

## CHAPTER-II

In contrast to verbal art or oral folklore physical folklore is generally called material culture. According to Dorson, “material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes, and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art.”<sup>1</sup> Material culture of a community reflects a lot about the socio-cultural and economic life of the community. Material cultural is also known to us as Material heritage which is also the physical evidence of a culture in the object and architecture they made or have made. But it specifically means all material evidence which can be attributed to a culture’s past or present; it tells us the relationship between people and their things, the making history, preservation and interpretations of object. From the material culture of a society we can understand the technology and use of material around them. Every society or a group of people are surrounded by more or less with the same materials but the use is different according to their understanding and technique. “Material culture also attempts to explore the relationship between art fact and society within their historical context and researches into the link between society and the production and the use of culture.”<sup>2</sup>

A material culture study helps us to think about the object, and the cultural, political, and economic systems that created them. According to Joyce Hill Stoner, material culture is the unpacking or mining of both historic and everyday objects to find the embedded ideas and concepts that define the surrounding society. So from the material culture of a society we can understand the availability of materials and kind of material, the technology they developed and their implementations in daily life. It also helps us to understand to know how people in traditional societies “make their cloths, prepare their food, farm and fish, process the earth’s bounty, fashion their tools and implement and design their furniture and utensils.”<sup>3</sup> So one can knows what kind of folk behavior existed prior to and continues alongside

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<sup>1</sup> Richard M. Dorson, *Introduction: Concepts of Folklore Studies*, in Dorson (ed), *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, Chicago, 1972,p-1

<sup>2</sup> Mc Dormott Catherine, *Design: The Key Concepts*, London&Newyork 2007,p-157

<sup>3</sup> Rishard M. Dorson, *Op.cit*,p-3

mechanized industry and therefore can also compare the two traditions-the folk and the modern-and try to establish correlations.

The present chapter will discuss about the Dimasa traditional art forms or the material culture. As the material culture can reflect a lot about a community's cultural background and the mode of living and also indicatives of its cultural maturity it will help us to understand the Dimasa maturity in folk arts. Will Scott also observed 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 by human beings, including tools, weapons, utensils, furniture, art, and indeed any physical item created by a society.<sup>4</sup>

The most fascinating and interesting aspect of the material culture of the Indian folks is their arts and crafts. These arts have followed a definite continuity in the history of folk arts of this country. Yet these arts have not received the attention they deserve and are still in a state of neglect. Folk art in India has a vast range of forms, diversity and function. 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 is also practiced. From their material culture we can understand the economic status of the society and availability of materials that is for used and their trade with other parts of the country for the import of the materials. The following lines try to explore the hidden culture of the tribe.

The Dimasa household is the finest example of their material culture.<sup>5</sup> Dimasa houses use a floor plan called *no-dima* that partitions the structure into a drawing room, sleeping room, kitchen and granary. The bathroom is 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 Houses are attached with two varandas, one in front and

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<sup>4</sup> Will Scott, *Fly Away: Four Paths of Culture in the Great Migration*, Jon Hopkins University Press, 2010, p-4

<sup>5</sup> Information gathered after a series of field survey, in rural and urban areas of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong District during 2014-15.

other in the back side. A temple is always seen in the front side and a store of paddy or granary 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 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. Ground Flour is generally used for domesticating pig. The temple in front indicates their religious life of the Dimasa. While Christianity though came to the land of the Dimasas with the British, the Dimasas never converted. Though the Dimasas were originally animistic, after the influence of Brahminical Hinduism (as mentioned in previous chapter) they worshipped idol too. The God Shiva and Goddess kali are important idol of the Dimasa religious life. 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. Temple utensil is generally of copper (*tama*). Though Dimasa are animistic and they have their own god and goddess the *sindur* or Vermillion is used in the forehead after worshiping 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 spirit. The Bodos instate of having a temple they use to plant the *siju* (*Euphorbia splendens*) 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 tradition of temple custom reflects their religious life as well as their Hinduisation. It is also reflected in the granary. In the wall of the store, image of *Lakshmi* the Goddess of wealth is kept. The store also indicates the people's profitable agriculture and their storing practice. The loom indicates the weaving culture of the Dimasa. The leisure hours of every woman are in the loom. 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 an earthen utensil. Traditionally a fire place is arranged in the kitchen and sometimes in the back courtyard of the Dimasa household. Dimasa kitchen is known as '*Sungkho*'. 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 cylindrical bamboo container which is called *pontho*. A *pontho* is made of bamboo one side open and other side is generally tightened with the leaf of *Siju* (*Euphorbia splendens*) tree. 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 Kaali mata. 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 rare among the other community. To make the paste of spices both wooden and aluminum mortar and pestle is used. The *Dhanki* a mortar of wood which is used by leg, a common in every non tribal houses of plain is not used by the tribe, instate they used *uro* 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. <sup>6</sup>From the use of this object we can understand the tribe's technology. They extracted oil adopting traditional method, which is not seen any other tribe of the region. Karbi used sesame but not in the form of oil but raw 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 there are also restrictions on to entry into the kitchen. During the menstrual period or in case of women who has delivered a baby and is not purified, she is not allowed to enter the kitchen. In the latter case, the husband is also not permitted to enter the kitchen. During that period they are supplied food by other family member. When a person dies, the kitchen is not used by the family member but the relatives cook the food.

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<sup>6</sup> Information gathered by Field Survey in the Diamsa Villages of N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong District during 2014-15.



Domesticated animals and birds are not only required during the celebration of socio-religious festivals and performance of rituals but required for Domestic consumption and sometimes for commercial purpose also. Hen and duck are also domesticated. Traditionally a pond is also constructed for fresh fish. The castor-oil tree plantation grown in the kitchen garden to provides food for the silk worm, while vegetable garden or kitchen garden is a common practice. Bringal, chilly, ladies finger are the favorite vegetable. In the Dimasa household dogs are not domesticated.

In the following paragraphs, the Dimasa material culture will be explained in details.

### **Bamboo and cane work:**

India is one of the 17 mega biodiversity in the earth having two hotspots the Western Ghats and Eastern Himalayas. North east region of the country is rich in natural resources.



Figure 4: Photograph of some of the traditional bamboo work of the Dimasas

The entire forest cover within the region is 173,219 sq km which is 6.70% of total forest area of the country. The region has been recognized as one of the 18 biodiversity hot spot of the earth.<sup>7</sup> The traditional cultural system and survival strategy has been based on local resources in its surrounding environment. It is one of the most diverse areas of Asia in terms of illustrating the relationship between man and environment throughout the ages. The use of natural resources is reflects on the life and culture of the north east India. Northeast India, Assam is rich in bamboos which are one of the notable economic and cultural significant of the tribes of northeast and are being used for household building materials as well as

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<sup>7</sup> Pronab, Paul, *Conserving India's Biodiversity through the use of Traditional knowledge: examples from Northeast India*. Biodiversity watch-International journal, on Biodiversity issues-ISSN No-2348-4498, Jan & June-2013. page-57).

food source, household implements, weaving implements and for rituals as a versatile raw product. Bamboo is the ‘green gold’ of northeast.<sup>8</sup> From the construction of houses to every domestic requirement bamboo is used. All the tribes of the region used to construct their houses with bamboo with their distinct and unique architecture. Thus according to construction we can differentiate and identify the community houses as Naga house, Karbi house, Dimasa house, Kuki house, Rengma house and Assam type houses. Not only in construction of houses but in social function too, are not complete without the use of bamboo. In marriage, birth, death and in all traditional rituals bamboo work is necessary.

Bamboo is very popular among the Dimasas and plays a significant role in their culture. Many household items are prepared from bamboo. Story of the first use of baskets is lost in the remote past. The making of baskets and other domestic requirements, to which the Dimasa are expert, is a task reserved exclusively for men and boys. There are no professional basket makers, but every man produces baskets for his own domestic use. Living in a land where cane and bamboo are plentiful, they are naturally expert basket maker of all shapes and sizes, from the rough little receptacle made in a few minutes into which an alive chicken is rammed for a journey, to the carefully woven baskets in which rice is carried up from fields. The raw materials used in basket and others are bamboo and cane.

