

# The Dimasa Narrative of Origin, Migration and Dispersal in the Rhetoric of Identity Construction.

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**Abstract:** This article traces the construction of the indentity of the Dimasas in the historically transitional area of Dima Hasao wherein they are located and it is informed by the relationship between the emergence of new concepts of political space and changes in the political economy. It studies the myths and other stories of origin, migration and dispersal of the Dimasa community and the various historical processes of their collective identity leading to a refashioning of social relationships between local groups into singular, substantive entities that shaped the identity of the community.

**Key Words:** Identity, Dimasa, myths, migration.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Memory is a mode through which the past is recreated and it is often institutionalised to address the non-institutionalised aspects of culture making way to cultural reproduction. It is also a dynamic social process through which oral narratives gain popularity, authenticity and continuity forging a connection between history, memory and narration in the making of a community's history. Jonathan Culler speaks of the historical power of narrative in producing a community identity through either of the two basic elements of the narrative, its story or its discourse. He says:

...the sequence of events that it (narrative) recounts might help a community by functioning as their history.... To be a member of this group is, precisely to take certain stories as in some sense your stories, your past. The role of discourse is less familiar, though possibly even more important. Narrative discourse, particularly its structures of address, posits an imagined community which is much like a nation, in that it consists of people who have no idea of each other's actual existence but who are considered as we by the discursive structures of the text (Culler, Narrative: A seminar 6).

Recalling Benedict Anderson and the realistic way he looks at narrative constructs, by the presupposition of their discourse' an imagined community of people who do not know of each other but are brought together in a novelistic space (Anderson 1991) Culler made the observation.

However, Mary Chamberlain understands of memory highlights a different aspect of memory and she writes:

What we remember and recall is not random, but conforms and relates to this social knowledge of the world. Memory and narrative are shaped by social categories, by language and priorities, by experience and tense, by choice and context. They are shaped also by imagination, by dreams and nightmares, hopes and fantasies which, however private they may feel, are moulded by culture (Chamberlain 10)

From these perspectives a branch of historical research that relies not only on the written accounts but also on oral memories extracted orally from people is a subject of contemplation. The historical character of folklore finds a distinct note in Richard M Dorson's 'historical-reconstructional' method in which folklore and folklife materials are used to 'recapture vanished historical periods for which other evidence is scanty'(Dorson 12). The historical picture that emerges from such recollections and stories is in Jan Assmann's word a 'history of the everyday' or ' a history from below'. This history tells how the past is known to us contemplating to establish a link between narrative, history and memory. The directness of memory is embodied in culture of a community and it is only through memory that many cultural practices produce signifying meanings whether ritual- spiritual, struggle- victory, war- resilience etc. In its embodied form it is more than information, it is a whole culture of representation (Assmann 37) who further sees cultural

memory transforming factual into remembered history, thus turning it into myth. Myth is thus the foundational history that is narrated in order to illuminate the present from standpoint of its origins.

Following Stuart Hall one can identify two different ways of thinking about 'identity'. The first position defines cultural identity 'in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (Hall 1990: 223). It is within this framework that the question of identity was thought of in many public and academic discourses on culture in India. In their own constructions of self-images also, many identity movements articulated their politics in such a 'primordial perspective'.

Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall 1990: 225)

This article discusses as an analysis local stories of origin and migration from and constitutes an integral part while constructing a collective Dimasa identity leading to a rhetoric of claiming a discourse by using stories of origin and migration as a collective identity. Dimasas are known as one of the earliest inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley and presently are found scattered in Dima Hasao, Cachar, Nogaon, Karbi Anglong, Hojai districts of Assam and some parts of Nagaland. The article also is an attempt at analyzing local historical, sociological, anthropological and oral traditions discovered of the Dimasas and interpreting how the cultural traditions have shaped their identity and how cultural appropriations and acculturation has influenced the Dimasas in the narratives of the community.

## **2. Etymology of Dimasa :**

The point of discussion is initiated from the etymology of the term Dimasa from which can also be gleaned the origin and migration of the Dimasa. One interpretation given by Monali Longmailai (studies on dimasa,2017) is that Dimasa is a generic term derived from 'di' meaning 'water' and the suffixes 'ma' meaning 'big' and 'sa' is a masculine suffix for the people who derived the term at the time of rule in Dimapur kingdom. She also points out how a female in Dimasa is referred to with suffix 'jik'. Further the terminologies used for regional sub-groups of Dimasa scattered in different regions are ha-sao (land-high), ha-war (land-plain), dem-bra( water- rough), and 'di-juwa'(water-high/tall) are derived from geographical descriptive terms of the region inhabited by the people and highlights how the the dialects or variety Dimasa that is spoken has diachronically become distinct dialects.

