

CHAPTER-VII

Conclusion

In our foregoing chapters, we have tried to discuss the establishment of Dimasa state in different part of Assam Valley from the earliest times and as well as the socio-cultural and economic condition of the tribe. The early history of the Dimasa though has remained a matter of conjecture and inference, oral history and large number of ballads helped us to go through. The history of the North East region of India and its ethnic groups began to embed in the chronicles or Buranjis since the advent of the Tai-Ahom in the beginning of the thirteenth century.¹ The monograph of Rev Sidney Endle, published by the Director of the Ethnology, Govt. of Assam and Bengal in 1911 also recorded the tribe, Dimasa.² In the History of Assam, E. Gait stated that in the 13th century the Dimasa kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu River (i.e. Dikhow) to the Kallang River or beyond, and included also the valley of the Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar subdivision.³ The Dimasa had a well established kingdom in the Northeast region when the Ahoms entered. In the pre-Ahom period the Dimasas ruled over different states, under different names, in different times and in different parts of the Assam Valley.⁴ Oral traditions, which includes Songs, legends and tales of the Dimasa tribe helps us to know about the tribe. The unique verse narratives or ballads of Historical, Legendary, Magical and Realistic are important in narrating the history of the Dimasas. Considering oral literature and other supporting sources it is said that the Dimasas first ruled in ancient Kamrupa(Kamruli).⁵ It is also said by scholars that the Dimasas had first experimented the arduous task of state building in the Brahmaputra valley and had experienced and passed through political turmoil; their authority being put to test by other contemporary tribes. Assamese chronicles mentioned about the Dimasa kingdom at Sadiya (Kundil or Kundilya) and was perhaps the most serious attempt to build up an independent state after their expulsion from Kamrupa.⁶ A legend

¹ Sir Edward Gait, *History of Assam*, Guwahati, 1905, p-248

² L.P. Vidyarathi, *Art and Culture of North East*

³ Sir. Edward Gait, *Op.cit*, p-248

⁴ S.K. Barpujari, *History of the Dimasas*, Haflong, 1997, p-189

⁵ S.K. Bhuyan, (ed), *Kachari Buranji*, Guwahati, 1951, p-XVIII

⁶ S.K. Bhuyan, *Ibid* , p-XVIII

about the origin of the royal Dimasa family tells us how one Manik became king of the Dimasa at and around Sadiya. The fact is also narrated by S. Endles in his work that the race established a powerful kingdom in the eastern corner of Assam, the seat of government being at or near Sadiya, who after prolonged battles were defeated and as a result withdrew from there first to Dimapure and afterwards to Maibong.⁷ The archaeological evidence of the *Kechai-khati* Gosani enshrined in the *Tamreswari* temple at Sadiya made a link about the Dimasa establishment at Sadiya. The Goddess was worshipped in the Brahmaputra Valley, which was also worshipped by the Dimasas and continued to be worshipped as the tutelary deity of the Dimasa royal family till the end of their rule in Cachar. However it is not known how their sovereignty came to an end and when.

From the mode of Dimasa life style, agriculture activities and other cultural aspect, people cannot be strictly said to be of hilly culture like Karbi and Naga tribes. The use of plough to till the land by means of buffaloes, which the Dimasas have been carrying on till today in certain remote areas in the midst of the hills indicates that this method has been inherited from the plains while *jhum* or shifting cultivation is the usual means of agricultural production for most of the hill tribes of the North East India. Some household materials and an important analytical process are of weaving of the Dimasa people. It is noticed that they do not use the typical lion looms which are usually seen with the hill tribes of the region. All this make one believe firmly that the ancestral legacy and the people of the origin of are from the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley.

The Kachari Buranji stated about the Dimasa rule on the bank of the Dhansiri River with Dimapur as their capital. Two legendary accounts are taken for this consideration. According to one the first, Dimasa king Bicharpatipha was a descendant of Ghotokacha, the son born of the wedlock of the second Pandava Bhima of Mahabharata fame and Dimasa Hidimba (demon princess).⁸ The second account relates Dimasa king was result of god Siva's desire to establish in the earth a ruling dynasty from his moral issue. Hence Siva appeared in the guise of a Dimasa, stayed with a Dimasa Deodhani with her as his wife. Son was born to

⁷ Rev.S. Endle, *The Kacharis*, London,1911,p-6-9

⁸ S.K.Bhuyan, *Op.cit*, p-3

Deodhani and Siva disappeared. The child was handed over to king Birhas who brought him up and named him Bicharpatipha.⁹

The Dimasa establishment in Dimapur has been illustrated by the magnificence of the remnant and ruins of the palaces, forts and tanks which are still extant on the left bank of the river Dhansiri. These all remind us that in the period in which the Dimasa ruled from Dimapur they had attained a high degree of civilization which was far superior to that of the Ahoms who had been then ruling in the Brahmaputra Valley with full glory.¹⁰ U.C Guha in his book '*Cacharer Itibritta*' have mentioned about the Dimasa rule in Dimapur. According to him Dimasa ruled Dimapur for about four hundreded years from 1150 A.D. to 1536 A.D.¹¹ it is again supported by B.N.Bordoloi, that the Dimasas established their capital at Dimapur prior to the advent of the Ahoms of Assam.¹² The ancient civilization which contributed to the plastic art in the form of self-standing columns and structural pieces, ornamented thoroughly with skilled artistic work now in its little existence. The works done in previous years were the important source of information of the civilization. In the pages of few historical works we can realize the artistic skill of the Dimasas. But today not a single physical evidence of this architectural works exist. It can be argued that a historical heritage should be well maintained, which has been the earliest civilization of the region for the generations.

