

“Few academic theorists today take nations or 'ethnic groups' as natural facts; they are products of the collective imagination. Below the surface of Northeast India's “insurgencies” lie powerful communities of memory that draw on much older geographies than the bland lines of colonial cartography and post colonial political engineering. Arup Jyoti Das has done a remarkable job of bringing this alive in the case of Kamatapur: a region that in his words, has no material existence, but it lives in the imagination of the Koch Rajbanshis of North Bengal and Assam. Drawing on historical material as well as contemporary political pamphlets, Das provides a lucid account of the Kamatapur movement in **Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination**. His voice is both of an insider and an outsider. Scholars, policy thinkers and lay readers will find this book a highly rewarding read.”

Sanjib Baruah, professor of Political Studies,
Bard College, New York

Arup Jyoti Das is a Guwahati based writer and activist who is also an independent researcher. A recipient of various fellowships, Das has been also involved in many civil society initiatives. A Post Graduate in Economics from University of Pune, Das has written extensively on film and popular culture in his early carrier. He is the writer of the book *Asomiya Chabir Hazarta Samasyar Eta*, (One of the thousand problems of Assamese films), Assamese feature film *Soru Bowari* (youngest daughter in law, jointly) and the critically acclaimed telefilm *Ashar Pratyush* (Dawn of Hope). Das continues to contribute regularly to leading Assamese dailies, weeklies and journals on social and cultural issues. At present Das is associated with Panos South Asia.

In **Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination**, Arup Jyoti Das attempts to provide an understanding of Koch Rajbanshi peoples' long struggle for social justice and recognition. This book is based on his research work done under a fellowship programme of Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies (CENISEAS) of OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati in 2005. In the context of complex ethnic politics of Northeast India, this book is an essential read for those wishing to understand some parts of these complexities in a simple way.

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Arup Jyoti Das

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imagination

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Arup Jyoti Das



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to my father
MANORANJAN DAS

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Preface:

“Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination” was lying in my computer since I completed this research work in 2005. I was very reluctant to get it published in a book form as it was supposed to be part of a publication to be carried out by OKD institute of Social change and Development, Guwahati. Unfortunately, that monograph did not happen and “Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination” remained an imagination till now. However, there has been constant request from my friends, particularly from Pranab Jyoti Das (Rajbanshi) to see my work at the public domain. Hence, the emergence of this book.

There has been much development in the Kamatapur movement since I completed this work in 2005 and this book doesn't include the post 2005 development of the movement. However, the central argument of the work remains same, the spirit remains the same, and the attitude of state too remains the same. I have put some of the important news clippings as annexure-I at the end this book which

*“Mora chahina artha, chaina maan,
Chahina bidya, chaina jnyan
Mora chahi shudhu jatir pratistha,
Mora chai Shudhu jatir pran”*

Koch Rajbanshi poet **Gobinda Chandra Roy**

[We do not want money, nor do we want prestige/ we do not want education, nor do we want knowledge/ we only want the recognition of our nationality/ we only want our nationality to be alive.]

Have you ever heard about Kamatapur?

‘Have you ever heard about Kamatapur?’—When I asked that question to one of my friends, (who is an employee of an international bank) at Guwahati, I received only a vague look of silence from him, which indicated that my friend was not acquainted with the name of Kamatapur. I was not surprised at his ignorance, but many questions appeared in my mind regarding Kamatapur. Is Kamatapur worth a topic to talk about? Is the demand for ‘Kamatapur state’ just another aspiration for autonomous self-administration by an ethnic group of the insurgency-ridden Northeast India? Or why the Koch Rajbanshi people, who were believed to have been assimilated into the mainstream society are trying to get recognised as a people with a ‘state’? Is their demand for inclusion of the Kamatapuri language in the eight schedule justified? Or is Kamatapuri language deserve so, as the common believe

about the Kamatapuri language is that it is the Northern dialect of Bengal or the Goalparia dialect of West Assam? There are so many questions, which are eagerly waiting for answers.

The Kamatapur movement which had hitherto been obscure, has now occupied a place in the media after the Royal Bhutan Army attacked the camps of 'Kamatapur Liberation Organisation' (KLO) situated in Bhutan in the month of December, 2003 along with other two organisations namely 'National Democratic Front of Bodoland' (NDFB) and 'United Liberation Front of Asom' (ULFA). KLO, who are fighting for a 'sovereign Kamatapur' for the Koch Rajbanshis of Northeast India, has been making news headlines time to time due to their insurgency activities since its formation in 1995.¹ This organisation has often been accused of causing disturbance to the peace of West Bengal by the state Government.

¹ Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) came into existence on December 28, 1995. At the time of its formation, its cadre strength was estimated 60. However, subsequently, it is said to be operating with approximately 300 'active cadres', This outfit is believed to have been abolished during the operation 'flush out' by Royal Bhutan Army in the month of December 2003 in Bhutan. According to a report by 'South Asia Terrorism Portal', KLO headed by Jivan Singh is most active in Alipurduar in Jalpaiguri and the Siliguri Sub-Division of Darjeeling, North Bengal. For more information on KLO please see the paper titled 'Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO)' published by 'South Asia Terrorism Portal', [accessed March 04, 2004] <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/Klo.htm>

The demand for Kamatapur state has come mainly from North Bengal, besides Assam of India's Northeast corner. North Bengal does not fit in to the traditional concept of Northeast India. No maps of Northeast India available in the market include North Bengal within it. This is probably because Northeast India is an official category. When we think of Northeast India, the concept of only 'seven sister' appears in our minds, though in recent time Sikkim has entered in to the Northeastern map. North Bengal is not a separate entity; it is officially a part of West Bengal and under the administration of the West Bengal government.

But still North Bengal is very closer to Northeast India, particularly closer to Assam than Kolkata in respect of historical, cultural and emotional point of view. The history of North Bengal is inseparable from that of Assam. North Bengal is closer to South Asian countries Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh than to mainland India. Geographically it is surrounded by these countries which bear seed of same history and culture. Siliguri in North Bengal forms the famous 'chicken neck' connection between Northeast India and mainland India.

The two main organisations, which are spearheading the Kamatapur movement are 'Kamatapur Peoples' Party' (KPP) and 'Kamatapur Liberation Organisation' (KLO). KPP appears to be a moderate organisation, which is trying to lead the Kamatapur movement politically. On the other hand, KLO is termed as an extremist organisation, which has otherwise more trust on bullets. The presence of KLO in the Kamatapur

movement has definitely made the issue more serious for the West Bengal State Government, as well as the Central Government. It has provided the journalists with matters for publishing entertaining stories on the organisation. It has also become a nightmare for the common Koch Rajbanshi people of North Bengal, since many innocent farmers are reported to have been haunted as KLO members in North Bengal.²

The objective of the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) as reported by 'South Asia Terrorism Portal' is to carve out a separate homeland called 'Kamatapur' for the Koch Rajbanshi community of Northeast India comprising six districts of West Bengal namely, Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar), Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur Malda and four contiguous districts of Assam namely, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara.³ The KLO has been allegedly coordinating its militant activities with the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which is demand-

² Kanu supports Nepal Maoists, *Times of India*, May 3, 2002, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/8696209.cms>>

³ According to few news reports the proposed Kamatapur of KLO comprises only the six districts of West Bengal.[See: *Asomiya Pratidin* (Assamese), Guwahati, December 19,2004]

Besides KLO, in 1995 another outfit called 'Koch-Rajbanshi Liberation Organisation' (KRLO) was formed by the ULFA as a subsidiary front for the Koch Rajbanshi community. Like the KLO, its reported goal is to establish a separate State, comprising Koch-Rajbanshi-inhabited areas of northern Assam. The first batch of 25 KRLO activists went to ULFA camps in Bhutan for

ing formation of an independent Assam. The fledgling KLO militants are reportedly being groomed by seasoned militants from the ULFA in the Dooars region, the Buxa reserve forests, Cooch Behar and North Bengal's bordering areas with Assam, and Bangladesh. KLO activists had launched a number of attacks on Communist Party workers in the last few years. The situation became so critical around the year 2000, that police force from Assam and West Bengal had to launch a joint operation code-named 'Operation Shadow' in mid-November 2000 to apprehend KLO activists.⁴

So here we are with another militant group, yet again a demand for a separate homeland by another ethnic group of Northeast India. It definitely doesn't seem to sound interesting. As anyone can argue that almost every major ethnic group of this region has been demanding separate homeland or au-

training in December 1995. By 1996, when these activists returned to Assam, counter-insurgency operations had been intensified in the State and the KRLO was more or less defunct. Most of its activists joined the Saraighat Unit of the ULFA. Some KRLO activists also surrendered to the authorities, [accessed March 04, 2004], <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/krlo.htm>

⁴ Ashok Behuria, 'Demands for Autonomy: Internal Weaknesses of a Multiethnic, Multicultural, and Multinational State', *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia*, 2002 <http://www.euconflict.org/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurveys_v0_10.nsf/0/06840134F9FC0119C1256C520035CFAB?>

onomous state since a long time. KLO is just a new comer or better we can say a latecomer in this arena.

Though we have heard about the Kamatapur movement recently, the idea for a separate homeland for the Koch Rajbanshis is more than fifty years old. According to one scholar a gentleman from undivided Bengal named Jogendranath Mondal, had demanded a separate state for Rajbanshis called “Rajar-sthan” or abode of king before independence. He feared that if Bengal were divided, a section of the backward classes⁵ would be dominated by the upper caste Hindus while the other would be under the Muslims.⁶

A group called Uttar Khanda Dal (UKD) renewed the idea for a separate homeland for Koch Rajbanshis again in 1969 in North Bengal. UKD demanded the formation of the Kamatapur State, but was unable to make much political headway and was first replaced by the Kamatapur Gana Parishad in 1987, to be followed by Kamatapur Peoples’ Party (KPP)

⁵ Though this scholar has not clearly stated who are the backward classes, it can be assumed that she has most probably talked about the indigenous communities of North Bengal like Rabhas, Meches, Namasudras, along with Koch Rajbanshis who are looked down by the upper caste Bengalis.

⁶ Sujata D. Hazarika, ‘Unrest and displacement: Rajbanshis in North Bengal’, *South Asia Forum for Human Rights*, [accessed March 05, 2004]

<http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch17_4.htm>

in 1997.⁷ It should be mentioned here that even in the Goalpara district of Assam, an organisation called Kamata Rajya Sangram Parisad (KRSP) was formed which demanded Kamata state around 1969. Though most of the leaders of KRSP were from the Koch Rajbanshi community including Kumar Pranabendu Narayan of Cooch Behar royal family, there were also other prominent personalities from other communities of the historical Kamatapur region in KRSP. There were even two Muslim members in the executive committee of KRSP including ex. Member of Parliament Md. Jahanuddin Ahmed.⁸

At present, Kamatapur Peoples’ Party (KPP) which is a North Bengal based political organisation, is found to be very keen in demanding the separate Kamatapur state for the Koch Rajbanshi community. We have already stated that KPP seems to be a moderate organisation. KPP’s demand is only statehood, not sovereignty. They are trying to achieve their goal in a democratic manner. Atul Roy, a leader and a former president of KPP, said to ‘The Week’, ‘we don’t want to go out of India.’ To prove their support among the people of North Ben-

⁷ Pinaki Bhattacharya, ‘The KLO Strikes, with a Little Help’ *Intelligence Review of the South Asia Terrorism Portal*, September 9, 2002, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/1_8.htm>

⁸ A.C. Choudhury, who was the founder General Secretary of KRSP, recalled all the names of the office bearer of KRSP in personal discussion with this writer on 13-10-2004, Guwahati. [Ref: my personal field research Note Book, 2004]

gal sixteen candidates of KPP including Atul Roy contested the Assembly election held on 2001.⁹ They succeeded in getting a considerable number of votes in the election. Atul Roy got 20,000 votes in Dhupguri and another one got 21,000 votes in a different constituency as reported by 'India Today'.¹⁰ Besides statehood, KPP is also demanding the inclusion of the Kamatapuri (Rajbanshi) language in the Eight Schedule and the propagation of the Kamatapuri language and culture through the state controlled radio and television.¹¹ On November 6, 2000, Kamatapuri activists descended in thousands on the Nilmoni Airport in Cooch Behar town in support of the demand for a separate Kamatapur, and held a hugely successful mass rally.¹²

'All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union (AKRSU), the Assam based student organisation of the Koch Rajbanshi community has been raising the Kamatapur issue in many occasions.

