

**A REPORT
ON**

**KAMATAPUR MOVEMENT OF THE KOCH RAJBONGSHI
PEOPLE:
A STUDY OF THE IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE KOCH RAJBONGSHI
PEOPLE**

Submitted by:

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Sponsored by:

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Preface:

Koch Rajbongshi community is one of the oldest ethnic groups of Assam and its adjoining areas. Besides Assam, they are also found in Northern part of West Bengal, Bihar, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Nepal. Their social, political and cultural situation differs from state to state and country to country. In Assam, they have been demanding Schedule tribe (Plains) status for the community since a long time. Besides, the demand for ST, they are also engaged in the demand for a separate Kamatapur state from the last two decades. The demand for Kamatapur is a shared demand of the Koch Rajbongshis of Assam and Bengal. In fact, the demand for Kamatapur originates in North Bengal rather than Assam. These two aspirations of the Koch Rajbongshis are now looked as a matter of identity crisis of the community.

The present study titled "Kamatapur Movement of the Koch Rajbongshi People: A study of the identity crisis of the Koch Rajbongshi people" is an attempt to understand the various aspects of identity crisis of the Koch Rajbongshi community in the context of Kamatapur Movement. The study mainly aims to understand the historical background of the Koch Rajbongshi community, social and political life of the Koch Rajbongshi community, to understand the emergence of identity of the Koch Rajbongshi community and to understand religious and political life of the Koch Rajbongshi community.

The study is mainly divided in four major chapters. Chapter-I is the introductory chapter which included more sub sections. These sub sections are Introduction, Scheduled Tribe demand, Review of literature, Objective of the study and Methodology. Chapter-II is a brief account of the Koch Rajbongshi community. This chapter included five sub chapters which

are Migration and Origin, Historical Background, Culture and Religion, Socio-Political Background and An overview of the Kamatapur Movement. The 3rd chapter is the finding of the village study in which findings from the field visits are discussed and analyzed. The 4th chapter is the concluding chapter where the overall conclusion of the study has been drawn.

This study is a humble attempt to provide an overall understanding of the Kamatapur Movement and the Koch Rajbongshi people. I will be happy if this work contributes its bit to

Acknowledgement

This study titled "Kamatapur Movement of the Koch Rajbongshi People: A study of the identity crisis of the Koch Rajbongshi people" has been possible due to the selflessness help and guidance of many individuals and people. Without their help, it is difficult to imagine completion of the study. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge those who have helped, guided me and cooperated with me during various stages of the study.

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I would also like to sincerely thank the members of the Koch Rajbongshi community of Kokrajhar and Dhubri districts where I have conducted the study. They have been very cooperative and showed enormous hospitality during field visits. Without their cooperation, this study would not have been possible.

I would also like to especially thank to my field investigator Krishna Kanata Roy, without whose help it was impossible to do the study. I am specially thankful to David Roy for taking the labour of shooting various events and collecting necessary photographs related to this study in his capacity as the Research Assistant. I would also like to extend my thanks to Prasenjit Kochari, Research Assistant of this study for helping me in the final layout and proof reading.

Shri Arup Jyoti Das

DECLARATION

This is to certify that the present work "Kamatapur Movement of the Koch Rajbongshi People: A study of the identity crisis of the Koch Rajbongshi people" is an original and faithful work done by the undersigned under Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22.

The report in part or full has not been submitted for any other degree or diploma in this other program.



Shri Arup Jyoti Das

Date:

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CHAPTER -I

Introduction

1.1. Introduction:

Identity is core to human society both in terms of individual and society level. When it says that an identity is in crisis, it implies that the very basic foundation of existence is questioned. Theorist Erik Erikson coined the term *identity crisis* and believed that it was one of the most important conflicts people face in development.

According to Erikson, an identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself. Erikson's interest in identity began in childhood. Raised Jewish, Erikson appeared very Scandinavian and often felt that he was an outsider of both groups. His later studies of cultural life among the Yurok of northern California and the Sioux of South Dakota helped formalize Erikson's ideas about identity development and identity crisis.

Erikson described identity as:

"...a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. As a quality of unself-conscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his communality. In him, we see emerge an unique unification of what is irreversibly given--that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals--with the open choices provided in available roles, occupational possibilities, values offered, mentors met, friendships made, and first (mostly) sexual encounters." (Erikson, 1970)

Erikson's theory helps in understanding the identity question at personal level, which is very important. However, in this study we are dealing with the question of ethnic identity in the context of Koch Rajbongshi and the Kamatapur Movement. "Ethnic identity (the degree to one which one views oneself as a member of a particular group), acculturation (the process of adjusting to a different culture), and cultural orientation (one's feelings toward and levels of engagement in different cultures)" in a number of ways. All these three constructs describe individuals' relationships to their cultural environments, span multiple domains of life experience (e.g. language, activities, etc.), and are dynamic and

constantly changing”, observes some scholars (Tsia, Chentssova-Dutton, and Wong:2015)



In this case, Kachan Chandra's view is very much helpful in understanding ethnic identity. Scholar Kachan Chandra observes:

“[b]y “identity,” I mean any social category in which an individual is eligible to be a member. Ethnic identity categories, I propose, are a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by descent-based attributes.”

By attributes that “determine” eligibility for membership I mean either those that qualify an individual for membership in a category or those that signal such membership. By descent-based attributes, I mean attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with descent. By attributes “associated with descent”, I mean attributes that are acquired genetically (e.g. skin colour, gender, hair type, eye colour, height, and physical features), or through cultural and historical inheritance (e.g. the names, languages, places of birth and origin of one's parents

and ancestors), or acquired in the course of one's lifetime as markers of such an inheritance (e.g. last name, or tribal markings). By attributes "believed to be associated with descent," I mean attributes around which a credible myth of association with descent has been woven, whether or not such an association exists in fact. The definition thus includes both a subjective and an objective element.

The set of identity categories in which membership is determined by descent-based attributes is large. Ethnic identity categories are a subset of this larger set defined by the following restrictions:

(1) They are impersonal. (2) They constitute a section of a country's population rather than the whole. (3) If one sibling is eligible for membership in a category at any given place, then all other siblings would also be eligible in that place. (4) The qualifying attributes for membership are restricted only to one's own genetically transmitted features or to the language, religion, place of origin, tribe, region, caste, clan, nationality, or race of one's parents and ancestors (Chandra Kanchan:2015)

The most widely used definitions of ethnic identity proposed in previous literature include the following:

- According to Max Weber, "ethnic groups are those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists." (Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 35).
- According to Donald Horowitz: "Ethnicity is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity" (Horowitz 1985, 52).
- According to Fearon and Laitin, an ethnic group is "a group larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually

autonomous, and has a conventionally recognized “natural history” as a group.” (Fearon and Laitin 2000, 20).

- In a subsequent refinement, Fearon defines a “prototypical” ethnic group as one that has several of the following features as possible: (1) Membership is reckoned primarily by descent, (2) Members are conscious of group membership, (3) Members share distinguishing cultural features, (4) These cultural features are valued by a majority of members, (5) The group has or remembers a homeland and, (6) The group has a shared history-as a group that is “not wholly manufactured but has some basis in fact.” (Fearon 2003, 7)

- According to Anthony Smith, an ethnic group is, “a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of a common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity.” (Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 6).

Public gathering in demand of Kamatapur at Kokrajhar, September 6, 2013



The community in identity question here in this study is the Koch Rajbongshi community of Assam. They are one of the oldest indigenous group of Assam as well as other

adjoining areas of Assam and India. Assam is the homeland of different ethnic groups with a variety of cultures and speaking different languages and dialects. Assam is considered as the melting pot of diverse races, castes, religions, languages and cultures. Inter-ethnic conflicts and struggle for identity among the ethnic groups too are not new but a frequently occurring phenomenon. For long, Koch Rajbongshi Community had been a part of the larger Assamese society, but from the last two decades they have engaged in asserting their separate identity as Koch Rajbongshi.

Koch Rajbanshi Women of Bolai Bazar, Dinajpur, Bangladesh



Koch Rajbongshi Community has been demanding a separate state named Kamatapur since last two decades. This community, who are mainly spread in Assam and Bengal, were for a long period thought to be assimilated with the mainstream Bengali and Assamese. However, the emergence of the Kamatapur movement has compelled us to rethink in the process and merger of the Koch Rajbongshis into the Assamese and Bengali identity. It seems there is a feeling and alienation and identity crisis within the Koch Rajbongshi community which need to understand in field based perspective.

The Kamatapur movement of the Koch Rajbongshi people is a demand for restoration of the historical Kamatapur region with a status of 'statehood'. It would comprise present

areas of North Bengal and Lower Assam. In Assam the movement is mainly spearheaded by All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRSU). In North Bengal the Movement is lead a political party known as Kamatapur Peoples' Party (KPP) and Kamatapur Progressive Party (KPP). Besides AKRSU and KPP, there is Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association (GCPA) who are also raising the same issue.

Kamatapur Association (KA) is another organization which is spreading the demand for Kamatapur state very seriously in the recent time. An armed organization called Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) is also demanding Kamatapur from both Bengal and Assam. But the difference between other organizations and KLO is that, while the KLO wants "sovereign Kamatapur", other organizations want the creation of the Kamatapur state within the territorial boundary of Indian Union. In the recent time, more groups like All Kamatapur Students' Organization (AKSO), Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Party (GCBDP), Kamatapur Association (KA) has joined in the movement for a separate state of Kamatapur and cultural recognition.

1.2. Demand for Scheduled Tribe Status:

Besides Kamatapur, the Koch Rajbongshis of Assam are also demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST Plains) Status for the community. Indeed, the issue of scheduling the community is the major issue in Assam than the issue of Kamatapur. In the last two decades, Assam has witnessed numerous agitations and road blockades in demand of ST status for the Koch Rajbongshi community of Assam. At present, the demand has mainly spearheaded by "All Koch Rajbongshi Student's Union" (AKRSU). Before AKRSU, it was All Assam Koch Rajbongshi Sanmilani (AAKRS) which raised the demand for a long period.

The demand for Scheduled Tribe status for Koch Rajbongshi is an old demand of the community and the social and political mobilizations of the Koch Rajbongshi community are in and around the ST demand. The failure of the Kshatriya Movement in Assam by the Koch Rajbongshi and the rise of the ST movement is a significant political change in Assam. In fact, failure to meet this demand by the government has intensified the demand for Kamatapur state in Assam.

As a response of the demand in 1996, the community was given the ST status by the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 1996.¹ This bill to provide for the inclusion of Koch-Rajbongshi in the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in relation to the State of Assam was introduced by the Minister of Welfare (now, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) in the Lok Sabha on 14/02/1996 and again on 12/07/1996.

The House, at its sitting held on 02/08/1996, during discussion on the motion for consideration of the Bill, authorized the Speaker to refer the Bill to a Select Committee of Lok Sabha. Accordingly, the Speaker constituted the Select Committee consisting of 15 members and referred the Bill to it.²

After various sittings, field trips, meetings with both government and non-government organizations the committee concluded that "The Committee finds that there is a good indication about the tribal origin of the Koch-Rajbongshi in Assam. They possess most of the tribal characteristics among them. Moreover, Registrar-General of India has also raised no objection to include Koch-Rajbongshis in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Assam. The Committee also finds that in Meghalaya, the Koches are notified as Scheduled Tribes which was a part and parcel of erstwhile Assam. As such, there is an adequate justification for inclusion of Koch-Rajbongshi community in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Assam. Keeping in view all these aspects, the Committee, therefore, recommended that the Koch-Rajbongshis should be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes so that they may come in the mainstream of the public life."³

As Parliament was not in session at that time, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Ordinance, 9 of 1996 was promulgated to give effect to scheduling of the Koch-Rajbongshi community in ST (Plains) list of Assam. The said ordinance was re-promulgated three times, but the bill never went for voting and since then the issue is hanging. The community enjoyed ST (P) status for one year (Times of India 2014).

In this research work, we have tried to understand the identity crisis of the Koch Rajbongshi in the present context and in the light of the Kamatapur Movement. Since the demand for the Kamatapur is based on a historical area, we have also discussed the

¹ Published in Part II – Section 2 of the Gazettee of India, Extraordinary dated the 12/07/1996

² Information provided by Vikram Rajkhowa, July 20, 2014

³ Personal discussion with Vikram Rajkhowa on July 20, 2014

historical background of Kamatapur. We have also looked into various social and political situations which has contributed into the demand of Kamatapur and lead to the feeling of identity crisis. On the other hand, to understand the ground realities, we have done field studies in areas of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Dhubri Districts of Assam and some parts of northern part of West Bengal. We hope that this study will help readers to have an understanding of the identity crisis of the Koch Rajbongshi community.



Koch Rajbongshi women of Nepal

1.3. Review of Literature:

The Koch Rajbongshi community has been a major subject of social science research since the colonial period. The uniqueness of the community, their attractive political

history and colourful ethnography has always caught attention of both local and foreign scholars. During the colonial period a number of foreign scholars took interest in the Koch Rajbongshi tribe and done valuable work on them. Though it was Edward Gait (1984) who did a systematic study on the history and ethnography of the Koch Rajbongshis in his work “A History of Assam”, scholars like Buchanan and Greirson were too are some of the pioneer people in Koch Rajbongshi studies. Hunter(2012) dedicated one complete chapter on the Koch Rajbongshi in his work “A statistical Account of Bengal, State of Kuch Behar” originally published in 1876.

CURRENCY USED IN KOCH BEHAR STATE



One of the major works on the Koch Rajbongshi in the post colonial period is the “Koch Rajbonsi Jatir Itihas Aru Sanskriti” by Ambika Charan Choudhury which was published by Ratnapeeth Prakashan of Bongiagaon. The 1st edition of the book was published in 1969 and the 3rd revised was published in 2011. This work is the first attempt to cover all the aspects of the Koch Rajbongshi community from ethnography to socio-political history. However this work doesn't cover much about the cultural aspects and is highly focused on the historical aspects. “Koch Rajbongshi Jatir Itihas Aru Sanskriti” is still one of the sought after books on the Koch Rajbongshi.

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"Koch Biharer Itihas" is the most pioneer and recommendable work on the history of the Koch Rajbongshi. Written by Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed in 1936 under the patronage Maharaja of Cooch Behar, this is the first systematic history of the Koch royal family and the kingdom. In this work, Ahmed(2001) has covered a wide range of area including early history of Kamatapur till the colonial period. This work has provided a good account of administration and revenue structure of the Cooch Behar state.

"History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)" by Nath (1989) can be referred as the most serious work on the history of the Koch Kingdom. The book has covered a period of hundred years which is very significance in terms of Koch history. The book has covered structure of the kingdom, its administration and other important aspect of the kingdom.

There is very less work on the political mobilization of the Koch Rajbongshi community. Swaraj Bose's work on the Kshatriya Movement of the Koch Rajbongshis of Bengal is one such work which has successfully captured the attention many scholars. This work titled "Dynamics of a caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947" was published in 2003. The book mainly deals with the upward mobility movement of the Koch Rajbongshi during the early 20th century. The work has also successfully discussed the migration of the upper caste Bengali gentry in to North Bengal and its impact on the social unrest among the Koch Rajbongshis of North Bengal.

