

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The nature of British economic, political and social impact on India has remained a controversial and exciting theme of Indian historiography since the later half of the Eighteenth century. The theme has attracted the Indian and the British scholars and administrators for academic and pragmatic reasons, and even to-day historians have been digging the past to understand and evaluate the nature of the British impact on Indian Society. It was a unique feature of British policy that after they established themselves as the sovereign power in India, they evolved relationship with the princely state in such a legalistic way and with such sophistication and skills that the ruling chiefs increasingly found themselves playing subservient role in the development of their states. "The growth of British power in India has perhaps no parallel in history. It was not the case of outright conquest one country by of another, but a story of slow penetration in which the country themselves helped the intruders."⁽¹⁾ By and large, they tended to serve the political and economic interests of the British Paramount power.

The object of this thesis is to discuss the history of Cooch Behar state and its relations with the British 1773-1839. Although some work has been done on Cooch Behar's history of the earlier period, the British era has not received sufficient attention. The policy which the East India Company followed towards this Tiny state to

1. Sen, S. N., 1857 - Introduction.

great extent typifies the general attitude towards the states of India which they found in existence and which sank into a position of dependence.

British policy in this area was mainly dictated by considerations of trade and commerce with the Himalayan states and the countries beyond. But the question of a fixed and stable northern frontier and peace in the northern districts of the company's possession, were no less significant than the question of trade and commerce.

British relation with Cooch Behar state developed in the later half of the eighteenth century in the wake of Cooch Behar Bhutan conflict. Being threatened by Bhutan, Cooch Behar asked the help of the East India Company which was renowned for its military superiority. (Warren Hastings was then the Governor General of Bengal. The ambition to trade through the Himalayas, and thereby link the British territories in India with the vast regions of Tibet and China. beyond, was the essential pre-occupations of the trading company and its authorities. The appeal for military help by Cooch Behar offered the company not only a golden opportunity to fulfill their by cherished commercial interests. But also opened a new horizon to the company for political foothold in this region which she was hankering for since the occupation of Rangpur, the last frontier of the British.

By giving military help to Cooch Behar and subduing Bhutan, Warren Hastings wanted to use Bhutan as a channel to Tibet and from Tibet to China. The control over Cooch Behar was also of a great advantage to the company. The geographical and strategical position of Cooch Behar attracted Warren Hastings and Charles Durling, the Collector of Rangpur very much. Hitherto the East India Company's northern frontier was confined to Rangpur. The occupation of Cooch Behar would complete and secure their northern boundary. The economic importance of Cooch Behar also provoked the company's response to the appeal of the Cooch Behar authorities.

With these ends in view, the company, under the governor generalship of Warren Hastings agreed to help Cooch Behar and a treaty was concluded in the year April 5, 1773. The Anglo Cooch Behar treaty marked a turning point in the history of Cooch Behar. A new relationship with the British developed therefrom. The far reaching impact of the Anglo Cooch Behar treaty was not confined to the Cooch Behar state only. In the long run, it re-shaped the political boundaries of the entire North Eastern part of India. Because Cooch Behar was the 1st native state of this part of India which came into contact with the company. The process which had been started with the Anglo Cooch Behar Treaty, was ended in 1826 with the acquisition of Ahom kingdom and other states.)

The Anglo Cooch Behar treaty did not specifically mentions the area of British interference in the state. The political instability and internal strifes within the state required its occasional interference. This interference, gradually and very systematically began to exert upon the state which reached its culmination during the time of Maharaja Harendra Narayan.

Harendra Narayan was very much aversive to the British interference in the state. His reign was eventful phase in the history of Anglo Cooch Behar relations. During this time owing to the minority of the ruler and mal-administration of the state the British Government wanted to introduce some Regulations in the state which would benefit its administration. But the king was adamant not to accept it. The British Government during this time was very much distrubed with regards to their security in Eastern as well as north-eastern frontier. In the Northern frontier in Nepal, the rising Gurkkhas became a challenge to the company. The importance of Nepal was very much with regards to the opening of the trans-Himalayan trade route of the East India Company. Formerly, the trade between Bengal and Tibet via Nepal had been very considerable. But with the coming of the Gurkhas as the ruling power in Nepal, the rhythm of interchange had been broken, merchants deterred and the trade all but destroyed. So it was not continuing desire to open channels for commerce through the Himalaya: which contributed to a serious war against the

Gurkhas in 1814.

The favourable conclusion of the Anglo Nepalese war and the treaty of Segouli (1816) gave the British that firm footing in the eastern Himalaya. Nepal became a permanent ally of the East India Company. In the Eastern frontier also, the East India Company was busy with regards to its security because of the activities of the Burmese in the bordering areas of Assam, Arakan. and Chittagong. The 1st Anglo Burmese war (1824-26) and the Treaty of Yandaboo established British hold over the region. So after the guarantee of a peaceful and secure frontier towards Nepal, and Burma the company now fall back upon Cooch Behar. The path of request and conciliation was over and the British tightened their policy on Cooch Behar. Harendra Narayan had no other way but to succumb to the reality. The status and position of the state of Cooch Behar changed after Harendra Narayan. The British Government, in a very cautious and systematic way tightened its hold on the state. British interference in Cooch Behar state, after Harendra Narayan was more confident and it was fulfilled during the time of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan.