

A study on the traditional textile motifs of Dimasa Kacharis in the Cachar District of Assam

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Dimasa Kachari is an ethnic community of the northeast region of India, and spread across the hilly and plain regions of Assam. Handloom weaving is a traditional practice among the women of this community and weaving is associated with the community's cultural identity. The purpose of the study is to document the traditional textile motifs of the community with the local names, meaning and significance; the individuality of motifs, the male and female motifs, and the techniques for making motifs are also documented. The documentation is based on the available primary materials collected during the study. The study was done by visiting the Dimasa Kachari villages of the Cachar district in Assam and spending significant time with the women weavers of different age groups. The significant findings of this study include the rich resources of traditional textile motifs of the community. During the study, it was observed that the tradition of weaving within the community is reducing slowly, the vocabulary related to the textile is shrinking, the application of traditional motifs has become limited, and are gradually replacing by motifs external to Dimasa culture.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, Dimasa Kachari textile, Dimasa textile motifs, Handloom weaving, Traditional textiles

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The northeast region of India has contributed significantly to the handloom textile production of India, with a total of 61% of the handloom workforce of this country¹. As per the handloom census 2019-2020, out of 31.45 lakh handloom households in India, 18.35 lakh households are from NER states². The NER, consisting of eight states, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim, is the homeland of 145 Scheduled Tribes^{3,4}. Unlike other states, where the men predominantly weave on the loom, in NER states, every woman of a tribal community is a handloom weaver⁵. Weaving is among the oldest traditions in this region, and the knowledge and skill of weaving have been passed on from the earlier generation to the next generation^{5,6}. Weaving is considered as part of the household activities of the women and they are highly skilled in weaving both intricate and bold patterned clothes⁵. Traditionally, women of the tribal communities weave clothes for their family members, and it is also a source of livelihood for the women¹. Apart from that, weaving has an important cultural significance among the tribal communities of NER, as traditional clothing expresses

the cultural identity of each tribal group⁶. A tribal group can be identified by their traditional clothing, textile motifs and patterns, and colour combinations of their textiles⁷. Along with that, the traditional textiles and motifs share an essential relationship with the habitat, rituals and religious life of the tribal communities^{1,7}.

Assam, being the largest state of NER, is the house of 23 notified Scheduled Tribes⁸. The Dimasa Kachari is identified as one of the Scheduled Tribes of Assam⁹, a subgroup of the greater 'Kachari' clan, and one of the earliest known inhabitants of NER¹⁰. The Kachari clan belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group of people¹¹, and it is the common term for the group of ethnic communities that spread across from North Bengal to Assam and Tripura¹⁰. The Dimasa Kachari tribe live mainly in Assam and some parts of Nagaland; in Assam, they are spread across Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Nowgong, and Cachar districts¹². The Dimasa Kachari tribe of Cachar district is known as the 'Barmans of Cachar', and they come under the category of 'Schedule Tribe (Plains)'^{8,13}. The main areas of considerable Dimasa population in Cachar District are Kumachera, Doloicherra, Joypur, Khaspur, Barkhala,

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Bikrampur, Kalahaor, Sheortal, Ganganagar, Dhalai, Lakkhinagar, and Bilaipur¹⁴.

The Dimasa language is known as ‘Grao-Dima’, a Tibeto-Burmese family of languages under the Sino-Tibetan language^{11,15}. The total population of Grao-Dima-speaking people in Assam is 110,957⁹. In the Grao-Dima language, *Di* means river, *Ma* means big, and *Sa* means children; thus, the term *Dimasa* can be translated as ‘children of the big river’¹⁶. Though there is no early record found regarding any particular river associated with the term ‘Dimasa’, according to U.C. Guha, the ‘big river’ indicates the river Brahmaputra¹⁶, but Thoasen suggested that it is the river Dhansiri, and ‘Dimasa’ refers to the people living on the bank of the Dhansiri¹⁷. However, as the name of the tribe signifies, the river is a key cultural element in the lifestyle of the community, which is reflected in their textiles as well.

The entire process of weaving is women-centric, where women do all the groundwork for weaving by themselves. They weave their clothes in plain weave using a throw shuttle frame loom and make motifs mainly with extra weft technique in geometrical shapes with colourful yarns^{18,19}. The motifs are inspired by their surrounding environment, elements from everyday life, myth, and legends²⁰; they inherited the weaving technique of the motifs and patterns from their intangible traditional knowledge, which is passed on

from generations²¹. The thickly woven colourful geometrical motifs are the identity of Dimasa textiles; the wide variety of colourful motifs and patterns makes their textile vibrant²².

