CHAPTER VIII

ASSAM
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The communities of Assam can be broadly divided into two categories:

1. Communities living in the plains i.e. the valleys of the rivers Brahmaputra and Barak.

2. Communities living in the hill areas i.e. North Cachar Hills and KarbiAlong districts.

The communities living in the plain areas can be subdivided into three groups:

1. Assamese and Bengalis of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, which have been deleted in the study as they have already been discussed by Dr.S.R. Ranganathan in his CCC 5th edition 1965.

2. The Bodo speaking communities found all over the Brahmaputra valley.

3. The outflow of hill communities who have comparatively recently come down to the neighbouring plains.

The tribals of Assam are the following:
A. In the autonomous districts:

1. CHAKMA (Dealt with in Chap. Mizoram)
2. DIMASA, KACHARI
3. GARO (Dealt with in Chap. Meghalaya)
4. HAJONG (Dealt with in Chap. Meghalaya).
5. HMAR (Dealt with in Chap. Manipur)
6. KHASI, JAIN'TIA, SYNTENG, (Dealt with in Chap. Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam Meghalaya)
7. KUKI, (Dealt with in Chap. Manipur)
8. LAKHER
9. MAN
10. ANY MIZO (LUSHAI) TRIBES (Dealt with in Chap. Mizoram).
11. MIKIR
12. ANY NAGA TRIBES (Dealt with in Chap. Nagaland)
13. PAWI (Dealt with in Chap. Mizoram)
14. SYNTENG (Dealt with in Chap. Meghalaya).

B. In the state of Assam excluding the autonomous districts:

1. BARMANS IN CACHAR (Dimasas)
2. BORO, BOROKACHARI
3. DEORI
4. KACHARI, SONWAL
5. LALUNG
7. MECH
8. MIRI
9. RABHA.

Bodos (Boros):

The Bodo communities are spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley from its easternmost corner to the westernmost corner and beyond. They can broadly be divided into the following communities:

1. The Boros and Borokacharis of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang districts;

2. The Rabhas of Goalpara and Kamrup districts;

3. The Lalungs of Nowgong and Karbi Along districts;

4. The Sonwal Kacharis of Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh districts;

5. The Chutiyas of Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh districts.

All these communities have similar social structures.

The Bodos were the first among the Tibeto Burman speaking people to enter North Eastern India. The home of these Tibeto Burman speaking people was the northwest China from where they moved southwards
to enter North East India and hills and valleys of South East Asia. A section of this population moved further southwest to reach Tripura and adjoining areas, where they are referred to as Hill Tipperah. Some of them have settled in the present day Meghalaya to form the Garos and Hajongs. All these tribes have smooth and flat wavy hair with coarse texture. Their beard and moustache are scanty in growth. Their eyes have Mongoloid fold. The eyelids are oblique and the palpebral fissure is narrow to medium. The skin colour is brown.

In the Bodo communities there are vestiges of clan organisation. Among them the clans are distinctly matrilineal (as in Garos). In other respects the societies have a distinct bias of patriliney though some elements of matriliney such as matrilocal residence are to be found occasionally. All these communities are Hindus. Some of them have completely merged themselves into the caste hierarchy and have completely lost their tribal identities. However some of them have preserved various elements of their traditional religion like their traditional deities, traditional rites etc. It is interesting to

2. Ibid. p.46.
3. Ibid. p.49.
note that the deities of the Hindu pantheon like Shiva and Kamakhya are recognised by them, as their traditional deities. Elements of traditional Hinduism are found in different degrees among different communities, even in different sections of the same community. As far as their material culture is concerned they are indistinguishable from the Assamese. Some of them have preserved their Tibeto Burman language while others are mostly bilingual using their own language side by side with Assamese. Recently there have been tendencies among all these communities to revive the traditional cultures\textsuperscript{4}.

ANALYSIS OF NAMES:

Bodo (Boro) Tribe:

There is no naming ceremony and no fixed day for the naming among the Bodos. The child can be named at any given time and the naming is done by the parents.

