

Chapter - II

Economic Scenario in the Koch Kingdom

In view of the comprehensive study of the Narayani currency the analysis of the economic magnitude of the Koch kingdom is very essential. Because currency is an integral part of the economic activity. Without proper understanding of the economic condition of the Koch kingdom we cannot realise the essentiality from the part of the Koch rulers to introduce a well-organized state sponsored currency system for the proper maintenance of the economic order in the state. So in the present chapter we will discuss about the various economic parameters of the Koch state and try to correlate them with the Narayani currency.

Due to the paucity of reliable source not many efforts have been initiated to write the economic scenario of the Koch Kingdom. In reverence of economic investigation of the Koch Kingdom we have to keep in mind the relevant fact of the intimate connection between the nature and natural environment. The natural setting of the kingdom had determined the mode of production. In the field of cultivation the indigenous communities kept themselves aloof from the fertile tracts of the kingdom¹ but in terms of irrigation they were acquainted with the artificial irrigation techniques.² The indigenous communities of the territory initially lead a nomadic life and shifting cultivation was very familiar to them in order to use the fertile soil of the kingdom. The late nineteenth century official reports on the western *Duaras* have spotted the indigenous community from whom the Mechs were the prominent had their habit of *Jhum* cultivation.³ In 1895 in a government report D. Sunder argued that ‘the habit of the Meches were very nomadic and they used to shift their cultivation and homesteads from place to place that they may obtain the full benefit of the virgin soil’.⁴

The Koch genealogies⁵ have informed us that the nomadic tribal or semi tribal communities of the territory carried out the *Jhum* cultivation in their livelihood.⁶ But with the little production from the shifting cultivation it was hard to feed a growing community, so side by side of this they used to rear cattle and which was a significant characteristic of these indigenous communities. The Koch genealogies also refer to cattle rearing as *Visvasimha* and *Sisvasimha* (first Raikat) in their early life had participated in the cattle rearing with other tribal folks. Besides this, hunting was also practiced for the instant supply of food.⁷ With the use of traditional implements fishing was practiced mainly by the womenfolk for subsistence. The secondary features of the tribal economy like-cattle rearing, fishing and hunting-gathering made the total economic structure as a diverse one. Besides these primitive craft like the silkworm cultivation was practiced for making the necessary clothing on self-sufficient basis. As the geographical area was a dense forest so the forest products were used massively for subsistence and for limited marketing.⁸ Production was labour oriented. The unit of production had been varied in turn with the operation of productivity. Cultivation, hunting, fishing and livestock were mostly collective works or had community participation. Besides this tribal existence the non-tribal economy of the region was far progressive than the sustenance economy of the tribals. Farming was the chief foundation of excess generation. Introduction of innovative agrarian methods and skills for cultivation by the *Kayastha Bhuiyans* had paid to the generation of excess in the Koch kingdom.⁹ Agriculture of other food grains and raw materials for crafts had increased the amount of surplus.

Agriculture:

Cultivation of the fertile land was the main occupation of the people. Most of the people were associated with agriculture by some way or other. In the classical sources the productivity of the land was vividly described. Among them the Persian chronicles amplifies the fertility and productivity of the soil in the Koch kingdom. In *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, a Persian text observed: “Koch Behar is well

known for its excellent water, mildness of the climate, its fresh vegetation and flowers. Oranges are plentiful as also other fruits and vegetables.”¹⁰ It also stated that the climate, land, vegetation and dwelling houses of the people of the kingdom were far superior to those of the other places of India. The *Alamgirnamah* also writes in the same strain and speaks of the efficiency of the region.¹¹

Cultivation was not only practiced by the common inhabitants, but the upper class of the community especially the Brahmins were also involved with agriculture besides their ancestral profession.¹² Manual labour was welcomed here as the population of the area was not high in those days.¹³ We can establish this taking reference from the royal chronicles of the Koch history where Hari Das (Haria Mondol) used to plough in the lands and he produced cotton.¹⁴ Philologically we can also prove that the land was so productive and other occupations close to agriculture were very familiar as we found the place names like *Khamar Khata* (Farm yard), *Golabari* (Farm), *Mahisbathan* (Buffaloe Shed) etc. all in the Koch kingdom attest to the popularity of agriculture. Damodardeva a Brahmin, disciple of Sankardeva was supposed to have involved slaves in cultivation¹⁵ and they took huge attention in agriculture.¹⁶ *Gosanimangala* a literary work of the 18th century also mentions to agriculturalists who often protested to one Brahmin named Sasipatra for the damage affected to their cornfields by his cow.¹⁷ The grassland was usually situated near the villagers.¹⁸ Here in the *Gosanimangala* reference have also been made to grassland where Kantanatha the cow boy of Sasipatra used to tend the cattle.¹⁹ Oxen were regularly used for agriculture but cows were also occasionally engaged in farming.²⁰ The loam of Koch Kingdom was of sedimentary formation and has a large admixture of sand. The greater portion of it is a light mud that can retain moisture and easily give it out and does not become water logged. When dry it does not cake up, but yields to light pressure and easily gets dissolved. So agriculture was easy and it does not need much labour.²¹ Five main river system flows through Cooch Behar and the soil is a formation of these river systems.²²

Rice was cultivated in the country massively. Various types of rice were cultivated in the kingdom and among them *Aush*, *Aman* and *Boro* were the major variety of rice. *Aush* cultivation

needed the shifting technique and this variety of rice cultivated the most. Its production was lesser than that of *Sali*, but it was short maturing. *Sali* or wet rice required relocation and hence such grounds which could hold water or could be artificially watered from neighboring watercourses were essential for its farming. The Kacharies for example knew certain methods of irrigation.²³ They used to make blocks across the hill streams and then lead the stored up water to the grounds through a system of dug-out canals. The *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* seems to comment on that skill. But both the Koch and the Bado-Kachari adopted hoe-culture and to produce *Aush* rice. The agriculture of *Sali* therefore was not wide in the Koch kingdom. The *Bhuiyans* however appeared to be interested in wet rice cultivation. It was due to their initiative that the cultivation of this rice, including the use of plough was making gradual headway among the tribes. The *Yogini Tantra*,²⁴ *Katha Guru Charita*²⁵ make reference to different varieties of *Sali* paddy like *raja*, *briha*, *soma*, *sighna*, *banga*, *rakta*, *keteki*, *asok*, *bara*, *jaha*, *mathanga*, *maigutiya*, *bar*, *lahi phapari* etc. *Bao* was a long maturing variety sown in February-March and harvested in November-January. It was very popular amongst the tribes. It was sown broadcast in low lands. It is worth mentioning that after conquering the Koch state Sikandar Saha changed the name of the territory as '*Chawlistan*'.²⁶ The ward Chawlistan denotes the agricultural lands for paddy cultivation. A place named *Chauler Kunti* found near the Kamatapura fort also gives support to it.