However, the textiles and textile motifs of the Dimasa Kachari community are rarely documented and archived in a standardised form. The present study attempts to document and make an archival record of the textile motifs of Dimasa Kachari with its local name and the nearest English synonym and tries to fill the knowledge gap. The meaning, inspiration, individuality, and significance of the motifs, the difference between male and female motifs, the structure of the motifs, and the techniques used for making motifs are documented here. Visual inventory of the motifs is done with graph structures, line drawings and photographs. The study is done with a special focus on the attributes of the textile motifs of Dimasa Kacharis settled in the Cachar district of Assam.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in the villages under the Udharband and Rajabazar blocks of the Cachar district. Villages from Khaspur Gaon Panchayat from Udharband block and Kanakpur Doloicherra Gaon Panchayat from Rajabazar block (Fig. 1) were covered.

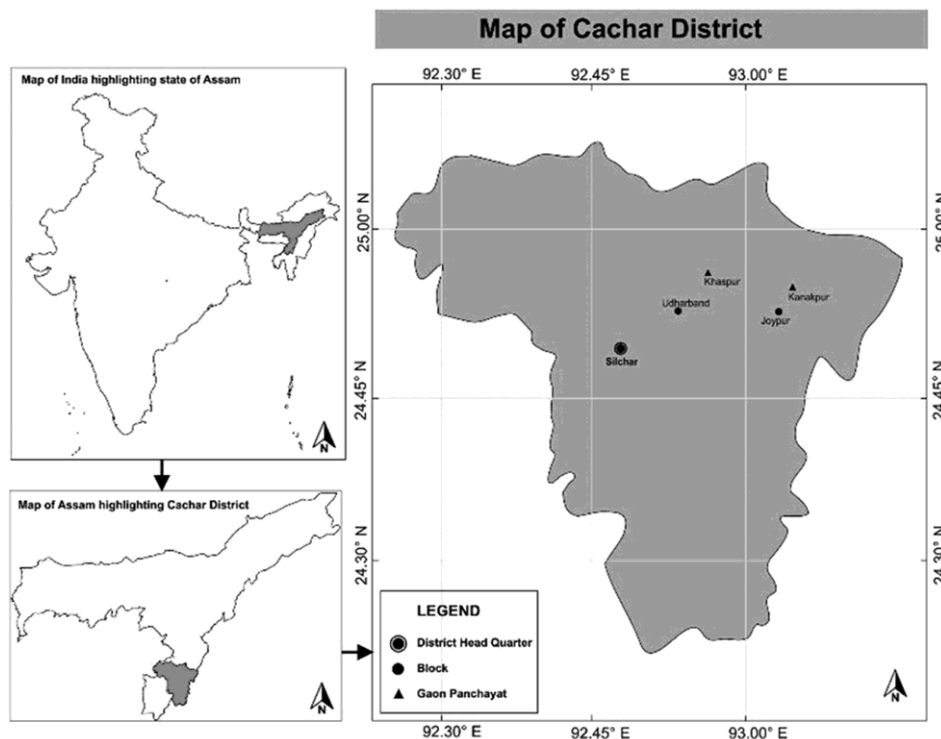


Fig. 1 — Map of the study area showing the location of Khaspur and Kanakpur village in Cachar district of Assam (Source: Author)

The villages were selected based on the majority of the Dimasa Kachari population where the women of the community practice handloom weaving. Before starting the field visit, scholars and authors in the field of Dimasa literature and culture were communicated with and discussed the study in detail. The communication helped to get information about Key Knowledge Holders (KKHs) in those areas, understand the culture and build trust among the community. Throughout the documentation process, the social customs and norms of the community were always kept in mind to maintain trust with the community.

As in the Dimasa community, weaving is a women-oriented practice; women of different age groups (20-75 years) were selected as the KKHs for the study. The names, meanings, and descriptions of textile motifs were documented through interviews and focused group discussions with the KKHs. The interviews were conducted based on the open-ended semi-structured and unstructured interview process. The KKHs are interviewed to share their life experiences, memories, and rituals related to weaving and textile motifs.

A significant amount of time was spent in the selected villages to conduct the study. The complete data collection process was conducted by taking field notes, journals, interviews (both formal and informal), drawing diagrams, photographs, and audio and video recordings. All the photography and the inventory of the textile motifs were done during the field study by the author. The diagrams and line drawings of the motifs were created by the author during the documentation period. The graph structures of the motifs were collected from resource persons. As there

is no adequate existing data and information found about this area of study, the documentation is largely based on primary data. The collection of primary data and the documentation of the textile motifs became possible with the cooperation and help of KKHs and resource persons.

