

Chapter II

Framework of Study

In last chapter, I discussed concept and theory of community. Previous exercise helped building conceptual clarity about community and instilled some genuine-specific knowledge to carry out further study in a diachronic form. Hence, in this chapter, I feel imperative to focus upon basic framework of study dividing primarily in two segments. First component deals with background of study, significance of study, research question, objective, assumption and method of data collection. Second part is devoted to review of literature. Synthesis of two embodies logistic component of work.

Background of Study Origin and Development

Koch-Rajbanshi vis-à-vis Dheyman-Rajbanshi, used interchangeably, is one of the very few early settlers believed to reach Barak valley in sixteenth century¹. Owing to its large territorial expansion, historians and

¹. J.B.Bhattacharjee, Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial East India, Vikash Publications, New Delhi, 1991,P.16

anthropologists regarded them equivalent to state. Hence, 'First Koch state in Cachar originated in 1562 during Chalarai's invasion and remained till 1745'² that is straight Koch kings ruled Cachar for nearly two hundred year to develop society, culture or literature embodying them in written form were vast. However, the kingly model and subsequent expansion of their kingdom could not continue for long time. Gradually over the time, the community and its ruling machinery became weak as other forces started attaining momentum with warfare. That is why erstwhile Koch-Rajbanshi's population is near around eight thousand across major nine villages. Further, the community's great tradition is in transition or flux as it now does not have written language and literature. Hence, custom, convention and ritual are symbolised in oral narrative and strength is continuously in decline order.

Likewise over successive year, Koch-Rajbanshivis-a-vis Dheyam experienced enormous upheaval in its socio-cultural life and identity in Barak valley. From 16th to 17th century onward, the community and society they presently live in is continuously in process of construction and

². Ibid

reconstruction/deconstruction according to politics of convenience. Likewise, myth of stable life or anything positive is alien to people of the community as their condition is in flux.

Nevertheless, during recent time, Dheyant-Rajbanshi faces insurmountable problem since it possesses almost a little written history. Ironically, the Rajbanshi living in Cachar district is hardly known to its larger brethren living in outside of the region. Rather bracketed identity of Dheyant-Rajbanshi put them always in isolation from outside. Settlement and residence of the people is not visible with basic amenity. The sacred and secular 'we feeling' which keep them united and consolidated are in verge of extinction. As such, old and gerentocrats, who lived in seventy and eighty only provide partial account of their past life depending upon which social structure of the community is built in Barak valley. They are cut-off from homeland or mainland (Cooch-Bihar) since long ago and now live in a place, where they often feel out of place, facing uncertain future because of demographic transition, subsistence economy and cultural hegemony of non-Dheyant-Rajbanshi neighbourhood. Cultural assimilation or negation is seen such an eccentric manner, wherein no exchange or reciprocity is maintained between them and others. The community is compelled to carve out its specificity domain and live a life of isolation as disliked by majority

Bengalis. Therefore, no 'Brahmin priest' is invited or interested to perform religious activity of Dheyman-Rajbanshi. Thus in course of time the community came under swaddle of Manipuri Brahmin and accepted Manipuri culture and way of life to certain extent. Cultural proselytisation induced quite a few Dheyman-Rajbanshi to give up their traditional *Sakta* practice and become votary of Vaisnavism acknowledging '*RasLeela*' as their dance form symbolising their religious aspiration. Their *namghar* is built in shape of Manipuri '*Mandop*' where they sing *Sankirtana* in *Vrajabuli* under guidance of Manipuri religious leader. *RathaYatra* of Dheyman-Rajbanshi is replica of Manipuri and thus, the community is continuously in process of upheaval or transition.

For survival purpose, members of Dheyman-Rajbanshi community relies upon mechanical solidarity and this could be one reason why they are not found in elsewhere in Karimganj, Hailakandi districts. People of the community follow a particular way of life for their family and neighbours who are in association to uphold unity and reciprocity among of them.

Dheyman-Rajbanshi in Cachar district is therefore socio-economically, politically and culturally backward. Hence, it becomes important to

investigate and understand their past and present life inclusive of social structure, who resides in the remotest and only nine different village in Cachar district of Barak valley.

Scope and Significance of Study Delimitation and Appropriation

Community study, content, structure and feature being limited or micro, is usually done at macro or large scale. Scholars across disciplines, but most from social anthropology and sociology studied/study divergent dimension of community. As of now, a good number of theories of community highlight its status spreading over societies. Be it evolutionary, Marxian and structuration; all in totality cover certain pre-requisiteness of community. Indeed some or most studies are empirical and intensive and on the contrary, some studies are casual too. In northeast, though such kind of study is limited or rare, hardly any community study covers problem inherently prevalent with them and or theory building is rather very less. Hence, taking cognisance of occurring perplex situation loathe with other important allied but implicit value, present study intends to develop a new arena of investigation and implication *per se*.

