

Impact Study of Land Settlements in Princely State of Cooch Behar

From the accounts of the British administrator-historians it became prominent that prior to the British intervention in the Cooch Behar State, the economic condition of the State was miserable. Mr. Beveridge, Deputy Commissioner, made the following remarks on the government of Cooch Behar with reference to the Annual Report for 1865-67:¹

“Before the appointment of a British Commissioner the government of Cooch Behar was in a deplorable condition. It neither had the small rigour which may be supposed to characterise the government of a thoroughly Native State, such as Nepal, nor had it the organization of a civilized state. It was in fact a mongrel government, being a cross as it was, produced by the Bhutia or Koch idea of government, and those which the Bengali amlah supposed to be ours. Hence the idea of the Raja being above the law, and of every thing in the country being his, existed side by side with the ideas of a Stamp Act, and of appeals, both regular and special, *ad infinitum*.”

The British historians further observed that it was the misrule of the Maharajas that was responsible for the sorry state of the economy. The sources of income were scanty in numbers. The only source of revenue worth mentioning was land, and even it was not properly taxed. The collection of land revenue was entirely carried on by the *Ijaradars*.² The land being the most important source of income and livelihood had been neglected during the initial phase of the British intervention. Vast portions of the cultivable land remained either uncultivated or were kept as fallow land. Most of the people did not have the interest or the confidence to produce because there was no certainty as to who would reap the benefits of cultivation. The revenue collectors of the Maharajas created an atmosphere of fear and suspense which acted as obstacle to any economic growth of the State. In addition, State officers who were entrusted for collecting land revenue (known as *ijaradars*) became corrupt and started gobbling up the part of taxes collected for the state. Maharajas' indifferences towards governance had aggravated the corrupt practices further.

Crimes were also on the rise. All these factors worked as deterrent towards the material prosperity of the people of the state.³

But after the British intervention in the policy-making body of the Cooch Behar State, a change was seen among the landed classes and the agricultural community in Cooch Behar. As we all know, the British being the trading community were always interested in expanding their commercial interests. It was obvious that their commercial interests were directly linked with their agricultural and land revenue policies, and they had realized the fact that unless the good agricultural policy was made, the commercial interests were going to be hampered. The British wanted to make the land as a medium of winning the loyalty and support of the people and with this intention the land revenue policy of Cooch Behar State was conceived.

It was found from the different Settlement Reports that during a time period of 55 years from 1872-1927 the revenue of the State increased by 394%. The revenue incomes also register an increase from Rs.3, 64,140 in 1872 to Rs.17, 98,984 in 1927.⁴ But the total land under cultivation and consequently having been settled with the *Jotedar* does not of course show a corresponding quantum change. From a total area of 21, 65,620 bighas in 1872 the area increased in 1927 to 22, 04,102 bighas⁵ i.e. an enhancement of 2.83% only. Moreover the enhanced area under the First Settlement are partly explained by *Patit Charcha Settlement* and partly by resumption of land from the termination of the old service tenures and reclamation of unauthorised holdings under the tenants. The rise in land revenue therefore was caused by revision of revenue rates and the rental share of the tenants and under-tenants. By allowing 35% profit to the *Jotedar*, 25% profit to the *Chukanidars*, 15% profit to the *Dar-Chukanidars*, 10% to the *Dar-a-dar Chukanidars*, 5% to the *Tashya-Chukanidars*, 5% to the *Tali-chukanidar* of the rental income the burden of rent borne by the cultivating rayat had gone up by 95% and in some cases even to 150%. So the burden of rent appears to have been raised to 194% at the grass-root level of the *Krisiprajas* in successive settlements.

Under the circumstances it is likely that at every stage of revised settlement a part of the total *Jotes* had been surrendered by the erstwhile *Jotedar* on account of inability to pay enhanced revenue. The *Jotes* 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 from adjacent districts of Bengal or other provinces of colonial India. They were more intelligent than the Cooch Beharis and they began to grab all real power in the State.⁶ At the time of the Final Settlement more than half of the temporarily assessed area in the Cooch Behar State was owned by immigrant *Jotedar*. Even during the *Rakamcharcha* and *Patit Charcha* settlements, it was found that larger quantity of land in the State was in possession of foreigners than that of held by the natives. The necessity of introducing effective rental law to prevent ousting of cultivating tenants by speculators was foreseen even during the First Settlement. Taking advantage of the backwardness of the local cultivators or poor *ryots*, the immigrant *Jotedar* began to exploit them.

