

# CHAPTER-I

## The Dimasas: The land and People

Assam, the land made up of the mighty expanse of the Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley as well as the undulating terrains of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, is one of the most beautiful states in the North East region of India. The state is known for the natural resources, which contribute to the national economy. Tea, Coal and Bamboo are among the resources that makes the state proud. The State occupies a strategically vital position in Northeast India. It is situated between latitudes 24 to 28 N and longitudes 89°42 to 96°30E. The state has a total area of 78,438 sq. kilometers out of which the two hill districts (Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao) account for 15,322sq. kilometers (Statistical Hand Book of Assam, 2001).

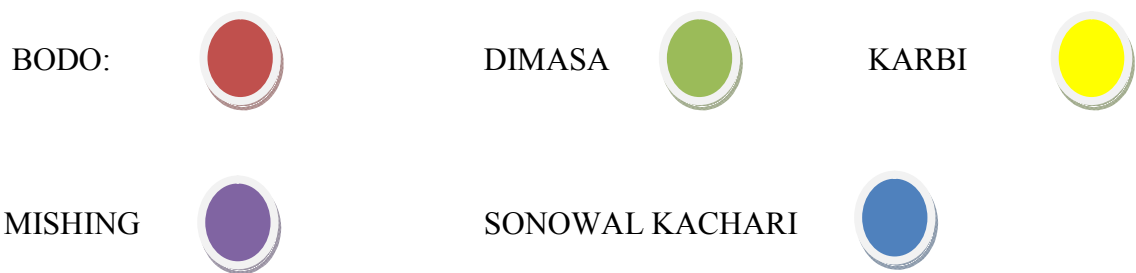
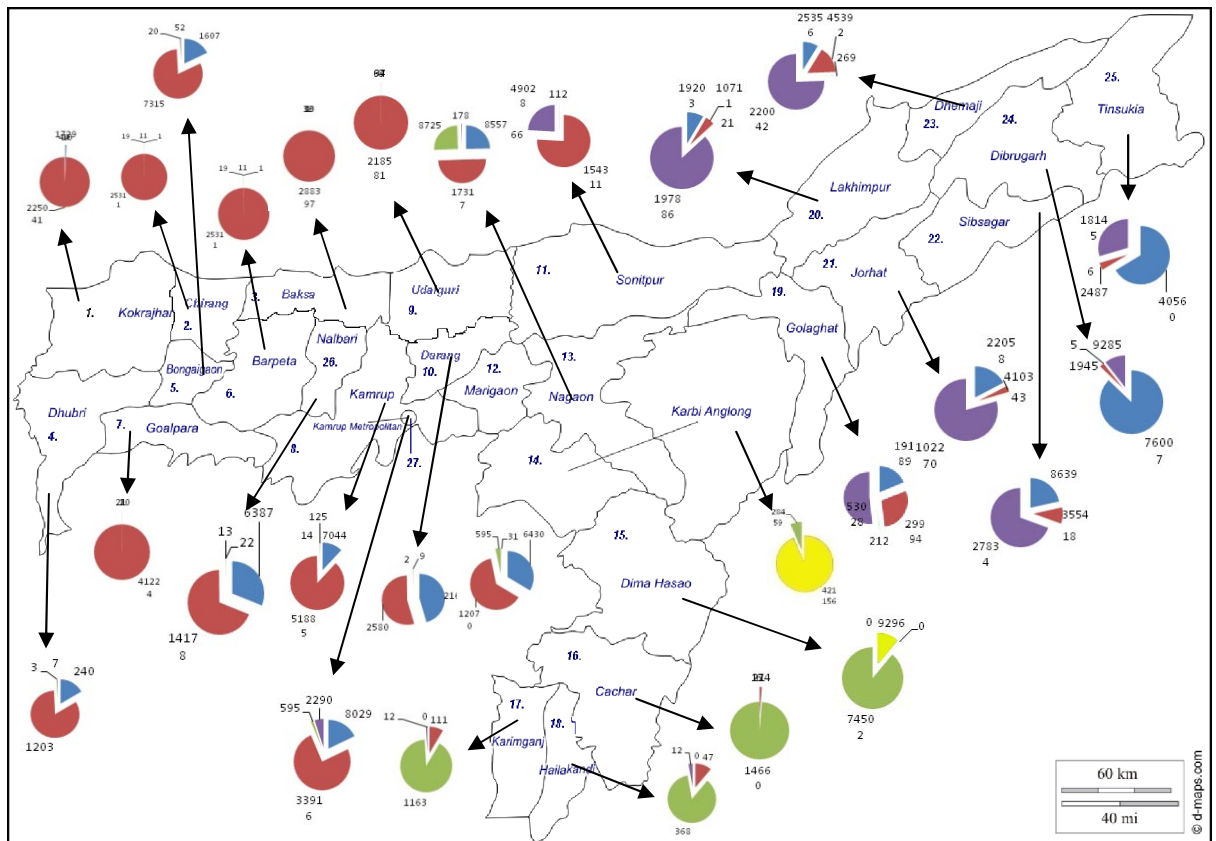


Figure 1: Map of Assam showing the distribution of major tribes including Dimasa

Assam is well-known for the confluence of various ethnic tribes.<sup>1</sup> It has been a meeting place of various ethnic stocks having diverse socio-cultural backgrounds that came to this part of the country during different times and from different directions including the Dimasas with whose history we are particularly concerned. The early history of the Dimasa origin, migration and settlement in Assam has remained a matter of conjecture and inference. However, at present there has been ample awareness and awakening to delve into the past history of these people much of which lies surrounded in legends, myths, folklore, historical relics and writings in the form of manuscripts.

Many Dimasa organizations were formed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to research and preserve their history and culture. *Nikhil Cachar Hiranba Barman Samity, Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad, Jadikhey Naiso Hosom, Dimasa Sahitya Sabha* and *Hasnu Development Society* are important organization in this field. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, development within the tribes on the question of identity also influenced the Dimasa youths. Some time the identity issues have not only been articulated in cultural terms but also in political terms and have taken the form of autonomy movement. The All Dimasa Student Union which was established in 1991, was an active organization to uplift the community in socio-cultural and in economic field. They tried to get cultural exposure in the state in the form of demanding enlistment of their festivals in the state holiday list. The death of Sambhudhan Phanglo the first Dimasa to fight against the British is recognized as Dimasa martyrdom day and 12<sup>th</sup> February is listed as holiday to celebrate the day and 27<sup>th</sup> February for Dimasa *Busu* festival. The organization was successful in signing MOU in 1<sup>st</sup> April 1995 with the state government. The identity issue has been expressed in the form of political rather than the cultural forms with the ongoing demand for a separate state for Dimasa, the *Dima-raji*.

The history of this region and its ethnic group began to be embedded in the chronicles or Buranjis since the advent of the Tai-Ahom in the beginning of the thirteenth century and their political consolidation in the region. Again in the monograph written in 1911 by Rev Sidney Endle, on the request of the Director of the Ethnology, Govt. of Assam and Bengal, the Kacharies were recorded to indicate

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<sup>1</sup> The major tribes of the state according to the 2011 census, are , Bodo, Dimasa,....

who are known today as the Dimasa tribe<sup>2</sup>. However the origin of the term Kachari is very difficult to trace. J.D. Anderson stated that the term Kachari is a corruption of *Koss-ari* and equated with the Koches. On the other hand Mr. G.A. Grierson says “the derivation of Khachari from *Kossari* is however, nothing but a hypothesis and cannot, as yet be proved by any historical fact.”<sup>3</sup> Dr B.K. Kakati and B.K.Barua are of the opinion that the word Kachari is connected with the Sanskrit word *Kaksata*, hypothetical formation parallel to Sanskrit Kirata which refers to the earliest inhabitant of Assam.<sup>4</sup> Sir E.A Gait opines that the term Khachar is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning a ‘bordering region’. The district of Cachar itself might have got its name directly from this word or it might have been so called after its principal tribe. Gait however ruled out the fact that the term Kachari came from the name of Cachar as Kachari were known by the name in many parts of Assam prior to their habitation in Cachar.<sup>5</sup> While the origin of the term Kachari may be a matter of conjecture, all the scholars are of the opinion that the Kachari’s were the original inhabitant of the Assam. They were scattered in different part of Assam under different names such as Bodo-Kachari, Sonowal-Kachari, Mech-Kachari, Barman-Kachari, Thangal-Kachari, and Dimasa-Kachari. In the Brahmaputra Valley the Kachari’s called themselves Bodo or Bodofisa<sup>6</sup> and in the North Cachar Hills and also in Hawaipur, Mohangdijua and Dhansiri areas of the Karbi Anglong District they called themselves Dimasa.<sup>7</sup> By whatever names they called, they are from the same ethnic root.<sup>8</sup> The term ‘Dimasa’ literally means the children or descendants of a big river, meaning the Brahmaputra. ‘Di’ means water, ‘Ma’ means big and ‘Sa’ means children.<sup>9</sup> According to Mr. S.R. Thaosen, the Dimasas were known as Bodosas prior to their settlement in Dimapur. When the Bodosas migrated to Dimapur region and started living on the Bank of the Dhansiri, they came to be known as Dimasa. According to his interpretation the term ‘Dimasa’ refers to the people inhabiting the bank of the river Dhansiri and in

