

### EPILOGUE

Essentially a Princely State, dominated by the British administration, Cooch Behar had experienced the legacy of the imperial prototype of administration. Notwithstanding the effort made by the imperial rulers to bring about the fruits of modernity, the imperialist power had an active hand in syphoning off the resources of the princely states and in order to fulfill their mission, the imperialist power wanted to introduce certain mechanics of modernization. Thus, at the very outset, it is to be kept into the consideration that the British Government had their own fashion of development while administering the entire India as well as the princely states.

The most important contribution which had its far reaching effect on the society as well as on the whole system of administration was the induction of the system of modern education which was obviously through English. The second epoch-making contribution of the British to the then existing Indian society and more specifically to the princely states was the effort in

launching a modernized system of administration. In their zeal to make their objectives implemented, the British Government through the help of the loyal kings of the princely states wanted to rejuvenate the age old moth-eaten social institutions by bringing about changes in all the spheres of the body polity such as Economic, Educational, Socio-cultural and Political life.

On a superficial vision the above-mentioned depiction would create an impression that the British imperial power acted as an active agent of modernization and development which simply channelised through the princely states and Cooch Behar may not be an exception. However, after we delve deep into the analyses, the fact which comes out, would prove that the Paramount Power in India was much more interested in extending, enriching and keeping their hegemony over the small and tiny states of India. While this would satisfy their objectives, the full development of the princely states and their modernization through the imperialist power would be, in the long run contradictory.

In fact the Paramount Power used to uphold the interest of the royal family and maintained regular connections with the States under their domination. But, the people, for whom the development and modernization were designed, had been simply neglected. The concept of popular participation, development

from below and modernization for the lower stratum of the society were negated. The British type of administration under centralized control had been followed by the princely states of India.

In their effort in modernizing and developing Cooch Behar, the kings under the direct influence of the British Government had made certain attempts in reforming the economy and society as a whole. While implementing the development programmes they infact rested upon mostly on the royal bloods and selected middle class intelligentsia. The populist style of development had been simply an over imposition which has been made clear in the depiction of the preceding chapter of the study.

Actually, as a Paramount capitalist Power the British developed and fostered a capitalist path of development<sup>1</sup>. In its progress, capitalist economy does have both spontaneous and controlled factors. A capitalist economy as was prevalent in the princely states of India, exercised the fullest control over the controlled factors of capitalist path of development. The fact that the kings of Cooch Behar through ages had their fullest control over the management and administration of the state system also corroborates our point. During the reign of Nripen-dra Narayan the whole political economy of Cooch Behar was under the complete command of the ruler. It is to be pointed out that capitalist economy has got its in-built weaknesses which may be exemplified through the spontaneous forces of the capitalist

economy upon which the power holders do not have control and command. In fact, spontaneous forces of the capitalist path of development engenders the weaknesses of the rulers. It invites resentment, lessens the popular allegiance to the king.

In fact the Cooch Behar State did not face such type of resentment from below although as it has been stated in the previous chapter popular sentiments sometimes cropped up hither and thither as in the attempt to establish the social rights of the Rajbanshis under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan<sup>2</sup>. However in the upper stratum of the Cooch Behar society, especially among the members of the royal families, hatred, competition and non-allegiance which have been referred in the chapter II & III of the study were rampant.

It is to be noted that the spontaneous factor of the capitalist path of development did not supersede the controlled factors of the capitalist economy of Cooch Behar. This is possibly because even capitalism or the capitalist path of development did not reach its boom in Cooch Behar.

Thus, an agrarian economy transplanted into capitalist economy under the direct pull and pressure of the British capitalist power did not proceed further, although the marks of capitalism as well as the typical Indian path of development had been at its fore in Cooch Behar even during the reign of English-educated king Nripendra Narayan. Prof. Rajani Kothari, while

depicting the approaches to modernization of the nineteenth century India, has come to the conclusion that although the capitalist pressure had been tremendous, the Indian princess followed a classical Indian path of development with a mixture of British capitalist economy. Thus he emphasises that "the Indian response to modern stimuli consisted of asserting the Indianness of India, reformulating this Indianness, and giving it a modern character"<sup>3</sup>.

The whole part of the nineteenth century India was highly confronted with the two basic ideas - tradition and modernity. The tradition-modernity dichotomy had been an essential feature of Cooch Behar Kingdom soon after her linkage with the Company's government and later with the Royal government in the 50s of the nineteenth century. The dichotomy was basically expressed in two contradictory questions - whether to keep the indigenous policies and actions being carried out by the rulers of Cooch Behar through ages or whether to accept or take the highly cherished British ideals of modernity to bring about socio-economic changes ? The tradition-modernity dichotomy had reached its highest stage soon after the coming into the power of Raja Harendra Narayan. The impact analyses of this dichotomy has already been made in the Chapter II. The dichotomy in its process had tilted the balance in favour of modernity. In spite of the reluctance of Raja Harendra Narayan, the process of modernity had over come in the race because of the political

sub-ordination of the king to the Company's government and the gradual acceptance of the British style of renovations by the rulers following Harendra Narayan.