Ahom's westward expansion in 1268-81 A.D brought them into contact with the Dimasa. Though Ahom did not declare war against the well established Dimasa kingdom, history says how Ahom occupied the Dimasa territories by foul means and taken territories up to Namdang. About two hundred years the river appears to have formed the boundary between the two kingdoms.¹³ However after that a series of struggle continued between Ahom and Dimasa and in 1536 A.D the Ahoms become the masters not only the Dhansiri Valley but also whole of the Dimasa possessions north-east of the kalang river in Nowgong. The

⁹ S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-34

¹⁰ S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-36

¹¹ U.C. Guha, *Cacharer Itibrita*, Guwahati, 1971.pp-64-65

¹² B.N.Bordoloi, *The Dimasa Kacharis of Assam*, Guwahati, 1984,p-15

¹³ L.Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, Guwahati,1964,p-79

end of Dimasa establishment in Dimapur is completed. But the tribe had enough stamina to establish another establishment, and so established; Maibong as the new capital on the bank of the Mahur River in 1540A.D. Dimasa state formation in Maibong entered into a “crucial phase” due to growing influence of Brahmanical Hinduism. The period was important for the development of socio-cultural and economic condition of the Dimasas. Along with political connections with many tribes adoption of new culture was developed. *Modan kumar*, the son and general of *Detchung* or *Desongpha* after establishing himself at Maibong took the Hindu name *Nirbhayanarayana*.¹⁴ This is the first instance of a tribal king adopting a non-tribal name which became a precedent for the future Dimasa rulers to adopt.¹⁵ The Dimasa coin was struck first during this period is a rare *tanka* in the name of king *Viravijayanarayana*.¹⁶ This king is otherwise unknown to history, but the legend on his coin gives useful historical information. The legends described the king as a worshipper at the feet of the Goddess Chandi or goddess of war was a patron deity of the Dimasa rulers and the clan Ha-tsung-tsa (now Hasnusa) as their ancestral. Koch expedition was carried out and a principality was established in Khaspur. Dimasa kingdom gradually extended its frontiers towards Cachar plains bordering North Cachar Hills over a small strip of land and came into contact with the Mughals in seventeenth century. But the Dimasas maintained their political sovereignty; Khaspur too was on its decline. The ruler Bhimsingha was growing old and had no male issue. His only daughter Kanchani was given in marriage to Dimasa King Lakshmi Chandra in 1745 A.D. shortly after the death of Bhimsingha, the two states were merged together and Dimasa capital was shifted to khaspur from Maibong.¹⁷

Dimasa rule in Khaspur was marked due to architectural development. The palace complex and the Ranachandi temple at khaspur were greatest achievements. The period between 1745A.D to 1832A.D. Dimasa rule in Khaspur was a struggling period for the Dimasa sovereignty. Manipuri occupation of Cachar paved the way for Burmese policy of imperial expansion led to the abandonment of

¹⁴ N.K, Barman, *The Queens of Cachar or Herambo etc*, Borkola, 1974,p-131

¹⁵ J.B, Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in pre-colonial North East India*, New Delhi,1991,p-150

¹⁶ N.G, Rhodes & S.K, Bose, *A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis*,Kolkata/Guwahati,2006,p-14

¹⁷ Amanat Ahmad Ullah, *Koch Beharer Itihas*, Cooch Behar, 1926,p-237
J.B.Bhattacharjee,Op cit,p-149

the Company's policy of non-intervention.¹⁸ British under Mr, David Scott, and an Agent to the Governor-General in the North East Frontier entered into an agreement on 6 March 1824, at Badarpur by which Raja Govindachandra's kingdom was taken under British protection. The agreement was necessary on the ground that Burmese may not come as Dimasa king Govindochandra was much advanced in age and was without any issue.¹⁹ Govindachandra the last Dimasa king died leaving no heir natural or adopted to his throne and by a declaration on 14 August 1832 the plains of Cachar was annexed to the British territories, giving the possession of the hill tract to the Dimasa chief Tularam senapati, which had been assigned to him by the Raja of Cachar. However by a new treaty in 1834 Senapati was forced to surrender the territory between the rivers Mahur and Doyang on the one side to the British Government. Tularam agreed to pay a tribute of four pairs of elephant's tusks each weighing 70 Lbs in token of subjection which before long was commuted to cash payment of Rs. 490/-. On the other hand he was given pension of Rs. 50/- per month.²⁰ Tularam Senapati, the redoubtable chief was thus reduced to the position of no better than the leader of a local group. He was forced to act as the buffer state leader. As the Nagas continued in their raids in the region, the British concluded the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 and started a consolidated rule so strong leader was needed in the borders. After the decline of the Dimasa kingdom regular barter relations among the neighboring tribes was also declining and a political struggle started. Dimasa and Naga's friendly relation which we talked about in the early Dimasa establishment in Dimapur was no more and they became each others enemy. The main reason behind their hostility was for the possession of the salt-spring at Semkhor.²¹ This was one of the items of barter system and later in trade with the tribe. Being disabled by old age and infirmity in 1844 Tularam entrusted the charge of his territory to his sons, Nakulram and Brajanath. The two sons to fail to control the Naga and accordingly, the territory of Tularam was annexed to North Cachar by means of a proclamation issued on 3 December 1853 and it was merged

¹⁸ J.B, Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in pre-colonial North East India*, New Delhi,1991,p-38

¹⁹ S .K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,pp-70-71
396 Bengal Judicial Proceedings,6 Nov.1850,No.127

²¹ S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-100

with the Nowgong District of Assam with the status of subdivision. The remaining heirs of Tularam were granted annual pension in cash, besides rent-free lands at Mohong Dijua during their lives.²² The resumption of Tularam's country not only marked the end of the rule of an independent hill chief but the culmination of an imperialistic game pursued for years. In 1829, the British found that Tularam had established his mastery as independent chief over the warlike tribes in the impenetrable hills, the geography and resources of which were unknown, they considered it expedient to accept it as an accomplished fact.²³ It seems instead of helping Tularam against the Naga's with potential strength, the British were more interested in their imperialism on the point that Tularam was a source of danger and embarrassment. No doubt British made Tularam's territory as a buffer state against Naga's and Burmese but did not help rather leaving him alone in a helpless position to fight for the existence. Besides Tularam's successor could neither extricate themselves from their powerful enemies with their own might nor reassert their position with the aid of any other power. Thus the whole of the Dimasa kingdom came under the Government of the East India Company.