Community study often encounters multiple problems at concept, method and theory level. Study conducted so far or existing studies highlight, some area and certain communities only. Paradoxically all communities are not yet studied. Reason is unknown; but one obvious reason may be lesser-known area and community are left out and scholars do not locate or identify them in time. Other reason may be during time antiquity a community could not emerge its strength and identity, which becomes notable during recently. Further, till date no significant work is done on and about Dheyant-Rajbanshi highlighting the community in entirety in Barak valley since 16th century. Firstly, the work adds to existing knowledge of people regarding Dheyant-Rajbanshi. Secondly, sociological and political dimension of Dheyant-Rajbanshi is the focus of study to unearth intricate and possible unique structure of other people and society they presently live in. Thirdly, it also examines whether Dheyant-Rajbanshi society and its administrative system in Barak valley bears resemblance to its mainland social and political development. Fourthly, the study also intend to deliver whether Dheyant-Rajbanshi continues to claim their socio-cultural and administrative affinity in present place of living. Further, the study is committed to find out level of acculturation, if any, crept in to Dheyant-Rajbanshi due to prolong stay in Barak valley and cut-off from their mainland, which is Cooch-Bihar now.

Apart from the above dimensions, the study explores by means of intensive fieldwork the insular life of the Dheyman-Rajbanshi focusing on their vocation, belief and superstition, stricture or taboo. Since very little or no work is available on socio-cultural and political life of Dheyman-Rajbanshi, present study tries to explore these critical aspects not only academically but also reference for future study.

Universe of Study Locality and Region

Cachar district of Barak valley of south Assam is the universe of study. The district is situated in southern part of Assam and Silchar is the head quarter of Cachar district and the largest town in the valley followed by two other districts of the region. River *Barak* is the largest river of the region due to which the valley has fertile land for cultivation. The district headquarter, Silchar is considered as the cultural mosaic of Barak valley. Official language of Cachar district is Bengali. Majority of people speak *sylheti*, a dialect of Bengali language. Apart from Bengali, Barak valley is the homeland of Kachari, Hmar, Manipuri (Both Bishnupriya and Meithei), Rongmei Naga and tea community. Population of Cachar district as per 2001 census is presents in table II. I

**Table-II.1
Population of Cachar District**

Residence	Person	Hindu	Muslim	Christain
Rural	1243534	728822	482685	29194
Urban	201387	157939	39366	2112
Total	1444921	886761	522051	31306

Source: Census of India, 2001

The table shows total population of Cachar district is 1444921. Out of which total urban population is 201387 and total, rural population is 1243534. Hindu, Muslim and Christian constitute majority of population of the Cachar district.

**Table no-II.2
Caste wise population distribution of Cachar district**

Category	Number of People	Percentage
Scheduled Caste	208,235	14.4%
Scheduled Tribe	18,631	1.3%
General and OBC	1,218,055	84.3%
Total Population	1,444,921	100%

Source: Census of India, 2001

Caste wise distribution shows 84.3% are general caste and other backward caste followed by 14.4% belong to Scheduled Caste and 1.3% are Scheduled

Tribe population. However, caste wise distribution of both general and other backward class are not covered in the report.

Table no-II.3

Block wise Distribution of Dheyant-Rajbanshi population

Development Block	No. Of Household	Total population
Udharbond	482	2646
Banskandi	216	1151
Rajabazar	385	1977
Barkhala	176	979
Fulertal	145	798
Joypur- Rajabazar	186	557
Total	1590	8,108

Source: Socio-economic Caste census, 2011

From above table, it is understood total Dheyant-Rajbanshi population in Barak valley is approximately 8,108. Block wise Dheyant-Rajbanshi population in Cachar district reveal majority of Dheyant-Rajbanshi live in Udharbond having approximate number of 2646 people followed by Banskandi, Rajabazar, Barkhala, Fulertal, and Joypur-Rajabazar, wherein approximately 1151, 1977, 979,798 and 557 Dheyant-Rajbanshi live respectively. In course of my study, I found no Dheyant-Rajbanshi inhabited villages in other two district of Barak Valley namely Karimganj and

Hailakandi. Keeping multiplicity of affairs in mind and nature of study the research question emerges **A Study of Dheyant-Rajbanshi in holistic perspective**

Objectives of Study Involvement and Association

1. To study socio-cultural life of Dheyant-Rajbanshi in Barak valley of Assam.
2. To study politico-economic life of Dheyant-Rajbanshi in Barak valley of Assam.
3. To examine continuity vis-a-vis change among Dheyant-Rajbanshi in Barak valley of Assam.

Assumption Ambiguity and Certainty Interface

- 1) Socio-cultural life of Dheyant-Rajbanshi is influenced by admixture of Manipuri (Meithei), Bengali and Dimasas in Barak valley.
- 2) Politico-economic condition of Dheyant-Rajbanshi is fluid and unstable in Barak valley.
- 3) Continuity and change among Dheyant-Rajbanshi is in flux in Barak valley.

