

Chapter – II

A Brief profile of Koch Bihar District

2.1 Introduction

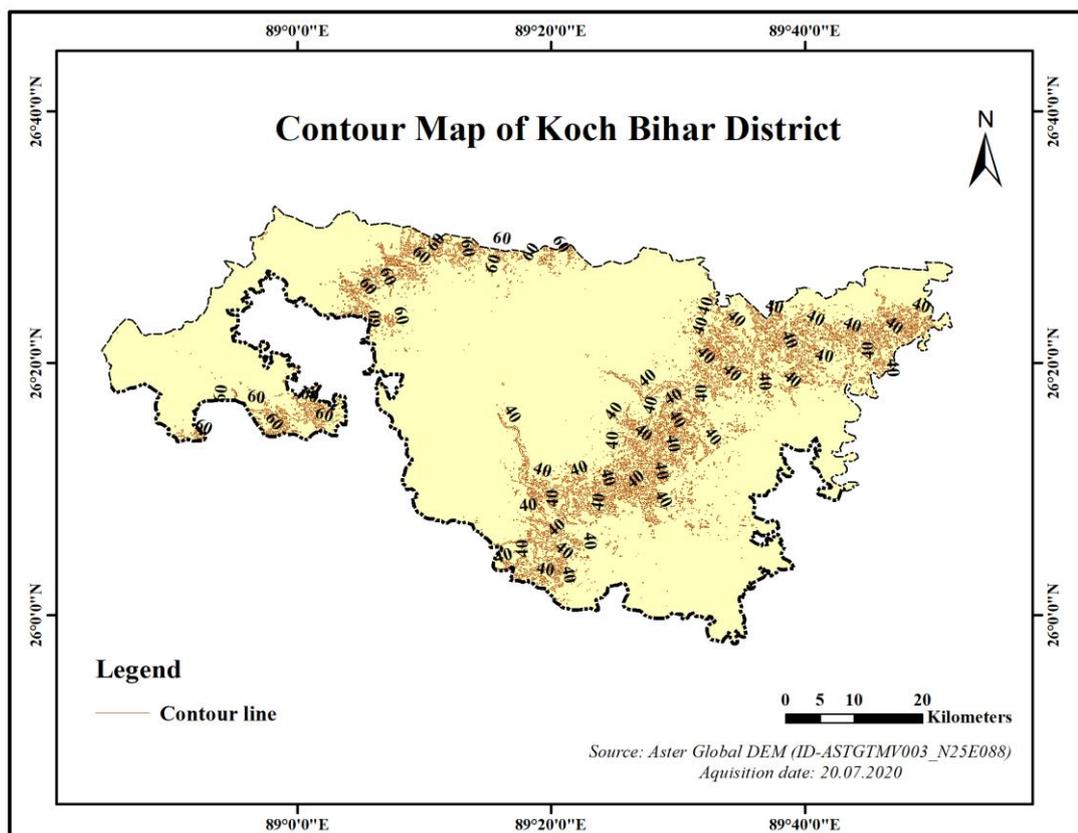
Koch Bihar (more commonly, Cooch Behar) district in the north-eastern frontier of India is included in Jalpaiguri Division of West Bengal. Koch Bihar was an Indian State ruled by the Maharaja of Koch Bihar under the British Government until the 28th August 1949 (Majumder, 1958). After the independence of India, Koch Bihar still remained a feudatory state in political relations with the government of India” (Chowdhury, 1903). Following the accession of instrumentation to the Dominion Government of India, Koch Bihar has been administered as a district of West Bengal since January 1st 1950 (Majumder, 1977). Before the Sanskritisation the region Koch Bihar was spelled as ‘Cooch Behar’. The name ‘Koch Bihar’ derived from two terms, i.e. ‘Koch’ means the ethnic group of the people who largely inhabits most of the part of this region and ‘Bihar’ or ‘Behar’ comes from Sanskrit word ‘Vihara’ means to abode or spot. Therefore Koch Bihar means the land of Koches. The district is located between the coordinates of 25°57’56” N to 26°32’46” N latitudes and 88°45’02” E to 89°52’00” E longitudes. It shares a common boundary with three neighbouring states i.e. Assam in the east, Alipurduar in the north, Jalpaiguri in the west and one neighbouring country Bangladesh in the south.

