

Chapter II

SOCIETY

The north-eastern region of India situated in "one of the greatest migration routes of mankind" ¹ from the time immemorial had been the habitat of population which perhaps represents an admixture of almost all the racial strains, like the Aryāns, the Alpine-Iranians and the Tibeto-Burman, latter being the most numerous and predominant. They had migrated to and settled in the region with their own culture, language and religion as groups of non-Hindu affiliation. ²

The territory of Kāmātā Koch Behar too, as it formed part of ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa, had nearly the same racial elements. People owing to their tribal foundation lived within their own tribal cultural and social limit and for a long time possibly remained untouched by the process of Aryānisation.

In the tribal society of the period under review Varnāśrama did not have any working. ³ The Varnāśrama Institution, a precondition of caste society, which is also an outcome of the process of Aryānisation, gained momentum after the formation of tribal state in highly centralised polity. ⁴

"The process of state formation within a tribe could have had started only when it had, a considerable extent, moved from shifting to permanent cultivation". ⁵ Accordingly an agricultural population with a *division* of labour and a resultant

social stratification, capable of themselves yielding a surplus was necessary, as because "a quantum of surplus was essential to maintain even a rudimentary state apparatus. The subsequent process of political consolidation over the centuries was coterminous with the twin processes of social consolidation through progressive sanskritization and of economic consolidation through market links."^{5a}

In the beginning of the sixteenth century we came across the emergence of two tribal state formations one under the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra Valley and other the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom in the territory extending from the Karatoyā in the west to the Badanadī in the east under the Koch Chief Viśva Siṅha.⁶

It has already been mentioned that the region is said to have inhabited by the non-Aryān tribes having Mongoloid traits and features. Accordingly the state of Koch Behār is admitted as the headquarters of those tribe who were called indiscriminately Koch, Rājbandi and Pālī.⁷

Immediately after the consolidation of the political power Viśva Siṅha came to be known to the Brāhmanas as the son of the God Śiva which probably led him to embrace Hinduism and to give regard for the Brāhmanas.⁸ Accordingly he brought many learned Brāhmanas from Kanauj, Mithilā, Benāres and Sylhet⁹ the latter having the title Kāmarūpī Brāhmanas. It is right from this time that the Brāhmanical influence was probably being widespread in the region.

The process of Sanskritisation in Koch Behar received a great impetus with the arrival of the Brāhmanas from the different regions at the court of Visva Siṃha. As noticed above Visva Siṃha was recognised as the son of Śiva himself. This was undoubtedly a clear manipulation of the Brāhmanas assembled at the Court of Visva Siṃha, for they found that Śiva who stood as the fertility symbols of the people of Koch Behar who were predominantly agriculturists and incarnation of any other god other than Śiva would not be acceptable to them. Hence, the Brāhmanas floated the theory of Visva Siṃha as son of Śiva. This also served the purpose of establishing the theory of divine right of kingship in the Kingdom¹⁰ as it was the practice of other medieval Indian states. The traditional Indian fourfold caste system gave rise to two fold caste system : Brāhmanas and Śūdras and Śūdras were also divided into several subcastes which were classified as Uttama, Madhyama and Adhama Śākhara on the basis of their different vocations in early medieval period in Eastern India.¹¹

It is not improbable that the social formation in the Koch Kingdom might have been influenced by the above distinguishing features of the society of medieval Bengal owing to its close proximity to Kāmatā Koch Kingdom.¹²

The immigration of Brāhmanas, however, from various places continued during the reign of Mahārājā Naranārāyaṇa, son of Visva Siṃha. The Brhat Rājvaṃśavalī composed at a later

period informs us that Siddhāntavāgīśa and Vidyāvāgīśa who came to Kāmarūpa on pilgrimage from Gauda, were cordially received by Naranārāyaṇa, and during whose reign Siddhāntavāgīśa composed eighteen books on Smṛti, all known as Kaṁudī.¹³ The aim of his works was to arrange the society of Kāmarūpa on the basis of traditional four fold division so much so that Raghunandana did in case of Bengal.¹⁴ Accordingly the Caturvarna system was introduced in the society keeping pace with the works of Siddhāntavāgīśa and the people of all persuasion came to be known as Brāhmanas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśhyas and Sūdras.¹⁵

The introduction of fourfold caste system in the society by Siddhāntavāgīśa remained more or less superficial. The caste rules were less rigorous, less inhibiting in the region than elsewhere.¹⁶ Like other parts of Bengal the real basis of the social division in the region was determined by the different professions of the people.¹⁷

The reason, however, behind the caste system to be less rigorous was primarily due to the Neo-Vaiṣṇavaite movement under Śaṅkaradeva and to some extent owing to the intermixture of the peoples.¹⁸

In discussing the caste hierarchical set up we would, however, like to divide the society into two segments - Brāhmana and non-Brāhmanas in accordance with the general trend prevalent during this period in other parts of eastern India.

Brāhmanas

In the Hinduised society of Kānatā Koch Kingdom the Brāhmanas whose number¹⁹ was not so much held an esteemed position. Besides, serving as priest to both the ruling class and the Hinduised converts they also used to enjoy the high posts in the administration.²⁰

The native Brāhmanas were mostly of Vaidic class and were the descendants of those that were from time to time brought from Kanauj, Mithilā, Vārānasi and Assam into the country by the kings of Kānatā and the successive Mahārājās of Kānatā-Koch Kingdom.²¹

They encouraged the Brāhmanas to settle in the kingdom with the grant of Brahmattara lands and stipends. Almost all the Brāhmanas settled near and around the town of Koch Behar, in taluk Khagrabari, Kaminirhat, Mainaguri, Bānesvara Tākāgāch Gobrachara and Bamanhat.²² They do not differ much from the Brāhmanas of lower Bengal in their religious and social customs.²³

Viśva Siṅha, as already seen, brought some Vaidic Brāhmanas from Sylhet, offering the title Kānrūpī Brāhmanas. They became the spiritual guide of the Koch Kings by replacing the Kalitās.²⁴ Learned Brāhmanas from Mithilā and Kanauj of the Vasistha gotra were engaged in the Kingdom for conducting religious ceremonies in the temples.²⁵ He engaged Vallavāchārya, the son of a Kanauji Brāhmaṇa Vāsudeva Ācārya bringing him from

Srīskhetra (Puri) as the priest of Kāmākhya Devi.²⁶

As noticed above Siddhanta Vāgisa and Vidyāvāgisa were brought in the kingdom by Naranārāyana. They were encouraged to settle in the country with the grant of nine villages.²⁷ As composer of the eighteen Kaumudis on the codes of Smṛti Siddhanta-Vāgisa procured a great respect for himself in Kāmatā Koch Kingdom as much as Raghunandana in Bengal received. He then became a social dictator. He prescribed the rites and ceremonies to be observed by the various people and his voice was supreme in matter relating to the social position of each class.²⁸ In those days if anybody had the audacity to violate the rule promulgated by Vidyāvāgisa, he was punished by the King and in serious cases even banished with his family.²⁹ In this way the Brāhmana authority was established in the territory of the Kāmatā-Koch Kingdom.

With the ascendancy of the Brāhmanas the ancient custom of worshipping the respective tribal deities by them was abolished. Siddhanta-Vāgisa by his Smṛti Kaumudī only allowed the Brāhmanas the right to worship Śakti. New injunction was laid down prohibiting the Koch Kings, the Sūdras, women in general particularly the young ladies and even the Brāhmana widows to have a look at the Goddess of Kāmākhya. Sūrya Khari-Daivajña's Darrang Rājva-
śāsalī gives us information regarding an edict^{of} Naranārāyana declaring that "in all temples lying to the north of the Goshāl

Kamala Āli which was the line of demarcation between western and eastern Assam the Koches and the Meches would continue to perform the worship, while in the south the Brāhmanas would officiate. The law was to hold good in all places."³⁰ It appears from the foregoing account that the supremacy of the Brāhmanas was established in the Kamata-Koch Kingdom inclusive of Goālpārā, Kāmarūpa, Nowgaon and Darrang.³¹ About the time we are speaking of Kāmarūpa was known far and wide as the greatest centre of the Śāktas.

Brhat Rājvaṁśavali of Mahārājā Harendranārāyaṇa also supply us facts regarding the then Brāhmanas, the topmost caste in Hindu society and custodian of Hindu faith. From the work we can have the picture that "The good looking Brāhmanas of Kāmarūpa live merrily at home performing the customary rites prescribed in the Vedas. Even when travelling from one country to another they perform their ceremonies without caring to bathe in holy waters, they also perform the Vedic ceremonies like Pūṣāyana and others and are attentive to their time honoured customs. They have taken to agriculture and partake of fish and flesh and chew betel leaves. In Kāmarūpa Brahmacharya has not to be practised through life, and no vow of Ekēdasi has to be observed. They gain as much religious merit by observing the single vow of Suklāstami as by observing a crore of Ekēdasi vows."³²

As regards the education of the Brāhmanas of the Kamatā Koch Kingdom Harendranarayan Choudhury informs us that those living

at Khagrabari were educated in Sanskrit.³³ Sanskrit toles are said to have existed there from the 16th century onwards.³⁴ But majority of the native Brāhmanas were without education worth the name.³⁵ Martin is of the opinion that the Brāhmanas who act as priest and purohit for all pure Hindus of the Kingdom generally understand more or less Sanskrit.³⁶ Still some Brāhmanas known merely as purohita with little knowledge of Varnas officiate for the lower caste of the pure Hindus. Again the Brāhmanas of Bengal do not act as purohita for any Kāmarūpa tribe. The monopoly, however, of officiating the tribes are said to have enjoyed by the Maithilos and Kāmarūpī only.³⁷

With the contact of the British East India Company in the latter half of the eighteenth century, like all the facets of the society the education of the Brāhmanas of the Kānatā-Koch Kingdom was getting transition from its old Hindu style. The spread of English education in its primary stage was very slow among the Brāhmanas of the region. Gradually they got interested in English education³⁸ and later on many Brāhmanas sent their children to school. They having gone beyond the preliminary stage of high education served the state in different capacities. Some have acquired landed property and are tolerably well off.³⁹ The spread of English education, however, got a great acceleration not only among the Brāhmanas but also among the general mass due to the influence of the Brāhma movement in the Kingdom.

Non-Brahmana Castes

Kayastha

Like Bengal next to the Brahmanas were Kayasthas whose professional occupation was Kayasthi (book keeping and accountancy).⁴⁰ In addition to that they also held important offices in administration. Visnu and Yajñvalkyas mentioned them as a royal official.⁴¹ In Bṛhad̥dharma Purāna Kayasthas are ranked with the Karana.⁴² Vedavyasa Smṛti, however, included them as sūdras.⁴³

In the western Brahmaputra valley, the most important persons who had both land and military resources were the Bhuiyāns and by and large known as Kayastha by caste.⁴⁴ Having defeated at the hands of Visvasiṅha, the Koch King, Kayastha Bhuiyāns fled to the Upper Assam.⁴⁵ Ultimately ousted from there due to the displeasure of Ahom King Sukhapha (1552-1603 AD) they appeared before the court of Mahārājā Naranārāyaṇa of Kāmatā-Koch Kingdom.⁴⁶

Mahārājā Naranārāyaṇa through the efforts of his brother Chila Rāy absorbed the Bhuiyāns as petty officers in the new state machinery.⁴⁷ They had been established by the side of the Brahmaputra by making grants of land.⁴⁸ It is, however, due to their knowledge in scriptures, mensuration, arithmetic as well as their efficiency in the use of arms.⁴⁹

It is generally believed that the Bhuiyāns constituted a

Hindu caste. But they did not altogether exclude Brāhmanas, Daivajnas or Muslims⁵⁰ which will be evident from various surnames like Bhuyan, giri, Dalai and Khan. In Darrang Rajyasāyāī as well as in Persian sources like the Akbarnamah and the Ain-i-Akbarī, there are references of Muslim Bhuyān. From the above account it appears that the Bhuyāns represented not merely a status group but also a class of armed land controllers.⁵¹

Barring the Kāyastha Bhuyān there were also fourteen Kāyastha families from Mithilā, Jessore and other places of Bengal. Kavindra pātra, the minister of Naranārāyana, is said to have procured them in order to enhance the power and prestige of the Kāyasthas in the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom.⁵² Some people of the old settlers of the Kāyasthas are to be found in Dinhatā which was once an important town.⁵³

In addition to those the Kalitas of Assam, having knowledge of reading and writing, were also known as Kāyastha and were the religious guru of the Koches and other people.⁵⁴ Martin is of the opinion that they were not dependent on the Brāhmanas and were unorthodox in character. The Kalitās have not far separated from the Koch as to intermarriage and frequently honour a Rājāsāī by accepting the hand of his daughter.⁵⁵ It is recorded in Bṛhat Rājā Vāśāyāī of Rājā Harendranārāyana that the King Naranārāyana had married Bhānumatī, the daughter of the Bhuyān Pratapa Ray and that his brother

Chilā Rāy had married Chandraprabhā, the daughter of Pratāp's youngest brothers. The learned lady Bhānumatī became the principal queen of Haranārāyana.⁵⁶

Most trades were carried on by the Kalitās and the Koch without distinction of caste.⁵⁷ In the Kāmātā Koch Kingdom Kalitās were appointed as clerks, domestic servants and braziers. Though their number was 810 in 1872, they enjoyed much respect in the Kāmātā Koch society as Bengal Kayastha got in Bengal.⁵⁸ They embraced Hindu worship and manners and were liked to be considered as pure Sūdra⁵⁹ in Hindu caste hierarchy. Martin observed that in eastern India most of the Kalitās were the worshipper of Kṛṣṇa for which they came to be known as 'Bhakt'. They are also said to have converted many of the tribes that living in the mountain, the Garos, the Rabhas, the Meches, etc. into their religion.⁶⁰

Vaidyas

The Vaidyas were the professional group of physicians but it is uncertain as to when this professional group came to be developed into a caste. The earliest reference of the Vaidyas as a distinct social group came to light in the eighth century by the south Indian inscriptions.⁶¹ But in Bengal there is no definite reference of Vaidya caste till twelfth century when they were given the status of uttama śūdra (sūdra).⁶² The Vaidyas comprising a small group of professional caste came to be emerged as a definite social group in the age of later Palas (11th century).⁶³

Outside Bengal in Tamilnadu, Kerala the Barbaras who were also surgeons had been called both Vaidyas and Ambasthas. Bharat Mallika in his Candrorahā composed in 1675 A.D. identified the Vaidyas with the Ambasthas.⁶⁴ D.C.Sircar is of the opinion that the Vaidyas-Ambasthas of Bengal were the migrants of the early medieval period from the south India and emerged themselves as physicians and ultimately this community developed into Bengali Vaidya Community.⁶⁵ Like the Kayasthas they also held high esteem in the society. In Bengal the Vaidyas carried the surname of Sena, Gupta, Das, Dutta, Kar etc. and though treatment of disease was their profession but they were also proficient in other scriptures.⁶⁶

Darrang Rajvatsavali mentioned the Vaidyas as physicians.⁶⁷ Martin observed that the number of Vaidya caste in the Kanatā Koch Kingdom were not numerous and few of them had a medical education.⁶⁸ There were altogether twentyfive families who were engaged in various employment. It is also said that about a same number of Vaidya family came from other places. They were in temporary services, partly as physicians and partly as priests and some time they also became religious guides of Zamindars.⁶⁹ In this connection mention may be made of Ojhas who are said to have existed in the kingdom as physician but it is difficult to ascertain as to whether they associated with Vaidyas. Mahamedan historians, however, recorded the high skill of the local Vaidyas in their treatment of ulcers and small-pox.⁷⁰ In the caste society the Vaidyas ranked as like as the Kayasthas.

