

INTRODUCTION

The western part of the Brahmaputra valley in former times was included in the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa and from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries A.D. the whole tract upto the Karatoya¹ seems still, as a rule, to have formed a single kingdom, but the name had been changed from Kāmarūpa to Kāmata.² The Muhammedan historians, as observed by Gait,³ sometimes speak as if the terms Kāmarūpa and Kāmata were synonymous and the same country and sometimes as two different territories.⁴ The connected account of the Kāmata-Koch territory may, however, be obtained since the time of the destruction of the Khyan (Khen) dynasty by Hussain Shāh, ruler of Gauḍa, who claimed himself as 'Conqueror of Kāmaru, Kāmata, Jājnagar and Odisa' on his coins issued in 899, 915 and 919 Hijri (corresponding to 1493, 1509 and 1513 A.D.)⁵ and the establishment of a new dynasty at Kāmata-pura under Viśvasiṃha, a Hinduised Koch Chieftain shortly afterwards (c 1530 A.D.)⁶. The dynasty was known as Nārāyaṇī following assumption of the title Nārāyaṇa by the rulers since the time of Naranārāyaṇa, the son and successor of Viśvasiṃha. Naranārāyaṇa who was credited to have kept in tact the kingdom of his father, is said to have made Raghudeva, his nephew the governor of a portion of his kingdom extending from the Saṅkoṣa to the Baḍnadi in 1581. Raghudeva assumed the title Kāmarūpesvara⁷

in 1583 A.D. during the reign of Naranārāyaṇa, but after his death he (Raghudeva) declared independence and struck coins in 1510 Śaka i.e. 1588 A.D.⁸ The successors of Naranārāyaṇa, however, (i.e. the main line) to the western part of the undivided Kāmata Kingdom with the Saṅkoṣa as its eastern boundary and Koch Bihar as its nucleus region. We have confined our study to the history of the dynasty established by Viśvasimha whose successors were known as Nārāyaṇī kings and who continued to rule to the east of the Saṅkoṣa river till the conclusion of the Anglo-Koch Treaty in 1773 A.D. Since then the rulers of Koch Bihar attained the status of native rulers of British India.

The Koch territories to the west of the Saṅkoṣa river appears to much bigger in area than the native state of Koch Bihar⁹ (i.e. Cooch Behar) which lies between 25°57'40" and 26°32'20" N and 89°47'40" and 89°54'35" E.

The extension of the Kingdom of Naranārāyaṇa, as suggested by H.N.Chowdhury¹⁰ on basis of the Vaiśāvalī seems to have been exaggerated. Most of the conquests attributed to Naranārāyaṇa, however, were no better than plundering raids. The testimony of Abul Fazl, as also held by S.N.Bhattacharyya, is conclusive in respect of the territorial limits of Koch Bihar 'on the east is the river Brahmaputra, on the north is lower Tibet and Assam, on the south is Ghoraghat and on the west is Tirhut.'¹¹ The boundaries of Koch Bihar as given in the Baharistān

generally tally with that derived from the Akbarnāmah. Jaipur (Joykong of Renell's Map No.5; about 25 miles north of the new town of Koch Bihar, was possibly the north-eastern frontier fort of Koch Bihar at this time.¹² Stephen Casella (1626-27) mentions 'Reinate' (Rāngānāti Joygaon, in western Duar 20 miles north-west of the modern town of Alipurduar) was the northernmost Limit of the Koch territory during Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa's time. On the south the regions of Bhitaband and Bahirband which were included in the Koch Kingdom under Naranārāyaṇa were seized by the Mughals in the initial stage¹³ and Sarkar Chhoraghat became an Imperial frontier post. To the east the Sankosa was the traditional frontier of the Koch Kingdom. The Baharistan¹⁴ refers to the Khontaghat pargana as included in Parīksitnārāyaṇa's realm, whereas the Fathiyā¹⁵ makes Khontaghat as the eastern boundary of Koch Bihar. On the west the boundary does not appear to be well marked. Abul Fasl rather vaguely says that Firhut was the western limit. From the Fathiyā¹⁶ we learn that Patganw (Patgong, about 20 miles to the west of the New town of Koch Bihar vide Renell's Map No.5) was the western frontier of king Prānanārāyaṇa's domain.

