

**Concluding Observations:**

In the preceding chapters, it is revealed that the vast region to the north-east of India between the foothill of the eastern Himalaya mountain ranges and extreme North of Bengal where the Koches, an indigenous tribe and ancestors of Naranarayan, had established their kingdom in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This region is known by different names from mythological age as such '*Pragjyotisha*', '*Kamarupa*', '*Pragjyotisha - Kamarupa*' and '*Lauhitya*' with its power of centre at '*Pragjyotishapura*' or '*Pragjyotishanagari*' near present Gauhati town, up to 13<sup>th</sup> century. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century, the region came to be known as such names as '*Kamata*' or '*Kamatapur*', '*Kamru*' alias '*Chaulistan*' and the centre of power shifted to '*Kamatapur*' or '*Kamatanagari*.' near present Koch Behar town and ruins of which locally known as '*Rajpata*'. It is also fact that from the mythological period, this region witnessed the ebb and flow of many dynasties in course of its historical development.

With the establishment of the Koch kingdom by one Bisu or Biswa Singha, in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this region came to be known as '*Couch*', '*Koch*', or '*Kochbehar*'. He first established at Hingulabus and then shifted it to *Kamatapura*, the capital of the former kingdom under the Khen rulers and finally it came to be known as Koch Behar or Cooch Behar, means 'abode of the Koches'.

The Mongoloid or Dravido-Mongoloid and Austric tribes such as Koch, Mech, Tharu, Bado, Rabha, and Kachari were the major population of the region and mixing of different ethnic groups of various cultures continued from the mythological period. Among them, the ancestors of King Naranarayan has been described in the epigraphic records and in Indian scriptures as *Kiratas*, *Kuvachas* and *Kambojas* and many mythological stories were attached to them and in the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century with their rise to political power, they took the designation 'Koch', and named the dynasty as Koch dynasty. However, they have very close affinity with other tribes of the region such as Mech, Tharu, Bado, Rabha, and Kachari and there are major differences in the socio-cultural pattern among them. The Koches are the people of basically Mongoloid origin.

However, due to their living with other racial / ethnic groups such as Dravidian, Aryan speakers and Austric of the region for a long period and admixture with them, the characteristics of theirs are also mixed the Koches. The arrival of non-tribal Brahmins and Kayasthas of the Aryan socio-cultural fold from Mithila and Bengal, under the royal patronage of the ruling families of the region from 13<sup>th</sup> century, another socio-cultural characteristic merged with the Koches. Thus, physiognomically Mongoloid features are predominant; Dravidian features are dominant with regard to the skin colour and culturally, Koches have close affinity with Aryan speakers. At present, thus, they are a mixed breed of many races. S. K. Chatterji described them as "Indo-Mongoloid" or "mixed Austric-Dravidian-Mongoloid". With their rise to political power as tribal chiefs/kings and Hinduisation, the Brahmins, for their own interest, attached mythological stories with the Koches and described them as *Kshatriya* of Brahmanical fold which was a tradition of any ruling dynasty of the Hindu tradition.

It was Hariya Mandal, grandfather of King Naranarayan and a Koch selected as 'chief' by 12 Mech families of the village Chikanagram in the Khuntaghat Pargana in the modern Goalpara, who organised his fellow tribes and formed 'clan based chieftdom' in the peripheral area of the region with considerable amount of power by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This incident seems to be very important and new in two senses. On the one hand, the selection of Hariya Mandal, a cultivator of paddy and cotton, as '*Mandal*' or chief point to the fact that he had enough economic capabilities and leadership qualities to organize his fellowmen and to protect and expand his chieftdom all around. On the other hand, the tribal people, who had only the political experience of being 'ruled' now raised their position as 'ruler' on local basis with some administrative measures and engaged themselves in inter-tribal and tribal-non-tribal conflicts to establish political power.

In the meanwhile, Hussein Shah of Bengal dethroned the last Khen king Nilambar in 1498AD and captured the region. However, he could not establish his full sway over the region due to the organised and repeated opposition of both the non-tribal Bhuyans and the tribal chiefs, which ultimately forced the successors Hussein Shah to retreat from this region. This made a political vacuum and 'stateless' situation in the region which gave golden opportunity to Bisa (Biswa Singha), the son of Hariya Mandal to lay the

foundation of the Koch kingdom. Thus, Bisa, a son of a mere tribal chief, with his successful leadership and military genius started guerrilla and aggressive warfare against the Bhuyans as well as against the Successor of Hussein Shah, in which he became victorious and brought larger territories under his sway and transformed the chieftdom of his father into a kingdom. After the considerable territorial expansion, Biswa Singha shifted the center of power from his native village Chikanagram of lower Assam to Hingulabus, a village in the plains of Western Duars temporarily and finally to Kamatapur (Koch Behar) for the consolidation of power and organization of administration. By these, he moved from the periphery to the heartland of political power and established his strong control over the plain alluvial land for the surplus generating agrarian economy.

The present study suggests that the secret of success of Biswa Singha in establishing the kingdom is multi-dimensional. Firstly, being a born leader, he organised the entire strength of all tribes of the region and followed a realistic policy to fulfill his political ambitions. Thus, at the early stage, he took the policy of the tricks and guerrilla war tactics realizing the real situation that the power of the Bhuyans was superior and his power was not sufficient for a direct challenge. He took the policy of open challenge after strengthening his position. This shows his political acumen. Secondly, by his diplomatic tactics, Biswa Singha prevented the powerful Bhuyans of the region to offer a united resistance against him and ultimately Bhuyans were forced to accept his over lordship. Thirdly, the existing political confusion, stateless situation and intra-Bhuyans conflicts offered Biswa Singha to consolidate his power. Fourthly, Biswa Singha remained neutral in the conflict between the Ahoms and the Padshah of Bengal considering the infancy of his kingdom. Lastly, under estimation and ignorance of his power by both the Ahoms and the Padshah of Bengal provided Biswa Singha enough time to consolidate his power. Thus, inspite of tribal origin, Biswa Singha was a born leader, a desperate military genius, a realistic diplomat and an efficient organizer who not only established the kingdom and organised its proper administration, but also institutionalized and legitimized his kingdom by adopting Brahmanical socio-cultural pattern, which gave him '*Khshatriya*' identity of Brahmanical fold. He assumed high-sounding name Biswa Singh of Brahmanical fold, discarding mere Bisa of Tribal fold and initiated the process of socio-political transformation of the multi-ethnic tribes and non-tribes of the region which

facilitated the future Socio-cultural homogenization and assimilation on a great scale during the reign of his son and successor king Naranarayan.

