

## Conclusion

---

The interrelated and interwoven preceding chapters attempted to establish the resulting implications of land-man relationship in pre-colonial and colonial Cooch Behar from the perspective of political economy approach. The chapters in ascending orders have provided the socio-economic and the political profile of Cooch Behar under pre-colonial and colonial formation. The Chapters are adequately dealt with the nature of land-man relationship vis-à-vis the right of the proprietary holdings, the indigenous land administration system, land revenue land settlement with their micro historical details have been spelt out different chapters of this study. It has been established adequately that the indigenous system of land propriety admixture with Mughal land revenue administration have provided Cooch Behar a distinctive place to be studied as a regional variant to understand the National discourse of the subject. It has been further established that the unique indigenous character of land man relationship in pre colonial and colonial Cooch Behar can well be placed under “National History Localised” frame. The entire study reveals the fact that Cooch Behar during pre-colonial and colonial formation and the land man relationship thereon had experienced a unique kind of aborted feudalism causing thereby the resultant abortions in its pre-capitalist formation.

Conclusively, the role of agrarian structure in economic development is one of the most important problems for social science research in underdeveloped countries. It is important to note that the study of the relationship of agrarian structure and economic development has been attempted in many cases without either clarifying the concepts or following a genuinely scientific methodology. For studying the agrarian structure in India the terms ‘feudal,’ ‘semi feudal’ and ‘capitalist’ had been indiscriminately used without always distinguishing between the Western and the Indian variants of feudalism. Charles Bettelheim<sup>1</sup> has defended the use of the term semi-feudal for the Indian agrarian structure on the ground that some of the typical elements of feudalism are present in the Indian situation. These elements have been identified as: i) absence of labour market in a large part of the rural sector, ii) the personal subservience of the immediate producer to the land owner, iii) the excessive importance of land rent, iv) the underdeveloped marketing system resulting in little

social division of labour, a low rate of accumulation and the use of produce mainly to satisfy immediate needs.

It is important to note that even when an attempt is made to identify the regional variations of agrarian system it is usually done through the use of such terms as *Jaigirdari*, *Zamindari* and *Raiyatwari* systems which have mainly legal and juridical rather than socio-economic significance. As Thorner<sup>2</sup> pointed out long back this habit of characterizing land systems as *Zamindari* or *Raiyatwari* results from equating revenue systems with the actual agrarian structure (i. e. Mutual relations of landlords, tenants and labourers). In terms of the forms of control of land and broadly, the resulting socio-economic relations among the rural classes many districts of Madras and of Bombay are poles apart even though in terms of land revenue payment they are both *Raiyatwari*. For the examination of regional variations therefore a set of terms and concepts is required which is very different from those imported of native categories which are now in vogue among analysts of agrarian structure in India or in other underdeveloped countries.

The fact of the matter is that neither Liberal Economics nor Marxian offer readymade tools for the analysis of the peasant economy. That the capitalist development of the economy on modern lines necessarily requires the destruction of a peasant economy is an assumption which is implicit in both liberal economics and Marxism and which needs a thorough re-appraisal<sup>3</sup> in the context of understanding any regional variant of such economy—may be pre-colonial and colonial Cooch Behar a reference point.

At the methodological level, for instance, Myrdal in his *Economic theory and Underdeveloped Regions* and in his *Asian Drama*, formulated an institutional approach and applied it to the Indian situation which may be of great significance. Myrdal's model<sup>4</sup> of analysis of economic stagnation in terms of structural factors was relevant at best only to the *ex-Zamindari* and *ex-Jaigirdari* regions of the country and not to the *ex-Raiyatwari* regions. Even in relation to the *ex-Zamindari* and *ex-Jaigirdari* regions, the model suffered from serious gaps especially as it did not explore the role of credit structure, the land lord-dominated power balance and the technological backwardness in perpetuating the retrogressive agrarian structure. These deficiencies of Myrdal's analysis were due to two reasons. In the first place in the absence of economic historical studies of the evolution of the Indian agrarian

structure in different period of Indian history, he does not take into account some of the peculiarities of the Indian Agrarian structure. These peculiarities were not present in Western feudalism but were very marked in the implanted feudalism of countries like India.<sup>5</sup>

In the recent period new contributions have been made to the study of agrarian structure and economic development. In the first place mere 'Theorising from above' has been replaced by a blending of abstract reasoning and model building with observation from below. Secondly, in earlier phase many research workers began with agrarian structure. That is why the preference for grand concepts like feudalism and capitalism or grand frame works like transition from feudalism to capitalism. Today it is being recognised that enormous ground work has to be done before the construction of a grand view may become possible. Thus formulation of smaller problems e.g. the changing forms and magnitude of tenancy, and middle range theorisation is now in vogue. Thirdly, in place of studies trying to generalise for the whole country, we have now more regional studies which try to evolve generalisations for specific regions on the basis of data pertaining to that particular region. (P, C, Joshi) As a point of reference the present study revealed the intensity of Colonial penetration in the economy of the Princely State of Cooch Behar and its effects on the political economy, society and the land-man relationship of the State. A number of significant socio-economic changes had originated from those economic measures for which the introduction of new land policy of revenue farming is held to be responsible.