2.2 Physical Background

The physical background of an area is very important not only to understand the physical aspects of that area but it helps to understand the socio-economic aspects of that area too as the socio-economic activities are related to the physical aspects. The livelihood of the people like their occupation, food habits, housing characteristics, clothing’s, culture, ritual everything is related to the physical aspect of that region. Geographically the district is a part of the Himalayan Terai region of North Bengal. The outline of the district is irregular. Mainly in the Southern part where it shares a common boundary of Rangpur district of Bangladesh and in the western part with the Jalpaiguri district. Koch Bihar is a flat alluvial region with a slight south-eastern slope along which the main rivers are flowing. Most of the highland areas and the low lying area of the district have located in Sitalkuchi and Dinhat region respectively” (DL & LRO, Koch Bihar, 2011). The district is formed due to the depositional work of various rivers of North Bengal such as the Torsa, the Tista, the Raidak, the Sankosh, the Kaljani, and the Jaldhaka-Mansai etc. and also part of Gangetic

plain. There is lots of Jhills and bills, Oxbow lakes, pond, wetlands and marshy lands found in the district. The low land and flood plain are only few inches above the water level, so some time these are inundated by the first showers of monsoon and stay water logged for more than six months. The district received high amount of rainfall. Alluvial lands are highly suitable for cultivation. It produced valuable crops like rice, wheat, pulses and mustard etc. as well as lots of vegetables.

2.2.1 Relief



Map 2.1 Contour map of Koch Bihar District

From the geographical point of view, the district belongs to the alluvial tract of North Bengal. Maximum altitude of the region is 75 meter, and the minimum is 28 meter; while the relative height is 47 meter (Fig. 2.1). Large part of the district is cultivated and is covered with green field studded with bamboo clumps and orchards. There is no forest worth mention, but tracts of land consisting mostly of heavy grass and shrubs are seen at places mostly along the interfluves of the major rivers (Majumder, 1977).

The relief shows overview about the district. It indicates that the north-western part of the district is slightly higher altitude than the south-eastern part, which reflects on the people's habitations also. In the south-eastern part large numbers of wetlands, which are

also called bills or Jhills locally have been observed and this is the reason that majority of Jhalomalo and Jaliakaibartta peoples live in this area. The south-eastern part of the district consist mainly Tufanganj I, Tufanganj II, Dinhata I&II and 40.00 percent of the Jhalomalo people observed in Dinhata II, 48.00 percent Jhalomalo found in Tufanganj I sub division. On the other hand 48.00 percent of Jaliakaibartta community people reside in this area, as their main occupation is fishing. Again the Namasudra and Rajbanshi community mainly concentrated in the central to north-western part of the district as their main occupation is cultivation. So the relief shows a relation with the distribution of Schedule Caste population in the District.

2.2.2 Climate

Table 2.1 Rainfall and Temperature of Koch Bihar District

Year	Annual rainfall (mm)	Maximum Temp. (°C)	Minimum Temp. (°C)
2007	2537	37	5
2008	3057	36	7
2009	2438	37	7
2010	3673	37	7
2011	2669	37	5

Source: District Statistical Handbook, 2011.

Climate also played a very important role in the human life. Depend on climate their housing characteristics, food production, food habits, life style is changed. As the climate of the district is suitable for human settlements as suitable for agriculture which is reflects on the people in this region. 70.00 percent of the district population is depending on agriculture. Along with various vegetables rice, wheat, maize etc. are the main agricultural product of the district which is entirely based on the climate and due to this the occupation of the Schedule Caste people reflect that. The climate of the district is a crucial physical factor which determines the nature and extent of agricultural conditions. There is a notable extremity in temperature and rainfall. The climate of the district as a whole is characterized by tropical monsoon. The climate of Koch Bihar is damp and furious, but not as hot as the western part of West Bengal mainly like Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia districts. It received annual rainfall 300 to 400 cm and average temperature of the district is 27° C. The maximum and minimum temperature of the district are on an average 25° to 35°C in summer and 5°C to 10°C in winter. The district experience mainly 3 types of season, winter summer and monsoon. It experience rainy season in the month of July to

September, and during this time it accompanied Thunder Lightning and rain. October to February the district experience winter season and during this time it experienced fog, cyclone, dew, smog etc. March to May the district experienced summer condition, hot weather and sometimes it faced 'Kalboishaki' the cyclone originated in the Bay of Bengal.