Kaivartas

Kaivartas are often associated with water and boats. In the smṛtis they are taken to be mixed caste and Manu uses the term to mean the offspring of a Nisāda father by a Ayagva mother and known as Mārgava or Dāsa in Āryāvarta.⁷¹ The Jātakas refer to the fisherman as Kevattas.⁷² According to Brahma-vaivarta Purāna Kaivarta is born of Kṣatriya father and Vaisya mother but it seems to imply that the Kaivarta was degraded in Kaliyuga by his association with the Tivara and adopted the vocation of fisherman.⁷³ Bhavedeva Bhaṭṭa also refers to the Kaivartas as one of the Antajas or low castes. It is, however, recorded in the Vallalacarita that the status of Kaivartas has been improved by Vallalāsena into a clean caste⁷⁴ so much so that they could serve the upper castes. From epigraphs it appears that at least Kaivartas owned land and lived on agriculture.⁷⁵ This agree with the present divisions of the Kaivarta caste namely Hālowa (one who works with hale or the plough) and Jālowa (one who works with jala or the throwing net).⁷⁶

In the statistical account of Bengal, W.W.Hunter states that in the Census of 1872 there were 852 Kaivartas in the Kingdom who were both fisherman and agriculturist.⁷⁷ Hamilton is of the opinion that Kaivartas who were fisherman mainly confined entirely to the vicinity of Goālpāra.⁷⁸

Daivajñas

The Daivajñas or the Astrologers who dealt with the propitiation of Grahas or planets had a place of honour in the society.⁷⁹ They subsequently came to be known as Ganakas. According to the Brahma-Vaivarta Purāna Ganaka was born of Sākadvīpa father and Vaidya mother.⁸⁰ The ganaka Brāhmana were considered as degraded as they were connected with the study of astrology.⁸¹ Martin informs us about Daivajñas of Rangpur who professed not only Astronomy but also Astrology.⁸²

Darrang Rāj Vaśśavālī and Gosānīmadala provides a clear account of the functions of the Daivajñas.⁸³ Śrīvāra Daivajña, an astrologer, who flourished in the court of Vīśva Śiṃha used to give advice to the king in order to avoid the occurrence of untowered incident.⁸⁴ He is said to have composed a work on astrology 'Jyotis' by name. The composition of Darrang Rāj Vaśśavālī at about 1791 A.D. under the order of Rājā Samudra-nārāyana by Sūrya Khari Daivajña alias Baladeva was himself also Daivajña caste.⁸⁵

Mention may be made of a large number of other non-Brāhmana Hindu castes who held inferior status in the Kāmetā Koch society. Most of them derived their caste name from the profession they adopted. According to Darrang Rāj Vaśśavālī and Behārodanta⁸⁶ the noted among the professions were sonari (Goldsmith), Kamar (blacksmith), Kahār (palanquin bearers), Kumār (potter), Gāyan (singer), Bāyan (Drummers), tele (oil presures), Tānti (weaver),

Māli (gardener), Sūtradhar (carpenter), Dhobis (Washerman), Cāmar (Shoemaker), Modak (Confectionaries), Jolā (fisherman), goālā (producer of milk products), barbar etc.

In the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom the major components of the population were the non-Hindu tribals. The most important of these were the Koches, the ruling tribe, the Meches, the Rabhas, the Garos, the Lalungs, the Hojais, the Kāchāris, the Dināsās, the Bhutiyas etc. They had of their own dialects, manners and customs. These non-Hindu tribes, however, after their proselytisation to Hinduism had been accepted to the Hindu social fold and this was done by adopting them to the Śūdra class.⁸⁷ This process has been going on for a long time past which gradually increased the number of the members of the Hindu fold in this region like other parts of India.⁸⁸

Origin and ethnic features of the Koch

The origin of the Koches is still shrouded in obscurity. There is a controversy of opinions among the scholars on the subject. H.H. Risley is of the opinion that the Koches, unquestionably "non-Aryan and non-Hindu, were large Dravidian tribe of North-Eastern and Eastern Bengal among whom there are grounds for suspecting some admixture of Mongolian blood."⁸⁹ Oldham also delineates them as "the most conspicuously Dravidian race in Bengal."⁹⁰ E.T. Dalton describes that the Koches belong to the Dravidian stock because of their dark complexion and "the thick protuberant lips and maxillaries of the Negro."⁹¹

Another group of scholars consider the Koches of Mongolian stock. According to B.H.Hodgson, the Koches belong to the "distinctly marked type of the Mongolian family."⁹² Waddel, while support him says that 'They (The Koch) do not belong to the Dravidian stock, but distinctly Mongoloid."⁹³ According to Grierson "there can be little doubt that the original Koch were the same as the Bodos. The Koch, Mech and Bodo all connoted the same tribe or at most different sects of the same tribe. The name Koch is, in fact, connotes a Hinduised Bodo who has abandoned his ancestral religion for Hinduism and ancestral Bodo language for Bengali or Assamese."⁹⁴ Buchanan and the Dacca Blue Book class them with the Bodos and the Dhimals.⁹⁵ Endle also classes the Rabhas, Meches, Dhimals, Koches, Dimasa, Hojais, Lalunga, Garos, Hajong and such other tribes within the fold of the great Bodo race.⁹⁶ According to E.A.Gait, the Koches of Assam belong to the Mongolian rather than to the Dravidian stock.⁹⁷ S.K. Chatterjee and D.C.Sircar also hold the same view.⁹⁸

As regards the ethnic identity of the Koches certain contemporary sources also provide us important informations. Tabaqat-i-Nasiri which contains an account of the expeditions of Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar Khalji to the kingdom of Kāmrūpa in the first part of the thirteenth century informs us that during that time northern Bengal are peopled by the Koch, Mech and Thāru tribes having Turk countenance.⁹⁹ According to S.K.Chatterjee their Mongoloid features and speech make a distinct impression upon the Turks who belongs to the same race.¹⁰⁰ Thereafter,

Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mirjuna, during his conquest of Koch Behar in 1661 A.D. opined that the inhabitants since early times were the Koch and Mech tribes.¹⁰¹ Ralph Fitch who visited the Kānatā Koch Kingdom in the sixteenth century (1585 A.D.) says "The people have ears which be marvellous great of a span long which they draw out in length by devices when they be young."¹⁰² According to Gait this practice is still common among the Garos who belong to the Mongolian group¹⁰³ and points out that the "Koches are very closely allied to the Meches and Garos."¹⁰⁴

The Koch and Mech - the two tribes are said to have been belonged to the same stock.¹⁰⁵ Scholars like Buchanon, Martin and Risley noticed similarities between the Koches and other Bodo tribes (like the Rābhās) in their religious beliefs and rites as well as in social manners and customs.¹⁰⁶ Buchanon also observed that the language of the Koches resembled that of the Garos.¹⁰⁷ We came to learn that free intermarriage between the Koches and Meches was in vogue from early times.¹⁰⁸ Hajo the Koch Chief, gave his daughter in marriage to the Mech Hariyā Mandal and from this marriage sprung the principal chief Visu or Visva Sīṁha.¹⁰⁹

Literary sources of that period also supply us references to the Koches and their characteristics. Purānas and Tantras often referred to the Koches as Kuvaca.¹¹⁰ Padma Purāna states that they had no choice of food and spoke a barbarian language and had no sophistication in their manner.¹¹¹ Yoginī Tantra, composed in about sixteenth century, describes the Koches as

Kuvācas and states that they were born of a Mech woman.¹¹² It is not unlikely that the Aryan scholars call them as such or sometimes as Mleccha. K.L.Barua is of the opinion that Mleccha might be a Sanskritised form of the term Mech.¹¹³ Scholars like E.A.Gait and S.K.Chatterjee endorsed the view.¹¹⁴

According to S.K.Chatterjee "the present day Bengali word is Koc, or, rather Kōmc, and this can well be from a Middle-Indo-Aryan source-form *Kawomca written Kamōca, which could be properly Sanskritised as Kāmbōja."¹¹⁵ Elsewhere he points out that the Kāmbōjas of Bengal are apparently the ancestors of the Koch people of North Bengal.¹¹⁶ This view is supported by D.C.Sircar.¹¹⁷

According to D.C.Sircar the Koches after their Hinduisation organised a strong force and rose to political power in this part of the country at the cost of Pāla ruler of Gauda in the latter half of the 10th century A.D.¹¹⁸ The Dinajpur inscription of Kunjaraghatavarsa, the 'Kāmbōja lord of Gauda' refers to the race belonging to the Kāmbōjas in the time of erection of a Śiva temple there.¹¹⁹ Thus it appears that the term Kuvaca included the Koch tribes.

The Koches are, however, described both as Rājbaṅsī and as Bhaṅga Kṣatriyas. Gait opined that "in North Bengal, and Goalpara" the term 'Koch' had been falling into disrepute "and it has to a great extent been abandoned in favour of the appellation Rājbaṅsī."¹²⁰ According to him 'in Jalpaiguri, Koch Behar, and Goālpārā, the persons now known as Rājbaṅsī are

either pure Koches, who though dark, have a distinctly Mongoloid physiognomy, or else a mixed breed, in which the Mongoloid element usually preponderates.¹²¹

Buchanan Hamilton is of the opinion that 'all the Koch are sprung from the same stock and most of the Rājbaśīs are Koch.'¹²² H. Beverly also support him with the view that the Koches, the Rājbaśīs and the Poliyās are one and the same stock.¹²³

It may be said with the grounds mentioned above that the Koches are of Mongoloid origin having their homeland probably in Tibet¹²⁴ wherefrom they came into India and spread towards the east as well as towards the south and west where they mixed themselves up with the Dravidians. S.K.Chatterjee has divided the Bodos of the North East India into two main branches the eastern and western. It is not unlikely that the one gradually advanced towards the south and west and the other advanced eastward through the valley of the Brahmaputra.¹²⁵ The western branch comprised of the Koches of the Koch Behar, Kametā and Hajo¹²⁶ and the eastern branch the Kāchāries and the Chutiyas.

According to S.K.Chatterjee, Kamarūpa, East and North Bengal were inhabited by the Koch, Mech and Kāchāri people of the Bodo race since the beginning of the Christian era. On the other hand Aryānisation started in Bengal in 4th Century B.C., possibly during the Mourya period. As regards the Aryānisation of the Bodos S.K.Chatterjee opined that in North Bengal and East Bengal must have begun immediately after central and North

Bengal became Aryānised.¹²⁷ Hiuen Tsang observed that in the 7th century A.D. Kāmarūpa was under a Hindu King and the people were mostly initiated to Hinduism.¹²⁸

It is not improbable that during this period there was a intermingling of the cultures¹²⁹ of the Aryāns and the Indo-Mongoloids. As a result the Koches who became Hinduised were seemed to have abandoned their Tibeto-Burman speeches as mentioned earlier and probably played an important role in transmitting the culture they adopted from the Brāhmanas. According to S.K. Chatterjee, they acted as "the intermediaries in the transmission by land routes of the Brāhmanical and Buddhistic culture of India to Burma and beyond during the greater part of the 1st millenium A.D., and probably in the early prechristian centuries as well."¹³⁰

Sanyal, however, believes that the Koches after their conversion to Hinduism became Rājbaṅśī.¹³¹ But it appears likely that the term Rājbaṅśī became popular only with the establishment of strong centralised Government at Kāmatāpura under Viśva Siṃha. The Hinduised people belonging to the same stock like that of Viśva Siṃha came to be regarded as Rājbaṅśī i.e. belonging to the family of the king. Later on they made their presence felt in Hindu fourfold caste system, themselves as belonging to the Kṣatriya caste. S.K.Chatterjee also believed that the Koches are the Hinduised or Semi-Hinduised Bodo who have abandoned their original Tibeto-Burman speech particularly during the day of Viśva-Siṃha and they are proud to be called themselves Rājbaṅśī.

descendants of the 'royal kindred'.¹³² The adoption of the designation Rājbaṅṣī was so much so that not a single person remained there as Koch in the Census of 1881¹³³ in Koch-kingdom.

It is equally interesting to note that we find no mention of the Koch termed as Rājbaṅṣī either in the Persian records or Foreign accounts or in the dynastic epigraph of the time.¹³⁴ The Darrang Rāyachāvalī, a genealogical account of the Koch royal family which was written in the eighteenth century does not refer to the term. Instead all the sources call them as Koches and/or Meches. Even the Bengali Māṅgalā Kāvya of that time often refer to the term Koch while describing god Śiva's fondness of a Koch woman.

In the Yoginī Tantra we have a story ascribing the Kṣatriya origin to Viśva-Siṅha, the founder of the Koch dynasty.¹³⁵ It describes that Lord Śiva became infatuated by the beauty of a Koch woman named Hirā, wife of Hariyā Mandala. Śiva is said to have had an intercourse with Hirā and she gave birth to son, named Visu who later on took the name 'Viśva-Siṅha'. We have already explained the reason of Viśva Siṅha's association with Śiva. Here, again it is interesting to note that soon after Viśva-Siṅha's establishment as a sovereign ruler the Brahmanas "discovered his tribesmen were Kṣatriyas who had thrown away their sacred threads when fleeing before the wrath of Parsurāma ... while Viśva himself was declared to be the son not of the humble Hariyā Mandala but of the God Śiva..."¹³⁶ This story,

however, ascribes the Kṣatriya identity which was considered an essential feature prior to his consecration as a king in those times.