Sample and Method of Data Collection

Ethnograph and Monograph

The study primarily is ethnographic, descriptive and qualitative. It depends upon two kind of data- primary and secondary. Primary data are collected with adaptation of **interview guide, participant observation, case study and diary** from field. Informal interaction or interview with senior aged persons, expected to have in-depth knowledge about their economy, custom, tradition, culture and moreover social structure, is conducted. At first I felt imperative to use interview guide owing to nature of study and kind of data required. Because interview guide, unlike interview schedule, is flexible and open-ended, wherein I was free to ask question according to situation-specificity and personal likes and dislikes of respondents. Through interview guide, several important questions relating to occupation, income, education, migration, family structure, role and participation in socio-cultural activity, awareness about political culture, emancipation including leadership if any are inquired to acquire essential data about the community.

Certain data, which I found difficult from the community in ease and direct attempt, for example nature and feature of little tradition, folklore, mores and certain distinct religious ceremony and ritual, are collected through

ethnography and **participant observation**. Ethnography is useful and administered sharply since the community does not have much written documents regarding its life, career and establishment in Barak valley. For this, I adopted some pro-Dheyman-Rajbanshi measure like chew and share of *Pan* or *Tambul* with young and old people, depending upon context, and speak in their dialect to become close to them. I also tried to develop personal rapport and faith in some of them to watch and observe their socio-cultural and religious functions, but could not be successful most times due to their self-propelled hesitation and community hindrance. What I observed, even I made regular visits and interacted with them friendly, most of them did not like to share data as they became suspicious about non-Dheyman-Rajbanshi outsider. Such kind of fear psychosis and disbelief is prevalent in their mind because their habitation is far-cut off from other people and some other unforeseen reasons existed earlier in their domain locality.

I adopted **case study** method to obtain certain data for qualitative development of idea and understanding. Selected and well reputed number of Dheyman-Rajbanshi people are identified and their views are taken as substantive reference. Case study facilitated to know different kinds of issue,

matter and problem of the community from different angle, mind-set and background of respondents.

Diary is notably used to write and store unorganised or raw data as sporadically given by respondents. This method helps to restore data for a long period of time giving wide option to data collector to use it according to convenience and suitability especially in such study.

For intensive fieldwork meeting all requirements, I made several visits and interacted with most Dheyant-Rajbanshi people consisting of male female and sometimes child too. Data are also collected from some non Dheyant-Rajbanshi or caste people in nearby Dheyant-Rajbanshi village to know what I failed to collect from Dheyant-Rajbanshi conglomeration.

Secondary data are collected from book, journal, newspaper and official/government documents from offices in Cachar district and OBC development authority, Silchar.

Six Dheyant-Rajbanshi inhabited villages are randomly selected for universe of study. The villages are Jhapirbond, Dewanand Larshingpar from Udharbond legislative assembly, two village, Harinagar and Narayanpur from Lakhipur legislative assembly, and one village Laburbond under

Barkhala legislative assembly taking **300 sample**, which is shown in the following table.

**Table no-II.4
Sample Size**

Name of village	Male	Female	Total
Jhapirbond	25	25	50
LarshingBasti	25	25	50
Dewan	25	25	50
Narayanpur	25	25	50
Harinagar	25	25	50
Leburbond	25	25	50
Total	150	150	300

From each Dheyman inhabited village 50 respondent- 25 male and 25 female randomly selected making a total 300 from six village.

Total sample initially I decided to be more than three hundred. But for ethnographic and qualitative study, I realised more than three hundred be difficult and hence restricted size of sample to be three hundred, which is approximately more than 3% of total population. Since Dhayan-Rajbanshi is a homogeneous community in terms of religion, language, occupation, income and education, three hundred sample is assumed to properly represent entire universe of study. However, in selecting sample randomly

each individual of entire population is given opportunity. A list of population has been prepared from voter list where individual is randomly selected for sample.

Universe of Sample Identification of Specificity of Locality

Universe of sample is Dheyman-Rajbanshi habitation in Barak valley and they constitute unit of sample. According to *Sara Assam Koach Rajbanshi Sammalini*, a social organisation of Dheyman-Rajbanshi, total population of Dheyman-Rajbanshi in Cachar district is 8,108 approximately. In Barak valley, Dheyman-Rajbanshi is thickly concentrated in nine villages under Cachar district. These villages are Jhapirbond, Laburbond, Harinagar, Labok, Larshingpar, Thaligram, Digli, Narayanpur and Lakhichara. Four Dheyman-Rajbanshi inhabited villages Jhapirbond, Narayanpur, Larshingpar and Thaligram are under Udharband legislative assembly, four villages Digli, Harinagar, Labok and Lakhichara are under Lakhipur legislative assembly and Laburbond village under Barkhala legislative assembly.

Fieldwork Experience Continuity and Contradiction

I enjoyed fieldwork and in course of complete fieldwork I, as usual like other scholars and empiricists came across with some challenge and difficulty in beginning too, but in due course of time and my continuous visit, interaction and motivation, I felt comfort since I developed personal rapport with both Dheyani-Rajbanshi and non-Dheyani-Rajbanshi in their habitation and field. In the beginning of my work i.e. pilot study, some Dheyani-Rajbanshi people of distance location became suspicious about my visit and sometimes they checked my papers and belongings too. As a result, some Dheyani-Rajbanshi youth and educated people in unknown village in Lakhipur and Barkhala block did not co-operate in course of my fieldwork.

