

CHAPTER II:

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

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2.1 INTRODUCTION: The Koch Bihar district is situated in the north eastern part of India and is included in the Jalpaiguri Division of West Bengal. Until the 28th day of August 1949, the princely state of 'Koch Bihar' was ruled by the Maharaja, who had been a feudatory prince under the British Government. By virtue of the 'Cooch Behar Merger Agreement' dated 28th August 1949, Maharaja Jagaddipendranarayan ceded the territory of 'Koch Bihar' to the Dominion Government of India. The transfer of administration to the Government of India appointed a chief commissioner who ruled 'Koch Bihar' as the Chief Commissioner's Province. Since 1st January 1950, 'Koch Bihar' was annexed to West Bengal by an order under section 290A of the Govt. of India act of 1935. Thus 'Koch Bihar' became a district of West Bengal.

2.2 LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES: The district of Koch Bihar lies in between 25° 57' 47" N to 26° 36' 20" N latitudes and between 88° 47' 44" E to 89° 54' 35" E longitudes respectively. The total area of the district is 3387 square kilometers (displayed in the Location Map of the study area in Map no. 1.1).

The district of Koch Bihar is devoid of natural boundaries except on the western and the southernmost extremes. To the west, River Tista forms the boundary between Mekhliganj P.S. and Haldibari P.S. The southern tip of Tufanganj Sub-division (C.D. Block I) is almost touched by the River Raidak. Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts border the whole of the northern and the western margin of the district. The southern boundary is much indented and is bordered by Bangladesh. The eastern fringe is delimited by Assam and Bangladesh.

The latitudinal & longitudinal extension of Cooch Behar Town (the study area) is 26°17'40"N to 26°20'30"N and 89°26'E to 89°28'30" E covering an area of 8.29 square kilometers. The location of the study area is conspicuous as it occupies a meander core of the Torsa River, one of the major rivers of the district (evident in Map no. 1.3 and 1.4).

Besides the congregated area, there are Indian enclaves or '*Chhitmahals*' which are outlying tracts of lands detached from the mainland situated amidst the district of Rangpore of Bangladesh similarly there are presence of Bangladeshi *Chhits* found in the district of Koch Bihar in different blocks all along the international border. During the merger of the Indian state of Koch Bihar with that of West Bengal, there were about 130 Indian enclaves situated in the Bangladeshi territory and about 95 Bangladeshi enclaves within Indian mainland (Koch Bihar Gazetteer, 1976: 5). A strange feature is also noticed regarding the enclaves is the presence of enclaves within enclaves (i.e. parent enclave of Koch Bihar have Bangladeshi enclaves set within). Of recent on 6 June 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi ratified the agreement during his visit to the Bangladesh capital Dhaka. In the presence of Modi and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the foreign secretaries of the two countries signed the instruments of the land exchange. The enclaves were exchanged at midnight on 31 July 2015 and the boundary demarcation was completed by 30 June 2016 by Survey Departments of the respective countries (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India_Bangladesh_enclaves).

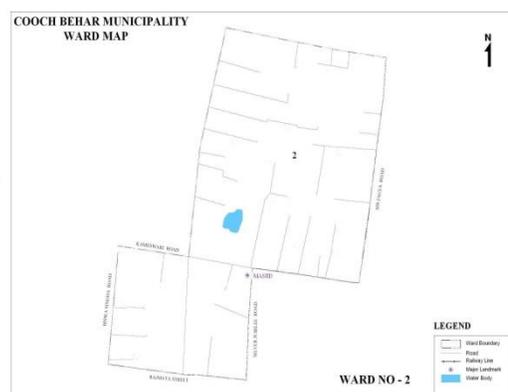
2.3 ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS: During the merger of Koch Bihar with West Bengal (i.e. at the time of signing of the Cooch Behar Merger Agreement on 28th August 1949 and the subsequent transfer of power to the Government of India on 12th September 1949), it had eight (08) Police Stations (P.S) (Koch Bihar Gazetteer, 1976: 6) . The Police Stations of Koch Bihar are Mekhliganj, Haldibari, Sitalkuchi, Sitai, Mathabhanga, Tufanganj, Dinjata and Ghokshadanga. Currently, there are 11 Police Stations, Kotwali, Baxirhat and Kuchlibari have been added to the above mentioned list. There are five (05) Sub-divisions in Koch Behar district, namely- Cooch Behar Sadar (with Kotwali P.S), Dinjata (with Dinjata and Sitai P.S), Tufanganj (with Baxirhat and Tufanganj P.S), Mathabhanga (with Ghokshadanga, Mathabhanga and Sitalkuchi P.S) and Mekhliganj (Kuchlibari, Mekhliganj and Haldibari P.S).

Cooch Behar was established as a planned town since 1885 during the reign of Maharaja Jaggadipendranarayan. His father Maharaja Nripendranarayan, the former king planned for the modern Cooch Behar Town as the 'City of Beauty'. A Town Committee was constituted in 1885 to supervise the amenities of the urbanites and later on it was transformed into Cooch Behar Municipality (CBM) in 1946 (Draft Development Plan, CBM, 2008-'09 to 2012-'13: 41). The

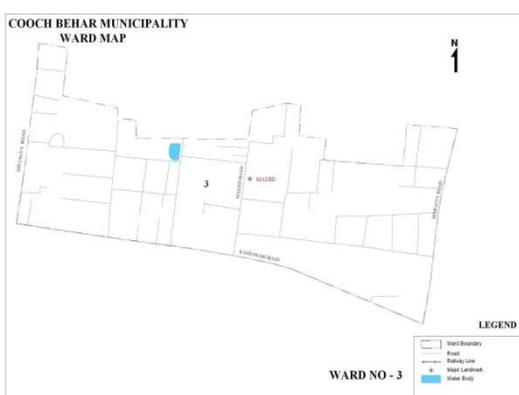
CBT area has the latitudinal extension of 26°17'40"N to 26°20'30"N and longitudinal extension of 89°26'E to 89°28'30" E and is bordered by Takagach Anchal in the west, Chakchaka village in the east, Guriahati in the south and Khagrabari village in the north. The area of the CBT is 8.29 Square Kilometres. The CBT has 20 wards (Map no. 2.1 to 2.20) at present with a total population of 77,935 persons (Census 2011). In response to the overwhelming population growth, the CBT is likely to engulf the surrounding areas within its boundary. The upcoming extension to the CBT would include the Khagrabari G.P.U situated to the north, up to the cancer treatment centre at Chakchaka village present in the east, up to Chakir Bazar to the south east and up to Harinchawra located far south east forming another five wards in addition to the present twenty wards.