It is said that physiography moulds the geographic base for human activities and settlements. The geographic personality of a region is erected over the base. From a geographical point of view the kingdom of Kāmatā may be divided into two sharply defined Zones - the Brahmaputra valley, and the territory lying to the west of it and reaching upto the Karatoya. The general topography and

physical features of the former region which may be said to begin east of the confluence of the Sankosa with the Brahmaputra which became the kingdom of Kamarupesvara Raghudevanarayana since 1510 Saka as noticed earlier. It is almost of triangular shape, with territories centering round Sadiya as the apex, and those bordering on the Garo and the Khasia Hills on the south and the South-west as the base. Regarding the physical features of this region, it presents 'the peculiarity of a perfect plain, studded with numerous clumps of hills rising abruptly from the general level, and surrounded by lofty mountains, and intersected in all possible directions by innumerable streams and rivulets, which, issuing from the border mountains at length empty themselves into the great channel of the Brahmaputra'. The lands having the alluvial deposits of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries are very extensive and of great fertility and elevation. The most typical of the fertile alluvial plains is the vast Kajali plain (Nowgong) which stretches for a distance of 42 kos east to west, according to the author of the Fathiyya¹⁷ which formed the territory of a powerful Bhuyan chief in whose family Sankaradeva, the Vaishnava reformer was born. Other alluvial plains are on the banks of the Badradi and the Manas and these appear to have been covered with extensive jungles during the Mughal periods.

The Manas rises in the Bhutan hills and after a winding course falls into the Brahmaputra. Jagighopa which stands near the confluence of the two streams, has always been

a place of great strategic importance. Further east of the Manās is the Bādnāī, which is famous in Persian and Assamese chronicles as making the eastern boundary of Kāmarūpa kingdom and afterwards of Mughal Kāmarūpa, and the western frontier of the Ahom State.

The territory lying to the west of the Sankosa, included the native state of Koch Bihar (or Cooch Behar), and which became the kingdom of the Nārāyanī kings (main line) since the time of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa, consists of a large well-cultivated plain of oblong shape, intersected by numerous streams. It stretches north and south, and gradually narrows down till it attains its smallest breadth between the South-west and the South-east. Its most striking feature is the general absence of hills and rising grounds, and the consequent dead level of the land. The entire tract is rather low and liable to inundation, to guard against which, extensive barriers, termed as āls, were raised in Mughal times. The Alamgirnāmah speaks of dense bamboo groves abounding in Koch Bihar very little of them being now seen except in the north-east.^{17a}

The river system of this area is an important study and besides the contemporary accounts of the Mughal period, the map left by the Dutch Governor Van den Broucke in 1660, Rennell's Bengal Atlas and the more recent maps supply us with interesting information.

In the tract west of the great basin of the

Brahmaputra the natural drainage is formed north-west to south-east. Among the prominent rivers Karatoyā, as we have already noticed, formed the westernmost boundary of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. It is shown in Van Den Broecke's map of Bengal as flowing into the Ganges. This must have been the course of the river in Mīrzā Nathan's time. But that course has undergone a great change. Before the great flood of 1737 it discharged the water of the Trisrotā (i.e. Tista) into the Ātreylī and then into the Ganges. But when after the flood the main stream of the Tista changed its course and broke away to the east, the Karatoyā became a stream of minor importance.¹⁸

Of the other rivers mentioned in the Alamgirnamah one appears to be, as suggested by S.N. Bhattacharyya¹⁹, the Dharlā (or Durlāh or Dhorlā), which rises in the Bhutan hills and flows through Pagong following South-easterly direction and ultimately empties into the Brahmaputra, skirting the Bhitāband parganāh in the west. It played a significant part in pre-Mughal and in Mughal times. Kāmatāpura²⁰, the famed capital of the Koch rulers; sometimes identified with Kāmarūpanagara the capital of the Pāla rulers of Kāmarūpa,²¹ stood on its west bank and its extensive ruins were observed by Hamilton in 1809. The places like Megul Hāt etc. on its bank seems to suggest that the river figured prominently also in Mughal days.

