

Culture survival for the indigenous communities with reference to North Bengal, Rajbanshi
people and Koch Bihar under the British East India Company rule (1757-1857)

Culture survival for the indigenous communities

(With Special Reference to the Sub-Himalayan Folk People of North Bengal including the Rajbanshis)

Ashok Das Gupta, Anthropology, University of North Bengal, India

Short Abstract: This paper will focus on the aspect of culture survival of the local/indigenous/folk/marginalized peoples in this era of global market economy.

Long Abstract:

Common people are often considered as pre-state primitive groups believing only in self-reliance, autonomy, transnationality, migration and ancient trade routes. They seldom form their ancient urbanism, own civilization and Great Traditions. Or they may remain stable on their simple life with fulfillment of psychobiological needs. They are often considered as serious threat to the state instead and ignored by the mainstream. They also believe on identities, race and ethnicity, aboriginality, city state, nation state, microstate and republican confederacies. They could bear both hidden and open perspectives. They say that they are the aboriginals. States were in compromise with big trade houses to counter these outsiders, isolate them, condemn

them, assimilate them and integrate them. Bringing them from pre-state to pro-state is actually a huge task and you have to deal with their production system, social system and mental construct as well. And till then these people love their ethnic identities and are in favour of their cultural survival that provide them a virtual safeguard and never allow them to forget about nature-human-supernature relationship: in one phrase the way of living.

Here this whole thing is to be discussed in terms of the Sub-Himalayan Folk People of North Bengal including the Rajbanshis.

Full Text:

West Bengal is a state within the federal structure of India (29 states and six Union Territories). West Bengal is formerly a part of ancient Bengal whose eastern part is now an independent country by the name of Bangladesh. Among various administrative zones within the state, North Bengal is an important one and it is truly transnational. Six districts out of total nineteen within the state fall in this North Bengal and these are namely Malda (also Maldah or Maldaha), Dakshin Dinajpur (also South Dinajpur), Uttar Dinajpur (North Dinajpur), Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

District	subdivision	blocks	District headquarter
Cooch Behar	Mekhliganj, Mathabhanga, Dinhata, Cooch Behar, Tufanganj	Haldibari, Mekhliganj (in Mekhliganj); Mathabhanga-I,	Cooch Behar town

		Mathabhanga-II, Sitalkuchi (in Mathabhanga); Sitai, Dinhata-I, Dinhata-II (in Dinhata); Cooch Behar-I and II (in Cooch Behar); Tufanganj I and II (in Tufanganj)	
Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri Sadar, Malbazar, Alipurduar	Rajganj, Jalpaiguri Sadar, Maynaguri and Dhupguri (in Jalpaiguri Sadar); Mal, Meiteili and Nagrakata (in Malbazar); Falakata, Alipurduar I and II, Kumatgram, Kalchini, Birpata- Madarihat (in Alipurduar)	Jalpaiguri town
Darjeeling	Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong	Matigara, Naxalbari,	Darjeeling town

	(also	Karshiang),	Kharibari,	
	Kalimpong,	Siliguri	Phansidewa	(in
			Siliguri);	Mirik,
			Kurseong	(in
			Kurseong);	
			Kalimpong I and II,	
			Garubathan	(in
			Kalimpong);	
			Darjeeling-Pulbazar,	
			Jorebunglow-	
			Sukiapokhri,	
			Rangli-Rangliot	
			(in DarjeelingSadar)	
Uttar Dinajpur	Islampur and Raiganj	Chopra,	Islampur,	Raiganj associated
		Goalpokhar I and II,	with Karandighi	
		Karandighi	(in	
		Islampur);	Raiganj,	
		Itahar,	Kaliyaganj,	
		Hemtabad	(in	
		Raiganj)		
Dakshin Dinajpur	Balurghat and Gangarampur	Balurghat,		Balurghat
		Kumarganj, Hili	(in	
		Balurghat);		

		Gangarampur,
		Tapan, Kushmandi,
		Bansihari,
		Harirampur (in
		Gangarampur)
Malda	Malda Sadar and Chanchal	English Bazar, English Bazar (also
		Bamongola, Ingrez Bazar)
		Habibpur, Gazole, associated with Old
		Kaliachak-I and II Malda town
		and III, Manickchak
		(in Malda Sadar);
		ChanchalI and II,
		Ratua I and II,
		Harishchandrapur I
		and II (in Chanchal)

Headquarter of North Bengal administrative zone: Jalpaiguri Town

Portions of North Bengal fallen in Bangladesh comprises of sixteen districts categorically distributed under Rangpur and Rajshahi Divisions.

North Bengal can be divided into seven subcategories: (1) Mahananda river system, (2) Barind ridge or highland, (3) Barind lowland and marshland, (4) Teesta river system, (5) Torsa river system, (6) Kaljani-Sankosh river system and (7) included areas.

Zone	Description
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Mahananda River system Mechi-Mahananda basin: It is eastern part of Mahananda-Kanki east-west foothill river system (sub-Himalayan). Mahananda-Kanki is transnational by nature (Indo-Nepal foothill), generally known as Terai and geopolitically as Morong. The India portion of Mahananda-Kanki is distributed between North Bengal administrative zone and eastern portion of neighboring Indian state Bihar. Mechi-Mahananda basin is completely under Indian jurisdiction: Siliguri subdivision (*see*: Table-1), small portion of Islampur subdivision (*see*: Table-1) and Thakurganj*tehsil* (subdivision) of Kishanganj district of Bihar. Mahananda and Kanki meet near Dalkhola town of Islampur subdivision (*see*: Table-1).

Mahananda-Nagar basin: This is next to Mechi-Mahananda basin and likewise falls completely in Indian territory. It is equally shared by Islampur subdivision (*see*: Table-1) and border districts of Bihar(Kishanganj, Purnia and Katihar). Nagar originates from Chopra block (*see*: Table-1) and determines Indo-Bangladesh international border between Islampur subdivision (*see*: Table-1) and Rangpur Division of Bangladesh (Panchagarh and Thakurgaon districts). This basin holds the entire Islampur subdivision (*see*: Table-1) and separates Bihar state from direct contact with Bangladesh border.

Mahananda lowland: Near Dalkhola, Mahananda creates Kalindi distributary. Both Mahananda and Kalindi from Barsoi block of Katihar

district of Bihar enter into Chanchal subdivision (*see*: Table-1). This is very fertile and lowland. Mahananda-Kalindi basin is known as *Tal* and Kalindi-Ganges as *Diara*. Kalindi reunites with Mahananda near Malda town. Mahananda separates roughly Chanchal and Malda Sadar subdivisions (*see*: Table-1) of Malda district. Mahananda then enters in Rajshahi Division (Bangladesh) and meets into Gangetic delta in Nawabganj district there.

Barind
highland

It is actually a north-south ridge with both sub-Himalayan and transnational nature (Indo-Bangladesh). It separates Mahananda system from Teesta-Torsa to its west and east respectively. It includes portions from Jalpaiguri Sadar subdivision (*see*: Table-1), parts of Mekhliganj subdivision (*see*: Table-1), regions from Rangpur Division (Bangladesh), Chopra block (*see*: Table-1) and pockets along Indo-Bangladesh international border at Raiganj subdivision, Gangarampur subdivision and Balurghat subdivision (*see*: Table-1). This is catchment area of so many rain-fed rivers running into both North Bengal and Bangladesh. Panchagarh, Thakurgaon and Dinajpur districts of Rangpur Division (Bangladesh) and Rajganj block (*see*: Table-1) are the origin of many such rivers.

Some facts: (A) Rajganj block is sub-Himalayan by nature and separated from Mechi-Mahananda basin by Mahananda river to its west. (B) Panchagarh district is separated from Mechi-Mahananda basin by Mahananda river and Chopra upland to the west. (C)

Panchagarh and Thakurgaon are separated from Mahananda-Nagar by Nagar to the west. (D) Dinajpur in Bangladesh is continuous with Raiganj, Gangarampur and Balurghat subdivisions where rivers like Kulik/Kulick, Gamor/Gamari, Tangan, Purnabhava and Atreyee/Atrai enter into. (E) Purnabhava-Atrai together is a river system. (F) Karatoa initiates from Baikunthopur forest region near Rajganj block and enters into Panchagarh. It joins the Atrai-Purnabhava system. It has now been disconnected with its Jamuneshwari water course that once flowed along with Teesta. (G) Teesta is on east side of Rajganj, Jalpaiguri Sadar and Haldibari blocks (*see*: Table-1). (H) Teesta flows into Rangpur Division towards Brahmaputra mouth there (Bangladesh). (I) Teesta-Jamuneshwari once flowed to further distant locations like Bogra on Brahmaputra mouth and even Pabna on Gangetic delta (via Ichhamati River). Bogra and Pabna are situated in Rajshahi Division (Bangladesh).

Barind lowland Raiganj, Gangarampur and Balurghat subdivisions (*see*: Table-1) on Kulik/Kulick, Gamor/Gamari, Tangan, Purnabhava and Atreyee/Atrai river from Barind highland from this lowland. It also extends upto major portions of Malda Sadar subdivisions (*see*: Table-1). It has marshland, water bodies, canal interconnections, sandy river basins and dry forestland. Kulik, Gamor and Tangan meet into Mahananda river system. First two are in Raiganj block and whereas Tangan flows over Kushmandi, Bansihari, and Malda Sadar (*see*: Table-1). Jagaddal was

situated by thereby.

Purnabhava-Atrai covering rest part of Dakshin Dinajpur district goes into Rajshahi Division (Bangladesh) and meets there into Chhalan *Beel* (a huge swamp covering major portion of this Division) created on Ganges-Baral intercourse. From Manihari subdivision of Katihar district (Bihar) to Bogra district (Bangladesh), it serves as a huge swamp including Malda district (North Bengal) and Rajshahi Division. This cross-country region was renowned for agriculture, perennial fishing, agro-forestry like that of mango and sericulture, social forestry in drier regions, inland river ports, ancient urbanization, educational hub, early civilization, transnational trade and political power centers. Pundrabardhana or Pundra or *Pundravardhana* was the Kingdom and the capital was Pundranagara (near Bogra town). Pundra, Bogra, Gour, Pandua, Ingraj Bazar, Ramavati, Lakshmanavari, Debikot, Jagaddal, Sompuri, Paharpur, Mahasthangarh, Pathirajpur, Balurghat, Raiganj, Karandighi and Manihari are some such important locations there.

Srimati and some other rivers originate from Itahar-Gazole upland and similarly Brahmoni from Tapan block. Adivasi communities were brought in into these areas by local zamindars (feudal lords) to clear up forests in these uplands from where such rivers originate. Adivasis could also be found in various border pockets nearby, Bangladeshi portion of Dinajpur, upland areas of Mahananda-Nagar and Mechi-

Mahananda, Chopra block, Mahananda-Kanki basin, Jalpaiguri Sadar subdivision and Kuchlibari area of Mekhliganj block.

Gour Bengal: Barind lowland and swamps on Ganges in North Bengal are roughly treated as Gour Bengal (*Gourvanga*). It is closely associated with Bangladesh, Brahmaputra mouth and Bengal delta, Mid Bengal (along with Murshidabad and Birbhum districts of South Bengal), Rajmahal region and Chhotonagpur plateau, Bhagalpur and South Bihar, Katihar and North Bihar, Purnia (or Purnea) and East Bihar, Kishanganj and sub-Himalayan Bihar (specially Mithilanchal), Varanasi and Gangetic North and undivided Dinajpur centered around Balurghat (along with Raiganj and Dinajpur towns).

Teesta	Teesta: The rivers are initiated from Sikkim Himalaya,
River system	Bhutan Himalaya and Tibet Plateau sharing Chumbi valley in common. Kalimpong hill on Teesta valley is included in Darjeeling district (<i>see</i> : Table-1); otherwise entire Indian portion of Teesta-Torsa is situated in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts of North Bengal where it forms a fertile plain area under Bhutan Sub-Himalaya. Its Bangladeshi lowland is now totally restricted within Rangpur Division.
	Teesta also serves as the natural demarcation between Barind upland and rest of Jalpaiguri- Cooch Behar. In its bank is situated the

Jalpaiguri town and Haldibari block renowned for Huzur Sahib Mazar.

Teesta-Jaldhaka Midland: Many small rivers from Bhutan, Kalimpong subdivision, Mal subdivision, Mynaguri block and Mekhliganj block (*see*: Table-1) falls between Teesta and Jaldhaka rivers. Chel, Lis, Ghis, Neora, Jarda and Saniajan are some of these. This entire track in an ancient trade route where places like Maynaguri, Jatileshtar at Churabhandar, Ranirhat, Jamaladaha, Jalpesh at Bhotpatti, Bhotbari-Niztaraf, Changrabandha, Mekhliganj, Kuchlibari and such areas are located. Burimari and Patkata are nearest important settlement in Bangladesh.

Some important information:

1) Kishanganj (Bihar), uplands in Phansidwa-Kharibari area of Siliguri subdivision, Chopra block, Panchagarh district (Bangladesh), Jalpaiguri Sadar subdivision (mainly Rajganj block) and Bhotpatti-Bhotbari-Niztaraf areas of Maynaguri-Mekhliganj serve as a new tea belt besides Hills, Terai and Duars.

2) Changrabandha is junction among Mynaguri, Mekhliganj, Nilphamari (Bangladesh) and Sitalkuchi-Sitai (watershed).

3) Sitalkuchi-Sitai (watershed) is isolated from Dinhat proper by Jaldhaka river and instead better connected with Mathabanga proper (*see*: Table-1). This watershed is closely adjacent to Nilphamari district (Rangpur Division) that was in colonial period an indigo producing unit, railway workshop of Bengal-Assam railways, control center for

telecommunication with Sayyedpur urban center and important airport. Jaldhaka from Mynaguri-Dhupguri enters into and flows through this Mathabhanga-Dinhata, becomes Singimari, meets with old course of Torsa at historical Gosanimari site (ruined city, capital of ancient Kamta kingdom, fort and river port) and moves into Bangladesh at Gitaldaha with a new name Dharala.

Jaldhaka-Torsa Midland: Dhupguri block is on the other side of Jaldhaka that shares foothill areas with Birpara-Madarihat and plain areas of Falakata to reach into Torsa (*see*: Table-1). From Dhupguri one can move into Alipurduar subdivisions through Birpara and also to Cooch Behar district through Falakata- both ways reaching into Bodoland Territorial Council (Assam, North East India). Both Bodoland and Jalpaiguri- Cooch Behar were once considered as the western portion of ancient kingdom Kamrup on Brahmaputra valley.

This region was once a dense jungle, bamboo forest and cane bush. Till now cane is cultivated. This was also a hidden trade route Jateshwar is a very old temple site here. Indigenous Toto porter community lives at Bhutan foothill. Local Rajbanshis and neighbouring groups annually participate in boating festivals and other water related games. Entire Mathabhanga-II block, parts of Cooch Behar I block and Dinhata I block upto the ruins of Gosanimari includes this basin.

Torsa	Torsa-Kaljani system: Torsa divides into Old track and main track
River system	<p>inCooch Behar district; by the bank of latter is situated Cooch Behar town and it in Tufanganj subdivision on Balarampur soil meets with Kaljani river that initiates in Duars region. It has some tributaries like Raidak, however Sankosh river that decides Kumargram-Bodoland borderline flows freely and falls in Brahmaputra near Dhubri.</p> <p>Most of Kaljani-Torsa midland under Alipurduar is either dense forest or tea estate zone from where many local rivers initiate. Army airbase, Hasimara-Jaygaon route to Bhutan, ruins of Nal Fort are all there. Rajabhat Khawa is the place here where once in pre-colonial period treaty was signed between Bhutan and Koch Kingdoms. That was basically patches of sandy grasslands which served food to wild animals like deer, bison, elephant and rhino and hiding place for tiger and leopard. It is said that once crocodiles were available here. It seemed to be perennial marshland full of local fish varieties. Kalchini-Hamiltonganj is at the center of the tea estate zone here. Adivasi and Nepali communities live here in considerable number. From Baneshwar, Pundibari and Dhangdhingguri, agricultural activities initiate and continue upto Gitaldaha (all in Cooch Behar district).</p>
Kaljani-Sankosh	From Kaljani to Sankosh, rivers like Raidak create so many horse shoe shaped lakes and swamps just like that in Raijanj-Balurghat region.
River system	Sponge, algae, straw grass and water hyacinth grow here in huge amount and form colony with grazing, paddy and jute land. Both tribal

and non-tribal elements here use a number of unique fishing implements for catching fishes. At a time, they also hunted in nearby jungles, collect wood and other forest resources and go for crabs and tortoises in the mudland.

Included areas In pre-colonial time, entire Mahananda-Kanki had fallen within Morong and eventually went under occupancy of Gorkha House of Nepal. Morong is now fallen under Nepal (Mechinagar, Jhapa, Biartnagar and Morong), Bihar (Kishanganj) and North Bengal (Siliguri and Islampur subdivisions).

Darjeeling Sadar and Kurseong subdivisions (from South Sikkim during colonial period) and Kalimpong (from western Bhutan during colonial period) as well as entire foothill region of Bhutan Himalayas or Duars are some included areas. Duars has been composed of 18 major sub-Himalayan entrances. Of these, western eight are now in North Bengal-all under Jalpaiguri district along Indo-Bhutan border line and collectively known as Bengal Duars. Duars was included during the British Raj; eastern part of Duars is now Bodoland. Cooch Behardynasty, Kingdom of Sikkim and local foothill Rajbanshi rulers supported the British force for inclusion of these disputed territories. British established urban and rururban settlements, hill stations, tea garden, forest department and tourist destination as alternative economy to this foothill and hill territories. Immigration of Adivasis from Rajmahal/Chhotonagpur/Central India/Deccan and Nepali

speaking peoples from Nepal Himalayas followed various caste groups (Bengali, Rajbanshi, Bihari, etc.) and other minorities from different regions changed the local demography composed previously of Bodo, Mech, Rabha, Toto, Dhimal, etc in foothills and Lepcha, Dukpa, Limbu, Tibeto-Bhutanese elements in hills. Nepali speaking groups included many within their fold and constructed a greater Gurkha identity serving for the nation as the Gorkha regiment.

Rotua block has been included from Katihar. Malda in pre-independence period remained parts of Katihar (then under Purnea Division also including Kishanganj, Purnia and Islampur), Bhagalpur and Rajshahi.

Raiganj, Balurghat and Gangarampur are now in India and rest eastern part of Dinajpur in Bangladesh.

Thakurgaon and Panchagarh are in Bangladesh, but Jalpaiguri Sadar subdivision including Rajganj falls in Indian side. Alipurduar region (Alipurduar I and II, Falakata) like Duars are in North Bengal. Kumargram is also in North Bengal, whereas Goalpara in Bodoland territories.

Cooch Behar or Koch Bihar princely state is now a district in North Bengal with regional sentiments. It also includes the Haldibari pocket. Enclaves or *chitmahals* are on both the sides of Cooch Behar and Rangpur Division international boundary. Koch Bihar state when formed on the Kamta kingdom or western part of Kamrup at around

first half of 16th century AD, it had links with Jalpesh, Bhutan, Barind, Brahmaputra valley, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Gour, Meghalaya, Mymensingh (Bangladesh), other interiors pockets of North East India (Dima or Cuchur, Barak valley and Tripura-Coomilla region). So, inclusion of Cooch Behar in North Bengal has its own significance.

Note on the Rajbanshis of North Bengal

Rajbanshi is an ethnic group found in North Bengal and neighbouring areas. Now the question is whether the Rajbanshis are tribe, clan, race, community or caste. Rajbanshis are a bit shy in nature and not always ready to reveal their all about to others.

The word " Rajbanshis " literally means "royal community". They have a rich cultural heritage and their own language. Koch and Rajbanshis are actually two different tribes but united by the great king into one and hence named as KochRajbanshis. They have a very strong history but a shaky present, and this is because of the lack of unity among these tribesmen that they have ceased to flourish in today's world (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koch_Rajbongshi_people).

According to Sanyal (1965), these rulers typically of Kashyapa-Bratya Kshattriya combination have now turned down to the status of simply agriculturists and in northern West Bengal and its adjoining areas and developed themselves as the Rajbanshis. These people allied over various tribe and caste groups have gradually transformed from a simple community to a huge complex heterogeneous Social Fold. The latter has been incorporated with various aspects like Animism, pre-Aryan and Aryan versions of Hinduism, various mythical elements, Buddhism, Tantraism, Kashyap/ Bratya-Kshattriya combination, quasi-egalitarian versions (Sufism and Vaishnavism),

status mobilization (Kshattriyaization/ approximately started from the date of Rajput-Mogul interference on Coochbihar state) and Western impact on local economy and polity (during rule of British and their Native Collaborators).

There are different kinds of Rajbanshis such as Koch Rajbabshi, Poundra Rajbabshi, Mech Rajbabshi, Newar Rajbanshi, Thakuri Rajbanshi and Khataha Rajbanshi. there are also many types of sub-castes of the Koch Rajbanshis in the North Bengal, India such as Paliya, Sadhupaliya, Babupaliya, Deshi, Domasir, Modasi, Jaluwa, Tongriya, Khopriya, Gobriya, Kantai, Dhalai, Tiyar and Koch. These sub-castes of the Rajbabshis in India are not found in Nepal (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajbanshi>).

Rangpuri is an Indic language spoken by ten million Rajbongshi people in Bangladesh, and five million in India, where they are known as Rajbanshi. Many are bilingual in either Bengali or Assamese. Rangpuri goes by numerous names. In Bangladesh, these include Rangpuri, Bahe Bangla, Anchalit Bangla, Kamta, Polia. In India, there is Kamtapuri, Dutta, Rajbangsi, Rajbansi, Rajbanshi, Rajbongshi, Goalparia, Koch Rajbanshi. Another name of the language is Tajpuri. The main dialects are Western Rajbanshi, Central Rajbanshi, Eastern Rajbanshi and Hill Rajbanshi (also known as Koch language). The Central dialect has the majority of speakers and is quite uniform. There are publications in this language. The Western dialect has more diversity. Lexical similarity is 77 to 89% between the three dialects. The version spoken in the hills has some influence of the local tribal languages and differs quite a bit from the other three. Rajbonshi shares 48 to 55% of its vocabulary with Bengali, and 43 to 49% with Maithili and Nepali ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rangpuri language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rangpuri_language)). The Rajbongshi/Rajbanshi language is spoken by 10 million people, according to a 2001 census report for West Bengal (Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Malda and Murshidabad), Assam (Goalpara, Kokrajhar,

Koch Rajbongshi in Silchar, Dhubri and Bongaigaon) and Bihar (Kishanganj District) in India; the Rajbanshi language has a complete grammar (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koch_Rajbongshi_people). Rajbanshis in Nepal generally treated as Jhapali Rajbanshi and they use titles like Rajbanshi and Singha (Sinha), instead of Roy, Sarkar, Barman and other surnames used by Kaivarthas (agrarian and fishermen categories). Rajbanshis using Sinha title is also found in North Bengal, mostly concentrated in Siliguri foothills of Darjeeling district along Nepal-North Bengal borderline.

The Kamata kingdom appeared in the western part of the older Kamarupa kingdom in the 13th century, after the fall of the Pala dynasty. The rise of the Kamata kingdom marked the end of the ancient period in the history of Assam and the beginning of the medieval period. The first rulers were the Khens, who were later displaced by Alauddin Hussain Shah, the Turko-Afghan ruler of Bengal. Though Hussain Shah developed extensive administrative structures, he could not maintain political control and the control went to the Koch dynasty. The Koch Rajbongshi's called themselves Kamateshwars (the rulers of Kamata/Kamatapur Kingdom), but their influence and expansions were so extensive and far reaching that their kingdom is sometimes called the Koch kingdom. Under His Highness Maharaja Naranarayan the then King of Kamatapur, the Koch dynasty flourished to the highest extent and his brother Shukladhwaj Singha (famous as Chilarai) was one of the greatest heroes of that time and he prominently dominated the eastern part of Kamatapur which now known as Assam (Previously Assam is known as Pragjyotispur) now it is known as Asom which is an integral part of The Republic of India. The Rajbongshi community has a rich heritage and culture which had been inherited from the ancient civilization. The Rajbongshi community has their own dialects, culture, and way of living. The culture reflects the humbleness, peace, unity and harmony with nature, as Rajbongshi are

primarily animist. A few rulers, kings, queens, princes and princesses of the Koch dynasty are His Highness Maharaja Naranarayan, Prince Chilaray, Maharani Gayatri Devi, (Princess Gayatri Devi later on married Prince of Jaipur Man Singh) which had helped a strong relationship between the two kingdoms. Maharaja Ajit Narayan Dev of Sidli (Capital at Bidyapur) Kingdom was also part of the Koch dynasty (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koch_Rajbongshi_people). Koch people are primarily tribe and were different from agrarian caste Rajbanshis. But, in order to rule North Bengal (Teesta-Torsha region and some other pockets as subsidiary to Mughal dynasty and British Raj), they accepted Rajbanshi ethnic identity, linked up with caste societies of Bengal and Assam, accepted Hinduism, prayed to the cult of Jalpesh and also helped mainland India to acquire disputed sub-Himalayas from the hands of Himalayan provinces like Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal next to Sino-Tibet plateau. Rajbanshis definitely possess Mongoloid features, but admixed with Austro-Dravidian elements. Rajbanshis have affinities with Bratya Kshatriyas, Pundra Kshatriyas and Kaivarthas.

Thinking politically, Rajbanshis could be subjected to non-Brahminic, PreVedic Aryan, Fertility cults, Kashyapa clan out of Kashmiri Brahmanism, Buddhism contemporary to Jainism and Judaism, Vedic versions, Brahmin-Sudra nexus, Brahmin-Kshatriya nexus, Brahmin-Vaishnava nexus, Buddhist Shahi, Brahmin-Vaishya nexus, Hindu Shahi, Muslim Shahi, Magical world converting into Christianity, colonial and post-colonial times. We can also explain it into pre-Vedic, Vedic and post-Vedic dilemma.

Dealing with economy, we can get pre-agrarian economy attached to forest and mines, agrarian economy expressed by caste system and estate, extra-agrarian economy by means of trade which could be categorized by different forms of capital- human recourse, gold, cattle, crop and cash. Cash system can be regulated by a party system or the banks or share-market. Spice and Silk

routes and Nation-States on them can be endorsed. In post-colonial period, we could guess about mixed, macro and global economies apart from micro-finance. Global economy is basically dealing with cash and gold. Believers in cattle and crop are trying to be adapted with this new system. Rajbanshis are caste people and they are attached to traditional agrarian economy. They believe in democracy higher than bureaucracy and anti-state elements. Rajbanshis may have incorporated some pre-agricultural tribes of sub-Himalayan North Bengal like Dhimal who have eventually learnt about settled cultivation.

On socio-religious ground also, we can meet with magical practices, concepts like blood sacrifice and fertility testing, closed structure of the caste system (related to agrarian production unit), and quasi-egalitarian versions like Vaishnavism and Islam and Christianity. However, Rajbanshis are basically Hindu expressing their faith in animism and other agriculture related folk performances. They are caste people and at the same time remaining within Hindu fold believe in Vaishnavism.

The Rajbongshi were primarily animist, but later on they followed Hinduism/Sanatana (both Shaiva and Vaishnavite). Many of the Rabha people are Christians, both Roman Catholic and Protestants. Many are members of the Rabha Baptist Church Union (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koch_Rajbongshi_people).

Presently, in countryside they are associated with settled agricultural systems and animal husbandry followed by supplementary activities for self consumption. Many of them are now in teaching line, government job, transportation, business, agricultural labour, industrial labour, carpentry, saw mills, construction labour, collection of sand and boulders from river beds, self help groups, private sectors, absentee non-cultivating owner and other sources of income (such

as land and property dealing). So, many of them are migrating to peri-urban, urban and out-of-the-state locations.

By religious faith, Rajbanshis are **Hindu**.

A major part of North Bengal has been gone to the north western part of Bangladesh. That portion is now known to be as Rangpur and Rajshahi Divisions. Rajshahi was a center of ancient civilization existed from **pre-Vedic** period. So, if there was any ancient civilization and thereafter destroyed, who were the creators? Definitely they were pre-Vedics. Those pre-Vedic people may be of different types and categories. People commonly pronounce a kind of classification: *Raksha, Yaksha, Deva, Daitya, Vanara, Kinnara, Apsara, Gandharva, Garuda, Naga, Manava, Danava, Sura, Asura, Arya, Anarya* and so on. So, it is quite possible that all these categories might not belong to the Vedic people but exist from a much earlier period with Pre-Vedic origin. And those pre-Vedics had their own priestly category the Brahmins (*Brahmanas*) who worshipped their deities. This could be treated as pre-Vedic Brahmanism. With time, they brought under mainstream and learnt Vedas and other sacred Hindu texts. Some more terms could be added to this: *Yama, Bhahma, Vishnu, Varuna, Indra, Shiva* and so fore.

People say that **Parasurama** came in there and destroyed their old civilization. Parasurama is a mythical personality and symbol of Hindu Brahmanism from Indian heartland. Brahmin is the priestly category. But Parasuram gave support to the **Vedic Brahmanism** and not the Pre-Vedic one.

After destruction of that ancient civilization of the pre-Vedics in the hands of the Vedics, people fled out to the remote areas. Vedic warrior cum ruler cum protectors used to be designated as the *Kshatriyas*, whereas these older forms as excluded categories or the *Vratya Kshatriya*. Latter

is a big social category and in many names could be found in different parts of South Asia. These peoples are shown associated with such pre-Vedic ancient civilization. In Bengal also they are known as Rajbanshis, Suryapuriyas, Pundra Kshatriyas, Borgo Kshatriyas, Ugra Kshatriya, etc. These people lost their Great Tradition which was their urbanism but not the Little Tradition. Latter involves certain artifacts, sociofacts, mentifacts and agrifacts. Their agrifacts describe their mode of production, which is settled cultivation. In the new remote areas, they mixed up with the local people. For instance, Rajbanshis in the sub-Himalayan North Bengal and neighbouring Assam admit that they have been mixed up with local elements like *Kirata* (Kirat), *Khen*, *Kocha* (Koch), *Mech* (Bodo), *Rabha*, *Koch Hajo* etc. A major section of the Rajbanshis addresses themselves as Koch-Rajbanshis. Rajbanshi is an agrarian caste and at the same time they have certain community sentiments as the local people.

They are also dealing with agricultural cycle and agro-climatic system. Certain magico-religious performances are carried out to overcome natural disasters (drought, flood, etc.) and crop failure (due to pests, fog, etc.). In this case, the performer does not always need sacred thread like other Brahmins. *Adhikari* is the priestly category here. Sometimes peasants perform these rituals by their own. These cultural and religious performances are associated with agricultural related Indigenous Knowledge System.

Rajbanshis in exclusion might have intermingled with these tribal community practicing food gathering and hunting, fishing, agro-forestry, slash-and-burn type of cultivation, shifting cultivation and fallowing, animal husbandry and poultry, etc. They expressed themselves in terms of psychobiological functions and now got associated with certain structural functionalism. They might have no urban center or statehood at the initial stage and people live in villages with a sense of Republican Confederacies.

Later on, due to the interactions with Rajbanshis, other *Vratya-Kshatriya* categories and other centers of civilization, they have improved their modes of production, accepted new socio-economic trends, become pro-state, enriched their religious life and experienced cultural diffusions. Intermarriages develop new sub-structures. Changes are there in mind structure and thought process/worldview/cognate. They select things according to their own choices.

These *Vratya Kshatriyas* with or without tribal affiliation(s) may follow some status mobilization process and regain their status of *Kshatriya*. But there is always the debate that how far it is applicable in case of the Rajbanshis especially when a section of the Rajbanshis prefers to address themselves as the Koch Rajbanshi and even the Koch tribe and demand for **Scheduled Tribe** status! Like other *Vratya* categories and lower castes belonging to *Sudra* status (within fourfold *Varna* system) or lesser than that (Fifth *Varna* or out *Varna*), majority of the Rajbanshis have *dalit* status (oppressed) and as they are castes and not tribes been affiliated to **Scheduled Caste** category.

These pre-Vedic and Vedic values have together given rise to the **post-Vedic** category. They are also related to other traditions. So, the Hindus are not classified into only pre-Vedics and Vedics, but as a whole in so many types- *Shakta, Shaiva and Vaishnava*. The first one worships *Shakti* or the female cult(s). The second one worships *Shaiva* or the male cult(s). *Vaishnava* worships both together and believes in formation of a semi-egalitarian community. Are these three the hints to the existence of matriarchal, patriarchal and egalitarian ideas? All these three types can be found in among the Rajbanshis.

Rajbanshis again show some local folk rituals that one may treat as under the category of **animism**. They worship the nature and at the same time have **soul** concept. They say that when you sleep, then the soul comes out from your body and then returns back again. When it

does not return, that is called death. Life is everywhere in the universe and you have to feel it. But soul or spirit has a special entity. Soul can not be destroyed. They believe in returning back of the departed soul. That might be a reincarnation process or back to the corps. Once local people did not burn the corps and actually buried them. They believe in **ghosts** and *mashans*. Latter is some type of malevolent deity.

Some dead bodies of priestly categories are still buried in a special condition. Actually under the grave, there they build up a side chamber and keep the corps in a sitting posture with bending knees to the chest. Such type of death ritual was seen in certain ancient civilization where the dead bodies are mummified. Mummification was an ancient process and associated with various early civilizations on earth and mega structures like pyramid that could be found in Egypt, Meso and Latin America and even in China. Why they preserved those dead bodies? Because they thought that one day, the departed soul could return back. Sitting posture is also very important. It seemed that it was taking a preparation for ultimate journey. Was that a journey to the heaven or a different dimension or outer space? And we are expecting that one day, the departed soul would return back!

In Rangdhamali of Jalpaiguri district, such a graveyard existed.

Local people say that Matigara, a settlement in Siliguri sub-division, has been named after “*mati gara*” or burying under the soil.

However some say that Matigara name derives from “*mati gora*” or manufacturing from the soil. It is true that soil of Matigara is good for pottery. There is a river Balason. Name of the river derives from *balu* or sand and *son* or sand. So, it is related to golden sand. Sand is just like gold as local people once believed. Now it has become just like an open mine for sand and boulders that the river brought down from the Himalayas. These things are used in construction. No gold

particles are found now in the sand. However, it is said that long ago the river brings in gold with the sand and that was a secret for the entire Mechi-Mahananda basin where Balason River flows in. However, good soil has now been purchased from other small river beds of the same Mechi-Mahananda basin of Phansidewa and Chopra blocks and not Matigara-Nakshalbari region.

Matigara was also known as Gocharan once upon a time. This name again derives from cattle grazing. The Gocharan area has been later developed as weekly market. Gocharan had at least four sacred ponds and till now in Chamta River, local Rajbanshis perform *BaruniSinan* which is a sacred bathing. Matigara was famous for wooden plough that was prepared from woods available in local forests. Cattle, liquor (fermented rice), jungle fowl, pottery and fragrant rice were some other products. Bay leaf, cardamom, raw silk, lemon grass, fodder, ethno-medicines, jute and other fiber plants, maize and other staple foods, local rapeseeds and pulses, fuel wood, organic manure, bamboo, cane, oranges, vegetables, local fishes and floriculture are some other secrets of Matigara neighbourhood from early days.

In Phansidewa block within Mechi-Mahananda block, there is a location that is known as Sonapur where a long ago corps were buried with gold or gold ornaments. Near Sonapur, there is a little mound known as Bhimpar or “hillock of King Bhim”. There is a pond which used to be considered very sacred. Similar ponds are also there in Phansidewa block, e.g., Ghoshpukur and Choupukuria Keshtopur. Near Buraganj, there is a place known as Pathor Hirhira. It actually represents the folk story of Harihar-Bhanumati love story. Harihar was male and Bhanumati was female. Bhanumati was cursed and transformed into a stone by Chenga River. Chenga River mainly flowing through forest and tea garden areas is good source clay that could be used in pottery.

Kirat tribes, Dhimal, Tharu, Mech, Limbu, Rajbanshi caste with various surnames, Adivasi tribes, Maithili Brahmins and Bengalis raise cattle in this region. Many of them treat milking cow as Goddess and valuable property. Rajbanshis ferment fresh cow milk and prepare card (*dahi*). That card is mixed with beaten rice or pressed rice known as *chura*. This card and processed rice are mixed together to prepare *dahi-chura*. This is a delicious food item and considered pious. This is served in every major religious occasion and all stages of rites-de-passage. Rajbanshis do not eat beef, pork and fowl. In some cases, they eat pork and fowl. Some Rajbanshis love to catch fish and prepare fermented fish dishes. Rajbanshis with tribal affinity cook food in bamboo funnel. Other Rajbanshis cook food properly and avoid fermented food. However, fermentation is a common process to prepare alcohol. This is consumed by some people and in some cases served in religious occasions.

Some Muslim settlements are also there in the Sub-Himalayas. These Sub-Himalayan Muslims also raise cattle. In North India, these Muslims in majority are belonging to the Ahir caste. In North Bengal, they are treated as Nashya Seikh. Bansgaon-Chathat region of Phansidewa block has the highest Muslim population. Nearby Bangladesh, villages along Indo-Bangladesh border, Islampur subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district including Chopra block, Mahananda basin along North Bengal and Bihar Purvanchal (Purnia-Katihar) have Muslim population.

The ancient state of Morang has now been shared by Nepal Sub-Himalayas (Jhapa, Biratnagar and Morang), Darjeeling district of West Bengal (Mechi-Mahananda basin: Siliguri Sub-Division and Mirik block), Bihar Purvanchal (Mechi-Mahananda basin or Thakurganj area and other parts of Kishanganj district under greater Purnea) and Islampur subdivision that has been added from Kishanganj Bihar to Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal.

Chopra block is outside the Mechi-Mahananda basin and a part of Barindland or *Borendrabhum* which is again a northern Sub-Himalayan extension of Dinajpur Highland. Karatoa River after entering into Bangladesh from Rajganj (Jalpaiguri district, India) again touches Indo-Bangladesh international border in Chopra block. Chopra block is the place from where Nagor and Dok (also Dahuk) rivers originate. However these two rivers like many other rivers from Dinajpur highland meet into Mahananda. Soil of Chopra block is very good for pottery. Dahuk river bed in Chopra-Kalagachh is the best for pottery making. Like Bhimbar in Phansidewa block, mounds can also be found at Dhumdangi in Chopra block.

Many rainfed rivers have been originated from Barindland- Dinajpur zone and they then flow in different directions to meet into Mahananda-Padma and Teesta-Jamuna water system. Padma is the main distributary of Ganges River and similarly Jamuna of Brahmaputra River. So, rainfed rivers from Barindland and Dinajpur upland flow into Dinajpur lowland and Rajshahi marshland. Main portions of Dinajpur and Rajshahi are now within the Rajshahi Division of North West Bangladesh and some portions have been fallen in Indian portion (Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda districts). Northern extension of Dinajpur or Barindland occupies a portion of Rangpur Division (mainly the Panchagarh region). This Panchagarh has some extensions in Indian portion of North Bengal and these are Chopra block of Uttar Dinajpur, Rajganj and Jalpaiguri Sadar blocks of Jalpaiguri district and Haldibari block of Cooch Behar district. One such rainfed river is Karatoa. It is initiated from Baikunthapur forest region of Rajganj block and then enters into Bangladesh. So, it is originated from northern Sub-Himalayan extension of Barindland. In Bangladesh it becomes Jamuneshwari River and along Teesta River flows in Rangpur block to meet into Teesta-Jamuna system. Once upon a time, both Teesta and Karatoa flow in today's Rajshahi division further south. Till now, Karatoa shares its water with

Purnabhaha-Atrai water system of Rajshahi division. This water system originates in Dinajpur highland (Bangladesh portion), flows in Dinajpur lowland (Indian portion: Dakshin Dinajpur) and meets in Rajshahi marshland (Bangladesh portion). This marshland is connected with Padma, Jamuna and their confluence. It is said that Dinajpur highland had definitely gold mines and rivers brought in gold sand with their flows. The grey soil is very good for pottery. Such good soil is also found in Karatoa.

Majority of Dinajpur region and its extensions were once flooded with Buddhism. Buddhists bury their dead. The Tibetan Buddhists burn the corps and then instead of pouring the ash in sacred rivers store them in burial chambers. Such burial chambers are known as *chorten*. Those Buddhists were converted into Sufi Islam and Hindu Vaishnavism. Muslims and Vaishnava Priests bury their corps. Muslims pray to star and moon. Vaishnavas have strong faith in solar eclipse. Were those some kinds of indication to worship to outer space objects?

They also focus on formal and informal **communication**. This leads to nature-human-super nature network. Formal communication is established through marriages, information sharing, feast and trade. Marriages and religious gatherings involve priestly categories. Information sharing is performed through talking in family and lineage. This is also done among relatives, group, various gatherings, neighbours and friends. Workplace, gossip centers, playgrounds and socio-political gatherings also serve as message centers. Informal communication exceeds beyond person-to-person communication and involves the super-nature.

Some people can possess the spirit. This spirit possession can not be performed by all but certain special individuals. They are the **Shamans**. Locally they have been called as *tantrik*.

They also **animate the soul** and worship it in form of an **idol**. Priests worship such idols of **Gods** and **Goddesses**. The soul can also be possessed by the idols and/or sacred objects. So,

they give a figure or shape to the soul and then pray to this. They do this to overrule any disease or any natural calamities or seek a better fortune. They also give importance to weapons, fertility cult symbols, living vehicles and flying objects.

They also prefer **thought experiments** and **communication with the outer world**. Meditation is the best way. Yogi or *Jugi* performs this meditation. *Jugis* follow Gorakhnath who was a religious leader from Gorakhpur located in the Sub-Himalayas. His followers are known as Nathvadi and this thought as Nathism. Previously, Buddhism and Jainism had originated from this Indo-Nepal foothill region. So, Nathism spread rapidly as an alternative to Buddhism. Followers of Gorakhnath are known as Jugi, Yogi, Nath, Debnath and so fore. Vaishnava Rajbanshis, Sufi Muslims and Naths are there in different pockets of North Bengal.

Yogis try to gather more and more knowledge. They believe that every information or knowledge trait is stored in a **knowledge world**. Knowledge is spread from the universe to the subatomic world. This is in the space and outer-space. Common people can communicate with the space and Wise Man to the outer space. For that they depend on *tantra*, *mantra* and *yantra*. These three things are going to be discussed later.

They in another way emphasize on self-innovation: **dreams** and **sub-conscious mind**. They are thus treated as Wise Man. They are expected to deliver answer to the unsolved mysteries. A suitable example has been given below-

Once there was an ancient kingdom of Kamtapur. Khens established that. It is believed that these Khens owed their origin to Bhutan Himalayas. They established their capital at Gosanimari which was a port area at the confluence of Torsa and Jaldhaka rivers. Both these rivers have been originated from Tibeto-Bhutan Himalayan territory. Kamtapur was contemporary to Sultani rule in mainland India. It was replaced by Koch Bihar dynasty. Koch Bihar kingdom was

contemporary to Mughal-Rajput alliance rapidly expanding in South Asia. Koch Bihar was a subsidiary alliance of Mughal *Padshahi* and Princely state during the British rule in South Asia. Koch Bihar was established by Koch tribe fallen under the Bodo family of Brahmaputra valley region.

They bore the Boro-Kamta heritage of Brahmaputra valley in association with Feni and Barak-Surma river system. This tradition was expected to be present throughout North East India and neighbouring areas of Bangladesh. That portion of Bangladesh was known as Harikel.

Besides Kamtapur on Teesta-Torsa system of North Bengal, we can get so many names like Kamrup, Kamaru and Cuchhur for North East India.

Barak-Surma system valley has Indo-Bangladesh nature. It was Shrihatta that has now been distributed into Sylhet (Bangladesh), Silchar (Assam, India) and Shillong (Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, India).

It is actually further extended to entire Meghalaya plateau. Portions of Meghalaya fallen in Bangladesh is represented by Mymensingh. Hindu rulers there used Sinha and Barman in their surnames. Folk people fall their under Boro-Kamta language group. Sushanga Durgapur was a princely state there like Koch Bihar.

Another extension of Barak-Surma was Manipur. Manipur is now an Indian state and was once a Princely State. It is surrounded by Dimas, Karbi, Naga, Kuki, Mizo and so many tribes. It shares international boundary with Myanmar or Burma. It falls under Kok-Borok heritage. Royals there use Singha in surname.

Feni has also Indo-Bangladesh nature as it covers Tripura and Coomilla. Hindu royals use Deb Barman in their surname. Feni later falls in Meghna that results out from all rivers of Surma-

Meghna system and Old Brahmaputra track. Like Brahmaputra mouth, Meghna joins into Padma River and contributes in formation of Gangetic delta.

So, formation of Koch Bihar on the Kamtapur was a paradigm shift. It was actually a shift from being solely with Tibeto-Bhutan to Boro-Kamta heritage of North East India and neighbouring Bangladesh. Rajbanshis also use Barman and Singha as their surnames. Their dialects are fallen under Indo-Aryan family and not Mongoloid family like the Bodo or Meche or Drukpa/Dukpa (Bhutanese) or Tibetan. Local Rabha tribe is also talking like the Rajbanshis. Assamese widely spoken in Assam, Nepali in Nepal, Maithili in North Bihar, Maitai in Manipur and Bengali in Barak valley plus Tripura are all belonging to Indo-Aryan family.

Kamtapur royal family worshipped *Kamteshwari* female cult. After formation of Koch Bihar, ruling Koch tribe rapidly intermingled with Rajbanshi *Vratya-Kshatriya* category. Koches probably did not know much about settled cultivation but the Rajbanshis practiced so. That was like the Rabhas where the forest Rabhas are more dependent on forest resources and agro-forestry and settled Rabhas practicing agriculture in real sense. Kamtapur and Koch Bihar had suffixes like –pur and –Bihar and both were meant for city. Koch-Rajbanshis established the Cooch Behar town on another tributary of Torsa. That tributary does not merge with Jaldhaka/Singimari/Dharal but Raidak-Kaljani. So, importance of both Gosanimari and *Kamteshwari* went down. Koch-Rajbanshi king had a dream and thereafter His Royal Highness established the *Borodevi* female cult. This is still present in Cooch Behar town. This is very close to *Durga* worshipped widely among the Hindus in Bengal and *Bhandani* among the Rajbanshis of Toesa water system. Koch King allowed both Vaishnavism and Sufi Islam in the town. They were also aware of Neo-Vaishnavism in Brahmaputra valley and therefore helped in the establishment of *Madanmohan*. The Royal family lost its entry in *Kamteshwar* temple

(Gosanimari, Kamtapur, Dinhata block, Cooch Behar district, North Bengal, West Bengal state) and even *Kamakhya* temple (Nilachal hills, Kamrup, Assam). However, Koch Rajbanshi Dynasty rebuilt this *Kamakhya* temple. Koch Bihar dynasty was also in favour of Westernization, Vedic Hindu religion and social reformations taking place in British era. They also supported old traditions, fertility cults, stone worship, tree worship, river worship, *Mashan* and different forms of Shiva cult the primmest among the *Vratya Kshatriya*, ancient civilizations and Austro-Dravidians. Even we can find Proto-Shiva in Harappa civilization. **Dreams** often played important roles and people from different castes and creeds established various temples and worshipped the cult.

They want to know their **fortune** that could hamper their deed. They further want to alter their **misfortune** as much as possible.

They also take interest in astronomical happenings. Many believe in **astrology** and **astrologers**.

They believe in **stones**, **megaliths** and outer-space objects (**comet**). They consider certain natural objects very sacred. Folk people have strong faith, fear and belief to this.

Many Rajbanshis believe in **blood sacrifice**. Even they practiced **human sacrifices**. They further believe in **star child**, **skulls**, **skeletons** and very **secret magico-religious practices** (commonly known as *tantra*).

North Bengal has some remote pockets where *harbhanga daktar* or orthopedic surgeons treat patients traditionally. They belong to both Muslim and Hindu communities. Many belong to Rajbanshi community.

They have invented chants (*mantra*), musical instruments, dancing pattern and songs. They worship the time (*kaal*), infinity (*mahakaal*) and time machine (*kaal chakra*). Such types of machines are commonly known as *yantra*. They want to know the future in the context of present

and past. They also have idea about zero, number and infinite. They pray for good hope. They talk about **sacred ponds** where they gave their offerings and pray; in return to this they got unexpected things like gold or silver plates or blessed differently. These are just like time space portal. They also believe in heaven, hell and underground world. They believe that there are so many **lokas** or dimensions from where Gods, Goddesses, other malevolent and benevolent deities come in. They pray to the energy (**shakti**) that controls the nature (**prakriti**). They prefer gold. In Rajbanshi society, we can found goldsmith; however they are now changing their occupation.

They manufacture wooden **boats**. **Spiritual liberation** of the departed soul or its returning back is just like crossing the **river** or reaching into the river mouth or firth. They also pray to the rivers. They perform sacred bathing in rivers. Rivers are treated as ancient trade routes and source of fertility for the arable land. River ports became cities and major power houses. Rivers played important roles in developing urbanism, civilization and statehood. Water ways brought in prosperity and diffused new thoughts- some accepted and some not.

Rivers are compared with snakes. Rajbanshis worship to the **snake deity** who is a female cult and known as *Manasa*. This cult is much worshipped during the rainy season when rivers overflow, lowland areas are flooded and snake attacks increase. *Manasa* songs are sung in their marriage ceremonies. That is accompanied with a particular bamboo made flute. It is known as *Mokha Banshi*.

They use the same wood to manufacture boat and burn the corps in riverside. This is another type of death ritual. Each and every step needs to be guided by the priests. *Soti* bamboo is used for cremation. People who died in snake bite are not burnt; their dead bodies are either buried in graveyard or sailed out in flowing river.

So, river is like the time. River is again compared to snake and bamboo pipes. So, sailing in a river is just like time traveling and reaching out to the sea like getting access to the outer space, other dimension or knowledge world. This is like a worm hole that we often discuss in any science fiction story.

Rajbanshis and other local people could also possess knowledge of certain ethno-medicines and hence treated as **Medicine Man**. Marijuana and other drugs are both used and abused. Alcohol and alternative foods are also consumed. These things can increase entropy, activate subconscious mind and help out in revealing hidden emotions. Rajbanshis in their diet eat so many herb dishes. All these herbs have various types of medicinal importance.

Account on Rajbanshis of North Bengal

According to Census 2001, Hindu Rajbanshis are 129,904 in Darjeeling of total individual 1,609,172; in Jalpaiguri 811,567 out of 3,401,173; in Cooch Behar 972,803 out of 2,479,155; in Maldah 144,158 out of 3,290,468; in Uttar Dinajpur 405,140 out of 2,441,794 and in Dakshin Dinajpur, 224,988 out of 1,503,178 and there of total 14,724,940 in North Bengal, Rajbanshis have a population of 2,688,560 (18%). Rajbanshis are now fallen in Scheduled Caste category.

Rajbanshis as Complex Social Fold

Rajbanshis talk in several dialects. Similarly, they are of several categories. Many non-Rajbanshi castes live long with the Rajbanshis and sometimes establish successful marital relationship. These people in Rajbanshi dominated areas talk in Rajbanshi dialects. Rajbanshis are mostly Hindus and Vaishnavites, but it is also possible like others many of them have converted into Islam. Tribal affiliations and contact with the mainstream by several means are two historical facts. They have certainly become a huge complex (agrarian cum pastoral) social fold.

Magico-Religious Practices by Rajbanshis

Outsiders through the Sub-Himalayas brought in Vaishnavite and Islamic influx in several selective pockets of Rajbanshi dominated areas.

