Similarly 72.7 percent of people below the age of thirty have traditional Tai Khamyang names in Rohon Shyam Gaon. This change in nomenclature is a sign of revivalism. Also the male members essentially use the prefix *Chao* and female members use *Nang* before their name which was generally the practice among all the Tai groups of Assam.

Table - 7.1 Tai Khamyang names in Chalapather and Rohon Shyam Gaon

Sl No	Village	Tai Khamyang Names	%	Below the age of 30	%	Above the age of 30	%
1	Chalapather Shyam Gaon	76	100	52	68.4	24	31.6
2	Rohon Shyam Gaon	44	100	32	72.7	12	27.3

Source- Field Work-2016-2019

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Tai Khamyangs were also referred to as Shyam and most of the Tai Khamyang people write *Shyam* as their surname. However during the field study, it was seen that few of the Tai Khamyang people have started writing clan names as their surnames viz. Chowlu, Tunkhang, Panyok etcetera. Table 7.2 shows that 10.8 percent people in Chalapather and 13.2 percent people in Rohon Shyam Gaon write their clan name as their surname. This percentage is increasing day by day. This can again be considered an attempt at revivalism by asserting their Tai Khamyang identity.

Table 7.2 - Surnames in Chalapather and Rohan Shyam Gaon

Sl No	Villages	Clan Name	Percentage	Shyam	Percentage	Total	Percentage
1	Chalapather Shyam Gaon	60	10.8	496	89.2	556	100
2	Rohon Shyam Gaon	32	13.2	210	86.8	242	100

Source -Filed Work 2016-2019

7.1.4 Dress

As discussed in the previous chapter there has been a considerable change in the dressing pattern of the Tai Khamyang of Assam over the years. As a result of the assimilation with the local populace they had started wearing dresses like *Dhoti*, *Kurta*, *Mekhela Sador*, *Saree* etcetera in their day today lives. The researcher came to know about some interesting facts regarding dress from different informants in both the villages. Most

of the respondents who are in their seventies and eighties are of the opinion that as a result of assimilation with the Assamese populace they used to wear the *Dhotis* (male) and *Mekhela Sador* (female) in day to day life. However this trend has changed since the past fifteen, twenty years and they have started wearing the traditional Tai Khamyang dresses in their day to day use also. According to him the elderly people strictly follow the dress code; the younger generation can't wear it all the time as they have to go out of the village for studies as well as work. However the youth wears the traditional costume on all religious and social occasions. The researcher also found almost all the elderly people wearing the traditional Tai Khamyang costume during his field visit. The youth were also seen wearing the traditional costume when the researcher was present in Chalapather Shyam Gaon for Poi Pee Mau (Tai New Year), Mai Ko Sum Phai, Poi Sangken and other festivals. Traditional fashion show was organized on the occasion among the youths to make the Tai Khamyang costumes and attire more popular.



Figure 7.5 Tai Khamyang children in their traditional attire

7.1.5 Contact with South East Asian Countries

The Tai Khamyang people belong to the greater Tai race. The Tai people are scattered all over South East Asia and well as Eastern part of India. Assam is home to six Tai groups, namely Tai Ahoms, Tai Khamyang, Tai Phake, Tai Aiton, Tai Turung and Tai Khamti. All the Tai tribes except the Tai Ahoms are Theraveda Buddhists. The Tai people believe that they have migrated to Assam from countries like Myanmar and Thailand. There has been an increase in the contacts and cultural exchanges between the Tai Khamyangs of Assam and the South East Asian countries like Myanmar, Thailand etcetera since the last decade. Researchers, scholars, academicians and pilgrims from both sides

have started visiting each other's places more frequently since the past few years. The researcher himself visited Chiang Mai, Thailand to attend the thirteenth International Conference on Tai Studies held from 15th to 17th July, 2017 along with many Tai scholars from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The researcher also presented a paper on Tai Khamyangs of Assam in the conference.