In marriage the use of bamboo is extensive. From decoration to rituals we can see the use of bamboo. In marriage ceremony, the place where the bride and groom exchange their garland is highly decorated with bamboo works the bachelor’s dominator or *Nordrang* played an important role in Dimasa social functions. *Nordrang* or bachelors group of the community used to show their artistic skill. A welcome gate is also common in every Dimasa marriage. The welcoming gate is similar with a small Dimasa traditional house. In the death ceremonies too bamboo work is noticed. Before the dead body is taken to the cremation ground the body is bathed ceremonially and then placed on a bier (*Bangfong*) made of split bamboo. The number of bamboo used in the making of their bier shows the social status of the deceased. If the deceased belonged to a poor

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<sup>8</sup>Kh Narendra Singh , *Traditional Knowledge and Forest Recourses utilization: practices of the Karbi tribe of Northeast India*.in Biodiversity watch-International journal on Biodiversity issues-ISSN No-2348-4498,Jan &june-2013.

family only one bamboo is used for making the beer. The beer is of skilled labor and very attractive one. It is like a box of net made of bamboo only. Upside is open for easy placing of the deceased. A long bamboo is used to place after placing the deceased vertically. Four bamboo stands in four corners and four bamboo handle is there to place properly and to carry respectively. Any kind of thread or nails is not used to make the bier. What is interesting to note is that only aged male folk take part in the preparation of the beer and arrangement of firewood's in the cremation ground.



Figure 5: Photograph showing preparation for making beer

On the other hand women performed all the other rituals, including bathing the deceased and putting a new clothes on the body. If the deceased is male, a close family male member of the same clan uses to perform. The participation of the three generation in the death ceremony is noticeable. We did not notice this type of participation in the Assamese society. A tall and small house is made to offer food and drinks to the deceased by the family members. The house is generally constructed in the backside of the house (Figure 7). This hut is made of bamboo carpet and flagged with numerous small square size flag, with red, white, green, yellow and black cotton thread. It is very surprising to notice by laymen that the required bamboo material is prepared by the people within the ground and is not brought or ordered. Bamboo is also required to prepare the funeral pyre with seven

layer of bamboo in the cremation ground and the work is carried out by the youths of the village.



Figure 6: Photograph showing Carrying of soul of deceased mother



Figure 7: Photograph showing replica of hut to offer food and drinks to the deceased soul.

Besides their use of bamboo works in customs and rituals, the entire domestic requirement are fulfilled by the cane and bamboo works. Some of the significant craft works are discussed below.

*Khoujeb* is such kind of small basket which is made of fine bamboo or cane strips. It is usually measures between 11 cm to 30cm in height. But some *Khoujeb* can be as high as 30 cm in height. This contains a lid on its top and stands on four legs. It is well built, attractive and both cane and bamboo with an inner layer of loco (*lairu*) leaves are used in making this basket. The leaves make it moisture proof and ensure its safety from the attack of insects. Though small and handy, it is made with so much care and precision that it can be regarded as a piece of art.



Figure 6: Photograph showing *Khoujeb* for storage.



Figure 7: Photograph showing traditional *Khoujeb*



' Khaujeb's' have their varied use. The villagers use them as boxes to keep their valuables including ornaments and money. They are also seen to have been used for storing cotton and yarns, as also other tiny objects needed in weaving.

*Jembai* is another popular type of basket used by the tribe, which is made either of bamboo or cane and is handy for carrying smaller objects. It is generally 21 cm in height and 18 cm wide and 12cm respectively at its ends. Because of its easily portable nature it is widely used for carrying items like refreshment to the fields and camp-sites. It was said that this type of piece is used for carrying *Ju-dima* (rice beer), *Shem* (salt) etc. to bride's house by the party of the groom.



Figure 8: Photograph showing basket for storing rice beer and salt.

*Yamsa* is a one kind of mat, small and designed intricately (Figure 9). The Dimasa people generally use three type of 'yam' made of bamboo strips. The 'yam flang' are used for spreading out paddy, for rough uses, and for sleeping by the Dimasa. The *yamsa* or *yamsa bumin* is a mat with decorative designs which is used on special occasion. The third is *Ju-yam* used in preparing *ju*. In some places we also came across, another two type of mats. These are made of cane strips and reed strips.



Figure 9: Photograph showing yamsa (mat)

The designs are so multi-coloured and proportionate that the overall impression of that mat that is created is not of a utilitarian object but an object of art. The color used in dyeing the bamboo strips of this mat are reported to be extracted from plant species, locally known as *ijisimla* and *nilasa* for black and *Jenglong* (tejpatta) for

red and dark brown respectively. The designs of this mat are of geometric patterns has a distinctive name. The Diamond type designs is called as *Khundi*, triangular as *Phakasisha*, Cross sign as *yamsanodilum*, the crosses, one over the other as *Thangamin* and crosses within a box is called *Radaulai*.<sup>9</sup>

*Lonkai* is another bamboo basket measuring about 40cm in height on average; this bamboo basket is attached with a broad belt made of cane so that it can be carried on the back of a person by using the belt around the forehead. It is very much in use among the tribes for carrying varieties of items such as rice, arum, vegetables and the like. Dry and packed material other than the water pots are carried in the *Lonkai*. Both men and women use this back basket in their daily life in the rural Dimasa populated area.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 9: Photograph showing a woman carrying *lonkai* (basket)

*Dikhangr* is a type of woven cane basket (generally hexagonal) similar to the *lonkai*. It is made of half-solid canes but, unlike the former, they are perforated. Measuring about 40cm in height and with wider opening at the top, it is slightly conical downward. The *Dikhangra* is carried on the back by passing a belt round the forehead. It is generally used for carrying water pots. It was extensively used in colonial and pre-colonial period by the Dimasa people. In modern period though this basket is not in daily used, however religious importance is still there. There are some Dimasa rituals that are performed in the jungle and Dimasa women are not allowed to participate, where the *Dikhangr* is used to carry water.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Information gathered through conversation with the village head Mr. Jackson Maibangsa, Amulapatty, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, January, 12<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Still prevalent among the Dimasa, filed survey in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills District. Dated 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Informed by Mohongdijuwa village Head, Dated 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2014

*Khaliem* is a large basket used widely by the Dimasa community. It measures about a meter in height and is slightly tapered, with a diameter of 40-45cm at top and 20-25cm at bottom. A *khailiem* stands on four bamboo legs and is often covered by a strip prepared from the *Siju* tree. It is fitted with a cane belt for carrying it on the back by putting the belt around the forehead. *Khailiem* is made by using four kinds of materials such as cane, bamboo, wood and a kind of leaves, generally the *Lairu* or the *khanglai*.



Figure 10: Photograph showing Khalim *khailiem* (basket)

The outer frame is usually covered with cane and the outer strip of *khanglai* with reed mate. The passage in between these two layers is lined with the leave

of a plant known as a *Lairu* or *khanlai*. These leaves not only serves as a water proofing veneer but also protect the materials keep inside the *khailiem* from insects, as these leaves posses chemical properties to serve as an insecticide. It was widely used for storing clothes and other valuables as it provided with a domical lid made of bamboo and cane. During my visit to Maibang,



Figure 11: Photograph showing bamboo made items.

I was informed about the *Khalim* and its preparation and uses but could find few pieces of this object.<sup>12</sup> The *Khalim* is used for the storage of cloths.

*Chani* is a simple ‘v’ shaped strainer made by using a piece of solid bamboo strips and is used for separating the rice beer from its suspended solid particles. Its top is kept open, while the bottom part is fitted with a cane net. It is an indispensable instrument for preparation of rice beer. To make the instrument strong and durable, its top portion is often tied with cane-strips.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Information gathered by field survey in Maibang, North Cachar Hills, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Observation in preparing rice bear preparation in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills District of Assam.

