

## Chapter III

### State in the Making: The Kamata-Koches.

Historically, the Tista-Brahmaputra valley is not a void region. Growth of civilization and early human settlements are evident from the archaeological explorations and other historical sources. Human flow to the region from different corners of the globe in different historical periods and their admixture had increased the population complexity and paved the way for the cultural synthesis in the region. Rise and growth of states in the region and their interactions with the neighbouring power led to the growth of political institutions with localised characteristics. All these historical traditions had immense impact on the rise and development of the Koch kingdom. So the pre-Koch political development has been reviewed to construct the nature of the formation of Koch state.

#### 3.1. Earley States of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa were the early states originated in the Tisat-Brahmaputra valley which have been illustrated in the *Mahabharata*, *puranas* (mythology) and in the *Tantra* literatures. These Sanskrit literatures have recorded that the boundary of the Pragjyotisha kingdom was extended from the *Karatoya* in the west to the *Dikrai* river in the east and Pragjyotisha was said to have been ruled by a *Kirata* chief (tribal chief) named Mahiranga Danaṃ. His successors Hatakasur, Sambarasur, Ratnasur and Ghataka had maintained the tribal rule.<sup>1</sup> Ghatakasur was, however, defeated and killed by Naraka.<sup>2</sup> Tribal king Bana of Sonitpur (right bank of the *Brahmaputra* of Upper Assam) was contemporary of Naraka. Being influenced by Bana, Naraka had the fascination to the tribal culture and religion for which Lord Krishna is said to have slain Naraka and installed Bhagadatta in the throne of Pragjyotisha.<sup>3</sup> The story of Bhagadatta has been illustrated in the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* describes that he had participated in the 'war of the Kurukshetra' in favour of the Kaurava but fell in the battlefield.<sup>4</sup> After Bhagadatta, Vajradatta became the ruler from that dynasty and his successors continued to rule in Kamarupa (Pragjyotisha) for several generations.

It is very difficult to determine the exact time period of the early tribal rule in Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa and to prove the historicity of the illustrious episodes of Naraka and Bhagadatta. But it is beyond the scope of doubt that the tribal rule (*Asura* or *Danava*) of the Tista-Brahmaputra valley was not replaced by the Aryans. Naraka and Bhagadatta as ancestors were invariably connected with the historical kingdoms emerged in the Tista-Brahmaputra valley in the later period.

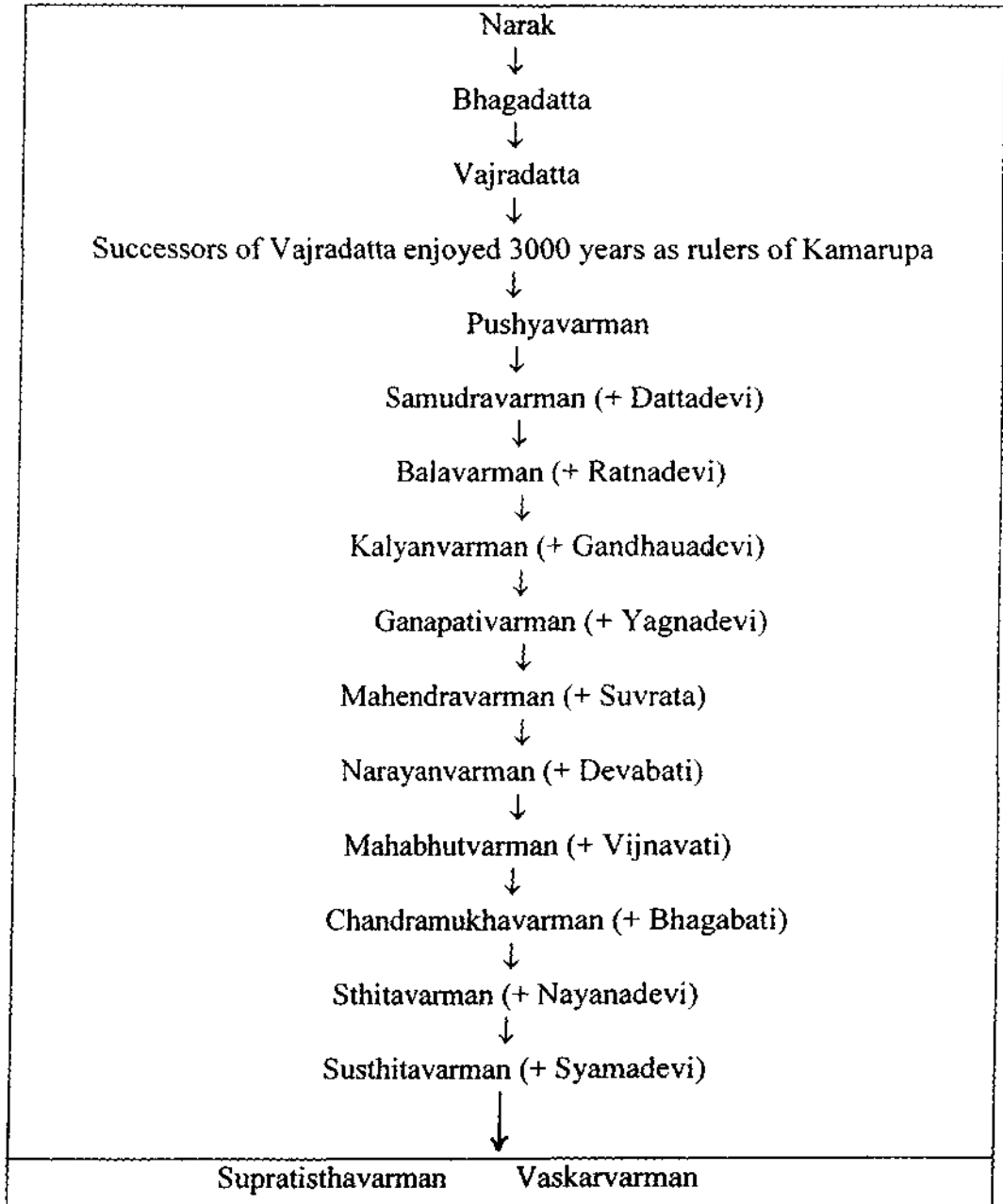
### 3.2. Kamarupa: From the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

Political history of the region began with the reign of Pushyavarman, a contemporary ruler of Samudra Gupta (335-376 A.D.), the Gupta emperor. The inscriptional evidences such as--the *Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription* and the *Dhubi Copper Plates* of Vaskarvarman have recorded the genealogical table of the Varman dynasty from Pushyavarman onwards <sup>5</sup> as mentioned in the **table 3.1**. King Pushyavarman (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) assumed the high sounding title like *Maharaja Dhiraja* which indicates his independent status.<sup>6</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> ruler of this line was Mahendravarman (5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) who performed two 'horse-sacrifices'<sup>7</sup> which was a significant achievement for the rulers of Kamarupa in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and paved the way for the political prominence of Vaskarvarman in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Mahabhutivarman, the 8<sup>th</sup> ruler of the dynasty had adopted the policy of territorial expansion by taking the circumstantial opportunity of contemporary Eastern India, i.e. weakness of the Gupta power. He donated lands to the Brahmins in large scale in the Mayulsalamalagraha in the Chandrapuri *Vishaya*, near the *Kaushiki* or *Kusi* river <sup>8</sup> The *Kaushiki* has been identified with the old channel of the *Kosi* river flowing to the west of Purnia and fell in the Ganges.<sup>9</sup> The land-grants to the Brahmins beyond the traditional (natural) western boundary of Kamarupa i.e., the *Karatoya*, signifies the territorial expansion of the Kamarupa kings in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and its social legitimation by Brahmanical culture.

Most prominent and illustrious king of Pragjyotisha (Kamarupa) was Vaskarvarman (c 600-650 AD). Under his able leadership, Kamarupa became so prominent that Harshavardhan of Kanauj (*Sakala Uttarapathanatha* or master of whole Northern India) became his political ally against the contemporary regional power of Gauda (Bengal) emerged under the leadership of Sasanka (early 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). After driving out Sasanka from Karnasuvarna (capital of Gauda), Vaskarvarman

reissued the order of land-grant to the Brahmins formerly granted by King Bhutivarman.<sup>10</sup> The *Nidhanpur Copper Plate* describes that Vaskarvarman was a lover of learning and propagator of the *Arya Dharma* (religion of the Aryans)<sup>11</sup>. Yuan Chwan's account (7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) has recorded the prosperity of idle worship and religious toleration to the non-Aryan in Kamarupa.<sup>12</sup>

**Table: 3.1** Genealogy of the Varman Dynasty



**3.3.Kamarupa: From the Late 7<sup>th</sup> Century to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.**

The successors of Vaskarvarman could not maintain the hold of the Varman line of rulers in Kamarupa. Salasthamba, a tribal chief (*Mlechadhinatha*)<sup>13</sup> had founded a

new ruling order in Kamarupa around the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. The term *mlechchha* indicates the tribal origin of the new ruling family. Subsequent rulers of this line like Sri Harsha Varma Deva, Vanamala (c835-60A.D.) and Balavarman III (c860-80A.D.) claimed their ancestry to the family of Bhagadatta.<sup>14</sup> Salastambha was described as 'a king like tiger' in the *Copper Plate Grant* of Harjjarvarman<sup>15</sup> but his immediate successors were not prominent figure in the ancient political history of Kamarupa.

