

## Documenting Dimasa Oral Narratives and Digital Archiving<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The authors will discuss how Dimasa traditional knowledge through the oral narratives from diverse genres can be digitally preserved in Mukurtu. Mukurtu is an online platform designed primarily to promote and preserve indigenous heritages and focuses on community based participatory design. Data for oral narratives such as children's games, folk stories, ritualistic chants, to name a few, have been collected using Narrative Inquiry and Narrative Storytelling methods (Clandinin and Connelly 2004). It will discuss the ethnolinguistic aspects of the selected narratives from the Mukurtu portal which can serve as textbook curriculum for the Dimasa language. The paper will finally highlight the importance of digital archiving using Mukurtu as a tool for Dimasa language documentation and revitalization.

**Keywords:** oral narratives, digital archiving, Dimasa.

### 1. Introduction

Dimasa is one of the Bodo-Garo languages from the Tibeto-Burman language family spoken mainly in southern Assam and Dimapur in Nagaland in northeast India. In Assam it is spoken in six districts, namely, Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Hojai, Cachar, Karimganj and Hilakandi. The Dimasa language has 4 major dialects: Hasao, Hawar, Dembra and Dijuwa, and these districts comprise the speakers of these dialects as in Hasao in Dima Hasao, Hawar in Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi, Dembra in Hojai and Karbi Anglong, Dijuwa in Karbi Anglong in Assam and Dimapur in Nagaland. The term 'Dimasa' means 'sons of the great river' where 'di' means water, 'ma' means 'big' and 'sa' means 'sons' (Singha 2007:1). Some historians claim that 'Dimasa' has been derived from 'Dimbacha' or 'Hidimbacha' meaning 'sons of Hidimba and Bhima' and 'Dimapur' was earlier known as 'Hidimbapur' (Barman 2007). Dimasas and the rest of the Bodo sub-group of people including the Bodos, the Morans, the Chutias, the Thengals, the Tiwas, the Sonowals and the Meches were called by the outsiders as 'Kacharis' meaning 'people belonging to the fertile soil'. The historical records of the Kacharis as mentioned in Gait (2008) discusses only the history of Dimasa Kachari kingdom as that of 'Kacharis', unlike the history of the other Kacharis (Barpujari 1997).

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Figure 1 shows the Dimasa speaking regions in Assam and adjoining areas:

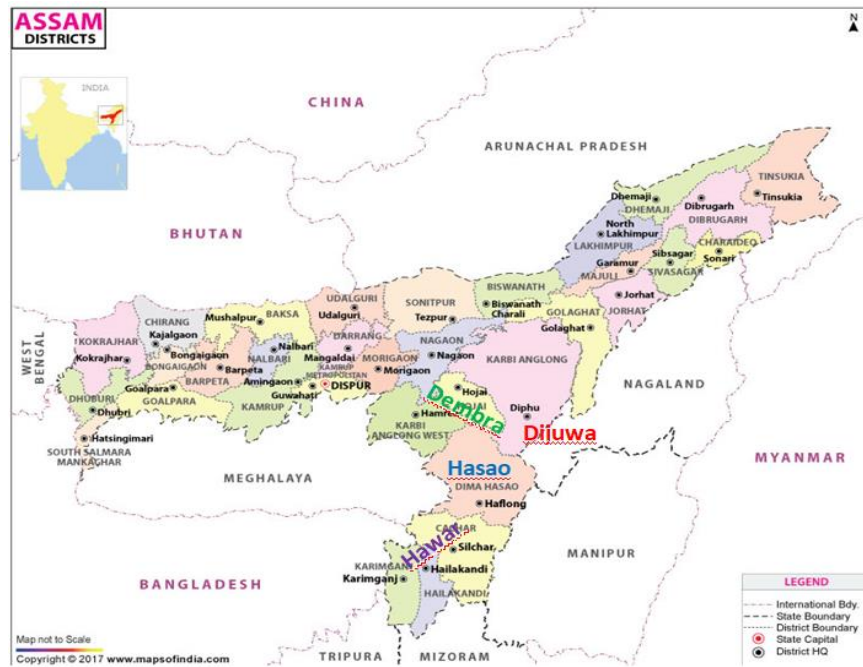


Figure 1: Map of Dimasa speaking regions<sup>2</sup>

According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of the Dimasa speakers is 137,184. The language does not have a script of its own so they use the Bengali script. In 2004, the orthographic convention adopted the Roman script for the Dimasa language and Hasao as the standard dialect of the language. However, despite its historical significance and cultural richness, the language faces numerous challenges that threaten its survival and vitality. According to the UNESCO’s Vitality Report, the language can be labeled as “vulnerably endangered” i.e., it is limited to the home and community domain only. The language is not much documented and so there is less data available including mass media. This passive assimilation into governmental structures has led to a lack of official recognition and support for the language.

