Chapter 4

Hinduisation of the State and Society

4.1- Introduction

The Dimasa rule at Maibang was significant as the process of state formation entered into a crucial phase mostly due to the growth of Brahmancial Hinduism.¹ For most tribals of Central India the model of state building and acculturation was the classical Hindu kingdoms of the mainland especially the various ruling Rajput lineages of Northern and North-Western India. For the tribals of North-East India especially the Dimasa rulers such model seems to have been provided by the kingdoms of Koch, Kamata, Tripura and Bengal. In this context the following observation by R.N Moshary seems significant:

The systematic and progressive Aryanisation of the Bodo people appears to have gained momentum in the seventh century A.D under the patronage of the Varman and the Salasthamba line of rulers who are believed to belong originally to Mech tribe who with the passage of time became thoroughly Hinduised. The kingdom of Kamarupa during their rule was bound by the Korotoya river in the west and hence, the western part of this kingdom was in close vicinity of the Aryan settlements in Magadha, Vaisali and Mithila etc. In this position, the kingdom of Kamarupa must have not only a close contact with the Aryans, but also have been continually receiving Hindu migrants. That was how the Varmans, the Salasthambas and other Bodo line of rulers were influenced by the Hindus and thereby became hinduised. So also their subjects who simply followed their tracks of their royal masters and protectors.²

The local states of Kamata, Ahoms, Jaintia, Manipur and Tripura came under the Hindu influence by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Dimasa royal house
was definitely influenced by these states in their process of cultural assimilation which introduced new ideals of kingship at Maibang. As far as the proximity of advanced Hindu states, their influence provided to the Dimasa state such necessary attributes of the state as an ideology, a system of power organization, a language for decrees and forms of official communication.\(^3\)

4.2- Hinduisation, terms of discourse

In line with the Hindu states of mainland India the Dimasa kings at Maibang adopted Hindu rituals and ceremonies to legitimize and enforce their claim to royal power. This has been termed by Kathleen Gough as Hinduisation. Virginius Xaxa prefers to use this term instead of Sanskritisation on the ground that in case of the tribes, climbing up the caste ladder is not the overriding concern.\(^4\) A. Eschmann and Staal prefers to use the term Hinduisation in place of Sanskritisation in respect to the tribal society where the populace were not under Sanskritic influence; Hinduisation may occur without any direct impact of either Sanskrit or Aryans. But in the context of the tribals Hinduisation is used in a generic way as opposed to tribal religions and the gradual approximation of the level of temple worship.\(^5\) Hinduisation was particularly frequent and intense in medieval times and its new institutions, the temples, became agents of Hinduisation, especially once it received royal patronage.\(^6\) Apparently, it also envisaged a Kshatriyaisation process as the case of the Ahoms, Koch and Dimasas would suggest.\(^7\)

4.3- Royal legitimation and ritual display

The ritual means of royal legitimation that was adopted during the medieval times by the Dimasa kings at Maibang were: (i) systematic and large-scale settlements of the Brahmans and their association in the royal court, (ii) the framing
of myths and genealogies by Brahmanas establishing the link of Dimasa royalty with the greater Hindu tradition which helped in strengthening and legitimizing the rule of a royal lineage (iii) adoption of Hindu titles and epithets, (iv) issue of coins and inscriptions, (v) patronage to Sanskritic languages and, (vi) ritual display which includes public displays of ostentatious religious ceremonies, transformation of tutelary deity into the Hindu pantheon, construction of temples, patronage of Hindu gods and goddesses, observance of Hindu rites and pilgrimages to Hindu holy places. In all these the Brahmanas acted as catalyst of change in the process of Hinduisation of the state and society. A beginning was made at Maibang which reshaped the paraphernalia of the state and gave the Dimasa kings a distinct status as patrons of the Hindu culture.