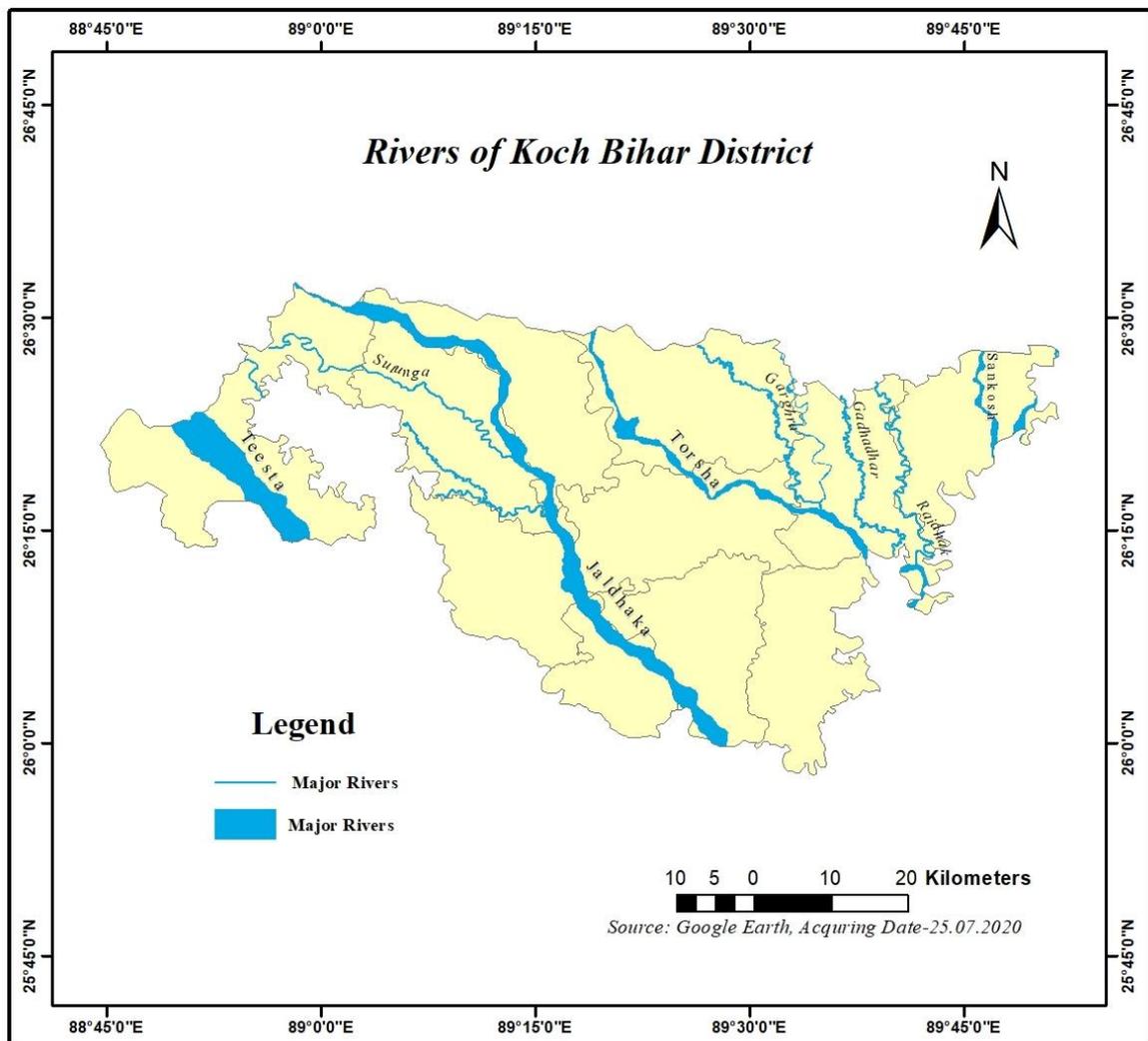
2.2.3 Soil

Soil is the main component on which the cultivation could practices as the majority of the people in the district are Schedule Caste and among them, majority (90.00 percent) engaged in farming activities. So to understand the Soil characteristic is the most important, which also reflects on the distribution of population. The soil of the region is formed by alluvial deposits which is acidic in nature. "It is fragile loam to sandy loam ranging in depth from 0.15 to 1 metre. Except for some village (especially in the banks of Karatoya) clay lands are rare" (Chowdhury, 1903). The soil is generally acidic in nature, because of heavy rainfall. The moisture holding capacity of the soil is very low. Silt-loam and sandy-loam soil are found in the northern portion of the district. The sandy-silt soil is formed along the flood plain of the major rivers. Older alluvium soil is found far away from river courses. Newer alluvium soil is found near the river. Every year this newer alluvium is deposited over the low-lying areas. "The level of nitrogen is low in the soil while potassium and phosphorus levels are medium. Deficiency of zinc, calcium, magnesium and sulphur are quite high" (DL& LRO Report, Koch Bihar, 2011). Sandy-loam soil is found in Mekhliganj, Haldibari, Mathabhanga-I and Sitai Block. Loam Soil is found in Mathabhanga-I, Koch Bihar-I, Koch Bihar-II, Dinjata-II, and Dinjata-I. In Koch Bihar District about 53.4 per cent area has been covered with deep fine loamy soil.