Instead of rice, people used to plough different kinds of pulses and other food grains like-wheat, *kaon* (maize). Pulses of different kinds like – *moog*, *musur*, *thakuri*, *rahar* and *pea* were popular food grains.²⁷ These crops need not as much of labour and less tilling. Oil seeds of different kinds were produced. Potato, ginger, garlic, turmeric, onion were cultivated in plenty for own consumption. Tobacco was produced in the state as a cash crop. The Places like Dinjata, Mathabhanga and Mekhligang *parganas* were the major site of tobacco cultivation. Besides these some local febriclike *Shan* and *kunkura* (rhea) were also produced. The fisher-men prepared their fishing net with this fiber. *Kunkura* was raised on small patches of ground near the home-sted land of

the cultivator. *Kunkura* gives short but strong and glossy fiber which was used to prepare fishing trap of different types. The fishing community used to cultivate these two varieties of fiber.²⁸

All the fruit trees found in Bengal are met with in the state more or less abundantly. Numerous types of fruits were common in the kingdom and they were jack-fruit, mango, coconut, orange, olive, bananas, grape, papaya, brinjal, palm, guava, pomegranate etc. The classical text like the *Yogini Tantra*²⁹ gives the names of a large number of fruits, vegetables. Shihabuddin Talish mentions that a large number of orange was produced in the Koch Kingdom,³⁰ and Stephen Cacella writes Cooch Behar is “famous for its fruits, which are better here than I have seen them in India and especially for its oranges of every kind”.³¹ Regarding the fruits and flowers of this part of the country Shihabuddin Talish observes:

*“Many kinds of odorous fruits and herbs of Bengal and Hindustan grow in Assam. We saw here certain varieties of flowers and fruits, both wild and cultivated which are not to be met with elsewhere in the whole of India. The coconut and neem trees are rare but pepper, spikenard and many species of lemon are abundant. Mangoes are full of worms but plentiful sweet and free from fiber though yielding scanty juice. Its pineapples are very large, delicious to the test and rich in juice. Sugarcane is of the black, red and white varieties and very sweet but so hard as to break one’s teeth, ginger is juicy.”*³²

Five kinds of Bamboo are found in the country. All over the country bamboo was grown depending on the geographical variations. Bamboo was used massively in day to day use like hunting and fishing instruments, agricultural implements and building home. Bamboo had widespread use in the making of furniture, musical instruments and tools of everyday uses. In making arms for the military, bamboo was extensively used.³³ The statement can be supplemented by the Ralph Fitch’s observation that bamboo made weapons had a major role in the Koch army. It recorded that ‘all the countries is set with bamboo or canes made sharpen at both the ends and driven into the earth and

they can let in the water and down the ground above knee deep that men nor horses can pass'.³⁴ Many varieties of timber, like *sal*, *sonaru*, *khair*, *agaru*, *palas*, *chandan ajar* etc. are the chief. These valuable trees were grown naturally in the forests of the kingdom. These trees had their immense use in the domestic and community life of the people.

Cotton was another item of cash crop. But its production depends on the natural setting. The hilly area of Chikinagram and Khuntaghat of lower Assam was a cotton growing area of the kingdom.³⁵ Late nineteenth century and early colonial reports on Bhutan have recorded the cultivation of cotton in the Duars region and gathering of cotton fiber from the forests.³⁶ Besides this cash crop certain medicinal plants like *Mahanim*, *Bel*, *Ishanmul*, etc. might have also been grown. Traveller Tavernier states that the kingdom is famous for production of red colour which they used to dry their calicoes and other stuffs.³⁷

Techniques used in Agriculture:

In terms of proper understanding of agriculture the techniques employed on it must demand special attention. So many new types of agro-tools were employed in the agriculture. Though we don't have contemporary accounts on the agricultural tools but the later works vividly mention about this.³⁸ It is possible that these implements were in vogue from long past as we do not notice any change in the cultivation system. Plough (*Langal*) and other implements are mentioned frequently.³⁹ From the *Guru Charita* we learn that each village of Magurmari was provided with *hal* (plough) along with bullocks to cultivate the fields.⁴⁰ In the Koch territory we do not come across *Dheki*, the husking implement of paddy and in its place wooden mallets or pestle observed.⁴¹ Farming then as now depend on the monsoons. The failure of rains means a sure disaster. The plentiful and usually cyclical rainfall allows the cultivators to do without irrigation. But to meet the contrary situation cheap and simple process of irrigation was followed. Hiuen Tsang who visited Kamarupa in the 7th century A.D. noticed that water led from the river or from reserves flowed round the towns.⁴²

Minhaj-i-Siraj has also referred to such irrigation works of opening up the water dykes all around at the time of the spring harvest in the kingdom of Kamarupa.⁴³ Ralph Fitch who visited the Koch Kingdom in the 16th century has remarked that the people used to damming the streams and inundated the country above knee deep as required.⁴⁴ With a definite system of canals water was drawn to the rice fields. Poppy fields in particular which need constant watering was provided by taking water with a small bamboo basket tied to the end of a small bamboo bundle from reservoirs dug in the field for the purpose⁴⁵ and leading the water to the fields through bamboo pipes. Low elevations of mud and grass was raised so as to hold the right quantity of rain water and to divide the rice fields into rectangular plots of about 20 by 30 feet. Excess water was thus let out of the demarcated fields. Although we come across such practice at a later date⁴⁶ it is interesting to note that during the reign of king Durlabha Narayan (c.1330-50), Candivara the *Kayastha* chief among others settled down on the bank of a stream called Lenguamari, otherwise known as Paimaguri as observed by Gait⁴⁷ and got the blessings of the people by erecting a *bund*.⁴⁸ It is said that people were brought to that place by the king for settlement.⁴⁹ The Kacharies are said to have more accustomed to watering their rice fields from the small streams of the *Duar* areas and consequently better rice crops were obtained.⁵⁰ When Nara Narayan the Koch king led an invasion against Assam, Khyrim the main stream of the Brahmaputra river flowed via the Kharubhanga near Hajo. On his way from Assam to Koch Bihar Nara Narayan excavated a canal to cause the river to flow straight to the west'. Later on this was re-excavated by the Ahom king when it was sited up.⁵¹

Land Revenue Structure and Administration:

In regard to the accounts relating to the land revenue settlement of the Koch kingdom no accurate information is available prior to the advent of the Britishers. No literary accounts on this regard can be found in the Koch chronicles. The *Rajopakhyan* or the accounts of the kings of the Koch kingdom written by Munshi Jaya Nath Ghosh during the reign of Harendra Narayan is the only recorded history of the state now available.⁵² A regular history of the land revenue administration of

Cooch Behar begins with its association with the British Government in 1773. Although the information since available are far from being full and connected they pretty fairly disclose the state of things as they existed before the connection with the British.⁵³

