



Centre for Koch Rajbanshi Studies and Development

www.kochrajbanshiculture.org

Powered by CKRSD:

www.kamatapur.com

www.mahabirchilarai.com

www.ambikacharanchoudhury.com

Photo: Spandan Anurag Barman

Empowering Koch Rajbanshis to bring Change...

The Profile

The indigenous, aboriginal and traditional Koch-Rajbongshi people are spread across Assam, Meghalaya, North Bengal, Bihar within India and is also present in Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, and can be safely called the largest trans-boarder ethnic community of South Asia. And even though the emergence of modern nation states have divided this group of people, across provinces and nations, yet their shared history, past imagination and many commonalities still tie them. And like the Banjulung people of Australia, the First Nation people of Canada or the Native Indian people of America, the Koch-Rajbongshi (Rajbanshi) people are the First Nation people of South Asia region.

The advent of the 21st century and an increasingly globalized world brings along new challenges as well as opportunities and one such opportunity is the Internet. Today, social media and the web has enabled this traditional group of people spread across different states and nations, to be able to come together, once again, at least online, like they once did as one people and one nation, when they roamed freely in this part of South Asia. The problems faced by the community, is both diverse as well as common. Keeping these aspects in mind, few like minded individuals from the community, belonging to diverse background, like law, research, media, business, etc., came together to work among the community both at the, 'strategic level' as well as at the 'ground level', by initiating various development programmes, including policy interventions, legal interventions, research and studies, training and capacity building, sports and cultural events, etc., with the primary objective to 'preserve' and 'promote' the rich culture, history, language, belief system, socio-political rights, etc., of the Koch-Rajbongshi people, culminating in the birth of CKRSD on 23rd August, 2012 at Guwahati, Assam.

**Centre for Koch
Rajbanshi
Studies and
Development
(CKRSD)** is
registered under
The Indian Trust
Act, 1882 vide
Regd. No.
3314/2012 at
Guwahati, Assam.



Shri J.P. Rajkhowa, Hon'ble Governor of Arunachal Pradesh and former Chief Advisor of CKRSD delivering a Lecture on 'Sankardeva in the Koch Kingdom' at Tezpur University, Assam

Our Advisers

Shri. Jogesh Borah, District & Sessions Judge (Retired), Guwahati

Prof. A.C. Talukdar, Former HOD of Political Sc. Dept, Arunachal University, Arunachal Pradesh

Dr. Rupanjali Devi, Associate Professor, Education Dept., Bongaigaon College, Bongaigaon

Indrajit Narayan Dev, Film Maker on Anthropological subject, Guwahati

Capt. Nalini Ranjan Ray, Chief Manager (Security), State Bank of India, New Delhi

Kamaleswar Koch, General Secretary, Meghalaya Koch Association, Meghalaya

Board of Trustees

Vikram Rajkhowa, Chairperson

Arup Jyoti Das, Managing Trustee and Director

Bhaskar Senapati, Trustee and Treasurer



Photo: Arup Jyoti Das

Advocacy and Lobbying

Scheduling of the Koch-Rajbongshi community of Assam in Scheduled Tribe (Plains) list: The President of India issued an Ordinance in the year 1996 declaring the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam as Scheduled Tribe (Plains), which was renewed for three subsequent terms of three months durations, i.e., combined duration of 1 year. In spite of continuous re-promulgation of the said ordinance for the fourth time, it was not enacted on time leading to its lapse. In view of the same it was CKRSD, which for the first time filed a Writ Petition (Civil) in the Gauhati High Court praying for adequate relief, which is now under adjudication.

Protected people in Tribal Belts & Blocks of Assam: Submitted a representation with the Chief Minister and other concerned authorities, demanding the inclusion of the Koch-Rajbongshi community as 'protected people' in all the Tribal Belts and Blocks of the state of Assam and not just in four districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon as the Koch-Rajbongshi people of Assam are one and the same class of people.

Refugee Law for Trans-Border Indigenous People: Submitted representation with the Home Minister of India and others, requesting for the creation of a separate division in the Ministry of External Affairs for the Koch-Rajbongshi people (like the Sindhi and Bengali people coming to India from Pakistan and Bangladesh) and also create a separate Refugee Law for the Trans-border Indigenous People of South-Asia, like the Koch-Rajbanshi's, Mech, Dimasa, Meitei's, Mizo's, etc.