*Yengthi* is like a bamboo cylinder made from a stout bamboo of large cross section so that the cylinder is spacious for introduction of a mug through it. *Yangthi* is used for removing suspended solid from beer stored in bigger containers. During operation, it is placed vertically in the centre of the liquor drum and the solids so arrested are taken out manually through it so that a mug can bail out the clean beer. It is widely used by the Dimasa people. *Ju-Dima* or rice beer is an important beverage of Dimasa in every function. In birth, marriage, death and *Busu* the *Ju-Dima* is consumed and prepared by the Dimasa women. Most of the tribes of the region prepared rice bear but the use of such instrument is absent. The use of *Yengthi* in preparing rice beer shows indigenous technology of the tribe along with the material culture.<sup>14</sup>

Damakho is a type of smoking pipe used by the Dimasas. It is made of a piece of solid bamboo. Though it appears very simple, the instrument needs precise workmanship to maintain its efficiency. The body of the bamboo tube is punctured to receive another short piece of smaller bamboo tube in vertical position, over which the earthen container or chillum with tobacco and burning pieces of charcoal is placed and main bamboo tube is partly filled with water. This type of smoking pipe is not in practice now. It is said by the aged Dimasa people of Dibrari village of Haflong, due to influence of Mughal culture.<sup>15</sup> During the Dimasa rule in Maibang the tribe came in contact with the Mughals. About a series of Mughal invasion throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century is also mentioned in the Lakhmi Devi's book on 'Ahom-Tribal Relations'.<sup>16</sup>

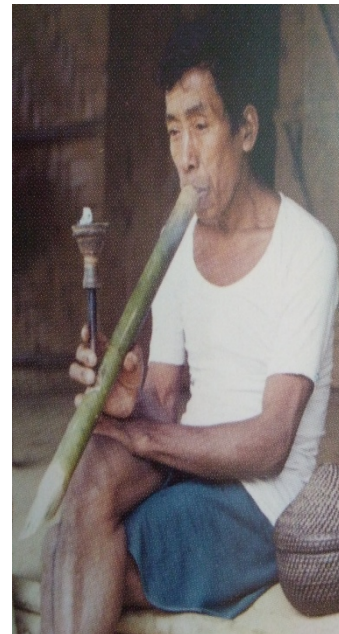


Figure 12: Photograph showing traditional *Damakho* pipe.

Not only baskets the comb made of bamboo too was used by the Dimasas. The piece of comb used traditionally by the Dimasa is called *Khojong Dima*. It is made

<sup>14</sup> Observation in preparing rice bear preparation in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills District of Assam

<sup>15</sup> Filed visit in Haflong, North Cachar Hills, Dated 15, November, 2014

<sup>16</sup> Lakhmi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, Guwahati, 1968, p-103



of a selective species of bamboo known as *washi*. It measures 255mm in length, 85cm in widths and weight about 50gm. The plain surface of the comb exhibits some carving, making it into a piece of art.<sup>17</sup> However we could not find an actual piece of the object.

A *Muree* is a large basket used in household for the storage of grains. It is same as Assamese people used and named as '*Duli*'. It is made of bamboo strips woven in diagonal directions. To ensure safety of the grains from wastage through the inter-slices of the bamboo strips, they are smeared with mud mixed with cow-dung. Its top is round, while it takes a squares' from toward the bottom. It measured generally 90cm in height, while top, middle and bottom measured 103cm, 78cm and 50cm in diameters respectively. Dimasa people used to construct a small house to store paddy which is called '*Maikho*' in Assamese it is called '*Bhoral*'. The *Muree* is kept inside the *Maikho* to store different types of paddy separately. The *Muree* is still prepared by the Dimasa as most of the rural Dimasa populace is engaged in agriculture.

A cylindrical bamboo container used for the safe storage of seeds for future cultivation is used by the Dimasas which is called *Pontho*. They are made of a special type of bamboo, the surface polish of which is removed by scrapping so that the seeds can't suffer from lack of aeration.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 13: Photograph showing *pontho* (bamboo container)

Other household articles like hand fan, decoration on walls of the houses, fishing implements, musical instruments are also prepared with bamboo and cane. *Kholong* is such a device which is used for catching fishes. Made of bamboo, it is tapered, measuring 25cm, 9cm and 4.5cm in diameter at front, middle and back respectively, the smaller end being closed while the other end is open. A *Kholong* is generally used in a stream when a fish is swimming down the stream enters it through its wider mouth, it gets stuck inside its narrower part and it caught. It is made out of a

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<sup>17</sup> Informed by Joi ch. Hasnu. Karbi Anglong. Unfortunately this art form seems to be lost as I could not find a single piece of the *Khojong-Dima* during my field survey.

<sup>18</sup> Still practiced in remote village of Karbi Anglong.

single piece of bamboo by keeping a knot at one of its ends intact and converting the entire body into strips lengthwise. The strips are windered towards its outer end and are woven into the shape of the front end of a *kholong* using bamboo strips.

Culture is the man-made part of the environment which recognizes that the man's life is lived in a natural habitat and social environment. The Dimasa people are a culturally rich tribe and music and dance play an important role in their social life. Dimasa musical instruments are prepared by the Dimasa male folk. Although they have only a few musical instruments, nevertheless, these have their distinctive characteristics. They have three wind instruments, namely *Muri*, *Muri-Wathisa* and *Suphin*. *Muri* is a musical instrument of the tribe. It is a blowing instrument, and one of the most conspicuous for the Dimasas. It is lengthy in shape and generally made out of a special type of timber known locally as *bongkholong*. When blowing, it produces a subdued but sonorous melody, which charges the air with a sense of festivity. The instrument is indispensable for any function of the Dimasa where music is necessary. Resembling in outline a brass trumpet without loops, a *Muri* is entirely carved out of timber except for its mouth-piece which is made of a piece of straw. It contains six holes on its rear half for producing musical notes by playing with fingers. A *Muri* has four parts. The first is *Memu* where a piece of straw is fitted on the tip. The second is *Muri* for producing sound and the third part another ring is placed through the tip of the *Muri* to support the chin of the player and is called *kudam*. The fourth part is called *muriphong* with six holes and the fifth part or last one is a horn to produce a deep sound and is called *muri-bar*. *Muri-Wathisa* is a bamboo flute produced from a special kind of bamboo tube. It is made from locally available bamboo and made from a single piece. *Suphin* is a kind of flutes which is produced by joining two flutes of bamboo tubes together.

The Dimasa have only one string instrument called *Kharam-Dubung*. It is an instrument like a "Been" (a kind of one stringed instrument) made from weeds. This instrument is not for everyday use. Dimasa people use one drum instrument and it is called *Kharam*. *Kharam* a type of elongated drum widely used among the tribe. It mainly consists of a barrel cut out of a piece of log from a tree locally known as the *jasim* tree. The ends of this barrel are covered with the skins of deer or buffalo which are kept in position using cane strips. The right end of the drum is called *jungiungba* and the left end is called *dungdungba*. Some selective objects are

kept inside the barrel of the drum to improve its sound. These objects consist of coins, charcoal, hair of black cats and dog etc. In every Dimasa dance *Muri* and *Kharam* is indispensable.



Figure 14: Photograph showing Dimasa musical instrument

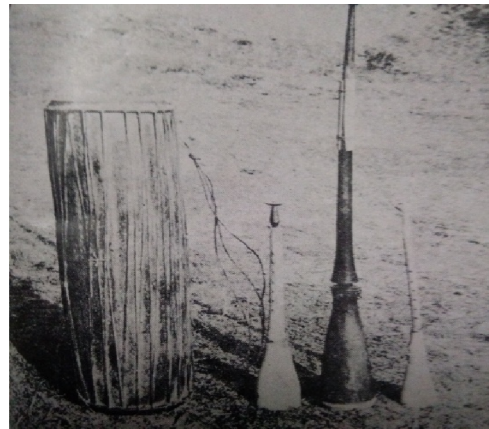


Figure 15: Photograph showing Dimasa musical instruments

### **Oil extractation:**

The Dimasa people also practice the oil extracting from mustard and sesame. The traditional technology or the indigenous technology of extracting oil is an important chapter of their material culture. While other tribes use raw sesame powder the art and science



Figure 16: Photograph showing Dimasa traditional oil processing method

of oil extraction is known only to the Dimasas. Assam the meeting place of various tribes is very rich in material culture. Very hard labored tribal people of Assam were self-sufficient and every household requirement was fulfilled by their work culture. The consumption of sesame was very high among the tribes but not in the form of oil. They used to make powder of sesame and added in their curry. Dimasa from their material culture found to use oil in their curry. The traditional method of extracting oil is known by the Dimasa people. Few craft object of

Dimasa indicates the practice of extracting oil. The traditional device of extracting oil by the Dimasa is known as *Thaosebyaba*. It is made of a piece of long wood measuring 250 to 300 cm in length. A slit is made at the bigger end lengthwise, to cover more than half of the length of the wood, so that it can be widened by putting a wedge inside it. The log is generally supported on both its end by two wooden blocks of heavy cross-sections. For extraction of the oil, *Chap* (a cane made container) containing fried mustard seeds are inserted vertically through the slit of the log in such a manner that the pointer end of the *chap* is kept downward. When the slit in the log is squeezed by using rope and wooden poles, oil drips out of the *Chap*, which is collected in a container. *Lungding* a large basket is used to store the mustard and sesame and a *chap* is a cane made container which is used in extracting oil. It was in the *Nodarang* or bachelors' dormitory that the art of oil extracting was learnt by the Dimasa boys.<sup>19</sup>

A large type of basket generally made of cane strips, and is used for the storage of grains and carrying large quantity of rice; paddy etc is called *Lungding*. It measures 64 cm in height. In cross section it measures 59cm at top, 35cm at middle and 24cm at the bottom with a tapered shape. It is made of bamboo, but lined with cane and *siju* leaves. A *Lungding* is round at its top end but gradually changes its shape downward to become square. Though used for storage of all sorts of food grains, it is more generally used for keeping sesame seeds. The use of the *siju* leave makes a *lungding* insect-proof and it makes the cane tougher and durable. Its square base rests on a timber rim made of the *siju* tree. This material culture of the Dimasa let us know about the extensive sesame cultivation and its use. It is a good example of Dimasa knowledge of storage and every precaution was taken to preserve the food grain. The traditional knowledge about the medicinal plant is also focused.

