

### **Regional Historiography: Political Economy of the Princely State of Cooch Behar**

#### **4.1 Regional Historiography, Regional History and (or) Local History**

The new regionally oriented directions in historiography are so recent that no generally recognised orthodoxy has yet been adopted. It becomes further complicated to correlate grand narratives of political economy and the political economy that exists or was in existence at regional and sub regional level. Therefore, many competing and opposite views regarding the definition and criteria of a region need to be considered first.

Sometimes regional history is portrayed as synonymous to local history. There are differences in the criteria by which the regions are defined. Naturally, a region may be differentiated on account of geographical details. In a way, this criterion is fundamental and sometimes it is even indisputable. Brian K. Roberts looks at geographical facts like climate, coastal profiles, forms of land and vegetation in order to define the region.<sup>1</sup> Roberts argues further that geography cannot be taken as the single frame of reference to define a region. Social, cultural and economic factors have been the other important determinants to define a region. For example Charles Phythian-Adams emphasises on the socio-cultural space to define a region.<sup>2</sup> Bill Lancaster provides an adequate list to perceive the notion of a region from a combination of pure socio-cultural factors: space, language, culture, economy, political movements, traditions and relationships vis-à-vis the concerned nation state. However a good number of scholars of economic history argues on the economic factor as the primary pre-condition to define a region.<sup>3</sup> According to Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, the basis of regionalism is also diverse: regions may be defined culturally (such as Jharkhand), linguistically (e.g. the Bhojpuri region), in terms of administrative units (like Madras Presidency), according to ecological classification (such as Gangetic delta), or ethnic identities (e.g. Nagaland).<sup>4</sup>

In order to differentiate regional history from local history and national history the regions may not be defined as divisions of states or as multiplications of localities. They may not assume a hierarchical unit between local and national. A region may be situated between them but they may not indispensably be situated there. A region may define itself autonomously. This means that neither national level nor local level may be given any primacy in historiography of regional phenomena. This also means that a historian ought to be careful while using statistical data produced by national authors; they may reflect unnatural projections of regional structure. This kind of top-down bias, uncritically utilized, may lead to secondary framing of questions and to false results in research work.

Nevertheless, it is evident from the above that region and its historiography subsume geography, economy (often as prime pre-condition), culture, language, traditions, ethnicity, political movements, and administrative units. These seemingly uncorrelated quantitative and qualitative variables help us to explore the niceties of political economy at regional, sub regional and local level. But what is political economy? Is it a homogeneous entity? Does it explain the economic behaviour of the society or encompass non-economic social attributes also? These questions have their relevance especially to explain politico-economic dynamics at regional context, that is, in contextualising the princely state of Cooch Behar precisely.

## **4.2. A Synoptic View on Political Economy**

Political economy is basically an approach which studies the social relations that evolve between people in the processes of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of the material benefits. Every society thus has definite system of production relations which depends on property. Adam Smith, the father of economics, did not use the term 'Political Economy' though all his disciples have invariably used the term for their treatises. However, Adam Smith considered political economy as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator and proposed two distinct objectives for it: first, to provide plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people and second, to supply the state or commonwealth with revenue sufficient for public services. <sup>5</sup>Political Economy thus proposes to enrich both the people and the sovereign. David Ricardo advocated that the purpose of the political economy is to

determine the laws which regulate distribution.<sup>6</sup> Marx in his introduction to the “Critique of Political Economy” (1859) outlined the order in which it is to be studied.<sup>7</sup> First, the general abstract definition, which is more or less applicable to all forms of society, second, the categories like classes, capital, wage labour, landed property and their mutual relations, third, the organization of the bourgeois society in the form of the state, fourth, the ‘International Organization of Production’ and fifth and finally, the world market and crises. According to Engels, “Political Economy is the science of the laws governing the production and exchange of the material means of subsistence in human society”.<sup>8</sup>

The emergence of subjectivism in the discourse of Political Economy is an extension of the essence of classical thought. The development of the Subjective School came in as a reaction to the ascendancy of organised socialism during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was a debate among the scholars about the definition of the Political economy. Marshall later tried to synthesize the views propounded by the classicists and the marginalists by saying that, “Political Economy or Economics is a study of mankind in the ordinary business of life. It examines that part of individual and social action, which is most closely connected with the use of the material requisites of well-being.”<sup>9</sup>

Dissatisfied with the classical and neo-classical postulates of political economy, Lionel Robbins conceptualised political economy as a discussion of principles of public policy in the economic field assumptions which, in nature of things, lie outside positive science and which are essentially normative in character.<sup>10</sup> The science of political economy embraced all of economics, positive and normative and evolved into different schools. In nutshell, political economy has a purpose and analysis and discussion of power relations and the distribution of income and resources.

It becomes obvious that classical, neo-classical school while dealing with political economy remained preoccupied with production, consumption and distribution of resources of a nation and possible positive outcome that society derives out of those economic activities. Hence, it is hard to distinguish between economy and political economy. Normative aspects of society have grossly been bypassed to deal with political economy or economy per se.