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<sup>2</sup>L.P. Vidyarathi, *Art and Culture of N.E. India*, New Delhi, 1986, p-17

<sup>3</sup>G.A. Grierson, *The Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol-III, Part-II, Delhi, 1967, p-1

<sup>4</sup>B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam, Early Period*. Vol-I, Guwahati, 1969, p-7

<sup>5</sup>E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, Guwahati University, 1963, p-299

<sup>6</sup>B.N. Bordoloi, *The Dimasa Kacharis Of Assam*, Guwahati, 1984, p-6

<sup>7</sup>At present they are known as..Dimasa.

<sup>8</sup>S.K. Barpujari, *History of the Dimasas*, Haflong, 1997, p-12

<sup>9</sup>B.N. Bordoloi, *Op.cit*, p-6

Dimasa the Dhansiri River is called 'Dima'.<sup>10</sup> A similar view is also expressed by Mrs. Nirupama Hagjer in her Assamese book entitled 'Dimasa'. According to her there has been a tradition among the Dimasa to introduce themselves as the children ('Sa') of the place of their habitation. 'Dimasa' in her opinion is derived from Dimapura, that is to say, the people who lived in Dimapur, the ancient capital of the Kachari on the bank of the river 'Dima' (Dhansiri).<sup>11</sup> S.K.Barpujari also stated that the Dimasa are known as 'Hill Kachari' and the Bodos as 'Plain-Kachari'.<sup>12</sup> The Dimasa form distinct tribe by themselves with distinct languages and cultures of their own, and this may have been due to the loss of closer contacts in their day-to-day life over decades. Dimasas in particular disclaim any connection with their kinsmen in the plains (Bodos) in the context of society, culture and ethnicity.

The Dimasa who inhabited in the present district of North Cachar Hills formed a part of ancient Kamrupa and later in the medieval period, it formed the northern part of the Kachari kingdom known as *Herambarajya*<sup>13</sup>. It is mentioned in the *Kachari Buranji* that the first Dimasa king Bicharpatipha was a descendant of Ghatotkacha, the son born of the wedlock of the second Pandava Bhima of Mahabharata fame and Dimasa princess *Hidimba* (so called demon princess) and here scholars argue that a connection has been established between the Dimasa and the Aryan family.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult for the historians to say in the absence of authentic historical information's when the Dimasa established their capital at Dimapur. The mythological beliefs about the *Hidimbarajya* is may be the Dimasa establishment in Dimapur as U.C. Guha in his *Cacharer Itibritta* says that the Dimasa king ruled Dimapur for about four hundred years from 1150 to 1536 A.D.<sup>15</sup> After a long period of Dimasa rule, following the death of Govindra Chandra Narayana (1813-1830 A.D.) the last independent king of Dimasa, the British annexed the district of Cachar to the East India Company's territory on 14 August, 1832 By a Proclamation<sup>16</sup> between 1832 and 1881 distribution and redistribution of old

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<sup>10</sup> S.R.Thousen, *The Dimasa Kacharis in Asomor Janajati* (Assamese), Guwahati,1962,p-44,also see the map.

<sup>11</sup> Nirupama Hagjer, *Dimasa* (Assamese), Jorhat,1974,p-1

<sup>12</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-6

<sup>13</sup> U.C. Guha, *Cacharer Itibritta*, Guwahati, 1971, p.1

<sup>14</sup> R.N.Mosahary, *Aryanisation and Hinduisation of the Bodos*, NEIHA proceedings, Shillong,1989,p-169

<sup>15</sup> U.C. Guha, *Op.cit*.pp-64-65

<sup>16</sup> R.B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India* (Reprint), D.H.A.S., Guwahati, 1996, pp. 198-199.

Dimasa territory took place and in 1881 North Cachar Hills was made a subdivision of Cachar. In 1951 North Cachar Hills was separated from Cachar and it became a subdivision of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District. It was only in 1971 that the North Cachar Hills was made a full-fledged district of Assam with its head quarter at Haflong with one Autonomous District Council<sup>17</sup>.

The present habitation of the people of this tribe is mainly concentrated in the North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, and Nagaon district in South eastern Assam and Dimapur in the state of Nagaland. The region is centrally located in the southern part of Assam bounded by the Hills of Nagaland and Manipur on the east and by the plateau of Jaintia Hills on the west. On the northern part there lies the plateau of the Brahmaputra River and on the south the plain of the upper Barak River. The region extends from 24°56'N to 26°36'N and from 92°7'E to 93°54'E comprising an area of 15,322 sq.km (10,434 sq. km and 4,888 sq km of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills respectively according to 2011 census publication). The Nagaon district of the south eastern part of Assam also absorbed the Dimasa tribes. In the state of Nagaland, Dimasas continue their settlement in the Dimapur area, the once capital of Dimasa Kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

The Dimasas are the *Indo-Mongoloids*, and on the basis of physical appearance, size and structure of head and colour of skin the anthropologists have classified them. Sumit Kumar Chatterjee calls them Indo-Mongoloid<sup>19</sup>.

The Mongoloids present a type of human race with short stature, monocephalic head, flat nose, projecting cheek bones; slit eyes as oblique, their hair dark coarse, straight and scanty. They have also scant moustache their facial features are moulded more smoothly than those of the Europeans



Figure 2: Picture depicting a Dimasa man (Source: [www.historyfiles.co.uk](http://www.historyfiles.co.uk))

or Africans, their body is devoid of hair, and skin colour is brownish yellow. These Mongolian features are said to be prominent amongst the Bodo and the Dimasas of

<sup>17</sup> B.Datta, Roy, *Tribal Identity and Tension in North East India*, Guwahati, 1989, pp.41-42.

<sup>18</sup> S.K.Bhuyan, *Kachari Buranji*, DHAS, Guwahati, 1951, p-3

<sup>19</sup> S.K.Chatterjee, *Kirata Jana Kristi*, Calcutta, 1974, p.45

the plains and the hills respectively. S. Endle is of opinion that in appearance they bear resemblance to the Nepalese, and in face and figure, they show distinct approximation to the Mongolian type<sup>20</sup>.

The Dimasas the 'Bodo' group of the Indo-Mongoloids who are believed to have migrated to the north eastern region from Tibet in ancient history which was known as 'Bodo' country, comprising north Himalayas and North China, which is presently known as Tibet. This suggests that the Bodos originated from Tibet. S. Endle suggest Tibeto-China region to be the original home of the race<sup>21</sup>. 'The imperial Gazetteer of India' states that the upper courses of the Yang-Tse-Kiang and Hoanghowa rivers in the North West China were the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races<sup>22</sup>. It is possible that the Bodos and their allied people had their pre-Assam habitat in Tibet and China. The Bodo saying '*Jouma futma bifa hajoma*' meaning of all the mountains, the highest and the whitest is the father. This saying is very old as it appears from its language and expression. By the highest and the whitest mountain it perhaps points at the snow-clad Himalayas and addresses it as the father. The saying seeks to suggest that the Himalayan or the Trans-Himalayan region was the father land of these tribes prior to their migration to Assam.<sup>23</sup> This proverb is also indicative of the patriarchal set up of the tribes.