Figure 7.6 Researcher attending and presenting a paper in ICTS 13, Chiang Mai, Thailand

On October 25, 2019 the Royal Kathina ceremony (Royal Kathina (Civara Dana) under the aegis of His Excellency the king of Thailand was held in the Chalapather Buddhist Vihara. It is notable that this is the first Royal *Kathina* ceremony which was held in a Tai Khamyang village. The Ambassador of Thailand presided over the offering ceremony of the king's robe. Many dignitaries including the delegates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand and officials of the Royal Thai Embassy, New Delhi were present on the occasion. *Kathina* is a Buddhist festival which comes at the end of the three month rainy season retreat for Theraveda Buddhists (usually in October). The season during which a monastery may hold *Kathina* is one month long, beginning after the full moon of the eleventh month of the lunar calendar. *Kathina* is a *Pali* word referring to the wooden frame used to measure the length and width by which the robes of the Buddhist monks are cut. Generally offering of the new saffron robes to the monks is done on that day. The Tais of Assam are also in constant touch with the Tais of Myanmar. In fact the Tai calendar, Buddha statues and many Buddhist artifacts are being imported from Myanmar. The first International Conference on Tai Studies was held in Taunggyi University Myanmar from 23-24 November 2019. Many Tai delegates from Assam participated in the same. Such type

of cultural exchanges has helped the Tai Khamyangs of Assam to know more about their ancestral customs and practices.

Besides the South East Asian countries, the Khamyangs in Assam are in touch with some other Asian countries like South Korea. A South Korean socio-cultural organization named 'Sejong Paramita' is constantly working with the Tai Khamyang villages since many years. They have opened a branch of the organization in Assam by the name Assam Paramita. Assam Paramita is engaged organizing various activities like language workshops, health camps etcetera from time to time.



Figure 7.7- Glimpse from the Civara Dana festival. Representatives of the King of Thailand offering robes to the monks of Chalapathar Shyam Monastery

7.1 .6 Tai Khamyang Organizations

As discussed earlier, due to too much of assimilation, the traditional socio-cultural practices of the Tai Khamyang people slowly went into oblivion by the end of the twentieth century. The later part of the twentieth century and early twenty first century witnessed a sense of identity crisis among them and as a result they began to assert their identity by way of reviving their traditional language, customs and practices. This led to the formation of socio - cultural organizations aimed at preserving and protecting the Tai Khamyang customs and traditions. Buddhist organizations like Sadou Akhom Boudha Mahasabha(All Assam Buddhist Assembly,1939) affiliated to World Fellowship of Buddhists, All Assam Man(Tai speaking) students Union(1986), Sadou Akhom Bhikshu

Sangha (All Assam, Bhikshu Association) are playing their part to raise issues about the Tai Buddhist communities of Assam from time to time. Most of these organizations are either related to the Buddhist population or they represent all the Tai Buddhist population of Assam. The first organization specifically related to the Tai Khamyangs of Assam is *Pub Bharat Tai Khamyang Jatiya Parishad* (2003).

Another such organization which is playing a major role in reviving and promoting the Tai Khamyang culture is *Phung Lai Khamyang* (Khamyang Cultural society). It is probably the most active Tai Khamyang socio-cultural organization. It came into existence on 22nd October 2012 in Chalapther Shyam Gaon in the presence of representatives of all the Tai Khamyang villages of Assam. Since its inception the *Phung Lai Khamyang* is engaged in organizing *Pangson* or workshops to teach Tai Khamyang language, song and dance to the young generations. Till now the *Phung Lai Khamyang* has organized several such workshops in Rohon Shyam Gaon, Balijan Shyam Gaon, Na Shyam Gaon etcetera. Here is a list of activities of *Phung Lai Khamyang* since its inception-

- i. Tai language and culture workshop at Chalapather in July, 2012.
- ii. Language workshop in Rohon Shyam Gaon in December 2012.
- iii. Workshop on Tai language and culture at Rajapukhuri Shyam Gaon from 2nd to 8th July 2013.
- iv. Workshop on Tai language and culture for Na Shyam, Balijan and Betbari Shyam Gaon in Balijan Shyam Gaon from 12th to 18th July 2013.
- v. Khamyang Youth festival (Poi Phung Mao Sao Tai Khamyang) in 2014.
- vi. Workshop on traditional dance for all Khamyang villages in September 2017.
- vii. Language workshop at Pawoimukh for Tai Khamyangs of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in July 2019.
- viii. Regular Tai Khamyang language classes at Chalapather Shyam Gaon from September 2019.
- ix. Yearly 'Poi Pee Mau' celebration at Chalapather Shyam Gaon.
- x. Publication of magazine named *Khow Kham*.

