Chapter 8

DIMASA STATE AND THE CRISIS
I. Dimasa State

The Dimasa state or *Heramba rajya* comprised of Cachar plains, north Cachar hills, parts of Nagaon - Hojai Daboka area. The Diyang-Dhansiri valley and the Jiri formed frontier with Manipur. The State had three distinct administrative positions designated on geographical basis; south (Cachar plains), north hill division and central Nagaon sections.¹

This was a tribal state formation of which ruling tribe were the Dimasa. During sanskritization, the Dimasas connected themselves with the legend of Hidimba – the wife of Bhim of the Pandavas. Thus, they also call their state Heramba rajya after the Hidimba connection.

The Dimasas belong to the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Burmese race of the Indo-Mongoloid stock. The Dimasas were also called Cacharis who were the autochtones of the valley.²

The state formation among Dimasa, perhaps started at Sadiya in early medieval period. It was probably their first attempt to build up an independent state and afterwards they were expelled from Kamrup according to their own legend.³ The existence of state is supported by the existence of a shrine of Kachai Khati, the titular deity of the Dimasa in the region. They worshipped the deity even when they established their new kingdom in Cachar. According to the legend, the founder of the Dimasa kingdom at Sadiya was a leader named Manik and his kingdom was bounded by Sadiya on the east, river Dikhou on the west, Dihing river on the north and Kendugiri on the south. From Sadiya the Dimasa migrated to Dimasapur (Dimapur in present Nagaland), where they developed the next phase of their state structure.

³ Ibid., p. XV,-XVI
When Ahoms were arriving in the Brahmaputra valley in the 13th century, the Dimasa capital was at Dimasapur and the kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra Valley, from Dikhou river to Kallang and also included the Dhansiri valley and north Cachar hills. The *buranjis* mentioned that the Dimasa king Khushkhara was defeated and killed by the Ahoms in war following which Dersongpha son of Khorapha ascended the throne. He made peace with the Ahoms by acknowledging the Ahom suzerainty. However, subsequently he was also defeated and killed in 1536 AD, when he was making attempts to regain ceded territories from the Ahoms. The Ahoms invaded and sacked Dimasapur, the king fled but he was followed, captured and put to death. After this invasion the Dimasas deserted Dimasapur and retreated further south and established the new capital at Maibong.

The state building efforts in Maibong was in crucial phase in the Dimasa state formation, because here the sanskritization of the Dimasa people as well as the state had begun and it became evident as the son of Dersongpha ascended the throne by assuming a

---

sanskritized name Nirbhaynarayan and appointed his guru as dharmadi, which become eventually an important institution of the state.  

The Dharmadi advised the king on all important matters and was interpreter of the laws of shastras. The guru and the brahmins courtiers invented the Mahabharata connection of the Dimasa to consolidate the sanskritization process. It was contrived that the Dimasa ancestors were descendant of Bhima – the Pandava hero of the epic Mahabharata who had married a kirata princess Hirimba and from union had a son Ghatotkacha. The genealogy of Nirbhayanaayan was thus traced to Bhima. The Brahmins and state officials who maintained the records added names of ascending rulers from the time to time, at the time of coronation. The Dimasa state, since then called Heramba Rajya as it is also known from the coins, inscription and records.

Another significant development was the process of Hinduisation of the royal family and the aristocracy as well as transformation of titular deity Kachaikanti to Ranachandi. The rajas of Heramba rajya had issued coins to mark coronation, pilgrimage and victory and several such coins are found. There were some

---

8 Ibid., pp. 139-40.
9 Ibid., pp. 140-41.
inscription too. The earliest known Dimasa coin was issued by Meghanarayan in 1576 AD on the occasion of the erection of gateway to capital complex at Maibong.\textsuperscript{10} An inscription found in a rock cut temple at Maibond dated 1721 AD and was issued by Harishchandra Narayan to commemorate the construction of the temple by him dedicated to Ranachandi.

