Ethnic Movements in Assam:

A Study of Koch Rajbanshis

Dissertation Submitted to Sikkim University in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for Award of the Degree of

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DECLARATION

I, **Paresh Borah**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation entitled "**Ethnic Movements in Assam: A Study of Koch Rajbanshis**" submitted to **Sikkim University** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is the record of word done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to any else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**Ethnic Movements in Assam: Study of Koch Rajbanshis**" submitted to **Sikkim University** in Partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in Political Science is the result of bona fide work carried out by **Mr. Paresh Borah** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree, diploma, associate-ship and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

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List of Abbreviations

AKRSU- All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union

AKRYCS- All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Yovo Chatra Sanmilani

AKSO- All Kamatapur Students' Organization Association

AGP- Assam Gana Parishad

BPF- Bodoland Peoples Front

BTC- Bodoland Territorial Council

CS- Chilarai Sena

GCBDF- Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Front

GKBPA- Greater Koch Behar Peoples' Association

GKPF- Greater Kamatapur Peoples Forum

GOI- Government of India

HS- Hitasadhini Sabha

KGP- Kamtapur Gana Parishad

KLO- Kamatapur Liberation Organisation

KPP- Kamtapur Peoples Party

KPP- Kamtapuri Progressive Party

KRLO- Koch-Rajbanshi Liberation Organization

KRCS- Koch Rajbanshi Cultural Society

KRSP- Kamta Rajya Sangram Parishad

KRS- Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani

KSP- Kamata Sahitya Parishad

KRSS- Koch Rajbanshi Sahitya Sabha

MOBC- Most Other Backward Class

NDFB- National Democratic Front of Bodoland

NSCN- National Socialist Council of Nagaland

OBC- Other Backward Class

RVA- Rajbanshi Vasa Akademi

SC- Schedule Tribe

ST- Schedule Tribe

UBSP- Uttar Banga Sanskritik Parishad

UKD- Uttar Khanda Dal

ULFA- United Liberation Front of Assam

UNLFW- United National Liberation Front of West East Asia

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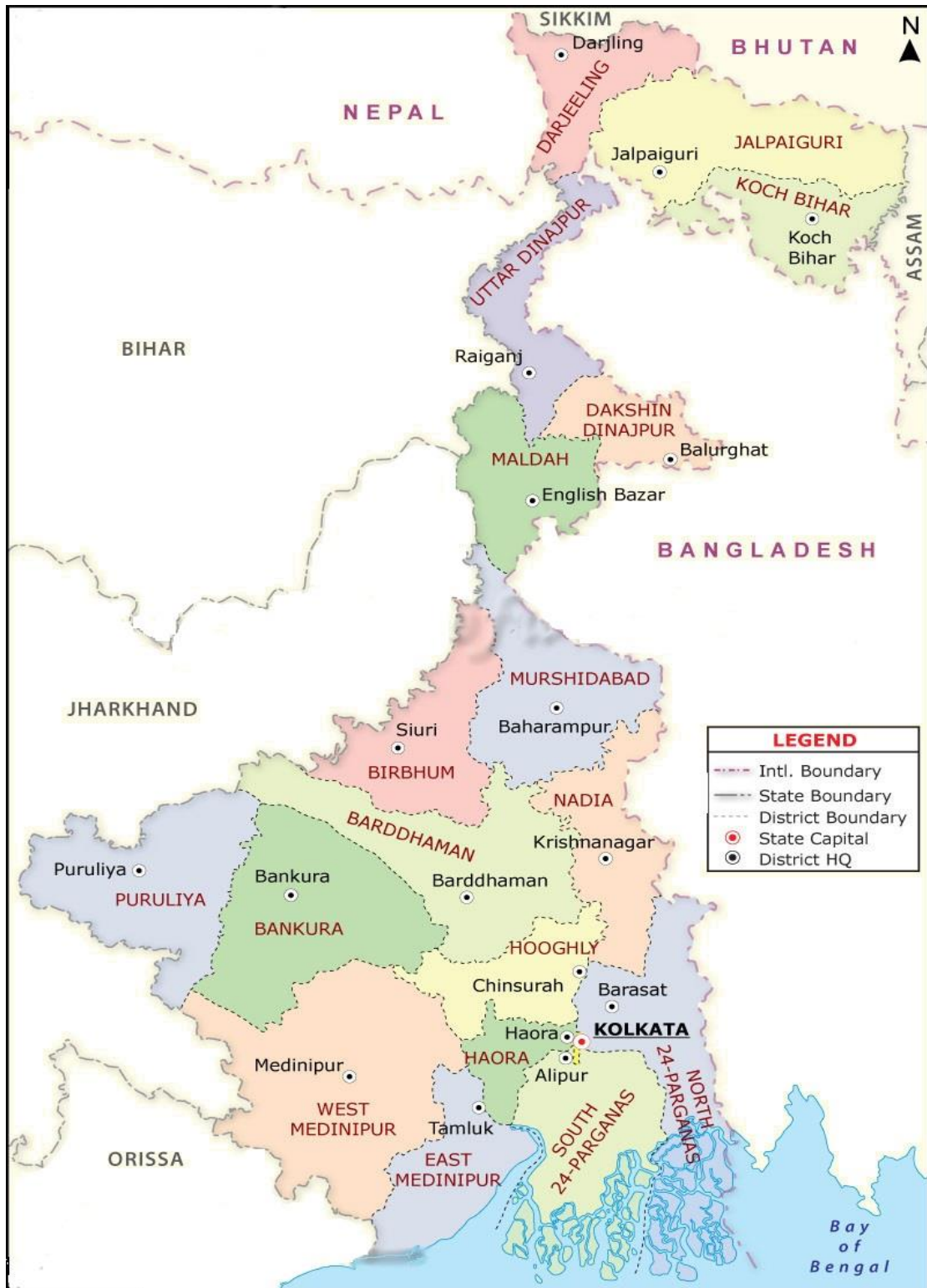
Source: Mapsofworld.com, Accessed of January 29-2016: http://www.mapsofworld.com/india/west-bengal/west-bengal.jpg.

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The period after the Second World War witnessed a rapid emergence of newly independent nations. These states started to engage in the process of nation building and simultaneously strengthening the very idea of a national identity. They tried to generate a new unified identity of "nationalism". Sociologist Dipankar Gupta calls it "exclusivist identity in the form of supra-local community called nation state" (Gupta, 2000). The idea of belonging to a nation predominantly guided the actions of the diverse groups and communities in the formation of this national identity. Such an idea was undermine the ethnic and linguistic variation within a state. For example, ethnic identity implies a sense of belongingness of a particular group or community which is derive from same descent. Max Weber argues that persons who consider themselves members of the same nationality are often much less related by common descent than are persons belonging to deferent nationalities. According to him difference of nationality may exist even among groups closely related to common descent (Weber 1997). But the process of building of national identity undermined the ethnic and linguistic variation which gave rise to ethno-political movements. In the late colonial period and early post independence period the nationalist leaders and Indian state tried to integrate and bring ethnic groups and tribals into the national sphere by restoring their ancient heritage. But doing so, somehow they undermined the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual identities of such groups that later period gave rise ethno-political movement. In the recent times, these groups have started to articulate their distinct identity by themselves due to threat posed by dominant group on their distinctiveness.

Ethnic identity is one of the most widely discussed issues amongst scholars, policy makers, and academicians. The term ethnicity is derived from the Greek word 'ethnos' which means 'heathen' or 'pagan' (Eriksen, 2010: 4). In the United States of America, 'ethnics' as a polite term was used throughout the Second World War to mean Jews, Italians, Irish and other groups of people "inferior" to the dominant groups (2010: 4). Paul R Brass has defined ethnicity as, "any group of people dissimilar from other people in terms of objective cultural criteria and containing

within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements for complete division of labour and of reproduction forms an ethnic category" (Brass, 1999: 19). By objective cultural markers, Brass refers the language, distinctive dress, customs, religion, and race etc. The above definition talks about the cultural basis of ethnicity and differentiates ethnic groups from other social groups based on class, gender and age groups. J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith refers to six important features of an ethnic group. These are: a common proper name to identify and express the 'essence' of the community, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland which will create attachment to the ancestral land, and a sense of solidarity among the people of the community (Hutchinson & Smith, 2009: 6-7). The above mentioned features are very much essential for an ethnic group. E. Hunter and Phillip Whitten used the term ethnicity to mean "any group of people within larger cultural unit who identifies themselves as a distinct entity, separate from the rest of that culture. Today, most of the social scientists use the term to refer to "a social group which consciously shares some aspects of a common culture and is defined primarily by descent" (Pakem, 1990: 36-27). Thus ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity and sense of belongingness to a particular group or community. It manifests the sentiments and emotions of a group which tries to preserve their distinct identity.

I.1. Theories of Ethnicity:

There are number of approaches like primordial, instrumental, and constructionist in understanding the concept of ethnicity. From instrumental view point, ethnic identity is a socially constructed concept and the product of human choices and actions. It is the "creation of elites who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves" (Brass 1999: 8) From the primordial point of view, ethnicity is a 'natural' and 'given' phenomenon. Every individual carries with him some attachments derived from his/her place of birth, kinship, religion, language and social practices which are natural to him, spiritual in nature and provide a basis for an easy affinity with other people from the same background (1999: 69). Notion of primordial ethnicity developed by Clifford Geertz

(1973) suggested that ethnic identity developed from certain 'givens' of social existence, including blood and kin connections, religion, language, region, and custom. Geertz states that these form 'ineffable', 'affective', and 'a priori' bonds. It is also apparent that these bonds are also considered to be the basis of character and the cause of long standing ethnic rivalries and even hatreds (Spencer 2014).[1] Thus, there are different meanings attached to ethnicity. Richard T. Schaefer in his study considers 'relative deprivation' as the potential cause of ethnic conflicts leading to extreme situations such as riots, insurgency, civil war and other instances of social deviations such as crime (Schaefer 2008: 69). Rational Choice theory, on the other hand, considers ethnic identity movement as a product of human choice and decision. According to Hechter (1995) and Banton (1987), any action can be seen as determined by a rational motive as the basis for the pursuit of scarce resources, usually in the form of public goods such as housing, benefits, political power or competition for employment (Spencer 2014). It believes that any ethnic group will be engaged in collective action only when they estimate that by doing so they will receive a net individual benefit (Hutchinson & Smith 2009: 28). Similarly, Constructivist approach considers ethnic identity of individuals as a dynamic concept. Individuals, according to this approach, go on changing their ethnic identity on the basis of their needs. Very often, they identify themselves with that identity which gives them more advantages - socially, politically or economically. These approach is somewhat essentially individualistic and somewhat aggressive actor, self-interested, rational, pragmatic and, perhaps, with a maximum orientation as well. What actors do, it is assumed, is rationally to go after what they want, and what they want is what is materially and politically useful for them within the context of their cultural and historical situations (Spencer 2014).[2] There is also other perspective of ethnicity like that of Benedict Anderson, who looked ethnic groups as 'imagined communities'. He says that the ethnic groups are imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 1991).

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[1]Stephen Spencer cited from Clifford Geertz in his "Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation".
[2]S. Spencer cited from Ortner 1984 in his "Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation".

I.2. Postmodern perspective on ethnic identity:

Post modernist view ethnicity as a subjective human construction where ethnic identity is constructed by a certain group in a community as an instrument to build a power base within a state society; it has no existence outside this power game. Thus ethnicity could be viewed as a product of certain objective conditions as well as subjective construct for a particular purpose.

Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), examined the debate over postmodernism and views, "the defining features of the postmodern condition as involving a rejection of the 'grand narratives' of the Enlightenment, such as Truth, Freedom, Justice and Reason...Modernity is characterized by the grounding of knowledge and science in appeals to 'master or meta-narratives" (Elliot 2009: 239). Grand narratives for Lyotard are intrinsic to the social repression and political domination of modernity. In condition of post modernity, knowledge is fragmented into multiple disciplines, diverse sites and particular paradigms. Therefore, any attempt to fix, close or stabilize the meanings of the concepts such as identity, sexuality, gender, and ethnicity is unjust and politically dangerous (Ibid: 2009: 204). In case of identity construction the post modernist are critical about the process of 'othering' of other's self. From this point of view the 'self' and 'other' relationship is a matter of concern in the formation of an identity. Self can construct and represent others identity. In this regard the view point Michel Foucault can de contextualized. Though Michel Foucault rarely made explicit comments on the representation and construction of other's self yet, his reference to representation and construction of other's self in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (1980), and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth the Prison* (1977) provides important interference on it. Foucault attempts to read how within a particular discourse power produces knowledge, how power makes a subject as an object of knowledge and how it legitimises certain social and political order over others. Through discipline and punish Foucault draws a genealogy of power by illustrating the evolution of prison system explains on the operation of disciplinary power over others. From his viewpoint besides the centralised forms of state power which used force and coercion, power also have other qualities that more often is being exercised without any resource of force. According to him this is the more effective type of power. Foucault

notion of 'biopower' indicates how these discursive forms of power vested in scientific and medical practices can have material effects on certain populations. Foucault makes the point that a primordial discourse of blood could be invoked to validate ideas of race and sexuality. For instance, the purity of bloodline was the basis of a number of definitions of nationality, as, for example, in Germany and Japan:

"Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the thematic of blood was sometimes called upon to land their entire historical weight towards revitalising the political power that was exercised through the devices of sexuality. Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, 'biologising' statist form). It was then that the whole politics of settlement, family, marriage, education, and social hierarchisation accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health and everyday life, received their colour and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race."

(Foucault 1984: 149)

From the Foucauldian view point it needs to be pointed out that power flows have real impacts and it originates from diverse disciplinary areas (sources), shaping and modulating social action to identify certain groups as deviant and threatening by constituting individual subjectivity. Foucault's study of discourse has had a marked impact on social science as it recognises that our social institutions, politics and structures are organised through 'regimes of truth', dominant disciplinary domains that focus and filter concerns about the 'other'. In fact, discourse creates 'otherness'. Foucault defines discourse as:

"Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern."

(Weedon 1987:108)

Foucault did not focus on ethnicity, but it seems clear that his conception of the fluid movement of power and resistance could be applied to regimes of colonial and anti-colonial struggles where the colonizers constructed the subjective identity of the people of its colonies. Here therefore the study will focus the view point of some

post modernists how they in their writings focuses the role and power of colonial modernity in the construction and representation of the identity of its colonies.

Edward Said is one of the foremost scholars to have used the Foucauldian idea of discourse in his study of the Western writings on the Orient. He analyses the representation of self on others through the discourse of *Orientalism*. Orientalism as a discourse constructed and produced the 'Orient' as an object of Knowledge. Applying its discursive power, the European culture was able to manage the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively by supporting the institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, colonial bureaucracies, and colonial styles of the East (Said 1978:02). Ashis Nandy states that colonial administration is not only about political and economic rule over other rather it has implied cultural and psychological implications. In this sense, colonialism is also about interpreting the self (Nandy 1983). The role colonial state can't be ignore towards the formation of subjectivity of the natives in India. Most of the identity conflicts in India today have its origin in the colonial modernity. The basic institutional arrangements of colonial administration including the courts, bureaucracy, police, and various technical services of government are remain same and continue. Therefore, Partha Chatterjee argues that "the postcolonial state in India has only expanded and not transformed" (Chatterjee 1994). The continuity of the legacy of colonial modernity has often been seen in post colonial India's North-eastern region. Akoijam states that not only the identities in this region carry the imprints of the colonial past(s) but also they are constantly nurtured and reproduced by the colonial modernity of the postcolonial Indian State (Akoijam 2006). The way of resolving the problem of insurgency and various ethnic conflicts in this region postcolonial Indian state has been following the colonial legacy.

Let us move on to one other aspect of the discourse of colonial modernity with regard to its role in formation, representation and categorization of the identities of people through the caste system. There were many ways through which the colonial rulers gave emphasis on the objectification of the identities in their colonies. Bernard S. Cohn in his essay *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* has shown the role of census introduced by the colonial rulers in identity formation. He says that Census emerged as an instrument of classification on the bases of caste and identity and provided the way within the purview of colonial ethnography where the

subject could identify and define oneself in apposition or in relation to others (Cohn 1987). The 'Ethnographic state' of India was important for the colonial rulers to understand and control its subjects, and to represent and legitimate its own mission. Nicholas B. Dirks is of the view that the ethnographic description, became increasingly formalized in India and caste was institutionalized affecting in the recruitment of soldiers, into the army, the implementation of legal codes that made the provisions of the law applicable on caste lines, the criminalization of entire caste groups for local policing purpose and the assessment of the political implications of different colonial policies in the area of local administration in caste terms (Dirks 1992). Therefore, caste based classification of Indian society is not a residual survival of ancient India but a specifically colonial form of discourse that maintained an Orientalist vision.

Colonialism has had a significant impact towards the construction, deconstruction and representation of Koch Rajbanshis identity as they were for a long time under the colonial rule. Moreover, the caste movement which was popularly known as the Khatriya movement by the Koch Rajbanshis in the post-colonial India was influenced by the process of caste based objectification of Indian society by the colonial discourse which will dealt with in the third chapter.

I.3. An Account of Ethnic Identity Movements in India and in Assam in Particular:

Identity is not an inherently attained trait neither does it has a fixed or determined structure, rather it is open. Identity is constructed through a close historical interaction between the individual and society. As a social construct, every type of identity (religious, ethnic, etc) undergoes change along with a change in the socio-psychological and politico-cultural sphere over a period of time. In general, the term 'identity' manifests a combination of group sentiments and emotions rooted in their tradition generating a sense of belongingness among its members. However, generalization of the notion of 'identity' may amount to the simplification of its complex underpinnings often implicitly driven by the notion of power and ideas governing inclusion and exclusion.

Ethnic identity politics starts with the process of identity construction, identity revives and identity protection by certain ethnic groups of the society, who consider them to be inferior, oppressed and marginalized. Such construction of self-identity begins on the basis of an ethnic consciousness of a group. Therefore, identity politics or politics of identity generally means the counter movement by the oppressed and marginalized groups or communities to protest against oppression and injustice that is met out to various communities on the basis of their racial, religious, cultural, and ethnic identity (Brass, 1999: 15). Politics of identity thus may be considered as a phenomenon that emerges out of shared experiences of injustice, marginalization and discrimination of certain sections of the society. It happens when the members of ethnic groups of the society find themselves as oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated and somewhat in a state under confusion that their uniqueness and features of their identity are under threat from the majority group. In such a situation, the groups try to collectively mobilize themselves with a view to secure and protect their distinct identity. Identity movement may be of different kinds, i.e. feminist, racial, linguistic, religious, environmental, gay, lesbian, ethnic etc. Ethnic identity movements generally occur with an aim to preserve, protect and secure ethnic identity. Different ethnic groups belonging to diverse countries may at times agitate for the revival and protection of their identity and rights. This kind of agitation had been seen arising in both the developing and developed countries from time to time. For example, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Turkey, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, Philippines, Canada, Australia, former Yugoslavia, Germany and the former USSR are some of the countries which are still facing the problem of ethnic identity conflict.

India's diversity in terms of region, language, caste, class, religion, etc makes the issue of identity much more complex. From the pre-colonial and post-colonial period India has experienced many ethnic based identity conflicts. Despite the division of India resulting in the formation of Pakistan as a separate nation, the country is witnessing the formation of states since the 1950's revolving around the issue of identity. The country also witnessed the emergence of various tribal movements in different parts of the country since the 19th century "of which a few have developed into bitter, violent, and secessionist movements directed against nontribal, against state governments and against the Government of India itself"

(Brass, 2010: 151). In Punjab, the Khalistan movement was launched to carve out an independent Sikh country; in Bihar, the Jharkhand movement was directed to preserve the separate tribal identity of Santhals. Likewise, the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal was motivated by Gorkha identity issue. The above mentioned examples reflect identity assertion movement in India to preserve separate and distinct identity.

North-eastern region of India is similarly witnessing many ethnic based identity movements since the last six decades. After independence the region was reorganised due to identity assertion amongst various tribal groups leading to the creating of several new states like Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1971), Mizoram (1986) and Arunachal Pradesh (1986). From last 1960s the situation of Northeast India is very much sensitive due to the growing assertion of identity by various ethnic groups. Since a long time many ethnic groups such as the Nagas from Nagaland; Kukis and Meiteis from Manipur; Karbi, Dimasa, and Bodos from Assam etc have been demanding for constitutional safeguards and territorial autonomy. Time and again demands are also raised by some sections from these ethnic groups for the creation of separate statehood on the basis-of their distinct cultural identity, and even some others are attempting to secede from the Indian state.

Assam is the most populous state amongst all the North-eastern states. Over a long period of time many tribal and non-tribal population have been living in Assam such as Assamese, Koch Rajbanshi, Bodo, Kachari, Sonowal, Mishing, Rava, Deuri, Barman, Chakma, Dimasa Kachari, Garo, Khasi, Hajong, Hojai, Kuki, Mech, Karbi and others. Society in Assam has historically been multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-caste, multi-class and multi-lingual in composition (Hussain, 2000). The genesis of ethnic conflicts and ethnic identity movements in the state lies in its colonial past and the British policy of 'divide and rule' (Kumar, 2007: 111-112). Inspite of divided many times on the basis of ethnic identity the demands such as constitutional safeguard, creation of separate statehood etc are still continue among many plain and hill tribes. For instance, the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district and the Dimasa Kacharis of Dima Hasao Autonomous District have been agitating for granting of a separate state on the basis of their ethnic identities. From the 1980s onwards the Bodos have been demanding a separate Bodoland state on the basis of their linguistic and ethnic identities. Similarly, the Koch Rajbanshis are demanding

'Kamatapur' as a separate state for preserving their distinct identities and political entities etc.

Thus, each community in Assam has its own history which has precipitated its identity crisis and led it to the path of movement. Koch Rajbanshi is an ethnic community and earliest inhabitant of Assam. Historically this community have the features of Austral-Asiatic or Adivasi, Dravidian, Mongoloid, and Aryan, mixed up with all four human streams or cultures but Mongoloid features were pre-dominant (Ray, 2007: 9). Usually this community has been living in whole of North Bengal barring its hilly terrains; in a sizable portion of Assam; western part of Meghalaya; Purnia, Kishanganj districts and eastern part of Katihar district of Bihar; Jhapa and Biratnagar districts of Nepal; Rangpur, east Dinajpur district and some parts of north west Mymensingh, northern Rajshahi and Bogra districts of present day Bangladesh and lower parts of Bhutan. They are known as Rajbanshi Kshatriya Bengali in North Bengal, simply Rajbanshi in Bihar and Nepal and as Koch Rajbanshi in Assam, Meghalaya and their adjoining areas (Ibid: 8). The Koch Kingdom ruled in Kamatapur and it is said that Sandhya Rai established the Kingdom of Kamata in the 13th century including few portions of North Bengal and West Assam of present Northeast India. The kingdom of Kamata was ruled by different rulers of different dynasties from the period of mid 13th century to the end of the 15th century (Das, 2009: 38-39). The Koch established their strong political power in the Kamata region in early 16th century by the Koch Chieftain Bishwa Singha (1515-1540). After the death of Bishwa Singha, many other Koch Kings ruled the Kamatapur region till the treaty of April 5, 1773 signed between King Dharmendra Narayan and East India Company. Through this treaty Koch Kamata alias Koch Bihar became a native state of the British India and continued till 1947. In West Bengal District Gazetteers Durgadas Majumder writes that until 28th August 1949 Koch Bihar was an Indian State ruled by Maharaja under British Government. By a document on 28th August 1949 Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan gave up his territory to the Government of India. By an order under section 290A of the Government of India Act 1935, Koch Bihar was included and merged with West Bengal on 1st January 1950. Since then it is being administered as a district of West Bengal (Das, 2009: 56).

It may be said that the genesis of identity assertion emerged amongst the Koch Rajbanshis due to merger of Koch Bihar against the will of the local. The beginning of the feeling of Rajbanshi's nationalism had been seen when the prominent Rajbanshi Kshatriya leader Thakur Panchanan Burma argued in favour of Rajbanshi language in the third general meeting of 'Uttar Banga Sahitya Parishad' held at Rangpur now Bangladesh in 1910 (Ray, 2007: 115). Uttar Khanda Dal (UKD) an organisation was born in 1969, demanding a separate state for Rajbanshis namely as Kamtapur or Uttar Khanda. 'Uttar Banga Sanskritik Parishad' another organisation formed in the same year also raised the demand for recognition of Kamta language and its development. Demanding a separate Kamata state, similar organisation named Kamta Rajya Sangram Parishad (KRSP) was formed in the Goalpara district of Assam in 1969. For the same purpose in 1987, UKD changed its name to Kamtapur Gana Parishad and in 1996 to Kamtapur Peoples Party (KPP) (Ibid: 116). Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), a militant organisation came into being on 28th December, 1995. All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AKRSU) and Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani are the two Assam based organisation fighting for separate Kamatapur state and Schedule Tribe status for the Koch Rajbanshis living in Assam. Their proposed Kamatapur state comprises of eleven districts of Assam and five districts of North Bengal. Some other socio-political organisations that have given further momentum to the demand of separate Kamatapur state and Koch Rajbanshis identity assertion movement are Kamatapuri Peoples Party, Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Front, Kamtapuri Progressive Party, Greater Kamatapur Peoples Forum etc. Thus, it is evident that the ethnic identity movement of the Koch Rajbanshis is a long drawn battle and still continuing. With this background, the proposed study is an attempt to understand the historical process of Koch Rajbanshis identity formation and the historical memory of the Kamatapur state in the cultural and political life of Koch Rajbanshis; the problem of identity among them from the colonial to the post-colonial period; and the roots and causes of their long drawn ethnic identity movement and the strategies carried out by them to resolve identity crisis.

I.4. Survey of Literature:

Ethnicity is the manifestation of sentiments and emotions of a group which is in seek to preserve its separate identity. Such sense of distinct identity in general rests

on the belief of uniqueness about one's own culture and tradition. Antony. D. Smith defines the ethnic community, or ethnie, as a named social group with alleged common ancestry and shared history, one or more elements of distinctive culture, a sense of territorial association and an active solidarity (Smith 1984: 284). Here Smith basically focuses on the measures of ethnic community's subjectivity. For Eriksen ethnicity refers to the relationship between persons or groups who think or consider themselves distinctive from the members of other groups and try to keep up this distinctiveness. Ethnic identity becomes crucially important at the moment when it is perceived under threat emerging from within or out. He argues that modern education and technology plays an important role in generating opportunities and constraints for cultural and social organizations including ethnic groups (Eriksen 2010: 7-10). It is a phenomenon that arises out of the shared experiences of injustice, marginalization, and deprivation of certain sections of the society (Imchen 2007: 85).

Paul R. Brass in his work *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (1999) discusses ethnicity and nationalism from the socio-political point of view and describes these as a socio-political construct. He describes ethnicity through instrumentalist theory of ethnicity and states that ethnicity is not a given or natural phenomenon; rather, these are the creation and construction of the elite groups of the society. The elite groups exploit and control the emotions, sentiments and the thinking of the ethnic groups in order to gain their socio-political and economic benefits in society. Brass argues that competition among the elites for socio-economic and political power and benefits gives rise to ethnic identity consciousness and ethnic conflicts. The cultural norms of the ethnic groups, their values, customs and practices are the main instruments for the elites to compete for political power and economic benefits. Brass further states that in a multi cultural and multi ethnic society the centralizing nature of the state increases the possibilities of conflicts. Thus, decentralization and devolution of power of the state is essential to manage and deal with various kinds of identity and ethnic conflict in India.