There is not much work on the Kamatapur movement. "Bichinatar Utsa Sandhane Kaamatapur Theke Uttarpurba Bharat" by Nag (2003) is the most prominent among the works on Kamatapur Movement. This work, which is in Bengali language has captured successfully socio-economical factor which caused the aspiration for the Kamatapur movement. This work has mostly focused on the Kamatapur movement of North Bengal.

As we have mentioned Koch Rajbongshi community also lives in Bangladesh and Nepal. However, only few works has been done on the Koch Rajbongshis of these two countries. "Rajbanshis of Nepal" by Rajesh Gautam (2005) is the one and only work on the Koch Rajbongshis of Nepal so far. This book was published in 2005 by Adroit Publishers, New

Delhi. The book has historical account of the Jhapa district of Nepal, where a major part of the Koch Rajbanshi population lives in. This work is in ethnographic perspective and has covered social and cultural life of the Koch Rajbanshis of Nepal.

'Bangaldesher Rajbanshi Samaj o Sanskriti' is the one and only work on the Koch Rajbanshis of Bangladesh.. This work is done by Ashok Biswas(2005) of Dhaka, who himself belongs to the Rajbanshi community. This book has covered the social and religious life of the Koch Rajbanshis of Bangladesh besides North Bengal.

Rajkhowa (2001)'s "*Generalissimo Chilarai and His Times*" is another well composed work in which the period of expansion of Koch empire in the 16th century has been highlighted. The book is mostly on the life and time of Chilarai, the commander of the Koch army of Koch King Naranarayan.

1.4. Objective of the study:

- To understand the historical background of the Koch Rajbongshi community
- To understand social and political life of the Koch Rajbongshi community
- To understand the emergence of identity of the Koch Rajbongshi community
- To understand religious and political life of the Koch Rajbongshi community

1.5. Methodology:

Since the research is of socio-political nature, certain methods related to social science are adopted to unearth the expected data. In this research study qualitative research methodology has been followed. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. The entire research study was mainly carried out in villages of Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts of Assam. The purpose of selecting two different districts was to see responses of same community under two different administration structure. Unlike the Dhubri district, which is administrated under Assam government. But the Kokrajhar district is administrated by the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) government, which is an autonomous structure for the Bodo community.

Sampling design:

Random sampling technique has been adopted while selecting the villages. Effort has been made to include diverse section of the society in terms of age, gender, occupation and education.

Sources of data:

The present study has covered both primary and secondary sources to enrich the depth of the report. Primary data is the data that is used from responses which is a first hand experiences. Primary data has been collected from field visits and other oral interventions. Secondary data for the study have been incurred from various report, articles, monograph and organizational publication. Some important opinion and data have been collected from newspaper. The field data were collected by interpreting the interview schedules which were used in all the 24 villages from Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts.

CHAPTER-II

A brief account of the Koch Rajbongshi community

2.1. Migration and Origin:

Koch Rajbongshis are one of the oldest ethnic groups of South Asia and are found in present India, Nepal and Bangladesh. In India, they are mostly found in North Bengal, Assam and parts of Bihar and Meghalaya. Their original migration route is still not vivid but they have been living in this area since the time of immemorial.

A.C. Choudhury, the renowned scholar from the Koch Rajbongshi community argues that the word 'Koch' is older than the Puranas and Trantras, which were composed in India by the Aryans to malign their opponents. He writes, "The word 'Koch' came down with these people when they came downwards from North China or Siberia region after struggling hard against natural odds and calamities in addition to the opposition from the rival groups in which most of the male members of Koches were killed in their way by fighting." He continues, "[T]his is partly evident from a folk song now occasionally sung by the Koch Rabhas, which is indicative as to their origin and development" (Choudhury 1991:61). A.C. Choudhury has mentioned this particular folk song in his book "*The Koches around the World*", which is according to him mostly forgotten by the present Rabhas and Koches.⁴ However, this is very difficult to confirm, but can be supported by a Limbu legend mentioned by Risley. Sir Harbert Risley in his book *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* has mentioned one Limbu Legend wherein references have been made about the origin of the Koches, Meches and Kacharis. According to the legend, the ancestor of the Koches, Meches and the Dhimals was one of the three brothers who were first dropped by the Gods from heaven and they fell in Banaras from where they wondered northward seeking the place appointed for them to dwell in. the track at the foot hills between the Brahmaputra and the Kosi rivers called Mule or Khachar by the Nepalese.

⁴ The folk song runs, "Hulun Lunga Hashong Chamdong Bondong / Koch Mian Chi ou Kocha Amai Namprangou". A.C. Choudhury writes about the simple and brief meaning of this folk song as this, "that the valliant Koches marched downwards from the North via Highlong to Chamdo to Bomdo after crossing and over coming many hilly areas, turbulent rivers and ferocious way-side plunders that cost many able bodied male members and the beautiful females of the Koches became helpless and bewildered.

The youngest brother settled in Kachar and became the father of the Koches, Meches and Dhimals and the two others went further into the hills and their descendents are Limbus and the Khambus of Nepal (Risley 1891: 87). The idea of coming or dropped from the heaven might have relationship with the fact of coming from upper or hill areas. It should be mentioned here that the Dhimals and Limbus are indigenous communities of Nepal besides the Koch Rajbongshis.



Koch girl of Meghalaya

It should be borne in mind that the term 'Koch Rajbongshi' is sometimes used separately as 'Koch'⁵ and 'Rajbongshi'. This system of such usage of the term is still continued in

⁵ There are references in History books about Koches being called as Kamboja and Kuvaca or Kuvacaka in Sanskrit. I have avoided the discussion of these terms in this paper, just to make the discussion short. D. Nath has discussed about all these terms very well in his book 'History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)'. For more information please see: D. Nath, History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615), Delhi, 1989, pp. 7- 11.

North Bengal. But at present in Assam 'Koch Rajbongshi' is treated as one term, not two which is evident in the names of the organisations like 'All Assam Koch Rajbongshi Sanmilani'(AAKRS), 'All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union' (AKRSU), Koch Rajbongshi Sahitya Sabha and many more. During field study, it was observed that a desire has been grown in Assam among the members of the community who seem to have gathered more satisfaction in designating themselves as Koch Rajbongshi than Koch or Rajbongshi.⁶

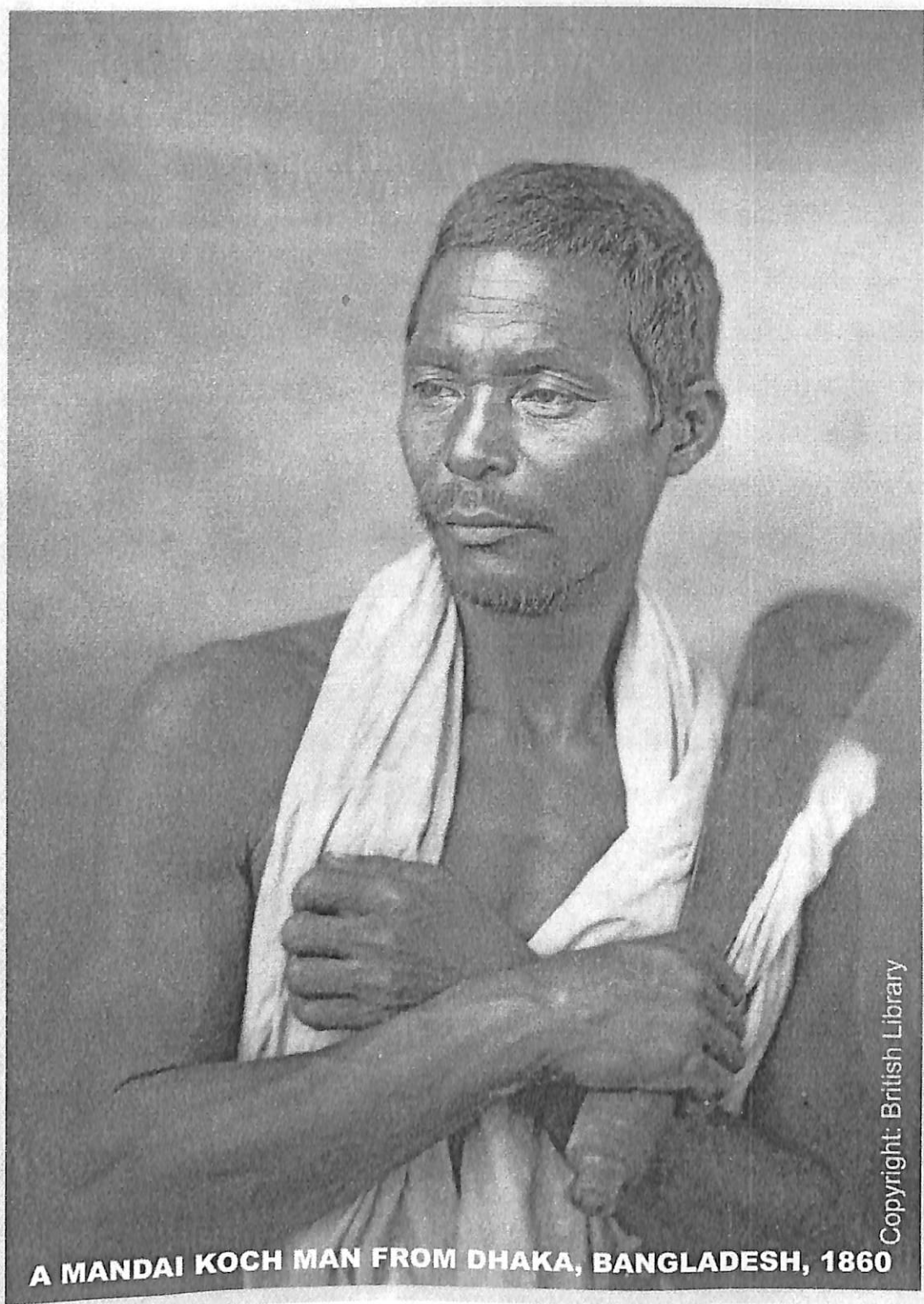
Among the colonial scholar, Edward Gait is the most prominent one who has done some commendable work on the history and ethnicity of the Koch Rajbongshi community. Due to the complex ethnic background of the Koch Rajbongshi community, in his work "A History of Assam", Edward Gait has said that the word 'Koch' is a term of some ambiguity (Gait 1984: 46). Gait further said that in Assam proper the term 'Koch' had become the name of a Hindu caste, into which are received the converts to Hinduism from the rank of the Kachari, Lalung, Mikir and other tribes ((Gait 1984: 46). However, present studies and government reports suggest that the Koch Rajbongshis are more or less like (similar to) any other tribe of Assam.⁷

Though majority of the Koch Rajbongshis are not other converted tribe to Koch Rajbongshi rank, there is no doubt that a few Mongolian 'Tribes' especially the Mech, Tiwa, Dimasa had joined the rank of Koch or Rajbongshi after being converted into Hinduism. Some works of both colonial and local scholars regarding 'Koch' bear the evidence of the above contention. A.C. Choudhury, has admitted that his forefathers were originally Mech or Kacharis who elevated them to the rank of Rajbongshis (Barua 2002:16). He also writes that a section of the Rabha community after becoming 'Pati Rabha'⁸ elevated to Rajbongshis by adopting surname like Rai, Barman, Sarkar, etc. (Barua 2002:7).

⁶Sarathi Roy, the tenant in my house, who belongs to this community call herself 'Koch Rajbongshi', not 'Koch' or 'Rajbongshi'. I have even encountered a person whose surname is Koch Rajbongshi.

⁷ See RGI report

⁸ Pati Rabha is that section of Rabha who has adopted Hinduism and practice Brahminical rituals, they have even abandoned the Rabha language long back to local form of Assamese, which resemblance what presently is being called the Kāmatāpuri Language.



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A MANDAI KOCH MAN FROM DHAKA, BANGLADESH, 1860

Another colonial scholar Greirson observes that the Koches and Kocheries⁹ are of the same ethnic groups and the true Koches are at any rate represented by the Kocheries who inhabit in Nowgong, Goalpara, Koch Behar and neighbouring countries. He also writes, "...the very name Koch has lost its original significance and has now come to mean a

⁹ Instead of 'Kachari', which is commonly used, Greirson has written 'Kocheries'. His intention was most probably to establish a link between the two terms 'Koch' and 'Kacharis' by writing that way.

Bodo who has become so far Hinduised that he has abandoned his proper tongue and in particular what he eats" (Choudhury 1993:60-61). All these comments related the origin of the Koches, sometimes make us believe that the Koches are nothing but the Hinduised Kacharis or other Hinduised tribes. But this cannot be taken as entirely true. Koch is a distinct community, though conversion of other tribes into Koch is not debatable.

Although there is a general agreement to the fact that the Koches include the Meches, Kacharies, Bodos, Rajbongshis, Garos, etc., there is still a difference of opinion about their racial origin (Nath 1989:2). Colonel Dalton considered them (Koch) to be Dravidian, and Riskey, while admitting an intermixture with Mongoloid stock held that the Dravidian stock predominates (Gait 1984: 46). Gait argues that the divergence of views seems to have arisen from the confusion caused by the use of the term 'Rajbongshi'. He says that it (Rajbongshi) originally referred to an entirely distinct community of Dravidian affinities. But afterwards adopted by the Koches west of the Monas river, who, when they atoned to Hinduism, appropriated the caste name of the most numerous Hinduised community in their neighbourhood. Edward Gait observed that in North Bengal and Goalpara the term 'Koch' had been falling into disrepute; and it has to a great extent, been abandoned in favour of appellation Rajbongshi (Gait 1984: 46). However, it can be said that the term Rajbongshi is of recent origin as neither in the Persian records, nor in the foreign accounts, nor in any of the dynastic epigraph of the time, the Koches are mentioned as Rajbongshis (Nath 1989:5). Even in *Darrangraj Bansavali*, which is a genealogical account of the Koch Royal family, there is no reference of this term.¹⁰ In respect of this matter, one scholar rightly observes that "it is possible that when the Koches became conscious of their past ancestral glory at later period, they began to call themselves as Rajbongshis—meaning 'descendants of royal kindred'. The new appellation also made them feel somewhat superior to the rest of their kinsmen (Nath 1989:5). A.C. Choudhury opines that "Rajbongshi" is the modern name of the Koches of West Assam and North Bengal (Barua 2002:7).

