Chapter-IV
THE BODOS AND THEIR STRUCTURAL POSITION
4.1 Today there is an increasing emphasis on the historical picture of caste, with greater emphasis on social reality in terms of inter-caste or inter-group relations and the power equations. Ideological and ritualistic approach tries to give an impression that, caste is social institution, which started its journey with all structural and functional features of caste, static in nature, since the time of Vedas. According to M.N. Srinivas, the concept is being too one sided. He insisted that the social reality of the caste system is not Varna-the ideological categorization, but jati or upa-jati that is the actually interacting group. He says, “the fact that the concept continues to be relevant for understanding some aspects of caste and has only helped to perpetuate the misconceptions and distortions implicit in it.” In his concept of ‘Sanskritization’ he links ideological hierarchy with interactional mobility and does away with the old stereotype of caste as an institution that admitted of no change or mobility. In the historical context, the concept of Sanskritisation explicitly exposed that; caste is a system of society, in which every caste stratum has its own history of origin, growth and development, till it acquired hereditary character. The formation of caste groups with their
specific identities develops through a historical and socio-cultural process. It is not just a matter of inheritance from one generation to the subsequent generation. The principle of occupational inheritance with specific features and hierarchical status in the society is the last phase in the process of the identity formation of specific caste strata. As a structural and functional system, the features of a particular caste stratum may develop, acquire and change in a particular socio-cultural condition by the people within and outside the caste society. ‘Sanskritisation’, as a process of socio-cultural mobility, that was taken place among the Bodos in pre-independent period, from historical and pre-historical time can be explained in three levels i.e., Acculturation and Diffusion level, De-structural or trans-structural level and Neo-structural level or appositional level.

When a group of individuals, having different cultural traditions, come into contact, changes take place in their original cultural patterns keeping the structural position of their society intact. This is referred to as the process of acculturation or cultural contact. Diffusion on the other hand, refers to the spread of cultural traits and patterns from major centers of civilization to smaller cultures and occasionally the other way round. If the system of caste was closed once for all, with hierarchical arrangement of status and with the principle of purity and pollution as persistently insisted by some Indologists and classical Indian writers where social and physical distances are strictly maintained; how could we imagine that kind of social mobility through acculturation and socio-cultural diffusion in that socio-cultural circumstances? Scientific and historical explanation of the process of Sanskritisation and historical origin and development of caste system in Indian sub-continent give a clear picture that before the era of Buddha and Buddhism social system in India was mechanical and egalitarian in nature and had never been organic in nature with the attributes of ‘closed jati stratum’ and other discriminatory features. Buddhism came as a revolt against the Vedic ritual, which was both complex and expensive, and also beyond the common man’s reach, but not because of social discriminations based on purity and pollution and hierarchical distance existed among different groups. Religion was monopoly to priest class. Religious rites and activities were conducted through Sanskrit language, again, which was monopoly to priest class only. Common people had access neither to religion nor to the language of the religion. Varna system was perhaps not a closed system. It was perhaps similar to class system of present time, open in principle based on quality and efficiency. Concept of ‘jati’ was perhaps during that time referred to a homogenous group of people based on similarities of cultural traits, language, descent, custom, belief, tradition, habit, mores etc. and Varna was just a system of internal division within a ‘jati’ or ‘homogenous
group’ into sub-jatis or sub-groups higher to lower, based on functional quality and efficiency of individual member of society. Jati is objective, specific and definite group of people; on the other hand, a Varna is a pattern of ideological norms, setting in different hierarchical levels. Ideological norms of Varna operate in different upa-jati or sub-group levels. In this connection we can refer Koches and Maches, prior to conversion to Hinduism who constituted a homogenous jati (Community) linguistically and socio-culturally, can consider the Koch rulers and their consanguine relatives (related by blood) as ‘Rajbonshis’ (Royal descent) and the people who often involved in war and defending activities of the society as ‘Kshatriya’. And the Deosrees or Kalitas who happened to be the royal priests of the Koch king.³ Deosrees or Kalitas were the class of people who also performed the role of a community priests among the Koches and Maches. With the conversion to Hinduism the king brought Brahmin (priest) from the west and subsequently the position of the Deosree or Kalita as a priest degraded below the Brahmin priest.⁴ The terms found in classical Greek literature and other ethnographic descriptions written by foreign travelers, like, ‘Kiloto, ‘Kilatiai’, ‘Khirrhadoi’, are used as synonyms of Kalita caste by some scholars from Assam to establish their racial origin by ‘Aryan’ or ‘Caucasian’ by race. The idea is absolutely based on racial prejudice, because, the terms were used to refer ‘Kirata’ people of some unspecified areas of eastern and north-eastern India and other parts of prehistoric time, and was not definitely referred to the ‘Kalita, caste of the present day Assam.

The eastern land (Kamrupa-Pragjyitisha) was tabooed land during prehistoric and even early part of medieval history. Therefore the existence of Aryans with Hindu caste system in prehistoric Assam, with social hierarchy does not arise. Some scholars tried to identify ‘Bhuiyas’ and Kalita as synonyms. But the term ‘Bhuiya’ has nothing to do with the concept of race or caste. The concept of ‘Bhuiya’ emerged with the development of stable agricultural system everywhere in India as part of feudal social system. The term ‘Bhuiyas’ was referred to landlords or the chiefs or rulers of the society irrespective of their racial affiliation. From that point, if ‘Bhuiya’ and ‘Kalita’ are considered synonym to land lords or chiefs, then they were undoubtedly belonged to ruling and noble class of the society and their demand for Kshatriyahood is justified, but tracing of their origin particularly the Bhuyas or Kalitas of Assam to Caucasoid is not only fictitious but also entirely absurd and guided by ‘nineteenth century myth of Aryanism’. Through the cultivation of Brahminical norms of life perhaps many of them achieved the status of real Brahmin, as they were the most

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advance intellectual section (priest class) of the Kirata (Kilatiai) Koch-Mech community. The recent Movement for Tribal Status by Koch-Rajbongsi and other indigenous people of Assam clearly shows that major section of Kalita people are also participating in this movement. Their participation in this movement is not just because of their narrow and selfish political motive but it is based on historical reality and racial affinity. Rest of the Koch people could be regarded as commoner or peasant class. As a whole, the Hinduised Koch-Mech people including the members of royal family regarded themselves as ‘Rajbongsis’ community as they consider themselves as the descendents of the same ancestor and share same blood. In the course of time, among the casteless egalitarian society, different categories of people came up on the basis of activities they involved in order to meet the different type of socio-cultural needs.

As we know that the emergence of monarchy and feudal states was the result of the development in political authority and power relation, which was again primarily attributed by the development of permanent and stable agricultural system. It was a universal phenomenon. We know, even long before the conversion of Biswa Singha into Hinduism, system of monarchy as a system of polity, without caste order had already been in existence among the Koches and Bodo. To trace the history of monarchy among the Bodos as a system of polity, only after the conversion to Hinduism is not based on sound logic. Even before the advent of Hinduism amongst the Koches and Bodos system of Monarchy was existed amongst them, there is no doubt. The formation of Hindu social identity and sanskritization as the process of acculturation and socio-cultural diffusion was found occurred on different premises of socio-cultural life of the Bodos, like, language, political, economy, religion, customs, tradition etc.

4.2 Most of the Indologists and Ideologists, who made their studies on classical Indian literatures during pre-independent time, held that language is one of the criteria of racial identity. The Aryan speaking people are commonly identified with Aryans by race what is always not true. Language is an aspect of culture and has nothing to do with race. Firstly, the position of a language in market situation makes the people psychologically oriented to learn a language of other people. We can very easily understand this fact in the market situation of the Northeastern region. Not only the indigenous tribal people of Assam but also the tribal people of Hill areas like, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya learned Old Assamese to fulfill the market needs in market situation.
Earlier it was believed that Aryan language was extended through only conversion to Hindu religion. The Aryan language was diffused and extended to non-Aryan inhabited areas through a number of market and business centers. Perhaps the vast people Koch-Bodo and other non-Hindu people living in Bihar and greater Bengal initially learnt Aryan language through contact in market situation and linguistic acculturation. And slowly extended to other parts of northeastern India without affecting the structure of their society. Bazar, hat, mela, morg were the centers where people in inter group level assembled for the purpose of exchange of economic goods and materials. Among the Bodos, Nagas, Miris, Kacharis, Mikirs, Hajongs, Arunachalis and other people of Bengal and northeastern region, the Old forms of Bengali or Assamese language were developed in inter group interaction situation. People of each group speak their own language in community level. In market situation or inter community level they always spoke Old Assamese language. The extension, growth and development of Old Assamese or Old Bengali form of language among these groups of people was taken place in inter ethnic interaction level and was purely based on economic reason. In market situation they learned not only Aryan language but also learn many things relating to food habit, ideas, culture, technology etc that were secular in nature. Aryanization through conversion to Hinduism was the subsequent phase of Sanskritization.

Philologists and linguists developed different types of theories regarding the origin and development of New Indo-Aryan languages. It is wrong to believe that Sanskrit or all Indo-Aryan languages originated and took a complete shape in Vedic time or at specific moment of ancient Indian history with all its features of the present day. The development of Sanskrit language might have been taken in the similar way as that of the New-Indo-Aryan languages. We do not find Sanskrit literature in the written form prior to Pali and Jaina literature. Vedas were written much later than the Pali and Jaina literature. We find little mention about the non-Aryan languages in the Vedic literature. Buddhaghosa mentioned about the language of the Kirata in his famous Pali commentaries ‘Digha Nikaya’ and ‘Abhidhamma Pitaka’ and recorded the language of the Kiratas within the category of ‘Milakkkanambhasa’ (Milakkha), the language spoken by all the Mlecchas. In Milakkhabhasas he included the languages of the Kirata, Oddaka (Ottas), Andhaka (Andhras), Damila (Tamil), Yavanas, Yonakas (Greeks), Okkalas and other languages of the non-Aryans. The Jaina Canonical text, ‘Jambudvipa Prajnapati’ written by Acharya Amitgati also refers to the Mleccha language of the Kiratas and other thirteen groups.
From the Buddhist source of literature it appears that the language was the most important criterion of socio-cultural differentiation and discrimination. The speakers of Sanskrit language held high respect in the society and confined to only priest class of the society. The Buddhists were very much conscious of the mleccha-bhasa and culture because of their close association with the mleccha people. Not only the Mleccha, but also common people from other categories of so-called Aryan speaking people did not understand Sanskrit. Buddhism does not support discriminations among men in the society based on caste principles and insisted on the principles of equality. Therefore they used Pali language that was the synthetic form of indigenous Mlecca Bh language and Sanskrit language. The innumerable elements of non-Aryan languages found in the structure and morphology of Indo-Aryan languages are the proofs of this fact. The king Asoka recorded the names of Kirata in one of his inscriptions and he never called them as Mleccha. It might perhaps because of their affiliation to the group of Kshatriyahood upgraded from Kirarta or Mleccha origin. In the ‘Mudrarakshasa’ his immediate ancestor, Chandra Gupta Marya was mentioned as ‘Vrishala’ and ‘Kulahina’, as the son of a person, without caste.7 Northern belt of Ganga-Yamuna doab and the areas of Uttarapatha8 was basically inhabited by the Kiratas-Bratyas (Kshatriyas Kirata origin) and slowly engulf by the Aryan language and culture by the process of the extension of Buddha religion and socio-cultural fusion and diffusion. The ‘Pracya’ was the main land where the Prakrit form of speech was started its formation and development. It was the ‘Prachya’ from where this form of speech gradually spread to the Northwest and West.9 Prakrit form of speech originated as a result of interaction of the speeches of the Aryas (elites or nobles) and of the common man (common man, i.e., Mlecchas and non-Aryan speakers), i.e., Sanskrit and the Mleccha or Paichacika speeches. The kings and rulers, for their political interest in the society encouraged the origin and development of Prakrit forms of languages. Prakrit forms of languages in the long run transformed into New Indo-Aryan languages and Prakrit speaking people in the long run became the speakers of the New Indo-Aryans languages. The evidence recorded by Vararuchi in 375-413 AD, contemporary of Chandragupta Vikramaditya, in his monumental work, ‘Prakrita Prakasa’ is a classic example in this regard.10 From this text it is evident that the Kiratas are the people who developed the Prakrita form of languages before the time of Bharat Muni, third century A.D.11 According to Hornel, Prakrita forms of language is phonetically equate with Pichasa forms of speeches. The speakers of Pichasa language are original people of India and perhaps of non-Aryan Kirata origin.12 But nowhere in the classical literature of ancient India we found the evidence of the Kirata or the Pichacha language.
Basically the people of Eastern countries, the 'tabooed land' of ancient India (Magadha, Anga, Banga, Kalinga, and Kamrupa) was of non-Aryan speaking people. Chatterjee is absolutely right when he said that Prakrita forms of language started its existence in eastern India (Magadha) and later spread to other areas of India. Magadhi Prakrita, which was, started its natural origin in Magadha, in the course of time split into two branches, as Purba-Magadhi (Eastern Magadhi) and Pachhima Magadhi (Western Magadhi). Purba-Magadhi moved towards the East and Pachima-Magadhi moved towards the west.

*Purva-Magadhi* is considered as the mother of Eastern Indo-Aryan languages. In comparison to other forms of Prakritas, maximum corruptions in language, from structural and phonetical points, was taken place in *Magadha Prakrita*. Purba-Magadhi Prakrita moved further to the eastern direction and took different forms in Bengal, Orisa and Assam. Banga and Assam acquired Prakrita form of language straight from the Magadha Prakrita. The origin of prakrita form of language in Orissa, Bengal and Assam is often equated with the language of *Charyapada*. Pre-independent historians and anthropologists on the basis of limited intangible evidences from classical literature try to say that a mass group of Bodo people migrated to India through northeastern corner of India. Latest evidence put this conclusion into doubtful dilemma, whether the Koches and Bodos of Bengal and Assam had been migrated from the direction of East or West, because entire northern India from Sapta Sindhu to Brahmaputra Valley exhibits toponomical and linguistic evidences of the people of Baric or Tibeto-Burman languages. That indirectly says that the entire northern India was in the past inhabited by people of Baric (Tibeto-Burman) linguistic family who are often referred by the scholars as the people of Pre-Austric linguistic family. But till now no scholars of India and abroad represented scientific studies showing Austric elements in the culture and language of the North Indian people. Some historians try to establish Bodo elements, some times as Old Austric and some times as Austric origin. Historians of the Pre-independent time hardly put any interest on the study of Pre-Hindu phase of civilization of Indian history. They try to locate and identify the abode of Bodos and their ancestors only on the basis of the hypothetical elements of classical Indian literature. The recent studies made by modern historians, anthropologists and social scientists, philologists in co-ordination with the archaeological evidences on the process of Sanskritisation focused new dimensions extending the possibility of wider areas under the habitation of the Kirata-Bodos in ancient India.
Probably in the 4th and 5th century AD an ancestor of Koch (Bodo) named Sangal or Sangla Deva reigned over Kamrupa and became most powerful. He established his capital at Lakshwavati or Gour.\(^{15}\) Sangal Deva is considered by many of the classical historians as the king of Bhagaadatta dynasty. The ascendancy of Sangal Deva as a king was the beginning of the reign of Koch Rule.\(^{16}\) If it is the fact, we can assume that Hinduisation among the Mech-Bodo was started from the time Sangal Deva because Koches are none but Hinduised Bodos. After Sangal Dev the kings from Varman dynasty, Salstambha dynasty, Sen dynasty, and Pal dynasty etc. came to power consecutively and archaeological evidences say that they were also the Kings of Asura origin in opposition to the ardent supporters of Aryanism who try to establish all these kings as Aryan by race. The Koch Kings just before the adoption of Hinduism were known as Mech or Bodos. According to Sunity Kumar Chatterjee, “When Hiuen Ts'ang visited Assam the Aryanization in language of the Bodo masses of Assam does not appear to have progressed much. The notable remnants of Bodo speech in most parts of Assam at the present day.”\(^{17}\) The Mongolian Koches started to accept Prakrita form of Indo-Aryan language from the time of Bhaskar Varman or some time earlier to him.\(^{18}\) The statements of Chatterjee and Bhakat clearly indicate that, prior to the acceptance of the Indo-Aryan language king Bhaskar Varman and his subject spoke Mech-Bodo language or Proto-Koch-Rajbongshi language. That is, we can undoubtedly assume that Sanskritization of the Bodos in terms of acceptance of Indo-Aryan language was started from the days of Varman dynasty with the extension of Buddhism. According to Sunity Kumar Chatterjee, when Hiuen Ts'ang was in Kamrupa the Aryanization in the language of Bodo (Mongolian) masses of Kamrupa does not appear to have progressed much. The notable remnants of Bodo speech in most part of Assam at present day.\(^{19}\) From this statement of Sunity Kumar Chatterjee, we can assume that the mass subjects of Kamrupa of King Bhaskar Barman were the Bodos and their speech was Bodo or Proto-Koch. Scholars are very much contradictory in identifying the geographical location of the Ancient Kamrupa or Pragjyotishpura. The time and information recorded in the classical Indian literature hardly conformed to the archaeological evidences found in different parts of greater Bengal and Assam for identification of Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa. Most of the archaeological evidences connected with Varman, Salstambha, Sen, and Pal dynasty are mostly confined to greater Bengal, and least in Assam. Ancient Kamrupa or Pragjyotishpura might have never been included the modern political geography of Assam. Ancient Kamrupa or Pragjyotishpura was perhaps composed of greater Bongo (Inclusive of Present Bangladesh and West Bengal), some parts of Bihar and Some parts of Orissa. Many scholars stated that the capital of ancient