Folklore narrate the origin and migration of Dimasa in the verses from their ancient homeland at the confluence of Dilaobra Sangibra. There have been quite a few attempts at locating the geographical location of Dilaobra Sangira by scholars who also connected it to the origin of Dimasa society, State and cosmology. The exact place from where they migrated to the valley of Assam is a matter of speculation.

Barman (1992) speculates on the arrival of the much larger Kachari group, to 5000 odd years ago and their settlement along the confluence of "Di Louhi" (Lohit) and "Tsang-Di" (Tsang-Po). This knowledge he claims, along with the Kachari traditions through traditional narratives have been passed down through generations by a clan, Zon-thai(Barman,1992, p.15) Although the origin of the word Dimasa is still a matter of debate among the indigenous scholars, one such view is that Dimasa is derived from Dimapura (Pursa= people), i.e people who lived in Dimapur (now in the state of Nagaland), the ancient capital of the Kachari kingdom on the banks of River Dima or Dhansiri (Barman,1992,p.17; Hagjer, 1974). In addition, the meaning of Dimasa may be translated as children (-sa/basa) of the great river (Dima) (Gait, 2013, p. 247). There is difficulty in identifying the river/rivers implied especially since the Dimasas have been known to establish kingdoms and their capitals across various rivers starting with Dhansiri, to Barak. Barpujari thus argues that perhaps the name does not imply one single river but 1Zaun-thai/Zon-thai/Jon-thai is term used for Dimasa equivalent of a priest. Jonthais are responsible for the religious activities related to daikhos, or the shrines or abodes for different clan gods. 48 rather the river valley plains (Ibid., p. 5). On the extreme east, the process of state formation starts in Sadiya along rivers Dikhow and Dihing, and then in Kamrupa, and Dhansiri, in Dimapur, then to Maibang along Mahur and finally in Khaspur in the plains of Barak. It is thus, widely believed that before the coming

of the Ahoms, the Kacharis must have inhabited the banks of Brahmaputra and its various tributaries. According to both Bordoloi and Barman, the fact that some rivers and places in the region have prefix „Di“ which translates to water in Dimasa, adds to the authenticity of the belief. A similar argument regarding the connection between the term ‘Di’ and its significance in the name of the community has been found in the works of Bordoloi (1984, p. 10), Barman (1992, p. 23) and Gaits(2013, p. 299). Most of the explanations provided by Barman, point towards the possibility of a very old existence of the Dimasa tribe, and how it is from them that other Kachari sub-groups of Koch, Mech, Bodo have come into being. However, his arguments are mostly etymological where much of Barman’s arguments on the genesis of the Kacharis and speculations on its expansion is based on the similarity of terms found in neighbouring communities and heavily contextualized on Aryan cultural and mythological history, citing the genesis of the tribe from Meghavarna, son of Ghatotkoch, son of Bheem from the Mahabharata epic, some of which have not been substantiated (Barman: 1992: 40). Using etymological arguments, but basing it on a more materialistic interpretation, Bathari (2017) adds to this discussion on the history of the Dimasa dynasty by emphasising on a much older genesis of the kingdom. Much of his discussion is centred on the possible links between the early Kamrupa state and its development by indigenous settlers of the valley namely the Kacharis rather than the Indo-Aryans (Ibid., p. 16-14). Tracing the emergence of rice-cultivation, its links to the plains of Brahmaputra, archaeological evidences in Dimapur ruins and the technology used, Bathari’s hypothesis is a hint at a much older origins of Dimasa kingdom. The architectural structures in Kasomari (Golaghat), Khaspur (Cachar), Dimapur(Nagaland), Maibong (Dima Hasao) and inscriptions and coins discovered have to a certain degree helped in reconstruction of the history and bearing imprint on the construction of Dimasa identity.

