

CHAPTER-VI: All of us enjoy decorating our bodies. Jewellery which is associated with treasure-gold, gemstones, valuable materials is considered to be objects of intrinsic beauty and ornamentation is a decorative art. Ancient sculptures are an important source of Indian jewellery tradition. The deities of the Rig Veda constantly present themselves adorned with a variety of Jewellery. Rudra is described as “firm with strong limbs, assuming many forms, fierce and twenty-coloured, shining with brilliant golden ornament” and wearing “an adorable, uniform necklace”.¹ Although fashion has rendered the forms of many of the ancient ornaments now obsolete, most of the names are still current in connotation with their substitutes, and the sculptures of *Bhuvanesvara* afford us a pretty fair idea of what their shapes were twelve hundred years ago. The bas-reliefs of *Sanchi* and *Amaravati* also exhibit specimens of a great variety of ornaments for hands, feet, waist, neck, and head. In ancient times it was believed that besides enhancing its beauty, decorating the body gave it additional strength and power.² Even today many tribal societies use flowers, wild berries, leaves and feathers and for this purpose. Flowers and fruits celebrate nature and growth while feathers are valued for their colour and for the power of flight. Seeds, even wings of insects such as colourful beetle wings are used as embellishment and decoration. One of the oldest forms used in jewellery was that of sphere, representing the seed, the *bija*. Later a range of beads were made from clay, glass, metals and precious stones. This symbolized fertility, growth and the origin of life. Taking India as a whole, they show a gradual, steady and marked advance towards refinement. The bangles, bracelets, and anklets of *Sanchi*, are the clumsiest possible. They are thick, rough, and heavy, almost devoid of workmanship and large enough to cover from one to two-thirds of the legs and fore-arms. Judging from specimens still in use among the lower orders of the people away from urban influence, they must have been made, in most instances, of brass or bell-metal. The bangles and armlets of *Amaravati*, though mostly of the same patterns, are smaller, lighter and neater, and the anklets are somewhat less ponderous. At *Bhuvanesvara* they are not only reduced in size and weight, but greatly improved in appearance. Amidst a few of the older forms

¹ R. Mitra, *Indo-Aryans*, Delhi/Varanasi, 1969, p-227

² F. Alkazi, M. Farell & S. Kalyanwala, *Living Craft Traditions of India, Jewellery*, p-49

there is quite an abundance of specimens, which for neatness, elegance, and beauty, would not stand in any great disadvantage besides the finest specimens of their times from any other part of the world.³

The purpose of ornamentation was not only to satisfy an instinctive desire to decorate the body; it was also invested with symbolic significance. This aspect is clearly expressed in the form of amulets which carry inscribed prayers to protect the wearer from evil influences. All communities and faiths use this form of jewellery as protection against harm or to activate certain positive qualities. According to Hindu belief, Gold and Silver are considered as sacred metal symbolic of the warm sun, the other suggesting the cool moon-are the quintessential metal of Indian jewellery. Pure gold does not oxidize or corrode with time, which is why Hindu tradition associates gold with immortality. Gold imagery occurs frequently in ancient Indian literature. In the Vedic Hindu myth of cosmological creation, the source of physical and spiritual human life originated in and evolved from a golden womb (*hiranyagarbha*) or egg (*hiranyanda*), a metaphor of the sun, whose light rises from the primordial waters.⁴ Again in some tribal societies, each ornament was a symbol of the rank and status of the wearer, and it was also believed to have certain magical powers.⁸⁸ It was with the establishment of a settled agrarian society that jewellery became a form of saving and a symbol of status.⁵ A variety of designs in folk jewellery evolved over the years, and the important position of the jeweler in village society also points to the fact that jewellery was considered as the only form of investment which could be encashed during the emergency. Jewellery holds a place of utmost significance for the Indian women. In Hindu, jain and Sikh communities where women do not inherit landed property, jewellery was a major component of the *streedhana* (gift given to a women at the time of her marriage). Women are also gifted jewellery in different phases of life such as, at birth, at coming of age etc. Jewellery is also signifying joy and happiness as it was and is mandatory for married women to wear jewellery. Necklace, earrings, head ornaments and bangles were essential for every married woman. And as a mark of sadness widows were deprived of jewellery.

³ Ibid,p-229

⁴ Oppi, Untracht, *Traditional Jewellery of India*. New York, Abrams, 1997, p-278

⁵ F. Alkazi, M. Farell & S. Kalyanwalla, *Op.cit*, p-50

Motifs in Indian jewellery are another important part of study. Many jewellery forms made in metal reproduce forms of flowers and fruits. *Champakali* is a necklace made of jasmine bud motifs and is worn throughout India. *Karanphul jumka* is a combination of the form of an open lotus at the ear lobe and a suspended half open bud. *Mangai mala* is rich necklace from Tamil Nadu, with a stylized mango forms studded with rubies. Precious metals such as gold and silver were both brass and white metal. Each region in India has a particular style of jewellery that is quite distinct. Differences occur even as one goes from one village to another. Despite the variety in jewellery patterns in different parts of the country, the designs in each region are also at times strikingly similar. However the common designs which are found in the rest of the India is absent in the northeastern part of India. Jewellery ornamentation in head and forehead of woman resting up on the parting of the hair in Rajasthan and parts of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, whereas the *tikka*, a rounded pendant at the end of a long chain which falls on the forehead, is used throughout India, but we do not come across any such jewellery among the tribes of Northeast. The *shringar patti* which frames the face and often connects with the *tikka* on the top and the earring are also used widely. Men's *kalgi*, a plumed jewel on the top of the turban is also not a jewellery item of Northeast India. The ornament worn in nose called *nath* and the nose ring worn in the centre just over the lips is also not a jewellery item of the tribe. The *bichhua*, scorpion ring for the toe, popular in western India is not known to the people of the region. Jewellery ornamentation is developed region-wise by specific sections, groups or areas.

