Chapter 3

THE BARMAN TRADITION

The chapter traces the Barman's historical tradition viewed in terms of the dynamics of their passage through the phases like the pre-Barman and the plains Barman.

The Barman is one of the major tribal groups in Barak Valley of Assam. They are the descendants of a section of those Dimasas, who migrated to the plains of Cachar (today's Barak Valley) from Maibong in North Cachar Hills in the second half of the 18th century. The Dimasa tribe is one of the sub- branches of the Kachari group which itself is a branch of the great Bodo race of Assam. Therefore, the present generation of the Barman too regards itself as one of the aboriginal inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. From anthropological point of view they belong to Sino-Tibetan language speaking groups of Mongoloid origin. Their lingua franca belongs to Tibeto- Burman branch of Kuki-Chin group (Sen 2003 :10 ; Dutta Choudhury 2002 : 15,52).

A Barman Boy

A Barman Girl

The Kachari, Dimasa and Barman

The Kachari originated in the central Asiatic region, i.e., Tibet. While migrating to India via middle China they might have entered Assam in the early part of the first millennium B.C. They first came to Dimapur in to day's Nagaland in the early part of the 13th century through Arunachal Pradesh. Then, they shifted their Kingdom to Maibong of North Cachar Hills in the middle of the 16 th century. During the second half of the 18 th century the kings shifted their capital to Khaspur in today's Cachar district of Assam and, finally, to Haritikar near Badarpur, in today's Tripura in 1832 A.D, after the murder of the king Govindachandra Narayan in 1830 A.D. (Sen 2003:9-10)

In Maibong they have been known as the Dimasa or the Dimasa- Kachari . On conferment of the Kshatriya title, 'Barman,' upon their king after his formal adoption of Hinduism by the end of 18th century these people came to be known as the Barman in Khaspur. Non- availability of historical records shrouds the origin of the Dimasa in mystery. The information on their historical development has been sourced by various scholars from their legends, traditions, folklores, etc.. From these it is evident that the Dimasa (previously called as Dima- Fisa) is one of the branches of the Kachari who ruled first from the capital at Dimapur, then, at Maibong and, lastly, at Khaspur. So, their Kings are known as the Kachari Kings instead of Dimasa Kings. The another group of the Kachari named as 'Bodo-fisa' ruled Sadiya and their country was known as Chutiya territory (Sen 2003:12). Thus, the Barmans of Cachar are the descendents of the Kachari Kings of Khaspur and basically belong to 'Dima-fisa' sub-group of Kachari group (Dutta Choudhury 2002 : 53 ; Sen 2003 : 12).

Barkataki (1987) says that the word 'Dimasa' is supposed to have been derived from 'Hidimba', a demoness from whom the second Pandava prince Bhima produced a son Ghatotkacha. Thus being the descendants of Hidimba, the Dimasa called themselves as 'Hidimbasa' and their kingdom as Hidimba or Heremba Kingdom or Heremba Emperor or Lord of Hidimba or Heremba. The uses of these terms are abundantly found in the coins, rockcuts, inscriptions, endowments, deels and seals, etc. The origin of the Kachari kings, was apparently an invention of the Brahmin pandits after the formal conversion of the Kachari kings to Hinduism in 1790 A.D. Burman (1972) referring to the Hidimba myth of the Dimasa origin writes that the inhabitants of the eastern region were known to the Aryans of Aryavarta and it was only after the exploration of this region by the pandava brothers that it found a conspicuous place in the Sanskrit literature, specially in the mythology. Meghavarna the son of Ghatotkacha and the grandson of Bhima and Hidimba, ruled this part of Aryavarta . From that time the ruling family of the Kachari nation assumed the aristocratic distinction of Hidimbacha (Guha 1971:12)

According to a Dimasa legend they are the descendants of a Bangla Raja (the God of earthquake) and his consort Arikidima (a huge bird like deity). Arikidima who had a divine conception faced a great problem in finding out a suitable place for laying eggs. A golden nest was searched out in a banyan tree at the confluence of Dilao and Sangi rivers. In that place she laid seven eggs. Out of those she hatched only six eggs and the babies appeared in the forms of divine human beings. Sivrai was born out of the first egg followed subsequently by Aluraja, Naikuraja, Waraja, Gunyung, Braiyung and Hamiadao out of the rest . The seventh egg that remained in the same state, when

broken, produced evil spirits which took shelter in the hills and rivers and these are supposed to be responsible for human miseries and sufferings. Deriving from this, the Dimasa consider Arikhidima as their ancestress and call themselves as 'Arikhi- Dimasa'. The syllable 'sa' means children. Hence, the Dimasas are the children of Arikhidima. In all probability, the term 'Dimasa' is a shortened form of the term Arikhidimasa (Nath 2006:42).