Pahi Saikia in her work *Ethnic Mobilization and Violence in Northeast India* (2011) discusses the ethnic mobilization and ethnic violence in Assam and explains the complex relationship between various 'tribal' groups and the dominant Assamese community. According to her the main cause of ethnic identity conflicts of different

tribal groups in Assam are due to lack of communication and respect on the part of the Assamese community towards tribal groups. She discusses three main tribal groups of Assam viz. Bodos, Dimasas and the Misings and the tribal ethnic movement launched by them for fulfilling their demands. Even if all three tribal groups are from similar circumstances the ethnic identity movements launched by them are different from each other with regards to their intensity, nature, support base, and success of their movement. The Bodo movement, for instance, is considered as high intensity and largely violent in nature. The nature of Dimasa movement, on the other hand, is not so much violent so they have taken the middle path. The Misings have taken the less disruptive methods to fulfil their demands for autonomy. The author has attributed these differences within the three ethnic identity movements to the differences in leadership quality, geographical location, and their aims and expectations.

Monirul Hussain in his work *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology, and Identity* (1995) narrates the anti 'foreigners' agitation in Assam which is popularly known as Assam Movement between 1979 and 1985. Hussain states that the Assam movement was not truly an anti 'foreigner' agitation and identity crisis movement, rather it was an act of inciting of the Assamese elites for their self interest. The Assam Movement demonstrated the illegal migration as the root cause of identity crisis of the Assamese people. But the author points out that it is not so. The author argues that the migrants also had their own contribution towards the economic development and formation of composite culture in Assam. But the elite group of the Assamese society has misinterpreted this by mixing their self interest with the interest of Assamese nationality. Here, though Hussain does not directly deals with the Koch Rajbansis identity question but he has taken as reference to look at the Assamese middle class domination on other small ethnic groups like Koch Rajbanshi of Assam.

Sanjib Baruah in his work *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (2008) analyses the history of conflicts between pan-Indian nationalism and Assamese sub nationalism and looks into the economic and political history of Assam since the province became a part of British India. The author says that the region has witnessed various types of ethnic violence, nationalism conflicts, human rights abuses by the government security forces and insurgents, kidnappings, murders, extortion etc. However, the situation in recent years is very serious. These conflicts affect the economy of this region very much. The author argues that this kind of

violence and conflicts is the outcome of the strong centralizing tendency of Indian federalism.

Virginius Xaxa in his article *Politics of Language, Religion and Identity: Tribes in India* (2005) dwells on the socio-political efforts and agitation by tribal groups to preserve and protect their distinct language, religion and identity. In the late colonial period and early post independence period the nationalist leaders and Indian state tried to integrate and bring tribals into the national sphere by restoring their ancient heritage. But in the recent times, the tribal group have started to articulate their distinct identity by themselves due to threat posed by dominant group on their distinctiveness, arrival of education and demands imposed by development. The growing middle class amongst the tribals has given a new shape in the articulation of their identity by leading the socio-political movements for protection and development of their language, religion, culture and customs.

Sanjib Baruah in his work *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (2008) highlights a new perspective to understand ethnic conflicts and meaning of democracy in northeast India. He says that the low intensity problems of northeast India is a great concern for the Indian state as the region has been facing lots of insurgency problems, violence and conflict since independence. Baruah is of the view that in order to bring peace and development to the region, India's policy towards this region will have to be changed and linked to a new foreign policy with Southeast Asia. He tries to understand the nature of Indian state, its complexities and diversities along with the consequences of colonial power which had different results for different regions in India. In case of colonial experience the north-eastern region of India is different from rest of India. The origins of the Indian constitution's Sixth Schedule which today is understood as the ethnic homeland subtext was the result of British colonial efforts to create protected enclaves for 'aborigines' where they can be allowed to pursue their 'customary practices' including kinship and clan –based rules of land allocation. The conflict between the concept of nationalizing space and speaking of frontier space generates further conflicts between the ethnic groups living in northeast India and Government of India.

Sanghamitra Misra in her work *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial North-eastern India* (2011) points out a new way of

understanding the north-eastern region of India and the ethnicities existing in this region. Focusing on the historical background of western borderlands of north-eastern India she highlights how power was arranged by colonialism through different tactics. In the pre-colonial period this region had existed in the imaginary core of the history of India and based on this imaginary core, colonial state integrated it with the important area of colonial interest which brought contestations between the space of colonial state and ethnic notion of space and power. The most important manifestation of colonial power in this borderland had been seen in the conflicts over livelihoods and lifestyles of the peasants by imposing a uniform notion of the inactive cultivator as the ideal productive subject and introducing the tenurial settlements and encouraging the migrants from other regions. The ethno-territorial frame created by the colonial officials to create boundaries between administrative unities and to plan rules of exclusion has been continuing to shape the notions of aspirations of the different ethnic groups.

Rajib Nandi in his article *Spectacles of Ethnographic and Historical Imaginations: Kamatapur Movement and the Rajbanshi Quest to Rediscover Their Past and Selves* (2014) presents the Rajbanshi as the victims of social and political hegemony by the colonial government, the Indian state and the dominant groups. He states that the present interpretations made by the Rajbanshis of their own history and identity are a mixing of colonial ethnography on one hand and Rajbanshi mythographies on the other. Based on these two aspects, Koch Rajbanshis are agitating to revive their identity which is rooted in their deep sense of history.

Ashok Das Gupta in his work *Querying Relevance of the Term 'Indigenous Peoples' in a Three-Level-Approach with Special Reference to Rajbanshi Community of North Bengal, West Bengal, India* (2013) states that colonial administration brought many changes in the Koch Rajbanshi area which affected the life and livelihood of Koch Rajbanshi people. Under the colonial rule, particularly from 1860, drastic changes took place- from a subsistence economy to a revenue based economy with introduction of tea timber and tilling; introduction of permanent settlement system; setting up of the forest department and reserve forests brought huge changes as forest based community in the life of the Koch peoples in those area. The new system introduced by the Britishers affected them greatly unlike those elements living within princely province of Koch Behar. Moreover, the immigration of *Bhatias* (immigrated

Bengalis) to their living area affected them which was initiated and encouraged by the British rulers.

Swaraj Basu's work *Dynamics of A Caste Movement: Rajbansis of North Bengal, 1910-1947* (2003) is one of the important work on the Kshatriya Movement of the Koch Rajbanshis of Bengal. The work mainly deals with the upward mobility movement of the Koch Rajbanshis during the early part of 20th century. it has also successfully discussed the migration of the upper caste Bengali gentry in to Rajbanshi dominated North Bengal and its impact on the social unrest among the Koch Rajbanshis of North Bengal. Somehow the work has also tried to look into the role of colonial caste policy and its impact on the Koch Rajbanshis caste movement.

D. Nath in his *History of the Koch Kingdom, 1515-1615* (1989) Narrates an overview of history Koch Kingdom, structure of the Koch kingdom, its administration, and many other important aspect of the kingdom. The work has covered a period of hundred years which is very significance in terms of Koch history. He states that the rise of the Koches as a political power on the ruins of the Kamata kingdom in the early part of the 16th century is an important chapter in the history of north-east India. Under their powerful king Naranarayan, they extended their influence over almost the entire north-east. But their glory was weakened due to the partition of their kingdom and conflict between the ruling houses of the divided kingdoms of Koch Behar and Kamrup. He states that the actual contribution of the Koch rule lies in the patronage it extended to the cultural development of this part of the country as well as to the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, which revolutionised the whole face of the Assamese society.

Arup Jyoti Das in his work *Kamatapur and Koch Rajbanshi Imagination* (2009) discusses the historical background of Koch Rajbanshi peoples and their long struggle for social justice and recognition of their distinct identity. Though Kamatapur was there in history from 13th Century, the Koch came out as a strong political power only in the early 16th Century with the establishment of Koch Kingdom in the Kamatapur region and ruled by different rulers till the independence of India. He says that with the subsequent merger of Kamatapur with the dominion of India as a district of West Bengal there was a rise of sub nationalism feelings to preserve their distinct identity and raised subsequent demands for autonomy. In support of their demand

many socio-political organizations was formed i.e. Uttar Khanda Dal, Uttar Banga Sanskritik Parishad, Kamata Rajya Sangram Parishad, Kamatapuri Peoples Party, Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Front, All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union, Greater Kamatapur Peoples Forum etc. Subsequently militant organization also came in to being demanding a separate territory of them. Das has pointed out that presently Kamatapur does not have its material existence but it lives in the imagination of Koch Rajbanshi peoples.

Nalini Ranjan Roy in his work *Koch Rajbanshi and Kamatapur: The Truth Unveiled* (2007) basically focuses on the historical process of Koch Rajbanshis identity formation, different theories of their origins, and the rise of Koch Empire till the independence of India. Koch Rajbanshis were originated of Kuvach, Kirats-Chinas, lived in frontier states of India in ancient period and entered in Northeast India from Thailand-Vietnam belt. In the 13th century they established their Empire and continued till independence of India. Roy discusses the Koch Rajbanshis feelings of identity crisis, drive for revival of their distinctiveness through socio-political movements. During the British rule Kamatapur was a princely state ruled by Maharaja as a feudatory prince, in 1949 it joined the dominion of India and finally it was merged with the province of West Bengal as a district. Problem of identity of the Koch Rajbanshis were started with the joining as a native state of British India through the treaty of April 5, 1773 and it has been continuing.

Sailen Debnath in his work *The Dooars in Historical Transition* (2010) investigates the role and importance of Dooars in the past as a centre of flourishing culture and civilization. Dooars was a geographical descriptive name where communications with other kingdom were taking place. Therefore, it is also known as door of communication. Debnath states that down the Bhutan hills, the part of India with an average breadth of 30 kilometres and length of 350 kilometres in West Bengal and Assam were known as the Dooars. There were eleven dooars in Bengal and seven dooars in Assam. A total eighteen dooars were there in that area. The Dooars was the seat ruled by many dynasties of which Kamatapur the most well-known was ruled by Koch Kingdom. The kingdom of Koch Bihar was founded by Viswa Singha in 1496 A.D. and ruled by many rulers through many political ups and downs. Since the establishment of their dynasty their socio-cultural position was well established through different movements and cultural changes. After the merger with West

Bengal the Koch Rajbanshi people began to feel dissatisfaction and alienation from the state and dominant groups resulting in the rise of socio-political movements demanding autonomy and protection of their distinct identity.

I.5. Rationale and scope of the study:

Ethnicity or ethnic identity consciousness is one of the important issues that promotes politics of identity and leads to ethnicity based identity movements. Ethnic conflict is in fact a dispute about political, economic, social, cultural or territorial issues between two or more ethnic groups which hamper the process of national integration and economic development of one region (Brown, 1997). The issue of the crisis and assertion of identity of the Koch Rajbanshis and the consequent identity movement merits a critical discussion of the various factors behind such assertions. As stated above, identity assertion by any ethnic group is born out of social, economic, cultural and political deprivations as perceived by the respective group. In the multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural landscape of Assam, emergence of identity movements of different ethnic groups lead to lot of serious issues ranging from terrorism, economic stagnancy, cultural threats and political instability. The issue of Koch Rajbanshi identity has already transcended the limit of a mere identity movement and has turned out to be a major catalyst of the socio-political scenario of the state. The recent times has witnessed the rise of various socio-political movements and adoption of protest mechanism by them. Demands of these movements include a range of crucial issues like the demand for a separate statehood, demand for Schedule Tribe status, recognition of their language, economic protection, socio-cultural improvement etc. This assertion of identity is articulated in the field of culture also which includes the revival of food habits, traditional dress, literature, music to name a few. So these issues are major emerging socio-political concerns in the field of nationalism, sub-nationalism, socio-cultural and economic development etc.

Thus the identity question of the Koch Rajbanshi appears to be of a vital concern in the socio-political field and hence needs a serious academic discussion. Here in lies the rationale of the present study. If we see the existing literature on Koch Rajbanshi there are very few studies that deal with the identity question of Koch Rajbanshi. Moreover most of the studies stick more to the historical narratives of the group and thus the problem of identity and its consequent developments have often

been ignored. Thus the study hopes to fill the void in the existing body of literature. Thus the study has tried to combine the historical and analytical methods in the study of the dynamics of Koch Rajbanshi identity formation.

It is the urgency of the time to look into the other dimensions of the issue so that a proper understanding and viable resolution can be framed. Keeping in mind this reality the study has tried to understand the process of identity formation of Koch Rajbanshi under the colonial and postcolonial state and the problem of their identity from colonial to post-colonial period. Understanding the reality behind such issue may help uncover the ground reality of the conflict scenario of the state and the political determinants working underneath. Moreover, the validity of such demands and justifications of the use of culture and cultural means also need to be evaluated. Academic research helps in spreading the information and awareness of such crucial fields in the wider paradigm. Koch Rajbanshi issue hardly gets scholarly attention and it affects its proper evaluations. Considering all these limitation, an attempt is being made here to somewhat address this highly significant issue and to place it in the mainstream academic platform so that more reasonable studies can be initiated.

I.6. Objectives of the study:

- To study the dynamics of ethnic identity formation;
- To study the historical process of Koch Rajbanshis identity formation;
- To study the problem of identity of the Koch Rajbanshis from the colonial to the post-colonial period;
- To examine the socio-political movements led by Koch Rajbanshis;

I.7. Research Questions:

- How are ethnic identities formed?
- What is the historical background of the Koch Rajbongshis identity formation?
- What are the reasons that led to the identity movement of Koch Rajbanshis?
- How the Koch Rajbanshis are using socio-political movement in negotiating their identity crisis?

I.8. Methodology:

The present study is based on qualitative methods. To understand the root of the problem and its magnitude and impact in present day context, the present study has adopted historical and analytical methods of research respectively. The study has tried to include both primary as well as secondary sources of data. Secondary sources of data include relevant books, journals, magazines, news papers, website and other related information. Primary sources of data comprises of interview, government reports, census data, memorandums, proceedings and other associated techniques. The primary data is collected through a semi structured interview schedule and group interview etc. It is generally felt that only a section of the population will have an extensive knowledge about the problem of the Koch Rajbanshi related to identity issues, therefore the study has applied purposive and snowball sampling for selecting the respondents. Though the study deals with the issue of identity of the Koch Rajbanshi living in Assam but to understand the historical process of their identity formation and the problem of their identity within the discourse of colonialism the study has also included the study of North Bengal and particularly Cooch Behar as historically they were under one Kingdom.

I.9. Plan of Study:

The proposed study has been divided into following five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter is an introductory overview of the proposed research. This chapter will introduce the subject, the objectives, research questions, scope of the study and the theoretical framework to be adopted. Moreover, this introductory chapter aims to discuss briefly the concept of ethnicity, the process of ethnic identity formation and periphery of the few cases of identity crisis and conflicts in contemporary world and relation it with that of Koch Rajbanshi in Assam.

Chapter 2: Historical Process of Koch Rajbanshi Identity Formation

This chapter will analyse the historical process of the Koch Rajbanshi identity formation and the historical memory of Kamatapur state in the cultural and political life of Koch Rajbanshis. The settlement of Koch Rajbanshi in Northeast India, the

establishment of their kingdoms, the advent of British, their subsequent merger with India and present relative position of their identity will thoroughly discuss in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Problem of Koch Rajbanshi Identity: Colonial to Post-colonial Period

This chapter will narrate the problem of Koch Rajbanshi identity from the colonial to the post-colonial period. Construction of Koch Rajbanshis identity within the discourse of colonialism will discuss here. Moreover, the socio-cultural and political identity crisis related to them within the colonial and post-colonial state will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Koch Rajbanshi Identity Movement and state responses

This chapter will look into the emerging identity consciousness among Koch Rajbanshi, the socio-political agitation for separate statehood, and their demand for getting Scheduled Tribe status under 6th Schedule of the constitution. This chapter will also study political mobilization among Koch Rajbanshi community in encountering the problem of identity. Further, the chapter will discuss the state responses towards the socio-political movements of Koch Rajbanshi.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This concluding chapter will sum up the entire findings of the study on the basis of the analyses and will suggest for probable solution of the problems. In addition, the limitation of the study and scope for further research will also discuss in this chapter.

CHAPTER-II

KOCH RAJBANSHIS AND THE KINGDOM OF KAMATAPUR: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

II.1. Origin of Koch Rajbanshis:

Koch Rajbanshis are one of the oldest aboriginal ethnic groups of South Asia. Presently they are found in three South Asian countries viz. India, Bangladesh and Nepal. In India they are predominantly found in four Indian states, West Bengal particularly in North Bengal, Assam, and some parts of Bihar and Meghalaya. There are different views among historians and scholars about the origin of Koch Rajbanshis. But before going to the discussion on the origin of Koch Rajbanshis identity, it would be useful to have a short discussion on the use of the terms *Koch* and *Rajbanshi* synonymously as in the present study both the term has been used together. Swaraj Basu in her work *Dynamics of A Caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal* has given a clear picture on the question of whether the terms Rajbanshi and Koch are synonymous or not. She has shown broadly two lines of argument regarding the origin of the Rajbanshis; one by colonial official-cum-ethnographers broadly they can be considered as orientalists and another by the Rajbanshi caste publicists (Basu 2003: 27). In the colonial writings, the Rajbanshis were generally regarded as purified group of 'Koch' who had adopted Hindu culture, tradition and caste norms leaving their own traditional cultural practices and social norms. B.H. Hodgson, W.W. Hunter, and Herbert Risley are among the colonial writers who have opined that the Rajbanshis were a purified group of Koch who adopted Hindu culture and social norms during the reign of Viswa Singha who established the powerful Koch kingdom in the beginning of sixteenth century[3]. However, E.A. Gait who also belongs amongst the colonial writer stated a slightly different view. Based on the census report of 1901 he says that the Rajbanshis of Rangpur did not look like the Koches and sprang from entirely different source. Gait is of the view that though there were many racial intermixtures in some places, the Rajbanshis belonged to a Dravidian tribe. In Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and in Goalpara in Assam, the people now

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[3] For detail see Basu, S. (2003). The Dynamics of Caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distribution.

known as Rajbanshi are either pure Koches who have a distinctly Mongoloid features or else a mixed type in which the Koch element usually prevails (Basu 2003: 28)[4].

The views of British ethnographers and officials were more or less same like the above interpretations by the colonial writers. But the observations of local writers were different. They have opined that the Rajbanshis are different from and superior to the Koch. These views are found in the writings of many indigenous writers, i.e. Monomohan Roy, Hara Kishor Adhikari, Upendranath Barman, Manbhola Barman etc, Monomohan Roy has argued, "irrespective of any question the Rajbanshis and the Koches were originated from entirely distinct caste. In social status the Koches were decidedly inferior to that of the Rajbanshis, who had greater ceremonial purity than the Koches. The physical features of the great majority of the Rajbanshis of Rangpur, except northern part bordering on Kooch Behar, were distinctly 'Dravidian'. The physiognomy of the Koches was distinctly 'Mongoloid" (Basu 2003: 29)[5]. The arguments in others indigenous literatures is almost similar to that of Monomohan Roy as they have argued that the term 'Koch' and 'Rajbanshi' were not synonymous and the term Rajbanshi existed long before the conversion of the Koch King Viswa Singha to Hinduism in the early sixteenth century. Some recent studies are also in the same dilemma on the question, that whether the Rajbanshis were the descendants of the Koches or they were a mixed race. This kind of controversies in the usage of the term 'Koch' and 'Rajbanshi' separately still continues in many parts of North Bengal. But at present in the case of Assam, in most of the recent studies on Koch Rajabnshis and existing most of the Koch Rajbanshis civic organisations has been witnessed of using both the term together and has treated as one community. For example, 'All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani' (AAKRS), 'All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union' (AKRSU), 'Koch Rajbanshi Sahitya Sabha' and many more use both the terms interchangeably. (Das 2009: 28)[6].

The origin of the Koch Rajbanshi continues to be a subject of controversy. Although there is a general agreement that the Koches include the Maches, Kacharies, Bodos, Rajvamsis, Garos etc. but still there is a difference of opinion about their

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[4] Basu, S. cited from Gait, E.A. (1901). Census of India, vol. VI, pt. I, pp. 382-3.
[5] For more information see Roy, M. 'Some Notes on the Rajbanshi', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. LXXI, no. 2, 1902, pp. 50-3.
[6] Presently in Assam the members of the Koch Rajbanshi community like to have designated themselves as Koch Rajbanshi instead of Koch or Rajbanshi separately. These were observed particularly through the field survey that I have discussed in the chapter IV.

racial origin (Nath 1989: 2). A. C. Choudhury, the renowned scholar who belongs to the Koch Rajbanshi community argues that the term 'Koch' is older than the Puranas and the Trantras, which were composed in India by the Aryans to malign their opponents. He states, "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 (Choudhury 1991: 61)." He further writes, "[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" (Ibid: 1991: 61).[7]

Edward Gait the colonial scholar stated that the term Koch is ambiguous. According to him in Assam proper it has become the name of a Hindu caste, into which are received the converts to Hinduism from the ranks of the Kachari, Lalung, Mikir, and other tribes. He further says that the Koches are frequently referred to as 'Kuvacha' in the Purans and Tantras. The historian of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji's invasion at the end of the twelfth century says that the features of 'the Koch, Mech and Tharu Tribes' resembled with those of a tribe of Southern Siberia (Gait 2011: 46). Based on the above contention A. J. Das states that thought majority of Koch Rajbanshis are not other converted tribe to Koch Rajbanshi rank, there is no doubt that a few Mongolian 'Tribes' especially the Kacharis (Bodo) had joined the ranks of Koch or Rajbanshi after being converted into Hinduism (Das 2009: 29). The colonial scholar Greirson provided the same kind of argument. He observed that the Koches and 'Kocheries'[8] are of the same ethnic groups and the true Koches are at any rate represented by the Kocheries who live in Nowgong, Goalpara, Koch Behar and neighbouring countries (Choudhury 1993: 60).

Nalini Ranjan Ray, a contemporary Koch Rajbanshi scholar argues that the ancestors of the Rajbanshi were settlers in the semi-hilly terrains and plains of present day North Bengal, Assam and their adjoining areas. They embraced Aryan culture and later took to Hinduism. Hinduism denoted the way of civilised life, following of Vedic procedures of rituals and adoption of 'Sanskritised' Maithili Apabhramsa

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[7] A. J. Das cited Choudhury in his *Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination* published in 2009 by Arunima Deka Publication, Guwahati.
[8] Instead of writing 'Kachari' Greirson commonly used the term as 'Kocheries' in his writings.

languages, which Aryan culture brought along with its advent into this part of ancient India. He writes:

> "the people of this community have the features mixed up with all four human streams i.e. Austral-Asiatic or 'Adivasi', Dravidian, Mongoloid and Aryan, where the Mongoloid features like short height, fare complexion and having flat nose are predominant. Some of them can be seen as tall, fare and having sharp nose like people of north or midland Indians, who trace their origin in Aryan culture; some of them can be seen as far as Aryan people and at the same time some are as dark complexion as Adivasis or Dravidians. This region was like a eastern gateway of India or a meeting place where all four human streams got amalgamated, which gave birth to new 'sanskritised' culture of the northeastern part of India" (Ray 2007: 9-10).

Here it is important to refer to some more arguments from other scholars about the racial origin of the Koches to make it clearer. According to Risley the Koches are unquestionably "non-Aryan and non-Hindu", were "a large Dravidian tribe of northeastern and eastern Bengal among whom there are grounds for suspecting some admixture of Mongolian blood" (quoted in Nath 1989: 2)[9]. Oldham also describes them as "the most conspicuously Dravidian race in Bengal" (Risley 1891:491)[10]. Dalton has stated that the Koches were all very dark and displayed "the thick protuberant lips and maxillaries of the Negro", and therefore, he considered them as belonging to the Dravidian stock (quoted in Nath 1989: 2). E. A. Gait argues that the divergence of views seems to have arisen from the confusion caused by the use of the term 'Rajbanshi'. He says that the Rajbanshi originally referred to an entirely distinct community of Dravidian affinities. But was after wards 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. Gait stated that Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and Goalpara, the persons now known as Rajbanshi are either pure Koches who, though dark, have a distinctly Mongoloid Physiognomy or else a mixed breed, in which the Mongoloid element usually preponderates (Gait 2011: 46-47).

To conclude, the controversies on the origin of the Koches D. Nath states that "the Koches are Mongoloid origin having their homeland in the Himalayan region, most probably in Tibet where from they poured into India following probably the

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[9] Nath cited from H.H Risley, Tribes and Caste of Bengal, Calcutta, 1891,p. 491.
[10] Risley cited in D. Nath, History of The Koch Kingdom, (1515-1615), Delhi,1989.

courses of the Teesta and the Dharla. They settled first in north Bengal and then spread gradually towards the east as well as towards the south and west, where they mixed themselves up with the Dravidians (Nath 1989: 4)." Again he argues that "the Koches are of Mongoloid origin having close affinities with other Bodo tribes like Meches, Rabhas, Dhimals, Hajongs and Garos. But in course of time and in some limited areas, they inter-married with the Dravidians and gave birth to a mixed Mongolo-Dravidian race but having preponderant Mongoloid characters (Ibid 1989: 4). Keeping aside all the controversies about the origin of the Koch Rajbanshis identity it can be said that Koch Rajbanshi is a Mongoloid group having the features of all four human streams i.e. Austral-Asiatic or 'Adivasi', Dravidian, Mongoloid and Aryan, where the Mongoloid features are preponderant.

II.2. Historical Memory of Kamatapur and Koch Kingdom:

In studying the historical process of Koch Rajbanshs identity formation it is very much important to trace the history of Kamatapur kingdom from 13th century onwards. Kamatapur was a region where the Koch Kingdom ruled over for a long period of time. In the contemporary social and political discourse the Koch Rajbanshis feel proud to identify themselves with Kamatapuri. The present socio-political movement for separate Kamatapur state draws its inspiration from the historical memory of Kamatapur. History says that Koch kingdom was there in the Kamatapur for a long period of time from 13th century onwards and disappeared in the process of post independent state formation in India with the Indian state of Assam, West Bengal and partly in Bangladesh. Presently it is noticed that the Koch Rajbanshis of Assam particularly West Assam or Goalpara and West Bengal particularly in North Bengal identify them as Kamatapuri and therefore, the present demand for separate Kamatapur state also seeks recognition of the history and culture of Kamatapur.

It is believed that Sandhya Rai established the kingdom of Kamata also known as Kamrup Kamata comprising some parts of present day Assam, North Bengal, and Bangladesh. R. N. Ray says "the geographically contiguous areas of Barendra-Pundra-Kamta-Kamrup comprising of whole of present day North Bengal, northern district of Bihar, Jhapa-Biratnagar region of eastern Nepal, Rajshahi division of Bangladesh, Western Assam, lower parts of Bhutan and some parts of Meghalaya

were parts of Kamrup" (Ray 2007: 13). F. B. Hamilton in his Manuscripts states "the Boundaries of Kamrup- almost the whole of it is included in the ancient Hindu territory of *Kamrup*, which extends east from the Korotoya where it joined by the kingdom of Motsyo, to Dikorbasini, a river in Assam which enters the Brahmaputra a little to the East of the eastern Kamakhya. The southern boundary of Kamrup is where the Lakhya river separates from the Brahmaputra and there it is bounded by the country called Bonggo". He further says that Kamatapur-The Raja (Niladhwaj) having settled his government built a city called Komotapur (in Cooch Behar district), and he and his successors took the title of Komoteswor or Lords of Komota, while the title of Komoteswori of lady of Komota, was bestowed on the family deity, a female spirit as usual, delighting in blood" (Ray 2007: 15).