2.2.4 Rivers

The district has a network of perennial rivers and ephemeral streams. The rivers in Koch Bihar mostly flow along a course from north-west to south-east. The major rivers are originated in the Himalayas and entered the district from the western Duars of the district Jalpaiguri and after flowing through the district, they enter the Rangpur district of Bangladesh to discharge into the Bramhaputra River. Numerous numbers of rivers are running through the Koch Bihar district. But the river Torsa is main life line of the district. The major rivers of the districts are Torsa, Jaldhaka, Kaljani, Gadhdian, Sankosh, Marshai, Gargharia etc. all the rivers are tributaries and distributaries of the Bramhaputra River Basin. The banks are abrupt, giving proof of widely nature of the streams and the beds are

sandy. One of the main characteristics of rivers in Koch Bihar District is meandering channels, lots of ox-bow lakes and cut off meander is also found.



Map 2.2 Drainage Map of Koch Bihar District

2.2.5. Flora and Fauna

The flora of the district is numerous and too varied in the species. Its alluvial soil help to grow all type of plants, crops, vegetables and flowers and contribute a lot to the richness of its natural objects. The Bamboo is the most predominant in this region which grows abundantly all over the district. Brush and Brushwood are plentiful but there is no forest formed in the district. Only some small patches of land containing sal trees are found in few places. Coconut- *Narikel*, Date- *khejur*, Bamboos- *bansh*, Plantation of Banana- *Biche kala* or *athiei kala*, *Jhama kala*, *Chini-champa* or *Champa Kala* etc. are found in the

district. The trees like *Bat*, *Ashwatha* or *peepul of makur* or *parur*, *dumer* or *jagnadumur*, and the timber trees like *sal*, *shishu*, teak etc. are observed in the district.

Except the areas near Rasikbil and Patlakhawa there are no large vegetation is found in the district. This is the reason of variations of forest animals, birds or flowers in the district. In the restricted areas of forests, multiple wild species can be found which includes Cheetal, Barking Deer, Sambhar, Hog Deer, Indian Bison (Gaur), Civet Cat, Jungle Cat, Leopard Cat, Jackal, Mongoose, Wild Pig, Hog Badger, Fox, Wild Dog, Pangolin, Hispid Hare, Porcupines etc. Turtles and small Tortoises are found in the riverine areas and waterbodies beside Gosap, small Crocodiles, Frogs and Snakes. Birds like Crow, Raven, Parrots, Cuckoo, Bulbul, Parakeets, Wood-pecker, Kingfisher, Sparrow, Mayna etc. are found all through the district (Census, 2011).

2.3. Cultural background

2.3.1 Language

As per the Census concept the language is a group of mother tongues. Mother tongue means the language which is spoken by the person's mother to the person in the childhood. In the case of infants and deaf mutes, the language usually spoken by the mother is considered as mother tongue. It is not necessary that the language spoken as mother tongue should have a script. In Koch Bihar most of the people speaks Rajbanshi and Bengali, as their mother tongue and a very few number of people speaks in Hindi, and Nepali.

2.3.2. Religion

It is observed that during 2011 Census; out of total district population of 2819086 majority of the population belong to Hindu community with a population share of 74.1% percent followed by Muslims (25.5 percent). It is also observed that the percentage of Hindu population of the district has an increasing trend up to 1981 and then followed decreasing trend up to the last Census i.e. 2011. On the other hand, the Muslim population has a decreasing trend up to 1981 and then followed increasing trend from 23.3 percent in 1991 to 25.5 percent in 2011 Census. As per Census 2011, only 0.1 per cent population belongs to Jains and Christian's community each.

2.3.3 Caste Composition

One of the important information collected in every decennial Census is the population statistics on SC and ST. The list containing the name of SC and ST varies from State to State. The below table shows the distribution of SC and ST population of Koch Bihar

district from 1991 to 2011. The decadal variation of population with respect to the previous decade is shown in the parenthesis.

Table 2.2 Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes population in Koch Bihar District.

Particulars	Census Years					
	1991		2001		2011	
Population	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST
Total	1123719	13275	1242374	14246	1414336	18125
Growth rate (%)	27.2	31.4	10.6	7.3	13.8	27.2
Rural	1091093	12662	1197449	13136	1350657	16872
Growth rate (%)	25.8	31	9.7	3.7	12.8	28.4
Urban	32626	613	44925	1110	63679	1253
Growth rate (%)	109.4	39.6	37.7	81.1	41.7	12.9

Source: Census of India, 2011

It is observed from the above Table that although the absolute population figure for Scheduled Castes population is gradually increasing over the decades, the decadal growth rate of Scheduled Castes population has followed a decreasing trend since the 1991-2001. This trend is followed for rural and urban areas also where as marginal increment has been noticed 2011 Census. Although the decadal growth rate of urban area follows a decreasing trend with an exception during the decade 1981-1991 when the growth rate of 109.4 which was the highest growth in Scheduled Castes population.