*Chap* as mentioned is a cane-made container like used in extracting oil from mustard/ *teel* (sesame) seeds, adopting traditional method. It is made of two fold joined together by stitching along its margin so that fried mustard seeds can be filled in and placed in between the slit of a heavy log used for its pressing. As this container is subjected to heavy pressure, utmost care is taken in the selection of the best quality canes for its making and the container is woven with utmost precision,

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<sup>19</sup> Fact collected through my field work in Maibang, North Cachar Hills District, dated 8<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and also from Subhas Ch Hasnu of Manja, Karbi Anglong District, dated 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2014.

keeping in view its durability. We have the references about this traditional method of extracting oil from mustard and sesame in P.C. Sarma's compiled work on "The Dimasa". It is also mentioned that a *Chap* was documented at *Khejorban* village which is located at a distance of 6 kilometer from Maibang. It was measured 42 cm in length and 33 cm at its flat side. The tapered end measured 6 cm. and was said to be very old, about 105 years, and is preserved as a family heirloom.<sup>20</sup> As the oil extracting is not practiced anymore by the tribe the preparation of the object is also not found.

**Weaving:**



Figure 16 and 17: Photographs showing weaving

Clothing recognized as one of the primary need of human being, plays an important role in his/her life. Since the pre-historic period people felt the necessity of covering their bodies for different reason. In the pre-historic period people covered themselves with the use of skin and fur of hunted animals as well as bark and leaves of trees to protect themselves from external injuries like bites of insects, cut, extremes of weather etc. such materials were also perhaps used in response to gradual development of sense of modesty and personal adornment. With the passage of time the basic need for clothing led to the development of textiles as early as the Neolithic or new stone age (Childe:1966).<sup>21</sup> The introduction of weaving made significant impact in the growth of human civilization.

The life and culture of various tribes and non-tribal ethnic stocks have contributed towards the growth and development of a synthesized Assamese society and culture

<sup>20</sup> "The Dimasa" Compiled by P.C.Sarma, Guwahati,2003,p-46

<sup>21</sup> Colin Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilisation*, UK,1972,p-45

through the ages. The handloom weaving as a folk-art having age old feature forms an integral part of the culture and tradition of these various ethnic groups with diverse socio-cultural background. The traditional hand-woven products of this region are widely known for their glorious heritages, artistry and fine workmanship with its beauty as well as simplicity. These products unfold the talent and creativity of the indigenous weavers. In this regard along with handloom weaving, Assam also has a glorious tradition in silk culture. The verity of silk namely, *endi* (*Philosamia ricini*), *muga* (*Antheraea assama*) and mulberry (*bombyx mori*) locally known as *pat* are found in Assam. Kacharies (also known to us as Dimasa) were the first to start silk culture in Assam and have an age-old tradition of spinning's and weaving.<sup>22</sup> Dr Lila Gogoi narrates a story in a *mantra* (hymn) used by the silk worm rears. According to this, Lord Siva gave species of silk worm to a man of the kachari tribe. Based on this, it can be said that the art of sericulture and weaving was introduced into Assam by the Dimasa kacharies, when a part of Assam was ruled by them during the pre-Ahom period. The Patronage of Ahom king for the development of sericulture and weaving is notable in the textile history of Assam. At the same time contribution of various tribal ethnic groups towards extensive prevalence of weaving occupied a significant place in the textile tradition of Assam as a whole.

The Dimasas themselves believes that the weaving culture is contribution of the spider. In the Dimasa oral tradition it is said that one day a young girl seating on a river side, she noticed spiders making their webs from one tree to another. Returning from the jungle she tried with her friends and that was the beginning. Dhorom sing Teron, in his 'Karbi Studies vol-2'<sup>23</sup> mentions about the legend of Kaman Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh which is similar to the Dimasa folklore. The karbi legend of Serdihun also tells us about the weaving culture.<sup>24</sup> However we may never be able to ascertain the exact location of the looms origin, but the weaving culture is the greatest contribution to the human civilization.

Exploring the ethnic regions of Northeast India, we have found that most of the communities possess mature standards of weaving and textiles. The ethnic

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<sup>22</sup>Labanya, Mazumdar , *Textile Trading Among Some Tribal Communities of Assam –An Overview*, New Delhi,2007, page-151

<sup>23</sup> D.S. Teron, *Karbi Studies*,Vol-II,Guwahati,2011,p-103

<sup>24</sup> D.S.Toron, *Ibid*,p-103



communities of Assam who inhabit the plains show comparatively better intricacy in weaving. In this regard the Bodo, the Rabha, the Deuri, the Tiwa, the karbi, the Dimasa, the missing and all the other smaller ethnic groups are worth mentioning. Handloom weaving is an indigenous craft plays an important role in the socio-cultural and economic life of the tribal communities. It is an important aspect of tribal culture which has been handed down from generation to generation.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the traditional Assamese weaving culture seems to have developed with the assimilation of all the ethnic weaving crafts of this region.

Weaving is an art which all Dimasa females are excellent at and has earned a great reputation. They weave clothes simple as well as of very high artistic designs. Most of the domestic requirements of clothes are met from the family looms. Spinning and weaving is confined only to the womenfolk and are considered as obligatory duties by the Dimasa women and girls. It is mandatory for girls to weave by herself the artistically design wedding clothes to put on herself at her marriages. We can say thus the textiles are a flourishing industry of the Dimasa tribes. The quality of the fabrics made by them is much superior in comparison of several other fabrics produced somewhere else in the country. The community thus occupies a high position in the handloom industry of Northeast India. The blended colour and the conspicuous designs on their dresses exhibit a bold effort of these weavers, which has enriched the treasury of their material culture. Dimasa females weave clothes with the help of traditional loom called "*Dauphang*". The process of weaving is called "*Daophang Dauba*". The loom is same as used by the Assamese weavers. Traditionally it is a very simple age old type. It is used without a rare board. The shuttle is thrown by one hand through the sheds of warp from one side and the same is received by the other hand on the opposite side. But today the throw shuttle loom is being replaced by the fly shuttle loom to increase the rate of production. However only the materials like shawls and bags are woven in *Jengstu*, a type of loom wherein the yarn is tied on the hips and other end of the yarn is tied to the pillar of the house now a days. This is mostly found among the other tribes of the region. Other than Dimasas the tribes of north east never use two types of loom e.g throw shuttle loom and throw shuttle lion loom. The Bride carries the looms to the in-laws house after marriage, not for the use of in-laws but for own personal use

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<sup>25</sup> D.S. Teron, Ibid P. 152

and this will be inherited by an daughter or nearest female relatives who belong to her own female clan *Jadi* or *julu*. All the artifacts for weaving are prepared by the Dimasa man including the artifacts of ginning device. The indigenous ginning device of the Dimasa is known as *Sergi*. The device for cotton ginning nodules is made of timber. The machine consist of a stout frame having a flat piece of timber at its base and two upright members fixed on it with a difference of 20 cm. Three round bars made of timber are placed horizontally across the middle of the upright members. The central member is longer than the other two. It is provided with a spiral notch on its left and a cross bar in the form of a lever on its right end by which it can be rotated in horizontal position. The left end of the upper bar also contains a spiral notch and it is kept loose over the central one. When the central bar is moved using the end-lever, the upper bar also moves simultaneously. When a piece of seeded cotton nodules put in between the two bars, the fibrous cotton passes through the gap in between the two bars while the seeds fail to cross and fall down. The fixed lower bar of the machine helps in raising or lowering the central bar to adjust the gap so that the seed-extraction can be easy. It is done using a wooden wedge in between the central and the lower bars. The wooden piece at the base of the *Sergi*, over which the frame of the machines stands, is fitted at its center with another piece of wood of almost equal cross-section to the frame members, at right angle to the base member the person using the *Sergi* placed one of his feet on it to keep the machine in position during its use.<sup>26</sup>

The *Sergi* is very much in use among the Dimasa living in villages. It is the finest traditional technology of the Dimasa. The popularity of the machine among the Dimasa women focused their hard working culture along with the use of cotton.



