

CHAPTER VI

ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE STATE

Section- I

Agriculture, Industry, and Trade and Commerce

Shinkichi Taniguchi, the Japanese scholar, wrote that after the fall of the successors of the great kingdom of Kamarupa in the 13th and 14th centuries, many petty tribal kingdoms emerged in this part of India. The Koch kingdom was one of them. These kingdoms were mostly tribal in their agrarian structure as well as in social system. When these petty kingdoms attained a sufficiently large production base through the introduction of advanced systems of agriculture, the ruling sections of these kingdoms started to embrace Hinduism. Since the 15th century changes in their agriculture from shifting type to settled one using a plough brought about changes in land ownership. These changes were closely associated with the rise of a group of rich peasants (Jotedars), and also with the increasing involvement of the tribal people in the outer and wider economy personified by merchants cum money-lenders. These political and socio - economic changes went side by side with very remarkable changes in tribal society and culture.¹

It is needless to say, agriculture constituted the main occupation of the people of the Koch kingdom from the early days. For the purpose of irrigation, the villages generally grew up around the river side. Agriculture was looked upon as noble profession by the people including those of the Brahmanas.² Manual labour was never looked upon with any odium or disgrace.³ Here it may be pointed out that Haridas (Haria) who became the Mondal or the king of Chiknajhara used to plough lands and produce "Karpasa" (cotton).⁴

The villages in India played a significant part in the economic life of the people of India from the early days, that is to say, the people lived a rural life with agriculture as their chief occupation. A noted scholar has pointed out that 'like other parts of Bengal the largest number of people of Cooch Behar State were also agriculturists and lived in villages.'⁵ In the words of Captain Lewin, the Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar State during 1875-1876, "The entire State is divided into small farms, and upon each farm (locally known as a jot) is built the home of the farmer, with the houses of his immediate relatives, and perhaps an undertenant or two. Hence the whole country, throughout its length and breadth, consists of small circles of cultivation, each with its central homestead, shut in and embosomed in bamboo, plantain and other quickly growing trees."⁶ As a matter of fact, land was the most important source of income of the Cooch Behar State. In order to absorb the growing population cultivation had been extended since the time of the first settlement (1870-72) either through a system of inducement such as changes in the mode of assessment

or through outright state pressure.⁷

Cooch Behar was, as of now, pre-eminently an agricultural princely state. With the exception of potters, barbers, drum-beaters, washermen and fishermen, there was almost no other section of the people which did not largely depend upon agriculture for their subsistence. All other occupations or professions were pursued in addition and were supplementary to agriculture.⁸ According to the census of 1921, of the total population of the state 5,25,496 or 88.7 percent were supported by agriculture, 15,444 or 2.6 percent by industries, 26,311 or 4.4 percent by commerce, 5,630 or 0.1 percent by professions and 19,608 or 3.3 percent by other occupations. There was one rent-receiver to 42 cultivators.⁹ In 1940, the total area of Cooch Behar state was 8,50,766.33 acres and the cultivated area was 5,67,042.66 acres. In the same year the total revenue from land amounted to Rs. 17,98,984.¹⁰

Agriculture was then, as of now, 'gamble in rains'. The failure of rains means a sure famine. Means of artificial irrigation like canals and tanks were few. The methods of cultivation were old and primitive. Implements were few and over wide areas, practically the only mechanical aid to cultivation was the plough.¹¹ In matters connected with agriculture as in other things the people had their peculiar superstition. New modes of cultivation or the rearing of new crops were regarded with fear as being incongruous. In other words, the system of agriculture which obtained in the state several generations ago thus remained unaltered.¹²

The soil of Cooch Behar is of alluvial formation and has a large admixture of sand. The greater portion of it is a light loam that can retain moisture and easily give it out and does not become water-logged. When dry it does not cake up, but yields to light pressure and easily gets dissolved. Ploughing is not thus difficult and does not entail much labour on the cultivator or his cattle. Although the soil differs in character in different parts of the state and even in different portion of the same taluk.¹³