The introduction of the concept of Kṣatriya identity of the members of ruling class, however, took long time to pass to the common masses. It was in the nineteenth century that the Rājbaṅśīs in general claimed as Kṣatriyas or more properly Bhaṅga Kṣatriyas.¹³⁷ The result was that while in the census of 1881, as Rājbaṅśīs in Koch Behar, in the census of 1891 the term Bhaṅga Kṣatriya first came to be applied to these people. C.C.Sanyal observed that there is a great fall in the number of Rājbaṅśīs in Jalpaiguri in that year.¹³⁸ In the Census of 1921 almost all the Rājbaṅśīs has been recorded as Kṣatriyas.¹³⁹ It was, however, admitted by the pandits of Rangpur Dharmasabha that the Rājbaṅśīs have become to all intents and purposes Hindus and their claim to rank as Śūdra (Kṣatriyas).¹⁴⁰

But it is interesting to note that the Rājbaṅśīs considered the Koch separate from them.¹⁴¹ Since pre-Independence times the Rājbaṅśīs are claiming the view through their social organisation Kṣatriya Samity.¹⁴²

It is difficult for us to distinguish the Rājbaṅśīs¹⁴³ from the Koches for the grounds mentioned below. First both the Rājbaṅśīs and the Koches are Physiognomically indivisible and they inherited the Mongolian blood profusely. Secondly, free

intermarriage took place between them since the early times. Thirdly, people of both the community carry on the same religion and culture and led their life on the same general norms of life.¹⁴⁴ Fourthly, both the Rājbaṅṣī and the Koch people claim of their Kṣatriya origin and refer to the story of Parśurāma in order to establish their Kṣatriya identity.

Thus it appears that the people of Kānatā-Koch Kingdom either they termed as Rājbaṅṣī or Koch were related and were one and the same race. They found a great inspiration to trace their identity with the Royal dynasty.

We have already mentioned that in the Hindu caste hierarchy the Brāhmaṇas were at the top. The non-Brāhmaṇa castes like the Kāyasthas, the Vaidyas, the Daivajñas and Kalitās were also considered as high caste Hindu but they were termed as Sūdras.¹⁴⁵

In the tradition-ridden Hindu society the Rājbaṅṣīs were placed in a very low social position which coincided with the rank of the Namāsūdras or Candāls, the Pātnia, Mālo etc.¹⁴⁶ Formerly the Hindus objected to drink water touched by a Rājbaṅṣī.¹⁴⁷ This is probably due to their social customs and rituals which were very much different from the orthodox Hindu culture and more akin to the simple tribal behaviour.

Social Stratification

The Kānatā-Koch Kingdom had a monarchical government and the society was feudal in nature. It had basically three broad

classes of people - (A) the aristocracy (not obliged to render any kind of manual service to the state), (B) a class consisting of small landholder, merchants and petty officers and (C) the peasantry (associated with production).

A. Aristocracy, however, can be divided into two -

(I) secular aristocracy consisting of the Rājās, big landholders, chief nobles and (II) the spiritual aristocracy which consists of Royal priests, learned Brahmanas, (temples priests, Śatrahikā-
rīas, Dharmādhyakṣa etc.

A.1. The secular aristocracy were dependent upon the king. The Koch Kings who particularly believed in the Divine right of Kingship tracing their origin from Lord Śiva could command respect and submission from the people which helped them in consolidating their power and position. Darrang Rājyaśāvalī informs us that Viśva-Siṃha was compared with different Gods like Brahma, Viṣṇu, Mahesa, Indra, Āditya, Vāyu, Varuṇa and Kuvera etc.¹⁴⁸ His successors beginning from Naranārāyaṇa assumed the title 'Nārāyaṇa' the name of supreme God of the Hindus.¹⁴⁹ We came across from the epigraphic sources that Naranārāyaṇa, son and successor of Viśva-Siṃha is compared with Arjuna, Dadhichī, Karna and Kandarpa.¹⁵⁰

The King was the supreme power of all the branches of administration both in the centre and in the provinces of the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom. As the source of all power he could make his will a law. But in practice he was to rule according to the Vidhi of the religious texts¹⁵¹ and traditional laws and customs

of the society and listen to the opinion of the council of ministers.¹⁵² Kālikāpurāna, a tenth century work on state craft, also states that a wise king was to listen to the advice of the wise and learned Brāhmaṇas and learn from the essence of the sāstras.¹⁵³ It was possibly in accordance with the principle the Koch Kings appointed Rājapurohita or royal priest from Brāhmaṇas. Practically, the king acted according to the advice of the Rājapurohita who have mastery over the sāstras and well-trained in sixty-four Kalās¹⁵⁴ but his ideals and duties were guided by the rule of Dharma or the rule of law.

The protection of the life and property of the subjects from the external aggression and internal misrule was considered by them as their primary duty. Darrang Rājvaśeśvalī informs us that the Koch King Viśva-Siṃha's relation with his subjects were like those of a father with his children.¹⁵⁵

The style of living of the Kāmatā Koch Kings was like that of the Sultans of Bengal or of the Mughal Governors.¹⁵⁶ There was royal harem under the Koch King. We came to know that Viśva Siṃha had eighteen queens¹⁵⁷ and his grandson Raghudeva as many as one hundred and twenty.¹⁵⁸ Persian sources informs us that Prāṇanārāyaṇa was "surrounded by singing women. His palace regal had a ghusul khana, private rooms, accommodations for the harems, for servants, baths and fountains and a garden."¹⁵⁹

Stephen Cacella while visited the Koch court observed that 'to have access to the king, he and his companions had to pass

through three courts by roomy verandah which were separated from each other by strong gates. There was a garden in the middle having a Villa where the King waited for them.¹⁶⁰

As regards religion the people of the Kāmatā Koch kingdom had heterogeneous sects and beliefs. They worshipped their deities and performed their own religious rites and rituals without any interference from the king. Religious Catholicity was the characteristic of the Kingdom which prevailed throughout the period.

In classical Indian tradition generosity¹⁶¹ and giving gifts to the Brāhmanas have been considered an important element of the role of Kings. The Koch Kings of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom are no exception to this. They endowed rent free landgrants to the Brāhmanas, temples, Satras, Mosques as well as other establishments.

The donation of lands is said to have immense redistributive roles in the society. The Brāhmanas who were offered such lands opened new areas of settlement and helped in the growth of production by their knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry.¹⁶² At the same time it extends royal control into new areas.¹⁶³ In this connection mention may be made of B.Stein who noticed the same thing in case of Vijayanagara rule in South India.¹⁶⁴

Barring the king mention may be made of Big landholders and high officials in charge of various departments of administration like Dewan, Patra-Mantri Senapati, Nāsidedo, etc. who

constituted the aristocratic class. They are of privileged class rendering no regular service to the state but while in office they were given land as perquisites by the king.

The income of the aristocratic class came from the land which they got cultivated by the peasants of the Kingdom. The land can, however, be used as hereditary due to the fact that the appointments were mostly hereditary. They wielded a crucial role in the court politics as well as in matters of succession. The kings are said to have taken their opinion when necessity arises.

The style of living of this class was one of pomp and splendour.¹⁶⁵ A clear distinction was there between the life of them and the commoners. Like their counterpart of Bengal the nobility of the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom marked its rank by possessing slaves,¹⁶⁶ servants, elephants, horses and last but not the least several wives. They used to wear silver embroidered clothes and umbrella to distinguish themselves from the King whose dress was embroidered with gold.¹⁶⁷

(A.II.) The spiritual aristocracy consisted of all big holders of revenue free landgrants like Devottara Brahmattara, etc. royal priest and scholars and the like.

Brahmanas generally were the recipient of the landgrants. They can be categorised as priest in the temples, royal priest, officiate priest of non-Brahmanas, and learned one who devoted to learning and study of the sastras.

The priests played an influential role in the society of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom. The coronation ceremonies of Koch Kings were performed with pomp and dignity¹⁶⁸ under the guidance of the royal priest. According to Vedic rites, waters were collected from various holy rivers and were sprinkled over the king's head before his sitting on the throne with the chatra and danda¹⁶⁹ and sacrifices were made to propitiate the gods and the Brāhmanas.¹⁷⁰

The image of the Brāhmanas in the popular mind is of a person who lives ministering to the religious needs of the people. The Brāhmanas who acted as priests in the temples enjoyed a high status in the society. It has already been seen that a large number of temples particularly Siva Temples were built all over the Kingdom beginning from Visva Sīṅha down to the last king of the Koch dynasty. People in large numbers assembled in the temple premises during the regular and periodical worship of the deities, the worship of which was performed by the priest.

It is interesting to note that sometimes the priest is said to have attributed their special personal contact to the deity of a temple. Thus the priests not merely championed the cause of kings as incarnation of divine Beings, but they declared that they were the Medium through which Gods or Goddesses express their vision or desires. Incidentally, the Gosānimaṅgala informs us that Goddess Gosāni used to perform dance in the presence of the priest in the temple the sight of which was prohibitory for the members of the royal family for watching.¹⁷¹

(B). Another class of people next to the privileged aristocracy is consisted of small landholders, merchants and petty officials of administration. The Bhuyans as landholders are used to occupy waste lands, settled new villages and got them cultivated by the peasants over which they wielded their lordship. They collected the land revenue of the villages under their jurisdiction and received a share of it from the government.¹⁷² The Bhuyāns who led a life nearly like those of the aristocracy with their own armed forces were a powerful class in the society.

The role of the Merchants in the social life of the country are no less significant. Trade and commerce are said to have been continued from the early times; Stephen Cacella writes that during this period (1626-27) Koch Behar was frequented by the merchants from Rājmahal and Pātna.¹⁷³ According to W.W.Hunter "Nearly all the commerce of the state except such as is carried on at the weekly markets is in the hands of foreign merchants, chiefly marwaries from Bikanir who bring more energy and enterprise to the work than the Koch Beharis usually possess."¹⁷⁴ Marwaries were also associated with money lending business both in the urban and rural areas of the Kingdom.¹⁷⁵ Big merchants usually dealt with gold, jewelleries, silk, salt, mastard seeds etc. and the smaller one with arecanut, betel vines etc.¹⁷⁶

It is said that the indigeneous merchants played a crucial role in patronising the Neo-Vaisnava religion and its establishments. In this connection mention may be made of Bhabananda Kalitā, a

disciple of Śaṅkaradeva, who traded with seven of his companions in Bengal, Bhutan,¹⁷⁷ Garo hills and the Ahom Kingdom.

With the coming of the English the upper caste Hindus from neighbouring British districts of undivided Bengal came in large numbers.¹⁷⁸ A part of them engaged themselves in trade and money lending business. The rest of the population particularly who had education in English were absorbed in the different branches of administration.¹⁷⁹ Later on lawyers and teachers etc. came.

This new English educated class which is known as middle class, was recognised by the Koch Kings like Nṛpendranārāyaṇa and his successors. The Koch Kings by giving power and prestige to the class at the cost of their Kingmen tried to bring about efficiency and effectiveness in the administration.¹⁸⁰

C. At the lowest rung of the three-tier society of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom was the peasantry consisting of peasants, artisans, jaigirdars and some small traders. They were required to render service or pay a tax instead of it in kind or cash.

Agriculture was the main occupation of the common people.¹⁸¹ There was no rigidity of rules regarding the landholding before the advent of the British. A person, however, could get hold of as much of waste lands for use as it could manage and is known as jotedar.

The secular and spiritual aristocracy had hereditary estates which were cultivated by slaves, bondsmen and tenants.

Satras establishments often reclaim wastelands for cultivation in order to evade monk's obligatory service to the state.¹⁸²

A peasant generally enjoyed his landright undisturbed and he could move from one place to another except in time of military duty to the state. Along with cultivation a peasant could undertake any occupation like weaving, carpentry, pottery etc.¹⁸³

As regards the land holding of the peasants Kathā Guru Carita informs us that some peasants had one bigha of land without granery while others had 26 puras of land with a number of ploughs and (3/4) graneries.¹⁸⁴ Large landholdings was based on the duration of service to the state. Besides, a peasant who had large number of members in the family could bring more waste lands under cultivation.

Like the big landholders an affluent peasant could purchase, though rare, a slave or two in order to employ them in cultivation. Most often he got the labour of a poor peasant who mortgaged his service against a small loan. Thus Parasānanda, a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva was formerly a bonded labour against a loan of one rupee.¹⁸⁵ Kathā Guru Carita states that Bhabananda Kalita, a great merchant disciple of Śaṅkaradeva, released him paying the debt of Rs.5/-.¹⁸⁶

(With the coming of the English the older land system witnessed a change. In 1790 the first settlement of land under

Bouglass introduced Isaradari system in which direct exaction of rent is settled.¹⁸⁷ During 1870-72 we came across that the Jotedars who sublet their land to undertenants¹⁸⁸ in six-grades like Chukani, Daradar, Chukani, Tasya Chukani, Tali Chukani and Tasya Tali Chukani were recognised in the Koch Behar agricultural society.¹⁸⁹ In 1888, however, an act was passed to check creating further under tenants.¹⁹⁰ In course of time a large number of new tenants were created Maharāja Narendranārāyana considering their helpless condition was pleased to confer on them a right on land for which they are known as Krishti Praja.¹⁹¹)

The rates of rent payable by each grade of tenants are settled and fixed by the state¹⁹² and jotedar was the intermediary between the state and the sub-tenants. The same was also followed by other subtenants.

(All the sub-tenants excluding the Jotedars¹⁹³ whose position was like those of the zamindars in Bengal were cultivators.¹⁹⁴ Each sub-tenants generally cultivates his land with the help of adhiars or else he gives the land to Dar Chukanidar in lease who pay him rent and retain the product.¹⁹⁵

(The coming of the upper caste people from various places from time to time points a significant change in the society of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom. These people were intellectually more advanced than the people of the semi-Hinduised agricultural society and gradually wielded a dominant position. Kings also

took their opinion in matters of political, social and economic importance.

Thus with the emergence of the new class of land owners whose status was based on ownership of land on the one hand, and the advent of caste conscious upper classes of people from different regions on the other, the social status of the existing Rājbaṅsī class was degraded. ¹⁹⁶)

(It was at this time a strong feeling about upholding the social rank of the Rājbaṅsīs was gaining ground in the minds of the common people. Accordingly a movement was started by the Rājbaṅsīs, in order to establish their claim to be qualified as Kṣatriya under the leadership of Thākur Paṅcānan Burmā, an inhabitant of Kānāta Koch Kingdom.)