Anti-Corruption initiatives: Filed RTI with Dept. of WPTBC seeking information about the functioning of the Koch-Rajbongshi Development Council, as there has been allegations from various quarters about financial and administrative irregularities in the said Council.

Documentation of Social History of the Koch Rajbanshis of South Asia:

Since its inception, CKRSD has seriously devoted itself in documenting the social history of the Koch-Rajbanshis of South Asia (India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan). The Koch-Rajbanshis have gone through many social movements and transformation in various parts of South Asia in the Post-colonial period. The community is now divided by modern political boundaries of South Asia though they live in contiguous areas. The modern political and regional division has resulted in loss of traditional and historical identity of the community and they are involved in various stages of social movement for social justice in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, etc. CKRSD is trying to document the social history of the Koch-Rajbanshi people from all important aspects, which includes documentation of Memorandum, Pamphlets, Audio-Visual materials and Monographs.

Koch-Rajbanshi children (left) of Dinajpur district of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, indigenous Koch-Rajbanshis have to face violent persecution in the hands of religious fundamentalist groups

Studies and Research:

From the very beginning, CKRSD's prime objective has been to study and do research on the Koch-Rajbanshi community of South Asia. The rich history and culture of the Koch-Rajbanshi people, as well as their present socio-political status has not to be studied properly by mainstream scholars. This is due to their unfortunate positioning in periphery of political territories. Lack of importance of the community in the mainstream society of West Bengal, Bangladesh, Assam and Meghalaya has resulted in academic negligence. Hence, CKRSD has devoted itself in various studies, research and field reports on the history, and heritage and present socio-economical condition of the Koch-Rajbanshi people. Some of the Studies (both completed and ongoing) undertaken by CKRSD or its members are given below:

- A Status report of the Cooch Behar Palace
- Koch-Rajbanshis of Nepal: A field based Study
- Demand for Scheduled Tribe Status by the Koch-Rajbanshi: A legal perspective
- Identity of the Koch-Rajbanshis: A Village Study in Dhubri and Kokrajhar District
- Internally displaced Koch-Rajbanshi: A report

Scholarships & Fellowships

• Shri. Kamaleswar Sarkar is a Cooch Behar (West Bengal) based Koch-Rajbanshi Writer and Poet, who was awarded the CKRSD senior Scholarship for the year 2013-14. Mr. Sarkar has been writing in the Rajbanshi-Kamatapuri language for long and is one of the most respected poets of the community. He is also a ardent collector of manuscripts and valuable documents related to the history of Kamatapuri region.

• Shri. Trinayan Konch, a promising student coming from an economically weaker section of society from North Lakhimpur district was provided a one-time Scholarship as well as a soft-loan to join the Master of Computer Application program at Cotton College State University.



Photo: Anuj Choudhury

Internally Displaced (IDP) Koch-Rajbanshis in Bongaigaon district of Assam. During the height of Bodo Movement, many indigenous Koch-Rajbanshi people became victims of ethnic cleansing by certain Bodo Insurgent Groups and lost their homes

Sanatan Koch Memorial Archery Competition: An Unique way to peace and unity

CKRSD strongly believes that traditional sports can play a catalytic role in bringing about peace and unity in the society. Traditional sports like archery competition was very much popular among the greater Koch society and Koch-Rajbanshis were once known for their Archery skills. Keeping the said aspect in mind, CKRSD is organizing an Archery Competition in the memory of Koch warrior Sanantan Koch since 2012. So far the event has been organized in Koch-Rajbanshi majority areas of Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Barpeta District of Assam. The event is organized in collaboration with other civil society organization with a view to encourage partnership. Kamatapuri Association, a West Assam based civil society organization has been partner of the event since its inception. In 2015, Daisingari Bisuwa Committee partnered with CKRSD to organize the event. Sanatan Koch Best Archer Competition has become very popular among all communities and every year around five hundred people (including women) belonging to various age groups participated in the said event. Besides Koch-Rajbanshi people, members of various other communities like the Adivasis, Boros, etc also participated in the event creating amity and bond among the participants.



Photo: Arup Jyoti Das

A woman participant ready to hit the target while her Adivasi counterpart looks on during the 3rd Sanatan Koch Memorial Best Archer Competition, 2015 at Daisingari Village, Barpeta, Assam

Knowledge Sharing:



KOCH RAJBANSHIS OF NEPAL

Arup Jyoti Das

CKRSD briefing aims to place information and knowledge about the Koch-Rajbanshi community in the Public domain.

