CHAPTER 3

History and Traditional Institutions of the Barmans

Consists of three sections:

3.1. Historical Background.

3.2.1. Traditional Cultural aspects of the Barmans.

3.2.2. Traditional Social aspects of the Barmans.

3.2.3. Traditional Religious aspects of the Barmans.

3.3.1. Traditional Village Administration.

3.3.2. Political Institutions.
3.1. Historical background:

The Barmans, who form the subject matter of the present study, are that section of the Kachari people who are inhabitants of the Barak Valley, mainly of the modern district of Cachar. To distinguish them from the Bengalee-Barmans, they are often called the 'Kachari Barmans', both belonging to the 'Kshatriya' caste of the Hindu community. Again, the Barman Kachari and the Dimasa Kachari are the two terms, which are also often used to distinguish the former from the hill Kacharis, mostly inhabitants of the North Cachar Hills.

Appearance:

They have a Mongolian type of appearance. They are a shorter and stouter people. A Barman, like all other Kacharis, has a square set face, a flat nose and almond shaped eyes. He has a little beard and a little or no moustache.

Since the Barmans of Cachar are originally a part of the Kachari people, it is necessary to take a cursory look at the historical background of the Kachari people as a whole before dealing with the Barmans. "The Kacharis belong to the great Bodo group of the Tibeto-Barmese sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese family of men"¹. The traditions points about the original habitations in far away lands of Tibet and China before they began to migrate southwards in successive waves.

in search of new homelands. They are believed to be the earliest settlers known the inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley. Having broken up into different tribes and communities and living scattered in different areas, they are now known by different names such as Koch, Mech, Garos, Lalungs and Tipperas etc. These names have been given to them by outsiders. They call themselves 'Bodos' or 'Bod-Fisas', (the sons of Bodo) in the Brahmaputra Valley and Dimafisa or Dimsas (the children of the great waters, rivers) in the North Cachar Hills.

The history of the Kachari Kingdom of the periods earlier than 13th century is not known. The earliest records providing us with some trustworthy account of the Kachari rule are the 'Ahom Burunjis' from which we know for certain that in the 13th Century, there existed a Kachari Kingdom comprising the Eastern Assam bounded by the Dikhu and the Kollong rivers in the South bank of the Brahmaputra, the Valley of the Dhansiri and North Cachar Hills.

The capital of the Kingdom was Dimapur whose name was 'Sankritised into Hidimbapur', apparently with a view to establishing a connection of the Kachari dynasty with Ghotot-Kocha, the son of the second Pandava, Bhima, of the 'Mahabharata' by his 'Rakshasi' or non Aryan wife, Hidimba. This connection enabled them to move closer to Hinduism.

In the 13th Century, Ahom king Suteupha (1268-1281) annexed the Kachari territory between the Dikhu and the

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Namdang rivers, but for the next two centuries, there were no hostilities between the two sides.

In 1440, Ahom king Suhenpha was defeated by the Kacharis in a battle fought on the banks of the river Dikhu.

In 1526, the Kacharis suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Ahoms in a war fought on the banks of Dhansiri. But the biggest defeat, the Ahoms inflicted on the Kacharis came about in 1531 in another battle in which Kachari king "Khunkara's" brother 'Detsa', was killed and the king himself with his son became fugitives. The Ahoms then made Detsang, a relative of Khunkar's, the king of the Kachari state to rule it, as their vassal. But in 1536, a quarrel arose between the Ahom King 'Suhungmung' and 'Detsang' was killed and the capital Dimapur destroyed. The Kacharis, then left Dimapur and the Dhansiri Valley and migrated further South to the North Cachar Hills where they established a new capital at Maibong on the river Mahur. But, here also, they had to suffer another military defeat at the hands of the Koch General, Chila Rai in or about the middle of the 16th century.

The history of the Kacharis for about a half-century from the time of Chila Rai's invasion is not known. But it was assumed that it was during that period that the Kachari rule was extended into the Cachar plains. But the capital was shifted to the plains about 1750.\(^3\)

Thus we see that the Dimasas are those Kacharis, who after the Ahom-Kachari war of 1536 and the destruction of

\(^3\) Dutta, P. N., Glimps into the History of Assam, P-101.
Dimapur, left Dimapur and the Dhansiri Valley and moved further south and migrated to the North Cachar Hills where they came to be known as Dimasas. The Barmans are the descendants of those Dimasas who had come down to and made the Barak Valley their new homeland after the end of the first half of the 16th century. They all use the word 'Barman' as their surname and thus, they came to be known as Barmans.

In the early part of the 17th century, one Kachari king Jasa Narayana who inflicted a military defeat on Dhan Manik, King of Jaintia, who had to accept the Kachari overlordship and make over his nephew and heir apparent, Jasa Manik to be held hostage. Dhan Manik died soon and the Kacharis set up Jasa Manik on the throne of Jaintia as their vassal. Jasa Manik resented the Kachari overlordship and tried to throw off the Kachari yoke. He got the Ahom king Pratap Singh involved in a war with the Kacharis and, in that war, though the Ahoms won the victory at first, the Kacharis later, by a surprise attack, destroyed a large part of the Ahom army. After this, Jasa Narayana who had assumed the title of 'Satrudaman' or 'Arimardan' before now assumed the title of Pratap Narayana and changed the name of his Capital Maibong into Kirtipur 4.

According to Prof. D. Dutta, Jasa Narayana and Pratap Narayana were two different persons and the former, might be the Kachari king at the time of Chila Rai’s attack 5.

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4 : Dutta, P. N., Glimps into the History of Assam, P-100-102.
5 : Dutta, D., History of Assam, P-161.
Islam Khan, the Mughal Governor of Bengal sent, an army under Shaikh Kamal for the conquest of Cachar in 1612. Satrudaman, who was the king then, strengthened his defences and put up strong resistance for some time but in the end had to sue for peace. The next Governor of Bengal, Quasim Khan sent again an army against the Kacharis in 1614 under the command of Mubrij Khan. Again, Jasa Narayana put up a strong resistance against the enemies. But, this time also he had to submit to the Mughals whom he offered 40 elephants and Rs. 1,00,000/- as tributes to the emperor and also some presents for the Governor and the General. But soon after, Mubrij Khan breathed his last one-day and next highest officer Mirak Bahadur lost heart and withdrew his forces to Sylhet.

After Satrudaman's death seven kings ruled in quick succession for about seventy-five years. When Rudra Singha became the Ahom King in 1696, his contemporary Kachari king boldly proclaimed Independence. In 1706, Rudra Singha sent a powerful army against the Kacharis. The Kachari king Tamradhwaja fled to Kashpur and appealed to the Jaintia king Ram Singha for help. The Ahoms occupied Maibong but had to leave the place because of an epidemic, which destroyed much of the army. But Ram Singha with a view to annexing Cachar to his Kingdom, captured the king Tamradhwaja treacherously. The King’s wife begged forgiveness of Rudra Singha whose

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6 : Bhattacharjee, S., History of Bengal (Edited by Sir, Jadunath Sarkar), Vol-2, P-279 to 283.
7 : Ibid, P-290 to 291.
overlordship the Kachari king now agreed to accept. Freed by the Ahoms, Tamradhwaja now returned to his capital and began to rule as a vassal of the Ahom King. But he died soon in 1708.

Rudra Singha set up Surodarpa Narayana, the 9-year-old son of Tamradhwaja on the Kachari throne. The Ahom Buranjis are silent about the Kacharis for the next 60 years (1708-1765).