Thus through the process of immigration the entire demographic composition of the State underwent a rapid change. As a result, the land control structure of the State was also changed. This included the racial character of the *Jotedar*, the money-lenders and the agricultural labourers. The large numbers of shops of the Cooch Behar town came under the possession of Marawari and Bengali merchants.⁷ The immigrants from Dacca were only temporary residents of the State and were generally the traders and shop-keepers who had their homes in the mother district.⁸ The emigrants from the district of Bihar were the day-labourers who seasonally migrated in large numbers during winter in search for employment. Many of these men gradually settled down permanently in the country, mostly in the town of Cooch Behar.⁹ This argument can be substantiated by the Census Reports from 1872-1931. No attempt of enumeration of the inhabitants of Cooch Behar was made before the Census of 1872. The Census of the State was initiated by the British Settlement Officers. It was completed in February, 1872. The result showed a total population of 532,565 persons, living in 1119 villages and townships. The area of the State was 1307 square miles, showing an average density of population 407 persons per square mile.¹⁰

This was not merely the fact that only immigration had taken place in the State but also emigration had taken place. This view was also substantiated in the Census reports. The next Census was undertaken in 1881, when the total population was increased to 602624. The third Census was carried on in 1891, and the population stood at 578,868, which showed a decrease of 3.9 per cent in comparison to Census of

1881.¹¹ The decrease of population since 1881 was, as would be noticed hereafter, due chiefly to two epidemics of Cholera and migration into the Duars of Jalpaiguri.

These emigrants generally hailed from the landless class and were heavily pressed debtors, who left the country in the hope of bettering their condition in a new land. Under an old decision of the Calcutta High Court, since overruled, the decrees for debts passed by the Civil Courts of the State could not be executed in British territory. The debtors found in this fact a strong incentive to migrate.¹² From the Saunder's Report of Jalpaiguri it was known that the number of the emigrants from the Cooch Behar State to Jalpaiguri district was very large and basically they belonged to *Chukanidar* or *Adhiar* class. They were compelled to leave the State because of the high rate of land tax, oppression on the part of the *Jotedar* meted out to other and sometimes for the infertility of the soil.¹³

Immigration was almost the same during the two decades between the years 1881 and 1891. The immigrants mostly came from the neighbouring districts of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Assam. In this connection Mr O'Donnell remarks, "Cooch Behar itself, however, seems to have a considerable attraction for outsiders, particularly for the people of Rangpur. Bihar contributes 6,494 men and 529 women, the great mass of the former being temporary residents who come for work only in cold weather. Assam sends forth 2,544 men and 1,573 women, many of whom are permanent settlers"¹⁴

Obviously, the British sponsored land management system in Cooch Behar affected the rural society of the Cooch Behar State. Though it is difficult to ascertain that how much the British policies were responsible for the creation of the landless agrarian class, however, due to the enhanced tax payment and the price hike of almost all the commodities¹⁵ most of the small peasants were compelled to sell their lands and became landless labourers. The rapid growth of the population also accelerated the process (Appendix-3). This reduced the per-capita availability of land. Consequently, a certain number of cultivators were inevitably slipped into landlessness though their numbers were not adequately reflected in these Census Reports. But in the Census of 1951 we saw a growth of a small class of landless agricultural labour.¹⁶

Cooch Behar, the Princely State, dominated by the British administration had practised the legacy of the imperial prototype of administration. To bring about the fruits of development, the imperialist power had an active hand to draw maximum resources of the State and in order to fulfil their mission, the imperialist power required to introduce certain steps for development. At the outset, it was to be kept into the consideration that the British Government had their own political and administrative outline of development while administering the entire India as well as the Princely State. In their effort to make their objectives successful, the British Government with the help of the royal kings of the princely State, wanted to change the old social, political and economic institution by bringing about change in all the spheres of life such as economic, socio-cultural and political life. In fact the British Paramount power always tried to uphold the cause of the royal families and maintained regular connection with the princely states under their domination. But the common people, for whom the all kind of developments was supposed to be designed, were always neglected. There was no sign of popular participation, no development from below and no changes for the lower strata of the society in most of the princely states of British India. The centralized administrative system like British type was followed by the princely states of India. The case of the Princely State of Cooch Behar was no exception.

