

CHAPTER-III

SUBJUGATION : AGE OF TRANSITION

In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyse the era of subjugation which the Cooch Behar State experienced soon after the death of Raja Harendra Narayan. The subjugatory state of affairs has been viewed from the angle of the process of transition. Although the term "subjugation" and "transition" are not simply a semantic variation, they differ in their implication but interestingly enough they lead to the same direction. The dictionary meaning of the term subjugation is "to bring into servitude" which implies political subordination under compulsion. The lexical meaning of "transition" is "Passage from one state to another" which implies a change towards desirable direction. In the ensuing paragraphs effort has been made to explain how political subordination or subjugation of the Rajas of Cooch Behar to the British has helped to lead the country

to the process of transition¹. It signifies how the political state of affair under the British influence helped to lay down the socioeconomic foundation on which the State of Cooch Behar started its journey towards modernity.

Soon after the death of Raja Harendra Narayan² the reign of whom has been depicted as an era of confrontation the character of the relation between the British and Cooch Behar changed. But the essence of this confrontation prepared the ground work of making Cooch Behar a subjugatory State under the British influence. The year 1939, that is, the period of Shibendra Narayan marked as the starting point of the era of subjugation and there after the British made their headway deep into the territory of Cooch Behar.

The opportunity to bring Cooch Behar under complete influence of the Company was offered just after the death of Raja Harendra Narayan. Soon after the death of Raja Harendra Narayan the State of Cooch Behar had been suffering from the crisis on succession question. Although Shibendra Narayan ascended to the Gaddi, the trouble developed when Kumar Jogendra Narayan, along with his brother with the support of the influential persons of the Palace, claimed his justified ground on to get over the throne on the plea of being the eldest son of Raja Harendra Narayan³. The rivalry over the succession of Raja Harendra Narayan offered a scope to the

Company to interfere directly into the affair of the State and the succession problem was resolved in favour of Raja Shibendra Narayan⁴.

Interestingly enough for the first time the question of succession over the throne of Cooch Behar had been settled by an alien, the East India Company, violating the provision of the Treaty that the Company would not interfere in the internal affairs of Cooch Behar. The decision of the Company tilting the balance in favour of Shibendra Narayan had been justified by the Cooch Behar Court on the ground that the right of the Company selecting the heir to the throne has been an acknowledged fact.

The British colonial policy to bring Cooch Behar under complete subordination, thus, had been successful on two basic grounds; (i) the Raja of Cooch Behar had been a nominee of the Company who had proved to be a man liked by the Company; (ii) the internal personality crisis and the discontents among the nobility on the question of succession helped the Company to intervene into the whole affairs of Cooch Behar under the active patronage of Raja Shibendra Narayan who wanted to strengthen his throne with the Company's support.

Soon after becoming the Raja, Shibendra Narayan wanted to (a) resettle the revenue of the state; (b) reorganise the administrative machinery; (c) improve the social condition of

the people; (d) ensure the safety of the State from the Bhutani inroads⁵.

Regarding the revenue of the State, the royal coffer was dwindling, and the ultimate result was a fall in the revenue⁶. There was no systematic collection of revenue and the people naturally was over burdened with taxes and at the sametime the State treasury suffered. The existence of Salami, Nuzzur in collection of revenue eating away the vitality of ^{the} State's collection. The system of land tenure was also defective. The important personalities of the palace were controlling most of the Jots of the territory in the name of the Ijaradar⁷. The result was that the State was deprived from its bulk of the revenues and the collection also fell to a low ebb. Moreover, Raja Shibendra Narayan found himself harassed with heavy debts owing to the extravagance and indiscriminate liberality of his father⁸.

He paid his particular attention to the revenue concern of the Raj, and by a careful observance of the conduct of the revenue officers and a due regulation of his expenses, he not only succeeded in clearing off the arear tribute to the British but also freed him entirely from the private debts that his father had bequeathed him⁹. One of the important steps taken to give his subject relief from the burden of taxation, Raja Shibendra Narayan abolished bankar (grazing

Tax)¹⁰ and in the agro-based rural society it proved beneficial to the people. These measures lead to a change in the Revenue Department and continued for a long period during the rule of his successors till the new arrangements were made by the modernized ruler Nripendra Narayan.