In most of the writing Kamatapur has emerged as the capital of Kamata kingdom. Hiuen Tsang, the famous traveller and scholar from China visited the ancient Kamarupa kingdom of Bhashkar Barma between 606 to 648 A.D. In his account the capital of Kamrupa was believed to be Kamatapur (Das 2009: 38). Many a times the term Kamata and Kamrup are used synonymously and have been treated as the same kingdom. E. A Gait stated that the western part of the Brahmaputra valley, which in the former times, was included in the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa and whose western boundary was the Karatoya; later on it was changed its name from Kamrupa to Kamata. According to him 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 2011: 42-43).

It is believed that in the year 1260 Sandhya Rai shifted his capital from present day Guwahati to Kamatapur in present day Cooch Behar to avoid the frequent skirmishers with the neighbouring Kacharis and to facilitate the king to effectively engage the invading Muslim rulers from south-western states. After shifting the capital, it was named Kamta or Kamta-Kamrup and the king adopted the title of 'Kamoteswar' or 'Kameswar'. During this period Kamta-Kamrup kingdom extended its area of control and it is consisted of Cooch Behar, entire Kamrup, Greater Goalpara district of Assam, districts of Mymensingh and Rangpur lying on the eastern side of river Brahmaputra (Ray 2007: 29).

Sandhya Rai's reign over Kamrup region came to an end with the rise of 'Bhuiyans'.[11] Their rule extended from Goalpara to Nagaon in the west and east, from river Brahmaputra to river Subanshiri in the north and river Kopili in the south. Durlabh Narayan was one of the most powerful Kamata king who ascended the throne of Kamata in 1330 A. D. to 1350 A. D. and brought all the Bhuiyans under his control. Besides the strong administrative arrangement king Durlabh Narayan took interest in the development of education, art and culture. Hem Saraswati and Harihar Mishra were two great poets who contributed many literary works during his time. Hem Saraswati wrote two important works i.e. 'Prahlad Charit'[12] and 'Hara-Gauri Sambed'. 'Laba Kushar Yuddha' was another such literary work by Harihar Mishra (Ray 2007: 30). After Durlabh Narayan his son Indra Narayan succeeded the throne from 1350 to 1365. After 1365 Arimatta, the grandson of Dharma Narayan became the king of Kamata and it is believed that he avenged forcible taking over of northern part of Kamata-Kamrup by Durlabh Narayan from his grandfather Dharma Narayan (Ray 2007: 31). After the takeover Arimatta shifted his capital from Kamtapur to Baidyagrah near the river Betna.

In 1440 A. D. a new line of kings emerged in the Kamata region. Niladhwaja was a powerful Kayastha Bhuiyan who became the new king in Kamata who established Khan or Khien Dynasty. The origin of Niladhwaja is not clear but it is believed that due to not getting a proper place in the 'Varna' system of Hindu caste, Niladhwaja and other Hindu Kayastha kings adopted the title of Muslims as Khan. He was succeeded by his son Chakradhvaj 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 Kaamateswari at Kamtapur. After Chakradhvaj, his son Nilambar took the throne of Kamata (Das 2009: 40).[13] Nilambar was a powerful king among the Khan Dynasty. He extended the kingdom of Kamata from Karatoya in the west to Barnadi in the east of Sonitpur district by annexing the neighbouring states. Around 1494 A. D. Nawab Hussain Shah of Gour invaded Kamata and destroyed the capital of Nilambar. Das stated that the downfall of Nilambar was eventually the downfall of the Kamata kingdom founded by Sindhu

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[11] The Bhuiyans were large land lords. Among all the Bhuiyans twelve of them were most powerful in the Kamrup region and therefore, they also known as 'Baro Bhuiyan' (twelve Bhuiyans).

[12] 'Prahlad Charit' is considered as the first Assamese epic.

[13] Das cited from P. N. Dutta, Glimpses into The History of Assam, Guwahati, 2000.

Rai. It is said that 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 latter centuries (Das 2009: 41).

According to D. Nath the period beginning from A.D. 1200 to 1500, the Koches might have maintained their existence with certain amount of political influence and continued to be so until Biswa Singha firmly established their hegemony in the western Brahmaputra valley in the first quarter of the 16th century (Nath 1989: 15-16). Though Koch Kingdom was there from 13th century onwards it was only in 16th century that the Koches emerged as a strong and influential kingdom. Bishwa Singha a Koch Chieftain ruled over Kamata from 1515 to 1540 and made the Koch Kingdom politically very strong. Bishwa Singha was son of Hariya Mandal. It is believed that in the village of Chiknagram[14] among twelve Meches, Barihana was the most powerful and took over as headman of the village. Later on he became famous as Hariya Mandal. Hariya Mandal had two wives namely Hira and Jira. It is said that Lord Siva, in guise of Hariya had one day sexual intercourse with Hira, and in due course she gave birth to Bisu and after becoming king this boy took the name Bishwa Singha (Nath 1989: 16-17).

According to historical account the region of Bishwa Singha's dynasty ruled was known as 'Koch Kingdom'. But most of the Koch Kings of Bishwa Singha's dynasty used to call it as the 'Kamata kingdom'. The kings 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 was named as Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) in the colonial period (Das 2009: 41). It was also noticed that most of the Koch kingdom intended to call themselves as the rulers of the Kamata kingdom. After he took over the reign of Kamata, Bishwa Singha declared himself as Kamateswar (Lord of Kamata). Bishwa Singha's son Naranarayan also declared himself as Kamateswar after ascending the throne of Kamata. Even after the split of the Koch kingdom into two parts namely as Koch Bihar and Koch Hajo, Lakhminarayan, king of Koch Bihar declared himself as Kamateswar (Ahmed 2001: 3)[15]

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[14] Chiknagram village was near the Chikna hills on the bank of the river Saral, presently in Kokrajhar district of Assam.
[15] A. J. Das cited Ahmed in his 'Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination', 2009, Pp. 42.

After the death of Hariya Mandal, his son Bishwa Singha ascended the throne of Kamata and declared himself as Kamateswar. There are differences of opinions on the exact year of Bishwa Singh's assumption of power. Some scholars located him in A. D. 1515-1540; some other placed him from A. D. 1509 to 1555. But considering many factors most of the scholars agreed with the former.[16] Historians believe that after the fateful end of king Nilambar's reign, the kingdom of Kamata started to break up into many fiefdoms under the control of different landlords and as a result many of them started to declare themselves as kings. Hussain Shah totally destroyed the socio-economic and political structure of the kingdom. As a result, it is believed that in the end of the 15th century there was anarchy prevailing in the kingdom of Kamata (Ray 2007: 35). According to 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 Deniel'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).[17]

Mentally as well as physically Bishwa Singha was brilliant with regard to administrative arrangement. After taking over the throne he first conquered the Bhuyans who were much strong at that time. One after another Bishwa Singha attacked and defeated the Bhuyans of Fulguri, Bijni, Pandu, Rani, Bangaon, Chhaygaon, Barnagar, Beltola etc. Gradually he extended his kingdom up to river Karatoya (North Bengal/Bangladesh) in the west and up to river Barnadi (Sonitpur district in Assam) in the east. He shifted his capital from Sikanagram (present Kokrajhar district of Assam) to Kamatapur (present Cooch Behar district of West Bengal) and declared himself as Bishwa Singha (Kamateswar) the Koch king and his brother Shishwa Singha as prince (Ray 2007: 38). D. Nath states that after

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[16] For more details see Nath, D. (1989). History of the Koch Kingdom, Delhi: Mittal Publication. Pp. 27.

[17] A. J. Das cited in '*Kamatapur and The Koch Rajbanshi Imagination*' 2009, Arunima Deka publication, pp. 44. From A. C. Choudhury, *Sangram Singha Chilarai* (Assamese), 1983, Bongaigaon.

establishing his sovereign power over all petty rulers of the region, Bishwa Singha declared himself as the king. Meanwhile he had come under Hindu influence and on the day of his formal accession to the throne, Bisu assumed the Hindu name Biswa Singha (Nath 1989: 26).

The second king of the Biswa Singha's dynasty was king Naranarayan. Naranarayan succeeded his father Biswa Singha and ascended the throne of Kamata. King Naranarayan ruled Kamata kingdom from A. D. 1540 for about 50 years whose reign could be considered as the most influential and golden period in the history of Koch Empire. Shukladhwaja alias 'Chilarai' his younger brother and a brave soldier who was appointed as his Commander-in-Chief to assist the king and commend the states armed forces. Rest of the brothers were appointed in various capacities to run the state machinery (Ray 2007: 40). The sovereign power of Koch kingdom during the reign of king Naranarayan extended to the major part of north-eastern India. H. N. Choudhury observes that in the beginning of this century the Naranarayan conquests comprised "almost the whole of Northern Bengal, Bhutan and Assam as well as the modern States of Kachar, Jayantia, Manipur, Tripura, and extended upto the coast of the Bay of Bengal" (Nath 1989: 75). Besides military glory, king Naranaryn was also interested in cultural development of the state. J. P. Rajkhowa says that the reign of Naranarayan is important from the point that both Naranaryn 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 many more. 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 till his death (Rajkhowa 2001: 44, 45)[18] some other valuable literary works patronised by king Naranarayan were Ram Saraswati's *Mahabharat,* Purushottam Bidyabagish[19] Sanskrit grammar *Ratnamala Byakaran* and *Kandali's Bhagawat Gita* (Ray 2007: 47). Another important contribution of king Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai was their support towards the Neo-Vaishnavite movement by patronising it. Scholar D. Nath writes of it that "by patronising the Neo-Vaishnavite

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[18] A. J. Das cited Rajkhowa in his *Kamatapur and The Koch* Rajbanshi Imagination, 2009, Arunima Deka Publication.

[19] Purushuttam Bidyabagish was a 'Pirali' Brahmin and he worked in the court of a Muslim rular Hussain Shah. Latter on he came to Koch Behar to grace the royal court of Koch King as a poet.

movement Naranarayan not only made a splendid and lasting contribution to the religious life of Assam, but at the same time he served a great social cause, namely that of spreading moral and spiritual education among the masses" (Nath 1989: 90). After the death of Chularai at around 1581 the kingdom of Kamata was weakened. The main reason for this was the fragmentation of Koch-Kamata kingdom into two parts between Naranarayan and his nephew and son of Chilarai Raghudeb. Due to the agitation of Raghudeb the Koch kingdom , once the undisputed power house of north eastern India, got divided into two parts, Kamata or Koch Bihar in the west and Koch Hajo or Kamrup in the east and this gradually lead to weakened the Koch Kingdom (Ray 2007: 47).

Following the year 1581 the kingdom of Kamata got divided[20]. The Koch Hajo or Kamrup went to Koch king Raghudeb and after the death of king Naranarayan his only son Lakshminarayan ascended throne of western kingdom of Koch Bihar. King Lakshminarayan ruled over the Kamata kingdom from A. D. 1587 to A. D. 1627. He was a weak ruler as compared to his father Naranarayan. According to D. Nath, "Lakshminarayan inherited very few of the brilliant qualities of his father. Weak and indolent, he was totally unfit to guide the destiny of his kingdom against the imperialistic designs of the Mughals and the territorial ambition of his cousin Raghudev" (Nath 1989: 90). Though Lakshminarayan was a weak ruler as compared to his forefathers but still the people of Assam always remember him for his contribution towards the 'Vaishnavism'. In the words of Ahmed, "though Lakshminarayan never had the vision and ability of his forefathers, he still could be remembered by the people of Northeast India, particularly in Assam as one who declared 'Vaishnavism' as the Rajdharma (state religion) of his kingdom" (Ahmed 2001: 151).[21] Moreover, he patronised many more authors, poets and many literary works by them during his period. Govinda Mishra translated Bhagwat *Gita* into Kamatapuri language during his reign. Madhab Deb who was chief follower of Sankardev took shelter at Lakshminarayan kingdom after Raghudev the king of Koch Hajo expelled him from his kingdom. Damodardev was another Vashnavite saint who

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[20] There is controversy regarding the date of the division of Koch kingdom. But considering all the facts 1581 may be accepted as the exact time of the division of the kingdom. For more, see D. Nath. (1989). *The History of Koch Kingdom*. Delhi: Mittal Publication.

[21] A. J. Das cited Ahmed in his *Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination*. 2007, Arunima Deka publication.

wrote *Bhakti Ratnavali and Krishna Janma Rahashya* took asylum at Lakshminarayan kingdom (Ray 2009: 48).

The eastern Koch kingdom known as Koch Hajo was ruled by king Raghudev who established himself in about 1581 A. D. After the death of Raghudev, his eldest son Parikshitnarayan succeeded his father's throne in about A. D. 1603. Parikshitnarayan tried a lot to make his kingdom politically stronger by making a friendly relation with the kingdoms of Ahom and also with his uncle the king of Koch Bihar Lakshminarayan and was also somewhat successful. After the death of King Parikshitnarayan in A. D. 1617 the kingdom of Koch Hajo came under the Mughal invasion appointed by the Nawab of Dacca (Ray 2007: 49). Like Koch Hajo there were many others small Koch kingdoms established in many parts of modern Assam, namely Bijni Raj, Darrang Raj, Beltola etc. The study here will not discussed all these Koch kingdoms in details accept the Kamata kingdom.

Lakshminarayan passed away in 1627 A. D. at Hajo. After his death his son Birnarayan ascended the throne of Kamata. He ruled over the kingdom of Kamata around A. D. 1627 to A. D. 1632. He was a weak ruler as compared to his father. During his rule, the power of Koch kingdom declined gradually and the king of Bhutan stopped paying the tribute (Choudhury: 1993: 203). Though Birnarayan ruled for a short period but he did some considerable work like rebuilding Bneshwar temple.

Prannarayan was son of king Birnarayan and ruled over Kamata kingdom from A. D. 1637 to A. D. 1665 after the death of his father. A. J. Das states that prannrayan occupied an important place in the history of Koch Kamata kingdom as he tried to reoccupy the territories of the undivided Koch Kingdom, which had gone into the hands of the Mughals during the reign of Lakshminarayan. He even occupied Dhaka, the capital of Bengal for a short period while Suja (son of Shajahan), the then Subedar of Bengal was away fighting a battle against Aurangzeb in 1661 (Das 2009: 50).[22] Prannarayan tried to maintain a good relation with the neighbouring kingdom to ensure the sustainability of his kingdom and to throw away the Mughal power from his kingdom. He also showed his kindness towards religion. In 1665 he reconstructed

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[22] Das cited from A. C. Choudury '*Koch Rajbanshis Jatir Itihas Aaru Sanskriti*' (Assamese), Bongaigaon, 1993, p. 203.

the famous Kamateswari Temple at Gossanimari. Moreover, he reconstructed many other temples namely, Baneswar temple, Sandswar Siva temple etc. Prannarayan was also a great patronage of literature and learning. He patronised many scholars like Jaykrisnha Bhattacharya, Kabi Ratna, Srinath Brahman and others created valuable works like Proyog Ratnamala, Rajkhandam, Bishwasingha Charitam, and many more (Choudhury 1993: 209).

After the death of Prannarayan, his brother Modnarayan took over the throne of Kamata. He ruled over the Koch kingdom from A. D. 1665 to A. D. 1680. Modnarayan was murdered by his relative Jay Narayan and ascended the throne of Kamata. Ray says "following the incident of the murder of king Modnarayan the internal conflict had begun and the Bhutanese found the time ripe for intervention. The Bhutanese king directly interfered with Koch affaires and kingdom at Bijni (Ray 2007: 53). According to Das "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 door for outsiders to interfere in the Koch politics. The Bhutanese directly entered into the political arena of the Koch kingdom especially of Koch Behar and Bijni" (Das 2009: 51-52).

In the later period for a short time from A. D. 1765 to A. D. 1783 the kingdom of Kamata was ascended by many new kings. Among them King Dharmendra Narayan was the last. During this period the attacks of the Bhutanese was increased in the internal politics of Kamata kingdom. They became the king maker in the internal political affairs of the Kamata kingdom. During the period from 1770 to 1776 the Bhutanese attacks was unbearable for the king Dharmendra Narayan. To get rid of the Bhutanese attacks King Dharmendra Narayan had to sign one treaty with East India Company (Das 2009: 52).[23] On 5th April 1773 an agreement was signed between King Dharmendra Narayan and the East India Company. This agreement provided East India Company with supremacy over Koch Kingdom. After this agreement in the meantime once again the Bhutanese attacked Koch kingdom and due to this again another confrontation was taking place. Dennis Morrisson was the captain of East India Company who arranged military help to the Koch kingdom and defeated the Bhutanese. In 1776 another treaty was signed between Koch kingdom and the East

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[23] Das cited from Dr. Ramendra Adhikari, *Satsho Bacaria Kaamata Koch Rajatwer Itihas (1250-1949)*, 1996, p. 24, (in Rajbanshi).

India Company. By this treaty Warren Hastings brought the Koch kingdom under complete control of the Company (Ray 2009: 56). As a result of this treaty the Koch-Kamata alias Cooch Behar kingdom became a native state of India. And as a native state of colonial India it was continued till the time of India got independence from colonial rule in 1947.

II.3. Culture, Religion and Language:

As an ethnic community, Koch Rajbanshis have their own distinct cultural, religious and linguistic identity. As mentioned earlier historically they contained all four racial elements i.e. Adivasi, Dravidian, Mongoloid and Aryan whereas the Mongoloid feature is predominant. Considering all the historical account D. Nath mentioned the Koch Rajbanshis as Hindu and non-Hindu tribal (Nath: 1989: 133). A. J. Das categorised the Koch Rajbahshi community as Hindu when it comes to religion. But it is observed in their social life that they practice their own independent religious traditions and practices which differ from other communities and bears their tribal characteristics. In case of religious practice they are much closer to the other tribes of Northeast India namely, Bodo, Rabha, etc.

There are many varied beliefs prevailing among the Koch Rajbanshis. Most of their beliefs, rituals and traditional festivals are closely related with nature, agriculture and harvesting etc. During the period from 15th to 17th century the non-Hindu tribals performed their own religious practices and worshiped their deities according to their own ways. Though the Koch king at that time accepted Hinduism but at the same time they patronised Brahmanic as well as tribal worship for the fellow people. A major change came in the religion during this period through to the New-Vaishnavite movement by Sankardev and his followers. The period of rule of Koch king Naranarayan and his son Lakshminarayan is considered to be the glorious period for the New-Vaishnavite movement. It is believed that the dynastic title 'Narayan' of the Koch kings was adopted in after of the name (Narayan) of the supreme deity of the Hindus (Nath 1989: 167). King Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai patronised 'Vaishnavism'. Lakshminarayan patronised 'Vaishnavism' and declared it as the state religion of his kingdom. Presently it is observed particularly in Assam most of the

Koch Rajbanshis follow the *Ek Saran Nam Dharma*[24] which was a part of larger 'Vaishnavism' propagated by great saint Sankardev in Assam.

As a peasant community the social life of most of the Koch Rajbanshis is related with agriculture and they consider and pray the earth and nature as their mother. Many Hindu gods and traditions are mixed with their traditional rituals. Historically most popular deity of the Koch kingdom was Siva. Bishwa Singha the most powerful king of 15th century Koch dynasty traced his descent from Siva. The non-Hindu tribes during Bishwa Singha's dynasty worshiped a primordial male deity namely, *Batho, Bathau, Bathau-Brai, Bathau-Siva-Rai, Burha* and *Baba* etc. with *Vamachara* practices who was accepted to Hinduism as god Siva (Nath 1989: 166), and Siva at that time was known by various names such as *Bhairava, Pasupati, Nataraja, Gopeswara*, and *Kirata* etc. As stated by D Nath besides the male deity, the tribes had also worshipped a primordial female deity called it as *Burhi, Jakani, Thakurani, Kuri, Mechini*, and *Bali-Khungri* etc. The female deity was accepted to Hinduism as *Durga, Parvati* or *Kali*, the consort of Siva (Nath 1989: 166-167).

In day to day social life Koch Rajbanshis practice many rituals and worship various deities. *Katipuja* is one of the oldest rituals of the Koch Rajbanshis in Assam. *Kati* is a god made by clay. Praying *Kati* they get lots of blessing and enjoyment. This Puja is generally offered around mid October to middle of November (Sankranti of Assamese Kati month) by women. *Hudum Puja* is another cultural tradition and ritual of Koch Rajbanshis through which women worshiped the mother earth when there is no rain. There is no need of any Brahman or priest to perform it, at any time and any place the Puja can be offered when there is scarcity of water by female members only. *Marai Puja* or *Manasha Puja* is another oldest ritual of Koch Rajbanshi people. They consider the *Manasha Devi* as the Goddess of Snake and worship her, therefore, this Puja is popularly known as *Manasha Puja*. This Puja is generally performed during the wedding ceremony. *Goalini Nritya*[25] and *Baas Nritya* are another two important

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[24] *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* was a part of larger *Vaishnavism* propagated by Sankardev in Assam. *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* believes only in one god, that is Krishna. It is believed that the *New-Vaishnavit* movement propagated by Sankardev under the patron of Koch King Naranarayan and Lakshminarayan during their reign was also known as *Ek Saran Nam Dharma*. During the time of field survey it was observed that most of the Koch Rajbanshis under interviewed answered *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* as their religion where they used to pray *Krishna* as their only and supreme god instead of *Vaishnavism*.

[25] In Assam this traditional rituals mostly popular among the Koch Rajbanshis of Western part of Assam.

traditional rituals of Koch Rajbanshis. These two folk traditions are equally popular among the Koch Rajbanshis of Assam as well as North Bengal. The *Goalini Nritya* (Dance) is basically related with agriculture and harvesting through which different stages of harvesting is narrated with the story of *Lord Krishna* by the women including one man who plays the *dhak*. *Baas Nritya* or *Baas Puja* is also known as *Kamdev Puja* which is performed twice a year. Once in mid April to mid May (in the month of Biashag in Assamese) and second in mid November to mid December (in the month of Aghon). They perform this Puja offering worship to Madan Kamdev to bring happiness, good health and welfare for their community.

Koch Rajbanshis have their own distinct language that is 'Rajbanshi'. According to the Linguistic Survey of India 1891, the total number of peoples in Northeast India who spoke Rajbanshi language was 35, 90,341. Among them 2,92,800 was in Goalpara, 5,68,976 was in Jalpaigri, 5,62,500 was in Cooch Behar, 47,435 was in Darjeeling, 20,37,460 was in Rangpur (present in Pakistan). Grierson wrote in 1891 Linguistic Survey of India, "When we cross the river (Brahmaputra) coming from Dacca, we meet a well marked form of speech in Rangpur and the districts to its north and east. It is called Rajbongshi and while undoubtedly belonging to the eastern branch, has still points of difference which lead us to class as a separate dialect. The dialect of western and South-Western Goalpara in Assam is pure Rajbongshi" (Choudhury 2009: 31). Though historically Rajbanshi is a separate and distinct language of Koch Rajbansis it gets its distinctiveness with the help of many other neighbouring languages like, Ahom, Bodo, Sautal (Santhal) etc.

After the independence there are lots of controversies regarding the question of what is the language of Koch Rajbanshis? On the other hand, another question raised and widely discussed today is whether Rajbanshi or Kamatapuri is a language or simply a dialect.[26] Later on considering all the facts and data available the Rajbanshis are identifying as the language of the Koch Rajbanshis. In the year 2010 Delhi Sahitya Akademi honoured to Dr. Girijasankar Ray with the 'Rajbanshi Vasa Sanman'. Moreover, Peoples Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), 2008, identifies Rajbanshi as the language of Koch Rajbanshis. Even today Koch Rajbanshis are

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[26]The study here has not discussed the language controversies of Koch Rajbanshis in detail. For more information see Ray, N. R. (2007). *Koch Rajbanshi and Kamtapuri: The Truth Unveiled*. Guwahati: Vicky Publication, p. 100.

demanding for the recognition of the Rajbanshi language under VIIIth Schedule of the constitution of India.

As stated above as a result of the treaty signed in April 5, 1773, between King Dharmendra Narayan and East India Company, Cooch Bihar became a native state of British India. It continued as native state till 1947, India got independence from British colonial rule. By this treaty British took control over a large area of Koch-Kamata kingdom alias Cooch Behar State, which included Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling district of present day North Bengal. Rangpur was taken out as a native state from the Cooch Bihar state (Koch Behar) and from the direct control of British rule. But later on Rangpur was also included with British occupied areas of Koch-Kamata kingdom. It is believed that around 1900 to 1908 during the reign of king Nirpendra Narayan, Kalika Das Dutta a minister (Dewan) of Nirpendra Narayan exchanged Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling with Boda and Chakla with the British when the king was in abroad (Das 2009: 52).[27]

Koch-Kamata kingdom alias Cooch Behar gained its independence from the British rule in 1947 according to the Indian Independence Act, section VIII, which was passed in British parliament. As a result the treaty of 1773 became invalid which was signed between Koch King and the British. Under, section VIII of India Independence Act, 1947, it was mentioned that all the princely states of India would get back its sovereign power and are free to join either India or with Pakistan (Burma 2002: 20).[28] Though according to the Independence act the princely states of India got back its sovereignty including Cooch Behar but it is not right to say that Cooch Behar got back its independence and sovereignty, Cooch Behar along with other 565 Princely states also called Indian states was neither partitioned nor given independence by the independence act of 1947. The only option that was given to the rulers of the princely states was that they had to join either India or Pakistan (Das 2009: 53).

According to A. C. Choudhury in the year 1948, 20 August, Koch king Gagaddipendra Narayan signed a treaty with government of India to join his state

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[27] Das cited from Dharma Narayan Burma, 'Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar' in Parag Koch Rajbanshi (ed.), Chilarai: Souvenir (Assamese), Guwahati, 2002, pp. 19-20.

[28] Burma cited in A. J. Das, Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination, Guwahati: Arunima Deka Publication, 2009, pp. 53.

with the Indian Union and request then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru to include the Cooch Behar state either with Assam or with West Bengal or should it keep as a centrally administered area should be decide according to the will of the peoples of Cooch Behar. In a public meeting at Kolkata, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru promised the people of Cooch Behar that Cooch Behar shall be included with the Indian state of Assam or it shall be kept as a centrally administered area according to the will of the people. But it was unfortunate that, in spite of the peoples willingness, mainly the peoples of Gaolapara to joined with Assam, the former Deputy Prime Minister of India Vallavbhai Patel decided to include Cooch Behar with the Indian state of West Bengal, because of the pressure from the former Chief Minister of West Bengal Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray, the president of Pradesh Congress Committee Late Atul Ghosh and the prominent leader of Hindu Mahasabha Late Shyama Prasadh Chakravarty. Cooch Behar was included with West Bengal on 1st January of 1950 and during that time Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was in Common Wealth Conference at London. The President of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee Late Deveshar Sarmah was also responsible for his ignorance on the matter (Choudhury 2011: 217-218).

