CHAPTER 2
THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For an in-depth analysis of the Dimasa nationality question, it is important to understand the connotations of the term *Dimasa* and also to trace the historical background of the land and its people. The historical background of the Dimasa is deeply embedded in their early settlement, migration, and state formation process. The Daikho system, with particular *areas gods,* is one of the major traditional systems which delineate different localities of the traditional Dimasa territory. As such, the entire territory from Dhansiri valley of Karbi Anglong to Silchar of Cachar district is regarded as the ancestral territory of Dimasa people. This chapter examines the historical background of the Dimasa, the processes of migration, sanskritization, and state formation.

The term *Dimasa* generally implies the *sons of the big river.* In Dimasa language *di* means *water,* *ma* means *big* and *sa* means *children.* The early Dimasa were inhabitants of present-day Sibsagar of Assam. However, in the first half of the fourteenth century, the Ahom, an offshoot of the great Tai or Shan race of Southeast Asia, forced the Dimasa to evacuate the region and move to Dimapur, on the banks of the river Dhansiri, which is presently demarcates the natural boundary of Assam and Nagaland.

During the reign of Kachari Kings, Dimapur was known as *Dimabang.* This is evident from a folk song; to quote:
Dimabang Manigu Gasangba, Daidonee Didrongba / Dimabong Phanigee
Thaniha gebengbo, Daieng donee ha dongba.¹

It literally means the hereditary habitat of Dimabang had a lengthy river and wide land.

Dimabong was situated on the banks of the river Dhansiri. Dhansiri is known as Dima. This river came from the source of Hajadisa and Prasah Dumuduh of North Cachar Hills. The source of the river is also known as Dima Croh; which means head of dima. As the capital was situated on the banks of river Dima, the capital was known as Dimapur and people were known as Dimasa.²

This view is supported by scholars like B.N Bordoloi and others. The Dimasa were known as Bodosa who migrated to Dimapur region and settled on the banks of Dhansiri, and later came to be known as Dimasa.³ However U.C Barman and others do not accept this view. According to them, the literal meaning of the word Dimasa is sons of the big water. By big water is meant the sea, ocean and large rivers. Thus the Dimasa are children of big water, i.e. people who reside on the seashores and large river banks. It needs no mention that seas, oceans and large rivers are found only in the plains, not in the hills and mountains. Thus the Dimasa are necessarily a plains people. The epic, Mahabharata, however, narrates that they are a people who dwell both in the plains and the mountains. From the epic account it would come out that the bulk of the Dimasa people were the dwellers of the big waters, which may be established not only from the fact

¹ N. Hagjer, Dimasa, Jorhat, 1974, p. 3.
² loc.cit.
that Bhagadatta while in the war of the Kuruksetra drew his troops from among his subject people who dwelt on the sea shore of Bay of Bengal. 4 Barman refuted the view that the history of Dimasa originated in Dimapur alone. He emphasized that its history began from the Vedic age of India history:

In 108 sukta of the 10th Mandala of the Rigveda, the Panis, ancestors of the Dimasas, are called ‘Rishis’ and again in the Rigveda (vii 45.14) even Indra has been called Pani.5

From the study of the earliest texts of the Vedas, it is evident that from about 6000 years ago, when the Aryans were yet to establish their definite base over Aryavarta, the Panis had made themselves the master of Northern India from Harappa to Kamrup, who later pushed further south to Deccan. The royal house of Kamrup was the Dimasa family derived from the Panis. They are credited with the introduction of Linga-worship in Kamrup.6

This point of view regards Dimasa origin within the Indian mainstream. Indian civilization plays a crucial part in the origin of Dimasa identity. Such an opinion is also based on the study of philology and etymology of Dimasa dialect. It is opined that as the ancient people of this region did not maintain any calligraphic records or documents of the past event, the modern historians are deprived of reliable and accurate sources for the reconstruction of its history. So in reconstructing the history of this land, particularly relating to the period prior to the thirteenth century, historians have to rely heavily on indication derived from

5 loc. cit.
philology and ethnography. The Mahabharata, Puranas and the Tantras also shed some light on its history.  

An interesting example is that Hastinapur the capital city of Mahabharata is defined in Dimasa language as *Ha* meaning earth (soil) *Sti* (step) meaning muddy, and *Na* (no) as house. *Ha-Sti-Na* means a house which is built on muddy soil. Although several place names of present day India are discussed on the basis of Dimasa etymology, its historical value and importance are yet to be ascertained. Therefore it is very difficult to accept such type of study to determine the original nomenclature of Dimasa.

The Buranjis are very explicit regarding the origin of the Dimasa people. The famous *Kachari Buranji* which is a collection of Assamese manuscript chronicles tells us that Bhima, the son of Pandu married Hirimba. Hirimba's son Ghatotkhas became the King. Dimasa are the sons of Ghatotkhas. Therefore the Dimasa Kings were called Herembeswar. The word *Hirimbasa* was derived from *Hirimba*. However, this legendary story of Mahabharata has no relation with Dimasa people. The Mahabharata states about the Hirimba Kingdom. Hirimba was a big forest of Barnabarta town situated near modern Delhi and this explains why the Pandavas reached that big forest within a day via Barnabarta. However, even if we agree that the term *Dimasa* originates from Hirimba, we cannot account for the fact as to why the other numerically strong sections of Kachari who live in the Brahmaputra valley are called Bodo, Bodosa or Bodofisa. If the

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7 Ibid, p. 1.
8 Ibid, p. 10.
origin of all the Kachari in Assam refers to Hirimba, Dimasa should have been their common name.\textsuperscript{10}

In this connection it will be worthwhile to mention the legend of the creation of Dimasa. According to the legend, in the initial stage, the world was completely uninhabited and the contours of the rivers and mountains and the trees and plants, etc were not the same as to-day and there was peace and tranquillity. In course of time two celestial beings, a male and a female appeared. Their appearances had worried the unearthly and all pervading silence of the world. The male was called Bangla Raja and he was also regarded as the god of the earthquakes. The female was called Arikhidima in the form of a very huge bird. Bangla Raja and Arikhidima fell in love and as a result Arikhidima had a divine conception. Being of divine origin and carrying a divine conception, Arikhidima had a great problem to find out a suitable nesting place for laying her eggs. She flew to all the four corners of the earth in search of a suitable nesting place. Arikhidima discovered a place called Dilaobra-Sanggibra, the confluence of the rivers Dilao and Sanggi.\textsuperscript{11}

Dilaobra-Sanggibra was a very beautiful place with a perfect landscape of sand and flowers. Arikhidima finally found a huge and strong banana tree to make her nest so that it may be safe from fire, storm and wind. There, she laid seven divine eggs. After the hatching course, Sibrai was born from the first egg. Sibrai was followed by the birth of Du-Raja, Naikhu Raja Wa-Raja Ganyung-Braiying and Hamiadao. All the six were gods in the form of the human beings and they

\textsuperscript{10} B.N Bordoloi, \textit{op.cit.} pp. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p.10.
started playing joyfully on the golden sands of Dilaobra-Sanggibra. However, the seventh egg still remained un-hatched, although the hatching period was over. This had caused great concern to Arikhidima. When she realized that the egg would not break naturally, she asked her sons to break it open, but they did not dare to do so. Then Hamiadao the sixth son gave a heavy kick to the egg. Ugly shaped evil spirits out came from the immaturely broken egg and they tried to demolish the world and cause widespread disorder. At last it was by Sibrai, the eldest brother who tried to settle the matter and bring peace by demarcating their habitats.

The six gods from Sibrai to Hamiadao in the form of human beings were regarded as the ancestors of the Dimasa. Thus the Dimasa were the descendant of Sibrai, Du-Raja, Naikhu-Raja, Waa Raja, Ganyung-Braiyung and Hamiadao, whom the Dimasa worshipped as their ancestral gods. It is believed that the evil spirits that were born out of the seventh egg are responsible for their diseases and other calamities. From this legend it is obvious that the divine female bird Arikhidima was the ancestress of the Dimasa. There was every likelihood of calling the Dimasa as Arikhidimasa in ancient times-Arikhidima (the divine female bird) sa-(children) As the term was found to be quite long, the former part, namely Arikhi-might have been given up in course of time. The remaining part dima and sa become prominent followers of Arikhidimasa were called as Dimasa.