Under the impact of European enlightenment in the then Calcutta, the rulers of Cooch Behar since the days of Narendra Narayan set out to establish English medium schools in Cooch Behar.¹⁷ They were found to have lost interests in establishing the vernacular schools. Though the new educational policy had promoted the cause of modern education but its benefit did not appear to have filtered down through the upper caste bureaucratic society and the non-Rajbansi immigrants to the level of the Rajbansis in general. A frequency distribution study of the Rajbansi students along with the non-Rajbansis from the data obtained from two schools namely 1) Sunity Academy and 2) Maharaja Nripendra Narayan High School indicates some significant trends.¹⁸

Table- 20: Percentage of Rajbansi Student's Population to Non-Rajbansis in Sunity Academy and Nripendra Narayan High School (Candidates Appearing in Matriculation Examination)

Names of schools	Years	No. of Non Rajbansi students	No. of Rajbansi students	% of Rajbansi students
1.Sunity Academy	1929-1939	38	3	7.1
	1940-1950	157	15	9.55
	1951-1961	208	15	7.2
	1962-1963	76	9	5
2.Swedish Mission Institution (Maharaja Nripendra Narayan High School)	1933-1934	8	Nil	Nil
	1944-1945	986	168	17

5% ± calibration to neutralise errors.

Source: i) Sunity Academy Centenary Volume, ii) Platinum Jubilee Commemoration volume (1924-1999) Maharaja Nripendra Narayan High School.

The English educated non-Rajbanshis swamped the administration of Cooch Behar State. Though no complete list of all the officials during the reign of different kings of the dynasty can be found, a tentative idea can be drawn from the list of important officials during the time of King Nripendra Narayan (Table 21).¹⁹

After the coronation of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan in 1883, a tendency to avoid the Rajbansi mass in the personal ceremonies of the Royal Family had started. By this avoidance they seemed to have moved away from their antecedents.²⁰ Maharaja Nripendra Narayan's marriage with Sunity Devi, the daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen was not liked by the common people as well as the palace ladies.²¹ Local people perceived this marriage as denouncement of Rajbanshi ritual and culture by the Cooch Behar Royal family. The marriage of Nripendra Narayan's daughter had to be performed at Woodlands in Calcutta instead of at Cooch Behar to the great disappointment of the local people.²² So from the very beginning a sense of cultural gap between the Royal family and the mass was observed.

Another dichotomy arose between them through religion. After the marriage of Nripendra Narayan with Sunity Devi, the religion of the Royal family had completely changed.²³ The Maharaja embraced Brahmoism as his personal religion and all the festivals of Royal family were done according to Brahmo rites.²⁴

Table- 21: List of Non-Rajbansi Officials Found in Administration (1882-1898)

Dewan	Secretary to the State Council
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Babu Kalikadas Dutta 2. Mr Narendra Nath Sen <p>Members of the Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kalika Dutta 2. Bulloram Mullick (judicial member) 3. Babu Jadav Chandra Chakraborty (Judicial Member) <p>Deputy Commissioners</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capt A. Evans Gordon B.S C 2. G.T.B.T Dalton C.S(1883) 3. W. O. A. Beckett. Asstt. Commissioner Cooch Behar Division. 4. FR. Cockerell, Commissioner Cooch Behar Division <p>President in Council King</p> <p>Vice- President in Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A. Evans Gordon (1885) 2. E.E.Lewis(1892) 3. D. R. Dyall. <p>Head clerk to the State Council Rajani Kanta Roy</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Babu Karuna Nidhan Palit(1884) 2. Babu Priyanath Ghosh (acting 1885) 3. Babu Narendra Nath Sen B.L (acting Secretary, 1888. 4. Thankur Jago Mohan Sinha (1888) 5. Babu Ashutosh Ghosh (acting) (1893,1894) 6. Babu Gopal Chandra Chatterjee 7. Harinath Basu (1895) <p>Settlement Naib Ahilkar</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Babu Rajkrishna Das (1894) 2. Babu Govinda Charan Dutta 3. Hemchandra Bhattacharya 4. Rameswar Pramanik 5. Harendra Narayan Chaudhury 6. Sashi Bhusan Roy (canoongoe) <p>Personal Assistant to His Highness Babu Priyanath Ghosh M.A. (1885)</p>

Source: Collected from different Settlement Reports and correspondence during the period of British intervention in the administration of princely state of Cooch Behar

But most of the local people of Cooch Behar believed in Hinduism. So the religion of the Rajbansi royalty and local people had started diverging from each other. This resulted in two parallel cultural streams for the Royal family and the masses respectively. *Vaishnavism*, as one of the principal props of native cultural framework had also suffered a setback. It seemed to have survived as a counter thesis to the new religious doctrine of the Royalty.²⁵

Anglicized members of the royal family hardly spoke in the local dialect or it might be that they could not speak the local language. It was presumable that this led to a serious communication gap between the Rajbansi Royalty and Rajbansi²⁶ subjects. Thus the cultural and psychological gap between the Rajbansi subjects and

the Rajbansi Royalty had gradually widened. It was presumable that a social tension of sorts had originated in the Cooch Behar State among the subjects for pronounced cultural dichotomy.

