

CHAPTER: TWO

THE REGION AND THE PEOPLE

The area of the ethnic unrest under the present research study confined within the boundary of North Bengal . This chapter depicted the historical and geographical account of naming this northern part of West Bengal as popularly known as North Bengal, notwithstanding the fact no such name has administrative sanction officially but used as Uttarbanga or NorthBengal even in the ancient scripts and also in different administrative organization of present setup. This chapter described the geographical location of North Bengal which was epicenter of different historical events during the period of early historical age and even during both the middle and modern ages. It also dealt with the brief account of the history of the Rajbanshi , the most dominant ethnic community in this area before the partition of India with the historical account of the Koch –Dynasty and the ethnic relationship between the Koch and Rajbanshi to explore the facts behind the difference of opinion in question of their ethnic identity.

2.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before going into details let us have an idea about North Bengal as no such name has been officially recognised. Still the name of North Bengal has been widely known and even accepted in different officials' description. For example, North Bengal State Transport, North Bengal University, North Bengal Medical College, I.G North Bengal etc. It has therefore become imperative to give a brief description what is called North Bengal.

The toponymy of a place gives the historical, geographical, and social account of that place which provides immense help in in-depth study of that area. Name of the many places in the districts of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling bear the name either Bodo and Austric origin or Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali origin. The name of Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Dhupguri, and Mainaguri are the Indo-Burmese (Bodo) origin. Similarly, Darjeeling, Kurseong, Sonada, Kalimpong etc are the names of Lepcha Origin. The origin of the name of the place signifies the history of the past and supports the demographic account of the areas including the geographical features of a particular place. Prof. Sukumar Sen remarked in his book 'from the toponymy we can have many historical facts of Bengal since the 5th century.'¹

Few examples are given below in support of the statement.

Badmatam derived from Lepcha word the bamboo of padam variety as this land was covered with this type of grass.

Chongtong is also Lepcha word means the confluence of the two rivers

Kursenong Lepcha word means the place of white cane.

Sivak- Sevok, Lepcha word, means place of cool air.

Senchal or Sinchal Lepcha word means hill covered with fog.

Gidha pahar Nepali word means hill of vulture.

Ambhutia, Nepali, means place of mango and so on

2.2 GEOGRAPHICAL LANDSCAPE OF NORTH BENGAL

Geographically North Bengal located between 27° 13' N to 24° 13'20" N latitudes and between 89° 54'35" E to 88° 47'40" E longitudes. It has an area of 21855 sq. Km and a population about 120,36,292 of which male population is 62,36,108 and female population is 58,00,118. The density of population in North Bengal is 560/sq. Km being the highest density population in Jalpaiguri and lowest in Darjeeling district (census 1991). Rajbanshi, the largest number of ethnic community of North Bengal is concentrated in Cooch Behar and lowest in Darjeeling. 31.19% population is scheduled castes and 10.47% population is scheduled tribe of total population of North Bengal. There are 59 sub-castes list of scheduled castes and 38 sub-castes list of scheduled tribes.

Location, accessibility and geographical setting played a very important role in giving the shape of the pattern of interaction of North Bengal. Here diversity of human geography displayed two notable characteristics in the processes of interaction. Firstly, it influenced the pattern of the inhabitants of the region and secondly it influenced the elements from the outside of the areas. These geographical factors moulded the perception of the inhabit, that the different terrain conditions along with the lack of accessibility and limited resources promoted to grow the isolation feeling of the local population of this area from the mainstream social process of the country as isolation and inaccessibility led to limited level of contacts and interaction with elements outside their respective environs.

It is found from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the puranic literatures that this areas were at that time was known as Prag-Joytish, Pundra, Kamrupa etc. The reason for the name of Prag-Jyotish was believed by some scholars that astrology was first started in this area. The present Bangladesh and the entire of present North Bengal were within that region. Subsequently a part of which was known as Pundra and the rest as Kamrup. River Korotoya which was flowing on the west of present Jalpaiguri district was the border of those two regions. The area spread along the western bank of the Koratoya was Pundravardhan. The Korotoya is still regarded as sacred river for the Hindus as it is that river which was mentioned in the 'San Mantra' related to the holy bath or ablutions of 'Tithi Tatwa' by Raghu nandan Bhattacharjee a great logician of Bengal. Pundra-Vardhan was also equally vast and took place in the pages of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata including in other ancient Sanskrit literatures. They were given importance in the epic and mentioned in the Mahabharata that Pundra was born along with five brothers namely Anga, Banga, Kalinga, Sunkhma and Pundra of Sudeshna, the queen of king Bali, legally begotten by Rishi Dhirghatama. Five kingdoms in the eastern India were named after the name of the sons of king Bali. Historians also believe that Mahashangarh near Bogra is the relic of Presidency Dacca, Chittagong and some other parts of West Bengal were once part of this region. The region which was known as Varendra Mandal or Varendri was also under this Pundra-Vardhana. The name 'poudra' came as it is believed by some peoples that the

word Punda came from pulp of sugar cane, as this area was also famous for the production of sugar cane. Here we come across the two names of Kamtapur. The kingdom established on the bank of the Brahmaputra towards the end of 13th century was known as Kamtapur. Another Kamtapur kingdom was established in the southern part of present Cooch Behar in the 14th century during the reign of Niladawaja Kamteswar and last of all, Cooch Behar, established by Biswa Sing towards the end of 15th century.

It is opined by some scholars like Dharma Narayan Barma, authors of several books based on several scripts and verses gave an account of the history of Kamtapur dynasty. There he stated in one of his article under the title '*Kamta Language – A brilliant and Tragic End*'² published in Socio Political Movements in North Bengal edited by Dr. Sukhabilash Burma published from Global Vision Publishing House N. Delhi (2007) as under:

'In the 13th century the name of the kingdom Kamrup was changed on shifting the capital of Kamrup to Kamtapur, fifteen miles south to Cooch -Behar city. Henceforth the name of the state became Kamta, and from that time down to the end of 19th century Kamta became the political and cultural centre of eastern India.

The Kamta kingdom was ruled by native kings successively beginning with Sandhya Roy in 1255 A.D. to Nilamber 1482 A.D. After that Pathan Chieftain Hossasin Sah, conquered Kamta but could not retain this land not more than 12 years. In 1515, Biswasingha attacked the kingdom and vanquished the Pathan ruler. Then Biswasingha ascended the throne of Kamta in the year 1496. Markendeya Purana, in 35th panda says:

“Kamta Nagare Biswasingha Narabar.
Priohanda Pratap Raja Bhoge Purandar.”³

Indeed, Biswasingha became the ruler of Kamta after the pathan. Twenty two kings of this line ruled over Kamta and lately Cooch Behar, for 454 years continuously from 1496-1950 which is the longest dynastical rule in India. Although stray reference to the land and the people of North Bengal are available in the Ramayana, Haribvansa, Brahamanandapurana, Vishnapurana, Raghuvavamsa, Brihat-Sanghita, Yoginitantra and the Greek work 'Peirplus of the Erythrean Sea of the first century A.D is the valuable document for its ancient past. The name of Bhagadatta, the king of Kamrup has been mentioned in the Mahabharata, described as a king of the Mlechhas, taking part in the battle of Kuruskhetra on the side of the Kauravs with his army of Chinese and Kirata.

It requires explaining a bit why it becomes necessary to give the account of the past history of North Bengal. As the present crisis is very much related with the feelings of marginalisation in the minds of the Rajbanshis community not only in question of their language and culture but their historical position also. So it becomes necessary to throw some light on the glorious past of North Bengal or Uttar Banga in the pages of history.

2.3 ORIGIN OF THE NAME

If we go back to the pages of history we come across the name 'Banga'. But at that time this name did not bear the same identity of whole of Bengal. After the establishment of Bengali language in the areas as the inhabitant of Bengal was divided into whole areas for long century – known as Gour and Banga.

Uttarbanga denotes the areas covering Rajshahi, Maldaha, Bagura, and Pabna known as Barendra Bhumi. On the otherhand, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Bardhaman, Hoogli Howrah, Bankura, and Midnapur known as Rarh. Moreover, Bangladesh denoted the areas situated by the side of the river Padma and the Northern part of that river. They are Maimansingha, Sreehotta, Cachhar, Kumilla, and Chattal or Chittagaon.