Salstambha line was revived with the rise of Sriharsha Varmadeva in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.. He extended the political influence of Kamarupa over the extensive territories of Eastern India and his daughter was married to Jaydeva II, the King of Nepal.<sup>16</sup> However, his domination beyond the west of the *Karatoya* did not last long and the next king merely maintained the core area of Kamarupa. But once again the Salasthambha line was revived with the accession of Harjjarvarman (c 820-835 A.D.) who began to regenerate the lost energy. He was an ardent follower of Shiva or *Parama Maheswar*.

Next king Vanamala (c835-60A.D.) had granted lands to the Brahmins in the village Abhisura Vataka near Chandrapuri *vishaya* in the west of the *Trisrota (Tista)*<sup>17</sup> river although the popular cult of *Shaivism* was his fascination. The *Nawgaon Inscription* of Balavarman III (c. 875-890 A.D.) mentions that Vanamala or Vanamalavarman (c. 835-860) had erected a row of beautiful palaces in the bank of the *Brahmaputra* at Harupeswar, the ancestral capital of the Mlechcha ruler.<sup>18</sup> Balavarman III was the last powerful monarch of Kamarupa from the Mlechcha dynasty and after him reliable account is not available about them.

### 3.4. The Pala Rulers of Kamarupa.

The grandeur of the Salasthambha dynasty was declined after the last quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>19</sup> and the last ruling prince Tyagasimha was died without issue. With this circumstantial opportunity, Brahmapal founded a new ruling order having fresh energies, ideas and state system. His son, Ratnapal (c. 1000 – 1030 A.D.) being a warlike king, had founded a fortified capital called *Durjaya* (impregnable) at the bank of the *Brahmaputra*.<sup>20</sup> His *Copper Plate Grants of Bargaon* and *Sualkuchi Grant* prove the long reign of Ratnapal and land grants to the Brahmins at the banks of the *Lohita* and the *Kalang*, respectively.<sup>21</sup> These grants also attached Bhagadatta as the ancestor of

this new dynasty of Kamarupa. Purandar Pal, successor of Ratnapala had a wife from the *kshatriya* family of Northern India<sup>22</sup> from whom Indra Pal was born who had fairly a long reign in the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (c. 1030-55 A.D.).

The 7<sup>th</sup> king of the Pala line was Dharma Pal (c. 1090 – 1115 A.D.) who revived the old policy of territorial expansion of Kamarupa particularly in the western direction. He shifted his capital from Pragjyotishapur to Kamarupa Nagar which was located in the bank of the *Brahmaputra* near Guwahati.<sup>23</sup> After the death of Dharmapala, Pala rule in Kamarupa was declined and it was conquered by Ram Pal, the Pala king of Gauda (1084-1126 A.D.).<sup>24</sup>

Like the Varman and the Salasthambha dynasties, the Palas did not follow any exceptional policy. But they granted lands to the Brahmins within the kingdom while the previous two ruling dynasties did the same only in the extended territories i.e., beyond the natural boundary of Kamarupa. Moreover the Palas realized the needs of defence of the political centers from the probable attack from southwestern corner i., e., Gauda (Bengal).

### **3.5. The Tista-Brahmaputra Valley: From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.**

Political hegemony of Gauda over Kamarupa did not last long. Tingyadeva, a vassal of the Palas, and his successor Vaidyadeva tried to restore the lost prestige of Kamarupa.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile the Pala rule of Bengal was replaced by the Senas for which Kamarupa got rid from the future attack from Gauda. But Bakhtiyar Khalji, a general of the emerging Delhi Sultanate, however, uprooted the Senas in 1198 A.D. which marked the beginning of a new era for the history of both Bengal and the Tista-Brahmaputra valley.

After the fall of the Palas of Kamarupa, the decentralized forces had entangled the Tista-Brahmaputra valley and led to the birth of numerous but mutually contesting political entities under the leaderships of tribal and non-tribal chiefs. In Bengal, Muslim rule was established by the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and Bengal started the repeated invasion to the Tista-Brahmaputra valley which was a new development for the political history of the region. At the same time, advent of the Ahoms in the Upper Assam in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>26</sup> and beginning of state formations of the Kachari and Chutia tribes in the eastern part of Kamarupa were closely associated with the politics and polities of North Bengal and Lower Assam.

During the time of invasion of Bakhtiyar Khalji from Bengal i.e. early 13<sup>th</sup> century, political center of Kamarupa was shifted to Kamata i.e., western part of the Tista-Brahmaputra valley. According to *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, Prithu (Barthu), the king of Kamarupa,<sup>27</sup> had checked the invasion of Bakhtiyar. The second Muslim invasion under Giyasuddin Iwaj in 1227 A.D. was also repulsed by Prithu.<sup>28</sup> Although Bakhtiyar, utilized the aids of the Koch and Mech tribes of the Western Duars in his Kamarupa invasions. it was a sheer failure. Contrarily, Prithu had full support of his subjects as *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* describes:

“when they (Bakhtiyar and his army) retreated throughout the whole route, not a blade of grass nor a stick of fire wood remained, as they (inhabitants) had set fire to the whole of it, and burnt it, and all the inhabitants of those defiles and passes had moved off from the line of routes.”<sup>29</sup>

Prithu realized the need of permanent defence of the territory from the enemies of southwest. Like the Pala rulers he began to construct forts in the southwest frontiers. His forts have been found in Rangpur and Jalpaiguri districts.<sup>30</sup> Attempts of fortification by Prithu indicates that the southwest frontier of Kamata became a great political concern for the successive rulers of this kingdom. In spite of it Prithu was defeated and killed by Muhammad Nasiruddin.<sup>31</sup>

However, the *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* describes that after the death of Prithu, Nasiruddin Muhammad on the condition of paying tribute had placed Prithu's son in Kamarupa<sup>32</sup>. But Nasiruddin's death in 1229 A.D. caused the end of the Muslim hegemony in Kamarupa even some portion of former Gauda was conquered by the Kamarupa-Kamata ruler. The *charita puthis* on the other hand, have left some impressions about a king of Kamarupa-Kamata of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D, named Sandhya who adorned the title *Gaudesvar*<sup>33</sup>. He successfully repulsed the Muslim invasion of Bengal under the commandship of Malik Yujbuk in 1254-55 A.D. <sup>34</sup>. Repeated invasion from Bengal compelled King Sandhya to arrange 'fortified defence' of his kingdom. So he shifted the center of power to Kamatapur situated in present Cooch Behar district.<sup>35</sup> Henceforth the ruler of the region began to be described as *Kamesvar* or *Kamatesvar* (lord of Kamata) instead of former appellation *Pragiyotishadhipati* or *Kamarupadhipati* (lord of Pragiyotisha or Kamarupa).

The *charita puthis* has illustrated another episode of the 13<sup>th</sup> century history of Kamarupa. It describes that successors of Sandhya were ousted by a Kayastha minister of the state, named Pratapdvaja<sup>36</sup> and he himself adorned the kingship but the location and the time period are yet to be traced accurately.

With the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D., control over Kamarupa became a troublesome task for any particular ruling family. The adventurers and usurpation were common. Singhadhvaja (c. 1300 – 1305 A.D.) had founded a new ruling order in the land by killing the *Kamesvar* of the line of Sandhya. New *Kamesvar*, Durlav Narayan was a contemporary of Chandibar,<sup>37</sup> the forefather of Sankardeva. Durlav Narayan (c.1330-50), however, was not a ruler of unified Kamarupa-Kamata. He had to fight against another chiefs of the region named Dharma Narayan whose title was *Gaudesvar*.<sup>38</sup> But the conflict was indecisive and eventually a peace was concluded between them. And on the request of *Kamesvar*, *Gaudesvar* sent seven families of Brahmins and seven families of *Kayasthas* to Kamarupa.<sup>39</sup> These *Kayasthas* were expert agriculturist who had introduced the advanced techniques of rice cultivation in the Brahmaputra valley particularly at Lengamaguri, on the bank of the *Baranadi* near Hajo.<sup>40</sup> They gradually emerged as a significant sociopolitical entity under the leadership of Chandibar, popularly called Shiromony Bhuiyan.

After the death of Durlav Narayan, Indra Narayan became the king of Kamata (c.1350-65)<sup>41</sup> who faced twofold pressure from outside i.e. from the Upper Assam (Ahom) and Bengal.<sup>42</sup> Death of Indra Narayan marked the end of the Kayastha rule in Kamata founded by Pratapdhvaj.