The Kachari capital complex at Khaspur was established by the Kachari Kings in the second half of the 18th century. The King Lakshmichandra (1772-1773 A.D.) was the first Kachari king at Khaspur, but he died after one year. After his death his son Krishnachandra Narayan (1780-1813 A.D.) became the king of this region and finally Govindachandra Narayan (1813-1830 A.D.) became the king of Khaspur. The Kingdom collapsed with the treacherous murder of the king Govindachandra in 1830 A.D. and it merged with the East India Company's territory in the East in 1832 A.D as the assassinated king had no legitimate heir to succeed to the throne (Sen 2003:33; Deblaskar 2006:25; Debnath 2004:47).

From Ghototkacha, the first legendary Kachari king, to Govindachandra Narayan the last Kachari king, there have been 103 kings in the whole dynasty of the Kacharis as given below (Guha 2006:48-50).

The Kachari Dynasty

1. Ghatotkacha Narayan
2. Meghabarna Dhaj Narayan
3. Meghabal Dhaj Narayan
4. Udaya Dhaj Narayan
5. Katu Dhaj Narayan
6. Bishwakirtee Dhaj Narayan
7. Baisaban Dhaj Narayan
8. Bital Dhaj Narayan
9. Bishabasen Dhaj Narayan
10. Unute Dhaj Narayan
11. Kulish Dhaj Narayan
12. Rudra Dhaj Narayan

13. Kundila Dhaj Narayan
14. Shatrujit Dhaj Narayan
15. Parirudra Dhaj Narayan
16. Bhaskar Dhaj Narayan
17. Bishal Dhaj Narayan
18. Hiranya Dhaj Narayan
19. Bhadrasen Dhaj Narayan
20. Shakul Dhaj Narayan
21. Eshan Dhaj Narayan
22. Gunakirti Dhaj Narayan
23. Pit Dhaj Narayan
24. Upendra Dhaj Narayan
25. Nil Dhaj Narayan
26. Padmanav Dhaj Narayan
27. Pic Dhaj Narayan
28. Brish Dhaj Narayan
29. Guna Dhaj Narayan
30. Sursen Dhaj Narayan
31. Ripudarpa Dhaj Narayan
32. Balbhadra Dhaj Narayan
33. Chandrashekhar Dhaj Narayan
34. Mukut Dhaj Narayan
35. Krishnasen Dhaj Narayan
36. Digish Dhaj Narayan
37. Gotra Dhaj Narayan
38. Maheshar Dhaj Narayan
39. Kulabhadra Dhaj Narayan
40. Bhanu Dhaj Narayan
41. Kamal Dhaj Narayan
42. Gandic Dhaj Narayan
43. Bhupendra Dhaj Narayan
44. Bhanujit Dhaj Narayan
45. Nirbhoy Dhaj Narayan
46. Udaybhim Dhaj Narayan
47. Modan Dhaj Narayan
48. Chitra Dhaj Narayan
49. Binando Dhaj Narayan
50. Kuta Dhaj Narayan
51. Shankha Dhaj Narayan
52. Bishya Dhaj Narayan
53. Sindu Dhaj Narayan
54. Lalit Dhaj Narayan
55. Singh Dhaj Narayan
56. Hem Dhaj Narayan
57. Shikandu Chandra Dhaj Narayan
58. Kumananda Chandra Dhaj Narayan
59. Prashanta Chandra Dhaj Narayan
60. Udit Dhaj Narayan
61. Probhakar Dhaj Narayan
62. Karpur Dhaj Narayan
63. Giri Dhaj Narayan
64. Bir Dhaj Narayan
65. Surjit Dhaj Narayan
66. Ahak Dhaj Narayan
67. Ranopratap Dhaj Narayan
68. Prakash Dhaj Narayan
69. Bikram Dhaj Narayan
70. Adittya Dhaj Narayan
71. Dhir Dhaj Narayan
72. Pundarikakkha Dhaj Narayan
73. Bhupal Dhaj Narayan
74. Prabal Dhaj Narayan
75. Puranda Dhaj Narayan
76. Trilochan Dhaj Narayan
77. Sri Dhaj Narayan
78. Kartik Dhaj Narayan
79. Nil Dhaj Narayan
80. Mokar Dhaj Narayan