The river Sankosa (i.e. Sankosh) finds mention

in the Persian and Koch Chronicles as well as in the Assamese Buranjis. It marked the physical boundary between the State of Koch Bihar and its offshoot Kāmarūpa as also perhaps the cultural barrier between Bengal and the north-east frontier tract.²² The course of the Sankosa as given in Rennel's Atlas was not very different from what we get from Mirsa Nathan's work. It rises from the Bhutan hills flows in a southward direction forming the eastern boundary of the Koch realm and joins the Brahmaputra along the eastern border of Bhitāband. It was a stream of considerable length and volume during the Mughal Conquest of Kāmarūpa and the rebels used to take asylum in Koch Bihar after crossing the river.²³

The ^{Soil} Land of the north-east frontier region is greatly varied in character. The most of the territory to the west of the Sankosa consists of a mixed free soil and is composed of light friable loam, superimposed on a deep bed of pure sand. It is very fertile and the Alamgirnāmah and the Fathiyys both testify to the abundance and productivity of Koch Bihar state of the time. Stephen Cacella, the Jesuit traveller, who visited the Koch Capital in 1626-27 speaks about the density of population and abundance of the necessaries of life there.

The rainfall in this region being quite heavy and well-distributed, the cultivator hardly needs artificial irrigation for his crop. Occasionally during the tobacco

season in winter the accumulated water are lifted by dms for irrigating tobacco-fields. The Persian Chroniclers speak of the salubrity and mildness of the climate of Koch Bihar in unmistakable terms, this have nothing but aversion and fear for the general unhealthy air of Assam.²⁴

These are the geographical bases of the Kāmata-Koch territory with which we are concerned. The present work will primarily be a study of socio-economic, religious and administrative history of the region. Though a number of contributions have been made by the scholars to ~~the~~ some isolated problems of the region, particularly of the post-British period, very little work has so far been attempted to the period under our investigation. Among some pioneer works mention may be made here of Edward Gait's A History of Assam, Harendranarayan Chowdhury's The Koch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement, Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed's Koch Biharar Itihasa (Bengali) [Eng. Tr. as A History of Koch Behar by S.C.Ghosal] and S.N.Bhattacharyya's A History of Mughal North-Eastern Frontier Policy.

The accounts of Koch Bihar from the time of its contact with the English starting from the reign of Dhairvendranarayana onwards are well-documented, but its history prior to that date is to be gleaned ^{from} various sources. Again, these sources often conflict among themselves and are subject to

different interpretations. But inspite of these difficulties they supply us with sufficient information which help us to reconstruct the history of the region. Among these sources, the following may be mentioned : Kālikā-Purāna, Yoginī-Tantra, different Parvas of the Mahābhārata and Purānas written by the Court poets and others; various Vaṁśāvalīs like Rājavāṁśāvalī, Bṛhat Rājavāṁśāvalī, Samdranārāyaṇa's Vāṁśāvalī (or Darrang-Rāja Vāṁśāvalī), Kāmarūpa-Vāṁśāvalī, Gandharvanārāyaṇa's Vāṁśāvalī etc.; Buraṇīs like Assam Buraṇī, Ahon Buraṇī, Kāmarūpar Buraṇī, Doodhai Assam Buraṇī etc.; religious treatises like Guru Carita, Śrī Śrī Deva Dāmodara Carita, Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śaṅkaradeva āru Śrī Nādhavadeva Carita, Gurullā, Bardova Guru Carita etc.

Besides the indigenous literary sources, the accounts left by the Muslim Chroniclers and other travellers are no less important. Among these a few works may be noted here: Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri, Tuzuk-i-Jahāngiri, Mīrṣā Nathan's Bahāristān-i-Ghaybī, Ain-i-Akbari, Akbarnāma, Pādīshāhnāmah Fathiyya-i-'ibriyya, Riyāṣ-us-Salātin, etc. and accounts of the Travellers like Stephen Cacella, Ralph Fitch, Van den Broucke, etc. The earlier account left by Hsien Ts'ang may also be taken into account in this connection. In addition to the literature, land grants, a few inscriptions and last but not the least in importance, the numismatic evidence supply us with very interesting information regarding socio-economic condition of the region. The information left by the early British writers

also form an additional corrective to those we derive from other source.