The state Assam rich in the tradition of manufacturing gold jewellery dates back to several centuries. The jewellery is typically hand-made, and the designs mostly depict flora and fauna treasures of the region. Traditional designs of Assamese Jewellery are simple but decorated with vibrant red gemstone, ruby or mina (stone inlay work in gold). Assamese jewellery ornamentations are one of the most important parts of Assamese culture. It is generally made by pure gold. Gold washing and manufacturing of jewellery were two important ancient industries in Assam and gold was abundantly found in the sands of different rivers of the state. References to gold in Assam in the early period are found in the writings of the classical writers and the earliest reference is found in the *Arthashastra*. F.C Hanniker

in his monograph on gold and silver wares of 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 high degree of purity. The Assamese goldsmith’s customers would not be satisfied with 14 carat or even 18 carat gold and many of the bracelets, necklaces are distinctly pleasing even to the critical eye and would attract notice in the midst of quite good collection of Indian wares”⁶ the ornaments worn by men and women on different parts of their bodies were of different designs. The *Kalika Purana* names forty different types which were made of both gold and silver.⁷ Both Assamese men and women used to wear ornaments. The male put on ornaments on their neck, hands, fingers and ears. If we notice the framed picture of Sri Sankardeva, the founder of neo-vaishnavism in Assam a clear picture of male ornamentation in Assam is focused. The ornaments are made of various shapes and designs. The names applied to the ornaments are mostly descriptive and they themselves indicate the shape and decorative work to the ornaments in most cases. Motifs of the jewellery are generally of animal, flowers and symbolic material culture of the Assamese people. A chunky type of golden jewellery with unique features of eminence was flourished under the patronage of the Ahom kings but declined in the subsequent periods. The turmoil in the political front, lack of state of art technology etc, are the factors according for the slump in the practice which augured ill for the craft as evinced by the plight of the craft in the following years. Jewellery making in Assam is a personal or family industry and few selected pockets spread over the state. There is no established or govt granted jewellery making industry. The Rontholi village of Nagaon district, Sonarigaon of Jorhat district and Barpeta town of Barpeta district are the spots of traditional Assamese jewellery making industries which were developed because of personal initiatives.

Jewellery ornamentation remained as a fascinating thing from the time immemorial to present period. But the trend in the jewellery designing has been subjected to change with the changing times. The jewellery designs and styles keep on changing with the change in lifestyle and tastes of people. The heavy and

⁶ Source-<http://incredibleassam.in/html/traditional.htm>

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

traditional designs in jewellery have been replaced with light and trendy contemporary designs. Traditional heavy gold and silver jewellery is now being replaced with light weight beads and platinum and crafted as per latest fashion trends. Changes in Assamese as well as tribal jewellery tradition of the northeast region is also took place. Assam is a land of many communities and tribes. Tribal jewellery however was never a part of Assamese jewellery. Every tribe has their own style and philosophy. Jewellery making and gold washing are practiced by the Dimasas as an important material culture. Dimasa jewellery ornamentation is significant as it focused their social hierarchy, religious practices, and extensive use of Gold and Silver besides the material available in surrounding. Dimasa traditional jewellery is typical hand-made, and the designs mostly depict flora and fauna treasures of the region, any dietary symbol etc. Dimasa jewellery culture is very rich and it represents a strong and established tribe of the region. The practice of ornamentation to beautify the body, is connected with the metal they used, what technology they used, from where the metals were imported or the availability of the metals and most important the social significance of the jewellery ornamentation. Dimasa jewellery tradition helps us to understand the socio-cultural and economic condition of the people and the region. Changes were noticed in Dimasa jewellery tradition in the long run from the royal period to modern period. However original formats of jewellery designs has been preserved by the tribe. We can discuss the period of change into three times zones: pre-colonial, colonial and modern period.

In the pre-colonial period the ethnic Dimasa jewellery practice was very rich. Use of gold is known to them and most probably only tribe that use gold in Assam. Before the advent of the Ahoms in Assam, the Dimasa held a supreme political position among the tribes. In the 13th century A.D., when the Ahoms registered their advent in Assam Valley, the Dimasa kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from Dikhou river to kallang river which also included the Dhansiri Valley and the North Cachar Hills.⁸ Use of gold and silver by the Dimasa is extensive. Dimasa annual tribute to Koch General Chilarai in silver and gold with other items is the evidence of the fact. It is also recorded in the Koch

⁸ J.B.Bhattacharjee, *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North-East India*, New Delhi,1991,p-137

chronicle that the Dimasa king offered eighty-four elephants and other gifts, and agreed to pay an annual tribute of seventy thousand silver tankas, one hundred gold mohars and sixty elephants.⁹ The availability and use of metal in Dimasa kingdom is known from the traditional Dimasa jewellery as, Gold and silver was also used in traditional jewellery making. Martin had recorded in early 19th century that there were merchants, goldsmiths, blacksmiths and coppersmiths among the Dimasas.¹⁰ Daulaguphu and Daulagajau were the silversmiths and goldsmiths respectably. Gold was available in the rivers of Assam and gold washing was an important material culture of the Dimasas but the silver is not found locally in the North Cachar Hills, so it must have been acquired as a result of trade, most probably from Burma in the east. Given where the coins have been found, it would appear that as soon as the Dimasa had settled in Maibong, a transit trade developed with goods being exported from Bengal paid for using silver coins. The same goods may have been further exported to Burma or china, in exchange for silver.¹¹ Obviously such a state of commercial development had not been reached all of a sudden, but had built up over the centuries. Silver was used extensively in traditional Dimasa jewellery making. Common people practiced jewellery ornamentation with the gold. However in the last part of pre-colonial period gold ornamentation gained much importance and became a metal of aristocracy.

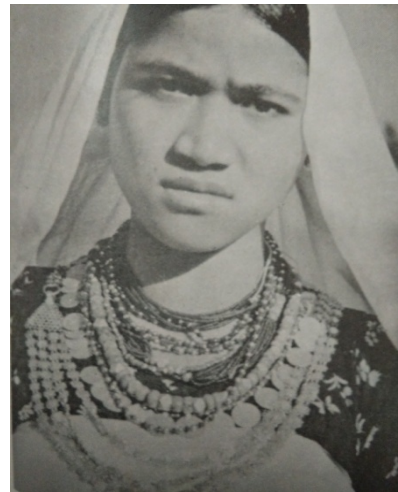


Figure 49: Photograph showing a Dimasa girl with ornaments in colonial period.

Social hierarchy in Dimasa society was prevalent as gold is available and goldsmiths also existed in Dimasa society but only for the upper class. Among its many uses, gold was also used in temple ornamentation and for tribute and trade.