As my familiarisation and intimacy developed among some people and as I developed gradual relationship with them, I was able to overcome difficulty to facilitate my fieldwork. Though difficult, I made most Dheyani-Rajbanshi to understand about objective and nature of my work, leading to Ph.D degree about them, and I categorically spelt out that I have not come to get any data against them or their concern. May be due to regular visit and overt simplicity, I received recognisable and adequate support. However, owing to

odd situation prevalent in Dheyant-Rajbanshi inhabited locality, I requested some Dheyant-Rajbanshi youth and aged people to help me in process of my data collection. During fieldwork, I also used to contact and share my experience with my supervisor from in field and at home, and he continuously guided me how to be brave and adaptive in field situation under different conditions.

Besides this, I also faced other sort of difficulties to reach to Dheyant-Rajbanshi family, community organisation, fair, festival, ceremony and non Dheyant-Rajbanshi people including panchayat members of the village. Apart from road and transport problem, several times I came across typical village muddy path even by foot. To visit one village, I went several times, even though I did not find adequate Dheyant-Rajbanshi and non Dheyant-Rajbanshi people.

To watch festival and other religious functions fieldwork in each selected locality are conducted in different time. As per calendar year, fieldwork timetable was divided in four phase. First phase from October to January, second phase from February to June, third phase became sporadic visit from July to October and fourth phase from March to April. Dheyant-Rajbanshi pre harvest, post-harvest, work hour and leisure time are identified to meet

them in such situations. For fieldwork, I spent altogether two years and more.

I started fieldwork from October 2012. My first respondent was 45 year old Batubabu Rajbanshi and a 29-year-old Nirmal Rajbanshi both teacher from Jhapirbond and Laburbond village. I relatively felt comfort in conducting fieldwork as both respondents were respectable and influential person in their locality and village because of their profession. I also requested and convinced both of them to spend some of their time with me. After knowing objective of my work and visit thereof, they took a deep breath and asked me what I want to know from them about their community. They provided me data, which I wanted to know from them about their community. In first day of my fieldwork I was assisted by Balaram Rajbanshi and Supriya Rajbanshi, while I sought their assistance in every stage of my fieldwork subsequently.

I too faced some kind of difficulty in course of collection of data from Laburbond and Jhapirbond respondents because of their poverty, illiteracy and ignorance about outside world to certain extent. However, with my persuasion and contact, I tried to convince them to share with me some data

about them. However, female always hesitated to interact with unknown, outside non-Dheyman-Rajbanshi people and in such process, I adopted different strategy and took help of some old women to reach up to them for data collection.

There are some remote and difficult area like Lakhichera, boarder area of Manipur and Narayanpur village, where I sometimes found wild animals and moreover unavailability of transport. But I managed to reach the village and became successful to collect data.

Further, in some cases I walked in foot miles because no transport and communication I found to some Dheyman-Rajbanshi locality.

To be honest and simple confession of fact,I could only visited these area with help of member of *Rajbanshi SamajUnnyan Samity*, who provided or extended help and support in course of my intensive and extensive fieldwork. Rather many overt and covert factors tried to inhibit me to collect data, because earlier no fieldwork is smoothly conducted by any outside scholar. Therefore, fieldwork in such adverse situation became more time consuming, tedious and life threatens. Braving all odds and challenges and

keeping objectives of work in mind, I tried to give maximum time, energy to complete fieldwork by October 2014. Fieldwork chart, conducted in different time frame, is shown in table no II.5 and II.6 respectively.

**Table no-II.5
Fieldwork hart**

SL.No	Period	Block	Place	No.of Day
1	Oct 2012- Jan 2013	Udharbond	Jhapirbond	47
2	Feb 2013- Jun 2013	Udharbond	Jhapirbond	48
3	August 2013-Nov 2013	Udharbond	LarshingBasti	42
4	December 2013- Feb 2014	Rajabazar	Dewan	32
5	March 2014– April 2014	Banskandi	Narayanpur	26
6	Total Number of Day in Fieldwork			305

In first phase, I undertook fieldwork from October 2013 to April 2014. Since majority of respondents reside in Udharbond, Rajabazar and Banskandi block of Cachar district, I spent maximum day in different localities in three-development block to conduct fieldwork. In month of July in the year 2013 fieldwork could not be conducted due to heavy rainfall and flood situation in

Barak valley. In month of November and December 2013 very less work is done because of some unavoidable circumstances. However, Dheyant-Rajbanshi concentrated in localities of Cachar district for which I could conduct fieldwork only took less time and relatively less expense.

In second phase, I undertook fieldwork in the following schedule as some component of work are left out. The period of fieldwork is stipulated below:

Table-II.6
Fieldwork chart

Sl. No	Period	Block	Place	No. of Days
1	May to July	Barkhala	Laburbond	47
2	August to October	Fulertal	Harinagar	48
3	Total			95

Ironically, Dheyant-Rajbanshi in Barkhala and Fulertal blocks are very much scattered and reside in remote place, which are difficult in every respect to reach and do intensive work. Therefore, I spent more number of day and time in the two blocks.

