

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER - II

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE BARMAN

In order to trace out the origin and history of the Barman tribe, one has to go long back. They are, infact, a part of the wider Kachari society. The early history of the Kachari suggests that prior to the advent of the Ahoms, the Kacharis entered into Assam most probably through Diphu pass and gradually moved towards west and further moved in Brahmaputra valley through upper reaches of Brahmaputra. They trace their original home between the bank of the river Yang-Tse-Kiang and Hoang-Ho in western China (Duarh 1988:2). They belong to the Bodo family of the Tibeto - Burman race of the Indo-Mongoloids (Bhattacharjee 1984 : 4). According to Gait (1992) they are believed to be very closely allied to the Koches and also, so far atleast as language is concerned, to the Chutiyas, Lalungs (Tiwa) and Morans of the Brahmaputra valley, to the Garos and Tipperas of the southern hills. Therefore, the Kacharis may be described as the aborigines or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. They are identical with the people called Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal. They are known by different names in different areas. In the Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis call themselves *Bodo* or *Bodofisa* (sons of the Bodo). In the North Cachar Hills they call themselves *Dimafisa*, a corruption of Dimasa or “sons of the great river” (most probably the rivers Yang-Tse-Kiang and Hoang-Ho of China). They were known to Ahoms as *Timisa*, a corruption of Dimasa. (Duarh 1988:2)

Thus, it can be said that the Kacharis are broadly divided into two tribal groups namely, Bodo-fisa and Dima-fisa. The first group is now recognised as Bodo tribe, mainly inhabited in Kokrajhar district of Assam. The second group called Dimasa and is mainly inhabited now in North Kachar Hills, Karbi Anglong Nowgaon and Cachar Districts of Assam.

The Kacharis are no doubt earliest inhabitants of the Assam valley and they ruled over different states under different names in different times in different parts of that valley (Nath 1949 : 72). According to Guha (1931 : 61-3), the legends are still current among the Dimasa about their Rajya and Raja in ancient Kamarupa (Kamruli) and how during a political turmoil they had to cross the big river (Brahmaputra) and a large section of their people were washed away by the mighty Brahmaputra. There is some historical evidence in Buranjis (historical records of Ahom kings) about their kingdom at Sadiya which was perhaps established after their expulsion from Kamurp (Bhuyan 1936 : XX). In the neighbourhood of Sadiya was the copper temple of Kachai Kati (the tutelary deity of the Dimasa and their cognate tribes), which the Dimasa rulers continued to worship even after the establishment of their rule in Cachar (Bhattacharjee 1984 : 5). Thereafter, they shifted to Dimapur (Dimasapur), now in Nagaland, where they ruled for about 500 years (Barman 1972 : 5).

The Ahoms, originally a hords of Mongoloid-Negrito group of the Shan tribes entered into the region during 13th century around 1228 A.D. At that time the *Dihing* river formed the north eastern boundary of the Kachari kingdom. Gradually the Ahoms became stronger in their position and in 1490 A.D. they crossed the

Dihing river and ventured upto the north of the *Dikho* river. Friction had thus started between the *Ahoms* and the *Dimapur* potentates, who opposed their transgression into the territory on the north of the *Dikhu* river. In this situation a battle had ensued in which the Ahoms forces were defeated. Their chief, Chuhen-fa had to sue peace and the ruler of the Kachari kingdom, however, agreed that, the river *Dikhu* should stand as a boundary between two princedoms.