⁹ Tapash Ganguly, 'Do or die', *The Week*, Nov 16, 2003
<<http://www.the-week.com/23nov16/events1.htm>>

¹⁰ Sumit Mitra, 'Statescan', *India Today*, [accessed March 22, 2004]
<<http://www.indiatoday.com/webexclusive/dispatch/20020915/mitra.html>>

¹¹ Ashok Behuria, 'Demands for Autonomy: Internal Weaknesses of a Multiethnic, Multicultural, and Multinational State', *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia*, 2002
<http://www.euconflict.org/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurveys_v0_10.nsf/0/06840134F9FC0119C1256C520035CFAB?>

¹² *Ibid.*

A booklet titled *Sukiya Kamatapur Rajya Kiyō* (Why Separate Kamatapur) published by AKRSU was even found to bear a map of the proposed Kamatapur state on its cover page.¹³ Besides Kamatapur, AKRSU is demanding 'Scheduled tribe' status for the community. Indeed, previously this was their prime objective. A delegation of AKRSU also met Samanta Party leader Gorge Fernandes, the then defense Minister of India on September 24, 2003 in New Delhi and submitted a memorandum demanding creation of the Kamatapur State.¹⁴

Apart from KLO, KPP, AKRSU and others there is also a distinguished organisation called 'The Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association' (GCBPA), which also talk about a Separate state for the people of North Bengal and West Assam without mentioning the name Kamatapur. But except the name they are more or less talking about the same issues like KPP and others. The area of the proposed 'Greater Cooch Behar' is all most same as that of the 'Kamatapur' of AKRSU and KPP.¹⁵

¹³ Bishwajit Rai, 'Sukiya Kâmatapur Rajya kiyō', *AKRSU* (Assamese), April 25, 2002

¹⁴ Sourav Pathak (2003),
<<http://pikespeak.uccs.edu/pipermail/assam/2003-September/003155.html>>

¹⁵ I came to know about 'Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association' from Nabyendu Roy Pramanik, a Rajbanshi youth who hails from Sitai Hat of Cooch Behar District of West Bengal. I met Mr. Pramanik on March 30, 2004 while attending the International Koch Rajbanshi Cultural Festi-

The inspiration for the present Kamatapur movement has been drawn from the historical Kamatapur or Kamata Kingdom, particularly the Kamata Kingdom that was established in the 16th Century which had survived up to 1950 through various ups and downs. The Kamata Kingdom of the 16th century, which has been referred as Koch Kingdom in most of the history books and also as Koch Kamata by a few local scholars, went through various names and settled as Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) and became a princely state of British India in the 18th century. Cooch Behar was merged with West Bengal in 1950 as a district against the will of local people of Cooch Behar. The leaders of the present Kamatapur movement consider merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal as a conspiracy of West Bengal government and have placed it as one of the main arguments in support of the demand for Kamatapur state.¹⁶

At the moment the Kamatapur movement has been considered as a law and order situation, particularly in West Bengal. In the past few years a number of KPP leaders have been

val held at Abhayapuri. Mr. Pramanik who is an executive member of the said organisation, informed that their organisation has been working for more than six year to create an awareness in support of the demand for the Greater Cooch Behar State. He gifted me a pamphlet titled 'Dangar Koch Biharar Kayata Katha', which reflects their aims and objectives. [Ref: my personal field research Note Book, March 30, 2004]

¹⁶ See the memorandum of AKRSU to the Prime Minister of India. dated 23rd June, 2004.

arrested and jailed by the West Bengal state authority and a number of KLO activists were killed in encounter by security forces. Even local farmers of North Bengal are hunted as KLO members.

The Koch Rajbanshis are at present mostly found in Assam, North Bengal, Meghalaya, North Bihar, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. They are one of the earliest ethnic groups of Northeast India to come under the influence of Hinduism. But in the caste ridden Hindu society their position is at the lowest rung. During the early 20th century the Rajbanshis of North Bengal challenged their lower status by claiming the Kshatriya status through a mass movement known as the famous 'Kshatriya Movement' led by Panchanan Burma. The present Kamatapur movement is better understood, when this 'Kshatriya Movement' is taken into account.

To possess AK47 by Koch Rajbanshi youths of rural North Bengal is not the last word of the movement. There is much more to the movement. This paper hopes to create an understanding of the Kamatapur movement beyond the demand of statehood considering its historical aspects and other factors.

Who are the Kamatapuris?

At present Kamatapur lives an imagination of the Koch Rajbanshis, it has no independent existence in this material world. That's why one will not get a train to Kamatapur. But still the Kamatapuris feel that in the good old days there was a place named Kamatapur. And the word Kamatapur still raises hope in their eyes. If there was a place named Kamatapur we should try to locate it and look to the past to understand the present Kamatapur movement. But before that we should know something about the Koch Rajbanshi people, who claim themselves as the Kamatapuris.

The demand for the separate state of Kamatapur is being spearheaded only by the Koch Rajbanshis, not by other communities of North Bengal or West Assam. In that way, the Kamatapur movement can be called a movement of the Koch

Rajbanshis and for the Koch Rajbanshis. In view of above the term 'Kamatapuri' should be ascribed only to those who are identified as Koch Rajbanshis. It should be mentioned here that though at present the Koch Rajbanshis are claiming as Kamatapuris, the Mech community of North Bengal has also expressed their desire to support the Kamatapur movement of the Koch Rajbanshis for a separate state and language.¹⁷

It should be borne in mind that the term 'Koch Rajbanshi' is sometimes used separately as 'Koch'¹⁸ and 'Rajbanshi'. This system of such usage of the term is still continued in North Bengal. But at present in Assam 'Koch Rajbanshi' is treated as one term not two, which is evident in the names of the organisations like 'All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani' (AAKRS), 'All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union' (AKRSU) etc. Recently a tendency has been grown in Assam among the members of the community who seem to have

¹⁷ Swaraj Basu, *Dynamics of a Caste movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*, New Delhi, 2003, p.139

¹⁸ There are references in History books about Koches being called as Kamboja and Kuvaca or Kuvacaka in Sanskrit. I have avoided the discussion of these terms in this paper, just to make the discussion short. D. Nath has discussed about all these terms very well in his book *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*. For more information please see: D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, pp. 7- 11.

gathered more satisfaction in designating themselves as Koch Rajbanshi than Koch or Rajbanshi.¹⁹

Edward Gait has said that the word 'Koch' is a term of some ambiguity.²⁰ But though the word 'Koch' seemed to be ambiguous in Gait's mind, it is clear that when we use the word Koch in Northeast India, it represents a distinct group of people or a particular community. In Rabha language the word Koch literally mean 'Human'. Gait also said that in Assam proper the term 'Koch' had become the name of a Hindu caste, into which are received the converts to Hinduism from the rank of the Kachari, Lalung, Mikir and other tribes.²¹ There is no doubt that a few Mongolian 'Tribes' especially the Kacharis (Bodo) had joined the rank of Koch or Rajbanshi after being converted into Hinduism. Some works of both colonial and local scholars regarding 'Koch' bear the evidence of the above contention. A.C. Choudhury, a celebrated personality from the Koch Rajbanshi community and author of many books on the Koch Rajbanshi, has admitted that his forefathers were originally Mech or Kacharis who elevated themselves to the rank of Rajbanshis.²² He also writes that a

¹⁹ Sarathi Roy, the tenant in my house, who belongs to this community call herself 'Koch Rajbanshi', not 'Koch' or 'Rajbanshi'. I have even encountered a person whose surname is Koch Rajbanshi.

²⁰ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.46

²¹ *Ibid*, p.46

²² Dr. Jatin Barua (ed), *Rangta Garo, Raja Mahendra Narayan Aaru Ambika Charan Choudhurir Jivan Kriti* (Assamese) Bongaigaon, 2002, p. 16

section of the Rabha community after becoming 'Pati Rabha'²³ elevated to Rajbanshis by adopting surnames like Rai, Barman, Sarkar etc.²⁴

Greirson observes that the Koches and Kocheries²⁵ are of the same ethnic groups and the true Koches are at any rate represented by the Kocheries who inhabit in Nowgong, Goalpara, Koch Behar and the neighbouring country. He also writes, "...the very name Koch has lost its original significance and has now come to mean a Bodo who has become so far Hinduised that he has abandoned his proper tongue and in particular what he eats."²⁶ All these comments related to the origin of the Koches, sometimes make us believe that the Koches are nothing but the Hinduised Kacharis or other Hinduised tribes. But this cannot be taken as entirely true.

²³ Pati Rabha is that section of Rabha who has adopted Hinduism and practice Brahminical rituals, they have even abandoned the Rabha language long back to local form of Assamese, which resemble what presently is being called the Kamatapuri Language.

²⁴ Dr. Jatin Barua (ed), *Rangta Garo, Raja Mahandra Narayan Aaru Ambika Charan Choudhurir Jivan Kriti* (Assamese) Bongaigaon, 2002, p. 7

²⁵ Instead of 'Kachari', which is commonly used, Greirson has written 'Kocheries'. His intention was most probably to establish a link between the two terms 'Koch' and 'Kacharis' by writing that way.

²⁶ Cited in A.C. Choudhury, *Koch Rajbanshi Jatir Itihas Aaru Sanskriti* (Assamese), rpt, Bongaigaon, 1993, pp.60-61

Koch is a distinct community, though conversion of other tribes into Koch is not debatable.

There are a few legends regarding the Koches that indicate their close affinities with other Mongoloid 'tribes' of this region. Sir Harbert Risley in his book *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* has mentioned one Limbu Legend wherein references have been made about the origin of the Koches, Meches and Kacharis. According to the legend the ancestor of the Koches, Meches and the Dhimals was one of the three brothers who were first dropped by the Gods from heaven and they fell in Banaras from where they wandered northward seeking the place appointed for them to dwell in. The track at the foot hills between Bhramaputra and the Kosi rivers called Mule or Khachar by the Nepalese. The youngest brother settled in Kachar and became the father of the Koches, Meches and Dhimals and the two others went further into the hills and their descendents are Limbus and the Khambus of Nepal.²⁷

A.C. Choudhury argues that the word Koch is older than the Puranas and Trantras, which were composed in India by the Aryans to malign their opponents. He writes, "[T]he word Koch came down with these people when they came downwards from North China or Siberia region after struggling hard against natural odds and calamities in addition to the opposition from the rival groups in which most of the male

²⁷ H.H. Risley, *The Tribes & Caste of Bengal, Voll. II*, rpt, Calcutta, (First edition: 1891), 1998, p.87

members of Koches were killed in the way by fighting.” He continues, “This is partly evident from a folk song now occasionally sung by the Koch Rabhas which is indicative as to their origin and development.”²⁸ A.C. Choudhury has mentioned this particular folk song in his book *The Koches around the World*, which is according to him mostly forgotten by the present Rabhas and Koches.²⁹

Although there is a general agreement to the fact that the Koches include the Meches, Kacharies, Bodos, Rajbanshis, Garos etc. there is still a difference of opinion about their racial origin.³⁰ Colonel Dalton considered them (Koch) to be Dravidian, and Risley, while admitting an intermixture with Mongoloid stock held that the Dravidian stock predominates.³¹ Gait argues that the divergence of views seems to have arisen from the confusion caused by the use of the term

²⁸ A.C., Choudhury, *The Koches around the world*, Bongaigaon, 1991, p.61

²⁹ The folk song runs, “*Hulun Lunga Hashong Chamdong Bondong / Koch Mian Chi ou Kocha Amai Namprangou*”. A.C. Choudhury writes about the simple and brief meaning of this folk song as this, “that the valiant Koches marched downwards from the North via Highlong to Chamdo to Bomdo after crossing and over coming many hilly areas, turbulent rivers and ferocious way-side plunders that cost many able bodied male members and the beautiful females of the Koches became helpless and bewildered.

³⁰ D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, p.2

³¹ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p. 46

‘Rajbanshi’. He says that it (Rajbanshi) originally referred to an entirely distinct community of Dravidian affinities. But after wards adopted by the Koches west of the Monas river, who, when they atoned to Hinduism, appropriated the caste name of the most numerous Hinduised community in their neighbourhood. Edward Gait observed that in North Bengal and Goalpara (undivided) the term ‘Koch’ had been falling into disrepute; and it has to a great extent, been abandoned in favour of appellation Rajbanshi.³² However it can be said that the term Rajbanshi is of recent origin as neither in the Persian records, nor in the foreign accounts, nor in any of the dynastic epigraph of the time, the Koches are mentioned as Rajbanshis.³³ Even in *Darrangraj Bansavali*, which is genealogical account of the Koch Royal family, there is no reference of this term.³⁴ In respect of this matter one scholar rightly observes that ‘it is possible that when the Koches became conscious of their past ancestral glory at later period, they began to call themselves as Rajbanshis—meaning ‘de-

³² Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.46

³³ D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, p.5

³⁴ *Darrangraj Bansavali* (also known as *Samudranarayanar Bansavali*) was written in the last quarter of the 18th century (around 1798 A.D.) by an Assamese poet named Baladev Suryakhari Daibagya by the order of then Koch king of Darrang, Samudra Narayan. In ‘Darrangraj Bansavali’ the term ‘Rajbanshi’ is not found. Instead of that the term ‘Mech’ has been used as synonymous with the term ‘Koch’. Nabin Chandra Sarma (ed.), *Darrangraj Bansavali*, , Pathsala, 1973

scendants of royal kindred'. The new appellation also made them feel somewhat superior to the rest of their kinsmen.³⁵ A.C. Choudhury opines that "Rajbanshi" is the modern name of the Koches of West Assam and North Bengal.³⁶

During the 'Kshatriya Movement' by Rajbanshis of North Bengal in the early part of the 20th Century, there was a tendency among the Rajbanshi Leaders to differentiate 'Rajbanshi' from 'Koch' identity. But their arguments were mostly based on mythological stories and had no objective value. Panchanan Burma and Hara Kishor Adhikari were among those Rajbanshi leaders who said that the Koches and Rajbanshis were not the same. Their main intention behind this opinion was to establish the Rajbanshis with a superior identity to that of the Koches.