Durgadas Majumder writes in 'West Bengal District Gazetteers' that Koch Behar was an Indian State till 28 August 1949 ruled by Maharaja and the Maharaja was a feudatory prince under the British Government. By an agreement Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan king of Koch Behar ceded his state with the Dominion of the Government of India on 28 August 1949. The administrative powers of Koch Behar was transferred to Government of India on 12 September 1949 and from that time onwards Koch Behar was ruled as a Chief Commissioner's Province by a Chief Commissioner appointed by the Government of India. But on 1st January 1950 Koch Bihar was transferred and merged with the Indian state of West Bengal by an order under section 290A of Government of India Act of 1935. From that time onwards Koch Behar is being administered as a district of West Bengal (Das 2009: 56).[29]

There are lots of controversies on the merger of Koch Behar with the Province of West Bengal. Many Koch Rajbanshi civil and political organizations believe that the merger of Koch Behar with West Bengal was a conspiracy of the government of

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[29] Das cited from Banshi Badan Barman (ed.), Dangar Koch Bihar Basir Koyta Kotha (Rajbanshi), Received on March 30, 2004 from Nabyendu Roy Pramanik.

West Bengal under the chief ministership of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray and the government of India. Two most important socio-political organizations which was born out immediately after the merger of Koch Behar were, 'Cooch Behar Congress', and 'Prajahit Sadhini Sabha'. These organizations felt that the merger was against the will of the local people. They were of the view that Cooch Behar should not be merged with either Bengal, or Assam, rather it should be a union territory under the control of central government (Das 2009: 60). All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union' (AKRSU) an Assam based Koch Rajbanshi students union has demanded that the merger of Koch Behar was the beginning and main factor which disturbed the unity of the greater Koch Rajbanshi community.[30] Even today this is the main argument made by most of the Koch Rajbanshis socio-political organizations that are demanding and agitating for a separate Kamatapur state which will be discussed in the Fourth chapter.

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[30] For more see Bishwajit Rai, 'Sukiya Kamatapur Rajya Kiyo' (Why separate Kamatapur), (Assamese), April 25, 2002.

CHAPTER-III

PROBLEM OF KOCH RAJBANSHI IDENTITY: COLONIAL TO POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism....*

Homi K. Bhabha.

In today's world most of the communities living in the newly emerged nations after the Second World War have been facing the problem of identity crisis. The two most discursive forms of power globalization and cultural hybridity emerged in 1990s as key challenges for the identity of the small communities living in the newly independent nations from the colonial rule. Most of the problems of identity of these communities have its root in the colonial modernity. Therefore, to understand the problem of identity, it is important to know the role of colonial modernity and the colonial state towards the formation and classification of the identity of such communities. In this regards the views of post modernists is very much important. Many postmodernists believe that the problem of identity is in fact the problem of modernity. One of the most important and lasting features of modernity is the necessity of all modern subjects to organise themselves around the normative idea of nation. The modern identities circumscribed as they are by the symbolic boundaries of the nation are mediated by the complex discursive structures of national culture and national identity (Golay 2006: 25).[31] From the Foucauldian point of view identities are formed by discourses, or ways of representing knowledge about people and their behaviour. Historically identities such as the 'hysterical woman' or the 'lunatic' could be seen not as essential types of self, but rather as subject positions constructed by the dominant forms of discourse in a particular social and historical context (Scott 2009: 148). In most of the colonies where alien rule was taking place, colonial modernity emerged as a dominant discourse that constructed the self of the natives and still constantly nurtured and reproduced in the postcolonial states.

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[31] Golay cited from Dipesh Chakravarty's "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for the Indian Past?" in Padmini Mongia (ed.), Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p.240.

In case of South Asia or India much of the identity consciousness has its root in colonial modernity. In the words of Bimol Akoijam, "Much of the identity consciousness in South Asia has its moorings in colonial modernity. The idea of nation and nation state, and the categories that define the identities of various groups in South Asia have their origin in the colonial modernity brought about by the Imperial British rule. The conflict of identities in South Asia is not free from this legacy of colonial modernity. Ideational and structural continuities between the colonial and postcolonial periods have led to the reification of these categories and the conflicts amongst them" (Akoijam 2006:113). Colonial modernity emerged in India as a dominant discourse; it operated its disciplinary power and legitimized their socio-political order over the natives. This power still operates as a modern regime of power in the post colonial Indian state. Giving example of Michel Foucault, Partha Chatterjee writes on modern regime of power as, a regime of power in which the power is meant not to prohibit but to facilitate, to produce (Chaterjee 1994: 15). Foucauldian notion of power indicates how power produces and facilitates certain socio-political order over others and produce truth. Foucault argued:

"Truth isn't outside power... Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned... the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true."

(Foucault 1980:131)

Most of the state institutions established under the colonial rule in India have been continuing and reproduced in postcolonial Indian state. According to Chatterjee "the postcolonial state in India has after all only expanded and not transformed the basic institutional arrangements of colonial law and administration, of the courts, the bureaucracy, the police, the army, and the various technical services of government" (Chatterjee 1994: 15).

There were many ways through which the colonial modernity represented, constructed and nurtured the identities of the natives in their colonies. In case of India, introduction of census and caste based classification of the Indian society was an important tool applied by the colonial state. Census was one of the important tool

through which the objectification of Indian ideas was taking place by the British colonial rulers. Through census the colonial state collected systematic information about many aspects of Indian society and economy such as, Indian life, family, religion, language, literacy, caste, occupation, marriage etc and explained it in their own way. Therefore, B. S. Cohn stated that "in the process of classifying and making objective to the Indians themselves their culture and society, the census played a key role" (Cohn 1987: 230, 250).[32] In this regards the view of Nicholas B. Dirks is very much important. Dirks characterised the late nineteenth century colonial state in India as ethnographic state and stated that from 1870 onwards colonial rulers took caste as the primary object of social classification and understanding the society in India. Caste emerged as the most important subject and classificatory factor for the organisation of India's social world applying in government documents, official manuals, and gazetteers and most importantly in census. After 1857 the ethnographic description, become increasingly formalized in India and caste was institutionalized affecting in the recruitment of soldiers, into the army, the implementation of legal codes that made the provisions applicable on caste lines, the criminalization of entire caste groups for local policing purpose and the assessment of the political implications of different colonial policies in the area of local administration in caste terms (Dirks: 1992: 43-47). After the first decennial census, conducted in the year 1872, caste emerged as the primary subject of social classification and knowledge.

With the above backdrop, the focus of the first part of this chapter is to study the role and impact of colonial discourse in the formation of the identity of Koch Rajbanshis. In this regard the study will try to contextualize the caste movement by the Koch Rajbanshis with the role played by the colonial modernity that classify the Indian society on the basis of caste.

IV.1. Situating Koch Rajbanshi Identity in Colonial India and the Dynamics of Koch Rajbanshis Caste Movement:

As stated in the second chapter that the British ethnographers and the colonial writers had a completely different view point about the origin of Koch Rajbanshis identity. In the colonial writings the Rajbanshis were generally regarded as purified group of

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[32] For detailed on British rule and its impact on Indian Indigenous caste system, see B. S. Cohn, 'An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays, Delhi, 1987.

'Koch' who had adopted Hindu culture, tradition and caste norms leaving their own traditional cultural practices and social norms. B.H. Hodgson, W.W. Hunter, and Herbert Risley amongst the colonial writer who opined that the Rajbanshis were a purified group of Koch who adopted Hindu culture and social norms during the tenure of Viswa Singha who established the powerful Koch kingdom in the beginning of sixteenth century. According to Hodgson, when the grandson of Hajo, and the founder of Koch Royal dynasty in the middle of the 15th century, Viswa Singha accepted Hinduism, the country was renamed as Bihar- the people, Rajbanshi....(Basu 2003: 27)[33]. Another colonial scholar Herbert Risley wrote that "Koch, Koch-Mandi, Rajbansi, Palliya, Desi, a large Dravidian tribe of North-Eastern and Eastern Bengal, among whom there are ground for suspecting some admixture of Mongoloid blood. Now the great majority of the Koch inhabitants of Northern Bengal invariably describe themselves as Rajbanshis or Bhanga Kshatriyas, a designation which enables them to pose as an outlying branch of the Kshatriyas who fled to these remote districts in order to escape from the wrath of Parasuram" (Risley 1981: 491). Similarly, W. W. Hunter in his *A Statistical Account of Bengal: State of Kuch Behar* stated that the Rajbanshis and the Paliyas were actually originated of the Koch tribe. He viewed that in the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century the Koch tribe established their politically powerful kingdom. During this time Brahminism was introduced and the first powerful Koch king Viswa Singha came under the influence of Brahminism and took it as a state religion for his kingdom. In this conversion they abandoned their earlier name 'Koch' and accepted the name 'Rajbansi' (Hunter 2012).

Thus, the British ethnographers and scholars had a very important role towards the popularization of the term 'Rajbanshi' during the colonial period. From the above it is known that 'Koch' is a historically originated name of a tribe or an ethnic group but 'Rajbanshi' is constructed and popularized term by the colonial discourse. It is also to be noted that in this construction and popularization of the term 'Rajbanshi', the ethnographic state constructed by the colonial discourse and the caste based categorization of the Indian society by the colonial state played a crucial rule that will

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[33] S. Basu cited B. H. Hodgson's 'On the Origin, Location, Numbers, Creed, Customs, Character and Condition of the Koch, Bodo and Dhimal people, with a general description of the climate they dwell in', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XVIII, pt. II, 1849, P. 705, In her *Dynamics of A Caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*, New Delhi: Manohar publication, 2003.

discuss few latter. Swaraj Basu stated that "Nowhere at this stage can we find any reference to the Rajbanshis in the history of the locality. There was no mention of the Rajbanshis either in the Persian records, in the foreign accounts, in the Assam *Buranjis*, or in *Darang Raj Vamsabvali* (genealogical account of the Koch royal family). In the Brahmavaivarta Purana there is an exhaustive list of mixed castes. In this list also there is no mention of the Rajbanshis, or the Paliyas or the Desis, though there is reference to the origin of the Koches" (Ray 2013: 112)[34]. This construction and popularization of the term Rajbanshi by the colonial ethnographers and scholars had a critical objective that raised many questions even till today relating to the identity of Koch Rajbanshis. Because, today this is a debatable matter among the peoples whether, the Koch and Rajbanshi are one community or different. It is to be noted that within India itself the identity of Koch Rajbanshis is differently located and uses the term Koch and Rajbanshi at times separately and some other time together. The Koch Rajbanshis of West Bengal call themselves as Rajbanshi, the Koch Rajbanshis of Meghalaya call themselves as Koch, and in Assam they call themselves as Koch Rajbanshi. This is a state wise location of their identity constructed by the colonial state and represented by the post-colonial Indian state.

The above argument can be contextualised with the caste based classification of the identity of Indian natives by the colonial state where the Koch Rajbanshis was a victim of it. Koch Rajbanshis are victims of caste based politics of difference constructed and popularised by the colonial discourse. The discursive form of power of the ethnographic state constructed by the colonial rulers in India in the early 20th century influenced the Koch Rajbanshis identity and located the politics of difference between them and the upper caste Hindus.

From early part of the 20th century onwards the colonial policy gave a new direction into the Indian social system. The caste policy helped directly to the lower caste groups to find a way out for their further existence within caste rigid Indian society but indirectly it helped to the upper caste groups to maintain their socio-cultural domination over the lower caste. Similarly, in one way the colonial caste policy gave a new direction to the Indian social system in order to safeguard the

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[34] G. N. Ray cited S. Basu in his 'The Rajbanshi Identity Politics: The Postcolonial Passages' in S. Debnath (Ed.) (2013). *Social and Political Tension in North Bengal (Since 1947).* West Bengal: N. L. Publisher.

interests of certain underprivileged groups, but in another way it reinforced and encouraged mobilization along caste lines. On the basis of the caste based classification the colonial government had taken many measures and special provision for the very lowest classes within the Hindu social system such as, taking special care to motivate the boys of these classes to go to school; opening of special schools and giving subsidized education to these classes; special grants to construct hostel for the backward castes like the Namasudras, the Jogis, the Rajbanshis; reservation of jobs in government offices for the members of the depressed classes etc. Thus, the colonial caste policy to some extent helped the lower caste towards their development but indirectly in created tensions between the upper and lower caste groups. As S. Basu stated "all the protective measures taken by the colonial government for the welfare of the 'depressed classes' had no doubt a rationale behind it. But by recognizing caste as an official category for providing social protection, the official policy reinforced the existing caste identities. This policy, which apparently appeared as a welfare measure actually infused a new spirit among the lower castes to work for caste solidarity in order to affirm their own separate identities. This led to social segregation and generated tensions between the upper and lower castes" (Basu 2003: 62).

As stated above it was the early part of 20th century when caste emerged as a primary determinant to determine the identity of an individual in the society. Similarly, it emerged as an important mobilizing force for the socio-political movement. The upper caste Hindus took it as a primary force to maintain their superiority. The caste rigidities in India was not similar in all the places, it varied from region to region. As compared to southern and western India the caste system was less rigid in the Koch Rajbanshi inhabited areas of Bengal as well as in Assam. Swaraj Basu observed that:

> "there is already a substantial amount of historical literature on the various aspects of caste system in Bengal... prescription of caste still determined the patterns of social interaction and determinant inter-personal group relations of the Bengali Hindus. Even among the elites in the Bengali Hindu society caste was the decisive factor in regulation of social relationships, particularly matrimonial alliance. Marriage outside one's own caste was a rare phenomenon and was not generally allowed in society. At the village level, partaking of cooked food from the lower castes was unthinkable and on committing such a social misdeed, a person had to perform *prayashchitta* or the rites of penance or else he or she could be declared outcaste. Caste pride was also very prominent and

usually the upper castes thought of themselves to be culturally superior to those lower down. Any misdemeanour was referred to as pertaining to lower caste culture"

(Basu 2003: 60)

There were numerous examples where the lower castes like Koch Rajbanshis were humiliated by the upper caste Hindus. In such a situation of social oppression the Koch Rajbanshis had only one option in their hand and that is to enter in to the fold of caste Hindu society or claim for *Kshatriya* status.

As stated earlier census was the only instrument introduced by the British through which caste emerged as the primary factor of social classification. One another immediate and important factor that encouraged the Koch Rajbanshis to fight for caste solidarity and claim for Kshatriya status was the colonial government's policy of enumerating Hindu castes in the census reports. Though at that time the process of Sanskritisation and the assimilation of the tribal and lower caste people into the upper caste Hindu fold were not easy but still most of the lower castes including the Koch Rajbanshis tried to liste their names in the census reports by claiming upper caste status as the census operation created a notion of belief among the lower castes that if they could have their names listed in the census reports their social rank would automatically be raised (2003: 65).

It is the 'Kshatriya Movement' through which the Koch Rajbanshis challenged the lower status assigned to them and claimed for upper status. Panchanan Barman was a lawyer by profession from the Koch Rajbanshi community. He tried to uplift the lower status of Koch Rajbanshis by claiming 'Kshatriya' status in the early part of the 20th century. The movement lead by Panchanan Barman to elevate the Koch Rajbanshis status was known as 'Kshatriya Movement'. In 1891 the Rajbanshis described themselves as 'Vratya Kshatriya' and from 1911 they began to claim pure Kshatriya status that was legitimized by the priests, genealogists and pundits (Debnath: 2013: 139).[35] From that time onwards in order to gratify their socio-cultural and ritual rank aspiration they began to imitate the values, practices and cultural styles of 'twice born' castes that formed a part of Hindu Great tradition. Many 'Kshtriya Samiti' was formed in different places. From 1912 onwards many mass thread

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[35] The citation has been taken from the article 'Kamatapur Movement: A Study Under Historical and Media Perspective' by Arjun Das published in the edited book 'Social and Political Tension In North Bengal, Since 1947' by Sailan Debnath, L. N. Publication, 2013.

wearing ceremonies (Milan Kshetra) were organised in different Koch Rajbanshis inhabited areas by the 'Kshtriya Samiti' where lakhs of Rajbanshis donned the sacred thread as a mark of 'Kshatriya' status. The prime and immediate objective of the 'Kshatriya Samiti' was to regain the lost social status of the Rajbanshi community in the Hindu social system and claim for Kshatriya status within the Hindu fold (Das 2009: 73-74).

One interesting point to be noted is that through the Kshatriya movement the leaders of the Rajbanshis community tried to disassociate the Rajbanshi identity from the identity of Koch, as they felt that by disassociating the Rajbanshis from the Koch identity they could establish the superior social rank within the Hindu caste fold. Though the Rajbanshis tried a lot to elevate their social status through the 'Kshatriya movement' they could not do it as most of the upper caste Hindus were opposed to it. Even the leaders of the 'Kshatriya movement' themselves failed to approach similar kind of efforts of other indigenous communities like Rabhas. Instead of developing a common platform with other victims of Brahminical hierarchy, the leaders of Kshatriya movement were opposed to this kind of demands. In the later phase 'Kshatriya Movement' had lost its significance while the Rajbanshis were offered scheduled caste status with the initiative of Panchanan Burma (Basu 2003: 100).

Thus, it is evident that once the Rajbanshi culture and language suffered due to the historical reasons mainly due to the caste movement that aimed at assimilation of Rajbanshis with the upper caste. They were the victim of cultural and social discrimination by the upper caste Hindus. Most of the upper caste Bengali did not consider 'Rajbanshi' as a language. Most of them considered it a dialect of the Bengali language. Presently most of the Kamatapuri leaders as well as intellectuals of the community are trying to established their cultural identity in terms of a politics of difference that take all kinds of steps to prove that their language and culture is different from the language of Bengali and Assamese and not distortion of them. Thus, now it is the culture and language that mark the politics of difference from the dominant Bengali community in West Bengal and Assamese in Assam. It is also observed that among many Koch Rajbanshis are trying to reject the term Rajbanshi that carries the old Hindu Kshatriya caste association to adopt another term. Now, many among them are trying to call themselves as Koch Rajbanshi instead of Rajbanshi that once they avoided to recognise themselves due to the process of the

Kshatriyaization. They are also insisting to prove that their culture, language, food habit, dress and religious rituals are not inferior to that of Bengali and Assamese in any way (Debnath 2013: 120-122).

From the above backdrop it can be said that it was the colonial caste policy that created the politics of difference on the bases of caste lines between lower and upper castes. Indirectly by this policy they constructed the socio-cultural identity of the Indians based on caste lines. The main objective of the ethnographic state constructed by the colonial discourse was to continue the permanency of their rule in India and its implication had been seen into the caste based classification of the identities of the Indians. Somehow this policy strengthened the caste rigidity among the upper caste Hindus and somehow it was given a new spirit to the lower castes to fight for caste solidarity. Koch Rajbanshis caste movement in the early part of the 20th century was an outcome of British lower caste policies and the social changes brought by the colonial discourse.

IV.2. Socio-Cultural Identity Crisis of the Koch Rajbanshis:

The present identity movement by the Koch Rajbanshis is related with the present and past socio-cultural and economic conditions of the Koch Rajbanshis. In this regards the context in Assam and North Bengal is to some extent different. In case of North Bengal in the early 20th century the migration of rich Hindu Bengali gentry from other parts of West Bengal and erstwhile East Pakistan (preset Bangladesh) to the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas created a feeling of alienation and deprivation. The influx of Hindu gentry created many social as well as economic problems for the Koch Rajbanshis. N. R. Ray wrote "influx of migrants in to the Koch Rajbansis dominated areas of North Bengal was a continuous process and their number were so great, they became a major factor of political 'Vote Bank' and they were utilised to the fullest. They were mutually benefited too. But it created lot of pressure on the aboriginal agriculturalist Rajbanshis in North Bengal (Ray 2007: 98). They were also victims of many land reforms act taken by the government of West Bengal where most of the beneficiaries were from the rich Hindu Bengali migrants, i.e. abolition of 'Zamindari' system in 1953, distribution of land to the landless 1967, 'Operation Barga' (land reforms) in 1977 etc.

Sujata D. Hazarika stated that the social status of Rajbanshis was not challenged until the influx of a large number of caste Hindu immigrants into the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas of North Bengal. The large number of immigrants with a strong awareness to casteism started interacting with the indigenous Rajbanshis in differential manners (Das 2009: 70).[36] In most of the cultural as well as literary works by the upper caste Hindus at that time also showed that kind of discriminatory attitude towards Koch Rajbanshis. Swaraj Basu further says that the local social situation provided a ground for the identity consciousness among the Koch Rajbanshis. With the gradual settlement of the upper caste Hindu gentry in what were traditionally the Rajbanshi dominated areas of North Bengal, the existing balance in local power structure had changed. The immigrant upper caste gentry in course of time 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 land holding class. As they were guided by the traditional Brahmanical cultural values, the Rajbanshis with a tradition and culture of their own failed to get a respectable position in the status estimation of immigrant upper caste gentry. There were sharp dissimilarities between the cultural practice of these two groups and the gentry treated the Rajbanshis as 'backward, uncultured and even *antyaj*'. They used the term *bahe*[37] to refer the Rajbanshis that implies their cultural inferiority (Basu 2003: 62, 63). Basu also has observed many other socio-cultural factors where the Koch Rajbanshis were humiliated in their everyday life. The higher caste always tried to maintain their ritual hierarchy such as food, marriage, etc and other kinds of socio-cultural interaction where the Koch Rajbanshis were humiliated and discriminated. The caste Hindus regarded the Koch Rajbanshis as *antyaja*, who had no right to enter the places of worship on the occasion of any public of *pujas*. Even there were some instances where water was not accepted from the hands of Rajbanshis by the upper caste Hindus (Ibid 2003: 63).

The discriminatory attitudes can also noticed in many literary works by many renowned scholars from the upper caste Hindus both in West Bengal as well as Assam. In the early 20th century Nagendranath Basu mentioned the Koch Rajbanshis

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[36] A. J. Das cited S. D. Hazarika's 'Unrest and displacement: *Rajbanshis in North Bengal' South Asia Forum for Rights* in his in his 'Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination' 2009, Arunima Deka Publication.

[37] The word *bahe* is originated from the word *babahe*. The Rajbanshis used this word to address a person. They used to refer to the outsiders to their land as *bhatiya*.

as 'barbarians' or 'Mlechha' in his *Vishwakosh* (Encyclopaedia). Another renowned Bengali scholar Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in his 'Bongo Darshan' wrote about Koch Rajbanshis that the identity of Koch is different from the identity of Bengali Hindu and not synonymous (Nag 2003: 163). In case of Assam narrow mentality of the upper caste Assamese in their literary works was not so much rigid as compared to North Bengal but it was noticed in some writings. A. J. Das observed in the writing of renowned Assamese novelist late Rajani Kanta Bodoloi interpreted the Koches as '*Nihaliya*' in his famous novel 'Dandua Droh (Das 2009: 71). Similarly, this kind of discrimination had also been seen in the social life of the Koch Rajbanshis where they faced social oppression in social practices. Sujata D. Hazarika noticed that in the early part of 20th century the Koch Rajbanshis were did not allow to entry into the temple of Jagannath Puri by an Act of the Government in the year 1911 (Hazarika 2004). Similar kinds of practices were also noticed in Assam too. A. C. Choudhury observed that "once the Koch Rajbanshis were denied entry in to the Barpeta Kirtan Ghar, a prayer place for the Vaishnavait sect of Assam, which is situated in the Barpeta town of lower Assam. To enter into the Kirtan Ghar, they had to fight a legal battle in the Calcutta High Court (Das 2009: 72).

The above narration amply proves it that the Koch Rajbanshis were the victims of caste based socio-cultural exclusion as well as economic marginalization and livelihood displacement by the upper caste Hindus in the early part of the 20th century. The Koch Rajbanshi felt proud to call them as 'Rajbanshi' which they mean descendent of royal blood. But in caste rigid society they enjoyed a lower status. In the caste Hindu society they have and given the bottom place in the caste fold. Migration was a major challenge during that period for the Koch Rajbanshis. Slowly and gradually with the changing of time, they lost everything including land, their vary livelihood, language, culture and identity. Soumen Nag states:

> "the Hindu refugee, who came from the districts of Rangpur, Mymensingh, 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 Rajbanshis could not stand anywhere and gradually lost their culture, language and land. Above all, they became minority due to the inflow of the immigrants and ultimately they lost their last asset, which was their identity"

(Nag 2003: 159)

In case of Assam the feeling of alienation was not so much strong as compared to North Bengal but still a sense of discriminatory attitude was prevalent among some upper caste Assamese as stated in the above. Many scholars have also been observed that due to discriminatory attitude from the caste Hindu Assamese groups towards the small small ethnic groups the feeling of alienation and identity consciousness emerged among many small ethnic groups of Assam. Pahi Saikia in her work *Ethnic Mobilization and Violence in Northeast India* (2011) states that the main cause of ethnic identity conflicts of different tribal groups in Assam are due to lack of communication and respect on the part of the Assamese community towards tribal groups. Similarly, Monirul Hussain in his work *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology, and Identity* (1995) argue on Assamese elite's domination over small ethnic communities in Assam. Due to these Assam was divided many a times based on their ethnic identity. That kind of assertion of identity is still prevalent among many ethnic groups of Assam including the Koch Rajbanshis. The immigration from Bangladesh to the Koch Rajbanshis dominated areas of lower part of Assam is still a major issue that creates many problems for the culture, language, identity and very livelihood of the Koch Rajbanshis.

Thus it is evident that in the early part of the 20th century the social exclusion was much more prominent in both North Bengal as well as in Assam. In most of the social practices the Koch Rajbanshis were socially excluded by the upper caste groups. Besides the social discrimination they are also victims of cultural and economic discrimination. The influx of migrants displaced them from their livelihood and created a feeling of alienation and discrimination among them. These feeling of alienation and discrimination created a sense of identity consciousness among the Koch Rajabsnhis that reflects in the present identity movement by them. Thus the genesis of identity consciousness was emerged among the Koch Rajbanshis and still continues.

IV.3. Constitutional Construction and Relocation of Koch Rajbanshis Identity in Post-Colonial India:

The relocation and dislocation of homogenous culture by the hybrid one is a contemporary and all-inclusive world phenomenon today. This kind of dislocation and relocation of culture had historically been seen within the boundary of a state itself but not by the hybrid one but by the discursive power of the state. In this regards if we contextualized the relocation of cultural identity of the ethnic groups by the states or by the governments, the Koch Rajbanshis identity can be considered as one among them.

As stated in the second chapter historically the Koches or the Koch Rajbanshis was living in different places of entire South-Asian continent right from the pre-Vedic period under one umbrella that is Koch or Kamata kingdom. As a result of the colonial administration the socio-political and cultural identity of the Koch Rajbanshi was relocated many a times. Now though the Koch Rajbanshis are living in the country of Nepal, Bangladesh, and India have their social and cultural similarities but their identity is politically relocated due to the process of new nation formation. Within India itself following the year 1947 as a result of the reorganisation of the Indian states many a time's the political as well as the cultural identity of Koch Rajbanshis was relocated several times.