In 1765, Ahom king Rajeswar Singha called upon the Kachari King Sandhikari to appear before him at his court, which the Kachari King refused to do. Following this, the Ahom army marched against him and Sandhikari submitted to them without a fight. The Kachari King was taken to the Ahom royal court where he begged to be forgiven. He was admonished and then allowed to return to his own country. But he died shortly afterwards and was succeeded by Harish Chandra Narayana (1771). After the death of Harish Chandra (1785), Krishna Chandra followed him on the Kachari throne. During the Krishna Chandra’s reign many Moamarias rebelling against the Ahoms fled to Cachar. The Kachari king, Krishna Chandra, was asked by the Ahom king Kamaleshwar Singha to turn them out of the Kachari Kingdom. Krishna Chandra’s refusal to comply led to the occurrence of another war in which he was defeated. Krishna Chandra died in 1813 and Govinda Chandra followed him on the thrown.

Govinda Chandra lost his control over North Cachar Hills when, Kohiram, one of his officers posted there rebelled. Govinda Chandra got him killed but Kohiram’s son Tularam continued the rebellion. But there were worse things to
follow. There were three Manipuri Princess - all brothers - were interested in Cachar. The three brothers Maurjit Singh, Chaurjit Singh and Gambhir Singh eventually occupied the whole of the Cachar Plain (1818), compelling Govinda Chandra to take shelter in Sylhet from where he appealed to the British for help. But the British refused to render him any help.

Govinda Chandra then turned to the Barmese who agreed to reinstate him on his lost throne. In 1824, the Barmese invaded Cachar then ruled by the Manipuri Princess. This alarmed the British Government which now drove the Burmese out of Cachar and set up Govinda Chandra on the Kachari throne as a tributary raja but he was asked to rule from Haritikar, a place a little away from present day Badarpur, where he was assassinated in 1830. The murder was believed to have been engineered by Gambhir Singh. Govinda Chandra died without leaving any legitimate heir. There were, of course, the other claimants to the throne, but their claims were not found valid. So in 1832, the areas ruled over by Govinda Chandra in the last years of his rule were annexed to the British dominion.

Later in 1854, the hilly areas then ruled over by the descendants of Tularam were annexed and made a part of the British dominion. From the time of annexation of the areas the British practically met with no opposition to their rule barring one uprising, which lasted for short while. In the second half of the 19th century, a man known as Sambhudan Phonglo had been practising as a miracle healer at Maibong. He gathered quite
a number of followers and supporters among his community. Afterwards, his popularity as a miracle healer greatly decreased seemingly because of diminishing of many people’s faith in his cunning ability. He began to live by collecting forced donation. In the beginning, his extortion met with no opposition but when he one day forcibly took away a buffalo from a fellow Dimasa, the owner of the animal reported against him to the British authorities at Gunjung. The administration at once tried to stop his extortionist activities. This led to armed clashes between the government armed forces and Sambhudan’s followers. As the small number of government policeman and guards were not sufficient to put down Sambhudan and his gang, the sub-divisional officer at Gunjung sent an urgent message for help to Mr. Boyd, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar posted at Silchar. The Deputy Commissioner left for Maibong with enough well equipped armed forces in January 1882. On the way, at some distance from Gunjung, he set up a bamboo stockade beside the road. A fight with Sambhudan’s men took place there and the Deputy Commissioner suffered a deep cut in his hand, Mr. Boyd later died of tetanus. Thereafter, Sambhudan and his men fled and in spite of thorough searches for them undertaken by the guards, they could not be traced mainly because the location and pathways inside the Dimasa country are totally unknown to them. Later, the authorities at Silchar came to know that Sambhudan was hiding somewhere near Khaspur. Some policemen one day surrounded a house in which Sambhudan was present and visiting a family, Sambhudan, somehow managed to break through the police cordon and ran into a hilly jungle where
his legs got caught in creepers and he was unable to move for some time. It was, then he was caught and killed.

The Barmans in the Barak Valley:

It has already been said that different sections of the Kachari people live today in different areas of Assam and North East Bengal and many of the sections have acquired the different names in different areas. But they retain some of their common features, which show their common ethnic origin. The descendants of those Kacharis who migrated to the North Cachar Hills after their defeat in the Ahom Kachari war in 1536 A.D. and the destruction of Dimapur, call themselves the Dimasas and are known to outsiders as such. But those who left the North Cachar Hills and migrated to the territory what is now known as the Barak Valley and are known as the Barmans' and they are now the inhabitants mainly of Cachar plains.

Traditional system of local Self-Governments of the Barmans:-

General administration:

The rural self-Government has always been the pivot of administration in India. From ancient times, various systems of village based self-Government came into being and went on being developed for centuries. In praise of the traditional Indian local self-Government, Sir Charles-Metcalfe said, "The

village communities are little republics having nearly everything within themselves.... dynasty after dynasty tumbles down, revolution succeeds to revolution ... but the village community remains the same."

What Sir, Charles-Metcalfe said of the traditional and indigenous system of rural local self-Government of the whole India, applies better to the traditional system of self-Government in tribal villages. The most important function of the local Government to defend the village from the outsider's attack, which could come at any moment. The Kachari system of local self-Government in their villages was developed when the life was more unsettled and communication with the capital was slow and sometimes even impossible. The village, therefore, had to depend on itself for its defence, maintenance of law and order and public works.

Every Barman village had a headman called 'Kunang' and the post of Kunang was an elective one. But his male descendant generally succeeded him. A person, who was not a descendant of last Kunang, could be appointed to the post when no capable and efficient person among the last kunang's descendants was found.

If a Village was very large, the village would have also an assistant headman who was called 'Dilo' with the assistance of the Dilo, the Kunang ran his village administration and often took decisions after discussions with the heads of the families when need arose.

9 : Mazumder, R. C., (Edited by) British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance, Part-1, P-842.
Defence:

The most important responsibilities of the village Government was to protect the villages and its inhabitants from the outsider's attack and from the wild animals. Each village had a youth dormitory where all the unmarried youngmen of the village slept. The dormitory called 'Nodrang' was originally maintained as a place where all the unmarried youngmen would sleep at night, always ready to wake up and rush to the defence of the village against the attacking enemies, whenever such an attack took place.

Public works:

The Kachari village administration often undertook different works in the common interest of the members of the village community. They built paths, dug tanks and also canals for channeling water from nearby rivers for irrigation, when necessity demanded. When they came down to the Cachar plains, they brought with themselves their age-old habit of forming a closely clannish organisation for undertaking and carrying out public works for the common good of all in the village community. S. Endle, who saw the Barmans' brethren in the Brahmaputra Valley to retain the system even in the early 20th century, remarked, "it will be obvious that the Kacharis have a highly efficient and very inexpensive Public Works Department of their own and vigorous effort of self-help of
this character would serve to be worthy of high commendation and healthy support."^{11} What was true of the Kacharis of the Brahmaputra Valley even in the early 20^{th} Century had certainly been true of the Barmans of Cachar at least till the start of the later half of the 19^{th} century. The system of Hedari or Biba is worth mentioning here. If and when a particular family found it impossible for its members to cultivate their lands or to harvest their crops, the family could go to the Kunang and request him to arrange the cultivation of their lands or harvesting of their crops under the Hedari system which meant that the Kunang would direct the youngmen of the community to carry out the work for the family on an appointed day for a small token sum of money. The youngmen would finish the work accordingly and keep the money to spend it on a festive day.