2.3.4 Festival and Rituals

The district celebrates all kind of festival mainly Durga Puja, Pohela Boishak, Akshaytritiya, Rath Jatra, Rash Mela, Dolpurnima, Christmas and Eid. Among all the festival Rash Mela is the significant one. It is the one of the biggest mela in the north-eastern India as the most of the people of the district is belongs from the Scheduled Caste community. In the district people of Scheduled Caste communities are mainly follow Saivism and Vaisnavism but although every community follow their own rituals. The Rajbanshi community mainly worship the Nature as their God and Goddess. They celebrate their festivals throughout the year according to their calendar like Dham puja in the month of March and April (Chitar mas) hope for good production of paddy and vegetables, Dhormo puja in month of April and May (Boisakh mas) for the protection and safety for the surrounding environment, and Naya Khoi or Nabanna in the month of November and December (Aghoran), Pushuna or Poush Parban in the month of December and January (Poush mas) etc. these are the main festival not only the Rajbanshi but other Scheduled Caste community like Namasudra, Jaliakaibartta, Jhalomalo they also follow the same festival like Nabanna, Poush Parban etc.(Roy, 2020).

2.4 Administrative Setup of Koch Bihar

The table below shows the administrative setup of Koch Bihar District. The district has 5 Sub-Division 11 Police Stations, 12 Community Development Blocks, 12 Panchayat Sanity's, 128 Gram Panchayat, 1202 Mouzas, 1132 Inhabited Villages, 6 Municipalities and 12 Census town as per 2011 census.

Table 2.3 Administrative Over view of Koch Bihar district

Sub-Division	Police Station	Dev.Block/ Municipality(M)	Panchayat Samity	Gram Panchayat	Mouzas 2001	Inhabited Villages -2011	Municipality	Census Town 2011	Total
Cooch Behar Sadar	Cooch Behar (Kotwali)	Cooch Behar-I	1	15	144	142	-	3	3
		Cooch Behar (M)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
		Cooch Behar-II	1	13	115	111	-	5	5
	Total		2	28	259	253	1	8	9
Dinhata	Dinhata	Dinhata-I	1	16	130	128	-	1	1
		Dinhata (M)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
		Dinhata-II	1	12	119	119	-	-	-
		Sitai	1	5	53	53	-	-	-
	Total		3	33	302	300	1	1	2
Mathabhanga	Mathabha nga	Mathabhanga-I	1	10	102	101	-	-	-
		Mathabhanga (M)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
	Ghoksada nga	Mathabhanga-II	1	10	93	92	-	-	-
		Sitalkuchi	1	8	70	67	-	-	-
	Total		3	28	265	260	1	-	1
Mekhliganj	Mekhliga nj (P) & Kuchlibar i	Mekhliganj	1	8	187	137	-	1	1
		Mekhliganj (M)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
	Haldibari	Haldibari	1	6	62	57	-	-	-
		Haldibari (M)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
	Total		2	14	249	194	2	1	3
Tufanganj	Tufanganj	Tufanganj-I	1	14	73	72	-	1	1
		Tufanganj (M)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
	Bakshirha t	Tufanganj-II	1	11	54	53	-	1	1
	Total		2	25	127	125	1	2	3
District Total	Police Stations : 11	Dev. Blocks : 12 Municipalities : 6	12	128	120 2	1132	6	12	18

Source: Koch Bihar District Profile, 2011

2.5 Demography

2.5.1 Population

According to 2011 Census, total population of the district is 2819086 of which 2529652 resides in rural areas and 289434 in urban areas. The distribution of population of the district the last three decades has been shown in the figure 2.1. It can be observed from the figure that the total population of the district has increased continuously from 1991 to 2011. The percentage of rural population has increased from 92.2 in 1991 to 89.7 in 2011 which decreased. Alternatively percentage of urban population has increased from 7.8 in 1991 to 10.3 in 2011.