Results and Discussion

Inspiration and meaning of the textile motifs

In the Grao-Dima language, *Rikhu Dima* is the common name for all the motifs and patterns woven in Dimasa textiles. The term *Rikhu* signifies motifs or patterns in general. In traditional Dimasa textiles, every motif has a distinct identity and name. The motifs are geometrical in shape, mainly simplified and abstract forms of flora and fauna inspired by the surroundings, objects from everyday life, legends, and the myth of the Dimasa people. As Kemprai mentions in her book, 'The Dimasa woven cloths indicate to a great deal about their faith, belief, traditions, culture, folktales, folklores, ancestral history, myths, legends and their closeness with the surrounding environment'²³, the textile motifs signify the community's lifestyle and their association with nature. From the textile motifs, we get an understanding of the common plants, flowers and animals that are associated with the lifestyle, belief system, rituals and worldview of the community. For example, the auspicious trees have a vital presence in the textile motifs; the banyan tree, *Praphang* is important in Dimasa legends and mythological stories, and it is found repeatedly in their textile motif in different forms (Fig. 2a). Another noteworthy example is the representation of the river as the textile motif.



Fig. 2 — Dimasa motifs inspired by the legends and folklore (a) *Praphang* (b) *Dilam*

The river plays a central role in Dimasa folklore and repeatedly comes in various forms in their textile motifs. One such example is the motif named *Dilam* (Fig. 2b), which means the ‘flow of river’.

The individuality of the textile motifs

One important aspect of Dimasa textiles is the application of different colours in their motifs and patterns. A single-coloured motif is rare, and the use of three to six different colours is common in their motifs. One example is the patterns of *Rhijhamphain Gufu* (Fig. 3a), where multiple types of colourful motifs are woven thickly to create a colourful patch of pattern. Another example is the motif called *Thori Shamin* (Fig. 3b), which is commonly weaved on the male scarf called *Risha Ramai*. It is a simple diamond-shaped motif, composed in a pattern, but three to four different colours make it look complex in construction. Working with multiple numbers of coloured yarns at a time shows the weaving proficiency of the Dimasa women.

Another significant aspect of the Dimasa textile is that the motifs are so thickly woven that hardly any blank space can be found in the patterns (Fig. 3). Generally, in a composition of motifs, the blank space between two colourful motifs is filled with black. The application of black as the background colour makes all the colours separate from each other, helps to retain the individuality of each colour, and makes the whole pattern look vibrant.



Fig. 3 — (a) The motifs of *Rhijhamphain Gufu* show the thickly woven colourful pattern. (b) *Thori Shamin* motif

In earlier days, the Dimasa women used to prepare dyes to colour the yarn by themselves; red, black, maroon, blue, and purple are the traditional colours for the motifs. The red and black dyes were developed from the shrubs called *zenglong* and *gisim lai* respectively²¹. Since synthetic yarns dyed in bright colours are available in the local markets, no one does the yarn dyeing anymore. Therefore, the traditional colour palette is now replaced. At present, black is the constant colour for the background; other than that, white, red, yellow, orange, green, blue and maroon colours are used. The traditional materials, cotton and Eri yarn are also largely replaced by a wide variety of synthetic yarns.

Techniques used for making the motifs

In Grao-Dima language, the loom is called *Dawphang*, it is a frame loom made of bamboo and wood with two shafts and two paddles¹⁹. Generally, the throw shuttle is preferred for weaving. The throw shuttle is a hand-operated wooden shuttle containing the weft yarn and passes through the warp yarn by hand at the time of weaving²⁴. The fly shuttle is rarely used.

The main cloth is weaved in plain weave; the motifs are made at the time of weaving the cloth on the loom, using two main techniques—the extra-weft technique and the interlocking technique. The extra weft technique (Fig. 4e) needs supplementary weft yarns for making the motifs, which gives a low relief effect against the surface fabric²⁵. This technique involves pre-loom preparation that starts with making the motifs in a small bamboo instrument called *Gonthai* (Fig. 4a). *Gonthai* is a traditional instrument for the trial of making motifs. It is also a traditional way of preserving the structure of the motifs. There are separate *Gonthai* for each motif. Nowadays, the weavers mostly prefer graph papers as a substitute for *Gonthai*. The *Gonthai* helps in understanding how to make the motifs in the loom, the repeat pattern, the number of yarns required for warp and weft, the size of the motif, and the lifting plan of the warp yarns in the loom. The lifting plan refers to the selection of the heald shafts to be raised and lowered for each successive insertion of the weft yarn while weaving²⁶. The lifting plan for extra weft is done before starting weaving the cloth, just after the loom is set. According to the requirements of the structure of the extra weft motif and the number of colours, the warps are separated by additional lifting order with an extra heddle called *Gong phong* (Fig. 4b) and heddle