Although the road to modernity from tradition had to cover a period of transition, for Cooch Behar this transitional process has been the story of complete sub-ordination and the active initiation of the imperialist power in grooming the members of the royal family, especially, of the future ruler of Cooch Behar kingdom. Thus, the process of modernity initiated and accelerated both by the British rulers and the educated, according to the English style, king Nripendra Narayan had been something of an imposition from the above. It is evident that the people of Cooch Behar kingdom did not have education and even they were not aware of the fruits of modernity which sought to bring about changes in the socio-economic and political life. In fact, no reference has been found to establish the fact of the resentment while process of modernization especially under the leadership of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan had started its course. The absence of resentment may be justified on two valid grounds. Firstly, the people of Cooch Behar as a whole were in a state of ignorance and little aware about what was good for them. Secondly, the allegiance of the people to the king of Cooch Behar was total and they could never think of resisting the royal family because of its total authority.

In spite of the complete direct command established by the British government over Cooch Behar kingdom, the British orientation to the modernization could not completely be injected in the Cooch Behar society because of certain essential indigenous features especially in the land-man relationship, the nature of land ownership and typical indigenous type of administration. Even the most modern ruler Nripendra Narayan could not bring changes in the different type of land holding and ownership and in the local and Sub-divisional system of administration. In fact the princely states did experience the same thing while intending to bring about the socio-economic changes. The North Eastern states, like Cooch Behar kingdom, did keep the indigenous land holding, tenure, judicial and social system of administration while bringing about changes in the socio-economic and political spheres of their respective body polity<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in consistency with the writings of Rajani Kothari, it could be established that the Cooch Behar kingdom like most of the princely states of North Eastern India had been in state of "tradition-modernity continuum"<sup>5</sup>.

The facets of modernization as depicted in the Chapter VI corroborate the fact that the reign of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan produced lasting changes in the socio-economic and political affairs of the State. His personal endeavour and his associations, patronized by colonial influence, prepared the ground for achieving his desired goal—a modern Cooch Behar.

At the time of his accession the different fields of the state life were at a take-off stage as discussed before hand. But the period from 1853 the process of development was very rapid. At the fag end of his reign it became evident that the traditional society had undergone a complete transformation. Not only the manners, even the outlook of the people had changed. The measures against the traditional vices were effectively implemented during his reign.

The outlook of the people had been changed with the changing circumstances and according to the need of the time. The development of communication and education resulted in the mobility and social interaction opened the mind of the people and changed the traditional form of society. The emergence of middle class out of the development of trade and commerce created a new class in the society who came up as the dominant group of the state administration. But it does not mean that the traditional system completely broke down. The land lords or jotdars were not completely dislodged. Their importance in the society and administration was recognized by the ruler<sup>5</sup>.

The homogeneity of caste between the subjects and the ruler afforded greater benefit to the ruler in administering and in collecting of revenue<sup>7</sup>. The sense of belongings within the same caste category not only provided benefit both to the ruler and the subjects but also safeguarded the interest of each other.



The traditional system thus continued in the rural society and the jotedars remained at the vortex of the social structure.

The mutual harmony among different caste groups reduced social unrest which was very common to the other princely states in India. For example, Travancore a progressive princely state witnessed the crisis arising out of casteism<sup>8</sup>. Besides caste harmony, the existence of over whelming majority of the Rajbanshi caste prevented any social tension which was in the offing in Travancore.

While analysing the contribution of Brahma religion and of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, it would be difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the two. The Maharaja was so inter-connected and influenced by the Brahma religion that his "religion" became the "Religion" of the State of Cooch Behar of which reference has been made in Chapter V. However, notwithstanding the development and forces of modernization operating under the direct instigation of the Brahma religion led by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, the religion did not penetrate deep into the life and the minds of the general people. Thus, the changes which occurred were being directed by the different socio-political elites situated at the top level of Cooch Behar body polity. Interestingly enough, while the State of Cooch Behar having Brahmaism as the state religion, could not make it the religion of the people of Cooch Behar, in the other

contemporary princely states this religion could not take its lead at all (for example, the Tripura State)<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, the Brahma religion in relation to Cooch Behar kingdom under Nripendra Narayan has had both its virtues and vices. To speak of the vices : (A) the religion was an over imposition; (B) the changes brought by this religion to the body polity of Cooch Behar were directed from the above. To deal with the virtues one should pay attention to the facts that : (1) the feature of the Brahma religion had its direct impact in shaping the neutral and impartial religious value judgements of the Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and (ii) the traditional values shared by the majority Hindus of Cooch Behar State were kept untouched which can be corroborated by the fact that even remaining at the helm of the affair, the Brahmoised Maharaja Nripendra Narayan did not show any effort to Brahmoise his Hindu subjects.

Regarding land revenue settlement, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan had played a crucial catalytic role of protecting and safeguarding the rights of the peasants. This has been elaborated in Chapter VI, Section III. As a result, the reforms on land revenue activated by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan reduced socio-economic tensions. While comparing the contemporary princely states with the State of Cooch Behar under Maharaja Nripendra Narayan specially in respect of land revenue settlement it may be substantiated that the State of Cooch Behar had

been in good health in this connection, while along with the other princely state Baroda had to experience serious problems emerging out of land revenue question<sup>10</sup>.