Not only culturally but also economically the Rajbansi people were disempowered on account of the phenomenal growth of the non-Rajbansi *Jotedar*, agricultural labour in the agricultural sector of the Cooch Behar State. There was an intrusion of rural society in Cooch Behar by educated Bengalis from British Bengal employed in the service of the native State, who, in the absence of *zamindari* or *taluqi* rights, began to get hold of the *Jotes*, turning them from land-holding titles to revenue-collecting rights.²⁷ Originally the *Jotedar* were all residents of the State and personally participated in agricultural operations. But with the influx of the outsiders to the State, usually educated Bengalis from the British territory, many of the *Jotes* were acquired by the non-cultivating classes in 19th century.²⁸ In many cases, resident *Jotedar*, in order to escape the oppression of the ladies of the palace and the officers of the State, who took most of the revenue farms, gave up their *Jotes* to influential foreigners and became their under-tenants (*Chukanidars*).²⁹ In other ways influential foreigners who happened to be farmers of the state revenue utilized this position to acquire *Jotes* by unfair means. In this way 54 percent of the registered titles to revenue-paying lands in Cooch Behar had by 1872 passed to foreigners. Of the remaining 46 percent, less than a third was held by cultivating *Jotedar* and rest by the non-cultivating *Jotedar* who collected rent from *Chukanidars*.³⁰

But these statistical data did not permit us to argue that the old resident *Jotedar* class of the State was destroyed in the process. They continued, as land holders below the new *Jotedar*, to employ the large body of peasants called *adhiars* (share-croppers), who cultivated for them for a half share of the crop.³¹ Thus the old resident *Jotedar* continued in effective possession as *Chukanidars* and their *Chukanidars* became dar-*Chukanidars*. The *Chukanidars* and *Dar-Chukanidars* were residents of the State and tenures were transferable and heritable, though subject to the consent of the *Jotedar*.³² The State itself stepped into protect the position of the old resident *Jotedar* and an order of the State in 1853 prohibited deeds called *istafas* and *ikrars* by which *Jotedar* used to give up their *Jotes* to influential persons.³³ By degrees a tribute-collecting superstructure was imposed over the village land-holding

class in Cooch Behar, but in British territory, they continued in effective possession of land and in actual control of landless labour.

As the Rajbansi mass was economically, culturally and educationally backward, the Maharajas of Cooch Behar always appointed the non-Rajbansi people in the high offices of administration. During the reign of Nripendra Narayan most of the administrative posts were captured by the Bengali intellegentia from British Bengal and during the time of the regencyship of Indira Devi the people who assisted her in the administration of the State, all came from other parts of India. Nawab Khusru Jang, noble of Hyderabad state, came to look after Cooch Behar's financial affairs.³⁴ Her private secretary, several senior members of the household attendants all came from outside Cooch Behar. Thus the whole life of the palace lost its Cooch Behari character. Even in spite of being capable of participating in administration of the State, Panchanan Burma, and the Rajbansi lawyer was not appointed as Governmental high officials by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar.³⁵

Thus in every sphere of life the Cooch Behar Royalty outdistanced themselves from the Rajbansi mass consciously or unconsciously. Now the question that might have arisen as a natural reaction among them was "Who were they"? Why were they deprived? The Census Report of 1891 played the role of match stick in the heap of disappointment of the Rajbansi mass. In this report it was shown that the people of Cooch Behar State are generally composed of two elements-Hindus and Muslims. The Rajbansis though grouped under Hindus, were given the status as Hinduised and clean subject tribe. So this report greatly disappointed them and compelled them to start movement to get the recognition as Varna Hindu as their caste identity was in question at that time.