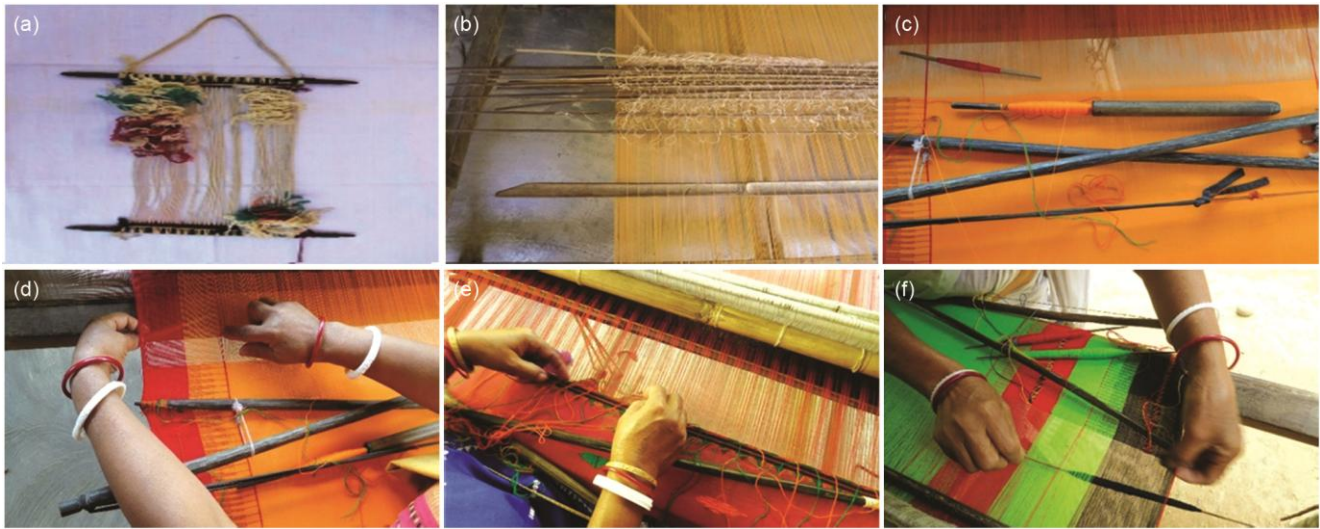


Fig. 4 — Tools and techniques for weaving (a) *Gonthai* (b) *Gong Phong* (c) *Thori* and *Thori khunthukuri* (d) Interlocking (e) Extra-weft (f) Combination of extra-weft and interlocking techniques

thread. The *Thori* and *Thori Khunthukri* (Fig. 4c), the traditional bamboo shuttle and pinn are used for making extra weft motifs; a weaver has to handle a separate pinn for each coloured yarn while weaving the motif into cloth.

Most motifs are made with the extra-weft technique, except the *Ramai Rikhu* pattern. This pattern is made by using the interlocking technique (Fig. 4d). The interlocking technique is used in plain weave, where two weft yarns run back and forth and interlock with each other between two warp yarns, and marks the margin of each colour²⁷. Generally, two different coloured yarns are used for the weft. This process is simultaneously done during weaving. No pre-loom process is required for this technique. *Thori*, *thori khunthukri*, and *makhu* (throw shuttle) are the tools for the interlocking technique. This technique is a time-consuming one and a work of patience. *Jorchiklik* is a diamond-shaped extra-weft motif usually made along with the *Ramai* pattern; the combination of these two patterns is an example of using both the extra-weft technique and the interlocking technique together at the time of weaving the cloth (Fig. 4f).

Variation of motifs in male and female clothing

Both male and female clothing are unstitched, draped clothes. The female clothing consists of three main clothes - *Rhijhampain Gufu* or *Rhijhampain Beren* is wrapped around the upper body, *Rigu Dima* is wrapped around the lower body, and *Rikhaosa Ramai* is the scarf draped around the shoulder. The

male clothing has two main clothes - *Risha Ramai* is the scarf draped around the shoulder, and *Risha* is wrapped around the lower body; apart from these two clothes, men occasionally wear *Rihmsau*, a shawl-like cloth. The motifs and patterns are woven on the border and two ends of the clothes.

The differences in motifs and patterns are the distinguishing elements in male and female clothing. Male motifs and patterns are simple in form and composition, there are fewer colours in male motifs compared to female motifs. The *Risha Ramai* (Fig. 5b) is made with a thin line of extra weft patterns on both ends. The *Thori Shamin* and *Radaulai* are common motifs woven in *Risha Ramai* and *Rihmsau*. The male motifs are defined, and any alteration or addition to a male motif is rare.

