CHAPTER : 2

LAND AND PEOPLE

2.1. Geographical Areas of Koch Habitation:

In the present age, the Koches are found permanently settled in the North-Eastern part of undivided India. It starts from Purnea District of Eastern Bihar on the North-West to Sadiya of Assam on the North-East, Manipur in the East, Tripura and Chittagong on the South-East, Noakhali of Bangladesh on the Southern most point and Bankura of West Bengal on the South-West\(^1\).

According to 1872 Census, the Koches are found in 13 districts of undivided Bengal such as Coch Bihar, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, Murshidabad, Pabna, Bankura, Midnapur, Nadiya and Chittagong. Of these 13 districts, highest number of population of the Koches is found in Dinajpur where their number is recorded 4,43,827. Second highest population is in Rangpur

District where the Koch population is shown as 4,07,658. Lowest number of Koch population is in Midnapur with 66 persons and second lowest is in Chittagong where they are found 154 souls.

In Assam highest number of Koch population is recorded in Goalpara District with 1,20,000 and lowest in Lakhimpur District with only 6,443. The Koch population in Assam gives an interesting reading. In the State more one goes eastward lesser becomes their number. Their population pattern in Assam district wise is as follows:

Goalpara- 1,20,000, Kamrup- 69,277, Darrang- 46,788, Nowgaon- 41,051, Sibsagar- 23,965, Lakhimpur- 6,443. On the South Garo Hills- 6,000 and Sylhet- 5.
2.2. Sources & Origin of the Term Koch:

The sources and origin of the term ‘Koch’ is obscure and largely based on conjecture. It is suggested that the term Koch is derived from the Koch word “Kuchimuchi” which means shrinkage due to shame. There is a story as to how the Koches came to be known as Koch\textsuperscript{2}. The story goes like this: Once upon a time Siva and Parvati were flying over certain areas. While flying, Parvati felt thirsty. So she requested Mahadeva (Siva) to take her to some river or stream. In the meantime they spotted a sweet flowing stream below. They descended there. But to their horror after descending they saw a flock of Koch girls bathing completely naked. According to another story, Mahadeva was wandering alone in the forest and came to a stream where he saw a number of Koch girls bathing or water sporting naked. The water sporting Koch girls also saw Mahadeva according to this story and, Parvati and Mahadeva according to the other story and became terribly ashamed and tried to hide and conceal themselves stooping low. This posture is called ‘Kuchimuchi’ in Koch language. The Koches believe

\footnote{2 Koch, S.N., The Koches: Their Migration and Settlement, 1981 (unpublished paper).}
that from that time onward they came to be known as Koch from the fact of becoming Kuchimuchi out of shame.

The story narrated in the above, must be an invention of some intelligent man and devoid of any historical value. Hence the word Kuchimuchi does not seem to be a source and origin of the term Koch. Many scholars think that the term Mech by which a section of the Kachari people is known is believed to have been derived from the Mechi river. There is logic to make some presumption. But with due respect to the learned scholars we are, however, of the opinion that the word Mech is a pure and simple Prakrit form of the Sanskrit word 'Mlechha'. Following the suspected origin of the term Mech, many want to say that the term Koch is derived from one of the lower Assam river name ‘Sonkoch’ as both sides of this river is thickly inhabited by the Koch people. Koches are also found in plenty in the Purnea District of eastern Bihar through which flows the river ‘Koshi’. In Mahabharata this river is called ‘Kaushikakaccha’ on the bank of which river Bhima encountered with the Kiratas. Mongoloids are believed to have been called as Kirata by the Aryans. The Koches belong to
Mongoloid people. So some believe that the term Koch is originated from the Sanskrit word ‘Kaushikakaccha’. But Rg Veda having taken the cognizance of the existence of the term Koch by referring them as ‘Kuvacha’ (Kuyvaca), it will be a travesty of truth to hold that the Mahabharata word ‘Kaushikakaccha’ could have the source and origin of the term Koch.

