

## **A Discourse on Origin and Antecedents of the Ruling Families of Obscure or Tribal Lineage**

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**Abstract:** As it is well known to everyone that the tradition of History writing was started away back in ancient Greece by the King Herodotus and his contemporary Thucydides popularized it by adopting the scientific method of history writing. The tradition was followed widely in both Eastern and Western Europe and thence to West Asia among the Arabs. It made in road to India when the Arab invaders came to India to rule for centuries starting from 1206. The Arab chroniclers who accompanied the intruders introduced it in India. Before those fateful historical incidents, in India there was no so-called History writing tradition except a few found in Kashmir, Kalhana's 'Rajtarangini' and in Assam 'Buranjis' of the Ahom kings. The great Indian Epics- the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are in different writing tradition, in verse form not exactly in conformity with the modern method of history writing which lack the 'time' and 'space' the most essential ingredients of modern history writing. So is the case with the Upanishads, Samhitas, Puranic, Tantric literatures and the lesser Vamsavalis of many dynastic rulers which India abounds. Although those available materials are not given full credit as the history, but, no one can deny the fact that these materials are being used especially in reconstruction of the history of ancient India and also the history of the unlettered communities in the face of the dearth of sources of history. The puranic and Tantric literatures or the stories were composed by the Brahmin literati who always endeavours to depict their plots linking the Hindu pantheon gods with locally available traditions found in some specific locations. And the literatures were written in more complex manner by adopting metaphoric presentation which entails many interpretations. In this paper attempt has been made to prove the hypothesis for wide dissemination by drawing the example of the Koch kings of Cooch Behar and their other branches available in the pages of history quoted from Vamsavalis and puranic stories.

**Key words:** Aryanisation, Brahmins, Koch Kings, Kshatriyas status, Legitimacy, Obscure origin etc.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

The Aryan culture has attained the position of dominant characteristics in India by absorbing the most of the populations of the non-Aryan descents. By now no culture is free from the influences of the Aryan culture. So also, the case of influences of the Brahmins who were proved to be the most privileged class throughout the ages of Indian history. Being in the centre stage of the religion the most vital affairs of human life, they were and are the most revered section of population whose kinship ties are hereditary. They were the most privileged class in the sense that they were placed in the position of monopoly in respect of getting education in the traditional Sanskrit *Tols* under Brahmin pundits. The Indian tradition tells that the populations other than Brahmins and Kshatriyas were not accepted as the pupil under Brahmin Pundits. As such they were instrumental in shaping the destiny of many dynastic rulers across India by resorting to tricky invented or concocted stories linking with the Hindu pantheon gods and goddesses while compiling *Vamsavalis* of various dynastic rulers especially of the humble origin kings who by virtue of their talents rose to power. In their efforts the Brahmins wrote ancestries of those kings by placing them in the respectable position of kshatriya status of the Brahmanical social hierarchy to legitimize their power.

It is already mention that the Brahmins adopted the practice for families of obscure or humble or tribal origin kings to invent some suitable genealogy for such kings or Chiefs in Epics or Puranas and to write their ancestries into the record to legitimize their power by successfully claiming upper caste kshatriya status<sup>1</sup>. High caste identity was regarded important in the process of the state formation of the tribal chief or humble or obscure origin families. The non-Aryan kings who were outside the pale of the Brahmanical Caste system, after coming into direct Brahmanical influence consciously followed their instructions to legitimize their kingship. Curious enough they even tried to hide the antecedents of the ruling families in their efforts to prove their legitimacy as rulers. In the words of Romila Thapar, "in the change from clan-based societies to State systems, Caste identities play curious roles". She further says that the families, which had acquired power and ruled as an

independent dynasty, back up their power by seeking legitimacy. This was frequently practiced in the form of an appropriate story of origin often involving the deities and also the claim to being of Kshatriya Status<sup>2</sup>.

### **Koch Kings:**

The founder of the Koch Dynasty of Cooch Behar was Biswa Singha, the son of one Haoria Mech a tribal chieftain of Chiknagram, under Khuntaghat pargana of erstwhile Goalpara district, now in the present district of Kokrajhar of Assam. In course of the Koch state formation, when Biswa Singha successfully could establish himself as a sovereign ruler, the Brahmins "sought him out". They discovered that this tribesman were Kshatriyas who had thrown away their sacred threads when fleeing before the wrath of Parasurama, the son of the Brahman ascetic jamadagni<sup>3</sup>. The Brahmins linked it with the story of killing Brahman ascetic Jamadagni by a King of Kshatriya descent for 'Kamadhenu'. To revenge his father's death, Parasurama launched Kshatriya Annihilation Campaign.