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12 Ibid, p.11.
14 loc. cit.
Dimasa people have their own ballads, folk songs, oral traditions etc. Such a ballad is Jiniba Raji, which abounds in historical events of the Dimasa dynasty. According to the Jiniba Raji, the Dimasa once ruled over the entire south bank of the Brahmaputra valley. The capital of their Kingdom was situated near present Naharkatia.\(^{15}\)

This ballad also reflects the historical tradition of the Dimasa. It extols the greatness of the Dimasa King in protecting the weak against the wicked. Moreover it narrates the past history, valour and glory of the Dimasa. It encourages them to stand united to protect the age-long tradition of the Dimasa as

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\text{Oh my Dimasa people / you are the worthy sons of the soil. / Don't forget the tradition of your grandfather. Don't embrace the foreigner's tradition / Oh my Dimasa people promise to follow the tradition of your forefathers and to restore your land.}^{16}\]

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.\(^{17}\)


\(^{16}\) Ibid, p. 27.

The folk tradition of Dimasa also mentions that in ancient times, their ancestors lived at a confluence of Dilaobra-Sanggibra and at 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. 18

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.19

Hence, the Dimasa are generally regarded as the sons of big water regardless of the fact whether that water implied the Dima or Dhansiri or the Dilao and Sanggi. As they have always been associated with big water, the term Dimasa itself implies sons of the big water.

(II)

The early settlement, migration and state formation process of the Dimasa formed an important background for the Dimasa nationality question. The Daikho system is one of the major traditional systems which give an idea about the early settlement of Dimasa people. Danda opined that the whole of the Dimasa land is under the control of Daikho system. The area-gods have their amorphous legendary shrine in different localities of the traditional Dimasa territory. It is believed that the god of particular area controls the lives of the

18 U.C Guha, op.cit. p. 31.
19 Ibid, p. 34.
Dimasa of that particular area. There are twelve *Daikhos* and each *Daikho* has its own place of worship and jurisdiction. The jurisdiction of Alu is over the confluence of Mahur and Diyung River, Baighai over interior of Hasadisa, Hamari over Diyung valley, Haor over Silchar, Longmailai over Haflong area, Manja over Langting, Misim over Dhansiri river valley, Mongrang over Maibang, Ranachandi over Mahur, Riao over Haflong, Maibang and Mahur, Waibra over Lanka and Wa all over the Dimasa territory. The above *Daikhos* are now present throughout the Dimasa territory.

From this account it is clear that, the entire territory form Dhansiri valley of Karbi Anglong to Silchar of Cachar district comes under the jurisdiction of *Dimasa Daikho system*. This vast area also can be regarded as the ancestral territory of Dimasa people.

The founding myth of the Dimasa relates to the burying of seven eggs by the original ancestors. In the version reproduced by Dipali Danda, which differs from the others, six of the seven eggs laid down by the original mother gave birth to the six main tutelary deities of the Dimasas; Sibrai, Alu-Raja, Naikhuraja, Woaraja, Ganyung-Braiyung and Hamiadao. Four of these are in Danda’s list of Daikhos, Sibrai being the paramount deity. The history of clan and territorial segmentation may give clues as to how the number increased to twelve; no oral tradition accounts for this.

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21 Ibid, p. 128.
Another legendary episode of Dimasa history tells about the **Sadiyal branches of Dimasa**. The names Dimasa, Kachari, Chutiya etc are found in various reference of Assam history. The Ahom chronicles refer to Dimasa as the *Timisa*. There are several legends regarding the Dimasa. The story of Manik Kachari and King Mukuta tells about the Sadiyal branch of Dimasa people. Twelve Kachari families settled near the Sadiya hills. The wife of one Manik Kachari became pregnant through a saint in guise of Lord Siva and had given birth to a black cat. As directed in a dream, he found the black cat transformed after a month into a golden one. Through the power of the golden cat, Manik became the overlord of the Kachari. Manik married his daughter to a Kachari named Mukuta. Manik abdicated the Kachari throne in favour of his son-in-law Mukuta. Mukuta also received the golden cat. The Kingdom of Sadiyal Kachari extended from Sadiya in the east to Dikhow River in the west; from Dihing in the north to Kenduguri on the bank of the Delhi River in the south. When Sukapha entered Assam in 1228, this territory was ruled by the Barahi and Moran Kings. Perhaps the Barahi and Moran Kings had destroyed Mukuta’s Kingdom or pushed the Kachari towards Dikhow. Ahom annexed this territory from Moran and Barahis and faced the Kachari in the bank of river Dikhow.

If those incidents are to be believed, the Sadiyal and Dimapur Kachari are the same people.

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There is a reference of **Dembra** in Dimasa tradition. In Dimasa language *Bra* means either the month or branch of a river or anything bipartite.\(^{25}\)

The Kopili-Jamuna valley was regarded as the *Dembra* in Dimasa tradition. This *Dembra* was conquered by the Dimasa King from the Tripuri King. *Rajmala* of the Tripuri describes that Tripuri King; Trilosona had married a Heramba princess. As a result of this wedlock, twelve sons were born. Drukpati, the first son became the King of Heramba and second son ascended the throne of South Tripura. A conflict followed between the two, in which the southern King was defeated. In due course he left the place and established a new Kingdom at Khalangma in the plains of Cachar. As a result Kopili valley was included under Heramba kingdom.\(^{26}\) In another oral tradition of Dimasa, it is said that two Dimasa princes fought for the throne. In that battle, one caught the divine sword and another caught its grip. The battle remained unsettled and both the princes had acquired the two parts of the sword. The prince who caught the grip of divine sword became the King of Tripura and another prince became the King of Dembra. From this account the **Dembra branch of Dimasa history** can be outlined.

There are two legends regarding the **Herembial branch of Dimasa history**. In one legend, the founder of the King of Cachar was Ghatotkhas son of Bhima, through the demon princess Hirimba.\(^{27}\) Nevertheless, this legend is indicative of the sanskritization process of Dimasa in the later period. When Krishnachandra


\(^{27}\) S.K Bhuyan, (ed) *op. cit.* p. 125.
and his brother converted themselves into Hinduism in 1790 AD, the Brahman priest had prepared this legend. The other legend is the story of Bicharpatipha. This account states that, Mahadeva (Siva) appeared in the guise of a Dimasa and married a Dimasa Deodhani. In course of time a son was born to Deodhani and Siva disappeared. The child was handed over to King Birhas. He brought the child up and named him Bicharpatipha. When he had attained manhood, Birhas married his daughter to Bicharpatipha and installed the latter to the throne.28

The chronicles of Kachari Buranji give a continuous account of the Southern or Heramba branch of the Kachari. The first King was Susenpha, perhaps a variant of Ha-tsung-tsa from whom, the Kachari Kings ordinarily derived their descent. According to another legend the earliest Kachari King was one Birahas, who abdicated in favour of Bicharpatipha. Prior to the establishment of the Kachari capital at Dimapur the seat of government had shifted to a place, somewhere between Sonapur, Banpur and Laksmindrapur.29

There is a controversy regarding the establishment of Dimasa Kingdom in Dimapur. It is not easy to determine the period of the establishment of the capital at Dimapur. There is no such written record. The existing oral traditions are also controversial. Therefore it is known that, Dimasa had ruled Dimapur for a period of four hundred years. In 1536 AD, the Ahom had destroyed Dimapur. So it is not unreasonable to say that the Dimapur capital was established in the middle of the twelfth century.30 The approximate date was 1150 AD.31

28 Ibid, p. 126.
30 U.C Guha, op. cit, p. 43.
31 loc. cit.
However this view is strongly refuted by scholars like Jatindralal Thaosen who state that the Dimasa established their capital at Dimapur at about 1036 AD, and they reigned for about five hundred years till they were driven out by the Ahom in the years 1536. The basis of this argument is Dimasa folklore. During the reign of the Dimasa at Dimapur, the Muli bamboo had flowered ten times. This Muli bamboo bloomed once after every fifty years. On the basis of this, it is assumed that the Kachari reigned at Dimapur for about five hundred years.

Dimapur was a fortified city in the northern bank of river Dhansiri. The mighty resources of the Dimasa Kingdom have been illustrated by the magnificence of the remnants. The ruins of the palaces, forts and tanks which still exist on the bank of the river Dhansiri, tell us about the existence of a powerful Dimasa Kingdom with its capital at Dimapur. They had attained a high level of culture.

The political power of Dimapur was well reflected in the victorious exploits of both men, like Rangadao, Degadao, Denmalik, Halodao etc and women like Waibangma, Wairingma etc, which largely enhanced the prestige of the Dimasa. It has been stated that Denmalik extended his brilliant victories as far as Burma and heroine Waibangma and Wairingma defeated the Ahom forces at the battle of Jakhalabandha.

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33 loc. cit.
In the field of trade and industry, this period was an important one. It is said that textile, pottery and cotton industries had played an important role in the economic life of the Kachari. These economic goods were traded to Golaghat and Rangpur, the capital of the Ahoms. The Rengma Nagas, inhabiting the outer edge of Dimapur supplied iron implements to the Kachari in exchange for salt. The Kachari had trade relations with the Zeliangroungs or the Zemi Nagas whom they supplied iron implements and weapons. In 1536, when the Ahom attacked the Kachari capital, the King Detsung was assisted by a Rengma Chief called Nzon Jegibo. The latter, however was slain in the battle while the other men of his tribe fled.\textsuperscript{36} This shows the economic and friendly relations of the Kachari Kings with the neighbouring tribes.