Some scholars think that the Koches got their tribe name ‘Koch’ from the name of their earliest known place of residence ‘Kuchar or Kucha’. This Kucha country is situated in Eastern Turkistan of North-Western China and its city ‘Kucha’ was one of the famous trade centre in ancient days as famous silk route passes through Kucha.
2.3. Racial Origin of the Koches:

Like the origin of the term Koch, there are divergent views on the racial origin of the Koches\(^3\). George Campbell holds that the Koches are of Negrito origin. Hunter, W. W. (1973), Baverly (1872), Dalton (1872), Risley (1890) on the other hand think that the Koches are Dravidian; while O'Donnell (1891), Gait (1905), Waddel (1900), Hodgaon (1847) place the Koches with the Mongoloids. Varying Somatological indices and cultural traits of the Koches also made many scholars to surmise that the Koches is a mixed race. Ancient Sanskrit text also calls the Koches as ‘Shankar Jati’ i.e. mixed race. (Shristi Khanda, *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*).

Our conclusion, however, is that though the Koches carried mixed blood from different streams, they have not lost their Mongoloid characteristics. This is very much evident from their physical structure marked by short stature, dumpy and fleshiness symmetrical body with flat nose often clubbed at the base, high cheek bone, smaller eyes, epicanthic eye folds,

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thicker lips, scanty or little beard, and large ears. The theory that the Koches belong to Mongoloid race also appears to have been widely accepted one in the midst of divergence of opinion.

Scholars are of the opinion that the Mongoloids are divided into more than one group. S. K. Chatterjee divided the Mongoloids according to their physical characteristics as (a) Primitive long headed Mongoloids, (b) Less primitive and more advanced short headed Mongoloids and (c) Tibeto-Mongoloids; who are fairly tall and lighter skins. B. S Guha and S. P. Dasgupta, however, divided the Mongoloids mainly into two: (i) Paleo-Mongoloid and (ii) Tibeto-Mongoloid. Out of these two sub divisions namely (a) Long headed (Dolicho-cephalic) and (b) Broad headed (Brachy-cephalic) basing on the cephalic indices.

The differences of their morphological characteristics are that in case of the former, i.e. Paleo-Mongoloid, their heads are either long or broad; stature short, face round and short, nose medium with low elevation, occiput round or bulging, skin

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colour varying from dark to light brown. In case of the later, they possess massive head, tall in stature; face flat and long, nose long, skin lighter.

From these broad demarcations of their physical characteristics if compared with the Koch physiognomy, it appears that the Koches are akin to the Paleo-Mongoloid than to the Tibeto-Mongoloid. The Koches are either broad or long headed but not of massive head. They are short in stature, nose flat and short, occiput round or bulging, colour dark to light brown. All these physical characteristics distinguish the Koches from the Tibeto-Mongoloid and bring them nearer to the fold of Paleo-Mongoloid. It also appears from the remarks made by Minhaj, who in his *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* observed that the Koches, Meches and the Tharus bear Turk countenance and resemble the tribes of southern Siberia⁶. Bhaben Narji, speaking about the early Mongoloids said that about 2000 years B. C. people having flat nose, short headed, wide forehead, round cheek, with little beard, brown skin were seen

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moving around Siberia and Mongolia\textsuperscript{7}.

Quoting \textit{Tabaqat-i-Nasiri}, S. K. Chatterjee holds that the Koches, Meches and Tharus are of pronounced Turkik or Mongoloid features\textsuperscript{8}. Tartars are undoubtedly not Tibeto-Mongoloids as they are class by themselves and from their cephalic indices, stature and skin colour they can be grouped together with the Paleo-Mongoloid. Another important physical feature which brings the Koches nearer to the Tartar Mongoloid is their unusual big ears. In 1585, when British traveler Ralph Fitch visited Koch Kingdom, he found the ears of the Koches a span long big\textsuperscript{9}. Eugen Pittard, while describing the eastern Mongols of Central Asia said that they had 'enormous stick out ears'\textsuperscript{10}. Hodgson also of the view that one of the physical characteristics of the Turanian is large "ears" with which race he places the Koches\textsuperscript{11}.

Socio-culturally, the Tibeto-Mongoloids are patriarchal

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{7} Narji, B., \textit{Bodo-Kachari Samaj Aru Sanskriti}, 1966:1
\textsuperscript{9} Gait, E. A., \textit{A History of Assam}, 1926, p. 47.
\end{footnotesize}
and patrilineal-polyandrus. This custom is foreign to the Koches, who were matriarchal and matrilineal. Keith Buchanan, speaking on the evolution of the ancient Chinese culture points out that the matriarchal culture complex is the contribution of the 'Proto-Tungustic'. Learned scholars are of the view that "suddenly around 2500 B.C. the North China had swelling population, and pottery impression suggests........ they had domesticated dogs, pigs and cattle; while Tunguses, during the same age, gave the North China 'terraced rice cultivation' and ancestor worship." In one of the earliest Koch ballad there is a mention of pig and hen. This shows that the Koches did learn domestication of animals. The Koches might have got the art of domestication of pig and ancestor worship from the North Chinese and Tungustic people. This surmise that the Koches had their earliest habitation in Kucha of North-Western China's eastern Turkistan, which country name is believed to have given them their tribe name Koch. All these go to show that the Koches are neither racially nor socio-culturally