Now keeping aside all these controversies regarding the origin of the Koches, it is believed that the Koch Rajbanshis are a Mongoloid group having Dravidian, as well as other elements in them, as Gait said, "There seems, however to be no doubt, that the true Koches were a Mongoloid race very closely allied to the Meches and Garos; and we find that in Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and Goalpara, the persons now known as Rajbanshi are either pure Koches, who, though dark, have

³⁵ D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, p.5

³⁶ Dr. Jatin Barua (ed), *Rangta Garo, Raja Mahandra Narayan Aaru Ambika Charan Choudhurir Jivan Kriti* (Assamese) Bongaigaon, 2002, p.7

distinctly Mongoloid physiognomy, or else a mixed breed, in which the Mongoloid element usually preponderates."³⁷ And the confusion which has been created in the use of the term 'Rajbanshi' can be cleared up to some extent by considering a comment of a rural Koch Rajbanshi youth of Dhupguri (North Bengal), whom I had met in the 'Dadar Guwahati Express' around the year 1996-97 along with his other friends. That youth from Dhupguri, who was working as labour in a Mill in Gujrat along with his friends were on their way home after leaving their jobs for good. Just out of curiosity I asked the youth, whether he had called himself 'Koch' or 'Rajbanshi'. He smiled and told me that it depends on the nature of the question. He told me that if somebody asked him whether he was a Koch, his answer would be yes, he was. And if he were asked whether he was a 'Rajbanshi', then too, his answer would be yes, he was a 'Rajbanshi'. The youth, whose surname was Roy (I can't remember his first name at present) with a distinct Mongoloid appearance took a pause for a while and told me with a dim tone, " There are no *Rajbaris* (Palaces), no *Rajas* (Kings) at present, everything has gone... there is no reason of calling ourselves Rajbanshis (Descendent of King), actually we all are now *Prajabanshis* (subjects)... " he didn't wait for my reply; he looked out side through the window of the train; most probably his destination was coming. But he surely made a good argument about Koch Rajbanshis and the present condition of them without a degree from any University.

³⁷ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.47

Kamatapur: What We Know From History

In Northeast India when a demand for a separate homeland comes from a particular community, the proposed homeland is generally named after that particular community. Like the Bodo Community is demanding Bodoland, the Nagas are demanding Nagalim, the Dimasas are demanding Dimaraji, Gorkha's demand is for Gorkhaland etc. But interestingly Koch Rajbanshis are not demanding 'Kochland', or 'Rajbanshiland'.

Now the question is what is the relation between Koch Rajbanshi and Kamatapur or more simply why they (Koch Rajbanshis) identify themselves with Kamatapur? But before answering this question we should try well to find Kamatapur. Though we have heard about Kamatapur very recently, Kamatapur was very much there in the history from 13th cen-

ture onwards. Even when Hiuen Tsang, the famous traveler and scholar from China visited the ancient Kamarupa kingdom of Bhashkar Barma between 606 to 648 A.D. the capital of Kamrupa was believed to be Kamatapur. What we find in “A History of Assam” is that, ‘[T]here were at this point (during the reign of Bhaskar Burma) no larger towns, and the capital of the country does not appear to have been a place of much importance. The only indication that is given as to its locality is that it lay 150 miles east of Paundra Vardhana. Cunningham, after identifying the later place with Pabna, concluded that it was at Kamatapur.’³⁸

Most of the time Kamatapur has appeared as the capital of Kamata kingdom in the history of Assam. And sometimes Kamata and Kamrup have been treated as the same kingdom. According to Edward Gait, the Muhammadan historians sometimes speak as if the terms Kamrupa and Kamata were synonymous and applicable to one and the same country, but on the other occasions they appear to regard them as distinct, and it would seem that at times the tracts east and west of the Sankosh owed allegiance to different rulers, just as they did in the later days of Koch rule.³⁹

It is said that Sandhya Rai established the Kingdom of Kamata in the 13th century comprising few portions of North Bengal and West Assam of present Northeast India. Historian N.N. Acharyya has written a brief chapter on Kingdom

³⁸ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.26

³⁹ *Ibid*, P.42-43

of Kamata in his book *A brief History of Assam*. He writes, “shortly after the invasion of Kamrup by Tughril Khan Malik Yuzbeg, the capital of Kamrup was transferred by king Sandhya from ‘Kamrup Nagar’ (North Guwahati) to Kamatapur (Cooch Behar) in the west. From that time onward, the Kingdom of Kamrup was known as ‘Kamata’ or Kamrup- Kamata. The rulers of Kamata were designated as Kamateshwara or Kameswara (Lord of Kamata). The kingdom of Kamata became, however, much smaller in extent than ancient Kamrup. It included, Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup district of modern Assam, besides portions of northern Bengal and Mymensingh (Bangladesh). . . .”⁴⁰

It is interesting to note that though the Koch Rajbanshis identify themselves with Kamata Kingdom or Kamatapur, Koch as a political power in this region came much later, almost more than 250 years later; after the Kingdom of Kamata was being established by Sandhya Rai. The Kingdom of Kamata was ruled by different rulers of different dynasties from the period of mid 13th century to the end of the 15th century.

One of the most renowned rulers of Kamata was king Durlabh Narayan, who ascended the throne of Kamata in 1330 A.D and ruled up to 1350 A.D. Durlabh Narayan was a great patron of learning and his royal court was adorned with many scholars and poets. Most of the ancient books written in

⁴⁰ N.N. Acharyya, *A brief History of Assam*, rpt, New Delhi, 1996, p.42

Kamrupi (or Kamatapuri) language were composed during his reign. Under his patronage the famous poet Hem Saraswati composed *Prahlad Charit*, which is considered to be the first Assamese epic. Durlabh Narayan was succeeded by his son Indra Narayan in 1350.

In the second quarter of the 15th century, a new line of kings known as Khan or Khen dynasty ascended the throne of Kamata (1440 A.D.). The first in this line was Niladhavaj. His capital was at Kamatapur, where he built a very strong fortress. He was succeeded by his son, Chakradhvaj on the throne in 1460 A.D. It is said that during the reign of Chakradhvaj, Sultan Barbak invaded the kingdom of Kamata, but was defeated by the former. Chakradhvaj built a temple of the Goddess Kamateswari at Kamatapur. After Chakradhvaj, his son Nilamabar became the ruler of Kamata.⁴¹ Nilambar was the most famous among the kings of Kamata and still lives through tradition in the minds of the people of Assam and North Bengal. Edward Gait has described a tradition related to the tragic story of Nilambar's fall in his book *A History of Assam*.⁴² During his reign, the kingdom of Kamata extended from Karatoya in the west to Barnadi on the east. He constructed a long road from Kamatapur to Ghoraghat. During his reign, Nawab Hussain Shah of Goura (Bengal) invaded Kamata and destroyed his capital Kamatapur around 1494 A.D. The downfall of Nilambar was eventually the down-

⁴¹ P.N.Dutta, *Glimpses into The History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 2000, pp.70-71

⁴² Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.44

fall of the Kamata kingdom founded by Sindhu Rai and we see the rise of Koch power within few years after the fall of Nilambar, which changed the history of Kamata in the later years, in the later centuries.

The Koches emerged as a very strong political power in the early 16th Century in the Kamata region with the establishment of the Koch Kingdom by the Koch Chieftain Bishwa Singha (1515-1540), son of Hariya Mandal.⁴³ The period of Koch Rule in this region has been referred as the 'Koch Kingdom' in History. But most of the Koch Kings of Biswa Singha's dynasty used to call it as the Kamata kingdom. They actually never renamed the Kamata kingdom as 'Koch Kingdom' or 'Koch Rajya' though in the course of time this kingdom went through various names and lastly named as Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) in the colonial period. They (Koch Kings) intended to call themselves the rulers of the Kamata kingdom, which was established by Sandhya Rai of 13th Century, and fell down during Nilambar's time. When Bishwa Singha ascended the throne he declared himself as Kamatewsar (Lord

⁴³ There has been difference of opinion regarding the exact year of Bishwa Singh's assumption of power. Few Historians have placed him in A.D. 1515-1540, which has been accepted by most of the historians. On the other hand few have placed him in A.D. 1509-1555. Though both the periods are still debatable, we are using the first one, which has been accepted by a local scholar, D. Nath after considering number of factors. (For details please see: D .Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, pp.27-28)

of Kamata) like those of the previous rulers of Kamata such as Durlabh Narayan and others.⁴⁴ It seems that Bishwa Singha wanted his Kingdom not to be known as something different from the Kamata kingdom and wanted to project himself as the new conqueror or ruler of the traditional Kamata kingdom. Narnarayan, who ascended the throne after the death of Bishwa Singha, declared himself as Kamateswar like his father and previous rulers of Kamata Kingdom. Even when the Koch Kingdom was split into two parts as Koch Bihar and Koch Hajo, Lakshminarayan, son of Narnarayan who became the King of Koch Bihar declared himself Kamateswar.⁴⁵ In the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* Lakshminarayan is called the Raja of Kamata.⁴⁶ 17th century Koch Kings of Koch Bihar Prannarayan and Modnarayan too called themselves Kamateswar. Blaev's Map of that century (1650 A.D.) recorded Kamata as Comotay.⁴⁷

Though the Koch Kings of the Western area desired their Kingdom to be known as Kamata, the Persian historians and the other visitors preferred recording the name of this country by other names, most of the times as 'Koch'. *Ain-i-Akbari*

⁴⁴ Rai. K.L. Barua Bahadur, *Early History Kamrupa*, rpt, Guwahati, 1988, p.191

⁴⁵ Khan Chowdhuri Amanatullah Ahmed, *Koch Biharer Itihas* (Bengali), rpt, Calcutta, 2001, p.3

⁴⁶ See Foote notes: Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.42

⁴⁷ Khan Chowdhuri Amanatullah Ahmed, *Koch Biharer Itihas* (Bengali), rpt, Calcutta, 2001, p.3

and *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* recorded the name of this country as 'Koch' and within the 'Koch' country they mentioned two kingdoms 'Kamata' and 'Kamrup'. In *Badshanama* and *Sahjahannama* of mid 17th century, Kamata has been recorded as 'Koch Bihar' and 'Kamrup' as 'Koch Hajo'.⁴⁸

The present Kamatapur movement has emerged from the historical 'Kamata' or 'Koch Bihar' area of Northeast India and the area of the territory they are demanding for the proposed Kamatapur state is more or less as that of the old Kamata kingdom, which was under the Koch dynasty. The identification of the Koch Rajbanshis with Kamatapur could be justified, as the line of Koches are the longest of all the rulers of Kamata.

The period from 1515 A.D. to 1949 A.D. which is the period of Koch rule in the Kamata Kingdom is a period of pride, tragedy, conspiracy, downs, falls and emotions for the Koch Rajbanshi community of Northeast India as well as of Nepal and Bangladesh. The memory of this period is still working as the solo soul of the Koch Rajbanshis of the above-mentioned area and it will continue to do so. To understand the emotional aspect of the present Kamatapur movement, at least a brief journey through this period is necessary.

Bishwa Singha, a Koch chieftain from the Siknagram of present Kokrajhar district of Assam, founded the Koch dy-

⁴⁸ Khan Chowdhuri Amanatullah Ahmed, *Koch Biharer Itihas* (Bengali), rpt, Calcutta, 2001, p.3

nasty, of Kamata Kingdom which was destroyed by Husain Shah of Gouda (Bengal) at the end of 15th century. “The Kingdom of Kamrup–Kamata witnessed anarchy at the end of the 15th century A.D.”, writes N.N. Acharyya, “Nawab Hussain Shah of Bengal had attacked and overthrown Nilambar, the last ruler of Khen dynasty. The city of Kamatapur was destroyed and a vast area around it was annexed. A colony of Afghans was left in Kamata, who disposed the local chiefs and took up the civil and military administration under the vice-royalty of Prince Daniel, son of Nawab Hussain Shah. But it did not last long. The local chiefs combined themselves under the leadership of the most powerful of them against the Muslim hegemony, and taking advantage of the rainy season, attacked Daniel’s garrison and cut it off to the last man. Among these chiefs and their followers by far the most numerous and powerful were the Koches, initially independent of each other, but gradually united under the authority of one among themselves named Bishwa Singha-founder of the Koch Kingdom.”⁴⁹ With his superior intelligence and organised military strength Bishwa Singha subjugated the Bhuyans of the region one after another. Thus the Bhuyans who could overthrow the Muslim rule in Kamarupa, had met with a crushing defeat at the hands of this new warrior of humble origin. Thus establishing his sovereign power over all petty rulers of the region, Bishwa Singha declared himself king. Meanwhile, he had come under Hindu influ-

⁴⁹ A.C. Choudhury, *Sangram Singha Chilarai* (Assamese), Bongaigaon, 1983, introduction.

ence and on the day of formal accession to the throne, Bishu assumed the Hindu name Bishwa Singha.⁵⁰

It seems that on becoming King, Bishwa Singha realised that he was no more a common man and he needed to prove it. He no longer wanted to call himself a person from a simple community of near by village or mountain. The Bramhmins were very helpful for this purpose. As Gait observes, ‘As usual in such cases, the Brahmans soon sought him out. They discovered that his tribesmen were Kshatriyas who threw away their sacred threads when fleeing before the wrath of Parasuram, the son of the ascetic Jamadagni,, while Bishu himself was declared to be the son, not of the humble Hariya Mandal, but of the God Siva who, assuming Hariaya’s form, had intercourse with his wife Hira, herself an incarnation of Siva’s wife Parbati.’⁵¹ Bishwa Singha seemed to be happy with this new finding of his origin and there after the Koch Kings were known as ‘Sivabanshi’ or the descendent of God Siva.