These kings had revived a standing army of which heir apparent (\textit{Yuvraj}) used to be commander-in-chief. The main column of the army was called Chandipaltan. The Dimasa raja also succeeded for some time in imposing vassalage over the \textit{Dimarua} State situated in Kamrupa and clashed for its control with the Ahoms and Jaintia State.\textsuperscript{11}

The most formidable challenge, however, came from the expanding Koch State under Naranarayan (16\textsuperscript{th} century). Durlabnarayan – the \textit{raja} of Dimasa State of Mibond was defeated by Chilarai in 1662 AD – the brother of Naranarayan and compelled the defeated king to pay a tribute of 70,000 gold \textit{muhar} and 60 elephants to the ruler of Koch-Behar. Chilarai also wrested Cachar in the Barak Valley from the \textit{raja} of Tripura and established a Koch principality in the area. But when the sultans of Bengal attacked Koch-Behar, the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 141-42.}
\end{footnotes}
Dimasa raja asserted his independence by taking advantage of the invasion and Uditnarayan laid the foundation of independent Khaspur State in Barak Valley.\textsuperscript{12}

On the other side, at Maibong the Dimasa State blossomed into a full fledged structure and the \textit{raja} emerged as the head of the state and he was assisted in the administration by the ministers called \textit{patras} and \textit{bhandari}.\textsuperscript{13} The Chief of the Council of Ministers was known as \textit{Barbhandari}. The ministers and other state officials were recruited from the Dimasa tribe. The each clan and division of the tribe called Sengfong sent representative to royal assembly called \textit{mel}.\textsuperscript{14}

An analysis of the function of the clan suggest that the Hindu caste system made deep impact into Dimasa society resulting in social stratification. The forty \textit{sengfong} where five were royal clans, one each were supplying the ministers, ambassador, store-keeper and correspondence, cook, gardener and barber respectively and two were supplying artisans and craftsmen and the rest belonged to the common clan.\textsuperscript{15} However, some of them in course of time developed professional specialisation like \textit{Songyabsa} (king’s cook), \textit{Nyablaisa}

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 143-44.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 148-154.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}
(fishermen), Nabidasa (hunters), Bengyasa (servants, stares and outcastes), and Sergasa (blacksmith). There were eight Dimasa families attached to the court to perform sacrifices and the chief priest was known as Alu Raja and was the spiritual advisor of the king.\textsuperscript{16}

Due to the emergence of the caste system there also emerged Brahmin within the clan, as the Hindu Brahmins refused to perform all the rituals, thus, the Dimasas evolved their own Brahmanical caste called the Barmans which is, obviously corruption of the word Brahman and any Dimasa could become a Brahmin on payment of a certain amount and performance of a ritual.\textsuperscript{17}

The process led to the emergence of hierarchical social order and new clan and deity came into existence. Each Sengfong was sending a representative to the mel and in the mel mandap (council hall) representative were given seats according to status as per the sengfong one represented.\textsuperscript{18}

This assembly became very powerful organisation in the state politics and it had at times even the authority to elect the raja and at least on one occasion, when Raja Suradarp Narayan died without son.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 146-147.
\textsuperscript{17} C A Soppit, A Historical and Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes in the North Cachar Hills, Shillong, 1885, pp. 25-48.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 9, see also, J B Bhattacharjee, op. cit., p. 147.
His mother Dhandraprabha nominated Kirti Chandra Narayan of the royal clan to the throne with the approval of Sengfong.\textsuperscript{19}

In course of time the authority of the \textit{Raja} was firmly established over the tribe and they further consolidated their position by entering into matrimonial alliances with the royal families of Ahom, Koch, Manipur and Tripura States.