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12 H. R. H., Price Peter, 1969:1
13 Martin, M., Eastern India, 1976, p.540; Kar, P.C., Social Research, 1981:1
14 Buchanan, K., The Transformation of the Chinese Earth, 1976:11
15 Buchanan, K., Ibid.
belong to Tibeto-Mongoloid group but Paleo-Mongoloid species.
2.4. Migration of the Koches:

The Koches is a section of the Indo-Mongoloid people with Tibeto-Burman tongue. Grierson believes that "Tibeto-Burman people appear to have first migrated from their original seat on the upper courses of the Yangtze and Howang-Ho towards the head water of the Irrawady and Chindwind". From there they followed the down streams of rivers Chindwind, Salwin, Irrawady, and some of them reached Burma. Some followed the upper courses of the Brahmaputra and populated Tibet. In course of time, these people made their further move towards west from Burma and south from Tibet and met and mingled in Assam valley in the east. Some are believed to have traveled westward from Tibet and reached Punjab.

S. K. Chatterjee also believes them to have dispersed from a Central zone between the Eastern Tibet and North-Eastern Assam, from where they began to spread into India and Tibet. He also states that those who reached Tibet made

18 Grierson, Ibid.
their further move towards south and west. Those who moved towards south reached into Assam and populated it. Some went further west and populated Kumaon Garwal\textsuperscript{20}. According to Sanyal, the Koches "came to North-Eastern Assam through Paṭkai range along Noa Dihing river"\textsuperscript{21}. The historians and ethnologists alike accepted this theory of Koch migration from across the North-Eastern border of India as a member of Tibeto-Burman speaking people\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{20} Chatterjee, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Sanyal, C. C., \textit{The Rajbansis of North Bengal}, 1965: 5.
\textsuperscript{22} Koch, S.N., \textit{The Koches: Their Migration and Settlement}, 1981 (unpublished paper).
2.5. The Koches of West Garo Hills:

The Koch community is a schedule tribe inhabiting the Western Garo Hills of Meghalaya. They claim that their original home was in the Arbella Hills range of Central Garo Hills. They gradually came down to the plain area due to scarcity of agricultural land. Another section of the Koch, however, believes in myth, which states that they are descendants of two sisters, Hira and Jhiva, daughter of the Sun. Both of them were married to man named Hajo. Hajo is also the name of a place in the Kamrup district of Assam, from where they came to Garo Hills. Francis Hamilton (1940) who visited Garo Hills in the beginning of the nineteenth century mentioned about these communities in northern Garo Hills as Kochunasindaya. By this term probably he denotes the Koches who are still found in those areas. However, Dalton (1872) misunderstood their term and he stated that Independent Garos of the interior rejoiced in the grand sounding name Kochnasiday.a.

The Koches of Garo Hills are one of the oldest

inhabitants of the district and are believed to be older than the Garos\textsuperscript{24}. Racially the Koches are taken to be Mongoloid and their language is Tibeto-Burman\textsuperscript{25}. But this view is not without dispute. George Campbell considers the Koches are Negritos. But some scholars hold that they are Dravidians and some a mixed people of Dravido-Mongoloid. It is well known that a community named Koches built an empire in Western Assam, and Naranarayan and Chilarai, two famous names in the history of Assam relationship with those empire building Koches. On the other hand, Koches is a Hindu caste found all over the Brahmaputra valley. Further the Dheyans of Cachar also claim their relationship with those empire-building Koches. Dalton (1978) has shown two parallel racial origins of the Koches- \textit{first}, the Rajbansis are real Koch belonging to the Dravidian group and \textit{second}, the animists Koches who are said to be known as Panti-Koch are of Bodo origin. But to Grierson, Bodo is a name of a linguistic group. Perhaps by the term Bodo, Dalton means Mongoloid. He also says that the Koches

\textit{Major Playfair, A., The Garos, 1975, p 22
of Garo Hills are known as Pani-Koch. Quoting Dr. Buchanan, Dalton says that they took this name to differentiate themselves from the Garos, with whom they are very often equated by the Bengalis, because they have certain similarities with them\textsuperscript{26}.