The Dimasa political History will not complete if we did not mention about the Sambhudhan Phonglo, a Dimasa leader who had challenged the British authority over the hills. The introduction of an alien system of administration by the British rulers and the divide and rule policy followed by them created suspicion and distrust amongst the simple minded Dimasas. Again the internal force like hinduising process of Dimasa royal family was not like by the Dimasa orthodox society, as their traditional clan system was affected. Bengali Brahmine influence in the royal court was so active that the traditional Dimasa priest Jonthai influence was less affective in religious as well as political advisor. The inability of King Govindachanra and annexation of Tularam's territory made the Dimasa masses leaderless and they rallied round under leaders like Sambhudhan. He set up his headquarter at Maibong dreamt the dream of reviving the old Dimasa kingdom. The revolt of Sambhudhan occurred within 14 months from the opening of the civil headquarters at Gunjung. Sambhudhan with his followers destroyed and burnt the British headquarters at Gunjung on 15 January 1882. In the skirmishes that

²² S.K. Barpujari, *Resumption of Tularams Territory: A Reappraisal*, I.H.C. Proceedings, Aligarh, 1976, p-434

²³ S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-108

followed next day at Maibong, Major Boyd, Deputy Commissioner of Cachar who received a deep cut in the fingers of his hand was carried to Silchar where he died after two weeks. Sambhudhan too was severely wounded while bravely fighting against the British and brought his end in course of a year.²⁴ By the end of 1883 Dimasa political activity in the region is ended.

We can say that the first political establishment of the Northeast India, the Dimasa kingdom has gone through the many political ups and down from the royal period to the British period. Reasoning on the basis of Dimasa folklore, late Sonaram thousen, a Dimasa scholar of repute presumed that Dimasa kingdom was established about the year 1086 A.D and the Dimasa were in possession of Dimapur for about 450 years hence they shifted their capital to Maibong on the Mahur river in the North Cachar Hills, a short distance from the Barail range.²⁵ This is supported by a Dimasa folklore, which said that the Muli Bamboos flower once after every 50 years and during the Dimasa reign in Dimapur, the Muli Bamboo blossomed nine times and calculating on the basis it is in the Dimasa history that the Dimasa king reigned from Dimapur for about 450 years.²⁶ In the year 1536 A.D Dimas king defeated by the Ahom and Dimasa shifted to Maibong in the year 1540 A.D. continuing their rule in Khaspur till British annexed the Cachar plain after the death of Govindachandra in 1832 A.D. From 1086A.D to 1832 A.D. This is a long period and it can be said that the Dimasa has ruled the region more than the Ahoms.

During this long period the tribe encountered many culture and religion, where few are adopted in keeping their traditional socio-cultural and religious identity. In our forgoing chapters we can see the tribe's socio-cultural religious activities, which was very much identical in itself. As the culture reflect a lot about their cultural background and the mode of living and is also expressive of its cultural maturity. Will Scott also observe that material culture studies help us to think about the objects, and the culture, political and economic systems that created by them. It also refers to the technology and material artifacts, the object produced

²⁴ '100 years of Haflong' Centenary Commemorative Souvenir, Haflong, 1995,p-24

²⁵ S.R, Thousen, *Dimasa*, An Article in Assamese in Asomor Janajati, Edited by P.Bhattacharjee, Guwahati,1962,p-47

²⁶ Oral literature commonly practiced in Dimapur, collected from Lokey Hasnu, Age-75,dated 23/06/13

by human beings, including tools, weapons, utensils, furniture, art, and indeed any physical item created by a society. The Dimasas who have a large treasure-trove of art have achieved it because of a long period of their cultural heritage. The people used to practice different form of art to fulfill their need. The work with bamboo and cane, weaving and rice beer making is important. The tribe also used to ornament themselves so the use of jewellery also practiced. From their material culture we can go through the economic status of the society and availability of materials to use and trade relation with other part of the country for the import and export of the materials.

Dimasa household is the finest example of the material culture. Dimasa houses use a floor plan called *no-dima* that partitions the structure into a drawing room, sleeping room, kitchen and granary. Latrine and bathrooms are always far from the main building. Houses are generally of bamboo and straws or which today we called as kaccha house. The roof of the house is higher than the other contemporary tribes. The British made houses of later period is similar. Houses attached with two verandas, one in front and other in the back side. A temple is always seen in the front side and a store of paddy in the back side. Another important feature of the Dimasa household is that kitchen is always separated from the main building. A loom is also seen in the back side veranda. The whole setup of the dimasa household system is differed from the contemporary karbi, Boro, and the Assamese community. Karbi houses are neither too big nor too small. It is built on a bamboo platform; far higher over the ground. The ground floor is generally used for domesticating pig. No worshipping building is seen as the dimasa temple architecture. The temple in front indicates their religious life of the Dimasa. Christianity though came in the land along the British Dimasa never converted to, whereas few per cent of karbi and bodo kacharies, converted to Christianity. Though the Dimasas are animistic after the influence of Brahminical Hinduism they worshipped idol too. Shiva and kali are important. The temple is generally small but one or two people can enter easily. Hibiscus, jasmine, marigold and Indian oleander flowers were decorated inside the temple. The walls of the temple are decorated with the symbol of *swastika* or *trisul* with orange or some time with the red color. The temple utensil is generally of copper (*tama*). Though dimasa are animistic and they have their own god and goddess the *sindur* is used in the