The process of Aryanisation of Assam or Kamrupa can be traced back to the Epic period. The prince Naraka of Videha who occupied and ruled over the Mlecchas and Kiratassettled a number of learned Brahmanas well versed in Vedas. The inscriptions also contain reference to immigration of Brahmanas to Assam from Madhyadesha, such Brahmana settlers doubtless spread the Vedic culture in the province and with the support of the kings, the movement received a great impetus from the 4th century A.D.<sup>4</sup>

The *Tariq-i-Assam* and *Tariq-i-Ferista* are the two other sources on the Koch Behar *Vamsavalis* amongst many variant sources which tells us about the fourth times change of guard. The books provide the information of welding of power and transformation into present day condition by their various branches of this *Vamsavalis* from the ancient times (4th and 5th century A.D.) in different conditions. The phenomenal transfer of power from one branch to the other amongst their *Vamsavalis* is clearly indicated by bringing reference to *Jogini Tantra's* prediction which says, "when Kamakhyapitha would suffer from Brahmanic curse, at that time Biswa Singha would appear and rule Kamrupadesha"<sup>5</sup>. It is an instance of bringing non-human element in the domain of history.

Information of Haoria's marriage with Hira and Jira and the eventual birth of Biswa Singha is found in many legends. Simultaneous marriage of Haoria Mandal with two sisters- Hira and Jira, the two daughters of one Hajau (Hajo) is a historical fact. This fact can be corroborated by Dr. Buchanan Hamilton writing which says that Hira's father was Hajo. He further elaborated that he (Hajo) was the valiant chief and he drove away the Mahammedans from Kamatapur<sup>6</sup>. 'Hajau' a king of Hajonear Gauhati is confirmed by Raj Gunabhiram Barua Bahadur who says that Hira's father was "Hajo", "Haji", or "Hakia". At the time of Dambambu (Haoria's father) one Sailoraj ruled eastern region of Bhutan, also known as Toango is mentioned by Amanatullah Khan in his book '*Cooch Behar Zilar Itihas*'<sup>7</sup>. He further says that Hira was the daughter of this Sailoraj and his wife Mira Bisu, the son Hira and Sisu, the son of Jira were born to Haoria's two wives. It is said that Bisu took birth at the first day of Bihu (*Kartik Bihu*) so his son was named as Bisu, (*Samudra Narayan Vamsavali*). The *Darrang Rajvamsavali* and Ramcharan Thakur edited *Sankar Charita* both sources mention the fact that Bisu was said to be the son of Mahadeva (16th C.). The *Akbar Nama* which was a contemporary to *Sankar Charita* and *Darrang Rajvamsavali* also says that Biswa Singha was called Mahadeva's son. The *Kamrupar Buranji*, which is regarded as *Itihas* or History and written in the 17th century, the most recent time depicted the fact that as a result of the curse of Basistha, Mahadeva and his consort Parvati had to take birth as Haoria and Hira and Biswa Singha was their son. It is a clear example of percolating down of the technic of use of non-human element in historical writing of the most recent time. The historians consciously use such spurious materials as Brahmin literati's concocted legends in their history writings of the unlettered people. The variant of legends available in the words of mouth of the folks were in turn, given by the Brahmin literati. Such legends of the birth of Biswa Singha runs as follows-

"one day to cultivate cotton at the hill slope Haoria was slogging with spade. At mid-day (*dupahar*) his wife Hira came to him with *Panthabhat*, rice beer and meat for his lunch. On her way Mahadeva (Siva) who was sitting under a tree, sees Hira and was enamoured at her beauty and assuming Haoria's form took the food, rice-beer, meat and had had intercourse with her there. That union gave birth to one boy on the first day of Bihu for which the boy was called Bisu"<sup>8</sup>.