4.3.1- Brahmanical influence

The process of state formation and state-structure entered into its crucial phase at Maibang when the influence of Brahmanical religion made a dent into the Dimasa political system. Bengali settlements began in the Dimasa state while the capital was still at Maibang. How the Brahmanas got a strong foothold in the Dimasa state has been alluded to in legends. Tradition goes that during the course of his wanderings southwards Nirbhaynarayana under whose leadership Dimasas migrated to Maibang came under the influence of a Brahmana who predicted a good fortune. When Nirbhaynarayana was proclaimed as the Dimasa Raja he accepted the Brahmana as his Dharmadi Guru. From this time onwards the Brahmanas became the spiritual guides and obtained the title of Rajpandit. The Brahmanas exerted a strong influence upon the king. The Dharmadi Guru was always a Bengali Brahmana and acted not only as the chief advisor to the Raja but was also the interpreter of Hindu law in the state. He recited the Bhagavata in the royal court
every evening and interpreted it to the audience. Brahmanas were invited by the kings to settle down in the state. The Rajas granted devottar and brahmottar lands for the support of the temples and the Brahmanas. In the tribal areas the agriculturists were placed under the control of the religious beneficiaries, especially the Brahmanas, who began to be granted lands on a large scale from the fifth and sixth century onwards. This practice seems to have commenced from the period of Dimasa rule at Maibang. The increasing presence of the Brahmanas in the Dimasa state had a profound influence upon the Dimasa royal family who came under the influence of Hinduism. Settlement of the Brahmanas and their association with the royal court and grant of debottar and brahmottar lands helped in the propagation of the Hindu brahmanical faith in the Dimasa state. Gopichandra (1745-57) brought several Brahmana families into the state and granted them lands for their upkeep. His coronation was conducted by eleven Brahmanas according to injunction laid down in the Vedas. The increasing hold of the Brahmanas brought with it the parallel influence of Sanskrit. The religion of the Dimasas was not akin to the Hindu system. There was no distinct class of hereditary priests neither did they take upon themselves exclusively sacerdotal functions. Those were performed by elders in the family, and by the ministers of state, and high public functionaries, on great public occasions. With the increasing influence of the Brahmanas they emerged as a privileged class in the state. As the influence of the Brahmanas became stronger in the state, the process of Hinduisation of the royal house accelerated.

4.3.2- Framing of genealogy

Early medieval rulers claimed descent from the solar and lunar dynasties in order to gain antiquity and respectability for their families. This could legitimize their position in the eyes of the people. The fabrication of family trees is a striking
feature in this respect.\textsuperscript{12} The acquisition of a genealogy was not a conscious step of the Dimasa kings but came about due to the Brahma ingenuity. The Brahmanas who sought to consecrate the person of the king as well as his pedigree framed a genealogy tracing the Dimasa ancestry to Hidimba, the demonness who married Bhima, the Epic hero. Ghotatkach, the son of Bhim and Hidimba was considered as their first ruler. This supposed investiture of the Dimasas with the Hindu origin gave them an ascribed status. This legend of their dynastic link brought a new identity to the Dimasas, that of Hedembial Kacharis with which they became known. This designation was used to emphasise their ancestry from Hidimba, the wife of Bhim.

A genealogy of the Dimasa rulers called ‘Herambarajyamala’ was recorded which has given an exhaustive list of 103 rulers from Ghototkoch to Gobindanarayan. U.C Guha has opined that the name of such Dimasa rulers like Khunkhara, Detsung, Hormeswar, Satrudaman or Pratapnarayan, Bhimdarpo, Harischandra, Sandikari etc which are mentioned in the Buranjis and other historical sources do not tally with the names of Dimasa rulers in Rajamala. In the opinion of W. W. Hunter, with the exception of Suradarpa, Dharmadhwaj, Kartikchandra, Ramchandra, Harischandra, Lakshmichandra, Krishnachandra and Gobindachandra, the whole list is a brahmanical forgery invented for the purpose of extolling the importance and pure descent of the dynasty.\textsuperscript{13} Whatever the motive of the Brahmanas in providing the list it gave the Dimasa kings a genealogy which traced back their descent to the Epic heroes. The Dimasas were designated as Hidimbacha (children of Hidimba) after Hidimba, the wife of Pandava prince, Bhim and mother of Ghotatkoch. Through the Brahmana exercise myths and legends were co-mingled to extol the Hindu origin of the Dimasa royalty. This Brahmana’s extolling ensured for the Dimasa royal family dominance in the state in perpetuity because once an
association with a particular Hindu dynasty of pure descent was established it was obvious that the kings would not revert back to earlier practices and customs. It instilled in the Dimasa ruling family and aristocracy with intense pride in their Hindu origin and hence they turned to be the champions of the new faith. The Dimasa state since then came to be called as the *Heramba-rajya* as known from their coins, inscriptions and records.\(^{14}\) The use of the word ‘Rajya’ (from the root ‘Raj’ meaning ‘to rule’) was commonly used in ancient Sanskrit texts to indicate a state. The use of the word ‘Rajya’ (from the root ‘Raj’ meaning to rule) for the Dimasa state was a novelty created out of the Hinduisation process.