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Kamrupa was located in Rongpur/ South Koch-Behar/Dinajpur etc. And this area was the abode of Bhagadatta-Hiramba dynasty. Under the light of these remarks we can assume that, north Bengal or lower Assam was not the western part of ancient Kamrupa rather it was eastern boundary of Kamrupa. Identification of Assam with Prajyotishpura or ancient Kamrupa was perhaps just for an intellectual absorption of the eastern most part of present political boundary to fulfill the historical necessity of Indian Nationalism.

We do not know much about the spread of Buddhism in ancient Kamrupa. But it was perhaps the Buddhism through which Prakrita form Indo-Aryan languages were developed, penetrated and spread among the mass subjects of Bhaskar Varman and other Kings of Non-Hindu origin of the East or the Prachya. The influence and prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Kamrupa or Pragjyotishpura was perhaps short lived. The emergence of feudalism and numerous feudal kings with separate political power and identity centering on the Saiva and Sakta culture might adversely caused damage to the existence of Buddhism in ancient Kamrupa and other parts of India. Feudal culture is opposed to egalitarian principles of Buddhism, rather prefers absolute power of the king and the rules of the aristocrat. and prefers discriminations in the society on caste line because sustenance of political power, authority and political entity demands unconditional loyalty of the subjects. Rigid caste system is the only way through which the centrifugal forces of the people against absolute rule of the king could be divided. Vaisnavite movements slowly replaced Saivism or Saktism. Since the time of Bhaskar Varman the process of Sanskritization of the Bodo or Proto-Koch languages continued unabated till the time of Indian independence. The Magadhi Prakrita which started its journey in the form of Old Indo-Aryan languages to the Prachya and split into three directions, South to Odiisya, east to Bonga and north-east to Kamrupa and took variation in their forms. The direct source of Indo-Aryan languages in Orissa, Bongo and Assam is Magadhi Prakrita. We do not find differences in the basic structure of the Indo-Aryan languages of these three regions. Confinement and limitation of the Koch-Rajbongshi history or Proto-Koch history within north Bengal only is a historical dictatorialism over the genuine history of indigenous people of Pre-Aryan or Proto-Aryan Civilization.

The structural and functional forms of present day Hinduism are the result of long historical process. The contribution of the Vedic civilization constitutes only small parts of Hinduism. In most
cases the growth of Hinduism marched together with the process of Sanskritisation. In fact the structure of Hinduism developed through the process of Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation as a process of the absorption of Tribal people and Non-Hindus also involves the process of the absorption of Tribal or Non-Aryan culture and tradition. The process of Sanskritisation is just not confined to imitation and acceptance of symbols and norms of higher caste or doctrines of Hinduism but it also involves the absorption of tribal culture and tradition. In fact the process of Hinduisation was in most cases accompanied by the process of Sanskritisation of Indo-Aryan language in horizontal direction. The process of the imitation of Indo-Aryan language also involves the absorption of linguistic elements from non-Hindus or non-Aryan speaking people.

M.N. Srinivas defines Sanskritisation thus, 'Sanskritisation is the process by which a 'low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste.' Sanskritisation is reality, it is not a myth. "Sanskritisation has been a major process of cultural change in Indian history, and it has occurred in every part of the Indian Sub-continent. It might have been more active at some periods of time than at others, and some parts of India are more sanskritized than others, but there is no doubt that the process has been universal." Thus through the process of sanskritisation, changes in economic interest and political power of groups could be accommodated, for it provided a symbolic justification in terms of the caste ideology for de facto results of the interactional process.

In earlier chapter a glimpse of the contribution of Bodo people to the Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan languages was highlighted. Sincere and systematic study will further be enlightening close relationship between two languages.

4.4 According to Hira Charan Narjinery the so-called early history of Assam or Kamrupa is basically and to a great extent the history of the Mongoloid Mech or Bodo people, their culture and heritage. Pargiter, with confidence say that Pragiyitishpura or Kamrupa was the land founded by Mongolian people from the Northeast. Mahiranga Danava is traced by most the ethnographers and historians as the earliest king of Pragiyotishpura and he is said to have been the son of Brahma. Hira Charan Narjinery says that, Mahiranga is sanskrizited form of the Bodo term 'Mairang' means rice or wealth. The complete meaning is perhaps, the King of the Rice Belt. In Bodo the
term 'rong' is popularly used to mean state of *joy and happiness*. The ethnological meaning in Bodo is 'the king of the land of joy and happiness'. Some historians assumed that Ronpur was the abode of Hirrima-Bhagadatta. According to KL Barua, "the Mairang was sanskritised into Mahiranga. It is clearly Bodo name and the people who inhabited the country were called Kiratas and Mlechhas and they were Mongalian immigrants."28 According to myth, Ghatutkocha (Gedet-Kocha, Koch the Great) was born out of the illicit union of Bhima and Hirrimba. (Kshatriya and Asura). Hindu mythology recognized Bhagadatta as 'Mlechhadhipati', the king of the Mlechha. The theory of Asura or Chandala origin as a result of the illicit union of Aryan male and non-Aryan female or vis a vis is absolutely fallacious and imaginary. Bodos and other tribes are called as Asura and Chandala or antyaja as they did not pay respect and conform to any principles of Vedic Hindu religion. *Illicit union* is symbolic referring to unity of Asuras and Aryans, through the process of conversion to Hinduism by the non-Hindus.

Interesting fact to be mentioned here is that, in classical Indian literature, many Asura, Danava kings were identified as the son or descendent of Brahma, Vishnu and great Rishis and Munis who are considered as Aryan Gods and Sages. In this category we can mention the name of Ravana, Hiranaksha, Harinya Kahipu, Naraka, Mahiranga, Gayasur, Vrityasur, Konshasur and many others who were either the sons of Brahma, Vishnu or great rishis or munish. Tracing the lineage of Asura, Danava, Raksha, kings of the prehistoric time with Aryan God and sages often leads to confusion to racial stratification made by the 19th century anthropologists. In classical Indian literature Asura, Danava, Rakshas, Daityas, Chandala, Mlechhas are depicted as the enemies of the *gods or devas* which can hardly be accepted. Hansha Narayana Bhattacharjee thinks that, it is entirely imaginary to think that the Asuras are non-Aryan aborigine of India. According to him Devas and Assuras are not separat race, but they were born of a common ancestor. He does not believe that the Danavas, the Rakshas, the Asuras are enemies of the Deva or they are anti Aryan religious group or non-Aryan aborigine.29

Aswini Kumar Sen says that there are striking similarities between the Meches or Bodos and the Kiratas depicted in Purana, biologically and says that the ancestors of that Meches had been those Kiratas. Therefore, Ghatotkoch's Kirata origin amply suggest that he was Mongoloid and that he was a Mech or Bodo by race.30 Sunity Kumar Chatterjee acknowledges, "The great Bodo people

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of Assam (were) the offspring of the son of Vishnu and mother earth”.31 This statement of Sunity Kumar Chatterjee dismisses the Aryan (as a race), Dravidian, and Alpine origin of Naraka, because Naraka was the son of both Vishnu and Mother Earth.32 As against the opinions of some celebrated historians Naraka’s, (the father of Bhagadatt) Alpine Aryan or Dravidian origin, the archaeological discoveries in Doobi copperplate, Ratnapal inscription, Nowgaon copperplate grant, Nidhanpur copperplate inscriptions, say that from Bhaskar Varman down to Sen dynasty, i.e., Kings of Varman dynasty, Salstambha dynasty, Pal dynasty and Sen dynasty, they identified themselves as the descendent of Bhagadatta-Hiramba dynasty. Bhagadatta-Hiramba is identified as Kirata-Asura. Bhagadatta was the son of Naraka and installed by Bishnu as a King of Pragjyotishpura.33 The Mahabharata bluntly declares Bhagadatta as a Mleccham Adhipah, i.e., the ruler of Mlecchas.34 He took part in the Mahabharata war and was surrounded by Kirata, China, and other warriors dwelling along the seacoast. If it is the fact, Bhagadatta was unmistakably Kirata and his father Naraka was undoubtedly must have been a Kirata by race. Naraka cannot be Aryan by race and culture because the land (Mithila) in which he was born and brought up was within the land of the Prachy, which was the tabooed for the Aryans till the time of writing Budhayana.

Caste identity itself was the symbol of one’s status and position in the society. In broader Hindu socio-cultural context the position of Asura, Danava, Rakhsasa, Daitya, Chandalas etc. were far below to even the Sudra of the caste hierarchy. Brahmin would drink water from Sudra but not from Chandala, Asura, and Danava. So much of hatred and neglect and disrespect was inflicted upon the Asura, Danava and Chandala people and to their culture, language, tradition, custom and practices which made the people of these groups self-rapprochement or remorse, self inferiority complex ‘atmaglany, atmoslagha’, and ‘infamy’ among them towards their own language, culture, custom and tradition and into the persons in themselves. Every practice, ‘acharan’ of the Asuras or Non-Hindus was regarded as ‘Ku-achara’ and the people following Ku-acharan were treated as Kuchachi or Kachari. Kachari is a neglecting term given by the Hindus. They never called themselves as Kachari. Language, ‘Vasa’ was regarded, as ‘Ku-vasa’ or ‘doana’, and the speakers of ku-vasa were treated as Kuwas or Koch: Koch is a term given to the Hinduised Bodos, as they were not well versed in Indo-Aryan language. Foods were regarded ‘abhaksha’ or ‘polluted’ and the people were regarded as ‘acchuty’ or ‘antyaja’. Whatever they have, all were regarded as ‘Sanskar-vibarjita’ or uncultured. Only way to get relief from this state of hell or ‘naraka’ is to accept the Daiva or Aryan religion. These are the fundamental
reasons why Hinduised people of Kirata or non-Aryan origin keep their original racial and ethnic identity secret after conversion due to infamy of original identity. The Sarania, Koches etc. never trace their origin with the Bodos or Meches. Every term used to identify the Bodos and other tribes connotes degraded and uncivilized socio-cultural status.

In this regard it is to say that, the term ‘antyaja’ referred in Dharmasatra bears sociological meaning. It refers to a person or persons who commit serious crime or violate the fundamental codes of religion for which they were ostracized from the total society. They are known as ‘antyaja’ and live in the outskirt of society. There is difference between degradation and ostracized. In the case of degradation, only personal caste status is degraded and accommodated in lower level, and membership within the total society is retained. The concept of degraded Kshatriya, degraded Brahmmins etc. comes under this category. But in case of ‘ostracize’ membership is lost both in individual caste level as well as in the wider level of total society. In Dharmasastra, ostracized people are referred as ‘anyaja’ Chandala or naradhom. No members of society is allowed to come into contact or mixed with ‘anyaja’. Antyaja are the ostracized member of caste Hindu society who are referred as Chandala.

But the caste Hindu people often used the terms- Chandala or Asura to refer the non-Hindu or tribal people beyond the fold of caste Hindu society, too. Neither they neither are the offspring of the ostracized caste Hindu people nor polluted by any kind of sin as explained in the Dharmasastra. In that case the concept of Dharmasastra has nothing to do with them. Instead of social meaning it bears racial or ethnological meaning. The concept Chandal referring to Namusudra people of Bengal and other places is misinterpretation of the Manava Dharmasastra. H.H. Risely held that a tribe was development out of race; while a caste was development out of tribe. Chandalas (Namasudras) were tribes, who had gradually embraced Hinduism, accepted Hindu social organization and thus had hardened into a caste.35 Supporting the idea of H.H.Risely Ronald Indene says, “Risely’s typology of the Namasudra (Chandalas) appeared as tribal, that is, they were beyond the jurisdiction of caste Hindu society. ‘Chandala Raja’ once ruled in the forest of Bengal. The tribes in this scheme appeared as a tribal chiefdom.36

So, the concept of Chandal ‘antyaja’ is applicable only in case of those people whose membership in the caste Hindu society were lost due to their sinful act and ostracized there after
Real Chandalas are those who are the descendent of sinful criminals and members of illicit union of Sudra male and Brahmin female within caste Hindu society. *Chandala* was a generic term for heterogenous groups of people beyond the Hindu Social structure in ancient time, used by the caste Hindu people. This term was used to refer to other people beyond the fold of Hindu society as they do not have any regards to and follow the rules of Hindu Dharmasastra. They were equated with the ostracized member of Hindu society. Namasudras are neither the descendent of the illicit union of lower caste male and higher caste female nor they are the descendents of 'antyaja' ostracized members of Hindu society. Gobinda Chandra Basak says, “The social status of ancient Chandalas, were not the untouchable or Panchama Varna, nor were the Namosudras the lowest of the low in Bengali Hindu society.” 

“The Namosudras were not Chandalas for they had nothing in common with the traditional Chandalas described in Sastra.”

