

CHAPTER-IV: Ornamentation is considered as a symbol that appears as a active non-verbal means of intercultural communication.¹ Ornament is perceived not just like an element of art system but also and a meta-cultural phenomenon is one of the most ancient and constant forms of communication and mutual enrichment of culture. Indeed, when we talk about different cultures, especially traditional, ancient Eastern or Western European culture before the Renaissance, our minds unwittingly begin to produce visual images, some kind of aesthetic models of a cultural tradition. For example, if we start to discuss the Arab Caliphate culture, we immediately imagine arabesques or luxury patterned carpet; considering ancient Chinese culture, first of all, we imagine refined hieroglyphic signs, which are also ornaments. Jewellery ornamentation is an age old passion for personal ornaments and decoration is common to every state of society. It may have been chastened and modified under particular circumstances, but it has never and nowhere been altogether suppressed. The jackdaw's feather and cowries-shell necklace of some of the pacific islanders may have been replaced in the boudoirs' of Paris and the drawing-rooms of England by the magnificent plumes of the ostrich and brilliants of unrivalled lustre, and in Asia by the opinions of the bird of paradise and orient pearls of exquisite perfection, but the desire for them remains the same, and equally ardent everywhere.² Ornamentation is varied in its growth under conditions, climatic and social interaction.³ The role of jewellery is also varied accordingly. Some used it as currency, wealth display and storage, some as a functional use, some for symbolised status or identity, some for the protection and some for the artistic display.⁴ Most culture has at some point had a practice of keeping large amount of wealth stored in the form of jewellery. Numerous cultures move wedding dowries in the form of jewellery or create jewellery as a means to store or display coins.

The time when jewellery was first used is not known but the remains of mollusc jewellery discovered in the caves of blombos in South Africa dates the

¹ N.Nikolenko, *Ornament as a symbol of intercultural communication*, Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, IDOSI Publication, ISSN 1990-9233, 2013,p-449

² Rajendralal Mitra, *Indo-Aryans*, Delhi/Varanasi,1969,p-227

³ Caral E. Henderson, *Culture and Custom of India*, London,p-141

⁴ George Frederick, *Magic of Jewels and Charms*, J.P.Morgan and the American Natural History Museum,New York,1917

existence of jewellery for over 100 thousand years.⁵ India has a long jewellery history, which went through various changes through cultural influence and politics for more than 5,000-8,000 years. Excavations at Mohenjodaro and other sites of the Indus Valley civilization have unearthed a wealth of handmade ornaments. It appears that both men and women of that time wore jewellery made of gold, silver, copper, ivory and precious and semi-precious stones. 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. While western traditions were heavily influenced by waxing and waning empires, India enjoyed a continuous development of art forms for some 5,000 years.⁶

Assam has a rich collection of traditional jewellery, which is unique and exclusive to the state. These jewellery hold a special place in the heart of the Assamese women and are worn during the cultural and religious events. Jorhat, the second biggest city of Assam, is the main jewelry making centre of the state. Thousands of natives and tourists come to Jorhat every day to purchase traditional Assamese jewellery in the numerous outlets of this region. The district also has a number of small scale and cottage industries wherein skilled jewelry makers work to promote this art of traditional jewellery making. The most famous ornaments of Assam are those made of gold. Gold washing and jewellery manufacture has been an important industry in the state from a long time. F.C. Hanniker in his monograph on gold and silver wares Assam writes “Assam jewellery is by no means without merit. It incurs the stock reproach of being unfinished, it is no doubt crude and precious stones used are not very precious or very well cut. But it is quaint and characteristic. The gold used is of a high degree of purity. The Assamese goldsmiths’ customers would not be satisfied with 14 carat or even 18 carat gold and many of the bracelets, necklaces etc are distinctly pleasing even to the critical eye and would attract notice in the midst of quit a good collection of Indian wares”⁷ The metal was abundantly found in a number of Himalayan Rivers flowing throughout the state. Sonowal Kacharis were the special group created by the Ahom kings which was particularly involved in gold washing in the various rivers, during

⁵ Dr. Jyoti Dwivedi, *Indian Tribal Ornament; a Hidden Treasure*, Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology, A.P.S. University Rewa, 2016, p-2

⁶ O. Untracht, *Traditional Jewellery of India*, New York: Abrams, 1997, ISBN 0 8109 3886 3, p-15

⁷ <http://incredibleassam.in/html/traditional.htm>

the reigns of the Ahom kings; this task was done on an elaborate scale.(which has been mentioned in chapter 2) In fact, the state received a good income from the yearly tax levied on gold washing. Apart from 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*, *Jonbiri*, *Dholbiri*, *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 ornament truly captivates the attention of the onlookers. Sonowal Kachari, (as we have discussed in previous chapter) gold washers of the Ahoms became a part of the Ahom administration under *paik* or *khel* system and cultural influence is noticeable. Their traditional ornaments, which are called '*Gam-kharu*', '*Hansor Mora Kharu*', '*Keru*', '*Thuria*', '*Zangphai*', '*Biri*', '*Kongkon*', *dugdugi*, *latumoni* are seems like a replica of Assamese culture.

Tribal culture of jewellery ornamentation is very much peculiar because of the materials used in its making. Various tribes use different types of jewellery to adorn themselves. Among the many reason for using jewellery among the tribes, the need to cover their bodies can be a reason. Sometimes it is found that may be they are scantily clothed but they have ample jewellery on their bodies.



Figure 32: Photograph showing tribal women with traditional wearings

In the pre-history period human used to decorate their body with tattoos and many African people are famous for traditional art on face and entire body, which can be call ornament. The African tribe also comes to our mind when we think of beaded jewellery. Various tribes across the African continent have used beaded jewellery differently through times. African beadworks held significance for the native tribes. Jewellery designed by the Zulu tribe represented the wearer's status or the family one belonged to. It is also found that women from the Turkana district of Africa too wore beaded jewellery to indicate their social status. Unmarried Massai girls wear a flat beaded disc around their necks and the married women wore a long, chunky beaded neckpieces made from beads.⁸ Among the Nagas the Angamis men used to wore cowries in rows of three or four, which signified exploits in war, but gradually they became emblems of love, and the fourth lines of cowries was worn by a man who had a intrigue with a married women with two girls of the same name, with two daughter at one father, or with a mother and her daughter at one and the same time. Among the khasis too, a Lynngam to show power and status is entitled to wear silver armlets above the elbows and on his wrist.⁹ Tribes of Northeast used verity of jungle beads along with the other metals. Initially they may use the jungle beads as a necklace to cover their upper portion, as the necklace is not of single piece. It generally covers the upper portion of body very well.

The lack of stitching knowledge is another reason of using huge amount of jungle beads as necklace. Sometime need also became a reason for ornamentation. For example in the Rajasthan women used to wear many bengals covering the whole hand due to hot and sandy weather. Sometime the traditional technique of the people, as the large cylindrical *Tumar* pendants worn in India were ideal for carrying written messages from one person to another became jewellery ornamentation. The jeweled silver toothpicks and ear cleaner pendants were worn by Turkmen as Hygiene Aid. Milkmaids wear ornately decorated fang-shaped pendants at their waist to support the milk buckets while they worked in Tibet. Women of Algeria and Turkey with their large-size jewellery around the neck, wrist and chest are considered paramount in protecting the most vulnerable parts of the body from injury. Again sometime to get attraction people ornamented

⁸ http://www.craftgully.com/index.php?route=news/article&news_id=7

⁹ K. P, Bahadur, *Caste, Tribes & Culture of India: Assam*, New Delhi, pp-9-12

themselves for profits. As Amulets include the coins and ornaments attached to a beggar's necklace in India for attracting more generous donations. In Central Asia, Turkmen boys wear a stylized bow and arrow (*ok-yai*) pendant on their backs to improve their luck when hunting.¹⁰