Almost every cultivator had cattle of his own and used cowdung and litter as manure for his tobacco, sugarcane, jute, mustard seed, wheat and barley as far as his own supply went. Little or no manure was applied to the soil in the case of other crops. Oil-cake was also sometimes used as manure. The abundant and generally seasonable rainfall enabled the cultivator to do without irrigation. The soil also retained sufficient moisture. Tobacco plants however needed frequent watering both in the nursery and in the field.¹⁴ Thus a small area of the tobacco crop was irrigated and specially near the river banks. Irrigation was not practised on any other crop of the state.¹⁵ Droughts were of exceedingly rare occurrence in the state.¹⁶ A cheap and simple process of irrigation could however largely improve the condition of agriculture in the state.¹⁷ In 1943, the total area irrigated in the state from the wells (15,897.66 acres) and other sources (348.00 acres) was 16,245.66 acres.¹⁸

On the subject of irrigation, the Post-War Reconstruction Conference held at the Lansdownee Hall on the

25th and 26th February, 1944 expressed the opinion that 'irrigation is not a crying need in the state being an area of heavy rainfall.... Moreover, the state being intersected by a very large number of rivers any project to use river water for irrigation by constructing drains and canals would be extremely costly. The surface soil and sub-soil being very sandy the rivers dammed up might change course or the canals may develop into uncontrollable rivers very quickly. The Conference therefore were of the opinion that only small irrigation projects of local value 'may be taken up of which the administration should advise the P.W.D. of the demand who would make necessary surveys and prepare plans and estimates and execute the works. The appointment of a Special Irrigation Officer for the purpose was also recommended.¹⁹

Crops : Rice formed, as of now, the staple crop and was divided into two classes, namely, bitri (early rice) and haimanti (winter rice), each of which was sub-divided into a great many varieties. The winter rice was much the more important crop. The other principal crops were jute, tobacco and mustard, Jute and tobacco were paying crops. Wheat, barley, pulses, maize, tij, sunhemp, sugarcane and the millets like cheena (panicum millaceum) and vegetables were grown in the state on a small scale. Bamboos grew extensively in the state. As for the rotation of crops, bitri rice and jute generally followed mustard seed, pulses, wheat, barley and tij. Haimanti rice was sometimes grown after the bitri rice was harvested. Jute and tobacco were also sometimes successively grown on the same land, but as both these crops required manuring this rotation was not largely followed.²⁰

The following were the principal crops which were produced in the state, namely :-²¹

- | | | | |
|------|-------------|----------|--|
| I. | Rice | | |
| II. | (a) Cereals |(a) | 1. Wheat
2. barley
3. Cheena (millet)
4. Kaon
5. Maize |
| | (b) Pulses |(b) | 1. Khesari
2. Musuri
3. Matar
4. Kalai
5. Mung |
| III. | Oilseeds | | Rape and mustard |
| IV. | Sugar | | Sugarcane |
| V. | Fibers | | Jute |

VI.	Drugs and narcotics	Tobacco
VII.	Root crops	Potato

All of these crops were raised in every part of the state in a more or less degree. With the exception of paddy all other crops were only of a secondary nature and the extent of their cultivation was not large.²² The following table will show the total area sown with crops in the state during the year 1939 - 40.²³

Total area sown with crops in Cooch Behar State during the year 1939-1940.

Cooch Behar State		Mekli- gunj	Matha- Bhanga	Lal- bazar	Dinhata	Cooch- Behar	Tufan- gunj	Total
English or Vernacular Names		Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres
Food grains	1. Rice.....	69235.33	81815.66	63537.33	98172	112431	63458.33	488649.66
	2. Wheat.....	86.66	6.33	48.33	655	956.66	235	1988
	3. Kaon.....	57.33	62.66	7.33	207.66	18.66	42.33	396
	4. Cheena.....	1.66	10.66	0.33	20.66	39	3.66	76
	5. Other food grains..... including pulses	128.33	421.66	157.33	3556	2739.33	1122	8118.66
Total		69509.31	82316.97	63744.65	1023641.32	116184.65	64857.66	499228.33
Oilseeds	6. Mustard.....	325.66	888.66	2342.33	6348.33	11879	13615.66	35397.66
Total		325.66	888.66	2342.33	6348.33	11879	13615.66	35397.66
Sugar	7. Sugarcane.....	25.66	10.00	73.00	27.66	9.33	17.66	163.33
Total		25.66	10.00	73.00	27.66	9.33	17.66	163.33
Fibres	8. Jute.....	13836	7911.33	4829.33	9080	6883.66	2316.66	44857
Total		13836	7911.33	4829.33	9080	6883.66	2316.66	44857
Drugs and Narcotics	9. Tobacco.....	6352.33	14096.33	13734.33	11562.66	12068.33	1056	58870
Total		6352.33	14096.33	13734.33	11562.66	12068.33	1056	58870
10. Potato including root crops....		96.33	20.66	27.66	443	258	237.66	1083.33
Grand Total		90143.29	105243.95	84751.30	130072.97	147282.97	82104.96	639549.66
11. Area sown more than once....		11647.66	7524	3846.66	31191	12530	5817.66	72557
12. Net area sown during the year		78495.66	97720	80904.66	98882	134753	76287.33	567042.65