(The Rājbaṅsī caste movement that took place during the 19th and 20th century in Northern Bengal was a movement of a depressed community the people of which wanted to raise their social rank by adopting the 'Bhadralok' pattern of living and the upper caste rituals. The process they followed is called Sanskritisation or cultural adoption as a camouflage to ventilate the upper caste domination. ¹⁹⁷)

(The Rājbaṅsīs organised the Rājbaṅsī Kṣatriya samity in 1st May, 1910. ¹⁹⁸ It was through this organisation that Thākur Paṅcānan tried to establish the claim of the community

to bear the sacred thread and to be qualified as Ksatriya. This was apparently an attempt to put the Rajbansis in the fourfold Brāhmanical caste system. It may be noticed in this connection that a similar movement of consecrating the non-Brāhmanas with the sacred threads by Swāmi Vivekānanda earlier on the day of placing sacred bones of Sri Rāmakṛiṣṇa at Belurmath on 22nd February, 1897. It is not unlikely that Thākur Pancānon received an impetus from Swāmi Vivekānanda. ^{198a})

An unanimous decision had come out from the general conference held in May 1, 1910. The Rajbansis decided to make an appeal both to the British Government as well as to the Koch Behar authority to enlist them in the census as Ksatriya and this was said to have been recognised by the British Government. Consequently, in the Census of 1911 and 1921 all Rājbanṣis were recorded as Ksatriya Rājbanṣi. By 1931 almost all of them become Kṣatriya after taking of sacred thread which resulted in the fall in number of Rājbanṣis in the Northern Bengal. ¹⁹⁹⁾

Mahārājā of Koch Behar who is supposed to sprung from the same community ²⁰⁰ did not comply with the view of Thākur Pancānan Burma and his movement of upgrading the Rājbanṣi as a twice born caste. It was probably due to the fact that the Koch Kings, as rulers, did not even want themselves to be considered in the same rank as those of the Rājbanṣis. Moreover, they were possibly not pleased with the way in which the movement was organised without the prior permission of the rulers perhaps to create some sort of

restlessness in the minds of the people of the kingdom.

We may conclude that the contention of Thakur Panchanon Burma may or may not be accepted by all scholars²⁰¹ but his contribution to awaken the self-respect in the people cannot be overlooked.)

Slavery

The prevalence of the system of slavery was a feature of the traditional agrobased economy. Slavery was not unknown in North Eastern India and the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom was no exception to it. Slavery is said to have been existed in the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom from early times.²⁰² A number of slaves were there in the household of Saṅkaradeva, the neo-Vaiṣṇava reformer in the 16th century.²⁰³ Stephen Cacella referred to the export of male and female slaves.²⁰⁴

Slaves were exported to Bhutan, Bengal and the Ahom Kingdom from the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom.²⁰⁵ Martin's Eastern India informs us that dressed up children were sold in the markets.²⁰⁶ Every year nearly a hundred boys and girls were sent for sale from Assam and Koch Behar to Bengal.²⁰⁷ The price of a girl varies from Rs.12 to 15 but a Koch boy is sold at Rs.25 and a Kalitā boy at Rs.50. Children of lower castes were sold to the Garos.²⁰⁸ Turner observes that "nothing is more common than to see a mother dress up her child, and bring it to a market, with no other hope,

no other view than to enhance the price she may procure for it."²⁰⁹

There were a number of ways by which one could trace the creation of slaves in the kingdom. Martin mentions that, if a man incurs debt or fine heavier than he can pay, he becomes a slave or mortgages himself, unless his wife chooses to redeem him. He works for his master and receives food and raiment.²¹⁰ Turner states 'if a rayat or peasant owes a sum of money and had not the ability to satisfy the creditors, he is compelled to give up his wife as a pledge, and possession of her is kept, until the debt is discharged. It sometimes happens, on the affairs, that the wife of a debtor is not redeemed for the space of one or two or three years, a family should have been the consequence, half of it is considered as the property of the person with whom she lived and half of her real husband."²¹¹

The people of the neighbouring Bhot or Garo tribes often abducted men and women of Kamatē-Koch Kingdom and reduced them as slaves.²¹² Besides, "Prisoners of war persons purchased from hill tribes, condemned criminals and persons born of slaves constituted a major section of the servile class."²¹³

Robinson, however, observed that out of the 3000 000 people, more than 20 000 were bondsmen and slaves.²¹⁴ It is said that slaves, serfs and bondsmen constituted 5 to 9 per cent of the population.²¹⁵

Slaves were often used as marriage dowry for the rich men.

Mahārājā Naranārāyaṇa is said to have been presented twelve persons as slaves who were known as Morgaji.²¹⁶ The possessing of slaves more or less remained confined within the noble persons of whom all the works of household and field were performed by the slaves.²¹⁷ However, no distinction have been maintained between serfdom and slaves in the absence of the classical form of a dehumanised slavery.

The existence of slavery in the Kāmātā Koch Kingdom was probably due to extreme poverty of the people. As regards the condition of the people Turner states in 1783 that "indeed the extreme poverty and wretchedness of these people will forcibly appear, when we recollect how little is necessary for the subsistence of peasant in those regions. The value of this can seldom amount to more than one penny per day, even allowing him to make his meal of two pounds of boiled rice, with a due proportion of salt, oil, vegetables fish and chillies."²¹⁸

Slaves are considered as the private property of their master and hence they were treated generally with kindness. The female slaves were permitted to marry but they had no right to go away with their husbands.²¹⁹

In the meantime reformative activities have been going on in the wakes of social life which resulted in the anti-slavery movement by the educated people of the Kāmātā Koch Kingdom. In 1864 the British Government proclaimed to this effect "The existence of actual slavery in Kuch Behar forced itself upon the

attention of the Commissioner and the matter was laid before the Governor-General." On 7th Sept., 1864 the abolition of slavery was formally proclaimed at a public Darbar and a Regulation in the Bengali language, embodying the provisions of the Penal Code respecting kidnapping and abductions, was declared to be in force as regards all future seizures, sales or detentions of persons, males or females.²²⁰

The abolition of slavery in the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom is followed by some measures which re-habilitate them. These freed slaves were given lands for cultivation. They were known as Jaloidars in the society but their status was not like those of the precolonial India.²²¹

Position of Woman

In the society of North-east India which is basically tribal or greatly influenced by the tribal elements, women enjoyed high status and freedom than her counterpart in other parts of India. This is true of the women in the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom. In Kāmarūpa woman is regarded as the representative of Goddess Kāmākhyā.²²² The supremacy of mother is thus recognised on all hands.

Woman in the upper stratum of the society had enough leisure to be devoted themselves in the different socio-cultural

activities. We came to know that the queens of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom like Bhānumatī, Kāmesvarī Devī, Bṛndesvarī Devī, Sunīty Devī, Nirupamā Devī took a great interest in the development of language, literature, education and the upliftment of the social status of the woman in general. It was at the instance of queen Bhānumatī, Vidyāvāgīśa composed the Grammar Ratnamālā.²²³ Bṛndesvarī Devī,²²⁴ queen of Mahārājā Narendranārāyaṇa, took keen interest on the subject relating to literature, punthia, Purāṇas etc. During her time language and literature developed to a great extent.

A lot of information can be had regarding the social relationship among the woman of various classes in the society from Behārodants of queen Bṛndesvarī Devī. She informs us about the dress, ornaments, which the woman generally used to wear to attend any social gathering.²²⁵ Kamalāpriya,²²⁶ who was married to Chīlā Rāy was highly proficient in performing devotional songs which impressed her husband to be a devotee of Viṣṇu.

The queens of the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom wielded a significant influence in the court. It was under the efforts of Kāmesvarī Devī and Bṛndesvarī Devī²²⁷ that the Jenkins' School was established during the reign of Narendranārāyaṇa. After the death of Narendranārāyaṇa the administration of the kingdom was entrusted upon the queens Kāmesvarī Devī, Bṛndesvarī Devī and Nistārīnī Devī.²²⁸

Sunīty Devī, daughter of Keshab Ch. Sen, who was married to Nṛpendranārāyaṇa, was another literary flare in the family.

The purpose of her writings both in Bengali and English was to inculcate in the mind of the readers the truths of morality and religion.²²⁹ Her Autobiography of an Indian Princess offers us an interesting sidelight into her inner circle.

Sunity Devī, as a true follower of Brāhma Religion, wielded her imagination in the cause of female education in the Kingdom. In this connection we may refer to the establishment of Sunity College in 1881.²³⁰ The institution, today known as Sunity Academy, played a vital role in woman education.²³¹

Sunity Devī was directly involved in the affairs of the School. The students of the institution were exempted from tuition fee and cost of books. Besides, on their success "Her Highness the Mahārānī pleased to invite the girls of the Sunity College to the palace in May last and after delivering to them an interesting address on their duties as girls, wives and mothers, gave them of useful books and other fancy things."²³² The result was that in 1891 the number of educated female was 545 against 231 in 1881, showing an increase of above 135% while in case of male the increase was 53%.²³³

The deeds of Nirupamā Devī were of no less significant. She had interest on literature and is said to have edited a journal 'Paricārikā' by name.²³⁴

In upper sections of the society polygamy was the usual way while monogamy among the commonality. Polyandry has no

sanction of society²³⁵ or law and does not exist. It is interesting to note that the protest against the system of Polygamy first came from the royal family. Sunity Devī's marriage with Nṛpendranārāyaṇa set an example against the system with the declaration that he would not marry again.²³⁶

The system of marriage by purchase is prevalent in the country. Here bride price is called in the dialect of the people as 'Koinā Beca' by her guardian and boy's side it is called 'Koina Jodā'.²³⁷

It is, however, noticed that amongst the modern educated boys there is tendency to demand money or some other dowry from the guardian of the girl and in fact some marriages have later on taken places where the father of the girl had to give costly dowry to the Bridegroom instead of receiving bride price. The reversal of position is said to have been probably due to the close association with the caste Hindus who often demanded heavy dowry from the guardian of the girl.²³⁸

We came to know from the Behārodanta of Bṛndesvarī Devī that there was a system of Pardah²³⁹ among the women of royal family as well as higher caste Hindus. In eradicating the system the contribution of Sunity Devī is worthy to be mentioned. According to his words²⁴⁰ "Rājā's wives are not allowed to go out of door. It may be my weakness or my strength, but I have altered my position in this respect a little, I do see people if urged." Again the visit of Sunity Devī to London in 1897 was a pointer towards breaking the system.²⁴¹

The chastity of women was praised in the society particularly after the Neo-Vaisnavite movement of Śaṅkaradeva.²⁴² Women among the lower order were also conscious about their chastity. Rādhikā Sati,²⁴³ a Kaivarta woman, whose chastity was highly praised by Śaṅkaradeva is regarded as an ideal of womanhood even by the commonfolk.

Literary education among the women was considered highly improper in the lower order of the population.²⁴⁴ According to Martin, "No man used to marry a girl who was known to be capable of reading."²⁴⁵ It is generally believed that a man who had educated wife did not live long.

Women are more industrious²⁴⁵ than their male counterpart in the household works of daily life. They help the men²⁴⁷ in weeding and transplanting, also in cutting and thrashing of the crops. Besides, they arrange the house, husk paddy, gather and cut fuel, fetch water, prepare the meals, sometimes weave the cloth, do the marketing, wash the cloths, nurse the children and attend upon the sick.²⁴⁸

Campbell is of the opinion that the women are generally more intelligent²⁴⁹ and better informed in all matters than the male. At an approach of a new-comer in the house it was women who responded first.²⁵⁰ They have almost full liberty both within and outside the house and could move from one place to another unveiled. H.N.Choudhury is of the opinion that although not positively respected they are not ill treated.²⁵¹

Domestic Rites and Rituals

Women in the region are associated with performing Vrata ceremonies. A good number of Vratas was in vogue in the society. Kātyāyanī Vrata,²⁵² Śatpūjā Vrata, Niskalaśika Vrata, Śuvāsanī Vrata, Manuvratā Vratā etc. were performed by the women in general for the welfare of the members of their family.²⁵³ Since early days these ceremonies were observed without the śāstric rituals.²⁵⁴ It was after Hinduisation, particularly during the reign of Naranārāyaṇa, Śāstric rules and regulations were said to have been incorporated into the Vrata ceremonies.²⁵⁵ In this connection mention may be made of Naranārāyaṇa who performed Nirāhara Vrata following śāstric rituals to propitiate Goddess Durgā.²⁵⁶ Besides, Śiva-Rātri, Jagadhātrī Pūjā, Śrī Pancamīpūjā, Manasā or Bisahari Pūjā, etc., were also held with pomp and grandeur.²⁵⁷ The woman of lower section of the society used to perform such ceremonial festivals. From Śatpūjā Vrata it appears that the people of base origin were admitted in the society.²⁵⁸

It is interesting to note that after the introduction of Brāhmanical rituals the Hinduised people were side by side associated with the worship of their traditional deities. Hudum deo worship, Mecinīkhela worship, Dharana Dhaker worship, Garakṣanath worship, Kherai,²⁵⁹ Pangthāri, Budā Thākuraṇī worship²⁶⁰ etc. are still more popular. In spirit and content the rites of these worships were magico-religious in nature. These magical performance are observed in order to get rid of disaster or natural

calamities, to control epidemics, to reap good harvests and to bring down rainfall during draught.²⁶¹

The upper caste Hindus like Brāhmanas, Kāyasthas etc. observed various other domestic rites in connection with birth, marriage and death. It was considered as to the Brāhmanas, who formed the priestly class, to perform the five sacramental rites²⁶² and duties relating Yajnas, achyānas, dāna and prati-graha. Kāyasthas also observed six sacramental rites in different stages of their life. A pregnant woman was offered pañcāharta at a ceremony at the fifth month of her pregnancy.²⁶³ The birth of a child was followed by a ceremony which is called suddhikarana, at the end of a month. Next to Suddhikarma was the ceremony of Annaprāsana or the first feeding of rice.

The common people, Hinduised or not, followed their own rites relating to birth. The Koch or Rājbañsī people did not build new or separate house for the lying in of their women, as is the custom of the Hindus, any dwelling house serves the purpose.²⁶⁴ In order to protect the house against evil spirits or Deos, branches of thorny trees were stuck in the walls.²⁶⁵ Immediately after the birth of a child, the naval cord is cut by the mother herself or some elderly female relative with a thin sharp slip of bamboo.²⁶⁶ The elderly woman in the after life of the child is regarded as second mother who is also known as narikata mai.²⁶⁷ After the birth of a child the mother is considered to be impure and she was kept in seclusion.

