

**ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE
RAJBANSHIS OF NORTH EASTERN PART OF INDIA AND
NEPAL AND BANGLADESH DURING THE PERIOD OF
1891 TO 1979**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.) IN HISTORY UNDER THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH BENGAL**

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To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that Sri Madhab Chandra Adhikary, formerly Lecturer-in-History, Shree Agrasen Mahavidyalaya, Dalkhola, Uttar Dinajpur, now a Lecturer-in-History, University of Gour Banga, Malda has completed his Ph.D. dissertation under my supervision. The title of his dissertation is 'ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE RAJBANSHIS OF NORTHEASTERN PART OF INDIA AND NEPAL AND BANGLADESH DURING THE PERIOD OF 1891-1979'. Shri Adhikary has fulfilled the requirements of the University rules and regulations in preparing the said dissertation.

I further certify that this dissertation has not been submitted in this form to any other University or Institution previously for Ph.D. Degree. Shri Adhikary has consulted all the available documents on the issue. To the best of my knowledge, it is an original work with sufficient academic merit. In addition to this, the Bibliography section is very rich. I feel that his dissertation will receive wide acclamation from the examiners. It is fit to be adjudicated for the award of Ph.D. Degree.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABSU	-All Bodo Students Union
AIR	-ALL India Radio
AKRASU	-All Koch-Rajbanshi Students' Union
AKRYCA	-All Koch- Rajbanshi Yuba Chhatra Association
ASSU	- All Assam Students' Union
AKSU	-All Kamatapur Students Union
AIKM	- All India Kshatriya Mahasabha
BAC	- Bodos Autonomous Council
BAES	-Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics.
BBS	- The Bangiya Brahma Sabha
BDCA	- Bengal Depressed Class Association.
BLCP	-Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings.
BPHS	- The Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha
BKRKM	- Bharatiya Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Mahasabha.
BKRP	- Bharatiya Kamata Rajya Parishad
BKM	- Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha
CESR	-Centre for Ethnic Studies and Research
CPM	- Communist Party (Marxists)
CPI	- Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	- Communist Party of India (Marxists)
CPI (ML)	- Communist Party of India (Marxists Liberation).
DHAS	-Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam.
EDN.	-Edition
EPW	- Economic and Political Weekly.

GB	- Government of West Bengal.
GCPA	- Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association
GCDP	- Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Party
GKUF	- Greater Kamata United Forum
GNLFF	- Gorkha National Liberation Front.
JARS	-Journal of Assam Research Society.
JASB	–Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta
JASB	- Journal of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. Dacca
JASP	- Journal of Asiatic Society of Pakistan
JAS	- Journal of Asian Studies
JRAS	- Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London
JNEICSSR	-Journal of North-East India Council for Social Science Research.
KSS	- Kamata Sahitya Sabha
KLO	- Kamatapur Liberation Organization
KPP	- Kamatapur Peoples' Party
KRI	- Koch Rajbanshi International
KMS	- Kishan Majdoor Sangathan
KOMS	- Kishan O Majdoor Sangathan
KYS	-Kendriya Yuba Samiti.
LF	- Left Front
MBE	-Member of British Empire
MOBC	- Member of Other Backward Class.
MP	-Member of Parliament.
MUTJOS	-Mahila Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan
NEHIA	- North East India History Association
NBAC	-North Bengal Academy of Culture
NEFSSR	-North Eastern Foundation for Social Science and Research

NEGSI	-North-East Geological Survey of India, Vol.I.
NBCO	- North Bengal Cultural Organization
OBC	- Other Backward Class
ONGC	- Oil and Natural Gas Commission
OUP	- Oxford University Press
OBDL	- The Origin and Development of Bengali Language
PTC	-Plain Tribal Council.
RPT.	-Reprint
RSP	- Republic Socialist Party
SJP	-Samajbadi Jana Parishad
SC	-Scheduled Castes
ST	- Scheduled Tribes
SRC	- State Reorganization Commission
TASO	- Transferred Area of Surjapur Organization
UBRP	- Uttar Banga Rajya Parishad
UF	-United Front
UKD	- Uttar Khanda Dal
USJSS	- Uttarbanga Jana-Andolan Samannya Samity
UTJAS	- Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati O Adibasi Sangathan

PREFACE

The Rajbanshis, a huge community, have been living for ages in North- Eastern part of India particularly in North Bengal of West Bengal, present Bangladesh (Rangpur, East Dinajpur, North Western part of Mymensingh district, Northern part of Rajshahi and Bogra district), Lower Bhutan, Lower Assam, Meghalaya, Nepal (Bhadrapur, Jhapa, Morang district), Bihar (Purnea, Katihar and Kishanganj districts). They are also found in some part of Tripura. It is to be mentioned here that the Rajbanshi community of these areas is getting increasing disposed of their distinct ethnic, socio-economics, linguistic and political entities, but also suffering from rudimental identity crisis in all fields. In the present study, it would like to be highlighted the problems of Rajbanshis.

The proposed study of the "Ethno-Cultural Identity Crisis of the Rajbanshis in North Eastern part of India and Nepal and Bangladesh" is an attempt to concentrate a serious inquest on micro-history hitherto unexplored and devoid of levity. This maiden effort is undoubtedly the first of its kind to synthesize an untold chapter of Indian history during the period of 1891-1979. It is felt that case studies of regional, local or micro-level will be helpful in bringing to light many untold or unnoticed corners of the history of our recent past. The case studies at regional, local, or micro-level of our recent past have been

neglected still now. From this point of view, this proposed study has been selected regarding the identity crisis of the Rajbanshis from 1891 to 1979. The problem of the Rajbanshi community gets an impetus movement in 1891 when the Census authority of India (1891) issues an instruction to the effect that Rajbanshis is same as 'Kochi' and such Rajbanshi Kshatriyas be returned with the Koch communities as had done in the previous Census of 1872. The circular of census authority barred the people of the community to register their caste as Kshatriya. This issue created resentment to the Rajbanshi people and in many places of Rangpur, Dinajpur and other parts of Bengal, they refused to disclose their name to the census officials and field workers. Keeping this point in mind, the year 1891 has been introduced in the proposed study. In 1979, the UTJAS movement (UTTARBANGA TAPASILI JATI O ADIVASI SANGATHAN) in North Bengal demanded autonomy. They also demanded economic development of the backward classes. It is interesting to mention here that before coming in power in 1977 the Left Front parties were sympathized to the various tribes in North- Eastern part of India. However, it is ironically observed that after establishment of the Left Front Government in West Bengal, a section of those people have been opposing against this Government and claiming separation in different regions. In this perspective, the Uttarkhand movement (1969), UTJAS movement and the Kamatapuri movement have been emerged with their distinct linguistic entities and separation. On the other hand, the ethnographers, British administrators, and scholars opine that the Rajbanshis and the Koches are the same and they are known as Koch Rajbanshi in Assam. A section of Koch Rajbanshi of Assam also launched

a separation movement with the collaboration of Rajbanshi people of West Bengal. They submitted memorandums to the Prime Minister and the President of India from time to time. Under these circumstances, it turns into a challenge to the present Government of India as well as the Government of West Bengal and Assam to tackle the situation for the integration of our tradition.

The planning of this proposed study is as follows.

The chapter –I begins with the geographical landscape of North-Eastern part of India comprising the areas where the Rajbanshis are majority in number. It also deals with the river system of this area. An attempt has been made to explore the historical names of North- Bengal of present West Bengal since ancient period viz. Pragjyotishpur, Kamrup, Pundrabhumi, Louhitya, Goudabhumi or Barendra Bhumi, Kamatapur and Kamata Cooch- Behar etc.

In the second chapter, a brief profile of the environments and character of the North-Eastern Rajbanshis along with Nepal and Bangladesh has been given in order to distinguish them from the other castes and Tribes of North- Eastern part of India and abroad. The discussion shows the distribution of the Rajbanshis in different districts, and climate and ecology of the area of our study. Here the word 'Environment' is not used fair technically or lexicographical meaning rather it is used as 'Social and cultural environment'. The foothills, hills, and hillocks of western Assam and the Duars (mountain Passes) to

Bhutan of the Sub-Himalayan Bengal were closely associated with the cultural format and mode of production of the people of the region. Plenty of Jungles and forests with wild animals of large varieties are closely linked with the total animism, hunting and gathering, cattle rearing and their way of life. Therefore, the people of this region, tribal and non – tribal used to collect their tools for hunting, fishing and agricultural operation from the forests. The forests of this region were also full with reeds, bamboos, caves, timbers, natural fruits, medicinal herbs etc. There were huge areas of land for agricultural production. The inhabitants were self-sufficient. They never feel deprivation from natural resources rather than the others. With these enormous natural resources, the local people were happy and they were simple and sympathetic in nature. This chapter deals in the simple and sympathetic character of the Rajbanshis along with their habits and customs ,food grains and dress style etc.

The third chapter shows the historical and ethnological data of the Rajbanshis. It shows the discussion of different scholars, ethnographers, viz Indian writers and foreign scholars regarding both origin and ethnological aspects of the Rajbanshis.

The chapter IV shows the population of the Rajbanshis in North eastern part of India, Nepal and Bangladeshi. It also deals with the social formation of the Rajbanshis. A brief profile of the socio-economic life of the Rajbanshis has been depicted in order to situate them within the social as well as economic structure. It also deals with the demographic changes in North Bengal after independence. The discussion

shows how the social, economic, and cultural differentiation had been taking place between the Rajbanshis and the immigrant people. It has been shown that how this difference corresponded social consciousness to the Rajbanshis.

The fifth chapter deals with linguistic question and cultural resurgence. The discussion shows debate on linguistic question-whether the language of the Rajbanshis is Bengali or dialect or separate language. This question gradually leads to constitute the Rajbanshis in the cultural resurgence from time to time. The Rajbanshi intellectuals have set up a good number of cultural centers to propagate their cultural activities and published a number of periodicals, pamphlets news bulletins, magazine etc. They contacted with All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union of Assam. Thus, cultural resurgence corresponds to political consciousness among a section of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal and Assam is the subject matter of this chapter.

The sixth chapter deals with the aspect of the social movement, focusing on the major issues taken up by the Rajbanshi caste movement and its attitude toward the British, the ongoing anti-imperialist struggle, and the Muslims, who constituted around 50% of the local population of North Bengal also responds to the Rajbanshi movement. How the different sections among the Rajbanshis responded to the socio-cultural and the political agenda of the Rajbanshi social movement, called the Kshatriya movement was led by the Kshatriya Samiti and other organizations have been discussed. The Kshatriya Samiti

had launched a vigorous movement through different census operations for their legitimized higher social status i.e., 'Kshatriya status' in Hindu society. Finally, the Rajbanshis had secured their 'Kshatriya status' in 1931 Census Report. After securing 'Kshatriya status', the chief architect of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya movement, Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma very tactically placed the economic backwardness of the Rajbanshis. When the Government of India prepared a list of the socio-economic backward class called 'depressed classes' for their special protection, Rai Saheb Panchanan also launched movement to enlist in the depressed class category. The Government, however, prepared the list as Scheduled Caste instead of 'Depressed Class'. The Rajbanshis had enlisted into the list of Scheduled Caste and waited to take the reservation facilities. It was an anti-thesis for the Rajbanshis who secured the 'Kshatriya status' and took the reservation facilities of the lower caste simultaneously. The chapter also shows the success of the Kshatriya movement in North Bengal, it had no influence in Assam. Why the Koch Rajbanshi people of Assam did not support the Kshatriya movement of Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma is also a subject matter of this chapter.. The Chapter also deals with the reservation politics of the Rajbanshis. At the later phase of Kshatriya movement, the Rajbanshi Kshatriya leaders merely concentrated in reservation politics. Consequently, the Rajbanshi Kshatriya movement lost its vigorous character of its initial stage. Very few well established Rajbanshis could secure their fate taking part in election, the condition of the masses remained the same and it had lost its potentiality to the common Rajbanshis.

In the seventh chapter, it would be stressed on the genesis of socio-economic and cultural crisis of the Rajbanshi people, the predominant group of the North Eastern part of India, which led them regionalism in the form of separatist and autonomy particularly for recognition of a distinct cultural linguistic identity including regional development during post- colonial period. They founded a good number of socio-political organizations during the period under review like Uttar Khanda Dal (UKD-1969), Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati-upjati Adivasi Sangathan (UTJAS-1979) Koch-Rajbnashi International (KRI-1984), Bharatiya Kamta Rajya Parisad (BKRP-1986), Kamatapuri Peoples Party (KPP-1987), Uttarbanga Rajya Samgram Parisad (UBRSP-1996) Greater Cooch Behar Peopl Association (GCPA-1998) to fulfill their ultimate goal of separate state and autonomy.

In the eighth chapter, the caste identity of the different castes and ethnic- cum -caste identity of the Rajbanshis have been discussed. The demand of ethnic/racial based identity of the Rajbanshis is one of the arbitrary constructions, which led the Rajbanshis to the origin of identity crisis later on. It is to be mentioned here that the endeavour of the Rajbanshis to be placed higher up in the order of precedence and be recognized as Kshatriya continued until 1931 by assuming in different census. In their desire to be recorded as a member of high caste, they passed through at least four distinct social identities from one census to another i.e. from Koch to Rajbanshi (1872 A.D.) , from Rajbanshi to Bratya/ Bhangra Kshatriya (1891), from Bratya/ Bhangra Kshatriya to Rajbanshi Kshatriya (1901, 1911, 1921 A.D.) and from Rajbanshi

Kshatriya to only Kshatriya. These occasional distinctions of the Rajbanshis had been raised their identity question to the present generation of the community. Such type of identity question corresponds to the identity crisis when they searched reservation about being as 'depressed classes'. Apart from this, the Rajbanshis are treated in different categories within the same Indian constitution viz., in West Bengal they are treated as SC, in Assam they are going to move to be ST while in Bihar the Rajbanshis are treated as OBC. These different identities lead the Rajbanshis to another identity crisis is the subject matter of this chapter.

In the final chapter, the Rajbanshi ethnic assertion has been discussed with the views of the Indian and foreign scholars. The Rajbanshi ethnic assertion had been started in colonial period as a social movement. For identity formation in the changing context, it has been turned into a caste-politics in Bengal under the leadership of elite section of the community. This caste-identity formation and the caste-politics had easily capitalized the caste feelings of the Rajbanshi people and achieved its destination to establish fellow feelings in the community. However, in the last phase a crisis has been created to the Rajbanshi community. This identity crisis became acute when they claimed Kshatriyahood in one hand, while on the other to enter Scheduled Caste list to take special protection in economic development, education, employment, etc. Finally, it turns into an assertion for nationality with cultural linguistic ethnicity. Since the crisis of the Rajbanshi culture originated from the economic decline of their people, cultural resistance may not materialized

without economic support. Therefore, disseminated linguistic ethnicity and multiple locations of ethnic identity in spite of valid ground of economic deprivation is merely an illusion to both the Rajbanshis and the immigrants' peoples. Therefore, it has been shown that ethnicity can be used to overcome social discrimination but would not be always compatible with the broad ideological objective of a community that has been occurred to the Rajbanshi Kshatriya community.

The Objective of this present Study:

The proposed study attempts to analyze the reasons behind the Social and political movement on the issues of identity crisis of the Rajbanshis and relates them to the historical and developmental context of India specially, it attempts to investigate:-

- i) Historical as well as ethno-linguistic and Caste factors;*
- ii) The socio-economic background of the Rajbanshis agitation.*
- iii) The ethno- linguistic and identity factors have given rise to the emergence of the political and social agitation among the Rajbanshis.*
- iv) The linguistic question:- Whether the language of the Rajbanshis contents to prove itself as separate language from Bengali namely Kamatapuri or simply it is a northern dialect of Bengali.*
- v) The role of the Government policies and the response and reaction of the political leaders or organization.*
- vi) Growth of regional movements coincides with uneven development that generates a feeling of deprivation.*

vii) *The identity crisis among Rajbanshis in the context of Nepal, Bangladesh and India distinguish themselves from each other's.*

For source materials, the present study has depended on archival materials as well as on published government reports, such as district Gazetteers and Census reports. But there is a major problem in getting information from official records on caste and social movement, which was not so important from the Government's perspectives. In view of this problem, field trips were undertaken in areas where the Rajbanshis were mainly concentrated or the leaders and veteran persons essentially those who have observed the problem and some other directly involved in the problem from a close quarter. Information and data for the proposed study have, therefore, been collected from published and unpublished documents, party resolutions and other related documents. Through cross-verification of archival documents, caste literature, and field experience, this study has sought to reconstruct a faithful history of the Ethnic Problem, Social, and Political Movement of the Rajbanshis during the period under review.

I am responsible myself for all the errors which might have crept in my alertness. It is a pleasure for me to acknowledge the kindness of my teachers, various persons, and friends from whose help and advise I have been benefited.

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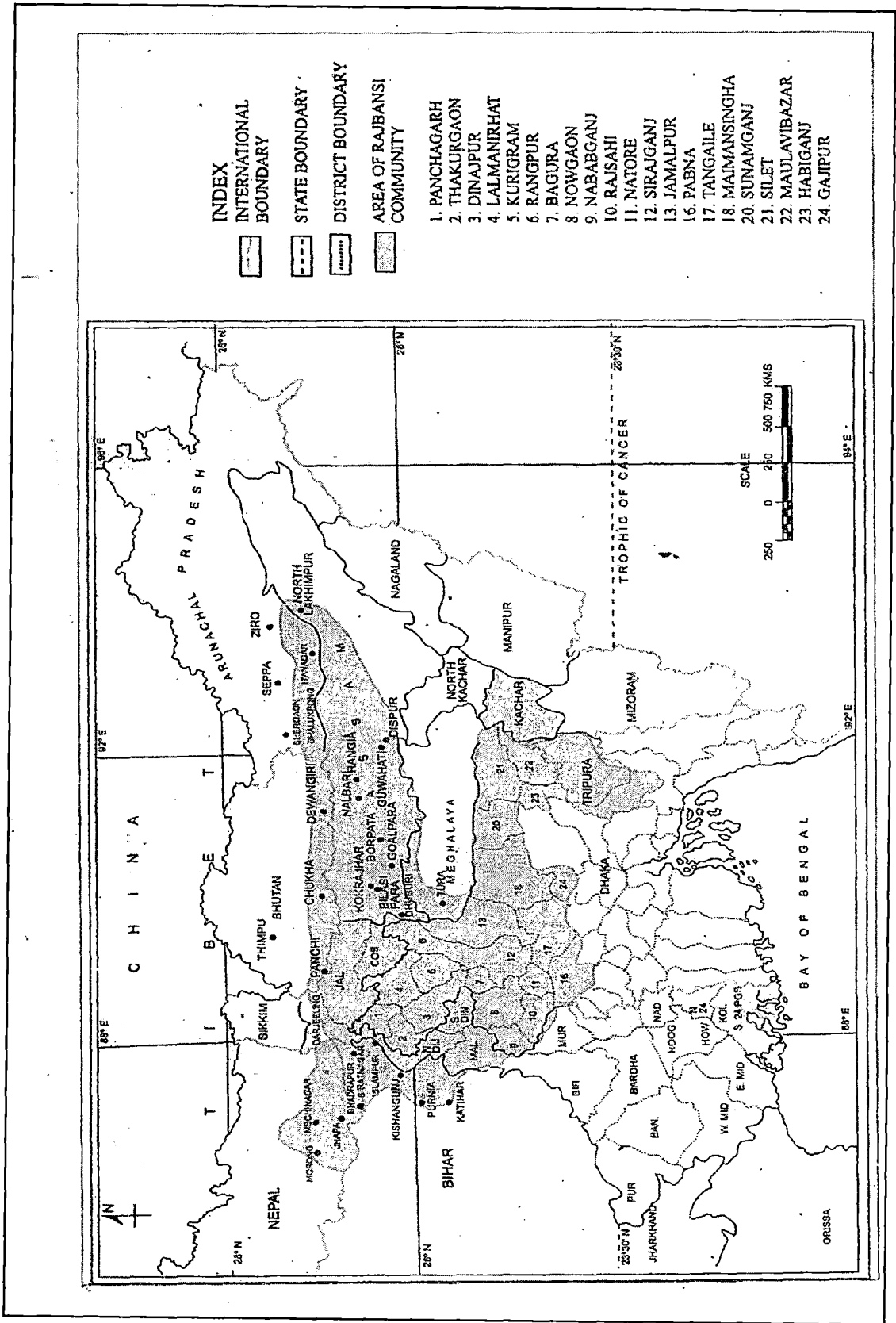
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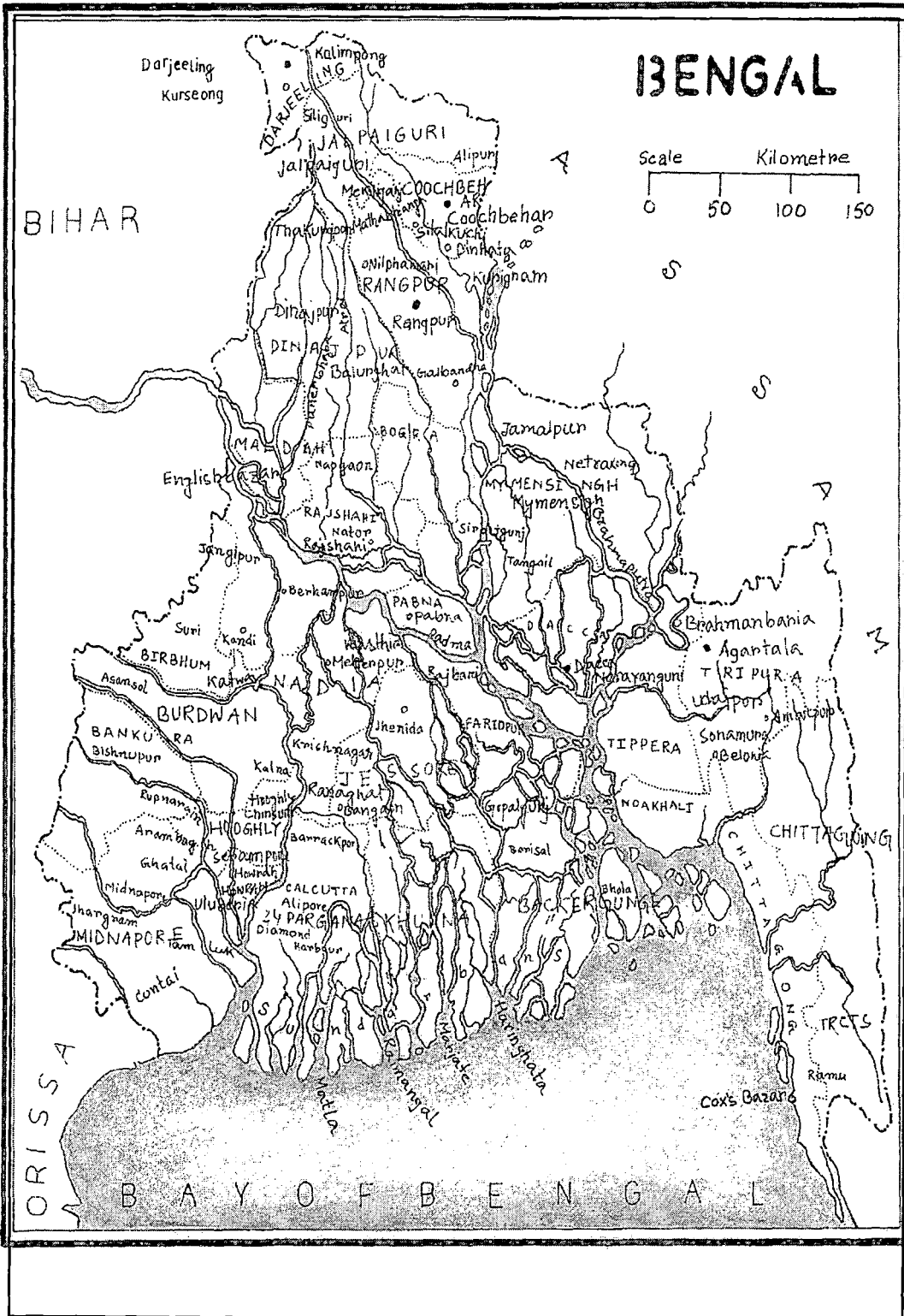
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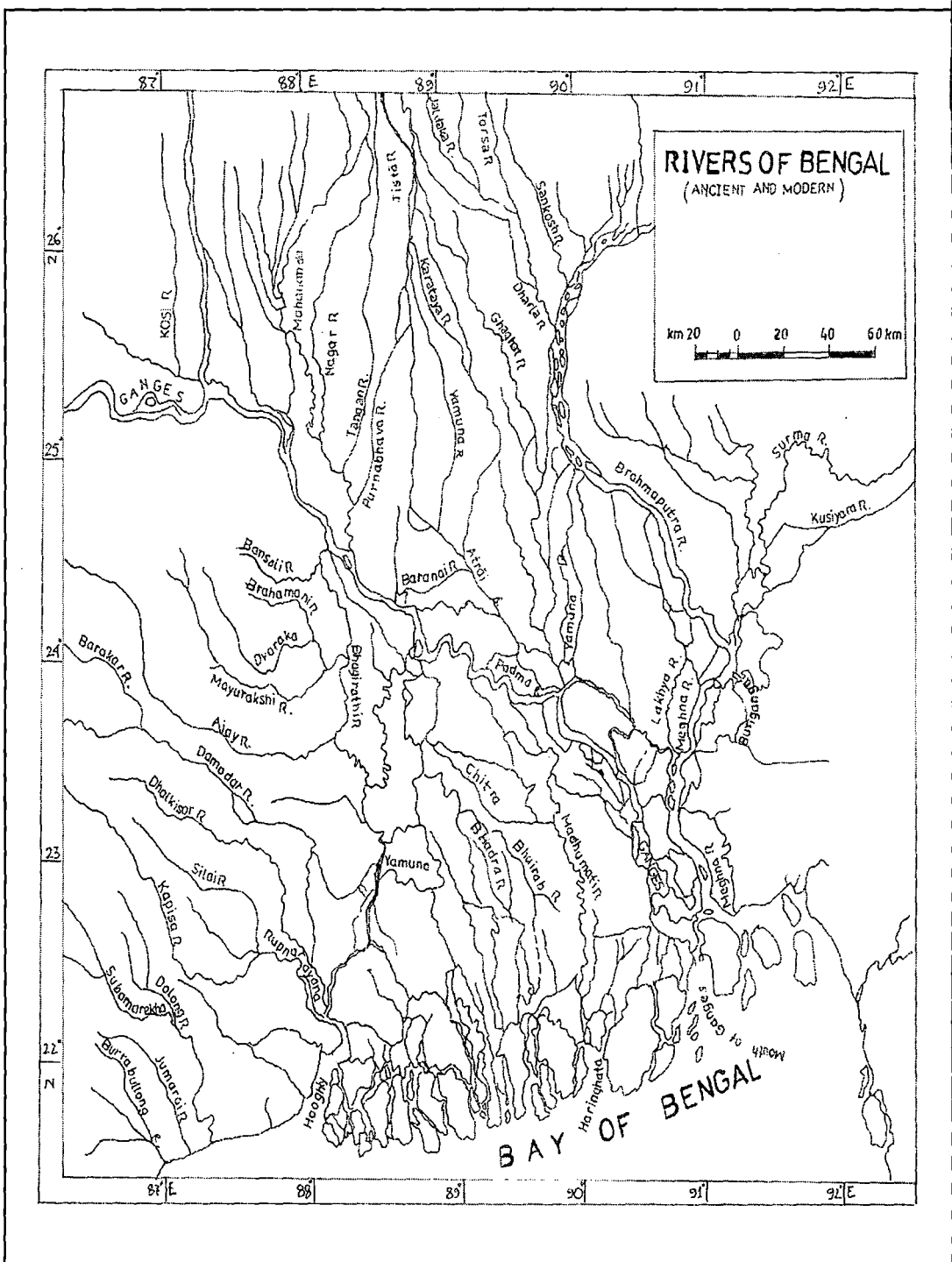
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MAPS

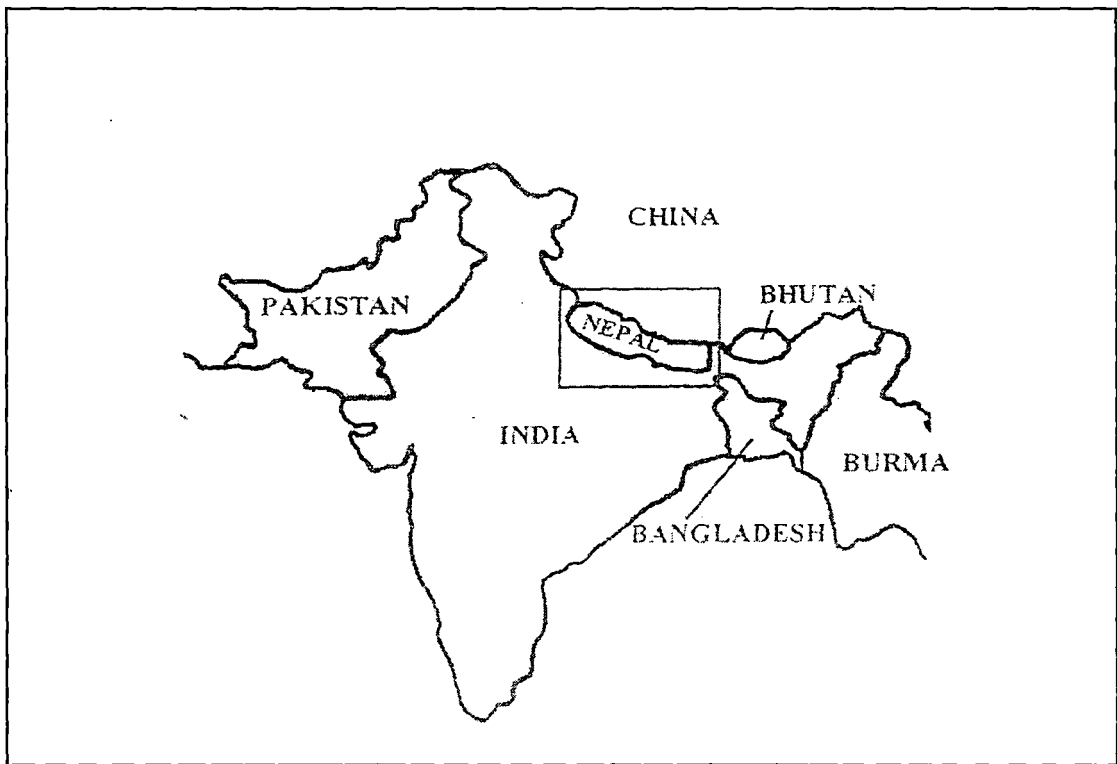




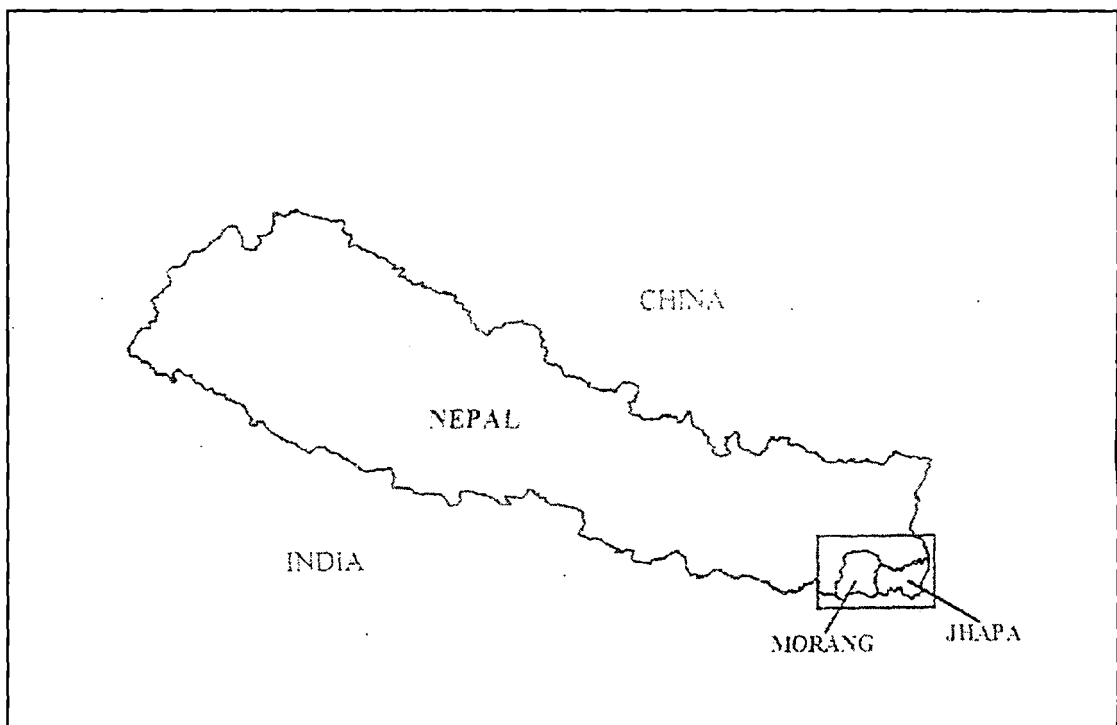
Map - 2 : Un-divided Bengal



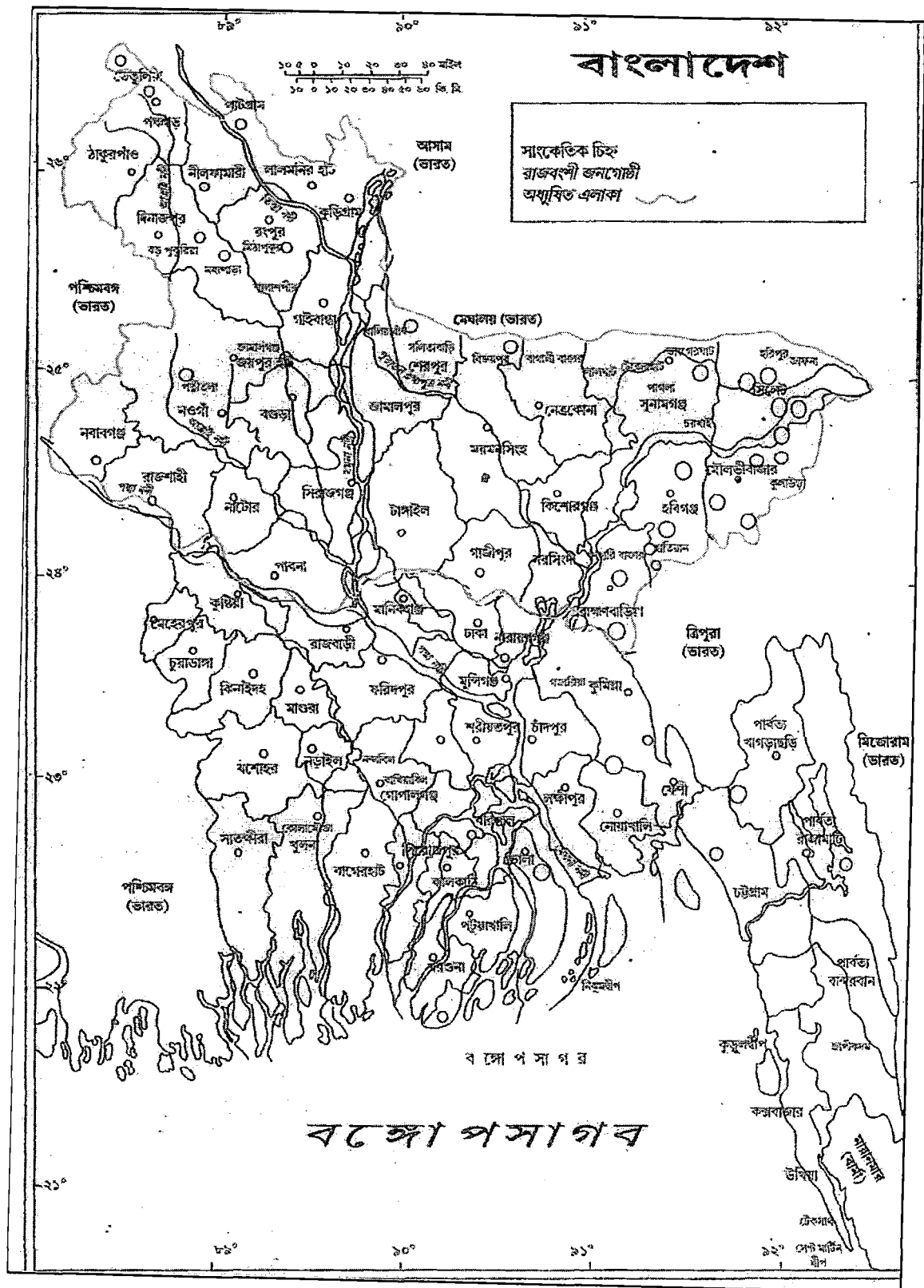
Map - 3 : Rivers of Un-divided Bengal



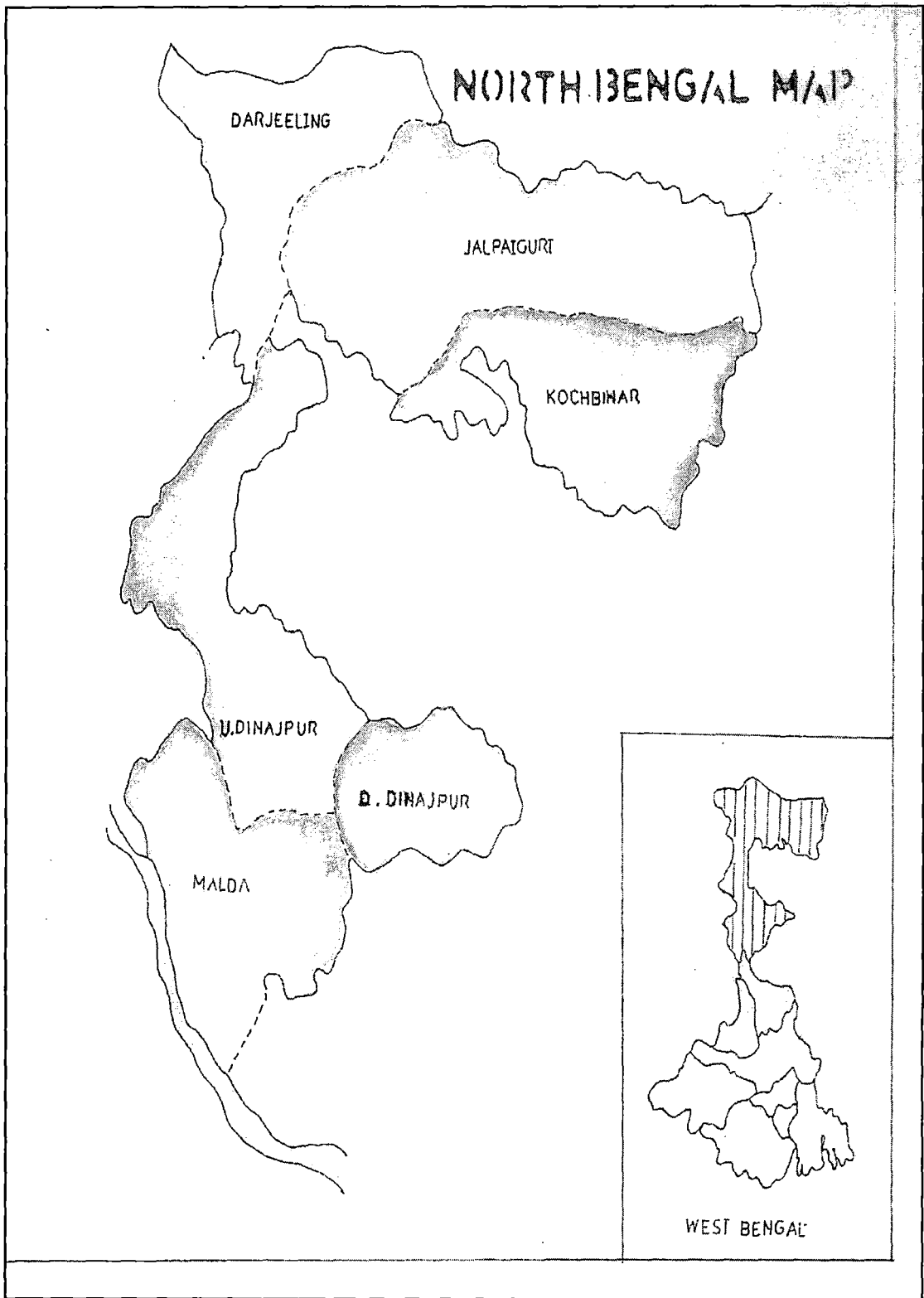
Map 4 (i) : Nepal with in South Asia



Map 4 (ii) : Districts of Nepal (Rajbansis Populated area)



Map - 5 : Bangladesh (Rajbanshi populated area)



Map - 6 : Present North Bengal of West Bengal



Map - 7 : Proposed Uttarkhanda

CHAPTER - I

Introduction

A Geographical Landscape of North-East India

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION: A GEOGRAPHICAL LANDSCAPE OF NORTH- EAST INDIA

The North Eastern part of India comprises with Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim including the Northern districts of West Bengal. But the geographical region of the present study confines with some districts of Assam (Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Bijn, Kamrup and Darrang), Meghalaya (Tura district), Tripura, some district of Bangladesh (Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, Rajshahi, and Mymensingh), Northern District of West Bengal (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, North and South Dinajpur and Malda), some districts of Bihar (Katihar, Purnea, and Kishanganj) and some districts of Nepal (Jhapa and Morang). Except the princely state of Cooch Behar, the portions of Bihar and Nepal it was formerly known as Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. The Baranadi sets the Eastern boundary and the Brahmaputra rivers while the Tista- Karotoya and the Mahananda from the western boundary. On the North by the Himalayas, and confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Karotoya in Rangpur (Bangladesh) up to Padma considered as the southern boundary of this region.

1.1. Physiographic features:

The physiographical features of North Eastern part of India present unity, diversity, and integrity in the midst of diversity and variety. It has a great variety of natural features in different tracts. It stretches

from the foothills of the Himalayas to the Padma on the South, from part of the great Gangetic plain and is wholly alluvial, with the exception of a strip of sub-montane country in Jalpaiguri and of an elevated tract of quasi-laterite soil, known as the Barid, on the confines of the districts of Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi and Bogra. The general level of the country is very low especially in Rangpur and the centre part of Rajshahi, where the rivers have silted up and there is a network of moribund streams and watercourses. In extreme North, the Sinchula Hills in Jalpaiguri rise abruptly to a height of from 4000 to 6000 feet; but the tract lying south of this within the angles formed by the coverings channels of the Ganges and Brahmaputra is a river, alluvial country, which stretches North Eastwards from the Ganges and Southwards from the sub-montane forest belt, in an expanse of almost monotonous fertility, clothed with perennial turf, and well provided with water carriage.

The Northern part is adorned on her North by the highest mountain system in the world, the Himalayans with its majestic peaks, the Mt. Everest (29040 feet) and the Kanchanjangha (28,146 feet). In Darjeeling areas, tertiary rocks (soft massive sandstones) occur as narrow bands along the foot of the Himalayas. Further north, occur Goundwanas (Sand shine quartzite, Shale and beds of friable anthracite coal) overlain by a thousand feet of slates, phylately and quartzite. The higher slopes are formed of hard gneisses and mica-schist.¹ The eastern part stretches the Brahmaputra valley, which forms an alluvial plain about 450 miles long with an average breadth of 50 miles. About the centre of the valley, there is a tract of mountainous country known as the Mirik Hills, which covers areas of about 2000 square miles, and contains peaks upwards of 4000 feet in height. Low hills of gneisses rock are also found on both sides of the river in the neighbourhood of Guwahati and Goalpara, but elsewhere

there is little to interrupt the even level of the plain. The Brahmaputra, through the greater part of its course is bounded on either by side by stretches of marshland covered with high grass jungle. Further inland the level rise, and there is a belt, usually of considerable breadth of permanent cultivation, and the staple crop rose being transplanted rice. In most part of the valley, this belt supports a dense population, but nearer the hill, cultivation again falls off, and grassy plains and forests stretch to their feet. The general aspect of the valley is picturesque. On a clear day, the view to both the North and the south is bounded by hills, while behind the lower ranges of the Himalayas snowy peaks glisten in the Sun. The rich-fields are interspersed with groves of feathering bamboos, and on every side there are rivers, woods, and pools. The slopes of the lower hills are clothed with forests, and the rivers that debouch upon the plain issue through gorges of exceptional beauty.

A mountain system known as the Assam Range separates the valley just described from that of the Surma. The range projects at right angles from the Burmese system, running almost due east and west. The Central portions consists of a fine table -land at an elevation of nearly 6,000 feet above the level of the sea; but on the east and west alike the hills as a rule, take the form of sharply serrated ridges. The highest point in British territory is Mount Japvo in the Naga Hills, whose summit is nearly 10,000 feet above the Sea- level. The Surma valley is flat pain about 125 miles long by 60 wide shut in on three sides by ranges of hills. The Western end of this valley lies very low, and as in vest of the Delta, the banks of the rivers are the highest portion of the country. During the rains, the greater part of Western Syllet the conditions of life are less unfavorable. Blue hills bound the view on every side, and the villages are surrounded by dense groves of fruit trees. The hill rises like a wall along

the northern borders, but on the south outlying ranges from the Tippera system project into the valley.

The southern portion of this part includes the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra, and is mainly alluvial; but on the confines of Dacca and Mymensingh the Madhupur Jungles a tract with a stiff clay soil resembling that of the Barind. It rises above the alluvium and in the southeast, the hill range that divides Assam from Burma projects into it. It is a great deltaic tract, enriched by annual deposits of fertilizing silt from a hundred interlacing rivers, and possessed of an abundant water supply. Owing to the annual overflow of the great rivers that traverse it, this tract remains practically under water for six months of the year, the villages stand on little mounds rising from the waste of waters and at this season, boats are the only means of communication. The alluvial rice fields cease as the rivers draw near the sea, and this portion of the delta is an intricate system of Sea- creeks and half formed island, densely clothed in many places with jungles and sparsely inhabited. On the southeastern frontier, a succession of low ranges covers the east of the Chittagong Division and Hill Tippera. None of them is of any great height, but the Sittakund Hill rises to 1,155 feet in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. They attain a greater attitude, the higher peaks being Keokradang (4,034 feet) and Pyramid Hill (3,016 feet).² These hills are covered by cultivated river valleys; a narrow strip of rice land divides them from the sea and to the south a services of low flat islands skirt the coast, while the shores have the same mangrove vegetation as in the Sundarbans.

The Himalayan foothills of North Bengal from a part of the Eastern Himalayas, and broadly consists of east-west trending strike ridges. These are dissected by North-South river gorges. The topography

is relatively more rugged in the eastern part, i.e. in the Duars. Of the major rivers there are broadly two sub-divisions—some of these, e.g. Tista and Toorsa etc. originate from the Tibetan region and flow across the entire range, while others e.g. Mahanadi, Balason etc, originate somewhere within the hill ranges of North Bengal or little beyond.

Geologically North Bengal Himalayas can be divided into three zones- an outer belt of Siwalik frontal range, a medium narrow belt of Damuda range, and the inner range of the metamorphoses.³

The outer belt consists of northwardly dipping homoclinal to gently folded Siwalik formations, giving rise to low hill ranges whose altitudes rarely exceed 900 metres (3,000 feet). The hill ranges of the Damadu formation represent a low-lying range in between the higher hills of the Siwaliks and those of the metamorphites. They rarely exceed 750 metres (2,500 feet). These two belts together usually constitute the sub-Himalayas. The hill ranges of the inner belt are usually about 1,000-2,500 metres (3,260-8200), this constitute the Lesser- Himalayas. In Darjeeling hills the outer zones of the inner belt is occupied by the Dalings, which gradually give place to the Darjeeling gneisses in structural levels towards the inner zone. In Duars the out zone is occupied by the Buxas.⁴

At the foot of the Himalayas, the Tarai region is covered with dense forests. Mainly valuable Sal (shores robust) trees clothe this Tarai area covering Jalpaiguri district and stretching about a quarter of the 2,000-s.q miles (5,180 km). As the mountain slopes down to the foothills, the density of forests becomes more and more gearing. The plains in the district of Jalpaiguri known as Duars (Duar-door)also abound with forest. The Duars forests densely wooded with evergreen vegetation are the

resorts of wild animals including the Royal Bengal Tiger, rhinoceros, elephants, antelopes and different species of snakes including the python. To the east, Khasi, Jaintia, Garo and Lusai hill areas are also covered with forests. Hence, mountains, hills, forests, jungles, fertile plains, tracts and mountain passes are common geographical features of the North – Eastern part of India which are equally related to the mode of production, socio-economic and cultural format and political history of this region.

1.2. The River systems:

The river system is the heart of civilization of the North Eastern part of India. The rivers like the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Meghna and their tributaries have indeed built up the whole landmasses of Northern Bengal making it a region of most fertile alluvial plains for human habitation. The alluvial plains of Bengal may be conveniently divided into four parts – i) Western Bengal (old delta); ii) Eastern Bengal (New Delta) ; iii) Central Bengal part of New and iv) North Bengal (The Ganga- Brahmaputra Doab).⁵ We have to discuss the alluvial plain of North Bengal (The Ganga- Brahmaputra Doab).

The Ganges and the Brahmaputra Doab on the Delta of North Bengal extends from North to South between the towers spurs of the Himalaya and the Ganges. Along the banks of the Tista, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna, the river-silt deposits or silt-loams predominate. Sandy loams cover alluvial plains in the North. This soil has been derived from the mountain- regions of the Himalaya and this is carried by the hill-rivers like the Tista, Mahananda, Toorsa, Jaldhaka and the other tributaries. The soil of this area is acidic and poor in base.

The rivers which are numerous and followed north- south, originate from Sikkim, Bhutan, and Darjeeling hills (except Toorsa which originates from Tibet) and can be divided into two system namely the Brahmaputra river system and the Ganga river system. The Brahmaputra river system contains the following rivers; namely Tista (with its tributaries), Jaldhaka, Toorsa, Kaljani, Raidak and Sankosh, while the Ganga river system contains the Mahananda with its tributaries⁶ The main rivers of the Northeastern part of India are as follows.

The Mahananda, originating at Chimla at an altitude of 20,060 m or 6763' in the Darjeeling district and flowing in a southern direction, alters its course slightly at Siliguri and then enters the Jalpaiguri district, remaining there for some distance. It has a total catchments area of 25,043 sq km,(9,669 sq miles at its confluence with Ganges out of which 6,755 sq.km.(2,608 sq.miles) lies in West Bengal.⁷ The river also goes by the name of Mahanadi, which is said to be a Bengali corruption of the Lepcha word 'Mahaldi'.⁸

Dr. Francis Buchanan Hamilton writing in 1809 thus narrates the course of the river within the district of Jalpaiguri. It has, indeed, a channel of no small size; day season the quantity of water is trifling, and even in the highest floods does not over the banks. It rises suddenly and falls quickly, so that boats do not attempt to navigate it; and even in the rainy season, it is only frequented by canoes, which ascend with difficulty but aid in floating down a little timber. In day weather, its stream is beautifully clear. The river also receives at various points- three small branches, which arises from springs in the fields of *Sannyasikatha*. They are called Trinai, Ronchondi and the divided course of Choker and Dank.

The Tista is the largest river of North Bengal and passes through the districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. It originates from the glaciers of North Sikkim at an altitude of 6,400 metres. The parts of Sikkim and Darjeeling district from its catchments before it enter the plain near Sinok. It enters the district of Jalpaiguri at its North-west corner. It is formed mainly by the union of two Streams, Lachen and Lachung at Chunthang in Sikkim. It flows through Baikunthapur and by the east of Jalpaiguri town. It has been identified with the 'Vedic *Sadanira*'⁹ though such identification cannot be fully accepted.¹⁰ It has been suggested that *Sadanira* formed the Western boundary of Pragjyotishpur (Assam) during the ancient days. The Kosala king fought with the Panis on its bank which was known as Karotoya in the *Puranic* days. Karotoya has been mentioned in *the Mahabharat* and that Mahasthangarh (now in Bogra in Bangladesh) was situated on the bank of the Karotoya. The Chinese Pilgrim Yuan Chwang crossed this river to go to Pragjyotishpur.¹¹ The Karotoya used to determine the western boundary of the ancient Kamarupa.¹² It was the natural frontier between the Mughal power and the Koch Kingdom.¹³ It is said that the Bodos named this river Tista or Dista as in the Bodo language 'ti' and 'di' stand for water. It has been suggested that *Sadanira* is rendered as Tista in the Bodo language. It is said that the Tista- Karotoya of the plain took the name of *Korto* when the Koches came down to Pragjyotishpur while the name of the river in the hill remain Tista. The socio-cultural format and economy of the western part of the Koch Kingdom were closely linked with the Tista. Many Rajbanshi peoples live in the banks of this river Tista. Some eminent linguists write their novel with this people like *Tistaparer Britanta* of Debesh Ray and some little magazine also named after Tista namely *Teestaparer Katha* edited by Arabinda Kar etc.

The Toorsa originates in the Chumbi Valley in Southern Tibet at an elevation of 7,060 metre. It flows for about 144 km in West Bengal. On leaving West Bengal, it flows through Bangladesh and joins the Brahmaputra near Nageswari in the Rangpur district. The Raidak and the Sankosh rivers join it on its left bank in Bangladesh before merging into Brahmaputra. The river bifurcates into two courses namely; Chaur Toorsa (West) and Sili Toorsa (East) just before the Hashimara road bridge. The two courses converge near Patlakhawa forest in Cooch Behar district. Before 1954, Sili Toorsa, the eastern course, used to carry the major portion of the discharge, but after the floods of 1954 Chaur Toorsa, the Western course, began taking a greater portion of the discharge. At present, however, Sili Toorsa is the major channel.

The Toorsa or 'toya-rosha' meaning 'angry water' has been the "Sorrow of Cooch Behar" for over two centuries and still shows no signs of having been appeased.¹⁴ The river is so capricious that any description of its course may become only a matter of history by the time the ink is dry. It has so frequently changed its course during the last two hundred years that the entire northern portion of Mathabhanga police station is a country laid waste by its caprice. Prosperous villages devastated and abandoned and the whole country is full of innumerable abandoned channels of the river covered with sand banks. Rich fields of tobacco and paddy were made barren by thick deposits of sand.

The river rises outside India and flows through Bhutan where it receives the name Amo Chu.¹⁵ The river enters Cooch Behar from North between *taluk* Natabari in Paragana Mathabhanga and Bakshbos –Putimari in Paragana Cooch Behar and flows nearly south with a few fortuous bends up to the north of Barabhita. Here the stream

bifurcates and one branch goes eastwards under the name Toorsa and other stream goes southward under the name of Dharla. The eastern branch of Toorsa proper now carries the main current. It passes by the south of the town of Cooch Behar and turning south –east. It receives the Ghargharia on its right bank after passing Mathabhanga and falls into the Kaljani in *taluk* Balarampur west of Tufanganja town. The southern branch under the name Dharla flows on in various turns and bends and passing about two miles west of Dinjata town falls into the Singimari in *taluk* Balarampur. The southern branch of this river is now in feeble current. Once it was a navigable river of the capital of the Kamata Kingdom established by the *Khenas*, Kamatapur the capital city of the *Khenas* and early Koch rulers was developed on its bank.

The only tributary of the Toorsa is the Ghargharia, which comes from the North West. It is formed by the union of two small streams outside the district in the western Duars. It enters the district in *taluk* Shibpur by the Northeast. After a flow of two miles by east of the *taluk*, it receives a small rivulet of the name Harimara which rises in the western Duars. It has a narrow steep channel; it may become turbulent at the height of the monsoon. Important political centre including the capital of the Koch Kingdom and cultural centre had been flourished on the bank of the Toorsa.

The Kaljani, Raidak, Jaldhaka, the Mansai, the Gadadhar and other small rivers flowing from Bhutan to southward are the tributary to the Toorsa. The Sankosh and the Brahmaputra are closely connected with the societal format of the western part of Koch kingdom.

The Mechi river forming the Indo-Nepal boundary rises at an altitude of 6,250 feet (1905 m) south of the west facing Rangbang a spur of the Singalia range at about 260 55' North, flows through a deep gorge throughout its hilly course and descends into the Bhabar tract where the bed suddenly widens to about 1,100 feet (335.30 m). Below this point, there is a long stretch of loose and water-worn gravel interested with water channels. Terraces flank the Mechi as well as Balasan at the point where the Sigalila slopes abruptly on to the plains. The Mechi flows past Loharghur, or 'iron hill', which lies in a dense forest. Its plain -ward flanks are very steep and covered with scattered weather -worn masses of ochreous and black iron- stone, but does not affect the compass. The Mechi eventually joins the Mahanada.¹⁶ In winter season water dry up in the Mechi river and huge people cross the river by walk through Galgalia(The Indo-Nepal border).¹⁷ Bhadrapur, the Rajbanshi dominated area of Jhapa district of Nepal is located on the bank of the river Mechi. As it flows through an international boarder, it played an important role in the socio-economic and cultural development of Bhadrapur and the adjacent areas of India.

The drainage system of North Eastern part of India particularly the Assam valley, the Brahmaputra has the most dominant control offering a unique example when considered along -with the other large rivers of India .¹⁸ The upper course of the Brahmaputra lies in the Tibet where it is known as the Tsangpo. It rises in the Kailas range of an elevation of about 5150 m. ¹⁹ The River is called the Dihang when it enters the Siang Division of NEFA in a southwestern course. At a point near Sadiya the Dihang from the north joins it and the Lohit from the east and it is from this point that the waters of the three streams flow as the mighty Brahmaputra. The Brahmaputra river system was the heart of

socio- political and economic life of the region. The Brahmaputra receives more than 35 major tributes from the northern bank, such the Subansiri, the Bharaeli, the Baranadi, the Pagladia, the Gadadhar, the Champamati , the Saralbhanga, the Manas, the Sankosh etc. Its notable tributaries from the south bank are the Noa- Dihang, Burhi-Dihang, the dishang, the Digaru, the Kulshi, the Singra, the Jiniram, Dudhnai, the Jhanji, the Kapili, the Dhansiri and the Krishnai etc. ²⁰ Important centers of political power religious, cultural and trade and commerce mostly developed along the banks of the Brahmaputra system.

The net work of rivers of this region had significant role in the formation of states in the region since the beginning of the historical period. As the natural frontier, the river system had pertinent role in the defence of the territory. Floods as regular occurrence in the rivers had protected the region from the aggression of the hostility from Bengal. ²¹

The rivers largely dominated the cultural format including animism of the tribal people. The *Kalika Purana*, compiled in the region has highlighted the river system of Kamrupa and important religious cities at the river bank which is still existed in present time. ²²

Foothills, hills and hillock of Western Assam and Duars (Mountain Pass) to Bhutan of sub-Himalayan Bengal were closely associated with the cultural format and mode of production of the people of the region. Total eighteen duars around Bhutan were the main trade route to Bhutan from Bengal and Assam. ²³ These Duars had political role too.

The above geographical landscape in respect of hills, rocks, forest and distinction seasonal and climatic variations, excluding of course her rivers system which was form by gone days undergone considerable changes in regard to the river courses, dying out of rivers and emergence now outlet, of drainage. The physical features as outlined above have made North Bengal a well-fortified geographical entity having at her disposal all vital recourses need for human existence and progress. Alluvium, fertile soil and adequate seasonal rainfall have made Bengal *Sujala and Suphala* with bountiful agricultural crops and fruits. Accepting some days for cold and humid summer, all other seasons of North Eastern part of India are not only soothing and pleasant, but also invigorating. Besides, the rivers of these regions perennial and non-perennial have been through countries the very life streams of her people providing all primary needs of man and other subsidiaries to be mated by human efforts and machinations. The natural beauty and other material recourses along with the seasonal and climatic characteristic, North Eastern part of India has been formed remote antiquity the most coveted and much sought for refuge for human settlements. It also became a veritable centre for the advancement of the creative facilities of man and their enrichments by adopting assimilating and synthezing new also by moulding them in her own fashion and thereby giving them a distinct stamp of Bengalese, Nepalese, Bhutias, Rajbanshis, Koches, Rabhas, and Bodos etc.

1.3. Historical background of Northern Bengal:

There is a popular history of Northern part of West Bengal since ancient time and this territory is popularly known as Uttar Banga. The British divided the state into some particular regions for

administrative purpose e.g. Madras Presidency, Bengal Presidency and Bombay Presidency. Before independence of India, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi and Pabna of Rajshahi Division were included into East Bengal. After Independence Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda and Western part of Dinajpur district were included with West Bengal and East Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi and Pabna of Rajshahi Division were remain in East Bengal. In 1949 on 12 September, an agreement has been signed to merge the Princely State of Cooch Behar under India Government.²⁴ The Government of India announced finally on 28th December 1949, that Cooch Behar should be merged with India Government by this agreement and the people of the state will be benefited and at the same²⁵. Finally, Cooch Behar was merged with West Bengal as a district on 1st January ,1950. In 1992 on 1st April the West Dinajpur district has been divided into Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur²⁶. Now, Uttar Banga consists of six districts of West Bengal i.e. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda. On the other hand, the rest districts of Rajshahi Division –Rangpur, East Dinajpur, Bogra, Rajshahi, and Pabna included with East Pakistan and later in 1972 it became to known as Bangladesh.

The Rajbanshis are the indigenous people of Northern Bengal and they are the largest section of the Hindu population in the state of West Bengal. Swaraj Basu²⁷ had accepted this view while he says the Rajbanshis are the indigenous people of North Bangal and they are the 3rd largest Hindu Caste of West Bengal. The Rajbanshi people have been living since ancient period in North Eastern part of India particularly in North Bengal (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, the plain of Darjeeling District, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda),Rangpur, East Dinajpur,

North Eastern Part of Mymensingh district, Northern Part of Rajshahi and Bogra district of Bangladesh, Assam (Goalpara,Northern Part of Kamrup and western part of Naogaon dsitric),Meghalaya, Eastern part of Purnia district, Katihar and some parts of Kishanganj district of Bihar. The Rajbanshis are found in Tripura and Nepal. According to Census Report of 1961, the Rajbanshis have been living all over West Bengal except Purulia district. ²⁸ Therefore, it is cleared that the Rajbanshi people are living not only the present North Bengal of West Bengal but also in Bangladesh, Nepal,Assam, Meghalaya ,Tripura and Bihar. The present study would like to be highlighted the problem of Rajbanshis in North- Eastern part of India and Nepal and Bangladesh.

1.4. Historical Name of the North Eastern Part of India:

The ancient scriptures viz *Puranas, Yoginitantra, Mahabharata, Copper plates*, foreign travelers accounts and historical and anthropological evidences have recorded different names of this region viz. *Pragjyotishpur, Kamrup, Pundrabhumi, Louhitya, Goudabhumi* or *Barendra Bhumi, Kamatapur* and *Kamata Cooch- Behar* etc. ²⁹

1.4.1.Pragjyotishpur:

In the scriptures like *the Ramayana, the Mahabharat, the Haribansha, the Brahma Purana, the Vayu Purana, the Matsa Purana, the Shrimad Bhagbata, the Mahapurana, and the Raghubansha* it has been mentioned that North Bengal is popularly known as ‘PRAGJYOTISHPURA’.³⁰ The *Brihatsanhita* indicates the name

“Upjyotish” and in the *Mahabharat*, it has been indicated as “Uttarjyotish”.³¹ Narakasura was the ancient king of this region. His successor Bhagadutta established his kingdom called Kamrupa (Present Assam). The copper plates of Indrapala indicate as ‘Pragjyotishpura’, ‘Uttarkula’ and ‘Durjaya’. Ratnapala established himself as ‘kamrupa nandi’ and “Pragjyotishpati” in his copper plate. Kalahan’s³² *Rajtarangini* indicates the name “Pragjyotish” and “Strirajya”.

1.4.2.Lohitya:

In the *Mahabharata*, the *Kalikapuran* and the *Markandeya Purana* it has been mentioned that this territory is known as ‘Louhitya’³³. Another name for Brahmaputra was ‘Lohitya’. It is considered as a sea due to her largeness. ‘Lohitya’ has been described in the *Kalikapurana* as “Barnashaya Dakshinasat Lohitya name Sagara”. The term ‘Lohitya’ is common to the *Raghuvamsa* and the *Brihat-Samhita*.³⁴

1.4.3.Kamrupa:

In the *Brahmapurana* it has been mentioned that the region is known as ‘Brahmakundu’ and ‘Kamakshya.’³⁵ *Vishnu Puran*, *Kurma Puran*, *Brahma Puran*, *Kalika Purana* and *Raghubansha* mention the name as ‘Kamrupa’. Ashoka’s inscription at “Prayag” mentions the name ‘Kamrupa in connection with Skanda Gupta’s Victory over this region. Copper inscription of Bhaskara Barman (7th century from Karnrsubarna) also indicates the name Kamrupa. “Kamrup” has also been mentioned in Hieun Tsang's account “*Si-u-k i*” and Banabhatta’s *Harshacharita*, *Tabaqut-i-Nasiri* etc.. In fifteenth century, the coin of Hussain Shah of

Gouda also indicates the name Kamarupa. In Pandunath, according to the *Pauranik* legend, the *Ausaras* Madhu and Kaitabha were killed and Brahma worshipped *kali* for the destruction of Keshu, another name of Asura. This place came to be more widely known as '*Kamakshya*' from the legend of a part of the body of *Sati* having fallen here.³⁶ Kamrupa is another name of '*Bhagabati*'.³⁷ Another belief inclined to derivation from the tribe 'Khambo' of Assam; yet another, that because Madan and Kama, after being destroyed by the fire from Shiva's eye regained His body (Rupa) this place name- became 'Kamrupa'.³⁸ *Allahabad Prasasti* of Samudra Gupta (c.325- 76 A.D.) mentioned that 'Kamrupa' was a frontier kingdom.³⁹ However, the *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidas, produced in the Gupta empire (Fifth century) mentioned two names of the region viz. 'Pragjyotish' and 'Kamrupa'.⁴⁰ But Kamrupa became the general political identity of the region since the fourth century particularly with the rise 'Varmanas' as ruling dynasty. During the reign of Vaskarvarman (600-650 AD) Kamrupa emerged as a significant political power. During his reign Yuan Chawag, the Chinese traveler, visited Kamrupa. In Yuan Chawng's account, Kamrupa has been described as Kia-Mo-Leo-Po situated in the eastern side of the Pundravardhana after a great river (the Karotoya).⁴¹ The natural boundary of Kamrupa was, however, defined in the *Yogini Tantra* (a late medieval sanskrit text) that Kanchangiri was the northern boundary, the Karotoya was the western frontier, the Dikar Basini formed the eastern boundary and the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Lakshya rivers stood as the southern frontier of Kamrupa.⁴² During the medieval period, western part of Kamrupa was depicted as Kamata. The Khens ruler established a kingdom in the fifteenth century with its capital at Kamatapur.⁴³

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1.4.4.Pundrabardhan:

“Pundrabardhan” is also a popular name of Northern part of West Bengal. The *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas* indicate that “Pundra State” was extended up to present Rangpur of Bangladesh, Dinajpur (Eastern), Bogra and northern part of Rajshahi, up to eastern part of Karotoya river. It is situated to the south of Kamrupa. In fourth century Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang reached at Pundra, the small state after travelling Kamrup. We come to know from Hieun Tsang’s account that from fifth century to eighth century some *Kshatriya* people fled from Pundradesh, reached, and settled at Ratnapith of Kamrupa State. Ratnapith was situated at the adjacent area of Jalpesh Temple of Jalpaiguri. Basudeva, the Kshatriya King of Pundra and the last king of this dynasty along with his kins took shelter to escape from danger of Buddha kings of Mahapadma.⁴⁴ This view is also supported in the *Kalika Purana*. Mahapadmananda, the son of Nandi was the king of Mahastangarh in Bogra district of present Bangladesh, is popularly known as Parshurama, the wrath of Kashtriya. The Kashtriya people of “Pundra State” settled in “Ratnapitha” to escape the wrath of Parshurama, gave up ‘kashtriya status’, and identified themselves as ‘Rajbanshi’. The second *patala* of *Bhramari Tantra* reiterates that the sons of Vardhana of Paundradesh discarded Kshatriya practices, sheltered in Ratnapitha (Kamrupa), and were known as ‘Rajbanshi’.⁴⁵ The later successors extended their inhabitation in this region. There were some Rajbanshi kashtriya vassal kings in present Rangpur district of Bangladesh (Dimla and Donar) such as –Manikchandra, Gopichandra, Harish Chandra and it was their enlightens the songs of *Gopichander Gan*, *Mayanamatir Gan* enhance the *Rajbanshi* or *Kamatapuri* literature.

1.4.5.Varendra Bhumi:

The history of Varendra is coeval with the ancient history of Bengal, so to say. It now forms a part of Eastern Pakistan (now Bangladesh) of the present day. The tract is commonly known as 'Barinde', 'Barind', and 'Barendra' corrupted from of Varendri. Sandhyakar Nandi, who styles himself as *Kalikala Valmiki* (Valmiki of the Kali Age) ,in his Sanskrit *Kavya Ramcharit-* describes Varendri as a tract lying between the Ganges and the Karotoya. "Varendri" has been described as the 'Janakabhu'- Father land of the Palas- and in the *Kavi Prasasti* Sandhyakara Nandi, the author of the *Ramcharita* has eulogized 'Varendri' as 'Basudhashiravarendri Mandalchuramani', the chest Jewel of the earth" and as '*Punyabhu*', 'the land of holiness or bliss'.⁴⁶ It includes the portion of Rajshahi, Malda, Dinajpur, Bogra and Rangpur districts. Varendra occupied a section of the country of *Pundra* or *Paundra* situated in a country, which went by the general name of Gouda.

Varendri was intimately connected from the earliest ages with Mithila, Magadha, Utkal, Sikkim and Bhutan on the North; and the kingdom of Karaka beyond the Karnataka on the East. By land as well as by sea it was in touch with various foreign countries relics of ancient connection have now come to be discovered and recognized during the Buddhapala dynasty. The early history of Varendra, therefore, is intact the history of the Northwestern part of the present Bangladesh.⁴⁷

1.4.6.Kamatapura:

Kamatapur was one of the popular names of present North Bengal of West Bengal. The Sena rulers of Gouda and the Ahom kings

both of them extended their power to Northeastern part of Kamrupa simultaneously and a political conflict had been occurred in this region. Taking this opportunity Niladhwaaja belonged to *Khen* Dynasty established capital at Kamatapur on the west bank of Dharla at Gosanimari of Dinhatra subdivision about 14 miles south-west of Cooch Behar district.⁴⁸ The ruin of this kingdom is known as “Kamateswar garh”. During the period of Chakradhaj and Nilambara, the Kamatapur state has been extended from Goalpara district of Assam to the North and South-West of Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Malda, Bogra, Rajshahi, Pabna districts with the help of local Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* soldiers. According to *Gosanimangal*, the Mughals defeated the last king of Kamata called Kanteswar and the king however, managed to escape himself from the Mughals. Thus, Kamatapur state came to an end.

Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahamed⁴⁹ says that Hussain Shah of Gauda captured Kamatapur in 1493 A.D. He extended his empire not only to Kamatapur but also defeated the Ahom King of Kamrupa. The *Rajbanshabali* of Durgadas serves that Biswa Singh and Ahom King signed a treaty to defeat the Muslim ruler.⁵⁰ But in the later period, Dulal Gagi, the son of Hussain Shah of Gouda was defeated and killed in 1497 A.D. by the Ahom King Tsu-Hung –Smung⁵¹. Biswa Singh thus regains his heritage from the Muslim ruler.⁵² Because of Hussain Shah’s invasion at Kamatapur, huge number of lower caste Hindus have been converted into Muslims. There is a large number of Muslim society called ‘Nasya Shekh’ have been living in North Bengal of West Bengal particularly at Cooch Behar since ancient Kamatapur State. Their culture is same as the Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* people.⁵³

Though Nilambara was called to Khen –dynasty, he was originally belonging to one of the member of Rajbanshi Kshatriya who had come to Ratnapitha of Kamrupa from Pundravardhana to escape from wrath of Parasuram. ⁵⁴ According to the '*Bhramari Tantra*', the *Kshatriyas* who had come from Pundrabardhan to Ratnapitha of Kamrupa gave up *Kshatriya* identity and recognized themselves as 'Rajbanshi.' ⁵⁵ The word "*Kshatriya*" generally pronounced as '*Kshatri*' and '*kshatri*' is told as '*kshatri*', '*kshe*' from '*kshetri*' and '*Na*' from naught corresponds the word '*kshen*'. The paternal relation of this dynasty comes from '*kshetri*' or '*kshatri*' and maternal relation comes from naughty. This maternal and paternal relation corresponds as '*Kshatriya*'. ⁵⁶ Thus, the Rajbanshis are related to the *Kshatyriya* indirectly or directly. From this point of view, some section of the Rajbanshi people of the present North Bengal claim themselves as 'Kamatapuri'. They are also organizing agitations and movements to establish '*Kamatapuri*' language and culture and demanding separate Kamatapur state.