To add, Dimasa is not included in the 22 official languages of India. Hence, as a non-scheduled language, it lacks the legal protections given to the scheduled languages. It is offered as an optional subject up to Class 6 in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. The community is having plans for extension of the language till Class 8 but the procedure of implementation is pending till now. The Dimasa Sahitya Sabha in the year 2004 adopted the Roman script for the orthography which signified a step towards standardization and preservation of the language. However, fewer literatures only are available in the language till date.

The present study thus aims to systematically document and analyze the different types of oral narratives present in the Dimasa community. This includes collecting a diverse range of narratives, including folktales, myths, legends, rituals, and historical information, and digitizing them for archival purposes. Secondly, it discusses the scope of creating an awareness about the cultural significance of oral narratives as valuable sources of traditional knowledge by highlighting their role. Lastly, the study will discuss how

<sup>2</sup> Modified from <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/assam/assam-district.htm>. Accessed on March 30, 2024.

digital archiving platforms can utilize oral narratives and create culture-based textbook materials and language learning.

## 2. Digital archiving of oral narratives

The project, Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive, is an open access archive whose main goal is to support and preserve the linguistic and cultural heritages of the indigenous peoples of northeast India. By doing so, it tries to revitalize the languages of these communities through the creation of blogs, web dictionaries, and digital encyclopedias. The Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive portal has been designed as a community-based digital archive, involving the community in the digital preservation of their heritage information. The online digital archive works through the Mukurtu platform in the Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive. Mukurtu is based on Drupal, open source content management software that is widely used for websites around the world. The project also aims to make materials for the community. The information used in the archive can take forms of the hard copies which will in result help the community people to understand their culture in a better way. These hard copies can be published in the future and can also be recommended for library and language education for both the communities. <http://bododimasaarchive.org/> is the link of the Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive.

The Dimasa archive team members collected various types of data from 15 villages of Cachar district of Assam, namely, Rongpur, Dholai, Sheorartal, Kumacherra, Kanakpur, Hawarma, Joypur, Khaspur, Khauthai, Raidilung, Madra, Bijoypur, Lodi, Lodi Kachari, and Borbond in 2022. The data include categories such as, tools and instruments, flora and fauna, folk songs etc. There are 256 Dimasa items added in the archive till date from this fieldwork, and out of which, 50 oral narratives have been archived from Cachar, Assam: Interview (10), Mythical Legend (1), Oral History (12), Short Story (5), Religious Song/Kirtan (1), Folk Song (6), Folk Dance (1), Children's Game (3), Ritual language (3), Idioms and Proverbs (1 Monologue), Taboo (1 Monologue) and Riddles (6).

### 2.1 Oral Narratives

The portal Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive has mainly three sections for digital archiving: categories, communities and cultural protocol. The categories or cultural categories include the cultural information and the oral narratives that are documented and preserved in the archive, the communities refer to the 'community' which is curating the archive (as in the Dimasa community for the Dimasa team members), and the cultural protocol refers to the ownership rights of the community in particular. Thus, oral narratives are preserved inside categories as 'cultural heritage'. Some of the genres of these oral narratives uploaded in the portal are analysed here briefly.

#### 2.1.1 Short Story

##### 2.1.1.1 *jaingeluma jang magusha khaiplung khalaiba ni kharmin*<sup>3</sup>

The story narrates how a selfish monkey befriends a firefly and a tiger but is devoured by the tiger in the end. The traits attributed with *jaingeluma* /dʒaɪŋgeloma/ or *Jengailuma* /dʒeŋgailoma/ 'firefly' are friendliness and *magusha* /maguʃa/ 'monkey' as selfishness. Moral of the story is, 'selfishness devours self'.