The tribal culture of India in jewellery ornamentation is very rich. Tribal jewellery is primarily intended to be worn as a form of beautiful adornment also acknowledged as a repository for wealth since antiquity. Tribal people are a heritage to the Indian land. Each tribe has unique style depending on environment and availability. The original format of jewellery design has been preserved by ethnic tribal. The desire to beautify and to make attracted, the primitive tribe ornamented themselves with various objects. Tribes in India generally wear necklaces made up of rupees coins with earrings, bracelets, anklets, bangles, amulets, hairpins etc. in many parts of India. In many places thick red coral bead necklaces are used in ornamentation. Tribal jewellery pieces are rarely uniform in shape or exactly symmetrical. The materials used are those found locally, with content and quality varying among the different cultures, artisans, and across time. Gt6yy, glass beads, jungle beads, shells, bones, animal claws, teeth and semi-precious stones for jewellery are important material in primitive period which hold a distinct rustic and earthy charm. Tribal jewellery is made of the products that are available locally. Bronze, silver and copper are used in later period and lastly the Gold. When the entire country was taken over by the spirit of globalization it was the tribal of India who had preserved the ancient craft and art of India. One such form of ethnic Indian art was the jewellery used by the tribes. Ornament used by the tribes stand out in a crowd because of its rustic and earthy flavour. They make jewellery from the indigenous items that are locally available. Moreover the jewellery they prepare exhibit their artistic skill in a profound manner. Rather it can be said that the appeal of the tribal jewellery is mainly due to its chunky and unrefined look. Tribals live close to the forest and are largely dependent on the wild biological resources for their livelihood. They utilize various plant parts like root, bark, leaves, and fruits to makes themselves comfortable. The shapes which they

¹⁰ Ibid,p-2

use are basic and very close to the ethnic Indian art.¹¹ Tribal concentration of each state is different with different origin, history, economic status lifestyle, food habits, traditional dresses and jewellery but the feeling, desire of looking beautiful by them is same. In daily life ornamentation is a part of tribal life to adorn themselves. The Banjara tribe of Rajasthan is known for its heavy silver jewellery. Tribal jewellery can be mentioned as one of the chief attractions of Rajasthan which mesmerizes the viewers. Silver is more commonly worn by the tribal women and is certainly more affordable. The *bor* or *rakhdi*, which is also known as a *ghundi* or *borla* adorns the centre of the forehead, at the hairline is an essential symbol of marriage and worn only by married women. Colourful bangles are made up of Lac with inlay work with semiprecious stones in it and the ethnic bracelet or upper armlet is again very precious for the tribal folk of Rajasthan. On the other hand Nagas used different variety of beads in large quantity in their jewellery, along with a wide range of materials, including metals like bronze and brass, glass, shell, stone, bone, wood, seeds, hair, fibre, teeth or tusk, claws and horns. Traditionally both sexes enjoy wearing colourful ornaments of bronze and brass armlets and anklets, heavy earrings, necklaces in bronze, shells, precious stones and boar tusks. Broken tumblers of thick glass were turned into ear ornaments and colourful glass red beads were strung on cords of local fibres fastened by coins. Miniature trophy masks are worn as a pendant in a necklace by Naga warriors. They are symbolic of their bravery as head-hunters. Trophy mask were handed down from one generation to another.¹² Women of Ladakh Himalaya region wear an ornament called '*sondus*' or '*branshil*' which is a marriage symbol usually fixed on the left shoulder having few gold or silver discs connected by a number of long silver strands. It is also inherited from the mother to daughter at the time of marriage. Trophy and jewellery inheritance from one generation to next generation is indicating the preciousness of the jewellery and symbol of hereditary. Tribes of West Bengal ornamented themselves with *Dokra* which is a symbol of craftsmanship. This is one of the oldest forms of metal casting basically comprise of different decorative accessories like lamp holders, lamps, chains, figures and various symbols of tribal folklore and religion as well as exquisite tribal jewellery of ethnic Indian designs and patterns.

¹¹ Dr. Jyoti Dwivedi, *Indian Tribal Ornament; a Hidden Treasure*, Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology, A.P.S. University Rewa, 2016, p-01

¹² M. Alemchiba, *The Art and Crafts of Nagaland*, Kohima, 1967, p-33

No *Dokra* items are same and this is the unique feature of *Dokra*.¹³ Jewelleries of Himachal Pradesh are inspired by nature. Jewellery like pipal-leaf-shaped forehead ornaments and motifs in other jewelleries are of lotus and tiger's head are used. In the bangles which is called 'kangan' a thinner and plainer in the middle but widens towards the two ends are engraved into heads of crocodiles, tigers and elephants. The heavy anklets, bangles and silver bracelets or 'kara' solid or filled with shellac are in the shape of crocodile or lion heads. Tribal jewellery of Andhra Pradesh is also influenced by nature. Women during their traditional dances decorated themselves with flowers, leaves, creepers and fruits. They also wear beautiful ornaments and belts that are embellished with shells, metal-mesh, beads and chains. Among the tribal women sometimes ornamentation also signified the marital status of women. The tribal married women of Uttarakhand smear '*Kumkum*' on their forehead and various types of necklaces along with nose ring or '*Nath*' and toe-ring or '*Bichhuwas*' made of silver. Jewellery among the tribes of Karnataka is having some religious touch. The devotees' of Shiva often wear finger ring depicted in it the god Shiva's vehicle, bull '*nandi*'. On the other hand *Konda Kapus* tribe of Karnataka displays wealth in their jewellery ornamentation. The necklaces of coins of 25 paisa and 50 paisa, where the coins are bedecked with jangling bell, are a jewellery of pride.

Northeast India, considered as one of most culturally diverse regions of the world, is a land of fascinating tribes. The entire area of northeast India is full of lush green valleys, mountains, springs and green vegetation. The land with the natural beauty and cultural heritage has always topped the list of an ideal destination for travelers from India and World. Different ethnic groups and tribal groups inhabit the region of northeast India. They all have their own culture and traditional customs as we have discussed in our previous chapters. The tribal art and craft of the region also shows the rich culture, creativity and tradition of the tribal communities. Tribes of this region use to decor their body with variety of jewellery. They mostly live and earn through the hills and forest areas and ornamented themselves with the nearby available materials. Tribal jewellery is carved out in any forms, be it gold or otherwise, clearly indicates the importance of the same. Lack of precious materials has never inhibited the wearing of jewellery and not

¹³ Opcit,p-8

even poverty or lack of technical skill has prevented the creation of innovative and striking forms. The instance of such a spirit is best noticed among the tribes of India with regard to their ethnic pieces of jewellery. When the entire country was engulfed by the spirit of globalization it is the tribal of India who had preserved the ancient crafts and arts of India. One such form of ethnic Indian art was the jewellery used by the tribes. Their jewellery also exhibits their artistic skill in a profound manner. The jewellery used by the north eastern tribes of India is exceptional in its look and artistic skill. For instance the tribes of Meghalaya like the Khasi, Jaintia Hills and Garo tribes are known for their exclusive creation of jewellery. The Khasi and the Jaintia tribes mainly use thick red coral bead necklaces and the Garo on the other hand are identified with thread strung thin fluted stems of glass. The Bhutias of Sikkim use the traditional gold to make jewellery. Along with gold they also use metals like silver, Dzi stones, turquoise and coral.¹⁴ There are around twenty major tribes and many sub-tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and there is a big variety of tribal jewelries in this region.

Women wear numerous necklaces, bangles and belts. Some jewellery signified their traditional custom. The Adi (Dafla, Minyong, Abor, Galong) women wear a distinctive locally made ornament *benyop* the belt on which is in a series of three, five, seven or nine brass discs are strung on cane, screw pine fiber or leather cord. The largest disc, its spiral motif represents the wheel of life, is placed at the center, the other arranged in graduated sizes. These ornaments are worn by girls and women until the birth of their first child. Adi a tribe of Arunachal regarded shell necklaces



Figure 33: Photograph showing tribal woman of Arunachal in bead jewellery.

¹⁴ Information accessed from http://www.indianetzone.com/2/tribal_jewellery.htm.

aisheri as sacred as and more valuable than other ornaments because they are handed down from mother to daughter through many generations. The most striking feature of the Apatani women another tribe of Arunachal is the way they adorn their noses. They insert wooden plugs into their nostrils. Small pegs are put in when they are little girls, and they grow up, they size of the pegs are increased until they are about 2-3 centimeters across. It is said that the ornament is to attempt to make Apatani women look ugly so that they would not be taken as slaves by the nearby Nyishi tribe.¹⁵ In Northeast region of India some tribal's used common materials like ivory, gold, bone, brass, silver, zee stones and coral. Feathers from birds as headgear, earrings made of glass beads, cane and bamboo is also used to beautify their body. People handcrafted jewellery out of natural materials found in abundance all over the country; everything from nature was affectionately gathered and artistically transformed into fine body jewellery. Human civilization is not static and as it goes on, culture also changes along with its need and requirement.