There exists another set of rulers of Kamarupa-Kamata of the period between the last half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the early 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This new ruling dynasty was founded by Arimatta (c.1365-85 A.D) who was succeeded by Gajanka (c.1365-1400A.D), Sukranka (c. 1400-1415A.D.) and Mriganka (c.1415-1440A.D) respectively.<sup>43</sup> The territorial extension of their kingdom was limited to Western Kamarupa or Kamata comprising present Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and northern part of Rangpur districts. The outlying territories of western Assam or Lower Brahmaputra valley became the mastery of the *Bhuiyans*<sup>44</sup> and faced expeditions from the emerging Ahom state. *Kamrupar Buranji*, however, has described the vast territorial size of Arimatta's kingdom extended from the *Karatoya* to Sadiya with a fort at Baidyagarh.<sup>45</sup>

Arimatta was killed by Phengua, a nephew of Durlabhendra, the *Kamesvar*. But again, Arimatta's son restored the power.<sup>46</sup> This version proves the chaotic political condition of Kamarupa in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus the Tista-Brahmaputra valley was segmented among the decentralized forces contesting mutually for establishing mastery over the land. Western part of former Kamarupa began to be identified as **Kamata** with its capital at Kamatapur. Kamata region had been fortified for the protection against the probable attack from Bengal Sultans. The region was facing the possibility of frequent raids from the Kachari and the Bhutias as both these power began the plundering of wealth of the Kayastha Bhuiyans, brought to the region.<sup>47</sup> Frequent changes of the dynasties undoubtedly created an unstable political scenario. Moreover, contest of power was not confined to the Mongoloid tribes only; non-tribal chiefs particularly the *Bhuiyans* also got involvement with it.

### **3.6.Pre-Kamata-Koch Political Traditions of the Tista-Brahamaputra Valley.**

The forgoing analysis on the growth and development of states and civilization in the Tista-Brahmaputra valley between the periods, 4<sup>th</sup> century to the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. reveals certain dynamics of sociopolitical changes. These features had considerable influence on the formation of states since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The first and foremost point was the emergence of kingdom from tribalism. The Varman dynasty, dynasty of Salasthambha or other ruling families of Kamarupa-Kamata had their tribal traditions.

The territorial boundary of the kingdoms was determined by the natural frontiers. The *Karatoya* was the southwest boundary since the beginning of political history of the Tista-Brahmaputra valley. The rulers from Brahmaputra valley relentlessly tried to cross the western boundary. Contrarily Gauda (Bengal) invaded Kamarupa-Kamata repeatedly. But the conquests through the aggressive warfare were short-lasting phenomenon for both the parties and the *Karatoya* had been remained the natural (acceptable) boundary between Gauda and Kamarupa. It was a common psychology of the rulers of Bengal and Kamarupa-Kamata to establish the single power domination.

Fortification with natural defences i.e., river, hill etc., and advanced technologies available to them; was also a common feature. Militia was consisted with locally available techniques and machinery like- guerrilla warfare and elephantry.

Economically the region was not a stagnant one. Coins were circulated by different dynasties of Kamarupa with limited scope. But cowry cells were the common medium of exchange<sup>48</sup>. The *Zamindars* and *Bhuiyans* were the agents of land revenue collection. Advanced agricultural techniques were introduced particularly for rice cultivation in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. But the tribals of the hilly area had been remained with primordial production system.

For the legitimation of political rule, Naraka and Bhagadatta were projected as the ancestor of the ruling family. The king was the leader of the polity, warfare and head of the state. Other offices were subsidiary. The Brahmins were frequently brought to Kamarupa and were endowed with land. The *Kayasthas* also established their stronghold in the Brahmaputra valley.

**Table: 3.2.:** Pre Kamata-Koch traditions of state formation of the Tista-Brahmaputra Valley

Features	Description
Nature of the process of state formation	From tribalism to state
Territory	Pragjyotisha / Kamarupa / Kamata, extended from the <i>Dikrai</i> in the east to the <i>Karatoya</i> in the west and from Bhutan in the north to Ghoraghat in the south.
Warfare	Inter-tribal feuds and Inter-regional conflicts were commons particularly with Gauda.
Militia	Tribal-militia with guerrilla-technique, standing army with elephantry, cavalry and infantry.
Defence	Natural and organized defence with fortification
Economic structure	Coin was circulated but cowry cells were medium of exchange. Agricultural surplus was concentrated regularly. Trade and commerce had been flourished. Rivers were the medium of transport.
Nature of administration	King was the leader of the society. He had subsidiary offices.
Legitimacy	Kingship was connected with either Narak or Bhagadatta. Land-grants to the Brahmins was also common.
Political center(s)	Pragjyotishapur and its vicinity and Kamatapur.
Political psychology	Single power domination.

Decentralization, anarchy and usurpation were also common phenomena prior to the emergence of the Kamata-Koches. Center of polity was remained in Pragjyotishpur or in the vicinity of Guwahati. But since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Kamatapur became the main center of politics.

### 3.7. Formation of the Kamata State in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Khenas initiated the formation of a state in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in the Tista-Brahmaputra valley where the above-mentioned political traditions had great impact. Racial and social identities of the Khenas are obscure and entangled with multiversal legends, myths and local traditions. But their history of state formation in the 15<sup>th</sup> century is beyond the scope of obscurity unlike the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century rulers of Kamarupa and Kamata.

#### 3.7.1. Origin of the Khenas.

Origins and early history of the Khenas are shrouded in mystery. Existence of local ballads called *Gosani Mangal* (on the king of Kamata) made the task more problematic to construct the identity of the Khenas. Buchanan Hamilton during his visits (1807-09) to the ruined sites of Kamatapur *Durga* or fortified capital of Kamatapur at Gosanimari had recorded a local tradition about the foundation of the Kamata kingdom by the Khenas. He describes that

“according to tradition, there was a Brahman whose name is unknown; but who had a servant that tended his cattle, no one knows where. According to some, this servant was an infidel (*Osur*) most probably from the mountain of Tripura, but concerning this, different persons are not exactly agreed, and some allege, that it was his mother who was of the impure race, and that she bore her a son while in the service of the Brahmin. The Brahmin ..... by his profound skill in the noble science of *Samudrik Jyotisha*, knew that the .....servant would become a prince, on this discovery, the Brahmin paid him to perform any law office, and showed him still more kindness by disclosing the certainty of his future greatness; for the servant in return, promised that when he become a prince, the Brahmin should be his Chief minister (*Patro*). Accordingly sometimes afterwards, it is not known how, became a king.”<sup>49</sup>

A similar narrative is also available in the *Gosani Mangal* composed by Radhakrishna Das Bairagi during the reign of Koch King Harendra Narayan (1783 – 1839 A.D.). It describes the story of Kantanath, son of a poor couple Bhaktisvar and Angana of Jambari village near Gosanimari, who was a servant of a Brahmin of that village. But being blessed by goddess Gosani, he became the king of Kamata, which had been facing a period of anarchy. He assumed the title like *Kantesvar*. His queen Banamala

had an extra-marital relationship with Manohar, son of Sashipatra, a Brahmin minister of the state. The king being revengeful to Manohar had killed him and served his cooked meat to his minister father. But the minister, knowing the barbarous act of the king, went to take the help of the Sultan to destroy the Kamatapur.<sup>50</sup>

These legendary accounts are not satisfactory for the identification of the origin of the Khenas and their Kamata Kingdom. But surely indicate that western Kamarupa or Kamata was going through a stage of anarchy that opened the opportunity to the adventurer like- Niladhvaja who is generally accepted as the founder of the Khenas rule in Kamata.

### 3.7.2. Identity of the Khenas

Like the Koches, racial and social identities of the Khenas are not beyond the scope of debate. K.L. Barua has constructed the identity of the Khenas as Kayasthas because **Khan** was a title of the Kayastha Bhuiyans of Western Assam.<sup>51</sup> Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed on the other hand, mentioned the possibility of an alternative origin of the Khenas. Relying on the description of *Kamtesvar Kulakarika* of Srutidhar Rup Narayan of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Ahmed connected the origin of *Kamtesvar* with the *Rajbanshis*.<sup>52</sup> But the *Rajbanshi* identity like *Kayastha* origin of the Khenas had been attached to them after their state formation in order to chastise (purify) their inferior social rank. So S.N. Bhattacharyya wrote: 'to what race the new rulers (Khenas) belonged is not known but they were rapidly hinduized and assumed Hindu names and worshiped Hindu gods and goddesses'.<sup>53</sup>