According to Romila Thapar genealogy becomes a reference point for legal rights and sanction in conditions of frequent warfare or in new land settlements. The genealogies would appear to record the movement from tribal and oligarchic forms to the more complex monarchical states. In the Dimasa state genealogy as provided by the Brahmanas seems to have provided the legal and religious sanction in the legitimization of their political rule from the time of their rule at Maibang. The Dimasa state became a monarchy of the Indian pattern at the head of which was the Raja as the supreme authority.\(^{15}\) The king came to acquire an inviolable sanctity and the Hindu legends increasingly used in inscriptions and coins only reinforced his image.

**4.3.3- Adoption of Hindu titles and epithets**

The Dimasa kings at Dimapur bore tribal names with the word ‘Pha’ affixed to it. With the establishment of a new seat of power at Maibang we find the rulers adopting Hindu names and titles. After establishing himself at Maibang in 1540 Madan Kumar took the Hindu name of Nirbhaynarayana. Undoubtedly this is the
The first instance of a tribal king adopting a non-tribal name which became a precedent for the future Dimasa rulers to adopt. The change in the practice of rulers in adopting Hindu name suggests that by that time Hinduism had come to influence the Dimasas, if not the whole tribe, at least the royal family. It seems that 'dhvaj' and 'narayan' were favourite appendages of princes and nobles of North-East India between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries just as the surname 'Pala' was fashionable in the previous age and the surname 'Varman' was popular in a still early age. The Kamata, Koch and Ahom kings suffixed 'dhvaj' and 'narayana' to their names, presumably after coming under Hindu influence. It also became a precedent for the Dimasa kings to suffix such words to their names. The coins issued by the Dimasa rulers are a revelation of this transformation. In one of his coins, Nirbhaynarayana proclaims himself as 'Gedemba Vamsaja' that is 'belonging to an exalted clan'. The next ruler, Meghanarayana assumed the titles of 'Herambeswar' (Lord of Heramba) and 'Worshipper of Ranachandi'. From the silver coin of Yasonarayana dated 1505 Saka (1583 A.D) we come across a new revelation, that he belonged to 'Hachengsa-Vamsaja' (one belonging to the Hachengsa clan). Hachengsa appears to be one of the gotras (family) of the Dimasas.

In the Dimasa state a new precedent was set forth when on the occasion of every military victory the Dimasa kings began to adopt high-sounding titles as a proclamation of their military prowess. In commemoration of his victory against the Ahom forces Jasanarayana assumed the title of Pratapnarayana. After repulsing the Mughal invasion in 1612 he assumed the title of Indrapratapnarayana. The practice of assuming high sounding titles after either a major territorial acquisition or a great victory was not new. The kings of Kamata styled themselves as 'Gaureswar' or 'Lord of Gaur' as early as the thirteenth century. Such titles were adopted either
because it was a title of great honour at that time or a part of Gaur was included in their kingdom. The assumption of epithets did definitely bestow on the state and its rulers an iconic status.

4.3.4- Issue of coins

While ruling at Dimapur no coins were issued by the Dimasa rulers. It was from the time of their rule at Maibang that the kings began to issue coins and inscriptions. In Assam no coinage is known before the third quarter of the fifteenth century A.D. The earliest coins were issued from Tripura by the ruler Ratnamanikya in 1467. The history of Koch coinage dates to the period 1555. The prevailing practice must have also inspired the Dimasa rulers to issue silver coins. In fact, the coins of Dimasas, Koch, Tripura and Jayantia dynasties were closely related to one another. The early Dimasa coins were imitations of the contemporary coins of Cooch Behar and Bengal while the weight standard were imitations of the Bengal standard. The native rulers in North East India had either followed the standard weight of ancient Hindu coins, or that of the Bengal Sultans. One Karsapana (silver coin) = 80 ratis = 146.6 grains = 9.4 grams and One Sultani Tanka = 166 grains = 10.7 grams. The legends on the Dimasa coins are very similar to those issued by Koch kings. They bear on the obverse the expression of devotion to a deity and the name of the king and date on the reverse.