Dr. Griesson also says that the Koches of Garo Hills are known as Pani-Koch, a name they have taken to identify themselves as little or inferior Koch as the term Pani means little. It sounds fantastic because there is no evidence of the existence of the superior Koch in Garo Hills to compare with, we also failed to trace out the meaning for the term 'Pani'. The term Pani in Bengali, Hindi and Assamese means water; in Sanskrit it means hand trade, cove tone, fearful Danava etc. and no where it means little.

Dr. Kar, however, narrowed down the application of the term Pani-Koch, according to him the Satpari Koches of Garo Hills alone are known as Pani-Koch\textsuperscript{27}. We can only say that we have not come across any such information till Dr. Kar tells us so. Mr. Rajen Rabha (1974) on the other hand holds that

\textsuperscript{27} Kar, Dr. P. C., \textit{British Annexation of Garo Hills}, 1970: XVIII
according to the legend of the Koch-Rabha the ancestor of the Rabha was one Koch. So far as our knowledge goes this legend does not belong to the Koch but to the Rabhas. He further says that the Tintikiya Koch Rabhas are the real Koch, who went to Garo Hills and took the name Pani Koch i.e. Jungle Koch to differentiate themselves from the Koches of the plain. It may be stated that the meaning of the term Pani is not Jungle as stated by Mr. Rabha but it means 'of the trees'. But according to Major Playfair the equivalent Tintikiya word for Jungle is talai and not Pan or Pani.

According, to our information the Tintikiya Koches are neither known as Pani-Koch nor as Koch-Rabha may be correct when he says that the Rabhas were the progeny of the Tintikiya Koches, but that does not mean that the Tintikiyas are the Rabhas or they should be called or known as Koch-Rabha. The Kalitas are believed to be of Aryan origin but that matter the Aryans cannot be called Kalita. It seems up that Mr. Rabha was mislead by the wrong classification of the Rabhas made by
Mr. Allan\textsuperscript{28}, Rev. Endles\textsuperscript{29} and Frienol Pereira\textsuperscript{30}; who hold that the Koch, Tintikiya and Sanga are Sub-Divisions of the Rabhas. But this division or classification is not correct.

The Tintikiyas and the Sangas are the section of the Garo Hills Koches. They do not have any link or connection with Rabhas of Garo Hills and also those of Assam. There are, however, a section of people known as Koch-Rabha in Dhubri and Kokrajhar sub-divisions of erstwhile Goalpara District in Assam. These are Koch people whom Dr. Buchanan called Pani-Koch in 1814, now call themselves as Rabha or Koch-Rabha\textsuperscript{31} but this nomenclature is not of great antiquity.

According to our information it is only from 1949 that the animist Koches of Goalpara started to accept the name Rabha, by which they were called by the higher caste Hindus to mean them as unclean people in opprobrious sense. This name seems to have been given first by their fellow kinsmen, the Koch-Rajbansis after their proselytisation to show that the

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  \item[\textsuperscript{28}] Allen, B.C., \textit{Gazetteers of the Khasi, Garo, Lushai Hills}, 1980, Ch. III, 31.
  \item[\textsuperscript{29}] Rev. Endles, S., \textit{The Kacharis}, 1975: 83.
  \item[\textsuperscript{30}] Friend-Pereira, J.E., \textit{Assam Census}, 1911 (1912), Vol. III, Part I, 146.
  \item[\textsuperscript{31}] Saha, R. \textit{Rasan}, August, 1981: 3
\end{itemize}
Koches were not as unclean as they were believed to be and unclean people who identify themselves as the Koch found in Pravat Joyar area are not the Koches but the Rabhas. This superficial name they own seem to have accepted very tamely. Now some of them are known as Koch some of them as Rabhas. This however does not seem to be without good reason. In Assam the Koches are not recognized as Scheduled Tribes while the Rabhas are; by identifying themselves as Rabha, they are at least entitled to the state facilities.