The Indian constitutional provision itself has a very important role towards the construction and relocation of the cultural and political identity of the Koch Rajbanshis. The Koch Rajbanshis are now constitutionally known as SC in Cooch Behar (North Bengal), Tribals in some parts of Maghalaya (Garo Hills district of undivided Assam), Most Other Backward Class (M.O.B.C). in Gaolpara district of Assam (Undivided Gaolpara district), Other Backward Class (O.B.C) in other district of Assam and caste Hindu in Karbi-Aanglong district of Assam (Choudhury 2009: 2). So, these identity of Koch Rajbanshis is not creation of Koch Rajbanshis self but by the others as a result of relocation of their political identity by the state force. Thus the identity of Koch Rajbanshis is now politically and culturally divided by the constitutional provisions that earlier were one identity under the Koch Kingdom.

The constitutional recognition of one identity which is politically dislocated in different places but socio-culturally connected may create inconveniences among the members of the communities. After independence, in the Indian states of West Bengal and Meghalaya the government of India categorised the Koch Rajbanshis as SC and ST respectively. In Assam they are categorised as Other Backward Class (O.B.C) But the Koch Rajbanshis of Assam are not satisfied with this recognition, and therefore, they are agitating from a long time for getting the same status (ST) which the Koch Rajbanshis of Meghalaya are enjoying. Koch Rajbanshis agitation for Schedule Tribe status will be discuss in the forth chapter.

From the last few decades it is observed among the Koch Rajbanshis that the identity consciousness among them is increasing. They are trying to find a way out to maintain, preserve and protect their cultural and linguistic identity. Most of the Koch Rajbanshis in the lower parts of Assam as well as in many parts of North Bengal are living under the socio-economic under development condition. In the early parts of the 20th century they were the victims of socio-cultural discrimination by the upper caste Hindus that compelled them to fight for change their lower caste status and claimed for the upper caste status that is known as 'Kshatriaization Movement' by the Koch Rajbanshis. Now it is also observed that the domination of the dominant groups on the Koch Rajbanshis culture and identity emerged as a major factor that make them become more conscious about their identity. Now they are in a state of fear of losing their culture and identity by the influence of dominant groups. At the same time the Government of Assam also not able to address the problems of the Koch Rajbanshis, i.e. socio-economic under development, protection and development of language and culture etc. Over the year's Government is totally failed to take an appropriate development measures for the Koch Rajbanshis which creates lots of inconvenience discomfort among them. This has led to a feeling of deprivation and disillusionment among the Koch Rajbanshis who are now become more conscious about their identity, in term of their history, language, culture, occupation, and their basic rights. As a result of this now through the socio-political movement they are trying to negotiate the problems that they have been facing.

CHAPTER-IV

KOCH RAJBANSHI IDENTITY MOVEMENT AND ITS FUTURE

The identity movements by the Koch Rajbanshis have a long history. The movement for a separate Kamatapur state is also not a recent one. The autonomy movement by the Koch Rajbanshis and the idea for a separate homeland is almost seventy years old and the aspiration for socio-cultural recognition is around hundred years old. The caste movement of early 20th century which is also known as 'Kshatriya Movement' by the Koch Rajbanshis under the leadership of Panchanan Burma was also part of the Koch Rajbanshi's identity movement. The present chapter will deal with the agitation and socio-political movements by the Koch Rajbanshis to preserve and protect their separate distinct identity based on the field studies that were conducted during the month of July and August 2015.

VI. 1. Movement for a Separate Kamatapur State:

There is a peculiar character and distinction of the demand for a separate state by the Koch Rajbanshis and also other ethnic communities of India. Most of the ethnic groups of India who are demanding separate state for their communities are using ethnic names for their proposed state. For example, Bodo's of Assam are demanding Bodoland, Gorkha's of West Bengal are demanding Gorkhaland to protect and preserved their separate distinct identity. But in case of Koch Rajbanshis, they are not using ethnic name for their proposed separate state. Koch Rajbanshis are demanding 'Kamatapur' as a separate state which is rooted in the historical memory of their erstwhile Kamatapur Kingdom. Therefore, to understand the present Kamatapur movement and the identity movement by the Koch Rajbanshis, it is important to know the nature of historical memory of the Kamatapur Kingdom which was established by Sandhya Rai in the mid 13th century comprising areas of present day Assam, North Bengal and Bangladesh.

The autonomy movement by the Koch Rajbanshis seeks creation of a separate Kamatapur state comprising same areas of present North Bengal and Assam under the constitutional provision. The movement also looks for the recognition of Kamatapuri

or Koch Rajbanshi language under the Eight Scheduled of the constitution of India along with the demands of cultural and socio-economic development of their community. In case of Assam, the movement also demand Scheduled Tribe status for the Koch Rajbanshis living in Assam. Presently, many organisations are spearheading the demand for the separate Kamatapur state. Two organisations are of considerable importance among those. The Kamatapur Peoples' Party (KPP) in North Bengal and All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union (AKRSU) in Assam have been quite active since their inception. At the same time, Kamatapur Liberation Oraganization (KLO) a militant organization formed in 1995 is working in support of the demand for a sovereign Kamatapur state. Similarly, 'Koch-Rajbanshi Liberation Organization' (KRLO) is another militant organisation which was formed in 1995 by the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) as an accompanying militant group for the Koch Rajbanshi community. The goal of the KRLO is also similar to that of KLO. They are demanding the establishment of a separate state for the Koch Rajbanshis living in the northern parts of Assam. All Kamatapur Students' Organization Association (AKSO), a new student organization, has joined recently in the movement for the separate Kamatapur state. Greater Koch Behar Peoples' Association is another North Bengal based organization agitating for the creation of a separate state of 'Greater Cooch Behar'.

Subsequently, there are some other non-governmental and literary organizations of Koch Rajbanshis which are working for the socio-cultural development of their community with sympathy to the demand of autonomy. The 'Koch Rajbanshi Sahitya Sabha' of Assam and 'Kamata Sahitya Parishad' in North Bengal are two literary organizations working on the area of language, culture and literary works of Koch Rajbanshis. Similarly, there are many literary organizations based in Assam, North Bengal, Bihar, Meghalaya, and Nepal that are working on the socio-cultural and literary issues of the Koch Rajbanshis. Recently, under the leadership of Vijoy Chandra Barman 'Rajbanshi Vasa Akademi' has started to work for the development of Rajbanshi language in North Bengal. 'Koch Rajbanshi Cultural Society' is another Assam based literary organization working for the development of Koch Rajbanshi's history, culture and literature along with the territorial demand.

Table-01: Name of some major organizations which seek creation of Separate Kamatapur state

Sl. No	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	Kamatapur Liberation Organization	North Bengal	1993
6	All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union	Assam	1993
7	Kamatapur Peoples Party	North Bengal	1995
8	Greater Cooch Behar Association	North Bengal	1998
9	All Kamatapur Students' Organization	Assam	2004
10	Kamatapur Association	Assam	2010
11	Chilarai Sena	Assam	2014

Source: Most of the above sources of information are collected from "A Report on Kamatapur Movement of Koch Rajbanshi People" by A. J. Das and some infrmations are collected from different articles, books and journals on Koch Rajbanshis.

It is important to note that though the root of the historical origin of Kamatapur movement was in the colonial period but in case of Assam the movement got its momentum after the 1980s only. Instead of separate statehood demand, the demand for the inclusion of Koch Rajbanshis of Assam into the Schedule Tribe (ST) category was an old demand. The demand for ST Status is very much strong in Assam since 1966. A. C. Choudhury a prominent Koch Rajbanshi scholar and former president of All Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani (AKRS) stated that the 'All Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani' which has been agitating for the Schedule Tribe status for the Koch Rajbanshis living in Assam since 1966, once opposed the demand of Kamata Rajya (Kamatapur as a separate state) which was supported and demanded by the Kamata Rajya Sangram Parishad (KRSP) at around 1969 (Choudhury 1993: 21). Therefore, many scholars including many leaders of the Kamatapur movement observed and opined that the Kamatapur movement that became stronger in Assam after 1980s was actually the expression of the frustration of the peoples on the politics played by the government towards their demand for Schedule Tribe. Moreover, in

2003 the government of India created the Bodoland Territorial Councils (BTC) comprising four districts of Assam to address the long drawn demand of the Bodos for a separate state. Many areas of present BTC has a large Koch Rajbanshi population and historically most of the present area under BTC was actually the Koch Kingdom. Therefore, it is believed that the inclusion of the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas into the BTC without taking the opinion of the Koch Rajbanshis has given the momentum and fuelled the demand for Kamatapur in Assam.

Figure-01: Map of Proposed Kamatapur State

Source: *http://www.kamatapur.com/*

The present demand for Kamatapur state by the Koch Rajbanshis includes some parts of West Bengal (particularly North Bengal) and some parts of Assam (particularly lower parts of Assam). It includes six districts from West Bengal and 14 districts from Assam. In case of Koch Rajbanshis demand for separate statehood, the historical memory of their Koch Kingdom or Kamata kingdom is very much strong

which is rooted in their history and therefore, the present demand of separate Kamatapur state includes all the areas which were historically under Koch Kingdom.

Table-02: Area demanded for Kamatapur by the Koch Rajbanshis

Sl. No	Name of the District	State of belongs
1	Darjeeling	West Bengal
2	South Dinajpur	West Bengal
3	North Dinajpur	West Bengal
4	Malda	West Bengal
5	Jalpaiguri	West Bengal
6	Cooch Behar	West Bengal
7	Dhubri	Assam
8	Kokrajhar	Assam (BTAD)
9	Bongaigaon	Assam
10	Chirang	Assam (BTAD)
11	Goalpara	Assam
12	Barpeta	Assam
13	Baksa	Assam (BTAD)
14	Nalbari	Assam
15	Kamrup	Assam
16	Udalguri	Assam (BTAD)
17	Darang	Assam
18	Morigaon	Assam
19	Sonitpur	Assam
20	Lakhimpur	Assam

Source: The above table are made on the basis of proposed map of separate Kamatapur state retrieved from *http://www.kamatapur.com/*

The demand of the Koch Rajbanshis for a separate statehood is quite old in North Bengal than Assam. 'Hitasadhini Sabha', a North Bengal based organization, demanded for the first time a separate homeland for the Rajbanshi community of

Cooch Behar (Debnath 2013: 129)[38]. Most of the members of the Hitasadhini Sabha came from the Rajbanshi Hindu, Muslim jotedars and some Kamrupi Brahmins. It was also evident from historical information that from the last decade of the 19th century the Rajbanshis began to get united themselves socially to keep their ethnic and caste identities and with this view in mind they set up a samiti called 'Kshatriya Samiti'. In the latter period 'Uttarkhand Party' a political organization was formed in the year 1969 with a demand for a separate state called 'Kamatapur' comprising the five districts of North Bengal- viz. Malda, Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar. Since then many socio-political organizations have come into being and given a fresh momentum to the movement for a separate state.

In the following section an attempt will be made to analyse and interpret the data collected during the field visit. The prime objective of the study was to examine the socio-political movements led by the Koch Rajbanshis to negotiate their identity crisis. With this objective field studies were conducted during the month of July and August 2015 and data were collected through a semi structured interview schedule comprising thirteenth (13) questions. Interview both personal and group has been taken from the members of different socio-political organizations of Koch Rajbanshis i.e. All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union, All Kamatapur Students' Organization, All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Yovo Chatra Sanmilani, Centre for Koch Rajbanshis Studies and Development (Trust), Kamatapur Peoples Party (North Bengal based). To know the opinion of the common people two villages were visited i.e. Gandhigram (Block: Bilashipara, Sub Division: Dhubri) and Chithila (Block: Dotoma, Sub Division: Gosaigaon). It is generally felt that only a section of the population will have an extensive knowledge about the problem of the Koch Rajbanshi related to identity issues, therefore the study has applied purposive and snowball sampling for selecting the respondents. The sample size was hundred (100). There is no specific area has been selected for the study but most of the study were conducted in the lower parts of Assam. The data collected from the field survey are analysed and interpreted in the below.

In order to study the nature of consciousness of the Koch Rajbanshis about their identity and how they see their own identity, one question was asked to the

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[38] For detail see S. Ghos, 'Revisiting the Uttarkhand Movement' in S. Debnath, (2013). *Social and Political Tension in North Bengal (Since 1947)*. West Bengal: N. L. Publication.

selected respondents. They were asked to identify the identity that they would like to consider in their social life. Four options were given to the respondents, Koch Rajbanshi, Assamese, Bengali, and others.

In response to the question relating to the identity that they would like to consider in their social life, as shown in the table below (Table-03), 86 percent of the respondents felt that 'Koch Rajbanshi' is their identity in their social life. 7 percent opined 'Assamese' as their identity. 3 percent as 'Bengali' and 4 percent of the respondents opined that none of the above mentioned identity they would like to consider in their social life. They select the answer from the options as 'others'.

Table-03: Tabular representation of the Respondents opinion to the question relating to identity that they would like to consider in their social life

Identity that They Would Like to Consider	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Koch Rajbanshi	86	86
Assamese	7	7
Bengoli	3	3
Others	4	4
Total	**100**	**100**

In fact it was observed that most of the people were aware of the fact that they speak Koch Rajbanshi language and their identity is Koch Rajbanshi. From the last two decades especially from 1990s, there is a growing tendency of identity consciousness among the Koch Rajbanshis and in this regards many socio-cultural and literary organizations and students organization has been playing a crucial role. 'All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union' a student's organization was formed in the year 1993. They played crucial role in creating awareness among the common masses for their identity related issues. It was observed among most of the Koch Rajbanshis that now they are more conscious about their glorious past history, about their culture, tradition etc and are trying to revive their food habits, traditional dress, literature, music to name a few.

Figure-02: Bar Diagram showing the Opinion of the Respondents to the Question relating to Identity that they would like to consider in their Social Life (in percent)
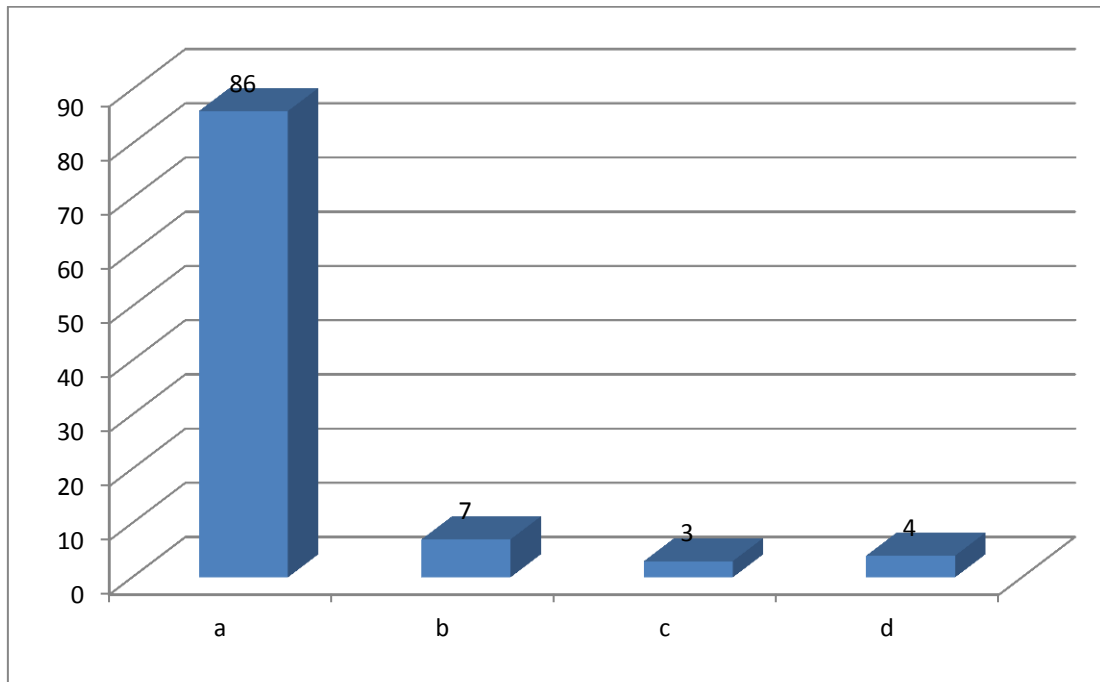
Note: a= Koch Rajbanshi, b= Assamese, c= Bengoli, d= Others

In order to know the opinion of the respondents about Kamatapur, a question was asked. Respondents were asked to identify what Kamatapur actually means to them. In response to the question, the respondents gave varying answers (Table-04). Twenty one (21) percent out of 100 respondents opined that Kamatapur is a royal state for them, while 47 percent felt that Kamatapur is a historical state for them. However, 32 percent of the respondents agreed that Kamatapur is a royal as well as historical state for them.

Table-04: Tabular representation of the Respondents' Opinion regarding what is Kamatapur for the Koch Rajbanshis

What is Kamatapur for Koch Rajbanshis	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
Royal state	21	21
Historical state	47	47
Both, Royal and Historical state	32	32
Total	**100**	**100**

In fact it is observed that most of the Koch Rajbanshi interviewee felt proud to be calling themselves as Kamatapuri. Kamatapur was their historical kingdom where Koch king ruled for a long period of time. They felt proud anticipating the glorious past history of Koch kingdom and considered it as royal kingdom where the power of Koch Kingdom were established in entire parts of North-eastern region of India. Now Kamatapur does not exist but it is living in their historical imagination.

Figure-03: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents Opinion on what is Kamatapur for the Koch Rajbanshis
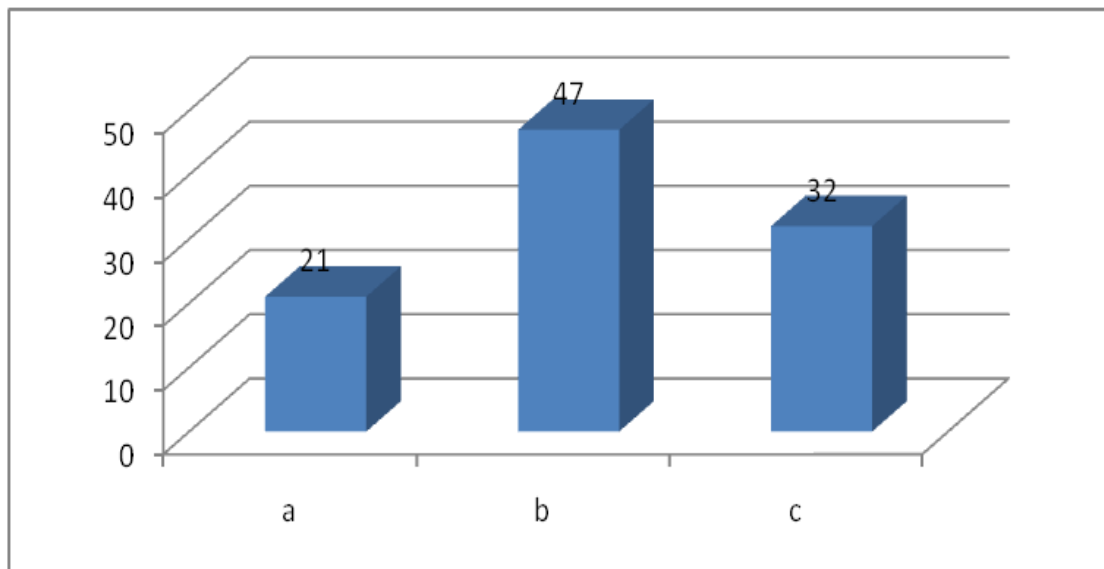
Note: a= Royal state, b= Historical state, c= Both royal and historical state.

In order to elicit the opinion of the respondents as regards the timing of the origin of the Kamatapur movement, a question was asked to the respondents. The

respondents were asked to identify the period of the origin of the Kamatapur movement. In this regards the respondents gave varying responses (Table-05).

Table-05: Tabular representation of the Respondents, Opinion about the Origin of the Kamatapur Movement

Origin of the Kamatapur Movement	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
Pre-colonial period	0	0
Colonial period	21	21
Post-colonial period	79	79
Total	**100**	**100**

Figure-04: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents Opinion about the Origin of the Kamatapur Movement
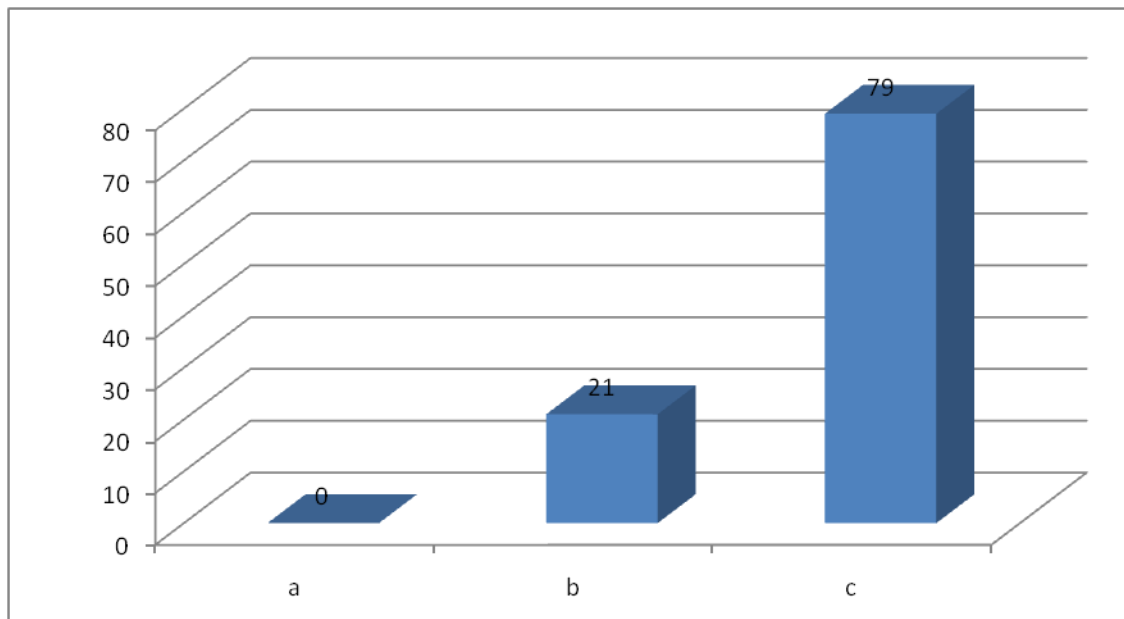
Note: a=Pre-Colonial period, b=Colonial period, c=Post-colonial period.

As shown in the Table No. (05), 21 percent respondents opined that the Kamatapur movement originated in the colonial period. Seventy nine (79) percent of the respondent opined that Kamatapur movement was originated during the post-colonial period while none of the respondents agreed that Kamatapur movement originated in the pre-colonial period. In fact it is believed that the genesis of Kamatapur movement or Koch Rajbanshis nationalism was emerged in the colonial

period. Jogendranath Mondal a scholar from undivided Bengal had demanded a separate of 'Rajar-sthan' or abode of king for the Rajbanshis before independence of India (Hazarika 2004)[39]. The issue of Rajbanshi language and its consciousness also rose during the colonial period. In 1910 Panchanan Barma, a prominent leader of 'Khatriya Movement' had raised the issue of Rajbanshi language for its recognition and development in the third annual conference of 'Uttar Banga Sahitya Parisad' held at Rangpur now Bangladesh (Ray, 2007: 115). Thus, it may be said that the genesis of Koch Rajbanshis nationalism and demand for autonomy emerged during the colonial period.

On the other hand, if we see in the post-colonial period the genesis of identity assertion emerged amongst the Koch Rajbanshis due to merger of the kingdom of Koch Bihar with the Indian state of West Bengal against the will of the local peoples[40]. Uttar Khanda Dal (UKD) an organisation was born in 1969 to demand a separate state for Rajbanshis namely as Kamtapur or Uttar Khanda. 'Uttar Banga Sanskritik Parishad' another organisation formed in the same year raised the demand for recognition of Kamta language and its development. Kamta Rajya Sangram Parishad (KRSP) was formed in Goalpara district of Assam in 1969 to demand the separate state of Kamata. For the same purpose in 1987, UKD changed its name to Kamtapur Gana Parishad and in 1996 it once again named itself Kamtapur Peoples Party (KPP) (Ray 2007:116). On 28th December 1995, Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), a militant organisation came into being. All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AKRSU) and Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani are the two Assam based organisations fighting for separate Kamatapur state and Schedule Tribe status for the Koch Rajbanshis living in Assam. Their proposed state of Kamatapur consisted of 14 districts of Assam and 6 districts of North Bengal. Kamatapuri Peoples Party, Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Front, Kamtapuri Progressive Party, Greater Kamatapur Peoples Forum etc are some other socio-political organisations that have given further momentum to the demand of separate Kamatapur state and Koch Rajbanshis identity

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[39] A. J. Das cited from Sujata D. Hazarika's 'Unrest and displacement: Rajbanshis in North Benagl', in his *Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshis Imagination*, Guwahati: Arunima Deka publication, 2009.
[40] *Sukiya Kamatapur Rajya Kiyo* (Why Separate Kamatapur state?) a booklet published by AKRSU (All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union) opined that the merger of Koch Behar in West Bengal was a conspiracy of the government and against the will of the local peoples. For details see Bishwajit Rai, 'Sukiya Kamatapur Rajya Kiya' AKRSU (Assamese), April 25, 2002.

assertion movement. Thus, it is evident that the ethnic identity movement of the Koch Rajbanshis is a long drawn battle and still continuing.

In order to understand the perception of the respondents as regards to why Koch Rajbanshis are demanding Kamatapur, a question was asked to the respondents. In response to the question the responses was varying as shown in the table below (Table-06), 11 percent out of total respondents felt that they wanted Kamatapur to avoid cultural differences. Twenty one (21) percent opined that they wanted Kamatapur to achieve development. Twenty six (26) percent of the respondents answered that they want Kamatapur because the identity of Kamatapur is the identity of Koch Rajbanshis. Forty two (42) respondents out of 100 considered all the above mention factors (i.e. to avoid cultural differences, to achieve development, identity of Kamatapur is the identity of Koch Rajbanshis) are responsible because of which they want Kamatapur as a separate state.

Table-06: Tabular representation of the Respondents' Opinion as regards to why Koch Rajbanshis want Kamatapur

Why Koch Rajbanshis want Kamatapur	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
To avoid cultural differences	11	11
To achieve development	21	21
Identity of the Kamatapur is the identity of Koch Rajbanshis	26	26
All the above	42	42
Total	**100**	**100**

Figure-05: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion as regards to why Koch Rajbanshis want Kamatapur (in percent)
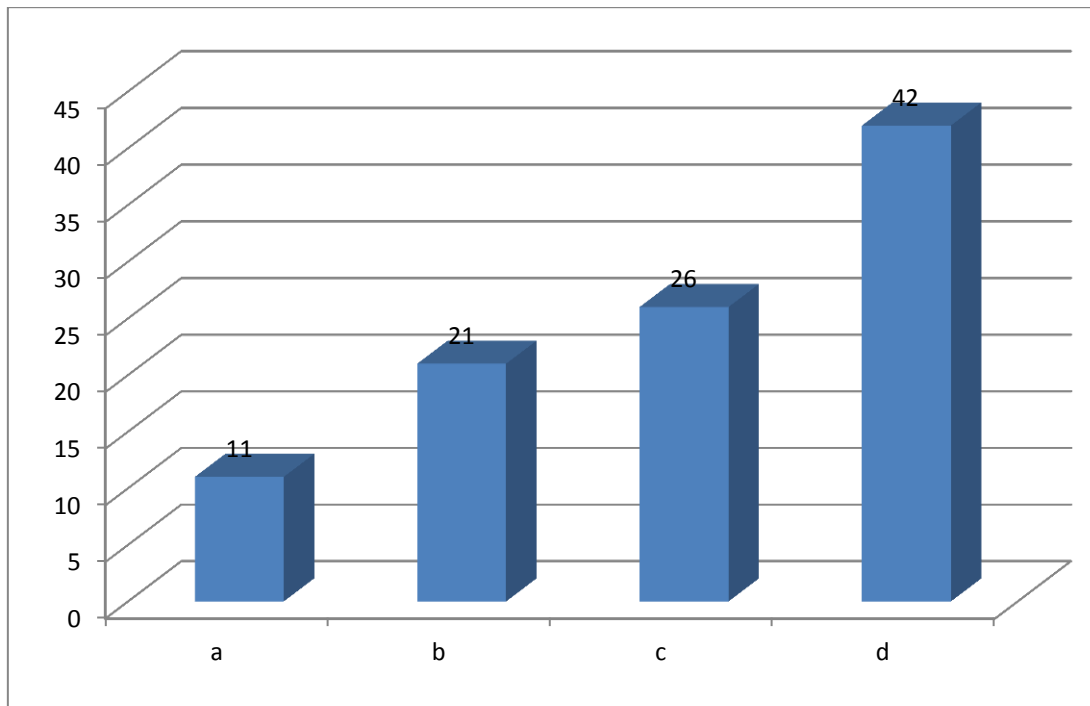
Note: a= to avoid cultural differences, b= To achieve development, c= Identity of the Kamatapur is the identity of Koch Rajbanshis, d= All the above.