1.4.7.Kamata-Cooch Behar:

The latest name of North Bengal was Kamata Behar, which was popularly known as 'Koch Behar State' under the British rule. During the reign of Nilambara, Kamatapur state has been extended through out the completely Northeastern part of India but after Kamateswar the last king of Kamatapur, it gradually becomes delineated and its kingdom Gosanimari also faced to ruin.

Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal says ⁵⁷ that the Koch tribe under the General Hajo defeated the Khens and ruled the western portion of Kamrup from 1510 to 1587 A.D. Some scholars say Koches had been in

Assam since 1205 A.D. It is said that they belonged to the great Bodo tribe who came to North- Eastern Assam through Patkoi range along the Noa-Dihang River. The Kingdom of Hajo included Assam eastern half of Morang (Nepal Terai) and the lands bounded on the east by Dhaneswari river, on the West by Konki river on the North by Dalim Kotte hills (formerly in Bhutan now in the district of Darjeeling, West Bengal and to the south up to Ghoraghat (Now in Pakistan) . This formed the boundary of Hajo's Kingdom at that time. Hajo's policy was to coalesce with the Mech and the Kacharis to be able to oppose the Koch and the Tephus who occupied Bhutan at that time. ⁵⁸

Hajo had two daughters Hira and Jira; both were married to one Haridas Mech of Mount Chikna (in Goalpara, Assam). At that time Koch and Mech could inter-marry freely. Haridas was the head of the Mech Tribe of Goalpara. ⁵⁹ Chandan and Madan was the son of Jira while Sisu and Bisu was the son of Hira. ⁶⁰ Chandan, the son of Jira defeated the Chikna and proclaimed him the King of Chikna and Madan was killed in the battlefield. The era of Koch Behar State starts from Chandan in the year 1510 A.D., when he was proclaimed king at Chikna, ruled for thirteen years, and after his death Hira's younger son Bisu named Biswa Singha become king of Cooch Behar. ⁶¹ Thus on the ruin of the Kamata kingdom, the Koch and Mech tribe established the Koch Kingdom territorially which was almost identical with Kamata under the leadership of king Naranarayan (1540-87), the Koch kingdom got its highest territorial boundary and began to be known as 'Koch' or 'Behar'. However, Prof. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya called it as 'Kamata-Koch Behar'. ⁶²

The western part of the Koch kingdom called Baikantapur (Jalpaiguri) extending up to the present Siliguri, formed part of Bengal (Goud) from the time of Palas and Khens and Biswa Singh wrested this area in 1545A.D. from the Mohamadan King of Gouda soon after the death of Sher Shah. Siswa Singh took a fancy to this tract of land and was allowed to settle there. His successors were popularly known as the ruler of 'Raikat' dynasty.

The extended Kingdom of Biswa Singh was called Koch Behar. Afterwards Koch Bihar State became the British Feudatory State through the Anglo-Cooch Behar Treaty concluded between East India Company and Dharendra Narayan ,the King of Cooch Behar on 5th April, 1773 named 'Kuch Behar' under the British reign.⁶³ After Post Independent, an agreement was signed on 28th of August 1949 made between the Government of India and His Highness Jagadeependra Narayan, the Maharaja of Kuch Behar State to merge the state with India Government. ⁶⁴ Finally, the State has been merged with West Bengal as a district on 1st January in 1950.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. *Ibid*, p. 4.
3. S.K.Acharyya; *Geological Framework of the Himalayan Foothills of North Bengal* in A.B. Chatterjee, Avijit Gupta, Pradip Kumar Mukhapadhyaya; (ed) *West Bengal*, (Firma K.L. ,Calcutta, 1st Edn. 1970), p.7.
4. *Ibid*, p. 6.
5. Radhakamal Mukherjee; *The Changing Face of Bengal: A Study in Riverine Economy*, (Calcutta, 1938), p. 100; Kanan Gopal Bagchi, *The Ganges Delta*, (Calcutta University,1944), p. 15.
6. Aboni Mohan Kusari and etel.; *West Bengal District Gazetteers : Jalpaiguri*, (Calcutta, 1981), p. 9.
7. S.K.Ray; 'Flood control' in *Advanced Course on Flood Control Drainage & Irrigation for Plytechnic Teachers June 1973, Jalpaiguri Polytechnic Institute, Jalpaiguri, 1973 (Cyclostyled)*, p.4.
8. J.F. Gruning; *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers Jalpaiguri*, (Allahabad 1911), p. 4,
9. C.C. Sanyal; *Tista –Kararoyar Ruprekha* (in Bengali) in *Jalpaiguri District Centenary Souvenir*, (Jalpaiguri, 1970), p. 358.
10. D.C. Sircar; *Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, (Delhi 1960), p.45, "*Sadanira* cannot be satisfactorily identified".
11. Yuan Chwang went from Paundravardhan to Kamrup in January-February of A.D. 639. Cunningham says "... I infer that the Capital visited by Huen Tsang was not Gowahati, in the valley of the Brahmaputra but Kamatapura in Indian district of Kusa-

- Vihara. The great river crossed by the Pilgrim would therefore be the Tista, and not the Brahmaputra” (Vide A. Cunningham- *The Ancient Geography of India*, Varanasi, 1963)reprint, p. 422.)
12. *Yogini Tantra*; (ed) and trns. By Swami Swami Sabeswarananda (henceforth *Yogini Tantra*) ,Calcutta, Naba Bharati Publishers, 1385 B.S.)ch. 13, vs. 16-18, p.114.
 13. S.N. Bhattacharya; *A History of the Mughal North Eastfrontier Policy: Being a Study of the Political Relations of the Mughal Empire With Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam*,rept. (ed) ,Calcutta, R. N. Bhattacharya, 1994, p.5..
 14. Durgadas Majumdear; *West Bengal District Gazetteers*, Koch Behar, 1977, p. 11.
 15. *Ibid*, p. 11
 16. J.D. Hooker; *Himalayan Journals*, 2 Vols, Calcutta, 1854, P.283 cf. *West Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling*, Amiya Kumar Banerji and etel., (Calcutta ,1980) , p.15.
 17. The author has own experience regarding this matter.
 18. H.P. Das; *The Brahmaputra Drainage System*, *Journal of NEIGS*, I, 1969, 20, cf., *India: A Regional Geography* (ed) by R.L. Singh, (New Delhi, rept.1994) , p. 308.
 19. H.J. Desai; “*The Brahmaputra*” *Mountains and Rivers of India*, (Ed) B.C. Law, 21st IGC (India ,1968), p. 431.
 20. R.L. Singh (ed); *India : A Regional Geography* , (UBS Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, rept.1994), pp. 309-310.
 21. The military invasion of Bakhtiyar Khilji in North Bengal and Lower Assam in the early thirteenth century was checked by the floods in the rivers of the region. Similarly, Mughal invasion in the region in 1661-62 under the leadership of Mir Jumla was also a sheer failure for heavy rainfall and flood in the rivers of the

- Brahmaputra Valley. For details see Minhasuddin Siraj, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* (ed) by H.C. Raverty, rpt.1970, Orient Books, New Delhi,(henceforth *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*), pp, 567-572; H. Blochman, Koch Bihar Koch Hajo and Assam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries according to the *Akbarnamah*, the *Padshanamah* and the *Fathiyah-i- Ibrriyah*, JASB,71.1,1872,pp. 87-89.
- 22.Acharya Panchanan Tarkaratna (ed) ; *Kalika Puranam* ,(Calcutta, Naba Bharat Publishers, 1384 B.S.) (henceforth *Kalika Puranam*) ch. 77-80, pp. 784-837.
- 23.There are total, eighteenth duars between Bhutan and India. Dalimkote (Durling Jung), Zumirkote, Chamurchi, Luku Duar, Buxas, Bhulka, Bara, Guman, Ripu, Cherang (Sidli) and Bagh Duar, are the duars between Bengal and Bhutan. Buri Gumang, Kallig, Ghur Kalla Duar, Banksha, Chapaguri, Chapakhamar and Bijni are the duars between Bhutan and Assam.
- 24.Agreement dated the 28th August 1949 made between the Government of India and His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. D.O.No. F 15(19)-P/49, Durgadas Majumder, *West Bengal District Gazetteers, Koch Behar*,op.,cit., pp. 40-42.
25. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*,29th December 1949
- 26.*The Census Report of India 2001, Uttar Dinajpur District.*
27. Swaraj Basu; “The Creation of Rajbansi Identity in Bengal” in *Bengal Communities, Developments and State* (ed) by Sekhar Bandopadhyaya; (New Delhi,1994), p. 46.
- 28.*The Census Report of India*,1961, The total Rajbanshi people in West Bengal was 1201706.
29. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed; *Kochbeharer Itihas*(in Bengali) Vol. I,(1936,rpt. 2001, Modern Book Agency, Calcutta), p. 1.

30. *Ibid*; p.1.
31. *Ibid*, p.1.
32. Kalahana's *Rajtarangini; Taranga-II, 147, IV171, VIII 2811* Trans. by Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, (1935, Third Reprint. 2002, Sahitya Academy, Calcutta.)
33. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed; *op. cit.*, p.2.
34. Hiten Nag (ed); *A History of Cooch Behar* trs. from original Bengali Work of S.C.Ghosal; (N.L. Publishers ,Siliguri, First edn.1942, rpt.2007), p.2.
35. *Ibid*, p. 2..
36. *Kalikapurana*; Chapter 62 ,Vs.74, 77, p, 103; *Yoginitantra*; Part-I, Patala 15th, Vs.48,49.
37. *Kalikapurana*; Chapter 62 ,Vs.73
38. *Ibid*, Chapter 51, Vs.55-76.
39. H.C. Chaklada; *Geography of Kalidas, Indian Studies: Past and Present*, IV.3, 1963, p. 451.
40. *Ibid.*, For details about *Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa*, see Ichhamuddin Sarkar; *Aspects of Historical Geography of Pragjyotisha- Kamrupa* (Ancient Assam), (Calcutta, Naya Uddyog, 1991.)
41. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, (629-645 A.D.), Vol. II, pp. 185-186.
42. *Yogini Tantra*, pt. I, Chapter II, Vs. 16-18, p. 114.
43. A. Mitra, *Census Report Of India 1951, Cooch Behar*, p. xxiv.
44. *Bhramari Tantra*;-
Nandisuta bhayatbhita Pundra deshata samatgata
Bardhanasya panchawaputra:
Swajanaiarbandhabai saha ratnapithang bibishante-
Te sarbbe rajbanshiti kshyatra bhubi.

- 45.Cf., Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed; *op.cit.*, p, 39; *Proceedings of the Forth Conference of Uttar Banga Sahitya Sammilan*, pp. 189-191; In ‘*Prachina Kamarupa Puravritta*’ (the ancient history of old Kamarupa) printed in “*Kamarupa Burunji*”,(ed) S.K. Bhuyan,DHAS,(Guwahati,1930,2nd edn.,1958) king Niladhwaaja is accounted a “Koch-vansi” (page 99). The ‘*Jalpesvar Mandirer Itivritta*’ records that Chandan ,the son of the Maternal aunt of Viswa Singha, married the daughter of Nilamvara the King of Kamata.
- 46.Kshitish Ch. Sarkar; *A Brief History of Varendra and Other Essays*; Jalpaiguri, p.2, year has not been mentioned .
47. *Ibid*; p.3.
- 48.A. Mitra; *op. cit.* , p. xxiv.
49. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed; *op. cit.* P. 88
50. Durgadas Majumdar, *Rajbanshabali*;(in Bengali), P.-26 during the rule of Raja Harendra Narayan of Koch Behar (1783-1830). It contains a History of the Koch rulers up to Harendra Narayan; *Assambasti Patrika*,Prakashak, June 27th , 1901.
51. Hissabuddin Muhammad Talish;*Tarikhe Assam* ;P.59. Munshi Ghulam Salim, *Riyas-us- Salatin (A.D. 1786-88)*; Trans by Abdus Salam, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1902,rpt. Delhi,1975 ,trns. (in Bengali) by Rampran Gupta, . p.126.
- 52.Ray Gunaviram Barua; *Assam Burunjee*; 1884, 4th Edn P. 55.
Prabhas Chandra Sen; *History of Bagura* (in Bengali), Vol.II,P.88.
- 53.Bajley Rahaman; *Sanrakshan Byabastha and Uttar Banger Muslim Samaj* Cooch Behar,2001, p.3.
- 54.Hiten Nag; *op.,cit.*, p. 43.
- There is a Khen caste in this part of the country . Probably Dr. Buchanan Hamilton(1808 A.D.) was the first authority to

regard Niladhwaja as a khen but he was not quoted any source for the view. He had also heard that Niladhwaja was a descendent of Asura (Narakasura) and that the Rajbanshis claimed him as belonging to their caste. Thus-

“According to some, this servant (Niladhwaja was an infidel (*Osur*), most probably from the mountains of Tripura....There is no trace of any earlier colony of Brahmans in Kamrupa than this from Mithila, and the great merits of the prince were rewarded by elevating his tribe called Khyen to the dignity of pure Hindu. It is indeed contended by the Rajbanshis that Niladhwaja was of their caste, and that the khen were only his servants begotten by Rajbanshis by prostitutes of Kshatriya tribe, but it seems highly improbable that the Raja would procure the dignity of pure birth for the illegitimate offspring of his servants, while his own family remains in the impure tribe of Rajbanshi, the origin of which seems to me of a later date”

The Eastern India Vol. III, pages 408,409.

This opinion of Dr. Buchanan cannot be sustained, for the Copper-Plate inscription of Nidhanpur issued by Kumar Vaskarvarma (dated at least as early as 4th century A.D.) that Brahmans resided in Kamarupa long before this time has settled it beyond doubt. In the Ahom language, there are two words “kun” or “khen” the meaning of which is the same, viz. king, great, good etc. In the work ‘Ahom Burunji’ we find the expressions ‘khun Kamata’ and ‘*khun Kamateswara*’ (page, 47, 48, 50). Possibly these words ‘*khun*’ and ‘*khen*’ were subsequently used to denote a particular tribe (*khen*).

55. *Bhramari Tantra*; - *Second Patala*

Nandisuta bhayatbhime Poundra deshat samatgata

- Bardhanasya panchawaputra Swajanaiarbandhabai saha
Ratnapithang bibishante Kaladwipaira Sangamat
Kshatradhamadapakranta Rajbanshi kshatri Bhribi.*
56. Panchanan Barman, *Uttar Bangiya Prachin Janajathir Bhasa Prasanga*, (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1997, 9th September, (1404, B.S. 23 Bhadra), p. 6.
57. C.C.Sanyal; *The Rajbansis of North Bengal*, The Asiatic Society Monograph Series, Vol. XI, Calcutta, 1965, p.5.
58. W.W.Hunter; *The Statistical Account of Bengal Vol.X* 1876, rept. 1984, Delhi ,P.218.
- 59.(a) According to Gait, Bisu was the son of Hira and Sisu was the son of Jira (E,A,Gait ;*History of Assam 1905* , 2nd revised edn (ed) B.K. Baruah and H.V.S.Murthy; 1963 rpt., Calcutta, 1967 ,7th Edn., 1997 , p. 46.
- (b) Footnotes stated in C.C.Sanyal; *The Rajbansis of North Bengal* (P.5) that G. Sarbadhakshya an old State lawyer of Cooch Behar stated to write that the eastern part of Bhutan was called *Trwang*. It is now in the Kamling frontier division in the N.E.F.A Mar Indo-Tibetan border. One Sailapati was the King of Teang. His daughter was Hira. There was no man called Hajo. Hajo was an area of land in Kamrup comprising of Goalpara, Dhubri and part of Guwahati. Haridas was the *Sardar* of Hajo. This Haridas married Hira .Hira's first son was Sishu .Jira prayed to *Mahadeva* at Jalpeswara for another son and Bishu was born.
- (c) Khan Chaudhry Amanatullah Ahamed; *Cooch Beharer Itihas*, Vol. I(in Bengali),1936, rpt.,2001 says that at time of Damambu a King called Sailaraj was ruling in the Eastern Portion of Bhutan called Twang. His wife was Mira. A daughter named Hira was born to her by Saila Raja (Sailapati) .Some one says that Sailaraja

62. P.K. Bhattacharjee; *Oitiharik Prekshapate Kamata Koch Rajbansha O Tar Kichhu Samasya* (ed), *The Kingdom of Kamata Koch Behar in Historical Perspective*, (First Published, 2000, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta), pp. 38-49.
63. Harendra Narayan Choudhury; *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement*, (Cooch Behar State Press, 1903),p,246; A.Mitra, *The Census Report of India, Cooch Behar*,1951, p.xxxii-xxxiii.
64. Agreement of Merger of Cooch Behar State made between the Governor General of India and His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar on 28th August 1949. D.O.No. F 15(19))-P/49 Durgadas Majumder, *West Bengal District Gazetteers, Koch Behar*, op., cit.,pp,40-42.

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CHAPTER-II

Environments and Character of the North-Eastern
Rajbanshis along with Nepal and Bangladesh

CHAPTER- II

ENVIRONMENTS AND CHARACTER OF THE NORTH EASTERN RAJBANSHIS ALONG WITH NEPAL AND BANGLADESH

2.1 Environments of North Eastern part of India:

As we today glance at the map of India on the northeastern extremity, we find a number of spanned-out states namely, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. These states are linked with the rest of India by a narrow corridor in Eastern Bihar and West Bengal, winding its way between Nepal and Bhutan on the North, and Bangladesh on the south. Located between 24° North to 28° North latitudes and between $89^{\circ} 46'$ East to $97^{\circ} 4'$ East longitudes. This present study will be confined to the north eastern region comprising the northern districts of West Bengal (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Malda, South Dinajpur and North Dinajpur); some districts of Bangladesh (Rangpur, East Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bogra) ; Assam (Goalpara, Northern part of Kamrup, western part of Naogaon districts); Meghalaya; Bihar (Eastern part of Purnea district, Katihar, Kishanganj); Tripura and Nepal. This area is formerly known as province of Eastern Bengal excluding Nepal in 1901 covering an area of nearly 190000-square mile, and contained a population of 78 $\frac{1}{2}$ million persons. ¹ According to the Census Report of India 1991, the total area of North Bengal particularly is covered with 22316 sq Km. and population about 12036292 and the density of the population was 560/sq. Km.. By virtue of its location in the transitional zone between East and South Asia, the region characteristically exhibits amalgamation of

phenomena. It has with a great variety of environmental features in different tracts. It stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas to the Padma on the South, forms part of the great Gangetic plains and is wholly alluvial, with the exception of a strip of Sub-montane country in Jalpaiguri and of an elevated tract of quassi-laterite soil, known as the Barind, on the confine of the districts of Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi and Bogra. The general level of the country is very low especially in Rangpur, and the central part of Rajshahi, where the rivers have silted up and there is a network of moribund streams and watercourses.

The natural environment of this area is traversed by innumerable streams most of them originated in the hills of Bhutan, Sikim and Tibet to the north of this area. The main rivers are, Mahanada, Karotoya, Tista, Jaldhaka, Toorsa, Raidak, Sankosh, Kaljani, and Brahmaputra along with their tributaries. These rivers swell up enormously in the rains and dry up against completely in the winter leaving sandy beds strewn with stones and sand. The flood does not stay long. It subsides without a few hours and the enormous speed of the water sweeps away large trees to long distances, which are found, deposited on the dry beds in the winter. It is dangerous to navigate these rivers in the rains due to a large number of driftwood. The over flow leaves a deposit of sand and stone converting many fertile lands into wilderness where only long thatch grass groups rendering the cultivation of other crops impossible for many years. This process is going on for a long time and extensive patches of sandy tracts are always visible in this area. The rivers are erratic in the nature and frequently changing their course.² This frequent changing of the course of the rivers caused heavy damages to the inhabitants on its banks. Some time it caused damages to a whole

villages and engulfing it. Therefore, the river very often influenced the habitation of North Bengal of West Bengal.

The average soil condition is sandy loam. Heavy rainfall causes soil erosion and washes away the surface every year. Hence, the production of paddy and jute fails for blows that of South Bengal. Tobacco is grown in this soil especially in the district of Cooch Behar. The cultivators raise earth embankments (Ali) found small plots of land called '*Khotu*' to preserve the water and to prevent soil erosion.³ These embankments from the boundary demarcation of cultivations land, they serve as path way and the grass grown on them serves as a pasture for the cattle when the low lands are waterlogged. The big and broad embankments serve as highways for bullock carts to go.⁴

The country being situated in the sub-montane area of the Himalayas with dense forest on the north is generally damp. Formerly malaria and black water fevers used to take a toll many lives every year but these have now been considerably checked in recent time. These environmental conditions of this Sub-Himalayan tract greatly influenced the habitation its socio-economic position.

It is to be mentioned here that the word 'Environment' is not used fair technically or lexicographical meaning rather it is used as 'Social and cultural environment'. The climate and ecology have greatly shaped the social and natural environment of the people in this region. The foothills, hills, and hillocks of western Assam and the Duars (mountain Passes) to Bhutan of the Sub-Himalayan Bengal were closely associated with the cultural format and mode of production of the people of the region. Plenty of Jungles and forests with wild animals of large

varieties are closely linked with the total animism, hunting and gathering, cattle rearing and their way of life. Therefore, the people of this region, tribal and non-tribal used to collect their tools for hunting, fishing and agricultural operation from the forests. The forests of this region were also full with reeds, bamboos, caves, timbers, natural fruits, medicinal herbs etc. There were huge areas of land for agricultural production. The inhabitants were self-sufficient. They never feel deprivation from natural resources rather than the others.

With these enormous natural resources, the local people were happy and they were simple and sympathetic in nature. As result, we find that when the outsiders came to the place, they did never face any difficulties regarding shelter, refreshment, hospitality from the local people viz., the Rajbanshi people of this area. The Rajbanshis were dominant in position in this region. They were the largest number of the Hindu society. The Rajbanshis were very much sympathetic to the uprooted people who had come to this region from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) at the initial stage. They gave shelter and food to the immigrants. It would not to be exaggerated that at the initial stage the immigrants were brought up in the lap of the Rajbanshi *jotedars*. There was no confrontation between the local people and the immigrants though their cultural practices were different in nature. Gradually the number of the immigrants were being increased day by day. After independence this tendencies became very worse. The huge influx of people not only created the social problem viz. habitation, growth of population but growing of land demand of land prices. Local people, tempted by the spiraling prices soon began to sell their lands leading to the transformation of the local small and middle *jotedars* into under tenants, subservient to a new class of immigrant landed gentry. Indeed all over

the region, the phenomenon of transfer of land from the hands of the Rajbanshis to those of the non-Rajbanshis became a standard pattern and in course of time, it generated a sense of grievance among the disposed Rajbanshi gentry. Needless to say, once the immigrants who were brought up in the lap of the Rajbanshi *jotedars*, became the administrative mechanism of this region. On the other hand, the Rajbanshi who dominated this region became landless and powerless in due course of time. The Rajbanshis felt that the immigrants are intellectually slashing their lands and they are lagging behind in all fields rather than the immigrants. Thus, a section of the Rajbanshi people raised the immigrants and underdevelopment issues. They subsequently launched socio-political movements to resume their position in the name of autonomy and separatism. This issue has been discussed in detail in the Chapter No. VII.

2.2. Social composition of North Eastern Part of India:

Social format of this region is very complex due to the admixtures of different biological and cultural communities. Vernacular and Sanskrit texts, Persian literatures and certain anthropological societal format of this region comprising the multilingual tribal and non-tribal communities. The *Kalika Purana* categorically illustrated that the Kiratas or as *Mlechchhas* were the original inhabitants of *Prgjyotish-Kamarupa*, who in our present knowledge system are considered to be the tribal people. ⁵ The *Yogini Tantra*, on the other hand, has described them as *Kuvachaka* (evil speakers) or non-Aryan people. ⁶ Tribal culture and Non-Aryan physical stature highlighted in these texts indicate that the tribal communities of the Mongoloid race have been existed in the reign

since the pre-historic period. It has also been corroborated by the account of Yuan Chawang (Hiuen Tsang), the Chinese traveller. Yuan Chawang illustrated that the people of region 'were of honest way, small of stature and black-looking. Their speech different a little from that of mid India, they were of violent disposition and were preserving students; they worshipped the *Devas*, and did not believe in Buddhism'.⁷ The *Tabakat – i- Nasiri*, a thirteenth century Persian works of Minhaj-ud-din Siraj, has given a similar description. It is clearly mentioned in this work that the settlement of three districts of tribal communities in the region situated 'between the country of Bengal (Lakhnawati) and Tibet viz. Koch, Mech and Tharu'.⁸ So the descriptions of the Sanskrit texts and historical literatures about the tribal people of North Eastern region are undoubted by indicated to the present tribal communities like *Koch, Mech, Tharu, Garo, Kachari, Bhutia, Chutia, Rabha Rajbanshis* etc. Formerly, the constant war with Bhutan, Nepal and other neighbouring tribes devastated the area long age. The terribly malarial country with forests containing wild animals had no attraction for the fortune seekers. Later on, the *Rajas* of Cooch Behar and Baikunthapur invited many people from the south of Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and encouraged them to settle in this country by giving them free lands. With the advent of British being peace followed, a large number of men from all parts of India came to this country at first as fortune seekers and then settled down as permanent residents. The Tea Estate that came into being after the British conquest of the Duars from Bhutan attracted nearly three lacs of people from Behar and parts of India and many of them have now settle down in this country as cultivators. They were mostly *Oraons* and *Santals*. The earliest inhabitants that could be traced were Bhutia, Toto, Mech, Koch, Tharu and Rajbanshi.⁹ However, social stratification of the people of this region, available in colonial and post colonial official sources may be

discussed into three division viz. i) social- traditional classification, ii) religious classification and ,iii)ethno-linguistic classification. Rupkumar Barman ¹⁰ in his *Contested Regionalism* has also supported this social formation.

Based on official parameter of social –traditional classification, people of this North- Eastern region under review can be classified as Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Castes (OBC) and General (GEN). The *Rabhas, Meches (Bodos), Toto's, Limbus, Tamangs, and Dhimals* who have been classified is Scheduled Tribes, have their special concentration and the districts of Lower Assam. These tribal castes have been settled in this region since the earlier period. Similarities in the racial origin, early history and cultural traditions of the Koch Rajbanshis, *Meches* and *Rabhas* and their multiple references in the diverse historical literatures have created confusion about their identity. ¹¹ The *Totos* is a small tribal community of a village of Jalpaiguri. The Toto dominated area is called *Totopara*. Like the *Totos*, the *Garos* and *Hajons* are small tribal communities of Jalpaiguri although they are largely distributed in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

Table ,2.1: Distribution of SC and ST population in North Bengal.

District	Total	SC	ST	% of SC to total population	% of ST to total population	%of SC/ST to total population
Darjeeling						
1971	781777	98277	108586	12.58	13.88	26.46
1981	1024269	145942	151073	14.25	14.75	29
1991	1299919	209876	179163	16.14	13.78	29.92
Jalpaiguri						
1971	1750159	595424	428595	34.02	24.48	58.50
1981	2214871	766498	491791	34.61	22.20	56.81
1991	2800543	1035971	589225	36.99	21.02	58.02
Cooch Behar						
1971	1414183	665020	10611	47.02	0.75	47.79
1981	1771643	883084	101105	49.58	0.57	50.42
1991	2171145	1123719	132275	51.76	0.61	52.32
W.Dinajpur						
1971	1859887	429578	221317	23.09	11.89	34.98
1981	2404947	687094	261600	28.57	10.82	39.39
1991	3127653	907553	208487	29.01	6.66	35.67
Maldah						
1971	1612657	265697	130715	16.47	8.10	24.57
1981	2031871	343089	153300	16.89	7.54	24.43
1991	2637032	477896	171326	18.12	6.49	24.61
North Bengal						
1971	7418665	2053996	899824	27.68	12.12	39.80
1981	9447601	2825707	10558860	29.90	11.20	41.10
1991	12036292	3755087	1161566	31.19	9.65	40.84

Source: Census of 1921

There are few more tribal communities in this North-Eastern India who migrated to North Bengal in colonial period such as *Santals*, *Oraons*, *Mudas*, *Malapaharies*, *Mahalis*, *Ho*, *Sabar*, *Birhors*, *Bhumiz*, *Lohar* etc. They actually migrated to this region from Jharkhand mainly as tea plantation labourers'. After a long transition, these people have been completely merged with the land and culturally enriched the region.

It may be noted that the Rajbanshis are the largest Scheduled Caste people in North Bengal while the same group of people is recognized as Scheduled Tribes in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and other North Eastern states in India. ¹² In Bihar, the Rajbanshis are recognized as Other Backward Castes (OBC) and in Nepal and Bangladesh; they are recognized as General Castes. The *Namasudras*, *Malos*, *Jalia Kaibartas*, *Patnis*, *Bagdis*, *Poundras*, *Dhobas*, *Mallas*, *Dom*, *Hadi*, *Sunri*, *Ghashi*, *Chamar* etc. were also included in the list of Scheduled Caste community. There were few Nepali speaking Scheduled Caste communities in North Bengal such as *Dami*, *Kamai*, *Sarki*. The OBCs although have been categorized recently numbers of such communities are being increased gradually. Rest of the people whether Caste-Hindu, Muslims (except few OBCs), Buddhist, Christians or any other communities have been categorized here as general castes and the second parameter of the social stratification were included them.

The third parameter of social stratification is the ethno-linguistic features of the communities. Apart from Bengali, Assamese, Nepali, Hindi, few ethno-linguistic regional communities generally are called tribe. They have their own dialect/languages like *Rabha*, *Mech (bodo)*, *Garo*, *Koch*, and *Mikir* etc. Linguistically they belong to *Tibeto-Burma* group. It is to be mentioned here that the Bodo language is directly related to the post-colonial Bodo land movement of Lower Assam. But the most debatable linguistic issue of the North Eastern region under review is the status of *Rajbanshi/ Kamatapuri* language. Whether it is a dialect or language, it is true that it is practiced by a large number of people including Nasya Shaikh, Rabhas and some other tribal of North Bengal and Northeast India. And it must be mentioned here that the *Rajbanshi /Kamatapuri* is the main issue of the separate statehood

movement of West Bengal on the basis of linguistic issue which will be discussed in the Chapter No.V.

Table.2:2 :Koch –Rajbanshi population in North Bengal in 1971,1981,1991

District	1971		1981		1991	
	Koch	Rajbanshi	Koch	Rajbanshi	Koch	Rajbanshi
Darjeeling	551	31505	192	62770	94	96745
Jalpaiguri	9572	329191	356	514274	538	656073
Cooch Behar	919	481304	1438	714221	2497	865622
W. Dinajpur	1527	134976	3267	369015	5005	489642
Maldah	3561	50693	3793	83462	5139	114697
North Bengal	16130	1027669	9046	1743642	13212	2222779

Sources: Census of West Bengal :1971,1981 and 1991.

The Rajbanshi population in Nepal can be found predominantly within the Jhapa and Morang districts in the southeastern corner of the country. The 1991 census of Nepal gives the total number of Rajbanshi in the country as 85,558. In the district of Jhapa, there was reported to be 66,224 Rajbanshi, whereas in Morang district, the Census records the Rajbanshi population as 18,243. This leaves only, 1,091 Rajbanshi spread throughout other districts of Nepal, not restricted to Jhapa and Morang's neighbouring district. There are a number of Rajbanshi people in Bangladesh. In Purnea district of Bihar the Rajbanshi people comprises 1,03,002.¹³ There are also a number of Rajbanshi people in Katihar and Kishanganj district in Behar.

It is now cleared that societal framework of the North Eastern region under review is very complex in term of language and culture. In Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal the Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe population is the majority accordance to the table 2.1. They are also majority in the districts of lower Assam.

Among the Scheduled Caste, the Koch –Rajbanshis on the other hand, is the largest community in North Bengal of West Bengal. And the separate statehood movement in North Bengal including the lower Assam is basically linked with the Koch- Rajbanshis on the questions of their cultural –linguistic identities. The separate statehood issue will be discussed in the Chapter Nos. V and VII in this paper. There are some distinctive characteristics in the life style of the Rajbanshi people of North Eastern part of India. Let us expose the distinctiveness of the Rajbanshi people of North Eastern part of India and Nepal and Bangladesh.

2.3. Characteristics of the Rajbanshis of the Northeastern part of India:

The Rajbanshis constituted the most predominant section of the local Hindu population in the Northern districts of West Bengal. Numerically they were the third largest Hindu caste in Bengal as whole.¹⁴ The origin of the caste is shrouded in mystery and the basic debate is around the question of their association with the Koches. Whatever might have been their actual origin, there is no dispute about the fact that the Rajbanshis were the early settlers in North Bengal. They were socially homogenous community, in the sense that there was no sub caste among them. Their religious- cultural practices were simple and free from Caste-Hindu rigidities and social organizations were different from the Caste-Hindu culture, which provided the Rajbanshis a distinct character.

2.3.1. Physical appearance of the Rajbanshis:

Generally, the Rajbanshis have darker skin and some are black. But in the case of the *Zamindar* of Baikunthapur, the children and most of their nearest kin (Raj-gan) have fair skin tinged yellow.¹⁵ The common thing is nose which is flat and at least the tip of the nose is broad, high cheek bones and thick lips, the eyes are generally small and slightly oblique. Recent observations marked that the Rajbanshi allow inter-caste marriage and their physical appearance has been changed than the former one. Even one can hardly be recognized the Rajbanshi and the caste Hindus.

2.3.2. Marriage System:

There was free intermarriage between Rajbanshi, Koch and Dhimal. But at present the Rajbanshi prefers to marry within them. In spite of this, the Rajbanshi allow free intermarriage among the other caste Hindu people. The *Panichita*, *chotradani*, *Ghorsodhani* forms of marriage are peculiar to those people.¹⁶

The marriage woman with husband living always uses vermilion on their forehead but not do they always wear iron bangles round the wrist. The women with husband living could be identified by the conch-shell a bangle (Sankha-kharu) at parting of hair is gradually growing but using of iron bangles becomes rare even in village. The widow remarriage is allowed but they do never use conch shell bangles or any vermilion. The women used silver ornaments of which 'Sujjahaar'

(Surjya har), '*Chandra har*', and '*chora kathi*' are specialties that are not seen anywhere else in Bengal.

2.3.3. Dress style of the Rajbanshis:

The Rajbanshis of North Eastern part of India had regional specialty in their dress. The original residents of the region had to become self-sufficient in spinning and making clothes. Spinning was the part time profession of the women in their leisure period. In the Terai, many poor women had their livelihood by spinning cotton yarn. Cotton used to extensively in Goalpara and Kamrup districts. It has been mentioned in the 'Gurucharit' of Assamese literature that Hariya Mandal, the father of Biswa Singha used to cultivate cotton by digging lands with the help of spade. The regional name of cotton is '*banga*'. Because the Meches mainly used to do the cultivation of this cotton, this was given the name 'Mech-banga', being carried on the bullock back. The weaving instruments on which the women had to weave very crude and they had to tie the yarn on the woven cloth was very short.

Formerly, the Rajbanshi adult women of the villages were a piece of cloth called *phata* tied round the chest just above the breast, which hangs up to the knees. The *Phota*, that women were used to wear were all hand woven and mostly dyed in red and blue. The weavers were dying out due to impact of mill made cloth. Later it was having replaced. The dress of Rajbanshi women was gradually being replaced by 'shari' made of handloom and power loom. Sometimes the women wear blouse. But in present time dress has been changed so far as modern culture. Men also had to wear short clothes for the similar reasons. Poor farmers and labourers used to wear loin clothes covering the buttock and the upper

portion of the thigh, while they were engaged in cultivation work but when they go out they used full-length cloth. The rich class put on the knee-length *dhotis* and other valuable garments in their life style. Besides the cotton wrappers, relatively well-off people used *Bhutia rags*, *Mekhala* sheets and heavy *kantha* in winter. Dishes ordinarily made of aluminum and water jars were made of gourd; earthen vessels jars, pots, etc. were the main household utensils of the common people. Zinc bangles, coral beads, silver jewelers were in use. There was hardly any use of gold ornaments. But in recent, the Rajbanshi women are using gold ornaments and civilized garments have been using both the men and women of this community.

According to L.A Waddel ¹⁷ the dress of the Rajbanshi is generally like Bengali peasant. The women go usually with their heads uncovered. Their dress like that of the Kachari woman is merely a narrow stripped cloth wrapped round the body. In younger women, this cloth reaches as high as the breasts and descends to little more than loincloths. The married women usually wear a bracelet of huge conch-shell like the *Bhutiya* women of Eastern Nepal. On the other hand, the Rajbanshis of Assam claim to be the *Kshatriya* in *Varna* system. The married women put vermilion and wear shell Bangles as marriage symbols ¹⁸. In the villages, the males wear only a loincloth while engaged in cultivation work. While going out of the village they wear full-length cloth and a shirt to cover the body and in the winter wear 'Chuddar'. The little kiddies are carried by tying them at the back of the mother with a piece of cloth the legs hanging on the two sides of the mother and the head protruding out of the upper opening of the cloth sling. ¹⁹ In this position, the child does not appear feeling uncomfortable. But in recent the tendency of carrying child on back is found rear.

2.3.4. Intoxicating Practices:

The Rajbanshis specially the women are voracious chewers of 'Pan' (*Betal* leaves). They gradually chew *betal* leaves from the creepers and climb up the areca trees. The *Zaminder* of Baikunthapur-P.D. Raikat once prevailed upon to Charu Chandra Sanyal to chew a 'Pan' prepared in his own way with green areca nut and lime. No sooner had he chewed a little his ears turned red, he began to perspire, so dangerously intoxicating and irritating the preparation was to the unaccustomed.²⁰

The women smoke tobacco in their own home but rarely in public. The male are veteran smokers of tobacco. They set fire to the prepared tobacco²¹ in a '*chilim*', hold its narrower end inside the palm of the two hands and smoke through a used '*Hookka*'.²² Recent the using of '*Hookka*' is to be found very rare. It cannot be seen even in the Rajbanshi dominated areas.

2.3.5. Superstitious Belief:

The Rajbanshi women in North Bengal carry a small knife when going out. They move about freely without *pardah*. It is said that the knife or the iron of the knife is a guard against the attack of the evil spirits. It is not unusual to see a Rajbanshi women on a village road with a knife or a '*dao*' in her hand on market days when she has to travel away to make purchase. The Rajbanshi believe in the evil spirit. The writer has much experienced about calling *baidya* to drive away the evil spirit if some one was attacked. Jharu *Baidya* was one of the popular *Ojha* who was used to drive away the evil spirit at the author's village area.

2.3.6. Food Habits:

Peoples' food habits of a particular region are developed depending on the natural and geographical situation. Environment also influences the food habit of a particular region. For this specific reason, food habits of the Northeastern part of India have some specialties among the caste and tribes. The principal food items are rice, fish, meat, and bird's meat. In the off-seasons and famine period, a large number of populations had to live on *cheena*, *Kaun* and *poyra sattu* (grinds) i.e. inferior staple food. Milk, because of its abundant availability found a significant place in the list of food articles. Butter and curd (*doi*) were natural corollaries. One of the popular milk products was curd made in the earthen pot (*ghatiya doi*). There was also a system of making curds in the Bamboo spout (hollow), *chira* (Flattened rice), *Muri* (Puffed rice), *Moya* (sweetened ball of puffed rice) with *ghatia doi* (curd) were very popular kind of food. *Doi-chira* (flattened rice with curd) is still a specialty of Rajbanshi culture. It is used as *prasada* for deity worship. *Atiya kala* (Banana with lots of seeds) sometimes-called *Bichi Kala* (seedy banana) is added to *doi-chira* when used as *prasada*. Otherwise also *doi-chira* is necessary as part of any ceremonial feast-particularly marriage related feasts.

At the time of marriage, *doi -chira* was used to be sent on yoke used for carrying the gift articles to the new relative as a token of respect. Fish-small or big which was available in plenty in the innumerable ponds, *beels*, rivers, paddy fields. The main instrument for catching fishers from such natural sources of water were *jhako*, *Palo*, *Jakai*, *Kocha*, *Jalanga*, *Dhorka*, *Deru*, *Hook*, *Burung*, *Khalai* etc. After the rains in the month of September and October, lots of fishes

particularly small fishes used to be caught in the ponds, *nala*, *beels*, most of which, except the deeper ones, got dried after the winter because of the nature of soil with low water retention capacity. Both the factors led to the idea of dry fish and eating dry fish became a food habit among the Rajbanshi. Not only the Rajbanshi, the other people of this region also eat dry fish. *Sidal*, a food variety made out of dry fish is still a special item. ²³

Among the vegetables and pulses, the locality cultivated and available brinjal, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, potato, *kakrol*, *shim* and *thakuri*, *masari*, *khesari*, *mug*, *kulti kalai*, etc. pulses were the main varieties. *Khuria*, *battua*, *kalmi*, *dheki*, *kachusak*, *patasak*, (jute leaves) *nafasak* were main leafy vegetables. *Sukati* made of dried leaves of jute and *bathua* is one of the delicious. It may be mentioned that the necessity of salt is used to be met by alkaline liquid. This alkaline salt was the alkaline water prepared out of ash obtained by burning the fibrous roots of plantain trees put through the distillation process. This kind of alkaline fermentation was used for cleansing the hair (especially by women) as substitute of soap and for washing clothes as substitute of soda. But this practice is gradually being given up even in the locality. The process of boiling clothes in earthen vessel with the help of alkaline water was given a specific name "*Chhyakapara deoa*". Alkaline water, slightly purified, was used for preparing human food called '*Chhyaka*' also. Alkaline water put in the preparation of gourd and *Kachu* (arum) makes delicious '*chhyaka*'. ²⁴

2.3.7. Household making Materials:

Houses were constructed mainly with the help of natural resources like bamboo, straw, kushgrass, shrubs and wood available in

plenty in the naturally grown forest and jungles. In the northern portion of the region, which was infested with wild animal, houses were mainly made of forest wood. Comparatively well-off people had the roofs constructed of tin. There was hardly any use of bricks, cement and iron rods, poles, hedges, truss, etc. because of availability of bamboo. But there were some *Zaminders* houses among the Rajbanshis who used bricks, iron rods, poles to make their house. Sometimes the Rajbanshi *Zamindars* used to make brick field themselves to build their house because there was scarcity of brickfield in locality.²⁵

2.3.8. Education facilities:

There was hardly any facility for education and medical treatment. People were mostly illiterate. According to the Census Report 1921, the total number of literate and illiterate Rajbanshi and Koch population of Bengal Province were 96140; 4293 and 1567808; 126979 respectively. The table: 2.3 shows the total number of literate and illiterate of the Rajbanshi and the Koch population in the Bengal Province.²⁶

Table: 2.3 Total numbers of literate and illiterate Rajbanshi and the Koch people

Caste	Locality	Population											
		Total			literate			illiterate			learning in Eng.		
		Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	P	M	F
Koch	Whole	131272	67627	63645	4293	4242	51	126979	63385	63594	83	82	01
	Province												
Rajbanshi	Do	1663948	864042	799906	96140	93889	2251	1567808	770153	797655	5151	5074	77

Source: *Census Report of India 1921*

Due to this illiterate problem, any kinds of sickness used to be considered as a result of being possessed by an evil spirit or deity and treated by *ojha* (exorcist). People had much more confidence in *mantra* than in medicine.²⁷ Even today, a section of Rajbanshi people believes this *mantra* practice. They had profound belief in spirit, witches etc. Amongst the wild animals tiger, bear, deer, bison, zebra, rhinoceros, snakes, wild boar, elephants were the main species. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, has specially mentioned elephant of Bhagadutta. The system of catching elephant was a custom in Kamrup, as mentioned by the pilgrim.

2.3.9. Rituals and Religious Belief:

The Rajbanshis are Hindus with special features in their rituals and beliefs. All Rajbanshis worship the snake goddess *Bishohari* or *Monosha*. During *Bishohari puja* songs in honour of the snake goddess are sung for several days with dancing. The male dress themselves as women and dance. Rajkumar Gidal is the pioneer of the '*Bishohara*' in North Bengal. The Rajbanshi sacrificed the animal to the goddess in different ways. Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal described the horror of sacrifice of a goat before a village deity in Jalpaiguri, by twisting and breaking the neck. Four persons held the body tightly fixed and two men twisted the head round and killed it by suffocation. It is reported that recently goats were killed by hanging or by stoning before the God *Siva* at Jalpeswar (Jalpaiguri) and the goddess Siddheswari at Baneswar (CoochBehar).²⁸ The author witnessed the method of existing goat sacrifice among the Rajbanshi in the different part of Cooch Behar like *Gosanimari Goyerkata Masan* deity in Dinhata subdivision where the head is severed from the body by one stroke. Dr. Sanyal described that

there was a system of human scarifies to the deity among the Rajbanshi in ancient time. ²⁹ It is also reported that about 200 years ago human sacrifices was performed before the goddess *Durga* in Baikunthapur and Cooch Behar. The tribes *Chutia*, *Khen*, *Koch*, *Aham* and *Kachari* who previously inhabited in Kamrup were in the habit of performing human sacrifices before their goddess *Kali* or *Durga* ³⁰ In this respect, it is to be mentioned here that in Cooch Behar , *Bara Debibari*, the goddess *Durga* is worshipped even now by human scarifies. However, in recent on the day of *Mahaastami*, at midnight *Durga* is worshipped secretly by human blood in the presence of the present *duarbaxi* of Koch Rayal Family(Amiya Deb Baxi) along with the blood donor . This year (2008), Kamsantait Shiben Ray has scarified blood. It is to be mentioned here that the Ray family used to scarifies blood by cutting their limbs (finger) by hereditary. ³¹

During *Shibratri* in the month of February, March, *Mahadeva* is worshipped with great pomp in *Jalpeswar* temple in the caves of Jayati, Phaskawa and Chamurchi in Jalpaiguri and Baneswar Temple in Cooch Behar and thousands pilgrims attended the ceremony, most of women are Rajbanshi . *Mahadeva* is usually called *Mahakal* in North Bengal. The Rajbanshi also worship the river goddess *Tista Buri*. They also worship the forest God (*Saleswari*) before entering a forest for collection of wood.

All Rajbanshi celebrates 'Bisoba' or 'Bisna' on the last day of 'Chaitra' (March-April). On that day all Rajbanshi male adult go out with weapons in their jungles for hunting .They must kill some edible animal and eat its meat either roasted or cooked otherwise, it is believed, the coming year would not be prosperous. This 'Bisoba' or 'Spring hunt'

is celebrated by the Rajbanshis of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Assam. Such spring hunt is also celebrated in some other parts of India and Burma. However, this practice of Spring Hunting is not existed in the present generation of the Rajbanshi community.

The Rajbanshis burn their dead body. In some cases, the dead body buried e.g. the child before teething, un-natural deaths and during epidemic when burning becomes impossible. After cremation, a piece of the frontal bone is taken out of the pyre and consigned to the Ganga or the *Karotoya*. If the first child is born dead it is buried near the house. It is believed that the soul of the child will move about the house and take the earliest chance to re-enter its mother's womb and another pregnancy might be expected soon. If several death children are born in succession, a portion of one of them is cut and it is buried far away from the house with the expectation that the devil soul will never dare to enter the womb of the mother. Now this kind of belief is not existed in Rajbanshi society since memory of the author.

At present the dress, old manners and customs, the religious rites and even their features have undergone revolutionary changes so much so that amongst the educated class there is hardly any difference between a Caste Hindu and a Rajbanshi. They are in a process of being completely absorbed. Recently the Rajbanshis allows intermarriage to other castes and adopted many customs from the Caste Hindus that have been reduced the difference between the former and the latter. However, the social organizations and religious customs will be discussed in the Chapter No. IV in details.

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10. It has also been discussed in *Contested Regionalism* by R.K. Barman, New Delhi, 2007, p. 17.
11. Also see, R.K. Barman; *The People of North Bengal* in Souvenir on *Investigating History of North Bengal Through Ages* (Malda, Pakuahat Degree College, 2004), p. 24.
12. P.S. Dutta; *Movement for Scheduled Caste Status in a Poly-Ethnic Society: The Case of the Koch- Rajbanshi of Assam*, J.N.E.I.S.S.R, II, 1978, p. 31.
13. O. Malley; *District Gazetteer of Purnea*, 1911.

14. Swaraj Basu; *The Creation of Rajbansi Identity in Bengal* (ed): Shehkar Bandopadhyaya: *Bengal Communities, Development & States*, New Delhi, 1994, p.46.
15. C.C.Sanyal; *The Rajbansis of North Bengal*, *op.,cit.*, p.3.
16. *Ibid*; p.3.
17. *The Tribes of Brahmaputra Valley*, L.A.Waddel, Logos Press, New Delhi, Reprint 2000, pp. 48-49.
18. Sipra Sen; *Tribes and Caste of Assam*; Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1999, pp.156-157.
19. This mode of tying the child is called 'bukuni bandha' There is a common saying 'choatak bukuni bandhi kam korek' (tie the child on the back and then work). It other thing such as puffed rice, cloth etc. Are so tied it is called 'bokuni bandha'.
20. *The Rajbansis of North Bengal*; *op. cit.*, p. 3; The writer has much experience regarding the 'Pan' in childhood.
21. Tobacco leaf cut up to into small bites and thoroughly mixed up with treacle forming a lump.
22. '*Hukka*' is a full coconut shell water-container into which a wooden pipe is fixed vertically and an earthen ware bowl (*Chilim*) containing the tobacco is placed on it .A small hole on one side of the shell serves the purpose of smoking. The writer also had seen practiced such smoking in his family.
23. *Sidal* is made by grinding dry mixed with '*mankochu*' (arum) in the pestle thus making a pulp and getting that pulp of fish grind, oil and turmeric scoured and then dried .This preserved properly so that it can be used any time of the year as substitute for fish.
24. Sukhbilash Barma; *Bhwaiya; Ethno-Musicological Study*; Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi(India), First edition 2004, p.89.

25. The author saw the remaining construction of the brick field at his village, near a Rajbanshi Zamindar's house and a tomb is still remaining which was constructed by the Zamindar in the first decade of twentieth century.

26. *Census of India 1921*, Table-IX, Education by selected Castes, Tribes, or Races-concluded ;Vol. 5,Part-II, p. 96.

27. C.C.Sanyal; *The Rajbansis of North Bengal, op.cit.*, p.147.

Montros(incantations):-

Hare k(r)ishno nam, paroar nam

Andhar ghar, phirache tok

Dzor dzari charia, paroar nam

Soggo hate namo kali montse dia paa

Ugir Ostang deha charia

Paroar siggir ko nam

Free translation:-Oh! The pigeon hear the name of Hari and Krishna. You are grouping in the darkness. Kali has come down from the heaven to the earth. Please at once take away the disease from the sick person and fly off. Note: Paro-Pigeon ,Ugi- Patient, Ostang dha- whole body.

28. *Ibid*; p. 4.33.

29. *Ibid*; p. 4.

30. E.A.Gait; *A History of Assam*(1906); Hutton; *Census Report of India 1921* ,Vol.V , part - I.

31. The *Pratidin*, 9th October,2008. This is described by Jayanta Maiti, the Sub-Divisional Officer, Cooch Behar(sadar) and the member of the Cooch Behar Debatra Trust Board. Personal met, the hereditary *duarboxi* of the Koch Royal family, Amiya Deb Baxi on 10th October, 2008.

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CHAPTER -III

Historical and Ethnological Data of the Rajbanshis

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HISTORICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL DATA OF THE RAJBANSHIS

The history of the origin of the Rajbanshis is a mystical fact. It is said that they belong to the Bodo family that entered India in the 10th century B.C. from the East, settled on the banks of the Brahmaputra, and gradually spread over Assam and the whole of the North Eastern Bengal. Now they are living in north eastern part of India, particularly in North Bengal, present Bangladesh (Rangpur, East Dinajpur, North Western part of Mymensingh district) Lower Bhutan, Assam (Goalpara, Northern part of Kamrup and Western part of Naogaon district), Meghalaya, Nepal (Bhadrapur and Jhapa, Morang district), Eastern part of Purnea district of Bihar, some parts of Tripura. The 1921 Census Report shows about 89% of this caste population lived in just districts i.e. Dinajpur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. ¹ They were the original inhabitants of North Bengal and the third largest Hindus caste in the whole province. The census commissioners and the Colonial ethnographers, however, faced a major problem regarding the identification of the Rajbanshis. Particularly a problem has been raised regarding the term whether the Rajbanshis and Koches were synonymous or not.

There is more than one viewpoint about the origin of the Rajbanshis. Some scholars say, the Rajbanshis are of *Kshatriya* origin, and they have subsequently become degraded and made themselves known as Rajbanshis, the term denoting their association with the *Raja*

(King), the Koch tribe of Bodo-origin. The basis of this viewpoint is that the Koch Behar dynasty, which ruled in Kamrup, had their origin from the Koch tribe. The King and the subjects being of same stock in this region, the Rajbanshis belong to the Koch. Both the viewpoints deserve some amount of discussions.

The evidences of inhabitation in the farthest northern part of Bengal are found in the account of invasion of Baktiyer Khalji ² while he entered Tibet in 1206 A.D.³ It is reported that at that time between the country Lakhnnavati and Tibet lay the hill or rather the jungle tract which was inhabited by three non- Indian tribes viz. the Koch, the Mech and the Tharu. We came to know from the history of Kamrup and medieval Assam that many tribal groups like the Kiratas, the Ahoms, the Khens, and the Koches etc. ruled over different parts of Kamrup. Among these various groups, the Koches under the leadership of Viswa Singha established their control in the western part of Kamrup by the end of fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. ⁴ But the term Rajbanshi was not mentioned in any Persian records, in the foreign accounts, in *Assam Burunjis*, or in *Darang Rajvanshavali* (Genealogical accounts of the Koch Royal Family)⁵.

There are different official and non- official works on the origin question of Rajbanshis. Broadly speaking, there are two lines of arguments regarding the origin of the Rajbanshis; one by the colonial official-cum- ethnographers and the other by the Rajbanshi caste publicists and indigenous literatures like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat*, *Puranas*, *Tantra Scriptures* etc.

Entrusted with the responsibility of collecting information on the various sects of population of the Eastern India, Sir Buchanan Hamilton did a survey in the years between 1807 and 1817. Based on Buchanan's finding a number of surveys were made and several ethnological monographs were produced on racial and ethnic origins of several of Indian social groups. ⁶ Buchanan reports –“Accounts of the district of Rangpur 1810” inserted in that book gives an account of the history of the Rajbanshis. ⁷ According to this report Koch and Rajbanshis, both being part of the larger Bodo stock, belong to the same caste. The report, however, says that not all the Rajbanshis are Koches, although most of them are those who have become degenerated by adopting the profession of palanquin bearer are Koch and amongst them, those who have become further degraded by taking to the habits of eating pork, chicken, etc are *Dahoi* or *Garol*. Most of the scholars in the latter years followed this research work of Buchanan Hamilton. However, all of them have restricted their discussion around the central point whether the Rajbanshis and the Koches are same. Some native *babus* who had very little idea about the Rajbanshi people of this region worked as assistants to British scholars and as such, their findings suffered from various kinds of limitations.

After Buchanan, B.H. Hodgson who in the “ Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal 1849” wrote that when Biswa Singha, the grandson of Hajo, and the founder of the Koch Kingdom, embraced Hinduism, the country was renamed Bihar- the people, became Rajbanshi. ⁸ According to him, the Koch and Kuvaca are synonyms. He has divided Koches of Assam into three groups- Kamkhali, Madai and Kalita. Koches of Rangpur on the other hand, are divided into two groups- Koch and Rajbanshi. In other words, he has described Koch and

Rajbanshi as belonging to the same stock from the viewpoint. He also says the Koches belong to the distinctly marked type of the Mongolian family. ⁹ He is supported by Waddel who also says that they do not belong to the Dravidian stock, "but are distinctly Mongoloid though some what heterogeneous". ¹⁰ In this respect he has given a note as follows-

"This term 'Koch' has become more of a caste title than a tribal appellation so that individuals of the Kacharie, Garo, Rabha, Lalung and allied Indo- Chines tribes are admitted as members; and there seems also in places to be a slight learning with Namasudra blood. Thus any one of these tribes can become a Koch by establishing a Brahmanical rituals and giving up eating beef. In this stage he is called 'Saraniya', and 'Haroniy' (usually pronounced in the Assam fashion), which means 'a refugee', implying that he has taken refuge in Hinduism. The more advanced stage can be gained leaving off beef and swine's flesh and strong drink altogether, when he assumes the full externals and status of a Hindu... only assign by the more orthodox Hindu the position of one of the very lowest caste. The term Koch, therefore, not being a favoured one in Bengal it is usual to find then dropping that title wherever there is a resident *raja* of their own kindred as at 'Koch Bihar'(Koch Behar) , Darang, Bijni, Mech para, Sidli, Beltola, Jalpaiguri and Lakhi. At such places they call themselves by the higher sounding Indian title Rajbanshi or Royal race."¹¹

After Hodgson, E.T. Dalton and other British ethnographers like Thomson, Porter etc. have observed that the Rajbanshis are belongings to non-Aryan stock and large Bodo population based on their physical appearances. ¹² H. Beverley comments that, the Koch, Rajbanshi and *Paliya* are for the most part one the same tribes. Rajbanshi is an indefinite term and some few of the individuals may possibly belong to

other castes. In the lower delta, Rajbanshis is said to be a sub-division of *Tiyars*, but by far the great majority coming from the district of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Goalpara are clearly the same as Koch and *Paliyas*".¹³ Captain Lewis, a Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar while commenting on the Census of 1872, "The present inhabitants of Cooch Behar State do not belong to any particular race. The Meches who inhabit the Bhutan Duars coming into contact with the immigrants from the south intermarriage have taken place and the descents are the modern Cooch Beharis".¹⁴

W.W.Hunter observes that towards the close of the fifteenth century one Koch king Hajo founded a kingdom at Kamrupa. According to him, the Rajbanshis and the *Paliyas* were the offshoots of the Koch tribes. The Koch tribe first came into prominence by the close of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century when they established the powerful Koch kingdom. During the reign of Viswa Singha, Brahmanism was introduced and the people including the King and his officers embraced the new religion. On their conversion to Hinduism, they abandoned the name "Koch" and adopted the name 'Rajbanshi' that literally means 'Royal Race'. He also opines that the cultivators adopted the name of Rajbanshi and they were semi Hindu aboriginals.¹⁵

Herbert Risley in a similar way noted-

Koch, Koch-mandi, Rajbanshi, Paliya, Deshi, a large Dravidian tribes of North- Eastern and Eastern Bengal among whom there are ground for suspecting some admixture of Mongoloid blood. At present day the name Koch, without doubt the original designation of the tribe, is a carefully tabooed in the districts where they are most numerous, and where there is very reason to believe them to represent the earliest

permanent settlers, that in Kuch Behar itself at the Census Report of 1881 not a single Koch was to be found. The transformation of the Koch into the Rajbanshi, the name by which they are now known in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Kuch or Koch Behar is a singular illustration of the influence exercised by fiction in the making of caste. Now the great majority of the 'Koch tribes' inhabitants of Northern Bengal invariably describe themselves as Rajbanshi or Bhanga- Kshatriya- a designation that enables them to pose as an out going branch of the *kshatriyas* who fled to these remote districts in order to escape from the wrath of Parsu Ram. They claim that they are descended from *Raja* Dasarath, father of Rama. They keep Brahmans; initiate the Brahmanical ritual in their marriage ceremony. They have begun to adopt the Brahmanical system of *gotroas* (Kasyapa). The original nucleus of the Rajput group may have been Aryan that of the Rajbanshi was certainly Dravidian.¹⁶ He also told that the *Koch, Rajbanshi, Paliya, Desi* and other varieties by whatever names they are descended from a Dravidian stock. They have occupied the valley of the Ganges at the time of the Aryan advance into Bengal driven forward by this incursion into the swamps and forests of Northern and North-Eastern Bengal. The tribes were here and there brought into contact with the Mongoloid races of the lower Himalayas and of the Assam, border and their type may have been affected to a varying degree by intermixture with these people. Overall, Dravidian characteristics predominate among them over Mongolian.¹⁷

However, in the Census Report of 1901, E.A. Gait remarked that there was basis for the assertion of the Rajbanshis of Rangpur that they did not resemble the Koches and sprang from entirely different sources. He believes that in spite of considerable racial intermixture in some places, the Rajbanshis appeared to be Dravidian tribes. They

probably owned the name long before the Mongoloid kings rose to power. In Jalpaiguri and Kuch Bihar and in Goalpara of Assam, the persons now known as Rajbanshi are either pure Koches who though dark have a distinctly Mongoloid physiognomy or else a mixed breed in which the Koch element usually preponderates.¹⁸ Gait also describes Dhimals of Darjeeling and Nepal Terai as Rajbanshi. They often call themselves Rajbanshis. Their title is Maulik (Mallik). The Koches are cultivators and same as Rajbanshi. The Koch Monde of East Bengal is the Koches who are still non-Hindus. They speak their own language 'Koch Munde.'¹⁹ Though the Koches freely call themselves Rajbanshis, it is believed that the two communities sprang from entirely different sources; the Koch Kings Mongoloid origin, while the Rajbanshis are Dravidian tribes, who probably own the name long before the Koch Kings rose to power.²⁰

H.B. Rowley describes that intermarriage with Koch tribes with Hindus has considerably changed their old habits. They resemble the Bengalese more than any other people do. One class of this tribe, the Rajbanshis worship Hindu deities and have adopted Hindu manners.²¹

H. Boileau, while commenting on the Census Report 1891 of the district of Jalpaiguri that "The Koches or Rajbanshis, are not within the pull of Hinduism, but are Hinduised aboriginal tribes of the district has been authorized fixed by the Privy Council ruling in reference to the succession of the Raikat Phanindra Dev of Jalpaiguri. The Raikots of Jalpaiguri, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar belong to the same family. Both the families trace their descent from the common ancestor Bisu Singha who was the offspring of Siva Madhavi Devi, a *Yogini Tantra*. The Raikot of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar families are *Kochhs* or *Kochhis* and *Mechs* mixed. As both royal families call themselves *Sivabangshi*, so the

mass of the *Koches* call themselves Rajbanshis as commented with royal families. Some of the Rajbanshis are now trying to prove that they are descendants of the *Kshatriyas*, who have taken shelter in North Bengal, being pursued by a Brahman hero Parsu Ram who extirpated the *kshatriyas* from the earth twenty one times. Some of them still call themselves *Bhanga Kshatriyas*.”²²

H.F.J.T. Maguire comments, “Among the Rajbanshis there is a distinction between those who have adopted the Vaishnava faith and the followers of God Siva. The latter appear to be Koches proper being of Mongoloid origin and having come from a small minority of the tribe of Rajbanshis. The former are of Dravidian stock and are more numerous and respectable, forming the main body of the agriculturists. The Rajbanshis have become to all intents and purposes Hindus and their claim to rank as Sudras (*kshatriyas*) was admitted by the *pandits* of Rangpur *Dharma Sabha*”.²³

O’ Donnel writes, “Another interesting tribe is the Rajbanshi or Koch of North Eastern Bengal, the localization of whose racial position has long been a subject of dispute. They are, however, only the third wave of Mongols who have advanced through the eastern passes the first being the *Chandal*, the second the Koch and the last *Ahom*”.²⁴

Grierson comments ‘there can be little doubt that the original Koches were the same as the Bodos. The Koch, Mech and the Bara or Bodo all connoted the same or at most different steps of the same tribe. The name Koch in fact connotes a Hindu Bodo who abandoned his ancestral religion for Hinduism and ancestral Bodo language for Bengali or Assamese. Rajbanshis are the Hindu Koches of Rangpur and

Goalpara. "Those Koch who are Hindus, are principally known under the name Rajbanshi. The Rajbanshi dialect bears any close points of resemblance to the dialect of East Bengal."²⁵

O' Malley states "The Rajbanshi or Barua Mugs are the offspring of Bengali woman by Burmese men or more generally of Arakanes mother by Bengali father"²⁶. He also says that 'a most persistent agitation was carried on Rajbanshis of North Bengal with the object recognized as *Kshatriyas* by descent. They desire not only to record separately from Koch, but also to be distinguished by the name *kshatriyas*. The former request was granted without hesitation as there is no doubt that at the present day, irrespective of any question of origin, the Rajbanshis and the Koches are separate castes. It was however out of the question to allow them to be returned by the generic and archaic name of *Kshatriyas*."²⁷

Thompson states, "The Rajbanshis are the indigenous people of Northern Bengal and the third Largest Hindu Caste in the province. Their total number has been exaggerated by the fact that a member of fisherman caste in Mymensingh, Nadia and Murshidabad returned themselves as Rajbanshis. In 1901, many Koches in North Bengal were returned as Rajbanshis. Many of the Rajbanshis have taken sacred thread and were prepared to use force in support of their claim to be returned as *Kshatriya*."²⁸ He also writes "No part of the Census in 1891, 1901, 1911 aroused so much excitement as the return of caste which caused a great deal heart burning and in some were returned as *kshatriya* quarters with threats of disturbance of the peace."²⁹ The Rajbanshis claimed to be included as *Kshatriya*, *Bratya kshatriya*, *Barua kshatriya*

Kayastha and Hari.....	as <i>kshatriya</i>
Kamar	as <i>kamar kshatriya</i>
Pod	as <i>Poundra or Bratya kshatriya</i>
Malo	as <i>Malla or Bratya kshatriya</i>
Koch	as <i>Koch kshatriya</i>
Jalia Kaibartta and Tiyer.....	as <i>Rajbanshi</i>

The feeling ran so high that the census would have broken down completely in Rangpur if this had not been promised.³⁰

Porter comments, "Some more gotras other than *Kashyapa* were introduced amongst the Rajbanshis. They are—i) *Kasyapa*, ii) *Sandilya*, iii) *Bharadwaja*, iv) *Savarna*, v) *Kapila*, vi) *Thandi* vii) *Batsya*, viii) *Mandgala*, ix) *Arti*, x) *Parasara*, xi) *Kausuka*, xii) *Viswamitra*.³¹ He then comments, "The Rajbanshis have now to some extent regularized the anomalous position in which they found themselves until recently owing to the fact that upon assumption of the *Kshatriya* Status they had all adopted themselves into the same *gotras* (*kasyapa*) with result that all marriages amongst Rajbanshi as *Kshatriya* would, upon a strict interpretation of Hindu law have invalid owing to their being within the same *gotras*. But even amongst those families which have been invested with sacred, it is apparently only the literate section who claim to belong to any *gotras* and those, when it is necessary to disclose a *gotras* at all, plump for the *kasyapa gotras* as a matter of course.

Porter also states- Koch, Palia, Rajbanshi, were originally the same. The *Kaivarttas* of Assam and North Bengal have more affinity with Rajbanshis. They all claimed to be recorded as Rajbanshis and all the Rajbanshis claimed to be a recorded as *Kshatriyas* at the beginning of the

19th century. The more backward and illiterate members of the Rajbanshi caste still maintain practices inconsistent with orthodox Hindu belief.³²

In the indigenous literature on the other hand, the Rajbanshis were referred to as different from and superior (in rank) to the Koch. But this assertion was made, it will be interesting to note through the use of the same concepts, either western anthropological (Dravidian, Mongoloid etc) or an ancient Scriptural (i.e. Varna status), borrowed from the official discourse. For example, Monomohan Ray wrote: "Inspective of any question as to identify or difference of origin, the Rajbanshis and Koches from entirely distinct Castes". In social status, the Koches were inferior to that of the Rajbanshis, who had greater ceremonial purity than the Koches did. The physical features of the great majority of the Rajbanshis of Rangpur, except the northern part bordering on Cooch Behar, were distinctly Dravidian'. The physiognomy of the Koches was decidedly 'Mongoloid'. He also says that the distinction between the Rajbanshis and Koches in the Rangpur district is not of recent growth, but points to a real ethnological difference. The theory that the term Rajbanshi is merely a recent title of the Koch who assumed it on the establishment of the Kingdom of Kuch Bihar does not on a close examination of the existing facts; appear to be a tenable one.³³

Hari Kishore Adhikary also argued that the Koches and the Rajbanshis were not the same caste and were different in many ways. The food habits, behaviour, and the upper caste Hindus, including the Rajbanshis, did not maintain social relations with them. In fact, Adhikary stressed that the Rajbanshis, on the other hand should be regarded as an upper caste, which is borne out, by their food habits behaviour, and customs. The Rajbanshis performed all their ceremonies and ritual in the

fashion of the *Kshatriyas* and other upper caste Hindus. He also objected to the contention that the Rajbanshis adopted Hinduism during the reign of Maharaja Viswa Singha of Cooch Behar (in the early 16th century). According to him, the Rajbanshis were Hindus before the reign of Viswa Singha and were recognized as *Bhanga Kshatriyas*. As according to the *Shasta's* the term *Bhanga Kshatriya* had no meaning so they had come recognized as 'Rajbnashi.'³⁴ Upendra Nath Barman also argued in a similar way that the Rajbanshis were *kshatriyas* and lived in the land called 'Pundra Desh', between the river Karotoya and Ganga. He refuted the arguments of colonial ethnographers by citing example from the Hindu *Shastras* and *Puranas* and he wrote that Rajbanshis were claiming the Kshatriya status long before the eighteenth century.³⁵ Maniram Kabya Bhusan and many others of the Rajbnashi literate also asserted the same mythic- historical claim of a *Kshatriya* origin.³⁶

Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee writes that the masses of North Bengal area are very largely Bodo origin, or mixed Austric-Dravidian- Mongoloid, where groups of peoples from lower Bengal (*Bati-des*) and Bihar have penetrated among them. They are now mainly as Koch, i.e. Hindu or Semi Hindu Bodo who have abandoned their original Tibeto- Burman speech and have adopted the Northern dialect of Bengali (which has a close affinity with Assamese). When they are a little too conscious of their Hindu religion and culture and retain at the same time some vague memory of the glories of their people particularly during the time of Viswa Singha and Nara Narayana, they are proud to call themselves Rajbanshis and to claim to be called *kshatiryas*. Yet they are quite content at the same time, for the sake of political advantages, to be classed as a Scheduled Caste, among the lowly in Hindu society whose past disabilities are now sought to be atoned for by giving them some

special privileges. He also says nothing much is definitely known about the Koches of North Bengal prior to the 16th century. They may be described as western Bodos, an extension of the great Bodo race of Assam valley from Sadiye right up to North Bengal, the Garo Hills, Mymensingh and Sylhet districts, Kachar district, and Tippera (Comillah) district and Tripura State, forming a ring round the Austric (Mon-khmer) area of the Khasi and Jaintia hills, and flanked in the East and South – east by their near kinsmen the Nagas and their distant cousins the Kuki-chins .³⁷

During the rule of Palas in Bengal with their capital at Gauda (Laksmanavati), the Koches were gathering strength and like their kinsmen in Assam, had become, at least outwardly, Hinduised. It would appear that by the middle of the 10th century A.D. they had overthrown the Pala ruling house from Gauda and established themselves as rulers in the northern part of present West Bengal. The short Bangarh Inscription in Sanskrit from Dinajpur giving a date 800 Saka = 966 A.D. briefly states the creation of a temple to Siva Kambojas (Kambojanvaya-Gandapat). As Rama Prasad Chanda suggested Kamboja have an only mean the Koch people of the period .³⁸

However, certain contemporary sources, supply us with important information regarding the ethnic identity of the Koches. Thus, Minhas-ud-din Siraj ,the author of the *Tabakat-i- Nasiri*, which contains an account of the first two expeditions of Mahammad-bin- Bakhtiyar Khalji to the kingdom of Kamrupa(ancient Assam) in the first part of the 13th century. It is noted that during that time this region (meaning present North and north-east Bengal and Western Assam which at that time formed a part of the kingdom of Kamrupa) was inhabited by the Kunch

(Koch), Mej / Meg (Mech) and the Tiharu (Tharu) tribes having Turk countenance.³⁹ S.K. Chatterjee in this connection rightly observes that their Mongoloid features and speech made a distinct impression upon the Turks who were also members of the same race.⁴⁰ Again, Ralph Fitch who visited Koch Behar in 1585 notes: "The people have ears which he marvelous great of a span long which they draw out in length by devices when they are young."⁴¹

On the other hand, referring to the description by Hiuen Tsang, S.K. Chatterjee has observed that the whole of Bengal including the Northern part adopted the Aryan language and culture by the 7th century. While assuming reasons for some difference between the language of Kamrup and that of middle India, as mentioned by Hiuen Tsang, he has commented that Kamrupi language has Tibeto- Burman elements and as such, the Aryan language has been a bit distorted by Kamrup pronunciation.⁴²

In other words, S.K.Chatterjee accepted that the language of North Bengal was principally the Aryan language in the 7th century itself. Unfortunately, he had adopted two contradictory positions as reflected from his observations mentioned above. From the description of the track followed by Baqtiair Khalji for his Tibet invasion in *Tabakat-i- Nasiri*, as mention by Sukumar Das in *Uttar Banger Itihas*. It is clear that Baqtiair Khalji and his followers contact with the mountainous tribes and their language and there was no opportunity of their contact with the people of the plains, i.e. Rajbanshi.⁴³ It, therefore, follows that the observations of S.K. Chatterjee about the Rajbanshis based on the *Tabaqat-i- Nasiri* are not well founded and have not acceptable.