### **4.3. Political Economy of Cooch Behar State in Pre-colonial and Colonial Period**

With these theoretical ambiguities here an attempt has been made to understand to realize the political economy of Cooch Behar State in pre-colonial and colonial period. While carrying on this micro-level analysis of local history of Cooch Behar, an attempt of contextualisation has also been done by taking different contested arguments in consideration. First, Marx's 'materialistic interpretation of history' has been explored. According to him, all historical events are the results of a continuous struggle among different classes and groups in the society and the root cause of this struggle is the conflict between the 'mode of production' and 'the relations of production'.<sup>11</sup> The mode of production relates to a particular arrangement of production in a society that determines its entire social, political and religious way of living. Marx calls these relations as the relations of production, which are changing continuously. The mode of production transforms primarily because of changes in the state of productive forces. It is a known fact that economic historians with Marxist pedigree are having an inherent penchant to delve deep into those factors and forces that determine the courses of the 'mode of production' or which they generically term and categorise as the 'base'. However, non economic factors like culture, ethnicity, governance, religion, those prevail at the level of super structure are ignored either for methodological reasons or for ideological overload. Dialectical process demands an interaction between base and superstructure to realise concomitant change within the society.<sup>12</sup> We intend to contextualize our study of land-man relationship of Cooch Behar State against the backdrop of these theoretical issues/ arguments. To unravel the political economy of the Princely State of Cooch Behar let us begin the analysis by keeping the issue of land as the focal point of our discussion. In the process, it has been scrutinised whether the Princely State of Cooch Behar (before and after the British intrusion) through a process of interaction between base and superstructure has transitioned from feudalism to capitalism or it continued to remain as a variant of pre-capitalist social formation with its own distinctiveness. Now to capture the impact of non-economic factors as determinants of economic activities, Althusser's argument finds its relevance here. To him, social formation as an outcome may not always be dictated by economic instances, political (state) or ideological instances (religion or

culture) may assume the dominant position in determining the courses of change in the 'mode of production' and 'relations of production'.<sup>13</sup>

Researches on the agrarian history of the princely State of Cooch Behar rarely draw our attention towards such crucial questions like land-man relationship, distribution and ownership of land, methods and techniques of production, indebtedness and the significance of the money lenders vis-à-vis the issue of change within the agrarian society. The present study is an attempt to explore all these issues in a single analytical thread of political economy approach. Although colonial administrators and the official surveyors made occasional references about the society, economy, religion and culture of the people of the state the most satisfactory study in this regard is perhaps the treatise on land revenue prepared by Dewan Harendra Narayan Chaudhury (*The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*). It discusses about the economic pattern, the revenue administration and the different land settlements of the Cooch Behar state starting from the pre-colonial period and ranging upto the colonial period.<sup>14</sup> But he remained silent about the effect of the land settlements on the poor people. Another elaborate study on the Rajbansis is the "Kirata Jana Kriti: The Indo-Mongoloids, their contribution to the history and culture of India" of Suniti Kumar Chatterji. He tried to prove the fact that the process of the cultural change of the Mongoloid communities including the Koch Tribe had started simultaneously with the process of the formation of the state. But he did not discuss about the process of social mobility.<sup>15</sup> The history of Cooch Behar written by Jayanath Munshi<sup>16</sup> (*Rajopakhyana*) and Ananda Chandra Ghosh (*Cooch Beharer itihās*)<sup>17</sup>, Bhagabati Charan Bandhyapadhyā<sup>18</sup> and Khan Chaudhury Amanatulla<sup>19</sup> and S.C.Ghosal<sup>20</sup> are all systematic studies on the social, economic and the political history of the Cooch Behar State. Sanyal's<sup>21</sup> ethnographic account on the Rajbansis of North Bengal enriches us regarding the cultural moorings of their society. But these studies remained to be deficient in conceptualising all the socio-economic, political and cultural issues in the realm of political economy approach and its relation with the changing, if so, in the rural society of Cooch Behar.

From the various accounts though not always consistent and very clear it appears that before the British started to intervene the Cooch Behar principality, and when they had already intervened, the Rajbansis who had formed the major ethnic group of the region, belonged to a semi-tribal community.<sup>22</sup> For a considerable period

of time they were settled agriculturist, with regional diversity, raising crops mainly using a plough drawn by bullock. But without knowing the social organization, cultural practices, and economic position of the Koch or Rajbansis we can't have a proper knowledge of the political economy of the Cooch Behar State.

Family was the basic unit of the Rajbansi community. They lived in the joint families which were patriarchal and normally the eldest male member was regarded as the head of the family.<sup>23</sup> The concept of the caste system was absent among the Rajbansi community. They were not divided into exogamous clans or *gotra*. They had only one *gotra*, i.e. *Kasyap* and marriage within the same *gotra* was therefore a common practice.<sup>24</sup>

A majority of the Rajbansis lived in the villages, which were very thinly populated and had developed around the house of a *Jotedar* or *giri*. A Rajbansi *Jotedar* does not like to build his house on the land of another *Jotedar*.<sup>25</sup> Thus a Rajbansi village consists of comparatively a bigger house of a land holder and a group of smaller houses of his sharecroppers or *adhiars*. The *Jotedars* or the *giris*, who generally stayed in villages with their sharecroppers, followed almost the same lifestyles and cultural practices followed by their sharecroppers, a majority of whom belonged the same community.<sup>26</sup>

The daily livelihood pattern of the common Rajbansis is very much similar with other rural masses. As agriculture was the basic means of livelihood most of the Rajbansis started their daily work early in the morning, either with ploughing or other kinds of related work in the field. A Rajbansi cultivator took his meal after returning home at noon.<sup>27</sup> The Rajbansi women had to more work rather than their male counterpart. Besides the management of the household work they have to assist their husband in cultivation work.<sup>28</sup> This importance of woman in the family encouraged men to marry more than one wife.<sup>29</sup>

The marriage system of the Rajbansis was not so much complicated like Bramhmanical marriage. Marriage was arranged through professional matchmakers. There were both regular and irregular forms of marriage. The most regular form was called the *Phul biha*,<sup>30</sup> in which a boy was married to a virgin girl. Marriage was mainly viewed as a union between man and woman. But cross-cousin marriages between brothers and sisters were not allowed.<sup>31</sup> Similarly divorce was also a simple

affair and no claim of maintenance allowance was made after divorce.<sup>32</sup> Widow Remarriage is allowed in Rajbansi society.<sup>33</sup> As there was no clan organization among the Rajbansis, matrimonial alliances were determined by kinship and marriages were arranged within their 'cultural group'.<sup>34</sup> But outside the community the marriage was not objected but there were a preference for marriage with the upper caste Hindus rather than with the Ravas, Mechas.<sup>35</sup> Thus marriage practices among the Rajbansis were different from the existing marriage norms among the upper caste Bengali Hindus.