However, the Dimasa failed to retain their power for long. The expansionist policy of the Ahoms inevitably clashed with the Dimasa and the hostilities between the two were recorded since 1490 AD. In the first encounter, the Dimasa defeated the Ahoms and compelled them to retreat. But soon the Ahom exerted pressure on the Dimasa, causing the Dimasa King Khorapha to be pushed back to the Dhansiri. Then, Khunkhura, the brother of Khorapha, renewed the war till his defeat in 1531 AD. Dersongpha, the son of Khorapha entered into an agreement with Ahom Swargadeo Suhunmung and acknowledged the Ahom supremacy. In 1536 AD, Dersongpha made an attempt to regain his position. When the Ahom attacked the Kachari capital, the King was assisted by a Rengma Chief, Nzon Jegibo. The Dimasa King was also killed by the Ahom. Then the Ahom occupied

\textsuperscript{36} B.N Bordoloi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20.
the capital city of Dimapur. Therefore under the leadership of the son of Dersongpha the capital city was shifted to Maibang in the North Cachar Hills.

The process of state formation among the Dimasa took a new turn at Maibang in the bank of river Mahur. After the death of Dersongpha, the Kachari lived for sometime without any Kings and eventually sent delegates to the Ahom King expressing their desire to nominate Madan Konwar as their King. Accordingly Madan Konwar was enthroned as King. The new King had to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom Swargadeo Dihingia Raja and provided his mother and his wife with requisites of a royal household. Then they returned to Laksmindrapur. It was thus through the intervention of the Ahom that the Kachari had obtained a King of their own together with the necessary paraphernalia of sovereignty. The Kachari Kings were henceforth called ‘thapita-sanchita’ (established and preserved) of the Ahoms.37

At Maibang the state formation process entered a crucial phase due to the several factors, particularly when they came under the influence of Brahmanical Hinduism. At Maibang, Madan Konwar assumed the name Nirbhayanarayan and he was proclaimed as the Raja. It may be noted that all of Nirbhayanarayan’s predecessors had tribal names. The tradition goes that the prince in his difficult times came across a Brahman who predicted a good fortune for him. The young prince was so delighted that he accepted the Brahman as his Dharmadhi guru (Dharmadhykshya) and gave him an important position in the court. The Raja with the help of Dharmadhi traced his descent to a divine origin.

37 S.K Bhuyan, (ed) op. cit. pp. (ix & x).
and that their tutelary deity Kachaikhati belonged to the Sakti cult. Dharmadhi became a vital body of Dimasa political system. He also interpreted the law of Shastras. Here the legend of Ranachandi is also worthy of mention. Ranachandi appeared in Raja Nirbhayanarayan’s dream and ordered him to meet her at the riverside the next day. While the Raja was waiting for Ranachandi he saw that a snake was swimming in the river. He caught the snake’s tail and it turned into a sword, which he brought to his palace. In the very night Ranachandi again appeared and told the Raja that he had done wrong by seizing the snake by tail. Raja kept the sword and preserved with care as the symbol of valour and prosperity.

Durlavhnarayan was the successor of Nirbhayanarayan. In 1562 he had to counter the attack of Chilarai. The expansionist policy of the Koch state under Naranarayan in the sixteenth century was a challenge to the Dimasa state. Durlavhnarayan was defeated by Chilarai in 1562 AD and the Dimasa Raja was compelled to pay annual tribute of seventy thousand gold mohars and sixty elephants to the ruler of Koch Bihar. This is also an indication of the level of resourcefulness of the Maibang state.

After Durlavhnarayan, Meghanarayana ascended the throne of Maibang in 1566 AD. Two inscriptions found at Maibang stated that Meghanarayana of Hasengha dynasty built the main gateway of the capital city of Maibang in 1498 Saka

39 Ibid, p. 139.
(1576 AD). Two gold coins of Meghanarayana bearing the dates of 1488 Saka (1566 AD) and 1498 Saka (1576 AD) were also found.\footnote{S.K. Barpujari, (ed) \textit{op.cit.} p.48.}

The Ahom-Dimasa relation was cordial during the reign of the Kachari Raja Nirbhayanarayan, Durlavhnarayan and Meghanarayana. However, the relation became strained, after Jasnarayan became the Raja. The Cachar-Jayantia conflicts were diverted to the Ahoms, when the Jayantia Raja Jasamanik offered a princess to the Ahom Swargadeo on condition that she would be escorted to the capital through the territory of Jasnarayan. Jasnarayan opposed this proposal as he did not see any necessity for deviating from the customary route between Assam and Jayantia. The Ahom Swargadeo dispatched Sunder Gohain, who succeeded in capturing several Kachari garrisons. The Gohain then proposed to attack Maibang. Meanwhile Sunder Gohain lost his interest in the campaign as he had received reports from Garagaon that the Ahom Swargadeo, taking advantage of the Gohain's absence, was captivating with the general's wife and attempting to take her to his palace. Bhimbal Konwar who made his mark as a leader in Cachar attacked Gohain's army and killed the general as well.\footnote{S.K Bhuyan, (ed) \textit{op.cit.} p. x.}

After the victory Jasnarayan declared himself as an independent ruler by denouncing the 'thapita-sanchita 'status. He assumed the title of Pratapnarayan and renamed the capital Maibang as Kirtipur. Thus Jasnarayan shook off the vassalage of the Ahom and the \textbf{Dimasa ruler emerged as a sovereign ruler and declared himself as Herembeswar or lord of Heramba}. This powerful Dimasa ruler also repulsed a Mughal invasion of his state in 1612 AD and after this
success assumed the title of Indrapratapnarayan. This victory had extended the power and prestige of Jasnarayan and he could establish his domain over a vast territory. His state extended from Dimarua to Dhansiri valley, the plains of Cachar and the eastern part of Sylhet. To commemorate his conquest of Srihatta Jasnarayan issued a coin dated 1524 Saka (1602) AD wherein he has been styled as Srihattavijayin.

Jasnarayan was succeeded by Narayana to the Kachari throne, and subsequently by Bhimbalnarayan. The Ahom Swargadeo Pratap Singha realized the importance of allying with the Kachari and he accordingly initiated for peace. The daughter of one Charingia Sondhikoi was offered as bride to the Bhimbalnarayan. The later however, continued with his hostilities. He attacked Baghargaon within Ahom territory. To stop further raids of the Kachari, Pratap Singha established a number of villages on the frontier as a bulwark between Ahom and Kachari. This measure was considered to be more effective than rigid walls or ramparts.

The Dimasa Raja Bhimbalnarayan died in 1637 AD. He was succeeded by his son Indraballabhanarayan. Immediately after his ascension, he sent emissaries with gifts to Pratap Singha and agreed to help him to fight against the Mughal invaders. But the Dimasa envoy was not properly received by the Ahom Swargadeo due to the communication gap and the bold attitude of the Dimasa ruler. The Buranjis stated that the envoy came to the Ahom court through Raha

43 S.K Barpujari, (ed) op.cit. p.50.
44 Ibid, p. 51.
45 S.K Bhuyan, (ed) op. cit. p. (xi).
and Kaliabor, an alternate road, avoiding the usual route through Marangi along the Dhansiri valley, 'which was depopulated and overgrown with deep jungles'.

In 1644, Indraballabhanarayan was succeeded by Birdarphanarayan. Soon after his ascension to the throne, he tried to renew friendly relations with the Ahom. The Ahom Swargadeo was once again offended by the overconfidence of the Kachari Raja. The Ahom considered the Kachari Raja to be a protected one and as such the later had no right to write a letter to the Ahom Swargadeo as an independent Raja. Birdarphanarayan took strong objection of the term ‘protected’ but when the Ahom Swargadeo promised to offer him an Ahom princess in marriage, the Kachari Raja withdrew his objection. However, his relations with the Ahom did not improve. In 1660, Jayadhvj Singha warned Birdarphanarayan that he would face serious consequences unless he sent envoys to the Ahom court. It is mention worthy that, when Mirjumla invaded Assam in 1662, the Ahom were defeated in several battles. In this crucial phase, Morangi Khowa Gohain took refuge in the Kachari state.

In 1663, when Chakradhavaj Singha ascended the throne after the death of his brother Jayadhvj Singha, he sent envoys to the Kachari Raja and demanded the transportation of Morangi Khowa Gohain. The Kachari Raja paid no attention to this demand. But after a gap of four years he restored cordial relations with the Ahom by sending envoys with complimentary messages. These peaceful relations continued till his death in 1684.