### 3. The origin myth of Dimasas.

In earlier documented literature the generic term Dimasa was not used while referring until the members of the community started referring to themselves with surnames derived from the client assistance the designation of Kachari seems derived from agents out site of the community. There are different opinions above the origin and meaning of the word Dimasa. The other narrative of Dimasa origin is derived from the mythical story of Bangla Raja and Arikhidima. It has also been argued that Dimasa is derived from the word Arikhidima, which would translate to children of Arikhidima, who is believed to be one of the mythical progenators of the Dimasa people. Bangla is the term used in Dimasa meaning earthquake and so from this a surmise can be concluded of the influence of the theory of a catalymistic big bang as the origin of the Dimasa universe or a gigantic explosion of pure energy that began billions of years ago. Interestingly th concept of the single super- concentrated point which later became the universe is called the ‘primeval atom’ or the ‘cosmic egg’ when the universe was in a highly compressed state of very high temperature and density, that the fundamental particles did not allow light to pass through its dark energy. The evolution of the universe has trajectory of comic timeline, of the worlds and ultimately of man and societies.

There are two interpretations of the confluence of the two rivers mentioned as Dilaobra Sangibra where ‘Arikhidima hatched seven eggs. One is of Brahmaputra and Ganga and the other one is of Brahmaputra and Tsangpho. Longmailai (2017) mentions Di-lao-bra literally translates into water-long-where/location and San-gi-bra into Tsang-water-where/location comes to the conclusion that Dilaobra Sangibra is the confluence of Brahmaputra and Tsangpo. She argues that the source glacier, Angsi, of these two rivers is located in the northwestern part of Tibet, few hundred metres away from the Himalayan mountain peak, Mt Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, who for Dimasa is believed to be their God ‘Shibrai’. She quotes further that the source of the river Indus lies in northwestern Tibet with the confluence of the Sengge Zangbo and Gar Tsangpo rivers near Mt Kailash and takes this as evidence of Dimasa’s migratory route. Taking evidences from folklore and toponyms the migration from their homeland that became a desert to the fertile land in northeast in Barman(2007) is estimated to have taken 6000 moons, that is 500 years (Longmailai: 2013)to the place already inhabited by previous groups of people.

### 4. Historical perspectives from linguistics :

Documenting a language in understanding the common source and origin from an interdisciplinary approach where history provides records and linguistics in language reconstruction through the folk and oral narratives.

Tracing the spread of Dimasa language from their first capital at Dimapur in early 11<sup>th</sup> century ( Barman) after their disintegration with the koches and other Kacharis, E.Gait( 2008 reprint) discusses Dimasa history among the remaining Kachari clans (Barpujari:1997), which led to various misinterpretations of the royal lineage with the history in the name of the misnomer nomenclature ‘ Kachari’.Dimasas were also known as Hrambo rulers (Barman: 2007). Dimasas

excommunicated the other kacharis for reasons of Aryanisation/ Brahmanical influence, Ahom invasion or influence of Vaishnavism as they shifted from Dimapur to Maibang, Khaspur and Haritikhor( Longmailai: 2013) finally being annexed to British Colonial Empire completely after death of Tularam Senapati in 1854( Barpujari: 1997).

In course of these shifts, there was also gradual shift in the linguistic patterns of old Dimasa and as the migrations and settlements from Dimapur to Maibang, then to Khaspur, northwards again to North Cachar, Nagaon and Dimapur took place it resulted in the increased regional varieties or dialects of the Dimasa language and they came under different dialectic terms and names according to their place of habitat. Dembra in Nagaon and Karbi Anglong and Dijuwa in Dimapur are more closely related to Hawar in Cachar while Hasao in Dima Hasao stands apart in the lexical convergence among the dialects. The Hasao speakers lived in isolation insulated in the hills during the medieval time and is considered the purists of the Dimasa who kept their old socio- religious practices alive. Some further sub- dialects such as Humri and Walgong from the Hasao are converged dialects of Hasao with Hawar with interfaces of Dembra. A newly documented 'Daononaiya' sub dialect spoken in Diyung- Hrangkhoh village of Haflong. Manja and Langkher are again two distinct sub- varieties besides the Dijuwa variety. The phenomenon of Dimasa dialects still evolving and changing in variation lies in recent migrations before the decline of the Dimasa Kachari kingdom (Longmailai:2019).The historical reconstruction of these dialects developed with migration and remains an under- documented and unexplored area of study.