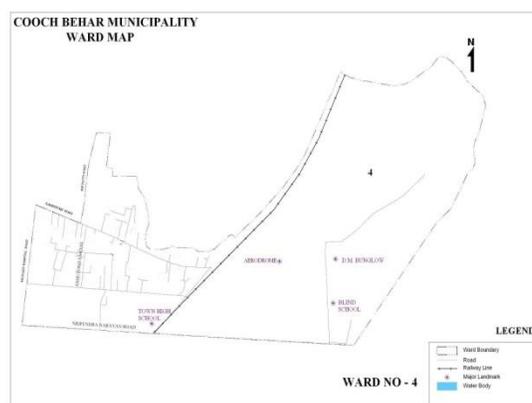
Map no. 2.1: Ward No. 1



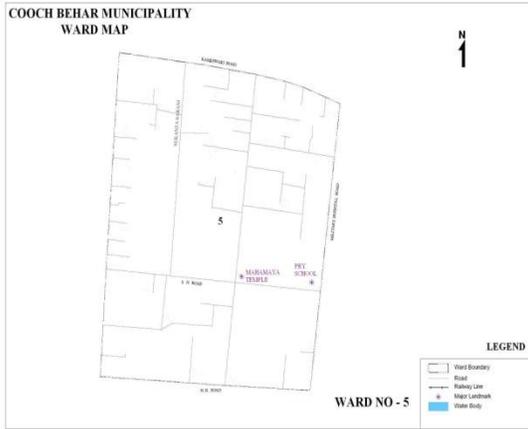
Map no. 2.2: Ward No. 2



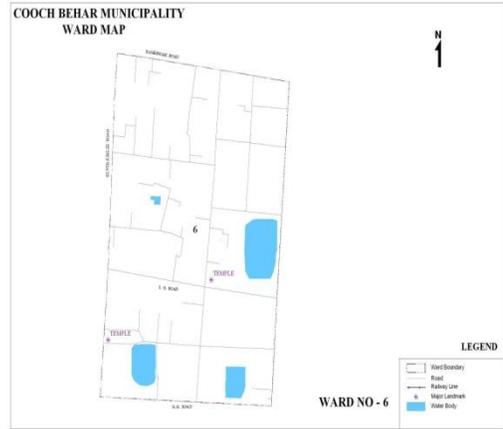
Map no. 2.3: Ward No. 3



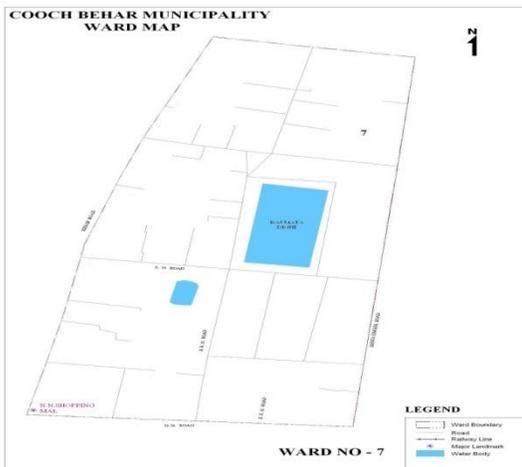
Map no. 2.4: Ward No. 4



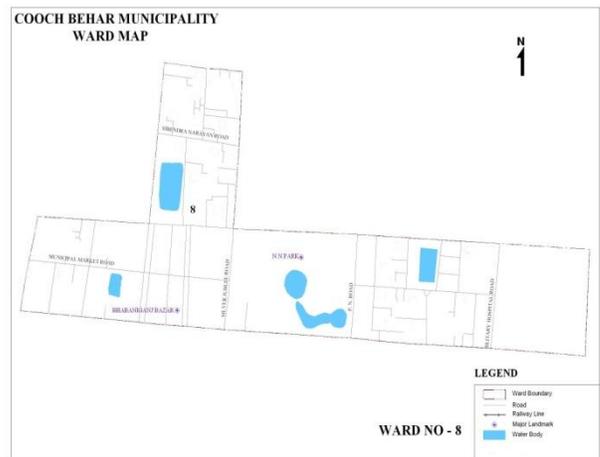
Map no. 2.5: Ward No. 5



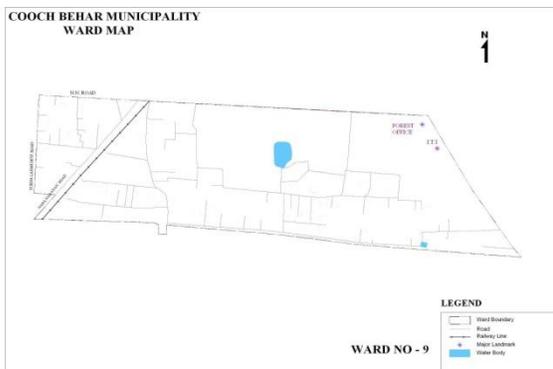
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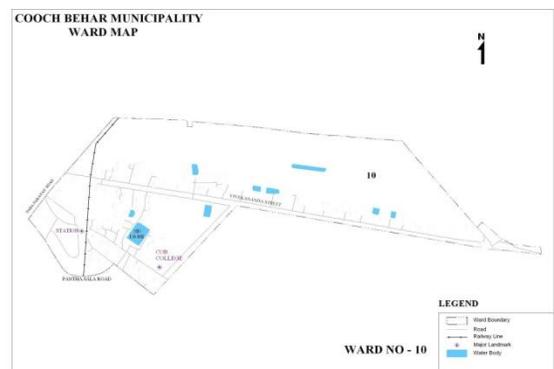
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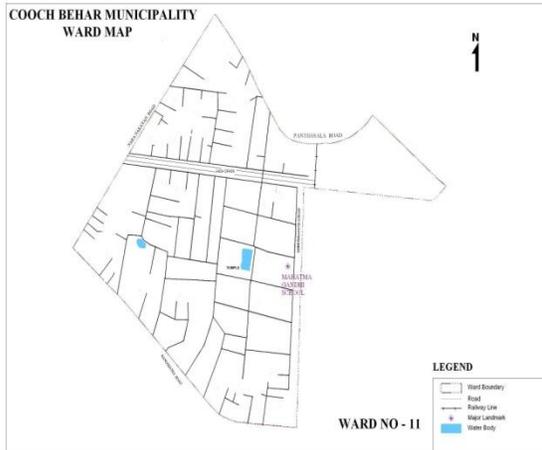
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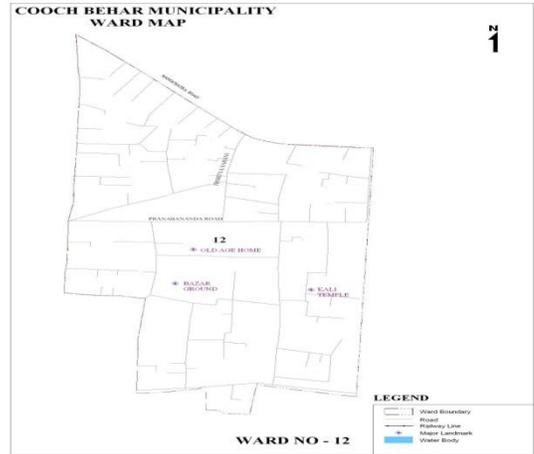
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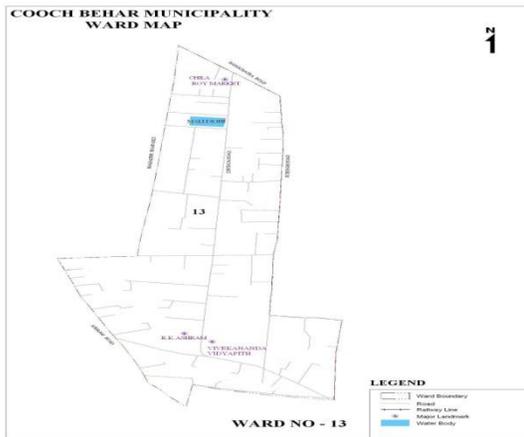
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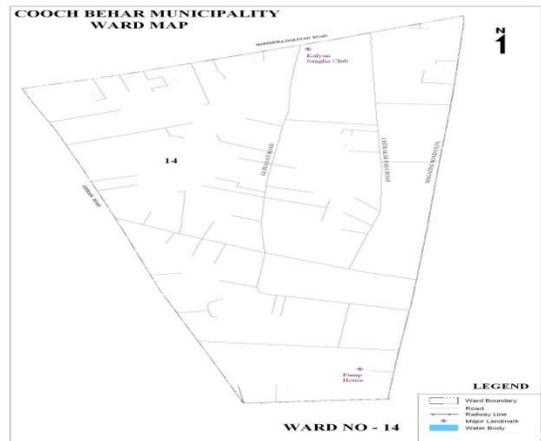
Map no. 2.11: Ward No. 11



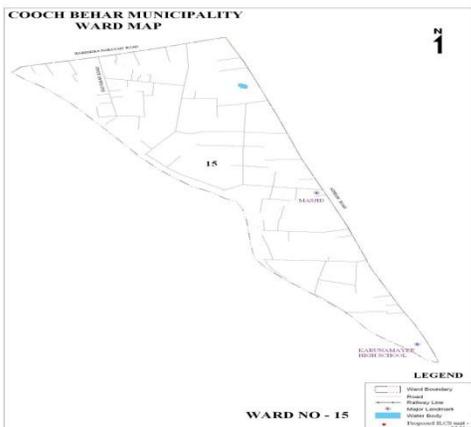
Map no. 2.12: Ward No. 12



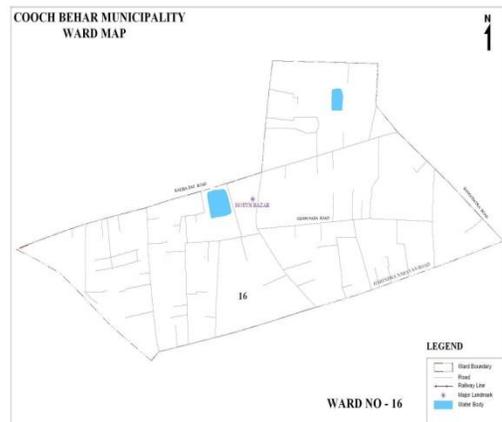
Map no. 2.13: Ward No. 13



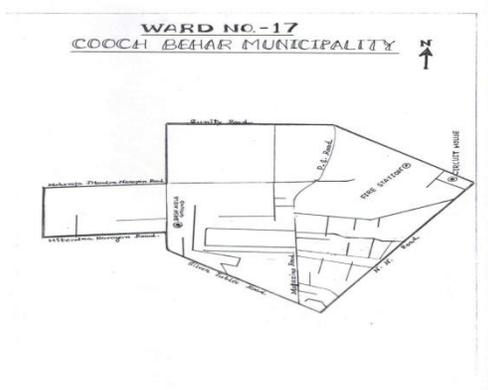
Map no. 2.14: Ward No. 14



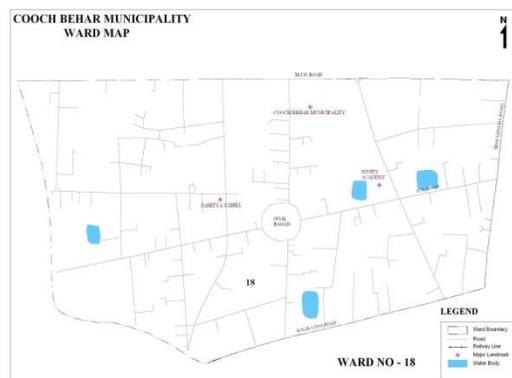
Map no. 2.15: Ward No. 15



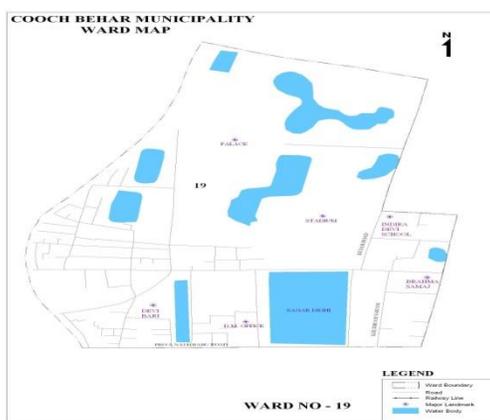
Map no. 2.16: Ward No. 16



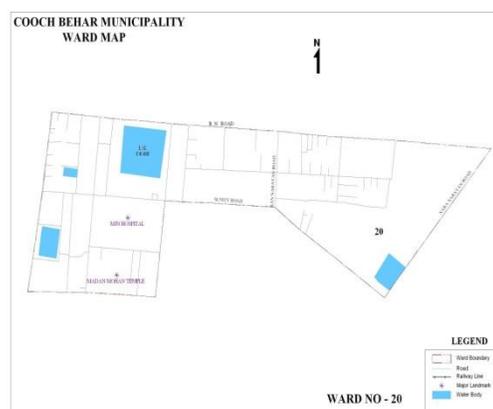
Map no. 2.17: Ward No. 17



Map no. 2.18: Ward No. 18



Map no. 2.19: Ward No. 19



Map no. 2.20: Ward No. 20

2.4 THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF THE DISTRICT: As mentioned earlier Koch Bihar was annexed to West Bengal as a district since 1st January, 1950 which had an areal coverage of 3386 Square Kilometres. Earlier it was known as ‘Kamta Behar’, ‘Behar’, ‘Nij Behar’ and ‘Kuch Behar’ respectively through different phases of time. In English, references for this place have often been found as ‘Kutch Bihar’/ ‘Koutch Behar’/ ‘Cooch Behar’ etc. the formerly mentioned names like ‘Kamta Behar’, ‘Behar’, ‘Nij Behar’ got changed along with the changes in the spatial extent of the territory: Kamrup and Goalpara was annexed to Assam; Darjiling, Jalpaiguri and Rangpore also became separated. From the British Period it came to be known as ‘Kuch Bihar’.

The earliest mention of this area has been found in the Allahabad Inscription of Samudragupta as Kamrup. In Blaeu’s map of 1650, Koch Bihar was named as ‘Comotay’. Baharisthan-i-Ghaibi

designated this region as 'Kamta' (Koch Bihar Gazetteer, 1976: 1). Koch Bihar was also sometimes been referred to as '*Koch Rajar Desh*' or the land of the Koch king. The Ain-i-Akbari refers to a Koch country which was parted into two kingdoms namely, the Kāmatā and the Kāmrupa (District Census Handbook, 1961:3). Some historians are of opinion that the north eastern part of the 'Kamata Rajya' was occupied by Koch people, who are non-existent now - a – days. One cannot deny the probability of a Buddhist connection owing to the presence of the raised mounds at the old ruins at the capital of the Khen kings popularly known as the 'Rajpat' (located near present Dinhata).

The name 'Koch Bihar' was first used in Shah Jahan Nama during about mid 17th Century. Major Rennell prepared maps in the 18th Century and referred Koch Bihar simply as 'Bihar'. In the Treaty between the East India Company and the ruler of Koch Bihar in 1773, the kingdom was referred to as 'Behar Fort' (Koch Bihar Gazetteer, 1976:1).

According to a popular version since Koch Bihar was located near the banks of River Sankosh, the word 'Kosh' might be altered to 'Koch' and 'Bihar' means abode of sport, place or land; finally 'Kosh' meaning 'Koch' and 'Bihar' meaning 'place' or abode of sport.

Another explanation of the word is 'Kochor' which might refer to the location of Koch Bihar in the Sub-Himalayan region or in the lap of the Himalayas which got changed to 'Koch Bihar' (Das, P. 1990). Maharaja Nripendranarayan in 1886 renamed this region as 'Koch Bihar', though the British given Spelling of 'Cooch Behar' still remained. Therefore, both 'Kuch Bihar' and 'Koch Bihar' are accepted in Bengali vocabulary.

The study area i.e. the Cooch Behar Town (CBT) is of recent origin, the year of establishment is just prior to the Indian Independence, in 1946. Prior to this, a Town Committee had been functioning to look after the necessities of the urbanites since the rule of Maharaja Jagaddipendranarayan (1885) (Draft Development Plan, CBM, 2008-'09 to 2012-'13: 39-41).