The female clothing, for instance, *Rigu Dima* (Fig. 5a) is more vibrant and has a wide variety of motifs compared to male clothing. *Dimasa* women keep experimenting with female motifs by altering and adding a variety of motifs to their compositions. Some common female motifs are *Misha*, *Mongplu*, *Jengrengsa*, *Dilam Balai*, *Dilam Bathai*, *Roina Thairiba*, and *Roina Thaimuaba*.

Ramai Rikhu is a distinct pattern in both male and female clothing. The most common application of the *Ramai Rikhu* is in the border of the female scarf *Rikhaosa Ramai* (Fig. 5c) and the male scarf *Risha Ramai* (Fig. 5d). Though the pattern is the same, the female pattern is longer in shape than the male pattern. This is the main difference to distinguish the male and female *Ramai* patterns.

Another key difference is the fringes made at the end of both sides of the clothes. Female clothing has untwisted fringes (Fig. 5e), and male clothing has twisted fringes (Fig. 5f). The Risha Ramai and Rikhaosa Ramai may look alike in terms of colour and very minute differences in the motifs, but the fringes make the difference more distinct.

Motifs common in both male and female clothing

Ramai Rikhu

Ramai Rikhu or the Ramai pattern (Table 1, Sr. No. 1) is the most common pattern in Dimasa textiles for both male and female clothing. Ramai Rikhu means 'lines of pattern'. It is found in Risha Ramai, Rikhaosa Ramai, Rhijhampain Beren, and *Bathau Ramai*, and weaved on both side borders of the clothes. The two clothes, Risha and Rikhaosa, are called Risha Ramai and Rikhaosa Ramai as there is Ramai Rikhu pattern. There are Risha and Rikhaosa, which are woven without Ramai Rikhu as well. The Ramai Rikhu is the main pattern in Rhijhampain Beren and Bathau Ramai. A male Ramai Rikhu generally has 10 ends and 30 to 36 picks, and a female Ramai Rikhu has 10 ends and 60 to 72 picks.

Jorchiklik

Jorchiklik (Table. 1, Sr. No.2) is a small diamond-shaped motif, weaved in both male and female

clothing along with Ramai Rikhu. The graph here has 7 ends and 7 picks.

Motifs weaved in female clothing

Motifs of Rhijhampain Gufu and Rhijhampain Beren

Rhijhampain Gufu (Fig. 6a) and Rhijhampain Beren (Fig. 6b) are the upper-body cloths worn by Dimasa women; these are wrapped from the upper part of the body to the knee. Rhijhampain Gufu is a plain white coloured cloth with a thick colourful patch of extra weft pattern that comes vertically on the left end of the clothing. The patch is around twenty centimetres wide, with a slight variation in size for each Rhijhampain Gufu. On this patch, a variety of motifs are composed as a pattern. On the other hand, the Rhijhampain Beren is a colourful cloth with lines of Ramai Rikhu woven horizontally throughout the clothing. Rhijhampain Beren has six to nine lines of Ramai pattern; together, these lines are called *Ramai Majai*. The extra weft pattern is weaved vertically on the left end of the cloth, the same as the Rhijhampain Gufu. These two clothes have some specific motifs that are weaved only on them. The main motifs are *Panthaubar*, *Baitha Bokro*, *Baitha Biao*, *Khaisuribar*, *Digdad Digba*, *Godali Cha*, *Phuta Cha*, *Baitha Cha*, *Biaurimiaba*, *Godali Dauba*, and *Ridaudu Dauba*. Among these motifs, *Panthaubar* is weaved on the



Fig. 5 — Difference between male and female motifs (a) *Rigu Dima* (b) *Risha Ramai* (c) *Longer Ramai Rikhu* in female *Rikhaosa Ramai* (d) *Shorter Ramai Rikhu* in male *Risha Ramai* (e) In female clothing fringes are untwisted (f) In male clothing fringes are twisted