Modern administration:

After Cachar (the modern district of Cachar and Hailakandi) came under the British rule, the new Government tried to refrain from interfering with the Kachari system of self-Government as much as it could. This hands-off policy was continued for quite a long time. But with expansion of Government establishments, the changes that began to take place could not but affect the Barmans lives too. Still they were able to continue with their system of village

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administration without outside interference till the early
decades of 20th century. They now had to pay taxes to the
Government whose laws they had to abide by. Their system of
administration, social rules and customs etc, could not now
violate the laws of the English Government. So, some changes
in their village Government and its rules became now
inevitable. But, internally they continued their system. The
establishment of the British rule in Cachar followed by great
influx of Bengalee people, from, not only neighbouring Sylhet
District but also such far-away places in Dacca. Then, there
was also influx of non-Bengalee people from such places as
Chotnagpur, Bihar, Orissa etc. to meet the tea planter's need
for labourers. As a result, the percentage of the Barmans
dropped sharply and they were more subjected to the non-
Barman influences. The situation remained more or less the
same till Independence.

The advent of the 20th century saw some changes in the
system of the rural self-Government though in all other
respects the system continued as before. Previously, elderly
women were invited by the Kunang for taking part in
deliberation only when the matters concerned women but now
the women who are the head of the respective families take
part in the discussion concerning even in the matters in
which no women are involved. There is an officer designated
as 'Habaisgao' whose duty is to give publicity to the
decisions, directions and invitations made by the village
administration. It also appoints an officer designated as
'Moja'. All the Mojas of the Valley meet together
occasionally. They deliberate on important social issues and
take decision on the matters concerning the society as a whole. In one of such meeting, they raised a demand to the Government for declaring them as one of the scheduled tribes. The Government fulfilled this demand of theirs through a notification. They still elect the members of the village body as before. In the past, they did not keep the Government informed of the decision taken by the village administration. Now, they, as a rule, inform the Government of the decision taken by the village administration and seek financial assistance, which the administration generally grants. The transition of their system to the modern time will be discussed in detail later.

3.2.1. Traditional cultural aspects of the Barmans:

When the Ahoms in 1536, sacked Dimapur, the Kacharis had already attained a more advanced state of civilisation than the Ahoms. The Kacharis did not achieve much in art of letters; but in the early stage of their power when they built Dimapur, they showed themselves to be gifted architects. The ruins of Dimapur with its huge structures and the hall of stupendous decorated columns all in bricks show something quite unique in the culture of the Indo-Mongoloids. Dimapur, as a city of brick, impressed the Ahom who built in wood and they described Dimapur as ich-din-chipin, 'Town Earth Burn Make, i.e., Brick Town.'

"The use of brick for building purposes was then practically unknown to the Ahoms and all their buildings were of timber or bamboo with mud-plastered walls. Dimapur, on the other hand, was surrounded on three sides by a brick wall of the aggregate length of nearby two miles while the fourth or southern side was bounded by the Dhansiri River." On the eastern side was a fine solid brick gateway, with a pointed arch and stones pierced to receive the hinges of double heavy doors. Octagonal turrets of solid brick flanked it, and false windows of ornamental moulded brickwork relieved intervening distance to the central archway.¹³

The Kacharis (The Dimasas and the Barmans) did not lose their taste for building art with the loss of Dimapur. They retained their taste in the North Cachar Hills and the Plains also. There are still in existence a few of buildings, which the Barman kings erected in Khaspur. They were all brick built, lime mixed with brick powder was used to join the bricks which was used to build them. Most of them are still standing in the palace compound, which is now the market place of the 'Patimara' (Thaligram Tea Estate). Each of them covers a rectangular plinth area with a super structure resembling the shape of thatched roofs from front and back meeting at the apex. One of them is 'main' or 'lion gate' on whose top stood a stone image of a lion. The headless stone image of the lion is now lying on the ground. The buildings other than gate are temples. They are still standing erect

though in somewhat dilapidated condition. There is another temple about a ten minutes' walk from the market place and the ruins of a two-storied building lying near it. There is also a brick built roofed platform, which have pillars supporting the roofs but no walls. It is situated on the side of the Madhura and it is called 'Snan' (bath) Mandir. Though the people did not achieve much in art of letters, in earlier times had other aspects of cultural life. They had their own form of music. The songs were naturally all folk songs.

The musical instruments they used were bamboo flutes and drums. But dancing was more important in their cultural life than music. "A great source of amusement to the unmarried women and men, is dancing. It is not customary for married people to dance on any occasion whatsoever. The dancing is done in pairs, while the married people on either side and keep up a chant. The steps are not very quick ...... The dancers often place garlands of flowers round their necks and are dressed in their best. A slow shuffling movement is kept up with the feet attending with a few semi-hops time being to the chant of the elders."¹⁴

Unlike among the Nagas, the war dances were not popular among the Dimasas. Traditional Dimasa dances are called 'Baidima'. (Bai means dance Dima stands for Dimasa).

It has been said that even now "most of the cultural activities of them (the Dimasa) are centered round the

¹⁴ : Soppitt, C. A., An Historical and Descriptive Account of Kachari Tribes in North Cachar Hills, P-3 to 19.
festival of 'busu’, which is celebrated every year after harvest. It is also the greatest occasion for dancing. The dances generally performed during the 'busu' are:-

**Madaikhilimba:**

It is a dance with a circular movement. Both the boys and girls with folded hands take part in this dance. They move round the courtyard with steps and pay homage to gods in different directions.

**Jaobani:**

In this dance, the dancer stands in a circle and move around. While dancing, at first the dancer raise right hand and then both the hands are raised and the area is encircled without lifting legs. They virtually brush the floor with their feet. It is a very slow dance. Both the boys and the girls take part in this dance.

**Baixoiung:**

It means elephant dance. In this dance, the boys and girls stand alternatively and form a circle. While dancing, they imitate the movement of elephant trunks with their hands.

"In addition to above mentioned dances, there are a few dances that are rarely performed. Though these are not exactly 'busu’ dances, these can be performed at that time of 'busu’ also. In these dances, activities like harvest, well-digging etc, are imitated."^{15}

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The length of the period of the observance of 'busu' may be three, five or seven days. The three-day and five-day 'busu' is known as Surembusu. The three-day Surembusu is called the 'Edining busujiba' and five-day Surembusu is called 'Hangseomonadada busujiba'. The seven-day Surembusu is called 'Hangseomonaba'. The last-named is very elaborate and expensive and when it is observed a very beautiful gate is made with bamboo and cane at the main entrance of the village. The unmarried girls wait there to receive the village youths with the animals brought for feast.

Throughout the seven-day period a flute is played continuously by a player who when tired, hands it to another who goes on playing as long as he can and then a next man relieves him.\(^\text{16}\)

The Dimasa retain a large stock of folk songs, which are handed down orally from generation to generation. Much of the flavour and taste of their original culture is still retained in their present form. They include the stories of the creation of lightning, thunder, earthquakes, the tiger, the bear, the hornbill and snakes etc. Besides, the specimens given in the appendix-2; the story of the original of the ancestors is narrated here.