The religious practices of the Rajbansis also differentiated them from the upper caste Hindus of Bengal. Both Saivism and Vaishnavism were popular among the Rajbansis, though the latter was adhered to by more people.<sup>36</sup> *Kirtan* or collective singing of devotional songs had a special appeal for the Rajbansis and most of them took part in it. They did not worship any deity of the Hindu pantheon, nor did they worship clay images. They were the worshipper of nature, as represented in the form of *Stupa* which was worshipped for the welfare of the community.<sup>37</sup> The Rajbansis had their own priests known as *adhikari*, *deosi*, *deodha*, etc, who officiated in their religious ceremonies.<sup>38</sup>

Educationally the Rajbansis were very backward compared with the other parts of Bengal provinces.<sup>39</sup> The reasons behind it were the lack of interest on the part of the local Rajbansi people and the limited opportunities available for education. The centre of education, Calcutta was far away from the villages of the Cooch Behar State. Though the Maharajas of Cooch Behar State had taken initiatives for the growth of education among the Rajbansi community but they did not respond effectively to modern education. They had a belief that if their sons were educated, they would take to white collar jobs and abandon cultivation, their family occupation.<sup>40</sup>

This brief description of the socio- cultural practices of the Rajbansis clearly indicates that they had very little in common with the local upper caste Hindus and it was this distinction which defined the boundary that separated the Rajbansi community from the upper caste Hindu society of the Cooch Behar State. The economic condition of the Rajbansi community in the State also clarifies this point of differentiation. But analysing the facts regarding their political economy which we got from different sources it appears that their economy was feudal economy. Feudalism guided the economic base and super structure of the State. The question thus arises

what are the possible attributes of feudal economy found in the Princely State of Cooch Behar.

What is today identified by historians as feudal society in Western Europe began to take shape about the fifth century A.D.<sup>41</sup> The term 'feudum' came into use only towards the end of the ninth century. Interestingly, a systematic study of feudal society began only in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Scholars devoted themselves to analysing the factors leading to the rise of feudal society. Feudalism contributed to increase in ruralisation of economy, use of new technology of agriculture and emergence of a class of worker, the serf. The position of the serf was neither like that of the 'slave' in antiquity that was completely separated from the means of production, nor was it such that he could be absolute owner of the means of production. The serfs enjoyed an intermediate position between the slaves of antiquity and free wage labour of industrial capitalism. An elaborate system of rights and obligations characterised the relationship between 'Serf' and his 'Lord' to whose land he used to be attached.<sup>42</sup>

Feudal society in Europe had dynamism of its own. Expansion of agriculture increased food production. It contributed to population rise and invention of new technologies of waterwheel and windmill.<sup>43</sup> The surplus population spread out to remote parts of Europe, cut down forests and thus vast land reclamation took place. The small peasants took initiative in this process. Lords also began to release serfs from bondage by charging them 'commutation' fee. The free serfs turned into peasantry, but as agriculture was capital intensive, only a few succeeded, a vast majority lost their borrowed capital too. All this was alien to feudal economy and marked the beginning of capitalist farming.<sup>44</sup>

Feudalism in India, however, associated to a phase of history when trade declined, and currency became scarce. This motivated the state to give land to Brahmins and officials for economic expansion. These classes subjected peasants who cultivated their land to their own control, contributing to the growth of feudal relationships. Whether feudalism really existed in India, continues to be a matter of debate among the scholars.<sup>45</sup>

Before we reach the period of high feudalism from the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards, we can trace the genesis of feudalism in Indian society from 300. A.D.

Feudalism means not only a special type of land tenure; it means a system of private government based on land. Thus the widespread land grants of the Gupta period led to the rise of Brahmana feudatories who performed administrative functions independently.<sup>46</sup> One of the axioms of feudalism is the existence of a hierarchy of intermediate landlords. This is called sub-infeudation. Another important feature of the feudalism is that the system of paying the officers by land in lieu of salary during the tenure of office. The conversion of offices as a hereditary system and to hold the assigned land in hereditary right in lieu of remuneration is another feature of feudal economy.<sup>47</sup> In this type of economy local needs were locally supplied. All sections of primary producers lived in the villages. Another aspect of feudalism is the limited trade and commerce and lack of circulation of coins.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes this type of economy depends on barter system or the use of kowrie for transaction. Naturally the capital supply was too small. The rulers and feudatories did not invest their surplus income on trade and craft, it was spent in building luxurious homes and forts and the temples for god. In feudal agrarian society, labourers were forced to remain tied up with the land. Various coercive forces were in operation to keep the labourers tied with the land and concept of wage labour was virtually missing. If we analyse properly the economy of the Cooch Behar State in pre-British and British period the entire characteristic features of feudal economy would be visible in Cooch Behar State.