### **5. Finding lost 'sister' languages of Dimasas: language change and obsolescence:**

The Dimasa language while at Dimapur was possibly different due to different cultural- linguistic situation. Of the eastern Kachari languages, Sonowal, Moran, Chutia are extinct Bodo-Garo languages while Moran is moribund (Jacquesson 2007). Deuri is highly endangered language and call themselves 'mo-sa-ya' meaning 'son of the great water,soil/sun and the moon', believing themselves 'sons of nature' which is homophonous to Dimasa with a related meaning ' son of the great river'. Historically the Dimasas lived together sometime with these Kacharis before shifting to Maibang after their defeat at the hands of Ahoms whereas the remaining Kacharis stayed behind and lived in proximity to Ahoms resulting in a homogenized language and culture, that is Assamization.( Longmailai: 2019). Longmailai observes that it would be interesting to study the proto- forms of extinct and moribund languages like Moran which would throw more light into the linguistic spread of the Dimasa language with its sister languages and the present day dialects.

Taking evidences from the folk verse of 'Dilaobra Sangibra' from linguistic constructions of the verse where lexemes in the narrative are not as old as that of migration verse (which is assumed 500 years from their homeland ) due to language change and contains Proto-Tibetan roots in the language. The Dimasa language as shown in the folk verse is still a modern innovation, distorted with changes in time, though it carries faint evidences of its origin and migration.( Longmailai:2019).

From Dundas(1908) who adapted the original work of native Dimasa writer Mani charan Barman and present day Dimasa a comparative study in the language showed a gradual shift in the pronominal forms and phonological shift in lexical usage. Loan words from Bengali, Hindi, Assamese and English has merged in the modern Dimasa language with new nativised lexemes replacing old ones.

Dimasa is one of the oldest living Tibeto-Burman languages of North East India(Longmailai:2019) and has shared linguistic affinities across the genetically related languages with shared typology. Dimasa is an endonym, referring to both the name of the language and the people.

A further insight into the folk epic shows the estimated time period of settlement ( origin story)happened sometime in the 1000-2500 BCE( colliding with the Mahabharat epic period), DeLancey(2012) mentions the croelization of the Proto Bodo- Garo languages during that period, which served as a lingua franca in the region . Longmailai places evidences of Van Driem(2012:192) where recent evidences of palaeo- ecology of the massive deforestation of the 'once heavily forested Tibetan plateau during the period of projected Bodic expansion' was said to occur sometime between the Majiyayao phase( 2700-2300BCE) and the Banshan phase(2200-1900BCE). She argues the justification of the case of Dimasa folk epic's concurrence with Mahabharat with the chronological evidences of paleoecology of Bodic trajectory in Tibet coinciding with the 500 years of the period of migration, as recollected in folk memory from the deserted Tibet to the northeast India till the Sunderbans.

The language spoken by the Dimasas( then Proto- Dimasa) during 1000 BCE perhaps is what the Proto-Bodo-Garo parent language might have been, since the Bodo-Garo group dispersed with one group identified as Dimasa from the folklore of crossing the mighty river and built the Dimapur kingdom. In that case, the Dimasa language is as old as the migration to northeast India, but it may have been a remnant of the PBG croele, that evolved as a more complex language.

It is interesting to note that at present Dimasas are neighbor community to any of its sub-group Boro-Garo such as Boro, Tiwa, Rabha, Koch, Deori, Sonowal, Kokborok etc( some of which have gone extinct) but surrounded by Eastern Indo Aryan languages ( Assamese in Brahmaputra valley and Bengali in Barak valley), Pnar, Jaintia ( Austro- Asiatic language) and several Tibeto-Burman languages including Karbi, Biata, Khelma, Zeme etc. There appear more questions than answers as to whether Dimasas originate from the Himalayas somewhere in Tibet? Are they part of Bodos or do they only linguistically form a sub group in the family tree node 'Bodo'? Were the extinct Eastern-Bodo-Garo languages dialects of Proto- Dimasa or were they (including Dimasa) distinct sister languages or dialects of Proto-Bodo-Garo?