Scholars are of the opinion that Mongoloids, came to Assam from different directions at different times. It is to be noted that the flow of migration to India was a continuous process spreading over centuries, it is very likely that the successive waves of immigrants had entered Assam following different routes along the north eastern ranges of the Himalayas, at different points along the foot hills of Bhutan stretching from Eastern Assam to West Bengal, such as Punsting, Karikola, Samduar, Gelempu, Bhaissabkunda, Sandrup Jhanka, Dewangiri.<sup>24</sup>

The Dimasa is a *Tibeto-Chinese* speech family of the *Indo-Mongoloids* group has their own language and is spoken by the people. Dimasa language is rich in numerous folk tales ballads, idioms and lullabies. As the Dimasa have no script of their own thus the oral literature became very strong. Songs, legends and tales

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<sup>20</sup> S.Endle , *The Kacharies*, London, 1911, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> S.Endle , *Ibid*, p.3

<sup>22</sup> S.K Barpujari, *Op.cit*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> M.Mochari, *Op.cit*,p-5

<sup>24</sup> R.N. Mosahary, *The Boros, their origin, migration and settlement in Assam*, NEHA Proceedings, Barapani, 1983, pp.53-54.

are the part of the oral literature. The songs are of various kinds as benedictory, emotive, amorous and magical each of which are set to a distinct and independence *Birili* (note of any musical composition). Each *Birilis* act is like a ‘guide song’. The songs associated with marriage, ‘*Busu*’ (Dimasa harvesting festival) and death are an important part of the oral literature. The song related to worship, the incarnation is also considered as important genre of verbal art or oral literature. The hymns or the traditional mantras uttered by the *Jonthai* (Dimasa priest), in oral form is practiced from generation to generation. The term “*Kharmin Rajathai*” is used in the Dimasa language to denote the meaning of ballad and in term ‘*Mazangdini Rajathai*’ is used to mean love song. The Dimasa oral tradition may claim uniqueness in respect of verse narratives or ballads. But out of a large number of ballads only seven ballads have been explored so far. These ballads may be classified into four. They are as (i) Historical (ii) Legendary, (iii) Magical and (iv) Realistic.<sup>25</sup>

However no systematic inclusion is made under the classification. While collecting the songs we can categorize the song on the basis of its meaning and description. “*Maibangma Hagarbani*” (Memories of Maibang) is one of the historical backgrounds which literally means, on leaving the great *Maibangma* and can be included under the classification of Historical ballads. It is a song in praise of *Maibang*, the historical kingdom of the Dimasa community. It is also a song of nostalgia because it recalls the days of prosperity and bounty which was not enjoyed later.<sup>26</sup> This song is an informative account regarding the fertile soil where there was cultivation of rice, cotton, mango, tamarind and bringal. The song also mentions about the *tulsi* (basil) leave which indicates their religious life. Dimasa widow of the same clan used to weep near the deceased person narrating the person’s life history. The practice is called “*Garasenang*” (Dirge). This type of rituals is also present among the karbis, which they called as *Kachar-he-Abang*.<sup>27</sup> “*Dishrudi*” is another popular ballad which speaks about princes and her sayings.<sup>28</sup> The social status of women along with the male domination in the society is

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<sup>25</sup> Dr.N.C.Sharma,*Oral Songs of Tribal Communities of Assam*, Guwahati, 2006,p.140

<sup>26</sup> Collected from *Komila Difusa*,Age-58,during field survey in the village,Dhansiri,dated-23/07/14

<sup>27</sup> Information gathered by an interview with *Tado Terangpi*, Head of the Department of History, Diphu Government College, Diphu, Karbi Anglong ,Dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April,2015.

<sup>28</sup> Information gathered from *Joi Chandra Hasnu*.Age-60, during filed survey in the village, Mohongdijuwa, dated-25/07/14.

focused in this narration. In the magical group we consider the hymns which are used in different rituals, like to get rid of an evil spirit and hymns that are uttered to relive from jaundice or any other physical sufferings. In the last division of the ballads the cultivation song, weaving song and the love song can be mentioned. *Nordang Thubani*, (song of the night in the bachelor's dormitory), *Ha-Yaobani* (Jungle clearance for jhum cultivation), *Dangba-Jibani Rjabthai* (Song of Existence) are important.<sup>29</sup>

Above all with its rich and meaningful expression, ballads reflect the culture and tradition of the society. The Dimasa oral literature contains most of the genres and sub genres of verbal art as found in other oral literature of the world<sup>30</sup>. It is needless to mention that the Kachari tribes in general and the Dimasas in particular were the earliest inhabitants of Brahmaputra Valley.<sup>31</sup> Here we can take oral literature in this consideration, although sources are meager to state that the Dimasas first ruled in ancient Kamarupa (Kamruli)<sup>32</sup>. It appears certain that the Dimasas had first experimented with the adoursous 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. The Assamese chronicles gives some accounts about their kingdom at Sadiya (Kundil or Kundilya) and this was perhaps the most serious attempt to build up an independent state after their expulsion from Kamrupa. In this connection it is appropriate to refer to the Kachari Buranji which relates in the form of a legend the story of the origin of the royal Dimasa family. The legend says that there was a Dimasa named Manik, Mahadeva who appeared in the guise of a *sannyasi* and touched Manik's wife and as a result the latter became enceinte. Manik was told in his dream what had happened to his wife and that she would give birth to a child in the form of a black cat, and at the same time he was instructed by Mahadeva that the black cat should be kept buried in a basket of mustard seeds until it turned into a golden one. The best piece of information that Manik was fed with was that possession of the golden cat would bring him fame and glory and raise him to kingship. In course of time the prophesy

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<sup>29</sup> Information gathered from N.Nunisa, Member Dimasa Sahitya Sabha.

<sup>30</sup> Dr.N.C. Sharma . *Op.cit*, p. 143.

<sup>31</sup> For details about the origin and racial affinities of the Kacharis with other tribes, see Report on the Census of Assam, 1891, p-224-28; Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp-247-48; S. Endle, *The Kacharia*, pp-3-5.

<sup>32</sup> S.K. Bhuyan, *Op.cit*, P. XVIII



came true and through the potency of the golden cat Manik became king of the Dimasa at and around Sadiya. After Manik's rule his son in law Mukuta inherited the kingdom along with the golden cat (as the king had no son). He extended his kingdom Sadiya to Dikhow River. Kachari Buranji defines Dimasa establishment in Eastern Assam and a close to chutiya political boundary in the north of the Brahmaputra River, taking Sadiya within their political boundary, but the greater mass of its population must have been Kacharis. Apart from the rivers which carry Kachari names, the shrine of *Kechaikhati* or the Tamreswari temple to which the Chutiyas were in the habit of offering sacrifices from very early times was also sacred to the Dimasa. The Dimasas worship the same goddess *Kechaikhati* in the form of *Ranachandi*.<sup>33</sup> From this we can say the Dimasas tried their first political establishment in Sadiya.

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 North East India.. Again some household articles made out of bamboo and cane and some craft objects of the same raw materials have shown close conformity with those which are used in the plains by the neighboring communities. The use of such objects which are closely related to their agricultural lives seems to be the reflection of the cultural growth of the plain. From the mode of their life style, agricultural activities and other culture aspects, the Dimasas of North Cachar Hills cannot be strictly said to be people of hilly material culture. The Karbi, Mizo and Kuki tribes who were inhabited in the Hill tract practiced *Jhum* cultivation where as Dimasa cultivated wet-land cultivation.

Again if we analyze the process 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 this region, where one end of the loom is fixed at a rigid point and the other end is tied round the waist of the weaver. It is a general experience in the high hills; they are seen to weave in the loom having a frame of four posts at four corners of the loom. Again in each and every part of such a loom we notice a clear similarity with those which are used by the plains people of the Brahmaputra

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<sup>33</sup> W.Robinson: *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, Delhi,1975,p-323

Valley. These sorts of practices which are usually of the plains make one believe firmly that the ancestral legacy and the place of the origin of the Dimasa are from the plains.

Some of their materials culture also reflected Dimasa as the original inhabitant of the Brahmaputra Valley. The Dimasa use a large bamboo made container for storing paddy which resembles those used by the people inhabiting the Brahmaputra Valley. In Dimasa it is known as 'Muree', whereas, the plain people of Assam call it the 'Duli'. The skilled workmanship of their artifacts speaks about their sustained craftsmanship in this sphere, which might have been carried down from the Dhansiri basin. As the well known adage goes – "Culture bears no boundary" – these is also possibility of some local impact. However it is more likely that Dimasa had more impact on the Ahoms rather than vice versa.