81. Janarddan Dhaj Narayan
82. Ranachandra Dhaj Narayan
83. Kashab Dhaj Narayan
84. Man Dhaj Narayan
85. Birdarpo Dhaj Narayan
86. Nirbhoy Dhaj Narayan
87. Meghabal Dhaj Narayan
88. Bahubal Dhaj Narayan
89. Iindrabal Dhaj Narayan
90. Shikhi Dhaj Narayan
91. Uday Aditya Dhaj Narayan
92. Mayur Dhaj Narayan
93. Garud Dhaj Narayan
94. Mokor Dhaj Narayan
95. Tamro Dhaj Narayan
96. Surdarpa Dhaj Narayan
97. Dharma Dhaj Narayan
98. Kirti Chandra Dhaj Narayan
99. Gopichandra Dhaj Narayan
100. Harichandra Dhaj Narayan
101. Lakshmichandra Dhaj Narayan
102. Krishnachandra Dhaj Narayan
103. Govindachandra Dhaj Narayan

The Kacharis

Though most of the Mongolian people appear to have migrated to Assam through the north-eastern and southern land-routes which connect Assam with Burma, yet P.C.Choudhury observe that one of the waves of the Tibeto-Burmans comprising the Aka, Mishmi, Garo, Mikir, Kachari probably came through northern land route (Sen 2003 : 10-11).

S.K.Bhuyan has come to the conclusion that the Kacharis first lived in a land which was known as Kamruli (perhaps Kamrupa), across which flowed a river, perhaps the Brahmaputra. When they were expelled from there they came to a place called Kundilo (modern Sadiya) (Sen 2003 : 11).

Another author C.A.Soppitt observes that a part of the Kacharis who first settled down in the hills and slopes to the north of the Brahmaputra proceeded up to the present Bangladesh district of Mymensingh which stands to the south of the Goalpara district of Assam though their headquarters continued to remain at Gauhati (Sen 2003 : 11).

The origin of the Kachari race is thus obscure. They came into prominence in different parts of the north eastern region. There still exists in the Brahmaputra Valley (Assam) some place names and river names beginning the Kachari prefix 'Di' (means water) such as Di-brugarh, Di-gboi, Di-mapur, Di-ju, D-mu, Di-garu, Di-puta, Di-bong, Di-hong, Di-kari, Di-khow, Di-khu, Di-marua, Di-Karang, Di-Sang, etc. The Dimasa called the mighty river Brahmaputra Di-lao which means long river. It is therefore, reasonable to think that in course of migration of the Kachari tribes from Kamrup to upper Assam, some of the migrants might have preferred to settle down on the banks of the rivers instead of proceeding alongwith the main group of migrants. Probably, some of them settled down even at the hilltops and established matrimonial relation with the aboriginal hill tribes. The most powerful group among the Kacharis might have established a kingdom by subjugating the aborigines. Some local Kachari traditions indicate the existence of two branches of the Kacharis; viz., Bodo-fisa or Sadiyal and Dima-fisa or Hedembial or Dimasa. The Bodo-fisa branch ruled from Sadiya and their country was known as Chutiya territory and Dima-fisa branch ruled from Dimapur, then, from Maibong and lastly from Khaspur (Sen 2003 : 12).

Hence, it appears that the Kacharis settled down in the hills and plains of the Brahmaputra Valley, though its complete history is lost in mystery (Sen 2003 : 12).

Dimasa-Kachari

From 11th century to 14th century the Dimasa-Kachari rulers started to expand their territories from Kamrup, Sadiya etc. up to Dimapur (Nagaland) and established their capital in Dimapur in the early part of the 13th century (Deblaskar 2006 : 22).