Figure 18, 19 and 20: Photographs showing processing of cotton ginning

<sup>26</sup> Informed by village Head of Dibarai, Haflong, North Cachar Hills and aged persons of village Mohongdijuwa of Karbi Anglong.



Dimasa women used *thakri*, a primitive hand spindle, which is a slender stick, made of bamboo, about one half feet long with a small hook on top and a whorl (a round disc cut out of the chest of tortoise shell) attached at one end. The stick is rotated, twisted continuously by the right hand as the left hand feeds the cotton fiber to produce an uneven and coarse yarn.<sup>27</sup> Before the spinning operation cottons are first moved through the *Sergi* (primitive gin) to separate the seeds from the fiber. N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose stated about the Stewart note in JASB, No.7 of 1855, that the cotton produced in Hill Cachar was of excellent quality and was grown by most of the inhabitants and was exported in great quantities. Rhodes and Bose work also mentioned about the use of *dhoti* and turban of white cloths by the Dimasa male in the early twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> Most of the cloths are woven from cotton yarn and only some specific clothes like *Rithap* are woven from endi/eri silk (called *rihendi* in Dimasa) Yet, the Dimasa women wove all the clothes from eddi/eri silk (silk made from endi silk worm) before the advent of cotton yarns. The silk manufacture and breeding of silk-worms by the Dimasa people is also recorded in the works of N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose.<sup>29</sup> The colours they use for dyeing yarns are prepared by the Dimasa women, using indigenous methods<sup>30</sup> from the wild herbs. Weaving was not commercialized by Dimasa women, rather woven for domestic use in the family. But today many of them have started weaving products commercially to earn livelihood or to supplement their income.

Female clothing of the Dimasa includes 1. *Rijamphain*: white colour cloth worn from chest to knees. It is a common and general attire of the Dimasa women.

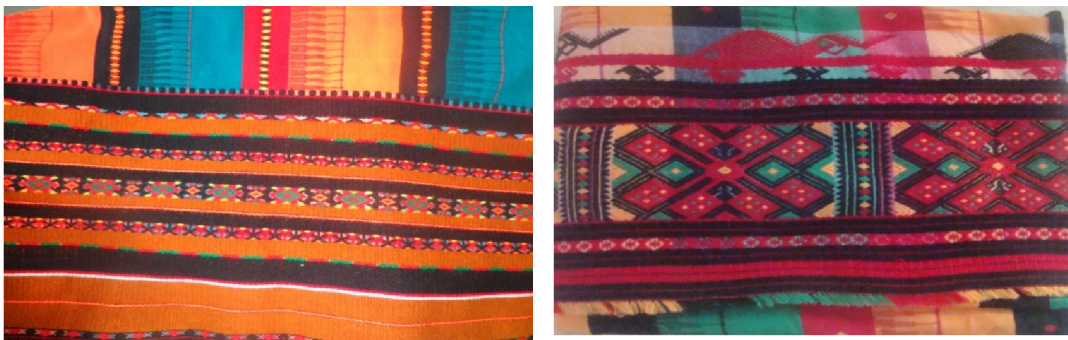


Figure 21 and 22: Photographs showing traditional designs

<sup>27</sup> Information is gathered by filed survey in rural Dimasa areas of Assam.

<sup>28</sup> N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose, *A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis, As Seen Through Coinage*, Kolkata & Guwahati, 2006, p-69

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p-69

<sup>30</sup> Details is in chapter-4

Unlike the *Rijamphain Beren* it has one or two coloured designs in it.

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 like marriage, dance and festivals and gained an important cultural significance since it is worn at formal and ceremonial occasions. It is a very colourful attire of the Dimasa and one can notice from an eye distance very clearly. It is an indispensable part of the Dimasa textile. It is also regarded as the distinctive dress of grown up unmarried girls. 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, is 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 sari. It can be of any colour.6. *Bathormai*: kind of *rigu*, (*mekela* or lower germent) with only *ramai rikhu* or *ramai* design therein.

The Dimasa male clothing's are known as, 1. *Sgaopha (phagri)* : Dimasa males wear turban called "*phagri*" or "*Sgaopha*" which are of either green or yellow colour 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 colours. 9. *Gamsa*: it is a small piece of textile item which is used to wipe the body and face. It is a replica of Assamese *Gamocha* or traditional towel. In the rural area it is worn from waist to ankle as it is longer than the Assamese *Gamocha*. Assamese *Gamocha* is of four cubits long and Dimasa *Gamsa* is generally of seven cubits long. In the two end of the *Gamsa* beautiful designs were woven.

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, so when one touches the Dimasa design, it appears to be very thick and has 3D look. Unlike designs (*pari*) of other community which is usually made of one or two colour but often one 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. A primitive type of reeling process followed by the Dimasa weavers was very simple. The process is completely manual. The reeler had to have considerable skill to determine that the filaments of cotton had uniform diameter. The loom used by the Dimasa are made of bamboo and wooden logs and used without a rare board. The shuttle is thrown by one hand through the sheds of warp from one side and the same is received by the other hand on the opposite side. Dimasa textiles designs are generally of geometric patterns. Most of the designs are of different kind of flowers, animals, materials and wild flowers.

Dimasa women also practice the art of dying. Use of myriad colours in handloom products is a unique feature of the textile tradition of Dimasa. The colors that are used in their clothes is prepared by them. Dying of yarns with the indigenous dyes obtained from locally available juices of shrubs and herbs. History reveals that there has never been any class of people among the indigenous Dimasa women for dyes. Women of the tribe express their artistic craftsmanship and their weaving procedure which include rearing, spinning, dying, farming of loom, selecting and creating motifs and designs and also the completing of weaving the textile material reveals the artistic sensitivity of the weaver. Moreover to get fine quality of endi silk, women of the tribe used to rear endi worm and prepare fine cotton yarns, which is another skill. The craftsmanship of Dimasa weaver has a long history of its tradition. From rearing to weaving at every stage the skill they use has its distinct characteristics from the skill or craftsmanship followed by the weavers of the other parts of the country. The distinct characteristics of the craftsmanship of the Dimasa weavers make the Dimasa textile different from the textiles of the other parts of the country.

Colours play an important role in Dimasa cultural life. Beliefs and legends of the Dimasas play a significant role in using the colours. Black colour dress is not used in the marriage. Like wise to cover the deceased body red color is not used. It is believed that if red color is used then the deceased in his/her next birth is likely to suffer from leprosy. Young one loved to wear bright color dress. Widow and aged women generally use white colored clothes. Legends of the Dimasa tells us that among the Dimasa clan, Nunisa did not use red colour or the *muga* cloth, as in the ancient period the clan offered it along with gold to their God.

Diverse elements of nature seem to be the main source of inspiration so far as ornamentation of textile is concerned. The motifs, designs and color of the Dimasa traditional dresses also reflect their closeness to nature. They generally designed their attire with surrounding flower, animal, trees and some domestic used materials. It is very much different with the designs and motifs of the other tribes. The *rajamphain* is example of the tribe's love of nature. It is woven in the pattern of the rainbow. Seven lines of green, yellow, red, black and white are woven in a horizontal patterns and in two sides end multi-coloured designs were weaved. The attire is of high demand in occasions like marriage, busu festivals, during traditional dance and in general. It is believed that the wonderful unities, orderliness, harmony of line and curve, the symmetry of form and shape which are all intrinsic characteristics of nature have inspired the geometrical designs.<sup>31</sup> Geometrical forms have been used for fabric ornamentation for a very long time in various cultural settings. In the textiles of Dimasa geometrical designs have been used widely.