Tribal chiefs or kings adopted Hindu religion purely on political reason for his own interest to make his political power, authority and domination over the rest, more secure and sustainable, and the common people accepted Hindu culture and religion to get relief from the state of *naraka* or from the state of being hated, i, e., to get relief from all kinds of social discrimination and exploitation made upon them by the higher and purer and stronger castes, being their lower and impure position in the society. Development of different caste categories amongst newly Hinduised people during the reign of Koch king shows finest example of Hinduisation and structural development of caste system. Non-Hindu people started their entry in the ladder of caste hierarchy, as ‘Sudra’ by accepting Hindu religion is partially correct and only applicable to common people. Elite sections of the society directly accommodate in the higher position in the caste hierarchy. Members of royal dynasty acquired *Divine* status, people who involved in the affairs of security of society as ‘Kshatriya’ landed or wealthy sections acquired the status of *Kayastha, Bhuya*, Oja or medicine man who engaged in the treatment of diseases as ‘*Vaidya*’. Similarly the people who performed the role of community priest retained the status of *priesthood*. The Brahmins brought from Varanasi or the west replaced the community priests, ‘Kalita’ or ‘Deosree’ or ‘Deori’ is partially correct. Indeed the Brahmins brought from the west enjoyed better position than Deosree, Deori or Kalita, the community priests, due to their command over the Hindu Sastras and religion. Some of the community priests, *Kalitas or Deosrees or Deoris* turned into pure Brahmins by cultivation and acquisition of the symbolic norms of the Vedic Brahmin. We have examples in Assam history how an ordinary warrior turned into Brahmins during the Ahom Kings. Transformation of society from
non-Hindu to Hindu began initially in the form of tribe-caste mobility in a horizontal order and then in the form of Caste mobility from lower to higher in the caste hierarchicy. That was the process of social transformation, which had taken place everywhere. Newly converted Bodos or Meches are called as Koch. The term Rajbongshi etymologically connotes the people belong to Kings family. Both the members of royal family and the Common Koches considers themselves as the descendents of the same ancestors or same race and hence identify themselves as Rajbongshi. There is difference between Sudra and Koch. In Hindu religious parlance Koches are below than real Sudras.

The cognate terms popularly used in lower Assam and North Bengal, the ‘Koch’ is more ancient than Rajbongshi. According to some scholars the term Koch is derived from ku-vasa, means bad mouth or language. That is Koch means speaker of bad language or unintelligible language and eater of bad or polluted food. Every term used to identify the Bodos or other tribes connotes degraded and uncivilised socio-cultural position. It was a historical truth and the Hindu people were very much governed by the principles of casteism. We cannot evaluate this process of social change as good or bad because it was an urge of the elite sections of the society and it was the historical trend of the time.

But history of Koch-Rajbongshi would remain quite incomplete and would be unhistorical if the history and ethnography of the culture and civilization of the Proto-Koch part of their history is kept alienated. Setting aside the history of Pre-Hindu civilization from the history India, become a regular tradition, which was initiated by the nineteenth century Indologists, and historians under the influence of nineteenth century concept of Aryanism fostered by the European writers. Common Koches do not like to trace their origin with the Bodo, Mech or Kachari due to fear of infamy created by the caste prejudice. If the ethnological existence and identity of Koch- Rajbongshi, is post Hinduised socio-cultural phenomena, we must accept the fact that, they possessed Proto-Koch-Rajbongshi identity before Hinduisation, i.e., Bodos. Koch-Rajbongshis constituted major segment of the Hindu population in North-Bengal and undivided Goalpara district. The Muslim populations of this area, both indigenous and migrated are also bearing the elements of this people. According to H.N. Choudhury, a major sections of Koch-Rajbongshi converted to Islam due to degraded status in which they had been allocated being newly converted Hindus or being the lowest grade of Caste Hindu society. He says, “Most of these people being refused a decent status under the Hindu Religion, very wisely adopted Islam in preference to hold Hinduism. The
higher Grade styled themselves Rajbongshis. A remnant only still adheres to the language, creed and custom of their forefather."42

The concept that some Khastriyas from other areas migrated to the east and formed Koch-Rajbongshis is totally absurd. Khastriya means warrior or defender of the land or people and they constitute one of the strata of Hindu Socio-Cultural system. Non-Hindu Chief, Rulers, leaders or Kings who ever accepted Hindu religion were recognized as Kshatriya or Rajbongshi. The term Rajbongshi is Synonyms of Kshatriya. Jat, Rajput, Raji, etc. are the synonymous terms for Kstariya used in other parts of India. In different places, newly emerged ruling class (Rajas) after conversion to Hinduism, were known by different names. Rajatantra with strong biasness to casteism is a system of polity, which was popularly imitated by tribal or other non-Hindu chiefs of non-Aryan origin. Migration and invasion by the Aryan invaders over the Non-Aryans and created caste-ridden society, is not a regular and only approach for the formation Khsatriya jati. Multi disciplinary approaches to the reconstruction of ancient Indian history and civilization inflicted that, origin and development of monarchy in India with biasness towards caste system was not due to single factor but due to a variety of factors. System of Monarchy already existed in the East, or ‘Prachya’ even before coming into contact with the Aryan Culture and civilization. Bhaskar Varman is an historical evidence of such example and we have series of kings in the similar category from Anga, Bonga, Magadha and Kamrupa of ancient India.

Jalia, Koibarta, Tiyar, Bania, Malu, Kohar, lohar, tanti, sonar, teli, mali, Kayastha, Bhuiya, Vaidya, Ksatriya, even Brahmin do not represent any particular ethnic, linguistic, ethnic and racial or regional groups. Rather we have all these category of caste groups in all places, languages, and races living in different parts of India. Identifying particular caste with particular ethnic, race, and linguistic groups is totally unacceptable. Rather each caste strata represent only structurally and functionally arranged symbolic and ideal norms of roles and statuses. A Caste category is a socio-cultural group. Positions of caste strata in the hierarchy, accommodated through a long historical process. We may have white Brahmin, black Brahmin, Brown Brahmin, Yellow Brahmin, with short as well as long height. Similarly, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras etc. All Brahmins from different regions do not conform to common biological features to put them into particular racial category as defined by the anthropologists. There is also no scientific explanation as to why Brahmin
and Kshatriyas are only from distinct racial family, i.e., Caucasoid and not from Mongoloid or Negroid. In contrary we can say that the people from any racial category could acquire symbols and ideological norms structurally and functionally designed for particular caste stratum, for which a Brahmin is regarded as Brahmin or a Kshatriya is regarded as Kshatriya. Almost all the Rajas, Rulers or Kshatriyas from Northeast and Bengals were from Kirata- Mongoloid or Non-Aryan origin. They acquired Kshatriyahood by the acceptance of structurally and functionally defined norms and symbols through the initiation of Hindu religion. Groups of people living in different geographical, socio-cultural circumstances developed their respective caste features and often governed and controlled and regulated by supra-mundane power and authority. Formations of caste strata with durable and honorable role and status needs sophisticated economic and political and socio-cultural basis. And to regulate the entire society with hierarchically arranged and socially discriminated value system needs a centralized authority of political power. Because, one of the principles of caste is based on the principle of discrimination, inequality, high and low, exploitation and opposition to each other. Social status in the caste hierarchy upward or downward must be recognized by the supra-mundane authority and at the same time must not affect the equilibrium of the society. Each caste stratum performs its respective functions from its own station voluntarily and spontaneously on the dictates of the doctrine of religion is psychologically not viable and opposed to the nature of human being. **Survival of the fittest; stronger, either physically or mentally rules over the weak,** is the basic principle governing the origin, development and structure and functions of caste system. Caste system was developed in order to serve the interest of the stronger at the cost of suppression of the weak.

The census of 1901 recorded all the cognate groups of Koch (Earlier Koch) as Rajbongshi and the Census of 1911 recognised all Koches as Rajbongshis. It is quite true that all the Bodo or Mechies and their cognate groups did not convert to Hinduism at one time or a period of time. Rather it was a long historical process from prehistoric to the post independent time. In the subsequent Censuses both Koches and Rajbongshis are separated. Koches of lower Assam and Bengal are shown as Bratya Ksatriyas or degraded Kshatriyas and many backward caste people from Murshidabad, Nadiya, Choubbis Pargana, Haora, Hugli, and Medinipur were brought under the Rajbongshi category. Difference between the Rajbongshis of North and South Bengal are basically:

1. Ethnic basis is more prominent among the Rajbongsis of North Bengal. On the other hand, structural and functional (caste) basis is prominent among the Rajbongshis of South Bengal. Many
of the Rajbongshis of the south Bengal developed their respective caste identities through the process of acculturation, Sanskritisation, Hinduisation and social mobility. Sometimes caste statuses and occupations were imposed upon the weak by the stronger, particularly; it is applicable in case of low, backward, polluting and impure caste. Newly converted people are generally put in the Low categories of caste hierarchy. If Sanskritisation is accepted as the process of social transformation or absorption of non-Hindus or tribes into Hindu social structure, and upward mobility of tribes or low caste from lower to higher; we can put the Rajbonshis of South Bengal as the Hindised Koches or cognates of the Rajbongshis of North-Bengal. With certain biological explanation we can, without hesitation, put them together into one homogenous group. Their biological difference is definitely due to influence of socio-cultural and geographical environment. From biological, linguistic, religious and socio-cultural point of view we do not find basic difference between the two. Difference is not based on race, rather based on relative socio-cultural distances.

Till independence we find the process of absorption of the tribal and primitives into Hindu social structure and which was continued unabated till independent in a large scale. For their group identity they used the term Rajbongshi and the language spoken by these people is known as Rajbongshi language. Construction of Rajbongshi identity is the result of psychological drive of Hindu Philosophy in the group level to raise the status of their own group. And it was the result of the Kshatriya movement started by the Great Rajbongshi leader named Panchanan Varma who was also leader of national movement from that community. One of the detrimental features of caste Hindu society is social inequality and opposition each other among the members of different caste strata. Inequality and opposition are apparent even among the members of the same caste stratum. Therefore the principle of opposition, ‘higher and lower, pure and impure’ is not only in the inter-caste level but it is evident even within the members of same caste stratum level. Therefore concept and features of individual caste stratum developed in fragmented level in different socio-cultural and economic circumstances and enforced and regulated by the central authority of power. Mobilisation of Caste Organization in horizontal level took place only during the days of British rule under the protective discrimination and when lower caste people were for the first time granted the right to equality before law.

Hinduised Bodos or Koches established their identity as Koch-Rajbongshi through organized movement under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Verma just at the moment when they were going to disintegrate into numerous functionally divided individual caste strata. He was
born in Khalichamari Village of Mathabhanga, West Bengal. He was born out of holistic conjugal union of Khosal Chandra Sarkar and Champala Devi. Before the crystallization of this group into functionally separate rigid-individual caste strata, the movement for Kshatriyahood turned into the movement of identity formation of Rajbongshi Community started under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Verma, the great. He happened to be one of the militant Hindu nationalist leaders. Under the orthodox Hindu nationalist leaders the National move gained Hindu tinge thorough out in India and reconstruction of Indian Nation on the basis of the Vedic principle became the motto of the nationalists. Number of Reformist Hindu Religious Organizations, took important roles in this regard. Reformation and Reconstruction of Indian society took under the leadership of militant Hindu nationalist Organization took All Indian National Character. Thakur Panchanan Verma took striking role in the upgradation of lakhs and lakhs of Koches and Proto-Koch people into Kshatriya–Rajbongshi status in Bengal and Assam. The process of Hinduisation among the Proto-Koch-Rajbongshi people of South Bengal was taken much earlier than the north Bengal and structural-functional features of caste had already achieved in maturity putting them into lowest caste status, i.e., Panchama Varna (anyaja or untouchable). The Koch Rajbongshi people of south Bengal had the opportunity to come in contact with the people, ideas and civilization of the west earlier than the people of the north, as Kolkata happened to become the capital of British-East India Company and center of western culture and civilization. Due to contact with the western culture and civilization social, economic, cultural, religious, political consciousness grew earlier amongst them in comparison to the people of other areas of north and north-eastern India and help in the identity formation of Namasudra. Namasudra movement of the 19th century was neither influenced by the ideology of the Brahmin nor Brahmanism, which had been reference model of life for the Namasudra. New pattern of rational values based on western ideas and civilization fostered by western education, created a sense of self-respect and identity consciousness among them and fought against the centuries of social discrimination and economic exploitation by the higher caste. It was only through the intervention of superior state power that they could circumvent their handicap. The movement which was started as protest movement against the dominant high caste trying to carve out place for themselves in the new competitive world of professions and institutional politics brought them closure to the colonial government. Later the same movement was by the clever manipulation of the high caste Bangali nationalists turn into anti-Islamic and but Pro-Congressi and pro-Hindu movement seeking legitimation for higher ritual status for themselves within the existing wider Hindu social structure. Both Rajbongshi and Namosudra movements were the
parts of the efforts of the reconstruction of Hindu Society under the leadership of Reformist Hindu Nationalists and high caste Congressi Bangali Boardwalk. These people live in the area in which Varman, Pal, Sen, Salstambha and Koch dynasty flourished. Archaeological evidence say that Pal and Sen dynasties have genealogical affinities to Asura king Narak-Bhadadatta. When the people of south Bengal flourished with western ideas and civilization, then the Koch Mech people of North Bengal practiced their undergrade Hindu culture and tradition. Koches are Hinduised Kirata-Bodos who sacrificed their ancestral belief and language and accepted Hindu religion and Aryan language.

According to Rakhaldas Bondopadhyay, penetration and extension of Aryan language and culture was started in Magadha in 6th B.C. The indigenous primitives gave up their language and traditions and accepted the culture, tradition and religion of the Aryans. Within two-three hundred years entire northern belt of Ganges came under the total influence of Aryan culture and Civilization. If we accept the view of Rakhaldas Bondopadhyay we can very safely conclude that, before the emergence of Aryan culture and language in the entire belt of Uttarapatha including Magadha and other areas were the habitat of non-Aryan speaking people. Often these people were termed by the scholars as Austric and ancestors of the migrants of the Yangchikian allied to the old Chinese language family group. And the name of river Ganga is believed to be an example of Sanskritization from some Austric (purely Bodo) Indo-China as Me-Khong, i.e., Ma-Gang or Mother river. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee also held the similar view. In Bodo language Ma means mother and Gang means River or thirst. Almost all the ancient toponomy that are purely Bodo or Proto-Koch terms in meaning and structure, linguistically, are identified by name historians as Austric terms, which is not based on scientific study of language.

Before the Aryanisation, the Rajbongshis of Assam and Bengal spoke Non-Aryan Koch language similar to Rabba speech. This view is partially true. The concept of Koch is post a Hinduised socio-cultural phenomenon which was not taken only among the Rabhas but sooner or later amongst almost all subgroups of the Bodo race. The Koches of Manikachar of Dhubri district and some pocket areas of Goalpara district of Assam and Meghalaya still speak language quite similar to Rabba language that positively indicates that earlier to Hinduisation some Koches had been originally belonged to Rabha group. The view, ‘Prior to Aryanisation, the Rajbongshis spoke
uniform Koch language', cannot be accepted as historically viable and impartial. Because Koches
are non-but Hinduised Bodos and allied group and Hinduisation or conversion was followed by
the acceptance of Aryan language and culture what is now known as Rajbongshi language. Koch
identity is Post Hinduised phenomena. Hence prior to Hinduization and formation of Koch ethnicity,
the existence of uniform and common Koch language is mere a fiction, not a reality.

Around 4th or 5th century AD Sangla Dev established a kingdom with capital at Gour who was
possibly of Mech or Koch origin. It is said that he was the ancestor of Bhagadatta. In ‘Khurved
Jahanama’ it is stated that, the Koch king Mangla Dev vanquished a Brahmin ruler and established
Gour City on Mandar hill. From the time of the ascendency of Sangla Deva the rule of the Koch
dynasty was started. According Kasim Ferista, Biswa Singha and his father Haria Mandal was
the descendent of King Sangla Dev of 5th Century AD, Kamrupa. According to S.K.Chatterjee,
Bhaskar Barman was the descendent of the Hinduised Mlechha of the Non-Hindu Mongoloid
family, which had been accepted within the fold of Hindu Orthodoxy.