The Bodo name consists of personal name and family name or surname. The honorific words Mushri for boys, Tharayna for unmarried girls and Mushrinya for married women are prefixed to the personal names of women. These are removable and hence should not be included in the rendering of the names.

\textsuperscript{4} Sharma, T.C. and Mujumdar, D.N. Eastern Himalayas, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1979, pp.32, 33.
Examples: DARHASHAT DAIMARY
MAHESWAR BRAHMA

Here DARHASHAT and MAHESWAR are personal names while DAIMARY and BRAHMA are the family names. The Bodo people are known by the personal names. But nowadays they have started to be identified by the family names. And again the number of family names are large. Therefore, the entries are to be entered under the family names. Hence the above names will be entered under the family names. Hence the above names will be entered as under:

DAIMARY (Darhashat)
BRAHMA (Maheswar)

Some Bodo people use the tribe name 'BORO' as the surname. This word is suffixed to the personal name. If the name of a person is KANAK BORO, then the entry should be in the direct form as found on the title page because a person cannot be identified by the tribe name. A cataloguer who is unaware of the structure of the Boro name may enter under the last word i.e. Boro, which will be meaningless. Thus the entry should be as under:

KANAK BORO

Few people use the common known 'Singh' as the
middle word (suffixed to the personal name) followed by the family name. Here the word Singh should be given as irremovable attachment to the personal name. Entries should not be made under this word.

Example: BIREN SINGH BASUMATARY will be entered as:

BASUMATARY (Biren Singh)

After marriage the female will change her surname to that of her husband. For example if Nageswari Narzary marries Tularam Hazawary she will be known as Mrs. Nageswari Hazawary. Thus the entry will be as:

HAZAWARY (Nageswari)

Some Boro male and female names are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL NAME</td>
<td>FAMILY NAME</td>
<td>PERSONAL NAME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARJUN</td>
<td>BRAHMA</td>
<td>ANJALI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARUN</td>
<td>BASUMATARY</td>
<td>BINITA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRISHNA</td>
<td>SWARGIARY</td>
<td>KABITA</td>
</tr>
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<td>Niranjan</td>
<td>KOCHARI</td>
<td>KAJAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ram</td>
<td>GAYARI</td>
<td>NILAKHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>RAMCHIARY</td>
<td>RAMANI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARAN</td>
<td>NARZARY</td>
<td>RITAMANI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAPSA</td>
<td>BAGLARY</td>
<td>SUBINI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPEN</td>
<td>MUSAHARY</td>
<td>SWETA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTTAMKUMAR</td>
<td>OWARY</td>
<td>URMILA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dimasas:

The Dimasas (Kacharis) are found in the Mikir and North Cachar Hills and Barak valley of Assam. They are a branch of the great Bodo tribe of Assam. They are divided into two groups:

1. Plain Dimasas found in the Barak valley;
2. Hill Dimasas found in the Mikir and North Cachar Hills.

The origin of the Kacharis is said to be in Tibet and China. There were supposed to be two great immigration waves, one through the Tista valley and the other through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihang valleys. They are short people and possess long head and medium form of nose. They are brown and possess coarse broad wavy head hair. Beards and moustaches are scanty.

The term 'Dimasa' literally means the children or descendants of a big river, meaning the Brahmaputra, 'Di' means water, 'Ma' means big and 'Sa' means children. As the Brahmaputra is the biggest river in Assam, the literal meaning of 'Dimasa' cannot but be the children of the Brahmaputra. However according to another theory

5. Das, B.M. Some aspects of the Physical anthropology of the tribes of North East India in 'TRIBES OF NORTH EAST INDIA' Edited by S.Karotemprel, Vendrame missiological institute, Shillong, 1984, p.27.
the term 'Dimasa' means the people inhabiting the banks of the river Dhansiri, that is Dima. However Nirupama Hagjer is of the opinion that the term 'Dimasa' is derived from Dimapursa, that is to say, the people who lived in Dimapur, the ancient capital of the Kachari on the bank of the river 'Dima' (Dhansiri). The origin of the term 'Kachari' is controversial. Dr. B.K. Barua in his book 'History of Assam' opined that the word 'Kachari' is probably concerned with the Sanskrit word 'Kaksata' which is hypothetical formation to Sanskrit 'Kirats' which refers to the earliest inhabitants of Assam.