Operational Definition Use and Misuse of Terminology

Dheyant-Rajbanshi

Dheyant-Rajbanshi, the two-word combination is co-terminus and often overlapping too. Earlier *Dheyant* and later *Rajbanshi* speak many things about the community in Barak valley. *Dheyant* nomenclature is distortion of *Dewan*, *Deoyant*, *Deyant* etc. suiting to local utterance of people. ‘*Dheyant*’ has been the term used to refer the *Rajbanshis* in Barak valley and even today they are better known as *Dheyants* than *Rajbanshis*. The use of the surname *Rajbanshi* by each member of the community has come rather very late – only during independence. In mainland (Cooch Behar), the community shares different surname but in Barak valley, the whole community uses “*Rajbanshi*” title after their name. SudhansuTnnga observes, ‘they previously called themselves *Dheyant* but no longer now. They call themselves *Rajbanshi* although other people continue to designate them as *Dheyant*. Reason for shift from *Dheyant* to *Rajbanshi* is simple. *Dheyant* is a common term meaning those of *Dheyant* and *Deoyant* do not fit to classify a people. On other hand, *Rajbanshi*, a racial term sufficiently significant to indicate a race. Moreover, the word *Rajbanshi* has a wide and more prestigious connotation: those who originate from a *Raja*. The *Dheyant* of

Cachar had also a racial connection with *Rajbanshi* of North Bengal from where they actually came to Barak valley in sixteenth century. That is why they switched to call themselves as *Rajbanshi*.³

II

Review of Literature Demystifying Discourse

Although some or scarce studies are available on Koch-Rajbanshi in Barak valley (U.C.Guha, 1971; J.B.Bhattacharjee, 1991; S.Tunga, 1985; S, Chatterjee, 2000) hardly any appropriate or suitable work is found to understand Dheyman-Rajbanshi socio-economic, cultural and politico-administrative life in relation to its place of origin and present place of residence. Such narrative and writing throw light on limited sphere only and none of them could be an exhausted study of the community. Though myth and magic hover around Dheyman-Rajbanshi, some but very scarce number of studies are available for reference and review here. These are as follows:

Upendra Chandra Guha ‘*Kacharer Itibratta*’ (1971) gives a description how Cachar was ruled by Koch kings from Kamal Narayan, popularly known as Gossain Kamal in middle sixteenth century, and how primordial

³.SudhansuTunga, Bengali and other Related Dialects of South Assam, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985. Pp. 76-77

Koch of Cachar become Dewan and afterward Dheyen deity and Manipuri influence upon the community and gradual decline of Koch power in Cachar. In this regard, he mentions social structure of Dheyen and some linguistic aspect of the community.⁴

SudhansuTunga (1985) in ‘Bengali and Other Related Dialects of South Assam’ argues Dheyen first settled in Khaspur and then scattered to different village: mainly nine village in Barak Valley. To his testament, Dheyen is a community, migrated to Cachar and further lived a simple village life as they depended on agriculture and sericulture. He gives casual reference of their socio-economic life dealing with linguistic aspect of the community. He further views that Dheyen speech is maintained all these years a wonderful identity of its own, resisting the Cachar Bengali pressure largely.⁵

J.B.Bhattacharjee (1991) in ‘Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial East India’ augurs Koch or Dhean principality in Cachar was product of military adventurism and in absence of conventional historical data, Koch community in Cachar can be used as “living history” of their own past’. Such observation of Bhattacharjee is significant since he gives an account how Koch or Dheyen in Barak valley particularly established their rule in

⁴. Upendra Chandra Guha, *KacharerItibritta*, Guwahati, 1971,Pp.28-42.

⁵. SudhansuTunga, *Bengali and Other Related Dialects of South Assam*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1985,Pp.74-78.

Cachar. He further views that once Cachar was under Tipra rule, but it could not last long. Because Chilarai, brother and commander-in-chief of army of Maharaja Naranarayan of Cooch Behar, in a powerful military campaign in second half of sixteenth century, subdued rulers of Assam, Maibong, Manipur and Jaintia who accepted Koch suzerainty with complete agreement to pay annual tribute. Chilarai then descended to Cachar plain and forced Tripuri army to retreat. Raja of Tripura handed over Cachar plain to *raja* of Cooch Behar, who appointed Kamalnayan as governor of Cachar. Thus, ruler of Koch principality in Cachar eventually declared independence and laid foundation of Khaspur state, popularly known as Dehan kingdom.⁶

Edward A. Gait (1997) in ‘A History of Assam’ presents a general but rather exhaustive picture of ethnic root of Koch. He observes ‘whatever may be racial affinity of original tribe, there lies no doubt about present Koch of Assam belonging to Mongolian rather than to Dravidian stock’. To him Koch is a term of some ambiguity. In Assam, it has become name of a Hindu caste, which received convert from rank of Kachari, Lalung, Mikir and other tribes. Regarding tribal status of Koch-Rajbangshi, Gait clearly observes that most people of northeast having Mongoloid connection were included in