The coins contained Hindu legends, in Sanskrit language and Bengali character. The legend on Nirbhaynarayana’s coin Hara Gauri/ charana para/yana Gede/ma Vamsaja Sri Sri Ni/rbhaynarayana devesya/ Sake 1481 is very similar to the Koch coins which bear the legend, Sri Sri Siva-Charana-Kamala Madhukarasya and Sri-Sriman-Naranarayana bhupalanya Sake followed by date on other. Unlike
the coins issued by the rulers of Bengal, the name of the mint does not appear on Dimasa coins. The inspiration of minting coins, as S K Bose averred must have come from Tripura which was already under Hindu influence. Nirbhaynarayana was the first king to issue silver coins dated 1481 Saka (1559 A.D). The importance of the coin is in the fact that it is the earliest monetary issue of the late medieval king of Cachar. Naranarayana’s successor, Meghanarayana issued silver tankas. The coin is round in shape, its weight is about 10 gms and measurement is 2.8 cm. It is a rupee coin issued in Saka 1488 (1566 A.D), seventeen years before the date of Yasonarayan’s coin.

Yasonarayana’s coins were first struck in the Saka 1505 (1583 A.D). His coins were of two types, silver tankas which were found in Bangladesh and broad flan tankas and quarter tanka coins found in North Cachar. The place of discovery seems to suggest that while the former were used for trade the latter struck for local use. No coins have appeared in the name of Suradarpanarayana, and it is likely that

Fig. 1.10: Coin of the Dimasa Kings of Maibang, Assam State Museum, Guwahati

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none were struck as Cachar remained a subordinate state to the Ahoms and the issue of coins might have been taken as an unwarranted act of independence.28

In line with the Hindu states in precolonial India, the Dimasa rulers issued coins to mark important events like military victory, coronation or for use in trade. There is no evidence of the issue of coins by merchants or traders in the Dimasa state. Only the kings had the sole authority to issue coins. But they never inscribed their portraits in those coins. Most probably the coins were initially struck on the occasion of specific Hindu ceremonies, when many of the coins struck would have been presented to the Brahmanas in order to reward them for their good guidance, and to ensure their continuing prayers for good fortune.29 It was a popular practice for the rulers to change the name of a town or celebrate an important event. It is from coins that we come to know that Jasanarayana (1583-1613) conquered Sylhet as indicated by the term ‘Srihattavijayina’ or ‘Conqueror of Sylhet’. After his victory over the Ahom monarch, Pratap Singha, the Dimasa king Jasanarayana assumed the title Indrapratapnarayana and minted coin in 1602. In commemoration of his victory against the Ahoms he changed the name of his capital to ‘Kirtipur’ (city of victory).

The tradition of issuing coins which commenced in the middle of the sixteenth century continued up to the late eighteenth century to the time of Govindachandra, the last ruler of Cachar. The Dimasa coins did not have much economic use, at least in the early stages. The demand for coins as currency in Cachar was probably very small during most of the period of the history of the state, and it was only during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that coins were struck in numbers sufficient to make any economic impact.30
4.3.5- Issue of inscriptions

From the time of their rule at Maibang the Dimasa kings started to issue inscriptions which were mostly religious in nature. Copper plates grants were rare but there is an evidence of such grant that was issued by Kirtichandranarayana dated 1858 Saka (1736 A.D) whereby Maniram Laskar was appointed as the Uzir of Borkhola. The earliest date of the stone inscriptions of the Dimasa king is 1498 Saka (1576 A.D) and it was issued by Meghanarayana probably on the occasion of the accession of the Raja to the throne as well as to commemorate the construction of a gateway (Singhadwara) to the capital complex at Maibang. From this the progress of prose literature in the Dimasa court can be obtained for the first time. The evidence of inscription can be acquired from the Conch Shell of Birdarpanarayana depicting the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu that was carved in Saka 1593 (1671 A.D). The legends of Meghanarayana’s inscriptions inscribed on the door lintel of the main gateway read thus,

I. Suvamastu Sri Srijut Meghanarayana Deva Ha-
   Chengsa Bangsata Jat Hoi Maibong
   Pather Singhadwara Bandhailen

II. Suvamastu Sri Srijut Meghanarayana Deva Ha-
   Chengsa Bangsata Jat Raja Hoi Maibong Ra
   jyot Pather Singhadwara Bandhailen Sa-
   Kabda 1498 Biterikha Asada

“Srijukta Meghanarayana of the exalted Hachengsa Vamsaja consecrated the Singhadwara (Stone Gateway) at Maibong in 1498 Saka (July, 1576 A.D).”