¹⁰ *Darrangraj Bansavali* (also known as *Samudranarayanar Bansavali*) was written in the last quarter of the 18th century (around 1798 A.D.) by an Assamese poet named Baladev Suryakhari Daibagya by the order of then Koch king of Darrang, Samudra Narayan. In '*Darrangraj Bansavali*' the term 'Rajbongshi' is not found. Instead of that the term 'Mech' has been used as synonymous with the term 'Koch'.
Nabin Chandra Sarma (ed.), *Darrangraj Bansavali*, Pathsala, 1973

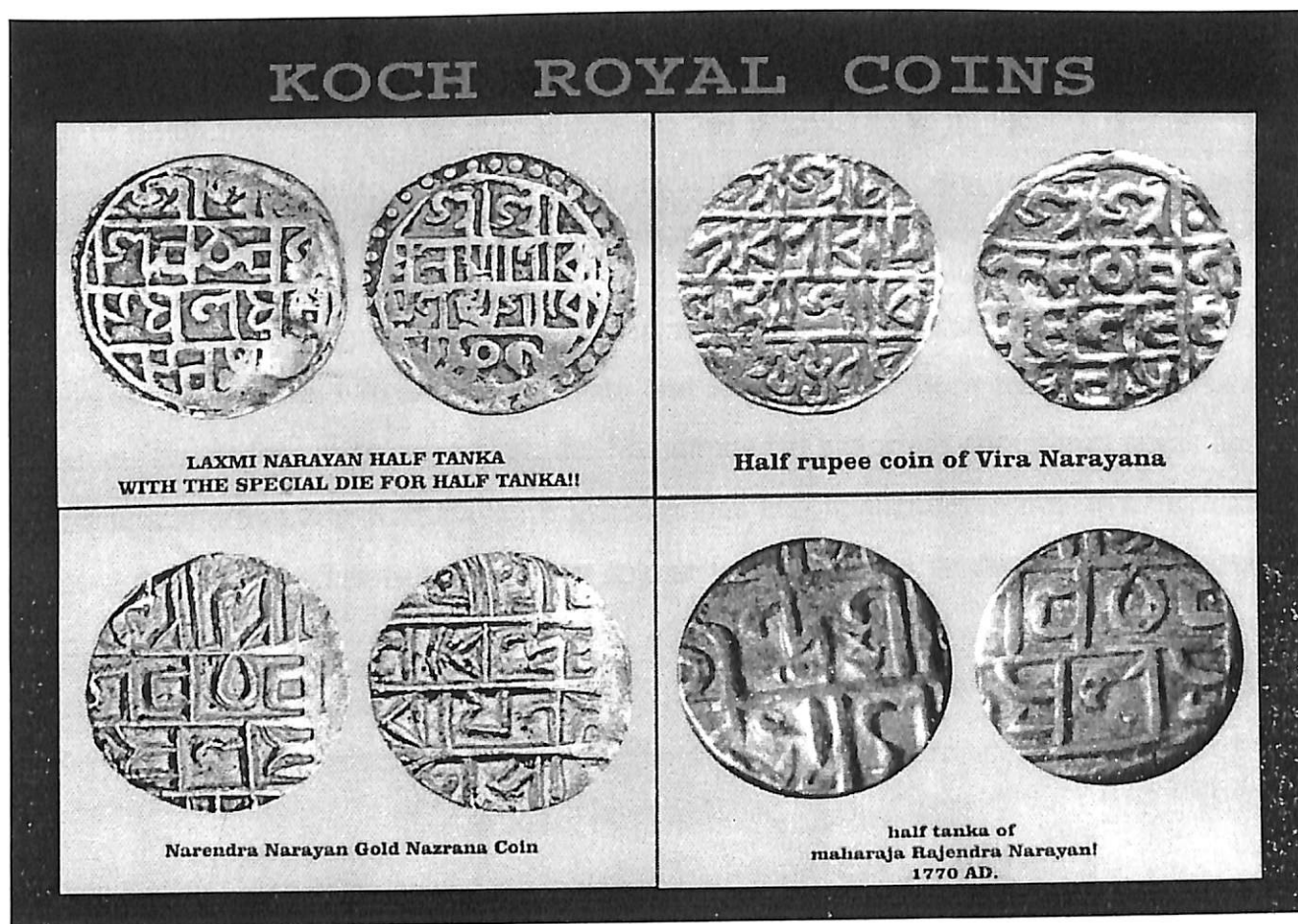
mythological stories and had no objective value. Panchanan Burma and Hara Kishor Adhikari were among those Rajbongshi leaders who said that the Koches and Rajbongshis were not the same. Their main intention behind this opinion was to establish the Rajbongshis with a superior identity to that of the Koches.

Now, keeping aside all these controversies regarding the origin of the Koches, it is believed that the Koch Rajbongshis are a Mongoloid group having Dravidian, as well as other elements in them, as Gait said, "There seems, however to be no doubt, that the true Koches were a Mongoloid race very closely allied to the Meches and Garos; and we find that in Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and Goalpara, the persons now known as Rajbongshi are either pure Koches, who, though dark, have distinctly Mongoloid physiognomy, or else a mixed breed, in which the Mongoloid element usually preponderates" (Gait 1984: 47).

2.2. Historical Background:

Kamatapur is a region, whose reconstruction in contemporary political discourse is rooted in history. The present Political Movement for Kamatapur draws its inspiration highly from the history of Kamatapur. In many occasions, Koch Rajbongshi identity has been interpreted as the Kamatapuri identity in North Bengal and West Assam. The idea is to see the historical Kamatapur kingdom in the present form of a federal unit of India. In the post independent scenario, this historical region disappeared in the formation of modern Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh. Like the Kamatapur region, its history also disappeared in the nationalistic history writings of Bengali and Assamese and it became partly Bengali history and partly Assamese history (also Bangladeshi history). In Assam, history of Kamatapur became the history of Goalpara or West Assam and in West Bengal, it is the history of North Bengal. So the language of the Koch Rajbongshis. It became Goalparia dialect in Assam and North Bengali Dialect in West Bengal. Indeed, the present demand for Kamatapur by the Koch Rajbongshi also seeks recognition of history and culture of Kamatapur. The historical memory of erstwhile Kamatapur kingdom or Cooch Behar was so strong among the Koch Rajbongshis that instead of demand for a ethnic Koch Rajbongshiland they opted for a regional identity contrary to the

cotemporary movements for ethnic homelands of Northeast India, which are using identical ethnic names in their proposed homelands (e.g. Boroland, Gorkhaland etc).



The Kingdom of Kamata, also known as Kamrup Kamata was established by Sandhya Rai in the mid 13th century comprising areas of present Assam, North Bengal and Bangladesh. In the mid of next century, Kamata was ruled by the famous king Durlabh Narayan, who was a great patron of learning and his royal court was adorned with many scholars and poets. Most of the ancient books written in Kamatapuri language were composed during his reign. Under his patronage the famous poet Hem Saraswati composed *Prahlad Charit*, which is considered to be the first Assamese epic. Durlabh Narayan was succeeded by his son Indra Narayan in 1350.

Now, the question is what is the relation between Koch Rajbongshi and Kamatapur or more simply why they (Koch Rajbongshis) identify themselves with Kamatapur? But before answering this question, we might try to well find Kamatapur. Though we have heard about Kamatapur very recently, Kamatapur was very much there (present) in the history from 13th century onwards. Even when Hiuen Tsang, the famous traveller and

scholar from China visited the ancient Kamarupa kingdom of Bhashkar Barma between 606 to 648 A.D. the capital of Kamrupa was believed to be Kamatapur. What we find in "A History of Assam" is that, 'There were at this point (during the reign of Bhaskar Burma) no larger towns, and the capital of the country does not appear to have been a place of much importance. The only indication that is given as to its locality is that it lay 150 miles east of Paundra Vardhana. Cunningham, after identifying the later place with Pabna, concluded that it was at Kamatapur' (Gait 1984:26).

Most of the times, Kamatapur has appeared as the capital of Kamata kingdom in the history of Assam. And sometimes Kamata and Kamrup have been treated as the same kingdom. According to Edward Gait, the Muhammadan historians sometimes speak as if the terms Kamrupa and Kamata were synonymous and applicable to one and the same country; but on the other occasions they appear to regard them as distinct, and it would seem that at times the tracts east and west of the Sankosh owed allegiance to different rulers, just as they did in the later days of Koch rule (Gait 1984:42-43).



Ruins of Kamatapur fort, Gosanimari, Cooch Behar

According to historical account, Sandhya Rai established the Kingdom of Kamata in the 13th century comprising few portions of North Bengal and West Assam of present

Northeast India. Historian N.N. Acharyya has written a brief chapter on the Kingdom of Kamata in his book *A brief History of Assam*. He writes, "shortly after the invasion of Kamrup by Tughril Khan Malik Yuzbeg, the capital of Kamrup was transferred by king Sandhya from 'Kamrup Nagar' (North Guwahati) to Kamatapur (Cooch Behar) in the west. From that time onwards, the Kingdom of Kamrup was known as 'Kamata' or Kamrup- Kamata. The rulers of Kamata were designated as Kamateshwara or Kameswara (Lord of Kamata). The kingdom of Kamata became, however, much smaller in extent than ancient Kamrup. It included, Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup districts of modern Assam, besides portions of northern Bengal and Mymensingh (Bangladesh)." Acharyya 1996:42)

One of the most renowned rulers of Kamata was king Durlabh Narayan, who ascended the throne of Kamata in 1330 A.D and ruled up to 1350 A.D. Durlabh Narayan was a great patron of learning and his royal court was adorned with many scholars and poets. Most of the ancient books written in Kamrupi language were composed during his reign. Under his patronage, the famous poet Hem Saraswati composed *Prahlad Charit*, which is considered to be the first Assamese epic. Durlabh Narayan was succeeded by his son Indra Narayan in 1350.

In the second quarter of the 15th century, a new line of kings known as Khan or Khyen dynasty ascended the throne of Kamata (1440 A.D.). The first in this line was Niladhavaj. His capital was at Kamatapur, where he built a very strong fortress. He was succeeded by his son, Chakradhvaj on the throne in 1460 A.D. It is said that during the reign of Chakradhvaj, Sultan Barbak invaded the kingdom of Kamata, but was defeated by the former. Chakradhvaj built a temple of the Goddess Kaamateswari at Kamatapur. After Chakradhvaj, his son Nilambar became the ruler of Kamata (Dutta 2000:70-71). Nilambar was the most famous among the kings of Kamata and still lives through tradition in the minds of the people of Assam and North Bengal. Edward Gait has described a tradition related to the tragic story of Nilambar's fall in his book *A History of Assam*(Gait 1984:44). During his reign, the kingdom of Kamata extended from Karatoya in the west to Barnadi on the east. He constructed a long road from Kamatapur to Ghoraghat. During his reign, Nawab Hussain Shah of Goura (Bengal) invaded Kamata and destroyed his capital Kamatapur around 1494 A.D. The downfall of Nilambar was

eventually the downfall of the Kamata kingdom founded by Sindhu Rai and we see the rise of Koch power within few years after the fall of Nilambar, which changed the history of Kamata in the later years, in the later centuries.

The Koches emerged as a very strong political power in the early 16th Century in the Kamata region with the establishment of the Koch Kingdom by the Koch Chieftain Bishwa Singha (1515-1540), son of Hariya Mandal.¹¹ The period of Koch Rule in this region has been referred as the 'Koch Kingdom' in History. But, most of the Koch Kings of Biswa Singha's dynasty used to call it as the "Kamata kingdom". They actually never renamed the Kamata kingdom as 'Koch Kingdom' or 'Koch Rajya', though in the course of time, this kingdom went through various names and lastly named as Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) in the colonial period. They (Koch Kings) intended to call themselves the rulers of the Kamata kingdom, which was established by Sandhya Rai of 13th Century, and fell down during Nilambar's time. When Bishwa Singha ascended the throne, he declared himself as Kāmatewsar (Lord of Kamata) like those of the previous rulers of Kamata such as Durlabh Narayan and others (Barua Bahadur 1988:191). It seems that Bishwa Singha wanted his Kingdom not to be known as something different from the Kamata kingdom and wanted to project himself as the new conqueror or ruler of the traditional Kamata kingdom. Naranarayan, who ascended the throne after the death of Bishwa Singha, declared himself as Kamateswar like his father and previous rulers of Kamata Kingdom. Even when the Koch Kingdom was split into two parts as Koch Bihar and Koch Hajo, Lakshminarayan, son of Naranarayan who became the King of Koch Bihar declared himself Kamateswar ((Ahmed 2001:3). In the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* Lakshminarayan is called the Raja of Kamata.¹² In 17th century, Koch Kings of Koch Bihar, Prannarayan and Modnarayan too called themselves as Kamateswar. Blaeu's Map of that century (1650 A.D.) recorded Kamata as 'Comotay' (Ahmed 2001:3).

¹¹ There has been difference of opinion regarding the exact year of Bishwa Singh's assumption of power. Few Historians have placed him in A.D. 1515-1540, which has been accepted by most of the historians. On the other hand, few has placed him in A.D. 1509-1555. Though both the periods are still debatable, we are using the first one, which has been accepted by a local scholar, D. Nath after considering number of factors. (For details please see: D .Nath, History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615), Delhi, 1989, pp.27-28)

¹² See Foote notes: Edward Gait, A History of Assam, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.42

Though the Koch Kings of the Western area desired their Kingdom to be known as Kamata, the Persian historians and the other visitors preferred recording the name of this country by other names, most of the times as 'Koch'. *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Baharistan-i-Ghayebi* recorded the name of this country as 'Koch' and within the 'Koch' country, they mentioned two kingdoms as 'Kamata' and 'Kamrup'. In *Badshanama* and *Sahjahannama* of mid 17th century, Kamata has been recorded as 'Koch Bihar' and 'Kamrup' as 'Koch Hajo'(Ahmed 2001:3).



Maharaja Nripendra Nararyan of Cooch Behar

The present Kamatapur movement has emerged from the historical 'Kamata' or 'Koch Bihar' area of Northeast India and the area of the territory, they are demanding for the proposed Kamatapur state is more or less as that of the old Kamata kingdom, which was under the Koch dynasty. The identification of the Koch Rajbongshis with Kamatapur could be justified, as the line of Koches are the longest of all the rulers of Kamata.

Bishwa Singha, a Koch chieftain from the Siknagram of present Kokrajhar district of Assam, founded the Koch dynasty, of Kamata Kingdom which was destroyed by Husain Shah of Gouda (Bengal) at the end of 15th century. "The Kingdom of Kamrup-Kamata witnessed anarchy at the end of the 15th century A.D.", writes N.N. Acharyya, "Nawab Hussain Shah of Bengal had attacked and overthrown Nilambar, the last ruler of Khyen dynasty. The city of Kamatapur was destroyed and a vast area around it was annexed. A colony of Afghans was left in Kamata, who disposed the local chiefs and took up the civil and military administration under the vice-royalty of prince Daniel, son of Nawab Hussain Shah. But it did not last long. The local chiefs combined themselves under the leadership of the most powerful of them against the Muslim hegemony, and taking advantage of the rainy season, attacked Daniel's garrison and cut it off to the last man. Among these chiefs and their followers by far the most numerous and powerful were the Koches, initially independent of each other, but gradually united under the authority of one among themselves named Bishwa Singha- founder of the Koch Kingdom"(Choudhury :1983:Introduction). With his superior intelligence and organised military strength, Bishwa Singha subjugated the Bhuyans of the region one after another. Thus, the Bhuyans who could overthrow the Muslim rule in Kamarupa, had met with a crushing defeat at the hands of this new warrior of humble origin. Thus, establishing his sovereign power over all petty rulers of the region, Bishwa Singha declared himself as king. Meanwhile, he had come under Hindu influence and on the day of formal accession to the throne, Bishu assumed the Hindu name Bishwa Singha (Nath 1989:26). It seems that on becoming King, Bishwa Singha realised that he was no more a common man and he needed to prove it. He no longer wanted to call himself a person from a simple community of nearby village or mountain. The Bramhmins were very helpful for this purpose. As Gait observes, "As usual in such cases, the Brahmins soon sought him out. They discovered that his tribesmen were Kshatriyas, who threw away their sacred threads when fleeing before the wrath of Parasuram, the son of the ascetic Jamadagni, while

Bishu himself was declared to be the son, not of the humble Hariya Mandal, but of the God Siva, who, assuming Hariya's form, had had intercourse with his wife Hira, herself an incarnation of Siva's wife Parbati"(Gait 1984:48-49). Bishwa Singha seemed to be happy with this new finding of his origin and there after the Koch Kings were known as 'Sivabanshi' or the descendent of God Siva.