⁵⁰ D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, p.26

⁵¹ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, pp. 48-49

The story of Parasurama’s wrath is found in the Darrangraj Vanssvahi, the genealogical account of the Koch Kings of Darrang. But interestingly this story is also shared by the ‘Hajong’ community.

Biswa Singha soon shifted his capital from Sikanagram (in present Kokrajhar district of Assam) to Kamatapur (present Cooch Behar district of West Bengal). In course of time Bishwa Singha consolidated his power over the entire western part of the region from river Kortoya to the Barnadi, after defeating the local Bhuyans of that region.

After the death of Bishwa Singha in 1540, his son Narnarayan ascended the throne. With the accession of Narnarayan the history of the Koches entered into a brilliant chapter of military glory and cultural achievements. This illustrious ruler established the Koch sovereignty almost in the entire northeast and made it important enough to get recognition in the court of Mughal Delhi.⁵² Narnarayan appointed his brother Sukladhvaj alias Chilarai his commander-in-Chief. Chilarai was a great conqueror and one of the greatest soldiers of his time. N. N. Acharyya observes, "Chilarai had consolidated the power of the newly established Koch Kingdom, eliminated the disruptive elements within, and transformed what was an infant kingdom to a national domain. He left to his successors a mighty and extensive kingdom such as no monarch of Eastern India had ever ruled after the hey days of the Barman rulers of ancient Assam."⁵³ The reign of Narnarayan is important from the point that both Narnarayan and Chilarai were great patronage of learning. His court was

⁵² D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, p.45

⁵³ A.C. Choudhury, *Sangram Singha Chilarai (Assamese)*, Bongaigaon, 1983, introduction

delighted with the presence of scholars like Sankardev, Ram Saraswati, Annanta Kandali, Bakul Kayastha and others.⁵⁴ Sankardev composed most of his major work including *Kirtana Ghosa*-sections 1, 17-28, 29, *Rukminir Prem Kalaha*, *Bhagavata*-Book I, II, IX, XIII, *Rukmini Haran Naat* and others including his last work *Rama Vijaya Naat* during his stay in the Koch Kingdom from 1543 to 1568 till his death.⁵⁵ After the death of Chilarai, the Koch-Kamata kingdom was split into two parts between Narnarayan and Raghudev, son of Chilarai, around 1581 as Kamata or Koch Bihar (western kingdom) and Koch Hajo or Kamrup (eastern Kingdom).⁵⁶ This partition greatly weakened the power of the Koches and led to the intervention of foreign elements in their internal affairs which subsequently resulted in the

⁵⁴ J.P.Rajkhowa, *Generalissimo Chilarai and His Times*, Guwahati, 2001, p.44

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.44, 45

⁵⁶ I have not discussed about the Koch Hajo Kingdom and other Koch kingdoms namely, Bijni Raj, Darrang Raj and Beltola, which were established in various parts of modern Assam. The Koch Hajo alias Kamrup, which was founded by Raghudev narayan, grandson of Bishwa Singha could not survive for long period due to political instability. In the later times Chandra Narayan, grandson of Raghudev and son of Parikshit narayan established the Bijni Kingdom in lower Assam. Balit Narayan alias Dharma Narayan, one of Raghudev's sons founded another Kingdom named Darang Raj in the present Darrang district of Assam. Another small Kingdom named Beltola Raja was established by an offshoot of Jaynarayan (Son of Parikshit) comprising present greater Guwahati city of Assam.

western kingdom losing its independence, and the eastern kingdom annexed to the Mughal empire.⁵⁷

After the death Narnarayan, his only son Lakshminarayan ascended the throne of Kamata (1587-1627). Lakshminarayan was a weak ruler as compared to his father, and tragically enough he had spend his entire life fighting with cousin Raghudev, the ruler of Koch Hajo and then with his son Parikshitnarayan. During this period the Mughals had the chance to enter into the Koch politics, as well as into the territory of Kamata and Koch Hajo Kingdom. According to *Akbarnamah* Lakshminarayan's country was 200 kos long and from 100 to 40 kos broad, extending in the east to the Brahmaputra, in the north to Tibet, in the south to Ghoraghat and in the West Tirhut.⁵⁸

Though Lakshminarayan never had the vision and ability of his forefathers, he still could be remembered by the people of Northeast India, particularly Assam as one who declared 'Vaishnavism' as the *Rajdharm* (State religion) of his kingdom.⁵⁹ Though 'Vaishnavism' is looked upon as one of the spiritual and cultural identities of Assam and Assamese, this fact is not recognised by the Assamese intellectuals. Madhabdev, the chief disciple of Sankardev took asylum in

⁵⁷ D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, p.83

⁵⁸ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, rpt, Guwahati, 1984, p.64

⁵⁹ Khan Chowdhuri Amanatullah Ahmed, *Koch Biharer Itihas* (Bengali), rpt, Calcutta, 2001, p.151

Kamata after Raghudev Narayan turned hostile against 'Vaishnavism' and asked Madhabdev to leave his kingdom. It's a very interesting irony in history as Chilarai, father of Raghudev Narayan was the chief patron of 'Vaishnavism' and saved Sankardev from the wrath of his brother king Narnarayan. Even Damodardev, another Vaishnavite saint faced the same consequences in Raghudev's Kingdom and took shelter in Kamata. Damodardev wrote *Bhakti Ratnawali* and *Krisna Janma Rahashya* and Gobinda Mishra translated *Madbhagavat Gita* with the patronage of King Lakshminarayan. In later periods all these creation have been regarded as valuable property of Assamese literature. On the other hand *Sivarrti Kaumadi* and *Grahan Kaumadi* which were written by Sidhanta Bagish by the order of Lakshminarayan became a part of Bengali literature. After the death of his strong rival Pariskhit Narayan, who was his own nephew, he repented and in remorse, led an ascetic life at Hajo, where he breathed his last in 1627 A.D.⁶⁰

After Lakshminarayan, his son Birnarayan ascended the throne in 1627A.D. and ruled up to 1632 A.D. The power of the Koch dynasty decreased day by day and during the reign of Birnarayan, the King of Bhutan stopped paying the tribute.⁶¹ During this period Stephan Catchila, a propagator of

⁶⁰ A.C. Choudhury, *The Koches around the world*, Bongaigaon, 1991, p.131

⁶¹ A.C. Choudhury, *Koch Rajbanshis Jatir Itihas Aaru Sanskriti* (Assamese), rpt, Bongaigaon, 1993, p.203

Christianity returned from Bhutan visited Koch Kamata and left a note on this country.

After the death of Birnarayan, who ruled for a very short period, his son Prannarayan ascended the throne of Kamata in 1632 and struck coins in his name. Prannarayan occupied an important place in the history of Koch Kamata as he tried to reoccupy the territories of the undivided Koch kingdom, which had gone into the hands of the Mughals during Lakshminarayan's time. He even captured Dhaka; the capital of Bengal for a short period while Suja (son of Shajahan), the then Subedar of Bengal was away for fighting a battle against Aurangjeb in 1661.⁶²

Like his ancestors Prannarayan too was a great patron of learning. With his patronage scholars like Jaykrishna Bhattacharya, Kabi Ratna, Srinath Brahman and others created valuable works like *Proyog Ratnamala*, *Rajkhandam*, *Bishwasingha Charitam*, and others.⁶³ It is said that a Maharastrian scholar named Jagannath in the Mughal court was so impressed by Koch King Prannarayan's learning that he left the Mughal court and came to Kamata and wrote 'Pranabharnam', based on the ruling period of Prannarayan.⁶⁴

⁶² A.C. Choudhury, *Koch Rajbanshis Jatir Itihas Aaru Sanskriti* (Assamese), rpt, Bongaigaon, 1993, p.203

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.209

⁶⁴ Dr.Ramendra Adhikari, *Satsho Bacharia Kaamata Koch Rajatwer Itihas(1250-1949)* [Rajbanshi], 1996, p.22

Prannarayan also rebuilt the famous Kamateswari Temple in 1665, which still stands tall, besides other works.⁶⁵ He was a man with a positive mind, who had always a desire burning inside to rule independently despite so many constrains. With a view to throwing away the Mughal power from his kingdom, he tried to make healthy relation with neighbouring kingdom Assam, and Nepal. Maharaja Pratapmalla, the then king of Nepal, became a close friend of Prannarayan by marrying his sister Rupmati. Rupmati Devi in memory of her marriage constructed the temple of Ugratara (Durga) at Anatapura in 785 Nepali Sambot, (1649A.D.).⁶⁶ According to A.C. Choudhury, in the stone inscription of the Vishnu temple erected towards the west of the Palace of Katmandu, the details of the happy relations prevailed since Bishwa Singha to Prannarayan were made available.⁶⁷

After the death of Prannarayan in 1665, his son Modnarayan ascended the throne and ruled up to 1680. But he died without any issue and after his death his brother ascended the throne in 1680.⁶⁸ But his relative, Yagna Narayan and his supporters murdered him. Actually from this period the internal politics of Bishwa Singha's dynasty became more dramatic

⁶⁵ Dr.Ramendra Adhikari, *Satsho Bacharia Kaamata Koch Rajatwer Itihas(1250-1949)* [Rajbanshi], 1996, p.22

⁶⁶ Khan Chowdhuri Amanatullah Ahmed, *Koch Biharar Itihas* (Bengali), rpt, Calcutta, 2001, p.161

⁶⁷ A.C. Choudhury, *The Koches around the world*, Bongaigaon, 1991, p.133

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 134

and tragic due to the internal conflicts in the royal family, which opened the road for outsiders to interfere in the Koch politics. The Bhutanese directly entered into the political arena of the Koch kings especially of Koch Bihar and Bijni. In the later period, the Bhutanese played significant role in making and unmaking of Kings of Koch Bihar.

From 1765 up to 1783, Dhajendra Narayan, Rajendra Narayan, and Dharmendra Narayan succeeded the throne of Koch Kamata Kingdom. During this period, the interference of the Bhutanese in the affairs of Kamata Kingdom and their frequent attacks on the Kingdom became so prominent that king Dharmendra Narayan had to sign a treaty with East India Company to get rid of the trouble caused by the Bhutias.⁶⁹ As a consequence of this treaty of April 5, 1773, Koch-Kamata alias Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) became a native state of the British India and continued so till 1947. When Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) was included in the British Empire Rangpur was taken out of the Koch- Kamata Kingdom as a result of the treaty. Jalpaiguri and Darjiling remained parts of the Kingdom. But in the later period, around 1900 to 1908 during King Nripenda Narayan, these areas also went to the British due to a conspiracy made by *Dewan* (Minister) Kalika Das Dutta. While Maharaja Nripenda Narayan was in England, Kalika Das Dutta exchanged Jalpaiguri and Darjiling with Boda and Chakla with the British. It is believed that he signed a treaty with the British regarding this most probably in the

⁶⁹Dr.Ramendra Adhikari, *Satsho Bacharia Kaamata Koch Rajatwer Itihas(1250-1949)* [Rajbanshi], 1996, p.24

year 1908. When the King returned from abroad, he got angry but there was nothing left for him to take any effective step. After a few days, he went to England and died.⁷⁰

The treaty of 1773 became invalid on 14th August 1947. Under Indian Independent Act, section VIII, which was passed in the British Parliament, Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) again gained its independence and sovereignty. According to the Act, all the Princely states of India that would get back sovereign power are free to join India or Pakistan according to their will.⁷¹ Actually it is not right to say that Cooch Behar got independence and sovereignty, Cooch Behar along with other 565 Princely States (also called native or Indian States) was neither partitioned nor given independence in 1947. The only options the rulers of these states had were to join Pakistan or to join India.⁷²

⁷⁰ Dharma Narayan Burma, 'Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar' in Parag Koch Rajbanshi (ed.), *Chilarai: Souvenir* (Assamese), Guwahati, 2002, pp.19-20

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.20

⁷² Willem Van Schendel, 'Stateless in South Asia: The Making of the India-Bangladesh Enclaves', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 1, February 2002, p. 119

From Kingdom to District

The merger of Cooch Behar state with West Bengal and its transformation from a native state to a mere district of West Bengal, plays a very important role in the present Kamatapur movement. Most of the Koch Rajbanshis organisations of Northeast India feel that it was a conspiracy of the then Chief Minister of West Bengal government, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray and the Indian Government. The 'All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union' (AKRSU) has termed this merger as the beginning of conspiracy to disturb the unity of the greater Koch Rajbanshis community.⁷³ AKRSU has even placed it as the main argument for the formation of a separate Kamatapur state in their booklet titled 'Sukiya Kamatapur Rajya Kiyo'

⁷³ Bishwajit Rai, 'Sukiya Kâmatapur Rajya Kiyo' (Why separate Kamatapur), (Assamese), April 25, 2002

(Why separate Kamatapur). The ‘Greater Cooch Behar Peoples’ Association’ (GCPA) argues that the merger of Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) with West Bengal by Dr. B.C. Ray was fully illegal, unconstitutional and initially void.⁷⁴

On this particular district of West Bengal Durgadas Majumder writes in ‘West Bengal District Gazetteers’ that until the 28th day of August 1949 Koch Bihar was an Indian State ruled by the Maharaja of Koch Bihar who had been a feudatory prince under the British Government. By a document dated 28th August 1949 Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan of Koch Bihar ceded his territory to the Dominion of the Government of India. The transfer of the administration to the government of India took place on the 12th day of September 1949, from when on Koch Bihar was ruled as a Chief Commissioner’s Province by a Chief Commissioner appointed by the Government of India. By an order under section 290A of Government of India Act of 1935, Koch Bihar was transferred and merged with the Province of West Bengal on 1st January 1950. Since then Koch Bihar is being administered as a district of West Bengal.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See the letter dated 26.12.2000, to the Home Minister, Government of India through the Chief commissioner of Cooch Behar (District Magistrate) by ‘The greater Cooch Behar Peoples’ Association’ in Banshi Badan Barman (ed.), *Dângar Koch Bihar Bâsir Koyta Katha* (Rajbanshi), received on March 30, 2004 from Nabyendu Roy Pramanik.