The earliest evidence of the use of Bengali in the Dimasa state is found in Meghanarayana’s stone inscription. The inscriptions on the coins issued by the
Dimasa kings indicate the growing use of Sanskrit and Bengali. Jasanarayana issued two coins in Saka 1505 (1583 A.D) and 1507 (1585 A.D) and the language used is Sanskrit. The legend on the obverse is: *Hara-Gaurī carana para (rā) yāna Ḥācheṅga śa vaṁśa ja*. The legend on the reverse is: *śri Yāśonarayana deva bhupālasya sāke 1507*. The meaning of this verse runs like this: "The coin of the king, the illustrious line and devoted to the feet of Hara and Gauri and in the Saka 1507".

![Stone Inscription](STONE_INSCRIPTION_OF_MEGHANARAYANA_AT_MAIBANG)

**Fig.1.11**: Stone Inscription at Maibang issued by Meghanarayana, *Field Visit, 2010*

### 4.3.6- Patronage to literature and fine arts

The language of literary discussion in the Dimasa court was Bengali. It seems that since in the three bordering kingdoms of Srihatta, Jaintia and Tripura the use of Bengali prevailed in the royal court, so the Dimasa Rajas had adopted Bengali as the official court language.⁴ Ranee Chandraprava who was learned in Sanskrit and the study of the Sastras influenced Bhubaneswar Vachasvapati to translate the *Brahmapurana* into Bengali. Under her patronage, Bubaneswar sowed the seeds of Bengali language in North Cachar. From that time the Dimasa Rajas became ardent
patrons of Bengali language and culture. The court was adorned by a galaxy of Brahmana scholars who translated some *Puranas* and portion of the *Epics* into Bengali. Some books like *Vivad-darpan, Rindan-vidhi* and *Kalmi puthi* were written either in Bengali or in Bengali with parallel Sanskrit as administrative manuals. Ananta Ram Barman translated the *Brahmapurana* into Bengali. There was a regular recitation of the *Bhagavata Purana* by Dharmadiguru at the royal court during the reign of Suradarpa.

There was a flowering of literature during the reign of Ramachandranarayana (1728-37) and Gopichandranarayana (1745-57). During the former’s rule a book of verses was written by Krishnamohan in 1735. One of the copious and prolific poets among the Dimasas was Krishnamohon Barman who worked under both Ramchandra and Gopichandra. He composed *Kalicharan Upakhyan* in 1735 and *Gopichandrer Panchali* in 1748. Gopichander Panchali, a chronicle was written during the reign of Gopichanranarayana. The Dimasa kings were composers of devotional songs. Amalendu Bhattacharjee has edited *Srinaradiya Rasamrita* of Bhuvaneswar Bachaspati Bhattacharjee wherein the songs compiled by Ramchandra and Suradarpa in Bengali has been given which reads thus,

**Song I**: Raja Ramchandranarayan’s compilation

**Raga**: Malsi

*Trans kor go janani! Bipade pariasi II*

*Bhakti nahi jani Ma go! Shakti nahi sthir I*

*Kebol hoi asi ami jogote bahir II*

*Sornukhe Samaner bhow jor jor sorir hoi,*

*Hridaye dhorasi rangapod Shankorir II*
Pronoti koriya bole Ramchandra nripa

Anande Kailashe jabo bole Durga Shiva

Free translation

Save me, O Mother! From my troubles
I know no devotion O Mother! My strength is unstable
And I feel lost in this world
The thought of Saman, 'Regent of death' dreads me,
The red footprints of Sankari overwhelms my heart
Thus says, Raja Ramchandra with obeisance
With bliss I shall go to Kailasha to Durga-Shiva

Song 2: Raja Suradarpunanarayan

Raga: Malsi

Din doyamoyee naam tumar
Suniya borosha boro hoi asi amar
Puja job-tob khichu nahik amar
Tobe jodi koro kripa mohima tumar
Amito kumoti oti-goti nai aar
Bhorosha kori asi kebol sri shoron tumar
Pronoti koriya bole Suradarpai
Agya koro mundo diya bhoji rangapai

Free translation

O Dayamoyee, the compassionate! This is thy name
Your name has kindled trust in me
I have no offerings or sacrifices to thee

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But if you shower your grace, it will be your benevolence!