The foregoing arguments are insufficient to construct the identity of the Khenas. But occasional references in the local literatures and the ethnographic data of the colonial period are helpful to prove the tribal status of the Khenas. L.A. Waddell had recorded the existence of a tribe called *Khyen* in the Indo-Burmese border.<sup>54</sup> Khan Cowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed had recorded the similarities in myths about the origin of the Khenas and the Kachari king, Nirvay Narayan. So he asserted that it was possible that while the tribe was passing through Kachar, came into contact with the Kacharis and brought the Kachari myth into Kamata<sup>55</sup>. Moreover, 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century was a period of frequent adventures of the Shan tribes (Tai-Ahom) from Southeast Asia who established their state in Northeast India as we have discussed in the chapter I. So it is not beyond the scope of possibility that the Khenas entered into Kamata from the

northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent around the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the Tista-Brahmaputra valley had been experiencing an unstable rule of the adventurers. This point is requires to be researched further.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Buchanan Hamilton recorded the Khenas as the only tribe of Kamarupa-Kamata from whom the Brahmin take water. But in Dinajpur, Mr. Westmacott found the Khenas in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as oil pressers and cultivators and the Brahmins do not take water from them.<sup>56</sup> H.H. Risely, however, found respectable social status of the Khenas. He wrote in 1891 that

‘their social rank is respectable, and Brahmin, Kayathas and Baidyas take water, fruit, and sweet-meats from their hands.’<sup>57</sup>

Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri in 1903 found the Khenas of Cooch Behar in multiple professions who were segmented into different sub-sections viz. – *Mahendri, Teli, Barai, Saloya* and *Patiyar*. Socially they were superior in social status than the *Rajbanshis*.<sup>58</sup>

Inspite of multiplicity in the social identity of the Khenas the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century official data prove their occupational and social mobility in diverse scale and level. It is also noticeable that they were *hinduized* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but during their state formation under the leadership of Niladhvaja they did not have caste status, hence stood below the caste hierarchy.

### 3.7.3.Beginning of the Kamata State Formation.

Niladhvaja (c. 1440-60) started his political career in a political turmoil of Kamarupa-Kamata. His virtue, dignity and leadership in the mutual contest for mastery over Kamata made him the ruler of Kamata having the title *Kamesvar* (Lord of Kamata). He constructed the fortified capital called Kamatapur situated at present Cooch Behar district and appointed the Brahmins in the managerial functions of state. Administration was basically the adoption from the previous states emerged in the region. Although, territorially the state was lying over the small tract of Kamata, the fortified capital city Kamatapur was of 19 miles circumference. A temple was erected within the city for the worship of family deity called *Kamatesvari*. Historical works done so far on the history of Assam and Bengal merely constructed the paragraph mentioned above and constructed Niladhvaja as an upstart.<sup>59</sup>

But the present work stands on the humble origin of Niladhvaja who appropriated the circumstantial opportunity and laid the foundation of Kamata state that continued the state-structure developed in the region. Fortification was foremost task for Niladvaja for the very existence of the emerging state particularly to check the threats from multiple directions i.e. Sultan of Bengal, Ahom, Kachar, Bhutan etc, and challenges from within.

### **Chakradhvaja (C. 1460-80A.D.)**

The second king of the Khena line was Chakradhvaja (c.1460-80). The Kamata state began to flourish territorially with him because he took few attempts for territorial expansion in the west bank of the *Karatoya*. A strong force was sent off from Kamata to face the Muslim force in Dinajpur.<sup>60</sup> Ismail, general of Ruknuddin Barbak (1459 – 74 A.D), the Sultan of Bengal, initially did not get any success but eventually the Kamata force was retreated from their conquered territories.<sup>61</sup> But the *Risalat-us-Shuhada*, a Persian account about Ismail's contest with Kamata in 1474, has illustrated that Ismail eventually defeated the Kamata force by a means of magical power and the *Kamtesvar* said to have converted to Islam.<sup>62</sup> This account is obviously an exaggeration and it is not acceptable to think that the Kamata state lost its territories as Nilambar, the next king, constructed forts in Rangpur-Gharaghat region.<sup>63</sup>

Another significant political development during the reign of Chakradhvaj was the attachment of the myths of purified origin of the Khenas. According to the tradition, 'the shrine of goddess *Gosani* was discovered in the form of a *kavacha* (amulet) in Gosanimari. That amulet belonged to Bhagadatta, the mythological hero of Kamarupa. After the fall of Bhagadatta in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, a kite seized the arm of Bhagadatta with that amulet. The kite after flying several countries came to Kamarupa and took rest upon a *shimul* tree grown in the bank of *Fatik Kura* (a lake) of Kamata. But the *kavacha* fell here and gradually sunk deep in the earth. The *Kamtesvar* came to know this secret from a fisherwoman and on digging the earth the *kavacha* was discovered. Accordingly, the *kavacha* was enshrined with due solemnity and placed within the temple of *Gosani*.'<sup>64</sup> Historicity of this tradition is doubtful but it indicates to the state's attempt to create a link with the mythical and popular hero of the land like Bhagadatta.

### **Nilambar (C. 1480-1498).**

Traditional enmity between Bengal and Kamarupa-Kamata in the border of the *Karatoya* again became a major challenge for the survival of the newly formed kingdom in Kamata. Nilambar (c. 1480-98 A.D), successor of Chakradhvaja, had to face a challenge from Hussain Shah (1493-1519 A.D.), the Sultan of Bengal. Historicity of Nilambar is thus beyond doubt. Without indicating the source, E.A.Gait determined the territorial size of Kamata under Nilambar that it was extended from the *Karatoya* in the west to the *Baranadi* in the east.<sup>65</sup> Political power was practically centralized to Kamtapur. Nilambar's attempts of fortification in the borders and construction of roads had strengthened the defence of the kingdom. A road towards northwest direction from Kamatapur to the Jalpesh temple through Mekhliganj was constructed and its both side ponds were excavated after a certain distance of one or two miles. Construction of a road to north direction extended up to Girimul through Kumari Kote and Muralabas had brought the northern frontier of the kingdom directly connected with the state-capital. The road from Kamatapur to Ghorahat through Rangpur was strategically more important for the infant Khenas state.<sup>66</sup> The forts in the southern boarder like Ghorahat, Hatibanda, Olipur,<sup>67</sup> Chhayghar, Manthan Kote and Fatehpur<sup>68</sup> were constructed by Nilambar to defend the future attacks from Bengal. Nilambar's attempt thus consolidated the kingdom.

Emergence of the consolidated Kamata state was a challenge for the Sultans of Bengal. Thus conflict between Sultan Hussain Shah (1493-1519 A.D.)<sup>69</sup> and Nilambar was inevitable. According to the *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, Hussain Shah invaded Kamarupa and Kamata after his Orissa conquest<sup>70</sup> and his intentions were to recover the lost territories of Bengal and to stop the aggression of Kamata.<sup>71</sup> It is said that Hussain Shah was instigated by a Brahmin minister of Nilambar whose son was brutally murdered by the king for having an illicit affair with the queen.<sup>72</sup> Hussain Shah's army comprising 24000 infantry and cavalry and numerous ships<sup>73</sup> finally destroyed the Kamatapur fort and Kamata state<sup>74</sup>.

#### **3.7.4.Process of Kamata State Formation**

The Khenas started their political formation in Kamata under such a situation when it was passing through anarchy, mutual contests and threats from within and outside. But within a short span of time the Khenas extended the political boundary

from the *Karatoya* in the west to the *Baranadi* in the east i.e. traditional geographical extension of former Kamarupa. They even crossed the natural boundary in the southwest. Their state formation reveals the following aspects.

The first point was the question of surplus generation, its exploitation, concentration and redistribution. As the Khenas initiated the state formation from obscurity, initially they did not have enough opportunity of surplus appropriation. But introduction of wet-rice cultivation with advanced technology early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and legacy of revenue collection by the state machinery undoubtedly materialized the process of surplus generation and its concentration. Otherwise construction of a fortified city would have been impossible for them. Even after the fall of the Kamata state Hussain Shah plundered huge wealth from this Kamarupa-Kamata<sup>75</sup>. The trade and commerce had fattened agricultural surplus. The *Gosani Mangal* depicts the settlement of the traders in the Kamata kingdom. The *Sankhari* (conch shell sellers), *Kanshari* (bell metal seller) and *Kanyan*<sup>76</sup> (or traders from Western India) became the essential part of the commercial economy.

No coin of the Khena rulers yet been noticed although probability of existence of their currency is very high. The *Gosani Mangal* refers the minting of coin and preservation of gold coins in a strong room called 'Attharakota' within the fort of Kamatapur.<sup>77</sup> A place called *Takshal* (mint) near the fort, indicates the elaborate minting machinery of the Khenas.<sup>78</sup> Bhagavati Charan Bandhopadhyaya although claims that the *Kamtesvar* had circulated silver coins and coins were rarely available in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>79</sup> But until or unless Khena coin is noticed such claims are hypothetical.

For the ordinary transaction cowry was the medium of exchange in different part of Bengal and Kamarupa-Kamata. The *cowries* had acceptability as a common medium of exchange and store value which were circulated in the Tista-Brahmaputra valley early in the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. for common and ordinary transactions<sup>80</sup> which continued to be circulated even after the introduction of *Narayani Tanka* by the Koch kings.<sup>81</sup> The large-scale external trade is evident from the 16<sup>th</sup> century sources.<sup>82</sup> The roads constructed by Nilambar had contributed to the development of communication and commercial transactions.