Rajbanshis obey various Brahmans- Bengali, Maithili, Varendri and Kamrupi are the most important of them. Mithila is known for the Maithili Brahmins, Barind for Varendris, Mid Bengal for Rarhis and Brahmaputra region for Kamrupis.

Kosi river system from Mithila spread the heritage of Vaishnavism and Islam throughout East Bihar, Katihar, pockets of Malda and Mahananda valley. Sub-Himalayan Kishanganj is the best example for that. Darbhanga is the center in Mithila besides Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi and Madhubani. These areas are renowned for their handloom cottage industry, litchi, mango, banana, betel vein, areca nut, cattle herds, sugar cane and agricultural production including jute. There is Madhubani script quite similar to Bengali. Darbhanga literally means door to Bengal. Similarly, Panchagarh was known as Pon Duar or door to Pundrabardhan (Teesta-Karatoa lost track). There were so many such doors of alternative silk routes from Chumbi valley and Indo-Bhutan foothill (Kamrup/Kamta/Koch Bihar). Buddhism was widespread there. Snake, bird, afterlife, spirit, spirit possession, ghost, soul, fertility cults (male and female: Chandi, Tara,

Mahakaal), malevolent and benevolent deities, sacred objects, gold, bones, skull, sacrifices, alcohol, flesh, fermentation, stones, comets, sacred chant, magical practices, imitations, thought experiments, communication, Yoga, meditation, time, energy, practices, nature-human-supernature connectivity, dancing, singing and ethno-medicines were some of its parts. Islam and Vaishnavism have replaced these things to a lot extent and only restricted at local level. Rajbanshis pray to basil, home deity and *kali*. *Kali* is the mother goddess and of several types.

Vaishnavism has not only affected Dhokras, but also Pundras, Jalia-Kaibattas, Kaibarttas and Mahiswas who have not converted into Islam. Many of them use the Das title which is common among upper caste Bengalis like Baidya and Kayastha. Rajbanshis express their respect for Vaishnava priests, non-Brahminical priests (Adhikaris), Naths, Sannyasis and Muslim Peer Fakirs speaking off of syncretism. They do not cremated dead body of a Vaishnava priest and believing in return back of the soul, they preserve it in underground chamber in special sitting posture.

Both Bhalapur-Deoghar and Jalpesh are Shiva temples. The stone at Jalpesh is said to a comet and hence outer space object. There are various other Shiva temples or proto-Shiva in the sub-Himalayas. Rajbanshis have some animistic behaviours also. They worship rivers, forests and have various folk rituals with every step of agricultural performance. They generally give their daughters early marriage (before the age of eighteen), but things are getting changed.

Rajbanshis are also connected with Hindu pilgrim center Varanasi situated on Ganges near ancient Buddhist center Sarnath. This place is the gateway to the East. Mughal troops also stayed there and therefore a place by the name Mughalsarai is situated closely. Varanasi or Kasi (also Kashi) is a sacred place and connected with Status Mobility. Rajbanshis though fallen under Scheduled Caste category by virtue of Indian Constitution, they are no more *Bratya* but

absolute *Kshatriya*. Rajbanshis take names of Vaishnava centers for pilgrimage like Nabadwip, Puri-Jagannath and Mathura-Vrindavan with respect. They often visit Iskcon temple at Bhaktinagar-Siliguri. Madanmohan temple is famous at Cooch Behar town.

So many lakes or other water bodies are there in remote countryside or jungles considered too sacred. That might be the places where traders stayed for a while carrying their goods through these hidden routes. Only Cooch Behar town has so many lakes. Jalpesh and Jatileshtar have their own tanks. Bhimbar and Choupukuria-Keshtopur under Phansidewa block of Siliguri subdivision have two such ancient water bodies. Teesta canal itself behaves like a water body. Gajoldoba on it is a beautiful site. Kulik near Raiganj and Rasikbil near Tufanganj are such places. Such highland ponds and marshlands often serve as the origin of a water stream or river.

Throughout Cooch Behar, *Mashan* is worshipped where non-Brahminical priests with tribal origin play important role. *Mashan* festival of Barokodali near Jorai-Sankosh river system at Tufanganj-Barobisha region in Dhuburi border is remarkable. Rajbanshis due to their status mobility do not consume pork, but on this special occasion could take it. It reminds us their negotiations with sub-Himalayan tribes and others throughout North East India, Tibeto-Burmese belt and Indo-Malayan belt.

Rajbanshi knowledge of Bio Diversity and Local Production System

Entire Terai and Duars foothills are good for grass land. That might be grazing land, source of fodder, wild grasses, habitat for bison and rhino, fond of by elephants and source of lemon flavour. Such fallow lands could be used for cowpea that is good for increasing cow milk. A heavy rain in foothill region is the main reason for so many ferns and arums- some of them are

edible. Various leafy vegetables also grow up reluctantly with some medicinal uses. Such grasslands are also found in sandy river beds of Barind lowland.

Areca nut is produced in high amount in Malbazar. There is a place named Odlabari as there were plenty of *odol* plantations.

Bamboo sacred grooves including yellow bamboo, upland ponds and *futki* bushes as fuel source are characteristic features of Rajganj.

Teesta canal, Gajoldoba and many such pond sites near Baikunthapur forest in Bhaktinagar-Rajganj area are used for fishing by local people. These are also seasonal habitat for the migrating birds from the Himalayas, Tibet, Ladakh, Central Asia and even Siberia. This forest is also home to the indigenous Mech tribe. Different types of mushrooms are grown there. Kranti-Kathambari pocket of the forest towards Malbazar is home to mixed population including the Mech.

Actually, entire Jalpaiguri Sarad subdivision has so many water tanks used for pisciculture. People catch fish from rivers and canals. They use various fishing implements from traditional to modern. Karala River in Jalpaiguri town and Mandalghat-Boalmari pocket on Teesta are good example of that.

Jalpaiguri town was the second home for the royal dynasty of Koch Bihar kingdom. They have also tried to develop a settlement in Dabgram area of Bhaktinagar under Rajganj block. That place was then inhabited by the Mech people in few numbers. Later British rulers established Siliguri town near Dabgram. Siliguri is the subdivisional town of Siliguri subdivision. It is also the second largest municipal corporation after Kolkata metropolis of West Bengal state. It is the gateway to North East India, Bhutan and Sikkim. Dabgram is now suburban area of Siliguri. I have heard that during its beginning days, Siliguri has so many coconut trees (native name: *dab*).

Jackfruit, poisonous berry fruits, shorea, catechu and some flowering plants also grew in this place reluctantly. Shorea was the raw material for wooden plough. In Matigara weekly market, those ploughs were sold at a good price. Indigenous liquor, fragrant rice, jute fibers and *tutma* were also sold there and due to rail connectivity, people from different places come to the area.

Jalpaiguri might have its origin from native name of olive that was grown up in the town reluctantly even a century ago. Catechu, wood plants and rubber can grow in good amount throughout Alipurduar which is also too important for agro-forestry.

People in Jalpaiguri district try to cultivate tobacco like that in Cooch Behar. They are also experimenting on strawberry and risinus (*erenda*). Latter is the home to local silkworm variety.

Rajbanshis prepare rice tablets for brewing, whereas in foothills there are wild millets that could also be used in brewery. In Barind lowland, there are plenty of date and date palm whose juice is used in brewery. Rajbanshis do not collect honey themselves, but know its usefulness. They know about fermentation process in brewery, food preservation techniques, pickles, fish balls, rice and pulse cakes, rice by-products, card, mushrooming, manuring, stock raising and seed preservation.

Two more information that I want to add are that sub-Himalayan soil in some specific locations is used for brick manufacture and there is coal mine in Barindland ridge of Bangladesh. Further, there was gold mine once in Dinajpur and rivers brought gold sand. Soil of Barind lowland (grey soil), Mechi Mahananda basin (especially at Kalagachh) and parts of Cooch Behar are very good for pottery.

Rajbanshi pre-agrarian to agrarian system

Rajbanshis at a time used to fallow their land, do slash and burn, grow some vegetables in uplands and marshes, rear their cattle/goat/lamb, occasionally hunt small games from neighbouring jungles (fowl, rabbit, pangolin, porcupine), protect vegetation with medicinal benefits and bamboo bushes, collect wild food and fuel, cultivate with traditional implements (millet like *kauni*, *marua*, local paddy, local jute, local pulses, local rapeseeds, local mango, jackfruit, litchi, guava, turmeric, banana, gourd, papaya, orange, local silk, betel vein, areca nut, sugar cane, etc.), perform fish-cum-paddy cultivation, have duckery, catch crabs and shrimps, hunt tortoise, collect snails (now totally absent), ferment fishes, process food, ferment areca/date juice/rice tablets/millet, collect ferns/bulb/arum/potato, eat boar and deer (occasionally), domesticate buffalo and elephant, have horses, appreciate joint-extended family structure, encourage handloom industry and perform festivals. Now they have become settled cultivators with crop rotation, green manure, biopesticides, chemical application, inter cropping, mixed cropping and ally cropping. Now, they are practicing much more than fallowing, fallowing-and-grazing, bush fallowing and slash-and-burn.

People of Rajganj are good in producing upland rice varieties, mustard, pulses and vegetables. Teesta-Mahananda canal provides water for irrigation. *Kukurjali* and *nunia* rice are renowned. *Nunia* rice is used in religious occasions. People here produce rice cake in winter season with rice dust and locally it is known as *vakka* or *vapa pitha*. Milk and coconut are also been used. *Thakurkalai* and *maskalai* are two local pulse varieties of Jalpaiguri and Rajganj.

Haldibari is famous for tomato, chili, brinjal and other vegetable items. I have seen these to grow up in Pathirajpur of Dakshin Dinajpur as well as Chopra of Islampur subdivision. If cultivated, various alternative products like ginger, turmeric and garlic could give good yield. Mustard, sunflower and other rapeseeds could also be cultivated thereby.

Mechi-Mahananda and Mahananda-Nagar are renowned by local fragrant paddy, jute, maize, wheat and banana with increasing intensity as the river flows towards Malda.

Small tea gardens could be seen in Mekhliganj, Panchagarh, Rajganj, Chopra and Thakurganj. Phansidewa block falling within Mechi-Mahananda basin is also very close to this new small tea garden belt. Uplands there are now meant for both tea and pineapple. Bidhannagar is a pineapple hub there. Pineapple is also cultivated in Thakurganj along with tea. Litchi, betel veins, mushroom and areca nut are important cash crops of foothill region. Local farmers are doing trial and error on this. Catechu, teak, mulberry and rubber plantations are also under experimentation. Neighboring uplands of Bangladesh are also used for mango, cotton and soybean cultivation; but no such incident I have noticed so far in sub-Himalayan North Bengal. Floriculture and off-season vegetables can also be grown with special care.

In earlier date, entire Alipurduar subdivision was a forestland and filled up by wild grasses, bamboo bushes, cane, sugarcane and marshland vegetation. Hiding places, temples within the jungle, waterways and hidden trade routes were there. Next are Cooch Behar II and Mathabhanga II blocks. Local Rajbanshis were initially cattle breeders with occasional hunting and fishing performances. They yielded handful of crop for self consumption. Sugarcane, areca nut, betel veins, wild fruits and even orange trees can be found in pockets. Today's agrobiodiversity there has been widely contributed by people immigrated from Rangpur division. Caste people from Rangpur have paid their tremendous labour to recover this sandy-loamy grassland (*kasia*, termed as *kasai* in Barind lowland) and established settled agrarian structure on the basis of intercropping, mixed cropping, ally cropping, kitchen garden, green manure, bio-pesticides, legume cultivation and crop rotation. They also produce jute seed, spices, fodder and other things.

Besides all these, in Dinhata area is the core center for tobacco. Tobacco can be source of smoking/chewing substance and even vegetable oil. There are many crop rotations in the entire district that includes paddy, maize, wheat, jute, vegetables (winter and monsoon), potato, garlic, rapeseeds and tobacco. Local rice varieties are much more in Cooch Behar in comparison to entire crop belt of the Sub-Himalayas and Barind (I am not talking about *Diara* and *Tal* of Malda).

People here in Cooch Behar are good in bamboo and wooden handicrafts, sponge items, *biri* binding, jute handlooms, cocoon production, fiber works, etc.

Rivers from there enter into Tufanganj area characterized by its Balarampur soil type with lower acidity. Throughout North Bengal, pH level is low and soil is acidic in nature. Micro-nutrients are also insufficient. Therefore farmers have to add lime in soil and various micro-nutrients. However, dolomite mines in Bhutan Himalayas are good sources of some micro-nutrients and lime. In the fish ponds, lime had to be added. I have met traditional lime producers from snail shells in Itahar block of Uttar Dinajpur who are also there in Gazole (Malda), Barsoi (Katihar) and other parts of Dinajpur. Piracy of tortoise shell is a crucial factor there. I have seen paddy-cum-duck-cum-fishing in marshland of Dinajpur. Such practices I have also found in wetland of Cooch Behar. But when I visited Tufanganj, I have found out that waterweeds, algal growth, *kochutipana* (water hyacinth) and sponge are maximum there. That is not just the case of swamp with watergrass or *jalsingara* (water chest nut) or lotus or arum or pond side vegetation or cane or bamboo bush. People here in Tufanganj have used maximum types of traditional fishing implements belonging either to the Rabhas or Rajbanshis. They cultivate paddy in the swamps full of red or green algal growth. They use *kochuripana* residues as green manure that in other places are not possible due to the risk of salinity and acidity increase in soil. Even their

cattle love to go into the marshland and collect fodder of their choice. Rivers and canals create so many horse shoe shaped ponds and water tanks that could be used for fishing of carps, crabs and most importantly catfishes. Because catfishes could survive in low oxygen water of a mudland filled up with algal growth and various other hydrophytes.

Rajbanshis from pre-State to State like Condition

Literally, Rajbanshi means of the royal origin or belongingness of royal dynasty. This term is used by different people in parts of South Asia. In Mid Bengal like that in Murshidabad district there are such people. I personally do not meet such people, but I was informed about that. Even in other parts of South Bengal this Rajbanshi term is used in surname. These people belong to Bengali ethnicity.

Rajbanshis of Gour Bengal are generally known as Dhokra and their dialect is known as Dhokoria. These people are associated with ancient civilization once spread from Katihar to Bogra. Pundras of Pundrabardhana are either converted into Islam or identified as Pod or Pundra Scheduled Caste community. It is said that their civilization was pre Vedic, pre Buddhist and obviously pre-Islamic. King Pundra or *Paundra* is still a legend. Pundra name is taken along with Vanga (Bangladesh), Suhma (South Bengal), Anga (Bhagalpur-Rajmahal and Chhotonagpur) and Kalinga (Odisha). Pundras are collectively placed with Andhra, Pulinda, Savara and such other indigenous peoples. Pundras are indigenous to undivided North Bengal. Bengal name origin is unknown. It is said that from Dravidian community Bang, the name has been appeared. Pundras were indigenous, pre-Dravidian or mixed up with Dravidian (Austro-Dravidian) where other people also came making the area multicultural and Pundras themselves feeling marginalized. That is the same case happened in neighbouring Bhagalpur-

Rajmahal area known in ancient history for river port, trade center, urban settlement (*Champanagara*), political power house, fishing, agriculture, agro-forestry (mango and sericulture), forest produce, mines, local dialects, temples and Great Traditions. Rajmahal falls under newly formed Jharkhand state of Bihar. Bhagalpur is still in South Bihar where other places are like Gaya, Patna, Bihar Sharif, Nalanda, Sasaram and Buxar. It had its control over Katihar and neighbouring Malda. Indeed Pundrabardhan and Gour Bengal were closely connected to Bhagalpur-Rajmahal for mines, ores and stones. Stone mines are there in Birbhum of Mid Bengal. Local rulers ruled Bhagalpur, Kajangal (Rajmahal), Birbhum, Murshidabad and South Bengal. So, concept of statehood and continuity with others were always there. Pundras stayed in-between Brahmaputra valley states and mainland Indian states. Brahmaputra was known as Kamrup and pre-Vedics in association with the Vedic there created ancient kingdom of *Pragyotishpura*. Bihar on mainland India was known as *Magadha* and considered as an important Indo-Aryan settlement from where several empires were originated unifying larger part of South Asia and beyond. That was also the place from where mainland Indian trends spread throughout remote pockets of Bihar, Bhagalpur, Rajmahal, Chhotanagpur, South Bengal, Mid Bengal, North Bengal, Bangladesh and even in North East Indian territories like Brahmaputra plains. So, local people were always in fear of being marginalized and status devaluation. Pundras were the rulers are therefore at per *Kshatriya* category of the Vedics. But, they were treated as non-Brahminical and therefore were excluded. For exclusion, they are still known as *Bratya-Kshatriya* (rulers in exile or with an excluded status). These people generally fall under agriculturist categories. After fall of Pundrabardhan in the hands of mainland Brahminical elements, these people fled here and there in countryside. Throughout Bengal, they are known as various excluded categories such as, *Bratya-Kshatriya*, *Borgo-Kshatriya*, *Pundra-*

Kshatriya and *Ugra-Kshatriya*. Rajbanshis are also fallen under such categories and always try to get rescued from that by status mobilization. Time to time, these excluded people try to form statehood or express their tendency from pre-state to state. Dhokra Rajbanshis are good example for that. They cultivate crops and fibers and from jute fibers develop their handloom textile jute cottage industry. Their jute mattresses are known as *dhokra* and marshes of Lower Barind and swamps of ancient Gour-Pundrabardhan are good places for jute cultivation. Gour and Pundra are names of local cane varieties yielded for sugar industry. Cane is still yielded in larger amount in Bihar, North India and Deccan. Sub-Himalayan grasslands and marshlands are known for bamboo, cane, wild grass varieties and sugarcane. Sub-Himalayan foothills have continuation with Indo-Malayan belt. There mixed type of people with Mongoloid features stay in. Dhokra Rajbanshis also possess Mongoloid feature. So, they are somehow different from other purely Austro-Dravidian groups. But all talk in Indo-Aryan language or dialect. Urdu is spelt by a section of local Muslims. Dhokra has another meaning and it means the thorny bushes grown reluctantly in uplands. Rajbanshis say that when there were outside attacks and they were defeated, they always fled to those bushy jungles and protected themselves. So, Dhokra in other terms means bushman.

Tribal people of Mahananda-Nagar and neighbouring places are treated as Surjapurias. In earlier times, local people used to pray to Sun or *Surya*. Local Rajbanshis are known as Dhokra and their dialect is influenced by both Bengali and Maithili. Mithila or Trihut (also spelt as *Tirhoot*) was center for ancient sub-Himalayan civilization of North Bihar. It has an Indo-Nepal character. It is the origin of Buddhism and Jainism. Sub-Himalayas are related to Nathism, Ramayana, Mahabharata and legendary Brahminical symbol Parasurama. Various microstates and republican confederacies were there similar to that in Indus valley controlled by Irano-Afghan

Empire. Eurasians, Central Asians, Indo-Aryans, Irano-Afghans from Indus valley in various occasions have tried to enter into South Asia, Kashmir and the sub-Himalayas. Kushans (associated with Scythians), Indo-Greeks, Kambojas, Ahirs and Turk-Afghans used there sub-Himalayas. Jat, Tocharian, Gujjar-Pratihara, Rajput-Hun, Turko-Mongol (Mughal) and others from North India as well as various others from Central India-Deccan entered into Bihar-Bengal region. Extreme South of Indian peninsula keeps relation with Bengal as they still do all over the Bay of Bengal region including South East Asia. Indo-Greek and Islamic subculture are there in the sub-Himalayas. They have their impact on Barind also (both highland and lowland). These local Rajbanshis are associated with Ghosh, Goala, Ahir, Yadav and Goswami- all being Hindu caste group with some community like attitude and traditional occupation of cattle rearing. From them many have converted into Islam and they are traded as Seikh and Mondal related to Bihar Sharif, other Sufi centers and local Peer Fakirs. Kulhaiya Seikh talks in Maithili and Bengali Seikh in Bengali. The latter has two sub-categories- Nashya Seikh converted from Rajbanshis and then Shershahbadia linked up with indigenous people of Bengal and Islamic heritage from South Bihar. Nashya Seikh is of the Sub-Himalayas and Shershahbadias are in Mid Bengal and Gour. Nashya Seikhs are in Kishanganj, Dinajpur, Islampur, Siliguri, Rajganj, Chopra, Jalpaiguri, Panchagarh, Haldibari and Mekhliganj. They have included under Other Backward Category (OBC) by the state of West Bengal. They have identified themselves as associates of Muslim intruders and conquerors as they consider Islam as a better option. They are influenced by both Bengali and Urdu besides local dialects. They talk about *Haveli* or palace and are in closer contact with mainland via Mid Bengal, Bhagalpur-Rajmahal, Gour-Katihar and Mithila. Rajbanshis are also there in Indo-Nepal Sub-Himalayan Terai where indigenous group was the Kirat or *Kiranti* or *Kiratanow* with so many sub-categories. They are highly influenced

by Nepal and being residents of Morong or Jhapa treated as Morongia or Jhapali. They are rather associated with cattle rearing tribes like Tharu and Dhimal. Dhimals of Mechi-Mahananda are nearly completely included in Rajbanshi, have become a caste and even demand for OBC category, whereas Rajbanshis have already been within Scheduled Caste category. Dhimals could not be primarily fallen under Indo-Aryan language group. Himalayan portion of Mahananda-Kanki Indo-Nepal borderland is home to indigenous Limbu or Subba who have accepted the Gorkhahood. They also rear cattle and in pre-colonial time, fell under both Gorkha House of Nepal and Sikkim Kingdom. Both of them took interest in Morong and Dalkhola, which would provide them full control over Mahananda basin upto Katihar-Malda. Rajbanshis of Mechi-Mahananda foothills address themselves with Sinha surname and on the other side much of Dhimals and other tribes have been incorporated within them.

Kami, Damai, Tharu and Karki are different low caste groups among Nepalis. In sub-Himalayan Bihar and Bengal, we could have Kumhar, Kurmi, Dom, Hari, Musahar and Chai type of people. They in various names spread from the sub-Himalayas to a wider part of South Asia. They might be *Dalit* or *Mahadalit*. They might be Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe or treated otherwise. They are basically artisan groups and attached with river transport. They could also be associated with agriculture. They might have knowledge of food preservation and fermentation. Even they could have Mongoloid features and special status for women. Kumhars are basically pottery makers.

Dinajpur within Barind is said to be origin of the Palas who were said to be originally potter makers and also ruled Bengal Bihar region against foreign intrusions but interruptedly for about four centuries (mid 8th to mid 12th century AD). Prior to the Palas, various elements like kings

of *Magadha*, Indo-Greeks, Kushans, pro-Kushans, Guptas, Later Guptas, kings of Mid Bengal and West India, Brahmaputrans, Kashmiris and Tibeto-Burmese groups had arrived to the place. Palas faced off agitation from the Kaibartta people. Whether those Kaibarttas were Maishwas or Jalia-Kaibarttas or Das are not known. That agitation was originated from Mechi-Mahananda basin in vicinity of Sikkim and centered on Barind. We do not know about its tribal affiliations and where there was any link to ancient civilizations like that of Pundras! Some Pundras might have come to the Sub-Himalayas, intermixed with local Mongoloid stalks especially Kirat people and finally, called themselves as Rajbanshi as a Indo-Aryan speaking agrarian-cum-pastoral caste. However, many Rajbanshis still use this Das in their surname. Many other peoples of different castes also use this Das in surnames. Most of the Das and Rajbanshis are Vaishnavites. Local Rajbanshis in North Bengal Sub-Himalayas call themselves Desi or Desia and their language as *Desibhasa*. Rabha tribe also speaks in this dialect. Rabhas are however of two types: settled agriculturist Rabha and forest dwelling groups. Toto, Bodo, Mech and Rabha are tribes of Sub-Himalayan Bhutan. Bodos are again linked with Garos of Meghalaya. Garos are present in Cooch Behar and Alipurduar.

Rajbanshis call their fellowmen as *Bau* which is respectful term. They also take other royal and prestigious surnames like different *Bratya-Kshatriya* groups in the way of status mobility. However, they are closely associated with Namasudra community of Bengal which is the largest Scheduled caste population in the state, definitely Bengali, result of exclusion and profoundly present throughout North Bengal.

During Palas, there was occupancy made by Kambojas and Gujjar-Pratihars. Pulia is another Scheduled Caste Hindu group often added into Rajbanshi fold. We do not know whether those Pulias have any link with Pala or Kamboja-Pala. Pulias are the people of Barind.

Patirajpur village area in Itahar is also known as Pratiharpur or Privirajpur- a clear symbol of Rajput impact. Choudhury or Chaudhury is also another tile indicating to Chwa-dhari which means holding up of the Chwa descent and linkage to Hapthalite Huns or Chauhan Rajputs. Rajbanshis of Barind and Mahananda share this title. It is also common in entire Bihar, North India and Mid Bengal. There are ruins of fort at Lohagarh in Mechi-Mahananda and at Rajganj-Panchagarh in Talma river basin. Later is linked with legendary king Prithu or Prithvi who might have any Rajput connectivity against Turk-Afghan intrusion. Roy, Roy Choudhury and Singha Roy as surname are being used by the Rajbanshis throughout Indo-Bangladesh Barind.

People of Barind use certain terms like *Kushan*, *Kush*, *Kashya*, *Kashyap* and *Kayastha*. A Shahi was developed there in the form of Dinajpur-Rajshahi like others in different parts of South Asia (Lucknow Shahi, Turk-Kushan Shahi, Hindu Shahi, Shahanoshahi, Rajput Shahi, Turk-Afghan Shahi, Mughal Padshahi, Deccan Shahi, Gorkha Shahi and Hindu Pad Padshahi of the Marathas). As the Shahi gradually proceeded during Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic regimes, people of Dinajpur-Rajshahi were more and more included in the mainstream. Sarkar is a common title there used by Muslims groups, Hindu castes (Bengali) and Rajbanshis. Dinajpur was the center for Buddhist excellence. Later, it has converted into Vaishnava and Islamic center. Bogra on ruins of Pundranagara is such an Islamic center. Kantawjitemple of Vishnu at Dinajpur (Bangladesh) is a center for Vaishnavite pilgrimage.

Shahi, Pratihar, Rajput and Turk-Afghan however provided political alternative to Tibeto-Himalayan impact on the line of Buddhism. Barind ranges from Sub-Himalayas to Gour Bengal and this Indo-Bangladesh territory of today is of great geopolitical significance. Various military and paramilitary establishments are there. In neighbouring Mechi-Mahananda basin, there are Bagdogra airport, Bangdubi army base, tea estates, administrative centers and Greater Siliguri

urban center as the second largest municipal corporation after capital of the state Kolkata. The largest municipal corporation of North Bengal that is Siliguri with its all its suburban pockets is situated by Mahananda and its tributary Balason. Latter is a good source of sand and boulder used in construction purpose. Once it is believed that this river Balason brought with it the gold sand. At nearby Bhimbar of Sonapur under Siliguri subdivision and at Dhumdangi of Haptiagochh Gram Panchayet under Chopra block of Islampur subdivision, I have seen mound like structures. Matigara and Chathat are two very old weekly markets nearby Siliguri urban center and have existed from a time quite a long before establishment of Siliguri township by the British.

Barind is also famous for Varendri Brahmanism. These Brahmins claim to have connection with Kashmiri, Himalayan and Sub-Himalayan Brahmanism. Kashmiri Brahmins represent Kashyapa as alternative to Parasurama who symbolically destroyed ancient Pundrabardhana. Among Varendris, Bhattacharya and Bhatta are crucial and they talk about remote connections with Kashmiri Bhatta Brahmins through Tibeto-Himalayan line. This is unclear whether there are connections with pre-Vedic traditions and tribal affiliations. Varendris had good connections with Sena Kings of Bengal in post-Pala period and parallel with Jetari school of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism spread into Bihar, Bhagalpur-Chhotonagpur, Nepal, Tibeto-Himalayas, South Bengal, North Bengal, East Bengal, Brahmaputra valley and other remote pockets of North East India. They had their own impact over tribal leaders, *Bratya-Kshatriya*, marginalized local rulers and semi-autonomous feudal lords and their subordinates (Baro-Bhuiyan/Bhuiyan/Bhuinya/Bhui/Bhumihar). Various *Bratya-Kshatriya* groups including Rajbanshis of North Bengal, Bengal and South Asia use *Kashyap* as their clan name.

Jalpesh temple of Maynaguri is in association with lost heritage of Pundrabardhana, Pundras in exile, Rajbanshis, Koch-Rajbansis, pro-Kushan king Jalpa, Indo-Greeks (praying to Jalpai or olive tree), Tibeto-Himalayan mountain pass Jelep-la, Jalda tribe (now abolished), Bhote people in Bhutan Himalayas, Sarkars and mainstream people. This is a Great Tradition and much similar to Bhagalpur-Deoghar. Near Jalpesh, there is another ancient temple of Jatileswharthat is said to be as old as Pala or Gupta times. In Falakata, coins of Gupta time have been recently discovered.

Palas were contemporary to Rashtrakutas of Deccan who in North-Central India are treated as Rathore. Pala or Pal has their spread on the other hand over the Sub-Himalayas from North India to Brahmaputra besides Bihar-Bengal. They in their last days were attacked by Central Indian Rajputs, pro-Rajput elements of Deccan and Gaharwals of North India. They lost their control over Bay of Bengal, South East Asia, Mithilanchal and Brahmaputra valley. East Bengal was gone into the hands of *Varmana* (also the Braman) and Chandra. Tibet was too influential and Arab-Buddhist trade relation was a fact. There was Nal kingdom near Deccan and those Nallas were involved in Silk Trade. Similarly, there is the ruin of Nal Fort in Bhutan foothills (Chilapata forest). Tat might be a coincidence. Another destroyed wreckage of fort is there at Bux Duar of Bengal Duars. After fall of Palas in Brahmaputra, there various tribal groups came into power: Chetia, Ahom (after which Assam name has been given), Bodo, Mech-Bodo, Garo and Cuchur. Bodoland region was under local Baro-Bhuinyas (feudal lords). Mech-Bodo elements either constructed or occupied Nal Fort, Jalpesh, Kamtapur (Gosanimari or Gossanimari) and Panchagarh. Mech people were said to be derived from Mechi River. Lohagarh Fort ruins and Mechinagar Municipality of Nepal are both by this river. Siliguri-Dabgram locality and Rajganj block were controlled by these Mech or Meche people. They were also at Morong. Mech-Bodo

alliance therefore ruled entire Sub-Himalayan North Bengal to its greatest extent and had its influence over Rangpur, Dinajpur, Morang, Mahananda basins, Brahmaputra valley, Cuchur hills, Meghalaya and Maymensingh both populated by tribes and castes. Mech-Bodo Kingdom was named as Kamta and Gosanimari as Kamtapur under the Khens. Khens were traditionally oil extractors as olive, sesame and mustard were growing reluctantly in highlands of North Bengal. That was contemporary to Turk-Afghan rule in Bengal. Mech-Bodo might have support from various tribal groups, but some more reformative actions were needed hereby. They were not from Indo-Aryan language group, but matrilineal (which is now lost) and closely associated with tribes of Bhutan (Khens might have originated from Kheng-pa of Bhutan and worshipped Kamtेशwari female cult symbol of feminine control over the state -Petticoat Government?). Internal political problems and Turk-Afghan ruler's intervention from Bengal brought end to Khen rule over Kamta (12th to 15th Century AD).

Mech and Koch combination then came into power and that had some positive factors: 1) Koch people is fallen under Indo-Aryan language group; 2) Koch have tribal status and associated with Hajang of Meghalaya and Hajoi of Assam speaking in Indo-Aryan dialect; 3) close association with Jalpesh Temple and Rajbanshi agrarian social structure; 4) caste status; 5) supporting Vaishnavism and Sufism as alternative to Buddhists interference over the state; 6) using tribal links to communicate with North East India from Tufanganj, Darrang and Kamrup; 7) patriarchal society; 8) settled cultivation on joint-extended family structure; 9) better negotiation with Bengal, mainland India, Mughal Padshahi and the British India; 10) inclusion of tribal dominated Bhutan foothills as subsidiary partner of mainland Indians and the British force; 11) control over Jalpaiguri, Rajganj, Panchagarh and Dabgram next to Siliguri; 12) besides Jalpesh, construction of Baneshwar Temple; 13) close links with social reforms in mainland Bengali Hindu society;

14) friendly relation with Muslim dominated Rangpur; 15) accepting Barman royal status from Mymensingh and several other pockets of ancient *Harikel* (North East India and Bangladesh borderline); 16) allowing Brahmin scholars from different sectors of South Asia including Brahmaputra valley; 17) supporting Vedic practices; 18) close association with Rajput dynasties; 19) reconstructing the female fertility cult (Borodevi instead of Kamteshwari or Chandi); 20) supporting British policy of making Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet friendly territories with the help of Gorkha House of Nepal; 21) contraction of Jalpaiguri district on included areas from areas from Bhutan foothills and demographic plus economic alterations there (tea gardens etc.); 22) modern education and allowing Westernization; 23) status mobility; 24) more and more inclusion of tribal communities of Bhutan Sub-Himalayas under permanent cultivation system; etc. Barman and Roy are the two most common surnames used by Rajbanshis. People of Cooch Behar talk in Desia in association with Rangpuria (of Rangpur) and Gawalpariya (of Goalpara upto Rangia-Guahati).

Jalpaiguri was under direct control of British government, though local Koch Rajbanshi branch also enjoyed enormous power. Rajganj-Panchagarh was known for King Prithu, Kamta Kingdom, Sannyasi and Fakir Movements in last half of 18th Century AD, Indigo movement in neighbouring places in 1860s, being gateway to Pabna known for Pabna peasant movement in 1870s, Tevaga movement of 1940s, Naxalbari movement of 1960s, Teesta canal, land reformation, Phulbari land port and protest against land encroachment in recent times. The place supported independence movement of Bangladesh. People here pay tribute to Chandra Bose, Anukul Thakur and Swami Vivekananda. Some old temple sites are present here. Missionary organizations and mazars are also located here and there. Neighbouring Mekhliganj has been known after Assamese silk cloth *Mekhla*. Chutiakhor or Chetiakhor in Chopra block might be

remote link with Chetia tribe of Assam. So many places are there by the name of Bhot, Bhote, Bhutni and Kamla throughout the sub-Himalayas and Barind; might that be due to impact of Bhutanese people or their associates and their orange orchards.

Local landlords brought in tribals from Central India, Rajmahal, Deccan and Chhoto Nagpur to clear up forests there in Barind highland, Gazole, Itahar and Tapan blocks (*see*: Table-1). Santals, Mahali, Oraon, Munda and others could therefore be found in Dhokra speaking areas. These people are also present in tea garden belts, Mechi Mahananda basin and even Morong (Nepal). Kuchlibari of Mekhliganj, Chopra of Islampur and Panchagarh have tribal populations. They are also present sporadically in Jalpaiguri Sadar subdivision. These people have their mother tongues and a common Sadri language. So, these people were not only brought in for tea garden labourers, but also replacing forestland by croplands. In Jalpaiguri Sadar Subdivision, goat and sheep are reared besides cattle.

Some additions

Rajbansis are conscious about their identity, natural resources, sustainability and public services. Their traditional life is simple with rich cultural heritage. They bear *Kashyap* clan that is used as identity. They bear Mongoloid feature as other indigenous communities of sub-Himalayan belt and intermixed with other racial elements like Austro-Dravidian and speaking in Indo-Aryan dialects quite similar with Bengali, Assamese, Maithili and Nepali. They consider themselves as an (agrarian) caste and at the same time, conscious social mobility, Great Tradition, modernity and market economy. They accept certain things and reject few. They often behave like dominant community and focus on their tribal affinities in some pockets. They have actually become a heterogeneous social fold.

That ancient civilization in Rajshahi, now in Bangladesh but close to Rajbanshi populated pockets of North Bengal (India), was known as *Pundrabardhana* or ***Pundravardhana***. This region is represented by Dinajpur-Rajshahi with distinct Indo-Bangladesh nature. Its Indian portion is mostly known as Gour Bengal or *Goura Vanga*. Dinajpur is a ridge or upland area whose main portion has now been fallen in Bangladesh. Some pockets of this upland have been fallen in Indian side (Gourbengal). Many of the rain fed rivers originated from Dinajpur ridge fall into Mahananda and contribute in formation of Dinajpur lowland (Gourbengal); those rivers not falling in Mahananda River also take part in formation of Dinajpur lowland (Gourbengal) before entering into Rajshahi. Rajshahi is a wetland area. Just a little portion of this Rajshahi or Rajshahi like wetland (Gour proper) is overlapped with Mahananda valley and included in India (Gourbengal). Rest part of Rajshahi is included in Bangladesh. The city of *Pundranagara* was situated on or near this Rajshahi wetland and the king *Paundrik Vasudeva* also existed there. This is now the Bogra town in Bogra district of Rajshahi Division. This town is near the confluence of Jamuneshwari and Jamuna rivers. Jamuna is the main river of Brahmaputra mouth in Bangladesh. Jamuneshwari is the lost branch of Karatoa River. At a time, Teesta and Jamuneshwari had joint flow. So, this Bogra town was very important in the context of transnational trade. King *Vasudeva* has been mentioned in Great Indian Epic of Mahabharata. King *Vasudeva* was allied partner of *Magadha* (Bihar) and *Pragyotishpur* (Teesta-Brahmaputra valley). He had influence not only over his kingdom *Pundrabardhana*, but also over Gangetic delta (*Vanga*), Chotonagpur plateau and Rajmahal Hills (*Anga*), Odisha (*Kalinga*) and delta adjoining valleys created by rain fed rivers from Chotonagpur plateau (*Suhma*). Present state of West Bengal in India is simply divided into two regions- South Bengal and North Bengal. South

Bengal is made up of entire *Suhma* and pockets from *Anga*, *Vanga* and even *Kalinga*. North Bengal is rather constructed with some portions of *Pundravardhana* state or Dinajpur Rajshahi. That portion is now regarded as *Goura Vanga*. North Bengal has also got some pockets from Bihar *Purvanchal* (Purnea and Katihar) and Sub-Himalayan Morang Kingdom (presently distributed among North Bengal, Nepal and Bihar). Both areas are falling on Mahananda river system. North Bengal has included some portions from Bhutan and Sikkim. Sikkim was actually in a position to control a wider part of Morang. Himalayan Kingdom Bhutan had a strong influence over the Sub-Himalayas commonly regarded as *Duars* or Doors representing ancient Indo-Tibet trade routes. Bhutan was also controlling over the trade route towards Chumbi valley through Kalimpong and its Duars foothill portion (Malbazar). Core areas of ancient kingdom of Kamtapur and Koch Bihar are also included to North Bengal. That core area was the westernmost portion of entire Teesta-Brahmaputra plains commonly known as *Pragyotishpur* or *Trigarta*. With formation of Koch Bihar Kingdom, that western chunk on Teesta-Dharala, Jaldhaka-Torsha, Kaljani-Raidak and Sankosh got a separate identity and therefore not included in Assam. Cooch Behar district of North Bengal represents this core area of Koch Bihar Kingdom. A portion of Koch Bihar was included in mainland Bengal and that portion is now the Rangpur Division of Bangladesh. Bhutan foothill is included in India and distributed between North Bengal and Bodoland territory of Assam. So, North Bengal has strong influences from 1 Bengal mainland, 2 Bihar *Purvanchal*, 3 Morang, 4 Sikkim, 5 Bhutan, 6 Bodoland-Assam, 7 Cooch Behar – Rangpur, 8 Dinajpur – Rajshahi, 9 Indo-Tibet and 10 Kamtapur-Harikel regions.

North Bengal in association with Dinajpur-Rajshahi and Rangpur portions of North West Bangladesh is a part of **Koshi-Arakan region**. Koshi River of *Dwar Vanga* or Darbhanga (door

to Bengal) is the power center of ancient Mithila or Trihut (also spelt as Tirhut). Mithila has been mentioned in Great Indian Epic of Ramayana. It is actually a Sub-Himalayan region and Indo-Nepal borderland. Koshi River from Tibeto-Himalayas opens into the Ganges near Katihar (Manihari) of Bihar *Purvanchala*. Like Mahananda, Teesta-Brahmaputra, Rainfed Rivers from Dinajpur-Rajshahi, rivers from Chhotonagpur plateau, Brahmaputra mouth, Barak-Surma and Feni-Meghna, we can see that Koshi is adding water to Indo-Bangladesh Gangetic Delta (also known as Bengal delta). All the water after crossing Surdarban mangroves fall into Bay of Bengal. Various rivers from Indian Peninsula similarly create deltas before falling in Bay of Bengal. On the other hand there are sea ports along Bangladesh-Myanmar coastline. This is known as Arakan or Rakhine. Its Bangladesh portion is known as Chittagong. Hill track of Chittagong has a considerable Buddhist population. Arakan coast of Burma of Myanmar has mixed population of Bengali speaking Muslim and Buddhist communities. Chittagong Division in Bangladesh not only includes Chittagong, but also Meghna-Feni and Barak-Surma systems. So, geographically a major portion of North East India and Sino-Myanmar territory were dependent on Arakan. This Koshi-Arakan region got support from Tibeto-Myanmar and this trade zone enjoyed autonomy from mainland South Asia for a long time. Now, only Bangladesh is an independent country and rest portions belong to India, Indo-Tibet region and Myanmar. In that context, *Pundravardhana* was a major center and flooded with Buddhism. Mahasthangarh in Bogra and Mainamati in Chittagong were two major Buddhist centers. So, parallel to Pre-Vedic and Vedic traditions followed by Post-Vedic way of living, Buddhism gave the alternative. Initially, the region was outside Vaishnava influence and legendary King *Vasudeva* was against Lord Krishna. *Kalinga* was a key center of Jainism and initially opposed Vaishnavism. From *Magadha*, mainland India with active supports from Indo-Himalayan micro-states and

Republican Confederacies as well as Central Indian mining zones gradually approached into *Anga, Suhma, Pundra, Vanga* and *Kalinga*. These five states thereafter were together started treating as *Pancha Goura* (union of five *Goura*). *Pundravardhana* or *Goura Vanga* remained as the center to this union. Wider *Goura Vanga* was known Mid Bengal in association with a portion of the Gangetic delta (Murshidabad). This Mid Bengal was also an important Buddhist center. By names, *Goura* and *Pundra* were two local cane varieties.

North Bengal has a close association with ancient Indian Kingdom of ***Magadha***. This power center in ancient Indian history represented Vedic traditions, collaborated with Pre-Vedic pockets, extended supported to the alternative traditions like Buddhism and Jainism, negotiated with autonomous territories, supported *Dhamma* and other forms of the folk beliefs practiced by common Indians, revitalized ancient urbanism, formed army and intelligence, established centralized governance, nationalized forest and mines, extended support to the pastoralists and also dealt with Indo-Greeks and other Greek colonies (established on Irano-Afghan territories, Indo-Iranian territories, micro states and tribal confederacies of Indus valley region, Central Asia, Middle East, Near East, Anatolia, Egypt and Greece; latter was then the entrance to Europe and also represent a major portion of Eurasia). This welfare state was again closely combined with *Pancha Goura*, Indian peninsula, Sri Lanka, Indo-Nepal region and Kashmir. Vaishnavism appeared as the major alternative for Buddhism and rapidly spread out into Indo-Nepal Sub-Himalayas, over ancient trade routes of Western India, above various Indo-Greek colonies in Indus valley and in such pockets where it could never enter before. *Pancha Goura* especially *Kalinga* did not accept that alternative at the initial stage. *Magadha* and Indo-Greeks from Indus valley formed an alliance and a new power center Bidisha or *Vilsa* or *Besnagar* was emerged out in Central India near Bhopal. This Vaishnava

center is situated very close to the Buddhist center Sanchi. Gradually, Vaishnavism reached in *Kalinga*. However, Magadha and Koshi-Arakan region remained stronghold of Buddhism and *Pundravardhana* was a major center there.

It might also happen that Rajbanshi rulers were *Kshatriyas* status holders, Aryan descent and Vedic people and excluded by an anti-*Kshatriya* movement initiated in *Magadha*. *Magadha*, one of the most important power centers of South Asia, was in close contact with other Aryan settlements of North and Central India extended upto Deccan in association with micro-states, little republics, pre-Vedic Aryan pockets and ancient dynasties in the Sub-Himalayas and Indus valley from beginning (600 B.C.). Sub-Himalaya region was origin of Buddhism and Jainism serving as alternative to Vedic Hinduism, whereas Indus valley was influenced by Irano-Afghanistan region and political changes happening at West Asia. *Magadha* was equally concerned about Nepal Himalayas, Kashmir, Malwa-Gujarat trade zone, Narmada valley, Konkan coast, entire Deccan, Andhra coast and Mysore. Various dynasties ruled over *Magadha* and they were either supports of Hinduism or its alternatives (mainly Buddhism). These dynasties vehemently tried to occupy the trade links of Bay of Bengal. They approached towards *Anga*, *Vanga*, *Pundra*, *Suhma* and *Kalinga*. *Kalinga* was a center for Jainism and also Buddhism. Nanda dynasty should maintain some good relation with this *Kalinga*. Nandas were contemporary to Greeco-Macedonian occupancy over Persian Empire reaching upto Indus valley. Indo-Iranians and Indus valley people took shelter in *Magadha* Empire. At the same time, Nandas were said to be the rulers of the *Magadha* Empire but not from the *Kshatriya* category. They were probably involved in an anti-*Kshatriya* movement. Rajbanshis of *Pundravardhana* might be amongst so many *Kshatriyas* who were excluded. *Kshatriya* movement occurred on contrary and Mauryas came into power. Maurya

dynasty there established contacts with Macedonian-Greek colonies over the ruins of Persian Empire (Egypt, Greece and Anatolia, Near East, Middle East, Irano-Afghanistan and Indus valley). *Maurya* Emperors were highly attracted towards Jainism and Buddhism. *Kalinga* was occupied lastly during this Maurya rule who also established contacts with Sri Lanka flourished as another center of Buddhism. Mauryas tried to make Buddhism as the backbone of their state. Mauryas also tried to bring in Buddhism closer to Aryan tradition believing in heaven, cattle breeders, the common people and their folk religion. Mauryas further tried to deliver a Welfare State, back native speeches and alternative scripts, revive ancient urbanism, focus on trade and industry, control forest and mine, and establish a big army and intelligence. In Maurya period, *Pundravardhana* became a center of Buddhism and Mahasthangarh was established at *Pundranagara*. The people of *Pundravardhana* who might be Non-Aryan, pre-Vedic Aryan, Vedic Aryan, caste groups or a mixed population but accepting the new trend(s). They might have shifted towards Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Nathism, Sufism and Islam with time. So, original Hindu Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* rulers cum warriors were completely excluded, lessened from a status of *Kshatriya* to *Vratya-Kshatriya* (ruling to no ruling status), and had to accept agriculture (and local trade) as alternative occupation(s). They remained just Rajbanshi (meaning 'of humble origin' or 'of royal origin'), but no Rajbanshi *Kshatriya*. They in exclusion were still associated with Indo-Aryan dialect, Hinduism, ancient urbanism and statehood. They fled to remote places like Bodo-Kamta areas including Teesta-Brahmaputra valley, Panchagarh-Rajganj and Morang. Teesta-Brahmaputra was politically under ancient Kingdom of *Pragyotishpur*. It had been an Aryan settlement along with so many tribes similar to other Indo-Himalayan pockets. These Aryans might primarily be fallen under Pre-Vedic category and developed own Brahmanism as could be found in far flung Kashmir. This *Pragyotishpur* later became Kamrup

where *Kamrupi* Brahmanism still exists. Similarly, *Varendri* Brahmanism has appeared in Dinajpur upland and spread to a wider territory. *Bhatta* Brahmins are present in Kashmir, Indo-Himalayas, Dinajpur ridge and other parts of Bengal, and *Bodo-Kamta* territories including Teesta-Brahmaputra valley. Besides *Pragyotishpur* or Kamrup, various indigenous groups in pre-state condition and with pro-state mindset gradually approached towards formation of micro-states, republican confederacies, Buddhist Kingdoms and Nation States. Rajbanshis in Teesta-Brahmaputra river system are still more concentrated at its western portion or Teesta-Torsha region. The place was known as *Rotnapeeth* and major religious place was Jalpesh. Mech was the prime tribal community of the region and they unlike Rajbanshis did not talk in Indo-Aryan dialect. Rajbanshis in Kaljani-Raidak region and Sankosh area overlapped with Rabha and Koch tribes who unlike Mech, Bodo and Garo people talked in Indo-Aryan dialects quite similar to that of the Rajbanshis. Later on Koch chiefdom married a Mech woman to establish Koch dynasty, praised Indo-Aryan speech, accepted Hinduism and addressed Rajbanshi identity; this dynasty gave rise to Koch Bihar Kingdom other than Morang, Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan. Koch Bihar Kingdom was an associate of the Mughals and the British over ruling Bengal and Bihar so as to expand into Bay of Bengal region. Koch Bihar Kingdom supported Vaishnavism in Bodo-Kamta territory including Brahmaputra valley where after Chetia occupancy the Ahoms got a commanding position but at initial stage faced strong opposition from Koch Rajbanshi branches in various pockets there. Despite of this Koch-Rajbanshi combination and marital relationships with other tribes, the Rajbanshis never fully accepted tribal status and always tried to get back their *Kshatriya* identity. These excluded people known as the Rajbanshi could equate their situations with other Hindu rulers excluded from time to time and variously associated with Non-Aryan tribes, different caste groups, pre-Vedic Aryans, Kashmiri Brahmanism, Kashmiri Hindu

Saint *Kashyapa*, Buddhism, Nathism, Vaishnavism, Sufism, and some other markers like *Kashya*, *Kush*, *Kushana*, *Kayastha*, etc. They often talk about *Parasurama* as the symbol of mainland Brahmanism against the impurities among the *Kshatriyas* and advocating anti-*Kshatriya* movement. Exclusion of Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* or *Pundra Kshatriyas* to a status of *Vratya Kshatriya* or the simple Rajbanshi identity or *Kashyapa* clan or Pre-Vedic Aryans afraid of the myth of *Parasurama* or a Non-Aryan might not be executed as a result of any anti-*Kshatriya* movement organized by mainland Brahmanism, but by another one merely supported by Jainism or Buddhism. So, Rajbanshis later got the scope to regain their *Kshatriya* status by purification process. There are other ruling categories in South Asia who are not any of these followings- Hindu, caste group, Aryan, Pre-Vedic group, Vedic group or *Kshatriya* but a ruling category. So, this Rajbanshi sect supported state formation alternative to Kamtapur, let their name be associated with Koch Bihar, fought back with Bhutan, wanted to get involved in mainstream politics and hoped to regain their Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* identity. Rajbanshis are also there in Nepal foothills and still use Rajbanshi in their surname. In Assam, it is more focused on Koch-Rajbanshi rather than *Kshatriya* Rajbanshi.