The other set of sources about the history of the Rajbanshis are indigenous literature like *Puranas*, *Up-puranas*, *Tantras*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata* etc. The materials available from such sources differ from the findings of the English and Indian researchers and scholars. According to *Bhramari Tantra*;

Nandisuta Bhayadbhime Poundradesat Samgatah

Bardhanasya Pancaputrah swaganairbandhabaih saha

Ratnapithan Bibasante Kaladbriprara Sangamat

*Kshatra dharmaparakranta Rajbanshti khyatah bhube.*⁴⁴

[Free Translation: Out of fear from the son of Nandi i.e. (Mahapadma Nanda) the five sons of Bardhana including Bhimeshwara with their relatives came from Poundradesh (within Magadha) and settled down in Ratnapitha of Kamrup; and for a long time due to non-connection with Brahmans being derailed from *kshatriya* rituals, become known as Rajbanshis in the earth.]

According to *KalikaPurana-*

Jamadagnya bhayabhitah Kshatriya Purbamebahi

Mleccha Chadmanu Pudaya Jalpizam saranam gatah.(30)

Te Mlecch bachah Satatamaryabachsha Sarbada

*Jalpizam Sebamanaste gopayanti cha tang haram.*⁴⁵

[Free translation: Out of fear from the son of Jamadagni, i.e. (Parasuram) the persons who were previously known as kshatriyas assuming the garb and attire of Mlecchas settled down round about Jalpesh.(30) They who always used both Mlecchas and Arya speeches used to worship Lord Siva secretly.]

The disciple of Mahapurusa- Sankardeva- *pandit* Rupnarayana in his “Kamateshwar Kula Kalika writes:

Mahanadisuta nanda Bouddharaja Sadamanda

Dhbansa kare Kshatrabansha tin Saptabar.

Seha gota bhujabale Yujhilen abhele
Dbiteeya Parashuram Jitu Abatar
Chhiriye gulardari kshatri Chinya lupta kari
Pranbhayae iti uti Palanta Sakali.
Sangramak bhaya kari bhanga kshatri nama dhari
Apanake mane keha Rajbnashi buli.
Bardhana suta Pachjan Ratnapithe nila than
Arakeha lukaila Yonigarbhapithe
Taramadhye Bhemeswara Aradhila Mahesware
Siddha haila sita Ratnapither nikate

[Free translation: The Second Parasurama, the son of Nandi demolished the *Kshatriyas* for 21(twenty-one) time. In addition, the *kshtriyas*, being afraid of war, tore off the sacred sacrificial thread and took the name as *Bhanga Kshatriya* and some of them as Rajbnashi. The five sons of Bardhana including Bhimeswara, worshipped Siva and he succeeded in penance near Rathna Pitha.]

It is very logical to assume that this second Parasurama is not a *Puiranic* person, but historic one who followed Buddhism. However, this view seems not to be a Pedantic one, because there is no historical and rational basis.

The question, therefore, arises whether Ratnapitha and Jalpesh are situated in the same place. One has to go through the ancient history of Kamrupa to know the history of the Rajbanshis because their living place was a part of Kamrupa only. Ancient Kamrupa had four parts-viz. *Kampitha*, *Yonipith*, *Manipitha*, and *Ratnapitha*. The most western part of the Kingdom was *Ratnapitha*. *Yogini Tantra* and the account of Buchanan Hamilton also supported this view. From this point

of view the boundary of ancient Kamrupa and the present location of Jalpesh in Maynaguri Police Station of Jalpaiguri district, there is a problem to accept that the location of Ratnapitha and Jalpesh is the same.

Now, where is the location of Pundrabhumi, referred to in Bhramari Tantra? According to the *Puranic* account, the origin of the name 'Pundra' as ascribed one of the five sons of the Asura king Bali. R.C. Majumder also supports this view.⁴⁶ He says they lived in North Bengal popularly known as Pundradesh and Pundra Vardhan one of the famous cities in ancient time. Mahastangarh located at a place with distance of seven miles from Bogra. This argument of R.C.Majumder as well accepted now. According to *Manusamhita*, *Poundra*, *Odra*, *Kamboja*, *Yavana*, *Saka* and *Kirata* all these *Kshatriya* people have been degraded to Sudra because of the Brahamans. In the annotation of *Sloka 44* of Chapter 10 of *Manusamhita*, *Kulluk* commented that the *kshatriyas* who used to live in Pundra Vardhana abandoned the Vedic rites and got degenerated to Sudra.

As per Manu's prescription the pure Brahmin, Kshatriyas or Vaisyas, if and when transgress the rules of *Varnashrama* dharma, become degenerated one. From the above discussion, it can be stressed that some Pundra kshatriyas, being sacred of chased by the king Mahapadma Nanda, crossed the river Karotoya, took shelter in *Ratnapitha* located in Jalpesh area and settled there. They were gradually become degraded and converted to mleccha because of their non-association with the Brahmins and close association with the mlecchas, adopting thereby the *mleccha* language too.

From the above discussion based on the Indian scholars, foreign scholars and researchers, it is not easy to conclude about the origin of the Rajbanshi community. However, it may be concluded that they are – i) from the Davidian stock, ii) from the Mongolian stock and iii) from the intermixture of Austric- Dravid and Mongolian people. One of the main issues of controversy was whether the Rajbanshi and Koches are the same caste. Some of the Indian scholars think that the Rajbanshis were the descendants of the Koches; others argue that the Rajbanshis were a mixed race.⁴⁷ The matter therefore would be clear to us if we discuss the origin of the Koches and their establishment in power into the throne of North- Eastern India.

A few words regarding the origin of the term 'Koch' is felt necessary here. In the *Yogini Tantra* the Koches are termed 'Kuvaca', and in the *Padmapurana* as 'Kuvacaka' who are said to have dirty food, and spoken a barbarian tongue.⁴⁸ It is possible that because of their difference particularly in food habits and speeches the Aryan scholars used to call them as such, or sometimes as mleccha. Rai K.L. Barua opines that mleccha, might be a *sanskritised* form of the Mech.⁴⁹ This view is supported by Edward Gait and S.K.Chatterjee that the Koches and the Meches are the members of the same family.⁵⁰ It is clear from the point that while Biswa Singh's father has been represented as the chief of the twelve Mech families, his mother has been described as the daughter of a Koch chieftain.⁵¹

According to S.K.Chatterjee " the 'Koc' (or rather Komc) ,comes from a Middle –Indo- Aryan source from 'kawomca' written 'komoca' which can be properly *sanskritised* as 'Kamboja'.⁵² He further states that the 'Kambojas' of Bengal are apparently the ancestors of the

Koch People of Northern Bengal.⁵³ Thus, it is reasonable to stress that the appellation 'koch' is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit 'kamboja' to which have a number of reference as a group of people or as a country where these people dwelt. Buchanan Hamilton says the primitive Koches called 'Pani Koch' lived amidst the woods, frequently changing their abode to cultivate land enriched by a fallow. He further told that the koches had their original home some where in the Northern part of Bengal towards Dalimkot.⁵⁴

On the other hand, a number of scholars, like H.C.Raychoudhury and R.C.Majumder believe that the Koches came to Bengal from North West India (NWFP) and hold them to be identical with the Kambojas an ancient tribe of that region.⁵⁵ N.N.Basu also states that the 'kambojas' came originally from near the Gurjara Country.⁵⁶ The Tibetan work *Pagsam- Zon- Zang* refers to a country called *Kampo-tsa* in the upper and eastern Luchai Hill tracts lying in between Burma and Bengal.⁵⁷ R.P. Chanda has taken to mean Kambojadesh and according to the 'kamboja' people have come to Bengal from Tibet.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that the Nepalese traditions apply the term Kambojadesh to Tibet.⁵⁹ The *Tabakat-i- Nasiri* points out that horses in large numbers were imported to Assam and Bengal from Tibet.⁶⁰ The *Riyas-us- Salatin* also refers to Bhutan and the neighboring mountainous region supplies of such horses.⁶¹ It is to be noted that there was a ruling race in Tibet called *khampa* or *Kampa* or *kamba*⁶² and that the Tibetan monasteries (Ucangne country) were called as campus or compus. In this connection, Dr. D. Nath says the term Koch (Sanskrit Kamboja, Kuvaca, or Kuvacaka) had its origin in Tibet and that these groups of Indo-Mongoloid people were from the country.⁶³

Now the matter of question arises that when the 'Kambojas Koches' came to Bengal and Assam? Gait in the Census Report of 1891 observes; " the first mention of the Koch of which I am aware in 1198. when Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered Bengal and invaded Tibet .⁶⁴ As we have already mentioned that, the Koch, Mech and Tharu tribes of North Bengal are the primitive tribes of his time. He has also recorded that one Ali Mech , a Mech Chieftain, guided Bakhtiyar's army through Kamrupa.⁶⁵ The epigraphic sources like inscriptions of the Kamboja king Nayapala (Kalenda villages of Orissa) who was the son of king Rajyapala and queen Bhagyadevi and younger brother of Narayanpala by which the king donated lands in the Dandabhukitmandala within the Vardhamanabhukti, are assigned on paleographical grounds to the latter half of the 10th century A.D. ⁶⁶ According to D.C.Sircar, these rulers belong to the same family (Of the Kombojas)⁶⁷, and occupied not only Northern Bengal(Gauda) but also the South Western part of the province, including Vardhamanabhukti.

The early Kamboja rulers were either Bhuddhist or Hindu by religion. Some of them Vaishnava (Narayanpala) and some other were Shaivaism. This proves that Hinduism to be a limited extent at least of the royal house alone began as early as the 10th century A.D.

From the above discussion, it may be presumed that Kambojas or the Koches, who migrated to India from Tibet, settled first in the North and North Eastern Bengal and then extended towards Western part of Assam. Gradually they occupied large areas as far as South and West Bengal where they came into contact numerous racial elements including Dravidian. For a brief period, they even held political power in those region and some of their rulers ruled with assumption of

sovereign titles like 'Parameswara' 'Parambhattaraka', 'Maharajadhiraja' etc. However, their power gradually dwindled when the Cholas invaded under the great king Rajendra Chola brought about the collapse of the Kamboja rule in the South. In the North; the Pala king Rajyapala, as proved by the Bhaturiya Inscription, extirpated their rule from North Bengal before the middle of the 10th century A.D. The political power extinguished, and the masses remained tribal until the beginning of the 16th century when they had a political and cultural renaissance under the leadership of Biswa Singha in Kamrup in 1515.

During the period of our study, we have seen that the entire tract of land viz. Pragjyotispur, Kamrupa, Kamta-Koch- Kingdom, Kamatapur, and Pundravardhan etc. had been inhabited by a group of people or groups of people since prehistoric period. Different stocks of people had ruled this land at different periods such as Negrito, Austric, Mongoloid, Alpaniya, and Dravidians.⁶⁸ The most important and largest group of people being the *Pundra Khatriyas*. In addition, the Pundras were perhaps the Rajbanshis who belong to Austric- Dravidian groups or Mongoloid groups called by the scholars. Whatever, may be their racial identity, they were the earlier inhabitants in this region and were quite liberal attitude and quite receptive too. Due to this nature, they could assimilate the Aryan language, religion and culture and made themselves a developing group of people. *Puranas* and *Tantras* mention that the Dravidian is the *Pundra Khatriyas* who claimed to be descendents of Aryans. According to S.K.Chatterjee Aryanization in Bengal commenced during the region of Mauryas in the 4th century B.C. and were completed in the Gupta era i.e. 7th century A.D. To him, Aryan religion, language and culture spread over the entire North Bengal of West Bengal by this time. It can be deducted that Aryanization took place in North Bengal too

during the same period as in other parts of Bengal. That the Rajbanshis adopted the Aryan language by the 7th century A.D. is supported by the Chinese Pilgrim Hieun Tsang's travel document. Regarding the language spoken by the inhabitants of Kamrup, Hiuen Tsang observed that the language sounded a little different from that of the middle India. This is explained by S.K.Chatterjee's observation that Hiuen Tsang might have heard the language of Western Assam or Kamrupa with a little different mode of pronunciation (of the same Indo- Aryan) which has made Assamese look and sound different from Bengali as a result of which Kamrupi language appeared to him somewhat different from the middle Indian language.

From this above discussion, it may be traced that the Rajbanshis was group of Dravidians or Pundra *Kshatriyas* of Pundra Vardhana came to Kamrupa and resided there towards the end of the 4th century B.C. Later on Tibeto Burmas tribes- Koch, Mech, Bodo, Kachari, Rabha, etc. of Sino- Tibetan groups entered North- Eastern part of India in the 1st century B.C. This conservative one of these tribes maintained their separate entity. The less conservative ones, however, had gradual intermingling with the Dravidians and formed a combined people. These combined people are perhaps the Rajbanshis, who in the subsequent period had admixture of blood with the so-called Aryans.⁶⁹

From the ancient period itself, this community of people tried to assimilate the Aryan languages and culture and even in the initial stages of assimilation by the 7th century, itself adopted the Indo- Aryan language as their own. However, from the standpoint of religious and culture the process of assimilation is being continuing. It is from this angle that the Rajbanshis claim themselves as the *Kshatriyas*. They claim

that Koches and Rajbanshis are not the same caste and they tried to prove their *Kshatriya* status by taking the sacred thread to get rid the degradation.

The Rajbanshis organized mass agitation from time to time to identify themselves as the descendents of Aryan and tried to establish their *Kshatriya* identity in Governments records. It took quite well organized shape towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Finally, the Rajbanshis became successful to recognize themselves as “*kshatriya*” in the final report of 1911 Census, where they were listed as a separate Hindu caste, ‘Rajbanshi, with *kshatriya* in bracket.’⁷⁰

During the Census operations of 1921 and 1931, the Rajbanshis once again mobilized the community and appealed to the census authorities to return them as only *Kshatriya* in place of Rajbanshi *Kshatriya*.⁷¹ Panchanan Sarkar alias Panchanan Burma (1866-1935) of the village Khalisamari of Mathabhanga sub- Division of Cooch Behar district and a pleader of the Rangpur Court was the chief architect of this agitation towards its final stage. It was Panchanan Burma who dedicated his life for betterment and strengthened of Rajbanshi community through the process of *sanskritization* would be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

On the other hand, Koches succeeded in building up a great empire under the Kingship of Biswa Singha from Kamtapur fort and ascended the throne of Kamrupa (A.D. 1496-1533). Maharaja Biswa Singha attempts to revamp Hinduism. He himself was a worshiper of *Siva* and *Durga*, revived the *shakta* shrine at Kamashka. This is an old shrine of hoary antiquity and of Mongoloid or possibly even earlier

“Austic origin”. It witnessed the final Brahmanization of a pre-Aryan cult. It is a symbol of the final Arynization or Hindusation of the Indo-Mongloids of North Eastern India.⁷² His son and successor Naranarayan (A.D.1533- 1587) was not only the greatest of the Koches ,but was also one of the illustrated rulers of North- East India of his time. His long reign of nearly half a century forms a landmark in the history of the Brahamaputra Valley. At first stage, a sharp distinction between the Rajbanshis and the Koches could be seen. However, hundreds of years passed on Koches rule in the throne were accepted by the Rajbanshis, in such a matrimonial connection was made, and in course of time Koches and Rajbanshis admixture themselves culturally and socially and their separate identity was lost. In fact, on such an admixture, the cultural and linguistic development took a new shape. However, at present the Rajbanshi community is facing a new identity crisis i.e. the Rajbanshis of North Bengal are as Scheduled Caste, whereas the Rajbanshis of Purnea (Bihar) are recognized as O.B.C. (Other Backward Caste). During the year 1995- 96, there was an attempt to include the Rajbanshis of Assam under Scheduled Tribe list. A parliamentary committee under the chairmanship of Sri Amar Ray Prodhhan, M.P.(Cooch Behar Loka Sabha Constituency) has given into the question wheather the Rajbanshis of Assam are SC or ST and submitted a report. The findings of the committee have, however, not yet been made in public.⁷³ On the other hand, Rajbanshis of Nepal are considered as General Caste recognized as ‘Rajbanshis’ in official records.

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CHAPTER –IV

**Traditional Socio-Economic Status of the Rajbanshis :
A Contemporary Historical Perspective**

CHAPTER-IV

TRADITIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE RAJBANSHIS: A CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

The Rajbanshis are considered the most important indigenous group inhabiting at the northern part of West Bengal, comprising the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling North and South Dinajpur and Malda. According to Census report 1981, the Rajbanshis constitute 19% of total of Scheduled Caste population of West Bengal. Out of the total Rajbanshis of North Bengal, about 74% lives in Cooch Behar, 32% in Jalpaiguri, 13% in North and South Dinajpur and 8% in Darjeeling and Malda districts. Therefore, the major concentration of the Rajbanshis is in the districts of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. The sex ratio of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal is 952 females per 1000 males (1971 Census). The Rajbanshis is one of the major Scheduled Castes in West Bengal. ¹ Out of total 2258760 Rajbanshis in West Bengal, 77.19 percent of them are found to live in the northern part of the state known as North Bengal. Some scholars believe that North Bengal is the homeland of the Rajbanshis and since long as a local community, have been dominating the ethnic situation of this climate. ²

I

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the social mobility movement of the Rajbanshis in their claim of *Kshatriya* status brought important changes in their population size and growth. Their steadily changing identities through different Census, which was essentially associated with their claim of superior status in *Varna*

hierarchy, make it difficult to trace exactly the trends of socio- economic changes in the Rajbanshi community. ³

Since mid forties, as an effect of various endogamous and exogamous forces, some noticeable changes have been taken place in population structure of northern part of West Bengal. After independence, the widening disparities between the Rajbanshis and the people belonging to other social groups in socio- economic opportunities had shaped their interpersonal relationships to a considerable extend. The present feeling of relative deprivation among the Rajbanshis and their somewhat antagonistic towards alien population can partially be understood from a comparative analysis of socio- economic data available from census. The following tables may show the growth of Rajbanshi population in India, Bengal, and North Bengal.

Table 4.1:Growth of Rajbanshi people in India(1901-1991) ⁴

Year	Total population
1901(a)	937291
1911(a)	1218346
1921(a)	1165141
1931(a)	1209612
1941(a)	826640
1951(a)	742619
1961(b)	1201717
1971(c)	1353919
1981(d)	2258760
1991(e)	2982280

Source: (a) Castes and Tribes of Bengal, Census of West Bengal, 1951, pp.95-114

(b) Census of India, 1961, Vol-I, India Part V-A(i), pp.286-92.

(c) Census of India, 1971, Series I, Paper -I of 1975, pp.89-92.

(d) Census of India, 1981, Series 23, Part IX(i) ,pp.8-62.

(e) Census of India, 1991, exclusively compiled in Surajit Kumar Chatterjee, *The Scheduled Castes in India*, Vol. 3, N.Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, Pp.1159-1160,

Table 4.2: Growth of Rajbanshi population in West Bengal (1872-1991) ⁵

Year	Total population
1872	290584
1891	30508
1901	939291
1911	1210346
1921	1165141
1931	1209612
1941	826640
1951	742619
1961	1201717
1971	1353919
1981	2258760
1991	2839481

Source: Census records, Government of India.

Table 4.3: Distribution of the Rajbanshi population in North Bengal by the Census years

District	1951	%	1961	%	1971	%	1981	%	1991	%
Darjeeling	15894	3.00	31887	3.50	31505	3.06	62770	3.60	96745	7.44
Jalpaiguri	172710	32.68	316020	35.19	329191	32.03	514174	29.49	656073	23.42
Cooch Behar	252069	47.7	418839	46.63	481304	46.84	714221	40.96	865622	39.86
W. Dinajpur	67489	12.78	93371	10.40	134976	13.13	369015	21.16	489642	15.65
Malda	20294	3.84	38443	4.28	50693	4.94	83463	4.79	114697	4.29

Source: Census of India, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991.

The Rajbanshi people of Nepal predominantly live in Jhapa and Morang districts in the southeastern corner of the country. In 1991, census of Nepal gives the total number of Rajbanshi in the country as 85558. In the district Jhapa, there was reported to be a total 66224 Rajbanshi, where as in Morang district, the census records the Rajbanshi population as 18,243. This leaves only 1091 Rajbanshi spread throughout other districts of Nepal, not restricted to Jhapa, Morang and it's neighbouring districts. The 2001 census of Nepal gives the total number of Rajbanshi in the country as 129883. The Rajbanshi people also live in

Bangladesh. In 2000 the Rajbanshi language speaking people in northwest region of Bangladesh in numbered is as 12,912⁶

In order to understand the traditional socio-economic status of the Rajbanshis of north eastern part of India, the social organization, cultural practices, educational status, and economic position of the Rajbanshis need to be discussed. This exercise would help us in identifying the different strands that existed among the Rajbanshis. All these factors would be discussed in four parts in this chapter.

II

4.2.1: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION:

Family is the units of the Rajbanshi community and they normally live in joint families. The family is matrilineal and paternal with recognition of social relations with the kin or both sides (father and mother) and generally the eldest male member was regarded as the head of the family.⁷ The house hold contains the dependent members from the father's side and sometime from mother's side also. Rarely a married son breaks away from the family and lives elsewhere. If it is so, it is due to economic means when the son goes away either to till some one else's land or to seek a job. Recently tradition of joint family in Rajbanshi society is being segmented due to socio-economic factors and non-cooperative relation among the family members.⁸ In addition to this, with the expansion of new education where a single individual becomes the sole earner because of his occupation, big joint families are breaking down gradually. The educated people are shifting to distant towns and

other places to earn their livelihood. In many cases, they have abandoned their ancestral house and settled in their places of earning.⁹

Rajbanshi community has a simple retinal structure and the concept of sub- caste absent among them.¹⁰ They are not divided into exogamous clans or *gotras*, but constituted a single endogamous group. They have only one *gotra* i.e. *kasyap*, and marriage within the same *gotra* is, therefore, a common practice.¹¹

A majority of the Rajbanshi live in village, which are thinly populated and have developed around the house of a *jotedar* or *giri*. Villages are scattered and in every villages there are various habitats and each group is called a *tari* (hamlet). A *tari* consists of a few kin or non-kin household.¹² Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal says a Rajbanshi village consists of comparatively a bigger house of a landholder and a group of smaller and nearer house of his sharecropper (*adhiars* or *borgadars*). A Rajbanshi village, therefore, consist of several dispersed groups of habitations. Each group called *chatal*, *chator* or *tari* has the house of a *jotedar* and several smaller houses of his *adhiars*. A small cultivator owing five to ten acres of land and paying rent for the same to his superior property owner is called *mulandar*.¹³ He also builds his house on his own plot of land. There are some *mulandars* engage in cultivation of their own land and *adhiars* on other's land. Such *mulandar* cum *adhiar* built his house on his own land. Several such groups of houses (*chatal*s), *chators*, *taris*) form a village. Each *catal* contains twenty or twenty five houses and village about one hundred and fifty houses but the number of houses of a village are being increased day by day. The name of the villages are generally named after –(i) the type of inhabitants living there, (ii) the nature of the soil and cultivation of the land, (iii) the previous

owner of the village (iv) some incidents that occurred long ago and (v) the name of the deity.¹⁴ Thus-

- 1.i. *Dakuapara, Pundibari* : Some robbers are said to have lived there.
 - ii. *Bamanpara* : where some Brahmins used to live.
 - iii. *Gidal para* : Some singers used to live and are living there.
- 2.i. *Dangapara* : High land.
 - ii. *Jhar Altagram* : A jungle grown on fresh alluvium.
 - iii. *Gorgoria ghat* : A deep stream with steep bank passing through this area.
- 3.i. *Naharipara* : One Sri Lahiri coming from the south was the owner of the village.
 - ii. *Bosepara , Prodhan para* : Bose ,Prodhan etc people used to live there.
4. i. *Bhutijhora* : Long ago a wild boar tore open the intestines of a person at this place.
(Bhuti-intestines)
 - ii. *Debi-jhora* : This was jungle where people come for hunting on the last day of Chaitra (Bisoba day) .Now there is no jungle but the village has grown up.
 - iii. *Voispara* : Where buffaloes used to be herded.
- 5.i. *Kalirhat* : There is a temple of goddess of kali.
 - ii. *Bhandani* : There is a temple of goddess of Bhandani.
 - iii. *Dhapgunge* : There is a temple of goddess Dhapchandi.

A Rajbanshi cultivator leads a very simple life. As agriculture was the basic means of livelihood most of the Rajbanshis started their daily work before the sun rises, either with ploughing or

transplantation and harvesting. They collected wood for cooking and sold agricultural products in the market. This importance of women in the family encouraged men to many more than one wife.²¹ The imposition of seclusion (*Parda*) is not very rigid among them. The flexibility of seclusion in Rajbanshi society has given the women more freedom than in comparison to other women of upper castes in their locality. Due to slackening of women's seclusion, the Rajbanshi women are free to participate in economic activities and contribute to family. The women who participate in economy enjoy more freedom and independence. In contemporary times many Rajbanshi women work as labour in agriculture, construction and other unorganized sector. However, their wages rate is much lower than the male labours. The lower wage rate denotes lower status of the Rajbanshi women.

The poor economic condition of the Rajbanshis created a social problem where women have been to adopt some lower skilled job is the informal sector. Recently a large number of Rajbanshi women are engaged in activities like- day labourer, domestic servants at rural, urban and semi urban areas.²² There are no restriction on the free movement of women and they enjoyed much more equality, than the women of the upper castes did. For example, smoking was common among Rajbanshi women and there was no taboo on their having free interaction with men within their own community. Although the Rajbanshi women enjoy certain freedom to participate in economic activities, smoking, interaction with men within same community, they have no strong voice on various societal restrictions. The men do not always consider their opinion on important family matters. They have no direct opinion in decision making about family affairs. Only the women get opportunity to exercise certain power in the family as mother and mother in-law. The mother has no

formal power of control on her sons, but has some influence on them. A responsible Rajbanshi woman very often exercises the power to control her lazy husband and this is so characteristic of a man in their society. She also has lot of say in domestic matters like the issues related to household work, selection of mates for her sons and daughters.

The social position of aged women in Rajbanshi family and society is not very problematic. An old woman continues to work for her family as best as her health permits. She looks after the small kinds and does such kinds of jobs for which she is capable. The old women are not under cared in her family. Among the Rajbanshis the old women who officiate over the family and other social matters, they continue to command respect by all even in their very old age. The women who have knowledge in folk medicine and expertise as witch doctor or *ojhali /gunia*, enjoy some special power and honour in the society.²³

Among the Rajbanshis, the women's position is rather not very important in political and organizational matters. They are excluded from the traditional political or caste organization as it is exclusively under the control of men. Owing to lack of education and isolation most of the women in Rajbanshi society are not much aware about the contemporary political situation, thus their participation in political matters are rather very limited. However, in contemporary times due to sincere efforts from the part of Government and political parties they are gradually coming to field of political arena.

At present the role and status of Rajbanshi women have also been gradually changing owing to the impact of various internal and external forces. Women belonging to microscopic section of well-to-do

Rajbanshi families nowadays participate in modern education and politics, take up jobs outside their homes, live in nuclear families, and enjoy more freedom. In very recent the Rajbanshi women took participation in the *Panchayet* and *Zilaparishad* election, they were given an important portfolio in *Gram Panchayet*, *Panchayet Samity*, and even they were given the portfolio of *Sabhadhipati of Zilaparishad* jurisdiction. In many respects, some important posts are reserved for the S.C. women. While the majority of Rajbanshi women of poor families are still far off from assigned domestic roles, experiencing taboos, and restrictions and thereby lacking the ambition of life. However, it is to be mentioned that the Rajbanshi women of both the rich as well as poor families are not free from certain impositions and exploitations on them, like other women of the country irrespective of castes and communities. The most typical examples in this context are the system of dowry, rules of seclusion, subordinate position, negligence, and dependent social position.

4.2.3: MARRIAGE IN RAJBANSHI SOCIETY:

The marriage customs and practices of the Rajbanshis have certain distinct features. Marriage within the same *gotra* is a common practice, though it is a deviation from the prevailing orthodox Brahmanical culture. Marriage is usually arranged through professional and unprofessional matchmaker who is popular by known as *ghotok*. The priest determines the marriage ceremony.²⁴ There are both regular and irregular forms of marriage in Rajbanshi society. Among the regular form of marriage is called *phulbiha*, in which a boy is married to a virgin girl. In this form, the marriage crown (*phul or sahera*) is tied on the bride and the bridegroom. A priest or *Adhikari* is essential in this type of

marriage.²⁵ Another form of regular marriage is known as *ghor-dzia-biha* in which a young man is received into a family with a view of being accepted as a son-in-law, in this respect he works as an assistant to the prospective father-in-law, is common amongst the Rajbanshis. In the alternative when the demanded bride price cannot be paid the new comers has to work under the prospective father-in-law to serve out a probationary period before he can claim to marry the girl. A salary is fixed to his work and as soon as bride price is covered, he is formally admitted as a son-in-law by proper celebration of a marriage. The period may extend from six months to seven years.²⁶

There were also irregular forms of marriages like *Panichita*, *Chatrodani*, *Levirate marriage*, *Ghor Sodhani Bia*, *Danguani*, *Porkhetri Pachua*, *Gao-goch and koina-patra* etc. Dr. Charu Chandra Sannyal says when a young man could not pay bride-price, he approach the guardian of a girl to sprinkle, with the consent of the elders 'Some water with the twig of a mango tree on the head of the girl and the boy'.²⁷ They were allowed to live together like husband and wife, and this was known as *panichitya*. However, being as a Rajbanshi the author is well aware that *Panichhita* is not a form of marriage but one of the important parts of marriage ceremony by which a well-known person or relative became more close like father-in-law /mother-in-law to the bride and groom. In this *panichhita* ceremony, the guardian of both the bride and groom proposed to sprinkle water at the time of marriage by which the proposed persons are called as '*panichhita Bap O Mao*' (father-in-law/mother-in-law). In this occasion, the proposed person takes some water with the twig of a mango tree and sprinkles it on the head of the bride and groom. The main purpose of this *panichhita* ceremony is to come more close to the relative. When the *panichhita* father-in-law/mother-in-law dies the

son-in-law/daughter-in-law has to perform *ashuch* of three days. *Chatrodani marriage* is a marriage of married women, even when her husband is alive, may be married to another man. Such type of marriage has been occurred where the first husband has hardly any means to maintain his wife or when he remains absent from the family or a pretty long time more than two years or when he is subsequently found to be constitutionally weak or sometimes the greedy father refuse to send his daughter to her husband's house and gives her in marriage to another man from whom he gets a fairly large sum as the bride-price. In this case, the status of the girl is reduced to that of a commodity. In this respect, formal divorce is automatically accepted by the society, former husband is simply paid back the bride-price.²⁸ Levirate marriage, *Ghor-sodhani Bia*, *Gao-goch*, *Danguani*, *Parakshetri Pachua* are the commonest form of widow remarriage in Rajbanshi society. When a man married his deceased elder brother's wife is called 'Levirate marriage'. When a young man and a girl to marry but the elders do not give consent probably because he or she would not be suitable, one day, of course by previous arrangement, the women suddenly enter the inner apartment of the house of the man and starts doing house hold works. In a day or two, she is accepted as the wife. In most cases a widow becomes a 'Ghor Sodhani', such a woman is called 'Pachua' or 'Pasua', and the man is called 'Songona'. A 'Ghor- Sodhani' woman is looked down upon by the society and the man loss his respectability. Although such marriage is accepted by the society and the children can inherit their father's property by the custom of the society. If a man brought a widow to live with him and to look after his house, it is called *goa- goch*; and if a widow owing property invited a man to live with her as a protector and to look after her property ; it is called *Dangua*.²⁹ The *Rajas*, big landlords and rich people used to keep an unmarried girl without marrying her, in

that cases the girl is called *Koina –patro*. The children are not legitimate and cannot inherit the property of keeper unless made legitimate by a subsequent marriage in *Panichita* or *Panisorpan* fashion ³⁰ *Porkshetri Pachua* is not the form of widow remarriage –when a widow has no one to look after her and she goes over to a man in his house to live with. She is then called *Porkshetri- Pachua*. (Wife coming after but living in another's house and land). Such woman is called *Dhemani* and as she is married with the consent of the elders she has a better position than a *Danguani* who of her own accord takes a man to live with.

Thus, in Rajbanshi society marriage is mainly viewed as a union between man and woman and there is not much complexity in marriage practices. As there is no clan organization among the Rajbanshis, matrimonial alliance is determined by kinship and marriage is arranged within their cultural –groups.³¹ Marriage outside the Rajbanshi community is not objected to but they seemed to have a marked preference for marriage with the upper caste Hindus, rather than with the Mech, Koch, Rabha etc. ³² Divorce is permitted among them and regarded as simple offers for which there is no compensation. ³³ However, incidence of divorce is very low among the Rajbanshi. Amongst the educated Rajbanshi, divorce is a rare occurrence. Child marriage or pre-puberty marriage is a traditional practice among the Rajbanshis, but post puberty marriage is the order of the day. Marriage is obligatory for a girl, remaining unmarried woman or maiden is beyond their social norms. Negotiation is the ideal form of marriage among them. They are usually monogamous; however, polygamy is also very common among them. In a well-to-do Rajbanshi household sometimes there are many wives regularly or irregularly married. In contemporary time Rajbanshis have come under the influence of Hinduism, thus their values,

attitudes, and patterns of behaviour are largely governed by the customs of their neighbouring Hindu castes and these in turn regulate their women's ascribed role and status.

III

4.3.1: CULTURAL PRACTICE IN RAJBANSHI SOCIETY:

The religious practice of the Rajbanshi society is differentiated than from the other upper caste Hindus of Bengal though in some cases they are adherents of Hinduism. *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism* are popular among Rajbanshi. J. A. Vas has observed, "The Rajbanshi who form the bulk of the Hindu population, profess to be *Vaishanava*, but the religion they practice is not free from rites. Thus, one of the forms in which *Sakti* is worshiped as *Chandi*. Unlike, *Durga*, *Chandi* is painted red and may be worshipped throughout the year. This form of *Sakti puja* is peculiar to the district of Rangpur".³⁴ Though they were the worshippers of nature, as represented in the form of *stupa* or *Munda*, which were worshipped for their welfare of the community, they also worship various *devis* and *devas* like upper caste Hindus.³⁵

The Rajbanshi people of Nepal worship *Bisto Thakur* (the Water god), *Barma Thakur* (protector from fire), *Pawan Thakur* (protector from storms), *Basanti Thakurani* and *Mahakal Thakur* (God of the mountains and forests). There are deities of Rajbanshis in Nepal such as; *Shiva Thakur*, *Dharma Thakur* and *Laxmi Thakurani*, *Sarawamangola*, *Bisahari*, *Dulai Chandi*.³⁶ But it may be noted here that the Rajbanshis have no particularly place or locality for deities and there is any of the

minor deities.³⁷ Some of the goddess like *visahari*, *kali*, *sitala*, are placed at house compound. Sometimes they build temple for those deities.

The Rajbanshis have their own priests popularly known as *adhikari*, *deos*, *deodha* etel. who officiated in their religious ceremonies. The *adhikari* enjoyed a special status in society. He was the village priest and officiated in all ceremonies in the village live. They are categories into two sections- *chakrodhari* and *pad-dhari*, or *kantulsi*. *Chakrodhari* *adhikari* possessed copper *chakro* or is authorized to prepare a *chakro*. He can initiate disciples. He conducts marriage, *sradha*, *seva*, *puja*.

Kantulsi or *pad-dhari* works an assistant to a *chakrodhari*. When the *chakrodhari* is satisfied that he has acquired some proficiency, his teacher puts a sacred basil leaf (*Ocymums*) on his ear. Then he is allowed to work independently and may perform rituals in the shrine in the absence of *chakrodhari*.³⁸ *Deosi* performs the worship in the temple and at *Charaka* festival. *Deori* works as an assistant in a temple. The *deodha* used to perform fire sacrifice or *homa* and other *tantric* rites belonging to *Tantrism*. Sometimes he performs as media through whom god is supposed to prescribe remedies for various problems. *Vouria* also performed *tantric* rites and works as same as *deodha*.³⁹ *Kirtinia* is another group who perform the death and attendant ceremonies. They performed *kirtan* from the date of dead body to the cremation until the *sradha* ceremony is over. They are known as *kirtonia* based on their performance.⁴⁰ Thus Rajbanshi cultural practices distinguish their religion from other upper caste Hindus. However, in course of time, there is assimilation of Rajbanshi traditional deities, rituals, and beliefs into those of the orthodox Hindu culture.⁴¹ The most important features of this acculturation were the worshipping of clay images and the induction of

Brahmin priests for performing religious rites all of which they adopted a later stage from the orthodox high caste Hindus. In this period, a process of *sanskritization* was being adopted in Rajbanshi society. It is due to this *sanskritization* process that led to another crisis in cultural field of the Rajbanshi society.

IV

4.4.1: EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE RAJBANSHIS:

Although literacy is a best index to judge the level of socio-cultural advancement of any community, the Rajbanshis are very backward in compares to other community in Bengal. If we discuss the educational position of the Rajbanshis based on different census reports, it would be cleared that how the Rajbanshi society of North –Eastern part of India is lagging behind from educational progress.

The Census Report of India, 1911 shows that only 51 out of 1,000 Rajbanshis were as literate , where the male –female ratio was even worse as 97:2 respectively out of 1000.⁴² A comparative analysis of literacy rates (Table 4.4) among the Namasudras, the Pods, and the Rajbanshis who belonged to the same ritual rank, shows that there was little improvement in the rate of general literacy among the Rajbanshis, whereas the Namasudras achieved significant advancement . In case of the Pods the trends was even downward what is, however, important is the fact that the Rajbanshis showed significant improvement in literacy rates in English as compared to the other two castes. This suggests that the general progress among the Rajbanshis was very slow, there was a

definite trend of improvement among the already advance section of the community.

Table:4.4: Number of literates among the Namasudras, the Pods and the Rajbanshis in Bengal⁴³

Name of Castes	Total Population	Literate	% of Total Population	Literate in English	% of Total Population
1911 Census					
Namasudra	1860705	91625	4.92	4161	.22
Pod	415880	58582	14.09	1275	.31
Rajbanshi	1454173	73686	5.07	1221	.08
1921 Census					
Namasudra	2004911	150548	7.51	13891	.69
Pod	575994	70548	12.17	3510	.61
Rajbanshi	1663948	96140	5.78	5151	.31

Source: Census of India, 1911, Vol. V; pt. II Bengal, Table IX, Page, 84

If we consider the Census Report of India 1921 (Bengal), it would be cleared that in Tripura province the Rajbanshi population dominated in society in number and in education field than the Koch and other *kshatriya*. The table 4.5 shows the picture as follows. ⁴⁴

Table :4.5: Population on Caste basis and literary rate

Caste	Locality	Total population			Literate			Literate in English		
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Kshatriya (Hindus)	Tripura State	26116	13435	12681	2157	2039	118	188	166	22
Koch (Hindu)	Whole Province	131272	67627	63645	4293	4242	51	83	82	01
Rajbanshi Kshatriya (Hindu)	ditto	1663948	864042	799906	96140	93889	2251	5151	5074	77

Source: Census of India 1921, Table IX, Education by Selected Castes, Tables or Races concluded, Vol.V, Part II, Page, 96.

In North Bengal, until 1981, the Rajbanshis had not given a fair account of themselves as far as the attainment of literacy and

education is concerned. Table 4.6 shows that only about 23.68 percent of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal were literates in 1981. The corresponding figures in 1961 and 1971 were 12.83 percent and 15.85 percent respectively.

Table: 4.6: Literacy rate of the Rajbanshis by Sex

District	Literacy Rate (%) *								
	1961			1971			1981		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Darjeeling	24.6	40.05	5.59	22.13	37.48	6.06	27.21	40.39	12.60
Jalpaiguri	9.23	14.67	3.00	15.62	23.81	7.71	23.18	33.55	11.91
Cooch Behar	17.52	28.71	5.23	16.93	24.07	9.28	25.90	37.50	13.57
W. Dinajpur	13.05	22.44	2.21	12.10	19.44	3.20	20.47	32.14	8.03
Malda	13.29	20.06	2.10	13.11	21.23	4.49	19.42	30.98	7.31
North Bengal	12.83	23.12	4.01	15.85	23.62	7.68	23.68	34.98	11.57

* N.B. Percent of Literates to total Population

Source: Relevant Census Report of India (Bengal).

Amongst males, the percentage of literates was 23.62% in 1971, and which has gone up to 34.98% in 1981. The female literacy portrays even a gloomier picture. In 1971, only 7.68 percent of the Rajbanshis females were literate and which has lazily creped to the figure of 11.57% in 1981.

With respect to variation in the literacy of the Rajbanshis of different districts had been considerable. In the Darjeeling district, the percentage of literates among the Rajbanshis was 27%. Next in ranking were Cooch Behar 26% and Jalpaiguri 23% on the lower side, the Rajbanshis of Malda and West Dinajpur had regularly low literacy rate with only 19 to 20% of them being literate. Here mention may be made that between 1971 and 1981, the Rajbanshis in all the districts of North Bengal have recorded an increase in the proportion of their literates at

varying rates.⁴⁵ The rural –urban differential in literacy among the Rajbanshis of North Bengal was very much pronounced. The table 4.7 shows the different literacy among the Rajbanshi in North Bengal in rural and urban areas.

Table 4.7: Percentage of literacy among the Rajbanshis in rural and urban areas

District	1961		1971		1981	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Darjeeling	24.68	22.56	22.10	-27.44	26.89	-44.93
Jalpaiguri	9.13	12.87	15.24	28.64	22.93	-27.80
Cooch Behar	17.42	50.97	16.70	35.13	25.57	55.62
W.Dinajpur	13.01	15.77	11.98	36.90	20.15	-38.47
Malda	-11.26	-22.89	13.05	36.30	19.24	-39.50
North Bengal	14.07	18.10	15.60	34.70	23.40	-35.26

Source: Relevant Census Report of India (Bengal).

As per 1981 Census, in rural areas, 23.40 % of the Rajbanshis were found to be literate. In the case of urban areas it was 35.26%. Between 1971 and 1981, the population of literates amongst the Rajbanshis of rural areas has marginally gone down. Such an unfavourable progress in literacy amongst the rural Rajbanshis had many social and economic consequences.

The education level also indicates the pattern of progress of the Rajbanshis in literacy. Table 4.8 shows this level of education of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal. According to 1981 Census, in North Bengal as a whole, majority (54.55) of the Rajbanshi literates were, educated up to primary and middle level of school education. However, the proportion of Rajbanshi graduates and postgraduate including technical degree

holders was only 0.66% .Thus it appears that up to 1981, the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were less privileged or responsive to higher education. In 1981, only 0.13% of the Rajbanshi literates of North Bengal had technical diplomas. It is to be noted here that even among the urban Rajbanshi literates, the number of person's degrees in engineering, medicine, agriculture and veterinary sciences were only 12%. Overall, the participation of the Rajbanshis in various technical and professional educational steams was quite poor.

Table 4.8: percentage distribution of Rajbanshi literates various levels of education by sex

District	Census	Literates without Educational levels			Level of education primary/ Junior Basic/ Middle			Matriculation and above		
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Dajeeling	(a)	77.78	78.84	68.32	20.90	19.72	31.30	1.32	1.44	0.38
	(b)	26.53	30.51	2.22	23.27	63.75	96.40	5.30	5.74	1.38
	(c)	43.67	41.33	51.94	50.26	51.96	44.22	6.07	6.71	3.84
Jalpaiguri	(a)	68.68	68.47	69.83	29.46	29.53	29.01	1.86	2.00	1.16
	(b)	2.27	12.37	11.97	82.60	81.72	85.22	5.13	5.91	2.81
	(c)	39.60	38.14	44.09	53.98	54.72	51.69	6.42	7.14	4.22
Cooch Behar	(a)	65.35	64.14	72.68	33.48	34.52	27.22	1.17	1.34	0.10
	(b)	25.14	33.60	1.70	72.91	63.92	97.85	1.95	2.48	0.45
	(c)	7.53	35.27	44.17	55.68	57.00	51.80	6.79	7.73	4.03
W.Dinajpur	(a)	66.36	67.30	55.37	32.70	31.70	44.32	0.94	1.00	0.31
	(b)	14.78	14.11	19.68	82.12	82.55	79.45	3.10	3.34	0.87
	(c)	40.48	38.70	48.06	53.46	54.56	48.77	6.06	6.74	3.17
Malda	(a)	68.52	68.26	71.06	30.07	30.21	28.68	1.41	1.53	0.26
	(b)	24.73	26.45	16.06	72.00	69.96	82.26	3.27	3.59	1.64
	(c)	38.05	36.06	46.97	55.55	56.71	50.36	6.40	7.23	2.67
North Bengal (Total)	(a)	67.03	66.52	70.72	31.59	32.01	28.87	6.51	7.31	3.91
	(b)	20.08	24.29	6.48	76.66	71.85	92.20	3.26	3.86	1.32
	(c)	38.94	37.04	45.10	54.55	55.65	50.99	6.51	7.31	3.91

N.B. a=1961; b=1971; c=1981 Censuses

* For easy comprehension, the figures of literates in all other levels of education above matriculation in urban areas have been merged in to this category.

As may be seen from the table 4.8, in 1981, amongst the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, about 7% of their male and only about 4% of female literates had education up to matriculation and above of it. The majority of their male 56% and female 51% literate were educated up to primary /Junior Basic/ Middle standard. The proportion of Rajbanshi

female literates without any formal education was 45.10 % as opposed to 37.04% in the case of males. In all the districts of North Bengal, 52-57% of Rajbanshi male and 44-52% of the Rajbanshi female literates had education up to primary /middle standard.

The decade 1971-81 recorded a substantial decrease in the proportion of Rajbanshi literates with primary /junior basic/ middle standard of education. The rate of decrease was from 71.85% in 1971 to 55.65% in 1981 for males and from 92.20% to 50.99 for females. In contrast, there was significant increase in the proportion of people (both male and female) is literate without any formal education. Amongst the Rajbanshis, only about 1% of their male and 0.41 % of female literates were matriculate in 1961. The corresponding proportion increased to 7.31% and 3.91% in 1981. In North Bengal as a whole, the proportion of Rajbanshi matriculates and other higher educated persons increased from 1.33% in 1961 to 6.51% in 1981 recording a rate of variation in the order of only +5.18% points. Between 1971 and 1981, the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar, West Dinajpur, and Malda districts had shown a relatively better progress in attaining education upto matriculation and above of it. In the remaining two districts, the rate of progress of Rajbanshis in this particular level of education was marginal. During the decade 1961-71, there was only 1% increase in the number of Rajbanshi literates holding university degrees. Less than 1% of the Rajbanshi literates had degree in Medicine/Engineering /Agriculture etc. Till 1971, in various technical and non-technical university education the performance of the Rajbanshi was extremely disappointing. ⁴⁶ Under this discussion, it is cleared that during the decade of seventy and eighty, though the literacy rate of the Rajbanshi has been increased, overall situation regarding education of the

Rajbanshis is marginal rather than upper caste Hindu. Normally causes may be shown behind marginal in education of the Rajbanshis;

(a) The Rajbanshis had a lack of interest on the education.⁴⁷

(b) The Rajbanshis generally lives at villages' compound. Initiative to spread modern education is mainly confined to urban and its surrounding areas. Therefore, there were limited opportunities to spread education in rural areas. In this connection, we can mention here the urges of *Kshatriya Samiti* like "We live in rural area named the village-Lishamari. Education has been come in town. We have no living place in town. We cannot expect education from this remote area. Though many of us have money and will, due to the lack of living place in town education is being impossible to us. Therefore, hostel or boarding should be established to overcome this situation."⁴⁸

(c) Economic problem was one of the most vital issues of the Rajbanshis for backwardness in educational field. Majority of them were financially not in a position to send their children to schools, because after the age of ten, the young had to provide helping hands for the family.

(d) In addition to these, those who could afford in education for their children also shared a belief that if their sons were educated, they would take to white-collar jobs and abandoned cultivation, their family occupation.⁴⁹

(e) At the earlier stage, some of the Rajbanshis hold plenty of lands to cultivate. They were reluctant to take education for other professions.

Whatever, may be the causes, the Rajbanshis are lagging behind in the educational and other professional field in practical. However, the Rajbanshis were confined with their own socio-cultural practice. The gradual settlement of the caste Hindu' in North –Eastern part of India disturbed the autonomy of the domain, bring the Rajbanshi

closer to the orthodox Hindu culture, which was also the culture of the dominant social group. This resulted in the growth of a tendency among a section of the Rajbanshis emulate the orthodox Hindu cultural practices. Moreover, a gradual appearance of line of distinction within the Rajbanshi community has been grown up. The well –off Rajbanshis begins to migrate to towns, sends their children for higher education, and takes up subsidiary occupations besides the family occupation of cultivation. Rajbanshis gradually felt the urge to change their existing cultural practices and life style⁵⁰ discarding their traditional clothes, both men and women dressed in the fashion of the upper castes in society.⁵¹ In this group, there were now also restrictions on the movement of women. The women were not allowed to work in the field, or go to market to sell goods nor were they permitted to talk freely to unknown men neither at home nor outside. They started to follow idolatry in their religious ceremonies.⁵² All these emulative tendencies of the Rajbanshi advance group distinguish them from more backward sections of the community and as a result ,social equality which had previously existed among them gradually disappeared and was replaced by system of status differentiation.⁵³ These advanced group of the Rajbanshis even suspended social relations with these relatively backward caste brethren, leading to a clear socio-cultural division within the community.⁵⁴

This differentiation in terms of cultural practice and social values within the Rajbanshi community is important as it help us in understanding the genesis of the identity crisis of the Rajbanshi society. Economic position of the Rajbanshis will provide us to clarify the point of identity crisis.

4.5.1: ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RAJBANSHI SOCIETY:

Economically the Rajbanshis are more dependent on primary sector, i.e. agriculture. The agricultural structures prevailing in different parts of Bengal varied widely. The Mughal land revenue system, the British land revenue reforms, the customary practices of different areas, and the ecological conditions largely determined the patterns of agrarian relations in different parts of Bengal. We may distinguish the Bengal agrarian structures into three categories-i) peasant small holding system in Eastern Bengal, ii) the prevalence in Bengal and Central Bengal of vast personal demesne of lands cultivated by landless labourers and iii) rich farmer-share-cropper system of Northern Bengal. Sugato Bose also frames the same structure of agrarian system of Bengal.⁵⁵ In the present section of our study the agrarian structure of North-Eastern India will be focused in which the Rajbanshis as a cultivating community are to be situated.

The *Jotedari-adhiari* system was dominant pattern of the agrarian relations in North-Eastern part of India. However, there are different parts of the region like –Dinajpur, Rangpur, parts of Jalpaiguri, which were permanently settled areas, and where *zamindari* system existed. There was no *zamindari* system in the Western Duars of Jalpaiguri and in Cooch Behar. The land was given to *jotedars* or rich farmers by the government in exchange of some undertaking to pay annual rent in these regions.⁵⁶ There were also variations of position and privileges enjoyed by the *jotedars* and other under tenants in different part of northern part of present West Bengal.⁵⁷

In pre-British time, there were vast stretches of uncultivated lands which were given to rich men at very low rents in order to motivate them to bring waste land under cultivation. This rich men gave the lands to poor cultivators, initially for no or minimum return. However, once cultivation started regularly the cultivators paid, generally in kind, $\frac{1}{2}\%$ of produce to the original titleholder. Thus, the cultivators who reclaimed the wasteland become the sharecroppers and the rich men by virtue of their economic supremacy became the landlords.⁵⁸ During the British rule, this system of agricultural structure became much more popular among the substantial landholders.

The sharecropping system became popular in this region due to the scarcity of labour compared to the availability of land. It results that land is being less precious than labour.⁵⁹ Under this circumstance, the wastelands are attributed to a want of farmers, and common workers or porters cannot be procured without the utmost difficulty.⁶⁰ There were also other causes like rise in prices, purchase of land by money lenders, and merchants, effects of the war, and the depression- all contributed to the expansion of the share-cropping system. Landlords, particularly those who had no link with land, like traders, and moneylenders or upper caste gentry, preferred share-cropping because it ensured good returns without any direct involvement in the agricultural process. Thus, because of this gradual extension of the sharecropping system a highly stratified and complex agrarian structure developed in North Bengal.⁶¹

If we follow the agrarian structure of this region, we will find that the *Zamindar* was the top of the hierarchy. He got land from the government, subject to the payment of a fixed amount of revenue. Next to

the *Zamindar*, there was the *jotedar* who got land from the *Zamindar*, subject to the payment of rent at prevailing rates. The rent paid by the *jotedar* was subject to enhancements.⁶² Though the *jotedars* formed an exclusive group of landlords, there were differences among them in terms of amounts of land hold. There were very big *jotedars* as well as a good number of small *jotedars*. A. Beteille has observed that *jotedars* were not an economically homogenous group and there were both rich and poor *jotedars* owing or cultivating large as well as small lands.⁶³ There were enormous sizes of *jotes* in different parts of northern part of present West Bengal.⁶⁴

There were different categories of land holders in northern part of present West Bengal.⁶⁵ However, the classes which were eventually recognized in law and by sufferance were four i.e; *jotedar*, *Chukanidar*, *Dar-chukanidar* and *Adhiar*.

Jotedar:

A *jotedar* is a person who holds land directly of Government. He is a tenant with a heritable and transferable title in his holding vested in him by the fact of possession with power to transmit this title to those to whom he sublets. He has the right to resettle of the land included in his *jote* on the expiry of the term of the settlement, but subject to an increase of rent .⁶⁶ His title to possession of the land included in his *jote* is, however, always subject to the superior right of government as proprietor to resume any portion required for public or other purpose or proportional abatement being made in the rental and compensation allowed for any payment improvement. A *jote* may be acquired by direct settlement, by purchase and by inheritance.

Chukanidar:

The tenant immediately below the *jotedars* is the *chukanidar* or *mulandar*. The rent payable by him is fixed. His title to his holding is heritable and transferable. He is not allowed under the provisions of the *jotedar's* lease to sublet the whole or any portion of the tenure under pain of immediate forfeiture of such tenure. But he is permitted to employ *adhiars*.⁶⁷ *Chukanidars* can not be ousted from his holding, except by order of a competent court, notwithstanding the fact that he may not have been twelve years on a *jote*. There is an unwritten law between him and his *jotedar* that he cannot be ousted from his land as long as he pays his rent.⁶⁸

Dar-Chukanidar:

This class of tenants hold direct from the *Chukanidars*. The tenure rights of this class of tenants were neither found relevant by the Bengal Government nor approved by it. In a letter sent by the Revenue Department to Mr. Sunder, the settlement officer, it was stated, "The Lt. Governor approves your proposal that the newly created under-tenure of *Dar-chukanidar* in the Duars estate should be absolutely ignored, as much as these tenures have been made contrary to the express order of the government".⁶⁹ The *dar-chukanidar* was the under tenant of *chukanidars*. All these under tenants had occupancy rights in Cooch Behar, but not elsewhere.⁷⁰

Adhiar:

Adhiars or *Prajas* are holders on the *metayer* system. They cultivate land immediately under the *jotedars*, *chukanidars* or a derivative

chukanidar, but whatever the designation or status of the *adhiars* immediate superior be, he is known as the *adhiars giri*, half the produce of the land. The *giri* usually makes an advance of seeds and cash to the *adhiar*, which is adjusted when the produce is divided. The cattle and plough sometimes belong to the *giri*, sometimes to the *adhiars*. The legal status of various classes of *adhiars* unfortunately remained uncertain.⁷¹ As the *adhiars* had to pay half of his produce, he was in a chronic state of debt and had very little means to improve his position. He had to take advance from his landlord to survive, and this the landlord realized with heavy interests during harvest time.⁷² There were no doubt variations in the position of *adhiars* in different areas of North Bengal. However, it was in this section of the local peasantry who had to bear the major burden of exploitation by the state and the landlord.⁷³

From the above discussion, it is cleared that the *jotedars* constituted the most dominant group in local agrarian social structure. An important to add in this context is the absence of non-cultivating upper caste gentry in this region under study. Some parts of Bengal there was a class of upper caste gentry who owned substantial amounts of land. They did not cultivate themselves, as manual labour was a matter of disrespect in society. They, however, enjoyed maximum power in society by virtue of their social and economic position. There was another situation in northern part of India. Till the advent of the ninetieth century most of the land in North Bengal was in the possession of the local people i.e.; the Koches, the Rajbanshis, the Mechs etc. Unlike the upper caste gentry, these local peoples did not face the problem of status inconsistency if they themselves cultivated the land. However, the situation began to change from the late ninetieth century with the migration of people in this region. They not only consolidated their position as non-cultivating

gentry, but also came to form a middle class at the village level, as it was from the group that the majority of the *Zamindari* agents and the staff of the local *cutchery* were recruited. Taking advantages of the backwardness of the local cultivators or poor *rayots*, they began to exploit them. In this respect we may refer from the Rangpur settlement report as follows-⁷⁴

“These men, of whom one or two are to be found in almost every village, are the leaders of the local factions who by a smattering of legal knowledge and ready wit have gained the confidence of their co-villagers. Often they are retained by the *Zamindar*'s staff and in return for land at favourable rates of rent or even rent free they watch their interest”.

Thus, the non-cultivating *jotedars* increased day by day in this region and secured a dominant position in the local agrarian structure. Based on the settlement reports, Amit Mitra has shown the ethnic composition of the *jotedars* of the Falakata *tahsil* in Jalpaiguri district between the year 1894 and 1905 where the Rajbanshis held 40% of the total *jotes* in 1894 and around 34% in 1905.⁷⁵ There, were however, subsequent changes in the pattern of land control in North Bengal with the result that the Rajbanshis were gradually pushed out by the non-Rajbanshi land holders from their position of eminence. In 1911, only 1.2% of the Rajbanshis who had any occupation derived their income from rent. In Rajshahi division, which contained the major concentration of this caste population, they constituted only 10.68% of the rent-receivers, while, the representation of the Brahmins in this category amounted to 25.26%.⁷⁶ Another example may be given here; one fairly big *jotes* (618 *bighas*) in the *paragana* Mekhliganj where Chunder Kishore Nandy was the proprietor of this *jote*. He leased out the entire

jote to one Chutiram Doss, who after retaining 335 *bighas* and his direct management (Nij Chukanidars) sublet the rest to 10 *Darchukanidars*. By title (or family names), these were 7 Dosses, 1 Nasya, 1 Doss Mali and 1 Singh Doss. Thus a caste from Bengal obtained this *jote* and sublet the whole to native inhabitants of Koch Behar, namely, a Rajbanshis (7 Dosses, 1 Doss Malli and 1 Singh Doss) and a native convert to Muslim (Nasya).⁷⁷

The changes that were taking place in the economic share because of war, depression, and famine in Bengal also severely affected the existing pattern of land ownership in the North Bengal districts. The rise in prices of food grains, and other necessities, following the World War II, also seriously affected the middle and poor peasants and this culminated in the great Bengal famine. The beneficiary's from this crisis were the merchants, moneylenders, and speculators- those who also invested their capital in land. The result of this development was the transfer of land from small *jotedars* and middle peasants to rich farmers, moneylenders, and speculators.⁷⁸ In the North-Eastern part of India, large-scale transfer of land from the Rajbanshis to this non-Rajbanshis, which had started, from the late nineteenth century was only accelerated further by these later developments.

Another important reason for land transfer to the non-Rajbanshis was the migration of a large number of outsiders to different districts of North Bengal. At the earlier stage, the attraction of this region were the abundance of land, possibility of good business, job opportunities in Government offices as the local people were not in a position to compete with them, opening of tea gardens which provide job facilities for both the 'Babus' as well as labourers.⁷⁹

Regular settlement work was undertaken and the Duars had been brought under regular administration providing security to the inhabitants. This administrative stability had particularly induced migration. However, most important factors that had encouraged the migration of the landed gentry were the land price of land and low rent compared to the situation in other parts of Bengal. Therefore, in the third settlement a large number of people who were not born to the soil could obtain lease could obtain lease from the Government as *jotedars* in the settled area.⁸⁰ Some ones acquired *jotes* through purchase. Escalation of land price caused by migration furthered transfer of *jotes* through sale to outside. In fact, the migrants were controlling many of the *jotes* paying revenue from Rs. 20 to 2000 per annum after the 1895 settlement in Western Duars.⁸¹ Comparing the population statistics of the 1881 Census with that of 1891 one finds an increase of 114277 in the population of the Western Duars. The break up of the increased population, who were migrants, can be studied based on the following table.⁸²

Table 4:9, Number, and place of migration

Place of Origin	Number
Darjeeling	1588
Dinajpur	505
Rangpur	10101
Kuch Behar	32224
From other District of B�ngal Proper	11364
Bihar districts	8491
Orissa	292
Chhotnagpur	20341
Other Province	29371
Total	114277

Source: Sunder's Report; Gruning, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteers; Census Statistics, 1881 and 1891.

This process continued as the 1901 Census shows that nearly one third of the inhabitants of Western Duars were foreign born and the

figure of the migrants rose to 188223. All the migrants i.e; 73946 persons after 1818 have settled in different *thanas* of Western Duars.⁸³ Most of the migrants from Darjeeling, Bihar and Chhotonagpur have been employed by the tea gardens as workers. People from Dinajpur, Cooch Behar have taken up land as *Jotedars*. The census figure on migration for the period between 1891 and 1921(table 4.10) in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts give us an idea of the volume of migration that was taking place in north eastern part of India.⁸⁴

Table 4.10: Migration to Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur from contiguous and other District between 1891-1921

Year	From contiguous District		From other districts to	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<u>Migration to Cooch Behar</u>				
1891	12997	15191	3262	1201
1901	9161	12531	12668	2255
1911	11000	13000	5000	2000
1921	9000	12000	10000	6000
<u>Migration to Jalpaiguri</u>				
1891	30920	27835	12431	7641
1901	24354	23856	65272	48636
1911	18000	15000	15000	10000
1921	21000	19000	5000	4000
<u>Migration to Dinajpur</u>				
1891	22670	18819	9308	5894
1901	13901	13319	60143	34871
1911	19000	16000	12000	6000
1921	12000	13000	10000	7000

Source: A Mitra, West Bengal District Hand Book, Calcutta 1951, Cooch Behar, P.XXXVi, Jalpaiguri, P.Lii, West Dinajpur, P. Xii.

This large influx of people not only led to a growing demand for land but also led to a rise in land prices. Local people, tempted by the spiraling prices soon began to sell their lands leading to the transformation of the local small and middle *jotedars* into under tenants,

subservient to a new class of immigrant landed gentry. In Rangpur and Dinajpur, the big *jotedars* and non-agriculturists brought the maximum number of *jotes*.⁸⁵ In Jalpaiguri, the number of *jotes* held by the Rajbanshis are decreased, while the *jotes* held by the Marwaris, the upper caste Bengali, middle –class people, others are increased sharply.⁸⁶ By 1872, in Cooch Behar 54% of the revenue paying land had passed into the hand of the outsiders.⁸⁷ Indeed all over North Bengal the phenomenon of transfer of land from the hands of the Rajbanshis to those of the non-Rajbanshis became a standard pattern and in course of time it generated a sense of grievance among the disposed Rajbanshi gentry.

Migration of population created demographic changes in an issue of concern while figures quoted by authorities are suspect it is pertinent to note that in the 20th century under British rule, immigration and migration, particularly into Assam, North Bengal and Tripura, was probably to the extent of about 30% of the population of which about 2/3 was from East Bengal (Bangladesh).⁸⁸ Unfortunately, after independence this trend was allowed to continue, with the majority of the migrants, being from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). In 1971 again was a major refugee exodus from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), the majority of who never returned owing to the situation, which leads to the Indo- Pak war. The population growth of North Bengal may show in Table 4.11 during 1951-1981.

Table 4.11: The growth of population in North Bengal from 1951-1981
(Population in Lakhs).

District	Area sq km	1951	1961	1971	1981	% of decadal growth (1971-81)
Darjeeling	3,386	459.6	624.6	781.8	1,024.2	28.74%
Cooch Behar	3,075	668.1	1,319.8	1,414.2	11,771.8	25.27%
Jalpaiguri	6,224	916.7	1,369.3	1,750.1	2,214.8	26.11%
West Dinajpur	5,206	976.9	1,323.8	1,857.9	2,404.9	29.19%
Malda	3,313	937.6	1,221.9	1,612.7	2,031.8	26.19
West Bengal	21,625	3,959.7	5,549.4	7,418.7	9,447.6	22.96%

Source: Census Reports 1981

The table shows that the decadal growth of the population of North Bengal in every district is higher than the growth rate of West Bengal. Darjeeling and West Dinajpur is most high rate. However, there are certain causes of growth rate of population in North Bengal. It is situated at national and international boundary and the media for communication with Eastern India. This geographical situation helps to induce the migration problem. Besides, in 1960 the Tibetan refugees settled in the Duars of North Bengal, the Bengalese from Assam came to North Bengal due 'Bangal Kheda Andolan' in 1960-61, Nepalese from Meghalaya and Bhutan were driven away who took shelter in India and the extensive pressure of migrants for Indo-Pak war in 1965. This influx of immigrants' people created an extensive pressure and crisis in socio-economic structure in North Bengal.⁸⁹ Marcus Dam says, "Indian authorities continue to thwart attempt by Bhutanese refugees back to their homeland. The problem of these displaced people is expected to snowball into a major geographical crisis in North Bengal specially Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri because they are sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan".⁹⁰

Demographic pressure and the introduction of land Acquisition Act (1953) give a new shape of socio-economic pattern of this region. A large number of *Jotedars* of North Bengal lost their lands in excess to the limit of seventy-five *bighas*. *Khas* (vested) land had been distributed to the landless cultivators. Although the victim *zotedars* were mostly of the Rajbanshi community, but their caste fellows were not sole beneficiaries. Hence, there was a strong voice for the distribution of the vested land to the Rajbanshis only. Naturally, land alienation to the non-Rajbanshis began with the first phase of land reforms in West Bengal germinated the seeds of deprivation among the pre-settled communities of North Bengal.⁹¹

Second phase of land reform was undertaken in West Bengal with the coming of the United Front (UF) Government in 1967. The UF Government during 1967-70 vested one million acre of land, which broken the backbone of social dominance of the landed aristocracy (*zotedars*) of West Bengal.⁹² The *zotedars* of North Bengal could not escape from it. However, third phase of land reforms called "Operation Burga" under the present Left Front Government was successful in vesting family land and recording 1.2 million of sharecroppers within three years (1978-81).⁹³ According to the official sources, 428179.95 hector vested land has been distributed among 2605432 beneficiaries. In North Bengal 170081.80 hector vested land was distributed among 671841 beneficiaries out of whom 301498 are SCs and 144181 are STs.⁹⁴

Land reforms and distribution of vested lands to the landless agricultural labourers by the UF and LF Governments had direct impact on the socio-economic pattern of the indigenous elites in North Bengal. Although SC/ST people were benefited by the land distribution process of

the Government, the anti foreigner feelings and feelings of deprivation of the indigenous people were capitalized. Under this situation, the Rajbansis were forced to migrate into the nearby urban areas and to the other province only to be absorbed into the marginalize section workers, domestic servants whose survival depended upon the selling of labour power. Alienation from their ancestral land and the transformation of Rajbanshi from land owing peasants to wage labour proletariats had various social connotations too and tension has been grown in North Bengal from time to time in respect of separate state and autonomous power in North Bengal. The self-sustain village community⁹⁵, however, began to change with the beginning of the commercialization of agriculture⁹⁶ particularly tea production, Jute, Tobacco production and the introduction of railways in North Bengal. The gradual penetration of moneylenders, merchants and middle-class service groups as appendages of the market economy, brought significant change in the existing agrarian social structure as well. However, the Rajbanshi who constitute the bulk of the *adhiars* in this region did not benefit from this transformation and they did not able to compete with the Caste Hindus.⁹⁷ There was also a tendency among the Rajbanshi *adhiars* to work under the *jotedars* of their own community and this is one of the causes of Rajbanshis economic depression. Another important causes of miserable economic condition among the Rajbanshis that they did not invest money in other economic fields than cultivation though the latter was not fit for modern cultivation system. As a result, it is to be mentioned here that after the abolition of *Zamindari* system in West Bengal (1953), the upper caste gentry would managed their economic crisis but the Rajbanshis could not.

The miserable condition of the Rajbanshis in the occupational field had been shown in census reports. From the table 4.12 we may get a general impression about the occupational patterns of the Rajbanshis. There are, however, ambiguities in categorization and classification of different occupations in the census reports. The table shows that a small section of Rajbanshis was rent receivers and their representation in other subsidiary occupations was insignificant. An over whelming majority of them were various kinds of cultivators, including a vast section of *adhia*rs and field labours. This makes one point adequately clear, that whatever be the magnitude, there was a vertical division within the Rajbanshi community along the economic lines.⁹⁸

Table 4.12: Occupational pattern of the Rajbanshis .^{99*}

<u>General Field</u>									
Income from labourers Rent of Land cutters		Cultivators off of all Kinds		Agent & Managers of landed Estates, Planters, Rent Collectors etc.		Field workers			
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
3767	537	414812	9110	482	1	23230	385		
<u>Public Administration</u>									
Traders		Gazetted Officer		Others		Lawyers, Doctors Teachers		Religious persons	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
3009	1863	18	(Not found)	116	2	497	2	610	39

Source: Census of India, 1911, Vol. V, pt II, Bengal ,Table XVI,PP.374-7.

Note: *Rajbanshis of Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, Faridpur and North Bengal are included.

The Table 4.13 also shows that the Rajbanshis of North Bengal mostly dependent on primary section.

Table 4.13: Percentage distribution of Rajbanshi workers into different occupational categories.

District	Census	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Darjeeling	a	87.77	6.42	0.23	0.85	0.23	0.07	1.17	0.16	3.10
	b	55.13	23.75	12.83	0.40	0.51	0.20	2.24	0.88	4.06
	c	47.30	39.03	0.67	0.30	1.89	1.13	2.16	1.58	5.88
Jalpaiguri	a	89.40	4.09	0.98	0.86	0.39	0.15	1.03	0.43	2.61
	b	68.85	13.05	9.97	0.86	0.81	0.20	0.08	0.90	5.28
	c	57.06	32.77	0.84	0.41	1.37	0.29	1.35	1.93	3.98
Cooch Behar	a	89.89	5.81	0.06	1.09	0.23	0.02	0.57	0.12	2.21
	b	78.58	16.77	0.17	0.53	0.44	0.03	0.56	0.27	2.65
	c	59.89	32.21	0.25	0.74	1.50	0.14	1.13	0.88	3.26
W.Dinajpur	a	73.64	19.63	0.84	1.71	0.39	0.11	1.05	0.14	2.49
	b	64.50	29.64	0.86	0.37	0.74	0.06	0.83	0.32	2.68
	c	56.27	36.17	0.84	0.83	1.45	0.11	1.44	0.58	2.31
Malda	a	69.88	13.78	1.16	6.62	0.96	0.05	0.67	0.47	6.41
	b	39.45	30.19	6.68	5.85	3.93	0.58	6.63	1.26	8.43
	c	59.13	27.96	1.58	2.18	4.68	0.16	1.25	0.92	2.18
N.Bengal	a	87.03	7.04	0.53	1.29	0.34	0.08	0.82	0.25	2.62
	b	70.73	18.57	4.01	0.85	0.78	0.12	0.65	0.53	3.76
	c	57.76	33.27	0.63	0.71	1.61	0.22	1.31	1.16	3.33

Note:a=1961,b=1971,c=1981Censu;Occupational,category:I=Cultivators,II=Agricultural laboureres, III=Mining, quarrying,livestock,fishing,plantation etc;IV=Household Industry;V-Manufacturing other than household industry,VI=Construction;;VII=Trade and Commerce;VIII=Transport, storage and Communication;IX= Other Services.

The Table 4.13 depicts that in 1981, 57.76 percent of Rajbanshi workers were cultivators, and 33.27 percent were agricultural labourers. Therefore, about 91 percent of the Rajbanshis workers were principally engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Among the Rajbanshi workers, although the cultivators outnumbered the agricultural labourers in all the districts, the ratio of latter to former was high in the districts of Darjeeling and West Dinajpur.

Only about 9% of the Rajbanshi workers were engaged in various non-agricultural pursuits. However, excepting in manufacturing, trade and commerce, transportation, and other services, the proportion of Rajbanshi workers in remaining categories of occupation was less than 1%. In 1981, about 2% of Rajbanshi workers were manufacturing industries and only 3.33 percent were in other services. Thus, it appears that up to 1981, the economic activities of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were less diversified and they were dependent on agriculture.

In urban areas, about 59% of the Rajbanshi workers were dependent on agricultural activities. Little changes in the means of livelihood of the Rajbanshi who were otherwise urban by their residential background. The participation of the urban Rajbanshis in service was less 19%. The corresponding percentages were 32, 28 and 38 for the non-scheduled people, the other SC and the ST respectively.¹⁰⁰ In the manufacturing field the participation of the Rajbanshis of this region is insignificant than the other section of the people. Overall, it appears that urbanization among the Rajbanshis was not accompanied by any significant change in their employment pattern.