Second point was the warfare and organized defence which were the determinate factors for the survival of the state. Warfare within the territory, i.e. against the similar regional emerging identity and with the enemies in the southern frontier i.e., against the Bengal Sultans, led the Khenas to construct forts in the frontiers and they developed the fortified capital city at Kamatapur which was already established as a center of power. Ruined sites of Kamatapur show the planned fortifications with advanced technology and defended by the nature i.e. rivers<sup>83</sup>. Buchanan Hamilton left an account of the ruin of Kamatapur in 1809. He observed:

“Kamatapur was situated on the west bank of the *Dharla*, which formed the defence on one side. The river has now shifted its course further east, but the old channel, which now occupies the east side of the old site, shows that formerly it was of great magnitude. The town was intersected by a small river, the Singimari, which has destroyed a considerable portion of the works, both where it enters and leaves the city but was probably kept within bounds, when the city was inhabited. The city is of an oblong form; and about 19 miles in circumference, of which perhaps five were defended by the *Dharla*. The remainder was fortified by an immense bank of earth, and by a double ditch ..... The rampart at present is in general about 130 feet in width at the base, and from 20 to 30 in particular height ..... The rampart has no doubt been chiefly of earth, and there is no trace of its having even been faced with brick; ..... The outer ditch has been about 250 feet wide; ..... from the greatness of the slope towards the country formed of the earth thrown out, the depth have been very considerable.<sup>84</sup>”

The fort had seven entrance doors viz. *Silduar* (door of stone), *Bagh Duar* (door of tiger), *Sannyasi Duar* (door for monk), *Jay Duar* (victory door), *Nimai Duar* and *Hukoduar*.<sup>85</sup> Doors were generally made of wood except the *Silduar*. Beside the citadel and other usual offices, existence of an important center called Takshal (mint and treasury) within the fort bears the testimony of state concern about the treasury, an essential requisite for state formation. Existence of a tank called Bholanather Dighi, Sitalabas (the summer palace) and Kadaldhoya dighi (pleasure jhil) within the fort proves the luxurious life style in the capital and capability of prolonged defence.

Beside the Kamatapur fort, the Khenas also built few other forts in the frontiers to keep the state in control.

Third point was the centralization of power and bureaucratization of the administration. Politically the state was centralized but rested on the leadership of the king in administration and warfare. His individual charismatic and integrative leadership was the prime factor in the longevity of the state. The ministers were primarily appointed from the upper castes particularly from the Brahmins who were so powerful that they could dare to oppose power and position of the king. The traditions and myths attached to the king of Kamata as we have analysed indicate that the Brahmins were the political advisers of the king. Bureaucratization of the administration was essential for the maintenance of the centralized leadership. But further research is required to construct the administrative structure of this state.

Legitimacy of the Khena rule over the multi-ethnic sociopolitical format of the Tista-Brahmaputra valley was the fourth aspect of their state formation. For legitimacy kingship, the Khenas were projected as *kshatriya* in the myths and traditions. So it was propagated that God Visvakarma, at the instance of the Goddess Gosani, had constructed the fort of Kamatapur for the *Kamatesvar*. So the founder king achieved the divine bless. Moreover mythical Bhagadatta also got attachment with the Khenas. Hence the story of Bhagadatta's *kavacha* was created as mentioned earlier. Finally adoption of the cultural tools and imports of the Brahmins by the Kamata kings completed their legitimization aspect. Appointment of the Brahmins in the temples built by the state<sup>86</sup> and their role in diffusion of caste-culture had returned a valid caste status to the Khenas.

The 'Khena state formation process' as a whole was a secondary one. Evolutionary ideas of early state formation are not applicable to them, as their tribalism is not yet constructed. But different processural characteristics of the Kamata state highlight the identical stages with the tribal state formation.

### **3.8. The Brahmaputra Valley in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.**

With the strong influence of pre-Koch political traditions and state system, Tista-Brahmaputra valley again became a center of conflicts and contests between the centralized tribal and non-tribal forces, particularly with the fall of Kamatapur in 1490-98 A.D. The region transformed into a sphere of ultimate chaos as Hussain Shah did

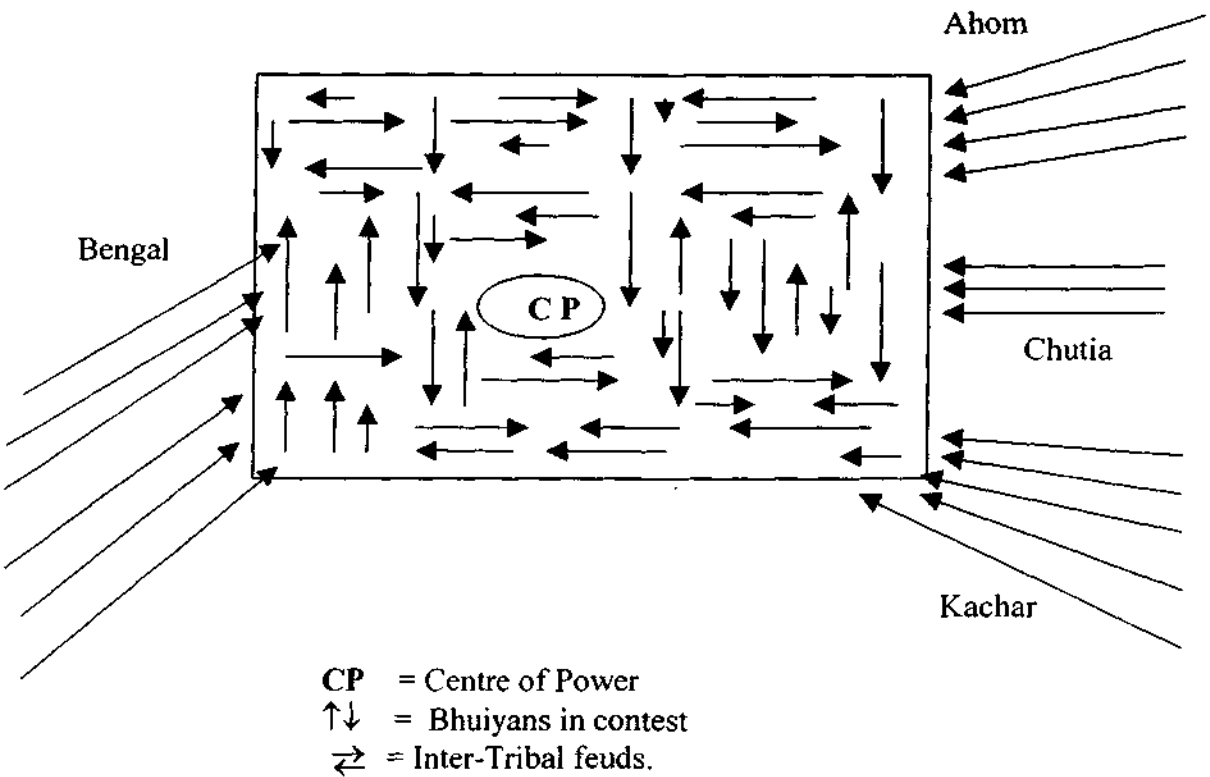
neither annex the conquered territories to Bengal nor restores the political and administrative stability of Kamata region. The decentralized chiefs called *Raja* like-Rup Narayan, Mal Kanwar, Gasa Lakhan and Lakshmi Narayan submitted to Hussain Shah but with the setting of rainy season, the garrison of the Sultan at Kamata fell in the hands of these *Rajas*.<sup>87</sup> However, they could not completely overthrow the political hegemony of Bengal. But anti-infidel policy persecuted in Kamata<sup>88</sup> by the subsequent Sultans of Bengal made the Muslim rule very unpopular. So political control of Bengal in the Brahmaputra valley was confined merely in a small tract of Goalpara.

In such a political situation the *Bhuiyans* came forward to control the political affairs of Kamata. Without going to the debate of origin of the *Bhuiyans* (*Bara Bhuiyans*) of the Brahmaputra valley, it is evident from the available historical sources that the *Bhuiyans* were not belonged to any particular caste.<sup>89</sup> Rather they were a class of estated with huge landed property, resources and political power. They rose to the apex of political power with their own militia in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The *Gurucharita* of Ramcharan Thakur, a 16<sup>th</sup> century biography of Sankardeva, describes that Chandibar, forefather of Sankardeva, was strong enough to repulse the *Bhutia* raids and to protect his rice field without the help of the king.<sup>90</sup> The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* also mentioned the existence of large number of *Bhuiyans* in the north bank of the Brahmaputra valley in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century with enough landed property and militia.<sup>91</sup> So the *Bhuiyans* of the Tista-Brahmaputra valley were those who due to the decentralization of the state had established themselves as political and economic identity more precisely landed chiefs in the Brahmaputra valley.