These briefings are based on research and field studies.

The present briefing on the Koch-Rajbanshis of Nepal is an outcome of the writer's field visit to Koch-Rajbanshi areas of Nepal during 2013.

The Koch-Rajbanshi people of Nepal live mostly in three districts of Nepal namely Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari. The present demand for a territorial **Kochila Pradesh** by the Rajbanshis of Nepal comprises these three districts. Among these three districts, Jhapa and Morang are the major two districts where Koch-Rajbanshi population is high. According to the recent census the population of Koch-Rajbanshi in Nepal is around 3,00,000. This is merely 5% (or less) of the total Koch-Rajbanshi population of South Asia. However, this small percentage of the Koch-Rajbanshis of Nepal are well-composed, progressive and seems to be united politically unlike the Koch-Rajbanshis of North

Bengal and Assam of India. "Rajbanshi Samaj Bikash Samity (RSBS)" was the pioneer organization which created awareness among the Koch-Rajbanshis of Nepal about their history, culture and identity in the 90s. In 1996, they took the initiative to organize the "International Koch-Rajbanshi Conference" in Nepal, where Koch-Rajbanshis of South Asia met at a large scale.

Social leaders and activists like Phulsing Rajbanshi, Tularam Sing Rajbanshi and Panisai Rajbanshi have contributed a lot in creating a progressive Koch-Rajbanshi society and making the Koch-Rajbanshi community an inclusive one in Nepal. It has been observed that Koch is an inclusive term in the context of Kochila territory in which Mechi, Bhotia and other indigenous communities are

Communicating Research and sharing knowledge in the public domain is an important initiative of CKRSD. CKRSD firmly believes that Research and Knowledge does not have real value unless it is not placed in the public domain. For an empowered society, Research and Knowledge has to be communicated. CKRSD attempts to achieve this purpose



Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, is welcomed in traditional Koch-Rajbanshi style by CKRSD in the Urban Winter Festival 2015 at Guwahati

through publications, dissemination of Research through websites, Photo and Cultural Exhibitions in various parts of Assam, Round Table discussion and workshops, etc. Moreover, many important documents, publication and books have been made available for free download in the official website of CKRSD. This has helped many scholars who are working on issues related to the Koch-Rajbanshi community. We have also started publishing 'CKRSD briefing' series, which aims to disseminate various Koch-Rajbanshi research to reach the public domain.

Awareness for Culture and History:

The Koch-Rajbanshi community is very rich in cultural tradition, and has a glorious history, with some of the most important heritage of East and North-East India are from the Koch-Rajbanshi people. To create awareness about their history, culture and heritage, CKRSD had organized two big events in Guwahati in the Urban Winter Festival. The winter festival is organized by Metropolis every year in the month of January where many organizations take part from India and abroad. In 2013 Urban Winter Festival, CKRSD organized a three day program titled the "Koch-Rajbanshi: A Journey of glory, dignity and struggle from 1250 A.D. to 2013 A.D.". The program was a unique combination of Photo Exhibition, Painting Exhibition, Folk Dance and discussion. Again in 2015, CKRSD organized another three day program titled "The Rise of the Koch Rajbanshis" in which a huge exhibition was held at Shradhanjali Kanan, Guwahati. Along with Exhibition, Koch Rajbanshi folk artists performed various cultural activities for three days attracting hundreds of visitors. CKRSD has started supporting public programs like Bisuwa to popularize culture of the Koch-Rajbanshis where it was forgotten. In April 2015, it supported the Bisuwa program of Daisingiri Village in Barpeta district of Assam.

CKRSD Digital Archive



CKRSD Digital Archive was created with a view to document social history of the Koch-Rajbanshi community of South Asia. The process was started in 2012 with the help of International Institute of Social History (IISH), Netherland. This initiative is an ongoing process and at present the archive contains rare video

Interviews of various scholars, writers and activists from the Koch Rajbanshi community, digitized copies of rare publications, pamphlet, memorandums, etc. A limited number of digitized documents are available for access.



Visitors taking photos at the "Rise of the Koch Rajbanshi" program at Urban Winter Festival 2015 at Guwahati

Collaboration and Support



In many occasions CKRSD works in collaboration with like minded Civil Society Groups and NGOs with an aim to build partnership and extend network. CKRSD highly value collaboration, so that better understanding is developed among various groups. At the same time it also supports activities of other organizations time to time. CKRSD gives equal importance to both local and International organizations while collaborating. In the past CKRSD has collaborated with local Civil Society Organizations, NGOs and International organizations, like International Institute of Social History, Actionaid, Kamatapur Association, Koch-Rajbonghi Cultural Society, Consortium of Koch Royal Family's among others.