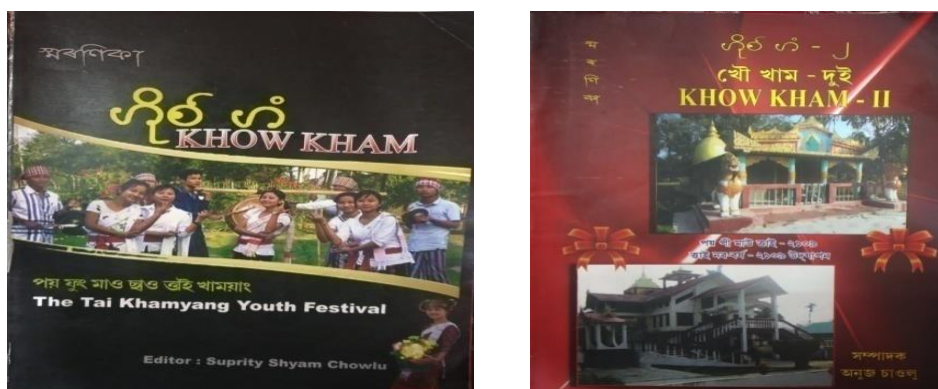


Figure 7.8, 7.9 *Khow Kham I* and *Khow Kham II* magazine published by *Phung Lai Khamyang*.

Besides these organizations, the new generation of the Tai Khamyang people is very conscious regarding their culture and heritage. It was due to the efforts of the villagers that the 150th year of the establishment of Chalapather Shyam Gaon was celebrated in a grand manner on 13th January 2019. The researcher was also present on the occasion.



Figure 7.10 Gate of 150 years celebration of establishment of Chalapather Shyam Village

7.1 .7 Wildlife Conservation

Chala Village Sanctuary- The indigenous religion of the Tai Khamyangs is a Tai folk religion where spirits of natural phenomena and ancestors are worshipped. They believe in the spirits of natural phenomena like earth, hills, rivers, forests as well as cities, villages, house, paddy fields etcetera. In a sense it can be said that the Tai Khamyang people were nature worshippers and they respect nature. Lord Buddha always preached for non-violence and asked his disciples to respect and conserve nature and wildlife. Also Lord Buddha attained *Bodhisattva* (spiritual enlightenment) under the *Bodhi* (Fig tree) tree.

Hence the Buddhists consider the *Bodhi* tree very sacred. This respect and love for nature among the Tai Khamyangs who are devout Buddhists, is visible and they have made attempts to conserve nature. The villagers of Chalapather Shyam Gaon established a forest reserve of their own naming it ‘Chala Village Sanctuary’ on 13/1/2019. The researcher was also present in the village on the occasion.



Figure 7.11 Chala Village Sanctuary

According to an informant who is a member of *Chala Gramya Abhiranya Samiti* from Chalapather Shyam Gaon, the villagers have planted about twelve thousand saplings from June 2019 to August 2019 and almost all of them have survived. The sanctuary is home to more than three hundred floral and two hundred faunal species. Some of the valuable floral species found there are *Holong* (*Dipetero Sarpas*), *Hingori* (*Castanopsis Indica*), *Nahor* (*Mesua Ferrea*), *Segun*, *Gomari* etc. The village sanctuary is flourishing and is attracting many rare animals and birds like capped langur, Black tiger (*Panthera* species), Leopard, Sambar (*Cervus Unicolour*), Rhesus Macaque, Flying Squirrels, Hornbill, Drongos, Kite Butterfly etc. It is also home to nearly 30 types of orchids and many rare herbs. The ‘Chala Gramya Abhayaranya Samiti’ was even felicitated by the Charaideo district administration on 15th August 2019.