Although, Biswa Singha, during his life time could not shake off 'lip-deep acknowledgement' of the Ahom's vassalage, but was able to leave a strong well organised formal 'lip-deep semi-independent kingdom', for his successors, on which his illustrious son Naranarayan (1540-1587) undertook aggressive military conquests.

The reign of King Naranarayan (1540-1587), the main area of our study, heralded a new dawn in the history of the northeast India and is considered as the 'golden age' in the annals of Koch Behar for various remarkable successes and socio-cultural activities. He is considered as the greatest king of the medieval northeastern India. He became victorious in a series of wars in northeast India and political power of the Koches reached its peak. King Naranarayan's court was not only adorned with a large number of great scholars but many scholars, such as Sankaradeva and others also got shelter and patronage of the Koch king Naranarayan. As a result, development of society, culture, religions, languages and literature reached its climax. It is no exaggeration then that he is considered as '*Bikramaditya*' of northeast India.

He inherited from his father not only a strong kingdom, but also enmity of the Ahom state, which incessantly came in the way of his political ambition. Naranarayan lucky enough to have process a brother like Chilarai, a great general and warrior of the period, along with whom he launched an 'aggressive and systematic military warfare', which was crowned with brilliant success. By this 'aggressive and systematic military warfare policy', they not only revoked the Ahom vassalage and defeated the Ahoms but also established the Koch hegemony over the entire northern bank of the Brahmaputra and the giant, once their nominal master was forced to become a feudatory of the Koches. This defeat made an overwhelming reaction among all the rulers (both independent and semi-independent under the Ahoms) of the whole of the northeast India and as a result some rulers (Kachari, Manipur and Khairam) voluntarily accepted the Koch supremacy by offering annual tributes. Some started war preparation to save themselves from the aggression of the victorious Koches, for which a series of whirlwind campaigns were directed successively against such disobedient and potentates of Jayantiya, Tripura, Sylhet and Dimarua and they were forced to accept the Koch supremacy and agreed to

pay annual tributes. But he did not annex these conquered kingdoms of the north-east considering practical problems such as the long distance, communication problem, geographical difficulties and insufficient machineries to do so. This realistic and innovative policy could only be comparable with the policy of great Gupta king Samudragupta's southern campaign in forth century AD, who due the such problems, did not annex the Southern states of India.

But, within few years the acceptance of the Koch supremacy and the promise to pay annual tributes, proved to be 'a lip-deep acknowledgement' of the Koch political supremacy and a hollow promise of annual tributes in future and left no permanent result. This all happened with the defeat of the Koch army as well as Chilarai which greatly encouraged the subjugated states of northeastern India to shake-off the Koch vassalage, stop agreed annual tributes and some of them even declared independence.

However, the present study revealed some important political influences and material gains, which cannot be denied. Firstly, king Naranarayan, at least for some time, established his political power and influence over the territories from his North-eastern campaigns which led to the peak period of the Koch political expansion and which is only comparable with the political expansion of the kingdom of Bhaskaravarman of Pushyvarman family of 7<sup>th</sup> century AD of the region. The names of king Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai spread like wild fire among the masses and contemporary rulers of the whole India as great warriors for which they were respected and-feared. King Naranarayan even established friendship with the great Mughal emperor Akbar on equal status. Secondly, the booty and tributes, which were gathered during the expeditions and few successive annual installments, enabled him to continue aggressive warfare, to establish standing army, to introduce navy, and to carry out proper administration and construction. It also enabled him to mint huge coins from the collected gold and silver, which gave great impetus to the developments of trade and commences.

Encouraged by long successive victories in the northeastern corner, the Koch king with his brother-cum-general Chilarai invaded the kingdom of Sulaiman Karrani of Gaud. But in the war that ensued, their army was defeated and his brother Chilarai was taken

prisoner, by the Badshah of Gauda. Naranarayan himself managed his escape from the battlefield in 1568 and thus they tasted defeat for the first time.

The crushing and humiliating defeat of the Koch army as well as Chilarai greatly encouraged the subjugated states of northeastern India to shake-off the Koch vassalage, which made a great impact in king Naranarayan's external and internal policies. The traditional policy of 'aggressive warfare' was replaced by the policy of 'defensive warfare' and 'peaceful co-existence'. Thus, when after some time Chilarai managed his escape, they did not try to restore the lost glory in the northeast. Instead, they tried to consolidate the kingdom, and to organize proper administration and to establish friendship with their traditional enemies i.e. the Ahoms and Bengal. However, the Ahoms were reluctant to establish such friendship with the Koches. In such situation, Naranarayan identified the Ahoms as real enemy and in order to safe guard himself, he tried to come closer to the great Mughal emperor Akbar. The later too, was in need of such friendship to subdue the rebellious Afghans, to establish effective control over Bengal and finally to carry out his imperialistic policy towards Northeast India. In such situation, from 1573 to 1576AD, both of them came closer through various co-operative activities and in 1578 king Naranarayan dispatched a formal embassy to the court of Akbar with a praising letter and presents for Akbar, who heartily reciprocated it and a peaceful and defensive alliance was formed on equal terms between them. Thus, king Naranarayan's wise foreign policy and diplomatic acts in the 'the defensive warfare' phase was the most distinctive feature of his reign. His political far-sightedness and realistic outlook led him to establish friendship, i.e. an honourable alliance based on mutual interests and reciprocal help and on terms of perfect equality with Akbar, the greatest of the Mughal rulers. This alliance not only strengthened the defense of his kingdom against the Ahoms and the Afghans, but also gave the prestige and all India identity of the Koches as an ally of Akbar.