forehead after worshipping in the temple but they never use it while performing other occasion like *madai khilimnang* or worship for wellbeing which is performed annually or rituals in jungle to offer sacrifice to the evil sprite. The bodos instate of having a temple they use to plant the *siju* tree in the middle of the front loon for their daily worship. Other tribes like kuki, Garo, karbi never developed temple custom in their household. Dimasa temple custom reflects their religious life as well as their hinduisation. It is also reflected in the store of paddy house. In the wall of the store goddess of wealth *lakshmi* is kept. The store also indicates the peoples profit from agriculture and their system of store. The loom indicates the weaving culture of the Dimasa. The leisure hours of every woman are in the loom. As all the required cloth is woven in the family loom. The traditional dimasa kitchen is a showcase of the material culture of the dimasas. Drinking water is kept in earthen utensil. Food is cooked in fire. The fire in the fire place is always kept burning. A small kettle of red tea is always ready near the fire place (*sungkho*). Over the fire place a round shape rack made of bamboo is hanged in the ceiling, where fish and some herbs are left to dry. In the karbi traditional kitchen rack is used to dry meat, as they are used to take dry meat in their curry. Dimasa did not use dry meat traditionally. In the walls, near to fire place variety of dry seeds for future cultivation were kept in a *pontho*, cylindrical bamboo container. For sitting while cooking, cutting vegetable or making a paste of different spices and herbs a wooden tool is use. Unlike the Bengali kitchen traditional dimasa kitchen is never equipped with the *sil-pata* and knife with stand or *bothi*. They use big and small knife to cut vegetable and a piece wood to piece the meat. A long *dau* (sheng) is kept separately for animal sacrifice in rituals. It is normally wedge-shaped, with its top end flat and blunt. This end sometimes contains a carving depicting an eye or symbols, which indicate the worshiper of *Ranachandi* (traditional dimasa goddeass). This type of symbol of eye is found in the half round knife of goddess kali. It symbolized the religious life as well as the Hindu influence. The *sheng* is considered a sacred object and is kept with great veneration. It is very rear among the other communities. To make the paste of spices a mortar and pestle is used. Both wooden and aluminum is seen. The *Dhanki* a mortar of wood which is used by leg is a common in every non tribal houses of plain is not used by the tribe, instate they used *urol* to get rice from row paddy. Another object of the tribe is a *chap/sheb or sep*, a cane-made container used in extracting oil from mustard and sesame seeds.

²⁷From the use of the object we can understand the tribe's technology. They extracted oil adopting traditional method, which is not seen any other tribe of the region. The Karbis used sesame but not in the form of oil but row in their curry. In a corner of kitchen all the required utensils are kept for preparing rice beer. They never use to take food inside the kitchen and also restriction is there to enter the kitchen. When a person dies the kitchen is not used by the family member but the relatives use to cook food. The interior of the dimasa kitchen is equipped with all the essential things. A social taboo is there, maintain the religious custom. The same restriction is there in case of entering temple.

In our foregoing discussion one can witnessed the ornamentation of Dimasas in their life and culture. The religious practices, customs and believes makes them distinct from the other tribe of the Northeast India. The Dimasas have their language and it is spoken by the Dimasa populac. The Dimasa language, according to B.N.Bordoloi, is rich in numerous folk-tales, folk lore's, ballads, idioms and idiomatic phrases. In the form of expression and vocabulary, it cannot be considered as inferior to any of the tribal language of Northern India. The unwritten folk literature has been orally transmitted from generation to generation, but in recent time these have been collected by the Dimasa Sahitya Sabha and some individual Dimasa scholars.

The ceremonies of birth, marriage and death are ornamented with many rituals, which have been in practice from the very age old days. These ceremonies are very systematic and logical with scientific norms. During birth of a new born baby, mother is not allowed to do work and also keep isolated from kitchen. When a deceased is cremated the house is purified and the people returning from the cremation ground were allowed to enter passing through a fire after taking the purificatory bath. The young girls and women during their menstrual period were not allowed to prepared food, hence isolated from kitchen. Again the Dimasa women clan '*Zadi*' or '*Julu*' is a systematic organization, where women of different '*Julu*' cannot share comb and '*Rigu*' or lower garment. A well established society ornamented with organization like '*Nodrang*' a bachelors' dormitory, '*Hangseu*' a economic organization of youths and village council headed by '*Khunang*', which

²⁷ Filed Survey in the Diamsa Villages of N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong District during 2014-15.

was an elective post; divided in 12 religious areas called 'Daikho'. Every Daikho has their area god, worshipped by a 'Jonthai' a Dimasa priest who is responsible for the religious activities of the area. Dimasas are animistic in nature but the process of Hinduisation had taken place. Hence the religion at present followed by the Dimasas is more or less a 'mixture of their traditional religion and Hinduism. Nevertheless Dimasas still maintain their old religious beliefs and customs and perform the traditional religious rites. But the most outstanding factor in the field of religion is the fact that all attempts on the part of Christian Missionaries to convert them into Christianity²⁸ have proved to be futile.