2.5 PHYSIOGRAPHY: Koch Bihar is essentially a flat country. The general slope of the land is oriented from north-west to south- east along which the main rivers have traversed. Basically, the land is undulating with occasional ups and downs. The lower reaches get flooded during the rains. There are no mountain ranges, peaks or hills within the district. The height above the mean

sea level is 57metres. It covers the Terai (Mekhliganj and Haldibari area) and Duars plains (Koch Bihar Duars). Physiographically, this portion of West Bengal belongs to the North Bengal Plains. The North Bengal Plain region is constituted by the districts of Darjeeling (Southern portion), Koch Bihar, Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda. Following the terrain characteristics, the North Bengal Plain region may be parted into **(1) Terai-Duars region and (2) Ganga-Brahmaputra Doab region respectively** (Dey Sarkar, S. 2012: 146-147).

2.5.1 TERAJ-DUARS REGION: The undulating land immediately present to the south of the Himalayas of West Bengal continuing up to the western bank of the River Tista is designated as the 'Terai' region. While, the eastern part of the Tista valley is known as the 'Duars'. Koch Bihar in particular is drained by the rivers Tista, Jaldhaka, Torsa, Raidak and Sankosh. The average elevation of this area varies from 75metres to 150 metres. The slope orientation is from north to south. This region is entirely veneered with river borne materials.

2.5.2 GANGA-BRAHMAPUTRA DOAB REGION: The interfluvial area between the Ganga and the Brahmaputra rivers is designated as the Ganga-Brahmaputra 'Doab' region. The Doab region extends from the southern limit of the Terai region to the northern bank of the River Ganga. The Doab region is further subdivided into **(1) 'Barendra Bhumi' or the 'Barind Land', (2) 'Tal' and (3) 'Diara'.**

2.5.2.1 'BARENDRA BHUMI' OR THE 'BARIND LAND': The left bank portion of the River Mahananda having 30metres of elevation on an average, is a part of the Old Ganga Plains comprising the districts of Dakshin Dinajpur and eastern Malda is designated as the 'Barendra Bhumi' or the 'Barind Land'. The old alluvium of this region is reddish in colour, hard and infertile.

2.5.2.2 'TAL': The southern reaches of Jalpaiguri district, almost the whole of the Koch Bihar district and a few portions of the Malda district comprise the Tal region. The Tals are low flood plain regions which get frequently inundated during rainy season. Many swamps (bils) and marshy lands remain scattered over the Tal areas (Rashik Bil in Koch Bihar etc.).

2.5.2.3 'DIARA': The south western part of Malda district adjacent to the River Ganga forms the 'Diara'. The 'Diara' on the contrary is made up of new alluvium and is preferred for agricultural activities.

2.6 GEOLOGY: Geologically, India can be divided into three (3) regions: (i) The Peninsular Region, (ii) The Extra- Peninsular Region and (iii) The Indo- Gangetic Plains (Khullar, D.R. 2005: 29).

2.6.1 The Peninsular Region includes the Meghalaya Plateau of the north east and the Kuchchh – Kathiawar region of the west. It is one of the oldest land masses of the earth.

2.6.2 The Extra- Peninsular Region includes the Himalayas and its eastwards extensions and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This portion represents the most youthful relief as evident from the presence of the Himalayas.

2.6.3 The Indo- Gangetic Plains lies between the Peninsular and the Extra- Peninsular regions. The alluvium filled Indo- Gangetic Plains represent flat, featureless and monotonous topography.

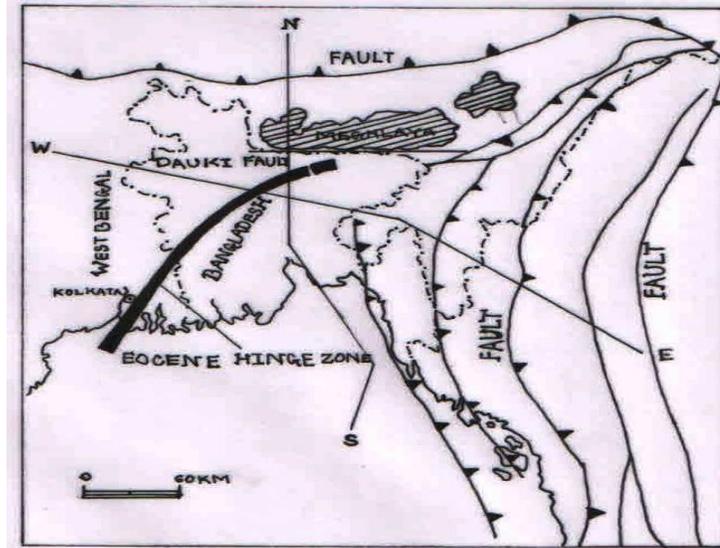
The study area belongs to the north eastern section of the country (i.e. the north eastern pocket of the state of West Bengal) occupying a portion of the ‘Great Plains’ of the northern India which have been covered by a thick mantle of Indo-Gangetic Alluvium. The most important, extensive and recently deposited materials are found in the Indo-Gangetic Alluviums which have filled the great depressions between the foot of the Himalayas and the northern edge of Peninsula. The older alluvium is called the ‘Bhangar’ (formed in the Middle or Upper Pleistocene time). The newer alluvium occupies the lower areas of the river valleys which are prone to annual floods is called the ‘Khadar’ (originated in the Upper Pleistocene Era.) (Khullar, D.R. 2005: 38). Besides this, the district is noted for occasional seismic disturbances.

2.7 GEOLOGICAL HISTORY IN AND AROUND THE STUDY AREA:

2.7.1 FORMATION OF THE HIMALAYAS AND THE RAJMAHAL HILLS: It was during the Cretaceous Period the present Indian sub-continent along with the other continents came into existence with the rifting and drifting action of the Gondwana Land. The plate tectonic activities in the shield area (Gondwana Land-Angara Land- Tethys sea region) compelled the Indian Plate to move first to the North West and then to the North covering a distance of 7000Kms. It confronted the North Asian Plate. The Indian foreland became subducted below the North Asian or the Tibetan Plate and the enormous sediments collected in

the Tethys Geosyncline crumpled upwards to form the mighty Himalayas. The Plate movement which commenced in this region since the Tertiary times is still in action.

Geological Characteristics of the North Eastern India After Alam et. al (2003)



Source: Map no. 3, Rudra, K. 2008, *Banglar Nadikatha*, p. 12

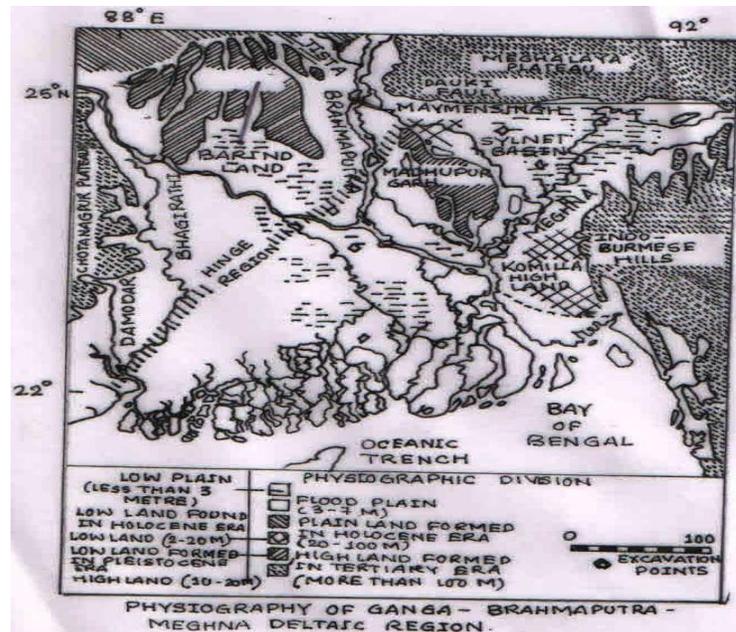
Map no. 2.21

The Rajmahals were created by the fissure eruption along the northern fringe of the Indian Plate (foreland). Later, a stupendous tectonic movement resulted in the separation of the eastern portion of the Rajmahals (by Dauki Fault, see Map no. 2.21) and settled down about 250 Kms away to the east which is known as the Meghalaya Plateau. As a result to this upheaval, the River Brahmaputra changed its course, instead of bending southwards near Sylhet (present Bangladesh), it began to flow westward for about 300 Kms and took a sharp southward bend near Dhubri (present Assam). The rise of the Himalayas in the Miocene Era has uplifted the Meghalaya Plateau further.

2.7.2 FORMATION OF THE BENGAL BASIN: The course of the River Ganga has divided West Bengal into two divisions, North Bengal with six (6) districts and South Bengal with the rest thirteen (13) districts. The Ganga and the Brahmaputra with their innumerable tributaries have entered Bengal (erstwhile, undivided) traversing almost a stretch of 250 Kms of plain land, keeping the Rajmahal Hills to the west and the Meghalaya Plateau in the east. The five major rivers of North Bengal originate from the Himalayas and flows through the region between the

Rajmahal Hills and the Meghalaya Plateau. Of these, the Tista, the Jaldhaka, the Torsa and the Raidak with their numerous tributaries carry huge quantities of load (water and silt) to the Brahmaputra and later on to the Jamuna of Bangladesh. The Mahananda is the only exception which is a tributary to the Ganga System. Both the Tista and the Mahananda have dissected the dome Structured ‘Barind Land’ while flowing down (Rudra, K. 2008: 1).

Physiography of Ganga- Brahmaputra-Meghna Delta After Goodbred et. al (2003)



Source: Source: Map no. 4, Rudra, K. 2008, *Banglar Nadikatha*, p. 14

Map no. 2.22

The Ganga- Brahmaputra- Meghna deltaic region is being referred to as the ‘Bengal Basin’ by the Geologists. These three (3) mighty rivers have contributed in the accumulation of silt in the vast stretch (about 2 lakh square Kms of area) of land between Chotanagpur and the hilly tracts of East Chittagong and Tripura. The Bengal Basin has an eastward tilt (in other words, along 87° E longitude the depth of the silt is only 120 - 160 metres, whereas it increases to about 22 Kms along the borders of the deltaic region of Bangladesh to the east) and the underlying rock bed is subducted below the Myanmar (Burma) Plate. It was during the Miocene era, the Myanmar Plate moved westward and confronted the northern and eastward moving Indian Plate obliquely. The Indian Plate got slowly subducted below it and the ‘Bengal Basin’ originated. The Bengal Basin

as a consequence provided the foundation for the development of the world's largest deltaic region.

2.7.3 THE DELTA BUILDING ACTIVITY: Structurally, the Ganga- Brahmaputra deltaic region can be divided into two parts. The delineation is possible along an imaginary line called the 'Eocene Hinge Zone' present obliquely from Kolkata extending in north east direction up till Maymansingh (Bangladesh). The structural slope also increases in the same direction and is thickly covered with silt forming the delta. The slope at the north western portion is only 2° - 3° and it increases to 6° - 12° on to the south eastern portion. Further south it again reduces to 1° - 2° . Actually, this Hinge Zone is the boundary area between continental and oceanic plates, whereby the north western part is relatively stable and the south eastern part having a huge amount of pressure exerted by the silt load is slowly subsiding (underneath the Myanmar Plate) (Map no. 2.22). Consequently, the depth of the silt is more towards the east. Since Cretaceous Era, this region was subjected to eustatic fluctuation in the form of inundation by sea water and retrogression of sea for several times following the rhythm of global warming and cooling. During the Pleistocene Era, global cooling engulfed the entire planet. The sea level dropped about 90 – 100 metres. Consequently, the mighty rivers like the Ganga, the Brahmaputra and the Tista carried lesser quantity of water with prolonged tracts. The present coastline was still to develop.