Professor Tapas Kumar Raychoudhury observes that the Rajbanshis were always prone to static. As all primitive communities, they were tied to family profession (agriculture) and were normally disinclined to changes professions.¹⁰¹ He also says, when the tea gardens were opened the Rajbanshis never opted out to work as tea garden workers; this factor had compelled the planters to import labour from the tribal of Bihar and Chhotonagpur. The Railways too failed to induce the local people to work in railway construction programmes, though the wages were high. All the labourers used to come from the United

Province and Bihar. Even during season time when a labour could have earned as much as Rs. 1.00 a day in jute godowns, Rajbanshis labourers were not available.¹⁰² Total abstentions from the non-family professions was the basic norms of the Rajbanshis milieu until the externals caused some important changes to be introduced in their attitude towards new professions. As they contact with the new forces of the society, a sense of exclusives gradually developed among the Rajbanshi elites, which created status differentiation with in the community.¹⁰³ Ultimately this Rajbanshi elite class played an important role to whip up this community consciousness in latter period in order to mobilize social and political movement.

From the above discussion, it is to be mentioned here that in the late nineteenth and until the end of the twentieth century, some important changes had been taken place in the socio-economic structure of the region under review. One of the most significance changes was that the Rajbanshis who once dominated the local society and economy were gradually subordinated and alienated from land by the newly settled dominant upper caste Hindus (elites). This domination of an essentially immigrant gentry as well as the cultural differences between them and the Rajbanshis created a sense of community solidarity among the latter. The most articulate section of the Rajbanshi people, the elites took an important part to whip up the community consciousness in order to formulate socio-political organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They raised a new identity based on social, political and linguistic problem and how did they try to success would be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

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3. R. S. Mukhopadhyaya; *Socio-economic Transformation of the Rajbanshis and Kamatapuri Movement in North Bengal*, *Journal of Indian Anthropology, and Sociology*, 1995, Vol.30, p. 223.
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8. Being as a Rajbanshi ,the author has much experience about the matter.
9. C.C.Saranyal; *op.cit.*, p.125.
- 10.W.V. Schendal; *Peasant Mobility :The Odds of life in Rural Bangladesh*, Delhi,1982, p.69.

11. H.H.Risley; *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol. I*, rpt. Calcutta, 1981, p.494.
12. S.Basu; *op.cit.* p.41.
13. C.C. Sanyal; *op.cit.* p.20.
14. *Ibid*, p.21.
15. *Khakrabhat*- cooked rice kept over night without addition of water to it. *Pantabhat*- cooked rice kept over night with addition of water to it.
16. C.C. Sanyal, *op. cit.*p.29.
17. It is only in the transplanting of paddy season that the mid day meal is carried to the field when the cultivators have hardly any time to come back. It is done in July- August for about twenty days.
18. *Bhuti* is a thick and long rape made of paddy straw, which is kept slowly burning all day and night, used for lighting a *biri* or prepared tobacco in a *chillim*.
19. C.C. Sanyal, *op.cit.*pp.29-30.
20. Sekh Rahim Mandal ,Rokaiya Begum; *Status of Rajbanshi Women in West Bengal :Problem and Prospects*; Bulletin of the *Cultural Research Institute*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, 1997,pp.49-52.
- 21.D.H.E. Sunder; *Report on the Survey and Settlement in the Western Duars in the Jalpaiguri District, 1889-1895*, Calcutta, 1895, p. 48; J.Ray, *Economic and Social Customs of the Rajbanshis*, *Modern Review*, August 1954, p.133.
- 22.S. Rahim and Rokeya Begum; *op. cit.* p. 52.
23. *Ibid*,p,54; C.C. Sanyal; *op. cit.* p.173.
- 24.J.F.Gruning; *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri*, Allahabad, 1911, pp,32-33; F.W. Strong, *Bengal District Gazetteers:Dinajpur*, Allahabad, 1912, pp. 34-43; Risley, *op.cit.*, pp.494-7.

- 25.C.C. Sanyal; *op. cit.*, p.91; W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X*, 1876, rpt.1984, p. 374.
26. C.C. Sanyal, *op. cit.* p.88; S. Basu, *op.cit*, Says in *ghor-dzia- biha* an Orphan or a poor boy who could not pay the bride-price was kept in, the house of a girl and after sometime, it the girl's father was satisfied with the nature and behaviour of the boy, he was married to his daughter in a regular form of marriage.
- 27.C.C. Sanyal;*op.cit.*, p.95.
28. *Ibid*, p.96; S.Basu; *op.cit.*, p.43.
- 29.B. Mukherjee; *Socio- Economic and Religious Organization of the Rajbanshi*, pp.68- 9; M. Ray, *Economic and Social Custom of the Rajbanshiis*, pp.131-2; C.C.Sanyal, *op.cit.*, pp.95-8; S.Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-3.
30. C.C.Sanyal; *op.cit.*, p.99.
31. B . Mukherjee; *op.cit.*, p.63; B.Dasgupta, *op.cit.*, pp.11-12.
32. C.C.Sanyal, *op.cit.*, pp.92-94 ; The author himself married with the daughter of a *Kayastha* family at Cooch Behar town and proves that there is no social barrier and also family affairs in his personal life.
- 33.C.C.Sanyal; *op.cit.*, p.99; Basu, *op.cit.*, p.43; S.R. Mandal and R. Begum, *op.cit*, p.52.
34. J.A.Vas; *Eastern Bengal And Assam District Gazatteers: Rangpur*, Calcutta, 1911, p.44.
- 35.Risley; *op.cit.*, p.498; Girijasnakar Roy; *Uttarbanger Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Puja Parban*, First Edn. 1970,rpt.1991,pp.12-91; *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, pp.1344-1345; *Baitanik* (Bengali) (ed), Gautam Ray,pp.247-256, Siliguri, 2004. Some of the God and goddess among the Rajbanshi society are given bellow.

<i>Tista Buri</i>	: Goddess of the River
<i>Madar or Satyapir</i>	: Islamic deity adopted by the Hindus
<i>Haribhola</i>	: Vaishnava deity
<i>Sannyasi</i>	: Saiva deity
<i>Sona Rai</i>	: God of wild animal
<i>Hudum Deo</i>	: Rain God
<i>Madan Kam</i>	: God of Procreation; This was worshipped in every village is a place away from homes and goats and pigeons were offered as scarifies.
<i>Kali</i>	: Female Shakti energy
<i>Devi Chandi</i>	:Female shakti energy
<i>Vishari</i>	: Snake deity
<i>Bhandani</i>	: Mother goddess for good crop in the field
<i>Masan</i>	: Malicious sprit.

36. *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, p.1344.

37. Risley; (in Microfilm), Real No.5, NAI, Delhi; *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, p.1344.

38. G.S. Ray, *op.cit.*, pp.1-2; C.C.Sanyal categories the *adhikari* as *Pad-dhari* and *Kantulsi*, *op.cit.*, p.134.

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40. G.S. Ray; *op.cit.*, pp.4-5.

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CHAPTER-V

Linguistic Question : A Cultural Resurgence

CHAPTER-V

LINGUISTIC QUESTION: A CULTURAL RESURGENCE.

Language is one of the major issues of socio-cultural aspect of a community. The language/ dialect of Northeastern part of India is genetically of the eastern group of the Indo- Aryan family (along with, at least Oriya, Bangla and Assamiya) with in the member of the Putative Bengali- Assames sub- group .¹ There is a general view among the scholars that this language/ dialect is spoken in East Purnea district of Bihar, Morang and Jhapa districts of Nepal; Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling and Dinajpur ,Malda districts of West Bengal ; the old Goalpara district of Assam (now Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Goalpara); Rangpur, Dinajpur and Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.² The spoken language of the Rajbanshi people has been identified in various way such as northern dialect of Bengali,³ Goalparia dialect of Assamese,⁴ Kamta,⁵ Kamrupi,⁶ Deshi,⁷ Kamtai language,⁸ Kamta Behari⁹ etc. Sir George A. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India* has first mentioned the language used by the Rajbanshis of Rangpur, Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and Goalpara as a separate dialect. ¹⁰ He named this dialect as 'Rajbanshi' since this is spoken mostly by the Rajbanshis but he considered it a dialect of Bengali itself.¹¹ Rajbanshi dialect according to Grierson "belong to the eastern variety of the language, has still points of different, which entitle it to be classes as a separate dialect. It has one sub- dialect called 'Bahe' spoken in the Darjeeling *Teari*." ¹² Grierson also argued that the Koches who adopted Hinduism and Islam generally speak the Rajbanshi dialect and it is called the 'Rangpuri'. ¹³

I

After Grierson the distinguish linguists like Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee , Dr. Sukumar Sen followed by Dr. Nirmalendu Bhowmick and Dr. Nirmal Das etel. had dealt with linguistic and literary analysis of this language. Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee and Dr. Sukumar Sen preferred to call this language 'Kamrupi' judged by its regional characteristics. Dr. Nirmal Das while dealing with the naming of the language preferred to follow them. Dr. Das has pointed out that the name 'Rajbanshi' for this language would lead to two errors –errors of exclusion and error of inclusion.¹⁴ Many other residents of the then Kamrup region such as Muslims, Khens, Yogis and even the Brahmins of Khagrabari area of Cooch Behar district used to speak this language as their mother tongue and hence these people will be excluded by naming the language as 'Rajbanshi'. On the other hand, there are Rajbanshi in Midnapur, 24 Paraganas, Hoogly and Nadia districts who may not be of the same stock and do not speak this language but therefore, preferred to call it 'Kamrupi'.¹⁵

Upendra Nath Barman, a adroit politician and social leader of the Rajbanshi community was in favour of the name of 'Rajbanshi'.¹⁶ Ray Sahib Panchanan Barman, the most dominant socio-political leader popularly known as the father of the *Kshatriya* movement called it 'Kamta Behari', Purnendu Mohan Sehanobis, a veteran member of *Rangpur Sahitya Parisad* also followed him. Very recently Dharma Narayan Barma in his work entitled, *A Step of Kamta Bihari Language*, called it as 'Kamta Bihari'.¹⁷ On the other hand ,Dr. Dwijendra Nath Bhakat in his work, *Rajbanshi Bhasha Sahityer Parichaya*, traced the

existence of the Rajbanshi language since seventh century. He argued that there are similarities between the Rajbanshi and the language used in the copper plate grants of ancient Kamrupa.¹⁸ Dr. Bhakat also claims that the literature produced under the patronage of the Koch Kings are the specimen of the Rajbanshi literature.¹⁹ The term 'Rajbanshi' has been proved by some scholars in their writings being named as such as *The Rajbansis of North Benagl* of Dr. C.C.Sanyal, *The Indo- Aryan language of Masica Colin*; *Atlas of the languages and Ethnic Communities of South Asia* of Roland J.L. Brovetor .

A section of the Rajbanshi people however, did not accept the title 'Rajbanshi dialect'. The term 'Rajbanshi (alternatively 'Rajvamsi') etymologically means 'royal lineage' and is associated with Hinduisation of the Koch tribe and the movement to bring them inside the caste system as 'Kshatriyas', (the warrior and royal caste) rather than as a scheduled or lower caste.²⁰ Dr. Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyaya suggests that the Koch King Viswa Singha (1496-1533) may have been the first to take this title when he converted to Hinduism. He goes on to say that not all the inhabitants of the old kingdom of Kamatapur followed their king in converting to Hinduism, but that most of the poorer Koches being refused a descent status under the Hindu regime, however, adopted Islam.²¹ The Koch King ruled over the kingdom of Kamatapur from 1510 until 1773 when full sovereignty was surrendered to the British.

Over the past century the term 'Kamatapuri' has been put forward by community leaders in North Bengal as a name for the speech of the original inhabitants of North Bengal which encompasses both Rajbanshi and *deshi Musalmans* (indigenous Muslims). A number of Rajbanshi intellectuals have considered the language spoken by them

recognize as 'Kamatapuri'. The Rajbanshi intellectual like Kalindra Nath Barman,²² Harimohan Barman,²³ Nikhil Ray²⁴ Dharma Narayan Barma²⁵ called it as 'Kamatapuri language'.

On the contrary, a number of experts have opined that it is yet another dialect of Bengali and both share the name root. Dr Nirmal Das in his work *Uttar Banger Bhasha Prasanga* categorically argued that the 'Rajbanshi' is nothing but another dialect of Bengali.²⁶ However, it cannot be denied that the dialect variations of a code always suffer from negligence and suppression by the standard form of that code. In this respect, 'Rajbanshi' is nothing but a dialect of Bengali. However, there is no standard format of this so-called 'Kamatapuri/ Rajbanshi' language.

II

Whatever the status of the language spoken by the Rajbanshi either it is a dialect of Bengali or a distinct separate language called 'Rajbanshi or Kamatapuri' is a debatable issue and it needs a critical explanation. The present works would not be taken to complete the linguistic exploration by any means. Rather this work is intended to explore how did a linguistic question geared up the cultural resurgence among the Rajbanshis.

As mentioned earlier the linguistic 'Pandits' have not accepted that the language spoken by the Rajbanshi is not a distinctive language but dialect of Bengali. This is to be mentioned in this context that some research scholars and writers have termed this language as 'Bahe'. They partially followed Grierson who had given this name 'Bahe'

to the variation and formed of the dialect as spoken by the Rajbanshis of the *Terai* area of Darjeeling which numbered 47345 only at that time; but the scholars following wrongly indicated this name 'Bahe' to the language (dialect) itself spoken by the entire Rajbanshi population Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Goalpara which numbered 3509171 at that time.²⁷

Table:5:1: Rajbanshi speaking people.

Name of the District	Number of spoken
Jalpaiguri	568976
Rangpur	2037460
Cooch Behar(Native State)	562500
Darjeeling (Bahe sub dialect)	47435
Goalpara	292800
Grant total	3509171

The other caste scholars called the Rajbanshis as "They are known as 'Bahes' of the Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar district" and "Bahe society and economy". This is almost case of naming of 'Genes' on the basis of 'species' and hence quite fallacious.

Moreover, there are inherent fallacies in the naming itself from the viewpoint of the meaning of the 'Bahe'. 'Bahe' is the shorter form of the vocative 'Babahe'. One should consider if it is judicious and proper to call a language group 'Bahe' and to call the speakers of the language 'Bahe' caste just because they use the vocative word 'Bahe'. That in addition, this word 'Bahe' is not used universally to address anybody and every body. The word 'Bahe' is used by the Rajbanshis to address the persons of paternal/ maternal and son/ daughter relations of affectional and love. It is not used for addressing the persons of brotherly or sisterly relations. For example, a person with the relation and status of

uncle will address the nephew like persons, 'O Bahe, how are you? /what is going on?'" etc. Similarly, the nephew will address in reply in the same manner, "No, Bahe, the situation is not alright." However, a person with brotherly relation will never address his brother or sister, "O Bahe, how are you?" This is appropriate use of the word 'Bahe'. Not only that, the word when used conveys sense of respect and honour. When the word 'Bahe', is used by any unfamiliar or less familiar person with unlined relationship, it demands proper use of the verb conveying the respect. For, example, 'ki Bahe shak becheba na ki?' will a wrong one. The appropriate form of the verb will be "Bechaiben" instead of 'Becheba' conveying due respect and honour to the addressee. These subtle features of very many words in 'Kamrupi/Rajbanshi/ Kamtai' speech form are not known to the people belonging to the communities other than those speaking the language for age.²⁹

Unfortunately, the persons who are unpopular with this spoken language often venture to use these words on inappropriate occasions with inappropriate verbs and create problems. That they may not know the words 'Bahe', 'Bou', 'Bapoi', etc. used only for addressing the paternally related affectionate ones. They think 'Bahe' can be used for addressing anybody. It is to be mentioned here that Grierson called the sub-dialect 'Bahe' because of his ignorance about the characteristic and actual meaning of the word. Moreover, the information collecting the supply the information for his suffered from the same deficiency. The Government employees through whom Grierson collected the informations were mainly from the South Bengal and East Bengal, having little of knowledge about the local language. It is seen from his report that the interpreter for Jalpaiguri district and Terai area of Darjeeling district

were 'Baboo' Murlidhar Roy Choudhury and 'Baboo' Prasanna Chandra Dutta respectively. ³⁰

This 'Baboo' class of people used to look down upon the Rajbanshi poor peasants and the language used by them and naturally having little respect for the language never cared to know the actual inner meaning of the word 'Bahe'. The implication of such an imagination also did never occur to their mind. However, the scholars and researchers seldom keep this matter in mind and intentionally or unintentionally create social tension by wrong interpretation of such words and phrases. The scholars of other caste used the word 'Bahe' inappropriately in their literature such as in *Mahakaler Rather Ghora* by Samaresh Basu. Social tension thus grew among the Rajbanshis and they recognize the non-Rajbanshis as 'Bhatia' (coming from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh) and a movement called 'Bhatia Khedao' organized by Satish Chandra Singh Ray. Though it was not succeeded, the Rajbanshis strongly protest against such behaviour of the caste Hindus. However, this practice of the caste Hindus is going on further more. In this context, the latest incident refers to the commonest of Dr. Asit Kumar Bandopadhyaya in his work where he made improper and inappropriate use of the word 'Bahe' that hurt the sentiment of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal. Not only this, Shri Bondopadhyaya, going a step forward, commented that the Rajbanshis and the 'Santhals' are not the Bengalese even. ³¹ Such comments of Shri Bondopadhyaya about a large community of West Bengal gave rise to widespread commotion meeting, slogans signature campaign organized by the scholars, teachers, students, and socio-political workers of North Bengal irrespective of caste and creed. ³²

Taking clue from the comment of Sri Bondopadhyaya, the separatist of the Uttar Khanda Movement of North Bengal had been started. The word 'Bahe' has thus open been very sensitive one leading to various kinds of socio- political problems in the past but even than some of the scholars and researchers use this word indiscriminately and cause disturbances in the social amity amongst various communities in the areas. It helped in formulating the sentiments, which are otherwise taken advantage of by unscrupulous political and so-called social leaders. Thus, a section of Rajbanshi people has been demanding a separate state with the recognition of their distinct language and culture. However, the then Deputy Chief Minister Sri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya (Now the Chief Minister of West Bengal) has given a speech in the Newspaper like this "But this time, Kamatapur protagonist under the Kamatapur People Party (KPP) and the KLO, have revived the agitation by raising illogical and baseless" issues like "Kamatapur is a different language, and Rajbanshi culture". He added that Rajbanshis were Bengalese and their language was one of the odd Bengali dialects .³³

The question remains for those who propagate the 'Kamatapuri' language community whether there are not in fact lower levels of diversity that should be classified as distinct languages. In the current political context there is, however, no desire among 'Kamatapuri' leaders to draw attention to heterogeneity within the 'Kamatapuri' language seeing as the request for the creation of a Kamatapur state is based on the principle of linguistic homogeneity. While this heterogeneity is currently seen to be erroneous and irrelevant, it is foreseeable that this would become a bigger issue were they in fact to receive their request for a separate state.

A central aspect of debate regarding language is debates over history. Apte describe the importance of history in the *History of the Indian language Debates* of 1950s;

“It is interesting to note the types of arguments presented by the MPs for claiming various linguistically complex border areas for their respective future linguistic states. Many used historical evidence and in this were challenged by others. The issues even came down to such specifics as which kings belonged to which linguistic region. One MP for example, claimed that a famous king by the name of Krishna Deva Raya was a Telegu King and the statement was immediately challenged by the Tamil and Kanada MPs, each group claiming the king to be from their linguistic region.”³⁴

History has been of analogous importance in the Bengali/ ‘Kamatapuri’ language ideological debate. Firstly, we may quote from Dr.S.K.Chatterji’s *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*; “Political and Social reasons have brought about the present unity of speech in Bengal, despite the fact of dialect. From the time of the Palas (8th to 12th Century A.D.), the greater part of Bengal formed portions of one empire.... It (the communal unity) had not been brought about by some sort of political union under the Palas just when the foundations of the Bengali language were laid ... The evolution of a common nationality and of one type of culture and literature among the people of heterogeneous origin in West Bengal, (East Bengal in North Bengal) would have been extremely problematic. There would have grown up, linguistically and culturally three ‘Bengals’ like ‘Radha’, ‘Varendra’, and ‘Vanga.”³⁵ According to Gait, the Kingdom of Kamrup reigned in today’s North Bengal from the 4th-12th century judging from the records left by Hieun Tsang- a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited

Kamrupa around 639 A.D. the Kingdom of Kamrupa included most of what is today known as Assam, Bhutan, as well as North Bengal. The Western Border of Kamrupa right through this period seems to have been stubble at the Karotoya river ³⁶, which would thus, included the current day districts of Koch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and Rangpur. The Western district of Kamrupa kingdom was alternatively named Koch Behar or Kamatapur. The latter seems to have been strictly speaking the name of the district capital (presently Cooch Behar town), though was also used to refer to the whole district.³⁷ According to some scholars like Cunningham, Kamatapur was the richest part of the Kamarupa kingdom, and became for some time the residence of the kings.

The Kamrupa Kingdom, including today's North Bengal of West Bewngal, was conquered in the early 12th Century by Ram Paul (of the Pala Dynasty referred to by that originated to the south –west of Kamrupa in today's Malda district). The conquest of Kamrupa by 'Gauda' was however, only short lived and only served to disintegrate the Kamrupa kingdom into a number of separate kingdoms. Gait maintains that the western district of the old Kamrupa kingdom formed into a separate kingdom during this time, under the name of Kamata, or Kamrupa.

During thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the rulers from Bengal; the first three invaders-Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar in 1205AD, Hisammuddin Iwaj in 1227 AD, Malik Yasbeg in 1257AD enjoyed only temporary victory before being repelled by the Kamatapur kings invaded Kamatapur for times. The forth invader, Alauddin Hussain Shah, however, overthrew the Khyan Dynasty of Kamatapur kings in 1498, and ruled over Kamatapur for a time, until an attempt was made to invade Assam

(which by now had come under the Ahoms). The Ahoms destroyed the Mohammedan army, and today's North Bengal of West Bengal was left for a time without a king, being instead ruled by petty independent chiefs.³⁸

Around 1510-15 AD, a Koch chief named Biswa Singha grew in power and established a kingdom that controlled all of today's North Bengal, *Terai* (up to and including Morang in Nepal) as well as the districts of Goalpara and Kamrupa in today's Assam. The capital of the Koch kingdom was at Kamatapur, the contemporary town of Koch Behar. After Biswa Singha the kingdom was ruled by his successors while his brother Sukladhaj also known as Chila Ray became governor of the area to the east of the river Sankosh river (now called Gadadhar, it separates modern day Assam from the West Bengal). Chila Ray extended the eastern portion of the kingdom into Assam and later declared independence from Kamata Koch Behar.³⁹

The western kingdom, Kamta Koch Behar was then invaded at several times by the Mohamedans from Dacca, and at times paid tribute to other kingdoms but "was never absolutely subdued"⁴⁰ retaining its independence until 1773 when it became a semi-autonomous kingdom of British India. Thus fifteen independent kings ruled in Cooch Behar from 1510-1773 AD that is for 263 years and six feudatory chiefs ruled from 1773- 1949 AD that is for nearly 176 years. Thus, Biswa Singha's dynasty ruled in Cooch Behar for nearly 440 years.⁴¹

Thus, S.K.Chatterji's account of the historical unity of Bengal empire, which brought about 'the present unity of speech' is Bengal-centric emphasizing the periods of Bengal domination over

today's North Bengal, which Acharya (2000), Gait(1905) and Sanyal(1965) describe in which more limited terms. Chatterjee's misconstrues of the history of North Bengal is plausibly explained by the homogenous principle with an historical twist politics are normatively linguistically and culturally homogenous, and such homogeneity can be demonstrated by a unified political history.

The divergent opinions over, how to categories the political history of today's North Bengal leads to confusion over the status of literature generated under the Koch kings. Dharma Narayan Barma, however, vents his frustration at how scholars from Calcutta and Assam have both classified an early piece of Koch literature as belonging to their respective languages:-

“ The letter of Maharaja Naranarayan was written in 1555 AD to the Ahom king Ckukham Pha (Swargadev) represents well the ‘Kamatapuri’ language. And if this be taken as the first specimen of Bengali prose literature, as held by the Calcutta University, then naturally, confusion arises that Bengali prose literature generated from the womb of ‘kamatapur’ language... It is also very astonishing that scholars of Assam demand this letter.....to be the first visible sign of Assamiya prose literature. This awakens very naturally our contention where ‘Kamatapuri’ will go then”.⁴²

III

This linguistic issue led the people of Rajbanshi help to generate to form political and non-political organization to achieve the ultimate goal of separate State. In the last phase of sixties, Uttar Khand

Dal (UKD) started movement for the development of North Bengal. At the initial stage the Uttar Khanda Dal (UKD) did not claim Rajbanshi language but later demanded 'Rajbanshi/ Kamatapuri' language for their own and lunched movement /strike/hartal in North Bengal.⁴³ Besides the UKD, large number of active and passive and signed- board and paper- type organizations have been flourished amongst the Rajbanshis. The most powerful and active organization is 'Uttar Banga Tapasili Jati O Adibasai Sangathan', (UTJAS). The UTJAS an ethno-based organization of the Rajbanshi people of North Bengal of West Bengal was established in 1979. During 1979 and 1989, the UTJAS tried to establish their claim on the socio-economic development and autonomy in North Bengal to their level best. However, it fiercely opposed the separate state demand but in some cases, their demands are identical with the UKD.⁴⁴ They demanded the recognition of 'Rajbanshi / Kamatapuri' language and introduction this language at primary level.⁴⁵ This is first time at the initial stage the linguistic issue has been raised by any non-political party in North Bengal. This issue added a new dimension in political activity among the Rajbanshi people in North Bengal. Afterwards, the Kamatapur Ganaparishad (1987) later known as Kamatapur Peoples' Party (KPP) also incorporated linguistic issue in their political activities. The student wing of the KPP viz., All Kamatapur Students' Union (AKSU) in the pattern of the All-Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AKRASU) is established to propagate the linguistic programme throughout North Bengal. The KPP was influenced while the other linguistic groups viz., Garo, Khasi. Bodos have succeeded to fulfill their linguistic demands. Needless to say, on the basis of State Reorganization Commission (1953), creation of linguistic state viz., Nagaland (1962), Punjab (1966), Hariyana (1966), Himachal Pradesh (1971), Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim (1975), Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (1987), Goa

(1987) and very recently Uttranchal, Chhatrisgarh and Jharkhand greatly inspired the KPP to organize movement for separate state viz., Kamatapur on linguistic basis. The KPP is determined to establish a separate Kamatapur state comprising the six districts of North Bengal including some portion of northern Bihar and lower Assam. They had submitted a memorandum in 1997 to Sri Indra Kumar Gujral the then Prime Minister of India containing 11 points of chartered demands in order to implement their demands for formation of the separate Kamatapur state.⁴⁶

In order to crystallize their idea of separate state and language the All Koch- Rajbanshi Students' Union of Assam(AKRSU) has established contact with its counterpart i.e. Kamatapur Peoples' Party (Atul Ray faction) of North Bengal of West Bengal. The Koch Rajbanshi International (KRI), centre was founded for the same purpose. Though it's headquarter is located at Tejpur, the centre of action is established at Burirhat near Dinhata town of the Cooch Behar district. At the time of inauguration of this centre, Maharani Gayeetri Devi of Jaipur a Scion of Cooch Behar Royal family was presented.⁴⁷ Initially the Koch Rajbanshi International (KRI) was known as Bharatiya Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Mahasabha (BKRKM). In the second conference of BKRKM at Burirhat village of Dinhata subdivision of Cooch Behar district on 23-24 February 1986 BKRKM was renamed as the Koch Rajbanshi International (KRI). The KRI had deep concern for cultural-linguistic identity of the Koch Rajbanshis. It also demanded the reservation of 80% jobs for the Koch Rajbanshis in North Bengal, formation of a state in North Bengal and formation of a military regiment in the name of Chilarai. The KRI was strongly supported by the UKD, 'Kamata Rajya Parishad', 'Chilarai Sangha', 'All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammelan' and the 'Rajbanshi Bhasha Pracher Samity' of Nepal.⁴⁸

Like the KRI, another political organization operated from Lower Assam called 'Bharatiya Kamata Rajya Parishad' (BKRP) began to mobilize the linguistic and cultural feelings of the Koch Rajbanshis. They demanded separate state namely Kamatapur for overall development of the Koch Rajbanshis of North Bengal and Lower Assam.⁴⁹ In addition to form of a separate state, its one of the demands was introduction of the 'Kamatapuri' as mother tongue in the primary level schools of North Bengal and establishment of research institution for the development of the Kamatapur language. The KPP also demanded for broadcasting of cultural programmes from Siliguri, Calcutta and Guwahati centers of the All India Radio.⁵⁰

The KPP gets active support from the 'All Kamatapur Students Union' (AKSU), and the 'All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union' (AKRASU). The KPP and the AKSU are trying to mobilize the Koch Rajbanshi people by organizing mass rally and meeting, publishing books, etc. They also have established connection with the Greater Cooch Behar Democratic Party (GCDP).⁵¹ The objectives of the AKRASU of Assam and KPP and GCDP of Cooch Behar are more or less remain same. For achieving their goal, they felt the necessity to form an umbrella organization. The result of their thinking has given the birth of an umbrella organization. They formed the Greater Kamata United Forum (GKUF) in 2006. For the first time in the history of the Rajbanshi after the creation of the province of Assam in 1874, we found a united organization of the Rajbanshi of Assam and West Bengal. Whether it will be worthwhile or not, it is undoubtedly a turning point in the history of the Rajbanshis of India. Both the Rajbanshi of Assam and West Bengal have successfully sorted their difference and are trying to remove it.

However, the founders of the Greater Kamata United Forum are not heavy weight, but still by taking the initiative for a joint organization, they have done the work of a primer history. It suggests us that this is a unique attempt on the part of the Rajbanshi of Assam and Bengal. How much it will be workable is a different issue. At least they have succeeded burying the divided identity, which created a hurdle for the growth of the united identity or community solidarity.

In order to create literary consciousness among the Rajbanshi people, the 'Kamatapur Sahitya Parishad' was formed. It has published a news magazine called 'Ratna Pitha' after the historical name of this region.⁵² The UKD had also published journal called 'Northern Express'.⁵³ They advocated the use of 'Kamatapuri' language through the journal like '*Jagaran*', '*Pubali*', '*Kamata Katha*', '*Ayana*' etc. In village level many 'Yatra Parties' were formed and they staged the popular drama '*Maynar Chokher Jal*' in the 'Kamatapuri' language. The contents of the *Maynar Chokher Jal* were widely appreciated by the Rajbanshi people. Recently, films have been produced in 'Rajbanshi /Kamatapuri' language such as 'Teesta Parer Kainya', 'More Biyar Ful', 'Baudi More Ma' etc. The Rajbanshi intellectuals established a good number of cultural organizations in North Bengal to advocate their language viz., 'North Bengal Academy of Culture'(NBAC) at Sibmandir, Darjeeling, 'North Eastern Foundation for Social Science and Research'(NEFSSR) at Jalpaiguri, 'North Bengal Cultural Organization'(NBCO) at Tufanganj, 'Centre for Studies Local Language and Culture'(CSLLC) at Cooch Behar, 'Kamata Sahitya Sabha' (KSS), *Panchanan Smarak Samiti* at Jalpaiguri, 'Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samity', 'Panchanan Mission' at Kolkata etc. These organizations are trying to revive the linguistic issue. They are publishing periodicals, pamphlets, magazines etc. in

'Kamatapuri /Rajbanshi' language. The North Bengal Academy of Culture publishing a periodicals such as *Uttasrbanga Maskia*, and a magazine called "DEGAR" (The Road) edited by Nikhilesh Roy. In addition to these, "Baghdhenuk", 'Raidak' etc have been published in 'Rajbanshi/ Kamatapuri' language to highlight the history, culture, language, anthropology, ecology and political affairs of the region from these cultural centers.

In Assam, the 'Koch Rajbanshi Sammilani' has been publishing 'Smriti Grantha' in Assamese script. Usually the Rajbanshis of Assam used to write Assamese script in their writings though they are demanding separate state. While in Nepal the 'Rajbanshi Bhasa Prachar Samity' is trying to establish Rajbanshi Language in *Devanagari* script and published bulletin regularly named "Rajbanshi." In Bihar, the Rajbanshis also used to write *Devanagari* script in their writings. In Bangladesh, the Rajbanshis are using Bengali script in their writings. All these trial may be regarded as a bold step to revive the Rajbanshi history, culture, language etc.

IV

From the above discussion, it is to be noted that though the Rajbanshis of North Bengal and Assam politically and culturally are trying to unite themselves, there is no homogeneity in linguistic issue among them. For example, in Nepal, the Nepali Government recognized the Rajbanshis language and they are using *Devanagari* script in their writings. In Bihar, there is no linguistic problem. They adopted Hindi script for their writings while in Assam the Rajbanshis used Assamese

script despite some of them demanded separate Kamatapur State. In Bangladesh Rajbanshi people are using Bengali script .There is no demand for separate language for themselves. However, in North Bengal there is a problem of linguistic identity. A section of Rajbanshi people formed a good number of political and non-political organizations to motivate the community to establish a separate Kamatapur state goal on the basis of language they speak i.e. Rajbanshi or 'Kamatapuri'. Apart from this, the Rajbanshi of North Bengal would not able to unite among themselves regarding the name of this language also. Some of them in favour of 'Kamatapuri' while some of them fashioned it as 'Rajbanshi'. This issue will lead another identity crisis to the future generation of the Rajbanshi community if the language consciousness will not be properly utilized as cultural consciousness.

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42. Dharma Narayan Barma; *op.cit.*p.3
43. *Janadisha*, Monthly Buletin, July, 1997, Vol.I, Part I.
44. *Dainik Tribitta*, 2nd January 1989, (A Bengali Daily of Cooch Behar).
45. *Resolution and Demands Istahar*; UTJAS, Jalpaiguri District Conference 20th and 21st December 1980.

46. Memorandum submitted to Sri Indra Kumar Gujral, the Prime Minister of India by The KPP on 26/09/1997.
47. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, *The Uttar Khanda –Kamatapur Movement: A Historical Perspective*, North East Indian History Association, Tenth Session, Shilong, 1989, p.406.
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49. Mayanaguri Declaration of the BKRP dated, 8th August, 1986.
50. *The Statesman*, 9th May, 2000.
51. *The Statesman*, 25th October, 2006; *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 25th October, 2006, *Uttarbanga Sambad*, 25th October, 2006,
52. *Ratna Pitha* Vol.II October, 1988 (A monthly News Magazine in Bengali and Kamatapuri Language).
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CHAPTER-VI

Emergence and Growth of Social Movements

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EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social mobility was a common phenomenon in Colonial India. The Hindus were constituted the majority of the population and it had to take place within the structural framework defined by the caste system. Its historical roots provide base for its evaluation. Glimpses of the self-conscious social mobility movement among the Rajbanshis of Bengal in demand of 'Kshatriya' status have been appeared in abundant detail throughout the Indian Census Reports of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We have to discuss the Rajbanshi social movement in two broad aspects of the community –viz. 'Kshatriya' identify and politics of the caste movement. Before entering to these questions, we have to concentrate on the existing caste system and social mobility in Bengal first.

I

If we follow the historical records, it would be cleared to us that in Bengal, as well as in India, there had been consistent movements for upward mobility with in the caste. The principal objective of this movement was its promotion from a lower to a higher berth in the 'varna'/ caste hierarchy and greater respectability in terms of the given conditions of caste system in a region. Either an aspiring caste laid claim to a higher traditional rank by calling itself by a 'varna' name, or it has dissociated itself from it; low rank by acquiring an entirely new name.

The following statement shows the claim of different castes in Bengal for specific 'varna' affiliation as had been recorded in the Census Report from 1911 to 1931. ¹

Table 6.1: 'Varna' status claimed by different castes in Bengal during the Census Report of 1911, 1921, and 1931.

Name of the castes	Varna status claimed
1. Namasudra, Jogi, Kamar, Napit (Kamar claimed kshatriya in 1921 and Vaisya in 1911; Napit claimed Kshatriya in 1911)	Brahman.
2. Kayastha, Aguri, Mahisya, Goala, Sundi, Pod, Mayra/Modok, Bagdi (Mahisya claimed Vaisya in 1901, Rajbanshi claimed kshatriya in 1911, their earlier claim being Bhanga or Bratya Kshatriya)	Kshatriya
3. Sadgop, Tili, Gandhabanik, Tambulibanik, Barui, Tanti, Subarnabanik, Saha, Chasadhoba (Claimed as Vaisya in 1911, their earlier claim being Sadgop)	Vaishya
4. Jalia Kaibarta	Mahishya.

Sources: Census Report of India 1911, 1921, 1931.

From the above table it is evident that many castes in Bengal sought three types of *varna* affiliations- Brahman, *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya*, the three classical "twice-born" *varnas* amongst the Hindus. However, it has been further observed that in terms of respective claims the *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya varnas* were regarded as better reference models of social mobility than the Brahman model. The real motive of such *varna* preferences was adaptation of *varna* status. Some intermediate castes claimed up to the respectable rank in the caste hierarchy through other social mobility process. ² Caste pride was also very prominent and usually the upper castes claimed to be culturally superior to those lower down. There were numerous examples of daily

usages of hierarchical behavior in Bengali life, which clearly indicates the mentality of the upper castes towards the lower castes.³ Such caste related cultural stereotyping often-generated social tension. But it was difficult to visualize any alternative means to register their protest or ventilate their grievance, the aggrieved lower castes looked for a solution within the caste structure itself by claiming higher status.

II

In the discussion of socio-political stirring of the period under review, it is important to take account a movement that emerged and spread among the Rajbanshi Hindus of Northeastern part of India particularly of Northern districts of West Bengal, Rangpur, Dinajpur, the Princely State of Koch Behar and Goalpara district of Assam. The movement came to be called the Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* movement by its leaders and participants.⁴ Now, if we look at the Rajbanshis in the context of existing social position, it will be easier to understand the genesis of the Rajbanshi social movement.

In the social position of Bengal, the Rajbanshis were placed at the bottom of the structure, along with the *Namasudras*, the Pods and the other *antajas* castes. Those among lower caste were not ready to bear this lower caste stigma, they argued and appealed in favour of their higher status. In this chapter, we have to examine their motive of new identity. Shekhar Bandopadhyaya in his book *Caste, Politics and the Raj* argued that in Bengal, around the beginning of the twentieth century the idea of social equality ingrained in the tents of Christianity by several Christian missionary agencies. It was gradually being dissimilated among

the people living at the bottom of the social hierarchy and the conversions that took place, like the earlier conversions to Islam, symbolized attempts on their part to break away from the stranglehold of the caste system.⁵ As a result, of all those liberalizing influences a number of *ajalchal* and *antajas* castes around the middle of the nineteenth century became conscious of their separate social identity arising out of their inferior position in society. Swaraj Basu has observed that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries apart from the Rajbanshis, several other lower and intermediary castes in Bengal as well as in other parts of India were also trying to claim higher caste status.⁶ He also argues that the local social situation also provided a sufficient ground for the Rajbanshis' assertion of a *Kshatriya* identity and their endeavour to build up caste solidarity.⁷ In the Chapter No. IV, it has been discussed that the gradual settlement of other caste Hindus in what were traditionally the Rajbanshi dominated areas of North Bengal, the existing balance in local power structure had been changed. The immigrant people in course of time had become the most dominant group in the field of social, political, and economic field. They managed the local administration and by virtue of their closeness to the administrative power and their shrewdness, emerged as the dominant landholding class. They also acquired a respectable position in society. On the other hand, the Rajbanshis with a tradition and culture of their own failed to get a respectable position in the status. There were sharp dissimilarities between the cultural practices of these two groups. The immigrant people treated the Rajbanshis as 'backwards', 'uncultured' and even *antajas*.⁸ They used to refer to the Rajbanshis as 'bahe' implying their cultural inferiority. It is to be mentioned here that the word 'bahe' was a distortion of the word 'babahe' by which the Rajbanshis generally addressed a person like fatherly /motherly relation, which was also discussed in the

Chapter No. V.⁹ As a result the indigenous Rajbanshis used to refer to the outsiders as 'bhatia', meaning an outsider (from East Pakistan) to their land. Thus, the attitude of cultural superiority of the immigrant people and their general tendency to look down upon the Rajbanshis prevented a closer relationship between the two communities. This alienation from the other caste did indirectly promote caste solidarity among the Rajbanshis according to Basu.¹⁰

There were other causes of alienation among the Rajbanshis. They have faced insults and humiliation from the Brahmanical culture of the caste Hindus. The immigrants with a strong awareness to caste started interacting with indigenous Rajbanshis in differential terms. There are numerous instances of humiliation and objectionable identities of the Rajbanshis by the other caste immigrant. Few such instances of racialism interpretation and social suppression are Nagendra Nath Basu in the early twentieth century while writing his *World Encyclopedia (Biswakosh)* mentioned the Rajbanshis as barbarians or *mlechha* and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya in *Bango Darshan* moots that the Koch identity. The immigrant people regarded the Rajbanshis as *antajas* who had no right to enter the places of worship on any public places/ celebration of *pujas* or to enter the kitchen in the upper caste households. Dharma Narayan Bhakti Shastri has mentioned that the Caste Hindus did not accept water from the Rajbanshis.¹¹ Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal, writing on the social history of Jalpaiguri has mentioned that caste system was strictly maintained there and the people of higher and lower castes used to sit in different rows on any public lunch or dinner. He also mentioned that the Rajbanshis were regarded as *ajalchal* and they were not allowed to touch the wells of the caste Hindus. However, after the beginning of the *Kshatriya* movement the situation gradually became changed.¹² Upendra

Nath Barman, in his biography of Panchanan Barma namely *Thakur Panchanan Barmar Jeeban Charit*, has mentioned that one day by mistake the lawyer Panchanan Barma went to the court room wearing the 'Toga' (the cap) of some Maitra ,who was one of his high caste colleagues in the bar. Realizing his mistake, when he was going to back the cap to Maitra, the latter angrily threw it away and said, "I hate to use a 'Toga' used by a Rajbanshi".¹³ Upendra Nath Barman has also mentioned the incident of Rangpur Normal School boarding house where a Rajbanshi student had entered the kitchen of the hostel to enquire from the cook whether the food was ready or not, but on this plea instantly two or three boys, belonging to the upper castes, refused to accept food, which ultimately had to be thrown away for the consumption of the cows and fresh food had to be prepared.¹⁴ In his autobiography, *Uttar Banger Sekal O Amar Jiban Smriti* (Bengali), Upendra Nath Barman has mentioned an incident of his student life at Cooch Behar Victoria College (1916-20) as follows.

"There were two dining halls in the college hostel. The students took food in either of these halls according to their liking. But one day the hostel superintendent in a notice declared that one hall would be reserved for Brahmins and the other for the *Kshatriyas*, while a separate arrangement would be made for the students of other communities for taking their food. Upendra Nath Barman protested against this caste discrimination by the hostel superintendent and complained to the state administration. Ultimately, the matter was brought to the notice of the college principal, who made it clear to the hostel superintendent that Victoria College hostel is not for those who observe caste distinction."¹⁵

Another personal memoir related to the *Swadeshi Days* (i.e. first decade of the twentieth century) mentions that in the Rajshahi College hostel a

Rajbanshi student who was not allowed to enter the dining hall, was ultimately compelled to have his meal in the hostel courtyard. To add to all these, the students of the lower castes were required to wash their own utensils.¹⁶ There are numerous incidents of the caste hierarchy in the society under review.¹⁷

From the above instances, it is clear that the position of the Rajbanshi in local social life was not respectable to the caste Hindus. Consequently, a sense of alienation and a spirit of community solidarity among the Rajbanshis have been developed. Their search for *Kshatriya* identity was only a symbolic cultural expression of this emergent collective self-consciousness. Swaraj Basu argued that being marginalized by the upper caste gentry in the field of power race, both in economic and political, the Rajbanshi elites used the caste idiom to voice their grievances. Thus, the aspiration for higher social status and political power motivated the Rajbanshi elites to develop among the Rajbanshis in general an articulate caste consciousness in order to launch a well-organized movement for social justice.¹⁸

The Government policy of enumerating Hindu castes in the census reports based on 'social precedence as recognized by native public opinions' geared the Rajbanshi caste leaders to mobilize their community members to claim a *Kshatriya* status. In this regard we may quote L.S.S.O' Malley's reports- "there was a general idea in Bengal that the object of the census is not to show the number of persons belonging to each caste but to fix the relative status of different castes and to deal with questions of social superiority.... This warrant of precedence gave rise to considerable agitation at the time and proved a legacy of trouble".¹⁹ The census operations had created notion among the members to the various

lower caste that if they could have their names listed in the census reports in the category of twice born, their social rank would automatically be raised and recognized by the indigenous society. Thus, this notion of legitimacy of the census operation created in local society led the sudden growth of caste associations and caste movements. However, A. K. Ray has remarked, though immediate cause of the caste movement originate through the Census of India, the basic origin of *Kshatriya* movement could be located in the hatred and ill-treatment received by the community at the hands of the upper castes of the Hindu society.²⁰ Buchanan Hamilton had noticed at the turn of the nineteenth century the prevalence of legends associating the Rajbanshi of North Bengal with the *Kshatriyas* of classical age. Indeed, it was from this time onwards, that some important Rajbanshi families, such as that of Mahiram Chaudhuri had started claiming *Bratya Kshatriya* status.²¹ Simultaneously, a movement for wearing sacred thread had also started among the *Kayastha*, under the initiative of Raj Narayan Ray, the '*Kayastha*' '*zamindar*' of Andal and Raj-Narayan Mitra.²² Shekhar Bandopadhyaya has remarked, "These movements were, however, more elite-oriented and could not involve the mass, as in the case of the *Namasudras*, and were, therefore, much less effective. Nonetheless, they signified a modest beginning."²³ On the other hand, Shib Sankar Mukherjee refers to two other reasons of '*Kshatriy movement*'. He observes, i) the claimants to Rajbanshi and *Kshatriya* lineage increased in the number of economically well-to-do landlords from the autochthonous population. This rise was the result of changes in agrarian relations associated with changing political and land revenue systems over time ; (ii) the upper echelons like '*jotedars*', '*babus*', and elites of Rajbanshi society ,because of their secular position demanded a corresponding high rank in caste hierarchy and organized articulated caste agitations in the last quarter of nineteenth

century.²⁴ The intention was to consolidate their social status. Therefore, the movement for *Kshatriya* status was expressive of the aspiration of particular sections of the Rajbanshi community distinct in the social background and historical origin. It was of course against the ill-treated humiliation by the caste Hindu. They became conscious of their low social position and wanted a higher berth in the local caste hierarchy.

III

Now the question, how did the Rajbanshis start the movement of *Kshatriyazation* ? The Rajbanshis caste leaders followed to move upward in the caste hierarchy like the path that pursued by the other castes in Bengal. According to Census Report of 1911, the common practice was to claim of affiliation to one of the three twice born *varnas*, and then in support of that status, to change the norms of religious-cultural behaviour to create myths to prove their claimed origin, and to appeal to the *pandits* for favourable rulings or *vyavasthas*.²⁵ A legend may be mentioned here as follows.

The Rajbanshis of North Bengal wished to be styled *Bhanga* or *Bratya Kshatriyas* and to be classed amongst the twice born castes. They follow various stories of their origin, the favourite one being the well-worn legend that their ancestors were the descendants of *kshatriyas* who discarded their sacred thread, when fleeing from the wrath of Parasurama.²⁶ In the Rajbanshi accounts the legend is constructed more elaborately. The Rajbanshis claimed that they were originally to the *kshatriya varna* and left their original homeland and took shelter in a region called Paundradesh corresponding to the districts of Rangpur,

Dinajpur, Bogra, and the adjacent areas in fear of annihilation of Parasurama, a Brahman sage. In order to hide their *kshatriyas* identity they gave up their sacred thread and started living with the local people and gradually came to be known as the *Bhanga Kshatriyas* or the fallen *kshatriyas*.²⁷ The Rajbanshis used the reference of *Bhramari Tantra*, *Kalika Purana* in support of their *kshatriya* origin.²⁸ It was supported in the writings of the famous eighteenth century Rajbanshi poet Rati Ram Das. In his *Jag-Samgeet*, Rati Ram Das spoke about his royal lineage and social that because of Paraushram's threat to the *kshatriyas*, they had come to North Bengal of present West Bengal and were living there as *Bhanga kshatriya* Rajbanshi.²⁹ Another reference may be produced here that the Rajbanshi people introduced to their memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission-

“They (the Rajbanshi *Kshatriya*) were once the ruling race in this part of the country sometimes with divided territories and different capitals, their last capital being Kamata Behar known also as Gosanimari now with the district of Cooch Behar. About 450 years ago sudden aggression made by Mohammedan invaders from Bengal brought about secretly by some non-*kshatriya* traitors surprised and made away with the late *Raja* Kamateswar, leaving the people quite consternate and without a recognized head.”³⁰

Though there are certain differences in these three accounts, the common thread that binds all of them together is the effort to create a convincing myth to provide their *Kshatriya* origin. The caste name ‘Rajbanshi’ that they used also implied their royal lineage or *Kshatriya* status. The first two accounts would describe them as an immigrant group; the third one appears to have been deliberately constructed to prove that they were the original ruling class in the Northern parts of

Bengal. There is a popular belief that the Rajbanshis to be the descendents of the Cooch Behar royal family, but the Rajbanshi caste leaders never equated themselves with this Cooch Behar royal family. However, the tribal origin of the Cooch Behar royal family was well documented in historical narratives. However, the Rajbanshi '*kshatriya*' leaders traced their origin from the legends rather than from the recorded history of the 'Cooch Behar Raj' to separate them from the Koch. The Rajbanshi caste leaders rather used certain legend for the reformation of socio- religion and cultural practices of the community. Hari Kishore Adhikary, one of the publicists for the caste movement , suggested three steps for the up gradation of the status of the Rajbanshi community viz., (i) adaptation of *kshatriya* like customs, (ii) shortening of the period of '*asauch*' and (iii) acceptance of *kshatriya* titles such as Singh, Barman, Ray etc. in place of existing ones like Sarkar ,Das, Mandal etc.³¹ Chandreswar Ray also prescribed some measures to raise their social status. They were as not to allow their women to roam around in the market and the fields, widow remarriage was to be discontinued, food items which were not be permitted by Hindu religion were not to be partaken of by the Rajbanshis either.³² Along with these measures, initiative should be taken to get favourable *vyavasthas* from the *Pandits* of various places in support of their claim to *ksahtriya* origin and their right to wear sacred thread. ³³

At the initial stage, the Rajbanshis caste leaders typically attempted to improve their social standing by altering their customs to resemble the ways of life of 'twice- born'. As a formal work of 'twice-born' they started wearing sacred thread and adopted *gotra* (clan) name. They also reduced the period of mourning and ritual pollution (*asouch*) from thirty to twelve days to corresponding with that of the *kshatriya*.

Discarding their origin 'Das' title, many of them adopted *kshatriya* surname like Barman, Burma, Singha and Ray etc. The Rajbanshis started settling their daughter's marriage at her early age and keeping their women behind curtain. They also gave up the practices of informal connubial relations, polygamy, widow-remarriage, and drinking of liquor. Traditional priests (Adhikaris) a section of the Rajbanshis established new '*jajmani*' relation with the immigrant '*storiya*' Brahmans. Meanwhile, the leaders of the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement also felt the need of participating in formal education and white collar jobs by their community men. But very soon the Rajbanshi leaders realized that without a proper organization this movement for *kshatriyaization* could not be carried further. The growth of various associations among the other castes might have also influenced the thinking of the Rajbanshi leaders. Thus, with the process of establishment of a formal organization network among the Rajbanshis was closely associated with their caste movement.

It has already been mentioned that the census operations gave an impression to the lower castes that if they could achieve official recognition of their claim for higher *varna* status, social recognition for the same would soon follow. Influencing by this impression of the Census authority the Rajbanshi leaders at the same time of every census tried to convince the census officials about the authenticity of their new claim. Upendra Nath Barman has written around 1891 Census, when the Government tried to lump together the Rajbanshis and Koches as members of the same caste; the Rajbanshis were hit by the caste sentiments and created a movement within the community.³⁴ The circular of the census authority barred the people of the community to register their caste as *kshatriya*. This created resentment among these

people and in many places in Rangpur, Dinajpur, and other part of North Bengal, they refused to disclose their names to the census officials and field workers. Many untoward incidents also took place, Rangpur became the centre of *kshatriya* movement.³⁵ Under Sri Harimohan Ray Khajanchi, a local 'Zamindar' of Shyampur (Rangpur), a movement against the census authority had been started and claimed that the Rajbanshi are '*kshatriya*' by caste.³⁶ He had established an association named 'Rangpur Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha' for improvement of his community.³⁷ Harimohan Ray Khajanchi had been working to awake the Rajbanshi '*Kshatriyas*', urging them to give up their inertia and exert their right and influence as they used to do in the past. He realized that to give spontaneity to the movement it was necessary to educate the Rajbanshis that will help to know their glorious past, history, society, and tradition. To fulfill his aim he began to collect history, proverbs, traditions, cultural heritage of the '*Kshatriyas*'. He also met many Brahmins '*Pandits*', '*Naiyayikas*', '*Sastrakars*' of Rangpur and Kamarupa, and other elite sections of Hindu society in Rangpur. To his credit, he was successful in getting recognition of his caste from the 'Pandit Samaj' of Rangpur and Kamarupa and a section of the elite group in Rangpur.³⁸ In his two books- *Vratya Mochan Paddhati* and *Kshatriya Uponayan Byavastha* he published the opinions of the '*Pandits*' of Mithila, Kamarupa and Bengal stating that Rajbanshis were '*Kshatriyas*' and had become '*Bratya*' due to the non-observance of certain Vedic rites but can regain their '*kshatriyas*' position.³⁹ Professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh observed that such progressing and scientific thinking of Harimohan Ray Khajanchi that the consciousness of glorious past could only convert the movement into spontaneous one was made from a rural place of Rangpur and such ideas were at that time only the monopoly of the Calcutta based intellectuals.⁴⁰

On 10th February 1891, a protest letter was lodged with the District Magistrate F. A. Skyne urging him to recognize Rajbanshis as a separate caste from the Koch and allow them to enroll as '*kshatriyas*' in this census. The letter referred the matter to the local '*pandits*' for this opinion. On their behalf, Mahamohopadhaya *pandit* Yadaveswara Tarkaratna gave the verdict that the manners and customs of the Rajbanshis were superior to those of the Koches. He further suggests that they practiced ritual and ceremonies, which were similar to those of the upper caste Hindus. He also drew references from the '*sastras*' and finally concluded that the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were '*kshatriyas*'. They should be recognized as '*Bratya Kshatriya*' not '*Bhanga Kshatriyas*'.⁴¹ The District Magistrate accepted the opinion of the *Pandit* Yadabeswar Tarkaratna on behalf of the 'Dharma Sabha', a mouth piece of Hindu religion and an association of the '*pandits*' and issued a fresh order on February 17, 1891. The order stated that the Rajbanshis would be permitted to refer themselves as '*Bratya Kshatriya*'. However, few '*zamindars*' and a section of elite of Rangpur town lodged a protest to the Magistrate against the decision. The District Magistrate then referred the matter back to the '*Dharma Sabha*' for a solution.⁴²

The '*Dharma Sabha*' called a meeting on 15th March, 1891 of Brahman '*Pandits*', '*Sastrakars*', '*Naiyayiks*' and influential members of the Hindu religion from Navadwip. The *Sabha* had also interviewed a large number of Rajbanshis, important Brahman '*Pandits*' of different places to know the social customs, habits and religious practices of the Rajbanshis. The convention was held in Rangpur town under the president ship of Prasanna Nath Choudhury where more than 400 representatives of the *Pandits* among of Hindu religion participated. On

the other hand, Navadwip *Pandit Mandali* was under the leadership of Mahamahapadhyaya Bhubaneswar Vidyaratna, the greatest *Naiyayik* of his time and five other learned *pandits*'s also participated in the convention. After a prolonged discussion, it was concluded that the Rajbanshi of North Bengal had Kshatriya descent and were Hindus. They had fallen as degraded from the Kshatriya position because of non-observance of *Vedic* rites and rituals and should be considered as '*Bratya Kshatriya*'.⁴³ The decision of the convention was conveyed to the District Magistrate on 18th March, 1891. According to the opinion, Skyne issued an order on 18th May stated that from 1st *Jyistha* 1298 B.S. (May, 1891) the Rajbanshis would be permitted to refer themselves as *Bratya Kshatriya* in all Governmental Deeds. This pacified the *kshatriyas* and the movement came to a temporary halt in 1891.⁴⁴ The movement, however, created a great enthusiasm among the people who began to shake off their inferiority complex, declare themselves openly as *kshatriya* and adopt *kshatriya* customs and titles. However, although it was getting popular and social awakening was visible; its nature was still sporadic and localized. By this time, the leadership was taken over by a more competent dynamic and forceful personality namely Panchanan Sarkar latter known as Panchanan Barma, an advocate of Rangpur originally an inhabitant of Cooch Behar State. It is to be mentioned here that when Panchanan Barma could not find any satisfactory job in his native place, he had decided to leave his birthplace and began to practice at court in Rangpur. It is also to be mentioned that he was the only first M.A. among the Rajbanshi community of his native state.⁴⁵

In 1901 Census the Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* were categorized as Rajbanshi only and this naturally caused resentment among them. The Rajbanshi leaders met in Rangpur and in a protest note to P. C. Maitra,

the District Magistrate of Rangpur on 1st February, 1901 urged him to recognize the Rajbanshis as *kshatriyas*. However, the latter in his order on 2nd February 1901, refused to reopen the case. Then it was quite clear that the recommendations of F. A. Skyne in 1891 were not accepted. The Rajbanshis there upon appeared to the Census Superintendent who also turned down their prayer, as it was too late to issue any fresh order on the point. On 19 April 1901, the Rajbanshis submitted a memorandum to Sir John Woodburn, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, who in a letter of 22nd April informed them that their application had been referred to the Secretary of the Revenue Department for necessary action. However, no further action had been taken. In the Census Report of 1901, the Rajbanshis and the Koches were therefore, again classified as members of the same caste.⁴⁶

The Rajbanshis were disappointed and launched a vigorous movement with new enthusiasm. They now consented mainly on social issues. The movement had been spread throughout North Bengal of present West Bengal and touched even in the village level. Charges in religious rules like reduction of the mourning days on death of either parent from thirty days to twelve days like upper caste Hindus were carried out particularly in Dimla (Rangpur) and Mathabhanga (Cooch Behar). Many Rajbanshis, as a Singh of 'twice born' (Dwija) began wearing sacred thread (Upabita) imposing their higher status like Shri Josh Rath Adhikary and others of Mekhliganj police station.⁴⁷

Under the leadership of Panchanan Sarkar, the movement had been got a new impetus. He urged to the Rajbanshis that unless the *kshatriya* stood on their own feet, no body will give them their *kshatriya* status and they should achieved it by merit and their right. He brought the

historical past and traditions of the Rajbanshi *kshatriyas*. He had started his campaign with the contention that Rajbanshis were different from the Koch who were a degraded caste and the because Rajbanshis were of royal lineage. According to the history narrated by him, the anti-*kshatriya* king Nanda, popularly known as Parasuram II lodged a fierce attack on the Paundra King, i.e. King of Paundradesh in North Bengal and Western Assam. The descendants of his agnates for many years to come concealed their sacred thread (which Panchanan claimed the Rajbanshis had) and their *kshatriya* identity. Panchanan also argued that being of royal lineage the descendants of the agnates now claim to be Rajbanshis. The popular notion quoted by Hunter (1879) that Rajbanshis were similar to the Koch Royal family of Majo, Bijni, Sidly and Cooch Behar. But Panchanan did not support this view. The agnates of Paundra king Panchanan Sarkar had started once broke away from the *kshatriya* ancestry they now claim to be *Bhanga Kshatriya*.⁴⁸ Panchanan claimed the *kshatriya* status for the Rajbanshis cited *Jaga Sangeet'* a kind of *Palagan* composed Ratiram Das during the time of Warren Hastings (1777-1785). Ratiram Das was a famous person of this time who launched an armed peasant Rebellion against the tyrannical Izaradar, Debi Singha, appointed by East India Company with the collaboration of a *Zamindar* of Itakumari, district of Rangpur namely Shib Chandra Ray with Rajbanshi *kshatriya* followers.⁴⁹ He further stated that Rajbanshis were not non- Aryan. While considering the physical structure of the Rajbanshis the 'principle of heredity' should not only be noticed but also the place, geographical condition, climate, food habits as well as the language, customs, religious rules, historical past which proves that Rajbanshis were *kshatriyas*.⁵⁰

But the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement inevitably brought about face to face confrontation with other castes as the latter were not prepared to accept the *kshatriya* status of the Rajbanshis. Even Brahmins began to refuse to serve the Rajbanshis as priests in religious and social ceremonies and some officials refused to record the caste of these people as *kshatriyas*. But *pandits* of Mithila, Kamrup and some local Brahmins continued to support their cause and even participated in the movements.⁵¹ In the meanwhile, enthusiastic attempts were made to collect proverbs, traditions, history, songs, sayings, and popular folktales, which made the task easier to be established *kshatriya* identity. Harikishore Adhikary, a well versed in Sanskrit and Hindu scripture published a booklet namely *Rajbanshi Kula Pradeep* in which he established that the Rajbanshis were *Paundra-kshatriyas*. The Rajbanshi literary works of Pandit Jagatmohan Singh namely, *Kula Kaumudi*, “*Kshatra Sangeet*” Gobinda Chandra Ray’s *Kshatra Sangeet*’ and Maniram Kabya Bhusan’s ‘*Rajbanshi Kula Dipak*’ also supported this view. Panchanan Sarkar was also a man of letters. He was the Secretary of *Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*, a branch of *Bangio Sahitya Parishad* wrote a number of traditional ‘*chhilkas*’, sayings, proverbs, myths, folksongs, tales of the community which were published in *Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*.⁵² Panchanan and other leaders decided to form a platform of the movement. With this idea a conference was convened on May 1, 1910 (18 *Baishakh* 1317 B.S.) in Rangpur town at Rangpur Natya Mandir which resulted in the foundation of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. It included Rajbanshis from Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Bihar, Dinajpur, Dhubri Goalpara, Bogra and Mymensingh amounting to almost 400 representatives. The aims and objectives of the *Kshatriya Samiti* were formulated with Sri Madhusudhan Ray a pleader of Jalpaiguri Bar as president and Panchanan Sarkar was the secretary of the *Samiti*.⁵³ In the conference it was decided that Rajbanshis were

Lancelst Hare, the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam at Dacca and Census Commissioner E.H.Ghoite in Calcutta and conveyed them their demands and grievances. A memorandum signed by more than 2000 Rajbanshis from Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar was also given to the Lieutenant Generals of East Bengal and Assam in January 1911. The Rajbanshi caste leaders at last succeeded in getting recognition of *kshatriya* status in the Census Report of 1911 as a separate Hindu caste, 'Rajbanshi', with *kshatriya* in bracket.⁵⁶ During the census operations of 1921 and 1931, they once again mobilized the community and appealed to the census authorities to return them as only '*kshatriya*' instead of 'Rajbanshi *kshatriyas*'.⁵⁷ Thus the Rajbanshi caste leaders tried to mobilize the community around the census to attain a respectable position in social hierarchy. By using this issue of census, the leaders wanted to develop a community consciousness among them. It could be further strengthened through the process of '*sanskritization*' and westernization.

In course of time, the *samiti* was formally registered and it developed its own constitution to regulate its various activities. The *Kshatriya Samiti* convened its second annual meeting on 20th and 21st May in 1911. The *Kshatriya Samiti* was approved and formally registered with its Head Office at Rangpur.⁵⁸ The organizational structure of the *Samiti* was as follows;

- i) An executive committee to formulate and implement *Samiti*'s policies,
- ii) A finance committee to look after the financial matters, and
- iii) A publication and publicity committee.

According to the article 14 of the constitution of the *Kshatriya Samiti*, the members were classified into three categories-i.e. (a) '*Manya*' or respectable members who paid hundred rupees or more at a time to the

Samiti's fund, (b) '*Ganya*' or distinguished members who would donate whole time offer to the work of the *Samiti* and paid Rs. 2/- each as annual subscription. They would get invitation to all the meetings of the *Samiti* and were able to vote as well and (c) '*Sadharan*' or ordinary members who also had right to vote.⁵⁹ The governing body of the *Samiti* was called '*sanad*'. The members of the '*sanad*' were chosen every year from only amongst the '*ganya*' and '*manya*' members. Swaraj Basu has observed that though the association tried to bring in all the common Rajbanshis under its fold, the strings to control it were retained permanently in the hands of the upwardly mobile elites of the community.⁶⁰

In order to reach out to the mass of the Rajbanshi peasantry, territorially spread over a number of districts, the *Samiti* set up an organizational network as follows:-

Kshtriya Samiti, \longrightarrow *Mahamandali* (in each subdivision),
 \longrightarrow *Mandali* (consisting of one, two, or more village) and
 \longrightarrow *Autarmandali* (consisting of some 'paras' or neighborhood).

The village units are as followed- '*mandali*' was at the top and '*patti*' was at the bottom. Ten or twelve '*pattis*' formed one '*gadiani*' and five to seven '*gadianis*' formed '*ghata*'. In each, '*patti*' there was a '*pramanick*' or '*Pttanayaka*'. The '*gadians*' of five to seven '*gadianis*' and the '*pattanayakas*' formed a '*ghata*' or '*mandali*'.⁶¹ The working committee of every '*mandali*' was comprised of active young social workers. The '*mandalis*' had to introduce socio- religious reforms with in the community, to supervise its various social functions and to persuade the common people to accept social practices befitting their *kshatriya* status. All of them being directly answerable to the central committee of the

“*Kshatirya Samiti*” located at Rangpur.⁶² The *Samiti* appointed many ‘*pracharakas*’ which included good number of Maithili and Kamrupi Brahmin to carry on the movement down to village level.⁶³ By 1926. three hundred ‘*madali samiti*’ had been established. The organ of the *Kshatriya Samiti* also continuously tried to help their peasant members by regularly giving them practical advice on scientific agricultural methods. A *Kshatriya Bank* was established at Rangpur for the benefit of the Rajbanshi peasants. Thus, the *Kshatriya Samiti* had managed to spread its organization network far a wide in order to mobilize the common Rajbanshi peasants in its support.⁶⁴ To develop an articulate caste consciousness among the students, an association of the students called *Kshatriya Chhatra Samiti* was established in 1917.⁶⁵ which acted as a sister organization of the *Kshatriya Samiti*.⁶⁶

Panchanan Barma, the secretary of the *Samiti* declared the ceremony of ‘*upbita*’ (sacred thread) for the Rajbanshis in the third annual conference of the *Kshatriyas Samiti*. It was a notion shared not only by Barma but also by even a casual reading of the Rajbanshi caste literature would to give impressive to the community to be practiced what was thought to be the *kshatriya* religious, prescribed by the Brahmins of different places. These practices or rituals should be followed to get back its lost glory of the community. Under Panchanan’s initiative, they sought the opinion of the Hindus *Pandits* who recognized them as *kshatriyas* and suggested methods of performing ‘*prayaschityas*’. *Pandits* like Mahamohapadhyaya Siddhinath Vidyabagish and others of Cooch Behar, Diseswar Bhattacharya and other of Kamrupa; *Pnadit* Srestha Mahamohapadhyaya Kamkshanath Sharma and others of Calcutta; *Panditraj* Yadebeswar Tarkaratna and others of Rangpur, Mahamohapadhyaya Bhubanmohan Sharma and others of Nabadwip;

Ramsastri Bhattacharya, *Pandit* Chandra Bhusan Sharma and others of Kashidham (Benaras) , Mahamohapadhyaya Chitradhar Mishra of Mithila and others depressed their consent that Rajbanshis were *kshatriyas* and can adopt sacred thread.⁶⁷ The suggestion of these *pandits* was distributed among the community members for building up a favourable public opinion. The secretary of the *Samiti* was thereupon given the responsibility of declaring the time and place for the organization of a mass thread wearing ceremony. It was fixed on 27th Magha in 1319 B.S. for adopting *upabita* and performing ‘*prayaschitya*’, ‘*anusthana*’ at Deviganj near Jalpaiguri on the bank of river Karotoya, the holy river to the *Rajbanshi kshatriyas*. Two days before the occasion Debiganj overflowed with people and a fair was held. The *pandits* of Nabadwip, Mithila and Kamrupa initiated thousands of Rajbanshis with the sacred thread according to the prescriptions of the Hindu *shastras* and the ceremony continues for three consecutive days. By the end of 30th *Chaitra* in 1319 B.S. almost 1, 82154 Rajbanshis took *upbita*, there were at least 251 ‘*milankshetras*’ in different districts and Rs. 89512 /-(Rupees eighty nine thousand five hundred twelve only) were collected from them.⁶⁸

Taking of sacred thread is not only the ritual obligation for the Rajbanshis, but it is a symbol for being accepted as a Hindu castes. The Rajbanshis appear to treat the sacred thread as a social equalizer.⁶⁹ The sacred thread for them because a symbol for social mobilization as since 1912 a number of mass thread wearing ceremonies (*Mahamilan kshetra*) were organized in different districts, where thousands of Rajbanshis went through the ceremony of ritual rebirth and began to do the sacred thread as a mark of their *kshatriya* status.⁷⁰ Along with this they began to adopt *kshatriya* surnames ; some of them arranged early

marriages for their daughters and some began to confine their women behind the 'purdah'.⁷¹ In addition to this, regular ritual of worship, known to have been observed by the *kshatriyas* such as *Gayatri*, *Sandhayapuja*, *Achman*, *Gitapath* etc. were also introduced. The *Kshatriya Samiti* published a number of pamphlets containing of these ritual and appealed to be performed by the members of the community. One of the important aspect of religious reforms was the introduction of the worshiping of goddess '*Chandi*' as '*Chandi*' is regarded as the symbol of '*matri shakti*'. It became a regular practice and custom of the *Samiti* to worship *Chandi* (goddess of Shakti or power) before every annual conference of the *Kshatriya Samiti*.⁷² In fact, at a time when the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were going out of the Hindu fold and embracing other faith. Panchanan Barma raised the claim that the Northern Rajbanshis were *kshatriyas* and his claim accepted by the *pandits* of Benaras. The Rajbanshis began to take sacred thread and declared themselves as *kshatriyas*. Not all scholars may accept his contention but it is certain that he saved the Rajbanshis of Northern Bengal from leaving the Hindu fold. This was his greatest contribution to the Rajbanshis in fact to the Hindu society.⁷³

In addition to these measures, another important aspect of the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* movement was the growing concern about the protection of the honour of their women. In reality, the Rajbanshi women enjoyed more freedom than the upper caste community did. However, as their caste movement made process, following upper caste models of feminine behaviour, the *Kshatriya* caste leaders urged certain changes in the existing practice of the community. They followed the *pardah* system, introduced early marriage, not allowed the women to go market freely etc. like the upper caste. On the other hand, the Rajbanshi women by

losing their status as equal partners of their husband gradually became objects to be protected from others. This attitude became much more pronounced with the gradual development of a concern among the leaders of the *Kshatriya Samiti* about the physical protection of their women from the Muslim goondas. The issue appeared repeatedly in the agenda of the annual conference of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. Finally, in the 13th annual conference of the *Kshatriya Samiti* a proposal was accepted for the formation of volunteer groups with proper training in every village 'mandali' to save the women from hooligans. Panchanan wrote in Rajbanshi language/ dialect, a rather inflammatory poem, namely "Dangdhari Mao" (mother, with the power to protect) to grow *kshatriya* spirit among the Rajbanshis.⁷⁴ The members of the *Samiti* took efforts to bring back the abducted women; Panchanan himself joined such mission to bring back the women. The women who are saved were given shelter in the *Samiti* for a certain period of time within which they were trained to fight back the abductors mostly Muslims with bamboo sticks and daggers. He inspired the *kshatriyas* to fight against the anti- social and to protect the chastity of women. He urged the men of his community that it was the 'Dharma' or duty of the *kshatriyas* to stand by the women and to protect against injustice.⁷⁵ The measures taken by the *Kshatriya Samiti* against the abductors for which not only the Rajbanshi women were relieved but also women of the other communities too was appreciated by intellectuals like Ramananda Chatterjee.⁷⁶

Here Panchanan Barma advised to the *kshatriyas* like that-

"Hindu Musalman bichar naire, manusjan to noy bhin/
Ulsi dhaya arter uddhar ai kshatriyer chin".⁷⁷

[Free translation :There is no difference between the Hindus and the Muslims, rather it is the duty of the *kshatriyas* to help the others who is in danger.]