The North Eastern part of India Assam is the place where ornaments are the expression of artistic mind of both the maker and wearer. The style of making the ornaments and the decoration on them is one of the most impressive artistic features in the history of Assamese folk art. In Assam jewellery ornamentation is also influenced by nature. Tribes of the region use varieties of natural object that are available locally to decorate themselves. Ornamentation among the tribes of the region is different but the tribes of the plain areas like Mishing and Sonowal Kachari jewellery ornamentation is similar. Again Dimasa, Karbi and Bodos wore similar kind of jewellery but the hilly tribes like Naga, Hmar, Kuki, Rengma and Mizo jewellery ornamentation is different with the other two groups. Some of the greater Assamese jewellery like *thuria*, *dugdugi*, *gam kharu*, *junbiri*, *maduli* is also included among the Sonowal Kachari, and Mishing, in different name. Mishing neck ornament is called *Doskari*. Several kinds of *Doskaris* are used by the Mishing women folk. Those are *tapi*, *galpota*, *tampilamg*, *sumyalaksin*, *bortap*, *jonbiri*, *gajara*, *maduli* and *polomaduli*. *Tapi* is a necklace made of white beads. The bead necklace is beautifid by silver rings and metal pieces. It is worn only in ceremonial occasions. It symbolized the wealth also as only rich and wealthy

¹⁵ Information gathered from <http://local-moda.blogspot.in/2012/12/tribal-jewelry-and-adornments-of.html>

people used to wear these ornaments. *Golpata* is a metal ornament generally made of gold or silver. The ornament is more or less like a belt around the neck as it is attached close to the neck. The word *golpata* is of Assamese origin where *gal* means neck and *pata* means belt or strip. On the top and bottom of *galpata* two rows of white beads or red rubies are arranged on lines. In the middle portion several gold or silver stars like flower motifs are arranged. Fine colored stones are studded on these flower motifs. Two ribbons are provided on both the ends to provide for a tie on the back of the neck. *Jonbiri* another golden neck ornament is an ornament of new moon shape. Motifs of flowers, leaves and butterflies are carved on it. It is worn by the Sonowal Kachari and Assamese people also. Mishing ornamented with *dugdugy* which is worn as neck ornament with *powalmoni* which is in the shape of a leaf.



Figure 34, 35 and 36: Photographs showing traditional Assamese ornamental jewellery.

It is commonly made of gold but silver made *dugdugy* is also prevalent. In Assamese it is called *dugdugi*. *Maduli* is a replica of Assamese drum call *Dhul* and the design is also called as *Dholbiri*. It is a pendant made of either gold or silver where red or blue stones called *bakhar* are studded on it. It is fixed with a garland of red or white *monis* (bead) of *powal*, *motor* and *silikha*. Ornament for bravery and religious significance is also seen among the Mishings. Sumyalaksin a traditional necklace of Mishing is a symbol of bravery. Tiger's claws were collected while hunting in the past. The claws or nails were arranged in some order and worn like a necklace. *Bortep* or *Dogne* on the other hand is a necklace used by the *mibu* (the priest). This ornament is made of beads. It is believed that there is living and dead beads and the *mibu* uses the laying one for his religious performance. Mishing ear ornament called *kentu* is generally of four kinds. These are *Birbir*, *takar*, *jongphai* and *thuria*. *Birbir* is an ear ornament of white bead like the seed of a small plant, like the seed of rice plant. Such seeds are braided together

with a yarn and are used as earring. *Jakar* is the earring made of *pipa* (a kind of reed). It must have been used before the advent of the metallic culture among the Mishings. Karbi's of hilly region of Assam used bamboo rings as their ear ornament, which also indicates their ornamentation practice and in the same time it reflects the lack of metallic knowledge. *Thuria* is like the shape of a lotus with a heavy stem. This ear ornament is also used by Assamese and Sonowal Kachari tribes of Assam. Bangle in Mishing language is called *Kongo*. Three kinds of *kongos* are used by the Mishings. These are *gamkharu*, *muthikharu* and *bala*. *Gamkharu* was formerly worn by the male, but in the present period only the female folk used it. It is convex on the upper part and plain in the inner side. The bangle has two halves which are joined with a stick. *Muthikharu* can be called a combination of several bangles having decorative motifs on it. *Bala* is a circular bangle whose two ends are joined but ends is open and pointed. It is like a circular rod having certain motifs on its surface. It is made of gold or silver. These three types of bangles are also ornamented by the Sonowal Kachari and Assamese people of the region. Mishing men wore two types of ornament. *Ludurai* was a metal made heavy garland whose upper part was covered with gold layers and shaped like a car wheel. It was worn as neck ornament with a black ribbon. It was an ornament of the rich family. *Longu karu* was a gold or silver made nail like nose ornaments worn by the young and aged men of Mishing community.



Figure 37, 38 and 39: Photographs showing traditional Assamese, Dimasa and Karbi bangle jewellery.

The Dimasa, Karbi and Bodos of Assam, can be arranged in one group in jewellery ornamentation. In the field survey that was undertaken for this study in the Dimasa, Karbi and Bodo populated areas of Assam during 2014-16, it was noticed that the jewellery ornamentation of these tribes has certain similarity in designs but the use of metal is different. Among the Bodo's and Dimasa's gold and

silver ornaments were used. Karbi's on the other hand ornamented them with silver and Brass. Dimasa jewellery includes *Rangbarsa* the necklaces is of silver coins, *Khadu*, bangles of silver, *Chandrawale* a silver necklaces of floral design having two to three pairs of chain joined together, *eansidam* a nose ring which is also of silver. *Khamouthai* means earrings which are generally made of gold and only women of rich families can afford to this. Besides gold and silver jewellery, materials like *Phowal*, Red and Black beads and variety of beads which are available in the jungle were used in jewellery making. *Phowal* necklace is very much in demand among the tribes. It is made of silver in which costly sea-shells are used.¹⁶ The sea-shells may have been acquired from sea and Assam is far from sea. This indicates a healthy trade of the Northeast with the other part of the world. *Li-kisim*, *Li-kjao* and *Jonshama*, the three neckpieces that are made of beads of black, red, and general jungle beads respectably are very attractive. It is said that *Rangbarsa* which is now in silver, in the royal days was of pure gold but seems it was only for the upper class women. The Dimasa male uses only two types of ornaments, namely, *Yaocher* and *Kharik*. The former is a silver armlet and the latter is silver earring. But the use of these two ornaments is confined to the old men only. The Bodo women used very few ornaments made of silver and gold. For the ear ornaments like *Khera*, *Japkhiring*, *Boula* (for the upper ear) are used. *Nak-phul* a small flower shape designed nose ornament and *Bulaki* a nose pendent are popular jewellery of Bodo women. There are four pieces of neck ornaments. *Chandra har* is a heavy necklace of five layers hung on the chest from the neck and it is similar with Dimasa necklace *Chandrawale*. *Thanka-Siri* is a simple necklace. *Bisahar* is a necklace worn round the neck made of silver coins and similar with the Dimasa *Rangbarsa*. However the Dimasa necklace of coins are tied with red and black threads and Bodo and Karbi necklace of silver coins, *Thanka-Siri* and *Lac-Siki* respectably are stitched with thread giving red beads in regular interval between the coins. *Jibou-Zin-Siri* is a necklace with silver oval unornamented piece for the back of the neck from which hangs on two sides two snakes like chains biting in two sides of another plain silver oval plate resting at the junction of the chest and abdomen. Bodo's called *ashan* to indicate bangles. Two types of bangles are used, one is small and other is a wide about two and half inchs. Both Karbi men and

¹⁶ B.N.Bordoloi, *The Dimasa Kacharis of Assam*, Guwahati, 1984.p-94

women are fond of ornaments. In olden days a young man used to wear oval-shaped beads in the neck called *pule-ahi*. He also used to wear *arnan* (rings) in every finger except the thumb. Most of the rings are made of silver. A middle aged man used to hang a necklace of round beads of different colours called *abonghom*. In the Karbi society for every age there is a specific type of ear-ring. Three types of ear-rings are ornamented by the Karbi's according to their age. A middle aged man wear a small ear-ring called *onti* made of silver, old man wear *norik* and a very old man wears *suwat-athe*. In the pre-colonial period a rich man used to wear a necklace of golden beads called *ser-alek* and a bangle called *roi* in the wrist usually made of silver. Only the man who knows magic or sorcery used to wear copper finger ring. Karbi women are very much fond of wearing large size ornaments.