Another important phenomenon occurred during this period, the upper layers of silt in the Gangetic Delta got oxidized and vast stretches of land developed lateritic soils. Presently it can be found superficially in the Rarh region of West Bengal, Barind Land (left bank of Mahananda), and Madhupur Garh (Bangladesh). Later, about 15,000 years ago, global warming enhanced the flow of water through the big rivers fed by both melting of glaciers and heavy rainfall initiated by the advent of South West Monsoons. This increased the volume of load in rivers and deposition started (almost at the rate of 250 crore tons of silt/ annum). The next 1,500 years saw heavy riverine deposition and resulted in the burial of the lateritic soils. During the latter half of Pleistocene period, enormous erosional activities of the Jamuna (Brahmaputra), Tista, Atrayee, Punarbhaba, and Mahananda separated Barind Land from Madhupur Garh (Bangladesh). On the other hand the Maurakshi, the Ajay, the Damodar and the Rupnarayan also became active in the accumulation of the river borne materials to form the Rarh region (on the flanks of the Chotanagpur plateau). But this process of delta building on the west was slow in comparison

with the increasing sea level (at the rate of 10 millimetres/ year). After the sea level became static (around 7,000 years ago) the delta building activity in the southern most portions started.

2.8 CLIMATE: Koch Bihar belongs to the Tropical Monsoon climatic regime. The climate of this place is characterized by humid atmosphere with abundant rains. The average annual rainfall is 3042 millimetres. The mean maximum and minimum temperatures are about 37°C and 5°C respectively. The cold season begins from mid-November to the end of February. January is the coldest month of the year. During the cold spells in association of the passage of western disturbances, the night temperatures may drop to 4°C. The period from March to May is the summer season. The summer season temperatures are rarely excessive. The dampness of the air makes the weather rather unpleasant. This is followed by the rainy season which commences from June and stays till early October. Maximum concentration of rains occurs in June and July. The post monsoonal period can be designated to October and mid- November months.

2.8.1 SPECIAL WEATHER PHENOMENON: During monsoons, the region experiences cyclonic storms and depressions having their sources to the Bay of Bengal. Both the arrival and the departure of the rainy season are marked with thunderstorms and widespread rains. Thunderstorms may culminate into violent turbulence. Fogs occur in winter months. Dews are common during summer nights.

2.9 SOILS: The soil of Koch Bihar is mainly composed of alluvium of very recent origin. The alluvial soils are acidic in nature and the soil depth varies from 15 – 50 centimetres on an average. The alluvial soils are also sandy and unconsolidated with low bonding. As a consequence, water retaining capacity is poor. In some places, the top soil has a loamy covering with very low depth (about 3 feet), but these regions are restricted to the riverine areas namely, east of the Kaljani River on the borders of Goalpara; area between the Jaldhaka and the Tista rivers etc. The level of Nitrogen in the soils is low; the soils are even deficient in Boron, Zinc, Calcium, Magnesium and Sulphur. The Potassium and Phosphorous content is however moderate. The soil condition of Koch Bihar therefore is not convenient for extensive agricultural practices.

2.10 FLORA AND FAUNA: Climatically the region is a part of Tropical Monsoon climate and situated in the north eastern section of the country. Rainfall being abundant (next to Cherapunji) supports moist deciduous vegetation. The commonly found species are palms, bamboos, plantain, fruit trees (mango, jackfruit, olive, black berry, litchis, custard apple, guava, coconut, beetle nut etc.), spices (like ginger, garlic, turmeric) and herbs like fern, orchid, creeper; timber wood trees, flowering plants, aquatic plants, grasses etc.

The study area i.e. the CBT area and its surroundings face deforestation due to increased demand for fuel wood and timber as well as air pollution from vehicular traffic.

The migratory birds are found in the vicinity of ‘Sagardighi’ (CBT), ‘Rasikbil’ and other ‘Tals’ of Koch Bihar especially during winters.

2.11 DRAINAGE: Rivers of Koch Bihar have important bearing on the physico-cultural aspect of the district. The rivers from the west are the Tista, the Jaldhaka, the Torsa, the Kaljani, the Raidak and the Gadadhar (or the Sankosh) having conspicuous characteristics (refer to Map No. 2.21). All the rivers owe their origin to the Himalayas and flow in a south-westerly direction to discharge their waters into the Brahmaputra (in Bangladesh). Since Koch Bihar is situated in the foothill region, the rivers essentially show seasonal character. Their courses are ever changing. During the rains they get flooded and collect colossal amount of load (silt, pebbles, gravels etc.) and carries them down stream. While in winter and summer they become lean and even dry up. Thus, seasonality of rivers has made them non-navigable. The piedmont area is very dynamic with regard to the river courses, as the rivers debouch from the hilly sectors; they lose the steep gradient which retards their speed and velocity affecting their discharge. In order to adjust with the change, numerous channels are created; several are discarded along with repeated shift of courses to facilitate the transportation activity. Thus, a large number of tributaries are found along with the main courses. The dual problem of seasonality and frequent change of course has failed to contribute to the development of intra-regional communication system and growth of dense settlement unlike that of South Bengal. Commercial development also suffered augmentation owing to the least developed communication system.

Drainage Map of the Cooch Behar Town



Map No. 2.23

Map No. 2.23 shows the drainage map of the study area in which the juxtaposition of the Torsa River and Mara Torsa River is evident. The location of the CBT in the meander core is conspicuous in character.

2.11.1 A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE RIVERS:

2.11.1.1 THE TISTA SYSTEM: The Tista is by far the largest river of the district. Though it forms a large system elsewhere, within the district a very small portion is discernible (about 15 miles only) separating Mekhliganj and Haldibari blocks to the extreme west. Three channels namely, the Buri Tista (oldest channel) used to flow along the then important ports like Bibiganj, Sahebganj, dewanganj; the Mara Tista (discarded or left out channel) flows along the present-day Mekhliganj which was the main tract during the first half of the 19th Century; the Tista (the present tract) is the main channel at present. The port of Mekhliganj was one of the busiest ports in the past and had trade relations extended till Burma (Myanmar). Tobacco was the main commodity which used to reach first to Kaliganj of Rangpore district (presently in Bangladesh) and then to Chittagong and finally to Burma through the river routes. Thus, the Mekhliganj port

along with the Tista River was the life blood of trade in Koch Bihar. A small stream named Shaniajan unites with Khutamara near Bhotbari taluk which flows parallel to the Tista past kuchlibari taluk and joins it near the borders of Kakina and Patgram (Bangladesh) are the only tributaries to the Tista in Koch Bihar.

2.11.1.2 THE JALDHAKA SYSTEM: the Jaldhaka with its right bank tributaries (from north to south), the Sutunga, the Dharla, the Khutamara or Gidari and the left bank tributaries (from north to south) like the Kumlai, the Gilandi, the Duduya, the Mujnai and the Dolong form the Jaldhaka System within the Koch Bihar district.

The Jaldhaka River is called in a variety of names as it flows through the different areas of the district. It is known as the Singimari when it passes through the relics of ancient Kamtapur. The local name of Mansai is given to this river, when it passes through Mathabhanga sub-division. Before its confluence with Brahmaputra, it meets with the Torsa and is called the Dharla or the Dhalla. But this is distinct from the other Dharla which joins the Jaldhaka- Mansai- Singimari at Sibpur (two miles downstream of Mathabhanga).

2.11.1.3 THE TORSA SYSTEM: Etymologically, 'Toya - Rosa' means angry waters. As evident from the name, the Torsa River is very capricious and very energetic in character. Fed by the rivers Amo Chu and other streams like Chimkifu, Tanka, Namuchkhola, Jak Ripley Khola, Tromo, Priyuna Khola and Pandi; the Torsa flows through Bhutan hills, with enormous volume and load. The Torsa can also be recognized by a number of names with its changing character. For instance, Buri Torsa – the left out channel/ old channel; Shil Torsa – the actual or present tract through which the river is flowing currently; Mara Torsa – the branch of river with feeble strength and Choto Mara Torsa – even smaller branch with very low water content. The Torsa bifurcates into two branches near Hasimara of Alipurduar district whereby the south eastern branch is known as the Shil Torsa. The Shil Torsa reunites with the main stream later on. Choto Torsa joins the main course at Madarihat Rail Bridge. The Buri Torsa, a ditributary of Choto Torsa joins Jaldhaka at Falakata(Alipurduar district)(Rudra. K, 2008: 77). The river again gets bifurcated past Koch Bihar, turning south east it receives Ghargharia and Kaljani in Tufanganj Sub-division; to the east it retains its name while reaching further south it is called the Dharla. The Dharla joins Singimari (Jaldhaka) far south near Dinhata. The Torsa joins the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh at Junkhawa village.

The Torsa had been a significant river for Koch Bihar through history. Firstly, because of its unpredictable character since it had mostly changed its course and oscillated through this region. Secondly, it had contributed to the development of the port of Tufanganj at its confluence with Kaljani (in Tufanganj Sub-division). History had witnessed trading relations through the water routes with Bangladesh. But floods were unavoidable especially speaking with reference to the Kaljani; the port activities at Tufanganj were worst affected.

2.11.1.4 THE KALJANI RIVER: the Kaljani is formed in the western Duars and it is a tributary to the Sankosh River. It enters Koch Bihar at Kholta mouza. It provides a natural boundary between Koch Bihar Sadar and Tufanganj Sub-division. The Jayanti River flows down the Bhutan hills to the east of Buxa Duars and takes up the name of Gadadhar and joins the Kaljani. This confluence is visited by numerous people who take the holy dip in the river water during the auspicious date of 'Astami' (the 8th day) in the Bengali month of Chaitra every year. With the progression of the river further down, the Kaljani receives streams like Ghatajani (or Katajani). At Panishala village, the Ghargharia and the Torsa meets the Kaljani. The river enters the Rangpore village of Bangladesh downstream. The Kaljani re-enters Koch Bihar to get united with the Sankosh, which releases its water to the Brahmaputra far south.

The Kaljani is a quick flowing river having good depths. Before the partition of Bengal, salt, rice, spices were imported through this river route. The business community of Balarampur, Ghoramara and Natabari exported jute, tobacco, paddy, mustard seeds, and oil through this route

2.11.1.5 THE RAIDAK RIVER: Due south of Koch Bihar, the Ghargharia, the Kaljani, the Gadadhar and the Raidak I confluences with the Torsa. From this point the river takes its name as the Raidak. Raidak I debouches from the Bhutan hills from the Akung Chu peak (about 6400 metres high). The Raidak is found splitted into three branches at Indo- Bhutan border. The two western most streams are the Dhaula and the Raidak I and the eastern most stream is known as the Raidak II which meets the Sankosh River far east (Rudra, K. 2008: 77). Popularly, the Raidak and its tributaries are also referred to as the Dipa Raidak, the Mara Raidak and the Raidak. The Raidak is mostly navigable and it had supported the growth of business-trade through the port of Phulbari.

2.11.1.6 THE GADADHAR RIVER: This river has its mention in the '*Kalikapuranas*'. The mythological name is '*Jatodaya*' or '*Jatoda*'. On the eighth day in the month of *Chaitra* of the

Bengali calendar, a holy dip in the waters of the Gadadhar or the Gangadhar brings goodness and sanctity. The Gadadhar also had changed its course many a times through history. It was used to delimit the western kingdom of Kamtapur from the eastern kingdom of Kamrupa in the Fifteenth Century (Koch Bihar Gazetteer, 1976: 14).