During his second expedition as an ally of Akbar against the Afgans of Gauda, Chilarai was attacked by small-pox and died on the bank of the Ganges, which is not only considered as the darkest day but its marked the end of wars in the history of the Koches for several years. King Naranarayan was so much shocked by the incident that he gave up interest in wars and state administration. Now he became much devoted to

religion, literary activities and works of public welfare. In this situation, the internal centrifugal forces and even his dissatisfied nephew Raghudeva raised their heads and ultimate result was that Bar Dado, Gabha Naik and Bar Katu revolted against the king in 1577AD. Raghudeva, although did not dare to an open revolt but left the capital with some of his officers, proceeded towards the east and reached at a place called Barnagar or Ghilajaypur and declined his uncle's sovereignty there. The disintegration of the kingdom was the worst outcome of the death of Chilarai. King Naranarayan first tried to tame his nephew by peaceful negotiation but this effort went in vain and was forced to partition the kingdom between him and his nephew Raghudeva in about 1581AD, fixing the Sankosh River as the boundary between the two parts. Naranarayan and his successors would be ruling over the western part of the kingdom named as Kochbehar, on the other hand Raghudev and his successors would be ruling over the eastern part of the kingdom under the name as Koch-Hajo.

The present study suggests that this partition greatly weakened the power and position of the kingdom of Naranarayan. The moral prestige and material prosperity reduced to the marginal level and it gave to rise of jealousy and conflicts between the two branches of the kingdom. The other powers tried to interfere in the Koch intra-family conflict. However, as long as king Naranarayan was alive he tried his best to check these evil effects of the partition. With the death of king Naranarayan in 1587, power, position and prestige of the Koches almost disappeared. Jealousy, rivalry and conflicts between the two branches of the kingdom reached such a situation that the western kingdom (Koch Behar) compelled to seek Mughal help at the cost of its independent status. Like wise, Eastern kingdom was also compelled to establish alliance with the Afghan leader Isha Khan to protect his kingdom. Thus, the division of the kingdom and death of king Naranarayan, who raised his country to the zenith of its power, prestige and prosperity, led to the end of the most glorious era of the political history of the Koches.

Nearly 50 years of the reign of king Naranarayan witnessed the political climax and disintegration of the Koch power, as well as political vicissitudes of the whole northeast India which in courses of times lost into the womb<sup>of</sup> history. But the peaceful long reign of King Naranarayan ushered the golden age for the development and transitions of military

organization, administration, economy, society, culture, religion, languages literature, art, architecture painting etc, under his own effective initiations and patronizations, for which he will be remembered. It was due to his realization of fact that to cement the strong ground of the military exploits and political hegemony could not last long without legitimization of his line, proper administrative arrangements, centralization of power, social cultural homogenization of various tribal and non-tribal populations and economic solidarity. Therefore, with his military conquests, he simultaneously organized proper administration and institutionalized it, accepted the Brahmanical socio-cultural and religious values to legitimize and popularize the position of the kingdom and took steps for social homogenization of various tribal and non-tribal populations. Besides, being a learned man and benevolent ruler, king Naranarayan took active part for the development of society, culture, and religions and the cultivation of literature and languages, both vernacular as well as Sanskrita, in the kingdom. It acted as two-dimensional roles for the all-round development of the kingdom. On the one hand, for the establishment political stability and well-grounded kingdom, institutionalization of administration and legitimization of his line, king Naranarayan had taken all these steps. On the other hand, the stable and peaceful political condition gave impetus to the development of the intra-human aspects, which led to the peak period of the kingdom of king Naranarayan. Thus, political stability and supremacy of king Naranarayan created such a situation that led to the development of all aspects of human life.

The present study revealed some distinctive features of the military organization of King Naranarayan. Tribal clan based temporary tribal militia of his father transformed into a well-organised multi-tribal multi-cultured permanent Koch army through the inclusion of the other tribes, tribal chiefs, non-tribal Bhuyans and feudal chiefs, not only from their direct control territory but also from the whole the region. Organizing the Socio-religious and cultural parties (bhoja-bhat) among the multi-tribal multi-cultured Koch army had undoubtedly influenced socio-cultural relations of all the heterogeneous tribes and non-tribal communities of the region and strengthened political and social-cultural integrity of the army as well as of the kingdom. For the long planned war preparation, king Naranarayan constructed roads and excavated many roadside ponds for proper movement of the army and proper supply line of war equipments. These were also used by civilians and traders and indirectly that helped him in the integration of the kingdom.

Formation of standing army, for the defense of forts and swift attack, introduction of navy in the Koch forces to facilitate the movement of army and to fight in riverine geographical region, swift and night attack with infantry and navy simultaneously keeping elephants and cavalry in front were some military tactics which immensely helped King Narayan in the wars.

It is revealed that the tribe and clan based state administration of his father distinctively was re-organised and enlarged by King Narayan to face changing situation of the kingdom due to the territorial expansion of the kingdom and multi-ethnic characteristics of his population by appointing officials from all tribal and non-tribal population considering only efficiencies. For instance, he being a staunch Saiva never hesitated to appoint Sankaradeva, the Neo-Vaisnava saint, as the 'Gamatha' or Viceroy of the Patbausi and its neighbouring places, considering only his knowledge. The appointment of officials from all tribal and non-tribal population, not only made the administration efficient but it also gave the administration a 'national character', which led to integration of the kingdom of numerous tribes, castes and communities. However, the members of upper strata of both the caste Hindus and Hinduised tribes monopolized administrative posts of the early Koches. Bureaucratization of the state administration by appointing influential tribal chiefs and non-tribal leaders/Bhuyans, King Narayan maintained the balance of power between the tribal and the non-tribal subjects of his kingdom which helped him to establish effective control over his subjects.