⁶. J.B.Bhattacharjee, Social and Polity Formations in Pre-Colonial East India, Vikash Publications, New Delhi, 1991, Pp. 106-109.

first list of Scheduled tribes in free India, though-Rajbangshi of undivided Assam could not find place in that. However, their brethren in North Bengal secured special protection because of their inclusion in scheduled caste list. Finally, in 1953 they are declared as OBC. Ironically, the same ethnic group now in contemporary India achieved invariably three contrary status- Scheduled castes in North Bengal, MOBC in Goalpara and OBC in several other districts in Assam.⁷

Birinchi Kumar Barua(1964) in ‘History of Assamese Literature’ states ‘Bodo built kingdom under various tribal names, Chutiya, Kacharis, Koch etc. and Bodo group included Koch, Kachari, Lalungs, Dimacha, Garos, Rabha, Tripuri, Chutiya and Moran tribes’.⁸

D.Nath (1989) ‘History of the Kooch Kingdom’ makes a detail study about Kooch kingdom including their socio-politico-economic life but about its arrival in Barak valley of South Assam, he gives a very little focus of the community and view that Chilarai made an administrative centre at Brahmapur, later known as Khaspur in order to maintain diplomatic relation with adjoining states. Kamalnayan who was appointed governor of Kachar was treated as first Dewan-raja. It appears that he was like a kooch deputy to

⁷. E.A.Gait, A History of Assam, Lawyer’s Book, Gauhati, 1997, Pp. 241-243.

⁸. Brinchi Kumar Barua, History of Assamese Literature, Sahitya Academy, Delhi, 1964, Pp. Pp-65-74.

Kachari raja because kachari king was allowed to reign in his territory. In other words, Dewan raja became *de facto* and kachari Raja, *de jure* sovereign in Kachar. Chilarai left a contingent of Kooch soldiers at Brahmapur. These Kooch came to be known as Dehan after name of Chilarai, who bore the title Dewan.⁹

Swaraj Basu (2003) 'Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbanshi of North Bengal 1910-1947' epitomizes gradual settlement of upper caste Hindu gentry from Rajbanshi dominated area of North Bengal changed balance in local power structure. Immigrant upper caste gentry in course of time become the most dominant group in local society, economy and politics. They managed local administration and by virtue of their closeness to administrative power and their shrewdness, emerged as dominant landholding class. As they were guided by traditional Brahminical cultural value, Rajbanshi having their tradition and culture failed to get a respectable position among these immigrant upper caste gentry. Sharp dissimilarity between these two groups and gentry treated the latter Rajbanshi as 'backward and uncultured. To him, it is not only in literature where Koch-

⁹. D Nath., History of the Koch Kingdom, 1515-1615, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1989, Pp. 59-61.

Rajbanshi were humiliated and they also faced social oppression in social life in Bengal and Assam too.¹⁰

Arup Jyoti Das (2009) in 'Kamatapur and Koch-Rajbanshi imagination' classifies Kamatapur: a region 'has no material existence, but it lived in imagination of Koch-Rajbanshi of North Bengal and Assam. Drawing on historical material as well as contemporary political pamphlet, he gives an account of kamatapur movement in Kamatapur and Koch-Rajbanshi imagination. To him Koch-Rajbanshi in Assam is known for its unique way of living and distinct culture. They try to communicate through various languages and assert son of soil now.¹¹

Ahmed Amanatulla Chowdhuri Khan (1936) in his 'Koch Beharer Itihas' makes a detail study of Koch kingdom on historical account. He says from 1515 A.D to 1949 A.D of Koch rule in Kamata kingdom was a period of pride, tragedy, conspiracy, downfall and emotion for Koch-Rajbanshi community of North Bengal. Memory of such turmoil is still working among some Koch-Rajbanshi of Kamata kingdom. To understand present Kamatapur movement, at least a brief account of such period becomes

¹⁰. Swaraj Basu, Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947, New Delhi, 2003, Pp. 62-63.

¹¹. Arupjyoti Das, Kamatapur, and the Koch-Rajbanshi Imagination, Montage Media, Guwahati, 2009, Pp. 121-136.

essential. Thus, it is a seminal work about the community and any work on Koch-Rajbanshi remains incomplete without reference of Khan Choudhuri Amanatulla Ahmed's 'History of Cooch Behar'.¹²

Donald Horowitz (1985) in 'Ethnic groups in conflict' concedes that in no case politics is easily reduced to simple common denominator of ethnic tie, even in deeply divided societies. In divided societies, ethnic affiliation not only affects family and social life but also formal organisation. He argues for comparative analysis between ranked and unranked system, centralisation of group, severity of division and group difference is important. He also argues that ethnic groups tied heavily on kinship bound to maximise effective use of political power to replace modern-western state services.¹³

P.S.Dutta (1990) in 'Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam' reveals unresolved ethnic question in Assam caused enough turmoil in past and seems to cause more worry in decade to come. This is partly due to incapacity of various ethnic groups to emerge in reality- in isolation and in such process neither protection nor emancipation is possible partly due to rigid nature of Indian state, which tries to accommodate rising expectation of small ethnic groups. He says most communities of northeast with a

¹²Amanatulla Ahmed Khan Chowdhuri, Koch Behera Itihas, rpt. Kolkata, Modern Book Agency Pvt. Ltd, 2008.