From very ancient times land revenue was taken in fraction of the crops harvested and Koch kingdom was no exception. Generally '1/2 *huri* of *Cowries* is understood as the regular revenue of one plough'.⁵⁴ Cowries were familiar in Koch kingdom even up to the middle of the last century. There was a custom that king Kanteswar (Nilambara) caused an inscription to be inscribed on a stone directing his heirs to understand only a very few Cowries as revenue for each plough. Though no inscription of Nilambara or his predecessors has yet been found.⁵⁵ It was written in the *Riaz-us-Salatin* that the rulers of Assam collected no revenue instead one out of every three subjects performed such work as ordered by the king and violation of the order, was punished with death. During Hindu and Buddhist supremacy the management was in the hands of numerous classes of *Samanta-Bhuiyan* or secondary officers. During their rule the practice had already been established in Kamarupa measuring land, locating and determining the boundaries. Todarmal the minister of Akbar prepared the famous settlement records known as the '*Asal Jama*' which were compiled from the *Daftar* (office) of the Pathan ruler Daud Khan.⁵⁶

From early times in the kingdom the land appeared to have been separated into two kinds; (1) Revenue paying (2) Rent free.⁵⁷ People taking the first kind of land had to pay revenue to the government. On the other hand the holders of rent free land were private individuals who obtained the land for their uses. They did not pay any taxes for such lands. The different taxes of rent free estates classified⁵⁸ are as follows: (a) *Brahmottra* – Land grants to Brahmin, (b) *Devottara* - Allotted to the performance of religious rites, (c) *Pirpal* – Land grants to Muslim *Pirs* and Saints, (d) *Lakheraj* – Reward for good service to the state, (e) *Petbhata*- To maintain the expenditure for the royal families.

In Koch Kingdom numerous settings for land grants have been recorded. Durlabha Narayan the ruler of Kamtapura settled seven families of Brahmins and *kayasthas* on the frontier (near

Lenguamari) as warden of the marches and gave them lands and slaves.⁵⁹ *Gosanimangala* also refers such lands for the performance of religious duties.⁶⁰ It may also be mentioned that Visvasimha defeated the *Kayastha-Bhuiyans* during the course of his consolidation of power. Kavindrapatra the minister of Nara Narayan, caused the induction of 14 *Kayastha* families from Mithila, Jessore and places of Bengal. In this way king Nara Narayan encouraged the new settlements of the *Kayastha* in his kingdom.⁶¹

Sukladhwaja the brother of Nara Narayan inscribed a copper plate where it was inscribed that the king gave to 14 *Bhuiyans* in order to settle them on the bank of the river Brahmaputra making land grants. On the other side the *Bhuiyans* also assured the king that they would settle at the place permanently. The promises of both the parties were embodied in a document.⁶² Nara Narayan gave lands to Sankardeva for settlement over Barpeta *Mahal*.⁶³ Not only this land grants were made to the people of numerous classes such as potters, Barbars, Washer man, Goldsmith at a period when the faith propounded by Damodardeva was gaining ground in Koch kingdom.⁶⁴ Prana Narayan the Koch king had patronized one Brahmin named Siromoni Bhattachryya by land grants and the copy of the said deed of gift has been reproduced in the History of Cooch Behar.⁶⁵ He also granted lands for the worship of *Badesvari* image established in Bhitargarh in the district of Jalpaiguri.⁶⁶ It may be mentioned in this connection that the king was credited to have established the image of *Chaturbhuj*a in Madhupura, *Madonmohana* in Srirampura, *Caturbhuj*a in Kagajkuta, *Banamali* in Banamalipur and *Modangopala* in Damodarpur. It is said that some images were discovered when the tank at Banesvara was excavated. The present temple of Kamatesvari *Gosani* in Kamtapura (Gosanimari) was constructed by him in 1665 and we know it from the inscription engraved on the temple.⁶⁷

Instead of the above mentioned land grant a special kind of land grant named *Jaigir* was granted in those days particularly among the slaves. Slaves were engaged in various activities connected with the royal palace. The right over such land was neither hereditary nor transferable. It may however be stated that this *Jaigir* right took the shape of '*Cakran*' of Bengal.⁶⁸ This system

came down to Koch kingdom from the period of Nara Narayan who received a few Morangi slaves from the Morangi king.⁶⁹ These slaves were given the *Taluks* in Mathbhanga, Kodalkseti, Bhogmara etc. They acquired lands in return to their service to the palace. The *Jaigirdari* right was confiscated if they failed to perform the work entrusted to them. The total numbers of *Jaigirdars* were 974.⁷⁰ Sometimes persons having close relation with the royal families managed to secure large quantities of rent free lands. For example, Sarvananda Goswami the royal priest and Kasinath Lahiri, the *Khasnavis* were among others who secured large quantities of rent free *Jaigirs-Taluks*.⁷¹

The revenue paying lands were again classified under *Mal*, *Devottara* and *Khang*. The *Mal* was considered for the state revenue, the *Devottara* for religious purposes and the *Khang* was set apart for the maintenance of the king's household. The persons paying revenues immediately to the state were called *Jotedars* who held numerous *Jotes*, and were strikingly similar to those of the Zamindars and Talukdars of British India paying revenues in the same manner direct to the government. A *Jote* was heritable and transferable.⁷² The *Jotes* were of two kinds: *Mokrari* and *Sarasari*. The rent of the *Mokrari* was settled in perpetuity and could not be enhanced. The occupancy of *Sarasari-Jote* was on the other hand only temporary, granted for a fixed number of years, after which the tenure was open for re-settlement.⁷³ The *Mokrai* lands however were of two types. In some deeds, the King had entered special clause giving hereditary rights and in other no such clause was inserted. In later form, a heir could not claim the right over land in the event of death of his father.⁷⁴ For obvious reasons, this system was discontinued and it led Doughlas in 1790 to introduce the *Jijaradari* system of collection and this system too could not achieve any substantial success.⁷⁵

Though no comprehensive accounts about the land revenue administration under the Koch are available, but certain references in their chronicles and also in the records of the British officers throw some light in this matter. The land revenue management enabled to obtain extra revenue out of which the heavy organizational mechanism was nourished. The royal revenue consisted of a proportion of the produced of the land.⁷⁶ Visvasimha perhaps retained and strengthened the Muslim type of

revenue administration. He might have thought that the indigenous system of revenue collection had been defective and causing the loss of revenue.⁷⁷ Visvasimha is said to have allotted lands called *Mahals* and *Camua* to his officials. These two types of lands yielding revenues were similar to those of the *Hazari-Malighujary* class of lands in the Muslim Kingdom.⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that Gadadhara Simha (1681-1696) the king of Assam brought many surveyors (*Amin*) from Koch kingdom and Bengal to engage them in working out the actual amount of land within the kingdom.⁷⁹ Moda Narayan (1665-80) the Koch king ordered for a general survey of lands occupied by his subjects in 1674.⁸⁰

But the assessment of land was not seen to be based on any uniform pattern.⁸¹ However H.N. Chaudhuri has stated three categories of rates to widespread in Koch Bihar state.⁸² These are (a) Rs. 20% for a *Bish* of first class land (b) Rs. 15% of second class land (c) 10% of third class. A *Bish* was however equal to about 13 *bighas* of standard measurement. The rate per *bigha* of land varied thus; Rs. 1-8-3 for first class land, Rs. 1-2-6 for second class land and 12 *annas* and 3 *pies* for third class land. The average of the above three rates was Rs. 1-2-4. These rates are hardly meaningful since no regular assessment of land was arranged.⁸³ The measurement of land as it is noticed was done in the *Khasmahals* and in new settlements under the crude *Khashrah* or old native system. Compass was not in use at that period. Generally measurement was done by a rope on a rod of a fixed line of measurement in *gaj* or 2ft. in length.⁸⁴ However this was not applied to *Mal* or *Devottara* lands.