As far as the movement for a separate Kamatapur state is concerned, the Koch Rajbanshis believed that they were victims of cultural differences of the dominant groups as the dominant groups always tried to maintain their socio-cultural hierarchy ignoring the Koch Rajbanshis. In the early part of the 20th century they were victims of culture of Bengalis in North Bengal and Assamese in the lower parts of Assam as the upper caste Bengali and Assamese showed a discriminatory attitude towards the socio-cultural and ritual practices of the Koch Rajbanshis and in many cases they were socially, culturally, and economically excluded. In Assam the process of 'Assamization' (to accept Assamese culture, language and tradition and call themselves as Assamese) is to some extent continuing till now. So, most of the Koch Rajbanshis particularly the middle class among them fears of losing their identity. It is observed that the middle class Koch Rajbanshis is more aware as regards to their identity consciousness compared to that of common masses. It is also observed that most of the leaders those who are leading the socio-political organizations and agitating for the Koch Rajbanshis identity issue are from middle class Koch

Rajbanshi. They are trying to mobilize the common masses by creating awareness among them. They think that a separate state alone will protect their distinctiveness. In fact most of their civic organizations are born with a view to safeguard their distinctiveness.

It is observed that the poor common masses supported the demand of separate Kamatapur state with a hope to develop their economic condition as most of the respondents were living under below poverty line. Agriculture is their prime income source but sometimes due to bad weather they suffered more. During last decade many times draught and flood badly affected them and hampered their livelihood. Though, from last many decades they are agitating for reservation policy of their community yet there are no such responses from the side of government. So, many of the respondents were of the view that if they get some amount of territorial autonomy for self rule, they will at least able to achieve some degree of development of their community. Some of them gave reference of BTC (Boboland Territorial Council) where the Bodo community is doing well after getting territorial autonomy. It is also observed that some of the respondents were very much reactive in opining that they want Kamatapur because it is their identity, their historical kingdom, and they have the right to get it. Whereas, majority of the respondents opined that Kamatapur as a separate state is required not only because it is their historical right but it is required for them to avoid cultural differences, to achieve development, to protect their distinct identity.

In order to assess the perception of the respondents as regards to the possible causes behind the Kamatapur movement, respondents were asked to choose from seven options to identify the causes responsible for the Kamatapur movement. In response to the question the respondents gave different views as shown in the table no. 07. Twenty one (21) percent of the respondents (out of 100 respondents) opined that the ethnic identity crisis of the Koch Rajbanshis is one of the sole cause responsible for the Kamatapur movement while 9 percent of the respondents identified land alienation as an important factor responsible for the Kamatapur movement. A small number i.e. 3 percent of the respondents felt it was an impact of colonial administration as a cause for the Kamatapur movement. Similarly, 16 percent of the respondents considered wrong policies of the government were an important factor responsible for the Kamatapur movement while 5 percent considered that the

Kamatapur movement was a creation of political elites. On the other hand a small number (3 percent) of respondents believed that the Kamatapur movement was a result of the impact of modern civilization. However, a majority of 43 percent respondents opined all the above mentioned factors (i.e. ethnic identity crisis, land alienation, impact of colonial administration, wrong policies of the government, creation of political elites, and impact of modern civilization) as responsible for the Kamatapur movement. They felt Kamatapur movement was the result of a combination of all the above mentioned factors.

Table-07: Tabular representation of Respondents' Opinion as regards to the causes responsible for the Kamatapur movement

Causes responsible for Kamatapur Movement	No. Of Respondents	Percentage
Ethnic identity crisis of the Koch Rajbanshis	21	21
Land alienation	9	9
Impact of colonial administration	3	3
Wrong policies of the government	16	16
Creation of political elites	5	5
Impact of modern civilization	3	3
All the above	43	43
Total	**100**	**100**

Figure-06: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion regarding the causes responsible for the Kamatapur movement
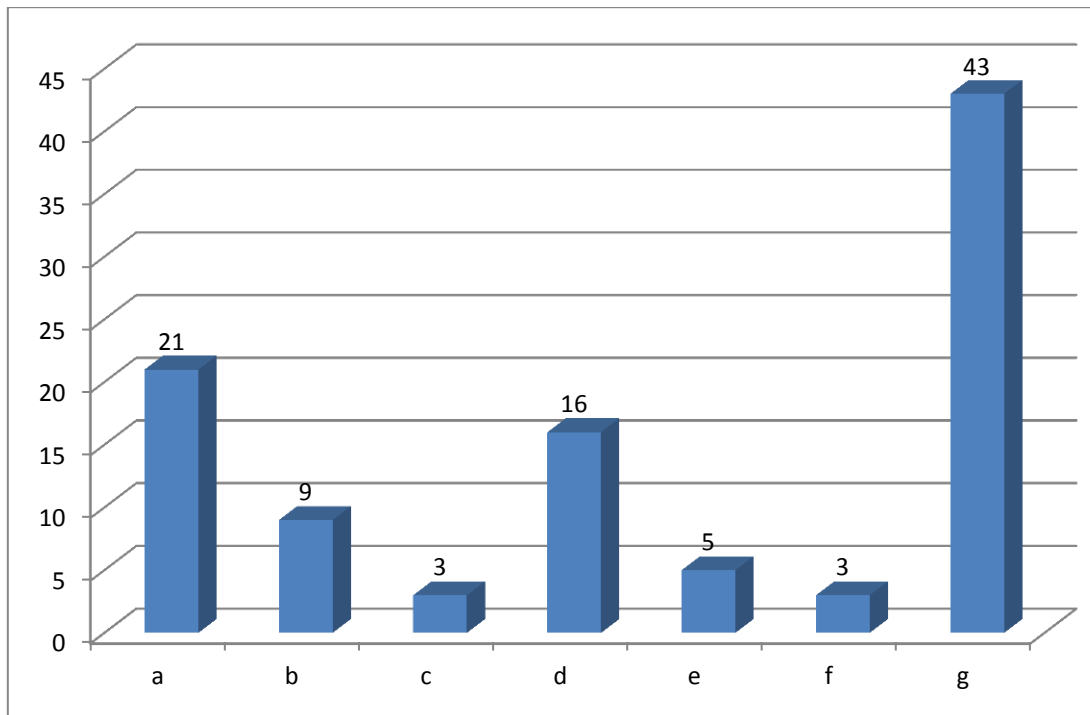
Note: a= Ethnic identity crisis of the Koch Rajbanshis, b= Land alienation, c= Impact of colonial administration, d= Wrong policies of the government, e= Creation of political elites, f= Impact of modern civilization, g= All the above.

If we see the responses of the respondents it is obvious that though all the factors mentioned in the above are responsible for Kamatapur movement but two emerge as the most important factors responsible for Kamatapur movement are ethnic identity crisis of the Koch Rajbanhis and wrong policies of the government. As an ethnic community Koch Rajbanshis have their own distinct culture, language, and identity but due to several causes like domination of the dominant groups, impact of modern civilization, indifference of the government policies etc, they are losing their distinctiveness. Land alienation is another problem. In the early part of the 90s the land alienation emerged as a major problem among the Koch Rajbanshis in North Bengal mainly due to migration of the upper caste Hindu Bengalis from the other parts of West Bengal as well as immigration from the Bangladesh to the Koch Rajbanshis inhabited areas that was a major cause which created a sense of alienation among them and compelled them to think for preservation of their distinctiveness. In case of Assam this problem emerged after 1980s as a major challenge due to illegal

infiltration from the Bangladesh to the lower parts of Assam where most of the areas are Koch Rajbanshi dominated. Therefore, it is evident that in the anti immigration movement of Assam the contribution of the Koch Rajbanshis is much more prominent.

Though a small number of respondents (3 percent) felt about the impact of modern civilization on Kamatapur movement but that is an important point that they have raised. Globalization, cultural hybridization, cultural fusion etc are the some remarkable world phenomenon that the world has experience today. Globalization is trying to make the world into a global village where everything will be same for all. Cultural hybridization is optimistic to make a common culture that is acceptable for all and which will decrease the cultural distinction and conflict over culture and identity. But it is contradictory to be optimistic to consider the cultural hybridity as a solution to the problem of conflict over culture and identity, as the world is witnessing of many ethnic based identity conflicts over the years. Koch Rajbanshis identity movement is also one among them. To achieve and fulfil the basic economic requirement of life, the Globalization, cultural hybridization and cultural fusion are pushing the smaller ethnic groups to accept it but at the same time it has created a consciousness and fear of losing their traditional cultural values, language and identity. Therefore, they have started to rethink and re-establish their traditional cultural values and identity.

In order to assess the perception of the respondents regarding the support base of the Kamatapur movement one question was posed to the respondents. The response was varying as shown in the table below (table-08). Seventy seven (77) percent of the respondents opined that the Kamatapur movement was supported only by the Koch Rajbanshis. Seven (7) percent of the respondent opined that besides the Koch Rajbanshis, the Kamatapur movement was also supported by all the tribal groups living in the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas accept the Bodos. 16 percent of the respondents opined that the Kamatapur movement received its support from both the tribal and non-tribal living in the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas.

Table-08: Tabular representation of respondents' opinion regarding the support base of the Kamatapur movement

Support base of the Kamatapur movement	No. Of respondents	Percentage
Only the Koch Rajbanshis	77	77
All the Tribals	7	7
Both Tribals and Non-tribals	16	16
Total	**100**	**100**

Figure-07: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion regarding the Support base of the Kamatapur movement (in percent)
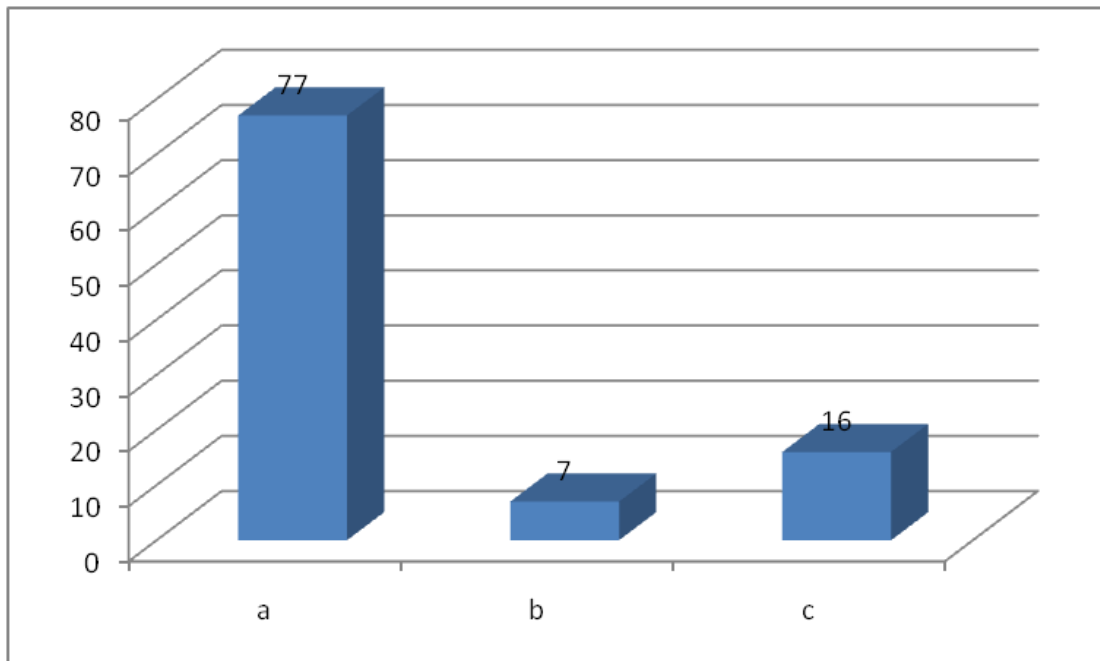
Note: a= Only the Koch Rajbanhsis, b= All the Tribals, c= Both Tribals and non-tribals.

It was observed from the responses of the respondents that the Koch Rajbanshis want Kamatapur at any cost and all the members of their community support it. It is important to emphasise that many respondents felt that all the Tribals and non-Tribals groups living in the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas are support the demand of Kamatapur accept the Bodo community. Even the Bodos do not support their demand of scheduling their community (as Schedule Tribe) that is why from

time to time when the Koch Rajbanshi agitates in support of their demand, most of the leader from the Bodo community counter agitates against it. There is a long drawn controversy between Bodos and Koch Rajbanshis of Assam on their historical and racial origin. The Bodos are saying that they are the aborigines (son of the soil) of Assam. On the other hand Koch Rajbanshis argue opposite to that of the Bodos. Even the proposed Kamatapur state includes all the four Bodo inhabited districts. As far the Koch Rajbanshis cultural organizations concerned they are of the view that the Bodos opposed their demand of ST status because they think that if the Koch Rajbanshis are included in Schedule Tribe category than it will be a challenge for the Bodos in getting job opportunities on the basis of reservation and many other kinds of challenges.

To know the opinion of the respondents as regards to government response towards the Kamatapur movement a question was asked to the respondents. The respondents were asked to identify whether the government response was positive, negative or partially positive. In response to the question as shown in the table below (Table-09), none of the respondents felt that the government response was positive. Ninety six (96) percent of the respondents opined that the response of the government was negative while a small number of the respondents (4 percent) opined that the response of the government was partially positive.

Table-09: Tabular representation of Respondents' Opinion regarding the government response towards the Kamatapur movement

Government response towards the Kamatapur movement	No. Of respondents	Percentage
Positive	0	0
Negative	96	96
Partially positive	4	4
Total	**100**	**100**

Figure-08: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion regarding the government response towards the Kamatapur movement
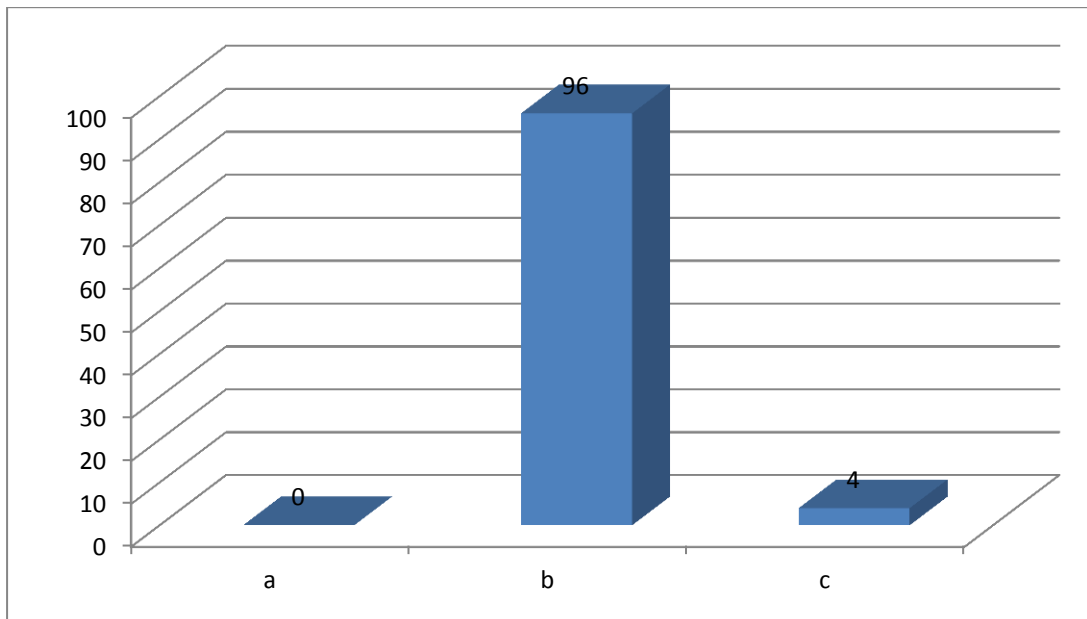
Note: a= Positive, b= Negative, c= Partially positive.

The charter of demands by the Koch Rajbanshi to the government of India includes 100s of demands. Among them the demand of granting Scheduled Tribes status; demand for separate Kamatapur state with immediate effect as per the merger and agreement signed between the Koch Rajbanshi king, His Highness Sir Maharaja of Cooch Behar and Government of India on 28th August 1949; recognition of Rajbanshi language under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India; handing over of the education system to Don Bosco Education Society; demand for modification of the land policy for safeguarding cultural heritage of Koch Rajbanshi community; demand to the government of India to institute the IMA Best Cadet Award in the name of Koch Rajbanshi General Cilaray of Kamatapur Kingdom; demand for the installation of a Bronze Statue of Bir Chilarai in front of the Parliament House, New Delhi; demand for raising Koch Rajbanshi Regiment in Indian Army, Navy, Air-force, BSF, Para Military Force, CRPF and other defence forces etc to name a few. Though the Koch Rajbanshis are demanding the above demands with immediate effect the Government response has been lukewarm. Even their very demand of ST status is not fulfilling which they are demanding since 1966. Actually the political parties of Assam are playing politics on the ST demand by the Koch Rajbanshis.

As regards the question relating to the nature of human rights violation during the Kamatapur movement, the respondents responses was varying. In response to the question as shown in the table below (Table-10), five (5) percent opined that during the time of Kamatapur movement innocent common people were arrested without any warrant. Thirteen (13) percent of respondents agreed that brutal torture was taking place during the time of Kamatapur movement by the police personnel. Three (3) percent respondents agreed that there were incident like sexual harassments; rape, abduction etc were taking place while 79 percent of the respondents opined that all the above mentioned human rights violation occurred during the time of movement. However, the respondents were of the opinion that no incidents like murder, custodial death as well as encounter deaths took place during the time of movement.

Table-10: Tabular representation of the Respondents' Opinion about the Nature of the Human Rights Violation during the time of Kamatapur Movement

Nature of Human Rights Violation	No. Of respondents	Percentage
Arrest without warrant	5	5
Torture	13	13
Murder	0	0
Sexual harassments./rape/abduction	3	3
Custodial deaths as well as encounter	0	0
All the above	79	79
Total	**100**	**100**

Figure-09: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion regarding the Nature of Human Rights Violation during the time of Kamatapur Movement (in percent)
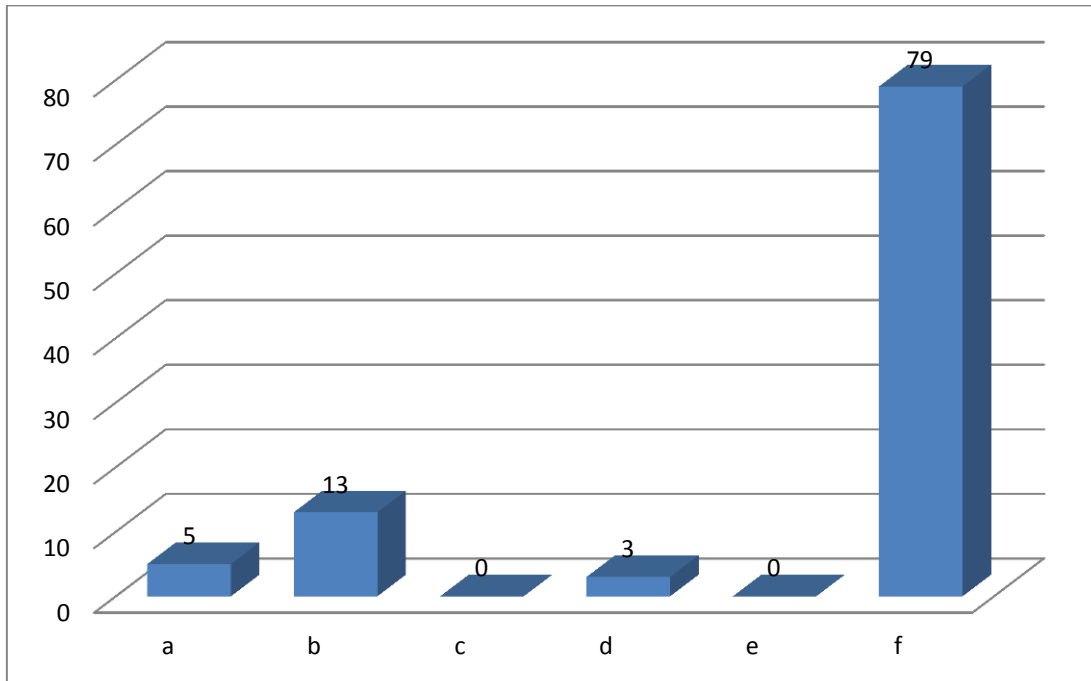
Note: a= Arrest without warrant, b= Torture, c= Murder, d= Sexual harassment./rape/abduction, e= Custodial death as well as encounter, f= All the above.

In order to assess the perception of the respondents about the impact of Kamatapur movement on the socio-political life of the Koch Rajbanshis, a question was posed. The respondents were asked to identify whether the impact of the Kamatapur movement was positive or negative on the socio-political life of the Koch Rajbanshis. In response to the question 11 percent of the respondents as shown in the table below (Table-11) opined that the impact of the Kamatapur movement was positive in the socio-political life of the Koch Rajbanshis. Whereas, 71 percent of the respondents were in view that the impact of the Kamatapur movement was negative in their socio-political life. However, 18 percent out of 100 respondents opined that the impact of Kamatapur movement was both partially positive as well as partially negative in the socio-political life of the Koch Rajbanshis.

Table-11: Tabular representation of Respondents' Opinion regarding the impact of Kamatapur Movement in the Socio-Political life of the Koch Rajbanshis

Impact of Kamatapur movement in the Socio-political life of the Koch Rajabanshis	No. Of respondents	Percentage
Positive	11	11
Negative	71	71
Both positive and negative	18	18
Total	**100**	**100**

It can be said that the variation of the responses of the respondents proves that the Kamatapuri movement had a mixed impact on the people. As far as the fallout of the Kamatapur movement is concerned, the Koch Rajbanshi did not get anything from the Government. Instead of fulfilling their demands the government as well as the political parties are playing politics on it. But indirectly the Kamatapur movement has had some positive impact on the socio-cultural life of the Koch Rajbanshis. It has created awareness among the people of Koch Rajbanshis of their socio-economic and political rights; socio-cultural and literary development; preservation of their tradition, history and distinctiveness. Many socio-cultural and literary organizations have developed and are working for the development of their society, culture and literature. Therefore, it may be stated that though the Kamatapuri movement did result in the formation of Kamatapur state but it undoubtedly has had a positive impact on the life of the Koch Rajbanshis.

Figure-10: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion regarding the Impact of Kamatapur Movement in the Socio-Political life of the Koch Rajbanshis (in percent)
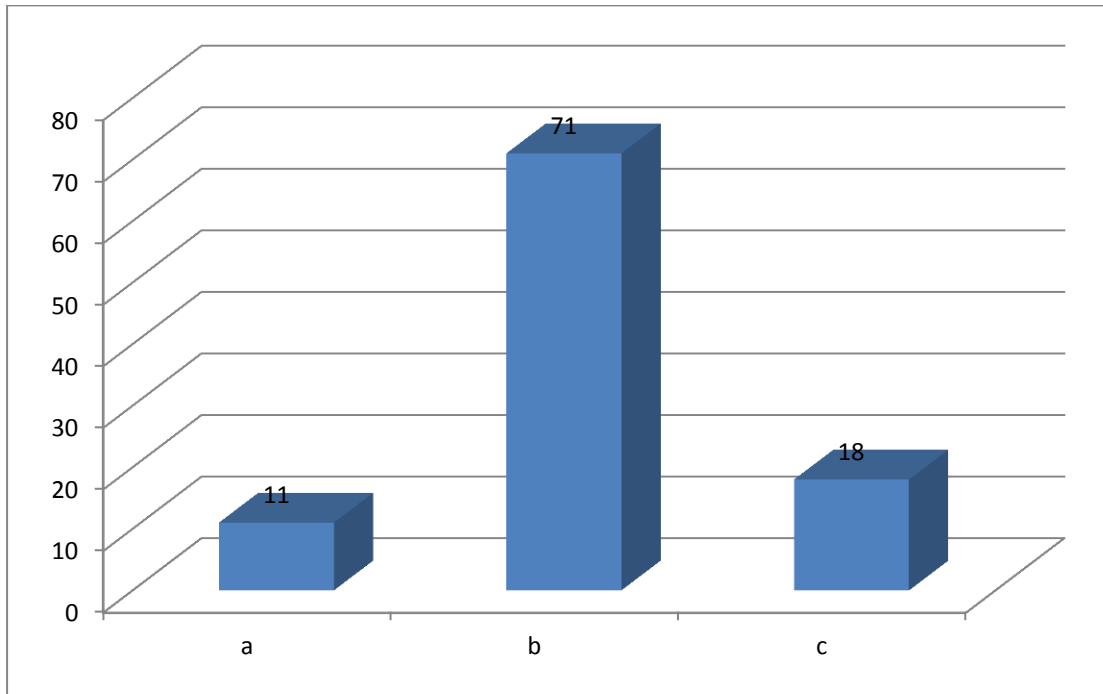
Note: a= Positive, b= Negative, c= Both positive and negative.

As regards to the question what kind of major challenges the Koch Rajbanshis are confronted at present, the response of the respondents was varying as shown in the table below (Table-12). Nineteen (19) percent out of 100 respondents opined that ethnic identity crisis is a major challenge that the Koch Rajbanshis are confronted with. Eleven (11) percent of the respondents agreed that land alienation is another problem which the Koch Rajbanshis are confronted at present while 9 percent opined that illiteracy is a major problem that the Koch Rajbanshis are facing at present. Similarly, 28 percent of the respondents identified economic underdevelopment as a major challenge of the Koch Rajbanshis. Considering all the facts 33 percent respondents considered all the above mentioned factors as a major challenge presently confronting the Koch Rajbanshis.