Women Empowerment:

Traditionally women have played an important and dignified role in the Koch-Rajbanshi society, whether it is in the decision making process within the community or in terms of representing the family. It should be mentioned here that traditionally Koch society is a matrilineal society in which woman is the family head. However, at present except the Koches of present state of Meghalaya, large section of the Koch-Rajbanshi people of plains area follow a patriarchal system. Moreover, due to influence of other cultures, Koch-Rajbanshi women have lost their past dignified position in the society. In some instances, they have become victims of dowry. CKRSD organizes workshops and discussions to sensitize issues like dowry and other important issues related to women empowerment in various Koch-Rajbanshi areas. One such workshop was held at Dumardoh in Dhubri district of Assam in collaboration with Actionaid. CKRSD also organizes skill building workshop for woman.



Students at CKRSD supported Axiom Computer Institute at Futkibari, Dhubri

Computer Literacy Program in rural areas:

In order to bring about positive change among the traditional Koch-Rajbanshi people, including other marginalized community members, CKRSD has initiated computer education and skill development programs in rural areas by supporting local entrepreneurs to set-up home-based Computer Centre's and also establishing CKRSD's own Computer Study Center with the support of local stakeholders. Through such Computer and Study Centre's, CKRSD and its collaborating partners aim to provide free as well as low cost computer education to students and job seekers coming from marginalized section of the society. Even Computer Training camps are held to give basic computer training to women and school going children. At present a computer study center has been established in Gauripur and a computer institute is being supported in Futkibari, in the border district of Dhubri in Assam.



Photo: Trish Roy

A Koch girl from the state of Meghalaya. The Koches of Meghalaya has been quite successful in retaining and preserving the ancient tradition, culture and language of the Koches in its original form.

CKRSD Library



CKRSD Library contains many rare books on the Koch-Rajbongshis of South Asia. The categories of the collection include History, Politics, Economics and Literature. Some of these collections are very rare and are not available in any other library. These books have been collected from various parts of South Asia by making visits to those areas by CKRSD members.

In many occasions, well wishers have come forward and donated books and publications to CKRSD library. The library is open on all working days on prior appointment. PhD and other research scholars from various institute's from within the country like Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Gauhati University, Indian Institute of Technology, Sikkim University, Jadavpur University, etc, including various International Institute's have used sources from CKRSD Library.

FUNDING & DONATIONS

Monthly Payment:

You can donate Rs.1000/-, Rs.1500/- and Rs.2000/- on a monthly basis by issuing post dated cheques for 6 months, 12 months or 24 months. Our volunteer's will collect the PDCs from your door step.

Annual Payment:

You can also pay us a one-time annual payment of Rs.10,000/- or above either by issuing cheque in our favour or account transfer.

Project Finance:

We have various project(s) under implementation as well as planned, which you can fund partially (25% or 50% of project cost) or fully (100% of project cost). Our project cost vary from project to project, but usually structured at Rs. 25,000/-, Rs. 50,000/- and Rs. 1 lakh and above.

Payment Mode:

Payment can be made by Cash/ Cheque drawn in favour of 'Centre for Koch Rajbanshi Studies and Development' payable at Guwahati.

Office Address:

2nd Gate, Ground Floor, Hrishikesh Apartment,
Bongaon Road, Lakhi Mandir, Beltola, Guwahati
Assam (India), Pin-781028
email: kochrajbanshicentre@gmail.com



Weaving workshop on presevation of traditional Koch Design at Daisingari Village, Barpeta (Assam)



CKRSD team interacting with Koch-Rajbongshi IDPs in relief camps at Gosaigaon (Assam) during 2012 ethnic clashes



Kr. Amitabh Narayan of Koch Behar Royal family felicitated at CKRSD office in a strategic meeting to form a platform to address the grievance of Koch Royal families. The meeting was hosted by CKRSD for AKRSU and KRCS

Contact Details:

Chairperson: +91 99543 48258,
vikram.rajkhowa@gmail.com

Director: +91 98641 39312,
orupkoch@gmail.com

Office Coordinator: +91 99570 77895,
kochrajbanshicentre@gmail.com