From the substantial amount of historical literature on the various aspects of caste system in Bengal it can be concluded that within the broad *varna* framework, the caste hierarchy could be further classified into six categories on the basis of the prevalent notions of ritual purity, i.e. a) The Brahmins, b) the *Baidyas* and the *Kayasthas*, c) the *Nabasakh* castes, d) the *Ajalchal* castes, e) the castes between the *Nabasakh* and the *Ajalchal* groups, f) the *Antyaja* caste.³⁶ The Rajbansis were placed at the bottom of the structure, along with the *Namasudras* in the social hierarchy of Bengal. With the gradual settlement of upper caste Hindu gentry in the native State of Cooch Behar, the existing balance in local power structure had changed. In the

course of time these immigrant upper caste gentry became the most dominant group in the local society, economy and politics. They obtained all the important administrative posts and by virtue of their intimacy to the administration they emerged as the dominant landholding class.³⁷ Culturally the Rajbansis were overpowered by these upper caste gentry as they were guided by the traditional *Brahmanical* cultural values. There were no similarities between the cultural practices of these two groups and the upper caste gentry treated the Rajbansis as “backward, uncultured”³⁸ Thus the attitude of cultural superiority of the upper caste gentry alienated the Rajbansis and indirectly helped them to develop a spirit of community solidarity among them. Their search for *Kshatriya* identity was only a symbolic cultural expression of this emergent collective self-consciousness.³⁹

The claim of the Rajbansis to be enumerated as a *Kshatriya* but not a tribe (Koch) began to take the shape of a movement at the time of the Census of 1891 when the Census authority gave instruction to the effect that the “Rajbansi is the same as Koch.” The Rajbansis presumed if they could succeed in getting themselves recorded as *Kshatriyas* in the Census, an official document of the Government, no one would indeed be able to dispute their rank in the caste hierarchy.⁴⁰ Further, to confirm their *Kshatriya* identity, there were serious efforts on the part of the Rajbansi leaders to secure the opinion of the Brahman pundits of Nabadwip and Benaras and other *shastric* sanctions from them to validate that claim. They also wanted to get it legitimized by the priests and genealogists.⁴¹

The social mobility movement of the Rajbansis is a recorded fact of history. From 1872, the Rajbansis of Bengal and parts of Assam were trying to disassociate themselves from the tribal Koches. They were frantically demanding for their independent entry in the Census as a distinct caste i.e. Rajbansi. As a step towards Hinduization, they also declared themselves as *Bratya Kshatriya* (fallen *Kshatriya*); while from 1911 they began to boast of a pure *Kshatriya* origin. Interestingly enough, they constantly changed their identity and for that matter asked for different names in different Censuses: from Koch to Rajbansi (1872), Rajbansi to *Bratya* (fallen) *Kshatriya* (1891), *Bratya Kshatriya* to *Kshatriya* Rajbansi (1911, 1921) and *Kshatriya* Rajbansi to only *Kshatriya*. (1931).

The most interesting point is that the Rajbansi mass never got the psychological and financial support from the Rajbansi Royalty in the State of Cooch Behar. The Royalty kept itself completely separated from the wave of the movement of *Kshatriyanization*. Moreover, the Cooch Behar State Notification in 1896 that henceforth Koch Bihar State would be known as Cooch Behar State instead of nij Behar or in any other designation was interesting. It is stated by Hunter that the Cooch Behar Raja repudiated the theory of a Koch descent.⁴² As the administration was under the control of the upper caste Hindu gentry, the Rajbansis faced strong opposition from the State administration. These officials were reluctant to accept the *Kshatriya* status of the Rajbansis.⁴³

The *Kshatriyanization* movement aimed primarily to achieve *Kshatriya* status and earn some specific concessions for the educated members, failed to be very appealing to the poor Rajbansis. The Rajbansi literature itself shows the frustration of the Rajbansi leadership to mobilize the masses on caste issue. This movement failed to improve the deplorable economic condition of the poor.⁴⁴ The motive behind the reforms introduced by British administrators in the revenue system was not only to guarantee and increase the land revenue collection but also they desired to form a rich "middle class." Houghton's intention can be substantiated from the reports in which he refers: "here there are none of that middle class who should form the bone and sinews of the country. It appears to me that every effort should be made to improve this state of things, and to produce a class having an interest the country."⁴⁵

As a part of satisfying their imperialist venture the British administrators fulfilled all the official posts in administration, judiciary, law courts, and schools by the immigrant Hindu upper caste people who had the training of formal education. These English educated upper caste people were called '*Babus*' or '*Bhadralok*' who were averse to physical labour and kept themselves separate and distinct from the mass people. They were mainly 'white collar' employees and elites of the society. The '*Babus*' of Cooch Behar had hardly the skill, intelligence or mentality to become the entrepreneur. But they were the emerging middle class with so called modern outlook. These '*Babus*' were hardly suitable to take risks in business; they preferred secured jobs in the government offices rather than risk taking ventures of industrial activities. Another middle class of Cooch Behar namely *Jotedar*, (local and immigrant) small peasants or new elites of the rural areas were more interested to

invest their capital in land rather than in the business. They were rooted to the soil, conservative to the outlook, tradition bound and not urban in outlook or spirit. The commercial class mainly composed of Marwari *banias* who came from far away place and became virtual shopkeepers of the area. They were not local, spoke a different language, had different customs and remained perpetually outsiders to the system of Cooch Behar State.