46 S.K Barpujari, (ed) op.cit. p. 52.
However, with the death of Birdarphanarayan the cordial relations between the Ahom and the Dimasa changed. The dispute also came into limelight during the period of Garurdhvaj, the son of Birdarphanarayan. When Garurdhvaj ascended the throne he dispatched the message to the Borphukan at Raha demanding usual congratulatory envoys from the Ahom Swargadeo. But he was reminded that it was Garurdhvaj's duty to send envoys with letters to the Ahom Swargadeo. But Garurdhvaj refused to do so. This affected the relation between the two rulers and till his death the relations did not show any improvement. He died in 1695.

After his death, his sons, Makaradhvaj and Udayaditty, ruled for a few months but their reign was uneventful. However, their brother Tramadhvaj's reign was regarded as an important chapter of Dimasa history. During this period the Dimasa Kachari Rajas of Maibang, declared themselves as independent sovereign. This was proved in the numismatic records. Dimasa Raja Bhimdarpharayan issued a golden coin where it was said that he ruled the territory in 1630 AD. Indraballabhnarayan and Birdarphanarayan also issued gold and silver coins.

Due to the Mughal invasions and the internal conflicts, the Ahom rulers could not pay due attention towards Kachari state. Taking full advantage of the situation, Tramadhvaj, declared himself as independent. The Ahom Swargadeo Rudra Singha could not tolerate this situation. Therefore he dispatched two Ahom armies in 1706 to invade the Kachari state. One army was dispatched to

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48 Ibid, p. 25.
the valley of the Kopili through Raha. The Kachari met with defeat and the capital of Maibang was occupied. Tramadhvaj left Maibang and took refuge at Khaspur, in the Cachar plains. Khaspur subsequently became the new capital of the Kachari. Tramadhvaj sent an appeal to the Jayantia King Ram Singha for help. In the meantime, the Ahom were compelled by diseases to return to their Kingdom. Before their departure, they demolished the brick-fort at Maibang. As the Ahom had left Maibang, the Jayantia King regarded it as an opportunity to annex the Kachari state. The Jayantia King managed to capture Tramadhvaj and kept him as a prisoner in Jayantiapur. Tramadhvaj then sent a letter to the Ahom Swargadeo Rudra Singha, seeking apology and praying for his assistance in releasing him from imprisonment. The armies of Rudra Singha attacked and conquered Jayantiapur in April, 1708. The Ahom forces could release Tramadhvaj from the prison. Along with Ram Singha, Tramadhvaj was placed before the Rudra Singha.51

At that time Rudra Singha camped at Biswnath where he was received in a grand Durbar. In the first Durbar on April 15, 1708 the Kachari Raja was embarrassed and made to offer his surrender. The Ahom Swargadeo received Tramadhvaj. The Borbarua narrated the state of affairs of the detention of the Kachari Raja. Rudra Singha explained the reason why the campaign had to be undertaken. He pointed out that the Kachari Raja had forgotten his traditional relationship of thapita-sanchita. In submission Tramadhvaj earnestly swore to be a loyal tributary forever and offered a yearly tribute of two elephants, two horses and forty servitors. Tramadhvaj had to cede the territory from Jamunamukh to the

51 Ibid, p. 108.
Buriganga of Kopili-Jamuna valley along with its amenities and products in gold, pearls, elephant’s tusks etc. Rudra Singha declared him to be his son. At the second Durbar on April 19 1708, Tramadhvaj was allowed to return to his state with several presents for himself and his queen.\textsuperscript{52}

After the return to his own capital, Tramadhvaj died. At that time, Suradarpa the son of Tramadhvaj was a minor of nine years. Rudra Singha deputed his officers to the Dimasa state for installing Suradarpa in the throne. However British official record suggests that in compliance with the wishes of queen Chandraprabha, Suradarpa was elected by the forty Sengphong. The Queen Mother acted as regent till Suradarpa came of age to rule the state.\textsuperscript{53} Suradarpa became the Raja and assumed the title \textit{Narayana}. Suradarpanarayans reign was famous for the literary and cultural activities.\textsuperscript{54}

Harichandranarayan (1720-28) became the Raja of Maibang after the death of his father Suradarpanarayan. He issued two gold coins in 1720 and 1721 AD. Another inscription was found in a stone temple at Maibang which confirmed the name of Harichandranarayan.\textsuperscript{55}

Ramachandra became the next Raja in 1728 AD. The Bengali chronicle \textit{Kalicharaner-Upakhyan} was composed during his reign in 1735 AD. Ramachandra married a Manipuri Princess and this fact has been revealed in

\textsuperscript{52} H.K Barpujari, (ed) \textit{op. cit.} p. 276.

\textsuperscript{53} S.K Barpujari, (ed) \textit{op. cit.} p. 57.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{loc. cit.}

\textsuperscript{55} J.B Bhattacharjee, \textit{op.cit.p}124.
Vijoy Panchali written in the eighteenth century in Manipur. He was a poet and he composed the *Malsi* songs in Bengali.⁵⁶

Kritichandra succeeded Ramachandra in 1736. He had issued two *Sanads* to appoint an *Uzir* as the Governor of plains Cachar. The first *Sanad* appointed one Maniram, son of Chand Laskar of Borkhola village as *Uzir* and the second *Sanad* empowered the *Uzir* with magisterial and Zamindari power. As a result of these appointments by Kritichandra, the Dimasa dominance in plains Cachar became powerful.⁵⁷ Kritichandra was succeeded by his son Gopichandranarayan (1745-57). During his reign the Dimasa state was fairly large and prosperous. Gopichandrer Panchali composed in the third year of his reign highlights all details about his coronation and administration. The Panchali reiterates that Gopichandranarayan was son of Kritichandra and grandson of Ramachandra.⁵⁸ Gopichandranarayan was a benevolent ruler. He adopted various welfare measures for the benefit of his subjects. Floods in Cachar were a regular feature that brought misery to his subjects, more particularly the peasant population. He introduced the *Borak Puja* for propitiating the Barak River and it is said that as there was no flood after this worship, and because of this, his popularity grew. Besides bringing about internal peace and prosperity he maintained diplomatic relations with the neighbouring states. Gopichandrer Panchali states that he conquered the land of the Kukis and appointed them Raja and *Mantri*.⁵⁹

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⁵⁷ Ibid, p.126.
Gopichandranarayan also encouraged trade and commerce. The existences of large markets in the border of the adjoining states indicate lucrative trade and commerce. These markets were frequented by merchants from Burma, China, and Bengal and also by the Europeans. Trade with Bengal was through water-route. The Baishya community received royal patronage and this encouraged them to maintain trade relations with the neighbouring states of Manipur, Tripura and Bengal. Another class of people, the artisan’s viz. Komar, Kumar, Yogi, Sutradhar greatly prospered as a result of the growing trade and commerce.⁶⁰

During this period, the Dimasa state acquired great significance, particularly in respect of state formation, territorial expansion and land settlement. The state formation process was initiated and strengthened by descent of divine origin. The Raja emerged as the head of the state and he was helped in his administration by the ministers called Patra and Bhandari. The head of the council of ministers and other important state officials were from the Dimasa tribe. Each division of the tribe called Sengphong, sent a representative to the royal court called Mel. The numbers of Sengphong, however, increased in due course of time.⁶¹

Sengphong, the male clan and Julu or Jadi, the female clan are most important social aspects of Dimasa people. These Sengphong and Julu or Jadis turned into a new shape in Maibang state. According to the oral tradition, the first Sengphong and Julu names were created in Dimapur. At first, seven Sengphong

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 60.
⁶¹ J. B Bhattacharjee, Social and Polity formation pre-colonial Tribal North East, p. 145.
and seven Julus were constituted. Then it was increased to twelve. At Maibang, the number increased even more.\textsuperscript{62}

This is a commonly accepted view. But question arises regarding numbers of the Julu or Jadis. It is said that when Dimapur was the capital of the Dimasa, there were only seven Petri-clans and no matri-clan among them. The numbers of Petri clans became 12 when the capital was shifted to Maibang.\textsuperscript{63}

If it is so, then what was the reason behind the emergence of Julu or Jadis? Danda maintains that when the Dimasa migrated to Maibang area, the region was already surrounded by Naga, Kuki and other local tribes. At this juncture a few Dimasa men married women from other communities and accepted them into their fold. In order to discourage this sort of union the then Dimasa Raja convened an assembly of the Dimasa women and introduced the matri clan system for them. Then by a proclamation the Raja declared any marriage between a Dimasa man and women not from Jadi or matri clan, as illegal. As the neighbouring tribes had no matri clans or Jadi system, Dimasa Raja put a check to unobstructed marriage outside the tribe.\textsuperscript{64}

