

# **KOCH COINAGE: A STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**BY**

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## ***Declaration***

I declare that the thesis entitled '**KOCH COINAGE: A STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**' has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Bijoy Kumar Sarkar, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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## *To Whom It May Concern*

This is to certify that Shri Debajit Dutta has prepared the Ph.D. thesis titled “**KOCH COINAGE: A STUDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**” under my supervision and guidance. The thesis embodies the result of original research work done by Mr. Dutta in light of published and unpublished records in the area of study. He has fulfilled all the necessary requirements for the purpose of submitting the Ph.D. dissertation for examination of the University of North Bengal.

I am happy to forward the thesis, which is worthy of consideration for the purpose concerned.

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# ***Abstract***

Ancient coins are living testimonials to the past and an important source of information about a region's political development, monetization, trading patterns, external contacts, religious beliefs, cultural diversity and so on. From very ancient times likewise the other sovereign principalities of the world, the South Asian kingdoms had a unique tradition of issuing coins to proclaim their independent character. The various phases of Indian History have witnessed the rise of numerous political identities and these princely identities had their own series of glorious coinage. This is not only an inimitable tradition in South Asian context but also a revolutionary event in global politico-economic perspective.

In late-medieval period Koch kingdom a small princely state situated in the northern part of sub-Himalayan Bengal, was a prolific coin issuing kingdom. The coins issued by the Koch rulers, were the proof of the majestic mark of the Koch kingdom's politico-economic and cultural achievements. These coins are among the earliest historical documents that survive from the region. The long practice of issuing coins was initiated by Nara Narayan, the second historical sovereign of the kingdom in mid-sixteenth century and the practice maintained by the successive rulers until 1773 un-interruptedly. In the said year due to some politico-administrative crisis Koch kingdom compelled to surrender its sovereignty to the English East India Company and by virtue of Anglo-Koch (1773) treaty they lost the authority of minting coins. But the successive rulers until the merger of the kingdom with Union of India were permitted to mint some commemorative issues to retain the four century long tradition. Koch Kings struck coins mainly on gold, silver and brass metal. The gold and brass coin is very rare, silver being the main metal of coining money.

Keeping in mind the above background of Koch currency the present study has explored the age-long Koch currency popularly known as *Narayanai Mudra* in different frontiers, like political, economic and socio-cultural perspectives and thus trying to establish a co-relation between the Koch coinage and coinage tradition of India. Not only that the present study has explored British economic imperialism by analyzing the currencies' gradual de-monetization in the late-eighteenth century and thoroughly presented an analytical explanation of the politico-economic impact of the

Koch coinage over the economy and politics of North East India and adjoining areas. The scheme of chapters adopted for the present research work is detailed below:

The main theme of the first chapter is the origin and development of the Koch dynasty. In this Chapter the political history of the Koch kingdom is discussed. Careful examinations are made here about the ups and downs of Koch Empire.

Economic perspective of the Koch Kingdom is the basic theme of the second chapter. This chapter includes the economic viability of the Koch kingdom. To ventilate the core issues of the Koch economics, careful study is made here about the kingdom's geographical settings, administrative machinery, production system, land revenue settlement and collection, trade and market networks and so on. The use of currency in trade and transaction in Koch Kingdom and also in several parts of North East India are also discussed here to understand the role of currency in day do day transactions.

The beginning of the Koch coinage is the main theme of the third chapter. Here the economic condition and the mode of transaction before the establishment of the Koch kingdom are discussed. The economic condition of the kingdom during the reign of Nara Narayan and the main causes which compelled him to establish a regularized currency system is the main emphasis of the chapter. Koch coinage from its inception up to the Anglo-Koch treaty (1773) is discussed here.

The fourth chapter thoroughly deals with the Koch coinage from Anglo-Koch treaty to Jagaddipendra Narayan. Careful re-examination has been made here about the ups and downs of Koch currency due to the British monopolistic attitude towards the Koch kingdom. The colonial masters always intended to carve the power and position of the Koch kingdom. So how the British policy towards the Koch currency hampered the circulation of this currency and ultimately paved the way of its debasement have been analyzed in this chapter.

Art and iconographic designs on the Koch coins are the primary subject matters of fifth chapter. This chapter highlights different symbols, various designs, engraved words on the Koch coins and their practical and spiritual causes.

In chapter six, the coinage of various other North Eastern kingdoms have been discussed to gather a comprehensive idea about the transaction system in North East India and to establish the co-relation of these coinages with the coinage of Koch kingdom. Lastly there is an observation of the overall in the form of conclusion derived from the discussion of the above mentioned chapters.

# ***Preface***

Ancient coins surviving into the present age are living commentaries on the dead past. So coins of a given period and area constitute an important source of information about its history and culture. In the field of antiquarian studies in particular, where the quantity of sources is very restricted, coins constitute a major body of historical, economic and artistic material and evidence. The importance of coins as a source of history can hardly be undermined in a country like India where genuine historical chronicles comparable to those of the west is not only rare but almost unavailable. In this backdrop coins, a very important component of archeological object can help us to reconstruct the past based on the true parameters set by both western and Indian scholars. It is common to belief that coins don't adequately compete with literary sources in revealing the complexities of past and merely confirm history but seldom to modifies or amplifies it. However they can shed ample light upon political, economic, social, religious, administrative and also on the historical geography of a certain region. From a close study of the symbolic significance of the varied emblems found on coins, we can know about various important events of royal history, as well as history of the general people and thus can draw a general picture of the contemporary life.

In late-medieval period, the Koch kingdom an important politico-cultural identity of sub-Himalayan northern Bengal had its own glorious series of coinage. As a royal issue, the coins of the Koch kingdom were the emblems of royalty and symbolic majesty of the Koch kings. The metals, the motifs, the legends as well as other accompanying details on the coins depict the details of faiths and customs adopted by the Koch kingdom. As the coinage can shed light on many aspects of the history and culture of a region, in this respect Koch kingdom is no exception, particularly as coins are the earliest historical documents that survive from the region. The dates on them give a firm

chronological framework for the early kings, the extent of the coinage at different periods demonstrate the changing economic wealth of the country and trace the trading links with the neighboring areas. These coins mark the beginning of a new stage of economic development not only for the Koch kingdom but also for the entire North East India as prior to the Koch coinage money in its organized form was almost non-existent in North East India. The currency is not only important on the above mentioned grounds but also it had the capacity to tell the British imperial intentions and their gradual penetration in the economy and politics of Koch kingdom in particular, as due to their politico-economic interest the Koch currency gradually de-monetized in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Although in recent years few papers have been published about particular aspects of the coins of the Koch kingdom, but no comprehensive survey of current knowledge on the subject has been written. The writers of the history of this region have not shown their interests in using the numismatic data, through which a better perspective into Koch history can be gained. Keeping in mind of the above background of research on Koch coinage the present study have presented a thorough study of Koch coinage by exploring the different frontiers of numismatic elements like political, economic and cultural perspectives and thus tried to establish a correlation between the Koch coinage and coinage tradition of India. The present research also presented an analytical explanation of the impact of the Koch coinage over the economy and politics of North East India and adjoining areas.

# ***Acknowledgement***

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all who helped me during the course of my research. First of all I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to my research supervisor Dr. Bijoy Kumar Sarkar, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal for his inspiration, guidance, constant encouragement, solicitation and extremely constructive and thought provoking observations. He spent immense time not only over the dissertation but also a detailed review of the critical areas of my thesis. In fact this might never have been written and submitted without his love and constant support.

I am earnestly grateful to Prof. Pranabanada Jash, Retd. Professor, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, who have masterminded the entire research. In this connection my gratitude is due to Mr. S. K. Bose who as a true guide steered me all the way through this laborious task. He solved many complicated problems gladly. Especially he provided me the opportunity to consult rare coins of Koch and other North East Indian coins from his own collection. Thanks are due to Late Mr. Nicholas Rhodes, Oriental Numismatic Society, Great Britain from whom I gained a lot. I am also indebted to Prof. Jai Prakash Singh, Retd. Professor, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi and Prof. Paras Nath Singh, Retd. Professor, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, who treated my queries with patience and generosity during the initial days of this study. I am also grateful to Dr. Nripendra Nath Pal, Cooch Behar, who have ever shown his interest and extended academic help whatever possible for him. I am also very much indebted to Mr. Anup Mitra, Kolkata and Mr. Jahar Sarkar, Agartala, Tripura who showed their collection of Koch coins. I am sincerely remembering Prof. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharyya, Retd. Acharyya Jadunath Sarkar Chair Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal for his valuable suggestions time and again. I am indeed thankful to the Head of the department, faculty members and non-teaching staffs of the Department

of History, University of North Bengal for providing me facilities as and whenever needed. I would like to express my thanks to all my colleagues in the Department of History, Jadavpur University for their continuous support and encouragement.

In course of my study I visited several libraries and institutions to collect materials. In this connection I got enormous help from the Cooch Behar State Library, Cooch Behar District Magistrate's Record Room, Cooch Behar District Treasury Office, Central Library of University of North Bengal, Central Library of Jadavpur University, National Archives, New Delhi, National Library, Kolkata, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata. I am really grateful to the management and staff of all these libraries and institutions.

For the collection of first hand data and picture of coins I visited several museums in India and abroad. The coins constituted mainly from A. K. M. Heritage Museum, University of North Bengal, Cooch Behar Palace Museum, Cooch Behar, Indian Museum, Kolkata, Tripura State Museum, Agartala, Tripura, Dhaka Museum, Bangladesh and few other personal coin galleries of coin collectors throughout India.

I would like to express my thanks to all the members of my family for their help and blessings throughout the study and for completion of the research work.

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# ***Abbreviations***

<i>AH</i>	Anno Hegirae.
<i>ANS</i>	American Numismatic Society.
<i>BM</i>	British Museum.
<i>BS</i>	Bengali Sambat.
<i>DHAS</i>	Department of Historical & Antiquarian Studies.
<i>ASI</i>	Archeological Survey of India.
<i>JAIH</i>	Journal of Ancient Indian History.
<i>JASB</i>	Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal.
<i>JNSI</i>	Journal of Numismatic Society of India.
<i>JRAS</i>	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
<i>NBSL</i>	North Bengal State Library, Cooch Behar.
<i>NS</i>	Nepali Sambat.
<i>NEIHA</i>	North East India History Association.
<i>ONS</i>	Oriental Numismatic Society.
<i>RS</i>	Raj Saka.

# Glossary

<i>Ahatamana</i>	: A kind of gold coin of Ancient India.
<i>Allah</i>	: Supreme God of the Muslims.
<i>Aman</i>	: A kind of rice.
<i>Amin</i>	: Surveyor.
<i>Anna</i>	: A former copper coin of India.
<i>Anti</i>	: An ear-ring familiar in Cooch Behar.
<i>Aush</i>	: A kind of early rice.
<i>Bania</i>	: Merchant.
<i>Bankkharoo</i>	: An ornament for the leg.
<i>Bazaar</i>	: Market.
<i>Bepari</i>	: Businessman.
<i>Bhuiyan</i>	: Chief of an estate with considerable socio-political power.
<i>Bhup</i>	: A person holding a large portion of land.
<i>Bida</i>	: A kind of firming tool.
<i>Bigha</i>	: A unit of measurement of land where 1 bigha – 0.33 acre or 1 acre – 3 bighas.
<i>Bihu</i>	: A cultural festival of the Assamese people.
<i>Bish</i>	: A unit of measurement of land.
<i>Bish payiji</i>	: A bamboo made weapon of Koch kingdom.
<i>Boro</i>	: A kind of rice.
<i>Brahmin</i>	: The first grade in Vedic Hinduism.
<i>Brahmottra</i>	: Rent free land, donated to the Brahmins.
<i>Bund</i>	: A barrier to obstruct the flow of water of a stream or river.
<i>Buranji</i>	: Assamese chronicles. Buranji is a Tai-Ahom word meaning a ‘store-house of knowledge’ which teaches the ignorant.
<i>Buri</i>	: A kind of measure familiar in Ancient India.
<i>Caitra</i>	: A month in Bengali calendar.
<i>Cakran</i>	: A portion of land donated to the servants.
<i>Camua</i>	: A portion of land donated by the Koch kings to the royal officials.
<i>Canta</i>	: Section in classical text.

<i>Chakla</i>	: An administrative unit consisting of several villages.
<i>Chap</i>	: Royal emblem of the Koch kingdom.
<i>Charita</i>	: Biography.
<i>Chatra</i>	: Royal umbrella.
<i>Chokidar</i>	: Guard of an outpost.
<i>Choudhury</i>	: Revenue collector.
<i>Cowrie</i>	: A flattened yellowish shell of marine. It was used as money in India.
<i>Daftar</i>	: Office.
<i>Dao</i>	: Knife of curved shape.
<i>Dan</i>	: Donation.
<i>Dando</i>	: Royal scepter; symbol of administration.
<i>Devanagari</i>	: Alphabet used for Sanskrit, Hindi, and other Indian languages.
<i>Devottara</i>	: Rent free land granted to the religious institution.
<i>Dewan</i>	: Head of the civil administration.
<i>Dewani</i>	: A the rights granted to British East India Company to collect revenues and decide the civil cases.
<i>Dharmasala</i>	: A place where the religious mendicants found food and lodging.
<i>Dheki</i>	: A husking implement of paddy and other grains.
<i>Dinara</i>	: A gold coin of early Islamic empire.
<i>Dronavapa</i>	: A unit of measurement.
<i>Duar</i>	: Mountain passes.
<i>Endi</i>	: A kind of silk produced in North Bengal and Assam.
<i>Faujdar</i>	: Military general.
<i>Footi</i>	: Local name of ear-ring in Koch kingdom.
<i>Gaj</i>	: A unit of measure, 1 <i>Gaj</i> equals 3 feet.
<i>Gamacha</i>	: Napkin. An indigenous textile product.
<i>Ganda</i>	: A measurement unit.
<i>Gandaka</i>	: A kind of currency in Ancient India.
<i>Gomasta</i>	: Administrative officer in Koch kingdom.
<i>Ghani</i>	: Wooden husking grinder for pressing the seeds of mustard.
<i>Ghatkar</i>	: Anchorage tax.
<i>Gur</i>	: Molasses.
<i>Guru</i>	: Preceptor.

<i>Handi</i>	: Earthen pot.
<i>Hijri</i>	: The year-numbering system used in the Islamic calendar.
<i>Jaigir</i>	: Land given to the state officials and servant in lieu of cash.
<i>Jal-kar</i>	: Tax levied on fisheries.
<i>Jama</i>	: A new settlement introduced by Todarmal in Mughol India.
<i>Janapada</i>	: People's settlement in Ancient India..
<i>Jhum</i>	: Shifting cultivation.
<i>Jote/Jotedar</i>	: Revenue yielding tract.
<i>Hal</i>	: Plough
<i>Har</i>	: Necklace
<i>Hat</i>	: A weakly market place.
<i>Hat-kar</i>	: Market tax.
<i>Hajari</i>	: Measuring thousand in number.
<i>Ijara</i>	: Deed of revenue collection.
<i>Kadma</i>	: A kind of ear-ornament familiar in Koch kingdom.
<i>Kahana</i>	: A kind of money in Ancient India.
<i>Kakni</i>	: A kind of coin of Ancient India.
<i>Kalasi</i>	: Picher for water.
<i>Kalifa</i>	: The civil and religious head of a Muslim state considered to be a representative of Allah on earth.
<i>Kalita</i>	: A community of Koch kingdom.
<i>Kanda</i>	: A Section in ancient classical text.
<i>Kamar</i>	: Blacksmith.
<i>Kaon</i>	: Food corn of low grade.
<i>Karji</i>	: An administrative rank for high state officials in Koch kingdom.
<i>Karsapana</i>	: A kind of coin in Ancient India.
<i>Kastriya</i>	: The fighter class in Hindu social structure.
<i>Katani</i>	: Local name of weavers in Koch kingdom.
<i>Kavya</i>	: Poetry.
<i>Kayastha</i>	: Record keeper class in Hindu society. They acted as keepers of records and public accounts, writers, and administrators of the state.
<i>Keot</i>	: Distorted form of <i>Kaivarta</i> caste.
<i>Khangi</i>	: A kind of revenue paying land in Koch kingdom.
<i>Khanikar</i>	: Local name of earthen image makers in Koch kingdom.

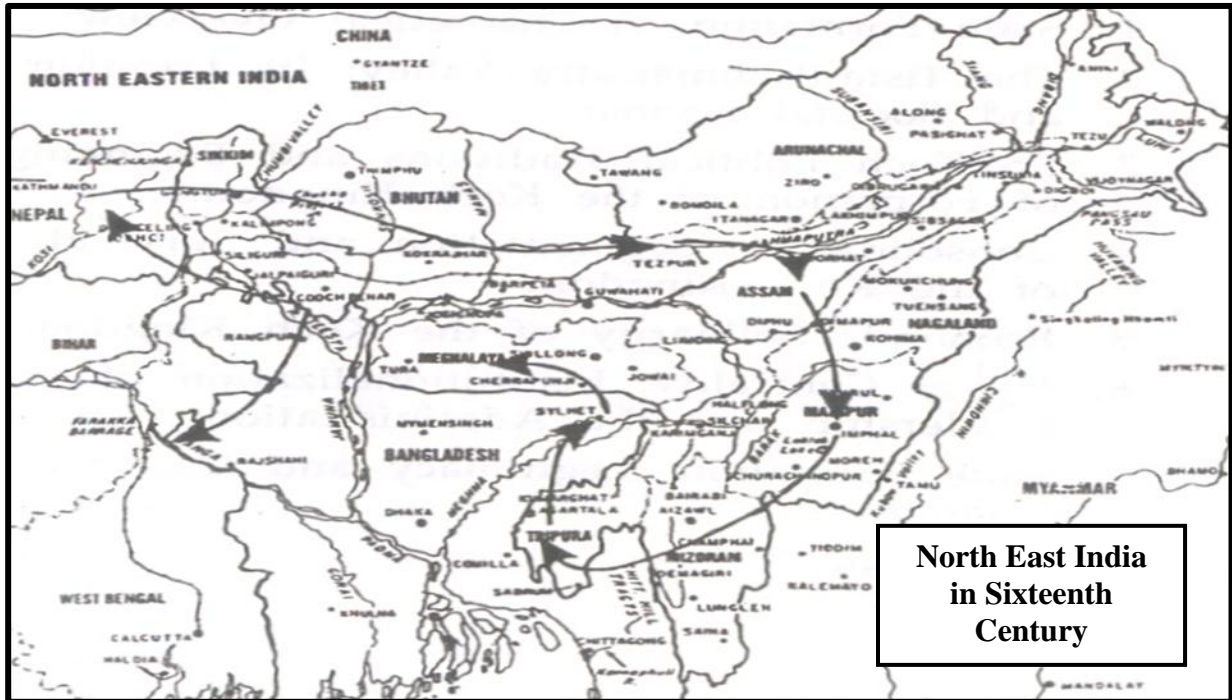
<i>Khashraha</i>	: Barren land.
<i>Khasmahal</i>	: Highly productive land.
<i>Khasnavis</i>	: Chief Secretary to the state.
<i>Khutba</i>	: Serves as the primary formal occasion for public preaching in the Islamic tradition.
<i>Kodal</i>	: Hoe.
<i>Kulyavupa</i>	: A unit of measurement.
<i>Kumar</i>	: An honorary title for the king's child.
<i>Kunkura</i>	: A kind of inferior fabric.
<i>Lakheraj</i>	: Tax free land granted to the individual as a special reward.
<i>Langal</i>	: Plough.
<i>Mahal</i>	: A portion of land donated by the Koch kings to the royal officials.
<i>Maharaja</i>	: King.
<i>Maharathi</i>	: Local governors and feudatories of South India.
<i>Mal</i>	: Land revenue.
<i>Malgujary</i>	: A system invented by Todarmal by which people could be systematically dominated by the rulers through their mercenaries.
<i>Makrai</i>	: A kind of revenue yielding tract.
<i>Mashaka</i>	: Coins made of copper familiar in Ancient India.
<i>Mootha</i>	: A kind of grass.
<i>Mora</i>	: A bamboo made stool.
<i>Mudoi</i>	: A category of traders
<i>Muga</i>	: A kind of silk made of cocoon.
<i>Mugdala</i>	: A kind of pulses.
<i>Mugur</i>	: A kind of firming tool.
<i>Muhar/ Mohur</i>	: A gold made coin issued by the Muslim rulers.
<i>Nadial</i>	: A fishing community.
<i>Narayani</i>	: Popular name of Koch currency.
<i>Nawab</i>	: An honorific title ratified and bestowed by the reigning Mughal Emperor to semi-autonomous Muslim rulers of princely states in India.
<i>Nazar/Nazzarana</i>	: A gift given to the king.
<i>Nazir/ Nazir Deo/ Chatra Nazir</i>	: Head of the military affairs.
<i>Neo-Vaisnavism</i>	: A new religious sect initiated by Shankardeva.

<i>Nigama</i>	: Guild.
<i>Nishka</i>	: An object identified as coins in Ancient India.
<i>Noeth</i>	: Nose ring.
<i>Pada</i>	: Coins made of copper familiar in Ancient India.
<i>Paik</i>	: An adult male who had to serve the state by military service.
<i>Pandit</i>	: Educated man, law officer.
<i>Pargana</i>	: An unit of the administration.
<i>Parva</i>	: Section of ancient classical text.
<i>Patala</i>	: Section in ancient classical text.
<i>Pati</i>	: A kind of mat.
<i>Peshkash</i>	: Tribute.
<i>Petbhata</i>	: Land granted to the relatives of the Koch kings for daily living.
<i>Pir</i>	: Muslim saint.
<i>Pirpal</i>	: Land donated to the Islamic institutes and for religious purposes.
<i>Pitha</i>	: Sub-divisions of Kamrupa kingdom.
<i>Phandi</i>	: Elephant catcher.
<i>Pon</i>	: A measure of quantity.
<i>Raikat</i>	: Protector of the fort and the military general appointed by the Koch king.
<i>Rajah Mohree</i>	: Coins circulated by the Ahom kings.
<i>Rajbanshi</i>	: A community of Koch kingdom.
<i>Rajguru</i>	: Spiritual instructor of the king.
<i>Rajmala</i>	: Royal chronicles of Tripura.
<i>Rajmata</i>	: Mother of the king.
<i>Rajsabha</i>	: Royal court.
<i>Rati</i>	: A small unit of measuring precious metals, like gold, silver.
<i>Rayat</i>	: Peasant.
<i>Rupaka</i>	: A currency familiar in Ancient India.
<i>Rupee</i>	: Currency.
<i>Sadagar</i>	: Big traders.
<i>Sakta</i>	: Mother worshippers.
<i>Sali</i>	: A kind of rice.
<i>Samanta</i>	: A class of landed intermediary.
<i>Sara</i>	: A clay utensil.
<i>Sarasadi</i>	: A kind of revenue yielding tract.

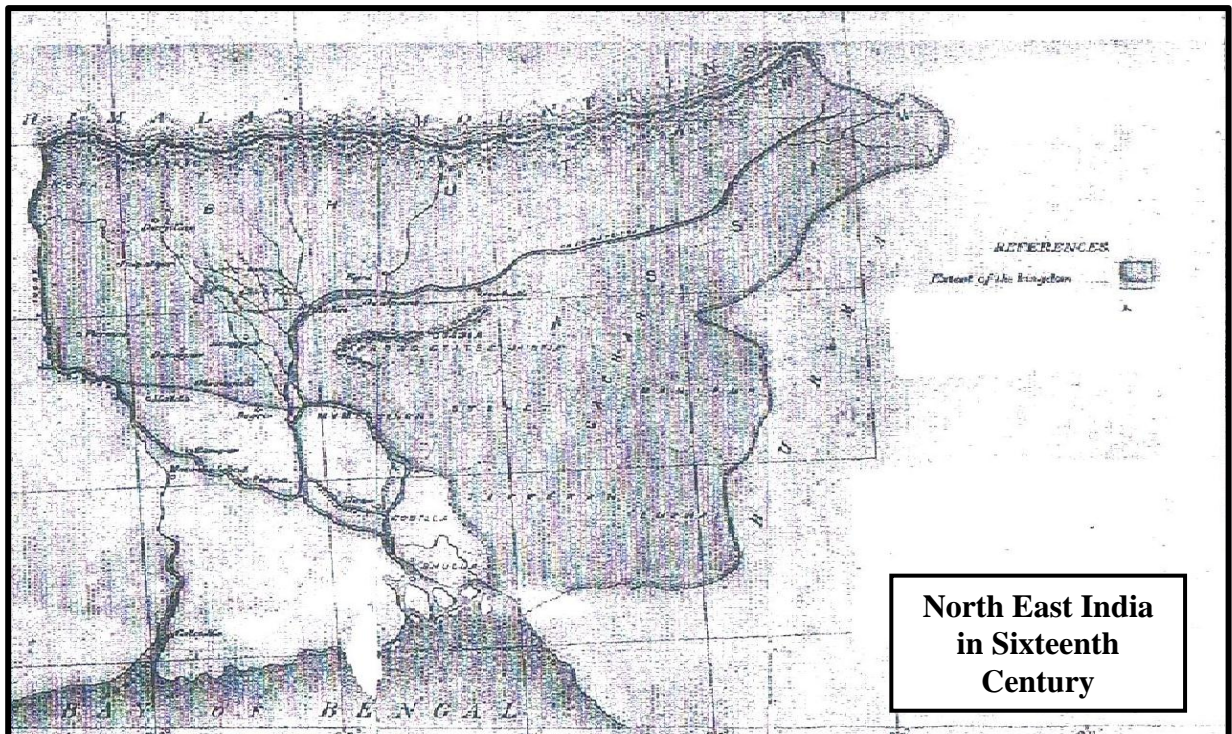
- Sewan* : An administrative rank for high state officials in Koch kingdom.
- Shiki/Sicca* : A rupee issued in Bengal before 1836 weighting more than the rupee of the British East India Company.
- Silakuti* : Stone engraver.
- Shan* : A kind of big grass.
- Shrof* : A banker or money changer.
- Sivatanka* : Coin devoted to God Shiva.
- Smritisashtra* : Hindu religious texts containing the Hindu religious and social codas.
- Sreni* : Guild.
- Subedar* : Governor.
- Suvarna* : Gold.
- Taka* : Currency.
- Taluk* : Small land holding.
- Tantie* : Weaver.
- Tantra* : A class of Hindu religious literature written in Sanskrit and concerned with powerful ritual acts of body, speech, and mind.
- Teli* : Professional oilman caste.
- Upanishad* : A Hindu sacred treatises, expounding the Vedas in predominantly mystical and monistic terms.
- Vahana* : An animal or mythical entity, for use as a vehicle by the Hindu deity.
- Vaisnava* : A Hindu sect which worship the God Krishna.
- Vamsavali* : Genealogy.
- Vina* : A musical instrument.
- Zamindar* : A landed intermediary between King and peasant.

# Maps

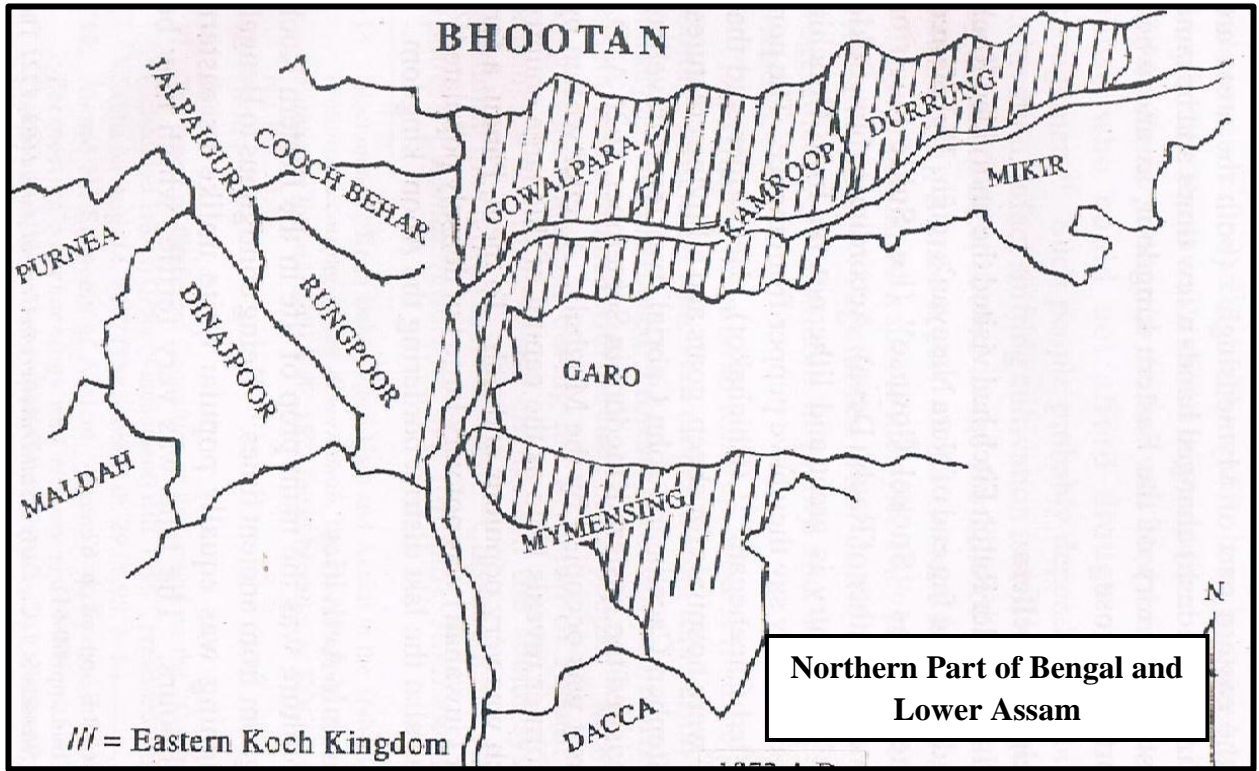
## 1. Route Map of Nara Narayan's Campaign in North East India:



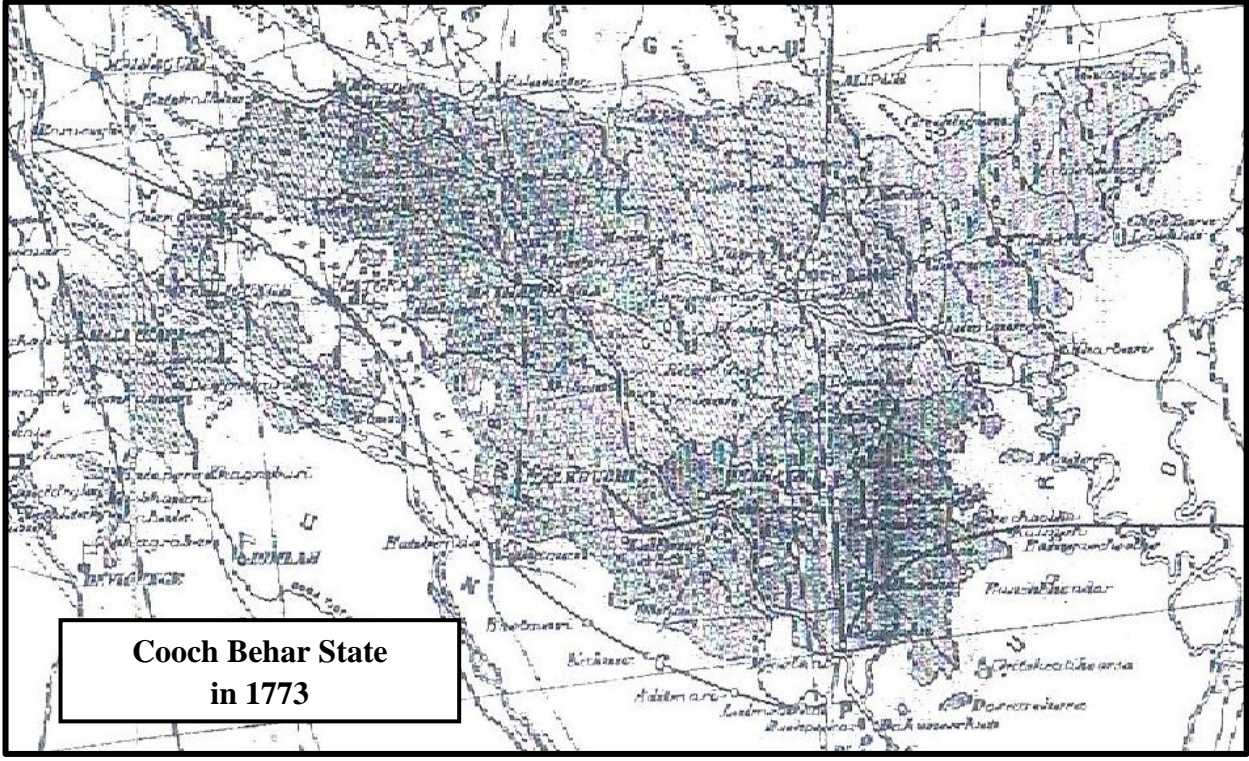
## 2. Area of Circulation of Narayani Currency in Late Sixteenth Century:



### 3. Map of Eastern Koch Kingdom:



### 4. Cooch Behar State in 1773



# Introduction

Historical analysis involves careful examination of the available sources of information searching for fresh evidence and devising creative, innovative ways of interpreting historical data. It involves asking new questions and searching for new answers to old ones. Debate and disagreement are an important part of the growth of all forms of knowledge and history is no exception. All historical interpretation ultimately based on two categories of sources- literary and archaeological. From a historical point of view, literary sources include all texts and on the other hand archeological sources include all tangible material remains like inscription, coins and inscribed images. Among these archeological sources coins have a unique place in the reconstruction of the old events. It is right to be state that coins have enormous power for initiating an unending dialogue between the past and the present. <sup>1</sup> A.H.M. Jones pointed out the value of numismatic evidence with the following words - 'Numismatic is a science in its own right. Coins deserve study both from the technical and artistic point of view and must be classified typographically and chronologically'. <sup>2</sup>

A coin technically speaking is a piece of metal of prescribed weight, embellished with designs or legends and produced under the direction of a public or private authority for its use as a medium of exchange. <sup>3</sup> Every coin has two sides, Obverse and Reverse. Obverse is also called head. It is the main side of a coin carrying the portrait head of the ruler or a symbol and name of the country. Reverse is the back side of a coin and is called tail. It depicts the denomination or issue price of the coin with year and mint mark underneath. <sup>4</sup> It is to be noted that the term *Numismatic* is derived from the Latin word '*numisma*' (i.e. currency) which signifies, 'the study of coins'. <sup>5</sup> Numismatics or the study of coins include the analysis of the material out of which coins were made; the identification of the sources of the metal; the classification and study of the form of the coins on the basis of their fabric

(size, shape, thickness, design, workmanship), metrology (weight), design, metallic composition, techniques of manufacture and message content.

Besides this technical side, the study of coins gives an insight into many aspects of the culture of a region. At first glance, coins may appear to carry little historical information but they provide ample light on several important historical process. Their very existence and in particular the denominations and number of pieces issued sheds lights on the economic and social structure of the country. The issuing authority sheds light on the political history. The quality of production indicates technological developments. The metal content indicates either minting activity, if the metal was mined locally or trading links if the metal was imported. The choice of design and inscription often shows the religious preferences of the issuing authority and the quality of execution sheds light on religious iconography and artistic development. <sup>6</sup> In fact, coins are datable contemporary documents of a rather special nature and as such they can be of great value to the historians.

## II

Before entering to the analysis of the evolution of the money economy we must have a clear idea about the mode of transaction before the advent of currency. Prior to the invention of coins other forms of exchange were conceived in the service of commerce. It is generally believed that the method of exchange of the primitive people was usually confined to barter <sup>7</sup> which arose initially from the practice of mutual propitiation of gifts. <sup>8</sup> But the barter system involved several difficulties such as - absence of common measure of value, necessity of double co-incidence of wants, difficulty in division of certain goods, settlement of debts, absence of good store of wealth and value, lack of standard weight and measure and ignorance of quality etc. These disadvantages of the barter system were soon realized and a new method was evolved. A common commodity was fixed to serve as an intermediary in all transactions. In course of time certain commodities got preference over others and a higher value was attached to them. They assumed the character of a medium of exchange and

attained a standard by which the value of other things was estimated. Thus emerged the notion of the unit of value, the first step towards the evolution of coinage.<sup>9</sup>

To trace the origin of a standardized medium of exchange we must have to look back to the remote past. The history of coins can be a little murky, because so many coins have been found across the Globe.<sup>10</sup> Traditional opinion names the Chinese as the first to widely use cast coins, beginning around the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The history of coins primarily as currency in the western world usually begins by mentioning Lydia, the Neo-Hittite civilization that arose in the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>11</sup> This is clear from the statement of Herodotus who mentions that the Lydians were the first nation to introduce the use of gold and silver coins. Coins dating back to around 643 B.C. in that region were found made of electrum, a natural alloy of gold and silver. These coins are generally considered as the first real use of metal for money because they were guaranteed by the Lydian rulers and were manufactured consistently. Since then, coins have held the attention of the major civilizations of the world and been traded for goods and services throughout the world.

In India the origin and antiquity of coinage are shrouded in considerable obscurity. The Stone Age people had neither currency nor coinage and conducted exchange through barter. Chalcolithic cultures too conducted trade without the use of coins.<sup>12</sup> The Harappans, for instance had a very extensive trade network based on barter. But some scholars also hold the view that perhaps Harappans used agricultural products as a medium of exchange as early as the third millennium B.C. Archeologists believe that the huge granaries that have been found in the cities of Harappa and Mahen-jo-daro were replenished by a system of state tribute and they fulfilled in the state economy the function of a modern bank or treasury.<sup>13</sup> Besides this, during Harappan period inscribed seals discovered with pictographic script were perhaps used for monetary transaction. As the script has not been deciphered its nature cannot be ascertained.

The *Rig Veda* mentions words such as *nishka* and *nishka-griva* (gold ornaments) and *hiranya-pinda* (gold globules), but these cannot be understood as coins<sup>14</sup> because they were not guaranteed by

any recognized authority and they were not used for ordinary transactions. As the metal was limited, Reg-Vedic people generally used cow as the medium of exchange in ordinary transactions. Later Vedic texts, viz., the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads* which are placed in c. 800 B.C. refer to golden metallic pieces such as *niska*, *suvarna*, *ahatamana* and *pada*. These may have been metal pieces of definite weight, not necessarily full-fledged coins and they have been mentioned only in connection with the gifts.

The *Janapada* or the tribal coins also arose in this time in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>15</sup> The tribal coins began their appearances after the disintegration of the Maurya Empire. Most of the tribes such as Yaudheyas, Ksudrakas, Kunindas, Audumbaras and Kulutas were located in the Punjab and they issued die-struck coins. Copper was the prime issue of all these republics but it is difficult to generalize about the weight of these coins. The copper coins found in large number were meant for ordinary transactions. Besides these tribal principalities the monarchical states such as Surasena, Pancala, Vasta and Kosala also issued a large number of copper coins. So without any prejudice or reservation it can safely be opined that a regular system of coinage or currency was probably in vogue during the 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in a context of the emergence of states, urbanization and expanding trade.

Money economy seems to have made considerable headway during the Maurya period. The Mauryan coins were punch marked with the royal standard to ascertain their authenticity. Kautilya in his 33<sup>rd</sup> chapter of *Arthashastra* mentions specifically that coins made of copper are classified in accordance with their value and these are like *mashaka*, *ardha-mashaka*, *pada-madhaka* (*kakani*), *ashtan-bhaga-masha* (*ardhakakni*).<sup>16</sup> Kautilya also mentions that the violation of the imperial Maurya standards by private enterprises may have been as an offense. Kautilya also seemed to advocate a theory of bi-metallism for coinage, which involved the use of two metals, copper and silver under one government. There was state control over monetary system during the Mauryan period because officers used to regulate the currency for medium of exchange. State had to issue the debased coins

because of the deficiency of silver. This tends us to presume that coins and currency system in India was well known to the people of this period.

The disintegration of the Mauryan Empire in the second century B.C. considerably influenced the money economy of India. The rule of the foreigners such as Indo-Bactrians, Indo-Scythians, Indo-Perthians and Indo-Kusanas in the North West India must have closed the minting of Maurya coins and started to mint their own coins. In north India, there arose a large number of small states both monarchical and republican and they issued large number of coins, mostly in copper. Besides during this period city *nigamas*, *srenis* or corporations also issued their coins generally in copper.

In south India after the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire the local governors and feudatories called *Maharathis* established their own kingdoms in many parts of the Deccan. They began to issue die-struck coins. After the *Maharathis*, Anandas ruled and their coins are also available. The Satavahanas ruled for a considerable time and over wide territory. Their coins were the richest in the Deccan both in variety and quantity. The money economy of the Satavahanas was regional. It was indigenous and it played dominant role in the development of coinage of south India. In south India the punched-marked coins seem to had been issued and remained in circulation for three or four centuries longer than in the north. Roman coins and their imitation were in circulation in the market for a long time.

The imperial Gupta kings issued well-executed die-struck gold coins with metrical legends in Sanskrit known as *dinaras*, these coins have been mostly found in north India. The obverse depicts the reigning king in various poses usually material ones, but there are interesting instances of the coins of Samudragupta and Kumargupta-I, showing them playing the *Vina* (a stringed instrument). The reverse of the Gupta coins have religious symbols indicating the king's religious affiliation. There was a decline in the metallic purity of gold in the later part of Skandagupta's reign. The Guptas issued gold coins of Roman Standard because of their trade with Byzantine Empire. Gradually there was an attempt towards Indianization of Gupta coins in style, metrology and fabric.

The numismatic history of early medieval period is a matter of continuing debate. Historians described this period of Indian History as marked by feudal tendencies in view of the decline of coinage along with the other characteristics of feudal society such as decline of trade and urbanization. Gold coins were rare, silver were few and copper not many in number during the post-Gupta period. Though the money economy of northern India declined considerably during the post-Gupta period but there was a revival of money economy on a wide scale in western and central India, R.S. Sharma traces this revival from the eleventh century.<sup>17</sup> Though there was a decline in the metallic value but the ruling dynasties of this time issued bullion coins, in which a mixture of copper and silver was used among the powers who issued coins in this time were the Senas of Bengal, Kalachuries, the Chndellas, the Gahadavals, the Chahamanas, the Sahis etc.

In the Sultani period the Sultans were not devoid of the practice of minting coins. In fact in Islam inscribing the ruler's name on the coins was invested with special importance. This privilege of inscribing the ruler's name in the *khutba* (public prayer) implied the definite assumption of legal power. This prerogative of the Muslim rulers led them to issue coins on each important occasion such as conquering a country or kingdom or even a fort or a town. The rulers of the five major dynasties that were the Ilabari Turkis, the Khaljis, the Tughlaqs, the Sayiad and the Lodies were the major issuer of sultanate coinage.<sup>18</sup> Besides this the various regional Muslim states of north and south India issued coins in their name. In the later stage of the Sultani period various ambitious and powerful governors of the provinces which were under the Delhi Sultanate took advantage of weakened control of the power became independent and issued their own coins.

The system of coinage was one of a glorious chapter in the Mughal administration. The Mughal coinage was remarkable for its richness, for its great variety, for the standard which it almost consistently maintained and for its wonderful gold issues called *Muhars*. The Mughals had three types of coins vis. gold, silver and copper. The specialty of the Mughal coins was their unanimity in purity, character and in weight. All the Mughal rulers issued coins in their reigns.<sup>19</sup> The coinage bloomed

exuberantly under Akbar, maintaining its vigor in the succeeding reigns as well. Besides the Mughals numerous Hindu states of north and south India issued coins the most important of them were Kangra, Mewar, Mithila, Assam, Koch, etc.

### III

Now we will concentrate our attention towards the coinage of the princely states of the Indian subcontinent prior and after the Muslim rule. The emergence of the princely states in India can be traced back to the Muslim rule. We must have keep it in mind that from the time immemorial India was mostly predominated by the Hindu religion and its followers, so when the Muslims assumed the power in India, the Hindu population did not took that align culture whole heartedly and a sense of discontent always prevailed in their mind and it was reflected in the form of revolts in various occasions in the Muslim period. The situation became worse in the later phase of Mughal period due to the political, economic and administrative failure.<sup>20</sup> In that time various principalities assumed power in various parts of India and they took the Mughal tradition of administration in their personal domain.

Likewise the other part of India, North East India also witnessed the growth of regional states. This large predominantly tribal area saw the rise of tribal kingship in different parts of the medieval period. *Tipras* in Tripura, *Ahom* in Assam, the *Koch* in Cooch Behar, *Kachari-Dimasas* in upper Assam and later Kachar, *Jaintia* in Meghalaya and Jayantipur and *Manipuri* in Manipur emerged to power and authority during 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of these Kingdoms in course of time became fairly powerful and came to control extensive land areas. Of these medieval powers the Ahoms, the Koch, the Tripura and the Manipuries were the most powerful. All these powers are known to have issued their coins. Oldest and strongest series of coins were struck by the Tripura, who struck their initial coins in 1464, the Koch in 1555, and the Ahoms in 1648, coins of Kacharies, Jaintia and

Manipuris were likewise struck in 1559, 1563 and 1709 respectively or somewhat earlier in each case.

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In the field of coinage they also copied the Muslim style. Though these rising states assumed the right of striking coins for themselves but for economic, political and other reasons they issued coins in prevailing imperial Muslim type relating the emperor's name.<sup>22</sup> The coinage of the Hindu states of North East India also derived their inspiration from the silver coinage of the Sultans of Bengal. The weight standard and fabric of the coins were initially derived from those used in Bengal and even the types used were sometimes based on Islamic prototype. They only added to them a characteristic ornament or monogram which distinguished them from the Mughal issues.

Among these regional powers the Koch<sup>23</sup> of northern part of sub-Himalayan Bengal holds a very distinguished place in the annals of numismatic heritage of North East India and in India as well. The origin and establishment of the Koch state can be traced back as early as to the sixteenth century. Koch kingdom was a small principality situated just south of the Himalayas.<sup>24</sup> The state was founded about in 1496,<sup>25</sup> in the vacuum created after the collapse of the Hindu kingdom Kamrup and Kamta. There is a great deal of obscurity leading to some academic controversy about the way it was established and more so about the ancestry of its original founder. In spite of a very modest beginning as a small principality in the early years of the sixteenth century the Koch state was unique for its long existence, remote antiquity, sustained continuity and survival down the centuries. As because the history of Koch kingdom needs several pages to discuss so we will switch over to our main center of attention that is the coinage of the Koch kingdom.

Coinage can shade light on many aspects of the history and culture of a country and Koch kingdom is no exception, particularly as coins are among the earliest historical documents that survive from the region. The dates on Koch coins give a firm chronological framework for the early kings. Though there is a controversy regarding the date of accession of Visvasimha but there is also

unanimity among the scholars that Visvasimha was the first historical ruler of Koch kingdom and he ruled up to 1533. Some scholars have suggested that Visvasimha may have struck coins<sup>26</sup> but due to the paucity of information we cannot say it definitely. Surely it was the credit of his son Nara Narayan who first struck coins. The currency was familiar as '*Narayani Mudra*' as '*Narayan*' was family title of the Koch Kings.<sup>27</sup> With the increase of his territory Narayani currency was also reached over a vast area of North East India. Though Koch kings struck coins on gold, silver and brass but the gold and brass coins are very rare, silver was the main metal of coining money.<sup>28</sup> After Nara Narayan the most important names of the Kings who struck coins are Lakshmi Narayan (1587-1627), Vira Narayan (1627-1633), Prana Narayan (1633-1665), Moda Narayan (1665-1680), Vasudeva Narayan (1680-1682), Mahendra Naryan (1682-1693) and others.<sup>29</sup> This continuation of minting coins was hampered due to the invasion of Bhutan in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Koch King took help of the English East India Company to defend the Bhutanese attack and made an agreement with the British in 1773.<sup>30</sup> By this agreement Koch kingdom became a tributary state and it lost the authority of issuing coins but in spite of that coins were struck ceremonially up to the reign of Jagaddipendra Narayan, the last king and the transaction of Narayani currency was in vogue up to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### IV

Over the last few decades we certainly see that the study of numismatic history is gathering attention to the scholars especially in the fields of economic history all over India and abroad. Coming to the Koch coinage although some research have been done in recent years and the research articles are spread over a wide range of different journal but the study of the Koch coinage on a comprehensive scale is yet to be done. We cannot deny that we still have much to learn about many aspects of Koch kingdom and most writers are not interested in using the numismatic data and have ignored the numismatic signals through which a better perspective into Koch history can be gained.

Keeping in mind the above background of numismatic research on Koch coinage, the work is intended to present a thorough study of Koch coinage by exploring the different frontiers of numismatic achievements like, political, economic and socio-religious as well as cultural perspective and thus tries to establish a correlation between the Koch coinage and coinage tradition of India. Not only that the study will also help to re-write the politico-economic and cultural history of North Bengal by scrutinizing the numismatic evidences found in this region.

On the basis of available source materials and keeping in mind the basic notion of research, the whole theme has been divided into six chapters. The main theme of the first chapter is the origin and development of the Koch dynasty. In this Chapter the political history of the Koch kingdom is discussed. Careful examinations are made here about the ups and downs of Koch Empire.

Economic perspective of the Koch Kingdom is the basic theme of the second chapter. This chapter includes the economic viability of the Koch kingdom. To ventilate the core issues of the Koch economics careful study is made here about the kingdom's geographical settings, administrative machinery, production system, land revenue settlement and collection, trade and market networks and so on. The use of currency in trade and transaction in Koch Kingdom and also in several parts of North East India are also discussed here to understand the role of currency in day do day transactions.

The beginning of the Koch coinage is the main theme of the third chapter. Here the economic condition and the mode of transaction before the establishment of the Koch kingdom are discussed. The economic condition of the kingdom during the reign of Nara Narayan and the main causes which compelled him to establish a regularized currency system is the main emphasis of the chapter. Koch coinage from its inception up to the Anglo-Koch treaty (1773) is discussed here because up to 1773 Koch kingdom was an independent kingdom but after this treaty it lost its sovereign character. So coinage from 1773 to the last ruler Jagaddipendra Narayan is discussed in a separate chapter.

The fourth chapter thoroughly deals with the Koch coinage from Anglo-Koch treaty to Jagaddipendra Narayan. Careful re-examination has been made here about the ups and downs of Koch numismatic due to the British monopolistic attitude towards the Koch kingdom. The colonial masters always intended to carve the power and position of the Koch kingdom. So how the British policy towards the Koch currency hampered the circulation of this currency and ultimately paved the way of its debasement have been analyzed in this chapter.

Art and iconographic designs on the Koch coins is the primary subject matter of fifth chapter. This chapter highlights on different symbols, various designs, engraved words on the Koch coins and their practical and spiritual causes.

In chapter six the coinage of various other North Eastern kingdoms like Ahom, Tripura, Kachar, Manipur, Bhutan have been discussed to gather a comprehensive idea about the transaction system in North East India and to establish the co-relation of these coinages with the coinage of Koch kingdom. Lastly there is an observation of the overall theme in the form of conclusion derived from the discussion of the above mentioned chapters.

For the purpose of this research I have used both primary and secondary materials. For the first hand data, the study is basically based upon source materials like archeological evidences including inscriptions, archeological remains and archeological findings in North Bengal and North East India. Numerous coins of the Koch and other North Eastern states, literary products under the patronage of the Koch and other North East Kings like *Charitas*, *Vamsavalies*, *Burunjis* have been scrutinized with great care. English translation of some Persian books which contain information about Koch and other North East kingdoms are also discussed. Besides this foreign traveler's account, diplomatic and official records, reports, private letters are the other literary sources. Additional data have been collected by the visitation of different museums, personal collections, state archives of North East India and India in general. In addition to this, field survey is also undertaken to utilize the yet unidentified and unrecorded numismatic specimens of the Koch and other North East coinage.

Based on the above mentioned primary and secondary data on Koch coinage and also based on early stated characterization there are certain questions as to the present work aimed at and the following hypothesis are presented for the same.

- King Nara Narayan was aware about the fact that without proper system of coinage the economic progress of the kingdom would not possible, so that he took the initiative to promote a well organized monetary system in his kingdom and thus the *Narayani* currency came into existence.
- The well organized system of coinage had a huge contribution to the development of the economic condition of the Kingdom and also for North East India in respect of its wide circulation and acceptability.
- The coinage of Koch Kingdom had a close relation with the coinage of Ahom, Tripura, Jaintia, Kachar and the Bengal Sultan's currency and probably all this coinages were inspired by each other and there was a steady competition among them in view of their acceptability towards the people of this region.
- In view of the purity of metal content, weight standard, its royal heritage and wide circulation the *Narayani* currency had played an important role in the immense popularity of the Koch kingdom not only in eastern India but also in India in general and abroad.
- The Bhutanese aggression in Cooch Behar State in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century badly affected the economy of Koch kingdom and it was the direct cause of the decline of the *Narayani* currency, although the British intervention in the kingdom and subsequently in the coinage was its immediate result.
- Although the Treaty of 1773 between the English East India Company and Cooch Behar State was the immediate cause for the elimination of the *Narayani* currency but the underlying factor was the monopolistic policy of the British Government to impose a single currency system in the company's domain in India.

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## Chapter - I

# Koch Dynasty: A Political Outline

The Koch kingdom was a state situated south of the Himalayas and in the northern part of Bengal during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Though there is a great deal of obscurity leading to some academic controversies about the way it was established but it is a fact that the state was established in 1496, in the vacuum created after the collapse of the Kingdoms of Kamarupa and Kamta and became one of the great regional powers of North East India. Nonetheless, it was unique for its long existence and can boast of its remote antiquity, sustained continuity and survival down the centuries. The early history of the kingdom has to be sought in the history of Assam. In early times the territory was known as *Pragjyotisha*.