At the early stage of the reign of Biswa Singha, plundered booty was the main source of income, which was irregular and was not sufficient to carry out all kind of activities of the state. For this reason, to accumulate surplus from other permanent sources, he tried to establish surplus generating mechanism by organizing revenue and taxation structures to extract surplus from land, agricultural surplus, trades, obligatory manual services, arts and crafts, industries and fines. King Narayan re-organised, this mechanism on permanent basis, encouraged, and took active part for the development of the arts and crafts, agriculture, trades, and industries to extract more income to face the increased requirements of the funds for the state administration and welfare activities like construction of roads, rest houses, channels, ponds, hospitals, bridges and others.

Present study reveals that king Naranarayan replaced 'the tribal mode of production' by introducing the non-tribal mode of production i.e. advanced agricultural techniques for the development of agricultural pattern to stimulate the state's economic solidarity. The adoption of non-tribal mode of production by the ruling section of tribe, the fellow tribal also began to adopt the not-tribal mode of production, which eventually resulted in the peasantiation of the tribes and development of agriculture and agricultural surplus. Due to the extension of the kingdom, a vast tract of the plain and fertile land came under its control, which was already transformed, into an important surplus generating field. The land revenue structure and mechanism organised by king Naranarayan in new agricultural pattern, helped him not only to collect more revenue for state's administration, development and welfare activities, but also to establish his direct control over the subjects of his kingdom.

Beside agriculture, for the economic development of the state and as well as that of the subjects of the kingdom, Biswa Singha and king Naranarayan encouraged and took active part for development of crafts, industries, trades and commerce. Biswa Singha appointed his sons in charge of various professional artisans and trade and commerce, and king Naranarayan had continued all their offices. These offices not only supervised the development of look after the crafts, industries, trades, commerce, and legal sides, but also they acted as collectors of taxes. It was due to the adoption of non-tribal advanced technologies, admixture of tribal and non-tribal techniques, peaceful political condition and state's encouragement, the development of crafts and industries reached a considerable advanced stage, which ultimately led to the economic prosperity of the kingdom. As non-tribal technologies were advanced and more productive, so the tribal people adopted it through the process of acculturation for their betterment. However, it is also fact that tribal people did not give up their traditional crafts and industries completely. Thus, development of crafts and industries, through the technological acculturation under royal supervision, accelerated the productions of a large amount surplus and marketable crafts and industrial goods. These not only gave a great impetus to the economic growth of the subjects and the state but also to the development of trade and commerce and to the establishment of the monetary economy.

Development of agriculture, crafts, industries and marketable surplus productions, during the reign of king Naranarayan gave a great impetus to the development of trade and commerce, not only within his kingdom but also in the whole of the northeast India. Moreover, encouragement in the way of establishment of roads, trade centers, commercial relation with neighbouring countries and finally introduction of coins by king Naranarayan also helped the development of trade and Commerce. Due to the favourable geographical location of the kingdom, trade and commerce of the states such as Assam, other northeastern states, Bengal, Bhutan, Tibet and China were carried out through the Koch kingdom and the kingdom acted as 'middle zone' of international trade and commerce. Not only that, even European merchant Ralf Fitch had come to the Koch capital in 1585AD to survey the prosperity of the trade and commerce with Tibet and China through the Koch kingdom. Although, we have no reference of the royal commercial enterprise, however, it is fact that the Koches had direct control over both the internal and external trade and commerce. Establishment of frontier Chowkies (outpost) to guard the illegal trade, collection of various types taxes like *hatkar* (market tax) and *Ghatkar* (taxes on river ports) and appointment of the officials, indirectly proved the direct control on the trade and commerce.

The most distinctive achievement of king Naranarayan is the introduction of Narayani Mudra (Tanka), which was not only circulated within the Koch kingdom but also in the whole of northeastern region including Bhutan and part of Tibet and were the prime medium of exchange in internal and external trade and commerce of many countries. Due to the geographical location as 'middle zone' and use of the Narayani Mudra (Tanka) as 'the prime medium of exchange', the trade and commerce of the region weighed in favour of Koch kingdom. It is also evident that Narayani Mudra (Tanka) had been minted from several places of northeast India like Jayantiya, and Khyram etc., for which money supply increased rapidly and as a result became an acceptable standard medium of exchange both in inter regional and intra regional trade and commerce of the whole north-east India. Thus, the political hegemony of the Koches under king Naranarayan though declined within short period but the hegemony of the Narayani Mudra (Tanka) of the Koches, over the trade and commerce of the whole region, continued for several succeeding centuries. This is the distinctive achievement of king Naranarayan in the field of economic development.

The economic development in the various fields like agriculture, crafts, industries, trades and commerce, of the Koches under king Naranarayan, not only established the strong political, military and economic bases of the kingdom but also enabled him to expense huge amount of money and materials for carrying out welfare activities, socio-cultural activities, cultivation education, learning, art and architecture.

The present study revealed that Biswa Singha and his son Naranarayan had taken active part in the socio-cultural assimilation not only in their line but also that of the whole tribal and non-tribal population of the region. Transition of Tribal Chiefdom of Hariya Mandal into a state by Biswa Singha, the father of Naranarayan, the dynasty and its close relatives started adopting Hindu socio-cultural pattern / Hinduisation or Sanskritisation process to legitimize their power as *Khshatriya* of the Brahmanical fold under the influence of the Brahmins. Divine connection of the kingship or its link with any mythical hero of the Hindu tradition was a common trend for the legitimization of kingship and the Brahmins had the sole authority to do this. The Brahmins, who so long designated the Koches as Mlecchas, came forward to Hinduise them adding fictitious myth and legitimize their royal position as *Khshatriya* origin after the rise of the Koches to power. Thus, with various myths, the Brahmins christened Bisu as Biswa Singha, ascribed him a *Khshatriya* origin and described him as the son of Lord Siva of Hindu pantheon to legitimize his rule over the state.