The *Kachari Buranjis* states that another powerful branch of the Dimasas ruled on the bank of the Dhansiri River with Dimapur as their capital. Some called them southern branch. There are two legendary accounts as regards the origin of the Hedembial<sup>34</sup> time of Dimasa rule. According to one account, 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 (so called demon princess) <sup>35</sup>The second account state that Mahadeva (Siva) desired to established 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. In course of time, a son was born to Deodhani and Siva disappeared. The child was handed over to king Birhas who brought him up and named his Bicharpatipha. When he had grown into a man, Bisha married his daughter to Bicharpatipha and abdicated the throne in favour of his son in-law. He extended his kingdom to Borhat and Namchary beyond the Disang in the Naga Hills and included these within his territory. In the *Kachari Buranji* Baicharpatipha has been considered as the first historical king of the Kacharis. <sup>36</sup>

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

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<sup>34</sup> Dimasa oral tradition is rich in legends nabout the Hidimba, the queen of Bhima

<sup>35</sup> S.K.Bhuyan:*Op. cit* p-3

<sup>36</sup> S.K.Borpujari, *Op.cit*,p-34

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.<sup>37</sup> 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 hundred years from 1150 A.D. to 1536 A.D.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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 the Dimasa architecture in previous years were the important source of information of the civilization. The remains of little historical work seen in Dimapur, one can realize the artistic skill of the Dimasas.<sup>40</sup> It revealed very little by way of physical evidence of Dimasa architecture. It is a sad state of affairs to say the least as an area which was the seat of earliest civilization of the region for generations has almost no physical proof of its existence.

The Ahom's westward expansion in 1268-81 A.D brought them into contact with the Dimasa. Though Ahom did not dare to declare war against the well established Dimasa kingdom, History says how Ahom occupied the Dimasa territories by foul means and took territories up to Namdang. About two hundred years this river appears to have formed the boundary between the two kingdoms.<sup>41</sup> However after that a series of struggle continued between Ahom and Dimasa and in 1536 A.D Ahom become the masters not only the Dhansiri Valley but also whole of the Dimasa possessions north-east of the kalang river in Nowgong. The end of Dimasa establishment in Dimapur was completed. But the tribe had the 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 socio-cultural and economic condition of the Dimasas. Along with political

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<sup>37</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-36

<sup>38</sup> U.C. Guha,*Op.cit*, pp-64-65

<sup>39</sup> B.N.Bordoloi, *Op.cit*,p-15

<sup>40</sup> A visit to the Dimapur on 7<sup>th</sup> July,2016.

<sup>41</sup> L.Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, Guwahati,1964,p-79

connections with many tribes adoption of new culture was also took place. *Modan kumar*, the son and general of ‘*Detchung*’ or ‘*Desongpha*’ after establishing himself at Maibong took the Hindu name *Nirbhayanarayana*.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> The Dimasa coin was struck first during this period is a rare *tanka* in the name of king *Viravijayanarayana*.<sup>44</sup> 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, who 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 extened 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 sovergnity; 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.<sup>45</sup>

Dimasa rule in Khaspur is a phase in marked architectural development. The palace complex and the Ranachandi temple at khaspur were their greatest achievements. The period between 1745A.D to 1832A.D. saw Dimasa rule in Khaspur as a period of struggle for the sovergnity. Manipuri occupation of Cachar paved the way for Burmese policy of imperial expansion which led to the abandonment of the Company’s policy of non-intervention.<sup>46</sup> On March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1824, the British under Mr, David Scott, and Agent to the Governor-General in the North East Frontier entered into an agreement, at Badarpur by which Raja Govindachandra’s kingdom was taken under British protection. The agreement was necessary on the ground that Burmese may come to interfere Dimasa state’s affairs

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<sup>42</sup> N.K, Barman, *The Queens of Cachar or Herambo etc*, Borkola, 1974,p-131

<sup>43</sup> J.B, Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in pre-colonial North East India*, New Delhi,1991,p-150

<sup>44</sup> N.G, Rhodes & S.K, Bose, *A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis*,Kolkata/Guwahati,2006,p-14

<sup>45</sup> Amanat Ahmad Ullah, *Koch Beharer Itihas*, Cooch Behar, 1926,p-237

J.B.Bhattacharjee,*Op .cit*,p-149

<sup>46</sup> J.B, Bhattacharjee, *Op.cit*,p-38

as Dimasa king Govindochandra was much advanced in age and was without any issue.<sup>47</sup> Govindachandra the last Dimasa king died leaving no natural heir 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.<sup>48</sup> Tularam Senapati, the redoubtable chief was thus reduced to the position of no better than a 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, British just concluded the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 and started a consolidated rule. A strong leader was needed in the borders for the cause of the British. After the decline of the Dimasa kingdom regular barter relations among the neighboring tribes started declining and a struggle started. Dimasa and Naga's friendly relation whom we talked about in the early Dimasa establishment in Dimapur came to an end. The main reason behind their hostility was for the possession of the salt-spring at Semkhor.<sup>49</sup> 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 were annexed to North Cachar by means of a proclamation issued on 3 December 1853 and it was merged 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.<sup>50</sup> 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

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<sup>47</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*, pp-70-71

<sup>48</sup> Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 6 Nov. 1850, No. 127

<sup>49</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*, p-100

<sup>50</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *Resumption of Tularams Territory: A Reappraisal*, I.H.C. Proceedings, Aligarh, 1976, p-434

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.<sup>51</sup> 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 be 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 liked by the Dimasa orthodox society, as their traditional clan system was affected. Bengali Brahmin 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



Figure 3: Picture depicting Dimasa girls in traditional dress

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<sup>51</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-108

British headquarters at Gunjung on 15 January 1882. In the skirmishes that 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. He ultimately died in 1863 A.D.<sup>52</sup> By the end of that year Dimasa political activity in the region also came to an end.

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 bank of Mahur river in the North Cachar Hills, a short distance from the Barail range.<sup>53</sup> 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 this basis it is in the Dimasa history that the Dimasa king reigned from Dimapur for about 450 years.<sup>54</sup> In the year 1536 A.D Dimasa king were defeated by the Ahom and Dimasa territory 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. If the period 1086A.D to 1832 A.D. is accepted as the historical period of the Dimasa kingdom, it can be said that the Dimasa has ruled the region for a period longer than the Ahoms.

According to Dimasa myth of creation they are the descendants of gods who were born in this world in the form of human beings. According to this one *Bangla Raja* and his consort *Arikkhidima* (a great divine bird) lived in a place called *Damra*. *Arikkhidima* who had a divine conception faced a great problem in finding out a suitable place to lay her eggs. A Golden Eagle was sent to search out such a place in the confluence of *Dilao* and *Sangi* rivers. There *Arikkhimda* laid seven eggs.

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<sup>52</sup> '100 years of Haflong' Centenary Commemorative Souvenir, Haflong, 1995,p-24

<sup>53</sup> S.R, Thousen, *Dimasa*, An Article in Assamese in Asomor Janajati, Edited by P.Bhattacharjee, Guwahati, 1962, p-47

<sup>54</sup> Oral literature commonly practiced in Dimapur, collected from Lokey Hasnu, Age-75, dated 23/06/13

Out of which she successfully hatched six benevolent gods – *Sibrai, Alu raja, Naiku raja, Wa raja, Yuniyang Braiyung* and *Hamiadao* who are called *Madai* (God). The seventh egg which did not break is the natural course when broken produced ugly shaped evil spirit causing wide spread chaos.

A Dimasa Kachari legend also tells that in the beginning there was only deep silence and the earth was very sparsely populated. From the silence evolved a man and a woman became pregnant. In course of time she laid seven eggs. From the first six eggs kings and gods were born and the *Hendeos* looking evils spirit came out from the seventh egg. This legend shows the apparent influence of Hindu mythology on the Dimasa culture, as according to Manu Smiriti in the beginning there was only deep darkness, the creator produced water and put his seeds in it. The seeds became golden eggs and the creator himself was born as Brahma, the progenitor of the world. He then divided the remaining eggs and made the two halves into the heaven and the earth.