The actual procedure and rate of assessment in the Koch kingdom is not known it appears that some sort of *Paik*-system, not similar in all respects with that of the Ahoms existed there. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* makes mention of *Paiks*⁸⁵ attached to the royal officers of the state besides slaves and servants attached to their houses. These *Paiks* had to serve the state with manual works and used to go to war as soldiers when necessary. In return they enjoyed some plots of lands free of revenue. Besides the *Zamindars* like the *Bhuyans* and other high state officials like *Sewan*, *Kajri*, *Choudhury* collected revenue from the peasants in their own way who were directly under their

control, and sent a certain amount of their respective collection to the center.⁸⁶ After the annexation of Koch kingdom by the Mughol Empire, the system of collection of revenue was changed. The royal prince and other zamindars deposited with the imperial treasure a certain amount of their collections from the peasants. The settlement in such cases was made annually and procedure was to 'settle the *jama* agreeably to that of the preceding year'.⁸⁷

Due to the paucity of information we don't know the exact amount of land revenue. Initially the Koch rulers stressed on tribute collection through regular warfare but after the growing rivalry with the Mughols and with the Ahoms the Koch rulers stressed on revenue extracting from their own peasants instead of warfare with the neighbours. The Koch royal cronicals have plenty of such references of revenue collection from the peasants. Yearly honor (*peshkash*) paid by Lakshmi Narayan to the Mughols was Rs. 100000 or 80000 Narayani Mudra.⁸⁸ The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* claims that Raghudeva Narayan had a hard cash of three cores in his treasury.⁸⁹ King Parikshit Narayan offered a *peshkash* of 80,000 to the Mughols.⁹⁰ Similarly Prana Narayan paid 55,0000 to the Mughol governor of Bengal in 1665 as an protection.⁹¹ The *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* also refers that the kingdom of Prana Narayan had the capacity of collecting 80,0000 as land revenue per year.⁹² Even *Fathiya-i-Ibriya's* writer estimated the revenue according to the Mughol system of 1/3rd of the total production it was not less than Rs. 600000 in the Koch system. Since the last quarter of the seventh century to the conclusion of the Anglo-Koch treaty in 1773, the exploited revenue was tripartite due to trifurcation of power among King, *Dewan* and *Nazir* for the maintenance of state by king, military by *Nazir* and civil administration by *Dewan*; the revenue yielding areas were tripartite.⁹³

In the initial years the Koch king was the sole owner of the soil.⁹⁴ The lands given to the relatives of the king (*petbhata*) were subject to be taken over by the king after the guarantee's death. The *Jaigir* lands were allowed to be held by the state officers during the period of their service only and were thus transferable. Available cultivable lands were distributed among the peasants and their records were kept by the concerning officers without allowing them to exercise their hereditary rights

over them. They were to pay a fixed amount of revenue or a fraction of their produce to the royal treasury. In any case the kings could occupy or bring under his control any kind of land according to the rules and customs of the kingdom prevalent during that period.

Crafts and Industries:

Craft and industries increased in the Koch kingdom in a considerable amount. The people of the Koch kingdom were self-sufficient and they themselves produced all things of their necessities by following customary techniques. The prevailing traditional economic system of the kingdom was almost the same, that of the whole of the North East India. With state formation under Visvasimha and Nara Narayan there started the process of diffusion of the traditional tribal techniques and technologies of the main land, which quickened the development of the economic structure and production.⁹⁵ During the early rulers of the Koch Kingdom development of crafts and industries reached in a considerable advance stage due to the adoption of non-tribal advanced techniques and peaceful state co-operation. The *Darang Raj Vamsavali* and other contemporary sources mentioned some professional communities and products which clearly proved the existence of crafts and industries in the region. Visvasimha had appointed his son Megha Narayan as a supervisor of the weaving industries and to collect taxes from the weavers and washer men⁹⁶ and king Nara Narayan also had continued this office. With the state formation, peaceful political condition and admixture of the tribal and non-tribal techniques during the reign of Nara Narayan and his successors crafts and industry had made considerable progress. The most noted industry were weaving and dying.

Various professional communities were existed in the kingdom having specialization in their respective crafts which indicates the existence of these industries in the Koch kingdom. However, the most noted industries were silk and textiles and had a reputation for very early times for its indigenous silk like, *pat*, *muga* and *endi*, manufactured from cocoon. There were professional silk spinners and weavers called *Katanis* in the Koch kingdom. The English travelers Ralph Fitch who

visited the Koch kingdom during the reign of Nara Narayan, makes a reference to its silk and textile industries. *Muga* silk from Assam and Koch Behar formed an important article of trade with Bengal, Bhutan, Tibet, Mughol India and in the Coromandal and Malabar coasts. ⁹⁷ Shihabuddin Talish observed that once a year in normal times, large quantities of wood, pepper spikenard, musk, gold and varieties of silk were offered in exchange of salt, salt petre, sulphur and several other products of Mughol India at the Ahom-Mughal check posts. ⁹⁸ It is possible that many of these commodities mainly silk came from Cooch Behar as well. Besides, textile industry was also highly skilled as mentioned, *tanties* were the professional weavers. Sankara Deva himself was appointed as the *Gomasta* or administrative officer over the *Tantie* of the *Tanti kuchi* area of Barpeta. At the request of King Nara Narayan Sankara Deva had got sixty by thirty yards large cloth woven, called the *Brandabania-kapor*, depicting on it the scenes of the early life of the lord Krishna. ⁹⁹ Kamarkuchi famous for the production of fine textiles in early eighteenth century might have worked during this period as well. It also appears that Narayanpur the eastern most outpost of the Koch kingdom, was another center of textile industry. ¹⁰⁰ It may also be mentioned in this connection that proficiency in weaving was an indispensable qualification for a girl for her marriage in this part of the country till recent times. There were also families even among the high casts who gained their livelihood by weaving. The *Gurucharita* of Daityari Thakur mentions of such a weaver couple whose daily income amounted to ten *pons* of Cowries. ¹⁰¹ It is learnt from the same source that the professional weavers had to pay an annual tax of rupees two to the government. ¹⁰²

Earthenware making had been developed in the kingdom. Various tribes were the maker of earthenware with very simple technology even without wheel. A section of *Kalita* also adopted the art of pottery. ¹⁰³ However pottery as a profession of a community (*kumar*) had very little concentration in the Koch state. The articles of pottery made in the country are of an inferior quality. The variety was also limited only *handis* and *saras* are ordinarily made. ¹⁰⁴ *Kalasi* (pitchers), water jugs and other utensils were imported from Eastern Bengal. ¹⁰⁵ Besides image making provided occupation to some

people called *Khanikars*. The art of making earthen images, particularly of Durga, was prevalent in the Koch kingdom even before the rise of Visvasimha. The *Katha Guru Charita*, for instance mentions such an image of Durga worshipped by Visvasimha when he was still a cowherd.¹⁰⁶ The earthen image of Durga so impressed the Ahom envoys that on their return to Garhgaon, they reported it to their king who lost no time in sending his own artisans to Koch Behar to get training in that branch of art.¹⁰⁷ The *Vamsavali* also makes mention of the *Silakutis* or stone engravers.¹⁰⁸