**Table: 3.3.:**Class structure of the *Bhuiyans*.

<b>Designation</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<i>Raja</i>	Militarily strong and capable to fight against the outsiders.	Rup Narayan, Mal Kanwar, Gasa Lakshman, Lakshmi Narayan and others.
<i>Baro Bhuiyan</i>	They were capable to fighting against the tribal chiefs and could check the tribal expeditions	Shiromany/Chandibar, <i>Bhuiyan</i> of Karnapur.
<i>Saru Bhuiyan</i>	Minor in power and position was not strong enough to check the tribal raids.	<i>Bhuiyan</i> of Ouguria, Chuti <i>Bhuiyan</i> , etc.

Figure 3.1. Tista – Brahmaputra Valley in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century.



The Bhuiyans became so prominent that they could dare to assume the title like *Raja* (king).<sup>92</sup> Some of the Bhuiyans had their dignified social identity like *kshatriya* and *Samajpati*.<sup>93</sup> The Bhuiyans again had their variation in class status due to the variations in their power, property and prosperity. Their designations such as *Raja*, *Bara Bhuiyan* and *Saru Bhuiyan* indicate the multiple locations of the Bhuiyans in the class status.

In spite of multi-caste social identity and their multiple locations in the class structure they were independent to each other within their own domain. Although they collectively overthrow the rule of Hussain Shah in Kamata<sup>94</sup>, the Bhuiyans were engaged in mutual conflicts. On the ruined state structure of the Khenas, these embattled Bhuiyan identities of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century had transformed the Tista-Brahmaputra valley into a chaotic sphere.

With such a background of early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Koch and Mech tribes under the leadership of their chief Haria Mech, had initiated the process of their chiefdom formation. In the immediate proximities of the Tista-Brahmaputra valley, few other

tribes such as - the Chutias, the Kacharis and the Ahoms already germinated the seeds of their state formation from tribalism and trying to acquire more territory. Moreover a multifarious threat from southwest i.e. Bengal was a general feature of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Brahmaputra valley. This scenario has been explained in the **figure 3.1.**

### **3.9.The Koches: From Periphery to Center.**

Political formation of the Koches began with the election of Haria Mech as the 'chief' (*mandal*) of the tribal villages of Chikina hill of Lower Assam, in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. The 'clan leaders' like-Panbar, Vedela, Bhedbhedo, Barihana, Kathia, Guwabar, Megho, Baihagu, Jeswe, Garukata, Judhabar and Dhekera had accepted Haria Mech as their chief<sup>95</sup> for providing leadership in the further political progress of the tribe. They submitted their ceremonial homage and tributes to the chief. Politically the small tract under Haria Mandal's chiefship bounded by the *Manas* in the east and the *Sankosh* in the west and from Dhabalgiri in the north to the *Brahmaputra* in the south was an autonomous entity. It was beyond the jurisdiction of any political power.<sup>96</sup>

Haria Mech was married to Hira and Jira, two daughters of the Koch chief of Hajo<sup>97</sup>. Without indicating any source, Buchanan Hamilton has argued that the Koches were united under the chiefship of Hajo in Muralabas, a place situated in the western Duars, 30 miles north from Kamatapur<sup>98</sup>. In spite of patrilineal tradition of the Meches,<sup>99</sup> the descendents of Haria Mech and his Koch wives were identified as **Koch** on the matrilineal line.<sup>100</sup> Instead of **Mech** henceforth the political identity of Haria Mandal's chiefdom began to be counted as Koch chiefdom.

The tribal chiefdom of Haria Mandal was incapable of generating surplus to be appropriated for state formation. Thus only way of surplus appropriation was warfare and plunder of wealths from the non-tribal chiefs. particularly from the Bhiyans who had the capacity of surplus generation and its appropriation. So Haria Mandal took some attempts against the neighbouring Bhuiyans although eventually he failed to extend the Koch influence in the region.<sup>101</sup> However, he was successful to bring the Koches and Meches in a common platform and transform them as a resistance and aggressive force which could be developed as a state. Thus the tribals under the leadership of Haria Mandal had placed them to the center stage from the periphery. His son Visu, who transform the chiefdom into a state, succeeded Haria Mandal.

### 3.9.1. From Chieftdom to Kingdom.

Decline of the Kamata state order in the last decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was a circumstantial opportunity for the further development of the chieftdom of Haria Mandal. The first step of transition of chieftdom to kingdom was the warfare of the Koches under the leadership of Visu against the similar tribal identities and Bhuiyans of the Brahmaputra valley. The *Rajopakhyan* describes that the first conflict of Koches was broke out with Turbak, the governor of Goalpara, recruited by the Sultan of Bengal.<sup>102</sup> Under the leadership of Visu Turbak was killed and the Koches got the taste of victory in warfare although the Koches lost their one leader, Madan (step brother of Visu). This source also claims that instead of Bisu, Chandan, another step brother of Visu, was entrusted the political authority to rule over the newly conquered territories and since then. the Koches began to count their calendar called *Raja Saka* (from 1510 A.D.)<sup>103</sup> Chandan, however, has not been recognized as the founder king of the Koches in other historical sources.

It is often argued that Visu got the allegiance of the other tribal chieftdoms of Brahmaputra valley as mentioned in the table 3.4<sup>104</sup> as these chieftdoms were the cognates of the 'greater Bado family'. But it seems quite impossible that these chieftdoms willingly supported Visu if not defeated by Visu. because each chieftdom wanted its own expansion. Few other chieftdoms (not appeared in the table 3.4) like – Boku, Luki, Chaigaon, Hengerabari, Aliabari, Kamtabari, Bafarampur, Karaibari, and Darrang<sup>105</sup> were brought under the control and leadership of Visu. The tribal solidarity established by Bisu, became a great challenge for the political prominece of the Bhuiyans.

Within a short span of time Visu fought against the Bhuiyans of the Brahmaputra valley. Some of the Bhuiyans were settled in terms of the payment of annual tribute while others were killed and their territories annexed to the Koch chieftdom. Few Buiyans fled from their estates<sup>106</sup>. It is very difficult to determine the exact location and strength of the estates of the Bhuiyans (as mentioned in the table 3.5). But it is beyond doubt that the Bhuyans of Phulguri, Karnapur and Bijni were militarily stronger than the tribal militia of Visu and they offered heavy resistance to the Koches. But Visu utilized the tribal technique of guerrilla warfare and by unusual means (like attack on the festival days) he successfully over-powered the Bhuiyans.

**Table: 3.4:** Tribal chiefdoms of the Brahmaputra Valley in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Name of the Chiefdom	Chief/Tribe	Locations
Dimrua	Garos	South of the confluence of the Kalang and the Brahmaputra.
Panbari	-	West of Dimrua
Beltola	Koch	Southwest of Guwahati
Rani	Garos	Southwest of Guwahati
Barduar	„	Near the Garo hills
Mairapur	-	East of Barduar
Bholagram	Mech	East of Mairapur
Lakiduar	Garos	West of Guwahati
Patan Duar	„	Adjacent to Laki Duar in the west.
Bangaon	„	West of Patan Duar

**Table 3.5:** Visvasimha's campaign against the Bhuiyans.

Name/Locations of the Bhuiyans	Caste/Status/Size	Result(s)
Bara Bhuiyan	Brahmin/big in size	Estate was annexed to the Koch chiefdom.
Saru Bhuiyan	Brahmin/small in size	„
Bhuiyan of Ouguri	-	„
Chhuti Bhuiyan	Daivagnā	„
Kusum Bhuiyan	-	Kusum Bhuiyan surrendered his properties to Visu.
Dighala Bhuiyan	-	Bhuiyan was killed and his estate was annexed to the Koch chiefdom.
Kaliya Bhuiyan	-	„
Jhargaya Bhuiyan	-	„
Kabilas	-	„
Karnapur Bhuiyan	Militarily strong	He resisted the Koch invasion. Visu with the guerilla warfare in the popular festival days ( <i>bihu</i> ) killed the Bhuiyan.
Phulguri	„	„
Bijni	„	„
Pratap Bhuiyan of Pandu	„	Bhuiyan's brother was killed. Properties were confiscated. Pratap Bhuiyan fled to the Ahom kingdom.

Visu increased the territorial size of the chiefdom through the aggressive warfare and this territorial formation led him to declare himself as a **King Visvasimha**. The Brahmins and the *Daivagnas* (astrologers) performed the rituals of his coronation

ceremony while the Koch, Mech, Kachari and other tribal subjects including the *Deodhais* (tribal priest) actively supported the kingship of Visvasimha<sup>107</sup>. This ceremony was the first step in the process of elevation of the status of a tribal chief to a king. 'The chiefship had been confined to the kin, clan and tribe but kingship was non-tribal. So the non-tribal priests (Brahmin) performed the non-tribal rituals.