The six gods mentioned above are considered the ancestral deities by the Dimasas and the whole Dimasa land is under this jurisdiction. Out of this idea emerged the concept of area god amongst them. It is believed by them that the god of a particular area controls the lives of that area. These area gods have their unstructured abodes in different places of the Dimasa land and their abodes or shrines area known as *daikhos*. There are twelve *daikhos* and each daikho had a priest known as *Jontai*. Over twelve *Jontai*, there is a principal priest known as *Gisa* who with all the Jontais perform the annual worship for the well being of the Dimasas. The priests are selected only from the Hasnusa clan which is a priestly one.<sup>55</sup>

The Dimasa practice a religion which is a blend of old traditional animistic faith and Hindu beliefs and practices. The religion therefore followed by the Dimasa is more or less a mixture of animistic and Hinduism. Their religion is based on the belief on super naturalism. They believe that the spirit live everywhere around their world and are always hostile to human beings. For them all sorts of sickness, death calamity and misfortune are caused by the spirit living around them. In order to get rid off from such things, they therefore appear the concern spirit by

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<sup>55</sup> Information gathered from field visit to Mohongdijuwa and Hojai...dated-04/08/2013



sacrificing fowls and animals unceasingly. Above all they also believe that there is a supreme being who is regarded as the creator of the world and is harmless whom they call '*madai*' and though there is no prescribed form of worshipping him. On any auspicious occasion such as marriage, harvest festival, his blessings are sought for with folded hands. Dimasa religion according to Rev. Kailash Chetri is monotheistic because Dimasa believes in one creative Supreme Being who lives in an unknown and inaccessible world<sup>56</sup>.

However the influence of Hinduism is seen among the Dimasa during the Maibang period. *Shivrai* and *Ranachandi* are equated with Hindu god Siva and Goddess *Parvati (Kali)* respectively. Now days the worship of Hindu goddess *Lakshmi* and *Saraswati* have also found favor among the Dimasa. Their favored goddess *Langmailaisa* (the goddess of paddy) can be identified with Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth). It might be due to the Brahmanical influence in the Dimasa royal court from Maibang to Khaspur. According to N.K. Barman, the Dimasa were divided at that time into two groups the first Puritan section which discarded paganism, abstained from keeping and eating pigs and fowls and put on holy thread and the second section which denounced innovation continued their own animistic ways of keeping and eating pigs and fowls and shunned reform under Vedic ways and culture. The reforms sections known as the Barman of Cachar worship all the gods and goddesses of the Sakta faith and engage Brahmana priests in their religious functions.<sup>57</sup>

The most noteworthy features of Dimasa religion is that the whole Dimasa kingdom was divided into twelve religious areas called *daikho*. It is believed that the god and goddesses residing in a particular *daikho* protect the people of that area and control their destiny. The twelve divisions based on religion have their own presiding deities. Since the Dimasa do not have representative images of god and goddess, they raise some earthen mounds to represent their deities at the time of worship. Besides the deities of the *daikhos*, each Dimasa village has its own popular deities. .

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<sup>56</sup> Rev, Kailash Chetri ,*The Dimasa religion*, A Thesis for attaining M.Th. (unpublished material), p.45.

<sup>57</sup> B.N.Bordoloi,*Op.cit.*p-68.

The concept of life and death of the Dimasas does not fundamentally differ from the Hindu concept of life and the death. The Dimasa believe in the concept of rebirth. Soul is known as the *base*. They do not believe that the soul decay with physical death of a man. To them it maintains its continuity through the process of birth and rebirth and hence soul is immortal. They think that after death it is transformed into spirit called '*Simung*' and it resides in the cremation ground until all the funeral rites are over. When all these are completed the relationship between the spirit of the dead and its living relatives is completely cut off and then only the *Simung* is eligible for rebirth.<sup>58</sup>

The Dimasa myth and mythology is a mixture of Hindu and traditional animistic believes. Again the Dimasas of Assam area in a period of transition due to the impact of modernization of the traditional Dimasa way of life is changing very fast and thus the myth and rituals of these ancient people are fast disappearing. However the senior generation of the tribe still continues in carrying the age old customs and tradition. A visit to Haflong, Nowgaon and Karbi Anglong areas reveals that the elderly people of the clan continue in their traditional customs but with little variation according to the area. The greater Dimasa land is now divided into four customary areas, Temra, Dijuwa, Hawar and Hasau. The Dimasa who are residing in Nowgaon District is called as Temrasa. Dimasas residing in Karbi Anglong District is called as Dijuwasa. Dimasas of Cachar and N.C Hills are called Hawarsa and Hasausa respectively. And it is obviously there have been influence and counter influence among the different tribes and races.

Dimasa myth and mythology also influenced by the Aryans with their superior organizing capacity and well developed languages have undoubtedly swept the land. But though the Dimasa, had picked up quite a number of gods and goddess, maximum rituals are originally their own. "They picked up Siva and they picked up Kamakhya, who was believed to be another goddess in the keeping of earlier kiratas"<sup>59</sup>. The culture is man-made and means of life which used to change with its need and requirement. The names were also spelt differently to mean the same god and goddesses as the Dimasa named Sivrai or Sivraj to mean Siva and Ranachandi to mean Parvati or Kali. It is because of that we can found Dimasa

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<sup>58</sup> S.K.Barpujari, *Op.cit*, p-144

<sup>59</sup> Jogesh Das, *Folklore of Assam*, New Delhi, 5<sup>th</sup> re-print, 2005

coins of bygone days depicting the picture of Siva and Parvati scripted as “*Haro-Gouri*”.<sup>60</sup>

Dimasa social life is also very rich with many rituals connected with every aspect of human life. The harvesting festival, the rituals of birth and death, marriage and the role of the village panchayat is very interesting. The basic structure of a Dimasa family is its patriarchal character. A Dimasa family comprise of the husband and his wife, their unmarried sons and daughters and the unmarried brothers and sisters of the head of the family. After their marriage, the sons and brothers have to live separately. However there is a system known as *Minbaha* which allows a newly married son-in law to remain temporarily for about a year in his father-in law house till he erects his own house to live separately. This system does not appear to be popular with the new generation and such it has been losing its ground. In the modern period basic structure of a Dimasa family can be called unitary in character.

The most outstanding characteristic of the Dimasa social life is the existence of clans, both male and female. There are forty male clans (*Sengphong*) and forty two female clans (*Julu or Jaddi*). Both the clans male and female are exogamous and no marriage can take place between boys and girls of the same clan. No one can marry in his father’s clan or mother’s clan. The son belongs to the father’s clan and the daughters to the mother’s clan. Bordoloi is of opinion that the existence of female clans is the most outstanding features of the social life of the Dimasa and such divisions of clans on the basis of sex are rarely found in the tribal societies. The number of female clan is numerically more than of the males. There are forty ‘*sengphong*’ (male clan) and forty two ‘*Julu or Jaddi*’ (women clan) in the Dimasa society. Every *Sengphong* (male) has its own deity. The ancestral God of the *Sengphong* (male clan) which first established in the village is believed to be the presiding deity of the village.<sup>61</sup> No deity for female clan was exists in the society. Other contemporary tribes of the North Cachar Hill like the Naga, Kuki, and Hmar did not bear such type of the clan system. No inter cast marriage is permitted in the Dimasa society. If any Dimasa boy or girl elopes with other different tribal partner, marriages were not recognized unless they go through a series of rituals. The Dimasa did not like the idea of inter cast marriage and in order to discourage this

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<sup>60</sup> N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose, *A History Of The Dimasa-Kacharis*, Kolkata: Guwahati, 2006. p-76

<sup>61</sup> Interview taken with Alit Hasnu, *Dimasa Jonthai (priest)*, Mohongdijuwa, dated, 12/08/13

sort of union elders of royal court convened a meeting of the Dimasa women and introduced matriclan system of them. The king also proclaimed that any marriage between Dimasa man and girl without matriclan or 'Julu' would be considered illegal. As the neighboring tribes do not have matriclan, a check to understand intra-tribes marriage had been put into operation and creation of "*Julu*" is done. It is believed that the kachari king during their reign in Khaspur had increased the '*sengphong*' and '*julus*' in order to tone up the royal treasury to look after the affairs relating to creation of more patriclans and matriclans and include desirous people into the clan folds, the king had a special officers known as '*Samdiklenang*'. In this king special Darbar of elderly people and leaders of Dimasa used to gather at Khaspur every year. Dimasas living in the Nowgong and Karbi Anglong also attended this Darbar reaching Khaspur after travelling by boats and on foot for about a fortnight.<sup>62</sup>