About the origin of the ancestors of the Dimasas, there is a very interesting legend. According to the legend, in the beginning, the world was completely un-inhabited and the

\(^{16}\): Danda, D., *Among the Dimasas of Assam*, P-27.

shapes of the rivers, mountains, trees and plants etc were not the same as we find today. An unhealthy silence had enveloped the whole atmosphere. In course of time, the two godly beings - one male and another female - appeared. Their appearance had broken the unhealthy and all pervading silence of the world. The male was called 'Bangla Raja'. He was also the god of the earthquakes. The female was called 'Arikhidima' in the shape of a very huge bird. The two fell in love and as a result Arikhidima had a divine conception.

Being a divine being herself and carrying a divine conception, Arikhidima had a great problem to find out a suitable resting place to lay her eggs in. Having flown about all the four corners of the earth in search of a suitable resting place, Arikhidima, at last, discovered a place called Dilaobra Sanggibra, the confluence of the rivers Dilao and Sanggi. Dilabora Sanggibra was a very lovely place. The landscape with its shining sands and blooming flowers were beyond description. There was such a huge strong banyan tree that even the heaviest storm could do little harm to its twigs, branches and leaves. Arikhidima selected this heavenly place and landed on the banyan tree. There she laid seven divine eggs. When the hatching course was over, from the first egg Sibrai was born. Sibrai's was followed by the birth of Du-Raja, Naikhu-Raja, Waa-Raja, Ganyung-Braiyung and Hamiadao from the second, third, fourth, fifth and the sixth eggs respectively. All the six were gods in the form of human beings, and they started playing gleefully on the golden sands of Dilaobra Sanggibra. But the Seventh egg still remained in the same state although sufficient time had
already elapsed. This caused great anxiety to Arikhidima. When she could realise that the egg would not break naturally, she asked her sons to break it open. But none of the first five sons dared to do this. At last, Hamiadao the sixth son who was naughty enough gave a heavy kick to the egg. Out came the ugly shaped evil spirits from the immaturity broken egg and they tried to devour the world causing wide spread chaos. But, Sibrai, the eldest brother, who also detailed their habitats and livings, pacified them. Thus, the six gods namely Sibrai, Du-Raja, Nikhu-Raja, Waa-Raja, Ganyung-Braiyung and Hamiadao were worshipped by the Dimasa Kacharis as their ancestral gods. The Dimasas believe that the evil spirits that were born out of the seventh egg were responsible for their diseases and other calamities.

3.2.2. Traditional Social aspects of the Barmans:

Rev Sidney Endle Says that in the 16th century, “the Ahom succeeded in capturing and sacking Dimapur” itself. The Kachari Raja, thereupon, removed the court to Maibong (Plentiful paddy) where the dynasty would seem to maintain itself for some two centuries. Finally, however, under pressure of an attack by the Jaintia Raja, the Kachari sovereign withdrew from Maibong to Khaspur in Cachar (Circa 1750)\(^\text{18}\).

“As regards this last mentioned migration, i.e., from Mibong to Khaspur about A.D 1750, and the conversion to

Hinduism which soon followed it, it would seem that the movement was only a very limited and restricted one, confined indeed very largely to the Raja and the members of his court. The great majority of his people remained in the hill country, where to this day, they retain their language, religion, customs and culture to a great extent.¹⁹

Thus, to form an idea of what the traditional society and culture of the Barmans were, one has to look at what they were and still are in the North Cachar Hills because there could not be much differences between the Dimasa culture and society and the Barman culture and society during the period in which the Kachari Kings ruled from Khaspur. One has also to study what they are at present in the North Cachar because the Dimasas there, being the dominant community, have been able to retain to a very great extent, the characteristics of their social and cultural traits to a very great extent, while the Barmans forming a tiny percentage of the total population of the plains has lost many more of their features than their hill brethren.

In 1885, C. A. Soppitt, wrote in his “An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes of North Cachar Hills” that the Kacharis (the Dimasas) lived ‘in the villages situated in the valleys among the hills in North Cachar, and in the plains as a rule, on any more or less raised land there may be.’ Unlike Naga villages, “they are rarely built on high hill tops or ridges and no fortifications of any sort

¹⁹ : Ibid. P- 6 to 7.
are put round them, entrance at either end being entirely open".  

Almost a century later Depali Danda writes, "The Dimasa villages are situated in the interior forest surrounded by the hills." However, it is almost axiomatic that there must be a river flowing nearby, which proves the myth that the Dimasa people love rivers.  

Thus, it can be concluded that the villages, which the Dimasas live in, have undergone little changes in North Cachar Hills. In the Barak plains during the early British rule, the Barmans lived in the villages inhabited only by them surrounded by forest and isolated from non-Barmans inhabitation.

Traditional society:

In the interior of North Cachar Hills, the Dimasas still retain much of the structures of their traditional social life. It is possible to form an idea of traditional society of the Barmans from the study of the present social life of the Dimasas living in the villages in the interior of the North Cachar Hills because there were not much difference between the Dimasa and the Barmans so far as their social lives were concerned even a hundred years ago.

21 : Danda, D., Among the Dimasas of Assam, P-12.
Clan:

Clan system plays an important part in tribal society. According to U.C. Guha, "There came into being 16 different clans into which they (the Kacharis) were divided, while they (the Kacharis) were in Dimapur\(^{22}\). Of these, a number of them were called 'Singphongs' into which all males were divided, while the rest were called 'Julus' to which all women belonged. 'Guha' does not say how many of the 16 clans were 'Singphongs' and how many 'Julus'. A woman, her mother, maternal grandmother, daughter and daughter's daughter belong to the same 'Julu'. While a man, his father, paternal grandfather, his son and the son's son belong to the same 'Singphong'. These gender-based clan systems are found also in the Melanesian, the Polinesian, the Australian and some Indian aborigine tribal communities like the Todis of the Nilgris. A boy's father's Singphong and mothers Julu determine his family's clan identity. While though a girl's 'Julu' never changes, she gets her husband's Singphong after marriage. According to Guha, Singphongs and Julus determined how high or low the status respectively of a Kachari man or a woman was in the society. With the passage of time, the numbers of Singphongs and Julus increased. There are 40 Singphong and 42 Julus now\(^{23}\). The present 40 patriclans and 42 matriclans were determined during the reign of Kashi Chandra, who is said to have ruled for some time between 1709 and 1780.

\(^{22}\) Guha, U.C., Kacharer Itibrita (Bengali, P.103.
\(^{23}\) Danda, D., Among the Dimasas of Assam, P-12.
The names of the Singphong and Julus are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adaosa</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Khersa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bader Bagiasa</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Laobangdisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Batarisa or Bodosa</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Langthasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Daodunlangthasa</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Langthadaogasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Daolagajaosa</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lapthaisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Daolagupusa</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Longamaidisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dibragadesa</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Maibangsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Difusa</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Maramsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Diruwasa</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mitherphangsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Girisa</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Nabeasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gorlosa</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Naidingsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Haflongparsa</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Nunisa or Londisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hapilasa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Parbatsa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Hagjersa</td>
<td>34. Phonglosa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Hasengsa</td>
<td>35. Purusa or Warisa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Hajaisa</td>
<td>36. Rajyungsa or Lampusa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Jaharisa</td>
<td>37. Sarangphangsa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>31. Jrambsa</td>
<td>38. Singyungsa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Kempraisal</td>
<td>39. Thaoscnisa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Karigapsa</td>
<td>40. Zigdungsa *</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