Jewellery ornamentation of the Dimasas has religious significance. The Dimasa territory was divided in 12 religious areas called *Daikho*. It is believed that

⁹ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *A history of the Dimasa-kacharis, As seen through coinage*,Kolkata,2006,p-22

¹⁰ M.Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, Vol-V,1838,p-550

¹¹ .G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *A history of the dimasa-kacharis, as seen through coinage*,Kolkata,2006,p-22

the God and Goddesses residing in a particular *Daikho* protect the people of that area and control their destiny. *Alu Daikho* was the oldest among them and it was worshiped by *Daolaguphu and Nunisa* clan. A golden cat is their area deity. As a worshipper of gold, the two clans as entrusted by the Dimasa king; were not allowed to wear gold. This religious practice is still in vague and the two clans do not ornament themselves with golden jewellery.¹² It indicates the use of golden jewellery among the common people. Gold ornamentation in pre-colonial period remained as a beauty for the aristocracy too and a pious metal to offer and use in temple ornamentation. During the pre-colonial period Dimasa traditional jewellery for women included necklaces of verities of beads; *lik-sim*, *lik-jau* and *jongsoma*, *Poal*, *chandrahari*, *Khadu* (bracelets), *Khamoithai* (earrings), *Yaoustham* (finger ring), anklet, and a heavy and flat silver necklace are in the traditional showcase. This traditional Dimasa jewellery faced many changes due to political instability and scarcity of metals. Dimasa's according to Rev. Sidney Endle in his monograph "The Kacharis" mentioned about the bracelets and the necklace of beads. The ornamentation is also evident from his photographs of 'Kachari girl fishing', 'Kachari Girls playing Jew's harp' (*Gongina*). This photograph indicates the jewellery ornamentation of the general masses in their daily life. Ornamentation in gold was common practice of the Dimasa in the Sadiya establishment. The pure gold which was obtained from the river was a metal for body beautification. Yaouser or arm jewellery, *Khadu*, *Khamoithai*, *yaostham*, and anklet were the items for the body ornamentation for the Dimasa women. Jewellery ornamentation among the male was not practiced till the Dimasa establishment in Dimapur. Jewellery was not finely polished nor was any motifs carved. Gold jewellery were of raw gold which is called *kecha hun* in Assamese. No systematic organization for gold washing was developed during their Sadiya period. The Assamese sources give details about their kingdom at Sadiya, and this "was probably the first attempt of the Dimasas to build up an independent state after their expulsion from Kamrup"¹³ In stages of struggling period to establish themselves in a state formation process jewellery ornamentation among the tribe did not develop in a concrete shape. Why and how the sovereignty came to an end in Sadiya is unknown. However their political hold in Dimapur and Maibang is in their height of power as mentioned by

¹² Interview taken with N.Nunisa, Presedent Dimasa Sahitya Sabha, Diphu, on 12th April, 2014

¹³ J.B.Bhattacharjee, *Op.cit*,p-136

S.K.Barpujari in his book “History of The Dimasas”.¹⁴ On the basis of Dimasa folklore, late *Sonaram Thaosen*, a Dimasa scholar of repute says that Dimapur was established about the year 1086 A.D and the Dimasas were in possession of Dimapur for about 450 years when they shifted their capital to Maibang.¹⁵ Dimasa state formation in Dimapur and Maibang was very stable. The ruins of Dimapur and Maibang Dimasa architecture are finest references to their rule in the region. In the Dimapur area they came in contact with other small tribal communities like Naga and Mizu. There were very cordial relations among the tribes. The Rengma Nagas who lived in the colonies in the suburbs of Dimapur supplies steel made implements for the Dimasa King and obtained salt in returned. In 1536 when the Ahoms attacked the Dimasa capital, Naga helped the Dimasa king Detsang with a body of warriors to fight the Ahoms.¹⁶ A cordial relation with the Naga tribes led to a cultural assimilation. The horizontal coloured stripes in Dimasa traditional dress may have influenced by the traditional Naga dress (Figures 51 and 52).



Figure 50, 51, 52 and 53: Photograph showing different tribes of northeast India with their traditional dresses.

We may interpret on the basis of earliest Kachari woman’s photograph which was in the work of Rev.Sidney Endle. The dress in this photograph shows few stripes.(See Fig-53)

¹⁴ S.K, Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-167

¹⁵ S.K.Barpujari, *Op.cit*,p-39

¹⁶ B.N, Bordoloi, *Op.cit*, p-20

Dimasa traditional ornamentation entered a new look. The use of beads to beautify body becomes popular.

As the jewellery ornamentation is a matter of one's state of mind. A thing of beauty is always precious and adorable. In the Dimapur region beads were available and Naga community, who were also inhabited in the region; their ornamentation includes the verities of beads which influenced Dimasa women too.

From the Indus Valley period the largest jewellery trade was that of Beads. The *Brahmi* and *Kharosti* inscriptions which were found on pots, seals and plaques in Bengal also indicate the inland trade.¹⁷ The bead ornamentation of the *Nyishis*, *Apatanis*, and *Hill Miris* and *Tagins* tribes of Arunachal in the pre-colonial period helps us understand the bead circulation and trade in the region. Trade in the Indian continent was a continuous process and in the Northeastern part of India trade was also developed. The geographical location of Arunachal Pradesh, between Tibet on the north, Burma on the east and the plains of Assam on the south, meant that these beads passed through the region as part of a vast network of trade routes linking South Asia with the rest of the world, not only its neighbors Tibet and China, but also Egypt, Mesopotamia, Europe, Africa, East Asia.¹⁸ It is also found that when beads reached northeast India, trade focused on Nagaland. Dubin stated that the carnelian, shell and glass beads began to move from Calcutta up to Nagaland about 1700¹⁹ and Untrach has documented a brisk trade in beads and other body ornaments between Calcutta and Nagaland in the early 19th century.²⁰ This bead trade in Northeast India was largely conducted through trade fairs (*duars* or 'doors') which was set up by the Ahom rulers at several locations in the plains of Assam close to the hills, came Tibetans, Bhutanese and Indian traders, for whom Arunachal tribesmen acted as middlemen and porters.²¹

¹⁷ B.N.Mukharjee, *Costal and overseas trade in pre-gupta Vanga and Kalinga*, Calcutta, 1996, p-181

¹⁸ S.Blackburn, *Memories of Migration: Notes on legends and beads in Arunachal Pradesh, India*, London, 2004, p-31

¹⁹ S.Dubin, *A History of Beads from 30,000 BC to the present*. London, 1987, p-34

²⁰ O. Untrach, *Traditional Jewellery of India*, London, 1997, p-15

²¹ Moving from west to east: there were five duars collectively known as the "Eastern duars" in J.N. Phukan, *Arunachal's trade with its neighbours in the pre-colonial days*, (ed)in. S.Dutta, *In Cross-Border Trade of North-east India*, Gurgaon, 2002, p-134

In the hill although trade was not extensive, the Dimasa-Kacharis inhabitants in the hills knew about trade and commerce.²² Moreover various trade centers were located in the Dimasa kingdom. Jenkins and Pamberton, who visited Dimasa area in the early years of the 19th century, noticed the big market in Mohung-Dijua (now in Karbi Anglong district) which was visited by large number of traders from outside, and were highly impressed by the economic prosperity of the tract.²³ The colourful beads were an important item of trade in this area. The necklace of varieties of precious beads; called Lik-sim (Black), Lik-jao (Red) and Jongsama, a necklace of ordinary beads collected from the forests became traditional Dimasa ornaments. Using beads in jewellery ornamentation was developed in the Dimapur region. The making of necklace of beads was done by the Dimasa women in their leisure hours. Beads as ornamentation may have also developed due to the entry of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra valley and their monopoly over gold washing resulting scarcity of gold for the commoner which forced the use of beads in jewellery ornamentation instead of gold. The shifting of Dimasa capital from Sadiya to Dimapur made the tribe more prominent and represents an independent cultural identity.