There were **other influences** on North Bengal from the sides of Indo-Greeks, Kiratas, Kushanas and new political developments in *Magadha*. Indo-Parthian Greeks were in Sind and in touch with Christian state of Aksum which was on Afro-Asian zone and controlling all the trade routes through Arabian Sea. So, there was a possibility that Christianity could develop itself as an alternative to Buddhism. But there were Satavahanas in Andhra and Deccan, Indo-Scythians in Gujarat and Western India and Kushana Empire from Irano-Afghanistan to Indian heartland. These three power houses preferred the worship of Lord Shiva and Lord Buddha. In regions like pre-Islamic Pak-Afghanistan, Indo-Himalayan region and Indian Peninsula with all its extension

throughout South Asia and beyond, Lord Shiva was worshipped in various forms. For example, Kashmir valley in the Himalayas was a place where Kashmiri Brahmins (*Pandits*) obtained the highest social rank and worshipped so many Hindu Gods and Goddesses; among those *Amarnath* was a major cult of Lord Shiva. They were the Kushanas who organized third international congress of Buddhism in Kashmir (or Afghanistan) where decisions were taken to bring in Buddhism closer to many more people with certain reformations, translation of Buddhist scripts into Sanskrit and construction of the concept of *Avalokiteshwara* very much similar to that of Lord Shiva. Buddhism established a strong grip over the entire Indus valley and defended Christianity from Aksum. Buddhism rapidly spread into Tibeto-Kashmir, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Far East in pre-Islamic era. Kambojas of Pak-Afghan region, peoples of Kashmir and Khwarezm or Chorasmia (Central Asia), Kiratas in the Himalayas and Koch in Teesta-Brahmaputra were worshipping idols, stones, natural objects and the cult of Shiva or similar demigods. *Vratya Kshatriyas* involved in local level village governance and closely associated with folk people in South Asia and beyond also exhibited similar tendencies. Lord Shiva has turned into *Mahakaal* in Tibetan Buddhism and is further associated with snakes and flying entities, female fertility cults like *Tara* and *Chondi* and about hundred malevolent and benevolent deities. Kirata people in the Himalayas and Sub-Himalayas also worshipped the cult of Shiva. The place was known as the land of Kiratas or *Kiratabhoomi*. Nepal is a Himalayan state with a Sub-Himalayan track. Majority of Nepali communities have been derived from the Kiratas. They give most importance to the Lord Shiva whom they pray as the cult of *Pashupatinath*. Katmandu in the present capital of Nepal and this city has been built surrounding the temple of *Pashupatinath*. It is true that Indo-Nepal foothill is the origin of so many mythologies like Buddhism, Jainism and Nathism and also associated with the stories of Ramayana and

Mahabharata. Nearby People of Tibet and various Himalayan pockets worship Buddhism. But still Nepal prefers this cult of Lord Shiva. Different parts of Bihar-Bihar, settlements of *Vratya-Kshatriya* and Sub-Himalayan North Bengal are known for worship of Shiva cult and not for Buddha or *Avalokiteshwara*. Bhagalpur or Sultanganj was such a place and served as the gateway to *Anga* Kingdom. It was also near Mid Bengal or *Goura Vanga* just at the center of *Pancha Goura*. The place also lied on Kashi-Arakan track. Nearby *Kajangal* (Rajmahal), Munger, Murshidabad, Gour, Lakhnauti, Ramauti and Pandua remained important power centers throughout the history. Similarly, there were so many Shiva temples throughout Teesta-Torsha-Raidak-Sankosh of North Bengal. Jalpesh was the most important of them. Jalpesh cult was linked up with ancient *Pundravardhana*, *Vratya Kshatriya* and Pro-Kushana mythical king Jalpa. We can see the similarities among the names of King Jalpa, Jalpesh cult, Jalpai plant (olive), Jalpaiguri town, Jaldapara National Park, Jalda tribe and Jelep-la Tibeto-Himalayan pass. Jalpaiguri is the district town of Jalpaiguri district and head quarter of North Bengal administrative zone. A century ago, this Jalpaiguri town had a green vegetation of *Jalpa* or olive plants. Olive was worshipped by Indo-Greeks who in South Asia followed both Buddhism and Vaishnavism. Local Rajbanshis of Teesta-Dharala-Torsha and Kaljani-Raidak river systems sang Kushana song. This portion is formed by western *Pragyotishpur* and was known as *Ratnapeeth*. It later became Kamtapur followed by Koch Bihar and today's Jalpaiguri-Cooch Behar region under North Bengal in close proximity to Rangpur Division of Bangladesh. This Indo-Bangladesh territory is roughly segregated from Dinajpur-Rajshahi region plus Gourbanga by Karatoa River. Jalpesh-Jatileshtar region is situated between Teesta-Dharala and Jaldhaka-Torsha river systems. It is on an ancient trade route and still there are the SAARC road, rail connectivity and Indo-Bangladesh Changrabandha check-post. Some Islamic centers are also

situated on nearby places including the Mazar of Huzur Sahib. Kushanas from Irano-Afghanistan had direct control over Indus valley, North and Central India and influence over Bengal-Bihar, *Pancha Goura* and even the Sub-Himalayan track from Kashmir to Brahmaputra. Indo-Scythians in Gujarat-Malwa were their subsidiaries and also in some involvements with Satavahanas controlling both Deccan and Andhra. In extreme south of Indian peninsula, there were Dravidian elements and *Pallavas*. These *Pallavas* might have some links with Indo-Parthian Greeks. Christianity had reached to that extreme south from Syria. Indo-Scythians from ports of Deccan, Gujarat and Sind were doing business with Roman Empire. Kushanas established Mathura as their major ruling center in South Asia. Now, Mathura is one of the most important pilgrim centers for the Vaishnava sect. After Kushanas losing their control over Mathura and mainland India, various small states were formed throughout North India. Guptas again from *Magadha* supported Brahmanism and expressed orthodoxy. They as the rulers of Eastern India established marital relationships with royal families of Deccan India and Indo-Himalayas. They brought together all the North and Central Indian states together. They had influence over *Pancha Goura*, Teesta-Brahmaputra valley and Bay of Bengal region. All the micro-states at eastern coast of Indian peninsula were flourished on the trade relations with Bay of Bengal and they became the subsidiaries. Buddhist trade houses of Sri Lanka and South East Asia kept good relation with this new formation. Warrior tribes of western India, Indus valley and rulers of Irano-Afghan region were however not under their direct control. Indo-Scythians of Gujarat-Malwa region in this post-Kushana period lost their control over the Arabian Sea trade leading to Roman Empire. That was gone to the hands of the Gupta Emperors. Guptas established new capital at Ujjain (near Indore and Mandsaur in Malwa in the way to Gujarat) besides old capital in *Magadha*. Existence of two capitals (one in *Magadha* and the other in

Malwa) was some kind of a situation similar to Constantinople and Rome present in Roman Empire. Guptas who had been orthodox and strictly in favour of Brahmanism gradually shifted over to Vaishnavism and Buddhism found empire started disintegrating. Roman Empire was also separated into Western Roman Empire from Rome and eastern Roman Empire from Constantinople. Groups from Eurasia started attacking Gupta Empire and Roman Empire. Hun, Abhar and Gujjar attacked South Asia from Eurasia, Central Asia and Irano-Afghanistan. These tribes established stronghold in Indus valley and Western India, but could not done much hamper to eastern power center of *Magadha*. Western power center from Malwa started acting independently and provincial administrators and feudal lords became autonomous. These groups instead of taking Buddhism accepted Hinduism and got the status of Neo-Kshatriya to defend Hinduism. In later days, they emerged out as Gujjar Pratiharas and Rajputs warriors. They established so many forts in Rajasthan, Central India and deccanIndia. Huns and German tribes also invaded into continental Europe from Eurasian Steppe. These tribes settled in North European plains, Germany, Austria and Hungary. They did not attack the local Slav people, Balkans andConstantinople who were mostly believing in Orthodox Christianity. Provinces in Western Roman Empires and North Africa became the free states. These groups took Catholic Christianity, became protector of the Pope and the city ofRome. Later, they helped in establishment of the Holy Roman Empire and became Feudal lords, knight warriors and crusaders. They have established so many castle and burgs throughout Europe. Later Guptas of *Magadha* and King Shashanka of Mid Bengal were all Hindu rulers and worshipped Lord Shiva. Barman rulers of Kamrup and their links with the Buddhist World, rulers of Tibeto-Kashmir in constant touch with China, remaining Buddhist pockets of North India (e.g., Emperor Harshavardhana) and Kiderites of Afghanistan were still there. Arab traders reached to Sindh,

Indian Peninsula and Chittagong and brought in Islam to South Asia. Thus a new situation arose. Politically Eastern Romans from Constantinople were ruling over Greece, Near East, Egypt, Anatolia, Mediterranean islands, Southern Italy and even Mesopotamia; they were known well to the Pre Islamic Arab World, Jews, Syrian Christians, Catholic Armenians, Africa, Irano-Afghans, followers of Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans and among the Slavs as well as Catholics in Western Europe in association with German tribes and Hungarians. Local Rajbanshis believe that their land in the Sub-Himalayas was directly or indirectly governed by these Guptas and their followers. They say that many of the ancient Shiva temples in the Sub-Himalayas were established on ancient trade routes and may be as early as the Gupta period. Near Jalpesh, there is Jatileshtar Shiva temple and this is said that it was established or rebuilt by the Guptas. They further said that in those days the area was densely covered with forest and rivers served as hidden trade routes. Bamboo, cane and wild grass grew there in huge quantities. Even now coins were excavated from various parts of North Bengal and they were dated back to the Gupta period. So, Jalpesh is linked to the Kushanas and Jatileshtar to the Guptas. In monsoon, people come to the Jalpesh and pray to fulfill their wishes. Paddy and vegetables are grown in huge amount by applying manual labour and mostly traditional cultivation process. Again, after harvesting the monsoon paddy in Spring and completing all the post-harvest processes in Fall, people again came to Jalpesh. That time a traditional fair is organized there. The temple site is very close to a traditional market area. Religious begging is a characteristic feature of this fair. The beggars are wearing any tidy clothing and pilgrims collect processed paddy items like *chura* and *muri* with cane molasses and give it to the beggars. It is believed that at a time Tibetans and Dukpa people from Bhutan falling under the Buddhist World came to the place to exchange ethno-medicines, yak wool, fur, traditional ornaments and metal objects with

rice and process rice. Till now, various iron items used as essential commodity, ornaments, crystal items, fly-whisk (brush for fanning made up of hairs of a yak's tail), sacred stones and suffrage are sold in this occasion. Other things that could be observed are tattooing, woodworks and cane works, cane, rice cakes, furniture, ethno-medicine, honey, vegetables, pottery, etc. Both sites are provided with sacred pond and sacred trees. Jatileshtar Shiva temple was actually situated in Hushlurdanga which means land of Hultsch or Hultz. So, Shiva and Buddhist cults prevailed in this area during Kushana and Gupta periods. The region was influenced by pro-Kushana elements and Guptas of *Magadha*. These Guptas were familiar to Brahmanism, Vaishnavism and even Buddhism. Later Guptas and King Shashanka also supported Lord Shiva. After that it went to the hands of Buddhists of North India-Brahmaputra valley alliance and Tibeto-Kashmir. On the other hand Arab traders brought Islam in the sea port of Chittagong. In such a situation, local rulers unanimously selected Palas as the rulers of Bengal-Bihar region.

Gupta Empire occupied Gujarat-Malwa region from Indo-Scythians and came into direct trade contacts with Roman Empire. Gupta Empire that once established on the base of mainstream Brahmanism gradually shifted towards Buddhism and Vaishnavism. The Empire had two centers: Pataliputra for eastern zone and Ujjain for the western part. Similarly, Rome was the capital of Western Roman Empire and center for Catholic Christianity; whereas Constantinople served as the capital of eastern Roman Empire and major center for Orthodox Christianity. Hun, German and Tocharian were different communities of Eurasia. White Hun or Hapthalite Hun or Chwa Hun or Chauhan or Chaudhury crossed Irano-Afghan Shahanshahi or Shishodia or Sassanoid Empire and Kingdom of Kiderite Kushans to enter into India, attacked Gupta Empire, accepted Hinduism, transformed into Neo-Kshatriya, settled in Rajputana desert areas near Aravali range, experienced feudalism in western zone and let eastern part ruled by Later Guptas

and King Shashanka who preferred worship of the Shiva Cult. Similarly, Huns also moved to Europe along with the Germans after crossing the Slav territories, attacked Roman Empire, accepted Catholic Christianity, became the Knight warriors, settled in Hungary near Alps Mountain, watched German tribes entering into Western Roman Empire from North European Plains to start on feudalism and let the eastern part be governed by Justinian (lived from 482 to 565 A.D.) and His followers who believed in Orthodox Christianity. Arab traders reached in both Mediterranean Sea and ports of South Asia. They occupied Iberian Peninsula and Indus delta. They were also in close contact with Eastern Roman Empire and Bay of Bengal region. They occupied Egypt, North Africa and Near East. They again established colonies into Malaysia, Indonesia and Rakhine (Arakan). Holy Roman Empire was set up as a defensive mechanism and Austro-Hungary was its last political center. Such state formation could also be seen in Western India from Mandsaur and then under the influence of Gujjar Pratihar. Austro-Hungarians established Hapsburg Empire. Similarly, Gujjar Pratihars occupied a larger portion of North and Central India. There was a Brandenburg in Prussia. Buddhist centers again emerged out in North India and were still there in Afghan mountain. Polish-Lithuanian Duchy connected Baltic Sea with Black Sea. Tebeto-Kashmir equally spread from Central Asia to Bay of Bengal. Vikings from Scandinavia sailed into Western European ports upto Morocco. Kashmir similarly spread over the entire Indus valley and reached to the ports of Indus delta and even Gujarat-Konkan coast. In such a situation, Pala rule developed in Bihar-Bengal region and it primarily managed to occupy East Bengal, North Bengal, Kamrup, Mithila, coastal Bengal along with Odisha and tried to establish control over Kannauj in North India. Palas for that had to compete with Western India and Deccan. That was very much similar to the question of control over Near East among Byzantium (Eastern Roman Empire), Holy Romans and Armenian groups. Arabs

occupied Near East ports and sacred places and Crusade began. At the same time, Cholas replaced earlier rulers in extreme south of Indian peninsula and reduced Arab influence in Bay of Bengal, Sri Lanka, Malabar Coast, South East Asia and Indonesia for sometime. In post-Chola situation, Arab colonies were developed in the extreme south. Similarly, Arabs were in Near East. So many Rajput states were emerged out over the *Gujjara-Pratihara* Empire. These Rajput states, Later Chalukyas of Deccan, extreme south groups, Kamboja-Pala and local agitators created problems in front of the Palas of Bihar-Bengal. Similarly, Byzantium kept relationship with Western Europe, Armenia, Arabs traders, Slav nations and its peoples. Ottoman Turks destroyed Constantinople and Turk-Afghan associates in India occupied Bihar-Bengal region. Ottomans further approached towards Balkans and Black Sea area. They also moved into Arab colonies in the Near East. They tried to move into Armenia and battled with Iran. Similarly, Turk-Afghan elements in India destroyed Buddhist *Viharas* and rapidly spread over to Bengal-Bihar. They further proceeded towards North Bengal, Sub-Himalayas, East Bengal, pockets in Bodo-Kamta belt and Bay of Bengal region. They even moved upto the Arab colonies in the extreme south. They also occupied Deccan temporarily where various Shiite states were to be formed.

Palas (750-1150 AD) in Bengal-Bihar established Buddhist rule and in initial stage took active part in South Asian politics and tried its best to capture of North Indian power center after competing with Deccan and West Indian forces. Barman Kings of Bodo-Kamta belt, Chandra Dynasty in Harikel, Kamboja-Palas from Indo-Afghan region, elements from Deccan India and extreme south of Indian peninsula, Gujjars from Western India, Rajput elements from North-Central India and Kaibarta agitation in the Sub-Himalayan North Bengal were different challenges to these Buddhist Palas. Palas had their major power centers in Magadha-Gaya region

and Dinajpur Rajshahi areas. Both were major Buddhist Centers. Nalanda and Vikramshila Buddhist centers were in the Magadha-Gaya zone. Some others like Mahasthangarh, Paharpur and Sompuri were situated in Dinajpur Rajshahi region.

Palas came into power of Bengal-Bihar region in post-Gupta period. They might have some links with the Barindland or Dinajpur-Rajshahi. Guptas had earlier supported Brahmanism, but later turned towards Buddhism and Vaishnavism. Certain Hun elements from Eurasia used the Indo-European line, Irano-Afghan region, Kiderite Kushana Kingdom and Indus valley area to enter into North India where they became Hindu and got the status of Neo-Kshatriya. Western part of Gupta Empire centering around Gujarat-Malwa trade zone and encompassing North-Central India experienced feudalism. These Huns along with other associates made Rajputana and Aravali Mountain their stronghold near Malwa-Gujarat pocket. Later Guptas with help of regional rulers governed Bengal-Bihar region for some more time. Neo-Kshatriyas in western part of former Gupta Empire made serious damage to Buddhism and backed the agrarian rural structure under feudalism. In eastern part still under the Late Guptas, some kind of orthodox attitude came into appearance with putting priority on worship of Shiva Cult. Kamrup, Deccan and extreme south of Indian Peninsula maintained their own traditions. In the mean time, Arab traders with Islam came to Indian ports as a part of their spread throughout a huge region from the Mediterranean Sea to South China Sea. They established certain colonies including Sind province, Indian Ocean islands, Rakhine coast, Indo-Malayan belt and East Indian islands. Interestingly, Buddhism again revived in North India in North India and Emperor Harshavardhan (590-647 A.D.) was an eminent personality and in contact with the Buddhist World. Harsha with help of allies like Kamrup occupied Bihar-Bengal region by defeating Shashanka who damaged Buddhist center at Buddha Gaya (Bodhgaya). Kashmir falling under Tibeto-Kashmir region then

rapidly moved into Indus valley, North India and even Bengal-Bihar region. Though Kashmir was then a Hindu Kingdom, but it was in touch with Buddhist territories of Sino-Tibet region. Tibet also occupied Brahmaputra valley and Bengal to establish contact among Central Asia, China and Bay of Bengal. Dinajpur-Rajshahi served as a major center for worshipping Jainism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism and the Sun Deity as alternatives to the Shiva Cult whom the Hindu *Kshatriya* rulers of *Pundravardhana* had respected the most. Shiva Cult was also worshipped by forest dwellers, agriculturalists, traders, various castes, ruling categories, Non-Aryans, Pre-Vedic Aryans, folk people, urbanites and ancient civilizations. *Pundranagara* or Mahasthangarh near Bogra had been such a city now fallen in Bangladesh and became a place for Buddhism. Similarly, *Devkot* or Kotivarsa near Gangarampur had been another such city area still in Indian portion of Dinajpur-Rajshahi (known as Gourbengal) renowned for *Virupakshya* Shiva Cult, but later turned towards Vaishnavism. Paundrik Vasudeva and King Ban were two mythical characteristics also mentioned in the epics. Harsha, Kashmir and Tibet had their impact on Dinajpur-Rajshahi like Nandas, Mauryas and Kushans. Palas then came into power in second half of eighth century A.D. over Bengal-Bihar, were great patrons of Buddhism and established innumerable Buddhist monasteries in their Kingdom. However, Emperor Dharmapala however set up a four faced Shiva Cult in the same Buddha Gaya (Bodhgaya). Palas competed with Gujjara-Pratiharas and Deccan rulers in order to establish control over North India. Gujjar was a warrior tribe accompanied with the Indo-Hapthalite Huns and also living in Rajputana region near Gujrat-Malwa zone. Gujjara-Pratihara Hindu King Mahendrapala occupied a large portion of Bengal-Bihar including Dinajpur-Rajshahi. Narayanpala of Pala Dynasty in the second half of ninth century A.D. started worshipping Lord Vishnu and it is said that he also set up a Shiva temple at *Devkot*. In East Bengal, Chandra dynasty came into power,

ruled the place for 150 years (900-1050 A.D.), supported *Vajrayana* Buddhism, improved trade with both Buddhist and Arab worlds and approached towards Gournag. In first half of tenth century A.D., Yashodas became the minister of King Rajyapala. Yasodas probably belonged to Kaibarta group that had stronghold in Barindland. Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gournag, Barindland and Mahananda river system were all overlapped with one another and therefore remained as a very important geo-strategic location. Kaibartas in Barindland and neighboring river systems have been considered as the agriculturists and owner-cultivators. They were prosperous but without any statehood. They were probably related to the lost Kingdom of *Pundravardhana* once ruled by the Pundra *Kshatriyas* who became *Vratya* or excluded. So, some of these Shiva worshippers of Barindland or Dinajpur-Rajshahi or *Pundrabardhana* might be Pundra *Kshatriyas* in disguise. Some of them however got even a much lower status like fisherman community, boatman group and transporters who did not know much about settled cultivation. They were designated as *Jalua* Kaibarta. I mean to say that after losing their ruling authority, Pundra *Kshatriyas* had to stay in disguise, take alternative occupation(s) and that new identity or identities could include Kaibarta category and *Jalua* Kaibarta group. If so, they would always maintain a hidden ambition to uplift their status from exclusion to inclusion. From exclusion or disguise, they should want to get back the *Kshatriya* rank as a Vedic Aryan descent even higher than any Non-Aryan or Pre-Vedic Aryan ruling category status. The Kaibartas or a section of them might be in some kind of relationship with the Rajbanshis who were not only in disguise or exclusion, but also in exile. Excluded Pundra *Kshatriyas* in camouflage often went into exile and after losing their statehood fled to interior regions of Barindland, Teesta-Brahmaputra region or *Pragjotishpur*, Morang, Sub-Himalayas, interior pockets of East Bengal, Bodo-Kamta belt and mangroves of Gangetic delta. They had not only to stay in disguise and

accept other occupation like agriculture or local level trade, but also out migrated from the most fertile lands, river ports and urban centers. They have been known as the Rajbanshis in Teesta-Brahmaputra valley and Morang which were primarily occupied by other people. They might be further reduced to labour category, serving castes, and fisherman community comparable to *Dhangar*, *Modesia*, *Dobhasi*, *Dauya*, *Garol*, *Jalua*, *Jhalua*, *Jhalo Malo* and in relationship or contact with different tribes like Kirat, Koch, Mech, Bodo, Garo, Rabha, Jalda, Toto, Doya, Dhimal, Dukpa, Tharu, Limbu, Lepcha or Rong and Tibetans. Even we could see the Palas being associated with pottery and fishing profession instead of ruling a state. There are low status communities like Pulia or Polia or Puliya besides Pod; often Pulia are shown associated with the Rajbanshis. Puliyas and Pods might be excluded types of Palas and Pundras respectively. Das is a common surname used by Kaibarta, Rajbanshi, Vaishnava, Mahishwa and different Bengali and Assamese caste groups. Rajbanshis are now using various *Kshatriya* titles as a result of their status mobilization movement, but still many Rajbanshis use Das in their surnames. Kaibartas are also known as *Bamunia*. It sounds very similar to the terms like *Bau* and *Baun* used by Rajbanshis and Nepali Brahmin group respectively. Mahishwa is a Bengali caste involved in land ownership, agriculture and even local level trade. The name is again related with *Mahish* or water buffalo which is important cattle and stay in mud land areas. Kaibartas are there in all parts of Bengal in addition to Brahmaputra valley, Bodo-Kamta belt, Odisha, Bihar and North India in different names. So, we can say that Kaibarta identity is a greater social fold than the Rajbanshi identity or *Kashyapa* clan and could provide shelter to some excluded groups staying in disguise if not fled into complete exile. In second half of tenth century A.D., Kambojas established control over Dinajpur and power shifted to the Kamboja Palas. Kambojas were originally from Afghanistan and related to local people of that mountain terrain domesticating the Afghan horse

breed. They were the inhabitants of Kabul valley and such mountain people could also be seen in Kashmir, Central Asia, Irano-Afghan region, Indus valley, different parts of India, Indo-Himalayas and even Bodo-Kamta belt. So, they were like other invaders like Indo-Aryans, Indo-Iranians, Indo-Parthians, Indo-Greeks, Indo-Scythians, Kushan Shahi, Indo-Hapthelites, Gujjars, Chauhan, Rajput, Shishodia, Abhar, Khas, Hazara, Jat and so many groups who then became integral part of South Asian population. Kambojas were warrior tribes and after accepting Hinduism behaved like the *Kshatriya*. Kamboj tribe is still there in Pak-Afghan region, known as Kamboh and follows Islam. In Pre-Islamic period, those people were also associated with idol worship, belief in Shiva Cult and known for their horses. Probably, they served as cavalry in Pala troops and horse traders. They might have habitats in North India as well and from there invade in Dinajpur region. *Tangan* or *Tanga* was a locally adapted horse variety in Dinajpur region. Tangon is also name of a local rain-fed river flowing near Kushnamdi, Bansihari, Harirampur and Malda proper to meet Mahananda. These places used to be important centers for worship of Shiva, Buddha, Sun and Vishnu. Jagaddala Buddhist monastery at Bansihari was linked with Tibetan Buddhism. Brahmani river valley in Harirampur was the battlefield where followers of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva fought with each other. There is the myth that both King Ban(a) and King Paundrik Vasudeva were against Vaishnavism. Kamboja-Palas spread over Dinajpur-Rajshahi or Barindland where other Hindu elements like Pratiharas, Kaibartas and Rajbanshis (?) had been present from before. Kamboja-Palas were basically followers of Vedic Hinduism and worshippers of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu with very few exceptions. They also spread over from Barindland to Gour Bengal and coastal South Bengal where Shiva Cult existed along by the side of Lord Buddha with equal importance. We could see Adhikari surname in both coastal South Bengal and among the Rajbanshi priests. In addition to that, Hindu Rajputs and pro-Rajput

elements from Central India in that post-Pratihara period were constantly trying to enter into Mid Bengal, Gourbengal, Dinajpur-Rajshahi and North Bihar through Rajmahal area and Chotonagpur plateau. Chandellas were quite successful in that process. In the first decades of eleventh century A.D., Chola rulers worshipping the Shiva Cult from extreme south of Indian Peninsula also entered in Bengal-Bihar region and included the Kamboja-Pala coastal pocket to their territory. Cholas actually competed with the Arab-Buddhist nexus and established control over Bay of Bengal, Indo-Malayan region, East Indian islands, sea routes, Malayan coast, Mysore, Andhra coast under a branch of the Chalukyas, Raichur basin, Deccan, Konkan coast, isle of Sri Lanka, Odisha coast and even coastal region of South Bengal locally ruled by a Kamboja-Pala. Coastal South Bengal like Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Rakhine and Odisha was a major trade zone and major center for Buddhism practitioners. At the same time of Chola occupancy, Islamic warriors from Afghanistan occupied Indus valley, attacked Rajput states of North and Central India, and fought back with the Central Asian Muslim states just two centuries before the establishment of Turk-Afghan Shahi in South Asia. That was also contemporary to Crusade. We could compare these incidents with history of British East India Company from getting trade license for Bengal in 1717 A.D. to Sepoi Mutiny in 1857 A.D. The differences were that Company got success in Anglo-French wars, occupied South Bengal coastal regions successfully, gradually approached towards major political centers (Mid Bengal, East Bengal, Purnea and Munger), included Barindland with its interior pockets, negotiated between Sikkim and Nepal, dealt well with Teesta-Brahmaputra valley, incorporated the Bodo-Kamta belt, established control over Andhra coast and extreme south of Indian Peninsula, entered in Mysore under Arab rulers, penetrated into Deccan, figured out terms and conditions with the rulers of Indian heartland (Central India, Malwa-Gujarat, Cauvery delta, Rajputana and Jatland), stopped

Rohilkhand and Sikh Kingdom at Indus valley the gateway for the Kamboja like groups or Irano-Afghans or Central Asians or Eurasians or Continental Europeans, executed treaties with Burma and Indo-Himalayan belt, and made North Indian Gangetic valley the subsidiary. Company and British Thorn had further interests in South China, Indo-Malayan belt, Dutch colony in Indonesia, Australasia, Ocean islands, Ceylon, Afro-Asian region, Arab countries including Egypt, Irano-Afghan zone, Indo-Tibet relationship, Turk-Russia relationship in Eurasia, Continental European politics, Arctic region, Catholic Nations, Slav Nations, independence of America, independence of Latin American countries, and British colonies in West Indies, Meso-America and Canada. Back in to the discussion, in a sentence we could say that when Hindu or pro-Hindu elements were being organized under Hindu ministers of the Palas, Gujjars or Gujjar Pratiharas or Pratiharas, Kaibartas, local Kshatriyas agriculturalists or fisherman by occupation (Rajbanshi or *Vratya Kshatriya*?), Kambojas or Kamboja-Palas, regional rulers of North Bihar, that in Kamrup, that in Odisha, Central Indian Kingdoms, Deccan links and Cholas from the extreme south; then at the same time, Buddhist World plus the so called Magical World and the Arab traders through Indo-Tibet territories, South East Asia, the Chandra dynasty at Harikela in East Bengal and Arakan (now Rakhine) had closer contacts with the Palas of Bihar-Bengal. Mahipala I from Bengal-Bihar in the initial decades of eleventh century A.D. occupied Varanasi-Saranath region, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gour Bengal and East Bengal upto Tripura. Buddhism revived again in Barindland; there is a place by the name Mahipal under Devikot-Kushmandi-Kaliaganj region. *Vajrayana* besides other doctrines of Buddhism from East Bengal and Tibet had accomplished its great influence over Bengal-Bihar. Constant attacks were simultaneously made by pro-Rajput Central Indian forces. Atisa Dipankar Srijnan was a great Buddhist scholar and belonged to the Chandra dynasty; he while at *Magadha* mediated between the Palas and the

Central Indian pro-Rajput Kalchuris and then went to Tibet. Marital tie up was also executed between two opposite forces. Mahipala II in 1070s imprisoned his own brothers and became the king. There was an agitation against him in the Barindland led by the Kaibartas. Kaibartas occupied the power of Barindland and also got support from other regional leaders. Did the Kaibartas want to grab the power? Or did they get the support from common public? Did they take in a pro-Hindu stand against Buddhist hegemony in Dinajpur-Rajshahi? Did they receive from Pro-Rajput elements? We are not sure about nature of this Kaibarta movement- fisherman agitation or peasant movement or peoples' protest or else something! It was led by Divya or Dibbok who established independent statehood in Barindland and followed by Rudra or Ruddok and King Bhim. It is said that King Bhim had very stronghold over Mechi-Mahananda basin. Bhimbar near Sonapur there is a historical place. In that same base at Terai Sub-Himalayan zone, Baunibhuta is a small village. It has been already mentioned that Kaibartas are also addressed as *Baunia*. Bairhatta in Harirampur and Biratnagar in Morang are often considered as the places under King *Virata's* Kingdom where legendary *Pandavas* took shelter in disguise for one year after being in exile for prolonged twelve years. *Pandavas* were five brothers, *Kshatriyas* and somehow related with customs of polyandry and even polygynandry. They belonged to the Vedic Aryans, but in against Pure Racial line preferred to be associated with matriarchy, ancient trade routes, Pre-Vedic Aryans, Non-Aryans, Vaishnavism, snake worshippers, forest dwellers, *Kiratas*, hunters, Shiva cult, Dharma, urbanism, hidden treasures, Himalayas, Tibet, *Raksha*, *Yaksha*, *Deva*, *Danava*, *Gandharva*, *Vanara*, *Kinnara*, *Apsara*, and so many mythical entities. So, exclusion, exile and disguise are three important features for the people living in the region and from time to time, they wanted to get back their lost status. Ramapala (1082-1124 A.D.) as the last famous Pala King shifted his capital in Itahar, managed to control

that long going agitation in Barindland, established control over Varman Kings of East Bengal or Harikel or Bodo-Kamta region in post-Chandra situation there, occupied North Bihar and Teesta-Brahmaputra valley (Kamrup Kingdom) due to the extra efforts made by Hindu minister, and kept good terms with his Central Indian relatives along with Chola Empire in Indian Peninsula and local rulers of South Bengal and Rajmahal-Chotonagpur region. Later Chalukya Hindu kings from Deccan however created problems for the Pala Kingdom. Other Hindu dominated areas like North Bihar, Brahmaputra valley and Odisha got out of control. North Indian Rajput state occupied *Magadha*. Varmans or Barmans in East Bengal and Boro-Kamta region became independent. Last Pala King Madanapala (1144-1162 A.D.) ruled in Buddha Gaya region (Bodhgaya) in South Bihar. Sena Kings from South Bengal were contemporary to 1070s Kaibarta agitation, since then gradually expanded into other territories and in the last days of the Palas entered into Gour Bengal and Barindland. They established Lakshmanavati at Gour as the major power center which is on Mahananda very close to Malda town. Senas were also known for supporting *Kaulinya Pratha*, devotion to Shiva Cult, relation with *Varendri* Brahmans, coexistence with Monk Jetari and Bara Bhuinya feudal system, and support to Vaishnavism. Navadwip was also their capital and is still the most important Vaishnava center in Bengal. Various female fertility cults have been also there. Buddhist fertility cults were transformed into Hindu Goddesses like Mahishasurmardini, Barahi, Chandi, Tara, etc. Turk-Afghan elements under the banner of Sufism and Islam ruled the place for about four hundred years (13th to late 16th century A.D.) followed by direct control of the Mughal Padshahi, Nabob families and British East India Company for more than two hundred fifty years (till mid 19th century A.D.). King Ganesha *Danujamardandev* was only Hindu ruler of Bengal in Turk-Afghan period and born in the Barindland region. Two different Shahi dynasties, Habsi, Suri and Karrani families

were amongst the major ruling lineages of Bengal Bihar during Turk-Afghan regime. Direct control was also there for some small portion and name of *Pundrabardhana* or Mahasthangarh was changed to Bogra or *Bogura* after Prince Bogra Shah. Khaljis having links with Irano-Afghan zone and with active support from newly established Turk-Afghan authority over mainland India after the efforts of late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries A.D. first invaded Bengal. They were just like the Kambojas of late tenth and early eleventh centuries A.D. Both came from North Indian settlements. Kambojas in majority supported Shiva and Vishnu cults. Khaljis supported Islam. Their presence in Bengal reduced the Buddhist hegemony. Khaljis destroyed Buddhist centers at Bihar and Barindland and that included Nalanda, Vikramashila, Jagaddala, etc. They did not completely rule out Sena dynasty in Bengal and let it rule in East Bengal and Delta region. Khaljis did not enter into Bengal from North Bihar, river routes or Rajmahal. They in disguise of horse traders and probably getting support of the local folks entered in Bengal from the way through Chotonagpur. They like the Kambojas mainly targeted Barindland and shifted state capital from Navadwip to Gourbengal. They occupied Dinajpur ridge and moved towards northern portion of Barindland. Their objective was to reach into Tibet through Chumbi valley and occupy the alternative way to import horses in Bengal from Eurasia. Was there an initiative to form a Hindu-Buddhist nexus and formation of a new political alternative in South Asia? We do not know. But that was the Sena period when we could see Orthodox Hinduism in the form of Shiva Cult, which was then followed by Vaishnavism, *Varendri* Brahmanism advocating for Pre-Vedic Aryanism of Indo-Himalayas, formation of autonomous Baro-Bhuinya feudalism in agrarian rural structure of Bengal and Brahmaputra valley, state formations in Bodo-Kamta belt followed by gradual entry of Chetia and Ahom from South East Asia, impact of Tibetan School of Buddhism over entire Bengal-

Bihar initiated by Monk Jetari staying at Barindland and empowerment of Mech tribe in the Sub-Himalayas falling under Bodo language group followed by establishment of Kamtapur state. Kamtapur was established by Khen group. Khens were probably related to Kheng people of Bhutan Himalayas who were other than Drukpa or Dukpa or Dakpa, Monpa or Menba, Dzalakha or Jalda (?), Bumthang, Kurtop, Sharchop, Lhokpa or Lhokpu or Lhop or Doya, Lepcha or Rong, Toto, Dhimal, Limbu or Subba, Rai, Tharu, Mongor or Magar, Yalmo, Ngalop or Dzongkha, Bhote or Bhutia, Denzongpa or Dranjongke, Khampa, Brokpa, Laka or Lakha, etc. Kheg people belong to non- Indo Aryan speaking group. They still follow Tibetan Buddhism. They used to stay in semi-autonomous pockets and are close to both Ngalop and Bunthang serving high altitude passes into Tibet. However, Kheng people originally fall under great Bodo group. So, we could assume that the political power went into the hand of Bodo or Mech people and Tibet through Indo-Bhutan connectivity. Bodos were in control of larger portion of Teesta-Torsha valley and Khen dynasty established their capital at Gosanimari over Torsha-Jaldhaka confluence known to be sacred Dharala. Bodos were not originally Buddhists, but matriarchal to some extent. They were animists and worshipped Proto-Shiva or similar demigods. Khens however in the Kamtapurgarh or the fort at Gosanimari river port established the female cult Kamteshwari. The cult was other than that of Kamakhya at Kamrup and more similar to Buddhist cult Tara or Kondi. Names of the Bodo and Khen rulers were like Hindu rulers. Even King Prithu at Panchagarh-Rajganj was not a Rajput but Khen. King Prithu defended the Khalji force from entering into Kamtapur on a way to Bhutan Himalaya and Chumbi valley. Hindu names of the rulers, similarity between the names of King Prithu and Rajput Prithviraj Chauhan, power in the hands of Bodo or Mech people and contacts with Buddhist pockets of Tibeto-Himalayas were remarkable features of Kamtapur Kingdom. Kamtapur was one of the

successors of Buddhist Palas. Hindu Deva dynasty in Kamrup failed to tackle the Bara Bhuiyas, control Bodo groups, resist Ahom and Chetia and counter Tibetan Buddhism in disguise. However, Dinajpur proper went into the hands of Khaljis and Islam spread rapidly throughout Dinajpur-Rajshahi including Gour Bengal and Bogra. Many of the local people accepted Islam including a section of the Mech people. It was like something similar to spread of Islam and Sufism in Kashmir valley where Hindu Pandits used to worship Shiva Cult, Lord Vishnu, the Sun deity, several female fertility cults and Kartika. Many of the Pundra *Kshatriyas* in exclusion and various camouflages accepted Islam. Nashya Seikh is a local Muslim community with maximum concentration in Indo-Bangladesh region of Barindland. It consists of converted Rajbanshis living outside Kamtapur and Morang. Mosques, Sufi Darhaga and Mazars were built up near Hindu and Buddhist worship grounds, at ruins of ancient urban centers, on ancient trade routes and in market places. This could be seen in Gourn Bengal, Mahananda valley, Barindland or Dinajpur ridge, and Dinajpur-Rajshahi region. Same thing happened from major administrative centers to remote isolated areas. Islam also spread into Mid Bengal, East Bengal, Gangetic Delta, coastal areas, Bodo-Kamta belt under Indo-Bangladesh territories and over the ancient trade routes. Gour, Pandua and Bogra (formerly *Pundranagara* or Mahasthangarh) became major Islamic centers. Mosques were also built up near Bangarh and interior parts of Kumarganj. Bangarh ruins are locally considered as haunted place. Hindu *Tantrik* and Buddhist *Vajrayana* completely overlapped on each other. Buddhism was not actually opposed, but people had fear of magico-religious practices, especially the black magic, human sacrifices, cannibalism and sexual cannibalism. Mosques of small size were built up in forest areas. We do not know if there was any major role to be played by the excluded *Kshatriyas* living in disguise and exile in the territory fallen under Kamtapur. On the other side, Vaishnavism rapidly spread

over Mithila and Bengal. Gour Bengal and Barind along with Mahananda valley were no such exceptions. Islampur and Mechi-Mahananda basin went under Purnea. Hindu King Ganesha could not rule there for a longer period. Kalapahar, a converted Muslim, destroyed many Hindu temples and relics throughout the Barind closer to Panchagarh fort area and Kamtapur Kingdom. Military activities were at high stage over there and forts like Ekdala were made over in Dinajpur-Mahananda region. Habsi rule was imposed over Bengal. Besides Turk-Afghan rule in Bengal, Jaunpur and Kara Manikpur in were developed as Muslim power centers. Urban centers at Rohilkhand (formerly *Ahichhatra* or *Panchal*) in North Indian Sub-Himalayas incorporated under the mainland after a long process There was famine in North India especially Jatland areas. Malwa, Gujarat, Central India and Bundelkhand were also incorporated. Narmada valley, Deccan and Telengana were occupied and later on Bahamani Empire and Shiite states were emerged out over there. They also moved into the extreme south where at Mabbar Arabs established their colony. Simultaneously Hindu Vijayanagara Kingdom from coastal Andhra spread into all over the extreme south involving Mysore, Mahlabar and Ceylon. Coastal Andhra was a very important trade zone and the Kingdom had near about four hundred ports or *pattanam*s. These ports were in trade with Arab World, Buddhist World and Europe. Trade with the magical world made this region so much prosperous and full of gold. Andhra ports should be in contact with ports in Bengal, Rakhine and Burma. Bihar and Bengal were considered as separate administrative regions. From Gournagpur, local rulers gradually approached towards South Bengal, East Bengal, Delta, Bodo-Kamta territory, Saptagram port, Sonargaon port, Odisha, Rajmahal, Mithila and even Nepal. However, their intervention in Kamtapur and interior parts of Brahmaputra were initially not successful. Stories of Maynamati, King Habachandra and Minister Gabachandra were famous in entire Bodo-Kamta region from

Kamtapur-Rangpur to Chittagong-Rakhine range. In British period, Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem on Habachandra and Gabachandra in relation to leather show invention. Farr, woolen and leather works used to be parts of local industries in South China, Tibet, Bhutan and pastoral communities of Teesta-Brahmaputra. Yak, goat, mithun, sheep and buffalo skins were used as raw material. Deer, bison, bear, monkey, tiger, *gharial*, snake, dolphin and leopard were among the fauna of Teesta-Brahmaputra forest zone. Elephant and rhinos are still present here. Leather work was also common in Bengal. Muslims also cared for their livestock and also use cow skin. Chetia or Chhutia was a warrior community of Brahmaputra interior where at a time Pala rulers had been in control. There is a place known as Chutiakhora near Majhiali in Chopra block. Silk, jute, cane, bamboo, sugarcane, wood, rapeseeds, spices, milk product, thread from dry animal intestine and herbs, ethno-medicine, fruits (including lemon and oranges), cotton silk, natural dye, catechu, areca and nuts, betel, lime, alcohol, dry fishes, dry food, paddy, mushrooms, jungle potato, millet, maize, tobacco, etc. were important local products. British incorporated tea, indigo, rubber and cotton to the place. Wheat, soybean and different pulse grains are now being yielded. At end of fifteenth century A.D. Kamtapur Kingdom fell down. There was an internal problem in the state and Muslim rulers temporarily occupy Kamta Kingdom. That was contemporary to arrival of Portuguese traders to Indian ports through Africa and Indian Ocean reducing importance of the Arab traders. That was also the beginning of direct contact with European traders through the sea routes reaching every corners of the world. There was also political turmoil in Central Asia. In Brahmaputra, Ahoms were comparably at a better position in comparison with the Chetia rulers. In such a condition, Mughals or Turk-Mongols from Central Asia through Irano-Afghanistan and Punjab occupied North India and entered in Bihar-Bengal. Koch Bihar Kingdom was in form on the ruins of Kamtapur. The state was

developed by Koch tribe who had marital relationship with Mech people. Interestingly, Koch tribe apart from other Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman or Bodo groups does not talk in Tibeto-Burmese languages but Indo-Aryan dialect. So, there was a drastic shift in the politics of Teesta-Brahmaputra valley. Koch after formation of the state Koch Bihar declared that their real identity ought to be the Rajbanshi and Hindu. Rajbanshis of Rangpur, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Barindland, Mahananda river system and Morang along with Pal or Puliya, Kaibarta or Mahishwa, Pundra or Pod, various Hindu caste groups and converted Muslims do not consider Koch as the real Rajbanshis. Pundra *Kshatriya* in disguise and exclusion became Rajbanshi. So, was the matter of Koch a case of being in further exclusion and disguise in exile under Kamtapur? In Kamtapur, language was predominantly non- Indo Aryan. There was higher connectivity with Tibeto-Burmese belt on the way to South China and South East Asia. There was a blend of Buddhism, animism and folk belief. Hindu Gods and Goddesses were seemingly worshipped as Buddhist cults like Mahakal, Nag or Dragon, Tara, Kondi, Bhairavi, etc. There was formation of new sub-structures through intermarriages with Bodo groups. There was a tendency towards inclusion in Bodo-Kamta tradition. Were the ministers of Kamtapur Kingdom from Indo-Aryan speaking Rajbanshis in exile, Rajbanshis with further exclusion and Rajbanshis in tribal disguise (Koch?) beyond any such caste identities? There were not only Koch but also Koch Hajo, Hajo, Hajoi and Hajong in Brahmaputra region. Koch tribe is related to Sankosh River rather than Mechi-Mahananda, Teesta-Dharala, Jaldhaka-Torsha and Kaljani-Raidak. Sankosh is the other name of Shiva cult. Did the Koch chiefdoms agitate against Kamtapur as previously happened in Pala rule over Barindland by Kaibarta movement? We do not know as there is no such substantial proof. Rajbanshis however treat Koch people as palanquin bearers. Palanquin bearers of whom? Khen or Bodo rulers of Kamtapur? In Hindu society, there is the caste system based on

occupational hierarchy and approved by religion. It also serves the traditional agrarian structures by providing a type of division of labour. Even caste like relationships could be found among rural Muslims and agrarian tribes. Castism as creed and on racial line could be found among some minority communities also. Castism is often being associated with Brahmanism. Lower caste people try to imitate Brahmans, upper castes and dominant castes for status mobilization. But here is the case of following dominant community as the reference group (Khen or Tibetan or Bhutia or Bodo or Mech?) for certain politico-economic gains Superordination and subordination relationships also exist in trade routes but at community level. Superordinates consider the subordinates as their porter tribes, servicing community and even a slave community. We have heard about costly slaves, slaves of high quality, slave dynasty, slave soldier, slave army and slave chiefs (in army, ministry and administration). It should not be misinterpreted with bonded labour, wage labour or day labour, employee and a joint extended family system. There were also instances of slave revolts and civil war on slavery. Was the empowerment of Koch on the ruins of Kamta Kingdom an output of slave revolution or superordinate-subordinate clash or revolt of elite slave section at high rank or a kind of sex revolution? Again, we do not have any substantial proof. Koch Kings however declared that they belonged to the Rajbanshis, accepted Hinduism, established Bododevi female cult parallel to Kamteshwari and Kamakhya, and extended state support to the ancient Shiva temples of Koch Bihar and Jalpaiguri including Jalpesh and Baneshwar. So, there was a Koch-Rajbanshi formulation. However, common Rajbanshis and converted Muslims try to prove that they are other than common Koch people. At the same time, many people believe in Koch-Rajbanshi association. Mughals in first half of sixteenth century A.D. entered in Indian heartland, moved into Bengal-Bihar, and subsequently were ousted from South Asia by Turk-Afghan rulers of

Bengal-Bihar. That incident was contemporary to Hindu Vijayanagara Empire defeating Muslim rulers of Deccan, establishment of Koch Bihar Kingdom, increase in Indo-European trade, Portuguese establishment in Goa, Shiite state formation in Deccan and Hindu Hemchandra as the last Hindu Emperor of India from Old Fort of Delhi. Hemchandra was from Bengal and associate of the Turk-Afghans of Bengal-Bihar. In the last phase of sixteenth century A.D., things were again changing. Mughals in exile got support from Iran and reoccupied India, Shiite states in Deccan reunited and destroyed Vijayanagara Empire, Mughal Padshahi formed alliance with Rajput leaders, Mughal-Rajput alliance took the policy of One India, Gondwana and Koch Bihar became their associates, and Indian government gradually moved inside Shiite states of Deccan and Bengal controlled by local Rajahs and Bara Bhuinyas (also Baro Bhuinyas). Even we could see Kamboja and Hindu regional rulers in Bengal during Karranis, Mughals and the British. Mughals deployed Kamboh and Rajput governors in Bengal. Hindu states and local rulers were there in Teesta-Brahmaputra valley, Bodo-Kamta belt, Gangetic delta, Rarh or Suhma, Chotonagpur plateau, Odisha, Deccan, Central India, North India, Jatland, Rajputana, Gujarat, Malwa, Bundelkhand, Himalayas and on the ruins of Vijayanagara Kingdom. Mughal Prince Shah Shuja who was administrator in Bengal Presidency in first half of seventeenth century A.D., well associated with Sufis and Shiites, in a controlling position of Bengal trade, with a soft religious stand and known for Iranian links, successfully united a huge territory (Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, tribal pockets, Rajmahal, Gourbengal, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Barindland, North Bihar, Purnea, Koch Bihar, Bodo-Kamta belt, Brahmaputra valley and the Delta touching Rakhine boundary). He failed to occupy central rule of India, defeated by Islamic hardliners and fled to Rakhine coastal province with his family, treasure and loyals. Was that another kind of political exclusion and fleeing into exile? There he denied to accept proposal of local rulers and thereafter

was brutally killed with his family, treasures were looted, and his loyals fled into the countryside. That was a serious blow to the supremacy of Mughal Padshahi in South Asia. Nabobs, Maratha, Jats, Hindu states, Nizam in Deccan, Arab pockets and extreme south of Indian Peninsula were gone out of hands. Attacks were organized from Iran and Afghanistan over Delhi in eighteenth century A.D. Afghanistan and Sind were gone out of hand and Sikh formed autonomous pockets in Punjab province. Lahore became the center for western part of Punjab and also incorporated Kashmir with it. Among so many, European trading houses and native businessmen, British East India Company got the trade license to do business in Bengal with special facilities. British gradually became the main competitor to the semi-autonomous Nabobs of Bengal. Company restored Nazafi family as the new Nabob and implemented dual governance in the province. After a severe famine in Bengal, British monarchy extended its control over the Company and its rule in Bengal. Company also got Andhra coast from Hyderabad Nizam. It established puppet governments in Hyderabad Deccan and Arkot at the extreme south. British also negotiated with local Hindu states, the Maratha rulers, Ceylon, Indo-Malayan belt, Dutch control over East Indies, Arab pockets, Iran and French Company. It got Koch Bihar state as a subordinate. That was a strategic location to make contact with Nepal, Morang, Sikkim, Chumbi, Bhutan, Tibet, Brahmaputra valley, Barak-Surma valley, Manipur, Feni valley, Coomilla, Tripura, Bodo-Kamta belt, Arakan mountains, Arakan coast and Burma. Till Sepoi Mutiny, Company rule was the primmest factor in South Asia. In Mughal and British tenure, Hindu landlords were there in Dinajpur Rajshahi areas. During Company rule, old landlords were replaced by newer ones, anarchic situation on the Mahananda route met with an end, and local agitations made by Sannyasis and Fakirs were diminished. That was contemporary to Arab activities in Mysore, Anglo-Maratha clash and negotiation, early British involvement in Sikkim-Nepal dispute,

independent war in America, British involvement in North India (Varanasi, Lucknow and Rohilkhand) and first French revolution. Earliest Indigo plantation was established in this place in late 18th century A.D. Missionary activities were also noticed in the place apart from eradication of anarchic situation over there along the ancient river way trade routes coming from Morang, Sikkim, Chumbi, Tibet and Bhutan. With fall of Napoleon in Europe and eradication of tribal movements in Bodo-Kamta pockets and South Bengal interiors, British went into a commanding position over Maratha rulers and local warrior tribes, Rajput states, Jatland and Nepal during 1800s and 1810s. When Latin American states got independence, then Company also increased Missionary activities in tribal pockets, occupied Arakan coast and other major trade centers of Burma next to French Indochina, protected Patiala court from Lahore, showed interest socio-religious reforms in Bengali society, showed special interest on Rangpur (close to Koch Bihar), incorporated Jalpaiguri in Rangpur, took interest over control of Bhutan foothills, tried to make contact with Bhutan and Tibet, established Tea Estates like in China, supported Brahmoism and saw gradually increasing Arab influence in East Bengal and along Punjab-Afghan borders. Brahmo religious institution followed Vedic Hinduism and at the same time showed interests in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, *Tantric* sect, Sufism and *Pagalpantha* (Baul? Manichaeism?). Sepoi mutiny of 1857 A.D. was important to see with an alternative vision involving Second French Revolution, presence of Russia in Central Asia, British in Sind and Punjab, role of Kashmir, Anglo-Afghan relations, Anglo-Arab relations, Anglo-Iran relations, Anglo-Burma relations, British trading Indian opium in Chinese market, Opium Wars in China (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), Missionary activities in Indochina and South China, Missionary activities in Indian tribal pockets and Santal insurrection (1855), British control over Oudh and Central Indian states, British policies in Deccan and North India, concepts regarding purity and

pollution, etc. Insurrection originated near Calcutta. It spread throughout North India, Bihar, Central Indian pockets, Kanpur and even Mid Bengal. British faced some opposition in different pockets of Bodo-Kamta belt during this mutiny, but not at Koch Bihar. Was there a fear of exclusion and disguise? Was that something like Rajbanshis, Kaibartas, Koch people and Shah Shuja? Was that something like Nadir Shahi of Iran attacking Delhi and capturing all the treasure and Princesses? We are not sure. After the mutiny, Mughal Padshah was sent to an exile in Rangoon (Yangon) of Burma (Myanmar). Koch Bihar Kingdom from Alipurduar tried to reoccupy Bhutan foothills; from Jalpaiguri to Panchagarh-Rajganj, Malbazar-Kalimpong and Morang; from Tufanganj to Brahmaputra valley and entire Bodo-Kamta belt; and from Rangpur to *Pundravardhana*. At initial stage, Koch Kingdom temporarily occupied whole of Dinajpur reaching upto Gournag. Rajbanshis were also there in Rajshahi, Purnea and Mid Bengal. Koch Kings supported to Vaishnavism in Brahmaputra valley and Bodo-Kamta belt (Harikel). They were in close contact with the Rajputs. In British period, Cooch Behar state and Jalpaiguri district became a center for Sufism, Brahmoism and other religious reforms. Christianity spread in the foothill region and different communities like Rabha, Mech, Bodo and Garo accepted Christianity. Garo is now a Christian community. A section of Rabha is now following Christianity besides their belief in animism. Palas are still there in Bengal and some even with ruling surnames like Pal Chaudhury or Pal Roy. There is a tea estate at Terai foothill of Bengal Morang or Mechi-Mahananda valley established by the Pal Chaudhury landlords of Nadia district. Nadia district is a part of Gangetic delta and again associated with Navadvip Vaishnava center. Hindu King Krishnachandra ruled over Nadia and Twenty Four Parganas of Gangetic delta; this strip on left bank of Bhagirathi-Hoogly distributary of Ganges has been included in India and not in Bangladesh or East Bengal. This region though recognized as South Bengal or

the southern portion of West Bengal state is closely associated with Mid Bengal, Gour Bengal (Indian portion of Dinajpur Rajshahi), Mahananda river system including Mechi-Mahananda basin, Barindland pockets in India and different river systems in Jalpaiguri-Cooch Behar. Dinajpur-Rajshahi was also closely associated with Rajmahal and Birbhum historically, as these places supplied good quality stones to local fine art industry and sculpture manufacturers.