{*Foot Note* - The clans were based on status and these were clearly occupational. Barman says, 'the clan grouping of the Dimasas is akin to 'the Gotra' of the Hindu system of social setup. But the clannish title of the Dimasas carried with it the occupational distinction of the family besides being the first originator of the group. Barman also mentioned the occupations of many clans. Interesting commentary on the clan system is that the people now 'abhor' to own many occupations, which do not sound honourable for them. With the change of time, the occupations changed but the clan names remain the same. In some cases, the clan names too changed. As for instances 'Akher' became 'Akhera' and now the clan is simply known as 'Khersa'. Hachengsa became Hasnusa, Daodung-Langtha became Langtasha, Kimpraisa became Kempraisa or simply Kemprai. (Tanmay Bhattacharjee, North Cachar Hills - It's land people and problems, P -21.)}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Names of the women &amp; their royally recognised julus</th>
<th>Name of the Julus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Kunja Barmanee</td>
<td>Saikudi Zuludi, Chagauidi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Jhambhubati Barmanee</td>
<td>Bhanglaima Gedeba Fachaidi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Omra Barmanee</td>
<td>Fachaidi Gedeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Tubangdi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Fachaidikacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Gayaing Chaodi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Godebecham Dechagao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Thailudi Barmanee</td>
<td>Chaidima Gedeba, Chagas Chandfarai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Debalidi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Gedeba, Hamlai, Gumandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ambhika Barmanee</td>
<td>Bhanglaima Gedeba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Kashimati Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Miyangma Gedba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Yashamati Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Paichan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Busudi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Saidima Gedeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Bishnudi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Bhanglaima Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Lakshmiddi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Gedeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Remadi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Miyang Daoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Lumaidi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Maireng Gedeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Ding Kashimati Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Saidima Daoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Fairangdi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mairong Daoga Jairungdi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Daomdi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mironk Gedeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Sukaidi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mironk Khacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Dechaidi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mironk Ma Gedeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Nairungdi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mironk Gedeba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Kashidi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Saidima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Rakshuni Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Ranchaidi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Mailong Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Bhangolaima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Durbati Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mireng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Dechadi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Miyung Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Gongadi Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mirong Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Dohani Barmanee</td>
<td>Mireng Mairong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Anjana Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Bhanglaima Kacheba</td>
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<td>32.</td>
<td>Oyai Chundi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Kacheba</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Maimandi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Saidima Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Jaludi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Thangjadi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Mairengma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Jhaludi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Maireng Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Chandrabati Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Diyungma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Julaidi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Saidima Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Samdi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Maireng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Subhangdi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Maireng Kacheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Kanchandi Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Kumbhading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Yashada Barmanee</td>
<td>Maireng Bairengcha 25 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FootNote*- Listing female clans is a bewildering exercise. No two lists tally in entirety. In Semkhor Village, atleast 13 female clans were noted. The present writer has noted carefully the female clans. A comparative study of the two lists (one of Nalinidra Barman) and another by Jiban Chetia) do not tally. Most of the matriclans found in Semkhor village are not found in the standered list. The explanation is that these julus were not awareded by the kings and therefore remained outside the list. Uttam Chand Barman of Silchar mentioned of one matriclans Grainsong Gedeba, which is dying out. Some matriclans may not be correct. Petriclans are more stable than the matriclans. [Tanmay Bhattacharjee (North Cachar Hills - It's land people and problems, P - 21)]

Originally, this Clan system seems to have been based on occupational status. For instances, Kings belonged to the Hammusa, Thaosensu or Bodosa Singphongs while a Jaharisa would be barbar, a Parbatsa a gardener etc.

The number of Singphongs and Julus were increased to 40 and 42 respectively and the system enforced rigidly, certainly with a view to keeping the social practice of tribe endogamy and clan exogamy intact and to prevent inter-tribe marriages between the Barman youngman and woman.

There are a number of women who do not belong to any of the 42 ‘Julus’. Barman boys normally do not marry spinsters of these groups because they do not belong to any of the 42 Julus. The Barmans avoid touching utensils, garments etc, used by these-out-of 42 women. During the field visits, it came to light, that these women are believed to have some magical powers. Again, a Barman young man, a government employee, mysteriously smiled and said these out-of-42 women also have their own ‘Julu’, but could not say what it was.

Traditional life in different phases:

Birth:

Life begins with birth - Soppitt gives a short account of the Dimasa practices pertaining to birth. The account is as follows:

A pregnant wife went on doing her domestic work until it became impossible. About twenty days before the birth of a child, ‘the mother was isolated’ neither her husband nor
anyone else was allowed to eat with her. When the confinement was over, a feast was held about seven days after the birth of a male child, while in the case of a girl, it was held five days after the birth. The day of the feast was also the day of christening. It was on that occasion, the child was given a name. The parents were, however, not allowed to choose the name. It was the old women of the Village who settled the child's name and they did not have to ask parents what their opinion or opinions were. But occasionally, they might allow the parents to have a say in the matter.

Danda who studied various aspects of the Dimasa in the North Cachar Hills describes the practices more elaborately. She undertook the study and wrote her book in the 4th quarter of the 20th century. It is clear from her description of the Dimasa practices pertaining to birth that these are still prevalent among the Dimasa in the North Cachar Hills. The Barmans also observed them in the way until their practices were diluted with the practices of the Hindus of the plains. The following is a short description based on her work.

After a baby had been born its mother did not give it the first breast milk. Instead, another women Anuma (who then had a breast fed child) gave it the first breast milk. If the new born was a male baby, its Anuma (Dai or midwife) had to be the mother of a female breast-fed child and vice-versa. From the time of the birth, the father of the new born baby could not leave the village for three days and the whole village observed a period of impurity.

On the day the umbilical chord of the baby fell, the mother and the father took a purifying-bath and the house and 80
utensils etc were cleaned. The head of the baby was also shaved on the same day.

**Childhood:**

There was also a ceremony pertaining to the taking of the baby outside the house for the first time. It was known as "Dao-Sat-Haiba". It was generally observed the day after the purifying day. But it could be observed on some other day also. The mid-wife took the baby out. The invitees then blessed the baby. The maternal uncle of the baby chewed some sesame seed and spat it on the face of the baby to keep away the evil spirits.

The baby was ceremonially fed with rice for the first time when it was six months old. The ceremony, "Bising Jiriba" could be observed sometime later also but within the year of the birth of the baby. The mid-wife, her assistant and the Anuma were entertained with food and drink and presented with cloth for the services, they had rendered at the time of the childbirth.

In the North Cachar Hills, like other tribal women, the Dimasa mothers still carry their babies on their backs almost all day long. The baby is kept fastened to her body with a piece of clothes in such a way that it can be fed with breast milk. The mother does not seem to find any difficulty in carrying the load of the baby during her day's work. Sometimes of course, she has to leave the baby for a short while. She then hands over the baby to her husband. In the village of the Barak Valley this is still a common sight.
child almost remained only with the parents until it was about 5 years old when he began to make friends with other children of his age. This way of growing up by and large remains the same in the villages of the North Cachar Hills. But in the Barak Valley, where, a large number of the heads of the families are service holders, children can no longer accompany their parents everywhere.

When the boys reached their adolescence, they began to be members of the 'Nodrang', the bachelor's dormitory, where the boys of 13/14 years and above lived together.