But at Maibang the process entered into a crucial phase due to several conducive factors, when came under the influence of Brahminical Hinduism. The impact of Sanskritisation was spontaneous on the members of the royal family and the aristocracy. The caste system also could make some influence. The functions of the various *Sengfong* or clan became rigid. Among the 40 *Sengfong*, 5 became royal clans, one supplied the ministers, one ambassadors, one store keeper, one correspondents or writers, one cook, one gardener, one barber and two artisans or craftsmen and the rest became commoner. The Bengali Brahmin influence was so strong in the Dimasa royal court that during Ramachandranarayana (1728-35) an industrial township called *karkhana-nagar* at a place called '*kalinagar*' on the bank of Barak was established. Families of porter, carpenter, weaver, blacksmiths, and goldsmiths were brought from Bengal. With the coming of the Bengali gold and silver smiths the philosophy of Dimasa traditional jewellery were changed. Gold became a precious metal and gained much more importance than before. Gold and

²² C.A, Soppit, *An Historical And Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes in North Cachar Hills*, Shillong, 1907, p-25

²³ Foreign Political proceedings, 12 November, 1832, No.46; Robinson, pp-312.

silver started to be considered as sacred metal symbolic of the warm sun, the other suggesting the cool moon. Hindu tradition associates gold with immortality was new to the tribe and the Brahmin implements the theory in the Dimasa royal family. Golden jewellery became the royal ornament and use of gold in temple is started from onwards as discussed. The traditional Dimasa smiths failed to compete with the skilled Bengali smiths and so the traditional Dimasa jewellery making profession decreased. Obviously the design and technology changed. *Chandrawal* a silver necklace having two to three pairs of small silver chains joined together is the Bengal artisan influence.

‘*Chandra*’ means ‘moon’ in Bengali language and ‘*wal*’ which is a short term of ‘*Hare*’ means necklace in Bengali language. ‘*Eansidam*’ a cheap nose ring made of silver was also started to be used by the Dimasa as their traditional jewellery ornamentation also borrowed from the Bengal artisan. Dimasa male ornamentation in form of jewellery started during the Maibang period.²⁴ *Yaocher* and *kharik*, a silver armband and a silver earring however confined to the old men



Figure 54: Photograph showing traditional Dimasa neckpiece Chandrawal

only. The *khadu* a heavy bracelet remained traditional with traditional Dimasa carving designs. Other women jewellery like armband and anklet became rare among the Dimasas after their Sadiya establishment.

Jewellery ornamentation in pre-colonial period undergone with a series of changes due to Dimasa contact with the other community and religion and also we cannot overlook the political condition of the Dimasa. Gold washing was not practiced by the tribe anymore. Trade in silver also suffered due to political instability and again tributes in kind of gold and silver coin made the metal very costly and out of reach for the common people. We have many references of

²⁴ Information gathered by an interview with J.K. Thousan, Former APSC Member of Assam.

Dimasa tributes in gold and silver which was recorded in the works of N.G. Rhodes & S.K. Bose, 'A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis'. In 1563 A.D. when Koch General Chilarai invaded the Dimasa-Kachari kingdom, the Dimasa King agreed to pay an annual tribute of seventy thousand silver *tankas*, a thousand gold *mohurs* and sixty elephant to the Koch king Naranarayana. Again in 1612 A.D Mughal General Mubariz khan held an expedition to Cachar, Dimasa king offered forty elephants, one lakh *tanka* in cash and some rear articles.²⁵ Here the mentioned cash is obviously of gold and silver. Another reason may be the cause for the scarcity of metals; many construction works was done during the Dimapur and Maibang reign of the Dimasas which resulted decrease of gold and silver in the royal treasury as the artisans or the labors were used to pay in gold and silver coins. History gave the reference of Sahajahan the Mungol emperor that make royal treasury empty by his construction works. It is also recorded that towards the end of the independent Dimasa-Kachari rule, a small store of money was kept at the court though little cash was by then current among the ordinary villagers. Due to scarcity, cowries were the recognized substitute for coins at the markets in the hills.²⁶ The scarcity of silver leads replacement of silver by debased alloy during the pre-colonial period. The chunky and unrefined appeal of Domasa jewellery got a fine look under the skilled hands of Bengal artisans. The broad and heavy gold necklace become thin and light than the Sadiya region.²⁷ The traditional Dimasa motifs were carved in the necklaces by the Bengal artisan as demanded by the Dimasa women. The earrings and finger rings which were very simple in early period become artistic under the Bengal Hindu culture. As the history says Bengal influence in Dimasa establishment in Maibang was very influential in their state formation. Language, religion, culture and craft had mixed with the traditional Dimasa society. Jewellery fashion has no barrier and easily can asses to any culture from anywhere. However Dimasa traditional jewellery ornamentation was not totally changed, rather it got an identical shape.

²⁵ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *A history of the dimasa-kacharis, as seen through coinage*,Kolkata,2006,p-71

Ibid,p-66

²⁶ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *Ibid*,p-71

²⁷ Information gathered by an interview with J.K.Thousan,Former APSC Member of Assam.

In the colonial period, Dimasa added another jewellery item to their traditional variety. The Rangbarsa, a necklace made of one Rupee or half Rupee or quarter Rupee silver coins.