Edible oil was produced in the kingdom in good quantity. The *Telis* had big concentration in the kingdom. Visvasimha appointed his son Ananta Natrayan, as an officer to supervise over the *Telis*¹⁰⁹ and Nara Narayan too continued the system.¹¹⁰ Oil productions were high and often it was exported to the nearby territories.¹¹¹ For the oil production the traditional *Teli* community used their cattle for pressing the seeds of mustard oil.¹¹² This was called *Ghani*. Like this the suger cane crushing machine was also a cattle-powered mill. *Gur* was prepared from the juce of sugarcane and in this work the southern portion of the state was famous. Instead of the internal production *Gur* was imported to meet the local need.¹¹³

In Koch kingdom smithery was an important profession. The black-smiths turned out the ordinary implements of a householder's daily use. *Kamars* or blacksmiths were numerous in the kingdom who was the chief producer of the iron implements and implements of ordinary uses such as *dao*, *kodal* and cooking utensils. Besides the daily utensils Kamars also produced lock, padlocks, sacrificial knives, spears, clamps for building boat, swords, arms and other items required by the people. The Koch state had keen interest in the iron works and we have reference that Visvasimha appointed his son, Brishaketu, as the supervisor of the iron works.¹¹⁴ Goldsmiths going by the name of *bantias* are not rare. These men have however not gone beyond the rude old patterns of native ornaments. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavalies* shows that prince Surasimha was appointed as the state officer to look after the gold smithery.¹¹⁵ Of the silver ornaments *har* or necklace, *mootha* or bracelet, *footi* or ear-ring and *bankkharoo* an ornament for the leg were the foremost. *Noeth* or nosering, *anti* or

ear-ring and *kadma* a kind of ear-ornament and finger-ring were the chief among the ornaments of gold.¹¹⁶ Besides the professional goldsmiths, the *Kalitas* of the kingdom had also developed their expertise in this craft.¹¹⁷

Carpentry was of a major profession of the kingdom and the Kalita community was involved in the profession. The carpenters used to make day to day utensils for local use. Besides this the making of boat for different use was a flourishing industry. The navy introduced by Nara Narayan and retained by subsequent Koch kings significantly contributed to the growth of boat making industries. Traditional references like *Fathiya-i-Ibraiya* and *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* have left some references about war boats and general boats of the region.

In Bamboo works the people are born artist and is testified by the good bamboo works turned by them. Besides wicker baskets and pans they make almost anything of their daily use from bamboo. Stools, cots, *moras* and chairs, hukas and pipes, sun-shades and sandals, fans and fine mats and many other articles of good workmanship are turned out by the native of the Koch kingdom from bamboo alone. Firming tools like ladder, plough, jaw, *bida* and *mugur* were made from bamboo. Bamboo made special weapon called *bish payiji* had special use in the defense of the country.¹¹⁸ Besides bamboo little small scale industry like *pati* from the mutha grass was extensively produced.¹¹⁹ Production of lime or calcium carbonate by the *Chunari* or *Mukhi*¹²⁰ and fishing by *Nadials* and *Keots* were other small industries of the region. Salt production was also local industry of the kingdom. Elephant catching, a high skilled job was done by a class of trained persons called *Phandis*. Although elephants were in high demand, there was no professional class engaged in this work. On the other hand, it was strictly under the supervision of the government.

In Koch kingdom, craft and industry progressed as because it took both local and outside technology simultaniously for the refinement of skills. The craft and industries developed in the region were the result of both tribal invention and technical acculturation from outside. The weaving skill developed by the *Bodo* tribes was the outcome of their long knowledge in the *Endi* culture and

largely limited to the internal use. It was labor exhaustive manufacture and cost of making was very high for which commercially it was less money making for the producer. On the contrary productions of expert weaving caste were more profitable. However technologies of iron works, oil pressing and few other crafts had been slowly diffused to the tribals of the kingdom. So the gazetteers, census and other official survey lead in the nineteenth century have chronicled that the Khen are the proficient in oil pressing,¹²¹ the *Keots* have their expertise in mustard oil making¹²² and the Koch and *Kalitas* are expert in iron and jewelry works.¹²³ Craft and industry was an important source of income for the Koch state. We have informed by the *Darrang Raj Vamsavalies* that the Koch state extracted some tax from few specialized manufactures. The weavers had to pay 2 rupees per annum as tax to the government.¹²⁴ Other professionals like the oilmen, washer men, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, traders and musicians also had to pay taxes to the state.¹²⁵

Commercial Relations with neighboring Countries:

Koch kingdom had extensive trade relations with the neighboring kingdoms. Taking advantage from its geographical location the traders of the kingdom established smooth commercial links with the other territorial kingdoms. Contemporary and near contemporary local sources¹²⁶ and accounts left by the foreigners,¹²⁷ reveal that the agricultural and craft production raised in a considerable position so that surplus could be exported to the other place for commercial pursuits. Besides agricultural and craft products the kingdom was always rich in respect of its forest and animal products. On the basis of these background industrial production increased qualitative and quantitatively. This surplus generation not only encouraged the local traders to carry on trade but also attracted foreign traders to pursue trade with the region. To this may be added all encouragements accorded by the rulers,¹²⁸ whose aim was to establish both political and economic hegemony over the neighboring territories. The able Koch kings took various steps to modernize the economy. They took numerous measures for the inter and intra-regional trade flourishing. Contemporary and near

contemporary sources categorically highlighted that the Koch had trade relations with Bengal, Assam, Bhutan, Tibet and China and later with Mughol India. English merchant Ralph Fitch who arrived in 1583 mentioned in his account about the flourishing trade relations of the kingdom with the neighboring territories.

Bhutan was situated in the north frontier of the Koch kingdom and taking advantage of the trans-Himalayan route the Koch kingdom established massive trade relations with Bhutan through its numerous *duars* or the mountain passes. From the account we can know that there in total eighteen important *duars* was there of which eight were situated in the eastern side of the kingdom and other eleven *duars* situated in the western side of the state. Among the articles exchanged between these two kingdoms the Chinese silk, woolen clothes, yak-tails, ponies, gold dust and rock salt, iron, lac, rice, silk, dried fish, buffalo-horns etc. were the major part. Occasional fairs were held at places like Hajo, Charigaon and Odalguri in the eastern ¹²⁹ and Darwani, Panga, Barabhita, Badargang etc. in the western Koch kingdom where Bhutias exchanged their products including ponies for cattle, conch shells and other products of the plains.