The Koches of the Garo Hills have no tradition or legend of their migration. They claim Arbella Hill range of central Garo Hills as the original seat of their residence. It is believed that they traveled down to the plain areas pushed by the new comers, the Garos. We have stated elsewhere that between the Koches and the Garos, the scholars believe that the Koches were the older inhabitants of the District. According to Hunter, in former days entire Garo Hills was peopled by the Koches. While according to Major Playfair the entire western Garo Hills was under their sway. From there they had to make way for the new comers the Garos either due to force mejeure
or in search of remunerative cultivation land.

Dr. Majumder however cited a legend of the origin and migration of the Koches of Garo Hills. According to this legend, the Garo Hills Koches were the inhabitants of Rasan Mukprak Tari (Sunrise Hillock). The Koch originated from two sisters Mukti and Kundi who were daughters of sun. They married one Hajo, one after other, on the death of the former. The Koches of Garo Hills who claim to be the children of these two sisters migrated to Garo Hills from Hajo in Kamrup District. The genuineness of this tradition is doubtful. It seems that the legend is a recent creation with a tinge of fiction upon the historical fact.

In any case it does not through any light on the past history and migration of the Koches. Dr. Kar also speaks of their migration form Tibet to Brahmaputra valley and then to Garo Hills but he cited no authority in support of his contention. Mr. Das and Mr. Rabha quoting Major Playfair say that the

32 Dr. Majumder, D.N., Eastern Himalayas, 1980: 42
Koches migrated from Tibet\textsuperscript{33}. But we did not find any such surmise in his monograph. The Garos, he rather holds that it is not believable that the Koches might have come from Tibet.

The Koches of Garo Hills are different in many respects from the Koches of other parts of the country. They have their tribal dialect, animistic religion and non-Hindu cultures and traditions. Perhaps this prompted Dr. Majumder to pose a question as to whether we can treat the Koches of Garo Hills as the Kinsfolk of the Koches and Rajbansis of Assam and Bengal. But we could not persuade ourselves to accept that the Koches of Garo Hills are a different Koch people, because their difference appears to us to be the difference of the degree of their acculturation and not racial.

We, however, notice a systematic attempts made by some eminent scholars to show that the Koches of Garo Hills are not the same Koch as are found in their parts of the country. But when put their surmises to historical test those appear to have fallen as wild conjecture than bases on any

\footnote{Dr. Das, A.K. and Dr. Rabha, \textit{The Rabhas of West Bengal}, 1967: 30.}
facts or historical truth. Of the scholars, who say that the Koches of Garo Hills are not the same Koches of Assam and Bengal mention may be made of Dr. Grierson. According to him the Koches of Garo Hills are the Garos on their imperfect stage of Hinduisation, for the name Koch, they took by propitiation Koch power. But we have neither any authority nor any legend to make such conjecture. The time factors of Koch in habitation in Garo Hills also appears to oppose any such surmise, as the Koches of Garo Hills are said to have been in Garo Hills much before the advent of the Garos therein. There are therefore, reasons to believe that the Koches of Garo Hills could not have been progeny of the Garos, since there was no Garo in Garo Hills when the Koches are believed to have been there. Col. Dalton also bears almost the same opinion about the Koches of Garo Hills though on a different context.

We have stated above that Koches of Garo Hills are different from the Koches of Assam and Bengal, and their no room for doubt about it. But their differences are neither unexplainable nor one of unknown antecedent. Their difference is the difference of the degree of acculturation which are bound
to be depending of the degree of foreign influence. So, it will be a travesty of truth, mutilation of fact and denial of history to say that the Koches of Garo Hills are different from the Koches of Bengal and Assam. There are authorities to show that the non Hindu Mongoloid Koches adopted Hinduism and became a caste and the process is found to be still active.

The Koches of the Garo Hills have also a tribal organization. The Koches of Garo Hills are divided into seven endogamous groups form the pattern of their distribution it appears that each of the groups or divisions lived in some well defined areas, traces of which are still extent. Dr. Grierson named six divisions of the Koches such as, Wanang, Harigaya, Satpari, Dasgaiya, Chapra and Tintikiya. But Mr. Allen has recorded only three divisions such as Dasgaiya, Harigaya and Anang (Wanang). This is apparently an incomplete list. The other divisions or groups such as Sanga, which is also known as Harigaya was known by him along with Tintikiya as the divisions of the Rabhas. Dr. Kar also holds that the Rabha has Tintikiya, Sanga and Koch-Rabha, as its sub-divisions. In Garo Hills there is no tribe known as Koch-Rabha. Dr. Majumder in
one place held that the Koches comprises five groups, and in another place only four.