The Gadadhar River owes its origin to the Bhutan hills near Buxa Duars. It enters the Koch Bihar district from the north at Laukuthi village. It flows to the south east and crosses Dhubri Road and progresses towards Rangpore district of Bangladesh and meets with the Sankosh River. Basically, the Gadhadhar River is a tributary to the Kaljani. After the union of the Gadadhar and the Kaljani the river ends up releasing its waters to the Sankosh.

2.12 A BRIEF HISTORY OF 'KOCH BIHAR':

2.12.1 THE PRE-HISTORY AND THE PROTO-HISTORY: The vast region of north eastern portion of our country subtending from the Himalayan foot hills, drained by the Tista (on the western most part) and the Brahmaputra (on the far east) has been recognized as the abode of the ancient Indian civilization. Through history, this portion has been named and renamed many a times as '*Pragjyotisha*', '*Lauhitya*', '*Kamrupa*' and '*Kamata*' whose boundaries have also fluctuated. Mention of '*Pragjyotisha*' may be found in the two great Indian Epics, the '*Ramayana*' and the '*Mahabharata*'; and other literary works like '*Vishnupurana*', '*Harivamsa*', '*Yoginitantra*' and even in the writings of the Chinese traveler Yuan Chwang.

According to the mythological understandings, *Naraka* was born to Mother Earth by the grace of Lord *Vishnu* in his 'Boar' incarnation. *Naraka* defeated the *Kiratas* (hunters) and was ordained the king of *Pragjyotisha* by the divine will. Later, *Naraka* fell into evil ways and was killed by Lord *Vishnu* himself in his '*Krishna*' incarnation. *Naraka* was succeeded by *Bhagadatta*.

2.12.2 THE 'GUPTAS': As per the inscriptions on the Allahabad Pillar, *Kamrupa* had been mentioned to remain under the rule of *Samudragupta*. But the period of his rule was not mentioned. The last Gupta king was '*Mahesanagupta*'.

With the rise of *Yashodharavarman*, the reign of the Guptas came to an end. Meanwhile, *Shasanka*, the king of *Gour/ Gauda* attempted the subjugation of *Kamrupa* but he did not succeed. On the contrary, *Bhaskaravarman* subjugated *Gauda* for a short period of time in the

mid Seventh Century. After the death of *Bhaskaravarman*, the *Mlechchha* lineage of kings ruled *Kamrupa* till the end of Tenth Century. The people elected *Bramhapala*, who was the descendant of *Bhagadatta*. The name of *Kamrupanagara* came to the forefront as the capital. This *Kamrupanagara* was most probably the same as the *Kamata* or the *Kamatapur*, whose ruins lie at *Gossanimari* (near present Dinahata) in Koch Bihar.

2.12.3 THE KHEN KINGS: Although local tradition says about the presence of the Chandra lineage of kings after *Dharmapala*, but it may be dismissed as a myth. After the Pala kings, there prevailed a period of anarchy. *Niladhwaaja* acquired power, declared himself as the king and made *Kamtapur* as his capital. He extended the fortifications and erected the *Kamtेशwari* temple and further assumed the title of *Kamtेशwar*. After his rule, his son *Chakradhwaja* ascended the throne. He was succeeded by *Nilambara*.

2.12.4 THE MUSLIM RULE: Kamtapur during Nilambar's rule experienced Mughal siege and was annexed to the kingdom of Allauddin Hussain Shah (A.D.1498). Kamata did not remain in the hands of the Muslims for long. They were defeated by the Ahom kings during the rains.

2.12.5 THE BARA BHUINYAS: After this the Kamata kingdom was engulfed by anarchy and was further split up into small chiefs who were collectively known as the *Bara Bhuinyas*.

2.12.6 THE KOCH KINGS: After the expulsion of the Muslims, the Koch chiefs became powerful. One of them was Hajo, whose daughters namely Hira and Jira were married to Hariya Mandal (who was the resident of Chikangram in Goalpara district). Jira gave birth to Chandan and Madan. Hira gave birth to Sishu and Bishu. Though there is enough debate over the lineage of the Koch kings, yet one account states that Chandan was proclaimed king after the defeat and death of Hariya Mandal. After Chandan's death, Bishu became the king and was known as Biswasingha. The period of Biswasingha's proclamation as the king had also remained highly debated. Some believes that '*Raja Saka*' was promulgated during his ascent as the king, but the year noted for the beginning of the *Raja Saka* was 1510 A.D. which was 14 years earlier than Biswasingha's rule. An account also says that Biswasingha ascended the throne in 1496 A.D. H. N. Chowdhuri gives the date of Biswasingha's reign as 1510 A.D. which appears more probable. E.A. Gait in his history of Assam assigns the reign of Biswasingha from 1515 A.D. to 1540 A.D. (Koch Bihar Gazetteer. 1976: 15). According to H. N. Chowdhuri in "The Koch Bihar State and

its Land Revenue System”, states that Biswasingha ascended the throne in his 22nd year in the 14th Raja Saka corresponding to 1522 A.D (Pal, N. N. 2010 :234).

2.12.6.1 BISWASINGHA: Biswasingha assumed the title ‘Kamtेशwar’. The name Sishyasingha was given to his brother Sishu, who assumed the title of ‘Raikat’(meaning the head of the family and the hereditary of the chief minister). Sishyasingha was said to be the ancestor of the Raikat family of Baikunthapur. Biswasingha was a systematic administrator. He subjugated Bhutan and compelled the Devraja to pay him tribute. He conquered the Soumara country, Bijni , Vijayapur and further attacked Ahom territory. He fell short of provisions and retreated. The next step of Biswasingha was to subjugate Gauda. The invasion of Gauda was the last act of warfare undertaken by him which he did not succeed. By this time Sishyasingha settled at Baikunthapur(Jalpaiguri).

After the death of Hira (Biswasingha’s mother), Biswasingha diverted his attention to domestic affairs of the state. He shifted his capital to Koch Bihar (*Hingulabasha*) where he built affine city. Biswasingha died in 1553.

2.12.6.2 NARANARAYAN: Maharaja Biswasingha had three sons: Narasingha, Naranarayan or Mallanarayan (since he was a wrestler) and Chilarai (or Sukladhwaja); of whom Narasingha abdicated the throne to Naranarayan in order to keep his promise to Naranarayan’s wife during their marriage. Thus, Naranarayan became the king in 45th *Raja Saka* corresponding to 1555A.D. Coins were struck in gold and silver and were named after him in his honour which became known as the ‘*Narayani Mudra*’. Naranarayan along with his brother Sukladhwaja set for the expansion of their kingdom. Their valour swept away powers from Tripura, Kachhar, Manipur, Jayantia, Dimru in the north east. They extended their empire even to the Chittagong sea board. After the alliance with Akbar, Chilarai and Raja Man Singh attacked Gauda and invaded it. According to Gait’s “Koch Kings of Kamrupa” the kingdom of Gauda was divided between the Koch king and the Emperor of Delhi. Naranarayan and Sukladhwaja erected the temple of ‘Kamakshya’ having inscriptions testifying this fact. During his rule, ‘Madhupur Dham’ – a sacred place for the Vaishnavas was built.

Naranarayan did not have son till his old age. Raghudeva, the son of Chilarai believed that he would succeed after king Naranarayan, but the birth of Lakshminarayan shattered his dreams. Meanwhile the eastern most portions (i.e. east of River Sankosh) of the empire were given to

Chilarai and he ruled the eastern Kamrupa (Pal, N. N. 2010: 237). Raghudeva rebelled against Naranarayan and the latter made peace with him.

2.12.6.3 LAKSHMINARAYAN: After the death of Naranarayan, his son Lakshminarayan ascended the throne. He was a weak king. Raghudeva proclaimed himself as the independent ruler of Kamrupa. This led to warfare. Raghudeva allied with Isa Khan while Lakshminarayan sought alliance of Man Singh, the then Mughal Subhadar of Bengal. The Mughals were ushered into Koch Bihar with this very act. Parikshitnarayan, the son of Raghudeva joined Lakshminarayan and assassinated his father. Later on, he rebelled against Lakshminarayan and got defeated and died in 1616.

After the death of Islam Khan (who helped Lakshminarayan to defeat Parikshitnarayan), Kasem Khan became the new Subhadar. He conspired against Lakshminarayan, who was called to Dacca (i.e. Dhaka of present Bangladesh), made captive and sent to Agra. He was released by Emperor Jahangir after the acceptance of the Mughal suzerainty. He died in 1627 (Koch Bihar Gazetteer. 1976: 32).

Maharaja Lakshminarayan had 18 sons he built '*Athara-Kotha*' or eighteen houses for his sons. Bajranarayan, Birnarayan and Mahinarayan became powerful among the sons. Mahinarayan was made the first *Nazir* (an administrative post of the commander of the army) and the ancestor of Nazirdeo family of Baikunthapur.

2.12.6.4 BIRNARAYAN: Birnarayan became the king after Lakshminarayan as he was born of the queen consort. His rule was short and was of less significance. He was mostly engaged in pleasures. He transferred his capital to *Athara Kotha*. He died in 1632 (ibid, 32).

2.12.6.5 PRANANARAYAN: Pranarayan ascended the throne after his father Birnarayan's death. At that time, the Mughal Empire was almost at its termination. He grabbed this opportunity and took possession of Kamrupa and even occupied Dacca. After Aurangzeb became the king, Mir Jumla (the then Governor of Bengal) was ordered to attack Koch Bihar. Pranarayan fled away to the Bhutan hills and took refuge there. Vishnunarayan, the eldest son embraced *Islam* and treacherously co-operated to Mir Jumla against his father. Mir Jumla took over Koch Bihar on December 19, 1661 and the city's name was changed to *Alamgirnagar* (ibid, 32). He settled the revenue of the state at 10 lakh *Narayani Mudra* and made Isfandiar Beg the in-charge of Koch Bihar. Mir Jumla went Far East to conquer Assam. The oppressive attitude

and tyrannical rule of the Muslims made the people rebellious. Prananarayan returned with much valour and drove the Mughals back. Mir Jumla was coming back to re-conquer Koch Bihar but fell ill and died. Shaista Khan in 1664 decided to conquer Koch Bihar but Prananarayan paid a handsome amount of 5.5 lakh *Narayani* rupees and was taken as a tribute by the Mughals.

Prananarayan was a learned man and excelled in Sanskrit Literature; he was a poet and also patronized singing and dancing. He erected temples at '*Jalpesh*' (in present Jalpaiguri), *Baneshwar* (at Koch Bihar) and *Sandeshwar*. He also rebuilt the temple at *Gossanimari* (1665). He gave his concern for the building of roads and highroads. He had 3 sons, Vishnunarayan, Modnarayan and Vasudevanarayan. Of them, Modnarayan succeeded his father in 1666.

2.12.6.6 MODNARAYAN: Modnarayan's period began under the influence of the Bhutan kings. After Prannarayan's death, Mahinarayan, the *Nazir* wanted to occupy the throne. Though Modnarayan was put on the throne, all the powers were retained by Mahinarayan. Modnarayan came to know about the political betrayal and Mahinarayan's secret plans. A death sentence was passed on Mahinarayan. His sons did sought help from the Bhutan king and fought a war against Modnarayan. Mahinarayan was killed in the war and the war ended as Yajnanarayan was made the next *Nazir* by Modnarayan. Modnarayan died in 1680 without a male heir.