### **Rice beer making**

The production of household liquors is another rich indigenous knowledge system of the tribe. Traditional knowledge of rice beer making among the Dimasas has been both explicit and tacit that has been codified into words or transferred from one generation to another through the ages. It also plays an important role in their socio-cultural life, as it is found to be associated with many occasions such as merry making, rituals, festivals, marriage and even death ceremonies. The

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<sup>31</sup> E.Bhavnani, *Folk and Tribal Design of India*, Bombay, 1974, pp-11-12.

preparation and consumption of this type of liquor emerged mainly due to the climatic conditions and discovering the use of surrounding natural resources.<sup>32</sup>

'*Ju*' or the rice beer is an indispensable and integral part of the life of the Dimasas from the time of birth till death. Each ritual, festival or any such occasion are unthinkable without the use of this rice beer. The popular myth behind the origin of *ju-dima* is heard in oral history. According to the oral history of the Dimasas, once a Dimasa man went to work at his *jhum* field, he carried his packet of lunch to be consumed during his break-time, which consisted of cooked rice and some vegetables curry tightly packed in banana leaves. As usual he had it during his break-time but, some amount of rice was still left packed and hung up on a tree, which happened to be acacia pennant plant, which is called *thembra* in Dimasa.



Figure 23: Photograph showing ingredients of rice beer making

When he went to the field the following day he saw drops of juice falling from the tree where he had hung the cooked rice. He tried to taste a few drops of the juice and discovered that it was very sweet and aromatic. Surprised and pleased, he came home and spread the word around about his new discovery, which is the origin of rice-beer. *Ju-dima* prepared by adding bark of acacia pennant.

*Ju*, prepared by mainly rice or sticky rice, can be of two type- *ju-dima* and *ju-haro*; the former is sweet in taste while the latter is a little sour and stronger. For the preparation of any type *ju*, it is essential to prepare the starter cake, which is known as *humao*. This flattened and round shaped starter cake is prepared by using the barks of acacia pennant creeper (*thembra*) and rice grain (shown in Fig, 1). First, the barks are cut into pieces and dried in the sun for a couple of days. After it has

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<sup>32</sup> Prof Brinchi kr Medhi & Humi Thaosen, *Dimensions of Rice Beer in the Socio-Cultural Matrix of the Dimasas of Assam*, Department of Anthropology, Guwahati University

completely dried, it is ground into fine powder. Rice is then soaked in water until it becomes softened and then ground into fine powder in wooden mortar with the wooden pestle. Thereafter, the *acacia pennata* and rice powder are mixed and a little water is added to make it into a paste. These are then made into cakes of appropriate sizes, generally diameter of about 5.5cms.to 0.5 to 1 cm. thickness. These cakes are allowed to dry for over a period of one week, covered in paddy straw. These can be stored in moisture-free places for over a year. Mainly the womenfolk are involved in the preparation of *humao*, as well as that of *ju*. The starter cake, *humao* serves as a microbial culture for the fermentation of substrate of rice to produce alcoholic beverage *ju*.

For preparing *ju-dima*, grains of both plain and sticky rice are boiled, till they are well-cooked. The cooked rice then spread out on a mat, and then allowed to cool. While this is being done, the *humao* is taken according to the requirement (one *humao* cake is sufficient for 5 kgs of rice), smashed to powder and mixed with the cooked rice. The whole mixture is then put into a funnel-shaped long bamboo basket, with a small outlet at the narrow end (*khulu*). This *khulu* is then covered with banana leaves and placed vertically on a bamboo holder (*shergi*). Under the lower narrow opening of the *khulu*, a vessel is placed in such a way that the juice pours directly into it. After about a week, slightly yellowish juice comes out of the mass, which indicates the completion of fermentation.

*Ju-haro* is the stronger kind of rice beer with taste comparable to that of vodka, which is a type of distilled spirit for consumption. The methodology of preparing *ju-haro* involves a meticulous process. The pulp of the prepared *ju-dima* (as discussed earlier) is only used for preparing *ju-haro*. First, an ample amount of pulp of *ju-dima* is put into one big vessel, which is put on heat upon the hearth. Above this, another vessel with holes, is placed, inside which the empty round bowl is put. Again, on top of this perforated vessel, another cooking vessel filled with water is placed and covered with a lid. The places between the vessels may be wrapped around with cloth pieces to prevent air from gushing in. The water in the topmost vessel boils up and by condensation, the vapor drops into the bowl inside the second perforated vessel. The *ju-dima* pulp in the lowermost vessel gets heated up and through the holes of the second vessel; the condensed vapor from it goes into the bowl as well. When the water in the topmost vessel gets boiled, it is replaced

again with fresh cold water until it gets boiled. In this way, water is continuously boiled until the required amount of vapor is accumulated in the bowl inside the second vessel. It is the vapor accumulated inside this bowl, which form the distilled liquor or spirit, *ju-haro*. Generally, 10 liters of water may be required for 10 kgs of *ju-dima* pulp. The total time taken to prepare *ju-haro* is approximately 3 hours. *Ju* has been considered to have many curative properties and ethno medicinal values. *Ju-dima* rice beer works as a tonic to promote sleeping tendency and also has a purgative effect. During gastric, diarrhea, urinary problems, headache, body pain, etc, distilled beverage *ju-haro* taken in a merge quantity is believed to cure these in a short time. It is regarded as a cure to cholera and to expel worms out of the body. During toothache, some people put a few drops on the area of pain, as its strong spirit content is believed to ease the ailments. Moreover huge significance that the *ju* has in the Dimasa socio-cultural and religious life cannot be ignored. The Dimasas are proud of their knowledge of rice beer brewing, passed down to them from their ancestors from generation to generation. Both *ju-dima* brewing and *ju-haro* distillation involve a very essential part of their, social, cultural and religious life, included in every occasion and ritual of this community. Besides, *ju* is considered as the most valuable item to be served to the guests. Some of the significant occasions and rituals are there where the use of *ju* is integral in the Dimasa society. The rituals after the birth of the child generally held after the newborn's umbilical cord is removed. Puffed rice and a drop of *ju-dima* on a finger tip are to be placed into the mouth of the baby. This is an indispensable custom during the ritual called *nana dihonba* because of which rice beer is essentially brewed much ahead of time. Another instance of the extensive use of *ju* is during marriage rituals. Dimasa marriage negotiation a bundle of salt is taken to the girl's family and after a few days rice beer *ju-dima* has to be taken in four small gourd shells to the bride's house. Informal discussions take place and date is fixed to meet again regarding date of marriage. On the fixed date too *ju-dima* is essential. Besides these customs there is a series of rituals connected to marriage where *ju-dima* is an integral part.

Death ceremony is another significant event where rice beer is essential. The Dimasa cremate the dead at a place called *mangklung*. After seven days of the death of a person, a post-funeral ceremony is held, where all the

members of the village, relatives and other people are invited to drink rice beer and discuss the date of last funeral ceremony. The entire guests are served with meat and rice beer *ju-dima* and *ju-haro*. On the day of funeral ceremony (*maimutharba*) animal sacrifice and mass weeping in remembrance of the deceased is made. After a series of rituals all the guests are served with food, meat and rice beer. Thus, *ju* is an indispensable part of the death rituals of the Dimasas.

In the festivals in the Dimasa society, people very widely indulge into rice beer consumption. The Dimasas brew a large quantity of *ju* many month ahead of their principle harvest festival i.e., *Bisu Dima*. In this festival, *ju* is not only brewed for consumption, but also to be offered to the supreme god *shibrai*, to thank for the good harvests of the year. In the merrymaking festival of *bisu-dima* all section of the village people participates. They enjoyed dancing traditional dances, performing traditional music and prayer-seeking from elders.

*Ju-dima* is an essential in every Dimasa religious rituals. All the villagers under the *daikho* contribute funds for the worship. A large number of eggs, hen, and goats are sacrificed and rice beer is offered to the area god by the *jonthai* (priest) assisted by another priest called *dainya*. The *jonthai* prays to the gods through incantations to accept the offerings, protect them from all kinds of calamities and bless them on all fronts. Thereafter, all the sacrificed meat is cooked for consumption. All the villagers gather at the *daikho* during the ritual, however, the females are strictly prohibited from going at the place of worship. After the rituals are over, a feast is held where the cooked meat is consumed along with *ju-dima* and *ju-haro*. Thus the brewing of rice beer is very essential in the religious life of the Dimasas.

Thus, having discussed the main events of the Dimasa society, it is but evident, that not a single one of them is conducted without the use of rice beer, the best preparation of the tribe to pay respect and homage. Undoubtedly, *ju-dima* and *ju-haro* are integral parts of the social, cultural and religious life of the Dimasas. It is worth mentioning that, the knowledge of brewing rice beer and using it accordingly in the different rituals, passed down since the ancient times, is of utmost importance to be recorded and maintained. Otherwise, in the absence of experienced and knowledgeable persons in the community, it may be lost forever.