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/jaingeluma-jang-magusha-khaiplung-khalaiba-ni-kharmin>, on March 29, 2024.

### 2.1.1.2 Ashampha<sup>4</sup>

Another story that can be mentioned here from the archive is *Ashampha* /afamp<sup>h</sup>a/, whose name is an eponym and popularly related with persons performing stupid actions in life. One of the most significant actions in *Ashampha*'s stories is, when he does not recognise his deceased baby after falling from his back in the return trail from a forest, and laughs at it, concluding that other babies also die.

## 2.1.2 Oral History

### 2.1.2.1 Gor Ail hillock, Hawarma village<sup>5</sup>

The proper name “Gor Ail” /gɔr ail/ hillock is a historical significance to the Dimasa Kachari history, as it bears its name, *Gor Ail* (in Sylheti Bengali ‘Came home’), after the retreat of Dimasa soldiers in the hillock after a battle with Burmese soldiers in the 18th century.

### 2.1.2.2 Durga Mandir, Thakurbari near Hawarma<sup>6</sup>

The *Durga* temple was built during the reign of the Dimasa King *Tamradhvaj Narayan Hasnu*, and it is about 600 years old, (according to the community members of the *Hawarma* village). The temple remains to be protected by the authorities as a heritage site.

## 2.1.3 Children’s games

### 2.1.3.1 Question-Answer game “shatraitrai gonthaitrai”<sup>7</sup>

It is a children’s quiz game narrating a series of events that starts from the sky and includes questioning every object identified in every answer until the object reaches the royal house. *shatraitrai* /ʃatraitrai/ is a reduplication of *fatrai* /ʃatrai/ ‘star’ to pluralise it as ‘stars and all’; similarly *gonthaitrai* /gɔnt<sup>h</sup>aitrai/ ‘*gonthai* (weaving model) and all’. An extract of the text is illustrated here:<sup>8</sup>

- 1) *shatraitrai gonthaitrai*  
 ʃatraitrai      gɔnt<sup>h</sup>aitrai  
 stars and all (weaving model) and all  
 ‘stars and *gonthais!*’
  
- 2) *gonthmai                      glau bra thangkha ?*  
 gɔnt<sup>h</sup>mai                      glau    bra    t<sup>h</sup>ɔŋk<sup>h</sup>a  
 a kind of bamboo      long    where gone  
 ‘Where has the long bamboo gone?’
  
- 3) *bari shukha.*  
 barɪ    ʃɔk<sup>h</sup>a  
 fence made  
 ‘It fenced!’

<sup>4</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/folk-story-asampha>. on March 29, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/gor-ail-hillock-hawarma-village>, on March 29, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/durga-mandir-thakurbari-hawarma-village> on March 28, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Accessed from on <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/question-answer-game-%E2%80%9Cshatraitrai-gonthaitrai%E2%80%9D> on March 28, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> The text has been glossed word-to-word (in place of morpheme-to-morpheme and IPA) in the Dimasa archive (which is open access) for the community members and other viewers for easier reading.

- 4) *bari bra thangkha ?*  
barɪ bra tʰaŋkʰa  
fence where gone  
'Where has the fence gone?'
- 5) *purnima jikha.*  
pʊrnɪma dʒɪkʰa  
full moon eaten  
'Full moon had it all'.
- 6) *purnima bra thangkha ?*  
pʊrnɪma bra tʰaŋkʰa  
full moon where gone  
'Where has the full moon gone?'
- 7) *purnima daono khonjikka.*  
pʊrnɪma daʊnɔ kʰɔndʒɪkʰa  
full moon hen pick eat up  
'The full moon picked the hen'.
- 8) *daono bra thangkha ?*  
daʊnɔ bra tʰaŋkʰa  
hen where gone  
'Where has the hen gone?'
- 9) *daono daoling kheplangkha.*  
daʊnɔ daʊlɪŋ kʰeplɔŋkʰa  
hen vulture snap become  
'The hen got snapped with the vulture'.
- 10) *daoling bra thangkha ?*  
daʊlɪŋ bra tʰaŋkʰa  
vulture where gone  
'Where did the vulture go?'
- 11) *yamjang sathaikha*  
jamdʒaŋ ʃətʰaɪkʰa  
with mat killed  
'It got killed with the mat'.
- 12) *yam bra thangkha ?*  
jam bra tʰaŋkʰa  
mat where gone  
'Where has the mat gone?'
- 13) *waijang wauthaikha.*  
waɪdʒaŋʃaʊtʰaɪkʰa  
with fire burned  
'It got burned with fire'.
- 14) *wai bra thangkha ?*  
waɪ bra tʰaŋkʰa  
fire where gone  
'Where has the fire gone?'