Figure 40: Photographs showing a Karbi woman wearing traditional *nothing-pi*

However young one in karbi traditional society used to wear bamboo as ear ring. When a time comes when the ear holes reach the size of one inch or more in diameter and the women is aged she wears a silver ear ornament called *nothing pi* each weighting about thirty grams or more. The *nothing pi* approximately resembles the *thuria* of Assamese women. A wooden ear-ring is also worn by the Karbi women called *nothing pi-okrun* only at the time of *Chamankan* (dead ceremony). A necklace called *Lek-waikom* is ornamented by the karbi women, which is made of red and black beads, like the Dimasa necklace of beads *jonshama*. A matured woman wears a wrist ornament called *roi-pengkhara* , a pair of thick and broad bangles made of silver and brass. This bangle ornamentation of the Karbi is similar with Dimasa *khadu*. The difference lies only in curved ornamentation of the *khadu* and Dimasa *khadu* is never seen in brass. Finger rings of brass in a simple design are luxuriantly worn in practically in all the fingers except the thumbs. Sometimes a silver coin is welded on the upper side of the ring.

It may be mentioned here that about the Tribal ornamentation very few works have been done. Among the few works Dr. Phukan Ch. Phangcho's work is important. However the necklace of coins is not mentioned as the traditional Karbi neck pieces in his book "*The Karbis of North-East India*" whereas he has mentioned all the traditional Karbi jewellery ornamentation. However in observation and field survey with aged Karbi women and reveals that the coin necklace is very much a part of Karbi jewellery ornamentation. These coins necklace are known as *Lek-chiki*.

Among the tribes of Assam Naga, Kuki, Rengma, Hamar and Mizo are different in their jewellery ornamentation. They used common material that is available locally for their ornamentation. Their ornamentation is so noticeable that the people were called by the Burmese as Naka meaning people with earring. Burmese guides about these tribes, Naka was recorded as Naga and has been in use thereafter.¹⁷ Jewellery has been an important part of Naga identity. They used different variety of beads in large quantity in their jewellery along with a wide range of materials including metals like bronze, brass, glass, shell, stone, bone, wood, seed, hair, fiber, teeth or tusk, claws and horns. Traditionally both sexes enjoy wearing colourful ornaments. They used to wear bronze and brass armlets and anklets, heavy earrings, necklaces in bronze, shell, precious stones and boar tusks. Broken tumblers of thick glass were turned into ear ornaments and colourful glass beads were strung on cords of local fibers fastened by coins. Among the Nagas Angamis were very fond of wearing something as an ear-ornament. This was not necessarily a silver or gold ear-ring but made of any material which seemed fancy.¹⁸ Mizo tribe makes use of shells, bones, animal claws, teeth and semi-precious stones for jewellery. The use of bird's feathers is also seen among these tribal groups.

Gold is known as *hiranya* and *svarna*; silver as *rupa* and copper as *tama*. These are continued to be used in ornaments often crusted with *ratna* or jewels. In Dimasa gold is called as *gajau* and silver is called as *guphu*. The Dimasa, one of the original tribal inhabitants of Assam developed the gold culture from their early period. Use of gold as valuable material for trade, jewellery and in temple

¹⁷ Dr. Jyoti Dwivedi, *Indian Tribal Ornament; a Hidden Treasure*, Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology, A.P.S. University Rewa, 2016, p-08

¹⁸ K.P. Bahadur, *Caste, Tribe & Culture of India: Assam*, New Delhi, 1978, p-8

architecture as well as in decoration of the deity seems a common practice of the Dimasa. Among the tribes of Northeast, use of 'Gold' by Dimasa is very ancient. As we have discussed in chapter two, among the varied material culture of Dimasa gold washing and its uses is an important culture of the Dimasas. However use of gold seems limited among the general public or can be a symbol of royal status. During the course of the investigation period we came across a very few traditional Dimasa jewellery in gold ignoring the economic condition of a family. Gold was available no doubt as we have lots of references about the availability and uses of gold by the Dimasa. History says when the Koch expedition under NaraNarayana entered Dimasa kingdom; the king quickly presented Sukladhvja with many valuables and 28 elephants and accedes to NaraNarayana with a promised to pay an annual tribute of 70,000 silver coins, 1000 Gold coins and 60 elephants.¹⁹ Again it is mentioned that in the Ahom-Kachari war of 1536, the Kachari king Detshung defeated and killed and Ahom had taken a gold sofa, a silver sofa and a considerable quantity of gold and silver.²⁰ A gold sofa and a silver sofa indicate the availability of the metals in the Dimasa kingdom. The financial position of the state as early as in the 16th century can be ascertained from the another fact that in 1562 the Dimasa Raja agreed to pay an annual tribute of seventy thousand gold *mohars* and sixty elephants to the victorious Koch ruler.²¹ The references have points out the economic wellbeing of the Dimasa kingdom. The restricted use of gold by the Dimasa commoner was may be due to keeping gold as a royal metal which continued to be a pride of the royal family till the colonial period.

A study of jewellery ornamentation also needs to reflect on social hierarchy of the tribe. Among the forty clans of the Dimasa male clan, *Nunisa* clan cannot use gold in their jewellery ornamentation and in post-colonial period also they maintain this restriction. It is said that the clan also known as *Singuengsa*, one of the royal family²² used to worshipped their God in gold and so they sacrifice the use of gold in personal matter.²³ Original Dimasa society may not practice such

¹⁹ Swarna Lata Baruah., *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 210

²⁰ L.Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations(A political Study)*, Guwahati, 1968, p-84

²¹ J.B.Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, New Delhi, 1991, p-145

²² U.Ghuha, *Kacharer Itibrita*, Guwahati, 1971, p-104

²³ Interview taken with *Najendra Nunisa*, *President Dimasa Sahitya Sabha, Diphu*, Karbi Anglong, Dated-05/04/13

offerings; it is said as an influence of Hinduisation. In Maibang state formation Hindu influences if not to all but in royal family and among the aristocracy is spontaneous. The caste system also could make some influence. Professional specialization of the various *Sengfongs* was started and as well as social stratification of the Dimasa society was a new element. Since Hinduisation there were eight Dimasa families attached to the court who sacrifice to a particular deity.²⁴ Again the ornamentation of gold by the Dimasa also became prominent in their final state formation in Maibang when they were influenced by the Hinduism. The defeat of Dimasas by the Ahom and their retreat from Sadiya and Dimapur made them more conscious about their political establishment. The Raja had to raise powerful army enlisting almost all the able bodied males of the state, named the main column as *Chandi Paltan* and in most cases, the heir apparent to the throne (*Juvaraj*) served as the commander-in-chief of the army. In their distress, the people looked upon the war goddess as the protectress of the state and this brought them more and more under Brahminical influence. The Dimasa tutelary deity, *Kachai Kati* was discovered as a form of *Sakti*. The deity quietly transformed into Ranachandi (Goddess of War).²⁵ Construction of two gold images of *Dasabhuia Durga* and *Baneswar Siva* at Sonapur and Banpur respectively²⁶ not only informed us about the use of the gold but also about the Hinduisation and ornamentation of gold, which signify the intercultural communication among the neighboring Bengali Brahmins. Dimasa king Ramachandranarayana offered great patronage to skilled labors. A Karkhana-nagar (Industrial Township) was developed at a place called 'Kalinagar' on the bank of Barak. A few families of porter, carpenter, weaver, blacksmith and along with goldsmith were brought from Bengal.²⁷ The importance of traditional or the royal smith *daula gajau* (one of the male clan) became limited due to entry of Bengali artisan as the former works within a few quarters of Dimasas. We can say jewellery making practice by the Dimasa clan

²⁴ J.B. Bhattacharjee , *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, New Delhi 1991, p147

²⁵ J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, New Delhi, 1991, p-139

²⁶ Lila Gogoi, *The History of The System of Ahom Administration*, Calcutta, 1991. p-222

²⁷ J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, New Delhi, 1991, p145

smiths is rapidly decaying and the specific clan which used to make jewellery has lost their professional occupation.



Figure 41: Photographs showing traditional Dimasa jewellery ornamentation.

Jewellery is a personal wealth for Dimasa women. From mother to daughter the wealth is passed on. The law of inheritance is greatly influenced by the existence of parallel male and female clans in the Dimasa society. Although the Dimasa society is a patriarchal society, it has three types of property, namely paternal, maternal and common property. The maternal property relates to ornaments, cloths and looms. The sons can never inherit the maternal property even if there is no daughter in the family and in such cases such property is inherited by the nearest female relative belonging to the mother's clan.²⁸ In the Dimasa society divorce is very rare, but in case the divorce takes place the jewellery is taken by the wife and female issues are given to the mother and the tradition of acquiring maternal property by daughter is continued. Contribution of Dimasa women in jewellery making is another feature of the society. Other than the metal works in jewellery making process, Dimasa women use to give the finishing touch to the phowal, *Li-ksim* and *Jonsham*, are few necklaces of beads and red carol which are collected by women and stitched by them. The *Rangbarsa*, necklace of silver coins is also tied in black and red color thread by women. For this works there is no special category or class, it is a common work for the every Dimasa women. The Dimasa also practice the inlay works in their jewellery ornamentation. The heavy silver bracelet, *khadu* is with flower motifs in it is carved. The designs in *khadu* are generally matched with the Dimasa traditional attire.