A pervert have I become, lacking in strength and agility!

I trust none but the shelter of your Holy feet!

Command me and I shall offer head sacrifice to your red feet!

Thus prays Suradarpo fervently!

4.3.7- Religion and ritual display

Hinduism served as the means to legitimize royal power among the tribals who were coming under its influence. It established a prime connection between the temporal and sacral power in the material domain of existence. In the Hindu religion the deity occupies a prime position; it is the symbol of veneration and oblation. In contrast to this, in the tribal religion there do not exist any edified image of a deity. Tribal shrines are either without any idol or may contain uniconic or elementary symbols like wooden posts, earthen pots, stones, spears etc. In the case of the Dimasas the tribal form of gods and goddesses remained confined to stone, bamboo or wooden pole. One such uniconic symbol which became the paraphernalia of royal power and valour is the sword.

How the Dimasas obtained their uniconic symbol is quite interesting. Legend has it that Ranachandi appeared in the dream of Nirbhaynarayana and instructed him to meet her next day at the riverside, at the spot now known as Chandi-ghat. The Raja duly fulfilled the assignation, but waited for a long time without seeing anything. At last he observed a snake swimming in the river, and he became aware that the goddess had assumed that form. He stretched out his hand to take the snake but instead of seizing it by the neck he took hold of the tail, and it forthwith turned into a sword which he carried home. The following night Ranachandi again appeared

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to him, and told him that he had done wrong in not seizing the snake by the neck, but nevertheless the sword would be ‘the luck of Cachar’ and the state would prosper as long as it was preserved with care.\textsuperscript{39} The sword was carefully preserved.

It was a period of political turmoils with intermittent clashes between the Dimasas and their neighbours particularly the Ahoms. The success in foiling the repeated Ahom onslaughts strengthened the belief that \textit{Ranachandi} was a protectress of the tribe and that worshipping her would ensure victory in the war path. This strengthened their belief in \textit{Ranachandi} the ‘Goddess of war’. At Maibang the royalty patronized \textit{Ranachandi} as their tutelary deity because they were always threatened by the Ahoms. Whether the Hinduized chiefs or Hindu rajas had ascended from the local tribes or whether they had entered the respective areas as roaming freebooters, most of them accepted the dominant autochthonous deities of their territories as family and tutelary deities of their principalities.\textsuperscript{40} The Dimasas were worshippers of \textit{Kachai Khati} which was their tutelary deity. The worship of war deities inspired the military character of the state and the Hindu-tribal assimilation.\textsuperscript{41} When a hill people take up Hinduism, they adopt that form which bears most resemblance to their own ancestor worship. The adoption of deities, religious myths and cults derived from the Brahmanic pale no doubt brought significant changes within the state. But in tribal areas the growth of special cults was congruent to the traditional forms of worship. The development of some of the important cults is associated with deities like Sakti, Siva and Vishnu.\textsuperscript{42} This trend was very much visible in the Dimasa state. Since antiquity the Dimasas believed in the supreme female energy so they could readily assimilate the cult of Sakti in their traditional worship. Thus the Dimasas, having practiced a gloomy demon worship, adopted the rites of Kali and identified her with their own female demon \textit{Ranachandi}.\textsuperscript{43}
High regard of the Dimasa royal house for the Hindu gods and goddesses was noticed in the life of the first Dimasa king of Maibang, Nirbhayanarayana. His coin demonstrates his regard for Hara-Gauri, identified with Siva and Sakti.\textsuperscript{44} The tradition of human sacrifice seemed to have prevailed. On the eight day of Durga Puja humans were sacrificed by the Dimasa kings. Strangers were kidnapped for being sacrificed at the altar of Ranachandi. Similar rites also prevailed in the neighbouring kingdom of Jaintia. Such sacrifices were offered on special occasions such as birth of a son in the royal family, or the fulfillment of some request made to the gods.\textsuperscript{45} There is an allusion in the Srinaradiya Rasamrita about the prevalence of this practice by the Heramba Rajas and how Vachasbapati, the raison de être of literary accomplishments was made a captive for this ghory rite. At the behest of Chandraprava a Brahmana was captured by the royal soldiers for being sacrificed at the altar of Ranachandi. This person was Bhubaneswar Vachasbapati who was brought to the Herambo state as a captive but at the site of sacrifice he managed to impress the king through his expertise. It was this Brahmana who later produced the greatest literary work of the Dimasa state Srinaradiya Rasamrita, the Bengali translation of the Naradiya Purana. Later, the kings at the behest of Brahmana abandoned the rite of human sacrifice. But the deep reverence to Ranachandi continued unabated.