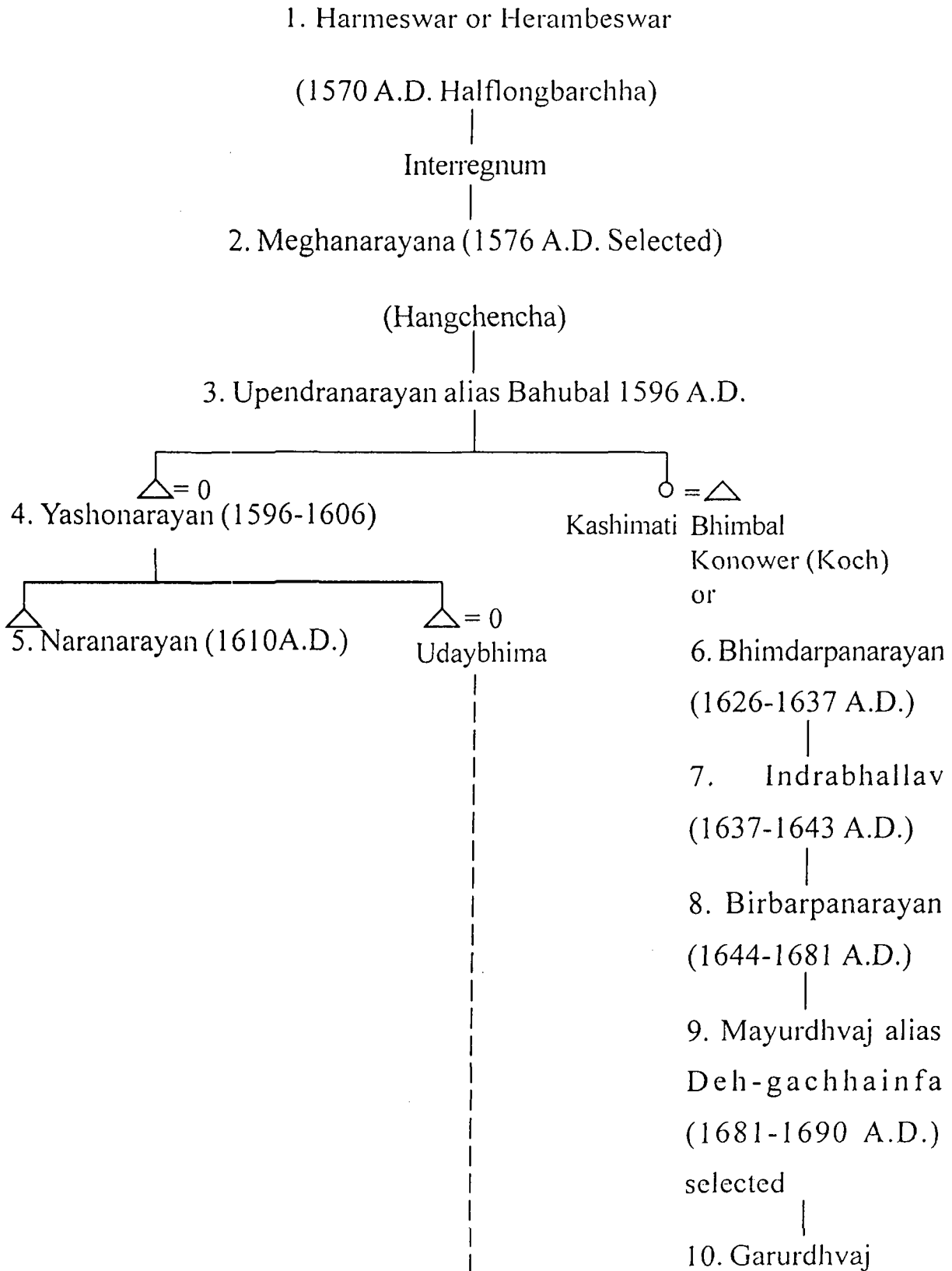
Later on, when *Chuhumung* succeeded the Ahom rulership, he renewed hostility with the Dimasa ruler by crossing the *Dikhu* river and marching his army further deep into the latters territory on the northern region. An engagement thus ensued at a place called *Marangi* near Jorhat in 1526 A.D. In this battle, the Ahom forces were defeated again by the Dimasa army. The Ahoms were pushed back beyond the *Dikhu* river. During the reign of Ahom king *Chuhumung* the Ahom-Kachari relations reached in a critical position when after few years of first battle the Ahoms rallied again and renewed their thrust by constructing a frontier fort at *Marangi*. This provoked the Dimasa king and he demanded to the Ahoms to dismantle the fort and to withdraw their forces. *Chuhumung* however, refused the demand. It resulted into a fresh battle between Ahoms and Dimasas. But in this battle, the Ahoms were defeated again. The Dimapur ruler had to sustain heavy loss of 1700 men killed and many more wounded. Ahoms after regaining strength started the reconstruction of fort at *Marangi* again. The Dimasa king *Khun-khara* therefore, declared war against Ahoms in 1531 A.D. He sent his army to subdue the Ahoms

