CHAPTER II

Pre-Modern Historical Background of the Dimasas

Dimasa is one of the communities in the Northeast India that underwent a process of state formation in the pre-British period. The advent of the *Ahoms* (from their land in Upper Burma) in the southern bank of Upper Assam in the thirteenth century led to a conflict for supremacy with the Dimasa state, which lasted until the eighteenth century. Although gradually reduced by the growing Ahom state, it remained a formidable adversary until both the states fell prey to the expansionist designs of Burma in the east and the British in the west. The Dimasa struggle for power and resistance to the Ahoms is often lost sight of in the celebration of six hundred years of Ahom rule. However, the six hundred years of Ahom rule also mark the six hundred years of Dimasa resistance. This resistance that lasted for centuries in the pre-modern times is a crucial part of Dimasa social memory and shapes the contours of contemporary Dimasa identity and politics. We shall discuss this in the following chapter in detail. This chapter briefly surveys the history of Dimasas in pre-modern times, their migrations, settlements, state-formation, and their social and cultural practices.

Usually state-formation and production of written texts are closely associated. In this respect the Dimasa state is an exception. There is nothing in written form that directly helps in the reconstruction of history in regard to the Dimasa state and society prior to the advent of the *Ahoms*, a branch of the *Tai Shan* groups that established its rule in the Upper Assam in the early part of the thirteenth century. The Ahoms had a tradition of maintaining chronicles known as *Buranjis* which make reference of the Dimasas.
As the Dimasas did not develop writing, the state-formation among them is considered to be engendered due to contacts with the neighbouring state societies.\footnote{For detailed discussion on state-formation in Assam, see Surajit Sinha, *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, 1987; Sophiya Meretna, ‘The KAchari State: Character of Early State-Like Formations in the Hill Districts of Assam’ in *The Early States* ed by Henri J Claessen and Peter Skalnik, Mouton Publishers, 1978}

In the later part of its rule, the Dimasa monarchy did produce a corpus of literary texts. These writings, however, were not in Dimasa language but in Bengali and Sanskrit. Although these texts do supply some materials for the reconstruction of the history of Dimasa people and the monarchy, there is nothing much in writing that throw light on the early migrations, settlements and history of the Dimasa people and monarchy. This lack of written sources are sought to be compensated by many with the help of coins and archaeological remains, both scarce as resources, mostly so in case of archeaology. In any case, this lack of written sources is considered a great problem in the reconstruction of the history of the Dimasa state and its people.

This historical lag, however, is viewed differently by the community. The Dimasa people, inspite of literary pursuits by the later monarchy, remained insulated from it. They are very rich in oral traditions like folksongs, ballads, tales, riddles, myths and legends. Dimasa world view was shaped by its cultural belief system and is still practiced in its old form. Their social structure has not undergone much change in the face of modernity and it still binds the people together as one ‘imagined community’. The sense of oneness is derived from their collective memory embedded in their various cultural practices. Their collective memory shapes their approach to their past and it is different from that of disciplinary history. What is viewed as lack of history in the sense of disciplinary history, is viewed as subversion of their past with purpose.

This gap has been a matter of debate within the community at various quarters leading
to the ossification of Dimasa identity and the subsequent movement for its political recognition.

On the other hand, if one departs from the conventional practice of positivist approach and take recourse to consider the social memory produced and reproduced through various ballads, folklores and so on, the gaps in the ‘disciplinary’ history can be compensated. This chapter is a discussion on the history of the Dimasa as represented in ‘disciplinary’ history along with the ambiguities it presents. It is shown here that community view of their past is different from the disciplinary view and there is a wide gap between the two. This chapter is an effort at combining both the ‘disciplinary’ and the community’s view of its past and filling the gaps in the reconstruction of their past. It is an effort towards presenting an inclusive history combining the so called historical sources with that of the alternative sources so far not considered for the reconstruction of Dimasa history. In this chapter, while discussing the pre-British historical background, discussion on gaps in ‘disciplinary’ history in dealing with certain ambivalences in regard to the Dimasa past and how these gaps were argued within the community and the parallel process of retrieving the past is sought. I shall briefly discuss the general ethnographic account of the Dimasas including current population distribution. The chapter also includes a discussion on the origin, and meaning of the term Dimasa, its historicity and its relation with the terms Kachari, Bodo/Boro, Hill Cachari etc.

Brief Ethnographic account

Dimasa, meaning ‘Son of Big River,’ is a name of group of people who presently inhabit the Northeastern states of Assam, Nagaland and a small part of Manipur. Racially grouped as Mongoloid, they have their own language/speech practice belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family. Their language is akin to speakers of the
Bodo-Garo language group and classified in the same grouping. They believe in their common ancestry with the Bodo-Garo speakers and consider themselves close kin of them. It is for this reason they are considered a part of the greater Bodo-Kachari group, adding much confusion in regard to their nomenclature that shall be discussed below in detail.

Dimasas are classified as Scheduled Tribe Hills (STH). However, the section of the people living in the plains districts of Barak Valley and Nagaon district are designated by the state of Assam as Scheduled Tribes Plains (STP). They are officially known as Barman Kacharis and Hojai Kacharis respectively, rather than Dimasa. Only those living in the hill districts of Dima Hasao (formerly North Cachar Hills) and Karbi Anglong are categorised as Dimasa. On the other hand, the Dimasas living in Nagaland are called Kacharis in official terms. In all these areas, they constitute a small part of the total population except in Dima Hasao district where they constitute the single largest group. The Dima Hasao district constitutes a Legislative Assembly constituency and elects one member thereby. Both the hill districts form one parliamentary constituency and hitherto no Dimasa has been elected to the parliament as the Karbis are numerically much stronger in the constituency.

The Dimasas living in the plains by and large claim themselves as Hindu in their religion. At the same time, however, they practice their age-old ritualistic traditions. The basic structure of their society is not very different from that of their brethrens in the hills. Dimasa is a patriarchal society and father is the head of family. One interesting feature of the Dimasa society is the presence of matrilineal clans. Anthropologically such a system of descent is called double descent. In this system an Ego inherits lineage from both paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother. The primacy of Ego’s lineage depends on his/her sex. If an Ego is male, his primary
lineage is inherited from his paternal grandfather and passes down the same to his children. His grandmother’s clan remains his secondary lineage. In his life time, an Ego remains close relative of his maternal grandmother’s clan and cannot marry any girl belonging to such a clan. In case of a female Ego, she inherits maternal grandmother’s clan and passes it down to her children while remaining close kin of paternal lineage in her lifetime. There are forty two female and forty recognised male clans in Dimasa society. 2 Clan exogamy is strictly followed till date. In case of same clan marriage, the couple is separated. If failed they are ex-communicated from the society. However, a child born out of such union are not stigmatised in the society.

All landed properties and livestock are inherited by the sons in the family. On the other hand, ornaments, cooking utensils, and weaving paraphernalia are given to daughters. If a person is childless or does not have any male issue, properties are inherited by the closest male member of the clan. Such practices are gradually changing and there are examples of properties being given to relatives who are not male member of the patri-clan. Normally married sons set up their own household and live separately. In earlier times, the groom used to spend some years in the house of the father-in-law, before setting up an independent household. This practice is called ‘min-habba’ and it is more or less obsolete in present times. Practice of paying bride price is still prevalent in Dimasa society. In case of divorce, the bride price is to be returned if the wife is found guilty. Child marriage is not prevalent, while widow remarriage is commonplace.

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Nomenclature
Any discussion on the history and society of the Dimasas requires a discussion of the nomenclature of this group of people. There is ambivalence in the nomenclature of this section of the people in the history of Assam, colonial ethnography and census reports and the constitutional status enjoyed in the post-independent India. As mentioned above, Dimasas are officially known by different names in different areas, i.e. Barmans in Cachar plains, Hojai in Nagaon and Kachari in Nagaland. They are listed as Dimasa only in the districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao (formerly North Cachar Hills). We shall see in the following chapters how this homogenised single group of people, speaking the same language with minor variations came to be identified by different names. Similar ambivalence is noticed in the nomenclature of the Dimasas in the history of Assam. Most of the writings on Dimasa history interchangeably use terms like Kachari and Bodo indiscriminately. The Buranjis of Ahoms use the term Timisa, a corruption of Dimasa. But at the same time Buranjis also use the term Kacharis. This is further compounded by the dispersed habitations of people who speak languages similar to Dimasas and claim common ancestry with them. Some historians have sought to group these dispersed populations under different branches like Sadiyal kacharis, Herembial Kacharis while keeping the term Kachari to denote the entire group. Similarly, some tend to identify them as Bodos and some by the term Boros. Ethnically Dimasas are known to be part of the Bodo group. But in the history of Assam, they are mostly referred to as Kachari. Under the circumstances, it is imperative to understand meaning of these terminologies and why they are used in such a manner so as to enable us to pinpoint how the group under discussion came to be known as what they are.
The term Bodo was first used by Brian H Hodgson in his book *On the Kocch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes* in 1847 and no reference of the term is seen in any sources in the history of Assam. Today however the term is used to denote the entire group of people who inhabit various pockets in Bengal, the Northeast and some parts of Bangladesh speaking language closely related to each other. Groups like the Mech in Bengal, Boros, Dimasa, Sonowal, Rabha, Tiwa in Assam, the Kokborok people in Tripura and Bangladesh are by and large identified as belonging to the Bodo group. The Meches in Nepal and Indo-Nepal border are also claimed to be part of this larger conglomeration. They are Tibeto-Burman in their linguistic practice and the entire group is called Bodo group of Brahmaputra section. In this sense, it seems that the term Bodo is used particularly to denote sections of people having agnatic relationship in terms of speech practices and a strong sense of shared ancestry. Thus term the Bodo is more anthropological in its usage.