On the 9th day, the barbar cut the nails both of the mother and the child which is known as 'ek-kaman' (first shaving). On the thirtieth day is held 'Do-kaman',²⁶⁸ (second shaving) and on that occasion the holy water known as 'Santi-ial' is prepared by the purohita or Brāhmana priest, placing therein springs of sacred Tulsi plant, atap rice, with durba grass and bel leaves. They pronounce incantations over the mixture which is then sprinkled over all members of household inclusive of mother and child. It was thus an imitation of the ways followed by the Hindus of Bengal.²⁶⁹

The ceremony of first rice or the Annaprāsana which is called by the people 'Bhatsoa' (touching of rice) is performed at the end of six month after birth.²⁷⁰ It is also at this time that the child is given a name in a ceremony where a Brāhmana priest officiates. The poorest classes, however, generally make an offering of 'naivedya',²⁷¹ consisting of atap rice and plantains, to the deities and a grain from the same is touched to the lips of the child. In the latter case a Adhikari,²⁷² the officiating priest of the Rājbañsi caste, offers the naivedya. The first mouthful of rice is generally given to the child by the grandfather, grandmother or the maternal uncle. The ceremony of first feeding of a child is performed very much in the same way as is in vogue among the Hindus of Bengal.²⁷³

The ceremony of Tonsura or Churākaraṇa is performed by the people. The child is generally shaved outside the house and

it takes place within a circle made with nith figures of horses and miniature flags where a 'Chakra' is also placed on the ground.²⁷⁴ The first growth of hair is supposed to be due to a deity called Budī Thākurañī.²⁷⁵ The hair thus shaved is removed to the shrine of the Goddess. The ceremony takes place in the 6th, 12th or 18th month after birth and a Adhikari officiates at the ceremony and offers the naivedya. It is worthy to be mentioned that from the Rājā down to the poorest man this ceremony is most scrupulously observed.²⁷⁶

Initiation

Everyman and woman is twice religiously instructed in his or her life though there was no fixed time of taking the instructions. Generally at the young age Adhikari whispers in the ear of the child the name of Hari. At a more advanced stage he gives the guru mantra in the ear of his disciple. The disciple in return offers some presents and consider him as his spiritual father and preceptor.²⁷⁷ It was necessary for the disciple to utter the mantra everyday after bathing and after taking meals. This dikṣa ceremony is considered a formal profession of faith or entry into Hinduism.²⁷⁸

Marriage

To the people of Kāṣṭhā Koch Kingdom marriage ceremony is considered a sacred religious duty. The Hindus performed their marriages according to Vedic rites. In the aristocracy it was obligatory to consult the horoscope of the pair before settling the marriage. When a marriage was settled the groom or his relations

made presents of dresses and ornaments to the bride. Marriage was performed generally *in* the house of the bride. But in case of royal family the marriage took place in the royal palace where the bride had to be brought.

Smritis record the prevalence of the eight forms of marriages in the society but all are not recommended by them. Among these Brahma, Daiva, Praishostya and Ashta types of marriage are spoken well of by all.²⁷⁹

In the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom three types of marriage - (i) Gandharva, (ii) Brahma and (iii) Widow marriage became prevalent. Gandharva and widow marriage are not sanctioned by the custom of the Hindu society.²⁸⁰

(i) Gandharva marriage :

In the Gandharva form of marriage generally a bride selects her husband and therefore none of the friends or relatives of the bride or bridegroom are expected to take part in the matter. These essential particulars relating to the marriage are sanctioned by the Hindu sāstras. But the Gandharva marriage among the Rājbaṅsīs in the Kingdom differs in almost all essential particular. Here the marriage takes place when the girl is between four and twelve years of age. The husband or his parents naturally select the girl. In this kind of ceremony the girl is placed before the Chalan bati,²⁸¹ a seive of bamboo, containing among other things five lights, a bunch of banana, some grains of paddy and a few ends of durba grass. She is presented with a new cloth and

ankh (shell bracelets). Garlands of flowers are also exchanged between the bride and the bridegroom. No religious ceremony is, however, performed and the services of the priest²⁸² are not required in the marriage. Formerly, it was in vogue in the royal family²⁸³ and among the higher order of the people.

(ii) Brahma marriage

The Brahma form of marriage prevails among the people in general and have the sanction of both of sastras and customs of the Kingdom.²⁸⁴ The usual way of the marriage is the gift of a daughter by the father or any other relatives after decking her with ornaments to a man who is learned and have a good character whom the bride herself invites. The fundamental portion of the ceremony is the same as is generally followed in Bengal.

The match is settled by the relations of both the parties with the assistance of Bhatait or ghatak (match maker).²⁸⁵ Generally the bridegroom has to pay bride price. The bride's father, however, makes a free gift of her to the bridegroom with some valuable presents.

After the agreement on marriage an auspicious day is fixed by the village astrologer on which day the friends of the bridegroom send a quantity of betel leaves and betel nuts to the house of the bride. On their way to the house of the bride if any inauspicious things like deadbody, a funeral, the evil sights, a ditch recently cut, a leech or a snake they meet, the match is never to be thought of.²⁸⁶ However, if met with milk,

flowers or fish which augurs happiness of the pair they reach the bride's house where the neighbours and relatives on both sides assemble together. The betelnuts are then cut in the presence of the gathering and distributed among them. This is called ghata path dekhanī Gū.²⁸⁷

If within three days after the cutting of the Gū no inauspicious event happens in the family, a day is finally fixed for the marriage in the presence of friends and neighbours accompanied by the cutting of betel nuts which is called dara gū. Presents consisting of curd, cheera, fish, new clothes shell bracelets, vermillion, betelnuts and betel leaves are sent to the bride.²⁸⁸

It is the custom for the father of the bride to sprinkle holy water on the heads of the couple when the bride is taken round the bridegroom. In the absence of father the function is performed by some elderly members of the family who is known as Panichita ban. The services of the Brāhmana Priest are received by the higher order of the people²⁸⁹ whereas in the lower order the priestly service of Adhikarī is taken.

Widow marriage

Widow remarriage is allowed in the society. The Hindus of the Kingdom do not regard the union of a widow and a man as marriage at all and no ceremony is performed on that purpose. This form of connection is looked down upon even by the people themselves.

In this kind of union the husband and the wife are known by different names. When a widow accepts a man to live with him she is said to do goo-gach or nika and is known as Pachua wife of the man who in turn is called her sangna.²⁹⁰ A widow lives by herself and a man goes to the house with a dang or stick in his hand and strikes a blow with it on the roof of the house and so enters in and takes possession of the woman, who is known as dangua wife.²⁹¹ This kind of union takes place only when previous understanding between the parties occurs.

Most of all the cases a widow for the security of herself and her property enters into the house of a man and she is denominated a dhoka wife and this form of marriage is called ghar Dhokani.²⁹² The children of the former husband call the new father as Dhokarbab and children are known as Dhokar beta and Dhokar beti.²⁹³

Generally the grown up children live in the house of the real father. Little children in the lap stay with the mother having liberty to go away to the house of the real father when they are grown up. The sons of the former husband, however, does not generally inherit any property of the foster or step father. This form of unions were not in vogue among the higher class of the Hindus in the Kingdom.

Intermarriages between Rājbañsi and Mech, Rājbañsi and Babu Koch, Rājbañsi and Dhimal, Rājbañsi and caste Hindus have often taken place in the society where the rules of the marriage

were very loosely followed.²⁹⁴ The offspring of these connections are not looked down upon as outcastes in the society.

The keeping of concubine is also prevalent in the higher section of the society.²⁹⁵ A young girl who has never been married may live with a man as a concubine and is called in this part of the country as Kanyapātra. There is no religious ceremony at the union. A concubine of this kind can never marry a person other than her keeper. It is said that "according to the original custom of Kāmarūpa the whole children thus born of a Kanyapātra might at any time be rendered legitimate by a subsequent marriage and that among the lower Rājbaṅśīs this is still sometimes practised. The two parents, being poor, wait until their children grow up to enable them to defray the expenses of the ceremony."²⁹⁶ With the introduction of Bengali manners such ceremony come to an end. Among the Rājbaṅśīs an unmarried woman who had a child must either live with her first lover or is considered only as a Kain so that she is redeemed to the rank of widow concubine.

The lower classes of the people do not always consider the marriage as sacred and inviolable as it should be. It often happens that a married girl is detained by her parents or other relatives for effecting a second marriage. This practice is not however, confined within the Rājbaṅśīs alone but prevails among the Muslimans as well.²⁹⁷

Thus it appears that the people of the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom enjoyed absolute freedom of marriage which was merely a matter of

consent to live together as man and wife and such union was never objected to by the society. Afterwards the impact of Brāhmanism restricted several forms of union.

Succession

Succession among the Rājbañsīs is governed by the Hindu law of the Bengal school, namely the Dayā-bhāga.²⁹⁸ Relating to the succession the Calcutta high court ruled that "the Rājbañsīa, quite independently a woman upon remarriage loses all title in the estate of her husband and that is not affected by any difference in the nature of the ceremony celebrated."²⁹⁹

The law suits before the court during the British period recognised only the Gandharya and the Brāhma form of marriage amongst the higher class of people in cases of succession, but the common people had much greater liberty in matters of conjugal union and the children born of such union were accepted as legitimate by the society³⁰⁰ with right of inheritance in most of the cases.

Custom of Sati

Like other Hindu traditions of Bengal the custom of burning Sati is also prevalent in the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom from early times. The Bṛhadharma Purāna (11.8., 3-10) in most eloquent terms speak well of the exploits of sati. It is believed that in Bengal the cases of sati was much more than that of other parts of India.³⁰¹ Yoginī Tantra, a work of late medieval period emphasised on the merit

of self-emolition by widows of the Brāhmanas.³⁰² Martin is of the opinion that widows of Kāmarūpa are allowed to burn themselves with their husbands.³⁰³

The rulers of the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom are associated with the practice of sati. According to a tradition queen Sudāmi of Viśva Siṃha had mounted the funeral pyre.³⁰⁴ After the death of Upendranārāyaṇa the eldest queen (Barā Āye Debatī) ascended the funeral pyre of her husband.³⁰⁵ The eleven queens of Dhairyendra-nārāyaṇa became sati at the time of cremation of their husband.³⁰⁶

The women of the lower order of the society are no exception in respect of sati. Vaisya and Sudra widows were also allowed to do it if they were moved by a deep sense of love for their husbands. Martin also refers to the Chāṇḍāl women's practising sati.³⁰⁷ The practice was, however, prohibited to unchaste women and women having many children.³⁰⁸ In a course of a year nearly three to four widows burn themselves in the areas except Batrishazari.³⁰⁹ The case of forced sati is not unknown. Glazier informs us that a middle aged Brāhmana widow who inherited fortune of Rs. 3,000 to 4,000 from his husband was burnt on the pile by her husband's brother.³¹⁰

The prevalence of sati is perhaps due to the socio-economic realities of the time. In this connection it must be mentioned that the Dayabhāga law of succession was to a great extent responsible for the system of sati in Bengal as well as other parts of the country.³¹¹ Benoy Bhusan Roy opined that the increase of

Brahmanical influence in the society had made the sati compulsory while it was optional in earlier times.³¹²

The custom of Sati was abolished in 1849³¹³ in the Kingdom when Maharaja Narendranarayana was a minor. In abolishing the traditional vice of the society the East India company took active initiative.

Funeral Ceremony

The mode of performing the last rites with the dying and the dead among the people is almost the same as is followed by the Hindus of lower Bengal.³¹⁴ The man who is about to die is made to drink a little water from the Ganga when available. After death the body of the dead is brought out and laid in the ground on a mat near the domestic shrine or the temple with his head towards the north.

The dead are generally burnt³¹⁵ in the way of usual Hindu style. The corpse is bathed and then has been carried to the riverside and the funeral pile erected, four large bamboos are planted beside the pile and Candratap is attached to their ends. A fan, sandals, a bamboo sunshade, a hukka and a chilum, an earthen pot full of paddy etc. are generally placed on the Chita (pyre) after the cremation has been finished.³¹⁶ For the immersion a bone is generally chosen from the forehead after cremation. It has been kept under earth near the burning ghat or outside the house. On the tenth day it is taken to the house of the deceased and afterwards it is sent to be thrown into the Ganges.³¹⁷

On the thirtieth day the Srādha ceremony is performed and the mourners observing the ashaucha became consecrated. On the thirty-second day fish is partaken by the relatives of the decesses.³¹⁸

Food

Rice, vegetables, fish and milk constituted the regular items of diet for both the rich and the poor. The Kumāra Harana throw light on the delicacies of the upper stratum of the society.³¹⁹ The sapkan (cook) in the royal kitchen, was proficient in preparing different kinds of dishes. Yoginī Tantra³²⁰ refers to the diet of the people in Kāmarūpa the flesh of Ducks, Pigeons, tortoise, and bears. Different preparations like khai, Muri, got-karai, sandah, pitha, etc., of rice and various kinds of pulses such as Mug, mali, nachur, arohar, etc., had been consumed by the people.³²¹

People of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom generally took two meals in a day - one at about midday and the other shortly after nightfall. They consumed food consisting of rice, vegetables, fish, salt, oil and chillies worth a penny.³²² In the morning cheera or goora is generally eaten. However, at the time of harvest when there are plenty of food there is no end of meals. When in difficulty they can endure hunger with patience and can subsist upon almost nothing.

Rice was the staple food of the common people. Dahi and cheera with a little salt and a couple of green chillies was a favourite food and people preferred it to rice.³²³ Sweet milk is preferred among the masses by the children.

Pani machh or tortoise is considered a delicacy. Besides, they also consumed pigeon, he-goats, ducks and rabbits and spices like onion garlic, green chillies.³²⁴ Salt being also expensive poor people use more of Alkali as its substitute.³²⁵ Ghee also was not a common item of food.³²⁶ Per-capita intake of salt, oil, etc. was obviously much less but the intake of rice, meat and leafy vegetables was higher in the 16th and 17th centuries than in the British period.³²⁷

The practice of chewing large quantities of betel leaves with unripe areca nuts of which the rind has not been removed by all classes of people was noticed by Shihabuddin Talish.³²⁸ A majority of the people also consumed an alcoholic drink prepared from rice, though the habit was looked down upon by the society.³²⁹ Tobacco is in wide use.³³⁰ The use of Ganjā (hemp) and opium is also of no uncommon occurrence.³³¹

With the passing of time a change in the food habits can be traced. In this connection we may refer to the neo-Vaisnavite movement of Śaṅkaradeva and his successor. It brought some changes in the food habits of the people as it forbade the use of the flesh of certain animals like pig and cow and birds like chicken as well as of liquor.³³² Later on the well-to-do classes are said to have imitated the food habits of the Bengali caste Hindus.³³³

Dress

The Dress of the aristocracy and the others varied region-wise and classwise. Silk was used more than cotton clothes by the upper

section of the society. Dress of the aristocracy consisted of three pieces of cloth - Metabhuni, (made of silk or fine cotton and which covered down to the knees), Pachara (wrapper) and donati or Tana (Double-folded scarf). Later on items of Mughal dresses like changa (waist coat), Chapkan (Long shirt), Jama etc. made of coarse cotton made their appearance in the royal court and also in the satras.³³⁴ Winter cloths of the aristocracy were made of endi, muga and wood or fur.³³⁵

Guru Caritas informs us that women wore various dress of white, blue and yellow colour.³³⁶ According to Campbell they used dresses of red and yellow colour.³³⁷ Kālikā Purāna, however, forbade the use of clothes of blue and red colour for religious purpose.³³⁸ The dresses of the womenfolk of the upper section of the society also varied regionwise. Women in the western part of the kingdom wore a single piece of cloth called sari,³³⁹ made of silk whereas their counterparts in the east wore a cloth which is called mekhela. In this connection it may be mentioned that when Naranārāyana sent saries as presents to the Ahom King Sukhampa to be used by his queens, the latter made a sarcastic remarks that these were quite unfit for exhibiting in a court, and the Koches were accustomed to them.³⁴⁰ Jackets and Blouses made their appearance beginning with the advent of the British. In winter aristocratic women covered their body with gold or silver embroidered shawls or Chaddar which usually made of endi produced in the locality.