In 1536 A.D. the Kachari King Detsung (1531-1536 A.D.) was murdered in war with the Ahoms and the Kacharis were therefore compelled to settle down at Maibong on the bank of the river Mahur in the North Cachar Hills. The Kacharis lived there for sometime without having a king of their own. The Ahom king Suhungmung naturally exploited the situation and installed Madan Kumar, son of the ex-King Detsung, on the Kachari throne. Clearly, the Ahoms established their overlordship in the Kachari kingdom from the beginning of the rule of the king Madan Kumar at Maibong. But in the period 1540-84 A.D. the Koch kings Naranarayan and Chilarai began to pursue a policy of territorial aggrandizement. Chilarai invaded the Ahom kingdom and for the Ahoms it became impossible to defend the city. The Kacharis, therefore, accepted the Koch overlordship without a fight. During the Koch hegemony in the Kachari kingdom the Ahoms lost their influence and domination over the Kachari court and people . Shortly, after Chilarai's death, the Kachari rulers re-establishment their political control over the greater part of Naogaon area which the Ahoms had forcibly occupied. They brought the North Cachar Hills also under them and extended their influence on the plains of Cachar (Sen 2003 : 15-17).

Thus, the Ahoms lost their political control over the Kachari kings from 1562 to 1603 A.D. as mentioned in Buranjis (history). The aggrandizement policy of the Ahom kings encouraged the Kachari king Satrudaman, known also as Yasonarayan (1583-1613 A.D) . He sent punitive expeditions against Dhanmanik, the neighbouring Jaintia king (1596- 1605 A.D.) who refused to allow merchants of the Kachari kingdom to pass through his territory to carry on trade with Sylhet. Yasonarayan thereupon routed

Jaintiapur and restored his suzerainty over the Jaintia kingdom. The king Dhanmanik then purchased peace by agreeing to hand over two Jaintia princess to the victorious Kachari king and to send his nephew Yasomanik as hostage to the Kachari court. After that, the trade between the Kachari kingdom and Sylhet might have channelised through the Jaintia territories. To commemorate the occasion the Kachari king Yasonarayan assumed the title 'Aslmardan' and re-named Brahmapur as Khaspur where he kept the Jaintia prince as a hostage. Thus, by the end of 16th century and the early part of 17th century, the Kacharis established greater political control over the plains of Cachar including Khaspur. A large number of the Kacharis, however, remained in the hilly country where they retained their language, religion, custom, etc. till the day (Sen 2003: 17-18; Deblaskar 2006:22)

After hundred years, the Ahom king Rudra Singh (1669-1714 A.D.) again invaded the Maibong Kingdom in 1706 A.D. and the Kachari King Tamradhvaj (1699-1708 A.D.) came down in the plains of Cachar and established the kingdom temporarily in the village Goderbhitor near Bikrampur (Khaspur). But after one year, the king Tamradhvaj communicated to the Ahom King Rudra Singh to beg his pardon, acknowledge the Ahom overlordship and returned back to Maibong. However, he died within a year in (1708 A..D.) (Debnath 2004:47; Deblaskar 2006:22).

After 18 years of his deaths the Kachari king Kirtichandra (1736-1755 A.D.) appointed Maniram as a minister of Borkhola in 1736 A.D. in Cachar district. This was one of the most important step in expansion of their Kingdom again in Cachar. In 1745 A.D. the Koch king Bhim Singh arranged marriage of his only daughter Kanchani with

the Prince Lakshmichandra the son of the reigning Kachari king Kirtichandra. After marriage Lakshmichandra was appointed as Koch governor of Khaspur (Cachar) by his father-in-law. When the Koch king Bhim Singh died the Kachari prince Lakshmichandra (1772-1773 A.D.) became the ruler of the plains of Cachar but after one year he died and his son Krishnachandra Narayan (1780-1813 A.D.) became the king of this region. During his rule Cachar was in the front of threat of Burmese invasion. After death of the king Krishnachandra (1813 A.D.) his younger brother Govindachandra (1813-1830 A.D.) became the king of the Kachari kingdom after (Deblaskar 2006 : 23; Debnath 2004 : 47-48; Dutta Choudhury 2002 : 57).

During the early period of Krishnachandra's reign Aga Md. Raja invaded his kingdom for which he sought the assistance of the East India Company. The Moamaria rebellion in the Ahom kingdom also affected that Kachari kingdom. Rebel leaders sought shelter in the Kachari territory. The Ahom King demanded their extradition but the Kachari King remained non-committal. Meanwhile, Manipuri Princes, on being driven out from Manipur, also took shelter in Cachar. Despite repeated appeals to the company the king failed to get any assistance from the British. The King Govindachandra also confronted the same situations. The revolt of the Kachari General Tularam Senapati (the step brother of the King Govindachandra) of North Cachar Hills and his son Kachadin and the occupation of Cachar by the Manipuri princes compelled Govindachandra to take refuge at Sylhet, then, under the Company's rule. After the Burmese war he came back to Cachar and started to live in Haritikar near Badarpur where an assailant killed him in 1830 A.D. (Sen 2003 : 104; Debnath 2004:48; Dutta Choudhury 2002 : 57).