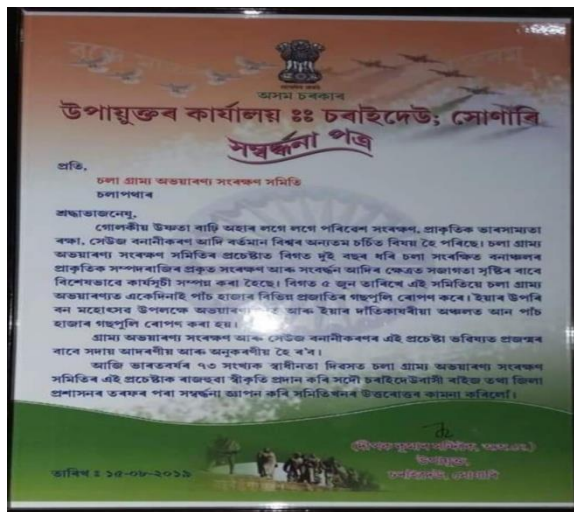


Figure 7.12- Appreciation letter given by the Charaideo district administration to Chala Village Sanctuary (Courtesy - Pyoseng Chowlu)

7.1 .8 Architecture

Tai Khamyangs follow Tai-Burmese form of Theravada Buddhism and in their every settlement they have a Buddhist temple called *Kyong*. A traditional *Kyong* is characterized by raised floor and multi staged roofs with an odd number of tiers (usually three). Historically the Tai Khamyang *Kyongs* were made with wood and bamboo neatly and elaborately carved in typical Southeast Asian architectural designs. However it was witnessed during the field study that an old *Vihara* of Chalapathar was not made on raised platform. It was built on ground and it resembled an Assamese *Namghar*. However, there were some Buddhist artifacts in that *Vihara* which distinguished it from *Namghar*. On the other hand, newly built Buddhist *Vihara* of Chalapather resembled South East Asian architecture. The informants let the researcher know that when the Tai Khamyangs initially came to Assam, all the *Vihars* were made on raised platform. Gradually *Vihars* were being made on ground in an Assam type building which almost resembled an Assamese *Namghar*. However the trend changed when frequent contacts and cultural exchanges began with the South East Asian countries like Myanmar and Thailand and the present day *Vihars* resemble typical South East Asian Buddhist architecture .The statues of Buddha in these monasteries are also brought in from either Myanmar or Bodh Gaya. The newly constructed *Vihars* also have replicas of *Pagodas*, *Chaityas* and *Stupas* built near them which were not seen in the early *Vihars*. However this varies from place to place.

Following the footsteps of Chalapather Shyam Gaon, Rohon Shyam Gaon has also started the construction of a new Vihar whose architecture resembles the tradition Tai Khamyang Vihar (Kyong).



Figure 7.13- Old Buddhist Vihar (Kyong) of Chalapather Shyam Gaon



Figure 7.14 - New Vihar of Chalapather Shyam Gaon



Figure 7.15- An under construction traditional Buddhist Vihar in Rohon Shyam Gaon

Revivalism is seen with regards to the housing pattern of the Tai Khamyang as well. As discussed earlier as a result of modernization and assimilation most of the traditional Tai Khamyang houses are being replaced by traditional Assam type (concrete) kutchra (mud baked) and semi pukka (semi concrete) houses. Few RCC buildings were also found in both the villages. A traditional Tai Khamyang house is known as 'Houn Haang'. The house of the Tai Khamyangs like other Tai groups is a wooden or bamboo structure rose on strong pillars and thatched roofs. A new trend of making semi traditional Tai Khamyang houses with a little bit of innovation is seen in both the surveyed villages. The houses were made on raised platform but in place of wood cemented pillars are used. In place of thatched roofs tin is being used. However the essence of a traditional Tai

Khamyang House (Houn Haang) i.e. the architecture is almost the same. There are two such semi traditional houses (one each) in both the villages and they belong to Romesh Shyam of Chalapather Shyam Gaon and Kumesh Shyam of Rohon Shyam Gaon respectively.