After Hinduisation, Biswa Singha accepted the Hindu Socio-cultural pattern, actively patronized Hinduism, and encouraged the worship of Gods and Goddesses of Hindu pantheon. He sent his sons Naranarayan and Chilarai to Benaras for the learning of the Hindu scriptures, established marriage relations with Hindu *Khshatriya* royal families and brought a number Brahmins from Mithila and other places to encourage Hinduised socio-cultural pattern. Thus, he initiated the Brahmanical socio-cultural system and socio-cultural assimilation in the kingdom.

Naranarayan and Chilarai, who were brought up and educated at Benaras and were greatly influenced by the ideal of high – caste Hindus and therefore they garnered a deep

sympathy for Hindu manners, customs and ideals in their hearts. Thus, they attempted to introduce those ideals and customs among their people after their accession to the power. They brought Siddhantavagisa and Vidyavagisa, the two Brahmins scholars and patronized them with nine villages and ultimately they became the advisor and social dictator of the kingdom. Through the efforts of the king Naranarayan and Chilarai, under the guidance of Siddhantavagisa and his '*Kaumudis*' (his 18 books in same name) four-fold Varnasrama i.e. *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* with necessary modifications was introduced in the Koch kingdom. But in reality, the society had two parts: A) the upper strata i.e. the privileged and rich class which included the tribal chiefs, ruling class, their subordinate officers, Bhuyans, Samanta rajas and the priests, both Brahmanical and Tribal and rich business communities. B) Lower strata i.e. non-privileged poor people of the country including the peasants, both tribal and non tribal, slaves, house servants, bondmen petty shopkeepers, petty government servants, sepoys, peons, Garmalis, storekeepers, Mahaliya, Dancers, Musicians, etc. They were directly involved in production or services and they were also the taxpayer in cash or kind or services. However, they directly received nothing from the state.

The Brahmin priests, non-tribal migrants, and the Koch royal patronage to them played instrumental role in the process of Hinduisation and socio-cultural assimilation in the Non-Hindu tribal royal courts and that of the kingdom. The process of Hinduisation and socio-cultural assimilation had started 'from above' i.e. creamy layer of the tribal people, including the kings, their tribal officers, clan leaders, and then the economically and socially stronger section of the tribal society followed them. They shifted residences to the centre of power (i.e. capital) and the core area (i.e. plains) and discarded or modified their tribal dialects, manners and social customs, following royal family. As the conversion to Hinduism and adoption of their socio-cultural pattern were considered as a matter of prestige, social status and way to obtain lucrative posts in Hinduised Koch royal court, so they accepted it by their own choice. However, a section of the tribal people preferred to live in the peripheral region in clan life keeping allegiance to their tribe following their own dialects, manners and social customs, which were regulated by tribal customs that came down traditionally from times immemorial, without any royal intervention. It is fact that king Naranarayan could not dare to impose his adopted Hindu

religion and Socio-cultural on his tribal fellows considering the interest of his kingdom. He allowed the Kacharies, Meches, Koches and other tribes of peripheral region i.e. northern side of the *Goshain Kamal Ali* of sub- Himalayan lower Assam, to follow their own religious socio-cultural traditions and rituals, according to their own wish, with their tribal priests. While the tribes of the same communities of the other areas largely adopted the Brahmanical religious socio-cultural traits. Thus, the policy of non-interference in the religious-cultural matter was another important distinctive feature of his rule.

During the reign of king Naranarayan, the *Neo- Vaisnava* preacher Sankaradeva (1449-1569) gave another great impetus to the socio-cultural assimilation of the kingdom, especially after the settlement of Sankaradeva in the kingdom of king Naranarayan in 1546. In spite of being a religious movement, Neo-Vaisnavism marked the beginning of the emergence of an egalitarian society cutting across not only caste taboos, expensive rituals and social restrictions, but also new social ethics, behaviour and code of conduct among the people of the Koch kingdom on equality and fraternity. Sankaradeva aimed at to establish a classless and casteless society on democratic and humanistic ground, and to stabilize and systematize the moral conduct and other socio-cultural-educational aspects of all the people of the kingdom. King Naranarayan was highly impressed and pleased by the saint's deep knowledge, appearance and saintly character, he offered him great seat of honour, appointed him as the '*Gamatha*' or Viceroy of the Patbausi and its neighbouring places. He patronized to establish a large number of *Satras* (*Neo-Vaisnava* Monastery) and *Namghars / Kirtanagharas* (*Vaisnava* prayer Halls) in the Koch kingdom. The non-Hindu tribal people were greatly influenced by Neo-Vaisnavism for its liberal outlook and socio-cultural aspects. Thus, due to the liberal outlook and socio-cultural aspects of Neo-Vaisnavism and active patronage of king Naranarayan, it was able to percolate deep into the heart not only of the common people within the Kingdom but also into the heart of the kings which brought a revolutionary change in socio-cultural pattern.

One of the distinctive features of the transformation of socio-cultural pattern and the socio-cultural assimilation in the Koch kingdom during the reign of king Naranarayan, under the influences of Neo-Vaisnavism was synthesizing liberal and universal outlook

of Koch kings and the common people. The kings as well as common people did not discard the old socio-cultural pattern and worshipping of other god and goddess of Hindu tradition, although Sankaradeva informed them that those who did not believe in the unity of the godhead and worshipped a number of deities were not entitled to get *Sarana mantra*. Koch kings of the dynasty although traditionally demanded them as '*Sivavansi*' (decent from Siva), they stated to use the title '*Narayana*' (other name of Bhagabata Vishnu). King Naranarayan, his successors and his subjects established large number of temples of Hindu pantheon as well as Neo-Vaisnavite *Satras* (Neo-Vaisnava Monasteries) and *Namghars/ Kirtanagharas* (Vaisnava prayer Halls) in the Koch kingdom. Therefore, it was not theological part i.e. spiritual and religious activities of Neo-Vaisnavism, but the socio-cultural part, i.e. socio-cultural activities including humanistic philosophy and democratic outlook, which influenced the kings as well as common people (even some time without initiation to the faith), of the kingdom.