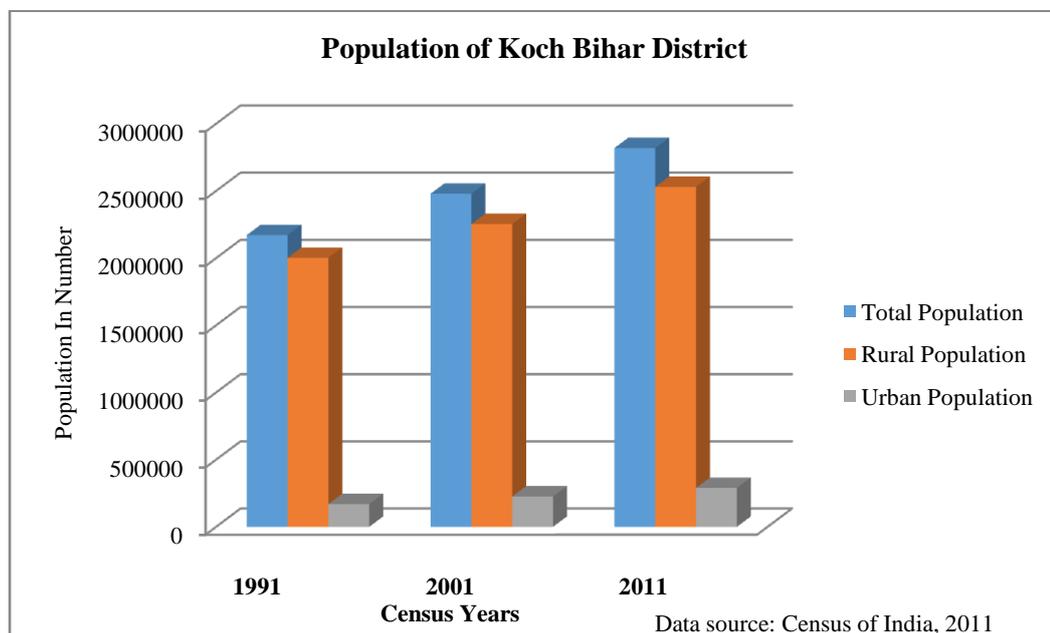


Figure 2.1 Population of Koch Bihar District

2.5.2 Decadal growth

The decadal growth rate is the key indicators of population dynamics of a district as well as a country. In the following figure 2.1 the decadal growth rate of Koch Bihar district can be observed. It is observed from the above figure that the decadal growth rate of population of district has followed a decreasing trend from 22.5 percent during 1981-91 to 13.7 percent in 2001-2011 and rural decadal growth rate has also followed a similar trend. The urban growth rate has followed decreasing trend i.e. from 38.6 percent in 1981-91 to 28.3 percent in 2001-2011 although the overall population is increased day by day.

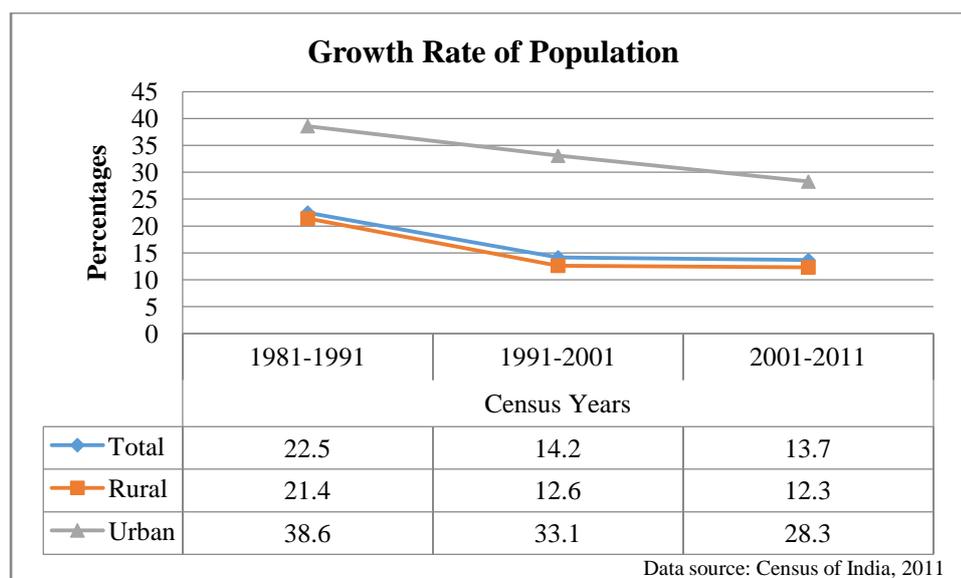


Figure 2.2 Growth rate of population in Koch Bihar district.

2.5.3 Density of Population

The Density of Population of the district from 1991 to 2011 is shown in Table 2.6 below. The below Table shows that total density of population of the district has increased from 641 per sq. km. in 1991 to 832 per sq. km. in 2011. Similarly the rural density of population has also increased from 596 per sq. km. in 1961 to 762 per sq. km. in 2011. It is also observed from the above Table that the density of urban population has followed an increasing trend up to 1991 but in 2011 Census it has decreased to 4198 per sq. km. from 5458 per sq. km in 2001 Census

Table 2.4: Rural and urban density of population in Koch Bihar District (1991-2011)

Population Density(person/sq. Km)	Census Years		
	1991	2001	2011
Total	641	732	832
Rural	596	674	762
Urban	5648	5458	4198

Source: District Census Handbook of Koch Bihar District 2011

2.5.4 Sex ratio

Sex ratio is an important demographic indicator for ascertaining the gender balance of the population and it is compiled for every Census year. The following Table 7 shows the sex ratio of the District.