Biswa Singha soon shifted his capital from Sikanagram (in present Kokrajhar district of Assam) to Kamatapur (present Cooch Behar district of West Bengal). In course of time, Bishwa Singha consolidated his power over the entire western part of the region from river Kortoya to the Barnadi, after defeating the local Bhuyans of that region.

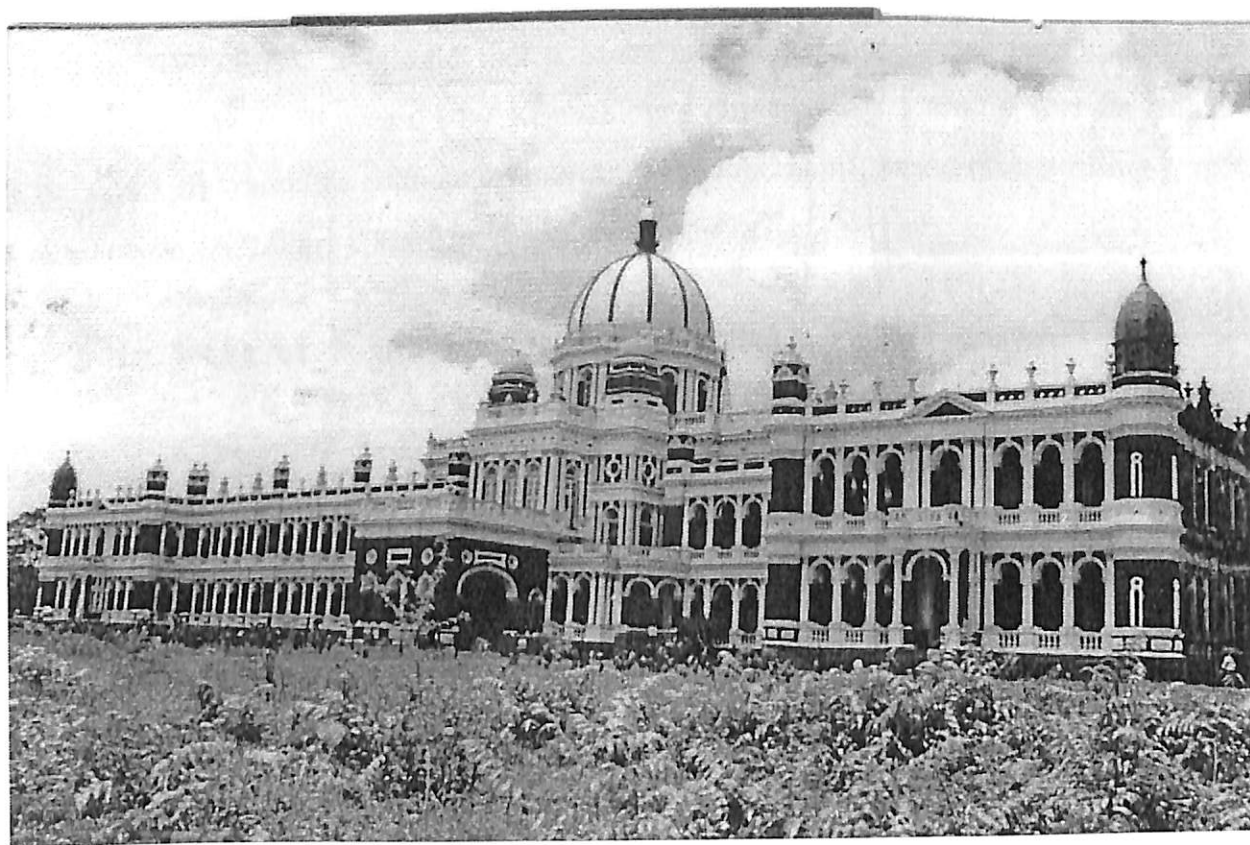
After the death of Bishwa Singha in 1540, his son Naranarayan ascended the throne. With the accession of Naranarayan, the history of the Koches entered into a brilliant chapter of military glory and cultural achievements. This illustrious ruler established the Koch sovereignty almost in the entire northeast and made it important enough to get recognition in the court of Mughal Delhi(Nath 1989:45). Naranarayan appointed his brother Sukladvaj alias 'Chilarai' his commander-in-Chief. Chilarai was a great conqueror and one of the greatest soldiers of his time. N. N. Acharyya observes, "Chilarai had consolidated the power of the newly established Koch Kingdom, eliminated the disruptive elements within, and transformed what was an infant kingdom to a national domain. He left to his successors a mighty and extensive kingdom such as no monarch of Eastern India had ever ruled after the heyday of the Barman rulers of ancient Assam"(Choudhury 1983:44) The reign of Naranarayan is important from the point that both Naranarayan and Chilarai were great patronage of learning. His court was delighted with the presence of scholars like Sankardev, Ram Saraswati, Annanta Kandali, Bakul Kayastha and others(Rajkhowa 2001:44). Sankardev composed most of his major works including *Kirtana Ghosa*-sections 1, 17-28, 29, *Rukminir Prem Kalaha*, *Bhagavata*-Book I, II, IX, XIII, *Rukmini Haran Naat* and others including his last work *Rama Vijaya Naat* during his stay in the Koch Kingdom from 1543 to 1568 till his death (Rajkhowa 2001:44,45) After the death of Chilarai, the Koch-Kamata kingdom was split into two parts between Naranarayan and Raghudev, son of Chilarai, around 1581 as Kamata or

Koch Bihar (western kingdom) and Koch Hajo or Kamrup (eastern Kingdom).¹³ This partition greatly weakened the power of the Koches and led to the intervention of foreign elements in their internal affairs which subsequently resulted in the western kingdom losing its independence, and the eastern kingdom annexed to the Mughal empire (Nath 1989:83).

After the death of Naranarayan, his only son Lakshminarayan ascended the throne of Kamata (1587-1627). Lakshminarayan was a weak ruler as compared to his father, and tragically enough he had spend his entire life fighting with cousin Raghudev, the ruler of Koch Hajo and then with his son Parikshitnarayan. During this period, the Mughals had the chance to enter into the Koch politics, as well as into the territory of Kamata and Koch Hajo Kingdom. According to *Akbarnamah*, his country is 200 kos long and from 100 to 40 kos broad, extending in the east to the Brahmaputra, in the north to Tibet, in the south to Ghoraghat and in the West Tirhut (Gait 1984:64). Though Lakshminarayan never had the vision and ability of his forefathers, he still could be remembered by the people of Northeast India, particularly Assam as one who declared 'Vaishnavism' as the *Rajdharm* (State religion) of his kingdom (Ahmed 2001:151). Though, 'Vaishnavism' is looked upon as one of the spiritual and cultural identities of Assam and Assamese, this fact is not recognized by the Assamese intellectuals. Madhabdev, the chief disciple of Sankardev took asylum in Kamata after Raghudev Narayan turned hostile against 'Vaishnavism' and asked Madhabdev to leave his kingdom. It's a very interesting irony in history as Chilarai, father of Raghudev Narayan was the chief patron of 'Vaishnavism' and saved Sankardev from the wrath of his brother king Narnarayan. Even Damodardev, another Vaishnavite saint faced the same consequences in Raghudev's Kingdom and took shelter in Kamata. Damodardev wrote *Bhakti Ratnawali* and *Krisna Janma Rahashya* and Gobinda Mishra translated *Madbhagavat Gita* with the patronage of King Lakshminarayan. In later periods, all these creations have been regarded as valuable property of Assamese literature. On the other hand, *Sivararti Kaumadi* and *Grahan Kaumadi* which were written by Sidhanta Bagish by the order of Lakshminarayan became a part of Bengali literature. After the death of his strong rival Pariskhit Narayan, who was his own nephew,

¹³ I have not discussed about the Koch Hajo Kingdom and other Koch kingdoms namely, Bijni Raj, Darrang Raj and Beltola, which were established in various parts of modern Assam.

he repented and in remorse, led an ascetic life at Hajo, where he breathed his last in 1627 A.D (Choudhury 1991: 131).



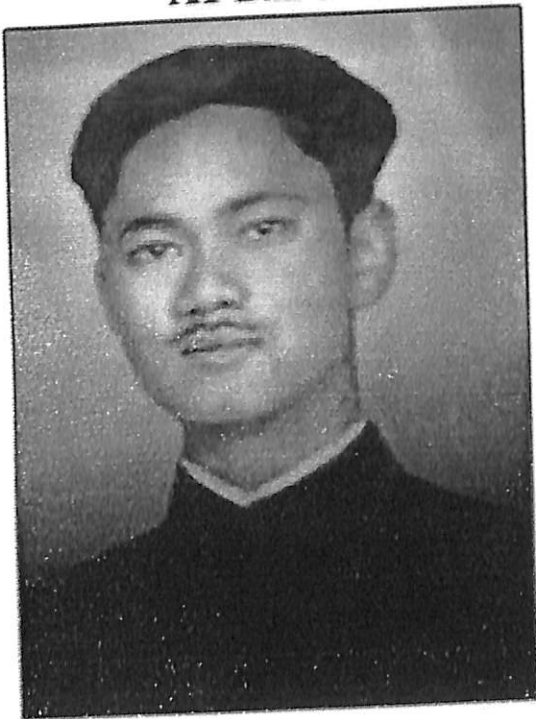
Royal Palace of Cooch Behar

After Lakshminarayan, his son Birnarayan ascended the throne in 1627A.D. and ruled up to 1632 A.D. The power of the Koch dynasty decreased day by day and during the reign of Birnarayan, the King of Bhutan stopped paying the tribute (Choudhury 1993:203). During this period, Stephan Catchila, a propagator of Christianity returned from Bhutan visited Koch Kamata and left a note on this country.

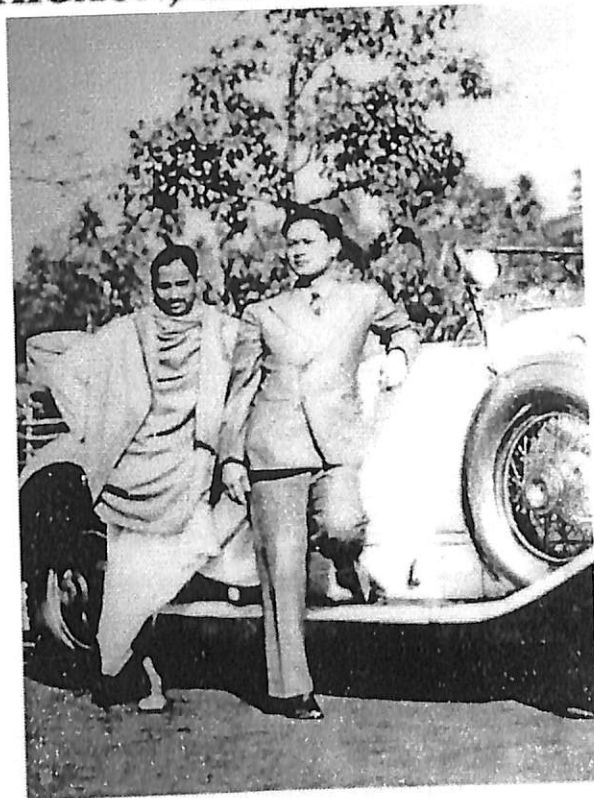
After the death of Birnarayan, who ruled for a very short period, his son Prannarayan ascended the throne of Kamata in 1632 and struck coins in his name. Prannarayan occupied an important place in the history of Koch Kamata as he tried to reoccupy the territories of the undivided Koch kingdom, which had gone into the hands of the Mughals during Lakshminarayan's time. He even captured Dhaka; the capital of Bengal for a short period while Suja (son of Shajahan), the then Subedar of Bengal was away for fighting a battle against Aurangjeb in 1661 (Choudhury 1993:203).

Like his ancestors, Prannarayan too was a great patron of learning. With his patronage scholars like Jaykrishna Bhattacharya, Kabi Ratna, Srinath Brahman and others created valuable works like *Proyog Ratnamala*, *Rajkhandam*, *Bishwasingha Charitam*, and others (Choudhury 1993:209). It is said that a Maharastrian scholar named Jagannath in the Mughal court was so impressed by Koch King Prannarayan's learning that he left the Mughal court and came to Kamata and wrote 'Pranabharnam', based on the ruling period of Prannarayan (Adhikari 1996:22).