The history of North Bengal has its long tradition. Up to the extent of 1576, North Bengal was the epicentre of political centre of the then Bangladesh. There was believe in the mind of some scholars like Dr. Ananada Gopal Ghosh, that after the conquer of Banga by the Mogul Emperor Akbar and shifting the capital from Rajmohal to Dacca was the beginning of the sunset of the political position of North Bengal. But whether this believe is acceptable Prof Ghosh himself cast some shadow of doubt .Because inspite of the fact that there was the downfall of North Bengal (copmprising Malda, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bagura and Pabna) the northern part of North Bengal (Comprising Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Goalpara) was emerged as the powerful political centre under the banner of kingdom named Kamta–Cooch dynasty which converted from a mere kingdom to vast powerful empire. That empire had close relationship with the ancient kingdom like Pragjyotishpur, Mithila and Magadh⁴.

If we go back to the ages of 'Pauranic era we can find the name of that dynasty as was mentioned in the great epic like the Mahabharata. The two kings Birat and Bhagadatta of Matsyadesh and Pragjyotishpur respectively took part in the Armageddon of Kurakhetra. Both of those kingdoms were the part of greater North Bengal. Birat supported the Pandobs and Bhagadatta took the side of Kauraba Taking into account of this back ground the inhabitants of North Bengal can reasonably claim that they are carrying the inheritance of ancient glorious tradition of history.

In this context we may remind the remarkable remark of Dr. Ahmed Sharif that he made in his book named, *Bangla , Bangali, O Bangalitta* (pages 12) where he said that in comparision to Eastern and Southern Banga the 'Rarh and' Barendra' were more ancient in the historical perspective. The present North Bengal is the inherent part of the said Braredra Bhumi⁵.

Another scholar Akhyay kumar Maitra wrote in his essay in the magazine *Prabashi*, (Jaistha, 1308) that North Bengal once upon a time were widely known for the Buddhist culture⁶. Md

Habibur Rahaman, the famous historian of Bangladesh wrote in his essay (*Gangaridhi*, p 11) that if the research work is done extensively there is every possibility to prove that 'Pandru' was the most ancient city of Bengal.⁷ At that time the 'Rarh' which is presently known as South Bengal had no connection with the rest of India specially with North India. Naturally, the history of Bengal can be claimed as the history of the then North Bengal until the establishment of the Moughal dynasty. Notwithstanding the fact, the name of Poundrabhardhan, Barendra, Gour, Gourbanga, and Kamta-Cooch dynasty are no-more existed to-day, but the present North Bengal is the derivative of three historical land masses. Nobody can deny the fact that North Bengal has the glorious historical past. But the historian who wrote the history of the ancient and Middle Ages did not bother to consider this history as the integral part of history of Bengal. Even so many research works were done but the readers of history could not find the due position of the history of that part of present Bengal in the course study of graduate and post graduate syllabus. It is true that the present North Bengal was annexed with the province of Bengal after the battle between English and Bhutan during the period of 1864-1865 but that could not erase the past history of North Bengal. Unfortunately that had happened for the northern part of present Bengal. On the other hand, the same treatment was made for the Bengali speaking dominated Surma Valley which comprised of the then undivided Shrihatra and Cachhar districts annexed with Assam province during the British period as the history of those two places could not find any place neither in the pages of history of Bengal or Assam.

Although there are four geographical regions of Bengal namely Purba Banga, UttarBanga, Dhakin Banga and Panchim Banga that are known for us but it is very difficult to say which division may occupy the position as the oldest in terms of their historical context. Prof Ananda Gopal Ghosh rightly said that Panchim Banga is the youngest. Dhakin Banga is not popular name if we compare with the other two names, Purba Banga and Uttar Banga .The name of Purba Banga became popular in the year of 1905 when the British ruler created two states Eastern Bengal and Assam by making the partition of Bengal. Although there was no official recognition of the name of Uttar Banga but it became the popular name and were used from old days in the lips of common people.(Ghosh; *Uttarbanga Namer Sandhyane* ,p:17)⁸

We can find several organizations bearing the names of Uttarbanga. The name of Uttarbanga that we can find in papers for the first time in '*Sanjibani* (2nd part edited by Kanilal Chattopadhyay) in the year of 1806 (Bangabadha 1292) where they mention the name Uttarbnga in the context of speech of Kumar Rajenedra Narayan Roy, the zaminder of Bhowal and published under the title '*Uttarbanga Nirab Keno?*'

In the essay written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay under the title '*Banglar Hitihis Samband, 1902*).Similarly we came across several magazines and books that were published after wards where the name of Uttarbanga took an important space.

Organizationally we find Rangpur Sahitya Parishad which was established in the year of 1905 first recognized the name of Uttarbanga. We quote from their statement:

‘From the very beginning Akshoy Kumar Maitra and Pundit Koklileshar Bhattacharya Vidyaranta, MA. The well known writer and professor of Sanskrit, Cooch Behar Victoria College, became Associate Member of Rangpur Sahitya Parishad. Besides, Rai Calica Das Dutta Bahadur C.I.E, Dewan of Coochbehar became Associate Member---Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, the Pillar of North Bengal----(*Uttarbanga Namer Sandhane*, p 4o)

In the year of 1870 we came across the name of Northern Bengal when the British Government set up ‘Northern Bengal State Railway’. Again, in the year of 1882 a commercial establishment in the name of ‘Northern Bengal Tea Corporation Ltd.’ was established at Jalpaiguri town. Northern Bengal Mounted Rifle was established in the same town in the year of 1908. At the end of the 19th century the British government began to use the term North Bengal taking into account of the popularity of using North Bengal instead of Northern Bengal. In the year of 1901 .C.E. Buckland in his book ‘*Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors*, wrote ‘He (Raja Promothonath Rai Bahadur of Dighapatia) founded the Rajshahi Association for the amelioration of the people of North Bengal. (Bengal Under the lieutenant goveonors, Vol-II- p.10 p. 89.) J.A Vas who published his Rangpur Gazetter in the year of 1911 used the word North Bengal. In census report that was published in the year of 1901 where E.A.Gait used the term North Bengal in several times.

The business community also used the term of North Bengal. For instance, in the year of 1910, North Bengal Jute Company was established. North Bengal Assurance Co. Ltd. was established in the year of 1934 by some businessmen of Haldibari who had their head quarters at Jalpaiguri town.

Prof. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay the national professor, used the term North Bengal in his widely acclaimed research work published under the title ‘*Kirat- Jana –kriti*’.⁹

From the above depicted examples it is cleared that the term North Bengal was widely used much before the independence.

My present study to examine the roots of the unrest of North Bengal particularly the Kamtapur movement where it becomes necessary to see the geographical identity of North Bengal.

At present, North Bengal has six districts, namely, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda. Before the British rule there were no existences of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. These two districts were created by the British ruler; the district of Darjeeling was created after the annexation of land from the king of Sikkim including some parts taken from Bhutan which was annexed with Jalpaiguri.

The Korotoya River which is flowing over North Bengal played an important role in demarking the geographical boundary of North Bengal. The eastern part of the Karotoya river included the present Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Rangpur Dist which is now in Bangladesh was included in the Kamtapur kingdom which was also known as Pragjoytishpur in the past. In the middle age the Kamtapur kingdom and in the later part of the Middle Ages the Cooch Behar dynasty comprised of this land. But this boundary was never static. It changed its boundary off and often either due to the political or natural reasons. The rivers of North Bengal played a very important role in changing the said geographical boundary.

At the beginning of the British rule Goalpara now in Assam province was the subdivision of Rangpur Dist. It was at that time named as Rajsahi-Cooch Behar Division. The present Murshidabad Dist was under that division. The geographical boundary of North Bengal thus changed from time to time. During the British period North Bengal represented the areas from the northern part of the Ganga and extended up to western part of the river Brahmaputra.