The Dimasa king though minted silver as well as gold coins was not for local exchange, it was for trade, tribute and for special occasions. Between, c.1520A.D and 1830A.D. coins were strike by the Dimasa-Kachari kings on the occasion of important events like coronations and victories.²⁸ In India during the medieval period trade was the main reason to strike silver coins. In Dimasa kingdom too trade related matter leads the Raja to struck silver coins. Late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries most of the Dimasa coins were struck. Copper and base metal coins or cowries shells were used to facilitate barter transactions in local markets and villagers might use silver as a store of wealth.²⁹ Silver coins were not circulated among the common people. Even some of the coins circulated, these were struck from debased alloy. These types of coins were used as royal gifts to the tribal chiefs and the Brahmins who exerted great influence on the king.³⁰ So the entry of British coins in the valley which was of pure silver was a new attraction for the people. It is not that the Dimasa Rajas struck only coins of debased alloy, coins of fine silver was also struck but for war tributes and trade which was not for the local use. During the second half of the 16th and early 17th centuries, the king struck significant quantities of tanka and quarter tanka denominations, depending on the requirement. The absence of further lower denominations indicates that the coins were used by the large traders to their advantage and were also stored by the aristocrats, Brahmins and other wealthy individuals as accumulated wealth.³¹ More over almost every coin differ in some way from every other coin. Many pairs of dies were used in the mint, which implies that a significant number of coins must have originally been struck in the Dimasa kingdom³² but not in same shape and size. When the capital shifted from Maibang to the plain of Cachar, coins became almost unobtainable in the hills. More importance was given to the coins which were from foreign than the locally available one. It is human psychology that rare

²⁸ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*,p-65

²⁹ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*,p-68

³⁰ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*,p-72

³¹ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*,p-92

³² N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*,p-65

and something new always became a precious and adorable. British silver coins became an item of ornamentation to the Dimasa. If we go through the tribal's in other part of India the British silver coin necklaces became important jewellery ornamentation.³³

'*Rangbarsa*' the necklace of silver coins, '*Rang*' means Rupee, '*bar*' means flower and '*sa*' means little indicating the coins in Dimasa language. The coins were hocked in silver and tied with red and black thread. The coins were arranged so tied that it remains intact when one wears it. A small scale industry to make hock in the silver coins developed. Some time instead of silver, copper and base metal mixture is used for the hock. Tying the coins with the thread was done by Dimasa elderly women. However it was done in home and every Dimasa household skilled in making the coin necklace.



Figure 55: Photograph showing traditional Dimasa necklace *Rangbarsa*

The necklace of coins became a symbol of status and dignity, as common people cannot afford it. The coins were used only for trade and for local transaction barter system and cowries were the recognized substitute for the coins at the market in the Hills. It was the Dimasa state policy to utilize silver as a trade item. And thus ban on local use is look after, as the existence of the Dimasa coins in Bengal implies that Cachar was an exporter of silver to Bengal.³⁴ Cachar locally silver was not available; possibility of silver coming from the mines in Yunnan in china or from Pegu



Figure 56: Photograph showing 25 paisa coins for making *Rangbarsa*.

³³ Dr.Jyoti Dwivedi, *Indian Tribal Ornaments; a Hidden Treasure*, Journaln of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology, Rewa,M.P,2016,p-1

³⁴ N.G.Rhodes&S.K.Bose, *Op.cit*,p-73

(Myanmar) which had trade relations with Bengal cannot be ruled out.³⁵ A well established trade activity was run by the Dimasa King and silver though locally not available collected from various trade relations and exported to Bengal and Ahom king. Near Jirighat (Cachar) 'there used to be big trade centre known as Rung-rang Bazar, where people of Manipur, Cachar, Lushai Hills(Mizoram), Tipperah (Tripura) and the surrounding hill-areas used to flock together. This was in existence even at the beginning of the British rule.³⁶ In this situation only a small amount of silver used to remain in the royal treasury. Circulation among the common people was somewhat impossible. The silver ornaments that the Bengali artisan sell in the region was may be brought from Bengal and sell in the market according to their profitable prize. The British coins were the symbol of status and *Rangbarsa* was the proper way to show one's wealth and status. The coming of Bengali artisan in the kingdom as entrusted by the Dimasa king to make jewellery in the hills still continues and they hardly knew about the significance of the curved designs and so the varieties of designs were lost. It was again encouraged due to departure of traditional Dimasa smiths. The necklaces of beads and pawal replaced by the machine made plastic and glass beads. The use of silver in the traditional Dimasa jewellery is replaced by a new metal called 'Led' and gold in traditional jewellery is no more. The handy work of the Dimasa elderly women in making *Rangbarsa* is become rare. British silver coins were replaced by Indian coins of 25 paisa. *Rangbarsa* became common jewellery ornamentation among the tribes and available in markets with machine made beads which is a new fashion. Dimasa jewellery tradition is still very popular among the women. The male ornamentation in modern period is not seen. Today Maibang is the centre of Dimasa traditional jewellery making. A hereditary Bengali artisan continued in this work from the pre-colonial period. They used to come in Dimasa populated area to sell the jewellery. Locally the jewellery is not made. It is said that to prepare traditional Dimasa *Khadu* and coins bearing British symbol for making *Rangbarsa*, need a special forma and it is known to only Bengal artisans and the local artisans lacked the knowledge. Due to single centre of Dimasa jewellery making jewellery tradition becomes uniform and nowadays costly too. Besides these many new fashionable beads works are developed. *Rangbarsa* the necklace of coins gained a new look

³⁵ B.N, Mukharjee, *A Note on the Coch Behar Coinage' The Coinage of Coch Behar*, Dhubri,1999,

³⁶ R.M, Nath, *Antiquities of Cashar, Silchar*, 1980,p-13

when red and sometimes with black beads were tied between the coins. The *Rangbarsa* with beads is also become popular among the Karbi and Bodo tribe of the region. Commercialization of Dimasa traditional beads necklace and beads earring, matching with the traditional dress are new in the local markets.

Modernity in tradition also touched the Dimasa traditional jewellery ornamentation. Tradition is not something waiting out there, always over one's shoulder. It is rather plucked, created and shaped to present need and aspirations in a given historical situation.³⁷ Men refer to aspects of the past as tradition in grounding their present actions in some legitimating principle. In this fashion, tradition becomes an ideology, a program of action in which it functions as a goal or as a justificatory base.