\textbf{4.4- Popular dimension of Hinduisation}

It is a universal tendency of all partially civilized tribes in India to accept Hinduism to increase their superiority over the surrounding barbarians. Upon wholly uncivilized tribes, on the other hand, Hinduism exerts no spell.\textsuperscript{46} ‘Civilization’ is a relative term; comprehension of the Hindu culture in respect to the countervailing tribal culture does not necessarily make tribalism uncivilized. However as a process
of cultural assimilation Hinduisation starts from the upper echelon of power and then permeates to the masses. But the exception here was the Dimasas inhabiting the hilly part of the state who continued to follow their traditional beliefs. The indigenous subjects did not seem to be much influenced by Hindu rites; the traditional Hindu rituals were followed only by the Dimasa royal family and aristocracy. The influence of the Brahmanas, was however, limited primarily to the royal and aristocratic families and the extension of their activities to laymen was not considered much necessary because they understood that the laymen simply followed the examples of their king and nobles. 47

The non-receptive nature of the Dimasas in this matter may be more due to the fact that the King was considered as their representative bound by traditions and not as divine authority having sanctity around him. Therefore the king was not considered above the people. Further the Dimasas were already akin to their traditional system of priesthood and therefore there was no felt need for them to engage the services of the Brahmanas. The rite of sacrifices was abandoned by the Dimasa kings after the reign of Suradarpa and the Dimasa royal family began to follow Vedic rituals. But the indigenous sections still followed their ancestral religion in which the offering of animal sacrifices to their deities formed an integral part. The idea of 'Swarga' (Heaven) and 'Narak' (Hell) pervades in Hinduism. Consequently the ritual specialists (Brahmanas) played a dominant role in performing rituals for purging a Hindu of all his sins so that after his death he is entitled to a place in 'Swarga'. This also led to Brahmana domination among the Hindus. But among the Dimasas there is no such distinction. In their traditional religious beliefs there is only one world of the dead, 'Damra', where all men, rich or poor, proceed after death. The royal acculturisation in the state therefore did not alter
the traditional beliefs and rituals of the Dimasas. The percolation of the Hindu tradition was from the Dimasa royal family to a select few in which the Brahmanas definitely played a redefining role. The use of the title ‘Barman’ by a section of the Dimasas suggests that at least a section of the indigenous elements was Hinduised and received education in Sanskrit and Bengali. They constituted the aristocrats among the Dimasas.

4.5- Significance of Hinduisation

The process of Hinduisation, in its cross-cultural aspects, which commenced at Maibang seeped into the religious outlook of the Dimasa rulers which profoundly altered the ideals of legitimation of state power. New roles and tasks assumed by the Dimasa rulers were in consonance with the Hindu ideals of kingship and they were legitimized by the Brahmanas who acted as catalysts of change. While the royalty was under the influence of Hinduism the socio-cultural life of the indigenous elements still had the vestige of their inherited beliefs. This, to a great extent brought a cultural rift between the royal house that followed Hindu rituals and the indigenous elements who remained outside its fold. However, with the permeation of the Hindu ideals among the Dimasa rulers at Maibang the Dimasa state which had emerged from a tribal base became attuned to that of an Indian state system.

4.6- Conclusion

A redefining change that occurred at Maibang was the process of socio-cultural assimilation through which the Dimasa kings legitimised their power in the order of the prevailing socio-cultural set-up of the contemporary Hindu states. It altered not only the ideals of kingship but also that of the basic structure and contours of the state. Therefore the period of Dimasa rule at Maibang was an
important phase in the cultural history of the region. The process of Hinduisation of the state and society at Maibang altered the nature of the Dimasa state and brought about manifold cultural changes transforming the erstwhile tribal state into a Hindu state.

Notes


6. Ibid., p. 80


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