### **Jewellery in dimasa society**

The history of jewellery is a long one, with many different uses among different cultures. It has endured for thousands of years and has provided various insights into how ancient cultures worked. The



Figure 24: Photograph showing Dimasa traditional bangles

first signs of jewellery came from the people in Africa. Perforated beads made from snail shells have been found dating to 75,000 years ago at blombos cave. Tradition of adorning oneself with jewellery is as old as the civilization of India, which went through various changes through cultural influence and politics for more than 5,000-8,000 years. India has the longest continuous legacy of jewellery making anywhere since Ramayana and Mahabharata times. Because India had abundant amount of jewellery resources, it prospered financially through export and exchange with other countries. One of the first to start jewellery making were the peoples of the Indus valley civilization. By 1500 BC, the people of the Indus valley were creating gold earring and necklaces, bead necklaces, and metallic bangles. Indian women and jewellery have always formed a great combination. The tradition is still alive and time has made it only more vigorous than earlier. The art of making beautiful ornaments, with delicacy and acumen, has been developed throughout the historical times. Rulers and feudal gave patronage to art and artist, to develop the same to optimum. There is jewellery for almost all the body parts, including neck, ear, nose, arms, ankles, fingers, waist, hair parting, etc.

Jewellery has been a tradition in Assam. The most famous ornament of Assam is those made of gold. Gold washing and jewellery manufacture has been an important industry in the state from a long time. The metal was abundantly found in a number of Himalayan Rivers flowing throughout the state. Apart from the gold other metals like silver were also used in the conventional jewellery making. The traditional ornaments of Assam include *doog-dogi*, *kerumoni*, *thuriya*, *gam-kharu*, *muthi-kharu*, *junbiri*, *dhoibiri*, *loka-paro*, *bana*, *gal-pata* and *keru*. All these pieces are unique in design and pattern. *Gam-kharu* is a large bracelet made of silver or

gold with a clasp. *Loka-paro* is an earring embellished with twin birds, placed one after the other. This may be in gold, ruby, mina, or even plain enamel coating. *Jethi pota* is a wide band of cloth placed as a row of small medallions, with a central pendant. There is a special type of earring, resembling the orchid '*kopou phool*'. The exquisite design and shimmer of these ornaments truly captivates the attention of the onlookers. Tribal jewellery in North East India is quit rich. Each tribe has kept its unique style of jewellery intact even now. The original format of jewellery design has been preserved by ethnic tribal. Jewellery that is made of bone, wood, clay, shells and crude metal, by tribals is not only attractive, but also hold a distinct rustic charm.

Among the tribes of north-east Dimasa kachari being a colourful tribe, have a great interest to adore with beautiful jewellery along with their colourful traditional dresses. The male Dimasa use only two types of ornaments namely *yaocher* and *kharik*. The women are the habitual users of ornaments i.e *phowal*-a necklace made of silver, *khamaothai*-earring made of gold, *chandrawal*-silver necklace, *rangbarsa*-necklace made of coin, *khadu*-a heavy bracelet made of silver, *eansidam*-a nose ring made of silver, *li-ksim*-a neckpiece of red beads and *jonsham*-a necklace of ordinary beads collected from the forest.

Sound economy and a developed society only can think about the wealth or property. The standing architecture of Dimasa kingdom, which is scattered in north Cachar hills district of Assam and in the state of Nagaland is of high quality and of skilled technology of the tribe. Besides many in karbi Anglong district and Nogoan district of Assam is in form of temple architecture. This scattered architecture also speaks about the vastness of the kingdom and their sound economy. The successor of the Dimasa kingdom the Ahom, ruled in Assam for 600 years-a larger span than any other ruling dynasty in Indian history. This stability was obviously based on economic solvency, with plenty of surplus production. However we can assume the economic stability of the Ahom from their building architecture. But it is very difficult to say about historiography of economic development of the region of pre Ahom period. According to Manorama Sharma "The main problem seems to be a lack of conceptual framework in writing of history which could provide a scientific paradigm for seeing history as the emergence and evolution of social processes. Because of this there has been an

inability to see the link between the information's provided in the sources and the process of socio-economic formation. The dominant tendency is to tag along social and economic data as an appendage to the administrative set-up.''<sup>33</sup>

It is only through the Ahom *Burangies* and some British writings that we knew about the Dimasa kingdom. From their material culture in weaving, in bamboo works and rice beer making etc we can assume a progressive and self-sufficient society. They have their own cultural identity though surrounded by different tribes. The dresses, weaving pattern, rice beer making and the use of bamboo in every aspect of day today activity is very much different with the surrounding tribes, but in case of jewellery little similarity is seen. The use of the necklace of coin is seen common to surrounding tribes. The karbies (known as *mikirs* in pre-colonial period) and the bodo's used to wear the coin necklace. Besides the Tripurians, the Arunachalies also used to beautify their body with the silver coin with a little variation. In Dimasa coin necklace we can see the use of black and red thread while the other community used small jungle beads in between the coins.

Dimasa among the tribes are very much attached to gold. The tribes both men and women used to decorate their body with gold and silver in their royal days. The use of jewellery indicates the availability of the gold and silver metal. We cannot say about the exact period from when the gold is exerted and used in Assam, but though history tells us its use and availability from the very ancient time. In the kautilya's Arthashastra it is mentioned that a place called *suwarna kunda* in ancient kamrupa gold was available.<sup>34</sup> Greek scholar Strabu and Megasthenes too mentioned about the availability of gold in northeastern part of India, place called *derdai*.<sup>35</sup> Pratap Chandra Choudhury pointed to this place in Assam. We have also evidence of gold production and its workshop in history. King Bhaskar barman of barman dynasty gift to harshavardhan of kaunaj through Ambassador Shangabeg is

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<sup>33</sup>Manorama Sharma ,*Socio-economic history in pre-colonial Northeast India,trends,problems and possibilities, society and economy in North-East India*,Mignonette Momin(ed),Dept of History,Nehu,Shillong, New Delhi, 2004

<sup>34</sup>Dimbeshwar Sharma&Rajanikanta Debsharma, *Kautily Arthashastra*, (Translated) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition ghy 2002.page-56

<sup>35</sup>M.C. Grindle., *Ancient India: As Described in classical literature*, 1901,cited in P.C.Chaudhury, *The History of the civilization of people of Assam to the twelve century A.D.*, third edition, ghy,1987, p-345

important in this connection. The gift includes gold jewellery of skilled labour.<sup>36</sup> The last king of Pala dynasty, Joipala (1115-1125) was also a great patronage of gold industry. Once he donated 900 gold coin to a Brahmin named Mudra prabha. It is mentioned in the inscription of Silimpur.<sup>37</sup>

In the pre-colonial period gold washing and its use is continued by the Dimasas. The coming of Ahom makes the gold washing as their monopoly under the organized *khel* system. The natural metal was free to all common people whereas the royal ones minted coins and made jewellery. The systematic administration of Ahom led them to organize a special category of people for gold washing under the *khel* system. This *khel* was known as the *sonuwal khel*.<sup>38</sup> The leader of the *khel* was called the Sonuwal Boruah.<sup>39</sup> If we go through the history of the *Sonuwal Kacharies*, it is said that they are one of a branch of great *Bodo-Kacharis* and in the medieval Assam only kachari origin people used to wash gold. It is also supported by W.W Hunter in his report on ‘A statistical account of Assam, (London-1879).<sup>40</sup> According to him gold wash is practiced in Sunai River of Cachar in Barak valley by the indigenous tribe and long before the coming of the British the practice was stopped. Here we can say that it is due to Ahoms organised system of gold washing, Gold washing became the monopoly of the Ahoms and traditional gold washer became labour under Ahom *khel* system. The *Sonuvals*, 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. Since then the *Sonuvals*, having separated from the original Kacharies, established themselves as an independent and superior group.<sup>41</sup>

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

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<sup>36</sup> H.K. Borpujari.,(ed) *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol-1, third edition, ghy,2007,p-114

<sup>37</sup> B.K.Baruah , *A Cultural History of Assam*,Ghy,1952,p-105)

<sup>38</sup> Captain Dalton, *Account of visit to Jugloo and Sese River in Upper Assam*,JASB,1852.