At present, the Dimasas are first learners of their own language besides they are, multilinguals in at least Haflong Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, English or Nagamese depending on their regional spread with very few monolinguals since nearly all Dimasa villages has access to at least lower primary school. Though language change and some form of loss as a natural process of the language is observed every dialect speaker use the language in their day to day life. Change in socio-cultural environments are changing the course of language with migrations for education, jobs and better lifestyle as manual degradation of forests leading to loss of native lexical usages. Dimasa is neither an extinct language nor a highly endangered but 'vulnerably endangered' at the moment as a language struggling with its identity and standardization issues. 'Hasao' was adopted as the standard dialect in 2004 by the Dimasa Sahitya Sabha, the apex literary body of the Dimasas and Roman script is the standard orthography of the language and it was introduced as a subject in school curriculum at Dima Hasao where it is taught upto class 8 at the moment.

Illustrated published accounts of writer like Dipali Danda (1977) have featured clan system as testimonies of Dimasa Culture and were an important agency in the construction of a narrative about Dimasas( detailed discussion in chapter 5). Bathari (1970) quoting Danda (1979) concedes that the essential element of identity is the village ( Raji). The other being the clan system ( Danda) but the Dimasas since time immemorial had formed larger identities with the collective term Dimasa. Usually, when a person is asked the identification the replied using terms of identity as resident of village name. as in most in North East India it was British administrative who categorized tribal population as tribes, and many of today's tribal territorial cartography can be traced back to colonial (Von Stock Hausen, 2008). These days the notion that Dimasa are tribal is commonly accepted and tribal identification is strong among the Dimasa.

The notion that the Dimasa are Hindus is a dominant perception among Dimasa though they have also been written as animists by colonial writers talking of culture identity is also generally associated with a entirely different set of religiosity, language, material culture and physical features.

In Dimasa experiences they do not question being Indian politically but rather have absolved their education and enjoy the comforts the Indian Welfare states and Indian economy provides for them. Culturally also there is a better form of integration in the other cultures of mainland India. Many perceive these are result of the amiable and accommodating nature of Dimasas.

The Dimasa origin myth is based of oral traditions where the Dimasa universe was conceived at the confluence of Dilaobra Sangibra . From the narrative point of view such myths are not very precise and not necessarily what one may encounter in an evening season of singing or poetry sessions around the hearth; the usual form in which oral tradition is preserved. In contemporary time the stories may be summarized or reference given in a discussion or speech and they may be recounted quite vaguely in an urban setting.

The Dimasa seldom go in details of narratives and vaguely mentions village names, most of which no body knows exactly physically where they are situated. ( Prasadimdik, Dimabong Halali) these are village names that are now given to the newly established Dimasa villages remembering the places of their origin. The narrative of origin is replete with interpretations of phylology and in order to give the claims a scientific evidence of a discourse, argumentations by local Dimasa intellectuals is enriched with speculations originally taken from colonial monographs or Sanskrit scholars or writer like N. K Barman of early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Evolutionist or diffusionist ideas in identity construction of Dimasa often come into play in interpreting the construction of identity based on narratives of origin myth. These are largely reinterpreted from and based upon reading of colonial authors like Edward Gait. It is easy to imply that social or linguistic influences are matter of the physical intensive migrations influencing Dimasa narratives.

## 6. Contesting the Ahom Buranji accounts:

An example furthering this type of rationale is also seen in the works of Sonaram Thaoson, an intellectual authority of Dimasa literature, writer, a social reformer, an educationist and a political leader who writes in a volume entitled as *An Introduction to Dimasa History* where an introductory history covers various aspects of Dimasa past like their migrations and early settlements. He also acknowledges that lack of sources is a major bottleneck in reconstruction of the history of the Dimasas or the Bodos. But he is not debilitated by this lack and ventures into oral traditions to fill the gap. In many cases he even questions objectivity of written sources in the light of social memory handed down orally. While he acknowledges History of Assam by Edward Gait as fine piece of historical and literary work, he questions the over dependence on the *Buranji* sources. He contends the theory of the Ahom conquests of Assam as described in the History of Assam based on Dimasa social memory. The Dimasa oral tradition describes how Dimasa king gave lands to the migrating Ahoms for settlement.