2.12.6.7 VASUDEVANARAYAN: After the death of Modnarayan, Yajnanarayan became anxious to ascend the throne. With the Bhutiya assistance, the kingdom was looted, some people were made captives and some other died. The *Raikats* of Baikunthapur advanced with their army and the Bhutiyas were laid down. Vasudevanarayan was placed on the throne by the *Raikats*. As the *Raikats* went back, Yajnanarayan stroke back with the Bhutiyas and Vasudevanarayan was killed in a minor battle. Yajnanarayan declared himself king. The *Raikats* returned with a force and a fierce battle followed whereby Yajnanarayan got defeated and fled to the Bhutan hills. Mahindranarayan, the 5 year- old grandson of Vasudevanarayan and the great grandson of Prannarayan was declared as the king by the *Raikats*.

2.12.6.8 MAHINDRANARAYAN: He was a minor when he was made the king. He was backed by the two *Raikats* (Jagadeva and Bhudeva), but his reign was not at all in peace and he faced constant disturbances from the two sons of *Nazir* Mahinarayan. After two years of the crowning, the two *Raikats* died. Mahindranarayan was left helpless. In this situation, the provinces located at distant site gave up their allegiance one after another. District after district

accepted Mughal suzerainty. In this sheer crisis, the minister of the king made peace with Jayanarayan, who was re-appointed as the *Nazir*. But Jayanarayan was unsuccessful in stopping the Mughals. Later even Baikunthapur was subjugated by the Mughals. Jayanarayan died and his son Santanarayan was made the *Nazir*. Mahindranarayan died in 1693. With his death, the main lineage of the kings came to an end.

2.12.6.9 RUPNARAYAN: After Mahindranarayan, Santanarayan aspired to become the king but since he was made the *Nazir*, he was declared non-eligible for the throne. His brother's son Rupnarayan was made the king and Satyanarayan another brother became the *Dewan*. The Mughals continued with their attack on Koch Bihar and in 1711 a treaty was concluded and Mughal suzerainty was accepted for the *Chaklas* of Boda, Patgram and Purvabhag. From Rupnarayan's reign, the kingdom of Koch Bihar remained confined to the present boundary of the district. Rupnarayan shifted his capital from *Athara Kotha* to Guriahati comprising of portions of the present Town area of Koch Bihar.

2.12.6.10 UPENDRANARAYAN: Rupnarayan died in 1714 after a reign of 21 years. Upendranarayan's (Rupnarayan's son) rule was constantly interfered by the Bhutiyas. He could not resist their entrance to the plains. Upendranarayan was childless till then so he adopted Dinanarayan, the son of Satyanarayan (the *Dewan* Dinanarayan wanted a written record in his own favour as the heir of the throne. But the king did not agree as he hoped for a son. Dinanarayan conspired with the Mughals, deserted the king and alleged a war against the king. Upendranarayan was defeated and Dinanarayan was made the king in 1736. Upendranarayan sought help and came back with newly collected army and attacked the Mughal Fouzdar from all sides. The Mughal Fouzdar was defeated and fled to Rangpore. Dinanarayan died in exile. He built a palace at Dhalia bari. At his old age, Upendranarayan had a son Devendranarayan. Upendranarayan died in 1763.

2.12.6.11 DEVENDRANARAYAN: In 1763, Devendranarayan was made the king. He was a boy at the time he ascended the throne. Upendranarayan assigned Radhiya Brahman Satananda Goswami as the *Rajguru*. After his death, his son Ramananda Goswami became the *Rajguru*. Ramananda started conspiring against the minor king but was driven out of the palace by the queen. Ramananda continued with his activities and conspired with the *Nazir Deo*. He appointed Rati Sharma to assassinate the boy king. Rati Sharma beheaded Devendranarayan.

Chhatra Nazir Rudranarayan wanted to make his son Khagendranarayan the king, but he was laid down by a young officer Gourinath Karji who told that if Khagendranarayan was made the king, people would say that Rudranarayan had complicity in killing Devendranarayan. So, Dhairyendranarayan, the third son of Dewan Kharganarayan was made the king.

2.12.6.12 DHAIRYENDRANARAYAN: In 1765, Dhairyendranarayan was declared as the king with popular support. But the actual autonomy of the king was lost. During his rule too much of Bhutan's interference especially in official matters had been noticed. The *Nazir* became very powerful and even collected revenues from the *zillas* in the name of defense without the king's consent. The rise of Dewan Ramnarayan (the elder brother of Dhairyendranarayan) was also significant in the familial matters of the Royal household. Ramnarayan took lion share of the booty which fell in his hands during the war of Vijaypur (between the Bhutan and Morang Territory) without the king's knowledge. He even got involved in the marriage of the king's sister without the consent of the king. Dhairyendranarayan became apprehensive of his growing powers and killed him in a scheme. Since Ramnarayan was friendly towards the Bhutan king, the latter planfully made Dhairyendranarayan captive at Chekakhata and later on sent him to Punakha via Buxa.

2.12.6.13 RAJENDRANARAYAN: Rajendranarayan was the elder brother of Dhairyendranarayan (who was greatly associated with the murder of Ramnarayan) went to Balarampur and as advised by the *Nazir* Khagendranarayan, told everything about the murder to the king of Bhutan. Rajendranarayan was made the king by the Bhutiyas. None of the former ministers joined the administration owing to the fact that Dhairyendranarayan was still alive. Bijendranarayan who was the son of Ramnarayan was made the *Dewan*. After a nominal reign of two years and a few months Rajendranarayan died. Pensu Toma (the representative of the Bhutan king) tried to put Bijendranarayan on the throne, but the *Chhatra Nazir* Khagendranarayan installed Dharendranarayan (son of Dhairyendranarayan) as the king. Pensu toma was driven out of Koch Bihar.

2.12.6.14 DHARENDRANARAYAN: He was also a minor when he ascended the throne and was sometimes referred to as the 'Naib Raja' or the temporary king. Since he was a minor, Maharani Kamteshwari took over the administration. She became close to *Rajguru* Sarbananda

Goswami whose authority in administration became evident (Silsharma, A. 2011, 16). This annoyed *Nazir* Khagendranarayan who himself sought a place in the administration.

Meanwhile, Pensu Toma reported about the situation to the Bhutan King and the latter sent a large army. Kamteshwari Devi and the King were removed and they fled to Rangpore. Khagendranarayan sought help from the East India Company. The Company sent soldiers under Lieutenant Dickson to Koch Bihar and they occupied Gitaldaha, Dinhat, Baladanga and Mowamari. The English army also occupied the Fort of Koch Bihar (December, 1772). On January 12, 1773 Nazir Khagendranarayan and king Dharendranarayan met with Charles Purling (the then Collector of Rangpore). The occupancy of Koch Bihar by the Britishers drove Raikat Darpadeva (who took refuge under Bhutan King). A fierce battle took place at Rahimganj between Captain Jones and Darpadeva. The fort of Rahimganj was conquered by Jones and Darpadeva fled to the forests. There he reconstructed the army and tried to attack. His group (referred to as the 'Sanyasi') fell before the Company's army. A treaty was finalized between the East India Company and the young king Dharendranarayan in April 5, 1773.

After this, Purling went to Bhutan and explained the consequence of enmity with the company. He further requested for the return of Dhairyendranarayan. The king of Bhutan asserted his desire for peace. The king dismissed himself from the throne and a new king was appointed. A peace was concluded thereafter between the Company and the Bhutan king on April 25, 1774. Dhairyendranarayan was released and became angry to know about the deal with the Company (made by Dharendranarayan). On his return to Koch Bihar, he did not take up his rule. But after the death of Dharendranarayan in 1775, once again he became the king. He died in 1780 leaving behind his only heir, his son Harendranarayan.

2.12.6.15 HARENDRANARAYAN: Harendranarayan was only 3 years 9 months old when he was declared as the king. Since he was a minor, Maharani Kamteshwari produced documents of being the guardian to the king. For the next thirteen years, there were internal skirmishes between the two contending parties- Maharani Kamteshwari backed by Sarbananda Goswami and Kasikanta Lahiri vs. Nazir Khagendranarayan. This internal conspiracy led to the kidnapping of the king. East India Company came for the rescue of Harendranarayan. Henry Douglas was appointed as the commissioner of Koch Bihar. Harendranarayan ruled from 1801 to 1839 and he

died in Varanasi. In the meantime the Company stopped the use of Narayani rupee once for all in 1800.

2.12.6.16 SIVENDRANARAYAN: Harendranarayan was succeeded by his eldest son Sivendranarayan. The new devoted his entire attention to administration and state affairs. The boundary dispute with Bhutan was agreeably settled by arbitration of Campbell, the then Superintendent of Darjeeling. Sivendranarayan did not have son so, he adopted the grandson of Nazir Khagendranarayan but the boy died in 1845. Then he adopted Chandranarayan as his son and was renamed as Narendranarayan. Narendranarayan became the king after Sivendranarayan's death in 1847.

2.12.6.17 NARENDRANARAYAN: Narendranarayan was only 6 years when he ascended the throne after his adoptive father's death. Sivendranarayan wanted that the Company would look after his son's education. Although the Maharani and the Dewan did not liked this matter, the Company convinced that the boy king would be admitted either to Dacca or to Krishnanagar at the queen's discretion. Narendranarayan was sent to Krishnanagar and admitted to the collegiate school. He was later on sent to Calcutta where he studied in Ward's Institution. He remained under the guardianship of Raja Rajendralal Mitter till 1859 till his attainment of majority. In 1861, Narendranarayan established the first English School in Koch Bihar and named it after Colonel Jenkins, the Agent of the Governor General. Narendranarayan died in 1863.

2.12.6.18 NRIPENDRANARAYAN: Nripendranarayan was a little over one year old when he succeeded the throne of his father. The Governor appointed a commissioner who took the charge of the state till the king's attainment of adulthood. From Nripendranarayan's reign, the administration of Koch Bihar entered into the Modern Phase. The king attained majority and was installed to the throne on November 8, 1883. Nripendranarayan was married to Sunity Devi (daughter of Keshab Ch. Sen, the renowned social reformer who founded the Naba Bidhan Brahmo Samaj). By 1887 the construction of the new palace was completed. In 1893, the Koch Bihar State Railway was publicly opened. He died in 1911.

2.12.6.19 RAJARAJENDRANARAYAN: Rajarajendranarayan succeeded Nripendranarayan as he was the eldest son but he died very soon after his ascent to the throne. He died in 1913 in England. He got his education in India as well as in England and he remained unmarried.

2.12.6.20 JITENDRANARAYAN: Rajarajendranarayan was succeeded by his brother Jitendranarayan. He took concern about the welfare and civic amenities of the people of Koch Bihar. He was married to Indira Devi (the daughter of Gaekwad of Baroda). He died in 1921 and his minor son Jagaddipendranarayan was made the king.

2.12.6.21 JAGADDIPENDRANARAYAN: Owing to his minority, king Jagaddipendranarayan's mother Indira Devi took up administration as the regent. He was the last king of Koch Bihar. On August 28, 1949 he transferred the State of Koch Bihar to the Dominion Government of India vide 'The Cooch Behar Merger Agreement'. The transfer of administration to the Government of India appointed a chief commissioner who ruled 'Koch Bihar' as the Chief Commissioner's Province. Since 1st January 1950, 'Koch Bihar' was annexed to West Bengal by an order under section 290A of the Govt. of India act of 1935. Thus 'Koch Bihar' became a district of West Bengal.