Prof. Hemchandra Roy Chowdhury in his '*History of Bengal*' Part 1 page no 2 published by Dacca University mentioned "North of main branch of the Ganges now known as Padma and west of the Brahmaputra lies the extensive region of North Bengal which embraces the modern Rajsahi Division and the state of Cooch Behar.¹⁰ Again if we go back to the middle age we can find the mention of North Bengal in '*Aini- I- Akbar* written by Abul Fazal where he wrote' Northly from Bengal is the province of Coach(Koch), the Chief of which commands 1000 horses and 100,000 feet. Kamtapur, which is also called Kiamtah, makes a part of his dominion'. (Dr. Burma: North Bengal and its People')

From the minutes of Rahbanshis Kshatriya Samiti (1917) it is known that there was a bank established at Rangpur in the name of 'North Bengal Bank'. So many scholars mentioned the name North Bengal during this period. In the year of 1922 an article was published in the 'Journal of Anthrpological Society, Bombay under the title, '*On the Cult of Rain god of North Bengal* (vol: XII, No 4). In the year of 1931 Dr. Rebati Mohan Lahiri wrote in the Modern Review under the title '*The After math of the North Bengal Flood*'. Again in the same year Sarat Chandra Mitra in the reference journal of the Asiatic society of Bengal under the title of '*On the Worship of the Diety Jalpeshwar in the district of Jalpaiguri*. (Vol: XXVII, 1931)¹¹

2.4 USES OF THE NAME OF NORTH BENGAL

Now we can give the examples the name of North Bengal that is used by government as follows:

Post Master General, North Bengal &Sikkim Division.

B.S.F. North Bengal

S.S.B North Bengal and Sikkim Division

The concept of North Bengal or a discourse building about North Bengal though is not a novel one the concept has also not been of much political significance until recently; the broad concept more or less has been geographical, demographic and administrative in denotation and connotation both ; and formative discourse is still far from being stabilized owing to further prospect of its change in the tunnel of ongoing political transitional probabilities in gestation.(Dr, Debnath; Essay on Cultural History of North Bengal')¹²

As we find from the above depicted facts that in the earliest time North Bengal more or less corresponded with the northern half of what used to be called Pounravardhana. Its capital is now identified with Mahasthangarh now in Bangladesh. We are now very much familiar with the term Varendri or Varedra bhumi which comprised the areas of Bogura, Rajsahi, Murshidabad, Malda and Dinajpur. Although the present North Bengal represents a quite different geographical boundary from the past but without taking the account of the history of Pounravardhana it will not possible to understand the roots of the present unrest where the question of cultural identity occupied a vital position in question of the self introspection and establish their ethnic identity.

The kingdom of Pounravardhana ruled for several centuries, began from the Mauryan period to the end of the Gupta period. Several inscriptions that were excavated clearly proved that the continuity of the Pounravardhana's political history. North Bengal played a very important role during the period of Sashanka and during the period of Palas dynasty. North Bengal again surfaced as the learning centre of Budhist culture with the establishment of a number of Bhudhist College and academic monasteries in Rajsahi, Malda, and Dinajpur. During the period of Sena dynasty North Bengal lost their cultural dominance with the establishment of emergence of Nadia as the alternative centre of politics and culture.

In the 18th century Kamtapur a place of North Bengal emerged as the important centre of political and cultural activities with the establishment of powerful kingdom known as Kamtapuri dynasty that existed up to the last decade of the 15th century. At the initial stage it was also a great Buddhist learning centre but the Brahmanical Hinduism made their head way cornered the Buddhist culture. When Iqtiaar Uddin Mohammad Bin Khiliji centred his administrative activity centering Gaur and Pandua in Malda, North Bengal again turned to be politically important centre during the Mughal period.

The present Bengal as we know now was not the same even few years back. It was divided in to two parts – Gour and Banga. Gour included Uttarbanga and West Bengal. Here again, Uttarbanga included Barendra Bhumi- namely, Rajsahi, Maldaha, Bagura and Pabna and Rarh comprised of the districts like Birbhum, Murshidabad, Burdhamam, Hooghly Howrah Bankura and Nadia .

Besides, the name of Bangladesh included the districts like Maymansingha, Sreehatta, Kummilya, and areas of Chattal. All of them either situated either on the left bank of the river Padma or on the right side of the river.

The present Banganam (what as we see it today) comprises of these two parts—Gaur and Banga. It should be kept in mind that these two names were very popularly used from time immemorial. The names Gour and Banga were mentioned in the great epic, the Mahabharata. The national professor Suniti Kumar Chattapadhyay told in search of the origin of these two names that the three names like Anga, Banga, and Kalinga which were uttered at one breath had their origin from three distinct non Aryan tribes (most probably, Kol origin). Although different scholars have different opinion regarding the origin of the name Gour. Prof Sunity Kumar Chattapadhyay explained the source of the origin of the name of Gour. In his opinion, this area was famous for the production of cane sugar and produced raw sugar known as ‘gur’ so the name of this region had been known as Gour. Other thought its name came from the ancient non – Aryan race, probably Dravidian linguistic tribes and from their word ‘gonda’ the name Gour’ had been derived.

By the name of Gour it was known the areas of West Bengal and middle part of North Bengal. On the other hand in the name of Banga it was known as the areas of East Bengal and South Bengal. But during the Hindu rule of ancient and middle period of history ‘Gour-banga’ indicated the whole of Bengal. In the thirteen century when the muslim ruler conquered West Benga they used Bangal or Bangalaha for the whole of Bengal and from this word the name Bengali came to be known as it is generally believed by many scholars.

During the middle age the word ‘Gouriya’ was used to denote the identity of the people of West Bengal. It was known that when lord Sri Chyatyanya went to Puri from Nabadwip he was called Gouriya not by the name of Bengali .Raja Ram mohan Roy gave the title of the book of grammar written by himself for Bengali as *Gauriya Byakaran*’ but not Bangla Byakaran.

Bengali gave their identity of their birth place by the joint name of Gour and Banga. Such joint names are found in different part of the country. For example, Chech+Slovaak=Chechoslovakia, can be mentioned.

South Bengal and North Bengal that are now used to denote the demarcation of two parts of West Bengal after the partition of Gour Banga may require explaining in the near future.

The present study is not to give any account of the historical background of Bengal or Bengali but it required to mention as depicted above as the present unrest that surfaced on the northern part of the present state of West Bengal is directing against the hegemony of the Bengali culture over the others community particularly after the partition of Bengal as the influx of Bengali refugees engulfed the whole of the state. Here it should bear in mind that the impact

of the refugee influx over North Bengal was completely different from the southern part of the state. The southern part of the state bears the same Bengali language and culture with a slight variation of dialects, on the other hand, the dominant racial group of North Bengal was Rajbanshis who claimed themselves as a quite distinct group having their own languages and culture.

The present study is to examine the factors that are motivating the present ethnic unrest dividing the line between Bengali and Rajbanshis identity based on their culture and language. In search of the source of the present ethnic conflict we need to explore the pages of history to understand the present situation. History reveals the facts that this region has long been the site of bitter conflicts over resources between strategic interest groups. During the nationalist upsurge the ethnic conflict did not surface because during this colonial period the conflict was mainly articulated against the colonial ruler and their feudal collaborators.

Feudal structure of our country of course is not the creation of colonial rule but it was used by colonial administration in the articulation of a different mode of production. This ultimately formed a new form of social relations between different groups of peoples. After the end of colonial rule this are continued to simmer in the rural areas, with the conflict between classes in the agrarian sector. This kept alive a process of renegotiation of resource sharing and social relation. Although it is difficult to see the struggle or movement as homogeneous and linear in its programme but they are till date remained the fulcrum on which the political change are affected. For example, the Naxalite movement that was ignited on the soil of North Bengal which signifies the ideological shifts and epistemological break in the understanding of aspiration of the somewhat amorphous masses.

The question of autonomy in general relate to the complex interplay between the ethno-cultural mooring of the individual of group identity and rather a seductive of geographical reductionism and territoriality (Chaturvedi).¹³ It cannot be denied that this issue is complex and no single theory is capable to explain its root and the nature of the movement.

Territoriality is the attempt by an individual or groups to effect, influence or control people, phenomena and relationship, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area. It is a rather complex strategy and the device through which people construct and maintain spatial organisation (Robert Sack 1986; 19-20,216).¹⁴ No doubt geographical concentration of a group or community is an essential factor to territorial autonomy but in the same time this particular consideration, in many occasion, becomes highly problematic in places characterized by heterogeneity or mega-diversity or hybridity.

In general, it is explained one of the most basic factor for this kind of movement is the uneven development in economic and social field within the state itself. Again, the cultural

dominance by the dominant group may consider as another important cause for watering the germination of regional movement as it provoke the feeling of inferiority complex which ultimately give birth a psychological state of mind what is called as 'identity crisis'.

In this context it requires to examine the facts whether these factors are also playing any role on the ethnic unrest that are now becoming the focal point of discussion of this problems.

First of all we have to throw some light on the pages of history of the local inhabitants and whether that was given due position in the pages of history of Bengal. The most dominant local inhabitant was the Rajbanshis community, came to settle here in the ancient past and expanded their settlement over a vast region covering the North Bengal and a wide area of the Brahmaputra valley by clearing the jungles and converting this area into a fertile agricultural land.