Table 2.5: Sex ratio of the state and the district, 1901-2011

Census Year	West Bengal			Koch Bihar		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
1901	945	994	650	881	892	540
1911	925	982	614	873	885	529
1921	905	971	591	877	888	875
1931	890	961	578	886	896	621
1941	852	945	559	879	893	608
1951	865	939	660	855	867	713
1961	878	943	701	890	899	744
1971	891	942	751	916	923	837
1981	911	947	819	935	936	927
1991	917	940	858	935	933	951
2001	934	950	893	949	947	964
2011	950	953	944	942	939	974

Source: District Census Handbook of Koch Bihar District 2011

It is observed from the table that the sex ratio of the district in 2011 Census is 942 of which rural is 939 and urban is higher than that of total and rural with 974. Total sex ratio of the district depicts an increasing trend up to 2001 except 1981 and 1991 where it remained same and in 2011 census it has decreased. The rural sex ratio also followed an increasing trend except 1991 and 2011 where it has decreased compared to that of the previous one whereas the urban sex ratio always followed an increasing trend up to 2011 Census.

2.5.5 Literacy

Literacy rate of the population is described as the percentage of literates in the age group of seven years and above. Table 8 shows the sex-wise comparative literacy trend for the State and the district.

Table 2.6 Literacy rate of Koch Bihar District (1991-2011)

Literacy Rate	Census Years								
	1991			2001			2011		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
Total	45.8	57.4	33.3	66.3	75.9	56.1	73.2	79.4	66.5
Rural	42.9	55.1	29.7	64.3	74.4	53.6	88.4	91.6	85.6
Urban	77.2	82.6	71.6	74.8	80.7	68.5	88.7	91.8	85.5

Source: Census of India, 2011.

It can be seen from the above Table that in every census year male literacy rate remained higher than that female literacy rate of district Koch Bihar from 1991 to 2011 in terms of both the urban and rural population. Although the literacy rate increased in a very

faster rate but disparity is exist in the society between the male and female and rich and poor.

2.6 Land Use

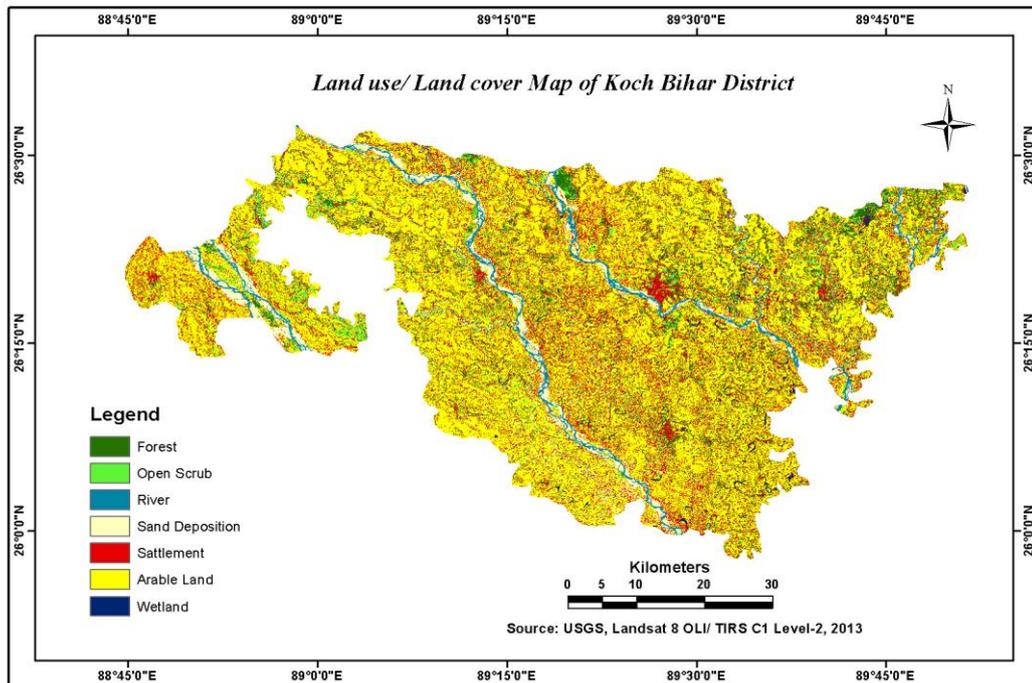
Land use and mapping of resources is one of the most important links to identify the dynamics of population growth and its sustainability. The land topography of Koch Bihar depicts generally flat plain, with slight South and South Eastern slope. Thus, the North-West of the district has marginally higher elevation than South and South-East portion.