The geographical frontier of the Kingdom was well set by the natural boundaries. The Baranadi and the Brahmaputra rivers constitute the eastern boundary while the river Tista and Karatoya are the indicators of the western boundary. In the northern flank Bhutan constitute the frontier and convergence of the Brahmaputra and the Karatoya in Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) is normally reflected as the southern frontier of the county.<sup>1</sup> However with the passage of time the administrative jurisdiction of the domain of Koch kingdom changed in several periods of its presence. The countryside of the kingdom is basically plane with a trivial south eastern incline along which the major rivers of the kingdom run. There are slim ups and downs and while some regions may be so down as to be flooded by the streams during the rainy season, others are a little elevated and stay permanently above water. There are neither mountain peaks nor any hills inside the monarchy. The waterways in Koch territory run in a sloping path from north-west to south-east. As a law they take

their upsurge in the Himalayas and come in the kingdom from the western *duars* of the state and after passing through they release their waters into the Brahmaputra. The streams are normally fame and thin in the dry period, they become extremely tumultuous and severe during the rains. The most significant rivers of the state include *Tista, Karotoya, Sankosh, Torsha, Dharla, Raidak, Kaljani, Jaldhaka, Mujnai, Gadadhar, etc.* The system of rivers in the kingdom had a noteworthy role in the creation of states in the area since the commencement of the historical stage. As the normal frontier the river system had relevant role in the security of the region. Floods as usual incidence in the rivers had guarded the area from the attack of adjacent adversary.<sup>2</sup> Owing to overflow the loam of the kingdom is of alluvial pattern and extremely productive.

The current name of the above mentioned physical area is Cooch Behar but previously the region was part of a much bigger territory of Kamrup.<sup>3</sup> The name of the kingdom was also changed with the passage of time. We have several references in our hand where the territory has been described as *Pragjyotish, Kamarupa* and *Kamarupa-Kamta*. For instance *Kalika Purana*, a Sanskrit text compiled in the early medieval period, placed the Pragjyotisha kingdom between the Dikkar Basini (*Dikkrai*) river and the Karatoya river during the pre-Christian period especially in the period of Naraka and Bhagadatta, the legendary heroes of the area.<sup>4</sup> The term *Pragjyotish* was replaced by the name *Kamarupa* in the early centuries of the Christian era. The term *Kamarupa* can be found in the *Allahabad Prasathi* of Samudra Gupta (325-76 A.D), where the kingdom has been described as a border kingdom of the Gupta Empire.<sup>5</sup> But in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*, a Sanskrit text composed in fifth century both the term *Pragjyotisha* and *Kamarupa* can be found.<sup>6</sup> With the coming of the *Varmanas* in the political scenario the term *Kamarupa* became widely used. But we can get a new term of the territory from Yuan Chawang's account, who stayed in *Kamarupa* and described the area as *Kia-Mo-Leo-Po*.<sup>7</sup> In *Yogini Tantra*, a late medieval Sanskrit text, we can find the name *Kamata*.<sup>8</sup> *Baharistan-I-Ghaibi* also refers the state as *Kamata*.<sup>9</sup> The term 'Cooch Behar' seems to have been first used in relation to this territory in *Shahjahan Nama* about the mid of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the

Anglo-Koch treaty (1773) the territory was mentioned as Cooch Behar.<sup>10</sup> However the terminology of the area as during the medieval period was described as Kamata, where the *Khen* kings settled a kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to the formation of the Koch state in early sixteenth century the physical extent of the state was under the suzerainty of Kamarupa kingdom and also under some other hereditary rule. But for the convenience of our investigation we will begin our study of political history from the appearance of the Khen family because former to the Khen the political development of the area was in its infant phase. So it is better to start the glimpse of historical growth of the region from the emergence of the Khen.

### **Emergence of the Khen:**

The Khen authority over the region established in the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>12</sup> From the *Kamarupa Buranji* we can know that after the dynasty of Arimitta, a new clan containing of three kings Niladhvaja, Chakradhaja and Nilambara reigned over the area with its capital at Kamatapura.<sup>13</sup> W.W. Hunter stated that king Niladhvaja succeeded the Pala house not to trouble on the Khen affairs.<sup>14</sup> S.K. Chatterjee on the other hand is of the view that Niladhvaja battled and defeated the last rulers of the Pala dynasty of Bengal.<sup>15</sup> So it is problematic to trace the source of Niladhvaja. In *Kamatesvara Kula Karik*, Srutidhar Rup Narayan states that the monarchs of Kamata were the posterities of king Vardhana of Vardhankot.<sup>16</sup> They being frightened of Nanda (Mahapadma Nanda) took shelter in the Kamata with the name of *Bhanga Kastariya* and later recognized as Rajbamsi.<sup>17</sup> Incidentally D.C. Sircar recognized Vardhanakot with Bardhankot and brands it a portion of the Nivrti country.<sup>18</sup> Conferring to the second *Patala of Bhramari Tantra* the sons of Vardhana discarding *Kastriya* practice took shelter in Ratnapitha (Kamarupa) and were identified as Rajbansis.<sup>19</sup>

From the traditional accounts we can know that Niladhvaja, the originator of the Khen family was however indicated to come to the authority from a very modest position. According to *Gosanimangala* he was cow herd of a Brahmin who found the symbols of kingship on the boy's figure and released him from the labor.<sup>20</sup> At the guidance of this Brahmin having beaten the last Pala ruler near Guwahati he announced himself king and assumed the title Niladhvaja. He made his capital at Kamtapura on the west bank of the river Dharla by settling many Mithila Brahmins in his domain. Gunabhiram Barua updates us that this was a prevalent ritual short of historical certainty. He did much to re-begin the devotion of the Khen people. They were elevated to the pride of clean Hindus for this admirable performance.<sup>21</sup> On the other side while remarking on the Khen dynasty R.D. Banarjee pointed out that Niladhvaja conquered the city of Kamtapura which was previously in existence. Niladhaja made certain modernizations of the fortified city which had been constructed sometimes ago.<sup>22</sup>

Niladhvaja was succeeded by his son Chakradhvaja in 1460. Significant event during his sway was the occurrence of the Bengal Sultan Barbak Saha.<sup>23</sup> Though the Sultan did not make any outstanding success in the battle against the monarch of Kamata. The supremacy of Chakradhaja is also said to have been related with the discovery and founding of the shrine of *Gosani* of Kamateswari, the chief divinity of the house. The shrine of *Gosani* or *Kamatesvari* is located within Kamatapura the capital of Kamata. Chakradhvaja was succeeded by his son Nilambara in the monarchy of Kamata in 1480. The territory of Nilambara is said to have comprised the larger part of Goalpara and Kamarupa the whole of Rangpur and Cooch Behar and portion of Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur.<sup>24</sup> Edward Gait opines that he also took a distant part of North Eastern areas which was under the control of the sovereigns of Gauda.<sup>25</sup> Nilambara is attributed to have built the long way extending from Kamatapura to Ghoraghat (Rangpur) remained of which may be found in the current Dinhata-Mekhligang road.

The consolidated Kamata state was a great challenge to the Sultans of Bengal so within few years the Bengal Sultan Hussain Saha (1493-1519) attacked the kingdom of Kamata and took the capital in 1498.<sup>26</sup> The Muslim subjugator brutally robbed the city and shrines were demolished, images of Gods and Goddesses were smashed. The kingdom as far as Hajo was seized. According to a custom Hussain Saha constructed a Madrasa in Malda which bears writing corresponding to 1502 in memorial of triumph against the ruler of Kamata.<sup>27</sup> In addition he issued coins as seen above in which he expected the title as the victor of Kamata, Kamaru, Jainagar and Orissa. The Sultan however, appointed Danyal or Dulal Ghazi as the administrator of the occupied land with the object to follow further conquest to the east.<sup>28</sup> But the rule of the Muslim was short-lived. The *Bhuiyans* made a joint outbreak on the Danyal's battalion and demolished the last man. There after there seems to have prevailed a state of disorder in the state while there emerged a number of minor principalities under local heads usually recognized as *Bara-Bhuiyan* who increasingly declared their freedom.<sup>29</sup>

### **Emergence of the Koch, Visvasimha (c. 1496-1533):**

In the last quarter of the fifteenth century the Koch tribe was slowly rising to the authority in the sub-Himalayan tracts of Bengal by suppressing the other tribal groups and became so powerful that they were succeeded to establish a new kingdom which was named as Koch kingdom as the *Koch* tribe was the ruling power.<sup>30</sup> After few hereditary rulers, one Koch chief, Visvasimha raised to power in the Koch Kingdom. The original name of Visvasimha was Bisu<sup>31</sup> though *Akbarnamah* recognized him the name Bisan.<sup>32</sup> His father Haria Mondol was a dweller of the Khuntaghat area. Various Koch kin assembled under him residing in that area.<sup>33</sup> Like his father Haria, Visvasimha also structured his authority by gaining suzerainty over diverse tribes of the region and launched ambitious campaigns against the landed *Bhuiyans*. He extended his territory of control from the river Karatoya in the west and to the Baranadi in the east beating the *Bhuiyans* one after another.<sup>34</sup> He established his capital at *Kamatanagara* or *Kamatapura*.<sup>35</sup> After this he took the name of Kamatesvara (Lord of Kamata)

perhaps after the name of preached deity of the kingdom. In the contemporary chronicles Visvasimha has been designated as the *Lord of Kamata*.<sup>36</sup> After the initial consolidation of his kingdom Visvasimha attacked Bhutan and concluded a treaty with them. Bhutan promised to pay tribute to him. After his victory he made an ambitious campaign against the Ahom kingdom but his battle against Ahom country was not productive.<sup>37</sup> But he succeeded in conquering some parts of that country of Gaur.<sup>38</sup>

The root of Visvasimha is credited to mythical Aryan figures. The Brahmin whose number was certainly very minor and who had to depend on the royal support for their living inclined to craft stories drawing their ancestry from Hindu Gods and Goddess or allegorical figures. According to a custom noted in *Darrang Rajavamsavali*<sup>39</sup> Visvasimha was born out of the amalgamation of Lord Siva and his mother Hira, a manifestation of goddess Bhagavati. Visvasimha was fitted in the sovereignty according to ceremonial rites and during his installation the Brahmins offered him the name Visvasimha<sup>40</sup> as becoming a king. It is obvious from the *Rajopakhyana* that Visvasimha became monarch on a heavenly rule and an umbrella, an insignia of divine origin being used at the installation. The story of heavenly source attributed by the Brahmins to the author of the Koch family marks a fabricated linking of the Koch with certain mythical figures while they were became Hindu. This kind of linking however offered a prospect of their dominance and assisted them to have adherence from the subject population.

But Buchanan Hamilton has informed us a dissimilar explanation about the source of Visvasimha. According to him two brothers Chandana and Madana recognized a government at Moralabasa. They reigned only for eight years and soon the people particularly the Koch 'who had a number of chiefs at first independent but who gradually united under the authority of one of themselves named Hajo'<sup>41</sup> occupied Rangpur and Kamarupa. He had two offspring Hira and Jira of whom Hira was wedded to Hariya an associate of admixed tribe named Mech. They gave birth to Bisu who succeeded to the entire of his grandfather.<sup>42</sup> Thus it apparent that Visvasimha's father was

from a *Mech* tribe and mother was from a Koch tribe, hence non Aryan and non Hinduised. Visvasimha worshipped *Siva* and *Durga* and had been introduced into the *Siva* doctrines by a Brahmin named Kalicarana Bhattacharya.<sup>43</sup> He is supposed to have revived the *Kamakhya Pitha* in the Nilachala close to Guwahati and created a shrine there.<sup>44</sup> He selected Ballavacharya the son of a Kanouj Brahmin called Vasudeva Acharyya and bought a great number of Brahmins from Kanauj, Varanasi and other places of North India.<sup>45</sup> The Brahmins were praised to settle in the Kingdom with payment free property. Their part in broadcasting the thoughts of the Sanskrit masterpieces had a great significance in the spiritual life of the people. Throughout the sovereignty of Visvasimha Pitambara wrote *Nala-Damayanti* episode of the *Mahabharata*<sup>46</sup> and transformed the 10<sup>th</sup> *Canta* of *Bhagavata Purana* at the request of Sangram Simha.<sup>47</sup> *Markandeya Purana* was translated by him into Bengali poetry. Mankara and Durgabara are supposed to have composed the *Manasa-Mangala Kavya*.<sup>48</sup> It was thought that the *Yogini Tantra* perhaps a sixteenth century work on *Devi* worship was composed during his time.<sup>49</sup>

### **Nara Narayan (1533-1587):**

At the time of Visvasimha's demise his two sons Malladeva and Sukladvaja were absent from the kingdom and they were at Banaras taking their higher education under a Brahmin.<sup>50</sup> Narasimha another son of Visvasimha ascended the power, when the news reached Malladeva and Sukladvaja they returned to the kingdom instantly raised an army and overcome Narasimha who along with his family escaped to *Morang* the sub-Himalayan area to the west of Koch kingdom.<sup>51</sup> Subsequently the removal of Narasimha, Malladeva became king and took the designation Nara Narayan.<sup>52</sup> A *Chap* was prepared on this event with his name '*Sri Sri Nara Narayan*' carved thereon and coins were also minted bearing the name of the king. His coins are named *Narayani Tanka* and they had on one side the name of the God *Siva* and on the other the name of the king both in *Devanagari* calligraphy.<sup>53</sup> He selected his brother Sukladvaja his Commander-in-Chief, who was also assumed a new name

Sangram Simha. Sukladhvaja was so accomplished and swift in military maneuvers that he was designated as '*Chilarai*' or the 'Kite king'.<sup>54</sup>

With the accession of Nara Narayan in the throne of the Koch kingdom the history of the Koch arrived into an excellent episode of military brilliance. He recognized the Koch independence in the whole North East India. H.N. Chaudhuri opines<sup>55</sup> that 'his conquest comprised almost the whole of Northern Bengal, Bhutan and Assam as well as the modern states of Kacchar, Jayantia, Manipur and Tripura and extended up to the coast of Bay of Bengal'. But actually the land under his direct management was possibly much lesser than that. According to *Akbarnamah*<sup>56</sup> on the east is the river Brahmaputra on the north is lower Tibet and Assam and on the south Ghoraghat on the west is Tirhut. It is possibly owing to the fact that Nara Narayan certified the conquered monarchs to enjoy their self-government by giving tribute. After the demise of Sukladhvaja there was no more war in the Koch Kingdom for some years and Nara Narayan became much dedicated to religion and works of community interests for which he came to be recognized as 'the pious King'.

But the splendor of the Koch Kingdom under Nara Narayan did not last long, degeneration soon set in subsequent the death of Sukladhvaja. Nara Narayan was infertile till late in life. *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*<sup>57</sup> mentions that even though Nara Narayan wedded before he remained childless late in life. As a result Raghudeva, child of Sukladhvaja had been chosen as his successor.<sup>58</sup> But in his progressed age Nara Narayan was consecrated with a son named Lakshmi Narayan which twisted doubt in Raghudeva's mind. It appears to him that being the son of ruling sovereign he had superior claim to the throne according to the regulation of birthright common at that time. Activated by some bureaucrats and councilors he advanced to Badanagar on the bank of river Manas and affirmed himself sovereign building there a fort there.<sup>59</sup>

The serenity loving king Nara Narayan favored to split the kingdom instead of going in a conflict against his nephew. Nara Narayan made over to Raghudeva the territories east of the Sankosa and the western part of the kingdom remained for himself and his descended. Raghudeva decided to

accept the suzerainty of his uncle to give him homage and strike coins in the name of his uncle.<sup>60</sup> Raghudeva's country was known as Hajo extended as far as the river Bharadi in the east and incorporated the localities of Kamarupa, Goalpara and Garo hills. The Koch kingdom practically integrated present Cooch Behar and portions of the present districts of Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur with its capital at Kamatapura.<sup>61</sup>

Nara Narayan was chiefly a man of peace and more fascinated in literary and artistic pursuits. He was an admirer of *Saiva* faith and was supposed to have built the Saiva temples. In this link mention may be made of the reconstruction of the holy place of Kamakhya in 1565.<sup>62</sup> It is marked from an caption in the temple that Nara Narayan and Sukladhvaja had various qualities. Again the stone message of the Hayagriva Madhava temple states that 'the most wise king Malla Deva was the subjugator of all adversaries. In significance and kindness and for bravery he had a great standing and was purified by spiritual conduct.'<sup>63</sup> Nara Naryan was a great patroniser of Art. The court of Nara Narayan was garlanded with a great number of court versifiers for which he was acknowledged as '*Vikramaditya*' of Kamarupa.<sup>64</sup> He was famous to have issued orders to the intellectuals soliciting them to apply vernacular words when they transformed the renowned Sanskrit classics into poetries.<sup>65</sup> So Ramasaravati translated the entire Sanskrit *Mahabharata* into verses.<sup>66</sup> The sway of Nara Narayan noticed the peak of *Vaisnava* literature, a new branch of Assamese literature. Sankaradeva the grand Neo-Vaisnavaite reformer and court writer of Nara Narayan interpreted the *Uttarakanda* of *Ramayana*, *Srimadbhagvata* and many works of Vaisnava doctrine.<sup>67</sup> Ananta Kandali, Kalap Chandra Dvija were also dedicated themselves in conversions of diverse Sanskrit classics.

### **Lakshmi Narayan (1587-1627):**

Nara Narayan was succeeded by his only son Lakshmi Narayan.<sup>68</sup> Following the tradition *Raikatas* of Baikunthapur and other officials brought *nazars* with the newly coined money at the time of his installation. He was not skilled in politics and war tactics like his father and he was also a weak

administrator. So the displeasures between the Koch royal families sustained.<sup>69</sup> During his reign Raghudeva denied to admit preeminence of Lakshmi Narayan and confirmed him sovereign and struck coins in his own name. Lakshmi Narayan went to battle with him, defeated him and came into custody of the imperial standard.<sup>70</sup> This unlocked the line of attack to both the Afghans and the Mughols intruders into their politics. Raghudeva had an ambition to make himself as the sovereign ruler of the whole of the Koch kingdom and for this he started to build relationship with Isha Khan the Afghan leader of Eastern Bengal.<sup>71</sup> Lakshmi Narayan as a consequence twisted his attention to accept the ceremonial dominance of the Mughol emperor Akbar and for the reason encouraged friendship with Mansingh the governor of Bengal by giving his sister in marriage to him.<sup>72</sup> Raghudeva there after attacked the Koch king Lakshmi Narayan and Bahirband was seized. At this state of affairs Lakshmi Narayan asked for the assist of Mansingh who instantly sent a force in help of the former. Being beaten in May, 1596<sup>73</sup> Raghudeva obliged to quit Bahirband hearing the reports Isha Khan hastened to help his supporter but his force was diplomatically blocked by Mansingh. Isa Khan crushed Man-Sing but could not continue to facilitate Raghudeva.<sup>74</sup>

After the loss of Raghudeva, his son Parikshit hurried to the territory and assuming the independence executed Indranarayan his step brother. After becoming king Parikshita also followed his father's strategy against the Koch Kingdom.<sup>75</sup> Parikshita became closer to the Ahom king Pratapa Simha in 1608. The Ahom king as they concerned in the combat with the Kacharies desist from any hindrance in Koch affairs. The disagreement among the two Koch houses sustained unabated. Parikshita made an assault on Bahirband and Lakshmi Narayan experienced an immense crush of men.<sup>76</sup> Under the circumstances Lakshmi Narayan submitted himself before the *Nawab* of Bengal and officially established the imperial vassalage approving to give tribute and sought aid from the Islam Khan<sup>77</sup> the *Nawab* of Bengal, then dispatched Mukaram Khan with a great military against Parikshita. The movement ended in the occupation of the kingdom of Parikshita who also made his surrender to the Mughols.<sup>78</sup> Lakshmi Narayan was provisionally put in charge of the eastern part of

Kamata but with the change in the administration, Qasim Khan the Bengal *Subedar* brought Lakshmi Narayan in imprisonment to Dhaka. <sup>79</sup> In the time in power of emperor Jahangir, Ibrahim Khan replaced Qasim Khan as *Subedar* of Bengal and Lakshmi Narayan was set free with presents i.e. an Iraqi horse, a superb elephant, a Turki horse, a unique sword and a few jewelry. <sup>80</sup> But he had to stay in Hajo and hold on the emperor's behalf up to 1626 and died in 1627. <sup>81</sup> By this time Lakshmi Narayan's kingdom incorporated Ghoraghat on the south of Sankosa river in the east and Karatoya river on the west. <sup>82</sup>

It was in the sway of Lakshmi Narayan that Madhavadeva and Damodardeva, the follower of neo-vaishnava reformer Sankaradeva left their inhabitant state because of the cruelty of the Ahom king. When they arrived at the Koch Kingdom, Lakshmi Narayan acknowledged them protection. Stimulated by the king's backing they dedicated to guide a spontaneous religious life. The neo-vaishnavism advocated by Madhvadeva is supposed to have been the imperial creed. <sup>83</sup> Animal sacrifices were also banned for an instance in the Kingdom's worship. But on the other side the Saiva faith was living during his rule among the ordinary people. Among the works of spiritual text of the period mention may be made of the conversion of Gobina Misra's eighteen *Parvas* of the *Bhagavata Gita* and Vipra Visared's translation of *Kirata, Bana* and *Karma Kanda* of the *Mahabharata*. <sup>84</sup>

### **Vira Narayan (1627-1633):**

King Vira Narayan succeeded his father Lakshmi Narayan to the royal throne in 1627 and in his installation *Nazir* Mahindranarayan held the imperial umbrella over his head. <sup>85</sup> In his short spell of five years, Vira Narayan failed to demonstrate skills of a strong administrator. The control of Vira Narayan was noticeable by the defeat of material magnificence and quick declining of territories. The *Raikat* discarded the Koch suzerainty. <sup>86</sup> The Bhutias did not recognize the allegiance of the king. It is simple to conclude that he continued to stay under Mughol vassalage, paying normal tribute to the Mughol ruler. Vira Narayan passed away in 1632. He is supposed to have been an immense supporter

of knowledge and education.<sup>87</sup> Sri Kavi Sekhara the court writer of the king is identified to have translated the *Kirata parva* of the *Mahabharata*.<sup>88</sup> Vira Narayan was a Vaishanava in reliance. A full and half Narayani coins have been exposed on which the reverse legend bears the royal commitment towards Krishna instead of the customary attachment to Siva.<sup>89</sup>

### **Prana Narayan (1633-1665):**

Following the death of Vira Narayan his son Prana Narayan was accordingly installed as king. Seals and new coins were arranged bearing the name of the new king.<sup>90</sup> *Rajopakhyana* accounts that during the time in power of Prana Narayan there was no outside turbulence in his kingdom.<sup>91</sup> But it appears from *Buranji* and histories composed in Persian that the sway was troubled due to attacks from external and the hostility of associates. When Prana Narayan became king of Koch kingdom, the Mughols in Bengal too were completely preoccupied with their own evils. The regal power of Kamarupa was gravely challenged by the clever king Balinarayan of Darrang, aided by the Ahom King.<sup>92</sup> Prana Narayan came ahead with an accessory of his troops to assist Islam Khan in his movement against Balinarayan and the Ahom (1636-38) subsequent the trail of custom of devotion to the Mughols.<sup>93</sup>

In 1657 the Mughol Emperor fell sick. Disorder and bewilderment prevailed in the Mughol Empire following an in-house disagree among his sons. Taking benefit of the circumstances Prana Narayan explicitly launched insolence to the Mughols, closed disbursement of tribute and rests himself up as a sovereign ruler.<sup>94</sup> He took the great supporter of Kamarupa (Koch Hajo) which belonged to the Mughol Empire. He is also said to have attacked Ghoraghat. In 1661 Aurungzeb sat on the imperial throne. His newly chosen *Subedar* of Bengal Mirjumla reached Dhaka and in order to take revenge invaded Koch kingdom (13<sup>th</sup> December, 1661).<sup>95</sup> Prana Narayan took shelter in the foot hills of Bhutan. The monarchy was annexed to the Mughol Empire, coins were struck in Aurungzeb's name and the name of the center city was altered to 'Alamgirnagar'.<sup>96</sup> Mirjumla after plundering

Koch kingdom fixed the tribute at ten lacks of Narayani coins.<sup>97</sup> It appears from the account of Shihabuddin Talish that having left an army under Istunder Beg he marched to the invasion of Assam.

In Mirjumla's non-existence the peoples of Koch Kingdom rose in rebellion against the new set of laws and regulations introduced by the Mughol officers for the gathering of tribute.<sup>98</sup> As a consequence the peasants united hands with overthrown ruler Prana Narayan who soon became victorious in recovering the throne of Koch Kingdom.<sup>99</sup> Thus the Mughol command was removed and Koch Kingdom yet again became sovereign in 1681. Subsequent *Subedar* Sayesta Khan who succeeded Mirjumla reached Rajmnahal in March, 1664 and articulated his purpose to attack the Koch Kingdom.<sup>100</sup> Prana Narayan thought that it judicious to suggest obedience to the Mughol Emperor in order to protect the security to the kingdom. Consequently he decided to disburse five lacks of Narayani coins as warfare compensation. The Subedar received the conditions and as soon as the protection reached him, royal army had been removed from the margins of the kingdom. Therefore after a little spell of freedom the Koch Kingdom became once again a vassal kingdom. Towards the conclusion of the Prana Narayan's sway the limits of Koch Kingdom extended (1600 square miles) Jajhat and Bahirband *Parganas* in the south Bhaskarpur near Khuntaghat on the east and Morang was on the west.<sup>101</sup>

With his demise in 1664 the rule of Prana Narayan ended. His regime was affluent in diverse fields. He himself was educated in grammar, literature and *Smritisastras*, and specialist in the art of singing and dancing and author of harmonious essays. His court was decorated with five *Pandits* of immeasurable teaching. Prominent among the spiritual literature were the translation of *Adiparva*, *Dronaparva* of the *Mahabharata* and the composition of *Draupadir Svayambara Kavya* by Srinath Brahmin<sup>102</sup> and the translation of some *cantas* of *Mahabharata* by Ramesvara,<sup>103</sup> Jagat Jiban Ghosal, the court poet of Purnia wrote the *Manasa Mangala Kavya*. Being an admirer of Sankardeva's Neo-Vaisnavism, Prana Narayan is believed to have confident the cause of the *Sakta* and *Saiva* religions and their observances.

### **Moda Narayan (1665-1680):**

King Moda Narayan ascended his father Prana Narayan in 1665. During this period four sons of Mahindra Narayan, *Nazir Deo* tried to acquire the throne.<sup>104</sup> Mahindra Narayan dissatisfied them by putting Moda Narayan the second son of Prana Narayan on the royal chair, but the authority of the new king became undermined from the beginning by the great authority of Mahindra Narayan.<sup>105</sup> During the rule of Moda Narayan there was reciprocal conflict in the kingdom. Taking benefit of the condition the Bhutiyas began to obstruct in the inner affairs of the state and the *Nazir Deo* offered the post of Prime ministership to a royal blood. He slowly brought the military under his control and sentenced to death some of the officers who sided with *Nazir Deo* and banished others.<sup>106</sup> This strategy however led to an open disagreement which was subsided through the engagement of Vajnarayan as *Chatra Nazir*.<sup>107</sup>

In 1680 Moda Narayan passed away without any sons to the royal chair. However he had a quite personality and in religion he was a neo-vaishnavait. Dvija Kaviraja's completion of the translation of the *Dronaparva* of the Mahabharata was the spiritual literature of his time.<sup>108</sup> On Moda Narayan's demise the sons of *Nazir Deo* Mahindra Narayan again made an effort to detain the throne with the help of the Bhutias.<sup>109</sup> The capital was plundered, people were killed and others were made captives by them.<sup>110</sup> At this vital juncture Jagadeva and Bhujdeva the Raikat brothers of Baikunthapura marched with an army and drove them out from the kingdom.

### **Vasudeva Narayan (1680-1682):**

On the death of Moda Narayan without any issue the Raikats installed Vasudeva Narayan the third son of Prana Narayan on the royal throne. Coins were minted in his name and *Simha Chap* had been prepared.<sup>111</sup> As soon as the Raikat brothers left for Baikunthapura, Yajna Narayan once more attacked the capital with the Bhutias and Vasudeva Narayan was murdered.<sup>112</sup> Yajna Narayan then affirmed himself king. In the intervening time the news of the tragedy reached Baikunthapura and the

Raikat brothers hastened towards the capital of the Koch kingdom with a big army. In a violent fight Yajna Narayan was crushed and he runaway in the hills. <sup>113</sup> Afterward Mahindra Narayan the grandson and the great grandson of Prana Narayan was positioned to the throne by the Raikats. <sup>114</sup>

### **Mahendra Narayan (1682-1693):**

Mahendra Narayan was only five years old when he ascended the throne of Koch kingdom. <sup>115</sup> But his reign was full of political turmoil because *Kumar* Yajna Narayan after his initial defeat again started hostilities against the king. After departure of the *Rraikats*, Mahendra Narayan again lost his control over the state apparatus and the provincial governors in far-away territories gave up their commitment. Moreover the Mughals started repeated in-roads and started snatching away the peripheral territories of the Koch kingdom. Mahendra Narayan took some steps to revive his control by making Yajna Narayan as *Charta Nazir*. <sup>116</sup> With this the Bhutanese government also started co-operation with the King. After the mutual peace between king and the *Nazir*, Yajna Narayan opposed the Mohammedan to drive away them from the Koch territories but the Mughol forces commanded by Ibadat Khan occupied the three central *chaklas* of Fatepur, Kazirhat and Kakina. The officer in charge of Tapa, Monthona and Jhori and some other *parganas* formally accepted the Mughol suzerainty and became *Zamindars* by taking charters in their own name. <sup>117</sup> Panga and Baikunthapura promised to give tribute to the Mohammedans. In 1691 *Nazir* Yajna Narayan died without any issue. Four grandsons of Mahendra Narayan namely Santa Narayan and Satya Narayan, sons of Darpa Narayan, Rupa Narayan and Visnu Narayan sons of Jagat Narayan now became commander of the army. The king halfhearted conferred the *Chatra Nazirship* on Santa Narayan. <sup>118</sup> Mahendra Narayan after a so-called reign of eleven years died in 1693 at the age of sixteen years. He was physically well gifted and in religion a pious neo-vaisnava. Dwija Rama his court poet translated the *Bhismaparva* of the Mahabharata. <sup>119</sup>

### **Rupa Narayan (1693-1714):**

After the short-lived reign of Mahendra Narayan again the succession debate flared up because the late king had no legal son. So, Santa Narayan the *Chatra Nazir* aspired to be king but the army opposed him. In this situation his brother's son Rupa Narayan was settled to the throne. With the accession of Rupa Narayan the main family of the Koch dynasty changed and the era of the rule from the members of the *Nazir* family started.<sup>120</sup> With the debate over the ownership of *Chaklas* of Boda, Patgram and Purvabhag strong hostilities flared up again between the Koch kingdom and the Mughols. To conclude this rivalry a treaty was signed in 1711 and it was determined that the control of *Chaklas* of Boda, Patgram and Purvabhag would stay under the Koch king while the *Chaklas* of Kajirhat, Kakina and Fatepur would be under of the Mughol authority.<sup>121</sup> But the Mughols changed the provisions of the treaty and got ownership over the *Chaklas* of Boda, Patgram and Purvabhag.<sup>122</sup> Rupa Narayan was the last king of Kamata Kingdom who had influence over western Kamarupa. After his reign the area of the kingdom was restricted chiefly to the borders of the present district of Cooch Behar. He altered his capital at Guriahati from Atharakatha.<sup>123</sup> He passed away in 1714 after the reign of twenty one years.

### **Upendra Narayan (1714-1763):**

After the departure of Rupa Narayan his eldest son Upendra Narayan ascended the throne in 1714. The usual coins and seals were struck in the new king's name and the management of the state continued as before.<sup>124</sup> During the reign Upendra Narayan the Bhutiyas began to make attacks in the plains and Upendra Narayan could not oppose them. He had to face a serious situation when Mughol *Faujdar* invaded the western part of the Koch Kingdom.<sup>125</sup> Upendra Narayan in this disaster concluded an agreement with Bhutan and with the help Bhutias drove back the Mughol *Faujdar* towards Rangpur.<sup>126</sup> As a consequence the Bhutiya power in the kingdom became growing.<sup>127</sup> Upendra Narayan died in 1763 after a time in power of 49 years. Upendra Narayan was a neo-

*Vaishanava* in religion. Among the religious literature Dvija Narayan's translation of *Uttara Bhaga* of *Naradiya Purana* and Srinath Brahmin's translation of the *Mahabharata* were done under his guidance.<sup>128</sup>

### **Devendra Narayan (1763-65):**

After the death of Upendra Narayan the throne of Koch kingdom dissolved upon his son who was then a minor.<sup>129</sup> The government of the Kingdom was carried on by the chief ministers on behalf of the small king under the instruction of the mother of the king.<sup>130</sup> By this time the power of the Bhutias amplified to an immense degree. A Bhutia agent stayed in the capital with some military and it was essential to take his assent in certain matters of government.<sup>131</sup> When Devendra Narayan was six years of age he was assassinated by a Brahmin named Rati Sharma by the order of *Rajguru*.<sup>132</sup>

### **Dhairyendra Narayan (1765-70-1775-83):**

After the assassination of the boy king Devendra Narayan in 1765 Dhairyendra Narayan ascended the throne of Cooch Behar. His rule marks the end of the royal glory of the Koch Kingdom because it was in his reign that the internal dissention broke out in the royal family. With this the foreign invasions were very frequent as Bhutan continuously tried to poke into the matters of the royal affairs of the Koch kingdom. The strenuous situation rose in its peak as in 1769 with the death of *Nazir* Rudra Narayan and his brother was appointed to the *Nazirship* but the actual control in the kingdom was in the hands of *Dewan*<sup>133</sup> who was given support by the Bhutias. Frightened by the growing power of the *Dewan Deo*, the other officials of the kingdom requested the king to impose certain check over the *Dewan Deo*'s activity and the consequence of which was the assassination of the *Dewan Deo* by the king in 1769.<sup>134</sup> For this assassination the Bhutanese authorities planned for revenge against the king and they did not fail to take payback against the king. The Bhutia army

invaded the Koch kingdom and they made the king and the new *Dwan Deo* imprisoned during the yearly feast at Checchakhata in 1770.<sup>135</sup>

The Bhutanese authority ascended Rajendra Narayan as the new king to the power. The new king was supported by Pensu Toma with his military.<sup>136</sup> But in 1772 Rajendra Narayan died suddenly and the succession debated once again came into surface.<sup>137</sup> On the consideration the news *Nazir*, Khagendra Narayan accordingly installed Dharendra Narayan in 1772, the son of Dhairyendra Narayan on the royal throne. But the Bhutanese government intended to put their man in the throne and they hunted to put his own alternative to the throne which led to the final attack of Bhutan upon Koch kingdom.<sup>138</sup> A huge army was sent under the command of Jimpe, who after conquering the state occupied the capital.<sup>139</sup> *Nazir Deo* and his army were defeated and he was driven out to the state. The Bhutanese power under Jimpe formed forts at Gitaldah, Bheladanga and Mawamari and also well confined the capital.<sup>140</sup>

In this serious situation the original king's party of Koch Kingdom got puzzled. After consulting with the heads of the state, they appointed the East India Company on behalf of the king for help against the Bhutanese and in return promised to give an instant tribute to the Company or a *Malgujary* from Koch kingdom.<sup>141</sup> A treaty was signed on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of April 1773<sup>142</sup> by which the Company decided to help Cooch Behar against Bhutan in lieu of an annual tribute. By this treaty Koch kingdom approved the suzerainty of East India Company and came to be a tributary state. After the conclusion of the agreement a power under the command of Captain Jones took the capital of the Cooch Behar and drove back the Bhutanese power.<sup>143</sup> Charles Purling the Collector of Rungpur even sent a letter to Bhutan pointing out the penalty of an escalation of war and requested return to Dharyendra Narayan failing which an attack would be made.<sup>144</sup> Thereafter Bhutan came to a peace agreement with the East India Company on April, 25, 1774.<sup>145</sup> In 1775 Dhairyendra Narayan officially assumed the sovereign authority for the second time.

## **Harendra Narayan (1783-1839):**

When Dhairyendra Narayan passed away in 1783, it was time for infant Harendra Narayan to be sworn in as the next king and as per Dhairyendra Narayan's will until Harendra Narayan matured enough to look after the administration, *Rajmata* would direct the state administration.<sup>146</sup> During the phase from 1783-1789 fight and disagreement amplified in the Koch royal house. But the first years of his sway in-house dissatisfaction between *Dewan* and *Nazir* came out again. The frequent complaints and claims of both the parties at last induced the Company to hinder in the domestic dealings of the Koch kingdom. In a declaration dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1788, the administration of Lord Cornwallis chose a commissioner with Messers Lawrence Mercer and Jhon Lewis Chauvet to report on the pretensions of the parties<sup>147</sup> and on a variety of additional subjects associated with the state of Koch Kingdom and on the form in which the British authority should be exercised for its better executive.<sup>148</sup> The commissioners submitted their report recommending complete autonomy in favor of the king conceding small allowance to the *Nazir Deo* and the *Dewan Deo* and the engagement of a commissioner or Resident at Koch Behar. Consequently Henry Douglas was selected as Commissioner in 1789<sup>149</sup> who put the management in order. From 1789 to 1801 the entire organization was beneath the British commissioner who conducted the affairs of the kingdom in the name of the minor king.

In 1801 Harendra Narayan gained the majority and the supervision was left in the hands of the king. He sought to rule according to the usual style and with authority as exercised by his predecessors before. Accordingly he demanded the removal of the commissioner. From 1801 almost each effort of the Company to interfere in the inner dealings of the Cooch Behar was unsuccessful due to the resistance of Harendra Narayan. The actual reason of his resistance was to maintain his sovereign position before his subjects. Harendra Narayan was an honest and pious *Sakta* was full of attachment to gods and Brahmins. The control of Harendra Narayan was magnificent for the religious literature. He himself was a poet of reputation and a galaxy of poets was shining in his court. In the

later days in his life he adopted the abstemious habits keeping the government in the hands of *Dewan* Kali Chandra Lahiri he went to Varanasi and passed away there in 1839.

### **Sivendra Narayan (1839-1847):**

After Harendra Narayan his son Sivendra Narayan ascended the throne in 1839 by the Koch officials.<sup>150</sup> New currency was issued in his name. The ritual of coronation of Sivendra Narayan was experiential in accordance with the system and directives of the Koch royal family. After his accession he dedicated his concentration to the domestic management of the kingdom. As regards to the income there was no methodical gathering and the people obviously were overburdened with taxes and at the same time the state reserves suffered. Moreover he had to face heavy monetary crisis due to the over-spending of his father.<sup>151</sup> By a cautious surveillance of the behavior of the revenue officers and a rule of his expenses, he succeeded in cleaning off the arrear tribute payable to the British and freed himself completely from the confidential debts that his father bequeathed him.<sup>152</sup> Sivendra Narayan also gave concentration to the Judiciary. Two courts were instituted at this time.<sup>153</sup> In 1840 a court of justice or *Rajsabha* for the final negotiation of civil revenue and illegal cases was recognized.

Sivendra Narayan was a man of many qualities. Being a pious *Sakta* Sivendra Narayan gave a great deal of consideration to the erection and restore of temples in the Koch Kingdom. In 1841 a *Dharmasala* was established where the religious mendicants found food and lodging.<sup>154</sup> Dvija Vaidyanath translated the *Siva Purana* which is considered the only text about the Saiva sect found in the court of Koch kingdom. He is also said to have composed *Sakta* songs.<sup>155</sup> In the later years of his existence he went Banaras where he breathed his last on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1847.<sup>156</sup>

### **Narendra Narayan (1847-1863):**

When Sivendra Narayan passed away in 1847, child Narendra Narayan was staying with his father at Baranasi. Over there he was crowned in next to his father as the king of Cooch Behar before

returning back to the capital. Narendra Narayan was then only 6 years old. Kalichandra Lahiri was then the *Dewan* of Behar. After discussing with *Rajmata* (mother-Queens) Kamteswari and Brindeswari Devi, Dewan took Narendra Narayan to Krishnanagar for imparting education to the king. Narendra Narayan was intelligent. Within a few days he gathered knowledge in Sanskrit grammar, literature, smriti and other subjects. After returning back to Cooch Behar he continued his studies in European style. Narendra Narayan was positioned under the tutorship of Mr. Noor <sup>157</sup> in accordance with the last wish spoken by the late king that East India Company's government should take care of his son's education. He was under the responsibility of Babu Rajendralal Mitra while studying at the Ward's Institution, Calcutta. <sup>158</sup> *Rajmata* Kamteswari and Brindeswari Devi looked after state administration till the king reached his adulthood. <sup>159</sup> In 1860 Narendra Narayan took up state's administration in his own hand. <sup>160</sup> At the time of his formal accession the chief officers were misappropriating the public money and equally the state revenue suffered a lot. <sup>161</sup> Moreover during his reign problem with Bhutan flared up again and these were solved but not permanently. There was trouble with Rungpur and the two governments determined on a joint survey. <sup>162</sup> In 1859 a topographical survey was made under J.G Pemberton revenue surveyor whose map is measured as the first regular map of the country. <sup>163</sup> His reign mark by the growth in education, religion and other fields. He was an intellectual, well-judged able administrator with fine character. Under his rule Behar kingdom flourished increasing state's income to much extent and his subjects lived peacefully.

### **Nripendra Narayan (1863-1911):**

When Narendra Narayan passed away in 1863, as per will of the king his ten month child-son Nripendra Naryan was crowned in as the next king of Cooch Behar. At first the state administration was looked after by Queen Kamteswari, Brindeswari and Nistarini Devi since Nripendra Narayan was only a child. <sup>164</sup> The British Government recognized the claim of Nripendra Narayan as the lawful heir to the throne <sup>165</sup> on condition that the little king would be conferred upon him when he attained

majority.<sup>166</sup> Later the power of administration was handed over to the Commissioner appointed by the British Governor General. Colonel Hawton was appointed as the Commissioner of Behar in 1864.

Nripendra Narayan returned to Cooch Behar on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1879<sup>167</sup> having been educated in England in the modern life. He attained his majority on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1883 and the installation took place on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1883.<sup>168</sup> In the coronation ceremony formalities were strictly followed.<sup>169</sup> The charge of the administration was formally made over to the new king. Nripendra Narayan had the aim not to make any violent disturbance in the planning of the administration that were introduced after much consideration by the British administrators thought the separation of authority and scheme of control witnessed a significant change.<sup>170</sup> A Deputy Commissioner under Nripendra Narayan was in supreme charge of all state departments. The administrative apparatus of the state was created on the model of a British district.

Nripendra Narayan had been highly influenced by his father in law Keshab Chandra Sen's ideas i.e. the Brahma faith that helped to an immense extent in molding his social, ethical, political and private outlook and efforts were made by him to increase the customary thinking in link with religion which prevailed in the royal family.<sup>171</sup> His variety of education and close association with the upper classes of Indian and foreign societies enabled him to overcome all superstitions.<sup>172</sup> He stated the Brahma religion as the state religion but he encouraged and supported the institutions of every creed, be it Hindu, Muslims, Christian or Brahma. Nripendra Narayan died in 1911 in England and was succeeded by his eldest son Raj Rajendra Narayan.<sup>173</sup>

### **Raj Rajendra Narayan (1911-13):**

Rajendra Narayan was the eldest son of Nripendra Narayan. During his childhood he took lessons under a British female home tutor. Nripendra Narayan sent Rajendra Narayan to England for studying. There he got admission to the "Preparatory" School of Mr. Castor and studied for three years. In 1897 he got admit to "Itan". After studying over there for three years he took admission in

Oxford University in 1900. Completing his studies at Oxford, Rajendra Narayan returned back to India and helped his father in carrying out state proceedings. By the demise of Nripendra Narayan the throne of Cooch Behar had dissolved upon his eldest son Raj Rajendra Narayan. The government of India recognized him as exclusively and fairly free to the throne. Two durbars were held in the Durbar hall. The Hon'ble Mr. F.W. Duke, Acting Lieutenant of Bengal, officially installed Kumar on his familial throne and delivered a speech at the Durbar held on 8th November, 1911, Nazarana were presented to the new king by his officers and an announcement was made.<sup>174</sup> He wished the cause of education particularly the primary and secondary education to be expanded by him as far as the state resources admit.

### **Jitendra Narayan (1913-1922):**

Jitendra Narayan was the second son of Nripendra Narayan and Suniti Devi of Cooch Behar and was known as Kumar Victor. In 1900 he left for England and got admitted to Itan School. After finishing his studies there, he took admission in Edinburrow University. He returned back to Cooch Behar after completion of his studies. Since Raj Rajendra Narayan passed away leaving back no descendant of his own, Jitendra Narayan ascended to the throne of Cooch Behar in 1913.<sup>175</sup> After being crowned-in Jitendra Narayan with utmost skill started administering his state. He took firm steps for the development of the state. The reign of Jitendra Narayan was remarkable for more than one reason. During his reign the First World War took place in which the British government became involved. Jitendra Narayan also extended his helping hand to the government by sending his younger brother Hitendra Narayan in the war.<sup>176</sup> Besides it was during his reign the Non-Cooperation movement was gaining ground in the national level. In Cooch Behar very few symptoms of the movement had appeared from the British districts of Rungpur and Goalpara.<sup>177</sup> Jitendra Narayan died in 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1922 in London<sup>178</sup> leaving two sons and three daughters.

## **Jagaddipendra Narayan (1922-1949):**

After the death of Jaitendra Narayan his son Jagaddipendra Narayan succeeded to the throne of Cooch Behar and the succession was duly recognized by the Government of India.<sup>179</sup> The Government of India recognized the state council to form a *Council of Regency* for the administration during the minority of Jagaddipendra Narayan. Maharani Indira Devi was the Regent for the fourteen years (1922-36). During the Regency period the State witnessed the civil Dis-obedience movement in British India. But the movement did not have much influence in the state as it was suppressed by the state.<sup>180</sup> Due to the economic burden over the peasants a few peasant revolt broke out in the state and they were organized under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Barmah.<sup>181</sup> However the unrest did not take a full form. In 1936 Jagaddipendra Narayan attained majority and he was formally handed over the administration of the state by the Governor Anderson on 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1936.<sup>182</sup> During his reign the impact of the quite India movement of 1942 was deeply felt in the state. Though attempts were made to check the growth of the movement, it made deep impression on the mind of the people of the kingdom.

During his rule a party known as "Hitasadhani" gained power. Patrons of that party wanted Cooch Behar to be centrally administered state. Most of the subjects of the land supported that party. Leaders of that party visited Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and others at Delhi and expressed their demand and aspirations before them. In a public gathering at Calcutta, the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru declared that the fate of Cooch Behar would be decided upon the public vote of that state. Indian Dominion attained independence in 1947. On 20th August 1948 Jagaddipendra Narayan in an agreement merged the state with the Dominion Government of India.<sup>183</sup> Thereafter Cooch Behar was transformed into Central Administered State. Jagaddipendra Narayan obtained annual amount of eight lakhs & fifty thousand as his Privy purse. At last on 1st January, 1950 Cooch Behar was incorporated within West Bengal, state of the Indian Dominion.<sup>184</sup> Jagaddipendra Narayan was left as stateless King. Thus five century old kingdom came to an end and the royal sovereignty of Cooch Behar got washed away by Democracy.

So from the above story it is evidently clear to us that the political journey of the Koch kingdom and later the Cooch Behar State was full of events. The Koch kingdom emerged in the mid of sixteenth century by ignoring the over-arching supremacy of the Mughol empire. The first few rulers especially up to the time of Lakshmi Narayan the entire North East India was under the Koch suzerainty. The able Koch rulers conquered one after another state by virtue of their political as well as military magnificence. During this period the Mughol Emperor or its agents in Bengal neither poke into the matter of the Koch state nor do they take chance of any hostilities with the Koch Kingdom. It was not only a major incident in the political glory of the Koch kingdom but also a remarkable event to the entire princely community of contemporary times as the sovereignty of the kingdoms was in danger in view of the imperial attitude of the Mughol Empire. But after the death of Lakshmi Narayan the politics of the kingdom confined in a much lesser area as most of the subjugated kingdoms freed themselves from the Koch realm. The Koch kingdom gradually reduced its power in view of the weakening leadership. None of the remaining kings had much courage to retain or re-establish the old glory of the Koch kingdom. This gradual loss of power invited the English East India Company in the later half of the eighteenth century to take the advantage of the situation and with an agreement with the Koch authority submitted the sovereign power to the British authority. Thus the sovereign stature of the kingdom had gone and Koch kingdom emerged as a tributary state of the British Empire. The succeeding history is a story of internal dissension and loss of political glory. The overarching British power almost seized all the powers of the state and puppet kings were placed in the throne of Koch state. Lastly the state joined with the union of India in the occasion of the independence of India and it became a district of Union of India by signing the merger agreement.

## Notes and References

1. Durgadas Majumdar, *West Bengal District Gazetteer: Koch Bihar*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 2.
2. The military invasion of Bakhtiyar Khalji in North Bengal and lower Assam in the early thirteenth century was checked by the floods in the rivers of the region. Similarly Mughol 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 Koch kingdom. H.G. Raverty, (transl.), *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A General History of Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia*, London, 1872-81, pp. 567-72.
3. S.L. Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 171-181.
4. Panchanan Acharyya, (ed.), *Kalika Puranam*, ch. 38, vs., 95-123, Calcutta, 1384 B.S., pp. 318-321.
5. H.C. Chakladar, *Geography of Kalidasa, Indian Studies: Past and Present*, IV. 3, 1963, p. 451.
6. *ibid.*, For details about Pragjyoish and Kamarupa, see, Ichimuddin Sarkar, *Aspects of Historical Geography of Pragjyotish Kamarupa (Ancient Assam)*, Calcutta, 1991.
7. Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (c.629-645)*, Vol. II, pp. 185-186, edited by Rhyas David and S.W. Bhushel, London, 1904.
8. Swami Sarbeswarananda, (ed. & tr.), *Yogini Tantra*, Calcutta, 1385 B.S., pt. 1, ch II, vs. 16-18, p.114.
9. The *Ain-i-Akbari* refers to a Koch country, in which there were two kingdoms 'Kamata' and 'Kamrupa'. B. Roy, *District Census Handbook, Cooch Behar, West Bengal*, Calcutta, 1961, p. 3.
10. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *Cooch Behar Itihas*, (Bengali) Cooch Behar, 1936, pp. 374-75.
11. The racial and social identity of the Khen is not beyond the scope of debate. K.L. Barua has identified the Khen as *Kayasthas* because Khan was a surname of the *Kayastha Bhuiyans* of western Assam. K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa: From Earliest Times to the end of the Sixteenth Century*, Shillong, 1933; Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed on the other hand, relying on the description of *Kamteswar Kulakarika* of Srutidhar Rup Narayan of the sixteenth

- century, connected the origin of Kamteswaar with the *Rajbanshis*. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 36-39.
12. S.K. Chatterji, *Kirata Janakriti: The Indo-Mongoloids, Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India*, Calcutta, 1998, p. 115.
  13. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamarupa Buranji*, Guwahati, 1987, p. 99.
  14. W.W. Hunter, *The Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X*, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 368-69.
  15. S.K. Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p. 115; N.N. Vasu doubts the very existence of this line of kings due to lack of the contemporary historical accounts. N.N. Vasu, *The Social History of Kamarupa, Vol. II*, New Delhi, 1926, pp. 30-31.
  16. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 39.
  17. *ibid.*
  18. D.C. Sircar, (ed.), *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vol., Calcutta, 1960, pp. 100-101.
  19. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 39.
  20. We have a reference to a local tradition according to which *Kamteswra* (the Lord of Kamata) after becoming king from humble base founded the city of Kamtapura after the name of goddess Kamateswari which was also known as *Chandi* or *Gosani*. Niladhvaja may be identified with *Kantesvara* of the *Gosanimangala* as it mentioned only about a ruler of the line. But we have seen that there were three kings of that line. *ibid.*, pp. 36-40.
  21. H.N. Chaudhuri, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, Cooch Behar, 1903, p. 228-32.
  22. R.D. Banerjee, 'Gosanimari' in *JASB, Vol. XIX*, 1977, p. 20.
  23. M.R. Tarafdar, *Hussain Shahi Bengal*, Dhaka, 1955, pp. 361-365.
  24. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 229.
  25. E.A. Gait, *History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1963, p. 45.