According to E.A. Gait, the capital of Kamrupa during Bhaskar Barman was in undivided
Goal para or Rongpur, in the northern part of Koch Behar. In the course of history the original
Barman dynasty split into a number of lineages. After Bhaskar Barman, Salstambah became
powerful and established a new dynasty. He was distant relative of Barman family.

From 8th to 11th century AD, Kamrupa was ruled by Pal Kings. From 10th to 11th
century, a Pal king known as Bhagadatta Pal ruled in Madhupur (Maimonsing District of Present
Bangladesh) He is also identified himself as Koch.

During and even after the invasion of Tibet by Mahammad Baktiyar in 13th century A.D. the
rulers of north Bengal reigned as independent kings. In his description it is clearly stated that, their
target of invasion was 'Tibet' but they actually made invasion on 'East Kamrup', i.e., North
Bengal and Old Goalpara district. That is during his time entire geographical area of present day
Assam was not covered within Kamrup. Or he read eastern Kamrup wrongly as Tibet or by Tibet
they meant Eastern Kamrup (North Bengal and Goalpara district). That is, the definition of Kamrup
during that time perhaps covered only up to North Bengal and Goalpara district with its capital at 
Rongpur and other parts of Assam was regarded as Tibet. In his descriptive accounts of Tibet 
invasion, he stated about the habitation of Meches and Koches in Goalpara, Rongpur, Jalpaiguri, 
and Koch Behar and their domination continued up to 14th century.61

In 1250 AD Sandhya Roy established a ruling dynasty in Kamatapur and his kingdom 
includes integrated old Goal Para district, Jalpaiguri, Maimonsingh district and present day Barpeta 
and Nalbari district also.62

After Sandhya Roy, Sindhu Roy, Durlov Narayan, Neelodhwaj were the rulers who 
consecutively ruled from the same dynasty and who were Koch by race.63 Sudhir Ranjan Das, the 
president of the Archaological deptt. of Calcutta University and archaeologist Omiya Kumar 
Bondopadhyay, stated the names of king Durlav Narayan, Kameswar, Kanteswar, etc. in their 
archeological work, 'Koch Bihar Jelar Purakirti' as the Koch King. Perhaps they reigned during 
14th century A.D.64

On the basis of the ethnographic description of Hien Ts'ang of the 7th century AD Kamrupa 
and archaeological evidences, Sunity Kumar Chatterjee, RM Nath, Padmanabha Vidya Vinode 
say that almost all the subjects of Varman kings were Bodos, and the first king of the Varman 
dynasty, Pushya Varman, the founder of Varman dynasty was the descendant of Mairang Danava 
or Bhagadatta dynasty and closely related to Salstabha dynasty by blood 65 After the death of 
Bhaskar Varman, Salstambha came into power and founded Salstambha dynasty. By examination 
of copper plate grant of Ratnapal, Sunity Kumar Chatterjee affirmed that Salstambha was Bodo 
Chief of Mech tribe.66 Padmanabha Vidya Vinode, K. L. Baruah are also agreed with S.K Chatterjee 
and affirmed that Salstambha was the descendent of Bhagadatta.67

After the death of Tyagashimha, the last ruler of Salstambha dynasty, Pal dynasty rose into 
power. According to another inscription of Ratnapala, the first king of Pal dynasty was the relative 
of Tyagashimha. So the Palas were also descendants of Hidimba-Bhagadatta dynasty. Palas also 
traces their origin to Naraka-Bhagadatta family.68 The ancestry of the Palas is, therefore, a clear 
proof of their belonging to Mech or Bodo race.69
During 1416-1418 a King Donuja Mardana ruled over Bengal. He was Koch Chief, that he was racially Bodo or Mech tribe. Eastern Bodos were known as Kacharis. They established Kachari, Chutiya, Moran, and Barahi, Tipra kingdom, in different places of Assam. In different parts of Assam archaeological sites have been discovered and scientific and unbiased studies are required to ascertain their society-culture and civilization. Scientific study, inclusive of interdisciplinary approaches like archaeology, comparative language, culture, traditions, anthropology, history of religion, ethnography, economy, political system etc. Excessive reliance on classical literatures without supported by other disciplines misled entire history of India as well as the history Eastern India in particular. Classical literatures were the creations of the Brahmins and Kayasthas patronized by the ruling class and hence the egos, ethos, interest and attitudes of these classes (elite or aryas) constituted guiding factors in the creation of classical literatures and so also the writings of history of India in pre-independent historical period.

On the basis of archaeological evidence of ancient Kamrupa, Amanat Ullah Ahmad, stated that King Neelodhwas, the founder of Sen or Khyen dynasty was Koch by lineage. Bucchanon Hemilton termed King Neelodhwas as ‘Khyen’ (probably corrupted form of Sin) a sub-caste of Hinduism. He popularly heard as, Neelodhwaj was said to be the member of Assura dynasty and the Rajbongshi people of that time accepted him as the member of their own race. Thus we find the mentioned of a number of Koch or Bodo kings ruling in different parts of Assam and Bengal, even before the establishment of Koch kingdom by Raja Biswasingha in 16th century AD.71

Haria Mandal (Aryanised form of Haoria Mech) established Koch-Kingdom. This kingdom flourished into a great empire under Nara-Narayana and his kingdom comprised of North-Bengal, Western Assam up to old Darrang district, Khasia & Jayantia Hills, Sylhet, Tripura, Rongpur, and Dinaspur. King Vishwa Singha adopted Hinduism through initiation and created new genealogy for him tracing his lineage to God Siva. Along with mass Bodo people he converted to Hinduism “It is said that the Mech Raja of Koch Bihar, became Hindu and assumed the title of Rajbongshi and declared himself as the son of Siva.”71 During his days the process of Hinduisation spread through out the tracts of Bengal and Assam mainly inhabited by the Bodos. The facts stated above clearly indicates that the people of Bodo origin primarily inhabited Bengal and Assam and they along with their kings converted to Hinduism.
The concept of king and governance was the result of economic, political and socio-cultural evolution. It is the later phase of hunting and food gathering civilization from economic point of view and it is the later phase of the tribal chieftain-chief. Chieftain-chief system of polity is relevant only with the tribal stage of simple society. The term simple society refers to small-scale societies with a relatively simple economic technology. Such societies are not only small in size but also their control over the environment. The term ‘Raja’ according Romila Thapar derived from ‘Raj’, the meaning of which is ‘to shine’ or ‘to stand out’. Clan and tribes are more often under the control of chiefs and possibly the raja referred to a chief rather than a king. Chiefs can have extensive powers without actually being kings. Raja gradually evolved into king and gradually transform into Rajanya then into ksatriya. So the concept of Raja has its root to the chief of clan or tribe. With small-scale market economy, their scope for specialization on the principle of division of labour is restricted. ‘Chief of the clan or tribe i.e., ‘raja’ translated almost automatically as king’. To be a king one must have wealth, power, authority and domination. There must be some one to govern or to work out the system of government. Only then we can imagine the system of Raj or Government. In Bodo language the etymological meaning of the term, ‘Raja’ is composed of two separate words, like, Ra means powerful, mighty, strong, mature and ‘ja’ means to become. The complete meaning of Raja stands for to become powerful, to become mighty, to become strong, to become mature. Similarly the Rani is composed of Ra+ni. Ra means powerful, mighty etc. and ni is used as suffix showing in possession of something by some one. Full meaning is, some one (specific woman) who is meant only for the Raja not for other. Example, Ram+ni = Ramni (Ram’s), ang+ni = angni (mine), nwng+ni = nwngni (yours), ra+ni = Rani (king’s) or women meant only for king (raja) or who has become strong.

The concept of king before Hinduisation is just a ruler and secular in nature. The people addressed kings as the ‘pha’ or ‘apha’ or ‘be-pha’ means father, master or lord a purely human, temporal and secular but most powerful one; ‘Pha’ term is more secular and less divinity in meaning. The Bodo people worship their ancestor or forefather but they never equated their ancestors with god or goddess. Oldest man of the community holds the position of chief of the clan. As per historical records the order was maintained by the principle of lineage. The headship is more ritual and symbolic than substantial. Almost all the kings of the Bodo family from ancient Assam added the epitaph of ‘pha’ with their names Mahmanikpha, Sukrengpha, Sudampha etc. The kings of Ahom dynasty were also used the epithet of ‘pha’. According to celebrated historians of Assam.
‘pha’ denotes ‘lord of the heaven’. It is very much doubtful because conversion of monarchy into a divine institution was started among the non-Aryans, like Ahom, Kocharis and others only with the Hinduisation of the Kings and their society. ‘Pha’ is a non-Aryan term and the retention of the term ‘pha’ after Hinduisation of the king is not acceptable from Hindu ethical point of view. The popular use of the term ‘pha’ by the Ahom kings indicates that they maintained non-Aryan features of polity till the arrival of Muslim in Assam and they maintained close socio-cultural and matrimonial relationship with the people of Bodo origin. ‘Pha’ is undoubtedly Bodo derivation. The Bodo language, culture and civilization till 16th and seventeen century, had maintained Pan-Baric psychology in entire Assam and northeast India.

Hinduisations of the king upgrade the institution of monarchy into divine institution and individual and family status of the king into divine status. He becomes different from all people. He becomes more than a king beyond temporal human. He becomes divine and superhuman. His power and position becomes a subject of divine institution. He creates a new genealogy and myth for him tracing his origin with some supernatural power or divine power or God or goddess just after initiation to the throne. He becomes above all, above all social structure. King enjoys divine position. He becomes absolute. To disobey the king is not only a breach of political obligation, it is also at the same time a breach of religious obligation.

In classical Indian history the terms hayung, hathum, halam, harung, hadab, harubu, hadung, hasong, hasam are rarely found mentioned without any explanation from linguistic point of view. These terms represent more political and less geographical in meaning. Hasong (Village Council) is an administrative unit in village level and the head of Hasong is known as Hasung-gwra. Hadung or Hadeng is administrative unit consisting of twelve villages and the head of this unit is known as hadung-gwra. Pratap Chandra Choudhury mentioned, ‘Hathum’ a place in Orissa in which Pragjyotishpura the capital of Narakasura was located. Pratap Choudhury stated four Pragjyotishpura in his work and one is located at Hathum in Orissa. Ha means land thum means high or heap, meaning country of high land. The term indicates that the Bodo speaking people also inhabited once in Orissa. The term Hayung and hayung-thal is often referred in the history of Assam Hayung is definitely Bodo term indicating a waste land ruled by king. Tha means live and al means man, as, people (Bang+al=Bangal (people of the extended land;
Nephalw+al=Nephal, the people who looks after herds; Sao-tha+al=Saothal, the people who have the practice of burning body etc.). Ha-rung or ha-rubu means soft land or fertile land. Harubu + Iswar = Harupewar, the King of the fertile land. Hasam is derived from two terms, ha and sam. Ha means land and sam means fertile, i.e., fertile country or land. The term ‘ha’ is also referred to mean ‘to win over the other’ or ‘to victory over the other’ and ‘sa’ means people. It is quite similar to the explanation made by Banikanta Kakati and other celebrated Assamese historians explained in connection with the origin and development of the term ‘Assam’. Kakati’s explanation is very much doubtful from philological point of view. From ethno-psychological point of view “the land of the victors with the name of the language of the vanquished” can hardly be existed. There is no doubt on the occupation Assam by Ahom. But philological and ethno-psychological point of view ‘Kakoti’s theory of the origin of Assam cannot be accepted. The term Assam might be derived from Hasan, means ‘land of the rising sun or eastern country’. Because in classical Hindu literature, the land situated towards the eastern side of Arya desha were repeatedly referred as the Pracchya desa. In Bodo language, Ha (land) + San (sun) = Hasan (land of the rising sun or Eastern countries). From Hasan, it gradually turn into Hasam > Assam. To define the jurisdiction of ancient Assam is quite difficult now. Multi-disciplinary approaches to the study of ancient Indian history will help in the reconstruction of history of ancient Assam.

Naraksur is the first Hinduised king of Kirata-Bodo origin. In classical Hindu literature it is stated that Narakasura was born and brought up in Mithila. The myth relating the birth of Narakasura is purely a myth in order to create a new genealogy for Narakassur. Narakasura’s birth out of the union of Pig incarnation of Lord Vishnu and the mother goddess of Earth was just a symbolic for adaptation of Hinduism by Naraka and consequently creation of Bhouma or Borah dynasty for him tracing his origin with Lord Vishnu. After Hinduaisation he adopted a new genealogy for him tracing his origin with the Pig incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Most of the celebrated historian regarded him as the first king of the Bhouma or Borah dynasty. Tracing the origin of Narakasura and his dynasty with Bhouma or Lord Vishnu is a myth. On the basis of this myth we may safely conclude that, Bodos are the descendents of Lord Vishnu. But in classical Hindu literature Narakasura was projected as the archenemy of Lord Vishnu and stated him as the worshipper of Goddess Kamakhya, Durga or Kali and behaved himself as the archenemy of the Lord Vishnu until death. In the classical Hindu literature the descendents of Narakasur were also found not as the worshiper of Vishnu, rather found as the worshippers of Siva, the Kirata God and considered themselves as...
the descendants of Hiramba-Bhagadatta dynasty. From the epithet of 'assura’ we can confidently assume that Narakasur and his descendents for generations did not come under the pale of Hinduism. He reigned as an asura king with pride and dignity with his own culture and social identity. The Aryan culture and religion was just in the transitional and emerging stage and still to hold its grips among the masses of Naraksura. The myth of Borah incarnation might be later day creation which had actually been non-existent during the days of Narakasura. Because, theoretically it is seen that after acceptance of Hinduism, king creates a new genealogy for him tracing his origin with particular Hindu God and abandoned his earlier socio-cultural and ethnic identity. It became the popular tradition associated with conversion of Kings to Hinduism till the time of Koch, Barahi, Chutia and Ahom Kings. Retaining of the epithet of asura after conversion to Hinduism is contrary to Hindu ethical point of view. But it is very difficult to understand the dichotomy of Aryan and Non-Aryan or Sura and Asura, Danava and Manava dichotomy. Perhaps, most probably, the concept is based on socio-cultural distance rather than race. Because it is seen that the primary Gods and goddesses of Hindu religions are of Non-Aryan. What we know as Aryan language is also a synthesis of the structural and physiological elements of different languages, like Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan languages.