The economic development was another important characteristic of Maibang state. This process had accelerated the state formation process. The Dimasa took to plough cultivation in the plains and the Jamuna valley contributed immensely towards the prosperity of the Kingdom. In the hills they practiced the primitive method of Jhum. \textit{Gopichandra Panchali}, the Bengali chronicle written in Cachar

\textsuperscript{62} N. Hagier, \textit{op.cit.} p. 68.
\textsuperscript{63} D. Danda, \textit{op.cit.} p.49.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, p.49.
in 1670 Saka (1748 AD), describes the peasants of Davaka as the children of Laxmi (Hindu goddess of wealth). It states that the area was well connected with North Cachar, Manipur, Naga Hills, Assam and Jayantia and through Kopili route with Sylhet and Cachar valley. A considerable amount of trade passed through this area. It also mentions that Jenkins and Pemberton, who visited this area in the early years of the nineteenth century, 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.65

**In the field of art and architecture** the Dimasa state in Maibang made its mark. Some remnants of Maibang town are still observable. The city had a brick wall, which was demolished by the Ahom forces in the year 1706. Dimasa Rajas also constructed numerous temples in Maibang. Two stone pillars with some inscriptions are found lying on the ground at the temple site. There is also a stone wheel at Maibang. The rock-cut temple carved in the year 1727 as per inscriptions on it, is attributed to the reign of Harichandranarayan, who was described as Lord of Hirimba.66 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.67

The phase of Dimasa history with Maibang as its capital witnessed considerably cultural development and prosperity. This is well reflected in the Dimasa folklore

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67 Ibid, p.28.
and folksongs. One such folksong is *Maibangma Haigarbani*, which literally means ‘on leaving the great Maibang’. It is a song in eulogy of Maibang, the historical Kingdom of Dimasa. It is also a song of nostalgia because it recalls the days of prosperity and bounty which was lost later. This folksong goes this way:

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 of 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.68

The Koch prince Chilarai invaded the Maibang state of Dimasa in 1562. After defeating the Dimasa Raja Durlavhnarayan, he marched towards the plains of Cachar. The Cachar was ruled by the Tripura King. Chilarai met the Tripuri forces at Lengkhai. Though he had lost his general Bhimbal Patra at the battle field, he could win the battle. Chilarai killed the Tripura King along with 18,000 Tripuri soldiers. As a mark of the conquest, Chilarai erected a sword and a bamboo in opposite direction. The Kingdom was merged with the Koch Kingdom and Gohain Komal, the brother of Chilarai deputed as the viceroy of Cachar. Gohain Komal assumed the name of Narayana following his elder brother Naranarayan. The Koch forces were constituted with the soldiers of Neli,

Gova and Kabi. These soldiers were called Dewan, and which later became known as Dehan. The Koch forces established its capital at Brahmapur (Khaspur). Gohain Komal invited the Kamrupee Brahmins of Kasyap Gotra (clan) in Yojurvedic cult from the Tikal River to Khaspur. These Brahmans were appointed as the royal priest. He also appointed some Koch as Deuri, Devagrihi and Sebaits. Shyama, Kachakanti, Ranbuali, Andheri, Chandai, Mal, Bairabi were the principal goddesses of the Dehans.

However, the successor of Gohain Komal was very weak. The autocratic rule aggravated revolt, which resulted in the death of the Raja. Meanwhile a portion of the Dehan Kingdom was annexed by the Dimasa King Tramadhvaj who established his domination at Khaspur. But a portion of Khaspur and its neighbouring places were ruled by the Dehan rulers known as Senapati. Chronologically the Senapati dynasty consisted of Udit—Bijoy—Dhir—Mahendra—Ranjit—Narashingha—Bhim Singha Senapati—Kanchani.

Bhim Singha Senapati had no offspring. So, he gave his daughter Kanchani to Dimasa prince Laxmichandra as a bride. After the wedlock Laxmichandra settled himself in Khaspur. Approximately in the year 1745 AD, prince Laxmichandra had married Kanchani, the daughter of Dehan King. He established a Rajbari at

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70 loc.cit.
71 loc.cit.
72 loc.cit.
Khaspur in plains Cachar. After few years, Raja Harichandra left Maibang and came to Khaspur. 73

Hence it is still a matter of controversy as to whether it was Gopichandranarayan who ruled between 1745-57 or was it Harichandra as stated.

This view is supported by several scholars of repute. However another version has it that, Dimasa Raja Tramadhvaj died at Khaspur in 1708. His minor son Suradarpanarayan became Raja with the help of Ahom soldiers. However there is no mention of this child Raja in the Ahom chronicles and as such it is not known, whether he was installed as the Raja at Khaspur or Maibang. As mentioned earlier, when the Ahoms invaded Maibang, Tramadhvaj took shelter at Khaspur. But it is not definite as to during whose rule the capital of Dimasa state had its jurisdiction in Cachar or that whether Khaspur was also included in the Dimasa state at that time.

There is another version of Dimasa Rajas marriage with Tripuri princess. This version is almost same as that of Dehan princes. According to C.A Soppit,

One of the Kachari princes of the royal family quarrelled with the then reigning king Dharmadhvaj. The prince was accused of aspiring to the throne. As a consequence he was banished to the Tipperah kingdom along with his followers. There he either married into the reigning family or subsequently became king or he was adopted by the people. 74

73 Ibid,p.61.
74 B. N Bordoloi, op. cit. p. 27.
Soppit based his argument on the fact that the ruling Maibang family and the Hill Tripura were closely associated. Soppit is of the opinion that the Tripuri King did not offer Cachar to the Kachari Raja as a present. Moreover the Kachari Rajas had faced much difficulty in collecting revenue from the settlers bordering Sylhet. Soppit is therefore, of the opinion that Kachari Raja occupied Cachar from the Tripura King. 75

**The aggrandizement policy of the Jayantia King was a cause for the shifting of the capital from Maibang to Khaspur.** In 1745 the Ahom Swargadeo Pramotta Singha was told by his Buragohain (Prime Minister) that Jayantia had failed to respect the terms of the agreement concluded during Rudra Singha’s reign. In 1768 Chattra Sing of Jayantia led an expedition against Cachar. 76

Therefore the threat of Jayantia King forced the Dimasa to shift their capital from Maibang to Khaspur. Moreover, the destruction of Maibang by the Ahom forces in 1706 and Tramadhvaj asylum at Khaspur prepared enough ground for the shifting of capital from Maibang to Khaspur. The shifting of the capital was in various phases. It had started during the reign of Tramadhvaj and it was completed towards the end of 1750.77

Khaspur became the new hub of Dimasa history. Like Dimapur and Maibang, Khaspur occupied a well-known place among the Dimasa. According to Bhattacharjee the final stage of the state formation was completed with the occupation of Khaspur. This stage was marked by two features: *sanskritization*

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75 loc. cit.
77 B.N Bordoloio, *op. cit.* p. 28.
(Brahmanical Hindu) of the royal family and aristocracy and second, the large-scale use and patronisation of Bengali language and literature.\textsuperscript{78}

The members of the Dimasa royal family and the aristocracy had shifted themselves along with the capital. The Brahman priest solemnized the Dimasa aristocracy as Barman of Khatriya rank and offered the sacred thread. The Dimasa began to practice Brahmanical rituals along with their traditional belief and practice. The Sanskritisation process was a strong social phenomenon in Cachar plains. This process was patronised by none other than the Dehan Koch Kings from the time of Chilarai. The Koch worshipped Sakta goddess Kamakhya. Naturally the Dehans of Cachar followed the Sakta cult. Like the other tribes, they offered sacrifices to the gods and spirits, but Brahmanical Hindu religion had a greater impact upon them. The Assamese Brahmins who came with Chilairai were very particular in preserving the Sakta religious identity of the Koch. Under their influence the Dehan rulers of Cachar were systematizing to the Hindu faith. They also propagated the same to the people of Cachar who constituted mainly of the lower castes.\textsuperscript{79} Chatterjee pointed out that the Kanva branch of the Yajurvedic Brahmans from Assam who formed a colony in Cachar during the rule of Dehan chiefs were also the first trained priests to impart religious directives to the people according to the Vedic rites. He states:

Though the credit of Sanskritization goes to Queen Chandraprabha of the Haidma dynasty the contributions of the Dehan in this regard was no less insignificant. The Dehan were the trail blazer in introducing the Hindu religious precepts of the mainland Cachar.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} J.B Bhattacharjee, \textit{op. cit.} pp. 149-150.