THE ROYAL FAMILY OF SIDILI "KOCH KINGDOM" AT BIDYAPUR, BONGAIGAON, ASSAM

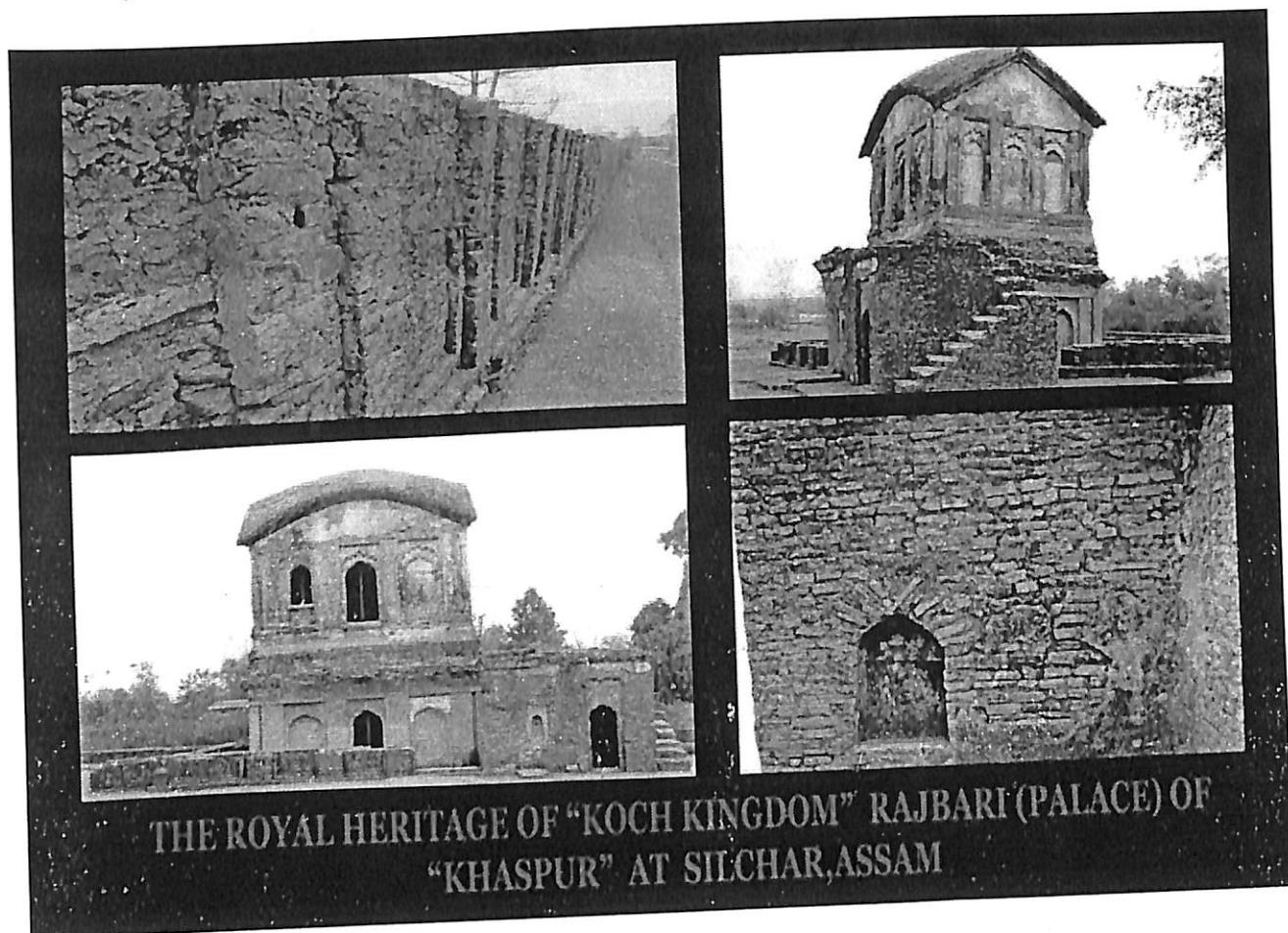


**Kumar-
Sailendra Narayan Dev**



Prannarayan also rebuilt the famous Kamateswari Temple in 1665, which still stands tall, besides other works (Adhikari 1996:22). He was a man with a positive mind, who had always a desire burning inside to rule independently despite so many constrains. With a view to throwing away the Mughal power from his kingdom, he tried to make healthy relation with neighbouring kingdom Assam, and Nepal. Maharaja Pratapmalla, the then king of Nepal, became a close friend of Prannarayan by marrying his sister Rupmati. Rupmati Devi in memory of her marriage constructed the temple of Ugratara (Durga) at Anatapura in 785 Nepali Sambot, (1649A.D.) (Ahmed 2001: 161). According to A.C.

Choudhury, in the stone inscription of the Vishnu temple erected towards the west of the Palace of Katmandu, the details of the happy relations prevailed since Bishwa Singha to Prannarayan were made available (Choudhury 1991:133).



After the death of Prannarayan in 1665, his son Modnarayan ascended the throne and ruled up to 1680. But, he died without any issue and after his death his brother ascended the throne in 1680 ((Choudhury 1991:134). But his relative, Yagna Narayan and his supporters murdered him. Actually from this period, the internal politics of Bishwa Singha's dynasty became more dramatic and tragic due to the internal conflicts in the royal family, which opened the road for outsiders to interfere in the Koch politics. The Bhutanese directly entered into the political arena of the Koch kings especially of Koch Bihar and Bijni. In the later period, the Bhutanese played significant role in making and unmaking of Kings of Koch Bihar. From 1765 up to 1783, Dhajendra Narayan, Rajendra Narayan, and Dharmendra Narayan succeeded the throne of Koch Kamata Kingdom. During this period, the interference of the Bhutanese in the affairs of Kamata Kingdom and their frequent attacks on the Kingdom became so prominent that king Dharmendra Narayan had to sign a treaty with East India Company to get rid of the trouble caused by

the Bhutias (Adhikari 1996:24). As a consequence of this treaty of April 5, 1773, Koch-Kamata alias Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) became a native state of the British India and continued so till 1947. When Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) was included in the British Empire, Rangpur was taken out of the Koch- Kamata Kingdom as a result of the treaty. Jalpaiguri and Darjiling remained parts of the Kingdom. But in the later period, around 1900 to 1908 during King Nripendra Narayan, these areas also went to the British due to a conspiracy made by *Dewan* (Minister) Kalika Das Dutta. While Maharaja Nripendra Narayan was in England, Kalika Das Dutta exchanged Jalpaiguri and Darjiling with Boda and Chakla with the British. It is believed that he signed a treaty with the British regarding this most probably in the year 1908. When the King returned from abroad, he got angry but there was nothing left for him to take any effective step. After a few days, he went to England and died (Burma in Koch Rajbongshi 2002:19-20).

The treaty of 1773 became invalid on 14th August 1947. Under Indian Independent Act, section VIII, which was passed in the British Parliament, Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) again gained its independence and sovereignty. According to the Act, all the Princely states of India that would get back sovereign power are free to join India or Pakistan, according to their will. (Burma in Koch Rajbongshi 2002:20). Actually, it is not right to say that Cooch Behar got independence and sovereignty, Cooch Behar along with other 565 Princely States (also called native or Indian States) was neither partitioned nor given independence in 1947. The only options the rulers of these states had were to join Pakistan or to join India (Schendel 2002:119).

2.3: Culture and Religion:

The Koch Rajbongshi community is categorized as Hindu when it comes to religion. However, when their social life is observed it is seen that they have their independent religious practices which bear their own tribal origin and are unique when compared to others. They are very much close to other tribes like Rabha and Bodo in terms of their religious practice. Being a peasant community, most of their rituals and festivals are related to agriculture, harvesting and fertility of the soil. Their social life is centred on the agriculture and they see the earth and nature as their mother. Various Hindu traditions and Gods are mixed with their rituals but these deities have taken a local form in the Koch Rajbongshi society. Some major rituals of the community are discussed below:



A group of Koch Rajbongshi girls from Kokrajhar, Assam

Katipuja:

One of the oldest cultural traditional of the Koch Rajbongshis is the Katipuja. Kati, Katika or Katikai is the god who provides enjoyment. According to Skanda Purana, Kati is the commander of Deva Sena of *Mangal Groha*. According to Mahabahat, Kati is the Son of Lord Mahadev and Parvati. According to Koch Rajbongshi Tradition, Kati is known as the Kati Thakur, which means God Kati. According to this tradition, God Kati sits on Peacock. In some places, he sits on an elephant also. In this case, he is known as the "Hatir Pithit Kati" (Kati on elephant back). In Koch Rajbongshi Society, Kati is the god of Prajanan.

The Kati is god which is made from clay or sola. Along with that, either the peacock or the elephant is also made. Some of the Koch Rajbongshis also worships the two Kati gods altogether. The Kati God is holding a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other hand. This Puja is performed in the Sankranti of the Kati month (mid October to mid November). The Puja which is performed on this day is called Botorer Kati (Kati of the season) or Batri Kati. This Puja can be also performed on any day of the Aghon month

(mid November to mid December). However, when it is performed on other than the Sankranti of Kati month, it is called as Abotri or Namala Kati Puja.

Male members are not allowed in this Kati Puja. If a male role has to be played, it would be played by a woman. Since, the Puja is related with Prajanan, childless women pray to Kati to be blessed with child in this Puja. This Puja even doesn't require a priest.

Hudum Puja:

Another important ritual of the Koch Rajbongshi community is the Hudum Puja. It is mainly performed when there is no rain. Hence, it is related to mother earth and agriculture. This deity is basically worshiped by the women of the tribe in order to bring down water to the earth when there is drought. Men are not permitted to participate in this Puja as well as not to watch the Puja. Women who perform the ritual do not wear any clothes and the songs related to rituals are sensual in nature. There is no specific day or date for performing the Hudum Puja. Except rainy and winter season, Hudum Puja can be performed at anytime of the year. If required, the Puja can be performed every year. On the other hand, if there is no necessity, the Puja can be performed after many years.

Whenever there is scarcity of rain or drought, this Puja can be performed. Like the Kati Puja, Hudum Puja doesn't need a Brahman priest to perform its rituals.

Kushaan Gaan:

Kushaan is one of the important folk-traditions of the Koch Rajbongshi community. There are various notions about the origin of the term "Kushaan". According to one notion, it is the song of Lava-Kusha sons of Rama, therefore, it is known as Kushaan Gaan or song. According to another notion, since these songs are sung by the Koches, they are known as Kushaan. On the other hand, according to another notion the word Kushaan means 'to wipe evil' (Ku-evil, Shan-to clean by wiping).

Kushaan Gaan belongs to the category of performing arts. In local form, the term Gaan also includes dramatized presentation along with songs. The performance includes dance, dialogues in rhythm and songs. As mentioned, the Kushaan Gaan tells the story of Ramayana, particularly the story of Lava and Kucha. The stories of Ramayana are very

popular among the Koch Rajbanshi society and Kuchaan is of that tradition. It is important to note that Kuchaan is performed only by the male folks.

The main person of the Kuchaan folk performance is known as Geedal or Kuchaan. Besides the Geedal, there are two Bain, one Pali or Pail and four dancers. These dancers who all are male members are called Chukri. The whole team is helped by one or two more persons who are known as Dohari or Dowari.

Goalini Nritya:

Another important folk tradition of the Koch Rajbongshis is the Goalini Nritya (Goalini Dance), which still prevails among the Koch Rajbongshis of Western Assam and North Bengal. The dance is related with agriculture and harvesting. The songs and dance reflected various stages of harvesting from cutting matured crops to depositing them safely. Like most of the agricultural society, harvesting has social significance in the Koch Rajbongshi society and it is always celebrated in many ways. The process of harvesting is narrated with the stories of Lord Krishna, the popular Hindu God. In the performance, Goalini or the wives of the Gowals (people related with the trade of milk) are requested to help Krishna in the process of harvesting. Goalini dance is performed by women and there is one male member who plays the *dhak*. Originally, only a *dhak* was played, however with changes of time, the other instruments also made its way to this dance form.

Baas Nritya:

One of the important rituals of the Koch Rajbongshi community in both Assam and North Bengal is the Baash Puja, which means worship of Bamboo. This ritual is observed in the month of Biashag (Mid April to Mid May) and the month of Aghon (mid November to mid December) for good health, fortune and welfare of the village community. Bash Puja is also known as the Madan Kam or Kamdev Puja. The origin of this deity is not clear. The meaning of Madan is happiness and Kam is desire. It is said that Kam is the son of Parvati. As the name suggest, Bash of Bamboo is used in this rituals to represent Kam dev. In some places, Baas Puja is also celebrated in the form of Shakti Puja or Kali Puja.



A Bash Nritya troupe from Dhubri, Assam

Marai Puja:

Marai Puja is one of the important rituals of the Koch Rajbongshi community. It's a kind of Puja where the Goddess of Snake Manasha Devi is worshipped. Therefore, this ritual is also known as Manasha Puja. It is mostly performed at wedding. The main theme of the Marai Puja are :

- 1) Wedding of Lord Siva and Parvati, birth of Padma or Manasha
- 2) Quarrel of Padma and Chando Sadagar, the merchant.
- 3) Journey of Behula to Devapuri for revival of the life of her husband Lakhindar. Rival of Lakhindar
- 4) Acceptance of Puja by Padma from Chand Sadagar.

This puja is related to the story of Chand Sadagar. The story goes like this as, Chand Sadagar (Merchant) was a dedicated worshiper of Lord Siva or Mahadev. Hence, he was not ready to accept Padma as Goddess and was not offering Puja to her. But, Padma was not happy with this, she wanted offering from Chando Sadagar by any means. Therefore,

she threatened Chando Sadagar that if he doesn't offer Puja to her, she will kill all his six sons along with their companion who are out for trade. Chando Sadagar didn't give attention to her. Therefore, Padma killed all his six son including 14 trading boat by drowning them into Brahmaputra river. That time, Lakhindar was not borne. After this incident, Padma told Chanda that if he still offer Puja to her, she will give life to his six sons. On the other hand, if he doesn't do that she will kill his future on the day of wedding by biting him taking the form of snake. However, Chando Sadagar didn't care for Padma's threatening and didn't offer her Puja. Later, a son was born to Chando Sadagar and his wife Soneka and was named as Lakhindar. Though Chando didn't wanted Lakhindar to marry due to Padma's fear, Lakhindar fell in love with Behula, daughter of another business man named Basak. Since Lakhindar was bound to marry Behula, Chando Sadagar had no other option but agree with Lakhindar's wish. However, fearing Padma threatening of killing his son on the night of marriage, Chando made a special house of iron for his son. There was no hole in this house known as Merghar so that no snake could enter the house. Unfortunately, the person who assigned to construct the house had left a very small hole (as small as the top of a needle) as ordered by Padma. After the marriage when Lakhindar and Behula came to stay in the house, Padma taking form a snake entered the iron house through the small hole. As thretend she killed Lakhindar. To bring life to Lakhindar, Behula started journey to Devapuri taking the deadbody of Lakhinar on Bhur of Banana tree. On her way, she met Netai Dhubuni (cloth washer) who helped to found her the Debapuri. Netai advised Behula to dance in front of Lord Siva to please him so that he retrieve the life of Lakhindar. Later, Lakhindar life was retrieved but Chando Sadagar had to offer Puja to Padma. However, he offered the Puja with his left hand. It is said that from that day onwards, the Marai or Manasha Puja is conducted to please Goddess Padma. Like Kushan Gaan, Geedal plays the main role in Marai puja.

2.4: Socio-Political Background:

The present Kamatapur Movement has deep linkages with socio- economic history of the region. Many observes that the feeling of alienation among the Koch Rajbongshis, particularly in North Bengal started with the influx of upper caste Hindu gentry into the Koch Rajbongshi dominated North Bengal (i.e. historical Kamatapur region) who came

from East Bengal as immigrant in the early twentieth century. Swaraj Basu observes, "...with the gradual settlement of an upper caste Hindu gentry in what were traditionally the Rajbongshi dominated areas of North Bengal, the existing balance in local power structure had changed. The immigrant upper caste gentry in course of time had become the most dominant group in the local society, economy and politics. They manned the local administration and by virtue of their closeness to the administrative power and their shrewdness, emerged as the dominant landholding class. As they were guided by the traditional Brahminical cultural values, the Rajbongshis with a tradition and culture of their own, failed to get a respectable position in the status estimation of these immigrant upper caste gentry. There were sharp dissimilarities between the cultural practice of these two groups and the gentry treated the Rajbongshis as 'backward, uncultured and even *antyaj*' (Swaraj 2003:62-63). In the early 20th century, the Koch Rajbongshis were even denied entry into the temple of Jagannath Puri by an Act of the Govt. in the year 1911 (Hazarika?). There were similar practices in Assam also. Once Koch Rajbongshis were denied entry in the famous Barpeta Kirtan Ghar, a prayer place for the Vaishnavait sect of Assam, situated in Barpeta town of lower Assam. For their entry in to the Barpeta Kirtan Ghar, they had to fight a legal battle in the then Calcutta High Court (Chaudhury 1993:49).