On the other hand, for the larger part of history, this group of people is referred to as Kacharis. Kachari in this sense is used as umbrella group which could be divided into several sub-groups like Boro-Kachari, Dimasa-Kachari, Sonowal-Kachari, Lalung Kachari. Add to this Barman Kachari, Hojai Kacharis and Rukhint Kacharis of British ethnographic usages to denote certain sections of the Dimasas. The British imperial ethnography itself makes a distinction between the Hill Kacharis and the Plains Kacharis, in this case the Dimasas being the Hill Kacharis.

This ambiguity in nomenclature has had a considerable impact in the intra-groups dynamics of this section of the people. While all the sub-groups in this section of people reiterate their kindred affinities, a tendency is witnessed amongst them to establish their separate identities. In recent times, there has been an effort from a section of the Boros in resolving this ambivalence in nomenclature by adopting the
common name of ‘Bodo’. This has been viewed with contempt by several sections of the groups as a design by the Boros to establish their pre-dominance over numerically and otherwise weaker sections of the group. Most of the resistance has come from the Dimasas, who often accuse the Boros of appropriating the history and language of the Dimasas. Besides, Bodo is one of the forty male clans among Dimasas and for this reason they also refuse to be identified with a name that is only a clan. 3

The term Bodo finds its textual space first time in the book by Brian Hodgson, who wrote about a section of Tibeto-Burman speech group claiming themselves as Bodo. However, the proper meaning and origin of the term is yet a matter of conjecture. Many believe that the term Bodo came from the Bod country in Tibet, their original place of migration while others argue that the term came from word Tibet itself, which got corrupted from the word, Di-bodo meaning snow or frozen water. A section of scholars also link the term to their Buddhist origins.

On the other hand, the term Kachari is rather an exo-ethnonym which at a later stage internalised by the community itself. Some argue that the term Kachari came from Kirata, whom S K Chatterji identifies as Indo-Mongoloid. There is also a section that argues the origin of the word as kacchata, a Sanskrit word for frontier or frontier dwellers. Some believe that the group received its name as a ruler of Cachar, which itself is derivative of the word kacchata since it is located bordering Sylhet. It is argued that the inhabitants of Cachar are known as Kacharis to their counterpart in Sylhet. Several scholars including Sir Edward Gait have argued that all inhabitants living in Cachar are identified by the Sylhetis as Kacharis is not convincing. During

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3On 23 January 2009, the first Bodo National Festival was organised at Bijni, Assam. Apart from the Boros, other groups invited were the Dimasas and the Kokboroks. The flag of the festival was prepared by mixing textile designs of all three groups. One of the sessions in the Festival was for deciding the nomenclature of the festival. The representatives of the Dimasa Community strongly opposed permanently naming of the festival as the Bodo National Festival.
my childhood days, my grandfather used to narrate that the term Kachari is derogatory in its usage and hence they were subjected to teasing and taunts as Kachari in schools by their Bengali school mates. Gait observes it as unacceptable, given that the group is known far and wide by that name even before their rule was established in Cachar. Whatever may be the case, evidence suggests that the term Kachari is used by the Hindus. This is evident from the use of the word Timisa, which is clearly a corrupt form of Dimasa, by the early Ahom sources. The Ahom sources also use the term Kachari and till date sections of this group that remained within the Ahom territory are identified as Kachari, i.e. Sonowal Kachari, Thengal Kachari, Mech Kachari. This change from Timisa to Kachari may be seen as a result of growing Hindu influence in the Ahom society in particular and Brahmaputra valley in general.4

Inspite of these ambiguities, today the Dimasas form a distinct identity even while sharing affinities with other cognate groups. Contrary to Hodgson’s claim, they prefer to identify themselves as Dimasa rather than Bodo. Their resistance to the naming of the common festival as the Bodo National festival recently has been mentioned above. While accepting common ancestry, the Dimasas have opposed bringing these three groups under the single term Bodo on the ground that Bodo is one of the forty male clans in Dimasa society and therefore this can never be a generic name for all the cognate groups. (See Footnote 3)

As per Dimasa tradition, the Bodo or Bodosa is the first clan to attain to royalty. The Bodo clan was followed by other clans like Thaosensa, Hasnusa (Hacchengsa). The Morans, who are believed to be part of these greater ethnic groups, in their traditions mention that they were ruled by their king named Bodosa when the the Ahoms arrived

\[\text{4 S K Barpujari in his } \text{History of Dimasa People, Autonomous Council, North Cachar Hills, 1997 presents a detailed discussion on the arguments and opinions of various scholars on the nomenclature of this group}\]
in Assam. This in some ways supplements the Dimasa claim that Bodo is the first clan to gain royalty in the community. It is probable that the community came to be called Bodos later as they belonged to the same group and in the long run the larger section of the community internalised the name. The Dimasa, their original endo-ethnonym, however, remained only with a small section of the group who carried the banner of monarchical tradition until the occupation of their territory by the British in the early nineteenth century. In this light it can be concluded that this group of the people identified today as the larger Bodo group, once called themselves Dimasa while their Indo-Aryan neighbours and others referred to them as Kacharis. In due course of time a section of the community began to internalise the term Bodo and came to identify them by that name.

**Meaning and Origin**

Dimasa is a compound form of three words *di* (water), *ma* (big) and *sa* (son). There is no evidence as to how and when the group came to identify themselves as Dimasa. The earliest evidence is found in the *Buranji* literature of the Ahoms who called them as Timisa, clearly a corrupt form of Dimasa. (Gait: 1997: 236) Historians including those within the community have advanced arguments on the origin of the word Dimasa, which may broadly be categorized into three. A section argues that the word Dimasa derives from their matriarch Hidimba who married Bhima, the second Pandava. As children of Hidimba they came to be known as Hidimbasa (sons of Hidimba), which in time changed over to Dimasa. This is the reason why the Dimasa kingdom was known as Hirimba and the kings as Hirimbesvera. U C Guha writes that the Hirimba mentioned in the Mahabharata was a forest of Barnabrata near modern Delhi and this explains why the Pandavas reached that forest within a day. Thus it is clear that this is an invented tradition by the Brahman pundits in the later stage of the
monarchy in the Cachar plains. Although this is fictitious, people within the community strongly believe in this story of their ancestry. In recent times, many from the community have come to know about the presence of a Hidimba temple in Himachal Pradesh and this has consolidated the belief amongst a section of the society that Dimasas migrated from the western part of India to this region.

The second group of scholars argues that the term Dimasa is a shorter version of the *Arikhidimasa*, meaning children of *Arikhidima*, the primeval mother who created man as per Dimasa origin myth. It is believed that later in time, the word *Arkhidimasa* got shortened to Dimasa.

The third section of scholars associates the origin of the word with river. This seems more plausible given their habitations along river valleys in the region. The river names suffixed with Dimasa word *di* in the region attests to this fact. Community historians like Sonaram Thaosen and Nirupoma Hagjer suggest that they received this name as they were settled on the bank of river Dima, the present Dhansiri river. The medieval Dimasa kingdom evidently flourished on the bank of Dhansiri and their capital city Dimapur is located on its bank.

However, some of the community historians like U C Barman does not accept this view. To Barman, big water meant the sea, ocean or large rivers. Based on sources of the Mahabharata that mentions Bhagadatta drew his troops from among his subjects who dwelt on the sea shore of Bay of Bengal, Barman argues that these were the Dimasa people. Barman claims that Dimasas are descendants of Panis who established rule in Kamrupa and introduced Linga worship.

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5There are some variations in the Origin Myth of the Dimasas. A version of the myth has been taken from the *Tales of Assam* by P D Goswami, Publication Board of Assam, 1980 and reproduced in the Appendix I.
While it is difficult to accept the argument of U C Barman in the absence of substantive evidence, it is equally problematic to accept that the term Dimasa comes from the river Dima or Dhansiri. A section of the community suggests that river Dhansiri is rather called Dimaidisa, not Dima as claimed above. Whether the river is known as Dima or Dimaidisa can be resolved by comparing it with its Assamese name of Dhansiri. The word Dima or big river has no relevance with Dhansiri. The word Dimaidisa, roughly meaning rice producing river or river of wealth is closer to Dhansiri in meaning. The word Dimaidisa itself might have got shortened as Dima in the long run and came to be used as such. In any case, it is unlikely that the Dimasas would name this one as big river when they were already acquainted with and inhabited the banks of rivers bigger than the Dhansiri. For instance, the Brahmaputra is known to them as Dilao, meaning Long River. Most of the rivers’ names in the Brahmaputra valley are prefixed by the word *di* itself suggest their acquaintance with larger river valleys. Thus there is little reason to believe that the word Dimasa comes from the river Dhansiri.