Table-12: Tabular representation of the Respondents' Opinion about the major challenges the Koch Rajbanshis are confronted at present

Major Challenges the Koch Rajbanshis are Confronted at Present	No. Of respondents	Percentage
Ethnic identity crisis	19	19
Land alienation	11	11
Illiteracy	9	9
Economic underdevelopment	28	28
All the above	33	33
Total	**100**	**100**

As far as the responses of the respondents are concerned the Koch Rajbanshi community of Assam is facing many problems. From the point of view of Kamatapur movement they are facing problems related to the problem of socio-cultural development and political identity, illiteracy, poverty etc.

Figure-11: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion about the Major Challenges the Koch Rajbanshis are confronted at Present (in Percent)
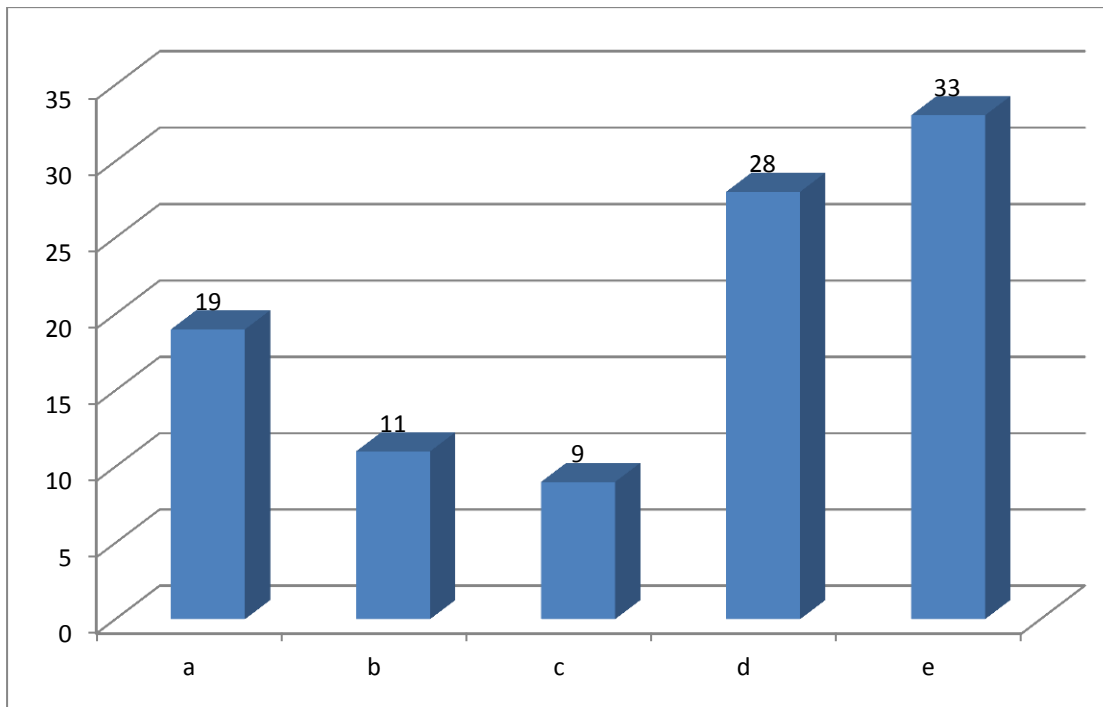
Note: a= Ethnic identity crisis, b= Land alienation, c= Illiteracy, d= Economic underdevelopment, e= All the above.

In order to assess the perception of the respondents with regard to the possible solution of the Koch Rajbanshis problem the response to the question was varying as shown in the table below (Table-13). The respondents were asked to identify the possible solution of the Koch Rajbanshis problem from the options. Eleven (11) percent of the total respondents felt that the preservation and development of Koch Rajbanshis cultural identity is one step that can be taken as a possible solution to the Koch Rajbanshis problem while 19 percent of the respondents opined that economic development of the Koch Rajbanahis is an urgent need to solve the problem of Koch Rajbanshis. On the other hand 25 percent of the respondents opined that creation of separate Kamatapur state is the only solution of the Koch Rajbanshis problem. Similarly, 7 percent suggested that check on land alienation of the Koch Rajbanshis will be an important step for bringing solution to the Koch Rajbanshis problem. However, 39 percent of the respondents opined that the all the above mentioned steps (Preservation and development of Koch Rajbanshis cultural identity, economic development of the Koch Rajbanshis, creation of separate akmatapur state, and check on land alienation) should be taken for bringing solution to the Koch Rajbanshis problem.

Table-13: Tabular representation of Respondents' Opinion regarding the possible solution to the Koch Rajbanshis problem

Possible Solution to the Koch Rajbanhis Problem	No. Of respondents	Percentage
Preservation and development of Koch Rajbanshis cultural identity	11	11
Economic development of Koch Rajbanshis	19	19
Creation of separate Kamatapur state	25	25
Check on land alienation	7	7
All the above	39	39
Total	**100**	**100**

Figure-12: Bar Diagram showing the Respondents' Opinion regarding the Possible Solution of the Koch Rajbanshis Problem (in percent)
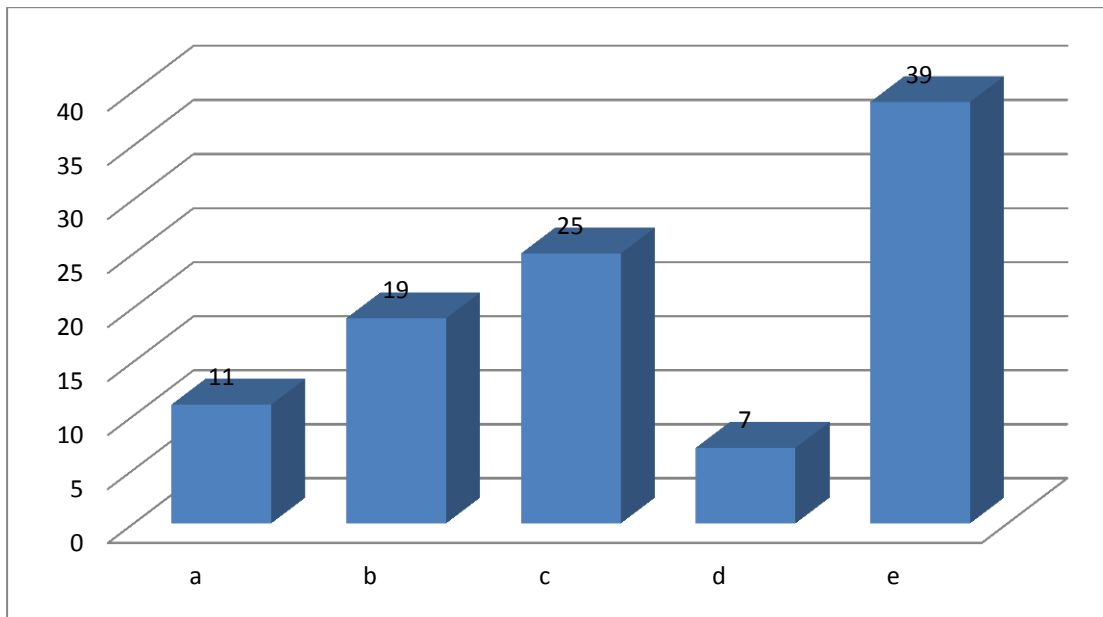
Note: a= Preservation and development of Koch Rajbanshis cultural identity, b= Economic development of Koch Rajbanshis, c= Creation of separate Kamatapur state, d= Check on land alienation, e= All the above.

Thus, from the above responses of the respondents it may be said that the problem of the Koch Rajbanshis does not lie in any single factor. They have been facing many problems since the independence. Different issues are required to be resolved to bring a permanent solution to their problems. Economic development of Koch Rajbanshis, preservation and development of Koch Rajbanshis socio-cultural and political identity, check on land alienation and if Kamatapur is not possible then creation of autonomous council where they at least get some amount of autonomy of self rule are some remarkable steps should be taken for bringing solution to the problems of Koch Rajbanshis.

Figure-13: Images of demonstration by the Koch Rajbanshis in demand of Kamatapur state and Schedule Tribe status:

Source: Images are collected from David Roy, media coordinator, CKRSD.

Figure-14: Images of demonstration by the Koch Rajbanshi women in demand of Kamatapur:

Source: Images are collected from David Roy, media coordinator, CKRSD.

VI.2. Movement for Schedule Tribe Status:

The Indian constitution which is considered as a major milestone in the life of a nation has made provisions for basic rights and social justice to all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion, language etc. The constitution also has provided some provision for the socio-economically backward sections of the society for their further upliftment and development. Besides these provisions for protection and development of minorities, the Constitution has also provided provision for the Tribal population. The Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India has empowered the state as well as the central government to make provisions for Tribals who live in the sixth Scheduled areas recognised by the constitution of India for their socio-economic and cultural development. The sixth Schedule also enables the local Tribes for self rule by giving some amount of autonomy. The aspiration of getting recognition under the sixth Schedule of the constitution of India as a Schedule Tribe prevails among many communities in North East India. Koch Rajbanhsi is only one among them.

As stated earlier the demand for Scheduling the Koch Rajbanshi community in the category of ST is a long standing demand. Since long particularly from1966 many Koch Rajbanshis cultural organizations have been demonstrating and agitating in support of their demand. In this context the role of 'All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilloni' is very much prominent. The Sanmilloni submitted its first memorandum to the central government on 10th October 1968 for scheduling the Koch Rajbanshi community of Assam (Choudhury 2009: 19). From that time onwards to till 1996 they organised many democratic protest movements. On several occasions they sent deputations to the successive Prime Ministers of India and joint committees, organised Assam Bandhs, blocked roads, sat in hunger strikes and organised mass rallies in many places. Members of Parliament visited Assam many times to discuss the issue of scheduling the Koch Rajbanshi. Finally the Government of India declared the Koch Rajbanshis as a Schedule Tribes only for three months by an Ordinance of President of India vide Ordinance No. 9 of 1996 dated 27th January, 1996 (Ibid 2009: 20). After that an official Bill was introduced before the Parliament for the regulation of the Ordinance that declared the Koch Rajbanshi as a schedule Tribe but due to conspiracy and politics of the upper caste politicians and the ignorance of the government the Bill was not passed and still hangs in the Parliament.

The categorization (ST) of the communities who are socio-economically backward and isolated from the mainstream culture and civilization was a contribution of the colonial discourse in India. With a political purpose the British categorised the communities who were socio-economic and culturally isolated and backward from the mainstream as a Schedule Tribe. But after the independence the issue of ST has been politicised by most of the political parties for their narrow ends. Presently, a total of six (Koch Rajbanshis, Tai Ahoms, Morans, Motoks, Chutiyas and Tea Garden tribes of Assam) communities of Assam have been demanding ST status though the Koch Rajbanshis demand is one of oldest one. In Assam the Scheduling issue of the Koch Rajbanshi is entirely politicised by the national as well as by the regional parties. Before every election (both general and assembly) the political parties' make false promise to schedule them but after the elections they fall silent on this issue.

According to the constitutional provision the government can declare any community as ST of the basis of five criteria i.e. indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, economic backwardness and shyness of contact with other communities. The Tribal Research Institute of the Assam government, in its study conducted in 1994 found and stated that there is adequate justification to declare the Koch Rajbanshis as ST and on the basis of the report the Register General of India agreed to include them in the schedule Tribe category of Assam. But later on the Register General again stated that they do not fulfil the five criteria and therefore they cannot be scheduled as ST, while the community make their self assertive evaluation that they fulfil all the five criteria which have been undermined by the centre (Ray 2014).

The demand for ST status by the Koch Rajbanshis has not been fulfilled yet by the government and the democratic movements are also continuing subsequently by the community. All this has created a feeling of alienation, sense of betrayal and frustration among them and that gives a further momentum to the demand for a separate Kamatapur state. The socio-economic and political backwardness of life and to get rid of these makes the communities like Koch Rajbanshis to think for lower status (ST). Perhaps it is time to ask a question: Will the socio-economic and political problems be solved if they are granted ST status by including them into the sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

After discussing the socio-political movements led by the Koch Rajbanshis to negotiate their issue identity crisis it may be said that the Kamatapur movement is a long drown battle. As stated above various causes are responsible for it. The genesis of Koch Rajbanshi identity consciousness started due to the feeling of discrimination, deprivation, and domination by the caste Hindus and the dominant groups. It is observed that the causes responsible for the emergence of Koch Rajbanshi identity consciousness in the early and middle part of 20th century were different as compared to present scenario. Many new issues have come up in recent times that has contributed and given a new shape to the Kamatapur movement. In the early part of 20th century particularly in North Bengal the immigration of upper caste Hindu Bengalis to the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas created tension among the native Koch Rajbanshis. A. Das states, "the influx of immigration created many social as well as economic problems for the Koch Rajbanshis. The economic dislocation and culture distortion has damaged the prospect of the Koch Rajbanshis as an independent nation-building force along with other ethno-communities around them, and planted the seeds of permanent conflict in the area. Moreover, due to the feudalistic system of landholding, the society had very little scope for capital formation and commodity production. In spite of the fact that the resources have a large share in creating national wealth, the people of this region (North Bengal) are still alienated, exploited and discriminated" (Debnath 2013: 140). Moreover, the failure of the government to check the illegal migrants and failure to take an appropriate policy for the socio-economic and cultural development and protection of the community has further increased the intensity of Kamatapur movement. Today the Kamatapur movement is trying to create an identity based on their culture and language which will help them to justify their claim of geographically demarcated land so that they can arrange the resources of this region for their own development. Similarly, they are also trying to mobilise people's consciousness towards their history, culture, and tradition to ensure their socio-cultural development.

CHAPTER-V

CONCLUSION

The present study 'Ethnic Movements in Assam: A Study of Koch Rajbanshis' is an attempt to study the ethnic identity movement of the Koch Rajbanshis in Assam. To understand the problem a field study was conducted during the month of July and August 2015. With this purpose an adequate size of sample was drawn from different socio-cultural and literary organizations including the common people who could throw light on this issue. Moreover, various secondary sources were also consulted during the course of the study.

Koch Rajbanshis are one of the oldest aboriginal ethnic groups of South Asia having predominantly Mongoloid features. There are different views and controversies with regard to the use of the term 'Koch' and 'Rajbanshi' synonymously. In the writings of orientalists, the Rajbanshis were regarded as purified group of 'Koch'. On the other hand native writers and litterateurs say that Rajbanshis were different from and superior to the Koch. Though this kind of controversies still continues in parts of North Bengal but in Assam 'Koch' and 'Rajbanshi' are treated as one term or one community.

Controversies also exists among historians and scholars on the racial origin of the Koch Rajbanshis. Some scholars opine that Koch Rajbanshis first came downwards from North China or Siberian region and settled in the North-eastern part of India. Some opine that they came from Tibet. Some considered them as belonging to Dravidian stock. Some considered them as non-Aryan and non-Hindu. Further still some called them an admixture of Mongolian blood. Considering all to conclude the controversies on the origin of Koch Rajbanshis identity it can be said that the Koches are of Mongoloid origin having their homeland in the Himalayan region, most probably in Tibet from where they travelled down probably along the course of the Teesta and the Dharla. They settled first in North Bengal and then spread gradually towards the east as well as towards the south and west, where they mixed with the Dravidians. They are of Mongoloid origin having close affinities with other Bodo tribes like Meches, Rabhas, Dhimals, Hajongs and Garos. But in course of time and in

some limited areas, they inter-married with the Dravidians and gave birth to a mixed Mongoloid-Dravidian race but having preponderant Mongoloid characters.

Historical memory of Kamatapur state and Koch kingdom is important to know the historical process of Koch Rajbanshs identity formation. In the contemporary social and political discourse, the Koch Rajbanshis feel proud to identify themselves with Kamatapur and are fighting for reconstruction of their Kamatapur state which is rooted in history. History says that Koch kingdom in Kamatapur was there for a long period of time from 13th century onwards and disappeared in the process of post independent state formation in India with the Indian state of Assam, West Bengal and partly in Bangladesh. It is believed that in 13th century Sandhya Rai established the kingdom of Kamata also known as Kamrup Kamata comprising many parts of present Northeast India and continued till 15th century.

It was in 16th century when Koches emerged as a strong and influential kingdom established by Bishwa Singha who ruled over Kamata from 1515 to 1540. The region of Bishwa Singha's Dynasty rule was known as 'Koch Kingdom' but in the course of time, this kingdom went through various names and lastly named as Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) in the colonial period. The Dynasty established by Bishwa Singha continued till middle part of 18th century with various ups and downs and many Koch kings ruled over Kamatapur kingdom. Dharmendra Narayan was the last king of Bishwa Singha's Dynasty. During this period the attacks of the Bhutanese was increased in the politics of Kamata kingdom. Bhutanese king directly interfered with Koch affaires and kingdom at Koch Behar. To get rid of the Bhutanese attacks king Dharmendra Narayan signed one treaty with East India Company on 5th April 1773. As a result of this treaty the Koch-Kamata alias Cooch Behar kingdom became a native state under colonial India and continued till 1947. According to the Indian Independence Act, section VIII, Koch-Kamata kingdom alias Cooch Behar gained its independence from the British rule and the treaty of 1773 became invalid. Till 28 August 1949 Koch Behar was an Indian State ruled by Maharaja. On 28 August 1949 by an agreement Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan king of Koch Behar ceded his state with the Dominion of the Government of India. The administrative power on Koch Behar was transferred to Government of India on 12 September 1949 and from that time onwards Koch Behar was ruled as a Chief Commissioner's Province. But on 1st

January 1950 Koch Bihar was transferred and merged with the Indian state of West Bengal.

The merger of Koch Behar as a district in state of West Bengal was a starting point which gave rise to identity consciousness among the Koch Rajbanshis. Many Koch Rajbanshi civil and political organizations argue that the merger of Koch Behar was against the will of the people and was a conspiracy of the government of West Bengal and the government of India. Socio-political organizations which was born out immediately after the merger of Koch Behar, 'Cooch Behar Congress', and 'Prajahit Sadhini Sabha' argued that Cooch Behar should not be merged with either Bengal, or Assam, rather it should be a union territory under the control of central government. Students' organisation like All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union (AKRSU) say that the merger of Koch Behar was the beginning and main factor which has disturbed the unity of the greater Koch Rajbanshi community. Even till today this is the main argument rises by the most of the Koch Rajbanshis socio-political organizations that are demanding and agitating for a separate Kamatapur state.

The study of the problem of Koch Rajbanshis socio-cultural identity from colonial to post-colonial period was another objective of the present study. Like any other identities in the world where the colonial rule was taking place, in case of India also the colonial modernity and colonial state emerged as a dominant source of discourse that initiated the process of classifying the Indian society, and constructed, produced and nurtured the natives' identities. The identity of the Koch Rajbanshi is one among such identities which was influenced in different ways by the colonial state. In the very first the orientalists along with some local writings took a discursive role towards the formation and popularization of the term 'Rajbanshi'. As stated earlier the orientalists regarded the Rajbanshis as purified group of 'Koch'. In their view it is found that Koch is a historically originated name of a Tribe but Rajbanhis is constructed and purified from Koches. In the writings of local writers it is found that the Rajbanshis were different from and superior to the Koch. This kind of argument that the Koch and the Rajbanshis were not similar and the Rajbanshis were superior to that of the Koch had been seen among the leaders of the 'Kshatriya Movement' through which Rajbanshis challenged the lower status assigned to them and claimed for upper status. The leaders of 'Kshatriya Movement' felt that it will help them to get upper caste status. On the other hand it was the colonial state that created the identity

consciousness among the Rajbanshsis to claim for upper caste status. Classifying the Indian society on the basis of caste the colonial discourse created the distinction between upper and lower castes and encouraged the lower caste groups to fight for upper caste status. From this point of view the colonial discourse have an important role in the formation and popularization of the term Rajbanshis.

It was the colonial state who represented, constructed and nurtured the identities of the natives by introducing census and classifying Indian society on the basis of caste. By recognizing caste as an official category for providing social protection, the official policy reinforced the existing caste identities. This policy, which apparently appeared as a welfare measure actually infused a new spirit among the lower castes to work for caste solidarity. On the other hand upper caste Hindus took it as a primary force to maintain their superiority. Koch Rajbanshis are victims of caste based politics of difference constructed and popularised by the colonial state. As a lower caste there were numerous examples where the Koch Rajbanshis were humiliated by the upper caste Hindus. In such a situation of social oppression the Koch Rajbanshis had only one option in their hand and that is to claim for *Kshatriya* status. Colonial government's policy of enumerating Hindu castes in the census reports was the immediate factor encouraged the Koch Rajbanshis to fight for caste solidarity. They tried to list their names in the census reports by claiming upper caste status as the census operation created a notion of belief among them that if they can have their names listed in the census reports their social rank would automatically be raised. From 1891 onwards under the leadership of Panchanan Barman the Koch Rajbanshis started to challenge the lower caste status assigned to them and claimed for upper caste status. Despite trying a lot to elevate their social status through the 'Kshatriya movement' they could not do so as most of the upper caste Hindus were opposed to it. They were the victim of cultural and social discrimination by the upper caste Hindus. Thus, it can be said that Koch Rajbanshis caste movement in the early part of the 20th century was an outcome of British lower caste policies and the social changes brought by the colonial discourse.

Socio-cultural as well as economic crisis was a prime reason of Koch Rajbanshis' present agitation. In North Bengal in the early 20th century the migration of rich Hindu Bengali gentry from other parts of West Bengal and erstwhile East Pakistan to the Koch Rajbanshi inhabited areas created a feeling of alienation and

deprivation. The influx of Hindu gentry created many social as well as economic problems for the Koch Rajbanshis including displacement from land, problems of livelihood, cultural threat etc. They were also victims of many land reforms acts adopted by the government of West Bengal. Though the purpose of most of the land reforms acts was distribution of land to the landless but in most of the cases the migrated rich Hindu Bengalis were beneficiaries of these acts in North Bengal at the cost of Rajbanshis. The discriminatory attitude towards the Koch Rajbanshis had also been seen in many literary works by the upper caste Hindus that created identity consciousness among the Koch Rajbanshis. There were many other socio-cultural factors where the Koch Rajbanshis were humiliated and socially excluded in their everyday life such as in maintaining the ritual hierarchy of food habit, marriage, entering into a place of worship and other kinds of socio-cultural interaction. In Assam it has been observed that due to hegemonic nature and discriminatory attitude of the caste Hindu Assamese groups towards the smaller ethnic groups, the feeling of alienation and identity consciousness emerged among many small ethnic groups of Assam including the Koch Rajbanshis. It may be said that the Koch Rajbanshis were the victims of caste based socio-cultural exclusion as well as economic marginalization and livelihood displacement that created the genesis of identity consciousness among them and it reflects in present autonomy and identity movement.

Koch Rajbanshis identity movement is a long drawn battle to preserve, protect and develop their distinct identity. The genesis of Kamatapur movement or Koch Rajbanshis nationalism was in the colonial period. The issue of development of Rajbanshi language and its consciousness also arose during the colonial period. After independence of India, identity assertion emerged amongst the Koch Rajbanshis due to merger of the kingdom of Koch Bihar with the Indian state of West Bengal against the will of the local peoples. After merger many socio-political organisations was formed both in Assam as well as in North Bengal and still agitating for a separate Kamatapur state and socio-cultural as well as economic development of their community. Their proposed state of Kamatapur consisted of 14 districts of Assam and 6 districts of North Bengal.

Apart from the creation of a separate state of Kamatapur the autonomy movement by the Koch Rajbanshis also looks for the recognition of Kamatapuri or

Koch Rajbanshi language under the Eight Scheduled of the Constitution of India. In the case of Assam, the movement also demand Scheduled Tribe status for the Koch Rajbanshis living in Assam. Scheduling the Koch Rajbanshi community in the category of ST is a long standing demand. Since long, particularly from1966, many Koch Rajbanshi socio-cultural organizations have been demonstrating and agitating in support of their demand. But yet this demand has not been addressed by the Government. Now in Assam the Scheduling issue of the Koch Rajbanshi is entirely politicised by the national as well as by the regional parties. It is observed that though the root of the historical origin of Kamatapur movement was in the colonial period but in case of Assam the movement got its momentum after the 1980s only. It was because of the expression of the frustration of the peoples on the politics played by the government towards their demand for Schedule Tribe. Another reason for the sudden eruption of the Kamatapur movement in Assam after 1980s was the inclusion of Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas into the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) which was formed in 2003.

In the course of the present study it was found that there are no such changes in the nature of Kamatapur movement over time. From the very beginning most of the socio-political as well as cultural organisations that are leading the movement has been following the path of nonviolent democratic protest movement in support of their demand. Road block, hunger strike, sending memorandum to the Government, calling Assam bandh etc are some way of demonstration they have been following. The leaders of the movement have generally failed to mobilize the common masses. One of the striking facts of the matter is that the Koch Rajbanshis of Assam do not have a political party of their own. Therefore, at the time of election they either support regional parties such as Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF), Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) or national parties. At the time of election though these parties promise to fulfil the aspirations of the Koch Rajbanshis but after the election the parties turn deaf ears to the problems of Rajbanshis. In North Bengal though the Kamatapur Peoples Party is somewhat active but due to not getting the support of the common people they are failing to get an adequate seat in elections. The state repression on this party is another matter of concern. A major change was seen in the nature of Kamatapur movement in 1995. Two militant organizations viz., 'Kamatapur Liberation Oraganization' (KLO) in North Bengal and 'Koch-Rajbanshi Liberation

Organization' (KRLO) in Assam were formed in support of a separate state of Kamatapur. With five years of its formation, KLO cadres were active terrorist activities. It is believed that this outfit was neutralised during the operation 'flush out' by the Bhutanese government in the month of December 2003 inside Bhutanese territory. The militant phase of Kamatapur movement still continues. A declaration was made in 2015 by NSCN (K) Chairman S. S. Khaplang, ULFA (I) Chairman Dr Abhizeet Asom, KLO Chairman Jiban Singha Koch and NDFB Chairman B. Saoraigwra. By this declaration all four outfits have formed a united armed organization named 'United National Liberation Front of West East Asia (UNLFW) to fight unitedly in support of their demands. Subsequently the democratic protest movement is also going on by the Koch Rajbanshis socio-cultural organizations. Last year there was a huge democratic protest by the Koch Rajbanshi community of Assam after the Central Government's decision to declare Telengana as separate state. Presently most of the North Bengal and Assam based socio-cultural organizations are trying to work together for socio-cultural development of their community.

One point needs to be underscored that though the historical reasons for claiming Kamatapur is similar in Assam as well as in North Bengal, yet there are some factors which contributed a lot to the Kamatapur movement in Assam. Issues of poverty, economic disparities, identity crisis and relative deprivation are some important factor that has given new shape to the Kamatapur movement in Assam. Though a superior feeling existed among some caste Hindu Assamese but unlike North Bengal the caste Hindu superiority and domination was not so much intense in Assam. After becoming part of Assam the undivided Goalpara district where the Koch Rajbanshi domination was there they contributed a lot towards the development of a composite Assamese culture and society. Many Assamese literary works were also composed and inspired by the glorious history of Koch Kingdom. But despite this a discriminatory attitude and socio-cultural hegemony by the caste Hindu Assamese is seen towards the Koch Rajbanshi and other ethnic groups of Assam. This has created lots of discomfort among Koch Rajbanshi.