Over a span of 400 years or so the political identity or the status of the Princely State kept on changing. From a small Koch Kingdom to Princely State, from a Princely State to a feudatory state and from a feudatory state to a small district town under West Bengal after the merger of the State to the Indian Union in 1950. Though the political status of the State changed so many times, its economy remained same—the agrarian economy as the agriculture was the primary sector of the economy in the State. Naturally the one and only source of revenue was the land revenue.

It has further been disclosed that the indigenous land revenue system of the Koch kingdom before the coming of the Mughals and after that it appears that the Koch revenue system was an admixture of both Ahom and Mughal land revenue system. Like the Ahoms they were habituated with shifting cultivation, *paik* system, and cultivating *ahu* rice and later followed like the Ahoms the wet rice (*Sali*)

cultivation. On the other hand when they were influenced by the Mughals, they started to collect the land revenue in cash instead of kind. It is presumable that under the Todormal's land revenue system the cultivable land of the State would had been surveyed. The Koch Rajas started using the designations of most of the officers like *Dewan, Ujir, Nazir, Sikdar, Piyada* and others under the influence of the Mughals in their administrative set up. The pre-colonial Cooch Behar had adopted the features of revenue administration of Bengal *Subha* under Murshid Kuli Khan to make its own structure. The feudal structure of revenue collection through the *Izaradars* seems to have been a direct adaptation of the *malzamini* system of Murshid Quli Khan. So the small principality of Cooch Behar in its pre-colonial formation had an indigenous system of land administration along with the Mughal land revenue administration resulting thereby an indigenous political economy distinctively different from the other princely State of pre-colonial India.

Before the arrival of the Colonial administrators in the Cooch Behar State, the indigenous revenue administration of the State was not systematised and well maintained. It is obvious that the amount of the collected revenue was not satisfactory. But the British entrance in this region by virtue of the Anglo- Cooch Behar Treaty in the year 1773 had radically altered the economic profile of this State. A great transition took place in the economy through the introduction of a quasi-feudalistic order and capitalist exploitations of waste land through commercialization of crops. To maximise the land revenue of the Cooch Behar State the British administrators implemented four successive land-settlements escalating the rent up to 134% over a period of 55 years. *Jotedari- Adhiari* System was the dominant proprietary relationship in the State. Although at the outset the British Government showed ambivalence in determining the classificatory attributes of *Chukanidar, Dar-chukanidar, Dar-dar-Chukanidar, Tasya-Chukanidar* as tenants and their tenorial rights, gradually it became clearer that the *Jotedars* were the supreme agent of the Colonial administration in realising the revenue. Most interesting part of this discussion is that unlike the British Bengal, the different intermediaries had the occupancy right in the State of Cooch Behar. Even the *adhiars* who formed the large number of cultivators got the favour of the State authority. The colonial administrators did not try to replace the inbuilt *Jotedari-adhiari* system of the Cooch Behar State by any of their new land settlement systems (Permanent, *Rayatwari* or

*Mahalwari*) like other parts of India though the State came under their direct administrative purview from 1789. Local conditions were the main factors behind the choice of proprietary body under the British land policy. The British administrators did never make any abrupt changes in the land administration of the Princely State.

But this was only one side of the coin. Obviously, the British sponsored land management system in Cooch Behar affected the rural society of the Cooch Behar State. It is though difficult to say that how much the British policies were responsible for the creation of the landless people. Due to the enhancement of tax payment most of the small peasants were compelled to sale their lands and became the landless labourers. The rapid growth of the population also accelerated the process. There was not enough land to accommodate the excess population. A certain number of cultivators were inevitably slipped into landlessness- though their numbers may not have been adequately reflected in the contemporary Census Reports.