⁷⁵ Cited in Banshi Badan Barman (ed.), *Dângar Koch Bihar Bâsir Koyta Katha* (Rajbanshi), Received on March 30, 2004 from Nabyendu Roy Pramanik

The merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal was not that smooth as it is seen above. Though there was no Gunfire at the time of merger, a great deal of politics was going on in that particular period. Though the merger was supposed to be the generally accepted verdict of the people of Cooch Behar, in reality it was not so. Observing the complexity of the situation Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India had declared that the merger of Cooch Behar would be decided according to the will of the people of Cooch Behar.

On 18th July 1947 Indian Independence Act was passed in the British Parliament and India got Independence on 15th August 1947. The entire native states including Cooch Behar too got back their sovereignty according to the Indian Independence Act and the decision whether they would join Indian domain or Pakistan was left to the Kings of those native states. GCBPA says that according to the Indian Independence Act, Section 7(1) all the treaties and agreements signed between Cooch Behar and British Government from 1773 to 1902 became invalid, and the territories, which were acquired by the British Government through various treaties in different periods from the various rulers of Cooch Behar were returned to Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan of Cooch Behar. These areas were Jalpaiguri, Darjiling, Dinajpur, Goalpara and West Assam. GCBPA also says that with all these areas the Maharaja started to reshape Cooch Behar.⁷⁶ Though most of

⁷⁶ Banshi Badan Barman (ed.), *Dângar Koch Bihar Bâsir Koyta Katha* (Rajbanshi), Received on March 30, 2004 from Nabyendu Roy Pramanik,

the native states decided to join Indian domain before 15th August 1947, Cooch Behar took the decision little lately.⁷⁷

The Maharaja finally made up his mind to join the Indian domain on 20th August 1948 on basis of a few arrangements from the Indian side.⁷⁸ On 28th August 1949, an agreement was signed between Government of India and Cooch Behar for the integration of Cooch Behar with India. The Maharaja raised a few points to the Government of India regarding the future of Cooch Behar State, its position in the dominion of India, position of the Maharaja, his rights, property of the state etc. V.P. Menon, the then Governor of India sent a letter to the Maharaja considering the points he raised on 28th August 1949. The first arrangement that the Government of India had accepted the demands of the Maharaja considering the points raised by him was as follows, “It is the intention of the Government of India to administer for the present the territories of Cooch Behar state as centrally administered area under a Chief Commissioner.”⁷⁹ Thus Cooch Behar was placed in the Constitution of India as a State in the ‘C’ category. The Maharaja after getting proper assurance from the

⁷⁷ Soumen Nag, *Bichinatar Utsa Sandhane Kâmatapur Theke Uttarpurba Bharat*, (Bengali) Kolkata, 2003, p.159

⁷⁸ Banshi Badan Barman (ed.), *Dângar Koch Bihar Bâsir Koyta Katha* (Rajbanshi), Received on March 30, 2004 from Nabyendu Roy Pramanik, p.5

⁷⁹ The Cooch Behar merger agreement is also available at: <http://www.coochbehar.nic.in/Htmfiles/royal_history2.html#cob_merger>

Government of India handed over Cooch Behar to the Government of India on 12th September 1949.

On the eve of the handing of Cooch Behar, he sent the following message to the people of Cooch Behar. This message clearly reflects the gloom felt by the King at that moment.

On this Solemn Occasion, which marks the end of long and happy association, my mother and I send our very best wishes to my beloved people. Wherever we may be, we shall never forget you, your loyalty, and your devotion, we hope you will always maintain the peace, goodwill and harmony, which has been our common heritage. We shall always watch with keen interest your moral and material welfare and always pray for your happiness and prosperity.
May god bless you all.

Message from his Highness the Maharaja Bhup Bahadur of Cooch Behar on the day 12-9-49 the State is integrated to the dominion of India.

Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur
12-9-1949⁸⁰

After the integration of Cooch Behar with India a few new points were raised regarding the future of this ‘C’ category state. Bidhan Chandra Ray, the Chief minister of West Ben-

⁸⁰ Available at :<http://www.coochbehar.nic.in/Htmfiles/royal_history2.html#cob_merger>

gal and 'Cooch Behar Congress' wanted to merge Cooch Behar with West Bengal though it was not locally supported. Dharma Narayan Burma, the President of North Bengal Cultural Association, has recalled one incident in his article '*Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar*' about the failure of 'Cooch Behar Congress' to evoke any support in favour of their demand to merge Cooch Behar with West Bengal among the general people of the State. In 1948 Mr. Burma attended a rally organized by 'Cooch Behar Congress' in support of the demand at Madanmohan Thakurbari field of Tuphanganj, which turned out to be a big flop attended only by 20-30 people.⁸¹

The problem became a big one within a few days. New organisations like 'Cooch Behar Congress' and 'Prajahit Sadhini Sabha' were born during this time. Majority of the people of Cooch Behar joined 'Prajahit Sadhini Sabha'. 'Prajahit Sadhini Sabha' intended that Cooch Behar should not be merged with either Bengal, or Assam, rather it should be a union territory under Delhi. Though people of Cooch Behar were not in favour of its merger with West Bengal, The then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Bidhan Chandra Ray left no stone unturned to convince and pressurise Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister of India in favour of inclusion of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. Mr. Ray's

⁸¹ Dharma Narayan Burma, 'Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar' (Cooch Behar State:Cooch Behar District) in Parag Koch Rajbanshi (ed.), *Chilarai: Souvenir* (Assamese), Guwahati, 2002, p.21

intention was clearly visible in the following letters written by him to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

To,
The Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel
Deputy Prime Minister of India

My Dear Vallabhbhai Patel,
I have spoken to you already about Cooch Behar and I have shown you certain papers regarding the subject ... I would like to take up these cases and their occasions to the west Bengal Government.

I am very much anxious about Cooch Behar because of certain developments, which have taken place there affecting the security not merely of West Bengal but also of the Indian Union. I cannot say more at this stage, but when I see you next time I will tell you.

Yours Sincerely
B.C. Ray⁸²

Another letter by B.C. Ray to Vallabhbhai Patel shows Ray's political intention to take advantage of the situation. The letter follows...

⁸² Cited in Dharma Narayan Burma's article 'Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar' in Parag Koch Rajbanshi (ed.), *Chilarai: Souvenir* (Assamese), Guwahati, 2002, p.21

Calcutta, 11 May 1949

To,
The Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel
Deputy Prime Minister of India

My dear Vallabhbhai Patel,

You remember I spoke to you on several occasions about allowing Cooch Behar to be merged to West Bengal. I am perfectly sure you are inclined to the same direction. It may be that it will take a little time before the preliminaries can be settled before the merger is decided. You know that Sri Sarat Chandra Bose has filed his nomination for the assembly for South Calcutta. The last date of the nomination being 24th May, Polling is taking Place in 12th June. I certainly expect help, advice and co-operation from you. In this connection may I suggest to you that the announcement from the centre that Cooch Behar could be merged to West Bengal would be a great help to us in the election campaign. When you have finally decided about this merging, kindly let us know so that we can keep the field ready and make our propaganda that the merging has not been effected by Sri Sarat Ch. Bose but by West Bengal Government. The Provincial Congress Committee has decided to put up a candidate a strong one against

Sri Sarat Ch. Bose. But of course polling booth is always a tricky customer.

I hope you are keeping well. An early reply will be welcomed.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. B.C. Ray⁸³

It is clear that the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Bidhan Chandra Ray, made lot of effort to convince Patel about the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. But it seems that the Deputy Prime Minister, Vallabhbhai Patel was aware of the situation that the merger was against the will of the local people of Cooch Behar. Regarding this matter he wrote a letter to the then Governor of West Bengal, Kailash Nath Katju. The letter goes as follows—

Dehradun, 26th June, 1949

My dear Katju,

Thank you for your letter of 23rd June 1949. I am glad to know your views on question of Cooch Behar. From all evidence it seems that merger with West Bengal is locally unpopular. It is a difficult problem and we will have to think hard about it.

⁸³ Das, Durga (ed), Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50
Vol.7, Ahmedabad, 1973, pp.547-548

Least we should provoke unpleasant local situation.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel⁸⁴

During this period, there was a wave in favour of the merger of Cooch Behar with Assam. As an observer of this situation, the Governor Assam Mr. A. K. Hydari wrote a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister where he says, “.....best solution in present circumstances would be to let Cooch Behar come under the wing of central congress, if that is not possible the second best would be to let it be affiliated to the Assam Provincial Congress...”⁸⁵

Amanatulla Ahmed (The writer of *Koch Biharer Itihas*), president of ‘Cooch Behar State Praja Congress’ (later known as Hitsadhini Sabha) and others in a letter to the Advisor of States Ministry, New Delhi dated August 8, 1949 said, “[T]he entire people of Cooch Behar (excluding the microscopic Bengali element) are against the merger of the state with West Bengal. Cooch Behar (both Hindus and Muslims) unlike the Bengalis, have peculiar characteristic of their own. Their spoken language Rajbanshi dialect—having greater affinity with Assamese... there grew a natural dislike for Bengalis among the Cooch Beharis.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Cited in Dharma Narayan Burma’s article ‘Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar’ in Parag Koch Rajbanshi (ed.), *Chilarai: Souvenir* (Assamese), Guwahati, 2002., p.22

⁸⁵ Das, Durga (ed), Sardar Patel’s Correspondence 1945-50 Vol.7, Ahmedabad, 1973, pp.549-551

⁸⁶ Ajit Patowary, *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, June 11, 2003

We should mention here that historically and culturally Cooch Behar alias Koch-Kamata Kingdom was more close to Assam than West Bengal. During this period the Chief Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordolai tried to change direction of the wave in Assam’s favour, after visiting Cooch Behar and hearing to the people of Cooch Behar. At that moment Jawaharlal Nehru declared that Plebiscite will decide the fate of Cooch Behar.⁸⁷ But Bidhan Chandra Ray was able to convince Vallabhbhai Patel in his favour by his continuous labour. Mr. Patel was convinced in such a way that he even saw the Ghost of East Pakistan in ‘Prajahit Sadhini Sabha’ as the support of local Muslims were with this organisation. The following letter, which was written to the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru by Patel clears the matter.

New Delhi
28 December 1949

My Dear Jawaharlal,

Thank you for your letter of 27th December regarding Cooch Behar and Bidarva Pradesh. I have examined the position in details in the cabinet and hope it was not necessary for me now to go in to the details again. As Menon has also told you the question of Cooch Behar was mentioned to you some

⁸⁷ Dharma Narayan Burma, ‘Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar’ in Parag Koch Rajbanshi (ed.), *Chilarai: Souvenir* (Assamese), Guwahati, 2002, p.22

time ago. It is possible it was slipped from your mind. In view of that I did not think it necessary to refer to you again though it was my intention to mention it in the cabinet before a public announcement is made. As regards consulting the people of Cooch Behar, I have already said that local congress has approved the merger. There is a local 'Hitsadhini Sabha', which is partly Muslim with its sympathies with neighbouring area of East Pakistan and partly consisting of some numbers of hill tribes who are looking to Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan for formation of an 'Uttarkhanda Pradesh'. I feel certain that we should do nothing to encourage this kind of organisation in its mischievous tendencies.

Assam's intention towards Cooch Behar is directed only because on account of its geographical isolation from the main area of West Bengal, I had to entrust supervision over its administration to the Governor of Assam. Otherwise they have never bothered about it.

Yours Faithfully
Vallabhai Patel⁸⁸

The iron man Vallabhai Patel made very little efforts to find out the will of the common people of Cooch Behar, and assumed that the Cooch Behar Congress represented the local people, and he suspected the motives of the Muslim members of 'Hitsadhini Sabha' whom he saw as being sympathetic to Pakistan. After much hue and cry Cooch Behar was merged with West Bengal against the will of the local people and on 1st January 1950 the Kamata Kingdom alias Cooch Behar or Koch Bihar became a district of West Bengal.