Person desirous of enlisting themselves into patriclans and matriclans could do so by offering gold, silvers, ivory and cash money to the royal treasury. However along with the death of the last kachari king Gobind Chandra, this system of conferring *sengphong* and *julu* was also stopped.<sup>63</sup> The clan tie is very strong among the Dimasa and fulfillment of clan obligation to the clan members is must. To the funeral feast of a man, the members of the patriclan and matriclans must be invited. Violation of this rule is considered to be serious offence. Dimasas clan tie is so deep rooted that an offence done to a clan member by a man outside the clan is considered to be an offence against the members of the entire clan without considering whether the clan's member is guilty or not. On the other hand, one positive point regarding Dimasa strong affiliation to their clan is lesser indulgence in crimes and offences as nobody tries to tarnish the fair name of his or her clan by doing foul deeds. We may conclude here by quoting Mr. Sappit "All kacharis are clannish and insult or offence to anyone of them being often taken up by the whole village or community".<sup>64</sup>

Though the clan divided the Dimasa population in the society, the "*Nodrang*" or the Bachelor's Dormitory is a common platform for the Dimasa youths. This type of community houses among tribes of India can be seen in pre-

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<sup>62</sup> B.N.Bordoloi, *Op.cit*, p-43

<sup>63</sup> *Ibide*, p-43

<sup>64</sup> C.A.Soppit, *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribe in the N.C Hills*, Shillong 1885, p-13.

literate period. Earliest account of such type of dormitory is *Nagas'* great bachelors' hall and the Oraons' youth dormitories.<sup>65</sup> There are the great men's houses (*morung*) of certain Naga tribes which serve as social centers not only of the unmarried youths but also of the married men. This institution plays a vital role in coordinating the activities of all male members of the communities and may gain particular importance in those warlike societies which depend on the young men for the defense of the village. In the traditional Dimasa society '*Nodrang*' or bachelor's dormitory is used to play an important role in the social customs and remains a purely masculine institution. There are no dormitories for their unmarried girls and the entry of girls into bachelor's dormitory is not allowed. A young boy of above 12 years in age can stay in the "*Nodrang*" till his marriage. The "*Nodrang*" is generally constructed in an accessible place of the village and is almost like a big hall having no compartments, but there is a hearth in the centre of the hall and during the winter the inmates of the "*Nodrang*" can sit around it. There is also '*Chang*' or raised platforms made of bamboos to sleep at night. The hall is artistically decorated and musical instrument like the *Kharam* (Drum) *Murli*, *Suphin* etc. are kept within it. The '*Nodrang*' is used as a club house and serves the purpose of an organization of youths of the village. As there is to be only one *Nodrang* in the village, all unmarried automatically become members of the *Nodrang*. It is in the *Nodrang* young boys learn the art of dancing, singing and playing of musical instruments. They also learn the art of making bamboo and cane articles including the art of haunting and fighting. The latter technique is very important because the *Nodrang* serves the purpose of a guard house for the protection of the village from outside attack and from wild animals. The *Nodrang* accommodates strangers as well. As the *Nodrang* is a hub of youth; it serves as an effective body during the time of the village festivals like the *Busu* which is an important annual harvest festival. This festival is always under the leadership of a very efficient young boy known as *Nagahoja* (leader of the youths). He is also helped by a female counterpart of same efficiency known as *Malahoja* (girl representative), they have also young assistants called *Malapharais* (assistants from boy and girls). The members of the *Nodrang* make elaborate arrangements attending to the minute's details for the success of this annual festival. Besides

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<sup>65</sup> Dr.N.L.Dongre,IPS,Ph.d.,D.Litt, *Institution of Youth Dormitories Among Tribes of India*.p-2.

these the boys of the *Nodrang* render social services such as tilling the land of the invalid, roofing the houses of the widow and clearing of jungles, helping in the death ceremonies in marriage parties with the traditional rituals. The composite life of the *Nodrang* fosters spirit of discipline, social service, cooperation and fellow feeling besides offering opportunities of learning traditional arts and crafts. <sup>66</sup> The men's house is an important element in the social structure of the Dimasa. The *Nodrang* is a symbol of self-sufficiency and importance lay in the field of economic contribution. Helping the poor during marriage and death is appreciable. Moreover their helping hand in the cultivation and in shelter to poor is remarkable. The youth dormitory itself must be regarded as the expression of a social tendency, an 'ethos', rather than as an isolated 'element' of culture. It plays active role in educating youth of the community in all aspects, practicing of material culture, songs, dance, assisting in ritual customs, helping in marriage ceremonies, death ceremonies and most important they are very active in cultivation both in *jhum* and shifting. The *Nodrang*, we may call as the institute of bachelor's education.

Besides the *Nodrang* the Dimasa have an important economic organization of the youths known as *Hangseu*. It is an organization of both male and female based on the principle of co-operation and mutual help. It is organized with the purpose of working together in cultivation and the member of the *Hangseu* complete the unfinished work in the *Jhums* and in wet paddy fields of each family on contract basis with very nominal charge. The primary purpose of this institution is to help the poor families to a considerable extent. The leader of the *Hangseu* is also known as *Naga haja* <sup>67</sup> and is the guiding spirit of the institution. The president of the *Hangseu* is called *Gujaibas*. There is another institution in a Dimasa village known as "*Surem*" which is an organization of similar age group and sex for working together in the fields. There may be more than one *Surem* in a village, whereas there is only one *Hangseu* in a village. <sup>68</sup>

The marriage in Dimasa society is monogamous. Child marriage is unknown in the society. Widow marriage is allowed, a young brother may marry his elder brother's wife, but an elder brother cannot marry his younger brother's widow. Similarly, a man can marry the younger sister of his wife but not her elder

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<sup>66</sup> Filed survey, in the Dimasa populated area. (Haflong, Nowgaon, Cachar & Karbi Anglong) dated-12/05/12

<sup>67</sup> *Naga* means young and *haja* means leader.

<sup>68</sup> Information gathered from field survey...dated-12/05/12

sister. Cross cousin marriage is allowed but within the nearer tie of consanguinity is not permitted. The Dimasa follows the rules of exogamy too rigidly and violation of such rules leads to excommunication from the society. The Dimasa society does not welcome any boy or girl marrying to a non-Dimasa. However in recent years some such marriages have been taking place but they are not recognized unless they go through a series of customs. If a Dimasa boy marries a non-Dimasa girl, she is adopted to the Dimasa society by a ritual of purification. Interested male member from the close family member used to give the clan name and in the same time she is also given a new women clan. But in the case of Dimasa girl married to a non-Dimasa boy, she is ex-communicated from the society. She cannot even come to her parents place to perform any rituals. In her siblings marriage she is just an invitee. Though the Dimasa society is equal in male and female regarding their clan system, male domination in respect of the inter-cast marriage cannot be un-noticed. Marriage by negotiation is the actual practice, although consent of both boy and the girls is taken into consideration. In case of such marriage, the father and the elder male relatives of the boy visit the girls' house on a fixed date and start negotiations for the proposed marriage. After two more such visit from the side of the boy a date for the marriage is fixed. In course of the final negotiations the bride price known as the '*Kalti*' is also settled. The *Kalti* varies from Rs. 30 to R. 500 depending upon the economic capacity of the bridegroom and also the quality of the bride. Along with the expenditure in kind such as pig, goats, fowls, rice-beer etc. will have to be offered from the groom side for the marriage feast to be solemnized at the brides' place. However the payment of the *Kalti* is disfavored by the educated section of the people. Speaking about the uniqueness of the system of *Kalti*, it is other part of the India the problem of dowry has become a national social evil but in Dimasa society the bride is paid a price to which she entitled to<sup>69</sup>.

Divorce in Dimasa society is very rare. On receipt of an appeal for divorce, society always tries to remove the misunderstanding between the husband and wife. If it fails, an appeal is made from the party or parties to the '*Khunang*' who is the traditional headman and village elder. If divorce takes place because of the fault of the husband, he cannot get back the *Kalti*, but in case the fault lies with the wife the same must be returned to the husband. If divorce takes place by mutual

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<sup>69</sup> Anupama Naiding, *Position of Dimasa Women in Traditional Society in the Tribal Women* edited by B.C. Bhyan, New Delhi, 1993, pp.68-69.

consent, the repayment of the *Kalti* is also settled mutually. After divorce is granted, the male issues are allowed to be taken by the father and the female ones are given to the mother. By birth, clan of father is the clan of his son and likewise mother clan is the clan of daughter. Both the divorced husband and wife can re-marry after performing a few rituals.