Boyhood:

The Dimasa and the Barman boys were always obedient to their parents and they worked in their father's agricultural field. Sometimes, they arranged musical and dancing programmes in which girls also took part. Older villagers also used to attend there. The 'Nodrang' was also a defence organisation bearing the responsibility to protect the village. In the Barak plains, no 'Nodrang' was found to be in existence and there are no 'Nodrang' now in many villages of the North Cachar Hills. 26

Parents' House:

While the boys were in the 'Nodrang', the girls used to follow and imitate their mothers in her work. They would fetch water in small pots and carry small bundles of wood

26 : Danda, D., Among the Dimasas of Assam, P-29.
etc. It was in this way that they received training in their domestic duties. When a boy had reached marriageable age, he began to look for a suitable match. Neither the Dimasas nor the Barmans sanctioned child marriage. No girl was forced into marriage by the parents if she did not like the suitor.

When a young man had fixed his choice on a girl, his father went to her parents to find out whether the parents of the girl or the girl herself had any objection to the match. The suitor’s father took with him a guard of liquor as a present. Nothing was settled then. Five or seven days later (not two, three, four or six days) another visit was paid to the girl’s house with some more liquor and dried fish as presents. On that occasion the bride-price (Kalti) to be paid by the bridegroom to the bride’s parents was settled. After another time-gap, equal to the time-gap between first and second visit, the father of the prospective bride-groom went to girl’s parents and it was then that the date of marriage was settled. On the fixed day, when the bride price (Kalti) had been paid, relations of both the parties gathered in an open place. The bride-groom’s relations sat on the right and bride’s on the left and the other villagers in front.

The bride-groom had to bow down to each elderly man there. Then he went to the house of the father-in-law and remained there while guests feasted outside. The marriage was thus complete. But the pair was not allowed to live together immediately. The day of the start of their conjugal life was settled at another meeting of elders. It might be three, five or seven days after the marriage. But not after any even numbers of the days. The North Cachar Hills, the newly couple
were obliged to live in his bride’s parents’ house for a whole year and helped them in their Jhum work and made in other ways themselves useful.

At the end of the period, they built a separate house and started living a separate family life.

The Barmans followed the same procedure of marriage and the newly married couples generally had to remain for about 7 years in the house of bride’s parents.

A person who got married to be a member of another tribe was treated as an outcaste and his fellow Kacharis would not eat with him.

Married people having children used to be called by the name given to the eldest children with the affix ‘Fa’ (father) and ‘Ma’ (mother). Thus, if his eldest son was Govinda, he would be called by the name ‘Govindafa’ and his wife ‘Govindama’. An old man having no child would be addressed as ‘Shagirfa’ and his wife ‘Shagrima’ signifying ‘no child’s father’ and ‘no child’s mother’ respectively.

A man could divorce his wife but would have to pay back the ‘Kalti’ only if the divorce was not because of her adultery. A wife could divorce her husband if she wanted but he had to return the ‘Kalti’ with a small addition. And also, all the presents, given to her and her parents had to be returned. But if she wanted the divorce on account of husband’s adultery, she was not compelled to return the ‘Kalti’. Divorce was not considered complete until it was formally announced at a meeting of the ‘Kunang’, Dilo (If there was one and a few of the village elders.)
If a man had two or more wives, the first would be considered the head of the house. But the Barmans were generally a monogamous people.

A man could marry his elder brother’s widow but not younger brother’s. A man could marry his wife’s younger sister but not the elder. According to Soppitt, there were 40 patriclans and 42 matriclans into which they were divided.

"To give an example, one male sect (particlan) was called 'Hasungsa' and one female sect was called (matriclan) 'sagoadi'. A Hasungsa marring a sagoadi, the male issues were 'Hasunsa' and female 'Sagoadi'. The sons 'Hasungsa' could not marry any women of the mother's caste or sect, in the same manner, the daughter could marry no man of their father's sect"  

Death:

On the death of a man or woman, the information was at once sent to all friends and relatives. The body was carefully washed, dressed in good clothes and placed on a mat. It was put at full length, hands closed by the sides and the eyelids down over the eyes. Funeral guests came and were taken to the room the corpse kept in. They placed their gifts, pieces of cloth or money etc alongside the body, when the guests had paid their respect to the dead, the corpse was lifted up and carried outside the village to the bank of river or stream. A pyre of 12 layers of dry wood was raised.

On the top of the pyre a bamboo mat was placed and the corpse 
was laid on the mat. The pyre was lighted by the nearest 
relative present. It was believed that the body would not 
burn properly because of the absence of some of those who had 
been very intimate with the dead. So, a connection of the 
deceased stood on one side of the corpse and at regular 
intervals threw across long pieces of sun grass, calling at 
the same time the names of absentees, explaining the reasons 
for their absence. After cremation, the bones and ashes were 
thrown into the river or stream. A portion of the frontal 
bone was retained and placed carefully in a miniature house 
raised at a short distance from the village. The bone 
remained there until the next harvest time. In some villages, 
the bone was retained one full year. It was then dropped into 
the Kopili or sometimes into the nearest stream. Until the 
dropping of the frontal bone into the river, no marriage 
could take place in the family. Three or four days later, a 
large feast was held. The body of a child less than two 
months old was usually buried and noted cremated.

A woman who had died at childbirth was burned but no 
feast was held. Her belongings were thrown away or burnt. A 
man killed by a tiger was not burnt but buried where found. 
His belongings were thrown away.
3.2.3. Traditional Religious aspects of the Barmans:

The Barmans of the plains (called the Dimasas in the hills) belong to the great Kachari stock. The Kacharis are believed to be the earlier settlers of the Brahmaputra Valley. But, they emerged into the history of the religion only in the first half of the 13th century A.D. Nothing, therefore, is known about their religious life of the periods before that century. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee says, "they came within the pale of Hinduism... as early as the 13th century." The fuller Hinduisation of the Kachari ruling class appears to have began "from the 15th century. From the end of this century, we have their kings bearing Hindu or Sanskrit names." The first Kachari king bearing a Hindu name is known from a coin found near Maibong and it bears a date equivalent to 1583 A.D. The coin was issued by Jasa Narayan Deb "a worshipper of Hara Gauri, Siva and Durga, of line of Hachengsa".

Thus, it is clear that Hinduism had already made considerable inroad among the Kachari community even before the 16th century A.D. While the Kachari kings were ruling from Maibong, they are believed to have extended their rule into the Cachar plains, sometime in the later half of the 16th century. As mentioned above, Dr. S. K. Chatterjee makes mention of the "Fuller Hinduisation of the Kachari ruling class". It was they who were to be the first and more

28 : Chatterjee, S.K., Kirata-Jana-Krti, p-123
29 : Gait, E., The History of Assam, p-313
influenced by Hinduism.

Though, the Kachari had come “within the pale of Hinduism” as early as the 13th century, they did not give up all their old religious beliefs even till the 19th century. One can form some idea about what their original religion was like from the description contained in the “An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes in North Cachar Hills” by C.A Soppitt:-

Their original tribal belief consists of ten gods, named respectively - 1) Alow Raja 2) Nali 3) Nikow 4) Wa 5) Mangarang 6) Dishang. The greatest of them is Alow Raja who is the creator of all. Nali, Nikow and Wa come next in the succession. Alow Raja aided by Wa, have the power to give birth to human beings. The six other gods are under the control of Nali and Nikow can cause sickness and death. Only the king and leading man can offer sacrifices to Alow, Nali and Wa. In Dimasa mythology, there are no devils. The Dimasas believe that witches and sorcerers, inspired by some evil sprits are responsible for harms to human being.