Evidently, for proper administration of justice, a de-centralised system of judicial administration had been started gaining ground under the British influence. The reorganisation of internal administration and judiciary was paid attention by the Raja Shibendra Narayan. In the first step two Courts were instituted, these were Naib Akhilkar and Sadder Amin for the purpose of deciding Criminal and Civil cases¹¹. Again a Court of Justice or Rajsabha, for the final adjudication of civil, revenue and criminal cases was established, and Dewan Kali Chandra Lahiri and Isan Chandra Mustaffi were made judges of the Court and the Raja himself used to sit in this Court to hear difficult cases, which he decided with the assistance of the above mentioned officers and learned pundits¹². The Superior Court exercised no control over the Magistrate's Court¹³. Thus the people who were harassed under Raja Harendra Narayan were given the protection of justice by the Court and the Judges were made free to exercise their duties well. In the process of the trials, the systems as prevailed in the Company's governed Bengal were practiced¹⁴. These measures reflected the fact

that the colonial influence to improve the condition of the Judiciary⁺⁺ and to give the people the benefit of justice at last gradually penetrated in Cooch Behar. ✓

The question of the internal safety of the State also engaged the attention of the British. The neighbouring State of Bhutan did not rest satisfied with the demarcation of the boundary made by Ensign Brodie in 1832¹⁵. In 1844 the problem aggravated further and the Bhutani soldiers began to encroach on the boundaries of Cooch Behar and oppress the people. The safety and security of the State was seriously threatened. The task of resolving the question fell on Mr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling. He adjudged the land as belonging to Cooch Behar and it was made over to the State in 1845¹⁶. Thus, in the internal affairs of Cooch Behar also,) the Company's influence became all pervasive. ✓

The complete Control and influence of the Company over the total affairs of the Cooch Behar State had been much more accelerated owing to Raja's illness. The native officers on behalf of the Raja used to carry out the administrative functions and led the country to irregularity¹⁷. The Company with much concern took note of the fact and started sending British officials occasionally in order to be apprised of the facts¹⁸. This move of the Company acted as a check to the irregularities made by the native officials¹⁹.

One important contention which is not out of place to mention here is that not only the British people domiciled in India, but also educated personalities, loyal to the Company had started immigrating to Cooch Behar, and with the tacit support of the Company's authority, began holding important posts in the Cooch Behar administration²⁰. The infusion of personalities having heterogenous character and the Raja's compliance to accept those officers served to lay the corner stone of a society which was at its take-off stage.

Thus, the reign of Raja Shibendra Narayan set the dawn of transition. ^{††}The change in the Judicial administration had ^{††}its limitation but at the sametime marked the Company's growing influence into the territory. It is evident from the despatch of the Honourable Court of Director, No.12, Dated 19th March, 1845 that [†]although the Raja is said to be personally inattentive to business, the great increase of population and extension of cultivation, stated by Major Jenkins, to have taken place of late years in Cooch Behar, are, as he observes conclusive proofs that there cannot be any considerable misgovernment²¹.

The above letter reveals that the Company was able to infuse some changes into the administration and the Judiciary of the State but the society experienced little change and social vices continued as it were before. The slavery was

not prohibited and at the sametime the Sutti system was practised by the subjects. Conscious of these prejudices, the Company's government followed a cautious policy, backed by firmness, to effect the desired change and utilised the minority or Regency Administration of the next ruler to infuse new administrative principles in the State.

Along with these social prejudices another important matter remained untouched during the rule of Raja Shibendra Narayan. This is the question of the education of the subjects. In the field of education the tols and Pathshalas were the main medium of imparting native languages²². The English learning did not receive any favour from the king. Raja Shibendra Narayan did not pay much attention in this field. But it is worth mentioning that he expressed his desire that his adopted son Narendra Narayan should be trained in the Western fashion²³. Thus, with the backwardness of education expected pace of modernization ultimately remained unrealised but the process of transition continued and the colonisers interest towards Cooch Behar intensified in the following years.

In 1847 Raja Shibendra Narayan died²⁴ and his adopted)
son Narendra Narayan ascended the throne while he was still a
minor. The Company had got the opportunity to infuse their ✓
own principles in the Regency Administration. The

administration was placed in the hands of Burjendra Narayan who has begotten the minor ruler and acted as Sarbarakar or "Regent"²⁵. During this minority period the active interference in the socio-political sphere resulted in the state's complete subjugation.

The first task to this end of the Company was to educate the minor Raja, in conformity with the British culture. But the scheme of educating the minor Raja in Western fashion was unpalatable to parties with vested interest of the palace. The Regent and the Ranees were against any policy of imparting Western Education to the minor Raja²⁶. However, to give effect to the expressed desire of the deceased Raja Shibendra Narayan, the Company's authority was bent on implementing the principle of training the infant Raja in Western fashion. The second task of the Company was to persuade the Ranees to allow the minor Raja to be educated along Western lines. Eventually the move of the Company was successful and as per recommendation of the Deputy Governor of Bengal, Mr. Ralph Moore was appointed to supervise the education of the young Raja²⁷. At the same time the Company took all sorts of precautions to keep the minor king free from all pernicious influences of the Cooch Behar palace²⁸.