Jewellery ornamentation is not practiced by the Dimasa widow. After the death of her husband she puts off all the jewellery and keeps for her daughter. The *chandrawal* necklace of silver in floral design seems a daily wear of a married

²⁸ B.N. Bordoloi, *The Dimasa Kacharis of Assam*, Guwahati, 1984, p-65

women and other jewellery for special occasions. Dimasa jewellery is both practical and functional as Dimasa jewellery sometimes plays a role in both physical and spiritual protection. Dimasa children are ornamented with the pendant of Pangolin's piece of skin. They believe that it will protect from the evil spirit. Among the Karbi's too such belief is exists. They used to ornament their children with the pendant of cowries' shells to protect them from the evil spirit. The Assamese people also practiced the custom of putting black mark (*tikka*) on the forehead of children to avoid the evil eye. Karbi women ornamented their teeth with black colour. Blanking of teeth in black is called 'So-ik', which is considered to be important care of beautifying a women and tattooing on the face passing from the forehead down to the chin over to the nose and the lips dividing the whole body in two parts, is called 'Duk'. Ornamentation in deep blue tattoo, according to them is to make them ugly. It is said that in their early days young Karbi girls were taken forcefully by some peoples from China, Japan and neighboring countries during the Burmese invasion. Ornamentation in the form of religious beliefs is articulated in Dimasa society. Sometime Dimasa children were ornamented with single coin pendant with a thread around the neck. We have discussed about the Dimasa beliefs in rebirth in our previous chapter. Here if any children cry continuously or suffer for many days or sometime did not show any interest in taking food, Dimasa priest or *Jonthai* acts as a fortune teller and generally find the reason as the child is seeking something from his or her relatives which was not given to his or her in its previous birth. The pendant of coin is used to mark the value of the things.

Jewellery ornamentation of the Dimasa speaks about the availability of metals and the material culture of gold washing. Because of their gold washing practices, a group of Dimasa people were entrusted to wash gold and named as *Sonowal khel* by the Ahoms in the line of *paik* system. This section of these people influenced by the Ahoms and in the later period assimilated with the greater Assamese society. They are known as the *Sonowal Kachari*. The history of gold washing and its uses by the Dimasa was suffered due to Ahom monopoly in gold. This also makes the tribes gold storage very limited, as the *khel* member was not allowed to use the gold and the every member of the *khel* has to deposit one *tola* of

gold annually.²⁹ May be because of this reason gold ornament became limited and was replaced by the silver as well as the non-metallic materials. The coming of the British is another reason for the use of silver in ornamentation. The ornamentation for need and beautification of body is transformed into status symbol and a need to satisfy aesthetic need. The necklace of coins of silver became popular among the Dimasa after coming of the British. The coins that are used in the necklace are British silver coins of the period of James I and Queen Elizabeth, which are depicted in the coins with its value of 25 paisa. However between, c.1520A.D and 1830A.D coins were struck by the Dimasa-kachari kings on the occasion of important events like coronations and victories.³⁰ It signifies the rarity of coins for the common people. The British coins became a valuable material for the ornamentation. Again one would have been aquired the British coins only by trade or exchange of valuable material and so the aristocratic family only affords the British coins as for local exchange no such coins were struck by the Dimasa king. Only copper and base metal coins, or cowrie's shells, were used to facilitate barter transactions in local village markets, and villagers might use silver as a store of wealth.³¹ Replacement of British silver coins and process of Hinduisation in Dimasa kingdom leads the decline of Dimasa traditional goldsmith. M.Martin had recorded in early 19th century, that there were merchants, goldsmiths, blacksmiths and coppersmiths among the Dimasa Kacharies.³² Obviously such a state of commercial development had not been reached all of a sudden, but had built up over the centuries. The fact is also supported by B.N.Bordoloi in his work 'The Dimasa Kacharies of Assam' that the Dimasa hold once very expert carpenters, ironsmiths, blacksmiths, goldsmiths and salt makers among them. But two categories of artisan are practically absent now-a-days that are salt makers and gold and silver smiths.³³ For much reason the role of goldsmiths in the society became non-importance and scarcity of silver and decline in trade may be among the reasons. As towards the end of independent Dimasa Kachari rule a small store of money was kept at the court and little cash was by then current among the common

²⁹ Lila Gogoi, *The History of The System of Ahom Administration*, Calcutta,1991.p-222

³⁰ N.G.Rhodes, *Op.cit*, p-156

³¹ N.G.Rhodes & S.K.Bose, *A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis*, ICHR,Kolkata& Guhati,2006,p-68

³² N.G.Rhodes & S.K.Bose, *Ibid* ,p-69

³³ B.N.Bordoloi, *The Dimasa Kacharis of Assam*, Guwahati,1984,p-81

villagers. Cowries became the medium of exchange as substitute for coins at the markets in the hills.³⁴ The scarcity in silver and Ahom monopoly on Gold leads jewellery ornamentation of the Dimasa in a state of declining by day by day. *Rangbarsa*, the necklace of silver coins became a rare and few Dimasa women were lucky to be the owner of it. Not only that, all the traditional jewellery of silver has been replaced by the led and modern machine made beads instead of jungle beads. Tribal jewellery ornamentation is like an index which indicates the appropriate culture, to the whole community and its worldview;³⁵ just like a letter its zip code indicates a country, a town or a post office.

The colourful traditional attire of the Dimasa is another form of ornamentation of the tribe. In North East India weaving is the monopoly of women. Every tribe of Assam knows the art of weaving. Their technique, motifs, dyeing process may be different from each other. Handloom weaving, as a folk art in Assam, forms an integral part of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups having diverse socio-cultural background.³⁶ Each tribe has kept its unique style of motifs and designing patterns intact even now. Traditional dresses are the identity of a tribe. Rich and colourful designed Dimasa traditional dresses are a creator's dreams. The weaving culture is a long process. Making of cotton thread from the cotton fiber, for endi cloth rearing the endi worm, for dyeing, collection of jungle plants and lastly arranging a loom; all are done by the Dimasas.

Ornamentation of handloom fabrics of Assam is done in the loom itself. The decorative motifs or designs with colours play a vital role in the textile tradition of Assam. The indigenous weavers produce attractive designs of various shades in different textile items. The emphasis on weaving attractive designs has always been a characteristic of this craft in Assam. The creative urge of the Dimasa women and their eye for beauty find expression in embellishing even such a simple functional piece of textile like *gamsa*, (towel) *sgaopha* or *phagri* (head turban) and *rigdo* (a short muffler) with captivating motifs and designs. The term traditional is often applied to motifs and designs which have been handed down from generation

³⁴ N.G.Rhodes& S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*, p-71

³⁵ N.Nikolenko, *Ornament as a symbol of intercultural communication*, Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, IDOSI Publication, ISSN 1990-9233, 2013,p-451

³⁶ Labanya Mazumdar, *Textile Tradition of Assam*, Guwahati,2013,p5

to generation, without losing their original characteristics.³⁷ Dimasa handloom with its motifs and designs is the finest example of the traditional handloom. The handloom fabrics of Dimasa are known for their various indigenous artistic designs. The motifs and designs in traditional textiles of Dimasa are unique and distinctive in many ways. The traditional Dimasa dresses are ornamented with indigenous motifs and designs. The most peculiar design is that of 'Ramai' which we can call 'Pari' or 'Poti' (border) of attire. The Dimasa motifs are found to be indigenous in their source of inspiration and carry specific meaning and significance in the socio-cultural life of the people of the community. Particular types of designs were meant for particular wear. Designs and colours meant for women costumes could not be used for men's wear. This code was strictly adhered to by the Dimasas.³⁸ The *Gainthao* a male lower garment, *Rithap* a shawl of *endi* and *Remshalu* a one coloured shawl are never used by the female. The designs are different from the female wear and meant for the male members only. Male attire generally contains the animal motifs sometime with structural motifs whereas in female attires floral and plant motifs are prominent. There is a taboo in ornamentation of body by a dress, other than the specific dress. Here dress is not just to ornamentation of body but an identity of a community which signify a traditional custom. Another important attire of Dimasa people is 'Rimsau' of 'white' colour. The 'Rimsau' is a piece of woven cloth; beautifully designed with 'Ramai' and motifs of flowers as well as of trees, animals etc. The 'Rimsau' is used during the marriage ceremony to cover the heads of the bride and bride-groom and it cannot be worn at any other time. The colour also indicates some meaning in the Dimasa society. Ornamentation in a Dimasa marriage in black coloured dress is not used, as black colour means 'Sad' or 'dark'. And so Red coloured dress is not ornamented to a dead person, as they believe the deceased will get leprosy in his or her next birth. The Mishing female does not wear black *gara* (*mekhela*) in her period of menstruation. Wearing black colour at the menstrual period is a taboo in the society. Mishing dressed a male dead body in white woven clothes called *tongani* or *dumer* having no coloured borders.