The issue of abduction of women had actually become a more general concern.⁷⁸ Swaraj Basu has observed that it was a growing and in fact a more psychological concern of the Hindus all over Bengal as well as India. The fear of the Muslim abductors was in fact more metaphorical than real.⁷⁹ In the early twentieth century cultural milieu, women were regarded as the symbol of chastity of the community and abduction of women by the Muslims was regarded as an effort to the community pride. The *Hindu Mahasabha* had made it a major social concern all over India and appeal to the administration as well as to the Hindu to save the honour of their women from Muslims.⁸⁰ However, the government did not accept this view. In reply to a question raised by Panchanan Barma in the legislative council on the issue of abduction of women in Rangpur, H.L. Stephenson, in charge of Police Department, presented the figures of abduction case in various subdivisions of Rangpur. From the figures it became clear that it was not Muslims alone who could be seen in the role of abductors, nor were only the Hindu women abducted always.⁸¹ Therefore, it had nothing to do with the reality; it was a deliberate communal strategy, which captured the popular imagination. Apart from this, Panchanan was aware of the physical fitness of the men of his community. To fulfill this object he met with Pulin Das and Sri Ramesh Chandra Das to provide physical training and to teach them the use of defensive weapon like bamboo sticks, daggers, and others. In 1330 B.S. due to frequent incidents of female abduction, physical training and the training of using daggers also became popular among the Rajbanshi women. From time to time teams of the trained

teachers were used to send from the central office to this centre for inspection and open new centre that created great enthusiasm among the Rajbanshis.⁸²

By publishing, '*Kshatriya*' in 1328 B.S., the monthly journal and the mouthpiece of the *Kshatriya Samiti* dealt with various economic problems facing the Rajbanshis.⁸³ The *Samiti* condemned in strong terms any move to emulate the caste Hindu practice of giving dowry by the parents of bride, though they (Rajbanshi) adopted most of the practices of the caste Hindu. In the seventh annual conference of *Kshatriya Samiti* in 1323 B.S., a resolution was adopted stating, "Bride-Price' is bad. The custom of giving dowry to the bridegroom is a heinous crime".⁸⁴ Through *Kshatriya* movement, *Rajbanshis* were not only benefited by the leaders of Panchanan Barma, but its result effected on the other tribes of North Eastern part of India like Jaldai, Hajong, Dhimal, Madai, Rabha etc. These tribes were united themselves through this '*Kshatriya*' movement and able to establish their social right and status.⁸⁵

IV

Education is considered one of the important means of social aspects. The Rajbanshi social leaders were painfully aware of the fact of educationally backwardness of the community. They realized that without an improvement in educational standard, the community would not realize the value of the social reforms. Therefore, the social leaders of the Rajbanshi society took initiative measures to promote education among the members of their community. The *Samiti* took provision for financial help to the needy students of the community. It also took initiative to set up *Kshatriya Hostel* for the Rajbanshi students. A general consciousness and

awareness programme was also taken by the *Samiti* among the peasants about the value of education for their children. In the Chapter No.IV, it has been already discussed about the poor condition of education scenario of the Rajbanshis. In this regard, the *Kshatriya Samiti* pleaded to provide scholarships to the needy students. From the report of the sixteenth annual conference of the *Kshatriya Samiti* it appears that it had by then spent more than Rs. 10,000 by way of providing financial help to about 70 students.⁸⁶ The *Samiti* also collected funds from among the members to construct hostel for the Rajbanshi students in Rangpur district school along with the Government contribution. The members of the *samiti* also felt that if the Government assured some employment to the educated Rajbanshis, then many more people would be attracted to education. Therefore, Panchanan Barma fervently appealed to the Government to provide some special facilities to the Rajbanshis in matter of public employment as were given to the Muslims. He argued that Government assistance was necessary in order to spread education among the Rajbanshis and subsequent improvement of their social status.⁸⁷ He also argued that students hostel which would serve as an umbrella for unifying the Rajbanshi Kshatriya students and would help to continue the '*kshatriya*' movement in future.⁸⁸

Apart from education, the Rajbanshi social leaders were also conscious about the problems of the peasants. The '*jotedars*' and prosperous peasants of the community raised a common fund so that it to be spent for the general welfare of the community. They also set up a financial company, known as "**Barma Company**", located at Ganibandha in Rangpur district. The basic objects of the company was to provide loans to the poor to protect against the landlord and moneylenders.⁸⁹ They urged the cultivators to improve their agricultural

practices and called upon them to organize co-operative credit societies. Accordingly, in 1320 B.S. a decision was taken to open a bank but due to the absence of energetic *Kshatriyas* in Rangpur the proposal was postponed. It ultimately succeeded in 1327 B.S. when the 'Kshatriya Bank' was established at Rangpur.⁹⁰ It was placed in the worthy hands of Kshetro Mohan Sinha. It flourished and won the confidence the people with a very short time. One or two branches of the bank were opened in different localities of the district, which helped not only the poor cultivators, but other needy people of the community. In this respect, it may be assumed that the *Kshatriya Samiti* had initiated for rural development by establishing "**Kshatriya Bank**" in 19th century while Nobel Laureate Md. Yunus Khan of Bangladesh had succeed in his mission of "**Rural Bank**" in the 21st century. However, the bank unfortunately closed down after the partition of India in 1947.⁹¹

In addition with these attempts of '*Kshatriyazation*' and regeneration, the Rajbanshi leaders also tried to develop linkage with the 'All India Kshatriya Movement'. Upendra Nath Barman narrates how from 1912 A.D. onwards, Panchanan Barma had been trying to establish contact with the *Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha*. Panchanan was successful in making contacts with Rajputs and other *kshatriyas* of North and Western India through Krishna Mohan Sinha, a descent of Rajput *Kshatriya* whose family resided in Cooch Behar for generations. The Rajputs at that time formed an all India platform for the unification of the *Kshatriyas* scattered all over India as well as improve their conditions. An Eastern Branch of *Mahasabha* leaders through its eastern branch got in touch with Panchanan Barma and invited him to join all India Kshatriya Movement and bring its eastern *kshatriyas* namely, the fold of *Mahasabha*. In 1922,(1328 B.S.) Panchanan Barma was elected as the

Vice- President of the Bengal Branch of the *Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha*, known as Bengal *Prantik Sabha*. At that time, he came to close contact with Janaki Pal Singh, a Punjabi *Kshatriya* who had taken an active interest to bring the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* into an intimate relationship with *Mahasabha*. Under his initiative, Panchanan Barma and some other members of *Rajbanshi kshatriya Samiti* went to Puri to attend the conference of the *Kshatriya Upkarini Mahasabha*, which was presided over by the Maharaja of Sailana. In 1924, the Maharaja of Alwar and Maharaja of Sailana became the president and secretary of the *Mahasabha* respectively. In the same year the conference of the *Bengal Prantik Kshatriya Sabha* was held at the University Institute Hall in Calcutta, Maharaja of Sailana presided over the conference and was attended by Panchanan Barma. In the same year Panchanan Barma, Kamini Kumar Singha, and Upendra Nath Barman went to Alwar to attend the conference of the *Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha (BKM)*. In 1927, Panchanan Barma and Harikishore Barua attended in the Indore Conference of *Bharatiya Mahasabha*.⁹² In 1333 B.S., Panchanan was recognized the title of "Thakur" by the *All India Kshatriya Mahasabha (AIKM)*. He also met with the *Kshatriya* leaders of Ujjaini, Dwaraka, Chitor, and Ajmeer.⁹³ To give a return to the visits of Thakur Panchanan, the *Mahasabha* had also sent a delegation consisting of Dalabant Singha, Suryabamsa Singh, Janaki Pal Singh, Mahendra Pratap Sinha at the nineteenth annual conference of *Kshatriya Samiti* held in 1335 B.S. at Votemari, Rangpur.⁹⁴ Janaki Pal is said to have also attended the Gaibandha, Chekdalia conferences of the *Kshatriya Samiti*, as the representative of the *All India Kshatriya Mahasabha*.

Swaraj Basu has pointed out that the growing initiative on their part to develop interaction with the *Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha*

had two main purposes. Firstly, the Rajbanshis needed the recognition of their Kshatriya status in other parts of India that would provide some sort of legitimacy to their social claims. Secondly, the leadership had realized the importance of a close collaboration between their association and the *All India Kshatriya Mahasabha*, as this would ensure the much-required political support of the all India body for their own cause. It was perhaps through this channel that the *kshatriya* movement of the Rajbanshis hoped to enter the terrain of modern institutional politics of colonial India.⁹⁵ Sekhar Bandopadhyaya, however, has pointed out that by the contact with the *All India Kshatriya Mahasabha* they were way to establish “A Greater Pan Indian Horizontal Unity.”⁹⁶

V

In the First World War the British declared war against Germany and India, being a colonial country also got involved in war. Since the *Kshatriyas* were regarded as a martial group, in order to develop the “*kshatriya spirit*” among the Rajbanshis, the *Kshatriya Samiti* tried to inspire the youths to join in the army. The *Kshatriya Samiti* resolved, almost every year in their annual conference to appeal to the Government to recruit the *kshatriyas* in large numbers for the army and to form a separate ‘*Kshatriya Regiment*’.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the *Samiti* also appealed to the youth to join in the armed forces. In this regard, the *Samiti* tried to inspire them by citing examples of those heroes of the Rajbanshi community who had done so well in the past. Apart from this, the opportunity came to the Rajbanshis to prove their ‘*Kshatriya Spirit*’ during the wartime. Responding to such appeals, about 400 Rajbanshis had joined the army during the First World War.⁹⁸ These men

fought in Belgium, France, and Egypt. Panchanan Barma described it as a response to a divine call and argued that the Rajbanshis had joined the war, considering it their sacred duty. Thus, by god's grace, he thought, the *kshatriya spirit* had been raised among the members of this community and appealed to the Bengal Government to form a separate regiment for the Rajbanshis.⁹⁹ In a 'Bengali' (17/09/1916), it was published that 'during the World War- I two of the important persons who worked for the collection of soldiers were Dr. Sarat Kumar Mallick, and Panchanan Barma. However, the Rajbanshis proved to be brave soldiers and was stated by the head of the Karachi Garrison to Panchanan Barma that 'The men (Kshatriya) community make better soldiers than most of the others'. The men of the *Kshatriya* community formed 50% of the total recruits from Bengal. The British Government also praised the bravery and courage shown by the soldiers and in recognition of the service of Panchanan Barma rendered in the wave effort; he was conferred upon the "**Member of British Empire**" (MBE) and the title of "**Rai Saheb**".¹⁰⁰

But, Panchanan Barma could not escape from the criticism of the caste Hindus. The caste Hindus criticized that he had inspired the Rajbanshi youth to join in the War to fulfill his self-interest rendering the title of "**Rai Saheb**" and "**Member of the British Empire (MBE)**". However, it is said that the symbolic invocation of the '*Kshatriya*' spirit was skillfully tagged to the more practical questions of material well-being, to be ensured by the creation of a new jobs exclusively for the Rajbanshis. This strategy of mobilization was more directly manifest in their leaders attitude towards education and public employment.¹⁰¹

It is interesting to note that while the *Kshatriya* movement gets its popularity in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, and Dinajpur, it was faced strong opposition from the Cooch Behar State authority. As the administration was under the control of the upper caste Hindu gentry and the local people being backward in education, they could not compete with them for positions of powers.¹⁰² The state officials were reluctant to accept the *kshatriya* status of the Rajbanshis. There were numerous instances of opposition to the thread wearing ceremonies i.e. *Mahamilankshetra* held at various places in Cooch Behar. It was reported in the fourth annual conference of *Kshatriya Samiti*, that in many places including Mathabhanga subdivision, the *Mahamilankshetras* were faced strong opposition by the caste Hindus. Priya Nath Ghosh, the *Dewan* of Cooch Behar State, sent an order that, "in Cooch Behar the funds raised in each of the *milankshetra* should be retained within Cooch Behar, no *milankshetra* should be organized within the estates of Cooch Behar. It was also mentioned in the order that the leaders of the *Kshatriya Samiti* will be charged for offensive acts and their immovable properties would be confiscated".¹⁰³ In reply, Panchanan Barma expressed his inability to follow the order of the *Dewan*. Consequently, harassment of the *Samiti* leaders within the Cooch Behar State increased and the state authority tried to disrupt the subsequent *milankshetras*. We may refer many instances of opposition from the State Government in this respect. In Baneswar, Cooch Behar district during the *Asokashtami* fair and on the bank of the river Gadadhar and Tufanganj during the ceremony time the State Police forcefully prevented the Rajbanshis from wearing sacred threads.¹⁰⁴ It is believed that Cooch Behar king opposed *Kshatriya*

mobility because Panchanan Barma did not allow the members of Cooch Behar *Raj* family to accept sacred thread, as he believed that successors of the Royal family were Koch and Mech admixture.¹⁰⁵ Panchanan argued that Koch were much a degraded caste which cannot equal the *Rajbanshi kshatriyas*.¹⁰⁶ Regarding the opposition of the upper caste Hindus of the Cooch Behar State, the *Kshatriya* leaders assumed that '*bhatias*' were opposing the social regeneration of the local people, they argued because they felt that their dominance in local society would be undermined. "If we, the *kshatriyas* raise our voice, resolved the *Kshatriya Samiti*, 'they' would lose their domination over us. So being sacred, they are not allowing us to unite and to awaken our *kshatriya spirit*." ¹⁰⁷ Swaraj Basu has observed that the construction of a new identity for the Rajbanshis also assumed a dimension of territoriality, as their conflict with the upper castes was defined in terms of a construction between the autochthons and the outsiders, both contending for power.¹⁰⁸

Apart from the non-cooperation of the Cooch Behar state towards the *Kshatriya* movement, an unthinkable event took place in 1926. that not only the life of Panchanan Barma but also the great shock of the history of the Rajbanshis. Panchanan Barma was banished from the state of Cooch Behar by a notice of 24 hours. In addition, it is further ordered the said Panchanan is prohibited from entering the state for a period of five years from the date of this order is communicated to him without the special permission, previously obtained of the Regency Council.¹⁰⁹ The banished order was as follows:-

**NOTICE OF EXPULSION OF PANCHANAN BARMA FROM
COOCH BEHAR STATE.**

**Extract of Notification regarding Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma, a
Jotedar of Cooch Behar:**

And whereas the Council consider it necessary in the interest of the state ,that the Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma should be prevented from carrying on a mischievous propaganda in the State and also to mark their displeasure at his disloyal and scandalous conduct in getting up the forged petition referred to above and utilizing in a manner calculated to bring Her Highness the Maharani Regent and the Regency Administration generally into contempt with the subjects of the state and the public generally and to create discontent in the State against Her Highness the Maharani Regent and the Regency Administration generally.

It is hereby ordered that the said Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma is prohibited from entering the State for a period of five years from the date this order is communicated to him without the special permission, previously obtained of the Regency Council.

It is further ordered that ,if at any time the Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma enters into any part of the State in disobedience of this order, he will be liable to be arrested by the Police and removed from the State and that he shall also be liable to prosecution on connection, to be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months or with fine which may extent to five

hundred rupees or with both provided that no such prosecution will be undertaken except with the sanction of the Regency Council.

By order
Sitesh Chandra Sanyal
Registrar, Regency Council
Cooch Behar.

The biographers of Panchanan Barma have given various explanations to this issue, Sri U.N. Barman writes that Panchanan had great honour for women and had openly protest against its disrespect for which he was banished from the State for five years. Still Panchanan remained unmoved from his ideal.¹¹⁰ Dharma Narayan Bhakti Shastri Sarkar has also provided that the misdemeanor for which Panchanan was punished is unknown still today. Thakur Panchanan has never told the reason personally and he did not prefer to mention it .However, it was probable that due to his protest against an incident for that he was banished for the State.¹¹¹ It may also be mentioned that the Royal family did not tolerate Panchanan's leadership in Cooch Behar State because the Koch Royal family would not agree to allow any superior personality than royal prestige. However, Panchanan's daughter in Law Hemlata Devi, the wife of his only son Late Pushajit Barman stated in an interview that Panchanan had commented about the character of Maharani Indira Devi of Cooch Behar for which he was banished from the state.¹¹²

During the lifetime of Panchanan Barma, he was not allowed to enter his kshatriya gospel in the Cooch Behar. Though the *Kshatriya Samiti* had sent letter through Prince Nityendra Narayan to the superintendent to withdrew the banishment of *kshatriya* movement from Cooch Behar state-“ In view of the amelioration of the Rajbanshi

kshatriya community of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Bogra, Goalpara and Cooch Behar socially morally, religiously and educationally this assembly for the Rajbanshi *kshatriyas* of above districts, most respectfully prays to His Highness, the Maharaja Bhup Bahadur of Cooch Behar in council of extend sympathetic help towards the movement inaugurated by the *Kshatriya Samiti* and respectfully prays that His Highness Government be graciously pleased to issue general instruction to all the officers to take a friendly attitude towards the *Samiti's* act.”¹¹³ But the authority was in deaf and Prince Nityendra Narayan conveyed the inability of Maharaja of Cooch Behar to *Kshatriya Samiti* through Telegram:-¹¹⁴

“THANKS TELEGRAM, HIS HIGHNESS CAN NOT WITHDRAW MR. COLLIN'S ORDER UNTIL IT IS FULLY PROVED YOU ARE NON-POLITICAL AND DO NOT CAUSE ANY INCONVENIENCE WHATEVER TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.”

PRINCE VICTOR

However, Cooch Behar did not seem to be moved by such appeals and it was only after the demise of Panchanan Barma, under the patronage the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Jagadwipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, the *Kshatriya Samiti* in Cooch Behar was established. Maharaja himself was the secretary of the society and had donated lands for construction of the office of the society and for *Panchanan Smriti Bhavan* to be used as a Hostel for Rajbanshi students' in Cooch Behar town.¹¹⁵ It is much lately after 1949, that the 'Mansai Setu' in Cooch Behar has been renamed as *Panchanan Setu*, the Women's College at Cooch Behar has been renamed as 'Thakur Panchanan Mahila Mahavidyalaya', road has been named as

Panchanan Sarani etc. Very recently, the West Bengal Government has under taken the birthplace of Thakur Panchanan Barma, Khalisamari for 'Panchanan Museum' on 27th Magh 1415 B.S. ¹¹⁶

VII

Panchanan Barma's view of struggle for the amelioration of his community was not confine to socio- ritualistic reforms only but on mass mobilization programmed that circumscribed the scope of success of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. So, beyond *kshatriya* movement, the Rajbanshi caste movement was mainly confined to the articulation of the demand for being enlisted as a Scheduled Caste. The social leaders tried to secure special protection in education, employment and in matters of reservation in the legislative council and the other local bodies of administration by this policy.

The colonial officials since the late nineteenth century were intending to prepare a list of caste, which needed special protection from the Government. Meanwhile, the Calcutta University Commission in 1884 A.D. prepared a list of 21 castes, that required such special assistance and called these the "depressed classes." Later the Government gradually expanded this list by including more and more caste at different stages. At the initial stage, the Rajbanshi leaders argue that they were educationally and economically backward and demanded the inclusion in the list of 'Depressed class'. However, the local associations viz. The *Bangiya Brahman Sabha*,(BBS) The Indian Association, The Bengal Provincial Hindu *Sabha* (BPHS) etc. had strong view against the demand of the Rajbanshis.¹¹⁷ Only the 'Bengal Depressed Classes Association'(BDCA) (1932) argued that the move by certain groups to

excluded the Rajbanshis and some of the lower classes from the list of the depressed classes was to deprive the backward section of the society of their legitimate rights. Therefore, the Rajbanshis should be included in the list of Depressed Classes. Panchanan Barma also argued with the 'Bengal Depressed Classes Association', but the term 'depressed classes' bore social stigma and it smacked of social inferiority. He suggested that instead of 'depressed classes', it should be termed as 'backward classes' and education could be made the criteria for ascertaining backwardness.¹¹⁸ From 1920s, the *Samiti* regularly reiterated its firm loyalty to the British Government. A resolution was adopted in seventeenth annual conference of the *Kshatriya Samiti* (Assar 1333 B.S) that "..... wethe *Kshatriyas* are expressing our sincere and firm devotion and loyalty to the British *Raj*"¹¹⁹ In its various resolutions it concentrated on the demands for formation of a Rajbanshis *kshatriya* battalion, nomination of adequate number of Rajbanshi *kshatriyas* to the district board, union boards, municipalities, etc. that is local Self-Government institutions, suitable measures for spread of educations and increased job opportunities for the educated Rajbanshi *kshatriya* youth.¹²⁰

In the meanwhile, the Lord Lothian committee in 1932 A.D. was appointed to enquire for the franchise for Indian people. The Commission excluded the Rajbanshis for the "Depressed Classes" as it was classified that those were untouchables and do not have the right to enter the temples. The commission also stated that the previous definition of 'Depressed Classes' created problems as high caste could also demand representation being "educationally and economically backward". The Rajbanshis were excluded because it was clearly incompatible with their insisted demand to be recognized as 'twice-born' or *kshatriya*. The

committee commented, "The Rajbanshi is a well organized community. They want to run with the hare and hurt with hound."¹²¹ The commission's rejection was, 'to prevent the danger that they may swamp the general interests of the genuine depressed classes.'¹²²

Certain castes like, Tele, Mahishya etc. had voluntarily withdrawn their names from the backward classes. A meeting was convened in *kshatriya Samiti* office at Rangpur to discuss whether the Rajbanshis should be included or not in the list of backward classes. Some section of the Rajbanshi community has a strong feeling that this would be inconsistent with their *kshatriya* status and would lower with their social dignity. Panchanan Barma then a member of the Bengal Legislative Council tried to convince his fellow caste leaders that without protection and reservation in politics, education and administration, a backward caste could not improve its social position merely by capitalizing on caste pride. He also cited the example of Brahmin who worked as cooks and did not earn the respect of their caste. Therefore, exclusion of the Rajbanshis from this list of "Depressed Class" would be detrimental to the interests of the community. He was ultimately able to persuade the other members of his society in favour of inclusion to the list.¹²³

After the Franchise Committee of 1932 A.D., Simon Commission and First Round Table Conference came in the Indian political scenario. Panchanan Barma now met with Sir William Prentice, the Home Minister and sent a telegram to the Secretary of the State. Sir William Prentice suggested the term "Scheduled Castes" in the place of "Depressed Classes" and it was accepted by the Government of India's Resolution dated 16th January 1933 A.D. Untouchables, temple entry,

etc. were to be taken into consideration not by themselves only, but along with other factors such as educational economic and political position of the caste. The committee finally declared that "The social and political backwardness of the castes and the necessity of securing for them special representation in order to protect their interest was recognized."¹²⁴ It was the resolution of the Government of India 1933 A.D., the name "Depressed Classes" was replaced by "Scheduled Castes". Put forwarding the new definition applied for Scheduled Caste, the *Kshatriya Samiti* leaders argued that the category for 'Scheduled' was not related with ritual and social hierarchical status of a caste and that the categories 'Scheduled Caste' just referred to certain castes included in a schedule for economic and educational purposes, hence there was no ground for having any misgiving.¹²⁵ Finally at the end of 1933 the final list of Scheduled Caste for Bengal was published by the Bengal Reforms Office and the Rajbanshis were included in it.¹²⁶ And after independences, as per article 341 of Indian Constitution and orders of 1950 and 1956, the Rajbanshis remains as Scheduled Castes in West Bengal. It was due to the systematic thinking and farsighted views of Panchanan Barma that the Rajbanshis could secure the facilities of the Scheduled Caste, reservations in jobs and in political sphere. Panchanan's efforts had contributed largely of amelioration and awakening of the community both social and political¹²⁷, but at this as an opportunistic maneuver of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. By demanding reservation for Scheduled Caste, the Rajbanshis had identified the backward socio-economic status, which is the prime criteria for reservation, is contrary to the realization of *kshatriyazation*. Thus, *sanskritization* and reservation perhaps appeared to them antithetical to each other.

In spite of this controversial antithetical theory of the Rajbanshis, under the leadership of Panchanan Barma the Rajbanshis has secure reservation of jobs in Bengal provincial service and entered in the politics as representative from backward classes. It was "Poona Pact" in 1932 which also been given the constitutional reservation for the 'Depressed classes'.¹²⁸ The Government of India finally accepted it and its proposals regarding electoral changes were incorporated in the Government of India Act, 1935. Under this new act, the first general election to the Provincial Legislative Assembly was held in 1937. In this election Puspajit Barma, Kshetra Nath Singh from Rangpur, Upendra Nath Barman from Jalpaiguri and Premhari Barma, Syama Prasad Barma from Dinajpur won the election as the candidates of *Kshatriya Samiti*.¹²⁹ For the first time, such a large number of Rajbanshi leaders could win the election and this was a direct benefit derived from the reservation of seats. In 1941, under the leadership of Fazlul Hoque, the Progressive Coalition Party formed government and Upendra Nath Barman as a representative of Rajbanshi was inducted into cabinet with the portfolio of Forest and Excise in its' Ministry.¹³⁰ It is also to be mentioned here that the Legislative Assembly Election in 2006 in West Bengal, out of 298 seats 76 seats are reserved for backward classes and out of 76 seats 51 seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes people. In the 7th Left Front Government in West Bengal three cabinet Ministers – Sri Ananta Ray, Sri Jogesh Chandra Barman, and Sri Paresh Chandra Adhikary are given the portfolio of Forest, Welfare of SC/ST and Backward Classes and Food respectively. All of them are Rajbanshi *kshatriyas* and secured the seats for the Scheduled Caste reservation.¹³¹ But in comparison with upper caste, the Rajbanshis are still far behind in education, economic and political consciousness in the age of globalization.

VIII

The *kshatriya* movement was enormously got popular among the Rajbanshis of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Malda, and Dinajpur. However, the impact of the *kshatriya* movement has been less in Assam. As it apparent from the list of annual conference of the *Kshatriya Samiti*, that only one meeting was held at Dhubri, Assam and the activities of local *Kshatriya Samiti* are not also much vigorous.¹³² It is interesting to be noted here that though Goalpara district lying adjacent to the Northern part of Bengal, the Rajbanshi people of that district do not get themselves seriously involved into the affairs of the central *Kshatriya Samiti*. There was an organized movement and association in Assam called “The *kshatriya Phelam Samiti*” which had strongly opposed against *kshatriya* movement. The *Zamindars* of Gouripur did not support the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement and did not like that Rajbanshis should be regarded as *kshatriya* and his non-patronizing attitude was one of the causes why Panchanan Barma could not get any hold in the Goalpara district not even in the western part of it.¹³³

It is to be noted in this connection that Panchanan Barma had to operate from the base of Rangpur and Jalpaiguri and only when the popularity reached its zenith in that areas then only the popular pressure could make it spread in Cooch Behar so easily. However, this local pressure was lacking in Goalpara due to the Sankar Deviate influence of the Koch and Rajbanshis of Goalpara.¹³⁴ In addition to this, the Rajbanshis of Bengal and Koches of Assam are two separate communities; Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma was the chief exponent of this view. The Rajbanshis of Assam on the other hand, have strongly believed that the Koches and the Rajbanshis belong to the same stock. In support

of this view, they have founded the *Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammilani* in Assam in difference with the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* of Bengal. That is why; the Rajbanshis of Assam did not support the *kshatriya* movement of Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma.¹³⁵ In 1921, the peasants of Goalpara started an agitation against the *Zamindars* under the leadership of Jnan Mandal, a Rajbanshi social leader. Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma requested Jnan Mandal to start the *kshatriya* movement but the latter did not agree with him. Therefore, a conflict had been started between the two. The reality was that Koch Rajbanshis of Assam could not subscribe the view of Rai Saheb on the origin of the Koch Rajbanshis.¹³⁶

On the social identity question, the situation of the Rajbanshis of Assam was, however, somewhat different while their kinsfolk in West Bengal secured some special protection because of their recognition as a Scheduled Caste, the Koch Rajbanshi in undivided Assam could not find any place in the said list. How and why the administrators could mete out differential treatment to the same ethnic category distributed between two political units remains a sociological mystery though this forms only part of much bigger mystery pertaining to the adhoc approach to our over all nationality question.¹³⁷ The aggrieved Koch- Rajbanshi of undivided Assam moved to the Backward Class Commission headed by *Kaka Saheb Kalekar* on whose recommendation they were declared as O.B.C. (Other Backward Community) in 1953 A.D. They were further categorized into two segments- the Koch Rajbanshis of undivided Goalpara district where categorized as M.O.B.C. (Members of Other Backward Community), while the rest of them in other districts of Assam remained as O.B.C. (Other Backward Community). As observed by P.S.Dutta, the same ethnic group thus achieved three different statuses for official purpose –SC in West Bengal,

MOBC in Goalpara district and OBC in other district of undivided Assam.¹³⁸ This different identical question of the Rajbanshis leads another crisis in their social identity construction.

After the demise of Panchanan Barma, the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and other parts of Bengal absorbed in attaining *kshatriya* status and in strengthening further their achievements. On the other hand, an effort prevailed in Goalpara district along with the other districts of Assam to build up a parallel organization, namely *Sadau Assam Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammilani*' bringing the threaded and non-threaded Koch and Rajbanshi under a common banner. The educated Rajbanshis leaders of Goalpara have been with them along with the non- Rajbanshis, that they can enter the periphery of the regional caste order".¹³⁹

Apart from this, the Koch and the Rajbanshi of Assam formed a party of All Assam Backward Classes Central Committee in 1953 at Dibrugarh and the members are Mech, Koch, Rajbanshi, Ahom, Kaibarta, Miri, and others. There it is seen that by merging themselves with the other backward classes, the Koch- Rajbanshis of Assam virtually receded from *kshatriya* movement which so much up held by the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri of North Bengal. While the Rajbanshis of Bengal do not admit that there is no any cultural link with the Koches, the Rajbanshis of Assam have not only united with the Koches for bring social amelioration but also with other tribal and Scheduled Castes of the area just to uphold their secular cause. The recognition as *kshatriya* has become subsidiary and secondary in Assam.¹⁴⁰

Recently a new move has been initiated by the international forum of the Koch Rajbanshi for demand of tribal status. The demand for conferring ST status to the Koch-Rajbanshi has been mooted in an international conference of the community concerned held at Bhadrapur in Eastern Nepal during 9-11 March 1996. Delegates from Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Burma, Assam, Bihar, and North Bengal participated in the conference under chaired by Sri Purna Narayan Singh, a former M.P. from India, and the sitting president of Koch Rajbanshi International Committee. The main resolution adopted in this conference is that for overall uplift of the under privileged Koch-Rajbanshi, they need to be immediately recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in India and in the neighbouring states where they inhabited in large number. In the conference, the Koch –Rajbanshi urged upon the cultural integration with the main stream of the society.^{141(a)} Very recently, on 5th May ,2007, the All Koch –Rajbanshi Students’ Union(AKRSU), Chila Rai Sena and All Koch- Rajbanshi Mahila Samiti had submitted a memorandum to the Hon’ble Prime Minister, Govt. of India, New Delhi for creating separate homeland called ‘Kamatapur’ and Status of Scheduled Tribe (Plains) for Koch–Rajbanshi community of Assam.^{141(b)} This demand of Koch Rajbanshis as ST status was not touched in social hierarchization movement started by Rajbanshi ‘*kshatriya*’ of North Bengal.

IX

The social mobility among the Rajbanshis through *kshatriya* movement represented an endeavour to find social identity and status for the Rajbanshi Hindus in a situation of considerable flux and contained significant elements of opposition to upper caste domination.¹⁴² Through

the social mobility the Rajbanshi used three fold of mobilization viz. from the level of Koch to Rajbanshi (Tribalism to Hinduism); from Rajbanshi to Rajbanshi *kshatriya* (from lower to higher caste order) and from Rajbanshi '*kshatriya*' to Scheduled Caste (from higher to degradation).

In the first instances, being morally and intellectually superior, an affluent section of Koches in the sixteenth century, abandoning their impure practices radically adopted the manners and customs of the Hindus and assumed the name of Rajbanshis to distinguish themselves from the more plebeian brethren. They thus came to be regarded as a distinct caste and socially superior than the Koch. A large section of the poor Koches who failed to embrace Hinduism and styled them as Rajbanshi had apostatized to the faith of Islam. Das Gupta¹⁴³ labeled them as Rajbanshi Muslims and is now confused with the general Mohamedan population of Northeastern part of Bengal. They were also called '*Nasya sekh*' in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and Dinajpur.

In second instances, through *kshatriya* movement the Rajbanshis exhibited '*sanskritizing*' tendencies with an assertion of Aryan origin and string for the higher social status of '*Kshatriyas*' by borrowing higher caste customs and rituals. They emphatically rejected the suggestion to the effect that the Rajbanshis and Koch are the same and had common tribal or semi tribal past.'¹⁴⁴

In the third instance, the Rajbanshi leaders manifested the socio- economic backwardness to enter the Scheduled Caste list to acquire the special protection in education, and economic development. The Scheduled Caste drive is contrary to the realization of '*Kshatriyazation*'. It appears to them as an antithetical to each other.

However, by this protection the 'Rajbanshis' secure social, economic and political reservation for the community. The question of inclusion in the list of Scheduled Caste also raised sharp debates within the community though it was over come latter on.

Apart from these, the appeal of the 'kshatriyazation' movement contained a mixture of evocation of the past glory of the Rajbanshi 'kshatriya' and Hindu revivalism with at these explicit anti-Muslim tones. *Nari Niryatan* or out rage of sexual purity of Rajbanshis and other Hindu women by Muslims became a recurrent issue. The ideal of "DANGDHARI MAO" or weapon welding Hindu women was put forward.¹⁴⁵ The *Kshatriya Samiti* developed a close relation with the *Hindu Sabha* and sent its representatives to the latter provincial conferences.¹⁴⁶ It is interesting that at least within one or two years a few Muslims took part in the *Samities* conferences.¹⁴⁷ The '*Kshatriya Samiti*' also referred to the need of unity between Hindu and Muslim of local origin against the immigrants (*Bhatias*). But Hindu revivalism predominated and precluded common programme and common organization for the Rajbanshis Hindus and Rajbanshi Muslims.¹⁴⁸

X

However, the *Kshatriya* movement of the Rajbanshis has some limitation of its own. The social movement of the Rajbanshis that initially began for achieving superior status in the caste hierarchy was thus ultimately reduced to merely a politics for reservation. In due course, that led to certain confusion, contradiction, and change in social identity of the Rajbanshis. Apart from this, the movement was one, which

sought only to improve the position of their own caste within, and there was no attack on the existing caste system has been launched or not has done a critique.¹⁴⁹ In contrast to some other caste movements with a radical opposition and rejection to Brahmanical authority like the *Satyasodhak Samaj* in Maharashtra¹⁵⁰, the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement attempted to get recognition from Brahman *Pandits* and 'Shastric' sanction. Moreover, due to the inherent economic differentiation within the community itself, it was not always possible for the power section to emulate the ritual traits and customs of upper caste and those were confined exclusively to the wealthy. Thus, the social mobility movement got a class character where poor Rajbanshis were less represented and less concerned to the issue involved. Ultimately, on the issue of *kshatriyazation* process, a social distance emerged within the Rajbanshi community. The *Samiti* failed to create further interest among the poor Rajbanshis on the issue of socio-cultural reforms. There was no issue of economic reforms in agenda of the *Samiti* except the issue of economic problem of the Rajbanshi peasant. Therefore, it did not have any programme for the poor peasants and *adhiars* who constituted the bulk of the Rajbanshi Hindu peasantry. The movement remained confined in the main, among the large *landlords*, *Jotedars* and better of peasants. It is to be mentioned here that two occasions the representatives of the *Kshatriya Samiti* in the Bengal Legislative Council had to taken a stand on moves to amend the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. In 1922, Panchanan Barma was made a member of the committee to consider such amendments, while on the question of relations between landlords and *Jotedars* who were either tenure-holders or *rayots*, he was keen to further interests of these two-groups against the *zamindars*, on the question of giving recognition to the *adhiar* or sharecroppers his position was decidedly against the *adhiars*. The incident happened in 1928 when Nagendra Narayan Ray the only

council member representative of the *Samiti*, who took his position against the *adhiars*.¹⁵¹ Thus, attitude towards agrarian relations kept the potential of the movement considerably limited.

In addition to this, at the later phase of the *kshatriya* movement, the *Kshatriya Samiti* reduced to a merely politics for reservation than social movement. Entering election process, the *Kshatriya Samiti* diverted its social activities to the reservation of politics. Very few well established members of the *Kshatriya Samiti* got chance to take part in the election process. Those who could afford election expenditure were benefited with the reservation of politics. On the other hand, lion share of the Rajbanshi people could not get such benefit. As a result, most of the people within the community itself were deprived by the reservation in politics. Thus, the *Kshatriya Samiti* gradually bypasses its main purposes viz. spread of education among the Rajbanshi people, the propagation of cultural activities within the society and economic development of the society rather it concentrated more and more to participate in the election. Consequently, the potentiality of the *Kshatriya Samiti* by which it had in its initial stage was set back. Participating in election very few of the well-established Rajbanshi people took the advantage of reservation but most of the people of this society were deprived and the social condition of the masses would not improve at all.

In spite of these limitations, it can be traced that it was the need of the time when *kshatriya* movement took the initiative to secure the social right of the Rajbanshis. The work and achievements of the movement can be understood in the light of the contemporary society when most of the Rajbanshis were embracing other faiths. Panchanan Barma and the *kshatriyas* movement not only saved the Rajbanshis

community from embracing other faith but also showed the right path at right time towards the progress of the society. The situation of the early twentieth century politic in Bengal made it clear that unless the *kshatriya* leaders enjoyed a proper share of political powers they had no prospect of competing with the already advanced upper caste elites. However, the upper caste elites would not accept the '*kshatriyazation*' movement and the reservation of Scheduled Caste of the Rajbanshi simultaneously. In the meanwhile, the indigenous 'son of the soils' is lagging behind in all the fields of education, economic and power politics, rather than the upper castes elites. From this issue of differentiation gradually arises between the immigrants (*bhatias*) and the indigenous people (son of the soils) that have and have-nots. It was this depression that led to generate the indigenous to revive their economic and social position through political power issuing separate state, autonomous power throughout North Eastern part of India would be discussed in the next chapter.

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15. Upendra Nath Barman ; *Uttar Bager Sekal O Amar Jeeban Smriti*(Bengali), 1392 B.S. pp.43- 45.
16. S.N. Ray;*Swadeshi Yuger Smriti in Jayasri* (Bengali) *Bhadra-Aswin*, 1358 B.S. cited in Swaraj Basu *op.cit.*, p.64.
17. P.R. Singha, *Kamta Rajye Pundra Kshatriya Itihas*, Vol. I (Bengali) ,Cooch Behar ,1379 B.S.Preface; P.B. Ray, *Sekaler Agradoot Ekaler Bismay, Thakur Panchananer Itibritta*(Bengali),Dhupguri, 1389, B.S. pp. 21-2; Interview of Shrimati Hemlata Devi, daughter-in- law of Panchanan Barma taken by Nripen Paul and Biman Chakraborty, *Madhuparni* (Bengali) Cooch Behar special Number, 1396 B.S. pp. 502-3. Rajbanshis were denied to entry into the temple of Jagannath, Puri by an act of the Government ,Census of India, 1911 Vol. V, part I, p.229.
18. U.N. Barman; *op. cit.*, p.65.
19. *Census of India*,1911, Vol. V,Pt. I, p. 440.
20. A.K. Ray; *op. cit.*, p. 49.

21. Montgomery R. Martin; *History Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, (London), 1838, vol. II, p.741; Upendra Nath Barman, *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas* (Bengali) ,Jalpaiguri, 1941, pp.1,51, 52.
22. Sashibhushan Nandi Barma; *Kayastha Puran* (Bengali) ,2nd edition, (ed) by Girish Chandra Vidyalkar ; Calcutta, 1335 B.S. p. 339.
23. Sekhar Bandopadhyaya, *op..cit.*, p.99.
24. Sibsankar Mukharjee; *The Social Role of a Caste Association in The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 31(I), 1994, pp. 92-3.; Rajat Subhra Mukhapadhyay, *Kshatriyaization Among the Rajbanshi: An Appraisal; Man in India*, 79(384) pp. 347-358.
25. *Census of India*, 1911, Vol.V, Pt. I, pp.440-3.
26. *Census of India*, 1901, Vol. VI, Pt.,I, p.382.
27. M. Kabyabhusan, *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Deepak*(Bengali) ,Dinajpur, 1318,BS, pp, 23-24, M.Barman; *Kshatriya Tattva*(Bengali), Santal Paragana, 1335B.S. p, 22; Deb Singha Barman, *Kshatriya Rajbanshi Kula Kaumundi*, pp.33-7.
28. *Bhramari Tantra*, Patala- II,
Nandisuta bhayatbhime Paundradeshat Samagata,
Bardhanasya Panchaputra saganaibandhabai saha ,
Ratnapithang bibasante kaladwipairasamgamat,
Kshatradharmamadpakranta Rajbanshi kshatriya bhubi.

[Free translation: Fearing from the wrath of the son of Nandi (Parasurama) the five sons of Vardhana of Paundradesha along with their kins came to Ratnapitha. They abandoned the Kshatriya identity and identified themselves as the Rajbanshis.]

- of Paundravardhan) took shelter in Ratnapitha and some one took shelter in Yonigarva Pitha.] Written by Pandit Rupnarayan, the disciple of Shankara Deva in *Kamateswara Kulakarika*, Quated in Dharma Narayan Barma and Dhaneswar Manta ;*Kamrupa Ksamata Kuchbehar Rajyer Itihas*, Cooch Behar, 2005, pp. 24-25.
30. *Kshatriya Samiti Memorandum* to the Indian Statutory Commission, Indian Statutory Commission written evidence, Bengal ,Vol. III, 1930, p. E/Bengal 720.
31. H.K. Adhikary; *Rajbanshi Kula Pradeep* (Bengali) ,Calcutta, 1314 B.S. pp. 97-9.
32. C.Ray; *Uttar Baga Rajbanshi Samaj Niti* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1333 B.S. pp. 12-15.
33. Deb, Singha Barman, *Kshatrriya Rajbanshi Kula Kaumandi*, pp.2-63.
34. Upendra Nath Barman; (1941) *op. cit.* p. 3
35. A.K Ray; *op. cit.*, p.49.
36. Haripada Ray, "After Prishtha Thake Kshatriya Andolan" *Swaranika, Rai Saheb Panchanan Barmar 125 the Birth Anniversary Publication*, Calcutta, 1991, p.30.
37. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, p.8.
38. Ray, A.K. *op cit.*, p. 50.
39. Kshetra Mohan Sinha, *Rai Saheb Panchanan Barmar Jiban Ba Rangpur Kshatriya Jatir Itihas*, Calcutta, 1939, p. 10.
40. Ananda Gopal Ghosh; "Rajbanshi Kshatriya Andolaner Samajik Patabhiumika " in *Kanchanjangha*, Raja Rammohunpur, 1984, p.6.
41. U.N.Barman; *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas*, *op.cit.*, pp.4-7.; Dharma Narayan Bhakti Sashtri Sarkar, *Rai Saheb Panchanan, Mathabhanga*, 1346,BS,p.21; A.K.Ray, *op. cit.* pp.49-52; Dahlia Bhattacharjee , *Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma: Life and Times(1866-1935)*, Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, NBU, 2001,p.19.

Kalikapurana patal 77/30-31;

Jamadagna bhayatbhita kshatriya Purbameba ye

Mlechhadmanupadaya Jalpishang Sharang gata.

Te Mlechhabacha Satatamayabashach sarbada

Jalpishang sebamaste Gopayanti cha tang haram.

[Free translation: Being feared wrath of the son of Jamadagna, the Kshatriyas took shelter at Jalpesh in disguise of impure ones (mlechha) and after being used the mlechha rites and manners, adopted the mlechha language.]

29. (a) *Hai re Rajar Banshe Laviya janam*

Parasuramer bhaye ebara saram,

Rane bhanga dia mora edese ashiachi

Bhaga kshatriya Rajbanshi ei name achi.

[Free translation: The Rajbanshis were born in the Royal family but due to fear of Parasurama, they gave up their royal identity and took new identity as ‘*Bhanga kshatriya Rajbnashi.*’] Quoted in Deb Singh Barman, *Kshatriya Rajbanshi Kula Kaumandi*, p.49.

(b) *Chhiria galar dari Kshatra china lupta kari*

Pranbhaye it uti palanta sakali

Sangramak bhaye kari bhanga kshatri nama dhari

Apanake maen keha Rajbanshi buli,

Bardhansuta Panchjana Ratnapithe nila thana

Aea keha lukailo Yonigarva pithe.

[Free translation: Torn off the sacred thread the Rajbanshi abandoned the Kshatriya identity, they flew off here and there. Flew from war field they took a new identity as *Bhanga Kshatriya*; some one identified themselves as Rajbanshi. The five sons of Vardhana (king

- of Paundravardhan) took shelter in Ratnapitha and some one took shelter in Yonigarva Pitha.] Written by Pandit Rupnarayan, the disciple of Shankara Deva in *Kamateswara Kulakarika*, Quated in Dharma Narayan Barma and Dhaneswar Manta ;*Kamrupa Ksamata Kuchbehar Rajyer Itihas*, Cooch Behar, 2005, pp. 24-25.
30. *Kshatriya Samiti Memorandum* to the Indian Statutory Commission, Indian Statutory Commission written evidence, Bengal ,Vol. III, 1930, p. E/Bengal 720.
31. H.K. Adhikary; *Rajbanshi Kula Pradeep* (Bengali) ,Calcutta, 1314 B.S. pp. 97-9.
32. C.Ray; *Uttar Baga Rajbanshi Samaj Niti* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1333 B.S. pp. 12-15.
33. Deb, Singha Barman, *Kshatrriya Rajbanshi Kula Kaumandi*, pp.2-63.
34. Upendra Nath Barman; (1941) *op. cit.* p. 3
35. A.K Ray; *op. cit.*, p.49.
36. Haripada Ray, “*After Prishtha Thake Kshatriya Andolan*” *Swaranika, Rai Saheb Panchanan Barmar 125 the Birth Anniversary Publication*, Calcutta, 1991, p.30.
37. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, p.8.
38. Ray, A.K. *op cit.*, p. 50.
39. Kshetra Mohan Sinha, *Rai Saheb Panchanan Barmar Jiban Ba Rangpur Kshatriya Jatir Itihas*, Calcutta, 1939, p. 10.
40. Ananda Gopal Ghosh; “*Rajbanshi Kshatriya Andolaner Samajik Patabhiumika* “ in *Kanchanjangha*, Raja Rammohunpur, 1984, p.6.
41. U.N.Barman; *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas*, *op.cit.*, pp.4-7.; Dharma Narayan Bhakti Sashtri Sarkar, *Rai Saheb Panchanan, Mathabhanga*, 1346,BS,p.21; A.K.Ray, *op. cit.* pp.49-52; Dahlia Bhattacharjee , *Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma: Life and Times(1866-1935)*, Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, NBU, 2001,p.19.

42. A.K.Ray, *op. cit.* p.51.
- 43.U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, pp.10-11; Dhananjay Ray, *Uttar Banger Dharma O Samaj Sanskar Andolan*, Malda, 1989, p.117.
44. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.* p.11.
45. A.K.Ray; *op.cit.*, p. 52.
- 46.U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, pp.11-13; Dhananjay Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48; Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp.21-22: Ray, *Ibid.* pp.49-52.
47. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, p.13.
- 48.*Karyabibarani*, first annual meeting *Kshatriya Samiti*, Rangpur, 1317, B.S.
49. “*Rane bhanga diya mora aye deshe ashilam, Bhanga Kshatri Rajbanshi aye name achi.*”
[Free translation: We have left out landing due to the fear of Parasurama and breaking from the Kshatriyahood, we have labeled ourselves as *bhanga kshatriya*],
Ratiram Das; Jagsangeet; a *Palagan*, cited in Dahlia Bhattsacharjee, *op.cit.*, p.25.
- 50.*Karyabibarani* first annual meeting *Kshatriya Samiti*,1317 B.S.
- 51.*Proceediungs of the Ninth Annual Conference, Kshatriya Samiti*, Doma (Rangpur), 1325, B.S.
52. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, p.12, Dharma Narayan Bhati Sastri Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.
53. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, p.16.
54. M.K. Singh; *op, cit.*, pp.11-15; Barman, *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.
55. Dahlia Bhattacharjee; *op. cit*, p.28.
56. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, pp.8-10.; Ray, *op. cit.*, pp, 55-6; Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam General (Miscellaneous), File No. IC-2g/11, B, March 1921 Proceedings Nos. 27-41, Cited in Basu, *op. cit.*p. 71; Dhananjay Ray; *op, cit.*, pp.38-39, 50-51.

- 57.G.B.Political (political), File No. 8A-4, B, December 1931, Proceedings Nos. 394- 406; Cited in Basu, *op.cit.* p.70.
58. U.N.Barman ; *op. cit.*, p.17.
59. Memorandum and Article of the *Kshatriya Samiti* in G.B., Political (Political), File No. 8A- 9,B, July, 1924 Proceedings Nos. 169-71, *Kshatriya* (Bengali), *Push-Chaitra*,1333B.S. p.208.
60. Swaraj Basu; *op. cit.*, p.72; Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyaya,*op. cit.*, pp.354-55.
- 61.Eight Annual Report of the *Kshatriya Samiti* (Bengali) Rangpur,1327, B.S.p.57
- 62.A.K. Ray; *op. cit.*, p.56; *Kshatriya Samiti Nabam Barshik Britta Bibarani*(Bengali), Calcutta, 1325, B.S. pp. 8-11, *Kshatriya, Baishakh*, 1331, B.S.p.15.
- 63.Eighth Annual Report of the *Kshatriya Samiti* (Bengali) Rangpur,1327,B.S.p,57;Barman,U.N., *op. cit.* pp. 16- 29; Swraj Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.
64. Sekhar Bandopadhyaya, *op.cit.*, pp.144-145.
65. *Kshatriya, Baishakh*, 1331 B.S., pp.21-22.
66. Swaraj Basu; *op. cit.*, p.73.
67. *Vyavastha Patra*(ed) Panchanan Barma, 1319 B.S. *Kshatriya Samiti*. This booklet consists of the opinions of the *pandits* of various parts of India. It was distributed throughout North Bengal, Purnea, and Goalpara. It was represented by *Panchanan Swarak Samiti*, Alipurduar, 1995.
- 68.U.N.Barman; *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas*, Jalpaiguri,1941, pp.66-67;*Thakur Panchanan Barmar Jeeban Charit*,pp.21-23; *Uttarbanger Sekal O Amar Jeeban Smriti*, pp. 46-47; Bandopadhyaya, *op. cit.*, p.117; *Proceeding of the Forth Annual Conference Kshatriya Samiti* ,Rangpur, 1320 B.S.

69. Biman Dasgupta; *The Dynamics of the Social Mobility Movements among the Rajbanshis of North Bengal and Assam*, Calcutta University Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1976, p.112.
70. Sekhar Bandopadhyaya; *op. cit.*, p.117.
71. Sekhar Bandopadhyaya; *Protest and Accommodation Two Caste Movement in Eastern And Northern Bengal, 1872-1937*, *The Indian Historical Review Vol. XIV*, Delhi, 1990, p.225.
72. U.N. Barman; *Thakur Panchanan Barmaer Jeevan Charit*, p.45.
73. C.C. Sastry, *op. cit.*, p.19.
74. U.N. Barman; *op. cit.*, pp.50-54.
75. Barman, *Ibid*, p. 30; Nikhil Sinha, "Arta Samaj Annyer Jibanta Pratiki Dangdhari Mao" in Koch Rajbanshi Mahila Sammilan, 22nd Conference, Gauripur, Assam, 1918.
76. Manmohan Ray; (ed) *Baraniyo Jiboner Katha*, Jalpaiguri, 1993.
77. U.N. Barman; *op. cit.*, p.52.
78. P.K. Dutta; *Carving Blocks; Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal*, Delhi, 1999, Chapter No.4 where he has shown that in early twentieth century Bengal how a careful organized attempt was made to whip up communal consciousness by creating an image that Hindu women were abducted by Muslim 'Goondas'. Through this was imaginary the protagonist, of Hinduism perhaps wanted to cover inter and intra- caste tensions within Hindu society.
79. Swaraj Basu; *op. cit.*, p.76.
80. *Hindu Mahasabha Paper*, File No. 6-8, 1934-37, M M L, Delhi cited in Basu, *op. cit.*, p.76.
81. *The Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings 13th Session Vol. XIII*, 1923, pp.72-373.
82. K.M. Singha, *op. cit.*, p.32.
83. *Ibid*, p. 32.

84. *Proceeding of the Seventh Annual Conference, Kshatriya Samiti, Rangpur, 1323 B.S.*
85. Madhab Chandra Adhikary; *Samaj Chintaya Manisi Panchanan: Ekti Anusandhan*” (Bengali) in *Sovenior, The 19th Rajya Bhawaya Sangeet Pratiyogita O Mela, 2008, Cooch Behar, p.53. ; Paschim Banga, Raisaheb Panchanan Barma, Special Number, 1411 B.S. Tathya O Sanskriti Bibhag, West Bengal Government, 2005, p. 35.*
86. *Kshatriya, Jaistha, 1332, B.S., p. 44.*
87. *Working Report of Kshatriya Samiti’s First Conference (Bengali) Rangpur, 1317, B.S. 18th Baishakh (1910 A.D.), pp. 18- 19.*
88. Ananda Gopal Ghosh; *op. cit.*, p. 7.
89. *Kshatriya Samiti, Eleventh Annual Conference Report, 1326, B.S. pp.15-16.*
90. A.K Ray., *op. cit.*, p.57.
91. K.M.Sinha; *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33; Dharma Narayan Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp.66-88.
92. Dharma Narayan Bhakti Shastri Sarkar; *op. cit.*, pp. 83-85; U.N. Barman, *op. cit.*, pp.23-24; *Kshatriya, Sraban, 1331, B.S., p.69;* Memorandum on the list of Scheduled Castes from the Secretary, Indian Association to the reforms officer to the Government of West Bengal, dated 15th February, 1933, G.B., Appoint(Reforms) File No. I-R-2, 1934, Proceedings no. 9-61.
93. K.M.Sinha; *op. cit.* pp.55-56.
94. *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference, Rangpur, 1335 B.S.*
95. Basu, Swaraj; *Op. cit.* pp.79-80.
96. Sekhar Bandopadhyaya; *Protest and Accommodation: Two Caste Movement in Eastern and Northern Bengal 1872-1937; The Indian Historical Review, Vol.XIV, Delhi, 1990, p. 225.*

97. *Kshatriya, Ashadh*, 1331, B.S. *Sraban*, 1332, B.S. ; *Sraban*, 1333, B.S.
98. *Kshatriya Samiti*, 10th Annual Report (Bengali) Rangpur, 1326 B.S. pp.37-39.
99. U.N.Barman; *Thakur Panchanan Barmar Jiban Charit*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.
100. *Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference, Kshatriya Samiti*, Jalpaiguri, 1335 B.S., U.N.Barman, *op. cit.*, pp.30-44.
101. Swaraj Basu; *op. cit.*, pp.77-78; Madhab Chandra Adhikary, *op. cit.*, p.52.
102. Most of the Officials of the Cooch Behar State were higher caste. The official lists of the state shown this facts ,Durga Das Majumder; *West Bengal District Gazetteers, Koch Behar*, *op. cit.*, 1937, pp. 2-9.
103. *Kshatriya Samiti, Britta Bibarani*, 1319 B.S. p. 36.
104. *Kshatriya Samiti, Forth Annual Conference Report*, 1320, B.S. pp. 36-37; *Kshatriya Samiti, Third Year Britta Bibarani*, Rangpur, 1319, B.S.
105. Biman Das Gupta; *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.
106. *First Year Karyobibarani, Kshatriya Samiti*, Rangpur, 1317 B.S.
107. *Kshatriya Samiti, Forth Annual Conference*, Rangpur, 1320 B.S. pp. 36-37.
108. Swaraj Basu; *op. cit.*, p.81.
109. Dugadas Majumder; *op. cit.*, p. 120.
110. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.*, p.53.
111. Sarkar; *op. cit.*, p.18.
112. Interview had taken by Dr. Nripendra Nath Paul and Biman Chakraborty, *Madhuparni*, Special Number, Cooch Behar, 1396 B.S. p.503.
113. *Forth Year Karyobibarani, Kshatriya Samiti*, 1320 B.S. pp. 36-37.
114. *Ibid*; p.37.

115. Dharendra Nath Adhikary; *Cooch Beharer the Kshatriya Societir Du Katha in Swaranika Patrika*, W.B., 1990, p.25.
116. Leaflet, *Panchanan Smriti Raksha Committee*, Mathabhanga, 2008, and the author was personally present at the ceremony on 27 Magh 1414 B.S. (1st February, 2008) at Khalisamari, the birth place of Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma.
- 117.G.B. appoints (Reforms) File No. I-R-2 of 1933, April 1934 Proceeding Nos. 9-61, Serial Nos. 10, 11,12; Basu, *op. cit.*, p.89- 90.
- 118.*The Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, 35th Session, Vol. XXXV*, 1930, pp. 763- 66.
119. *The proceedings of the Kshatriya Samiti, 17th Annual Conference*, 1333 B.S. ;U.N.Barman, *Uttarbanger Sekal O Amar Jeeban Smriti*, *op. cit.*, pp.31-36.
120. *Ibid.*
121. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.* pp.58-59.
122. Report of the Franchise Committee (1932), Calcutta.
123. U.N.Barman; *op, cit.*, p. 63.
124. *Ibid*, p. 65.
125. U.N.Barman; *op. cit.* p.77; Biman Dasgupta , *op. cit.* 1992, p.145.
- 126.G.B.appoint (Reforms) File No.IR-2 of 1933 April, 1934, Proceedings Nos. 9-61 serial no. 50.
127. U.N. Barman, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
128. By the 'Poona Pact' Ambedkar agreed to give up his claim for a separate electorate in return for increase in number of lower caste seats from 71 given by communal Award to 148 (Later on 159) seats in the provincial legislative assemblies. The system of separate electorate was replaced with joint electorate.

129. G.B. Home (Constitution and Election) ,File No. RBE- 27, May 1937, Proceedings Nos. 1- 13; U.N. Barman, *Uttarbanger Sekal O Amar Jeevan Smriti, op.cit.*, p.70.
130. Gautam Chattapadhyaya, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle 1862- 1947*, Delhi,1984,- p,173, U.N.Barman, *op. cit.*, p.98.
131. *Paschimbanga, Legislative Assembly Election 2006*, pp.3-11.
132. *Eleventh Annual Conference, Kshatriya Samiti*, Dhubri, Assam, 1327 B.S.
133. Biman Dasgupta ; *op. cit.*, p.121; *Karyobibaranj, Kshatriya Samiti Fifth Annual Conference*, 1321 B.S.
134. Ranjit Kumar Ghosh ;(ed) *Mati O Manush*, Calcutta,1977, pp.64-68; Shankar Dev was a Vaishnava preacher and had spread its gospel among the Rajbanshis. He was popular among the Rajbanshis of Assam.
135. Sailen Debnath; (ed) ,*Social and Political Tensions in North Bengal (Since 1947)*, Siliguri, 2007, p.141(Prof. Ananda Gopal Ghosh; Administrative Reorganization of Bengal and Assam in 1874 and its impact upon the Rajbanshi Identity: Question of Northern Bengal and Western Assam)
136. *Ibid*, pp.141-142.
137. P.S. Dutta; 1978, *Movement for Scheduled Status in a Poly-ethnic Society: The case of Koch- Rajbanshis of Assam*, *Journal of North East Indian Council for Social Science Research, Vol. II*, pp.29-39; *Change in Social Identity of the Rajbanshis, Journal of Indian Anthropology and Sociology Vol. 34*, 1999, pp. 133-138.
138. Dutta, *op. cit.*, p.31.
139. Biman Dasgupta; *op. cit.*, pp.123-124.
140. *Ibid*, pp.126-127.

- 141.(a) *Uttaranga Sambad*, 10th March, 1996.
- (b) A Memorandum submitted to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Govt. of India, New Delhi by the All Koch- Rajbanshi Students' Union(AKRSU), Chila Rai Sena and All Koch- Rajbanshi Mahila Samiti on 5th May, 2007. The Copy of the Memorandum also submitted to Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Hon'ble President, AICC, Rajnath Singh, President of BJP, Sivraj Patil, Hon'ble Home Minister, Govt. of India.
142. Ranjit Dasgupta; *op.cit.*, p,91; Swaraj Basu, *op.cit.*, p. 82; Bandopadhyaya, *op. cit.*, p.129.
143. Biman Dasgupta; *op. cit.*, p.12.
144. *Ibid*, p. 92.
145. *Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference, Kshatriya Samiti*, Patgram(Jalpaiguri) in *Mid Asad*, 1335 B.S. (June-July 1928); Dharma Narayan Bhakti Shastri Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp.73-81.
146. Hindu *Sangathan* and Hindu *Sabha*, "*Kshatriya, Jaistha*, B.S. 1331(May- June. 1924) p.24 and Resolutions on "*Hindu Sangathan*" adopted in *the Fifteenth Conference, Kshatriya, Asad*, B.S., 1331.
147. *Kshatriya, Sraban*, 1332, B.S. p. 96.
148. Ranjit Dasgupta,; *op.cit.*, pp. 127-128.
149. *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, p.92.
150. Rosalind O' Hamlon; *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, CUP, 1985 Cf. Ranjit Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
151. D.N.Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p.97; *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings* Vol. XXX, 2, 13th Session, 1928, Proceedings Nos. 14 and 15, pp. 76-82, 96-107; Land Revenue File No. 2-A-I, Proceedings Nos. 11-19, 1923.

CHAPTER -VII

Emergence and Growth of Political Movement :

A Regional Polity and their Associations

CHAPTER-VII

EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF POLITICAL MOVEMENT: A REGIONAL POLITY AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS

The history of the post-colonial statehood in India shows that the states' relation to different ethnic and linguistic groups become the major issues in the body politics, as various sorts of conflicts and contradictions have not been resolved within the existing framework of the Indian democracy. In this context, ethnic mobilization has become one of the major instruments of grass root political activity, reallocation, and redistribution of resources and share in and access to political power. This tendency of different state indirectly provides to grow regionalism in the form of ethnic- problem, ethnicity, nationality question, and autonomy in Indian politics. In a multi-ethnic plural society of post-colonial India, several ethnic groups based on tribe, caste, language, religion even the region and the sense of otherness' cohesion by the question of 'existence' began to assert distinctiveness instead of assimilation with the dominant or mainstream culture.¹ Dipankar Gupta in his essay *Ethnicity and Politics* shows how different mode of identification communal, regional, linguistic and natives have significantly given rise to the separatist movements along these lines in different parts of India.² Unexceptionally, North Eastern part of Bengal being a polyphonic and plural cultural region is also witness of such phenomenon. New challenges emerged from the structural changes and power politics have strengthened on the issues of caste, regional, cultural, linguistic and 'son of the soils' during the post colonial period.

7.1.1: SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE RAJBANSHI PEOPLE IN NORTH EASTERN PART OF INDIA:

In this chapter, it would be stressed on the genesis of socio-economic and cultural crisis of the Rajbanshi people, the predominant group of the North Eastern part of India, which led them regionalism in the form of separatist and autonomy particularly for recognition of a distinct cultural linguistic identity including regional development during post-colonial period. They founded socio-political organizations from time to time during the period under review like *Uttar Khanda Dal*(UKD-1969), *Uttarbangla Tapasili Jati-upjati Adivasi Sangathan* (UTJAS-1979) *Koch-Rajbnashi International*(KRI-1984), *Bharatiya Kamta Rajya Parisad*(BKRP-1986), *Kamatapuri Peoples Party*(KPP-1987), *Uttarbangla Rajya Samgram Parisad*(UBRSP-1996) *Greater Cooch Behar Peoples Association*(GCPA-1998) to fulfill their ultimate goal of separate state and autonomy. In this Chapter, we have to discuss the socio-political movement of the Rajbanshis up to the UTJAS movement, as our area of study is limited from 1891 to 1979 A.D.

Table 7. 1: Socio-political organizations of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal:

Organizations/ Party	Nature	H.O.& foundation Year	Issues	Goal
UKD	Political	Krantivita, Darjeeling 1969	Economic exploitation, political subordination, cultural and linguistic identity.	Separate State
UTJAS	Social	Giyashil, Noth Dinajpur, 1979	Social, educational and economic development.	Social change
KRI	Social/ Political	Tezpur, Assam 1984	Socio-cultural identity and political and econo- mic development.	Separate State
BKRP	Political	Gauripur, Assam 1986	Economic, cultural-lingu- istic and political development.	Separate State
KPP	Political	Shivmandir, Siliguri, 1987	Economic development, political autonomy and cultural linguistic identity	Separate State
AKSU	Political	Shivmandir Siliguri, 1987	Social, economic and cultural identity	Separate State
UBRSP	Political	Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur 1996	Historical, geographical cultural, political and economic issues.	Separate State
GCPA	Political	Vetaguri, Cooch Behar, 1998	Merger of Cooch Behar State, political, economic and cultural linguistic issues	Separate State

The socio-political organizations of the Rajbanshi have raised the questions of their cultural- linguistic identity, economic grievances, and political subordination in post-colonial India. Naturally a question has been raised- Why are there continuous agitation for the formation of separate state in North Bengal and Western Assam comprising the territories of former Koch- Kingdom? Generally, the socio-political organizations argue that the post- partitioned demographic changes, state policies, lop-sided economic development, and psychosocial differences contributed to the growth of regionalism in this region. Therefore, we must review the major causes, which have direct relationship with the ethno- cultural regionalism.

7.2.1: CAUSES OF DISCONTEND AMONG THE INDEGENOUS PEOPLE:

The Rajbanshis has been recognized as a major Scheduled Caste in West Bengal. As per 1971 census, about 76% of the Rajbanshis live in Northern part of West Bengal. It is believed that Northern part of West Bengal is the Homeland of the Rajbanshis where they have been dominating the ethnic situation of this claim.³ By caste identity, about 14% people of North Bengal are Rajbanshis. Among the Scheduled Castes of North Bengal, numerically Rajbanshis is the dominant community. They constitute more than 50% of the total Scheduled Caste population of North Bengal. It had been discussed in detail in the Chapter No. IV. However, the Rajbanshis are lagging behind compared to the other caste people in respect of education, economic, work participation and other fields and this section of predominant groups is feeling alienation from the mainstream of the society.

After independence, the influx of East Pakistani (Now Bangladeshi) refugee's including Rajbanshis to India had radically changed the demographic pattern of present North Bengal. Though it is very difficult to enumerate the exact figure of the refugee who got shelter in North Bengal or West Bengal as a whole, we can get an idea about the migration of the East Bengalees to West Bengal and North Bengal from the population growth rates of certain communities and decadal growth

rates of population of North Bengal and West Bengal from census reports and districts gazetteers.

Table 7.2: Comparative table of population growth rates of certain SC communities in West Bengal.

Name	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91
West Bengal	+32.80%	+26.89%	+ 23.17%	+24.73%
SC	+46.38%	+70.80%	+36.12%	+33.39%
Rajbanshi	+61.80%	+12.66%	+66.83%	+25.70%
Namasudra	+124.47%	+34.49%	+72.58%	+52.55%
Bagdi	+21.14%	+17.17%	+41.85%	+285.55%
Jalia Kaibarta	+39.38%	+74.37%	+55.53%	+39.05%
Jhalo Malo	+47.08%	+30.77%	+71.88%	+42.54%
Gonrhi	+507.32%	-12.31%	+22.04%	+63.32
Tiyor	-5.59%	+101.31%	+2.88%	+94.27%
Patni	-90.98%	+103.265%	+75.7655	+31.58%

Source: Census Report of India.

Table 7.3: Comparative table of population growth rates in West Bengal and North Bengal (in %)

Census	West Bengal	North Bengal
1951-61	32.80%	40.49%
1961-71	26.87%	33.01%
1971-81	22.96%	27.63%
1981-91	24.55%	27.61%
1991-2001	17.84%	22.43%

Source: Census of West Bengal, 1951,1961,1971,1981,1991,and 2001

The Table No. 7:2 shows that there were tremendous decadal growth rates of certain communities like Rajbanshis, Namasudras, Jalia Kaibartyas and Jhala Malo castes in West Bengal. The Bangladesh Government has also officially recognized the fact of migration from East Pakistan (Now Banladesh). It is said "if there were no migration of the Hindus from East Pakistan and Bangladesh during 1961-91, there would have been 16.5 million Hindus in Bangladesh instead of 11.2 million in 1991 according to our (Bangladesh) calculation a total of 5.5 million i.e. average 2, 00000 persons have been missing during 1964-1991. ⁴ From the table7: 3 it appears that population growth rate in North Bengal was

always higher than that of West Bengal average in each decadal census which clearly indicates large cross border and inter –state migration in North Bengal. The flood of refugee engulfed the border district of West Bengal and Northeast India. The cross border immigrants (refugees) have gradually settled down in North Bengal with a strong attitude of resettlement in the new land. North Bengal also receiving refugees from Nepal, Bhutan and Northeast India due to out break of regular ethnic violence. The following two tables indicate the settlement of the immigrants in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts

Table 7. 4: Immigrants in Jalpaiguri District (1891 -1961) ⁵

Year	No. of immigrants	Year	No. of immigrants
1891	98611	1931	158757
1901	95899	1941	156765
1911	152174	1951	278842
1921	163024	1961	454177

Source: West Bengal District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Abani Mohan Kusari and etel, 1981, p73

Table 7.5: Immigration and emigration of Darjeeling District(1891-1961) ⁶

Year	Actual population	Immigration	Emigration	Natural population
1891	223314	119670	962	104606
1901	249117	113588	802	136331
1911	265550	111269	6000	160281
1921	282784	101807	6000	186941
1931	319635	100700	3455	222390
1941	376369	95750	4120	284739
1951	445260	100311	6900	351849
1961	624640	169250	N.A.	455390

Source: West Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, Amiya Kumar Banerjee and etel, 1980, p.276.

The demographic increase in post- colonial northern part of Bengal had altered the population composition. Even the percentage of the Rajbanshis in the total population is decreasing gradually.

Table 7.6: Distribution of of the Rajbnashi population in North Bengal by the Census years.

District	1951	%	1961	%	1971	%	1981	%	1991	%
Darjeeling	15894	3.00	31887	3.50	31505	3.06	62770	3.60	96745	7.44
Jalpaiguri	172710	32.68	316020	35.19	329191	32.03	514174	29.49	656073	23.42
Cooch Behar	252069	47.7	418839	46.63	481304	46.84	714221	40.96	865622	39.86
West Dinajpur	67489	12.78	93371	10.40	134976	13.13	369015	21.16	489642	15.65
Malda	20294	3.84	38443	4.28	50693	4.94	83463	4.79	114697	4.29

Source: Census of India, 1951,1961, 1971, 1981, 1991.

The table 7:6 shows that the population of Rajbnashis has been decreased from 47% in 1951 to 39.86 in 1991 in Cooch Behar district where the SCs have largest percentage even in 2001.⁷ Condition of Jalpaiguri district is more critical where the percentage of the Rajbnashis has been decreased from 32.68% in 1951 to 23.42% in 1991. It is to be noted that Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts remained the epitome of regional agitation led by the Rajbnashis. In addition to it, after partitioned, with rapid industrialization and the mushrooming of the tea gardens in North Bengal there was a gradual growth of land *Mafia* in this region trying to monopolies the only large-scale Agro-based industry of this region.⁸ Most of the land, which was earlier, dominated by the local Scheduled Castes communities of Koch and Rajbnashis were thus brought over by the affluent Hindu refugees from Bangladesh and Marwari's from Rajsthan. In Jalpaiguri district while the number of *Jotes* holds by Rajbnashis, those hold by the Marwaris, the upper caste Bengali middle class people, and other increased sharply.⁹ An important aspect of land alienation was the rapid growth of an unprotected tenancy structure in the form of *adhiari* system. J.F.Gruning noted, "In some cases the sellers sinks to the position of *adhiars* and at the mercy of new *jotedars*, who can turn them at any time."¹⁰ During the post partition period the whole

region became over populated with the influx of the immigrants from the then East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). This huge number of influx of refugees (Bhatia) to North Eastern part of Bengal added to the trouble, as they became unequal competitors of local people in the matter of service, business, and other socio- economic pursuits. Because the local people being mostly illiterate or semi-literate and having practically no connection with the higher ups were not in a position to compete with the immigrants, (Bhatia) and the grievance of the indigenous people increased day by day. This has given rise to a tendency in this community to organize a sort of middle class nativity movement in opposition to migrants. ¹¹

Besides the demographic changes, after the introduction of land Acquisition Act (1953) , a large number of *Jotedars* of North Bengal lost their lands in excess to the limit of seventy- five bighas. *Khas* (vested) land had been distributed to the landless cultivators. Although the victim *zotedars* were mostly of the Rajbanshi but their caste fellows are not sole beneficiaries. Hence, there was a strong voice for the distribution of the vested land to the Rajbanshis only. Naturally, land alienation to the non-Rajbanshis began with the first phase of land reforms in West Bengal germinated the seeds of deprivation among the pre-settled communities of North Bengal. ¹²

Second phase of land reform was undertaken in West Bengal with the coming of the United Front (UF) Government in 1967. During 1967-70, the United Front Government vested one million acre of land, which had broken the backbone of social dominance of the landed aristocracy (*zotedars*) of West Bengal. ¹³ The *zotedars* of North Bengal could not escape from it. However, third phase of land reforms called

“Operation Burga” under the present Left Front Government was successful in vesting family land and recording 1.2 million of sharecroppers within three years (1978-81).¹⁴ According to the official records, 428179.95 hector-vested lands have been distributed among 2605432 beneficiaries. In North Bengal 170081.80 hector-vested lands were distributed among 671841 beneficiaries out of which 301498 are SCs and 144181 are STs¹⁵ The table 7:7 and 7:8 show the distribution of vested land in North Bengal.