From the last few decades particularly from 1980s it is observed that the identity consciousness among the Koch Rajbanshis is increasing and they are trying to find a way out to maintain, preserve and protect their cultural and linguistic heritage. It is also observed that the domination on the Koch Rajbanshis culture and identity

has emerged as a major factor that has made them become more conscious about their identity. They are increasingly in a state of fear of losing their culture and identity by the influence of dominant groups. At the same time the Government of Assam has also not been able to address the problems of the Koch Rajbanshis. Yet the state Government has not taken any policy to ensure the socio-economic development, protection and development of language and culture of the Koch Rajbanshis. Over the years the state Government has totally failed to take appropriate development measures for the Koch Rajbanshis leading to lots of serious problems among them.

At present Koch Rajbanshis are confronted by problems ranging from ethnic identity crisis, economic underdevelopment, land alienation, illiteracy, unemployment etc. Most of the Koch Rajbanshis in Assam are living below poverty line. No policy measure has been taken by the government to uplift their economic conditions. The claim for ST status is a long drawn demand. They were in hope that if they get the ST status they will at least be able to get some opportunities for their socio-economic and cultural development. But they are deprived from that too. After 1980s the immigration into Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas of lower parts of Assam emerged as a major problem. Relative deprivation is another factor which makes them feel deprived from opportunities of socio-economic development from the government. Like Koch Rajbanshi, Bodo is also an ethnic group (plain tribal) of Assam. Through socio-political movement the Bodo community of Assam are able to avail many benefits from the state as well as central government. Their socio-political movement is stronger as compared to Koch Rajbanshis. After a long fight, Bodo language got constitutional recognition in the year 2003 and was included in Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India. Following the year 2003 they again got Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) under which they got some amount of autonomy for self rule and opportunities for socio-economic and cultural development. Like Bodos, though the Koch Rajbanshis' autonomy agitation for socio-economic development is a long drawn battle but they get nothing. This feeling of deprivation is an important reason which has fuelled the Kamatapur movement in Assam in recent times.

It may be safely argued that the Kamatapur movement is in many ways the outcome of the socio-political and economic marginalization of Koch Rajbanshis. Koch Rajbanshis who once ruled over large parts of Northeast India suffered economic hardship and political marginalization due to the attack from Bhutias and to

get rid this they came under British India as a native state. After the merger of their princely state 'Cooch Behar' with the Indian state of West Bengal they systematically became victims of socio-cultural and economic marginalization that has created a feeling of alienation, deprivation and fear of losing their distinct identity. In the early part of 20th century their culture and language suffered due to the caste movement that aimed at assimilation of Rajbanshis with the upper castes. During that time in North Bengal the immigration of upper caste Hindu Bengalis to the Koch Rajbanshi dominated areas created tension among the native Koch Rajbanshis. They were victims of social-cultural discrimination and domination by the upper caste Assamese in Assam and Bengalis in North Bengal. Their social identity suffered due to colonial caste policies which led them to fight for caste solidarity. Today the Kamatapur movement is trying to create an identity on the basis of their culture and language. This will help them to justify their claim of geographically demarcated land so that they can arrange the resources of this region for their own development. Similarly, they are also trying to mobilise people's consciousness towards their history, culture, and tradition to ensure their socio-cultural development.

As regards the future of Kamatapur movement it may be said that the movement will continue till the basic problems of the Koch Rajbanshis are addressed. The community members who are leading the Kamatapur movement instead of mobilizing identity on the basis of their culture and language needs to search solution in development and good governance. Considering all the findings during the course of the present study it may be suggested that several steps may be taken to address the problems of Koch Rajbanshis. Firstly, it is of urgent importance to conduct a survey of the social, economic and political conditions of the Koch Rajbanshis of North-east India. Such a survey will help us to understand the socio-economic and political problems that Koch Rajbanshis have been facing. Any kind of policy aimed to address the issues related to this community is bound to fail if we do not have a clear understanding of their socio-economic and political conditions. Secondly, immediate steps should be taken to preserve and protect the peculiarities and particularities of this community. The feeling of alienation and relative deprivation can be addressed only by protecting their very distinctiveness and by improving socio-cultural and economic conditions. Thirdly, the language controversy is another important issue. To put an end to the debate on Rajbanshi language and their aspiration to develop,

their mother tongue should be given constitutional recognition. Fifthly, economic development of the region should be accelerated. As most Rajbanshis live in abject conditions of poverty, certain political-economic measures have to be taken urgently for the economic security of the Rajbanshis living below poverty line. Along with this, spreading of quality education and creation of employment avenues may go a long way in solving such problems. Moreover, Rajbanshis should get their socio-economic and political dues to be governed by them as a true democracy in India.

The present study has some limitations. The study did not make a comparative analysis of Koch Rajbanshis identity movement with other such movements in Northeast India. Another limitation is that the present study mainly focuses on the socio-cultural identity of Koch Rajbanshis. It could not look into the political as well as the economic problem of the community. Another concern is the role of women. Women have made considerable contribution in the course of the Kamatapur movement but it was also not covered in the present study.

Northeast India's durable disorder is often explained by the region's supposed underdevelopment and poor integration into the pan-Indian mainstream. Sanjib Baruah argues this kind of explanation as failed narratives. He states that continued faith in the failed narratives of national development and nation-building can be quite dangerous in the present global conjuncture. Therefore, to imagine Northeast India beyond durable disorder India's policy towards Northeast has to be changed. Emphasis should be given to acquire access to global markets and technology to overcome the handicaps of landlocked condition of the region through the policy like 'Look East'. It can be said that this kind of policy could create a transnational space for a less territorialized version of the politics of recognition that will reduce the ethno-national conflict of Northeast India. The national security centric discourse about Northeast and the techniques of counter insurgency applied by the Indian state should be changed. It is heavily pro-state and insensitive to the vulnerability of common man and dismissive of the frequent transgression of the rights of its own citizens by the state (Baruah 2009).

To conclude it may be said that the Indian state has not been able to address the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual problems of the indigenous peoples living in India. In case of North-east India, particularly in Assam, the Central as well

as the State government has failed to resolve the ethnic problems, the ongoing ethnic conflicts by the various ethnic communities in Assam including the Koch Rajbanshis. The identity movement by these ethnic groups has thrown up issues of terrorism, economic stagnancy, cultural threats, human rights violation, political instability to name a few. To maintain national integrity, political stability and socio-economic development of the state, it is an urgent need and responsibility of the Indian state to address the multilayered problems that the ethnic and tribal groups of Assam have been facing.

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(Interview Shedule)

1. In your social life, what is the identity that you would like to consider?put (√)

    a. Koch Rajbanshi.

    b. Assamese.

    c. Bengoli.

2. What is Kamatapur for Koch Rajbanshis?

    a. It is a Royal state.

    b. It is a historical state.

    c. Both (a) and (b).

3. What is your opinion about the origin of Kamatapur Movement?

    a. Pre-colonial period.

    b. Colonial period.

    c. Post-colonial period.

4. Why Koch Rajbanshis want Kamatapur?

    a. To avoid cultural differences.

    b. To achieve development.

    c. Identity of Kamatapur is the identity of Koch Rajbanshis.

5. What are the causes responsible for the Kamatapur Movement?

    a. Ethnic identity crisis of the Koch Rajbanshis.

    b. Land alienation.

    c. Impact of colonial administration.

    d. Wrong policies of the government.

    e. Creation of political elites.

    f. Impact of modern civilization.

    g. All the above.

6. Who are the supporters of the Kamatapur Movement?

    a. Only Koch Rajbanshis.

b. All the tribal groups living in the Koch Rajbanshis dominated areas.

c. Both Tribal and Non-tribal living in the Koch Rajbanshisdominated areas.

7. What is the government response towards the Kamatapur Movement?

a. Positive.

b. Negative.

c. Partially positive.

8. Do you have any comment on the government responses towards the Kamatapur Movement?

9. What kind of human rights violation is taking place during the Kamatapur Movement?

a. Arrest without warrant.

b. Torture.

c. Murder.

d. Sexual harassments./rape/abduction.

e. All the above.

f. Custodial deaths as well as encounter

10. What is the impact of Kamatapur Movement on the socio-political life of the Koch Rajbanshis?

a. Positive.

b. Negative.

c. Both positive and negative.

11. What kind of major challenges the Koch Rajbanshis are confronted at present?

a. Ethnic identity crisis.

b. Land alienation.

c. Illiteracy.

d. Economic underdevelopment.

e. All the above.

12. What is the possible solution of the Koch Rajbanshis problem?

a. Preservation and development of Koch Rajbanshis cultural identity.

b. Economic development of Koch Rajbanshis.

c. Creation of separate Kamatapur state.

d. Check on land alienation.

e. All the above.

13. Do you have any comment on the present condition of Koch Rajbanshis?

Appendix 2

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 saidpowers, 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 purpoting 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   V. P. Menon

Maharaja of Cooch Behar   Advisor to the Govt. of India

                                                                                Ministry of States

(Source: *Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbansis Imagination* by Arup Jyoti Das, Published in 2009, Arunima Deka Publication, Guwahati.)

Appendix 3

Demand of Kamatapur Peoples' Party

The KPP or Kamtapur Peoples' Party on 26.09.97 submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, Indrakumar Gujral, through the divisional commissioner of North Bengal, Jalpaiguri division. The 11 points charter of demands were —

1. In order to enable the Kamtapuri speaking people to govern their own lives by reason of ethnic, linguistic, historical, cultural and social distinction from the rest of the people of West Bengal a separate statehood namely 'KAMTAPUR' be created within the framework of India comprising the whole of North Bengal and adjoining Kamtapuri populated areas in India, in accordance with the article (3) of the Constitution of India.

2. With a view to advancing the language of the Kamtapuris it be included in the 8th schedule of the Constitution of India.

3. On the basis of the lease-year of 1971 (Indira-Mujib accord) the expulsion of illegal foreigners from Kamptapuri areas of North Bengal be implemented soon.

4. In order to curb the illegal influx of immigrants in North Bengal and adjacent Kamtapuri dominated areas, the 'INNER & PERMIT LINE' must immediately be imposed on the said areas.

5. With a view to restraining the intrusion of illegal foreigners in North Bengal, barbed wire be erected on the borderline of both India and Bangladesh without further delay.

6. Regarding various cultural programmes of Kamtapurians for the Kamtapuri people of North Bengal should be arranged to telecast on the television by opening Fulbari Doordarshan substation centre immediately.

7. With a view to ensuring an all round development of North Bengal, the 'Teesta irrigation project' should be immediately declared as a national project.

8. In order to enrich the culture of the Kamtapuri people of North Bengal as well as neighbouring areas, different types of cultural programmes of Kamtapurians be broadcast through 'All India Radio, Siliguri at par with daily the programmes in Nepali by the All

India Radio, Kurseong.

9. In respect of promoting higher education for the aboriginal people of North Bengal a central university namely Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma University be set up in the district of Coochbehar immediately.

10. Regarding exchange of enclaves, Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and Bagladeshi enclaves in India be exchanged without further delay.

11. In respect of pre and post independent history of North Bengal a 'WHITE PAPER' regarding economic status, culture, population and ethnical identity of the origional people of North Bengal be published immediately.

(Source: Kamtapuri Struggle A Reply To Injustices, People's march, Voice of the Indian Revolution, Volume 5, No. 10, October 2004, [accessed March 18, 2004] < http://www.peoplesmarch.com/archives/ 2004/oct2k4/Kamtapuri.htm>)

Appendix 4

Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India by Nikhil Kumar Ray, President of Kamtapur Peoples' Party on 28.09.2005.

From

NIKHIL KUMAR RAY

President

Kamatapur People's Party

To

The Hon'ble Prime Minister

Govt. of India

New Delhi -= 110001

In Ref: Letter, Dated 28-09-2005

For New Kamatapur State

And for Recognition of Kamatapur language

Under VIII Schedule of the Constitution

Of India

<u>MEMORANDUM</u>

Sir,

Under the reasonable necessity and obligation, I compel to draw your sincere attention to the fact that the long standing demand for New Kamatapur State comprising of 6 District of North Bengal is insistent and compelling.

It is compelling because-

1. It is a demand that first initiated by Uttar Khanda Dal (UKD) in 1969 i.e. 39 years ago for emancipating the kamatees people from the tentacles of Bengal Tyrannism. For which one Gagen Roy, Jagadish Roy and many others sacrifice their life for the cause of separate state.

2. Kamatapur peoples party renewed the Andolan in the name of Kamatapuri Andolan in 1996. Again in 1999, thousands of people were arrested, raided, totured, jailed and hundreds of people were sacrifice their life for their cause of –

   (a) New Kamatapur State

   (b) Recognition of Kamatapur language, political, economical and cultural development of all the jatis and janajatis of the area concerned.

3. The colonial type exploitation, oppression and negligence should be stopped in North Bengal.

4. Massive influx of foreign Nationals should be indentified and evicted to stop the tensions born out of the struggles for mere survival and again to stop cross boarder terrorism, black marketing, dacoity, smuggling etc.

5. To stop rudimentary agriculture, massive poverty, endemic employment and to establish industry, agro- industry, agricultural-irrigation projects etc.

6. To stop cultural exploitation and to provide Kamatapuri Language and Kamatapuri cultural of their own.

7. To stop natural resource exploitation i.e. forest products, agricultural products, minerals etc. in North Bengal.

8. To stop illegal and criminal activities and to maintain law and order situation, separate state is compelling.

9. To fulfill urges and aspirations of Kamatees people for better identity in concerned area.

10. It is historically proper, geographically desirable, economically essential, constitutionally correct and legally justified.

In conclusion it is your only judicious state-craft that can fulfill the urges and aspirations of the people of North Bengal carving out a New Kamatapur State comprising of Six district of North Bengal namely Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda under the art. 3 of the constitution of India.

If the process of making separate state would not be allowed to start sharply, we have no other alternative than to lunch democratic movement to get justice and redress.

Thanking you in anticipation of your favourable action _____

Enclose: (i) A Xerox copy of memorandum to the Prime Minister of India.

Dated 28.09.2005

(ii) A Xerox copy of memorandum to the Minister of Home Affairs

Dated 28.9.2005

(iii) A Xerox copy of Mass deputation to the D. M.

Dated 25.04.2005

(iv) A Xerox copy of memorandum to the Director General & Inspector General Of Police, West Bengal

Dated: 27.06.2005

(v) A Xerox copy of memorandum to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Govt. of India

06.01.1999

<div align="right">

I Remain,

Yours faithfully

Nikhil Kumar Ray

President

Kamatapur peple's Party

</div>

(Source: Centre for Koch Rajbanshis Studies and Development (CKRSD), Guwahati, Kamrup (M), Assam.)

Appendix 5

Memorandum submitted to Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India through the Chief Minister of Assam on 23.01.2004 by All Koch-Rajbonshi Students' Union (AKRSU).

ALL KOCH-RAHNONSHI STUDENTS' UNION

CENTRAL COMMITTEE

H.O BONGAIGAON, KAMATAPUR

PIN – 783380

A
MEMORANDUM
TO
DR. MANHONAN SINGHJI
HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA
GOVT. OF INDIA
NEW DELHI – 110 001
(Through the Chief Minister of Assam)

Dispur, Dated the 23rd of June 2004

On

Dharma Pogramme

SUBJECT

ON THE MATTER OF CREATION OF A
SEPARATE STTE "KAMATAPUR"
SUBMITTED BY
ALL KOCH- RAJBONGSHI STUDENTS' UNION (AKRSU)
H.O: BONGAIGAON, ASSAM

Correspondence Address

Vill: Bhakarivita (Valipara)
P.O & Dist: Bongaigaon, PIN – 783 380
Ph. No: (03664) 236527 (R) 94350 21114 (M)
(03666) 261333 (R) 94340 25633(M)

To,

DR. MANMOHAN SINGHJI,

Hon'ble Prime Minister of India

NEW DELHI – 110 001

SUBJECT: MEMORANDUM- ON THE MATTER OF CREATION OF SEPARATE STATE "KAKMATAPUR" AND OTHER SOCIO-ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT FOR KOCH RAJBONSHI NATIONALITY .

Most Respected Sir,

We the following signatories on behalf of all Koch-Rajbonshi Students' Union beg to submit and to grave your kind attention to the fact stated as below.

1. That Sir, Koch-Rajbonshi is an Indian Nationality (A tribe of great Mongoloid origin), who found the "KAMATA" the Koch kingdom, comprising entire North Bengal, Lower Assam, Meghalaya extended up to Tripura – by Maharaj Viswa Singh, subsequently ruled over by Maharaja Naranarayana, Viswa Mahabir Chilarai during 16th century, till the end of 30th August 1949.

OUT OF ENOUGH SUPPORTS WE QUOTE SOME AUTHORATIVE REMARKS OF JCERTAIN RENOWNED SCHOLARS:

(a). "THE COCK KINGDOM OF THE 15TH CENTURY WAS FOUND BY KOCH TRIBE ………….. Prof. P.N. Gohainbarua (Glimpse of the History of Assam).

(b). "…………………. Koches are at any rate represented by Kacharies who inhabits in Nawgaon , Goalpara, Koch Behar and neighbouring countries …………………………………" Dr. G.A. Grierson., Director General, Geographical Survey of India.

(c). "…………………………………. The Koches as belongs to the Mongoloid Group of Tribals of North Eastern India ………………" E.S. Gait (Renowned Historian), B. Hudson, Colonel Delton, W.A Waddle, RAibahadur K. Baruah, Dr. S.K. Bhuyan.

2. Historians and authors like Riselay, Dalton, E.S. Gait B.C Allen, Dr. Sunity Kr. Chetterjee, R.C. Majumdar, Gierson and many other opined and recorded that the Joch Rajbonshi who are indigenous people of North Eastern India originally belonged to Indfo Mongoloid tribes (Nationality) who found Koch Dynasty as early as 12th century flourishing their Kingdom "Kamata" during 15th/16th century during the reigh of Maharaja Naranarayana (who was contemporary to Akbar – the great Moghul emperor) dominated and subjugated the entire North East India.

That Sir, as stated above the rules ruled over the Koch Kingdom till 30th August 1949. The Koch Kings ruled over ancient Kamrup, North Bengal, Sylhet, Kachar, Tripura, Manipur – and wielded great powers and influenced over vast tracts of lands of neighbouring states.

But after August 15th 1947, Coch Behar state integrated with the Union of India, recognized and included in the list of "C" category state along with the state of Ajmir, Bhopal and Coorg.

Table –III

Territory of India

(A) As in the Original constitution 1949

UNION

State in a part A	State in Part B	State in Part C	Territories in Part C
1. Assam	1. Hyderabad	1. Ajmir	1. The Andaman &
2. Bihar	2. J&K	2. Bhopal	Nicobar Island
3. Bombay	3. Madhya Bharat	3. Bilaspur	2. Acquired Territories
4. Madhya Pradesh	4. Mysore	4. Cooch Behar	
5. Madras	5. Patiala and	5. Coorg	
6. Orissa	East Punjab		
7. Punjab			
8. The United Provinces			
9. West Bengal			

The agreement so made by then Governor General of India which is very clearly revealed in a D/O letter No. F-15 (19), P/40, Ministry of State, New Delhi, dated 30th

August 1949, addressed to the last ruler of Koch Kingdom, Moharaj Jogadipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, K.C.I.T, Maharaja of Cooch Behar.

We are pleased to quote this letter as under:

Do No. F.15(19).p/40   Ministry of States

                                                         New Delhi

                                               The 30th August 1949

My Dear Maharaja Sahib

In connection with the agreement concluded between the Governor General of India and your Highness for the irregration of Cooch Behar state your Highness raised certain points on 28.08.1949 with the Government of India gave considered them and accept the following agreement.

1. It is the intention of the Government of India to administer for the present terrorist of the Cooch Behar state as a centrally administered area under a Chief Commissioner.
2. All constructs and agreement entered 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 of agreements is earlier repugnant to the previous of any law made applicable to the state of incosistent with 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 state. Your highness brother and other members of RULING Family will also be paid allowances from the revenues of the state as per list attached.
4. The responsibility for the Cooch Behar state Forces will be 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 pension or gratuity or compensation to which they may be emitted under rules of state.
5. Adequate guards will be provided for the protection of your Highness person and palace.
6. No land of building begin Your Highness private property shall be requisitioned or 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 fixed rate in existence immediately before the transfer of administration to Government of India. Water supply will be provided free of charges 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 (Three) nominees of your highness and 2 (Two) nominees of Government. This trust will be in charge of all Temples in the state will also administer properties of the temples both inside and outside the state. In the event of the Zamindaris which are Debutter property Government will ensure that the trust has adequate resources to fulfill its objects.

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 Trustees will be bedidey your highness. Their 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 yours Highness marriage or special repairs to the palace and your unforeseen expenditure.

11. The administration of the Moharajkumar Trust Fund with a corpus of Rs. 4,86,000 shall be formally vested in a Trust of which your Highness and their Highness of Jaipur Dewas Junior shall be trustees.

12. Your Highness will be entitled to hold customary Dorbars and troops present at the capital will take part in the Dasserah 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 privilages and dignities which has been finalized in consultation with the Rajpramukhe of Union and other states. Your Highness will see that the Memorandum deals adequately with the various suggestions made by the rulers from time regarding their and priveleges.

With kinds regards,

Lieutenant – Colones Highness **Your's Sincerely**
Maharaj Sir Jagadipendra Narayan **V.P. Menon**
Bhup Bahadur, K.C.I.T.
Maharaja of Cooch Behar,
Cooch Behar (Bengal)

3. After handing over of the Cooch Behar state to Central – the most illustrious son of mother India, Sardar Vallabhvai Patel, the then Home Minister of India wrote a letter

to Sri Nanjppa, the Chief Commissioner of Cooch Behar state in turn responsibility of the Union Government towards its subjects.

We therefore take the opportunity to quote that too, which has bore the historical value.

From Minister, Home   Camp-Biraja House

To Sri Nanjappa   Malabar Hill

Chief Commissioner of Cooch Behar   Bombay, 11th September 1949

On the handing over of Cooch Behar to Central administration I send to its people my best wishes and assurance behalf of the Government of India that through far, their interest welfare will claim our close and intimate attention I am fully aware of the many problems, political and economical which effect the state can I am confidence that with their co-operation and assistance we would succeed in solving them in the best interest of the state and the country for their happiness and prosperity, unity and mutual adjustment between the constituent elements of the population are essential pre requisite without this such resources and personal as we may able spare them would avail little.

I hope therefore, that the people of Cooch Behar will work with single mindedness and devotee a united team for their own betterment and to achieve their place in the political and administrative set-up of India.

To accept transfer to territory from a ruler is no small responsibility which re we feel on this occasion. To give up sovereignty over territory is no mean sacrifice. I am grateful to him for the spirit of accommodation and understanding which he has displayed and the prompt manner which he accepted our advice.

May he and he and his people be happy, prosperous under the new dispensetion which is being inaugurated today.

4. But after handing over the Cooch Behar state to the Central Administration what had happened to the state of KAMATAPURI people and Cooch Behar state itself?? the tragic history as we have record today and to cite the examples to your honours and in fact beyond description. The Cooch Behar state and the KAMATAPURI

people were made a scape goat for the interest of Union of India fulfill the political aspiration of some politicians and for the rearrangement of British India by its Divide and Rule policy. The mainland of Cooch Behar state (Kamata State) was divided into divisions. The Rangpur district where the Koch Rajbonshi were the largest single majority was given to then East Pakistan, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri district demarcated with West Bengal, Purniya district with Bihar and district of undivided Goalpara, Kamrup and Mongaldoi district with present Assam.

The Koch Rajbonshi has become feminity in each state including Bangladesh.

AND THIS IS WHAT WE THINK IS THE DIVIDE AND RILE POLICY

5. In the present context the Government of Assam, West Bengal, Bihr, Meghalaya, Tripura had completed to declare and recognize the Koch Rajbonshi as Most Other Backward Community. In some states given them plain Tribal status caste status etc.

But why??

As these people due to historical need and for interest of the Union of India had been scapegoat they have become minority in each of these states, they have lost their political representation, concurred for their economic upliftment, reduced 80% of them into day labourer, for more backward man than plain tribal people of Assam. West Bengl, Meghalaya and Tripura, educationally so much backward that more than 70% of them are illiterate. Socially they are living in the lowest category among other community. Their ethnic identity is on the verge of dying –bed, if "Transport is Civilization" (R. Kippling) than these people are uncivilized world who look after them ? Government ? Politicians ? No, not at all.

6. With creation of separate Bodoland or B.A.C or B.T.C area nearly 8 (eight) lakhs of Koch-Rajbonshis are within B.A.C and they are practically reduced into second class citizen there. Fate or destiny is so cruel to us that once dominating, ruling community is now become the THIRD CLASS CITIZEN in Indian Union.

What more we can narrate? All these are based on facts. We invite facts founding enquiry from the Indian Government.

7. DEMAND FOR ENSCHEFULEMENT OF KOCH-RAJBONSHI FOR PLAIN TRIBAL STATUS.

The most dismal fact is that despite staggering demands and persistence efforts which sets in motion since 1967. We failed to evoke any positive response so far and resulted in utter frustration and gradual degradation their major segment of this aboriginal tribe of Assam, who are the most neglected and unprotected constitutionally in the sphere of social, political economic backwardness.

After enquiry by Parliament Select Community having its positive view the pending bill for enschedulement of Koch Rajbonshi in the list of S.T. (Plains), is still hanging in the balance. Through the bill has been tabled, still it has no set into motion.

It is really unfortunate, a glaring negligence to this backward tribe.

8. WHY KAMATAPUR STATE??

That Madam, taking into accounts of the above historical background, the "All Koch-Rajbonshi Students' Union" has no option but to demand for a separate state "KAMATAPUR STATE" as HOMELAND for Koch Rajbonshis for their self determination, self planning for their Social, Economic, Cultural, Political, Linguistic and Educational upliftment and for their list ETHNIC IDENTITY.

We vowed along with the SEVENTY LAKHS of Koch Rajbonshis of Assam, Koch-RAjbonshis of North Bengal and other adjacent areas to set in motion through peaceful democratic movement to have a seprte HOMELAND for Koch-Rajbonshis. The people of erstwhile Cooch Behar state which had integrated with the Union of India on 30th August, 1949 take no rest unless we can fulfill our cherished desire.

Though the Union Govt. have divided the ancient kingdom into different administrative units, we show you the map of the proposed Homeland which will on the basis of historical background comprise of the present administrative units of Assam and West Bengal.

Assam   :   Dhubri District, Kokrajhar District, Bongaigaon

                          District, Goalpara District, Barpeta District, Nalbari

District, Kamrup District, Darang District, Morigaon District, Sonitpur District, & Lakhimpur District.

West Bengal: Kochbehar District, Jalpaiguri District, Darjeeling District, Dinajpur District, & South Dinajpur District.

We hope humble crave the kind attention for the Government of India, hope for kind consideration for our justified demand within the framework of Indian Constitution.

<div align="center">

We remain Sir,

For and on Behalf of

ALL KOCH-RAJBONSHI STUDENTS' UNION

</div>

Biswajit Ray ` Parbajyoti Das

President General Secretary

<div align="center">

ALL KOCH-RAJBONSHI STUDENT'S UNION

Bogaigaon, Assam

</div>

Usha Deka Maya Das

President General Secretary

<div align="center">

ALL ASSAM KOCH-RAJBONSHI MOHILLA SANMILONI

</div>

(Source: All Koch-Rajbanshi Students' Union (AKRSU), Head Office- Bongaigaon, Assam, Pin- 783380.)