26. *ibid.*, According to *Riyas-us-Salatin* Hussain Saha invaded Kamata or Kamarupa after his conquest of Orissa. Abdus Salam, 'Riyas-us-Salatin', *JASB*, 1894, pp. 132-33.
27. P.N. Bhattacharyya, *Kamarupa Sasanavali, Nidhanpur Copper Plates*, Rangpur, 1338 B.S., p. 31.
28. Muhammad Kazim Mirza, *Alamgirnamah*, Eng tr. by N. Vansittart, Calcutta, 1883, p.72.
29. E.A. Gait is of the opinion that after the departure of the Mohammedans there were no kings of the whole of the Kamata country which was ruled by a number of petty Chiefs. E.A.Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 46.
30. *ibid.*, p. 49.
31. Visvasimha was so named because he was born on the first *Bihu* day.
32. Abul Fajal Allami, *Akbarnama*, Vol. I-II, translated into English by Beveridge Henry, New Delhi, 2010, p. 1067.
33. N.C. Sharma (ed.), *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, v. 51, Guwahati, 1973.
34. E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 49.
35. *ibid.* In *Darrang Rajvamsavali* Behar is referred to as Visvasimha's capital which shows the territory in which the capital Kamatanagara was built by Visvasimha.
36. N.N. Vasu, *op.cit.*, p. 46.
37. N.C. Sharma (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.41-42.
38. *ibid.*
39. *ibid.*, p. 7.
40. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 87.
41. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Deo Dhai Assam Buranji*, Guwahati, 1962, p. 126.
42. *ibid.*
43. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 95.
44. *ibid.*
45. *ibid.*

46. *ibid.*
47. Shashibhusan Dasgupta (ed.), *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts*, preserved in the State Library of Cooch Behar, Manuscript no. 58, 1948, p. 62.
48. A.K. Chakravarty, *Literature in Kamata-Koch Bihar Raj Darbar. From Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Dhubri, 1964.
49. D. Nath, *The History of the Koch Kingdom 1515-1615*, New Delhi, 1986, p. 178.
50. N.C. Sharma (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 53 (v. 266).
51. Munshi Joyanath Ghosh, *Rajopakhyana* (Bengali), edited by Biswanath Das, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 29-30.
52. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 101.
53. Nicholas Rhodes and S.K. Bose, *The Coinage of Cooch Behar*, Dhubri, 1999, pp. 4-16.
54. E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 52.
55. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 232. It is evident from the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* that all the states of North East Kachar, Jayantia, Tripura, Dimrua, Manipur, Sylhet were annexed by Nara Narayan in his kingdom. N.C. Sharma (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 80-99.
56. Abul Fajal Allami, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 96.
57. N.C. Sharma (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 126, (v. 618).
58. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p.120.
59. *ibid.*, p. 121.
60. Provided he agreed to stamp the name of Nara Narayan on his coin. J.P. Wade, *An Account of Assam* (1800), edited by Benudhar Sharma, North Lakhimpur, 1927, p. 210.
61. S.L. Baruah, *op.cit.*, p. 215.
62. E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 58.
63. *ibid.*, p.44.
64. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

65. S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies on the Literature of Assam*, Guwahati, 1956, p. 123.
66. A.K. Chakravarty, *op.cit.*, p.86.
67. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.* p.130-132.
68. E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 64.
69. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp.136-137.
70. *ibid.*, p. 138.
71. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *A History of the Mughol North East Frontier Policy: Being a Study of the Political Relations of the Mughol Empire with Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam*, Calcutta, 1994, p. 118.
72. Abul Fajal Allami, *op.cit.*, pp. 1068, 1081.
73. *ibid.*, p. 1068; Charles Stewart, *History of Bengal*, Calcutta,1903, p. 119; E.A. Gait also observed on the authority of the above source that Lakshmi Narayan offered his submission declaring himself as a vassal of the Mughol Empire. E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 65.
74. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, pp. 108-18.
75. E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p.65.
76. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, pp.125-26.
77. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, Vol.I*, Guwahati, 1936, p. 40.
- This event is suggested by S.N. Bhattacharyya, is of immense significance in the annals of Mughol North East frontier policy. It symbolized the completion of the process which had begun with the political subjugation of Koch kingdom in the winter of 1596 and which was soon to affect the states of Kamarupa and Assam as well. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *ibid.*, pp. 126-27.
78. R.C. Majumder, (ed.), *The History of Bengal, Medieval Period*, Calcutta, 1973, p. 150.
79. S.K. Bhuyan, *op.cit.*, p. 290.
80. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 521.
81. *ibid.*

82. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 40.
83. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p 151-152.
84. A.K. Chakravarty, *op.cit.*, p. 69.
85. Vira Narayan carried on the administration of the kingdom as heir apparent during his 'honorable' exile at Hajo after his release from Delhi, apparently under Lakshmi Narayan's instruction. Stephen Cacella calls the Prince Gabur Shah (Gaburasa). C. Wesseles, *Early Jesuit Travelers in Central Asia, 1603-1721*, The Hague, 1924, pp. 126-127, 131.
86. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Brihat Vanga* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1935, Vol. II, p. 1072.
87. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 154.
88. A.K.Chakravarty, *op.cit.*, p. 69.
89. *JNSI, Vol. XXXIII*, pp. 123-31, *The Numismatic Circular*, London, 1981, p. 115.
90. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*,p. 155.
91. *ibid.*
92. *ibid.*, pp. 155-56.
93. *ibid.*, pp. 156.
94. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, p. 299.
95. J.N. Sarkar, *The Life of Mirjumla*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 287.
96. Khafi Khan, *Munta-Khab-ul-Lubab in the History of India*, Elliot and Dowson, Vol. VII, 1<sup>st</sup> edn.,London, 1867-77, p. 265; J.N.Sarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 289.
97. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 159.
98. Gautam Bhadra, *Mughal Juger Krishi Arthanity O Krishak Bidraha* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1983, p. 165.
99. Amalendu Guha, 'The Medieval Economy of Assam'in the *Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. I*, Tapan Roy Chowdhury and Irfab Habib, (ed.), New Delhi, 1984, p. 485.
100. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, p. 309.

101. *Alamgirnamah*, p. 692, as quoted in the Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 159-160.
102. Siva Prasad Dakua, *Cooch Behar Sahitya Sabha Manuscript*, 1269 B.S.
103. A.K. Chakravarty, *op.cit.*, p 73.
104. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 244.
105. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 169.
106. *ibid.*
107. *ibid.*, p. 170.
108. A.K. Chakravarty, *op.cit.*, p. 65.
109. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 170.
110. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 245.
111. *ibid.*, With the death of Moda Narayan the order of succession from father to son which started from Visvasimha discontinued.
112. *ibid.*, p. 246.
113. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 174.
114. Bhagabati Charan Bandopadhyaya, *Cooch Beharer Itihas* edited by N.N. Pal, Calcutta, 1987, p. 68.
115. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 175.
116. *ibid.*
117. *ibid.*
118. *ibid.*, p. 178.
119. A.K. Chakravarty, *op.cit.*, p. 73.
120. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 247.
121. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

122. *ibid.*, The *Faujdar* wanted to take tax from the following *Chaklas*. At the conclusion of the treaty the *Chaklas* Boda, Patgram and Purbabhadg were taken *Ijara* on behalf of the king in the name of *Nazir* Santa Narayan as it was thought derogatory for an independent king.
123. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 248.
124. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 183.
125. C. Stewart, *History of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1903, p. 431, The king had to refuge in the woods of the foothills.
126. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 184.
127. *ibid.*, p. 185.
128. *ibid.*, p. 187.
129. *ibid.*, 188.
130. *ibid.*
131. *ibid.*, p.190-192.
132. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 250.
133. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 196.
134. *ibid.*, p. 198.
135. *ibid.*, p. 200.
136. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, pp. 251.
137. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 203.
138. *ibid.*
139. *ibid.*
140. *ibid.*
141. *Committee of Circuit Proceeding*, Calcutta, 1927, pp. 38-39.
142. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 373-75.
143. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 253.

144. *ibid.*
145. *ibid.*
146. *Selections from the record of the Government of Bengal*, Paper on Cooch Behar by Major Francis Jenkins, Calcutta, 1851, p. 33.
147. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 258.
148. *Proceedings of the Governor General in Council, Revenue Department, Vol. 129*, pp. 83-96.
149. H.N.Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 259.
150. *ibid.*, p. 285.
151. *ibid.*
152. *ibid.*
153. *ibid.*, p. 286.
154. *ibid.*
155. A.K. Chakravarty, *op.cit.*, p. 96.
156. Nirupama Devi (ed.), *Beharodanta* by Maharani Brindeswari Devi (Bengali), Cooch Behar, 1330 B.S, pp. 12-13.
157. *Letter from officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the officiating Secretary Government of India* (Foreign Dept. Vol. II, No. 156; 1848, p.144.)
158. Sashi Bhusan Halder, 'Lectures on Maharaja Narendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur Jiban Charita' at the meeting of the *Cooch Behar Hitasadhanai Sabha*, 7<sup>th</sup> issue, 1272 B.S. p. 58.
159. Nirupama Devi (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.58; N.N.Pal, *op.cit.*, p. 89-90.
160. Sashi Bhusan Halder, *op.cit.*, pp. 132-33.
161. *Proceedings of the Governor of Bengal, General (Political)*, November, 1859, No. 1.
162. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 289.
163. *ibid.*, p. 292.

164. Letter from Maharani of Cooch Behar to W. Agnew officiating Agent in North East Frontier, dated, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1863, *Select Records*, Vol. II, p. 268.
165. *Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, General (Political) Dept.*, March, 1864, No. 3, p.2.
166. Letter of W. Agnew, Officiating Agent of Government of India in North East Frontier, 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1864, to the Maharani of Cooch Behar, (*Select Records*), Vol. II, p. 275.
167. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 296.
168. *ibid.*
169. *ibid.*
170. *ibid.*, p. 297.
171. Yogesh Chandra Bagal, *Keshab Chandra Sen*, Calcutta, 1365 B.S., pp. 143-44.
172. *Hindu Patriot*, 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1911.
173. The king left Cooch Behar for England on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1910 for best treatment. But despite all efforts he passed away on the 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1911.
174. *Annual Administrative Report of Cooch Behar State for the year 1911-12*, para 3.
175. *Annual Administrative Report of Cooch Behar State for the year 1913-14*, para-3.
176. Swapan Kumar Roy, *Prachin Cooch Behar Sompurna Itibritta*, Kolkata, 2006, p. 280.
177. *Annual Administrative Report of Cooch Behar State for the year 1921-22*, para 12.
178. *Cooch Behar Gazette*, 4.12.1922, *Annual Administrative Report of Cooch Behar State for the year 1922-23*, No. 1127, p. 2.
179. *ibid.*
180. A.G. Ghosh, (ed.), *Madhuparni* (Bengali), 1396 B.S., pp. 404-05.
181. *ibid.*
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## Chapter - II

# Economic Scenario in the Koch Kingdom

In view of the comprehensive study of the Narayani currency the analysis of the economic magnitude of the Koch kingdom is very essential. Because currency is an integral part of the economic activity. Without proper understanding of the economic condition of the Koch kingdom we cannot realise the essentiality from the part of the Koch rulers to introduce a well-organized state sponsored currency system for the proper maintenance of the economic order in the state. So in the present chapter we will discuss about the various economic parameters of the Koch state and try to correlate them with the Narayani currency.

Due to the paucity of reliable source not many efforts have been initiated to write the economic scenario of the Koch Kingdom. In reverence of economic investigation of the Koch Kingdom we have to keep in mind the relevant fact of the intimate connection between the nature and natural environment. The natural setting of the kingdom had determined the mode of production. In the field of cultivation the indigenous communities kept themselves aloof from the fertile tracts of the kingdom<sup>1</sup> but in terms of irrigation they were acquainted with the artificial irrigation techniques.<sup>2</sup> The indigenous communities of the territory initially lead a nomadic life and shifting cultivation was very familiar to them in order to use the fertile soil of the kingdom. The late nineteenth century official reports on the western *Duaras* have spotted the indigenous community from whom the Mechs were the prominent had their habit of *Jhum* cultivation.<sup>3</sup> In 1895 in a government report D. Sunder argued that ‘the habit of the Meches were very nomadic and they used to shift their cultivation and homesteads from place to place that they may obtain the full benefit of the virgin soil’.<sup>4</sup>

The Koch genealogies<sup>5</sup> have informed us that the nomadic tribal or semi tribal communities of the territory carried out the *Jhum* cultivation in their livelihood.<sup>6</sup> But with the little production from the shifting cultivation it was hard to feed a growing community, so side by side of this they used to rear cattle and which was a significant characteristic of these indigenous communities. The Koch genealogies also refer to cattle rearing as *Visvasimha* and *Sisvasimha* (first Raikat) in their early life had participated in the cattle rearing with other tribal folks. Besides this, hunting was also practiced for the instant supply of food.<sup>7</sup> With the use of traditional implements fishing was practiced mainly by the womenfolk for subsistence. The secondary features of the tribal economy like-cattle rearing, fishing and hunting-gathering made the total economic structure as a diverse one. Besides these primitive craft like the silkworm cultivation was practiced for making the necessary clothing on self-sufficient basis. As the geographical area was a dense forest so the forest products were used massively for subsistence and for limited marketing.<sup>8</sup> Production was labour oriented. The unit of production had been varied in turn with the operation of productivity. Cultivation, hunting, fishing and livestock were mostly collective works or had community participation. Besides this tribal existence the non-tribal economy of the region was far progressive than the sustenance economy of the tribals. Farming was the chief foundation of excess generation. Introduction of innovative agrarian methods and skills for cultivation by the *Kayastha Bhuiyans* had paid to the generation of excess in the Koch kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Agriculture of other food grains and raw materials for crafts had increased the amount of surplus.

### **Agriculture:**

Cultivation of the fertile land was the main occupation of the people. Most of the people were associated with agriculture by some way or other. In the classical sources the productivity of the land was vividly described. Among them the Persian chronicles amplifies the fertility and productivity of the soil in the Koch kingdom. In *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, a Persian text observed: “Koch Behar is well

known for its excellent water, mildness of the climate, its fresh vegetation and flowers. Oranges are plentiful as also other fruits and vegetables.”<sup>10</sup> It also stated that the climate, land, vegetation and dwelling houses of the people of the kingdom were far superior to those of the other places of India. The *Alamgirnamah* also writes in the same strain and speaks of the efficiency of the region.<sup>11</sup>

Cultivation was not only practiced by the common inhabitants, but the upper class of the community especially the Brahmins were also involved with agriculture besides their ancestral profession.<sup>12</sup> Manual labour was welcomed here as the population of the area was not high in those days.<sup>13</sup> We can establish this taking reference from the royal chronicles of the Koch history where Hari Das (Haria Mondol) used to plough in the lands and he produced cotton.<sup>14</sup> Philologically we can also prove that the land was so productive and other occupations close to agriculture were very familiar as we found the place names like *Khamar Khata* (Farm yard), *Golabari* (Farm), *Mahisbathan* (Buffaloe Shed) etc. all in the Koch kingdom attest to the popularity of agriculture. Damodardeva a Brahmin, disciple of Sankardeva was supposed to have involved slaves in cultivation<sup>15</sup> and they took huge attention in agriculture.<sup>16</sup> *Gosanimangala* a literary work of the 18<sup>th</sup> century also mentions to agriculturalists who often protested to one Brahmin named Sasipatra for the damage affected to their cornfields by his cow.<sup>17</sup> The grassland was usually situated near the villagers.<sup>18</sup> Here in the *Gosanimangala* reference have also been made to grassland where Kantanatha the cow boy of Sasipatra used to tend the cattle.<sup>19</sup> Oxen were regularly used for agriculture but cows were also occasionally engaged in farming.<sup>20</sup> The loam of Koch Kingdom was of sedimentary formation and has a large admixture of sand. The greater portion of it is a light mud that can retain moisture and easily give it out and does not become water logged. When dry it does not cake up, but yields to light pressure and easily gets dissolved. So agriculture was easy and it does not need much labour.<sup>21</sup> Five main river system flows through Cooch Behar and the soil is a formation of these river systems.<sup>22</sup>

Rice was cultivated in the country massively. Various types of rice were cultivated in the kingdom and among them *Aush*, *Aman* and *Boro* were the major variety of rice. *Aush* cultivation

needed the shifting technique and this variety of rice cultivated the most. Its production was lesser than that of *Sali*, but it was short maturing. *Sali* or wet rice required relocation and hence such grounds which could hold water or could be artificially watered from neighboring watercourses were essential for its farming. The Kacharies for example knew certain methods of irrigation.<sup>23</sup> They used to make blocks across the hill streams and then lead the stored up water to the grounds through a system of dug-out canals. The *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* seems to comment on that skill. But both the Koch and the Bado-Kachari adopted hoe-culture and to produce *Aush* rice. The agriculture of *Sali* therefore was not wide in the Koch kingdom. The *Bhuiyans* however appeared to be interested in wet rice cultivation. It was due to their initiative that the cultivation of this rice, including the use of plough was making gradual headway among the tribes. The *Yogini Tantra*,<sup>24</sup> *Katha Guru Charita*<sup>25</sup> make reference to different varieties of *Sali* paddy like *raja*, *briha*, *soma*, *sighna*, *banga*, *rakta*, *keteki*, *asok*, *bara*, *jaha*, *mathanga*, *maigutiya*, *bar*, *lahi phapari* etc. *Bao* was a long maturing variety sown in February-March and harvested in November-January. It was very popular amongst the tribes. It was sown broadcast in low lands. It is worth mentioning that after conquering the Koch state Sikandar Saha changed the name of the territory as '*Chawlistan*'.<sup>26</sup> The ward Chawlistan denotes the agricultural lands for paddy cultivation. A place named *Chauler Kunti* found near the Kamatapura fort also gives support to it.

Instead of rice, people used to plough different kinds of pulses and other food grains like-wheat, *kaon* (maize). Pulses of different kinds like – *moog*, *musur*, *thakuri*, *rahar* and *pea* were popular food grains.<sup>27</sup> These crops need not as much of labour and less tilling. Oil seeds of different kinds were produced. Potato, ginger, garlic, turmeric, onion were cultivated in plenty for own consumption. Tobacco was produced in the state as a cash crop. The Places like Dinhata, Mathabhanga and Mekhligang *parganas* were the major site of tobacco cultivation. Besides these some local febriclike *Shan* and *kunkura* (rhea) were also produced. The fisher-men prepared their fishing net with this fiber. *Kunkura* was raised on small patches of ground near the home-sted land of

the cultivator. *Kunkura* gives short but strong and glossy fiber which was used to prepare fishing trap of different types. The fishing community used to cultivate these two varieties of fiber.<sup>28</sup>

All the fruit trees found in Bengal are met with in the state more or less abundantly. Numerous types of fruits were common in the kingdom and they were jack-fruit, mango, coconut, orange, olive, bananas, grape, papaya, brinjal, palm, guava, pomegranate etc. The classical text like the *Yogini Tantra*<sup>29</sup> gives the names of a large number of fruits, vegetables. Shihabuddin Talish mentions that a large number of orange was produced in the Koch Kingdom,<sup>30</sup> and Stephen Cacella writes Cooch Behar is “famous for its fruits, which are better here than I have seen them in India and especially for its oranges of every kind”.<sup>31</sup> Regarding the fruits and flowers of this part of the country Shihabuddin Talish observes:

*“Many kinds of odorous fruits and herbs of Bengal and Hindustan grow in Assam. We saw here certain varieties of flowers and fruits, both wild and cultivated which are not to be met with elsewhere in the whole of India. The coconut and neem trees are rare but pepper, spikenard and many species of lemon are abundant. Mangoes are full of worms but plentiful sweet and free from fiber though yielding scanty juice. Its pineapples are very large, delicious to the test and rich in juice. Sugarcane is of the black, red and white varieties and very sweet but so hard as to break one’s teeth, ginger is juicy.”*<sup>32</sup>

Five kinds of Bamboo are found in the country. All over the country bamboo was grown depending on the geographical variations. Bamboo was used massively in day to day use like hunting and fishing instruments, agricultural implements and building home. Bamboo had widespread use in the making of furniture, musical instruments and tools of everyday uses. In making arms for the military, bamboo was extensively used.<sup>33</sup> The statement can be supplemented by the Ralph Fitch’s observation that bamboo made weapons had a major role in the Koch army. It recorded that ‘all the countries is set with bamboo or canes made sharpen at both the ends and driven into the earth and

they can let in the water and down the ground above knee deep that men nor horses can pass'.<sup>34</sup> Many varieties of timber, like *sal*, *sonaru*, *khair*, *agaru*, *palas*, *chandan ajar* etc. are the chief. These valuable trees were grown naturally in the forests of the kingdom. These trees had their immense use in the domestic and community life of the people.

Cotton was another item of cash crop. But its production depends on the natural setting. The hilly area of Chikinagram and Khuntaghat of lower Assam was a cotton growing area of the kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Late nineteenth century and early colonial reports on Bhutan have recorded the cultivation of cotton in the Duars region and gathering of cotton fiber from the forests.<sup>36</sup> Besides this cash crop certain medicinal plants like *Mahanim*, *Bel*, *Ishanmul*, etc. might have also been grown. Traveller Tavernier states that the kingdom is famous for production of red colour which they used to dry their calicoes and other stuffs.<sup>37</sup>

### **Techniques used in Agriculture:**

In terms of proper understanding of agriculture the techniques employed on it must demand special attention. So many new types of agro-tools were employed in the agriculture. Though we don't have contemporary accounts on the agricultural tools but the later works vividly mention about this.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that these implements were in vogue from long past as we do not notice any change in the cultivation system. Plough (*Langal*) and other implements are mentioned frequently.<sup>39</sup> From the *Guru Charita* we learn that each village of Magurmari was provided with *hal* (plough) along with bullocks to cultivate the fields.<sup>40</sup> In the Koch territory we do not come across *Dheki*, the husking implement of paddy and in its place wooden maces or pestle observed.<sup>41</sup> Farming then as now depend on the monsoons. The failure of rains means a sure disaster. The plentiful and usually cyclical rainfall allows the cultivators to do without irrigation. But to meet the contrary situation cheap and simple process of irrigation was followed. Hiuen Tsang who visited Kamarupa in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. noticed that water led from the river or from reserves flowed round the towns.<sup>42</sup>

*Minhaj-i-Siraj* has also referred to such irrigation works of opening up the water dykes all around at the time of the spring harvest in the kingdom of Kamarupa.<sup>43</sup> Ralph Fitch who visited the Koch Kingdom in the 16<sup>th</sup> century has remarked that the people used to damming the streams and inundated the country above knee deep as required.<sup>44</sup> With a definite system of canals water was drawn to the rice fields. Poppy fields in particular which need constant watering was provided by taking water with a small bamboo basket tied to the end of a small bamboo bundle from reservoirs dug in the field for the purpose<sup>45</sup> and leading the water to the fields through bamboo pipes. Low elevations of mud and grass was raised so as to hold the right quantity of rain water and to divide the rice fields into rectangular plots of about 20 by 30 feet. Excess water was thus let out of the demarcated fields. Although we come across such practice at a later date<sup>46</sup> it is interesting to note that during the reign of king Durlabha Narayan (c.1330-50), Candivara the *Kayastha* chief among others settled down on the bank of a stream called Lenguamari, otherwise known as Paimaguri as observed by Gait<sup>47</sup> and got the blessings of the people by erecting a *bund*.<sup>48</sup> It is said that people were brought to that place by the king for settlement.<sup>49</sup> The Kacharies are said to have more accustomed to watering their rice fields from the small streams of the *Duar* areas and consequently better rice crops were obtained.<sup>50</sup> When Nara Narayan the Koch king led an invasion against Assam, Khyrim the main stream of the Brahmaputra river flowed via the Kharubhanga near Hajo. On his way from Assam to Koch Bihar Nara Narayan excavated a canal to cause the river to flow straight to the west'. Later on this was re-excavated by the Ahom king when it was sited up.<sup>51</sup>

### **Land Revenue Structure and Administration:**

In regard to the accounts relating to the land revenue settlement of the Koch kingdom no accurate information is available prior to the advent of the Britishers. No literary accounts on this regard can be found in the Koch chronicles. The *Rajopakhyan* or the accounts of the kings of the Koch kingdom written by Munshi Jaya Nath Ghosh during the reign of Harendra Narayan is the only recorded history of the state now available.<sup>52</sup> A regular history of the land revenue administration of

Cooch Behar begins with its association with the British Government in 1773. Although the information since available are far from being full and connected they pretty fairly disclose the state of things as they existed before the connection with the British.<sup>53</sup>

From very ancient times land revenue was taken in fraction of the crops harvested and Koch kingdom was no exception. Generally '1/2 *huri* of *Cowries* is understood as the regular revenue of one plough'.<sup>54</sup> Cowries were familiar in Koch kingdom even up to the middle of the last century. There was a custom that king Kanteswar (Nilambara) caused an inscription to be inscribed on a stone directing his heirs to understand only a very few Cowries as revenue for each plough. Though no inscription of Nilambara or his predecessors has yet been found.<sup>55</sup> It was written in the *Riaz-us-Salatin* that the rulers of Assam collected no revenue instead one out of every three subjects performed such work as ordered by the king and violation of the order, was punished with death. During Hindu and Buddhist supremacy the management was in the hands of numerous classes of *Samanta-Bhuiyan* or secondary officers. During their rule the practice had already been established in Kamarupa measuring land, locating and determining the boundaries. Todarmal the minister of Akbar prepared the famous settlement records known as the '*Asal Jama*' which were compiled from the *Daftar* (office) of the Pathan ruler Daud Khan.<sup>56</sup>

From early times in the kingdom the land appeared to have been separated into two kinds; (1) Revenue paying (2) Rent free.<sup>57</sup> People taking the first kind of land had to pay revenue to the government. On the other hand the holders of rent free land were private individuals who obtained the land for their uses. They did not pay any taxes for such lands. The different taxes of rent free estates classified<sup>58</sup> are as follows: (a) *Brahmottra* – Land grants to Brahmin, (b) *Devottara* - Allotted to the performance of religious rites, (c) *Pirpal* – Land grants to Muslim *Pirs* and Saints, (d) *Lakheraj* – Reward for good service to the state, (e) *Petbhata*- To maintain the expenditure for the royal families.

In Koch Kingdom numerous settings for land grants have been recorded. Durlabha Narayan the ruler of Kamtapura settled seven families of Brahmins and *kayasthas* on the frontier (near

Lenguamari) as warden of the marches and gave them lands and slaves.<sup>59</sup> *Gosanimangala* also refers such lands for the performance of religious duties.<sup>60</sup> It may also be mentioned that Visvasimha defeated the *Kayastha-Bhuiyans* during the course of his consolidation of power. Kavindrapatra the minister of Nara Narayan, caused the induction of 14 *Kayastha* families from Mithila, Jessore and places of Bengal. In this way king Nara Narayan encouraged the new settlements of the *Kayastha* in his kingdom.<sup>61</sup>

Sukladhwaja the brother of Nara Narayan inscribed a copper plate where it was inscribed that the king gave to 14 *Bhuiyans* in order to settle them on the bank of the river Brahmaputra making land grants. On the other side the *Bhuiyans* also assured the king that they would settle at the place permanently. The promises of both the parties were embodied in a document.<sup>62</sup> Nara Narayan gave lands to Sankardeva for settlement over Barpeta *Mahal*.<sup>63</sup> Not only this land grants were made to the people of numerous classes such as potters, Barbars, Washer man, Goldsmith at a period when the faith propounded by Damodardeva was gaining ground in Koch kingdom.<sup>64</sup> Prana Narayan the Koch king had patronized one Brahmin named Siromoni Bhattachryya by land grants and the copy of the said deed of gift has been reproduced in the History of Cooch Behar.<sup>65</sup> He also granted lands for the worship of *Badesvari* image established in Bhitargarh in the district of Jalpaiguri.<sup>66</sup> It may be mentioned in this connection that the king was credited to have established the image of *Chaturbhuj*a in Madhupura, *Madonmohana* in Srirampura, *Caturbhuj*a in Kagajkuta, *Banamali* in Banamalipur and *Modangopala* in Damodarpur. It is said that some images were discovered when the tank at Banesvara was excavated. The present temple of Kamatesvari *Gosani* in Kamtapura (Gosanimari) was constructed by him in 1665 and we know it from the inscription engraved on the temple.<sup>67</sup>

Instead of the above mentioned land grant a special kind of land grant named *Jaigir* was granted in those days particularly among the slaves. Slaves were engaged in various activities connected with the royal palace. The right over such land was neither hereditary nor transferable. It may however be stated that this *Jaigir* right took the shape of '*Cakran*' of Bengal.<sup>68</sup> This system

came down to Koch kingdom from the period of Nara Narayan who received a few Morangi slaves from the Morangi king.<sup>69</sup> These slaves were given the *Taluks* in Mathbhanga, Kodalkseti, Bhogmara etc. They acquired lands in return to their service to the palace. The *Jaigirdari* right was confiscated if they failed to perform the work entrusted to them. The total numbers of *Jaigirdars* were 974.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes persons having close relation with the royal families managed to secure large quantities of rent free lands. For example, Sarvananda Goswami the royal priest and Kasinath Lahiri, the *Khasnavis* were among others who secured large quantities of rent free *Jaigirs-Taluks*.<sup>71</sup>

The revenue paying lands were again classified under *Mal*, *Devottara* and *Khangi*. The *Mal* was considered for the state revenue, the *Devottara* for religious purposes and the *Khangi* was set apart for the maintenance of the king's household. The persons paying revenues immediately to the state were called *Jotedars* who held numerous *Jotes*, and were strikingly similar to those of the Zamindars and Talukdars of British India paying revenues in the same manner direct to the government. A *Jote* was heritable and transferable.<sup>72</sup> The *Jotes* were of two kinds: *Mokrari* and *Sarasari*. The rent of the *Mokrari* was settled in perpetuity and could not be enhanced. The occupancy of *Sarasari-Jote* was on the other hand only temporary, granted for a fixed number of years, after which the tenure was open for re-settlement.<sup>73</sup> The *Mokrai* lands however were of two types. In some deeds, the King had entered special clause giving hereditary rights and in other no such clause was inserted. In later form, a heir could not claim the right over land in the event of death of his father.<sup>74</sup> For obvious reasons, this system was discontinued and it led Douglas in 1790 to introduce the *Jijaradari* system of collection and this system too could not achieve any substantial success.<sup>75</sup>

Though no comprehensive accounts about the land revenue administration under the Koch are available, but certain references in their chronicles and also in the records of the British officers throw some light in this matter. The land revenue management enabled to obtain extra revenue out of which the heavy organizational mechanism was nourished. The royal revenue consisted of a proportion of the produced of the land.<sup>76</sup> Visvasimha perhaps retained and strengthened the Muslim type of

revenue administration. He might have thought that the indigenous system of revenue collection had been defective and causing the loss of revenue.<sup>77</sup> Visvasimha is said to have allotted lands called *Mahals* and *Camua* to his officials. These two types of lands yielding revenues were similar to those of the *Hazari-Malighujary* class of lands in the Muslim Kingdom.<sup>78</sup> It is interesting to note that Gadadhara Simha (1681-1696) the king of Assam brought many surveyors (*Amin*) from Koch kingdom and Bengal to engage them in working out the actual amount of land within the kingdom.<sup>79</sup> Moda Narayan (1665-80) the Koch king ordered for a general survey of lands occupied by his subjects in 1674.<sup>80</sup>

But the assessment of land was not seen to be based on any uniform pattern.<sup>81</sup> However H.N. Chaudhuri has stated three categories of rates to widespread in Koch Bihar state.<sup>82</sup> These are (a) Rs. 20% for a *Bish* of first class land (b) Rs. 15% of second class land (c) 10% of third class. A *Bish* was however equal to about 13 *bighas* of standard measurement. The rate per *bigha* of land varied thus; Rs. 1-8-3 for first class land, Rs. 1-2-6 for second class land and 12 *annas* and 3 *pies* for third class land. The average of the above three rates was Rs. 1-2-4. These rates are hardly meaningful since no regular assessment of land was arranged.<sup>83</sup> The measurement of land as it is noticed was done in the *Khasmahals* and in new settlements under the crude *Khashrah* or old native system. Compass was not in use at that period. Generally measurement was done by a rope on a rod of a fixed line of measurement in *gaj* or 2ft. in length.<sup>84</sup> However this was not applied to *Mal* or *Devottara* lands.

The actual procedure and rate of assessment in the Koch kingdom is not known it appears that some sort of *Paik*-system, not similar in all respects with that of the Ahoms existed there. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* makes mention of *Paiks*<sup>85</sup> attached to the royal officers of the state besides slaves and servants attached to their houses. These *Paiks* had to serve the state with manual works and used to go to war as soldiers when necessary. In return they enjoyed some plots of lands free of revenue. Besides the *Zamindars* like the *Bhuyans* and other high state officials like *Sewan*, *Kajri*, *Choudhury* collected revenue from the peasants in their own way who were directly under their

control, and sent a certain amount of their respective collection to the center.<sup>86</sup> After the annexation of Koch kingdom by the Mughol Empire, the system of collection of revenue was changed. The royal prince and other zamindars deposited with the imperial treasure a certain amount of their collections from the peasants. The settlement in such cases was made annually and procedure was to 'settle the *jama* agreeably to that of the preceding year'.<sup>87</sup>

Due to the paucity of information we don't know the exact amount of land revenue. Initially the Koch rulers stressed on tribute collection through regular warfare but after the growing rivalry with the Mughols and with the Ahoms the Koch rulers stressed on revenue extracting from their own peasants instead of warfare with the neighbours. The Koch royal cronicals have plenty of such references of revenue collection from the peasants. Yearly honor (*peshkash*) paid by Lakshmi Narayan to the Mughols was Rs. 100000 or 80000 Narayani Mudra.<sup>88</sup> The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* claims that Raghudeva Narayan had a hard cash of three cores in his treasury.<sup>89</sup> King Parikshit Narayan offered a *peshkash* of 80,000 to the Mughols.<sup>90</sup> Similarly Prana Narayan paid 55,0000 to the Mughol governor of Bengal in 1665 as an protection.<sup>91</sup> The *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* also refers that the kingdom of Prana Narayan had the capacity of collecting 80,0000 as land revenue per year.<sup>92</sup> Even *Fathiya-i-Ibriya's* writer estimated the revenue according to the Mughol system of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total production it was not less than Rs. 600000 in the Koch system. Since the last quarter of the seventh century to the conclusion of the Anglo-Koch treaty in 1773, the exploited revenue was tripartite due to trifurcation of power among King, *Dewan* and *Nazir* for the maintenance of state by king, military by *Nazir* and civil administration by *Dewan*; the revenue yielding areas were tripartite.<sup>93</sup>

In the initial years the Koch king was the sole owner of the soil.<sup>94</sup> The lands given to the relatives of the king (*petbhata*) were subject to be taken over by the king after the guarantee's death. The *Jaigir* lands were allowed to be held by the state officers during the period of their service only and were thus transferable. Available cultivable lands were distributed among the peasants and their records were kept by the concerning officers without allowing them to exercise their hereditary rights

over them. They were to pay a fixed amount of revenue or a fraction of their produce to the royal treasury. In any case the kings could occupy or bring under his control any kind of land according to the rules and customs of the kingdom prevalent during that period.

### **Crafts and Industries:**

Craft and industries increased in the Koch kingdom in a considerable amount. The people of the Koch kingdom were self-sufficient and they themselves produced all things of their necessities by following customary techniques. The prevailing traditional economic system of the kingdom was almost the same, that of the whole of the North East India. With state formation under Visvasimha and Nara Narayan there started the process of diffusion of the traditional tribal techniques and technologies of the main land, which quickened the development of the economic structure and production.<sup>95</sup> During the early rulers of the Koch Kingdom development of crafts and industries reached in a considerable advance stage due to the adoption of non-tribal advanced techniques and peaceful state co-operation. The *Darang Raj Vamsavali* and other contemporary sources mentioned some professional communities and products which clearly proved the existence of crafts and industries in the region. Visvasimha had appointed his son Megha Narayan as a supervisor of the weaving industries and to collect taxes from the weavers and washer men<sup>96</sup> and king Nara Narayan also had continued this office. With the state formation, peaceful political condition and admixture of the tribal and non-tribal techniques during the reign of Nara Narayan and his successors crafts and industry had made considerable progress. The most noted industry were weaving and dying.

Various professional communities were existed in the kingdom having specialization in their respective crafts which indicates the existence of these industries in the Koch kingdom. However, the most noted industries were silk and textiles and had a reputation for very early times for its indigenous silk like, *pat*, *muga* and *endi*, manufactured from cocoon. There were professional silk spinners and weavers called *Katanis* in the Koch kingdom. The English travelers Ralph Fitch who

visited the Koch kingdom during the reign of Nara Narayan, makes a reference to its silk and textile industries. *Muga* silk from Assam and Koch Behar formed an important article of trade with Bengal, Bhutan, Tibet, Mughol India and in the Coromandal and Malabar coasts. <sup>97</sup> Shihabuddin Talish observed that once a year in normal times, large quantities of wood, pepper spikenard, musk, gold and varieties of silk were offered in exchange of salt, salt petre, sulphur and several other products of Mughol India at the Ahom-Mughal check posts. <sup>98</sup> It is possible that many of these commodities mainly silk came from Cooch Behar as well. Besides, textile industry was also highly skilled as mentioned, *tanties* were the professional weavers. Sankara Deva himself was appointed as the *Gomasta* or administrative officer over the *Tantie* of the *Tanti kuchi* area of Barpeta. At the request of King Nara Narayan Sankara Deva had got sixty by thirty yards large cloth woven, called the *Brandabania-kapor*, depicting on it the scenes of the early life of the lord Krishna. <sup>99</sup> Kamarkuchi famous for the production of fine textiles in early eighteenth century might have worked during this period as well. It also appears that Narayanpur the eastern most outpost of the Koch kingdom, was another center of textile industry. <sup>100</sup> It may also be mentioned in this connection that proficiency in weaving was an indispensable qualification for a girl for her marriage in this part of the country till recent times. There were also families even among the high casts who gained their livelihood by weaving. The *Gurucharita* of Daityari Thakur mentions of such a weaver couple whose daily income amounted to ten *pons* of Cowries. <sup>101</sup> It is learnt from the same source that the professional weavers had to pay an annual tax of rupees two to the government. <sup>102</sup>

Earthenware making had been developed in the kingdom. Various tribes were the maker of earthenware with very simple technology even without wheel. A section of *Kalita* also adopted the art of pottery. <sup>103</sup> However pottery as a profession of a community (*kumar*) had very little concentration in the Koch state. The articles of pottery made in the country are of an inferior quality. The variety was also limited only *handis* and *saras* are ordinarily made. <sup>104</sup> *Kalasi* (pitchers), water jugs and other utensils were imported from Eastern Bengal. <sup>105</sup> Besides image making provided occupation to some

people called *Khanikars*. The art of making earthen images, particularly of Durga, was prevalent in the Koch kingdom even before the rise of Visvasimha. The *Katha Guru Charita*, for instance mentions such an image of Durga worshipped by Visvasimha when he was still a cowherd.<sup>106</sup> The earthen image of Durga so impressed the Ahom envoys that on their return to Garhgaon, they reported it to their king who lost no time in sending his own artisans to Koch Behar to get training in that branch of art.<sup>107</sup> The *Vamsavali* also makes mention of the *Silakutis* or stone engravers.<sup>108</sup>

Edible oil was produced in the kingdom in good quantity. The *Telis* had big concentration in the kingdom. Visvasimha appointed his son Ananta Natrayan, as an officer to supervise over the *Telis*<sup>109</sup> and Nara Narayan too continued the system.<sup>110</sup> Oil productions were high and often it was exported to the nearby territories.<sup>111</sup> For the oil production the traditional *Teli* community used their cattle for pressing the seeds of mustard oil.<sup>112</sup> This was called *Ghani*. Like this the suger cane crushing machine was also a cattle-powered mill. *Gur* was prepared from the juce of sugarcane and in this work the southern portion of the state was famous. Instead of the internal production *Gur* was imported to meet the local need.<sup>113</sup>

In Koch kingdom smithery was an important profession. The black-smiths turned out the ordinary implements of a householder's daily use. *Kamars* or blacksmiths were numerous in the kingdom who was the chief producer of the iron implements and implements of ordinary uses such as *dao*, *kodal* and cooking utensils. Besides the daily utensils Kamars also produced lock, padlocks, sacrificial knives, spears, clamps for building boat, swords, arms and other items required by the people. The Koch state had keen interest in the iron works and we have reference that Visvasimha appointed his son, Brishaketu, as the supervisor of the iron works.<sup>114</sup> Goldsmiths going by the name of *baniyas* are not rare. These men have however not gone beyond the rude old patterns of native ornaments. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavalies* shows that prince Surasimha was appointed as the state officer to look after the gold smithery.<sup>115</sup> Of the silver ornaments *har* or necklace, *mootha* or bracelet, *footi* or ear-ring and *bankkharoo* an ornament for the leg were the foremost. *Noeth* or nosering, *anti* or

ear-ring and *kadma* a kind of ear-ornament and finger-ring were the chief among the ornaments of gold. <sup>116</sup> Besides the professional goldsmiths, the *Kalitas* of the kingdom had also developed their expertise in this craft. <sup>117</sup>

Carpentry was of a major profession of the kingdom and the Kalita community was involved in the profession. The carpenters used to make day to day utensils for local use. Besides this the making of boat for different use was a flourishing industry. The navy introduced by Nara Narayan and retained by subsequent Koch kings significantly contributed to the growth of boat making industries. Traditional references like *Fathiya-i-Ibraiya* and *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* have left some references about war boats and general boats of the region.

In Bamboo works the people are born artist and is testified by the good bamboo works turned by them. Besides wicker baskets and pans they make almost anything of their daily use from bamboo. Stools, cots, *moras* and chairs, hukas and pipes, sun-shades and sandals, fans and fine mats and many other articles of good workmanship are turned out by the native of the Koch kingdom from bamboo alone. Firming tools like ladder, plough, jaw, *bida* and *mugur* were made from bamboo. Bamboo made special weapon called *bish payiji* had special use in the defense of the country. <sup>118</sup> Besides bamboo little small scale industry like *pati* from the mutha grass was extensively produced. <sup>119</sup> Production of lime or calcium carbonate by the *Chunari* or *Mukhi* <sup>120</sup> and fishing by *Nadials* and *Keots* were other small industries of the region. Salt production was also local industry of the kingdom. Elephant catching, a high skilled job was done by a class of trained persons called *Phandis*. Although elephants were in high demand, there was no professional class engaged in this work. On the other hand, it was strictly under the supervision of the government.

In Koch kingdom, craft and industry progressed as because it took both local and outside technology simultaniously for the refinement of skills. The craft and industries developed in the region were the result of both tribal invention and technical acculturation from outside. The weaving skill developed by the *Bodo* tribes was the outcome of their long knowledge in the *Endi* culture and

largely limited to the internal use. It was labor exhaustive manufacture and cost of making was very high for which commercially it was less money making for the producer. On the contrary productions of expert weaving caste were more profitable. However technologies of iron works, oil pressing and few other crafts had been slowly diffused to the tribals of the kingdom. So the gazetteers, census and other official survey lead in the nineteenth century have chronicled that the Khen are the proficient in oil pressing,<sup>121</sup> the *Keots* have their expertise in mustard oil making<sup>122</sup> and the Koch and *Kalitas* are expert in iron and jewelry works.<sup>123</sup> Craft and industry was an important source of income for the Koch state. We have informed by the *Darrang Raj Vamsavalies* that the Koch state extracted some tax from few specialized manufactures. The weavers had to pay 2 rupees per annum as tax to the government.<sup>124</sup> Other professionals like the oilmen, washer men, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, traders and musicians also had to pay taxes to the state.<sup>125</sup>

### **Commercial Relations with neighboring Countries:**

Koch kingdom had extensive trade relations with the neighboring kingdoms. Taking advantage from its geographical location the traders of the kingdom established smooth commercial links with the other territorial kingdoms. Contemporary and near contemporary local sources<sup>126</sup> and accounts left by the foreigners,<sup>127</sup> reveal that the agricultural and craft production raised in a considerable position so that surplus could be exported to the other place for commercial pursuits. Besides agricultural and craft products the kingdom was always rich in respect of its forest and animal products. On the basis of these background industrial production increased qualitative and quantitatively. This surplus generation not only encouraged the local traders to carry on trade but also attracted foreign traders to pursue trade with the region. To this may be added all encouragements accorded by the rulers,<sup>128</sup> whose aim was to establish both political and economic hegemony over the neighboring territories. The able Koch kings took various steps to modernize the economy. They took numerous measures for the inter and intra-regional trade flourishing. Contemporary and near

contemporary sources categorically highlighted that the Koch had trade relations with Bengal, Assam, Bhutan, Tibet and China and later with Mughol India. English merchant Ralph Fitch who arrived in 1583 mentioned in his account about the flourishing trade relations of the kingdom with the neighboring territories.

Bhutan was situated in the north frontier of the Koch kingdom and taking advantage of the trans-Himalayan route the Koch kingdom established massive trade relations with Bhutan through its numerous *duars* or the mountain passes. From the account we can know that there in total eighteen important *duars* was there of which eight were situated in the eastern side of the kingdom and other eleven *duars* situated in the western side of the state. Among the articles exchanged between these two kingdoms the Chinese silk, woolen clothes, yak-tails, ponies, gold dust and rock salt, iron, lac, rice, silk, dried fish, buffalo-horns etc. were the major part. Occasional fairs were held at places like Hajo, Charigaon and Odalguri in the eastern <sup>129</sup> and Darwani, Panga, Barabhita, Badargang etc. in the western Koch kingdom where Bhutias exchanged their products including ponies for cattle, conch shells and other products of the plains.

Besides trading with Bhutan Koch kingdom had trade relations with Tibet. Owing to its unique location it controlled the main trading way between Bengal and Tibet. <sup>130</sup> According to Ralph Fitch primarily Koch kingdom did not get the initial advantage of this trade <sup>131</sup> but after the consolidation of power by Nara Narayan in the foothills of Bhutan and other places Koch state started to take advantages of its location. Conventional trade with China, during the medieval period was conducted through Tibet and Bhutan and it continued right up to the British period. The British political missions sent to Bhutan and Tibet (after 1773) categorically recorded the trade links between Bengal and Tibet carried through the *Duars* of the Koch state. Both Bhutanese and Tibetan traders came to the plain land of the Koch kingdom with their merchandise. <sup>132</sup> We also know that the Chittagong port had an effective role in trade as was connected to north Bengal through both river and land routes. <sup>133</sup>

Koch kingdom had a significant role in the trade relation between Bengal and Assam as well as Bihar as the main river route passes through the state.<sup>134</sup> Specially the river Brahmaputra entirely navigable and it was the main artery of commerce.<sup>135</sup> The use of this route was mentioned by Al Idrisi as early as 1162.<sup>136</sup> The land route that connected the eastern part of the Koch kingdom for entry to Assam was either via Murshidabad, Malda and Dinajpur through Rangpur or from Dhaka to Singmari via Dharmai and Jamalpur.<sup>137</sup> However both the land routes were impassable during rains. Interestingly, in a notification dated 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1875 in the Assam Gazette, in connection with an annual fair at Dhubri, the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara drew the attention of traders to the routes connecting Dhubri, the present gateway of Assam with Bihar and Bengal.<sup>138</sup> Koch kingdom established good trading relation with the North Eastern kingdoms as it initially conquered the whole area. Certain goods from Koch kingdom had extensively in demand in those areas. In 1627 Jesuit traveler, Stephen Cacella came to the kingdom and chronicled that objects from Patna, Rajmahal and Gauda were supplied regularly to meet the internal demands of the kingdom.<sup>139</sup> Fine clothes produced in Bengal had a great demand in the state.<sup>140</sup> Besides this salt was an important item of import.<sup>141</sup> From Ahom kingdom they imported gold, cloth, knife, elephant etc. regularly.<sup>142</sup>

If we discuss on the traders as a community then we can find both big and small traders. Big merchants carrying on trade in river traffic with the neighboring kingdoms were called *Sadagars*, whereas smaller ones were called *Beparis*. There was another category of traders called *Mudoi* referred to all classes of traders; big or small engaged in river traffic. The big traders regularly dealt with gold, jewelleries, silk, salt, mustard seeds, elephant tusks etc., whereas the smaller ones dealt with betel vine, fuel wood, salt, fish, vegetables etc. It is on record that big merchants invested as much as 4 lacks as capital in their trade.<sup>143</sup> The traders used to form temporary partnership to trade in distant lands.<sup>144</sup> The traders of the Koch kingdom looked upon the kingdom of Assam as ‘something like a paradise for merchant, where all valuable trade commodities could be procured in good qualities and at a considerably low price.’<sup>145</sup> Big marchants carried on their trade through river used

to sail with boats with huge goods, sell them distant markets and return with goods not available in the region. For inland circulation, besides porters, elephants, horses and camels were used. Sometimes, the traders themselves had opened shops in their own residence or in the market places. There were also weekly and bi-weekly markets or *hats* where usually rice, alkali, fuel wood, fruits, vegetable, fish and bamboo and wooden furniture were sold. Stephen Cacella observed many *bazars* in the state where everything was available including the imported items.

For effecting maintenance of the trading activity trading hubs were very necessary. The most important trading cities of that time were Koch Behar, Rangpur, Malagul, Balrampur, Karampatan, Rangamati, Khuntaghat, Dhubri, Barnagar, Pandu and Hajo. Stephen Cacella refers Hajo as the most important town in the Koch kingdom, very rich and thickly populated.<sup>146</sup> He also mentioned of Cooch Behar as having possessed many *bazars* or markets.<sup>147</sup> Rangmati had, in the meantime a Portuguese settlement along with two churches.<sup>148</sup> Besides trade centers, the fairs held at different places was a center of marketing activity. The noted among the fairs were the one held annually on the bank of the Gadadhar River, in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) and the one at Hajo, held on the occasion of the Buddhapurnima in the month of May. There were also foothill like Ranihat and Gobhahat where the hill tribes exchanged their products like raw cotton and iron implements for dried fish, cotton and silk fabrics, bell-metal and brass utensils and such other article of plains.

Though no details of the price list is available to us but it is learnt from the *Kathagurucharita* the *Gamacha* (towel) cost eight pons of cowries<sup>149</sup> and a packet of betel vine cost four to eight pons of cowries.<sup>150</sup> Contemporary Persian sources informs us that oranges used to be sold at ten for a price in the Muhammadan camp.<sup>151</sup> Further light is thrown in this matter by the author of the *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*.<sup>152</sup> In normal times the cost of these articles must have been much lower in both the eastern and the western Brahmaputra valley. Regarding the price of animals, that of horse only is known which was the most costly of all animals- its price being double of that of a slave, the highest price of

the latter then being rupees twenty each. Different types of customs and duties were collected by the Koch government. The *Guru Charita* refers to some of such duties like *hat-kar*, *ghat-kar*, *jal-kar* and *dan* or sales taxes etc. <sup>153</sup> A class of officers, *Chokidars* were appointed to guard the outpost and collect taxes. These were also high administrative officers to look into the affairs of trade and commerce. Thus Visvasimha the founder of the Koch kingdom appointed his son Suryabar to look into the affairs of the merchants.

### **Narayani Currency in Trade and Transactions:**

The effective maintenance of trade and commercial relation both inter and intra-regional compass need a well-organized system of currency. Because small regional level trading activity may be carried on by barter system but to carry out inter regional large scale commerce, the presence of currency was an essential requirement. There is no historical evidence as to when coins were first used in the Koch kingdom for effective undertaking of economic activity. Currency in the Koch kingdom before the emergence of the *Narayani Mudra* was consisted of *Cowries*. Likewise other parts of Bengal Cowries were regularly used in small and internal transactions only. <sup>154</sup> A special kind of fruit called Almond was also accepted as money.

The Koch king Nara Narayan first understood the necessity of eradication of the complexities of barter mode of transaction. It was Nara Narayan who first stabilized the political condition by suppressing the other tribal groups of the region and then began the process of economic consolidation to establish his kingdom upon a strong economic base. The introduction of the state sponsored currency for effective continuance of trade and commerce is an integral part of this consolidation process.

After introduced by Nara Narayan the Narayani currency became an acceptable standard medium of exchange both in inter-regional and intra-regional trade of Northern part of un-divided Bengal, lower Assam, Bhutan and other adjoining territories. <sup>155</sup> It led to the growth of trade and commerce in

favor of the Koch state. Contemporary literature particularly the biographies of Sankardeva and his disciple Madhadeva contain the references of circulation of the coins among the masses of the region. The *Guru Charita* of Ramcharan Thakur frequently mentions the *taka*, *adhtaka*, *shiki* as the prevailing coins for ordinary and big transactions.<sup>156</sup> Narayani currency greatly monetized the whole economic structure of the region. Besides this the period also witnessed introduction of coins in almost all the tribal states of the North East India.<sup>157</sup> The Ahom, the Kacharis and the Jayantiya kings issued coins and these currencies brought about the process of modernization in commercial activities. Thus beginning from the 16<sup>th</sup> century down to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the North Eastern markets became conceived of gold, silver and copper coins.

The study of the role of currency in trade and commerce can be divided into two phases. As the currency was in circulation un-interruptedly up to 1773 so the influence of Narayani coins over the transaction system was more high comparing the period after 1773 when the British influence in the state was increased gradually and the role of imperial currency became dominant because of the repeated interruption of minting Narayani currency by the part of the Koch rulers.

During the early rulers the extent of trading activity was reached its zenith as king Nara Narayan conquered a considerable part of the North East India. Sukladwaja, the commander in chief and also brother of Nara Narayan compelled the other North East Indian kings like Ahom, Tripura, Kachar, Jayantipur, Manipur to subjugate before Nara Narayan.<sup>158</sup> These kingdoms had their own currency system and after defeat in the hand of the Koch, they forced to stop minting their own coins and asked to mint coins in the name of Nara Narayan. This event tremendously enhanced the importance of Narayani currency in local trading activity in those state. Because as the local currencies were forced to stop, the local markets faced a scarcity of coins and so in place of indigenous currency, Narayani currency played an important role in day to day transaction. Besides as these kingdoms were compelled to pay taxes in Narayani currency so they encouraged the local traders to trade in Narayani currency and extract tax in Narayani rupees from them to pay tribute to Koch ruler.

During the reign of Nara Narayan the power and prestige of the kingdom was in a high stature so the subjugated kings did not raise voices for their sovereignty but after Nara Narayan due to the succession debate with the Raghu Deva state was divided into two regions that is the western Koch kingdom and Eastern Koch kingdom popularly known as Koch Hazo.<sup>159</sup> During this period almost all the subjugated states emerged as sovereign power and again started to mint their own coins and gradually Narayani currency lost its hold from the markets of North East India and Narayani currency confined only to the territories of the Koch kingdom, west of the river Sankosh.