Dress of the common people as revealed in the sculptures of the temples of the early part of our period consisted of a single unstitched cloth piece (dhuti) wrapped round the waist and hardly reaching the knee. As regards the dress of the commoners in the Kingdom Shihabuddin observed : "It is not their custom to tie turbans round the head, to wear coats, trousers, or shoes or to sleep on bedsteads. They only wrap a piece of fine linen round the head, and a waist band around middle, and place a chaddar on the shoulders. Some of their rich men in winter put on a half coat like a jacket."³⁴¹

The use of lengti, a piece of cloth about a foot and a half in breadth and three in length, was in vogue in the poorer section of the population. It passed between the legs and attached at two ends to a cord passing round the waist. It had its origin in the wants of the people due to the fact that they actually feel uncomfortable in a bigger or fuller raiment.³⁴² Subsequently, Dhuti has been largely substituted for it. Endi Gilap or chaddar prepared from endi of very coarse texture is largely in use as a winter cloth.³⁴³

The common women are comparatively better dressed. Normally a woman wore one piece of cloth about 5 feet length called patani³⁴⁴ while at home. The patani is tied round the body a little above the breast and it is broad enough to reach below the knee. But while going out they used to wear two pieces of cloth. One called patani is wrapped round the waist and the other called agran is folded over the breast.

There was professional caste (sonari) to make ornaments. Ornaments of the aristocracy were made of gold and silver and those of the commoners were of nickel and coral. In a like way upper classes could use utensils of gold and silver while the commoners used utensils made of brass, copper, clay, bamboo and wood.³⁴⁵

House or Dwellings

All people, aristocrat or commoners lived in thatched houses, the distinction being maintained in design and space.³⁴⁶ It appears that the houses of the nobles, though built of bamboo and timber, were very nicely decorated and furnished with all amenities including a beautiful garden in front.³⁴⁷

Most of the common people live in a thatched or tin roofed huts raised on bamboo posts with mat or grass walls and earthen floor. A householder ordinarily gets four huts arranged around a quadrangle of which two huts are used as bedroom one cook room and one as the room for cattle. In addition to these they have separate huts for worshipping the gods.³⁴⁸ There is a Tulsi-Maṅga in the north-east or south-east corner of every house where every kind of worship is performed. The establishment of Tulsi-Maṅga by the people is highly appreciated by the society.

Well-to-do cultivator have more substantial dwellings with verandahs in the said compound.³⁴⁹ Besides, rich men who can afford begin to make house of bricks and corrugated iron both in

the urban and miffossil areas.

The people generally sleep on bamboo platforms called 'Machang'. A few pillows two or three quilts for winter, a wooden seats and mats and some brass or bell-metal cup, plates and cooking utensils complete the list of ordinary household furniture.³⁵⁰

Muhammedan community

The population of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom is mainly consisted of both the Hindus and the Muhammedans. The majority of the people belonged to Hinduism, the Muhammedan who though minority are said to have led a happy life by reciting the Quranī Verses.³⁵¹ According to W.W.Hunter the Muslim population of Assam consisted of 8.2 per cent among the total population of Kāmarūpa.³⁵²

Contemporary literary sources often refer to the turks or Turuks and Yavanas. It is not unlikely that both the term Turuk implies the turks, the use of the terms Yavanas in the Vātsāyali and the Gurucaritas indicates all groups of Muhammedans-Turko-Afghan and Mughals.³⁵³

The first contact of the region with the Muhammedans is said to have been started at the beginning of the thirteenth century (1205 A.D.) when Mahammed Bakhtiar Khalji sought to conquer Tibet through Kāmarūpa.³⁵⁴ It is believed that the growth of the Muhammedan population in the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom has been increased during subsequent invasions³⁵⁵ by the Mahammedan rulers of Bengal and Delhi. During the war of Hussain Shah with Nīlāmbara, ruler

of Kāmatā, a large number of Mahammedan soldiers and infiltration of Musalman continued to settle in the region. It was at the reign of Naranārāyana that an amicable relation had been established with the emperor Akbar, the muslim empire of India. The favourable circumstances probably led the Musalman to infiltrate here through trade and other relations.³⁵⁶ Musalman infiltration seems to have reached its highest limit during the Mughal rule in the Koch Hājo region (1613-1647 A.D.).³⁵⁷ The invasions of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom by Mirjuma in 1661 A.D. and Sayesta Khan in 1665 A.D. were no less significant in respect of Musalman settlement.³⁵⁸ In the Census of 1872, Hunter observed that, out of a total of 176 396 adult males 48086 or 27% was Musalmans in Kāmatā Koch Kingdom.³⁵⁹

It is generally believed that the preaching of Islam was stated in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. In this connection mention may be made of one Ali Mech, a leader of Mech tribe, who embraced Islam and took the name.³⁶⁰ There was a mosque in Hājo which was known as Pos-Mecca, a quarter of Mecca. Hazrat Ghiyasuddin Awliya is said to have inland holy earth from Mecca in the Daragā.³⁶¹

With the encouragement and co-operation of the Musalman invaders Musalman divine orders like Pir, Darabesh, Fakir etc. came forward in preaching the Islam religion in the region. Paglapir, Torsha pir, Gazi Pir, Satya Pir, Shah Fakir, Shah Garib Kamal Ismail gazi³⁶² are much respected both by the Hindus and the Musalmans in the Kāmatā Koch society. Mahārājās of the kingdom also took liberal attitude towards them. They not only granted rent free lands to the Hindu religious establishments but also to

the Musalman Pirs and their religious establishments. The grants for the maintenance of Pirs and the religious establishments called pirpal.³⁶³

Muslim people of Kāmatā Koch Kingdom are of three denominations Mughal, Pathan including Saiyed, Shaikh including Nasyas.³⁶⁴ Mughals and Pathan are foreigners and enjoyed high status among the Muhammedan community. Majority of the Muslim people are the Shaikh or popularly known as Nasyas who descended from the Hindu converts³⁶⁵ to the religion of Muhammed. H.N.Choudhury is of the opinion that "it is generally believed to be the corrupted form of Nasta, which means fallen or degenerated and appears to be the most probable nickname which the Hindu subjects of a Hindu principality would give to their converted co-religionists."³⁶⁶ E.A.Gait writes in the report on Census of Assam 1891 A.D. that the great majority of persons professing the Islam faith in Assam are, as in eastern Bengal, local converts from the lower castes and aboriginal tribes who on version described themselves as "Saikhs". Most of the Musalman population are of suni sect and there are no Farazis and Wahabis.³⁶⁷

Their social status, however, appears to be low in the Kingdom. Any person accepting on any pretext Islam was made an out caste in the Hindu society.³⁶⁸ But Śaṅkaradeva accepted the Muslim to his fold. In this connection we may mention Gandsai, a Musalman, whom he made his disciple.³⁶⁹

The Muhammedan community in the Kāmatā Koch Kingdom played a significant role in various fields of the society. They formed the most efficient community in cultivation.³⁷⁰ The cultivation of

pineapple is stated to have been introduced in the kingdom by the Musalmans. Turner witnessed some cluster of wild pineapples in his way to Bhutan.³⁷¹

Martin observed that the Musalman proprietor of estates are more numerous in proportion in the region than in Dinajpur.³⁷² Hunter informs us that there were a large number of Jotedars in the Kingdom.³⁷³ It is said that the musalman mollas, however, were decent farmers.³⁷⁴ The musalman cultivators took great interest in the cultivation of Tobacco, Jute, rice etc. which were the chief cash crops of the kingdom.³⁷⁵

It is interesting to note the tradition of friendly relationship between Hindu and Muslim communities. It may be explained in the useful roles played by the immigrant Muslim community in the extension of cultivated lands, in the reclamation of cultivable lands and in the application of better methods of cultivation in the kingdom of Kāmatā Koch Behar. As a result, the kings although professed Brahmanical religion always patronised the Muslim community of his kingdom with grant of stipends like Pir bhats and construction of Mosques in the Kingdom.³⁷⁶

With the introduction of the Mughal revenue administration in the Kāmatā-Koch Kingdom its economic life began to move towards profound change. The Mughal administration demanded revenue in cash from the paik allotments in lieu of the traditional militia system.³⁷⁷

In this connection we may refer to the land called Mahal and Canua which can well be compared with the Hazari-Malouzari class in the Muslim Empire.³⁷⁸ The Mughal revenue system retained by the rulers of this Kingdom even after the ousting of them from Assam and Kamatā Koch Kingdom.³⁷⁹

A good number of Musalmans in different capacities like spinners, tailors, weavers, oil pressures etc. are said to have been organised in a guild. They were skilled in Metal casting on gold, silver, bronze, bell metal, brass and iron.³⁸⁰ It is not impossible that the production of Mekhli in Mekhliganj is associated with such a guild.

Some of the Musalmān Community used to occupy high position in the administration. Maulavi Meher Ali is said to have been appointed as tutor of Persi language.³⁸¹ In the beginning of the present century Khan Choudhury Amanatulla^{Ahmed} became a Devān³⁸² under the Koch King. The history of Cooch Behar, Vol. I, is written by him. Besides we may mention the name of Abbas-Uddin-Ahmed who became famous as singer.³⁸³

It is not unlikely that a certain number of Musalmān were there in different capacities in the guild of mason and artisans whose functions were construction, decoration of walls and repair of buildings. It is probably due to this Mahārājā Prānārāyana is said to have brought Musalmān mason³⁸⁴ in order to built temples in the kingdom. The result was some influences of Islamic art and architecture that can be traced in some temples of Kamatā Koch

Kingdom. The spacious building with rounded pillars, carved door shapes, windows, geometrical patterns and the domes are said to be some of the characteristics of (Persian) Muslim architecture.³⁸⁵

We can easily trace some of these features in the temples built by the Koch Kings in the precolonial period. Besides, most of the temples as well as the Mosques are dome shaped both in the inner and outside.

Notes and References

- 1 J.H.Milla, Assam Review, March, 1928, p.24.
- 2 R.N.Mosahary, Aryanisation and Hinduisation of the Boros
J.B. Bhattacharyya (ed.), Proceedings of North East India
History Association, Tenth Session, Shillong, 1989, p.165.
- 3 R.C.Majumdar, HH, Vol.I, pp.413 ff.

Mention may be made here about the emergence of two
fold caste-system-Brāhmaṇa and Śūdra in Eastern India.
Since early medieval period as mentioned in the Brahma
Vaivarta purāna and the Brhaddharma purāna.
- 4 R.Buragohain, On Brāhmanical influence in the formation of
Ahom state. Proceeding North East India History Association,
8th session, Kohima, 1987, pp.170-182.
- 5 A.Guha, The Medieval Economy of Assam in The Cambridge
Economic History of India, Vol.I (C.1200-C.1750)
(ed.) Tapan Roychoudhury and Irfan Habib, Cambridge
University Press, 1982, p.480.
- 5a Loc.cit.
- 6 Ibid., pp.478-79.
- 7 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.346.
- 8 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.58.
- 9 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.403.
- 10 P.K.Bhattacharyya, Śiva as Guardian Deity : Case Studies of
the Kingdom Kāmata Koch Behar "Lecture delivered at the
University of Gauhati on 9.8.93.
- 11 Cf. The Brhaddharma Purāna, (ed.) in Bibliotheca Indica series,
Pts.I & II, R.C.Majumdar(ed.) HB, Vol.I, pp.413ff.

12 S.N.Bhattacharyya, A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy, Calcutta, 1921, p.22.

13 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol. II, p. 58.

14 Ibid., p.59.

15 Cf. Bipra Kestri²g^hon^hvaisya Sūdra Janāno nāmā Jātica^h//
Karia bived^h dilā paricheḍ Bhāge Bhāge atisay^a//

V-1791

Samasta Jātik Bhinna Karilek Uttama madhyama kari /
Kati Salalak hīn Karilek Sāstra bākya anusārī //

V-1792

Rājā Harendranārāyana, Brhat Rājā Vāṁśāvalī,

quoted from N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol. II, p.59.

16 A.Guha, op.cit., p.487.

17 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol. II, pp.59-60.

Also see, Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam,
London, 1841, Reprint, Delhi, 1975, p.259.

18 P.C.Choudhury, HCA, p.342.

- A.Guha, op.cit., p.487.

19 In the Census of 1872 the number of Brāhmana was 1164.

Also, W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol. X, p.343.

20 D.Nath, HKK, p.133.

21 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.121.

22 Ibid., pp.121-22.

23 Loc.cit.

24 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.544.

As regards the Kalitās the observations made by different scholars are as follows :

(i) Mārkendeya Purāna refers to Kutta along with Darada Gana etc. (Chap.55)

(ii) E.A.Gait opined Kalitās as Kāyastha and the caste was predominant and enlightened

- HA, p.258.

(iii) W.W.Hunter mentioned that the Kalitās were the agriculturists. They were the priests of the Koch rulers before the advent of the Brāhmanas and appeared to have been a supreme race

- SAB, Vol.V, , p.356.

25 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.47.

26 N.N.Paul (ed.), MW, p.3.

27 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.58.

28 Ibid., p.60.

29 Rājā Harendranārāyana,

Brhat Rājā Vahsāvalī,

Padas, (1793-1794), Vide Assam Govt.Collection,

Darrang, No.2, Part I.

30 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, p.68 (vv.336-37).

31 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.62.

32 Rājā Harendranārāyana,

Brhat Rājā Vahsāvalī, Padas (103-32),

Vide Assam Govt. Collection, Darrang, No.2.

- 33 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.121.
- 34 S.GuhaRoy, Study of Some Aspects of the History of Kamata Koch Behar, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of North Bengal, 1985, p.191.
- 35 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.122.
- 36 M.M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.561.
- 37 Loc.cit.
- “ Here Brāhmanas who act as spiritual guides or priests for the lowest castes or who officiate in temples are not degraded. They have many followers among the Śūdras, both Rājbaṅśīs and Khyen.”
- M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.518.
- 38 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.122.
- 39 Loc.cit.
- 40 Kathā-guru-carita, p.78.
- 41 N.R.Ray, Bāṅgālī Itihāsa, Ādī Parva, Concised edition, Calcutta, 1962, p.133.
- 42 Loc.cit.
- 43 Ibid., p.135.
- 44 A.Guha, op.cit., p.479.
- 45 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.64.
- 46 Ibid., p.65.
- 47 A.Guha, op.cit., p.479.
Also see,
N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.70.
- 48 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.70.
- 49 A.Guha, op.cit., p.479.
- 50 Loc.cit.