The groups or divisions of the Koches of Garo Hills, as we find them now are the Wanang, Harigaya or Sanga, Satpari, Chapra or Dasgaiya or Margan, Tintikiya, Banai and Sankar Koch, Dr. Grierson's Chapra and Dasgaiya are not two distinct groups or divisions but are two names of the same Chapra group. Margan is also another name of the Chapra Koches. The Harigaiya and Sanga are also not different groups. They are the same people known in two different names that Allen has shown as Koch while refereeing to them as Harigaiya and the Rabha, while calling them Sanga. This is not correct.

The aforesaid Koch groups are endogamous and they practice non-connubiality among the groups. Most of the aforesaid Koch clan names appear to be geographical such as Satpari which means the inhabitants of seven villages, Dasgaiya the inhabitants of ten villages, Harigaiya the inhabitants of the village Harigaon, Chapra from Assamese Chapar i.e. low lands.
The name Wanang however, is an exception. There is a Koch clan (Nikini) called “Wanang”. It is believed that the group name Wanang has been derived from the clan name Wanang. It is likely because there is a legend of Wanang veer of extraordinary size and strength capable of carrying all the trees together grown in seven hillocks (sat hadoon). The term Wanang has other connotations also, “You are bamboo” or “Bamboo be fruited”. But no legend or tradition is available to connect them with the element of bamboo. Originally it might be a totemistic name. The name Tintikiya is said to have been originated from the term ‘tin thak’ i.e. wearing pattern of the Koch women in three parts of body. The traditional dress of the Koch women is comprised of three pieces of cloth which they wear on the three parts of the body, Lifun on the waist, Kambang on the breast, and Paga on the head. The Sankar Koch is the name, derived from the Sanskrit term Sankar meaning mixed. They are called Sankar because they are a mixed people of different communities or Koch groups. This group is constituted by the excommunicated Koch people, due to some social offence such as incest, adultery and marrying
within prohibited degree or outside their own group or Koch tribe and fell out of their favour of their own people. They are also called Halu-Mandai, literally meaning land Garo (Halu-land: Mandai-Garo), but its actual meaning is ploughing or plain Garo opposite to Hill or non-ploughing Garo. They are called Garo because the Koches equate the excommunicated Koches with the Garo, whom they consider lower in social rank.

The aforesaid clans or groups are generally confined to some distinct areas of the plain Mouzas of Garo Hills district. The Wanang live on the northern most of the Koch areas between Phulbari and Garobadha in Mouza NO. 6 and 7; the Harigaiya and Satpari in the middle i.e. southern part of the Mouza No. 7 and western part of Mouza No.10. The Chaptera or Dasgaiya dwell further south, from Garobadha up to Dalu comprising the Mouza Nos. 7, 8 and 9. The Tintikiya and the Banias only on the southern border including Mymensing in Bangladesh (now they are found in Mouza No VII also). Tintikiyas are sub-divided into three subdivisions such as Simsang, Hajum and Mri. The Sankar Koch lives in the East and West of Garobadha and not beyond.
Under each of the aforesaid endogamous groups there are small exogamous group called Nikini or Jat in Koch language. These groups are almost identical with the Garo Machong and the Khasi Kur in their organization and function. The Koch Nikinis are still in constituted from its original 18 Nikinis. Dr. Kar has mentioned about 64 such spatial groups of the Kochees on the basis of the survey conducted by Dr. Majumder. But in practice it appears that there are more than 64 spatial groups, a list of which is furnished in Appendix ‘A’. The Kochees belonging to all the endogamous groups however, refer only about eighteen jukus (atharo-juku), meaning eighteen clan or Nikini. The term juku also means clan. This shows that originally the Kochees had only 18 clans or spatial groups, from which expanded to a large number with passage of time.

The Spatial groups of the Kochees are matrilineal and strictly exogamous. They cannot marry within the group from their mother’s side. The groups or Nikinis has many functions and duties. They regulate marriages of their young’s and bear the responsibility to look after the welfare of the distressed members of the clan people such as the orphans, widowers,
old and infirm people and the minors. The clan women are also required to make Chika Sora when any of their clan people dies.

The Koches of Garo Hills also has a kind of clan friendship called Saru-juku. The Saru-juku is sponsored relationship and from the day a clan becomes a Saru-juku of another clan the people belonging to both clans are treated as the members of the same clan as if they have descended from the same ancestress. This relationship is made by exchange of hind legs of a pig at the time of Saru-juku making ceremony.