The discriminatory attitude of the upper caste Bengalis were also reflected in the contemporary Bengali literary work. Soumen Nag observes that Nagendranath Basu in the early 20th century while writing his *Vishwakosh* (Encyclopedia) mentioned the Koch Rajbongshis as barbarians or (Mlechha). Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the renowned Bengali scholar says in 'Bongo Darshan' that the Koch identity cannot be synonymous with Bengali Hindu identity (Nag 2003:163). He writes in 'Banga Darshan', "Lots of Koches live inside the Bengal. Koches are also found in the districts of Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi, Bagura, Dacca, Moymonsing of Bengal. There are almost one lakh Koches, who lives in Bengal. Few people say that they should be counted as Bengalis. But I express my doubt over this matter" identity (Nag 2003:201).

It is through 'Kshatriya Movement' that we find the Rajbongshis challenging the lower status assigned to them. While in 1891, the Rajbongshi's described themselves as 'Vratya Kshatriya', from 1911 they began to claim pure 'Kshatriya' status legitimized by priests, genealogists and pundits. In order to gratify their ritual rank aspiration, they began

to imitate the values, practices and cultural styles of 'twice born' castes who formed a part of a Great Hindu Great tradition. Since 1912, a number of mass thread wearing ceremonies (Milan Kshetra) were organized in different districts by the 'Kshatriya Samiti', where lakhs of Rajbongshis donned the sacred thread as a mark of 'Kshatriya' status. The immediate objective of the 'Kshatriya Samiti' was to regain the lost social status of the Rajbongshi community in the Hindu social system (Hazarika ?).



A demonstration by AKRSU in demand of Kamatapur

The land loss of the Rajbongshis of North Bengal into the hands of the Hindu immigrant is one of the main reasons for the feeling of alienation among the Rajbongshis of North Bengal. We have already mentioned that Jalpaiguri and Darjilleng were part of the Cooch Behar state till 1908 and it went to the British due to a conspiracy of Kalika Das Dutta. Therefore, till 1908 the Royal Koch family had control over the lands of these areas. "In fact after the sad demise of the Royal influence", argues Nalini Ranjan Rai, "upper caste Hindu Bengalis settled in the Kingdom, slowly placed themselves in the driver's seat as far as administration of the urban centres of erstwhile entire north Bengal were concerned. It happened in case of very capital town erstwhile Koch Dynasty, Cooch Behar where ethnic Rajbongshis lost their landed properties to caste Hindu Bengalis,

most of whom were migrated from south long ago under the patronage of the Royal House. Similar case was seen for Jalpaiguri town too”(Ray 2008: 179). The various post independent land reforms, which were introduced in West Bengal rather than protecting the land of the Rajbongshis, created more landless people among the Rajbongshis due to the loop holes of the law.

With this changing scenario, the Rajbongshis not only lost their land, but lost their language, culture and identity. Observes Nag, “[t]he Hindu refugees, who came from the districts of Rangpur, Mymonsingh, Pavana, Dinajpur, Dacca and others to Cooch Behar after independence, had good economic background. They had a strong cultural awareness with a good knowledge of cultivation. In front of their developed culture, modernity of language, education and efficiency, the indigenous Rajbongshis could not stand anywhere and they gradually lost their culture, language and land. Above all, they became minority due to the flow of this immigrant and ultimately they lost their last asset, which was their identity” ((Nag 2003:159).

Unlike Bengal, the situation in Assam is different. Though a superior feeling pervades the caste Hindu Assamese, they are not immigrants. The Koch Rajbongshi has a good presence in all over Assam both physically and socially. The Koch Rajabanshi dominated undivided Gowalpara District (Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta), which comprised the small Koch Kingdoms like Bijni, Sidli and Guaripur became part of modern Assam in 1950 with the initiative of Koch Rajbongshi leader late Sharat Chandra Singha. Assamese literary work and social life is loaded with inspiring stories of Koch king Bishwa Singha, Naranarayan and General Chilarai. The first martyr of the Assam movement (for expulsion of illegal foreigners) is also from the Koch Rajbongshi community. There are many such examples, where Koch Rajbongshis have proved themselves as “good Assamese”. But despite this “feel good” factor, there is a presence of parallel history of cultural and social resistance from the caste Hindu Assamese society towards Koch Rajbongshi and other non mainstream community of Assam. Even renowned novelist like Rajani Kanta Bordoloi could not escape from this kind of mentality. Bordoloi had used the term ‘Nihaliya’ to interpret the Koches in his famous novel ‘Dandua Drohi’ (Bardoloi,1988:71,72). There are many proverbs and social customs

where Koch Rajbongshis have been looked down by the caste Hindus.¹⁴ It seems that the failure of the caste Hindu Assamese to accommodate the tribal identity into the Assamese culture has caused the feeling of alienation among the various tribes of Assam, including the Koch Rajbongshis.

It is important to note that the prime and the old demand of the Koch Rajbongshis in Assam is the inclusion of the Koch Rajbongshis into the Schedule Tribe (ST) category. The demand for Kamatapur is comparatively new in Assam. The All Assam Koch Rajbongshi Sanmilani, which has been demanding the ST status for the Koch Rajbongshis of Assam since 1966, once opposed the demand of Kamata *Rajya* (State) by Kamata Rajya Sangram Parishad in and around 1969 (Choudhury 1993: 21). This surely points that the feeling of alienation was not there among the Koch Rajbongshis of Assam till the recent past. Though, the staging of this demand has completed fifteen years now, it remains unfulfilled. Many observers opine that if the Koch Rajbongshis had been given the ST Status in Assam, the Kamatapur demand from Assam would not have been raised. However, this is debatable whether this colonial idea of scheduling people would be of any help in terms of development and social justice. Moreover, the inclusion of the Koch Rajbongshi dominated areas into the Bodoland Territorial Councils (BTC) without consulting the Koch Rajbongshis has also fueled the demand for Kamatapur in Assam.

2.5: An overview of the Kamatapur Movement:

The Kamatapur Movement of the Koch Rajbongshis seeks the creation of the Kamatapur State (federal unit) under the constitution of India comprising areas of present North Bengal and lower Assam. The movement also seeks the recognition of the Kamatapuri Language and culture along with the territorial demand. At present, mainly Kamatapur Peoples' Party (KPP) of North Bengal and All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRSU) of Assam are spearheading the movement. An armed group called Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) has been fighting for a "sovereign" Kamatapur since its

¹⁴ There is a believe among a section of the caste Hindu Assamese that a particular kind of ringworm could be cured if rubbed by the Gamosa of Koch Rajbongshi. As this can hurt the sentiment, the Gamochoa is most of the time, taken without the knowledge of Gamochoa owner.

formation in 1995.¹⁵ Another Student Organization called All Kamatapur Students' Organization Association (AKSO) has joined the movement recently. Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association is another organization which is also demanding the creation of a separate state called "Greater Cooch Behar" comprising the areas of the proposed Kamatapur.

There are also significant numbers of Koch Rajbongshi bodies which are mostly working on cultural issues of the Koch Rajbongshi with sympathy to the territorial demand. Koch Rajbongshi Sahitya Sabha (of Assam), Kamata Sahitya Parishad (of North Bengal) and many other such bodies of Assam, West Bengal, Bihar and Nepal are working on the language and cultural issues of the Koch Rajbongshi. Dictionary, poems, periodicals, audio albums and video films of the Kamatapuri(Rajbongshi) language are being produced from various Koch Rajbongshi dominated areas of North East India and Nepal.¹⁶ Besides the cultural issues, the Koch Rajbongshis of Assam are demanding schedule Tribe status since a long time.

The Kamatapur Movement is neither accidental nor it is an effect of the other struggles for self determination of Northeast India. The idea for a homeland for the Koch Rajbongshis is almost seventy years old and the aspiration for cultural recognition is around hundred years old. A gentleman from undivided Bengal named Jogendranath Mondal, had demanded a separate state for Rajbongshis called "Rajar-sthan" or abode of king before independence. He feared that if Bengal were divided, a section of the

¹⁵ Besides KLO, in 1995 another outfit called 'Koch-Rajbongshi Liberation Organisation' (KRLO) was formed by the ULFA as a subsidiary front for the Koch Rajbongshi community, reports the South Asian Terrorism Portal. Like the KLO, its reported goal is to establish a separate State, comprising Koch-Rajbongshi-inhabited areas of northern Assam. The first batch of 25 KRLO activists went to ULFA camps in Bhutan for training in December 1995. By 1996, when these activists returned to Assam, counter-insurgency operations had been intensified in the State and the KRLO was more or less defunct. Most of its activists joined the Saraighat Unit of the ULFA. Some KRLO activists also surrendered to the authorities. (For more information about KLO and KRLO please visit: <<http://www.satp.org>>)

¹⁶ Dr. Dwijendra Nath Bakhat has mentioned about many literary work of Kamatapur language of Nepal, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam in his book "Rajbongshi Bhasha-Sahityar Parichay". For details kindly see (Bhakat 2000)

backward classes would be dominated by the upper caste Hindus while the other would be under the Muslims (Hazarika 2004). The issue of Kamatapuri language was also raised strongly almost hundred years back in 1910 by Panchanan Barma, the leader of the famous Kshatriya Movement in the 3rd annual conference of Uttar Banga Sahitya Parisad (Barma 2002:1). Though the official establishment of Kamatapuri both in territorial and cultural form could not be possible along with the Bengali and Assamese, the aspiration for these remain alive over these year.

Area demanded for Kamatapuri

Name of the District	State
Darjeeling	West Bengal
South Dinajpur	West Bengal
North Dinajpur	West Bengal
Jalpaiguri	West Bengal
Cooch Behar	West Bengal
Dhubri	Assam
Kokrajhar	Assam (BTAD)
Bongaigaon	Assam
Chirang	Assam(BTAD)
Goalpara	Assam
Barpeta	Assam
Baska	Assam (BTAD)
Nalbari	Assam
Kamrup	Assam
Udalguri	Assam (BTAD)
Darang	Assam
Morigaon	Assam
Sonitpur	Assam
Lakhimpur	Assam

The Koch Rajbongshi people have a long history of struggle for social justice, dignity and recognition. In the early twentieth century, the Rajbongshis of North Bengal challenged their lower social status by claiming "Kshatriya Status" through the famous Kshatriya Movement under the leadership of Panchanan Barma. In 1966, Uttar Banga Sanskritik Parishad demanded the recognition of the Kamatapuri language and cultural development. In 1976, another strong movement started demanding preservation and protection of the Schedule caste¹⁷ and indigenous people of North Bengal and all round development of North Bengal. This movement which was spearheaded by Uttar Banga Tapsil Jati O Adivasi Sangathan, popularly known as UTJAS lasted till 1990.

Major Organization which seek creation of Kamatapur

	Name of the Organization	Place of origin	Year of existence
1	Hit Sadhini Sabha	North Bengal	1949
2	Uttar Khanda Dal	North Bengal	1969
3	Kamata Rajya Dabee Parishad	Assam	1969
4	Kamatapur Gana Parishad	North Bengal	1985
5	Kamtapur Libearation Organization	North Bengal	1993
6	Kamatapur Peoples Party	North Bengal	1995
7	All Koch Rajbongshi Students Union	Assam	1993
8	Greater Cooch Behar Association	North Bengal	1998
9	All Kamatapur Students' Organization	Assam	2004
10	Kamatapur Association	Assam	2010
11	Chilarai Sena (Independent)	Assam	2014

The territorial demand also came up in many occasions since Mr. Mondal raised it in 1940 and before the emergence of the present Kamatapur Movement in 1990s. A group called Uttar Khanda Dal (UKD) renewed the idea for a separate homeland for Koch Rajbongshis in 1969 in North Bengal. UKD demanded the formation of the Kamatapur

¹⁷ The Koch Rajbongshis are Schedule Caste in West Bengal, General in Bihar, Other Backward Class in Assam and Schedule Tribe in Meghalaya.

State, but was unable to make much political headway and was replaced by the Kamatapur Gana Parishad in 1987 (Bhataacharya 2002). In Assam too, an organization called Kamata Rajya Sangram Parisad (KRSP) demanded the creation of Kamata state around 1969 (Choudhury 1993:13).

Kamatapur is a region, whose reconstruction in contemporary political discourse is rooted in history. The Kingdom of Kamata, also known as Kamrup Kamata was established by Sandhya Rai in the mid 13th century comprising areas of present Assam, North Bengal and Bangladesh. During the rule of Koch King, Naranarayan, the kingdom of Kamata reached its zenith, establishing its supremacy almost over all the monarchies of contemporary Northeast India. However, later on the Kingdom was divided into two parts among the royal family as Koch Kamata or Koch Behar (Cooch Behar) and Koch Hajo or Kamrup. Many small Koch Kingdoms like Bijni, Darrang, Beltola emerged in Kamrup later.



National Highway blockade in demand Kamatapur and ST status

The Koch Kamata or Cooch Behar Kingdom came under British control and became a Princely state and remained so till 1947. When India became independent, it was

expected that all the small Koch kingdoms (then zamidaris) along with Princely state Cooch Behar would be integrated and a separate Kamatapur State (federal unit) would be created as it had happened in Rajasthan. Unfortunately, the central government, not knowing the historical and cultural background of the region, merged the Princely state with West Bengal despite strong protests from the people of Cooch Behar. On the other hand, the undivided Gowalpara District (a sizable portions of modern Assam as well the areas of Koch Hajo Kingdom) became part of Assam.

The merger of Cooch Behar State with West Bengal continued to be a major political and emotional issue for the Koch Rajbongshi organizations which are engaged in the present Kamatapur movement. The leaders of the present Kamatapur movement consider merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal as a conspiracy of West Bengal government and have placed it as one of the main arguments in support of the demand for Kamatapur state.¹⁸

¹⁸ See the memorandum of AKRSU to the Prime Minister of India. dated 23 rd June, 2004.

CHAPTER-III
Findings of the Village Study

Though Koch Rajbongshis are found all over Assam, the visibility of Kamatapur Movement and identity emergence of the Koch Rajbongshi people are more in lower Assam, particularly in the undivided Goalpara District. Within undivided Golapara, Kokrajhar and Dhubri District are the two districts where cultural elements and language of the Koch Rajbongshis have been revived in a strong way. A non-government organization called "Koch Rajbongshi Cultural Society" has been working hard in reviving and spearheading the Koch Rajbongshi folk culture in the area. The "Koch Rajbongshi Sahitya Sabha" which is based in the district of Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon is working on spreading the language and literature of the community. On the other hand, the Gauripur area of Dhubri district is known for preserving the folk music, particularly the Bhaowaia (known as Goalparai) Music of the Koch Rajbongshis people. However, the cultural life of the Koch Rajbongshi doesn't stop in the Assam border. As we mentioned earlier, if we cross the border of Assam, the issue is much more visible in all parts of North Bengal, excluding hill areas of Darjeeling district. It should be mentioned here that, Kokrajhar comes under a different administrative structure, which is Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) than Dhubri, which is under direct administration of Government of Assam. The idea of selecting to different district under two different administrative structure for the village study was to see whether response of these two districts different or not.