The coming of a new born, whether a boy or girl is always an occasion of Jubilation in a Dimasa family. Two elderly women, the *Dhai* (*Hajai Sule*) and her assistant (*Barwaja*) used to play an important role during and after delivery of the child. After the birth of the child, the mother is isolated and this period of isolation lasts till the naval chord of the new born falls off and purifying ceremony of the mother of the child takes place. During this period she is not allowed to cook and fetch water for others and even the father of the child cannot go out for three days from the day of Birth.

Unlike birth which is an occasion for joy in the family the death is an event of mourning and gloom for the family members and the relatives. The close relatives of the deceased observe mourning. Soon after death a cock is sacrificed by the male member of the family near the head of the deceased. It is believed that he sacrificed cock will show the deceased the right way to the heaven. If the deceased is a married man the wife is not allowed to tie the knot of her hair till the dead body is cremated.

The Dimasa cremate the dead. Before the dead body is taken to the cremation ground called "*Mangphlang*" the body is bathed ceremonially and then placed on a bier (*Bangfong*) made of split bamboos. The number of the bamboos used in the making of this bier shows the social status of the deceased. If the deceased belongs to a poor family only one bamboo is used for making the bier. And in the funeral ceremony that is to be observed at a later date an animal has to be sacrificed. Each of the four people carrying the bier to the cremation ground will get a leg of the sacrificed goat. If the deceased belongs to a well to do family more than one bamboo have to be used in making the funeral bier and two buffaloes have to be sacrificed during the funeral ceremony.

Before taking the body to the cremation ground, new cloths are put on according the sex of the deceased. But under no circumstances red coloured cloth is used. The Dimasa believe that if the dead body is consigned to flames with red colour cloths on, the deceased in his next birth is likely to suffer from leprosy.



When the ceremonial bathing and clothing ceremonies are over, a few one rupee silver coins are placed on the forehead, eyes and mouth of the dead body. A few close female relatives, generally from the same *Julu* and *Sengphong* of the deceased then sit around the dead body and start weeping by singing a very melancholy song called *Garasangnang*. The funeral procession starts from the house of dead person and in this procession people of all ages and both sex can take part. But the aged women generally take their place at the head of the procession. The dead body is carried to the cremation ground by four people on the bier. A woman continuously throws paddy and cotton on the sides of the village road from a basket while another women draws raw cotton thread along the road leading to the cremation ground. The Dimasa have a strong faith that the deceased will be reborn in his own house or in one of the houses of his close relatives. Throwing the paddy and cotton and drawing of raw cotton thread along the road signifies that the deceased will recognize the path leading to its village and home and this will enable him to return to the earth in the shape of a new born child. Thus this process may be regarded as the construction of a bridge between the dead and the living and it is called *Kunyaocry Maiyaocry Saiba*.

The funeral pyre with seven layers of bamboos and logs are generally constructed in the cremation ground by the youth of the *Nodrang*. Here Dimasa people used to buy the land (where the deceased is going to cremated) with a minimum value. They also constructed a temporary hut there so that the soul of the dead person may take rest for the time being. This temporary hut is called '*JARA*'. A closed basket made of bamboos and a piece of cloth called *RINO* is also carried with the funeral procession. It is required to carry the spirit of the dead person from the house to the cremation ground. As soon as the procession arrives at the cremation ground the *RINO* is opened and the spirit is transferred to the temporary hut called *JARA*.

The dead body is then placed on the pyre which is already constructed. In the meantime rice-beer is offered to the spirit of the dead person at the *JARA*. Two son or in their absence two close male relatives with burning torch in hand stand at either side of the dead touching each other's torch and then set fire to the pyre from both side. The placement of the dead body on the pyre is an important thing to be taken care of. The head must be kept westward. The relatives and the other people who assemble there for the purpose of cremation pray to the dead ancestors of the

deceased to treat him or her in the other world with due honors. When the burning of the body is completed a piece of charred bone is collected and kept within the *JARA*. The fire is extinguished with water and the ashes and other remain are collected and thrown way in the mid stream of a river or a stream.

Death in a family is considered unholy and hence some purification rituals are also to be performed. When the dead body is taken to the cremation ground the family members who do not attend the funeral ceremony wash the floors and the plinths of the house with muddy water. Holy water prepared by dipping Gold, Silver and Copper with Tulsi leaves is taken sprinkled over all cloths and household articles. Those who returned home after attending the funeral must have a bath with holy water called *DITHER*, prepared by the village priest prior to their entrance to the village. In this way animate as well as inanimate objects are purified. In the death ceremony there is no invitation from the house of the dead. People used to attend without any formal invitation as their duty to free the spirit of the dead to go in the next birth. The Dimasa believe that the entertainment of a larger number of people at the death ceremony ensure the spirit of the deceased a more happy and prosperous life in the next birth.

The Dimasa socio-religious activities also reveal their skilled and self-sufficient material culture. Bamboo and Cane work is an important material culture of the Dimasas. Almost all the domestic requirement in bamboo is fulfilled by the male member of a family. Varieties of bamboo baskets, for different purpose is prepared in every household. Like for keeping cloths, ornaments, paddy, rice, even for caring water and small baskets to be use in religious activities are prepared by them. Bamboo is also used in making loom and construction of houses. Besides these in every religious and social ceremonies bamboo is used. In birth, marriage and death festivals the use of extensive bamboo work is seen Bamboo is also used in preparing in Dimasa Musical instrument. In the Dimasa society there is no system of using hired labour, which indicates the habituation of skilled hand in material culture. Preparing *Ju-Dima* (rice beer) is another material culture of the Dimasa, where some of the important utensils were prepared from bamboo. *Yengthi*, *Chani*, *Jengsong* or *Yengshong* are important. '*Ju-Dima*' or rice beer is essential in every Dimasa function. Religious rituals, birth, marriage, death and in marry making *Ju-Dima* is consumed by the Dimasa. Dimasa women are expert in preparing *Ju-Dima*.

Besides their socio-religious practices, they ornamented themselves with beautiful jewellery and colorful traditional dresses. Both man and woman are fond of beautifying their body. Traditionally both man and woman use jewellery. Jewellery culture among the Dimasa is very rich and one of the important material culture of the tribe. The ornaments are of varied forms and designs which together provide their folk-art a distinctive style. The major parts of their ornament are made of silver, even though necklaces made of beads are also considered very precious. *Chandrawal*, a silver necklace, *powal*, a red bead necklace *jongshomma* a neckpiece of jungle beads and *rangbarsa* a necklace of silver coins, *khadu* a bangle made of silver and *khamaothai* or ear ring are important jewellery of a Dimasa woman. Dimasa man used only two type of jewellery *Yaocher* a finger ring and *Kharik* or ear ring. The traditional attire of Dimasa community carries the message of their cultural identity. They used to get all necessary cloths from the family loom. They are a unique example in the craft of weaving. The indigenous dresses of the community occupied a high position in the handloom industry of Northeast India. People with versatility in weaving and textile has a distinct position in the socio-cultural world and also forms a part of their ancestral legacy. *Rikhousa*, *Rajamphaing barren* and *Rigoo* are traditional garments used by the Dimasa female folks. *Sgaopha*, *Rigdo*, *Risha*, *Gainthao*, *Rikhaosa*, *Rithap*, *Remshau* and *Magong* are important male attires.

Dimasa stone work or ornamentation in architecture is also another notable character. Many architectural works of Dimasa reflects their artistic skill and technology. The symbolic significance in the architecture focused on the tribe's philosophy of life. Dimapur and Kachomari remains of Dimasa establishment focused the Dimasa use of mortars in brick masonry and quarrying of the stone blocks. The stone pieces are not only enormous in size, they are thoroughly ornamented also. From their artistic skill we can realize the tribe's primitive megalithic tradition and the ornamental fancy of the late-medieval period. After a close examination it is said that the self-standing columns and structural pieces were the greatest contribution of the Dimasas in the plastic art. The archeological evidence of Dimasas in Dimapur speaks of the megalomania of a dynasty of victorious monarchy. The stone triumphal arch or the gate-way as stated by S.K.Barbujari is the best examples of a transition of a long primitive tradition to its

classical stage.<sup>70</sup> The fortification of Dimapur by the Dimasa shows their age of supreme skill in planning, execution and subtle treatment. The Dimasa patronage in architecture in their pre-British period is also seen in Maibang and Khaspur with Hindu influence.