From mythological description we may rather consider Bhagadatta, as the first king from Bodo-Mech or Proto-Koch origin to be Hinduised. The historicity of this myth is subject to scientific verification. His relation with Kaurava was very comfortable and he participated in the eighteen-day epic war of Kurukshetra in favour of Kaurava. Similarly Heramba-Ghatutkusha (Gedet-Kocha) maintained relationship with Pandava and participated in the epic war in favour of Pandava. Participation of Bhagadatta and Ghatutkusha in the war of Kurukshetra gives us different picture and impression of social cultural relationship between Asura and Manava. During epic time Indian people were not divided and discriminated into Sura-Asura, Deva-Danava concept. The idea of purity-pollution, high and low, associated with the concept of Varna and caste system was perhaps much later day creation of smritikar and purankar during the time of feudal kings, the time when, the principles of caste discrimination, like, purity and pollution, superiority and inferiority, endogamy, hereditary occupation and the principles of opposition to each other, taboos relating to food etc, were taken into rigid shape. It was perhaps much later day social phenomena after the advent of Buddhism and Jainism.
4.4 Edmund Leech, identifies some important features of caste such as hierarchical division, hereditary occupation, endogamy, taboo relating food, principle of opposition to each other and ideals of purity and pollution etc. Caste system is not uniform and universal everywhere and features of caste differ from place to place. Here our important concern is not the pattern of change in a society with caste structure but how a society structurally and functionally different from Caste-Hindu society develops the features of caste system. M.N Srinivas dealt both with the Vertical Change and the horizontal change. According to him the direction of change in the traditional Hindu society or pre-British India was oriented towards the achievement of high status and it was slow and gradual as a process. The direction of change and achievement of higher status was determined by number of factors. People with wealth and property, political power and authority, specialization in certain field have more potentiality to conform to the essential norms, values and ideals prescribed for the achievement of higher status for higher caste. We have clear examples in Indian history. King Viswa Singha of Kamatapur, after conversion to Hinduism recognized as Rajbongshi. Most of the celebrated historians tried to identify the courtiers of Viswa Singha and Naranarayana as indigenous, 'deshi' Kayastha, Vaidya etc. different from Koch-Mech group. Common subjects are identified as 'deshi' and treated different from Koch-Mech people. It is absolutely unscientific and fallacious and influenced by caste and race prejudices. In history it is clearly stated that, the courtiers of Viswa were pure Bodo by race. After the conversion King Viswa Singha his courtiers were also converted into Hinduism and maintained status quo in the royal court. Presence of high caste Hindu courtiers in the court of Viswa Singha would not occur prior to conversion into Hinduism. Because association of High caste people with the non-Hindu 'antyaaja' never could take place.

Only after the conversion into Hinduism non-Hindus become eligible to come into contact with the higher caste people. Association of high caste people with non-Hindu people were strictly prohibited as tribes or non-Hindu people were considered as pollutant. Names of the courtiers of Haria Mandal, recorded by the famous historian, Sir E. A. Gait in his work 'A History of Assam' clearly shows that his courtiers were purely Bodo by race. He thus recorded, "He was recognized head of twelve leading families of Mechies or Koches) living in the Pargana, their names are Panbar, Phedela, Phedphedo, Barihana, Kathia, Guabar, Megha, Baisagu, Jagai, Gurikata, Jugbar, and Dakharu. These are most part common Bodo names."
The course and nature of change in the society was very much determined by the dominant caste in traditional Indian society. The historians of Assam are less interested on the scientific study of the Origin and Development of Caste structure in Assam and Assamese society. Some of the scholars depicted highly superficial structure of Caste Hindu society. Most of the modern scholars try to say that in Assamese Hindu society, there are only two castes, i.e., Brahmin and Sudra or Sudir. Sudra consisted of Kayastha, Kalita, Keot, Koch, Nath, Chutiya, and Koibarta. He was supported by many scholars.

From structural and functional point of view there is no caste system in Assamese society. There are categories of castes enjoying dominance and command over the society; probably most of them are the descendents Petty-chiefs, Bhuiyas, leader and head-man of non-Hindu origin who adopted Hinduism long back during the time of Koch, Kachari and Ahom reign. In Assam the principles of caste system was never operated in a pure sense and pure form. In earlier chapters it was stated that Eastern countries, ‘Prachya’ had never been within the pale of Aryan Culture and civilization. It was also stated that, for regulation of caste society, structurally and functionally, strong central political power is needed as caste society is based on the principles of inequality, discrimination, exploitation, purity and pollution and superiority and inferiority. All the caste groups within the caste structure are divided not only hierarchically but also psychologically. Each of the caste categories within the structure is psychologically in opposition to each other based on the principle of social disparity and exploitation. Even the Brahmins are divided into superior and inferior Brahmin. Use of force was a necessary condition to impose caste norms and ideals in all hierarchical level. To consolidate and regularise caste behaviour into spontaneous tradition, structurally and functionally it requires hundred years of time. Process of Aryanization was too late in Assam to attain the caste system into pure and rigid form. Except in some small pocket areas there was no centralized power to regulate the principles of caste. Brahmin is the only category of caste that maintains the norms and ideals prescribed by the Sāstra for them. We cannot arrange different caste groups of Assam in hierarchical order. Except Brahmin, the concept of endogamy had never been followed strictly. Ideas of purity and pollution and superiority and inferiority are also clearly visible only in two levels, i.e., Brahmin on the one hand and people outside the Hindu fold on the other hand. Restrictions on food habit were also confined on beef, liquor and pork only. Caste system was never attained and existed in Assam in pure, rigid and complete form from structural and functional point of view. Before attaining pure and rigid form the process of the
development of caste order in Assam was affected by Arrival of Islam with pan-Indian Islamic Psychology. Modern scholars attribute to the fact that, it is due to late arrival of the process of Hinduisation; and due to lack of necessary span of time, system of caste failed to achieve pure and consolidated form. The arrival of Hinduism is not much ahead of the arrival of Islam in Eastern India. Lastely the establishment of British Empire in India and arrival of western ideas and civilization affected the normal course Hinduisation and process of the development of caste structure among the people of Assam.

Most of the writers of Pre-independent time held the view that the people, Aryan by race through war and conquest upheld the Process of Aryanisation over the vanquished what is now proved as fallacious. Now it is proved that there were no such people Aryan by race; rather Aryans were none-but ruling class or elite sections of the society with wealth, intellect, power and authority that exercised controlled over the society. The converted elites, i.e., tribal chiefs or bhuyas, kings and head of the communities, after adoption of Hindu religion maintained status-quo in the new order and obtained similar position over their subjects and patronized immensely in spreading of Hindu religion, language, culture and civilization. The king or chief become the center of new social order, and new structural order of Hindu society slowly developed centering the king around. Absorption of non-Hindus within Hindu social structure and accommodating them in lowest ladder of caste hierarchy was regular process of Hinduism. Excess amount of wealth was used by people for obtaining services from Brahmin in performing religious rites for purification and achievement of high status in the society. Economically weaker sections of the society were compelled to remain in lower ladder of caste hierarchy.

Nicolas Darks in his study shows that, the hierarchical arrangement of pre-colonial South Indian Society was not based on the concept of purity and pollution but based on the relative distance of each group from the monarchical power. That is, the status and position of each caste obtained legal sanction and naturalized only by the approval of the authority of the king. This type of references may be drawn in case of the origin and development of caste structure in Assamese and Bengali society. Ultimate authority to define caste status and position of a new group was held by the king and Brahmin, the royal priest. The Brahmin and king determine structural model of Hinduisation. And the process of caste identity formation of a particular person or group completes with certain religious rites performed by the Brahmin or priest.
The advent of Vaisnavism in Assam arrived not before 16th century and its extension was very slow. And before the advent of the Vaisnavism, Saivism was the religion of the elite sections of the society. The propagation and conversion of people into Hinduism needed the approval of the king. Initially Sankardeva failed to preach Vaisnavism within Ahom and other tribal Kingdoms because the Kings were totally against the new religion. He was compelled to flee away to Koch Bihar and preached Vaishnavism there under the patronage of the King Naranarayana. Later only with the consent of the kings he came back to Assam and started preaching Vaisnavism in different parts of Assam.

For induction into Hindu social structure from tribal to non-tribal (Hindu) a person has to pass through three stages of religious purification.81 By tribal, basically he means the people from Bodo linguistic groups of Assam, like, Rabha, Boro, Sonowal, Chutia, Mikir, Lalong, Hazong etc. He says, “The first stage of conversion from ‘tribal to Caste Hindu system, starts with self imposed taboo on certain food items (i.e., beef, pork, chicken, rice beer or alcoholic beverages). In the second stage they identify themselves as Khena. A Khena is entitled to invite the religious preceptor, a Brahmin priest for baptism after public veneration for tulasi plant (sacred basil) and adoption of cleaner habits. After receiving religious instructions known as saran and performing bhazan (mode of prayer) a Khena thus becomes a sarania. A sarania always remains under the constant obligation and surveillance of their society. “The next higher stage Bor Koch or Jati Koch is but one step below the twice born caste, Barman (sic) or Kshatriya, which they enter into by performing the prescribed rituals.”82 However a Saraniya is also known as Pani Koch in Goalpara. ” He again says, “A male Bor-Koch or Jati-Koch can further upgrade his social status by observing upanayana ceremony (wearing of sacred thread) which is regarded as the initiation ceremony of the Brahmana (priest) and the Kshatriya (warrior or ruler) caste among the Hindus. Among the Koch Rajbongshi, the person who observes this ritual is considered as a Kshatriya, the caste next to the Brahman in the Hindu Varna scheme.”83 Any one who recognized the sacredness of the Sastras, and refrained from eating forbidden food were admitted into the Kshatriya clan.84 Conversion into Rajbongshi caste used to occur everyday. Any Mech, Koch, Kachari, or Rabha could become Rajbonshi on payment of a small sum to the priest and promising to conform to the rules of the caste.85 This was the regular process of Hinduisation and tribe-caste mobility for centuries of years. The process of social mobility does not exhaust with the achievement of Kshatriya hood. There are instances of achievement of Brahminhood through the process of caste mobility. That is the process in which a
non-Hindu adopts Hinduism and then moves vertically from bottom to highest status of social hierarchy.

During pre-independent time the concept of purity-pollution and superiority and inferiority was visibly found among these categories of people. In the bottom Khena, followed by, Sarania>Pani-Koch>Bor-Koch>Kshatriya>Brahmin. There are categories of people who claim their caste status above the Koch-Rajbongshiis and below the Brahmin. People holding surname like Ganak, Mahanta, Adhikary, Devasarma, Majumder, Choudhury, Bagshi, Mandal, and Bhowmic etc put themselves in this categories and termed them as ‘Yogi’. There is no caste or community discrimination among the ‘Yogis’ and people from any community or ethnic can take initiation to ‘Nath-Yogi, religion. They consider themselves as Proto-Brahmin caste and sections of Yogis achieved the status of Brahmin hood by attachment to God through exercising yoga, dhyana, montra, tapa etc. Tandya Brahmana says that, by conformation of the norms of Vedic Brahmana through initiation of ‘gayatri-diksha and ‘upanayana’ a man can attain Brahmin hood. Manusmriti also stated that, he is the Brahmin who acquired high quality of man by attachment to the study of Veda and ultimate soul and devotion to God.

“Odhyapona modhyoyonong yojono yajonong thoitha
Danong protigrohong choivo Brahmono namo kolpoyote.” (Manusriti).

Yogi–tapaswi stated in the Vedas and Upanishadas are the Brahmins of the first stage. By regular study of Veda and exercise of yoga, dhyana and meditation they achieved the higher-level of spiritual world. Before the rising of the Vaisnavism, the Saivism might have been the reference model of religiosity to which the people were oriented towards and this section of people spread the massage of religion.

Community priest could achieve the status of Pure Brahmin by cultivating the higher and purer form of Vedic knowledge and standard of Brahminic mode of life. Cultivation of Knowledge and ideals of Hindu scriptures and conformation to pure norms of Hindu religious life is the only way to achieve the status of Brahmin. More the purity of life and adaptation to knowledge of Veda and Satra, better and higher the position as Brahmin.

“It is known that a considerable number of Kshatriya became Brahmin, Viswamitra is the notable example. Besides him Devapi, Gorga, Mudgola, Harit and Kanva also achieved the status...
of Brahminhood. In contrary it is seen that, Brahmins also adapted the occupation of the Kshatriya Parasuram, Druna, and Kripa etc. are the example from classical Indian literature. It is cleared that Varna was initially not hereditary and closed in character. Historically, system of caste was so designed that the power and authority of the society would rest in the hands of the elite. The people in the lower ladder in the caste hierarchy was not in a condition to get united and put for common resistance against the exploitation and suppression of the elite even they knew that, elites were responsible for their miseries. Because each of the caste groups in the caste hierarchy is designed on the principle of opposition to each other, purity and pollution, higher and lower from bottom to the top.

Jati system in traditional Indian society is 'a cultural reflection of power relation between the rulers and the ruled.' The pattern of power relation determines the nature of Jati system. The change in the pattern of power relations leads to the change in the nature of Jati relationship. That is the people in the society who acquired more wealth and power gradually come up in the higher ladder of hierarchy and weaker sections involving particularly in manual activities come down to lower ladder of the caste hierarchy and the entire structure adapt and integrate in coordination with the changing pattern of power relation. Possession of wealth, power, knowledge and skills in particular field, numerical strength etc. were the factors helped promotion of status in the society. Protest, revolt and oppositions of the people from lower ladder of the society (serving people) were absorbed by the sacred power and authority. Man expresses his individual entity through his activities and this individual entity in action helps in determining his position in the society.

Gail Ombhat in his study clearly reflected that, the Caste structure in feudal period in India sustained only by the joint efforts of Brahmins and monarchs. It was not the power of religion but will of the dominants that designed the ideals of caste structure and imposed and regulated.

Along with it, adoption of different types of culture and religious ideology, adoption of western idea and philosophy, and adoption of secularism are the new aspects of society without which we cannot understand the specific and particularistic nature of Indian society. Stating from 'Social Change in Modern India' famous work of M N Srinivas, Bondopadhyay and Das Gupta say that diversity developed in the characteristic features of caste system in different places due to sanskritisation, parochialisation, secularization and westernization. According to them diversity,
the characteristic features of caste strata developed due to all these factors. Another important thing to be added here is the relative distance in socio-economic and power position of the incoming group in the context of wider and inter-societal socio-economic and political level. If a person or a group is in a comfortable position economically and socio-politically in pre-Hinduised society, he holds high potentiality to accumulate higher status in the Social hierarchy after Hinduisation. Dipankar Gupta tries to explain the origin and development of jati system with reference to “From Varna to Jati: From the Asiatic to the Feudal mode of Production”. He tries to identify Varna system with Asiatic mode of production and Jati or caste system with Feudal mode of production. He also shows how Production systems in ancient India move from Asiatic to Feudal Mode of Production.

Kalitas or Deosree or Deoris were the royal or community priest during the reign of Viswa Singha before adoption of Hinduism. Even after Hinduisation of Koch or Meches they retained the position of community priesthood. Initially they were not allowed to perform Jayna but in the long run they accommodated themselves with the position of real Brahmin by expertising with the norms of Vedic religion. In this connection a Japanese scholar, Chinkishi Tanigushi stated this way, “After the creation of royal dynasty of Koch-Raj, King Nara Narayan, installed the Brahmins brought from Srihatta as royal priest and deprived the Kalitas, traditional royal priests and Maithili Brahmins from the prestigious position of royal priesthood. Because new Brahmins brought from Srihatta created myth for the king tracing a new genealogy for him with God ‘Narayana’. Basing on this myth Common Koch people started to identify themselves as Koch Rajbongshi. Besides, the people of Kamrup and Chin, i.e., Meches and Hazongs etc. who adapted Hinduism in later period also identify themselves as Rajbongshi. The descendents of Hira on the basis of this myth adopted the divine status, ‘Lord or Master’ for them and used the epitaph of ‘Narayana’. Till the 16th century the priests in the Kamakhya temple were the ‘Kalitas’ from the Koch community. And they were non-but Kalitas.

Every phase of social mobility or up gradation was concluded through rites of purification. Caste or social mobility requires payment to the society in the form of community feast and to the priest in the form of dana and dakshina in traditional Indian society. More the possession of wealth and power; more the potentiality for achievement (mobility) to higher caste position.
Pure form of theoretical concept of Varna system cannot provide us the real picture of the working of caste stratification in Indian society. In reality, there are thousands of castes and sub-caste in India and we cannot define and explain their position with reference to Varna system. Besides, caste and sub-caste, there are many ethnic and untouchable groups beyond the jurisdiction of Hindu social structure.