When they followed their original faith, the Dimasas sacrificed goats and fowls etc to their gods. When they offered sacrificial animals or birds to a god, they raise thirteen hips of earth somewhat away from the village, put the animal or fowl on these and then slaughtered and allow them to bleed. While doing so, they said their prayer to the God stating the object of the sacrifice. After that, the meat of the body was cooked and eaten on the spot by the villagers.
According to the original Dimasa religious beliefs, there is a heaven in the skies and in the midst of the earth there is hell. Heaven is according to the original Dimasa belief, is a big village where good people leave after their deaths with Gods as their neighbours. In the hell, the wicked are subjected to shame and punishment for the their bad action in this life if they have not been already punished, before death. But the sprits do not live in heaven or hell permanently and return to this world as children.

Before the Royal familie’s, and the leading people’s conversion to Hinduism, there were eight families from each of which there would be a priest attached to the royal court. Each of the eight priests’ would sacrifice to a particular god. They were called ‘Jantaizoa’ and their posts were hereditary. The post of the priest, having no son, would be inherited by his nearest relative. The priests lived in their own villages and went to Maibong when called upon by Raja. The high priest of Alow Raja was the head spiritual advisor to the king. Other priests’ position was in accordance with the extent of importance of the gods whose rites they performed. Villagers might also be allowed to avail of their services. What a priest would get in return for the services, he rendered seem to have been left to the villagers to decide.

It is now worth mentioning the two traditional festive events of socio-religious importance are still observed. They

are 'Gaddi Sainjara' and 'Garba Puja’. The two are describe as follows:

The principal function of the Barman community is the "Gaddi Sainjara". This function is celebrated on the day of 'Karthik Sankranti’. On that day, the members of each household at dawn offer a dish of meal containing meat, egg, fish, Zu and a kind of leaf, known as 'Khanaringma' in Dimasa language, to the spirits of their ancestors. So, this function is a form of ancestor worship. On that day, any person invited or uninvited who visits one’s house is entertained with a hearty meal. According to some aged Barmans, Gaddi Sainjara is said to be a function pertaining to the jhum harvest. Once Banrmans practised jhum cultivation. In the village Chailtacherra, Kumacherra, Gorevitor, Kacharigaon, Dhanipur etc, the villagers informed the author that they practised jhum cultivation before independence. Still a few Barman households in some villages are found practising jhum in the land far from their home. In the North Cachar Hills, the kinsman of the Barmans, known as Dimasas, practised jhum as a primary occupation. The 'Gaddi Sainjara' is observed in every house.

The second important communal function is known as 'Garba Puja’. This function is held in the month of Magh or Phalgun (according to Indian calendar) once in a year. The 'Garba Puja’ is observed for the welfare of the entire village. The village headman is known as 'Kunang' with the consolation of his assistant and other elderly persons, fixes the date of 'Garba Puja’ and the amount of subscription to be paid by each household of the village. The Puja continues for
two nights and a day. It is held in the boundary of the extremity of the village. During the day of 'Garba Puja', the important paths of the village are closed with some bamboo posts. No person from outsides even if he/she happens to be their close relative or kinsman, is allowed to enter the village. Similarly, no person from inside the village is allowed to go out of it. There are many deities worshipped during the 'Garba'. But after investigating different villages, it is learnt that the numbers and the names of the deities differ from village to village.

These are the original Kachari beliefs. Till the last quarter of the 19th century, a great many Kacharis retained them in the pure form. Others moved away to some extent. They also practised the same religion but deferred on some points of religion. They called some of the Kachari gods by different names.

Every year, once two man were sacrificed at the foot of the shrine devoted to Ram Chandi. (Ranachandi ?)

It has already been said that the Barmans are the Kacharis or the Dimasas who migrated from the North Cachar Hills to the Cachar plains. "It would seem that the movement was only a very limited and restricted one, confined indeed very largely to the Raja and the members of his court." 31

Thus, it can be assumed that the Barmans are the descendants of the Dimasas belonging to the upper stratum of the community. Soppitt defines the Barmans as 'Kacharis'....

"converted to Brahminism", "The Barman is one entitled to wear the Brahminical thread, not, be it observed, by hereditary right, but by right of purchase". Thus, any Kachari, of whatever caste he may be, can become a Barman, provided only that he can pay the necessary expenses.\textsuperscript{32}

"Even the child of the Barman is not entitled to any of the privileges of his caste until he has undergone certain ceremonies and has bought the thread". The only difference that is made in regard to the sons of Barmans is that they can obtain the sacred thread cheaper than can the children of Kacharis other than the Barmans.

Fifteen years after Mr. Soppitt wrote his book, Stuart Baker wrote in its introduction, "Even in the villages where the Barmans have no direct influence, the Kachari religion in its old form is fast dying out."\textsuperscript{33}

It has already been said that it was mainly the royal family and the members of the court who migrated to the Cachar plains from the North Cachar Hills. They all naturally decided to be placed in the same Kshatriya caste. Their religious life began to be guided by Bengalee priest.

3.3.1. Traditional village administration:
What originally the Kacharis', the traditional village administration was, is exactly not known. That is why the system of administration followed by Kacharis in and from 13\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{32} : See reference 27, Introduction, by Stuart Baker, E. C.,
\textsuperscript{33} : ibid.
The system of village administration was the most important part of the administrative system, as a whole. The reason is not far to seek. During the period mentioned above, there was little connection between the seat of royal power in the capital and scattered existing villages. Whenever the kingdom as a whole was attacked, the royal family fled the capital living their subjects to fend for themselves. Those were days of slow and difficult communications. The Kachari villagers thus could not depend on the king for their protection, nor could they expect that the king's administrative setup would be able to maintain peace and order in their villages.

The villages thus, had to depend on themselves for defence, peace and order both in their social and administrative matters. Thus, every village became a tiny republic, which would look after not only the subjects mentioned above but also welfare and public works.

The most important feature of the Kachari village administration was the institution of 'Kunang'. The post of the Kunang was by and large hereditary. Though after the death of the Kunang of the village, the appointment of the successor would have to be approved by village elders. Again if a Kunang died without leaving any male heir, it would be only with in the authority of the village elders to select a new man for the appointment to the post.

Another official called 'Dilo' often assisted the Kunang. There was also another office bearer who announced the decisions arrived at the meeting of the village elders,
which the Kunang presided over. These officials called ‘Habisgao’ also served as a means of communication between villagers in general and the village administration also. The function of the village government had various aspects. They were as follows.

(1) The most important function of the village administration was the maintenance of the security of the village and its people from both internal and external threats. The Kacharis during that period, had to defend themselves against attacks not only of the enemies of the kingdom from outside but also the neighbouring tribes. The Non-Kachari tribals together were the majority people in the North Cachar Hills. There were often quarrels involving the Kacharis and others. These quarrels frequently led to violent occurrences. Again, the Kacharis had also the fear of surprise attack at night. Besides, they had also the fear of wild animals like elephants and tigers etc. These threats to their security necessitated the existence of a regular defence organisation, which every village had. This organisation functioned as an establishment called ‘Nodrang’ which was a sleeping house for all unmarried male members who had crossed their childhood.

This Nodrang though mainly a defence organisation had some cultural aspects also. The boys occasionally sang and danced there and underwent a training course to be efficient members of the society when they grew up. They slept together in the Nodrang ever ready to rise at the call of duty to defend the village when it was under attack from enemies.
Their requirement to sleep together at night also implies that the villagers feared attacks at night.