It is an urgent need to open the pages of history in the search about the root of the feeling of isolation in the mind of the Rajbanshi community as they are complaining that their tradition and glorious heritage and heroic historical past are constantly marginalised by the dominant Bengali intellectual class by dint of their demographic majority. The history of Bengal is not only the history of kings and sultans of Bengal. The history of Bengal is the history of the aboriginal peoples of North Bengal which is the integral part of whole of Bengal.

2.5 A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE RAJBANSHI COMMUNITY

It becomes necessary to give an account of the history of the Rajbanshi as the point of disputes has one of the issues whether they belong to any one of the sub group of the Bengali community and in consequence their language is a dialect of Bengali language. In question of establishing the self identity of Rajbanshi and self determination which is the focal point of present unrest in North Bengal it has become imperative to peep in to the historical fact as well as anthropological observation on the question of their origin.

The Rajbanshis were the most dominant social group before the partition of India but still today they are one of the dominant social groups, notwithstanding the fact of the influx of Bengali refugees followed by the partition of Bengal. No clear picture was, however, available except the ancient scripts and literatures about the origin and identity of this dominant group. Long before Charu Chandra Sanyal in his monumental work entitled '*The History of Rajbanshis of North Bengal (A Study of a Hindu Social Group)*' published by the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, in 1965, had attempted to throw light on the views of several scholars and writers relating to the origin and identity of Rajbanshis community. Before that during the colonial period many theories were floated by the British and Indian scholars on the same issue. Compiling all these views Dr Sanyal tried to reach a conclusion that 'the koches are non-Aryan in origin. Some of them adopted Hinduism and became Rajbanshis latter on claimed to be kshatriyas.'¹⁵

A long and complex social assimilation process which took place in course of time gave a new shape to the socio-cultural profile of this region. The pans, Palias, and Deshis, of Dinajpur and Koches of different districts of North Bengal and Purnia districts of Bihar were categorised as 'Hindu Social Groups'. The Muslim population had grown out of the conversion of Rajbanshis, Koches or their subdivisions. Both these groups spoke the 'dialect called Rajbanshis or Kamtapuri. (Dec, 2007).¹⁶

The theories propounded by the British or the non –Rajbanshis Indian authors about the origin and ethnic identity of Rajbanshis were strongly denied by the present Rajbanshis intellectuals. They demanded that the Rajbanshis had no affinity with the Kochese, Paliyas, and Bodo. They based on the Hindu scriptures and epics and argued assertively that the Rajbanshis were Kshatriyas of Aryan origin and demanded their status of a separate caste in the Hindu Social Polity. The census report from 1872 to 1941 had thrown such light on the antecedents of the Rajbanshis that confusion still remains about their identity. The census report of 1872 1881 and 1891' enumerated Koch, Rajbanshis, and Paliyas etc under one head Koach.' It is found in subsequent census reports that these reports recorded the Rajbanshis in a separate manner. All subsections of the Koch were recorded as Rajbanshis in the census reports of 1911 and 1921. Even many Rajbanshis were recorded as Kshatriyas in 1921. So it revealed that the census reports it selves showed a contradictory position and could not come out to a decision about the ethnic identity of Rajbanshis and thereby become the responsible for the social tension of this region. The Rajbanshis elite launched a social movement for the recognition of their 'bratya kshastriyas' status.

2.6 THE EARLY HISTORY OF KAMTAPUR AND THE RAJBASNSHI AND KOCHES

The history of a particular race or tribe cannot be completed without the knowledge of its ancestors. So it is very much important to study about the origin of the Koches and to find out the present disputes between the Koches and the Rajbanshis. It is evident from different historical accounts Kamtapur with its capital of Goshanimari a place nearly 15 kilometres to the south of the present Cooch Behar was the important centre for culture and political power in North Bengal, besides Mahasthangarh, Gaur, and Pandua.

Vaskarvarman ruled over the whole of the Brahmaputera Valley in Assam and a large portion of North Bengal. It is known that he was the contemporary to Harshabardhan of Kanuj and King Shasanka of Bengal. In the opinion of Prof sunity Kumar Chatterjee that this seventh century king was a Kirat or an Indo–Mongoloid. He was devotee of lord Shiva which was taken as conclusive prove that he embraced the Hinduism and naturally Hinduisation and Sanskritisation of the leading section of the Indo–Mogoloid people had taken place by the seventeenth century. Hieu-en-Tsang the famous Chinese traveller also described that the kingdom of Vaskarvarman

included the whole of Assam valley and extended up to Karatya river of North Bengal. In the ninth century it came under the rule of Pal Dynasty. His domain were included Vanga and Varendra.¹⁷

By the end of the tenth century another dynasty emerged. They were the Kambojas who captured the certain parts of varendri of North Bengal. It was opined by the different scholars that the Kambojas might have been originally an Indo-Mongoloids tribes speaking one of the Tibeto-Burman languages but in course of time they embraced the sanskrit language as their court language as is evident from the stone pillar inscription of a Siva temple at Bangarh of Dinajpur. It thus appeared that successive waves of Indo-Mogoloids had become Sanskritised and Hinduised.

It should be noted here that ‘before the emergence of Kamptapur since the historian gets no reliable trace of any composite political as well as well as social; culture in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri and no mention of Koch culture and Rajbanshi culture, the rise of Kamptapur certainly may be considered to have marked a new beginning in the area of North Bengal sandwiched by the powerful Kingdom of Gaur and Kamrup.’ (Debnath; 50).¹⁸

The kingdom of Kamrup as mentioned earlier is believed to be emerged as an independent political unit in the first half of the eighth century but until the fourteenth century its history remained under so many speculations. The ruler of this region might have been independent or feudatories either of the ruler of Kamrup or of Gaur from time to time. In that case some clues are found in the Bhutanese Chronicles like Gyalarb Selvimelong and the Namthars. They threw some lights on the history of North Bengal in the eighth century. Many of the Bhutanese chronicles stated that in the eighth century a king named Sidhu of Indian origin ruling in Bumthang of Bhutan fell ill and to save him his courtiers invited Guru Padasambhava of Nalanda University. Guru Padmasambhava or Rimche entered Bhutan across the kingdom of the Khens or Khyengs (Khen Nabje Korpu and Ogyen Dang). Most probably, Sindhu Raja himself had a big area of the plains under his control for which he had to conflict with another ruler of the plain named Nabadura. It is believed that Guru Padamsambhava persuaded them to bring peace between them and both of them embraced Buddhism and made arrangement to spread Buddhism both in hills and plains but the genealogy was incomplete. So it became very difficult to establish between Sindhu Roy and and Sindhupati, the first two rulers of Kamtapur as their names could not be found categorically anywhere nor is there any time period of their ruling .On the other hand, there are ample evidence in Bhutanese chronicles that the Khem used to live in Shamgong of Bhutan from where they used to come on plains for tending their cattle. They were also agriculturists and many of them began to settle there for that purpose. At that time there was no such political boundary between the hills and plains. So in coming to plains and going back to hills according to their convenience was not any matter. But the situation completely changed after the coming of Tibetans to Bhutan and established their political control over there. There is

every reason to believe that this new power might have ousted the Khens from Bhutan who forced to come down from the hills and made their new settlement on plains. It can be taken as granted that Sindhu Raja and Sindhu Roy was the same person who happened to be the first ruler of the kamtapur. But here it should be mentioned that no strong historical evidence of beyond doubt can be placed in support of this conjecture. In the present context it can be said that Kamtapur was known as the widely known learning centre for Buddhist culture. During the Pal period Kamtapur was under the attack from the two sides; one from the Kamrup and another from the Pal dynasty and lost its independent status during the period of King Deva Pal and might have been reduced to a feudatory under the Palas. After the fall of the Pal Dynasty a major change might have been taken place in Kamtapur. It is believed that from different accounts some descendants and scions of the family of Laxan Sen the ruler of Gour might have taken refuge in the capital of Kamtapur and even the areas encircling it .They occupied the high post in the Kamtapur court. They were bitter anti Buddhist and gave the leadership in building the pro Brahmanical religious culture which ultimately turned into revolt against the Buddhist ruler. That revolt might have led to the assassination of king Singhadhvaj by his jealous minister Pratapdhvaj.