Jati and Varna system are different from each other but they are interrelated to each other.

Early studies on Indian societies made by Orientalists and Christian Missionaries were absolutely based on classical Hindu literatures through which they try to discover the actual picture of the caste system in rural India. (Luis Dumount and David Pukock in their news magazine, “Contribution to Indian Sociology” published during 1950s started to highlight about ideal and actual forms and functioning of castes system in India. According to them two types of social stratifications are found, one is based on actual or field view another one is ideal or book view.

The government officials and administrators, during colonial regime collected lots of information on Indian societies for administrative purposes through Government surveys and ethnographic records. And the government planners objectified this information for the purpose of identification of the groups.

After 1950, Mackm Marriot started scientific explanation on the jati system of India. Mackm Marriot and M.N. Srinivas were the forerunner in the scientific study of social stratification in India. In the subsequent stages outstanding contributions to the study of jati system in India was made by F.G Beilley (1962), Scarlet Aspstine (1962), Andre Beteille (1963), Adrion Meyer (1970,) Cathlin Goough (1981, 1989). With the publications of their research works a new chapter in the study of jati system in India began.

With the publication of ‘Homo Hierarchies’ a critical works of Luis Domount, ‘ theoretical debates and discourses on jati system and its origin and development was started. These developments brought a radical change in the traditional outlook on caste system and with this, planning for the protection of right and security and development of the people enlisted in the scheduled categories are started and realistic approach was adopted in the study of caste system.
Owen Linch, (1969), Robert Hardgrave (1969), Michael Mofet (1979) undertook to study on the social and political movement of the people in South India. Earlier studies try impressing that religion was the root of everything and the power and authority of religion automatically and spontaneously bound all sections of people together and regulated their relationship. All sections of people follow the rules of religion voluntarily. The idea of purity and pollution, superiority and inferiority were the forces, which determined the structure of Indian society. The ideal, spirit and power of religion defeat the material power of the world. When field studies were started on the actual functioning of caste system in rural areas, they discovered totally different picture. But, the scholars were rather tried to integrate the informations collected in the field situation with that of information recorded in the classical literature. No efforts had been made to reflect the actual pictures of the caste system and its functioning. Rather efforts were made to objectify and impose the classical view on the intellectual society. They failed to show the actual functioning and real picture of caste system in rural India, rather ignored the influence of other factors on caste system like, influence of wealth and property, influence of political power, authority and control and domination; numerical strength of a group etc on the formation, development and functioning of caste system.

Process of Sanskritisation is always explained in terms of fission, i.e., expansion of Hinduism through adoption or imitation of ideals, norms, customs, and traditions, rules of Hindu society. But at the same time we may explain the concept in term fusion, that is by the process of Sanskritisation the tribals or non-Hindu people are adding to the inner core of the Hindu social structure losing their individual socio-cultural entity.

People in the lower ladder of caste hierarchy always try to defy the authority and power of the religion, though they never succeed in their efforts and they were always defeated and absorbed by the power and authority of religion. Regulation of caste order requires strong and central political power with religious sanction. Pre-feudal societies are characterized by mechanical order (Asiatic mode of relationship) where the members followed similar type occupation like. In the archaic stage, societies were egalitarian in character and agriculture was the primary means of livelihood for all. In the course of time, due to the creative urge in man specialization developed among some of people in different field, like, in pottery, weaponry, carpentry, art, craft, ivory works and even in agriculture. Specializations are the inventions of talented members of society and it is not just to

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satisfy the creative ego of the inventor himself but their creation oriented to fulfill certain socio-cultural needs. Specialization came up on the principles of “necessity is the mother of invention.” According to Malinoswki and Redcliffe Brown cultural contents develop in society in order to fulfill certain social needs. Necessity drives man to create cultural contents. According to Herskovit Culture is a man made part of environment to satisfy certain human needs, biological or social. The specialists in different field had enjoyed special honour in the society. In the course of time some people of the society adopted these specialties as the avenues of occupation, which was initially open for all. With the surplus production some people became wealthy and powerful and they began to purchase the services of the specialists and similarly the specialists began to sell their services to wealthy and powerful. In the course of time it becomes hereditary occupation and become an organic part of social structure of traditional society. Indeed adoption of certain trade as a profession or occupation was initially based on efficiency and open for all. People accepted particular trade as his occupation on the ground of economic security. In the course of time it obtained religious sanction and it became mandatory on the part of people to get sanctioned from the society (Ruler) for undertaking occupations what they adopt.

With the development of settled agricultural economy, intelligent, powerful and wealthy sections of society (wealthy, noble, priest, medicine man) came up and the weaks who involved in menial work they remained in the lowest ladder of the social hierarchy. Rigidity in caste system is not found in Eastern and Northeastern India. It is comparatively very loose in comparison to western part of India. According to Nihar Ranjan Roy, it is due to delayed advent of Brahminical culture in the area and predominance of the indigenous culture and tradition on the society.

In twelfth century, during the reign of Pal king, Bengal was completely under the influence of Buddhism and the rigid feature of caste system was still to appear in Bengal. Beginning from twelfth to thirteenth century, during the reign of Sen and Varman dynasty Bangali smritikaras try to install a social order based on Varna model. But they were not successful in their efforts. That is what reflected in the Puranas written in 13th century. That is the process of Hinduisation arrived in Eastern India not much before the arrival of Islam in this region.

According to Nirmal Basu, Varna system was the most influential authoritarian religion exerting tremendous influence on the people of Bengal. The close interaction between the Hindu
religion and indigenous culture brought among them the process of Sanskritisation or the 'Method of Tribal Absorptions' into Hindu Social Structure'.108 Keeping in view of the structural and functional system of caste in Assam we can assume that the arrival of Hinduism in Assam was much later than Bengal. At least we can see strata of caste in visible forms in structural and functional level in Bengal but not in Assam. In another term we may say that arrival of Hinduism in Assam was just further extension of Hinduism from Bengal.

In Hindu social structure there is a provision for accommodating wealthy and powerful sections of people in the higher ladder of social hierarchy.109 Chief, Village head, and community head directly acquired high position in the society. And they patronized Hindu religion, patronized the Brahmins, and built temples. The Brahmins were also satisfied with them and accorded religious sanctions to their high social position. The finest and recent example of this kind of social mobility is the Koch–Rajbongshis of Bengal and Assam. Earlier an example was given from Assam, how tribal people registered into Hindu social structure from lower to higher. In Purulia and adjacent areas of Singhbum similar type of social transformation was taken place in mass level among the Bhumis during 13th-15th century.110 After adoption of Hinduism they retained many of the traditions of their ancestor. Even during the colonial regime the process of the absorption of Non-Hindus into Hindu fold was popularly occurring in many parts of Indian sub-continent. Lots of examples are found in Northeastern region.

Extension of Hinduism brought a new pattern of structural order in the society, social stratification based on the concept of purity and pollution, superiority and inferiority, principles of hereditary occupation, endogamy, taboos relating to food habit etc. Tribal or non-Hindu society moves from egalitarian-mechanical social order to Caste based organic social order. During the colonial regime process of Sanskritisation gained momentum and continued unabated due to constitutional and legal protection of the government to non-Hindu as well as lower caste people.

Since the last part of the 19th century there was renaissance among the middle, lower and untouchable castes. Tribal and untouchable castes were enlisted in the scheduled categories for their protection and they become socio-culturally and politically organized. This freedom was not existed in the pre-colonial régime. Basic reasons were, spread of education, which open their eyes, and realized how they were exploited socially, culturally, politically and economically.
discrimination of the government provides them with security, freedom of conscience, freedom to fulfill the aspiration of the group for development of their own culture, language, identities etc.

The minute examinations of the Hindu philosophy and social structure gives us the impression that besides ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ there are other factors that attributed to the development of caste hierarchy. Indeed, the idea of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ is a very important factor in understanding the complex hierarchical Hindu society.

Andre Beteille say, in European society morality and religiosity played an important role in the evaluation of status in the society.111 Ideals of Classical Hindu literature cannot provide us clear understanding about the present Social structure and internal relationship among the strata in the caste hierarchy. Because, these literature were written in a particular time and in a particular socio-cultural environment and cannot provide references for explanation of the social phenomena developed in later time. With the change of time changes come in the ideas, attitudes and value system. This dynamic part of societies of all time cannot be reflected in this classical literature. The understanding of the dynamic life and culture of later times is impossible within the framework of Vedic literature as thousands of changes have been taken in subsequent time.112

People in common think that in the structural development of Hindu Society, from lower to higher, wealth, power and authority has little role. But this kind of consideration is absolutely wrong. We should keep it in mind that wealth; power and authority played a very important role in the structuring of caste ordered society with hierarchical arrangement.113 Development of caste as a structural and functional system in India is a historical process. Keeping aside the time and socio-cultural, political, religious situation of a particular place we cannot analyze the existing facts and events only on the basis of theoretical ideals and values 114

4.5 Sri Sri Sankar Dev is considered as the harbinger of New-Vaisnavism in Assam. But the religious principle constructed by him represents him as a great socialist, humanist, reformist, liberalist and a great lover of human being. It is seen that through the propagation Vaisnavism, rather he desired to break down barriers of caste and community and established homogeneity and equality among diverse ethnic groups through the process of Vaisnavism. His immense love and equal feeling for all human being are reflected through his works and writings. His vision of love for
God was universal, beyond the jurisdiction caste and community. His vision for love is even reflected on all living being. The following lines are enough to establish this fact-

‘Kukura srigalo Gordhorboru atma Ram’
Jania hhabako pori Koriba pronam.’
‘Nacho bhokotita jati ojati bisharo.’
Krishnoto bhokoti hhomostore odhikar.’
“Oba norolluluko Hori bhojiuka,
Bhokotito nahi jati ojati bishar.”
‘Hhomostobhutote byapi asu moi hori,
Hhobako maniba tumi Vishnu buddhi kori.’
‘Chondale hhori nam loye matro,
koribe uchita jgyor patro.’
‘Garo bhotojobone horiro namo loyo,
handy horiro namo hhojone nindooy.’

He set the institution of Namghor for the purpose community prayer and conformation of community rites. The function of Namghor was not just confined to prayer and other religious rites. It performed a diversity of functions. He set a democratic tradition among the followers of Vaisnavism through Namghor. Through the institution of Namghar he set the ideals of democracy in operation in which every member of society could exercise their right to expression. All-important problems of the village community, economic, religious, social, matrimonial etc were settled in Namghar.

Namghar is also used as village court for the purpose of settlement of disputes, like disputes between the members of family, between persons, cases of adultery, theft etc.

He desired to establish a society in which all would be equally treated irrespective of ones caste and ethnic affiliation, in contrary to the existing system of caste inequality and idea of commensality His leading disciples were from diverse community, like Gobinda was a Garo, Naruttam a Nagas, Paramanda a Mishing, Purnanda and Dhwaqa Atoi were from Koiborta, Haridas a Bania, Bolai and Ramai were Kacharis, Sansai from Yavana etc His faith and love for equality, humanity, democracy and justice reflected in the stanzas written by him.

1. “Koiborto Kolita Koch Bramono hhamosta

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Ekeloge khai doodh kol chira joto"
2 "Bramonoro Chandaloro nibishari kul Datato Churoto jendristi eko tul"
3. “Jati kul bisharia vaisnovo nindoy, Ponchomo patoki huia noroko bhunjoy
4. “Chondale hori nam love matro Koribe uchit jogyor patro”

The life and activities of Sankardeva reflected him as a secular rather than orthodox Brahmanist. His greatest contribution was establishment of the institution of Namghara, the prayer hall in village society. Sankar Deva was a great Social reformer. Along with the propagation and preaching of Vaisnavism he was also devoted his life in setting new order in society by reformation of the evil practices, customs, tradition etc of the time. He was a community organizer. He founded the structure of homogenous Assamese society based on language and culture on which the present Assamese society is standing. He was great humanist and tried to established unity integrity, equality, freedom and liberty among the people. Sankar deva was succeeded in establishing social equality

“He succeeded in realizing his long nourished ideal of life. His victory in the court of Naranarayana, threw open the door of Bhakti to all”. During the days of Sankardeva, the people of Assam were greatly disturbed due to socio-economic exploitation by the feudal kings, i.e., the landed aristocracy who primarily insisted upon their command over and retention of political power and hence favoured caste system as an ideal system in which the status of king is recognized as divine origin, above Brahmin and others. Though it is always allaged that caste system was the creation of Brahmin, but from social, economic, political, administrative and authoritarian point of view, as a sophisticated instrument of social and political control, caste system serve very important political function in favour of the king, the Divine Authority and absolute ruler, rather to Brahmins, the priestly class. Brahmins, just play the roles of instrument as advisers, priests and planners subject to approval of king. Brahmins were the agents who implement the will of the Divine Authority in field situation. Brahmins maintained direct contact with every family in connection with religion. People have regular or occasional contact with Brahmins. Hence we can consider caste system as a necessity of the Kings as a sophisticated political instrument and it was created to serve the interest of the king or divine authority, but not for the Brahmins in spite of being them.
were larger beneficiaries of the system. Brahmin collected dakshina regularly from every family under the system of *kuloguru* or *gurukul*. Peoples of the villages are divided under different *kulogurus*.

Contrary to complex Brahminical order, Sankardeva insisted on the simplicity of religion and unity and cohesion among the people. He stood for removing social disparity between man and man in the name of tribe, clan, race and colour etc. He discourages the hereditary tradition of Brahminical monopoly over religion. In New Vaisnavism, leadership was not based on hereditary but based on one’s moral integrity and life of religiosity and command over the ideas and knowledge of dharma sastra. His principal disciples were non-Brahmins. He founded the institution of *Namghar* as a part of religious order. The institution of *Namghara* maintained democratic spirits among the followers in the village management and administration. He was not an escapists ‘Sanyasbadi’. He himself led a domestic life with his wife and children and demonstrated an ideal domestic life. He taught people how to attain salvation amidst hundreds of problems around. He translated the philosophy of Vedanta and the Bhagavata in a language of the common people and asked his follower to remain attached with God Vishnu-Hari through Kirtana, sravana, smarana of God Vishnu-Hari (Chanting, listening and thinking about God).

His mission was unity, brotherhood and happiness among different section of people. His *Eka sarana dharma* thus awakens a new spirit of cooperation, love and brotherhood among the people in Assam breaking the barriers of tribes, clans, races and kingdoms. *Namgharas* were not only the centre of religious congregation but also was the centre for community welfare. Namghars played diversity of roles, like mass socialization, Social control, social reformation, and community litigation, school of art, craft, music and dance for the people in village level. The new doctrine preached by Sankardeva is known as the *ekasaranarnamadharma*, the faith and salvation, the unconditional surrender to the supreme God, Vishnu or Krishna. In the *ekasaranarnamadharma*, the surrender to the God is rigorously enjoined and the worship of other gods and goddesses is prohibited. He prescribed very simple mode of religious worship, which is absolutely free from ritualistic complexities and is the simplest, liberal, tolerant and the easiest way of attaining God. He taught his followers always to be guided by the principles of tolerance and catholicity of out look in the matter of religion. He advised them never to show disrespect or hostility towards the adherents of other creeds or religions. It is because of this tolerance of Sankardeva that most of the Brahmin
scholars who were initially hostile to his Bhakti movement, later on became devout followers of Sankardeva and his faith. According to Prafulla Mahanta, the institution of Satra, in subsequent time, which performed the functions of Namghar in a wider and regional level, was the original creation of Sankardeva. Sankardeva moved from village to village and initiated the people to his akasaraniya namadharma through the organization of Bhaona, Nama, and Kirtana etc. Premises of such organization was later known as Than.