Besides trading with Bhutan Koch kingdom had trade relations with Tibet. Owing to its unique location it controlled the main trading way between Bengal and Tibet. ¹³⁰ According to Ralph Fitch primarily Koch kingdom did not get the initial advantage of this trade ¹³¹ but after the consolidation of power by Nara Narayan in the foothills of Bhutan and other places Koch state started to take advantages of its location. Conventional trade with China, during the medieval period was conducted through Tibet and Bhutan and it continued right up to the British period. The British political missions sent to Bhutan and Tibet (after 1773) categorically recorded the trade links between Bengal and Tibet carried through the *Duars* of the Koch state. Both Bhutanese and Tibetan traders came to the plain land of the Koch kingdom with their merchandise. ¹³² We also know that the Chittagong port had an effective role in trade as was connected to north Bengal through both river and land routes. ¹³³

Koch kingdom had a significant role in the trade relation between Bengal and Assam as well as Bihar as the main river route passes through the state.¹³⁴ Specially the river Brahmaputra entirely navigable and it was the main artery of commerce.¹³⁵ The use of this route was mentioned by Al Idrisi as early as 1162.¹³⁶ The land route that connected the eastern part of the Koch kingdom for entry to Assam was either via Murshidabad, Malda and Dinajpur through Rangpur or from Dhaka to Singmari via Dharmai and Jamalpur.¹³⁷ However both the land routes were impassable during rains. Interestingly, in a notification dated 5th September, 1875 in the Assam Gazette, in connection with an annual fair at Dhubri, the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara drew the attention of traders to the routes connecting Dhubri, the present gateway of Assam with Bihar and Bengal.¹³⁸ Koch kingdom established good trading relation with the North Eastern kingdoms as it initially conquered the whole area. Certain goods from Koch kingdom had extensively in demand in those areas. In 1627 Jesuit traveler, Stephen Cacella came to the kingdom and chronicled that objects from Patna, Rajmahal and Gauda were supplied regularly to meet the internal demands of the kingdom.¹³⁹ Fine clothes produced in Bengal had a great demand in the state.¹⁴⁰ Besides this salt was an important item of import.¹⁴¹ From Ahom kingdom they imported gold, cloth, knife, elephant etc. regularly.¹⁴²

If we discuss on the traders as a community then we can find both big and small traders. Big merchants carrying on trade in river traffic with the neighboring kingdoms were called *Sadagars*, whereas smaller ones were called *Beparis*. There was another category of traders called *Mudois* referred to all classes of traders; big or small engaged in river traffic. The big traders regularly dealt with gold, jewelleries, silk, salt, mustard seeds, elephant tusks etc., whereas the smaller ones dealt with betel vine, fuel wood, salt, fish, vegetables etc. It is on record that big merchants invested as much as 4 lacks as capital in their trade.¹⁴³ The traders used to form temporary partnership to trade in distant lands.¹⁴⁴ The traders of the Koch kingdom looked upon the kingdom of Assam as ‘something like a paradise for merchant, where all valuable trade commodities could be procured in good qualities and at a considerably low price.’¹⁴⁵ Big merchants carried on their trade through river used

to sail with boats with huge goods, sell them distant markets and return with goods not available in the region. For inland circulation, besides porters, elephants, horses and camels were used. Sometimes, the traders themselves had opened shops in their own residence or in the market places. There were also weekly and bi-weekly markets or *hats* where usually rice, alkali, fuel wood, fruits, vegetable, fish and bamboo and wooden furniture were sold. Stephen Cacella observed many *bazars* in the state where everything was available including the imported items.

For effecting maintenance of the trading activity trading hubs were very necessary. The most important trading cities of that time were Koch Behar, Rangpur, Malagul, Balrampur, Karampatan, Rangamati, Khuntaghat, Dhubri, Barnagar, Pandu and Hajo. Stephen Cacella refers Hajo as the most important town in the Koch kingdom, very rich and thickly populated.¹⁴⁶ He also mentioned of Cooch Behar as having possessed many *bazars* or markets.¹⁴⁷ Rangmati had, in the meantime a Portuguese settlement along with two churches.¹⁴⁸ Besides trade centers, the fairs held at different places was a center of marketing activity. The noted among the fairs were the one held annually on the bank of the Gadadhar River, in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) and the one at Hajo, held on the occasion of the Buddhapurnima in the month of May. There were also foothill like Ranihat and Gobhahat where the hill tribes exchanged their products like raw cotton and iron implements for dried fish, cotton and silk fabrics, bell-metal and brass utensils and such other article of plains.

Though no details of the price list is available to us but it is learnt from the *Kathagurucharita* the *Gamacha* (towel) cost eight pons of cowries¹⁴⁹ and a packet of betel vine cost four to eight pons of cowries.¹⁵⁰ Contemporary Persian sources informs us that oranges used to be sold at ten for a price in the Muhammadan camp.¹⁵¹ Further light is thrown in this matter by the author of the *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*.¹⁵² In normal times the cost of these articles must have been much lower in both the eastern and the western Brahmaputra valley. Regarding the price of animals, that of horse only is known which was the most costly of all animals- its price being double of that of a slave, the highest price of

the latter then being rupees twenty each. Different types of customs and duties were collected by the Koch government. The *Guru Charita* refers to some of such duties like *hat-kar*, *ghat-kar*, *jal-kar* and *dan* or sales taxes etc. ¹⁵³ A class of officers, *Chokidars* were appointed to guard the outpost and collect taxes. These were also high administrative officers to look into the affairs of trade and commerce. Thus Visvasimha the founder of the Koch kingdom appointed his son Suryabar to look into the affairs of the merchants.

Narayani Currency in Trade and Transactions:

The effective maintenance of trade and commercial relation both inter and intra-regional compass need a well-organized system of currency. Because small regional level trading activity may be carried on by barter system but to carry out inter regional large scale commerce, the presence of currency was an essential requirement. There is no historical evidence as to when coins were first used in the Koch kingdom for effective undertaking of economic activity. Currency in the Koch kingdom before the emergence of the *Narayani Mudra* was consisted of *Cowries*. Likewise other parts of Bengal Cowries were regularly used in small and internal transactions only. ¹⁵⁴ A special kind of fruit called Almond was also accepted as money.

The Koch king Nara Narayan first understood the necessity of eradication of the complexities of barter mode of transaction. It was Nara Narayan who first stabilized the political condition by suppressing the other tribal groups of the region and then began the process of economic consolidation to establish his kingdom upon a strong economic base. The introduction of the state sponsored currency for effective continuance of trade and commerce is an integral part of this consolidation process.

After introduced by Nara Narayan the Narayani currency became an acceptable standard medium of exchange both in inter-regional and intra-regional trade of Northern part of un-divided Bengal, lower Assam, Bhutan and other adjoining territories. ¹⁵⁵ It led to the growth of trade and commerce in

favor of the Koch state. Contemporary literature particularly the biographies of Sankardeva and his disciple Madhadeva contain the references of circulation of the coins among the masses of the region. The *Guru Charita* of Ramcharan Thakur frequently mentions the *taka*, *adhtaka*, *shiki* as the prevailing coins for ordinary and big transactions.¹⁵⁶ Narayani currency greatly monetized the whole economic structure of the region. Besides this the period also witnessed introduction of coins in almost all the tribal states of the North East India.¹⁵⁷ The Ahom, the Kacharis and the Jayantiya kings issued coins and these currencies brought about the process of modernization in commercial activities. Thus beginning from the 16th century down to the middle of the 18th century the North Eastern markets became conceived of gold, silver and copper coins.