After his death, the king of N.C. Hills Tularam Senapati, claimed the vacant throne but the British rejected the claim and the kingdom passed into the hands of the East India Company (Debnath 2004 :48).

The Barman

In the middle of the 18th century the king Krishnachandra appointed 12 Bengali Brahmins (brought from East Bengal) as royal priests and helped in propagating Hindu Brahminical faith in the Kachari kingdom. From then the royal family followed the Hindu life style and worshipped different forms of the Mother Goddess. But the royal house failed to efface the tribal background connected with the demoness Hindimba. The royal priests expressed reluctance to attend royal feast without formal conversion of the royal family to Hinduism. This might have quickened the process of formally acceptance Hinduism by the royal family and the Brahmins recognized them as 'Kshatriya' (a Hindu caste) with the title of 'Barman'. Therefore, the term 'Barman' denotes status and only a section of the Dimasa-Kachari tribe have acquired the status at a particular time in the history (Sen 2003 :60,69; Dutta Choudhury 2002 : 52).

There are many historical monuments of the Dimasa -Kachari / Barman kingdom found in the Barak Valley of Assam as well as in Tripura as mentioned below (Barman 2006 : 68).

1. The Khaspur Capital complex, the Siva temple and the tanks.

2. Haritikar, Rajartilla, where the Raja Govindachandra Dhaj Narayan, the last king of Kachari kingdom was assassinated in 1830 A.D and the princely state of Cachar was annexed to the British Rule in 1832 A.D.

3. Forts at Badarpurghat previously under Haritikar and Pratapgarh at Patherkandi : Treaty between the king Govindachandra Narayan and David Scott, the first

commissioner of Assam was signed at Badarpur Port in 1824 A.D. known as "Treaty of Badarpur".

4. The ancient tanks at Behara (Boro Hali Pukur), Panchgram, Tulaipang (Telsipa) and Siberbond near Khaspur.

5. The Sonai Bhubaneswar Siva Temple at Sonai Siva Tilla Chandragiri Peak built by the Kachari king Krishnachandra Dhaj Narayan in 1787 A.D. on the day of Bhratridwitiya Tithi of the Bengali calendar. Every year the Dimasa-Kachari people throng there to worship the Lord Siva called Bhubaneswar. The peak is 3000 ft. above Sea level.

6. The Ranachandi Temple at Bijoypur near Borkhola.

7. The Goddess Dashabhuja at Borkhola.

8. The Kachakantibari Temple at Udharbond.

9. The Vishnu Temple at Ujan Nagar Borkhala.

10. The Nirmata Temple at Ujan Nagar Borkhola.

11. Madan Mohan Temple at Rani Nagar, Ranighat, Borkhola.

12. The Shyamabari at Thaligram, Khaspur.

13. The Laxmi Mandir at Alambag, Hailakandi.

14. Adikali Mandir : The oldest Kalimandir in Barak Valley dating back to 1707 A. D., built by the queen of the Kachari king Krishnachandra Dhaj Narayan.