Table 2.7: Land use of Koch Bihar District

Year	Forest Area	Area under non-agricultural use	Barren and Uncultivable land	Permanent Land and grazing land	under misc. tree groves	Cultivable waste land	Fallow land other than current fallow	Current fallow	Net sown area
2006-07	4.26	66.19	1.35	0.14	8.75	0.83	0.89	0.89	248.27
2007-08	4.26	66.63	2.3	0.08	7.71	0.96	0.04	1.45	248.14
2008-09	4.26	67.85	1.1	0.01	5.84	0.04	0.01	0.5	251.96
2009-10	4.26	68.08	0.85	0.04	5.63	0.12	0.04	1.2	251.36
2010-11	4.26	69.43	0.26	0.01	5.8	0.29	0.06	0.86	250.61

Source: District Census Handbook of Koch Bihar District, 2011.

Numerous Himalayan Rivers and rivulets pass through the district in South and South-East ward direction. The landmass of Koch Bihar being a recent alluvial formation created by the deposition from the erosion spawned by these rivers; is loose, sandy and permeable; primarily lying in the floodplains. Many parts of the land get overflowed during monsoon making occurrence of flood a periodic concern. The details of the Land Utilisation in district Koch Bihar for last few years is given below. As revealed from the above Table, around 76 per cent of the total district landmass of 331.58 hectares is under crop cultivation (Net sown area). Forest cover in the district is very low (at 1.28 per cent only) and has remained almost static through the years. About 20 per cent of total district land has been identified as ‘Area under Non-agricultural use’. The people of Scheduled Caste communities also distributed on the basis of the land use pattern like the Rajbanshi and Namasudra people are mainly concentrated in the high fertile alluvial land as their main occupation is cultivation and the Jaliakaibartta and Jhalomalo people centred nearer to the river, wet land and water bodies as their main occupation is fishing.



Map 2.3 Land use/land cover map of Koch Bihar District

2.7 Work Participation

Work Participation Rate shows the proportion of working population to total population in an area and is computed as the percentage of total workers which include main and marginal workers to total population.

It can be seen from the Table 2.8 that total Work Participation Rate of the district was lower than that of State up to 1991 and in 2001 and 2011 Census it was higher than that of State. Both total and rural Work Participation Rate of the district maintain increasing trend from 1991.

Table 2.8 Percentage of total Workers (Main & Marginal).

Year	West Bengal			Koch Bihar		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
1991	32.2	33.2	29.6	34.9	36.3	25.9
2001	36.8	37.9	33.9	40.8	42.1	31.7
2011	38.1	38.7	36.7	41.9	42.6	37.8

Source: District Census Handbook of Koch Bihar District, 2011

Table 2.9 Percentage of Main workers.

Year	West Bengal			Koch Bihar		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1991	30.2	50.7	8	30.6	53.3	6.3
2001	28.7	47	9.1	30.4	53.3	9.5
2011	28.1	46.3	9	31.4	51.7	10

Source: District Census Handbook of Koch Bihar District, 2011

The above table 2.9 shows that the percentage of main workers to total population for Koch Bihar district in Census 2001 and 2011 are 30.4 and 31.4 respectively. For the State as a whole it was 28.7 in 2001 Census and 28.1 in 2011 Census. In the State level the figure is gradually decreasing in the last three decades (1991 to 2011) while at the district this figure increasing from 30.6 (1991) to 31.4 (2011). Gender wise distribution shows that the proportion for male main workers in the district is following increase trend up to 1971 but now it shows the decreasing trend after 1991 up to 2011 Census. Although the female worker is increasing but most of them engaged in the marginal work and the percentage is very less.

2.8 Conclusion

The study of physical and cultural aspects of a region is very important to understand the present scenario of that region in terms of its anthropogenic characteristics, economic development, social and environmental awareness. The present study deals with the brief profile of the Koch Bihar District, which includes both physical (like relief, climate, soil, rivers, flora & fauna) and Cultural aspects (like religion, caste composition, demography, and land use and work participation). In the chapter the researcher has describe how the Scheduled Caste population is varies within the district with the variation of the relief and land use change. The Rajbanshi and Namasudra communities are mainly concentrated in the North West part as the altitude slight higher and land is more fertile on the other hand the Jaliakaibartta and Jhalomalo in the south eastern part as the wet land and water body and rivers are more in that part and their main occupation is fishing. So it shows that the Scheduled Caste population has a relation with the physical aspect of the region.

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