15) *dijang lukhlaikha.*

didʒaŋ            lək<sup>h</sup>laik<sup>h</sup>a  
with water        poured down  
'It splashed with water'.

16) *di bra thangkha ?*

dɪ    bra    t<sup>h</sup>aŋk<sup>h</sup>a  
water    where gone  
'Where has the water gone?'

17) *mithang sropkha*

mɪt<sup>h</sup>aŋ    sɾɔp<sup>h</sup>a  
yak        slurped (it all)  
'The yak slurped it all'.

18) *mithang bra thangkha ?*

mɪt<sup>h</sup>aŋ    bra    t<sup>h</sup>aŋk<sup>h</sup>a  
yak        where gone  
'Where has the yak gone?'

19) *Rajani nodain                    jaindahi                    grum                    baishenghikha.*

raʒani    nɔdani                    dʒaɪndahi                    grɔm                    baɪʃeŋhɪk<sup>h</sup>a  
King's new house        after shifting        groom sound        crossed over (inside)  
'It bumped into the new house of the king'.

The game covers relevant cultural items from Dimasa as in cultural items such as bamboo, fence, moon, hen, vulture, mat, fire, water, yak, and finally the king. This quiz game as Longmailai (2023: 47-50) describes, is an age-old tradition as the animal *mithang* /mɪt<sup>h</sup>aŋ/ 'yak' is mentioned in the narrative, whereas the present habitat of Dimasa has only *mishap* /mɪʃep/ 'buffaloes'.

2.1.3.2 *yaoshijang mlaoyaba (finger game)*<sup>9</sup>

It starts with "yeng yeng gulala" /jeŋ jeŋ ɡulala/ played by using all ten fingers on both hands and repeating the same story in this game. *yaoshi* /jaɔʃɪ/ refers to 'fingers' and *miao* /mlaɔ/ 'game'. *yaoshijang mlaoyaba* jaɔʃɪdʒaŋ mlaɔjaba/ literally translates to 'the game that is played with fingers'.

1) *yeng yeng gulala,*

jeŋ jeŋ ɡulala  
tingling sensation  
'The tingling sensation yeng yeng there you go!'

2) *banju                    bathai    gelaoba.*

bandʒɔ                    bət<sup>h</sup>ai    ɡelaɔba  
Krishnachura    tree        so big  
'The royal Poinciana (Krishnachura) tree is so big and tall!'

<sup>9</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/node/1316> on March 28, 2024.

- 3) *Arikhidijang Narashing shingshingba.*  
 arik<sup>h</sup>ididzəŋ    narəʃŋ    ʃŋʃŋba  
 Arikhi with    Narasingha    rustling sound  
 ‘Arikhidi (mythical mother nature) and the curry leaf (narasingha) tree *Murraya Koneigii* are rustling and whispering softly in nature’.
- 4) *bailai                    bathai laikhonthaisha.*  
 bailai                    bə<sup>h</sup>ai    laik<sup>h</sup>ənt<sup>h</sup>aɪʃa  
 Dancing as if fruit/veg baby pumpkins  
 ‘dancing like leaves of the baby pumpkins!’
- 5) *yaoshariha            gdingba.*  
 jaʊʃariha            gdŋba  
 hands on            rolling  
 ‘rolling on the hands’
- 6) *Ani ega dainsho!*  
 anɪ    ega    daɪŋʃə  
 my    leg    cut off  
 ‘Please numb my leg and let it go!’

The game is a fun activity with children’s imaginative concepts from nature and the tingling sensation in the hands (Longmailai 2023: 46-47).