Although paddy was grown all over the state there were special tracts known for the excellence and abundance of this crop. The western portion of Pargana Mekligang, the northern portion of Pargana Mathabhanga, a tract in the north of Pargana Cooch Behar known as Gird Chowra and almost the whole of Paragana Tufangang were well-known paddy producing areas.²⁴ Mustard-seed formed one of the staple crops of Tufangang which raised this crop very extensively. The supply of oil in the greater portion of the state was obtained from that pargana. Tobacco was, as of now, one of the principal crops of the state and the most profitable of all agricultural products of the people. With the exception of the north of Cooch Behar and Tufanganj the cultivation of tobacco was extensive almost everywhere else. Lalbazar Pargana was specially famous for the excellence of its tobacco. This crop was, as of now, also very largely raised in Mekligang, Mathabhanga and Dinhata, and formed one of the staple products of agriculture of those areas. The traffic in tobacco was large, and the people made a good deal of money by it. Tobacco was sent down in boats to the eastern districts of Bengal in large quantities. During the early days the Burmese merchants annually used to take away thousands of maunds of tobacco from Mekliganj and Lalbazar. The value of the annual exports of this crop was about 10 lakhs of rupees as early as 1876. A very small portion of tobacco remained in the state, and that only for home consumption.²⁵ Even after partition of the country, Cooch Behar alone supplied about 72 percent of the total tobacco output of West Bengal.²⁶

Of the manufactural crops jute was one of the principal crops of the people. It was, as of now, largely grown in every part of the state. The traffic in this article was large and had helped the springing up of Bundars all over the state. Haldibari owed its prosperity to jute traffic only. The jute grown in this state had fine fibre, and in demand in Calcutta. It fetched better price than most other jute. The cultivation of sugarcane, another manufactural crop was extensive in the south - west of Dinhata and in the south of Lalbazar. The cultivation of this crop was gradually extending to every part of the state. Besides raising the crop the people drew juice from it and prepared molasses out of the same. Sugarcane paid better than paddy or mustard - seed.²⁷ The following is the statement showing the approximate area under different principal crops and the yield during the year 1919.²⁸

Statement showing the approximate area under different principal crops and the yield during the year, 1919.

Sl. No.	Name of Pargana	Total area of pargana in square miles	Percent of total area of pargana under jute	Total area in acres under jute.	Yield per acre in maunds	Total yield in maunds	Percent of total area under tobacco	Total area in acres under tobacco	Yield per acre in maund	Total yield in maunds	Percent of total area under paddy	Total area in acres under paddy	Yield per acre in maunds	Total yield in maunds	Percent of total area of pargana under mustard	Total area in acres under mustard	Yield per acre in maunds	Total yield in maunds
1.	Cooch Behar	309	4	8,000	15	1,20,000	4	8,000	15	1,20,000	30	60,000	18	10,80,000	3	5,750	5	28,750
2.	Mathabhanga	230	4	6,000	15	90,000	8	12,000	15	1,80,000	30	45,000	18	8,10,000	1	1,500	5	7,500
3.	Tufanganj	190	4	4,800	15	72,000	1	1,200	15	18,000	35	42,500	18	7,65,000	4	4,800	5	24,000

Sl. No.	Name of Pargana	Total area of pargana in square miles	Percent of total area of pargana under jute	Total area in acres under jute.	Yield per acre in maunds	Total yield in maunds	Percent of total area under tobacco	Total area in acres under tobacco	Yield per acre in maund	Total yield in maunds	Percent of total area under paddy	Total area in acres under paddy	Yield per acre in maunds	Total yield in maunds	Percent of total area of pargana under mustard	Total area in acres under mustard	Yield per acre in maunds	Total yield in maunds
4.	Dinhala	209	4	5,250	15	78,750	4	5,250	15	80,000	40	55,000	18	9,90,000	1.5	2,000	5	10,000
5.	Lalbazar	176	2	2,250	15	33,750	10	11,250	15	4,68,750	35	40,000	18	7,20,000	1	1,000	5	5,000
6.	Mekli gunge	193	5	6,000	15	90,000	3.5	43,000	15	64,500	33	40,000	18	7,20,000	1	1,200	5	6,000
	Total	1,307	—	32,300	—	4,84,500	—	42,000	—	6,31,250	—	2,82,500	—	50,85,000	—	16,250	—	81,250