But the most attractive culture of the Dimasas that we concerned most is the ornamentation. Dimasa ornamentation in architecture speaks about the tribe's skilled craftsmanship. Ornamentation as multi-functional communication means that can not only provide information about the cultural history of an ethnic group, but is a powerful factor of self-identification in the society, contributing to further enculturation and spiritual self development. The architectural evidences of the Dimasas help us to locate their state formation. The designs, motifs and geometrical patterns are the features of the Dimasa ornamentation, which is very much present in their traditional dress as well as in their architecture. The Kashomari and Dimapur monoliths were the finest example of the Dimasa craftsmanship of Dimasa architectural ornamentation. The carvings consisted of figures of men, animals, birds, flowers and geometric designs. In this context, Dr.T.Bloch referred to the figure of a lion mounting on an elephant, seen on the broken V columns of Dimapur. The peacocks, of which two are represented on another tile with their bodies twisted around each other, are also a favorite design of Dimapur columns, and the ornamented pattern occurs again on some V columns in the newly discovered group of pillars at Dimapur.²⁹ Other sites of Dimasa architectural ornamentation is seen in Kachomari, which is situated besides the

²⁸ B.N.Bordoloi, G.C.Sharma Thakur & M.C. Saikia, *Tribes of Assam*(Popular Series), Part I, Guwahati,1987,pp-131-132

²⁹ Dr.T.Bloch, *Report in a Annual report of The Archaeological Survey of India,1907*



Fig. 67- Dimasa Architecture in Kachomari, Dated 24.07.2016



Fig. 68-Dimasa Architecture in Dimapur, Dated. 02.09.2016

Doyang River.³⁰ The second in lineage of the Kachari royal house, after subjugating all the tribes around that region and then shifted to Dimapur.³¹ A group of megalith is the architectural and constructional evidence of the Dimasas. Like Kachomari, ruins of Dimapur speak about the Dimasas attainment of a state civilization considerably in advance of that of the Ahoms.³² The double row of carved pillars of sandstone, averaging about curious V shaped pillars which are apparently memorial stones which is also exists in Kachamari ruins. The monoliths of Dimapur are classified into three groups, such as Chessman type, V type and Girder-type. According to researchers the greatest contribution of the Dimasas to the plastic art is the self-standing columns and the structural pieces of Dimapur and Kachamari.³³ The stone pieces are not only enormous in size, they are thoroughly ornamented also. Most of them are megaliths, but not in the usual sense of the term. They are unique because of their artistic exuberance. They are the example of primitive megalithic tradition to its classical stage and the ornamental fancy of the late medieval period.³⁴ The ornamentation of the monoliths is the representations of the elephant, deer, dog, duck and peacock. This representation is found in the designs of the Dimasa traditional attire.

The artistic skill of the Dimasa is focused in their ornamentation of monoliths. Not only has that it also reflected the significance of the motifs and designs. Same motifs and designs were seen in two sites as well as in the Dimasa traditional attire. These two sites were free from Hinduism as the Dimasa architectural activities in Maibong and Khaspur is not in the same pattern. The influence of Hinduism is focused in their architectural construction. But the most depressing fact about the architecture is that they were not properly protected. Dimapur architectural sites remains in the pages of few research works which were done long before. In N.C. Hills District is too same case. The constructions of Assam Bengal Railway line was the biggest harm to the antiquities. In the Kachomari sites monoliths were kept somehow but without any adequency. As a student of History it is a serious issue that the constructive activities of the Dimasa

³⁰ At present in *Golaghat* District of Assam.

³¹ R.M.Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Guwahati,1988,p-71

³² J.B.Bhattacharjee,*Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*,New Delhi,p-137

³³ S.K.Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-171

³⁴ S.K.Barpujari, *Op.cit*p-171

kingdom have been destroyed and the future generation will remain ignorant from the Dimasa skilled craftsmanship.

Dimasa traditional attire is very attractive and almost all the cloths are prepared in the family loom. It is said that the weaving culture of the Dimasas is a compulsory for the women folk. Every marriageable girl should know the art of weaving and a loom is always sending from her parents' home in her marriage. For teenage, for women, for aged women and for widow dresses are different and woven with beautiful designs. The designs and motifs of the Dimasa traditional dresses bear significant meaning. As we have discussed, Dimasas indigenous technology in weaving culture by no means inferior to other tribe's weaving culture. Getting cotton tread from raw cotton, dyeing in different colours and loom arrangement all are done by the Dimasa women. The artistic designs of geometrical patterns creating a 3D look are the skilled craftsmanship of the Dimasa women. Females clothing include 1. *Rijamphain*: white colour cloth worn from chest to knees. 2. *RijamphainBeren (Ramai)*: Chest wrapper with Stripes of Bright colours like white, Green(sometimes deep blue), Black, Yellow(sometime orange) and red, worn only in special occasions(marriage, dance, festivals). 3. *Rigu*: Wrapper or Lower Garment worn from waist to ankle. It can be of various colours. 4. A Muffler: either of yellow, green or white in colour, worn above the chest wrapper or shoulders. It can be also taken by the males. 5. *Rigu-set*: It is introduced recently due to influence of mainstream culture, it is a Dimasa Mekhela Chadar, consisting of Rigu (lower garment worn from waist to ankle.) and set is cloth which is same piece of Rigu that is draped like Indian saree, it can be of any colour. 6. *Bathormai*: kind of *Rigu*, with only *Ramai Rikhu* or *Ramai* Design therein.