(2) The village administration also had to look after the peace and order in the villages. It was very important because, for its own security, it was also required that the unity of the villagers should be maintained, failing which defence organisation mentioned above, would be considerably weakened.

The village administration had its social and political laws to enforce. These laws, which were created by customs, were handed down from generation to generation. The people were habituated to obey these laws. The maintenance of law and order was not difficult. The few, who violated them, would be tried at the meeting of the village elders presided over by the Kunang who after discussion with those attending the meeting would decide the case. Disputes over lands and property were also settled in the same way.

The village administration also heard and decided the marital disputes when such cases were brought before them, they would first try to conciliate husbands and wives who were party to the cases. When they failed to conciliate them, they allowed them to divorce. Various demands about the sharing assets were decided upon at these meetings.

(3) The village administration also had to decide what public works they had to undertake. The public works mostly were building of paths, digging tanks and wells. Besides, there might be families who could not cultivate and raise crops in their own lands, may be because of absence of any adult male member in the family or illness or invalidity of
its head. So, the village administration shouldered the responsibility of the cultivation of the family's lands and growing crops on behalf of the family was borne by the village administration headed by Kunang who would direct the youths of the 'Nodrang' to undertake the work on nominal payment.

3.3.2. Political institutions:

The political institutions of the Kacharis belong to two strata. The basis of the first was the kingdom as a whole. The king ran the administration in consultation with his ministers. The ministers were appointed from the class of nobility. The minister's responsibilities were not well defined, but one thing was certain. They all had to lead the king's forces in time of war. Thus, they had to carry out the responsibilities of army officers also. Besides, the ministers there were also other subordinate employees who had to carry out different responsibilities, which they were entrusted with. But even then, there were no clear cut sphere of duties and officers entrusted with the task of collecting taxes could be asked to perform any other duty, when the king desired so. The officer called Senapati or a General was asked to carry out all the duties in a particular area as was seen in the case of Kohiram who was placed in charge of North Cachar Hills and who later became a rebel. Kohiram was to discharge all kinds of duties, civil and military.

What is to be remembered is that the administration was conspicuously effective only in the capital and nearby
surrounding areas. The villages, specially the far-flung ones of often remained disconnected from the capital for long periods. Some times, old villages were deserted owing to various reasons and new villages came up in different places. The king and his ministers were often not informed of these. Besides, a distant village or villages might suffer attacks from outside. But the King and his government could not know of these incidents. The villagers could not wait for the helps from royal government and therefore, could not depend on it. There were instances that invasions took place and the king and its courtiers themselves fled the capital leaving their subjects to fend for themselves. Thus, the royal government was effective mainly in the capital and its surroundings. It also happened that a hostile force invaded and occupied some of the villages of the kingdom, but the villagers preferred to remain there under the new rulers. The king also sometimes appointed an officer called 'Wajir' who was his agent and whose designation was a Persian one, which clearly was borrowed from the Muslim usage. The 'Wajir' kept at diplomatic connection with other states and dealt with legal matters. The ministers and other officers were mostly illiterate, so the king had to have a person or persons who could make written correspondence and write documents etc. These educated officers also needed to keep accounts. They were mostly non-Kacharis and belong to the Bengalee community.

The different singphongs or male clans of the Kacharis had to carry out different responsibilities towards their kings. Some were entrusted with the task of supplying the
royal family with fruit, some others with rice and some others with clothes etc. The priest came from two singphongs. There were three singphongs from which, the royal family and the nobility came. Then, there were two singphongs supplying the royal family with meat and fish. They formed the professional hunting class. Five or six singphongs supplied the king and his courtiers with manual labourers who formed the largest number of the people. The workers from these singphongs had to cultivate the lands belonging to the king and the nobility without any payment. From three singphongs came domestic servants of the king and of its courtiers.

Thus, it is seen that the royal government had almost no responsibilities to carry out towards their subjects though the latter had to discharge different kinds of duties. The kingdom had ill-defined boundaries and the royal government often could not determine its own jurisdiction.

Thus, the upper stratum, of the Kachari rule was not well knit and was almost absent in distant areas and though they technically might form the part of the kingdom.

The Kachari Political institution, thus, practically had to be village based. The village-based administration outlasted the king’s jurisdiction, which often changed. There were villages, which came to be outside the boundary of the kingdom following invasion from outside. These villages came under the rule of new non-Kachari rulers but the political systems of the village administration still continued.

These does not mean that the Kachari villagers who practically had to run their own government at the village level and had to depend on themselves for their defence and
maintenance of peace and order, did not owe allegiance to the Kachari kings. But, they owed the allegiance to them not because of any effective rule they were living under. But they were accustomed to obey him and the dynastic rule symbolically represented their identity also. This was because when they had a king belonging to their own race, they felt their kingdom as their own. Thus, they naturally had an emotional attachment to their kings and their kingdom.

As seen above, the Kacharis for all practical purposes lived under the village governments, which they themselves ran. These village governments were practically tiny republics, which never deserted them. When villagers of a particular village had to desert their old village owing to attacks from outsiders etc, their village government also moved with them to be set up where they established their new village.

The functions of the various officials of the village administration and duties they discharged have been briefly described next.

An elaborate description of the village administration is necessary. The village administration is headed by the Kunang. The institution of the Kunang is a very old one. The Kunang was the most important and respectable person of the village who had to take every decision on any matter concerning the village community in consultation with other heads of the families. His responsibilities can be divided into three kinds (a) Administrative (b) Social (c) Religious.
(A) Administrative: A Kunang had to see that its members do not violate the laws handed down by the customs. He had to prevent violation of law. So, he was entrusted with the task of running a police administration in the village. The strength of its authority was rooted in the age-old practices of obeying the Kunang's command. He tried the small cases of assaults, thefts etc. Besides, he had also to deal with the cases with inter-village ramification. He had thus, to deal with Kunangs of other villages when cases involved also the villages other than his own.

(B) Social: The most important social function of the Kunang was to see that the traditional social rules were not broken. These rules pertained to marriages, customs and social events. He had to see to it also that the young men and girls did not marry outside the community for that would damage the purity of the race. The Kunang had also to see that the rules of retaining the purity of the race were obeyed. The Kunang had also to see to it that no girl married a youngman of her father's singphong and no youngmen married a girl belonging to her mother's julu. Now, it is the bond of marital connection, which bound the different clans of the Kachari community together and kept at the community's social unity. Thus, the Kunang and his administration also maintained the unity of the community as a whole.

There were some social rites, which had to be observed in the village. The Kunang had to initiate and supervise the observances. These kept the villagers on good terms with one another and kept the unity of the community strong.
(C) Religious: The Kunang had a number of religious duties to discharge. The Kacharis originally, practised a tribal animistic religion like other neighbouring tribes like Kukis and the Hmars etc. They were also spirit worshippers. They believed that they fell victims to various unfortunate things for which evil spirits were responsible. So, when any disease broke out in the form of an epidemic, the village deity had to be propitiated for the appeasement of this god or semi-god. He had to be worshipped in the village and the Kunang had to arrange everything for the worshipping of the god, which continued for days. The most important religious events in the village were the 'Garba puja', which used to take place just before the start of the sowing seasons. It is not necessary here to describe how it was observed but it was accompanied with a great feast and singing songs. The Kunang had to manage each and everything concerning the events. There were some other minor religious events, which had to be observed and Kunang had to see to it that everything was done in the proper manner. He arranged offerings, sacrifices and proper adherence to the customs and rules of these worshipping.