#### 2.1.4 Myths and Legend

*Dilaobra-Sangibra* /dilaɔbra-ʃəŋɡɪbra/ is one of the oldest of Dimasa primordial verses refers to myth of the river confluence *Dilaobra-Sangibra* in which it is narrated how their ancestors met at the confluence of river named *Dilao-Sangi* to formulate all the governing principles of Dimasa socio-religious experience. *Dilaobra* is an endonym of the river ‘Lohit/Brahmaputra’ and *Sangibra* that of ‘Tsang-po’.<sup>10</sup>

#### 2.1.5 Songs

##### 2.1.5.1 *Dol Purnima Kirtan*

*Dol Purnima Kirtan* /dɔl purnima kɪrtən/ is a series of religious songs based on *Dol Purnima* performed by the villagers on Holi festival to collect alms from house to house. The song is devoted to Hindu deities *Krishna* and *Radha*. The Hawar speaking Dimasa community from Cachar, Assam traditionally performs this ritual, which is a dying tradition today.<sup>11</sup>

##### 2.1.5.2 *Folk song on Dishru*<sup>12</sup>

This is a sentimental Dimasa ballad on princess *Dishru* /dɪʃru/ who was the daughter of King *Horiram Haflongbar* /hɔrɪram hap<sup>h</sup>lɔŋbar/ and Queen *Dumaidi* /dəmaidɪ/. *Dishru* was kept hidden from her father in his kingdom, as the priest instructed to kill the baby if it was a female who’d bring downfall to the kingdom. One day, the king saw his daughter and unknowingly fell in love with her. The fellow kinsmen shamed her and she had to leave the kingdom out of shame and lament. This sentimental Dimasa ballad laments the pain of *Dishru’s* mother, as her daughter had to leave the kingdom permanently.

<sup>10</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/dilaobraha-sangibraha> on March 30, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/dul-purnima-kirtan-religious-song> on March 28, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/folk-song-dishru-dishru-ni-rajabthai> on March 27, 2024.

## 2.1.6 Ritual

### 2.1.6.1 *daosa rataiba*<sup>13</sup>

*daosa rataiba* /daʊʃa ratʰaiba/ is the ritual of sacrificing a pair of birds for purification after childbirth. *daosa* means ‘small bird pair’ and *rataiba* ‘sacrifice’. The old lady narrates and demonstrates in the recording, how the house and village where a child is newly born in the Dimasa community, performs this traditional childbirth ritual.

### 2.1.6.12 *kharoma jukhuba*<sup>14</sup>

*kharoma* /kʰarɔorma/ or *khaoroma* /kʰaɔrɔma/ means ‘frog’ and *jukhuba* /ɟʊkʰɔba/ means ‘marriage’. The ritual is the wedding ceremony of a frog which is often performed by the people of *Joypur* Village to call out the rain from gods. The wedding ceremony of frogs is similar to the wedding ceremony of Dimasa people. Frog is culturally associated as the bringer of rain from heaven, thus the reason for the notion of its marriage to bind heaven and land through rain.

## 2.1.7 Proverbs

Proverbs in general are words of wisdom passed from generations and carry cultural concepts. Two proverbs are discussed here from the archive:<sup>15</sup>

- |    |                  |              |                 |            |           |                |
|----|------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1) | <i>nikhudada</i> | <i>khudi</i> | <i>thukadeh</i> | <i>jar</i> | <i>na</i> | <i>glaireh</i> |
|    | nikʰɔdada        | kʰɔdi        | tʰɔkʰade        | ɟar        | na        | glaire         |
|    | push if          | spit         | thrown          | self       | to        | fall           |
- ‘If you spit up in the air it will fall down on you’.

The figurative meaning of (1) is, if one spits up, it falls down on the person. Its literal translation is ‘What goes around comes around’. That is, you will get rewarded by your actions, good or bad, in the future. The keyword here is *khudi* /kʰɔdi/ ‘spit (n)’ to denote the kind of action that will receive the reward.

- |    |              |           |                    |            |           |                 |              |
|----|--------------|-----------|--------------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|
| 2) | <i>shain</i> | <i>ha</i> | <i>thathikadeh</i> | <i>hor</i> | <i>ha</i> | <i>gibrimba</i> | <i>maire</i> |
|    | ʃam          | ha        | tʰatʰikʰade        | hɔr        | ha        | gɪbrɪmba        | maɪre        |
|    | day          | in        | store if           | night      | at        | helpful         | get          |
- ‘If you keep things carefully during the day, then it will be helpful for you at night’.