At the end of the thirteenth century, a feudatory chief named Durlavnarayan became the supreme king of Kamrup. It is learnt from the Rudrasingha's Buranji, Durlavnarayan invited many Brahmins and Kayastha from the Gangatic plain and made them settlement in Cooch Behar and Brahmaputra valley. It should be mentioned here that the famous Vaishnava poet and great peacher Sankara Deva who born in 1449 was the lineage of those kayastha. Durlavnarayan's line could not survive long and they were uprooted by the Dhawaja kings namely, Niladhwa, Chakradwaja, and Nilambar with their capital of Kamtapur at Gosanimari.

The dynasty of which Niladhwa was a scion may be called Kanteswar or Kamateswar dynasty for all the rulers of dynasty virtually used the title Kanteswar or Kamateswar irrespective of their original names. But the most of the historians prefer to call them Khen or Khyen dynasty. The origin of the Khen or Kanteswar dynasty is still shrouded in mystery. It is believed

that several dynasties ruled over Kamtapur. The list of which is mentioned below as it appears important to study the historical account of the demand for a separate state.



From the above list it should be noted that from Sidhu Roy to Singhadhwa belonged to one dynasty; and from Pratapdhwa to Nilambar belonged to another dynasty. It also to be noted that although Pratapdhwa, who was the minister in the court of Singhadhwa that does not mean that later, belonged to

another family. In those days generally such kind of important post in the court was awarded to the nearest member of the royal family. As such it may be presumed that Pratapdwaj also belonged to the same family. Although there is still controversy, but it can be taken that the rulers of kamtapur dynasty belonged to Khen dynasty and the Khens were supposedly akin to the Koches. One interesting point should be mentioned here in support of the above contention that in present Dinhata and Goshanimari those who claim the Khen lineage for themselves they use their title Sen; so Sen and khen stand synonymous to each other. One reason for that might be taken in to the consideration during the Turkey invasion they migrated to this region after their discomfiture in the hands of the Turkey invaders and settled in Kamtapur and maintained their identity with the Khens who were already in power. This view finds at least some solid foundation as greater Brahmanical influence that in architecture and sculpture witnessed tremendous achievement in making stone statues of Hindu god and goddesses. A great enmity developed between the muslim ruler of Gour and the newly grown Brahmanical dominated dynasty of kamtapur. It was with their advice well protected fortresses were built around the royal palace and the city of Goshanipur which took long twenty years for the army of Hussain Shah to break the defence of the capital of kamtapuri.



Fig: 2.6.2 The Tista once the mighty river of North Bengal

Let have a look on the history of attack against the Kamtapur kingdom by the powerful turkey ruler of Gaur which will prove the mighty presence of the Kamtapur dynasty during this period.

Ghiyasudin Azam Shah (1389-1409) the Ilayas Shahi king of Gauda invaded Kamrup but could not advance beyond the Tista – Karotyoa, being resisted by the joint force of Kamtapur – Kamrup and Ahom King. Again, Rukunuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474) sent his general Shah Ismail Ghazi to war against the king of Kamtapur – Kamrup but Ismail faced a terrible defeat in a battle nearer to Santoshpur in Dinajpur in 1498. This proves that there was a close bondage among Kamrup Kamtapur and Ahom. This also indicates they had the feeling of ethnical bondage among them.

2.7 ESTABLISHMENT OF KOCH-BEHAR DYNASTY

Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519) launched a massive campaign against Nilambar the king of Kamata pur. His one Brahmin minister instigated Hussain Shah to invade Kamtapur capital because the king gave death sentence to his licentious son. With the help of that Brahmin minister of Nilambar Hussain Shah could gain entry in to the inner citadel and captured Nilambar after a long battle. He then proceeded towards Ahom Kingdom but without success.

Husain Shsh could not hold the rule over Kamtapur long, rather immediate after the fall of Nilambar, Haridas Mandal alias Haria Mandal became a powerful feudatory chief and his son Biswa Singha waged war against the powerful neighbouring Bhuinya and consolidated his rule over their territory. He then crowned himself as the Kamteswar king of Kamtapur – Kamrup. He declared himself as the follower of Hinduism and his coronation was held in accordance with the Vedic rites performed by the Brahmin priest and attended by Brahmins, Kshatriyra, Vaishyas and Sudras to acknowledge the sovereignty of the king. There he formally declared himself as Hindu with his large number of both the civil and military officials. Many of the scholars are of the opinion that it is through Biswa Singha that the large scale sanskritisation of the Koches began which eventually led to their assumption of the caste name Rajbanshi.

The kingdom of Koch- Behar thus founded by Viswa Singha in 1496 or in another opinion in 1509A.D. His son Naranarayan extended the border of Kooch Behar kingdom to the extent of Eastern India and converted this kingdom an empire.

The history of the Koches is available from various sources- Bansavali of Darang Rajas, Assam Buranjis, Gurucharit katha, etc. According to these sources Haria mandal was a Mech Sardar. He married two sisters Hira and Jira. They belonged to Hazo community. They had two sons by them namely Bisu the son of Hira, Sisu the son of Jira. Bisu was a man of extra ordinary courage and had skill in warfare. Thus from this account it is seen that Biswa Singh, the founder of the Koch dynasty was originally a tribal leader, having defeted the other tribal sarders

of western Assam brought them under his suzerainty and established the Koch–Rajbanshi kingdom. According to scholars like Prof. Sunity Kumar Chattopadhyay, quite a number of Bodo Tribes of the North Eastern region having been influenced by the Brahminic Hindu culture had undergone sanskritisation and adopted Hinduism and changed their identity to Koch.

In the cultural history of Assam, B.K. Barua gave the following account: ‘Biswa was a man of exceptional enterprises, courage, military and administrative ability. With the assistance of his brother Siva Singha, he crushed the Bara Bhuiyan and set up a strong, united and independent monarchy. When the Muslims were supplanted by the combined pressure of the Ahoms from the east and Koches from the west, Biswa Singha organised a vast army and organised his unquestioned authority over his newly built kingdom bounded by the Karatoya on the west and Barandi on the east’¹⁹

It again invites to inspect about the origin of Koches as it has become now the focal point in order to find out the root on the issues of debate about the relation between the Koches and the Rajbanshis.

It is evident from the different sources that a process of sanskritisation and detribalisation was going on from the early part of the history of Kamrup. But as fresh batches of tribal people from the hills were settling down increasingly in the villages of Assam, the process was continuing and within the giving situation of the hills-plains continuum the early semi-tribal, semi-feudal formation progressively acquired marked anti-tribal features. A converted tribal of these groups of Assam first became a sharanya then developed in to Koch. Koch was accordingly an omnibus caste, which accommodated within itself tribal neophytes from different Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups.’ (Burma; 9)

Edward Gait in his ‘A history of Assam said that the word Koch is a term of some ambiguity. It may appear as ambiguous in the mind of Gait but it is clear that Koch in Northeast India represents a distinct group of people or a particular community. In Rava language the meaning of Koch is ‘Huma.’ Gait in his same book (page 46) said, in Assam the term Koch had been used to denote the name of Hindu caste who converted to Hinduism from the rank of their Kachari, Lalung, Mikir, and other tribes. Some of the scholars, both colonial and local believed that a few Mongolian Tribes especially the Kacharis or Bodo had join the rank of Koch or by another name Rajbanshis after being converted into.Hindduism.²⁰

A.C. Chowdhury a celebrated personality from the Koch Rajbanshis community and author of many books on the Koch Rajbanshis has admitted that his forefathers were originally Mech or Kacharis who elevated themselves to the rank of Rajbanshis He also wrote that a section of the Rabha community after becoming ‘Pati Rabha ‘ elevated to Rajbanshis by adopting surnames like Rai, Barman, Sarkar etc. (Das p30)²¹

According to Greirson the Koches and Kocharies (Greirson used Kocharies instead of Kachari probably to denote a link between the two term Koch and Kacharis) are of the same ethnic groups. He also wrote ‘ The very name Koch has lost its original significance and has now come to mean a Bodo who has become so far Hinduised that he has abandoned his proper tongue and in particular what he eats (Chowdhury 30)²²

Sir Herbart Raisely in his book ‘The Tribes and Castes of Bengal’ mentioned some legends about the origin of Koches. One limbu legend appears interesting. It may not consider out of place if it is mentioned here to denote the relationship with Mongoloide culture. According to this legend the ancestor of the Koches, Meches and Dhimals were the brothers. They were first dropped by the God from heaven and fell on Benaras and from there they made their journey towards the north east and ultimately reached at the foot hills between Brahmaputra and the Kosi River called Mule or Kachar by the Nepalese. The youngest brother prefers to settle in Kachar and became the father of the Koches, Meches and Dhimals. The other two brothers went further in to the hills and became the forefathers of Limbus and the Khambus of Nepal²³.