The Bhuiyans of considerable military strength did not accept the emergence of Visvasimha as a king. Kharo Bhuiyan (Saru Bhuiyan) of Upper Assam and Narayan Bhuiyan, a vassal of the Ahoms had challenged the kingship of Visvasimha. But Visvasimha eventually defeated them<sup>108</sup>. He plundered of the estates of the Bhuiyans including their military weapons like- bows, spears, swords, hatchet, etc. So continuity of warfare had increased the territorial size of the kingdom which became identical with the former Kamarupa and Kamata i.e. Tista-Brahmaputra valley.

**Table: 3.6:** Bhuiyan challenge to Visvasimha.

Bhuiyan	Location/Strength	Year	Consequence(s)
Kharo Bhuiyan	Upper Assam/ had the status like <i>Raja</i> of Bhuiyans of first category of Table 3.3.	1527 A.D.	The Bhuiyan was killed. Visvasimha plundered the estate specially the weapons like-bows, arrows, shields, spears, hatchet and swords.
Narayan Bhuiyan	Vassal of the Ahom. He denied the kingship of Visvasimha	1533 A.D.	Bhuiyan inspite of offering serious challenge, eventually killed by Visvasimha. The Koches captured the fort of Narayan Bhuiyan. It contributed to the growth of Koch militia.

Emergence of the Koches as a political entity and their successful warfare had alarmed the neighbouring states i.e. Bengal, the Ahoms and Bhutan (see table 3.7). The Ahoms, an emerging tribal state of upper Assam integrated under the kingship of Dihingia Suhungmung Raja (1497 – 1539 A.D.), after defeating certain tribal powers of upper Assam<sup>109</sup> were looking towards Lower Assam. Hence conflict between the Koches and Ahoms was inevitable. At the same time Bengal was looking towards the Brahmaputra valley. The *Buranjis* claim that Visvasimha had acknowledge the supremacy of the Ahoms in 1459 *Saka* or 1539 A.D. and agreed to pay a nominal annual tribute.<sup>110</sup> The Koch genealogies on the other hand describe that Visvasimha had attacked the Ahom territory and the Koches retreated from merely for the shortages of sufficient sources and preparation.<sup>111</sup> So the historical sources are contradictory

about the exact relationship between the Koches and the Ahoms during the reign of Visvasimha .So it can be assumed that both the Ahoms and the Koches had carrying on the aggressive warfare .

**Table: 3.7.** Visvasimha's conflict with the neighbours.

Power	Description(s)	Year(s)	Result(s)
Ahom	Under the leadership of king Suhungmang (1497-1539 A.D.) the Ahoms established a centralized state extended from Sadiya in the east to the <i>Kalang</i> river in the west.	1533-37	Visvasimha's attempt against the Ahom was abortive.
Sultans of Bengal	Nushrat Shah (1519-1532), Firuz Shah (1532-33) and Muhammad shah (1533-38) continued the aggressive warfare in the Tista-Brahmaputra valley.	1527	The aggressive policy of the Sultans did not last long.
Bhutan	Bhutan was a state with diarchic rule under the <i>Dharma Raja</i> (political and religious) and <i>Dev Raja</i> (administration). Bhutan was closely related to the emergence of the Koch kingdom.	-	Bhutan agreed to pay tribute to Visvsimha.

The Sultans of Bengal who like their predecessors in Gauda followed the aggressive policies towards the Tista-Brahmaputra valley. The army of the Sultans under the commandership of Bar Uzir,<sup>112</sup> Bit Malik<sup>113</sup> and Turbak<sup>114</sup> entered into the Brahmaputra valley but eventually retreated.<sup>115</sup> The invasions from the Sultan of Bengal could not establish any permanent blockade for the further growth of the Koch kingdom. Visvasimha, however, avoided direct confrontation with Bengal.

Neighbour of the Koch kingdom in the northern frontier was Bhutan that was associated with the Koch state formation since the beginning. The *Rajopakhyan* mentions that Visvasimha sent a messenger with a letter to **Deva Raja** and **Dharma Raja** of Bhutan; <sup>116</sup>claiming tribute with the following words:

“You have always been remained subordinate to the rulers of Kamarupa-Kamata but due to anarchy in the region you are enjoying autonomy. But I am now the king of Kamarupa being blessed by the Goddess Bhagavati, so you must pay tribute otherwise be prepared for war.”<sup>117</sup>

Bhutan initially denied paying tribute to Visvasimha but being afraid of rapid growth of the Koch power eventually acknowledged the Koch supremacy. Bhutan also

promised to render military service to the Koches in their future warfare against other tribal rulers.<sup>118</sup>

The *Rajopakhyan* also claims that Visvasimha after confirming financial and military tributes from Bhutan had proceeded to conquer Gauda when Islam Shah was the Emperor of Delhi.<sup>119</sup> Similarly the *Yogini Tantra* described Visvasimha as the conqueror of *Panchagauda*.<sup>120</sup> But such claims are not corroborated by any other source. More over Visvasimha was died (1540 A.D.) before Islam Khan became the Afghan Emperor of Delhi in 1545 A.D. So Visvasimha's successful attempt against Gauda cannot be taken as a confirm fact but only indicate that Visvasimha like the previous rulers of the Tista-Brahmaputra valley wanted to cross the *Karatoya*.

'Aggressive warfare' led by Visvasimha had transformed the small chiefdom of the Koches into a kingdom territorially defined by the *Karatoya* in the west to the *Baranadi* in the east and from Bhutan frontier in the north to Bengal frontier in Rangpur in the south. Visvasimha also took few innovative steps for territorial defence, formation of a militia and managerial functions of the emerging kingdom<sup>121</sup>.

Chikina, a village Lower Assam was the beginner of the political centrality. But with the territorial expansion Visvasimha shifted the center power to Hingulabas,<sup>122</sup> a village in the plains of Western Duars.<sup>123</sup> Hingulabas was a temporary capital. Finally it was shifted to Kamatapur,<sup>124</sup> the capital of the former kingdom under the Khenas. It served two major purpose of the state formation. First was the control over the surplus generating peasantized economy. Secondly the Koches moved from the periphery to the center or heart of the political power.

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10. *Nidhanpur Copper Plate*, cited in K.L.Barua :*op.cit.* pp.99-104, *lines 34-44*.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, vol. II, p. 186.
13. According to the *Bargaon Copper Plate Inscription* of Ratnapalavarman, Salsthambha, a *mlechchha* chief, owing to a turn of adverse fate of the Naraka's dynasty, took possession of the kingdom. A.F.Rudolf Hoernle: *Bargaon Copper Plate Inscription, J.A.S.B, LXVIII.1.1(1898)*, p.104; K.L. Barua: *op.cit.*, p. 107.
14. *The Nepal Inscription of Jaydeva* describes that Sri Harsha Varma Deva was a decadent from Bhagadatta (*Bhagadatta Raj Kulaja*). A.F. Rudolf Hoernle: *The Nawgaon Copper Plate Grants of Balabarman of Pragjyatisa, JASB, LXVII.1.4 (1897)*, p. 293.
15. E.A. Gait: *op.cit.*, p. 31.
16. D.R. Regmi: *Ancient Nepal*, (Calcutta, Firma KL Mukhopadhyay, 1969), pp. 166-167.
17. P.N. Bhattacharyya :*op.cit.*, p. 70.
18. *The Nawgaon Copper Plate Grants, v.14 .See.* A.F. Rudolf Hoernle: *The Nawgaon Copper Plate Grant of Balvarman of Pragjyatisa in Asham, J.A.S.B., LXVII,1. 4(1897)*, p. 294.
19. P.N. Bhattacharyya: *op.cit.*, pp. 89-108.
20. A.F. Rudolf Hoernle: *Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapal of Pragjyatisa of Asham, J.A.S.B., Vol. LXVI,1.2(1896)*, p. 130.
21. P.N. Bhattacharya(ed): *op.cit.*, pp. 94, 103.
22. K.L. Barua: *op.cit.*, p. 141.

23. M.M. Sharma (ed): *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, (Gauhati ,Gauhati University, 1978), pp. 263-65.
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25. K.L Barua: *op.cit.*, pp. 192-196.
26. N.K. Basu *Assam in the Ahom Age 1228-1826: Being a Political, Economic and Sociocultural Studies*,(Calcutta, Sanaskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1970), p. 18.
27. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 628-29.
28. N.N.Acharyya: *The History of Meieval Assam (from the 13<sup>th</sup> centry to the 17<sup>th</sup> century)*, reprint ed., (Delhi, Omson Publications, 1984), p.135.
29. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, p. 568.
30. E.G. Glazier: *A Report on District of Rungpore*, (Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1873), p. 8.
31. N.N.Acharyya: *op.cit.*, p. 141.
32. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, p. 624.
33. *Guru Charita*, vs 78-82, pp.14-15.
34. N.N.Acharyya: *op.cit.*, p. 150.
35. *Ibid.*, p.150.
36. *Guru Charita*, ch. 1, vs. 59-61, p. 11.
37. *Guru Charita*, vs 56-77,pp. 10-14; *Katha Guru Charita*, pp. 5-9.
38. *Guru Charita*, ch.1, v. 78, p.14; *Katha Guru Charita*, p.6.
39. *Guru Charita*, ch.1, vs 19-85, pp.15-16; *Katha Guru Charita*, p.7.
40. *Guru Charita*, vs. 96-100, p.18; *Katha Guru Charita*, p.7.
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43. Haliram Dhekial Phukan: *Assam Buranji (IV Vols.)*, edited by Jatindra Mahun Bhattacharyya (*combined volume*), (Guwahati, Mokshada Pustakalaya, 1369 B.S.), p.12,
44. K.L. Barua: *op.cit.*, p.277.
45. *Kamrupar Buranji*, pp. 2-4.