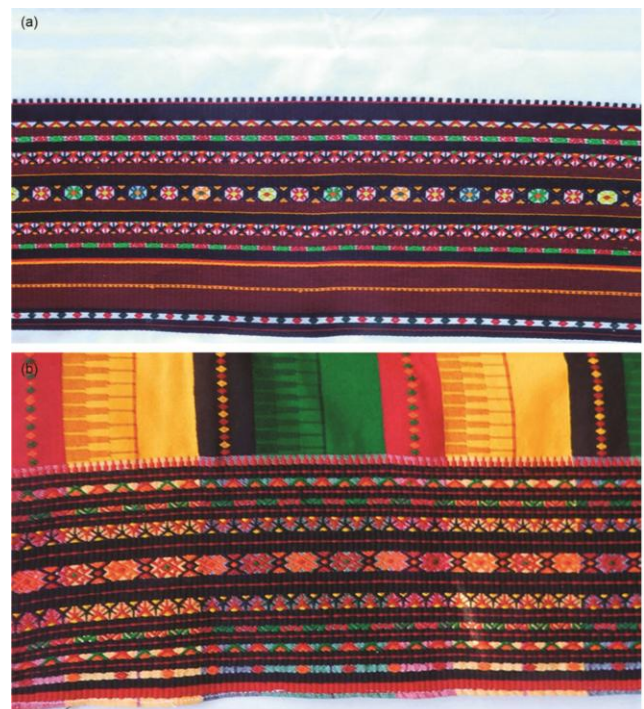


Fig. 6 — Motifs of (a) *Rhijhampain Gufu* (b) *Rhijhampain Beren*

other clothes such as the borders of Rigu Dima and Rikhaosa. Phuta Cha, Digdab Digba, and Godali Dauba are the common motifs for the finishes, which can also be seen in Rigu Dima and Rikhaosa.

Panthaubar

Panthaubar (Table. 1, Sr. No. 3) means ‘flower of brinjal plant’. The graph here has 19 ends and 11 picks.

Baitha Bokro

Baitha Bokro (Table. 1, Sr. No. 4) can be translated as ‘dancing heads’. The graph here has 13 ends and 8 picks.

Baitha Biao

Baitha Biao (Table. 1, Sr. No. 5) can be translated as ‘dancing hands’. The graphs here have 13 ends and 12 picks, and 13 ends and 13 picks.

Khaisuribar

Khaisuribar (Table. 1, Sr. No. 6) is the flower of the *Khaisuri* plant. The graph here has 13 ends and 4 picks.

Digdab Digba

Digdab Digba (Table. 1, Sr. No. 7) pattern is weaved to finish the edges.

Godali Dauba

Godali Dauba (Table. 1, Sr. No. 8) is another pattern for finishing the edges.

Phuta Cha

Phuta Cha (Table. 1, Sr. No. 9) pattern is weaved as an added ornamentation and for the finishes. It is a small motif and can be found in various shapes, the most common is the diamond shape.

Table 1 — List of motifs weaved in Dimasa Kachari textiles in Cachar district of Assam

Sr. No.	Name of the motif	Meaning	Graph	Line drawing	Woven pattern
1	Ramai Rikhu (Both female and male)	It means ‘lines of pattern’.			
2	Jorchiklik (Both female and male)	A small diamond-shaped motif, weaved with Ramai pattern.			
3	Panthaubar (Female)	It means ‘flower of brinjal plant’.			
4	Baitha Bokro (Female)	It can be translated as ‘dancing heads’.			
5	Baitha Biao (Female)	It can be translated as ‘dancing hands’.			
6	Khaisuribar (Female)	The flower of the Khaisuri plant.			
7	Digdab Digba (Female)	Pattern for finishing the edges.			
8	Godali Dauba (Female)	Pattern for finishing the edges.			

Table 1 — List of motifs weaved in Dimasa Kachari textiles in Cachar district of Assam (Contd.)

Sr. No.	Name of the motif	Meaning	Graph	Line drawing	Woven pattern
9	Phuta Cha (Female)	A diamond-shaped motif for finishing the edges.			
10	Misha Bokro (Female)	Misha means small animals.			
11	Daosa (Female)	Daosa means hen.			
12	Praphang Gedeba (Female)	Praphang Gedeba means Big Banyan tree.			
13	Dilam Balai (Female)	It can be translated as, 'leaf in the flowing river'.			
14	Panthaubar (Female)	The motif is also weaved on the borders of Rigu and Rikhaosa, with variations in size and colour.			
15	Jengrengsa (Female)	It means small crabs.			
16	Roina Rikhu (Female)	Roina is the name of a local plant.			
17	Samthaimin (Female)	It means the mark of wild grass.			
18	Bathau Ramai (Female)	It is a type of Ramai pattern.			
19	Thori Shamin (Male)	It means 'the mark of the bamboo shuttle'.			
20	Radaulai Gedeba (Male)	It signifies 'the big castor leaf'.			

