

ABOUT THE KOCH RAJBANSHI



Photo: Linkan Roy

Various legends trace the origin of the Koch Rajbanshi in Siberia region and its affinity with communities like Lepcha and Dimasa. Considered as indigenous people of South Asia, at present they live in lower of Nepal, Northern of Bengal, North Bihar, Northern Bangladesh, whole of Assam, parts Meghalya and Bhutan. These modern geographical areas were once part of the Kamata kingdom ruled by the Koches for many centuries.

The Koches also started calling themselves as Rajbanshi to keep connected with their royal lineage of Koch Dynasty of Kamata. Koch Rajbanshis have gone through many social and cultural changes through the centuries and have become an inclusive social category in which many other groups have joined. The transformation of the “Koch” tribal society into the “Koch Rajbanshi” nation is a unique phenomenon. At present when we refer about the Koch Rajbanshi, we actually refer to an inclusive social group, rather than an exclusive community. Koch Rajbanshis are largely Hindus with lots of their own deities and rituals. A large section of Koch Rajbanshi became follower of Islam and the present Muslims of North Bengal, West Assam and Northern Bangladesh known as “Deshi Mushalman” are of Koch Rajbanshi origin. There are also Christian and Buddhist Koch Rajbanshis.

During the expansion of the Koch Kamata Empire, Koch Rajbanshi took the initiate of creating a common culture and a common language in the region which is at present popularly termed as Kamatapuri. Small sections of the Koch Rajbanshi people have successfully preserved the Tibeto-Burman Koch language and culture. On the other hand majority of Koch Rajbanshi people speak the language of the ancient Kamata Kingdom, which is Kamatapuri (or Rajbanshi). The western part of the ancient Kamata kingdom became Cooch Behar princely state during the British rule, which was later annexed with West Bengal as a district. The eastern part was merged with Assam after independence of India.