In the second example, its figurative meaning is, if you store in the day, it will be available in the night. Its nearest literal translation can be framed as, ‘a stitch in time saves nine’. The keyword here is *thathi* /tʰatʰi/ ‘store (v)’; that is, saving is a basic requirement in life. Saving in better times can save one in difficult times.

<sup>13</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/daosarataiba-ritual-sacrificing-pair-birds-purification-after-childbirth-shantipur> on March 27, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/khaoroma-jukuba-frog-wedding> on March 27, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/grao-sol> on March 25, 2024.



### 2.1.8 Riddles

Riddles are question-answer puzzles where the answer is hinted at, in the question. These keywords in these riddles serve as cultural metaphors in Dimasa. Two such riddles from the Dimasa archive are illustrated here in (3) and (4):

- 3) *hadam guphu, maimu gishim : laishi rebba*  
 hadam gop<sup>h</sup>o maimo gɪʃim laɪʃi rebba  
 field white rice seed black book writing  
 ‘Empty field is white, rice seed is black: writing a book’.<sup>16</sup>

The comparison in (3) of the empty field *hadam guphu* and black rice seed *maimu* with writing a book as in *laishi rebba* has been made as the book is conceptualised as a flat, empty surface without inks like an empty field, and inks that are used to write on a book like black rice seeds. The fact that the primary occupation of Dimasa is cultivation, such a riddle is therefore, culturally associated with Dimasa traditional knowledge.

- 4) *dama guphu birkhlaikha de birkhuphinya : khudi thuba*  
 dama gop<sup>h</sup>o bɪrk<sup>h</sup>laɪk<sup>h</sup>a de bɪrk<sup>h</sup>oʔ<sup>h</sup>ɪnʃa k<sup>h</sup>oɔɔi t<sup>h</sup>oʔba  
 butterfly white fly if fly can’t again spit throwing  
 ‘If a white butterfly jumps, it cannot jump back: spitting’.<sup>17</sup>

In (4), the metaphor is *dama* ‘white butterfly’ and the target word is *khudi* ‘spit (n)’. *dama guphu* are white moths or butterflies which cannot reverse their transformation once they start flying. Similarly, *khudi* ‘spit’ once is out of the mouth cannot be reverted in action. The comparison here is on the transformation from one medium to another; that is, emerging from a body to air.

### 2.2 Oral Narratives and Community Based Research (CBR)

The content of the oral narratives discussed in the section 2.1 can be classified under two types of community-based research (CBR) models a) narrative inquiry and b) storytelling. Short stories, children’s games, songs, proverbs and riddles fall under ‘storytelling’, while oral history, myths and legend, rituals and the like are ‘narrative inquiry’ although the boundary of the two models is marginal. Narrative Inquiry, developed by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2004) is a “qualitative research method that focuses on the study of human experiences through the process of storytelling. That is, researchers gather and examine the stories that people share to comprehend the significance of these narratives within certain cultural contexts”. Interview method is also used in this kind of data collection in which the researchers engage with the participants and collect information. In case of Dimasa narratives, interviews were conducted one-in-one and also in groups, and face-to-face. Traditional stories and oral histories from Dimasa were collected in this process. These narratives help in understanding the “heroes, supernatural beings and symbolic elements” along with the cultural beliefs and values associated with it. Also, ‘oral history’ is a useful tool during CBR for the documentation of lesser-known narratives not included in historical records.

<sup>16</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/dimasa-riddle-hadam-guphu-maimu-gishim> on March 25, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage/dimasa-riddle-dama-guphu-birkhlaika-de-birkhuphinya> on March 25, 2024.

Storytelling is a culturally appropriate research methodology which plays an important role in transmitting cultural knowledge, traditions and values from generation to generation. Different forms of narratives like folk stories, monologues and enactments are present in it. Idioms, proverbs, riddles, taboo stories, and other spoken expressions are all included in monologues.