Figure 57: Photograph showing modern Dimasa jewellery.
Diphu daily market, dated 10th April,2012

The concern for tradition as an explicit policy is not an automatic response to change but is itself a movement to exist. Modernity appears as an aspiration, which seeks to move the society. “Modern” became a perceived state of things functioning as a criterion against which to judge specific actions and a program of actions to guide something new.³⁸ The indigenous items that are used by the tribe in ornamentation with their artistic skill in a profound manner suffer due to so called modernity. In an conversation with an aged Dimasa women about the traditional Dimasa jewellery and its continuity she gives the following information, quoted (and loosely translated)

³⁷ J.R, Gusfield, *Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the study of social change.* American Journal of Sociology, Published by University of Chicago Press,1967,p-358

³⁸ *Ibid*,p-358

*“Gada gada ha Dimasani Khamou khimbar dongbamu. Gajauni phoronthai khimbar, guphuni bhantau barni khamouthai bainu gainkhamu. Thikabo duhala bo beren busu-basa buthu dauphain phainhi dini dhakhana ni bosu hamjau balai salamlakha.jing rabani duhala gainya mujuingiyakha”*³⁹

“In our young days we used to wear earrings. Earring of gold called *Phoronthai Khimbar* (flower of Ridge-gourd) and silver earring called *Bhantau bar* (flower of Bringal) were the most popular one. Now I have lost all my jewellery as my daughters and granddaughters have re-made it according to their choice. Therefore traditional designs have become very rare. Now I am become old so I have given up wearing on my own traditional jewellery.”

.From the above line it can be understood how forces of changes have taken their toll of traditional Dimasa jewellery. Colonial jewellery has now become a rarity in the contemporary period.

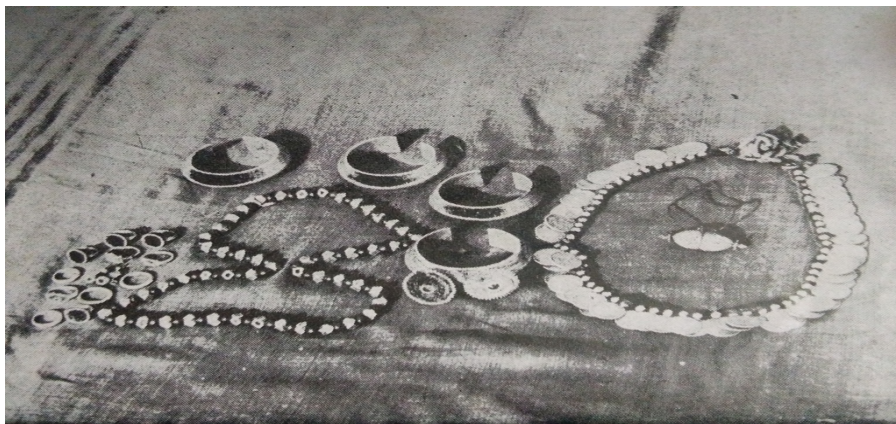


Figure 58: Photograph showing Dimasa jewellery in colonial period.

Source-the Dimasa kacharis of Assam by B.N.Bordoloi, 1984

The above picture also focused about the ornamentation of varied Dimasa traditional jewellery in the bygone days.

With its ever changing trends, the jewellery industry has become as dynamic as the fashion industry. There is a constant churning of varied jewellery items, lunch of new ideas and innovation. Each season new range of jewellery is introduced or a reappearance of age old trends can be witnessed. Technological advancements have brought about a whole new dimension to the jewellery in terms of the cuts, shape designs and finished jewellery. The beads which were common

³⁹ Interview taken with *Alam Maramsa*, upper Eekorani, Manja, Karbi Anglong, dated, 2nd April, 2014.

items of tribal jewellery tradition became more transparent and semi-transparent. Now a day's India is the largest producers of coloured glass beads, crafted metal beads and semi-precious stones beads are exported in large quantities. The use of these beads gives rise to glamorous and eye-catching contemporary jewellery designs. The pearl, gemstone, wooden, metallic, glass, crystal beads etc are available in a range of beautiful natural colours and shapes are used to make



Models during the Miss Moh-Mol contest in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday. - UB Photos



Figure 59, 60, 61, 62, 63 and 64: Photograph showing traditional dresses and jewellery ornamentation in modern style.

beautiful designs of bracelets, necklaces, anklets, earrings etc. these days, beads made out of sterling silver are gaining popularity. For instance a jewellery brand by the name of Juvalia is centered in Dimapur and it has taken the initiative to promote traditional designs in jewellery ornamentation. Nonetheless designs which are being promoted as traditional. In modern period jewellery is relates with the fashion industry. Fashion is an accessible and flexible means of expressing modernity. Fashion industry has led the way or followed, depending upon the nature of the fashion and its origins.⁴⁰ Jewellery began to look alike. In recent times, one can see fashion designers from the northeastern states being very experimental with the way they have portrayed the tradition, have been criticized for changing traditions. But for them contemporizing art and tradition infuses new life into conventional elements and keeps ancient designs and techniques alive.⁴¹ Today, traditional necklace are used as head ornament and waist ornament. In a recent beauty contest in Arunachal Pradesh, in Changlang district, models wore the coin necklace around their waist and around their shoulder.⁴² The following picture of a model in traditional jewellery ornamentation and models in traditional dress in a contemporary style helps us to understand the changes in traditional wearing.(See the Fig-59-64)

The traditional Jewellery ornamentation relates not only with the beautification but it is related with series with its affordabelety. Collection of jungle beads was a team work of the young ones. They know the knowledge of beads. It was a good activity of the *Bachelor's Dormitory*. The 20th century gold washing and its indigenous uses and designs in silver brecllets matching with the Dimasa traditional woven dress has become history. In the modern world with the industrialization and globalization process ethnic activities are struggling to find a place to exist. We should emphasize that today in true sense many ancient ornaments have become almost unknown. In this junction of tradition and modernity the traditional Dimasa jewellery; Khadu, Chandrwal, Jongsoma,

⁴⁰ E.Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London,1985,p-19

⁴¹ Deigner, Danial Syiem, Meghalaya, Atsu Sekhose, Nagaland, Meghna Rai Medhi,Guwahati.

⁴² Assam Tribune,Guwahati,Dated the 27th April, 2016

Rangbarsa is still ornamented by the Dimasa women. Use of traditional jewellery in Dimasa marriage and festivals is significant. In a globalized world many new jewellery patterns have become available at a low cost and it is used by every teenage and women of every society. Dimasa young one and women are not against this new trend. Modern jewellery with contemporary designs is used as daily wear, but in their marriages and any traditional function, traditional ornamentation is still followed. In our survey in N.C Hills District and Karbi Anglong district we found use of traditional jewellery more in urban areas comparing to that of rural areas. The modern jewellery in the rural areas is new to them and traditional jewellery is ornamented by them for many periods, may be the reason behind that they prefer modern then the tradition.

Table-1: Use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in rural areas of NC Hills.