The Darrang Rajas were another branch of the Koch kings of Koch Behar. The *Darrang Rajvamsavali* written in metrical Assamese on oblong strips of Sachipat (Aquilaria agallocha), is the manuscript of only detailed narrative. Late Raja Lakshmi Narayan Kuar, who was the leading representative of the Darrang branch of the Koch Royal family got it written by Surjyakhari Daivajna, a Brahmin literati. The author consciously traces back the origin of the Koch Kings by linking to the puranic stories of Parasurama legend. It says that later kings of lunar race of *Haihaya* of *Sahasrarjuna* lineage twelve Kshatriya princes to escape from the wrath of Parasurama lived hidden at Chiknagram of Rathnapith under the guise of Mech. In their concealment these twelve Kshatriyas adopted Mech manners and even married Mech girls. The names of these twelve Kshatriyas are mentioned in stanza 51 of the manuscript. Their names are Panbor, Bhedela, Avor, Guabor, Phedphedo, Borihana, Kathia, Baishagu, Megha, Garkata, Jogai, Bhokora (51)<sup>9</sup>. From these Kshatriya princes Sumati (Mech

?) was the greatest and Sumati's son Bhadrarajit took birth, his son Bhadrasrabha, his son Basudam and his son was Dambambu. Dambambu and his consort Urbasi bigoted Haridas Mech or Haoria Mech(Mandal).Haoria Mech was the most powerful amongst the original twelve Mech chiefs of Chiknagram, a village in the Khuntaghat pargana of Goalpara district from where the origin of the Koch Kings can be traced. In like manner many later kings of the Koch Dynasty got written their Vamsavalis. Among many Vamsavalis of the Koch kings, *Gandharva Narayan's Vamsavali* says 'they all together brought Haoria and made their Mondal, from that day onward he (Haoria) became supreme authority'. Such source materials are now being utilized for writing history in modern times. Sibananda Sarma in his *Goalpara Zilar Itihas* refers to the twelve Mech sarders among whom Haoria Mech appeared to be the most powerful<sup>10</sup> and Amanatullah Khan in his *Cooch Behar Zilar Itihas* refers *Karganarayan's Vamsavali* which also conveys the same message with some addition of lines as follows:

Manas in the East, Sankosh West

All after coming made Haoria Mandol

From thence of twelve villages became supreme authority

Dhobalgiri in the North Lauhit in the South

After grand feast all lived happily

To no one pay tax within that boundary<sup>11</sup>.

If we exclude non-human being as the elements of historical discourse, the foregoing discussions show that the progenitor of the Koch Kings was Mech, named Haoria Mandal, a resident of Chiknagram, a village in the Khuntaghat pargana, now under Kokrajhar district. Haoria Mech after being selected as the Chief over twelve Mech Sarders assumed the name Hariya Mandal. The appellation 'Mandal' which Haoria assumed was not a clan name, but, an official designation of Haoria's contemporary period. The small kings were called Mandal. In the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Manusamhita* we find the mention of the small kings and Samantas as Mandal. Also, during *Guptaraj* the provincial administrators were known as *Mandals*.

The fact that the Koch Kings were the Mech or Kacharis by nationality is corroborated by the Buranjis of Assam also. It is said that in the lineage of Biswa Singha at Cooch Behar there was a Kachari whose name was Haoria. Hira and Jira were his two wives. Different scholars expressed divergent views on the origin of the Koch Kings. On the origin of the Koches, some contemporary literary sources enlighten us with some important information. Minhas-ud-din Siraj in his book *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* an official account of the expedition of the kingdom of Kamrupa by Muhammed-bin- Bhaktiyar Khalji states that this region (Kamrupa) were peopled by the *Kunch* (Koch), *Mej* (Mech) and the *Tiharu* (Tharu) tribes having Turk countenance<sup>12</sup>. The Koches were referred to as *Kuvackain* Padma Purana which states that they had no choice of food and spoke a barbaric tongue and they didn't follow sophisticated manner. The *Yogini Tantra* was composed in about the 16<sup>th</sup> century which refers to the Koches as *Kuvacas* and states that they were born of a Mech woman<sup>13</sup>. *Dharma Purana* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century states that the Koches did violence to all kinds of creatures and used to take even beef<sup>14</sup>.

But, other group of scholars argue that the Koches are definitely of Mongolian stock. Hodgson states that the Koches belong to the distinctly marked type of the Mongolian family<sup>15</sup>. Waddel also says that they do not belong to the Dravidian Stock, but "are distinctly Mongoloid". Buchanan in the *Dacca Blue book* classes them with the Bodos and the Dhimals. Rev. S. Endle classed the Rabhas, the Meches, Dhimals, Koches, Dimacas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, Hojongs and such other tribes within the fold of the great Bodo Race<sup>16</sup>. E.A. Gait in his census of India states that there is no doubt that the Koches of Assam belong to the Mongolian rather than to the Dravidian Stock<sup>17</sup>. S.K. Chatterjee also holds the same view that the Koches are of Mongoloid origin.