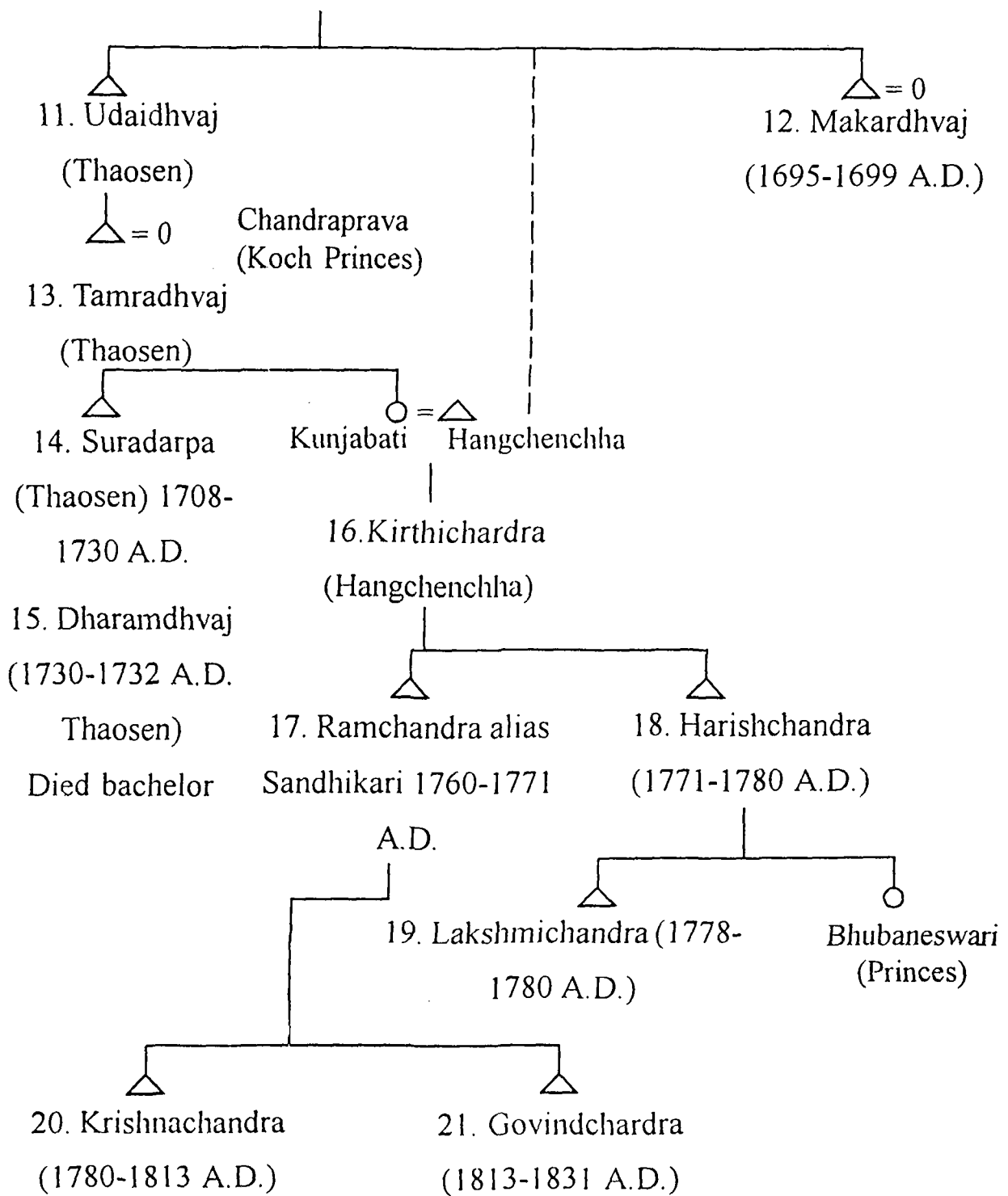
and to evict them from the fort of Marangi. But Dimasa army failed to contain the Ahoms. *Khun-khara* was defeated near Golaghat and he had to retreat his capital Dimapur. The families of ruling house became fugitive. (Barman 1972 : 8)