Prior to the advent of the Mughal, our knowledge of the Dimasas is limited to what can be laboriously pieced together from old inscriptions, the account of foreign invaders or travelers, and incidental references in religious writings. On the other hand, Ahom conquerors of Assam had a keen historical sense, and they have given us a full and detailed account of their rule, which dates from the early part of the thirteenth century.<sup>71</sup>

The Ahoms are the first to develop the record keeping practice in Northeast India and only trustworthy information regarding their past history is contained in the *Buranjies*.<sup>72</sup> The Ahome *Buranjis* agreed that when the Ahoms first arrived in Assam in the thirteenth century, there was a powerful Kachari kingdom at Sadiya, founded by one Manik and his son-in-law, Mukuta. Links between the ancient Sadiya kingdom and the Dimasa Kacharies seem evident from the fact that the ancient copper temple of Sadiya, dedicated to *Kachai-khanti Gosani*<sup>73</sup> (the goddess who takes the raw meat) Most of the tribes are habituated with the “oral art of tale telling, which is far older than history”.<sup>74</sup> . When the Ahoms established their supremacy in the land, the entire earlier inhabitant was incorporated in the writings of the Ahoms records. The Ahom records are very valuable to us. It is the base of the origin of the inhabitant. Prior to the advent of the Mughals the inhabitants of other parts of India had no idea of history whereas Assam was one of the few regions in India whose inhabitants beat back the tide of Mughal conquest and maintained their independence in the face of repeated attempts to subvert it. Full accounts of these invasions have come down, both from Ahom and from Mughal sources and are interesting not only in themselves but also from the light which they throw on the old methods of warfare, and from the evidence which they afford of how little superior arms, numbers and discipline can

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<sup>70</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*, p-173

<sup>71</sup> E.Gait, *Op.cit*. p-viii

<sup>72</sup> The Ahom record keeping system.

<sup>73</sup> N.G.Rhodes and S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*, p-6

<sup>74</sup> Thomson, Stith-*Myth and Folktales; Source*, The journal of American Folklore, vol.68(Oct-Dec.,1955)p-482.Published by American Folklore Society.

avail against difficulties of communication, inadequate supplies and an unhealthy climate.<sup>75</sup> But these records are political in character. No independent tribal writings were developed. May be it is due to lack of knowledge of record keeping practice, as for example Dimasa kings used inscribe their names in their buildings but they did not practice the record keeping system. However in the later period, the Bengalee influence in the Dimasa court of Maibong is seen. Sanskritisation became spontaneous on the members of the royal family and the aristocracy. Caste system had some influence in Dimasa society. We have the reference of one clan for correspondents or writers. Among the 40 *sengfongs*, 5 were royal clans, one supplied the ministers, one ambassadors, one store-keeper, one correspondents or writers, one cook, one gardener, one barber and two artisans or craftsmen is recorded.<sup>76</sup> But though we did not come across any systematic record of the Dimasas. It is only in the form of inscriptions that we can see the Dimasa recorded work, like the Dimasa royal building and gateways e.g. Royal Gate Inscriptions of Meghanarayana at Maibong.<sup>77</sup>

As far as modern historiography is concerned, there are very few works about the Dimasas who were the earliest inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley. Works like that of B.N. Bordoloi's "The Dimasa Kachari of Assam" (Guwahati-1984), which is a monograph on one of the major ethnic groups of Assam e.g. Dimasas. The work tries to focus every aspect of life and culture of the hitherto unknown Dimasa Kacharis of the North Cachar Hills district where the traditional manners and customs and pattern of behavior are almost intact. The work is very useful but it is based on only one area. Dimasa inhabitation is also present in other part of the Assam and their settlement was as important as in the *Cachar*. N.K. Barman's "*The Queen of Kachar*" and "*The History of the Kachar*" (Cachar-1984) are also important work on the tribe but again concentrates only in Cachar area. P.N. Bhattacharya's "*Herambo Rajyar Dan Vidhi*" (Bengali, Guwahati-1920) is about royal rule over the subject. It helps us to understand Dimasa system of royal proceeding. The influence of Bengali script and Brahminism in the Dimasa kingdom can be understood. Likewise, J.B. Bhattacharjee's "*Kachari Rajyar Uthan aru Patan*" (Guwahati-1933) and "Cachar under British Rule in North east India" S.K.

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<sup>75</sup> Ahom-Mirjumas wars in Ahom History.

<sup>76</sup> J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Op.cit*, p-147

<sup>77</sup> Bose. N.K and Rhodes. N, *Op.cit*. p-24

Bhuyan's *Kachari Buranjee* (Guwahati-1951) are mostly political in character, as the works are basically to establish the tribal kingdom which was very active in its bygone days.

Similarly, Upendra Nath Guha's "*Cacharer Itibritta*" (Guwahati-1971) Nirupoma Hagjer's "Dimasa" (Jorhat-1974) S.K. Borpujari's "*History of The Dimasas*" (Guwahati-1997) are important work done on the dimasa, but these works do not peep into the socio-cultural aspect of the tribe. The ethnographic work "*The Kachari*" by Rev.Sidney Endle (Delhi-1975) is another important work in this field. The work covered all the aspect of the tribes of Assam. The work is about the greater Kachari, s and does not focused the tribe specifically. The only work of Dipali Danda, s "*Among the Dimasa of Assam*" (Delhi-1977) we can know little about the cultural life of the Dimasas. The recent work on this tribe by N.G.Rhodes and S.K.Bose, s "*A History Of the Dimasa Kacharis, As seen through Coinage*.(Calcutta-2006) is also an important work but does not refer the cultural life of the Dimasas. The only work which throws some light on the art of the Dimasa is the "*Jana-Kristi*" in Assamese by the Folklore society of Assam (Guwahati-2005). Here the article "*Primitive Tribal Art*" by Sobha Brahma mentioned about the Dimasas artistic genius and rare variety of designs on their costumes. The work deals with the Dimasa weaving patterns and the geometrical designs in their attires. It is a comparison with the Bodo weaving system and designs of motifs. This work focused the Dimasa geniuses in the field. The work also focused in the indigenous technology of the Dimasa dye but in a very brief manner.

Most of the works which deals with the Dimasa only engaged themselves with political evolution of the Dimasa state formation. The state formation has received more attention at the cost of the Dimasa Social and Cultural History. A recent empirical study on '*Textile Tradition of Assam*' by Labanya Mazumdar of 2013 is a good informative work on Assam textiles with tribal art of weaving but does not incorporate the colourful Dimasa weaving culture, which indicates the non-exposure of the Dimasa material culture. The same problem is seen in the works of Mandira Borthakur Saikia's book on "*Studies in North-East India: Assamese Textile*" of 2013. Dimasa textile is discussed in her work but the traditional name of the dresses is not correct and in the picture plates, an incorrect

picture is depicted indicating as Dimasa Kachari dress, which indicates the unexplored culture of the tribe.

No significant work has been done on the Socio-cultural and economic aspect of the Dimasas. Therefore enough scope lies to undertake a study on the cultural field. This study on Ornamentation culture of the Dimasa is a sincere attempt to find out the tribes Jewellery tradition and the indigenous technology in their various field of material culture. Again it is very much necessary to preserve the almost dying art of oral tradition of the community through documentation. The proposed study on "*Jewellery and Ornamentation of the Dimasa*": *A Historical Survey* is a humble attempt to bring the Dimasa tribe's socio-cultural and economic life into focus and in the process trace a more historic picture of tribal life in the North East.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for the present study had been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources includes archival records, from National Achieves, Delhi, folklore, oral literature, interviews and field survey in the tribal dominated areas of Assam. The study also documented the activities, rituals and functions of the tribes of Assam in general and the Dimasas in particular.

The secondary sources included the available written materials in the form of books, journals, articles and electronic sources

For this research work, both historical and analytical method has been applied. The study is based on both literary evidence and field survey. So far as the literary data are concerned, Ahom chronicles, articles published in magazine, periodicals and journals about the tribes under discussion is taken into account. Various articles published in dailies, periodicals, reports, magazines, local souvenirs, seminar paper, books, scholarly articles etc. are also used to unearth relevant facts. An extensive field work in the tribal dominated areas of Assam has been done covering five five locations (village/towns) of Assam. The rituals and functions of the tribes of Assam in general and the Dimasa in particular are documented. For this recording and still pictures have been taken. Interviews with the members of the

Dimasa tribe have been taken in an unstructured interview schedule. Apart from this, oral history and narratives obtained from the local inhabitants have been used to throw light on the Dimasa way of life in an unbiased manner while reproducing the facts.