In 1848 a notable change occurred in the Company's policy towards the State. Uptill then the management of the

State was exclusively in the hands of the rulers of the State, but in the year a shift in the policies took place and the management of the affairs was placed directly under the government of Bengal and all questions of an important political bearing were referred to the Supreme Government²⁹.

Accordingly the minor Raja's education was not neglected. He was first shifted to Krishna Nagar in 1853 and then to the Court of Ward's Institution in Calcutta³⁰, where he remained under the guardianship of Raja Rajendra Lal Mitter, a Europeanised intellectual of Calcutta. The Raja remained there until he attained majority in 1859³¹.

While Narendra Narayan was a minor, the Regent was entrusted with the duty of conducting the State's administration. The intention of the Company to this effect did not bear fruits. The administrative efficiency could not be developed because of the intrigues among the State high officials. The conflict between them made the State administration more confused³² and the appointments of some inefficient official turned the matter to worse³³. Nepotism and misuse of administrative power were very much prevalent as the native guardian did not have the skill to fight out the problems.

All these trends led the Company to take the most integrated policy towards the State affairs. Firstly, they felt the necessity of appointing a Resident Commissioner after

a long time; Secondly, to take the entire management of the State at their own hands. These policies of the Company enhanced the scope of political subjugation of Cooch Behar.) This was possible because of two facts; (i) the minority of Raja Narendra Narayan and (ii) the state of instability under the native administrator .

The subjugated state of affairs in Cooch Behar would help the Company on the one hand to steer the country to the road to modernity and on the other the prevalent social vices would be wiped out under the direct control and supervision of the Company. The first step, against the social vices, was the abolition of the Sutti system in 1849³⁴. The promulgation of the banning of Sutti marked a turning point of the traditionalism and a step towards modernizing the State.

The process of modernizing the judicial administration in tune with the Judicial administrative system of Bengal which started during the reign of Raja Shibendra Narayan had received further momentum under the active supervision of the Company. In 1849 the number of the Courts were increased with officers specially appointed³⁵. Moreover, the Company took notice regarding the non-existence of police organisation in the State and took initiative to re-organise the police system to enforce law and order in the State. Thanas (Police station) were established in different corners of the state and these were fashioned like the Thanas of British administered Bengal.

The Police Department was placed under a officer known as Fouzdari Ahilkar³⁶.

Some noticeable feature of this system was that the police and the judges of the courts were not regularly paid by the State. They managed their finances out of the collection of the fees and fines. Naturally corruption crept in³⁷.

Narendra Narayan, after attaining majority in 1859 took the reins of government in his own hands and set himself in improving the State administration. He followed the principles as laid down by the Company. But the affairs of the State did not improve a lot. He could not eradicate the evils of the administration which developed out of the jealousies of the high officials of the State. The chief officers were misappropriating the public money and naturally the state revenue suffered a lot³⁸. To resist the mal-practices in the different departments of the administration the young Raja had been properly advised by the British³⁹.

The colonial transitia-dependencia model of administration which the Company intended to introduce in the Indian States had been successful when the Cooch Behar State had acknowledged and recognised the authority of the Company to confer "Titles" to the Cooch Behar rulers. The recognition of this authority of the Company had ultimately turned the ruler

to the altar of British authority and control. In 1862 the Government of India granted a Sannud to the Maharaja conferring on him and his successors the right of adoption failing natural heirs⁴⁰. Further the Government of India recognised the title of "Maharaja Bahadur"⁴¹. Thus, the political subjugation was almost complete.

In 1859, soon after Raja Narendra Narayan ascended the throne a topographical survey was made by the Revenue surveyer, J.G. Pemberton. This map happened to be the first regular map of Cooch Behar State⁴². This helped in settling the land revenue and assessing the total land. But the attempt of the Raja to reform the land revenue settlement was opposed by the influential persons of the State⁴³. The traditional system continued and influential persons of the palace controlled most of the ijaras of the State and the land revenue system witnessed no further improvement⁴⁴.