If all these comments are taken to be accepted then there is no other option but to accept that the Koches are nothing but the Hinduised Kacharis or other Hinduised tribes. In the midst of so divergent opinions it is not possible to reach a single conclusion especially when the emotion prevails upon the situation in absence of definite historical fact.

Even the modern western scholars they are not in the same opinion about the racial origin of Koches inspite of the general opinion that the Koches includes Meches, Kacharies, Bodos, Rajbanshis, Garos etc. While Colonel Dalton considered the Koches to be Dravidian, Raisely considered them as the intermixture of Mongoloid stock and the Dravidian stock. In the opinion of Gait this confusion was due to the use of the term Rajbanshis. Where this term was originally referred to the distinct community of Dravidian affinities but the confusion caused afterward when the Koches west of the Manas River adopted and they atoned to Hinduism and took the caste name of the Hinduised community in the neighbourhood. Whatever divergence of opinion in question of the racial origin of the Koches but more or less a general consensus has been arrived that the term Rajbanshis is of recent origin. This term Rajbanshis neither found in the Persian records nor found in the foreign records or not even in the dynastic epigraph of the time where they mentioned Koches as the Rajbanshis. The Darang Bansavali the genealogical account of the Koch royal family did not mention the term Rajbanshis. The opinion of the scholars like Dr. Jatin Barua may be considered to be accepted where he registered his opinion in ‘ Rangta Garo, Raja Mahendra Narayan Aru Ambica charan Choudhuri Jivan Kriti’ (Assamese) edited by him and published from Bongaigaon (p’7) “ it is possible that when the Koches became conscious of their past ancestral glory at later period , they began to call themselves as Rajbanshis- meaning descendants of royal Kindred and made them feel somewhat superior to the rest of the others.

The renowned Rajbanshi scholars like Upendra Nath Burman and Dharma Narayan Burma in their books like 'Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas' and 'Rajbanshi kshatriya Jatir Itibritta Banam Tribal Andolon' strongly opposed the opinion that Rajbanshis and Koch are the same racial group. Rather they claimed that the Rajbanshis are carrying the pure Aryan blood while the Koches belonged to tribal groups.

We may come into conclusion that the early Koches had been akin to the Dravidians and through the processes of social transformation, as a rule of social science there took the blood mixture with the people of Austric and Mongoloid origin. The same history covers the history of the Hindu civilization if such civilization in that is recognized at all. Co-mingling of the Aryans and non Aryans culture, thought, trends and practice which gave birth of the present Indian society as whole is the product of the social process not only for India but throughout the human history of the world. The present Rajbanshis community cannot be the exception of this social process. There is no purity in question of blood of Aryan and non Aryan. So the question of Hinduization does not arise at all, though many historians emphasised on this point either deliberately or because of their myopic views of Hinduism. Similarly it can be said the name of Rajbanshis is also the germination of the seed of the pluralistic Hinduism in gestation. Over the centuries not only the Koches but all the races who came from different part of the land converged into each other not adopting only the culture, language, customs and practices but also with mingling bloods of each other. Who can deny the fact whatever the origin of the Koches in the distant past over the centuries they adopted more and more prevailing Hindu practices and rituals on account of cross-cultural fertilization and contact with the people of mainland. In that context one glaring example may be cited from the great Epic, the Mahabharata which is not only a mythological description but this great epic is also valuable account of the social transformation of the Indian society. Sri Krishna, here not as god but represented the most dominating class of that period and became the key factor of the permutation and combination of the social amalgamation of the whole episode. He belonged to the Non- Aryan Dasyu family from his mother side, Kanshya, a 'Dasyu' King being his maternal uncle from his mother side on one hand. On the other hand, he belonged to Aryans races; Basudeb being his father belonged to the Aryans. Thus Krishna is the unique creation of the mixed blood between the Aryans and the Non- Aryans and that is the history of the present social structure of India today.

Here one pertinent question to be answered, what are the originating factor which led this vast community to convert themselves into Hinduism. During the Pala dynasty Buddhism had been the most dominating religion of Pundravardhan or Varendri. During that period most part of North Bengal and the northern districts of the then Cooch Behar was under the rule of Pal dynasty. So it can be presumed during that period most of them followed the religion of the ruler. Again during the period of the Sen kingdom many of this part were under the rule of Sen Dynasty. As a consequence, Hinduism took the commanding role. But how even before the

establishment of Koch kingdom, how they became the strong votaries of Brahmanical Hindu tradition that is now an important query that has to be enquired. That area was adjacent with Kamrup where the Brahmanical worship was strongly prevailed. Or there might have been another powerful ruler who ruled over there and votaries of Brahmanical practices. As no definite proof of the existence of such ruler until now there is reason to believe that the influence of the Khen Dynasty who played the important role in spreading the Brahmanical practices in Kamrup before the establishment of both the Pal and Sen kingdom. It is therefore in order to find out the root of the cultural history of Cooch- Behar it is not possible to do that without taking in to the account of the history and its influence of the Kamtapur dynasty.

The above statement appears to be true from the fact that in the first phase of the Koch rule, the Brahmins who came to Koch-Behar were Kamrupi Brahmin. Afterwards more Brahmins from North India came and settled here but the majority of the Brahmins came from the Varendrabhumi and they are called the Barendri Brahmin. It was found that the Kamrupi Brahmin were mainly devoted themselves in the religious activities, on the other hand, the Vrendendri Brahmin were involved in administrative affairs. Taking the advantages in the administrative post the Varendri Brahmin grabbed land and exerted influence upon the common people. Although these Varendri Brahmin were responsible for many woes of the common people of Koch-Behar but they contributed a lot for the spread of education and other sphere of social life and helped the peoples for their intellectual developments.

The demarcation line between the Rajbanshis and Koches was drawn during the Kshatriya movement in the 20th century. But those advocated that the Koches and the Rajbanshis are not the same racial group they based on their argument mostly on the mythological stories. Panchanan Burman the great scholars and the leader of the Kshatriya movement along with Hara Kishor Adhikari were among the Rajbanshis leader who claimed that the Koches and the Rajbanshis were not the same.

Let I conclude this debate taking the views of Edward Gait expressed in his '*A history of Assam*' (Guwahati) where he said 'There seems, however to be no doubt, that the true Koches were Mongoloid race very closely allied to the Meches and Garos; and we find that in Jalpaiguri, Cooch-Bihar and Goalpara, the persons now known as Rajbanshis are either pure Koches, who though dark have distinct Mongoloids physiognomy, or else a mixed breed in which the Mongoloid elements usually preponderates²⁴'.

Before concluding this chapter I like to present here an interesting experience that was given by the scholar Arup Jyoti Das in his Book '*Kamtapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination*' while he was travelling by Dadar- Guwahati Express. He met a youth who was travelling from Dupguri of Jalpaiguri District to Gujarat where he was working as labour. From his appearance Prof Das could easily recognised him as a member of Koch -Rajbanshi community. Prof. Das

asked that young man whether he call himself Koch or Rajbanshi. He smiled and told that it depends on the nature of question. He answered that if somebody asked him whether he was a Koch his answer would be yes, he was. And if he was asked whether he was a Rajbanshi, then too, his answer would be yes, he was Rajbanshi. The surname of the youth was 'Roy' with a distinct Mongoloid appearance ' After a pause the man told him with a dim tone ' there are no Rajbaris (palaces), no Rajas (king) at present , everybody has gone,--there is no reason of calling ourselves Rajbanshis (Descendent of King), actually we are all now Prajabanshis (subject). Prof Das wrote 'He did not wait for my reply; he looked outside through the window of the train; most probably his destination was coming. But he surely made a good argument about Koch–Rajbanshi and the present condition of them without a degree from any University'.