Figure 7.16- and Figure 7.17- Newly built semi traditional Tai Khamyang House (Houn Haang) in Chalapather Shyam Gaon

7.1.9 Tai Khamyang Dance and Music

The Tai Khamyangs traditionally had a rich variety of dances and songs. Most of their dances are organized during their religious festivals. Their dances include *Ka-Ya-Phra* (Buddha statue procession dance), *Ka-Chong* (umbrella dance) and *Ka-Thung Tai* (Tai cultural dance) Etcetera. Dances are generally accompanied with their traditional musical instruments such as *Kong Pat* (a big drum), *Yam-Mong* (Gongs), *Pai-Seng* (cymbals), *Pee* or flutes and *Saiting* (Violin like instrument). However most of the instruments are rarely found these days. Dance dramas based on the *Jataka* tales such as *Ka Pung* were also popular in earlier days. Traditionally, the Tai Khamyangs used to sing different songs, rhymes and ritualistic chanting on different occasions. Some of these songs like *Mo kam Soi Oi* (Rice pounding song), *Oi Thoun* (Forest song), *Khaam Poong* (Drama song) and *Khaam Tra* (religious hymns) are slowly going into oblivion as most of them can't speak Tai Khamyang language and hence it is difficult to pass it from one generation to another. Due to strong influence of Assamese culture most of the Tai Khamyang traditional dance forms are also going into oblivion. During festivals Assamese Bihu dance and musical instruments were favored by them. But it is seen that within last few years they have been trying to revive their old cultural dances and music. Musical instruments are

generally brought from Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh. Tai dance forms are learned from their brethren and Tai dances of Thailand and Myanmar. Regarding the traditional songs there are only handful of people who still sing their folk songs. Most of them are the old aged people who live in Pawaimukh village of Tinsukia district and few in Chalapather Shyam Gaon of Charaideo district.



Figure 7.18- Photo of a Tai Khamyang Music album sung by Pyoseng Chowlu



Figure 7.19 - Tai maidens performing traditional dance

Some of the prominent Tai Khamyang people of Assam engaged in cultural activities are- Pyoseng Chowlu (Chalapather Shyam Gaon). Pyoseng Chowlu, who is a teacher by profession, is trying to revive the Tai Khamyang language. He has composed many Tai Khamyang songs and also released a few modern Tai music albums of his own. Albums like *Khamyang Phu Sao Nang Onn*, *Thuk Ni Ka* have been uploaded in YouTube so that the young generation has easy access to it. Sha Met Wailoung from Rohon Shyam Gaon has also uploaded one song named *Margheria Man Pawai*, which is available in YouTube. According to Pyoseng Chowlu, music can play a great role in popularizing the Tai Khamyang language, particularly among the youths. He is also engaged in organizing language workshops in various Tai Khamyang villages. Besides him, Tapan Shyam and Ai Seng Hun Shyam of the same village, Mrs Yein Shyam Wailoung and Bonita Wailoung from Balijan Shyam Gaon and Humen Wailoung from Rohon Shyam Gaon are also playing a major role by involving themselves in propagating different cultural activities. It could thus be said from the above discussion that attempts were made by the Tai

Khamyangs at different level to revive their customs and traditions. The above information is elicited by the information collected by the researcher during the field visits through informal interviews and observation.