The songs amongst the Dimasa talks of the king asking his subjects-

*'Hear my countrymen! Asimsa ( term used for Ahoms in Dimasa language) are asking for a piece of land measuring a cow's skin. Tell me! Should I consider their prayer?'*

For more than two centuries peaceful cultural exchanges existed between the two communities. This argument may be also corroborated by *Buranji* sources. The Assam *Buranji* edited by G C Barua writes that Sukapha found more than three thousands ghats under use and fearing confrontation moved back to safer areas towards Charaideo. As another error referring to the *Buranji* sources, he writes that name of the last Dimasa king who ruled from Dimapur is not Detsung, but Desainfa which is within the memory of the Dimasas. For Ahoms 'fa' means God but for Dimasa context 'fa' means father and it is tradition to address a person by term derived from the name of eldest child's name suffixed with fa for father and ma for mother. He posits a query whether the Ahoms in course of cultural contact with Dimasas been influenced by the Kachari system of giving names and also whether the *Buranjis* which were written by Brahman priests in Pali script like the Kacharis in absence of their own writers and script been subjected to interpolation of Hindu vedic ideas in compiling of records.

There are many incidents in connection with the Ahoms as mentioned in the *Buranjis* which have been contended based on the oral traditions. For instance, Dimasa traditions informs that Dimapur was rather abandoned wilfully due to the growing threat from the Ahoms. The Ahoms sacked a deserted city and a detachment of Ahom force that followed the trail of Dimasa army was ambushed at mouth of small stream that falls into river Dhansiri. There was massive loss of life on the Ahom side and the spot was named as 'Mangloo literally translated into "Stack of Corpse". Dimasa social memory as transmitted in oral form for generations speak quite contrary to the records in the *Buranjis* and other sources.

## 7. Geological scientific evidences of origin theory:

Migration can be due to different reasons and they are often linked with the adjustment of a human group with the prevailing natural condition or an issue to adjustments with other adjoining human conditions. Raktim Saikia(2019:) in analyzing the migration of Dimasa within Brahmaputra valley argued that wet-rice cultivation and the ancient Kamarupa state is not an Indo-Aryan innovation. Referring to the migration of the Dimasa people he posits that phytolith analysis of paleochannel sediments of Jorhat, once capital Dimasas indicate cultivation of rice before their migration to Dimapur indicating a stable farming society (Saikia, R.R. and Amin,2016) along with presence of flora like bamboo and indications of dry-wet-dry phases of climate. He further cites sedimentological evidences of Dimasa migration further authenticated the belief of a big river. The geomorphological features formed by fluvial processes with presence of different sedimentological evidences like sand deposition of considerable size, sedimentary facies and associated sedimentary structures like current bedding. Dating by OSL method indicated the age of the sediment as being between 620 to 800 BP ie around 1100 to 1300 AD suggesting presence of rivers at different locations due to possible shifting of same river from one place to another in tectonically active belts that the area is located (Saikia and Amin 2016: 556-559) Availability of huge quantity of fossil wood in the river deposits indicate occurrence of some natural calamity and AMS radiocarbon dating of the fossil woods gives the age as around 1420 to 1450AD pointing to a shifting of the river

due to some natural phenomena like flood or earthquake.(ibid) The initiation of the river shifting and migration of Dimasa capital falls in the same period.

He also argues the Bhauma-Naraka legend is but an appropriation of the rice farming knowledge by the Indo-Aryans and its reintroduction in Assam, possibly in more advanced form. This can be argued from the usage of *asura* title in case of Naraka despite his claim of birth from the union of Earth and Vishnu in his *Varaha* form.

Oral tradition says prior to coming to the Kamruli as they called Kamrupa, the progenitors of the Dimasas ruled over Kasaibam and then Hadolai Gajao, meaning Rangamati. While one group was ruling Kamruli, another group moved upstream settled at Ulubam and Mandifang. But he does not identify and locate these two places, but claims a long rule from these two seats. Thereafter they crossed the Dilao (Brahmaputra) somewhere around Dibrugarh and established themselves at Dilibam, the present Dili railway station. Some traditions however, mentions the river crossing point as at Guwahati. While the point crossing is a matter of dispute, tragic incident of breaking of rope bridge while crossing the river still remembered by the community as *raising dainsengba*. Interestingly, both the Deoris and Tiwas share this tradition, which suggests the point of crossing in the upstream of Dilao. Therefore, the river crossing point in discussion is most likely to be upstream of Brahmaputra rather than around Guwahati as believed by many.