Enactment as a part of storytelling is the act of performing rituals, songs, dances, stories, children's games or other cultural traditions. It promotes cultural identity of a community while protecting and transmitting their cultural heritage. In case of Dimasa oral narratives discussed in the paper, the rituals *Daosa rataiba* 'bird sacrifice for childbirth' and *Khaoroma jukhuba* 'frog marriage', songs such as *Dol Purnima Kirtan* 'Holi festival religious song', children's games *shatraitrai gonthaitrai* 'question-answer game' and *yaoshijang mlaoyaba* 'finger game', were all enactments during the data collection, in which the community participated in performing respective activities to demonstrate the cultural traditions in Dimasa.

Simonsen and Robertson (2013) in Longmailai, Barman, Bihung and Wasson (in print), discusses how the collaborative practices between the 'researcher' and the 'researched', i.e. the community, play an important role in collaborative researchers. The design of the Dimasa archive is participatory and involves community collaboration with the archiving team experts for the digital preservation of the traditional knowledge systems and age-old traditions.

There have been linguistic digital archives introduced in India such as Sikkim-Darjeeling Himalayan Endangered Languages Archive (SiDHELA) (Narayanan 2020; Narayanan and Takhellambam 2021) and abroad as in, Computational Resource for South Asian Languages (CORSA), University of North Texas, and Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR), Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. However, most of these archives are digital databases and have restricted access to the community. The Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive, on the other hand, in which these oral narratives have been digitally preserved, is not only open access, it is a community-based archive, as it involves community participation as curators and administrators to run and monitor the portals. The Dimasa team members with the Bodos have been doing collaborative research with the respective communities and sharing traditional knowledge directly in the portal since 2021.

That is, the portal Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive necessitates the importance of preserving and transmitting traditional knowledge and passing it on to the next generations as a means of safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Dimasa people.

### **2.3 Archiving for Dimasa Community Based Language Resource**

The oral narratives become an important tool to facilitate mother tongue learning through an indigenous curriculum design covering all aspects of traditional knowledge preserved through storytelling and/or enactments. Archiving them as a collection of cultural narratives serves the purpose, thereafter, towards promoting the cultural and linguistic knowledge in digital technology, besides creating a corpus of materials for developing textbooks consisting of traditional knowledge-based curriculum. The National Education Policy (2020) further depicts in the section 22.19 to develop digital platforms and create a scope to add "videos, dictionaries, recordings, and more, of people (especially elders) speaking the language, telling stories, reciting poetry, and performing plays, folk songs and dances". This not only encourages the community members to participate in the designing of the archive, but also in creating a digital repository or source of traditional knowledge for producing language materials.

Moreover, in the section 22 (III, pp.53-56) in NEP, it clearly emphasizes on the ‘promotion of Indian languages, arts, and culture’, as a part of promotion and revitalization efforts among the individual and the community of India as a whole. Longmailai, Barman, Brahma and Wasson (in print) also pointed that, with NEP’s effort to develop high-quality textbooks in Indian languages with culture-based curriculum, more publication is required mostly for language development. In this case, creating a digital corpus with oral narratives in a web platform such as Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive is an effective means of keeping the heritage information well preserved for publication purposes and wider access.

Presently, the Dimasa archiving section has 256 items documented in the ‘Cultural Heritage’ category, among which oral narratives are 54 in number till date (50 are collected from Cachar district and 4 from Dima Hasao district in Assam), besides 256 dictionary words (Dimasa-English) and 3 blogs. The oral narratives are documented through audio and video recordings; audio files are directly uploaded into the Mukurtu platform while video recordings are watermarked and uploaded through Vimeo platform. The images are equally watermarked and protected from content misuse by other sources. The narratives are documented through text into 3 parts: ‘summary’ states, what x is about; ‘description’ provides a brief background of the metadata of the item, and ‘cultural narrative’ provides ethno-cultural information and text translation of the recorded data. The metadata and other necessary details of the narrative collected are available for the viewer for easy reference.

This archive has thus created multiple videos and audio files besides watermarked photos and the text information that can be useful for developing web material for learning Dimasa culture and language as well as exporting them into printed form.