The Ahoms installed *Deh-tu-sang*, brother of *Khun-kura* to the throne of Dimapur in return to a large quantity of valuable presents. But, within few years, *Dehtusang* stopped sending the annual tribute and envoy to the court of the Ahoms and demanded withdrawal of the Ahom garrison from the fort of Marangi. *Chuhu-mung* sent a strong army to capture *Dehtusang*. In the war *Dehtusang* was defeated in the year 1536 A.D., and his capital city was sacked. He had to flee from the capital but was followed, captured and put to death by Ahoms. The city of Dimapur was deserted and survivors of the ruling aristocracy moved to south and established their new capital at a place called Maibong, situated in the hilly recluse of the Barail range (in North Cachar Hills district of Assam) under the leadership of the son of *Dehtusang*. This place was in the bank of the river *Mahur*. Here they were soon to meet a fresh enemy Koch. It is recorded in the *Bansabali* (Genealogical chart) of the Darrang Rajas that the Kachari king was defeated, about the middle of the sixteenth century by Chila Roy, the brother and general of the great Koch king Naranarayan. However, it is not known that then who was the Kachari king (Dutta 1986). Upto 1603 A.D. much more is not known about the Kacharis and the kingdom was then comprised of greater part of the Nowgaon district, the North Cachar Hills and the plains of Cachar district. It was at this stage that the Kacharis

TABLE - 2.1

GENEALOGICAL MAP OF DIMASA-KACHARI KINGS SINCE 1570





came in the contact of Hinduism via *Kochs* and they adopted Hinduism. It is evident from the fact that there is a sudden and conspicuous change of the royal name subsequent to the expedition and conquest of the Koh king.

According to some legend *Harmeswar* or *Herembeswar* was the first ruler of Maibong and he ruled till, 1570 A.D. Harmeswar died without a descendant and an interregnum followed. But when Dehtusung was followed by the Ahoms he came in contact with a Naga girl and for some time he took shelter in her house and she gave birth to a male child. So during the regime of Harmeswar this son grew up to be strong handsome youth and after his death (Harmeswar) this boy was selected as their king, although he did not belong to the royal clan, *Halflongbarcha*. He assumed the title of *Meghanarayan* (1576) and a new royal clan, namely, *Hangchengcha* (*Hasnusa*) emerged among the Barman (Dimasa - Kachari) (See table 2 .1) . After Meghanarayan his son Upendra Narayan had a brief rule upto 1596 and he was succeeded by Yosho Narayan (1596-1606), whose kingdom was comprised the greater part of the Nowgaon district, N.C. Hills district including *Dhanshiri* valley and the plains of Cachar including eastern land of Sylhet district of present Bangladesh (Barman 1972 : 43). This period was very eventful because during this period they came in contact of Hinduism. Some of the Brahmin scholars were also brought in and established in the royal court and through them the vedic doctrines got interpenetrated wholly or partially.

Yosho Narayan was famous ruler of the Kacharis and his time was very eventful. During his regime Jaintia king was defeated and his (Jaintia King's) nephew Yosho Manik was kept as a hostage. Later on Yosho Manik was released but he

made a plan for harassing the *Kachari* king. Conspiracy was such that he (Yoso Manik) offered his daughter to Ahom prince, on condition that the bridal procession should be taken through the Dimasa territory. But Dimasa king Yoso Narayan refused the proposal and as a consequence faced a battle at Raha in 1606 AD. In this battle the Kacharis defeated the Ahoms and Yoso Narayan assumed the title of Pratap Narayan and also changed his capital's name from Maibong to KirtiPur. In 1627 AD the Muslims accompanied with Raja Pran Narayan of Koch Bihar defeated the Ahoms at different points near *Bharali*. Then Ahoms sent an envoy with a letter, invoking his (Kachari king's) help against the Muslim forces. Yoso Narayan agreed and sent his brother-in-law *Bhimbal* Konowar to help the Ahoms and under his able command, the Muslim invaders were expelled from many parts and finally defeated at *Hajo* (near Guwahati). Yoso Narayan was also known by other names, such as Pratap Narayan, Satrudaman and Asimardan. After his death his son Naranarayan (1610) ruled the kingdom. Then Bhimbal Konowar was appointed as ruler of Kachari kingdom as Raja Naranarayan died childless. Bhimbal's (1627-1637 A.D.) name was also changed and he was called as Bhimdarpa Narayan. He died in 1637 and in or about this year Cachar was invaded again by Muslims under the leadership of Qusim Khan. After Bhimdarpa, his son Indrabhallav (1637-43) came into power on one occasion, he sought to live in good terms with Ahoms, who at that time rose to the climax of their power and were hostile towards Kachari rulers. Birdarpa, son of Indrabhallav came into power in 1644 after the death of Indrabhallav and he ruled till 1681 A.D. During his time, when Chakradhavj Singh ascended the Ahom throne, he sent envoys demanding extradition of Marangi, Khowa