In the light of this, we selected some Koch Rajbongshi inhabitant areas of Dhubri and Kokrajhar District of Assam to examine the identity assertion of the Koch Rajabnshi. We tried to examine whether they practice a separate culture than that of Assamese, whether try to distance themselves from the Assamese identity as a result of identity crisis within the Assam and many more. Their views was collected through a set on questioners, but as a part of questioners methodology, the interviews were not limited only to the questioners, and whenever it was necessary it was encouraged to explore more from the community.

A total number of 54 people from various villages of Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts were interviewed for the study. 18 numbers of villages from Dhubri and 6 numbers of villages from Kokrajhar districts were selected for the study. The people who were interviewed belong to various section of the society including both men and women. They are

between the age group from 15 to 68. They are mainly commoners and hardly have any political affiliation as well as sound political awareness, which would have helped them to give politically correct answer. Hence, there were very less probability to provide manipulative answer. The questions were very specific and aimed to explore one's individual identity assertion, cultural life and their perception of the idea of Kamatapur. Two questions were asked specifically on cultural practice and rituals of the Koch Rajbongshi community. Two questions were related to Koch Rajbongshi's demand for Scheduled Tribe status of the community. Another two questions were framed to know their idea about Kamatapur. i.e. what is Kamatapur for them and why Koch Rajbanhsis want Kamatapur. Around seven questions were framed to see how they see their own identity. Do they see it as separate identity from mainstream Bengali and Assamese or not.



Koch Rajbongshi women

During our study, we have covered 24 villages from two districts. During the interview, when it was asked specifically "in your social life, what is the identity that you would like to consider?". The answer that was picked by most of the people was "Koch

Rajbanshi".¹⁹ The term *Deshi* was used by one woman named Namita Barua, when asked the same question. Namita who hails from Baruapatti of Gauripur used the term *Deshi* in most of the instances where others have used Koch Rajbongshi.

List of Villages of Dhubri District where survey was done

Sl. No.	Name of the Village	Sub Division	Block
1	Baniamari	Dhubri	Rupsi
2	Dumardoh part-III	Dhubri	Rupsi
3	Dumardoh part-I	Dhubri	Rupsi
4	Dumardoh part-IV	Dhubri	Rupsi
5	Madhusoulmari	Dhubri	Rupsi
6	Paglahat	Dhubri	Rupsi
7	Gaurangtari	Bilashipara	Raniganj
8	Kurirpar	Dhubri	Rupsi
9	Gandhigram	Dhubri	Bilashipara
10	Gaurangnagar	Bilashipara	Bilashipara
11	Galakganj	Dhubri	Galakganj
12	Futkibari	Bilashipara	Raniganj
13	Jhabsabari	dhubri	Agomoni
14	Dumardoh	Dhubri	Rupsi
15	Saibari	Dhubri	Chapar-Salkosha
16	Bhandarkuthi	Bilashipara	Bilashipara
17	Dhepdhepi	Dhubri	Rupsi
18	Kherbari	Dhubri	Rupsi

In both the districts, there were commonalities in terms of culture and religious indemnity. It was observed that everyone was aware of the fact that they speak Koch Rajbongshi language and their identity is Koch Rajbongshi. They were also very firm in

¹⁹ They were given three options. i.e. 1) Assamese, 2) Koch Rajbongshi and 3) Other.

asserting that their language (Koch Rajbongshi Language) is different from Assamese and Bengali. Response to the question, "Is your language different from Assamese or Bengali" was "Yes". This was same for both the district. It was also interesting to found that the women attire of the Koch Rajbongshi has been mentioned as Patanai in most of the cases. There is not a single case of mentioning Mekhela Chadar as the women attire, which is commonly used by Koch Rajbongshi women of middle and upper Assam. Interestingly, during field visit, it was found that amny Koch Rajbongshi women wear sari in their daily life in Dhubri District, but during interview they mentioned about Patani. Patani is the traditional women attire of Koch Rajbongshi women, even in other parts of South Asia.

Koch Rajbongshis are not follower of *Vaishnavism* in these two districts, where the study was carried out. This is against the common notion, according to which it is believed that Koch Rajbongshis are by and large follower of *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* of the great saint Sankardeva. There is historical background for this assumption. The propagator of Ek Saran Nam Dharma, Sankardev was patronized by Koch king Narnarayan and Koch King Laxminarayan (son of Naranarayan) declared *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* as the state religion of Cooch Behar state.

: List of Villages of Kokrajhar District where survey was done

Sl. No.	Name of the Village	Sub Division	Block
1	Khukshi	Gosaigaon	Dotoma
2	Serfanguri	Gosaigaon	kosugaon
3	Chithila	Gosaigaon	Dotoma
4	Narabari	Kokrajhar	Titaguri
5	Shakti Ashram	Kokrajhar	Dotoma
6	Chandrapara	Kokrajhar	Titaguri

In the study area, *Siva (Mahadev)*, *Manasha* and *Kali* have been mentioned as the three major deities of the Koch Rajbongshi community in both the districts. Besides, these three daities, there are also reference of *Bishohorini* and *Mashan*. *Mashan* is also

worshiped in North Bengal by the Koch Rajbongshis. *Manasa*, *Bishohorini* and *Mashan* are some of the Koch Rajbongshi deities, which are not worshiped by other communities.

As mentioned, in our study we also tried to understand issues of Kamatapur from the perception of common Koch Rajbongshis. While Koch Rajbongshi student body like "All Koch Rajbongshi Student's Union", Political organization like "Kamatapur Peoples' Party" and "Kamatapur Progressive Party" are very much clear about the demand for Kamatapur, we wanted to know the view of the common Koch Rajbongshi on their idea of Kamatapur. Most of them see Kamatapur as the historical Kingdom of the Koch Rajbongshi people. Some says it as a Royal state, some as a historical state, but whatever they say, it was clear that they are aware of the fact that Kamatapur is a historical place. The most interesting and important observation came when it was asked why Koch Rajbongshis want Kamatapur. Prammeswar Roy, of Gandhigram, Dhubri District responded this with some important points. According to him, Koch Rajbongshi want Kamatapur due the following factors:

- 1) The history of the Kamatapur is the history of the Koch Rajbongshi. They want to preserve this history.
- 2) Identity of the Kamatapur is the identity of the Koch Rajbongshi. This identity (Koch Rajbongshi community) has been broken apart.
- 3) Koch Rajbongshis want Kamatapur so that they can avoid cultural differences.
- 4) Koch Rajbongshis want Kamatapur so that they can achieve development as a whole.

The aspiration of the common Koch Rajbongshi is highly reflected in these three points. They believe that their Kamatapuri or the Koch Rajbongshi identity has been broken into many pieces. Many think, formation of Kamatapur is the birth right of the Koch Rajbongshi people. Madan Roy of Golakganj stated that Kamatapur is the birth right of the Koch Rajbongshi people. Same view was expressed by Prosenjit Roy of Gauripur. On the other hand, some of them see Kamatapur as an instrument for cultural and economical development. Sanjib Kumar Choudhury of Gaurangtari of Bilashipara sub-division opines that Koch Rajbongshis are culturally, economically and identity wise very weak and

therefore they need their homeland Kamatapur. There was interesting observation by Bhuban Ch. Roy of Baniamari, Dhubri District. Mr. Roy argues that Koch Rajbongshis are extremely threatened by the creation of District Autonomous²⁰ council in their own homeland. Therefore, creation of Kamatapur is necessary. This leads to the aspiration of the Koch Rajbongshi for self rule. Dulal Kr. Roy of Dumardoh (Dhubri District) opines that “..Kamatapur was a separate state and the question of Koch Rajbongshi’s self-determination is related to Kamatapur. Hence, they (Koch Rajbongshi) want the creation of Kamatapur”. Jago Mohan Ray too, had responded in the same line.

But, what is the problem of being in Assam and becoming an Assamese? This was asked to understand why there is a feeling of alienation among the Koch Rajbongshis of Assam. Some answer came as very simple. Below are some of the such responses -

“We are originally Koch Rajbongshi, not Assamese”, Buduram Roy, Chandra Para, Kokrajhar.

“The Assamese don’t want us to be Assamese. Therefore, we are separate”, Jago Mohan Roy, Dumardoh, Dhubri.

“Who are Assamese in Assam? We are Koch Rajbongshi, not Assamese.”, Dulal Kr. Roy, Dumardoh, Dhubri.

“we are different from Assamese:”, Khoka Adhikary, Dumardoh, Dhubri.

Mousumi Roy of Bhandarkuthi village of Bilashipara sub-division was more articulate while answering this question. Mousumi observes, “we (Koch Rajbongshi) lost our identity in Assam, which is the problem being in Assam and becoming Assamese”. Like Mousumi Roy, Sanjib Kumar is very much clear that Koch Rajbongshis are not Assamese because their culture is different from the Assamese. He opines, “We (Koch Rajbongshi) are completely different from them (Assamese). We have separate language and tradition”. “The Assamese don’t want us to be Assamese, hence we are different”, opines Jago Mohon Roy of Dumardoh village.

²⁰ Mr. Roy was pointing to the BTAD administrative structure when he said District Autonomous

The village study which was conducted in Twenty four villages of Dhubri and Kokrajhar district reveal that the Koch Rajbonghis prefer a separate identity that the Assamese one. It was also evident that in their day to day life they have maintained an independent cultural and social identity in the above mentioned area.

CHAPTER-IV

Conclusion

“Koches are Assamese by blood and soul”, argues one Assamese writer (Borah 2008: 32). Another Assamese writer Ismail Hussain, while mentioning about the Koch Rajbongshi of Barak Valley, use the term “Asomiya Koch Rajbongshi” in his writings. He also very emotionally argued in his writings that Koch Rajbongshis are the protector of the Assamese identity and culture in the Bengali dominated Barak Valley of Assam (Husian 2005). On the other hand, former Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu said that the Rajbongshis are nothing but Bengali (Acharya 2000). Between the tag of war of Bengalis and Assamese over the Koch Rajbongshis, Koch Rajbongshis are trying to say that the Koch Rajbongshis are Koch Rajbongshi, not Assamese or not Bengali. What is secessionist in the eyes of the Bengalis and Assamese, is the aspiration for integration in the eyes of the Koch Rajbongshis (Das 2008). The confusion whether Koch Rajbongshis are Assamese or Bengali has arose due to the ignorance of the fact that Koch Rajbongshis are a trans-border community who lives in both side of the Assam and Bengal border. We have already mentioned that the Koch Rajbongshis are leaving as indigenou people of Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Bhutan. In this context, it could be argued that Koch Rajbongshis are not only Assamese and Bengali, but also Bihari, Nepali, Bangladeshi and Bhutia.

On the contrary to the Assamese and Bengali’s claim over the ownership of the Koch Rajbongshi nationalism, the Koch Rajbongshi may not choose none of them and could opt for their own identity, i.e. Koch Rajbongshi identity. It was assumed during the independence that nationalism like Koch Rajbongshi would disappear or would become a part of the nearest mainstream nationalism like Bengal or Assamese. But in reality it did not happened.

We have already observed that Koch Rajbongshis aspiration is very much old. When they talk about their identity in terms of both territorial and cultural interpretation, the border between present Assam and West Bengal often disappear and the imagined Kamatapur appears strongly. There had been many attempts in the past to capture the trans-border nationalistic aspiration of the Koch Rajbongshi. In the year 1996, an International Koch Rajbongshi Conference was held in Jhapa district of Nepal, which was attended by Koch Rajbongshis from various parts of South Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma and India (Assam, North Bengal, Bihar) as reported by

'Uttarbanga Sanbad'. This conference which was presided by late Dr. Purnanarayan Singha, ex Member of Parliament from Assam, was also attended by the then Prime Minister of Nepal Sher Bahadur Deoba.²¹ The Koch Rajbongshis of these areas are still trying to keep a close relation with each other. The state conference of the 'Confederation of Rajbongshi Kshatriya Society', which was held at Jalpaiguri of West Bengal in mid-June, 2004 was attended by speakers from Nepal, Burma, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal. All the speakers expressed their support for the formation of a separate Kamatapur State (Asomiya Pratidin 2004).

However, it should be borne in mind that the Koch Rajbongshi identity has not emerged just for shake of it. There are many socio-political causes which has given rise to this situation. We have already seen that a feeling of alienation has been prevailing among the Koch Rajbongshi since a long time. The Rajbongshis who are considered as untouchable by the immigrant caste Hindu Bengalis during the early twentieth century, had challenge it through a movement. The discrimination was so high during that time, poet Govinda Chandra had to write that the "Rajbongshis do not want money, nor they want prestige/ they do not want education, nor they want knowledge/ they only want the recognition of their nationality/ they only want their nationality to be alive" (cited in Basu 2003:52).

The Koch Rajbongshi identity is sometimes used as synonymous to Kamatapuri identity. In their movement for self determination and journey for search of their own nationality, Kamatapur played a very important role. While most of the contemporary demand for homelands and nationalism are based on ethnic identity, Koch Rajbongshis are not demanding ethnic homelands but a regional homeland. In many of the Kamatapuri organizations like KPP, GCPA, there are sizable numbers of other communities particularly indigenous Muslims. In North Bengal, there is also support from the Mech and Rabha people for the Kamatapur Movement. The territorial demand for Kamatapur is largely constructed on the historical Kamatapur alias Kamata alias Cooch Behar kingdom. An understanding of the historical Kamatapur Kingdom would help us to understand Koch Rajbanshsi present political aspiration.

²¹ This news was published in 'Uttar Banga Sanbad' in March 10, 1996. Cited in, Dr. Jatin Barua (ed.), Rangta Garo, Raja Mahandra Narayan Aaru Ambika Charan Choudhurir Jivan Kriti (Assamese) Bongaigaon, 2002, p.52

One needs not to be surprised to see the emergence of the Koch Rajbongshi nationality and its identity, as well as to be suspicious of the same. We have seen in the earlier parts of this study that their (Koch Rajbongshi's) failure to get a dignified position in the caste Hindu society (of Assam and West Bengal) and non recognition of their cultural-political aspiration by the mainstreams has contributed a lot in Koch Rajbongshis' quest for their own identity. The post independent socio-economical condition of the Koch Rajbongshis has added fuel to this quest. Until and unless the question of social justice to the Koch Rajbongshis (as well as to the others) is addressed with sincerity, the aspiration for self determination charged by ethnic nationalism will not go easily. As the issue of nationality and a separate identity is very sentimental for the Koch Rajbongshis, it is needed to be dealt with care. If the mainstream feel that justice have been denied in the past to the Koch Rajbongshi people, than it is high time to check whether any damage control has been done so far by the mainstream on this matter.

The question of solving the problem (Koch Rajbongshi identity) is unrealistic, as it is difficult to term identity assertion of any group whether powerful or weak as a problem. If it is term so, it will be an attack on their rights. Every community has right to claim over their own identity and to self determination. However, one's quest for own identity or right to self determination should not violate the same of others. If it happens, it creates conflict among groups. In Northeast, we have seen conflicts among various communities in the matter of ethnic identity as a result of not recognizing the nationalistic aspiration of others. Bodo's journey for their own nationality and homeland has made many Adivasis, Minorities and Koch Rajbongshis homeless. Who knows, Koch Rajbongshis could be accused in the future for violating others nationalistic aspiration. In Northeast, ethnic nationalism has often turns violent. It should be mentioned here that Bodos, Karbis and Dimasas of Assam were successful in getting protection of their nationality in the form of territorial autonomy under the provision of 6th schedule of the Indian constitution. Unfortunately, these three areas are most disturbed areas of present Assam. This compelled us to think that something is wrong even in the constitutional structure.