The study of the role of currency in trade and commerce can be divided into two phases. As the currency was in circulation un-interruptedly up to 1773 so the influence of Narayani coins over the transaction system was more high comparing the period after 1773 when the British influence in the state was increased gradually and the role of imperial currency became dominant because of the repeated interruption of minting Narayani currency by the part of the Koch rulers.

During the early rulers the extent of trading activity was reached its zenith as king Nara Narayan conquered a considerable part of the North East India. Sukladwaja, the commander in chief and also brother of Nara Narayan compelled the other North East Indian kings like Ahom, Tripura, Kachar, Jayantipur, Manipur to subjugate before Nara Narayan.¹⁵⁸ These kingdoms had their own currency system and after defeat in the hand of the Koch, they forced to stop minting their own coins and asked to mint coins in the name of Nara Narayan. This event tremendously enhanced the importance of Narayani currency in local trading activity in those state. Because as the local currencies were forced to stop, the local markets faced a scarcity of coins and so in place of indigenous currency, Narayani currency played an important role in day to day transaction. Besides as these kingdoms were compelled to pay taxes in Narayani currency so they encouraged the local traders to trade in Narayani currency and extract tax in Narayani rupees from them to pay tribute to Koch ruler.

During the reign of Nara Narayan the power and prestige of the kingdom was in a high stature so the subjugated kings did not raise voices for their sovereignty but after Nara Narayan due to the succession debate with the Raghu Deva state was divided into two regions that is the western Koch kingdom and Eastern Koch kingdom popularly known as Koch Hazo.¹⁵⁹ During this period almost all the subjugated states emerged as sovereign power and again started to mint their own coins and gradually Narayani currency lost its hold from the markets of North East India and Narayani currency confined only to the territories of the Koch kingdom, west of the river Sankosh.

Due to the paucity of reliable source of information it is very difficult to know the total amount of money circulation in the markets of Koch kingdom but the tribute structure can be treated here as substantive source of information. As the Koch after Nara Narayan were subjugated by the Mughals, so from the amount of tribute payable to the Mughal exchequer we can get a rough idea about the total volume of money in the kingdom. In the later phase of the Koch rule the Mughol interventions in the state had increased the demand of revenue in cash also got pace. So the process of money collection from the peasants was regularized. From the occasional references contained in the contemporary literatures an idea can be made about the amount of collected revenue. Annual tribute paid by Lakshmi Narayan to the Mughals was Rs. 1,00,000 or 80,000 Narayani Tanka. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* claims that king Raghudeva Narayan had a hard cash of Rs. Three cores in his treasury.¹⁶⁰ King Parikshit Narayan offered a peshkash of Rs. 80,000 to the Mughals.¹⁶¹ Similarly Prana Narayan paid Rs. 55,000 to the Mughol governor of Bengal in 1665 as an indemnity.¹⁶² The *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* also refers that the kingdom of Prana Narayan had the capacity of yielding Rs. 8,00,000 as land revenue per year.¹⁶³ Even *Fathiya-i-Ibriya's* writer estimated the revenue according to the Mughal system of 1/3rd of the total production it was not less than Rs. 6,00,000 in the Koch system. This huge amount of land revenue and tribute indirectly points out the amount of money circulation in the Koch kingdom. As the amount was extracted from the common people so it is not heard to assume that they acquired cash only by sealing their agro-products and menial products in

the markets of the Koch territories and which ultimately to some extent gave impetus to the trade and commerce in the Kingdom.

From literary references we can establish that Narayani currency was hugely popular and it was a greater acceptability in trade and transactions. A number of monetary transactions in Narayani coins have been mentioned in autobiographies, biographies, chronicles and literature such as *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, *Guru Charita Katha* and *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* etc. covering the mostly earlier periods of Koch rule. Substantial number of documents, archive materials and the books written by foreigners clearly indicate that Narayani coins were highly sought after for trade, transaction and payment of revenues. Such information obviously rejects the existing belief that Narayani coins were only used as ceremonial gift items, donations to the temples and royal administrative class.

As to the paucity of reliable information on the economic scenario and the role of currency on it, it is very hard to draw any accurate picture of the role of currency in trade and commerce in markets of the Koch kingdom, but it can be easily imagined that Narayani currency was an acceptable mode of transaction during the independent rulers of the Koch kingdom. Because starting from Nara Narayan come down to Dharyendra Narayan all the kings introduced coins not only in the time of their accession but also several times in their reign with different dies. It is considered that only Nara Narayan used one hundred and fifty different kinds dies to mint coins.¹⁶⁴ The coin hoards of different rulers have been discovered not only with in the actual territories of the kingdom but also from distant places of North East India where Koch rule was established during the reign of Nara Narayan. Mere hoarding for wealth was not possible in those days because hording needs availability of coins in good numbers but in those days due to the metallic scarcity, coins were minted in limited numbers and with demand or necessity. So most probably coins were reached in the far flung parts of the kingdom in due course of trade and commerce. The denomination of Koch coins is important here because small denominations were introduced largely by the Koch rulers where as big denominations were issued in small numbers. The small denominations can be treated as a demand of the market.

Because small denomination were used to exchange day to day transactions in the local markets of the kingdom.

Though the role of Narayani currency was vital in the years of the Kingdom's independent existence but the whole scenario was changed after 1773, the year marked by the treaty of Anglo-Koch treaty by which the kingdom became a subsidiary state and the administrative power to some extent fall in the hand of the authorities of the English East India Company.¹⁶⁵ Though the treaty had not banned the free minting of Narayani currency but from the later developments we can know that the British authority was in no mood of its free circulation and different times they imposed certain restriction over the minting of Narayani coins. Though the Koch rulers had took initiatives but their efforts were not enough to revive the glory of the Narayani currency and due to the pressure of the imperial powers the currency lost its hold from the markets of the state and lastly the circulation stopped officially form 1866.¹⁶⁶ This withdrawn not only important from political perspective but it had crude effects on the trade and commerce of the state. Due to the uncertain minting of Narayani coins a kind of confusion occurred in the kingdom and it directly hampered the trading activities of the state. Both inter-state and intra-regional trade troubled greatly due to this confusion. Due to non-availability of coins in good numbers the local markets in the far flung areas of the state suffered heavy setback and people also suffered a lot. The problem in local level was understood by Cornel Jenkins who was the Commander in Chief in the North East frontier province, asked the Company authority to do something for the people who were the worst sufferers. In 1849 Capt. Jenkins said to the Company authorities in his report "the people of Koch Behar still suffer much inconvenience from the prohibition to coin Nararinee rupees, and the non-currency of the Government coin".¹⁶⁷ Not only the internal trade but also external trade of the state got heavy loss. For example the Bhutanese authorities in the years after Anglo-Koch treaty denied accepting the new Narayani coins minted by Dhairyendra Naradan due to its degraded metallic quality. Besides this as the state had great commercial relations with the neighboring territories so after the withdrawn of the Narayani currency

they almost stopped the trading relation with the Koch state in view of monetary un-clarity. With this, the British trading interest also hampered the Koch trading interests heavily as it was keen to implant its own imperial currency in the territories of the Koch state to get grip over local as well as external trade.