A ballad called Jiniba Raji narrates that the Dimasa state once extended to the south bank of the Brahmaputra with its capital close to the present day Naharkatia. (Sarma. 2006:26.) ‘Folktales tell us that the Dimasa belong to a place on the confluence of the rivers Dilao and Sanggi, where there was a big banyan tree, a branch of which extended up to the land of the Ahom and another branch extended up to the land of Turus (Muslim). In the shade of that tree, thousands of birds and animals met. Unfortunately they had to leave their capital several times for the onslaught of external enemies and came to Dimapur.’ (Baruah: 1992: X)

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6 This information had been supplied by Najendra Nunisa, Gopal Thaosen and others during the period of research.
The folk tradition of the Dimasa also mentions that in ancient times, their ancestors lived at a confluence of Dilaobra-Sanggibra and on a sea coast. It was a land of natural beauty with a big pipal tree. Eventually the place became over-populated and so the elder generation advised the young Dimasa to leave the place. A large section had crossed the Sanggibra and marched towards Nilachal. There was a big river identified as Brahmaputra which was called Dima by the Dimasa. They lived in this valley for a long time and then established their Kingdom at Dimapur. (Guha: 2008)

Given the fact that most of the river names particularly in upper Assam is prefixed with the *di*, their habitation was near some river banks may safely be concluded. Dimasa origin myth itself describes the birth of their progenitors in the confluence of Dilaobra-Sangibra. (See FN 5). Besides, a close look at the Dimasa settlement system and belief associated with the establishment of new settlements show their preference to closeness with river banks. This rather might have earned them the name, ‘Son of Big River’.

**Early History**

Historically virtually nothing is known about the migration and settlement of the Dimasas in the Brahmaputra valley. Lack of sources is considered the major stumbling block in this case. As mentioned above, Dimasa society is oral in its practice and did not develop literacy. In writing, their history comes alive only in the *Buranjis* of the Ahoms. However, using disparate sources may help in conceiving their possible past in the pre-Ahom period. Writings like *Kalika Purana*, *Joginitantra*, accounts of foreign travellers including the epics, may be used to imaginatively glean information on the history of this region. Even the linguistic studies throw significant light on the early history of settlement of various groups in the region. However, the most ignored aspect in the writing of history in the region is the use of social memory
as reflected in various folk and oral traditions. Their use can perhaps fill the gaps in conventional sources as a plausible reconstruction of the history of the community history in the region.

Northeast India, straddled between India, China and South East Asia has been a corridor of migration and human activity since the early period. Although understudied, the pre-historic activities in the region show a rich cultural tradition. Many scholars believe that the north-eastern region of India was a potential site for early domestication of rice. Linguists have argued that the early settlers in the region belong to the Austro-Asiatic community of Mon-Khmer linguistic group. They are followed by a large number of Tibeto-Burman speakers who migrated in waves from their original homeland in Sichuan in China.

Dimasas are Tibeto-Burman speakers belonging to the Bodo group of the Brahmaputran branch. They are considered as one of the earliest settlers in the Brahmaputra valley, though their migration route is unclear. As indicated by S K Chatterji, this group of people known as Kirata to the Indo-Aryans were inhabiting the northern foothills of Gangetic plains. Many scholars within the Dimasa community claim that Dimasas were the architects of the Harrappan civilisations and were driven out by the invading Indo – Aryans. They claim themselves to be the progenitors of Hidima, the Demon princess who married Bhima, the third Pandava. The presence of a Hidimba temple in the Himachal Pradesh has only strengthened the claim that Dimasas entered the Brahmaputra valley from the West. Such claims also emanate from the occurrence of Di in many north Indian cities and rivers as prefix and suffice, e.g. Di in Dilli or Gomti where ti got corrupted from di meaning water. Though such claims are difficult to be established, it is a fact that a large number of people in Northern part of India and in Nepal still connect themselves as part of the Bodo
groups, i.e. *Meches* in Nepal. We can at least surmise that various sections of this group under various names might have dominated vast tracts of land in the Assam-Bengal region including the foothills of the Himalayas at various times.

**Pragjyotishpura-Kamrupa**

The earliest recorded state in the Brahmaputra valley, however, is the Kamarupa state. It is mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription along with the state of Dobak. It is said that the king of Kamarupa and the king of Dobak presented themselves at the court of Samudragupta as a mark of submission. (Lahiri: 1991) The Kamarupa state then was ruled by the Barman dynasty. While the lineage of the Dobak state is not clear, the Kamrupa was ruled by the Barhan dynasty and it has a clearer lineage preserved in various copper plate inscriptions. The Barman dynasty was succeeded by the Salastambhas and the Palas. Kumar Bhaskara was the most important monarch of the Barman dynasty and he was a contemporary of Harsha. During his reign, Huen Tsang visited Kamrupa. The Dimasa and its agnate groups like the Boros, consider the Barman dynasty of early Kamrupa state as one of their ancestors. E A Gait mentions in his *History of Assam* about the Kamruli state that was ruled by the Bodos. But in the absence of proper evidence this claim is not taken seriously.

There are various myths in regard to the early history of Pragjyotisha – Kamarupa, found in religious texts like the *Kalika Purana, Joginitantra*. It is said that Kamarupa was ruled by Naraka, born out of union of Bhumi and Vishnu in his *Varaha* (wild boar) avatar. Naraka was raised by Janaka of Videha and set up as ruler of Kamarupa. The epic Mahabharata also mentions Bhagadatta, son of Naraka, who took part in the Kurukshetra War. Various copper plate inscriptions belonging to the Barman and later dynasties ruling the Kamarupa state claim their ancestry to Bhauma-Naraka. This has led to a general conclusion that the emergence of state in the Brahmaputra valley was
a result of Indo-Aryan settlement and the Barman monarchy had north Indian ancestry. This conclusion is based on the discovery of several copper plate inscriptions belonging to the Barman dynasty in the sixth century AD. The inscriptions composed in Sanskrit, records the donation of lands to Brahman priests. The use of Sanskrit together with the fact of land grants made to Brahmins seems to stand in favour of Sanskritisation or Aryisation of the Valley. It also suggests importation of wet-rice farming into the valley by the migrating Indo-Aryan populations.

However, there are several problems in accepting this argument. Firstly, the inscriptions, though written in Sanskrit, also feature certain words of Tibeto-Burman and other origins. (Lahiri: 1991) This suggests strong influence of non-Sanskrit speakers in the region. Besides, use of Sanskrit itself does not necessarily mean that wet-rice cultivation was introduced in the Brahmaputra valley under the aegis of Brahman priests as it was elsewhere in India. The inscriptions mention amongst other things, the quantum of produce in the donated lands. Such estimate of production itself testifies that the land donated were already under cultivation. Secondly, even if we take that the wet-rice cultivation was introduced in the valley by the earlier hordes of Indo-Aryan settlers much before the actual donation of the lands, linguistic and other evidences point against this established belief on the introduction of wet-rice cultivation in the valley. Linguistic and archaeological evidence suggest that Assam and the Northeastern part of India is a potential site of early domestication of rice. Besides, morphological studies yet do not confirm whether rice is a swampy or dry land crop which later diverged. If rice is a swampy crop, Assam with its wet climate is the most suitable contender of the early cultivation and one of the earliest settlers, Dimasas and its cognate groups undoubtedly were familiar with this farming.
The prevalence of indigenous irrigation system amongst them itself suggests the presence of knowledge of wet rice farming.

Thirdly, the existing terminologies of implements used in wet-rice farming does not show any traces of Sankritic origin. It is already a well established fact that *nagnol* is a Dravidian word. Words such as *haal, juwal, sali* etc. do not bear any Indo-Aryan or *Ahom* trace. In some of the Brahmaputra branch of Tibeto-Burman language group, e.g. Dimasa *ha* denotes soil, earth or land and *lo* means soft. Jointly (*halo*) they denote muddy soil. It cannot be ruled out that the word *haal* is a mutated form of this Tibeto-Burman word. The wet-rice farming in Assam, chiefly the summer rice, is known as *saali* and it may have been derived from the word *haal*. Similarly yoke is known as *juwali*. There are two syllables in the word, *ju* and *wali*. The first syllable denoting to unite or put together*, and the second syllable minus *li* denoting bamboo, does show that the word *juwali* is a derivative of these two words. Further, the Dimasa word *hadi* (*ha* = soil/land/earth and *di* = water) meaning rain also denotes wet paddy fields while a separate word (*phadain*) is used to denote *jhum* field. Had the Indo-Aryan settlers brought the new technique of farming, the terminologies would have been adopted by the locals and would still have survived since the Indo-Aryan language is the dominant language in the area till date. This argument can be corroborated by the farming and language dispersal theory. In his introduction to the monograph on farming/language dispersal hypothesis, Colin Renfrew writes: ‘In favourable cases the language or the languages of the nuclear area are transmitted alongwith the plant and animal domesticates, either through demic diffusion of the farming population (the wave of advance model), or through adoption by local hunter-gatherer groups of the new language with the new agricultural economy (acculturation: ‘availability’ model).’ (Renfrew: 2002: 8) The connection between
farming and population dispersal is further illustrated in the following statement by George van Driem on the spread of Sinitic languages in southern China. ‘The Sinification of Southern China during the second half of the first millennium BC is relatively recent, and the early spread of Sinitic as a whole may be one of the best candidates for a language spread associated with farming dispersal. (van Driem: 2002: 237)

The Brahmaputran branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups predominantly inhabited the Assam region since pre-historic times. A comparison of Neolithic sites and linguistic studies establish this long assumed fact. Most of the major river names in Assam suffixed with Di meaning water, testifies to this. The word Dimasa, meaning sons of the big river further attests that this group inhabited the river valleys in the region and must have carried out wet-farming. Van Driem writes, ‘Toponymical evidence and details about the cults of certain deities have been used to argue that even the Sumerians originally migrated to Lower Mesopotamia, where they adopted agriculture from a resident population. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that the Sumerians appeared to have borrowed agricultural terms such as agar ‘field’, apin “scaler plough” and aspin “furrow” from a substitute language.’ (van Driem: 2002: 239)

What is more applicable is the theory of linguistic intrusion in a diametrically opposite direction of agriculture flow, as is said to be the case in many instances. (van Driem: 2002: 239) In our case given the dominance of Indo-Aryan language in Assam and in its west, it is far less acceptable that only the agricultural terms were borrowed from the Tibeto-Burman speech practice while the technique itself an Indo-Aryan innovation. What is more plausible is that the Indo-Aryans adopted the techniques and improved upon them as it happens in case of ‘secondary adoption’, (van Driem: 2002:
and finally able to seize control of the ideological apparatus of the social institutions. Creation of several myths for connecting genealogical ties with the Gangetic culture attest to this growing influence of Indo-Aryan culture in Assam.