From Dilibam, they shifted capital to Kasaibam and to Halali which is located at the confluence of Dilao and Disangi or Disang, the location is 20 kms north-west of the present Sibasagar town.(source) The kingdom was identified here as Dimabong Halali and this is a crucial phase in the history of Dimasa identity formation. Here at this juncture Bodo name was replaced with Dimasa and new creation myth was evolved. The old Buddhist rituals gave way to new Tantric form by incorporating many Hindu traditions. (Thaoson:2015). In the early medieval period (7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> century) 'Hinduism' had accommodated more cults as more tribal lands were donated to Brahmanas as Brahmadeyas by various rulers and one such cult is Tantricism of the eastern region.( Chiranjeev Nunisa:2019).

Gleaning the mythic origins and genealogy of Dimasa kachari rulers by means of the Brahmanas giving them humble origins from their texts Nunisa says from Hidimba originated Hidimbasa children of Hidimba) and Dimapur evolved from Hidimbapur. In epigraphic records, the Dimasa rulers styled themselves as 'Herembasvara/ Lord Heramba.' Puranic Hinduism spread to Assam presumably through the Gupta rulers (300-500 AD). Material evidences of the Puranic Hindu pantheons are found in Surya Pahar, Ambari, Dah Parvatia all of which belong to 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thus, Gait s(2001) and Bathari(2017) argue that Pragjyotishpur/ (later kamrup) was a Proto- kachari kingdom with court Brahmanas, much like at Maibang and khaspur before Govindachandra converted to caste Hinduism. The Puranic schemes of absorbing local cults and its spatial importance around it, is apparent in the kalika puran too. (C Nunisa.2019) like weaving the myth around kamakhya hill. According to the myth, the genitalia of Parvati fell on the hill but many scholars opine that kamakhya hill was of importance to the matrilineal tribes such as khasis and Garos, who revered the water spring therein as a form of the mother Goddess( Sharma in Barpujari, 1990). The Goddess in course of time got incorporated as kamakhya Devi in the Puranic pantheon, who then becomes Parvati, wife of Shiva. In the medieval period, kamarupa was a neighbouring kingdom of the Dimasa kingdom, and it was quite probable that the Dimasa kachari rulers were also influenced by Hinduism during this time. Also prior to the rise of the Dimasa Kacharis, the large span of Assam was already under kamarupa rulers who were practising and patronising Puranic Hinduism. The dimasa rulers whilst at upper Assam were also known to worship Ranachandi or Kesaikhati, another form claimed as the Puranic Goddess kali. The synthesis of Puranic Hinduism and native faith is further evidenced in the Ahom Buranjee retaining the tribal name of Dimasa rulers such as Detsung and khunkara but there are inscriptional records of their sanskritized names. (C Nunisa:2019)

The Dimasa tryst with Hinduism has during the Maibang rule the ruler adopting Sanskritised names ending with Narayan like Nirbhay Narayan and the religious dynamics of this phase is unexplored. In the colonial period Dimasa kings Krishna Chandra and Govinda Chandra underwent the Hiranyagarba ceremony of conversion into Kshatriya caste and assumed the title 'Varman/Barman'. Hence the surmise that the myths were created during this period around the genealogies of Dimasa rulers by Brahmanas, providing the king niche' in Brahmanical texts.

Most of the traditional practices prevalent among Dimasas find its origin to this period. The confluence of Dilao and Disang as informed by the local tribes residing there is that the confluence in olden days was far down stream of the present one. This fact is corroborated by several historical sources like the recent sedimentological evidences put forward by Raktim Saikia. This could be the reason of shifting the capital to Kasomari, also known as old Dimapur.