Prices of Chief Agricultural Products : With the opening up of the state by roads and railways and the facility thus afforded to the export trade the prices of food-grains were gradually rising. In the times of old Maharajas food stuff was extremely cheap, probably because what was grown in the state remained in it, and few people had any occasion to buy food. There had been an increase in the price of other articles also. The table showing variation of the prices of different articles during the four decades ranging from 1870 to 1900 has already been furnished in the following chapter.²⁹ This increasing trends in the prices of the principal crops continued in the later decades under our study. The following sub-joined table gives the names of the principal crops cultivated in the state, the time of their cultivation and reaping as well as their appearance in the market, together with the out turn and market price during the 1920s :³⁰

Name of crops	Month or Months during which cultivated	Month or Months during which harvested	Month or Months when available in market	Average outturn in maunds per bigha		Average value per Maund of 80 tola seer			Net income of the cultivator from one bigha		
				Md	Sr	Rs.	A.	P.	Rs.	A.	P.
Haimanti Paddy	May to August	Nov' to January	Nov' to June	6	0	3	8	0	10	8	0
Bitri Paddy	Feb. to March	June to August	July to October	7	20	2	15	0	11	0	0
Tobacco	Sept. to November	March to April	May to September	5	0	18	1	0	45	2	8
Potato	Sept. to November	Feb. to March	Feb. to April	12	0
Jute	April	August to September	September to Decr.	5	0	10	3	0	25	7	6
Mustard seed	October	January to February	January to March	1	20	8	8	0	6	6	0
Wheat	October to November	March	March to April	6	0	4	12	0	13	2	0
Cheena	January	March	March to April	6	0	3	3	0	9	9	0
Kaon	January	May	May to June	8	0	2	15	0	11	12	0
Pulses	August to September	March	March to April	3	0	5	3	0	7	11	6

It can be seen from the foregoing table that tobacco was the most profitable agricultural crop. Next came jute. But net income derivable from mustard-seed was rather little.

But there had been considerable fall in the prices of all agricultural crops owing to the economic depression which commenced in the state in the year 1930-31.³¹ During the year 1931-32, the price of common rice ranged from Rs. 2-14 to Rs. 4-2 per maund ; of tobacco from Rs. 5-8 to Rs. 15 per maund ; of mustard seed from Rs. 2-12 to Rs. 4-8 per maund ; and of jute from Rs. 2-12 to Rs. 6-10 per maund. From the foregoing figures it will be seen that the price of paddy and that of the other chief crops of the state were much lower than those of the previous year owing to the trade depression and the economic condition of the people consequently was not good.³²

But the state gradually recovered itself from the unabated fury of the economic depression and there was again upward trend in the prices of agricultural produce in the later years, particularly after the termination of the Second World War. In September, 1946 the price of haimanti paddy was Rs. 5-12-0 per maund, of common rice was Rs. 11 per maund, of tobacco was Rs. 60 to Rs. 80 per maund, of mustard seed was Rs. 16 per maund, of jute was Rs. 16 to Rs. 20 per maund, and of mustard oil was Rs. 70.³³ The prices of the agricultural products continued to rise in subsequent years also. In September, 1947, the price of common rice was Rs. 24 to Rs. 32, of haimanti paddy was Rs. 14 to 16, of bitri paddy was Rs. 11 to 13 ; of mustard seed was Rs. 22 ; of jute was Rs. 22 to 24 ; and of tobacco was Rs. 80 to Rs. 100.³⁴