As the head of the State, the king was the pivot of all branches of administration in the State of Cooch Behar. Being the source of all power; he could, in theory, make his will a law. But in practice, there were certain restrictions upon his power.<sup>49</sup> It appears from the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* that the Koch kings usually followed the tradition given in the *Kalika Purana*, a 10<sup>th</sup> century work, relating to state-craft and also regarding rights and duties of a king. This source further records that the relationship of the Kings with the people were like those of a father with his children. The king's first and foremost duty was to protect the life and the property of the people. The king was assisted by a council of ministers in administering the kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

Society was feudal in character. At the top was the privileged aristocracy consisting of the nobility, dependent upon the king.<sup>51</sup> The nobility derived its income mainly from the lands cultivated by peasant proprietors. It monopolised all the high

offices in the administration. While in office, a noble, got certain portion of crown land as his perquisites which was liable to be taken over by the king at his death. But in practice this had hardly ever happened. This hereditary succession made the nobility powerful enough to play the crucial role in the court politics. At the bottom was the peasantry who also formed the militia of the kingdom. But the land holdings of the peasants were not equal.<sup>52</sup>

The economy of the Cooch Behar State was mainly based on agriculture. Though there was no accurate information regarding the Settlement of Land Revenue of the Cooch Behar State prior to Anglo-Koch Treaty of 1773, it appears that the land was divided into two categories-1) tax paying and 2) tax free.<sup>53</sup> The persons holding the first kind of land had to pay revenue to the State and were called *Jotedars*. Hierarchy was prevalent among the tenure holders. *Jotedars* were at the top of the hierarchy and at the bottom there were *adhiars*. Lands were also granted to persons for rendering personal services to the State, and these were called *Jagirs*. *Jagir*, *Brahmattar* (donated to the brahmanas) *Debattar* (donated to the deities) *Lakheraj* and *Petbhata* lands were all revenue-free lands. No regular *patta* (lease), however, was given to *Jotedars*. The settlement was renewed from year to year and the assessment was not fixed and based on the qualities of land.<sup>54</sup> The mode of assessment and the system of the collection were both irregular and exploitative in nature which caused great sufferings to the people. The harassed and oppressed tenants left the State in large numbers. As a result the amount of the revenue of the Cooch Behar State decreased.<sup>55</sup>

But when the State became the feudatory State after 1773, Douglas, on behalf of East India Company, introduced the *Ijaradari* system in 1790 to obtain the highest possible revenue for a short period.<sup>56</sup> There were also *jagir* lands in the *Ijaradari* time. The *jagirdars* showed their loyalty by helping the Raja in period of war through the military assistance. In return they were paid by land in lieu of cash. The country was divided into small parcels and put up to auction and the highest bid was accepted. As this system gave rise to greater abuses, steps had to be taken to put a stop to the evil effects of the system. As a remedial measure, a general survey of the whole State was initiated and the first settlement was concluded in the whole State in 1877.<sup>57</sup> The *Jotedari* system was the dominant pattern of the agrarian relation in Cooch Behar State. According to the Settlement the *Jote* or revenue paying estates were

demarcated. The *Jotedars* were to pay their revenue to the sub divisional *kutcharis*. Default of payment entailed annulment of the *patta*. Later the defaulting *Jote* were to be put to auction and sold for arrears of revenue. As a result of this settlement the amount of the revenue increased. There were other three successive land settlements made by the British for the State to maximise their profit.<sup>58</sup>

During colonial period, the process of collection of rent became systematized, profit increased and naturally the process of sub-infeudation was accentuated. The intermediaries so created in the process were the *Chukanidars*, *Dar Chukanidars*, *Dara-dar-Chukanidar*, *Tashya-Chukanidar*, *Tali-Chukanidar*, and *Tashya-tali-Chukanidar*. All of them had their hereditary occupancy rights on the land belonged to them.<sup>59</sup>

The agrarian structure shows that the *Jotedars* was at the top of the hierarchy. He got land from the Raja or the Government; subject to the payment of rent at prevailing rates. The rent paid by the *Jotedars* was subject to enhancements.<sup>60</sup> Though the *Jotedars* were an exclusive group of land holders but there were differences in terms of the amounts of land held by the different *Jotedars*. A. Beteille has observed that *Jotedars* were not an economically homogenous group and there were both rich and poor *Jotedars*, owning and cultivating large as well as small lands.<sup>61</sup> There were enormous variations in the size of *Jote* in different parganas of Cooch Behar State. The *Jotedars*, as Hunter observed, "can underlet their holdings to inferior tenants or farmers, and also transfer all the rights and privileges to their under tenants. These subtenants or farmers have the power of again subletting their lands to holders of the third degree and so on." So below the *Jotedars* was the *Chukanidars* who paid a fixed rent to the *Jotedars* and the latter could not oust him from land if he paid the rent regularly. His title to his holding was heritable and transferable. The *Chukanidar* could again sublet land to *Dar-Chukanidars* and the *Dar-a-dar Chukanidar* was the under tenants of the *Dar-Chukanidars*. All these under tenants had occupancy rights in Cooch Behar State but not in elsewhere. An *adhiar* or *praja* is a person who cultivates lands on the condition that he gets half of the produce of the crop; he is, in fact, a hired labourer, paid in kind. The *adhiars* had no rights on the soil. But from the year of 1872 the *adhiars* got the occupancy right on land. Each class of tenants usually cultivates some of his land through *adhiars*. Thus there were *adhiars* under *Chukanidars*, *Dar-chukanidars* as well as *Jotedars*.<sup>62</sup>

Trade and commerce was limited in the State and the rulers did not show any kind of interest to promote the trade and commerce before the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This economic stagnation also refers the character of the feudal economy. The local needs of the people were locally satisfied. Sometimes *kowries* were also used as the mode of transaction in the State.<sup>63</sup> The agricultural surplus was used to maintain the luxurious life of the rulers and for the beautification of the cities.