The *Namghars / Kirtanagharas* (Vaisnava prayer Halls), mainly Village *Namghars/ Kirtanagharas*, which were established as a Neo-Vaisnavite religious institution in almost all Hindu villages of the region within a short period, it became epicenter of the all types of socio-cultural activities, spiritual and other leanings, religious activities and dramatic performances and brought about significant changes in all spheres of life. It contributed immensely to the process of socialization and cultural homogenization, which led to the building of a vibrant civil society, based on peace, goodwill, mutual respect, social justice, self-help and equality.

It also revealed that the period witnessed the synthesis among the Brahmanical religions (with its offshoots like the *Tantricism* and *Nathism*) tribal religions, and Neo-Vaisnavite faith. The state and creamy layer of the tribal people adopted the Brahmanical religious culture to legitimize their political power and position but could not completely discard their lineage with the general layer of the tribal people of the remote periphery who maintained their primordially. They brought some religious-cultural ideas or beliefs from their ancestors, which led to the inevitable religious-cultural synthesis under the state sponsorship of the Brahmanical religious culture and continuity of the tribal beliefs system. Thus, Rishi (Mahakal), the male deity of the Rabhas and the Koches ; *Bathou* (male god of *Bathouism*), the male deity of the Meches and some minor male deities like

*Masan, Jakha, Bura Thakur, etc.*, were taken into the Brahmanical religious fold as local incarnations of Lord Siva. *Bhandani* and *Devi*, two female tribal deities became localized incarnations of the mainstream Brahmanical Goddess Durga. All the deities are worshipped in both the tribal and the mainstream Brahmanical forms by both, the tribal and the Brahmanical priests, bear the testimonies of religious cultural synthesis of both the tribal rituals and the Brahmanical rituals. King Naranarayan initiated this and it has been continuing till today. Besides, the worship of 'Bardevi, a special synthesized form of both the Goddess Durga of the Brahmanical faith and *Devi*, the chief tribal female deity, which might be considered as the strongest example of religious cultural synthesis of the period.

It is also revealed from the present study that king Naranarayan was very liberal in his personal religious belief and thus, he patronized all (both tribal and Brahmanical) religions of the region. As a staunch Sakta, king Naranarayan constructed Kamakhya temple at Nilachal hill and others and introduced a combined ritual of tribal, Brahmanical and Tantric rituals to worship the deity. As a Saiva, he patronized to construct Banerwar Siva temple at Banerwar, near Koch Behar and many others and introduced a combined ritual of tribal and Brahmanical rituals to worship the deity in various forms like Siva, Siva Linga and Mahakal. As a well-wisher of the Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva, he patronized the construction of large numbers of Satras including Madhupur Satra (also know as Bardowa Satra), Barpeta Satra (Barpeta) and many more. This liberal outlook helped him to synthesize religious cultural life of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural subjects of his kingdom. Thus he was able to unify the diverse tribes and communities in a liberal synthesized religious cultural pattern which led to the socio-cultural integration of the kingdom which again supplemented political integration and strengthened the bonds of the unity of the both the subjects as well as kingdom.

Thus, modification of the tribal deities, their incorporation into the Brahmanical faith and synthesis of the both was not complete Hinduisation of the tribal religious culture but it was 'the modification of tribal religious culture and synthesis of indigenous and exogenous religious culture' under the royal patronage to keep pace with situation and times. In course of time, Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva as a religion added only some liberal and democratic religious cultural ethics and re-synthesized it without discarding

'synthesized indigenous and exogenous religious culture'. This proved from the information of the *Thakura-Charita of Vidyānanda*, which records, "These people not conscious of the Great Way (Neo-Vaiṣṇavism); and Sakti (Saktism) then reigned supreme. They sang songs of *Hari*; but then, when the autumn came, they installed a *ghata* (pitcher representing the goddess) each in every one's house".

The present study suggests that king Naranarayan marked distinctive achievements for the development of both indigenous and Sanskrita languages, literature and education of the region. He patronized migrant Brahmins, Kayasthas and others, who accelerated the development of indigenous language, literature and education and as well as the cultivation of Sanskrita language, literature and scriptures, for which he is regarded as the '*Bikramaditya*' of Assam and his reign is termed as 'golden age in the annals of the Koch Behar'.

His court was adorned with large number of scholars of various branches of learning, including literature, language and education. Neo-Vaiṣṇavite preacher Sankaradeva was the most luminous and a man of multi-genius star in the court of king Naranarayan, who composed large number of works mainly on religious subjects and rendered many Sanskrita scriptures into the indigenous vernacular to diffuse the secrets of the sacred scriptures among the masses. Besides Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva, the scholarly disciple of Sankaradeva, Pitambar Siddhantavagis, Kavi Rama Saraswti, Ananta Kandali, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, Kalap Chandra Dvija, Purusshottam Vidyavagish, Bakul Kayastha, Sridhar, Bhusan Dvija, Rama Ray, and other were notable luminaries of the court of king Naranarayan, who marked their achievements for the development of languages, literature, religions and scriptures. Naranarayan himself was the author of a dictionary of Sanskrita language named '*Malladevi Abhidhan*'.

As both king Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai, were well versed in the Sanskrita as well as the Bengali (or *Kamarupi / Kamatapuri*) languages, they took active interest to spread the teachings and values of Sanskrita literature through the contemporary vernacular of the region i.e. Bengali (or *Kamarupi / Kamatapuri*). The indigenous language, which originated in this region and popularised by king Naranarayan is known as '*Kamarupi / Kamatapuri*' and the language is akin to Bengali

language of the middle age. King Naranarayan distinctively, adopted this standard language i.e. Bengali (or *Kamrupi / Kamatapuri*) of eastern India; by discarding their tribal languages like Mech / Baro / Koch and keeping aside his well-versed language i.e. Sanskrita, which gradually became the language of the state for administrative and communicative purposes. The earliest specimen of this language so far known is the letter of Naranarayan dated 1477 Saka (1555) sent to the Ahom king with the peace proposal<sup>237</sup> and in succeeding periods the language was modified for all-round usages. Moreover, he also encouraged scholars to render Sanskrita scriptures into this vernacular and to diffuse the teaching, morale and knowledge of the classical Sanskrita literature through this language. Sankaradeva, though a distinguished Sanskrita scholar, wrote mainly in this language, with the aim of bringing Sanskrita lore within the uneducated masses. Thus, the adoption of this standard language i.e. Bengali (or *Kamrupi / Kamatapuri*) by King Naranarayan in his administrations, courts, foreign affairs and even in cultivation of literature, led the tribal people to be acquainted with this language( *Bengali / Kamarupi / Kamatapuri* ) and ultimately this was accepted by the tribal people along with the upper strata of the society as colloquial language.