Due to the paucity of reliable source of information it is very difficult to know the total amount of money circulation in the markets of Koch kingdom but the tribute structure can be treated here as substantive source of information. As the Koch after Nara Narayan were subjugated by the Mughals, so from the amount of tribute payable to the Mughal exchequer we can get a rough idea about the total volume of money in the kingdom. In the later phase of the Koch rule the Mughol interventions in the state had increased the demand of revenue in cash also got pace. So the process of money collection from the peasants was regularized. From the occasional references contained in the contemporary literatures an idea can be made about the amount of collected revenue. Annual tribute paid by Lakshmi Narayan to the Mughals was Rs. 1,00,000 or 80,000 Narayani Tanka. The *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* claims that king Raghudeva Narayan had a hard cash of Rs. Three cores in his treasury.<sup>160</sup> King Parikshit Narayan offered a peshkash of Rs. 80,000 to the Mughals.<sup>161</sup> Similarly Prana Narayan paid Rs. 55,000 to the Mughol governor of Bengal in 1665 as an indemnity.<sup>162</sup> The *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* also refers that the kingdom of Prana Narayan had the capacity of yielding Rs. 8,00,000 as land revenue per year.<sup>163</sup> Even *Fathiya-i-Ibriya's* writer estimated the revenue according to the Mughal system of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total production it was not less than Rs. 6,00,000 in the Koch system. This huge amount of land revenue and tribute indirectly points out the amount of money circulation in the Koch kingdom. As the amount was extracted from the common people so it is not heard to assume that they acquired cash only by sealing their agro-products and menial products in

the markets of the Koch territories and which ultimately to some extent gave impetus to the trade and commerce in the Kingdom.

From literary references we can establish that Narayani currency was hugely popular and it was a greater acceptability in trade and transactions. A number of monetary transactions in Narayani coins have been mentioned in autobiographies, biographies, chronicles and literature such as *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, *Guru Charita Katha* and *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* etc. covering the mostly earlier periods of Koch rule. Substantial number of documents, archive materials and the books written by foreigners clearly indicate that Narayani coins were highly sought after for trade, transaction and payment of revenues. Such information obviously rejects the existing belief that Narayani coins were only used as ceremonial gift items, donations to the temples and royal administrative class.

As to the paucity of reliable information on the economic scenario and the role of currency on it, it is very hard to draw any accurate picture of the role of currency in trade and commerce in markets of the Koch kingdom, but it can be easily imagined that Narayani currency was an acceptable mode of transaction during the independent rulers of the Koch kingdom. Because starting from Nara Narayan come down to Dharyendra Narayan all the kings introduced coins not only in the time of their accession but also several times in their reign with different dies. It is considered that only Nara Narayan used one hundred and fifty different kinds dies to mint coins.<sup>164</sup> The coin hoards of different rulers have been discovered not only with in the actual territories of the kingdom but also from distant places of North East India where Koch rule was established during the reign of Nara Narayan. Mere hoarding for wealth was not possible in those days because hording needs availability of coins in good numbers but in those days due to the metallic scarcity, coins were minted in limited numbers and with demand or necessity. So most probably coins were reached in the far flung parts of the kingdom in due course of trade and commerce. The denomination of Koch coins is important here because small denominations were introduced largely by the Koch rulers where as big denominations were issued in small numbers. The small denominations can be treated as a demand of the market.

Because small denomination were used to exchange day to day transactions in the local markets of the kingdom.

Though the role of Narayani currency was vital in the years of the Kingdom's independent existence but the whole scenario was changed after 1773, the year marked by the treaty of Anglo-Koch treaty by which the kingdom became a subsidiary state and the administrative power to some extent fall in the hand of the authorities of the English East India Company.<sup>165</sup> Though the treaty had not banned the free minting of Narayani currency but from the later developments we can know that the British authority was in no mood of its free circulation and different times they imposed certain restriction over the minting of Narayani coins. Though the Koch rulers had took initiatives but their efforts were not enough to revive the glory of the Narayani currency and due to the pressure of the imperial powers the currency lost its hold from the markets of the state and lastly the circulation stopped officially form 1866.<sup>166</sup> This withdrawn not only important from political perspective but it had crude effects on the trade and commerce of the state. Due to the uncertain minting of Narayani coins a kind of confusion occurred in the kingdom and it directly hampered the trading activities of the state. Both inter-state and intra-regional trade troubled greatly due to this confusion. Due to non-availability of coins in good numbers the local markets in the far flung areas of the state suffered heavy setback and people also suffered a lot. The problem in local level was understood by Cornel Jenkins who was the Commander in Chief in the North East frontier province, asked the Company authority to do something for the people who were the worst sufferers. In 1849 Capt. Jenkins said to the Company authorities in his report "the people of Koch Behar still suffer much inconvenience from the prohibition to coin Nararinee rupees, and the non-currency of the Government coin".<sup>167</sup> Not only the internal trade but also external trade of the state got heavy loss. For example the Bhutanese authorities in the years after Anglo-Koch treaty denied accepting the new Narayani coins minted by Dhairyendra Naradan due to its degraded metallic quality. Besides this as the state had great commercial relations with the neighboring territories so after the withdrawn of the Narayani currency

they almost stopped the trading relation with the Koch state in view of monetary un-clarity. With this, the British trading interest also hampered the Koch trading interests heavily as it was keen to implant its own imperial currency in the territories of the Koch state to get grip over local as well as external trade.

As Koch kingdom traded with Tibet via Bhutan, Narayani coins found their way into Bhutan and became very popular locally for commercial transactions.<sup>168</sup> In 1774 by the order of the Governor and Revenue Council, the new varieties of Narayani half rupee were not accepted in British India treasuries.<sup>169</sup> These are the coins struck by Dharyendra Narayan (1765-70 and 1775-83). Such restrictions created problems for the Bhutanese traders who were accustomed to the use of both old and new varieties Narayani coins without making any distinction. The king of Bhutan raised his objections to such stipulations to the British authority and explained the hardship created for the traders of his kingdom. The matter was considered by the revenue council and order was issued to release Narayani coins from the Rangpur treasury as required by the Bhutanese.<sup>170</sup> In fact Bhutan set up its own mint, after the closure of the Koch mint and started striking coins which were close copies of the half *tankas* issued by Harendra Narayan (1783-1839) with an occasional Tibetan letter.<sup>171</sup> These Bhutanese coins also became popular in the plains, due to the non-availability of Koch coins, as a new source of supply. But the most interesting example of the popularity of Narayani coins can be derived from the fact that even the Mughols also copied their style. In 1661 Koch kingdom was invaded and occupied by the Mughol under General Mir Jumla. The name of Koch kingdom was changed to '*Alamgirnagar*' and coins were struck in the name of the Mughol Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir. The style of the said coin was similar to the coin of Prana Narayan, but the legend was in Urdu and written in Bengali script.<sup>172</sup> This probably the only example in the numismatic history of Mughol coinage that coins were issued in a regional script. The whole affair simply underlines the high acceptability of Koch coins in the region.

According to Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed Narayani coins were widely accepted in the whole of North Bengal, as well as in the parts of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Tibet and Assam. Even the Ahom rulers collected their revenues in Narayani coins, in addition to their own currency, up to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>173</sup> Even now-a-days Narayani coins occasionally surface in different markets in North East India. The use of Narayani coins in huge quantities in the medieval period is the only reason for such situation. Though we know that the British rulers took a negative policy toward the Koch currency, but in some instances we find that they compelled the other princely states of North East India to pay their taxes in Narayani currencies. The British Indian Judicial proceedings dated 14<sup>th</sup> June 1836 highlighted how the British Government not only compelled the Garos living in the border areas of the Garo Hills to submit to the East India Company, but also pay *nazzarana* (tribute) in Narayani *tankas*. The Garo Duars or the trade routes were assessed at 196 Narayani rupees per annum. This amount was again raised to two hundred Narayani rupees in 1825.<sup>174</sup> Walter Hamilton has highlighted a most interesting information. It was recorded by him that Narayani coins were the only medium of exchange available to the Garos, living in difficult terrain of Garo Hills. This was the only currency the Garos accepted.<sup>175</sup> Unfortunately, no details are available as to how Narayani coins were adopted by the Garos in the Duars and hills but it confirms the popularity of such coinage.

The archival materials preserved at the Assam State Archive amply indicates the growing use of coins issued by North Eastern kingdoms especially the Koch and the Ahom in business transactions during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The correspondence of the British officials with Fort William in Kolkata reveals the status of Narayani coins in circulation, their paucity compared with the demand and the rate of exchange in whole of North Bengal Assam and other neighboring regions. The British Governmental record preserved in the Guwahati Archives amply shows that attempts were made to withdraw the Narayani coins entirely from circulation. In April, 1834 the East India Company wanted to introduce the Company's new Farrukhabad rupee and they compelled the local inhabitants to

surrender their savings of Narayani half or full tankas.<sup>176</sup> During that period, the Narayani coins had a wide acceptability among the members of the public over a large geographical territory. The matter was reviewed at intervals to check its efficiency. A step was taken by the agent of the Governor General in Assam that from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1839 the acceptance of Narayani coins should be discontinued at the treasuries of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgaon on the ground that coins of such description were in very limited circulation in those districts.

However even ten years later it was found that Narayani coins were in the way of the British plan to introduce their own currency. Among the various steps taken by the East India Company the most important was that Narayani half rupee would be accepted at the treasuries at a 37% discount. According to the then mint master, it was sufficient to secure the British Government from any loss of exchange. In 1849, Capt. Jenkins observed that 'the people of Koch Behar still suffer much inconvenience from the prohibition to coin Narayani rupees'. The question of releasing the Narayani coins from the Government treasury was again reviewed as is revealed from the proceedings of the Hon'ble the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal during December, 1864 AD. It appears that J.L. Lushington the then Deputy Audit and Accountant General of Bengal wrote to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 1864 with a recommendation to place at the release of the Commissioner of Cooch Behar a fund between four and five lacks Narayani coins. But the response of the Government of Bengal was totally negative and the proposal received a cold response. We know that finally in 1866 Narayani coins ceased to be a legal tender.<sup>177</sup>

From the above study we can come to this conclusion that the economic condition of the Koch kingdom in its initial stage was weak, as it was a self-sufficient rural economy and the surplus generation in the kingdom was very limited. But with the consolidation of power by Nara Narayan the political stability of the kingdom established and the scope of the economic development increased. The agriculture, craft, and industry all the subsidiary branches of the economy flourished rapidly. With this the introduction of coinage by Nara Narayan paved the way of trading activity in a larger

scale. The currency is very significant in visualizing the economic environment of the Koch Kingdom especially to understand the economic development in the kingdom. By assaying the role of these coins conclusions can be drawn about the prevailing economic condition of the kingdom. When coins came to replace the barter mode of transactions then trade and commerce flourished in the region and the self-sufficient rural economy started to transform into a surplus economy and which ultimately increased the standards of living of common people and also helped a lot to develop the communication network. By taking inspiration from the Koch rulers the other princely kingdoms of North East India started minting their own currencies and which popularized the acceptability of coins as a good mode of transaction, which ultimately paved the way of trade and commerce in greater scale. The size of the coinage provides a crude measure of volumes of this trade. In particular, no coins were struck in Koch kingdom between 1683 and 1695, which probably indicates that the trade was disrupted during this decade. So finally from the above study we can clearly prove that Narayani currency played an important role in the development of the economic condition of the Koch state. The growth of trade and commerce laid the economic foundation of the kingdom and upon which the able Koch rulers established the political as well as economic superstructure of their kingdom which lasted more than two hundred years independently and it was due to the trading interest simultaneously attached the attention of the British authorities to come here and take part in it and which gradually paved the way of its steady dissemination towards subordinancy.

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## **Chapter III**

# **Origin and Development of Koch Coinage (c.1496-1773)**

The present study is focusing on the coinage of Koch kingdom which was situated at the eastern part of India and particularly at the northern part of undivided Bengal, so before going into the core issue i.e. the origin and development of Koch Coinage we will first take a glimpse of the system of coinage and exchange system in this part of India from the earliest time to the foundation of the Koch Kingdom. It will help us to understand the currency traditions of this region and simultaneously help us to understand the perspective of the introduction of Koch coinage.

### **Monetary Scenario in Early Bengal:**

The territory known for centuries as Bengal is linguistically and to a great extent culturally a fairly homogenous unit.<sup>1</sup> Though intersected by rivers its major regions were linked in ancient, medieval times by political as well as cultural and commercial ties. Hence the territory concerned can be considered as a unit for study. Outstanding discoveries during the last few decades have established the numismatic history of Bengal as familiar with the coins and other forms of money in the early and proto medieval periods. These discoveries have developed our knowledge for the monetary history of eastern India.

The use of minted metallic coins as the medium of exchange mark a big forward step in civilization, especially in its economic aspects but how and when metallic coins were first introduced in Bengal is shrouded in mystery. But it is a proven fact that they were known and used several

centuries before the commencement of the Christian era. This is proved by some concurrent pieces of evidence. Firstly, the Mahasthangarh fragmentary stone plaque inscription,<sup>2</sup> discovered from ancient Pundravardhana on the bank of Karatoya at Bagura District in present Bangladesh, is the earliest inscription (c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) of the undivided Bengal, contains reference to, two types of prevailing currencies (a) *Gandakas* and (b) *Kakanikas*, though their size and weight are unknown to us.

In the early literature and later inscriptions the coins were generally known as *Karsapana*, which is derived from the term *Karsav* and weight 80 *ratis* or 146 grin. *Karsapana* which made of gold was known as '*Suvarna*' or '*Niska*' and silver made *Karsapana* was known as '*Purana*' or '*Dharana*'. While copper made as '*Pana*' in 33<sup>rd</sup> chapter of *Arthasastra* it is stated that coins made of copper are classified in accordance with their value, and these are: (i) *Masaka* (ii) *Ardha-masaka* (iii) *Pada-masaka* (*Kakani*) (iv) *Arta-bhaga-masaka* (*Ardha-kakani*)

The *Kakanika* of the Mahasthangarh record possibly indicated *Pada-masaka* (or, *Kakani*) of Kautilya. *Masaka* or *Tamrapana* is equal to 80 *ratis*. Again in the monetary tables of Orissa and Bengal we notice the use of *Kadi* (or cowrie shell) from an early time and according to this table: 4 *Kadi* = 1 *Ganda*; 20 *Ganda* = 1 *Pana*; 16 *Pana* = 1 *Kahana* (i.e. *Kahapana* in Pali or *Karsapana* in Sanskrit). *Gandaka* of the Mahasthangarh inscription is possibly equivalent to 4 (four) cowrie shells. D.C. Sircar thinks that '*Gandamadha*' used in Kalinga was equal to *Karsapana*.<sup>3</sup> In India *Karsapana* was linked to the price of cowrie shells i.e. one *Karsapana* was equivalent to 1280 cowrie shells.

Secondly, the '*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*' records that a gold coin known as '*Caltis*', was in vogue in the market town of Ganga (Tamralitpti) at about the first century.<sup>4</sup> But by far the most valuable evidence in this regard is furnished by the discovery of a large number of silver and copper punched marked and cast coin most of them dating back to the pre Christian epoch. These have been found sometime in large number in various localities of the province in the neighborhood of Bera-Champa (24 parganas near Manda, Rajshi),<sup>5</sup> in the highland close to the river-bed at Tamluk<sup>6</sup> and

Wari-Bator (Dhaka).<sup>7</sup> There are good reasons to think that these punched marked pieces<sup>8</sup> present the earliest coinage of Bengal as perhaps also of many other provinces of India served for centuries for the commercial needs of the people. The symbol punched on these coins<sup>9</sup> are often similar to those found other parts of India a fact which shows that from very early times Bengal followed the main currents of general Indian economic life.

The Kusanas brought new ideas in the coinage of India and a few coins of the Kusana kings have been discovered in Bengal but there is nothing to show that they were used as medium of exchange within the province. They might have come by the way of trade, along with pilgrims or in the trail of an invading army. In the first century A.D. commercial transactions were being carried on with south-western port of Bengal known as Ganga from the '*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*'. The medium of exchange which was employed for such transactions were a type of gold coin known as '*Caltis*'.<sup>10</sup>

With the establishment of the Gupta Empire Bengal shared the currency system introduced and maintained by the Gupta rulers. The coinage of the Gupta monarchs were based essentially on gold and silver though copper was not unknown. The discovery of a large number of Gupta coins both of gold and silver, in almost every part of Bengal show that they came into fairly wide circulation within the province, though for ordinary transactions the cowries shells continued.<sup>11</sup> Extent specimens prove that the earlier gold coins of the dynasty followed the standard of their Kusana prototypes weighing about 122 grains. But from the time of Skanda Gupta onwards a deliberate attempt seems to have been made to revert to the old Hindu Suvarna standard of 146.4 grains.<sup>12</sup> The silver coins of the Gupta monarchs show considered variations in weight but those circulating in the central and eastern provinces of the empire appear to have approximated the standard weight of silver *Karshapana*, i.e. 36 grains.<sup>13</sup>

Epigraphic records belonging to the Gupta period mention two varieties of coins, viz. the *Dinara* and the *Rupaka* as media of exchange in purchasing land. It is generally held that the former

denotes the gold and the latter the silver coins of the Gupta monarchs. Concerning the rate of exchange between the two, we get valuable information from the Baigram plate. The epigraphic records show purchase of land at the price of 6 *Dinaras* for 3 *Kulyavupas* and 8 *Rupakas* for 2 *Dronavapas* in the area. The customary price in that locality being 2 *Dinaras* for each *Kulyavapa*. As already stated one *Kulyavapa* was equivalent to 8 *Dronavapas* in area. It is thus clear that the rate of exchange between the *Dinara* and the *Rupaka* coins was 1: 16.

But this rises an intricate problem as to the rate of exchange between gold and silver in Eastern India about the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Whatever may be the explanation of the rate of exchange of gold and silver in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the immediate successors of the Gupta monarchs minted coin. In Bengal however the minting of gold coins was restricted since the seventh century as the gold mine at Raichur was closed and Kolar remained operative in 700 A.D., as appeared through radio carbon dating analysis, the use of gold for temples and ornaments however became wider. It is possible that the Indian trade relation with Roman Empire though snapped India's cultural and commercial relations with south-east Asian countries increased. <sup>14</sup> R.S.Sharma has drawn our attention to the writing of Chinese writer Tan Chang where in it is stated that among the countries that exported gold to India besides the Roman Empire were southern China and south east Asian countries and for that reason perhaps following the trading of the Gupta kings a number of later kings <sup>15</sup> continued to strike coins in Gold. Among them Sasanka of Karnasuvarna was a ruler of remarkable personality and an important rival of king Harsavardhana. Sasanka is credited to have issued not only gold but also silver coins. Incidentally even Hiuen Tsang observed that for transactions both gold, silver, pearl and cowrie shells were used. <sup>16</sup>

The discovery of a number of post Gupta imitated Gupta Archer type gold coins with eight hundred deities on reverse from south eastern Bengal is also noticeable. Scholars believe that these common types of coins were issued by the successive dynasties like the Khadgas, Devas, Rats apparently at the behest of mercantile communities. Even the hoard of Sasanka also yield such

imitated gold coins indicating perhaps the practice continued even during the time of Sasanka.<sup>17</sup> Under this perspective the scholars are surprised not to find a single definite coin-type of the powerful rulers of the Pala and Sena dynasties. This phenomenon has been explained by Nihar Ranjan Roy as an expression of lack of business and increasing pressure on land during these periods.<sup>18</sup> Later on scholars like R.S. Sharma and other described this as an example of the growth of feudalism on Indian soil since the post Gupta period.<sup>19</sup> Following the debate initiated by R.S. Sharma scholars have put forward their arguments for and against the emergence of Indian feudalism.<sup>20</sup> But the matter still requires a thorough examination in order to assess the situation in a more objective manner. By following the arguments of N.R. Ray or R.S. Sharma we may suggest that under the Palas and the Senas foreign trade came to a sudden halt and this resulted in scarcity of metals like gold and silver and the rulers were obliged not to issue any coins.

Thus the above mentioned controversy regarding the coinage of Pala, Sena period we may say it is still an ongoing debate in Indian monetary history. We have to wait for the discovery of the coins of this period or we must have to reconstruct the history of this period with the help of the other supporting facts. But from the above mentioned discussion it is clear to presume that from very early period coins was in circulation in Bengal although it may not be the indigenous coins but it was of the major ruling dynasties of India. As far as our present study is concerned now we will turn our attention on the coinage of Koch Kingdom.

## II

The territory of Koch kingdom<sup>21</sup> originally formed a part of the ancient kingdom of Pragjyotish and Kamrupa<sup>22</sup> and had no separate existence of its own as a distinct principality prior to the abolition of the ancient Kamrupa Kingdom in the middle of the sixteenth century. So the early history of the state therefore legitimately belongs to the wider history of Kamarupa.<sup>23</sup> It cannot be clearly ascertained at what date or even in what century in particular the kingdom of Kamrupa or

Pragjotish was founded.<sup>24</sup> There cannot however be any doubt regarding its great antiquity. It is mentioned in the Mahabharata that Bhagadatta, the king of Pragjyotish was a contemporary and a powerful ally of Durjodhana and fell on the field of *Kurukshetra* fighting on his side.<sup>25</sup> There is also no definite information regarding the territorial extent of this ancient kingdom. The boundaries appear to have varied in different times.

The entire country of Kamrupa is considered sacred by the *Puranas* and *Tantras* and its subdivisions are called *Pithas* or sacred tracts.<sup>26</sup> The ancient Kamrupa was divided into four *Pithas*. These are Kama-Pitha, Ratna-Pitha, Suvarna-Pitha and Saumara-Pitha. There were other minor *Pithas* besides this and they were included in one or other of the wider sub divisions. The western part of the country lying between the river Karatoya in the west and the river Sankosa in the east called the Kama Pitha. The Swarnakosa or Sankosa as it is popularly called roughly marks the eastern boundary of Koch Kingdom. The territory of Koch kingdom thus formed part of the Kama-Pitha and bordered on the Ratna-Pitha which lay on the east of the Sankosa and extended as far as the river Rupika.<sup>27</sup>

As far as the economic history of the Koch kingdom is concerned likewise the political history, the economic history cannot also be discussed without the Kamarupa's economic history as because prior to the abolition of the Kamarupa kingdom there was no sovereign existence of the Koch Kingdom and it was formed a part of the Kamarupa kingdom. So before going into the analysis of the coinage system of Koch kingdom it is important to discuss about the system of coinage in Ancient Pragjotish-Kamarupa. Though Koch territory earlier formed a part of the Pragjyotish-Kamarupa kingdom, so we can have a little idea about the exchange system in Koch territory prior to the establishment of the Koch kingdom in the first half of the sixteenth century.

### **Monetary Scenario of Kamarupa:**

The Mahasthangarh inscription<sup>28</sup> seems to suggest the inclusion of present North Bengal territory in Maurya Empire. But there is little information about the socio-economic life of Assam

during the pre-Christian period and about its relation with the Mauryas, but one cannot ignore the significant fact that we have not discovered in Assam any punched marked coin, which was the regular silver and copper currency of the Mauryas although such coins have been found in considerable numbers as far east of Bengal. Surprisingly it is the fact that we have not found in Assam any of the abundant issues of the Gupta even though we know that the province of Pundrovardhana or North Bengal formed a part of the Gupta empire from the fourth to sixth century A.D. and the ancient Assam or the Pragjyotish-Kamrupa country was separated from the Pundravardhana territory in the west only by the river Karatoya.<sup>29</sup> In the same context we have to remember that Pushyavarman of Assam and his successor appear to have had political relation with the Gupta emperor probably as subordinate allies of the latter and that it is difficult to accept complete lack of trade between Assam and Gupta Bengal especially when the spread of Gupta influence in Assam is evidenced by the use of Gupta years 510 (i.e. 829 A.D) in the Tezpur inscription of Harjaravarman.<sup>30</sup>

But more than fifty gold coins of the imperial Gupta type were found by the laborers while digging the earth near a temple at Paglatek on the south bank of Brahmaputra above fifteen kilometers west of Goalpara in Assam. These coins believed to be the oldest discovery of coins in Assam.<sup>31</sup> To comment on these coins D.C. Sircar suggested that ‘considering the practical lack of numismatic tradition in early Assam and the identity of the Paglatek coins in type and weight, with that of similar gold coins found in considerable number in Bangladesh and Tripura, the Paglatek coins would appear to have gone there from the adjoining eastern regions of Bangladesh where such coins were being issued for a few centuries after Sasanka’s death in the first half of the seventh century A.D.’.<sup>32</sup> Recently after re-examining the coins of Paglatek hoard at the state museum Mr. S.K. Bose have been deciphered as *Sri Kumara*. In Sy-yu-ki, Hiuen Tsang mentioned Bhaskarvarman as Sri Kumara. From literary and other sources we find that coins were in use in Kamarupa during Bhaskaravarman’s time but none of such has yet been found. It is claimed that the coins bearing legend Sri Kumara may be

issued by great ruler Bhaskarvarman of Pushyavarman dynasty of Kamarupa.<sup>33</sup> If the claim is accepted the existence of coinage in Assam may be pushed back to the middle of the seventh century. It may be mentioned that '*Kumara*' is the name of another ruler of Salastambha's house who ruled in Kamarupa during eighth century. Much information about the '*Kumara*' is not available whose tenure was not as long as Bhaskaravarman allies Sri Kumara.

In the first half of the seventh century A.D., the great king Bhaskaravarman of Assam had very close relation with Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh not only as an enemy of Sasanka and a friend of Harshavardhana but also as a visitor of Karnasuvarna, Kajangala, Prayaga and Kanyakubja and must have seen the gold coins of Sasanka and the silver issues of Harsha. Still we have not discovered even a single coin of Bhaskaravarmana. The explanation must be that the bankers and traders men of seventh century Assam did not feel any necessity of coins because they could manage with barter and such media of exchange as cowries shells and produced of the field.<sup>34</sup> Thus even if Bhaskaravarmana issued any coins they were meant for use at particular occasions and were minted in small numbers.

The next numismatic development of significance which have undoubtedly proved the existence of metallic coin in Assam as back as in ninth century A.D., are coins from two other hoards, both are from tea gardens. The first lot of thirty three coins were unearthed in seventies at Dhulapadung tea estate near Tejpur. D.C. Sircar opined that 'these finds.....seems to suggest that these coins were issued on a particular occasions and limited number'<sup>35</sup> But subsequent discovery of 2089 coins, recently in a hoard at Tulip tea estate near Dhakiajuli and some more Nakuchi Bargaon in modern Kamarupa district have proved beyond doubt that coins were in use as money in Kamarupa much earlier than what have been believed so long.<sup>36</sup> These coins are roughly round shaped and their weight varies between 1.94 and 15.87 grms and their diameter between 2.5 and 3.1 centimeters.<sup>37</sup> The chief interest of the hoard is that the thirty three coins bear a blank reverse and show a single letter obverse legend which is *ha* on some specimens and *Va* on other. The letter *ha*, which might be assigned to the ninth century A.D., on paleographical grounds would suggest that the coins might be

ascribed to the same century. These types bearing *Ha*, *Va* and *Ta* in Brahmi script have so far been identified and linked with Harjavardhana, Balavarmana or Valavarmana and Tyagasimha all of the Mlechcha dynasty of Salasthambha who ruled in 9<sup>th</sup> century in this region. No other similar coins were known in this region or in any neighboring region before or after the period so they represent a unique numismatic phenomenon. The simple design of a single letter implies that there are no religious dimensions to the issue. The choice of copper and the fact that no examples have been found outside Kamarupa itself implies that internal use was intended. The fact that they have only been found in a few places rather than widely spread seems to indicate that they were used to facilitate trade in few markets rather than used as a wider store of wealth. Numismatist Nicholas Rhodes has some different clarifications regarding this copper coins. According to him trade seems the most likely reason. The Nan Jiao kingdom in south western China was growing in importance at this period and it was keen to acquire cowrie shells which formed the main currency of this region. Kamarupa may have identified a trading opportunity in the export of shells to china and the copper coins may have been issued to ensure that market traders at home were not inconvenienced by the consequent scarcity of cowrie shells available for local use.<sup>38</sup>

Though there is controversy regarding the use of coins but there is also unanimity among the scholars that besides coins, cowrie shells played an important role in trade and transaction in Kamarupa and adjoining areas for such a long time prior to the introduction of metallic coinage by the different regional powers. They were popular among the people because they were of a small enough size to be useful in making small daily perches. The earliest reference of using cowrie shells by a ruler of Pragjyotish is seen in *Harshacharita* which states that Bhaskarvarman presented Harsha with heaps of black and white cowrie.<sup>39</sup> The Tezpur inscription of 829 A.D. speaks of a fine of *Panchavattika* or 5 Budis, i.e. 20 cowrie shells. The continued use of cowrie shells in Assam is indicated by the Nilachal plates of Madhava who ruled in fifteenth century as the said record counts 320 *Gandas*

or 1280 *cowrie* shells as equivalent of one silver coin.<sup>40</sup> *Ganda*, equal to 4 cowrie-shells and 1/5 of a *Budi*, is also a measure of calculation on like the *Budi*.

The most of the people were self-sufficient in the necessities of life and urban communities were non-existent and limited market trading was facilitated by the use of cowrie enabled the traditional patterns of life to be maintained. The phrase 'only strangers need money, people who know each other can do without' applied. Strangers were rarely seen in the region and were actively discouraged by the Ahoms, who adopted in isolationist policy of discouraging outside traders to come to their country. The lack of a coinage helped to ensure a degree of social stability and indeed there was no incentive for those in power to allow coins to be used.<sup>41</sup>

Thus prior to the Muslim invasion in the early thirteenth century coinage in Kamarupa was conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps the reason for the lack of any state sponsored coinage during the centuries around the millennium can be found in the structure of the society and in particular it may have been that the interest of the ruling class would not have been served by a money based economy. Society was probably based on the largely self-sufficient village, with villagers strictly divided into occupational based castes and taxes would have been paid through labor or kind, with the rulers not needing to purchase anything. Without money the villagers were to a large extent deprived of physical mobility and with the caste system were also deprived of social mobility. A stable and structured community such as this with the rulers of the caste system enforced by priests is relatively easy to rule provided the authority of the king is recognized by the priests. The ruler may discourage the use of coins by the people because of the financial independence and hence physical mobility that such coins could give to sectors of the community such as traders.<sup>42</sup>

In the thirteenth century the situation changed in Bengal when the Muslim invaded and occupied political power from the Hindu ruling dynasty, the Senas. The Muslims introduced a coinage of fine silver<sup>43</sup> which may have had the effect whether intended or not of increasing the power and influence of the trading classes at the expense of the Hindu religious institutions. On the

other hand rulers who do not have the support of the priests may introduce coins in order to gain the political support of the secular population particular the traders, farmers or artisans and hence they can control the country in a very different way. The coins can be used by rulers to perches goods or service from the people and in that way the economy can be controlled. <sup>44</sup>

When Mohammed Bakhtiyar invaded and conquered Bengal in 1202, he has had just these ideas in mind when he introduced coins into the economy, limiting production to large silver and gold pieces. As a Muslim he could only hope to gain lasting control over the Brahmin priests and gaining the support of at least some of the Hindu population. The Muslim invaders may have decided that by encouraging trade and allowing the Hindu trading and banking community to enrich them, they would gain their support and ensure that they were able to exercise stable political control over the newly conquered territory. The introduction of a silver and gold coinage may have been part of the strategy through which Bengal was successfully ruled by the Muslims. <sup>45</sup> Thus in this way Muslim system of coinage introduced in this part of the country.

Another very important political development of fourteenth and fifteenth century is that side by side of Muslim intervention in eastern India and also due to the abolition of the Kamarupa kingdom a regional state formation process started and most of these new powers were dominated by the Hindus. We must keep it in mind that from time immemorial India was mostly predominated by the Hindu religion and its followers, so when the Muslims assume in the power in India, the Hindu population did not took the align culture whole heartedly and a sense of discontent prevailed in their mind and it was reflected in the form of revolts in various occasions in the Muslim period. <sup>46</sup>

At the time when Muslim invaders started to expand their empire in the eastern side of Indian subcontinent the Brahmins of the Gangetic valley and also from Bengal were feeling threatened and unvalued in territories that had become increasingly Islamicised and some of them started migrating eastward. <sup>47</sup> A process of Hindu state formation commenced in the eastern India when one or more Brahmins or Brahmin groups convinced a local tribal leader to embrace Hinduism. The Brahmins

provided the rulers with a genealogy appropriate to a Hindu monarch and in exchange the Brahmins received valuable patronage. The new Hindu state formation process also involved a degree of social stratification which may have made the tribal aristocracy feel more comfortable with the stability of the regime. Furthermore the new Hindu states provided a more secure ideological barrier to the eastward spread of Islam, which must have been a factor that worried both rulers and the Brahmins.

### III

The kingdom of Kamta Koch Behar was a direct consequence of this Hindu resistance of Islam, likewise the other Hindu principality namely Ahom, Tripura, Kachar etc. in other parts of North Eastern India. Koch Behar was a small kingdom situated just south of the great Himalayas controlling the main route up the Brahmaputra river from Bengal and Bihar to Assam. The state was founded about 1496 in the vacuum created after the collapse of the Kingdom of Kamarupa and Kamta. Though some other minor dynasties ruled in the kingdom prior to the acquisition of power by the Koch but no significant development in the economic sphere took place because of the political unpredictability. It was under the Koch who first stabilized the political condition by suppressing the other tribal groups and also initiated for the economic stability of the kingdom and took concrete steps to give the kingdom a strong economic footing.

Before entering into the core issues of the Koch coinage it is important to give the salient features of the Koch coinage. Koch coins were die-struck and round in shape. They were struck in a comparatively broad and thin flan in imitation of the *Tankas* of the Sultans of Bengal and were about 172 grains (11.15grams) in weight. They did not bear any device but have like their prototype, legends on both sides. These legends were in Sanskrit and were written in Bengali characters.<sup>48</sup> The obverse side of the Koch coins bore the name of the king and the date in Saka era and the phrase '*Sri Sri Sivcharana Kamala Madhu Karasya*' inscribed in the reverse. This particular phrase was engraved

in most of the coins of the Koch rulers. The coins of the Koch kingdom were not only known as *Narayani Mudra* after the title Narayan assumed by the rulers but also as '*Sihvatanka*' as the association of Siva with the people of the kingdom was very deep rooted.<sup>49</sup> These Narayani rupees were the most dominant currency for circulation in both Koch kingdom itself and the neighboring areas of Assam and Bihar. But there is no historical evidence as when coins were first used in the Koch Kingdom. The oldest surviving coin of Kamtapura was of Samsuddin Ilias Saha<sup>50</sup> in 759 *Hijri* (1358) with the inscription of *Kamru* as *Chaulistan* which was recovered with other coins from Kamarupa (Gosanimari) in 1863.<sup>51</sup> Besides this large hoard of 13,500 coins spanning the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, coins were found in other places of Koch Behar also.<sup>52</sup>

### **Monetary Scenario in Kamatapur under the Khan:**

Likewise the political history of the Koch Kingdom before Visvasimha the evolution of money economy also lays in deep mystery. For the lack of proper historical information, it is unknown to us that when and how coinage came to replace the system of barter mode of exchange. Though some other dynastic coinage like those of, Maurya, Gupta, Sultanate Bengal etc. have been found within the territory of Koch kingdom but with those little amounts of coins it was hardly possible to run a full-fledged kingdom's exchange system. Before the establishment of the Koch dynasty the *Khen*<sup>53</sup> was the major political power of this area centering the Kamtapura (Gosanimari) as their capital. Nilambar<sup>54</sup> was the most powerful king of the Khen dynasty. Nilambara attained great power and extended his rule eastward to the Bara Nadi and westward as far as Karatoya. He also included within his dominations the north eastern part of the tract which previously belonged to the Islamic rulers of Bengal.<sup>55</sup> But Nilambar or the other Khyan rulers did not take any step to introduce coins or issued any coins to commemorate their political victory over the region as the archeologist yet not found any coins belonged to the Khyan kings.

Though archeologically we have no specimen of Khyan coins but we have some literary reference of coins during the Khyan times. As for example Radha Krishna Das Vairagi in his book ‘Gosanimongal’<sup>56</sup> which was written in poetic style mentions the introduction of ‘Mohur’ or gold coin by king Kanteswar a king of the Kheyen dynasty. He wrote....

*“Mama Nama Khudi Koro Mohur Taiar*

*Kanteswari Mohur Boli Hoibe Prochar”<sup>57</sup>*

This means.... king Kanteswar orders to introduce gold coin on which his name must be engraved and that will named as Kanteswari Mohur.

Again in another place it is referred.....

*“Sonar Mohur Bande Hajare Hjar*

*Sakat Purilo Nia Andar Vitor”<sup>58</sup>*

But these are only literary references until any discovery of the coins of Kanteswar it is not to be taken as an authentic reference. But in Kamtapura ruins a mint is discovered by the Archeological Survey of India and which can be treated as a reference that in that mint Khyan coin might be minted at that mint.

### **Visvashimha (c.1496-1533):**

After Nilambara the last king of the Khyan dynasty of Kamtapura, Visvasimha of Koch clan became the ruler of Kamtapura. Visvasimha during his first few years of reign was busy in consolidation his position to the north of the Brahmaputra. After the departure of the Muhammadans<sup>59</sup> the whole country was ruled by a number of petty independent chiefs. Visvasimha seized this opportunity and in course of time made himself the master of the country west of the Bara Nadi.<sup>60</sup> Visvasimha assumed the title of Kamteswra and declared himself as an independent king after his formal coronation in 1496. It was the usual practice among the Indian rulers to issue coins in their own name, the moment they felt themselves independent and powerful enough to do so. But

unfortunately no coins have so far been discovered. Neither Darrang Vamsavali nor Rajapakhyan <sup>61</sup> of Koch Behar says anything whether Visvasimha struck coins. This may lead to us to believe that unstable political condition of the time might have prevented Visvasimha from issuing any coins in his name.

Though archeologically no coins of Visvasimha have been found yet but in some literary sources both from Assam and Koch Behar inform us about Visvasimha's coins. The Assam *Burunji* by Rai Gunabhiram Barua informs us that the predecessors of Visvasimha did not issue any coins. <sup>62</sup> In another words the author of the Assam *Burunji* wants to suggest and emphasis the point that Visvasimha was the first ruler of Kamtapura, who issued coins in his own mane. Again Ripunjoy Das in his *Rajavamsavali* says that Visvasimha enthrone himself in Saka 13 and struck coins in his own name. <sup>63</sup> From the *Burunji* of Rudrasimha <sup>64</sup> we learn that one Ahom ruler sent an expedition against Visvasimha in about 1405 Saka i.e.1483. Visvasimha who was only consolidating his position at that time, acknowledged the suzerainty of the Ahom king with many presents which have not been specified in the book. But Mjumdar refers to a meeting between the Ahom king Suhunmun and Visvasimha in Saka 1419 (i.e., 1497) and the latter's presentation of 500 of pieces of struck coins and five horses to the former. <sup>65</sup>

*“Suni Visvasimha bhupa Mahananda mane  
Apana jarava tada kori sehi kshana  
Pancha sat a mudra dila pancha turangama  
Manojava gati tara drishti haya bhrama”*

This means....Hearing this king Visvasimha with his mind filled with great delight immediately presented a parse of a coin struck in his own name. He gave 500 coin and five horses

The coins of Visvasimha so much impressed the Ahom king that he wanted to make similar coins in his own name. He is also said to have admitted that none of his thirteen predecessors had any coins.

*“Turanga dekhiya mama ranga atisaya  
Apara jarav a dekhi haila vismaya*

*Bale 'mama Vamsa-madhya traya-dasa jana  
Rajatva kariya svarge karila gamana  
Tathpi jarava nahi kare kona bhupa  
E jarava dekhilama ati aparupa  
Ehi mata alochiya Assam Isvara  
Brahmana pandita ani rachila mohura.' ”<sup>66</sup>*

This means....After seeing the Koch coins the Ahom king was so astonished and impressed and thought why his thirteen predecessors not minted coins. Ahom king then called the Brahmins and ordered to mint his own coins.

The above statement make two points absolutely clear, first Visvasimha issued coins in his own name and secondly, the Ahom ruler got inspiration from these coins to strike coins in his own name and Ahom rulers were generally influenced by the coins of the Koch kingdom. But no coins of Visvasimha have been discovered yet so the matter still needs thorough investigation.

### **Nara Narayan (1533-1587):**

After the death of Visvasimha Malladeva ascended the throne after expelling Nara Simha and assumed the name Nara Narayan.<sup>67</sup> Although there may be speculations as whether Visvasimha issued coins or not but it was unquestionably credit of his son Nara Narayan who struck coins and his coins are discovered plenty in number from Koch Behar and adjoining areas. He issued numerous types of die struck coins, among them full rupees are very plentiful but only a few specimens of half and quarter rupees are known.<sup>68</sup> All his coins are of the same design with an invocation to Siva on the obverse and the name of the king and the date 1477 (1555) on the reverse.<sup>69</sup> It is probably that this merely represents the accession year and the coins were struck on several occasions and perhaps even in the several mints throughout his reign.<sup>70</sup> (Plate No. I-III).

To expand the frontier of his kingdom and to get wealth Nara Narayan started the aggressive warfare initiated by Visvasimha against the tribal states of North East India together with his brother Sukladhvaja whom Nara Narayan appointed as his commander-in-chief. Nara Narayan continued the

policy of expansion initiated by his father Visvasimha through aggressive warfare. The analysis of his military campaign will light on the amount of silver that Nara Narayan is reputed to have obtained as booty and tribute as he extended his kingdom and secondly it will give us some clue as to when and where Nara Narayan's army had struck coins. Valuable information can also be obtained from certain hoards that have been discovered containing coins of this king.

Nara Narayan started to plan a military attack towards the Ahom kingdom of Assam fairly early in his reign in view of aggressive policy of Ahom king Sukenmung.<sup>71</sup> In course of these operations the Koch constructed an embankment road the whole way from their capital in Koch Behar to Narayanpur, in the south west of what is now the north Lakhimpur subdivision, a distance of some 350 miles. The work was carried out under the supervision of Gosain Kamal, the king's younger brother; parts of it are still in existence and are known to this day as Gosain Kamal's road.<sup>72</sup> This great undertaking was completed in 1547 and the Koch then created a fort at Narayanpur. Suklenmung struck in behind them and entrenched himself on the bank of the Pichala river. He thus cut off their supplies and forced them to assume the offensive. The result was a disastrous defeat for the Koch. Many were slain in the assault and a large number of fugitives were subsequently surrounded and killed.

This decisive defeat led to a cessation of hostilities for some years, but in 1562 a fresh attempt was made by Nara Narayan to overcome his powerful rival. According to one of the *Ahom Burunji* this war arose out of a dispute in connection with Nara Narayan's invasion of the Kachari country, in the course of which he is said to have devastated some villages inside the Ahom frontier. A force was sent up the Brahmaputra in boats as far as the mouth of the Dikhu, where an engagement took place in which the Ahoms appeared to have been worsted. In the following January the formidable Chilarai<sup>73</sup> himself took the field with a large force and, in a second engagement near the Dikhu inflicted an overwhelming defeat on the Ahoms. Their king and his chief nobles fled to Charaikharang in Kamrupa and the Koch entered their capital Garghaon in triumph. After this resounding military

victory a treaty was agreed in July 1563 whereby the Ahom king presented Nara Narayan with among other things a large store of gold and silver coins and the whole of the north bank of Brahmaputra passed under Koch rule. <sup>74</sup> Kumar Kamal Narayan was appointed *Uparaja* or representative of the king in Morang country (in the district of Lakshmpur).

Nara Narayan annexed Kachar after conquering Assam. After the defeat of the Ahoms Sukladhva advanced towards Maibong the capital of the kingdom of the Kachar. The Kachar king quickly submitted and presented Sukladhaja with many valuables and twenty-eight elephants. He acknowledged to Nara Narayan and promised to pay an annual tribute of 70,000 silver coins, one thousand gold coins and 60 elephants. Sukladhaja established a colony in Kachar. <sup>75</sup>

Manipur was the next kingdom acknowledged Koch suzerainty. The king of Manipur feeling himself too weak to oppose so powerful Koch without resistance. His tribute was fixed at an annual tribute of 20,000 silver coins, 300 gold coins and 10 elephants. <sup>76</sup>

The kingdom of Jayantia was next attacked and in the battle that followed the king was killed by Chilaray with his own hand. His son was placed on the throne after acknowledging the authority of Koch kingdom and promising to pay regular tribute. The tribute was fixed at 10,000 silver coins together with some horses and weapons. It is said that the one of the conditions imposed on him was that he should not in future strike coins in his own name. This seems to imply that Jayantipur had struck coins prior to this date but it is also possible that the story was invented later as an explanation as to why virtually all Jayantipur coins even up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century did not have the name of the ruler. <sup>77</sup> From Jaintipur Sukladhja advanced to Sylhet and extracted an annual tribute of 3,00,000 silver coins, 10,000 gold coins 100 elephants and 200 horses before turning his attention Tripura. <sup>78</sup>

A fierce battle was fought probably in the plains of Kachar near Khaspur, north of Silchar and the king of Tripura was apparently killed together with eighteenth thousands of his troops. <sup>79</sup> His son was set up in his place and undertook to pay tribute of 10,000 silver coins, 100 gold coins and 30 horses. <sup>80</sup> There is no mention of this war in the Tripura chronicles and the only corroboration of the

Koch *Vamsavalies* is found in an Assamese *Buranji* of uncertain date. This is not sufficient to establish it as an historical fact.<sup>81</sup>

Subsequently an annual tribute was fixed at 9,000 rupees and a body of soldiers was stationed in Brahmapur (now Khaspur) to maintain the authority of Nara Narayan. Later his brother Gohain Kamal became an independent ruler of Kashpur and his descendants ruled the area until the early eighteenth century.<sup>82</sup> It is possible that coins may have been struck by Gohain Kamal in the name of Nara Narayan as part of the process of the formation of this site.

The king of Khyrim then offered submission and tribute and apparently managed the Koch authority that trade was important to his kingdom and asked permission to strike coins. Agreement was given on the understanding that the coins were in the name of Nara Narayan and that they had the symbol of a mace to distinguish them from the normal Koch Behar coins and the king then set up a mint.<sup>83</sup> Annual tributes were fixed at 900 gold coins, 15,000 silver coins 50 horses and 30 elephants.

Though this wars which led to the defeat of rival neighboring powers in the region the Koch kingdom emerged as a strong state with tribute paying subordinate allies. This in turn enabled it to raise a substantial amount of surplus from the region and strengthened further. Continuity of 'aggressive warfare' under the commandship of Chilarai further extended the territory of the kingdom. These military expeditions resulted a collection of indemnity totaled Rs. 380000, 22100 gold, 264 elephants 370 horses and other valuable goods.<sup>84</sup> The first installed of total Rs. 3,80,000, from subordinate allies and the promises of an annual tribute of Rs. 42,2000, 22,200 gold coins, 320 horses, 260 elephants and other valuable commodities significantly contributed to the economic development of the Koch kingdom. It also accelerated the state formation and consolidation of the economy.

By the mid 1560's Nara Narayan became unquestionably the most powerful ruler in the North East, although it is not clear far how long he managed to retain his empire. The Koch chronicles are silent over whether the promised annual tribute was collected and if so for how long. The chronicles

of the defeated kingdoms are silent over the Koch conquest. The most likely scenario seems to be that the extended Koch Empire did not survive for longer than a year or two and after the defeat by the Muslims at Gour the other tributary rulers quickly forgot their treaty obligations which Koch kingdom was in no position to enforce. However some territory north of Brahmaputra and east of the Sankosa river became part of the Koch Behar and control of this newly conquered region was delegated to Sukladhvja. However the amount of tribute recorded in the chronicles may well have been paid to the Koch Behar army at the time of the initial campaign, even if it was not paid yearly thereafter. Apart from Tripura and to a very limited extent Kachar and Jayantipur none of the tributary kingdoms had a coinage of their own so it is probable that any tribute in the form of coin would have been paid in coins of the Sultans. Coins of the Muslim rulers had been present in Assam since the thirteenth century and the local rulers probably had large hoards of them in their treasuries as stores of wealth. From such tribute and other booty acquired Nara Narayan would have obtained the new material for his coinage, so it is very likely that many of his coins were struck either during or soon after his military campaign.

As far as the source of silver <sup>85</sup> is concern trade was a major way of accumulation of metal. As there are no silver mines in northern Bengal or in the Himalayas it is worth considering the source of the silver used by the Koch Behar for this large coinage struck in the last half of the sixteenth century. During this period there was a major trade route between and Tibet, passing through Koch Behar and Bhutan. <sup>86</sup> This trade route was recorded by the English merchant and traveler Ralph Fitch in 1583, who noted that musk, wool, agate, silk and pepper were purchased. As he mentions no major exports it is not unreasonable to assume that the imports were paid for with silver, some of which was converted into silver coins in Koch Behar. It is not clear from any historical source whether this trade route was being used in the first half of the sixteenth century, although there are some numismatic evidence to suggest that around 1540 trade from Bengal to Tibet passed through the Dalakha <sup>87</sup> in the Kosi valley, and hence not through Koch Behar. Indeed the evidence of the coins of Koch Behar

would seem to suggest that the trade was probably minor in volume prior to the reign of Nara Narayan, and expand significantly sometime after his accession in 1555.

Silver was also obtained as booty or tribute during the successful military campaigns initially by Visvasimha while he was establishing a viable political entity and subsequently by Nara Narayan as he expanded his influence over the whole of the region. It seems likely that the initial impetus for the coinage may have been a demonstration of political power and independence from Muslim suzerainty. The existence of the coinage and the power and political stability of the new state would then have oiled the wheels of commerce and trade with Tibet through Bhutan and with Assam and this trade would in turn have provided an ongoing source of silver for the coinage.<sup>88</sup>

### **Lakshmi Narayan (1587-1627):**

After the death of Nara Narayan his only son Lakshmi Narayan ascended the throne and Raikat of Bykunthapur and other ministers of the state brought their *nuzars* to the king in the newly coined money.<sup>89</sup> The rupees are identical in style to the late coins of his father, but half rupees are also commonly found struck with rupee dies on smaller flans apart from these pieces, single examples of quarter and half rupees struck with special small dies are known and two rare varieties of rupee exist, one with the legend in a square and the other with an ornamental border of fourteen arcs.<sup>90</sup> All the coins have the accession date of 1509 RS, but both rupees and half are found with a date in the Koch Behar era below. (Plate No. III-V). Usually this date is clearly 98 RS (1608), but on a few pieces it may perhaps be read as 92 RS.<sup>91</sup> Most probably this date represents the actual date of issue of the coin, while the *Saka* date of 1509 was retained as the accession year. Exactly why this date should have been celebrated by the issue of coins is not certain as this period the first decade of the seventeenth century was one of considerable unrest. It may well be that it was Lakshmi Narayan's intention to date each coin with the year of issue following the Mughol custom and this year 98RS, was the only one in the later part of his reign when coins were struck. Lakshmi Narayan was a rather

weak ruler and in about 1596 he gravely offended many of his subjects by declaring himself to be a vassal of the Moghuls.<sup>92</sup> He encouraged a rebellion and he sought help from his Mughol allies after a period of increasing Mughol influence in Koch Behar in 1614 Lakshmi Narayan left his country to visit the Moghul Governor of Dhaka.<sup>93</sup> Once there he was detained and was able to return only after about four years having spent one year in Dhaka and three years in and around Agra, during which time he met emperor Jahangir near Ahmadabad in 1618. He was permitted to return to his country only after he had presented *Peskash* of about 80,000 Narayani coins to the Emperor.<sup>94</sup> According to one source during his period of detention Lakshmi Narayan agreed to strike coins only of half size,<sup>95</sup> but this does not seem to have been the case and the story may have been invented later to explain why Koch kingdom alone among the Indian states only issued coins of half rupees size after the middle of the seventeenth century.

### **Vira Narayan (1627-33):**

Vira Narayan succeeded his father Lakshmi Narayan to the throne in 1621.<sup>96</sup> His reign was marked by loss of martial glory and rapid falling of territories. A few rare rupees and half rupees are known of this king, dated 1548 S and 117 RS, corresponding to the early months of 1627.<sup>97</sup> These coins are unique in the series having an invocation to Krishna, rather than to Siva and Parvati (Hara Gauri). (Plate No. V). But there is a good deal of controversy among the scholars regarding the coins of Vira Narayan centering on the legend and the issuing date of these coins. The matter needs careful examination. It is believed that Lakshmi Narayan the father of Vira Narayan was alive up to the beginning of Saka 1549 and accordingly the same Saka year is considered to be his son Vira Narayan's installation year.<sup>98</sup> This supposition is based on an extant letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> October 1627 AD, (1549 Saka) written by a Portuguese Jesuit named Stephen Cacella. It was stated in the letter that Cacella met King Lakshmi Narayan at Hajo in September 1626 AD, (1548 RS) on his way to Bhutan.<sup>99</sup> Casella resumed his journey from Behar to Bhutan on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1627 AD (1528 Saka). At that

time Gabur Saha the son left Behar, Lakshmi Narayan died and his son Kumara Vira Narayan was duly installed as the king.<sup>100</sup>

From this evidence it is evident that Lakshmi Narayan died sometime between 2<sup>nd</sup> February and 4<sup>th</sup> October 1627. However as there is no other point to the exact death year of Lakshmi Narayan in the Saka era, this is because both Saka 1548 (ending in mid-April) and Saka 1549 (beginning from mid-April) were forced in the year 1627. The date of Lakshmi Narayan's death in the History of Cooch Behar is therefore only a conjecture.<sup>101</sup>

Now with the help of the dated coins of Vira Narayan we can come to the conclusion that Lakshmi Narayan died some time in between 2<sup>nd</sup> February and mid-April 1627, when the Saka year 1548 was in force. Kumar Vira Narayan ascended the throne in the same Saka year and coins were struck with the date Saka 1548 on it, according to the traditional system of the royal family. We regard these two full coins as coronation coins because the Koch Behar era- *Rajasaka* 117 inscribed on these coins corresponds to the *Saka* year 1548.<sup>102</sup>

The epithets inscribed on the reverse of all the coins of the Koch Behar rulers, described as either *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya* or *Sri Sri Hara Gouri Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya*.<sup>103</sup> But an exceptional example is the epithet on the coin of Vira Narayan, where he was described as *Sri Sri Krishna Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya*.<sup>104</sup> This change to a Vaishnavite epithet during Vira Narayan's reign is corroborated with certain historical facts which we would like to state here.