From the tables below, a general idea can be developed on the pattern of income and expenditure of the State of Cooch Behar. It was predominantly, the land revenue that remained as the major sources of income. It was observed that more than 65 per cent of the income was coming from land revenue. Absence of manufacturing activities or presence of any form of industrial activities was eminently clear. However pattern of development carried on during the monarchic rule could be traced out from the pattern of expenditure. It was observed that in 1877-78, 14 per cent of the total expenditure was incurred on Privy Purse, Maharajkumaris & Royal family and if expenditure on royal ceremonies was added then the figure turned out to be 25 per cent. This implied that one-fourth of the state expenditure was spent for the royal family alone. This figure was further increased both in absolute and percentage terms in 1881-82. As a matter of fact the expenditure on Privy Purse, Maharajkumaris & Royal family was increased from 14 per cent in 1877-78 to 26 per cent (a rise of 12 per cent) in 1881-82. It was observed that a large percentage of expenditure was incurred on public works. In 1877-78, around 34 per cent of total expenditure was on public works and the figure came down to 25.5 per cent in 1881-82. High expenditure on public works had two implications. First, the Cooch Behar Royal Family was keen to create better urban amenities with a sense of beautification for the Cooch Behar town where the Royal palace was located and second, respective Rajas had remained pre-occupied to create their lasting impression among the public minds by erecting monuments, buildings etc. during their era. In addition, other than Cooch Behar town, no major expansion of infrastructure and urban amenities were visible in rest of the part of the State of Cooch Behar. However, expansion of infrastructure to promote trade and commerce and manufacturing activities were not the priority, had it been so, then that would have been reflected in the income from various sources. It was already mentioned that two-third of the income alone was coming from land revenue. From the tables, especially from the expenditure data, it was revealed that State's

expenditure on health was quite low, it hovered around mere 2 per cent between 1877 and 1881.

**Table- 17: Income from Various Sources (Between 1877-78 and 1881-82)**

Source/Year	1877-78	%	1881-82	%
Land Revenue	823403	67.2	878473	66.5
Stamps	93010	7.6	127539	9.7
Interest	84270	6.9	95691	7.2
Debutter	80495	6.6	84617	6.4
Others	63697	5.2	36201	2.7
Excise	48820	4.0	62635	4.7
Civil & Criminal Justice	5138	0.4	9145	0.7
Jail	6591	0.5	7550	0.6
Registration	3664	0.3	6334	0.5
Education	2989	0.2	2391	0.2
Public Works	13506	1.1	9810	0.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1225583</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1320386</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: data were taken from Bhagavati Charan Bandopadhyaya's 'Cooch Beharer Itihas (The History of Cooch Behar)', p.40, and percentages were calculated

**Table- 18: Expenditure on Various Heads (Between 1877-78 and 1881-82)**

Source/Year	1877-78	%	1881-82	%
Privy Purse, Maharajkumaris & Royal Family	189205	14.05	309494	26.61
Revenue	111909	8.31	115577	9.94
Education Dept	61575	4.57	62237	5.35
Civil & Criminal Justice	46062	3.42	53455	4.60
Administration	47441	3.52	46657	4.01
Jail	27649	2.05	16736	1.44
Police	43209	3.21	48080	4.13
Army	22075	1.64	15213	1.31
Misc. Expenditure	70434	5.23	87992	7.57
Pension and Other Charitable Works	30406	2.26	26624	2.29
Debutter	42025	3.12	35859	3.08
Medical Dept.	20486	1.52	24320	2.09
Registration	2441	0.18	3065	0.26
Excise	7842	0.58	6868	0.59
Press and Stamps	12311	0.91	13787	1.19
Public Works	456300	33.89	297070	25.54
Ceremonials	155054	11.52	0	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1346424</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>1163034</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: data were taken from Bhagavati Charan Bandopadhyaya's 'Cooch Beharer Itihas (The History of Cooch Behar)', p.41, and percentages were calculated

Economically the Rajbansis were primarily agriculturists. The agrarian structures prevailing in different parts of Bengal varied widely. The Mughal Land Revenue system, the British land revenue reforms, the customary practices of

different areas, and the ecological conditions largely determined the patterns of agrarian relations in different parts of Bengal. Following the analysis of Sugato Bose, we may distinguish three broad categories in Bengal agrarian structure viz., a) the peasant small holding system in east Bengal, b) the prevalence in west and central Bengal of vast personal demesne of lands cultivated by landless labourer and c) the rich farmer-share-cropper system of north Bengal.<sup>64</sup>

Here our focus of discussion will only be on the agrarian structure of the Cooch Behar State within which the Rajbansis as a cultivating community are to be identified. The *Jotedari-Adhiari* system was the dominant pattern of the agrarian relations in North Bengal. However there were also variations in tenurial relationship in different parts of the region. There were regions like Dinajpur, Rangpur, parts of Jalpaiguri which were permanently settled areas, and where zamindari system existed. But in the western duars of Jalpaiguri and in Cooch Behar, where there was no zamindari system, land was given to *Jotedars* or rich farmers by the Government in exchange of an undertaking to pay annual rent.<sup>65</sup> There were also variations in the positions and privileges enjoyed by the *Jotedars* and other under-tenants in different parts of north Bengal. This was due to the number of variables, such as, local customs, administrative necessity, or ecological factors.

The *Jotedari-Adhiari* system dominated the agrarian relations in the Princely State of Cooch Behar too. There were reasons for the development of this rich farmer-share cropper system in this area. There were vast stretches of uncultivated land, which were given to the rich men at very low rents in order to motivate them to bring waste land under cultivation. These rich men gave the lands to poor cultivators, initially for no or minimum return. But once cultivation started regularly, the cultivators paid, generally in kind, half of the produce to the original title holder. Thus the cultivators who reclaimed the waste land became the share-croppers and the rich men by virtue of their economic supremacy became the landlords.<sup>66</sup> This system of leasing out land existed in north Bengal in pre-British times and during British rule it became much more popular among the substantial landlords.