7.2 CASE STUDIES

To further understand the revivalist tendencies, ethnicity and identity issues among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam the researcher has used the case study method .Specific cases from both the surveyed villages are discussed below-

Junbala Shyam aged 82 years, married (illiterate), housewife and mother of two children (both male, adults) from Rohon Shyam Gaon, Charaideo district, Assam (paternal house at Powaimukh Village, Tinsukia district) when asked about the question regarding the causes for the near extinction of the Tai Khamyang language replied that one of the main reasons behind it was that the language was not passed on from one generation to the other. She further stated that Assamese language became the lingua franca of the community after two or three generations. She is the only Tai Khamyang language speaker in the village. Besides Tai Khamyang language she can speak other Tai languages like, Tai Khamti, Tai Aiton, Tai Turung and Tai Phake. When asked how she learned so many languages she said that her maternal place is in Powaimukh village, where most number of fluent Tai Khamyang speakers lives. She learnt the other Tai Khamyang languages from the speakers of the languages who were married in her native village. She states that she is aware about the pitiable condition of the Tai Khamyang language which is nearing extinction and she is ready to provide any assistance for preserving not only the Tai Khamyang language but all the other Tai Buddhist languages that she is able to speak fluently.

She further stated that the present generation is more aware and conscious with regards to the preservation and promotion of their culture. That is the reason why the younger generation prefers traditional Tai Khamyang names she added. She was also asked why most of the middle aged people had Hindu names like Rudra, Sumitra etcetera and not traditional Khamyang names. To which she replied that her own sons are named Hemanta and Rajesh. The main reason for it was that in earlier times it was difficult to find a Tai

Khamyang astrologer. So to name their child they had to go to the Hindu priests and astrologers who named them accordingly.

Rudra Shyam, aged 55 years passed the Higher Secondary exam, by occupation a government primary school teacher, married with two children (both male, adults) from Rohon Shyam Gaon, Charaideo district was asked the question regarding the existence of traditional customs and practices. To which he replied that most of the old customs and practices are going into oblivion. Still people are making individual efforts to preserve the same. He states that he has named his younger son Munseng, which is a Tai Khamyang name. He further states that he has tried to preserve the traditional food habits by using certain herbs in our cuisine and his kitchen also resembles old Tai Khamyang kitchen. The researcher is showed the kitchen by him. He believes that the government should take steps in preserving the Tai Khamyang language and culture. He also said it was since the past fifteen to twenty years that the Tai Khamyang people, particularly the older generation people have started wearing the traditional dresses at home. He cited the example of his father who is in his late eighties. His father used to wear dresses like *Dhoti*, *Kurta*, and *Shirt* in the olden days. But since the past fifteen to twenty years he has started wearing traditional Tai Khamyang dresses. According to him ethnic consciousness and identity crisis are major factors responsible for the revivalist tendencies among them.

Gunjan Shyam, aged 33 years, agriculture graduate and MBA, married with one daughter, working as a marketing manager in Seeds Corporation Limited from Rohon Shyam Gaon, Charaideo, Assam (presently living in Guwahati for work), was asked the question regarding the existence of traditional Tai Khamyang customs and traditions, to which he replied that most of the traditional customs and practices are either extinct or endangered now and too much of assimilation with the local populace is one of the main reasons behind it. Though, people are making efforts to revive the old customs and practices. He cited the example of the celebration of Poi Pee Mau or the Tai New Year as a community festival. According to him the festival had lost relevance as the Buddhist New Year was given more importance. But since the last decade or so Poi Pee Mau has also been given equal importance and according to him it a way to assert their Tai identity. According to him Tai calendar is also gaining prominence these days. Celebrating ethnic Tai festivals like Poi Pee Mau is a sign of growing ethnic consciousness. He believes that

it was the identity crisis particularly among the Tai Khamyang youths which led to the ethnic consciousness and revivalist tendencies among them. According to him frequent contacts with their Tai brethren in Myanmar and Thailand have also contributed in creating ethnic consciousness among them. He further states that this revivalist tendency will gain momentum in the future.