- 51 Loc.cit.
- 52 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, pp.67-68.
- 53 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.122.
- 54 N.K.Basu, Assam in Ahom Age, Calcutta, 1970, p.200.
- 55 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, pp.543-44.
- 56 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.72.
- 57 M.Martin, EI., Vol.V, p.76.
- 58 W.W.Hunter, SAB, vol.X., P.343.
- 59 Martin, EI., Vol.V, p.544.
- 60 Loc.cit.
- 61 Epigraphia India, Vol.XVII, pp.291-309.
Indian Antiquary, 1893, pp.57f.
Epigraphia Indica, Vol.VIII, pp.317-21.
- 62 R.C.Majumder, HB, Vol,I, p.436.
- 63 D.C.Sircar, Studies in ^{The} Society and Administration of Ancient and Medieval India, Vol.I, pp.21ff.
- 64 N.R.Roy, op.cit., p.150.
In Brahma Vaivarta Purāna Vaidyas are separated from Ambasthas. In Bṛhadharma Purāna we have no mention of Vaidyas.
- 65 D.C.Sircar, op.cit., p.118.
- 66 R.C.Majumder, HB, Vol.I, p.414.
- 67 N.C.Sharma(ed.), DRV, p.37 (VV 180-181)
- 68 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.528.
- 69 Loc.cit.

The Vaidyas became the spiritual guides of Rājā Harinath Kumar one of the chief zaminders of Rungpur district.

- 70 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, p.73.
- 71 Manu, X.4.
N.R.Roy, op.cit., p.136.
- 72 Fick, Sociale Gliderung, 302.
- 73 R.C.Majumder, HB, Vol.I, p.437.
- 74 Ibid., p.438.
- 75 B.K.Barua, CHA, p.128.
- 76 Robinson, op.cit., p.263.
- 77 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.343.
- 78 M.Martin, El, Vol.V., p.531.
- 79 P.C.Choudhury, HCA, p.339.
B.K.Barua, CHA, p.127.
- 80 Bṛhadharmasūtra, Uttara Kāṇḍa, XIII, 52.
- 81 Cf. N.R.Roy, op.cit., p.146.
R.C.Majumder, HB, Vol.1, p.432.
- 82 M.Martin, El.Vol.V, p.505.
- 83 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, pp.36-37.
N.N.Paul (ed.), Gosānimaṅgala, p.37.
- 84 Ibid., pp.36-37.
- 85 S.GuhaRoy, op.cit., p.163.
- 86 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, pp.17-18.
Also see, Nirupamā Devī (ed.), Beharodanta,
by Br̄ndesvarī Devī (in Bengali), Cooch Behar, 1330 B.S., p.25.
- 87 S.L.Baruah, CHA, p.153.
- 88 S.K.Chatterjee, KJK, p.53.

89 H.H.Risley, Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Calcutta, 1891, p.492;
E.T.Dalton, Tribal History of Eastern India, Reprint,
Delhi, 1973, p.89.

90 Cf. H.H.Risley, op.cit., p.491.

91 E.T.Dalton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, Reprint,
Calcutta, 1872, pp.90f.

Again in support of his claim he put forward the opinion of a medical officer, an inhabitant of Koch Behar, who describes "the Koches of the region as face flat... eyes black and oblique, hair black and straight, in some curling, nose flat and short, cheek bones prominent, beard and whisker rather deficient, colour of skin in most instances black." - Ibid., p.70.

92 Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol.XVIII,
Part II, pp.704-706.

93 L.A. Waddel, Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley, Reprint,
Delhi, 1975, p.48.

94 G.A.Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.III, Part II,
First Edn., 1903, Reprint, Delhi, 1967, p.95.

95 E.A.Gait, HA, p.47.

96 S.Endle, The Kāchāries, London, 1911, p.4f.

97 Census of India, 1891, Assam, Part II, p.213.

98 S.K.Chatterjee, KJK, p.111.

99 H.G.Raverty (tr.) Tabaqat-i-Nasiri, Vol.I, Reprint,
New Delhi, 1970, p.560.

100 S.K.Chatterjee, KJK, p.101.

101 Fathiya in JASB, Vol.41, 1872, p.66.

- 102 H.J.Risley (ed.), Ralph Fitch, England's Pioneer to India, Burma etc., London, 1899, p.112.
- 103 Census of India, Assam, 1891, p.213.
- 104 E.A.Gait, HA, p.47.
- 105 N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.130.
- 106 M.Martin, EI., Vol.V, pp.540ff.
H.H.Risley, op.cit., pp.498 ff.
- 107 M.Martin, EI., Vol.V, p.546.
- 108 E.A.Gait, HA., p.48.
- 109 W.Robinson, op.cit., p.262.
M.Martin, EI.Vol.V, p.538.
- 110 E.A.Gait, HA., p.47.
- 111 Srsti Kānda, Ch.57
Cf. N.N.Vasu, SHK, Vol.II, p.71.
- 112 Yoginī Tantra (tr.) K.N.Bhattacharyya, Calcutta, 1333B.S.
Ch.XII, V.3.
- 113 K.L.Barua, SHK, p.67.
- 114 E.A.Gait, HA., p.47.

"These Mlecchas or barbarians are accustomed to eat everything; they are idiotic, and they kill cows and Brāhmaṇas : these other Mleccha Kuvācakas have their birth place in the hills. Their language is of Piśāca (demeniac) character, and they have no (good) social usage."

He further observed, "there is thus no doubt that the reference is to the Koches before their Hinduisation, as a barbarous Tibeto-Burman speaking Indo-Mongoloid people,

who had not yet any regard for the Brāhmanas and for the cow and whose language had no meaning for the Aryan speaking Hindus."

- 115 S.K.Chatterjee, KJK, p.113.
- 116 S.K.Chatterjee, The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language, Vol.I, First Published, 1926, reprint, Calcutta, 1979, p.339.
- 117 D.C.Sircar's introduction, Gauda Rājamālā by R.P.Chanda, Calcutta, 1975.
- 118 D.C.Sircar, Pāla-Sena Yuger Vāsānu-Carit (Bengali), Calcutta, 1982, p.75.

R.P.Chanda also support the identification of the Koches with the Mābojas

Gauda Rājamālā, Rajshahi, 1319 B.S., pp.41-46.

- 119 R.P.Chanda, op.cit., p.35.
- 120 E.A.Gait, HA, p.47.
- 121 Ibid., pp.47-48.
- 122 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, pp.538-39.

He found the pāni Koch, a small tribe, in the forests of Pārbat Joyar in a very rude state living among the woods and frequently changing their abode in order to cultivate lands that had been enriched by a fallow, as the primitive representative of the race.

Also see, - E.T.Dalton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, pp.89-92.

- 123 H.Beverly, Census report of Bengal, 1872, Vol.I, p.130.

Hunter is of the opinion that the people commonly known as Koch, Rājwāsi and Pāli are very mixed race.

- W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.353.

Captain Lewin, a late Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar, giving in 1872 apparently as the prevalent impression amongst the immigrant Bengali says :
"The present inhabitants (Rājbañsī) of the Cooch Behar state do not belong to any particular race. The Meches who inhabit the Bhutan Duar coming into contact with the immigrants from the south, intermarriages have taken place and their descendents are the modern Cooch Beharis.

- Cf. H.N.Choudhury, CBSLR6, pp.125-26.

124 R.P.Chanda has taken Tibet to mean Kāmbojadesa and according to him the Kāmboja people have come to Bengal from Tibet

- R.P.Chanda, op.cit., p.37.

This view is also supported by R.C.Majumder who considers that Kāmboja was an Indian name for Tibet.

- R.C.Majumder, HE, Vol.I, p.173.

It is equally interesting to notice that the Nepalese tradition also refer Kāmbojadesa to Tibet.

- Foucher, Iconographic Buddhisme, p.134;

- V.A.Smith, The Early History of India, Oxford, 1924, p.193 fn.

- Business transaction is also a pointer in this connection. The Tabaqat-i-Nasiri informs us that horse were imported to ^{Assam and Bengal from Tibet} H.C.Revery, (tr.), op.cit., pp.566 ff.

125 S.K.Chatterjee, op.cit., pp.45-46.

126 Loc.cit.

127 S.K.Chatterjee, ODBL, Part I, pp.69-70.

- 128 S. Beal, Records of the Western World, II, London, 1906,
pp.194 ff.
- 129 S. GuhaRoy, op.cit., p.55.
- 130 S.K.Chatterjee, KJK, p.55.
- 131 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.21.
- 132 S.K.Chatterjee, KJK., p.112.
- 133 H.H.Risley, Tribes and Castes of Bengal, p.492.
- 134 H.Raverty^(*), op.cit., p.239;
H.Blochmann, 'Koch Behar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the
16th and 17th Centuries...' JASB, 1872, Pt.I, No.1, pp.67f.
Riyaz-us-Salatin (tr.), Abdus Salam, Reprint, Delhi,
1975, p.11.
William Foster (ed.), Early Travels in India,
Oxford, 1921, pp.24f.
C.Wessels, Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia,
The Hague, 1924, p.122.
R.P.Chanda, op.cit., pp.41-46.
Khanchoudhury Amanatulla Ahmed, op.cit., p.4.
- 135 Yogini Tantra, Chap.XIII, Slokas, 2-19.
- 136 E.A.Gait, HA., pp.49-50.
- 137 C.C.Sanyal, RNB., p.14.
- 138 Loc.cit.
- 139 Loc.cit.
- 140 Loc.cit.
- 141 Upendra Nath Barman, Rājbaṅsī Kṣatriya Jātir Itihāsa(Beng.),
1370 B.S., p.30.
- 142 Ibid., p.62.

143 During the survey and settlement operation in Dinajpur in 1934 to 1940, F.O. Bell has observed that "formerly they (Rājbañsī Kshatriyas that are found in large numbers in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Koch Behar), were known as Paliyas. Officially in the Census they were listed as Rājbañsī Kshatriyas. There has always been some difficulty in distinguishing them from Koches," but actually there is no distinction between the Koch, Rājbañsī and Paliyas who are really the three names of the same thing."

F.O. Bell, Final Report on the survey and settlement operations in Dinajpur, 1934-40, pp. 11ff.

144 G.S. Roy, Uttar Banga Rājbañsī Samajer DevDevī O Puja Parvan. North Bengal University, 1972, p. 8.

145 D. Nath, HKK., p. 138.

146 Swaraj Basu, A Case Study of the Rājbañsī caste movement in Northern Bengal, 1901-21, The Quarterly Review of historical studies, Vol. XXVI, 1986, No. 3, p. 60.

147 H.N. Choudhury, CBSLRS., p. 127.

W. Hamilton made the following observation

"In this district by far the most numerous and important of these tribes, by the Assamese, Nepalese, and by all such Bengalese as are not under the influence of their chiefs, is called indiscriminately Koch, Rājbañsī, and the sub-divisions, and distinctions, which they themselves have introduced, are considered as effusion of vanity and of no importance, the whole being thought low and impure. This opinion as naturally might be

expected, is exceedingly disagreeable to their chiefs, and especially a divine origin, and many of them observed the Hindu law with such purity, that in their own territory at least, they are allowed to be real sūdras and the Maithila and Kārupī Brāhmins admit them to be such; but Bengalese hold them in the utmost contempt."

- M.Martin, El., Vol.V, p.538.

148 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, (VV.132-39), pp.26-28.

149 S.N.Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.23.

150 E.A.Gait, HA, p.58.

D.K.Debsharma, Kānākhyā Tīrtha (in Bengali), Gauhati, 1394, B.S., p.117.

151 Ms Koch Rājār Burūñī, p.91.

152 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, pp.41-42 (VV.5-6) .

153 Kālikā Purāna, Chapter VV.18-19.

154 N.C.Sharma (ed.) DRV, p.36, V.174.)

155 Ibid., pp.29-30, (V.143) .

156 D.Nath, HKK, p.135.

157 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, pp.46-47, (VV.230-35) .

158 Ibid., p.131 (V.648) .

159 H.Blockmann, 'Koch Behar, Koch Hajo and Assam in 16th and 17th Centuries...', JASB, 1872, Pt.I, No.1, pp.66f.

160 C.Wessels, op.cit., p.126.

161 Marcel Mauss, The Gift, New York, 1967, pp.53-59.

V.R.R.Diksitar, Hindu Administrative Institutions, Madras, 1929, pp.102-104.

- 162 S.L.Baruah, CHA., p.153.
- 163 A.Appadurai, Worship and Conflict under Colonial rule - A South Indian Case, 1981, Reprint, Orient Longman, 1983, p.64.
- 164 Burton Stein, The Economic function of a medieval South Indian Temple, ^{in the} Journal of Asian Studies, 19, No.2, 1960, pp.163-76.
- 165 A.Guha, op.cit., p.505.
- 166 Loc.cit.
- 167 Koch Rajār Durāñī, pp.91 ff.
- 168 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, pp.23-26 (VV 123-31).
- 169 Loc.cit.
- 170 Loc.cit.
- 171 N.N.Paul (ed.), Gosānimañgala, pp.76-77.
- 172 D.Nath, HKK., p.137.
- 173 C.Nessels, op.cit., pp.128f.
- 174 W.W.Hunter, SAB., Vol.X, p.398.
- 175 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.195.
- 176 D.Nath, HKK, p.155.
- 177 Kathā Guru Carita, p.107.
- 178 Sibsankar Mukherjee, Koch Beharer Samaiik Kathano, Madhuparni, (a Bengali Journal), Koch Beher Jela Sankhya, 1396 B.S., p.120.
- 179 N.N.Paul (ed.), CBI, p.86.
- 180 AARC - 1909-1910, p.3.
- 181 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.345.