Thus the people of the Princely State of Cooch Behar were sharply divided on two broad categories- Cooch Beharies and non-Cooch Beharies. Cooch Beharies meant the local Rajbansi Hindus, the local Rajbansi Muslims, the Kamrupia Brahmins who had settled in Cooch Behar since the time of the Hinduisation and some other non-caste Hindus such as the Saha's, Jogi's and some tribals.⁴⁶ Obviously the terminology of Non-Rajbansi denotes the meaning of the term-not the people of Cooch Behar. They were called by the local people outsiders or the *Bhatias*. The *Bhatia* people came from the East, South and West Bengal. But most interestingly the Marwaries and the other non-Bengali people were not called *Bhatias*.⁴⁷ Though initially there was unity among the Cooch Beharies and the non-Cooch Beharies but gradually the ground was prepared for confrontation among them on economic and cultural disparities. It appears from the Administrative Reports of the State that the lion's portion of the opportunity of higher education was availed by the *Bhatias*. Not only that the all higher posts of all the educational institutions were occupied by the non-Cooch Beharies. This disparity had created a feeling of discontent among the rising Rajbansi middle class. The all important administrative posts were also captured by the Non-Rajbansis.

The situation took a new turn in the question of land. There was a massive change in the ownership of the land. As mentioned earlier the State Government adopted various measures to develop the agriculture and to increase the land revenue. So the fallow lands and the jungle lands were distributed to the cultivators of the outside Cooch Behar. In order to attract the cultivators of the outside the Government had announced various measures. This resulted in a radical change in the land-man ratio as well as ownership of the land of the Cooch Behar State. Further urgency to introduce commercial crops to boost revenue income necessitated new class of revenue farmers. The Muslim population, who had mostly immigrated from Mymensingh and Rangpur were excellent cultivators and did much to improve

cultivation in the State.⁴⁸ In order to enhance the land revenue of the State, Calica Das Dutta; the Dewan of the State encouraged the peasants of British Bengal to settle in the State. Thus most of the lands were captured by the Non-Rajbansi people. This process of change in ownership of land is continuing even today. This became matter of social conflict between the Cooch Beharis and the non-Cooch Beharis. The emergence of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* in the late 40's was the direct outcome of these conflicts.⁴⁹ The members of this *Sabha* had launched a crusade against the immigrant Bengali caste Hindus or the *Bhatias* and raised the slogan of "*Bhatia Hatao*".⁵⁰

The change in land-control structure in the rural society seriously affected the land-man relationship in the rural Cooch Behar. The relation between the *Bhatia Jotedar* and the Rajbansi *adhiar* had undergone a plausible change. The Rajbansi *adhiar* never felt the kinship relation, the racial affinity with the Non- Rajbansi landlords. On the other hand the level of exploitation increased by the Non –Rajbansi Landlords as they had a feeling that they were the outsiders. Racial and cultural differences between Rajbansi *Adhiars* and Non–Rajbansi *Adhiars* had also contributed in aggravating the social tension. The attitude of the *Jotedar* from local ethnic groups also changed substantially as they came in contact with the upper caste gentry. The prevailing practice of the *Jotedar* themselves cultivating their lands was now increasingly discontinued and a class of non –cultivating *Jotedar* emerged. As a result subsequent changes in the patter of land–control had taken place. The non-Rajbansi landlords gradually pushed out the Rajbansis from their position of eminence.

At the initial stage of the settlement when there was abundant land in the Cooch Behar State, the early settlers invited their own kinsmen to settle in their lands and the work was shared among them. There was a personal relationship between the landlords and the cultivators.⁵¹ But with the passage of time this was replaced by a mechanical contractual relationship and different intermediaries came into existence between the two.⁵² Those among the Rajbansis who were *Jotedars* or rich farmers came under the cultural influence of the upper caste land lords or other *Jotedars* of the area as they were closer to this group in terms of secular status.