Creation of homelands on the basis exclusive ethnic identity is not the only solution. The category called 'exclusive' is problematic, as different groups of people have been living with each other from time of immemorial and the imaginary "exclusive Homeland"

of particular community is shared by many other communities in reality. The call of the time is for co-existence, respect for each other and to trust each other. It's also time to recognize other's nationality with full dignity. The challenge is not to work on the similarities of Koch Rajbongshis with Assamese (or Bengalis) and to assimilate the Koch identity within Assamese identity (or Bengali identity), but to recognize the differences. It is also time to explore the possibility whether communities like Koch Rajbongshi can have pluralistic identities or not.

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Annexure-I:

Truce with East India Company

Dharendra Narayan, Raja of Cooch Behar having represented to the Honourable the President and Council of Calcutta the present distressed state of things of the country, owing to its being harassed by the neighboring Rajas, who are in league to dispose him, the Honourable President and Council from love of justice and desire of assisting the distressed have agreed to send a force, consisting of four companies of Sepoys and a field-peice for the protection of the said Raja and his country against his enemies and the following conditions are mutually agreed to :-

1st :- That the said Raja will immediately pay into the hands of the Collector of Rongpur Rs. 50,000 to defray the expenses of the force sent to assist him.

2nd :- That if more than Rs. 50,000 are expended, the Raja make it good to the Honourable the English East India Company, but in case any part of it remains unexpended it be delivered back.

3rd :- That the Raja will acknowledge subjection to the English East India Company upon his country being cleared of his enemies and will allow the Cooch Behar country to be annexed to the Province of Bengal.

4th :- That the Raja further agrees to make over the English East India Company one-half of the annual revenue of Cooch Behar for ever.

5th :- That the other moiety shall remain to raja and his heirs for ever, provided he is firm in his allegiance to the Honourable United East India Company.

6th :- That in order to ascertain the value of Cooch Behar country, the Raja will deliver a fairHastabud of his didirict into the hands of such persons as the Honourable the President

and the Council of Calcutta shall think proper to depute for that purpose, upon which the valuation of annual Malguzari which the Raja is to pay, shall be established.

7th :- That the amount of Malguzari settled by such person of the Honourable the East India Company shall depute, shall be perpetual.

8th :- That the Honourable East India Company shall always assist the Raja with a force when he has occasion for it for the defense of the country, the Raja bearing the expenses.

9th :- That this treaty shall remain in force for the space of two years, or till such time as advices may be received from the Council to rectify the same for ever.

This treaty signed, sealed and concluded by the Honourable the President and council at Fort William, the fifth day of April, 1773, on one part and by Dharendra Narayan, Raja of Cooch Behar at Behar Fort, the 6th Magh 1179 Bengali Style, on the other hand.

Annexure-II:

Cooch Behar Merger Agreement:

Agreement made this twenty eighth day of August 1949 between the Governor General of India and His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar.

Whereas in the best interests of the State of Cooch Behar as well as of the Dominion of India it is desirable to provide for the administration of the said State by or under the authority of the Dominion Government :

It is hereby agreed as follows :~

Article 1

His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar hereby cedes to the Dominion Government full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and powers for and in relation to the governance of the State and agrees to transfer the administration of the State to the Dominion Government on the 12th day of September 1949 (hereinafter referred to as 'the said day').

As from the said day the Dominion Government will be competent to exercise the said powers, authority and jurisdiction in such manner and through such agency as it may think fit.

Article 2

His Highness the Maharaja shall continue to enjoy the same personal rights, privileges, dignities and titles which he would have enjoyed had this agreement not been made.

Article 3

His Highness the Maharaja shall with effect from the said day be entitled to receive for his lifetime from the revenues of the State annually for his privy purse the sum of Rupees eight lakhs fifty thousand free of all taxes. After him the privy parts will be fixed at

Rupees seven lakhs only. this amount is intended to cover all the expenses of the Ruler and his family, including expenses on account of his personal staff, maintenance of his residences, marriages and other ceremonies, etc., and will neither be increased nor reduced for any reason whatsoever.

The Government of India undertakes the said sum of Rupees eight lakhs fifty thousand shall be paid to His Highness the Maharaja in four equal installments in advance at the beginning of each quarter from the State Treasury or at such Treasury as may be specified by the Government of India.

Article 4

His Highness the Maharaja shall be entitled to the full ownership, use and enjoyment of all private properties (as distinct from State properties) belonging to him on the date of this agreement.

His Highness the Maharaja will furnish to the Dominion Government before the 15th September 1949, an inventory of all the immovable property, securities and cash balances held by him as such private property.

If any dispute arises as to whether any item of property is the private property of His Highness the Maharaja or State property, it shall be referred to a Judicial Officer qualified to be appointed as High Court Judge, and the decision of that Officer shall be final and binding on both parties.

Article 5

All the members of His Highness' family shall be entitled to all the personal privileges, dignities and titles enjoyed by them whether within or outside the territories of the State, immediately before the 15th day of August 1947.

Article 6

The Dominion Government guarantees the succession, according to law and custom, to the Gaddi of the State and to His Highness the Maharaja's personal rights, privileges, dignities and titles.

Article 7

No enquiry shall be made by or under the authority of the Government of India, and no proceedings shall lie in any court in Cooch Behar against His Highness the Maharaja, whether in a personal capacity or otherwise, in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by him or under his authority during the period of his administration of that State.

Article 8

(i) The Government of India hereby guarantees either the continuants in service of the permanent members of the public services of Cooch Behar on conditions which will be not less advantageous than those on which they were serving before the date on which the administration of Cooch Behar is made over to the Government of India or the payment of reasonable compensation.

(ii) The Government of India further guarantees the continuance of pensions and leave salaries sanctioned by His Highness the Maharaja to servants of the State who have retired or proceed on leave preparatory to retirement, before the date on which the administration of Cooch Behar is made over to the Government of India.

Article 9 :

Except with the previous sanction of the Government of India no proceedings, civil and criminal, shall be instituted against any person in respect of any act done or purporting to be done in the execution of his duties as a servant of the State before the day on which the administration is made over to the Government of India.

In confirmation whereof Mr. Vapal Pangunni Menon, Advisor to the Govt. of India in the Ministry of States has appended his signature on behalf and with the authority of the Governor General of India and Lieutenant Colonel His Highness the Maharaja

Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, Maharaja of Cooch Behar, has appended his signature on behalf of himself, his heirs and successors.

Jagaddipendra Narayan
Maharaja of Cooch Behar

V. P. Menon
Advisor to the Govt. of India
Ministry of States

Annexure-III:

Response of Indian Government to Maharaja of Cooch Behar

MINISTRY OF STATES

NEW DELHI

The 30th August 1949

D.O. No. F. 15(19)-P/49

My Dear Maharaja Sahib,

In connection with the Agreement concluded between the Governor General of India and Your Highness for the integration of Cooch Behar State Your Highness raised certain points for clarification; the Government of India have considered them and accept the following arrangements :-

1. It is intention of the Government of India to administer for the present the territories of the Cooch Behar State as a Centrally-administered area under a Chief Commissioner.
2. All contracts and agreements entered into by your Highness before the date on which the administration is made over to the Government of India will be honoured except in so far as any of these contracts or agreements is either repugnant to the provisions of any law made applicable to the State or inconsistent with the general policy of the Government.
3. The allowances at present drawn by Her Highness the Rajmata will be continued for her life time and will be paid out of the revenues of the State. Your Highness; brother and other members of the Ruling Family will also be paid allowance from the revenues of the State as per list attached.
4. The responsibility for the Cooch Behar State Forces will taken over by the Government of India from 12th September, 1949. If these forces are disbanded or any of the men

discharged they will receive the pension or gratuity or compensation to which they may be entitled under the rules of the State.

5. Adequate guards will be provided for the protection of Your Highness' person and palace.

6. No land or building being Your Highness' private property shall be requisitioned; acquired without your consent and without payment of full compensation.

7. Electricity from the State Power House for the main residence of Your Highness and family within the State will be provided at the fixed rate in existence immediately before the transfer of administration to Government of India. Water supply will be provided free of charge to the main Palace of Your Highness and family within the State.

8. The management of the temples and Debutter properties in the State may be entrusted to a Trust which shall consist of Your Highness as President, 3 nominees of Your Highness and 2 nominees of Government. This trust will be in charge of all temples in the State and will also administer the properties of the temple both inside and outside the State. In the event of the abolition of the zamindaris which are Debutter property Government will ensure that the Trust has adequate resources to fulfill its object.

9. Your Highness may create a Trust for the marriage of the son and daughter of Isharani of Cooch Behar with a corpus of Rs. 1 lakh. The Trustee will be besides Your Highness, The Highness of Jaipur and Dewas Junior.

10. The Civil List Reserve Fund of Rs. 10,60,900 shall be Your Highness' private property and shall be held by Your Highness in Trust for Meeting expenditure in connection with Your Highness' marriage or special repairs to the Palace and any unforeseen expenditure.

11. The administration of the Maharajkumar Trust Fund with a corpus of Rs. 4,86,900 shall be formally vested in a Trust of which Your Highness and Their Highness of Jaipur and Dewas Junior shall be Trustees.

12. Your Highness will be entitled to hold customary Durbars and troops present at the capital will take part in the Dassera and other celebrations.

13. Your Highness will retain your present rank in the Indian Army.

14. Government will endeavour to associate the name 'Narayan' with the Cooch Behar State Forces even after their absorption in the Indian Army.

The Ministry of State has issued a Memorandum on the privileges and dignities which has been finalized in consultation with the Rajpramukhs of Unions and other States. Your Highness will see that the Memorandum made by the Rulers equates with the various suggestions made by the Rulers from time to time regarding their rights and privileges.

With kind regards,

Yours Sincerely,

V.P. MENON

Lieutenant Colonel His Highness
Maharaja Sir Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, K.C.I.E.
Maharaja of Cooch Behar

Cooch Behar (Bengal)

Kamatapur Movement: Identity crisis among the Koch Rajbongshis

Interview Schedule

Name: Male Female Age

Village: Sub-division:

District:

Student self-employed service holder Housewife others

1. In your social life, what is the identity that you would like consider?

Assamese

Koch Rajbanshi others

2. What language do you speak at home?

Assamese

Koch Rajbanshi others

3. Is your language different from Assamese and Bengal ?

Yes No

4. Koch Rajbanshi women wear separate dress or is it same with the Assamese women?

Yes No

5. If so, what is the name of the dress?

6. Is your culture different from of Assamese and Bengali?

Yes No

7. If so, what is the name of your culture?

8. What are the festivals that you observe?

9. What are the deities/ rituals you observe?

10. Why do you want ST Status?

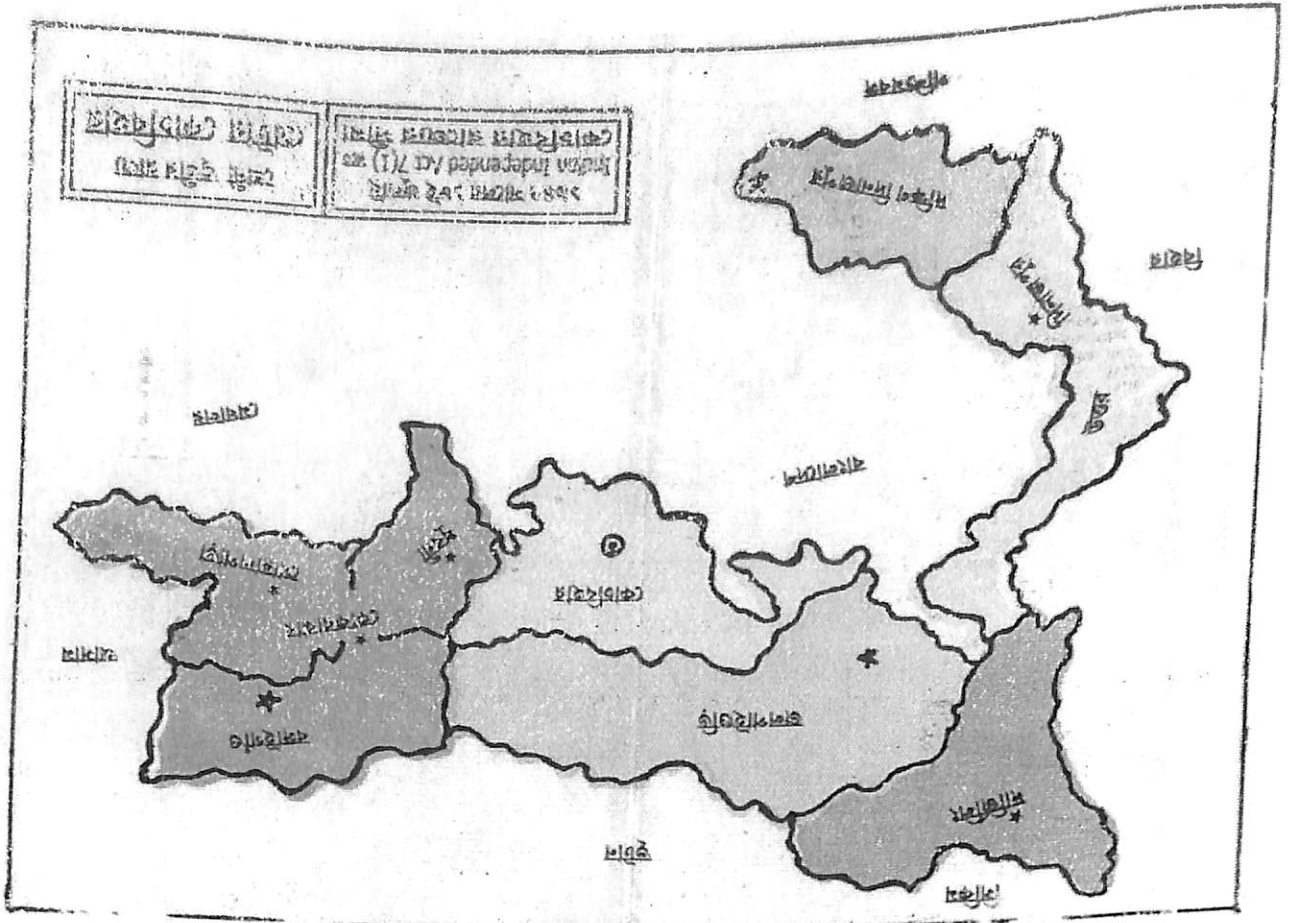
11. What you will get through ST?

12. What is Kamatapur?

13. Why Koch Rajbanshis want Kamatapur?

15. What is the problem of being in Assam and becoming an Assamese?

Map of Greater Cooch Behar



Map of Proposed Kamatapur by AKRSU