⁸⁸ Cited in Dharma Narayan Burma's article 'Rajya Cooch Behar: Jela Cooch Behar' in Parag Koch Rajbanshi (ed.), *Chilarai: Souvenir* (Assamese), Guwahati, 2002, pp. 22-23

The struggle for Koch Rajbanshi dignity

For a better understanding of the present Kamatapur movement we should not only study about the political history of the Koches, we should also take account of the social factors, which laid the foundation for common political aspiration among the Koch Rajbanshis. Keeping Kings and Kingdom aside lets talk something about the general Koch Rajbanshis of historical Kamata Kingdom (North Bengal). Though these people like to call themselves 'Rajbanshi' (descendent of royal blood), in reality they enjoy a lower status in the caste Hindu society. They have been placed in the bottom of the caste fold and have often been victims of discrimination.

In the early social setting of this region (North Bengal), the social status of the Rajbanshi's was not challenged until

the influx of a large number of caste–Hindu immigrants into this clime from some other parts of the country. These people with a strong awareness to casteism started interacting with the indigenous Rajbanshis in differential terms.”⁸⁹ Swaraj Basu observes, “with the gradual settlement of an upper caste Hindu gentry in what were traditionally the Rajbanshi dominated areas of North Bengal, the existing balance in local power structure had changed. The immigrant upper caste gentry in course of time had become the most dominant group in the local society, economy and politics. They manned the local administration and by virtue of their closeness to the administrative power and their shrewdness, emerged as the dominant landholding class. As they were guided by the traditional Brahminical cultural values, the Rajbanshis with a tradition and culture of their own, failed to get a respectable position in the status estimation of these immigrant upper caste gentry. There were sharp dissimilarities between the cultural practice of these two groups and the gentry treated the Rajbanshis as ‘backward, uncultured and even *antyaj*.”⁹⁰

The narrow mentality of the upper caste Bengali Hindus were reflected in the work of renowned scholars of that time.

⁸⁹ Sujata D. Hazarika, ‘Unrest and displacement: Rajbanshis in North Bengal’, *South Asia Forum for Human Rights*, [accessed March 05, 2004]

< http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch17_4.htm>

⁹⁰ Swaraj Basu, *Dynamics of a Caste movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 62-63

Soumen Nag observes that Nagendranath Basu in the early 20th century while writing his *Vishwakosh* (Encyclopedia) mentioned the Koch Rajbanshis as barbarians or (Mlechha). Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the renowned Bengali scholar says in ‘Bongo Darshan’ that the Koch identity cannot be synonymous with Bengali Hindu identity.⁹¹ He writes in ‘Banga Darshan’, “Lots of Koches live inside Bengal. Koches are found in the district of Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi, Bagura, Dacca, Moymonsing of Bengal. There are almost one lakh Koches, who live in Bengal. Few people say that they should be counted as Bengalis. But I express my doubt over this matter.”⁹²

It is not only in the literature where Koch Rajbanshis were humiliated, they also faced social oppression in their social life in Bengal and Assam. According to one scholar, in the early 20th century the Koch Rajbanshis were even denied entry into the temple of Jagannath Puri by an Act of the Govt. in

⁹¹ Soumen Nag, *Bichinatar Utsa Sandhane Kâmatapur Theke Uttarpurba Bharat*, (Bengali) Kolkata, 2003, p. 163

⁹² Cited in Soumen Nag, *Bichinatar Utsa Sandhane Kâmatapur Theke Uttarpurba Bharat* (Bengali) Kolkata, 2003, p. 201

It should be mentioned here that, even in Assamese literature Koches were looked down as inferior to other caste. The renowned Assamese novelist late Rajani Kanta Bordoloi had used the term ‘Nihaliya’ to interpret the Koches in his famous novel ‘Dandua Droh’. (See: Rajani Kanta Bardoloi, *Dandua Droh* 1988, rpt, Guwahati, p.71-72)

the year 1911.⁹³ There were similar practices in Assam. Once Koch Rajbanshis were denied entry in the famous BARPETA Kirtan Ghar, a prayer place for the Vaishnavait sect of Assam, situated in BARPETA town of lower Assam. For their entry in to the BARPETA Kirtan Ghar, they had to fight a legal battle in the then Calcutta High Court.⁹⁴

So in such a situation of social oppression, the Koch Rajbanshis had two options. First, they could live with their 'Koch Rajbanshi' identity without caring about rest of the world. Secondly, they could once again try hard to enter the fold of caste Hindu society. Unfortunately, the Rajbanshi leadership went for the second option. As the dream world of 'Kshatriya' was still in their mind.

Panchanan Burma was the person who tried to elevate the status of the Rajbanshis by claiming 'Kshatriya' status for them through the famous 'Kshatriya Movement' of the early 20th century. He had a reason for this, as he himself was a victim of racial discrimination by upper caste Hindu. About his humiliation Ranjit Kumar Mandal writes in his book 'Ray Saheb Panchanan – Life and Time' that Panchanan Barma experienced caste hatred right in his childhood. Once in early

⁹³ Sujata D. Hazarika, 'Unrest and displacement: Rajbanshis in North Bengal', *South Asia Forum for Human Rights*, [accessed March 05, 2004]

<http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch17_4.htm>

⁹⁴ A.C. Choudhury, *Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilanir Samikshatmak Itihas*, (Assamese) Bongaigaon, 1993, p. 49

childhood, he happened to touch the Gita of their family Priest while the later was on his visit to their house. He was shocked that even the conduct of the innocent child was grossly condemned through an alarm of hue and cry. He was cautioned that being a non- Brahmin he had no privilege to touch a holy book that too written in Sankrit, the Deva-Bhasha." Mandal continues, "even after the brilliant Panchanan established himself as a highly qualified lawyer, he could not escape the fate of caste hatred. Once in Rangpur court, Panchanan unconsciously, in hurry, put the hat of his colleague Mr. Maitra to attend a court proceeding. Mr. Maitra subsequently refused to use the same hat and retaliated, "I hate to use a toga used by a Rajbanshi."⁹⁵

It is through 'Kshatriya Movement' that we find the Rajbanshis challenging the lower status assigned to them. While in 1891 the Rajbanshi's described themselves as 'Vratya Kshatriya', from 1911 they began to claim pure 'Kshatriya' status legitimized by priests, genealogists and pundits. In order to gratify their ritual rank aspiration they began to imitate the values, practices and cultural styles of 'twice born' castes who formed a part of Hindu Great tradition. Since 1912, a number of mass thread wearing ceremonies (Milan Kshetra) were organised in different districts by the 'Kshatriya Samiti' where lakhs of Rajbanshis donned the sacred thread as a mark of 'Kshatriya' status. The immediate objective of

⁹⁵ Ranjit Kumar Mandal, *Ray Saheb Panchanan – Life and Time*, Delhi, 2002, p.27

the ‘Kshatriya Samiti’ was to regain the lost social status of the Rajbanshi community in the Hindu social system.⁹⁶

But sadly the Rajbanshis could not elevate their social status through ‘Kshatriyisation’ as the caste Hindu gentry were against this. The caste Hindu zamindars and professionals protested strongly against the demand placed by the ‘Rangpur Vratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Vidhayani Sabha’ to write ‘Vratya Kshatriya’ as the caste before the Rajbanshis. In fact they put forward this protest to Mr. F.A. Skyne, the then District Magistrate of Rangpur. All the more when the community donned sacred thread on Feb 10, 1912 at Perolbani, Mr. J.S. Milligan, the then D.M. of Rangpur remained present with a group of armed constables lest caste Hindu people should attempt to create disturbance and frustrate the ceremony. In the given circumstances, it may be presumed that the Rajbanshis were not treated at par with the respectable caste groups in spite of their attempt to ‘Kshatriya’ mobility.⁹⁷

Interestingly one of the main thrusts of the movement was to disassociate the Rajbanshis from the Koch identity, as the leaders felt that by doing so they could establish the superior social rank for the Rajbanshis. The tragedy of the Kshatriya movement was that though through this movement

⁹⁶ Sujata D. Hazarika, ‘Unrest and displacement: Rajbanshis in North Bengal’, *South Asia Forum for Human Rights*, [accessed March 05, 2004]

<http://www.safhr.org/refugee_watch17_4.htm>

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

they (Rajbanshis) tried to elevate their social rank, they were against similar efforts of the other indigenous communities of North Bengal. “The Rajbanshis did not support the Rabhas own attempts at upward social mobility.”⁹⁸ “Instead of developing a common platform with other victims of Brahminical hierarchy, writes Basu, “the Rajbanshi leaders remained preoccupied with their own exclusive community-centric interests. In order to secure only a positional improvement for themselves, they tacitly endorsed the caste-based system of social differentiation, thus missing an important opportunity to bring about some fundamental structural change in the society.”⁹⁹ The ‘Kshatriya Movement’ lost its significance in the later phase while with the initiative of Panchanan Burma, the Rajbanshis were offered scheduled caste status.¹⁰⁰

But it is still hard to ignore the ‘Kshatriya Movement’ of the Rajbanshis. The Rajbanshis had no other option than to try and elevate their social rank, in a society where everything from eating, sitting and even getting a job was dependant on social position of a person. If Kamatapur is a call of the present time then ‘Kshatriya Movement’ was too a call of that particular period.

⁹⁸ Swaraj Basu, *Dynamics of a Caste movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*, New Delhi, 2003, p.82

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 82

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 91

We have already stated that with the gradual settlement of the Upper caste gentry in North Bengal, the indigenous Koch Rajbanshis faced a great loss regarding economic power and land holding. They also experienced a great deal of social discrimination. But more than social discrimination, loss of land and power, they went through a bigger threat of cultural politics. Soumen Nag offers a good example of cultural politics in Siliguri town of North Bengal. He writes, “Before independence Siliguri was not a full town. The indigenous Rajbanshis were the major inhabitant of Siliguri. Even these areas were known by their names. The educated Bengalis who came from East Pakistan and settled in these areas after purchasing lands from local Rajbanshis first replaced the indigenous Rajbanshi name from the places with their names. The new names not only pushed back the old names into the past, this also resulted the loss of old Rajbanshi identity.¹⁰¹ Nag further informs that in a govt. report of 1930, the old name of the present *Deshbandhu Para* was recorded as *Rajrajeswari Jot*. Same way *Hakim Para* was *Brajasingh Jot*, *Bharat Nagar* was *Jagen Jot*, *Mahananda Para* was *Lambodas Mohan Jot* and the present *Babu Para* was recorded as *Sabur Jot*.¹⁰²

What’s in a name? It has been said and argued many times. But when it comes to cultural politics, name plays a very important part, at least in the context of North Bengal and

¹⁰¹ Soumen Nag, *Bichinatar Utsa Sandhane Kâmatapur Theke Uttarpurba Bharat* (Bengali), Kolkata, 2003, p.172

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p.197

Kamatapur movement. Nabyendu says, “they don’t want to see the name Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) anywhere. Any name that makes us feel about our past history, they will change it. They have changed the name of ‘Cooch Behar State Library’ to ‘North Bengal State Library’, ‘Cooch Behar State Transport’ to ‘North Bengal State Transport’ and ‘Moti Mahal’ to ‘Kalyan Bhavan’. We have lost every thing, land, language, culture and even the names of places.¹⁰³

“The Hindu refugees, who came from districts of Rangpur, Mymonsingh, Pavana, Dinajpur, Dacca and others to Cooch Behar after independence, had good economic background. They had a strong cultural awareness with a good knowledge of cultivation. In front of their developed culture, modernity of language, education and efficiency, the indigenous Rajbanshis could not stand anywhere and they gradually lost their culture, language and land. Above all they became minority due to the flow of this immigrant and ultimately they lost their last asset, which was their identity”, says Nag.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *Personal discussion with Nabyendu Roy Pramanik*, (Ref: my personal field research Note Book, March 30, 2004)

¹⁰⁴ Soumen Nag, *Bichinatar Utsa Sandhane Kâmatapur Theke Uttarpurba Bharat* (Bengali), Kolkata, 2003, p.159

In search of a solution...

Whether Kamatapur, the Koch Rajbanshi imagination will become a reality or not, that question can be left for the coming days. Even accepting or giving the suggestion for the creation of a separate Kamatapur state as a solution for the present movement is somehow difficult and doubtful after considering the experience of Northeast India. Then what could be the possible solution for the Kamatapur movement? It is sad to know that the West Bengal Government is treating this sentimental issue of the Koch Rajbanshis as a law and order situation and has used police and security forces as the solution for the movement. But that has not discouraged the spirit of the KLO, KPP and AKRSU. In a latest press release, KLO chief Jivan Singh has said that they will con-

tinue their fight for freedom until the last drop of blood of the last KLO cadre endures.¹⁰⁵ The AKRSU has become more aggressive lately in the demand for Kamatapur state in Assam. More than 300 cadres from AKRSU and other Koch Rajbanshi organisation held a successful rally on June 23, 2004 in Guwahati in support of separate Kamatapur state. When enthusiastic members of AKRSU and other Koch Rajbanshi organisation forcefully entered the Janata Bhavan (Dispur) they were physically assaulted by security forces, which were on guard there. Newspaper reported that few members were seriously wounded and even aged women were not spared. Security forces even pulled out ‘*patani*’¹⁰⁶ from women members of the organisation.¹⁰⁷ Fourteen people from Koch Rajbanshi organisations were arrested including the General Secretary of AKRSU Pranabjyoti Das on that day.¹⁰⁸

Keeping aside what happened in Assam, lets consider the West Bengal government’s reaction to the Kamatapur movement as it is based in Bengal. At present the West Bengal Government has considered Kamatapur movement as a law

¹⁰⁵ *Asomiya Pratidin* (Assamese), Guwahati, July 17, 2004

¹⁰⁶ Traditional dress of Koch Rajbanshi women.