2.12.6.22 VIRAJENDRANARAYAN: Jagaddipendranarayan did not have any heir; after his death, Virajendranarayan (son of his brother Indrajitendranarayan) was declared as the crownless and throne-less king w.e.f April 11, 1970 vide Government Order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India (D.O. No. F 12/1/70- Poll. III, dt. 24.06.1970) (Pal, N. N. 2000: 98). With his death on August 24, 1992 the Narayani dynasty got terminated.

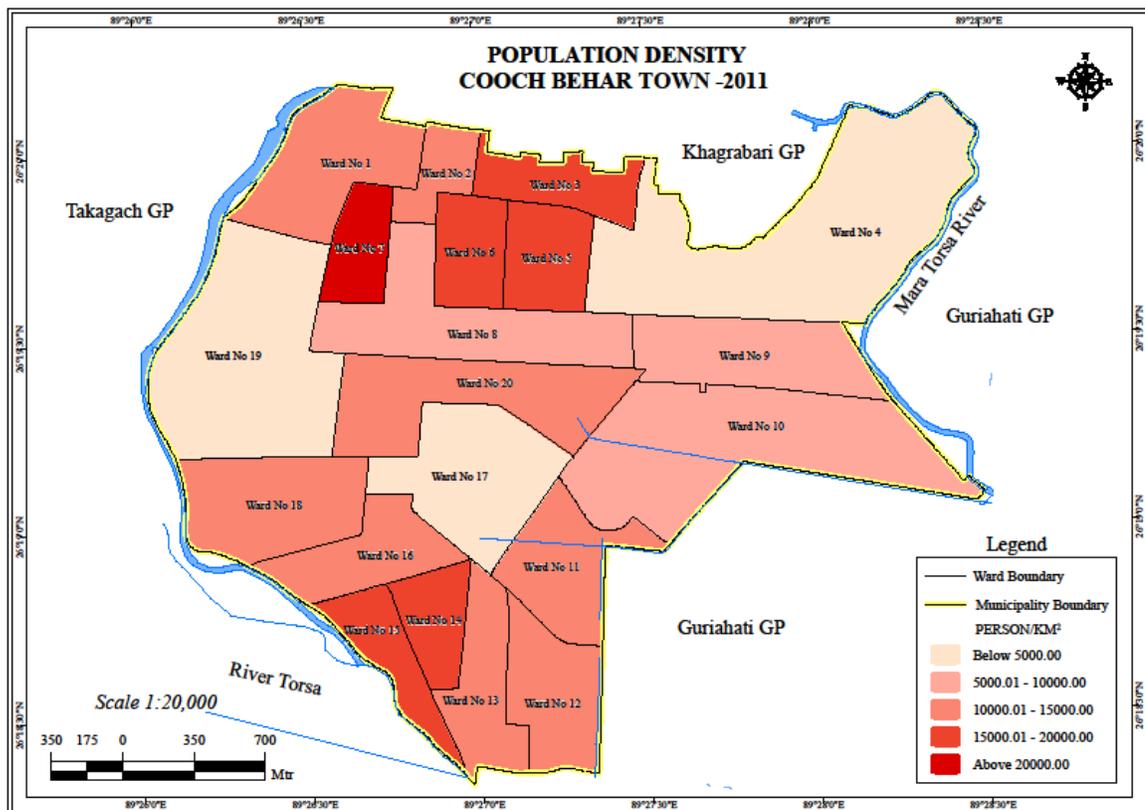
2.13 THE CULTURAL SET-UP: Culture of a particular society or civilization is considered as a habitual practice in relation to the way of life. The popular notion goes – 'what man does is his culture'. So, the cultural component of Koch Bihar entails information related to Population, Educational level, Language, Religion, the popular culture and the livelihood pattern of the people (including Dwelling, Dress-up, Dietary habit etc).

2.13.1 POPULATION: The total population of the Koch Bihar district according to 2011 Census is 2,819,086 persons of which 51.49% is represented by Male population while the rest i.e. 48.51% is represented by the Females. The total population of the Study Area i.e. Cooch Behar Town (CBT) for 2011 is 77,935 persons. Of this number, there are 39,014 Males (50.06%) and 38,921 Females (49.94%). About 13.19% of the urban population of Koch Bihar district alone resides within the CBT area. A population density map (Map no. 2.24) has been prepared on the basis of the ward wise Census data for 2011. It shows that population density is highest in the ward nos of 5, 6, 7 and 15 (15,703-23,182 persons/sq. kms.). It is moderately high (12,996-

15,703 persons/sq. kms.) in the ward nos 2, 3, 11, 12, 14 and 16. It is moderate (8,548-12,996 persons/sq. kms.) in ward nos.1, 13, 18 and 20; it is low in ward nos. 4, 8, 9, 10, 17 and 19 (2,752- 8,548 persons/sq. kms.). So, the density of population in the study area is quite high. Inter-state and inter-district migration is also very common.

The district of Koch Bihar after its merger to the Dominion of India had experienced demographic change significantly. Besides its own population, a trail of migration had been noticed. People from the adjacent districts of Bangladesh i.e. Rangpore, Maymansingh (erstwhile and undivided), Pabna and Bugura migrated to Koch Bihar; simultaneously some also out-migrated to the industrial districts of 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Hugli, Barddhaman and even to Jalpaiguri. While some of the business communities of North India from the states like Bihar, Assam, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odhisa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Punjab were the chief emigrants.

Population Density of CBT- 2011



Map No. 2.24

The Rajbangshis or the Kochs form the bulk of Scheduled Caste. They are of mixed origin arising out of a Dravidian stock with marked features of Mongolian blood (Koch Bihar Gazetteer. 1976: 51). Besides the Rajbangshis, the other Scheduled Castes commonly found in Koch Bihar are Badgi, Chamar, Kaibarta, Jhalo, Malo etc. The Rabhas, Meches, Oraons, Garos and the Santhals constitute the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of the district. Koch Bihar has the highest concentration of the Scheduled Caste population (50.17%) among all the districts of West Bengal. The Study Area however shows 13.50% of Scheduled Caste population among the urban dwellers. The Scheduled Tribes are insignificant in their presence; only 0.52% people in the CBM belong to this category. The district level almost shows a similar reflection of 0.64% of ST population.

2.13.2 EDUCATIONAL LEVEL: According to the 2011 Census, the Koch Bihar district shows 65.64% of literates (the Male Literacy Rate being 55.59% and the Female Literacy Rate being 44.41%). The Study Area records 85.20% of literates for the same census period. The Male Literacy Rate in the Study Area amounts to 51.28% while 48.72% is represented by their counterparts. The district level figures are almost reflected in the figures pertaining to the Study Area.

2.13.3 LANGUAGE: Bengali is the principal language spoken by the bulk population. The next major language of the district is Hindi spoken by the Hindi speakers, who are mostly people of North India, who have migrated to Koch Bihar and settled here for trade and commerce. Besides these two, Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Assamese and Nepali are also spoken here.

The Rajbangshis speak their own dialect which is a diversion from Bengali greatly influenced by one of south West Bengal and the other of Mithila. Apart from the Rajbangshi, Rabha, Oraon and Santhali are also being spoken.

2.13.4 RELIGION: The Rajbangshis inhabit this place the most who are Hindus by religious belief. They claim themselves as the Kshatriyas following the 'Varna' system; but some of the kings were found to get influenced by the Brahmanical rituals. Towards the end of the 'Koch Rule', some of the kings were seen to get influenced by the 'Brahma Samaj'.

The chief God of the Rajbangshis is 'Mahakal' or 'Shiva' besides him, Vishnu as Madan Mohan, Manasa and Kali are also being worshipped throughout the district. The two main sects of the

Hindus i.e. the Vaishnavas (the worshippers of Lord Vishnu) and the Saktas (the worshippers of Mother Goddess like: Kali, Durga etc.) are found largely.

Though minor yet the Muslims also occupy important position as a religious sect. Islam had spread to this region almost at the beginning of 13th Century A.D., as many saints came to Kamrupa for preaching.

Some of the business community especially from the other North Indian states follow Jainism as evident from the presence of the Jain Temple situated in the ‘Marwari Patty’ of Ward No.8 of the CBT area near the vicinity of the main market or ‘Burra Bazaar’ area. As per the 2011 Census, the following table shows the Religious Groups represented by their percentages at the district level:

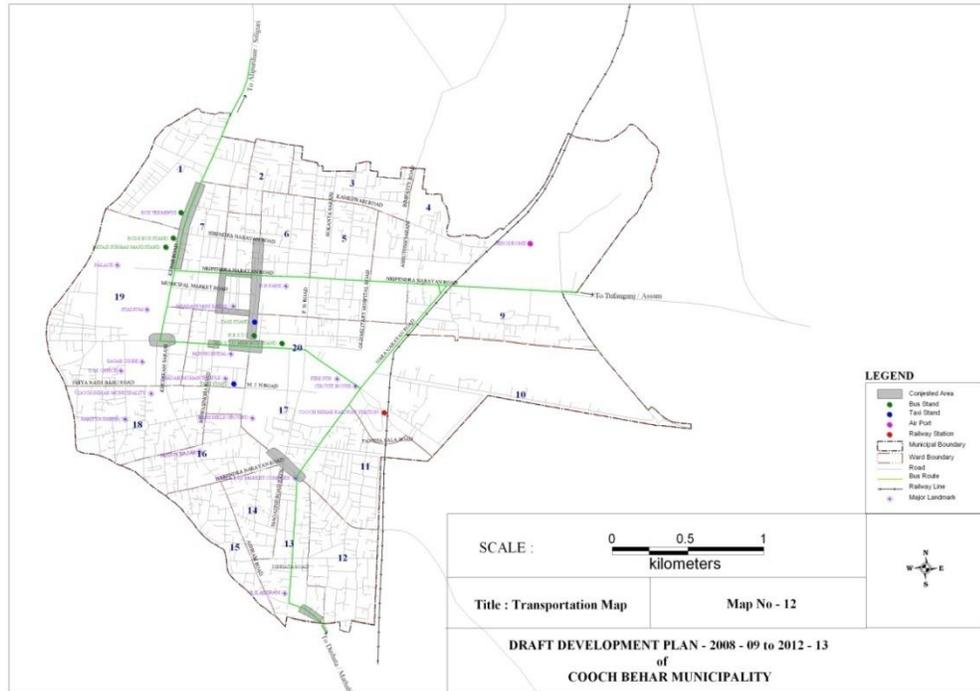
Table: 2.1 Religious Composition of Koch Bihar District, 2011

Religious Groups	%
Hindu	74.06
Muslims	25.54
Christians	0.15
Sikh	0.02
Buddhist	0.02
Jain	0.07
Others	0.01
Not Available	0.15

Source: Census Report, 2011

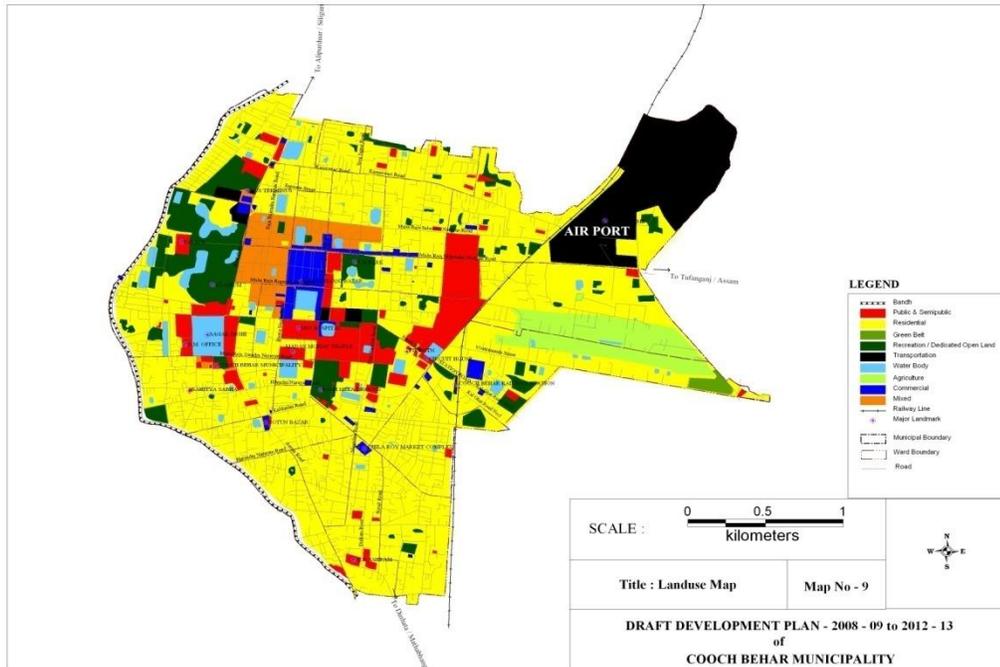
2.13.5 LAND USE: Presently, the land use patterns are being minutely investigated at the regional or micro levels rather than national level. Looking at the current Land Use Map of CBT (Map no 2.26), one finds that the road layout has a checker-board pattern, where every road meets at right angle with the other roads. This trend is still very much pronounced in the main built up area surrounded by the Maharaja S. N Road to the north, Nara Narayan Road to the east, Kalika Das Road to the south-west and the Palace itself on the west.