Hunter in 1876 has mentioned census report of 1872 to say that total number of **Koch**, Rajbanshi and Palis in Bengal, Assam and Bihar was a little more than one and a half millions. Of these Rajbanshis accounted to be about 59%, Koches 26% and Palis 15%. In Rangpoor, Jalpaiguri and Kuch Behar state, Rajbanshis were involved in agriculture and designated as respectable class, whereas common Koch people were treated as labourers and palanquin bearers. However, Rajbanshis and/or Koches were very powerful race. In Kuch Behar state, Rajbanshis and Koches were not separately counted and the Koch tribe was 'manifestly included' among the Rajbanshis and they together were enumerated to a sum total of 137135 (63% of the total population). Deputy Commissioner of Kuch Behar however said that real Koch tribe in the state was very little in number and served as palanquin bearers quite similar to a foothill porter tribe. Today we see Lhotshampa group in Bhutan lower Himalayas; they were serving there as step cultivators and local goods carriers. They are basically people from Nepal and mainly talking in Nepali dialects under Indo-Aryan family with few exceptions. They are not treated as Nepalese as in Nepal, Sikkimese as in Sikkim, Gurkha or Goorkha or Gorkha as in West Bengal, but as Lhotshampa under the Bhutanese people. Among the Gurung and Pakhrin are Buddhists. Limbu and Rai fall under Kiranti group. Limbu are the mountain people of ancient Morang, rear cattle, maintain orange orchards, cultivate spices and animists. So, the Nepalese groups have become Lhotshampa in lower portion of Bhutan Himalayas, but still locally talk in Nepali language.

Same thing might happen to Pundra *Kshatriya*, Pod, Kaibarta, Rajbanshi and Koch in region to region. Hunter further mentioned Daltonreport to state that Rajbanshi, Koch and Pali were 'a very mixed race'. To him, Koch people were closer to Bara Bhuiya or Bhuiya family or Dravidian stalk. Bara Bhuiyas or Bhuiyas were more concerned with agrarian rural structure rather than pre-agrarian status. So, the Koch people should be result of extreme exclusion in exile with disguise. It might have happened that a ruling category was first reduced to a status of collaborator or government official, then feudal lord, then large scale agriculturalists, then medium and small scale cultivators, then tenant and labour, then fisherman, then cattle breeders, cobbler and porter. So, Koch and Rajbanshi might not be Mongoloid in real sense as Burmese, Bodos, Dzongkha, Tibetans, Chinese and Mongols. We could see the Rajput rulers of North India gradually shifted over to the interior Himalayan pockets when Turk-Afghans and Khaljis started ruling North India and Dinajpur respectively. When Lucknow in North India became a major power center and Lakshmanavari in Gour Bengal was nowhere, Gorkha House as a major Hindu center of power took its form in Nepal Himalayas. Both Rajbanshi and Koch speak in Indo-Aryan dialects like a Bengali, an Assamese and a Hindi speaking individual. Hunter also supported this fact. Here, going into exclusion, disguise and exile was followed with mating with others and creating new substructures. Was Koch a kind of such substructure? We could see spread of Hinduism and Buddhism from South Asia to South East Asia and formation of such substructures there. Certain substructures brought the locals and snake worshippers from a pre-state condition to statehood. Many of the rulers there took the surname Barmana or Vanran which exists in Bodo-Kamta belt and Koch Bihar dynasty. Many ancient dynasties and local rulers of South Asia used this title. Verma or Varma is a surname widely used in North India. While Rajbanshis bear Aryan features, local agricultural castes and Koch tribes are basically

Paleo-Mediterranean group or Dravidian. Dravidians built up Indusvalley civilization. Caste system as the division of labour holds up the agrarian system in South Asia and seems to be an Indigenous Knowledge System. Like Pundra in Rajshahi, place with similar name is there in Indian Peninsula with maximum Dravidian concentration. There are place names with the suffix *guri*, which is common in both Dravidian areas of Indian Peninsula and Teesta-Brahmaputra areas in association with Siliguri. Austro-Dravidian people are in majority among the aboriginals of Bengal and again overlapped with Indo-Aryans and Mongoloid groups to some extent. So, it might happen that Rajbanshis from Indo-Aryan stalk first replaced Dravidians, Austro-Dravidian groups and worshippers of Mashan demigods from power, made these castes their subordinates, compelled them speak in Indo-Aryan dialect and finally pushed them to Bodo speaking areas. Then in second phase, Rajbanshis were being replaced by another tradition from power and had to take other occupation, stay in disguise, loose their status, become excluded or *Vratya*, and go in exile that might include Bodo-speaking areas. We do not know the Rajbanshis, if Aryan, were whether Pre-Vedic or Post-Vedic. Why have they taken *Kashyapa* clan? Who were their priests? Were they Adhikari, *Varendri*, Bhatta, Maithili, Kamrupi, local Sannyasi or Tantriks, Nath Guru, Buddhist Guru, Sufi Peer, Vaishnava Guru of Navadwip or Assam or Puri, Pandit, Purohit, mainland Brahmins, Parasurama, Tibetan monks or Lama or others? In disguise and exile, Rajbanshis and Koch people could interbreed with other Non-Aryan tribes under the Bodo fold and develop new sub-structures. We can therefore get so many substructures within the Rajbanshis. Koch on the other hand has marital relationship with other tribes. Socially or socio-politically, Rajbanshis serve as a major social fold and various other castes, religious groups and tribes have either taken shelter in this or exhibited their belongingness. Again, due to the intermixing in the Sub-Himalayas, both Koch and Rajbanshi

might seem to be fallen in the great Bodo fold. Hunter further mentioned Hodgson that Koches and Rajbanshis are the most Hinduised form of the common stock. Hodgson was further cited to state that Koch dialect and their culture-religious practices were similar to that of Bodo or Dhimal. However, that was proven not correct. But other tribes with whom Koch (and even Rajbanshi) interbred might belong to these earlier tribes. Hodgson also opined that Rajbanshis were provided with higher social strata and Koch the lower; many of the Koches accepted Islam. In Barindland or Dinajpur-Rajshahi, that might have happened. These people chose Vaishnavism or Sufism as an alternative to Tibetan Buddhism. It is true that majority of people in Bogra or Mahasthangarh or *Pundranagara* accepted Islam and those people might be Non-Aryans, Pre-Vedic Aryans and Vedic Aryans as well. Non-Aryans might include agrarian castes, fishing communities, Austro-Dravidians and Dravidians. They might be Koch, Pundra or Pod, Kaibarta, *Jalua* Kaibarta, Ruidas, Namasudra, Jhalo Malo, etc. Some Mech people even accepted Islam. Rangalibajna is a place in Bengal Duars that has been named by Ranga Ali, a converted Mech. Paharia Muslim or Hill Muslim is also present. Nashya Seikh, Shershabadia, Ahir and various other Muslim groups might be the Muslims found in North Bengal region. Carpet, shawl and blankets were prepared by the Dhunias. Many involve in the profession of shoemaking, cane and bamboo work, and carpentry.

O'Malley however in Census report of 1913 has mentioned that Koch and Rajbanshi have the separate identity. Rajbanshis in majority stayed with Bengal, shed off tribal affiliations, participated in the democratic activities, performed certain purification processes to get back *Kshatriya* status, did not show much interest in political changes taken place in China in 1911 and saved British interest in Indian Subcontinent. They were the same people who had been treated two centuries ago in the report of Sir Francis Hamilton as sharing the same stalk with the

Koch and other fishing tribes known as Garol or Dauya. Difference was just Rajbanshis maintained purity and pollution as much as possible, Koches bore the Palanquin and Garol consuming fermented fish, liquor and fowl. Hamilton was a medical practitioner and worked on the Teesta-Brahmaputra region during 1807-1814 A.D. That was the most critical time as Napoleon could attack India from Russia, Mediterranean, Egypt, Irano-Afghanistan and French had their colonies at Indo-China. Burma was an independent country, had its interest on East Bengal, Bodo-Kamta belt, Arakan coast and Brahmaputra valley. Rajbanshis could be their easy target through Koch, Garol and other tribal groups staying at the valley. The work of Hamilton was later published by Montgomery Martin in 1838 A.D. where drastic political changes occurred in France, which had an impact over continental Europe and on the other hand Russia could reach upto India through Central Asia, Irano-Afghanistan, Punjab and Tibet. But the Kingdom of Koch Bihar was with the British, social reformations and Rajbanshis outside the princely statehood of Rangpur (also Rangpoor) from late 1890s wished to get back their *Kshatriya* status and be a part of mainstream society in every aspect.

The first work on Rajbanshis was done by C. C. Sanyal, 1965, who wrote on the Rajbanshi community of North Bengal, with its own cultural heritage and their origin and important position even at the Indian context. According to him, these peoples were not only indigenous in nature, but involved in peasantry and associated with various agriculture related rituals, often acted as permanent agriculturist caste, underwent through the status mobilization processes like Vaishnavization and Kshatriyaization, highly affected by Nathism, modified their traditional folk rituals so as to incorporate them into the Hindu fold, having own priestly category as Adhikari, following the principles laid down by the Kamrupi Brahman category, incorporating several ancient beliefs and even fragile Buddhist remnants, worshippers of Mother Goddesses and the

cult of Shiva basically in form of Jalpesh. Sanyal's monograph is an open mirror to see transformation of the pro-Paundra Kshatriyas Rajbanshis up to the semi-Kushana Kamboja-type Koch-Rajbanshis apart from Tibeto-Bhutanese interference in this buffer region, all the Islamic establishments in India and Bengal, political turmoil in North East India in own way, and British consequences. These Koch-Rajbanshis soon became an agrarian caste group with their relations with both other tribal and non-tribal dilemma. Exclusion to inclusion in the mainstream in terms of polity, economy, religion and society are the best example of status mobilization of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal through centuries. Rajbanshis existed in ancient Indian History, and successive regimes of Palas, Khens, Koches, Turk-Afghans, Mughal-Rajputs in Bengal and British rule in terms of Company Rule and British Raj. Koch Bihar got the status of a Princely Kingdom under British India and now integral part of West Bengal state, India. Still these peoples maintain their folk life and possess their own values, norms, customs, symbols, and way of living. These things would surely be helpful in determining their attachment with the land with a definite historicity. The author also provided handful of information on material culture, house type, folk songs, rite-de-passage, types of marriage as well as riddles found among the Rajbanshis.

Hindu Kingdoms were established in Kamrup and Trihut Sub-Himalayas. North Bengal in a part west into the hands of the Hindus and Palas failed to defend it. The **Kaibarta** agitation that the Palas faced originated in Sub-Himalayas North Bengal. Kaibartas were treated as dacoits or a criminal tribe by the ruling Palas. There is an argument on whether these Kaibartas were agriculturist or boatman. They might have some association with the local tribes likewise the excluded *Vratya Kshatriyas*. These Kaibartas had their stronghold over Mahananda valley

system and probably their center was situated in Mechi-Mahananda basin. It is speculated that the place was Bhimbar near Sonapur. Bhimbar or Bhim Pahar means the mound of Kaibarta King Bhim. Sonapur means the Golden City. That place was fallen under Morang and again under Sikkim. Again it was ruled by the Pala Kings of Bihar-Bengal. Mahananda river system served as a very important trade route flowing in Purnea, Katihar, Gourbanga and marshland of Rajshahi before falling in Gangetic Delta. Palas defeated the Kaibartas who were probably worshippers of Lord Shiva like various *Vratya Kshatriyas* and *Kirata* people. Their agitation was contemporary to Chola dominance throughout Bay of Bengal who were from the extreme south of Indian Peninsula, worshippers of Shiva Cult and reduced the Arab-Buddhist influence on sea routes. Palas after the end of this Kaibarta agitation and becoming a subsidiary alliance of the Cholas probably shifted the center of power to Mahananda valley or nearby Dinajpur. Various portions of the Pala Kingdom were getting independence and many of them were gone to the Hindu rulers. In Mechi-Mahananda valley there was a place by the name of King Mahi Pala and it is known as Mahipal. Today Kaibartas and Rajbanshis both belong to same **ScheduledCaste** category. They could be compared to Namasudra category of Bengal. Kaibartas are of two types- agriculturists and fisherman cum boatman. Other Scheduled caste categories are Puliya, Jhalo Malo and Pod. This Pod refers to the actual Pundra community. Fisherman category among Kaibartas and Rajbanshis are considered of lower status in comparison to the agriculturists. Puliya may have some links with the Palas, but they are often treated as part of the Rajbanshi fold. They have also become fisherman cum agriculturalists, whereas Palas do work in pottery (artisanship) and some still behave like ruling category. Jhalo Malo is again associated with fishing and agriculture. In due course, Rajbanshis have gradually turned into caste people. They started following Varendri and Kamrupi Brahmans. Many of

these *Vratya Kshatriyas* and excluded categories (lower caste and out-*Varna*) have taken shelter under alternative Brahmanisms and most important ones are Kashmiri Brahmanism and Maithili Brahmanism. Saint *Kashyapa* was the symbol of Kashmiri Brahmanism and alternative to *Parasuram*. *Kashyap* is the clan name of Rajbanshi and many other *Vratya Kshatriyas*. Maithili Brahmans say to me that beside Vedic heritage and *Parasurama*, they can deal with souls, ghosts and ethno-medicines. Like the Kaibartas, elements like Kambojas from Indo-Afghan region, Cholas from extreme south and Later Chalukyas from Deccan also created problems for the Palas. These elements were not Buddhists but mostly worshipping Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. Rashtrakuta, Kalchuri and different Rajput elements from Central and North India in due course attacked Bengal. Still it is also not clear with whom these Kaibartas were interbred! There is an opinion that Kaibartas were primarily big land owners and associated with agriculture. They cultivate the land by using plough. That plough was probably dragged out by a pair of bullock or buffalo. So, they are also associated with animal husbandry. They were the Hindus and probably praying to the cult of Shiva or Vishnu. They might have some similarities with the Mahishwa or Vaishya community. They might deal with *mohish* or water buffalo. Some of them might be involved with fishing and therefore have control over the river routes. River trade could bring in to them the wealth. They might have mixed with the people belonging to fisherman community. Kaibartas can use Das in their surname. Rajbanshis also do so. Das surname is also common to *Vaishnavas*, some upper caste people (like Kayastha and Vaidya), business communities, serving categories (*Shudra*) or lower castes but still within the *Varna* fold, Mahishwa, Namasurda, Kaibarta, Rajbanshi, Assamese and others. It is a generalized thought that Rajbanshis use surnames like Rajbanshi, Singha, Roy, Chaudhury, Sarkar and Barman to prove their ruling status and/or warrior attitude. Like Kaibartas and *Vratya-Kshatriyas*, they have

also marital relationships with other groups and even the warrior tribes and human shields. But there are Rajbanshis using other surnames like Adhikari, Goswami, Ghosh, Kundu, Saha, Pal, Das and so on. There are many other people who talk in Rajbanshi dialects or its toughest versions like *Goalparia* and *Rangpuria*. They say that they are also the Rajbanshis but not belonging to the *Kshatriya* category. In a different situation, they say that they are not the real Rajbanshis, but more Bengalis. This type of information on Bengali-Rajbanshi overlapping we may not get from census schedule. Kshatriyas talking in Rajbanshi dialects are the real Rajbanshis and they are more prone to marry with warrior tribes and human shields like Bodo, Mech, Rabha, *Vratya Kshatriya*, Chaudhury, Rajput, etc. and to confirm prosperity of the region could collaborate with trader, boatman, fisherman, oil extractor, cloth manufacturer, weaver, etc. Surnames like Sinha, Roy and Sarkar are common among Rajbanshis, *Vratya Kshatriyas* and Kshatriyas. Barman is also a surname associated with Royals of Boro-Kamta belt including Teesta-Brahmaputra system; it is also common to the early kings of Gangetic North India, Sri Lanka, Dravida dominated Indian Peninsula and Indian colonies in South East Asia. Some say that Kaibartas were mixed up with the Mech people falling under the Bodo community. They might also be Koch people close to Indo-Aryan dialectology. Morang foothill is also the place of Tharu and Dhimal groups. Morang Himalayas was inhabited by Limbu or Subba people. High altitude Himalayas above Morang was populated by the Lepcha people and they established the Sikkim state. Sikkim was again connected with Bhutan and Tibet through Chumbi valley. Sikkim was mentioned as a place of peace and prosperity. Chumbi valley is still mentioned as a heavenly place. Even the high altitude Sikkim has valleys named as Pink valley and Red Rhododendron valley. All rivers from Morang including Mechi-Mahananda water system meet near Dalkhola. It is said that Sikkim and Morang were once extended to this

Dalkhola. Presently Dalkhoka falls in Islampur subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district. Centering this settlement of Dalkhola, we can have Kishanganj of Bihar and Islampur of North Bengal. These two places were controlled by Greater Purnea in Mughal and British rules. Inclusion of entire Mechi Mahananda basin was happened as a gradual process during these two periods. British established its administrative center near Mahipal in the basin. There was a weekly market known as Chathat where jute, jute thatches and bamboos were sold or exchanged. There was a port or *bondor* on Mahananda River and that was known as Bondorgochh. That was the actual administrative area and so called dacoits or criminal tribes were hanged here. To hand in a verb and in local terminology, it is spoken off as “*phansi dewa*”. From that the place was come to be known as Phansidewa. Later Siliguri town was established by the British near another weekly market area called Matigara. Matigara is on the banks of Mahananda and Balason Rivers. Siliguri was also situated on Mahananda River. Siliguri means a place made up on stone. It is very close to Dabgram settlement and Baikunthapur forest that have another story. Based on Chathat-Phansidewa and Siliguri-Matigara within Mechi-Mahananda basin, British rulers gradually included Kurseong and Darjeeling Himalayan pockets from Sikkim. They also gave protection to the Sikkim Government from Gorkha power house of Nepal that has captured mainland Morang where cities like Biratnagar and Bhadrapur were situated. Kurseong, at least the Mirik block there, was one Himalayan pocket as a part of the ancient Morang state where Limbu people also inhabited. Mirik is famous for its oranges, tea gardens, cardamom and the lake. The lake once was considered very pious and different mosses, ferns, pines, flowering plants, insects, aqua flora, fishes and salamander (a living fossil) could be found there. Squash is a local fruit vegetable growing on some climbing herbs; they could be found surrounding the pond easily climbing on the fine trees. One can collect the fruit vegetable from the ground, but

could not collect them direct from the plant without permission of the owner cultivator. If anybody done this, it is a general belief that person may face some problems. The lake area has now become a famous tourist destination and a hilly way to neighbouring Nepal. Balason has its origin in this block. The entire Mechi-Mahananda system owes its origin to these Kurseong and Darjeeling. British made larger part of Mechi-Mahananda foothill the Siliguri subdivision and to it added Kurseong and Darjeeling Sadar subdivisions in order to form Darjeeling district for the first time. So, it was actually a portion of ancient state Morang and included from southern Sikkim. Teesta River has its origin in Sikkim and the river separated Himalayan pockets of then Darjeeling district from Bhutan Himalayas. From Bhutan Himalayas, British rulers crossed Teesta River and included the Kalimpong pocket. Kalimpong was on the way to Chumbi valley and therefore strategically very important. Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim in past tried to occupy Chumbi and Kalimpong. Chumbi is still in Tibet. Jelep-la is a major trade route there wherefrom Tibetan traders reach to Jalpesh which was a major trade center. Kalimpong has become the forth subdivision of Darjeeling district. Portion of Morang under Purnea has now become Kishanganj district of Bihar and its Islampur portion has been added to Bengal Dinajpur (Islampur subdivision under Uttar Dinajpur district under North Bengal). Thakurganj area under Kishanganj is the end portion of Mechi-Mahananda basin. Prior to 1770s, a portion of present day Islampur subdivision also fell under Mechi-Mahananda basin. Indeed, the Islampur town of today was on the bank of Mahananda River. At a time, it was probably a major port area. It is also assumed that prior to the Muslim period; this place was named as *Ishwarpura* or City of the God. Probably, it was also a major center during the Palas. Palas excavated so many ponds there and some of them might be considered sacred. Temples were constructed there and it was one major trade centers of entire Dinajpur and Mahananda basin. In Muslim period, Islam and

Vaishnavism rapidly spread throughout Dinajpur and Mahananda basin. *Ishwarpur* was no such exception and it has become Islampur. It is believed that the entire Mahananda valley including Sub-Himalayan Mechi-Mahananda basin produced huge amount of jute and served as a major textile industry. Now the jute fibers are exported outside in tons of bundles. That jute industry was probably the backbone of Morang state. The gateway to Morang was Dalkhola which still exists as trade center between Bengal and Bihar. From Dalkhola, mainland Indian trucks today enter into Sikkim, Bhutan, Teesta-Brahmaputra valley and beyond. There is a major spinning mill in nearby Raiganj which is the district capital of Uttar Dinajpur district. However, Raiganj is situated outside ancient Morang region and a part of Dinajpur zone. A big textile factory has been set up near Bhadrapur municipality in Nepal Morang with Indian assistance. But due to problem in power supply, it could not go well. In Siliguri subdivision near the Mirik block, there are some other factories and saw mills. Regular power supply is provided here with high tension electric wire. The power is supplied from Mahananda barrage near Phulbari which is Indo-Bangladesh border. In Mahananda barrage, Teesta canal crosses the river. Mahananda River here decides Indo-Bangladesh international border and separates entire Phansidewa block under Siliguri subdivision from Bangladesh. Near the border, there is another major pond site known as Leusipukuri besides Ghoshpukur and Choupukuria-Keshtopur. Then Mahananda River decides the inland border between Chopra block under Islampur subdivision and the same Phansidewa block under Siliguri subdivision. There again Teesta canal crosses Mahananda river (locally known as Khari River). Concrete made Teesta canal turns into an aqueduct near Haptiagochh area here and canal road as the side bridge. Here also energy is being produced in huge quantity. A gas turbine is also established at Shibmandir region of Matigara block under Siliguri subdivision. All these aqueduct, barrage and gas turbine produce the energy. This energy is

actually supplied to the factories. Tea gardens with factories are basically located in Nakshalbari block and extend to adjacent Phansidewa block. Kakarbhatta (Mechinagar) and Dhulabari are new trade zones of Nepal and these are very close to the settlement of Nakshalbari. This block is known for seed farms, silk center, forest areas, alternative way to Mirik, Bagdogra Airport, Military Engineering Services, missionary activities, army cantonments and other establishments, market places like Bagdogra and Naxalbari, schools and colleges, *Kendriya Vidyalayas*, teacher training colleges, floriculture hubs, perishable cargo, rice bowl in Lachka-Buribalason river valley, different small rivers and bridges over them (alternative communication network), a few factories, check post, residential schools, Hindu *Ashramas*, mosques and churches even in remote interior areas, Sikh Gurudwara, Buddhist monastery, settlements of different cattle breeders supplying milk and organic manure, poultry farms, weekly markets, permanent markets, shops and villages, dealers in agricultural instruments (machines, fertilizers and pesticides), petrol pumps and roadside inns, cancer hospital, Rangapani rail station, Bagdogra rail station, Naxalbari rail station, Numaligarh refinery and some small scale tea gardens. With establishment of tea gardens, Adivasis and a few Nepalis can also be found here. Nepalis, Biharis and other Hindi speaking people are more concentrated near Indo-Nepal border, army establishments, forest interior and the airport. It is said that this place was a center for ancient civilization and traces are sometimes found in places like Gossainpur and Tarbandha (Rajbanshi dominated countryside). Gossainpur had again a sacred pond site and till now jute is grown reluctantly to the place. It is also said that Gossainpur is the main *Vaishnava* center to the place; some Muslim castes are still living in Bagdogra-Nakshalbari region with few other interior pockets; dacoits were there even a few decades ago; communities like Dom and Chandals were also there in several hamlets. Places on Buri Balason rice bowl are

Putimari, Turibhita, Tarbandha, Gossainpur, Siabhita, Radha, Bhusibhita, Ruidas, Leusipukuri and then via Mahipal-Kantibhita-Fulbar-Lachubhita chunk into Bansgaon areas. Small scale tea gardens and pineapple cultivation are two new trends for this Bansgaon area which has canal water, fishing opportunities, bamboo bushes, marshland, grazing land, vegetable and staple crop fields. This situation continues in the Chopra block with increase in small scale tea gardens. It is also known for Kachakali temple, Debijhora market place, sand beds of Mahananda and Karatoa, origins of Dok and Nagar rivers and some interior settlements other than Chopra. Like calico produced from cotton, local people in Dinajpur, Mahananda valley and Mechi-Mahananda basin produce mats and cloths. Mat is known locally as *chot* and a piece of cloth as *dhokra*. Rajbanshis of Dinajpur are also known as Dhakra; in one opinion, they have been named so as because they are so good in production of *Dhokra*. Major business areas and industrial hubs of Mechi-Mahananda are now actually located within the core city area of Siliguri and suburbs. Matigara block is separated from Nakshalbari and Phansidewa blocks by Lachka River which is a tributary of Mahananda River like Buribalason. There was a proposed industrial hub in Shibmandir under Matigara block, however it has now become a center for higher education, semi-urban settlement, a few factories and saw mills, army and paramilitary base camps. Shibmandir under Matigara block is known for a Shiva temple. The Block Development Office is also situated in Shibmandir. Shibmandir is a proposed municipality area (Bairatishal). Balason River has traversed the block from middle and it is also the gateway to Mirik. Boulder and sand are collected from Balason River bed and many people depend on this type of open cast mining. It separates Shibmandir from Matigara proper. This Matigara proper has been however developed centering on Matigara traditional weekly market. Like Shibmandir there is another Shiva temple at Chandmoni. Matigara proper is still known for its weekly market and it is the actual way to

Mirik block which is a tourist destination and famous for Makaibari tea, its oranges, cardamom and squash vegetable fruit. Actually, this Matigara proper falls within Balason and Mahananda rivers. It is further served with two locally originated small rivers- Chamta and Panchanai. Matigara proper contains a silk farm and well known for carpentry and earthen pottery industry. Raw material for carpentry was once supplied from Nakshalbari block and that for pottery, the *khari* soil, is still being delivered from Phansidewa and Chopra. Once Matigara was a major liquor producing center. The *bhatti* or factory was on the bank of local Chamta River. There are three tea gardens in the entire Matigara block- Matigara tea garden, Chandmoni tea garden and that one removed long ago. The block also contains North Bengal Medical College and Hospital and Himul dairy farm. Himul has been established to collect milk from the foothill areas and adjacent Himalayan pockets of the district. Matigara tea garden and the Medical College are located on the right bank of Balason River along with Shibmandir. Missionaries have built up a hospital, a mission and a major leprosy cure center here. Other two tea gardens (no more exist) and Himul are on the left bank of Balason River along with Matigara proper. Chandmoni was the biggest tea garden area between Chamta and Panchanai small rivers. Nearly total area of this tea garden has been replaced by a planned urban hub. In nearby areas, we can see more urban-industrial growth. This includes information technology based industries, food processing industry, factories, real estates, petrol pumps and highway inns, truck terminal and garage, private hospitals and nursing homes, shopping malls and shopping complexes, *Nirman Vihar*, shops and houses and even slums. Simply saying, Chandmoni and Shibmandir are famous for Shiva cults. Baba Loknath Temple has been recently developed in Panchanai area and become a major attraction to this place. Baba Loknath was a Wise Man and treated as Lord Shiva. A new power grid has been established to the region. Panchanai-Mahananda region is

now as good as Matigara proper and Shibmandir. This is the way to Kurseong and Darjeeling through Sukna. It has been rapidly urbanizing, even more than Matigara proper and Shibmandir. A portion of it has already been incorporated within Siliguri Municipal Corporation (SMC). In this Panchanai-Mahananda area, there are various residential complexes, hotels and restaurants, amusement parks, educational hubs, motor vehicle showrooms, **factories**, **real** estates, **petrol**pumps and highway inns, garage, **private** hospitals and nursing homes, **shopping** complexes, shops and houses, minority community establishments, Nepali settlement, Hindi speaking settlement, schools and colleges, Buddhist establishments and study centers, military establishments, Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority (SJDA) office, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) office, Sikkim Nationalized Transport office, other offices, tea auction center, police station and outpost, bars and fast food centers, slums, cattle sheds, cane handicraft center, mess and lodge, recreation center (cinema hall and multiplex) and other small weekly markets. A portion of this newly developing zone of Matigara proper is incorporated within Siliguri Municipal Corporation. It is also a major transportation hub. Siliguri Junction rail station, TN Bus Terminus, Sikkim Nationalized Transport office, North Bengal State Transport Corporation office, Siliguri regulated market, Shopping complexes and so many small markets are all situated here. The bus terminus here provides bus services to Assam, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling via Kurseong, Indian parts of Morang (Islampur, Kishanganj, Thakurganj and Mirik outside Mechi-Mahananda basin proper), Indo-Nepal borders of Bihar (Mithilanchal and Bhojpur), Bihar, Jharkhand, South Bengal including greater Midnapore, Kolkata, Nadia and Mid Bengal (Murshidabad), Gourbanga (including Malda and Balurghat besides Raiganj), Indo-Bangladesh pockets (Hili, Balurghat, Kaliyaganj, Rajganj-Gadra, Haldibari, Changrabandha-Mekhliganj, Mathabhanga-Sitalkuchi and Dinhata-Sitai), Teesta-

Torsha region (Jalpaiguri, Mainaguri, Jalpesh, Dhupguri, Falakata and Pundibari- Cooch Behar), Bengal-Assam borderland (Alipurduar-Kumargram, Sankosh and Tufanganj-Bakshirhat), main gateway to Bhutan (Birpara-Jaigaon). Local bus services to the entire Mechi-Mahananda basin proper are provided from two different centers: Siliguri and Islampur. This local bus stand is situated within Siliguri proper and near the Siliguri Town Station. Similarly, Doors Bus Stand is also there in Siliguri proper from where private bus services have been provided to Kalimpong subdivision and the entire Doors. Siliguri also includes areas from Jalpaiguri district. That portion is not included under Siliguri Police Station, but under Bhaktinagar. It is attached to Baikunthapur forest region and Dabgram-Phulbari region of Jalpaiguri district. New Jalpaiguri station is located here. This New Jalpaiguri station has reduced the importance of Siliguri Town station and Siliguri Junction to some extent.

Dabgram is hidden key that has contributed a major role in formation of present day North Bengal. Dabgram was a forest village of Mech people. Dabgram-Siliguri was tried to be transformed into the second power center by the Koch-Rajbanshi dynasty of Koch Bihar Kingdom. As they were not able to do it permanently, they chose present day Jalpaiguri town as an alternative option. Jalpaiguri unlike Siliguri is far away from Mechi-Mahananda and situated on the bank of Teesta near Teesta-Dharala basin. Teesta-Dharala basin now falls under Malbazar subdivision under Jalpaiguri district. So many local rivers from Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district are coming to this Malbazar subdivision. Malbazar subdivision contains various tea estates and forests. It is distributed in three blocks: Nagrakata, Metiali and Mal. The first two blocks are full of tea gardens and forests. They were once hidden paths towards Bhutan Himalaya and prime way was Chalsa-Samsing-Bindu-Jhallong. Chalsa is the block development office was Matiali. Matiali name has been derived from *mete alu* or big

potatoes grown in local jungles. Chalsa was known as the Queen of Doors during the British regime. On the other hand, Mal block has its block development office in Malbazar. This Chalsa-Malbazar was the gateway to *Duars* or Doors which is the foothill of Bhutan Himalayas. With Kalimpong, this Duars has also been included in India by the British (with Anglo-Bhutan treaty of Sinchula, 1865). Eastern portion of Duars to the Brahmaputra valley has been included in Assam. Western portion of Duars ranging from Teesta to Sankosh has been given to frontier Bengal. This Western Doors includes areas like Mal, Matiali, Nagrakata, Banarhat, Birpara-Lankapara, Madarihat, Hasimara-Jaigaon, Hamiltonganj-Kalchini and Kumargram-Sankosh. Madarihat block is the place where resides Toto Primitive Tribal Group (PTG). They live in Totopara village under Ballalguri. Torsha River separates Totopara in Madarihat from Hasimara-Jaigaon. Dukpa people stay near the Buxa fort under Hamiltonganj-Kalchini. Sibchu is a place in Malbazar subdivision and the name sounds very similar to Sinchu-la where Anglo-Bhutan treaty was annexed. Sinchu-la or the Sinchu mountain pass in Bhutan. Sinchu or Sibchu is a word that stands for SibRiver as *Chu* stands for river in Drukpa dialect. River Torsha is also known to them as Amchu or Amuchu meaning AmuRiver. Now, this Sip or Sib sounds very common to Lord Shiva. Sibchu in Malbazar region can be connected to the cult of Jalpesh. From Bagrakot and Damdim of Mal block of Malbazar subdivision one can reach to Kalimpong town and Gorubathan. Both places are situated within Kalimpong subdivision and on the way to Chumbi valley. Jelep-la is the nearest mountain pass. Odlabari is the way to Teesta-Dharala basin where Kranti is the main business center and a weekly market also. It is actually a rice bowl and indeed there is a village known as Golabari. Literally, Golabari stands for store house. It is also known for arum production. Huge amount of jute is being yielded here. It is also a fishing destination and large part of this basin is known as Chengmari which means catching the

local Cheng fish. From Malbazar town not only Duars initiates, but it near the Teesta-Dharala basin is connected to Mainaguri, Jalpesh, Bhotpotti and Changrabandha Indo-Bangladesh international checkpoint. This Changrabandha area is actually connected with three Indo-Bangladesh pockets: Mekhliganj (India), Kurigram (Bangladesh) and Mathabhanga-Sitalkuchi (India). From Mathabhanga, one can further go to Dinahata-Sitai Indo-Bangladesh pocket. All these places mentioned here are on an ancient trade route falling in-between Teesta and Jaldhaka Rivers. However, after crossing Jaldhaka River one can enjoy multiple connectivities from Mathabhanga town; that includes Cooch Behar district town and Tufanganj-Bakshirhat as one of the easiest gate way to Assam and entire North East India. Jaldhaka River has other names like Dharala and Singimari. Singimari literally means catching the local Singi fish. This Dharala should not be confused with Teesta-Dharala basin or Chengmari area under Mal block. Mekhliganj name on the other hand derives from *Mekhla* which is a cloth piece produced from local raw silk. Like *chot* and *dhokra* produced from jute in Mechi-Mahananda basin, Morang, Mahananda valley and Dinajpur; *mekhla* or *mekhala* is the product of Mekhliganj. This pocket contains the biggest Bangladeshi enclave (Angrapota-Dahagram) which is directly connected to Patgram area of mainland Bangladesh by Tinbigha corridor. Mekhliganj town is located in Bhotbari-Niztaraf area of this Mekhliganj pocket. Mekhliganj and the enclave in it are open to Teesta River. Teesta River however separates Mekhliganj pocket, better to say Mekhliganj block, from Haldibari block on the other side of the river. These two blocks actually form the Mekhliganj subdivision. Interestingly, this subdivision instead of being added to Jalpaiguri district falls under Cooch Behar district. From Jalpesh and Jatileshtar of Mainaguri block one can reach into Changrabandha and Jamaladaha towns and both of them are included within this

Mekhliganj block under Mekhliganj subdivision. Jamaladaha has a forest pocket and similarly Gorumara National Park falls on the Malbazar-Mainaguri road. So, interesting features here are forest, potatoes and yams (like arum), Shiva cult, fishing, Teesta-Dharala rice bowl, jute and silk. *Mekhala* is also produced in Assam. Presence of Bhotbari in Mekhliganj and that of Bhotpatti in nearby place (Mainaguri block) also support the link with Bhutan. While Teesta separates Malbazar subdivision and the entire Duars is on the left side of Teesta River, Jalpaiguri subdivision and Mekhliganj subdivision are actually traversed by this river: Mekhliganj into Mekhliganj block on left and Haldibari block on right; Jalpaiguri into Mainaguri block on left and Jalpaiguri Sadar block on right. Tobacco is also a cash crop to this region and yielded highest in Mathabhanga-Sitai area. Small scale tea gardens are increasing in number in Mekhliganj, Jamaladaha, Bhotpatti (Mainaguri) and Teesta-Dharala basin. Silk farm is there in Mainaguri. Presence of different citrus fruits, castor, local wood yielding plants, floriculture, mushrooms, exotic strawberry, different types of arum, different types of yams (carrot, beet, radish, wild potatoes and sweet potatoes), vegetables and spices (chilli, etc.) supports agroforestry and kitchen garden. Domohoni in close proximity to Teesta-Dharala basin in Mainaguri block is the biggest marshland to the place and heaven for pisciculture. Mustard is also cultivated here and there in season time, but *sadasorisha* is the variety that is commonly propagated by the locals in forest boundaries to counter elephant attacks. Both Teesta and Jaldhaka Rivers have created sandbeds and there in large amount watermelon (*tarmuj* and *kharimunja*) are yielded. Bhandani is the female fertility cult worshipped both in Mekhliganj and Teesta-Dharala basin. This also proves that both these regions were very important rice bowls and till now Teesta-Dharala basin is so. Strategically, Teesta-Dharala basin is as important as Mechi-Mahananda basin. Koch Bihar Dynasty after not so much successful to

establish a power center at Dabgram or Siliguri closer to Mahananda set up today's Jalpaiguri town on the bank of Teesta. Siliguri was developed by the British. Both Siliguri and Jalpaiguri towns were in close proximity to but outside Mechi-Mahananda and Teesta-Dharala basins respectively. The British constructed bridges and railway tracks from Siliguri Town station to Mechi-Mahananda basin that was further extended upto Kishanganj, Purnea and Katihar. Similarly, railway connectivity was there between Siliguri town and the Bengal Doors. That track crossed Teesta River in Shivok. The name Shivok is again quite similar to that of Lord Shiva. Shivokeshwari Kali, a female fertility cult, is prayed there as the Wife of Lord Shivok. The temple there is a place for pilgrimage. Shivok is the direct way to Kalimpong and Sikkim from Siliguri side. Many Rajbanshis of Mechi-Mahananda basin have their nicknames like Shiv, Shivok and Shipok. After crossing Teesta at Shivok or Shebok, the track found Bagrakot as its first station. Shivalik range of Kalimpong Himalaya yields very poor quality of pit coal and these were all loaded in wagons at Bagrakot from where brought back to Siliguri Town station and from there to other places. In this way, surrounding area of Siliguri Town station was given with the name Bagrakot. From Bagrakot in Malbazar subdivision of today this track went on to all the major tea gardens and the small townships that were developed on those tea gardens throughout the Bengal and Assam Doors. These tea gardens and townships were all developed on the ancient trade routes between Bhutan and Koch Bihar Kingdom. Tea and timber were carried on to the auction center at Siliguri Town. So, the intercity track actually traversed all the rivers and routes coming down from Bhutan Himalayas. A narrow gauge line was also constructed from Siliguri Town station to Kurseong and Darjeeling town. Many townships and health stations were established by that track during the British rule. With time, importance of Siliguri Town station has been decreased

and the New Jalpaiguri station as a new alternative has been established near Dabgram. A railway track is also there from Changrabandha to Mainaguri for goods carriage. This Mainaguri station is connected to Jalpaiguri and New Jalpaiguri in one hand and at the same with Dhupguri, Falakata and Cooch Bihar. Rail service in Cooch Behar is further extended to Bamanhat Dinhat. Similarly, Haldibari on the other side of Teesta is also connected to this main track through Jalpaiguri. Haldibari is famous for Mazar of Huzur Sahib, chilli, tomato and other vegetables besides watermelon, paddy, jute and different yams. It was also known for rapeseeds and turmeric. It by using rail service to New Jalpaiguri extended upto Siliguri Town regularly supplies vegetables to Siliguri Town station and from there these vegetables spread throughout the local markets of Siliguri Municipal Corporation and semi-urban areas within Mechi-Mahananda valley. There is still a weekly market or *haat* near this Siliguri Town station where dry fishes, bamboo baskets and processed rice are being sold. New Jalpaiguri station near Dabgram and Siliguri Junction at Mechi-Mahananda basin are still linked up to Matigara proper, Bagdogra (along with Bagdogra airport and the army base), direct Nepal border (Nakshalbari, Raniganj, Batasi, Adhikari and Galgalia-Debiganj), Thakurganj, Islampur, Kishanganj, Purnea, Katihar, Barsoi and Malda with extensions like Mithilanchal (upto Janakpur Road to Nepal), Balurghat, Raiganj and Kaliyaganj-Radhikapur. Again, train services to Doors and Darjeeling Himalaya are still there from Siliguri Junction often extended upto New Jalpaiguri at Dabgram. From Changrabandha, a new extension is under process to Jamaldaha and Mathabhanga. So, Dabgram is now connected to all the major Indo-Bangladesh borders like Balurghat (via Malda), Kaliyaganj (via Rajganj), Haldibari (via Jalpaiguri), Changrabandha (via Mainaguri), Mathabhanga (via Jamaldaha-Changrabandha and also Falakata-Ghoksadanga) and Dinhat-Bamanhat (via Cooch Behar). It is connected with entire Doors and Darjeeling Himalaya via

Siliguri Junction. Hasimara station in Duars is on the way to Bhutan. Train line through Duars and that via Jalpaiguri- Cooch Behar proper are both connected to Alipurduar. Alipurduar is the largest urban center in Duars. It forms a triangle with Falakata and Cooch Behar town through both railways and roadways. New Alipurduar is the actual rail junction and it is linked up with Assam, Cooch Behar, Falakata and the entire Duars. Alipurduar is the gateway of Assam and entire North East India and therefore entire railway system of mainland India depends on this Alipurduar via New Jalpaiguri (Dabgram) and Siliguri Junction (Mechi-Mahananda basin). On the Jalpaiguri- Cooch Behar main track, there is a station at Domohoni fallen under Mainaguri block. At a time there was a line towards Malbazar which was further extended to Shivok and from there moved on the Himalayas upto Teestabazar by using Teesta valley. Teestabazar is on the way to Kalimpong and Gangtok. There is a long demand to connect Gangtok with mainland India through the rail service. This Teestabazar-Shivok-Malbazar-Domohoni lost rail track is a substantial proof that the hand between Teesta and Jaldhaka was a trade route where Teesta-Dharala and Mekhliganj served as two prime rice bowls. From Domohoni junction, train could pass to Changrabandha via Mainaguri and Haldibari via Jalpaiguri. In Shivok-Malbazar, it shared the Duars track. In Jalpaiguri-Mainaguri, it shared the mainland track. And as usual both these tracks are connected to Alipurduar and Siliguri-Dabgram. So, Dabgram-Siliguri, Siliguri Junction, Mechi-Mahananda and Darjeeling railways are comparable to Jalpaiguri-Paharpur, Domohoni Junction, Teesta-Dharala and Domohoni-Teestabazar lost track respectively. This Dabgram has gained much more importance after establishment of industrial hub here. It is also now connected to Bangladesh (Panchagarh area) via Fulbari (also written as Phulbari). Fulbari literally means flower house. This Dabgram-Fulbari along with Mechi-Mahananda basin, Siliguri Municipal

Corporation, Mahananda barrage at Fulbari and Siliguri Junction is comparable to Jalpaiguri Sadar block with Teesta-Dharala basin, Jalpaiguri municipality, Teesta barrage at Odlabari and Domohoni junction. These two systems are separated by an upland which has a forest cover by the name of Baikunthopur forest. This is known as Rajganj. From this forest region, various local rivers have been originated. Some important rivers are Talma and Karatoa. Both enter into Panchagarh region of Bangladesh. Karatoa there joins with Atrai-Purnabhava river system in one hand and as Jamuneshwari flows along with Teesta to meet into Jamuna distributary of Brahmaputra in Bangladesh. Talma there joins with Jamuneshwari. Panchagarh literally means five forts. The inner fort or Bhitargarh is still there in Indo-Bangladesh borderland. It is said that the fort belonged to legendary King Prithviraj or *Prithu* and therefore also known as Prithu Rajar Garh. Talma is also a weekly market and falls on Indian side. Rajganj block also covers the Dabgram-Fulbari region, New Jalpaiguri rail station and Bhaktinagar police station where majority of added wards of Siliguri Municipal Corporation falls into. Fatapukur is the main administrative center. Sannyasikata is another place of the region. *Sannyasi* or monks resided in this forest area and protested against the British. Their revolution was accompanied by Muslim Fakirs and contemporary to independence war of America, various other local revolts made by different tribal and peasant groups in Bengal Presidency (especially Bengal-Odisha border), Anglo-Mysore wars, Anglo-Maratha wars, British interference in Varanasi and Oudhand war at Rohilkhand. *Sannyasis* attacked both Dhaka and Patna which were at the center of East Bengal and Bengal-Bihar. *Sannyasis* were also present in Mechi-Mahananda upland. Sannyasithan is a place under Phansidewa block near Keshtopur Choupukuria. Sannyasithan means settlement of the *Sannyasis*. Keshtopur and Baikunthopur both stand for the Lord Vishnu or a heavenly place. Like Choupukuria sacred pond site, there is Baladapukur in Rajganj.

Rajganj and upland regions within Mechi-Mahananda had been the epicenters for Kaibarta agitation centuries before *Sannyasi* revolt occurred. Debi Chaudhurani was a legendary female character involved in this *Sannyasi* agitation. From this it is again clear that Chaudhurys from Mid Bengal, Gour Bengal and Morang had entered into the Barindland ridge upto this Rajganj. I am not sure whether these *Sannyasis* prayed to Lord Shiva or female cult. It is a general belief that they more emphasized on female cults. Jatiakali is an important female cult in Fulbari region near the Indo-Bangladesh check post and the Sannyasikata area. Again, it is true that these *Sannyasis* were worshipped like living Shiva cult. Near Sannyasithan tea garden of Phansidewa block of Mechi-Mahananda foothill, there are so many forests. These forests all belong to Nakshalbari block and the Bangdubi army establishment and a tea board office are situated in this area. There in Sannyasithan forest is a Shiva cult known as Janglibaba. It is said that this cult is protecting Bagdogra from all the evils. At Rohini in the Mirik block on an alternative way to Kurseong, there is another Shiva cult. People in Rohini temple pray to a huge stone piece. People now are going for picnic in Sannyasithan forest and to Rohini as a tourist destination. Similarly, Sannyasikata in Rajganj is equally important. There are various other hamlets of Sannyasikata throughout this Rajganj area. Rajganj literally means the residence of a king. There is again a place known as Raniganj which is an army settlement and industrial hub. Bottling of cold drink is one of these industries. Various small scale tea gardens and new tea factories are growing there along with old tea estates. Belakoba is situated in the Shikarpur region. *Shikar* is a native word which means hunting. Zamindars or Landlords were once there in this Rajganj block and hence places like Jamidarguri could be found thereby. Belakoba and Ambari Falakata are two major stations on New Jalpaiguri to Jalpaiguri railway track. It is also said that Mech people once live throughout this block in different settlements. Mech people have

already been linked up with Kaibarta agitation. It is said that Kaibarta agitation was against Buddhist Pala rulers of Bengal-Bihar and probably on control over river trade routes. Kaibartas often designated with the surname Das and Rajbanshis have this title. Mech women worship the rivers and can perform war dancing. Rajbanshi women worshipping Teesta River have probably learnt from the Mech women. There are some pisciculture related self-help groups among the Mech dominated areas of Rajganj along the forest boundaries. Sannyasikata literally means killing off of the monks. These monks might have wider acceptability throughout a greater zone through the river trade. Till now when any boat is discovered from lost river courses in Mechi-Mahananda and Teesta-Dharala basins, people say that it belonged to the *Sannyasi* and the Queen. *Rani* is the native name of a queen and there are places like Ranidanga (place of the Queen) in Nakshalbari-Phansidewa border, Debidanga (place of the Deva) in Mahananda-Panchanai under Matigara block, Raniganj-Panishali in Nepal border, Raniganj in Rajgani block and Ranirhat (marketplace under the Queen's rule) near Uchhalpukuri (again a sacred pond) at Jamalidaha in Mekhliganj block. All these places are uplands and near any forest or *jhar*. Ranidhanga has now no forest, but still there is a place known as Rajajhar nearby. This indicates presence of a jungle king. There are some important but unknown Dargah of Muslim Peer Fakirs in both Mechi-Mahananda and Rajganj areas. In Rajganj, indeed there is a place known as Dasdarga or a place of ten Dargah. People in Rajganj pray to both Muslim Peer Fakirs and these *Sannyasis*. They call them *Sannyasi Thakur*. Even there is a temple of *Sannyasi Thakur* in Rajganj-Jalpaiguri Sadar region. People further believe that a *Sannyasi* could tame a tiger like Pashupatinath in Nepal. He is the protector for ferocious animals and prevents external interference in local politico-economic matters. Probably, they represent a pre-state system that is gradually turning over to a pro-state direction. Many Buddhist monks also do this.