It is also fact that he did not discourage the cultivation of Sanskrita language and literature. With the state formation under Biswa Singha and King Naranarayan, the Koches adopted Hinduism, Sanskritized themselves and became great patron of Sanskrit language, literature and learning. Besides, king Naranarayan and Chilarai had their education at Benaras in *Sanskrita* grammar, the *Puranas*, *Sruti*, *Smriti*, *Mimamsa* and Atharvanic military practices and they became well versed in many aspects of Sanskrit language and literature. Thus, they became a great source of inspiration to the scholars and poets of the kingdom and created such a situation that was suitable for the cultivation of Sanskrita language and literature.

The literary activities of his reign included the composition of Sanskrita and Bengali (*Kamarupi / Kamatapuri*) texts on languages, religions and secular subjects and translation of the Sanskrita scriptures including the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas* and *Smriti Sastras* etc. into the vernacular. As all these were the sources of Indian mythology and Hinduism, so it got special attention of the king to popularize the teachings and values of these texts among the subjects. Purusshottam Vidyavagish in

the direction of King Naranarayan and his queen had compiled a Sanskrita grammar called '*Prayoga-Ratnamala*', which became the main grammar for general education including the kids of the royal family. In the court of Naranarayan, Pitambar Siddhantavagis compiled 18 *Smritinvandhans* called *Kaumudi*. Bakul Kayastha, a court writer of king Naranarayan, wrote the *Kitavat manjuri*, a book on arithmetic, land surveying and bookkeeping. Bhusan Dvija, a court poet of Naranarayan, composed the biography of Sankaradeva named '*Guru Charita*'. Ananta Kandali had composed many books including *Sri Rama Kirtana* in *Kirtana* style and translated the *Rajasuya* section of the Mahabharata into vernacular. Kalap Chandra Dvija had translated the fourth and sixth *Skanda of Bhagvata Purana* and a part of the Ramayana under the *Ramayana Chandika*.

The Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankaradeva gave another great impetus to the literary activities during the reign of king Naranarayan. The Hindu traditional scholars have generally translated the epics and the Puranas into the vernaculars (Bengali or *Kamarupi / Kamatapuri*) for diffusing the secrets of the classical literature. However, Sankaradeva had encouraged the Vaisnava scholars to produce literature on the Neo-Vaishnavism. Sankaradeva and his disciples not only translated the scriptures into the vernaculars but also composed various types of literary works. At the instance of King Naranarayan, he took up the works of translation of the all the *Bhagavata* books and himself translated the major portion, namely Books I, II, III, VII, VIII, IX, X, and XII. Besides Sankaradeva, under his guidance, his others disciples, writers, undertook the translation of other sections of the *Bhagavata*. Under the inspiration of the Koch kings, Sankaradeva and his disciples had composed a large numbers '*Ankiyanats*', *Baragitas* (great songs) and many *Kirtana-ghosh*. During his stay in Koch state, he wrote *Gunamala* (the garland of qualities), a summary of the *Bhagavata* at the instance of King Naranarayan and *Bhakti Ratnakara*, a doctrinal work in the ideas of *Bhakti*. He also translated the Ramayana (*Uttar-Kanda*).

It seems to us that there was no centralized educational system during the reign of king Naranarayan. However, there were large number of Sanskrit Gurukula type *Tolas* and *Chhatrasalas*, Neo-Vaisnavism Satras and royal court, where education were imparted mainly in Sanskrita Grammar, Lexicons, the Epics, the *Puranas*, religious

works- *Dharmasastras*, *Niti-Sastras* and *Yajamanis*, etc. The Brahmins and the Satradhikaris mainly managed these institutions and maintained by public donations. However, formal *Tola* centric education was limited within upper strata of the society and the common masses were beyond that. Although, there was no formal vernacular education centers but the masses received informal education through the stories of the translated form of the classical writings, Vaisnavite propagations, folk-stories, songs, folk music, dance, etc. The state-sponsored stalwarts had mainly translated the classical literature in the vernaculars and composed Vaisnavite works in the vernaculars. These gave impetus to the learning and education among the masses.

Present study suggests that in the field of performing arts like traditional tribal and non-tribal music, dances and dramas with various types of musical instruments were prevalent and received royal patronage during the period. King Naranarayan organised a musical dance party during his Ahom expedition to obtain the support of the Mech Kachari, which clearly indicates the patronage of tribal music and dances. Chilarai, the brother of the king not only encouraged performing arts like music and dramas but he also built a theatre hall for the performance of *Rama-Vijaya* drama and he himself wrote '*Saraswati*', the commentary of the '*Gita-Govinda*' of Jaydeva in vernacular. The Non-Vaisnavite performing arts based on mainly classical pattern, were executed in traditional non-Vaisnavite religious performances, agriculture, in the community feast and socio-religious occasions.