Transport Routes of CBT (Draft Development Plan 2008-2013 by CBM)



Map No. 2.25

Land Use Map of CBT (Draft Development Plan 2008-2013 by CBM)



Map No. 2.26

The Land Use Map of Cooch Behar Town (Map no. 2.26) brings out the following salient features in respect of its spatial distribution of different uses of land (Table: 2.2).

Table 2.2: Principal Types of Land Uses in CBT

LAND USAGE	% OF TOTAL AREA COVERED
Public and Semi Public use	6.88
Residential	53.32
Green Belt	0.31
Recreational	12.79
Transportation	7.72
Water Bodies	2.41
Agriculture	4.58
Commercial	3.26
Mixed use	3.02
Other uses	5.72
TOTAL	8.29

Source: Draft Development Plan, CBM, 2008-2013

The central market (Bhawaniganj Bazaar) is located almost at the central part of the town with an outlier in the south, the central square is bounded by four principal roads and is almost completely built-up, having the buildings of various institutions and organizations from transport to community services.

The town lacks any large and medium size industrial complex but the small size units are extremely isolated in respect of their locations.

The Palace being located on the western part of the town has attracted the high class residences at its vicinity; while the middle class residences have developed mainly in the north. The town has a greater tendency to expand south and south-east wards which are mainly residential areas.

The principal types of land uses of CBT are as follows:

1. Residential use
2. Public and semi-public uses
3. Recreational purpose
4. Transportation
5. Commercial centres

6. Water body etc.

Other type of land use includes Agriculture, Green Belt and miscellaneous purposes have also been observed in a small scale in this town.

2.13.6 THE POPULAR CULTURE AND THE LIVELIHOOD PATTERN: The cultural fabric results as an outcome of the evolution process defining human civilization. The cultural heritage of Koch Bihar also has a long historical antecedence. The cultural characteristics are prominent, unique and diversified in nature. Far flung from the rest of Bengal Koch Bihar occupies the remotest north eastern corner of the state of West Bengal. Cultural overlapping is inevitable and is evident as it is juxtaposed to Assam, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Koch Bihar may be ascribed as the melting pot of culture where different racial traits and cultural groups have intermingled. Thus, the cultural setting of Koch Bihar is an admixture of different cultural elements which have resulted in a cultural diffusion.

Many eminent scholars opine that Koch Bihar also provided a strong foundation to the Bengali Literature. This region was even settled prior to 3000 years while the southern part of Bengal (i.e. the Deltaic Bengal and the Rarh Bengal) was undergoing its geologic construction. The elements of ancient verbal literature belonging to the Bengali Folk Culture lay its origin in this region. For instance, mention may be made of the ‘Songs of Maynamati’ (*Maynamatir Gaan*), the ‘Songs of Gorakshanath’ (*Gorakshanather Gaan*) and even the ‘*Charjyapads*’. The folk songs like ‘Bhawaiya’; songs related to the customs and rituals (especially the marriage songs) like the ‘Jari’ and ‘Heto’ all stories of the livelihood patterns of the local people of Koch Bihar. The cultural elements portray the vivid socio-economic scenario. The folk plays like the ‘Ditora’, ‘Kushan’, ‘Manasha-Bishahari’ deserves special mention which attracts peoples’ attention even today.

Besides this, Bengali Literature also received a royal patronage from the Narayani Dynasty. The royal support helped the development of literary culture with its own identity. The kings were interested in the study of regional dialect (the Rajbangshi language). The ‘*Kirat Parva*’ is the oldest hand written verse found in Koch Bihar. During the reign of Maharaja Pranarayan, the Royal Poet named ‘Srinath Brahman’ translated the great epic of *Mahabharata*. The pious Shankar Deva (1543- 1568) illuminated the ‘Raj Sabha’ during Maharaja Naranarayan’s reign. Jayanath Munsri wrote ‘*Rajopakhyan*’ in Bengali in 1846(Dey, Dilip Kumar 2007, 33). The

ancient literature of Koch Bihar was translational in character. Lord Shiva was worshipped almost everywhere in Koch Bihar. The Narayani dynasty (especially Biswasingha) established Hinduism as the state religion. Generally, the tribal and the racial groups like the Koches, rabhas, Meches, Garos etc residing here have transformed their deities to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati as an effect of 'Brahmanization'. The Royal Poet Radhakrishna Das Bairagi wrote '*Goshani Mangal Kavya*' to describe the grace of Goddess Gosani (the Royal deity) during the rule of Maharaja Harendranarayan.

The songs, plays, fables, folk tales, verses etc are also in practice; along with Lord Shiva, Goddesses *Shitala* and *Chandi*, local popular deities like *Hudum*, *Shaitol*, *Mashan* etc are also worshipped in the same platform in the rural environs of Koch Bihar. Though urbanization process is inevitable yet these are important artifacts to the cultural milieu of Koch Bihar.

2.13.6.1 DIETARY HABITS: Bengali culinary traits are commonly found here. The staple food of the local people is 'Rice'. The delicacies like green leafy vegetables (Shak), aurum (Kochu), dried fish (Suntki), Boroli fish (sp. *Aspidoparia morar* – a riverine small fish) are consumed almost everywhere. The local people usually have rice-meal thrice daily. The consumption of other food as breakfast or evening snacks is not so popular. But drinking of tea is very common. People greet guests with tea, beetel leaves and beetel nuts (*Gua/ Supari*). Chewing of beetel leaf and beetel nut is very popular among all age groups.

2.13.6.2 LOCAL CUSTOMS AND FAIRS: Although modernization has set in, yet local customs are seen prominently during the household occasions like Marriage, Initiation (first rice-eating), and *Shraddha* (last rites) ceremonies.

Like the rest of Bengal, *Durga Puja* is the most important festival observed here. *Bara Devi*, the Royal Goddess equivalent to Goddess *Durga* is worshipped during the *Navaratri* at the Devibari Temple. Lord Krishna is named as the '*Madan Mohan*' who is the Royal Deity as well is also worshipped. The festivals like Dol Yatra, Rath Yatra, Janmashtami, Rash Yatra etc are also observed centering *Madan Mohan* in his honour. Apart from this the holy dip at rivers Gadadhar, Sankosh, Kaljani and even Brahmaputra at Dhubri (Assam) during the eighth auspicious day of 'Chaitra' - the last month of the Bengali Calendar, is also very popular.

Among the fairs, 'Rash Mela' is most worth mentioning. It has been celebrated throughout more than 200 years. It was first patronized by Maharaja Harendranarayan in 1812. He had built a

palace at Bhetaguri (near Dindata) since his palace got dilapidated. He went into the palace on the auspicious day of 'Rash Purnima' and he was accompanied by priests and businessmen whose assemblage took the configuration of a fair (Dey, Dilip Kumar. 2007: 199). This is now being named as 'Rash Mela' and presently is held in and around the Madan Mohan Temple and the Rash Mela Ground in the Koch Bihar Town.

Other than this '*Huzur Saheber Mela*' – a fair of the Mohammadans usually held every year at Haldibari on the fifth and sixth day of the Bengali month of '*Falgun*' to commemorate the demise of the Hazrat Moulana Shahsufi Ekramul Hoque. The 'Madhupur Mela' held during the fifth day of the month of the '*Magha*' of the Bengali Calendar is an example of Assamese culture. Besides these mention may be made of *Shivaratri mela* at Baneshwar.

2.14 CONCLUSION: Koch Bihar is unique as far as its location, history, and culture is concerned. Geographically, its location is very significant. It lies entirely in the Duars region at the foot hills of the Eastern Himalayas. Being located in the eastern margin of the sub-continent, it receives huge amount of rainfall next to Cherapunji. Several mighty rivers traverse through this region with conspicuous characteristics. Phenomenon like flash flood and shifting river courses are very common. Since most of the rivers debouch from their mountain course to the plains, they cannot control their flow with the abrupt change in the gradient and therefore give rise to flash floods. The climate over here (though gradually getting modified owing to the global warming) is also very striking with three distinct seasons: the dry summer, the monsoons with torrential rains and the severe winter. Climatic extremity during summer and winter months may be attributed to continentality.

Koch Bihar belonged to the 'Ratnapitha' of ancient Kamrupa Kingdom (Dey, Dilip Kumar. 2007: 27) according to the mythological and proto-historical accounts. It has a long and complex historical lineage whereby gradually the Narayani Dynasty (the Kochs) got established who ruled for about 450 years. Internal politics of the royal family provoked by Bhutiya and Mughal interference resulted into skirmishes, assassination and gradual deterioration. Meanwhile, the social revivalism ushered in development and annulled the initiation of a new era by the mid 19th Century. The educated and enlightened royal family supported modernization and took interest

in designing the socio-cultural field. After independence, the feudatory princely state of Koch Bihar merged to the dominion of India.

The geographical and the historical uniqueness have contributed to the cultural characteristics of this area. Though this place was inhabited long back, but most of the present population has migrated from Bangladesh during the freedom struggle and partition. As evident from the current statistics, about 50% of the district's population belongs to the Scheduled Caste category. Indeed, the Rajbangshis form the majority of the population. The people of Koch Bihar show individuality in their culture such as in their language (Rajbangshi, a diversion of Bengali), customs, rituals, food habits and livelihood pattern. The people of Koch Bihar are very fond of music especially the 'Bhawaiya' sung in the local Rajbangshi language. The traditional plays (Jatras), songs sung during different festivals and marriages, folklores present the socio-cultural condition and simple living of these people.

Thus, Koch Bihar has undergone metamorphosis in its culture through time. It has gradually become cosmopolitan in character especially in the urban areas. Presently, modernization has enhanced the pace of development. Being situated one-sidedly, it has formed a pocket economy but with the natural bounties and resource endowments it may soon get developed into a more prosperous region in the future. People would become more enterprising and dynamic in resource utilization.

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