This Saru-juku is like the Saru-Bhais of the hill Bondos. But among the hill Bondo Saru-Bhai relationship is based on residential proximity. But Koch Saru-juku knows no geographical limit. They treat each other as the people of the same Nikini or clan from the day they become Saru-juku to each other and marriage between Saru-juku is a taboo, in whichever part they may live.

The Koch Saru-jukus are not parallel group. A particular Nikini may be the Saru-juku of one clan and again it may be
Saru-juku of another clan with which the former Nikini may not be a Saru-juku. A list of Wanang Saru-juku is shown in Appendix ‘B’

The Koch Saru-juku is completely different from the Garo exogamous clans of Marak, Sangma and Momin but it has little similarity with the Khasi ‘Iteh Kur’, though there are also difference between Koch Saru-juku and Khasi Iteh Kur. Khasi Iteh Kur is believed to be the branches of the same clan. The term Saru seems to be Garo origin. In Garo language Saru means friend to which relationship the Koches call Sakhi. So the compound term Saru-juku means the friend of a clan. Col. Dalton is of the opinion that the Koches are one of the disturbed remnants of the great Kon-Munda people, who conquered Kamrup.

The Koches of Meghalaya trace their relationship to Naranarayan and Chilarai two Koch kings who once established a great kingdom in Western Assam. As such they believe in the story of their origin from an adulterons union between two sisters Hirai and Jirai (who were the wives of Hira
Mondal) with Shiva the Hindu God. The story of their migration to their present habitat in Garo Hills was given to the eminent anthropologist Dr. D. N. Majumder by Shri Binod Chandra Koch of Harigaon village in West Garo Hills. It runs like this: the original home of the Koches was in a place called 'Rasan Mukpraktario' (the hill where the sun rises) or Udoigri which is probably the sanskritized form of the Koch term. Then they migrated to Kamrup and reached Hajo. But from Hajo they also had to migrate for fear of Paramrama of the Koches originated from two sisters Mukdi and Kundi, who were daughters of Sun. Mukdi was married to Hajo, who after Mukdi’s death married Kundi. In their migration from Hajo they reached Sonapur and there they went to a place described as Hacheng (sand grains as big as tamarind seeds and stayed there for some time). From there they migrated to a place called Rongjeng. From Rongjeng they continued their journey towards south-west where they reached the Simsang River and followed its downward course. They crossed the river in a very difficult place. Twelve households failed to cross the river and they were left behind. These twelve households inter married with
the Garos and started to take beef. When the Koches established a kingdom in south-west Garo Hills the descendants of these twelve households were invited to come and settle in the new Koch kingdom but they refused on the ground that they had taken beef. The Atongs are the descendants of these twelve households. The other branch of the Koches followed the course of the Simsang River and, ultimately in the plain areas in the south western portion of Garo Hills, they found a kingdom under a powerful chief named Surya Narayan. After him Mahendra Narayan became the chief and during his time the Koch kingdom was annexed to the British Empire. Even today the Koches of Garo Hills referred Mahendra Narayan as Pagla Raja (mad king) for his antics. He is also known as Okata Raja, the king who tears open the womb of pregnant women. There is a place in the south western corner of Garo Hills (under Ampati Civil sub-division) which is called Mahendraganj after the Koch king Mahendra Narayan.
2.6. Population:

Exact number of the Koch population is not ascertainable. By the time Census operation started in India, the Koches came to be known by various designations, spoke language different from their own, professed faith other than their religion and wedded to a culture foreign to the Koches. Buchanan in the early part of the nineteenth century estimated their number as three lakhs and fifty thousand; while Hodgson observed that the number of the Koches could not be less than eight lakhs to a million or a million and a quarter by the middle of the same century.

In Meghalaya, the Koches are mainly concentrated in western and south-western parts of West Garo Hills District. They are also found in Assam, Manipur, Tripura, North Bengal, Bankura in West Bengal, Purina in Bihar and, Chittagong and Nowakhali in Bangladesh. The Koch population according to available Census reports is as follows:
Population Census of Koches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Garo Hills</th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>313000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>354635</td>
<td>2337</td>
<td>1050171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>377807</td>
<td>5609</td>
<td>1228900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>343000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1200000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td>6684</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
<td>All Meghalaya Male – 6712 Female 6808 Total – 13,520</td>
<td>N. A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1881 Census and 1891 Census the figures for Koches in Assam and West Bengal include both Great Koch and Small Koch. However the figures for Garo Hills include only the small Koch community.