Pyoseng Chowlu, aged 38, Master's degree holder, married with one daughter and working as a teacher in a government school from Chalapather Shyam Gaon, Charaideo district, Assam was asked the question asked about the efforts made by the Tai Khamyang people of Assam to revive the traditions and customs, to which he replied that the revivalism process has gained momentum since the past decade. According to him identity crisis due to too much of assimilation and consciousness about their ethnicity is the reason behind this awareness. Few socio - cultural organizations are trying their best to revive the old customs and traditions. *Phung Lai Khamyang* is one such organization. It came into existence in 2012 and it has played a major role in organizing Tai Khamyang language workshops in different Tai Khamyang villages of Assam. It has also organizes traditional dance workshops at regular intervals. Tai Khamyang Youth festival was also organized at its behest in 2014. He also states that individual efforts are also necessary for the same. He himself is trying to popularize the near to be extinct Tai Khamyang language by means of music. He has sung few Tai Khamyang songs and uploaded them on social media platforms like You Tube and Facebook to popularize the language especially among the youths. He also let the researchers know about the people from different Tai Khamyang villages of Assam who are engaged in reviving the traditional songs and dances.

Suprity Shyam, 34 years old, Master's degree holder, married with one daughter, working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics, Women's College, Tinsukia from Chalapather Shyam Gaon, Charaideo district, Assam (paternal house in Chalapather, presently living in Tinsukia) was asked the question regarding the status of the Tai Khamyang women in Assam, to which she replied that there is not much distinction in the Tai Khamyang society as such. The women are given freedom and liberty. They play a major role in most of the social as well as religious practices. The modern day Tai Khamyang women are taking up higher education and it reflects in the high literacy among them. When asked by the researcher if inter community marriage is one of the reasons for

the near extinction of the Tai Khamyang language she said that it may be considered as one of the reasons as language is generally transmitted from the mother to the children. She however reiterated that the present generation of the Tai Khamyang youth is very conscious regarding its ethnicity and identity and is making efforts to revive the traditional customs and practices. Increasing cultural contacts with their Tai kinsmen in South East Asian countries like Myanmar and Thailand is due to the urge to know more about their ethnicity and ancestry.

Munseng Shyam, aged 21 years, has done ITI course, unmarried, unemployed from Rohon Shyam Gaon Charaideo district, Assam was asked the question regarding the growth of ethnic consciousness among the youth, to which he replied that education has played a major role in creating a sense of awareness among them as the literacy rate is pretty high among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam. Literacy along with the identity crisis has played a major role in the revival of many of their old customs and practices. The educated youth takes inspiration from the revivalist movements going on among the different ethnic groups not only in India but also all around the world. He states that the youth is aware of the situation and whenever there is a gathering of their friends they do discuss issues related to their community. He himself has taken part in many Tai language and dance workshops. He is trying to learn the Tai Khamyang language and write the Tai Khamyang script. According to him; one of the major reasons for the near extinction of most of the indigenous rituals and practices is that it was not passed from one generation to the other. He is also trying to learn some indigenous rituals from his grandfather so that he can also pass it to the future generation. He further believes that it is high time that the community as well as the government should take necessary steps to preserve their culture.

It thus becomes evident from the above discussion that though many traits, customs and traditions among the Tai Khamyangs of Assam are either not into practice or going into oblivion. This led to a sense of identity crisis and ethnic consciousness among them. As a result efforts are being made by them to revive their customs and traditions. Sincere efforts are being made to revive the language, dress, music, architecture festivals etcetera. It is also seen that the revivalist tendencies among them started from the later part of the twentieth century and the process accelerated since the early twenty first century A.D. The researcher has reached the conclusion from the facts that the prominent organizations

which are engaged in reviving the customs and traditions of the Tai Khamyangs of Assam came into existence in the later part of the twentieth century and the early twenty first century. This fact is also corroborated with the help of informal interviews and chatting with the villagers. Most of the elderly people are of the view that they have consciously started wearing the traditional dresses since the past fifteen, twenty years. Also during the field study it was observed that the younger generation had traditional Tai Khamyang names whereas the middle aged people and elderly people had Hindu names. *Shyam* was the common surname of the elderly people whereas the younger generations write their clan names as their surname. This may be seen as an attempt made by them to assert their identity. Contacts with the South East Asian countries like Myanmar and Thailand have also increased in the last few years. This may be seen as an attempt made by them to connect with their roots.