Motifs weaved in Rigu Dima and Rikhaosa

The Rigu and Rikhaosa set consists of Rigu Dima and Rikhaosa, with extra-weft motifs in the border of both the clothes. The pattern of Rigu Dima and Rikhaosa border is generally divided into three parts - top, middle, and bottom (Fig. 7). The motifs such as *Rikhu Kro*, *Misha Bokro*, *Daosa*, *Mongplu*, and *Jengrengsa* are woven on the top. *Praphang Khasiba*, *Praphang Gedeba*, *Praphang Roina* are woven on the middle part. In the bottom part, *Dilam Balai*, *Dilam Bathai*, *Roina Rikhu*, *Roina Thaibriba*, *Roina Thaimuaba*, *Panthaubar* and *Samthaimin* are woven. If the size of the motifs is bigger, only the top and bottom parts are weaved. The body part of Rigu Dima is embellished with types of Phuta Cha. The finishes are done with Godali Dauba or Digdab Digba patterns.

Misha Bokro

Misha Bokro (Table. 1, Sr. No. 10) means small animals. It is weaved as the upper part of a pattern. The graph here has 11 ends and 12 picks.

Daosa

Daosa (Table. 1, Sr. No. 11) means hen. It is weaved as the upper part of a composition. The graph here has 34 ends and 16 picks.

Praphang Gedeba

Praphang means Banyan tree, *Gedeba* means big. *Praphang Gedeba* (Table. 1, Sr. No. 12) means 'big Banyan tree'. It is one of the prominent motifs of Dimasa textiles. The other similar motifs are *Praphang Basa Bokro*, *Praphang Khasiba*, *Praphang Roina*. It is weaved in the middle part of a composition, either individually or paired with some other motifs. The graph here has 13 ends and 19 picks.



Fig. 7 — The three main parts of the pattern of a *Rigu Dima* and *Rikhaosa* border

Dilam Balai

In the Dimasa language, *Dilam* means 'flow of river', and *lai* means leaf. *Dilam Balai* (Table. 1, Sr. No. 13) together can be translated as 'leaf in the flowing river'. It is another important motif of Dimasa textiles. A few other motifs similar to this motif are *Dilam Bathai*, *Dilam Laibri*, *Dilam Bubar*. The *Dilam* is a small motif, generally woven in combination with other motifs in a pattern. It is always placed on the bottom of a composition. The graph here has 12 ends and 9 picks.

Panthaubar

Other than in *Rhijhamphain Gufu* and *Rhijhamphain Beren*, *Panthaubar* motif, the 'flower of brinjal plant' (Table. 1, Sr. No. 14) is weaved on the *Rigu* and *Rikhaosa* borders, either individually or as part of a composition with other motifs. The motif is weaved in multiple colours and variations in sizes. The graph here has 19 ends and 11 picks.

Jengrengsa

Jengrengsa (Table. 1, Sr. No. 15) means small crabs. The motif is woven on the top part of a composition. The graph here has 7 ends and 8 picks.

Roina Rikhu

Roina (Table. 1, Sr. No. 16) is the name of a local plant. The motif is woven in the middle part of the pattern. The graph here has 17 ends and 13 picks.

Samthaimin

Samthaimin (Table. 1, Sr. No. 17) means the mark of wild grass. It is weaved in the middle part of a pattern or individually. The graph here has 13 ends and 9 picks.

Bathau Ramai

Bathau Ramai is a type of *Ramai* pattern (Table. 1, Sr. No. 18). This pattern is weaved in a particular lower-body wrapper; the clothing is named based on the name of the pattern itself, *Bathau Ramai*. The pattern is a combination of extra-weft and interlocking techniques. One or two lines of *Bathau Ramai* pattern are weaved on the border of the clothing. Generally, it has 8 ends and 80 picks.

Motifs weaved in male clothing

Motifs of Risha Ramai and Rihmsau

Thori Shamin

Thori Shamin (Table. 1, Sr. No. 19) is the most common motif in male clothes. *Thori* is the traditional

bamboo shuttle used for weaving, and *Min* signifies a mark. If we translate Thori Shamin into English, the nearest meaning will be ‘the mark of the bamboo shuttle’. There are two types of Thori Shamin motifs; one has seven yarns, and the other has thirteen yarns. The graph here has 10 ends and 8 picks.

Radaulai Gedeba

Radau is the castor plant, *lai* means leaf, and *Gedeba* means big. Here, *Radaulai Gedeba* (Table. 1, Sr. No. 20) signifies ‘the big castor leaf’. The Castor plant has a significant role in the everyday life of Dimasa people. They make oil from castor fruit and alkali from the ashes of castor stem. Besides that, castor leaf is the main food for eri silkworms. Eri silkworm rearing, making yarn from eri cocoons and weaving shawls with eri yarn are essential parts of the Dimasa textile tradition. The graph here has 23 ends and 24 picks.