¹³Horowitz Donald, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, University of California, Berkeley, 1985.

Mongoloid origin are included in first Scheduled Tribe (ST) list. However, Koch-Rajbanshi, recognised as Tribes in Assam Forest Manual, 1891 and allowed to remain within tribal belt too, somehow missed the status privilege. Aggrieved Koch-Rajbanshi of undivided Assam moved to Backward Class Commission in 1953. Subsequently, Rajbanshi of undivided Assam are further divided into two categories–Koch-Rajbashi of undivided Goalpara district who are recognised as More Other Backward Class (MOBC) while rest in other districts remained OBC. To his account now the community is segmented into three categories – SC in North Bengal, MOBC in Goalpara and OBC in other parts of Assam state.¹⁴

MitaBhadra (2004) in ‘Status of Scheduled Caste Women: A Case Study of Rajbansi of West Bengal’ examines diverse socio-cultural factor of Rajbansi, a scheduled caste in West Bengal, to assess pattern of social status of women. To her Koch, a tribe primarily became Kshatriya, to re-designate honorific name Rajbansi due to tribal transformation, Hindu way of cultural assimilation and sanskritisation. Such process helped Rajbansi to adopt new cultural norm and practice and such also affected status of its women. They have regular exchange with local caste Hindu and they too replicate and

¹⁴.P.S Dutta, Ethnic Movement in Poly-Cultural Assam, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1990, Pp. 161-173.

internalise value, custom and practice of upper caste Hindus. They dumped many old custom like bride price, companionate marriage, delayed marriage, marital union, divorce and marriage of women, widow-remarriage, levirate, polygamy, etc. On contrary Sanskritisation emphasised a “*pativrata*” model for Rajbanshi women, confined them in domestically and curtailed their freedom and increasingly lowering their status in society.¹⁵

Vashyati Bhuyan (2006) in ‘Movement of Lesser Known Ethnic Groups of Assam’ draws a picture of various movements of lesser-known ethnic groups of Assam. In his work, Bhuiyan views that Assam came under British rule in 1826 with treaty of Yandaboo. In spite of much geographical and administrative reorganisation, self-determination and aspiration of ethnic groups remained unfulfilled. Due to this they have been suffering from “identity crisis”. For most people, in general ethnic movements in Northeast meant, for a long time, Naga-Mizo type insurgency in Assam. Likewise various ethnic groups of Assam are agitating for long is not known to most people. Citing example of Ahom Movement for recognition, Karbi-Dimasa autonomy movement and movement of Koch-Rajbanshi for Scheduled Status, Bhuiyan observes that there is a serious need to resolve these problems, which should be independent of any politics. To justify his

¹⁵.MitaBhadra, Status of Scheduled Caste Women: A Case Study of the Rajbansis of West Bengal, Man in India, Man in India Office, Ranchi, 2004, Vol-84, No 3&4, Pp. 285-301.

argument, he further says that it is a great responsibility of all right-minded members of our society to find solution of question as to why friend and neighbor for centuries are accusing and asking for social and political aspiration and without solution to issues raised by these movements. Any permanent solution to ethnic tangle in Assam will forever remain very different as well as difficult to address.¹⁶

DambarudharNath (1980) in ‘The Darang branch of Koch Royal Family views that defeat and capture of Parikshitnarayana, son and successor of Raghudeva narayana at hands of Mughal resulted in Balinarayana, brother of Parikshit, fled in to Ahom territory along with his kinsmen for protection of himself and his family. Pratap Singha,Ahom monarch (1603 – 41) who found person at full length with his face to ground, became fully convinced of Balinarayana’s honesty and established him as a tributary in Darrang. He was henceforth known as Dharmanarayana, and became founder of Darang branch of Koch royal family. He and his successors ruled as vassal rulers under Ahomuntil British in first half of nineteenth century annexed their principality.¹⁷

¹⁶.VashyatiBhuiyan, Ethnic Issues, Secularism and Conflict Resolution in North East India, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2004, Pp. 151-158.

¹⁷. D Nath., The Darang branch of the Koch royal Family, Proceedings of the North East India History Association, First Session, Singhanian Printing Press, Shillong, 1980, Pp. 40-43.