Now onwards the cultivators did not have the kinsman relationship with the respective migrated *Jotedars*, *Chukanidars*. They felt the absence of heartily relation with the new landed gentry because of their different racial identity. There was also a

tendency among the Rajbansi *adhiars* to work under the *Jotedars* of their own community, although the latter were no less demanding than other *Jotedars*.⁵³ As there was no racial similarity between the immigrant *Jotedars* (Bengalee and Marwaris) and Rajbansi under-tenants or *adhiars* the volume of exploitation has extended. As the most of the *Jotedars* became the non-cultivating *Jotedars*, naturally the sense of belongingness towards the *Jotes* was absent among these *Jotedars* which also affected the *Jotedar-adhiar* relationship. It was seen that the Rajbansis who once dominated the local society and economy of the State were gradually subordinated by the newly settled dominant upper caste gentry. On the other hand, the prevalence of different kinds of land grants and hierarchic structure of landlords added a new element of complexity in the rural society of Cooch Behar. The *krishiprajas/adhiars* under the *Jotedars* and *Krishiprajas/adhiars* under the different grades of *Chukanidar* created problems in the rural society of Cooch Behar.

The other complexity that developed was the dichotomy between the locals and the immigrants on ethnic and cultural ground. The attitude of the *Jotedars* belonging to the local ethnic groups also changed substantially as they came in contact with the Hindu upper caste gentry. The gradual settlement of the Caste Hindus in the Cooch Behar State had shaken the cultural autonomy of the Rajbansi people of this region bringing them to the closer to the Orthodox Hindu culture.⁵⁴ There was one section of the Rajbansis who felt the urge to change their existing cultural practices and lifestyle and also the religious practices. But this section of the people was economically more affluent rather than the others. They suddenly started to worship the god and goddesses of the upper caste Hindus instead of local deities.⁵⁵ Now the concept of the sub-castes developed among this community. Discarding their traditional clothes, both men and women started to dress themselves in the fashions of the upper castes in society.⁵⁶ Now they started to disallow the widow remarriage. They had also started to follow idolatry and the Brahmin priests were invited to preside their ceremonies. They formed a distinct group within the Rajbansi community. Educationally they were advanced than the common peasant folk. This makes one point clear that there was a vertical division within the community. Initially the economic differentiation did not lead the cultural differences within the community. But the penetration of the market forces, administrative and political changes brought significant change in the local society. As they came in contact with

these new forces of change, a sense of exclusivism gradually developed among the Rajbansi elite which affected the intra-community relationship among the Rajbansis. This intra-community relationship also affected the land–man relationship of the rural Cooch Behar.⁵⁷

This affluent Rajbansis started to migrate to towns, send their children for higher education and take up other subsidiary occupation besides their family occupation i.e. cultivation. All these tendencies of the Rajbansi elites disassociated themselves from the more backward sections of the community and as a result the concept of social equality was replaced by a system of status differentiation. This differentiation in terms of social and cultural practices and economic profile within the Rajbansi community is very important as it sowed the seeds of dynamics of their caste movement.⁵⁸

The above mentioned argument that the most of the cultivable lands were in the hands of the Non-Cooch Beharies can be substantiated by the proofs of *Dalil* and *Khatiyan* of different sub-divisions and of different point of time (Appendix-4).

The lists of the names of the faulty *Jotedar* in the Cooch Behar Gazatte, 1897,⁵⁹ also corroborate the fact that the most of the *Jotes* were under the Non-Cooch Behari *Jotedar*. Many *Jotedar* could not pay all the arrears on due dates and time and became defaulter. It was, therefore, become necessary from the part of Government to initiate various procedures to realize those unpaid arrears. As a result, the lands of those defaulters were put on for auction (Appendix-5). If the defaulters were able to make part payment of their dues they were given some time to enjoy the ownership or the auctions of those lands were put to on hold. In extreme cases only sales were held.

The Rajbansi *Jotedar* were also sometimes became the Defaulters. Not being able to meet up the excess demand of land revenue they were compelled to sale their *Jotes*. From the status of the *Jotedar* they were decreased to the status of the *Chukanidars*. But the excessive demand of land revenue was not always the cause of selling the land. Sometimes the big *Jotes* were divided among the successors of the *Jotedar*. Sometimes the lands were sold to mitigate the expenditure of the marriages of their daughters. Sometimes, to meet up medical expenses they used to sell their *Jotes*. Sometimes the *Jotedar* willingly sold their lands because they wanted to settle in town for the education of their children. Another important reason of the sale of the

Jotes was that the Rajbansi *Jotedars* were reluctant to cultivate their land. They did not prefer to toil on the land. They preferred to live a luxurious life by selling vast amount of lands to the non-Rajbansi people. Because that time the Rajbansi people were not in a position to buy the lands on satisfactory price. Naturally the lands were bought mostly by the *Bhatia* people who wanted to settle in Cooch Behar State that time.