¹⁰⁷ *Dainik Janasadharan* (Assamese), Guwahati, June 24, 2004
The exact number of the people who were injured by security force on 23 rd June is 89. Ref: List provided by General Secretary, AKRSU.

¹⁰⁸ Case Ref: Dispur P.S.C/No.541/04 u/s-120 (B)/147/148/149/152/353/447/427/506 I.P.S. 2 pm on 23/06/04, Dispur Police Station.

and order situation. As Pinaki Bhattacharya observes, that the state government’s primary response has been to unleash the security forces to stamp out the movement by force.¹⁰⁹ According to Sumit Mitra of ‘India Today’, the CPI (M)’s response to the problem (Kamatapur movement) has been stronger police measure. In Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri, KPP men are hounded for harbouring rebels.¹¹⁰ As reported by ‘The Times of India’ in November 2000, the West Bengal Government on various charges put numbers of KPP leaders and workers behind bars.¹¹¹ Nikhil Roy, the present president of KPP, who was released after serving eight months in jail, said to ‘The Hindu’ that the number of KPP workers and leaders who were jailed are at least 500. Mr. Roy was jailed in March 2003 after arrested on several charges, including the charge of waging war against the state.¹¹² Regarding these

¹⁰⁹Pinaki Bhattacharya, The KLO Strikes, with a Little Help, *Intelligence Review of the South Asia Terrorism Portal*, September 9, 2002,

<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/1_8.htm>

¹¹⁰Sumit Mitra, ‘Statescan’, *India Today*, [accessed April 21, 2004

<<http://www.indiatoday.com/webexclusive/dispatch/20020915/mitra.html>>

¹¹¹Debashis Sarkar, ‘KPP leaders differs on armed movement’, *Times of India*, July 9, 2001,

<<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/376919101.cms>>

¹¹² Marcus Dam, ‘Demand for separate Kâmatapur State renewed’, *The Hindu*, Tuesday, Jan13, 2004

<<http://www.hindu.com/2004/01/13/stories/2004011304971200.htm>>

charges against KPP, different views are found. The West Bengal police say that the KPP has a link with KLO, but on the other hand KPP denies it. There are people in North Bengal who opine that even simple farmers are hounded as KLO activists. This accusation against West Bengal Government is debatable but it makes sense when this kind of accusation comes from senior citizen like Kanu Sanyal. While addressing a huge gathering in Siliguri, as reported by 'The Times of India' Kanu Sanyal, the veteran communist leader and CPI (ML) chief said that the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) was not a big issue. According to him, 'to hide its own failure, the state government is projecting it as so. Even petty criminals and simple farmers are being labeled as KLO militants.'¹¹³

It seems that the West Bengal Government is not interested in solving or listening to this movement of the Koch Rajbanshis of North Bengal. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee even refused to sit across the table for talks with the KPP leaders.¹¹⁴ Later he changed his mind and expressed his desire to have a talk with KPP, but that did not evoke much enthusiasm amongst top KPP leaders as reported by Debashis Sarkar of 'Times of India'. Reacting to the Chief

¹¹³ 'Kanu supports Nepal Maoists', *Times of India*, May 3, 2002, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/8696209.cms>>

¹¹⁴ Pinaki Bhattacharya, The KLO Strikes, with a Little Help, Intelligence Review of the South Asia Terrorism Portal, September 9, 2002, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/1_8.htm>

Minister's willingness to talk with them, Atul Roy, the then president of KPP questioned, 'Why is he so keen to see us now after putting all our workers in jails without legitimate reasons before election?'¹¹⁵ Atul Roy's question was definitely justified as we stated earlier that from November 2000 onwards the state government started jailing the KPP workers. And of course a friendly talk is not possible in such a situation. The KLO has been projected as an ULFA aided extremist organisation with the support of foreign country, rather than a rebel group who are fighting for a separate homeland for the Koch Rajbanshis. According to Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee the foreign element behind KLO is Pakistani intelligence service ISI.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Debashis Sarkar, 'KPP leaders differs on armed movement', *Times of India*, July 9, 2001, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/376919101.cms>>

¹¹⁶ Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharjee said in an interview to the CPI (M) daily 'Ganashakti' that KLO and ULFA had the direct backing of Pakistan. In another news published in 'Times of India' he said that whether KLO in Jalpaiguri or NLFT in Tripura are working in tandem in Northeast India with active support from the ISI and Bangladesh has become haven for them. For the complete news report please see 'Buddha backs Manik on Bangla rebel camps' (August 26, 2003, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/146690.cms>>) and 'Terrorist activities in Bengal being tackled: Buddhadev' (May 18, 2002, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/10265195.cms>>) of 'Times of India'.

The popular notion about Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) is that ULFA created it for their own benefit and it has been labeled as a ULFA aided group. A report by 'South Asian Terrorism Portal' on KLO says, "The origin of the Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) can be traced from the attempts of certain members of the Rajbanshi community belonging to the all Kamatapur Students' Union (AKSU) to organise an armed struggle for a separate Kamatapur State. For this purpose, they approached the 'United Liberation Front of Asom' (ULFA). ULFA reportedly agreed to train them in order to gain foothold outside Assam, in the other geographically contiguous Indian States to use them as transit routes. ULFA's line of thinking was that, it would not only facilitate the movement of its cadres to their base camps in Bhutan but also provide a safe haven for the injured or sick cadres."¹¹⁷. An Intelligence Bureau officer traced the birth of the KLO to the "militant politics of Assam". He said the ULFA and 'People's War Group' of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa as well as Maoist Communist Centre militants of Jharkhand and Bihar wanted to coordinate operations with Nepali Maoists. A safe corridor was necessary, and North Bengal was ideally situated.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), *South Asia Terrorism Portal*,
http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/Klo.htm

¹¹⁸ Tapash Ganguly, 'Do or die', *The Week*, Nov 16, 2003
 <<http://www.the-week.com/23nov16/events1.htm>>

ULFA's role in the creation of KLO cannot be denied and it is not debatable that KLO had been involved in violent activities. But what we should keep in our mind is that KLO is not the entire 'photo album', which contains all the photographs of Kamatapur movement; instead of that it is just one photograph of the album called Kamatapur movement, which expresses anger. KLO is just a faction of the Kamatapur movement, which is engaged in insurgency activities. We should allow all the photographs of Kamatapur movement to be seen. If we recall, the demand for a separate homeland for the Koch Rajbanshis is more than fifty years old. KLO is actually one of the new comers in this arena, with a firm belief in bullets. The path leading to the violence for the Kamatapur movement is actually opened recently.

It is doubtful that KLO is the real problem. But when we talk a lot about KLO, it diverts our attention to other issues like, military, law and order, secessionism, terrorism, ISI and so and so. It also sometimes overshadows the real issues related to Kamatapur movement. You forget other issues relating to Kamatapur movement. Kanu Sanyal rightly said that KLO is not a big issue. He also stated that the main reasons behind the movement for a separate Kamatapur were the misrule and negligence of the State and Central government towards North Bengal.¹¹⁹ Even there are many people in West Bengal who believe that the ruling CPI (M) uses KLO as an ide-

¹¹⁹ Kanu supports Nepal Maoists, *The Times of India*, May 3, 2002,
 <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/8699209.cms>>

logical tactic to politically isolate those who demand a separate Kamatapur.¹²⁰

After the crack down of KLO¹²¹, actually every body should have lived happily, especially those who used to think that Kamatapur movement was an arm movement. But ethnic movements are not like fairy tales or not like those of Bollywood¹²² movies, which always have happy endings. A report in 'The Hindu' says that after being political limbo for

¹²⁰ Pinaki Bhattacharya, 'The KLO Strikes, with a Little Help', *Intelligence Review of the South Asia Terrorism Portal*, September 9, 2002

<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/1_8.htm>

¹²¹ Though it is believed that KLO was completely destroyed during the army operation by Bhutan Government, recently 'Asomiya Pratidin' reported that KLO along with ULFA and NDFB has again started organising themselves in the forests of Bhutan. The report also says that, this time all these militant groups have established link with Nepali extremist organisation Moaists and a Moaist 'land mine' specialist has arrived their camps with a view to train them about land mines. (Asomiya Pratidin, Guwahati, April 25, 2004, P.7)

¹²² The term 'Bollywood' is used to refer Indian commercial movies made in Hindi language that are generally produced in Mumbai. Other Indian movies, which are made in regional languages, are not called 'Bollywood' movies. Even 'Art films' or 'Parallel films' that are produced in Mumbai in Hindi language don't come under this category. A typical 'Bollywood' movie has songs, dances and a happy ending, which have been the trademarks of these movies since a long time.

over three years, the KPP has renewed its demand for a separate Kamatapur state. A founder member, former President and present spokesman, Atul Roy stated in the same report that the decision to renew the statehood demand had been publicly announced at a meeting in Siliguri on January 7, 2004 on KPP's foundation day.¹²³ AKRSU has formed a committee named 'Kamatapur Daabee Samiti' to peruse the demand for Kamatapur state in particular.¹²⁴ KPP and AKRSU in a recent development has expressed in an Assamese daily that they will lead the Kamatapur movement jointly. Now the proposed map of Kamatapur includes Goalpara, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur districts of Assam, Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar), Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda districts of West Bengal and Purniya and Kishanganj districts of Bihar.¹²⁵ This area is more or less the historical Kamata kingdom of the 16th century during the reign of Koch King Narnarayan. With the inclusion of modern portions of historical Kamata kingdom in the map of Kamatapur, what we can expect in future is that the Koch Rajbanshi inhabiting areas of Nepal, Bhutan and even Bangladesh can make their way to the map of Kamatapur, which is likely to affect these neighbouring south Asian countries. It should be mentioned here that the Koch Rajbanshis of North Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Meghalaya and Nepal have tried to keep relation with each

¹²³ Marcus Dam, 'Demand for separate Kâmatapur State renewed', *The Hindu*, Jan 13, 2004

¹²⁴ *Dainik Agradoot* (Assamese), Guwahati, April 21, 2004

¹²⁵ *Asomiya Pratidin* (Assamese), Guwahati, November 11, 2004

other through various organisations from time to time. In the year 1996 an International Koch Rajbanshi Conference was held in Jhapa district of Nepal, which was attended by Koch Rajbanshis from various parts of south Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma and India (Assam, North Bengal, Bihar) as reported by 'Uttarbanga Sanbad'. This conference which was presided by late Dr. Purnanarayan Singha, ex Member of Parliament from Assam, was also attended by the then Prime Minister of Nepal Sher Bahadur Deoba.¹²⁶ The Koch Rajbanshis of these areas are still trying to keep a close relation with each other. Even the recently held state conference of the 'Confederation of Rajbanshi Kshatriya Society' at Jalpaiguri of West Bengal in mid- June, 2004 was attended by speakers from Nepal, Burma, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal. All the speakers expressed their support for the formation of a separate Kamatapur State.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ This news was published in 'Uttar Banga Sanbad' in March 10, 1996. Cited in, Dr. Jatin Barua (ed.), *Rangta Garo, Raja Mahandra Narayan Aaru Ambika Charan Choudhurir Jivan Kriti* (Assamese) Bongaigaon, 2002, p.52

¹²⁷ *Asomiya Pratidin* (Assamese), Guwahati, June 14, 2004

Conclusion:

Though at present Kamatapur seems to be a Koch Rajbanshi imagination, it is a fact that Kamatapur or Kamata Kingdom or Cooch Behar, what ever we call it, is a historical reality. It is only during the birth of India and Pakistan and in the post independent India that many of the historical regions like Cooch Behar disappeared and new regions like Meghalaya, Mizoram appeared in the Northeastern part of India. Cooch Behar, the representative of the 16th century Koch Kamata Kingdom managed to maintain its identity first as a sovereign Kingdom, then as a tributary Kingdom under the Mughals and lastly as a princely state under British India until 1947. But Cooch Behar was reduced to the status of a district in the post independent India scenario. It was for the first time that this Kingdom lost its identity in its seven hundred years old legacy due to its merger with West Bengal. If Cooch Behar

could have been handled in a better way during its integration with the Indian Union, most probably then the present scene of the Kamatapur movement would have been different.

During the formation of independent India and Pakistan, the existing ethnic and cultural divisions and popular political aspirations of various ethnic groups of the sub continent were not realized and hence ignored. The birth of 'Bangladesh' within 'Muslim Pakistan' could be the result of the inability to understand such factors. Even the Indian states (Federal unit) were created primarily based on languages, ignoring these facts. But the language based formula for creation of states did not work particularly in the case of Northeast India. The cultural and linguistic differences of the various ethnic groups of these region and their political aspiration to get recognized as a state has been the 'head ache' of the Central Government since the past few decades. We saw the birth of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and others within the so-called 'Bor Axom' (Greater Assam). We should remember that the KPP is also demanding the inclusion of the Kamatapuri language in the eight schedule and the propagation of Kamatapuri language and culture through the state controlled electronic media. The cultural differences of the Koch Rajbanshis with the mainstream Bengali society have played an important role in the movement. Tomorrow we may see Kamatapur as a reality against the present state of imagination, but than again within Kamatapur there may be other political aspirations of the other ethnic groups like Rabha and Mech.