Changes observed

During the field study, a few changes were observed related to the Dimasa textile and motifs. There are machine-embroidered and screen-printed motifs similar to the hand-woven motifs, used in traditional clothing, along with the hand-woven ones. There is an increase in the use of such clothes. There are few instances where the dobby, jacquard or power loom fabrics are included in traditional clothing. Besides those clothes, the use of machine-made fringes and saree borders (Fig. 8) as additional embellishments in traditional woven clothes has become common in recent years.

The traditional textiles, motifs and patterns are copied and reproduced very efficiently with the technological advancements in the textile industry²⁸.



Fig. 8 — Machine-made border in a traditional cloth

It doesn't need the same traditional skill set to replicate the traditional clothes; any semi-skilled factory worker can make the replicated machine-made fabrics²⁹. Although such machine production destroys the authenticity of an indigenous community's traditional skills and cultural identity, since those fabrics and materials are low-cost and look suitable to contemporary fashion trends, people get easily attracted to those fabrics³⁰. The lack of awareness towards one's cultural elements also plays a significant role here.

Another important change observed while comparing the textile motifs of traditional and modern clothes is that the shape and structure of the motifs are changing slowly, and there is a trend of inclusion of motifs that are not traditional to Dimasa culture. Dimasa textile motifs can be distinguished for their simplified and abstract geometrical shapes, which are inspired by the natural environment and elements from the everyday life of the community, and every motif has a deep association and significance in the Dimasa culture²³. But now, in their woven cloths, figurative motifs are seen that don't have any cultural significance or association with their folklore.

It is also observed that the practice of weaving has been reduced among the younger generation compared to the older generation, and its effects are visible in many ways. The first instance is that the vocabulary associated with weaving is shrinking. A young Dimasa woman knows the name of the motifs but cannot explain the significance and meaning of the motifs elaborately. The researcher also noticed that even though the weavers have the structure of a variety of motifs drawn in their graph papers, they weave only a few motifs repeatedly in most of the clothes. Especially in female clothing, where there is a scope to express the weaver's creativity, they are confined to very few motifs which are comparatively simple to construct. The structural construction of weaving the motifs is indigenous to the Dimasa Kachari community. If the women don't weave those motifs, slowly they might forget how to weave them. With that, they will also forget their indigenous philosophy and folklore involved with the textile motifs. Eventually, they may stop appreciating their traditional textile motifs. Here, the threat is that if the weavers forget the significance of their traditional textile motifs, the motifs might easily get replaced by external ones. It is prominently visible in Dimasa traditional textiles that the process of the replacement of motifs has already started. In their modern clothing,

they include some external elements, whether it is a motif, sequence bead, fringe or saree border.

The traditional textiles of an indigenous community play a vital role as a visual archive of their verbal history, language, folklore, material culture, ecological knowledge and cultural identity. The traditional skill and knowledge of weaving motifs and patterns in the clothes are considered an intangible cultural heritage of a community³¹. This heritage can only be safeguarded by practising it.

Conclusions

It is crucial to document and archive the traditional textile motifs of the Dimasa Kachari community with the local name, meaning and weaving techniques before the motifs get completely diluted with external motifs or by the mindless use of advanced textile technologies. From the wide number of Dimasa textile motifs, the researcher was able to collect the names of many motifs, but the meaning and nearest English synonyms were not found for the following motifs—*Baitha Cha*, *Biaurimiaba*, *Godali Dauba*, *Ridaudu Dauba*, *Rikhu Kro*, *Mongplu*, *Praphang Basa Bokro*, *Praphang Khasiba*, *Praphang Roina*, *Dilam Bathai*, *Dilam Laibri*, *Dilam Bubar*, *Roina Thairiba*, *Roina Thaimuaba*, *Samthaimin Gibim*, *Bongur Dainslai*, and *Kalongbar*. For this reason, only the motifs with English synonyms and meanings are listed here.

The researcher tried to document and archive the textile motifs of the Dimasa Kachari community of Cachar District in a standardised format so that readers and researchers from allied fields can understand the rich cultural heritage of the Dimasa Kachari community and initiate more studies in this area. The documentation may also contribute to policy making that encourages the practice of weaving among the younger generation within the community. The documentation would also contribute to the protection and preservation of traditional knowledge, verbal history and material culture, and help in promoting the cultural heritage of the community to a wider platform.

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Conflict of Interest

The researcher has no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

The researcher has collected the data, made the illustrations, clicked the photographs, analysed the data and prepared the manuscript.

Prior Informed Consent

The author has obtained prior informed consent from the informants.

Data Availability

The author will provide the data upon reasonable request.

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