This argument can gain support in a contemporary farming practice of a particular variety of wet rice named Boro rice. This farming is popular in a wide geographical area covering eastern Bihar, Orrisa, West Bengal, and Bangladesh, besides Assam. An article in an edited volume entitled ‘The Boro Rice’ published by the International Rice Research Institute, Manila, maintains that the word Boro is derived from Sankrit word borop. However, the word borop has not been found in any Sanskrit dictionary. The name of the rice may have come from the practitioners themselves, the Boros in the Brahmaputra valley. The Boro rice is wet rice and it requires transplantation of seedlings. The farming of Boro rice starts with the harvesting of saali rice. Colonial records show that in summer the banks of Brahmaputra remained flooded. The situation could not have been different two millennia ago. The flood water of Brahmaputra together with torrential rains in summer would render farming difficult. Thus the indigenous population must have supplemented their earning with the winter rice when rainfall recedes, around the marshy flood plains of Brahmaputra. The practice must have spread later to other areas as population growth necessitated the intensification of rice production. The winter wet rice yields far more grain given that water supply is constant and it receives more uniform sunlight than the summer wet-rice. If we at least accept Boro rice farming as indigenous, its larger yields would have had larger surpluses. Colonial records also mention the use of traditional systems of irrigation among the Bodo groups of people in the region. Among the ruins of Dimapur lie ‘the traces of irrigation canals and roadways...’. (Sophiya Meretina: 1978: 340) There could be no reason for construction of irrigation if not for the purpose of
farming. Irrigation of course can also be used for supplying drinking-water, but its primary purpose seems to have been to provide water for farming. This strongly suggests the indigeniety of wet-rice cultivation in the region.

So it would seem that wet-rice farming was not an Indo-Aryan innovation in the Brahmaputra valley and that it was an indigenous practice and it would be wrong to say that the Sanskritisation/ Aryanisation was the driving force behind the formation of State in Assam. All this however still does not explain the use of Sanskrit and the donation of lands to the Brahman priests during the reign of the Barman dynasty. The advent of Brahmanical Hinduism can thus be argued on the following lines.

As we have seen, the Kamrupa state and its neighbour Dobak are mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta. It is believed that these two states were defeated by the imperial Guptas and they were made to submit. The defeat of these states to the imperial Guptas might have opened the floodgates of Brahmancial ideology which entered the royal houses and finally seized the dominant ideological position. This was not sudden and immediate. The ideological domination of Brahmanical Hinduism happened slowly over nearly two centuries. The absence of any sources between the Allhabad Pillar inscriptions and the copper plates inscriptions of Bhaskar Barman explains for the argument made here.

This argument may be extended by elaborating the Bhauma-Naraka legend/myth of origin of Kamrupa state in a different manner. The myth says that Naraka was born out of the union of Vishnu and Bhumi (Earth) while the former was salvaging the latter from the eternal deluge. That Naraka was raised by Janaka and set up as the king of Kamrupa should not be understood in its literal sense that Naraka was of Aryan origin. Here Naraka symbolises the agricultural practice adopted by the Indo-Aryans which was improved upon and reintroduced to Kamrupa in a new form, i.e.
the practice of land donations as elsewhere in India. This argument is completely in line with the ‘theory of secondary adoption’ of van Driem and the argument of Peter Bellwood who suggests a possible meeting of eastern and western farming techniques in the Ganges basin in the light of archeological evidences as mentioned earlier.

Therefore the early Kamrupa state was not a western import under the aegis of the migrating Indo-Aryans nor was wet-rice farming. It is rather a state built by the indigenous groups who settled the valley much before the advent of the Indo-Aryans. And in this regard, the strongest contender is the Dimasas/ Bodos / Kacharis. Occurrence of several Bodo (read Dimasa) and other non-Prakrit words in the inscriptions belonging to the pre-Ahom period are a fact mentioned by scholars like B.K Kakati.7

That the Barman dynasty had a non-Aryan origin can also be corroborated by Chinese accounts. The Chinese accounts She-kia-fang-che mentions a private conversation between the Kamrupa king Kumar Bhaskarvarman and Hiuen Tsang in which the kings claimed his ancestors having come from China.8 (Acharya: 1984)

This fact tells us that the Barman dynasty was of Indo-Mongoloid origin and most likely belonged to the Tibeto-Burman group. Folklore tells us that they ruled the Kamruli state in ancient times. It must be noted that Dimasas after conversion to Hinduism in the late eighteenth century in the Cachar plains, assumed the title of Barman and still are officially recorded as Barman Kachari. This assumption of
Barman title might have been in memory of the Barman dynasty of Kamrupa, who were the early converts to Hinduism.

As the wet-rice farming is an indigenous practice as argued above, or least it pre-dates the Indo-Aryan migrations, the common belief that the Ahoms introduced the wet-rice farming in the upper Assam is not true. In fact some Ahorn source itself points to this fact. For instance, the Ahoms after their arrival in the Brahmaputra valley, named it as *Mung-dun-chun-kham* meaning a garden (land) filled with golden crops. The *Naoboicha Phukonor Axom Buranji* states that the Ahoms came to Assam in the month of *Aghun*, month of harvesting wet-paddy. (It needs a mention here that paddy turn golden as it is ready for harvest.) On their descent from the Patkai Hills, the Ahoms viewed the plains of the Brahmaputra Valley painted in golden colour with paddy all ready to harvest and thus named the place as a garden filled with golden crops. (Naoboicha Phukonor Buranji: 15) Thus it is evident that wet-rice was farming was laready extensive in the valley of Upper Assam contrary to general belief that it was introduced by the Ahoms.

**The Dobak State**

The Allahabad Pillar inscription also mentions the Dobak state in the vicinity of the Kamrupa state. Nothing much is known about this state and its ruling group. But scholars identify this state with the present Doboka in Nagaon district on the bank of river Kopili. R M Nath in his book titled *Background of Assamese Culture* (1978) wrote about the Tripura Kingdom in Kopili Valley in second century AD.9 This is commensurate with Dimasa folk tradition which claims that the Dimasa and the Tipperahs are descendants of two brothers who once fought for the throne. As per the legend, both the brothers were vying to take hold of a magical sword of which the elder one caught the hilt and younger by the blades. Although the elder brother

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9 Also see Antiquities of Kopili and Jamuna Valleys, R M Nath, BE, JARS (KAS), Vol XXXIII, No. 2, 1994 (Printed in 1997), 99 – 137.
managed to take the sword, the hilt of the sword went off in the scuffle. This is referred to as the reason behind the hilt less sword which is used by Dimasas in sacrificial rituals. In any case the elder brother assumed the throne and the younger moved to the south to establish a new kingdom with his followers. If this legend is taken on its face value, the Dobak kingdom mentioned in the Allahabad inscription may well have been ruled by the Dimasas or their ancestors.

Here a question arises as to who the rulers of the Kamrupa state were if the rulers of Dobak kingdom are ancestors of the Dimasas? As mentioned above, the Dimasas and their agnate groups claim the Kamrupa rulers as their ancestors. Dimasa folklore informs us that they initially resided in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. At a certain point of time, for reason unexplained in the folklore, they crossed the river Brahmaputra at a site in present day Guwahati. Some of the people crossing the river, though asked not to do so, looked back at their abandoned territory. This caused the breaking of a ropeway made of a species of cane named raisingin Dimasa language. Many were washed away in the current of the river and a large number of people remained on the other side. This is still remembered in the community as raiseng daingsengba. In any case, this section after crossing the river might have marched eastward on the south bank and set up a kingdom in the Kopili valley which is recorded as the Dobak country in Allahabad inscription. Many historians call this section as the Southern section which later extended their rule in the entire south bank with their capital at Dimapur. 'Disciplinary' history is silent on this except R M Nath, who writes that 'The old King of Kamrupa who was perhaps a Bodo moved to the present Nowgong district and established the Dovako (present Doboka) Kingdom in

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10 U C Guha wrote that this migration was on advice from the elders due to over population as mentioned above.
11 Many Dimasas had proposed renaming of the Bodo National festival with this name that symbolises the restoration of broken link. This incident is also believed to be the cause of separation between the Boros and the Dimasas.
the Kapili valley. Both the kings of Kamrupa and Dovako attended the royal conference convened by Samudra Gupta at Allahabad in token of their allegiance to or friendship with him.’ (Nath: 1978: 33)

In between the crossing of the river Brahmaputra and setting up of capital at Dimapur, nothing much is known about the Dimasas, although Dimasa folklore informs us that the areas in present Nagaon district known as Hayung-Hado it formed an important part of the Dimasa state. Thus as mentioned above, they must have settled in Kopili valley and established the Dobak kingdom. This is where struggle for throne took place between two brothers leading to the separation of Tipperah house of the group who are said to have settled in the southern plains of Barak valley across the hills. Both the groups speak similar language till date. Beside this linguistic similarity, both the groups still consider themselves belonging to the same ancestry. In the year 2007, the Dima Halam Daoga – the Nunisa group, a militant organisation in political negotiation with the Government of India, organised a public meeting in Kampur on the river Kopili. In the meeting the prince of Tipperah royalty and the great grandson of Tularam Senapati were invited and a sword was ceremonially exchanged between them as sign of brotherhood.