The Vishnava religion obtained a strong footing in the country during the later part of the reign of Lakshmi Narayan the father of Vira Narayan. Madhavadeva (the disciple of Sankardeva) and Damodardeva, the two Vaishnava reformers, left their native country because of the oppression of the Ahom king and reached the kingdom of Kamta.<sup>105</sup> Lakshmi Narayan received them with favor and offered them shelter. Prince Vira Narayan and many ladies of the royal family were charmed by his qualities and became attached to Madhavadeva. The religion preached by Madhavadeva was

considered as the royal religion. Vaishnavism received official recognition when Lakshmi Narayan enrolled himself as the disciple of Damodardeva, who became the royal *Guru*. Under the instruction of Damodardeva animal sacrifice was prohibited for a time in the state worship. On the issue of greater importance of Vaishnavism some scholars argue that the coins of Vira Narayan were not actually coins but medallions issued in honor of Lord Krishna during the life-time of Lakshmi Narayan.<sup>106</sup> This explains also the paucity of this type of issues which were naturally not minted in large number.

Vira Naryanan's coins are important from another point of view. It is recorded in the *Rajopakhyana* that Lakshmi Narayan promised to the emperor Jahangir that he would only mint Narayani half coins and historians have accepted this story.<sup>107</sup> The story has however been doubted on the ground that in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* which preserves an account of the meeting of Lakshmi Narayan with Jahangir (1618) there is no such hint in relation to the restriction imposed on minting. Moreover the full coins of Prana Narayan grandson of Lakshmi Narayan were struck when Sahajahan was ruling.<sup>108</sup> The full coins of Vira Narayan thus establish a doubtful character of the evidence of the *Rajopakhyana* and the subsequent chronicles of Koch kingdom.

### **Prana Narayan (1633-65):**

On the death of his father Prana Narayan succeeded to the throne in about 1633. Seals and new coins were prepared bearing the name of the new king and the funeral rites of the late king were performed according to family custom under the new ruler's direction.<sup>109</sup> A large number of Prana Narayan's coins have been discovered. (Plate VI, XII, XII). Prana Narayan seemed to have changed the earlier system of striking coins. On the coins of Prana Narayan under the *Na* of *Narayan* symbol was something added, such as a cross or a crescent moon, with or without a dot. The coins of the new ruler differ from those of his predecessors in respect of its date as they no longer have fixed dates but have the actual date of striking initially 1653 RS or 155 RS but later both the full rupees and the half

rupees have a three digit date in the Rajsaka era. The half rupees were struck with rupee sized dies so the date which appeared at the bottom of the reverse design was usually off the flan and hence illegible. Perhaps the most remarkable coin of the period is a gold coin of which only a single example is known. This is of particular interest as the date is written as 753, which must be the Nepal *Samvat* era that was used by the Malla dynasty in Nepal.<sup>110</sup> This is probably the only time this exclusively Nepalese era was used outside Nepal and must have been something to do with the fact that one of Prana Narayan's sisters Rupamati Devi married Pratap Mallao of Kathmandu.<sup>111</sup> The coin is also unusual in that it weighs 6.9 gm., which does not conform to any of the well-known local weight standards. It is possible that the weight was intended to correspond to a Tibetan weight standard, as small bags of gold dust weighing about 7gms. used to circulate in Tibet as a form of currency.<sup>112</sup> During Prana Narayan's reign Bhutan had a strong leader in Shabdung Rimpoche who came from Tibet and established the rule of the Dugpa sect of Buddhism. At this time trade between Koch Behar, Bhutan and Tibet probably flourished and the half rupees of Prana Narayan are among the most common of all Koch Behar coins. The full rupees, by contrast are very scarce. It is worth noticeable that it was during this reign that the Ahoms in Assam began to strike coins, showing that there was a general flow of silver into the North East, coinciding with a change in Moghul North East frontier policy which was for a limited period centered more on trade than on conquest.<sup>113</sup>

In the reign of Prana Narayan the Koch rule came to a sudden halt for a little period because of the short lived victory of the Mughol army over the Koch kingdom. Mir Jumla the commander of Mughol army while directing his army towards Assam, invaded the Koch kingdom in 1661 and occupied the state. The Mughol occupied the kingdom for two years. The Mughol general Mir Jumla used Koch kingdom as military base for his ultimately disastrous expedition into North East India. During the Mughol occupation, Prana Narayan had to seek refuge in Bhutan and stayed there sometime and returned only in 1663.<sup>114</sup>

At this time Mir Jumla changed the name of the kingdom as *Alamgirnagar* and a half coin made of copper was struck bearing the name of Aurangzeb in Bengali script but this did not contain any date.<sup>115</sup> (Plate No. VIII: 55). A mint was established in Koch Kingdom where from the new coins were minted. The new coins were exactly similar to the half rupees of Prana Narayan with the legend in Urdu, but written in Bengali script. A symbol of cross was assigned to these coins to identify the coins distinctly and the symbol also bears some historical significance. These new coins were a new addition to the Koch numismatics.

### **Mada Narayan (1665-80):**

After the departure of the Mughol army from the Koch kingdom once again the Koch rule established in the territory and Moda Narayan son and successor of Prana Narayan ascended to the throne and he ruled from 1665-66 to 1680-81.<sup>116</sup> A large number of full and half rupee coin was minted in his reign but no full rupee coin of Moda Narayan has been discovered. (Plate No. VII). A number of half coins of this ruler are supposed to have been issued in different *Rajasakas*. Mada Narayan continued to strike half rupees with a *Rajasaka* date that appears to read illegible.<sup>117</sup> One such half rupee has a date that appears to read 179 *Rajasaka* equivalent to about 1689, or eight years after Mada Narayan's death. Two possible explanations may be derived from this. Some coins may have been struck in subsequent reigns retaining the name of the former king or perhaps more likely the dates which are so rarely visible had become meaningless and merely symbolic. Besides this like all other previous rulers the term *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhu Karasya* in *Nagri* script is engraved on the reverse side of his coins.

### **Vasudeva Narayan (1680-82):**

After Moda Narayan Vasudeva Narayan ascended to the Koch royal throne and coins were struck at the time of installation of the new king.<sup>118</sup> (Plate No. VII). The half rupees of Vasudeva

Narayan are among the rarest coins of Koch Behar. On the obverse *Sri Srimat Vasudeva Narayansya* and on the other side *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhu Karasya* were engraved in his coins. The half rupee coin of Vasudeva Narayan is a very rare variety of coin and not easily available. Only a few numismatists have Vasudeva's coin. Numismatist Nicholas Rhodes has a few of Vasudeva's coin in his custody.

### **Mahendra Narayan (1682-93):**

On the occasion of the death of Vasudeva Narayan without any lineage Mahendra Narayan, the great grandson of Prana Narayan was declared King.<sup>119</sup> Coins were struck at the installation but no coins of Mahendra Narayan have been surfaced yet now. It is very likely that half rupees were struck and that they will surface one day. Only limited numbers of coins were struck in the time of accession to fulfill the ancestral ritual and perhaps due to the internal chaotic condition of the state due to the growing rivalry between king and the nazir, Mahendra Narayan did not get the chance to mint coins for commercial purpose. Besides this the king was minor at the time of his accession and died only at the age of sixteen so he got little chance to consolidate the transaction system by issuing new coins. In Mahendra Narayan's coins the term '*Sri Srimat*' included to raise the prestige of the king where as most of his predecessors used only '*Sri Sri*'. Like his predecessors the epithet *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhu Karasya* was engraved in his coins.

### **Rupa Narayan (1693-1714):**

On the death of Mahendra Narayan his brother Rupa Narayan raised to the throne.<sup>120</sup> At the time of his accession coins were struck among them a few half rupee coins have been surfaced. (Plate No. VII). Rupa Narayan like his brother was trying to consolidate his political authority in view of the growing power of the *Nazir* so he perhaps did not get opportunity to mint coins for commercial purpose except the ceremonial coins at the time of his accession. Rupa Narayan also uses the term

*Srimat* before his name in his coins. During the reign of Rupa Narayan silver half coins were struck in much the same pattern as under Prana Narayan. Coins of Rupa Narayan are relatively scarce but not rare. His coins are now preserved in the British Museum and in the custody of Nicholas Rhodes.

### **Upendra Narayan (1714-1763):**

Rupa Narayan was succeeded by his eldest son Upendra Narayan. Coins were struck in the occasion of his accession.<sup>121</sup> (Plate No. VII). His coins are relatively common. It seems that production of his coins had increased during the latter part of his tenure. For this increase, growing trade between India and Tibet may be a probable cause. The trade relation between India and Tibet increased considerably after 1754 because of the siege of the Nepal valley by Prithvi Narayan Saha. Upendra Narayan's half rupee coins are preserved in the British Museum and Fitzwillium Museum. The term *Sri Srimat Upendra Narayansya Sake Karasya* is engraved in the obverse side and *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhu* is engraved on the reverse side of his coins.

### **Devendra Narayan (1763-1765):**

After the death of Upendra Narayan his son Devendra Narayan still a child was placed on the throne, and the government was carried on by the chief ministers of the state.<sup>122</sup> (Plate No. VIII) On the occasion of his coronation half rupee coins were minted and in the obverse side of these coins *Sri Srimat Devendra Narayansya Sake* and in the reverse side *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhu Karasya* is engraved. His coins are now preserved at British Museum, Fitzwillium Museum and in the custody of Nicholas Rhodes.

During the reigns of the above three kings half rupees were struck with close resemblances with the coins of Prana Narayan. The Coins did not have any date and many do not have the letter to the left of "ndra" visible so it is often not possible even to attribute them to the correct reign. Having said that coins of Rupa Narayan are relatively scarce while those of Upendra and Devendra are relatively

common so it seems that production increased during the latter part of this period. This increased production occurred most probably after 1754 when transit trade between India and Tibet through Nepal virtually ceased because of the siege of the Nepal valley by Prithvi Narayan Shah.<sup>123</sup> Koch Behar and Bhutan were able to benefit because they provided a viable alternative route for trade between India and Tibet. The coins of Devendra Narayan are particularly common and are found quite often in Bhutan. This is consistent with the fact that during this reign the influence of the Bhutanese in the affairs of Koch Behar increased and a representative of Bhutan together with an armed escort was based there and had a significant role in the administration of the State.<sup>124</sup> This Bhutanese influence over Koch Behar continued during the reign of Dhairyendra Narayan but the latter incurred the displeasure of the Bhutanese and in 1770 he was deposed and taken as prisoner to Punakha in Bhutan.

### **Dhairyendra Narayan (1765-70 & 1775-83):**

After the assassination of Devendra Narayan in 1765, Dhairyendra Narayan proclaimed as king.<sup>125</sup> But internal disputes were prevailing among the officials and in 1770 Rajendra Narayan placed to the throne. After Rajendra Narayan's death Dharendra Narayan was made king again supported by the Bhutanese. Though still there were some disputes regarding the re-accession of Dhairyendra Narayan in the throne but Dhairyendra Narayan was regarded as the rightful ruler by many people and to check the Bhutanese attack in the kingdom an appeal was made to the British to intervene. With an eye on the lucrative Tibetan trade the British agreed to provide assistance and a troop of the Company under Captain Jones was dispatched. As the price for this assistance Koch Behar became a tributary to the British. The Bhutanese were soon driven out of Koch Behar and under one of the terms of the treaty negotiated in April 1774, Dhairyendra Narayan was released. Dharendra Narayan remained as king but on his death in the following year Dhairyendra Narayan was restored to the Throne.<sup>126</sup> He was however very disillusioned with state affairs as he did not approve of the fact that his predecessor

had signed away his independence to the British. Strangely although it clear from British records that the Koch Behar mint was striking coins in large numbers during the years around 1780 only a few have the name of Dhairyendra Narayan. Accordingly it is possible that only coins with the legend Rajendra Narayan were struck during the second reign of Dhairyendra Narayan. (Plate No. VIII).

### **Rajendra Narayan (1770-72):**

Rajendra Narayan was installed on the throne with Bhutanese support but only ruled for two years until his death in 1772.<sup>127</sup> His coins are rather common and are readily identifiable as they have a cross to the right of the letter '*ndra*' rather than the normal dot. Interestingly sometime this cross is defaced by a small circular countermark making it look like dot.<sup>128</sup> (Plate No. IX). His coins are now kept in the British museum and Fitzwillium museum.

So from the above discussion we may come to this position that the system of currency in this part of the country was in vogue since from the beginning of the early centuries of this millennium. From the discoveries of the various currencies of mainstream dynasties of Ancient India we can prove the numismatic history of this region. Though due to the political as well as economic compulsions the system of currency never got an organized shape until the emergence of the regional kingdoms in sixteenth century but we can freely say that people of this region were accustomed with the use of currency from very early times. This habit of using currency in day to day transaction paved the way of introduction of Koch Kingdom's own coinage and also helped a lot towards the free acceptability of the Koch coinage among the people of the Koch kingdom and also other territories of its spheres of influence.

After its commencement by King Nara Narayan in the mid of sixteenth century Narayani currency became an acceptable media of transaction in the Koch kingdon, not only so it succeeded to establish its acceptability to the greater mass of the entire North East India. From the time of Nara Narayan to Rajendra Narayan the currency was in circulation and hugely popular among the masses

of the region. Until the reign of Rajendra Narayan its production of Narayani currency depended upon the will of the Koch Kings and the currency was produced accordingly. But in the last quarter of the eighteenth century its production came to a sudden halt due to the British intervention in the kingdom. The political events of that period is discussed elsewhere but we must have to mention here that after the treaty with the British in 1773 the external influence on the Koch Kingdom increased harshly and the free minting of the Narayani currency also hampered greatly. The course of events regarding the issuing coins by the successive rulers and its gradual decline will be discussed in the next chapter.

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6. *ibid.*, 1930-34, p. 225.
7. *ibid.*, 1921-22, p. 74.
8. D.C.Sircar, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.
9. Punched marked coins bear numerous symbols like bird, animal, human figure, tree, hill, river, sun, crescent, wheel, etc. The exact significance of many of the symbols is still remains uncertain.  
*ibid.*, p. 6.
10. W.H. Scholff, *op.cit.*, Section 63. The city of Ganga is placed by Ptolemy to the southern east of 'Thamalites' (Tamralipta?). There were gold mines in the vicinity. We know nothing of these mines though R.C. Majumdar refers to the existence of 'Gold District' (*Suvarna Vithi*) of a Faridpur grant. R.C.Majumdar (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.45.
11. H.C. Raychaudhury, *Political History of Ancient India*, New Delhi, 2006, p. 558.
12. This is only a general statement and must not be taken too literally. For a detailed study of the metrology of the Gupta coins, see John Allan, *Catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka King of Gauda*, New Delhi, 1975, Introduction, pp, cxxxi-cxxxv.
13. *ibid.*, p. cxxxiv.
14. We may refer to the inscription (5<sup>th</sup> century) of *Mahanavik* Budhagupta found in Malayasia. Budhagupta hailed from Raktamrittika Mahavihara (near Karnasuvarna, capital of Sasanka) (*Mahanavik Buddhaguptasya Raktamrittika vas...(ta vasya)*, Nihar Ranjan Roy, *Bangalir Itihas, Vol. I*, Calcutta, 1980, pp. 201-202.

15. Among these rulers the name of Samaccaradeva (*Ghugrahati* plate), Sasanka (John Allan, *op.cit.*,; also *JNSI*, XLII, 1980), Jayanaga (*Vappaghosavata* charter from Karnasuvarna), Devavarmana (possibly Devakhadga), Su-dhanvaditya (or Vasuvarman). Rajabhata, Balabhata, Jivadharanarata, Vangalamrganka, Annadadeva, Prthuvira and others. M.H. Rasid, 'The Mainamati Gold Coins' in *Bangladesh Lalitkala*, No. 1, 1975; B.N. Mukherjee 'Numismatic' in *Numismatic Studies*, Vol. 2, New Delhi, 1992, p. 31; B.N. Mukherjee, *Media of Exchange in Early Medieval North India*, NewDelhi, 1997; and *Coins and Currency System in Gupta Bengal*, New Delhi, 1992.
16. J. Barthelemy and Saint Hilari, *Hiouen –Tsang in India*, New Delhi, 1952.
17. P.K. Bhattacharya, in *JNSI*, Vol. XLII, 1981.
18. Nihar Ranjan Roy, *op.cit.*, pp. 209-11.
19. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, Calcutta University, 1980.
20. The theory of Indian feudalism has been strengthened by archaeological evidence of the decline of many major Gangetic cities as indicated of de-urbanization since post-Gupta period onwards; R.S.Sharma, 'Decay of Gangetic Towns in Gupta and post Gupta Times', *Proceeding of Indian History Congress*, 33<sup>rd</sup> Session, 1972, pp. 92-104; B.D. Chattopadhyaya however does not consider the trend as conclusive as he thinks the establishment of new cities during this period may have balanced the decline of old ones; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, "Trade and Urban centers in Early Medieval India", *Indian Historical Review*, (1-2), 1974, pp. 203-19. A comparative study of 'feudalism' is aimed at an international seminar at the University of Sydney, which resulted in an exciting publication on feudalism. Edmond Leech and Others, (ed.) *Feudalism: Comparative studies*, The Sydney Association for Studies and Culture, Australia, 1985.
21. The name Koch Behar is a compound of two words *Koch* and *Behar*. The term *Koch* is a corrupted form of *Coch* or *Koch*, being the name of a race of people inhabiting a large tract of country in the north east of Bengal and *Behar* are more properly *Vihar* denotes abode or sport. Thus the

- term 'Koch Behar' means the abode or land of the Koch. H.N. Chaudhuri, *Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue settlements*, Cooch Behar, 1903, p. 1.
22. Icchimuddin Sarkar, *Aspects of Historical Geography of Pragjyotisha Kamrupa (Ancient Assam)*, Calcutta, 1991.
23. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *Cooch Beharer Itihash, Vol. 1*, (Bengali), Cooch Behar, 1936, p. 6-8.
24. *Kalika Puranam*, edited by Tarkaratna Panchanan Acharyya, Calcutta, 1384 B.S., ch. 40, vs. 108-125, pp. 349-50.
25. K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa: From the Earliest Times to the end of the Sixteenth Century*, Shillong, 1933, p. 34.
26. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 6.
27. *ibid.*, p. 7
28. D.C. Sircar, *op.cit.*, pp. 79-80.
29. D.C. Sircar, *Studies in Geography of Ancient Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 159.
30. D.C. Sircar, *op.cit.*, pp. 289-90.
31. H.K. Barpujari, *Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. III*, (Article: S. Chattopadhyaya), Guwhati, 1994, pp. 55-56.
32. D.C. Sircar, *Early Indian Numismatic and Epigraphical Studies*, Kolkata, 1977, p.48.
33. *Coin*, 1999, note L: S.K. Bose.
34. Nicholas Rhodes., *The Coinage of North East India*, (unpublished manuscript), Kent, 1994, pp. 3-9.
35. H.K. Barpujari, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.
36. *Numismatic Digest, Vol.18*, (article: S.K.Bose), 1994, pp. 121-133.
37. J.P. Singh and N. Ahmed (ed.), *Coinage and Economy of North Eastern State of India*, JNSI, Varanasi, 1978, p.4.

38. Presidential Address given by Nicholas Rhodes in *NEIHA* Conference, Shilong, 2004, pp. 3-4.
39. H.K. Barpujari, *op. cit.*, p. 262.
40. D.C. Sircar, *op.cit.*, p. 47.
41. Nicholas Rhodes, *op. cit.*, pp 4-5.
42. *ibid.*, p. 3.
43. For a catalogue of coins of Sultans of Bengal see, Stan Goron, J.P.Goenka and Micheal Robinson, *The Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, New Delhi, 2001, pp.135-266. For an analysis of the coins in a historical context Syed Ejaz Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate, Politics, Economy and Coins (1205-1576)*, New Delhi, 2003.
44. Nicholas Rhodes, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.
45. *ibid.*, p.4.
46. To know more about Hindu Culture see, Sir Monier Williams, *Brahmanis and Hinduism, Religious Thought and Life in India*, New Delhi, 2004.
47. F. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam* (collected during the year 1807-1809), edited by S.K.Bhyun, Guwahati, 1987, pp. 51-52.
48. R.C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal, Medieval Period*, Calcutta, 1973, p. 282.
49. Bijoy Kumar Sarkar and Debajit Dutta, '*A Rare Gold Coin of Koch Kingdom*', *JNSI, Vol. LXXIII*, Varanasi, 2011, pp. 68-70.
50. Wright H.N., *Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum*, Calcutta, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1894, p.152.
51. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 279.
52. E. Thomas, 'The Initial Coinage of Bengal' *JRAS, Vol. II*, 1866 and *JASB*, 1867, p.1.
53. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp.36-48.
54. E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1963, p. 45. It may be mentioned that *Rudra Simha's Buruniji* (1634, now preserved in the office of Director of Ethnography, Assam) contains the accounts of rulers of Kamta previous to Visvasimha.

55. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-48.
56. Radha Krishna Das Vairagi, *Gosanimangal*, edited by N.N. Pal, Calcutta, 1992.
57. *ibid.*, pp. 100-101.
58. *ibid.*
59. The date of complete of evacuation of the Mohammedans is not known with any amount of certainty. But the last known date of the coins with the legend - Sultan (Hussain Saha) the conqueror of Kamaru, Kamta, Jajnagar and Orissa is *Hijri* 979 i.e. 1513; A.W. Botham, *Catalogue of Provincial Coin Cabinet of Assam*, Assam, Ahallabad, 1930. But it appears that Visvasimha's authority was well established in this part of Kamrupa even before 1513.
60. Khan Chawdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-88.
61. Munshi Joynath Ghosh, *Rajopakhyan*, edited by Biswanath Das, Kolkata, 1989.
62. *aru veharate visvasimha rajar purve kono taka na chhila*- this means....Before king Visvasimha there was no coin in vehara, Khan Chowdhuri Amantulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 280.
63. *13 (tera) Sakaya maharaja Visvasimha Simhasana prapta haiya apana name chhirka jarap kariyachhilen*, this means...*After assuming the royal throne King Visvasimha issued coins in his vown name*, Ripunjay Das, *Raja Vamsavali*, Manuscript preserved in NBSL, No 4, also edited by N. N. Pal, *Bishay Cooch Behar*, Calcutta, 1994, 16 patra.
- It may be mentioned here that the *Rajavamsavali* is considered to be the Second importance only to the *Rajopakhyana* as the source of the history of Cooch Behar, Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *ibid.*, p. 281.
64. *The Burunji of Rudrasimha*, 17 Patra; Khan Chowdhuri Amantulla Ahmed, *ibid.*, pp. 87, 281.
65. *ibid.*, pp. 280-283.
66. *ibid.*

67. In some of the old religious writings he is called Malla Narayan. In Blochman's paper on Cooch Bihar and Assam he is called *Bal Gosain*, but the proper reading should be Mal Gosain, as in Elloit and Dowson, *History of India as Told by its Historians*, Allahabad, 1964, Vol. VI, p. 591.
68. A similar situation is found with the coinage of the Sultans of Bengal, which is almost entirely confined to rupees and gold *mohur*'s favoring the large and powerful traders, so that it never became a true coinage of the people. In this way the coins of Nara Narayan were following the precedent set in Bengal, although they may have played a function as a symbol of political power a source of revenue for the state and perhaps as a convenience for the traders, it is doubtful if the coins ever circulated much among the people. Fitch writing about 1585 mentions that 'their small money is almonds which often times they use to eat'.
69. It is interesting to note that certain rupees of Islam Saha with no mint, but clearly struck in Bengal perhaps at Tanda, have a 'pseudo date' 1477 in Arabic numerals above the reverse. These pieces are dated 952-60 AH (1545-1552), whereas 1477 *Saka* - 1555 or three years after the end of Islam Saha's reign. These pieces may either be posthumous issues with pseudo AH dates, struck by Nara Narayan, with his accession year indicated or it is possible that '1477' has some meaning other than AH date. Nicholas Rhodes, 'The 1477 Type of Islam Saha Suri', *ONS Newsletter*, No 148, Spring, 1996, pp. 21-22.
70. After 1581 the kingdom was divided with Nara Narayan's brother Sukladvja and his descendants ruling the territory to the east of the Sankosa River. Coins were struck in this area by Raghu Deva dated 1510 *Saka* (1588), showing that at least at this time there was more than one mint in the region.
71. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 103-110; Debajit Dutta, 'King Nara Narayan's Military Campaigns in North East India: An Analysis through Numismatics', in *The NEHU Journal*, Vol. XI, No. 1, January 2013, pp. 34-43.

72. During the Ahom regime in Assam 'Gohai' signified a high officer of state. The '*Kumara*' of the Visvasimha's dynasty were also called 'Gohai' (Gosain?). In the Akbarnama we find the names 'Mal Gosai' and 'Sukal Gosai' and in the Baharistan-i-Ghaibi' the name 'Surya Gosai'.
73. Sukladhaja attacked his enemy suddenly like birds, and for this he was named 'Chila Rai'.
74. Details of the campaign are to be found in Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 103-110. 1, and in E.A. Gait, pp. 50-52.
75. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p.110.
76. *ibid.*
77. The subject is discussed by J.P. Singh "Jayantia Coins and the Koch Historical Tradition: An Examination", *N.I. Bulletin*, May 1988, pp.112-116.
78. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp.110-111.
79. Numismatic evidence proves that Vijaya Manikya of Tripura died in about 1564, but the *Rajmala* indicates that the king died of smallpox and no mention is made of any invasion from Cooch Behar.
80. The impressive gold *mohur* dated 1486 *saka* (1564 A.D.) with the lion type of Tripura and in the Name of Nara Narayan published by Vasanta Choudhury and Parimal Ray, *JNSI*, 1975, pp. 144, is considered to be a forgery, Nicholas Rhodes and Michal Mitchiner, *Spink's Numismatic Chronicles*, March/April, 1981.
81. E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 54.
82. J.B. Bhattacharjee, 'The Koch Principality in Kachar' in *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial North East India*, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 106-22.
83. G.C. Barua,(ed.) *Ahom Burunji*, Calcutta, 1930, p.40, quoted by N.C. Shadap, *The Origin and early History of the Khasi-Synteng People*, Calcutta, 1981, p. 157. The Khyrim chief at the time was either Viryavanta or Gunilanta.
84. Rup Kumar Barman, *From Tribalism to State*, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 86-87.

85. Nicholas Rhodes, "Silver in the Himalayas" *Mudra*, Vol. VII, No. 1, for a wider ranging discussion of the correction between silver coinage in the Himalayas and the Trans-Himalayan trade links.
86. A. Dab, "Cooch Behar and Bhutan in the Context of Tibetan Trade", *Kailas*, Vol. 1, 1973, pp. 80-88.
87. Undated Shimha *tankas* were struck by Jaya Indra Simha of Dalakha (c.1540-48). Nicholas Rhodes, Gabrisch and Valadettaro, *The Coinage of Nepal*, London, 1986, pp. 65-66.
88. Pranab Kumar Chattopadhyay and Gautam Sengupta, *History of Metals in Eastern India and Bangladesh*, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 110-124.
89. H.N. Chaudhuri, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, Cooch Behar, 1903, p.241.
90. Nicholas Rhodes, "A Remarkable Rupee of Cooch Behar", *Mudra*, Vol. VII, 199, no.1.
91. The date of 1549 S published by prof. P.K. Bhattacharyya 'On the Dates on the Coinage of Cooch Behar', *JNSI*, Vol. XXXIV, Pt.I, 1972, pp.93-6 & pl. IV, was wrongly read. The coin published is of 1509 S with the *Rajsaka* year 92 below, but as the die has been damaged, at this point the date is not easy to read.
92. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p.241.
93. *ibid.*
94. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 145.
95. *ibid.*, p. 144.
96. *ibid.*, p. 153.
97. Nicholas Rhodes and S.K.Bose, *The Coinage of Cooch Behar*, Dhubri, 1999, p. 19.
98. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 153-54.
99. C. Wessels, (ed.), *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia, 1603-1721*, The Hague, 1924.

100. *ibid.*, In Cooch Behar *Cabur* is used in the sense of ‘yuva’(young) and *Shah* in the sense of *Raja* (king), or in other words, the would be king and this has been represented as ‘*Gaburrasa*’ by Stephen Casella in his letters.
101. Vasanta Chowdhury and Parimal Roy, ‘Hitherto Unknown Coins of Cooch Behar of Vira Narayan and Mahendra Narayan’, *JNSI, Vol. XXXIII*, part I, 1971, Varanasi, pp. 129-132.
102. *ibid.*
103. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p.290.
104. Vasanta Chowdhury and Parimal Roy, *op.cit.*, p. 131.
105. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-65.
106. P.K. Bhattacharyya, ‘On the Dates on the Coinage of Cooch Behar’, *JNSI, Vol. XXXIV*, Part I, 1972, p. 93-96.
107. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 144.
108. *ibid.*
109. *ibid.*, p.154.
110. This coin was first published by V.V. Mirashi, ‘A Gold Coin of Prana Narayan’, *JNSI, Vol. III*, p. 93. The fact that Prana Narayan struck gold coins was mentioned in the *Padishahnamah*, H. Blochmann, ‘Koch Bihar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries According to the Akbarnamah, the Padsahanama and Fathiya-i-Ibriya,’ *JASB*, 1872, p.68.
111. A quarter *mohur* of Kathmandu struck in the name of Rupamati Devi in 669 NS (1649 A.D.), describes her as *Vihari Rajkanya*, (Princess of Behar).Nicholas Rhodes and Gabrisch and Valadettaro, *The Coinage of Nepal*, London, 1986, Coin No.262, p.87.
112. Nicholas Rhodes, ‘The Coinage of Cooch Behar’, *ONS Information Sheet*, No.10 1974.
113. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *A Mughol North East frontier policy: Being a Study of the Political Relations of the Mughol Empire with Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam*, Calcutta, 1994.
114. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 158-59.
115. R.D. Bannerji, ‘Alamgirnagar, A New Moghul Mint’, *JASB, Vol. XXXIII*.

116. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 244.
117. Nicholas Rhodes and S.K. Bose, *op.cit.*, 21.
118. Khan Choudhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, p. 173.
119. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p. 246.
120. *ibid.*, p. 247.
121. *ibid.*, p. 249.
122. *ibid.*
123. Nicholas Rhodes, "Silver in Himalayas", *London Numismatic Club Newsletter*. Jan. 1989,  
reprinted in *Mudra, Vol., VII*, 1990, No.1, p.6.
124. H.N. Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p.250.
125. *ibid.*
126. *ibid.*, p. 253.
127. Khan Chowdhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, *op.cit.*, 201.
128. It would be interesting to analyze the silver content of these coins, to see if the changed mark signaled any reduced fineness. In that case, any defacement of the mark may have been an attempt to have the coin accepted at higher standard. Nicholas Rhodes and S.K. Bose, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

## **Chapter IV**

# **Koch Coinage: From Anglo-Koch Treaty to Merger (1773-1949)**

The year 1773 was marked by the Anglo-Koch treaty in the history of the Koch kingdom and this treaty had profound influence over the following course of events in the Koch kingdom. By this treaty the kingdom became a subsidiary state and the administrative power to a great extent fall into the hand of the authorities of the English East India Company. This treaty had profound impact over the Kingdoms age long currency system also. Though the treaty had not banned the free minting of Narayani currency but from the later developments after the treaty we can understand that the British authorities was in no mood of its free circulation and different times they imposed certain restriction over the minting of Narayani coins. Though the Koch rulers took some initiatives but their efforts were not enough to revive the glory of the Narayani currency and due to the pressure of the imperial powers the currency lost its hold from the markets of the state and finally the circulation stopped officially form 1866. But before analyzing the declining process of the Narayani currency we will first look at the successive rulers who issued coins after 1773. The coins issued after this date was mainly ceremonial coins and issued only in the time of accession in limited numbers. This coronation issues started from the time of Dhairyendra Narayan and came down to the state's last ruler Jagaddipendra Narayan.

### **Harendra Narayan (1783-1839):**

After the death of Dhairyendra Narayan his young son Harendra Narayan a baby scarcely four years old was placed in the throne. Coins were struck ceremonially at his installation and in large

numbers during the early years of the reign so they are relatively common.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the normal half rupee sized coin he also issued a full sized piece.<sup>2</sup> (Plate No. IX). In the reign of Harendra Narayan the British authority took some steps to close permanently the minting of the Narayani currency but Harendra Narayan took some firm steps in view of restoring the pride and economic value of the currency. For his repeated intervention the British authority was not successful in curbing the minting of the currency. In his coins the term *Sri Srimat Harendra Narayanasya Sake* is engraved but the most important factor is that a single dot and a small crescent is also associated in the obverse side of his coins. Some numismatist say these two symbols are mint marks but these signs might have some special implications because they have distinctive significance in terms of its historicity. Besides the coins of Harendra Narayan some scholars claim that in the time of minority of the king, Khagendra Narayan issued coins. But the coins issued by Khagendra Narayan are yet to discover. Harendra Narayan's coins are now preserved in British Museum and Fitzwilliam museum.

### **Sivendra Narayan (1839-1847):**

After the death of Harendra Narayan his son Sivendra Narayan ascended the royal throne in 1839. Sivendra Narayan had availed of this privilege and struck both gold and silver coins.<sup>3</sup> (Plate No. IX). He tried to regain the economic solidarity of the Koch Kingdom, and took some drastic steps in order to do this. He tried to issue Narayani coins in view of smooth transaction in his kingdom. But the British resident commissioner did not allow him to mint Narayani coins except coronation issues. Moreover during his time Company official took necessary measures in regard to the permanent closure of the Narayani currency. In letter No. 2969 dated the 27th December 1845 Government ordered the Agent to close the mint in Cooch Behar. The term *Sri Sri Sivendra Narayan Bhup* was engraved in its obverse side. The word 'Bhup' signifies, a person holding a large portion of land and which ultimately carries the notion that the issuer of the coin is a King. In the

reverse side as usual the term *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhu Karasya* was engraved. Though his silver coins can be noticed in few coin cabinets, but the gold coins are now-a-days extremely rare. A few of his gold coins are now preserved in the Modan Mohan Temple, Cooch Behar. Besides this Silver half rupee coins are preserved at British Museum and Fitzwillam Museum.

### **Narendra Narayan (1847-63):**

Narendra Narayan ascended the royal throne in 1847 at the age of six years in Banaras. Narendra Narayan was at Banaras when Sivendra Narayan died. <sup>4</sup> As Sivendra Narayan had no legal heir so he took Narendra Narayan as his adopted son. <sup>5</sup> The state was governed by Rajmata Kamteswari Devi and Brindeswari Devi till Narendra Narayan became an adult. <sup>6</sup> In 1860 Narendra Narayan took the charge of the state. During his reign he took some major steps to increase the material prosperity of his peasants and also introduced some reforms into the administration. In terms of reviving the position of Narayani currency he did not achieve any success. Only in his accession one thousand one silver and one hundred one gold coins were issued. (Plate No. IX). The terms *Sri Sri Narendra Naryan Bhup* and *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhu Karasya* were engraved on obverse and reverse sides of this coins respectively.

### **Nripendra Narayan (1863-1911):**

Narendra Narayan was succeeded on the throne by his son Nripendra Narayan who was nearing the completion of his first year of age. <sup>7</sup> During the premature stage of Nripendra Narayan, the charge of administration was vested to the Government with full authority and in 1865 they ordered that the use of Narayani coins should cease in the state of Cooch Behar. At that time the Colonel Houghton, the Commissioner of Cooch Behar submitted a proposal to the Government proposing the manufacture of Narayani coins with the king's portrait on one side and the portrait of the Queen of England on the other. The Government however disagreed with the Commissioner and declared the

British Indian currency as legal tender in Cooch Behar in 1865 and abolished the Narayani coins from 1st January 1866. As Nripendra Narayan was a firm believer of British model of administration so after gaining majority he did not take any step to re-issue the Narayani Currency and supported the British authority to introduce their imperial currency in his state. (Plate No. X). However the term *Sri Sri Nripendra Naryana* was engraved in the obverse side of his coin. A point to be noted here the term *Bhup* was omitted from the name. It has special significance too. As Nripendra Narayan was educated in England and he was keen to introduce the British model of administration in the Koch kingdom so perhaps he consciously omitted the term *Bhup* which literally means, a person holding a large portion of land and indicates a kind of feudalistic tendency. This is a major direction of the change of the nature of Koch state which can be supplemented by Nara Narayan's coin. Beside this the epithet *Sri Sri Sivacharana Kamala Madhukarasyas* can be found in a square box and garlanded with arabesques around. His coins are now kept at British Museum.

### **Raj Rajendra Narayan (1911-13):**

By the demise of Nripendra Narayan the throne of Cooch Behar was dissolved upon his eldest son Raj Rajendra Narayan.<sup>8</sup> The government of India recognized him as solely and rightfully entitled to the throne.<sup>9</sup> His reign was very short lived and no major numismatic achievement was gained except the customary issues minted in the time of his accession. (Plate No. X). In his coin once again the term *Bhup* was incorporated with the name of the king. Besides this the Coat of Arms of the Koch state was also incorporated in the reverse side of the coins for first time. The royal symbol of the Koch kingdom was engraved in the center of the coin. This coat of arms had special significance because it was used as the royal emblem of the state. This emblem was used in the governmental documents of the kingdom. On the upper portion of the symbol a picture of monkey sitting on a globe and having crown on its head and a club in either hand is engraved. Under the flag, the picture of two corn-stalk

of paddy can be seen. Under this royal symbol a Sanskrit word, “*Yato-dharma Stato Jayah*” is engraved. The picture of a lion and an elephant is engraved on the left and right sides of the flag respectively. Below this monkey picture a flag is engraved and on this flag there are two swords can be seen in cross section, these two swords might be the reflection of the military capacity of the kingdom. A scale of balance is hanged on the top of these two swords which may be the reflection of equality and justice. On the two sides of the flag, the pictures of two animals appear. This symbol was engraved in the coins of Raj Rajendra Narayan, Jitendra Narayan and Jagaddipendra Narayan. Raj Rajendra Narayan’s coins are now preserved at British Museum.

### **Jitendra Narayan (1913-22):**

After the death of Raj Rajendra Narayan his brother ascended the throne <sup>10</sup> whom the government recognized by a proclamation on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1913. <sup>11</sup> On the occasion of the accession to the throne 100 gold and 1001 silver coins were struck in the name of the new king. <sup>12</sup> (Plate No. X). The name of the king and the royal insignia of the Koch state are engraved in obverse and reverse side respectively.

### **Jagaddipendra Narayan (1922-49):**

Jagaddipendra Narayan the eldest son and heir of late Jitendra Narayan succeeded to the throne of Cooch Behar and the succession was duly recognized by the Government of India. <sup>13</sup> The coronation ceremony of Jagaddipendra Narayan was performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1923 when a *Darbar* was held for the occasion. The new king took the seat on the throne and *nazars* were prepared to him by all concerned. <sup>14</sup> On the occasion of the accession to the royal chair 100 gold and 1001 silver coins were struck in the name of the new king. (Plate No. X). In these coins the name of the

king and the royal insignia of the Koch state are engraved in obverse and reverse side respectively. After the reign of Jagaddipendra Narayan the state of Cooch Behar merged with Union of India and the currency tradition of the state comes to an end and the currency of the Government of India was declared as the legal unit of value throughout the state.

So from Harendra Narayan coming down to the last ruler Jagaddipendra Narayan no such major change in the numismatic history of the Koch state occurred. It was due to the loss of political grip over the internal administration by the the Koch rulers and due to the feudatory nature of the Koch kingdom during this time. From 1773 to 1947 the Koch rulers were in the throne but all the administrative power was vested in the hands of the British administrators who never intended the free minting of the Narayani currency. The British treatment was shocking in regard to the de-monetization of Koch currency. They took one after another step in the direction of de-monetization of the currency. This de-monetization not only dislocated Cooch Behar State's political interest but, its commercial implication was much more severe, as the currency had a greater economic impact over north eastern part of India. With the withdrawal of the currency a monetary crisis started due to the non-availability of either *Narayani* currency. The impact was rigorously faced by the indigenous people of Cooch Behar who were accustomed with the use of *Narayani* currency in their transaction activity. In the following we will focus on the gradual penetration of the Britishers in the Koch economy and its disastrous consequences towards the abolition of Narayani currency. But before going directly to the de-monetization process of the Narayani currency we have to understand shortly the backdrop of such intention from the part of the British rulers. So first we will analyze the British motive behind the monetary unification of India and then we will go into the details of the process of the decline of the Narayani currency.

### **British Policy toward a Uniform Currency in India:**

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were crucial periods in the history of South Asia. It was during this period that the European countries having created a series of stable nation states,

evolved the technology and institutions of an industrial society and began the process of colonial domination in Asia and rest of the world. For a long time before the rise of the British as a political power, the Europeans were carrying on their trade and commerce with India. During the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century, European trade was quite normal in character and did not dislocate India's economic laws. It was after the battle of Plessey in 1757 and the conquest of Bengal that commercial relations became subservient to the political power of the English East India Company with disastrous consequences for India.<sup>15</sup> The transaction of trade proceeded in an unprecedented manner when the norms of economic relations vanished and a politically oriented economic situation developed. In this new situation the advantage was always on the side of the ruler at the cost of the ruled.

Before the advent of the Britishers in India there was no uniform currency system in India.<sup>16</sup> There were numerous parallel economies existed side by side with the central authority. Though the central administrative authority had their own coins but due to the lack of authority in the far flung parts of the country the currency of the center had very limited importance and circulation. Instead of the central currency the regional powers maintained their own currency for their own economy. There are two major factors behind this. First, the volume of the central currency was limited due to the metallic scarcity, so that it was not possible for the central authority to allot sufficient amount of currency for the regional economy. Secondly, in that time coins were treated as the symbol of sovereignty. So every regional power used to maintain their own currency rather than to follow any uniform currency. Both the central and regional power had a kind of negotiation in regard to the currency and there was no competition to each other.

This tradition continued in the successive centuries and there was no uniform measure of value in the early phase of British domination in India.<sup>17</sup> Silver seemed to had been the unusual standard over the greater part of the country with gold coins in concurrent circulation at rates varying from time to time according to the price of gold bullion. Whatever the currency whether of gold or

silver, the coins differed widely in denomination, weight and fineness even with in the same region. In 1799 the company first considered the introduction of a uniform currency for territories under its control. At that time major currencies in circulation included the Bengal silver rupee, the Arcot silver rupee and the Madras gold pagoda. Apart from these, many states issued their own currencies and local transactions took place in copper coins or cowries, both accepted as the medium of exchange for a long time. The company's intention was to replace Bengal *Sicca* rupee instead of all others. However since the gold silver price ratio varied between Madras and Bengal so the plan did not seem feasible in 1799 and multiple currencies continued including several that the Company itself coined.

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Although the Directors of the East India Company had given their approval for the introduction of a uniform currency in India in 1806, the era of such currency began only in 1835 when, in terms of Act XVII of that year, the silver rupee of 180 grains, was declared the sole legal tender throughout British India, this was in fact the coin that had been in circulation in parts of the country such as Madras and Bombay.<sup>19</sup> The mints were opened to the public for free coinage of the metal thus, India was put on a monometallic silver standard. It should be mentioned that although the Directors of the East India Company favored a silver standard they were by no means opposed to the circulation of gold coins. The Act of 1835 permitted the minting of gold coins (i) of the same weight and fineness as the silver rupee, that is, 180 grains and this was to be the gold *mohur* equivalent in value to Rs. 15, and (ii) of five, ten and thirty rupee pieces. It was declared that gold coins would not be legal tender but, the public Treasuries in terms of a notification issued in 1841 were to accept the coins on the basis of Rs. 15 for one gold *mohur*, in payment of taxes and other public dues. Besides the silver and gold coins, currency notes were also in circulation, these being issued mainly by the Presidency Banks of Bengal from 1809 and those of Bombay and Madras from 1840 and 1843, respectively. These notes were not however legal tender and their circulation was practically confined to the Presidency towns.<sup>20</sup>

To bring about uniform monetary system the East India Company enacted the currency Act of 1835 according to which the silver rupee was declared as the standard coin in the country. <sup>21</sup> This ushered in the era of silver mono-metallism in India. Under the silver standard (a) there was free and unrestricted mining of silver rupee (b) the weight of the silver rupee was 180 grains and its fineness was 11/12 and (c) the silver was unlimited legal tender. From 1873 onwards the silver standard fall into difficulties. Due to the discovery of new silver mines, the production of silver increased and the gold price of silver began to fall. As a result of this, exchange value of silver rupee fell and Indian foreign trade received a setback. Thus the government on the recommendations of the Herschel Committee abandoned the silver standard in 1893. <sup>22</sup>

From 1893 to 1898 was a period of transition which preceded the adoption of gold exchange standard in the country. In 1898 the British government appointed the Fowler Committee to draw up a suitable gold standard for India. The Fowler Committee recommended the traditional gold standard with a few modifications. The government under the Currency Act of 1899 introduced gold exchange standard in India. The Chamberlin Committee of 1913 approved the working and suitability of gold exchange standard in India. But in 1916 due to storage of silver, the price of it started rising and the people started melting silver rupee and selling it as silver. This made almost impossible for the government to purchase silver a higher rate and supplying silver rupee at a lower rate. In August 1917 the silver rupee was ceased to be standard coin and the gold exchange standard was abandoned. <sup>23</sup>

The period between 1917 and 1920 was marked by unstable exchange rates. During this period the government tried to restore gold exchange standard by allowing the exchange rate to vary with the price of silver. In 1920 by the recommendations of the Babington-Smith committee exchange was fixed as 1 rupee = 2s. This was a very high rate and the attempt to maintain it cost the Indian exchequer Rs. 40 corers. After 1920 the government gave up all attempts to maintain a particular exchange rate. The policy which was known as the policy of Masterly Inactivity continued till 1927. In 1925 the government appointed Hilton Young Commission to investigate into the monetary system

in the country. The commission made far reaching recommendations for remodeling and renovating the Indian monetary system. Under the currency Act of 1927 a mixture of gold bullion and sterling exchange standard was adopted. According to this system the rupee was linked to gold but its value was fixed at 8.47 grains of fine gold. Rupee and notes were made convertible into gold or into sterling at the option of the government for making foreign payments. This hybrid system continued up to September 1931.<sup>24</sup>

Coming to the Bengal province the standard of money was silver. Gold was occasionally coined, but the *mohurs* were rarely in use. The unit of the Bengal currency was the *rupee*. Copper coins were also in use. But while in other parts of India copper coins circulated extensively, in Bengal the use of them was much limited. Not many copper coins were struck in Bengal mints during the later part of the Muhammedan rule. Besides this smaller transactions were generally carried on through the medium of the cowries which was the currency of the mass of the people.<sup>25</sup>

But these complex currency systems created very big trouble for the British authority. This confused condition of the currency involving many losses and much inconveniences in trade led the East India Company to its intention to establish one uniform system of currency throughout the whole of its possession in India. With the establishment of the Company rule the import of bullion stopped. To meet the scarcity of silver, gold coin was introduced in 1766 and 1769 but gold failed to take the place of silver. Bengal *shrofs* and consumers had a strong preference for silver. Thus gold price fell with the rise of silver prices. It made the currency market more confusing. Warren Hastings suspended gold coinage in 1777 but introduced it again in 1780 to meet fall in gold prices. Lord Cornwallis stopped gold coinage in 1788 but reintroduced in 1792 to meet the scarcity of silver and its impact on the currency market.<sup>26</sup>

The company kingdom in Bengal grew into an all-India empire in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1833 the nomenclature of British Bengal became British India and Bengal became one of the provinces of British India; Calcutta was being the imperial capital. Keeping the

imperial consolidation in view, the Cornwallisian currency system was brought to an end in 1835 when the silver rupee of 180gm with the nomenclature 'Rupee' was declared the sole legal tender throughout British India.<sup>27</sup> The Act of 1835 declared that no gold was thereafter to be a legal tender of payment anywhere in India, but at the same time it authorized the minting of a gold piece, known as the *mohur* to be identical weight and fineness with the silver rupee, and designated to circulate at its metal value.

As the primary goal of the monetary policy in colonial India was to stabilize the exchange rate, so mere introduction of a standardized currency in company's domain was not enough to meet the British need. For this it was extremely important for the colonial masters to stop the circulation of the regional currencies. At the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Indian subcontinent was bifurcated into numerous political identities and most of the major powers had their own currency system.<sup>28</sup> So these regional currencies were the major obstacle for the Britishers to introduce their own currency. Because the rate of exchange was not same and varies from region to region, so company merchant had to face great loss. So they tried to stop the circulation of the regional currency forcibly. As we know that the way of warfare and treaty system the English East India Company conquered the whole of India, so when they conquered a place, they forcibly introduced their own currency and withdraw the regional currency. But where the forceful accusation was not possible they conclude treaties and in the clause of the treaty it was categorically stated that the province should not mint any currency. Instead of that, British Imperial currency would be the medium of exchange. By this way the British administrators made the monetary unification of colonial India.

### **British Intervention in Cooch Behar Affairs:**

Now we will discuss about how the Koch kingdom came into contact with the British and which resulted the loss of political sovereignty and which subsequently paved the way of the demonetization of its age long currency called '*Narayani Mudra*'. Before going into the details of the

storyline of British policy towards the de-monetization of *Narayani* currency it is important to analyze the roots of British contact with Koch kingdom. It will help us to understand the complexities of British intention towards the currency.

East India Company's intervention in the affairs of Cooch Behar (erstwhile Koch kingdom) presents an interesting narrative. British expansion in North East Bengal was not so rapid as in other parts of the country.<sup>29</sup> East India Company's contact with the Cooch Behar in 1772 was the stepping stone of the British in the northern frontiers of Bengal. In the year 1772, Khagendra Narayan, the Nazir Deo<sup>30</sup> of Cooch Behar applied to the East India Company for help against Bhutan, who had commenced hostilities and carried away the king and the Dewan Deo<sup>31</sup> of Cooch Behar as prisoners. This help was readily given by the Company. Before going into details it would be better to take into account under what circumstances Cooch Behar a State hitherto independent of foreign control, voluntary invited British protection and what was the motive and interest on the part of the East India Company to intervene in the affairs of such a small state.

The background of these developments date back to the year 1765. The year is momentous in the history of British expansionism in India and is equally significant in the history of Cooch Behar State. The *Grant of Diwani* to the East India Company on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1765 offered fresh advantage and legal status to the Company to consolidate its position in Bengal.<sup>32</sup> Cooch Behar State during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was suffering from chaos and dissension of the ruling authorities which encouraged Bhutan to middle in Cooch Behar affaires and make her own position secure in the state. Taking the advantage of this situation the Bhutanese attacked the Cooch Behar State and carried away the king and *Dewan* of Cooch Behar as prisoners. This incident paved the way of direct intervention of the Company into the Cooch Behar affaires. When Bhutanese captured the entire Cooch Behar State there was no chance to save the state. At this stage, *Nazir* Khagendra Narayan in consultation with other dignitaries of the state approached the East India Company for the help to drive out the Bhutanese forces. In the opinion of Jayanath Munshi, it was promised to the company on

behalf of the minor king of Cooch Behar that a sum of rupees one lakh would be paid to it if it could succeed in freeing the state from Bhutanese control. But the offer was not acceptable to the Company which wanted a sum of the annual revenue of the state as price for its help in expelling the Bhutanese and protecting the state in future. However a treaty was signed with the East India Company in 1773.<sup>33</sup> The Nazir Deo concluded the treaty on behalf of the infant king Dhairyendra Narayan and the company force facilitated quick dispatches to Cooch Behar. Bhutanese were defeated by the Company's force and Dhairyendra Narayan the abduct king of Cooch Behar was ultimately released in 1774. By the treaty of 1773, Cooch Behar came out as is a tributary state.<sup>34</sup>

### **British policy towards the de-monetization of Narayani currency:**

The intervention of the British in the Cooch Behar affair was not only important in political perspective but also it opened the flood gate by which the British rulers started to interfere in almost every matter of the state. Though the Anglo-Koch treaty was successful in saving Cooch Behar from the clutches of Bhutan but elimination of the Bhutan's hold upon Cooch Behar did not result in peace and tranquility in the state. Old feuds and old jealousies between the branches of the ruling house that lay dormant for few years again came upon the surface. The result was that from 1774 to 1789 the state was convulsed with internal disorder and confusion which had a great effect upon the people of Cooch Behar in the future. Again the history of Cooch Behar from 1789 onwards may be called the period of Commissioner's rule in Cooch Behar. During the period the administration of Cooch Behar passed into the hands of the British commissioner appointed by the Governor General. In this time a series of letters were exchanged with the Governor General, the secretary and the sub secretary to Government and the Commissioners from time to time. The Commissioners informed the Government of their day to day decisions with regard to the numerous issues and problems of the state. These letters are the main source of information to reconstruct the history of this period and

now by analyzing this letters and other sources of information available, we will look into the matter that how the Narayani Currency of Cooch Behar came to an end.<sup>35</sup>

The Anglo-Koch treaty of 1773 came as a catastrophe in the internal affair of Cooch Behar. The treaty can be identified with the act of *Dewani* of 1765 where the company had power without responsibility and the king had responsibility without authority. The Company authorities tried to poke their nose almost every matter of the Cooch Behar state affairs. Company's intention was very clear in this regard. They wanted to seize the political power of the state anyhow. To do so the age long indigenous currency came to them as an instrument of legitimization of their newly gained power. A point to be noted here that in Koch kingdom coins were minted in the time of accession of a new king to legitimize his sovereign stature. So the Company authority tried to fan the sentiment of the common people by introducing the imperial coins to get the support of the general masses. But the major aim behind the intention of introducing an imperial currency was economic. As the East India Company wanted to introduce an imperial currency in India, so the existence of Koch currency was treated as a barrier to do so in this part of India, because from very early times the Koch currency had a greater acceptability towards the general people of this region and it was extensively used in day to day trade and transactions. Apart from this as the Cooch Behar State situated in the Trans Himalayan trade route so the existence of any local currency might hamper the Company's trading interest.<sup>36</sup> So the Company authority took a series of attempts to stop the circulation of this age long native currency.