In the field of performing arts, *Neo-Vaisnavism* and *Satra* institution not only brought a new era but also an organised form of the performing arts in the region under the active royal patronage during our period of study. Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, two master artists of the period composed a large number of *Baragits*, *Ankargits*, *Kirtan-ghosh*, and *Bhatima*, *Nam-ghosh*, which influenced all classes of masses very much and acted as the vehicle for the propagation of the Neo-Vaisnavism faith. These songs are blended form of Indian classical musical and dance traditions with local tribal and non-tribal ones, which led to the rise of two independent schools called 'Assamese school of music' and 'Satra School of dance'. The Satra dance was mainly connected with dramatic performances of Neo-Vaisnavite themes; however, it became prime dance pattern of whole northeast India and there may have been some connection with the

classical and traditional dances like the Manipuri dance and the Bihu dance respectively. Even, the Satra dance form with a very old ancestry has been included in the list of Indian classical dance formats along with *Kathakali*, *Bharatnatyam* etc.

The early Koch kings patronized the painting of the period, which was executed mainly by Neo-Vaisnavite artists on walls, pillars, and interior of the *Namghars / Kirtanghars*, gates (*Karapats*), *Manukutas*, and others parts of *Satras*, and manuscripts. Thus, the painting of the *Neo-Vaisnavite Artists* was mainly *Satra* centric paintings and may be named as 'the *Satriya* style of paintings', which enhanced a 'new chapter' during the reign of king *Naranarayan* in the sense that no specimen of paintings done in the area anterior to the time of the *Sankaradeva* is available to us. In the *Satra* centric paintings, religious matters were the main subject and local materials were used in it. *Sankaradeva* was a great painter, who painted the scenes of the '*Seven Vaikunthas*' on the ginned cotton paper (*tula-pat*) and supervised the painting of scenes of Lord *Krishna's* childhood woven into a tapestry sheet of embroidered designs on silk cloth 180 feet long called *Vrindavani Vastra* . Besides, a large number of Manuscripts with illustrated borders were known as *latā-katā puthi* or manuscripts with scrolls and running motifs along the borders. Many manuscripts contain pictures of the deadly sins, of the glory of *Visnu*, and of His incarnations according to Hindu conception.

The strong economic solidarity, comparatively peaceful political situation and keen interest of the early Koch king *Naranarayan* and his brother *Chilarai*, led to the development of architecture and sculpture. The reputed architecture and sculpture of the period i.e. the *Kamakhya* and *Hayagriva Madhava* temples bear characteristics of all India pattern with little local variations or a fine admixture of local and the all Indian pattern. However, high plinth and underground *Garvagriha* (sanctum) with an underground natural spring are distinctive features of the architecture and sculpture of the period, for which it may be term as '*Nilachala* type of architecture and sculpture'. The *Kamakhya* temple architecture and sculpture is the most important example of this school. Another type of architecture and sculpture developed during the period of our study and under the influences of Neo-Vaisnavite movement and royal patronage is '*Satriya School*' of architecture and sculpture. It is distinctive in the sense that instead of bricks and stone slabs, products like timber, bamboo, soil, thatching material etc. were

used for the construction of *Satras* which served as the religious place, place of learning and the dwelling place of the Monks of the faith. Our present study revealed that the architecture and sculpture of the period is mainly religious based and secular architectural and sculptural works are very rare. However, references in literary sources of forts and decorative royal palaces indicate the development of the secular and court centric architectural and sculptural works. As most of the works were constructed with raw materials like woods, bamboos and canes, they might have disappeared due to the wet climatic condition and heavy rainfall of the region.

The present study also revealed that the process and procedure by which Biswa Singh and King Naranarayan had formed the Koch kingdom do not conform to any stereotype theories like the Hydraulic theory of state formation of Karl Wittfogel, the Galactic State System theory or Galactic Republic theory and segmentary state system theory or others state formation theories. Rather, 'aggressive warfare and circumscription' (R.L.Carneiro), 'the conquest theory of state formation' (F.Oppenheimer) and the 'institutionalization of centralized leadership and legitimization of kingship' (Elman Service) simultaneously acted as mechanisms for the territorial expansion and formation of the Koch kingdom. Therefore, formation of the Koch kingdom though not identical with any stereotyped theory of state formation, but it is identical with many theories and concepts and may be considered as combined form of state formation, which bears characteristics of both conventional and non-conventional theories.

Thus, Biswa Singha, as a tribal chief (leader) organised his fellow tribes following guerrilla and aggressive warfare, institutionalized and legitimized his rule through the process of Hinduisation and bureaucratization of administration on hereditary line in early stage. King Naranarayan like his father Biswa Singha, following 'aggressive warfare' and 'conquest policy' expanded territory of the basic kingdom of his father and established independent Koch kingdom as well as his sway over the whole northeast India. Simultaneously, he institutionalized and legitimized his kingship through the process of bureaucratization of administration with new innovative steps, monetization of economy for economic solidarity of the kingdom, socio-cultural and religious homogenization for socio-cultural and religious development and patronization of the development of languages, literatures, learning and others. Thus, the reign of King Naranarayan is rightly

is considered as the golden age not only in the annals of Koch Behar but also in the history of the whole region. The territorial extent of his kingdom is comparable only with Bhaskaravarman of ancient Kamarupa. His conquests and nominal political hegemony can be compared comparable only with Samudragupta of Gupta dynasty of ancient India and his achievements in the intra human development is comparable only with legendary Bikramaditya of the classical age of Indian history.

The people of northern Bengal and adjoining lower Assam fondly cherish the legacy of the Koch kingdom. Their pride is felt in the terminology of their tribal heritage as in the names of Koch, Rajvansi and Kamtapuri. The people of the lower Brahmaputra valley including some present districts of lower Assam and Koch Behar proudly remember their ancestors like Biswa Singha and Naranarayan. They named many roads and social-educational institutions / organizations on their great ancestors and erected statues in different places of the region. A statue of Chilarai stands at the entrance of the city of Gauhati and main road of the present Koch Behar town is known as 'Biswa Singha road'. Moreover, following the legacy of the Koch dynasty, the people of this region nurturing movements in various names like Kshatriya Rajbansi movement, Kamtapuri movement, Greater Koch Behar movement etc. in post independence period. Thus, past greatness, glories and lingering notion of the Koch dynasty as well as that of the Koch-Rajbansi people of the region gave rise to a sense of pride which accelerating the emergence of the different types of socio-political movements in this region.

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