Dimasas might have ruled Dobak for centuries until disturbed by the growing power of Kamrupa, that forced them to move eastward. Prior to the establishment of Dimapur, the Dimasas might have set their capital at Kasomari. Or it may well be the case that they ruled the entire tract from Kasomari, where ruins have been found similar to the kind in Dimapur. An interesting observation was cited by Manjil Hazarika from the unpublished thesis of Dr. P J Sharma, as follows: “Sharma made a study on the settlement pattern history with a ‘regional approach’ addressing the crucial questions such as the site formation process, contexts and cultural links etc. in
Dhansiri- - Doyang Valley. He successfully brought out an important hypothesis that the earliest state formation in the region was not necessarily due to the inflow of the Indo-Europeans into the soils of Assam, but was a result of the intermittent trade relations between the mainland India and the southern Chinese territories, in which Tibeto-Burman speaking communities played a crucial role”. (Hazarika citing Sharma: 2008)

Further citing Sharma, Hazarika emphasises that the Dayang-Dhansiri culture complex, as mentioned above, was founded by the Kacharis. If this argument of Sharma and Hazarika is accepted, the Dimasa might have ruled over this vast tract of land extending from the Kopili valley to the Doyang – Dhansiri valley. Kasomari might have been the seat of Dimasa power, which was moved further to the foothills due to natural disturbances like floods. An inter-disciplinary sampling of various sites for soil sediment test or pollen analysis in the region can give better insight for the reconstruction of history of the area. At the least the findings from such studies may help in confirming the Dimasa folk sources that talk about the rule of around five hundred years from Dimapur before it was sacked by the Ahoms.

It needs to be mentioned here that a stone inscription recovered from Khanikargaon in Sarupathar of Doyang – Dhansiri valley mentions a land donation to one Brahmadatta. The eastern side of the donated land is recorded in the inscription to be bounded in the east by a pond Dimru. This very name attests that the whole region was under Dimasa habitation during the period. 4 – 5. (Choudhury: 1972-73)

Similarly, a clay seal of an oval shape bearing a short legend was recovered in the Doyang-Dhansiri valley. It records donation of land by one Vasundhara Varmana belonging to the period of 4– 5th century AD. This seal belongs to the same period of stone inscription found in the Khanikargaon in the same region. This inscription is the
earliest so far discovered in Assam. Dharmeswar Chutia has observed that Vasundhara Varmana might have belonged to the ‘collatoral branch of the great Varmans of Pragjyotisha – Kamarupa and ruling in the region perhaps independently’. He furthers observes that it could even be part of the Dovaka country mentioned in the Allahad inscription and thus ruling the region independently of the Kamrupa lineage. (Chutia: 1998)

In any case, the Dimasa power may have extended beyond the Doyang – Dhansiri valley in the east. In 2006, at the conference of North East India Linguistic Society, Prof. Francois Jaquesson made a presentation where he compared some Moran words as collected by a former British officer with other languages of the Bodo-Garo linguistic family. The Moran words were found closest with that of Dimasa language and on the basis of this finding, he concluded that Dimasa language might have been dominantly used by the inhabitants of the Southern bank of the Barhmaputra in Upper Assam. With the advent of the Ahoms in Sibsagar and their gradual expansion might have separated the Dimasa speakers of Central and eastern most parts of the southern bank of Brahmaputra.

This assumption of Francois may be supplemented by a contemporary folk source of the Morans. The Morans believe that they were ruled by a king named Bodosa during the advent of the Ahoms. Bodosa is one of the forty male clans among Dimasa. This clan is believed to be the first royal clan to be followed by the other clans like Thaosensa, Hasnusa (Hacchengsa). It is probable that the Dimasa king belonging to Bodosa clan might have extended his control upto the Moran territory around thirteenth century. River names like Dibang also suggest the pre-dominance of Dimasa in that area once upon a time. N C Sarma writes ‘They claim, as in their oral
tradition, that once they ruled over the entire south bank of the Brahmaputra. 217'.
(Sarma: 1996)

The Dimapur Phase

The date of establishment of capital in Dimapur is unknown. Using the sources in the Buranjis, some historian put fourteenth century as the probable date for establishment of capital in Dimapur. However, J L Thaosen, a community historian and writer, calculates the establishment of Dimapur in the eleventh century based on oral tradition. Dimasas have practice of measuring time as per some natural events like great floods, earthquake etc. One common way of measuring time is calculation of the flowering of local muli bamboo (*melocanna baccifera*) which happens once every fifty years. As per Dimasa oral traditions, the rule from Dimapur is marked by the flowering of bamboo ten times making it approximately five hundred years. If counted backward from the date of sacking of Dimapur by the Ahoms, the year of settlement in Dimapur would be around 1050 AD.

According to the Kachari Buranji the first king of the Heramba branch of the Kachari was Susenpha, perhaps a variant of *Ha-tsung-tsa* from whom, the Kachari Kings ordinarily derived their descent. This however does not correspond to the Dimasa oral tradition which states the Bodos as the first royal clan, not the *Ha-tsung-tsa*. Another legend informs us that the earliest Kachari King was one Birahas, who abdicated in favour of Bicharpatipha and before the establishment of capital at Dimapur the seat of government had shifted to a place, somewhere between Sonapur, Banpur and Laksmindrapur. (Bhuyan: 1984: VIII)

Dimasas fondly remember the glorious days of rule from Dimapur. Oral tradition is replete with military exploits of some legendary men and women. Dimasa folk
tradiotrs till date recount the exploits of soldiers and generals like Rangadao, Degadao, Demalik, Halodao etc and women like Waibangma, Wairingma etc. It is claimed that that Demalik conquered territories as far as Burma.

Despite the success of these warriors, the Dimasas failed to retain their power for long in the face of growing Ahom power and expansionist policy. The first recorded military face-off between them was in 1490 AD. The Ahoms were forced to retreat initially. The Ahoms soon gathered their forces and forced the Dimasa king Khorapha to retreat to Dhansiri. His brother Khunkhura continued the war till his defeat in 1531 AD. This led to the acknowledgement of Ahom suzereignty by Dersongpha, the son of Khorapha by means of an agreement. Soon he consolidated his power and tried to regain lost ground in 1536 AD. This renewed the hostility and the Ahoms occupied Dimapur and sacked it. Thereafter, the capital was shifted to Maibang with a brief stay in Prasa Dimduh.

The Maibang Phase

J B Bhattacharjee states that the process of state formation among Dimasa entered a crucial phase in Maibang with the growing influence of Brahmanical Hinduism. The death of Dersongpha, left the Dimasa leaderless for some time and therefore requested the Ahom king to nominate Madan Konwar as their king. Eventually Madan Konwar was set on the throne on a promise of annual tribute. The Ahoms henceforth called the Dimasas as ‘thapita-sanchita’ (established and preserved) of the Ahoms since they obtained a king through the Ahom intervention. (S.K Bhuyan: 1951: ix & x) Madan Konwar soon after assumption of the throne assumed the Hindu name Nirbhayanarayan. As tradition states, the prince came across a Brahman in his difficult times, who predicted the prince of his good fortune and later the Brahmin was accepted as his Dharmadhi guru (Dharmadhykshya) and given an important
position in the court. The Dharmadhi became an important position in Dimasa political system thereafter who interpreted laws of Shastras. (Bhattacharjee 1991: 138)

Thereafter royal descent was traced to divine origin and Kachalkhati, the tutelary deity of the Dimasas reincarnated as Ranachandi and brought within the Sakti cult. As per legend, Goddess Ranachandi appeared and ordered Raja Nirbhayanarayan in his dream to meet her at the riverside the next day. While waiting for Ranachandi, the saw a snake swimming in the river. As he caught the snake’s tail, it turned into a sword, which he brought to his palace. That very night Ranachandi again appeared in Raja’s dream and told that he had done wrong by seizing the snake by the tail rather than by head. The sword was preserved as the symbol of valour and prosperity.

Nirbhayanarayan was succeeded by Durlavhnarayan. In 1562 he was defeated by the Koch general Chilarai and secured peace by paying an annual tribute of seventy thousand gold mohars and sixty elephants to the ruler of Koch Bihar. This demonstrates the level of resourcefulness of the Maibang state. (Barpujari: 1992-395)

In 1566 Meghanarayana ascended the throne of Maibang. The inscriptions found at Maibang states that Meghanarayana of Hasengha dynasty built the main gateway of the capital city of Maibang in 1498 Saka (1576 AD). Two gold coins of Meghanarayana bearing the dates of 1488 Saka (1566 AD) and 1498 Saka (1576 AD) were also found.12

Meghanarayana was succeeded by Jasonarayano. During his reign, relation with the Ahoms was strained and war broke out. This strained relationship originated from the Dimasa-Jayantia conflict. The Jayantia King wishing to avenge his defeat at the hands of the Dimasa king, offered a princess to the Ahom Swargadeo on condition that she

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12 For detailed discussion on coins of Dimasas, see NG Rhodes and SK Bose, A History of the Dimasa-Kacharis as Seen through the Coinage, 2006.
would be escorted to the capital through the territory of Jasnarayan. This was opposed by Jasnarayan as he was uneasy with the presence of Ahom army in his territory and did not see any necessity for deviating from the customary route between Assam and Jayantia. The Ahom army under Sunder Gohain succeeded in capturing several Dimasa Kachari garrisons and preparing to attack Maibang. Soon Sunder Gohain lost his interest in the campaign receiving reports from Garagaon that the Ahom Swargadeo was captivated with the general's wife and was attempting to take her to his palace. In a subsequent attack Sundar Gohain was killed by Bhimbal Konwar who made his mark as a leader in Cachar.