Year	Traditional Jewellery	Modern Jewellery
2012	80%	20%
2013	75%	25%
2014	60%	40%

A three year survey in rural and urban areas of North Cachar hills was done between the years 2012-2014. Taking ten Dimasa families of rural area and ten families of urban areas as a sample, the data was collected. The families were marked for three years and interview was taken three times once in a year. In rural areas of North Cachar Hills it was found that the use of traditional jewellery decreased by 5% every year and the use of modern jewellery was increasing by 5% in the first year and in the second year by 15%. The increase of modern jewellery ornamentation among the Dimasas of rural areas is very rapid. The following Bar Diagram highlighted the use of traditional jewellery in rural areas of N.C. Hills District of Assam.

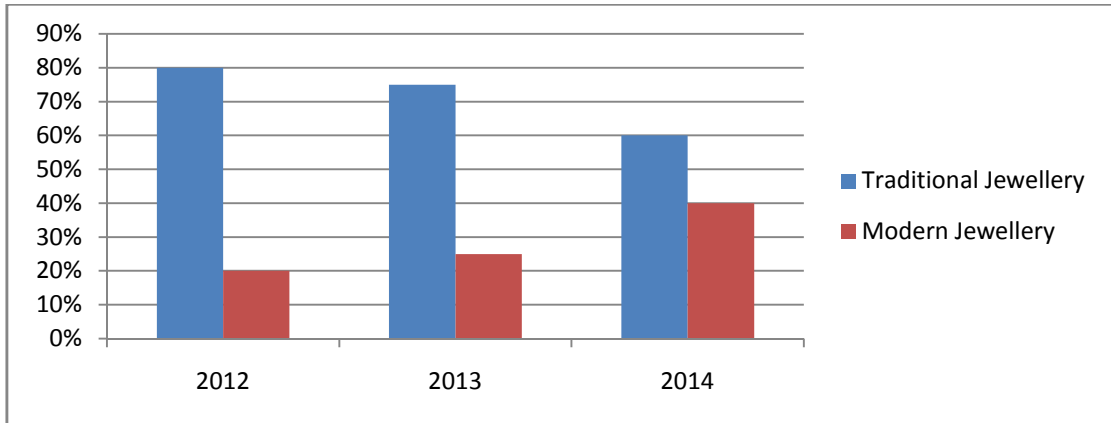


Fig.-1 Bar Diagram showing the use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in Rural areas of Dima Hasao District of Assam.

On the other hand urban people become more conscious about cultural identity, which is a major issue in India. The tribes as a whole feel exploited and now very conscious of their tribal identity.⁴³ Adopting traditional dress and ornamentation is one step to show as a distinguished tribe. They consciously protect their tribal identity with the strong feeling that the tribal identity is at stake. Infact today, many tribal organizations have been set up for the preservation of traditional culture and practices. An example is the organization called ‘*Jatikhey Naiso Hosom*’ meaning to look after the community, which is an active organization to uplift the tradition among the Dimasas.

From the households survey in urban areas of N.C.Hills District of Assam we get a clear picture of traditional jewellery ornamentation of the Dimasas urban women.

Table-2: Use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in Urban areas of NC Hills District of Assam.

Year	Traditional Jewellery	Modern Jewellery
2012	55%	45%
2013	74%	26%
2014	85%	15%

⁴³ S.L, Doshi, *Emerging Tribal Image*, New Delhi, 1997,p-51

In the table-2 we can see the traditional jewellery ornamentation of the urban women in the N.C Hills District of Assam. The table shows the increase of traditional jewellery ornamentation in three successive years. It shows serious concern about their cultural identity and in the same time minimum use of modern jewellery in their ornamentation. The following Bar Diagram shows the use of traditional jewellery ornamentation in the urban areas of N.C.Hills District of Assam.

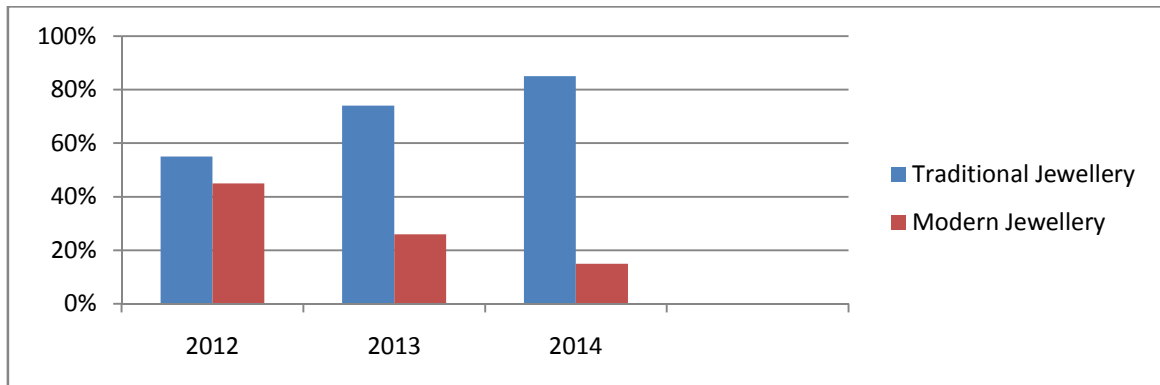


Fig-2: Bar Diagram showing the use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in Urban areas of Dima Hasao District of Assam.

The data is collected taking ten rural family and ten urban families of the different part of the Karbi Anglong district. The same family was taken for three interviews in three years. In rural areas of Karbi Anglong District it is however found that the use of traditional jewellery is more than the modern jewellery. From the household interview it is found that the due to lack of cash money they cannot buy the modern jewellery and use the traditional jewellery which is practiced generation to generation.

Table-3: Use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in rural areas of Karbi Anglong District of Assam.

Year	Traditional Jewellery	Modern Jewellery
2012	78%	22%
2013	74%	26%
2014	58%	42%

Again various social organizations were very active in the region, which continue in encouraging wearing traditional dresses and jewellery. Table-2 shows the % of traditional jewellery ornamentation in rural areas in Karbi Anglong District of Assam and the following Bar Diagram highlighted the ratio of modern and traditional jewellery ornamentation.