Table 7.7: SC and ST families of North Bengal benefited by the ‘Operation Burga’(upto31.12.85)

Dist./State	Total figure	SC	ST	% of the SC/ST
West Bengal	13456757	401627	162662	41.89
Darjeeling	12831	4139	3028	55.85
Jalpaiguri	55792	25769	12841	51.27
Cooch Behar	74420	44507	770	60.38
W.Dinajpur	96431	26534	28699	57.27
Malda	75453	19056	18993	49.10

Sources : Deptt. of SC/ ST Welfare, Government of West Bengal.

Table 7: 8: Distribution of vested land (till30.09.95)

Descriptions	West Bengal	North Bengal
Distribution vested land	428179.95 ha	170081.80 ha
Beneficiries	2605432	671841(SC-301491,ST-144184)
Bargadars	1498386	343817
Land cultivated by the Sharecroppers	448286.16 ha	142405.26 ha

Source: Deptt. of SC/ ST Welfare, Government of West Bengal, This statement was also framed by Dinesh Dakua in *Kamatapuri Andolan Ekti Jana Bichhinna Andolon*, Calcutta, National Book Agency Pvt. Ltd.,2003,pp.-30-31.

Land reforms and distribution of vested lands to the landless agricultural labourers by the UF and LF Governments had direct impact on the ethnic movement of North Bengal. Since the employment, market is not growing as fast as the number of entrants; local middle class aspirants have started viewing migrants as block to their mobility and

development. Thus, an atmosphere of struggle for access to and control over new resources has emerged. The *jotedars* and being landlords lost majority of their land because of ceiling laws as mentioned earlier. They were now to sell part of their retained lands for their livelihood. The lands were incidentally purchased by the immigrants (*Bhatias*) who were being uprooted from East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) ; came to this part of the country with better financial capacity, better education, better capabilities in all respects rather than the locals. The financial supports from the Government for the refugees also helped them setting on the lands earlier belonging to the landholders.¹⁶ The new owners of the lands with more capital and skills and with their lands newly irrigated, earns a high income, while the former landowners have become landless farmers, rickshaw pullers or van pullers, weigh labourers. The prosperous farmers, owners of business firms and factories, administrative personal- all are the immigrants and hence some of the local people have become resentful at their subordinate economic role. They have developed a tendency to perceived immigrants as economic and political thread and also a thread on their cultural system Under this situation, the Rajbansis were forced to migrate into the nearby urban areas and to the other province only to be absorbed into the marginalize section workers, domestic servants whose survival depended upon the selling of labour power. Alienation from their ancestral land and the transformation of Rajbanshi from land owing peasants to wage labour proletariats had various social connotations too and tension has been grown in North Bengal from time to time in respect of separate state and autonomous power in North Bengal.¹⁷

It was the demand of the socio- political organization of the Rajbanshis that North Bengal is full or resources, but since independence no sufficient industrial development have been progressed

in this region . Because of which the people of this particular region are trailing behind either in the field of services or in any other independent professional line. In absence of any industrial development and their economical activities, agriculture has been the only sources of livelihood of the people of these regions but since century's past, there has been no irrigation system either for distribution of water for cultivation purpose or to control floods whatever, till date. Consequently, the people of this area have to be solely depended on nature.

The dominance of immigrants in the world of economic, social, and political fields had led the local youths to emulate their dress, their style of living, even their language. However, they have now grown with a feeling that the immigrant's have forced them to lose their own cultural identity. At the same time they have learnt the new phenomenon of territorial inclusiveness –the theory of “sons of the soil” being applied by the so-called indigenous people in the whole world. Keeping this view in mind, they assert that the indigenous people have a special claim to the region; firstly claim on employment, school, and even control over the political system. In addition, the new comers are entitled to their services and benefits only after they have been adequately distributed to the indigenous population. Thus, it is the issue of social mobility again which pushed a section of Rajbanshi community for the second phase of the movement which was directed at creating an “identity” based on “sons of the soil” concept emphasizing their differences with the mainstream society and claiming their share of economic and political power on the basis of this ‘identity question’. All these issues added to the discontent among the local people, have given rise to the politico- social movements in the form of *Uttar Khanda*, *UTJAS (Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan)*, *KRI (Koch Rajbanshi International)* and *Kamatapur*

movement etc.¹⁸ Let us focus the characteristic of the movements launched by the Rajbanshis of North Bengal from time to time based on socio-economic development.

III

7.3.1:SEPARATE STATEHOOD MOVEMENT AND HITASADHANI SABHA:

Before going to the origin and development of socio-political movement in North- Eastern part of India we should aware of the fact that different groups or organizations have been pursued the idea of a separate state in different ways and manners in different period. Sometimes they included Purnea district of Bihar and Goalpara districts of Assam in their proposed Uttarkhand State in addition to the six districts of North Bengal viz. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda. On 30th October, 1949 the leaders of the parties of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri Sikkim and Darjeeling demand for the creation of separate province named Uttarkhand Pradesh.¹⁹ But latter they give up the hill areas of Darjeeling from the 'Kamatapur'.

Historically, the first demand for the formation of a separate state for the Scheduled Caste people of Northern part of Bengal was made by Jogendra Nath Mandal, the leader of the East Bengal Scheduled Caste Community in public meeting at Kharibari in the Darjeeling district on 4th May 1947.²⁰ Mr. Mandal strongly denounced the proposed partition of Bengal and stated that if it is being implemented at all, then we demand a separate state viz "Rajasthan" in the name of Rajbanshi people. It will be

consisted of Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur districts, certain portions of Rangpur and Darjeeling districts as well as Purnea district of Bihar and Goalpara district of Assam.²¹ The areas mentioned by Mr. Mandal were largely inhabited by the Rajbanshi people. However, what was interesting is that in the proposed province of Mr. Mandal, the native State of Cooch Behar was not included, though it was considered as the citadel of Rajbanshi community. In addition to this, the reaction of the Rajbanshi people is not known. It is necessary to mention here that Mr. Mandal was an outsider and belong to non- Rajbanshi Scheduled Caste Community of Eastern Bengal.

As because Cooch Behar was the citadel of Rajbanshi community, the demand for the first time for the formation of separate state came from a section of the Rajbanshi community of the Cooch Behar Native States. The demand was raised by the Cooch Behar *Hitasadhani Sabha*, a local group or party controlled organization and dominated by the Hindu and Muslim Rajbanshi *Jotedars*.

There is a debate on the foundation date of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* in Cooch Behar. Dr Charu Chandra Sanyal, an eminent political personality and the editor of the *Janamat Patrika* (a well-circulated Bengali weekly) of Jalpaiguri has mentioned in one issue of the *Patrika* that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was founded on 18th May, 1947. On the other hand, Shree Parbananda Das, a retired Headmaster and a member of the “*Hitasadhani Sabha*” has stated that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was founded on 19th May, 1946. The Statement of Parabananda Das was more authenticate one.²² There are other evidents, which helped us to support that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was founded in 1946. The first concrete historical evidence is the Election of 1946 and 1949 in Cooch Behar

State. The *Hitasadhani Sadha* participated in both the elections and got thumping majority in the Legislative Council of the Cooch Behar State. The Second Historical evidence is a song comprised by an anonymous Cooch Behari poet. It was distributed among the visitors and the pilgrims of the *Rash Mela* in 1946. The song was composed in the names of the leaders of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* and indicated the grievances of the Cooch Behari people against the outsiders i.e. *bhatias*. The song was as follows: ²³

*Othore Native Bhai, Jagore Native,
Tarao Bhatia sab,
Gorji uthilo Sarat Singha
Tuli hunkar rab,
Eso Despran Jaladhar eso,
Satish Sange kari,
Dharanir Sathe eso Ansar
Kari Gala dharadhari,
Kothay Majir Majila edese,
Gelo bhatiar hate, Gelo kata Bir Purnendu Eso
Khan Chowdhuri Sathe.*

[Free translation:-Native brothers, get up and drive out the *bhatias*. Satish Singha rises up finger with a great plea and please come patriot Jaladhar along with Satish Chandra Singha. Ansar come along with Dharani by shoulder to shoulder. The state handed over to the *bhatias*. Many warriors passed away and Purnendu come along Khan Chowdhury Amantullah Khan.]

From the above historical and oral evidences, it can be said that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was founded on 19th May, 1946. Prasenjit Barma, member of the Cooch Behar Association also says-“... At last on 19th May, 1946 (4th *Jaistha*, 1353 BS) before a huge gathering of more than

sixty thousand people on the Rash *Mela Maidan* which was than wide open having no stadium and other construction there on the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was formed in great enthusiasm with the following persons; ²⁴

Formation of the Hitasadhani Sabha:

President : Khan Chowdhury Amanatullya
Khan

Vice- president : Satish Chandra Ray Singha
Dharani Sankar Bhattacharya

Secretary : Jaladhar Saha

Assistant Secretary : Majiruddin Ahmed

Members : Moqbul Hossain & Jafaruddin Boxi (Dinhata), Bazle Rahaman(Cooch Behar), Satish Chandra Ray (Khagrabari) Satinath Ray (Bhetaguri), Aneswar Ray (Bhetaguri),Dr. Jogendra Nath Ray (Mekhliganj),Ekin Prodhan, Mossahar Hossain, Gajen Ray Bsunia, Jogendra Nath Mondal (Tufanganj), Dhira Ray Basunia, Jogen Ishore, Rajeswar Sarkar, Jotindra Nath Singha Sarkar (Tufanganj), Patal Chandra Barman (Natabari), Hefajuddin Mia (Premerdanga), Anchharuddin Ahmed (Cooch Behar Sadar), Kumar Purnendu Narayan,Kamini Kumar Barman, Kamaruddin Miah, Kumar Birendra Narayan, . In addition to these, there were many village people who were also included as the ordinary members of the *Sabha*. Famous singer Abbasuddin Ahmed, Suren Ray Basunia indirectly encouraged the *Sabha*. Bholanath Ray, Harish Chandra Ray Sarkar, Karimuddin Ahmed, Naren Singh, Mahesh Barma, Akshay Kumar Barma, Nirmal Ray, Purna Chandra Sarkar, 2nd Grand sons of Amanatullaya etc were in the youth section of the *sabha*.

It is alleged that the British Resident of Cooch Behar State and the private secretary of Maharani Indira Devi, Nawab Khasru Jung, and a scion of the Nazam of Hyderabad encouraged the formation of *Hitasadhani Sabha*.²⁵ However, the ethnological composition of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was peculiar in character. The Rajbanshi Hindus and Muslim, the Kamrupi Brahmins (Mithili and Sylhati) and some other lower caste people supported the formation of *Hitasadhani* that started movement against the outsiders i.e. Bhatia, particularly against the upper caste people of the Eastern and Southern Bengal who dominated the administrative and cultural scene of the urban areas of the Cooch Behar State.²⁶

Since the marriage of Prince Jitendra Narayan with Indira Devi, the Princess of Gaikwar State, the administrative machinery had been changed gradually in Cooch Behar State. The Bengali dominance over the administration began reduce due to the attitude of Maharani Indira Devi. Her Highness was in favour of appointing the high officials of the State from the other parts of India. Therefore, the administrative structure of the state, which was headed by Dewan Kalika Das Dutta, I.C.S., was revised with consent of His Highness Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur. This reversal was revealed in the appointment of High officials earlier dominated by the Bengalese *bhadraloke* particularly the Brahma Bengalese *Bhadralok*. A list may be produced of the high officials of Cooch Behar State;

Dr. A.R. Secondy, Chief Medical Officer of the State.

Mr. M.L. God, Chief Engineer of the State.

Mr. I. Sekhar, Education Secretary, and Publicity Officer of the State.

Mr. Hanuman Sahi Routh, Revenue Secretary of the State.

Mr. P.K. Kaul, Commandant, Home Guard of the State.

Mr. G.C. Fookan, Police Commissioner of the State.

Captain K. Grey, Pilot of the State.

Mr. K.R. Singh, Minister-in- waiting of the State.

The Bengalization process of the Cooch Behar State has been received a set back and this resulted in the birth of de- Bengalization process. In fact, the *Cooch Behari* did not welcome the Indianization process of the Cooch Behar State. It was also alleged that the British Resident at the *Durbar* (court) of Cooch Behar patronized the growth of *Hitasadhani Sabha* in the view of political objectives. Firstly, they wanted to free Cooch Behar from influence of the *Tebhaga* Movement of the neighboring districts of Bengal. The land Holders Association of Cooch Behar was the chief defender of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*. They became alarmed at the rapid growth of the *Tebhaga* Movement in the border area of Cooch Behar State. Secondly, in order to check communist infiltration in Cooch Behar State, the British Government also encouraged the foundation of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*. The role of Maharaja in the formation of the *Hitasadhani* is unknown although he was its patron. He addressed the meetings of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*.²⁷ A scion of the Royal family Kumar Indrajit Narayan also addressed the *Hitasadhani Sabha* meeting at Mekhliganj.²⁸ Abbas Uddin Ahmed, a member of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* and eminent international folk singer writes in his autobiography that Maharaja was sympathetic to the cause of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*.²⁹

The concept of *Hitasadhani Sabha* for separate state was very different from that of the UKD and others. In fact, the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was concerned only about Cooch Behar Native State. In the first stage, the *Hitasadhani Sabha* demanded a separate state. In the second stage,

they demanded Cooch Behar should be certainly administered territorially. In the third stage, they demanded that Cooch Behar should be merged with Assam and not with West Bengal.³⁰ In addition to these, it is to be mentioned here that the Pro -Muslim League sympathizers of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* (Amanatullya Khan Chowdhury, the revenue minister of Cooch Behar State, Hakim Ahmed Hossain, high Official of the State and SDO of Mathabhanga) once wanted the merger of the Cooch Behar State with East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh).³¹ Let us discussed the pro-Muslim league attitude of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* after post independence period.

We have already mentioned that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was essentially an ethno- caste –linguistic Association of the Cooch Beharies irrespective of their religion. However, after the birth of Pakistan, the lion share of the Muslim members of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* deviated from the *Cooch Behari* identity, which was the cornerstone of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*. Instead of pleading Cooch Behari identify they have been including to the Muslim identity .This change of minds of the Major section of the Muslim members of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was very much distinct from their speech and action. Some of the nationalist leaders compared the activities of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* even with the *Rajakars* of Hyderabad State.³²

The activities of the Muslim members of *Hitasadhani Sabha* were objectionable. Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani's call for "Great Bengal" greatly influenced the minds of the Muslim member of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*. Khan Chowdhury the President of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* and the Revenue Minister of Cooch Behar State encouraged the Muslim immigrants of Rangpur and Mymensingh to settle

in the Cooch Behar State. Land Hungry Muslim peasants of the overpopulated East Pakistani's district of Rangpur and Mymensingh took this advantage and by marrying the girls of the Rajbanshi community and began to settle in Cooch Behar as native people. Apart from this, at the invitation of Khan Chowdhury Amanatullya, Majahad Four (Army of Liberation, Sirajganj, Pubna) leaders led by Assadullah Siraji came to Cooch Behar with his army. Professor A.G.Ghosh says, "By this way, the Muslims members of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* tried to materialize their dream known as "turn Cooch Behar into Pakistan".³³

Though the *Hitasadhani Sabha* had successfully sold the Cooch Behari identity still there were many people in Cooch Behar who did not subscribe to their views. The Person who had strongly opposed the *Hitasadhani Sabha's* aims and actions was Umesh Chandra Mandal, a Gandhiate Cooch Behari or Rajbanshi pleader of Dinhata Town. In order to resist the nefarious design of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*, Umesh Chandra Mandal had founded the "*Cooch Behar State Prajamandal*" in 1947 with the help of the progressive minded people. These people were mostly the followers of the Forward Block and the Communist Party has been working secretly in Cooch Behar since, 1940's.³⁴ In fact, barring the *Hitasadhani Sabha*, the different political parties have opened up their office in Cooch Behar State only after 1947. However, a problem had created in Cooch Behar among the different parties regarding the joining of Cooch Behar State with Indian Union.

The *Praja Mandal* leaders and followers actively supported the cause of joining with Indian Union. They also cautioned the people about the dangers communal politics of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* and tried to revenue Cooch Behari Non –Cooch Behari animosity. The

Prajamandal was very much aware of the anti- Indian activities of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*. In a memorandum dated July 20, 1948 addressed to Vallabbhai Patel, the Vice-Premier of India, the *Praja Mandal* alleged that the Maharaja and his Pro-League Muslim Ministers as well as the Ministers who belonged to the SC were hobnobbing with Pakistan.³⁵ It has also been said that the Maharaja Himself met Suhrawardy, the Prime Minister of Bengal and invited his opinion about the question of merger referring to the fact that his State was surrounded on three sides by territories of Pakistan³⁶ Besides; the State authorities had forced the people to sign against merger with Indian Union.³⁷

To draw the attention of the intelligentsias as well as the people of Calcutta and Government of West Bengal and India, workers of *Praja Mandal* formed a new Association in Calcutta known as the "*Cooch Behar People Association*".³⁸ This Association's spokesman Prof. Chunilal Mukherjee, Pulakesh Dey Sarkar, Tarapada Chakroborty and Sailen Ray prepared a memorandum for submission to the Prime Minister of India signed by Umesh Chandra Mandal, Prof. Chunilal Mukherjee, Ramesh Chandra Ray, Satish Chandra Paul, Prem Nihar Nandi, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Rajendra Chandra Chatterjee, Kalanath Ray Barman, and so others.

In order to create public opinion regarding the problems of Cooch Behar, the '*Cooch Behar Peoples' Association*' and the '*Praja Mandal*' jointly convened a public meeting in Calcutta. The intelligentsias, writers, political activist, journalists, social workers of Calcutta have published an appeal letter to the people and tried to draw the attention of the Government. The Government also aware of the fact of Cooch Behar State. In a letter to Sardar Patel, Dr. Bidhan Chandra

Ray, the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, wrote that the obnoxious developments in Cooch Behar state will not only affect the security of West Bengal but also of the Indian Union.³⁹ Sardar Patel himself informed Jawaharlal Nehru that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* had sympathy for Pakistan.⁴⁰

In fact, the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was desperate for political power. It was reflected in a letter of Nanjappa, the Chief Commissioner of Cooch Behar to the Joint Secretary, Government of India on 22nd November, 1949. Mr. Nanjappa wrote, it is interesting to note that the *Hitasadhani* Party willing to merge Cooch Behar with Gorkha district of Darjeeling or with Assam. Their real intention appears to be to try to maintain their political influence in this area. However, in order to create a separate state, the representatives of different parties of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Skkim and Darjeeling met at Darjeeling on 30th October, 1949. They demanded the formation of a separate state comprising the above-mentioned areas and formed a committee viz. "Uttar Khanda Pradesh."

In addition to this, a new kind of political environment had been developed in the Duars area of the Jalpaiguri district. A section of the Rajbanshi people of both Hindu and Muslim community demanded the inclusion of the western Duars with the Cooch Behar State. They argued that before the conquest of Bhutan and the British Indian Government, the Western Duars was a part of the Cooch Behar State. It is also to be mentioned that the people of Western Duars ethnically and linguistically belonged to the same stock with the Cooch Beharies. So, the people of this area dreamt for the establishment of a state where their ethno- linguistic predominance will be preserved. It was a dream of the Duars people, not the Cooch Beharies or the *Hitasadhani Sabha*, as the

Hitasadhani Sabha was concerned only about the *Cooch Beharies* and the Cooch Behar State, not the Duars.

This topsy-turvy political development of Cooch Behar State led to alarm the Government of Cooch Behar State as well as the Government of India. Meanwhile the Government had solved the integration problem of the major states of western and southern India, and now turned their attention to this troubled state in the North Eastern part of India. After prolonged deliberation, the treaty of merger of Cooch Behar with India was finally signed on August 28, 1949.⁴¹ Accordance to the treaty, between the Government of India and Jagadeependra Narayan, the king of Cooch Behar, the Government of India took over the administration of Cooch Behar on September 12, 1949 and placed it under a Chief Commissioner.⁴²

Thus ended the rule of the historic Royal Dynasty of Cooch Behar, Sardar Patel highly appreciated the Maharaja's gesture and spirit and expressed his gratitude to him.⁴³ Cooch Behar was marched with the national stream of Indian Union and strengthen India's Northeast frontier. Whatever may be the objectives of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*, it had inspired the ethno- caste- linguistic groups of the Rajbanshis of the western Assam i.e. Goalpara and Kamrupa districts. The 70% people of these two districts belonged to the Rajbanshi community. The Assamese Rajbanshi leaders Sarat Chandra Singha (Later the Chief Minister of Assam) and Purnendu Narayan Singha wanted the merger of Cooch State with Assam. However, the Rajbanshi leader Upendra Nath Barman of Jalpaiguri (formerly Cooch Behari) and others did not support this. They fervently advocated the merger of the Cooch Behar State with West Bengal. In this way, the *Cooch Behari* identity question of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* had

encompassed all the Rajbanshis in one point. It was not the objective of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*; it was actually a by-product of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*'s movement. However, the Rajbanshi leaders could not understand the writings of the wall.

The immature political behaviour and the anti- Indian activities of the Muslims members of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* precipitated the merger of the Cooch Behar State with West Bengal. Nehru and Patel had a kind of sympathy to the demand of the *Cooch Behari* people. It was reflected in the announcement of Nehru in a public meeting at Calcutta in 1949, when he announced that plebiscite would be arranged to honour the opinion of the people of the State. The question of the merger of Cooch Behar would be decided according to the wish of the people.”⁴⁴ But the speeches, activities and the behaviour of the *Hitasadhani* people damaged their own cause. The central government was very much perturbed to see the development of Cooch Behar. Therefore, the Government was in a hurry to solve the problem of the Cooch Behar State. On 1st January, 1950, the Cooch Behar was merged into West Bengal by a notification issued by the Government of India on 31st December 1949 entitled the States Merger (West Bengal) Order, 1949. The Government of West Bengal appointed a Deputy Commissioner and administrator of Cooch Behar. From 1st January 1950 Cooch Behar became a district of West Bengal. ⁴⁵ The *Hitasadhani Sabha* was disbanded and Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah, Anchhar Uddin Ahmed, Bazle Rahman, Moqbul Hussain were externed from Cooch Behar within 24 hours. Abbas Uddin departed to East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) of his own accord. However, Satish Chandra Singh joined Congress Party and later on, he was elected as an M.L.A to West Bengal Assembly and became the Deputy Minister for Transport and Communication. On the other hand, Umesh Chandra

Mandal the leader of the *Praja Mandal* was also inducted by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray in his Cabinet as a Minister.

Thus, the power struggle of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*, the Stormy- petrel of Cooch Behar politics on the eve of the merger was ended. The *Hitasadhani Cooch Behari* identity as well as power politics was ended. However, with the remnants of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*, a new wind of politics started, through in different way. The basic issue was revised and enlarged from the *Cooch Behari* identity to the Rajbanshi identity will be discussed later on.

IV

7.4.1:UKD (UTTAR KHANDA DAL):

After the independence of India, there was consistent immigration to Northern part of West Bengal from East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) and part of Assam. Consequently, significance changes have taken place in the population structure of this region. The Rajbanshis now feel that this large-scale immigration of refugees has resulted in their economic misery and hardship. Out of this feeling, the young belt of Rajbanshi *Kshatriya Samiti* of North Bengal desired to form a new political party for the people of North Bengal, which would deal with the development of North Bengal only.⁴⁶ However, accepting the proposal for the formation of a new political party, most of the old leaders retired from the Executive Committee of the *Kshatriya Samiti* and a new Committee was formed on 31. 05. 1969 with the following members.

- President : Harimohan Barman, Rangali Bazna, Jalpaiguri
- Vice President : 1) Panchanan Mallik (since deceased) P.O. Bhangarhat, Dt. Jalpaiguri.
- 2) Bhupendra Nath Ray (since deceased)
P.O.Kharija Berubari, Dt.Jalpaiguri.
- General Secretary : Haripada Ray, Jayantipara, Dt. Jalpaiguri.
- Assistant Secretary : 1)Kalindra Nath Barman(since deceased),Panchanan Ashram, Rath Khola, Siliguri
- 2)Pulin Behari Ray (since deceased), Millpara,
Dhupguri,Jalpaiguri
- 3)Sripada Sarkar, North Dinajpur.
- 4)Digendra Lal Ray,(since ceased),P.O. Bhotpatty,
Jalpaiguri.

There were also 10 members from Jalpaiguri district, one from West Dinajpur and one from Darjeeling. The newly formed committee of the *Kshatriya Samiti* assured that the steps would be initiated for the all round development in respect of language, culture of the Rajbanshis. The then General Secretary of the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* of North Bengal, Haripada Ray called a meeting on 5th July 1969 at 2 P..M. at *Thakur Pat* Rajmohan Junior High School under Dhupguri Police Station as the venue for discussion on the various problems of the Rajbanshis. Fortunately, the Dhupguri branch of *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* and *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Yuba Samiti* convened another public meeting at the same venue on the next day under the president ship of Ramprasad Ray and Bijendra Nath Ray and Nirmalendu Ray as joint secretaries. In a public meeting, the leaders belonging to different political parties resigned from the respective political parties on the spot and formed a new political party with an ad-hoc committee and namely it as Uttar

Khanda Dal (UKD).⁴⁷ On the other hand we came to know from the constitution of *Uttar Khanda* Party and the memorandum of the Uttar Khanda Dal that the party formed on 5th July ,1969 at the historical Jalpesh Temple complex under the Maynaguri Police Station in Jalpaiguri district.⁴⁸ Whatever may be the date, the UKD came into existence in July 1969 on the pattern of Jharkhanda Dal and the DMK. It was initiated by the priest of the Jalpesh temple, Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, a Kamrupi Brahmin. Though the official headquarter of the Uttar Khanda Dal was located at Kantivita of Darjeeling District, the centre of gravity of the movement was concentrated in the Jalpesh Temple complex.⁴⁹

The office barer of the UKD were as follows:

- President :Panchanan Mallick (since deceased from PSP)
- Vice President : Harimohan Barman(from Congress)
- Soma Oraon (since deceased from TMU)
- Bali Chandra Karjee(from congress)
- Secretary : Kalindra Nath Barman(since deceased from KSP)
- Assistant Secretary: Pulin Behari Ray (since deceased from congress)
- Members : Haripada Ray, Wajuddin Ahmed, Girish Chandra Deb Singha, Sitanath Sarkar, Babunath Barman,Sashi Bhusan Adhikary, Banka Behari Barman (since deceased), Digendra Lal Roy(since deceased) Purna Chandra Ray, Gobindra Mohan Ray(since deceased), Gunadhar Barman and many others.

The main slogan of the Uttar Khanda Dal was “Bande Mataram” and “Jai Hok”. According to the version of the Uttar Khandis, the *Sannyasis* were the first to adopt this slogan in North Bengal in 1763 and as a successor of the *Sannyasis*; they took “Bande Mataram” as their catchword.⁵⁰ A

view in support of the Uttarkhandis for giving the name of “Uttar Khanda” to their movement was that a large number of labourers working in the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri Duars, Malda and West Dinajpur were sympathetic towards the Jharkhanda Movement. To acquire the support of the tea garden labourers, the Uttarkhandis preferred to take “Khanda” from Jharkhanda and gave the name of “Uttarkhanda” to their party.⁵¹ The jurisdiction of the Uttar Khanda Dal comprising the five districts of North Bengal namely- Malda, West Dinajpur(North & South), Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

At the initial stage, the UKD, started its peaceful movement through public meetings covering almost all the villages of North Bengal comprising Mayanaguri, Dhupguri Sadar, Rajganj of Jalpaiguri district and also under Mekhliganj sub-division of Cooch Behar district. The demands of the Uttar Khanda Dal were as follows: ⁵²

1. Equalization of the value of the personal wealth in money's worth. A raiyat under W.B.E.A. Act was allowed to possess only 25 acres of agricultural lands, the valuation of which was at that time Rs. 75.000/-, whereas a landless businessman could own truck, bus, shop, factory, service without any ceiling. Why is such discrimination?
2. Rationalization of Govt. and Non- Govt. service i.e. ceiling of family service.
3. Reclassification of ration card. The landless people in business services etc. belonged to “A” category ration Cards, whereas an adhiar who cultivated only 2 to 4 acres of land was categorized as “C” class ration cardholder.

4. Implementation of slogan "Matri bhasa matri dugdha-sama" by introducing the medium of education in mother tongue like Rajbanshi/ Kamatapuri, Bodo, Santali, Mundari, Nepali, etc. along with Bengali in Primary Schools within the radius of two kilometers without any public contribution of the locality for the purpose of construction of school building with provision of drinking water and sanitation for girl students.
5. Renaming the North Bengal University as Thakur Panchanan Univeresity.
6. Establishment of High Schools within the radius of four Kilometres with the entire cost by Government for construction of school buildings with arrangements of light, drinking water and sanitation.
7. Introduction of attendance money in cash to the guardians of poorer section of the pupils in the primary schools.
8. Introduction of free education up to class XII.
9. Establishment of agro-based small and medium sized industries in villages like jute spinning, weaving, paper, tobacco and timber products.
10. Introduction of subsidy to the poor and marginal cultivators by way of free distribution of seeds, manure, bullocks, agricultural equipments and cash loan on easy term at minimum rate of interest.
11. Introduction of irrigation facility free of capital cost without any capital contribution by the cultivators.
12. Establishments of free coaching centres for IAS, IFS, WBCS and allied service courses for SC/ST candidates as in Kolkata.
13. Nationalization of Banks and other financial institutions and introduction of proportionate reservation of seats of SC/ST candidates in Government Services.

14. Establishment of High Court, Medical College, Agricultural College, and more Engineering Colleges, Law College and more Technical Educational Institutions in North Bengal.
15. Promotion, preservation, maintenance and development of the cultural heritage of North Bengal and promotion of knowledge on history, culture, language and anthropology of the people of North Bengal and Northern part of the country.
16. Introduction and maintenance of quota for students in Government and Non-Government schools.
17. Maintenance of quota in license and permits for business to the SC/ST candidates.
18. Development of Tourism.

Their main agitation was against mal –distribution of allocation of money in the annual budget. The North Bengal has an area of about 21,325 sq. Kilometers i.e. 25% of West Bengal, inhabited by 30% of SC and ST people. The Uttar Khanda Dal observed that there is vast number of resources in North Bengal, yet the development of North Bengal was in measurable condition particularly the economic condition of the indigenous people became measurable day by day due to leadership of Calcutta- based people. In this regard, a Rajbanshi leader of UKD remarked-“The unabated refugee influx from Bangladesh is making over lives impossible and the time has come for us to govern ourselves.”⁵³ Keeping this view in mind, the Uttat *Khanda Dal* intended to participate in the general election held on 10th March, 1971. At the initial stage, they contested Mayanaguri, Dhupguri, Falakata seats of Jalpaiguri district and Mekhliganj seat of Cooch Behar district and 1 Lok Sabha seat of Jalpaiguri. The results are given bellow. ⁵⁴

Table 7:9: Result of the general election of 1971 in North Bengal

Constituency	Candidates	Party	votes scored
Mayanaguri(SC)	Bijoy Krishna Mahanto	Cong.(R)	39,173
	Haripada Ray	UKD	6,075
Dhupguri(General)	Bhabani Pal	Cong(R)	11,471
	A. Guha Neogi	SSP	11,279
	Wajuddin Ahmed	UKD	5,321
	Suresh Ch. De	C.P.M.	7,054
Jalpaiguri Sadar(Genl)	Anupam Sen	Cong(R)	25,608
	Girish Deb Singha	UKD	1,928
	Renu Chakraborty	CPI	7,551
Falakata (SC)	J. Ray	Cong(R)	13,410
	Abhoy Barman	CPM	11,415
	Panhuman Mallik	UKD	4,302
Mekhliganj(SC)	Sitanat Ray Sarkar	UKD	1,627
	Mihir Kr. Ray	F.B.	19,880
	Manibhushan Ray	Cong(R)	15,982
	Kshir Prasad Barman	C.P.M.	3,996
	Tara Prasanna RayBasunia	Cong(O)	3,745
Jalpaiguri Lok Sabha (ST)	Tuna-Oraon	Cong(R)	1,03,104
	Birsen Kujur	C.P.M.	60,137
	Stephen Kujur	R.S.P.	40,443
	Soma Oraon	UKD	11,097.

No candidate from UKD could win in the general election of 1971. But no party received absolute majority, C.P.M. won 116 and Congress (R) 103 seats and Ajoy Mukherjee formed the Government with Congress (R) coalition. This Government lasted only three months and the Chief Minister voluntarily resigned on 19th June 1971 and thereafter on 29th June the President Rule was imposed which continued upto 10th March 1972. Haripada Ray, one of the candidates of UKD from Mayanaguri constituency has remarked that the main reason of failure of UKD candidate was the lack of funds that were necessary for contesting

the election. He also said that from the date of initiation of the party until the date of election the workers of the party worked hard with full devotion and defrayed the minimum expenditure from their pockets since the newly formed party had no fund of their own.⁵⁵

However, the Uttar Khanda Dal prepared to participate in the general election of 1972. For the development of neglected and underdeveloped North Bengal the Uttar Khanda Dal published the election manifesto in 1972 contained the following points:-⁵⁶

1. Protesting against the exploitation of resources of North Bengal.
2. Removing the economic differential between rural and urban areas.
3. Giving permanent tenancy rights to the landless farmers on the vested lands.
4. Providing free education in rural areas.
5. Setting up industries according to needs.
6. Nationalising the tea industry of North Bengal.
7. Introducing the principle of single profession and family based job distribution with a view to solving the unemployment problems.
8. Allocating budgetary funds for North Bengal's development in accordance with the revenue earned from North Bengal.
9. Vesting of surplus houses or homestead plots of the city owners to solve the refugee problems.
10. Amending Agricultural Income Tax Law in consonance with the Income Tax for the welfare of the farmers.
11. Resolving the *Chhit Mahal* problems of India and Bangladesh.

In the general election of 1972, the Uttar Khanda Dal had participated in 8 seats but without any success. In this election of March

1972, the congress(R) party regained their position and won 266 seats and under the leadership of Sri Siddhartha Sankar Ray formed the Government. The UKD continued their movement strongly for the next five years but got a set back due to promulgation of emergency through out India w.e.f. 26th June, 1975. At that of emergency, the Government of India imposed prohibitory rules and amended the "MISA". The Government banned many regional political parties and the movement of the UKD became very weak during this period. Many of the UKD leaders came back to Congress (R) . In spite of this condition, the UKD continued their activities and again participated in the general election of 1977.

Under the leadership of Sri Jyoti Basu, the Left Front Government comes into power in 1977. The Front Government led by C.P.I.(M.) took several measures for implementation of Ceiling Laws', 'Operation Burga' and 'Panchayati Raj' administration and so on. Under these circumstances, the local Rajbanshi people became the victims to the exploitation and oppression of caste Hindu leaders. The UKD had tried to convince the Government about the deplorable condition of the Northern Bengal; but in vain. Under these circumstances, the UKD called for a separate state for North Bengal- "Kamatapur" which was once the own territory of the Rajbanshis with glorious history and culture. The UKD gave wide publicity to this concept of separate state through leaflets, pamphlets, manifestos, and public meetings. The UKD appeals through their manifesto- "On behalf of the Uttar *Khanda Dal*, we appeal to the people irrespective to caste creed and religion that this party is not communal; it is a party not of Rajbanshis only, not of *bhatias*, but for all. Hindus, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Bengalee, Marwari, Punjabi, Bihari, Nepali, Tribals, Katham, Oraon, Munda and Rajbanshi

Kshatriyas all our brothers- we are Indian. We want our developments and rights. We want separate state “Kamatapur” in North Bengal. Don’t be misled by the selfish Kolkatan right-left politicians; rise to the call united for North Bengal.”⁵⁷

The *Uttarkhandis* were then determined to transform North Bengal as “Kamatapur state” because they argued that there are some examples of union territories which had been created within Indian Federal structure depending on language and culture like Maharashtra and Gujrat were developed as separate states in 1960 by partitioning the Bombay Province, Nagaland came out as a separate state from Assam in 1962, Hariyana came out from Punjab in 1966, Maghalaya was given as a separate state in 1971, and Andhra was separated from Madras in 1953. In support of the nomenclature of their state, the *Uttarkhandis* argued that they adopted the name of “Kamatapur” because it had a long historical tradition. In ancient period North Bengal christened by the name of “Kamtapur”. Moreover, according to the *Uttarkhandis* the name of any part of India can be changed by the amendments of the constitution. Hence, their movement cannot be suppressed on this ground. Their proposed “Kamtapur State” would be wider area of 8384 sq. K.M., which would be much greater than many union territories of India from the point of view area, population, and natural resources. Therefore, according to the *Uttarkhandis* their demand of a separate ‘Kamatapur State’ would be legitimate from all respect.⁵⁸

The *Uttar Khanda Dal* also contested in nine seats of general election in 1982. However, none of them has succeeded. In this respect it is to be mentioned here that in order to wise over the masses, the *Uttar Khanda Dal* had contested in the election of 1971, 1972, 1977, and 1982

but in each time, the candidates had lost their deposit. It is also to be mentioned here that they contested generally from the reserve constituency.⁵⁹ Though the UKD had contested from the reserve constituency, they did not score much support of their own community. The following table shows the support of UKD candidates in Assembly election of 1982.⁶⁰

Table 7.9 : Result of the general election of 1982 in North Bengal

Districts	Constituency	Candidate	Score
Jalpaiguri	Dhupguri (SC)	Panchanan Mallick	2150
Jalpaiguri	Mayanaguri(SC)	Panchanan Mallick	2959
Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri Sadar(Gen)	Rukmini Kanta Ray	999
Jalpaiguri	Rajganj(SC)	Harendra Nath Barman	1264
Jalpaiguri	Madari Hat(ST)	Julias Tapno	2265
Darjeeling	Fasideowa (ST)	Edward Tirke	3173
Cooch Behar	Cooch Behar West(Gen)	Janawuddin Bapari	227
Cooch Behar	Cooch Behar North (Gen)	Rabindra Nath Sarkar	766
Cooch Behar	Mekhliganj (SC)	Manindra Nath Ray	1118

The above table shows that though the UKD had an influence over Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling plain, they had no influence over Malda and West Dinajpur. The UKD did not able to give any candidate in the district of Malda and West Dinajpur.⁶¹ However, it is to be noted here that in the *Panchayet* election in some areas of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar, the UKD candidate had elected.⁶²

7.4.2:CHARTER OF DEMANDS OF THE UTTAR KHAND DAL:

The charter of demands as approved by the *Kendriya Parishad* of UKD on 23rd April, 1989 presided over by Prabhas Chandra

Singha Shastri, "Uttar Khanda Dal is the only political party which can fulfill the political, social and economic aspirations of the 'Sons of the Soil'. This party believes that the interests of the indigenous people can be safe guarded with the fulfillment of the following demands".⁶³

1. Formation of Kamatapur state consisting of five districts of North Bengal.
2. Reservation of 80% of jobs Central Government, State Government, Semi Government and private sector for the sons of the soil.
3. Relaxation of existing rigidities in the educational institutions for the students belonging to Scheduled Castes , Scheduled Tribes and other backward communities like local Muslim, Khen, Kaibarta, Teli, Kamar, Kumar, etc.
4. Reintroduction of English from class III level and reintroduction of primary final examination.
5. Setting up of Navodaya School (Model School) in every district of North Bengal.
6. Introduction of *Kamatapuri* as the medium of education upto school level.
7. Broadcasting of news and other programmes relating to agriculture, music, drama and other cultural functions in *kamatapuri* language on all the radio stations of North Bengal.
8. Reservation of 80% of recruits from North Bengal in Military services for the sons of the soil, setting up of Recruitment Boards in each district and relaxation of age and height for Rajbanshis, Ravas, and Mech candidates.

9. Establishment of Jute, tobacco, and bamboo based industries and reservation of 80% of employment in such industries from amongst the indigenous people.
10. Following the Indira-Mujib agreement, 1971 should be the base year for citizenship.
11. Making the temporary employees permanent at Government approved wages without discrimination between male and female.
12. Arrangement of irrigation facilities for high yielding agriculture and subsidy to the farmers in periods of natural calamities like draught and flood.
13. Reservation of seats for the residents of North Bengal, Medical College, Jalpaiguri Engineering college and Cooch Behar Agriculture College.
14. No handing over of the Tin Bigha of Cooch Behar to Bangladesh.
15. Making non-formal teachers, teachers of adult educational institutes and anganwadi employees permanent.
16. Exchange of Chhit Mahals of India and Bangladesh.
17. Reservation of seats for the SC and ST in proportion of population in the Panchayat Elections.
18. Setting up of a High Court in North Bengal.
19. Extension of reservation for SC and ST upto 2000.
20. Employment of one person from each of their families of the land looser for Tista Barrage, Railways, Road, Industrial units, Schools and Colleges etc. according to qualifications.

Uttar Khanda Dal started a movement in 1980 A.D. called "Drive out the refugees" (*Bhatia Khedao Andolan*) from North Bengal. Needless to say, that the UKD had been inspired by the AASU (All Assam Students Union) in this regard. By the end of 1980, this movement

spread in the village level of Northern Bengal. The refugees, who came in North Bengal after independence were mainly the Namasudras. They were in fear that they might be the 'Second time Refugee'. Consequently, conflict came out in front between the Namasudras cultivator and the supporter of UKD. The main cause of the conflict was land. The refugee Namasudras bought land from the Rajbanshis and gradually they improve their poor economic condition and within a short time, they became well established. On the other hand, the former gradually increased in numbers as landless farmer.⁶⁴ This conflict between the Rajbanshis and Namasudras became more acute when the Uttar Khanda Dal called the latter as foreigner who had come in this place after 1971. The UTJAS, another ethno-based organization of the Rajbanshis also claimed this demands.⁶⁵ The Koch- Rajbanshi International also claimed such demands. Needless to mention here that after 1971 a huge number of refugees came from East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) to this part of the country most of whom were SC Namasudras. Therefore, the Namasudras organized counter organization to resist such attitude of the Rajbanshis.⁶⁶

Another remarkable instance of 1980's is that the UKD get an enthusiastic energy from ASSU. It was "Madhupur Dham" of Shankaracharya in Cooch Behar, a religious centre where the political leaders including the Chief Minister of Assam used to come on birth day celebration of Shnakaracharya. In 1983 Hiteswar Shaikiya, Kabir Ray Pradhani(Rajbanshi), Mukut Sharma had come at Madhupurdham. In 1986, Prafulla Mahanta, the Chief Minister of Assam had also come at Madhupur. From this availability of the Ministers and other political leaders of Assam at Madhupurdham, it was imagined that the UKD had direct relation with Assam Ganaparisad (AGP).⁶⁷ Frankly speaking; the UKD was more influenced by success of AASU. It was AASU that

inspired UKD to organize a movement called “Rail Roko Andolan” at Altagram Station in Jalpaiguri.⁶⁸ More than three thousand *Uttarkhandis* had participated in this movement. Four *Uttarkhandis* had died in the incident at the police firing on 25th June, 1987. That is why the *Uttarkhandis* observe “Myrtre Day” on 25th June in every year.⁶⁹ It was the movement from where the *Uttar Khanda Dal* got set back and divided into *Uttar Khand Dal* and *Kamatapur Ganaparishad* and gradually the movement became weak.

If we carefully analyze the composition of UKD, we will find that the most of the leaders belong to Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. Mr. Panchanan Mallick, Rukmini Kanta Ray, Kalindranath Barman, Rabi Sarkar, Suma Oraon and all other senior members were belonged to Jalpaiguri. In Darjeeling, we find only one stalwart Mr. Sampad Ray, an ex-socialist cadre. We do not find any important leader in the UKD who held from Malda and West Dinajpur. Needless to say, that it was Sampad Ray who led a terrorist movement in Darjeeling Tarai region against the Naxalist terrorism who had come in North Bengal from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Nepal and occupied the land from the Rajbanshis. Sampad Ray’s movement against the Naxalist terrorism gave impetus energy to the *Uttar Khanda Dal*. In an interview, Sri Sampad Ray says, “Most of the *Jotedars* who had died in the Naxal Terrorism in Darjeeling Tarai were Rajbanshi jotedars.”⁷⁰ In spite of this enthusiastic leadership of Sampad Ray, the *Uttarkhanda* movement got set back gradually due to the lack of support of the masses. In this regard professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh says, “The *Uttar Khanda* movement is essentially a rural based and not an urban based. They failed to draw the attention of their educated middle class of the Rajbanshi community. It has been proved by their failure to file up any candidates in the election of the Municipalities.”⁷¹

Gopa Kumar says, "The leaders, supporters and sympathizers of UKD mostly came from the landed class."⁷² The Rajbanshi community is land-dependent people. Their only occupation is cultivation. Naturally, their livelihood is entirely depended upon on the land. They felt that the refugees of the erstwhile East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) had grabbed their land illegally. The *Uttarkhanda Dal* is agitating for the restoration of their land, which was occupied by the refugees. This programme of restoration of land of the UKD had attracted the large number of Rajbanshi landless labourers.⁷³

Professor R.S. Mukhapadhyaya says that the Kamatapuri, Uttarkhanda movement was the result of clash of interest between the indigenous Rajbanshi and the non-Rajbanshis population over control of economic resources of the region. He shows that after Independence the relative proportion of the Rajbanshi to total population as well as to the SC and /non- SC population of North Bengal has decreased considerably. Due to the increases of non-Rajbanshis population, the Rajbanshi had limited chance to set absorb in the non-agricultural occupations in competition with the alien population.⁷⁴ It is to be noted that one of the demands for the *Uttarkhanda Dal* was reservation of jobs for the local people in state and semi-state government establishment private firms and tea gardens in the Rajbanshi tract.⁷⁵ In a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi in 1981, and the UKD categorically express that-

"Immediate effect of the partition, as now well known, was the huge influx of refugees from the then East Pakistan(Now Bangladesh). West Bengal had to throw its border open and its arms of welcome wide to receive the East Pakistan refugees(Now Banladeshi), as they were known as 'one nation', viz., the

Bengalese, during the pre-partitioned societies. Hence North Bengal which happened, because of a chance of historical circumstances, to be part of West Bengal could not also raise its voice of objection and had been forced by the command of history to fall in line with West Bengal in its endeavour to accommodate the refugees. As a result North Bengal had to live with a chunk of people alien to its customs language and culture.”⁷⁶

The UKD had received a rude shock in 1987. The Dal was formally divided in that year and the *Kamatapur Gana Parishad* was formed in the pattern of the *Asom Gana Parishad*.⁷⁷ Professor A.G. Ghosh also says that in the presence of strong national party the regional parties can not get opportunities to be strong in this region. In addition to these, the neo- middle class of the Rajbanshi community is more interested to get reservation facilities than any direct confrontation with the Government.⁷⁸ Above all, the population of strength of the Rajbanshi is not favorable for the creation of a separate state at that time. According to the Census report 1971, the Rajbanshis are only 13.88% of the total population of North Bengal. Naturally, the demand for a separate State is not getting wide support from the different corners including the intellectuals.

V

7.5.1: UTJAS (UTTARBANGA TAPASILI JATI O ADIVASI SANGATHAN):

The *Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Samgathan* – the UTJAS an organization moves on socio-economic, political, and cultural

discrimination in the area of North Bengal. It was one of the ethno- based organization of the Rajbanshi people of northern part of India particularly North Bengal of West Bengal. From 1979 – 1989 the UTJAS movement tried to establish their claim on the socio-economical development and autonomy in North Bengal to their level best. It was started under leadership of Mr. Naren Das (Now advocate in Jalpaiguri Bar Association) with the active support of the students of North Bengal University in 1976. The name of the organization was *Uttar Banga Viswavidyalaya Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Chhatra Sangathan* to deal with the acute problems of admission, stipend and also misbehaviour from the upper class students.⁷⁹ In that period, the SC/ST students were few in number in the University area and as such, the higher caste students insulted them now and then.⁸⁰ The other members of the *Sangathan* were – Amal Sarkar, Ranjit Adhikary, Satyendra Nath Barman, Ramesh Mandal, Biren Ray, Yugal Kishore Ray Bir, Krishna Kanta Ray etc. At initial phase of the movement, it encountered challenge to the Government and the government developmental programmes were held responsible for the marginalization of SC and ST students in the different sections of University's degree.⁸¹ Incidentally on third or fourth day of the formation of *Chhatra Sangathan*, some of the students insulted on the members at the dining hall of Vevekananda Hostel in North Bengal University at the time of dinner. Receiving this information, all the members of the *Sangathan* reached the spot within a few minutes and the wrongdoers were bound to seek apology.⁸² Under this circumstance, a good number of other caste students, especially Muslims extended support to the *Sangathan* and criticized the wrongdoers. However, the necessity of a broad based student's organization was felt very soon. Thus, a new alliance among the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Class was formed as a new organization namely

Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Students Organization in 1977. Bijoy Chandra Barman, Pradip Kumar Ray, and Naren Das were holding the post of secretaries from time to time. The organization-launched movement through out North Bengal in various institutions to implement the Government declared facilities for the SC/ST students and uplift the economic conditions of the downtrodden people.

The period from 1976 to 1980 was the prime period for the student movement in North Bengal and the Government was compelled to implement the declared facilities in the educational institutions for their movement. The main issues of the student movement were as follows-⁸³

1. Organize protest against the insult/ assault upon any member of down trodden people especially on the students by the upper caste students.
2. Keeping constant pressure on the heads of educational institutions and the administrative heads for regular payment of stipend, book grant and hostel grant.
3. Keeping close watch on the point that the students selected according to general merit shall not be included in reserved quota.
4. Allowing the students to appear in examination and to remain in hostel without payments of dues of the institution or hostel with the undertaking that they would pay the dues on receiving the payments of SC and ST stipend from the government authority.

It is for such agitations that the institutions were compelled to regularize the payments of stipends, book-grants, hostel grants and to allow the non-paying poor students to stay in hostel and to sit for examinations until the receipt of payments from the Government authority. It should be mentioned here that after that agitation the North Bengal University had

introduced reservation system in this University and in all colleges under its justification from the last part of 1977.

On May 1978, a *padayatra* was organized for a period of 28 days from Tufanganj, Cooch Behar to Shibmandir, Siliguri under the guidance of the students organization. The student leaders contacted with the downtrodden people of all the districts of North Bengal by that time. All the leaders agreed to open a new front to fight for reservation in employment and other problems of people in general. The *Sangathan* drew up economic and cultural awareness programmes to ST/ST people. In the meanwhile, the State Government established West Bengal SC and ST Development and Finance Corporation' with a view to develop the downtrodden people through economic programmes with considerable subsidy. Unfortunately, this fact was either being completely unclosed to people or the people were unaware of it. However, very soon it was come out to the people. Under this circumstance, the Organization called its meeting in Tufanganj town in Krishak Samiti's Office and decided to submit a memorandum to the Sub Divisional Officer, Tufanganj. According to the plan, the organization submitted the proposed Memorandum to the sub divisional officer, Tufanganj with the following demands.⁸⁴

1. The members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to be provided with loan facility for improving their financial conditions.
2. Vested land to be distributed as per provisions of west Bengal Land Reforms Act with priorities to scheduled tribes, Scheduled Castes, and general castes.

3. The students would be allowed to write/ declare, in any application in column of mother tongue, their own mother language i.e. Rabha, Oroan and Kamatapuri etc. in place of Bengali.

The concept of subsidy of 25% and 50% was unknown to the downtrodden people of North Bengal. Because of awareness, the people began to apply for the declared loan at direct supervision of the *Sangathan* and within a few weeks, few hundred applications were filed before the authority. However, the authority of West Bengal Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Development and Finance Corporation was not in a position to dispose of the applications for want of sufficient fund and proper machinery to handle such huge number of applications. Naturally, the administration took help of the local elected leaders and ruling political leaders who tried to restrain the people from filing application at their level best and refused to certify the eligibility of the applications.⁸⁵ On this issue of deprivation people organized themselves under the banner of *Uttar Banga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan* (UTJAS) at Jamerdanga High School ground, Tufanganj in Cooch Behar district ignoring the threat of the ruling party leaders. Naren Das, Sachin Barman, Hiralal Layek, Sambar Hari Shankar, Subal Chandra Barman and Probhat Sen Ishore took the leading part of the *Sangathan*.⁸⁶ The first central conference of the UTJAS was held at Narasingha Vidyapith at Kadamtala (now Shibmandir), Darjeeling district in 1981A.D. The delegates from all districts of North Bengal had participated in this conference. Apart from the *Tapasili and Adivasi* delegates, Prof. Ananda Gopal Ghosh of History Department and Prof. Manas Das Gupta from economics Department of North Bengal University also took participate in the conference.⁸⁷ The significance of the foundation conference of the

UTJAS is very great and it is like lighting a little lamp to dispel that darkness which the constitution of the *Sangathan* drafted. ⁸⁸

1. To fight against the socio-economic discrimination among the members of weaker section of people particularly members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who are the largest number of citizen of North Bengal.
2. To uplift the socio-economic condition of the members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who has been remaining neglected and backward following traditional mode of agriculture?
3. To undertake agitation for the redresses of grievance in any school of thoughts either in economic, cultural, historical or in trade and agriculture and for the extension, improvement, and protection of such matters as are incidental to the attainment of the objects.
4. To demand for 60% reservation in service and study centre both professional and sectarian or elementary for the inhabitants of North Bengal.
5. To stop the foreigners' infiltration that has threatened the existence of indigenous people in respect of their social, economical, cultural and political life and that has also threatened communal harmony.
6. To promote the interests of the people of North Bengal in matters relating to historical places and to maintain cultural affinity and to protect monuments of the erstwhile Cooch Behar.
7. To endeavour mobilization for the execution of the B.P. Mandal Commission's Recommendation.

8. To endeavour for the achievement of the political gain on the basis of alternative preventive measures to the burning problem of India ;and
9. To extend the co-operation among the members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to increase the participation in agitation.

The main issues of the UTJAS movement in North Bengal were socio- economic backwardness, threat of refugee influx in North Bengal, drawback policies of the ruling Government, social injustice and insecurity and the measurable condition of the local people etc. The main grievance of the UTJAS was that, the huge areas of lands starting from Darjeeling hill to Malda plains in the south and in the Cooch Behar are well fertile with the flow of the river *Tistaa*, *Toorsa* and *Mahananda*, vast areas is covered with evergreen rich forest but to be hopelessly backward in every respect. There was no significant development concerning agriculture, industry, education etc. during the British rule in spite of increase possibilities for the same was there.⁸⁹ Therefore, growth of development in neither satisfactory nor spectacular. It is also lagging behind in infrastructure facilities like power, transport and communication, banking and health and education. The scope of education is still far behind in this region compared to the other parts of the country. As a result, of which the people of this particular region are trailing behind either in the field of services or any other independent professional line. In absence of any industrial development and their economical activities, agriculture has been the only living sources of the people of this region but the people of this region solely dependent only on nature for agriculture.⁹⁰ Consequently, production would not be sufficient according the need of the population. Since the time of the

British regime and even after the independence, huge amount of money has been earned from tea industry. Bulk of revenue income of the governments come from tea and forest property of North Bengal, but it is a matter of regret that even a small portion of which has not been spent for the development of all this area so far.⁹¹

In addition to these, after independence, the mushrooming of the tea garden in North Bengal there was a gradual growth of land *mafia* in this region trying to mobilize the only large- scale agro-based industry of the region. Most of the land, which was earlier, own by the local Scheduled Castes communities of Koch and Rajbanshis was thus brought over by the affluent Hindus refugees from Bangladesh and Marwaries from Rajasthan. The marginalization and pauperization of the indigenous Rajbanshis has given rise to a general feeling of alienation and unrest among them, which is further aggravated by the apathy shown by the mainstream society primarily composed of the upwardly mobile Bengali and Marwari community.⁹² Alienated from their land and traditional occupation eroded of this cultural and linguistic identity they find themselves at the receiving end of a degrading eco-system and a alien social structure which is different to this traditional identity .This has led to a feeling of deprivation and disillusionment among the Rajbanshis who are now growing more and more identity conscious, in terms of history, language, traditional social structure, occupation and land rights.

One of the main issues of the UTJAS movement was the influx of refugee from erstwhile East Bengal (East Pakistan now Bangladesh). The UTJAS continuously propagated that the refugees those who entered into North Bengal of 1971 should not be given political rights and vested land must not be distributed to them.⁹³ The infiltration

of Bangladesh; Bhutanese, Nepalese emigrants have put this North Bengal in a quandary. Ever increasing population in North Bengal created so many socio-economic problems and the UTJAS movement was the consequent of this population.⁹⁴ The following table shows how the population of North Bengal gradually increased after 1961.⁹⁵

Table 7:10 Population growth of North Bengal (1951-1981)

District/State	Area/ Sq. K.M.	1951	1961	1971	1981	% of Decadal growth (1971-1981)
Darjeeling	3386	469.6	624.6	781.8	1024.2	28.78
Cooch Behar	3075	668.1	1319.8	1414.2	1771.8	25.25
Jalpaiguri	6224	916.7	1369.3	1750.1	2217.8	26.11
W.Dinajpur	5206	976.9	1323.8	1857.9	1404.9	29.19
(North & South)						
Malda	3713	937.6	1221.9	1612.7	2631.8	26.19
West Bengal	21625	3959.7	5549.4	7418.7	9447.6	22.96

Source: Census Report of Indian, 1981 (population in lakhs)

The table 7.10 shows that after 1961 population of North Bengal was gradually being increased. The population growth rate was much more in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Dinajpur. If we try to understand the causes of the growth of population, we will find that the Tibetans took shelter in the Duars in 1960, because of “Bangal Kheda Andolan” in Assam in 1960-61, a large number of refugees came in Uttar Banga, and thousand of Nepalese were driven away from Meghalaya or Bhutan who took shelter in North Bengal. Apart from these, after the war between India and Pakistan in 1965, huge number of refugees infiltrated in North Bengal.⁹⁶ Marcus Dam in his article “*Bhutanese Refugees and the Indian Game Politics*” says –“Indian authorities continue to thwart attempts by Bhutanese refugees settle in camps along Nepalese eastern border to

march back to their homeland. The problem of these displaced people is expected to snowball into a major geographical crisis in North Bengal specially Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri because they are sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan.”⁹⁷ J.C. Samaddar wrote a letter to the editor of *The Statesman* on March 6, 1996 headed as “*Threat of Refugee Influx*”, that the political turmoil in Bangladesh is sure to hit its economy hard with loss of production following unending spells of agitation, the Government may have to go in for massive foreign aid. India is concern about influx of refugees, the infiltration across in order, now a trickle, may take a turn for the worse.”⁹⁸ The table 7.10 also shows that the decadal growth of population of all districts more higher than West Bengal in 1971-81. The tables 7.4 and 7.5 show that after 1971 immigration of refugees much more in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts because they are located in international border areas. If we follow the table 7.2, we will find that the comparative population growth rate of SC is rather high than Rajbanshis population in West Bengal according to the Census Reports from 1971-1991. The table 7.3 shows the population growth rates of West Bengal and North Bengal where comparative growth rate of population is higher than West Bengal from 1951-2001.

Under this circumstance, the UTJAS articulates infiltration immigrants have polluted the regional balance relating to socio-economic development of North Bengal. This imbalance socio-economic development lead identity challenge to the weaker section of the people.⁹⁹ In this respect, Sajal Basu says –“A particular group shifts its identity, its distinctness, otherness as an ethnic nation in course of age-long feeling of being discriminated, a sense of in security and aspiration for a larger share in power.”¹⁰⁰

Like UKD the UTJAS, criticized the draw back policy of the Government regarding land reform. The UTJAS articulates the Left Front Government policy fails to bridge between the alternative process of culture and generation of mass concepts. Accordingly, the socio-economic development has not been achieved, yet in all means of production mainly due to drawbacks of land reforms.¹⁰¹ The three phases of Land reforms programme of Left Front Government like –(i) *Operation Burga*, which implies recording the names of the *Bargadar* to ensure their right against forcible or motivated eviction; (ii) A 75 :25 share cropping ratio between the *bargadar* and the land owner where the cost of production is borne by the former and (iii) A minimum wage rate of Rs. 8.10 for the daily labourer , have not succeeded in many respect.¹⁰² Table 7.7 and 7.8 show that refugee SC were benefited more than the Rajbanshis by the distribution of vested lands to the landless agricultural labourer by the United Front and Left Front Government. This had direct impact on the ethnic movement of North Bengal. The Rajbanshis were forced to migrate into the nearby urban areas and to the other province only to be absorbed into the marginalize section workers, domestic servants whose survival depended upon the selling of labour power. In this changed economic order, they became backward in politically, economically, and socially for generation after generation. Even they could not compete themselves with the migrated *Namasudras* to establish their right within SC status. Under this circumstance, tension has been grown in some section of the Rajbanshis in respect of separate state and autonomy in North Bengal. However, the UTJAS propagates that, "What ever we are doing, it is for the best interest of our country as a whole by trying to involve the majority of the population in the development work of the country. This is movement of all the *adivasis*, backward communities of entire North Bengal aiming at the achievement of rights,

as well as to render their best services in building up a new, powerful and prosperous India along with the privileged classes and castes” .¹⁰³

7.5.2: CHARTER OF DEMANDS OF THE UTJAS:¹⁰⁴

1. The purpose of this movement is to find out the ways and means for the development of North Bengal and remain free from all political influence.
2. North Bengal should be declared as backward zone and an effective and scientific planning should be undertaken for its development.
3. For the cultural development of the North Bengal people, there should be a cultural department of Govt. for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.
4. A special provision should be made for business loan, employment etc. both in the Govt. and private services. At least 44% seats should be reserved in school service for backward communities. It is also demanded that the economically backward but not Scheduled; at 16% seats should be reserved for them in this regard. Strong penal measure should be taken against those persons who will violate the provision.
5. Primary education should be made compulsory and in *adivasi* dominated areas the medium of teaching should be in Hindi.
6. Scheduled Castes and Tribal candidates should be given preference in appointing the teachers and there should be reservation of seats for them at appreciating percent.
7. Uniform should be provided for the Scheduled Castes and *adivasi* students.
8. Book grant must be disbursed within February of every calendar year, and maintenance allowance should be paid in every three months.

9. 25% seats should be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes students for admission in North Bengal Medical College, Engineering College, University and other vocational institutions. Age bar required marks should be relaxed for their admission.
10. Duly elected representatives of Scheduled Castes and Tribes should be taken in the Governing Body and Senate of North Bengal University, North Bengal Medical College, Engineering College etc.
11. More Secondary, Higher Secondary Schools, Colleges should be established as per area wise requirements in North Bengal for further expansion of Education, and for the *adivasi* students, medium of education should be in Hindi.
12. Education grants for SC/ST students should be extended to the families who are under Rs.1000/-income callings, instead of three hundred rupees at present.
13. Transfer of lands of the SC/ST should be declared illegal and any complaint in this regard should be heard and disposed of within time limit.
14. Irrigation and flood control arrangement should be done on emergency basis for modern cultivation.
15. All the vested lands should be distributed amongst the SC and ST poor farmers.
16. Agricultural grants should be provided for the marginal and small farmers.
17. The price of agricultural goods and industrial goods should be so fixed so that the balance of income among all group of people are maintained.
18. Easy termed loan should be offered for reforming all the silted ponds or the same should be taken over by the Government. Intensify fisheries through Fishermen Corporative.

19. The food for work scheme should be continued for Rural Developmental Works and to solve rural unemployment problem partly.
20. Adequate arrangement of wholesome drinking water for every village people should be done within 5 years time.
21. At least one latrine for every household be provided by the Govt. in the interest of Public health.
22. The Tea and other big Industries should be nationalized immediately. As huge revenue is earned by both the State and Central Govt. from North Bengal Zone, it is therefore, demanded that the proportionate share of which should be invested in rural oriented industries at Bengal for the overall interest of the country.
23. For industrial development of this region, communication must be improved and arrangement should be made for generation of power and vocational training.
24. The conditions for building up cement and fertilizer factories, paper mills and wood craft etc. exist in this region which should be given shape without killing any further time.
25. The ratio of income or in independent profession and expenditure ceiling also to be fixed at par with average national income.
26. North Bengal should not be take any responsibility of the refugees coming from outside India particularly Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan. Homeland should be claimed from Bangladesh for rehabilitation for the refugees dropped out from Assam.
27. The name of the foreign citizens came in India after 1971, should be eradicated from voter list. They should be rehabilitated in National Level.
28. Women seats should be reserved in respect of education and service.

The UTJAS is organized by unfurling flag four in colours. It has composed of deep saffron, black and red half part and remaining part is white. In the white part of the flag, there is a green circle where is symbol of balance(*Naya Danda*) .The UTJAS strives to make it a flag of socialism, equality and social justice and of all the oppressed sections of the society.¹⁰⁷ The president of the UTJAS pledges –“ the principals and nobilities of the *Sangathan* that it hates the process of re-constructing of the States, it is expected to construct or re organize the state on the basis of following condition of administrative structure, geographical boundaries and socio-economical values but not the following of linguistic, cultural and basis of communalism.”¹⁰⁸

7.5.3: AGITATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UTJAS:

From 1979 to 1986, the UTJAS spread out its activities through out North Bengal by its various organizations. It criticized the Left Front Government's policy of land reforms and organized mass rally, meetings and strikes.¹⁰⁹ Regarding that question of possession and distribution of *khas* land (vested land) several clashes broke out between the UTJAS supporters and the Left Party supporters on 11th April, 1980 at Harihat in Tufanganj subdivision, Cooch Behar. The police arrested several members of UTJAS and when the delegates came to a deputation to meet the S.D.O. of Tufanganj, the police charged *lathis* and fired on the gathering. Two supporters namely, Naren Barman and Nimai Barman were injured and the former was died on 21st April in M.J.N. Hospital, Cooch Behar.¹¹⁰ This incident was a landmark for the UTJAS movement. The UTJAS organized meeting, rally, mass hunger strikes from 1st March

to 8th July 1980 in every districts of North Bengal and pressure on the local Government. Under the leadership of Probhat Barman, secretary of UTJAS, a team of delegates comprising Probhat Sen Ishore, Manindra Nath Das, Karuna Kanta Das, Sachindra Nath Barman and Naren Das submitted a detailed memorandum to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi on August 21, 1980 with following points- ¹¹¹

1. Demand for judicial enquiry on the issue of Naren Barman who was died by the police firing at Tufanganj when UTJAS procession was marching towards town and articulating for granting financial aid to the families who were both wounded and assassinated and proceed the punishment to the police who were engage in operations.
2. Demand for introducing the industrialization in North Bengal on national products.
3. Demand for to open the IAS and WBCS examinations centre and Circuit Branch at Siliguri.
4. Filling of the service quota of Scheduled Castes and Tribes people as early as possible in proportion of population.
5. Development of North Bengal in all respects and protecting the scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes people from eviction and also from the torture from government and other non-government organizations.

The secretary of UTJAS urged the Prime Minister of India to immediately invest an official emissary of the Central Government of India to Tufanganj for verifying the present issue and depriving condition of SC & ST peoples. ¹¹² After discussion, the *Sangathan* was assured that she would send a team to enquire into the incident and also call for a

report the Home Minister of West Bengal. Within 15 days, a team consisting of two officials came to Tufanganj and enquired into all the incidents of the police firing and other incidents thereafter. During the visit to New Delhi, the delegation also met the central ministers viz Mr. Jogendra Makoan, Mr Pranab Mukherjee and the M.Ps viz Mr. Purna Narayan Sinha, Mr Amar Ray Prodhan, Mr. Piyus Tirkey, Mr. Ranendra Barman, Mr. Ladli Mohan Nigam, Mr. Hembati Nandan Bahuguna and others of different political groups. The team also met Bhola Pashowan Sastri, the then Chairman of National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission.

In the secretarial speeches at the 2nd Central Conference of the UTJAS which was held at Cooch Behar on 18-19 and 20 February, 1983, the following aim of actions were resolution during agitations of 1981 and 1982 as follows -¹¹³

1. To protest against the assault of Moral Ray, resident of Mathabhanga, Cooch Behar, 9 schools' students called froth 10 days *bandh*.
2. Over the demand for "6 points" on 17th June 1981, a 24 hours '*Bandh*' was called forth in front of administrative offices both Subdivision and district levels of North Bengal. The number of agitations was about 6700.
3. To protest against demolition the *Panchanan Samiti Bhawan* at Tufanganj, Cooch Behar on September 23, 1981, about 792 agitators were arrested.
4. Over the demands of several issues a number, of seven thousand women's' deputation was submitted to the District Magistrate of

- Balurghat by leadership of Mrs. Ranjana Roy and Ms. Sunity Hassdar.
5. The leaders were attracted and wounded by cadres of CPI(M), when a procession of UTJAS was marching around the Tufanganj town.
 6. To observe a "Black Flag Day" on December 6, 1981 during the visit of the Chief Minister of West Bengal at Tufanganj and Cooch Behar respectively in protest against alleged atrocities and discrimination perpetrated on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
 7. To protest against illegal transfer of Professor of the Balurghat Junior B.T.College a mass petition was submitted to the District Magistrate by Mrs. Ranjana Ray participating with about six thousand agitators.
 8. Through out North Bengal a demonstration movement was launched in protest against the alleged the "Fire on" the huts of the SC/ST people at Itahar.
 9. To observe "Shahit Dibash" on April 21, 1982, "Civil Disobedience" was launched before the all sub-division offices of North Bengal.
 10. On June 17-18, 1982 to launch 8 points of demand, a mass picketing was held at every sub- divisional officers of North Bengal.

The next step of the UTJAS agitation was a memorandum addressed to the President of India with copies to the Prime Minister of India, Home Minister of India and opposition leader of parliament of India in March 29, 1984 by the president of UTJAS. It was the memorandum where the UTJAS complained with the imaginary genocide

of SC/ST and apartheid by the West Bengal Government against SC/ST people in North Bengal and launched for the comprehension development of North Bengal articulating with 10 points charter demands.¹¹⁴ As there was no result of memorandum, the UTJAS decided to spread their movement very widely.

The UTJAS alleges that they had submitted several memorandums to the Government relating for granting of facilities of SC/ST; stoppage false certificate and socio-economic development of North Bengal. In spite of this, they have been shuddering to be burning of houses of local people; denying work to local people, and snatching away the vast lands from the SC/ST people, which would be distributed in favour of the foreigners – among, have proved that North Bengal is passing through a critical phase.¹¹⁵

The State Government worried over the certain developments in North Bengal and counter acted that the UTJAS was responsible about the critical position in North Bengal.¹¹⁶ Under this issue, a three-days demonstration from the September 24-26 1985 by members of *Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Yuba Chhatra Sangathan* at Esplanade East in Calcutta and at outside various State Government offices in North Bengal. The demonstrations were protesting against the step motherly attitude of the Government towards SC/ ST of North Bengal. A memorandum, containing 15 points charter of demands handed over to Mr. Binay Chowdhury, the Minister of Land Reforms, Government of West Bengal.¹¹⁷ There after the UTJAS demonstrated picketing, street corner meeting in different places and demanded that the reservation quota for the SC /ST people should be filled, implementation of the “Mandal Commissions Report” , hostel grants for the SC /ST

students increased and special attention given to the problems of the SC /ST in North Bengal. Civil Disobedience programmes, in support of their demands, were held during the day in all the district head quarters. ¹¹⁸

On 30th October, 1986, the members of the UTJAS held a demonstration at Esplanade East Calcutta complaining “the state Government ‘Apathy’ towards North Bengal. Two memorandums addressed to the Chief Minister and the Governor, were submitted by the organization containing a 15 points charter of demands. Most of them were as follows- ¹¹⁹

1. The main demand is 60% seat reservation for the students of North Bengal in the medical college, engineering college and other higher education institutions in North Bengal .
2. Demand to step for stopping the infiltration of foreigners into North Bengal.
3. They also demanded that the names of all foreigners who came into North Bengal after 1971, to be stricken from the electoral rolls, and
4. They called for the introduction of modern and scientific methods of agriculture and the setting up of more small industrial scale and medium scale.