The Dimasas are unique among the tribes of North Eastern India because of the system of descent. Because they present a case of double descent. Both patriclan and matriclan systems of descent are in vogue. Originally there were fortytwo patriclans and matriclans but now many are not found. For reckoning their descent they primarily go by sex. For example a man primarily reckons his descent from the paternal grandfather and concurrently from his grandmother. But a woman ordinarily reckons

her descent from her maternal grandmother and then from her paternal grandfather. Thus matrilineal and patrilineal terms of descent are followed concurrently. Both patri and matriclans are exogamous. A man cannot marry a girl of his father's patriclan and his mother's matriclan. Likewise a girl cannot marry a man whose mother belongs to her matriclan and who belongs to her father's patriclan. Therefore, a man and his son belong to the same patriclan but to different matriclans. Nowadays many educated Dimasas are reluctant to disclose the names of their matriclans. When the girls are sent to school, the names of their matriclans are recorded as their surnames. But this is a superficial phenomenon and the rules of exogamy in respect of matriclans and patriclans are observed with equal strictness.

The Dimasas are Hindus since the middle of the eighteenth century. However, they have their own gods and goddesses. Some of the deities are identified with the deities of the Hindu pantheon. For example, their deities of Shivrai and Ranachandi are identified with the Shiva and Kali of Hindu mythology. For worship of their traditional deities animal sacrifices are performed.

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but not for Hindu gods like Satyanarayana. Saraswati is worshipped very commonly as is Lakshmi. However, the Dimasas continue to worship their gods and goddesses like ALURAJA, GUNYUNG, MISMIRAJA, WOARAJA etc. The Dimasas are divided into twenty subtrites or castes depending on the type of occupation they engage in.

ANALYSIS OF NAMES:

Dimasa Tribe:

The Dimasas are divided into patriclans and matriclans, both types of clans are strictly exogamous. The plains Dimasas were given the title of 'Barman' by the British. Hence the surname 'Barman' is frequently used by them.

The Dimasas do not perform any naming ceremony and the name is given at any convenient time by the elders of the family. Only traditional Hindu names are given.

Children are often named after the day or month in which they are born like DEOBAR, MANGAL, BUDHU (names of days) or like MAGHUA, PHAGUNA (names of month). Other names were probably given by the mother in infancy expressive of some peculiarity in the new born child's mental or physical temperament. Examples are KHANGKHOA meaning 'voracious one', GAB-GRA meaning the 'weeper'.
A Dimasa name consists of two components, the first being the personal name and the second part is the surname.

Example: DHANANJOY MITHER

In the above name the first word is the personal name and the second word is the surname. Even if they are known by the personal names, the names will be entered under the surnames because the people in this tribe are identified by the surnames. Hence surname is the potent element of the name. Thus the above name should be entered as:

MITHER (Dhanajoy)

Just like in any Hindu society, the female after marriage changes her surname to that of her husband. A girl named SHEFALI MAIBANG will change to SHEFALI SARANG after marriage to a man of SARANG family. The entry will be under the surname of the husband. Thus the entry will be as under:

SARANG (Shefali)

Some common Dimasa male and female names are given below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALES</th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL NAME</td>
<td>Surname</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIRENDRA</td>
<td>BADERBAIGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEMALU</td>
<td>SENGYUNG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRANMOY</td>
<td>HRIPTACHEKAW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hriday</td>
<td>HAFLONGBARSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JYOTIRMAY</td>
<td>ARDAU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRINAL</td>
<td>KUMPRAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARSING</td>
<td>HAPILA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PINAK</td>
<td>TAUSEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURNENDU</td>
<td>HOJAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATYEN</td>
<td>DIJUA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In case of Dimasa and Bodo tribes, the potent element is said to be the surnames or clan names rather than the personal names, as per the views of the persons interviewed. This seems to be due to the influence of the Assamese on these tribes. The culture and social customs are more or less the same as those of the Assamese.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid. p.46.

3. Ibid. p.49.