The other reason for the growing attractiveness of the share-cropping system in this region was the paucity of labour compared to accessibility of land.<sup>67</sup> Certain other factors like rise in prices of land, purchase of land by money lenders and merchants, effects of the Second World War, and the World wide depression of 1929-

30, all contributed to the expansion of the share-cropping system. Landlords particularly those who had no link with land, like traders and money lenders, preferred share-cropping because it ensured good returns without any direct involvement in the agricultural process. Thus as a result of this gradual extension of the share-cropping system a highly stratified and complex agrarian structure developed in the State of Cooch Behar after the British penetration in this area.

Thus from the above discussion the main fact emerged is that the *Jotedars* were the most dominating class in local agrarian social structure of Cooch Behar. Another important factor should be noted here in this context is the absence of non-cultivating upper caste gentry in the State. In the east and the other parts of Bengal there was a class of upper caste gentry who owned substantial amounts of land. But they themselves did not plough because manual labour was a matter of contempt in society. They, however, enjoyed maximum power in society by virtue of their economic and social position. But this was not the situation in Cooch Behar State. Because till the advent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most of the land in this State was belonged to the local people i.e. the Koches or the Rajbansis. Unlike the upper caste gentry the local people did not have the problem of status inconsistency if they themselves cultivated the land.<sup>68</sup> But the situation began to change from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the migration of upper caste Hindu gentry in this area. Now the question comes why the upper caste Hindu gentry did suddenly enter to the Princely State of Cooch Behar from other parts of Bengal. In the preceding discussion an attempt is made to find out the answer of this query.

From analysing the results of four successive land revenue settlements of the Cooch Behar State one of the most important facts appears that the revenue of the State increased. Under the state of affairs it is likely that at every stage of revised settlement a part of the total *Jote* had been surrendered by the erstwhile *Jotedar* on account of inability to pay enhanced revenue. The *Jote* thus obtained had been settled with new *Jotedar*, many of them were immigrants from other districts. Originally the *Jotedar* were the cultivators of the soil and the residents of this State. Gradually there was an influx of the foreigners (not local) from adjacent districts of Bengal or other provinces of colonial India. They not only consolidate their position as non-cultivating gentry but also succeeded to form a middle class at the village level.

Taking opportunity of the backwardness of the local cultivators or poor *ryots*, they began to exploit them. As Rangpur Settlement Report noted:<sup>69</sup>

“These men, of whom one or two are to be found in almost every village, are the leaders of the local factions who by smattering of legal knowledge and ready wit have gained the confidence of their co-villagers. Often they are retained by the zamindar’s staff and in return for land at favourable rates of rent or even rent free they watch their interests.”

The most important part of this study is to situate the Rajbansis or the local people to the local agrarian structure of the Cooch Behar State. It is not possible to determine the exact numerical status of the Rajbansis in different categories of tenure holders due to the unavailability of data. From the available sources<sup>70</sup> it can be assumed that there was a fair representation of the Rajbansis among the *Jotedars* till about the late 19th century. They were the local people and since there were not many takers of the waste land at the initial stage, they could secure for themselves a dominant position in the local agrarian structure. There were, however, subsequent changes in the pattern of land control in the Cooch Behar State, with the result that the Rajbansis were gradually pushed out by the non-Rajbansi landholders from their position of importance.<sup>71</sup>

During the reign of Maharaja Harendra Narayan, Henry Douglas was appointed British Commissioner for Cooch Behar in 1789.<sup>72</sup> Thus the State of Cooch Behar came into direct contact with the British administration. But the real breakthrough in the whole system came with the accession of Nripendra Narayan to the throne in 1883. Under him the administrative machinery of the State was created on the model of a British district. The land revenue system became scientific after rearrangement and re-settlement. The State was thoroughly surveyed and all tenures and rights were recorded. As a result the land revenue increased. Both the civil and criminal courts were conducted by the best executive servants. The English law codes were introduced.<sup>73</sup> The police of the state had also been re-organised. The education of the people was given proper attention. Three schools and one college were opened to cater the needs of the people of the State.<sup>74</sup> Good carriage roads were built to connect the State with adjacent commercial centres. The rivers were bridged, and an efficient system of the postal and telegraphic communication was established.<sup>75</sup> Every

encouragement was given for the extension of agriculture. Production of commercial crops like jute and tobacco was given priority.

Under the British Administrative system the communication system was also geared up with the opening of the new roads and the Cooch Behar State Railway for traffic in 1894.<sup>76</sup> The development of transport and communication facilitated the movement of agricultural goods from the rural areas to the towns, market places or *bazars* and ports or *bundars* in increasing quantities. With the opening up of the country by roads and railways it was quite natural to expect that the export-import trade of the State would gradually expand. Thus Cooch Behar became an area of lucrative trade and commerce and hence an area that held out a good business prospects to any enterprising community in India. The rail link changed the entire pattern of the State's economy by creating variety of new avenues of employment. What is more important to be noted here that since most of the people of the area earned their subsistence livelihood from land, there never existed a native business community as such in this region.<sup>77</sup> There had always been a 'commercial vacuum' in the area. So as years rolled on, various merchant communities such as the Marwaris, Gujratis, Bengalis (*gandhabaniks*, *Subarnabaniks* in particular), and *Khattris* got attracted to the vast business prospects of the state and began to migrate and settle here to exploit the situation. The pioneers in this field were the Marwaris.<sup>78</sup>