Gohain, who deserted the Ahoms, out of some differences and took refuge with the Cachar monarch. But when Chakradhvj Singha defeated the Mughal army at the battle of Saraighat, the Cachar monarch Birdarpa sent complimentary messages and friendly relations were, thus, re-established. He was child less and died in 1681 and sudden changes occurs in the Kachari state affairs, it was managed under their national council called Melma and Melcha, being councils of representatives of the different clan leaders. Ultimately, *Deh-ga-Schain* the celebrity of Thaosen clan, who had managed the state affairs very efficiently became the ruler and assumed the name Mayurdhvj but he died early in 1688 A.D. After his death his son *Garurdhvaj* tried to establish friendly relations with the Ahoms again but he failed to do so and relations became strained. Garurdhvaj died in 1695 and was succeeded by his two sons *Udayaditya* and *Makardhvaj* who ruled from 1695 to 1699 A.D. without any notable events. Then, *Tambmdhvaj* (1699-1707) ascended on the throne in the year 1699 A.D . Soon after taking power he denounced allegiance to the Ahom ruler and the Ahom king Rudra Singha decided to attacked from two sides . One of the forces moved up along the Dhanshiri and the other moved via Raha along the Kapili and in 1706 friction thus occurred between the Ahoms and the Kacharis. Later on *Tambradhvaj* managed tactical evacuation from Maibong and moved to the plains of Cachar namely in Bikrampur locality of Garerbhitar means within ramparts. Ram Singha, the Jayantia king was interested to marry his sister *Kamladevi* with Tambradhvaj but he refused to the proposal under the influence of his beautiful queen *Chandraprava*, a Koch princess. Thus, Jayantia king felt very offended and he kidnapped Tambradhvaj from *Sidheswar* (near Badarpur) and he was interned

inside the apartment of Kamladevi. The queen Chandraprava sought the help of Ahoms for the release of Tambradhvaj. The Ahom king Rudra Singha demanded the release of Tambradhvaj and sent a strong army of 43,000 soldiers. Ram Singh submitted with out resistance and he handed over Tambradhvaj to the Ahoms at *Biswanath*. The Ahom king sent back Tambradhvaj to Maibong with his escorts. He was handed over to his own man at *Dimaru* (Nowgaon area) where he committed suicide by jumping into the Kapili river before he reached to his capital.

After Tambradhvaj his nine years old son was installed on the throne in collaboration with the Ahom officers at capital town Maibong. Chandraprava played very important role during this time, she paved the way for introduction of Sanskrit culture and language in the court of Kachari monarchs. Her son *Suradarpa* came into power in 1708 A.D. ruled upto 1730 A.D. During his regime the tradition of human sacrifice was demolished. Then his son *Dharamdhvaj* became the Kachari ruler he ruled upto 1732 A.D. and died as a bachelor. Then one Kriti Candra Konowar, a descendant of the stepbrother of Naranarayan was installed to the rulership after giving marriage with *Kunjabati*, the sister of Suradarpa. *Kirtichandra* of *Hangchergcha* (Hasnusa) clan has very brief rule from 1732 A.D. to 1756 A.D. He had appointed one *Vizir, Maniram* to the *Barkhola* area in 1736 A.D. who was said to be the ancestor of Khumpraicha clan belonging to the Koch neophyte.

Ramchandra (1758-71), the eldest son of Kirti Chandra was the next monarch in 1758 A.D. he refused first to appear before the Ahom king but later on he was taken before Rajeswar Singh the Ahom king. On some conditions he was released and it was perhaps due to that he was nick named as *Sandhi-kari*. He was

succeeded by his brother the crown prince Harish Chandra. During this period the downfall of Koch power in the plains of Cachar is noticed and the Koch Governors of the *Khaspur* had to cede their authority to the Kachari rulers at Maibong and maintained terms of a Kin-folk with the ruler. In this condition the last Koch Governor of Khaspur, Bhimsingh gave in marriage of his only daughter named Kanchani, with Lakshnichandra the crown prince and second son of Harish Chandra. //