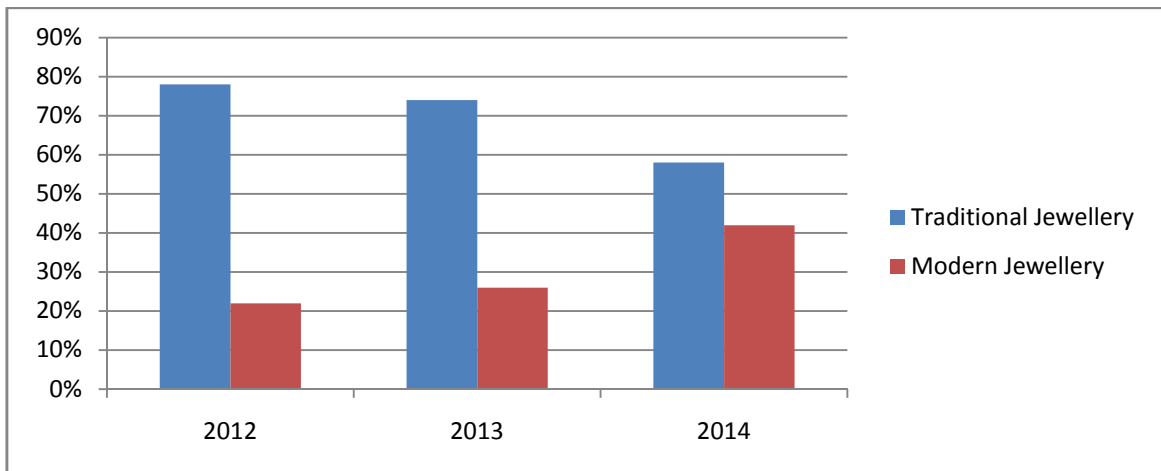


Fig-3: Bar Diagram showing the use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in Rural areas of Karbi Anglong District of Assam.

The above field survey data table indicates the increase of traditional ornamentation comparing to the modern jewellery ornamentation.

Table-4: Use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in Urban areas of Karbi Anglong District of Assam.

Year	Traditional Jewellery	Modern Jewellery
2012	49%	51%
2013	64%	36%
2014	73%	27%

. Here the use of traditional jewellery in three consecutive years is increasing and on the other hand modern jewellery ornamentation is practiced by

the Dimasa women but less than the former one. The Bar Diagram-4 highlighted the increase of traditional jewellery ornamentation.

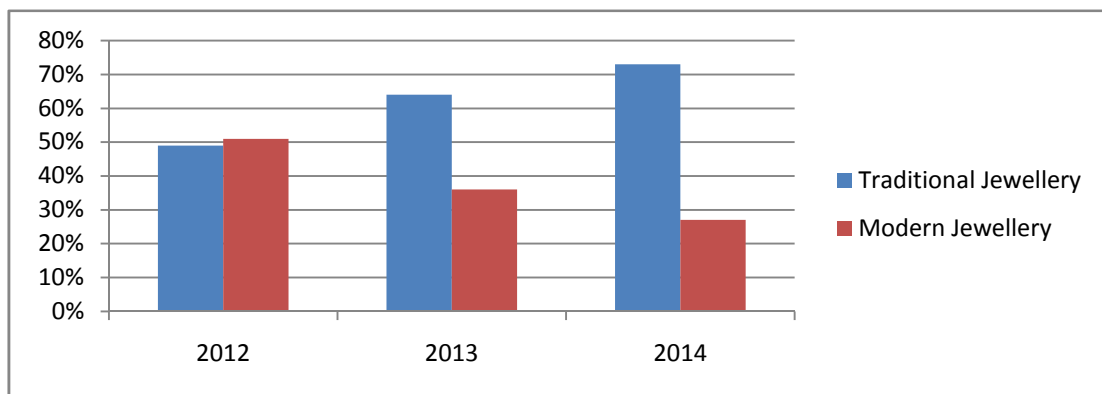


Fig-4: Bar Diagram showing the use of Traditional and Modern Jewellery in Urban areas of Karbi Anglong District of Assam.

Going through the field survey and the data, it is found that the use of traditional jewellery ornamentation among the Dimasas is very satisfactory. Variation in using traditional jewellery is though seen, the traditional jewellery ornamentation is still remain a symbol of the tribe. In the Dimasa socio-cultural function one can see the eye catching tradition of the people.

Modern jewellery ornamentation does not indicate the tribe or community and the culture they belong. Nowadays the application of traditional ornaments of the past shows that very often neither the artist nor the intended recipient of the subsequent creative product are not even aware of the true “message” encoded in ornamental structure.⁴⁴ May be the symbol curved in the Dimasa “Khadu”(breclets) seems meaningless for the new generation but it is ornamented during every cultural festivals of the Dimasas. Commercialization of Dimasa traditional beads necklace and beads earring, matching with the traditional dress are new in the local markets. In the modern period much newly designed jewellery is coming in the market, it is not that Dimasa women wore only traditional jewellery. The modern or jewelleries which were available in the market is also used. However wearing traditional attire and jewellery is regular by the Dimasa women in every community festival. Dimasa

⁴⁴ N.Nikolenko, *Ornament as a symbol of intercultural communication*, Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, IDOSI Publication, ISSN 1990-9233, 2013,p-449

marriage, busu festival, and in traditional rituals tradition of wearing traditional dress and jewellery is seen. Even the Dimasa male use a Dimasa traditional towel, (which is hand woven with beautiful designs) in Busu and any Dimasa gathering. Demands for traditional ornament are increased than before. Instead of coming from Maibang middle man are used to sell the jewellery. Traditional jewellery is quite popular all across the world. The traditional design that gives dull and rough antique look is quite popular now days and people, who value the exclusiveness of antique ornaments, go for it.⁴⁵ Revival of culture is a new move of the tribes and Dimasa are also in the run. Going back to original tribal religion, social customs, and practices is getting much importance's. In understanding of the Indian society and its social transformation tribes as entities with their distinct language, culture, custom, and tradition are least recognized.⁴⁶ The rich tribal heritage of India's northeast is under the political boundary of the region, even the rest of India have no idea of Dimasa, Karbi and Bodo culture. In Dimasa case one can recognize it very well within northeast. We have to surrender that beyond the region the tribal culture of the region is not exposed. In many fashion shows Dimasa fabrics and jewelleryes were used but represented as tradition of greater Assamese culture. Tribal identity is least recognized. Hence there has been articulation to go back to their cultural roots. The following picture of Dimasa Youth Festival shows the youths consciousness in their culture.



Figure 65: Photograph showing a Dimasa cultural rally in traditional attire, dated 15th December,2015.

⁴⁵ R. Kelly, *Changes in Silver Jewellery Fashion*, www.changes.in_silver_jewellery_fashion.html,2011

⁴⁶ V.Xaxa, *Tribal Identity: A Discourse*,(ed). In. V.Dhanaraju,*Debating Tribal Identity*,New Delhi,2015,p-37-38