New Vaisnavism of Sankardeva was bereft of Castism. After the death of Sankardeva, Damodardev split away from the mainstream of Vaisnavism and open separate denomination known as Brahma Sanghati. Brahma Sanghati of Damodar Dev compromised with Brahmanyabad and incorporated some orthodox Brahminical elements in the existing Vaisnava order and paved the way for gradual entry of orthodox and rigid features of caste system which was quite contrary to caste free ideology of Sankar Deva. Damodor Dev initiated the institution of Satra. Worldly comfort and materialistic order gained penetrated in the institutional life of the new denomination. After the death of Sankar Deva, Vaisnava congregation was split into four denominations, like Kal Brahma Sanghati, Puruh Sanghati, Nika Sanghati and Oikya Sanghati. Following Damodar Deva, other denominations also installed Satras separately and started preaching Vaisnavism among the people. The functions of Namgharas were brought within the purview of the Satras order. Special favour granted by the kings as patrons and for certain other specific social, political and historical reasons the liberal principles of New-Vaisnavism based on equality, fraternity and freedom was slowly and gradually distorted and rigid features of caste system replaced most of the Satra orders. Even amongst the disciples of different Sanghatis; the disciples of one denomination set a tradition of considering the members of other denomination as inferior and impure and avoided taking of cooked food from the other. Ultimately the principles of equality, liberty, democracy, brotherhood etc set by Sankardeva were replaced by the Brahmanical traditions of disparity, inequality, idea of commensality, superiority and inferiority etc.

Greatest contribution of Sankardeva is the recognition of man as equal being irrespective of caste, creed or status through his neo-Vaisnavism. He did not attach any importance to caste system in his religious order, which is considered as curse for Hinduism. He declared that all men are sons of God (amrtasya putrah) and are therefore equal in the eye of God. Sankardeva initiated into his new order, persons from all sections of the people including the aboriginal tribes of hill and
even from Muslims. It was because of Sankardeva’s reformative movement that the stigma of casteism and untouchability could not attain the criminal proportion in Assam. Recent studies conducted on language, history, economy and ethnology of Assam depicted a totally different picture. During the time of Sankardeva Hinduism with caste stratification was non-existence in Assam. Perhaps, caste system might have been totally non-existent during the time of Sankardeva. The literature available indicated only an egalitarian societies with mechanical order based on tribes and clan. Group feuds frequently aroused were based on clan and tribes rather than caste. Because of its liberal principle people from all parts of Assam and even beyond Assam rushed to seek shelter under the banner of his new faith.

Now, caste system is a matter of severe criticism in the form of social evil everywhere in India. Stigmas of casteism and untouchability have attained a criminal form in other parts India. Caste ideals failed to consolidate into rigid form due to late entry of Hinduism in Assam. However web of New Vaisnavism founded by Sankardeva swept the people of different parts of Assam in different ways under different denominations. Undoubtedly we can say that more than seventy percent of the followers of New Vaisnavism are the people of Bodo-Koch origin. Efforts have been made to bring into lime light some samples of the conversion of Bodos into New Vaisnavism.

One of the remarkable examples of tribe-caste migration of the Bodos to caste Hindu society through conversion was the case of Jaminder of Mechpara. Earlier the Jaminders of Mechpara had to supply firewood to the queen, Abaishree of Koch-Hajo kingdom (Bijni) as per annual agreement. Earlier to conversion they wrote their surname Mech. According to a retired Kanangu, Srijut Bolicharan Basumatary a living witness, soon after his conversion, the Jamindar and his villagers started to write their surname as Choudhury and sacrificed his original community identity. He says that only before two or three generations, large numbers of Bodo people from undivided Goalpara district converted to Hinduism leaving their ancestral socio-cultural identity. He says, many units of regions with several villages in each, like Gouripur, Bagaribari, Sapatgram, Bilashipara, Boholpur, Boitamari, Bongaigaon, Silgara, Chapar, Chaprakata, Bijni, Abhayapuri, Jogighopa, Krismai, Bidyapur, Sidly, Dimolgaon, Titaguri, Chandrapara, Phutkibari, Fakirgram, Sakti Ashram converted to Hinduism with total population. These people, who, now identify themselves, as Koch-Rajbongshis, are undoubtedly from Boro origin. In order to confirm his information he mentioned the land records of that area, of the pre-independent time. According to
him the land of all these areas during pre-independent time were recorded in Boro names. He says, Honorable Ex-Chief Minister of Assam, Sarat Chandra Singha and many other elite Koch-Rajbongshi leaders known and unknown were the descendents of the Boro-ancestors. Many of the Rajbingshis living in these areas have still close or distant relatives in near by Boro villages. Due to influence of caste ideology the converted Rajbongshis hardly maintain any socio-cultural interactions with the counterparts Boro relatives who maintained ancestral culture and social identity. They entered into a new structural, functional and ideological system completely different from their ancestral society. But, some Rajbongshi people still maintain family relationship with Bodo relatives living near by Bodo villages.

Examples, showing family relationship between Rajbongshi and Boro families are-

1. Hoten Roy, inhabitant of village-Chandrapara and Head Master of Chandrapara ME school is Rajbongshi by community. He has close Bodo relatives in nearby Bodo Village-Bonargaon, and still maintains close interaction with them.

2. Earlier, Diabari was a single village inhabited only by the Boros. When a section of the villagers converted into Hinduism the village divided into two different villages, like Diabari for the Rajbongshis and Bwrsi-Diabari for the Boros. Merga Boro of Barshi-Diabari and Bolit Roy of Diabari are the descendents of the same ancestor. Similar categories of people are considerable in number. Common Rajbongshi people feel shy to trace their origin with the Bodos or Rabhas.

3. Another example of converted Boro-Rajbongshis is from Borigaon village situated in between Bongaigaon town and Khagorpur area. The old men and women, still living in this village, whenever, get chance to meet high profile Boro personalities, express this way, “sons and daughters, once we all had also been Boros. Due to hatred meted against us by the ‘Harsa’ inferior community (Caste Hindu) we had been compelled to become Rajbongshi, don’t mine.” Prior to conversion to Hinduism, the ancestral name of Khagorpur was Khongkhorpur and Borigaon was Bwrigami. The name of Khongkhorpur and Bwrigami were Aryanised into Khogarpur and Borigaon. Before the Koch-Rajbongshi movement for the recognition as Scheduled Tribe under Indian constitution, there was a strong urge among almost Assamese-speaking people from all over Assam to identify themselves as the descendents of high caste Varna Hindu ST movement created a reverse sense of renaissance among not only Assamese speaking people but also among many Bengali speaking.
people. The Rajbongshi movement revived the spirit of ancestral community feeling even among the sections that have already attained the highest ladder in the caste hierarchy through the process of vertical or upward mobility. The actual history of this great royal community was deconstructed; fabricated, interpolated, misinterpreted, eliminated and certain fictitious facts are added in the interest of constructing *Indian History* in favour of Aryan culture and civilization. Most of the historians during 19th and 20th century sincerely tried to establish the elite sections people following Aryan language, culture and religion as Aryan by race and the low caste people as the non Aryans only the basis of fictitious classical literature without taking the linguistic, political, economic, archaeological, sociological, environmental, and anthropological and other dynamic socio-cultural factors into consideration. In this regard discussion has been made at length in earlier chapters with reference to recent studies conducted by different scholars in different fields.

**Some instances of the reverse trends in caste identification to Koch-Rajbongshi—**

1. Ram Chandra Hazarika, Asstt. Teacher, Dondo Saharia High School, Vill- Bhalukmari, Rowta Chariali, Darrang. He says that, his ancestors were High Grade Kalita and now they become Koch-Rajbongshi. Earlier tradition of social psychology was oriented in favour of upward mobility, i.e., from Koch to Kalita to Mahnta etc. The reverse trends of identity construction, from Kalita to Koch-Rajbongshi is, definitely the result of decades long Koch-Rajbongshi movement for recognition as ST. Along with their kings they lost their ancestral identity. The basis of the movement is genuine, because they are really the community members of the great royal dynasty.

2. Krisna Kanta Saharia, UDA, Rowta Chariali, Darrang: He admitted that, earlier they were Soru-Koch. By sacrificing seven he-goats and observation of rites they become Bor-Koch and Saharia. Therefore he belongs to Koch-Rajbongshi.

3. Santi Deka is an Asstt. Teacher working in Donda Saharia HS School. Originally he was from Sipajhar area. Originally he belonged to Phulgaria Bodo Community. During the reign of Koch king their ancestors became Koch. And hence they are also Koch-Rajbongshi.

4. Kulen Saharia, Principal, Danda Saharia HS School. He is a son of Late Dandadhar Saharia, the most dignified person of Rowta Chariali. Originally their ancestors were pure Darrangia Bodo by community. They adopted Vaisnavism during the time of his grand father and accordingly adopted the surname of Saharia. Principal Saharia freely admitted that, still they have distant relatives.
living in other Bodo villages but without any social interaction. Prior to adoption of Vaisnavism they practiced Saktism. Mr. Kamal Saharia, second son of late Dandodhar Saharia says that they are the descendents of the Nath Community of Boro-Origin. Later they left Saktism in favour of Vaisnavism and became Koch-Rajbongshi.

5. Golak Talukdar, No-2 Phuhrabari, Rowta Chariali. He is the father-in-law of Mr Kamal Saharia. He migrated from Dekargaon, Tezpur to Rowta Chariali and changed their community status to Rajbongshi by conversion to Hinduism and adopted the surname of Talukdar. Originally they were pure Boro as he confessed

6. Bihu Ram Boro, Rowta Chariali, Ex-Secretary Bodo Sahitya Sabha. Late Bihuram Boro was born in village-Bechimari, Rowta Chariali. This village was converted into a Sarania with whole the villagers by conversion to Vaisnavism. Bihu Ram Boro himself took the role of Sri Krishna in the bhaona. The whole village returned back to their ancestral Bathou religion only in 1960. Instruments like, nagara, khol, Tal, bortal etc. used in the performance of bhaona, Kirtan, borgeet etc. are still lying in the namghar without being used. Bihuram Boro happened to be one of the top leaders of Bodo Sahitya Sabha as well the leader of Bodo identity construction movement.

7. Mrs. Lalita Barua, wife of late Bihuram Boro, parental village-Bhakatpara. This village was originally Boro village. After the village was fully initiated to Vaisnavism by one renowned bhokot (devotee), the name of the village was changed into Bhokatpara. The ancestors of this village were pure Boros. But the villagers now identify themselves as high caste Kalita even instead of Koch. This kind of social mobility is often defined, as the process of Sanskritization was a very normal and regular process of social transformation in entire Indian sub-continent during pre-independent time. This type change was neither conspiracy any particular race or section but it was designed by the ruling class or elite sections of society to govern the rest.

8. Entire Bhakatpara area encompassing more than twenty villages and number of Boro villages under Sapai Mauza were completely swept by the web of New Vaisnavism Till 1970, the villagers of this area, particularly the last generation, to a major extend forgot their mother tongue and used Assamese as domestic language. I have an opportunity for frequent visits of this area for organizational (ABSU) purposes when I was a student of Mangaldoi College for four years. Along with some spirited Bodo students we organized Mongaldoi Ancholik Bodo Students Union in 1977, covering near by Bodo areas of Mangaldai town. Mr Malen Muchari and I have had an opportunity to be the founder President and Secretary respectively. Similar was the case with the Bodo people of Kalaigaon area. Number of Bodo villages turn to Koch and many of the villages
were on the verge of becoming Koch. When I was a student of Kabirali High School it was very difficult to find a Boro village speaking pure Bodo language. People used to write their surname as Boro or Kachari but they did not know how to speak Bodo language. They used to speak refined Assamese but speak a horrible Bodo, like—

*Kaora mathayao hagilangbai.* (The crow passed excreta on the head)
Halikayauridwing. (Salika bird is flying)
Phithaikhou katidw. (Cut the fruit)
Pitaya donfangao uthibai (Father climbed tree)
Mathayao tel makhidwng. (Put oil on head)
Dourinanwi phai. (Run and come).

The roles of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha created a sense of socio-cultural conscious amongst the converted Boros. The introduction of Bodo medium as a medium of instruction created a reverse sense of community pride among them and they slowly return to ancestral socio-cultural fold. New Vaisnavism of Sankardeva absorbed large sections of Non-Hindu and tribal people of Brahmaputra Valley. The process of absorption was different from place to place and denomination to denomination. In the chapter, ‘Sanskritisation of the Bodos’ much have been discussed about the process of absorption of the Bodos and other non-Hindus into Hindu social structure. The Bodos and other non-Hindu tribes were always regarded as antyaja. Even after the entry into Hindu fold they are put into the lowest rank in the caste hierarchy. Theoretically, though caste is defined as a closed system but functionally it is not quite so. Man of power, wealth, resources, wisdom quickly attain the high status in the social hierarchy and poor and weak sections of the society engaged in manual activities slowly move down to the bottom of the social hierarchy. Mr. Anil Roy Choudhury stated an example of the Conversion of Deuri-Chutiyas to Vasnavism from the Census of 1891 Similar type of the process of conversion was equally followed in case of other tribes of Assam and continued till the time of independence. Regarding the conversion of Deuri-Chutiya, the Census of 1891 recorded as—

“Since the last census report was written, however, the religion has made great progress amongst the Chutiyas, and the number who still hold aloof from Hinduism is very small, only 103 having returned themselves as Animistic against 86,588 who describes themselves as Hindus. Even the Deuri Chutiyas, who represent the old priestly class, are now succumbing to the attraction of this religion. In upper Assam they are now most of them disciple of Mahara Gosain of Teok. It

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is said, however, that many of those who profess to be Hindus are so only in the name."123 Adoption of Hinduism by non-Hindus or tribe with a freedom to retain their ancestral traditions and practices was the result of 19th century Hindu socio-religious reformed movement. During Muslim rule, due to rigid system of caste, particularly the people from lower caste, tribes and untouchables were converted to Islam in mass level, attracted by the principles of equality, brother and love for equals as against the principles of social inequality, untouchability, exploitation etc. of Hinduism. The advent of Christianity is also set a new trends of conversion every where in India particularly amongst the lower castes and tribes of people in different places. Otherwise adoption of Hinduism by tribes or non-Hindus, initiated by a Brahmin with freedom to retain their ancestral tradition had never taken place. Unity and equality under the rigid principles of caste system was an impossibility. In order to incorporate indigenous tribes and Caste within Hindu fold and to stop the trend of conversion to Islam and Christianity Hindu socio-religious reformers relaxed the rigidity of caste system to a great extent. Accordingly Boro, Garo, Rabha, Santhal and many tribes were recognized by the leading Hindus Organizations as Khatriyas. Since then Hindu organizations insisted integration, i.e., unity with self identity rather than assimilation. Brahma Dharma, advocated by Gurudev Kali Charan Brahma among the Bodos is an example, in which the followers accomplished Vedic Hindu ideals with freedom to follow their traditional Bodo language, culture, dress etc. Here exception to Deuri Chutiya is that they retain their ancestral habits and practices etc., but they sacrifice their language in favour of Assamese. It might be, perhaps, due to the efforts of the builders of Assamese nationality, who tried to construct Assamese nationality based on Assamese language tinged with Hindu culture and religion. When Gurudeva Kali Charan Brahma swept the Bodo people by the Brahma movement simultaneously Sarania or New-Vaisnava movement was also swept the Boro, Kachri, Rabha and other tribal people, in different parts of Assam. Saraniya movement was blended with Assamese nationality movement and insist upon acceptance of Assamese language along with indoctrination of Hindu ideals. Refined Assamese spoken by the Saranias (Sonowal, Deori-Chutia, Boro-Kachari, Lalung etc) indicates that, they are the latest groups of people who came under the influence of Vaisnava movement only in the beginning of the 1st and 2nd decade of the 20th century. In the Chapter of Brahma Dharma movement, it is stated that some Vaisnava Gosain tried to obstruct Brahma dharma movement and replaced with Sarania movement in association with some Jamindars in Goalpara district. Otherwise in earlier tradition, after conversion to Hinduism, a tribe and non-Hindu had to sacrifice his parental socio-cultural identity in favour of Aryan, Culture language etc. Example is, Koch king Viswa Singha and his Community members, the Koch-
Rajbongshis. They sacrificed Bodo language, culture and traditions in favour of Aryan culture and religion.