³⁷ Labanya Mazumdar, *Op.cit* ,p-117

³⁸ S.Brahma, *Primitive Tribal Art*, Journal of the Folklore Society of Assam, Guwahati, 2005, p-40

No professional designers are found among the Dimasa. Traditionally, the designs are created. The objects of nature constitute the main source of inspiration for motifs and designs used in the ornamentation of textile in Dimasa loom. In the course of field investigation we came across four categories of motifs viz., Floral and plant motifs, Animal motifs, Structural motifs in Geometrical pattern. Dimasa women used varieties of flower and plant motifs in their attires. *Thai di bar*, (ou Tenga flower), *fanthau bar* (bringal flower), *Bhami bar* (lotus), *Khasuri bar* (wild flower), *phalung bar* (wild flower) Trees and besides these various leaves like *dilam palai* (Pomegranate leaf), *Tilam Palai* (Leaf of water lily) *Rudai lao*, (Castor Leaf), *Mukugreay* (fern) are commonly found in the Dimasa women textile.

A variety of animal motifs like *Endi malai* (Eri worm), *Patha ramai* (Parrot), peacocks, elephant, ducks and swans, rabbits, horse, snake (jubu ro), *thursamin*, *yado yagain*, *murusa yagain* are important. Animal motifs are generally found in the Dimasa male attire. Elephant and duck motifs are common in every Dimasa traditional attire. A great influence of material culture is often marked in the textile tradition of Assam. In Dimasa textile artifacts and material object used in their socio-cultural life are adopted for ornamenting the textile. Such designs are classified by Labanya Mazumdar in her book entitled 'Textile Tradition of Assam' as structural design.³⁹ Motifs and designs of Brick walls (*ramai*) hand-fan (*gaseb*), knife hanger (*sisung phalang*) are important. Sometime diverse elements of nature seem to be the main source of inspiration so far as ornamentation of textile is concerned. It is believed that the wonderful unity, orderliness, harmony of lines and curve, the symmetry of form and shape which are all intrinsic characteristics of nature have inspired the geometrical designs.⁴⁰ Geometrical forms have been used for ornamentation for a very long time in various cultural setting. In Assam textile geometrical designs, individually or in combination with stylized motifs have been used widely since the olden times. Tribal designs are generally of geometrical pattern and so the Dimasas in that forms commencing on the straight lines, triangles, rectangles, squares parallel lines and vertical lines. The names corresponded to the object, plants, animals and birds in nature but did not present realistic representations of them. These were but abstract decorative forms derived

³⁹ Labanya Mazumdar, *Op.cit* ,p-131

⁴⁰ Enakshi Bhavani, *Folk and Tribal Design of India*, Bombay, 1974,p-11

from reality and nature. The designs and motifs also indicate tribe's closeness to the nature. The *Rajamphainbaren*, a multicolored attire of the Dimasa is in the pattern of rainbow. The stripes of colours of the attire are similar in the pattern of a rainbow. Seven lines of green, yellow, orange, black and white are woven in a horizontal pattern and in two side of the attire a cubit multi-coloured designs are woven.

Rikhaosa is like *Riha* chador of Assamese people. It is either of orange, green or white in colour, worn above the Chest wrapper or shoulders. We can assume it as a substitute of blouse, as due to lack of knowledge about sewing. The border of the *Rikhaosa* is of artistic handy work of the Dimasa weaver. At the two end of the *Rikhaosa* beautiful designs of flowers and animals were woven. These designs are made by tying the threads, which makes the designs very thick and has a 3D look. However, the designing of "*Rigu*" or Design differ from region to region. The Dimasas of Nagoan, Karbi Anglong Districts of Assam and Dimapur region of Nagaland, weave with the help of "*Shampor*"(flat Bamboo Stick) whose length is same as the breath of cotton or thread inserted in the Loom(Dauphang) and their process of weaving is slightly similar with Assamese way of designing and on the other hand the Hill Dimasa of Dima Hasao District use the "*Gonshai*"(Cylindrical Bamboo Stick) whose Length is same as the "*Shampor*."

The silk manufacture of the tribe is an age old practice. The silk produce was of the kind called *eri*. The breeding of silk-worms used to take place throughout the year and the leaves of the castor-oil plants are used to provide food for the silk-worms. Cotton and silk thread is produced by using a *takri*, a primitive hand spindle, which is a slender stick, made of bamboo, about one and half feet long with a small hook/ groove on top and a whorl (a round wooden disc) 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.

The Dimasa women had the expertise to find out the very many colours from nature according to their chosen palette. Dimasa Kacharis get their varieties of colors from dyeing the cotton thread using indigenous methods. The common dyes in use are red and blue. C.A. Soppit, in his book '*An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes in the North Cachar Hills*' describes that the method used in the hills was that "the root of a tree named *jeng-glong* is dug up, cut into

small pieces, pounded and soaked in water. The cotton thread it is intended to dye is then soaked for two days in the mixture, and afterwards dried in the sun. This dye is a bright red. The blue colour is obtained from a species of indigo grown in the rains around the villages.⁴¹ Lac was other important sources used by the Dimasas to dye cotton. Colonial officers had noted about this practice-“The commercial product known as lac dye is nowhere produced. The dye can however be easily extracted from crude or boiled lac and is in everyday use in Assam for dyeing cloths and yarn.”⁴² “And the Lac-dye of a good quality is found, and used by the Dimasa in dyeing, as is also wild indigo.”⁴³ The primitive or indigenous technology of dying is a popular practice among the Dimasa. The use of many colours in dressing ornamentation of the Dimasa also focused their knowledge about the colour inventory methods. Besides the three primary or basic chromatic trios of white, red, and blue, the Dimasa weaver had orange, yellow, green and black in their traditional loom. Marshall Sahlins had observed that “...despite the proven ability of human subjects to discriminate thousands of color percepts, natural languages manifest only a very limited number of ‘basic color terms’ such as are applicable to a wide variety of objects; the number ranges from two to eleven, corresponding to English ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘red’, ‘green’, ‘yellow’, ‘blue’, ‘brown’, ‘grey’, ‘purple’, ‘orange’, and ‘pink’.”⁴⁴ The most desired and essential element of the human civilization, clothing and for the preparation of this all supplement materials are produced by the Dimasas. Silk, cotton, and the dyed thread are available in the valley, besides other materials like rice, cane, elephant-tusk, rubber etc. It is found that due to the availability of the material a healthy and direct trade relation developed with the Ahoms kingdom and Bengal, and there have been routes to Tripura and Manipur.⁴⁴ The Central Cachar division which was under the Dimasa rule was fertile for agriculture and this portion of Nowgong district (Davaka) even now is considered as the granary of Assam. Gopichander Panchali, a Bengali chronicle written in Cachar in 1670 *Saka* (1748 A.D), describes the peasant of Davaka as the children of Lakhmi (Hindu Goddess of wealth) the area was directly connected with the North Cachar, Manipur, Naga Hills, Assam and Jaintia, and though kapili route with Sylhet and Cachar Valley, and a considerable amount of

⁴¹ N.G.Rhodes & S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*,p-69

⁴² Report on *the Administration of North East India*, Mittal Publication.p-19

⁴³ R.Stewart, *Notes on North Cachar*, JASB,NO.7,Calcutta, 1855, p-595

⁴⁴ R.M. Nath, *Antiquities of Cachar*, Silchar,1980,p-13.

trade passed through it. Jenkins and Pamberton, who visited this area in the early years of the nineteenth century, noticed the big market in *Mohung-Dijua* which was visited by large number of traders from outside, and were highly impressed by the economic prosperity of the tract.⁴⁵ The early British records suggest that the North Cachar Hills and the adjoining hill areas supplied to Bengal timber, precious wood, cane, elephant-tusk, rubber, and cotton, silk etc.⁴⁶ It is also known from Persian sources that Kajali-ban in Central Cachar was famous for elephants and Rajas exported elephant.⁴⁷ The trade added prosperity of the state and to its revenue.



Figure 42 and 43: Photographs showing similarities between the motif in the cloth and carving on the stone architecture of Dimasa founded in Kachomari.