In the Ethnographers discourse which have been discussed, it appears that the Koches are of Mongoloid origin having close affinities with other Bodo tribes. In course of time they freely inter-married with Dravidians and gave birth to inter-mixture of Dravido-Mongolian features having preponderance of Mongoloid characters. E.A. Gaitsays "there seems, however, to be no doubt that the true Koches were a Mongoloid Race very closely allied to the Meches and Garos"<sup>18</sup>.

The designation "Rajvamsi" had been applied to the Koches widely as a result of the movement of *Nagunkaran* (initiation of Sacred thread) launched by its leader Panchanan Barma. According to Gait, "the appellation 'Rajvamsi' was originally referred to an entirely distinct community of Dravidian affinities, but was afterwards adopted by the Koches west of the Manas river, who when they atoned to Hinduism, appropriated the caste name of the most numerous Hinduised Community in their neighbourhood"<sup>19</sup>. While supporting Gait's view Dr. D. Nath cites Mr. Risley that the adoption of the designation was however, so complete that in the Census of 1881, not a single person was returned as Koch in Cooch Behar, the cradle of the community itself<sup>20</sup>. He further argues that neither in the Persian records, nor in the foreign accounts, nor in any of the dynastic epigraph of the time, the Koches are mentioned as Rajvamsis. Even the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, which is a genealogical account of the Koch royal family, and which was written in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century does not refer to this term.

Instead, all these sources call them as Koches or the Meches. Thus, he(D.Nath) concludes that the term Rajvamsi as applied to the Koches is of recent origin<sup>21</sup>.

It is worth the claim that the Koch Kings were non-Aryan descent and that they had been recognized by the Brahmins as sprang from the Siva, the God having taken the form of one of their ancestors and visited the queen, who was herself none other than an incarnation of his divine spouse Parvati. From these two contentions if we exclude the non-human element then it is clear that Biswa Singha, the founder of the Koch Dynasty was the son of Haoria Mech an obscure or tribal origin initially selected as the *Mandol* by the twelve Mech Sarders of Chiknagram. For the Kachari kings of Dimapur similar technique was initiated for writing their ancestry into the record to claim upper social strata. Their genealogy had been satisfactorily traced back to Bhima, one of the *Pandava* princes of the epic, the Mahabharata. Likewise, for the Ahoms the God Indra was selected as the progenitor of their Kings. It is an indication of linking the Ahoms with the Hindu Pantheon God, the Indra. The coming of the Ahoms into Hindu India only in 1228 A.D. is a very recent historical phenomenon, who were the descendants of the Shan tribes of Upper Burma (Myanmar). Not only the genealogies of these non-Aryan kings were invented by the Brahmins but also the non-Aryan deities, religious myths and cults derived from the races beyond the Brahmanic pale adopted and were developed into special cults along sectarian lines<sup>22</sup>.

The worship of Siva prevailed in Kamrupa from a remote period and was the popular form of religion both amongst the aboriginals and the Aryanised people. Ray Bahadur Gunabhiram Barua in his *Assam Burunji* states that Siva worship was first introduced in early Assam by King Jalpeswar, a king of North Bengal (Jalpaiguri) which was formerly included in the kingdom of Kamrupa. The Skanda Purana narrates the story how the King Jalpa, came to be a Siva worshipper, the Brahmins for their own sake also invented the myths of these deities. Along with this new place of pilgrimage were also introduced with suitable myths to make them respectable. The Epics and Puranas are full of such materials<sup>23</sup>. The worship of these newly absorbed primitive deities was part of the mechanism of acculturation.

## II. CONCLUSION

Thus, we find that the founder of the Koch dynasty of Cooch Behar, Biswa Singha in his effort to claim high caste Kshatriya status, had hidden the antecedents of his ruling family, Haoria Mech's family, a tribal chieftain of Chiknagram of Khuntaghat pargana. The Brahmin literati were engaged in the compilation of the *Vamsavalis* of those Kings of non-Aryan descents and on the part of the kings, in their attempt to hide their antecedents they allowed the Brahmin literati to invent suitable genealogy for them to record into their ancestry. In the process, suitable myths by linking them with deities of Hindu pantheon gods were invented and the myths of new places of pilgrimage were also introduced to make them trustworthy. After coming under the influences of the Brahmins those kings, who were outside the pale of the Brahmanical social hierarchical system, in their attempt to legitimize their kingship hid their antecedents and claimed Kshatriya status. From the discourse, it seems that the historians of the modern age have been utilizing such materials while attempting to trace the origin of a specific dynasty under their study and successfully traced back to Lunar race, *Sivavansham*, *Suryavansham*, *Indravansham*, *Bhimavansham*, etc which are untenable.

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