The State Government's efforts towards Agricultural Improvement : The backwardness of agriculture throughout the state was remarkable, the more so as the climate was so favourable. Not only was the variety and in some cases the quality of the crops grown, exceedingly meagre, but the implements of agriculture were absolutely primitive and agricultural livestock were of the poorest quality. No attempt was made, it has been argued, to exploit the possibilities which the soil and the climate held out but the cultivators went on doggedly growing rice, tobacco and jute again and again. It mattered not that the situation of his land was much better suited for the growth of other crops. The cultivators pinned his faith on rice, tobacco and jute. There were patches of sugarcane fields in Lalbazar. Mustard was grown a good deal in Tufanganj and Cooch Behar, pulses in Cooch Behar and Dinhat to some extent. This with a few miscellaneous seeds crops and some quantity of a poor variety of potatoes, vegetables and fruit made up the total produce. Consequently, the system of agriculture which obtained in the state several generations ago, remained unaltered 'even at the present day.' The people took no sufficient interest in the breeding of the cattle used for agricultural purposes. As a matter of fact, it seemed that they had no knowledge about efficiency of sound breeding. There was no scientific manuring of the fields. Notwithstanding the innate richness of the soil, the land had begun to lose its ancient productivity.³⁵

The main income of the agriculturists was the produce of the land, chief of them being tobacco, jute, rice and mustard seeds. Owing to the economic depression the prices of agricultural products had fallen heavily and this slump in prices had told very badly on the agriculturists of Cooch Behar State as it had been in Bengal.³⁶ His Highness' Government made all possible endeavour to improve the agriculture and to cope with the economic depression. This Government had opened an Agricultural Department with an Agricultural Officer mainly for demonstration and propaganda work in the interior in connection with profitable substitute crops on economic basis and jute restriction, and some success had already been noticed in the sugarcane cultivation and gur manufacture by the cultivators.³⁷

In order to bring as much areas as possible under improved crops, improved varieties of seeds, (sugarcane) cuttings, manure and implements were sold and freely distributed among the willing growers.³⁸ New crops such as Bogra and Hill potato, 321 and 431 varieties of sugarcane, pusa IV wheat, Akola variety of ground nut were introduced and supplied to the selected growers.³⁹ Improved aus paddy seeds such as Kataktara, Dherial and improved aman paddy seeds such as Indrasail, Dudsar, Chinsurah No. 2 were sold and tried in several taluks with success. Improved jute seeds such as D 154, G.O. were supplied at cost price for the benefit of the cultivators.⁴⁰

In order to enlighten the local agriculturists and to educate them on improved agriculture, extensive tours were made by the Agricultural Officer and also by the Agricultural Demonstrators. The Agricultural Officer, in the course of his tour, met the cultivators who were instructed in all kinds of agricultural possibilities in the state. Some of the cultivators took keen interest in agricultural discussion. The subjects dealt with were chiefly the manufacture of gur (molasses), the proper method of tillage, selection and preservation of seeds, conservation of cow-dung manure in covered pits and proper manuring etc.⁴¹

A Model Agricultural Farm in Cooch Behar town had been established by the state for the purpose of experiment in and demonstration of improved methods of agriculture and bringing those improvements to the notice of the cultivators. Arrangement had also been made for agricultural training of the subjects of the state, and suitable stipends had been provided for the encouragement of the candidates receiving training in the Cooch Behar Model Agricultural Farm.⁴²

Cattle-wealth was a great factor in the agricultural operations, and improvement of cattle was of vital importance in an agricultural State like Cooch Behar. His Highness' Government were fully alive to this important fact and introduced and also provided stud bulls to improve the local breed of cattle in the different centres of the State.

A Model Dairy Farm had been established in Cooch Behar town with the pedigree bulls and cows as well as buffaloes with a view to constitute eventually a pedigreed herd, and to supply pure milk and milk products to the

people of the state. Arrangement had also been made for proper training of the Cooch Behar subjects in animal husbandry and dairy farming in the Model Dairy Farm at Cooch Behar on suitable stipends.⁴³

It may be noted here that the experimental tobacco farms at Nilkuti and at Dinahata had already been started in 1905-1906. 176 bighas of land were included in the Nilkuti Farm and 20 bighas in the Dinahata Farm. The imported seeds of tobacco which were experimented in the noted farms were Virginian or American, Turkish and Cuban. The results in all cases had been successful and expert opinion pronounced the quality of the tobacco growth in the state farms to be almost as good as tobacco grown in America. The highest price obtained was Rs. 60 per maund and the lowest price Rs. 25, while the average price per maund of the country tobacco was Rs. 12 only. All these circumstances led the Dewan to think that the objects of the foundation of the farms had been practically attained and that the jotedars would be induced to adopt improved methods of tobacco cultivation as being more lucrative than those hitherto followed. The Dewan therefore recommended that Nilkuti Farm be abolished with effect from the 1st July, 1912, but that the Dinahata farm being in the centre of the chief tobacco area in the state, be maintained for the present, and his proposals had been sanctioned by His Highness in Council.⁴⁴