In the Princely State of Cooch Behar, the Marwaris were the leading money lenders. The absence of any landed aristocracy<sup>79</sup> usually seen in the rural Bengal who lent money to the peasants in the Cooch Behar State and non-existence of any State regulation for agricultural loans to the peasants helped the Marwari *Mahajans* to become the money lenders. They usually lent money to the distressed peasants against the guarantee of land to be mortgaged to them. Gradually their early occupation i.e. money lending or banking helped them to a great extent to become *Jotedars*. It was so because in most of the cases the poor peasants failed to refund the money which they had taken in high interests from the Marwari money lenders. This helped the Marwari a lot to become proprietors of land-holdings.<sup>80</sup> That a large number of *Jote* in the Cooch Behar State was being alienated from the original inhabitants of the district and passing into the hands of the Marwari money lenders has been expressed in the various district Gazetteers and official records. But there was no record of any tension or strife between the local peasants and the Marwari money lenders. They

have little impact on the nature of the economy and society of the rural Cooch Behar. Though they came across the revenue set up in the State but they had added nothing to the internal forces of change in the socio-economic set up in the State nor had they introduced any external force of change.<sup>81</sup>

The changes that were taking place in the economic sphere as a result of Second World War, Depression of 1930 and famine in Bengal also affected the existing pattern of land ownership of Cooch Behar State.<sup>82</sup> A crisis in rural credit that followed the depression compelled many small *Jotedars* and middle peasants to sell their lands. The rise in prices of food grains and other necessities, following the World War II, also seriously affected the middle and poor peasants and this culminated in the great Bengal famine.<sup>83</sup> But in comparison to other peasants in the rest of the Bengal, the position of the Rajbansi peasants was better under the Cooch Behar Raj.<sup>84</sup> The beneficiaries of this crisis were the merchants, money lenders and speculators-those invested their capital in land. The net result of this development was the transfer of land from small *Jotedars* and middle peasants to rich farmers, moneylenders and speculators.<sup>85</sup> In the Princely State of Cooch Behar large scale transfer of land from the Rajbansis to the non-Rajbansis, which had started from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was accelerated further by these later developments.

Another important factor for the transfer of land to the non Rajbansis was the migration of a large number of outsiders from the different district of Northern Bengal to the Cooch Behar State.<sup>86</sup> With spar of immigration of caste Hindus, Bengalis, Beharis, and Marwaris as also of Muslim from the neighbouring districts such as Rangpur, Pabna, Noakhali and Kumilla, the Rajbansis of this area underwent a process of cultural assimilation and transformation through both Hinduization and Islamization.<sup>87</sup> The attractions of this region were the abundance of land, job opportunities in Government offices as the local people were not in a position to compete. The administrative and the judicial set up so created in Cooch Behar generated new employment opportunities especially for the Hindu upper caste people who had some formal English education. As the system of English education did not develop much in Cooch Behar, so for the clerical as well as administrative services in courts, schools and other establishments they required the services of the educated Hindus. This was one of the reasons of the migration of the upper caste Hindus from the south and east district of Bengal. As the Tenancy Legislation of 1910 of the Cooch

Behar State<sup>88</sup> was more pro-tenant in comparison to Bengal Tenancy act, because a *Chukanidar* by this act was also allowed to let out lands in his *khas* possession but the letting out of lands by under-tenants below *Chukanidars* continued to be banned. Naturally the agricultural labourers were also attracted to the State for job opportunities and for less exploitation. The Census figures on migration for the period between 1891 and 1921 in Cooch Behar State give us an idea of the volume of migration that was taking place in Cooch Behar (see the following table).

**Table-19: Migration to Cooch Behar State (1891-1921)**

Year	From Contiguous District		From other Districts	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1891	12997	15192	3262	1201
1901	9165	12531	12668	2255
1911	11000	13000	5000	2000
1921	9000	12000	10000	6000

Source: A.Mitra, *West Bengal District Handbook, Calcutta, 1951, Cooch Behar, p.xxxvi*

This large influx of people led to the growing demand for land and a rise in land prices. The local people tempted by the increased prices soon began to sell their lands leading to the transformation of the local small and middle *Jotedars* into under-tenants, subservient to a new class of immigrant landed gentry. Thus in the Cooch Behar State, the people from outside those who were mostly in the administration and in the business of the State and were perceptively more resourceful than the local inhabitants, grabbed a large number of *Jote*. By 1872 in Cooch Behar 54% of the revenue paying land had passed into the hands of the outsiders.<sup>89</sup>

So from the above discussion it may be said that the ethnic composition of the land holding class in Cooch Behar State was changed and it also changed the rural economic pattern of the State. Before the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the economy of the State was self-sustained village economy.<sup>90</sup> Land was in surplus while cultivation was still being conducted in a traditional way. As the communication system of the State was less advanced different parts of the State were not well connected with the markets. As there was no existence of market economy naturally

the production need was determined largely by the need for the peasants' own consumption. For the rich cultivators life was easy because they can any time get the basic necessities of life but for the poor cultivators life was not easy due to their burden to the landlords and money-lenders.

This 'self sustained' village economy, however, began to transform with the process of commercialization of agriculture<sup>91</sup> and the introduction of railways in North Bengal as well as in Cooch Behar State. As the people of this State were all agriculturists, there was no regular manufacturing community in Cooch Behar.<sup>92</sup> Nearly all of the commerce of the State was in the hands of the Marwaris from Bikanir. The chief exports from the State were tobacco, jute, mustard-seed, rice and mustard oil. The gradual penetration of money-lenders, merchants and middle class as a part and parcel of a market economy, brought significant changes in the agrarian social structure as well. But the local Rajbansi people who mainly formed the bulk of the *adhirs* in the State did not benefit from the transformation. They were the worst sufferers and they were the people who were mainly affected by the changed ethnic composition of the State.