Males clothing includes- 1. *Sgaopha(phagri)* : Dimasa males wear turban in a head called "*Phagri*" or *Sgaopha*," *Phagri*" are of either green or yellow but on the occasion of marriage or dance, the bridegroom or dancer wears white "*Phagri*" tied with red ribbon on the chin. 2. *Rigdo*: Short muffler which can be of any colour worn by men. 3. *Risha*: Short dhoti worn from waist to knee and sometimes taken as muffler also, *Rihsa* can be of different colours. 4. *Gainthao*: White long dhoti worn from waist to ankle worn only during marriages and dance. 5. *Rikhaosa*: Long muffler taken by both men and women, it can be in the colours of white, green and yellow. 6. *Rithap*: Chaddar or shawl worn by men

usually made from Endi/Eri silk of Endi-silk worm. 7. *Remshau*: Shawl only of colour either white or yellow with colourful design embedded in white background, this type of designs is found only on Remshalu. 8. *Magong*: shawl of various colour.

Weaving has been of the most excellent artistic crafts in Dimasa culture. Textiles were of fine quality, brightness of colour and durability. The designs which are woven in Dimasa clothes are very unique. The various designs and patterns on the Dimasa clothes are made by tying the threads and rest part of clothes are wove similar to any other community, so when one touch the Dimasa design, it appears to be very thick and has a 3D look. Unlike designs (*pari*) of other community which is usually made of one or two colour, the Dimasa adds three or more colours. It means that the Dimasa designs are multicolored. The design for females differ from the males, the designs determines whether the clothes is for the males or for the females. Wearing of male clothes by women or female clothes by men is considered as taboo. Weaving which is traditionally a feminine activity and a way of expression of the creativity of women, however found changed in Dimasa traditional loom and social ornamentation. Change is inevitable in every society and so to Dimasa society too. Socio-cultural changes, flexible social set-up, modern education and westernization can be the forces among many. The institution of youth or bachelors dormitories of tribes became a lost culture. It acted as a center of material culture of a tribe as well as social and ritual centers co-ordinating male activities in peace and war. Handicraft like bamboo and wooden works, a school for junior member of the dormitory about rituals of the tribes and girl's a meeting place to discuss various issues. Talk about the weaving textile is also part of the girl's gossip. The motifs and its designs were the creation of the meeting. Completion of weaving tasks was items of conversation. The lost of such dormitory affected not only weaving but also other material culture. In a tribal society though dormitory played an important role in socio-cultural life it was not built under any compulsion, it is an autonomous body of the youth. So in due courses it failed to survive. Weaving culture is an important culture among the Dimasas as well as the other tribes of northeast India but the modern education affected this culture a lot. Introduction of schools makes the generation more enthuse about receiving formal education than learning weaving skill at home than the weaving. In recent years, a

gradual disappearance of handloom weaving as a household craft has been marked among the urbanized section. But in the rural areas, the craft of weaving continues, albeit with changes incorporated in it, as an integral part of tribal culture. Tradition of weaving is thus remained in the few hands of village women. Moreover, it provided an important boost to the rural economy. In this connection, it would be pertinent to mention that even to this day many of the Dimasa families in rural areas of Assam have been saved from economic hardship by the skilled craft of weaving. In the modern period the causes of declining trend in tribal textile tradition in the region is more and more tribal people of younger generation are staying away from perusing this craft of weaving. Western fashion is the another factor that the demand of the traditional dresses minimized and younger one instead of wearing traditional dresses prefer to wear western dresses.

Colours in tribal dress has a great significance. It represents their status, beliefs, and love for their nature. The Bodos are a colourful tribe. Green, yellow, golden yellow are predominant colour in their costumes. According to Bodo weavers, green colours signifies their closeness to the nature and golden yellow, the colour of paddy field before harvesting. Mishing the second largest tribe of Northeast used many colours in their textile which has significant meaning related to nature such as black represent darkness, blue represents sky, green represents green pasture of nature. The horizontal red, white and black stripes dress of Mishing married women is to keep evil eyes away. Significance of colour in Dimasa society is also seen in their beliefs. Red signifies fire and the use of the colour in deceased body is a taboo. They beliefs in wearing a red colour cloth the deceased will suffer from leprosy in its next birth. Black colour signifies dark so the using of this colour by bride and bride-groom is a taboo. Yellow, green, orange are the colours that represents rainbow. In the transformation period of tribes from ethnic character to a modern character the significance of the traditional colours get less important. The indigenous dyeing culture has also suffered because of the invention of machine made coloured yarn. All the Northeastern tribal people practice the dyeing culture. Tribe's 'dyeing' culture is an indigenous culture. Dimasa, Karbi, Bodo, Mishing including Ahoms practiced the dyeing culture. Every tribe has their preferred colour. Karbi's mostly used 'black', 'white' and 'red', whereas white, red, and blue are the primary colour of

the Dimasa. Orange, yellow, green and black colours are also prepared by mixing. Bodos and Mishings too have their traditional colours like 'orange' and 'black' respectively. The dyeing culture is practiced by the womenfolk of the every tribe. Role of women in the weaving culture is very important and appreciable. Unlike the rest of the country weaving was and is the monopoly of the women. Tribal dyeing culture has remained intact during the Ahom period and in the beginning of the British period. We may presume that it is from the period of industrialization that many colours were invented and the Indian as well as Northeast market were filled up with the variety of coloured yarns. The easy available colouring yarns made the tribal weaver relaxed from the lengthy process of dyeing practice in their early-British period. The input of the new colours added fashion to the traditional dress; however the role of traditional colours remained same in their dresses. In the later period the dyeing practice of the tribal people of Northeast India was becoming out of their material culture. The deforestation can be the reason behind it. Cutting of jungle for shifting cultivation or for new construction made many herbs rare and if found, also it was of not much use as the ready-made colouring yarns were easily available. The tribal dyeing culture could not compete with the machine which resulted in abandonment of the indigenous dyeing practice. Along with this, the significance of different colours in the life of the tribal also became less important. The practice of 'dye' among the different tribes of North-east became a history.