Rent can increase either because of fall in land-man ratio (that occurs when population increases because of natural population growth and immigration) or increase in the rate of rent both in percentage as well as absolute terms. With the rise in population if new land is brought into cultivation then land -man ratio may remain unaffected. In case of Cooch Behar State population was increased both because of population growth as well as immigration. Therefore it is the fact that the land-man ratio had fallen and that resulted in increase in land rent. However, it was also observed that in pursuit to increase their mercantile capital raised the land taxes. It added penury to the peasantry. As a matter of fact during the period from 1872 to 1927 the percentage increase in revenue was 394% while the percentage increase in land in use for cultivation was 2.83%. No major technological changes took place in agriculture. Therefore the rise in agricultural productivity was a distant reality. Therefore two outcomes were obvious. One, the increase in mercantile capital for the British and the other is sub-infeudation and marginalization of peasantry.

As a part and parcel of the British land policy, the self-sustained village economy of the Cooch Behar State started replacing itself by a transitional economy from the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The break-down of the barter system and commercialization of agriculture, the spread of English education in the urban Cooch Behar created new opportunities, new tertiary job avenues for outsiders to migrate to the State. The urban population in Cooch Behar composed of English educated

people or “*Babu*” or “*Bhadralok*” or gentlemen class who were averse to physical labour and kept themselves separate and distinct from the mass people as part of the prevailing “*Babu*” culture in India at that time which was a product of British rule in India. The growth of urban society in Cooch Behar is very much related to the growth of urban centres to meet up the need of the British and the Cooch Behar Raj for administrative purposes. Keeping these administrative needs at centre, all kinds of commercial activities grew up. Trade, commerce, administrative ramifications including establishments of law courts, judiciary, schools, college etc led together an expanded employment base offering job opportunities to people. As a result being attracted by the new openings, occupational groups entered into urban Cooch Behar from different parts of Bengal. Therefore, the new opportunities in employment and commercial activities were restricted to only those who had the qualifications and means. Mostly such opportunities were enjoyed by educated enlightened Rajbansis (absentee landlords) and immigrant gentries. This was the reason why the great majority of Bengali upper caste Hindus was found in every nook and corner of the urban settlements of Cooch Behar State. Besides, a land market had gradually emerged due to the newly formed policy. The entry of the caste Hindu professionals and the Marwari business community in the area from the neighbouring districts triggered the land price movement as they invested their capital in land. The price movement had induced some of the land-holders to sell their estates to the affluent migrants.

One of the major effects of the change was that the indigenous people who once dominated the Cooch Behar Society were gradually subordinated by the newly settled dominated upper caste gentry. Since the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century a substantial amount of Rajbansi land had been transferred to the non-Rajbansi immigrant gentry and many of the earlier Rajbansi *Jotedars* had turned into *Chukanidars* and *Dar-chukanidars* and the small peasants or *adhiars* turned into landless labourers. Sharecropping which was the general feature of agriculture in Cooch Behar State increased since the 1920's, because of the depression and other economic causes. As a result of this the number of the *adhiars* increased and became more dependent on the whims of *Jotedars*.

The domination of an essentially immigrant gentry as well as the cultural differences between them and the Rajbansis created a sense of community solidarity

among the latter. The Rajbansi society was basically egalitarian in their code of social conduct. Even though they are a significant component of Bengali Hindu society but the traditional Hindu cultural norms failed to make an impact on them. At this stage of egalitarian social order the transfer of *Jotes* in the hands of the non-Rajbansi people as expected disturbed specially the traditional fabric of the society. Stratification of the society both in terms of caste hierarchies and class differences gradually assumed a discernible shape by partial rejection of the erstwhile kinship dominated society.

The influence of the immigrant landed gentry on the Rajbansi society was not at all negligible. It was the English education and the process of urbanization that influenced the old society and they served to displace the traditional rural elite which were the strongholds of the Rajbansis. Both due to the Government and private initiatives schools were set up even in the rural sectors. The Rajbansi student population too had increased over the years. The new elitist outlook gradually spread among the Rajbansi *Jotedars* who encouraged their children to get the fruit of modern education. The process of absentee landlordism developed among the Rajbansi *Jotedars*. One tangible result of this alienation was the derogation of physical labour or professions like farming which would involve physical labour by the new class of *Jotedars*. The formation of this “*bhadralok*” mentality among the Rajbansi, a section of *Jotedar* community created a social strata which was clearly distinguished from the parental background. It affected the intra-structural relationship within the Rajbansi society itself.