\textsuperscript{79} S. Chatterjee, \textit{A Socio Economic History of South Assam}, Jaipur, 2000, p.334.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{loc. cit.}
The Dimasa-Koch-Dehan matrimonial relation played the cohesive role in the process of sanskritization at Khaspur. Therefore the Dimasa Rajas had accepted that process and even identified themselves in their newly given identity Barman of Khatriya rank.

Harichandra II (1757-1772) was the successor of Gopichandranarayan. Harichandra II was regarded as Sondhikari in Ahom Buranjis. During the period of Ahom Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singha (1751-69) he was called to the Ahom court. As Harichandra II refused, Rajeshwar Singha sent an armed force under Kritichandra Borbarua. Barbarua marched through Raha. Kachari Raja Sondhikori surrendered before Barbarua along with the Manipuri King Krishnachandra. Harichandra had started the construction of the Khaspur city. He also constructed the palace complex and the Ranachandi temple at Khaspur. He undertook the responsibility for the preservation of the Kachakanti temple constructed by the Dehan Kings at Udharband. The two stone inscriptions at Khaspur confirmed the constructions of the royal palace and excavation of a big tank.

Harichandra devoted himself to religious activities. He paid no interest to the state dealings. Rather he was leading a life of an ascetic by spending his time in religion and meditation. Thus he was popularly known as Baul Raja* meaning a

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* The Dimasa Dictionary *Dimasa Bhasar Bharal* by N.N Baruah and Anglo Dimasa Grammar & Dictionary by R.R Barman (ed) does not mention this term Baul. It is a Bengali word (*Sansad Bangla Abhidhan*, p. 482) meaning one who is free from religious dogma.
moody king in Dimasa terminology. Later he abdicated in favour of his cousin Laxmichandra who died after a very brief reign without leaving any issue.\textsuperscript{83}

Krishnachandranarayan, who ascended the throne in 1773, was the most important Dimasa Raja at Khaspur. He too was a religious person from his childhood. He paid more attention to religious activities, than to the day to day affairs of the state. The process of sanskritization of Dimasa Rajas had reached its fullest stage during his reign.

Although the Dimasa Raja had been admitted into the Hindu fold, they were not given equal status in the caste-Hindu society. Even the Brahmans and the other high castes would not take water from them. It is referred that one day Krishnachandra invited the Bormajumder of Bikrampur and asked him to take either the sword or glass of water, which the Raja had placed before him. The Bormajumder took the sword and said that this sword would protect his caste. The Raja felt insulted. He invited an assembly of the Brahmans to suggest the way of getting a proper position in the Hindu social fold. The Brahmans advised the Raja to perform the \textit{Hiraynagarva} ceremony in 1790. Accordingly, Raja Krishnachandra along with his brother Govindrachandra and the royal aristocracy entered the body of the gold plated statue of a cow. After emerging from the cow they were declared to have taken rebirth as pure Hindu of the \textit{Khatriya} caste.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{83} loc. cit
\textsuperscript{84} U. C Guha, \textit{op. cit.} p. 72.
After the ceremony the Brahmans divided the gold plate among themselves. They were treated to a feast at the Raja’s expenses. In the feast, Raja Krishnachandra and Govindrachandra had to serve water to the Brahmans. The local traditions suggest that many of the Dimasa got admission to the fold of caste Hindu society though such ceremonies. However it is certain about their *Khatriya* status in the fold of caste Hindu society. There are evidences that the Brahmans who took water from Dimasa were charged with deterioration and contamination and called ‘Cachari-Brahman’. Even the intermarriage between the two sections of the Brahmans was rejected.  

Shortly after Krishnachandra ascended the throne, two *Pirs* attempted to establish their power in Khaspur. One *Pir* called Fherudupi reached the western border with a massive army. The royal army was not adequate to defend against the *Pir*’s army. He had no option but to depart for North Cachar. Many Hindu subjects took refuge at Srihatta and in the forest area for fear of being transformed into Islam to a large extent. Krishnachandra appealed to the British Company for military assistance. The Company sent Kalyan Sing to suppress the *Pir* from Srihatta. After expelling the *Pir*, Kalyan Sing attempted to set up himself in Cachar. But with the help of the Collector of Srihatta the attempt was obstructed. This incident took place in between 1799-1800. Another *Pir* attempted to penetrate Khaspur through Bhuban Pahar but failed and the *Pir* left Tripura through Hailakandi.  

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86 U. C Guha, *op. cit.* p.73.
Krishnachandra became involved in a conflict with the Ahom Swargadeo. During the Moamoria Revolt, he gave shelter to a large number of Ahom subjects. Dembra of the Dimasa territory turned into a safe haven for the Moamoria rebels. Bijoy Bormura Gohain, grandfather of Swargadeo Purandar Singha joined the ranks of the rebels. In a letter of 1795 AD the Ahom Swargadeo wrote to Krishnachandranarayan,

If Bormura, the fugitives and the Moamarias are not restored the consequences will be seen with your own eyes. \(^87\)

The Kachari Raja replied in reassuring terms:

From the moment when Rudra Singha established paternal relationship attended by all the solemnity of a sacred covenant by seating Siva Singha Raja on his right thigh and Tramadhvaj Raja on his left, at the holy site of Biswanath after having rescued Tramadhvaj from among his enemies who were no other than his own kith and kin, the uninterrupted friendship between the two kingdom has flowed as it were, in the majestic pace of Ganges. \(^88\)

However the hostilities continued, till Ahom general Haripada Dekaphukan defeated Krishnachandra and his Moamoria allies in a battle at the mouth of the Kolang River. \(^89\)

Influenced by Hindu Vedic religion, Krishnachandra involved him in religious conduct. He constructed temples, excavated tanks etc. The Soner Mandir, temple

\(^88\) Ibid, p. (xiv).
\(^89\) loc. cit.
of Khaspur was an important construction of Krishnachandra. He granted Devattor and Brahmattor lands to the Sebaits. He also granted Niskar land to Brahmins like Gopinath Sirumoni, Atmaram Bhattacharyya etc. Despite his patronisation of Saiva and Sakta faith, his contribution towards Vaishnavaite faith was also mention worthy. His marriage with Manipuri princes Induprava led him towards the Vaishnavaite faith. After his acceptance of Vaishnavism, he undertook a number of pilgrimages to holy places like Navadhip, Varanasi, Mathura Prayaga, Haridwar etc. He studied Sanskrit as well as Bengali and acquired sufficient expertise. His composition of Shyama Sangeet, Rasalelamrita, Vasanta Bihar and Sri Gobinda Kirtan are best specimens of his poetic art.

The Vaishnavaite movement of Sankardev also attracted Dimasa Raja Krishnachandra. He took Soron (religious verdict) from Bishnudev Goswami, the Satradhikar of Dakhinpat Satra. While Bishnudev Goswami camped at Debar Satra of Jakhalabandha at Kaliabar, Krishnachandra had gone there. He participated in religious dialogue with Satradhikar. Being attracted by the principles of Vaishnavism, he became a disciple of Satradhikar. He donated 2090 Bighas of Debottor land to Satadhikar for establishment of a Satra institution in the bank of river Kopili and Haria. Accordingly in 1795, (1717 Saka) the institution was established and became famous as Dakhinpat-Kachari Satra. The Kachari-Dimasa subjects were highly influenced by the Vaishnavism and left their traditional process of worship. Thus Krishnachandra played a

91 Ibid, p.137.
pivotal role in spreading the Vaishnavism and contributed towards the assimilation of the Dimasa into the Assamese society.\textsuperscript{92}

Before the accession of Krishnachandra, Cachar never had faced any threat from neighbouring Kingdoms. The influential political relation with the Ahoms might have protected the Dimasa from the hostile neighbours. However, during the time of Krishnachandra, the Burmese aggression became a security threat for the Ahom, Dimasa and Manipuri. Internal political turmoil turned the Ahom into a militarily weak force. Thus the Ahoms lost their influence on the Dimasa. Moreover, queen Chandraprava, devised the policy of living under the powerful Ahom. since her father was an important member of the Ahom court of Rudra Singha. As a result, she could earn the protection from Ahom. However, relinquishing the duties of protecting the frontiers to the overlord directly affected the military strength of Cachar. Moreover, living a life of comfort, the Dimasa Rajas could not apprehend any forthcoming danger. Therefore, when Cachar was attacked by the invaders, the Dimasa Raja had to retreat towards the hills. Krishnachandra had to leave his capital completely defenceless in the face of several threats. Moreover, his marriage with the Manipuri prince, Induprava perplexed his sufferings. He failed to check the political aspiration of his in-laws who became a part of the royal household.\textsuperscript{93}

Govindrachandra succeeded his brother Krishnachandra in 1813 and ruled the state till his death. He had to face several internal and external pressures. The attacks of Manipuri prince and the uprising of Kohidhan and his son Tularam