So the most important fact that emerged from the above discussion that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries some significant changes had taken place in the socio-economic structure of the rural Cooch Behar. The commercialization of agriculture, development in small scale industry, the introduction of railway lines, the development of trade and commerce, the introduction of the new job avenues all were indicative to the emergence of the capitalist economy.

On the other hand the fundamental features of capitalism are private ownership of the means of production or private property, the existence of a proletariat dependent on wage labour and the pursuit of private individual benefit as the guiding principal of production and distribution relations.<sup>93</sup> Land, labour and money become commodities under capitalist economy. Capitalist production is commodity production or production for exchange and private gain. Labour and capital are free to choose occupation and industry under capitalism. But all these characteristic features were not present in the economy of the State of Cooch Behar.

Capitalism, in Marxist terms, is not possible until the shape of the society and economy is largely determined by the exploitation of the property less wage workers by the Capitalist class. The process of transition from Feudalism to Capitalism is concerned primarily with this issue. But during the period of our study there were no significant class of property less wage workers in Cooch Behar State and there was no indication of class contradiction in the truest sense.

In Cooch Behar there is hardly any change of the society. The feudalism did not construct the path for the rise of capitalism. Rather the society in spite of having so many changes remained pre-industrial and pre-capitalist in nature. Therefore the theory which tells us that feudalism gives rise to capitalism has not proved to be right in the case of Cooch Behar or the society of Cooch Behar witnessed "transitional" phase. The spontaneous factor of the capitalist way of development did not supersede the stagnant factors of the economy of Cooch Behar. This is because capitalism or path of capitalist development hardly reaches the feudal society of Cooch Behar. After the coming of the British in Cooch Behar certain land laws were altered, a middle class based on landed aristocracy emerged but these were insufficient to bring about either industrialization or capitalism in the sense we understand in the western economy or even in the eastern part.

The fact remains that in Cooch Behar State feudalism as introduced by the British did not give rise to industrialization or capitalism. The feudalism of Cooch Behar remained virtually immobile with a few ornamental changes in the successive periods. There were no major industries, no mobility movement of the wage labourers and so there was no steady movement for change. Sweezy's interpretation of the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism may give us some sort of theoretical reasoning for understanding this phenomenon in Cooch Behar State.

Sweezy showed that the transition from feudalism to capitalism need not always be automatic. The internal contradiction and external factors may lead to change. One of the important factors that Sweezy categorises as external factor is the pace of urbanization.<sup>94</sup> If neither internal nor external factors are strong enough then feudal system will continue in a stagnant way. Perhaps, Sweezy's model of the transition economy may give us some ideas about the apparent stagnation of Cooch Behar and its imperfect development.

The internal factors were not really sufficient to give rise to new social order in Cooch Behar. The social order that existed was more or less continuation of the same system with periodic marginal changes. According to Sweezy, Feudalism declined because of the external factors. The factors were the consequence of the growth of long distant trade, growth of towns and changes in consumption pattern. The growth of towns provided a refuge to serfs escaping from oppressive exploitation.<sup>95</sup> The external factors namely urbanization or growth of cities was not sufficiently strong enough to give rise a new economy in the State of Cooch Behar. This is because the slow growth of urbanization in Cooch Behar. The cities or towns were not formed in the way Sweezy desired in the Cooch Behar State.

Besides education, rapid technological change also requires some business leaders who will introduce the new technology and they were commonly called as entrepreneurs. But it is needless to say that this industrial class who brought capitalism in England and other parts were surprisingly absent in the small principality of Cooch Behar. The educated middle class or the *babus* of Cooch Behar had hardly any skill to become the entrepreneurs. They preferred secured job instead of taking risks. Another middle class in the rural areas were *Jotedars* who were interested investing their capital in land rather than in the risk taking ventures. The Marwari class came from far away place and became virtually the shopkeepers of the area. They were not the local, spoke different language, have different customs and remained perpetually outsiders to the system of Cooch Behar.

Capitalism to be emerged and to be economically triumphant may require additional capital, changes in the magnitude of endeavour and trained and disciplined labour force. In an even deeper sense, they may require a society which is willing and able to adjust itself to economic changes. In societies like Cooch Behar, attitudes and institutions are necessarily geared not to what is new but to what is traditional. Hence, Cooch Behar State in spite of having some attributes of capitalist society primarily remained pre-capitalist society if not feudalistic in ideal sense.

The feudal society of Cooch Behar did not give any signal for change. Here Feudalism did not give rise to capitalism. Dobb discussed about the internal factors for the rise of Capitalism. He says about the changes in the techniques of production which ultimately led over time to diluting the coercive nature of production relations under feudalism. This paved the way for the emergence of the pre-conditions of

capitalism.<sup>96</sup> In Cooch Behar State there was hardly anything in the internal to the system which helped the Capitalism to be emerged. It was observed that in case of agricultural production hardly any technological changes had taken place. Sweezy talked about the external factors. There were no external factors which brought any transformation in the society of the Cooch Behar State because the absence of long distant trade, the slow growth of towns as well as business centres helped Cooch Behar to be remained an agricultural society and land still remained the principal productive assets. So from the womb of the Feudalism, Capitalism has not sprouted in Cooch Behar State. What ultimately emerged in the economy of this State was the abortive Capitalism where the feudal mode of production still prevailed.

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- <sup>92</sup> Hunter, opcit, p.398
- <sup>93</sup> R.R.Suresh, opcit 2010 p.38.
- <sup>94</sup> Rodney Hilton, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2006. p. 40
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.50.
- <sup>96</sup> R.R. Suresh, opcit, p. 66