With these sources proper we attempt to embark upon our study by the different aspects of the history of the Kāmata-Koch Bihar. The present work consists of five Chapters. The Introduction is followed by a Chapter connected with the problems relating to the origin of the peoples.

Next, there is a Chapter on the Historical Background which is based upon the latest information available in respect of the policies of the rulers towards the Mughal, Ahoms and Bhutan. This is followed by another on the religion and attempt has been made to discuss the various influences that were brought to bear upon the religions of the people. The next Chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the formation of the society and the avocations of the people along with some other problems like sati rites and slavery, while in the second section we discuss the educational condition of the country laying emphasis on the growth of literatures by the Court poets and the Vaisnava reformers. The last Chapter is concerned with the economic life of the people.

The Appendices contain some interesting discussion relating to the Administration of the country and the numismatic experiments of the rulers.

Lastly, we present a map of this region which will, we think, be of some help for the proper understanding^{of} the areas under our study.

Notes and References

- 1 The Karatoyā was regarded as the western boundary of Prāgyjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa from the 7th century A.D. The evidences of the Chinese Tang Shu, and the Kālikāpurāna and Yoginī Tantra may be cited in this connection.

See D.C.Sircar, Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India, 2nd ed., Delhi, 1971, pp.161 ff.

Cf. Uttarasyān Kañjagirih Karatoyā tu pascime || V.17

Tīrthasreṣṭha Dikṣu nadī purvasyān giri Kanyake |

Dakṣiṇe Brahmaputrasya lākṣyaḥ saṅgamāvadhīh |

Kāmarūpa iti khyātaḥ sarva Śatrosiv niscītaḥ || V.18

Yoginī Tantra (ed) S.S.Saraswati, Calcutta,

1385 Bengali San, Pt.II Pala XI

i.e. Kāmarūpa is bounded in the north by the Kañjagiri (probably Kanchenjunga) in Nepal, in the west by the Karatoyā, in the east by the Dikṣu river (identified with the Dikhu meeting the Brahmaputra near Sibsagar, Assam) and in the south by the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Lākṣā (i.e. the Lakhyā). The Kālikāpurāna (Ch.38, VS. 122-23) Lalitākānta (associated with the hill streams of Sandhyā) as the western boundary of Kāmarūpa. See D.C.Sircar, loc.cit. and also Cf. the legend of

Durlabhanārāyaṇa and his successors as rulers of the Kāmata Kingdom. (Gait, A History of Assam, 3rd ed. 1963,

Reprint, Calcutta, 1967, pp.44).

- 2 Cf. Kāmatā shown as 'Reino de Comatah' or 'Comatah' in some of the old Maps of Bengal e.g. that embraced in the Magni Mogolis Imperium of Balaeus's Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Amsterdam, 1650 (Hule and Burnell, new ed., W. Crooke, Hobson-Jobson, Delhi, 1969, p.239).
- 3 E. Gait, op.cit., pp.43-4.
- 4 Cf. Hobson-Jobson, 2nd ed., p.248. In the thirteenth century the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri (Tr. by Raverty, Vol.I Reprint, Delhi, 1970, pp.561-63) refers to the country of Kāmarūp (or Kāmrū), which according to the Rivāz-i-Salātin (Tr. by Abdus Salam, Delhi, Reprint, 1975, p.66 fn 3), lay to the east of the river called Namakdi identified by Blochmann with the river Karatoya (Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal, Calcutta, 1968, p.29).
- 5 H.N.Wright, Catalogue of the Coins in Indian Museum, Vol.II, p.173; A.W.Botham and R.Friel, Catalogue of the Provincial Cabinet of Coins, Assam (Supplementary), pp.148-52. The names of Kāmarūpa (Kāmrū) and Kāmatā also occur in both the Malda Madrāsā and the Kāntāduar Inscriptions of Hussain Shah. Kāmarūpasāssanāvalī (ed. P.N.Bhattacharyya), p.31 fn.
- 6 Narsanārayana, son and successor of Viśvasimha, ascended the throne on 1555 A.D. (Cf. the evidence of his coin bearing 1477 Saka) at the death of his father who reigned for 25 years

according to the testimony of the Darrang-Rāja-Vamsāvalī (Cf. Pancisa pashara prthibī pālilā tathā, V.273, N.C.Sharma ed., op.cit., Gauhati, 1973, p.55).