The social dynamics thus released gave rise to a complex crisis of identity in the Rajbansi society itself. The occupational reasons forced the service class to leave the village and thus it produced among them a sense of alienation from the villages and village communities. They adopted the new urban mode of living which accentuated the differences between them as problematic in the rural urban dichotomy. The professional changes in fact developed a sense of loss of identity both for those who adopted the new professions and those who choose to live within the fold of traditional economy. The most articulate section among the Rajbansis, the elites, played an important role to whip up this community solidarity and consciousness in order to mobilize the members of their caste for collective mobility.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through the caste mobility movement or *Kshatriyaization* movement, the Rajbansis aspired to raise the social status by claiming *Kshatriya* status and wanted a promotion from a lower to a higher birth in the regional caste hierarchy thereby gaining greater prestige and respectability in terms of the conditions of caste system prevalent at that time. This has been a peculiar social mobility movement asking for a better placement at the hierarchically arranged Hindu caste structure, while on the other, the caste movements of that contemporary period had been to defy Hindu *Brahmanical* caste structure. Thus the Rajbansi caste movement was a mismatch in comparison to other caste movements in India.

Along with *Sanskritization* another important goal of this caste movement was to secure for themselves an access to political power which had so far remained the monopoly of the upper caste elites. The demand for reservation in education, employment and representative bodies was primarily aimed at ensuring a place for the Rajbansi elites. The facilities that were provided in the name of reservation mainly helped the advanced section within the community. Most unfortunately the majority of the poor Rajbansi remained same as they were. This movement failed to touch the heart of the backward section among the Rajbansis. Thus the nature of the socio-economic relationship between the Rajbansis and the non-Rajbansis of the State remained unaltered.

Though these developments brought several changes in the rural society of Cooch Behar, simultaneously the British developed a feudal path of development. A feudal economy as was prevalent in the other Princely States of India exercised the fullest control over the factors of production which in other way should have helped the growth of capitalist economy in the State. In the State of Cooch Behar the feudal economy was prevalent as the Maharajas of this State through ages had controlled the land management system and the administration. Obviously the feudal economy has got its in-built weakness which may be verified through the “spontaneous forces” of the economy upon which the power holders do not have control and command. This force of the feudal path of development endangers the weak rulers. It invites resentments and decreased the volume of popular allegiance to the king. But the rulers of the Cooch Behar State did not face such type of resentment from below



except few popular sentiments sometimes cropped up here and there to obtain the social rights of the local people.

Actually, class contradictions and social polarization may lead to the upheaval. But the question is that was there any class contradiction in the Cooch Behar State? Was social polarization a fact of Cooch Behar? Most probably the answer is no. The social polarization of the scale sufficient to create antagonism was never present in Cooch Behar State. This was because the land was mostly held by a particular “ethnic group” –namely the Rajbansis or the Koch. The Rajbansis or Koch had their distinct Mongoloid features as opposed to hierarchical structure were related with each other by blood and ethnic relationship. For example it was the practice of the Rajbansi landlords to employ able-bodied young men for cultivation of land and enter into marriage relationship with their daughters. The landless young agricultural labourers were always treated as part of their extended family. The concept of “We” and “they” had not developed in this type of economy. Social polarization could have occurred if the kitchen is different or labourer is hired. This type of relationship was nearly absent in the Cooch Behar State. The *Jotedars*, *Adhiars* and the landless peasants were very often related by family and blood relationship. Naturally except a few sporadic cases no violent struggle were found anywhere in Cooch Behar.

But it was further argued that the economic and the institutional changes probably created the favourable conditions for the emergence of the other dominant group in the agrarian society of Cooch Behar. But it is difficult to suggest that this dominant group was at all revolutionary. This was so because that those dominant group was totally patronised by the Royal family. This so called intelligent middle class people had the unquestionable loyalty for the Royal family and they never play the role of the peasant leader against the system. Secondly, in Cooch Behar many of the money-lenders were outsiders and small in numbers. This smallness of numbers put them at a disadvantage, particularly when they had to deal with village community as a whole. So naturally there was no class contradiction or struggle among the landlords and peasants because there are innumerable layers of middle and very small ownerships. The economic organization of a village in Cooch Behar, characterised by a combination of a self-sufficient peasant economy and rural industry did not ensure economic progress and growth in the Marxist sense of the term. The village community were gainfully employed and were not usually

compelled to seek employment elsewhere, except during period of severe natural calamities or famines.

The Koch kings belonged to a very low caste of Hindu society. The Koch Kings distributed their lands among the relatives and the people of their own race and made them settle in agriculture. As a result the settlers were mostly non-Brahmins by and large. The Brahmins were insignificant proportion in the rural areas because they were hardly land-owners. They mainly entered into the service sectors. So the vast rural sector in Cooch Behar was not that much caste-based. Further, landless labourers were virtually non-existent in the Census before 1951. The phenomenon of landless labourer is the recent origin in Cooch Behar and the caste system as hierarchy has nothing to do in this regard. The group of small peasants were not really "have-nots" in the orthodox sense of the term. The small peasants in Cooch Behar were not alienated from the land. The nature of land relation, as pointed out, was hardly caste based serfdom. The so called attached workers in Cooch Behar could breakaway from the master's domination and could themselves become small farmers. It is in this context, so called alienation never really existed in the State of Cooch Behar-at least for a very long period.