It has been already stated how the English east India Company had taken the chance to interfere in the Cooch Behar affairs. The Cooch Behar authority and East India Company concluded a treaty on 1773. Though the Company had not banned the Narayani currency completely but imposed some restrictions on the mint and fixed the number of coins which can be minted in the royal mint. Under the treaty of 1773 the state of Cooch Behar was minting 40 to 50 thousand Narayani silver coins at a place called Takagach, where the royal mint was located.<sup>37</sup> In the account given in 1788 by

Kashinath Bhandar Thakur to the resident Commissioner Mercer and Chauvet, it has been stated that the same number of coins were not struck each year. It was depended on the rate of exchange to Arcot rupees by which Narayani Coins were made in those days due to the non-importation of silver for coining money. As the Cooch Behar state had been minting the Narayani currency successively since from the mid of sixteenth century so the restriction of minting a certain number of coins was strictly opposed by the ruler Dhairyendra Narayan. When the terms of the treaty were settled, the king proposed that the right to strike his own coins should remain unhindered. But the Company's view was expressed in a letter dated the 5th January 1773 to the Circuit Committee of Rangpur-

*“If the raja of Cose Behar can be prevailed upon voluntarily and cheerfully to relinquish the privilege of coining we would be glad to have it effected, but if he yields to it with reluctance, with we imagine will be the case, we would no wish to instant on it”* <sup>38</sup>

In the clause of the treaty it has been categorically stated that the king of Cooch Behar have to pay 50,000 rupees as war cost and also to surrender half of the total revenue forever. <sup>39</sup> But in 1774 the Governor General and the Revenue Council promulgated orders prohibiting acceptance of new Narayani coins minted after the treaty. <sup>40</sup> Old Narayani coins were not so open to objection as the new. Coins of Rup Narayan, Upendra Narayan and Devendra Narayan were considered as old issues. Even local Zemindars objected to accept the new Narayani coins. As Narayani coins were current in Bhutan, Devaraja protested against the Government order and the Revenue Council agreed to deliver from the Rangpur treasury a good quality of Narayani coins necessary to the Bhutanese traders. Most probably it was due to the debasement of the quality of new Narayani coins minted after 1773 that both the English and Bhutanese authority objected to receive new coins. It can be easily presumed that the Anglo-Bhutanese war heavily affected the Koch economy and the silver supply for coining money might have been hampered and for that Koch king Dhairyendra Narayan compelled to reduce the quality of the new Narayani coins. This debasement of coins can be proved by analyzing

Dhairyendra Narayan's coins. By analyzing the metallic purity of his coins it has been proved that Dhairyendra Narayan's coins was substandard in comparison to the old Narayani coins issued by the early kings.<sup>41</sup>

During the second reign of Dhairyendra Narayan (1775-83) the Company fixed the maximum number of coins to be struck annually at 12,000 but the Cooch Behar officers paid little attention to the limit.<sup>42</sup> At Rangpur, the administrative headquarter of Company, three kinds of coins like Sikka, Narayani and Franch Arcot were current and the public suffered much inconvenience due to varied value of these three types of coins. The authorities of the Company were therefore increasingly opposed to the Narayani coins. They initiated a definite policy of checking the circulation of Narayani currency. In 1777 Mr. Purling the Collector of Rungpur, reported to the Board that the Company would be free of burden from discount if the Cooch Behar mints were closed and the Narayani coins were gradually withdrawn.<sup>43</sup> Though the Company authority not took the proposal wholeheartedly but started its gradual de-monetization by denying the remittance of Narayani currency to Murshidabad in 1779. Besides this in 1780 the Company ordered to curtail the production of Narayani coins and ordered that the production of the coin be limited to 1000 per month.<sup>44</sup> In practice, although the authority of Cooch Behar did not recognize this order.

In 1788, two commissioners Mercer and Chauvet,<sup>45</sup> were sent to investigate the situation in Cooch Behar after several complaints of mal-administration had apparently been received. Their report makes an interesting reading. The report says....

*“from the information of Kisnnund Bhaundar Thakoor who has the management of the Behar mint it appears that the only specie coined in it is half Narayani Rupees of which there were coined last year about twenty eight or thirty thousand; the quantity however depends upon the exchange on the French Aecot Rupees from which the Narainnies are generally in the Arcot Rupees, the intrinsic value of the silver in the Narainny Rupees can very little exceed one half of the weight.*

*The coin however passes current throughout Behar and the neighboring countries of Assam, Bootan, Currybari”.*<sup>46</sup>

As a result of this report it was decided that the mint should temporarily be closed down and from then on in spite of many representations from the king it was only rarely responded. It was certainly closed from 1789, until about 1795, was in operational in 1799, but was closed down again in 1800 on the recommendation of the resident apparently as a temporary measure.

After the treaty, though the authorities of the Company admitted the right to the king to strike coins in clear terms, they expressed their desire that it should be shortened.<sup>47</sup> When the Company managed the affairs of the state during the infancy of Hrendra Narayan, they almost stopped the minting of Narayani coins. After receiving powers of administration Harendra Narayan wanted to affirm his right of minting. A resolution of Government dated the 26th August 1802 admitted the right, but in their reply dated the 13th November 1805 to a letter from the king, it was stated...

*“As serious inconvenience would be experienced from that measure in the British Territories, my public duty will not permit me to concede that point to your wishes. On this subject, I request you to consider my determination to be final and I accordingly, expect that you will not have recourse to that measure”.*<sup>48</sup>

In 1821 the king again raised the question. At that time the attitude of the Government became more un-favorable, and expressed in their reply to the commissioner dated the 22nd October in that year.

*“His lordship in Council is of opinion that, to allow this coinage to be renewed, after it has been for 21 years prohibited, will be opening the door to abuses not easily controlled, besides being on other accounts objectionable. Since therefore the Raja cannot claim it as a matter of right and is not entitled by his late conduct to any favour or indulgence”.*<sup>49</sup>

On the 3rd February 1828 the Government was again addressed in the matter but they were not disposed to modify this determination.<sup>50</sup> Moreover they urged the ruler to stop the use of Narayani coins and Government also issued order not to take tribute from Cooch Behar authorities on Narayani currency.<sup>51</sup> But keeping in mind the inconvenience faced due to this order, Colonel Jenkins the Agent of the North East frontier Province in his letter No. 476 dated the 16th November 1837, requested to Accountant General to reconsider that order.

*“I thought it proper to recommend to Government that their order, prohibiting the payment of his (Raja’s) tribute in Narayani rupees should be suspended for the present or during the life-time of the present Raja. His life is not likely to be long protracted, and on the succession of a new Rajah (we) would be able without difficulty to arrange for the complete suppression of this currency.”*<sup>52</sup>

Although the number of Narayani coins were struck after 1788 and must have been very limited in quantity they continued to be the most popular currency in the area well into the nineteenth century. On several occasions the British tried to replace them with British Indian rupees, but they always met strenuous opposition. For example in 1796 they suggested the introduction of Sicca rupees, in Cooch Behar to the exclusion of the Narayani currency. But the people of Cooch Behar were accustomed with the use of Narayani currency in day to day commerce so the plan had to be abandoned. In 1834 the government wanted to introduce the Farukkabad coins in Cooch Behar. Harendra Narayan objected to this and an appeal was made not to introduce the Farukkabad rupees. The government however insisted upon carrying out the scheme and in 1835 threatened to make Farukkabad and Company’s rupees as legal tender in Cooch Behar. But due to the vigorous opposition of king and his strong dislike for the measure, the government did not force the issue during the lifetime of Harendra Narayan. Although a kind of uncertainty was in the Cooch Behar state regarding legal tender of the state and this can be substantiated by a statement of Capt. Jenkins. In 1849,

Capt. Jenkins said that “the people of Koch Behar still suffer much inconvenience from the prohibition to coin Narrainnee rupees, and the non-currency of the Government coin”.<sup>53</sup>

After the death of Harendra Narayan, Sivendra Narayan ascended the throne and he was reluctant about the administration of the state and used to spend his times in religious activities. In the time of his accession one thousand one silver coins and a few gold coins were minted to facilitate the coronation ceremony.<sup>54</sup> Like the previous ruler the new king was not interested in the state apparatus so the question currency got limited attention to him. This non-involvement from the part of the ruler gave the Company officials to take necessary measures regarding the permanent closure of the Narayani currency. In letter No. 2969 dated the 27th December 1845 Government ordered the Agent to close the mint in Cooch Behar.<sup>55</sup> After Sivendra Narayan, Narendra Narayan became the ruler of the state and like his father he did not took any major step to retain the glory of the Narayani currency. After the premature death of the king his infant son Nripendra Narayan was placed on the throne. During the minority of Nripendra Narayan, the charge of administration was vested in Government with full authority and in 1865 they ordered that the use of Narayani coins should cease in the state of Cooch Behar.<sup>56</sup> At that time the Colonel Haughton, the Commissioner of Cooch Behar submitted a proposal to the Government proposing the manufacture of Narayani coins with the king’s portrait on one side and the portrait of the Queen of England on the other. The Government however disagreed with the Commissioner and declared the British Indian currency as legal tender in Cooch Behar in 1865 and abolished the Narayani coins from 1st January 1866.<sup>57</sup> The Narayani rupees were gradually recalled and received at the Cooch Behar Treasury at the rate of 100 full coins for 68 Government rupees. Although the government keeping in mind the public sentiment of following the immemorial custom of the royal family of issuing coins in the name of the new ruler on each accession authorized the striking of one thousand silver coins and some gold coins.

## **Demonetization of Narayani currency in adjacent territories:**

Narayani currency not only the media of transaction in the Koch territories. It had its profound impact in the trade and transaction in the other parts of North East India especially in Assam. Though the medieval kingdoms of North East India issued coins but due to the fineness and good quality Narayani currency was in circulation in the markets of the North East India until the last decades of nineteenth century. So when British authority intended to circulate their own imperial currency in this region then Narayani currency came to them as a barrier to do so as the people of this region were accustomed with the use of currency in day to day transaction. So the British authority eagerly felt the necessity to demonetize the Narayani currency from the market places of North East India. So they took one after another step to de-monetize the currency. Side by side with the consolidation of the British rule in North East India, the British authority had attempted to introduce a uniform currency system here. Before the introduction of imperial currency various types of coins were in circulation in North East India.<sup>58</sup> The coins of the Ahom, Koch, Tripura states was in vogue. Side by side of these the coins of other tates like Sicca<sup>59</sup> and Arcot<sup>60</sup> was also in the markets of the North East. All these coins had different weight standard and for this the British as well as to the long-distance traders was in great difficulty.

To reconstruct the history of the de-monetization process of the Narayani currency we have to depend entirely on the governmental source of that period because without those no such official record is available to us for that period. These governmental records include the letters exchanged between F. Jenkins, Agent and Commissioner of the North East frontier, on behalf of the East India Company, Accountant General and Mint Master stationed at fort William, Calcutta. Beside some stray references can be availed from the records of Political, Finance Department and Board of Revenue of the Company.<sup>61</sup> All these source to some extend recorded the course of events towards the demonetization of the Narayani currency in North East India.

The first boost toward de-monetization came from His lordship in Council of British India, who in his opinion that the new Farukkabad rupees should be introduced in place of the regional currencies in North East India. On 28th November, 1783 this message was communicated to C. Morely, Accountant General, by N.H. McNaughton, Secretary to the Government, Council Chamber.

<sup>62</sup> Taking measure of the communicated message the Accountant General ordered the Revenue Accounts Officer to enquire about the matter by measuring the intrinsic value of the *Rajah Mohree* and Narayani half rupees. It was also ordered to calculate how many Narayani rupees could be received for 100 new Farukkabad rupees. The Revenue Accounts Office, on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1883 <sup>63</sup> conveyed the matter to R. Saunders, the Mint Master of Fort William. But he opined that the Narayani coins instead of issuing from should be brought down to the Presidency Mint for re-coinage into the legal currencies under Section 14 Regulation 35 of 1793 @ 37% discount.

After receiving the order on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1834, the mint master of Fort William communicated to the Accountant of the Revenue Department that 100 Narayani coins were equal to 69 Farukkabad rupees. <sup>64</sup> The mint master then conveyed his message to the Secretary to the Government in the Political Department by Morely. The Secretary opined that...

*‘the Public Officers receiving these coins be restricted from re-issuing them for any purpose, and be directed to retain them in their treasuries till a favorable opportunity offer to remit the accumulated amount to three Presidency Mint under the escort of troops at seasons when the latter are relieved by other troops’.*

He further opined that the public officers should be given twelve months time to exchange the local coins to new Farukkabad rupees. Though the re-coinage of Narayani coins were restricted but another coins prevailing in North East India i.e. Sicca rupees were given permission to recoinage. Probably as the Sicca rupees were not local coins so it was given permission but as Narayani coins were the local coins so considering the sentiment of the local inhabitants, the British authority took some cautions in regard to its recoinage. The secretary to the government in the political department

Mr. Morely opined that until the Farukkabad rupees were adequately supplied, the Sicca coins might be allowed to be re-issued in public payments. Lastly Morely told the Accountant General to grant five lacks of Farukkabad rupees for the effective maintenance of the company proceedings in Assam, viz. one lakh to the Political Treasury in upper Assam and the remaining two lakhs each to the Revenue Treasuries in central and lower Assam. <sup>65</sup>

On 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1834 <sup>66</sup> the East India Company's authorities had conveyed their message to introduce the Farukkabad rupees <sup>67</sup> in Assam. But the the area of circulation of the new coins were not defined in the order so, Capt. F. Jenkins had written a letter to the Company, whether or not the above instructions were applicable to the North Eastern part of Rangpur. He wanted to take the Rangpur district under the perview of the Company's order because to him Goalpara was one of a principal trading center of Assam and the Narayani currency constituted the currency of the neighbouring Cooch Behar. The tribute of Cooch Behar was also paid in that currency. Jenkins thereafter led to apprehend that unless Farukkabad rupees were made the currency of Gawalpara, the measure intended by the Government would be rendered inadequate and unproductive. He also wrote to C.V. Trevelyan, Deputy Secretary to Government in the Political Department, Fort William as follows....

*“3<sup>rd</sup>. The total abolition of the Narainee can never be accomplished until an arrangement is made with the Cooch Behar Rajah to pay his tribute in Sonur or Sicca Rupees for it is in vain to expect that these rupees will became extinct from merely prohibiting the Rajah from having a mint, as private mints, both in his and our country, will always keep up a supply as long as the Narainee rupees are receivable in our Treasuries and the coinage a source of great profit.”*

*“4<sup>th</sup>. The Raja of Cooch Behar might object that the Narainee rupees Being the coin of his country, he was unable to make the payments in Sonats or Sicca*

*and I am not aware how difficulty is to be got over than by allowing the Rajah to coin rupees. In weight and assay entirely similar to the F. rupees.”*

*“The privilege of coining has been long sought for the Cooch Behar Rajah and I think he would gladly indemnify the Government for the loss of seigneurage that would be occasioned by allowing to coin to the extent of or two lacks per annum”.<sup>68</sup>*

On 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1834,<sup>69</sup> Jenkins further informed that *“the Narainee Rupees were the coin of the countries of Cooch Behar, Bijnee, Kamroop and Durrang (in Assam) under the different members of the Narrain race of princes”*. He also opined that according to the assessment of his assistant Capt. Davidson, ten lakh of Narayani Rupees existed along the Gowalpara frontier and the total withdrawal of the current would be very difficult. Further he commented that there were private mints and any crisis of Narayani currency would provoke the private mints to issue more coins. Regarding private mint he opined *“in the Bootan Doars and the demand created by any forced measure of the nature alluded to would have a tendency to prolong their existence”*.<sup>70</sup>

Jenkins had suggested several steps in the direction of the withdrawal of the Narayani coins. According to him there should be a fixed date upto that the circulation of the Narayani currency may be permitted but after that it should be ceased to be a legal tender. Jenkins suggested the people to give their Narayani coins to the company treasury and take their value in Sonat.<sup>71</sup> Jenkins had his opinion that the company should arrange an agreement with the King of Cooch Behar to surrender all Narayani coins of their treasury. Besides this Jenkins felt the necessity to provide a good amount of half and quarter rupees of Company to the local treasuries for the effective maintenance of the day to day dealings. To tackle the adverse situation after the withdrawal of the Narayani coins a suggestion was forwarded by Capt. Bogle to Jenkins. Jenkins forwarded this suggestion to the political department.<sup>72</sup> In this letter Jenkins wished that the Narayani coins should be taken at his treasury at a 25 per cent discount instead of 32 as directed in the Accountant General. Bogley also proposed to

collect rent in Sonat rupees instead of Narayani coins and it might increase the government revenue to a great extent. Regarding the effect of the proposal on the peasants Jenkins opined...

*“I hope that considering the improving condition of the Province and the great oppression that the Ryots now suffer in consequence of the advantage taken of them by the Shroffs and Chowdries that when the change of the currency has been once effected the additional burden will be left”.*

Again, keeping in mind the depreciated market value of Sicca Rupees, Jenkins stated that if the Government did not sanction to receive the Narayani rupees at a premium value the Company would not be rid of the Narayani coinage for years to come. Jenkins strongly recommended for an additional supply of five lakhs in rupees and also opined that Company should constantly supply the half and quarter rupees to habituate local people to use the new coins, otherwise a vast majority of Narayani coinage would be in the hands of the people. It appeared to Jenkins as to give justice to the people, the Company should encourage the people to submit their currency and take new coins in lieu of that. But by a letter on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1834 the Company authority expressed the opinion that it is impossible to permit one year time to implant the new currency. With the rejection of his proposal Jenkins again wrote <sup>73</sup> to the Political Department and expressed his fear that the abolition of the Narayani currency might provoke the local people against the Company authority. Jenkins also felt that from the moment Narayani Rupees would no longer be received at the Government Treasuries, the holders of such coins would suffer severely. His letter also highlighted other aspects such as land measurement, assessment and settlements in the province which are quite interesting from various angles. Jenkins said in the following words...

*“3<sup>rd</sup>. With reference to your 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph, I beg to observe that all contracts between the Government and the people had ceased the whole of the settlements in the Province being annual and the year up. Whether the new Rupees had been introduced or not, there would have been a general rise in the rate of land*

*assessment consequent to the very improved state of matters in the Province and by taking the Narainee rupees at 25 percent discount we should have greatly facilitated the keeping of accounts and encouraged the bringing in of that coinage to the treasuries, and should not have materially raised that rates upon the Ryots beyond what had previously been contemplated. The gain to the Government would have been great in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and succeeding years, and having displaced the Narrainee Rupees, I imagine the people would not have suffered from the alteration of the assessment from Narrainee to Farukkabad Rupees.*

*4<sup>th</sup> The assessment that the Ryots will have to pay under new settlements will in fact be only in a slight degree greater than what they hitherto paid to their Chowdries, or subordinate officers of collection, but by increased means of European surveillance by the total abolition of all irregular cesses and the effect of an exact measurement of the lands, we have now have the power of preventing any concealments, of giving to each Ryot in the country a written statement of what he has to pay, and of knowing that the Chowdry has not exceeded the demands of Government. I speak now of the districts of Kamroop in which the measurement of the lands has been completed, throughout these the settlements will be concluded for 5 years. But in the Districts of central Assam where the lands are not yet measured, the settlement must still be annual”.*

On a letter dated 30.08.1834 Jenkins had requested the Political Department to order the Superintendent of the Government Lithographic Press to strike off 4 or 6 thousand impressions of the Tables of Exchanges for the use of the ‘Chowdries’ and ‘Patgris’. This table contains the rate of exchange of conversion of Sicca rupees into Farukkabad and of new Farukkabad rupees into Narayani rupees and vice versa. Jenkins opined that as the people are in general very ignorant of arithmetic, true exchange should be extensively known to all.<sup>74</sup> The said tables of exchanges were sent by the

Political Department to the Accountant General for ensuring the correctness of the calculations and eventually sending 7000 lithographed copies for use.<sup>75</sup>

The matter of rate of exchange and other allied factors continued to be dominated and it led the Accountant General to write to the Political Department in length regarding the matter on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1834.<sup>76</sup> In his letter, the Accountant General had advised that after the expiry of twelve months from the receipt of the New Farukkabad rupees in Assam, the receipt of Sicca rupees be prohibited both in payment of revenue and in exchange for the Farukkabad rupees, except at the rate 95/11 to the 100 Farukkabad, to prevent the importation of Siccas from the neighboring districts and the continued tender of that rupee. He wrote, the rules that obtain in the western provinces in respect to the relative value of Sicca and New Farukkabad rupees might be applied to the treasury receipts and issues of the province of Assam and north east parts of Rungpore generally, the receipts in payments of revenue in the local coin would continue to be governed by the following rates i.e. 100 Rajah Mohree Rs. = 100 New Farukkabad rupees; 100 Narainee Rs. = 69 New Farukkabad rupees, until it might be expedient to prohibit their tender. In addition to this it was asked that henceforth all bills must be drawn out in Farukkabad rupees. The complicacy in introduction of the new Farukkabad rupees vis-a-vis local coins have been highlighted in paragraph 12 of the above letter which reads as follows:

*“The rates at which the local coins are now receivable, appear to be the best suited to the object in view, without subjecting Government to a great loss ; to authorize their receipt at rates above their intrinsic value, would unquestionably hold out an additional inducement to tender the local coins in payment of Revenue in preference to the New Farukkabad rupee, but it would at the same time be depreciating our own currency, and it might have the effect of creating an unfavorable impression as to the intrinsic value of our own coins. It would assuredly stimulate the activity of the local mints and prolong their existence. The*

*parties who are interested in maintaining the native mints, have probably propagated unfavorable reports in respect to the British currency ; but when the natives find that we make no demure to receiving back our own coin, the reaction in favour of the latter will, I apprehend, lead to the extinction of the native mints and if the cooperation of the Raja of Cooch Behar, in the manner suggested by Capt. Jenkins, can be secured, it is very desirable, and will no doubt have great influence with the native community and I strongly commend that, His Highness's aid be requested, until we have displaced a considerable portion of the local coins, when it will perhaps be proper to recognize the New Farukkabad rupee as the only legal tender in Assam and the North East Parts of Rungpore."*

But the plan to introduce the company currency was not taken wholeheartedly by the native rulers and they expressed their concerns about that to the authority. They forwarded few letter to the Company authority stationed at Rangpur and the grave reaction of the native ruler in the proposed withdrawal of local coins can clearly be noticed from a translated extract.<sup>77</sup> The letter was from the Royal Court of Cooch Behar. The transliterated copy reads as under...

*"...you to reflect on the injury such a change will bring on me. Former Commissioners have frequently written to me to pay my revenue in the Current Sicca rupees proposing to deduct some 36,000 some hundreds of rupees as the difference in the coin, but I have never consented to the proposal solely with a view to preserve the currency of my coin and in this have met with the support of the Court. Should the Narrainee Rupee be entirely done away with my Ryots and Merchants also must be injured if not totally ruined, as a very considerable trade is carried on between us and the Bhotes with whom none but the Narrainee rupees will pass and should this lead to a stoppage of our trade with them it will be very difficult for me to pay my revenue at all. The delay in writing must be given entirely to the difficulty of giving a suitable*

*answer to your proposal, and perceiving that none but yourself can assist me in this dilemma I have laid upon to you my condition. I acknowledge myself entirely subject to the Company who can never be benefited by insisting on a change so materially injurious. I must therefore beg you to stop the proposed measure yourself or to write to the Court in such terms that it may not take place. (True translations, signed by, F. Jenkins, A.G.G.)*

In reply to the above stated Accountant General's letter the the Political Department replied on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1834<sup>78</sup> and it was stated there that the Honorable Vice President in Council agreed in with the different measures suggested by the Accountant General and authorized him to carry them into effect, in communication with Capt. Jenkins. But by 1838 there was a certain change in the scenario. In a letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1838, the Agent to the Governor General in Assam had recommended to the Accountant General to discontinue the receipt of Narayani and Rajah Mohree coins from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1839 at the treasuries of Kamroop, Durrung and Nowgaon on the ground that coins of those states were in very limited circulation in those districts. However the Accountant General did not feel disposed to concur with the Agent's views because according to him, if the circulation of Rajah Mohree and Narainee rupees were so limited, *"they would soon cease to be tendered at all and no order to prohibit their receipt would be necessary"*.<sup>79</sup>

The problem regarding the rate of exchange remained confusing and from the proceedings of the Honorable Governor of Bengal in the Finance Department dated the 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1839, it appeared that enquiries were again made (vide Letter No. 74 of the 17<sup>th</sup> January 1839) to the accountant General about the rates and rules under which native coins were credited when received at a Government Treasury in Assam. In response, the Accountant General had furnished all the information and recommended that the *"Rajah Mohuree and Narainee coinage, whether fractional or otherwise, should henceforth be received as bullion, subject to a duty of 2 percent for re-coinage"*

On 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1839 Captain Jenkins had sent a letter to the Suder Board of Revenue, Fort William<sup>80</sup> about the process of ceasing to accept Narayani or Rajah Mohree rupees at the treasuries in Assam. In his letter he expressed his deep concern about the problems after the withdrawal of the local currency. In his opinion, the quantity of Narayani rupees in circulation in Assam was very limited and mostly coined in the Bootan. Jenkins further stated that there would not be any difficulty to the peoples for the payment of their revenue from the large quantity of money available in Assam. In fact, expecting the concurrence of the Accountant General, he had directed in advance the collector to proclaim that Rajah Mohree would not be received after 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1840.<sup>81</sup> According to him, however, the receipt of Narayani rupees at Goalpara must be continued until arrangements were made with the Rajah of Cooch Behar to pay his tribute in Company rupees. He felt that it was describable that Narayani rupee should continue to be received to exhaust the great quantity of that coinage which still existed in North East Rungpore and Cooch Behar. Jenkins also felt there was no necessity to accept Arcot rupees by the collectors as allowed and that it should be prohibited “as adding to the complication of accounts – very limited amounts appear to be now in circulation”.

Jenkins’s opinion on the question of ceasing to receive and issue of local coins in upper Assam and also in lower Assam had received support from Sudder Board of Revenue as could be seen in the letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> October 1839,<sup>82</sup> addressed to F.I. Haliday, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Revenue Department. Jenkins had requested to place the same to the Honorable Dy. Governor of Bengal. It appeared that on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1839, the Honorable Dy. Governor of Bengal ordered that prior to prepare any orders for the discontinuance of the receipt of Narayani rupees at the treasuries in Assam, there was a need for further opinion from Capt. Vetch and Ensign Bradie on the subject.<sup>83</sup> While the related subject had not thrown any light about the proposed restrictions, it appears from the Resolution of the Processings of the Honorable President in Council of India, in Council in the Finance Department dated 7<sup>th</sup> November 1845 that the Company’s rupee had already attained complete currency throughout the provinces of Assam. It was revealed from a return received from

the Accountant General that, out of a sum of 841/2 lacks of rupees upward into the Revenue Treasuries of Assam, including the receipt from Cooch Behar within the last five years less than 1000 rupees in value consisted of Narayani rupees notwithstanding that it was optional with the public to pay in these rupees in liquidation of Government demands at the prescribed discount of 32 percent, which was believed by the Company “*to be as nearly as possible the actual difference of their intrinsic value as compared with the Company’s Rupees*”. It was also resolved that the suggestion of the Agent to the Governor General to the effect that the Government might be disposed to allow to the Rajah of Cooch Behar to have Narayani Rupee struck at the Calcutta Mint, provided they were made with the same intrinsic value as the Company’s Rupee, would not be attended to “*Nor can any further coinage whatsoever of Narainee rupees be permitted*”. Above all in the above resolution President in Council observed that the policy of the Government in India was....

*“to introduce one single uniform currency throughout the whole of the British possessions in India and that the object of this policy was not alone as supposed by the Agent to the Governor General in the North East frontier to ensure a known intrinsic value to the coinage of India, but to exhibit passably to the common understanding of all its subjects the fact of the supremacy of British power by impressing on the whole of the silver coinage legally issued in the British India dominions the effigy of the reigning sovereign of Great Britain”.*<sup>84</sup>

Thus from the above study we can come to this conclusion that the British construction of administration in the Koch kingdom had multifaceted dimension. In one hand it welcomed new western ideas in the spheres of the government, on the other paved the way for the disappearance of so many efficient mechanisms of the ruled. British imperial mind did not recognize any obligation which came under their way of profit making. Though the introduction of a uniform currency in India had some positive aspects, but it did not mean that India’s age long currency system was the only obstacle for doing so. In India or more largely speaking in many societies of the world coins were

treated as the embodiment of political and cultural illustrations. But the colonial rulers did not pay any attention to this aspect of currency. They were in hurry to eliminate the local currency of India anyway to secure maximum interest.

In the case of Cooch Behar State, the British treatment was shocking. When the state was suffering from aggression, the British authority took the advantage of the situation and gradually snatched all powers from the hands of the native rules. As Cooch Bbehar's geo-political situation was crucial so they eagerly interested to implant the imperial currency here to secure maximum profit. They took one several steps to de-monetize the currency. Thought the native rulers especially Harendra Narayan took some steps to revive the glory of the Narayani currency but his intention was not fulfilled due to the British economic interest. Not only by Harendra Narayan, but some English governmental authorities showed considerate attitude also. Among them Captain Jenkins was in favor for the free circulation of the currency. We have analyzed earlier how by repeated exchange of letters with his higher authorities he tried to convince them that the withdrawal may hamper the politico-economic setting of the Cooch Behar State seriously. But all his efforts were in vain and he was asked to remove the age long currency at any coast.

This de-monetization not only dislocated Cooch Behar State's political interest but its commercial implication was much more severe, as the currency had a greater economic impact over the north eastern part of India particularly in Assam. With the withdrawal of the currency a monetary crisis started due to the non-availability of either *Narayani* or newly introduced imperial currency. The inter-state and intra-state trading activity of Cooch Behar also got heavy set back. But most importantly, the impact was rigorously faced by the indigenous people of Cooch Behar who were accustomed with the use of *Narayani* currency in their commercial activity. Not only that the de-monetization had its religious implications also as the *Narayani* currency was devoted to some Hindu Gods and Goddesses worshiped in the region, so the people of Cooch Behar denied to accept the Company currency or any other currency due to their cultural affiliation with the *Narayani* currency.

But finally they were forced to submit their economic as well as religious interest, so finally we can say that although the British intention of having a uniform currency in India was a need of time but it was not necessary to construct the pillars of the uniform currency on the ruins of India's age long indigenous currencies.

## Notes and References

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P.K.Bhattacharyya, ‘Some Un-noticed Coins of Kamata-Kuch Behar’, *JNSI, Vol. LIV*, 1992, p. 92-98.
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5. *ibid.*
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Later he was admitted into the Maya College, Ajmer. Thereafter he was sent to England prosecuting his studies at Eton and Oxford. Swapan Kumar Roy, *Prachin Cooch Beharer Sompurna Itibrita*, Kolkata, 2006, pp. 250-264.
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38. *ibid.*, p. 293.
39. *ibid.*, p. 295.
40. *Bengal District Records, Rangpore, Vol. I*, p. 41.
41. Shamoan Ahmed, 'A Brass Coin of Koch Behar', *Bulletin of Aksaya Kumar Maitraya Heritage Museum, Vol. –V*, North Bengal University, 2010.
42. *Mercer and Chauvet Report, Vol. II*, p. 24.
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45. Their report was published in the *Cooch Behar Select Records*, Cooch Behar press, 1869.
46. Nicholas Rhodes and S.K. Bose, *op.cit.*, Appendix I.
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57. H.N.Chaudhuri, *op.cit.*, p 421.
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59. D. Chakravarty, *Nineteenth & Twentieth Century Coins of India*, Calcutta, 1979, p.3. Sometime around 1790 the East India Company endeavored to put an end to the discrepancies in weight and purity in coinage as per British standard, by establishing a standard currency.....to supersede the various local issues in British dominated India. These coins were known as *San Sicca*.
60. F. Pridmore, *The coins of the British Commonwealth of Nations*, Part 4 , India, 1975, pp. 8, 27 and 225. After the death of Emperor Aurangzib, the Nawabs of Arcot had struck coins of the Empire at Arcot. Though the rupee coins struck by the Nawabs were inferior to Bengal Sicca. Arcot coins could achieve popularity among the merchants of Bengal, resulting in a large circulation of such coins in that province and neighboring areas. Subsequently French and British too were striking Arcot coins in their Mints.
61. The present day's Goalpara district (undivided) was known as North East Rungpore. By 1836 the district assumed the present name. H. K.Barpujari, (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. IV*, Guwahati, 1992, p. 53-54.
62. *Assam State Archives Records, Bengal Government Papers*, File No. 399 of 1839. Sl.No. 1-3, No. 688 (Letter dated 28.11.1833- enclosure).
63. *ibid.*, Enclosure dt. 30.12.1833.
64. *ibid.*, Enclosure dt. 17.03.1834.
65. *ibid.*, Enclosure dt. 29.03.1834.
66. *ibid.*, Enclosure dt. 10.04.1834.
67. Farukkabad or Lucknow rupees of 45 San Sicca were first minted by the East India Company at Farukkabad. By Regulation XLV of 1803, the erection of a mint at Farukkabad was ordered by the Company in 1817. The right of minting Farukkabad Rupee was extended to the Mints at Calcutta and Varanasi vide Regulation XXXVI of 1817 – Pridmore F., *op. cit.*, p. 222 and K.K. Maheshwari and B.Rath, (ed.), 'The Acquisition of Indian Mints by the East India Company', *Numismatic Panorama*, New Delhi, 1996, p. 340.

68. *Assam State Archives, Vol. No. 1, 1834-35, Letter dt. 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1834.*
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71. During the Mughal Period a rupee coin was known as ‘Sicca Rupee’. While the value of such coin, prior to the rule of Emperor Farrukh Siyar, remained same during the life time of Emperor who had struck it, after the accession of the new Emperor, the coin of the previous ruler lost its ‘Sicca’ rating and became rupee of decreased value (i.e. subject to ‘batta’ in the market) and not acceptable in the Royal Treasury. By the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> Century battas were charged on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year’s of ‘Sicca’ at 3% and aggregate 5% respectively. When the 3<sup>rd</sup> year’s a *batta* was added, the coin became known as Sonaut or Sonat rupee. The East India Company, by its Regulation of 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1771, attempted to establish a standard rupee by declaring that from 11 Sun Sicca coin onwards value of Sicca coin shall not fall year wise, but continue to be on the same footing as Siccas of the present and subsequent years, Pridmore, *op.cit.*, p. 190-192.
72. *ibid.*, Enclosure dt. 27.06.1834.
73. *ibid.*, Enclosure dt. 06.08.1834.
74. *Assam State Archives, No. 33. Extract from the Proceedings of the Hon’ ble the Vice President in Council in the Political Department, under date 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1834.*
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76. *Assam State Archives 1839 Bengal Government Papers, File No. 399 of 1839, Sl. No. 1-3, Enclosure- ‘Extract of a letter from the Accountant General to the Day Secretary to Government in the Political Deptt.’, Dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1834.*
77. *Assam State Archives, Vol. No. 1, 1834-35, p. 319.*
78. *ibid.*, 1839 Bengal Government Papers, *op.cit.*, Enclosure dt.30.10.1834 – Extract from the letter from the Dy: Secretary to the Government.

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nod and the Political Department has dt. 22th July, 1839.
80. *ibid.*, No. 104. Letter, dt. 23.9. 1839.
81. *ibid.*, Extract from a Letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1834.
82. *ibid.*, No. 512, Letter dated 9.10.1839.
83. *ibid.*, Government of Bengal Letter 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct. 1839.
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Finance Department, 7.11.1845, No. 2116 of 1845 and No. 2869 of 1845.

## **Chapter V**

# **Koch Coins in Cultural Perspective**

History is the study of the past visualized by a historian. Besides the direct sources which purposely record contemporary facts in the form of a written text or an epigraph, the historian searches for information in various indirect sources. These indirect sources are objects belonging to the past but they are never intended by the authors or creators to record contemporary information. Among these indirect sources of history, coins occupy a distinct place of importance as they throw a welcome light on the peculiarities of cultural development of an area. The inscriptions on the coins highlight the cultural identity of the monarch and of the state. Presence of name or some time pictures of the Gods and Goddesses on the coins help us to determine the evolution of the religious sects. The study of varied types of coins belonging to different age exhibit an embodiment of culture in a miniature form. An in-depth study of the coin symbols from the historical perspective can provide an idea to the solution of the problem emerging out of the diversity of races or ethnic groups professing divergent religious faith. The present chapter will focus on the decorative art motifs and symbols present on the Koch coins and also scrutinize the historical as well as aesthetic reasons behind the insertion of each and every decorative ornament present in Koch coins and thus try to correlate its decorative aspect with the other contemporary currencies in vogue. But before entering into the core issue we will try to understand the numismatic art and briefly survey the various art motifs present in Indian coins from time immemorial.

Basically the coin is an object of utility. It is a small piece made of metal has prescribed weight is embellished with designs and inscriptions and is manufactured on orders from an authority for its

use as a currency, the medium of exchange. The artistic quality of an individual coin depends upon various factors like the creative skill of the artist-engraver, the mode of fabrication, quality of the metal and nature of alloy used etc. The use of well-designed dies result in device in fairly high relief and this give the device a bold effect on some coins, the relief is quite low and there are even a few specimens on which just bare outline of figures are visible. The ancient mint masters did not know the use of shape controlling collars to contain the shape of the semi-molten metallic blank at the time of the striking. As a result, perfectly round or square or rectangular shapes are almost unknown in ancient coinage, the heated metal unhampered by any collar assuming under the strokes of the hammer forms rather like some unpredictable living organism. It is also likely that when engraving dies for coins of precious metals like gold and silver, the artist-die-cutter would have put in more care in this work treating it with a reverence that such precious metals deserve than while engraving dies for coins of relatively baser metals like copper, bronze, lead and potin. The discussion of the coin-legend and the formation of its letters to an extent affect the artistic quality of a coin. When the letters are well-executed and the legends are arranged symmetrically this add to the artistic merit of the coin and vice versa.

The primary purpose of a coin is to facilitate economic transaction. But apart from their economic importance coins throw valuable light on various aspects of culture. This includes social and religious aspects, scripts, language and fine arts. For instance, the culture reflected on the early indigenous coins of India were essentially primitive in character but skilled artist were engaged to prepare dies and casts for manufacturing coins and some of their creations can be classed as object *d'art*. Not only this, the existence of common storehouse of symbols may be traced in the gradual evolution of religious beliefs from the stage of savagery through the age of barbarism to that of civilization.<sup>1</sup>

Coins may be utilized for the reconstruction of the culture. It is a truism, as Arnold Hauser observes that all art has been reflecting the contemporary life.<sup>2</sup> A Study of our ancient coinage show

that the numismatic art is also no exception to it. Looking at Indian art we find a large number of symbols occupying a preeminent position in its fabric right from the time of the Harappa culture and a few of them have come down even to our times passing through, *inter alia*, the area of Indian coins for this reason of cultural continuity at least symbols of Indian coins deserve a thorough study. But before entering into the core issue that is the cultural aspects of coins it is necessary to clarify the term 'culture'. The term culture has been defined in hundreds of ways over the years. Each of these definitions highlight different aspects of culture and some of these definitions even conflict with each other. The word is such a diverse and fluid concept that each one has a rough idea of what is meant by culture. It is usually applied to a particular stage of advancement in civilization, although it is of wide significance. It covers the entire scenario of human activity, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, ethical, spiritual, social, political so on and so forth. In fact this comprehensive term incorporates man's relation to the beauty and glamour of nature, the creativeness of art, intrinsic and subtle values of human life, the zest of knowledge, the lure of power, peace, progress, prosperity and others that civilized people value in mundane life it is, as defined by some, not just an ornament; it is the expression of a nation's character and at the same time it is a powerful instrument of shaping character.<sup>3</sup>

Coming to the devices on ancient Indian coins a most remarkable feature of early Indian indigenous coins of the pre-Gupta period right from the time of the punch-marked coins are the occurrence of them of numerous symbols - natural, geographical, geometrical, auspicious motifs etc.<sup>4</sup> 'Symbols represent the earliest record of man's urge for self-expression'.<sup>5</sup> They manifest the invisible through the visible form<sup>6</sup> and act as necessary and helpful intermediary between the inadequate capacities of the mind.<sup>7</sup> No wonder, the list of symbols on early Indian coins are virtually endless- tree, animals, insects, reptiles, fish, the sun, the moon, constellations and stars, hill, river, circle, semi-circle, dotted circle, square, rectangular, triangle, divided square, straight line, curved line, dotted line, star, *chaitya*, temple, steelyard, bow-and-arrow, quiver, trident, battle-axe, *svastika*,

*nandipada, srivastsa, Indradhvasampat, lingam, turbine symbol, triskeles, hollow cross, etc.* <sup>8</sup> Of these some symbols like the hollow cross, the svastika, the triskeles, the hill symbol, wheel, etc. also occur in the ancient art of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and other ancient civilizations and it has often been suggested that either the Indians borrowed these symbols from earlier or contemporary civilizations with whom they came into contact, or *vice versa*. A.K. Coomerswami observes that ‘all that belongs to this phase of art is equally the common inheritance of Europe and Asia and its various forms as they occur in India or elsewhere at various period up to the present day are to be regarded as cognates rather than as borrowings.’ <sup>9</sup> Such symbols as from the common heritage of all mankind may be designated as universal symbol.

## II

Likewise the ancient Indian currency the *Narayani Mudra* <sup>10</sup> of Koch kingdom is full of artistic vigor and sensibilities. The *Narayani Mudra* holds a very distinguished place in the annals of numismatic art heritage of North East India. These coins are beautifully stuck which may be termed as masterpieces of contemporary numismatic art. Looking at art on Koch coins we find a large number of symbols occupying a preeminent position from the time of Nara Narayan come down to its last ruler Jagaddipendra Narayan. <sup>11</sup> Though the art motifs on the Koch coins are essentially primitive in character but some of their creations can be classed as art object. In the following we will focus on the decorative art motifs and symbols present in the Koch coins and also scrutinize the historical as well as aesthetic reasons behind the insertion of each and every decorative ornament present in Koch coins and thus try to co-relate its decorative aspect with the other contemporary currencies in vogue.

Before going into the analysis of the decorative symbols of the Koch coinage it is important to throw some light on the perspectives of such decorative signs. A careful study of the legends show that these coins have invocation to Gods and Goddesses of two separate cults of Hinduism prevailing at that time in Eastern India the *Sivism* and *Vaishnavism*. While examining the volume of availability

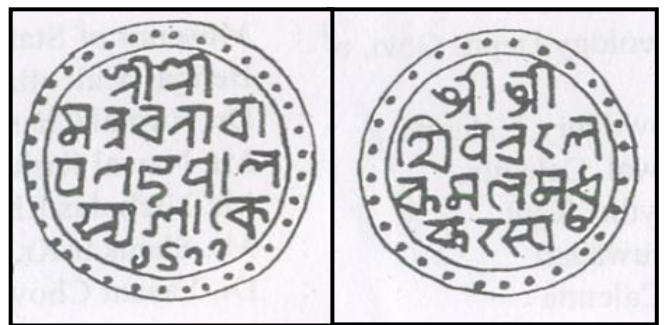
of the Koch coins it is seen that generally the coins with invocation to *Siva* are plentiful while those invoked to *Vishnu* are rare. As in medieval period pictorial representation was gradually replaced by legends so in Koch coins we do not find any pictorial representation of the king or the deity worshiped. Instead of that we find in obverse, the name of the king along with the date of accession and the reverse side devoted to the God. In most of the reverse side of Koch coins the legend '*Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala-madhuka rasya*' and '*Sri Sri Hara Gouri Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya*' can be found to show the strong *Sivait* affiliation, while in some coins the epithet '*Sri Sri Krishna Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya*' was engraved to show the *Vaishnavite* association of the ruler.<sup>12</sup>

But it was not only the religious factor that influenced the ornamentation on Koch coins but there were some other reasons behind it, which compelled the Koch rulers to choose certain kind of decorative ornamentations. Among these, the other contemporary coins and their religious affiliation was a determining factor behind the execution of Koch numismatic art. The Muslim currency both from Bengal and Delhi was in vogue in the territories of Koch kingdom<sup>13</sup> before the establishment of the state and the use of such coins probably influenced the artistic execution of Koch coinage. So when Nara Narayan planned to introduce his own currency, he was stylistically very much influenced by the Muslim currencies and copied their style. He issued coins in the prevailing imperial Muslim types. The weight standard and fabric of his coins were initially derived from Hussain Shah's Sultani *Tanka*.<sup>14</sup> But it was not only the Muslim coins that influenced Nara Narayan but also the glorious series of ancient Hindu coinages of different dynasties might have profound impact behind his artistic execution of coins. Because Nara Narayan was at Varanasi in his childhood to pursue *Sanskritite* education and as Varanasi was a place dominated by the Hindu kings mostly from time immemorial, so Nara Narayan might have come into touch of ancient Hindu coinages and the artistic excellence of ancient Indian coins shaped his artistic mind. The coins of the Koch rulers were basically die-struck and round in shape and made by silver generally but occasionally made in gold and contain legend in both sides. Koch coins have a good number of decorative signs. Though there is a controversy among

the scholars regarding the inclusion of different signs on coins but certainly these signs enhanced the decorative nature of the Koch coins greatly. Now in the following we will discuss the most prominent decorative features of the Koch coins and try to establish their historicity.

Koch coins, mostly those of the early rulers were stylistically decorated. The engraved legend on coins are quite clear. A dotted circular outer border and a circle within the dotted border run along the edge of each face of these types of coins. This dotted line gives a bold look of the coins. This superb artistic specimen is a masterpiece of beautiful new design and varieties experimented by Nara

Narayan. Besides Nara Narayan the full rupee of Lakshmi Narayan, Raghudeva Narayan, Vira Narayan's coins have this particular characteristic. As the dotted circular line is the most prominent decorative feature of this type of



coins, so let us throw some light on this. If we judge the historicity of this dotted line design then we can easily trace that the dotted circular line design is a very common feature in ancient as well as medieval Indian coins. Many dynasties of Ancient India used this particular dotted line design in their coinage. For example we can trace this dotted design in the coins of Huvishka and Kaniskha I, the two most prominent rulers of Saka dynasty.<sup>15</sup> Again, the Gupta kings like Chandragupta I, Samudragupta also used this design in few of their coins. Not only in the ancient period but also in medieval times the design was in vogue. The coins of Jahangir and Aurangzeb also have the outer dotted line design. So we can say it easily that the dotted line designs in the Koch coins was not an innovation by the Koch rulers it was probably borrowed from the surviving coins of India.

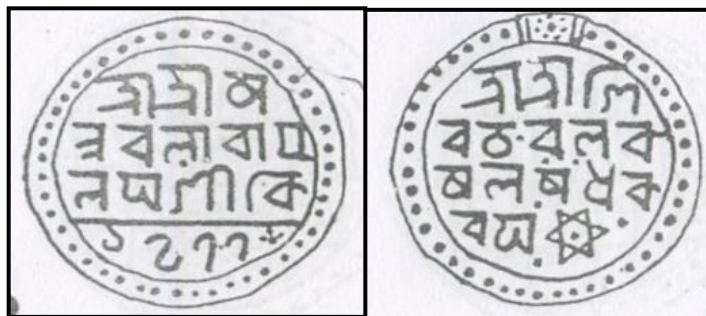
In some coins of Nara Narayan an ornamental outer line outside of a circular line runs along the edge of each face of the coins. These types of coins are very much rare. None other than Nara Narayan issued this type of coins. The ornamental outer line increased the artistic quality a lot. But it is not presumable for why this type of decorative feature was added on the Koch coins. We cannot

trace this type of design in any coins from both ancient and medieval India. The most probable cause may it be to exterminate the monotonous dotted design. As most of the coins of Nara Narayan bears the dotted lines so it might have been struck to give a different look to the



Nara Narayan's coins. However the artistic execution of the ornamental outer line was unique and it was a new addition by Nara Narayan on numismatic art in contemporary times.

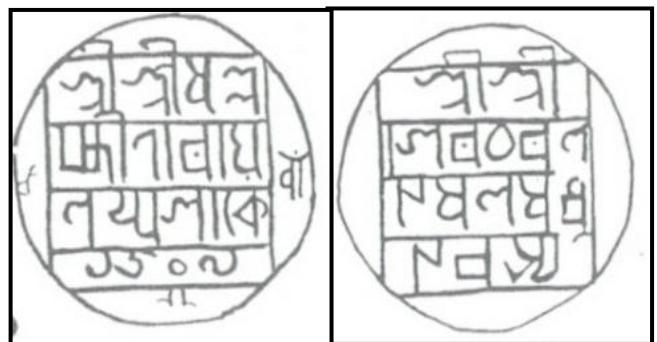
Some Koch coins of Nara Narayan have large hexagonal *Star of David* <sup>16</sup> on the reverse side. This hexagram definitely has some religious significance. The first known occurrence of the *Star of David* is found in Mesopotamian writings dating from 3000 B.C. In many cultures of the world this sign is treated as sacred sign and the Hindu culture is no exception to that. In Hinduism the



shape is generally understood by consisting of two triangles - one points up signifying *Purusa* and the other down signifying *Prakrti*. - locked in harmonious embrace. The downward triangle symbolizes *Shakti*, the sacred embodiment of femininity, and the upward triangle symbolizes *Siva*, representing the focused aspects of masculinity. The mystical union of the two triangles represents creation, occurring through the divine union of male and female. This symbol has deep significance in Hindu ritual worship and history. <sup>17</sup> Likewise Hinduism, the six pointed star have also been found in

cosmological diagrams in Muslim culture and the star can be found in mosques and on other Islamic artifacts also. <sup>18</sup> As the symbol was engraved on the reverse side of Nara Narayan's coins, so the intention might be purely religious. It was acted as double edged weapon. By engraving the hexagonal diagram on his coins Nara Narayan might have tried to imbed the Hindu and Muslim believes in a same platform. As the *Narayani Mudra* was devoted to Hindu deity so it was necessary for Nara Narayan to keep some Islamic elements on his coins to catch the attention of Muslim population of his kingdom. From this point of view the hexagonal diagram was the best option for him because it was treated as sacred sign both by the Hindus and the Muslims. Besides this hexagonal sign a decorated band was also enclosed on the top of the reverse side of the coin to give it a different look. This type of decorated band is not present in any other Nara Narayan's or any other Koch coins. Most probably this band has also some special significance.

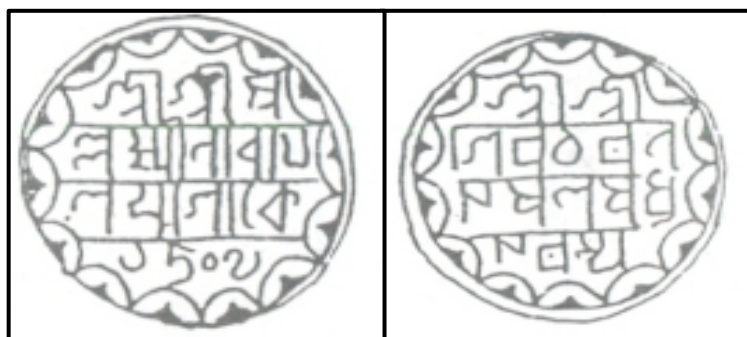
In some of the coins of Lakshmi Narayan we see the legends are written in both sides with in a square box. This particular coin is also very unique because neither of Lakshmi Narayan's other issues nor any other Koch King's coins has this type of engraving. But why Lakshmi Narayan minted this type of coin is a matter of



enquiry. The most probably Lakshmi Narayan was influenced by the Manikya coins of Tripura, where the style of writing legends in a square box was very much popular and so many Manikya kings minted their coins in this style. <sup>19</sup> Besides this there may be some political reasons behind it. As in the time of Lakshmi Narayan the state was going through a chaotic situation due to the succession debate with Raghu Deva, so instead of minting earlier type of coins Lakshmi Narayan issued this new type of coins. <sup>20</sup> Because Raghu Deva, son of Sukladhaja and king of Eastern Koch kingdom started minting of coins in his name and stylistically his coins were so similar to the Nara Narayan's coins. So probably Lakshmi Narayan consciously took the new style to distinguish between Koch Kingdom's

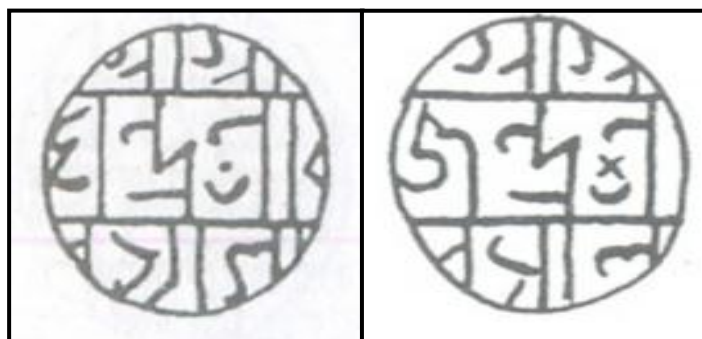
coins to those of the Eastern Koch Kingdom's coins. Stylistically these types of coins have little significance because there is no artistic decoration on the coins instead of the square box.