According to the tradition mentioned by T.H.Lewin, Candana became king in 1510 A.D. and was followed by his brother Visvasimha who ascended the throne in 1523 and reigned reigned for 31 years. An Account of the Koch Bihar State, Koch Bihar, 1876, p 11

7 M. Neog (ed.), Prāya Sasanāvalī, pp.3, 143.

8 Cf. Nārāyanī Coins of Raghudeva bearing Saka 1510 known to be the date of his accession (S.C.Ghosal, A History of Cooch Behar, Cooch Behar, 1942, p.345).

9 Ain-i-Akbari mentions Kamroop, which is called Kamroo and Kamatah falls within the domains of the Koch Kings (tr. Jarrett, Vol.II, p.117). Mīrzā Nathan, the author of the Maharistān-i-Gharbī speaks of Lakṣmīnārāyana and Parīksitnārāyana as the Rājās of Kamatā and Kamarupa respectively and sometimes uses the Koch to signify both the domains (MS. p.257a). Abdul Hāmid Lahori, the author of the Padishāhnāmah, is the first persian author who uses the terms Koch Bihar and Kamrūna to discriminate between the two Koch States - the original one established by Visvasimha and the latter carried out of it by his grandson Raghudeva. (See, Padishāhnāmah, The History of India, Vol.VII, H.M.Elliot ed, by J.Dowson, Allahabad, First Indian Edition, 1964,p.65).

The word Koch-Vihara (i. e. Koch Bihar or Cooch Behar) stands for the 'abode or land of the Koches'. It may also mean 'the land of sporting or dalliance with the Koches', and it has 'a mythical allusion to the Vihar of God Mahadeva with the Koch damsels. In fact the same God is described in mythology to be the progenitor of the present line of rulers of Cooch Behar'. H.N.Chowdhury, The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement, Cooch Behar, 1903, p.1. Hamilton observes that 'in order to distinguish this Vihar from the large territory of the same name near Patna, it has been usual to call it Koch Vihar (Cooch Beyhar - Cf. Rennell's Atlas)', sometimes also Nij Vihar. Hamilton also holds that 'the name of Kusha Vihar is doubtlessly derived, though the people now know nothing of it, from the Buddhist monastery or Vihara which existed there in ancient times, as did the province of Behar from another monastery near Gaya, or at Behar'. [Dr. Buchanan Hamilton's Account of Rangpur (Rangpara) ed. by F.Jenkins in J.A.S.B., No.73, 1838, p.15]

10 H.N.Chowdhury, op.cit., p.232.

11 Akharnama, Eng. tr., Beveridge, New Delhi, Reprint, 1973.
Vol.III, p.1067.

12 S.K.Bhuyan (ed.), Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, Vol.II, Gauhati, 1936, p.837.

13 Ibid., ^{vol.I} pp.230-31.

- 14 ^{Vol. I} Ibid., p. 242.
- 15 J.A.S.B., 1872, p. 65.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 65-66.
- 17 S.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p. 5.
- 17a J.A.S.B., 1872, p. 65.
- 18 I. Sarkar, Aspects of Historical Geography of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa from Early & Medieval Records, (Unpublished doctoral thesis of N.B.U., 1963), S.V. Karatoya, pp. 131 ff.
- 19 S.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
- 20 P.K. Bhattacharyya, Study of a few Geographical names of North Bengal etc. (Paper presented at the Inter-University Seminar on Geographical Factors in Indian History held at the A.I.H.C., Calcutta University, 1962).
- 21 P.N. Bhattacharyya, Kāmarūpa Śāṣṇavālī, p. 31.
- 22 Cf. the statement of B. Hamilton, quoted in Martin's Eastern India, Vol. II, p. 383.
- 23 S.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p. 8.
- 24 The Pāthivya (J.A.S.B., 1872, p. 66) says "Koch Bihar is wellknown for its excellent water and mildness of climate".

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