As Koch kingdom traded with Tibet via Bhutan, Narayani coins found their way into Bhutan and became very popular locally for commercial transactions.¹⁶⁸ In 1774 by the order of the Governor and Revenue Council, the new varieties of Narayani half rupee were not accepted in British India treasuries.¹⁶⁹ These are the coins struck by Dharyendra Narayan (1765-70 and 1775-83). Such restrictions created problems for the Bhutanese traders who were accustomed to the use of both old and new varieties Narayani coins without making any distinction. The king of Bhutan raised his objections to such stipulations to the British authority and explained the hardship created for the traders of his kingdom. The matter was considered by the revenue council and order was issued to release Narayani coins from the Rangpur treasury as required by the Bhutanese.¹⁷⁰ In fact Bhutan set up its own mint, after the closure of the Koch mint and started striking coins which were close copies of the half *tankas* issued by Harendra Narayan (1783-1839) with an occasional Tibetan letter.¹⁷¹ These Bhutanese coins also became popular in the plains, due to the non-availability of Koch coins, as a new source of supply. But the most interesting example of the popularity of Narayani coins can be derived from the fact that even the Mughols also copied their style. In 1661 Koch kingdom was invaded and occupied by the Mughol under General Mir Jumla. The name of Koch kingdom was changed to '*Alamgirnagar*' and coins were struck in the name of the Mughol Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir. The style of the said coin was similar to the coin of Prana Narayan, but the legend was in Urdu and written in Bengali script.¹⁷² This probably the only example in the numismatic history of Mughol coinage that coins were issued in a regional script. The whole affair simply underlines the high acceptability of Koch coins in the region.

According to Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed Narayani coins were widely accepted in the whole of North Bengal, as well as in the parts of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Tibet and Assam. Even the Ahom rulers collected their revenues in Narayani coins, in addition to their own currency, up to the first half of the 19th century.¹⁷³ Even now-a-days Narayani coins occasionally surface in different markets in North East India. The use of Narayani coins in huge quantities in the medieval period is the only reason for such situation. Though we know that the British rulers took a negative policy toward the Koch currency, but in some instances we find that they compelled the other princely states of North East India to pay their taxes in Narayani currencies. The British Indian Judicial proceedings dated 14th June 1836 highlighted how the British Government not only compelled the Garos living in the border areas of the Garo Hills to submit to the East India Company, but also pay *nazzarana* (tribute) in Narayani *tankas*. The Garo Duars or the trade routes were assessed at 196 Narayani rupees per annum. This amount was again raised to two hundred Narayani rupees in 1825.¹⁷⁴ Walter Hamilton has highlighted a most interesting information. It was recorded by him that Narayani coins were the only medium of exchange available to the Garos, living in difficult terrain of Garo Hills. This was the only currency the Garos accepted.¹⁷⁵ Unfortunately, no details are available as to how Narayani coins were adopted by the Garos in the Duars and hills but it confirms the popularity of such coinage.

The archival materials preserved at the Assam State Archive amply indicates the growing use of coins issued by North Eastern kingdoms especially the Koch and the Ahom in business transactions during the 18th and 19th centuries. The correspondence of the British officials with Fort William in Kolkata reveals the status of Narayani coins in circulation, their paucity compared with the demand and the rate of exchange in whole of North Bengal Assam and other neighboring regions. The British Governmental record preserved in the Guwahati Archives amply shows that attempts were made to withdraw the Narayani coins entirely from circulation. In April, 1834 the East India Company wanted to introduce the Company's new Farrukhabad rupee and they compelled the local inhabitants to

surrender their savings of Narayani half or full tankas.¹⁷⁶ During that period, the Narayani coins had a wide acceptability among the members of the public over a large geographical territory. The matter was reviewed at intervals to check its efficiency. A step was taken by the agent of the Governor General in Assam that from 1st January, 1839 the acceptance of Narayani coins should be discontinued at the treasuries of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgaon on the ground that coins of such description were in very limited circulation in those districts.

However even ten years later it was found that Narayani coins were in the way of the British plan to introduce their own currency. Among the various steps taken by the East India Company the most important was that Narayani half rupee would be accepted at the treasuries at a 37% discount. According to the then mint master, it was sufficient to secure the British Government from any loss of exchange. In 1849, Capt. Jenkins observed that ‘the people of Koch Behar still suffer much inconvenience from the prohibition to coin Narayani rupees’. The question of releasing the Narayani coins from the Government treasury was again reviewed as is revealed from the proceedings of the Hon’ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during December, 1864 AD. It appears that J.L. Lushington the then Deputy Audit and Accountant General of Bengal wrote to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal on the 6th December 1864 with a recommendation to place at the release of the Commissioner of Cooch Behar a fund between four and five lacks Narayani coins. But the response of the Government of Bengal was totally negative and the proposal received a cold response. We know that finally in 1866 Narayani coins ceased to be a legal tender.¹⁷⁷

From the above study we can come to this conclusion that the economic condition of the Koch kingdom in its initial stage was weak, as it was a self-sufficient rural economy and the surplus generation in the kingdom was very limited. But with the consolidation of power by Nara Narayan the political stability of the kingdom established and the scope of the economic development increased. The agriculture, craft, and industry all the subsidiary branches of the economy flourished rapidly. With this the introduction of coinage by Nara Narayan paved the way of trading activity in a larger

scale. The currency is very significant in visualizing the economic environment of the Koch Kingdom especially to understand the economic development in the kingdom. By assaying the role of these coins conclusions can be drawn about the prevailing economic condition of the kingdom. When coins came to replace the barter mode of transactions then trade and commerce flourished in the region and the self-sufficient rural economy started to transform into a surplus economy and which ultimately increased the standards of living of common people and also helped a lot to develop the communication network. By taking inspiration from the Koch rulers the other princely kingdoms of North East India started minting their own currencies and which popularized the acceptability of coins as a good mode of transaction, which ultimately paved the way of trade and commerce in greater scale. The size of the coinage provides a crude measure of volumes of this trade. In particular, no coins were struck in Koch kingdom between 1683 and 1695, which probably indicates that the trade was disrupted during this decade. So finally from the above study we can clearly prove that Narayani currency played an important role in the development of the economic condition of the Koch state. The growth of trade and commerce laid the economic foundation of the kingdom and upon which the able Koch rulers established the political as well as economic superstructure of their kingdom which lasted more than two hundred years independently and it was due to the trading interest simultaneously attached the attention of the British authorities to come here and take part in it and which gradually paved the way of its steady dissemination towards subordinancy.

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