After the victory Jasnarayan assumed the title of Pratapnarayan and renamed the capital Maibang as Kirtipur. In 1612, he defeated the invading Mughals and assumed the title of Indrapratapnarayan. During his reign Dimasa territory extended from Dimarua to Dhansiri valley, the plains of Cachar and the eastern part of Sylhet. Jasnarayan issued a coin in 1524 Saka (1602) AD wherein he has been styled as Srijattavijayin to commemorate his conquest of Srijatta.

Jasnarayan was succeeded by Narayana, and subsequently by Bhimbalnarayan. Realising the importance of alliance with the Dimasas, the Ahom Swargadeo Pratap Singha sought for peace and offered the daughter of one Charingia Sondhikoi as bride to Bhimbalnarayan. The latter however, continued with his hostilities and attacked Baghargaon. To stop further Dimasa raids, Pratap Singha established a number of villages on the frontier as a bulwark between the Ahom and the Dimasas, a measure more effective than rigid walls or ramparts.

In 1637 Indraballabhanarayan ascended the throne after the death of Bhimbalnarayan. Indraballabhanarayan sent emissaries with gifts to Pratap Singha offering help against the Mughal invaders. But the Ahom king was offended by the bold attitude of the
Dimasa ruler and the envoy was not properly received. The *Buranjis* informs an alternate route to the Ahom territory through Raha and Kaliabor, which was used by the envoy as the usual route through Marangi along the Dhansiri valley ‘was depopulated and overgrown with deep jungles’. (Barpujari: 1997: 52)

In 1644 Birdarphanarayan succeeded king Indraballabhanarayan. Like his predecessor, his offer for friendship was also rebuffed by the Ahom king. It soured the relationship of the two states despite the Ahom offer for a princess to the Dimasa king. In 1660, Jayadhvij Singha sought submission, failing which warned of dire consequences. During the Mughal invasion of Assam under Mir Jumla in 1662, many took refuge in the Dimasa kingdom including Morangi Khowa Gohain.13

In 1663 Chakradhvaj Singha ascended the throne after the death of his brother Jayadhvij Singha and sent envoys to the Kachari Raja demanding the transportation of Morangi Khowa Gohain. This was not heeded by the Dimasa king initially, though he sent envoys after four years and restored cordial relation that lasted until his death in 1684.

Bit soon the Dimasa-Ahom relation soured during after assumption of the throne by Garuradhvaj, the son of Birdarphanarayan, who despatched message to the Barphukani at Raha demanding ceremonial congratulatory envoys from the Ahom king. But Garuradhvaj was reminded that it was his duty to send envoys which he refused to do resulting in this souring relation that continued till his death in 1695.

Garuradhvaj was succeeded by his three sons, Makaradhvaj, Udayaditty and Tramadhvaj one after another. As evident there was constant tussle between the Ahoms and Dimasas on the issue of political control over the later. Most of the

13Gohain is an officer in Ahom administration. Marangi khowa Gohain is the officer in charge of the fort set up at the Marangi, bordering Dimasa kingdom.
Dimasa kings refused to accept Ahom suzerainty and struck coins to commemorate their reigns, i.e. Bhimdarpharayan (1630 AD), Indraballabhnarayan and Birdarphanarayan. (Bhattacharjee: 1993: 106)

This constant tussle culminated into a military face-off during the reign of Tramadhvaj and Ahom King Rudra Singha. In 1706, the Ahoms invaded Dimasa state and occupied capital Maibang. The Dimasa king retreated to Khaspur in the Cachar plains which subsequently became the capital. Tamradhvaj sent an appeal to the neighbouring Jayantia King Ram Singha for help in recovering lost ground. The latter instead took Tamradhvaj prisoner. Without having any option left, Tramadhvaj again sought help from the Ahoms for his safe release from Jayantia captivity. The Ahom army defeated the Jayantia army and occupied Jayantiapur 1708. Tramadhvaj was the freed and along with Ram Singha, was placed before the Rudra Singha at Ahom camp in Biswanath. Tamradhvaj accepted Ahom suzerainty and agreed to pay an annual tribute of two elephants, two horses and forty servitors beside the territory extending from Jamunamukh to the Buriganaga of Kopili-Jamuna valley. Moreover, products of gold, pearl and elephant tusk were also offered. Rudra Singha declared him to be his son and allowed to return to his country along with his wife.

Tramadhvaj died soon after his return to his capital. His minor son Suradarpa succeeded his throne. There are two separate accounts on the succession of Suradarpa.

It is said that Rudra Singha deputed his officers to the Dimasa state to establish young Suradarpa on the throne. But the British record informs that Suradarpa was elected by the forty male clans called Sengphong at the request of queen Chandraprabha who acted as regent ‘till Suradarpa came of age to rule the state’. (Barpujari: 1997: 57)

Suradarpa assumed title Narayana and came to be known as Suradarpanarayan. His reign is known for literary and cultural activities.
Harichandranarayan (1720-28) succeeded the throne after the death of his father Suradarpanarayan and issued two gold coins in 1720 and 1721 AD. Another inscription found in a stone temple at Maibang also confirms the name of Harichandranarayan.

**The Khaspur Phase**

The shifting of the capital to Khaspur is a turning point in the history Dimasa kingdom due to its proximity to Sylhet and Manipur. The final stage of state formation was completed with the occupation of Khaspur. This stage was marked by two features: *sanskritization* (*Brahmanical Hinduism*) of the royal family and the aristocracy, and *second*, the large-scale use and patronisation of Bengali language and literature. We shall see how this influenced the fate of the Dimasa kingdom and its people later. As we have seen, Raja Tamradhvaj took shelter in Khaspur while the Ahom army sacked Maibang. It was not known if by then Khaspur became part of Dimasa kingdom already. But the fact is that it remained capital of Dimasa kingdom thereafter. It may be mentioned that Khaspur was part of Tripura state and it was occupied by Koch general Chilarai. A section of Koch army was set up there who later came to be known as Dehans. How and when Khaspur passed onto Dimasa from the Dehans is not clearly known.

In 1728 Ramachandra ascended the throne. Vijoy Panchali, a Manipuri text written in the eighteenth century informs us that he married a Manipuri princess. The Bengali chronicle *Kalicharaner-Upakhyan* was composed during his reign in 1735 AD. Ramachandra himself was a poet and composed the *Malsi* songs in Bengali.

The next king Kritichandra succeeded Ramachandra in 1736. He had issued two *Sanads*, the first *Sanad* was in regard to the appointment of one Maniram, son of
Chand Laskar of Borkhola village as *Uzir* of the Cachar plains and the second *Sanad* empowered the *Uzir* with magisterial and Zamindari powers.

Kirtichandra was succeeded by his son Gopichandranarayan (1745-57). In the third year of his reign the *Gopichandrer Panchali* was composed that informs in details about his coronation and administration. Gopichnadranaryan introduced the *Borak Puja* for propitiating the Barak Rive. It is said that there was no flood after this worship leading to his popularity among his subjects. There was peace and prosperity during his reign and he maintained friendly relations with the neighbouring states. *Gopichandrer Panchali* informs us about his sujugaion of Kukis and appointed Raja and *Mantri* from their own people.

Harichandra II (1757-1772), regarded as Sondhikari in Ahom *Buranjis* was the successor of Gopichandranarayan. He was called to the Ahom court by the Ahom Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singha (1751-69). On his refusal, Rajeshwar Singha sent an armed force under Kritichandra Borbarua through Raha. Raja Sondhikori surrendered before Barbarua. The construction of the palace complex and the Ranachandi temple including the digging of a tank at Khaspur during his reign is confirmed by two stone inscriptions at Khaspur. He undertook steps for preservation of the Kachakanti temple constructed by the Dehan Kings at Udharband.

Leading a life of an ascetic, Harichandra devoted himself more to religious activities than to affairs of the state. He spent most of his time in meditation earning an epithet of *Baula Raj* meaning a moody king in Dimasa terminology. He abdicated the throne in favour of his cousin Laxmichandra who died after a very brief reign without leaving any issue.\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\)Baula in Dimasa language denotes drunkenness or in trance. It may also have some connection to the Bengali word baul.
In 1773 Krishnachandranarayan ascended the throne. By then the East India Company had acquired the diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Dimasa state located on the margins of Sylhet was bound to be affected by this change in the political scenario. On the other hand, the Ahoms were facing great political crisis in the form of rebellion and struggle for power. Taking advantage of this situation, Burmese had begun their expansionist design. The Dimasa states got drawn to this political turmoil that eventually had lasting impact on the state and people. We shall discuss these events in details in the following chapter.