Again in some of Lakshmi Narayan's coins an ornamental border of arches can be found. None other than Lakshmi Narayan issued these types of coins. As it is hinted earlier that the initial years of



Lakshmi Narayan was marked by internal dissention so he brought some changes in his coins. The reason of issuing this type of coins may be traced from the internal dissention. As Raghu deva started minting coins with dotted lines which is familiar to Nara Narayan's coins, so Lakshmi Narayan had opt this sign for his coins. The circular ornamental border contains fourteen cusped curves. Besides this, twelve and thirteen cusped coins are also noticed.

Crescent is one of a most common symbol on the later issues of Koch coins. The crescent and star symbol is one of the most ancient designs.<sup>21</sup> It appears on pictographs and seals of the first civilization in Sumer. This symbol was adopted by the Greeks also. It is not surprising that this symbol found its way into Indian coins. In Koch coins, Prana Narayan first used this crescent symbol with small dot.<sup>22</sup> After Prana Narayan, kings up to Dharyendra Narayan used this sign in their coins. But the



sign was little bit changed in the reign of Rajendra Narayan. Instead of the small dot Rajendra Narayan used a small cross over the crescent. This crescent with small cross symbol is familiar with

the Muslim coins.<sup>23</sup> As the Koch kingdom was annexed by the Muslim rulers several times so this symbol might be borrowed from the Muslim coinage or it might also be possible that the Muslim rulers forced the Koch kings to introduce this symbol in their coin which is a sacred symbol in Islam. It may also be described in the way that the Koch rulers consciously included this sign in their coin to catch the sentiment of the Muslim population of their kingdom.

Cross is one of a common symbol on Koch coins. A cross is a geometrical figure consisting of two lines or bars perpendicular to each other, dividing one or two of the lines in half. The lines usually run vertically and horizontally, if they run obliquely, the design is technically termed a saltire, although the arms of a saltire need not meet at right angles. The symbol of cross can be traced in Ancient Indian coins. Numismatist often depicts cross symbol as a phallic representation of the symbiotic relation between Siva and Parvati.<sup>24</sup>



The coins of Prana Narayan of Koch kingdom have the symbol of cross in almost of all his coins. Instead of Prana Narayan no other Koch rulers have issued this cross sign on their coins. But the sign was used by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb when he annexed Koch kingdom in 1661 and issued coins in his name. In style these coins were similar to the half rupee coins of Prana Narayan. It had cross sign in its obverse side.<sup>25</sup>

In the coins of Nripendra Narayan a crude version of the epithet on the reverse side is engraved within a square box. The square box is placed in the center of the coin. Outside of the box the remaining parts of the coin is decorated with beautiful figure of flower and arabesques. The outer border on both sides of the coins were engraved with dotted line. The ornamentation of arabesques is unique in this type of coins. This is the first example in the whole series of coins where a secular ornamentation like



flower is being used. Probably the style was borrowed from the imperial currencies which were prevalent in India and after the withdrawal of the Koch coinage the English East India Company introduced them in the territories of Cooch Behar. As these type of coins were issued during the infancy of Nripendra Narayan, when the state was governed by the British authorities<sup>26</sup> so this type of coins were minted with close resemblance to the imperial currencies in vogue. However the stylistic ornamentation was unique and graceful.

In the late years of the Koch rule the kingdom used a symbol as the emblem of the state. This emblem was used in the governmental documents of the kingdom. This symbol was engraved on the coins of Raj Rajendra Narayan, Jitendra Narayan and Jagaddipendra Narayan. It appears to us that the royal symbol of the Koch kingdom is engraved in the center of the coin. On the upper portion of the symbol a picture of monkey sitting on a globe and having crown on its head and a club in either hand is engraved. As *Hanuman* was identified as a sacred figure by the Koch so the '*Hanuman Danda*' or monkey-scepters was considered as an important royal insignia. Moreover *Hanuman* was identified as a tribal and aboriginal figure and the Koch had a tribal connection so there might be an affinity of *Hanuman* with the Koch. Below this



monkey picture a flag is engraved and on this flag there are two swords can be seen in cross section, these two swords might be the reflection of the military capacity of the kingdom. A scale of balance is hanged on the top of these two swords which may be the reflection of equality and justice. On the two sides of the flag, the pictures of two animals appear. The picture of a lion and an elephant is engraved on the left and right sides of the flag respectively. As because the lion is regarded as the king of all animals and a symbol of bravery and elephant as the symbol of mass power so these two pictures ultimately were made to signify that the power of the Koch Kingdom was enormous. Under the flag, the picture of two corn-stalk of paddy can be seen. It signifies that paddy was the major crop of Cooch Behar and the kingdom was fertile and well cultivated. Under this royal symbol a Sanskrit

word, “*Yato-dharma Stato Jayah*” is engraved. The meaning of this word is “where is virtue there is victory” and this ultimately reflects the moral character of the Koch kingdom. <sup>27</sup> So the emblem engraved on the coins of the later rulers of the kingdom was stylistically well decorated and very significant.

The style of writing legends on Koch coins is very important part of its decorative ornamentation. The legends on the Koch coins are written in *Devanagari* language with the use of Bengali script. But the Bengali alphabets are found in crude form and it reflects the evolution of Bengali alphabet in miniature form. The artistic quality of coin legends depend upon the die cutters. In the time of Nara Narayan when the size of coins were big, the legend could be prominently seen but in the later phase when size of the coin became lesser the legend was written tightly and some cases it was quite difficult to read the legends properly. Besides this, as the technology of dies making was primitive so all the characters of the legend could not be presented in coins of the later issues. Besides this the initial issues of the Koch coins contained four lines but in the case of later issues, the upper two lines were not properly executed by the die-cutters and virtually it came down to three lines and thus the artistic quality hampered. But coins which are minted after the reign of Narendra Narayan, the script and alphabets can properly be read.

Though the appearance of the above mentioned signs on the Koch coins can be established in strong historical footing but there is a debate over the significance of these signs. Some numismatist say that the symbols on Koch coins are mere mint marks. <sup>28</sup> In support of their view they say that the Koch coins were minted in different mints across North East India, because when Nara Narayan subjugated any king of North East India, he compelled the local king to mint coins in the name of Nara Narayan and to differentiate the coins from Koch royal mint and with that of the other territorial mints, separate symbols were assigned in the new coins. In support of this view few numismatist cited the reference of Assamese *Buranjis*, where it is clearly stated that the symbols were used to identify

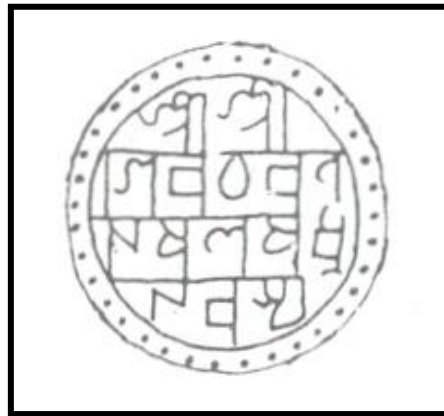
the mints of the subordinate states to which the coins were related. They pointed the Khyrim and Jayantia coins in support of their view. After defeated by the Nara Narayan both Khyrim and Jayantia kings were compelled to withdraw their names from their own coins and instead of that the name of the kingdom was permitted to engrave in one side and in another side the name of Nara Narayan was ordered for engraving. But it can hardly believeable that these symbols were mere mint marks. Because each and every symbol used by the Koch rulers or their subordinate kingdoms had strong historical background. If the signs were incorporated only to identify a particular mint so why they chose the particular symbol which had historical importance. They might choose any insignificant symbol. But all the symbols are very significant in terms of historical interpretation. So the Koch kings probably engraved different symbols consciously to cope up with contemporary need. For example the crescent symbol, star symbol, and most importantly the royal insignia were carefully executed in the coins. Probably with the growing influence of the Islamic religion in the kingdom the Koch kings were compelled to keep some Islamic symbols on their coins like crescent, star etc. So we can argue that the different symbols on coins have proper historical values. They may act as mint mark but it does not mean that they only signifies a particular mint, they have multifarious significance.

### **Religious invocation on Koch Coins and their Historical Significance:**

Indian cultural heritage is basically imbedded in vast religious activities and coins are no exception of that. If we look back deep into the Indian coinage it can be seen how the same is influenced by religion. In numerous types of coins one can find pictures of idol and legends symbolizing the religious path followed by the rulers. Judging from this angle the particular issuer's religious incitement can be assessed. Among the Hindu Gods and Goddesses Siva, Parvati, Vishnu and Lakshmi are the most popular according to number of appearances on coins all over India.<sup>29</sup> In medieval period pictorial representation was gradually replaced by legends as a result of Muslim influence. Such legends were able to convey more messages than the pictorial representation.

The Koch kings also adopted the style of engraving religious legends in their coins. The specialty of Koch coinage is that unlike coins of other contemporary era, no iconography has been found except tiny symbols at the bottom or in between the lines and letters. Both side of the coin contains legends. The obverse shows the dedicative inscriptions and the ruler's name, epithet, year of issue. The legends are found to be in details in full unit coins while fractional unit coins show shorter forms. A careful study of the obverse legends show that these coins have invocation to Gods and Goddesses of two separate cults of Hinduism prevailing at that time in Eastern India, these are *Shivism* and *Vaishnavism*. While examining the volume of availability of the Koch kingdom coins it is seen that generally the coins with invocation to Siva are plentiful while those invoked to *Vishnu* are rare.<sup>30</sup>

The worship of Siva in the Phallic and iconographic representations prevailed in the Koch Kingdom from a most remote past. It was the popular form of religion among the aboriginals and the Aryanised people. Siva was recognized as the guardian deity of the land. Rai Gunabhiram Barua in



his *Assam Buranji* states that the worship of Siva was first involved in early Assam by Jalpaswara who was the king of present North Bengal.<sup>31</sup> The worship of Siva seems to have been represented to its position as the important form of religion at the time of accession of Visvasimha the founder of Koch kingdom. It was believed that the religion sprang from God Siva who having taken the form of one of their ancestor visited the queen who was herself none other than an incarnation of his divine spouse *Parvati*.<sup>32</sup> The Sivait religion remained popular among some of the subsequent Koch kings.

*Darrang Rajvamsavali* informs us that Nara Narayan son of Visvasimha offered worship of Siva according to accepted ceremonial rites on the eve of his expeditions against the Ahoms.<sup>33</sup> The numismatic evidence of the period also holds the same view in connection with the popularity of Siva worship. The coins of Nara Narayan those are known as *Narayani Mudra* exhibit deep respect of him towards lord Siva as most of the coins bear the phrase 'Sri Sri Siva Chara (na) Kamala ma(dhuka) rasya' on the reverse literally means 'of bee at the lotus like feet of Siva'.<sup>34</sup> This phrase is engraved in most of the coins of the Koch dynasty. As hinted earlier, Visvasimha though described as the son of a mortal father named Haridasa, was allegedly begotten by Siva and his wife Hira. This referred to in the official records of Koch Bihar like the *Rajopakhyana*, the *Darrang Rajvamsavali* and the *Sankaracharita* of Ramacharan Thakur as well as in the *Akbarnamah*. It points to the emergence of the concept of the divine origin of kingship in Koch kingdom. Use of the honorific *Sri Sri* both before the name of the God as well as the king is also a pointer to the divine theory of the Koch kingship. The coins of the Koch kingdom were not only known as *Narayani Mudra* after the title 'Narayan' assumed by the rulers, but also known as *Siva-Tanka*.<sup>35</sup> The relationship of the Koch kings with Siva is repeatedly pronounced probably because of the fact that as the association of Siva with the people of the kingdom was very deep-rooted and old an account of his association here with the fertility of soil and cultivation, the Koch kings consciously tried to project themselves as descended from the deity at least partially for political purposes. The Koch rulers since the time of Nara Narayan had taken refuge to Sankaradeva's Neo-Vaisnavism but it could not penetrate deep into the heart of the people. The kings therefore could not but build and repair the shrines of Siva and Sakti to honor the sentiment of the subject. This ultimately led to the decline of Neo-Vaisnavism in the kingdom of Koch Behar.

The history of the worship of Vishnu may be traced in Koch Kingdom from early times. The Vaisnavism was developed in a large extent by the Vaishnava sects during the early centuries of the Christian era. The basic trait of the doctrine of Bhakti was the love in one God. In Koch Kingdom the Bhakti movement was launched by Sankaradeva.<sup>36</sup> The Vishnava religion obtained a strong footing

in the country during the latter part of the reign of Lakshmi Narayan the father of Vira Narayan. Madhavadeva (the disciple of Sankardeva) and Damodardeva, the two Vaishnava reformers, left their native country because of the oppression of the Ahom king and reached the kingdom of Kamta.<sup>37</sup>

Lakshmi Narayan received them with favor and offered them shelter. Prince Vira Narayan and many ladies of the royal family were charmed by his qualities and became attached to Madhavadeva. The

religion preached by Madhavadeva was considered as the royal religion. Vaishnavism received official recognition when Lakshmi Narayan enrolled himself as the disciple of Damodardeva, who became the royal *Guru*. The numismatic evidence of the period also holds the same view in connection with the popularity of Vishnu worship. The epithets inscribed on



the reverse of all the coins of the Cooch Behar rulers, described them as either *Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya* or *Sri Sri Hara Gouri Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya*.<sup>38</sup> But an exceptional example is the epithet on the coin of Vira Narayan, who described himself as *Sri Sri Krishna Charana Kamala-madhu Karasya*. These coins are unique in the series having an invocation to Krishna, rather than to Siva and Parvati (Hara Gauri). But there is a good deal of controversy among the scholars regarding the coins of Vira Narayan centering on the legend and the date of the issue of these coins. On the issue of greater importance of Vaishnavism some scholars argue that the coins of Vira Narayan were not actually coins but medallions issued in honor of Lord Krishna during the life-time of Lakshmi Narayan.<sup>39</sup> This explains also the paucity of this type of issues which were naturally not minted in large number.

### **Impact of contemporary numismatic art on Koch Coinage:**

The Koch kingdom was a medieval kingdom which emerged in the northern part of the Bengal side by side of the growing Muslim intervention in the peripheral parts of India. With the spread of Muslim rule the Muslim cultural trend was also spread. So it is quite natural that the numismatic

issues of the Hindu Kingdoms were also influenced by the Muslim cultural traditions. The study of the numismatic legends and devices on the numismatic issues of mediaeval Hindu kingdoms can show a gradual waning of Hindu element on their coins. Muslim coinage bears the largest stamp of their cultural influence in language, script and also legends. Minting of coinage was a customary practice in the time of accession in medieval India. Especially in medieval times the accession of a ruler was incomplete unless he minted coins in the name of the *Kalifa*.<sup>40</sup> The numismatic issues thus illuminate the exercise of the political power and acted as the instrument of legitimization of authority and *vis-a-vis* symbolism of power.

In course of time the Muslim influence in terms of political domination established in the Koch kingdom. We have noticed that the Koch rulers especially rulers during the internal dissensions applied the Muslim authority in Bengal to provide support. This internal dissention gave the Muslim rulers an opportunity to interfere in the Koch affairs. With this intervention the Muslim coinage came into the contact of the Koch rulers and also to the general people.<sup>41</sup> Taking inspiration from the Muslim coinage the rulers of the Koch Kingdom initiated a currency of their own. The rulers of the kingdom introduced currency with a motive of legitimization of power. Not only the currency legitimized the political authority of the Koch rulers but also it had wide stretching cultural significance. The Islamic currency indirectly advocated the Muslim religion as it was the usual practice among the Muslims to devote their coins to *Allah*. In this backdrop being a Hindu Kingdom the Koch Kings introduced their currency which was devoted to a Hindu God Siva. It worked as two edged weapon. As God Siva was very much popular in the region so by engraving the name of Siva the Koch kings tried to catch the religious attention of the people as well as tried to make the cultural unification of the kingdom.

Besides this psychosomatic influence of the Islamic numismatic over the Koch coins there are some other material influences of Islamic traditions on Koch Coins. In contrary to the coinage tradition of India, being a Hindu state the Koch rulers did not engrave their picture or the pictorial

representing of their deity on the coins. But ancient Indian coinage from the very earliest time contains pictorial representation of the king or the deity worshipped. This non-appearance of the pictographs may be an influence of the Islamic numismatic tradition on Koch coins. As we know that in Islamic tradition pictorial representation of the *Allah* is prohibited. So the kings did not inscribe their own picture on their coins. Instead of that they only inscribed legends which advocate Islam. Taking inspiration from this, the Koch kings also did not inscribe any pictorial representation of the God or the king in the coins. Instead of picture they only inscribed legend on the reverse which advocates the Shaivism and Vaishnavism and in obverse they inscribed the name of the issuer with year. Besides this we find various symbols on Koch coins, some of which are familiar with the Islamic symbols found in Muslim coins. For example the crescent is a most common symbol found in the Koch coins. This crescent symbol is a sacred symbol of Islam and mostly used in the numismatic issues of the Muslim ruler and other religious activities. So it may very possible that the crescent on Koch coins is the Islamic cultural contribution. Another symbol on Koch coins which deserves our attention is the symbol of star. It is also treated as a sacred sign in Islamic tradition and it is reflected in the numismatic issues. So the star symbol is also an influence of Islamic numismatic tradition on Koch coins.

The coinage of the Koch Kingdom added a new chapter in the numismatic heritage of India in terms of its artistic qualities. It is very surprising to us that how in those days in spite of technological underdevelopment such kind of artistic marvels were made. The decorative ornamentation on Koch coins are very significant in terms of enriching its artistic quality and it not only gives a very prominent look to the coins but also has multifarious implications. When Nara Narayan introduced the currency there were so many currencies in circulation in the territories of the Koch kingdom and the preliminary artistic inspiration might have come from these coins but the style of engraving legends, selection of signs, and other ornamental insertions on the coins were made very carefully to enhance the artistic quality. Though due to the technological backwardness the execution of

ornamentation sometimes hampered but considering the time and technology these coins are not inferior comparing to those of the contemporary currencies. By a minute study of the decorative ornamentation on the Koch coins we can learn about so many aspects of Koch as well as North East Indian culture. As they are not much affected by outside influence they often proceed along their own line and thus can have significance for people trying to determine general patterns of cultural development. The close study of the legends and symbols suggest the continuity of Indian cultural heritage in the region. So finally we can say the Koch coins are the masterpiece of contemporary art and the signs of Koch king's artistic sensibilities.

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## Chapter VI

# Koch Coinage in relation to that of the Neighboring States

Koch kingdom was established in late-medieval period so without the analysis of other contemporary coinage it is very hard to draw a comprehensive picture of Koch coinage. Because on the one hand Koch coinage was influenced by the other contemporary coinages of that time similarly it also influenced other regional currencies to a great extent. So from a comparative analysis of the Koch coinage with that of the other coinages especially the coinages of medieval North East India, we can get a thorough idea of both Koch and other contemporary coinages. The present chapter will first analyze the different contemporary coinages of medieval North East Indian states and then try to make a comparative study drawing the similarities among them.

Before entering into the inter-relation between the Koch coinages with the other North East Indian dynastic coinage it is important to know from when and how a regularized currency system came into existence in North East India. The territory including in North East India was known as Pragjyotish Kamarupa <sup>1</sup> in the early centuries of this millennium. This part of India was never totally occupied by the mainstream ruling dynasties of India before the advent of Muslims. So on account of the geographical situation, North East India has been out of the central focus of Indian history and the developments in central areas have only occasionally touched the course of events in this part and this area had only marginal influence on the total history of India. The territory known as North East India is linguistically and to a great extent culturally a fairly homogenous unit. Through intersected by rivers its major regions were linked with ancient, medieval times by political as well as cultural and commercial ties. Hence the territory concerned can be

considered as a unit for study. Before the advent of the Ahoms in thirteenth century the territory was ruled by various small dynasties like *Naraka*, *Varmana*, *Salastambha* and *Bhouma-Naraka* dynasties. <sup>2</sup> These dynasties were small and till now no numismatic specimen is yet found belongs to these dynasties. Though the *Mahasthangarh* inscription <sup>3</sup> seems to suggest that the ancient kingdom of Pragjyotish-Kamarupa was a part of the Maurya Empire but one cannot ignore the significant fact that we have not discovered in Assam any punched marked coin, which was the regular silver and copper currency of the Mauryas, although such coins have been found in considerable numbers in Bengal. Surprisingly it is the fact that we have not found in Assam any of the abundant issues of the Gupta even though we know that the province of *Pundravardhana* or North Bengal formed a part of the Gupta empire from the fourth to sixth century A.D., and the ancient Assam or the Pragjyotish-Kamrupa country was separated from the Pundravardhana territory in the west only by the river Karatoya. <sup>4</sup> In the same context we have to remember that Pushyavarman of Assam and his successors appeared to have had political relation with the Gupta emperor. In the first half of the seventh century A.D., the great king Bhaskaravarman had considerable political dominance over the region but still we have not discovered even a single coin of Bhaskaravarmana to our satisfaction. However, evidence of use of cowries as currency can be noticed in the Tezpur rock inscription of Harjaravarman dated Gupta era 510 (829-30 A.D) wherein the imposition of a fine of 100 *vuttikas* has been mentioned for violating royal order with regard to playing of the fishing boats on the river Brahmaputra. <sup>5</sup> In this backdrop, it is very recently assumed that metallic coinage was introduced in Assam only in the seventeenth century. But a series of hoards noticed in various parts of Darrang, Sonitpur, Kamarupa and Nagaon districts have conclusively proved that copper coinage was introduced in Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa kingdom in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>6</sup>

This large predominantly tribal area saw the rise of some tribal kingship in different parts in the medieval period. Tipra in Tripura, Ahom in Assam, Koch in Cooch Bihar, Kachari, Jaintia in Meghalaya and Jayantipur and Manipuri in Manipur were the major power and authority during 13<sup>th</sup>

to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of these village kingdoms in course of time became fairly powerful and came to control extensive land areas. All these powers are known to have issued their coins. Oldest and longest series of coins were struck by the Tipras, better known as Manikyas of Tripura, who struck their initial coins from 1464, the Koch in 1555 and the Ahoms in 1648. Likewise coins of the Kacharies, Jaintias and the Manipuries were also struck in c.1559, 1563 and 1709 respectively or somewhat earlier in each case. Thereafter the coins of all these ruling tribal families were struck fairly regularly in most cases.

Prior to the Muslim invasion in the early thirteen century coinage on North East India or more specifically the coinage of the Hindu rulers which formed the majority of the numismatic issues of medieval and late medieval North East India was conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps the reason for the lack of any state sponsored coinage during the centuries around the millennium can be found in the structure of the society. Most of the people were self-sufficient in the necessities of the life and urban communities were non-existent and limited marked trading was facilitated by the use of the cowries. <sup>7</sup> Society was probably based on the largely self-sufficient village with villagers strictly divided into occupational based castes and taxes were paid through labor or in kind. Without money the villagers were to a large extent deprived of physical mobility and with the caste system were also deprived of social mobility. The ruler might discourage the use of coins by the people because of the financial independence and hence physical mobility that such coins could give to sectors of the community such as traders.

But in thirteenth century the situation changed in Bengal when Mohammad Bakhtiyar (1198) invaded and occupied political power. As a Muslim he could only hope to gain lasting control over the country by breaking the power of the Brahmin priests and gaining the support of at least some of Hindu population. The Muslim invaders might have decided that by encouraging trade and allowing the Hindu trading and banking community to enrich, they would gain their support and ensure that they would be able to exercise stable political control over the newly conquered territory. The

introduction of a silver and gold coinage might have been part of the strategy through which Bengal was successfully ruled by the Muslims. The Muslims introduced a coinage of fine silver as it was a usual practice in the Muslim society. The sultans of Bengal were the first who introduced the metallic currency in eastern India and also brought a drastic change in the transaction process.

Another very important political development of fourteenth and fifteenth century was that side by side of the Muslim intervention in eastern India the Brahmins of the Gangetic valley and also of Bengal were feeling threatened and some of them started migrating eastward. A process of Hindu state formation commenced in the eastern India when one or more Brahmins or Brahmin group convinced a local tribal leader to embrace Hinduism and to establish their new kingdom. Thus in this way some new state namely Tripura, Cooch Behar, Assam, Kachar, Jayantipur came into existence. All this medieval and late medieval Hindu states of North East India had their own system of coinage and they derived their inspiration from the silver coinage of the Sultans of Bengal.<sup>8</sup> Now in the following we will make an overview of the contemporary coinage other than Koch coinage. A basic summary of the relevant coinage is set out below.

### **Coinage of Tripura:**

The state of Tripura an erstwhile princely state of North East India currently occupying about four thousand square miles in the hills to the east of Brahmaputra plain, was one of a strong regional power in the history of entire North East India.<sup>9</sup> The state of Tripura was important because instead of repeated Muslim invasions it succeeded in remaining its political identity against the Muslim invasions. The Manikya kings of Tripura issued coins in their names and as a royal issue the coins of Tripura were the emblems of royalty and also a symbolic majesty of the Tripura kings. The metals, the motifs, the portraits as well as other accompanying details of the coins depict the details of faiths and customs adopted by the kingdom of Tripura. The Tripura coins are no way less important than

epigraphy, literary sources or other source of information regarding the history of Tripura as we come across different types of coins which have produced much effective records in Tripura history.

The kingdom of Tripura provides us the most remarkable and longest series of coins of North East India and covers a period of five hundred years. <sup>10</sup> During the Mughal period the state was relatively isolated but before, during and after this period it produced un-arguably one of the rarest and most attractive of all Indian coinage. The state was visited little by Europeans during British occupation of India and as a result relatively few examples of the coins reached the west and therefore its coinage remained virtually unknown and unpublished until after independence. We find in the sources that during the first half of the fifteenth century, Maha Manikya and his son Dharma Manikya ruled the country and these two kings were probably the first to assume the title *Manikya* a title that was taken by all subsequent rulers of the state. According to *Rajmala* after the death of Dharma Manikya, Ratna Manikya took the charge of the state after defeating his other brothers with the help of the Muslim Sultan of Bengal, Ruknuddin Barbak Saha. <sup>11</sup> Ratna Manikya while in Gour, the then capital of Bengal, noticed the use of silver coin in the trade and transaction. So when Ratna Manikya assumed power he struck silver coins in his own name, probably bringing Muslim metal workers from Bengal to work in his mint. In this way coins were introduced in the state of Tripura and the subsequent rulers of Tripura followed the tradition of minting coins until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The last Tripura king, who issued ceremonial coins was Viravikramakishor Manikya in 1951.

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The coinage of Tripura are entirely Hindu in their design and inspiration and one of the reason behind their issue may have been as political demonstration of independence but the types are so numerous and varied that there must have been other motives for their issue. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the coins is the quality of the striking and the artistry of the designs which is far superior to the carelessly made products of the mint of Bengal. The latter presumably reflect the mass production techniques employed at the mints in Bengal, whereas in Tripura with little need for coins

in quantity, much greater care could be taken with the striking. The weight standard adopted by Ratna Manikya was identical to that used by the Muslim Sultans, so the two series of coins were presumably intended to circulate alongside each other, although it is significant that coins of Tripura are very rarely found outside the Historic territory of Tripura.

The coins were certainly circulated as currency but to different extent at different times. During the sixteenth century they were struck in reasonably by large numbers and probably had a significant monetary function for payment of mercenary soldiers, as well as being used as a store of wealth and for use in religious ceremonies and for payment to Brahmins. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they had a modest role for the payment of taxes and for use in the kingdom.<sup>13</sup> They have been found in hoards beyond the boundaries of the state, primarily in the plains of present Bangladesh but their monetary use was largely confined within the borders of Tripura. After 1760 the coins were struck exclusively for ceremonial purpose but the privilege of striking coins were carefully preserved and exercised even though the coins themselves could hardly be used as currency.

### **Coinage of Ahom Kingdom:**

In medieval period the kingdom of Assam had its own glorious series of coinage. As a royal issue the coins of Assam were the emblems of royalty and also a symbolic majesty of the Ahom kings. The metals, the motifs, the portraits as well as other accompanying details on the coins depict the details of faiths and customs adopted by the kingdom of Assam. The *Ahom* rulers issued fine series of coins. The shape, size and calligraphy are such that the coins attracted attention easily.<sup>14</sup> At the time of introduction of the *Ahom* coinage the basic medium of exchange was formed by the cowries. It should be noted that the *Ahoms* were a tribal people and the cowries as a media of exchange was acceptable to a tribal as well as non-tribal milieu. Although the *Ahom* started ruling in Assam as early as 1228 AD,<sup>15</sup> but the first Ahom coin so far known is only with date is 1648. No doubt there are references in literary texts to the use of coins by a few early *Ahom* kings like, Siu-Ka-

Pha (Sukapha, 1228-68), Siu-Dang-Pha (Sudanpha, 1397-1407), Sui-Han Pha (Suhenpha 1488-93), Siu-Hum-Mong (Suhunmung, 1497-1539). But these references to coins are not substantiated by the discoveries of actual pieces struck by these rulers. So such claims may be considered as wrong or we shall have to wait for discoveries of such coins in future.

It is not known why and under what circumstances the rulers took the initiative of starting a new coinage. As records are available there might not be any strong economic reason behind such decision. The silver coins were not used as money to meet the daily necessities of the people, at least at this starting stage of coinage.<sup>16</sup> The external trade was also very limited. The Ahom rulers adopted a policy of isolation and they did not like outsiders to enter into their territory even for trade and commerce. It may be the continuous Turkish invasion which forced them to be isolationist. But these Muslim invasions resulted infiltration of coins of sultans of Bengal in the area. Coins of Koch Kingdom and Bengal sultanate probably influenced the Ahom rulers to issue their own coinage as a declaration of sovereignty after becoming the major power in North East India.<sup>17</sup>

Among the Ahom coins discovered so far the earliest series belong to a king having the title *Svarga Narayandeva*. The octagonal silver coins of the series bears legends in Assamese (or Assamese Bengali) characters on the obverse and reverse side. The legend engraved on one side is '*Sri Sri SvargaNarayan Devasya Saka 1570*'. The inscription on the other side can be deciphered as '*Sri Sri Hari Hara Charana Parayanasya*'.<sup>18</sup> The same dates occur on the obverse of another series of octagonal silver pieces which bears on the reverse the Chinese inscription. '*Tsang Pao*' meaning 'Tibet Valuable' (i.e. a valuable medium of exchange for traders from Tibet). Such pieces could have been issued to facilitate trade with Chinese knowing persons coming from Tibet.<sup>19</sup>

The second phase of Ahom coinage commenced with Rudra-Simha (1696-1714) who introduced the practice of striking coins annually beside in the first years of region. The custom was followed by his successors. The vast majority of these coins are octagonal in shape and is bordered by dots flanked by two lines. These coins also carry Sanskrit legends in Assamese Bengali characters on

both sides and a date in the *Saka* era on one side. After starting a full-fledged system of coinage by the Ahom in 1648, the later rulers also followed the practice of minting coins until the territory was occupied by the British.<sup>20</sup> Though the style of the coins were changed during the reign of successive rulers but the basic style of the Ahom coinage remained same. Of the two precious metals used for minting Ahom coins, gold was available locally. Gold dust was actually produced from gold bearing stone pieces carried down by the Brahmaputra. Silver was perhaps imported from outside through commercial transactions. Among the possible sources of supply were the silver mines of Yunnan (China) which was connected with the area of Assam by a land route.<sup>21</sup>

The coins of the Ahom kingdom were beautifully struck mainly on carefully produced octagonal flans with dies of the same size as the flan. Their weight standard was carefully controlled and the silver content appears to have been of the highest quality. The fact that relatively few pairs of dies were used at most periods indicates that production have been high although survival rate seems to be quite high, perhaps because the coins were retained as religious amulets or buried as treasure. The small denominations produced during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would seem to indicate that the coins were intended to be used in circulation but such use seems to have been limited and small denominations are often in very fine condition.<sup>22</sup>

### **Coinage of Jayantipur:**

With the commencement of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Jayantiyas who belonged to *Mon-Khmer* stock came to the plain tract situated in the south of their original abode Jayantiyapur Hills and made their capital at the place which was called Jayantipur.<sup>23</sup> Jayantia was one of the major kingdoms in the medieval North East India which struck coins in the sixteenth century as part of its state formation process.<sup>24</sup> The history of the kingdom is somewhat obscure and sources are mainly confined to traditions collected at the end of the last century. We find mentions in various Ahom or Koch

chronicles, a very few inscriptions and other contemporary documents about the Jayantias and for this the coins are the major source of information about the Jayantias.

The earliest coin of Jayantiya king is remarkably anonymous undated coin, but may have been struck by Bar Gohain. It has the legend '*Sri Sri Rupesa Banadasthana Jantapuramka Saupradhuna*' which may be translated as 'coin of the most beautiful chief ruler of the forest land and the Jayantia people'.<sup>25</sup> The other side has a more conventional *Sivaite* invocation to *Hara* and *Gouri*. The next ruler to have struck coins was Vijaya Manik who was the only ruler to strike a full *tanka* coin with his name. It bears a date 1497 Saka (AD 1575) and has an unusual invocation to *Bhubanesvar*. Though the Jayantias minted coins in 1580, yet they could not throw out the yoke of the Koch suzerainty. They not only honored the imposition of not putting their names on the coins but they also reflected their dependency by striking their names on the coins but they also reflected their dependency by striking their money alike with those of the Koch.

No Jayantiya coin is found in between 1580 and 1669. Hence it is not unlike that during this period the Jayantiya kings ruled as the vassals in all respect. However about ninety years after 1669, Pratap Simha captured the Jayantiya throne and re-started the Jayantiya coins by minting on the earlier pattern. At the time the Jayantias were not the feudatories of the Koch. The subsequent kings except the last continued minting of money. They all issued the anonymous coins on which the dates range from *Saka* 1591= 1669 to 1712= 1790. But three Jayantiya rulers besides using the earlier model of anonymous coins also attempted to coin their money in their own names.<sup>26</sup>

In the later course of Jayantia history Jayantiya coins became much debased and it is recorded by the British that the right to strike coins was auctioned off to the highest bidder, a practice was not followed in any other state. The debased nature and light weight of many of the coins would have meant that it was not worth anyone's while exporting them, so they are only occasionally found in hoards outside Jayantipur territory. E.A.Gait notes that in 1835 coins were hardly used in the local economy so they probably played a ceremonial and revenue raising role and may have also been used

by the high officials as a way of strong wealth rather than being used as currency for everyday transactions.

### **Coinage of Kachar:**

The Kacharis known to be the earliest indigenous inhabitants of Assam belonged to the Mongolian stock.<sup>27</sup> They came here either from Tibet or China.<sup>28</sup> These people first inhabited the hills and slopes in the north of Brahmaputra and then they expanded to its south. The Kacharis after their occupation of the region which was south of the Brahmaputra made their capital at Dimapur. But in 1536 it was sacked by the Ahoms and hence they established a new capital at Maibong in the North Kachar Hills which also met with the same fate in 1706 at the hands of the Ahoms and then they founded their capital at Khaspur in the plains of Kachar.<sup>29</sup> The history of Kachar is obscure as they have no historical chronicle of their own although they appear as side players in the chronicles of Cooch Behar, the Ahom and Tripura. So these coins are an extremely important historical source for this kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest numismatic record of the Kachar kingdom is a coin in the name of Vira Vijaya Narayan dated 1502 or 1520 but although this is the first silver rupee to be struck by any of the Hindu rulers of the Brahmaputra Valley nothing else is known about this king but these coins do indicate that the state of Kachar must have been relatively advanced at this early stage as it struck coins even before Koch kingdom.<sup>31</sup> The next king to strike coins was Megha Narayan in 1488 *Saka* (1566). These dates are not available from other sources and hence the coins provided very important information to historians on the chronology. For example it seems clear that the invasion of the Kachar by Cooch Behar troops in 1562 under Chilarai fell during the reign of Nirbhaya Narayan. According to the Koch chronicle on this occasion the Kachar king agreed to pay tribute to the Koch King 70,000 silver coins, 1000 gold coins and seventy elephants.<sup>32</sup>

Since the Kacharis were made their feudatory of the Koch and they agreed to pay annual tribute mostly in the form of the coins to the latter, the Kacharies minted them and for that they partly adopted the coin pattern of the Koch. Vasanta Choudhury and Pariman Ray two well-known numismatists, observe; 'It is remarkable that the legend and calligraphy as well on the coins issued by the king of Kachar and the Koch kings are very similar'. However the noteworthy characteristics to be pointed out is that the initial Kachri coins like some of those of the Koch kings Nara Narayan, have bi-scriptural legends in proto Nagari on the obverse and Assamese on the reverse. The Kacharies also modeled their currency on the coins of Sultans of Bengal.<sup>33</sup>

All the Kachari coins are round in shape except those of Lakshmi Chandra Narayan which are in octagonal form. The latter is evidently adopted from the Ahom coinage. Vasanta Choudhury and Parimal Ray rightly observe 'this break in the traditional shape of the Kachari coins possibly signifies the supremacy of the Ahom king upon Lakshmi Chandra Narayan'.<sup>34</sup> They were abnormally broad and thin in fabric except those of Lakshmi Chandra Narayan and his son Govinda Chandra who were the latest kings of the dynasty. The Kacharies like Jayantias inscribed their legends on their coins in Sanskrit language and for that they used the old Assamese script although some scholars consider it Bengali.<sup>35</sup> They have an expression of religious faith on the obverse and name of the king and the date on the reverse. Botham writing on the coins of the Assam dynasties observe that the inscriptions are adaptations of those on Muhammadan coins since in addition to the name and title of the king; they include a profession of his devotion to his favorite deity. The form of the Sanskrit inscriptions appear to have been derived from the coins of the Hindu kings of Bengal. Danujmardandeva and Mahendradeva who flourished in the early fifteenth century<sup>36</sup> But the Kacharies adopted the legend patterns for their coins from those of the Koch, which are inscribed on both sides on the coin.

The coins generally have very poor calligraphy and are rarely found in private collections although a few hoards have been found in Kachar. There are so many die varieties found in these hoards and it is clear that the coins were struck in significant number and were most probably

intended to circulate as currency although the fact that they do not seem to be found outside Kachar territory could imply that they did in practice facilitate external trade. After an abortive start in 1520 the coinage of Kachar commenced in 1559 and thus was the very earliest of the coinage of the North East. From then, until soon after 1616, a continuous coinage of silver was struck. Initially mainly rupees were struck but after 1583, most of the coins were of the quarter rupee denomination. The calligraphy was of poor quality showing that the Kacharies did not have access to such skilled metal workers as the other North Eastern states. The coins may have circulated to a limited extent internally but those struck after 1580's have never been found outside Kachari territory. After 1620's only a handful of coins are known and these were probably ceremonial issues, struck to demonstrate independence from the Ahoms.

### **Coinage of Manipur:**

Manipur is a small hill state to the south east of Assam bordering Burma. The early history of Manipur is set out in local chronicles which contain long genealogical lists but little in the way of firm historical information. Manipur also finds occasional mention in the chronicles of neighboring states but reliable information is hard to find. They have record that contains a list of chiefs which purport to carry back their history to the thirtieth year of the Christian era. The list enumerates forty-seven kings upto 1714 but many of these earlier chiefs are probably entirely legendary.

The modern history of the state begins from the time when Pamheiba, a Naga Chief ascended the throne of Manipur in 1714.<sup>37</sup> Subsequently he became a convert to Hinduism taking the name Garib Newaz and reigned approximately for 35 to 40 years. He was an outstanding ruler from all accounts. During his reign Brahmanical Vishnavism was accepted as the religion of the court. Moreover, the Manipuris adopted the Bengali script, abandoning their old and complicated alphabets. The first coins of Manipur were probably square bell metal pieces struck during the reign of Gharib Niwaz, in 1724. These were followed by square and round bell-metal coins with the *Sri Ram* or with

single letters such as *Ja*, *Wa*, *Sri* and *La*, weighting about 3.5-4 gm on average, but fluctuating considerably about this mean. Some coins apparently have the letter in archaic Manipuri script.<sup>38</sup> Silver and gold coins were known locally as *Lupa Tanga* and *Sana Tanga* respectively, were struck from 1756-1831. They were generally square in shape, and are extremely rare nowadays. Apart from full rupees and *mohurs*, struck to a weight standard in excess of 11gm, a few half and quarter denominations coins are known. The earliest square rupees weight over 12gm, making them the heaviest silver coins of the region. Later rupees are struck to a weight standard similar to the Moghul and the Ahom rupees, but differ from the Ahom coins in being square in shape and with the legend in Nagari script, rather than Bengali. Most of these silver and gold coins were probably struck more for ceremonial purposes than for use as currency, although the square rupees of Chaurajit Simha may have circulated to a limited extent. It is interesting to see that the coins are dated to the year, or even the day of issue, rather than showing merely the accession year.<sup>39</sup>

At a glance it would be difficult to access the merit of technical efficiency of the coinage of Manipur. The bell-metal seal produced in local Manipur mint were quite crude both in shape and finish. In the same way we find most of the entire square shaped gold and silver issues from the time of Garib Newaz were known so far having the same fate as of the crude struck seals. But all those remarkable ornamental designated round gold coins except one type of both gold and silver struck by Marajit Simha does not have only high technical merit but also reveal the great aesthetic sense of its issuers. The noticeable features of the said round mohurs are strikingly akin to the coins of the kings of Kachar. Manipur history records that political intercourse between the kingdoms of Kachar and Manipur was quite close and frequent. It may be assumed that the minting technology was borrowed from time to time from Kachar specially for the striking of gold round ceremonial issues in question. It may also be presumed that not much attention was paid to the striking of square coins both in gold and silver including seals as because they were minted for commercial use.<sup>40</sup>

## **Coinage of Bhutan:**

In ancient times the country of Bhutan was ruled by independent small chieftains but no historical account of that period is available. About the beginning of the sixteenth century a disciple named Noanamgi of the Tibetan Lama brought the whole of the Bhutan country under his absolute control.<sup>41</sup> Likewise the political history of Bhutan the monetary history of Bhutan also shrouded in deep mystery. No records are available which show exactly when coins were first struck in Bhutan. But it is certain that coins struck in Bhutan were close copies of the Narayani rupees of Koch kingdom and only very minor modifications of the design distinguish the early Bhutanese productions from the Koch coins.

During the late medieval period Bhutan had commercial links through her various '*duars*' with the Ahom and Koch kingdoms and subsequently with the company ruled areas of Bengal. It is very likely that Koch coins might have reached Bhutan in the course of trade as early as the sixteenth century when there was a flourishing trade between Bengal and Tibet that passed through Koch kingdom and Bhutan.<sup>42</sup> The earliest coins found in Bhutan date from the reign of Lakshmi Narayan (1587-1627). The earliest Bhutanese reference discovered that mention coins date back to the time of the Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal. In about 1619 the Shabdung went to Chaochha to preach and receive presents from the king of Koch kingdom including silver and gold coins. Also the people of Chapchha apparently offered 'lots of silver coins' to the Shabdung on this occasion.<sup>43</sup> On his return from Chapchha the Shabdung apparently started the construction of a new monastery called Cheri Dorjidhen. In this monastery he placed a double storied silver *stupa* containing the ashes of his father, which has been made with the silver coins brought of Chapchha.

In another account this time referring to the period about 1640-43 there is lengthy description of gifts received by Shabdung including several thousand '*matang coins*' called as *brgya-bul* (hundred offerings) from the district between Rtse-rag dum-bu and from the district of Dar-dkar as far as the place was called Bye-ma in India.<sup>44</sup> The use of the term Ma-tang is interesting and may well be

explained by looking at the coins themselves and in particular the full coin or half coin of Prana Narayan who ruled between 1633 and 1665. These as do the earlier rupees of Lakshmi Narayan have prominent letter *Ma* coin at the top right of the obverse legend. This letter although written in Bengali would have been easily recognized by the Bhutanese so that probably caused the coins to be referred to as '*Ma-tang*' or '*Ma tam*' as it is unlikely that they could have read any part of the legend. In 1680 Tenzen Rabgye was enthroned as the 4<sup>th</sup> *Druk Desi* and apparently received present of 1000 gold and 1000 silver coins from the king of Ladakh <sup>45</sup> and 700 gold coins and 1000 silver coins from the Koch king. The presents were distributed to the general public including one silver coin to each family. <sup>46</sup> In 1707 on the enthronement of the 8<sup>th</sup> *Druk Desi* a gift of the silver coin was distributed to each of the monks and to the general public of Bhutan <sup>47</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> *Desi Sherab Wangchuck* (1744-63) distributed gifts of one silver coin (*ma-tam*) to each citizen eight times during his reign. This made him very popular in the country. <sup>48</sup> Furthermore in 1747 on the occasion of the coronation of the Shabdung II, Jigsmed Graga-pa (1725-61) gifts were described in detail and valued in *Ma-tam*. For instance gifts presented to the Gyalse Rinpoche Mi-pham brug-sgra rnam rgyal included images, coins, horses, clothing, brocades etc. the total value of which was listed at 2290 *Ma-tam*. This passage is particularly interesting in that it indicates that the *Ma-tam* was actually used as medium of exchange and as a common unit of value at this time. The kingdom of Bhutan issued coins upto the middle of the nineteenth century independently after that its authority of minting coins was seized by the British authorities.

## II

From the above mentioned survey of various dynastic coins it is evidently clear to us that in late medieval period, North East India witnessed the rise of numerous kingdoms and all these states were well known for their own series of coinage. As these coinages were belonged to a same geographical region so they shared lots of things in common and must have some close inter-relationship to each

other. As we have already mentioned that the region of North East India was less influenced by the mainstream ruling dynasties so in terms political, economic, cultural and other spheres these regional states shared lots of common practices. In the field of medium of exchange these states were to some extent same in their intention of introducing its own coinage. In the following we will discuss the basic similarities of these above mentioned dynastic coins as a whole and by which we can understand the closeness of these currencies with that of the currencies of the Koch kingdom. In terms of comparative analysis we have to divide our discussion into some sub categories. It will help us to understand different resemblances of these currencies with each other.

In terms of political prerogative behind the introduction of coinage all these state were similar because the first boost for striking coins came from political compulsions. We have already discussed elsewhere that a Hindu state formation process was started in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in medieval North East India in view of the growing Islamic political hold. In the said period the Muslim power gradually increased and threatened by this Muslim predominance the local tribal or semi tribal communities with the help of migrating Brahmin community embraced kingship in their respective territories and succeeded in establishing kingdom in their territories of control. But after establishing kingdom, they needed for a device which can prove their political authority in a firm footing and in this respect coins came to them as a media of demonstrating their political authority. As the minting of coins in the name of the king in time of accession was treated as a sacred event in India from time immemorial so this practice was grabbed by the newly established kingdoms and all the kings of these kingdoms issued coins in the time of their accession. This particular incident of issuing coins in time of accession was common among the coin issuing kingdoms of medieval North East India. The Koch kings were also not devoid of this practice and in terms of this the Koch kingdom following the same custom with that of the other states of North East India.

Probably the practice of engraving the name and the accession year in the coins were borrowed from the Islamic coins of contemporary India. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the

Muslim domination in Eastern India was growing rapidly and as all these states emerged to restrict the growing Muslim political hold over eastern India, so it is probable that they consciously copied the Muslim style of minting coins. In Islamic coins the pictorial representation was prohibited so they engraved the name and accession year of the ruler in one side. These types of coins were familiar in eastern India so while minting their own coins, all the kingdom of North East India took this style of engraving the name and accession year from the contemporary Islamic coins. So in this respect the medieval kingdoms of North East India shares common similarities.

The dynastic coins of North East India can be used as a media of reconstructing the political history of the each state. Coins bearing the name and year provide us systematic information regarding the chronology and succession of the rulers of a particular dynasty, and in North East Indian perspective this short of information is very useful as because of the lack of adiquite volume of literary evidences. All these kingdom maintained a practice of engraving the name of the ruler along with the accession year in their coins so by the minute study of the coins in each case a detailed chronological history of a particular kingdom can be achieved. In the case of Koch coinage for example, starting from Nara Narayan down to Jgaddipendra Narayan all the kings inscribed their names in their coins, from this we can have a chronological history of the Koch rulers. Similarly the other states also practiced this custom of minting the name of the king and accession year while minting their coins. By the comparative analysis of Koch coins and with that of the other kingdoms one can know the name of different rulers at a same time by using their coins. So in terms of reconstruction of chronological history of these kingdoms the coins are a good source of information and in this respect the kingdoms of medieval North East India shares common similarities.

In respect of economic compulsion behind the introduction of coinage all the North East Indian kingdom share a similar motive. Before the establishment of a well-organized currency system by these kingdoms, the region was carring on its transaction activity in barter system. The most probable cause of this nonexistence of currency may be traced in the patterns of the society. The tribal

societies of North East India were homogenous and the economy was self-sufficient due to political as well as communicational backdrop. But with the state formation process the economy also got pace when limited market trading was unable to meet the kingdoms internal as well as external necessities. In this situation most of the kingdoms understood the necessity of eradication of the complexities of barter mode of transaction and issued currencies in their respective territories and thus making their economy stronger. Besides this economic compulsion the growing use of coins in day to day transaction compelled all these state to mint currency of their own.

In the case of introducing coins though the early impetus came from political prerogatives but economic reasons were as strong as the earlier cause. Probably it was due to the economic cause that compelled these kingdoms to mint coins to consolidate the economy first and then claim obedience from the common masses. In this respect the role of currency is crucial because monetary consolidation of the region gave pace to the state formation process. Similarly, with the introduction of state-sponsored coinage, these Kingdoms regulated the transaction system, which helped a lot in the direction of their economic development. With the advent of a proper medium of exchange, trade and commerce flourished and the self-sufficient rural economy of these states started to transform into a surplus economy. The regional currencies of medieval North East India are very significant in visualizing the entire economic environment of the region especially to understand the growth of trade and commerce. Trading activity in the North East India can be supplemented by the discoveries of several hoards of different dynastic coins from various remote areas of North East India. By comparing the role of these coins conclusions can be drawn about the prevailing economic condition of the region.

Another area in respect of comparative analysis of these regional currencies is the source of metal for coining money. As there is no silver mines in North East India so the silver must have reached in these states in the course of trade. These dynastic coins provide an interesting case study as the silver coinage was very plentiful at several periods in these states. Side by side of trading activity

silver was acquired in the way of warfare. For example it is recorded in the local chronicles of the Koch kingdom that the kingdom acquired a lot of silver as tribute from various states conquered by Nara Narayan during his military expeditions. Much of this treasure was struck into coins by Nara Narayan. Similarly all the other states acquired silver from taking tributes from their subordinate states.

In terms of cultural comparison among these coins lots of resemblances can be found. The coins of Medieval North East India provide valuable information regarding beliefs and practices of the kings and the people of these kingdoms and by the comparative analysis of the religious epithets inscribed on coins one can understand the cultural sensibilities of the region in general. The religious inscriptions on the coins, together with the name of the king reinforced the religious identity of the monarch and of the state. Presence of name or some time pictures of the Gods and Goddesses on the coins help us to determine the evolution of different religious sects in North East India. The comparative study of varied types of coins belonging to different kingdoms exhibit an embodiment of North East Indian culture in the miniature form. By the in-depth comparative study of the coin symbols from the historical perspective we can get a comprehensive idea of the gradual evolution of religious sects. For example the term '*Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhukarasya*' is engraved in most of the coins of Koch dynasty. The phrase inscribed on the reverse side of the coins show the deep relationship between the Koch kings with Siva and also it establishes the fact that the association of Siva with the people of the kingdom was very deep-rooted. Likewise the Koch kingdom, Siva was a very popular deity in Medieval North East India which can be supplemented by the coins of Ahom and Tripura kingdom where *Sivait* affiliation can be proved from their religious epithets inscribed on the coins of those two states.

If we compare the various dynastic coins of medieval North East India we donot find any pictorial representation of the deity except in some coins of Tripura where an image showing the traditional attributes of the tribal mother goddess *Nowi*, takes the role of *Garuda* as the *vahana* of

Vishnu and Narayan is depicted as a human-faced dragon, which may have been recognized by the tribal as a deity. So it can be proved that the worship of Vishnu was popular in Tripura and as the dynastic title of the Koch kings was Narayan so it can be assumed that there was a deep interrelationship of Vishnu worship in both Koch and Tripura kingdom.

The absence of pictorial representation either of the ruler or the deity in the coins of these states offers a serious review in respect of comparative understanding of these coins. It is very surprising to us that why the then rulers devoid of practice of inscribing their pictures. The answer can be found in the greater perspective of issuing these coins. These regional currencies had introduced in respect of the gradual penetration of Islamic currencies in North East India and they were inspired by the Islamic coins a lot. In Islamic coins there were no pictorial representation either of the issuer or of the deity due to the non-idol worship philosophy of Islam. So instead of pictorial representation the Islamic rulers inscribed their name and accession year in their coinages. So all the states of North East took this style of minting coins to maintain close similarities with that of the Islamic coinage.