The *Sannyasi* temple here looks like a Buddhist pagoda. Now the question is what these monks were doing in Rajganj and Mechi-Mahananda! Both Kaibarta and Sannyasi movement were organized from these two areas. Interesting to know, Naxalbari movement in post-independent India was organized first in Nakshalbari region. That was a time in 1960s when Dalai Lama fled to India, Tibet was under Chinese control, there was a border dispute between India and China, and Sino-India war was over. Majority of the Rajbanshis who favoured community farming opposed this movement. Leaders of this movement mostly belonged to *Varendri* Brahman community to whom Barindland ridge has been named. Local Adivasi people to a large extent were convinced to this as they had been brought there by the British as tea garden laborer, had a revolutionary history and Jangal Saotal was leader to them. Many Adivasis came to this place from Central India and Chotonagpur in search of agricultural lands. They are very much hard working. Later on, people turned towards democratic movement and electorate system by casting votes. Jangal Saotal belonged to Santhal or Santal Adivasi community and he actually controlled the entire local bus service system. He was a big owner here. These stories of Kaibarta King Bhim and *Sannyasi* groups in different times but look quite similar and are also comparable to the political dominance of Jangal Saotal and *Varendri* Brahmans during Naxalbari movement in the Mechi-Mahananda basin. This agitation has now spread to a larger part of India in a different form. Not only in the times of Buddhist Palas, British-*Sannyasi* clash and Naxalbari movement, but also in Sultani period some local Mech people accepted Islam and helped in spreading Turk rule from mainland area to this territory. That time, a converted Muslim Kalapahar took over nearly whole of this Mahananda valley including Morang and the Barindland ridge. He reached into Rajmahal or Kajangal to address Mid Bengal, South Bengal, tribal pockets, Bengal-Bihar and even Odisha. This

Kalapahar myth still existed in this region. In Muslim belt of Islampur, the Ultra-Lefts still talk about the Kalapahar. He was highly criticized by many for destroying Hindu temples and relics which were part of local history and heritage. On the other hand, most of the community farmers in Mechi-Mahananda basin belonging to Rajbanshi community use Roy and Sinha in their surnames. Some *joats* or community lands were on the names of Sinha Rajbanshis, like Baramohansingh jote, Chhotomohansingh jote, Lalmohansingh jote, Bharatsingh jote, Rupsingh jote and others. Some say that Roy Rajbanshis are the *Deshi* groups and Real Rajbanshi. Those who use Sinha in surname are Rajbanshis of traditional Morang and never under direct control of Koch Bihar dynasty. They have their areas in Dabgram and Rajganj areas also. Rajganj is the Sub-Himalayan portion of the Barindland ridge that separates Mechi-Mahananda from Teesta-Dharala. This ridge ranges in north-south direction. It is followed by Panchagarh and Dinajpur highland in Bangladesh. It actually separates the entire Teesta-Brahmaputra system from Mahananda valley. So many rain fed rivers have been originated from this place. These rivers then pass into Gourbanga and Rajshahi region. Entire Rajshahi is now in Bangladesh. This Rajganj-Panchagarh area was the way to Dinajpur-Rajshahi where ancient civilization *Pundravardhana* was in form. So, it was on the way to the *Pundra* region. Pundra was also a local cane variety. This gateway to *Pundra* is named as *Ponduar* or the door towards *Pundra*. Mustard and some vegetables are yielded here. Some fragrant rice varieties like *kati*, *kalam*, *kukrajan*, *kukurjani*, *kukurjali*, *kalo nunia*, *nenia*, etc. were common to this place. These are also known as *bhogdhan* such as *kattik bhog*, *kathal bhog*, *katari bhog*, etc. This place is also good for pulses, mustard, yams, potato and vegetables. Experimentally, some even cultivate tobacco that they brought in from Cooch Behar. Neighbouring river valleys and basin areas on two sides of Rajganj block were major jute producing chunks. Jute is locally known

as *pat* in native speech and jute bag as *chot*. Places like Chathat in Mechi-Mahananda basin and Patkata over Teesta valley in Jalpaiguri Sadar block close to Teesta Dharala basin are such examples. Patgram is a place now falling under Bangladesh. It is very close to Mekhliganj Indo-Bangladesh pocket and connected with Angrapota-Dahagram enclave of Bangladesh through Tinbigha corridor. Changrabandha check post of India provides rail connectivity to this Patgram. Here, Chathat and Patkata and Patgram stand for market of jute bag, harvesting the jute and jute village respectively. People here after extracting the jute fivers use dry jute sticks or *patkathi* as fuel and construction material. Jute sticks are used in making fence, cowshed and roof. On the roof one can use layers of paddy straw or hey. Jute straws are nonconductors and hollow thus airy. This prevents heat to enter into the house. Hey layers resist rain water. Walls and floors are traditionally made up of mud soil. In order to give strength to the walls, paddy seed coats are mixed with the mud. Structure of the house or cowshed is made up of bamboo. Bamboo flakes and jute straw are also used in making wall. There is also a place known as Burimari near Patgram. Literally, Burimari stands for killing the witch. Tiger is here treated as *Burar beta* or son of the old person. A food item is also there commonly known as *Burir Moa*. Actually, *buri* and *bura* here stand for demigoddess and demigod and not any witch or aged person. *Bura* is the other name of jungle king, king of all the animals, a person who can tame the tiger, proto-Shiva, a *Sannyasi*, Wise Man, Medicine Man, Shaman, magico-religious entity, the soul in the world of spirits and even malevolent deity like *mashan* whom you have to dare and worship if you want to stay in healthy, prosperous, safe and secured condition with happiness. *Mashan* is of various types; he is male and described in association with tiger, elephant, horse, etc. *Dhela Mashan* is also there where people have to throw stones or tie up the stone to a tree. This is also known as *Dhel Thakur*. I have come to know that throwing or pelting

stones is comparable to falling star or a comet. This is the symbol of coming in of an outer space object or soul to the biosphere of this planet full of spirits. This is also a kind of contact with that demigod turning out from malevolent to benevolent entity. There is another *mashan* who is in association with big *Boal* fish. He is known as *Jalua Mashan*. He resides in water or *jol* and eats burnt fish fries. This *mashan* cult is worshipped throughout Cooch Behar district, but at a time it was a matter of concern for a wider territory. Concepts of *Bura Thakur*, *Sannyasi Thakur* and *Mashan Thakur* are not only related to jungles and ferocious animals, but also fishing and animal husbandry. Animal husbandry is a basic feature of the Sub-Himalayan Terrain. It continues from Indo-Nepal border of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar states of India to Teesta-Brahmaputra valley. Bihari communities are also living in different pockets of North Bengal and they also prefer this type of animal husbandry and believe in such demigods, malevolent entities, witch and bad weather (*hawa*). Maithili Brahmans of Mithilanchal believe in ghost, pray to the *Gau-mata* or the Holy Cow and know some traditional procedures to cure such psychological or psycho-social subjects. They call it *hawal laga*. This means that the individual has been attacked by some malevolent spirits or harmful soul in this world of spirit or any demigod or demigoddess. *Hawa* is the air and this entity spreads most effectively through air. It is like some harmful microorganisms or viruses contaminated through this air. They could further be contaminated through soil and water. In damp and humid situation, water born diseases and contaminations are far more evidenced. So, *Jalua Mashan* is very impotent in the context of Cooch Behar and other remote areas of North East India affected by heavy precipitations during the Monsoons. *Nathgurus* are also dealing with such things with the malevolent entities. They are present in the Indo-Nepal Sub-Himalayas of Gorakhpur, Bhojpur and Mithila. Gorakhpur name has been derived from *Gorakshpur* that means protecting the Holy

Cow. These Naths perform their religious rituals in the cowshed. They carry out this performance mainly in monsoon season when there is heavy shower and high humidity- a condition when jute plants are ready to be harvested. Naths then spread throughout Boro-Kamta belt (Indo-Bangladesh) including Teesta-Brahmaputra region and are also present in Rajganj and Barind ridge, Mahananda valley, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gourbanga, Mid Bengal, Bihar and different pockets of South Bengal upto the Bengal delta. Some of them are known as Debnath. They could further belong to *Vaidya* community, *Rudra* Brahman, Nath *Jugi* and trading communities. Nath *Jugis* have some presence in Bengal-Bihar Mahananda valley. *Jugis* are also involved in making cloth pieces from jute fibers. They inhabit with Dhakra Rajbanshis who produce *dhokras* from jute fibers. They are also associated with preparation of lime from snail shells in traditional method. Lime is locally known as *chun* and therefore its manufactures as *Chunia* or *Chuniya*. They collect these snail shells from Adivasi people who consume this snail flesh in their dish. Snail is also consumed by these *Chunia* people, but not the Rajbanshis. Snail dishes are also avoided by caste Hindus and Muslim community. Folk people consider snail flesh very good for eye sight. Snails are also consumed widely by folk people in Indo-Nepal borderland areas of Bihar. Traditional Maithili Brahmans do not eat fish and meat. But with time, things have changed to some extent as many of them have chosen alternative occupations. They even consume snail flesh that they washed well and cook with oil and spice. Adivasi community is also following this preparation, but also eats it in traditional way which is half-cooked in pulse soup. It is considered highly energetic and can increase the *asurik pravriti* or malevolent entity. Maithili Brahmans used to rear the cow for milk and bullock for ploughing. They do not prefer to plough the land by their own hands, but deployed some other caste people who also take care of their cattle. Neighbouring Ahir and Yadav groups rear both

cow and buffalo. Cow is known as *gai* and buffalo as *bhaisa*. These cattle are also raised in Sub-Himalayas North Bengal. Local people are involved in this pastoralism. Ghosh is such a community. They basically belong to Bengali people, but some Rajbanshis also bear this surname. There is a sacred pond in Mechi-Mahananda basin and it is known as Ghoshpukur. Other people like Rajbanshi, Dhimal, Mech and Limbu are also involved in animal husbandry. In high altitude, Lepchas also know about existence of malevolent entities or *mashan*. I have come to know that in Sikkim, local people believe in existence of *mashan*. In Duars, animal husbandry is a basic characteristic. Even the Toto Primitive Tribal Group has own animal husbandry. They actually raise *mithun* that is locally known as *goru*. A large portion of Duars is covered with Gorumara National Park. Literally *gorumara* means killing the *goru* or *mithun*. I have seen Totos eating red meat of *mithun* in special occasion. Totos are now only staying at Totopara, but it is assumed that once they were living throughout a larger part of Bhutan foothills. They carried in goods from the Bhutan Himalayas to the local markets like Bhutki, Bhutni, Bhutkirhat, Bhotpatti, Bhotbari, Balabhut, etc. They need high protein food to get up and down through steep Himalayan tracks. Women are better in carrying goods. Even in Siliguri Municipal Corporation, there is a Bhutia market where in winter season various woolen goods have been sold. In Mechi-Mahananda valley again there are two places known as Ghoshpotti and Tambari. In Duars, other communities like Adivasi, Rajbanshi, Boro or Mech, Rabha and others raise their animal husbandry. Same is applied to the local Bengali and Hindi speaking people. *Mashan* is also common to Brahmaputra valley and Boro Kamta Indo-Bangladesh territories. In different parts of North Bengal, snails, crabs, shrimps, small fishes, catfish (like Koi, Magur, Singi) and river tortilla or *panimachh* (locally known as *Dura*) are available in local small rivers, swamps, big wetlands and muddy floors. All these snail shells are made up of calcium which is also found in

the bones. That bone may be of any human or animal or fish. Some *Sannyasis* perform magico-religious practices with human bone and skull. It is also a common practice among the Buddhist monks. In Buddhism, it is known as Lamaism or *Vajrayana*. In Hinduism, it is known as *Tantradharma*. There are some traditional experts on orthopedics. Such traditional doctors belong to Hindus and Muslims in Sub-Himalayan North Bengal. They are from both Rajbanshi and Bengali societies. They are commonly known as the *har bhanga daktar*. We can say them as doctors who do treatment to bone crack. Bones also crack down when the corps is burning during cremation process. Dom and Hari groups of people are often associated with this process. They use bamboo poles to regulate this bone cracking during this cremation process. Mechi-Mahananda basin has a population of these people. It also contains North Bengal Medical College and Hospital here. There is a long demand to establish another Medical College in Raiganj area. Dinajpur highland (Indo-Bangladesh), Panchagarh-Rajganj area, Barindland, Chopra upland, small uplands (*danga*) within Mechi-Mahananda, ancient kingdom of Morang and Mekhliganj-Haldibari area were once very famous for good quality bamboo. Bamboo is actually growing in large quantities throughout North East India. Bamboo bushes can be found in Himalayan slopes, other small hills, plateau region (Meghalaya-Mymensing), any other upland area within the Teesta-Brahmaputra valley, Arakan range, Barak-Surma and Feni river systems spread throughout Indo-Bangladesh territories, Indo-Myanmar, Indo-Malaya belt, South East Asia and South China where heavy Monsoon rains are expected. These Hari and Dom groups are very good in bamboo and cane handicrafts. Near Chathat area, there was a huge bamboo forest and till now it exists to some extent. This is known as Bansgaon. *Bans* is the native name of bamboo and *Bansgaon* means bamboo village. Bansgaon-Kismat is a place here and *Kismat* is a word standing for fortune. So, a typical case

arises there: jute in the lowland and bamboo in the upland. In Rajganj, traditional orthopedic doctors are present at Ambari-Falakata. Near this area, there is a place known as Bhutki. *Bhutki* stands for female traders from Bhutan Himalayas. This place is not far away from Dabgram. Nishiganj under Mathabhanga subdivision of Cooch Behar district is also famous for the same *har bhanga daktar*. This place is also very close to Falakata. Like Ambari-Falakata in Rajganj area, this Falakata is associated with Bhutkirhat settlement which means a place where female traders coming to sell their products in weekly market. Nishiganj is the Queen's place as it derives from the name of Her Highness Nishimayee who was the Queen of Koch Bihar Kingdom. Nishiganj falls in the Jaldhaka-Torsha basin. Falakata is very close to Torsha River and serves as a knot among Doors (Birpara and Madarihat), Dhupguri (via Bhutkirhat and Shalbari), Alipurduar (after crossing Torsha), Cooch Behar town (after crossing Torsha) and different places of Mathabhanga-Sitalkuchi area including Nishiganj. Mashan is widely worshipped or believed by all the communities in every corner of Cooch Behar district and Mathabhanga is not an exception to that. *Mathabhanga* literally means breaking off of the skull cap. In Mathabhanga, *Sannyasi Thakur* is also worshipped. In Rajbanshi dominated pockets under Sub-Himalayan North Bengal, there are places or rivers like Singimari, Magurmari, Chengmari, Folimari, Takimari, Chandamari, Putimari, Khalisamari, Sholmari, Boalmari, Moamari, Koimari, etc. All these names mean for catching the fishes like Singi, Magur, Cheng, Foli, Taki, Chanda, Puti, Khalisa, Shol, Boal, Moa (Maurala?) and Koi. There under Dhupguri block is place like Duramari that means hunting a *Dura* or tortilla. There is place name by a fish catching kingfisher bird's name which is Pankauri and falling under Rajganj block. Boalmari falls on Tista River near Mandalghat under Haldibari block. Magurmari is in Mechi-Mahananda basin and Chengmari in Teesta-Dharala zone. Other places mentioned here are all falling under

Jaldhaka-Torsha system, Kaljani-Raidak system and Sankosh River in Cooch Behar district. *Jalua Mashan* has a wider acceptance to this place. In Kaljani-Raidak system, rivers create marshlands and Tufanganj is the main urban center here. Nearby place is Burirhat just like Bhutkirhat of Falakata region. *Burirhat* means the market where *Buri* used to sell her product. This is very close to Najirhat which is famous for its *potol* or palwal variety. Barasakdal –Najirhat is near Indo-Bangladesh border where Kaljani and Raidak from the confluence. This confluence however falls in the Bangladesh territory. Other side of this confluence is Balabhut which is again Indian territory and falls under Tufanganj subdivision of Cooch Behar district. Here, Raidak River turns into violet colour as it is completely covered with Azolla and other aquatic weeds. Raidak basin in Balabhut has high bamboo vegetation. It is said that the entire Kaljani-Raidak basin was once covered with bamboo vegetation, dense forest and water weeds. Raidak River has created so many marshlands here and some are considered sacred. One such is the Poati beel at Polika village near Tufanganj municipality. Rajbanshis and Bengalis go there for sacred bathing and the Nath group is involved in this process. Rashik Beel is another location. It is a site for large scale cultivation of water hyacinth. This is then processed into compost manure for organic farming. The mud water is also good for catfish like Shingi and Magur as well as tortilla (*Dura*). Azolla and waterweeds are again good sources of manure and fodder. This basin and nearby areas were well known for cattle. That might be cow or buffalo. This Kaljani-Raidak basin is habitat of the Rabha people who could also be found in different parts of Doors. These Rabhas are of two types- one residing in jungle and based on agro-forestry, the other highly adjusted with agriculture. They speak in local Rajbanshi dialect. They are also associated with animal husbandry. These Rabha people pray to *Bura Thakur* for protection to their cattle and themselves. They are afraid of *Buri* or the witch. *Buri* does not stand always for

witch but aged or elderly women who could guide the community. She is also treated as demigoddess. Teesta River is herself is worshipped as *Teestaburi*. This is however govered by aged Rajbanshi or Mech women and younder women also take part in this. It is done to appease the river and in hope of good crop yield. Women after completion of the ritual get into the river and play with the water. This is called *Mecheni Khela*. Some say the word Mech has been derived from Mechi River, whereas some other think that ir is related with fish which in native language is known as *machh*. Boalmari near Mandalghat on Teesta in Haldibari block again reminds me about the demigod *Jalua Mashan*. Near Tufanganj town, there is aplace known as Barokodali which is known for *Dameshwar Shiva* who is a version of Lord Shiva, cane and bamboo work and *Jalua Mashan*. *Dam* is locally meant for wetland. In nearby area, there is another Shiva cult known as *Shandeshwara* Shiva. That version of Lord Shiva is directly related to the worship of the Holy Ox which is necessary for successful breeding of their cattle. Rabha people are good in paddy-cum-fishing type of cultivation and good in catching fishes by the bamboo made instruments they manufacture. *Jalua Mashan* is here worshipped by *Karji* who is not a Rajbanshi, but a Mech priest. On the other hand, *Sannyasi Thakur* is worshipped by the local Rajbanshi priests. During the worship of *Jalua Mashan*, people can eat pork and big fishes. Pork is usually prohibited by the Rajbanshis. But in Rajbanshi social fold, various tribal people have been incorporated. So, in Morang or Kaljani-Raidak region, these things are not totally uncommon. These Rabhas from Kaljani-Raidak once spread into Jaldhaka-Torsha and even upto the Teesta. Therefore, we can get Burimari settlement in Patgram area of Bangladesh near Mekhliganj and Angrapota-Dahagram. Rajbanshis or tribes so far integrated under Rajbanshi social fold not always shed off their traditional features. Some Rajbanshis in Kaljani-Raidak basin and Teesta River valley are too close to Rabha community and expert in catching local

fishes and other aquatic creatures, using waterweeds as nutritious fodder, praying the demigod or river monster *Jalua Mashan*, while consuming pork and big fishes. They can even sacrifice water buffalo in special occasions. Rabhas are fearless and never dare to go inside deep jungles. They are somewhat other than the Mech people. The bamboo and cane made fishing instruments introduced by Rabhas are very common in mainland Brahmaputra valley within Assam, but not used by the Mech people as a whole. These instruments I have found in Jaldhaka and Torsa region to some extent, but never in Rajganj or Mechi-Mahananda areas. Some instruments are even used to catch fishes in Domohoni water bodies near Teesta-Dharala basin. In Mechi-Mahananda region, they use fishing rod, fishing net, ethno-toxicants, mud barricade and pots. Big net trap on bamboo frame going down into and coming up from water with a sitting position is often constructed on the middle of the river on bamboo poles. This is very common to the rivers in Teesta-Torsha and Kaljani-Raidak river systems. In big rivers, additional bamboo-and-net fencing is also created to channel off all the water to the trap. When fishes fill up the submerged net, the net trap is pulled up by using bamboo leaver. The trap is bamboo triangle and net is attached to it. When it is pulled up, water is poured down from the sieve and fishes are collected by the person sitting on the seat. Then he by using the leaver again puts down the trap into the water and fishes with flow come into the trap. This trap can seldom be found in Mechi-Mahananda basin. It could be found in Phansidewa block near the confluence of Buribalason and Mahananda. There is a place *Buraganj* within Mechi-Mahananda basin. Buraganj is the earlier power center of Khoribari block of Siliguri subdivision. It is also close to both Nakshalbari and Phansidewa blocks. It is in close proximity to Pathar Hirhira that has already been mentioned. Interestingly, same story of Harihar and Bhanumati stone was famous in Kaljani-Raidak basin. Buraganj area is an upland with nearby forests and a silk farm; small scale tea gardens are there

besides old tea estates of Nakshalbari block, ways to the earliest interior settlements (that of the Tharu, Dhimal, Sinha Rajbanshi and Mirik), weekly market and settlement of Rajbanshi Chaudhury. They are the definite proof that Chaudhurys from Mid Bengal and Mahananda valley reached to the Morang besides Dinajpur/Barindland/Panchagarh/Rajganj. These Chaudhurys are most respected here. In Kharibari block, there is the Batasi Tea Estate and so many pockets that were the *joats* or areas for community farming and mostly owned by the Singha Rajbanshis. Kelabari is there next to Batasi Tea estate. This region yields lots of bananas and also known for a huge statue of the fertility cult *Kali*. The Goddess protected the land from elephant attacks. There is a lowland area drenched by the widening Mechi river basin. This is the way to Thakurganj under Kishanganj now in Bihar. This place is also known as Mainaguri and yields lots of potato, yams and vegetables. Sugarcane, banana and wheat are grown there in season time besides paddy and jute. Mustard and some pulses can also be cultivated in this region. Debiganj is the gateway to Bihar and from this place one can also enter into Bhadrapur Nepal. Khopalasi is a nearby place. By this name, a place is also there at Panchkelguri-Patharghata of Matigara proper. Patharghata is the only place in the whole district where there are brick factories. Mechi here decides the Indo-Nepal international border. Mechi is here accompanied with Bataria River. This river is meant for small irrigation projects, local level fishing and other domestic uses. Mechi-Bataria borderland is a place where Rajbanshis of different types are living together with Nepali speaking, Bengali speaking and Hindi speaking people. This place is well known for Indo-Nepal trade and transportation. Dhulabari and Kakarbhatta are two major urban places of Nepal under its Jhapa district. Nepal foothill is again renowned for areca nuts and pulses propagated by these Rajbanshis. Kakarbhatta under Mechinagar Municipality provides regular bus services to Katmandu and Pokhara. There are many more *bhatta* or *bhita* areas falling under

Kharibari block. Khemchi is another river in this block. Both Bataria and Khemchi with their networkings fall into Mechi River in Bihar. The block contains rail stations like Raniganj, Batasi and Adhikari. Near Debiganj, there is Galgalia station falling under Bhatgaon village area of Thakurganj. Entire Kishanganj has a high Muslim concentration, but still the Muslim rulers did not deny from the supernatural powers of the Vaishnava priest. Kishanganj means the place of Lord Vishnu. It yields tea and pineapple like Phansidewa and Chopra Muslim dominated pockets of Mechi-Mahananda. Calypso is a private company with multinational brand that focuses on organic farming of pineapple and other vegetables and produces pineapple juice and processed pickles. It is situated in Bidhannagar region of Phansidewa. It is also a major market place of locally produced pineapples. Bidhannagar-Muraligachh has grabbed the attraction of Sonapur-Bhimbar historical site. With New Jalpaiguri station at Dabgram-Siliguri, all the megacities of mainland India are connected via an alternative track. This track is passing through Rangapani of Nakshalbari block, Nijbari (near Mahipal) and Chathat of Phansidewa block, Dhumdangi of Chopra block and Aluabari near Islampur town. Ambari in Phansidewa block serves road connectivity to Bihar near Ghoshpukur. Islampur town has also good connectivity with entire Kishanganj area by road away from rail services. Again returning back to the discussion of Buraganj, I have to say that the local Chaudhurys were against Naxalbari movement centered on *Bengai jote*. Hatighisha is a nearby area falling under Nakshalbari block and known for Naxalbari movement, tea gardens, betel vein cultivation, missionary institutes, forest villages and elephant attacks. Once the Rajbanshis of Morang kept domestic elephants and the Chaudhurys raided on their horses. There are places like Sonachandi, Sonapindi indicating presence of gold and silver. People say that golden and silver plates came out from the sacred ponds. There are many stories about hidden treasures. People say that there is a sacred door in

Kishanganj that is being closed for a prolonged time period. On the other side of that door, there are treasures, way to the heaven (outer space or knowledge world or prosperity). In Phansidewa block, usually after successful harvesting of the crop and bringing in them to the thrashing floor, people often establish a bamboo pole in the empty field and with it tie up winnowing tray and brush used in post-harvesting techniques. They also tie up animal horn to it. This structure is known as *bura dhallato* many and meant for wiping off of harmful spirits during the fallowing and grazing process. We can see this in upland crop fields where large bamboo bushes coexist. Laldas jote in Mechi-Mahananda is such an area and there we can see such post-harvest erect structures. Laldas jote area is also known for floriculture, bamboo bush, year-long vegetable propagation under Green House, local *chura* producing factory, Mahananda River at Indo-Bangladesh area and factory. So, the *Bura* cult is also present in Mechi-Mahananda where there were large bamboo bushes. There is a ritual known as *bansjagano* during worship of Madankam. It is a bamboo related ritual where only male can take into practice. It is mostly restricted to Kaljani-Raidak region and absent in Mechi-Mahananda. Still there in Mechi-Mahananda, people try to cut off bamboo from the bamboo bush in dark night. That is not stealing of the bamboos, but has some similarities with the original ritual. Bamboo related stories and masks are common to the entire Dinajpur track and Mahananda valley. They believe that some malevolent entities reside in bamboo bushes and at night throw stones on the people on their way. It is believed that paddy has been improved from a bamboo grass variety available in Cooch Behar district. That was a summer variety and known as *bonoful* or *bansful*. That indicates to wild flower or bamboo flower. In Teesta region, a local fish variety is available that looks like bamboo leaf and thus known as *banspata*. Rajbanshis doing ethno-fishery at a large scale plus paddy-cum-fishing in Kaljani-Raidak system and nearby areas are often treated as *Garol*. This is a sheep variety. This

lamb is also consumed in different occasions in alternative to goat. Sheep is locally known as *bhera* and goat as *chhagol*. *Bhera* is therefore included in the animal husbandry of the local people. Big sized mountain goats are known as *ramchhagol*. Some of these could be found in Teesta area, but mostly in Torsha and Kaljani-Raidak regions. *Garol* is also domesticated in Sikkim, Darjeeling Himalayas, Mirik and Bhutan. Mirik was once famous for this creature; lakeside grassland and mountain slopes were ideal for the sheep. Sheep is the source of both wool and meat. From this wool, cloths were made and sold in the Bhutia markets. Tufanganj and Alipurduar are two major municipalities within Kaljani-Raidak and provide entrance to Assam after crossing Sankosh River. It is said that Koch tribe has been originated from this Sankosh River which is again associated to the Shiva cult. Koch people in Cooch Behar have become a Hindu caste and talk in Rajbanshi dialect. They use Barman in their surname and address themselves as Koch-Rajbanshi. They are associated with establishment of the ancient Koch Bihar Kingdom. Cooch Behar town and Chilakhana near Tufanganj are two important centers of that Koch Bihar state and they along with Gosanimari are now situated in Cooch Behar district. They were in favour of Baneshwar Shiva cult like all other Shiva and Vishnu cults under their kingdom besides different female fertility cults. Baneshwar is treated as old as Jalpesh. It is situated very close to Cooch Behar town. Its relatedness with King *Baan* or *Bun* is a myth, but indicates some connections with the *Vratya Kshatriya* groups taking shelter into Teesta-Brahmaputra region after leaving out *Pundravardhana* Kingdom. In nearby, there are two places known as Dhangdhingguri and Pundibari. Pundibari literally means the home to the *Pundis* or *Paundras*. Pandit is used as a surname to many and it stands for the Wise Man. Dhangdhingguri is a place related to dense forest, tigers, *mashan*, marshland, sandbed, *kasia* grassland, Harobhanga River (river of the cracked bones) and the lost myth

of *Dhangdhing*. Some say that *kasia* is a fragrant grass variety like lemon grass and grown in sandbeds, ditches and marshes and wild relative to fragrant high quality tasty local variety *ofkalo* or *kola* common to Teesta-Brahmaputra basin, Dinajpur region including Rajganj and Panchagarh, Morang, Indo-Nepal Sub-Himalayas, Mahananda river system and other remote pockets of North East India sharing Indo-Bangladesh border and continuous with Indo-Malayan belt. It is known as *kasai* in Dinajpur area where it is used with tuemeric paste for beautification and bridal preparation during marriage ceremony. It is a sacred item. *Dhangdhing* is probably a demogod who is king of the forest, holds a stick or *dang* in the hand to tame down ferocious animals like tiger and protects the animal husbandry. So, this is a cult comparable to Lord Shiva or *Sannyasi* or *Bura Thakur* or Gorakhnath worshipped by Naths and Nath *Jugis*. Local Rajbanshis in Dhangdhingguri-Konamali region use special type of bamboo funnel to make rice cake from rice dust. They crack the bamboo like a bone to bring out the *banspitha* or rice cake in bamboo funnel. It is probably the *dholu* bamboo variety that is used in this case. It yields a chemical that prevents the rice dust in the funnel from sticking off or burning out. Rice dust produced from fragrant paddy varieties is poured inside the funnel with coconut powder, molasses and other garnishing ingredients (optional), covered up with banana leaf and let to be fumed in fire. Stick in hand shows the sigh of commandment, status and magico-religious power. Such usage of bamboo in food preparation used to be common among Rabhas. Bodo group of people also do agroforestry. Sub-Himalayan cattle breeders pray to such entity and seek protection for the cubs and cattle which might include cow, water buffalo and even *mithun*. They prepare card from the fresh milk that they call *goleya dahi*. They mix *chura* or pressed rice and prepare *dahi-chura* dish item and also add to it *bichia kela* which is a banana variety with medicinal importance. They offer this to the demigod. They also produce small balls from highly

condensed milk or *khir*. There is a paddy variety that is known as *khir* or *dudh dhan*. Such paddy is as tasty as condensed milk or sweet milk. There is a place on the way from Matigara proper to Mirik known as *Dudhae* or *Dudhia* again indicating to milk. So, here milk is here as pious as paddy. However, from this *khir*, small balls are produced and offered to the cult. These balls are known as *Burir Moa* or product of the *Buri*. So, again the link with Bodo or Mech people appears in front of us. Further, this is a general belief that Kamrupi Brahmans of Assam can transform a human into a goat or a sheep. This also means to make a fool. But, indeed there is a ritual in Rajbanshi society by the name of *Bherar Ghor Chhuba*. That means touching the shed built up for the sheep. Here, a temporary small home made up of jute sticks is constructed and some foods are served in this. A person seemingly a sheep enters into that hut and start eating these foods. Suddenly, this hut is set on fire and the person flees out of the room crying “ba-ba”. These people also collect fermented young bamboo shoots, mushrooms, edible ferns and herbs from the wild and wetland. These are some sorts of alternative foods. Tribal women, Nepali women and even some Rajbanshi women do these collections. Such places were either populated with Rabha or Mech people. These are uplands with slopes and bamboo bushes. In Cooch Behar, *Bura Thakur* and *Sannyasi Thakur* are two different entities that have been overlapped. This overlapping is maximum in Haldibari, Mekhliganj, Mathabhanga-Sitalkuchi and probably in Patgram that has now gone to Bangladesh. We can clarify this as a superimposition of Teesta-Torsha and Kaljani-Raidak. Balabhut is exceptionally there in Kaljani-Raidak and Burimari in Teesta-Torsha. Teesta and Torsha are two rivers initiated from Sikkim and Chumbi valley, crossing the Himalayas, creating fertile plains in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar and finally, entering into Bangladesh to meet into Jamuna as a part of Brahmaputra mouth. This Teesta and Torsha parallel to each other therefore form a system

where *Jalpesh*, *Jatileshtar*, *Sannyasi*, *Mashan*, *Bura Thakur*, Jelep-la, Sipchu and Shivok are situated. Dharala is a common name to this region. Jaldhaka River is known as Dharala. Jarda River flowing by Jalpesh is also known as Dharala. There is a Teesta-Dharala basin. Old channel of Torsha is met with its tributary Jaldhaka in Dinhata-Sitai region. Capital of ancient Kamtapur Kingdom was there near this **confluence** and it is known as Gosanimari. It is also the place of Goddess *Kamteshwari*. Then Torsha-Jaldhaka joint flow enters into Bangladesh and it is also known as Dharala River there. Further, **Teesta barrage** at Gojoldoba near Odlabari and Teesta-Dharala basin is an important point to this whole issue. From there major irrigation canals have been created. The shorter canal brings in water to Teesta-Dharala basin and after crossing Dharala River enters into Mainaguri block. It provides water to Domohoni region and Marichbari gets the highest benefit. *Marich* in local term stands for chili and Marichbari means the chili house. Actually, Rajbanshis were very much involved in spice production like chili and turmeric. Turmeric in local language is known as *halud* or *haldi*. Haldibari has already been mentioned here. Haldibari and Marichbari are known for chili production. Haldibari is still famous for that. It is proposed that this leftwards canal has to cross or connect Jarda, Sutunga, Jaldhaka and Torsha and then reach to the Cooch Behar proper. Main purpose would be irrigation and flood control in Teesta-Jaldhaka midland, Jaldhaka-Torsha basin and probably leading to Kaljani-Raidak system. Teesta-Jaldhaka canal is now under process. The rightwards canal has traversed the entire Rajganj and provides Teesta water for irrigation purpose. A power station has been constructed over there. It crosses local rivers like Karala and Neem to reach into Karatoa. After crossing Karatoa, it is connected with some other minor rivers of Rajganj like Sahu, Barang and Jorapani. Jorapani River passes through Dabgram-Fulbari and Dabgram industrial hub is located at the place. This has a tributary

known as Fuleshwari that passes through Siliguri urban area. This place is commonly known as Ghughumari that indicates catching or hunting the dove or **pigeon**. In the same name, there is a place near the CoochBehar town. Like Karala River passing through Jalpaiguri town and then meeting into Teesta at Mandalghat, Fuleshwari covers a major portion of Siliguri Municipal Corporation and its added areas under Bhaktinagar Police Station before meeting into Jorapani in Dabgram-Fulbari near Chaturagochh. This area falls under Panchkelguri-Sahudangi. Nearby traditional market places are Paglahat, Fulbarihat and Ambari-Falakata. Dabgram in vicinity has so many permanent market areas around New Jalpaiguri station. From Ambari-Falakata, a rural way (panchayet road) is connected with Shikarpur-Belakoba and then through canal road to Gojoldoba barrage, Teesta-Dharala basin, Odlabari, Kalimpong, Malbazar, Lataguri, Maulani and Domohoni. From Malbazar, Lataguri, Maulani and Domohomi one can easily reach to Mainaguri through Malbazar-Mainaguri road. By this way, it is possible to reach to Teesta-Dharala basin, Mainaguri and Kalimpong from Dabgram-Siliguri by avoiding Jalpaiguri and Shivok. Paglahat by its name literally means a weekly market protected by the fanatical entity. This does not stand for madness in actual, but indicates to a process of communication to the supernature or the world of knowledge through some crazy acts. This is a process that many *Sannyasis* follow to possess the spirit and communicate with demigod, demigoddess, malevolent and benevolent entities, the special souls in this world of spirit, etc. and gather more and more information. It again indicates to the cult of Shiva. Similarly, near Gosanimari as the capital of ancient Kamtapur Kingdom near the confluence of Old Torsha (*Mora Torsha*) and Jaldhaka (*Singimari*) water systems, the place is known commonly as Matalhat; this indicates to the existence of a weekly market there by the name of a *Matal* or drunk. Alcoholism is a process to many to activate the subconscious mind of inactive part of the brain. A drunk says so many

things and some of the speech might be proved very vital. Turning over to the topic on right hand Teesta Canal; it clear that the canal crosses different rivers in Rajganj area and meets into Mahananda barrage. Here Lachka meets into Mahananda and a substation of National Thermal Power Corporation is also there. Mahananda barriage and Gojoldoba barriage are tourist destinations, a biodiversity zone, water sources to Siliguri Municipal Corporation and big artificial pond sites. These two could be compared with Mirik, Choupukuria, Ghoshpukur, Leusipukuri, Rupandighi and Domohoni. Ponds are also there in Chopra and Islampur areas. From Mahananda barriage of Fulbari to Haptiagachh of Chopra, Mahananda River separates Phansidewa block from Bangladesh. At the same time, Teesta canal further extened into this Phansidewa block. So, Teesta canal provides water to both Mechi-Mahananda and Teesta-Dharala basins. In Haptiagachh, the canal again crosses Mahananda or Khari River and enters into the upland area of Chopra block where it crosses Dok or Dauk or Dahuk River. Canal then passes through the plains of Islampur and Raiganj subdivisions of Uttar Dinajpur district where it meets with other rivers like Nagar, Luna, Kanchan and Kulik. District town Raiganj falls into Raiganj-Hemtabad area and served by this Kulik River. Kulik River area is also a good biodiversity zone like Gojoldoba and Mahananda barrages. Islampur subdivision falls into Mahananda-Nagar basin and ends in the confluence of these two rivers. Raiganj subdivision depends on Kulik, Gamor and Tangan rivers all falling into Mahananda River that separates this subdivision from Bihar state. Local people say that once Teesta was linked with Karatoa, Mahananda and even Koshi and all these rivers fall into the Ganges. Now, Teesta and old track of Karatoa in Bangladesh falls into Jamuna of the Brahmaputra mouth along with Jaldhaka-Torsha, Kaljani-Raidak and Sankosh. Main track of Karatoa is in association with Purnabhava-Atrai system; Atrai falls into a marshland and Purnabhava in the Ganges. Purnabhava-Atrai

initiates in Dinajpur highland of Bangladesh, then enters into Dinajpur lowland of India(Dakshin Dinajpur district) and again moves into marshland area of Bangladesh. Entire Mahananda system flowing through Morang, North Benagl and Bihar *Purvanchala* with various tributaries from Indo-Bangladesh Dinajpur highland enters into Gourbanga or Malda marshland and Bangladesh marshland before falling in the Gangetic delta like Purnabhaba. So, Teesta canal again builds up the interconnectivities. Teesta canal therefore connects the two different river systems, namely Teesta and Mahananda, and the Mahananda barrage on it is situated under Dabgram-Fulbari area. And this canal is also known by the name of Teesta River. So, by establishing Siliguri town in British period and then constructing New Jalpaiguri station in post-independent India along with the Teesta canal, Dabgram has got the impotence that the traditional rulers had tried to provide it and then formed the alternative Jalpaiguri town.

Priests in the major temple sites belong to different Brahman groups like Maithili, Kamrupi, *Varendri* and other Bengalis. They are involved in worship of male and female cults including Lord Shiva. Nath and Vaishnava monks are also there. *Bhongriya* or *Adhikari* is the Rajbanshi priests. They conduct the prayer to *Sannyasi* and *Bura* demigods. The terms *Bura* and *Buri* are common among the Rabhas who dominate over Sub-Himalayan river systems (mainly Kaljani-Raidak) and indicate to a probable link with Boro people. Mech priest is involved in worship of *Jalua Mashan*. Both Rabha and Mech people belong to the greater Bodo fold. Mech and Bodo in some sense have no such difference. Both of them are outside Indo-Aryan language group. But Rabhas along with Koches and Rajbanshis are speaking in Indo-Aryan dialect at least in North Bengal areas. I have seen Rajbanshi dialect in Mechi-Mahananda shares commonness with Bengali, Nepali and Maithili. In Teesta-Brahmaputra, Rajbanshi dialects are linked up with Bengali and Assamese. There are two other dialects,

namely *Rangpuria* and *Goalparia*. Rabhas strongly believe in *Bura* and *Buri*. At the same time, *Teestaburi* is worshipped by Rajbanshi and Mech women. Rabhas are good in agriculture-cum-fishing and also speaking in Rajbanshi dialect. Mech people talk like the Bodos, associated with river ways and fishing, and pray to the river monster and demigod like *Jalua Mashan* and *Teestaburi* related with rivers.

People of Himalayas, low altitude Shivalik range and Himalayan foothill are mostly associated with worship of this Shiva cult, proto-Shiva, demigods and female fertility cults. Earlier inhabitants of this foothill area are known as the *Kiratas*. They still present in large number in Nepal Himalayas and pray to different forms of Lord Shiva along with associated female cults. Nepali people have their own Brahmin caste generally known as *Baun* or *Bauni*. In Nakshalbari block, there is a place known as Dhimal next to Baunibhita and Tarabari. Baunibhita is the place where *Bauns* are supposed to stay. Tara is an important female cult worshipped along with Lord Shiva. Dhimal on the other hand is a community very close to the Rajbanshis. They use Mallick in their surname instead of surnames used by Rajbanshi Kshatriyas. Huchai Mallick is also a place in Nakshalbari block and has derived from a Dhimal name. Dhimal is often associated with *Himal* and *Dhiman*. *Dhiman* is indicating to a person with calm and cool head. *Himal* stands for Himalaya and Hillman communities like Kirat (*Kirata*), Tharu, Limbu, etc. Tharubhita nearby refers to the existence of the Tharu people. Tharu, Dhimal and Limbu are all living in the Indo-Nepal Shivalik and foothills exclusively belonging to ancient Kingdom of Morang. Singha and other Rajbanshis including the Chaudhurys also stay in this foothill area of Indo-Nepal. These groups like the Kirat people used to be associated with animal husbandry, land fallowing, slash and burn technique, seasonal agriculture and probably carpentry. Himul and Hillman's are two milk supplying branded companies. Local Bengali and Rajbanshi carpenters are there

involved in production of furnitures and wooden crafts. Shorea tree is available in this region and commonly known as *Shal*. Its wood is good for construction purpose, furnitures, boat manufacturing and plough making. There are places known as Shalbari in Sub-Himalayan North Bengal. Bairatishal is the other name of Shibmandir under Matigara. Shalbari or Shorea house is a place on the Siliguri-Darjeeling Hill Cart Road. Ektiashal is situated near Dabgram-Siliguri under Bhaktinagar Police Station of Rajganj block; this added area under Siliguri Municipal Corporation is known for temple of the Iskcon mission that involved in spreading out Vaishnavism throughout the whole world. It is by Thakurnagar-Ashighar is connected to New Jalpaiguri station, interior regions of Rajganj block and Baikunthapur forest. So, **the forest at Rajganj area near Dabgram is known as Baikunthapur or the Heaven where Lord Vishnu resides in.** Shalbari is also there under Dhupguri block of Jalpaiguri district. Dhupguri is on the left bank of Jaldhaka River which separates Dhupguri from Mainaguri block. Dhupguri and Mainaguri are both falling under Jalpaiguri subdivision that also contains another two blocks, namely Jalpaiguri Sadar and Rajganj. Jalpaiguri, Mainaguri and Dhupguri by names have been derived from some plants like *Jalpai* (olive), *Maina* (teak yielding plant) and *Dhup* (yielding fragrance). Nearby Teesta-Dharala basin falling under Malbazar subdivision has a forest known as Kathambari and a place known as Odlabari. Literally, these places are linked up with the terms like *katham* and *odol*. *Odol* is a plant name and *katham* means a structure or, better to say, a wooden structure. In many cases, Rajbanshis construct such *katham* or structure for the earthen iolds from *Maina* wood. That wooden structure might be of Borodevi, Durga, Bhandani, Kali or Tara. Shorea wood is the best raw material for wooden plough and boat besides furniture and wooden house. There is a place Halermatha near Dhimal-Tarabari and Nathua in Mainaguri block. *Haler matha* means plough head and *nao thua* indicates to a place or riverside to keep in

the boats. Slender high speed wooden boats from Shorea trunks used to be manufactured. Boat racing is often participated in Jaldhaka-Teesta and Kaljani-Raidak. Boats are there in Teesta and Mahananda river systems. Matigara and Dhupguri weekly markets were famous for wooden crafts and plough. Till now, I have seen different types of wooden plough being sold at Dhupguri weekly market. Both Matigara and Dhupguri weekly markets were known for cattle. Till now Dhupguri has a cattle market. This could be compared to the Patirajpur market in Itahar in Dinajpur. Saw mills and carpentry are present in Mechi-Mahananda Sub-Himalayas and Chopra market. There both Rajbanshi and Bengali carpenters work. Forests of Nakshalbari are meant for fuel wood. Actually, carpenters are present throughout Sub-Himalayan North Bengal and Dinajpur areas where forests are there. People still collect or buy fuel wood from neighbouring jungles. Women basically collect the fuel wood. However, men go deep inside the jungles to collect good quality wood, which often turns into a legal matter. Forest department and forest villagers however often negotiate with each other. Army and other defence establishments are settled in these jungle areas. People also let their cattle graze in the jungle and nearby fallow lands. They often collect nutritious herbs from the jungle and ensure increase in the milk quality and amount. Social forestry, agro-forestry, medicinal plantation and monoculture of wood yielding plants are special features to that. They are often confused with the poachers involved in biopiracy. Torsa River is flowing through Jaldapara National Park and Chilapata forest, separates Dhupguri and Falakata from Alipurduar, and finally enters into Cooch Behar district where by the side of its old channel, Gosanimari is located and by the new channel Cooch Behar town. It also serves as the gateway of Bhutan Himalayas through Jaigaon. Here another Shalbari is located on Falakata-Alipurduar way. Falakata and Alipurduar along with Chilapata forest and Jaldapara National Park are under Jalpaiguri district, whereas parts of Shalbari-Kholta are

falling under Cooch Behar district towards Cooch Behar town, Pundibari, Dhangdhingguri and Baneshwar Shiva temple. In this Shalbari, Rashmela festival is organized just like that in Cooch Behar town. Rashmela is again related to Lord Vishnu. Rashmela is an annual festival where *Rashchakra* has been created of wooden structure. In Cooch Behar town, it is manufactured by a Muslim carpenter family. It is not cyclical but a conical structure and fixed on a pole by its axis. It looks like the head of a pyramid or a rocket or a space craft. People come under the structure and by the ropes hanging from the machine rotates it. In Cooch Behar, the main festival is organized in Madanmohan temple. **Madanmohan** is another edition of Lord Vishnu and worshipped singularly. During this occasion, all the ten forms of Lord Vishnu (*Dashavatara*) and different idols from other major Vishnu temples of the district are brought together and people come to worship them. Some idols are in pair (male and female cults). Religious songs and drama are organized here. Various earthen models are constructed here to express folk stories, epics and life events of Lord Krishna form of Lord Vishnu. Krishna or Madanmohan is represented here as a shepherd. Killing of a malevolent demigoddess in the hands of the child shepherd has given the highest importance. Rashchakra and earthen model of this killing are presented in both the Rashmela festivals. Madanmohan is definitely Lord Krishna but not with any female partner like Laxmi or Radha. This type of ritual is often regarded as Neo-Vaishnavism. This sect follows Shankardeva who was an eminent personality of mainland Brahmaputra valley and religious leader of Vaishnava sect there centuries ago. He took shelter in Koch Bihar Kingdom when Brahmaputra valley was under the control of Ahom tribe not ready to accept Vaishnavism at the initial stage. Koch Bihar state was formed by Koch tribe who were highly associated with Sankosh River and in Torsha area combined with Rajbanshi caste to form Koch-Rajbanshi association. This caste formation then spread over to plains of

Kaljani-Raidak, Jaldhaka-Torsha, Teesta-Dharala and Teesta-Torsha across Indo-Bangladesh areas of today followed by Rajganj-Panchagarh highland. In this way, they reached to the Dabgram area and touched the boundary of Mechi-Mahananda basin. They were in conflicts with Kingdom of Bhutan on the issue of control over Doors region. They were aware of Sikkim, Morang and Tibet. Even temporarily they have acquired the Barindland or Dinajpur ridge or Dinajpur heights leading upto Dinajpur lowlands falling under Gour. It was not possible for them to control entire Dinajpur-Rajshahi or Gour Bengal or Morang or Mahananda river system or Purnia-Katihar region or Mid Bengal where Rajbanshis could also be found. Besides the Jalpaiguri branch, they had another branch at Rangpur (now in Bangladesh). Another branch of Koch-Rajbanshi dynasty from Chilakhana Tufanganj on Kaljani-Raidak basin occupied entire Brahmaputra valley and also reached into Manipur, Khaiyam (Khasi territory in Meghalaya plateau), Cuchhur, Jayantia, Dimasa territories, Barak-Surma valley and Feni river system (Tripura-Coomilla) near to the coastal region of Chittagong-Arakan. They either occupied or impacted over to the entire Harikel region of today's Indo-Bangladesh. They had more branches at Brahmaputra proper and even Bogra (ancient *Pundravardhana*) at a distance. They tried to control the Boro-Kamta tradition and protect it from external interference. Vaishnavism has spread out widely to these places. Caste people, Kshatriya, *Vratya-Kshatriya*, warrior tribes and human shields are not out of that. There is another Shalbari in Cooch Behar district and this is located near Barokodali-Tufanganj. Shorea forest is again there on the way from Tufanganj to Alipurduar via Barokodali and Mahakalguri. *Mahakal* is another name of Lord Shiva. *Dameshwara* and *Shandeshwara* Shiva cults are present there in Barokodali-Nakkatigachh. *Soti* variety of bamboo is growing there near the marshland areas full of water weeds and *Azolla*. Rabha do agro-forestry and catch fishes there in the jungle area and nearby

places. Poati pond, Raidak River and even Sankosh River are considered ideal for sacred bathing. There is a Langalgram area near Barokodali and by name it means a village of the wooden plough manufactures. *Kodal* is a native or local word and it is meant for spade. So, places with the term *Kodal* refer to initial or early cultivations with later introduction of hand plough and bullock plough. Such places we could find in Teesta-Dharala basin and Torsha valley with closer proximity of the forest belt. Interestingly, Madanmohan temples are there in Kaljani-Raidak near Tufanganj, Cooch Behar town and also Madhupur. Latter two are situated on Torsha valley. Madhupur is close to Shalbari-Kholta region. It is on the way to Jaldapara. It is important to notice that instead of one Rashmela, two places have been chosen for this occasion in the district. The major one is organized in Cooch Behar town and before that the idol in a wooden palanquin is brought to all the major Vishnu temples. Other Vishnu idols were also brought in there in main Madanmohan Temple- these cults are in pair (male and female). Another one is arranged in Kholta-Shalbari. There also earthen models were exhibited but on the tribal life. That might represent way of living of the Naga tribes. It is assumed that Jaldapa was the lost tribe who lived in the Jaldapara forest region, depended on the ancient trade routes of Torsha River, and has gone out for a complete extinction or fully assimilated by others. Toto is a tribe still living in Totopara under Ballalguri Panchayet area of Madarihat block in Duars and this Totopara village is also on the Torsha riverside. Now, Rashmela is being organized outside Cooch Behar including Matigara under Mechi-Mahananda basin. Near Alipurduar, there is another place known as Shalkumarhat. In Mathabhanga-Sitalkuchi Indo-Bangladesh pocket there is a place known as Chhoto Shalbari meaning the small Shorea house. Shalmara is a place in Nazirhat-Barashaldal near Burirhat under Dinhata Indo-Bangladesh enclave where Chaudhurihat is recognized as a traditional market place. Shalbari name also belongs to an Indian enclave in

Panchagarh region of Bangladesh. There is a very old mosque known as Shalbari mosque at a Shorea forest in Thakurgaon areas on Dinajpur ridge now falling in Bangladesh. It was probably constructed at a time when Islam with the Turk-Afghans in Sultani period stepped into North Bengal for the first time on the way of Gour, Mahananda river system and Dinajpur ridge and initially got struck at Rajganj-Panchagarh areas. Like Madanmohan in Cooch Behar, we have Kantaji for Dinajpur. The temple is situated at Dinajpur town in Dinajpur proper that now falls under Bangladesh. Kantaji is a variation of Lord Vishnu and accompanied with female cult Radha or Laxmi. So, the cult is the symbol of Vaishnavism. Dinajpur-Rajshahi is now Indo-Bangladesh territory. It is contained with Dinajpur heights in association with Rajganj-Panchagarh Indo-Bangladesh pocket. This entire highland area is also known as Barindland or the home to *Varendri* Brahmins. That was also the core areas of the *Sannyasis* and Muslim Fakirs in post-Buddhist period. Like Dinajpur, Vaishnavism has also spread in the ancient Kingdom of Morang. Portion of Morang under Bihar *Purvanchala* is known as Kishanganj which literally means the residence of Lord Vishnu or Lord Krishna locally addressed as *Kishna* or *Kishan-ji* or *Kanta-ji*. Shrikrishnapur near Islampur and Muraligachh near Sonapur-Bhimbar on Mechi-Mahananda basin again associated with Lord Vishnu also known as Shri Krishna is holding *murali* or bamboo flute in his hand. There are places like Horibhita, Madhabbhita and Keshtopur in the Phansidewa block of Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district. These interior settlements of Mechi-Mahananda were all under Morang and Sikkim, inhabited by some ethnic groups previously mentioned (Dhimal, Tharu, Subba or Limbu, Singha, Rajbanshi) and also hinterland for the *Sannyasis*. Hori, Madhab and Keshto are other names of Lord Vishnu. This Hori is different from the term Hari (already mentioned as a community known for cane and bamboo basketry along with cremation process of the

corps), *Heera* (diamond or gems excavated from the mines), *Handi* (a pot like a skull cap of *mathabhanga*), *Har* (bone like leg bone or *thang-bhanga*), *Hargor* (bone dust), *Harbhanga* (cracked bone), *Harbhanga* *Daktar* (orthopedic doctor), *Har Har Mahadev* (Lord Shiva), *Haragauri* (Lord Shiva with Goddess Gouri the white) and *Haraparvati* (Lord Shiva with the Himalayan Queen). There are several Shorea parks in Sub-Himalayan North Bengal. One of these is on Siliguri-Shivok near Shalugara. Many other trees are also being prayed, such as *jiga*, *bot*, *pakur*, etc. By tree names, there are so many places like Ambari, Amtola, Bottola, Pakurtola, Nimtola, Kultola, Beltola, Bakultola, Kamlabagan, Kamalpur, Lichupukuri or Leusi Pukuri, Belgachhi, Kadamtala, and so fore. Kasiabari and Khagrabari in Cooch Behar are again derived from plant names. Many other trees are being respected in either positive or negative sense. Those include *kamranga*, *bel*, *ghoksa*, *kanthal*, *tentul*, *gua*, *dab*, *shimul*, etc. Places names also follow by this way: Kamrangaguri, Beldanga, Ghoksadanga, Kanthalguri, Tentulguri, Guabari, Gauhati (state capital of Assam), Guabarnagar, Dabgram, Shimulbari, etc. *Gua* and *shimul* are the areca and the catechu plant. Areca nut and catechu extract are consumed with betel leaf. Betel vein is commonly known as *pan* and there are places with the name Panbari. *Shishu* is also a wood yielding plant and it is the teak plant; Shishubari or teak house is also there in Madarihat, Doors. Madarihat has also another place by the name Shishujhumra. Champasari is a place in Mechi-Mahananda basin. It is said that it has derived from *Champa* flowering plant. Mech people have a surname Champramari. When local people prepare structure of the idol from *Moina* or *Moyna* tree, it is also a tribute or prayer to that wood yielding plant. This is the dependence on Shorea or *Shal* tree that has made them to pray to folk deity *Shaleshwari Thakur*. That is a prayer to the *Shal* tree. Often a black stone is worshipped and symbolized as Lord Vishnu. This is known as the *Shalgram shila* (*shila* is meant

for stone). From Morang to Sankosh there might be so many tribes like Dhimal, Tharu, Lumbu or Subba, Toto, Jalda and Rabha. Of these, Dhimal has become a caste. These forest dwelling tribes used to depend on forest and practice animal husbandry. These tribes have come in contact with other people like Bodo or Mech tribe, Rajbanshi caste(s), Nepali speaking people (both castes and ethnic communities) including *Bauni*, Kirat groups of Indo-Himalayas, Koch tribe, Boro-Kamta tradition, Bengali and Bihari castes, Adivasi tribes, Bhutanese people, Lepcha tribe, Garo tribe, Assamese people, Hindi speaking castes and mainland trading communities, Bangladesh immigrants and others. Dhimal, Rajbanshi, Kirat, Koch and Rabha prefer to talk in Indo-Aryan dialectology. Assamese, Bengali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Nepali and Hindi also belong to this family. New generation Subba or Limbu, Mech, Bodo and Toto groups can also communicate well in Indo-Aryan languages. Tharu and Lepcha can talk in Nepali as well. This is their fear of ferocious animals that has brought them to Lord Shiva and proto-Shiva like *Sannyasi Thakur*, *Bura Thakur*, etc. Dependence on fishing has made them to appease river monster or *Jalua Mashan* the demigod. This is their animal husbandry that compels the locals to worship Lord Vishnu in different forms and names including *Shalgram Sheela*. Many of the Sub-Himalayan forest dwelling cattle breeders and worshippers of Shiva cult or proto-Shiva or demigods might be found attracted towards Vaishnavism, negotiate with the mainstream and be found talking in Indo-Aryan dialectics.