Another notable incident which marked the change of traditional administrative system during the reign of Raja Narendra Narayan is the effort to give the administration a participatory character. The Raja was influenced and guided by the British Government to constitute a Sabha (council) known as Desh Hitaishini Sabha⁴⁵ to aid and advise the Raja. The nature of the composition of the Sabha reflects an oligarchic character. The personalities of different traits were nominated as members of the Sabha such as the landlords,

leading aristocrats, intellectuals and business men of high standard⁴⁶. The intention of the British Government was to streamline the Raja to the British control and supervision both from within and without. The internal control was made through loyal aristocrats and the external control was through the constant vigil of the British officials. But the historic implication of the constitution of this Sabha, although elitist in character, has marked the beginning of the participatory nature of administration. Ultimately this Sabha was abolished during the life time of the Raja Narendra Narayan⁴⁷.

With the British concept of development of production relation the rural society of Cooch Behar had undergone a sea-change. The manual labour was replaced by bullock carts⁴⁸. The introduction of this system in one hand checked the oppressive old manual labour system, on the other it set the communication system to the path of modernity. It can be said that the abolition of manual labour set in motion the complete abolition of slavery from the State.

The economy of the country witnessed a developmental trend during the reign of Raja Narendra Narayan with the business intercourse with Bhutan which was re-opened in July 1855⁴⁹. The increase of trade and commerce helped the producers and ryots to earn a high price. The increase of

business centres contributed to the growth of urban centre through out the territory⁵⁰. The economy was also fostered with the increase of cultivated lands by occupation of water lands and Jheels⁵¹.

In the field of education, Raja Narendra Narayan realised the necessity of Western education along with the native education. The establishment of Jenkins School heralded a new era in the field of Western education⁵². But the education was a neglected matter and it was not placed on an efficient footing⁵³.

In spite of the British interference into the affairs of Cooch Behar the whole management of the state had not undergone, inter-alia, in tune with the modernity. Although some changes were witnessed during the period of 1839 to 1863, there were still some social vices such as slavery, Poligamy, Stri Narook (female murder), Seshoo Narook (infanticide) and Bahoo Narook (General destruction of the people), were being practised by the subjects⁵⁴. Even the British tried to enlighten Raja Narendra Narayan along British line, but did not fully succeed because of the fact that he was not properly guided by the Government's Agent from Gowhatty.

While summing up the period of transition it is not irrelevant to mention that/being essentially a backward agro-based traditional society with all its vices and evils, the

Cooch Behar State had been experiencing a considerable transformation under the British control and supervision. ✓
The increased dependence of the Raja on the British administration on the one hand welcomed the British hegemonistic attitude, on the other, the British culture and system of administration, injected into the State of Cooch Behar, had ✓
helped it to complete its transitory process of journey which opened the vistas to modernity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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5. Munshi Joynath, op.cit., p.132; Bandopadhyaya Bagabati Charan, op.cit., p.38.
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9. Bandopadhyaya Bagabati Charan, op.cit., p.89.
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13. Ibid., p.20.
14. Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, General (Political) Department, February, 1864, No.55-57, (Appendix), p.5.
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23. Letter from Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to Jenkins, SRC, Vol.II, op.cit., No.125 of 1852, p.181.
24. Sashi Bhusan Halder, Lecture on "Maharaja Narandra Narayan Bhup Bahadurer Jiban Charit", at the Meeting of the Cooch Behar Hitaishini Sabha, 7th issue, 1272 B.S., p.114.
25. Ibid., p.116.
26. Letter from Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Officiating Secretary Government of India, (Foreign Department), SRC, Vol.II, No.156 of 1848, pp.143-147.
27. Ibid., p.144.
28. Ibid., pp.144-147.
29. Ibid., p.147.
30. Sashi Bashun Halder, op.cit., p.124.
31. Campbell, A.C., op.cit., p.297.

32. The high officials, the chief Dewan Gopal Mohan Mazumder and Shib Prasad Bakshee, the first officer of the State were at perpetual loggerheads and they did no public works whatever in consort; Letter from Cooch Behar, to G.G.I, received by the Supdt. of Darjeeling, 2nd February 1848, SRC, Vol.II, op.cit., p.135.
33. "Kulindra Narayan a boy of fourteen years, without any education or of any training was appointed as the head of the Criminal Courts. Guru Charan Ray, a dismissed officer for misconduct was appointed a Fauzdari Ahilkar. Ram Dhan Mazumder, a nephew of chief Dewan Gopal Mohan Mazumder, a boy of sixteen was appointed as Naib Ahilkar, Ibid., p.135.
34. Letter from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to Major Jenkins, G.G.I's Agent in N.E.F., 1849, SRC, Vol.II, op.cit., No.32, p.159.
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36. Jenkins, F., op.cit., pp.19-20.
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50. Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, General (Political) Department, 1860, No.37, Para 5.
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