46. Ibid.
47. *Guru Charita, ch.1, vs. 192-196*, p. 40; *Katha Guru Charita*, p.10.
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49. Major F. Zenkins: *History of Cooch Behar: Being an Extract of a Passage from Dr. Buchanan's Account of Rungore, J.A.S.B., 73.1.(1838)*, pp.6-7. Francis Buchanan: *General View of the History of Kamarupa*, reprinted in S.K. Bhuiyan(ed): *Kamrupar Buranji*, 3rd ed., (Guwahati, DHAS, 1987), pp.120-121.
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58. Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri: *Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement*, (Cooch Behar, The Cooch Behar State Press, 1903), p.128.
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62. Pir Muhammad Shattari: *Risalat-us-Shuhada* (Written in 1633), translated into English by G.H. Damant: *Notes on Shah Ismail with a Sketch of the Contents of*

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63. N.N.Acharyya: *op.cit.*, p.173.
  64. Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri: *op.cit.*, p.221; Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed: *op.cit.*, pp.40-41.
  65. E.A. Gait:*op.cit.*, p.45 ;Jadunath Sarkar: *op.cit.* p.146; M.R. Tarafdar: *Hussain Shahi Bengal: A Socio-Political Study*, (Dacca ,Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965), p.47.
  66. Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed: *op.cit.*, pp.43-44.
  67. Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri: *op.cit.* p.222.
  68. Khan Cowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed: *op.cit.*, p.44.
  69. Jadunath Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p.143. M.R. Tarafdar, however, determined the date of Hussain Shah as 1494-1519 A.D. M.R. Tarafdar: *op.cit.*,p. 37.
  70. *Riyazu- u-Salatin*, p.132.
  71. Jadunath Sarkar: *op.cit.*, p.146.
  72. Montgomery Martin: *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India (5 vols.1838)*, reprint ed..(Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 1976), vol.V, *Rangpur and Assam*, pp.410-11; E.A. Gait:*op.cit.*, p.45;Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri:*op.cit.*, p.224;R.C. Majumdar: *History of Medieval Bengal*, (Calcutta ,G. Bharadwaj and Co. 1973), p.50.
  73. *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, p.132, H. Blochmann: Koch Bihar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, *JASB*, .7.11(1872), p.79.
  74. R.C. Majumdar: *History of Medeival Bengal*, p.50; N.N.Acharyya:*op.cit.*, p. 175;E.A.Gait:*op.cit.*, pp. 44-45.
  75. *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, p.133.
  76. *Gosani Mangal*, p. 84. The traders of Western India who had a great role in the trade and commerce of the Koch state were used to call as Kayan the local language. Bhagabati Charan Bandopadhyay: *Cooch Biharer Itihas*, (Cooch Behar, 1884), reprinted and edited by Nipendra Nath Pal: (Calcutta, Anima Prakasani, 1987), p.20.
  77. *Gosani Mangal*, p.86.

78. Shyamchand Mukhopadhyay: *Koch Behar Jelar Purakirti*, (Calcutta, 1381 B.S.), p.34.
79. Bhagavati Charan Bondhyopadhyay: *op.cit.*, p.52.
80. N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose: *The Coinage of Assam, Pre-Ahom Period*, pp. 62-64.
81. Blochmann: *loc cit.*, p.78.
82. Ralf Fitch, in William Foster (ed): *Early Travels in India, 1583-1619*, reprint ed., (New Delhi, S. Chand & Co., 1968).
83. See *Plates 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3*.
84. Montgomery Martin: *op.cit.*, pp.426-38; Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri: *op.cit.*, pp.426-38.
85. Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri: *op.cit.*, p.81; Shyam Chand Mukhopadhyay: *op.cit.*, p.30.
86. See *Plate 7.2. Gosani Mangal* has versified that priest as a Brahmin from Mithila (*Maithili Brahmin*) and *Deories* as *Chandal*. *Gosani Mangal*, p.102
87. *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, pp.132-33.
88. Haliram Dhekial Phukan: *Assam Buranji*, p.11.
89. The term *Barobhuiyans* (12 *Bhuiyans*) does not mean that *Bhuiyans* were 12 in number. Numerical figure 12 (*baro*) is symbolic in the Tista-Brahmaputra alley, such as 12 Mech village, 12 Mech leader, 12 *Karzi*, etc. There are two well-known traditions about the origin of the *Bhuiyans* of Brahmaputra valley. The *Bhuiyans* of the north bank of the *Brahmaputra* and east of the Chutia kingdom claimed that they were the descendents of Samudra, the minister of Arimatta. But the *charita puthis* depicted the *Bhuiyans* as *Kayastha* by caste invited to Kamarupa-Kamata by Durlabha Narayan. On the request of *Kamesvar* Durlabha Narayan, Dharma-Narayan (the *Gaudesvar*) sent 7 families of *Kayastha* from Kanauj, who gradually settled in Kamarupa under the leadership of Chandibar. Chandibar was in the position to oppose the *Kamesvar*. Lakhinath Bejbarua: *Sankardeva*, (Calcutta, 1926); p.5. E.A. Gait: *op.cit.*, p.39. *Darang Raj Vamsabali* depicts the multi-caste identity of the *Bhuiyans*, particularly as *Brahmin, Kayasth and Daivagna*. vs. 90-91.
90. *Guru Charita*: vs 192-210, pp.40-43.

91. *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, vs. 89-97, pp.15-19, vs.118-122, pp.21-23.
92. *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, p.132.
93. Maheswar Neog: *Sankardeva and His Time*, (Gauhati, Gauhati University, 1965), p.52.
94. *Riyazu-s-Satatin*, p.133.
95. *Kamrupar Buranji*, p.10; *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, p.127; *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, vs. 51-52, p.9.
96. *Kharga Narayanar Vamsaali*, Ms.f.7, cited in Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed: *op.cit.*, p.82
97. *Kamrupar Buranji*, p.10; *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, p.127;
98. *Ibid.*, pp.1-11.
99. Bhabesh Narzi: *Bodo Kacharir Swamaj aru Sanaskriti*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.,(Guwahati, Bina Library , 2001), p.23.
100. The Rabhas, who claimed their identity equivalent to the Koches, are basically matrilineal which is still exists among the Rabhas of West Bengal, Assam and Meghalay.
101. N.N. Vasu: *Social History of Kamrupa*, (3 vols.), reprint ed., (Delhi, 1983). *Vol. II*, p.38.
102. *Rajopakhyan*, p.14.
103. *Ibid.*
104. D. Nath: *History of the Koch Kingdom*, p.23.
105. Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed:*op.cit.*, p.88.
106. *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, vs. 90-93, p.16, vs. 118-121, pp.21-22.
107. *Ibid.*, vs. 125-131, pp.23-26.
108. J.P. Wade: *An Account of Assam* (1800), edited by Benudhar Sharma (Lakhimpur, 1927), pp.186-189.
109. *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, pp.14-21.
110. *Ibid.* ,p 28; *Kamrupar Buranji*, p.11
111. *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, vs. 201-206, pp.14-42.
112. Bar Uzir was identified with Rukanuddin, one general of Alauddin Hussain Shah. S.N. Bhattacharyya: *op.cit.*, p.86.

115. Jadunath Sarkar: *op.cit.*, p.158; S.N. Bhattacharyya:*op.cit.* pp.86-92; E.A. Gait: *op.cit.*, p.95.
116. *Deb Raja* was the head of the secular administration in Bhutan and **Dharma Raja** was the head of the religious administration and the supreme monarch in Bhutan.
117. *Self-tr.* from the *Rajopakhyan*, pp.15-16.
118. *Rajopakhyan*, p.16.
119. *Ibid.*
120. *Yoginitantra*, pt. I, ch. 13, v.15, p. 134.
121. For details see *supra Chapter VI*
122. *Rajopakhyan*, p.16.
123. Hingulabas has been identified with the present Mahakal Guri village, which is situated in Alipurduar Sub-division of Jalpaiguri District. This village is still dominated by the Koch (Rajbanshi) and Mech People.
124. *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, vs. 207-08, p.42; Pitambar Siddhyanta Vagis: *Markandeya Purana, Ms.* (NBSL Ms. No.8), f.1; also. (N.B.S.L., ms. 58). f.78.