Society and Economy in Pre-British period

Economic Life

Finally, here is a quick survey of the pre-British Dimasa political economy and society. It is generally understood that the economic base of the Dimasa state is not strong compared to the Ahom and the Koch State of the period. Contrary to traditional belief, the Dimasa state witnessed a major boom in the field of trade and commerce. Cotton, textiles and pottery played an important role in this. Its trading relations were not only confined to its neighbouring groups or states, but it travelled beyond that. Discovery of coins belonging to the Dimasa monarchy of this period bears testimony to this fact. A large number of coins have been discovered in a village named Durgapur, 112 km west of Sylhet which is believed to be the trading outpost of the Dimasa state. (Rhodes & Bose: 2006: 25) Dimasa coins were struck in fine silver and corresponded to the Mughal coins in weight and quality. Certain other coins of the Dimasa state are inferior in quality and seemed to be an alloy of tin and copper. These coins are believed to have been used for internal circulation, which certainly would not have been accepted by the traders from other regions. ‘The coins give us (of Nirbhoynarayana) some additional information; firstly, the fact that the king was
worshipper of Lord Siva, but most interesting is the metallic composition of the coins. One specimen was analysed and discovered to be an alloy of copper and tin. From the appearance of the coins, they certainly look as if they were made of silver, or at least a silver alloy, the fragment analysed shows that at least some of the coins of this period had no silver in them at all. This is remarkable and unique among the coinages of the north-east. This fact may also explain the two parallel coinages of the earlier kings, from Yashonarayana. On close examination, it seems as if the coins found in Bangladesh are of fine silver, whereas the coins found in hoards near Maibong, that are struck on thin, broad flans, may be debased even to the extent of having no silver content at all. The use to which these debased coins were put can only be guessed at, but it is unlikely that the trading classes from Bengal would have accepted them as having value, so their use must have been confined to the capital, where the guarantee of the king may have ensured their circulation as coin.' (Rhodes & Bose: 2006: 34-35) It not only shows the level of monetisation of the economy, but also metallurgical skill in developing silver like metal out of tin and copper alloy. But it is likely that large sections of societal transactions also took place by barter and cowry shells. Silver might have procured through trade from areas of Burma and China, as it is not locally available. S K Bose and N G Rhodes write, ‘Silver is not found locally in 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 Dimasas had settled in Maibong, a transit trade developed, with good being exported from Bengal paid for using silver coins. The same goods may have further been exported to Burma or China, in exchange for Silver.’ In her recent book dealing with expansion and consolidation of British rule in the Northeast India, Gunnel Cederlof outlines the importance of this trading route from Bengal to
China. The importance of trade and commerce of Dimasa state can be gauged from the statement made by Manijl Hazarika on the Doyang-Dhansiri valley culture based on the unpublished doctoral thesis of P J Sharma. The statement has been cited here: “Sharma made a study on the settlement pattern history with a ‘regional approach’ addressing the crucial questions such as the site formation process, contexts and cultural links etc. in Dhansir- - Doyang Valley. He successfully brought out an important hypothesis that the earliest state formation in the region was not necessarily due to the inflow of the Indo-Europeans into the soils of Assam, but was a result of the intermittent trade relations between the mainland India and the southern Chinese territories, in which Tibeto-Burman speaking communities played a crucial role”. (Hazarika citing Sharma: 2008: 9)

The Bengali text Gopichander Pachali informs us that trade and commerce flourished during the reign of Gopichandranarayan. Large markets were set up in the border areas which were frequented by merchants from Burma, China, and Bengal and also by the Europeans. Trade with Bengal was carried out through water-routes. The Baishya community received royal patronage. People belonging to the class of artisan’s viz. Komar, Kumar, Yogi, Sutradhar also greatly benefitted from the growing trade and commerce.

The Dimasa state was economically stable and strong. In the historiography of Assam, it is believed that the Brahmaputra Valley was inhabited by tribes and communities who carried out subsistence economic practices or primitive production systems. It is believed that introduction of wet rice farming in the lower Assam by the Indo-Aryan settlement and the Ahoms in the Upper Assam brought the formation of strong states. This view have been critically discussed above and argued that wet rice farming was an indigenous practice.
The Jamuna and Dhansiri valley contributed largely to prosperity of the kingdom. *Gopichandra Panchali*, the Bengali chronicle written in 1670 *Saka* (1748 AD), describes the peasants of Davaka as the children of Laxmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth. Even some sections of the hills were the site for wet-rice farming, particularly in the river banks of Mahur. The capital Maibang meaning plenty of rice, earns its name from its large production of rice. Extensive wet-rice farming is still carried out in the area without using the plough. Animals are used for making good tilthe. In the surrounding hills, *jhumming* is practiced. However, *jhumming* has been viewed traditionally as primitive and subsistence system of farming. It is just the opposite in reality. It requires a special skill for dry land farming. Also morphologically, the origin of rice has not been confirmed. If rice is a swamp grain as many believe, it must have been an arduous task to make it suitable for dry-land farming. Therefore it would be historically insensitive to call it primitive. On the other hand, it is also wrong to believe that dry land farming is subsistence farming. Unlike the wet rice farming, dry land farming is a composite farming system and therefore a single plot produces vegetables along with rice, thus ensuring nutritional supply. Dr. Sukhendu Debabarma mentioned in one of many conversations during the period of my research what his grandfather mentioned to him on the abundance of food supply and that they were never familiar with the idea of famine in the hills.

The Dimasa kingdom even after it lost much territory to the Ahoms, was extensive in its geographical expanse and strategically located. It is straddled the Brahmaputra Valley and the Surma Valley in the South. It is for this reason that the British embarked upon the construction of railways through North Cachar Hills as outlet to Sylhet and the sea. During those times, the Dimasa territory was well connected with Manipur, Naga Hills, Jayantia, and Sylhet. A significant amount of trade passed
through this area. During their visit to this area in the early years of the nineteenth century, Jenkins and Pemberton noticed that a large number of traders from outside participated in the big market at Mohung Dijua, and were highly amazed by the economic prosperity of the tract. (Foreign Political Department, 1832, File No. 70)

**Social and Religious Life**

If we accept that the early Kamrupa kings and others belonged to the Tibeto-Burman speakers then the conversion, at least of a section of the Dimasas to the Hinduism is beyond question. Their submission to Samudragupta must have brought in Hindu influence to the region. The royalty might have assumed the titles denoting kshatriyastatus under the influence of the Brahmin priests. Scholars have made comprehensive studies of the inscriptions discovered in pre-Ahom Assam. These inscriptions show that Siva and Vishnu were the most prominent of the Hindu pantheon. The Hindu convert royalty assumed various titles on the lines of kings in northern India. This tradition extended to Dimapur and down to Khaspur, the last capital of the Dimasa kingdom. It is generally believed that Dimasas were not converted to Hinduism until their capital was shifted to Maibang. However, this is not the case. Even if we cast doubt on the Dimasa origin of Kamrupa state, their conversion to Hinduism is attested by recovery of a coin that bears the name of king Viravijayanarayana. According to S K Bose and N G Rhodes it seems likely that this first coin of the Dimasa kings were struck at Dimapur just before the great defeat of 1520s. Most probably it was struck either by King Khorapha or by his predecessor. 'The Ahom chronicles would have referred to the Dimasa king by his tribal name, not by the name given to him by the Brahmins, so it is quite possible that Khorapha and Viravijayanarayana were one and the same person. We can, therefore, postulate that Khorapha ascended the throne in 1502 AD, was converted to Hinduism around the
year 1520 AD and was killed in battle in 1526 AD’. (Rhodes & Bose: 2006: 16-17)

In fact, Dimasa familiarity with Hinduism and Prakrit seems to be quite old by looking at certain Dimasa words. For instance, the Dimasa word *bakha* meaning heart or chest is similar to Sanskrit word *vakshya*. Besides, B K Kakati and other have shown that the pre-Ahom inscriptions do bear certain words of Bodo origin. However, society in general remained non-Hindu and it took hundreds of years for Hinduism to percolate to the common people. This process received a major thrust with the neo-Vaihsnavite movement under Sankardeva. Till date we find a large number of people outside in Hinduism, though there are several instances of influences of Hinduism in their traditional belief systems.

In their book on *The History of Dimasa Kachari as Seen through the Coins*, N G Rhodes and S K Bose mention the translation of an inscription in Sankrit found at Gachtal in Nagaon. They also claim it to be the earliest reference to Kachar Rajya by any inscription in Assam so far belonging to the eleventh century. The inscription mentions the king as a worshipper of Vishnu. This shows that the Dimasa kings were followers of Hinduism. The same is also corroborated by a coin belonging to Varavijayanarayan from the Dimapur phase of Dimasa rule. Besides, certain caste features also make their appearance in Dimasa society during this phase, e.g. Sergasa or the iron smelters. (Sophiya Meretina: 1978) This influence of Hinduism is but natural given their contacts since the age of Guptas.

Although the royalty followed Hinduism, the king as head of the state, administered the traditional belief practices of the Dimasas. It was the king who appointed traditional chief priests and assistants of various *Daikho*. This word may have originated from *mdaikho* meaning house of lords/gods. Some however argue that it has derived from *dainkho* meaning place of slaughter as animals are sacrificed for
propitiation of gods. In any case, traditionally there are twelve Daikho and each having a presiding deity. Each of them has their priests and officials called jonthai (priest), dainyah (assistant priest who sacrifices the animal), phatri (diviner who gets possessed during the ritual) and gisiyah (who purify the priests, assistant priests and diviner). The forty male clans are members of these twelve Daikho. Sometimes, some section known as khet or khisong of the same clans may be member of different Daikho. For instance, the Bodosa clan is sub-divided into four khels, i.e. Bodo, Bathari, Sergasa, Duliysa. Of these Bathari clan is member of mungrang daikho while the rest are member of another daikho. While several clans may be a member of particular daikho, only particular clan(s) can take the position of priests and other officials. With the end of monarchy, the community themselves manage the appointments of these officials and the daikho system is still practiced by people.

Administration

Nayanjot Lahiri and other have discussed in detail the state and political structure in the Pre-Ahom Assam: Pre-Ahom Assam: Studies in the Inscriptions of Assam between the Fifth and the Thirteenth Century AD. Nayanjot Lahiri has suggested presence of a 'feudal' type of polity in which the king was at the centre and supported by the lords and chiefs. She argues this from the use of terms such as samanta, maha-samanta etc. which occur in the inscriptions discovered so far.