Most interestingly the overall process suggests two dichotomous areas: i) owners of land became physically alienated and proved to be extractors of surplus of land such as *Jotedars*, absentee *Jotedars*, different intermediaries and ultimately the Kings of Cooch Behar, ii) the native peasantry being physically present as tillers of the land virtually alienated from such extractions.

The fact remains that in Cooch Behar State feudalism as introduced by the British did not give rise to industrialization or capitalism. The feudalism in the Cooch Behar State remained static with a few ornamental changes in the successive periods. There were no major industries and so there was no steady movement for change. Both the internal and external factors were not sufficient enough to bring any type of change in the Royal Cooch Behar. Because of the slow growth of urbanization and the absence of any proper entrepreneur class who could bring capitalism the society of Cooch Behar remained stagnant.

The shift to a market-based economy required a revolutionary and violent class struggle through which the capitalist bourgeoisie could capture state power and

create conditions conducive to the capitalist mode of production. This happened in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century civil war between the forces aligned with the bourgeoisie and the feudal forces. This type of violent class struggle had never taken place except some small abortive movements in the State of Cooch Behar and naturally the favourable conditions for the rise of capitalism was always absent in the State.

The basic factor that worked as pivot for the pre-colonial and the colonial rule was land. It was on land that government was solely dependent for its revenue. Majority of people earned their living from land as agriculturist and semi-agriculturists (rural artisans and professionals). Therefore, to have a perceptible change in the society a change must begin from the village. The subject of change must be the village institutions and the village infrastructure. Majority of the people were tied to agriculture because the productivity of agricultural labour was very low. Therefore, agrarian community continued to tie up with land to earn their subsistence and thus freeing labour from agriculture to non- agricultural pursuits was mere impossibility. Low productivity was thus one of the key factors for the static mode of production and relations of productions in case of Cooch Behar State.

Such a feudatory nature of economy gradually through phases witnessed an abortive kind of capitalist process certainly not leading to the capitalist formation of the society as per the deterministic discourse that feudalism would ultimately lead to the process of capitalism. The pre-colonial and the colonial Cooch Behar continued with agriculture as the principal primary sector of economy. The colonial Cooch Behar witnessed aberrations of different nature in its own economic process defined in terms of the relationship between the proprietary land and the tillers of land—the peasantry. However, beneficiaries of such economy varied from time to time due to the changes in the over all land revenue system witnessed by the Princely Cooch Behar. At no point of time the reforms in land system did bring peasantry as beneficiaries.

The marginalizing process of the peasantry had been a continuous process resulting out of the changes in the political, administrative, social and cultural intricacies that took place over the last few 100 years. This abortive capitalism as experienced by Colonial Cooch Behar may be reference point to understand the macro-dynamics of Indian agricultural history, society and political economy at large.

which may create a new academic space for the verification of the grand narratives of the nature of national economy based on agriculture.

While dealing with the experiences of agricultural history of Cooch Behar State both during pre-colonial and colonial formation, it has been revealed that a unique kind of feudalism prevailed in Cooch Behar till the de-colonization had taken place. Thus the mega-narratives on the societal development do not match with the experiences of Cooch Behar both under pre-colonial and colonial period. One needs a separate tool to conceptualize the intricacies at the local regional scale as little narratives. Evidently, this research venture specifies the micro details of the Cooch Behar, a marginally situated region neighbouring the North Eastern part of India, reaffirms the academic compulsion to understand the national history taking into cognizance its regional variants in a 'National History Localised' framework. Indeed the search on the issue whether Grand National history is the aggregation of the regional/local narratives or the regional/local histories are the by product of Grand National narratives-this is the question /query which has puzzled me throughout the years of my attempt to understand history which I live in. Nevertheless, the pre-colonial and colonial Cooch Behar finds a place in the mosaic of Indian social history.

## References

---

- <sup>1</sup> Charles Bettelheim, *India Independent*, Maggibon and Kee, London, 1968, p.23
- <sup>2</sup> Daniel Thorner, *The Agrarian Handbook for India*, The Agricultural Situation in India, Souvenir Volume, 1954
- <sup>3</sup> P.C, Joshi, *Land Reforms : A Trend Report in A Survey of Research in Economics*, Volume IV , A project Report, pub. Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1975, p.3
- <sup>4</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama*, Vol. 1, Allen lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1968, p.66.
- <sup>5</sup> P. C. Joshi, op. cit. p. 69.