An attempt was made to induce some of the Jotedars to grow foreign tobacco with seeds supplied by the state but the tenants here, as in other parts of India were very conservative in matters of agriculture and were slow to change systems which had come down to them from their forefathers and the scheme did not therefore succeed. However in the Agricultural Farm experiments had been taken up for growing and curing different varieties of tobacco for the manufacture of cigar and cigarettes as cottage industry.⁴⁵

The subject of tobacco cultivation was again raised by A.S. Wilson, the Supervisor, the State Gardens Department of Cooch Behar. Before coming to India Mr. Wilson had spent many hours in the Museums at Kew Gardens and also in those in other parts of London examining tobacco. He stated in a letter dated the 3rd February, 1938 that 'but I had never seen such good quality of tobacco as that which was exhibited at the Cooch Behar Industrial and Public Health Exhibition held in November, 1937, the fine texture of the leaves and the productiveness of the plants point that the soil in the Cooch Behar state is admirably suited for tobacco growing.' In view of growing demand for virginian tobaccos and the amount of factories that had been erected in India within the last few years for dealing with tobacco, he therefore proposed a trial should be made of the various forms of Virginia Tobacco.⁴⁶ Later on it is learnt from the Administrative Report of the State that Virginia Tobacco was one of several new crops which were introduced in the state. Nearly 60 bighas of land were put under Virginia Tobacco by 87 growers of Gossanimari. The growers were supplied with adequate seeds and seedlings. Nearly 200 lbs of Flue Cured Virginia Tobacco were obtained during the year 1944-45.⁴⁷

In spite of these measures initiated by the State Government for agricultural improvement, the table given below containing the data relating to yield rates of the crops for the period 1871-72 to 1949-50 shows that the yield rates of paddy, jute and tobacco, the major crops of the state, were not noticeably high during the stated period. Again the same table clearly demonstrates that the yield rates of paddy and jute declined in the same period.⁴⁸

Name of the crops	Yield Rates		
	years		
	1871-72	1903-04	1949-50
Paddy	2.61	2.50	1.52
Jute	Not available	1.86	1.58
Tobacco	Not available	1.86	Not available

From the foregoing discussion one observer has rightly pointed out that the presence of the pyramidal shape of agrarian society (at the top of which the jotedars and at the bottom the adhivars), the extension of cultivation, the mostly unchanged cropping pattern associated with heavy bias towards the cultivation of food crops, namely, paddy and also with remarkably increasing tendency of the cultivation of cash crops, jute and tobacco, the below satisfactory and declining level of yield rate also with multiple cropping practice, the negligible use of manure and irrigation were broadly the chief features of agriculture of Cooch Behar State during the period under study. On the basis of these findings, the noted observer has rightly concluded that the agriculture of the state during our period was 'nature - dependent, under - developed, inefficient with unchanged technology and above all, not modern. But at the same time it contained the seeds in form of extension of cultivation, increasing tendency of cultivation of cash crops, multiple cropping practice, of modern agriculture which developed during the time period after the merger of the state with India.⁴⁹

Industry and Craft : According to the census of 1931, out of the total population of 5,90,866 in Cooch Behar state, industry supported only 15,444 persons or 2.6 percent. One observer has argued that before long the people of Cooch Behar was self-contained as regards their cloth and other very simple bare necessities of life. But want of necessary finance and of organisation and enterprise, habit of using mill made cloth and consequent loss of interest and impetus, and want of market for selling such products were some of the many causes for the decay of this important cottage industry.⁵⁰

One of the oldest industry of Cooch Behar was rearing, spinning and weaving of eri.⁵¹ The climate of the state was very favourable for rearing both mulberry and eri silk worms. Eri silk worms were extensively reared in Cooch Behar in olden times. In 1941, in few localities even these worms were reared.⁵² This industry was confined to

women for domestic consumption. Very little was sold in the open market. These endi chaddars were very stout and wore very long and rough. They were not however made in large quantities.⁵³