The forth-central conference of the UTJAS was held on 10th January, 1987 at Alipurduar, in Jalpaiguri. More than 40 thousand delegates participated in the conference from different parts of North Bengal . ¹²⁰ It was the manifesto of the 4th annual conference of UTJAS that the *Sangathan* appeals- “You may be member of any political party which is not hindrance, as a scheduled you have been exploited day by

day deprived of constitutional rights and privileges, discriminated in social justice... our endeavour for developing the socio-economic condition of the North Bengal..... it is warning that general development is basis end of UTJAS but not sectarian review.”¹²¹ But it was a painful and undemocratic events to assert whom a public procession was marching towards conference, in the mean time a brutal attack came across in it by anti- social elements.¹²² As a consequent, 100 of delegates were wounded and many maids were assaulted in different ways. Unfortunately, the Police was very weak to challenge the evil attack. As a result, the delegates had been threat from both administrative help and social kind perusal also.¹²³

Regarding Alipurduar tragedy, the then irrigation Minister, Mr. Nani Bhattacharjee says at an interview of press on 17.01.87 at Mathabhanga, “He would produce a report to the Chief Minister Mr. Jyoti Basu about it.” He also says, “....in the procession of UTJAS, the members used perverse and exciting speech and slogans were result of occurrence and that was pretence of local congress leaders”.¹²⁴ On the other hand, Mr Biswaranjan Sarkar, the local congress leaders articulated that the CPI (M) and RSP played the occurrence. The then president of the *Prodesh Congress*, Mr. Priyaranjan Das Munshi asserted that the Alipurduar tragedy was proved that North Bengal has been suffering from all administrative proceedings and social injustice.¹²⁵ Under this circumstance of Alipurduar, the UTJAS decided to launch long and steady movement through out North Bengal. On February 9, 1987. A.D. the UTJAS , laid siege to all North Bengal’s National Highways for 12 hours from 6 am to 6 pm in protest against the State Government’s ‘apathy’ towards North Bengal. The UTJAS held a conference on January 10-11, 1987 A.D. at Alipurduar court premises. It also articulated for

judicial enquiry arrest to the criminals, grant in compensation to the wounded and judicial punishment to the criminals .¹²⁶

The Fifth Central Conference of the UTJAS was held at Kiliaganj in Uttar Dinajpur District of North Bengal. To create a permanent third force or national political party, the UTJAS shall have to endeavour tenaciously bring all the parties namely *Karnataka Raja Raykot Sangha*, *Dalit Sangharsh Samity* (Karnataka) ,*Uttarkhanda Sangharsh Bahini* (UP), *Samata Sangathan* ,*Yuba Chhatra Bahini* and *Jana Mukti Sangharsh Bahini* professing equality together on the platform of Democratic Socialism called *Jana-Andolan Samanyaya Samiti*(J.S.S.). Building up of the third force is going to be a long-term process and it will occur in a phased manner starting with the programmatic alliance with a view to forming an ultimate unity based on definite ideology most suitable to Indian conditions.¹²⁷

The Sixth Central Conference of UTJAS was held at Dinhat, Cooch Behar where in decided that *Kishan O Mazdoor Sangathan* would be politicized by fighting in election.¹²⁸ In 1994, *Mahila Uttarbanga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan* and *Kishan O Mazdoor Sangathan* alienated at Jalpaiguri Central Conference.¹²⁹ It was 1995, the seventh Central Conference of UTJAS ,the movement started with a new venture with the formation of *Uttar Banga Swayatwa Shasan Mancha* which consisted of CPI(ML) (*Communist Party of India[Marxist Liberation]*), TASSO(*Transferred Area of Surjapur Organization*), UBJSS(*Uttar Banga Jana- Andalon Samannya Samiti*), Rana Group, Forward Block (Kamal Guha fraction), Rajbanshi Yuba Sangathan, UTJAS and KMS(*Kishan Majdoor Sangathan*). The new *Mancha* came out as “*Samajbadi Jana Parishad*”, the foundation conference of this *Mancha*

was on 31st December 1994 to 1st January 1995 at Thana, Maharashtra. ¹³⁰
It is homage to appeal to all the political Organizations striving for equality to consider the concept of the third force based on socialist ideology instead of pursuing illusionary and temporary alliances. In this respect, Mrs. Ranjana Ray, president of the UTJAS says- "UTJAS not only move for North Bengal but also it transforms into national movement in character." ¹³¹

Naturally, a question has been raised about the ideology of UTJAS. If we discuss it in historical perspective, it will be cleared that at the initial stage the UTJAS started its movement for socio-economic development of North Bengal but gradually bypassed its initial aims and finally it was turned into a third force political organization. The non-Rajbanshis or caste Hindu leaders did not support these issues of the UTJAS. Consequently, the organization lost its popularity itself. The ideology of autonomy and separatism issue of the UTJAS led to obscurity to fulfill the necessity of people. ¹³² As a result, the *Sangathan* lost its faith from the very public support. In addition to this, frequent attack on the supporters of the UTJAS and no satisfactory remedy that led the supporters in confusion about the future of the movement. Above all, the national parties are very strong in this region. So, it is very tough for the regional party to secure support from the masses. One of the main demand of the UTJAS was to drive out refugees particularly who came from Bangladesh after 1971. But apart from the Bangladeshis, there were so many other people came into this area. Was it possible to drive out them from North Bengal ? Regarding this question, there was a contradictory opinion between the UTJAS supporters and others. This was also the cause of unpopularity of the *Sangathan*. Above all, the emergence of KPP in the last decade of twentieth century, with demand

of separate state caused the set back of the movement.¹³³ Naren Das one of the secretary of the UTJAS remarks- “The *sangathan* lost its ground towards the end of 1990, when the leaders began to nourish the dream of being the national leader leaving the nucleus of home leadership and began to tie up with same, other organizations whose attitude was against the policy of reservation. The relation of the *Sangathan* with *Kishan* organization of Mr. Mahendra Singh Tikayat gave the final blow to the *Sangathan*”.¹³⁴ Now, the UTJAS continue its activities with the name of *Samajbadi Jana Parisad*, in North Bengal of present West Bengal like a subterranean river.

Though the *Sangathan* lost its popularity the dream of the *Sangathan* became fruitful in some cases when the ruling Government took same developmental measures in North Bengal –like the creation of *Uttar Banga Unnyayan Parisad* and their own men to speak in their own voice for the development of their culture, language, history and economy. It can therefore, be safely concluded that the mission of the of the UTJAS was not wrong; rather it was still in remains the final slogan needed for all round development of North Bengal and its people but it was not led in appropriate ideology.

VI

Though the scope of discussion of our study is limited from 1891 to 1979, the Koch- Rajbanshi people of Assam and the Rajbanshi people of Northern Bengal had launched several political movements after 1979.

While the UKD and the UTJAS were engaged in mobilization of the SC / ST peoples of North Bengal, the Koch Rajbanshis established one socio-political organization namely the Bharatiya Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Mahashabha (BKRKM) in Assam in 1984. They demanded the formation of a separate state in North Bengal and over all development of the Koch Rajbanshi community under the leadership of Dr. Purna Narayan Singh (M.P.from Tezpur). In 1984, the first conference of BKRKM held at Dhubri district in Assam where the *Bangiyo Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* and the leader of UKD, Sri Panchanan Mallick and large number of Rajbanshi delegates from Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura participated. In this conference, the BKRKM expresses that “the Rajbanshis are indigenous people of eastern and northeastern India, highly backward in social, political, educational, and economic affairs although they have Scheduled Caste status in West Bengal and Tripura. However, in other states they do not have Scheduled Caste status. So all Koch –Rajbanshi of India should stand united and make efforts to secure equal social, political and economic status as one class .¹³⁵ The second conference of the BKRKM was held at Burirhat, Dinhata subdivision of Cooch Behar district on 23-24 February in 1986 where the BKRKM was renamed as *Koch –Rajbanshi International* (KRI). The KRI had deep concern for the cultural linguistic identity of the Koch- Rajbanshis. It also demanded the reservation of 80% job for the Koch Rajbanshis in North Bengal, formation of a state in North Bengal and formation of military regiment in their name of Chilarai. The KRI was strongly supported by the UKD, *Kamata Rajya Parisad*, *Chila Rai Sangha*, *All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammelani* and the *Rajbanshi Bhasa Pracher Samity*.¹³⁶

Like the KRI, another political organization operated from Lower Assam (Gouripur) called *Bharatiya Kamata Rajya Parisad* (BKRP) began to mobilized the linguistic and cultural feelings of the Koch Rajbanshis. It demanded a separate state (Kamatapur) for overall development for the Koch-Rajbanshis of North Bengal and Lower Assam . The KRI and the BKRP although adopted the policy of mobilizing the people of North Bengal on the ground of common caste origin but did not realize the need of bringing people of other castes into their agitation. There was no member in these organizations from non-Rajbanshi communities. Even the *Nasya Shaikhs* (local Muslim) who claim themselves, as Rajbanshi were not given proper treatment in the caste based KRI. Therefore, the KRI and the BKRP had no impact on the people of the North Bengal except the Koch – Rajbanshis.¹³⁷

Although the ethnic movement for the formation of a separate state could not get success in the 1980s but it get another witness of organization with the formation of *Kamatapur Gana Parishad* in 1987. It was formed in the pattern of the *Assam Gana Parishad*.¹³⁸ The ambition of the *Kamatapur Gana Parishad* was to established separate state consisting six districts of North Bengal. The *Kamatapur Gana Parishad* formed the *All Kamatapur Students Union* (AKSU) in the pattern of the *All Koch –Rajbanshi Students Union* (AKRASU). In order to create literary consciousness among the Rajbanshi people, the *Kamatapur Sahitya Parishad* was formed .It published a news bulletin called *Ratna Pitha* after the historical name of this region.¹³⁹ In addition to this, a good number magazine have been published in *Kamatapuri* language such as *Northern Express*, *Jagaran Pubali*, and *Kamata Katha* etc. In the village level many *Yatra Parties* were formed and they staged the most popular was ‘*Yatra Maynar Chokher Jal*’

produced by Guneswar Adhikary in Kamatapuri language. It was highly appreciated among the Rajbanshi people. The *Kamatapur Gana Parishad* or KPP put a eleven-points charter of demands to the Prime of India (Sri Indra Kumar Gujral) in 1997 on 26th September, in order to implement their demands for the formation of state i.e. '*Kamatapuri* speaking people in the whole North Bengal along with adjoining *Kamatapuri* dominated areas in India.¹⁴⁰

In the beginning of the present century, a section of Rajbanshi people started Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association movement in Cooch Behar (GCPA) in 1998 citing clause in the merger agreement on 28th August, 1949 signed by the Government of India and the Maharaja Jagadeependra Narayan, the last independent king of Cooch Behar State. They demanded Union Territory status for Cooch Behar that will eventually pave the way for a 'C' category state.¹⁴¹ Underdevelopment was also another issue of the GCPA. The movement though stirred through out Cooch Behar, it could not affect the mind of the people of whole North Bengal. Even Gayeetri Devi, who died on 29th July, 2009 the successor of the Koch Royal family was not interested about the movement of the GCPA. She had expressed her view about the movement in a daily newspaper like, "I cannot understand why this movement has been raised in Cooch Behar. Cooch Behar has become too much dirty and the people have been changed too."¹⁴² Even, she made it clear that she has no willingness to meet the leadership of the GCPA.¹⁴³

VII

It is a matter of fact that not only North Bengal, India is being faced in great troubles for several insurgencies and movements because of ever increases migration. The North Eastern India has over 500 ethnic groups owing to frequent immigrant's invasions, though all are neighbours played a major role in segregating the population in the main river valleys. Migration of population creating demographic changes is an issue of concern while figures quoted by authorities are suspect it is pertinent to note that in the 20th century under British rule, immigration and migration, particularly into Assam, North Bengal and Tripura, was probably to the extent of about 30% of the population, of which about two-third was from East Bengal (Bangladesh).¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately after independence this trend was allowed to continue, with the majority of the migrants, being from East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). In 1971 again was a major refugee exodus from East Pakistan,(Now Bangladesh) the majority of who never returned owing to the situation, which leads to the Indo- Pak war. In 1947, the population of North Bengal was 46 lakhs, but presently it stands more than one cores. Therefore, the average growth of population in a decade is likely more than 10 lakhs.

In North Bengal, the immigration problem corresponds to rise of various types of movements such as, GNLF, Uttarkhanda, UTJAS, Kamatapuri movement, and the GCPA movement. In Meghalaya, it gave birth to the Khasi movement and the anti-Khasi agitations. Other hill areas adopted harsh anti-immigrant policies while we may blame the British, the fact remains that the maximum number of immigrants came after independence. Both the Central and State Government failed to take suitable remedial action giving rise to insurgency, strife, discontent, and

unnecessary deployment of security forces resulting in wasteful expenditure. Regarding *Kamatapuri* movement in North Bengal Swaraj Basu says, "This movement could be seen as a protest against assimilation or integration of the local indigenous people by dominant socio-cultural groups of this region. However, while ethnicity can be used to fight social discrimination, there is always the possibility of subsequent use to achieve narrow reactionary objectives".¹⁴⁵ Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that statehood movements keep popping up in North Bengal from time to time. If it was the Uttarkhanda agitation in the late sixties, the *Kamatapuri* movement was in the nineties, and its Greater Cooch Behar is today.

From the above discussion, I would like to state that neither the formation of separate state nor regional autonomy could itself solve the basic problem like social oppression. Instead of separation, we need the balanced and speedy economic development, the removal of social disparities immediately in the right direction to achieve the goal. These steps would presuppose the broadest unity of the people for which our state government claims to have been working.¹⁴⁶ One must go into the roots of the problem to find out the proper solutions. Our ruling government, no doubt, attempt to find out the deep-seated reasons for poverty, hunger, illiteracy and many forms of social backwardness in its own ways. However, it is still far from capturing the imagination of the people at large who are struggling for their national emancipation. Unless by its action and practice, the Government is able to inspire the vast majority of the people, their battle for "National Unity" will remain problematic.

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CHAPTER –VIII

Origin of Identity Crisis: Response and Reaction
among the Rajbanshis in all Indian Perspective

CHAPTER-VIII

ORIGIN OF IDENTITY CRISIS: RESPONSE AND REACTION AMONG THE RAJBANSHIS IN ALL INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

To explain the origin of identity crisis of the Rajbanshis, we have to discuss the character of the caste mobility in Bengal during colonial and postcolonial period that led to the Rajbanshis to caste hierarchy and separate ethnic identity movement during the period of our study. One important aspect of caste mobility in Bengal is that the members of low caste often tend to claim the status of a higher caste. Thus, the aspiration of a caste is invariably to push itself up the caste ladder and get rid of the ignominy of being on the rung of lower castes. In Hindu society, the Hindus constituted the majority of the population; it had to take place within the structural framework defined by the caste system. Although we know, caste position being determined by birth was immutable in the upward direction, but in practical, the system did permit vertical mobility generated by the opening up of new frontiers of economic opportunities.

I

From the substantial historical account, we have come to know the various aspect of the caste system of Bengal. ¹ Out of four traditional *varna* i.e. *Brahman*, *kshatriya*, *Vaisha* and *Sudra* Bengal has only the *Brahmins* and the *Sudra* caste system. However, in the broad sense of *Varna* framework, the caste hierarchy could be further classified into six categories on the basis of the prevalent notions of ritual purity

i.e.i) *Brahmins*,ii)the *Baidyas* and the *Kayasthas*, iii) the *Nabaskh* castes,iv) the *ajalchal* castes, v) the caste between the *Nabaskh* and the *ajalchal* groups and vi) the *Antyaja* castes. ² In the predominant local traditions of Bengal, this caste based ritual ranks still had a significant bearing on the forms of social interaction. In spite of the growing influences of modern secular values and the collapsing of caste based occupational structure caused by the result of colonial rule, there was not much change in social outlook towards caste. Shekhar Bondopadhyaya in this connection observes, “Prescriptions of caste still determined the patterns of social interaction and dominated inter-personal group relations of the Bengali Hindus”.³ In this regard, it may be mentioned here that among the elites in the Bengali society caste was the decisive factors in regulating social relationships, like matrimonial alliance, partaking of cooked food from the lower castes etc. Caste pride was also very prominent and usually the upper castes thought of themselves to be culturally superior to those lower castes. Such caste related cultural stereotyping often-generated social tension. However, as it was difficult to visualize any alternative means to register their protest or ventilate their grievances, the aggrieved lower castes looked for a solution with in the caste structure itself by claiming higher status.

During the colonial period, it became much more pervasive that altered the political base of the caste system, while a market economy operating under the aegis of the colonial government with marketable land and labour struck at the economic foundations of the traditional hierarchical, yet interdependent structure of relationship. Nevertheless, the caste system prevailed as an important determinant of social behaviour of the Hindus. Shekhar Bandopadhyaya observes, “Vertical social mobility in a secular context, therefore, had to be

ritualized through movement upwards in the scale of caste- ranking which was still prestigious.” He also remarks, “Those who had improved their economic opportunities, demanded a corresponding higher rank in caste hierarchy, and organized articulate caste agitations in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.”⁴ It is to be mentioned here that the caste movement had been developed into two stages. Firstly, the concerned caste aimed acquiring the symbols of high status. Then in the second stage, the emphasis shifted to the more material sources of high status, i.e. education, employment, and political power.⁵ In Chapter No. VI, we have discussed both of these stages regarding Rajbanshi social movement. How did this social or caste movement of the Rajbanshis correspond to the origin of identity crisis would be the subject matter of the present chapter.

II

The most important component in a society was perhaps the caste ranking and individuals could rise in prestigious dimension only if their castes could rise as corporations. Therefore, the changes in the distribution of productive resources and political power that altered the patterns of account and secular social interaction between groups and individuals, often sought expression through attempts at achieving a higher ritual rank. In general, the discrepancies between the secular status and the rank of a particular caste were sought to be resolved through “Sanskritization” on symbolic justification.⁶ Rowe observes, “Most of these agitations for caste mobility, that we come across not only in Bengal but in other parts of India as well, during the early twentieth century were in the shape of ‘attempt to change the group name to one

more hallowed in Hinduism".⁷ In this regard, most of the caste mobility movements recorded in the Census Reports and known from the wide variety of caste literature, sought three types of *varna*-affiliations-*Brahmanic, Kshatriya and Vaisya*, the three twice-born *varnas* of the classics. Each of these castes resorted to some origin myth, which associated them with one or the other of these *varnas*, and quoted *Puranic slokas*, sometimes spurious and sometimes incomplete, in support of these claims. Their pretensions were later validated through securing *vyavasthas* (religious judgments) from the Nabadwip *pandits* whose discussion were already influenced by the present secular status of the caste concerned.⁸ Historical records reveal that beginning of the twentieth century in Bengal as else where in India, there had been consistent movements for upward mobility within the caste system. On the part of a particular caste, the principal objective of such a movement was its promotion from a lower to a higher birth in the *Varna* /caste hierarchy and greater respectability in terms of the given conditions of caste system in a region. The following statement shows the claim of different castes in Bengal for specific *Varna* affiliation as had been recorded in the Census Reports from 1911 to 1931.

<u>Caste</u>	<u>Reference categories</u>
Kamar	<i>Brahmin</i> (a 1931 claim, their 1921 claim being Kshatriya as 1911 claim <i>Vaishya</i>)
Napit	<i>Brahmin</i> (a 1931 claim, their 1921 claim being <i>Baidya</i> , and 1911 claim <i>kshatriya</i>)
Kayastha	<i>Kshatriya</i>
Aguri	<i>Kshatriya</i> (<i>Ugra kshatriya</i>)
Mahisya	<i>Kshatriya</i> (1931 claim, their 1901 claim being <i>Vaisya</i>)

Goala	<i>Vaidya (kshatriya)</i> (a 1931 claim, the earlier being <i>sadgop</i>)
Sundi	<i>Kshatriya</i> or <i>Saundik kshatriya</i> (a 1931 claim, the earlier claim being <i>saha</i>)
Rajbanshi	<i>Kshatriya</i> (a 1911 claim, their earlier claim being <i>Bhanga or Bratya Kshatriya</i>)
Pad or Padmaraj	<i>Bratya Kshatriya</i> (fallen <i>Kshatriya</i>)or <i>Paundra Kshatriya</i> .

From the above statement it is noticed that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an increasing number of lower castes adopt the “Sanskaras” or social beliefs and ritual ceremonies, that had once been peculiar to the higher *varnas* and following social practices that had been the hallmarks of the respectable castes enjoying a higher position in the regional caste hierarchy. For example, the *Baidyas*, *kayasthas*, the *anguris* or *ugra Kshatriya*, *Paundra Kshatriyas*, *Mahisha*, *Goala*, *Sundri*, *Rajbanshi* and the *jogis* had started wearing sacred thread and claiming *Kshatriya* status, while a section of the *Sadgops* and the *Mayras* introduced *Kulinism* with all its ancillary taboos and customs.⁹ The social hierarchical movement of the different castes corresponds to *kshatriya* movement in North Bengal. It corresponds to the two identities in the forefront of social mobility among the concern caste i.e. i) caste identity and ii) Ethnic –cum-caste identity.

In the first front i.e. ‘Caste Identity’ issue, some castes like *Ugra Kshatriya*, *Malla Kshatriya*, *Paundra Kshatrriyas*, *Sundri Kshatriyas*, *Mahishya*, *Goala*, etc only claim the caste identity against the Brahmanical system. They claim *Kshatriya* status to establish higher social position in the existing caste system. This movement of particular

castes corresponds to the caste identity only. They did not raise any ethnic base identity movement against the existing caste system.

On the other hand, the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement corresponded caste identity and ethnic issues simultaneously. For *Rajbanshis*, the sacred thread had in fact become a symbol round which a lot of social mobilization actually took place. In 1912, the *kshatriya Samiti*, organized its first mass thread-wearing ceremony called the *milankshetra*, at Bhogmari in Rangpur district, where four to five thousand Rajbanshis went through the ceremony of ritual rebirth. This was followed by many other such *milankshetras* organized in different districts, resulting 'lakhs' of Rajbanshis donning the sacred thread as a mark of their *kshatriya* or twice-born status.¹⁰ We have already discussed this elaborately in the Chapter No VI. The social movement of the Rajbanshis correspond their caste identity in the social system. Analyzing this issue Swaraj Basu has remarked that their search for *kshatriya* identity was only a symbolic cultural expression of this emergent collective self-consciousness.¹¹ By this self-consciousness, the Rajbanshis tried to legitimize their social and ethno-cum caste identity issue that led them a ethnic and racial difference between them and the Koches. This demand of ethnic based /racial based identity of the Rajbanshis is one of the arbitrary constructions, which led the Rajbanshis to the origin of identity crisis later on. Let us discuss how did the ethnic-cum-caste identity gears up the origin of identity crisis of the Rajbanshis as follows.

III

The social movement of the Rajbanshis is a historical fact. During the Census of 1872, the Rajbanshis of Bengal and some part of Assam were trying to dissociate themselves from the tribal Koches and frantically dependent entry in the Census as a distinct caste i.e “Rajbanshi”. In the process of Hinduisation, they declared themselves as *bratya Kshatriya* (fallen *Kshatriya*). One of the earliest reference to the Rajbanshi people is available from a ballad ascribed to a folk poet named Ratiram Das who had lived under oppressive rule of Debi Singha, the *Ijaradar* of Dinajpur and Rangpur districts in Bengal during the administrative period of Warren Hastings (1772- 1785) the first Governor of India under East India Company. Ratiram Das in his *Jagan* said-

Rane bhanga diya mora ai-deshe asiachhi

*‘Bhanga kshatriya’ Rajbanshi ai name achhi.*¹²

[Free translation: Fleeing away from the battlefield we have come in this country and took the name as *bhanga Kshatriya* Rajbanshi.]

This descriptive term like ‘*Bhanga Kshatriya*’ and ‘Rajbanshi’ were already in vogue at that period while these epithets are not to be found in the older Persian records or in foreign accounts, or in any of the dynastic epigraph of that period. Even it is absent in *Darang Rajbanshabali*, the only genealogical account of the Koch Raj family of the of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam.¹³ Risley¹⁴ also accepted that there is no historical foundation for the claim of the Rajbanshi to be a provincial variety of the *Kshatriyas*. The Rajbanshis also used the reference of *Yoginitantra*, *Kalika Purana*, and *Bhramari Tantra* to establish their claim as *Bratya Kshatriya* or *Bhanga Kshatriya*. They also formed an association, under the leadership of Harimohan Ray Khazanchi, the *Zamindar* of Shyampur in Rangpur namely *Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati*

Bidhani Sabha. The Rajbanshis lodged several deputations to the District Magistrate, F.A. Skyne with the *Vyavasthapatra* of the Rajbanshis to use themselves as *Bratyā Kshatriya* in all the government deeds in 1891 May (*Jaistha*, 1298 B.S.)¹⁵

From the beginning of 1901, when the Rajbanshis were found as only 'Rajbanshi' in the primary census enumeration, resentment was caused. During this census period, the Rajbanshis began to boast of a pure *Kshatriya* origin. They have lodged several deputations to the census authority, District Magistrate, and Sir John Woodburn, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal but there was no result. The Rajbanshis and the Koches were therefore again classified as members of the same caste in the Census Report of 1901.¹⁶

In 1910, from the very beginning of the census operation the Rajbanshis again started their campaign for having themselves enumerated as *Kshatriya*. There were several meetings held in the different districts of Bengal to claim as '*kshatriya*' status and memorandum also submitted to the District Magistrate and census authority in support of their *Kshatriya* claim and distinguished their from the Koches. They also appealed to the District Magistrate in different districts to permit them to use respectable titles such as Barma, Ray, Singha in place of Das, Sarkar etc. Almost all the districts this permission was granted except in Cooch Behar, the Princely State, where the Government official strongly opposed it. However, by interference of E.W.Denith, the state superintendent, the matter was solved latter on. They began to emulate many Hindu manners and customs discarding their old practices in order justify their *Kshatriya* appellation and Aryan origin. However, in 1911 Census, the first demand of the Rajbanshis, i.e.

separation from the Koches was conceded, while the second i.e. be recognized the Rajbanshis as *Kshatriya* descent was turned down.¹⁷ These all their efforts to get recognition as *Kshatriyas* had ultimately failed except successfully enlisting their name “Rajbanshi” with “Kshatriya” in brackets separately from the tribal Koches.¹⁸

Under this circumstance, the Rajbanshis felt the need for an association to mobilize the community around the census for attaining a respectable position in social hierarchy. In the meanwhile, Rangpur *Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha* of Harimohan Ray Khazanchi, the Rajbanshi *Zamindar* of Shyampur in Rangpur moves social movement but failed to make wider impact on the community. Therefore, the Rajbanshi felt to need an active organization to legitimize their *Kshatriya* demand in society. Meanwhile, the most pragmatic among these leaders, who actually took the initiative to unite the Rajbanshis under the banner of a single organization was Raisahib Panchanan Barma (1866-1935 A.D.), the son of Khosal Sarkar of Khalisamari village of Mathabhanga subdivision, the then Princely State of Cooch Behar. It was under his leadership the *Kshatriya Samiti* was established in 1910 A.D.(1317 B.S.) at Rangpur. The *Kshatriya Samiti* carried of social and political mobilization among the Rajbanshis. During the Census period of 1921 A.D. and 1931 A.D., the *Kshatriya Samiti* launched social mobility to establish their *Kshatriya* status instead of *Rajbanshi Kshatriya*. In the Chapter No. VI, we have discussed how did the *Kshatriya Samiti* mobilized the Rajbanshis to legitimize their *kshatruiya* identity through different stages. However, during this period the Rajbanshi had to face opposition from the caste Hindus. Meanwhile, under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, the *Kshatriya Samiti* managed to over come all their opposition and finally the Rajbanshis were

recognized *Kshatriya* in the census report of 1931. However, their official recognition as 'Kshatriya' was challenged by the upper caste Hindus as their social threat to own social domination. As Swaraj Basu ¹⁹ has described that –“In spite of their general passive attitude towards the whole movement, they often, made ridiculous statements about it and some places there was also active opposition”. A.K. Ray ²⁰ has observed that the movement (*Kshatriya*) inevitably brought about face-to-face confrontation with other caste particularly the so-called upper castes of Hindus who neither were nor prepared to accept these men as *Kshatriyas*. Many Brahmins began to refuse to serve these people as their priests in religious and social ceremonies and some officials refused to record the caste of these people as *Kshatriyas*.

From the above discussion, it is to be mentioned here that the endeavour of the Rajbanshis to be placed higher up in the order of precedence and be recognized as *Kshatriya* continued until 1931 by assuming in different census. In their desire to be recorded as a member of high caste, they passed through at least four distinct social identities from one census to another i.e. from Koch to Rajbanshi (1872 A.D.) ,from Rajbanshi to *Bratya/ Bhanga Kshatriya*(1891), from *Bratya/ Bhanga Kshatriya* to *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* (1901,1911,1921 A.D.) and from *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* to only *Kshatriya*. These occasional distinctions of the Rajbanshis had been raised their identity question to the present generation of the community. Such type of identity question corresponds to the identity crisis when they searched reservation about being as 'depressed classes'.

IV

During the beginning of the 20th century the anti- imperialist agitation have been grown up that caused headache of the Colonial Imperial Government. The Colonial Government took some policy of protective discrimination through which sought to grant special favour in matters of education, employment and constitutional rights, to the Muslim first and then to the depressed classes.²¹ The First direct colonial intervention to develop a separate identity of the "Depressed Classes" had come on the eve of the census operation of 1911, while the commissioner circulated an instruction to enumerate them separately from the other Hindus castes.

Since the late nineteenth century, the colonial officials were thinking of preparing a list of 'depressed classes' to provide special protection from the government. Meanwhile, the Calcutta University Commission prepared a list of 21 castes, which required such special assistance and called these the 'depressed classes'. The Rajbanshi leaders argued that as they were educationally and economically backward, they should be included in this list. However, many other local associations such as *The Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha*, *The Bangiya Brahman Sabha*, *The Indian Association* etc. strongly opposed the inclusion of the Rajbanshis in the list of 'Depressed classes' because of their claimed higher ritual *Kshatriya* status in the *Varna* order.²² Only *The Bengal Depressed Classes Association* (1932) was favour to include the Rajbanshis in the list of 'Depressed Classes'.²³ Regarding this debate on the inclusion of the Rajbanshi in the list of 'Depressed Classes', Panchanan Barma argued that some castes including the Rajbanshis were needed special protection from the Government in order to make

themselves equal with the advanced classes. However, he suggested the term "Depressed Classes" bore social stigma and it smacked of social inferiority and in place of "Depressed Classes" the term, "Backward Classes" could be used. He also suggested that education could be made the main criterion for ascertaining backwardness.²⁴ In this connection, it is to be mentioned here that under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, the *Kshatriya Samiti* appealed to the British Raj to nominate them to the local bodies and to extend preferential treatment to them in the matters of education and employment. In a personal note to the government, Sri Panchanan Barma pleaded for "special electorate" to protect the political right of the Rajbanshis.²⁵

In 1932 A.D., Lord Lothian made an enquiry into the special electorate right of the Indian citizens and prepared a list of "Depressed Classes" of 118 castes, including some educationally and economically backward castes to avoid any anomaly over such inclusion of castes in the "Depressed Classes" category in order to granting them special electoral privileges. The Lothian Committee also recommended that "Untouchables" must be the main criterion for ascertaining the social backwardness of any caste and who is to be listed as a member of "Depressed Classes".²⁶ However, *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* protested against such recommendation and reiterated its earlier decision not to enlist them in the category.²⁷

In 1933 A.D. the Government of India by a resolution, instead of "Depressed Classes" the term, 'Scheduled Caste' was used. By this resolution, it is said that rights of temple entry, untouchables etc. were to be taken into consideration along with other factors such as educational, economic, and political position of the castes for inclusion in

the special list.²⁸ Finally, in 1935 A.D., the Bengal Reforms Office published the final list of Scheduled Castes for Bengal and the Rajbanshis were included in it.²⁹ The question of inclusion in the list of 'Scheduled Castes' also raised a debate within the Rajbanshi community itself. There were a strong feeling among certain section of the Rajbanshis, that this would be inconstant with their *Kshatriya* status and lower their social dignity.³⁰ But Panchanan was successful to establish his argument infavour of inclusion of the Rajbanshis in the list of 'Scheduled Castes' in special meeting of the *Kshatriya Samiti* in order to take the advantages of reservation in politics, education, and administration. He also argued that without protection from the Government the Backward classes could not improve its social position merely by capitalizing on caste pride.³¹ However, by this inclusion, the Rajbanshis gained special concessions, in reservation, in politics, employment, education, and administration that have been discussed in detail in the Chapter No. VI.

Bidyut Chakraborty in his (ed) book *Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in Twentieth Century*, observes that if identity politics is about expressing one's agency and creating new forms of collective agency, then the Rajbanshis did that by playing on the politics of difference and of identity at the same time. Their caste movement was a negotiation of difference to register an altered from the projected view about themselves as Koches.³² But in virtue of that alteration, what it aspired to be identity with high-ups in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Since caste ranking is necessarily, 'interactional' rather than purely "attributional", the Rajbanshis required a long process of social and discursive interaction in this score. However, other counter forces queered the pitch for them, so much that it was engulf in it, providing thereby the presence of a more compelling imperative in them to act as

community ethnicity rather than a caste. They enlist themselves as 'Scheduled Caste' and enjoying the movement. Professor Girindra Narayan Ray in this respect says, "This inevitable contradiction as much as contemporary politics soon eroded the edge and credibility of the *Kshatriya* movement. No wonder their history happened to be more of a fulfillment as 'Scheduled Caste' rather than as *Kshatriya*. It was from this contradiction and failure of resolution that the postcolonial phase of their identity movement got its different start as separate state regional autonomy etc. by some section of Rajbanshis in North Eastern part of India.³³

Regarding the social identity question, the situation of the Rajbanshis in Assam was however, somewhat different. While the Rajbanshis of West Bengal secured some special protection to recognize as a 'Scheduled Caste', the Koch Rajbanshis in undivided Assam could not find any place in the list of 'Scheduled Caste'. How and why the administrators could mete out differential treatment to the same ethnic category distributed between two political unites remains a historical and sociological mystery.³⁴ The Koch-Rajbanshis of undivided Assam moved to the Backward Class Commission headed by Kaka Saheb Kalekar on whose recommendation they were declared as OBC in 1953. They were further categorized into two segments. The Koch- Rajbanshis of undivided Goalpara district were categorized as MOBC while the rest of Assam remained OBC. As observed by P.S. Dutta, the same ethnic group thus achieved three different statuses for official purpose- i.e. SC in West Bengal, MOBC in Goalpara and OBC in the other districts of undivided Assam.³⁵ The fact of the identity question of the Rajbanshis is not over here. The Rajbanshis of Meghalaya and Tripura are regarded as Scheduled Tribes, while in Bihar they are treated as OBC under the same

constitutional protection for political, social, educational, and economical uplift being given to the Rajbanshis in Meghalay, Tripura, and West Bengal but not in Assam and Bihar. On the other hand, the Rajbanshis of Nepal and Bangladesh are treated as general castes. This is one of the prime factors of identity crisis of the Rajbanshis that they are considered in different status in different states within the same Indian constitution and abroad also.

Under this circumstances, the international forum of the Koch- Rajbanshi has been initiated a new move in demand of tribal status. The forum has produced the following arguments behind its demand-i) the Koch –Rajbanshi are originally belong to Indo- Mongoloid tribal stock, ii) the Koch- Rajbanshis of Assam and Bengal cannot have two separate officially ascribed status. Such a differential treatment leads to utter confusion in their national identity and affects social intercourse between the Rajbanshis living in two adjoining states. Therefore, no such differential in fixing statutory identity to the people belong to the same ethnic stock would be allowed ,and iii) due to their ambiguous social position in the caste hierarchy and officially astrictive backward groups, the Koch- Rajbanshis suffer from various discriminations in socio-economic and political spheres. Therefore, a uniform ethnic identity and official status may help them in mitigating many problems from which their community men have been presently suffering.³⁶

The Koch- Rajbanshis of Assam has been demanding since 1967 to include themselves as Scheduled Tribes. To fulfill the issue they had submitted numerous memorandums, deputations to the Union Government and State Government but in vain.³⁷ However, they did not give up hope to fulfill their demand. The demand for conferring

Scheduled Tribes status to the Koch-Rajbanshi has been mooted in an international conference of the community concerned held at Bhadrapur in Eastern Nepal during 9-11 March 1996.³⁸ To make fruitful the conference, delegates from Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Burma, Assam, Bihar, and North Bengal participated in it. Sri Purna Narayan Singh, a former M.P. from India and the then sitting president of Koch-Rajbanshi International Committee presided over the conference. In this conference one of the main resolution was that for the overall uplift of the underprivileged Koch-Rajbanshis, they need to be immediately recognized as a 'Scheduled Tribes' in India, and also in the neighbouring states where they inhabit in large number. The conference also urged upon the cultural integration of the Koch-Rajbanshi with the main stream of society.³⁹ Thus the matter of recognition of the Koch-Rajbanshis as Scheduled Tribes has become an important ethno-political issue to the Rajbanshis.

The economic condition of the Rajbanshis in Assam is, however, very much deplorable. Under the chairmanship of Sree Amar Ray Pradhan the then Member of the Parliament a Committee was appointed by the Indian Government to submit their tribal status of the Assamese Rajbanshis. The committee had submitted the report to the Parliament. The Chairman of the abovementioned committee remarks that the condition of the Assamese Rajbanshis is really like the tribal people. This remark and observation of Amar Ray Pradhan revealed the suffering of the Rajbanshi of Assam. They have lost their language, their livelihood, their territory.⁴⁰ They are in the disillusioned stage. However, the report of that committee has not published yet. In addition to this, they have acted as the main muscle power during the anti- foreigner agitation of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). Now they are facing

two- pronged threat of Assamese Caste Hindu Chauvinism and the Bodo Military. The demand of the Assamese Rajbanshis for 'Scheduled Tribes' status is also a lost case. This is actually a last straw on the camels back. They dreamt that if they got the 'Scheduled Tribes' status they would be emerged as the largest community in Assam. This will help them to control the politics of the Bodo Autonomous Council .⁴¹ But their long cherished dream has been shattered down.

The different tribal organizations in Assam including the Bodos resisted against the inclusion of the Koch- Rajbanshis in the list of Scheduled Tribes. *Assam Tribal Sangha* and *Tribal Students Federation* launched a resistance movement not to include the Koch Rajbanshi in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Assam. However, the Assam Institute of Research for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes recommends its reports in twice to the court in 1992 and 1994 while in the first report the Koch Rajbanshi did not able to fill up of its criterion for Scheduled Tribes. Based on the contradictory report of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Institute, the *Tribal Students' Federation* including the Bodos appealed to the court not to include the Koch Rajbanshi in the list of Scheduled Tribes.⁴² However, the Bodos has succeeded to sign Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam. Perhaps, it is the expectation of the Koch Rajbanshis that after establishment of BTC they would be a larger in number than the former with the support of other backward caste and would be gain in political goal. That is why politically conscious Bodo leaders do not agree to accept the demand of Koch Rajbanshis to enlist Scheduled Tribes. Both the Central and the State Government do not intent to interfere this issue immediately to create a new crisis.⁴³ In this situation, the inclusion of the Koch Rajbanshis in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Assam is still pending yet.

From the above discussion, it is cleared to all that in the beginning of the twentieth century, the Rajbanshis of North -Eastern Bengal socially dissociated them from the Koch tribal stock. Through the process of *sanskritization*, they embraced Hinduism and declared themselves as pure *kshatriyas* by origin. However, at the last phase of the twentieth century some sections of their descendents are contesting that position by retracing their old ethnic affinity with the Koches. In this way, the contrary to their earlier cherished *kshatriya* status, they are now aspired Scheduled Caste status and some of them seeking Scheduled Tribes status; a phenomenon deserved serious attention from both the sociologists and historians alike.

The objective of the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement was the promotion of the Rajbanshi from a lower to a higher berth in the *varna* order and greater respectability in terms of the given conditions of the caste system in the region. The Rajbanshi finally secured their aim in officially in 1931 census. On the other hand, they took the advantage of “Protective discrimination” of policy of the British Government in favour of certain castes and communities, which was started at the beginning of twentieth century and firmly established by 1937.⁴⁴ So, in adjunct to *sanskritize* their life ways, the leaders of *Kshatriya Samiti* also realized that a new prestige system had emerged in which education white-collar jobs, were important secular ingredients for social ranking and mobility. Therefore, they looked at the government for official patronage and in extending them preferential treatment in matters of education, employment, and legislators. They thus caught in between ritual rank aspirations via *kshatriyaization* at one point and the prospect of material

achievement via “Protective Discrimination” on the other. In their pattern of choice between two available alternative models of social mobility, the *Kshatriya Samiti* leaders accepted for the latter.⁴⁵ On this issue, the *kshatriya* movement became more faction- ridden. The social movement of the Rajbanshis that initially began for achieving superior status in the caste hierarchy was thus ultimately reduced to a mere politics for reservation. In due course of time, that led to certain confusion, contradiction and change in social identity of the Rajbanshis.

The move of the Koch- Rajbanshi in demand of tribal status is altogether a new phenomenon. It is perhaps another manifestation of seeking comfortable accommodation in the institutional framework of protective discrimination. Mukhopadhyaya here raise pertinent question- “Does it imply that the Rajbanshis who had eagerly aspired after an upward social mobility in the early part of this century, their successors later in the bandwagon of backward tribal groups for demanding special treatment by the government taking up a course of downward mobility?”⁴⁶

Thus, the Rajbanshi leaders created many tensions through the *kshatrization* movement while they understand there was status anxiety without much benefit in concrete terms. Afterward their pitiable economic condition and craze for power and status led to process of downward mobility through aspiration for reservation benefits. They had identified the backward socio-economic status, which is the prime criterion for reservation, is contrary to the realization of *kshatriyaization*. In respect of economic backwardness, though the demand of reservation of the Rajbanshis is acceptable, at the same time recognition as Kshatriya status in the *varna* hierarchization perhaps appeared to them antithetical to each other. The consecutive changes in social identity of

the Rajbanshis led them to issue a problem of identity crisis in the twenty first century.

VI

The year 1874 is the watershed in the history of North – Eastern Part of India including Northern Part of undivided Bengal. Before, 1874, Rangpur, Goalpara and Princely State of Cooch Behar were known as the lands of the Rajbanshis. Since 1874, reorganization division and partition whatever, have taken place in each time the Rajbanshis community has been marginalized sometime linguistically, sometimes in number of population and some times politically and culturally.

The province of Assam was created in 1874 with a view to relieving the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal of a part of his huge responsibility. The head of the newly created province was given the title of Chief Commissioner. It is true that the size of the province of Bengal was big-naturally; the creation of a new province was necessary. However, the composition of the province has raised certain questions. The question was not raised at the time of the formation of province, even in the closing phase of the colonial rule, no organization or association of the Rajbanshi community raised the question. It was only after the partition and independence; some people wanted a separate state and afterwards a Kamatapur State. In due courses of time, the groups or associations have raised different types of demands.

The new province was created by five Assamese-speaking districts namely Sibsagar, Nagao, Darang, Lakshimpur, and Kamrup. These districts were geographically known as the Brahmaputra Valley. Dibrugarh of upper Assam was included with new province later on. However, the Bengali speaking Surma Valley, Sylhet district and Goalpara district were also included with this new province. In this context we are concentrating our attention on the inclusion of Goalpara formerly a part of the Bengal's Rangpur district. Since then Goalpara became a cause of disagreement between the Bengalees and the Assamese. The Surma Valley's Sylhet was Bengali speaking district is an acknowledged fact. However, the inclusion of Goalpara with Assam, there was another fact. A notion prevailed amongst the colonial administrators that the historical Kamrup kingdom consisted of Goalpara, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri (East Bank of Karotoya), parts of North Mymensing (Netrocona Sub Division), and the entire Brahmaputra Valley region. In fact, Karotoya was the boundary like between Kamrup Kingdom and Bengal. This conviction perhaps was indeed Goalpara in the new province of Assam. They finally believed that Assam was the successor of the old Kamrup Kingdom. Apart from this, since the conquest of Assam proper from the Burmese by the English East India Company, Goalpara was added to the commissioner of the conquered territory i.e. Assam proper in 1826. The interesting fact is that the contemporary Rajbanshi social leaders did not put objection to it. Had the Rajbanshi social leaders of the time protested against this decision of incorporating of Goalpara with Assam the course of history of the Rajbanshis community might have different.⁴⁷ The administrative Reorganization of Bengal and Assam in 1874 and its impact upon the Rajbanshi identity question of North Bengal and Western Assam. Unfortunately, the Rajbanshi leaders could not understand the future situation.

The Rajbanshis felt that there is nothing wrong for the inclusion of Goalpara with Assam province since the day of the Kamrup-Kamata- Cooch Kingdom they had been living here. Only during the latter phase of the Muslim rule, they had been administered from Bengal as a part of the Rangpur district. Naturally, they could not find anything it. However, there was a great difference between the Ahom rule of the Pre-British period and the Assamese administration of the post 1874 period. The western educated Assamese now wished the dream of the linguistic state since 1874. Due to the consistent demand of the western educated Assamese, Assamese was introduced as the medium of instruction in the newly created province. This was the beginning phase of Assamization in course of time and the process of Assamization has been increased. However, the Rajbanshi leaders of Goalpara district, where the 80% people in 1874 were Rajbanshis could not understand the far-reaching consequences of this nascent linguistic Chauvinism. Local historian of the post-colonial period is describing this incident a historical blunder on the part of this Rajbanshi leaders of Western Assam have never raised the question of their mother tongue i.e. Rajbanshi or Kamata language. On the other hand, they lost their two hundred years connection i.e. from 1639 to 1822 with Bengal. In 1639, the region of the present day Goalpara was incorporated with Bengal Rangpur and it was served from Rangpur in 1822. In that year, the Goalpara district was created. Prof. Amlendu Guha has rightly stated that where as in the Goalpara district of the Brahmaputra Valley the majority, according to early census figures, spoke Bengali this was because once it formed a constituent part of Bengal continuously for about two hundred years from 1639 to 1822 .⁴⁸ Historically speaking, the separation of Goalpara from Rangpur by the East India Company was a curse to the Rajbanshi community. Because,

linguistically and racially they were the single largest community of Rangpur district. Apart from this, the continuous territorial change of the Goalpara district was also harmful to the Rajbanshi community. At the time of its creation i.e. in 1822 it comprised the three police stations such as Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari. After the second Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864-65, the seven Duars known as the Eastern Duars was merged with Goalpara. It was a thinly populated tribal zone, though a vast tract linguistically, ethnically geographically it was different from Goalpara. In addition to this, Goalpara was a permanently settled area whereas the Eastern Duars was a non-permanently settled area. In this connection, the fate of the Goalpara district may be compared with her sister Jalpaiguri district which comprised the permanently settled area and the non-regulation of the Western Duars. The Western Duars area was brought under the British domination after the second Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864-65 A.D. like the Eastern Duars. The Western Duars was also a sparsely populated area and a tribal area. The composition of the two districts i.e. Goalpara and Jalpaiguri seem to be almost identical. What is interesting is that today the two districts are facing the same problem of the Rajbanshi linguistic ethnic identity question. It is a unique situation in the history of the present day ethnic linguistic turmoil of the Western Assam and Northern Bengal.

Another important thing is to be noticed that at the time of creation of Assam Province, the total Assamese speaking population was roughly 35 *lakhs* while the total Rajbanshi ethnic population was also roughly 35 *lakhs*.⁴⁹ But there was a difference in the geographical distribution of the Rajbanshi population. The Assamese population had been generally living in their own homeland. The number of Assamese people in the outside of Assam was extremely significant whereas the

Rajbanshis had been living in Goalpara and Kamrup of the Assam province the Princely State of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling Terai, Rangpur, Dinajpur of Bengal, Purnea district of Bihar, Jhapa and Morang of Nepal. The Colonial Government had created a separate province for the Assamese but not for the Rajbanshis. It is true that the Assamese did not demand a province before 1874. The Assamese had resented the introduction of the Bengali language in the schools of Assam. Therefore, the province of Assam was a creation of the British Government not for the Assamese demand. It was believed by some people that the British Government had a thought for creating a new administrative zone in the Northern part of Bengal. Finally, it was not materialized for the two reasons. Firstly, though before 1874, the Northern Zone of Bengal was the land of the Rajbanshis but the scattered distribution from Goalpara to Jhapa, had created a hurdle. Secondly, the gradual extension of the British power over the North Eastern part of India had changed the mind of the British colonial Administrators. Therefore, the thinking for the new administrative zone had been abandoned permanently.⁵⁰

In Chapter No. V, we have discussed that how the creation of Assam province heeded a deathblow to the future community consolidation as well as the linguistic uniformity of the Rajbanshis of Assam and Bengal. Gradually the Rajbanshis of Goalpara accepted the process of Assamization. The Western educated Assamese, intellectuals had extended pressure for the introduction of Assamese in the school teaching. But the Rajbanshis did not understand the far-reaching consequences of the change. Therefore, they accepted and embraced the new process of Assamization systematically. However, a problem of differentiation arises between the Rajbanshis of Goalpara and the Rajbanshis of Rangpur as the former was an integrated part of Rangpur

since 1639. During the period of State Reorganization Process, this differentiation became more acute in 1935-55. But the Rajbanshi leaders namely Upendra Nath Barman of North Bengal had fervently advocated the retention of Cooch Behar with West Bengal and Sarat Chandra Singh, the Rajbanshis leaders of Goalpara had also fervently advocated the retention of Gaolpara with Assam. Professor Ananda Gopal has rightly observed that both the leaders had forgotten the question of the community solidarity and the Rajbanshi homeland .⁵¹ Had Goalpara been not corporated with Assam in 1874, such type of situation i.e. linguistic identity crisis might not have been arisen? ⁵²

Needless to say, that the Rajbanshi community had lost their geographical homogeneity and linguistic consolidation. It is true that – since the fall of the Kamata- Cooch Kingdom the Rajbanshis had been started to lose their community identity. In the colonial period when Goalpara district was included in Assam in 1874, it really created a problem of identity for the Rajbanshis. Their identity question was further dependence during the partition of the country in 1947, Because Rangpur, the epicenter of the Rajbanshi life and culture was included in the East Pakistan (Now Bangaladesh). The loss of Rangpur was irreparable. The first blow of 1874 and the second blow of 1947 had virtually aggravated the identity crisis. Nevertheless, the partition was not an unmixed blessing. It had provided an opportunity to the Rajbanshi leaders of Western Assam and North Bengal to restore their community consolidation partially. However, before we proceed to discuss the circumstances leading to the restoration of the community consolidation, we have to revive this period to worthwhile the issue.

its second session in 1928 held at Goalpara that the five thousand delegates of the session are fervently declaring that their language is Bengali.⁵⁶

Under this circumstance' the role of the Rajbanshis was pro-Assamese. They did not assert their linguistic on racial identity. The educated young Rajbanshis, such as Sarat Chandra Sinha, Raja Ajit Narayan Deb, Purnendu Narayan Singha and others have advocated the assimilation of the Rajbanshis with the Assamese.⁵⁷ Thus the difference between the Rajbanshis of Assam and their counter part in Bengal was created on these issues. There are many other issues, which accelerated the difference between them. They have already been discussed in the Chapter No. VII.

Immediately after the independence, an excellent opportunity had come to the Rajbanshi of Assam and West Bengal for re-union. The Government of India had appointed a Commission i.e. State Re-organization Committee in 1953 to meet the deviated linguistic status .But in this historic time the Rajbanshi community of Assam and the Rajbanshi community of Bengal could fail to wherever unity amongst themselves. On the contrary, a sharp and open division was displayed. As a result, the last chance of the community consolidation of the Rajbanshi was disappeared.

Let us explain the circumstances that destroyed the chance of community consolidation. Since the inclusion of Goalpara to the province of Assam in 1874 to the partition of India in 1947, Goalpara became a cause of disagreement between the Assamese and the Bengalese. This time, in addition to Goalpara, the Princely State of Cooch Behar also

It is unfortunate that the Bengali 'Bhadralok' of neither Calcutta nor the Rajbanshis social leaders of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, and Goalpara raised any question on the inclusion of Goalpara into Assam. The same incident was happened during the partition of Bengal in 1904-1905 and the re-unification of Bengal in 1912. Therefore, the inclusion of Goalpara with Assam became a settled fact. However, the people of Goalpara were divided on its inclusion with Assam. The All Goalpara Association (an umbrella organization of the Zaminders of Goalpara) wanted merger with Bengal. In its Annual Session on 15 December 1918, the Association resolved that the district of Goalpara mainly identical in race, language, social customs, and systems of lands with Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar be placed under the same laws and administration with the district of Rangpur and Jalpaiguri.⁵³

It was also decided that the resolution be placed in the ensuing meeting of the Assam Association scheduled to be held at Goalpara towards the end of December, 1918.⁵⁴

The Assamese intelligentsias on the other hand, had a different view on this issue; they considered the district as an integral part of Assam. The intellectual like Lakshminath Bezbarua, eminent poet and son-in-law of the Tagore House of Jorasanko, Kolkata; Tarun Ram Phookan, the president of Assam Association strongly opposed against the resolution of inclusion of Goalpara with Bengal. In the Annual Session of Goalpara Association at Goalpara on 27-29 December 1918, Phookan emphatically declared, "the (Goalpara) district should never be taken away from Assam; if necessary the whole of Assam might be united with Bengal."⁵⁵ Raja Prashat Chandra Barua the president of the All Goalpara Association categorically stated in his presidential speech in

its second session in 1928 held at Goalpara that the five thousand delegates of the session are fervently declaring that their language is Bengali.⁵⁶

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became an issue of tug of war between Assam and West Bengal. Before independence, the question of Cooch Behar did not come as an area of conflict as it was a Princely State. However, after the lapse of the paramount like the other Princely States, the fate of the Princely State of Cooch Behar also became an issue of hotbed discussion, whether Cooch Behar should be merged with West Bengal or Assam or holds the status of union territory. When it was decided that Cooch should be merged the neighboring province, their tug of war was started between West Bengal and Assam. The Assamese, intellectuals, the political parties have demanded the merger of Cooch Behar with Assam. The Bengali intellectuals, the political parties, on the other hand, demanded the inclusion of Goalpara with West Bengal.⁵⁸

It was the most critical time to the Rajbanshi community. It was an acknowledged fact that both Cooch Behar and Goalpara was predominantly a Rajbanshi region. Naturally, their savings and reactions were more important than to the Assamese and the Bengalese. Now, we are coming to discuss the role of the Rajbanshi leaders of Assam and Bengal during the most critical hours of that period to the Rajbanshi community.

The Rajbanshis of Goalpara wanted to stay in Assam but not to be a part of West Bengal. They never liked to be a part of West Bengal. Sree Sarat Chandra Singha, a young Rajbanshi political leader of Chapar in Goalpara district had organized a movement against the inclusion of Goalpara with West Bengal. When the members of the State Reorganization Commission went Assam to gauge the mind of the local people, the majority of Goalpara district, Rajbanshis under the leadership of Sarat Chandra Singha and the Goalpara immigrant Muslim under the

leadership of Muhammad Qamaruddin has organized a mass movement against the inclusion of Goalpara with West Bengal.⁵⁹ Besides, Sarat Chandra Singha, Kabir Ray Prodhan, Atul Koch, Purnendu Narayan Sinha, Madhab Rajbanshi, Shibendra Nath Koch have participated in this movement. They also demanded that Cooch Behar should be merged with Assam .Their slogan was that Assam should not be divided –“*Asamer Angachhed Ibno Bare –Amar Bhasa Asamiya*”⁶⁰

The Second group mostly consisted by the Bengali Hindus demanded the merger of Goalpara with West Bengal. Ramani Kanti Basu, a dweller of Dhubri was the leader of the group.⁶¹

The third group under the leadership of Santosh Barma of Gouripur has submitted a memorandum to the SRC for the creation of Kamatapur State.⁶² For the first time we found the demand of the Kamatapur state and it came from Assam. In the proposed Kamatapur State, they have included Goalpara of Assam and Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur of West Bengal. It was supported by Raja Ajit Narayan Deb, Raja of Sidli, Prakitesh Chandra Barma (Lalji) of Gauripur Raj family etc.⁶³

After the accession of Cooch Behar with the Indian unions, a section of the Rajbanshi of Cooch Behar wanted the inclusion of Cooch Behar with Assam. On the other hand a section of the Rajbanshis with Muslims wanted to join with Pakistan .(Khan Choudhury Amanatullah , the Revenue Minister of Cooch Behar State, Hakim Ahmed Hussain, SDO Mathabhanga Subdivision).⁶⁴ Another section of the Rajbanshi wanted to remain independent of the union of India (Satish Chandra Singh, the education Minister of Cooch Behar State).⁶⁵ But the most

respected Rajbanshi political personality and member of Loksabha, Shree Upendra Nath Barman of Jalpaiguri and Shree Umesh Chandra Mandal a Gandhian Rajbanshi pleader of Dinhata, Cooch Behar have firmly supported the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. By showing and presenting various arguments Upendra Nath Barman who have spearheaded a crusade against Assam over Cooch Behar. It was Upendra Nath Barman's demand, which greatly strengthened the claim of West Bengal. They have criticized Upendra Nath Barman for his opinion on Cooch Bihar. Even many of the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar believed that Upendra Nath Barman had made mistake. The Assamese Rajbanshi writers are also critical on the Cooch Behar issue. Ambika Charan Sarkar a Rajbanshi of Assam unit work that due to weak leadership of Assamese people the intelligent Bengali people with the help of the central Government the old centre of the Kamrup Kingdom- the Ratnapith region was included with West Bengal .⁶⁶ Thus, the opportunity of re-unification of Goalpara with West Bengal was destroyed. If Goalpara came back in West Bengal in 1916, the course of the history of the history of Northern Bengal might have been different.⁶⁷ In support of this connection, we are presenting here just one point that if Goalpara had reunited with West Bengal, the Rajbanshis became the half of the population of North Bengal despite the influx of the refugees from the East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). An excellent opportunity of re-unification of the Rajbanshi community was lost due to the lack of farsightedness of Sarat Chandra Singha and others. Had Sarat Cahndra Singha been showed his commitment to community solidarity the course of the history of the Rajbanshi in the post SRC period might have been very different? It was the most turning points in the history of the Rajbanshi community of North Bengal and North East India in the Post Colonial phase.

However, some of the Rajbanshi leaders have secured important post of the state such as the post of Chief Minister (Sarat Chandra Singha 1974-1975 as a member of the Indian National Congress Party. He was the staunchest champion of the introduction of Assamese language every sphere of his life. He never exposed the cause of the Rajbanshi language of Rajbanshi identity at any stage of his political career. The second Rajbanshi political heavy weight was Golok Rajbanshi, who became the president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. Kabir Ray Pradhan and Bhumidhar Barman hold important portfolio in the cabinet of Hiteshwar Shakia Government. However, all these they got at the cost of the Rajbanshi formerly believed in the policy of assimilation and accommodation, not separation. It is true that the successive Assam Government has been trying to woo the sentiments of the Rajbanshi by declaring the birth day of Chila Ray, the legendary military general as a state holiday, and they founded the Second Bridge on Brahmaputra as Chila Rai Setu etc.

VII

It is an interesting and serious fact to be mentioned here that in the sphere of language, there is no universal uniformity among the Rajbanshis of the North Eastern Part of India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The Rajbanshis of North Bengal are demanding recognition for their language as distinctive form is called Rajbanshi/ *Kamatapuri* language, which separate from Bengali. In order to crystallize their demand a section of Rajbanshi intellectual of Northern Bengal organized a good number of socio-political and cultural movements throughout North Bengal that has been discussed in the Chapter No. V. However, in Assam

there is no utterance for their language identity. It is interesting to be noted here that the Rajbanshis of different region have been using different scripts to accommodate themselves to their region viz, in Assam the Rajbanshis use Assamese scripts, in West Bengal they use Bengali scripts while in Nepal the Rajbanshis use “Devanagari” Scripts and in Bihar they use Hindi scripts. In Bangladesh, there is no demand for Rajbanshi language, similarly in Nepal, Meghalaya, Bihar there is no separate linguistic identity question. This differentiation made the linguistic issue to be very complicated one and it is very tuff to be solved. This controversial linguistic issue accelerated the Rajbanshi identity crisis into a new phase while a section of Rajbanshi people namely KPP has made some radical departures in their objective.⁶⁸ Professor Girindra Narayan Ray observes, “It is not caste and religion determining the communitarian politics any longer. It is now culture and language that shaped the politic of difference from the dominant Bengali community as a Hindu *kshatriya* caste association to adopt another term.”⁶⁹ This section of the Rajbanshi have popularized the term “Kamata” having charged it with historical and cultural connotations. This claim of the KPP indicates the area the Kamata and the latter kings had ruled for centuries and where the indigenous people spoke the same language and shared the same culture. Ray Sahib Panchanan Barma, the most dominant socio- political leader popularly known as the father of the *kshatriya movement* called this language “Kamata Behari”. Purnendu Mohan Shanobis, a veteran writer in Rangpur Sahitya Parishad also followed him. Very recently Dharma Narayan Barma a retired Headmaster in his work “*A Step of Kamata Behari Language*” called it as “Kamata-Behari”.⁷⁰ This denomination emphasizes the determination of cultural identity not caste identity in terms of a region, language and culture. It is not the Rajbanshis alone but the local Muslims who were Rajbanshis, converted into Islam

as much as a number of other sections that subscribe to this language and culture. It is on the ground that these people to have formed a “Nationality”, and in terms of the principles of linguistic organization of state claim a different state. The name is suggested for the state as “Kamatapur” and the language as “Kamatapuri”.⁷¹ Professor Girindra Narayan Ray has observed rightly that the crux of the claim is contingent on challenging the dominant discourse, that subsumes the ‘Kamatapuri’ language into Bengali as one of its dialects and the ‘Kamatapuri’ people to be Bengali by acculturation and assimilation.⁷²

Indeed, that was once the Rajbanshi leaders through *Kshatriyahood* had aspired to merging into the *varna* Hindu hierarchy as Bengali. The latter leaders observed that this did not happen although that meant abolition of the true identity of the community. The upper caste Bengali Hindu society had never accepted them as “caste at all, although the official voice at times called them Bengali political expediency”. This issue led to vigorous attempt on the part of the ‘Kamatapuri’ leaders as well as the intellectuals of the community to establish their identity in terms of a politics of cultural difference that took pains to prove that their language was a different language from Bengali, not a distortion of it. Nor are their culture, food, habit, dress, and religious rituals in any way inferior to those of the Hindu Bengali. It take places them a shape of difference of the earlier called themselves ‘bratya’ or ‘fallen’ in terms of religious practices, rituals and other habits, and brought that they needed to pass through *shuddhi* or ritual purification in order to be incorporated into the *varna* fold. So, it is needed now for the new politics to turn the tide back from acculturation. However, in practice it propped to be difficult in a fast changing modern society where education, employment, and development are being carried on form the culturally dominant

position. That is why the educated middle classes of the Rajbanshis community were long unconvinced and still aloof from the political activities of the KKP, as much because of the long acculturation as because of the state terrorism unleashed on them from time to time.⁷³

Under this circumstance, a common question has been raised- What is the real identity of the Rajbanshis of North Eastern India? From the very beginning of the census operation, the Rajbanshis tried to establish their separation the Rajbanshis tried to establish their separate distinction from the Koches. Finally, they were recognized as '*Kshatriya*' in the official record of 1921 census. In this connection, from 1891 to 1923 the Rajbanshis social leaders vigorously carry on their social movement for social hierarchy status in *varna* fold system and several memorandums submitted to the different Government officials to establish their claim as "*Rajbanshi Kshatriya*". They neither identified themselves with the Koches as the same caste nor they included with the *Namasudras*; they were hundred percent sure about their identity as '*Kshatriyas*' and that is why they could able to organize such a successful social movement in favour of their social hierarchical status.⁷⁴

However, during the decade of eighty in the twentieth century a section of Rajbanshi community is trying to establish themselves as '*Kamatapuri*' instead of "*Rajbanshis*" and launched political movement on the basis of their language is so called "*Kamatapuri*" through North Bengal (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, plains of Darjeeling district, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda) including lower Assam with the collaboration of All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AKRSU) of Assam. Based on their '*Kamatapuri*' language, the concerned section of the Rajbanshi demanded

Ray has observed that the politics of autonomy in a democratic and federal polity contains a necessary content of resistance for the efficacy of polity itself, and this is more so when it comes to the question of a region and a community in the face of cultural extinction.⁷⁵ Needless to say, after the partition of India the excessive pressure of immigration into the Northern Bengal created so many problems regarding social, economic, habitation, over population etc. to the local people. Under these pressures, the culture of once dominated indigenous people in the North Eastern part of India is going to be extinction directly or indirectly. The KPP and the other socio-political organization of the Rajbanshis community have tried in their limited way to put up this resistance. The organizations have been successful to rouse the ethnic emotions of the cultural community even in the face of a left progressive challenge in West Bengal. The KPP has especially successful to evolve the powerful discourse of the "Kamatapuri Nationality" based on a common culture, language, and region. However, the future of the movement both cultural and political does not make one very optimistic due to the lack of foresighted leadership.

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CHAPTER -IX

Conclusion

CHAPTER- IX

CONCLUSION

The present study attempts to explore socio- economic status and ethnological identity of the Rajbanshi people of Northeastern part of India, Nepal and Bangladesh. India may be called a land merely infinite ethnic diversity. Ethnicity as a sociological concept is based on the notion that certain ethnic groups are “rooted in space”.¹ Mitchell,² Epstein,³ Gluckman⁴ and Nair⁵ stated that culture is the basis of ethnicity on which ethnic groups are formed by assimilating their cultures of origin within a new social context. Francis⁶ and Gordon⁷ stated that ethnicity provides a sense of peoplehood or we-feeling shared by members of a group. Nair⁸ also stated that the four major premises on which ethnicity operate in Indian castes, languages, region of origin and religion. On the other hand, Desai⁹ says, “Ethnicity appears to have tremendous scope for perseverance for group mobilization without necessarily passing through historical phases.” Paul R. Brass in his work *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* says, “There are three ways of defining ethnic groups in terms of objective attributes, with reference to subjective feelings and in relation to behaviour.”¹⁰ An objective definition assumes that though no specific attribute is invariably associated with all ethnic categories, there must be some distinguishing cultural feature that clearly separates one group of people from another, whether that feature or features be language, territory, religion, colour, diet, dress or any of them. The problem with objective definitions is that it is usually extremely difficult to determine the boundaries of ethnic categories in this way. The

difficulty with subjective definition is that they make it impossible to answer the basic question of how a group of people arrives at subjective self-consciousness in the first place. Behavioural definitions are really a form of objective definition since they assume that there are specific concrete ways in which ethnic groups behave or do not behave, particularly in relation to an interaction with other groups.¹¹

Ethnicity is the sense of ethnic identity, which has been defined by De Vos as consisting of the “subjective symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people ...of any aspect of culture in order to differentiate themselves from other groups.”¹² This definition can be used for the analytic purposes required here by altering the last phrase to use in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups. An ethnic group that uses cultural symbols in this way is a subjectively self-conscious community that establishes its criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the group. At this point, matters of descent, birth and a sense of kinship may become important to ethnic group members, for the methods of inclusion and exclusion into the group often involve the explicit or tacit adaptation of rules of endogamy and exogamy.¹³ Ethnic identity is the root from where ethnicity arises, which manifests in both intra and inter ethnic interactions. This identity aspirations and sense of identity have offered a new dimension to the assertiveness of the ethnic groups.¹⁴ Ethnic identity plays a crucial role bringing about social mobility of a community on which interaction takes place. It also provides common norms on which interaction takes place. It provides a sense of solidarity. These in turn, lead to upward mobility in stratified society.¹⁵

In this regard, it may be stress that social mobility is the movement of an individual or groups, from one social position to another. It is a change in social object or value, by human activity. It is a change in conditions, in ones education, occupation, incomes, and economic change in conditions, prestige, status, power and wealth. It changes persons over all social position. Rao¹⁶ in his Foreward to Chandrashekhar Bhat's Study "*Ethnicity and Mobility*" says, "Ethnic identity is a significant unit of operation in educational, economic, and political field" which leads to social mobility of the community. Ethnic communities, which are locally segregated, develop their own ethnic associations and ethnic organizations, which provides for upward mobility. Ethnic associations play a pivotal role in the preservation of ethnic identity by simulating their culture and social mobility by promoting educational and occupational facilities and financial help to members of the community. They look after overall development and progress of the community. Yogendra Singh has observed, "Earlier aspiration for vertical mobility or '*sanskritization*' among lower castes, has now been replaced by new feeling of self-identity within ones own caste or increased horizontal solidarity. Caste associations are an indirect reflection of these new trends".¹⁷ While, Kumaran observed that ethnic associations have given a new life to the depressed classes by strengthening their group solidarity and identity. They stir for social upliftment and development of their community through educational progress, eradication of superstitions and blind faith, and inculcating and developing spiritualism among the community members. These ethnic associations fight for the democratic rights and demands, through collective members.¹⁸ Thus, the ethnic identity plays an important role in acquiring political power for upward mobility. Ethnicity, therefore, is an alternative form of social organization and identification to class ,but

it is a contingent and chargeable status that like class, may or may not be articulated in particular contexts or at particular times. The socio-political movement of the Rajbanshi people reflects on their separate “ethnic-cum- caste identity” drive which was started in the last phase of nineteenth century formed a distinctive features in the historical perspective.

Historical sources adequately bring out the fact of social mobility among the autochthones in different forms including the emergence of new castes in the social claim of North-Eastern Bengal and parts of Assam. The Rajbanshis appellation and the claim of *kshatriya* status goes back to the early historical period.¹⁹ The colonial administration-ethnographers like Gait, Hutton, Dalton, Risley and Thompson were unanimously support that a section of Koch of Northern Bengal began to call themselves as ‘Rajbanshi’ from the early 19th century. But there was also a belief among others that all the Rajbanshis were not Koch. Some of them were Dravidian and not Mongoloid like the Koches.

Regarding ethnic affinities, Buchanan Hamilton was in opinion that all the Koches are sprung from the same stock, and that most of the Rajbanshis are Koches; but may of the Rajbanshis belong to the different tribes, who have abandoned their impure practices and admitted to communion.²⁰ Hunter viewed the people commonly known as Koch, Rajbanshi and Pali are very mixed race.²¹ A.K. Ray in his article *Some Notes on the Kshatriya Movement in North Bengal* noted that when the Mongoloid Koches rose to power in the West of Assam, and the north of Bengal they gradually fell under the influence of Hinduism and began to assume the name Rajbanshi which was already

the appellation of the great bulk of the admittedly Hindu population in their neighbourhood. Hodgson takes down the physiognomy of the Koches as verily similar to the physical traits of the Mongoloid and thus regard them as Mongoloid.²² He also says, "Hajo's grandson Viswa Singh became Hindu, renounced the name Koch and adopted 'Rajbanshi'". Bravery calls it as a Rajbanshi and Polia are the same ethnic group of people. This ethnic group is not Aryan but it originates from kin of Dravidian- Bhutanese family, says Dalton. However, O' Donnell says, "another interesting tribe is the Rajbanshi or Koch of North-Eastern Bengal, the localization of whose racial position has long been a subject of dispute. They are however, only the third wave of Mongoloid who have advanced through the eastern passes in the first being the Chandal, the second the Koch and the last the Ahom."²³ It assumes that this ethnic group of people's blood is a mixture of Dravidian-Austro- Mongolian impacts to be black or copperier. This group of people, have, small eyes, straight hair- broad jaw. There are yellow and white colour people among the Rajbanshis. Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal has dealt this issue in his work *The Rajbanshis of North Bengal* in detail. Thus most of the colonial administrator and ethnographer and some of Indian scholars tried to establish that the Koches and the Rajbanshis are the same racial group.

On the other hand, the Indian scholars like Maniram Kavyabhusan, Harikishore Adhikary, Manbholā Ray, Upendra Nath Barman, S.K.Chatterjee and others tried to refer that the Rajbanshis were different from the Koches and the formers were superior than the later. The Rajbanshis were the indigenous Hindu inhabitant than before the reign of Viswa Singh adopted Hinduism. This view is also supported in the religious and cannon literatures like Puranas, *Tantras*,

the Ramayan, the Mahabharata etc. In Chapter No. III it has been discussed in details. On the basis of selected anthropometric observations, Atul Sur comes to the conclusion that in the Jalpaiguri, there was considerable admixture of the Rajbanshi with the Mongoloid blood; where as in West Dinajpur, the *Desi* Rajbanshi had intermingling with the Dravidian race.²⁴ However, the ethnic affinity of the Rajbanshi with the Koch is still a matter of mystery. In addition, on the identity question, several controversial statements have been noted²⁵ that ultimately instead of simplifying the problem, have made the issue more complicated and sensitive. This issue became more complicated when the Rajbanshi claimed ethnic-cum-caste identity and differentiate themselves from the Koches.

Since the late nineteenth century, the institution of Decennial Census had been introduced in colonial India, came as an opportunity to the Rajbanshis for pressing and perhaps obtaining some recognition of the social claim to be enumerated in the census as *kshatriya* otherwise denied by persons of castes higher than their own. They looked at the census as a new government sponsored channel of social mobility. Not only the Rajbanshi, had the existing fragmented society become much more consolidated as most of the caste groups were trying to rally their members around the cultural symbol of caste identity.²⁶ In Bengal, Shekhar Bandopadhyaya has shown that how caste was politicized and used by the Government for the sake of imperial rule in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.²⁷ Similarly for Madras Presidency, David Washbrook has argues that by the second decade of the twentieth century the British government had ensured that “the administration continued to run along caste channel”.²⁸ This had become a general phenomenon all over India around this

time.²⁹ It is to be remembered that caste formed a very important item in the census operation in British India. A substantial portion of the census reports from 1872 to 1931 was devoted to workout the details of caste ranking and examining the claims of the different castes for higher ranks or caste respectable positions. So census was used by caste groups as an instrument to impure their position in the social hierarchy by assuming new names or titles and advancing claims to a position than that usually assigned to them in the social scale.