Figure 2 provides a glimpse of the Cultural Heritage window of the Dimasa platform:

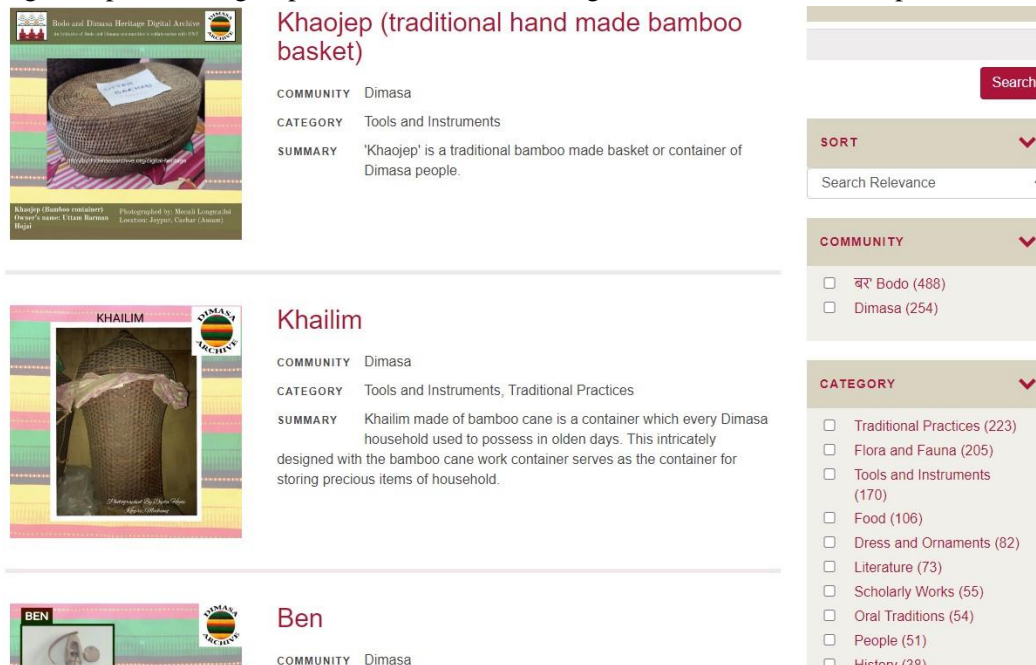


Figure 2: Screenshot of a sample from Dimasa Cultural Heritage Items<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Accessed from <https://bododimasaarchive.org/digital-heritage> on March 30, 2024.

Longmailai (2023:p.52) has mentioned how Indian folk tales were preserved and developed into printed story books such as *Amar Chitra Katha*, *Panchatantra*, *Jataka Tales*, and how media popularised contemporary drama such as *Squid game* and novel *Game of Thrones (GOT)*. Similar attempts can be recreated from the Dimasa narratives such as *Ashampha*, princess *Dishru*, folk epic on *Dilaobra-Sangibra* and other folklore in the form of storybooks, epic series, video documentaries to name a few. This kind of community engagement results in motivating the Dimasa learners in improving language skills both virtually and written literature, besides contributing towards a greater understanding of Dimasa knowledge and local culture.

### 3. Conclusion

To sum up, digital archiving is essential for preserving and promoting speech communities and their cultural history, including that of the Bodo and Dimasa communities. The project, namely, Bodo and Dimasa Heritage Digital Archive works using Mukurtu platform as an open access and community based archive; its main goal is to support and preserve the linguistic and cultural heritages of the indigenous peoples of northeast India.

Cultural heritages such as oral traditions in the form of folk stories, oral history, songs and ritual, idioms and riddles, myth and legend, and children's games are pivotal in preserving the Dimasa linguistic and cultural knowledge. Digital archiving guarantees that these rich cultural traditions will be preserved for future generations. This process of digital archiving of oral narratives can lead to material production for introducing culture and knowledge based indigenous curriculum in language education. Materials like language primers and illustrative story books, including traditional encyclopedic books can eventually be prepared which further contributes to the revitalization and preservation of the language.

In conclusion, a successful digital archiving project aims to preserve cultural history that incorporates community engagement and the maintenance of an effective connection between linguists and members of the Dimasa community. It is therefore a continuously hand-to-hand collaborative research practice with the community participants, without which documenting oral narratives and creating digital resources remains an upheaval task as such.

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