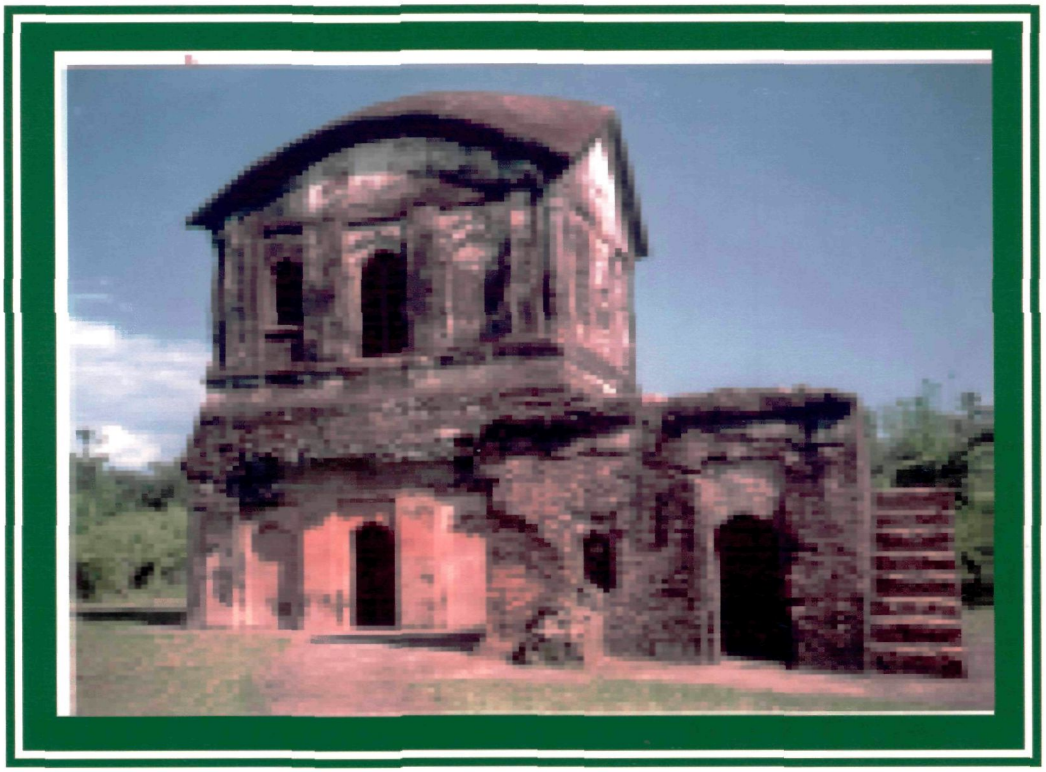
Briefly, before its final collapse in the plains of Cachar, the Kachari Kingdom lost most of its tribal character and emerged successfully as a Hindu kingdom on the contemporary Hindu religious yardstick.

The Barman is by and large a peaceful community of simple, gentle and soft spoken people mainly concentrated alongside the non-tribal people in the rural and urban areas of the plains of Cachar district.

The Ranachandi Temple: A Temple of Goddess Ranachandi (Durga) of Kachari Kingdom at Khashpur (Bijoypur near Borkhola), 18th Century

The Vishnu Temple: A Temple of Lord Vishnu of Kachari Kingdom at Khashpur (Ujan Nagar near Barkhola), 18th Century

Elephant Pass Gate: A Royal Gate of Kachari Kingdom at Khashpur, 18th Century



Barodowar: A Royal Palace of Kachari Kingdom at Khashpur, 18th Century

Religious Conversion

Under the Kachari kings of Khaspur the cultural change of the Barman people occurred too quickly. The life-style was brought close to the Hindu life-style. They perform almost all the Hindu festivals such as Kalipuja, Durga Puja, Ganeshpuja, Doljatra, etc. alongwith their tribal deities. No doubt, they ungrudgingly accepted many Hindu customs and usages as their own, yet they did not give-up many of their traditions and values inherited from their ancestors. They preferred to keep themselves isolated from the neighbouring tribes as they feared any social dealings with them might contaminate their racial purity. This attitude perhaps helped them to accept the Brahmanical faith more easily than any other tribal communities in the neighbourhood. Though they were the followers of Saktism, simultaneously they patronized Vaisnavism and Saivism (Sen 2003 : 108,68-74).

The Brahmanical religion has brought major changes in their society and life style. The age old Hindu social divisions also influenced the Barman society in the plains of Cachar. Due to the impact of the Bengali culture and society in their vicinity, the Barmans have adopted joint family system which was not prevalent among the Dimasa of N.C. Hills (Sen 2003 : 62).

Clan System

The Barmans in the plains of Cachar and the Dimasa of the hills of North Cachar have same double clan system, i.e., feminine and masculine clan systems as their generic identity, and both the tribes maintain it by following clan exogamy rule strictly. After formal acceptance of Hinduism by the Barman, both the tribes maintained structural identity by adhering to the rule of endogamy for about 100 years. In recent

decades, some attempts have been made to restore marital ties between the two tribes with a motive of reintegration for political objectives. In both the groups, there are found the same 40 male clans (*Sengphongs*) and 42 female clans (*Julus/Jadis*). The Dimasas use their male clan names as their surnames whereas the Barmans commonly use the title 'Barman' as their surname (Guha 2006 : 75).

Language

In course of the time the Barmans have come to speak a language that is slightly different in intonations from the hill Dimasas. The language does not vary widely and it seems that some phonetical differences have emerged (Thousen 2006 :21)

Marriage

Though the two tribes follow the same rules of marriage, yet many changes have taken place in respect of marriage ceremony in the two tribes. Barring a few customs they have completely given up the traditional Dimasa system of marriage for Hindu marriage system. Monogamy is the general practice while second wife can be accepted only if no child is born out of the first wife. Widow re-marriage is also permissible (Nunisa 2006 :10-11).

Dress and Ornaments

Some differences of dress are observed between the Dimasas of hills and the Barmans of the plains. The traditional dress of a Dimasa women is *righu* (wrapper around the waist), *rijhampai* (a short sari) and *rikausa* (additional chador) and of a Dimasa male it is *rimsau* (a chador) and *risa* (a traditional towel). But the Barman women use *righu* and *chador*, i.e., *rijhampai* but not rikausa and the males use *dhoti* and *risa* not *rimsau*. The Barman women use sari also in their daily life but the Dimasa

women do not. In respect of ornaments, some differences are also seen between the two groups. The Dimasa women are much more fond of jewellery than the Barman women. The Dimasa women like to use a lot of their traditional ornaments but the Barman women like to use modern form of gold and silver ornaments as the Benglai women do . This is due to their sanskritization in the context of the local Bengali culture (Nath 20006 : 12).

Food

After adopting Hinduism, the Barmans have given up the eating of fowl and pork and consider these as taboo. In cooking and eating they have many differences with the Dimasas. The Dimasas are habitual of taking all kinds of vegetables in boiled form with or without oil by adding dry fish (*napham*) and sidol (*nagraing*). But due to the influence of the Bengalis, the Barmans like to cook their food with oil, Ghee and different kinds of spices. But both the groups are habitual of taking their traditional rice bear (*judima*) on all socio-religious occasions, festivals and other activities as well as in day-to-day life (Nath 2006 :15).

Cultivation

Unlike the practice of the shifting cultivation among the Dimasas, the Barmans are practising settled cultivation after coming down from the hills. But the tradition of weaving is continued mainly in the rural areas by the womenfolk which plays an important role in their economic life (Paul 2001 :131-35).

Rites and Rituals

As they did not discard their traditional tribal customs totally, they still like to follow numerous tribal rites and rituals on various occasions alongwith Hindu rites and

rituals. For performing Hindu rites , they may call a Bengali Brahmin priest. But to perform tribal rites, they must call their own traditional priest, *Hojai*. In the Shradh ceremony, the Brahmin priests are engaged to perform all rites are performed sanctimoniously (Paul 2001 :199-12).

In brief, the Barman came close to the mainstream of the Hindu religious life by replacing many of age-old tribal habits, customs and rituals with the Hindu practices. Even then they retained some of their age old customs and rituals up till now. It makes them different from the Dimasa as well as from the Bengali Hindus among whom they are living. This accords them a separate identity of the Barman, the Schedule Tribe of the plains of Cachar (Barak Valley)

Some of the Barman villages of Cachar district are given below according to the Legislative Assembly Constituencies (Paul 2001 : 72):

Udharbond Constituency

Amaranagar, Bagherkhona, Chattacherra, Chimtibill, Leburbondh, Khaspur, Nayagram, Rotonpur, Siberbondh, Tikarpar, Thaligram.

Borkhola Constituency

Borbon, Dhemkar, Marwa, Bijoypur, Dolu, Ujannagar, Chandrapur, Koaibondh.

Katigorah Constituency

Andurgul, Bagherala, Balirbondh, Gorebhitor, Nathurbondh.

Sonai Constituency

Chekercham, Dholai, Dhonip, Dolakhal, Dormikhal, Gojalghat, Kangla, Kulicherra, Lailapur, Lantugram, Methnathal, Mohanpur, Nikama, Pancherra, Puni, Sadagram, Sewratal, Ujangram, Jembrao, Jibangram, Joorkhal.

Lakhipur Constituency

Bigajim, Dhaamnagar, Diguli, Diphu, Dolaicherra, Harinagar, Joypur, Kalinagar, Kanakpur, Koraibill, Krishnanagar, Kumacherra, Laduma, Langlacherra, Lakhinagar, Ludhi, Makhannagar, Mudri, Nagarbasti, Narainpur, Rakhaltilla, Railung, Raidilung, Salamatpur, Santipur, Sonpur, Taipunagar, Thalu, Watetung, Zemboo.

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