\textsuperscript{93} S. Chatterjee, \textit{op.cit.} p.4.
was a remarkable one. Due to these factors he had to abandon his territory several times. Moreover external threats like Burmese aggression compelled him to seek help from the British authority. The Burmese policy of imperial expansion led to the desertion of the Company’s policy of laissez faire.\textsuperscript{94}

On 6 March 1824 David Scott, Agent to the Governor General in North East Frontier entered into an agreement with Govindrachandra at Bardarpur. By this agreement Govindrachandra had to place his country under British protection and the Company undertook to protect him from external aggression. The Company would arbitrate in case of any differences that may arise between Govindrachandra and other states. Considering the aid promised by the Company, the Raja agreed to pay an annual tribute of rupees ten thousand. The Company also promised to provide for the maintenance of the Manipuri princess.\textsuperscript{95}

In 1827, Govindrachandra shifted his capital to Haritikar, on the banks of the Boro-Bokro or Barak, where the river divides into two, the Surama and Kushiara. The Haritikar, now bordering Bangladesh, was the last bastion of Dimasa Rajas in Cachar also known as the Rajar-Tilla.\textsuperscript{96}

Govindrachandra tried to revive the economic condition of his state by distributing \textit{title} to his subjects on purchase. The Brahmans, Kayastha, Heedle, Patani, Nath etc, Hindu and Muslim subjects had acquired four ‘titles’ such as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{94} S.K Barpujari, (ed) \textit{op. cit.} p. 70.
\item \textsuperscript{95} loc. cit.
\item \textsuperscript{96} V. Kemprai, \textit{Haritikar- the last bastion}, in Hudang, Vol, issue. 6.
\end{itemize}
Choudhary, Majumdar Laskar and Bhuyan. The costs of these titles were Rs. 100, Rs. 50, Rs. 25 and Rs. 15 respectively. The Raja also issued a *Farman* by mentioning the names of the title holders. After two years, he issued an order called *Avaya* too many people. Such departmental titles were like Bara Khelma, Majumdar, Laskar and Bar Bhuyan, Suta Khelma, Nader Majumdar, Laskar and Bhuyan etc. Through these efforts, he enhanced the royal treasury.\(^97\)

He also curtailed the various expenditures by reducing the salary and privileges of his officers. But his efforts were in vain. Raja Govindrachandra had to appeal to the Company authorities to grant him reduction of tribute for two years 1825-26 and 1826-27. Due to the support of David Scott, the petition of the Raja was granted but with many conditions. The most important condition was that he was to construct a road across his territory facilitating communication between Sylhet and Manipur. The Calcutta authorities also tried to find out from the Raja whether he was willing to hand over Cachar to the Company as he was getting old, physically weak and with no heir.\(^98\)

During the reign of Govindrachandra, he appointed Kohidhan, a domestic servant of Krishnachandra as the in-charge of the hilly tract of Dimasa state. But Kohidhan revolted to declare an independent identity and was assassinated by Govindrachandra. Then Tularam the son of Kohidhan declared himself as the

\(^97\) U. C Guha, *op. cit.* p. 84.

\(^98\) S.K Barpujari, (ed) *op. cit.* p. 72.
sovereign with a command of huge army comprising of the hill people. Govindrachandra tried to restrain Tularam, but was not triumphant. 99

There is another version regarding Tularam Senapati, which prevailed among the Dimasa of North Cachar Hills. According to this version, Tularam Senapati was not the self-styled commander. Rather he was appointed by Krishnachandra due to his heroic skill. He was allowed to launch a military voyage at his own initiative. During such an expedition at Nagaon, he is said to have met with a wild elephant. The elephant bowed down raising its trunk before Tularam. This incident was regarded as a positive signal of triumph. However, Govindrachandra took the entire incident in a different way. He opined before his brother Krishnachandra that as the wild elephant saluted Tularam, the latter would try to capture the throne in due course. He also advised the Raja to put Tularam to death. Krishnachandra did not accept his advice and revealed Govindrachandra's plan to Tularam just before his death. While Govindrachandra ascended the throne, Tularam left the Dimasa state to Sylhet. Tularam regrouped his armed forces and returned through Jayantiapur from Sylhet and affirmed his independence.100

Govindrachandra despatched a force under Karam Singh to suppress Tularam. Both the forces met at Jatinga valley, but Karam Singh failed in his mission and Tularam remained as the independent ruler in his acquired territory.

99 B. N Bordoloi, op. cit. p.32.
100 Ibid, p. 33.
In 24th April 1930, Govindrachandra was assassinated. He had no heir to succeed him. Therefore the Company authority tried to resolve the question by annexing the territory of Govindrachandra. So temporarily, Thomas Fisher, Quarter Master General of Sylhet undertook the administration of the said territory in June 1830. However, on the basis of the Company’s proclamation, several aspirants of the Cachar territory put their cases before the Company authority. Among the aspirants; Induprava claimed the right as the widowed queen. As royal inheritor, Tularam Senapati claimed the territory. The Forty Sengphong claimed for the traditional right to elect a Raja. Gangaram, the son of late Krishnachandra also claimed on behalf of a section of Dimasa. Moreover, Gambir Singh of Manipur showed his long desire on Cachar by a proposal for a grant of lease of Cachar for a period of 20 years on an annual payment of Rs 15,000 and promised means of subsistence.\footnote{Ibid, p. 76.}

After a prolonged discussion among the Company’s officials, mainly David Scott, Cracroft, Tusker and Captain Fisher and even Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton; the East India Company annexed the Cachar plain on 14 August 1832. Thus the history of the decline of the Dimasa power was underway and it was only a matter of time.

After the death of Govindrachandra, Tularam demanded the throne of Cachar before the East India Company. The Company officials had rejected Tularam’s claim over the throne of Cachar. The circumstances of Cachar compelled Tularam to sign an agreement with the British. As per the terms of the
agreement, concluded with Tularam Senapati on the 3 November under the orders of Government dated 16 October 1834 and signed by TOOLARAM SENAPUTEE and F. Jenkins, his jurisdiction was clearly delineated:

Toolaram is to hold the remainder of the country formerly in his possession, or the tract of country bounded on the west by the Dyung river and a line to be determine here after, drown from the Barc ford or the Dyung to appoint on the Jamoona river, between the cultivation of Seil Dheurenpur and Duboka and the Hajaee. (Excluding the two latter) by the Jamuna and Dyung river North, by the Dunsira river east and to the south and south-west the Naga hill and Mowheir river and he agrees to hold the above tract in dependence on the British Government and to pay a yearly tribute, for their protection of four pairs of elephants teeth, each pair to weigh 35. 102

The entire territory of Tularam Senapati covered an area of about 2160 sq miles, the capital of which was Rajapathar. He ruled this territory with the help of his son, Nakulram and Brajanath. However, he had to face both external and internal problems. The Angami Naga often raided his territory. Financial condition also deteriorated. Moreover as per the agreement with British, he received a monthly pension of Rupees fifty, but he had to pay Rs Four hundred fifty to British as an annual tribute. Saikia states that like other ruling families of then Assam, the ancestors of Tularam were also reduced to poverty. His condition was deplorable in that he had a territory but no power. 103

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103 R. Saikia, Social and Economic History of Assam 1853-1921, New Delhi, 2000, p. 29.
The Angami attack became a serious threat for Tularam. He himself could not resist the attack due to old age and infirmity. In 1844 with the endorsement of the British, Tularam entrusted the responsibly of his territory on his sons Nakulram and Brajanath. But, they too failed to resist the Angami Nagas. John Butler reported that the Nagas had attacked six times in the villages of eastern side of Mahur river. But Tularam and his sons failed to protect their own people, which resulted in their migration into British territory.¹⁰⁴

Tularam Senapati was thus totally ineffectual to defend the territory and his failure to pay tribute, sounded the death knell of his rule. Meanwhile Nakulram the son of Tularam was killed in an expedition against the Nagas. On 1853 Bivar, Junior Assistant of Nagaon was deputed to enquire into the incident. In his report Bivar recommended for seize of Tularam territory, which had failed to check the Naga attacks.¹⁰⁵

Jenkins supported Bivar’s opinion and urged the Company’s authority to annex Tularam’s territory. A.J Moffat Mills, Judge of Sadar Dewani Adalat in Calcutta also supported the view of Jenkins. Therefore, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India approved the proposal of annexation on 27th August 1853. Accordingly the territory of Tularam was finally annexed in 1854.¹⁰⁶

The British divided the entire territory into two parts. The hill section amalgamated with Cachar district and the plains were attached to Nagaon.
district. Later the hill area formed the North Cachar subdivision of Cachar and the plains, Jamunamukh *Mahal* of Nagaon district.