Later on, the administration of the Dimasa state is known to be structured in the following manner. The Raja as the head of the state was supreme in matters relating to the land. He was helped in this by ministers called Patra and Bhandari. There was a council of ministers and it was headed by a Dimasa and so are other important state officials. Each of the clans called Sengphong, sent a representative to the royal court called Mel.
It needs a mention here that Dimasa social structure is strongly clannish. There are today forty Sengphong, the male clans and forty two Julu or Jadi, the female clans. Scholars who worked on the Dimasas argue that Sengphong and Julu or Jadi took a new form in Maibang phase. As per Dimasa oral tradition, the first Sengphong and Julu names were created in Dimapur. During that time there were seven Sengphong and seven Julus, which increased to twelve later at Maibang. However, numbers of the female clans appear to be higher than as claimed. There is a difficulty in collecting the names of all the female clans, due to the association of some social taboos in regard to matri-clans. For this reason, I have preferred in designating these forty and forty two clans as ‘recognised’ clans.\footnote{In my paper on Concept of Purity and Pollution, published in Society and Religion in North East India, I have tried to address the issues of attachment of taboo to certain clans, particularly female clans, in connection with growing centralisation of Dimasa monarchy and in the process how only certain clans received recognition. See Footnote 5 in this dissertation for detailed citation.}

In her book, *Among the Dimasas of Assam*, Dipali Danda maintains that when the Dimasas migrated to Maibang area, the region was already surrounded by Nagas and other tribes, leading to inter-tribal marriage. In order to discourage this sort of union the then Dimasa Raja introduced the matri clan and by a proclamation the Raja declared as illegal any marriage between a Dimasa man and a women bear do not bear jadi or julu. But it does not explain why Dimasas already had seven matri-clans is to be remembered that matri-clans pre-existed the move to Maibang.

There is another version in regard to the presence of matri-clans in Dimasa society. As the King had married princess from non-Dimasa back ground, they were given a certain clan to trace their ancestry. This seems plausible. In fact that certain clan names do suggest their possible non-Dimasa origin. There is, e.g. a matri-clan by the name of Garni, meaning from Gaur (now in West Bengal) or belonging to Gaur. It is
claimed that the clan name derived from the princess of Gaur, Garama Konwari who was married to a Dimasa King.

While both the arguments have some plausible historical truth, the presence and expansion of clans, both matri and patri, may be assigned to a growing centralisation process of the state. The King might have separated large and powerful clans by creating parallel new clans. This might have also acquired a large number of tribute to the royal treasury since the patriarch or matriarch of new clan would have received a place in the royal court or mel headed by the King. (See the Footnote No 5 & 15 above)

There is no word for ‘king’ in the Dimasa language. The use of the word raja was probably derived from Sanskrit nomenclature used in Indo-Aryan statecraft. But his also suggest that certain societies do not transform into Indo-Aryan state-like structures in spite of having all requisite apparatus. In the case of the early Kamarupa state, the terminologies associated with the statehood might have been derived from the Gangetic plains. In the long run, the expanding state structure might have removed the traditional one. Studies on the pre-modern states in Assam may throw some light in this regard. We know from Sir Edward Gait that Kacharis living within Ahom territories regularly paid tribute to the Dimasa king. This defies the concept of state as territorial entity. The Ahom system of posa is another example of sovereignty that is not absolute but shared.

**Ethnic relationships**

It is said that the Rengma Nagas, inhabiting the outer edges of Dimapur supplied iron implements to the Kachari in exchange for salt. The Dimasas also had trade relations

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Footnote: Posa is a system followed by the Ahoms, whereby certain border villages were assigned to supply their grain produce to a particular hill community. Similar practice seemed to have existed in many areas in the South East Asia in pre-modern times.
with the *Zemi Nagas* whom they supplied iron implements and weapons. In 1536, when the Ahoms attacked Dimapur, the King, Detsung, was assisted by a *Rengma* Chief called Nzon Jegibo and was killed in the battle. (Bordoloi: 1984: 20) This suggests a close friendly relationship of the Dimasa Kings with the neighbouring tribes.

Karbi folklore informs us that that Dimasa king was oppressive of the Karbis and one of the king’s officers was killed by one Rongpharpi Rongbe. Notwithstanding this, there appears to have been intimate cultural exchanges between the Karbis and Dimasas. In one of conversations with Dharam Sing Teron, a community leader and scholar, I was informed that names of several varieties of rice species cultivated by the Karbis actually come from the Dimasas, e.g. *maitsu* from *maiju* in Dimasa. During the period of research I was informed that some clans and families were originally Karbis. However, information on the names of specific clan and families were not mentioned, possibly deliberately. In any case this indicates the mobility of people from one ethnic background to another.

Similarly with the *Zemi Nagas*, there had been cultural exchanges. Some existing Dimasa practices are said to have derived from their close interaction with the *Zemi Nagas*, e.g. certain songs and Dance forms observed during the celebration of *Hangseu busu*, the most elaborate form of *bihu* observed by the Dimasas. In fact some songs are still sung in a language believed to be the Zemi, though they do not comprehend the meaning of the song. It is probably the archaic *Zemi* tongue, making it unintelligible today. During the period of research, B B Hagjer, former Commissioner of Forest to the Government of Assam, shared his experience in a Zemi Village during his tenure as Principal Secretary to the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council. In one of his official visit to a Zemi village, he was told that
most of the families in the village belonged to the Hager clan of the Zemi tribe. It is said that the monarchy organised the Zemi society on the lines of the Dimasas and parallel clans were assigned to Zemis.

It is evident from records that the Dimasa king had good relationships with other Naga subjects. In 1830, some Naga villagers submitted a petition to the Company administration of Cachar against atrocities perpetrated by the Manipuri king. The petition mentions their cordial relationship with the Dimasa monarchy. (Foreign Department, 1832, File No 89)

There is another case that highlights cordial ethnic relationships within the Dimasa kingdom. In 1882, Sambudhan Phonglosa revolted against the British. At that point of time, the order to carry out operations against Sambudhan was refused by the Kuki Levi and subsequently disbanded. (Barpujari: 2000)

It may be mentioned here that Dimasas had a traditional technique of iron smelting. There is a sub-clan named Sergasa, meaning iron smelters, belonging to Bodosa clan. (It is said that Bodosa itself had four sub-clans, i.e. Bodo, Bathari, Ser-gasa and Duliyasa). In any case the iron smelting clan and the technology itself are lost now.¹⁷

Art, Architecture and Literature

The Dimasa state left its mark in the field of art and architecture as well. A Grand Royal Capital along with a massive gate on the bank of river Dhansiri is a testimony to the architectural skill attained. The entire city was walled by bricks on three sides while one side was bounded by the river. The chess-man pillars are fine works of art in stones. Similar style and form of construction is witnessed in the ruins of Kasomari. R M Nath also observes some similarity in archaeological remains in Akashi Ganga

¹⁷ See Sphiya Meretina (1978) and Rhodes & Bose (2006)
of Doboka with that of chess-man columns in Dimapur. (Nath: 1994 (Printed in 1997): This corroborates that as the Dimasa state continued to expand towards the east, its art and architecture evolved to a unique style that culminated in Dimapur. Like in Dimapur, the capital complex in Maibang was also surrounded by a brick wall. The ruins of the capital complex are still visible. Numerous temples were constructed by the Dimasa kings. In one of the temple sites at Maibang, two stone pillars with inscriptions were found. While the capital complex and the walls are in ruins, the rock cut temple carved in the year 1727 is still intact. The inscriptions attribute it to the reign of Harichandranarayan, the Lord of Hirimba. Bordoloi remarks:

From the relics that are still found in Maibang, it can be ascertained that the Kachari arts and sculptural designs reached a very high stage of development during the reign of the Kachari kings at Maibang. (Bordoloi: 1984: 28)

After Maibang was sacked by the Ahoms, the Dimasas set themselves up at Khaspur in the Cachar plains. A huge palace complex on the banks of Mathura is a protected site under the Archaeological Survey of India. These sites testify the level of achievements attained by the Dimasas as has been remarked by B N Bordoloi (quoted above) and many others. These structures stand as pillars of Dimasa memory of their past which has robust influence in formation of contemporary Dimasa identity. This is well reflected in their folklore and folk songs. One such folksong is *Maibangma Haigarbani* (On leaving the great Maibang) which recalls the days of prosperity and bounty. The song goes as follows:

In the vast plains of Maibang / lived the Dimasa / in hundreds and thousands
/ the breadth of Maibang was such / it took six months to cover the entire stretch / The length of Maibang / you can well imagine / Because it took
twelve months / and more to measure / with the thread of the cotton / which 
bloomed in plenty there / The soil of Maibang was fertile / The fields were a 
granary o rice / Fruits of mango and / the tamarind outnumbered / the leaves 
of those trees / one could not see stems / of the Tulsi for its leaves / Brinjal 
plants rose to / size equal to palm tree/ Memories of Maibang we recall / 
Although we have come away. (Sarma: 2003: 74)

There are more of songs of this kind, e.g. Jiniba Raji, which recalls various pasts 
and forms part of people’s memory. Their performances are readings of the pasts, 
though the act of reading itself must be contextualised. The context of reading is 
crucial in shaping the people’s perception on their pasts or events. As we shall 
see, contemporary Dimasa society is shaped by the memories of their pasts, 
which are recounted in the form folk performances.