It would be an over simplification if we come to the proposition that the economy of Cooch Behar under the reign of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan had been experiencing tremendous changes both qualitative and quantitative in nature. It would be pragmatic to have the view that although new factors and forces were generated to boost up as well as to bring momentum in the economy, there was infact no such effort to change the basic structure of the economy. Not only the effort but also the incapacibilities of a native king under the direct domination of the British ruler may be a point to be borne in mind. The changes which occurred came simply through the process of historical development. Without denying or limiting the capability and the wisdom of the king, it may be pointed out that in his pious effort in bringing changes and development to the economy of Cooch Behar, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan had tried his best (although without involving people) to develop the economy of the State. It should be taken for granted that the development and establishment of Railways and the construction and reconstruction of the roads under the reign of Nripendra Narayan had accelerated the development potentiality of the economy of Cooch Behar. Needless to mention that trade

and commerce developed and a move toward urbanization was also visible during his reign (details have been made in the preceding chapter).

Some features of the changed economic system, thus, come out as a consequence. Firstly, the agrarian economy had received a good amount of jolt at the new schemes launched by the modern, educated Maharaja Nripendra Narayan under the direct sponsorship of the British ruler of Indian Empire. Secondly, the agrarian society after being adapted to the changes being brought about by the Maharaja, had become a society with new factors and forces. Thirdly, these new factors and forces had produced in certain new classes such as the middle class and the upper class intelligentsia. Convincingly enough no reference of class contradiction has been observed by the researcher. It might be because of the absence of articulation of class interest owing to the lack of awareness and the nature of gap between the classes did not reach its maximum extent.

In our study reference has already been made regarding education and its spread under Nripendra Narayan. It may be presumed that Nripendra Narayan could understand the necessity of education among the masses. The establishment of schools both primary and secondary as well as the institution of higher learning such as the Victoria college, under the able guidance of the educated Maharaja, made Cooch Behar a pivotal point of

education in the North Eastern states of India. The role of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan in spreading education may be viewed from two angles; firstly, the English educated modern ruler Nripendra Narayan followed the British policy of spreading education in India and thus higher education was simply concentrated to the capital which gave birth to an educated ruling elite class. Secondly, Maharaja's efforts in spreading education speak of his superior statesmanship. The establishment of primary and secondary schools at the remotest corner and the opening of the printing press corroborate this presumption. In fact Nripendra Narayan under the active influence of Maharani Sunity Devi also tried to spread female education, though his success in this field was limited. Thus, from the above picture it is clear that Maharaja Nripendra Narayan tried to spread education taking it as the most vital vehicle of modernization, and social awareness.

The traditional judicial and administrative system of Cooch Behar had been reshaped and reconstructed. The changes were brought into being down from the below to the top levels of judicial and administrative systems of which mention has been made in the preceding chapter. One pertinent point which may be pointed out is that although under the modern ruler Nripendra Narayan, efforts were made to bring about changes in the administrative and the judicial system according to British line of thought, the policies regarding changes had to adhere to the

prevalent traditional bureaucratic and judicial structures. Thus the elements of modernism which were brought into being carried both the traditional values and modern elements.

The populist style of administering both the judiciary and the administration did not get much attention during the regime of Nripendra Narayan. Although the legislative council and the state council were established during his period, they lacked popular participatory character. In spite of this flaw the seed of democratic virtues and values sowed by Nripendra Narayan had their far reaching effect. The later rulers of Cooch Behar, following Nripendra Narayan, had tried to set up popular participatory bureaucratic and administrative machinery remaining on the edifice constructed by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan<sup>11</sup>.

The modernizer of Cooch Behar, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, did not confine himself to the uplift of his own kingdom but he has associated with a large number of cultural associations both in India and in England<sup>12</sup>. The contemporary news paper, The Times, mentions that "he did much to bring Europeans and Indians together and to advance the social life of Calcutta, Darjeeling, Simla and other Indian centres"<sup>13</sup>.

Culturally his interaction with the Indian mainstream enhanced his enlightened attitude and rational vision. But Nripendra Narayan refrained from being associated with any nationalistic movement in British India. He, on the contrary,

expressed his dis-satisfaction about the activities of the growing intellectual middle class-dominated nationalistic movement in India<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, we have no reference of any influence of the nationalist awakening of India on this State. The first signs of Indian nationalist movement in Cooch Behar can only be found in the 1920s during the rule of Maharaja Jitendra Narayan<sup>15</sup>.

Nripendra Narayan died in 1911 at Bex hill on Sea<sup>16</sup> in England, but during his life time he tried to bring about remarkable changes in all the spheres of the State life. The Cooch Behar State turned into a better-run State with the combined efforts of the British, the Brahmos, and the Maharaja himself. The State, thus, emerged as one of the most progressive and model states among the princely states of India and Nripendra Narayan himself appeared as the most accomplished and popular prince in India<sup>17</sup>.

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