\textbf{II. Dimasa State in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century}

The final phase of state formation started with the acquisition of a portion of Barak Valley which was certainly an addition to resources which had strengthened the state’s administrative structure. The Bengali population of the plain in the Valley remain the subject and peasants. \textit{Raja} Kirtichandra Narayan (1735-45) had appointed Maniram Laskar from the place called Borkhola as the \textit{vazir} for the administration of justice and collection of revenue as it is evident from the \textit{sanad}.\textsuperscript{20}

The self governing \textit{khels} of Bengalis of Cachar continued as an instrument of local administration. However, the \textit{dharmadi Guru} happened to be a Brahmin of the Barak Valley and was chief advisor of the \textit{raja}, besides being the sole interpreter of Hindu laws. The \textit{Raj}

\textsuperscript{19} J B Bhattacharjee, \textit{ibid.}, p. 147-150.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}
Durbar adorned by galaxy of Brahmins and they had translated some of the puranas and portion of the epics in Bengali. One of them, Bhuvaneshwar Bachaspati, a Bhattacharyya Brahmin of Sylhet was court poet in the reign of Surdarpnarayan. The Rajas used to grant Devottar and Brahmottar land grants to support the temples and Brahmins. They also encouraged settlement of artisans from Bengal in Maibong. The state formation process reached its peak during the reign of Kirtichandranarayan. He was assisted by 50 patras or ministers appointed as uzir for administration of south Cachar and Aditya was appointed to administer the central Cachar.

By the time his son Gopichandranarayan (1745-57) ascended the throne the state was fairly large and prosperous and the matrimonial relationship resulted in further enlargement of the state. Bhim Singha the Raja of Kashpur had no son and his only daughter Kanchani was married to Prince Laxmichandra of Maibong raj family, as a result the two states eventually merged into one and in 1750 the Dimasa capital shifted from Maibong to Khaspur. Around this time momentous changes had started taking place outside the Dimasa state but the changes were bound to determine the course of history in the Dimasa state as well.
In the neighbouring Bengal the declining Mughal power which paved way for the emergence of independent successor state Bengal, which too faced the crisis. But at this time emergence of colonial power – the English as an increasingly powerful force with the interventionist attitude and on the other side of the Dimasa State i.e., Manipur too was being threatened by a medieval expansionist power - the Burmese.

The Dimasa was also affected by the Moamaria rebellion of the Ahom State in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Several rebelled fled to Dimasa territory and on refusal to extradite them by the Dimasa ruler led to the conflict between Dimasa and Ahom states. In this conflict the Dimasas were defeated.23

But the Burmese threat to Manipur, led to the visit of the English East India Company’s official Captain Verelst to visit the capital of Dimasa state Khaspur. But the due to inherent weakness, the Dimasa State could not even control an adventurer Aga Muhammed Riza, who was ousted with the help of the company forces, but even some of the sepoy of the force had also occupied some part of the state which was returned only after intervention of the company.24 Obviously the Raja was incapable to protecting

23 Ibid., p. 376.
24 Ibid.
himself against the offenders. Therefore, the Dimasa State sought protection of British power on payment of expenses incurred, which was not accepted by the British power initially.

Subsequently the Dimasa State faced internal rebellion led by a table servant of the Raja, name Kohi Dan who declared himself independent. The king got him killed. But his son Tularam continued the rebellion and he received help from Jaintia Raja and his success affected the integrity of the Dimasa State.\(^{25}\)

On the face of Burmese invasions of Manipur the Manipuri Raja tended to seek refuse in Dimasa State. When Chaurjit Singha became raja of Manipur, his brother Marjit Singha with the help of Burmese ruler expelled Chaurijit to Dimasa Raja, who on denial of assistance from the Dimasa king and British company, sought help from Jaintia Raja and created disturbances in the Dimasa territory\(^{26}\) and on the other hand, Marjit Singh, the Manipur ruler invaded Dimasa state and once again British did not intervene. But interestingly Chaurijit came to the rescue of the king and they together defeated Marjit Singh. After some time due to some differences the Burmese expelled Marijit Singh, who reconciled with his brother Chaurijit Singh and created problem for the Dimasa State by occupying different parts of the

\(^{25}\) Ibid., pp. 377-78.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp. 378-379.
State. Thus, the State was in state of disintegration. But once the Burmese started claiming suzerainty over the Dimasa State the British power interfered and the state was finally incorporated into British ruled state.

\[27\] Ibid.