According to 2001 Census Report, the present population of Meghalaya is 23, 06,069. In this figure of total population of Meghalaya, Koches shared 70,000. But according to a survey done by Meghalaya Koch Association, the present population of Koches is around 50,000.
2.7. Language and Dress:

The Koch dialect is of Tibeto-Burman origin (Gill 1924). The influence of both Bengali and Assamese language is reflected in their dialect. The language that the Kochees of Eastern India spoke in olden days is now almost extinct to all intents and purposes as majority of them now Assamese, Bengali and their patois. The Kochees of Meghalaya can speak Bengali, Assamese and Garo, and the educated section among them can converse in English and Hindi too.

It is a well known fact that the Kochees ruled Assam and Bengal for a long time. The extent of territory over which they ruled must have fluctuated from time to time. At one time, according to Anderson, their kingdom extended from Himalayas on the north to the Bay of Bengal on the south. He is also of the opinion that the people of the vast Koch kingdom spoke Koch language, and holds that the initial accent stress found in the Bengali and the Assamese are due to influence of

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35 Anderson, J. D.: Vide introduction to the Kacharis, 1975: XVII
36 Ibid.
the Koch language\textsuperscript{37}. B. Kakati also traces the Koch elements in the initial accent stress found in the Kāmrūpī dialects, although he observed that the Koch dialect might not have been so powerful to influence the two neighbouring Aryan dialects- Assamese and Bengali, and to direct the radical changes in the complicated accentual system\textsuperscript{38}.

A comparative study of the vocabulary of the three languages shows that there are many Koch words in Assamese and Bengali languages. B. Kakati rightly thinks that a close scrutiny of the various sub-branches of the Bodo language will undoubtedly swell the list of loan words\textsuperscript{39}. He also believes that the Bodos which includes the Koches and the Aryan speaking people of North eastern India lived side by side for centuries and therefore, incoming and outgoing from the Bodo to Aryan and vice versa in their vocal are but natural expectation\textsuperscript{40}.

Excepting Chapra and Satpari section of the Koches, a

\textsuperscript{37} Anderson, J. D.; \textit{JARSB}, 1913, p. 865
\textsuperscript{38} Kakati, B., \textit{Assamese: Its Formation and Development}, 1972, p. 86
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, p. 45
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, p. 41
section of the Pati Rabha the Dalus and Hajongs and other communities speak language which are closely related to each other and to the Atong dialect of Garo. All the languages of the Hinduized communities of Meghalaya are ultimately related to Garo and Bodo as all these languages come under the Bodo group of the Assam-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman family (Grierson 1903). Burling shows the genetic relationship between these languages by the following diagram⁴¹.

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  PROTOBODO
     /   \
  /     \
PROTOBODO  PROTOBODO
     |    |
    |----|
PROTOBODO     PROTOBODO
```

In a latter publication Burling (1961:79) states about these languages as follows:

"Though widely dispersed these languages or dialects are said to be mutually intelligible. The member of the Koch

⁴¹ Burling, Robbins, 'Pro-Bodo' Language, 35, Baltimore, 1959
Burling Robbins, 'An Incipient Caste Organization in the Garo Hills', Man in India, XL, 1960
group are also quite scattered but are found mostly to the West of Bodo group, though there is considerable overlap. It includes apparently some almost, of not completely extinct languages of Cooch Bihar. Rabha which is found to the north of Garo Hills and Pani-Koch, a small group to the West of the Garo Hills, which is divided into several divisions, including Tintekiya and Wanang. The Koch group also includes Atong which is spoken by a group actually living in the Garo Hills and generally reckoned both them and by other Garos, but whose language is not mutually intelligible with Garo proper”.

As far as the dress of the Koches is concerned, the traditional dress of the Koch women is comprised of three pieces of cloth which they wear on the three parts of the body, *Lufun* on the waist, *Kambang* on the breast and, *Paga* on the head. The name *Tintikiya* is said to have been originated from the terms ‘Tinthak’ i.e. wearing pattern of the Koch women in three parts of the body. The men wear *dhoti* (unstitched lower garment) and shirt. However, sari, blouse, pant, shirt, coat are now commonly worn by women and men respectively.