The endeavour of the Rajbanshi to be placed higher up in order of precedence and be recognized as *kshatriya* continued from 1872 A.D. to 1931 A.D. census assuming new names viz., from *Koch* to *Rajbanshi* (1872), from *Rajbanshi* to *Bratya / Bhangra Kshatriya* (1891), from *Bratya Kshatriya* to *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* (1911 and 1921) and from *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* to only *Kshatriya* (1931). The Rajbanshi presumed that if they could succeed in getting themselves recorded as *Kshatriya* in the census, an official document of the Government no one would indeed be able to dispute their rank in the caste hierarchy. Further to confirmed their Kshatriya identity, there were serious efforts on the part of the Rajbanshi leaders to secure the opinion of Brahmin *Pandits* of Nabadwip and Benares and other *shastric* sanctions from them to validate that claim.³⁰ They also wanted to get it legitimized by the priests and genealogists. Mythology and traditions were also frequently cited in support of their claim to be recognized as descendents of *kshatriya varna*. Attempts were being made to recognize *kshatriyahood* as by the Rajbanshi taking the materials from folk tales, folk songs, legends, proverbs etc. For some kind of institutional support to their endeavour to get recognized as Kshatriya and also for mass mobilization, they also founded *Kshatriya Samiti* in 1910 at Rangpur. It

was Panchanan Barma under whose leadership the *Kshatriya Samiti* not only put forward claim to higher social status but also urged their members to abandon many of the practices considered degrading by the upper castes have been discussed in the Chapter No. VI.

Historical accounts show that in the context of changing social, economic and political conditions under colonial rule, the Rajbanshis of North –Eastern Bengal strove for '*kshatriyahood*'.³¹ Or, to put it in another way, behind the claim of the Rajbanshi for *kshatriya* status there were many intricate underlying reasons. It was not a sudden demand, but obviously a manifestation of reaction to changing social situation in Northern Bengal. It was in this context, we have to see growth of Rajbanshi caste movement, which grew out of a protest against upper caste domination and represented an urge to change their existing degraded social position. The social system with which Rajbanshis were associated faced a challenge with advent of consistent immigration of caste Hindu from other parts of the country. According to A.K.Ray, with the influx of large number of caste Hindu immigrants who started during the Muslim rule of Bengal reached the peak during the British advent and with modern education, *Zamindari* and new economic system introduced by the British, the pattern of the Hindu society in North Bengal completely changed.³² Following such transformation in social milieu caste distinctions in a nebulous form began even in the autochthonous society. The Rajbanshis entered into a phase of social humiliation and tension when the Hindu migrants with strong caste identity started to interact with them with a sense of caste superiority. Many of them began to lookdown upon the Rajbanshi as an inferior caste and declined to establish any commensally and other social relations with them. There were also instances when the members

of Rajbanshi community suffered from humiliating ill treatment and hatred from upper castes and others. (See the Chapter No. VI in detail). It was under this social degradation, the Rajbanshi leader Panchanan Barma sacrificed his life for the social recognition of *kshatriya* status in social hierarchy system. In the adoption of ritual symbols of a higher *varna* status, this group saw their alleviation in the caste hierarchy. On the other hand, the problems of the backward and illiterate sections of the community were not linked to such issues. Mere claim for higher *varna* status or change in cultural practices without a change in their economic status seemed meaningless to the majority of the community. Realizing this fact, Panchanan Barma, the leader of the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement confined caste movement to the articulation of the demand for being enlisted as a Scheduled Caste so that they could enjoy special protection in education, employment and in the matters of representation in the Legislative Council and their local bodies. Throughout different process and controversial arguments, the Rajbanshis entered in the list of Scheduled Caste in 1933.³³ The framer of Indian Constitution also adopted the term Scheduled Castes coined by the British. After Independence, as per Article 341 of Indian constitution and orders of 1950 and 1956 the Rajbanshis remain as Scheduled Caste in West Bengal. This inclusion no doubt helped the community in getting special concessions in education, employment and in the matters representation in the legislative council and the other local bodies. But the inconsistency between their claim of social rank and the special privileges achieved as a member of the Scheduled Caste category had to put an identity crisis to the community. Some controversies were there within and without the Rajbanshi society in accepting the new Scheduled Caste status. However, the Rajbanshi leaders could managed to overcome this controversies arguing that the

category of 'Scheduled' was not related with ritual and social-hierarchical status of a caste and that the category Scheduled Caste just referred to certain caste included in a scheduled for economic and electoral purpose, hence there was no ground for having any misgiving.³⁴ Thus acquiring *kshatriya* status in one hand, enter in the list of Scheduled Caste on the other put the community to an identity question. In this respect, the social movement of the Rajbanshi community differs from the others viz. *Paundra Kshatriya*, *Malla Kshatriya*, and *Ugra Kshatriya*. In the nineteenth century the *Paundra Kshatriya*, *Malla Kshatriya* and *Ugra Kshatriya* claimed higher status through *kshatriya* movement but they did never claim separate ethnic issue and reservation.

On social identity question, the situation of the Rajbanshis in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh, however, somewhat different. The Rajbanshis of West Bengal secured some special protection become of their recognition as Scheduled Caste but the Koch Rajbanshis in undivided Assam could not find any place in the said list. The Koch-Rajbanshis were recognized as MOBC and OBC. Thus, the same ethnic group achieved there difficult status for official purpose viz. Scheduled Caste in West Bengal and MOBC and OBC in Assam. The Rajbanshis of Meghalaya and Tripura are regarded as Scheduled Tribe while in Bihar they are treated as OBC³⁵ under the same constitutional protection for political, social, educational, and economic upliftment. On the other hand, in Nepal and Bangladesh the Rajbanshis are treated as General Caste.³⁶ This kind of variety of social status caused one of the suffering from identity crisis of the Rajbanshis remained unresolved.

The language issue of the Rajbanshis is taken for the mother tongue, or demanded for the development of separate language namely Rajbanshi / Kamatapuri language. It is the general view among the scholars that the people of Eastern Purnea of Bihar; Morang and Jhapa districts of Nepal; Northern districts of West Bengal; undivided Goalpara district of Assam and some part of Bangladesh speak this language.³⁷ The spoken language of the Rajbanshi has been identified by different names such as dialect of Bengali, Goalparia dialect of Assamese, *Kamata*, *Kamrupi*, *Deshi*, *Kamatai* language, *Kamata Behari*, Rajbanshi etc. There is different views among the scholars whether it is dialect or language was discussed in the Chapter No. V. But this spoken language is considered “a heart, a medium of self expression, a way of displaying their ethnic distinction and cultural richness, the existence as people who deserve to be treated as equals in a modern democratic society”³⁸ to the Rajbanshi people. But some section of people terminate this spoken language of Rajbanshi as ‘*Bahe*’. This termination of ‘*Bahe*’ raised question to this ethnic group of people and makes agitation against it. Perhaps the concerned section of people was not aware about the colloquial meaning used by the Rajbanshis including the Hindus and Muslims who have been living in this region for generation. They use the term ‘*Bahe*’ as the shorter form of the vocation ‘*Babahe*’ to address the persons of paternal /maternal and son/ daughter relation of affectionate and love. But this kind of ignorant of knowledge provides wrong message to the general public which is very harmful to the community concerned.

In order to create literary consciousness, the Rajbanshi intellectuals establish a good numbers of cultural centers in the dominated areas. They publish magazine, periodicals, weekly news, and

monthly journals in Kamatapuri / Rajbanshi language, and even set up *Yatra Dal*. This is a good effort of the Rajbanshis to propagate their history, cultural activity, language, anthropology, ecology and political environments. Based on linguistic issue namely *Kamatapuri* language, a section of the Rajbanshi people put forward a political goal viz. to organize movement for separate statehood namely Kamatapuri state. This effort had been done by the Rajbanshis of North Bengal with the collaboration of the Koch –Rajbanshis of lower Assam. Needless to say, this endeavour of separate statehood issue created another crisis of the Rajbanshis. The Kshatriya identity apparently lost its relevance once the Rajbanshis got them enlisted as Scheduled Caste and became entitled for protection in education, job and electoral politics. Rup Kumar Barman has rightly says, “Cultivation of language and literature is not an evil practice but driving the linguistic sentiments of the marginal people with illusionary sights for a separate state is a seductive approach”.³⁹ Professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh has remarked, “By taking ‘*Kamatapuri identity*’ the Rajbanshis are playing an arbitrary construction role which will create more obscurity about their glorious past history, nation and language”.⁴⁰ Needless to say that by the ‘*Kamatapuri identity*’ the future generation of the Rajbanshi community will forget their glorious past, and the contribution of their social leaders who had tried their level best to acquire the ‘Kshatriya identity’. Therefore, the process of demanding separate statehood may be sought out in such a way so that the majority of people of the region might support the overall process.

The psychological distinctiveness of the people of North-Eastern part of India is perhaps the most crucial factor in the development of regional sentiment. Their growing sense of relative

deprivation and feeling of hatred against the immigrants Bengali gentry in Northeastern part of the region created a strong sense of resentment among the Rajbanshis. Indeed, lopsided economic development and exploitation of the national resources of the region by the politically dominant groups or a policy of internal colonial policy are prominent ground which encourage the sense of regional movement like separate statehood and autonomy. In his work *Regional Movements*, Sajal Basu says, domination in service and industry, local of employment opportunities for the educated natives etc. were responsible for the 'Sons of the soil' sentiment in North Bengal. Issuing these factors, the Rajbanshi leadership using their shared ethnic identity, capitalized the grievances to mobilize their community members, and projected this as discrimination against their community. Really, in respect of economic development, employment, transport, and communication, this region is comparatively behind rather than the rest of the state. Therefore, the issue of under development and exploitation of natural resources of this region raised by the UKD, UTJAS, KPP and GCPA is not irrelevant. Analyzing the Uttarkhanda Movement, R.S. Mukhapadhyaya has commented that it was an offshoot of the conflict over sharing of power between the gentry in which the Rajbanshi leaders tactfully used the mythical tradition of the Kamatapuri kingdom to mobilize the local indigenous people.⁴¹ Writing on the present Kamatapuri Movement, H.C. Narjinary, a Mech intellectual, has noted that the Mech community would support the Kamatapuri Movement in North Bengal for a separate state and language. In his opinion, local indigenous people like Rajbanshi, Koch, Mech, and Rabha have not only economically suffered but have also faced social humiliation. After a long and silent suffering, they see this movement as a chance to express their resentment against exploitation.⁴² Very recently the GCDP of Cooch

Behar and GJMM of Darjeeling hill supported the Kamatapuri movement and they declared their joint venture to move against the Government to snatch their demand of separate state namely Kamatapur and Gorkhaland respectively. Jayantanuja Bandopadhaya says, "Kamatapur movement is not fundamentally a problem of law and order, but one of collective existential alienation. Hence, it would also be a grave error to try to suppress the movement with the help of the armed forces, or to marginalize them through the bestowal of minimal local autonomy and Pseudo-philanthropic economic packages".⁴³ Needless to say, it is a power struggle between the indigenous and the immigrants gentry as the former once had dominated the land and gradually became wage labourer, rickshaw puller, house hold servants and have to be migrated to other states for job. It is perhaps the second effort of the indigenous people to acquire economic position through political movement.

The Rajbanshi ethnic assertion had been started in colonial period as a social movement. For identity formation in the changing context, it has been turned into a caste-politics in Bengal under the leadership of elite section of the community. This caste-identity formation and the caste-politics had easily capitalized the caste feelings of the Rajbanshi people and achieved its destination to establish fellow feelings in the community. However, in the last phase a crisis has been created to the Rajbanshi community. This identity crisis became acute when they claimed *kshatriyahood* in one hand, while on the other to enter Scheduled Caste list to take special protection in economic development, education, employment, etc. Finally, it turns into an assertion for nationality with cultural linguistic ethnicity. Since the crisis of the Rajbanshi culture originated from the economic decline of

their people, cultural resistance may not materialized without economic support. Therefore, disseminated linguistic ethnicity and multiple locations of ethnic identity in spite of valid ground of economic deprivation is merely an illusion to both the Rajbanshis and the immigrants' peoples. We may come to conclude that ethnicity can be used to overcome social discrimination but would not be always compatible with the broad ideological objective of a community that has been occurred to the Rajbanshi Kshatriya community.

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APPENDIX

(A - H)

APPENDIX-A

MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA BY THE UKD IN 1981

From:

PANCHANAN MALLICK

Chairman of the Presidium

UTTAR KHANDA DAL

P.O. Bhangrahat, Dist. Jalpaiguri

PIN 735224

To

SRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India

New Delhi

Respected Madam,

Under authority from the executive committee of the Uttar Khanda Dal as envisaged in its resolution dated 17.8.81, I on behalf of that committee and the Dal itself and for the matter of that of the much exploited aboriginal inhabitants of North Bengal irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex and political shades, would like, with all humility and differences to you, to invite your kind attention to the two memoranda submitted to you on previous occasions, one by me on 22nd April 1980, and the other by Sri Sampat Ray, General Secretary of the Dal on 27th March/ 81 on the matter of demand for a separate state within

the Indian Union carved out of five districts of North Bengal viz., Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Bengal and Malda.

The executive of the Dal felt very much disappointed and pained at the tight-lipped silence of the Government of India for more than a year now on its just demand for separate state within the Indian Union. This has compelled the Dal to give vent to its dissatisfaction on different platforms and through various newspaper media. But the Government of India though it convenient to ignore all these as occasional barks of few interested jaunt. The Government of India might have adopted this callous attitude on the advice of some of its interested leaders .But the fact must clearly to be stated without any sort of ambiguity that the Dal is firm in its stand and shall not rest a while or lie low with any kind of threat rill it has achieved its goal of a separate state within the Indian Union. In this connection the Dal painfully notes that the Government of India has been practicing since Independence and attitude of callousness and indifferent to all democrat persuasions with peaceful means till such persuasions failed to move it and consequently it took violent turns and till such violence resulted in killing and death of precious lives and destruction of scare wealth. Starting with the constitution of a separate Andhra Pradesh after the sacrifice of he precious life of Shri Ramalu through the process of formation of a different states in Eastern India it had been same story whether of the Punjabi Saba, Meghalay, Mizoram, etc. The Dal as a democratic organization adheres all kinds of violence and loss of life and property as a consequence, but will not feel shy of fighting its objective out if it is unwillingly pushed into such contingency. In recent time ,the Dal has witnessed with utmost pain that the Government of India on the advice of a handful of interested persons, did not pay any heed to the movement in

Assam on the issue of detection, deletion and deportation of foreign nationals till the movement took seriously violent turn and many precious lives were lost and valuable properties destroyed, pray God, no such a occasion arises the Dal to become violent. With these prefatory words the Dal now desires to lay down before you the grounds on which its demands for a separate state within the Indian Union are based in addition to those it already laid down in its two previous memoranda. The ground may be grouped under different heads viz. (1) Historical, (2) Social, (3) Cultural, (4) Economical, (5) Political and (5) Others.

1.HISTORICAL:

From the historical point of view, this part of our country now wanted to brought under a separate state viz., Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling ,Dinajpur and Malda districts in North Bengal along with a vast of land now included in Bangladesh, in the state of Assam and Bihar in India and in Nepal had a chequered past unparallel in any part of India and for that matter of that of the world. The history of this area starts with Narakasur of mythological era. His descendent Bhagadatta was brother –in-law of Durjodhana of the Kaurava dynasty of the Mahabharat age. As has been accepted by the International History Conference held at New Delhi on 16th and 17th December 1979, the battle of Kurukhetra was a historical fact and hence the personalities involved in the battle of Kurukhetra were historical personalities. Bhagadatta participated in the battle of Kurukhetra on the Kaurava side and hence he was a historical personality and was the king of Prag-Jyotispura, the then name of the kingdom ruling over this area. The dynasty founded by Bhagadutta in this area for thirty six generations when it ruled ended in 309 A.D. Thereafter here came to rule the Barman Dynasty of which

Bhaskar Barma was the most renowned king and was contemporary to the emperor Harsa Vardhan. The great Chinese traveler Hiew-en- Tsang visited his kingdom and its capital and spoke very highly of it .The Barman dynasty ruled till 619 A.D. where after the kingdom went to the hands of a dynasty known as Kamateswar, the founder of the kingdom named as Kamatapur with its capital at Gossanimari now near Dinhata, the sub divisional town in Cooch Behar district. The ruins of the Capital and the great barrier built by the Kamata kings around the capital are still there to attract travellers. The Kamata kings ruled over the area till 1528 A.D. when the kingdom change hands and the Kuch dynasty became the ruler. The Kuch dynasty continued to rule the kingdom in its different sizes, (once its jurisdiction extended up to Nowgoan and Darrang districts in Assam in east, upto Sylhet and Bogura districts in Bangladesh in the south, upto Purnea district in Bihar in the west and upto Bhutan in the North) till 1864 when the then Koch King accepted the suzerainty of the British crown maintaining its separate identity though in a small area compared with its past glory .But it maintained its separate identity nonetheless. The small kingdom of Cooch Behar continued to survive till 1949 where after it accepted integration with India in keeping with tides of time.

It will thus appear from the above that for a continuous period of long 3500 years this area now demanded as a separate state had maintained its own independence and separate identity and had thereby infused in the bloods of its people an attitude with does not admit of any subjugation or subordination of any kind by others much less by a set of people who ,as will be evident from facts detailed elsewhere hereafter, are unnecessarily haughty and have scant regards for the sentiments and feeling of others.

2. SOCIAL:

If social customs and traditions are any guide to establish the identity of a people then the people inhabiting this area under the demand for a separate state as also the adjoining area as mentioned above have customs and traditions distinctly of its own and remain unpolluted in any way till to date. There the social ceremonies observed in births, marriage and death are different so much that only *purohits* from Assam can perform the rites as observed by the people of the area. These customs of their origin in the semi-tribal way of life used to by the people and got very much to do with their physical and mental formation. Evidences overwhelmingly go to show that they are of a different stock than the Aryans or at least ,may be an admixture of Aryans with the aboriginals of the area. The mode of wearing cloths, of displaying jewelries, of gathering in social functions and of eating and drinking there have no resemblance of similarity with other people in our land. The gods and goddesses they worship, the idols and images they create of them, the bands and pipes played at the *pujas* have no similarity with any other elsewhere.

3. CULTURE:

The people inhabiting this area have a distinct culture based on distinct language which are not any way inferior to any other culture of India .is not superior to some of them in some respects. The language spoken by the people residing in this vast area with slight variation from place to place does not bear any distinct name of its own though it has got a vast treasure of literature dating back from the nineteenth century. It is not a local dialect of the Bengali language from which it has got wide

difference in the use of words, vowels and verbs. The negative in this language as in Hindi is used before the verb as distinct from Bengali. Thus, "I shall not go" when translated in our language gets "Muin na Jaim", "Hum Nahi Jayenge" in Hindi and "Ami Jaba Na" in Bengali. The Bengalese, learned and illiterate, derisively called our language the 'Bahe Bhasa' by which they display their own ignorance and a show of haughtiness and expression of hate complex to the local, as 'Bahe' is only a word to address an esteemed person or an unknown personality. No language in the world is or can be named after only one of its words used as address to another. If some of the languages as Bengali or Oriya are named after the names of their states, then our language may appropriately be called *Pragjyotishi*, *Kamatapuri* or *Kamartapuri* language. Be whatever name it may called there can be no denying the fact that this language with slight variations are used by not less than 25 millions of people residing in the five districts of North Bengal, in the district of undivided Goalpara and Western part of Kamrupa in Assam, Rangpur, East Dinajpur and part of Bogura and Mymensingh districts in Bangladesh and Purnea districts in Bihar. Some of the old literature in this language as *Gopiganer gun*, *Jogir gun*, *Manasha gun*, *Bhasan Geets* have already been published. The greatest man of literature in this languages Srimat Sankara Deva, the exponent of *Suddha Vaishnavism* who was one of the jewels in the court of the great king Naranarayan of Kuch Behar.

In the field of music known as Bhawaiya Sangeet of which the most successful exponent at present is Mrs. Pratima Pande (nee Barua) the niece of the great cinema artist and Director, the late Pramatosh Barua. Her songs are regularly broadcast by the A.I.R (All India Radio) Centre at Siliguri. Like its music its musical instruments are peculiar to its own and

will be nowhere found in other parts of the country or even in the world. In short, if *Bhatiali* is a specialty of East Bengal, *Borgeet* of Assam, *Bhojpuri-Kawali* in Bihar, it must be admitted that *Bhawaiya* is the special preserve of the Kamatapuries.

4. ECONOMICAL:

Agriculture being the backbone of the economy of this area, all economic activities naturally centered round agriculture. At the apex of the agricultural organizations was the king himself under whom there were several *jotedars* who their counterparts in *Jagidars* and *Jamindars* in other parts of the country. The *jotedars* let their land either by themselves or by their sharecroppers i.e. *Adhiars*. Unlike, however, in other parts of the country the actual tillers of the soil or the *adhiars* had never been much poverty ridden nor were they looked down upon. This was due to two facts, one the actual tillers by birth of the same caste with their high-up including the all powerful monarchs and two they supplied the man power needed factor made the inhabitants of this area, one of the martial races of India, and many of their children still now make themselves fine men in different branches of armed forces in our country.

In addition to agriculture, the areas abound in forest produce of different varieties and have potential deposits of mines and minerals awaiting explorations after proper survey. It produces few crops and contributes largely to the National Exchequer by way of Excise and other duties. It produces one of the finer varieties of tobacco, flavour tea, coffee and fine fabrics of jute.

5. POLITICAL:

Kingship is the only political institution known in this area from time immemorial till the advent of independence. They did not know or worship any form of Government other than kingship. Their feelings for the king and their loyalties to him were so much that even after they ceased to be the subjects of the king, they showed utmost respect to him and did not tolerate slightest show of disrespect to the Kuch king. Because of their deep-rooted sympathy towards the king, most of whom were happily for us, benevolent despots with whom the people were bounded by the same thread of ethical origin, caste and culture, the people could not easily take up the thread of democracy and as a consequence have now to suffer as will be evident from the subsequent details.

6. OTHER GROUNDS:

Prior to the independence the people in this area had a homogeneity own tied by a common bondage of history, culture, social and political institutions and economic activities so much so that the Goalpara Tenancy Act had to be enacted to bring the people of Goalpara district in Assam in conformity with their brethren living in the then North Bengal where feudalism and permanent settlement prevailed. This homogeneity received a rude shock after independence. The political partition of Bengal divides the people overnight into two nations viz., Indian and Pakistani. The vast number of people in Rangpur, East Dinajpur, Bogra and Mymensing had to be separated never to be united again. This was, so to speak, a deathblow to their homogeneity. After the partition came the integration of Cooch

Behar which had to throw its lot with West Bengal because of political pulls and pressures prevailing then. These two events of partition of the country and integration of Cooch Behar with West Bengal brought about effects far-reaching in impacts, widely shattering the homogeneity of its people and its culture.

The immediate effects of the partition, as is now well known, were the huge influx of refugees from the then East Pakistan. West Bengal had to throw its border open and its arms of welcome wide to receive the East Pakistan refugees, as they were known as one nation, viz., the Bengalese during the pre-partitioned societies. Hence, North Bengal which happened because of a chance of historical circumstances, to be part of West Bengal could not also raise its voice of objection and had been forced by the command of history to fall in line in West Bengal in its endeavour to accommodate the refugees. As a result, North Bengal had to live with a chunk of people alien to its customs, language and culture.

In this connection mention may be made two historical injustices perpetuated on the people by the then power that would be at Delhi at the instance and advice of those at Calcutta(1) which consent of the people were obtained in the matter of the decision if Sylhet would go either to Pakistan or remain in India because the population there were almost equally divided into two major religions, the Hindus and the Muslims, no deed for such consensus was thought necessary in the case of Rangpur district though as at that time 60% of its population were Hindus. This superficial treatment gave shattering blow to the homogeneity of the people living in this vast area. (2) Secondly while our Government professes democracy, no attempt was made to obtain the

consent of the people of Kuch Behar prior to its integration with West Bengal. The will of the King, obtained through various political pulls and pressure ,was thought to be fate accomplish for the people of Kuch Bihar. This has put the last straw on the back on the proverbial camel. These two political decision taken ex-prate without any kind of consultations with the people whatsoever had produced effects which are demolish and destroy a culture and heritage, break the backbone ,economic and political ,of a people which had been enjoying the fruits of independence and saw many ups and downs of its chequered history of 3500 years. The people have found out its past and want to shape its future as it deem fit and proper in keeping with its rich past.

Leaving apart the fact of partition, which cannot be undone let us, detail out the impacts of the huge influx of the refugees. Whatever might have the refugees said while they crossed the border ,the fact remained that many of them came here not wholly destitute but with wealth left by their forefathers earned by themselves during their life times and procured by them selling their properties at whatever price they could. All the refugees never came penniless. On coming here they received the hospitality of the Government of India generosity by way of the refugees loans very little of which were repaid later. Thus the refugees were doubly benefited. They had coppers in their had taken away from East Pakistan and substantial sum of money given by the Government of India by way of loans. With this money in their hands they began to search out for suitable properties and professions. The impact of refugees was the security of goods because of fall in production resulted in rising prices. As one may remember for about a decade after independence food grain were items very scare in the market. The illiterate local people who were used to lead easy lives were puzzled at

this sudden change of situation and found no other alternative for survival to the selling of their landed properties. Taking advantage of their helpless position the sharks among the refugees began to purchase landed properties from the simple minded and hospitality laden local people in some cases even taking recourse to deception and fraud.

With the passage of time the refugees driven by the dire necessity of survival began to corner every possible means of earning money and in the process pushing the local inhabitants to backward places. These activities of the refugees were supported and backed by the government and the business community at Calcutta who felt it obligatory to render all possible help to the refugees and partly because of *hulla-ballus* raised by the Calcutta based newspapers. This process of business activities had acted as catalytic agents in economic fields which had rooted out most of the indigenous people from all towns and had taken away all business from them. This so happened because the Calcutta centered business community stood at the back of the refugees and the Calcutta based Government tried to look to the interest of the refugees at the cost of and with sheer neglect of the local people. As a result after thirty three years of independence the indigenous population of the area irrespective of the caste ,creed and religion, have become hewers of wood and drawers of water to the refugees who are now lording it over original people so to speak .

The refugees brought with an air of cultural and linguistic superiority though majority of them illiterates. This superiority complex which totally false and baseless produced in the refugees and attitude of haughtiness and arrogance which local people ,because of the simplicity and indifference had to suffer silently as any kind of protest was expected

to bring about rude behaviour from the refugees resulting in some cases in bitter quarreling and rowdyism. The indigenous people have now to pass their days in a state of constant fear and terrorism which has since increased many fold during the misrule of the United Front Government.

Keeping with the then trend in political and economic thinking the institutions of *Jamindars* and *Jotedars* had been abolished and a ceiling of land holding had been prescribed. This was very good in principle, but it left many loopholes in its practical execution. As a result the cohesive village economy was destroyed on the one hand vast area of land was cornered by the *benamdars* on the other. Much to our consternation the number of landless people and pauperism increased many fold.

In view of above the people had become displeased and restless because of their genuine fear of extinction socially, politically, economically and culturally and feel in their hearts of hearts that only way to come out of this sorry state of affairs is to organize themselves in a separate state under the name and style of Kamatapur state within the Union of India.

It is, therefore, of the Government of India under your kind leadership that a separate state comprising of the five districts of North Bengal, namely, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda be set up within the Union of India without any further loss of time as any further delay may cause irreparable loss and damage and extinction of valuable cultural heritage.

In this respect mention must be made of the fact that though it is the sacred duty of any civilized Government to preserve its relics with all earnestness and sincerity, the so called superior civilized

Government based at Calcutta has embarked on a gradual process of bringing the old relics of this vast area to utter ruins. This process of gradual annihilation of old relics had been undertaken by the Government of West Bengal with the hidden object of doing away with a rich heritage of culture and great tradition so that the successors of the present ruling camp may shout from their house tops that this area had been under complete darkness and in a primitive stage of development and it was only through the generosity of their forefathers that they had seen the light of civilizations. This would be a very sad day for the aboriginal people of this area indeed!

It has to be stated that it would be welcome if any future time any adjoining area in the Indian Union wants to join the newly formed state and it has to be states without any amount of ambiguity that if the demand of the Uttar Khanda Dal for a separate state comprising of the five districts of North Bengal is not acceded to the Government of India latest by the 31st January 1982, the Uttar Khanda Dal and for the matter of that the aboriginal people of North Bengal will have to choice before them but to embark on any democratic movement within the framework of the Constitution of India as the Dal may deem fit and proper and necessary to achieve its objectives viz. a separate state within the Union of India.

Yours faithfully,

(signed)

(PANCHANAN MALLICK)

Dated, Kanti Vita, Chairman of the Presidium,
24th August, 1981, UTTAR KHANDA DAL.

Appendix – B (i)

Leaflet of the UTJAS. Why dose this movement occur?

উত্তরবঙ্গ তপশিলী জাতি ও আদিবাসী সংগঠন
কেন এই আন্দোলন?

সত্য শক্তি

উত্তরবঙ্গের পাঁচটি খেলা সামাজিক, আর্থিক ও রাজনৈতিক দিক হইতে অনগ্রসর। স্বাধীনতার ৩৮ বৎসর পরেও এই এলাকার উন্নয়নের অগ্র সঠিক কোন পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণ করা হয় নাই। কেন্দ্র ও রাজ্যের সমস্ত পরিকল্পনাই এই অঞ্চলকে বঞ্চিত করিয়াছে। অথচ উত্তরবঙ্গের ঐতিহাসিক সম্পদ ভারতের স্বাধীনতার লক্ষ্যে অপরিহার্য। উত্তরবঙ্গের পাট, তামাক, বাঁশ, কাঠ, ডালোমাইট, সিল্কোনি, ইপিকাক্স প্রভৃতি কাঁচামালের সাহায্যে কলিকাতা, দিল্লী, বোম্বাই প্রভৃতি শহরে অনেক ছোট বড় শিল্প প্রতিষ্ঠান গড়িয়া উঠিয়াছে। কিন্তু এই অঞ্চলে আদ্য পর্যন্তও কোন ছোট বা মাঝারি শিল্প কারখানা স্থাপন করা হয় নাই। উত্তরবঙ্গের চা-পাড়া বিশেষে রপ্তানী করিয়া প্রতি বৎসর ১০ কোটি টাকার বিদেশী মুদ্রা অর্জন হয়। পাট, তামাক, আম প্রভৃতি হইতেও শত শত কোটি টাকা বিদেশী মুদ্রা অর্জন করা হয়। অথচ ইহার সুস্বভাব অর্থও এই এলাকার উন্নয়নের অগ্র ব্যয় করা হয় না। চা বাগিচার মালিকেরা এই অঞ্চল হইতে স্বাধীনতার পর যে হাওয়ার হাওয়ার কোটি টাকা মুনাফা অর্জন করিতেছে তাহার সামান্যতম অংশও এই অঞ্চলের উন্নয়নের অগ্র বিনিয়োগ করে নাই। সরকার ও সমস্ত বেসরকারী সংস্থা উত্তরবঙ্গকে শোষণ করিয়া কলিকাতা, বোম্বাই ও দিল্লী শহরে সেই মুনাফাকে কেন্দ্রীভূত করিয়াছে। স্বাধীনতার কালে সরকারী সাহায্যপুষ্ট একচেটিয়া পুঁজিবাদের বিকাশের ফলে যে শহরকেন্দ্রীক সত্বতা গড়িয়া উঠিয়াছে তাহার ফলে গ্রাম ও শহরের মধ্যে আর্থিক বৈষম্য অচণ্ডভাবে বৃদ্ধি পাইবারে এবং সৃষ্টি হইয়াছে আকালিক বৈষম্য।

১৯৪৭ সালে উত্তরবঙ্গের লোকসংখ্যা ছিল ৪৬ লক্ষ। বর্তমানে এই সংখ্যা এক কোটিরও উর্ধ্বে উঠিয়াছে। এই অস্বাভাবিক জনশিক্ষার কারণ বাংলাদেশে, নেপাল প্রভৃতি দেশ হইতে প্রায় ১০ বৎসরে ৮ লক্ষ বিদেশী নাগরিকের অভিবাসন অনুষ্ঠিত হইবে। পশ্চাদপদ উত্তরবঙ্গে এই বিপুল জনসংখ্যাসামাজিক, আর্থনৈতিক ও রাজনৈতিক দিক হইতে এক চরম সংকটের সৃষ্টি করিয়াছে। প্রতি বৎসর এই অঞ্চলের হাজার হাজার কৃষক ভূমিহীন ক্ষেতমজুর পরিণত হইতেছে এবং শিক্ষিত ও অশিক্ষিত প্রকার সমস্তা অস্বাভাবিক ভাবে বৃদ্ধি পাইতেছে। এই অঞ্চলের কৃষি কার্ণামের উন্নতির অগ্র আশ্রয় কোন সঠিক পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণ করা হয় নাই। কৃষির প্রধান প্রয়োজন জলসেচ ব্যবস্থার পরিকল্পনা শতকরা একভাগ কমিতেও করা হয় নাই। এখানকার কৃষি সম্পূর্ণ অক্ষতির উপর নির্ভরশীল।

উত্তরবঙ্গে তপশিলী জাতি ও আদিবাসী সম্প্রদায়ের জনসংখ্যা শতকরা ৬০ ভাগ। সামাজিক, আর্থিক ও সাংস্কৃতিক দিক হইতে অনগ্রসর এই সম্প্রদায়ের উন্নয়নের অগ্র কোনরূপ ব্যবস্থা পরিকল্পনা আজও গৃহীত হয় নাই। সাম্প্রদায়িক দিক হইতে যে সকল সুযোগ সুবিধা এই সম্প্রদায়ের পাওচার কথা, সামাজিক ও রাজনৈতিক কারণে সেই সকল সুযোগ সুবিধা হইতে এই দুর্বল শ্রেণীর মানুষদের বঞ্চিত করা হইতেছে। আদিবাসী অধাধিত এলাকা বিশেষতঃ চা-বাগিচা এলাকায় শিক্ষার অসারতার অগ্র যেখানে হিন্দি স্কুল ও কলেজ স্থাপনের বিশেষ প্রয়োজন সেখানে সরকার ইহার বিন্দুমাত্র প্রয়োজনীয়তা অনুভব করেন নাই।

দৌর্ভাগ্যবশত শোষণ, বঞ্চনা ও অবহেলার ফলে উত্তরবঙ্গের মানুষের মনে যে তীব্র ক্ষোভের সঞ্চার হইয়াছে তাহার সঠিক মূল্যায়ন করিয়া সম্ভার মূল্যেচন করা গুরুত্বীয় প্রয়োজন। উত্তরবঙ্গ তপশিলী জাতি ও আদিবাসী সংগঠন বিগত ৪৮ বৎসর ধরিয়া উত্তরবঙ্গের সার্বিক উন্নয়নে উত্থাপিত দাবীসমূহকে কার্যকর করিবার অগ্র আন্দোলন চালাইয়া আসিতেছে। এই আন্দোলনকে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদী ও সাম্প্রদায়িক অধাধিত উত্তরবঙ্গের অগ্রগত পরিস্থিতির মোকাবেলা করা কখনই সম্ভব নহে। দেশের বৃহত্তর অনগ্রসর এলাকাগুলিকে বঞ্চিত করিয়া সমাজের দুর্বলতর শ্রেণীর মানুষদের বিচ্ছিন্ন রাখিয়া যাচার জাতীয় সংহতির কাঁচামূলি আকড়াইয়েছেন তাহার মতলব অগ্র যাহাই হউক, ৭০ কোটি দ্বন্দ্বিত ও নিরন্ন ভারতবাসীর সংহতি প্রতিষ্ঠা নহে।

উত্তরবঙ্গ তপশিলী জাতি ও আদিবাসী সংগঠনের পক্ষ হইতে বঙ্গবীর রাজা সরকার, কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ও বিভিন্ন কর্তৃপক্ষকে সংগঠনের দাবীসমূহ দিখিতভাবে জানানো হইয়াছে। কিন্তু সরকার পক্ষ ইহার সম্পর্কে কোন হুনিদিত্ত বক্তব্য রাখেন নাই। এমনকি মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর মত দায়ীশীল ব্যক্তি এই আন্দোলনকে বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদী

Appendix – B (iii)

Leaflet of the UTJAS, Containing *Satyagrah* Movement

উত্তরবঙ্গ তপশিলী জাতি ও আদিবাসী সংগঠন
(উ ত জা জা স)
দক্ষিণ দিনাজপুর

॥ অবস্থান সত্যগ্রহ ॥

স্থান—বালুরঘাট ডি. এম অফিস।

তারিখ—২৪ ও ২৫শে জানুয়ারী ২০০০ (বাংলা—২৫ ও ২৬শে
মাঘ ১৪০৬)। সময় বেলা ১১টা পর্যন্ত।

সফল করার আবেদন

গুরুগণ,

কিষ্কিণের পর যা বলেন তাদের ব্যবস্থা কমিশনের সবর ওলটাই, যা বলেই কোন বন্ধন উন্নয়ন হয় না। উপনিবেশিক শোষণ, প্রকার চরম শিকার, এই যা দিনাজপুর জেলা: বণ্টনকারী বাণী সাংসারিক চন্দন, যেমন তপশিলী, আদিবাসী, মুসলিম ও মজাজ জনগণের সন্তান মুক্তিযুদ্ধ শাসক গোষ্ঠীর শোষণে পরিত্যক্ত হয়েছে। সমস্ত জনতা অস্বাভাবিক ১২% উচ্চ বর্ণের হাতে মুক্তিপত্র হয়ে যাচ্ছে। জনগণের আন্দোলনকে প্রশমিত করে, প্রতি বর্ষের বিকল্প রাজনীতির পক্ষে, ইতিমধ্যেই করে দীর্ঘ যুক্ত দাবীতে কঠোরভাবে তুলে করতে উক্ত জন মা স নিম্নলিখিত দাবীগুলি দৃঢ় করে মাঝে পেশ করতে :-

- ★ জন, জমি ও জঙ্গলের অধিকার জনগণের হাতে কিষ্কিণে দিতে অবিলম্বে উ: বঙ্গের শাসন পালন করে বন্ধন।
- ★ রাজস্ব সংক্রান্ত অর্থে এবং জমি জনগণের জন্য যথা কামোদন, সাদরি, পাওরাসি, কুকক, কুম্বাসি, জোটা ইত্যাদির বিকাশ করতে হবে এবং স্বীকৃতি দিতে হবে।
- ★ পাণ্ডিত্য দশা থেকে মুক্ত করতে অসমস্বস্তি প্রকারে অবিলম্বে পানীয় জল, স্বাস্থ্যসেবা ও বাস্তব ক্ষেত্রের ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে।
- ★ বহু SC / ST স্টাডেন্টসকে অবিলম্বে চালু করতে হবে: Book Grant, Maintenance Grant, Stipend, SC / ST / OBC Certificate যথা সময়ে দিতে হবে।
- ★ মেডিক্যাল, ইন্টিনিয়ামিয়ে সরবন্ধন বাতিল করা চলবে না। যোগ্যতার বোধেই বিধে SC / ST / OBC দের পদগুলি General করা চলবে না।
- ★ অবিলম্বে কৃষিদীর্ঘি ও কৃষি ফসলের লাভজনক মূল্য মিত্যরণ করতে হবে। দেশের স্বার্থে বাণিজ্যিক জল সেচের ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে। এবং গভীর বাস্তবের উচ্চ বিনিয়োগ প্রকল্পগুলি চালু করতে হবে।
- ★ কর্ম সংস্থানের উচ্চ গতিতে উচ্চ করে যুক্ত, মাঝারি শিল্প কারখানা খুলতে হবে এবং আবাদী বহু আতিথ্য কোম্পানিগুলিকে পরিষ্কার করতে হবে।

শ্রী যোগেশ নাথ রায়

সম্পাদক

শ্রীমতি বাহার মনি হুত রম

সভানেত্রী

উ ত জা জা স
দক্ষিণ দিনাজপুর জেলা কমিটি।

Appendix – B (iv)

Leaflet, *Swayatwa Shasan Sangram Mancha* (The UTJAS, The S.J.P. and The TASO)

স্বায়ত্ত্ব শাসন সংগ্রাম মঞ্চ-এর উত্জাভাস, স. জ. প ও টাসোর ডাকে- আইন অমান্য আন্দোলন সফল করুন

- ★ সি. পি. এম কর্তৃক কামতাপুরি মহলের নামের গণতান্ত্রিক আন্দোলনের উপর আক্রমণ।
- ★ ক্যান্ডার বাহিনীর দ্বারা রাকতবর্ষণের ব্যক্তি গুলি পোড়ানো।
- ★ কুমারগোমস্তা, বাগোবিলা ও জেনারী ঘটনার স্মৃতি চাপনা, রাকতবর্ষণের মিথিলায় গ্রেপ্তার, হারানি ও তৎবিচার বিভাগীয় তদন্তের ঘাটী।
- ★ উগ্রহন পর্বক মহলের নামে ভাওতাগোষ্ঠী ও হায়াবাতীর প্রতিবাদ।

ক্রমাগত স্থানঃ - রাণগঞ্জ রেন স্টেশন।

আঃ-এই স্থান ২০০০ (জুনের ২৪ বুধবার)।

বঙ্গদেশ,

উত্তরবঙ্গের দীর্ঘকালের শোভন বহনকারী জাতির না চওড়ায় একটিকে যেমন দেশে দুর্ভিক্ষের মিত্রের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা এবং অস্থির রক্তের আন্দোলন শুরু করেছেন। অপর পক্ষে বাহিনীগণ উৎসাহের স্বাধীনতার নামে কয়েকটি স্বাধীন পোড়না বাঙ্গালী সাম্প্রদায়িকতা বৈধী করে অস্থিরের জন্য আন্দোলনকে দমন করার জন্য বিভিন্ন কৌশল প্রয়োগ করছেন।

উত্তরবঙ্গের দীর্ঘকালের শোভন বহনকারী জাতির না চওড়ায় একটিকে যেমন দেশে দুর্ভিক্ষের মিত্রের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা এবং অস্থির রক্তের আন্দোলন শুরু করেছেন। অপর পক্ষে বাহিনীগণ উৎসাহের স্বাধীনতার নামে কয়েকটি স্বাধীন পোড়না বাঙ্গালী সাম্প্রদায়িকতা বৈধী করে অস্থিরের জন্য আন্দোলনকে দমন করার জন্য বিভিন্ন কৌশল প্রয়োগ করছেন।

এই পরিচালনা করণ সি. পি. এম পাঠী ও পুলিশ প্রশাসন কলপাই গড়ির চেম্বার কুমারগোমস্তা, জেনারী, বহনগড়ি, কুমারগড়ি প্রভৃতি জায়গায় কে. সি. পি.এম. শান্তি-পূর্ণ মিছিলের উপর আক্রমণ এবং হারানি চালায়ে হত্যা মিনন, রাকতবর্ষণের ব্যক্তিগণ পোড়ানো এবং মিথিলায় বাঙ্গালী গুলি পোড়না ও সত্যায়ন শুরু করেছে।

সি. পি. এম পাঠী দুর্ভিক্ষ এবং বহিঃসংস্কার মধ্যে গাভগড়িক অস্থির এবং হারানি বাস্তবতায় বৈধী করে উগ্রহনকে এক অস্থির বিক্ষোভ পরিস্থিতির মধ্যে আঁতড়িয়েছে।

এই ক্রমাগত অস্থির থেকে পরিচালনা থেকে শুরু হন সংখ্যক বিভিন্ন উগ্রহন বেলের উগ্রহনতা সম্পন্ন হয়েই পশ্চিম অস্থিরের একান্ত প্রয়োজন

স্বায়ত্ত্ব শাসন সংগ্রাম মঞ্চ নির্দেশিত দাবীর ভিত্তিতে আইন অমান্য আন্দোলন কমতুচী গ্রহণ করেছে। আন্দোলনের সভাপতি ও সভাপতিগণ কামনা করি।

- ১। কুমারগড়ি উগ্রহন উগ্রহন পর্ব ব্যক্তিগত করে কলকাতা কেন্দ্রিক বৈধীকারী ক্ষমতার বিকেন্দ্রীকরণের জন্য অস্থিরের উগ্রহন উগ্রহনতা সম্পন্ন হয়েই শাসন চাই।
- ২। কলপাই গড়ি কুমারগোমস্তা, বাগোবিলা ও জেনারী ঘটনার উগ্রহন শান্তি-পূর্ণ মিছিলের উপর হারানি চাপনা, ক্যান্ডার বাহিনী কর্তৃক আক্রমণ, রাকতবর্ষণের ব্যক্তিগণ পোড়ানো, মিথিলায় গ্রেপ্তার, অস্থির অস্ত্রাচার ইত্যাদির বিচার বিভাগীয় তদন্ত করতে হবে। গোষ্ঠীদের শান্তি দিতে হবে এবং অভিযোগের প্রতিপালন দিতে হবে।
- ৩। কামতাপুরি জালা সহ অন্যান্য ভাঙনগোষ্ঠী আবার অস্থিরের পৌরকি দিতে হবে।

সংগ্ৰামী পরিচালনা-সহ-

আনোয়ারা বেগম
টাসো

কানিশদ বর্মিন
সংগঠক
জি. পি. উৎসাহ

চিত্ত রঞ্জন বর্মিন
সংগঠক
জি. পি. স. চ. প.

Appendix – B (v)

Leaflet of the Swayatwa Shasan Sangram Mancha,

স্বায়ত্ব শাসন, ভাষা, কৃষি ইতিহাস সংরক্ষণের দাবীঃ স্বায়ত্ব শাসন সংগ্রাম মঞ্চ-এর

III। ধর্ম-অবস্থান II।

রায়গঞ্জ ১৮ অক্টোবর, ইজামপুর ৩০ অক্টোবর ২০০০
উত্তরবঙ্গের মা, বহিন, ভাই, বহুলা।

পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার এবং বিভিন্ন জনগোষ্ঠালা সাম্প্রদায়িক ও স্বায়ত্ব চর্চা-
তেইল দিনকার ঠকবাতি আর কুসনের তানে, উত্তরবঙ্গ নামে ভৌগোলিক এলাকা-
টার পোকলা, আড়ি, ক্ষুণ্ণতার মানসিলা আড়ি এক সিংহাসন লোকে দিন কাটাতে।
হেপ্টাকার (ক্রাই-টেকার) তেশুমা ভাষা মুক্তি ও ঐতিহাসিক মুক্তি বিয়াহানে, এত
বিশাল একাকীতাৎ কুসনের লুটিকা খোবেব মূলত বানেশা, পশ্চিম হীন, পহলার
শাকতি সখা "জমুয়ার বাটার" গড়েবা চাহেজে। চতুর্থ দশা ককিবার বান
মিহের দায়াদারী-শাসনের স্বাক্ষরের দাবীং তেশুমা ভাষা মুক্তি, ইতিহাস
বক্ষ্য এবং নিজের পরিচয় (Identity) দাবীং আড়ি উত্তরবঙ্গ উত্তর উখাতি
পাতালি কেউ চলেছে। সেইতানে হামরা বাটার শাসন সংগ্রাম মঞ্চ পশ্চিমবঙ্গ
সংস্কারেরঠেইলি আলাপ আলাপোনা ও পসিবার তানে তেইলা মিনতি আনাইছি।
এং সমস্তা মুখিল আসানের তানে ঠেপাকার সক্রিয় শক্তিলাক মিয়া গোমটেইল
ঠেইলের ঠেখাব দিহি। কিন্তু সরকার হানার কাথং কান নি দেয়।

এলা সরকারের তাল বাস্তবায়ন-স্বাভাৱ নিয়াহানে এরদল উস্কাইফা লোক
পরিদৃষ্টিটাক স্বাভাবিক বানেশা বিপথে নেগাবা/নেযাবা চাহেজে। আর পরি-
শিতিক নিয়ন্ত্রণের নামে সরকার ও জনগোষ্ঠালা স্বাধীনতা-ভিন এক বিহিনের
সাম্প্রদায়িকতা বানাবে। এই তানে উত্তরবঙ্গের পরিদৃষ্টি আহও বিধিমা উঠেছে।

উত্তরবঙ্গ যাতে আর একটা আসাম নি হয়, সেই পাবে সক্ষ্য বৃহতা হানরা
পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকারেরঠেইলি কেউত লেখা এটা দাবীক মানিবার তানে আন্দোলন
চালাছি।

দাবীনা :-

- ★ উঃ বঙ্গকে ২৪৪(ক) দ্বারা অনুসারে ত্রাঙ্কোর তিতর রাজ্য Autonomous State অধিক ক্ষমতা সম্পন্ন পূর্বাঙ্গ স্বায়ত্ব শাসন দিবা হোবে।
- ★ কামতাপুরি, সাদুরি দাঁওতালি, ইত্যাদি- গুয়ের ভাষায় (Home Language মাধ্যমে) প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা চালু করিবা হোবে।
- ★ উত্তরবঙ্গে অভিবাসন (Rehabilitation) নিয়ন্ত্রণ করিবা হোবে।
ভূমি পুত্রলার তানে কৃষি জমি সংরক্ষন আইন চালু করিবা হোবে।
সংগ্রামী অভিনন্দন সহ—
স্বায়ত্ব শাসন সংগ্রাম মঞ্চ-এর পক্ষে
(উত্তরামাঙ্গ, সমাজবাদী জনপরিষদ, উঃ বঃ মহিলা সংগঠন)

APPENDIX- C

A MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA BY THE KAMATAPUR PEOPLE'S PARTY ON 26-09-1997.

To

Sri Indra Kumar Gujral,

Hon'ble Prime Minister of India,

Parliament House,

New Delhi; INDIA.

Through the Divisional Commissioner of North Bengal,

Jalpaiguri Division: West Bengal.

Hon'ble Sir,

With due respect I beg to submit the memorandum before you containing 11 CHARTER OF DEMANDS in order to implement our demands for the formation of a state i.e. KAMATAPUR comprising the areas of Kamatapuri speaking people in the whole North Bengal adjoining Kamatapuri dominated areas in India.

As the Government of India as well as the Government of West Bengal are fully aware that the aboriginal people of North Bengal has various organizations of the area, such as the Uttar Khanda Dal, Kamatapur Gana Parisad have long been demanding a separate state of Kamatapur for the sons of the soil of North Bengal. Recently the KPP has also been demanding a separate 'HOMELAND'(State of Kamatapur) for original inhabitants of North Bengal and neighbouring Kamtapuri dominated areas within the frame work of India under Article (3) of the

constitution to fulfill our political ,economical and cultural aspirations to govern our own lives. So the demand for creatrion of a homeland namely Kamatapur is not a new one, as a whole, the demand for creation of a Homeland is overdue.

Now ,your honour, as representative of the whole aboriginal people of North Bengal as well as of adjoining areas, the KPP is willing to put forward some historical facts, reasons and grievances to take appropriate action from your side.

Historical Facts:

It is an established and unquestionable fact that the present territory of North Bengal as well as Kamatapuri dominated areas were historically parts of two kingdoms before Independence of India- the kingdoms of Cooch Behar and Baikantapur, the erstwhile Kamatapur. Under various wars and treaties signed with these two kingdoms the present territory lastly came under British occupation by the war of Bhutan, Mughal, and British with Cooch Behar as well as Sikkim, Mughal, Nepal and British war with Baikantapur as also by the Anglo-Cooch Behar treaty of 1773, Anglo- Bhutan treaty of 1774, Anglo- Nepal Sugaulee Treaty of 1816, Sikkim-British Titaliya Treaty of 1817 and Anglo- Bhutan Cinchula Treaty of 1865 even after Independence of India the Government of India had forcibly integrated the princely state of Cooch Behar with Bengal along with Baintantapur in totally unconstitutional ways by virtue of the treaty of Cooch Behar Merger Agreement Act (August 28,1949) and the Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1954 A.D. As to populations, the aboriginal people of these regions are ethnically, linguistically ,culturally, historically and socially dissimilar

from the rest of the people of Bengal and constituted nearly 80% of the total population.

Various documentary evidences, settlement records and census reports provide us a number of information as recorded by the Government of India that North Bengal was totally non-Nepalies, non-Adibashis and Non-Bengalis region before Independence of India. During British Period in India particularly the Nepalese and the Adibashis came to this territory as immigrants from Nepal and Bihar following development of the tea Industry and the Bengalis came to this territory for clerical and various professional activities for expansion of the local administration. Hence, it can be said according to the historical facts, that North Bengal belongs to the Kamatapuri speaking people and it is their own HOMELAND.

Now the KPP beg to appeal you to concede the demands on the basis of above historical facts so that the aboriginal people may govern their own lives by creation of Homeland and may their lives , saying of Abraham Lincon such as “Democracy is a Government governed by the people of the people for the people” be materializes in the newly formed state of Kamatapur.

Reasons and Grievances :

As we know that our country passed 50 years of Independence but North Bengal in till now considered as “Non Industrial Region” under colonial rule of West Bengal as well as the majority of the Kamatapuri people of these region are under poverty line and underdeveloped in economic, social, political and cultural strata. Unemployment problems are acute as because ample resources of North

Bengal are kept unused internationally by the Government of West Bengal. Large scale and small scale industry, factory, Higher Educational Institution, Power Plant and Project have not been set up to provide with jobs for the Kamatapuri educated and unemployed youth. All kinds of development works, industry, factory, project and Higher Educational Institutions are located and established in and around Calcutta. However, the State Government of West Bengal is taking away a plenty of raw material like, Jute, Bamboo, Tea, Timber, Tobacco, Medecinal plant and Orange from North Bengal by exploitation, depriving and victimizing the Kamatapuri people. As though, the state Government of West Bengal is speaking much about development of North Bengal as well as of the people of this region, but practically it is Nil and only on papers. Higher Educational Institution, Medical College, Poly Technique College, Vocational Institution and University are not adequate in proportion to the populations. Only one University, Medical College and Engineering College are in North Bengal for serving 2 croores of people. On the other hand, 8 Universities, 7 Medical Colleges and 5 Engineering Colleges are in South Bengal for serving 6 cores of population. Drinking water, power supply, Medical facility, communication of transport and irrigation are not available here. Even Kamatapuri speaking people are also being discriminated in securing various official jobs, trade licenses, bank loans, permits and licenses for Bus, Mini Bus, Taxi, Cooking Gas, Petrol Pump, Cinema Hall and Dealership. Our language and culture are also being neglected by both the state Government of West Bengal and Central Government of India ,for instances, medium of instruction of education through vernacular languages are not effected in North Bengal and various cultural programmes through Radio are neglected. Even a complete T.V. Centre with all its infrastructure is awaiting long for just open for ceremony adjacent to Siliguri.

Apart from above grievances the aboriginal people are at present facing lots as regards infiltration because of becoming minority in number and losing their own identity, culture, language and civilization under pressure of illegal foreigner as well as Bengali civilization and culture. Left Front Government aware of such illegal infiltration but inactive for fear of losing refugee votes. No one can deny it that Left Front is at present standing on refugee votes. Various Newspaper and District Census Reports will confirm my words as I have stated above. Now, the Government should take immediate measures to remove such foreigners from North Bengal, otherwise, the KPP will not remain silent. Therefore, problem of infiltration is a most urgent one, important and sensitive which immediately be solved in the interest of the Kamtapuri people as well as national interiority.

Now, the time and opportunity have come to think about communal attitude of the Government of West Bengal. As long- suffering and victimized Kamatapuri people do not want to remain more within Bengal as slaves under colonial rule of West Bengal, it is true fact that when we raise our voice in regard to deprivation ,exploitation, victimization, discrimination, humiliation and inhumanism, the Government of West Bengal then try to crush our democratic movement by torturing, intimidating and oppressing even malign us as antinational, divisive, communal and secessionist in the name of democracy and national integrity . But we can pay it undoubtedly, that our movement is not anti- national, divisive and unconstitutional rather than peaceful, democratic, constitutional and non-violent. As the Government of India had created several states during 50 years since Independence of India, as Manipur for Manipuris, Nagaland for Nagas, Mizoram for Mizos and

others ,but neither the Government of India not the State Government of West Bengal has done anything for the sake of us. Hence, the KPP earnestly request you to send a “Fact including Team” to visit North Bengal to prove and judge the true facts as I have stated above.

So, the KPP as representative of the whole ‘Kamatapuri’ speaking people urges you to set up a separate administrative unit outside of Bengal so that all kinds of exploitations, deprivations, discriminations and humiliations may be redressed by creation of a separate Homeland of our own. Hence, I beg to encloses herewith a copy of 11 point CHARTER OF DEMANDS for immediate materialization.

An early reply is solicited.

Yours Faithfully,

(signed)

Atul Chandra Ray

President

Kamatapuri People’s Party

26.09.1997.

Copy to:-

1. Hon’ble President off India.
2. Hon’ble Chief Justice of Supreme Court.
3. Hon’ble Home Minister of India.
4. Hon’ble Speaker, Lok Sabha.
5. Hon’ble Governor of West Bengal.
6. Hon’ble Chief Minister of West Bengal.
7. Sri Atal Bihari Bajpayee, Ex-Prime Minister of India.

11-POINTS CHARTER OF DEMANDS OF KPP

1. In order to enable the Kamatapuri speaking people to govern their own lives by reason of ethnical, linguistically, historical, cultural and social distinction from the rest of the people of West Bengal a separate statehood namely 'Kamatapur' be declared within the frame work of Indian Constitution comprising of the whole of North Bengal and adjoining *Kamatapuri* populated areas in India, in accordance with the Article (3) of the Indian constitution of India.
2. With a view to ameliorating, the language of *Kamatapuri* is included in the 8th Scheduled of the constitution of India.
3. By the base year of 1971(India-Mujib Accord) regarding expulsion of illegal foreigners from *Kamatapuri* dominated areas of North Bengal be implemented shortly.
4. In order to curb illegal influx of immigration in North Bengal and adjacent *Kamatapuri* dominated areas the "INNER PERMIT LINE" must immediately be imposed on the said areas.
5. With a view to restringing the intrusion of illegal foreigners in North Bengal the "BAROED WIRE" to be erected the borderline of both India and Bangladesh without further delay.
6. Regarding various cultural programmed of *Kamatapurians*, for the *Kamatapurians*, for the *Kamatapuri* peoples of North Bengal such programmes should be arranged to telecast on the Television (Fulbari) Centre, All India Radio, Siliguri at daily.

7. With a view of all round development of North Bengal as the “Teesta Irrigation Project” should be declared as ‘National Project’ immediately,
8. In order to enrich the culture for the *Kamatapuri* people of North Bengal as well as neighbouring areas , in different types of cultural programmes of *Kamatapurians* to broadcast through ‘All India Radio, Siliguri at per daily programmes of Nepali in “All India Radio , Kurseong,
9. In respect of upliftment of higher education for the aboriginal people of North Bengal a Central University namely Ray Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma University be set up in the district of Cooch Behar immediately.
- 10.Regarding exchange of enclaves as Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and Bangladesh enclaves in India are exchanged without further delay.
- 11.In respect of pre and post History of North Bengal since Independence of India a ‘White Paper’ regarding economical, social, culture, population and ethnical identity of the aboriginal people of North Bengal be published immediately.

APPENDIX-D

A LETTER OF THE GREATER COOCH BEHAR PEOPLES ASSOCIATION TO THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE OF COOCH BEHAR DATED 29.05.2002.

To

(1) The District Magistrate

Cooch Behar .

(2) The Superintendent of Police

Cooch Behar.

Subject: Prayer to pass necessary direction to save the members from the clutch of the political parties.

Respected Sir,

On behalf of the Greater Cooch Behar People's Association, I beg to submit the following in respect of the above mention subject for your kind information and necessary action.

Your honour is aware of the fact that our organization is not a political organization. The organization has been formed with a view to-

1. Maintain the cultural heritage of Cooch Behar.
2. Take steps to solve the problems of Cooch Behar.
3. Safeguard the interest of the Cooch Behar People.
4. Improve the living and social condition of the people of Cooch Behar.
5. Promote the unity, fraternity and cooperation among the Cooch Behar people.

6. Take steps for maintaining the clause of the merger agreement made between His Highness Maharaja of Cooch Behar and the Union of India.
7. Give the status of Cooch Behar as a class' C' State as was mentioned at the time of merger of Cooch State with Union of India.

That previously we went on deputation before your honour and submitted memorandum in respect of our demands .Our movement is totally democratic and we believe in peaceful movement. Our organization has got no relation with any other organization. It may kindly be noted here, we have placed our demand before the Honourable Home Minister, Union of India, above all we have placed our demand before the President of India, The Secretary to the President of India ,vide his letter No. P1/ D- 31910 dated 16-04-2002 informed us that he has forwarded our demand letter to the Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs for appropriate action.

Here I am most respectfully beg to mention that ,just before the Assembly Election of the State ,some illegal action were taken against some of our members, but on further enquiry the police administration came to the conclusion, non of our members were/ are involved with K.P.P. and K.L.O. organization, thus our members were released from such suspicion.

You know the ensuing *Panchayet* election is scheduled to be held in the middle part of 2003 and for the same the political parties already started their activities for the election. In our estimation to capture the village through the election the political parties made their plan to

pressure upon our members for obtaining support and help of our members in their favour. In some places the political parties in their meeting quoting the name of our organization threatening us that if we do not stop our movement in that case they will make arrangement to arrest our members as 'Linkman or sympathizer of KPP or KLO.

It may be kindly noted here that there are incident of harassment on our members during the meeting of our organization even with the permission of ther administration.

Under the above circumstances most respectfully I beg to state, please take necessary steps to stop the procedure to harass members of or organization and oblige.

Thanking you.

Yours Faithfully,

(Signed)

Arun Kumar Ray

Secretary

The Greater Cooch Behar People Association.

APPENDIX-E

A MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA BY THE GREATER COOCH BEHAR PEOPLES' ASSOCIATION

To

His Excellency The President of India

Rastrapati Bhawan,

New Delhi- 110004.

Through the Chief Commissioner,

Cooch Behar

Through The S.D.O.

Cooch Behar.

Through the B.D.O.

Cooch Behar Block No. I

Subject: Prayer to stop the illegal and unconstitutional imposition of the Legislative Assembly Election of West Bengal at the Cooch Behar State and permission to form a CARE TAKER MINISTRY for administration of Cooch Behar State as per the merger agreement made between the Maharaja of Cooch Behar State and the Government of India on 28th August, 1949.

Respected Sir,

With due respect we on behalf of The Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association have the honour to inform you that we have informed about the matter to the Honourable Prime Minister of India and the Honourable Home Minister of India vide our petitions date 26-12-2000 and 26-08-2004 that the merger of the then Cooch Behar State with

West Bengal on 1st January ,1950 by Dr, Bidhan Chandra Ray the then Chief Minister of West Bengal is fully illegal, unconstitutional and initially void. Also we informed this matter to the then the Excellency President of India ,honourable Home Minister of India and the Honourable Prime Minister of India by the said petitions in the categorical way. The people of Cooch Behar State as well as the people of Greater Cooch Behar areas (Which is consist of the area of Districts of Cooch Behar ,Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, North and South Dinajpur and undivided Goalpara district of Assam) raised their voice against the illegal merger. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehuru the then Prime Minister of India, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel the then Home Minister of India knew this fact very well. Even they informed Dr. B.C.Ray the then Chief Minister of West Bengal that fully unable to merge the Greater Cooch Behar State with West Bengal as per agreements on 20.08- 1948, 28-08-1949 and 30-08-1949 made between His Excellency Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur of Cooch Behar State and the Government of India.

Here we like to quote in short the intention of Government of India in said letter D.O. No. F 15 (19) Dated 30-08-1949 stated “ If is the intention of the Government of India to administer for the present the territory of the Cooch Behar State as a centrally administered area under a Chief Commissioner.”

Now, the area of the Cooch Behar State was handed over to the Government of India on 12th September ,1949 and the Government of India recognized this Cooch Behar State as “C” category State in the constitution of India adopted on 26th November, 1949. It is also historically fact that the Cooch Behar State was administered under a

Chief Commissioner up to 31st December, 1949 and Mr. V. I. Nanjappa was the 1st Chief Commissioner of this recognized Cooch Behar State.

Further, we would like to inform you that according to section 7(1) of Indian independence act passed by the British Parliament, the area of the Cooch Behar State shall be consisted of the area of Darjelling, Jalpaiguri, North and South Dinajpur and also undivided Goalpara areas of Assam ,because the above quoted areas were tactfully occupied by the British rulers from the Kings of Cooch Behar from 1773 to 1902 A.D. by various agreements .But it is well known to all that the British rulers lapsed all agreements relating such occupation by section 7(1) Indian Independence Act 1947 and returned in writing the above quoted areas to Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahdur Maharaja of Cooch Behar of 18th July, 1947.

We on behalf of our association as well as on behalf of the people of the Greater Cooch Behar areas , these people are now legally entitle to form the Greater Cooch Behar State in the above quoted areas as Greater Cooch Behar which is still a recognized state ('C' category state). We should like to inform you that the Government of West Bengal and the Government of Assam have been ruling 1st January ,1950 over this area without having legal jurisdiction and constitutional right.

We also like to raise before you that the issue of the present socio-political of this Cooch Behar area ,where the poor people are being deprived of their all sorts of constitutional rights since the date of merger agreement concluded between His Excellency Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhp Bahadur of Cooch Behar State and the Government of India. After that agreement and merger no Government have been taking

any sincere and careful initiative for upliftment and the betterment of the erstwhile of subject Cooch Behar State.

We have informed about the matter from 26-12-2000 to update. However, from the Prime Minister of India and the Home Minister of India no any initiative has taken. In that situation we were forced to come to New Delhi with mass (at Jantar Mantar) on 26-08-2004 for the establishment of our agreement and the Honourable Home Minister Mr. Shiv Raj Patil received our memorandum by his own hand and assured us that he will look into the matter immediately .But till now no any initiative has been taken from their end.

We know according to the merger agreement India Government is bound to establish the prosperity of the Cooch Behar people. The India Government has no right to do anything without the consent of the Cooch Behar people. However, we are finding that the Government of India is avoiding the merger agreement and doing everything according to their wishes. The Government of India is also destructing the art, architecture, language, prosperity, and the heritage of Cooch Behar. Therefore, we are reminding you to obey the promises mentioned in the merger agreement and the imposition of Legislative Assembly Election of West Bengal Government at the Cooch Behar State is illegal and unconstitutional. Therefore, therefore, our kind request to you please does not impose the illegal and unconstitutional Legislative Assembly Election at the Cooch Behar State and we pray to you to form a CARE TAKER MINISTRY for administration of the area of Cooch Behar State with immediate effect.

Therefore, we request your kindly to look into the matter and do a favourable action from your kindness for which shall ever be grateful to you.

With Regards.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)

Secretaries of the different Anchal Committee
The Greater Cooch Behar People's Association.

Address of Correspondence

Banshi Badan Barman

General Secretary

The Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association

P.O. Jarabari, Dinhat

Cooch Behar-736135.

APPENDIX-F

**A MEMORANDUM TO THE HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER,
GOVT. OF INDIA, NEW DELHI- BY ALL KOCH-
RAJBANSHI STUDENTS' UNION (AKRSU) ,CHILARAI
SENA &ALL KOCH-RAJBANSHI MAHILA SAMITI DATED,
NEW DELHI ON 5TH MAY, 2007.**

**TO
DR. MANMOHAN SINGH,
Hon'ble Prime Minister,
Government of India,
New Delhi-01.**

**Sub:-By "GHEROU PROGRAMME OF PARLIAMENT"
we hereby submit Memorandum for creating separate
homeland"KAMATAPUR" and Status of Scheduled
Tribe (Palins) for Koch-Rajbanshi Community of
Assam.**

Hon'ble Sir,

We the undersigned, on behalf of "All Koch- Rajbanshi Students' Union, Chilarai Sen and All Koch-Rajbanshi Mahila Samiti" crave the leave by your honour to place before you the following vital and sensitive matter for favour of your kind attention and for favour of taking necessary action by your Government to alleviate the problems set forth below:-

1. That Hon'ble Sir, "All Koch- Rajbanshi Students' Union, Chilarai Sena & All Koch- Rajbanshi Mahila Samiti " are represents the Koch- Rajbanshi Community to promote, safe guard and uphold the interest of the said community and with that end in view, spearhead all democratic movements in this region.
2. That Hon'ble Sir, the Koch-Rajbanshi Community constitutes a big segment of the entire population in the state of Assam and they have a distinct cultural heritage and they constitute a distinct entity.
3. That Hon'ble Sir, the Koch-Rajbanshi Community founded the "KAMATAPUR" the Koch Kingdom in the century comprising entire North Bengal, Lower Assam, Meghalaya extended upto Tripura by Maharaja Viswa Singh. The Koch kings rules over ancient Kamrup, North Bengal, Sylhet, Kachar, Tripura, Manipur and wielded great powers and dominated over vast tracts of lands of neighbouring states. It is only after 'Independence' Cooch Behar State was integrated with Union of India and was given the status of "C" category state along with State of Ajmir, Bhopal , Bilaspur and Coorg. This integration was the result of an Agreement between the Governor General of India and the Maharaja of Koch Kingdom. But, regrettably the general interest of the subject of the Koch Kingdom was lost sight of the said agreement and thus the Koch-Rajbanshi Community has been suffering from a sense of neglect. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the identity of the Koch -Rajbanshi is on the verge of extension.
4. That Hon'ble Sir, in the present context, the Govt. of Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Meghalaya and Tripura had declared and recognized the Koch-Rajbanshi as "Most Other Backward Community". In some

states, they have been given the status of plain Tribal. Thus the Koch-Rajbanshi people have become minority in each state losing their political representation and reduced to a lower position than the plain Tribal People of Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura. Their 'Ethnic Identity' is on the verge of dying .

5. That Hon'ble Sir, as many as three ordinances were passed by the Hon'ble President of India to give the Koch Community the status of S.T.(plains), but no legislation was ever passed in this regard. It is a felt necessity that the Koch Rajbanshi Community should be upgraded to the status of Scheduled Tribe and accordingly the Koch-Rajbanshi Community is required to be Indian Constitution for the welfare of the Community. It is also equally important that the community needs a separate Home Land' of their own comprising some parts of Assam, West Bengal and Bihar to protect their ethnic cultural and socio-economic heritage and identity by which alone the community can be ensured of their full protection, peace and progress in the country. That Hon'ble Sir, in spite of persistent demand set in motion since 1967, no positive response has been received from the Government and thus the people of Koch- Rajbanshi community are suffering from frustration and gradual degrading and they feel utterly neglected and unprotected putting them into the quagmire of social, Political and Economic backwardness in absence of any constitutional provisions.
6. That Hon'ble Sir, in spite of positive view expressed by the parliament Select Committee in that past of pending bill inclusion of the Koch – Rajbanshi in the list of S.T.(Plains) is still hanging in the balance without any bill passed in the Parliament. Such a neglect of an

important segment of the population as set forth above is volatile of the concept of a welfare State and Spirit of our Constitution.

7. That Hon'ble Sir, for substantiation of our humble submission set forth above, a number of correspondences made by the "All Koch-Rajbanshi Students' Union " to different personalities at different times are annexed herewith for ready reference which will go to show that the grievances and demand of the Koch –Rajbanshi Community are consideration and effective constitutional measures to alleviate them, at an early date.

8. That Hon'ble Sir, we are fully aware that your honour remains busy to look into various problems which our country is confronted with .Yet we sincerely believe that in view of the urgency of the matter set here under, your bearing self well be gracious and magnanimous enough to personally see to the genuine and long standing grievances of the Koch-Rajbanshi Community and will be kind enough to take effective constitutional measures to ensure protection, peace and progress of a backward community.

In view of the facts and circumstances set forth above ,we fervently appeal before your kindly honour kindly to look into the vital issue personally and to use your good offices to bring a suitable legislation in the Parliament as your honour deems fit and proper for the inclusion if the Koch- Rajbanshi Community in the 'Sixth Scheduled' as Scheduled Tribes(Plains) & to legislative measures to fulfill the genuine and long standing demands of the community at the earliest possible time.

And for this act of kindness we the undersigned shall ever pray and remain ever grateful your begin self.

With kind regards.

Yours faithfully,

(Biswajit Ray)
President
All Koch- Rajbanshi Students'
Union

(Pradip Ray)
General Secretary
All Koch- Rajbanshi Students' Union

Copy to

- 1.Smt. Sonia Gandhi
Hon'ble President, AICC.
2. Sjt. Rajnath Singh
Hon'ble President, BJP
- 3.Sjt. Sivraj V. Patil
Hon'ble Home Minister, Govt. of India.

APPENDIX-G

A DEPUTATION HAS BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE, COOCH BEHAR BY THE KAMATAPUR STUDENTS' ORGANIZATION ON 20TH OCTOBER, 2008.

To

The District Magistrate,
Cooch Behar.

Sub: Recognition of the Language of *Kamatapuri* and Implementation of *Kamatapuri* language in School and College.

Respected Sir,

We, the member of *Kamatapuri* Students' Organization Central Committee beg to demand & appeal you that from this running session in school of six district of North Bengal the *Kamatapuri* language may kindly be implemented in grass root. We further demand that the *Kamatapuri* language may kindly inserted in 8th Scheduled of Constitution of India.

Thanking you.

Date: 20.10.2008
Place: Cooch Behar

Yours faithfully,
(Signed by)
Anarul Sekh (President of K.S.O.)
Swapan Ch. Barman
(Vice- President of K.S.O.)
Ranjan Ray (Member)
Mukul Singha (Member)
Bishnu Barman (Member)
Jayanta Ray (Member)

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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