Dhimals use the Mallick surname. Mallick is also used as a Bengali surname among **Teli** caste. *Teli* refers to the oil extractors. I am not sure whether Dhimals were involved oil extraction! But people living in forest villages and neighbouring areas of the forests often cultivate different varieties of mustard. They do it to make a natural protection to wild elephant attacks on their villages for food grains, bananas and fermented drinks. In Dhakna jote of

Nakshalbari block I have seen a mixed population of Rajbanshis, Nepalis, Adivasis, Bengalis and others. It is situated on Indo-Nepal border in Mechi-Bataria system. Paddy, jute, cane, local vegetables and bamboo are the crops here. Local have cattle with them and are producing organic manure to be applied to the crop field. Further, some of them maintain piggery and prepare rice balls or rice tablets which is applied as the raw material or the main ingredient in liquor preparation. The upland portions are traditionally utilized for mustard production and local variety is known as *rai*. *Rai* is a Nepali surname and also close to the Royal title Roy used by the Desi Rajbanshis commonly known as *Deshia*. This tendency to cultivate mustard is higher in Maniram areas near Mechi forest. It is also found in Fakna and Huchai Mallik areas near to Dalkajhar forest. There along with Rajbanshis and Nepali people, Dhimal are living and they all in some extent are propagating mustard. Dhimal use Mallick in their surname which is indicator to mustard cultivation. From Dalkajhar and Mechi forest elephants try to cross Indo-Nepal border and these mustard plants are natural barrier to the elephant. It is true elephants do not attack these villages. Local Rajbanshis are often termed as *Bau*. Some find a similarity to the honourary term *Babu* and again to *Baun*. Some Rajbanshis have just become Bengali caste and use Bengali surname Kundu used by the *Tili* community. They are the trading community doing business of rice and vegetable oil both. They are also in good services. Nandi is another such surname and also the name of associate of Lord Shiva. So, worship of Shiva or *Mahakal* or proto-Shiva or demigods are very significant here. There is Telipara near Dabgram-Siliguri at Ashigarh from where Thakurnagar, Barobisha, Foktoibari, Sahudangi and Ambari-Falakata are all in close proximity. The place is very close to Baikunthopur forest. Elephants are there in the jungle. Good quality paddy varieties like *Kalo*, *Bhog*, *Nenia*, *Dudhi*, etc. used to be yielded in high quantity. They also used to produce alternative staple food grains like *kaoni* and

chamghas or *chopsi*. There are places like Chapra, Chopra, Chapramari, Topsikhata, etc. in and around Rajganj and Teesta-Dharala basin. In Siliguri a place is there known as Mallaguri. Mal is a place in Malbazar. Mal, Malla, Malik and Mallik are different terms used in various ways. *Malsa*, *Masila* and *Malsira* are the names wild grasses and improved paddy. These grasses are grown in neighbouring jungles of Teesta-Jaldhaka region. Mustard variety like *Sada sorisha* is widely cultivated near the forest areas by the local Rajbanshis. Kamtapur state was formed by the Khens who were probably from the Bhutan Himalayas and worship Goddess Tara or Chondi in the form of *Kamtेशwari*. There are various Telipara areas in Sub-Himalayan North Bengal and it is also there in Alipurduar region. In Alipurduar area towards Assam, there is a Telipara tea garden. Interestingly, there is also a Totopara tea garden. Actua; Totopara is situated at Madarihat block by Torsha River and the same river was used by the Khens who ruled over the Teesta-Torsha valley from Gosanimari. The probably had another center of power in Chilapata forest which is associated with King Nal. The fort of King Nal is known as Nal Rajar Garh. The fort is in the Alipurduar side where at a distance was the Bakshaduar fort or Baxa fort. That Baxa or Buxa area was incorporated along with Duars by the British in India. So many battles in post-Kamtapur period were fought between Kingdoms of Bhutan and Koch Bihar over the control of Duars and Buxa fort. Rajabhatkhawa is an area near the mythical Nal fort where the two kingdoms signed a pact for peace. Koch Bihar Kingdom was with the Mughal Padshahi, Mughal-Rajput alliance and Mughal establishments in Bengal. They were helping the mainland India and then the British India in establishing control over Brahmaputra valley, Duars region and Morang. They had their branches in Tufanganj-Bakshirhat and mainland Brahmaputra valley. They have given the Rangpur areas to then the Bengal under direct control of mainland India. Rangpur is now in Bangladesh and a Division there. Kurigram,

Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari and Panchagarh are falling under this Rangpur Division and served with rivers like Karatoa, Jamuneshwari, Teesta and Torsha. These areas of Bangladesh are in the border of Cooch Behar district. So, international Indo-Bangladesh border is there. Cooch Behar district was the core area of the Koch Bihar Kingdom. Cooch Behar district and these border territories fallen within Rangpur Division of present day Bangladesh have Indian and Bangladeshi enclaves. Those enclaves were created by the Koch Bihar Kingdom and Bengal fallen directly under Mughal Empire. Those enclaves were present during the British rule in South Asia when Koch Bihar kingdom was considered as a princely state under the British supremacy. These enclaves are still present in post-independence period. Koch Bihar princely state was incorporated in India during independence and added into the state of West Bengal. Koch Bihar dynasty helped the British and its accompanying forces to take control over Duars from Bhutan. That also includes Nal fort cum Buxa fort. Alipurduar town was then created in close proximity with Rajabhatkhawa. After inclusion of Duars, its portion on the left side of Sankosh River has been included in Assam state and that on the right hand was treated as Bengal Duars. This western portion of Duars was not included in Koch Bihar Kingdom or not made as a district governed from Alipurduar town. Jalpaiguri region that was ruled by another branch of Koch Bihar dynasty had been already included as a district of the British India and to that Jalpaiguri, Bengal Duars was annexed. Jalpaiguri was a big district controlling over Jalpaiguri, Malbazar-Mainaguri ancient trade route, Dhupguri-Falakata region, Rajganj-Panchagarh areas, Dabgram-Fulbari and also the Bengal Duars. During independence, this Panchagarh was gone out of India and is now under Rangpur Division of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is an independent country and formerly the eastern portion of Bengal region or the East Bengal. Alipurduar is a subdivision controlling all the areas situated left

to Torsha River. This is the Kaljani-Raidak river system of Bengal Duars upto right bank of Sankosh River. It also controls some portions on the right side of Torsha River. Madarihat-Falakata ancient route towards Mathabhanga–Sitalkuch is such a portion. Totopara falls under this route. Further Birpara and Banarhat areas of Bengal Duars are within this Alipurduar subdivision. Mal, Matiali and Nagrakata areas of Bengal Duars in the foothills of Kalimpong are with Teesta-Dharala basin and have formed Malbazar subdivision; it is the gateway to Mainaguri. Kalimpong-Malbazar-Mainaguri, Chamurchi-Banarhat-Nathua-Dhupguri, Birpara-Falakata and Totopara-Madarihat-Falakata are the routes from Kalimpong-Bhutan into Bengal Duars that has lost their importance in comparison to Jaigaon-Hasimara towards Cooch Behar town and Dinhata. From Hasimara, it is also well connected with Alipurduar, Kumargram and Tufanganj areas. From there the route goes in Assam and via Dhuburi into Bangladesh. Jaigaon-Hasimara has also reduced the importance of Buxa another way into Duars. So, we could see that Nal Rajar Garh being replaced by Alipurduar, Gosanimari by Cooch Behar town and Talma-Bhitargarh in Rajganj-Panchagarh transnational region by Jalpaiguri town. So, Khens were replaced by Koch-Rajbanshis but still mustard is being cultivated in Jalpaiguri-Cooch Behar region along with Tobacco. It was the same case during the Mughals, British and is now in independent India. Portions fallen under Bangladesh has however shifted over more to different pulses and soybean. Nilphamari during the British rule was a hub for indigo plantation. Sunflower and other rapeseeds besides mustard are now being cultivated in Bangladesh. Same is the case for various parts of North Bengal areas like Duba or Dabba *jote* in Kharibari block, Patirajpur region of Itahar and Haldibari near Panchagarh. Kharibari shares borders with both Nepal and Bihar and part of ancient Morang. Itahar was temporary capital of Pal Kingdom of Bengal-Bihar and is now situated in Indian portion of Dinajpur. Patirajpur and Panchagarh

were both power centers and related to the legendary name of Prithviraj. But these two centers have now been disconnected as the Dinajpur proper or Dinajpur highland has gone into the Bangladesh. Dinajpur lowland like Raiganj and Balurghat also yield mustard. Indian portion of Rajshahi marshland, Bamangola-Habibpur upland as the remotest extension of Dinajpur ridge, end parts of Dinajpur lowland served with rivers like Tangan and Mahananda-Phulhar basin shared with Katihar (Bihar) are different portions of Malda district. It is also known for power centers like Gour and Pandua. It is well connected with Katihar, Itahar, Raiganj, Balurghat and Bangladesh. Rajbanshis are present here also. Rajbanshi concentration is mainly found near the Gour-Pandua region or the Tangan River area or the Bamongola-Habibpur uplands. Mustard is cultivated there from very old days. Malda was also a major river port in past and is still known for paddy, jute, mango and silk. Malda shares its border with Murshidabad or Mid Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. It is directly connected with Mahananda River. Oil extracting machine is commonly known as Ghani or Gani. *Pundravardhana* was a mythical kingdom of Dinajpur-Rajshahi in the hoary past. Its King was Paundrik *Vasudeva* or Basudeb. It is said that he tried to defend Vaishnavism from entering in his kingdom. He battled with Lord Krishna. He was also mentioned in the Great Epic of Mahabharata. He was a friend of Magadha King Jarasandha and King Bhagadatta of Brahmaputra valley or *Pragyotishpur*. He was in an alliance with the Kauravas in the battle of Kurukshetra against the Pandavas and Lord Krishna. But Vaishnavism had actually spread to the area between Koshi and Karatoa. Karatoa, Purnabhava and Atrai have been considered as sacred rivers. There is Manihari near Katihar and the place is associated with the stories of Lord Krishna. Gangarampur in Dinajpur lowland falling between its upland and marshland of Rajshahi is another place of Lord Vishnu. So, it is a fact that Vaishnavism was there in a wider part of Koshi, Mahananda and Dinajpur-Rajshahi,

though alternatives were there. Later with time, Vaishnavism has reached into Morang, Rajganj-Panchagarh and crossed Karatoa to reach into the Teesta-Torsha region. However, the confluence formed by old track of Teesta-Karatoa joint flow and Jamuna distributary of Brahmaputra was the ancient city of *Pundranagara*. The place was a prime center for Buddhism as other parts of Dinajpur. It was known for Buddhist center at Mahasthangarh with other subcenters like Paharpur in Dinajpur proper. Muslim rulers from Gour and Pandua of Malda gave priority to entire Rajshahi region including *Pundranagara*-Pabna area. *Pundranagara* or Mahasthangarh rapidly turned into a place of Islamic center with a new name Bogra or Bogura. Koch Bihar state for a short while included Dinajpur ridge upto Gour, and on the other side controlled Rangpur region towards Ghoramara near Bogra.

Chaudhurys are here present among Nepalis, Rajbanshis, *Varendris*, other Bengalis, *Vratya-Kshatriyas*, Muslims and Biharis. They like other parts of Bengal, Bangladesh and even Tripura and Barak valley in North East Indian pockets present in Mid Bengal, Gourbengal, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Barindland, Panchagarh-Rajganj, Mahananda valley and ancient Morang. Chogyal Dynasty of Sikkim occupied a big portion of Morang. In British Period, Chaudhurys also spread into Rangpur, Koch Bihar, Jalpaiguri and Duars. These Chaudrurys or Chau people might have relatedness with hapthalites or White Huns or Chau Huns. They from Eurasia entered in South Asia through Irano-Afghan region and Indus valley. Like the Huns attacked Western Roman Empire and settled in Austria-Hungary region and accepted Christianity; these Huns took Hinduism, became Neo-Kshatriyas, revived Hinduism against Buddhism, tried to replace Gupta control from previously Indo-Scythian dominated Gujarata-Malwa trade zone and settled in nearby Rajputana and became the Rajputs. Among so many Rajputs, Chauhan or Chouhan was in association with Shishodia or Sassanoid tradition of Persia. Rajputs formed the Rajput Shahi.

Gujjars or Gojarians or Tocharians or Thakurs were also there. They probably protected North Indian power center from control of Bengal-Bihar (under the Buddhist Palas) and Deccan kings. That was happened in post-Gupta period, when Arabs with Islam started coming to Indian ports, Bay of Bengal and South China Sea. Some temporary Buddhist pockets were established in mainland India and also Tibeto-Kashmir elements were trying to establish direct control to the sea shores. Several Rajput and pro-Rajput states and estates were developed in North and Central India in a process of their gradual spread from West India to Deccan region. From Central India, they spread into Jharkhand or Chotanagpur, Rajmahal and parts of Bengal in the last days of Pala rule in Bengal-Bihar. From there they entered into Mid Bengal and Gour Bengal from where spread in different parts of North Bengal including Dinajpur and Morang. In Dinajpur, there is a place known as Patirajpur. It is now in Indian portion and at the center of Gour Bengal (Malda, Raiganj and Balurghat). It is under Itahar block of Raiganj subdivision. This block was also the temporary capital for the Palas and local Muslim rulers of Bengal during Sultani period. The area is very close to historical places like Gangarampur, Bangarh and Debikot (also *Devikota*). That was on the way to Dinajpur town which is now under Bangladesh. Dinajpur name has been derived from King Ganesha *Danujamardandeva*. He was the only Hindu ruler of Bengal during the Sultani period. Besides ruins of Buddhist religious cum educational places, throughout Dinajpur there have been found out so many Hindu relics that of Lord Vishnu and Lord Ganesha. Kanta-ji temple of Lord Vishnu in Dinajpur town is a historical place. In Panchagarh-Raiganj Sub-Himalayan pocket of Dinajpur, there was a fort by the name of King Prithu. Some portions of that historical site have been fallen in India at Talma in Raiganj block and other parts in Panchagarh. It was also a center for the Kamtapur kingdom besides Nal fort at Chilapata and Kamta fort at Gosanimari. King Prithu and Potirajpur are both links with the name of legendary

Rajput King Prithviraj Chauhan. In the initial period of British rule in Bengal, *Sannyasi* or Sannyasi agitation occurred in North Bengal. It had its core in Rajganj-Panchagarh region. *Devi Chaudhurani* or the Queen Chaudhury played a major role in this agitation and she was probably from present day Jalpaiguri Sadar block. *Sannyasis* were also there in Mechi-Mahananda basin and they were notified as dacoits. So, we could get places like Sannyasikata or killing ground of the *Sannyasis* and Phansidewa or the hanging ground. However, Chaudharys were protectors to the local agro-economic systems. There is a place Chaudhurihat or market place of the Chaudhurys near Burirhat, Barasakdal and Nazirhat at Dinhata region close to the confluence of Raidak and Kaljani Rivers before entering into present day Bangladesh. So, Chaudhurys were also present in Koch Bihar from equal distance from Gosanimari, CoochBehar town and Tufanganj. The way used by the Chaudhurys to enter into Mid and North Bengal from Central India, Deccan, Chotonagpur and Rajmahal was again followed by Adivasis from there who are now present in Mid Bengal, Gourbengal, Dinajpur (Indo-Bangladesh), Mahananda valley, Morang region, Panchagarh, Mekhliganj, Mechi-Mahananda basin, Dharala-Teesta basin, Bengal Duars, Assam Duars and agricultural pockets of Jalpaiguri-CoochBehar. Koch Bihar dynasty has established marital relationship with Rajput dynasty. Vedic and other post-Vedic Hindu texts are being read by Hindu Rajbanshis of Dinajpur and some of them have even taken the surnames like *Sharma* similar to *Upadhyaya* among the Nepalis. This tradition can also be seen among the Rajbanshis of Cooch-Bihar, Gourbengal, Mahananda valley and other areas. Rajbanshis often address them as Rajput or Neo-*Kshatriya*. In colonial period, British took over direct control of Rangpur like Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Purnea, Bhagalpur and other places. They gave birth to Darjeeling district and incorporated Jalpaiguri areas along with Panchagarh-Rajganj-Baikunthapur into Rangpur. Later they created a separate Jalpaiguri district incorporating

Panchagarh (now in Bangladesh), Rajganj, Baikunthopur, Teesta-Dharala basin, Malbazar *Duars* (beneath Kalimpong Himalayas) and entire Bengal *Duars* or Western *Duars*. Mainaguri, Dhupguri and Falakata agricultural pockets are still under Jalpaiguri district. Alipurduar region instead of becoming a separate district (which is long pending demand) has been incorporated in Jalpaiguri and administrative center of the Bengal *Duars* and the way to Bhutan Himalayas. Many Rajbanshis in Jalpaiguri are in close contact with local tribes like Rabha, Bodo, Mech, etc. Koch-Rajbanshis have again affinity with the Koch tribe. People talking in Rangpuriya dialect are both Hindu and Muslim by religion. Hindus are caste people falling under Bodo-Kamta tradition. They have dual identity like Bengali and Rajbanshi. They prefer the Bengali identity more. To them, Rajbanshis are the Kshatriya caste (warrior and protector). They lost their statehood in hoary past (*Pundarvardhana* Kingdom?). They have become a part of the local agrarian social structure. They lost their control over Mahananda valley, Gour Bengal and their heartland Dinajpur-Rajshahi. They then probably moved into Morang, Panchagarh-Rajganj and after crossing Karatoa river to Rangpur-Koch Bihar region. In Morang, they have come under close contact with local tribes. Those who remained in earlier places have met with people from *Magadha*, mainland Indians, Indo-Himalayan people, Sub-Himalayan people, Indo-Tibetans, Tibeto-Kashmiri elements, Indo-Greeks, Indo-Europeans, Vedics and Post-Vedics, Turk-Kushanas, Kamboja-Pala, Rajputs, Turk elements, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Islam, people from Central India, people of Chhotanagpur plateau, Deccan people and Bengali speaking castes and communities. In Rangpur and Koch Bihar, they merged up with Bodo-Kamta tradition. Tribes of Bhutan Sub-Himalayas and Brahmaputra valley have been in direct contact with these excluded caste people and the *Kshatriya* group. Once being excluded, they could not mention them as the *Kshatriya*, but *Vratya-Kshatriya* or excluded *Kshatriya*. As

they were the royals, so they could mention themselves as the Rajbanshi meaning “of the royal dynasty”. If they were non-Aryans, then they were excluded by the Aryans. If they were the Pre-Vedic Aryans, they were excluded by the Vedic Aryans. Local tribes of the Sub-Himalayas like Koch accepted this Rajbanshi heritage, became Hindu, formed Koch-Rajbanshi alliance and on the ruins of Kamtapur Kingdom established the Koch Bihar Kingdom. This state collaborated well with mainland India and the British India. Koch Bihar set up various offshoots. Those offshoots were incorporated within Bengal in pre-British and British times. Mainland Koch Bihar has been assimilated in India and merged up with West Bengal state of post-British independent India. Rajbanshis show some impact of Sufism on them. They supported social and socio-religious reforming agencies like *Brahma Samaj*, Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Ramkrishna Mission even more than Anandamargi, Theosophical Society and Aurobinda Ghosh. So, from beginning, they were with mainland India. They supported Gandhi and expressed themselves as Frontier Gandhi. They maintain hidden notion of tribalism, ancient civilization, trade routes, urbanism, royal heritage, Koch-Kamta tradition, micro-state and republican confederacies. But those issues were not against India and behaved like human shield. Rajbanshis were attracted by peasant movements, alternative politics of Chandra Bose and freedom movements in the last decades of British rule in India. But a section of Rajbanshi society was on the way to status mobilization from *Vratya Kshatriya* to real *Kshatriya*. They took part in World War I and II in favour of British Raj along with Gorkha or Gurkha regiment, Assam regiment and Bihar regiment. They also demanded to form a Kshatriya Regiment. They still go to join in the Bihar regiment of Indian army. They also took participation in parliamentary politics initiated by the British in Indian Subcontinent from beginning outside the princely state of Koch Bihar. They remained indifferent with political shift in China in 1911

A.D. from monarchy to democracy. They for their economic and other backwardness were provided with certain reservations. These things are still on in independent India. They as Indians experienced India with Third World with alternative options and outputs, Sino-Indian war, Bangladesh war, incorporation of Sikkim, Indo-Pakistan wars, successive immigrations from East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh, India with the Second World, Cold War, insurgencies in Brahmaputra valley, political alternatives, United Front and Left Front rules in the state of West Bengal, changes in land relation in the context of food security and the political outputs, fall of USSR and post-USSR politics in South Asia, neo-colonialism, Arab impact, growing Chinese impact in Asia, roles of Civil Society, fall of Left rule in the state, biparty system in Indian politics with a provision of qualification politics, Shahi traditions, Yadav-Muslim politics, Dalit-Muslim politics, question of purity and pollution, role of global market economy, politics on fuel and bio-fuel, various international lobbies and business lobbies, impact of the medical colleges, impact of Indian Army, impact of regional politics along with ethnic sentiments and minority issues, formation of human shield especially in the borderland areas and so fore.

Koch Bihar (also written as Kuch Behar and Cooch Behar) existed from 1510 A.D. to 1949 A.D. In this time span, on 1773 A.D. the kingdom became a vassal state of British Bengal. It was also served as a Princely State to the British Raj (1858-1947) in post-Sepoi Mutiny politics in South Asia. Under Queen Victoria's rule, British authority tried to bring in improvements or better to say westernization at least within the privileged section of Cooch Behar State. In 15th August, 1947 A.D., India got independence from direct British rule. Previously Bihar, Odisha and Burma had been separated from Bengal or Calcutta (Rajmahal or Chotonagpur or present day Jharkhand and Mithila fallen under Bihar state). During independence of India East Bengal was gone to Pakistan that was got independence just a day before (14th August, 1947

A.D.). Pakistan contained tribal pockets along Afghanistan borders, Beluchistan along Iranian and Southern Afghanistan border, entire Sind province and western part of Punjab or Lahore-Multan region along with few pockets at the border with Rajasthan. East Bengal within a few years was started considering as East Bangladesh and mainland Pakistan on Indus valley as the West Pakistan. Pakistan was declared independent from the day one, but India got the dominion status under Constitutional Monarchy of British King George VI during 1947 A.D. - 1950 A.D. until Constitution of India was adopted in 26 January, 1950 A.D.. Governor-Generals or Viceroy remained Louis Mountbatten (1947-'48 A.D.) and C. Rajagopalachari (1948-'50 A.D.). In 1947 A.D., first Indo-Pakistan war began on the issue of control over Kashmir which was a Princely State built up of Jammu, Kashmir valley and Tibet Heights. Warrior tribes from Pakistan side occupied western part of the Kashmir state. The occupied portion is now known as Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). It also controls Hunza and Baltistan tribal belts, whereas Ladakh is in Indian portion. PoK is governed from Muzaffarabad and rest of the Kashmir State from Shrinagar. Hindu Raja Hari Singh, a Dogra Rajput, in that situation decided to go with India besides staying independent under British Commonwealth or going with Pakistan. All other Rajput or pro-Rajput or Hindu states decided to go with India. China went into the hands of the Communist Party there in 1948 A.D. Hyderabad Nizam highly affected by peasant movement, communist movement and pro-Indian demands failed to control the situation by his own army and before he went with Pakistan, the territory was included in India. Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari was a Tamil and considered communist party movements as intervention of China and/or Russia in Indian sovereignty. India was keeping good relations with Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, Burma, French Indian colonies and Portuguese Indian colonies. Indian Territories under these two colonies were soon incorporated in India.

Rajagopalachari personally was against inclusion of Portuguese colony Goa; they still had their colony in Macao Island in South China region where people besides Buddhism highly follow animism and Christianity. That was the same case in Indochina and North East India. He was also supported by Hindu organizations, Sikh organizations, activists in Indo-Pakistan bordering states like Punjab and Rajasthan and Gujarat, Royal families, Tamil activists, regional political entities and supporters of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose or we could say Japanese sympathizers in altered situation. Junagarh state at Saurashtra region of Gujarat was amongst so many princely states (actually micro-states looking like republican confederacies over there) decided to go with Pakistan, but included in India. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel from Gujarat was the Home Minister at that time under the Government of India led by Indian National Congress and under the primeministership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru a Kashmiri Hindu Brahman by birth. During the dominion status period, Cooch Behar Princely State along with all its enclaves in Rangpur division of East Bengal (gone with Pakistan as previously stated) was included within the Union of Democratic India in 12th September 1949 A.D. after the decision taken by Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan (1915-1970). Before adopting Indian Constitution on 26 January, 1950 A.D., Cooch Behar was composed into the state of West Bengal (Indian portion of Bengal) in 1st January 1950 A.D. according to 29 (A) provision of Government of India Act, A.D. 1935.

End of Bodo (Khen) rule and Tibeto-Bhutanese absolute dominance in Kamta kingdom in last decade of 15th century A.D. was instituted with the Koch in marital relation with the Meches forming the new dynasty (Koch Bihar dynasty). Koch tribe was treated as palanquin bearers or *behera* or porters or *kuli* or *quli* or **coolie**. Some points I would like to mention here. 1) When the British occupied Indo-Bhutan foothills with the help of Cooch Behar State and incorporated it under British Raj in second half of 19th century A.D., they established so many tea gardens

here and brought in tribal groups or Adivasi people from Rajmahal, Chhotonagpur, Odisha, Central India and Deccan as the efficient labour force or Cooli. 1.1) They were also deployed these labours at the tea estates of Indian portion of Morang foothills and Rajganj or Barindland. 1.2) Small scale tea gardens in independent India have been started to be established in Chopra and Mekhliganj blocks to India and Panchagarh region to Bangladesh. Adivasis have been reportedly working at small scale tea gardens of Indo-Bangladesh. They have been associated with Surjapur movement in Islampur subdivision that also includes Chopra block. 1.4) In Nepal Morang also there are tea gardens. 1.5) Adivasis are highly deployed in Assam tea gardens. They are also present in Nepal Morang and Indo-Bangladesh territories. However, they have no such presence in Himalayan tracks. Sagina Mahato was a famous Hindi feature film related to the story of a Mahato working at Darjeeling tea garden on the Himalayas. 2) Tea gardens are there in Sikkim, North East India (other than Assam), Nilgiri hills of extreme south of Indian peninsula, Sri Lanka, Kenya, western part of Himalayan mountain and Indo-Bangladesh Bodo-Kamta region. 3) Local labours like the Adivasis work at tea gardens of Kenya, Sri Lanka and Nilgiris. 4) Nepali porters were there on the Himalayan terrains of Darjeeling district established by the British by taking control over Indian portion of Morang from Sikkim and then incorporating Kalimpong trade pocket from Bhutan Himalayas. 5) With help of these porters, British established many hill stations in Darjeeling Himalayas. 6) Nepalis are also present along Indo-Bhutan borderline. 6.1) In Bhutan, they are treated as Lhotshampa. 6.2) They are also there in different parts of Brahmaputra valley and other interior parts of North East India of today. 6.3) They are also there in Sikkim. 7) They are the main transporters of all these interior mountainous regions. 8) They are the main working force in tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas. A few tea gardens are there in Kalimpong Himalayas and high altitude

Sikkim Himalayas as well. They are also workforce there. In both Morang foothills or *Terai* (Indo-Nepal) and Indo-Bhutan foothills or *Duars*, they especially at the interior pockets work again as tea garden labourers. They are also reportedly working in tea gardens of Assam and further interior pockets of North East India. Local Himalayan folk people of Western Himalayan and Nepal Mountain work at the local tea gardens there. 9) Nepali speaking people believe in Gorkhahood and from British period served the army through Gurkha regiment. They from Nepal, Darjeeling, Sikkim, *Terai*, *Duars*, Assam and other pockets in North East India joined Indian Army. 10) Gorkha regiment was also there in British Royal Army and it is there in present Indian army. 11) Gorkhas are involved in different jobs throughout India. 13) Nepalese, Gorkha and Nepali speaking people could be found Indo-Malayan belt, ports of South China Sea (Hong Kong), Arab countries and Western world. Nepal is an independent country. Among the Nepalese people of Nepal, mainly hill people prefer to talk in Nepali language which is the highest spoken language over there; among the hill people traditionally believing in Gorkhahood, there are other local dialects spoken off by Kirantis and Tibeto-Nepalese groups. 14) If tea garden labourers and transporters announce a strike, there would be a large scale loss for the tea garden owners and local traders. So, the Adivasis and Nepalis have served here as human shields which are again politically very relevant. Tea garden labour/trade unions are there under different political banners. Many Adivasi and Nepali groups are directly associated with settled cultivations. Like orange orchards of Bhutan and Darjeeling district, oranges are also propagated in Nagpur region of Deccan. 16) Just before Sepoi Mutiny in 1857 A.D., British started construction of roads, bridges, telegraphs and rail connectivity in South Asia. Large amount of Cooli was deployed in this massive work. Control of the British government over the British East India Company had been increased and there were other British companies also

(such as in tea gardens). In port areas, Coolis were also doing hard work. Central India and pockets of Bengal-Bihar were poppy growing areas and from this poppy fruit, opium was extracted. Opium was exported to China. Indigo plantation was also spread throughout a wider region. Labours were working in these plantations. Timber, coffee, cotton, and oranges were some other important plantation crops. Jute, food grains, coconut ropes and sugarcane were some other agricultural products. In that context, there was Second French Revolution in 1830s and Afghanistan border was still open to Russia, Iran, Turk dominated regions and France. France was also there in Indochina. In 1830 A.D., British resident was appointed in Bruma. Protests were raised over opium trade in China. Catholics were active in tribal pockets of South Asia, Bodo-Kamta belt, Indochina and South China. Adivasis were often selected as the Coolis. Entry of British administration, forest department officials, mining agencies, monetary system, money lenders and mainland landlords in tribal pockets made the situation more volatile. That was reasoned into Santal insurrection in Rajmahal. That insurrection was just few years before the Sepoi Mutiny against the British Company. In the Mutiny, various groups besides native soldiers participated including peasants, local landlords, countryside people and few royals. They tried to reestablish the supremacy of Mughal Padshahi and oust the Company from power. These soldiers fought in the jungles of Burma as after occupying Arakan, Rangoon and Indo-Malaya region. Question of purity and pollution was also raised from Hindu and Muslim mindset. It ended with abolition of Company's rule as well as the Mughal Padshahi. South Asia went officially under the direct governance of the British Throne. After the Mutiny, the last Mughal Padshah was sent to Rangoon (Yangon) in exile. That was like the case of Mughal Prince Shah Shuja going in exile to the Arakan area two hundred years ago before the Sepoi Mutiny. Santals or Santhals or *Saontals* rapidly spread to a wider region throughout Bengal-Bihar including

Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gour Bengal and Barindland both as agriculturalists and Cooli under the local landlords and in Bengal-Assam foothill tea gardens. Cooli is still a huge unorganized or semi-organized workforce in India and related to railways, port areas, plantation zone and other means of services. They might be tribal people, caste like groups or caste people. There are movies on Cooli society in Indian cinemas. Cooli is a common term used in Turkic, Hindi, Bengali and English and it has a common meaning: porter. There were so many Quli in Mughal period who ruled over Bengal Presidency. Some of them were Sher Afghan Ali Quli Khan, Murshid Quli Khan and Shah Quli Khan. 1) Ali Quli Khan was a table attendant of Persian Emperor, a Shi'ite, Mughal administrator in Bardhaman (South Bengal), leader of local Afghan lords, first husband of Mughal Empress Nur Jehan later married to Mughal Emperor Jahangir and father of Ladli Begum married to Mughal Prince Shahryar. 2) Murshid Quli Khan was either a converted Deccani Odiya Brahman or an offspring of a converted Maratha warlord and his Muslim wife of Iranian descent. He was bought as a slave, taught Islam in Iran (Ispahan); Mughal administrator in Deccan, Odisha and Bengal; very loyal to Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb; became the first Nabob of Bengal; built up a Shiva temple in the memory of his Hindu wife and founder of Nasari dynasty. For his Deccan links, Irano-Afghan associations and loyalty to Mughal Padshahi, he was successful to deliver strong governance in Bengal Presidency and both Odisha and Rajmahal were incorporated in Bengal-Bihar. He became Nabob in 1717 A.D. in the same year British East India Company got the license to do duty free business in Bengal Presidency. He was the mastermind behind formation of Natore parallel with Kuch Behar state. The *Varendri* Brahman family of Natore got huge territory including Dinajpur-Rajshahi along with its important pockets like Gour Bengal, Pabna and Bogra. It also included Rangpur (Indo-Bangladesh). Natore Hindu dynasty had also control over Birbhum, Murshidabar, Kushtia and

Jessore, hence the entire Mid Bengal of Indo-Bangladesh territory of the date. It was a huge division. In British rule, Jalpaiguri area along with Rajganj-Panchagarh region was also included in Rangpur (also Rangpoor). The division also had some areas from Dacca (Dhaka) and Mymensing. It had borders with Purnea and Rajmahal. Natore town was built up like ancient cities of *Pundranagara* and Bangarh. Murshid Quli shifted his capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad that owed to his name. Previously, less than a century ago Mughal governor to Bengal Presidency was Mughal Prince Shah Shuja. He had strong support of Sufi, Shi'ite and Shahi traditions and included Odisha, Bihar, Rajmahal, Purnea, Gour, Barind, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, East Bengal, Bodo-Kamta belt and even Brahmaputra valley under his control. But he failed to conquer the Mughal Throne and fled to Arakan. While in exile, there was dispute with local rulers of Arakan that was a port area used by Arabs, Buddhist world and Europeans for trade. Elites, princesses and royal wealth were sacked. His brother Aurangzeb became the Emperor; but Mughal Padshahi under Aurangzeb became much more Islamic, while his sister Mistress of Princesses Jahan Ara, a real Sufi, did a lot for the poor and from Surat port of Gujarat sent voyages full of rice to Mecca. In that context, establishment of a converted Deccani Hindu Brahman Murshid Quli Khan in Bengal Presidency in Aurangzeb's regime (later half of seventeenth century A.D.) was very significant. Murshid Quli was established later in 1717 A.D. as the Nabob of Bengal Presidency, which was marked with special protection to British interest, foundation of a Shiva temple, formation of *Varendris* in greater Barindland or *Pundravardhana*, beginning of Nabobi in Oudh and that in Deccan. Asaf Jah dynasty in Deccan was soon proclaimed as Nizam of entire Deccan. Oudh and Barind were both related to the Hindu Epic of Ramayana so as Arakan, Odisha, Andhra coast, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Marathas literally accepted the supremacy of the Mughal Padshahi. Sikhs

helped the Mughals to conduct a procession in Brahmaputra valley. Dutch were in control of Indonesia or East Indies and also here in Chinchura (Hoogly). British and French East India Companies competed for their business interests in Bengal, Deccan, extreme south, Mysore, Maratha dominated areas, Gujarat and mainland India. In Aurangzeb's tenure, Murshid Quli got more power than Mughal Prince in Bengal. Soon after formation of Bengal Nabobi and providing excess facilities to the British, Sayyid Brothers became very active and placed puppets in Mughal Throne. But they failed to control Oudh, Deccan and Bengal not ready for unilateral Arab dominance unlike the pre-Lodi situation at Delhi Sultanate. Lodis ruled Delhi sultanate in the last half of 15th century A.D. and first quarter of 16th century A.D. At that time, for the first time European voyages could reach up to Indian ports through the oceans alternative to Mediterranean region and Arab dominated areas. So many political changes in South Asia occurred after innovation of direct Indo-European ocean trade routes. Formation of Koch dynasty in Teesta-Brahmaputra region, formation of Shi'ite states in Deccan, their clashes with Hindu Vijayanagara Empire of extreme south from Andhta coast, battle between Indo-Afghan warlords and Rajput dynasties, and initial establishment of Mughal dynasty in mainland India were the most importance among these. Before the Lodis, previous dynasties throughout 14th century A.D. tried their best to establish direct control over Deccan, Bengal and extreme south by overruling hegemony of the Arab traders there. But they actually failed to do so and even the Sub-Himalayan territories were gone out of control. They even felt difficulty to control Rajputana, Malwa, Central India and Gujarat. Neither local dynasties of Bengal nor the Delhi Sultanate could enter in Teesta-Brahmaputra region (Kamtapur Kingdom). Further, for the major part of first half of 15th century A.D., Sayyid dynasty was in Delhi Sultanate. Sayyids were followed by Lodi, European direct trade, political turmoil and gradual establishment of the

Mughals. After assassination of Prince Shah Shuja at Arakan, thing again stated to alter. Arabs and French were trying to provide alternative. But Mughal Padshahi was in favour of the British. Its subordinates were also divided in decision of taking a stand on either sides of British and French. They were again divided into Deccan and Irano-Afghan lobbies. In such a situation, appearance of Sayyid brothers for a short tenure was so significant. 3) Shah Kuli Khan was Arab by birth, from Deccan, and worked under Mughal administration in Bengal during Aurangzeb regime who was very much favour Islamic disciplines other Islamic doctrines and their Hindu trade partners. He however was married a lady of Turk-Iranic Shi'ite Afshar aristocrat family and used surnames like Khan and Mirza. While his elder son was a Haji, younger son was imposed to high ranks in Bengal presidency and entitled as Shuja-ul-Mulk. He later became Alivardi Khan, removed Nasiri dynasty from Bengal, established his own Afshar dynasty; this dynasty along with the another Nabobi dynasty set up in Oudh were both Shi'ite by faith and stood in favour of Irano-Afghan lobby. However, Marathas from Deccan chased out Odisha from Bengal Nabob, tried to capture Midnapore and Burdwan, turned Bengal Nabob in favour of French and Maratha. Afshar dynasty in Bengal in its last days and Begum of Lucknow were in favour of the Marathas of Deccan. Arabs set up their hold at Mysore in Deccan. Mysore was a Hindu kingdom, formerly a part of Vijayanagar Empire and an autonomous territory in the history of peninsular India. Irano-Afghan lobby in Bengal with the help of a section of the army, the British and some business houses and aristocrats ruled out Afshar dynasty favouring Deccan and French in its last days. Najafi dynasty though not Shi'ite became the new rulers of Nabobi Bengal and British Company got the power to collect taxes (1756 A.D.). Marathas in response to that occupied Agra, placed new Mughal Emperor at Delhi, got support from the French and tried to rule out influence of Durrani dynasty from North India. Marathas

were defeated in North India as Oudh was gone to the opposite lobby (1761 A.D.). New Nabobs of Bengal tried to establish relation to the Dutch, left to Rajmahal areas (Munger), joined the Shi'ite Nabob of Oudh in favour Irano-Afghan lobby, but in the battle Buxer lost completely to the British (1764 A.D.). Bengal was completely gone to the hands of the British under supremacy of the Mughal Padshahi. British Company got the right to do free trade in Oudh and got some strategic locations in North India. Najafi dynasty became completely dependent on the British.

Harendra Narayan Choudhury in 1908 mentioned that ancestors of Cooch Behar were the issue of intermarriage between Koch and Mech tribes. If the name 'Rajbanshi' be an honourary term with the meaning of 'related to the royal family', then there would be equal probability of using or claiming this term by both Meches and Koches. As the Koches were related with the dynasty from mothers line and Meches from father side, it looked quite unusual to see that Koches felt proud by mentioning this term and Meches seemed nor interested in doing so. But it is also true that Meches are in the Bodo fold and Khens of the same fold ruled the region before the Koches. So, here Mech like people were replaced by the Koches and power was shifted to the mother's side. Women played important roles in other contemporary dynasties as well; that might be the Great Mughals, Marathas, Sikh, Shi'ites of Deccan or Bengal or Oudh. Status shifted to others through marriage links or sexual intercourses. That might be from the Mughals to the Arakanese Arabs and the Afshars, from the Afshars to the Arabs, and so fore. Even the Arabs after getting in power could use titles like Mirza, Khan and Afshar. In ancient Indian history, Satavahana Emperors of Andhra were addressed each with his mother's name. Maurya dynasty got its name of a female Mura. Marital relationships were very much valuable for Guptas and Palas. In Hindu Epics also, mother's identity was given the maximum priority from time to time. Sometimes,

identity of the father or mother was compared to any Vedic God or Goddess. Fire which is generally associated with the purification process was found associated with the birth. Harendra Narayan Choudhury in the same article mentioned that it was impossible that all the Rajbanshi people in the state of Cooch Behar were the offsprings of that union. Rajbanshis were involved in agriculture and related occupations. There might be successive exclusions and inclusions under the Rajbanshi social fold. They might be follower of the King and not the common Koch tribe. Koch and Rajbanshis might have the same dialect and similar deity to be worshipped. That was like majority Hindu subjects in South Asia accepting a dynasty that might be Sunni, Shi'ite, Sufi, Shahi, Quli, Arab, Turk, Iranian, Turanian, Afghan, European and the British. And they should be treated as South Asians or as Indians or as a Nation. So, Rajbanshi might be a nation or a caste or a agrarian community or excluded Kshatriyas in disguise and some intermarriages. On the other hand, Koch people suffered even more exclusion and went through more intermarriages; they could get a tribal status and an occupation of porter. Later they perhaps managed to get into the political power and secure some valuable marital relations within predecessor Bodo fold.

Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah in 1936 opined that the name Koch Bihar or Koch Behar or Kuch Behar or Cooch Behar stood for common habitat of the Koch people. Koch referred to the state and Bihar to the state capital. The state was not included in Bengal Presidency or Bengal Province or *Suba-e-Bangal*. The term *Suba* stood for a province under Mughal Padshahi. Bengal *Suba* or *Suba-e-Bangal* included entire Bengal Presidency that again encompassed Bengal-Bihar region, East Bengal and Odisha. It also incorporated some important pockets of Bodo-Kamta belt. By its name, Koch Bihar state indicated that the area was not a Mughal province and had a separate identity outside Bengal-Bihar region fallen under *Suba-e-*

Bangal. The name Koch Bihar could also be emerged out from a term *Koch Bodhupur*, i.e., kingdom or city of the Koch Bride. It is assumed that this Koch Bride was the daughter of Himalaya and married to Lord Shiva. *Pundra* Kshatriya while being excluded from ruling category, disguised, accepted other occupations for livelihood and went in an exile with the Shiva cult(s) reached into dense forest areas of Bhutan foothills and pockets of Bhutan Himalayas in successions. There they might have formed substructure by marrying Koch women. Koch became thereafter followers of Lord Shiva. Or it might happen that *Koch Bodhupur* has the meaning of a place or city for the bride of Koch. Koch people were themselves Shiva worshippers and had been excluded much before to the Himalayan terrains. Koch married women from other tribes. Such tribes might be Mech, Bodo, Garo, etc. fallen under great Bodo fold. So, that was probably the formation of a sub-structure by either union of Indo-Aryan speakers and other language groups or racial intermixing among Aryans, Pre-Vedics, Dravidians, Austro-Dravidians and Indo-Mongoloids. And the new substructure(s) were found following the Shiva cult. So, the women were treated as wife of the Lord Shiva.

G.S. Ghurye in 1932 said that Brahman, Kayastha and Chandal occupying first, second and sixth position in the scheme of special precedence on the basis of caste system and purity and pollution could not be distinguished much racially from one another.

O'Malley report (1913) on the basis of 1911 Bengal Census indicated to a fact that the Hindusthani Brahmins and the Chamars represent the Arya-Dravidian type and Bengal Brahmins and Kayasthas, the Muhamedans of Eastern Bengal represent the Mongolo-Dravidian race. So, it would be better to go by occupational stratifications, ethnicity and social structure rather than the racial classification for all the time.