Dimasas ornamentation in architecture also speaks about the tribe's skilled craftsmanship. The architectural evidences of the Dimasa help us to locate their state formation. The designs, motifs and geometrical pattern are the features of the Dimasa ornamentation, which is very much present in their traditional dress as well as in their architecture (Figure 42 and 43). The temple architecture of the Dimasas played a significant role in decoding the area of the Dimasa establishment. The Goddess *Kechaikhati* enshrined in the *Tamreswari* temple in the Sadiya region was the presiding deity of the Dimasa and was so much influential with the Dimasa that she continued to be the tutelary deity throughout all reverses of the Dimasa ruling power up to its last independent rule in the Barak Valley till the British annexation in 1832 A.D.⁴⁸ The artistic sculpture of *Bhismak Nagar*, which was not far off from *Tamreswari temple*, is a beautiful example of Dimasa architectural

⁴⁵ J.B.Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, New Delhi, 1991, p144

⁴⁶ W.K.Firminger(comp), *Sylhet District Records, Vol-I*, Shillong, 1913. Nos-32-43

⁴⁷ H. Blochhman, *Koch Behar, Koch Hajo, and Assam in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, JASB, 1872, p-94

⁴⁸ S.K.Barpujari, *History of The Dimasas*, Haflong, 1997, p-161.

ornamentation. The carvings consisted of figures of men animals, birds, flowers and geometric designs. In this context, Dr.T.Bloch referred to the figure of a lion mounting on an elephant, seen on the broken V columns of Dimapur. The peacocks, of which two are represented on another tile with their bodies twisted around each other, are also a favorite device of Dimapur columns, and the ornamented pattern occurs again on some V columns in the newly discovered group of pillars at Dimapur.⁴⁹ Other sites of Dimasa architectural ornamentation is seen in Kachamari, which is situated besides the Doyang River.⁵⁰ At present it is under the geographical area of Golaghat District of Assam. The second in lineage of the Kachari royal house, after subjugating all the tribes around that region (surrounding Kachamari) and then shifted to Dimapur.⁵¹ In Dimapur the architectural development of the tribe was in zenith. A group of megalith is the architectural and constructional evidence of the Dimasas still standing. It consists of a cylindrical shaft mounted with a hemispherical cap decorated with two rows of drooping petals, one row rearing from the other downward, the lower ones being more elongated and each petal incised with a sword which pointed upward. These petals are bordered towards its bottoms with beaded designs flanked by ribbons indicating that the petals probably represent an ornamented strip hanging in a series from the waist band. The lower portion of the shaft is partly decorated with floral motifs and a beaded band and rest is kept plain presumably for increasing below the ground. The workmanship of the column is perfectly geometric and precise, indicating employment of experienced and skilled craftsmen for the work. The shileld-type of the columns are shaped in the form of slab slightly tapered towards its bottom, and is modeled with a semi-circular top. One flat side of such a column is carved with a stylized tree having a wide bottom, a uniformly but acutely battered trunk, two circular wheels on each side in the upper part, one above the other and a heart-shaped crown. Each of the wheels is decorated with a full blown flat lotus, the stalk of which is brought down to the base of the trunk and two stylized lion facing each other in the lower profile⁵².

⁴⁹ Dr.T.Bloch, *Report in a Annual report of The Archaeological Survey of India,1907*

⁵⁰ At present in *Golaghat* District of Assam.

⁵¹ R.M.Nath, *Op.cit*,p-71

⁵² S.K.Barpujari, *History of The Dimasas*, Haflong,1997,p-167

Like Kachomari, ruins of Dimapur speak about the Dimasas attainment of a state civilization considerably in advance of that of the Ahoms.⁵³ The double row of carved pillars of sandstone, averaging about curious V shaped pillars which are apparently memorial stones which is also exists in Kachamari ruins. The monoliths of Dimapur are classified into three groups, such as Chessman type, V type and Girder-type. According to researchers like S.K.Barpujari and R.M.Nath the greatest contribution of the Dimasas to the plastic art is the self-standing columns and the structural pieces of Dimapur and Kachamari.⁵⁴ The stone pieces are not only enormous in size, they are thoroughly ornamented also. Most of them are megaliths, but not in the usual sense of the term. They are unique because of their artistic exuberance. They are the example of primitive megalithic tradition to its classical stage and the ornamental fancy of the late medieval period.⁵⁵ The ornamentation of the monoliths is the representations of the elephant, deer, dog, duck and peacock. This representation is found in the designs of the Dimasa traditional attire. It can be said that the representation symbolized the ‘signature’ of the tribe. The representation also focused their surrounding communication. As mentioned earlier Elephant and Elephant-tusk was a popular export item of Dimasa trade was a popular figure in their architecture also. It is also known from Persian sources that Kajali-ban in Central Cachar was famous for elephant and the *Rajas* exported elephant.⁵⁶ Duck and deer were also used to be important items of tribute to Ahoms by the Dimasa. The Ahoms to overcome from the food scarcity due to famine of 1641⁵⁷ ordered thr Dimasa Raja to provide items includes *khalon*(a kind of indeginiously prepared salt cum alkal), *sukan kaaricha*(dried bamboo shoot), *dai*(curd), *awa* (milk), *sakpat*(vegetable) *pahu*(deer), *Kacha*(tortoise), *rajhah*(goose), *patihah*(duck), *carai*(cock).⁵⁸ The references of animals in the monoliths indicated the importance and availability of the animals. So as we may assume the availability of Dog and Peacock in the region. The megaliths of Dimapure and Kachamari a unique antiquities and are types by themselves. They are the best examples of a primitive tribal culture. The monoliths culture of the Dimasa no doubt is the example of their fancy ornamentation and identity marker. The reason behind the construction is an inference. It may be to commemorate the victory over the tribes or can

⁵³ J.B.Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, New Delhi, p-137

⁵⁴ S.K.Barpujari, *Op.cit*, p-171

⁵⁵ Ibid, S.K.Barpujari, p-171

⁵⁶ H.Blochman, “Koch Behar, Koch Hajo, and Assam in the 16th and 17th Centuries, according to the Akbarnama, the Padishanama, and Fatiya-i-Ibriya (JASB), Vol-XLI, 1872, p-94.

⁵⁷ E.Gait, *The History of Assam*, Guwahati, 1962, p-121

⁵⁸ Lila Gogoi, *The History of The System of Ahom Administration*, Calcutta, 1991. p-214

be a memorial or cemetery of the Dimasa soldier that had lost their lives during the war with Ahoms. At present the Archeological survey of India kept as Historical Heritage site. The Ranachandi (Goddess of War) was continued to be their main presiding deity. Dimasa fought several battles against their enemies and even successfully repulsed three Mughal attacks.⁵⁹ Ahoms failed to compete with the Dimasa in early period of 1268A.D. occupy Dimasa territories by foul means and *Namdang* became the Ahom Dimasa border⁶⁰ and in 1526 A.D Dimasa defeated the Ahoms.⁶¹ The remnants of the Dimasa capital complexes at Dimapur, Maibang and Kashpur, forts, walls, embankments and ramparts are not only suggestive of the prowess and resources of the Dimasa rulers, but also of their defensive structure.⁶² Dimasa had a strong military administration, however in both Kachamari and Dimapur, Dimasas defeat by the Ahoms lead them to establish their hold over the Maibang. The construction of the richly ornamented columns of the Dimasa became a tradition-setter. By a close observation by Godwin Austen and T.Bloch, says that the monoliths do not show any evidence of Hindu influence. The view is again supported by J.B.Bhattacharjee and S.K.Barpujari in their works on Dimasa.⁶³ There is no evidence of such monoliths in Maibang and Khaspur. Architectural activities are there but the influence of Hinduism is clearly focused in their ornamentation and temple architecture became popular. The columns are also absent in Maibang or in North Cachar Hills. A brief recounting of the history of the Kackaris and their significance to Assam's medieval past may offer us some indications. By the beginning of the 13th century the Dimasa kingdom was stretching probably half way across the modern Nowgaon district and included about three fourths of the present Sibsagar district. As Gait observes, "In the thirteenth century it would seem that the Kachari kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu (Dikhow) river to the river Kallang or beyond and included also the valley of the Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar subdivision,"⁶⁴ The Chutiya tribe was Ahoms immediate neighbors, who ruled the country east of the river Subansiri and the Disang. Ahom to establish their stronghold in the land needs a sound economy and the Chutiyas was the target and thus completely sacked and annexed the kingdom in 1522 A.D.⁶⁵, the rivalry was not just over territory, it was over the recourses too. From the economic point of view the annexation was a great gain for the Ahoms.