Another important body ornamentation of the Dimasa is the jewellery ornamentation. Jewellery ornamentation which was a common practice of women was prevalent from the Indus Valley Civilization. Tribal people are a heritage to the Indian land. Each tribe has unique style depending on environment and availability. The original format of jewellery design has been preserved by ethnic tribal. The desire to beautify and to make attracted, the primitive tribe ornamented themselves with various objects. Bamboo, glass beads, jungle beads, shells, bones, animal claws, teeth and semi-precious stones for jewellery are important material in primitive period which hold a distinct rustic and earthy charm. Tribal jewellery is made of the products that are available locally. Bronze, silver and copper are used in later period and lastly the gold. When the entire country was taken over by the spirit of globalization it was the tribal of India who has preserved the ancient craft

and arts of India. One such form of ethnic Indian art was the jewellery used by the tribes. Ornament used by the tribes stand out in a crowd because of its rustic and earthy flavour. They make jewellery from the indigenous items that are locally available. Moreover the jewellery they prepare exhibit their artistic skill in a profound manner. It can be said that the appeal of the tribal jewellery is mainly due to its chunky and unrefined look. The shapes which they use are basic and very close to the ethnic Indian art.³⁵

Dimasa women ornamented themselves with beautiful traditional jewellery. The Dimasa women ornamented with jewellerys named *Rangbarsa*, the necklaces is of silver coins, *Khadu*, bangles of silver, *Chandrawale* a silver necklaces of floral design having two to three pairs of chain soined together, *eansidam* a nose ring which is also of silver. *Khamouthai* means earnings which are generally made of gold, women of rich families can afford to put this on. Besides this gold and silver jewellery, materials like *Phowal*, Red and Black beads and variety of beads which are available in the jungle were used in jewellery making. *Phowal* necklace has great demand. It is made of silver in which costly sea-shells are used.³⁶ The sea-shells are may have been acquired from sea and Assam is far from sea. This indicates a healthy trade of the Northeast with the other part of the world. The use of this necklace signifies the economic prosperity of the Dimasa families. *Li-kisim*, *Li-kjao* and *Jonshama*, the three neckpieces that are made of jungle beads of black, red, and general beads respectably are very attractive. It is said that *Rangbarsa* which is now in silver, in the royal days it was of pure gold but seems it was only for the upper class women. The Dimasa male uses only two types of ornaments, namely, *Yaocher* and *Kharik*. The former is a silver armlet and the latter is silver earring. But the use of these two ornaments is confined to the old men only.

The study of Dimasa jewellery tradition is very significant. It is not related just with the way of ornamentation or importance of jewellery ornamentation in their Social life, but also indicates their material culture of gold washing. In our discussion we found that Dimasa gold washing was a common

³⁵ Dr. Jyoti Dwivedi, *Indian Tribal Ornament; a Hidden Treasure*, Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology, A.P.S. University Rewa, 2016, p-01

³⁶ B.N. Bordoloi, *Op.cit*, p-94

practice. It is after the coming of the Ahoms that made the culture under their control. For this Ahom created a *khel* system only to wash gold and people recruited from the Dimasa tribe. Gold washing become the Ahom monopoly and the Dimasa gold washer came to known as Sonowal Kachari. A social class or a different community from the Dimasa branch was developed. The Sonowals, a section of the kacharis whose original home was in Cachar, by adopting the occupation of gold working under the patronage of the Ahom kings settled down near the bank of the Subansiri. In the mid-seventeenth century the Sonuwal kacharies converted themselves to Vaishnavism under Keshabdeo, a Gosain of Auniati Satra (sarma 1975:49, 158). Since then the Sonuwals, having separated from the original Kacharies, established themselves as an independent and superior group.³⁷

So the Dimasa not only use the metal jewellery but also developed an important material culture of gold washing in its royal period and a clan called *Daulagajau* to make jewellery for the royal family³⁸ but in Khaspur period we did not come across any special category of jewellery making. It may be of two reasons. The Ahoms superiority in the land after the destruction of the Dimasa royalty and British occupation of the land are the key factors. The Sonowal *khel* were not permitted to use gold for their personal use by the Ahom administration. They have to deposit the gold to the royal treasury one *tola* annually by one member of the *khel* and if they wash excess gold, they could not sell it or to use it. As a result the gold became royal metal. It also affected the jewellery tradition of the Dimasa society, as gold was not only used for manufacturing ornaments and minting coins but a great number of luxurious utensils and in temple architecture. The kachari king Vikramadityapha erected two temples with gold image of *Dasabhujia Durga* and *Baneswar Siva* at Sonapur and Banpur respectively.³⁹ Gold the precious metal was once used by the Dimasas in ornamentation of god and temple, using in sword handle and jewellery, replaced by jungle beads, led and later by silver. The Pre-British period gold jewellery among the Dimasa became very

³⁷ R.K, Bhandra, *Caste and Class:Social Stratification in Assam*.New Delhi, 1991,page-28

³⁸ U.C, Guha, *Op.cit*,p-105

³⁹ Gogoi, Lila, *The History of the system of Ahom Administration*, Punithi Pustak Calcutta, 1991, page-222).

rare. It is during the British that silver jewellery became prominent with other non-metallic jewellery. To catch with the traditional jewellery making of the Dimasas, in later part of the royal days jewellery designs and making was changed, may be due to political contact with the Tripura and may be due to influence of Bengali Brahmins in the royal family.