Not only the *Bhatia* people but also the Marwaris bought large number of *Jotes* from the Rajbansi people.⁶⁰ The wave of the Great World wide Depression in 1929-30 and the following crisis in rural credit also affected the rural people of the Cooch Behar State like other districts of North Bengal. To meet up the increased revenue demand along with Rajbanshi *Jotedars*, the *Chukanidars* were also compelled to sell their lands to outsiders.⁶¹ Naturally the condition of the under-tenants can easily be assumed. Though from the Annual Administrative Reports of the State of different years it appears that the concession in land revenue was made by the administration and the concession were extended to all classes of under tenants but these were not sufficient to reduce the hardships of the peasants.

Another important effect of the British land policy was the creation of a new structured rural society mainly based on the emergence of a new landlord community. The Colonial Government's aim to bring all the waste land under rent and to extract maximum possible revenue through *Jotedari* settlement could only be materialised with a corollary creation of a land market. Particularly in the princely State of Cooch Behar this wish was fulfilled. Various factors such as commercialization of agriculture, land speculation, periodic enhancement of revenue through successive settlement operations and immigration into the State from British Bengal prompted the rapid sale of *Jotes* to the outsiders who had no previous connection with the land. The new settlers brought with them a caste-based hierarchical social structure that was not exact to the local society as the Rajbansi society was basically egalitarian in their code of social conduct.

The sufferings of the Rajbanshi peasants reached to such an extent that sometimes they revolted against both the Rajbansi and the Non-Rajbansi *Jotedar*. The disappointment on the part of the peasants against the administration was first observed among the peasants of the subdivision of Mathabanga region under the leadership of Panchanan Burma who tried to wave the burden of the loans of the

peasants of that region.⁶² But this disappointment could not take a shape of organised revolt.

The Cooch Behar peasants were largely influenced by the Tebhaga revolt of the adjoining part of the country. The Communist Party organised the peasants of the Tufangunj sub-division against the extra charges (*tola gandi*) on sale of the animals. The younger leader of the Communist Party, Jiban De told the peasants not to pay the extra charges taken by the *izaradars* over the royal charges on sale of the veterans.⁶³ But when one of the agents of the Administration declared Jiban De as terrorist, the peasants badly revolted against the royal administration. They demanded that the *Nirikh Nama* (royal order) signed by the Raja should be displayed in different market places. At last the *Ahilkar* Sri Hemanta kumar Burma was compelled to display the *Nirikh Nama* in different places.⁶⁴ Thus the peasants won their battle against the royal power.

The big dissatisfaction of the peasants was manifested in the various places of Mekhligung subdivision. The rebellion was led by the peasant leader Dineswar Singh. He started the revolt against the excessive exploitation of the *Jotedar*.⁶⁵ He was renamed by the peasants as "Raja". He carried an autonomous administration for three months. But at last he had to surrender to the power of the *Jotedar*.

But this type of show of anger and disappointment of the peasants of the Cooch Behar State can not be compared with the revolt of the peasants of the other parts of India. These revolts were not organised revolts at all. Therefore they never revolted against the Raja. Their loyalty to the Raja was almost unquestionable. They did even think to revolt against Raja. The peasants always felt the 'ethnic identity' with the Rajas and the royal family. On the other hand, generally from our experience of Indian history, the peasant revolts of the other parts of Indian region were led by the educated middle class, but the educated middle class people of the Cooch Behar State were outsiders and they were too loyal to the Rajas to revolt against. Therefore, the political system, the rules and regulation of the Cooch Behar State were not congenial for revoltees to revolt against the State. The famous 'Deportation law' was prevalent in the Cooch Behar State like the other Princely States.⁶⁶ According to this law anybody could be declared irrelevant for the State and could be ousted from the State within 24-hour notice. As a result no one can dare to express their resentment against Royalty.

So from the above discussion it appears that in late 19th and early 20th century some socio-economic changes had taken place in the State of Cooch Behar. These changes were basically due to the implementation of the British land policies. It was seen that the Rajbansis who once dominated the local society and economy were gradually subordinated by the newly settled dominant upper caste gentry. On the other hand, the prevalence of different kinds of land grants and hierarchic structure of landholders added a new element of complexity in the rural society of Cooch Behar.

Indeed, not only in Cooch Behar State but also in other parts of whole North Bengal Region the phenomenal growth of transfer of land from the hands of the local people to outsiders became a pattern and in course of time it generated a sense of grievances among the dispossessed Rajbansi gentry. Later on this gained an ethnic dimension as the Rajbansi elites tried to raise caste sentiments among the members of their community.

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