Bengal Politics during 1717-72 A.D. was very crucial to understand the reasons behind **Kuch**

Behar going with the British at 1773 A.D. British East Indian Company got special business facilities from Mughal Padshahi in 1717 A.D. for free trade in Bengal-Bihar and also stepped in coastal belts of Bengal, Andhra and extreme south after severe competitions with other business rivals. Company then in 1757 A.D. helped in bringing in a change in Bengal government also controlling Bihar and got the authority of taxation. So, the year is considered as the beginning of British colonial rule in Bengal and at the same time in India or Indian subcontinent. Immediate after that Maratha leaders who then controlled Deccan region and Gujarat-Malwa trade zone, intervened in Mughal Padshahi and ultimately changed the Emperor. Maratha leaders were under the Hindu Pad Padshahi (from Pune or Poona) which was again subordinate to Mughal Padshahi (from Delhi or Dilli); but in reality Marathas in 1740s and 1750s were gradually moved to a controlling position throughout a wider region including Central India, Odisha, all Mughal provinces of Deccan under the authority of Hyderabad Nizam, Mysore and neighbouring places, pockets in extreme south, Rajputana, North Indian pockets, Jatland, Delhi and Punjab. They had disputes with then Nabob at Bengal-Bihar. Marathas had French artillery and Pindari forces with them. Mughal Prince Ali Gauhar fled to Sub-Himalayan province of Oudh where Shuja-ud-Daulah, a Shi'ite, was the Nabob there and provided him the shelter; the Prince announced himself as New Mughal Padshah Shah Alam II and the Nabob got the post of Nawab Wazir or the Prime Minister. They protested against Shah Jahan III in Mughal Throne with the support of the pro-Maratha forces who had replaced Alamgir II. They got support from pro-Afghan forces in North India. Now the question is that what the link between change in Bengal and Maratha aggression in North India from Deccan was. No doubt, that was actually a dispute between pro-Deccan groups (then under the Marathas) and pro-Afghan lobbies (then owing to Afshar dynasty of Iran) on control over Bengal where the British Company became a catalyst. Shuja of Oudh

had an alliance with Rohilla Pathan warlords of Rohilkhand and Durrani of Afghanistan, and stood against the Marathas. These Afghans previously had taken part in Iranian procession towards Delhi led by Nader Shah founder of Afshari dynasty, which eventually made Mughal Padshahi a subordinate in 1739 A.D.; and by the next year (1740 A.D.) Nabobi rule in Bengal Presidency (*Subah-e-Bangal*) went to the hands of Afshar dynasty replacing the previous Nasiris. Nasiri dynasty was founded by Murshid Quli Khan and he had probably his origin in Deccan. On the other hand, Afshar dynasty was established by Alivardi Khan and associated with Irano-Afghan region. Some explanations are needed here and these are follows: 1) Real names of Alivardi, his elder brother and father were Mirza Muhammad Ali, Mirza Ahmed and Mirza Muhammad Madani; 2) they were Arabs by ethnicity and thereby initially Sunni Muslim; 3) Madani was known as Shah Quli Khan; 4) like Murshid Quli Khan of Nasiri dynasty, he was also from Deccan India; 5) but unlike to Murshid Quli, he worked directly under the Mughal administration in Bengal-Bihar and not a converted Muslim; 6) besides bearing titles like Khan and Mirza, he had marital relation with Afshar, therefore a new substructure was formed and when his son Mirza Md. Ali or Alivardi Khan established a new dynasty; that was termed as Afshar dynasty; 7) Afshar is a Turkic group from Turkey and they used the same Irano-Afghan plateau used by Turk-Afghans and Turk-Mongols however from Central Asia to enter into India; 8) due to the marriage with Afshar, a new sub-structure was in form and the Afshar dynasty was established; 9) so the dynasty was not either Sunni favouring Sufism or orthodox Sunni, but actually Shi'ite which is still the main religion of Iran. Since the conquest of Nader Shah Afshar from Shi'ite Iran along with Afghan artilleries and warriors over Mughal Padshahi, the latter was associated with the Durrani of Afghanistan and Rohillas of Rohilkhand, and also supported establishment of Shi'ite Nabobi at Oudh by Dynasty Safdar Jung and replacement of pro-Deccan

power in Bengal Presidency by Afshar Dynasty which was a substructure from the blending among Arab, Sunni, Deccan, Afshar Turk, Iran, Shahi, Sufi and Shi'ite. From female side, the dynasty turned into Shi'ite. Nafisa Khanam and Ghaseti Begum were two most important female characters in Afshar dynasty. It seems that the Empresses and Princesses[1] used to play crucial roles on political ground but from behind, which was nearly absent during the Turk-Afghan Sultanate (exception: Razia Sultan). So, Afshar dynasty replacing Nasiri in Bengal Presidency might be the point of conflict between Deccan and North India. Nizam and other Deccan powers were in favour of the Marathas. Now the next question was that why Bengal became so much sensitive issue. Some points could be raised here: 1) Eurasian groups entering into India through Irano-Afghan plateau in various occasions were highly influenced by Persian culture and contributed in formation of Indo-Parthian traditions like Shahi, Padshahi, Shahanoshahi and Sufism; 2) after spreading out of Islam in Persia or Iran, later groups (Muslims by religion) brought in Sufism in South Asia with them under the banner of Islam; 3) Turks, Turk-Afghans and Turk-Mongols were found basically Sunni by religion; 4) Iranians on the other hand were mostly Shi'ite; 5) Interestingly these Sunni Turkic elements used Iran and nearby Afghanistan as their ways to Indus valley, Kashmir and different corners of South Asia, often backed Sufism and not Shi'ite religion; 6) When direct sea trade was started gradually shifting from hands of Arabs (Sunni by religion) to European traders at around last decade of fifteenth century A.D., things started changing rapidly: 6.1) formation of Shi'ite states in Deccan by the side of pre-existing Hindu Vijayanagara Empire in extreme south; 6.2) power shift from Khen to Koch in Kamta Kingdom in Bhutan foothills and formation of Koch Bihar state over there (1510 A.D.); 6.3) clashes among Turk-Afghans rulers of India and Hindu Rajput kings; 6.4) no such control of Turk-Afghan Sultanate in India over Bengal-Bihar, Odisha, Indian peninsula, Central India,

North Indian pockets, Gujarat-Malwa region and Indus valley; 6.5) entry of the Turk-Mongols or Mughals in South Asia through Afghanistan as an alternative (1525 A.D.) and conflict with Suri Afghans and Hindu Hem Chandra of Bengal-Bihar (1540 A.D. - 1556 A.D.); 7) Mughals were primarily ousted from India and took shelter Iran which held on Persian tradition; 8) Mughals returned back again with the help of Shi'ite Iran, reoccupied Delhi (1556 A.D.), formed Mughal Padshahi, established marital relations with Rajput Shahis, spread rapidly throughout Turk-Afghan Shahi in North India and Shi'ite states of Deccan, incorporated Indo-Afghan tribal regions and Kashmir, integrated tribal dominated areas of Central India (Hindu Kingdom Gondwana), entered in Bengal-Bihar region extended upto Odisha and Rajmahal and Bodo-Kamta belt, approached towards ancient trade routers of Indo-Himalayan region and Indo-Nepal Sub-Himalayas, from Deccan further exerted influences in extreme south, and also kept in touch with Koch Bihar on the way to Tibeto-Bhutan and Brahmaputra valley; 9) Persians (Iranians) just like the Rajput Royals started getting various important posts in the government and established marital relationships with the Great Mughals; 10) Mughals appointed Kamboh and Rajput as Governor of Bihar-Bengal besides persons like Sher Afghan Ali Quli Khan from Iran; 11) Mughal Prince Shah Shuja in first half of 16th Century A.D. served as the governor of Bengal-Bihar along with Rajmahal and Odisha, supported Sufism as a means of syncretism, had marital relationship with Iranian Shi'ite aristocrats, reserved friendly ties with Persian business houses and also controlled Brahmaputra valley and Bodo-Kamta belt; 12) after his failure to capture the Mughal Padshahi Throne he went in an exile to Arakan coast (presently Chittagong-Rakhine track in Bangladesh-Myanmar) under Bodo-Kamta belt (also Indo-Malayan track); 13) after dispute with the local rulers there, Shah Shuja was assassinated and all wealth, royal personalities and princesses were sacked; 14) next Mughal governors throughout rest part of

16th century A.D. in Bengal-Bihar paid special attentions to Brahmaputra valley, Bodo-Kamta belt, river trade routes, semi-autonomous regional rulers, port areas, European traders and Chittagong trade zone; 15) Hindu Marathas revolted in famine stricken Deccan where about a century ago Shi'ite states had been in existence; 16) warrior groups of Marathwara and Kurmi Kshatriyas present throughout the entire Deccan area and all of its extensions actively participated in the Maratha agitation; that were quite similar to the roles played by warrior tribes of Koch Bihar and neighbouring places besides *Vratya* Kshatriyas, Kshatriyas in disguise, Kshatriyas in exile, Kshatriyas with substructures, Kshatriyas with so many successive layers like Austro-Dravidians, Dravidians, Pre-Vedics, Vedics, Post-Vedics, Neo-Kshatriyas, Shiva worshippers and real owners of the land; 17) cash crops, leather industry, forest resources and trade relations existed there in Deccan similar to Himalayan foothills; 18) in favour of nationhood, main branch Hindu Maratha dynasty from Poona became the Hindu Pad Padshahi or the subordinate to Mughal Padshahi and the other one stayed at Kolhapur; similar case we could find in case of Koch dynasty with main branch in Koch Bihar and others at Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Tufanganj, Darrang and Kamrup focusing directly at Barindland, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gour Bengal, Brahmaputra valley and Bodo-Kamta belt besides Bhutan, Indo-Tibetan belt, Indo-Himalayan belt and beyond; 19) Peshwa, Maratha Sardars, Pindari forces, Hyderabad Nizam and Rajput associations were there in favour of Deccan; this is again comparable to existence of great Vaishnavite religious leader Srimanta Shankaradev, Chila Roy, tribal warriors, Mughal administration/governor/prince and Rajput links; 20) Mughal dynasty in that later half of 16th century A.D. took the Sunni hard-line; native traders, Jat, Bundela and Sikhs were not co-operating with the Mughal Padshahi as before; relations with Irano-Afghanistan went down considerably; 21) local rulers became semi-independent in Kashmir, Oudh and Bengal-Bihar;

Nizam became the sole authority and decision maker over Deccan provinces; Arkot province in extreme south was not ready to accept subordination under Nizam's supremacy; Hindu states of extreme south took either Maratha line or Arab line; for unity of the nation, Mughal Padshahi from Delhi remained symbolically in existence; 22) Murshid Quli Khan, a scholar of Deccan Nizam and also serving to Mughal Padshahi, established Bengal Nabobi under Nasiri dynasty; regional governance in Bengal-Bihar-Odisha became dynastic; 23) Shuja-ud-Din of Nasiri dynasty deployed Mirza Md. Ali first in Odisha, then in Rajmahal and finally in Bihar; Mirza Md. Ali was entitled as Shuja-ul-Mulk or *Shuja* of the entire country; 24) as soon as Irano-Afghans under newly established Afshar dynasty in Iran made Mughal Padshahi at Delhi their subordinate (1739 A.D.), Mirza Md. Ali replaced Sarfaraz Khan of Nasiri dynasty and as Alivardi Khan established Afshar dynasty in Bengal-Bihar (1740 A.D.); besides the Afshar dynasty in Bengal Bihar, another Nabobi was formed by Safdar Jung at Oudh or Awadh or Ayodhya; both of them were Shi'ite and expected to be loyal to Irano-Afghanistan than Deccan; 25) the new Nabobi in Bengal-Bihar throughout 1740s tried everything to defend its control over Odisha where influence of Deccan was maximum; administrators of Odisha and Rajmahal looked helpless; Marathas from Deccan with some local associates continuously attacked Bengal; impact was also fallen upon Bihar; Nizam remained silent; Maratha force attacked Bengal capital Murshidabad and Mahatabrai Jagat Seth who was said to be the wealthiest banker in the world; Nabob was successful to keep Burdwan under control, but left Odisha to the Marathas; so, indirect control of Maratha Peshwa and in that sense of Deccan was reestablished in Bengal; 26) Nabobi of Oudh could not help out of the situation; 27) in the meantime, Siraj-ud-Daulah became the new Nabob in 1756 A.D. and seemed much closer to the French East India Company and against special business facilities for the British East India Company; Ghaseti

Begum was against Nabob; Jagat Seth and many other aristocrats were also taken the opposite stand; they stood by the British which was against state monopoly over the trade and/or sanctioning similar special trade facilities to native traders or other foreign business houses; 28) in the next year, 1757 A.D., at the battle of Plassey, British Company as a part of the process towards reduction of French influence over Bengal, Nizam and extreme south defeated the Nabob's army and appointed Mir Jafar as the new Nabob; 28.1) in this way, the Afshar dynasty was replaced by new Najafi dynasty founded by Mir Jafar and the British got the authority to collect taxes; 28.2) British Company eventually reduced the influence of French on Nizam and Arkor the extreme south where the French had previously solitary control over important ports and coastal Andhra districts besides getting hold of huge monetary assistance and treasure; 28.2.1) like Cooch Behar, Andhra coast was a major tobacco growing region; 28.2.2) British just like Najafi dynasty in Bengal-Bihar, ascertained puppets at the courts of Nizam and Arkot by replacing French assisted deployments; 28.2.3) competition between French and British East India Companies led to occupying the treasures; 28.2.4) and getting monetary support for their respective armies from local rulers and personal gains under their protections; 28.3) the new Najafi dynasty, Sunni by religious faith, could climb into the power not just because of British assistance, but also as because of 28.3.1) a conspiracy against Siraj by pro-Iranians aristocrats and business houses like Ghaseti Begum, Jagat Seth, Umi Chand, etc., 28.3.2) Mir Jafar who had been the governor of Odisha during the Maratha attacks at the time of Alivardi Khan and then in charge of financial matters of the army, 28.3.3) Hindu elites including Krishna Chandra and Rajah Jagatballav who were in direct contact with the British, 28.3.4) Hindu royals of Burdwan and Krishnanagar in favour of the British, 28.3.5) a new section of feudal lords from Calcutta loyal to the British replacing many of the older ones, 28.3.6) similar newlt established native

business houses and bankers of Calcutta (now Kolkata), which was rapidly reducing the importance of aristocrats, landlords, business houses and bankers of Murshidabad- a great city even bigger than London under the Nabobs; and 28.3.7) local authority of Purnea or Mahananda valley areas was also against the Nabob; 29) in that context of a completely new kind of situation, Marathas from Deccan spread throughout North India, occupied Agra, entered in Punjab and established Shah Jahan III as the new Emperor of Mughal Padshahi, which was vehemently opposed by Mughal Prince in exile (taken shelter at Oudh), Shi'ite Nabobi in Oudh, Rohillas and Durrani. In the fatal third battle of Panipat in 1761 A.D. near Delhi the alliance caused much harm to the Marathas, their French artillery, Pindari warrior tribes and Hindu pilgrims with them. Thereafter, the alliance tried to reestablish control over Bengal-Bihar taking it back from the British interventions. Mir Jafar had been already replaced due to his alleged links with the Dutch East India Company at Chinchura near Kolkata and new Nabob Mir Qasim formerly in charge of Purnea also had bitter experience with the British Company. Mir Qasim with all royal treasures left Murshidabad (Bengal) and made Munger (Bihar and Rajmahal) as his new center of power; from Munger (Munghyr) he was in contact with the alliance, which ultimately led to the battle of Buxar against the British in 1764 A.D. Nearby regions of Buxar had been previously related to Sher Shah Suri who in alliance with Hem Chandra of Bengal and Afghan warlords of Bengal-Bihar fought against the Mughals. The place was at a time under the control of Oraons, a Dravidian community, having its links in Deccan, now permanently settled in river valleys of Chotanagpur plateau, and taking in Kurux or Kurkhu language indicating to a probable association with Coorg[2] region in extreme south. Buxar is nearer to Sasaram, the birthplace of Sher Shah Suri, and the Rohtasgarh fort. However, two more things are here interesting to be noted: A) Iranian link and B) Identity of the female genders in the dynasties. A)

Mir Qasim had deployed Armenians in his army. Previously, Alivardi Khan had installed Georgians probably from Tabaristan (Iran) and Abyssinians in the army while fighting against the Maratha forces in Bardhaman. Midnapore port area had been very much important before the Palas and also during Palas, Kambojas, Cholas, Chalukyas, Senas, rulers of Odisha, Deccan, Marathas, Turk-Afghans, Indo-Iranians, European traders, Bengal Nabob, Bihar region and Mughal Padshahi. Murshid Quli Khan had included the place permanently under Bengal and then it was given up to the British. Midnapore or Medinipur with all its extensions in South Bengal was the initial trade blocks received by the British. B) Qasim was son-in-law of Mir Jafar, and in the same way Siraj-ud-Daulah was grandson of Alivardi Khan but from his mother's side; Nafisa Khanum was wife of Alivardi and was involved in the war of Bardhaman (Burdwan); though Alivardi was actually an Arabian descent by ethnicity from father's side and his elder brother Mirza Ahmed was a Haji, the new dynasty formed by him was Afshar from his mother's side and thereby Shi'ite, Turkic and pro-Iranian. Now the question rose that these two points of Iranian link and gender related aspects to be correlated to the situation prevailed in Kuch Behar. Some points could be addressed here. 1) Northern Iran along southern coast of Caspian Sea and at the foothills of Elburz Mountain was known as Tabaristan or Tapuria. The mountain was at the same line with Himalayan Mountains of South Asia, Kashmir and Pamir areas, Zagros Mountain of Turkey and even Alps Mountains in Europe. 2) This Tabaristan also includes the regions like famous Mazandaran and Gulistan or Golestan. The region was situated on ancient trade route connecting Far East, Middle East and Near East. It had a mixed population of Christians, Jews, Manicheans, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (the Sun Worshipers), Pagans, Greeks, Armenians, Georgians, Turkic descents, proper Iranians, Central Asians of Turanans, Circassians and Kurds. The place was also known for education. Similar trade routes, ancient

cities like *Pundranagara* and Bangar, state formations, own historicity, hill and plain peoples, early universities and multiculturalism had also emerged out in Dinajpur-Rajshahi. 3) There were also gradual political exclusions as a result of successive inflows in Tabaristan. Formations of Kamtapur or Kamta Kingdom and Koch Bihar were just a response to that. That was also a place for successive invasions, gradual exclusions, disguise, going in exile and formation of substructures. 4) *Islams* spread to this area of Iran very lately and by the Imams and not under direct control of the Arab Caliphate. People were Shi'ite Muslims and area was broadly distributed among mountain people and foothill-cum-plain people. Shiva has become the predominating cult and Islam has also got entrances with Sufism. Himalayan portion is a separate kingdom and people in that Royal Kingdom of Bhutan mostly practices Buddhism besides pre-Buddhist traditions and animism. 5) Women in Tabaristan enjoyed freedom and did not hesitate to talk to the foreign traders. Mother's identity was quite important here. There was a large number of Christians living with the Shi'ite Muslims. In Indo-Bhutan region also Bhote women conducted the trade. Women traditionally practiced polyandry in different Tibeto-Himalayan pockets. Freedom was also given to matriarchal Bodo groups at Teesta-Brahmaputra region in early days of Kamtapur. Women are still enjoying much freedom among these Nepali/Gorkha and Adivasi groups. So, freedom of women in Tabaristan (Iran), Himalayas and Sub-Himalayas was an interesting feature. Rajbanshi women in early days participated in rain dance to appease The Rain God, which was a nude dance, performed in dark night and in absence of male members of the society. Shift of the power from Bodo (Khen) to Indo-Aryan speakers (Koch) at Kamta Kingdom and eventual formation of Koch Bihar State were related to gender issue among the Royals at the arrival of European ships to Indian ports. Koch dynasty was formed by virtue of generation of a new substructure through intermarriage with Mech

women. Here mother descent of Mech (Bodo) community was very important. 5.1) Similarly, we could see participation of women in politics and mentioning mother's identity in various occasions during the Mughal-British period. Examples could be cited from Mughal Dynasty (especially Nur Jehan and Jahan Ara), Nabobs of Bengal (mainly Afshars), Maratha Queens and other royal ladies. 5.2) Queen Victoria of British Royal Dynasty was so important in Indian history. 5.3) Empresses of China, Russia and Austria were important personalities of world history of 19th century A.D. 5.3.1) Catholic Austria was the last political center of Holy Roman Empire and enthronement of a Queen there was so significant. 5.3.2) Many tribal groups have accepted Christianity in Indo-Bhutan borderland so far. 5.3.3) Social reforms and education for women were some relevant concepts introduced by the British Company in 1820s and 1830s. In Bengal *Brahmo Samaj* took a pioneer's role. It was something like the Manichean Church based on Hindu Vedic tradition believing in monotheism and social reforms. 5.3.4) Muslims also started reorganizing themselves in their ways. Muslim organizations were very active in Punjab, Punjab-Afghan borders and Bengal. Later on, they realized the importance of Westernization and established so many Anglo-Muslim institutes such as in Aligarh. 5.3.5) Missionaries were also doing their works in different regions. 5.3.6) There were no other ways to repel black magic, witchcraft and similar customs like *sati daha pratha*[3]. 5.3.7) That was a time to accept certain Great Traditions, process of Westernization and social reforms rather being absolutely orthodox. Founder of *Brahmo* institution was Raja Rammohun Roy[4]. 5.3.8) Later on, during the rest part of 19th century A.D. Kuch Behar dynasty allowed *Brahmo* institution to enter in the Princely State, established marital relation to generate new substructures and new thoughts. The institution was in association with various other reformative institutes in Bengal and other parts of India. Bamboo varieties are numerous in the

Teesta-Brahmaputra region and Bodo-Kamta belt extended up to Indo-Malayas, Indochina and South China; one such variety is *Sati* bamboo used in the Hindu cremation process. 5.3.9) Ramkrishna Mission and the status mobilization movement or Kshatriya movement initiated in Rangpoor brought in drastic changes in the local societies. There are some other institutions like Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Anandamargi. Kshatriya movement in first half of 20th century A.D. was a major factor in Rajbanshi society and realized that the importance of social reforms should be brought in to the commoners and even the neglected womenfolk. They further focus on women's education which was impossible to think a century ago.

Walter Hamilton in 1815 clearly mentioned that in Rangpoor men did not marry a woman capable of reading and girls of rank were given marriage at eight years of age.

In Dalton report prepared by Deputy Commissioner of Kuch Behar state, what was clear mentioned was that when the British took charge of affairs in 1864 there were only two state funded schools and no elementary schools at all.

H.H. Risley in 1885 tried to draw a comparison among Rajbanshis, Dobhasis, Modesi and Jalua or Jhalua. He opined that the common people could be treated as the Rajbanshis and the rest three as their subcastes (subordinates?). So, on real ground, the perception of Rajbanshi could be changed overtime. Rajbanshis might act as a huge social fold preferably talking in Indo-Aryan dialect(s) and providing shelter to other excluded, disguised, migrated or exiled or marginalized groups. Such groups and sub-groups might once be any ruling category now taking shelter under the huge Rajbanshi umbrella. It is believed that the basic characters of *Pundra* Kshatriya should be patronage, bravery, noble work, calm, devotion and peasantry. Rajbanshis are treated as excluded form(s) of these *Pundra* Kshatriyas. However, there might be further exclusions and formation of some substructures through exchange of women, i.e., intermarriages or

interbreeding. Such substructures could not be directly justified as being the Rajbanshis. Some of these groups through intermarriages and due to political opportunism could gain or regain their ruling status and hence address selfhood as the Royal Dynasty or the Rajbanshis. They could try to adopt some features of the Rajbanshis or Pundra Kshatriya or other Kshatriyas as a process of status mobilization. Even the real Rajbanshis could try to get back their status. There might be groups with same kind of exclusion or successive exclusions like the Rajbanshis and they still bear the ruling identity in their cognate and love to self-address as the royals of a lost civilization or an indigenous state existing no more. Hindu Rajbanshi is a definite caste and said to be excluded Kshatriya. It should be some subordinates. New subordinates could be delivered here. Dobhasis were extremely marginalized, in disguise, result of intermixing, of tribal status, becoming porter tribes, often treated as a subordinate slave community, caught and kidnapped to other locations in few numbers, enslaved, even allowed to intermix with people of the new area and talking in their mother tongue and again in the native languages, and hence treated as bilinguals. Or they could be excluded from peasantry to do further immigrations, marginalization and lead the life of a fisherman and establishing marital relationship with the fishing communities who knew well about river and sea trade routes and could provide alternative food sources in the form of aquatic fauna and flora. So, the term Jalua has been coined here. They might go to the exile in a buffer region between the old kingdom that they had lost and a new kingdom in vicinity. They might be overlapped by the both. They might feel cultural traits from both the cultural areas. And hence they could be treated as the mainlanders or the Modesis. Demographic changes due to immigrations could however be emerged out within these categories like Dobhashi, Jalua and Modeshi; the newcomers or immigrants might not be directly related to the Rajbanshis and their subordinates besides nature of occupational

marginalization. These new categories therefore started staying with the old categories under the same occupational groups. Suppose, there are occupations A, B and C obtained by a1, b1 and c1 groups who are somehow related with the Rajbanshis. Now there might be some other immigrants like a2, a3, a4, etc. under the occupational category A; b1, b2, b3, etc. under category B; and c1, c2, c3, etc. under category C. These latecomers might not be directly related with the Rajbanshis but with time show some occupational interdependences (Rajbanshis with A, B and C). Again latecomers could adopt the food habits of the earlier people in the same occupations (food habits of a1, b1 and c1 being ideal for latecomers under A, B and C categories; a1, b1 and c1 knowing well about the local food resources). All these groups (both latecomers and/or originals) under occupational categories A, B and C might be not at all derived or further excluded from the real Rajbanshis and bear their respective ethnic identities; but still they could be found staying under the Rajbanshi social fold for protection from enemies, protection from further exclusion, food security, etc. Suppose, b3 group could establish marital relation with a1 group, a1 group be result out from further exclusion from Rajbanshi society or not, a1 itself be a product out from union between real Rajbanshis and c1 group or not, and after union of this a1 and that b3 we could have a new formation X sub group or sub caste or sub structure that would form a statehood and compare or correlate with the real Rajbanshis. X could use the identity of the Rajbanshis, as it has derived directly or indirectly from the Rajbanshis or wish to follow on the Rajbanshis who were once a prestigious ruling category. However, Rajbanshis could obey the royal dynasty but not the common c1 or a1 or b3 or X people. Hunter broadly categorized as Dobhasis consuming pork, fowl and alcohol, Modesis eating pork and drinking alcohol but not fowls, and Jaluas catching and selling fishes.

O'Malley in 1913 on the basis of 1911 Census declared that Rajbanshis and Koches are separate castes. Koches did intermarriages with others and became the rulers and then considering Rajbanshis as a reference could follow for certain status mobilization in a given politico-economic situation appeared in early 16th century A.D. On the other side, Rajbanshis tried to imitate features of the Kshatriya caste and get back the lost status. However, if we consider Rajbanshis as excluded form of *Vratya* Kshatriya, then the range or domain of its subordinates, sub-castes and sub-structures would be smaller. But if we mark the group as *Balia* Kshatriya, then we could correlate some other groups with it as well. In that case we could say that wider range better probabilities. If it is brought under attention that Paundrik Vasudeva or King Vasudeva of Pundra Kingdom took part in the great battle of Mahabharata, then obviously he was a ruler cum warrior. And states like Anga, Pundra, Sumha, Vanga and Kalinga were all established by the dive sons of Bali the Great. As Bali was a Kshatriya, then his sons should be also Kshatriyas. So, here Pundra being the son of King Bali ought to be a Kshatriya and so the Rajbanshis. Pundra stayed at the city or fort of *Pundranagara* or Mahasthangarh or Bagura or Bogra, King Bana stayed at *Bangara*, Koch stayed at Cooch Behar, Raja Ganesha Danujamardandeva at Dinajpur, Rani Bhavani at Natore and Rajshahi, *Varendris* at Barindland or *Varendrabhoom*, Murshid Quli Khan at Murshidabad, and; Dutta at Dabok or Dhaka or Dacca, similarly mythical King Bali was living at Chunar fort. The fort was used by mythical King Raja Harishchandra Dom, Rajputs, Afghans, Mughals, Mughal-Rajput alliance and the British. It is surrounded by areas like Vindhya Mountain, Ganges River, Varanasi, Saranath, Jaunpur, Hajipur, Buxar, Sasaram and Rhotasgarh fort. In a greater sense, latter is also associated with Oraon community speaking Dravidian dialect Kurux. Oraon as a reference further indicates to Kolarians, Mundari, Deccan, Mysore, Coorg, Nilgiri hills and Travankore at Malabar Coast.

Oraons are now staying at Chotonagput plateau and among the latecomers in Indo-Bhutan foothills or *Duars* region and with *Terai* region of Morang foothills serving as Modesia or mid-landers and Dhangar or Cooli or Koch like group or a labour group and one of the most excluded disguised marginalized agrarian tribe who were actually ancient forgotten rulers over a huge territory and today could simultaneously talk in Indo-Aryan languages and a mixed type of dialect known as *Sadri* and hence behaving like a *Dobhasi*. So, apparently Oraons have no such links with the Rajbanshis, but in a greater sense might look like a tribal community like the Koch. As Oraons have excluded from Rhotasgarh from the latecomers, it is possible that Koches were also marginalized like the Rajbanshis and such other groups. In marginalized condition, Koches and Oraons might create some sub-structures by associating with the others. Fall of Bengal Nabob Mir Qasim in Buxar in the hands of the British in 1764 A.D. might create a far reaching situation avoidable for the princely states like that of the Koch with a majority of Rajbanshi peasants. Pundra was a territory or kingdom established on the Karatoya River basin coming down from Dinajpur or Barindland or Tanchagarh-Rajganj uplands. But it could also include the Teesta-Brahmaputra valley, Mahananda River basin and Koshi water course. It was obviously a Sub-Himalayan kingdom. It had its core in Dinajpur and Rajshahi, which together as an entity was also known as *Varendrabhoom/ Varendri* or Barindland. Gour Bengal thus was an important of that. In its highest extent, it included Mahananda valley and Bihar *Purvanchal* upto Mithila or Trihoot or Videha or River Koshi. However, that *Purvanchal* was later governed from a separate center Purnia or Purnea. Thus it should had connections with Morang undivided and Sikkim as a way to Tibet. Mithila was itself governed from Darbhanga or *Dwarvanga* or Door to Bengal from North Indian Sub-Himalayas, Nepal Himalayas and Tibeto-Nepal mountain passes. Pundra had its influence over Mid Bengal that

would include Murshidabad and ancient royal families of Birbhum as a way to South Bengal, coastal South Bengal and Odisha, Rajmahal, South Bihar, Chotonagpur plateau, and again from there to radiating towards North Central India, Deccan, Mysore and Travankore. Bhagalpur and Munger were in or near Rajmahal area. Patna-Gaya region was at South Bihar. Buxar-Chunar was the entry was there from North India. From Murshidabad, one could reach upto every part of Gangetic Delta and Dhaka. Jessore and Kushtia were also political extensions of Pundra in the delta region from Murshidabad. That could be further extended upto Nadia and Khulna upto the mangrove forests. Pundra had borders with and pockets in Dhaka or Brahmaputra mouth and Mymensingh leading upto *Harikela* or Bodo-Kamta belt upto Chittagong and Arakan (Rakhine). Excluded people of Pundra often took shelter in these distal regions. They could also move towards Rangpur and stay there in exclusion and exile as the Rajbanshi or *Rajvamshi* or *Vratya* Kshatriya. Next interior region was Cooch Behar and then agrarian pockets of Jalpaiguri and finally Indo-Bhutan foothills or *Duar* or door(s) to Bhutan Himalayas and Tibet and henceforth *Duars*. It after crossing Sankosh from Teesta, Torsha, Jaldhaka-Raidak river basins led into Brahmaputra valley and other distal portions like the territories of Garo, Khasi, Cuchhur, Naga and Kuki. Similarly, from Harikel one could again move into these territories through Barak-Surma valley and Manipur. By using Feni river system and Noakhali-Sandip region, one could get into Tripura state, Tripura hills and Mizo territories. From Manipur routes are still there towards Burmese or Myanmar territories like Chin, Kochin Chin and beyond. There were hidden routes towards Thailand and South China as well.

Chinese traveler Hu-en-Tsang during Harshavardhana's rule in North India described Bengal as such: passing through Hiranya Parbat (near Mongyer) and Champa (near Bhagalpur) one could come to Bengal which was then divided into five Kingdoms, viz., P(o)undra or North Bengal,

Kamrup or Assam. Samatata or East Bengal, Karna Subarna or West Bengal and Tamralipta, the Southern sea coast.

In Ramayana again, places together have been mentioned like this: Brahmapala (Burma), Pundra (North Bengal and Brahmaputra valley), Videha (Mithila), Malla (Bhojpur), Koshal (Ayodhya), *Magadha* (Bihar), Anga (Rajmahal) and Mahagram (North India?). So, Pundra existed in the Sub-Himalayan track of North India-Brahmaputra belt. Again, a series of names have been enlisted there: Andhra (Andhra coast), Pundra (Pandya), Chola (Cauvery delta) and Keral (Kerala or Malabar coast). East portion of India include areas like Pragyothish (Assam), Pundra (North Bengal), Videha (Mithila), Mal (Bhojpur), Magadh or *Magadha* (Bihar), Tamralipta (coastal South Bengal) and *Golanda* (?) and all these areas were important trade routes.

We could arrange the incidents leading to British-Koch Bihar pact up as follows: Irano-Afghan attack on Mughal Padshahi (1739), political changes in Bengal (1740), Deccan's constant efforts to get back into Bengal (1740s), turning Bengal again to Deccan's side (1750-'55) and a situation of internal dispute with pro-North Indian plus Shi'ite plus Irano-Afghan plus British lobbies (1756), another shift in Bengal politics and establishment of British there (1757), Bengal government trying to establish contact with the Dutch Company as alternative to the British (1760s), Maratha intervention in Mughal Padshahi and clash with pro-North Indian lobbies plus Shi'ite Sub-Himalayas (Nabob of Oudh) plus Irano-Afghan elements (Durrani and Rohilla) (1761) with the subsequent result of exclusion of the Marathas from North India, enthronement of Mir Quasim of Purnea at Bengal Nabobi (1761-1763), revolt of Sannyasis or Hindu Monks of North Bengal (then North Bengal was governed by the *Varendris* of Natore-Rajshahi) and attacking East Bengal (Dhaka) (1763), Mir Quasim leaving Bengal and going into

Munger (1764) and allying with Oudh and Irano-Afghanistan deploying Armenians in the army, intervention of the winning side in the battle of 1761 A.D. and Mir Qasim in British Bengal (1764) with an utter failure, Mughal Padshah and Deccan Nizam and Nabob of Oudh (also in control of Arga and Kashmir) signing agreements with the British and approving British supremacy over Bengal (1765), rapid rise of Arab element in Mysore Hindu state of extreme south (1766), surfacing Anglo-Mysore war I (1767-'69) on the issue of control over extreme south (Arkot Nabob), act of Hindu Shahi Dynasty of Nepal believing in the formulation of a Pan-Gorkha Himalayan region incorporating Tibeto-Himalayan mountainous trade passes and inclusion of Indo-Nepal foothill regions mostly belonging to Oudh and Bihar border (1767), alliance formation between Sannyasis and Muslim Fakirs in North Bengal resulting into an attack over Patna (1767), similar revolt occurring in places near Arakan previously known for the assassination of Mughal Prince Shah Shuja of early half of 17th century A.D. (revolts in Tripura and Noakhali-Sandip: 1757-'69), Choar movement in Midnapore (1767), Anglo-Nizam pact (1768), end of Anglo-Mysore war I (1769), Sannyasi-Fakir alliance attacking Purnea (1770) with utter failure and taking shelter at ancient ruins of Mahasthangarh under the *Varendri* kingdom of Natore-Rajshahi then under the rule of Rani Bhavani, insurrection by the Choar again in Ghatshila and Purulia (1770), great Bengal famine (1770), peasant agitation against severe oppressions on local people and violation against all kinds of human rights in Rangpur (1772), Maratha failure in reestablishing control over North India (1773), mass killings in Rohilkhand by British-Oudh alliance (1773), diminishing power and authorities of Begum of Oudh and local Hindu ruler at Varanasi again by British-Oudh alliance (1773), and direct intervention of the British government in Company's matters (1773). Rohilkhand under Pathans, Oudh under Shi'ite rule and Dinajpur-Rangpur under *Varendri* groups were all in the

Sub-Himalayas and the places related to legendary Lord Ramachandra's and his *Ramarajya* (a kind of utopia). These places were also mentioned in Ramayana with different names. These sub-Himalayan territories were all lying under Hindu Kingdom of Nepal which was rapidly expanding under Prithvi Narayan Shah with an ambition of Pan-Gorkha Himalayan state formation. That was a kind of conceptuality of *Ramarajya* formation. On the other side, the assassination of Mughal Prince Shah Shuja in Arakan or Rakhine was a blow to Mughal supremacy in Bengal; Rakhine has treated as one of the habitats of King Ravana who was the rival of Ramachandra, great follower of Shiva cult, and also the supreme authority of *Raksha* or *Rakshasa* controlling the sea trade. So, importance of those Sub-Himalayan pockets was increased considerably, which might be further associated with the concepts of *Sita*, *Vanara* and *Yaksha* (Tibet?). Were Nepal and its Sub-Himalayan associates trying to deliver an alternative to fill up the vacuum so formed in North Indian politics? Was that a reminiscence of the forgotten past parallel to Shiva, Mughal Padshahi, Arabs, Indo-Persian tradition and the British rule? So, the concept of *Ramarajya* was there intrinsically at least at rudimentary stage and suppressing the fact in this way was a sensitive matter. With control upon Company by the British government in post-1772 situation, Sub-Himalayan Kingdom of Koch Bihar went directly into the British favour and Jalpaiguri pocket under its subordinates was included under Rangpur district. With best efforts, British gradually approached towards Morang, Nepal, Sikkim, *Duars*, Bhutan, Brahmaputra valley, Bodo-Kamta belt, Rakhine, Indo-Malaya region, present day Myanmar, Tibet, Himalayan pockets under the rulers of Punjab, Kashmir, Afghan tribal pockets, Afghanistan, Iran, trade with China, tribal pockets of South Asia, ancient trade routes spread throughout the world, Cyclone, Egypt, West Indies, seas and oceans, Australasia, handing over Indonesia or East Indies from Portuguese to the Dutch, and

keeping open eyes on political developments in Continental Europe, Eurasia and the New World. Like Koch Bihar, a section of the Maratha Hindu Pad Padshahi under Peshwa or dynastic primeministership in post-1772 situation went in favour of the British and did not want political tolerance of the Mysore Arabs in Indian politics. British also wanted to control Maratha Sardars of Baroda and Nagpur in order to establish control over Gujarat-Malwa trade route and Odisha on the other side. However, clashes between Maratha and British came into day light since 1775 A.D. Sannyasis and Fakirs in North Bengal were also found indulged into internal disputes. Like Koch Bihar, Natore-Rajshahi was also in a compromising situation with the British authorities. American war was over and American states announced independence from British monarchy. So, possibilities of French assistance were still there especially in Deccan and extreme south. British government strictly ordered British establishments in Bombay and Madras to follow up Governor-General and the British Council at Calcutta and disapproved any such isolated action taken by either of these British establishments in peninsular India. Till then British Company got involved in Anglo-Maratha war I initiated in 1779 A.D. Nizam and Mysore Arabs also took part in that. In 1782, with the death of Salabat Jung (grantee of previous Anglo-Nizam pact passed away), Marathas executed a pact with the British (Maratha Sardar Scindia controlling Maratha activities in North India became the guarantee), and Tipu Sultan established an Arab Sultanate in Mysore who wanted to establish a marital tie up with Nizam and became the decisive power in Indian politics. Choars in Midnapore and people in Jessore-Khulna region again stated agitations (1783-'84). However, British government established some more control over the company. So, Scindia and Tipu could now modify their army with help of the French. French interest in India was protected. Other Indian rulers were not in favour of establishment of an independent sultanate over the Mughal Padshahi at Delhi. Afghan or better to say Irano-Afghan lobby again

became much active in Agra, Rajputana and probably in Pune. In that context, Anglo-Mysore war II ended up in 1784 A.D., but immediately followed by Maratha-Mysore war (1784-'87) and Rajput-Scindia war (1787-1790). In that post-1784 situation, Majnu Shah, leader of the Fakir Agitation in North Bengal passed away and Musa became the new leader. After informal intervention of Pune (also Poona) over Rajput-Scindia clash, reestablishment of Anglo-Nizam tie-up against Mysore Sultanate through a diplomatic letter (1789), and bringing in Mysore Sultanate in a subordinating position (1790), Rajput-Scindia clash was diluted and Scindia regained supremacy in North Indian politics. So, Marathas were not completely against the French, but they did not want to a separate center of power in the form of Mysore Sultanate deforming Mughal Padshahi and hence, went in a compromising position with the British. Might be the same reasons applied on the policies taken by nature and Koch Bihar. Mysore Sultanate wanted an explanation from Nizam- the agent of Mughal Padshahi in Deccan- for its positive response to the British diplomatic letter, raised question on Hindu Math in Mysore going in favour of Hindu Pad Padshahi Marathas and tried to intervene into the British loyal Hindu state Travancore at Malabar coast where a considerable section of the common people were Mopala Arab Muslims. These three things led to Anglo-Mysore war III (1790-1792). Mysore Sultanate could not get support from the French side due to French Revolution against the monarchy over there. Mysore faced a defeat and the most of its trade routes and port areas went under Nizam, Maratha and British-Travancore alliance. Latter also got control over Coorg. Sons of Tipu Sultan were considered as guarantee. Nepal in the meantime negotiated with the Limbus of Morang and made Sikkim a subordinate. The country also moved into western and far western territories of Nepal Himalayas of the date. Nepalese later on temporarily moved into Kumaon above Rohilkhand region, Garhwal Mountains opening at Patiala (East Punjab), Kangra fort directing

towards Lahore (West Punjab) and Kashmir, Palpa near Gorakhpur opening at Oudh, Malla as the direct link between Katmandu and Kashi (Varanasi) through Bhojpur, *Kiratabhoomi* of Rai and Limbu groups towards Bihar through Mithila, Sikkim and Morang towards Chumbi, Bhutan, Teesta-Dharala, Rajganj-Panchagarh, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, areas under Sannyasis and Fakirs, kingdom of Natore, areas under Purnea and the Mahananda valley. Koch Bihar was an associate of the British and conducting its policies regarding Bhutan and Brahmaputra valley along with the Bodo-Kamta belt. In 1790s, Nepal occupied Sikkim, approached towards Chumbi valley, tried to involve in the politics of Tibet, but was defeated while facing the Chinese forces and thereafter it literally became a subordinate of the China (1791). Sikkim was also became a subordinate of China just like Tibet. Sikhs defeated Bhimsen Thapa, the Army Chief of Nepalese army, and protected Kangra fort which was at the knot of Punjab, Kashmir and Tibet (1892). During that time, France was going through the first French Revolution. Mysore Sultanate could not get any necessary help from the French side while battling in the Anglo-Mysore war III (1790-'92). Mahadji Scindia who had occupied the Agra fort (1784), became the gurantee of Anglo-Maratha pact (1784) and also own the battles of Rajputana (1787-'90) situated as a bridge between Deccan and Afghan protected areas passed away in 1794 A.D. In post-Mahadji Scindia (after 1794), a vacuum was created in North Indian politics, Mysore Sultanate was in contact with Afghanistan, Afghan Sultanate tried to fill up vacuum developed in North India (1796), insurrection again occurred in Jessore-Khulna areas (1796), Nizam took a friendly stand with the French, Marathas in Pune remained neutral, French mission arrived at Mysore (1797), Tipu wished them for their success in French revolution at the same place he had been defeated in Anglo-Mysore war III (1797), French Authority sent an open diplomatic letter to Tipu Sultan in his support from Mauritius (French colony) and translated copy of the letter was well circulated

throughout India and published in new papers of Calcutta (1797), possibilities raised for a probable attack by French Army in South Asia on the way of Egypt, Mysore Sultanate tried to establish diplomatic tie-ups with Choars again started agitation at Midnapore (1789-'99), Tipu wished them for their success in French revolution at the same place he had been defeated in Anglo-Mysore war III (1797), French Authority sent an open diplomatic letter to Tipu Sultan in his support from Mauritius (French colony) and translated copy of the letter was well circulated throughout India and published in new papers of Calcutta (1797), possibilities raised for a probable attack by French Army in South Asia on the way of Egypt, Mysore Sultanate tried to establish diplomatic tie-ups with Ottoman Turks and Iranian Shah, Afghan forces again tried to invade into North India (1798), Choars again started agitation at Midnapore (1798-'99), however the Policy of Subsidiary Alliance in favour of British establishments in India was accepted by Nizam (1798) and Nabob of Ahmadabad of Gujarat (1999), and Tipu Sultan was killed in Anglo-Mysore war VI (1799). Hindu Dynasty of Mysore was restored and family of Tipu Sultan was sent to an exile in Calcutta, British modified terms and conditions with Nizam in post-war situation and with this, Sannyasi agitation ended up in 1800A.D. Napoleon became the new Emperor of France in post-Tipu aftermath (1800). British included Coimbatore from Mysore, renewed the Anglo-Nizam pact (1800), and soon after the death of Nana Phadnavis as the masterminder of Maratha confederacies in 1800 A.D. made the Marathas its subsidiary alliance partners (Marathas at Cauvery delta, 1801; Maratha Peshwa at Poona, 1802; Marathas at Nagpur, 1803; and Marathas at Gwalior, 1803). It also occupied Agra fort and Red fort (1803) and made Mughal Padshah a dependant. Marathas of Indore only remained independent. We could relook the things likewise: French Revolution (1789-1799), people's agitation in Birbhum (1789; the place is very close to the core area of Santal insurrection in 1855), Anglo-Nizam tie up against

Mysore Sultanate (1789), Maratha-Mysore war and Mysore's defeat (1790), defeat of Nepal in Sino-Nepal war on cross border trade with Tibet (1791), Mysore Sultanate losing the third battle against British (1792), death of Louis XVI King of the French from the House of Bourbon (1793), Mahadji Scindhia (also Sindhia and Shinde) passing away (1794), Peshwa passing away (1795), Maratha-Nizam clash (1795), Afghan interference (1796), French reinterference in Mysore (1797), Afghan reinterference (1798), French pro-actively trying to conquer Egypt, Anglo-Nizam pact (1798), Anglo-Ahmedabad pact (1799), revolt in Midnapore (1798-'99), Mysore Sultanate losing the fourth and final battle against British (1798-'99), new developments in France after the revolution (1800), modifications in Anglo-Nizam pact (1800), British making Oudh a subsidiary alliance (1801), death of Nana Phadnavish at Poona mastermind of Maratha confederacies (1800), Failure in the forming a united region throughout the Maratha dominated areas (1800), success in the formation of a united territory by uniting Sikh confederacies of western part of Punjab through a decadal process and fight against Afghan interventions (1790s), formation of Lahore Durbar (1800), fall of Maratha confederacies in a one by one process (Cauvery delta or Thanjavur, 1801; Poona, 1802; Nagpur, 1803; Gwalor, 1803), fall of Agra and Red Fort (1803) and Napoleon Bonaparte becoming the Emperor of the French (1804-1814 and again in 1815) and King of Italy (1804-1814). Indore could still resist and in touch with the Jat[\[5\]](#) and Sikh on the way to Afghanistan. Holkars of Indore probably tried to deliver a new alternative by associating with the Jats; but British made a pact with the Jats (1805) and then with the Lahore Durbar (1806). Holkar after being cut off from direct contacts with Irano-Afghanistan due to the formation of a united state over Sikh confederacies just like Gurkha Nepal and unlike failed process of the Marathas in 1800 A.D. had found no option other than to sign a treaty with the British for the safety of allied provinces in Rajputana and its own

territories. During Napoleon's rule in Europe and its impact over a larger part of the world, the post-Sannyasi Movement period (post-1800) was featured with Anglo-Nepalese conflicts (1804-1816), Pindari attacks in North and Central India (until Marathas lost the third and final Anglo-Maratha battle of 1818), Nayek movements in Midnapore (1808-1816; notable point is that Nayeks in extreme south in first half of 16th century A.D. brought in the Vijayanagara Empire at a new peak of success by virtue of their monopoly in Arabian horse trade with Portuguese company; their army chief Ram Roy was as brave as Hemchandra during the Suri Afghans in North India), Anglo-Lahore agreement (Amritsar, 1809) to counter any possible attack by France or Russia through Central Asia, Mainpuri revolt (1812) on Bodo-Kamta belt closely related to French colonies in Indochina region, and Burma dwelling in Manipur and Barak-Surma region (1813). Sugauli treaty was finalized and signed in 1816 A.D. to solve disputes between Nepal and British authority. Garhwal and Kumaon were annexed in India. Indo-Nepal Terai border was finalized. Sikkim was removed from the political control of Nepal. Sikkim was made as a dependent territory of British India. Sugauli treaty (1816) and end of Napoleon's second term (1815) were the game changer and soon British reestablished full control over Midnapore (1816), provided shelter to the Kingdom of Sikkim from Nepalese aggression (1817), and assured peace and peoples' safety in Pindari affected areas (1818). In such a situation, Marathas became protectorates under the British. On the other side, Lahore Durbar fully utilized the A.D. 1809 Amritsar pact and in order to develop a strong shield in western part of Punjab against any kind of foreign interference from the mountain passes of Afghanistan occupied all the Sikh confederacies, Multan, Jammu, Kashmir, Dera Gazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan and other tribal pockets of Baluchistan-Afghan borders within 1820 A.D. Missionary activities increased in the tribal pockets and the British government from 1814 onwards (the year Napoleon lost control

over Italy) moved towards social reformation programmes. Within first five years of 1820s, Islamic activities increased in Bengal (especially delta region and East Bengal, such as, Barasat and Dhaka) and tribal dominated Afghan borders. In those years, most of the Iberian colonies announced independence from colonial rules in Latin and Meso America. That resulted into Young Bengal Movement in Calcutta. Lahore Durbar further tried to occupy Peshawar in 1823 A.D. In the same way Sikhs at the Lahore Durbar rapidly approached towards the Afghan borders, Burma rapidly moved into Manipur (1813) and Assam (1822) and then from Arakan tried to establish control over East Bengal, Mid Bengal, Gour Bengal (Dinajpur-Rajshahi) and islands on the delta region (1823) or in a single phrase, tried to wipe out British control over Bengal. But with support of the Koch Bihar kingdom British was successful to rule out Burmese force from Assam(1824). Finally, the British occupied coasts of Burma including Arakan, its delta region and southern fertile territories (1826). British faced *Pagal Panthi* movement in Mymensing and Meghalaya region (Indo-Bangladesh) led by a converted Garo Muslim (1825-1827). Missionary activities increased in remote pockets of Brahmaputra region including Garo Hills. Bengal Sati Regulation or Regulation XVII, A.D. 1829 of Bengal Act was passed in 1829 after strong protest from orthodox Hindu organizations. In 1830s, second French Revolution occurred. Some protests were made against suppressions in indigo plantation sectors. British government took over more control of South Asia and monopoly of British East India Company was abolished. Tea gardens were finally set up in Indian soil challenging Chinese monopoly. Lahore in friendly ties with the British reoccupied Peshawar in 1834 A.D. With the help of Lahore and by using the water ways of Sind province, British entered into Afghanistan to rule out any French, Russian or Iranian control over there and possible attack through the region. That resulted into an Anglo-Iranian clash in Heart (1837). With the same mitivation, British took

over the internal administration of Oudh previously governed by the Shi'ite Nabob (1837). They established Shash Shuja in Afghanistan (1838) but faced a severe defeat (1839). British had to reestablish Dost Khan in Afghanistan previously sent in an exile to Calcutta and occupied Sind province (1739). Sind had been occupied by Baluch tribes since 1771 A.D. who united the whole area within 1783 A.D. In the critical year of 1799 A.D., British made a pact with Sind. After 1800 A.D., when Sikh confederacies in Western Punjab gave rise to a united figure; Maratha confederacies, Holkar-Rajput alliance and Amirs in Sind became vulnerable. Sind confederacy signed a pact with the British in 1809 A.D., then again in 1820 A.D., and finally in 1832 A.D. to counter Napoleon, Sikh and possible foreign attacks due to new developments in France respectively. British in 1830s used its Indus River to move into Afghanistan. In this process, they gradually started encroaching its territories as in 1831, 1832, and 1835 with the final blow in 1839. Defeat in Afghanistan, assassination of Shah Shuja and sudden demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1839) compelled the Sikhs to find out new routes like tribal pockets in Kashmir in accordance to Baltistan and Tibet Heights. Success here came through a coalition between Sikhs and Dogra Rajputs, which resulted into a clash between pro-Dogra and anti-Dogra groups at the Durbar. Dogras got higher posts, but were soon displaced (1845). British intervened into the matter, which caused into Anglo-Sikh war I. Kashmir got into the hands of Dogra king of Jammu and Lahore Durbar became fully dependent on the British. After a revolt in Multan (1846), in second and final Anglo-Sikh war the Sikh kingdom in Western Punjab was completely annexed (1849). Afghanistan remained just as an important buffer in the border region. After death of Peshwa (1851), British by using the Doctrine of Lapse tried to abolish various Princely States without any 'legal' heir. Even they tried to eradicate Maratha Royals at Satara, that in Thanjavur and Nagpur, non-Marathas in Rajasthan, in

Bundelkhand, in Oudh and in Jhansi (1850s). Anti-British protests were organized in China around 1850s. British on the other side demanded control over that portion of Morang state included within southern Sikkim (1848), occupied rest portion of Burma (1852), and finally Morang portion of Sikkim was annexed into India and finally Darjeeling district was formed as a part of Bengal (1853). In this way, British established control on Indo-Himalayan zone with its Sub-Himalayan track and that included Afghanistan, tribal pockets, Baltistan, Tibet Heights, Kashmir, Jammu, Jalalabad, Peshawar, Multan, Sind, Lahore, Sikh Khalsa, Fakirs in Punjab, Patiala, Kangra, Garhwal, Kumaun, Rohilkhand, Nepal, Oudh, Palpa, Gorakhpur, Hajipur, Chunar, Varanasi (Kashi), Patna, Sino-Tibet, Sikkim, Morang (Darjeeling), Purnea, Sannyasis, Fakirs, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gour Bengal, Natore, Travancore, Coorg, Mysore Sultanate, Maratha Confederacies, Nizam, Midnapore, Birbhum, Jessore-Khulna, Garo Hills, Brahmaputra, Khasia Jaintia, Surma, Coochihar, Manipur, Kachin-Naga, Kuki, Bodo-Kamta belt, Mymensingh, Noakhali, Sandip, Tripura, Arakan, Burmese coasts, Burmese delta, Southern fertile Burma and Burma inlands. And with all these we have to add the Koch Bihar state staying with the British from very beginning (1773).