AyangbamShyamkishor (2010) ‘In Search of Common Identity: A Study of Chin-Kuki-Mizo Community in India’ highlights process of unification among Chin-Kuki-Mizo to bring more problems than solution. To him, Chin-Kuki-Mizo constitutes an ethnic group since they fulfill core of necessary factors of concept of ethnicity. Chin-Kuki-Mizo is a group of community having common culture and tradition. They admit about being same race, having same culture, tradition, customary practice including marriage and law of inheritance. In spite of setting in three neighboring countries i.e. Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, they like to live under one secretarial unit. Leaders of these communities tryinghard to unit them; however, they fail until to-day. However, each clan or tribe desires to maintain its own culture and tradition. People are not ready to forfeit or submit their ethnic name or dialect for a common cause. So, possibility of amalgamation under one category for Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups looks unlikely to be realised in future.¹⁸

KalyanBaruah (1980) in ‘The Sonowal Kachari: Some Aspect of their Social Life’ makes an attempt to portray some component of Sonowal Kachari, a scheduled (plain) tribe’s social structure viz. institution of

¹⁸.ShyamkishorAyangbam, In search of Common Identity: A Study of Chin-Kuki-Mizo Community in India, International journal of South Asian Studies, Pondicherry University, 2010, Vol.3. No.1, Pp. 149-159.

marriage, kinship, clan and phratry. His main assertion is that traditional tribal structure among Sonowal Kachari is still intact. Regarding marriage, the community maintains four traditional ways. They usually select their mates from within tribe. However, sometimes-mutual love leads to group exogamy. To his analysis Sonowal Kachari, living mainly within geographical parameter of Assam at present adopts Assamese language, dress and even dialect. How these processes is found place among Sonowal Kacharis and what type of change generated by them are described in the study.¹⁹

Ashok Kumar Das, Manabendra Ray Choudhury and Gajen Chandra Sharma (2013) in ‘Medicinal Plant used by Koch Rajbanshi of Bongaigaon, Assam India’views that a total number of 73 medicinal plants belonging to 44 families of angiosperms are used in healing practice of 36 diseases, including diabetic, heart problem and neurological disorder by Koch Rajbanshi of North Salamara sub-division of Bongaigaon district of Assam. More use of leaf is found in disease treatment than other parts of plant. Among plants species 49 are common in occurrence, 19 species less common and 5 species viz., *Aristolochia indica* L., *Asparagus recemosus*

¹⁹.KalyanBaruah, The SonowalKachari: Some Aspect of their Social Life, Proceeding of the North East India History Association, First Session, Singhanian Printing Press, Shillong, 1980, Pp. 121-125.

willd, *Cissusquadrangularis* L, *Garcinia Morella* (Gaertn) Desv and *Rauwolfia serpentine* Benth are in rare category in study area.²⁰

Anil Kumar Singh (1993) views tribes and tribal life are as evergreen and charming in terms of ethnicity, manners, mores, material and cultural life of people. Indian comes close to accept reliability of different way of life. Every tradition helps man to recognise his environment, which assists him to live in freedom and friendship with his neighbour, which helps him to boost his heart to divine, is praiseworthy of acceptance.²¹

NaliniRanjan Roy (2013) 'Tribal and Tribal Life' views Rajbanshi community of India appears to be on verge of extinction not numerically but from social point of view; a peculiar in nature ever came across in any known history of humankind for reason attributable to socio economic and political aberration. Their history remained in obscurity because they did not write it themselves but allowed others to do so, who could mould it in their favour. These people are in majority in rural North Bengal and third major caste Hindu community in West Bengal and majority in two districts of neighbouring Bihar and almost half of the districts in Assam and few other area too, but they do not have say in any sphere of social or political activity.

²⁰. [http:// www.academia.edu/](http://www.academia.edu/)

²¹ Anil kumar Singh, Tribal and Tribal Life, Sarup and Sons, New Delhi, 1993, Pp. 1-18

They identify themselves as Kshatriya in North Bengal and its adjoining area but got them denigrated socially by accepting lower social status. Their learned and established people are in quandary to keep away from vortex of identity crisis as they always found easier way out just to get absorbed in mainstream populace to hide their identity. However, a sizeable group of community raises their voice for grant of separate statehood to greater 'Cooch Behar' to bitter dislike of many. At times, situation appears to be explosive and dangerous for the nation.²²

Conclusion

The study is intended to harp upon methodological aspect covering major component on ethnography of a lesser known community in a relatively backward area. The study is also heavily depended upon explorative and descriptive to develop qualitative aspect. In course of study and further inquiry and involvement with problematique of the study, scope and rationale of study, review of literature, research question, objectives and hypothesis and method of data collection are undertaken. As the work is primarily empirical, some earlier monograph, ethnograph and unpublished

²².NaliniRanjan Roy, Koch Rajbanshi and Kamatapuri, The truth unveiled,Centre for Koch Rjbanshi Studies and Dedelopment,Gauhati,2013

works are reviewed to understand research gap work relating to study of small community. To do so the study also depended on well designed scientific method for selection of universe, sample and tool for data collection. Participant observation method is used for data collection. Interview guide and case study method are also used for data collection to make study more intensive. Data are analysed systematically and a standard format is used to develop the study accordingly. The mainstay and strength of the chapter is research methodology and lacunae in earlier study, which may be partly attempted to address in the present study and going to be discussed in the subsequent chapters of work. In view of these inherent and pressing problems, the next chapter is going to devote to profile of the community.

MAP OF ASSAM