2.8 KAMTAPUR DYNASTY

Before giving the accounts of Kamtapur dynasty it requires to give an explanation about the necessary to bring the history of Kamtapur Dynasty in this study. In North east India it is find that there are several ethnic upsurge erupted at different times and the demand for either a sovereign state or state within the boundary of the country in the name of their homeland. The proposed homeland is generally named after the name of their community. For example Bodo land for the Bodo community, Naglim for the Nagas, Dimaraji of Dimasas, Gorkhaland for the Gorkhas and now the Kamtapur for the Kamtapuris. Here it should be noted that neither the demand for 'Kochland ' or Rajbanshi land ' has been echoed either by the Koches or The Rajbanshis , although for Kamtapur state tried to rock the soil of this Northern part of West Bengal and the demand for the creation of Greater Cooch Behar state again surfaced almost in the same back ground of the Kamtapur state.

It is therefore become imperative to bring the history of the Kamtapur Dynasty to examine what is the relation between Koch Rajbanshi or Kamtapur or why they are identify themselves with Kamtapur?

Although the name of Kamtapur is heard recently, Kamtapur was very much in the pages of history. Even Hiuen Sang during his visit in India he visited this place during the rule of Bhaskar Burma between 606 to 648 A.D. The capital of Kamrup was Kamtapur. In the ancient period there was no big town or cities like today and the capital of the kingdom or the country does not appear to have been a place of importance. So in most cases the historian mentioned only the location of the capital where the king lived.

From the masterpiece work of Khan Chowdhury Amanullah Ahmad '*Kochbeharer Itihas* '(Bengali Ed) gave the description of Kamtapur. In the 15th century, Kamtapur the prosperous capital of the kingdom of Kamrup was situated on the west bank of the river Dharala (Gosanimari). It has vast fort. According to Edward Gait, it was situated about 150 miles east of

Paundra Vardhan. Cunningham, after identified the place with Pabna (Gait; A history of Assam p 26). Amantullah Khan clearly identified the place 14 miles south west of Cooch Behar 5 miles west of Dinhat railway station now known as Gosanimari.

Dr. Buchanan Hamilton also suggested the same location and after visiting the place he gave a description about the fort. From his account it is known that it was a big fort with well arrangement for its protection. There were several 'Duar' or doors of the fort named like "Shil Duar", 'Bas Duar', 'Joy Duar', 'Sannyasi Duar', 'Hoka Duar', and 'Nimai Duar.' There were two trenches one encircled the inner fort and another encircled the outer fort. In the centre of the fort there was alter like platform named 'Rajpat' It was bounded by bricks construction. The height of it was 60 feet and a square shaped of 360 feet of each side²⁵. The Rudra Sing Buranji of Assam stated that two kings named Tipam and Tmang took the shelter of the king of kamrup after defeated by the Ahom King. Chao Fha Sudang the king of Ahom kingdom took it as the disrespect to him and marched against the Kamteswar, the king of Kamrup. The Ahom queen requested Kamteswar for the peace treaty with Ahom king in order to avoid the bloodshed Kamteswar responded the request and established the friendship with the Ahom king. That relation was further strengthen with the marriage relation with the daughter of Kamteswar to the Ahom King. After that he established the friendship with the king of Gour and married his daughter Sushidhi and gave the honour as the queen-consort.

Srutidhar Rupnarayan, the disciple of Shankar Deb described in the genealogy of Kamteswar named 'Kamteswar Kulukarika' that they are the descendant of the Rajya Bardhan. In this genealogy it is said that the five sons of Bardhan fled for the fear of Parashuram took the shelter in Rantanapith and abandoned the principle of Kshtriya hood and named as 'Bhagna Kshtriya'.

In another script named 'Bromoni Tantra' said that the sons of Bardhan renounced their principle of Kshatriyahood took the shelter in Ratnapith (Kamta) and took their title Rajbanshi or Koch. Niladhvaj, one of the king of this dynasty shifted his capital from Gauhati to Kamtapur. After Chakradvaj Nilambar became the king during the period of the middle of the fifteenth century. It is believed he established the goddess Kamteswari in his capital. He constructed many roads from his capital to the extreme end of the boundary of his kingdom. During his regime a road was built to the north-west up to the extent of Jalpesh Temple. A road in the northern part of Rangpur is still known as Nilimbari Road.

2.9 THE LAST HINDU KING OF BENGAL

Raja Prithu, a descendent of Baidaydeb became the king probably in the year of 1195A.D. During his reign the Kamrup Valley and the whole area of the Korotya land was under his rule. It is known that Baktiar Khiliji elevated his position from the Jaigirdar to the sultan of Bengal. He had a plan to invade Kamtapur and reached nearer to the capital of Kamrup. He invaded the king of Gaur and at that time laxman Sen was the king. There is the rumour that Baktiar Khiliji came

with the nineteen numbers of his cavalry. Laxman Sen fled from the capital without any resistance. But Baktiar Khiliji was defeated in the hand of Raja Prithu and Baktiar was badly wounded and died on his way to his capital. This study has no any interest to describe the battle as well as whether the King of Gaur really fled from his capital for the fear of the sound of the hoof of the cavalry of Baktiar was a fact or not. But this study gave the importance about the description of the many historian of modern Bengal where they described Laxman Sen the Last Hindu Raja of Bengal. The question automatically surfaced who was Raja Prithu then? He was the king of the Eastern part of the Present Bengal, and a true devotee of Hinduism. Laxman Sen was not true sense a Bengali in origin as they hailed from Karnataka. If the defeat of Laxman Sen could be termed as the last Hindu king of Bengal then what would be the place of Raja Prithu in the history of Bengal? This question become the question of the present Koch or Rajbanshi community, if the so called main land historian of Bengal do not find it necessary to consider the glorious role of King Prithu and give him the proper place in the history of Bengal as the Hindu Bengali king then how they can claim that the Koch and Rajbanshi belonged to the main stream of Bengali community and their mother tongue, either Rajbanshi or Kamtapuri are dialects of Bengali. It should be remembered that every group of community hopes that he should be given the position at par both in the society and in the pages of history. Here it would be not out of place to a give very short description of the brilliant military skill that showed by King Prithu which his descendents reasonably hoped that the glorious role of their king should find a proper place in the history of Bengal. What the historians of Bengal did not think to give the place in the history of Bengal that should be known at least in a brief so that one should know why the present generation of this vast community felt insulted and hurt their feeling being marginalised by the dominant Bengali intellectuals.

King Prithu was also old at that time. He kept keen watch over the movement of Batkiar Khiliji. The Sultan came with his strong experience forces. The king Prithu allowed the invaders to march them into the deeper part of his kingdom. In the meantime all the residence was shifted with their belongings including the every grain of food. Nepolion, the French Emperor faced the same situation after some hundreds years of that military strategy. So nobody could claim that Prithu followed the strategy that was shown by the Russian General Kutuzev at the time of the March of the emperor Napolion against Russia.

Baktiar sensed the danger. There was not a single grain for his solders. Not a single fodder for his horse. He tried to retreat. But on his way he found that the bridges over the swift stream disappeared. And the solders of Prithu already took the position there. Khiliji took the shelter with his forces in a temple ground. Prithu being the devotee of Hindu cult did not attack him as he and his solder took the shelter of the temple of god. But he ordered his solders to construct the wall made of bamboos around the temple to encircle the enemy so that they even unable to fetch water to drink.

Finding no other alternative, Khiliji tried to escape from the besieged condition by swimming across the river. But the showers of arrows from Prithu turned the river in to the killing field for Khiliji. Almost ten thousands solders including the horses were killed before they cross the river Puspabhadre. Kiliji, however, could escape his life with serious injury. Sir Usli Heg remarked about the defeat of Kiliji which recorded in Cambridge History of India–(Vol VIIIp-50) ‘Armies had been defeated but Iktiaruddin force had been all but annihilated and it would have been well for him to have perished with it.

Very few instance of such humiliating defeat of a Sultan in the hand of a Hindu King can be cited. Here it is not the question of the Hindu and Muslim. It is a question of historical account that sould given due position in the main land history. A new wave has started to inspect the self search to establish the identity of every community. When the present generation who searched their identity and find that their glorious past could not find the entry in the history of Bengal a feeling of isolation would take the place in their mind. The student of Rajbanshi community when read the history of Laxman Sen in their text book but could not find the history of Raja Prithu naturally a discontentment knock their mind which ultimately may turn into the trap of separatist thinking. They may reasonably ask if they are the part of Bengal then their glorious past should have been the part of the history of whole Bengal.

After the defeat of Khiliji, the kingdom of Prithu was again under the attack of Giasuddin yuaj. But here also Prithu showed his brilliancy in battle strategy and Giasuddin faced the similar humiliating defeat.