⁵⁹ S.K.Barpujari,*Op.cit* ,p-88

⁶⁰ Lila Gogoi, *The History of The System of Ahom Administration*, Calcutta,1991.p-79

⁶¹ Lila Gogoi, *Ibid*.p-81

⁶² S.K.Barpujari,*Op.cit* , p-88

⁶³ S.K.Barpujari, *Op.cit*, p-171

⁶⁴ Sir Edward Gait, *History of Assam*, p-248

⁶⁵ L.Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations (A political Study)*, Guwahati, 1968,p-63.

Chutiya kingdom was the only place in the plains of Assam which produced salt. An important but rare commodity like salt came within the easy control of the Ahoms and revenue derived from the salt in 1809A.D. amounted to about 40,000/-per annum.⁶⁶ Besides land suitable for wet-rice cultivation. The Dimasas could never be fully annexed by the Ahoms and their rivalry and conflict continued throughout most of the six hundred years the Ahoms ruled Brahmaputra valley till the British annexation of Assam in 1826A.D. Dimasa Raja died in 1830 and as he had no descendants the country was annexed by a proclamation dated the 14th August 1832, allowing a portion to govern by Tularam,⁶⁷ which was also annexed to British administration in 1854.⁶⁸ Among the many factors that helped Ahoms to expand their suzerainty almost the whole Brahmaputra valley and rule for six hundred years, beating back several Mungul invasions in the process was their economic prosperity. The present day Golaghat district of Assam where the Ahom-Dimasa conflict most intensely played out over at least four centuries represents territory which was coveted for wet-rice cultivation, contained iron ore deposits, controlled vital routes of trade, and access to areas with rich natural resource deposits.⁶⁹ Dimasas in Kachamari were at their height of power during state formation at Dimapur. Military as well as the man power technology was supreme. In Dimapur as well as in Kachamari, the stone blocks for the ornamented monoliths were not available in the immediate neighborhood of alluvial Dimapur⁷⁰ and the Kachamari stones quarries at a great distance, the transportation was a great effort.⁷¹ The meticulously curving with exquisite designs is the example of Dimasa skill of ornamentation. We may believe logically that these monoliths were ‘cenotaphs’ to fallen Dimasa war heroes. The monoliths of Dimapur and Kachamari is absent in later state formation of the Dimasa in Maibang and Khaspur. The reason that differentiates is that former two state formations were not influenced by Hinduism whereas in later period Dimasa Rajas converted to Hinduism.

Dimasa had developed their cultural traits by blending their own with those of the autochthones of Kachamari and Dimapur. Dimasa Rajas might be

⁶⁶ Ibid,L.Devi,p-67

⁶⁷ Claimant to the vacant Raj of Dimasa, (as a descendant of an ancient line of princes.)

⁶⁸ E.Gait,*History of Assam*, Guwahati, 1962,p-311

⁶⁹ *The Kachamari monoliths: Re-exploring Kachari Grandeur*, On South and Southeast Asian history, heritage, Art and Culture, source:<https://revivingforgottenhistories.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/the-kasomari-monoliths-re-exploring-kachar-grandeur>.

⁷⁰ S.K.Barpujari,p-169

⁷¹ *The Kachamari monoliths: Re-exploring Kachari Grandeur*, On South and Southeast Asian history, heritage, Art and Culture, source:<https://revivingforgottenhistories.wordpress.com/2012/01/08/the-kasomari-monoliths-re-exploring-kachar-grandeur>. And visited the site on 27th June 2016

great patronages of art and architecture. Though politically tensed due to repeated disturbances from the Ahoms, leading their changes in establishment, continued a great lover of art and architecture. The ornamentation of the building however referred the intercultural communication of the Dimasa with Bengal in later period. The sculptures, designs and motifs took in different form than their early period. The *do-cala* stone temple is a work of a skilled workmanship, cut out of a huge rock lies in the northern end of the Maibang valley. Use of the ribbon ornamentation is seen in the stone work.⁷² The influence of the Hinduism was so strong that the constructions were of temple. *Snan* temple (bath temple), the word signifies bath, has four door way one on each wall, which do not contain a door-shutter. The dome of the structure resembles the regular wavy shape of garlic with its vertical ribs. The temple might have been used for undertaking ceremonial baths to the portable deities which were brought here during some festival. However, the structure with its graceful dome, circular drums and slopped sun-shed exhibit distinct influence of the Islamic culture. Ornamental art as a symbolic system expresses worldview and ways of existing of an ethnos. For each individual the acceptance of this worldview and existence models is closely related to the notion of “cultural identity” considered as an individual’s personal identifying with a particular cultural environment, society and tradition.⁷³ The two temple of Lakshmi temple and Kali temple are of similar designs and are examples of the Dimasa architecture. The temples were ornamented with floral designs. The Baroduwari or the twelve-door houses, has derived its name from the twelve door-like depressions on the walls of each storey, although all the doors except the front ones remain closed. It can be taken to be the outer-court wherefrom the king gave audience to his subjects.⁷⁴ It is a symbol of Bengali influence in language in Dimasa court. ‘Baro’ means twelve is used in Assamese and Bengali. The nearest is the Bengali inhabitant and so the influence of the Bengali language is more prominent. The Dimasa architectures help us to locate the tribe’s political hold over the region.

In discussing role of ornamentation and jewellery in Dimasa life and culture, we have to go through gender and ornamentation in Dimasa society too

⁷² Visited Maibang, N.C Hills.

⁷³ Nadezhda Nikolenko, *Ornament as a Symbol of Intercultural Communication*, Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, IDOSI, Publication, 2013, ISSN 1990-9233.p-452

⁷⁴ S.K. Barpujari, *Op.cit*, p-183

which focused the condition of Dimasa women. Gender is a multifaceted reality that is culturally constructed and socially determined by the society. In other words, gender is culturally and socially constructed role, responsibilities, privileges, relations and expectations of women and men. Because these are socially constructed, they can change over time and differ from one place to another. Gender refers to behavioral differences between males and females that are culturally biased and socially learned (Appelbaum and Chambliss, 1997:218). The understanding of gender in the context of Dimasa Culture in North East India needs to be perceived from their structure of social stratification, existing power relations between women and men, and the process of acquiring the accepted roles and behavior, which are discussed in our previous chapter. Traditionally, the birth of the girl as the first offspring in the family is considered favorable since there is a requirement of the eldest child to play a certain role, which is essential for the welfare of the family. Girls are preferred to be the eldest child as they are helpful to their parents in the discharge of domestic duties. However, the birth of a boy is generally preferred in the Dimasa society as the customs and traditional rules imply that the lineage of a clan and family is through a male child. The fact that Dimasa society is patriarchal as well as matrilineal implies beyond any doubt that women were not equal to man, in certain aspect of life. The patriarchal Dimasa society is reflected by notions such as it is the son or a male of same clan used to put fire the deceased on the cremation ground, men as a bread winner the landed property is always inherits by the son as paternal property, and women being subordinate to their household, daughter inherits maternal property like jewellery, loom and dresses. Again some customs are very flexible in case of male and the same is very rigid in case of female. Dimasa traditional society did not encourage marriage with non-Dimasa, however if a Dimasa boy married a non-Dimasa girl by elopement there is a custom to adopt the girl in the Dimasa society by a ritual called *therba* but in case of Dimasa girl if she married to a non-Dimasa boy there is no ritual to adopt them in the Dimasa society.⁷⁵ The custom of bride price is a prevailing practice among the North East India and Dimasa society is not different to that. The bride price or *Kalti* has to pay to the girl's parents. It is reflection of the fact that women are a productive worker in the economy of the tribe and they never took active

⁷⁵ Information gathered by an interview with Momota Hasnu, Member of Dimasa Mohila Samiti, Dhansiri.

participation in decision making process in case of customary law of village council. Nonetheless, Dimasa traditional culture provides more equality between women and men as compared with the mainstream Indian society. Dimasa women enjoy certain privilege and status more than women in other parts of India as they do not encounter *sati*, do not wear *pardah*, do not pay dowry and enjoy platonic relationship with the opposite sex and of course do not practice female infanticide.

In case of ornamentation in dress and jewellery different motifs and jewellery are meant for men and women. Designs and colours meant for women costumes could not be used for men's wear. This code was strictly adhered to by the Dimasas.⁷⁶ The two male ornament *Yaocher* (a silver armlet) and *Kharik* (silver earring) are for man only and women cannot wear it.

⁷⁶ S.Brahma, *Primitive Tribal Art, Journal of the Folklore Society of Assam, Guwahati, 2005, p-40*