<sup>39</sup> Maneeram Bur Bundare, *Native Account of washing of gold in Assam*.JASB,1838

<sup>40</sup> W.W. Hunter, *A statistical Account of Assam*, vol-II,London,1879.

<sup>41</sup> R.K.Bhandra, *Caste and Class:Social Stratification in Assam*, New Delhi,1991,page-28

Daulagajau to make jewellery for the royal family.<sup>42</sup> It has refelects the matured technology and skill of the community. However in colonial and modern period we did not come across any special category of jewellery making. It may be of two reasons, due to Ahoms superiority in the land after the destruction of the Dimasa royalty and British occupation as the key factors. The *Sonuwal khel*, which was created by the Ahom king 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 even they can't sale it or to use it. As a result the gold became a 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 Dasabhuia Durga and Baneswar Siva at Sonapur and Banpur respectively.<sup>43</sup> Gold the precious metal which was once used by the Dimasas in ornamentation of God and temple, in sword handle and jewellery came to be replaced by beads, lead and later by silver. In the Pre-British period gold jewellery among the Dimasa became very rare. It is during the British rule that silver jewellery once again became prominent.

Like gold, silver was also produced, procuring raw silver-earth from the neighbouring hill areas like the Garo hills and khasi hills by the Dimasa kacharies.<sup>44</sup> It is an important indication towards the existence of extensive trade between the Dimasa and their neighbouring communities. Silver, for e.g., is not found locally in the north Cachar Hills. Yet most of the traditional ornament of Dimasa, as listed earlier is essentially of silver. So scholars such as Nicholas Rhodes have gone on to suggest that Silver that has been used traditionally must have been procured through trade between the Dimasas and the Burmese in the East.<sup>45</sup> Rhodes has been even suggested that the Dimasa must have developed trade, taking advantage of the export of goods from Bengal into the neighbouring areas and communities, which might have contributed to the collection of silver coins by the Dimasa. The *Rangbarsa*, necklace of silver coins is the collection of silver coins. As we do not

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<sup>42</sup> U.C, Guha, *Cacharer Itibrita*, Guwahati, 1971, p-105

<sup>43</sup> Lila Gogoi, *The History of the system of Ahom Administration*, Calcutta, 1991, page-222.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p-222

<sup>45</sup> Rhodes N.G & S.K. Bose, *Op .cit*, p.22

came across the minting of Dimasa round shaped coins of pure silver in the history. However jewellery making during Ahom and post Ahom period was done by Bengali jewellers for the Dimasas. The process of Hinduization commenced at Maibong, atleast among the royal family and the court. At khaspur it proceeded rapidly, and in 1790 the formal act of conversion took place. Raja, Krishna Chandra, and his brother, Gobind chanra, entered the body of a copper effigy of a cow.<sup>46</sup> Along with the Bengali Brahmin in the Dimasa royal court, Bengali scripts and jeweller became prominent. The present study also makes us to notice the making of traditional Dimasa jewellery in Maibang of Barak valley by a group of Bengali jewellers who were entrusted by the Dimasa royal family. The Dimasa gold smith called *Doulagajau* lost its hold over the profession.

In the history of the jewellery ornamentation among the North East tribes (Naga, Kuki, Garo, Karbi and Bodos) ornamentation though develops much later, but we did not come across any metal jewellery culture, which also indicates their ignorance about the metal culture. May be use of their non-metallic objects, like the use of bamboo, jungle beads, glass, and feathers as common items of ornamentation, metallic ornamentation did not touched their culture. Bamboo ear rings are ornamented by the karbis and contemporary Naga tribes is due to their lack of knowledge about metal jewellery or may be non availability of the metal. A generation of Dimasa jewellery tradition developed and declined, and then a common jewellery culture developed in the region.

Thus in the field of material culture Dimasa people are expert and skilled, which was not seen among the neighbouring tribes. Besides weaving, bamboo works, rice beer making and the metal works they are also expert in stone works and in construction technology. The example of their work still stands in the form of ruins in Dimapur. Dimapur was a very large city E.A Gait has mentioned in his 'A history of Assam' that it was enclosed on its east, north and west by brick wall with a lots length of 3.2km and the fourth, the southern side is bordered by the river Dhansiri. The Dhansiri side of the city also has a brick wall which had been eaten up by the erosion of the river long ago.' The use of bricks was seen only in Dimasa architecture and the relics were considerably more advanced as regards building

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<sup>46</sup> Gait, Edward, *Op.cit*, page-257.

skill and technique than the neighbouring states at this period’’.<sup>47</sup> Infact the ruins of Dimapur is the example of Kachari’s advanced technology than that of the Ahoms. The use of brick for building purposes was then practically unknown to the Ahoms, and all their buildings were of timber or bamboo, with mud-plastered walls.<sup>48</sup> The relics of Maibang city can be still be seen by the side of railway tank about one km to south of the Maibang railway station. The rock-cut temple which situated about the km north to Maibang railway station of *Ranachandi* temple is the finest example of Dimasa architecture. Two most important contribution of the Dimasa in the field of architecture is the use of brick and plastic art as mentioned by the S.K. Borpujari in his work History of the Dimasas. The V-type monoliths of the Dhansiri Vally should be given the pride of place of being the only example of thoroughly cared and ideally shaped megaliths to be accepted as the finest in the country, if not all over the world.<sup>49</sup> In the Kachomari *pathar*, the Dimasa artistic columns are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India as the finest example of the Dimasa Material culture. It is reported that the works were of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century Kachari kingdom. Material culture of the Dimasa tells us about the socio-economic and cultural as well as their technological achievements. A self-sufficient society, well settled sound economy with a developed technology, the tribe placed themselves in an important position in the pages of history.

So from the above discussion on the Dimasa material culture we find that the Dimasa household indicates the tribe’s socio-cultural activities. The system of kitchen interior of bamboo works and keeping dry seeds in a *Pontho* is very interesting. Other tribes too used to preserve but the *pontho* made of special type of bamboo is made with special care. The polish surface of the bamboo is removed by scrapping so that the seeds can not suffer from lack of aeration. Again the *khaujeb*, a small basket of bamboo or cane strips as we mentioned the use of Locon (*lairu*) leaves as its inner layer also indicates the indigenous knowledge of the tribe. They use the locon leave as moisture-proof and as insecticide. The corn leaves is also used as bobbin. *Siju* tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) is also used in their material

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<sup>47</sup> H.H, Austin Godwin -*On the ruins of Dimapur on the Dhanshri river*, Assam, Calcutta, 1874, p-6

<sup>48</sup> J.B.Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-colonial North-East India*, New Delhi, 1991. p-137

<sup>49</sup> S.K. Borpujari, *History of Dimasa* (edited) ,Ghy, 1997. pp-173-174.

culture. The legs of various bamboo baskets are often covered by a strip prepared from *siju* tree because of its durability. *Siju* leave like the *locon* leave has the medicated value and insect does not bite it. The Dimasa knowledge of environment focused in their culture. Exploring the very natural value and their utilization is remarkable. Bamboo is used more or less by the every community of the land. From construction to traditional curry bamboo is common. The technique to use bamboo with that of jungle leaves is unique. The *Acacia pennata* is known by the tribe and it is used in preparing rice beer. The weaving practice of the Dimasa which is another features of the tribe focused the skilled labour of the womenfolk. The designs, technique and the pattern of the Dimasa traditional dress are remarkable. In the period of globalization, the community's identity is due to the traditional dress. The uniqueness in their designs and patterns placed them in high standards.

We can measure the developed culture and technology of the Dimasa in their pre-colonial period. The coming of the British in India affected all the part of the country and more or less in the field of indigenous culture. An alien culture garbed the country in the socio-cultural and political aspect. The industrial revolution further minimized the traditional culture. In this aspect the tribal culture including Dimasa continues in their age-old tradition in their life. Traditional, customs, rituals and culture are still prevalent. It is natural that some aspects of material culture have died due to varied reasons, for instance the dyeing culture and oil extracting. The coming of modern machine made coloured yarn and the changing life style of the Dimasa has taken its hold on Dimasa textile. However the credit goes to the Dimasa women for preparing beautiful Dimasa traditional attires in their busy scheduled life. They not only create the beautiful attire but also maintained the cultural identity. Again the preparation of rice beer, which is an integral part of the every Dimasa rituals, is Dimasa women's contribution to the community. In a word, it can be said that the survival of Dimasa material culture is dependent on its women and their skill in weaving and participation in socio-religious functions etc.