Kamtapur kingdom again faced the attack of Nasiruddin Mahamud who invaded the kingdom with his big forces. In order to save the capital he constructed many strong forts outside the capital and he arranged his army at Panchagar near the border of present Jalpaiguri and Rangpur. His son Sandhya Roy took the charge of the capital. In Panchagarh there were four forts and walled with black earth all along three kilometres around the boundary. After that there was a wall of sands. Inside it there was a barricade of bamboo built wall. At last, to give the protection of the members of the royal family he built a strong protective wall made of bricks and stone and stored a huge amount of food grains and arrangement for drinking water by digging big ponds inside the core area of the fort. In spite of this protective measure and the heroic resistance, the big forces of Nasiruddin outnumbered the army of the king and could break the Protective wall. The king Prithu preferred to die to be captured in the hand of the enemy. He jumped into the pond and died.

After his death his son Sandhya Roy took the charge of the kingdom and agreed to pay tax to the Sultan. But as soon as Nasiruddin left the place he declared his freedom and began to fortification his kingdom because he apprehended that Nasiruddin will attack again in retaliation.’ He shifted his capital near the area of present Dinhata of Cooch Behar. After the death of Nasiruddin he took the advantage of the political disorder of Gaur and captured the vast territory of Gour and declared himself as the ‘Gaureswar’.

In the year of 1251 Mallick Ittaruddin became the Sultan of Gaur. He attacked Kamrup with his large army. The number of soldiers of Sandhya Roy virtually negligible in comparison with the number of soldiers of Ujbek. But Sandhya Roy did not surrender and prepared to face the Sultan. He had the experience of the battle warfare from his father. He asked the cooperation from his subjects. The response that he got from them was unprecedented if it is taken the account of the history of the feudal system where the king was regarded nothing but the oppressor and the subjects had nothing to do with battle. They usually considered it as if it is a battle between the two oppressors. But here in this case the subjects of the Kamtapur kingdom responded to the call of their king and deposited their food stock in the king's store and destroyed their surplus grain so that not a single grain could be collected by the invader.

Malik Ittaruddin entered into the inner part of the kingdom without facing any resistance. But he could not imagine that an artificial famine could be more powerful than any army. The condition of Malik can be seen from the description 'Tabakat-i-Nasari' written by the contemporary writer Minhajuddin.

The plains land was under the flood water. The roads were controlled by the Hindus. Sensing the danger Malik wanted to escape from this land with the help of a local path finder. He took the path along the hills. He reached near a narrow pass. He found that both end of this pass had already been under the control of the Hindus. At that time two elephants were engaged in fighting at the front of the pass which created panic among the army of Malik and a confusion swift over them. The Hindus took that advantage and showered arrows. An arrow struck the chest of Malik and he fell from the back of the elephant. He captured along with the members of his family in the hands of Sandhya Roy.

The wounded sultan was brought before Sandhya Roy and he expressed his last wish that he should be allowed to give up his last breath in the lap of his son.

It is from my study I find that very few even among the Bengali Intellectuals are aware of this remarkable historical event that the ruler of Bangla-Bihar-Ayodhya faced such crushing defeat in the hands of a king the mother tongue of the descended of whom is claimed as a dialect of Bengali and denied their claim as their separate identity. Such indifferent attitude towards the glorious past has every reason to cause injury to the sentiment of the Koch-Rajbansi community as a whole and provoke to response to the call of the separatist sentiment to establish their own identity and glorious past.

After the death of Sandhya Roy his son Sindhu became the king of Kamtapur (1260). During his regime he was attacked by the two fronts of his kingdom; one from the king of Ahom from its eastern front and from king of Laxnabati from its western front. Sandhya Roy made a treaty with the Ahom king by agreeing to pay tax to him. But after defeating Mahiuddin he stopped to pay the tax.

After the death of Sindhu his son became the king of Kamtapur. After him his son sat on the throne. But he was killed by his own minister named Manic and occupied the throne and crowned him as Pratpdhwaj. His kingdom lasted only five years. After his death, Dharma Naryan a descended of Baidyadeb occupied the throne of Kamrup. He declared himself as

Gaureswar and shifted his capital from Kamtapur to Dimla of Rangpur. At that time Durlav Narayan gave the leadership in the massive revolt that surfaced on the eastern part of his kingdom. After a long battle between two they at last agreed to divide the kingdom among them. The areas comprising the eastern part of his kingdom including Kamtapur went for Durlav Narayan and areas from Maymansingh to Rangpur went for DharmaNarayan.

Durlav Narayan was one of the ablest kings of Kamtapur Dynasty. The son of Ahom king, Chan Pullai revolted against his own father and being defeated he took the shelter of his maternal uncle, King Durlav Narayan. In support of his nephew Durlav Narayan invaded the Ahom Kingdom and annexed Atgow and establishes a fort there. At that time they got the information that Mahmmd Bin Tughlak, the Sultan of Delhi Marcehd with his one lakh cavalry proceeding to attack Kamtapur. Durlav Narayan approached a friendship treaty with the Ahom king who immediately responded to the request and made joint defence plan against the invader. It is again, when the enmity between Joychand and Prthiraj took an important place in the history of India in the face of the foreign invader. The unique example of friendship between two kings of North East India forgetting their enmity in the face of the invader did not find place in the pen of historian of so called main stream history.

From the account of 'Alamgir Nama (p 731)' it is known that Md. Bin Tughlak attacked kamtapur from the side of Eaniatpur (present Maymansingh). This statement is supported by the discovery of the coins of Bin Tughlak bearing the mark of the year 1332A.D. in an around Eniatpur. From the description of Alamgir Nama it is known that the big armies of Bin Tughlak were completely defeated in the hand of King Durlav Narayan. The Sulan again invaded Kamtapur in the next year and from the same account it is known that this was similarly crashed by the king Durlav Narayan. During his regime no such attack was made and he reigned up to 1350. After his death his son Indra Narayan became the King but he lost his throne to Aramitra or Shanka. There is a controversy about the identity of Aramitra or Shasnka. But many of the scholars believed that he was the descended of Baidyadeb family. After Aramitra his son Gajanka and after Gajanka his son Shrukranka became the king .During the period of Shuranka war began with the Ahom King. But when Giasuddin, the king of Gaur attacked his kingdom he made a friendship treaty with the Ahom king and gave the marriage of his daughter Bhajani to the king of Ahom. . The sultan of Gaur faced a defeat in the hands of the combined forces of Ahom king and the king Shuranka. After the death of Shuranka his son Mrikanka became the king. He had no son or daughter. After Mrikanka a new dynasty emerged named Khen Dynasty.

2.10 THE KHEN DYNASTY

The Khen Dynasty needs to discuss in order to understand the ethnicity of this area as the identity of Koch or Rajbanshi is closely related with it.

From the Kamrup Burunji it is learnt that Niladhvaj the founder of Khen Dynasty initially a king of a very small area named Sigamari. His political foresight gave him a chance to establish his dynasty. After ascending the throne Niladhvaj declared himself as Kamteswar. He built a

strong fortress. He was succeeded by his son Chakradhvaj in 1460 A.D. During his reign his kingdom was attacked by Sultan Barbak but was defeated by the former. After Chakradhvaj his son Nilambar the most famous king among the kings of Kamata ascended the throne. During his reign the kingdom of kamata extended from Korotoya in the west to Barandi on the east. He constructed a long road from Kamtapur to Ghoraghat. During his reign the most famous ruler of Gour (Bengal), Nawab Hussain Shah invaded Kamtapur. But the Sultan could not defeat Nilambar in direct battle. So he adopted a deceptive way. He sends the message to the king that he wants a friendship treaty with him. Nilambar agreed and allowed the men of Nawab to enter in the fort. Moreover Dulal Ganji, the general of Nawab suggested that the female family members will meet the royal female members in order to establish a permanent relationship between two kingdoms. King Nilambar could not realise the tricks and allowed the visitors covered with borqua. The guard of the fort did not think to examine the person by lifting the veil from their face. But those people were originally the soldiers of the Nawab. They took chance of the belief of the guard of the king and as soon as they enter into the king palace they opened their sword. True, there is a proverb, in war and love there is no wrong; but the win through such deceptive way at least is not befitting for Sultan like Nawab Hussain Shah. So king Nilambar lives traditionally in the minds of the people of Assam and North Bengal.

The downfall of Nilambar was eventually was the end of the Kamata dynasty founded by Sandhya Roy. The rise of the Koch power was the beginning of the new chapter of this region which changed the history of Kamata in the latter centuries.

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