The teen aged boy Lakshnichandra was brought down to Khaspur and was appointed as Governor of the plains of Cachar. During his period the Kacharis of the plains have adopted Hindu style of living under the influence of Kochs. Lakshnichandra introduced a number of social reforms in Kachari society. Another significant event in this period was the migration of a number of Brahmin families from Bengal and they were patronized by the Kachari king. Not only Brahmin but some other Hindu occupational castes namely Nath (yogi), Patni, Malakar, Karmakar, Tanti etc. also migrated in Cachar from Bengal. They were granted permission by the Kachari king. A number of Muslim traders also permitted to settle down in Cachar. At this juncture, Kachari king made an attempt to reorganise his community by introducing division of labour among different clans of Dimasas on the line of Hindu social system. During this time Harish Chandra, father of Lakshnichandra from Maibong moved down to Khaspur with his courtiers and joined his son in 1761 A.D. For the administration of North Cachar region, Harish Chandra left one Bara-Bhandari as in-charge with an army commander under him, his name was said to be Ananta Ram Barman. Lakshnichandra died prematurely without having any male issue in 1780 A.D. After his death his father Harish Chandra again ruled the

kingdom from Khaspur and he called his two nephews namely, *Krishnachandra* and Govinda Chandra to attend him due to his old age and then *Krishnachandra* was installed as a ruler and Govinda Chandra as crown prince of the Kachari kingdom.

Krishna Chandra (1780-1813 A.D.) was highly devoted to religious pursuits and was very much influenced by Orthodox Brahmins. During his regime, a number of Hindu rituals of life cycle were introduced in the Kachari society. But such reforms were not favoured by many Dimasa Kachari folks. This dissent group rallied around the *Kohidan*, administrator of Maibong. They scoffed at the spiritual and cultural reform of their king and brooded a rebellious mood. *Krishna Chandra* was drawn into an alignment with the prince of Manipur in 1805. About 1809 Madhu Chandra, the king of Manipur was deprived by his brothers Charjit and Marjit, Madhu Chandra fled away and sought the help of Kachari king. *Krishnachandra* sent an army under the command of *Tularam*, son of *Kohidhan* of Maibong. *Tularam* defeated Charjit and Marjit and reinstated Madhu Chandra as the ruler of Manipur. In return Madhu Chandra gave his pretty daughter *Induprava* in marriage with *Krishna Chandra*. *Krishna Chandra* pursued the course of a true Hindu ruler, he established temples of *Ranachandi*, *Kancha Khanti Siva*, *Laxmi Narayan* in Cachar.

After the death of *Krishna Chandra* his brother, crown prince *Govinda Chandra* came into power in 1813 and ruled upto 1831. He married his brother's wife *Indruprava* and this action stirred up the stormy interludes of his future life. During this time queen *Induprava* played very important role, she appointed her cousin *Gambhir Singh* as commander in place of *Tularam* who was appointed as Governor

of the northern division which comprised the valleys of Kapili, *Dhansiri*, *Diyong* extending upto *Doboka*, Lanka and *Kachamari* pather. These decisions made ultimately the people against him and some of the leading members with the help of Tularam make secret conspiracy against him (Govinda Chandra). Later on Tularam led the rebellion against the king Govinda Chandra, and declared himself as king of Dimasas of North Cachar Hills. The weak Kachari king Govinda Chandra could not do any thing against Tularam, because most of the Kachari population was supporting Tularam. During this time Cachar was a hot-bed of politics of the Manipur princes. The Manipuris captured the plains of Cachar and Govinda Chandra took shelter in sylhet in 1818. In 1824 with the help of British he became a tributary Raja of Cachar and pay Rs. 10,000 as annual tribute to British. In this condition Govinda Chandra tried to capture North Cachar Hills from Tularam but Britishers make a settlement with Tularam in 1829. After the death of Tularam the N.C. Hills district was annexed by the British India and similarly in plains of Cachar after the death of Raja Govinda Chandra, the last king of Kacharis, the British annexed the Cachar on 14th August 1832 A.D. (Barman 1972).

During the regime of Govinda Chandra when Tularam revolted against him the Kachari kingdom bifurcated into two parts - N.C. Hills and Cachar. It was perhaps the time when the Kacharis divided into two groups namely Dimasas and Barmans. Those who were against of adopting orthodox Hindu rituals and practices continued to be called Dimasa. While the followers of the king Govinda Chandra, who adopted orthodox Hindu rituals called themselves as Barmans.

Even after the decline of Kachari rulers both at Maibong and Cachar the division of the Kacharis into Dimasa and Barmans continued. It is evident from the fact that marriage ties between Dimasas and Barmans were also ceased for about more than 150 years, as a result of this division. However, in recent past an attempt was made to restore these ties in new changing political scenario.