- 182 A. Guha, op.cit., p.482.
- 183 Ibid., p.501.
- 184 Kathā Guru Carita, p.65.
- 185 Bhusana Dvija, Mahāpuruṣa Saṅkaradeva, V. 637.
- 186 Kathā Guru Carit, p.128.
- 187 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLR6, p.444.
- 188 Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, July 1872, No.210, p.225.
- 189 K.C.Ganguly, Final Report on Survey and settlement operations, 1913-1927, Cooch Behar, 1930, p.13.
- In the book written by Bhagabati Charan Bandopadhyaya we have the following kind of tenants :
- (1) Jotedar, (2) Chuknidar, (3) Darchukanidar,
(4) Daradar Chukanidar, (5) Tasyachukanidar, (6) Adhier.
- N.N.Paul (ed.), CBI, p.26.
- 190 K.C.Ganguly, op.cit., p.13.
- 191 Cooch Behar Gazette, 1918, p.109. The total number of Kmsiprajas under different grades recorded in 1912 was 49, 125.
- K.C.Ganguly, op.cit., p.54.
- 192 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.392.
- 193 Ibid., p.388.
- 194 Sibsankar Mukherjee, op.cit., p.115.
- 195 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.384.
- 196 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.347.
- 197 K.C.Das, op.cit., p.129.
- 198 Upendranath Barman, op.cit., p.62.
- 198a P.K.Bhattacharyya on 'Swami Vivekananda and Chicago Religious Congress, Radio Talk, All India Radio, Siliguri, 29.11.93
- 199 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, pp.16-17.

- 200 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.345.
- 201 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.19.
- 202 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, p.72.
- 203 Kathā Guru Carita, p.619.
- 204 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, p.188.
- 205 Ibid., p.72.
- 206 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.681.
- 207 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, p.279.
- 208 Loc.cit.
- 209 Samuel Turner, Embassy to Tibet, London, 1800,
Reprint, New Delhi, 1971, p.11.
- 210 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.542.
W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.257.
- 211 Samuel Turner, op.cit., p.9.
- 212 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, p.279.
- 213 A.Guha, op.cit., p.503.
- 214 Robinson, op.cit., p.204.
- 215 A.Guha, op.cit., p.503.
- 216 A.Mitra, DCHC, 1951, p.XIVI.

When they came in the Kingdom they were granted
Jaigir lands free of rent for their service as guards
of the Andar.

Samuel Turner, op.cit., p.2.

- 217 E.A.Gait, HA, p.265.

David Scott is said to have released 12000 slaves
in Kamarūpa alone.

The system of slavery continued unabated even during the reign of Harendranārāyaṇa. There were one thousand slaves in his possession.

- Letters from Norman Macleod, Commissioner of Cooch Behar to John Monckton, Acting Secretary to the Govt.

Secret Dept., Dated, 20th April, 1815, SAC, Vol. I, p. 338.

- 218 Samuel Turner, op.cit., p. 11.
- 219 Robinson, op.cit., p. 279.
- 220 W.W. Hunter quoted in the SAB, Vol. X, p. 425.
- 221 K. Das, op.cit., p. 133.
- 222 N.N. Vasu, SHK, Vol. I, p. 74.
- 223 Ibid., p. 64.
- 224 S. Guharoy, Op.cit., p. 166.
- 225 Nirupamā Devī (ed), Beharodantsa, pp. 54-56.
- 226 Katha Guru Carit, p. 138.
- 227 Monika Roychoudhury, Koch Beharer Raj Amala Hari Praastir Ruparekha (Bengali), Koch Behar Sahitya Sabha Patrika 1380 B.S., pp. 25-26.
- 228 M.N. Paul (ed.), CBI, p. 93.
- 229 Krishna Choudhury, Centenary thoughts in Retrospect, Centenary Volume of Sunity Academy, 1881, pp. 84-85.
- 230 Rina Roy, Unabingaha Satabdite Koch Behar Rajya Siksha Khetre Raj Pariberer Abadan, Centenary Volume of Sunity Academy, 1981, p. 66. Also, AARC, 1881-1882 (Education)
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232 AARC, 1890-1891, p.41.

Also see Meredith Borthwick, The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905 New Jersey, 1984, p.359.

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234 Nirmala Guha Roy (Basu), Amar Kaler Katha (Bengali) Centenary Volume of Sunity Academy, 1981, pp.17-18.

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236 Sunity Devi, The Autobiography of an Indian Princess, London, 1921, p.53.

237 C.C. Sanyal, RNB, pp.90-91.

238 Loc.cit.

239 Nirupama Devi (ed.), op.cit., p. Intro-13.

240 Sunity Devi, op.cit., p.97.

241 Meredith Borthwick, op.cit., p.241.

"Sunity Devi visited England with her husband, the Mahārājā of Cooch Behar on occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Celebration in 1897 and made a number of subsequent visits. And thus broke the traditional pardah system of the Cooch Behar society.

242 D.Nath, HKK, p.144.

243 It is said that on their repeated failure to build an embankment on the Temburani river the Bhuyans came to a conclusion that the work could be done only if a woman of chastity would bring water from the Brahmaputra on a sieve and offer it there. When all other women in the area refused to do so, one Radhika alias Yogamaya of the Kaivarta caste, did it to the amazement of all, thereby proving

her chastity - Kathā Guru Carita, pp.48 ff.

- 244 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.500.
- 245 Loc.cit.
- 246 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.356.
- 247 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.32.
- 248 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, pp.131-32.
- 249 A.C.Campbell, A Comprehensive Archaeological Biographical and Pictorial of Bengal, Behar and Orissa, Vol.I, Chap. Glimpses of Bengal, tr. by N.N.Paul (Bengali), Calcutta, 1979, p.3.
- 250 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.132.
- 251 Loc.cit.
- 252 H.S.Bhattacharyya and S.S.Bhattacharyya, Koch Beharer Prachin Vrata Katha, (Bengali) Burdwan University, 1983, Intro, p.15.
- 253 Digvijay De Sarkar, Lakshata Darpana Uttarbanga, (Bengali), Calcutta, 1982, pp.57ff.
- 254 H.S.Bhattacharyya and S.S.Bhattacharyya, op.cit., Intro., p.15.
- 255 S.Guha Roy, op.cit., p.167.
- 256 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, p.70
- 257 Koch Rājār Burañi, p.98.
- 258 Loc.cit.
- 259 M.Neog, Pavitra Assam, Jorehat, 2nd edn., 1969, pp.256f.
- 260 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.424.
- 261 Pabitra Kr. Gupta, Hudumdeo in the Northern Districts of West Bengal, ^{in the} North Bengal Review, Vol.I, No.I, April, 1978, p.52.
- 262 P.C.Choudhury, CHA, p.313.
- 263 Kathā Guru Carita p.29.

264 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.372.

265 Loc.cit.

266 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.142.

267 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.62.

268 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.142.

269 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, 373.

270 The ceremony of first rice is also performed on the 7th, 9th, or 11th month after birth of a child. People of better class performed a religious ceremony on this occasion invoking the spirits of their forefathers and offered Pinda or rice cakes. An Adhikārī generally minister the ceremony.

The name of the child is given within ten days of birth among the lower class people while the well-to-do ones consulting astrologers or Āchārya Brāhmanas named their child on 3rd, 7th or 30th day.

W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.373.

The name of child is selected in the Hindu fashion from the names of Gods and Goddesses, sacred ruins and places and the like.

- H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.143.

271 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.142.

272 Loc.cit.

An Adhikārī is a village priest or divine order among the Rājbaṅsīs who is respected. He lives like common man by agriculture and officiates in religious festivals of Rājbaṅsīs when necessary. There is two kinds of the

Divine order.

- C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.134.

Martin observed that Adhikārī are of two types. Some are proprietors of a flock of people. The other are proprietors of a temple and image of god.

- M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.558.

273 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.142,

274 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.373.

275 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.143.

276 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.373.

277 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.144.

278 A.Mitra, DCHC, 1951, p.XLIX.

279 Cf. Asvalayana Grhyasūtra,

1, 6, 1-8

Also see Bodhayana, 1, no.1-2,

Gautama, iv, 6-15.

280 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.374.

281 T.H.Lewin, An Account of Cooch Behar State, pp.24-25.

W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.374.

282 Loc.cit.

283 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.144.

284 Loc.cit.

285 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.375.

- C.C.Sanyal is of the opinion that the marriage is settled by the elders with help of Karog or matchmaker,

- RNB, p.91.

286 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol. X, p.375.

287 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.145.

Also see, C.C.Sanyal, RNB, pp.105ff.

288 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol. X, p.375.

289 Durgadas Majumdar, op.cit., p.56.

Also see, C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.91.

In this form of marriage when a man cannot pay for a girl, he has to work in his would-be father-in-law's house as a servant for a probationary period before he can claim the hands of the bride. In this, the bridegroom is called char-iyas or char-ymats.

- H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.144.

290 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.146.

291 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.98.

292 Durgadas Majumdar, op.cit., p.56.

293 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.98.

294 Ibid., pp.92 ff.

W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol. X, pp.353-54.

295 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, pp.554-555.

Also see C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.99.

296 M.Martin, Vol.V, p.555.

297 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.146.

298 Ibid., p.147.

299 A.E.Porter, Gensus of India, 1931, Vol.V, Part I, p.474.

300 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.100.

301 R.C.Majumdar, Bāṅgla Desher Itihāsa, Vol.III (Bengali),

Calcutta, 1981, p.340.

- 302 Yoginī Tantra, 11. Verses, 302-08.
- 303 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.555.
- 304 S.C.Ghosal(tr.), HCB, p.124.
- 305 Ibid., p.233
N.N.Paul (ed.), CBI, p.71.
B.Das (ed.), RO, p.41.
- 306 S.C.Ghosal(tr.), HCB, p.276.
- 307 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.556.
- 308 Yoginī Tantra, 11, Verses 302-308.
- 309 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.556.
- 310 Partha Kr. Sen quoted in the Study of Some Aspects of the History of Kāmatā Koch Behar Since 1772 to the date of Accession^{of} Sibendranārāyana, unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, University of North Bengal, 1989, p.90.
- 311 N.K.Sinha and Nisith R.Ray, A History of India, Calcutta, 2nd edn., 1986, p.518.
- 312 Binoy Bhushan Roy, Socio Economic impact of Satī in Bengal and the Role of Rājā Rānchōn Roy, Calcutta, 1987, p.27, as cited in M.Bhattacharyya's 'Satī in Bengal', in the Economic and Political weekly Review, Vol.XXIV, 1st April, 1989, p.669.
- 313 B.Das & Subhendu Majumdar, Princely Cooch Behar : A Documentary study on letters (1790-1863 A.D.), Calcutta, 1990, Letter no.25, p.91.
- 314 A.Mitra, DCHC, 1951, p.XLV.

315 C.C.Sanyal, RNB, p.119.

In some cases dead body is also buried. A person dying of Cholera, small pox, snake bite, suicide, drowning, mouled by wild animals or children before eruption of the permanent teeth and the Vaisnava is buried. Women with children in her womb is not buried unless they are separated.

316 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.147.

317 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.377.

318 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.147.

319 L.Gogoi (ed.), Kumāra Harana Kavya, Sibsegar, 1972, pp.41 ff.

320 Yoginī Tantra, Uttarā Kanda, Patala IX, V.16.

321 Kathā Guru Carit, p.20.

322 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, p.279.

323 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.137.

Gur or cured milk is called Dahi in the language of the people of the kingdom.

324 N.N.Paul (ed.), Glimpses of Bengal, (Bengali), p.4.

325 Shihabuddin Talish, Fathiyva-i-Idkaya, p.326.

Common people used to prepare it by burning the plaintain tree.

- A.Guha, op.cit., p.504.

326 Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707, tr. (Bengali), Calcutta, Reprint, 1990, p.99.

Shihabuddin Talish, op.cit., p.367.

327 A.Guha, op.cit., p.504.

328 Blochmann (tr.), Ain-i-Akbari, p.67.

329 A.Guha, op.cit., p.504.

330 M. Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.493.

331 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.137.

Also see, W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.371.

332 D.Nath, HKK, p.141.

333 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.137.

Also see, W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.371.

334 A.Guha, op.cit., p.504.

335 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.134.

336 K.C.Pathak (ed.), Gurucarita, pp.104-105.

337 N.N.Paul (tr.), Glimpses of Bengal, (Bengali), p.5.

338 Quoted from Kālikāpurāna of B.K.Barua, CHA, pp.145-46.

339 M.Neog, Purānī Assamiya Samāi Aru Sanskriti, Gauhati, 1971, p.133.

340 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, pp.132-33.

341 Blochmann (tr.) Ain-i-Akbari, p.67.

342 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.134.

343 Loc.cit.

344 Ibid., p.135.

Patani is also known as Bukbandha.

S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, p.72.

345 Loc.cit.

346 A.Guha, op.cit., p.504.

347 Kathā Guru Carita, p.97.

348 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.132.

349 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.371.

350 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, pp.133-134.

Also see W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.371.

- 351 N.C.Sharma (ed.), DRV, p.115 (V.563).
- 352 W.W.Hunter, A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol.I,
London, 1879, p.39.
- 353 Kathā gurū caritā, p.155.
- 354 S.C.Ghosal(tr.), HCB, p.299.
- 355 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.359.
- 356 Mohini Kumar Saikia, Assam-Muslim Relation and its Cultural
Significance, Gauhati, 1978, p.133.
- 357 Loc.cit.
- 358 S.C.Ghosal(tr.), HCB, pp.524-25.
- 359 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.358.
- 360 S.C.Ghosal(tr.), HCB, p.299.
- 361 Mohini Kumar Saikia, op.cit., p.212.
- 362 Hiten Nag, Koch Beharer Musalman Samai : Agraati O Bikash,
in The Madhuparni (in Bengali), 1990, pp.129-30.
Also, S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCB, pp.83 ff.
- 363 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.541.
- 364 Ibid., p.120.
- In the Census of 1891 the following distribution among
Muslim community are made.
- Mughal-49.
- Pathan including Saiyads - 1146.
- Shekh including Nasyas - 169 551.
- H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, p.120.
- 365 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.359.
- 366 H.N.Choudhury, CBSLRS, pp.120-21.
- 367 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X , p.359.

- 368 Cf. D.Nath, HKK, p.114.
- 369 Kathā Guru Carita, p.155.
- 370 A.Mitra, DGHG, 1951, p.XIII.
- 371 Turner, op.cit., pp.14-15.
- 372 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, pp.512-13.
- 373 W.W.Hunter, SAB, Vol.X, p.396.
- 374 M.Martin, EI, Vol.V, p.513.
- 375 Hiten Nag, op.cit., pp.141-42.
- 376 P.K.Bhattacharyya, Dainik Basumatī (Bengali Daily), 25.3.93.
- 377 A.Guha, op.cit., p.485.
- 378 Mohini Kumar Saikia, op.cit., p.162.
- 379 A.Guha, op.cit., p.485.
- 380 Ibid., p.494.
- 381 B.Das (ed.), RD , p.86.
- 382 Letter of Rājā Harendra-Narāyana to the Vice-President
in Council Fort William, 17th Dec., 1814, SRC, Vol.I, p.85.
- 383 Hiten Nag, op.cit., p.136.
- 384 S.C.Ghosal (tr.), HCR, p.206.
- 385 Tarachand, Influence of Islam on Indian Culture, Allahabad,
1946, pp.242-43.