In the Census report, it is further stated as— “When the neophyte takes the saran, the Gosain inculcates a few moral precepts such as ‘Obey your parents’, ‘never raise your hands against them’, ‘be always respectful to your elders’, ‘tell no falsehood’ etc. He then sprinkles sacred water over them and blesses them. Having done this he takes his fee and departs. He interferes no further with their old religious beliefs, nor does he insists on their abstaining from eating pork and drinking rice beer. His further connection with them is limited to collecting his annual fee of two annas and paying them an occasional visit. … informs me that when… asked same Deuri Chutiyas why they accepted a Gosain at all when they still adhered to their old beliefs, he answered that they did not like to be called obhakatiya (disciple of no one) and despised accordingly by their neighbours. Thus their change of religion is purely nominal, and is due to desire to avoid unfashionable exceptions to a general rule, rather than to any more serious motives.”

Though it is said that, taking of saran is without any serious move but the serious motive was definitely associated with and that is to avoid despised by their neighbours Hindus both old and new converts. New converts or Saraniyas, though they follow the major practices of their ancestral tradition, they begin to exposed despise to their non-converts brother in the similar way as they were despised by their Hindu neighbours. Just after they come into sarana, they ceased off their relation with non-convert relatives. Desire for higher status and idea of commensality both constituted capital for the new converts which encourage them for upward social mobility. Contrary to the record in Govt. Census, the Saranias of latest generation from most of the areas are found to be sincere devotees and followers of Vaisnavism and ceased all kind of socio-cultural relation with the non-converts ancestral brothers. They constituted a distinct social group allied to Koch-Rajbongshi. Till recently, they hardly maintained any kind of social relationship openly with the non-convert Bodos or Rabhas. They also sacrificed their ancestral language. The ongoing ethnic movements for political autonomy created a reverse sense of identity consciousness among Saranias and they show a strong tendency towards revivalism. But they donnot want to forego their Saraniya (religious) identity.

The regular process of tribe-caste continuum and upward caste mobility was affected by the introduction modern system of education, political and administration, economic system etc.
during British rule and subsequently by the execution of modern constitution of India. As because, every group of people was brought under the specific scheduled category by the execution of Indian constitution.

Similar method of conversion or taking Sarana was followed by Boro-Kacharis living in the vast area Tezpur, encompassing the areas up to the railway tract to the north and Brahmaputra river to south and Bharali river to the east and Gabharu river to the west. The Bodo people of this area do not know how to speak Boro language except a few. Only a few generation ago their forefathers took Sarana indeed without acquiring new caste position for them. Only, till the arrival of British people in Assam, Tezpur was the habitat of the Boro-Kachari people and undoubtedly their mother tongue was Boros. Migration of different types of people for administrative, educational, employment, commercial, business and other purposes, out numbered indigenous Boro-Kachari population in Tezpur town. And slowly they came under the influence of immigrants who settled there in Tezpur. The Mahabhairav temple, Bhairavi Temple, Holeswar temple, standing in the midst of Tezpur town were once, happened to be the places of worship of the Boro Kachari people. Two places named Kachari gaon and gareki, still carries the glorious memories of ancient history of king Harupeswar, Ban and of their descendents. Once the people of this area liked to identify themselves as Assamese. In order to hide their actual identity they used the surnames, Bora, Saikia, Das, etc. Men used to be dressed in dhuti and women in Riha-mekhela. Following the neighbouring Sarania, Koch and Hindus they chanted Kirtana bhajana, performed ankia nut, bhaona and observed Bihu festival by blowing pepa-dhol along with the observance of their community worship, ‘Kherai-Bathou’. Many of the leading persons of this area along with villagers adopted Saran under different Vaisnava Gosain. Till now, the Bodo people of Tezpur area chant Kirtana, Dashama, Bhagavata, and organized ai-hobah, Sitola puja; observed Bihu festival blowing dhol and pepa and organized Angkia bhaona. Following the Hindu neighbors, they observed tithi-Parvan, organized marriage and initiate good actions according to logno-tithi-bar, organized tuloni biya (on first menstruation), women observe the rules during menstruation time, males used to shape their head during shraddha of their parents, observed janmastomi, holly festival, observed Viswakarma, Durga, Lakshmi, Swarswati, Kali, Soni and other pujas by engaging purohits. In brief, the Boro people of Tezpur area accepted major contents of Hindu culture and civilization. Similar categories of people are found in northern side of the railway tract in Udalguri, Baska, Shirang districts in large numbers

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In Middle and Lower Assam a different method of Hinduisation was followed. The note of the Deputy Commissioner of Nagaon district regarding the method of Hinduisation was recorded in the Census report, Govt. of India, 1891 this way the aboriginal tribes of this district who are now becoming Hinduised are Lalungs and Kacharis. Some Mikirs are also converted occasionally, but their number is very limited. The method by which they are converted is as follows—The Gosain or some of his subordinates usually select certain families of the regional tribes, who resides in the vicinity of Hindu villages and at a distance from the main villages of the aboriginal tribes. These families are frequently lectured upon the purity of Hindu religion and the easy way in which they can get salvation and how they can acquire a position in the Hindu society if they give up their habits of eating pork and other forbidden food and drinking strong liquor and conform to the Hindu methods of eating and drinking and worship. As these people frequently feel the inconvenience of their isolated position they are easily tempted to become Hindus, and there by be enabled to associate and move with their Hindu neighbours by whom they are hated and looked down upon as degraded class or so long as they remain in an unconverted state. When these people after frequent lectures show some inclination towards giving up their religion and becoming Hindus, a certain propitious day is selected, and they are questioned as to whether they would like to give up their former habits and customs, and become perfect Hindus or that they simply take saran (Religious initiation) from Hindu Gosain and remain free as to their habits of eating and drinking. When they express a desire of entire conversion to the Hindu religion, they are made to fast for a day or two, and then to undergo a Prayachit (atonement) for which they have to spent some 5 to 10 rupees according to their circumstances. They then received their Saran and Bhajan (religious initiation and mode of worship) from the Gosain, from whom, they look upon as their spiritual guide. These people can change all former utensils of cooking and eating and also their dwelling house and become quite Hinduised. The Gosain makes them over to a certain khel (a body of Hindus who eat and drink and associate with each other) with whom the converted men are to associate. The converted people then give a fast to their new associates, to whose habits and mode of worship they entirely conform. The converted men are closely watched by their new comrades as to whether they take any forbidden food and strong liquor or not, and if they are found to have entirely given up these things, they are freely admitted into the Hindu society and are called Suru-Koch. For the first three generations from their conversion they are looked down upon a little by their Hindu comrades and they are not allowed to take any leading part of their society. From the third generation they become quite as good as any Hindu of the Koch caste. Upward mobility starts soon after the
initiation to Hinduism depending on one's economic, political, social position and roles that one performs in the society. In ancient times, mobility goes up to the rank of Brahmin. Buchanan made an observation on how the autochthon people absorbed into Hindu Bangali mainstream and he found variation among them. Buchanan says, Entire Koches living in Southern Kamrupa, specially the Rongpur district, lost their tribal character. The Koches of this area gave up their ancestral tradition of eating pork, drinking liquor and widow remarriage. Certainly, can assume that, they came within the fold of Bangali speaking people and adapted settled agricultural economy. Some of them engaged low grade Brahman as their priest and many of them following ancestral tradition and honoring the dignity of ancestral religion engaged Kalita as their priest, who performed as Community priest prior to conversion to Hinduism. In spite of being using Bangali language as their mother tongue and adapting sophisticated agricultural system many of them did not give up their ancestral tradition. They were known as Doua or Gorol. And the Koches who accepted Hindu social institution and conformed the prescribes norms of Hindu social life regard Gorols as inferior and maintained social distance from them. The Koches of Koch-Hazo (Bijni kingdom) are divided into two groups like, who followed under a Vaisnava Guru, they were known as Bhokat and those who continued to take meat, drinks and worship Goddess Kamakhya are known as Garami. It is assumed that they were influenced by their ancestral priest Kalita.

All categories of Koches claimed themselves as Rajbongshi.

1. Role of Namghars and Satras Earlier we have discussed the role of Namgharas as an agency of mass socialization, social control, village parliament, village court, centre of religious activities, art, craft, dance, music, etc. Namgharas were the centre of all religious activities. Prayers were observed, Common religious congregations were held, separate congregation are held for women and young girls. Religious initiations are conducted. Nama-Sangkirtan was the popular medium through which the people of new converts easily learn the doctrines of Hindu religion and also learn language of the scripture very easily and quickly. Namgharas took the role, more than a school. The organization of Bhaona, Angkia nat, Khulia bhaoria, Nam, Bornam, Saru Nam, Namoti, Ai-Nam observed in open places immensely helped in the indoctrination of the religious ideal and values, myth and stories amongst the people. These institutions were so popular, no other institution contributed so much in the extension and adaptation of Assamese language and culture among mass illiterate, ignorant and simple people of Assam. Roles performed by these organizations can only compared with the modern cinema through which even illiterate children learn to speak Hindi language fluently.
2. 16th century Hinduism was characterized by certain important features for which Non-Hindu Kings and Chiefs were attracted towards it. These are-

a. Hindu society is structured around caste system. The members of entire society is divided on caste line. On the basis the principles of purity and pollution and higher and lower, the people of the society are hierarchically arranged. People are divided psychologically and physically. Each of the caste stratum in the caste hierarchy stands on the principle of opposition to each other. System of caste has religious sanction. Social and economic disparity, misery and caste position in life are taken as the result of the action of previous life. Caste system is so arranged that, deviant forces of the society against the king or rule of aristocracy have little opportunity to consolidate and raise its head. In Hindu social history we have no example of social revolt organized on caste line against the misrule and exploitation of the ruler. Caste system has in-built mechanism which dissolved the deviant forces of the society against the king or privileged class.

b. Caste system was recognized as an institution of God with supremacy and domination of the King and aristocracy. Kings were regarded as the descendent of God or some super natural being. The institution of monarchy was granted as divine institution. The king enjoyed absolute power. Common people defined Brahmans as the architect of the caste system and put them above all social hierarchy. But, the Brahmans had never been above the kings, the representative of God. They were always subordinated to Divine authority. They expressed and acted only the will of the king. Perhaps, only after the establishment of British rule they became completely free from the bindings of the Divine authority. During British regime Brahmans became the highest opportunists class and ally of British Govt.

c. 16th century Hindu society was characterized by feudal economy with permanent agriculture. For maintaining regular army and administration feudal polity needed huge wealth and resources. That amount of money is collected from people in the form of agricultural tax. Division of labour based on caste system was chosen as the only viable alternative to meet the diverse needs of the feudal kings and elite aristocracy, the privileged sections of the society.

d. Monarchical polity as Divine institution with absolute power on King was another reason Hindu kings are considered as the descendents of God or some supernatural power. And as such he enjoyed absolute power. He is accountable for his action only to God not to the people. He becomes different from ordinary people. In the history of Assam we see that, approval of the king became quite essential for preaching of Hindu religion. Initially Sri Sri Sankardev failed to propagate Vaisnavism in Assam due to non-recognition of the king. Vaisnavism extended to mass level of people only with patronization of kings.
e. Hindu temples, Satras etc were the centers of income. In the form dana and orgha, huge amount of wealth was accumulated. A considerable part of the income goes to the treasury of the king. Because of all these condition tribal kings preferred Hinduism.

f. Common people accepted Hinduism to avoid the hatreds and despises of the Hindu neighbours whose society and social order was clustered around the power and authority of king and Brahmin allies. Common tribal people were too faithful and loyal to their chief or the King. Once, king or chief adopted Hinduism they also follow the path of their king or the Chief and accepted Hinduism. The powerful tribal or non-Hindu king with vast political boundary might perhaps chose Hindu social system, because, a political society with diverse ethnicity based on language, culture, clan, tribe, race is tough challenge for governance. The loyalty of the people first go to the head of the clan, tribe or race. In the caste ridden society loyalty of the people is to the system and to the authority who governed the system. And the barriers of tribe, clan, race language etc could easily dismantle by the introduction of caste system. The early phase of Sanskritization was brought by the Kings of autochthonous origin. They became the patrons of Sanskritization. It is believed that, the Sanskritic elements were first extended to Eastern and North-eastern India through the extension of Buddhism. Next phase came in the form of Saivism, Saktaism. Development of Saiva and Sakta cult under the patronage of feudal kings, stroke a fatal blow on the foundation of Buddhism in India. The religious reform movement led by Sri Sri Chaitaanya Dev in Bengal completely swept away the existence of Buddhism along with its roots and trunk from the soil of Bengal. Sri Sri Sankardeva brought the strongest wave of Hinduism in ancient Assam, in the form of Vaisnava movement. That was the last wave of Hinduism before the establishment of British rule in India.

g. The advent of Muslim traders in Bengal in the beginning of the 12th century by sea rout, set the strong and popular tradition of Islamisation in Bengal. Due to its liberal principle of equality, brotherhood and humanism, the indigenous people, particularly the backward caste and classes were attracted towards Islam like swamps. Till 16th and 17th century more than half of the total population of Bengal converted into Islam. European people brought another process of conversion, i.e., Christinization. The process of Christianization was more stronger than the other. Because the methods Christianization was based on the 19th century logic, rationality and realistic approach, not solely on belief and ideals. Christianity set a strong tradition of conversion up to the occurrence of first war of Indian independence in 1858. From 1858, movement of Indian nationalism started. The national movement led by Congress was very much blended with Socio-Religious Reform
movement. Building of Indian Nationalism based on ancient Hindu culture, religion and civilization constituted integral part and motto of the movement. Socio-Religious reform movement took a shape of more than reform movement. In all parts of India it took a shape of the movement of conversion to Hinduism. In some places, new Muslims and new Christians were reconverted to Hinduism. New Vaisnava movement, Sarania movement, Brahma Dharma movement in Assam, Bratya-Kshatriya movement amongst the Rajbongshis of Bengal and Assam, Chandala movement for Namasudra status in Bengal, Suddhi movement in western parts of India etc occurred in the 19th and early part of 20th century, all were the results of the Hindu Socio-Religious reform movement, which were again constituted integral parts of the movement of Indian nationalism. Sarania movement under Nava-Vaishnava movement was a part of the movement of the construction of Assamese Nationality. In brief, socio-religious reformed movement of the 19th and 20th century of India can be regarded as the movement for conversion to Hinduism, movement for restructuring and reforming of Hindu society and religion. And it was also movement for protection and preservation and reformations of the indigenous society, culture, religion, civilization etc.

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