Here, we could compare 1) Sikh Khalsa with Sannyasis, 2) Dogra Rajputs with Koch Dynasty, 3) **Sikh** confederacies with Himalayan confederacies, 4) Sikh state with Nepal, 5) Lahore Darbar with Gorkha House, 6) Patiala House with Sikkim state, 7) Tibet Heights with Chumbi valley, 8) Jammu with Morang, 9) Multan agitation with Rangpur agitation, 10) *Varendri* Brahman with Kashmiri Brahman, etc. We could further put in North Bengal and its adjoining areas, Punjab-Kashmir, and Oudh-Rohilkhand-Nepal and even Tabaristan on a geographical line. Guru Gobind Singh was the Tenth Master and from Bihar. Like Maratha socio-religious reformers, he worked in Punjab. He spread the concept of equality among all the people, supported

monotheism, Against Mughal oppression over the Sikh and Jat agriculturists, he raised his voice. He wrote *Dasven Patshah Da Granth* and hence was fully aware of Indo-Iranian traditions and the concept of Shahi. He against caste system spread the concept of equality among all the people, supported monotheism, and made the Sikh Nation a religious warrior clan or the *Khalsa* force under *Sikh Panth*, common ‘Singh’ surname and one identity. Sikhs are not the Hindus and hence could not be treated as Hindu Kshatriyas, but they are actually holding the status of a house riding Kshatriya race in disguise. He was influential to the common people living in the small Hindu states located at Shivalik Hills of Himalayan range. Against Mughal oppression over the Sikh and Jat agriculturists, he raised his voice against severe exclusion. He wrote *Dasven Patshah Da Granth* and hence was fully aware of Indo-Iranian traditions including the concept of Shahi. His father, the Ninth Master, Guru Teg Bahadur was closely associated with Kashmiri Brahmanism and also went into Brahmaputravally. Govind Singh was a utopian (*Ramrajya?*) and also supported Bahadur Shah I on Mughal Throne. He also went in Deccan. After him, one Lachhman Das or Lakshman Das as his follower reorganized the entire Sikh Nation and continued their movement against oppression over the common peasants. They also served as human shield in 1790s when Afghan rulers tried to attack into India through Punjab and secured India during that critical decade when Nepal, Mysore, France, Scindia and Maratha confederacy. But that concept of utopia probably lasted for long. Examples could be taken from Rangpur Division of Bengal (1770-1773) and Sepoi Mutiny (1857).

1. Ratiram Das, a Rajbanshi poet cum ballad singer, mentioned that Kamta kingdom was situated over ancient *Pundravardhana* or North Bengal areas. Its natural boundaries were Koshi River to west, Brahmaputra to east, Himalayas to north and Bengal to south. The area was blessed by Goddess Kamakshya and hence was a part of Kamrup state

established throughout Teesta-Brahmaputra region. So, Kamta kingdom was the western part of Kamrup. The area was characterized by Karatoa River, Shiva cult and marital bondage. The poet indicated to the marriage of Shiva. In other sense, that was a marriage between Shiva worshippers who had been related to ancient civilizations like *Pundravardhana* and local people. He then mentioned a place known as Shiladevi or Mistress of the stone cult or Shiva. The place was situated at the bank of Karatoa. That was also the worship ground of great Hindu monk Parasurama who was credited for his act in favour reestablishment of Brahmanism. Brahmins are the priestly category of Hindu society and protect the society and its values on religious paradox. The monk was also raised to the level of Lord Vishnu and indeed said as one of the ten Avatars of Him. He saved Hinduism from the supremacy of early Hindu rulers-cum-warriors, commonly known as the Kshatriyas. These Kshatriyas broke the orthodox, fixed and ideal structure or occupational stratification of Hindu society by developing various substructures. They in order to establish stronghold in their territories allowed various intermarriages between different occupational groups and communities and races and peoples believing in completely different values. At initial stage, such a process was proved to be deleterious to traditional Hindu social structure. It was suffered from sudden appearance of various new sub-structures with no such fixed identities or occupational obligations. Further new values, customs, norms, information traits or ideas, beliefs, food habits, natural resources, laws and models were there in front of Hindu culture or civilization as never before. It was hard to decide which trait would be incorporated and which not. There were questions regarding placements of the new substructures in close-ended social stratification system. New strata were about to be formed and therefore the ideal

stratification model needed some internal changes. So, Hindus started excluding these new substructures. Poet then mentioned that the same Shiladevi area was a port (river port) and for commercial benefits /financial prosperity/ wealthy society, such intermixing were to be allowed along with exchange of goods and information. So, in winter season when countrymen completed all the post-harvesting activities and food processing, people from far away came here (for trade purpose) and prayed to Narayan or Lord Krishna. He is another Avatar of Lord Vishnu just like Parasurama but in favour of a quasi-egalitarian society where different ethnicities and strata could mix with each other to form a huge community and even a bigger social fold. That happened as the place was an important trade route or door (Door to *Pundravardhana* known as '*Pon Duar*'). They were Royals by birth, but too actually scared of Parasurama. They lost in the battle, left the core area, fled to the marginal territories, were transformed into a low-status or low ranking excluded Kshatriya category (*Bhanga* or *Vratya* Kshatriya), and their accompanying loyal subjects therefore being treated as sons and daughters of the excluded Royal Dynasty (Rajbanshi). A different opinion is also there. This process of exclusion might occur in a successive manner. The earlier exclusions might be delivered by the Brahminics, but later on those Brahminics were also excluded. So, we could say that earlier exclusions were by Parasurama and later ones of the Parasurama. Rajbanshis as followers of the Royal Dynasty were excluded from the mainstream society; but then the mainstream society itself believing in the holy guidance of the Brahmins was excluded. (Only those who accepted transformation process and were converted into Buddhism or/and Islam could stay in the core territory. *Pundravardhana* finally became stronghold of Buddhism and Islam and not of Brahmanism; Brahmanism was actually

excluded from the region.) So, the poet said that they Brahmans were hated but treated just like the God by the excluded. Parasurama was not the only Brahman. There were other Brahmans or priests or monks who provided safety and security to the excluded ones. Kashyapa was such a Brahman. All the excluded people became his followers and took Kashyapa as their common clan name. Vaishnavite priests who supported formation of an egalitarian society or a quasi-egalitarian one and the post-Parasurama Brahmans had no such basic difference. Rangpur was the main place for those excluded people. Ghoraghat or famous river port for horse purchase was also located there. Rangpur-Ghoraghat was the pride of Bengal. Rangpur was fallen within Kamrup and Nilambar was the king there. For its geo-strategic location, all including Bhutan and Burma (Myanmar) and Tibet (China) became its subordinates. Here, interdependence between Indo-Aryan speaking groups and others has been indicated. The alliance defended superdominance of Kaji and survived against the Gazi. Here, the indications are very clear and directed towards the Islamic heritage. However, alternative terms like Peer, Murid, Imam, Mazar, Dargah, Sufi and Shi'ite are not been mentioned. So, it has probably indicated towards Islamic hardlines and no such syncretism. Further religious warfare, trade rivalry and business interests are passively pointed to. Then the era of ruling behind the veil began and the state lost its sacredness and fame. Then Koch- an Indo-Aryan speaking porter tribe and in marital bondage with Mech the non-Indo Aryan speaking group- reorganized the state, accepted Hinduism, delivered a new Royal Dynasty, and continued the Rajbanshi system (republican ideology: all being Royals under the Royal). Nara Narayan was a great king of the new dynasty and successful to reoccupy or at least reestablish relationship with Bhutan and Burma and the territories

dominated by them. So, it indicates towards a relationship with communities under the common Bodo group or holders of Bodo-Kamta tradition. Those people resided in Brahmaputra valley and were also there in Bhutan and Burma. Unlike the previous dynasty, it failed to establish a fruitful relationship with China or Tibet or Bhutan Royals and indulged into border disputes. Earlier dynasty was related to the Kheng community of Bhutan who became the Khen people in Kamrup. But this later dynasty was related to Koch and Mech who were not the inhabitants of the Bhutan Himalayas or Sino-Tibet. Rather they were people initially related to Teesta-Brahmaputra plains and local uplands/plateau/hills (Meghalaya region). Parikshit was the king of another branch of that Koch Dynasty placing Lord Shiva at supreme. Koch Bihar was developed on Rangpur governed by the main branch, while proper Rangpur remained as a part of Bengal like *Pundravardhana* proper. So, we could get a sequence: Mid Bengal> Gour Bengal (new power center of *Pundravardhana* proper)>Dinajpur-Rajshahi (*Varendri* or Barindland or *Varendri* Brahmin dominated section of *Pundravardhana* proper)>Bogra or Mahasthangarh or *Pundranagara* (older region of *Pundravardhana* proper)> Rangpur or Rangpoor (marginal territory major, overlapped with Kampur or Pragyothishpur)> Kamta Kingdom and then Koch Bihar (also Kuch Behar or Cooch Behar, local state developed in Rangpur)> Kamrup proper and its interior pockets> Tribes in Teesta-Brahmaputra region (Rabha people, Mech territory, Koch-Hajo territory, Bodo-Kamta territory, Garo people, Chhutia-Bodo territory, Ahom territory, Cuchhur, Khasi people, Dimasa, Karbi, Manipuri, Kacha-Naga, Daphla, Kuki, etc.)> Tribes in the Himalayas and cis-Himalayas (Dukpa, Shangla, Monpa, Toto, Lhokpu or Doya, Khengkha, Dzongkha, Denzongpa, Rong or Lepcha, Magar, Yolmo, Tibetan, Dhimal, Kiranti, Limbu, Rai, Gurung, Sherpa,

etc.); other marginal territories of *Pundravardhana* in Bengal-Bihar being parts of Mymensing as far as Harikel, parts of Dhaka, parts of Jessore-Khulna region parts of Nadia, parts of Birbhum-Rajmahal, Murshidabad-Kushtia, Purnea-Katihar, Morang-Kishanganj, Panchagarh-Rajganj, Jalpaiguri, Teesta-Dharala basin, Mainaguri-Dhupguri, and Falakata-Alipurduar. Other branches of the dynasty ruled in the proper Brahmaputra valley or Kamrup and therefore located in the eastward territories beyond Rangpur. Parikshit was from such a parallel dynasty and ruled in Kampur-Goalpara region. Territory in Brahmaputra ruled by Parikshit was acquired by mainland India under the Mughal Padshahi (that then gradually approached towards Darrang and Ahom). In Mughal Era, Rajput Royals and Mughal Padshahi were tied up through marriages. Rajput Man Singh was appointed as the administrator of Bengal-Bihar. [He made Chunar-Rhotasgarh as his administrative center (an important administrative center near Varanasi and center of the Balia Kshatriyas). The place served as a meeting point among Northern, Southern, Central, Deccan and Eastern India. So, Bengal-Bihar region became a part of India or *Bharat*.] Royal subjects of King Parikshit were highly demoralized and lost their enthusiasm. (The clash was occurred on the issue of dominance over Bodo-Bhuinya/Baro-Bhuinya pockets on Brahmaputra valley and Bengal as a whole.) Rangpur-Fatehpur was a huge block in Mughal Bengal. (Within Nabobi rule in Bengal under Mughal Padshahi in 18th century A.D., entire Dinajpur-Rajshahi along with all its extensions were gone into the hands of *Varendri* Brahman who established Natore city and ruled the region from Rajshahi city; the region was divided into various blocks or *chaklas* like Rajshahi, Murshidabad, Dinajpur, Rangpur, etc.; during the British rule Jalpaiguri was incorporated within Rangpur before inclusion of *Duars* region). Local

Hindu ruler of Rangpur-Fatehpur donated so many vest lands to Brahmans, Vaidyas and Temple Trusts. So, various Hindu subordinates were there. (We could compare it with a utopia or *Ramarajya*). Manthana, Bamandanga, and so many small pockets (*Parghanas*) were developed thereby. Presence of Brahmans increased the status of Muslim Fatehpur. (Definitely, the situation was extra-religious and an issue of good governance; it could be further compared to semi-autonomous nature of local governance and the philosophy of simple living great thinking then existed in entire Sub-Himalayan belt from Bengal to Oudh and Rohilkhand; similar situation might also prevail in Kashmir, Nepal and various parts of North India; feudal system under old or local dynasties were not considered exploitative as such. That was a situation after 1757, 1761 and 1764, when Nabob of Bengal and Marathas of Deccan and Shi'ites supported by Irano-Afghan rulers met with their failures and at such a time Arab elements from Mysore and Hindu Shahi of Nepal could deliver an alternative to the British in the silent presence of France gradually approaching towards a Revolution. Sannyasis and Fakirs in the foothills went against the British Company. Sikh Khalsa was very much active in the Punjab speaking for social reforms, equality and egalitarianism among its people. During first French Revolution, Sikh confederacies in Western Punjab became united to give rise to a single state, behaved like a shield in the borders and tried to find out new trade routes.) Debi Singh was employed by British Company to tackle the situation as that was considered as against the interest of the Indian mainland. Great famine of 1770 occurred and even prosperous families were succumbed to starvation and death. In such a situation, in the name of taxation, authority tried to grab as much money, property, wealth, ornaments and even clothings as they can. Violation of human rights, violence against women, severe

oppression and physical humiliations were reported. Women feared to go to bathing places; people dared to ride on palanquin; rich and poor were both sufferers; and even the most adored people in the region were found devoid of all reputation. Shiv Chandra Roy of Itakumari and Joy Durga Chaudhurani of Peergachha-Manthara were eminent and the most influential personality to the region. Shiv Chandra was imprisoned behind the bars and in chains while clarifying their side in front of Devi Singh. After release, all the landlords and elite persons under the Rangpur confederacy were called in by Shib Chandra belonging to Vaidya caste. Open letter was issued to the common public in the peoples' court. Mentioning of Peergachha or the rururban pocket of a Peer and a female leader Joy Durga indicates wide acceptance of women from the elite families and Sufism. Guns, cannons, horses and elephants were accumulated in huge number. General demand was river and floor control mechanism and rationing system in the disaster hit areas. Aristocrats were afraid of any direct conflict against the authority. A lady could deliver a public speech in front of the public openly (not behind the veil). People believed in the female cult of Durga or *Magishashuramardini*. They also have faith in snake deity, blood sacrifice and human sacrifice. Finally, a public revolution at a massive scale occurred. That was just a miniature form of great revolutions occurred at local, regional and even trans-regional levels for the next one century throughout different parts of the world. Devi Singh fled to Dhaka or Murshidabad. British government directly intervened into the matter and Company's rule in India (1773), that finally resulted into change into the company authority, large criticism in Supreme Council, imprisonment for the Devi Singh's associates and Devi Singh himself was excluded from the territory. That was first public agitation in British rule leading to a success. Today Rangpur has been included in

Bangladesh, whereas Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar are in India. Rangpur Division of Bangladesh and Cooch Behar district in India shared so many enclaves in their territories.

2. We should have a relook in Sepoi Mutiny of 1857 A.D. and probably that was a notion towards establishment of the utopia again throughout North India and beyond. That was accompanied with infrastructural developments in India like railways, roadways, bridges, telegraphs and other improvements, which again followed by Santal insurrection in 1855 A.D. and then Sepoi Mutiny of 1857 A.D. with active participations by all category peoples in North India (especially Oudh and Meerut of Rohilkhand), Marathas attacking Kanpur (near ancient power center of Kannauj), conflicts in Agra-Delhi region, and throughout the Bihar-Bundelkhand region. Indian Sepoi in British Army put an accusation of violation of their purity and pollution according to their own cultural beliefs and food ways. That arem had already fought in 1852 A.D. in Burmese interior pockets and despite opium movement in China took back the Morang portion from lower Sikkim. In Santal insurrection between 1853 A.D. and 1855 A.D., we could see the concept of utopia formation was working. Was there the same utopian concept working during the Sepoi Mutiny in 1857 A.D. when the Native Army or Indian Sepoi declared their ambition of full restoration of Mughal Padshahi under Bahadur Shah II. Previously, Gorkha House of Nepal tried the same as there was no such direct boundary between India and Nepal. Gorkhas of Nepal and Nayeks of Midnapore apparently failed in that process in 1816-'17 A.D., which followed Napoleon's end in 1815 A.D. and was followed by end of Maratha sovereignty in 1818 A.D. A century ago in early decade of 18th century A.D. Guru Gobind Singh of the Sikh community also had had similar vision and supported enthronement of Bahadur Shah I as the seventh Mughal Padshah. His

father and sons had been killed during the regime of sixth Mughal Padshah Aurangzeb and thereafter he was also assassinated in Deccan. During Sepoi mutiny Sikh and Gorkha regiments remained with the British army. There were no such tensions in peninsular India and in case of Bengal there were only a few small incidents in Sylhet-Chittagong track near Burma, Barrackpore near Calcutta and also at Murshidabad. The movement failed, British Company rule was completely replaced by British Throne, Mughal Padshahi was abolished, Princes were assassinated and the old Bahadur Shah II was sent in an exile to Rangoon. Since then restoration of Lord Rama or King Ramachandra has been continuing as a principle issue in Ayodhya. Notable, there was the Opium War II in China during that time (1856-1860).

- a. After end of Opium trade, British with the aid of its subordinate Cooch Behar Princely State and Indian collaborators included the entire *Duars* region: eastern part as Assam *Duars* and western portion as Bengal *Duars*. Whole of the decade of 1860s was featured by civil war in United States and rebellion against indigo plantation in India followed a series of famines throughout South Asia. In that decade, Bodo group dominated *Duars* foothill region along Indo-Bhutan buffer zone was included in India and merged up with Jalpaiguri, Mainaguri, Dhupguri and Falakata. That also included the Mal block of today incorporating Teesta-Dharala basin, Chalsa the Queen of *Duars* and ancient ways towards Kalimpong-Chumbi regions. It also incorporated **Baikunthapur** forest region, Dabgram, Rajganj and Panchagarh region (last one is in Bangladesh today).
- b. The next decade of 1860s was full of famines and deterioration of the peasantry, which was contemporary to civil war in United States between farmland owners

who used to deploy slaves as their workforce and industrial belts believing in machines. Such agitations were also seed in indigo plantations in South Asia.

- c. Gradually machines were imposed in tea gardens. For factory, electricity was a basic need. Some British tea companies established small scale hydro-power plants in their tea gardens where there was a small water fall. They also set up small aero-plane runways in their gardens. Later on after independence, several small scale irrigation plants have been set up in local foothill agricultural lands by the government. Regular power supply has been assured in the tea gardens and their factories.
- d. After Sepoi Mutiny in 1857 A.D., the Kingdom of Cooch Behar became a Princely State under the British Raj. Rajbanshis were also outside the kingdom. Rajbanshis of Rangpur were heavily protested against being treated as identical with the Koches during their phase of 1890-1911 A.D., motivated towards status mobilization, reestablished themselves as the P(o)undra Kshatriyas, participated in parliamentary politics, were in support of formation of Rajbanshi regiment or Kshatriya regiment (just like Gurkha regiment, Rajput regiment and Sikh regiment) and participated in World War I. During World War II, they again joined in the Imperial British Army, though a major part of the society was associated with freedom struggle, peasant movement (Tevaga Movement), Gandhian ways and also stood in support of Chandra Bose. Was that Kshatriya Movement in 1890-1911 A.D. comparable with Puritan Movement of Great Britain (16th and 17th century A.D.), Sikh developments in Punjab (18th century A.D.) and emergence of Islamic movements in Afghan border (19th century

A.D.)? In first decade of 20th century A.D. or just before abolition of Monarchy in China, developments like Anglo-Tibet talks, re-look in Anglo-Bhutan treaty, positive approach towards restoration of representative politics in Bengal, special treatment for the landlords, that for the Muslims, that for Rangpur, Kshatriya movement within Rajbanshis initiated from Rangpur, steps towards reorganization of Bengal Presidency, demand made by the hill people in frontier Bengal and different kinds of political movements in Bengal and beyond were all highly significant. In 1911 A.D., capital of India was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. British made New Delhi by the side of Old Delhi. At that time, Rajbanshis of Rangpur were highly motivated by a status recovering approach and tried to establish themselves as P(o)undra Kshatriyas and not the Koch, Cooli or porter tribe.

- e. Maharani Gayatri Devi (1919-2009: daughter of Princess of Gaekwad, Baroda and also Rajmata of Jaipur State in Rajasthan 1940-1949) of Cooch Behar dynasty was married to King Man Singh I of Rajput state of Jaipur and her son Prince Jagat Singh has been married to the Thailand Royal family. Jaipur Rajput dynasty had marital relation with the Great Mughals in past and Man Singh of this dynasty from Chunar-Rhotasgarh region (1590-1614) administered Bengal and Bihar.

We can see Rajbanshis with exclusion, disguise, peasantry, deployments in armed forces, one nation, one clan, Kshatriya surnames, formation of Koch Bihar Throne and other statehoods in neighbouring places, existence outside these native states, habitat in the Sub-Himalayas, act of a human shield in the borderland and association with the Mughals and the British. Maharaja Laxmi Narayan of Koch Bihar dynasty was on the side of the Mughal presence in Bengal.

Mughals ruled out Karrani Bangash Afghan dynasty and its army chief Kalapahar a converted Hindu and eventually brought in Baro Bhuinyas of Bodo Kamta belt, Brahmaputra mouth, delta and Noakhali-Chitagong under discipline. Mughals with active support of Koch Bihar went in the Bodo-Bhuinyas of Brahmaputra valley under Kamrup and Darrang state. Mughals tried to implement a stable government throughout Bihar, North Bengal, South Bengal, coastal South Bengal, Odisha, Rajmahal, East Bengal, Bodo-Kamta belt, delta, Noakhali and Chittagong. Mughals fought against the last Karranis in Chittagong-Surma region. They tried their best to establish control over the river trades of Bengal from the hands of Arakanese Mogh and in that process Portuguese traders had their own roles to play. Mughals also countered against the Ahoms regarding the matter of control over Chetia (also Chutia or Chhutia) and Bodo dominated regions. Similarly, Maharaja of Burdwan helped the Mughals to defeat Chetua-Borda rulers at Ghatal block in Midnapore. Koch Bihar state was outside Bengal Nabobs and till 1773 A.D. and had been directly following Mughal Padshahi. However, anti-British activities were banned within the Princely State of Cooch Behar. So, the silent associations of Koch Bihar with Mughals, British Company, British Raj and independent India were highly significant and yet a less discussed matter.

Some people under the common Rajbanshis social fold are often compared with Indo-Malayans and Pacific islanders like those in Hawaii and Philippines. I do not know how far this is justifiable! Rajbanshis are racially intermixed and especially in the Sub-Himalayan region and North East India, Mongoloid features could be noticed in their appearance.

[1] We could see so many Empresses and Princesses taking important role in politics from Mughal dynasty and contemporary royal families as aftermath of European traders reaching into India. Some examples are as such: 1) Maham Anaga (wet nurse of Emperor Akbar and forming a 'Petticoat government'), 2) Mariam-uz-Zamani (Mariam-uz-Zamani meaning 'Mary of the Age'; also known as and Hira Kunwari; originally being Rajput Hindu Princess Jodha Bai and Hindu Empress Consort of Emperor Akbar; mother of next Emperor Jahangir and grandmother of Emperor Shah Jahan; Akbar praying to the Sun, promoting his own philosophy *Din-e-Illahi*, supporting to Perso-Islamic culture and blending it with indigenous Indian elements to give rise to Indo-Persian tradition, constructing a huge library and bringing in back *Navaratna* tradition: reminiscence of the past- Nalanda? Hindu Emperor Vikramaditya?; Akbar reconstructed the Agra fort previously used by Rajputs in pre-Islamic era; Delhi Sultanate under Lodi rule shifted the capital from Delhi to Agra in last decade of 15th Century A.D. when European traders by direct sea routes reached to the Indian ports and reduced the monopoly of Arab traders; the Great Mughals got Koh-i-Noor diamond from here and also ruled the Subcontinent from Agra; so many building of Bengal and Gujarat patterns were established in Agra; Agra today also known for mental hospital), 3) Empress Noor Jahan (Iranian Shi'ite descent and wife of Mughal Emperor Jahangir; also spelt as Nur Jehan or the Light of the World; also known as Mehr-un-Nissa or Sun among the women; recognized for being the 'real power behind the Throne'; mother of her only child Ladli Begum from her first husband Sher Afghan Ali Quli Khan; Ali Quli being a table attendant of Persian Shi'ite Emperor in early life and then becoming regional ruler of Burdwan or Bardhaman in Bengal under Mughal Empire; Ladli Begum being married to Prince Shahryar; after death of Jahangir, Shahryar competed for Mughal Throne but lost to Khurram or Shah Jahan), 4) Empress Mumtaz Mahal (wife of Emperor Shah Jahan who was also known for Peacock Throne and Taj Mahal tomb; wooden foundation of Taj Mahal made from the timbers brought from the Sub-Himalayas of Btahmaputra valley), 5) Jahan Ara Begum (sister of Emperor Aurangzeb and Governor of Bengal Shah Shuja; advisor to her father Emperor Shah Jahan; entitled as First Lady, Lady of the Age, Lady Emperor, Empress of Princesses; believing in Sufi Doctrine; against imposing poll tax on non-Muslims, doing for the poor, at the control of Surat port used by European traders and sending voyage to Mecca with food grains; herself famous character, writer, biographer, poet, town planner, donor and supporting poor and needy people of Delhi; contemporary to assassination of Shah Shuja at Arakan and highest expansion of Mughal rule in peninsular India by Aurangzeb; she passed away before insurrections in different parts of the Empire), 6) Chand Sultana (Shi'ite, as regent in control of Ahmednagar Shi'ite State of Deccan, 16th Century A.D.); 7) Begums

of Oudh (Shi'ite, 18th century A.D.); 8) Rani Ahalya Bai (Hindu Queen of Holkar House, Maratha state in Malwa, later half of 18th century A.D.), 9) Lakshmi Bai (Hindu Queen, as regent at Jhansi, Bundelkhand, taking leading role in Sepoi Mutiny, first half of 19th Century A.D.), 10) Maharani Jindan (Sikh Empress, as regent at Lahore Darbar controlling the politics of Punjab, mid 19th Century A.D.), 12) Maharani Baija Bai (Hindu, wife of Daulatrao Scindia, Maratha Sardar at Gwalior under Maratha Hindu Pad Padshahi and Mughal Padshahi; also termed as Sindhia or Shinde; in reality Sindhia, Holkar and Gaekwad controlled the Malwa-Gujarat trade zone and established three different Maratha dynasties; Scindia dynasty praised by both Mughal Padshah and Maratha Peshwa; the dynasty controlled directly or indirectly many of the Rajput states in Rajputana, large part of North and Central India, and the Agra fort; Agra fort only gone to the British in 19th century A.D.; Scindias being the Maharaja or King of the Kings and beyond the Maratha Confederacy of Deccan very much influential in North Indian politics and over the Mughal Throne, later the state of Gwalior turned into a princely state under Company rule) and so fore. Jija Bai was mother of Shivaji the Great Maratha of 17th century A.D. Rani Bhavani of Natore in Rajshahi, Jai Durga Chaudurani of Rangpoor, Devi Chaudhurani of Barindland were some local influential women protesting against British East India Company's misrule or new implementations. Rani Bhavasi was influential throughout Dinajpur-Rajshahi, Gour Bengal and Mid Bengal areas. After the names of Koch Bihar Queens, there are places (viz. Nishiganj after Queen Nishimayee). The dynasty has marital relations with Brahmo Samaj and Rajput dynasty. This also keeps relations with other dominant communities in Brahmaputrabal valley. There are places like Raniganj, Ranidanga, Ranirhat, etc. and all these places are associated with the queen or *rani*.

[2]Coorg was a Princely State in British India and before that it had remained as a small micro-state near Mysore. Mysore was another Hindu Kingdom that became a stronghold of the Arab Muslims who eventually formed a separate Sultanate there in later half of 18th century A.D. Mysore also maintained its terms with the Marathas, Nizam and Iran. There was great demand of Arabian horses in Mysore. Hider Ali, an Arab descendant, got high rank in Mysore Army. Haider on behalf of Mysore intervened in Arkot, distal Mughal establishment in the extreme south as the third party besides French and British. That was the first Anglo-Mysore war in which Hider was victorious. He died during the second Anglo-Mysore war. Third Anglo-Mysore war was fought under Hider's son Tipu Sultan, where the Sultan failed to get any major support from either of Marathas and Nizam. Tipu proposed Nizam for a marital bonding, which was disapproved. Tipu was trying to provide a welfare state, but described as a

hardliner more than Shahis, Shufis and Shi'ites and even anti-Hindu or against Maratha influence in the state or the control of the Hindu Maths over the state. Tipu Sultan established close relationships with French East India Company and was highly influenced by the First French Revolution. He fought with the British several times and died in the battlefield during the fourth Anglo-Mysore War. That was just before Napoleon taking control over France. Family of Tipu Sultan was sent to Calcutta. In Kolkata, there is a Tipu Sultan Mosque which is still very influential in Bengal politics. All the four battles were fought during last half of 18th century A.D. Arab influence in Mysore was increased probably as a counter-effect of 1) Failure of Sayyid Brothers to resist Irano-Afghan, Deccan and European (especially the British) influences as main challenges against Arab impact in various pockets under Mughal Padshahi (including Bengal); 2) power of the Bengal shifting from Nasiri (converted Deccan Hindu dynasty with Irano-Afghan influence, Sunni) to Afshar (Arab Muslim dynasty with Turk-Iranian links, close to Irano-Afghans and Shi'ite by faith) to Najafi (Sunni); 3) Deccan and Irano-Afghan clashes over influence upon Mughal Padshahi and Bengal; 4) intervention of the British as the third party in Bengal; 5) again intervention of the same British in Deccan, extreme south and Cauvery delta as against the influential French; 6) after the battle of Burdwan and inclusion of Odisha into Maratha province, Afshars again shifting towards Deccan and standing against British interests in Bengal; 7) power again shifting to pro-Deccan Afshars to Najafis in Bengal with supports of pro-British and pro-Irano-Afghans; 8) Deccan led by Maratha trying to rule out Irano-Afghan influence from Mughal Throne, North India, Agra, Punjab, Kashmir, and the Sub-Himalayas (Rohilkhand and Oudh); 9) role played by Shi'ite Nabob of Oudh against Maratha led Deccan and in favour of Afghan Durrani, Pro-Afghan tribes on Indus valley, Rohilla Pathans and Shah Alam II as the new Mughal Emperor; 9.1) Shi'ite Nabob of Oudh becoming prime minister of Shah Alam and in extra control of Agra and Kashmir; 9.2) Sikhs taking control over Punjab upto the tribal pockets; 10) alternative lobby formed against Marathas led by Shi'ite Nabob of Oudh and a kind of support from Shah Alam II losing control over entire Bengal Presidency to the British and its native collaborators after the battle of Buxar; 11) British getting trade license in Oudh and control over strategic points of North India including Gazipur, Varanasi and Chunar in vicinity of Buxar. So, an emptiness was created by this way after successive failures of Deccan and Irano-Afghans (associated with the Sub-Himalayan Rohilkhand and Oudh) to establish control over Bengal. In that case, Mysore in the extreme south, French and Arab groups remained as the only alternative. Mysore expanded to the nearby coastal areas and ports (viz. Mangalore) and incorporated various micro-states established on the local trade routes (viz. Bidnur, Savnur, etc). It also got support of the local peasant sections

and forest lands under Poligarhs and Nayeks. Travancore was a Hindu state in Malabar coast nearby with populations of Mopala Arab Muslims, indigenous locals, peasantry, Hindu castes, Hindu Maths, Churches and ports with so many foreign influences. People in Cylone and a series of small and coral reef islands nearby had their own system just like Travancore. The micro-state Coorg in Nilgiri mountain areas was a junction among Mysore, Travancore, Arcot and Cauvery basin. It was located at Coonoor near present day Coimbatore. Both Mysore and Coorg were parts of Vijayanagara Kingdom developed on entire extreme south and Andhra coast when the Turk-Afghan Sultanate failed to establish permanent rule over Deccan and extreme south in 14th century A.D. and contemporary to Sayyid dynasty in Delhi Sultanate, Bahamani Muslims in Deccan (converted Brahman Hindu dynasty into Islam), Lodis in Delhi Sultanate, arrival of European traders by alternative sea routes other than the Arabs used, Afghan-Rajput clashes, Shi'ite state formation in Deccan, Mughals fighting against Suri Afghans and Hindu Hem Chandra of Bengal-Bihar, Iranian support to the Mughals, formation of Mughal Padshahi in real sense and Mughal-Rajput alliance. During the initial clash between Mughals and Suri Afghans, Chunar fort was a very important strategic location. The fort still exists near Bauxer, Sasaram (birth place of Sher Shah Suri) and Rhotasgarh. Latter is also a fort, linked up with legendary king Raja Harishchandra Dom, Oraon people who then shifted to interior regions of Chotonagpur (Palamu-Ranch) and introduced irrigation technique to the local peasants, Sher Shah Suri, Mughal administrative center under Man Singh and Babu Jagjivan Ram serving as former prime minister of India and father of first female speaker of Indian Parliament (Lower House) Smt. Mira Kumar. Nearby Gazipur is the birth places of famous Hindi writer Prem Chand and present Vice President of India Hamid Ansari. Varanasi is one of the major Hindu pilgrim centers. It also gives us present Prime Minister of India Narendra Damodardas Modi. Varanasi is also related to Hinduisation process of Dhimals at Morang and Kshatriya movement of the Rajbanshis of Indo-Bangladesh. Varanasi is a place of Shiva worship, ancient city and a river port of Ganges. It is accompanied with Saranath a major Buddhist pilgrim center. Chunar fort was the center of King Bali and his followers are known as *Balia* Kshatriya. Rajbanshis and Pundra Kshatriyas are said to be related to this *Balia* Kshatriya as well. Oraons in Chotonagpur say that Austro-Dravidian Mundas are their brothers. Hence, they are also related to Mundari, Kolarian or Ho people of Chotonagpur Odisha tribal belts. They pronounce mother with the term *Ayo* which is in Marathi *Aye*. They in traditional tribal society of Ranchi-Palamu region enjoyed a superordinating position and even maintain purity and pollution with many other groups. Though things have now been changed a lot. Poor sections of Oraon agriculturalists during the British period came to North Bengal pockets,

especially foothill tea belt, in hope of a better livelihood. There, being both animistic Hindus (*Samsar*) and Christians, they have served as labourers and peasants. They in plantation sector had the expectations for salary, ration, drinking water, residential quarter, health services, tax free life, safety and factory works. Similar tea, coffee and cardamom plantations are there in Nilgiri hills where Coorg was a native state. Like Nilgiri hills, we can see Palamu-Ranchi, Dinajpur upland, Morang foothills, Indo-Bhutan Sub-Himalayas, Chopra, Panchagarh-Rajganj, Rhotasgarh and Chunar are all upland areas. Chunar is actually an extension of Vindhya Mountain of Central India to river Ganges. Hajipur-Chunar is the largest poppy producing center in India. Opium extracted from the poppy fruits is now used in pharmacy. In British period, opium of Hajipur was exported to China. Opium and indigo plantations were developed here by the British. Indigo as a dying substance also propagated in different parts of Bengal Presidency by the British planters in 19th century A.D. Nilphamari was a major center in Rangpur. Dinajpur was also a major hub. During Second French Revolution of 1830s and especially at the time of Civil War in United States of America on slavery in 1860s, exploitation in the name of indigo plantation was raised by Bengali intellectuals. There were also indigo revolts throughout 19th century A.D. Gandhi ji, Father of the Nation, first introduced the non-violence type of protest against any such exploitation to indigo plantation in Champaran (Bihar-Nepal Sub-Himalayas) in 20th century A.D. Some trials have been made recently to establish poppy plantation in remote river islands of Malda (Gour Bengal) and Teesta (Teesta-Dharala basin), but as they were illegal and not approved by the government have been soon destroyed. A section of Oraons also work as Cooli in tea garden. They are also treated as *Dhangar* or day labourers in agriculture sector. Again they are also there in government services and railways. They and other tribal groups in Sub-Himalayan tea garden belt from Central India and Deccan are commonly named as *Modesia* or people from mid land. In Nepal, the foothill people between Nepal Himalaya and North Indian plains are also addressed by the same term '*Modesia*'. So, this is a new type of *Modesia* sponsored during the British time. These tribal groups including the Oraons have a common speech known as *Sadri*. Dravidian language speaker Oraons and some other groups along with Mundari or Kolarian speaking Munda and some other groups have chosen to speak in *Sadri* which is very similar to Bengali and Hindi, thus with a Indo-Aryan dialectology. Was the same thing happened to the common Koch suffered from successive innovations who are Dravidian in look and Indo-Aryan in speech? Current Governor of West Bengal M.K. Narayanan is from Palakkad region of Kerala. Palakkad is situated on the way from Coorg to Travancore sea ports. Calicut or Kozhikode was the nearest port area from Coorg, comparable to Mangalore under Mysore Sultanate and one of the earliest European

colonies (non-British) similar to Calcutta being established by the British East India Company in Bengal.

[3] Upper caste Hindu death ritual with some similarities with that of the early Scandinavians where a recently widowed woman of the deceased individual was burnt alive during the cremation process as she was expected to self-sacrifice or immolating herself, a kind of suicide, typically on her husband's funeral pyre and that wooden funeral pyre was considered as the boat to the heaven; Viking sailors of Scandinavia also had such kind of funeral process in pre-Christian era; with arrival of the European traders by their newly invented trade routes in last decade of 15th century A.D., Arab monopoly in sea trade was reduced considerably and Hindu aristocrats believing in *sati daha pratha* rose their heads in different parts of India along with the Shi'ite groups, which resulted into further loosening of centralized authority of the Turk-Afghan rulers, then the Lodis, believing in Sunni Islam; Mughal Emperors appointing Hindu Rajput Royals and Shi'ite Muslims at higher posts and keeping good relations with subordinate Hindu kingdoms had also tried to put an end to this custom; Bengal Sati Regulation or Regulation XVII, A.D. 1829 of Bengal Act was a legal act promulgated in British Company rule with the special efforts of the *Brahmos*, Queen Victoria announced a general ban on that funeral process throughout the British Raj including all the Princely States and territory of the Nizam in 1861; the custom however continued in Nepal till 1920 with all the legalities

[4] He was from Hoogly fallen under greater Midnapore zone of South Bengal. He was a Bengali aristocrat, close to the British Council and known to Mughal Padshahi. He was a scholar of Sanskrit texts, Holy Books of different religions, in touch with Hindu *Tantriks* and the Church, protested against *sati daha pratha*, visited Tibet, stayed at Rangpoor, was entitled with *Raja* and sent to England as the ambassador of Mughal Padshahi, and passed away in England.

[5] In pre-Mughal era or er can say during the Turk-Afghan regime in Delhi Sultanate, we have seen 'Slave Dynasty', Khilji Dynasty, Tughluqs, Sayyids and Lodi Afghans; in that so called Slave Dynasty Sultan Iltutmish (also spelt as Altamash indicating an Arabic or an Egyptian link) was an Emperor; after his death his widow Shah Turkan from behind the veil started controlling the whole power and then his daughter Razia Sultan or Raziyya al-Din became the only lady to be enthroned during the entire Muslim rule in South Asia. She did not use veil and had an attitude like other male Sultans. She ruled for a short time span (1236-1240) and allegedly involved in an affair

with her Habsi (Abyssinian Siddi) slave Jamal-ud-Din Yaqut. Raziyya later had to marry Turk aristocrat of Punjab, but looted and killed by Jats of Hariyana. Jats are supposed to be Indo-Aryan farmland cultivators and pastoralists. They mostly follow Vaishnavism which is an easy alternative to Buddhism. Mathura of nearby region was once the Indian capital of Kushana Emperors who vehemently contributed to establish the Buddhist World due to their Eurasian links. Mathura is now one of the most important Vaishnava pilgrim centers in South Asia. It is also a Jat dominated area. Again, Buddhism was a better alternative for the Indus valley people who opposed the Indo-Parthian Greeks and went in favour of Kushanas. Indo-Parthians Empire Gondophernes of Suren lineage ruled from Sind-Baluchistan area and was in close contacts with Abyssinian sailors, Abyssinian state Aksum or Axum and the Christian Church there. Sind was the first Arab Islamic colony in major throughout South Asia. So, we could guess the value contradictions about keeping relationships with Habsi, Turk Kushans and Vaishnavite Jats. After the Raziyya incident, Jatland suffered with severe famine, Hindu Jats captured, converted, enslaved and sold in Central Asian slave markets and even laddoes of the Jat landlords were made into maid servants. Now Jats have become dominant caste in North India. Again during Mughal Padshah Aurangzeb Jats agitated against discriminatory actions above the Hindus. Princess Roshan Ara of Mughal Dynasty was surrounded with so many controversies. She started living in her own place outside the city and allegedly her secret lover and she were poisoned.

Rajbanshis in the current age

Rajbanshi teachers are there in primary schools. They are also in schools are higher education sectors. Rajbanshis are speaking of their dialect and say that it should get recognition. Their children, especially at remote countryside would be benefited if they are taught in local language or communicated in it.

They are very conscious about their culture. Many are expressing interest in films, songs and cultural performances in local dialects. Many non-Rajbanshis are also involved there. Financing, direction, acting, editing, promotion, selling of those DVDs, showing them in video halls and theater halls are various steps. There is a craze for these cultural events and DVDs in countryside. If you not go there, you cannot realize. The film makers admit there that Rajbanshis

have different dialects and that is a problem in wider circulation. Pirated CD/DVD is an easy profit making business. Many possess the dream of establishing an academy(-ies) for their films, culture, literature and language. They have a special interest in literature especially Bengali as such.

Many go to the defense sector and work under Bihar regiment and not the Gorkha regiment. They are also in paramilitary, police and home guard.

After land reformation programme, those in agricultural sector get their own piece of land. Their joint-extended type of family system and agriculture totally on manpower and bullocks are no more. They have been now in nuclear families. Collaborations might be their within their lineages and/or neighbours. Many have become landless or a very low amount of land. They thus have turned into wage-labourers, shopkeepers, rickshaw pullers, van pullers, car drivers, bus drivers and in such other works.

Rajbanshis are also associated with stone crushing industry. That might be sub-Himalayan river beds or stone mines in Rajasthan. Stones and sand are used as construction material. They may also be seen as land brokers and mediators. They demand for rail connectivity, so that they could have a wider exposure to outside.

They love sweet items from milk and for that they depend on Bengali sweet producers. They are fond of snakes, fried items, boiled eggs, processed foods, tea and fast foods.

They actually depend on Bengali and Bihari castes too much. They also negotiate with the local Muslims. Muslims are those who from early days have been associated in tailoring, fiber works and cotton works. Step mothers are basically from Muslim society.

Rajbanshi women were once heavily involved in jute fiber works and even making clothes with local silk. Now, these are all over with an end of the cottage industry. They also processed food

and used to rear cattle, goattery and piggery. They still have cows in their homestead. They have interest in clothe and during festive season, they buy varieties of clothes. Many Self Help Groups involving Rajbanshi women are running good in the countryside and suburbs.

Cross border trading is still there and many Rajbanshis are carriers. Areca nut is a very important cash crop for the Sub-Himalayans.

They at a time use their uplands for growing spices, rapeseeds and tobacco and lowlands for jute and flex. Those were major cash crops. They also know about lemon grass. Now, vegetables of different types grown by them are sold at good price. They are advised for crop diversity. They also propagate potato. They demand for cold storage.

Rajbanshis if provided with facilities have shown a tendency to study mathematics, science and other technical lines. However, economy is a barrier to them.

Many from their age of education have to earn money for their families. They have to good in accounting. Some work in banks also. Countryside cooperatives, money marketing agencies and rural banking are there.

Rajbanshis express special interest in medical science and medicine.

Many Rajbanshis from well-to-do families express their ambition in becoming doctor. Traditionally, there are healers and orthopedic surgeons know as *har-vhanga-daktar*. Many people from North Bengal and neighbouring states come to them. Such specialized people you can have in various parts of Barind and Mathabhanga subdivision. Traditional healers are also there in Morong. Entire Sub-Himalaya is full of various exotic plants with medicinal characters and that is a part of hidden knowledge of the locals (including Rajbanshis).

They learn bioscience or pharmacy. They have a notion to serve their people in countryside or a job at block/sub-divisional health center. Hemp, poppy and drug producing substances could be grown in the Sub-Himalayas. Rajbanshis are interested in pharmacopoeia.

Black water fever, malaria and other mosquito born diseases were prevalent there and child mortality rate was very high.

They bring their children in rural sub-health centers for vaccinations. They go to health camps. They also show interests in awareness programmes. They also allowed sciences camps at their places, especially during festivals and fairs.

It is assumed that they have a higher expectation for boy child; however gender exploitation is not a serious problem over there. They prefer early marriage of the girl at her teenage. But things are now getting changed.

They still prefer fish-cum-duck-cum-paddy cultivation and catch fishes with various implements. There are people who hunt crow, collect snake venom, rare buffalo, gather honey, have piggery and poultry, eat snails and tortilla, produce limes from snail shells and have interest in floriculture and silk. Rajbanshis know these people very well. Rajbanshis have dogs, cats, goats and birds like parrots as pets. Even they have mongoose in their homes. They have good concept over python, monkey, deer and languor. They raised banana and sugarcane agro forestry for their domestic elephants. Banana gardens are still there. Sugarcane and bamboos are still being propagated. Horses, lamb and fowls were there. Elephants were also used in bringing out of wooden logs from dense forest.

They knew well about all the hidden ways, bullock carts, dacoits and hidden temple sites in dense forests and bamboo bushes. They can sound peculiarly that are all signals which no other outsider can recognize so easily. They were good in water rafting. They produced swift and

elongated boats from large single tree trunks. They were good manufacturers of wooden plough. Wooden commodities, wood and bamboo works, ivory items, goods from elephant bones, leopard skins, furs, wools, deer horns, application of ethno-toxic substances in local fishing and essence and dyes from natural objects were once part of their knowledge system.

Rajbanshis and Rabhas are considered fearless. Some are stayed in and around forest areas with Adivasis and Nepalis. They are under joint forest management programme with forest department. Some are working under the forest department on permanent or temporary basis. Some tourist spots and recreation centers-cum-resort areas are there. They collect jungle wood for fuel and construction purpose. House used to be made up of wooden logs at a height from the ground.

However, many Rajbanshis are good carpenters. They are also associated with construction works. Poor Rajbanshis go for construction works and try to provide their children a better future by learning them in schools.

They also use bamboo, dry palm leaves, bamboo leaves and tin/asbestos in construction. They used to live in earthen homestead often with mud floor smeared with cow dung plaster. They are now using brick, cement and sand for constructing house.

They do not work in tea gardens, but now raised small scale tea gardens on their own.

Rajbanshis have good sportsmanship. They love to play football and interested in indoor games. They have some games for their own.

They practice alcoholism mainly rice beer. Cheap beer from Bhutan and Sikkim is available in local market. Many Rajbanshis go to Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, North Eastern States, Gujarat and Maharashtra in search of work. They also go to Mumbai, Delhi (NCR), Chandigarh and Bangalore besides Kolkata, Hyderabad and South Indian Cities.

Rajbanshis and other local people are now demanding for national level medical service at Raiganj. There are so many hospitals, nursing homes and two medical colleges and some nursing training centers in North Bengal.

Rajbanshis think off of both Kamta and Koch Bihar traditions. They have nostalgia regarding their old heritage. They believe in democracy and voting rights rather than anarchy. Sub-Himalayan sentiments in the form of micro-states and little republics are also there. They keep connections with the mainstream. They also behave like Human Shield in the cross border. They are in favour of sustainability and oppose unidirectional development. Majority is peace loving, but some elements associated with terrorist camps were also there. They are highly in favour of negotiation, mutual understanding and inclusiveness. They are also in administration and legal centers. They also know about the reality of global market system and are highly attacked towards corporate world. They give priority to media (print and electronic), telecommunication and mobile phones. They are also interested in government schemes. They also focus on computer education. A lot more thing are to do.

They are influenced directly or indirectly by state, national and transnational politics associated with Brahminical and non-Brahminical traditions, Shahi pockets, sub-Shahis like Koch Bihar kingdom, Western Lobbies, trade routes and Nation States.

Sino-Tibet, Tibeto-Burmese belt, Tibeto-Himalayan region, Sub-Himalayas, Indo-Malayan belt, Pan Pacific, Japan, Germany, Austro-Hungary, eastern Europe, Mediterranean, Indo-Greeks, Turk elements, former USSR, Central Asia, European Union, Afro-Asia, British Commonwealth, Great Britain, Muslim World, Irano-Afghanistan, Indo-Pakistan, Kashmir, Indo-Bangladesh and North East India are different factors in this regard.

They also have hidden notions regarding Buddhist nations, Arabs and magical world. Changes in social system and transformations are there. Church, Sufi centers and Vaishnaite institutions are there in North Bengal. They often talk about craziness, medicines and ancient urbanism. They did not know about slums and slum subculture before independence. However, religious begging was always there. They love the nature, good people and sympathetic. They have humanism and love to communicate with the outer world.

Conclusion

Rajbanshis in association of other castes and tribes of Sub-Himalayan North Bengal at this current stage often behave like human shield and are also aware of the facts of Global Market Economy. These new inputs are not beyond their culture(s) and cultural survival.

But the problem is that other people observe them with their own perceptions. That may include Haldia petrochemicals in Southern West Bengal, Assam oil in North East India (Brahmaputra valley), Central Asian oil fields, Oil in Chinese Turkistan, Oil in South China Sea, Oil and Gas in Bay of Bengal region along with Myanmar, Bangladesh and Indo-Malayan belt. The view point may involve successive immigration from Bangladesh into India occupying Rajbanshi dominated areas, clashes between earlier and later successions and impact of that on the Rajbanshis and other local groups. North Bengal is a way to China. So, it is important for Look East Policy. But the question is which part of China! China proper or the South China region more close to Myanmar, North East India and Indo-Tibet areas? North Bengal borderland is also considered as a place both influenced by Colonials and Ultra-Imperialists.

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