Reconstruction of the Dimasa history in pre Dimapur phase based on oral tradition, particularly the Dimabong Halali phase on the confluence of Dilao and Disangi is subject to debate. Settlement at the confluence of Brahmaputra and Disang, thereafter shifting of the capital to Kasomari and finally to Dimapur seem plausible given the geographical proximity of these places. However locating the confluence of Dilao and Disang as the site as mentioned in the origin myth is problematic. In Dimasa, mouth of the river is always named after the smaller river, i.e. Diyungbra as the Diyung River falls into Kopili. Therefore, Dilaobra-Sangibra seems rather a single river. In this case Sangi/Siang/Sangpo is the real name of the river, Dilao being the honorific title because of the sheer distance the river flows from its source. If this is accepted, the mouth of Brahmaputra, as it falls into Ganges seems more likely site of the Halali as mentioned in the Dimasa creation myth. Nevertheless, the shifting of capital from Halali to Kasomari and to Dimapur may be confirmed by carrying out more geological survey of the region. The site that occur in oral traditions may offer some good clue for understanding habitations and cause of abandonment. Moreover, if establishment of Dimapur capital is attributed to the Thaosensa clan as per oral tradition, it doesn't tally with the Moran oral tradition which informs of Bodosa king during the advent of the Ahoms. However, this can be explained in different ways. It is possible that by the time Ahoms came, the Morans became separated from the Dimasa and the legend of Bodosa king stayed alive amongst them. This is just an example how traditions of a particular groups may also be corroborated by legends in circulation in other communities. Besides, he lists names of communities living in the neighbourhood of the Dimasa kingdom around this time that they encountered who lived in the same terrain previously. These people might have migrated or settled somewhere else. Identification of these groups can help in locating the areas under the Dimasa rule and thereby give more credence to the narrative.

But these people may have left and found a homeland or they may have integrated into some other group. A narrative example for such a process can be seen in the case of Tiprasas or Tripuris. One of the very important traditions among the Dimasas is their separation with the Tiprasa or Tripuris. This tradition is very common and almost every member in the community is acquainted with it. As Thaosen writes the deity Gorja worshipped by the Tipras are also worshipped by the Dimasas as Khorkori. While Gorja is worshipped by entire Tipra community, its Dimasa counterpart Khorkori seems to have lost its pre-eminence and presently worshipped around Maibang area as informed by Joynacharan Bathari. The Tipras trace the origin of the Gorja worship to Dimapur. This throws up a little problem. R.M Nath writes that Tripuri kingdom flourished in the Kalang-Kopili valley in the second century AD. If the Tripuri claim for origin of Gorja worship is considered, establishment of Dimapur would push back to the beginning of the first millennium. In any case, the tradition of their separation is very much alive in both the communities both in oral and ritualistic traditions.

The accounts of origin and migration of the Dimasas might sound like a reasonably founded oral traditions even adding names of habitats and giving their geographical location. But to what extent the narrative has been influence by accounts by other sources is difficult to determine. For instance story of origin of universe in which Arikhidima lays 7 eggs sounds similar to goddess Parvati as Kusuma Nanda giving birth to the universe in the form of a cosmic egg which manifest as the universe. The Dimasas beliefs and practises adheres to some elements and teaching of the Tantras, Sanskrit religious writing concerned the mysticism and the magic ritual. Especially magic ritual for healing, averting evil, and union with the female creative principles.

Other than the precise Dilaobra sangibra narration myth of origin there are opinion of Dimasa's sense of belonging as one people ( Hasao, Hawar, Dambra, Dijua). This sense of 'oneness' constructed around the origin myth for Dimasas deals an aspect of colonial legacy also. Dimasas like many other groups aspiring to their own state were directed towards a myth model of oneness. Most indigenous prople of the colonies were generally grouped and termed as tribes by their colonisers, and this was also true of the Dimasas. The classical notion of a tribe included a common origin, kinship and territory, sometimes also a common language(Gingrich 2001)The concept of tribe was institutionalised especially in post colonial Indian administration in order to develop so called ' backward peoples'. According to Panda (2006: 35), the definition of 'tribe' accepted most in Indian context is given by Majumdar and Madar(1980[1956]:241) who, based on colonial concepts of the emphasise that a tribe is above all, conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration'. With such notion of 'oneness' among local Dimasa people , their traditional myths of origin and migration, and especially their use in the construction of collective identity is influenced by colonial history too to a large extent.

Locally renowned elders of the community and writers like S. Waibra ( 2011 ) sets his opinions about which features constituted Dimasa unity like clan organization, the Nodrang system, Jhum cultivation and the daikho system that generated a 'we' feeling.

## 8. Conclusion:

Migration leads to experiences of multiple stresses that can impact well-being, including the loss of cultural norms, religious customs and social support systems, adjustments to a new culture and changes in identity and concept of Self. Constructing identity involves life experiences, relationships and connections and rejections, a psychological or emotional stamp on a human and figuratively involves metaphorically or symbolically representation of thoughts or emotions in an expressive way, creating a conceptual visual representation. Identities are constantly changing and the most powerful way to construct an identity is by identifying analysis of the origin myths of the Dimasas.

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