It is also found that the Dimasa jewellery have a religious significance. Tradition says that in their Sadiya establishment, *Mahadeva* appeared in the guise of a Sannyasi and touched one Dimasa *Manik's* wife and as a result the latter became enceinte. *Manik* was told that his wife would give birth to a child in form of a black cat and he was asked to keep buried in a basket of mustard seed until it turned into a golden one. *Manik* was told by *Mahadeva* that the golden cat would bring him fame and glory and raise him to kingship. The words became true and two clans (*Nunisa and Daulaguphu*) were deputed to worship the golden cat, who was later known as the priest of *Alu-Daikho* (Dimasa area god, *Alu* means Cat and *Dikho* means group). Maintaining the age old tradition the two Dimasa clan did not wear gold jewellery, which also indicates the use of gold jewellery by the Dimasa common people.

In our discussion we can also noticed the scarcity of gold and silver in the later period of Dimasa rule in Maibong and Khaspur for reasons such as lots of gold and silver coins were given away as war tributes. Silver was not found locally and gold washing came under the Ahom control. In this situation jewellery tradition of the Dimasa was affected. Some jewellery became the symbol of aristocracy. It is said that the Copper and base metal coins, or cowries shells, were used to facilitate barter transactions in local markets and villagers used to store silver as wealth. Trade was the only way to get silver, as there is no reference even in post Dimasa era regarding availability of indigenous silver. Silver was raised as taxes charged on trading activities on the borders with Bengal. Scarcity in silver and trading in silver was possible as Dimasa imported silver from Yunnan in China or from Pegu and a net exporter of silver to Bengal.⁴⁰ Needless to say those in such situation silver coins was used by the large traders to their advantage and were also stored by the aristocrats, Brahmins and other wealthy individuals as accumulated wealth. Coins

⁴⁰ N.G,Rhodes & S.K, Bose, *A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis*, Kolkata/Guwahati,2006,pp-73-74

would have been very relevant to the common people, especially to those who resided in the hills. However traditional Dimasa jewellery ornamentation was affected due to Hinduization of Dimasa royal house. Establishment of Karkhana Nagar by the patronage of Dimasa king further encouraged the Bengal artisan in the hilly area. The traditional Dimasa smiths failed to compete with the skilled Bengali smiths and so the traditional Dimasa jewellerymaking profession adopted by the skill persons day by day decreased. Obviously the design and technology of Dimasas jewellery has been changed. *Chandrawal* a silver necklace having two to three pairs of small silver chains joined together is the Bengal artisan influence. 'Chandra' means 'moon' in Bengali language and 'wal' which is a short term of 'Hare' means necklace in Bengali language. 'Eansidam' a cheap nose ring made of silver was started to be used by the Dimasa as their traditional jewellery ornamentation which was also borrowed from the Bengal artisan. Dimasa male ornamentation in form of jewellery started during the Maibang period.⁴¹ Presence of the British in the region and circulation of British silver coins was new to the Dimasa people and like other part of India Dimasa women developed silver coin ornamentation. The necklace of coins which is called *Rangbarsa* in Dimasa becomes a part of traditional Dimasa jewellery ornamentation.

We cannot overrule the fact that the globalization and modern jewellery tradition affected the Dimasa society. With changes in motif, designs and technology traditional jewellery became in varied form. However traditional attire and jewellery is regularly worn by the Dimasa women in every Festival. Dimasa marriage, *busu* festival, and in traditional rituals the tradition of wearing traditional dress and jewellery is seen. Even the Dimasa male use a Dimasa traditional towel, (which is hand woven with beautiful designs) in *Busu* and any Dimasa gatherings. Demands for traditional ornament have increased in this age of globalization than before. Instead of coming from Maibang middle man are used to sell the jewellery. It indicates the increase in jewellery ornamentation among the Dimasas. People became more conscious about their own tradition and so commercialization of jewellery started. In Karbi-Anglong and N.C. Hills district we can visualize the jewellery with certain modifications. The use of varied coloured small beads is seen along with the coins of 25 paisa and with beads of led giving a traditional look to it.

⁴¹ Interview with the Respondent, August, 18th, 2013

In the contemporary period traditional jewellery is quite popular all across the world. The traditional design that gives dull and rough antique look is quite popular now days and people, who value the exclusiveness of antique ornaments, go for it.⁴² Revival of culture is a new move of the tribes and Dimasa are also in the run. Going back to original tribal religion, social customs, and practices is getting much importance. In understanding of the Indian society and its social transformation tribes as entities with their distinct language, culture, custom, and tradition are least recognized⁴³ and thus the rich tribal heritage of India's northeast is under the political boundary of the region, even the rest of India have no idea of Dimasa, Karbi and Bodo culture. In Dimasa case one can recognize it very well within northeast. We have to surrender that beyond the region the tribal culture of the region is not exposed. In many fashion shows Dimasa fabrics and jewelleryes were used but represented as tradition of greater Assamese culture. The tradition is not just a symbol of a tribe but a cultural identity, a mark of culture to have a unique identity. We should represent it in a proper way to focus the tribe's cultural heritage.

With globalization and modernization, while traditional jewellery and ornamentation have undergone changes in motif, designs and colour, we also see a parallel and counter trend that of "going back to the roots". Though this, ethnic wear and jewellery of the tribals, including the Dimasas (as seen in chapter 6) are being encouraged. Moreover as point out previously, while the search for and restoration of Assamese culture has been largely successful, the focusing on Dimasa material culture has not really taken off. Herein lies the justification of a study like the present one. The study here hopes by focusing on the Dimasa jewellery and ornamentation, has been successful in establishing a clear picture of tribal history of the region.

⁴² R. Kelly, Changes in Silver Jewellery Fashion, www.changes_in_silver_jewellery_fashion.html,2011

⁴³ V.Xaxa, Tribal Identity: A Discourse, Dominant Publisher, New Delhi, 2015, p-37-38