The role of KLO is better understood when taken within the Northeast Indian context. Though any demand for autonomy from the extremist organisations of Northeast India has been considered as a threat to national integration and primary response to these demands has been police or military force, but in most of the cases, the Central Government has responded positively to the demands of the insurgency groups. The Nagas, the Mizos and even recently the Bodos have got positive responses from the Central Government of India and have achieved something near to their goal- if not sovereignty then statehood, if not statehood then autonomous council. The Northeastern experience tells us that until and unless bullets speak, the oppressed voices are most of the time unheard in Delhi.

The humble aim of this book is to create an understanding of the movement, not to find a solution. Of course an understanding of the movement, creates an environment of looking beyond and looking within the demand for Kamatapur State. When we look within the movement, it seems that the Koch Rajbanshis are seeking recognition of their differences with the mainstream Bengali and Assamese society. These differences, which have been ignored for a long time, are the differences, which opened the door for social, political and economic humiliation. They are speaking in different languages to get recognised. They are speaking in Kamatapuri language, they are speaking in cultural language, they are speaking in political language and of course some of them are speaking in the language of the 'bullets'. They are trying

to communicate through various languages, but it seems that they are trying to say that they are there, with a glorious past, with a struggle against racism, with emotion, self-respect and striving to continue their struggle to make a place in this beautiful world.

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Abbreviations:

- AAKRS: All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani.
- AKRSU: All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union
- GCBPA: Greater Cooch Behar Peoples' Association
- KLO: Kamatapur Liberation Organisation
- KRSP: Kamata Rajya Sangram Parisad
- KPP: Kamatapur Peoples' Party
- NDFB: National Democratic Front of Bodoland
- UKD: Uttar Khanda Dal
- ULFA: United Liberation Front of Asom

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Annexure-I

The Hindu, online edition

Tuesday, Sep 27, 2005

We will abide by statute, says Cooch Behar leader

Special Correspondent

"Our movement is peaceful and democratic"

- 1949 accession treaty cited in support of demand
- No links with ULFA, KLO, says Bangshi Badan Burman

KOLKATA: "We will abide by the Constitution and carry forward our movement for a separate Greater Cooch Behar peacefully and in a democratic manner," Bangshi Badan Burman, general secretary of the Greater Cooch Behar People's Association (GCPA), said on Monday. The activities of the GCPA, demanding "either a separate State or Union Territory of Greater Cooch Behar" to be carved out of the districts of north Bengal and eastern Assam, have caused a flutter. Five persons died in a clash last week between GCPA supporters and the police in Cooch Behar. GCPA leaders cite the 1949 treaty between the Government of India and the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Jagatdipendra Narayan, that led to the merger of the princely state with India as a "document that substantiates our claim for special autonomous status for Cooch Behar." "We have no links with any militant outfit — be it the United Liberation Front of Asom or the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation — and have no intention of seeking the support of either," Mr. Burman told The Hindu over phone from Cooch Behar. "The GCPA was set up in September 1998, and it has taken us seven years to marshal our forces." Last week, West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee denounced the re-emergence of separatist forces in north Bengal and warned that the people would foil any attempt to divide the State. Mr. Bhattacharjee accused militant outfits such as the ULFA of fomenting trouble in the region and providing support to organisations such as the GCPA and previously, the KLO. Centre intimated The West Bengal Government informed Gour Chandra Dhar (48) and Jogesh Chandra Sarkar (47), said North

Bengal's inspector-general, Mr KL Meena. Two GCPA activists died in police firing. Mrs Tanushree Biswas, officer-in-charge of the Siliguri police women's cell, Ms Mumtaz Begum, inspector, Bagdogra, and constables Gore Tamang and Dilip Pradhan, injured, were taken to a nursing home at Siliguri. The IG said the police had told the GCPA to remove a road-block. Then they started firing: "only eight rounds," said the police while locals alleged a 15-minute fusillade. Mr Meena, too, was injured in the scrimmage. At Khagrabari and Chakchaka, several police vehicles and the Cooch Behar magistrate's car were damaged. The magistrate, Dr Ravi Inder Singh, ordered an extension of prohibitory orders under Section 144 Cr PC by another 24 hours. Some 23 GCPA supporters found themselves in MJN Hospital. Four hundred people were arrested. The GCPA general secretary, Mr Bangshi Badan Sarkar, demanded an inquiry by a Supreme Court judge into today's incident, alleging that the party's fasting supporters had been stopped by the police from moving towards the town. The district Trinamul Congress president, Mr Rabindra Nath Ghosh, too, demanded a judicial inquiry. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is to come here on Saturday for an 'anti-Greater Cooch Behar' gathering organised by the Left Front at the airport ground.

Earlier, the GCPA announced a mass fast-unto-death programme, scheduling its start for today. It wants Cooch Behar made a C-category state.

Left slams 'Greater Cooch Behar'

Statesman News Service

COOCH BEHAR, Sept. 14. — "Greater Cooch Behar" is fast becoming the main issue for the next Assembly elections in Cooch Behar. In the first phase the CPI-M tried to ignore the issue but later they came forward possibly to maintain its vote bank.

The Forward Bloc chairman, Mr Kamal Guha is the first Leftist leader who had felt that the movement for the "Greater Cooch Behar" might later.

Forward Bloc sources said that the CPI-M took a long time to feel the danger. The Bharatiya Janata Party and the Trinamul Congress are

yet to express their stand over the issue.

The Congress ventilated its stand on last Monday. They found a well-planned design of the CPI-M over the issue. Cooch Behar District Congress president Mr Shyamal Choudhury alleged that the CPI-M was trying to redirect the attention of common people from all the problems they were suffering from.

He made it clear that they will not term The Greater Cooch Behar People's Association as a secessionist and terrorist organisation till the administration does so. He alleged that the Left Front was playing a dual-role over this issue.

The Statesman online edition
Wednesday, October 5 2005

Cooch Behar killings spark Left row

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 21. — A day and five deaths later, Cooch Behar emerged as a potential potboiler with the CPI-M and Forward Bloc exchanging blames, at a level rarely witnessed before. While Mr Kamal Guha, state agriculture minister and vice-chairman of the North Bengal Development Council, blamed the administration for the chaos that was reigning in Cooch Behar, the CPI-M state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, found Mr Guha "instigating the agitators" instead of doing something for the region as NBDC vice-chairman. Today's exchange is likely to add a new dimension to the local political equations when the chief minister, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, addresses a Left Front meeting on 24 September. The Union home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil, is scheduled to visit the Berubari area on 25 leader. "I have heard that he used to be an SFI activist. But I don't know about the forces behind him."

GCPA denies hand in top cop's death

COOCH BEHAR/KOLKATA, Sept. 21.— Thousands of Greater Cooch Behar People's Association (GCPA) supporters continued their fast-unto-death agitation, having begun it yesterday. Six of them, ill, have had to be shifted to hospital. The GCPA, to be at it until the home ministry yields, denied attacking policemen yesterday. It said it did not know who had done so. According to it, it does not harm even the CPI-M. The Forward Bloc claimed to have organised anti-GCPA rallies around the district today as the separatists vowed to carry on till "victory" was achieved. In Kolkata, grieving people poured into Gas Street today for a last glimpse of Mustaq bhai, the additional superintendent of Kalimpong slain in yesterday's police-GCPA confrontation. The body was flown in from Bagdogra. Ahmed, a pan-vendor's son, was born and brought up in this economically low-profile area. He is the first high-rank West Bengal police officer to have died in action in more than two decades. Vinod Mehta, deputy commissioner (port), was killed by a Garden Reach mob in 1984. Some 25 junior policemen have died since 2003 whilst doing duty in West Bengal's Maoist-dominated districts. — SNS

Annexure-II

Demand of Kamatapur Peoples' Party

The KPP or Kamtapur Peoples' Party on 26.09.97 submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, Indrakumar Gujral, through the divisional commissioner of North Bengal, Jalpaiguri division. The 11 points charter of demands were —

1. In order to enable the Kamtapuri speaking people to govern their own lives by reason of ethnic, linguistic, historical, cultural and social distinction from the rest of the people of West Bengal a separate statehood namely 'KAMTAPUR' be created within the framework of India comprising the whole of North Bengal and adjoining Kamtapuri populated areas in India, in accordance with the article (3) of the Constitution of India.
2. With a view to advancing the language of the Kamtapuris it be included in the 8th schedule of the Constitution of India.
3. On the basis of the lease-year of 1971 (Indira-Mujib accord) the expulsion of illegal foreigners from Kamtapuri areas of North Bengal be implemented soon.
4. In order to curb the illegal influx of immigrants in North Bengal and adjacent Kamtapuri dominated areas, the 'INNER & PERMIT LINE' must immediately be imposed on the said areas.
5. With a view to restraining the intrusion of illegal foreigners in North Bengal, barbed wire be erected on the borderline of both India and Bangladesh without further delay.

6. Regarding various cultural programmes of Kamtapurians for the Kamtapuri people of North Bengal should be arranged to telecast on the television by opening Fulbari Doordarshan substation centre immediately.

7. With a view to ensuring an all round development of North Bengal, the 'Teesta irrigation project' should be immediately declared as a national project.

8. In order to enrich the culture of the Kamtapuri people of North Bengal as well as neighbouring areas, different types of cultural programmes of Kamtapurians be broadcast through 'All India Radio, Siliguri at par with daily the programmes in Nepali by the All India Radio, Kurseong.

9. In respect of promoting higher education for the aboriginal people of North Bengal a central university namely Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma University be set up in the district of Coochbehar immediately.

10. Regarding exchange of enclaves, Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and Bagladeshi enclaves in India be exchanged without further delay.

11. In respect of pre and post independent history of North Bengal a 'WHITE PAPER' regarding economic status, culture, populatlon and ethnical identity of the orignal people of North Bengal be published immediately.

(Source:Kamtapuri Struggle A Reply To Injustices,People's march, Voice of the Indian Revolution, Volume 5, No. 10, October 2004, [accessed March 18, 2004] < <http://www.peoplesmarch.com/archives/2004/oct2k4/Kamtapuri.htm>>)

Annexure-III

Cooch Behar Merger Agreement :

Agreement made this twenty eighth day of August 1949 between the Governor General of India and His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar.

Whereas in the best interests of the State of Cooch Behar as well as of the Dominion of India it is desirable to provide for the administration of the said State by or under the authority of the Dominion Government :

It is hereby agreed as follows :~

Article - 1 :-

His Highness the Maharaja of Cooch Behar hereby cedes to the Dominion Government full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and powers for and in relation to the governance of the State and agrees to transfer the administration of the State to the Dominion Government on the 12th day of September 1949 (hereinafter referred to as 'the said day').

As from the said day the Dominion Government will be competent to exercise the said powers, authority and jurisdiction in such manner and through such agency as it may think fit.

Article - 2 :-

His Highness the Maharaja shall continue to enjoy the same personal rights, privileges, dignities and titles which he would have enjoyed had this agreement not been made.

Article - 3 :-

His Highness the Maharaja shall with effect from the said day be entitled to receive for his lifetime from the revenues of the State annually for his privy purse the sum of Rupees eight lakhs fifty thousand free of all taxes. After him the privy parts will be fixed at Rupees seven lakhs only. this amount is intended to cover all the expenses of the Ruler and his family, including expenses on account of his personal staff, maintenance of his residences, marriages and other ceremonies, etc., and will neither be increased nor reduced for any reason whatsoever.

The Government of India undertakes the said sum of Rupees eight lakhs fifty thousand shall be paid to His Highness the Maharaja in four equal installments in advance at the beginning of each quarter from the State Treasury or at such Treasury as may be specified by the Government of India.

Article - 4 :-

His Highness the Maharaja shall be entitled to the full ownership, use and enjoyment of all private properties (as distinct from State properties) belonging to him on the date of this agreement.

His Highness the Maharaja will furnish to the Dominion Government before the 15th September 1949, an inventory of all the immovable property, securities and cash balances held by him as such private property.

If any dispute arises as to whether any item of property is the private property of His Highness the Maharaja or State property, it shall be referred to a Judicial Officer qualified to be appointed as High Court Judge, and the decision of that Officer shall be final and binding on both parties.

Article - 5 :-

All the members of His Highness' family shall be entitled to all the personal privileges, dignities and titles enjoyed by them whether within or outside the territories of the State, immediately before the 15th day of August 1947.

Article - 6 :-

The Dominion Government guarantees the succession, according to law and custom, to the Gaddi of the State and to His Highness the Maharaja's personal rights, privileges, dignities and titles.

Article - 7 :-

No enquiry shall be made by or under the authority of the Government of India, and no proceedings shall lie in any court in Cooch Behar against His Highness the Maharaja, whether in a personal capacity or otherwise, in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by him or under his authority during the period of his administration of that State.

Article - 8 :-

(i) The Government of India hereby guarantees either the continuants in service of the permanent members of the public services of Cooch Behar on conditions which will be not less advantageous than those on which they were serving before the date on which the administration of Cooch Behar is made over to the Government of India or the payment of reasonable compensation.

(ii) The Government of India further guarantees the continuance of pensions and leave salaries sanctioned by His Highness the Maharaja to servants of the State who have retired or proceed on leave preparatory to retirement, before the date on which the administration of Cooch Behar is made over to the Government of India.