Bivar devised the policy of land settlement in Jamunamukh *Mahal*, with four *Mouzas* viz. *Nowmatty, Dubokamukh, Hozae and Thercho Purbat*. He appointed Bodoram Laskar, Dayaram Laskar, Bidoor Barman and Jinlur as Mauzadar’s of the *Mouzas* respectively. ¹⁰⁷

Several factors were responsible for the decline of the Dimasa state. Like the contemporary Ahom, the basic character of the Dimasa state was a feudalistic one. This feudal character of economy couldn’t resist the expansionist colonial economic forces like the British. The weak leadership of the Dimasa Rajas, mainly Krishnachandra and Govindrachandra was also responsible for the deplorable economic condition of the state. This deplorable condition led birth to the revolt of Pirs and Kohidhan. Though revolts were suppressed with the help of external assistance, but it weakened the state from within. The rise of Tularam paved the way for bifurcation of Dimasa state in Cachar. Moreover the aggression of Burmese and interference of Manipuri princes created a chaotic situation, which gave immense opportunity to the British to penetrate into Cachar. British could engage both Govindrachandra and Tularam in concluding agreements, which finally ended Dimasa state.

However, from the Sadiyal, Herembial branch to Maibang and to Khaspur, then again Haritikar, Rajapathar; Dimasa Rajas left their footprints in the society and civilization of Assam.

The British coloniser annexed the Dimasa territory in 1832 and 1854 respectively. The prospect of trade and commerce motivated the colonial administrators. They introduced a set of new revenue rules, regulations and taxation on the people. Even the introduction of the railway tract though the dense forests of Dimasa dominated areas created a new environ for the Dimasa. This environment created a climate of unrest among the tradition-bound Dimasa which led to the revolt of Sambudhan Phonglosa in 1882. The Dimasa oral tradition has clearly depicted the revolt:

Nokhasauha Aalumai lambu/Sisa mat jidu Sibayarabo paidune / Mai Rikhula, which literally means the cats are drying paddy in the sky / the Sepoys are also coming / procure and protect your paddy.\(^{108}\)

The local people were forcefully employed for construction of sub-divisional office at Gunjung and demarcation work for Assam-Bengal Railways. With a view to exploiting those people with minimum wages, the British administration turned them into opium addicts. The British officers adopted many methods of suppression and oppression. The people were forced to carry the goods and luggage of the English soldiers. Such kind of forcible acts and humiliation slowly created resentment and disgruntlement among the Dimasa. Such a treatment under the British administration led them to cry for the freedom of their motherland. The following folk songs reflected the keen desire and zeal of the Dimasa for liberating their land:

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\(^{108}\) B. Barman, *Legendary Hero Sambudhan Phonglosa* the first raising in the North East, in Hudang.
Jiniba nolaima rajiha beng / Sumuya hung gelao hungphaidu beng / Soasase Daolingkhe Khepdulao being Jiniba gajaoni rajiha being / Guphusa ha nedao nephaidu Guphusa di nedao nephaidu beng / Jiniba gajaoni rajiha beng / Demalu Haladao, Rangado Degadao, Delai Mailai-li-phainangli? Which means, what a disgraceful incident has happened in our village / the chicks are captivating the mighty Eagles / the white men are gradually occupying our soil and river / will nobody be born in our golden land that who save our country? Will our legendary heroes Demalu, Halodao, Rangadao Degadao and Delai Mailai reincarnate? 109

Sambhudhan Phonglosas early activities proved his ability as a true fighter. Witnessing the terrible condition of his people, he dedicated himself for their cause. He organised a movement to reinstate the old Dimasa state by raising the banner of revolt against the British. He also recruited a large number of dedicated youth to form a fighting force. They were given the necessary training of warfare. From among his followers he selected Mann Singh as his principal adviser and Molongthong as the subordinate commander. The Sub-divisional Officer at Gunjung issued orders to Sambhudhan to appear before his court on the basis of a complaint lodged by a person against Sambhudhan. His strong influence among the people manifested, when none could be found to serve the official notice on him. At last, a warrant of arrest was sent through a headman but to no effect. The official messenger was ordered to immediately leave Maibang.110

109 loc. cit.
Sambhudhan ignored the order of the administration. As such CA Soppit, the SDO of North Cachar sought the help of the Deputy Commissioner of Silchar, Major Boyd. On January 15, 1882 Boyd along with CA Soppit and 40 Kuki militia reached Maibang and found that the place was deserted. Sambhudhan had already informed his people about the intended operation of Major Boyd and they were asked them to evacuate the place. On that very day, Sambhudhan marched with his force to Gunjung and attacked the Sub-divisional Headquarter. The Kuki militia posted at the Sub-divisional Headquarter and Police Station fled away without any resistance. One police constable and two employees were killed in the attack. They also killed two horses. The opium storage and all the government offices of Gunjung were set on fire by Sambhudhan. This action proved the fact that the people were aware of the ill effects of opium and the motives of the Government opium policy. Then Sambhudhan marched to launching another attack against the British at Maibang. Boyd was oblivious about the incident at Gunjung. Sambhudhan, Mann Singha and Molongthong designed a new strategy for trapping Major Boyd and his force at Maibang.

As narrated by Dimasa people and eminent social workers like Hambang Bathari, a group speedily advanced from a nearby jungle dancing to the rhythms of Maduli (small Khram or drum). They advanced towards the British force without any fear as dancing troops. On seeing this Major Boyd did not apprehend any danger. He ordered his force not to fire till the situation for self-protection arose. As such the troops of Sambhudhan had the opportunity to come nearer to Boyd and his force which could not even apprehend a possible attack. The troops of Sambhudhan suddenly attacked the troops of Boyd. While defending himself,
Major Boyd suffered a serious injury on his hand by a bold sword attack by Dimasa warrior. The troops of Major Boyd immediately retaliated and killed few Dimasa warriors. The Dimasa warriors then retreated to the jungles. The troops of Boyd followed them, but returned backed for fear of being attacked by Sambhudhan. Sambhudhan was waiting near the Sainyader hill with a large number of warriors to trap the British troops, who were expected to follow the dancing warriors to the jungle. About 11 Dimasa warriors sacrificed their lives in the conflict. Injured Major Boyd was sent to Silchar for treatment. But he was died on January 30, 1882. 111

Sambhudhan despatched his chief adviser Mann Singha to Tripura to seek help and co-operation of the Tipraisa (Kok-Borok), a section of the Kachari. In his movement for liberation, Mann Singha was arrested by the British authority in Tripura. He was brought to Silchar and sentenced to life imprisonment. Mann Singha died in the Silchar jail as he refused to take food and water. Sambhudhan could not manage another movement against the British. After a year of Gunjung and Maibang encounter, he died on Feb 12, 1883, as a result of the injury he received while fleeing from the British troops. This incident brought to a close the chapter of the struggle of the Dimasa under the leadership of Sambhudhan, for the cause of their land and heritage. 112

The British colonial forces could establish its supremacy over the Dimasa dominated areas of Assam. Through its colonial administration the British

111 B. Barman, op. cit. p.15.
112 Ibid, p.16.
Government established its hegemony and ushered a new era of society, polity and economy in Assam in general and the Dimasa dominated areas in particular.

The history of the Dimasa is an important part of Assam history. History shows that the Dimasa had once ruled a vast territory from Sadiya to Khaspur. They were a great ruling power in North East for about three hundred years. During this period, their state was large and prosperous, with a significant feature of administration. Buranjis written in Tai-Ahom and Assamese, make certain reference to the Dimasa as Kachari in regard to their relation with the Ahom. They came into formal contact with the Ahom during the reign of Suhunmung alias Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) The Ahom had maintained the relation of friend and foe with the Dimasa until they shifted their capital from Maibang to Khaspur. At Khaspur the Dimasa had come into the formal contract with the Dehan, a section of the Koch. They also embraced in to the Hindu fold. The Dimasa had acquired a new social identity as Barman.

After the seizure of Assam in 1826, the British paid due attention towards the Dimasa Kingdom. After the death of last Dimasa King Govindrachandra in 1832, the British had annexed this territory in 14 August 1832, comprising the Cachar plains. The other portion of Dimasa state was governed by Tularam Senapati comprising the plains of Nagaon district, Mikir Hills, Naga Hills and Dhansiri Valley. As a result of the agreement concluded between the Tularam Senapati and the British in 16 October 1834, the formers territory was annexed in 20 July 1854. Thus, the last vestige of the Dimasa state came to an end.
However the colonial forces had to face the massive resistance from the Dimasa. The revolt of Sambhudhan Phonglosa is mention worthy in this regard. Though Sambudhan’s attempt failed, it could establish a deep mark in the Dimasa mindset. The historical background thus formed the important plank of the Dimasa nationality question, from which the Dimasa intelligentsia drew its inspiration, and used it as the basis for the legitimization of its autonomy movements.