In terms of artistic vigor and sensibilities all the currencies of Medieval North East India share strong resemblances. From a comparative analysis we can find that in the field of decorative design all the regional currencies have drastic similarities. The varied symbols present on the coins of medieval North East India depict a vivid reflection of religious as well as cultural impression of its people as well. These dynastic coins are beautifully stuck which may be termed as masterpieces of contemporary numismatic art. Looking at art on different coins we find a large number of symbols occupying a preeminent position. Though the art motifs on the coins are essentially primitive in nature but some of their creations can be classed as art object. Both religion and practical necessity compelled the issuer of these coins to assign certain decorative ornamentation. As in these states *Shivism* and *Vaisnavism* had a very strong hold so *Sivait* and *Vaishnavite* epithets took a prominent place in the coins of different dynasties. Besides this religious perspective of artistic execution of North East Indian coins some other reasons were also behind it, which compelled the rulers of

different dynasties to choose certain kind of decorative ornamentations. Among these, the other contemporary coins and their religious affiliation was a determining factor behind the execution of numismatic art. The Muslim currency both from Bengal and Delhi was in vogue in the territories of North East India before the establishment of these states and the use of such coins probably influenced the artistic execution of the regional coinage. So when these kingdoms planned to introduce their own currency, they were stylistically very much influenced by the Muslim currencies and copied their style. They issued coins in the prevailing imperial Muslim types. The weight standard and fabric of their coins were initially derived from Sultani *Tanka*. But it was not only the Muslim coins that influenced the artistic designs of the coins of these kingdoms but also the glorious series of ancient Hindu coinages of different dynasties may have profound impact behind their artistic execution on coins. Because all these kingdoms practiced Hinduism in faith so they may have come into touch of ancient Hindu coinages and the artistic excellence of ancient Indian coins shaped their artistic mind. The coins of these kingdoms were basically die-struck and round in shape and made of silver generally but occasionally they were made of gold and contain legend in both sides. Though all the coin issuing state of North East India issued coins round in shape but the Ahoms issued coins in octagonal shape. This octagonal shape gave the Ahom coins a unique place in the entire series of North East coins.

The style of writing legends by these regional states on their coins is very important aspect in comparative analysis. The legends on most of these coins are written in *Devanagari* language but used proto-Bengali or Assamese script. But the Bengali or the Assamese alphabets are found in crude form and it reflects the evolution of Bengali and Assamese alphabet in miniature form. The artistic quality of coin legends depend upon the die cutters. For example, in the time of Nara Narayan when the size of coins were big, the legend could be prominently seen but in the later phase when size of the coin became lesser the legend was written tightly and some cases it was quite difficult to read the legends properly. In the case of the other states the size of the coins gradually reduced. It may be due

to the lack of silver supply or may be the growing use of coins that compelled the kings to struck smaller denominations which ultimately reduced their artistic quality. Besides this, as the technology of making dies was primitive so all the characters of the legend could not be presented in the coins in any of the issues of these states.

The process of de-monetization of the regional currencies of medieval North East India offers a fresh investigation in terms of comparative analysis of these currencies. The complex currency condition in the early phase of British domination in North East led the English East India Company to its intention of establishing one uniform system of currency throughout its possession in North East India. The company's intention was to have the Bengal *Sicca* rupee replace all the other currencies of North East India. As the primary goal of the monetary policy of the British in North East India was to stabilize the exchange rate, so mere introduction of a standardize currency in company's domain was not enough to meet the British need. For this it was extremely important for the colonial masters to stop the circulation of the regional currencies. Instead of using the Company currency the regional powers of North East India used their own currency in day to day transactions. So a series of attempts had been taken by the Company authority to demonetize these princely currencies.

Initially the British authorities permitted the regional kingdom of North East India to mint their own currency but later they found it would be difficult for them if the regional currencies were in circulation. So first of all they imposed several impositions over the free circulations of the different currencies. The British authorities fixed the number of coins to be struck. For example in the Koch kingdom the British authorities asked a certain number of coins to be struck in every year. Likewise the Koch kingdom, several impositions was placed over the free minting of coins in the other Kingdom's currency. The next attempt towards de-monetization of these currencies was that the British authorities denied accepting tribute in the local currencies. Instead of that they claimed that tribute must be paid on imperial currency only. The third step towards the demonetization of regional currencies of North East India was that the British authorities tried to impose the Farukkabad rupees

in the markets of North East India for the steady implantation of their own currency. The British authorities took these measures towards the demonetization of the regional currencies of North East India. Gradually by the pressure of the British authorities the all regional Kingdoms lost its hold over their right of coining money. If we compare the process of demonetization of each and every case then we can find that the procedure of making the British intention was successful similar in each case.

So from the above study it is evidently clear that that in Mediaeval North East India indigenous coins issued by different dynasties occupied a prominent position in politico-economic and cultural spheres in medieval North East India. It is really a surprising fact to us that how in those primitive days the kings of different dynasties felt the necessity of a state sponsored well-organized currency system for the improvement of their subjects. As all the medieval kingdoms emerged in a specific geographical area so in terms of administration they were highly influenced by each other and this steady competition gave birth to so many effective mechanism which ultimately paved the way for the gross development of the entire region. Introduction of a regularized currency in their respective territories was one of the important path breaking event in their history. Though the currency got its initial impetus from outside but with the passage of time they assumed their special character and made their place permanent in the numismatic heritage of the subcontinent. These currencies not only revolutionised the economic scenario but also opened a platform where the North East Indian heritage could be preserved. As the medieval kingdoms were emerged from a common root so in the field of coinage they had common intention, characteristics and utility. In terms of political, economic, cultural and artistic execution they were so similar to each other so that sometimes numismatist can identify just from a glimpse. Not only that like its origin its weakening process was also to some extent same.

Koch coinage has a special importance here because it was the Koch coinage that inspired the other North East Indian kingdoms to strike their own coins. Because when Nara Narayan began his

empire building process he almost conquered the entire North East India and subjugated all other kingdoms under the imperial umbrella of Koch kingdom and ordered to pay tribute by the subjugated kings. This drive compelled the other kingdoms to strike coins for paying tribute to the Koch royal exchequer. So they were very much influenced by the artistic execution of Koch coinage and other allied factors. Not only that Nara Narayan compelled some of these kingdoms to mint coin in the name of Nara Narayan so the initial coinages of those states were minted in the name of the Koch ruler. As time passes the political hold of Koch kingdom over these kingdoms started to reduce and although the tribute paying compulsion was nonexistent but the people of these kingdoms was accustomed with use of currency in their day to day activity, so the rulers of the concerned kingdom carried on the practice of minting coins uninterruptedly. So in this respect the Koch coinage had deep impact on the other contemporary coinages. Similarly if we examine the decorative execution of the Koch coins so we can find that the other territorial currencies of North East India shaped the decorative design of the Koch coinage a lot. For example the square box design of the Koch coins was borrowed from the Manikya coin that was also a tribute paying state in Nara Narayan's reign. Besides this if we examine the denomination of the Koch coins then we can notice that in the initial years of its existence Koch coins were issued in big denomination but after the reign of Lakshmi Narayan smaller denomination were minted. It was probably an impact of the other dynastic coins of North East India. So finally we can say that the Koch coinage and other territorial coinages of North East India had a reciprocal relationship to each other and both of them were influenced by each other tremendously which ultimately increased the accessibility of coins in the entire region.

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45. It should be noted that coins hardly existed in Ladakh at this time but in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Alamgir (1665-66), 1000 *mohurs* 2000 rupees of the imperial type with the mint name Tibet Kalam were sent as specimens to the court. Only the gold mohur of this issue has been seen to date and it would be interesting to speculate that the coins sent to Bhutan in 1680 might been of this type.
46. C.T. Dorji, *op.cit.*, p. 108.
47. *ibid.*, p. 113.
48. *ibid.*, p. 118.

# Conclusion

The present research contains an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion of the overall study. In the introduction we have introduced the problems under study and presented a brief overview of the system of coinage in India from its beginning to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century to give an idea of the system of coinage in India. Then the next part briefly summarizes the technical aspect of a coin. The next section concentrates our attention towards the coinage of the princely states in the Indian subcontinent, prior and after the Muslim rule to justify the need of coinage system by the independent states. The remaining section finally gives a bird's eye view of the organization of the entire thesis. In the following we have attempted to summarise the main contents of our study and point out the important findings of the present study and also present a set of concluding observations.

Chapter I bears a title '*Koch Dynasty: A Political Outline*' which is an introductory chapter of the present research. The chapter intends to show the history of the Koch kingdom from the early thirteenth century up to the merger of the state with Union of India. In the first part of the chapter, location, nomenclature and topography are discussed to understand the favorable condition of the emergence of the Koch state. Though the Koch emerged in the territory in the first half of the sixteenth century but the politico-social condition of the area before the establishment of the Koch state is also discussed here. In this respect the emergence of the Khen dynasty is consulted and how gradually the Khen rule came to an end is also highlighted here. The emergence of the Koch is the most historically significant event of the sixteenth century. How the Koch grew here after dispelling the other minor communities is analyzed here. After the initial years of its existence Koch kingdom witnessed of its most able ruler Nara Narayan. How Nara Narayan consolidated the kingdom and expanded the territories of the state in the far-flung parts of North East India and retained as a

sovereign state until the second half of the eighteenth century is vividly examined. Events which paved the way to the involvement of the English East India Company in Koch affairs are carefully re-examined and how the state from an independent principality turned into a tributary state of the British Empire is vividly analyzed. The political history of the state during the Company and also under the Crown rule is also discussed. Lastly the history of the merger of the kingdom with union of India is shown in the later phase.

The chapter II entitled as '*Economic Scenario in the Koch Kingdom*', this chapter also acts as a background chapter. This chapter is incorporated because as the present study attached with coinage which is an integral part of the economic affairs so without understanding the economic viability of the kingdom we cannot justify the system of coinage properly. In this chapter the economic viability of the Koch state and correlation among the surplus generation, its extraction and concentration are the basic themes which have been discussed here. The structure of land revenue system and administration, technological acculturation of the people of the kingdom, process of peasantization, commercial relations with neighboring countries and the role of *Narayani Tankas* in the commercial transaction of the kingdom are discussed here.

The chapter III is given the title '*Origin and Development of Koch Coinage (1496-1773)*'. The origin and development of the Koch coinage is the main attention of the third chapter. Here the economic condition and the mode of transaction before the establishment of the Koch kingdom are discussed. The transaction system in Bengal and its neighboring territories are clarified here, as because it will help us to understand the general patterns of development of the coinage system. The events which compelled Nara Narayan to introduce a state sponsored currency in the Koch kingdom is discussed here. How with the expansion of the territory by Nara Narayan, the Narayani currency became popular in a wider range of area of North East India and how far the Narayani currency acted as the instigating factor for the introduction of various other regional currencies is vividly discussed here. Besides this some technical aspects of Nara Narayan's currency is attached here to understand

the gradual development of this currency. After the demise of its originator how the remaining kings of the Koch kingdom maintained the acceptability of the currency to a wider range of area upto 1773, is discussed in the later part of this chapter.

Chapter IV entitled '*Koch Coinage: From Anglo-Koch Treaty to Merger (1773-1949)*'. The chapter explores the condition of the Koch coinage from Anglo-Koch treaty to Jagaddipendra Narayan the last king. Careful re-examination has been made here about the ups and downs of Koch coins due to the British monopolistic attitude. How the Koch kingdom came into contact with the British and which resulted the loss of political sovereignty and which subsequently paved the way for the de-monetization of its age long currency is also narrated here. The chapter also explores the Company's intention of establishing a uniform unit of money to eradicate the complexities of multiple unit of value. In this respect on the basis of the diplomatic letters exchanged between the commissioners stationed at Cooch Behar with the high official of the British government is consulted here to reveal the gradual debasement of the Narayani currency.

In chapter V we have discussed the '*Koch Coins in Cultural Perspective*'. How far the Koch cultural heritage is being preserved on the coins is discussed here. If we look back deep into the Koch coinage it can be seen how the same is influenced by religion to a great extent. In numerous types of coins one can find legends symbolizing the religious path followed by the rulers of the Koch kingdom. Judging from this angle, the religious incitement of the rulers is can be asessed. The speciality of Koch coinage is that both side, of the coin contain legends. The obverse shows the dedicative inscriptions and the rulers name, epithet, year of issue. The legends are found to be in details in full unit coins while fractional unit coins show shorter forms. A careful study of the obverse legends show that these coins have invocation to Gods and Goddesses of two separate cults of Hinduism prevailing at that time in Eastern India the *Shivism* and *Vaishnavism*. While examining the volume of availability of the coins in the Koch kingdom it is seen that generally the coins with invocation to Siva are plenty

in number while those invoked to Vishnu are rare. Besides this both Hindu and Muslim elements on Koch Coins, secular symbols have been analyzed here.

Lastly, chapter VI deals with the '*Koch Coinage in relation to that of the Neighboring States*'. This chapter is basically a descriptive as well as analytical chapter which has explored the other dynastic coinages of medieval North East India. In this chapter the beginning of the system of coinage in North East India is discussed. We have found that the Koch coinage greatly inspired the other North Eastern states to introduce coins in their respective territories. Here we have discussed about the other coinages like as Ahom, Tripura, Kachar, Manipur, Bhutan to understand the impact of the Koch coinage over the economy and politics of North East India and adjoining areas. In the remaining section a comparative analysis in terms of Political, economic and socio-cultural perspective is discussed to understand the inter relationship between Koch and other North East Indian coins.

## II

So from the above mentioned survey we can come to this point that the Koch kingdom was one of the most prolific coin issuing kingdoms of the medieval North East India and struck coins for circulation almost continuously from the mid-sixteenth century until the late eighteenth century when the British forced its closure. It is suggested that Visvasimha may have struck coins however, in course of our research we have find several literary references regarding Visvasimha's coins so it is presumable that Visvasimha might have his own coins. But until the discovery of Visvasimha's coin we can not say it definitely. But surely it was the credit of his son and successor Nara Narayan who struck coins in quite high numbers. With the increase of his territory *Narayani* currency extended over a vast area of North East India. This continuation of striking coins was hampered due to the invasion of Bhutan in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The King of Koch Behar took help from the English East India Company to resist the Bhutanese attack and made an agreement with the British (1773). By this

agreement Koch kingdom became a tributary state and it lost the authority of minting coins. Finally the Koch mint was permanently closed by a British order of 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1845. In spite of the closure, the Narayani rupee of Koch kingdom continued to be very popular among the local people until the mid-nineteenth century because of its relatively reliable silver content and weight and the rulers retained the right to strike one hundred one gold and one thousand one silver coins on the occasion of their coronation. The coins were mass produced using rupee sized dies to strike half rupee sized coins with no attempts at artistic excellence. The coins were used not only in the Koch state itself but also beyond its borders in Bhutan, western Assam and other adjoining areas. From our study we have reached certain conclusions on the importance, viability of the Koch currency. In the following we will highlight on that.

The coins are of immense importance as contemporary historical documents in providing firm dates for the reign of the each king and independent confirmation of certain other important events. While literary sources may illuminate brilliantly short periods or episodes, coins offer a much more continuous chronological and geographical coverage. In this respect coins of Koch kingdom are of immense historical importance particularly as these coins are among the earliest historical documents that survive from the region and almost invariably dated as they are; for they duly bear the names and epithets of the issuing kings. The evidence of coins not only corroborate genuine facts as given by the literary sources but also supplement information not which are supplied by the literary sources. Coins have therefore a reliable chronological framework to be constructed for the history of the state, a framework that could not have been produced without them.

The coins are certainly circulated as currency. During the sixteenth century they were struck in reasonably large numbers and probably had a significant monetary function for payment of mercenary soldiers as well as being used as a store of wealth and for use in religious ceremonies and for payments to Brahmins. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they had a modest role for the payment of taxes and for use in day today transaction in the kingdom. These coins were the first path

maker of revolutionising of transaction system. As we have no specimen of state sponsored coinage before Narayani currency in North East India, so it is easy to believe that transaction was depended on barter system. But at the moment coins came to replace the barter mode of transaction it changed the whole volume of trade as it eradicated the complexities of barter transactions. As a result trade and commerce flourished in this region and the self-sufficient rural economy started to transform into a surplus economy and which ultimately increased the standard of living of common people and also helped a lot to develop the communication network. By taking inspiration from the Koch rulers the other princely kingdoms of North East India also started minting their own currencies and which popularized the acceptability of coins as a good mode of transaction, which ultimately paved the way for economic development of the entire region. Though we cannot get this short of information directly from coins but it compels us to think about the economic development and thus can be treated as valuable source for North East Indian economic history. They have been found in hoards beyond the borders of the Koch state primarily in the other kingdoms of North East India but their monetary use was largely confined to within the borders of the kingdom. In practice their commercial use was probably limited to the main commercial centers of the sub-Himalayan region of northern Bengal as well as some neighboring areas such as in Bhutan and in lower Assam.

Another area of economic activity to which coins provide an insight is in trading patterns. As there are no silver mines in North East, so the silver must have reached the states in the course of trade, probably from Bhutan or China, either directly or via Bengal. Koch coins provide an interesting case study as the silver coinage were very plentiful at several periods. After 1562, it is recorded in the local chronicles that Koch kingdom acquired a lot of silver as tribute from various states conquered by Nara Narayan during his military expedition. Much of this booty was struck into coins by Nara Narayan. Later kings however did not acquire silver through conquest and it is likely that those coins were struck from the profits earned from transit trade between Tibet and Bengal that passed through Bhutan and Koch kingdom. The sizes of the coinage provide a crude measure of volumes of this

trade. In particular no coins were struck in Koch kingdom between 1683 and 1695 which probably indicates that trade was disrupted during this decade. Find spots of coins indicate trade flows.

Numismatics illuminates the exercise of the political power and Koch coins are no exception of that process. There is a close relation in between imperialism or more specifically speaking empire building and coinage. The spread of an imperial coinage or of symbols relating to imperial control on local coinage may mirror the expansion of political sovereignty. The Koch established their political sovereignty over a considerable portion of North East India from about 1550 to about 1600. The ruling power imposed its own coinage, own weight standard and system of denominations over the regional kingdoms of North East India to claim imperial control. There is however another aspect of the coinage which has received less attention from historians. The introduction of coinage in Koch kingdom coincides with the time when the entire North Eastern region, came under the influence of Brahmanical Hinduism. This process of conversion to what is now commonly known as Hinduism at different times in different places and throughout the North East the introduction of coins became a part of this Hindu state formation process. The Muslim rulers of Bengal had been striking silver coins since the thirteenth century, so the issue of coins could perhaps be seen as part of a process of 'Civilization', instigated by the kings of each kingdoms of the region at the behest of the new immigrants from Bengal and in particular new Hindu immigrants.

Culturally also these coins are very significant as by the close study of various legends engraved on Koch coins we can get a picture of cultural atmosphere of the Koch kingdom and as well as North East India. The coins of Koch kingdom provide valuable information regarding beliefs and practices of the kings and the people in general. The religious inscriptions on the coins together with the name of the king reinforced the religious identity of the monarch and of the state. A careful study of the legends engraved on Koch coins show that these coins have invocation to Gods and Goddesses of two separate cults of Hinduism prevailing at that time in Eastern India the *Shivism* and *Vaishnavism*. While examining the volume of availability of the Koch coins it is seen that generally

the coins with invocation to Siva are plentiful while those invoked to Vishnu are rare. For example in Koch coins the term '*Sri Sri Siva Charana Kamala Madhukarasya*' is engraved in most of the coins Koch dynasty. The phrase inscribed on the reverse side of the coins to show the deep relationship of the Koch kings with Siva and also to establish the fact that the association of Siva with the people of the kingdom was very deep-rooted. Besides as the term *Narayan* was taken by the Koch rulers as their official dynastic name. As we all know that the Vaishnavism had a strong command over the Koch kingdom so it can be stated that the Koch took the name *Narayan* (Vishnu is also known as Narayan) as their dynastic name. We find both the term Siva and Narayan on the Koch coins so on the other way Koch coins signify that the Koch were not rigid in their religious attitude. Koch coins are not only the platform of assimilating the two cults of Hinduism itself but it has some greater significances as we find some unique signs on the coins which is regarded as sacred symbol in Islamic faith. In this way Koch coins tried to catch the sentiment of both the Hindu and Islamic population of the Koch kingdom. Apart from this direct information, coins provide us information relating patronization of religion. In those days monetary donations to temples and to the Brahmins were made by the state or private individuals. This economic assistance had increased the economic power of the religious institution and thus arts could flourish.

After 1773 the coins were struck exclusively for ceremonial purpose but the privilege of striking coins were carefully preserved and exercised even though the coins themselves could hardly be used as currency. With the consolidation of the British power in Northern part of Bengal, the East India Company had attempted to establish a uniform monetary system in this part of the country. Since the British neither sanctioned nor proscribed their issue the officials seemed to have kept a diplomatic silence over their continued production in the official administration and reports. The coinage was presumably regarded as a private issue of medallions not requiring sanction whereas the official policy was only to allow states to issue coins under strict control.

The coins of the Koch kingdom were beautifully struck mainly on carefully produced circular flans with dies of the same size as the flan. Their weight standard was carefully controlled and silver content appears to have been of the highest quality. The fact that relatively few pairs of dies were used at most periods indicate that production had not been high although the coins were retained as religious amulets or buried as treasure. The small denominations produced would seem to indicate that the coins were intended to be used in circulation but such use seems to have been limited and the small denominations are often in very fine condition. Gold coins were very rare and probably only struck for presentation purposes as the fineness was not as high or consistent as that of the silver pieces.

The introduction of a regularized currency system in Koch state by Nara Narayan was not a mere event of history but it ushered a new era in political, economic and also in cultural spheres. These coins were the sign of Nara Narayan's personal glory as well as his political supremacy over the territory he ruled. He was a contemporary ruler to Akbar, but in the way he conquered different parts of North East India and made the indigenous rulers as his subordinates it reflects his political wisdom and ability. These coins were the sign of sovereignty of Nara Narayan's military victory. As we have no specimen of state sponsored coinage before Nara Narayan in North East India, so it is easy to presume that transaction depended on barter system. But with the minting of coins, monetary transactions appear to have replaced the barter system and enhanced volume of trade. By taking inspiration from the Koch rulers, the other princely states of North East India also started minting their own coins and popularized the acceptability of coins as a better mode of transaction, ultimately paving the way for economic development of the entire region. Culturally also these coins are very significant as the close study of various legends engraved on Nara Narayan's coins we can get a picture of cultural and intellectual environment of the Koch kingdom and as well as North East India. By a minute analysis of the letters engraved in the coins we can know about the evolution of Bengali script and language. Besides the above mentioned importance these coins may be treated as primary

source materials in reconstruction of the Koch and North East Indian history. The information supplied by the literary sources can be corroborated with the numismatic sources and thus it helps us to draw a clear picture of the past. So finally, it can be stated that the coinage of the Koch kingdom have added a new chapter in the numismatic heritage of North East India and also in the Indian subcontinent. When corroborate with the legends, symbols and language of the era, the coins of the kingdom suggest the continuity of the cultural legacy of the mainland India. The information offered by these medieval coins certainly goes a long way to provide an antithesis of the 'colonial theory' that the region was 'completely isolated' from the rest of India. We have to work harder at producing proper corpuses of the coinage that exist and must use the raw data gleaned from the numismatic source.

## **:Appendices:**

### **Appendix- A**

#### **The Anglo-Koch Behar Treaty, 1773 A.D:**

Articles of the treaty signed between the Honorable East India Company and Durrinder Narayan, the king of Cooch Behar, 1773.

Durrinder Narain, Rajah of Cooch Behar, having represented to the Honorable the President and Council of Calcutta the present distressed state of the country, owing to its being harassed by the neighbouring independent Rajahs, who are league to depose him, the Honorable the President and council, from a love of justice and desire of assisting the distressed, have agreed to send a force, consisting of four companies of Sepoys and a field piece for the protection of the said Rajah and his country, against his enemies, and the following conditions are mutually agreed on:

1<sup>st</sup> – That the said Rajah will immediately pay into the hands of the Collector of Rungpoor 50000 rupees to defray the expenses of the force sent to assist him.

2<sup>nd</sup> - That is more than 50000 Rupees are expended, the Rajah will make it good to the Honorable the English East India Company, but in case any part of it remains unexpended that it be delivered back.

3<sup>rd</sup> – That the Rajah will be acknowledge subjection to the English East India Company upon his country being cleared of his enemies, and will allow the Cooch Behar country to be annexed to the Province of Bengal.

4<sup>th</sup> - That the Rajah further agree to make over to the English East India Company one half of the revenue of Cooch Behar forever.

5<sup>th</sup> – That the other moiety shall remain to the Rajah and his heirs forever provided he is firm in his allegiance to the Honorable United East India Company.

6<sup>th</sup> – That is order to ascertain the value of the Cooch Behar country, the Rajah will deliver a fair hustobood of his district into the hands of such person, as the Honorable the President and Council of Calcutta shall think proper to depute for that purpose, upon which valuation the annual mulguzary, which the Rajah is to pay, shall be established.

7<sup>th</sup> – That the amount of the mulguzary, settled by such person as the Honorable the East India Company shall depute, shall be perpetual.

8<sup>th</sup> – That the Honorable East India Company shall always assist the said Rajah with a force when he has occasion for it for the defense of the country, and Rajah bearing the expense.

9<sup>th</sup> – That this Treaty shall remain in force for the space of two years, or till such time as advices may be received from the Court of Directors, empowering the President and Council to ratify the same forever.

This signed, sealed and concluded by the Honorable the President and Council at Fort William, the fifth day of April 1773, on the one part, and by the Durrinder Narayan, Rajah of Cooch Behar, at Behyar Fort, the 6<sup>th</sup> Maug 1179 Bengal style, on the other part.

## Appendix – B

### Important Official Letters Related to Narayani Currency:

#### Letter No. 1

To – The Hon'ble Warren Hastings, ESQ., Governor-General of Council of Revenue at Fort William.

Rungpore:  
17<sup>th</sup> June 1779.

Hon'ble Sir and Sirs,

*COOCH BEHAR*, - The balance of Rs. 36,847-14-9 that appears against the pergunnah has, in a manner, been paid, and wants only your approbation to be carried to account. ...Raja Dudjinder Narain, in 1184 petitioned to pay his revenue in Kazannah Shi rupees, which you have honored by your approval in your letter of the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1777. But this year, being unable to accumulate more than half of his revenue in that specie, he deposited the remainder in New Narianny rupees, which are now in the treasury, and for this I want your commands. I take the liberty to observe, I do not think it will be his power to perform his engagement. You may probably require to know the reason of his being able to comply with it for the Bengal year 1184 and not for 1185. The case was in 1184 he had recourse to the shroffs, to whom he paid his revenues in New Narianny rupees, and they deposited their seared bags in the treasury for the amount, but this traffic with the shroffs being abolished as highly detrimental to the Hon'ble Company, the Zemminder has no other resource than to throw himself on your indulgence to release him from his engagement, and to admit the New Narianny rupees now in deposit in the treasury to be carried to his credit. I have the honor to enclose you translation of his petition to this purpose No. 2

*(Translation of the Petition of Raja Dudjinder Narayan, Raja of Cooch Behar)*

AT THE first settlement of the Tanna Beyhar the bundbust was made in New Narianny rupees. In the year 1184 according to my own desire and the favour of the Gentlemen of Council it was altered to Kazannah Shi rupees. At the time I made the request, I was unacquainted with the difficulty of procuring that specie. In that year with the utmost difficulty and trouble I obtained sufficient to pay my rent. In this year 1185, though I have done everything I could not complete my engagements, I have found it impossible, and have therefore deposited New Narianny rupees in the treasury to be carried to account, I humbly

request that you will permit the said New Narianny rupees now in the treasury to be carried to account, and suffer me in future to pay (as formerly) any rents in the specie.

**Letter No. 2**

To – The Hon’ble Warren Hastings, ESQ., Governor-General, and the Gentlemen of the Council of Revenue at Fort William

Rungpore:  
22<sup>nd</sup> November 1779.

Hon’ble Sir and Sirs,

I AM favored with your commands of 1<sup>st</sup> ultimo.

You will please observe that a very large part of the treasure is in New Narianny rupees, which are current only in Cooch Behar and the country subject to Bhootan. The state of this coin having brought so fully and repeatedly before you, it is unnecessary for me this time to say much on the subject. New Nariannies are nominally estimated at proportion of 13,674 to 100 Siccas, which is much higher than their actual value. The batta at they have continued to be converted, since your orders of the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1778 in six annas in the French Arcot rupee; but the sum exchanged ever at this rate being less during these two last years than the annual revenue received from Cooch Behar, it is likely to require some exertion to prevent their accumulating. The present season of the year, when merchants proceed towards the hills to purchase cotton and other goods, has hitherto afforded the best and indeed almost the only opportunity of realizing them. And as I find it impossible to exchange them at the ideal discount of 3,674 per cent, I shall endeavour to dispose of as large a quantity as possible to the merchants at the rate you were pleased formerly to approve.

I am, etc.  
George Bogle.

**Letter No. 3**

To – William Paxton, ESQ., Mint Master, Fort William.

Rungpore,  
22<sup>nd</sup> December 1779.

Sir,

AS I FIND it will be necessary to address the Hon’ble Board on the state of the coin of this province, and wish to bring the subject before them as completely as possible, I beg leave to transmit your parcels containing specimens of the different kinds of the old and new Narianny rupees marked with the name of Rajahs of denominations by which they pass,

request you will be pleased to assay and furnish me with the account of the quality of pure silver in each class together with that in a sicca rupee, in other that I may be enabled to compare the intrinsic value of the two coins together.

I am, etc.,  
George Bogle.

#### **Memorandum of Classes**

1. Cohna	8 halves or	Rs. 4
2. Metrass	”	4
3. Furcha	”	4
4. Kazanna Shi	6 halves and 1 whole or	4
5. Debender Narain	8 halves or	4
6. Marrinder Narain	”	4
7. Durga Narain	”	4
8. Roopinder Narain	”	4

#### **Letter No. 4**

To – C. Morley, ESQ., Accountant-General.

Sir,

CONFORMABLY to the instruction of Government, conveyed to me in Mr. Secretary Trevelyan's letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> ultimo, I have the honor to inform you that as I presume the introduction of Furruckabad coinage into Assam is a preparatory step to a measure of far greater importance, I would beg to suggest that the Rajah of Cooch Behar should be desired to receive from the Collector of Rungpore or Gowalparah the Furruckabad Rupees in exchange for all the Narainy Rupeea, paid into his Treasury, and be requested to make issues to all his establishment in the new coin only. I am inclined to believe His Highness would not object to this proposition. I observe I have led you into an error. The Rajah is not permitted to have a mint, but a great quantity of spurious Narainy Rupees comes into Assam that is coined out of our territories; the largest portion and the most debased probably from Bhootan.

I have & c.  
(Sd.) F JENKINS,  
*Agent, Governor-General.*  
POLITICAL AGENT'S OFFICE,  
N. E. FRONTIER, *The 8<sup>th</sup> October 1834.*  
POLITICAL AGENT'S OFFICE, N. E. FRONTIER.

## Letter No. 5

The 28<sup>th</sup> June 1835.

To – W. H. MACNAGHTEN, ESQ., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, in the Political Department, Fort William.

Sir,

WITH reference to that part of the 12<sup>th</sup> paragraph of the Accountant-General's letter of the 23<sup>rd</sup> October last, to the address of the Deputy Secretary Trevelyan, which suggested the expediency of endeavoring to introduce the Furruckabad coinage into Cooch Behar, I have the honor to submit a translation of a letter to me from the Rajah of Cooch Behar, in reply to my letter to him proposing the subject

1. It will be perceived that the Rajah is very averse to the adoption of the measure in question, which he alleges would be derogatory to his dignity, and injurious to the agricultural and commercial interests of his territory, particularly in stopping the trade with Bhootan.
2. The Narainee Rupees, the current coin of Cooch Behar, formed the coinage of ancient Kamroop, the kingdom of the Narayan family, of which the principal branch extant is the family of the Rajah of Cooch Behar. The coinage now is one of the oldest now current in India, and we may readily suppose that the Rajah eagerly clings to retention of the coin, as to one of the only remaining tokens of the sovereign independence of the house. It will be for the Government to judge, whether he can with propriety be indulged in his wishes, in reference to what has been prescribed elsewhere relative to the coinage of other dependent princes, for the general benefit of the people of our Indian Empire.
3. It will be recollected that our Government has never allowed the Rajah to coin Narainy Rupees, and though it has entrusted to him the internal management of his country, it has never admitted any pretensions *independent*. The Government has indeed placed the Rajah on a superior footing to that enjoyed by his ancestors under the Mahomedan Government, which only permitted the family to assume the title of zeminder.
4. Notwithstanding that no open coinage of the Narainee Rupees has been acknowledged for a half century at least, and the constant consumption of this coin at our mints and in other ways, yet the number of these Rupees is still apparently undiminished, which naturally leads to the conclusion that extensive forgeries of them must take place somewhere, and with so rude a coin, it might be expected that its falsification would be common, as is certainly the case within the Bhootan frontier, if not in the Raja's and our country. It appears to me, therefore, that the coinage will never be exhausted, as long as the Government continues to receive the tribute of Cooch Behar in its Rupees.

5. With regard to the effect of an altered currency upon the inhabitants of Cooch Behar, I cannot apprehend any injurious tendency, as far as their payment of revenue is concerned, if the exchange is made in good faith by the Rajah; as to their internal communication, those with our immediate subjects are most important to them and these must now be effected through the medium of the Sicca or Sonat Rupees, their intercourse with the Bhooteahs being principally confined to barter; but if much coin is exchanged, no falling off of the trade is likely to take place from the exchange of the Rupees, Judging from the result of the alteration which has already taken place on the much longer frontier Bhootan, east of Cooch Behar, into which the Sonat Rupees has now been introduced, and to take which the Bhotas, to my knowledge made no objection whatsoever.

6. I beg to mention that I am of opinion that, whether as regards the well – being of the inhabitants of Cooch Behar, who are really our subjects, though under the Rajah’s separate management, or the general good of the surrounding districts, that the abolition of the Narainee coinage is equally desirable, and the only question is whether the great object of establishing a uniformity of coinage throughout our territories is to be delayed or hindered by a regard for the personal feelings of the Rajah of Cooch Behar, as, I conceive by any engagements.

7. At the present Rajah is very old and debilitated man, his decease cannot be long deferred, and possibly the Government may think proper to postpone till that event any arrangement on the subject in question. The personal character, however, of the Rajah is not such, I fear, as to entitle him to much consideration from the Government, and he is in such a state by my accounts, as to be scarcely able to estimate any kindness, the Government may intend to show him.

I have & c.  
(Sd.) F. JENKINS,  
Agent, Governor – General.

### **Letter No. 6**

Translation of a letter from the Rajah of Cooch Behar dated 27<sup>th</sup> Bysac, 325 Rajshaka (A.D. 9<sup>th</sup> May 1835) to the Governor – General’s Agent of Assam.

AFTER COMPLIMENTS:

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 17<sup>th</sup> Aughun 1241, on the subject of the abolition of the Narainee Rupees and institution in their place of the new Furruckabad Rupees, (as established in the territories south and west of Benaras and now in Gawalparah and Assam), and recommending to send in my Narainee Rupees in order to have them

exchanged, as the coin will not be current after one year; also yours of the 25<sup>th</sup> Falgoon requesting a speedy answer to the foregoing. In truth, I am at a loss for a reply on this subject, as my ancestor subjected himself to the Honorable Company, in the hope that our old laws and institutions would, in some measure be respected and no alteration in them be exacted, and no change has yet been required that, should your present intention be carried into effect, my dignity and rank must very materially be affected, since in the impression on the coin must be considered as the first distinguishing rank of royalty. I must, therefore, beg of you to reflect on the injury such a change will bring on me. Former Commissioners have frequently written to me to pay my revenue in the current Sicca Rupees, proposing to deduct 36,000, some hundreds of Rupees, as the difference in Coin, but I have never consented to the proposal solely with the view to preserve the currency of my coin, and in this have met with the support of the Court. Should the Narainee Rupee be entirely done away with, my ryots and merchants will also be injured, if not totally ruined, as a very considerable trade is carried on between us and the Bhooteahs, with whom none but Narainee Rupees would pass, and should this lead to a stoppage of our trade with them, it will be very difficult to pay my revenue at all. The delay in writing must be attributed entirely to the difficulty of giving a suitable answer to your proposal, and perceiving that none but yourself can assist me in this dilemma, I have laid open my condition. I acknowledge myself subject to the Company, who can never be benefited by insisting on a change, must so materially injure me. I would, therefore, beg you to stop the measure proposed by yourself, or write to the Court in such a manner or term, that it may not take place.

(True translation)

(Sd.) F. JENKINS,  
Agent, Governor – General.

### **Letter No. 7**

To – CAPTAIN F. JENKINS, Agent to the Governor – General, N.E. Frontier.

Sir,

WITH reference to your letter, dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> June last, submitting translation of a letter from the Rajah of Cooch Behar, stating his dissent to the proposed introduction of the Furruckabad currency in his country, I am desired to forward to you for your information the accompanying copy of a letter to my address from the Accountant – General, dated the 20<sup>th</sup> ultimo.

2. The Rajah of Cooch Behar cannot be considered in any respect entitled to exercise an act of sovereignty, and his personal objection to a measure of such general importance cannot be permitted to prevent its being carried into effect.

3. You are accordingly authorized to require the Rajah to pay his tribute in the standard coin of British India, and you will consult his convenience by offering to his new Furruckabad Rupees in exchange for all the Naraynee Rupees, now in his Treasury, at the proper rate exchange, though His Honor doubts the expediency of holding out the same indulgence with regards to all such Rupees, as may hereafter accumulate previous to their absolute prohibition.

4. It will be time enough to consider the further measures, proposed by the Accountant – General, should the measure of requiring the Rajah’s tribute to be paid in Furruckabad Rupees fail of producing the effect anticipated.

I have & c.  
(Sd.) W.H. MACNAGHTEN,  
Secy. To the Government of Bengal.  
FORT WILLIAM  
3<sup>rd</sup> August 1835

### **Letter No. 8**

To – W. H. MACNAGHTEN, ESQ., Secretary to the Government.

Sir,

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of an extract from proceedings of the Government of Bengal in the Political Department, under date the 31<sup>st</sup> instant, desiring me to report my opinion on the subject of the address of Captain Jenkins, the Agent to the Governor – General on the North East frontier, dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> ultimo, communication the translation of a letter, written to him by the Rajah of Cooch Behar, in which the Rajah expresses his aversion to the payment of his tribute in new Furruckabad Rupees, and to the extinction of the Naraynee Rupees.

2. The argument adduced by the Rajah for the continuance of the Naraynee Rupee are so ill – grounded and ill – sustained, as shown by Captain Jenkins (who is under no apprehension of injury either to agriculture or commerce from the introduction of the new Furruckabad Rupee), and the object on view of such paramount importance, that I have no hesitation in expressing my entire concurrence in the propriety of making it peremptory upon the Rajah, to pay his tribute in the standard coin of British India, which measure will, I

apprehend, induce him, for his own sake to waive his objections and receive the same from his ryots in payment of their revenue.

3. With the view to the Rajah's convenience, new Furruckabad Rupees might be offered to him at the prescribed rate, in exchange for all the Naraynee Rupees, now in his Treasury and which may hereafter accumulate, until the receipt of the Naraynee Rupees be altogether prohibited, but with the understanding that unless he co-operate with the British authorities in the object of giving general currency to the Furruckabad Rupee, and eventually to the Company's Rupee by disbursing it to his establishments, such accommodation will not be accorded in future, and that he will be left to procure the same as he may be able, he being held liable to interest and penalty in default of payment of his tribute at the regulated period. By this means he will be compelled to encourage the tender of the said Rupees and receive them from his Ryots.

4. Should these measures fail of procuring the Rajah's concurrence; the only alternative will be to declare the new Furruckabad and Company's Rupees to be legal tenders throughout Cooch Behar by a proclamation to this effect, which would compel his acquiescence in the views of Government. I have taken the liberty of recommending measures of a prompt and determinative character, from an opinion that the Rajah of Cooch Behar, who is apparently rather a subject of the British Government than an independent Sovereign, should not be permitted to interfere with a financial measure of the comprehensive and beneficial nature, just resolved upon by the Supreme Government of India, of having an uniform coin for the whole of British India, and likewise from a conviction that in the state of imbecility, in which he is represented to be by the Agent to the Governor-General, and surrounded probably by sinister influence, such an unequivocal expression of the intentions of Government is necessary to remove his repugnance to the contemplated change of currency.

I have & c.  
(Sd.) C.MORLEY  
Accountant – General  
FORT WILLIAM  
20<sup>th</sup> July 1835  
(True Copy)(Sd.) W.H. MACNAGHTEN,  
Secy. To the Government of Bengal.

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*Rautkuchi Copper plate Inscription of Purushottamdas.* The inscription records the grants of village, Rautkuchi, near modern Nalbari in Kamrup district to a Brahmin, Dharmakanta, by a Bhuyan named Purushottamdas in Saka 1251 (AD1329). It throws light on the political history of the Kamarupa kings who ruled before the Koch.

*The Hayagriiva Madhava Temple Inscription:* The rebuilding of the temple by king Raghudeva Narayan in the *Saka*1505 has been engraved in this inscription.

*The Kamakshya Temple Inscription:* This inscription has recorded the rebuilding of the Kamakshya temple by Malladeva (Nara Narayan) and Sukladhvja (Chilarai) in the *Saka* 1487.

*The Kamatesvari Temple Inscription:* The inscription in engraved in the temple of Kamatesvari has recorded its building by King Prana Naranan in the *Saka* 1587.

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# Plate No. I

## 1. Nara Narayan:



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

**Plate No. II**



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

**Plate No. III**



**2. Lakshmi Narayan:**



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

**Plate No. IV**



Courtesy: S.K. Bose

## Plate No. V



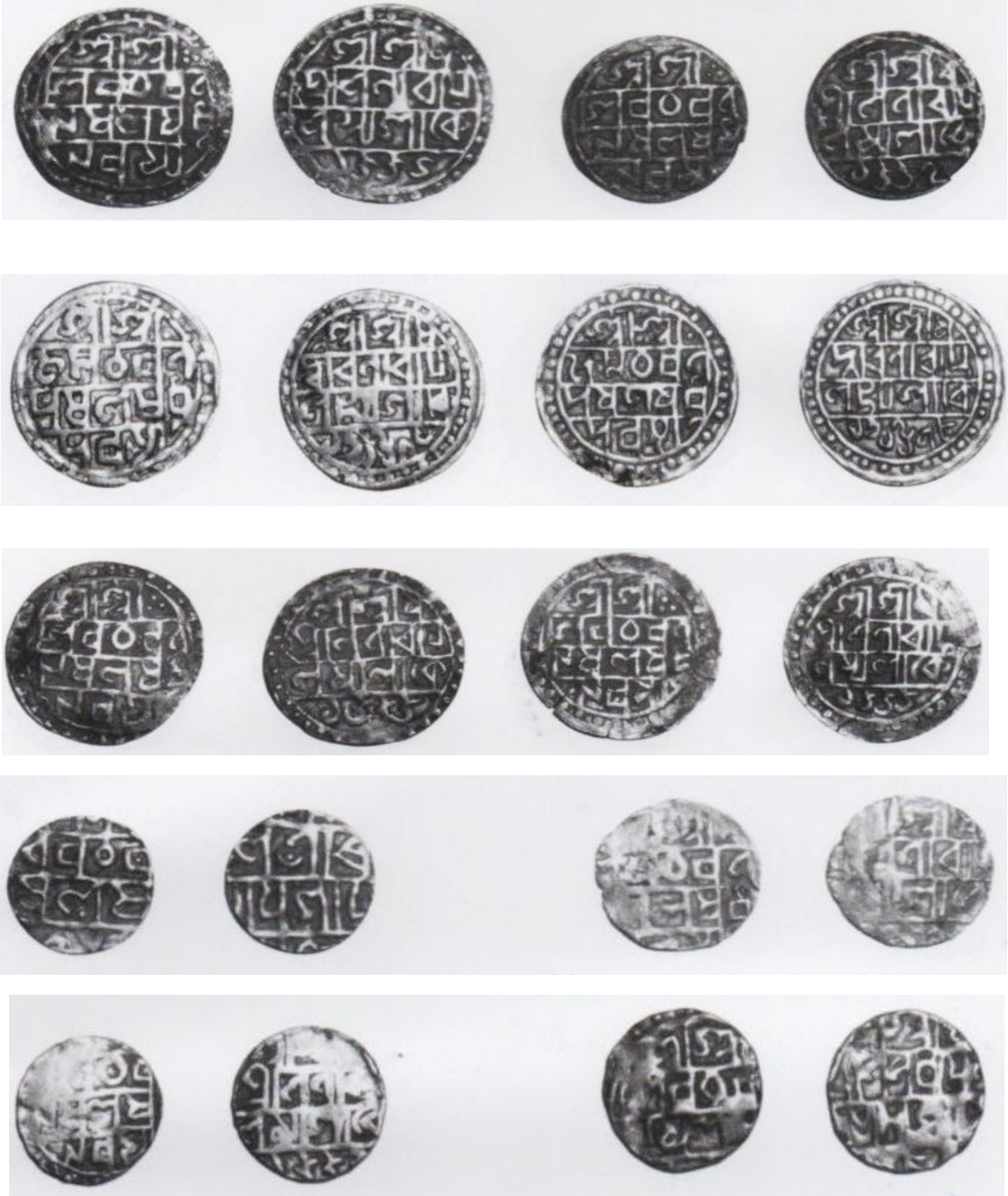
### 3. Vira Narayan:



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

# Plate No. VI

## 4. Prana Narayan:



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

**Plate No. VII**

**5. Moda Narayan:**



**6. Vasudeva Narayan:**



**7. Rapa Narayan:**



**8. Upendra Narayan:**



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

## Plate No. VIII

### **8. Devendra Narayan:**



### **9. Dhairyendra Narayan:**



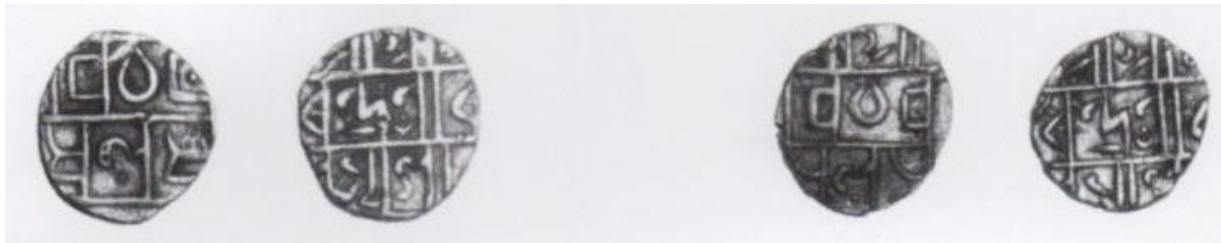
Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

**Plate No. IX**

**10. Rajendra Narayan:**



**11. Harendra Narayan:**



**12. Sivendra Narayan:**



**13. Narendra Narayan:**



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose.

## Plate No. X

### 14. Nripendra Narayan:



### 15. Raj Rajendra Narayan:



### 16. Jitendra Narayan:



### 17. Jagaddipendra Narayan:



Courtesy: Mr. S.K. Bose

**Plate No. XI**



Recently discovered Prana Narayana's Coins (Obverse)

**Plate No. XII**



Recently discovered Prana Narayana's Coins (Reverse)

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**THE NUMISMATIC SOCIETY OF INDIA  
BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY**

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# A Unique Gold Coin of Maharaja Narendra Narayan of Kingdom of Kamta Cooch Behar

*Debajit Dutta*

The state of Cooch Behar was situated in the Terai region of the great Himalayas and the northern part of the present state of West Bengal earlier known to us as *Kamtapur*, was one of the great regional powers of North-East India, during the 16th to 18th century A.D. Following the downfall of the Kamta and Kamrup kingdoms mainly from repeated invasions by the Bengal rulers a political vacuum developed in North Bengal and adjacent western Assam. The Koches<sup>1</sup> under the leadership of Visvasimha son of a Koch chieftain, declared themselves independent and founded the kingdom on the ruins of Kamtapur which included the modern Cooch Behar.<sup>2</sup>

The Kingdom of Cooch Behar was unique in the history of entire North-East India in various respects and the numismatic achievement by the Koches was one of them. This glory of numismatics heritage was started by the King Nara Narayan<sup>3</sup> (1555-87) and as the Koches worshipped Narayana as their royal deity, the currency was named as *Naranimudra*.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards the subse-

quent rulers of the Koche dynasty also followed the practice of minting coins. They struck coins mainly on gold, silver and brass metal.<sup>5</sup> The practice however, ended following the Anglo-Cooch Treaty of 1773.<sup>6</sup> In spite of the restrictions on minting regular currency, coins were struck by subsequent rulers on various occasions. Finally the mint was permanently closed by a British order of 27th December, 1845.<sup>7</sup> But even after the closure the rulers retained the right to strike one hundred one gold and one thousand one silver coins on the occasion of their coronation.<sup>8</sup>

The present coin in discussion was of Narendra Narayan (1847-63) and it is made of gold and it is now preserved in a religious institution of North Bengal. Before going into the analysis of the coin it is necessary to say something about the reign of Narendra Narayan.

Raja Narendra Narayan ascended the royal throne in 1847 at the age of six years in Banaras. Narendra Narayan was at Banaras when Maharaja Sivendra Narayan died.<sup>9</sup> As Sivendra Narayan had

no legal heir so he took Narendra Narayan as his adopted son.<sup>10</sup> The state was governed by Rajmata Kamteswari Devi and Brindeswari Devi till Narendra Narayan became an adult.<sup>11</sup> In 1860 Narendra Narayan took the charge of the state. During his reign he took some major steps to increase the material prosperity of his peasants and also introduced some reforms into the administration. After a short reign of four years Narendra Narayan passed away on 6th August 1863.<sup>12</sup>

**The description of the coins is as follows :**

**Metal** = Yellowish gold; **Size** = round; **Weight** = 6.12 gms. **Measurement** = 2.3cm.

The Obverse side of the coin is given as under :



*Sri Sri Narendra Na rayan Bhup*

*Observe*

On the obverse there are four lines. On the first line there appears the word *Sri Sri*, which is a characteristic feature of most of the *Narayani* coins. On the second line the first name of the king *Narendra*

can be seen. On the third line the word *rayan* occurs which can be completed with the last letter of the second line *Na* as *Narayan* and on the last line the word *Bhup* is present.

We may now cast a glance over the significance of the engraved words on the obverse side of the coin. The language of the engraved words is *Sanskrit* and the script is in *Bengali*. On the first line of the obverse side the name of the king Narendra Narayan is engraved with an honorary word *Sri Sri*. As because the king is a noble person so to dignify his position the Koches used to engrave the word *Sri Sri* before their name on the coins. On the Second line the first name of the king i.e. *Narendra* is seen. The name of the king is important because, it clears that the coin was minted during the reign of Narendra Narayan which was also an indication of the political independence of the king in those days. On the second and third line the word *Narayan* is present and it is the official dynastic name of the Koche dynasty. As because we all know that the Vaishnavism had a strong command over the Koche Empire, so it can be stated that the name *Narayan* (Vishnu is also known as Narayan) as their dynastic name. It also signifies that the Koches were not rigid in their religious attitude. On the fourth line the word *Bhup* signifies a person holding a



*Sri Sri Siva Chara (Ka) mala ma  
(dhuka) Rasya  
Reverse*

large portion of land and which ultimately carries the notion that the issuer of the coin is a King.

The Reverse side of the coin is given as under :

On the reverse of the coin in question there are also four lines. On the first line there appears the word *Sri Sri*, which is a characteristic feature of most of the *Narayani* coins. In the second line *Siva Chara Na* is seen. The word *(Ka) mala ma (dhuka)* is present on the third line. Though the engraved word on the last line is not clearly visible but undoubtedly, the word is *rasya* because it is also a common characteristic feature of most of the *Narayani* coins.

The phrase-*Sri Sri Siva Chara (na) kamala ma (dhuka) rasya-* occurring on the reverse literally means 'of the bee at the lotus-feet of Lord Siva'. It indicates that like the bees engaged in collecting honey in flowers, the Koche king used to

take refuge at the feet of the Lord Siva to drive his blessings through constant and profound devotion. This particular phrase is engraved in most of the coins of Koche dynasty. As Visvasimha I the founder of the Koche dynasty, described as the son of a mortal father named Haridasa, was allegedly begotten by Siva himself through Haridasa's first wife Hira. This is referred to in the official records of the Cooch Behar like the *Rajopakhyana*, the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, and the *Sankaraccharita* of Ramacharan Thakur as well as in the *Akbarnama*. It points to the emergence of the concept of the divine origin of kingship in Kamata Cooch Behar. Use of honorific *Sri Sri* both before the name of the God as well as the king is also indicating the divine theory of the Koche kingship. The coins of the Koche kingdom wear not only known as *Narayanimudra* after the title '*Narayana*' assumed by the rulers, but also known as *Siva-tanka*.<sup>13</sup> The relationship of Koche kings with Siva is repeatedly pronounced probably because of the fact that as the association of Siva with the people of the kingdom was very deep-rooted and old on account of his association here with the fertility of the soil and cultivation, the Koche kings consciously tried to project themselves as descended from the deity at least partially for political purpose.<sup>14</sup>

coins the rulers generally describe themselves as the "devotees of Lord Siva" as we find the phrase "*Sri Sri Shivacharana Kamalamadhu Karasya*" inscribed on the reverse side of the Koche coin. The most probable cause for this devotion is that the Koches always tried to project themselves as descended from Lord Siva. (See, Ghoshal. S.C., *op.cit.*, p. 304).

14. Roy Girijashankar, *Uttarbange Rajbansi Kstriya Jotter Puj-Parban*, pp. 12-47, Dibrugarh, 1970.