Formerly the people used to wear home-made cloth in Cooch Behar as in every other part of India.⁵⁴ Even in 1905s, it has been seen that the village homes weaved quantities of what was called locally fota and patani. These fotas were either plain or coloured and were worn by Rajbanshi women. The textured was rough and the thread used was imported. Gamchhas were locally made in fewer quantities. The old industry of making coloured gamchhas with flowered borders was almost extinct in 1950s.⁵⁵

In 1941, one commentator said that before long a kind of striped but very durable cotton cloth called phota and very fine Mekhli woven from the thread of jute (patesari) were manufactured by handloom in almost every house, besides fine endi woven out of thread of wild silk for family use and for sale. But all these had become a decadent industry although there were a few houses here and there where weaving of endi cloth might be seen in 1940s. Likewise, some mekhli of coarse quality was woven in the Mekhliganj sub-division and was sold in Mekhliganj hat.⁵⁶ It has been pointed out that the manufacture of Mekli became extinct, because the spinning of fine jute thread was a difficult art and did not pay in the days of cheap imported cotton-yarn. The import of foreign cloths had however served to practically extinguish the native industry.⁵⁷ During 1940s, in some villages in the Dinhat sub-division and some other villages in the state a few persons had got handloom for weaving endi chhaddar and cloth. But they did not manufacture such cloths on any commercial basis but only for individual family use.⁵⁸

As for pottery, good clay being unavailable in Cooch Behar, pottery wares were not of very good quality.⁵⁹ There were some potters manufacturing various pottery articles including earthen rings for wells. But these potters worked under the most primitive method of manufacture and whatever they produced their works were not fine and lasting. Hence they could not satisfy local demands, and every year potteries (earthen wares such as hari or cooking pot, Kalsi or water jars etc.) from Mymensingh, Pabna and other districts were imported by boat in Cooch Behar State and got a brisk sale at the market. In 1941, the local pottery industry was a decaying one.⁶⁰

Bamboo baskets, dharas and dollies were prepared by some patni and dom people barely meeting the local demands only. Some cane works (such as making cane boxes, cane chairs, cane baskets, moras etc.) were done in the Cooch Behar Central Jail as a part of jail industry. But the articles produced therein were too few to command or create any market for sale on a commercial basis.⁶¹

Carpentry and joinery were not extensively practised in the state.⁶² Some wood works of crude and ancient type such as making of Dhenki or orgonic (for husking paddy), maikosh (big wooden box and bedstead combined),

baiyam (wooden jars) and such other articles were found in the moffusils during 1940s. Besides this, the most important cottage industry in wood works was the manufacture of cart-wheels, which had got a very good demand among the cultivators and other cart drivers, cart being the cheap means of conveyance in moffusil communications in the state. But these cart wheels were all manufactured by up country artisans and mistries and the centre of this industry was in Dinahata. Wooden chairs, tables and stools etc. (works of cottage industries) were being imported here by boat from Dacca and Mymensingh villages and having a brisk sale in the towns. This shows that local artisans could not and did not meet the local demands for such articles. There was no other furniture industry worthy of mention in the state except the state P.W.D. maintained Artisans School in the capital town, where furniture were manufactured or were made to order but were not offered for commercial sale among the general public. In 1941, one commentator remarked that 'in recent years Cooch Behar town had seen the growth of several furniture shops as also the outlying towns.'⁶³

Blacksmith turned out the ordinary implements of agriculture and daily use. The patterns were local and the weapons were generally light. The local blacksmiths were good fashioners and knew the art of tempering steel. Blacksmiths were mostly outsiders in the Cooch Behar state.⁶⁴ Gold and silver smiths were numerous. Locally they went by the name of banias. Gold work was not so very good, as its use was limited only to a few families. Silver ornaments were more generally sold, the chief articles being the necklace (har), bracelets (muttha), ear-ring (footi) and ornaments for the legs (Bankharoo).⁶⁵

There was little of brass or bell-metal industry. The preparation of brass lotus was confined to Mekhliganj ; elsewhere the industry was not at all extensive. As in other places, brass and bell-metal utensils were most extensively used in every house-hold, rich or poor, in the Cooch Behar state and lakhs of rupees were being drawn annually from the state by the sale of imported brass and bell metal articles of other districts or provinces.⁶⁶

As in Bengal, cottage ghanies were one of the important home industries of Cooch Behar bringing subsidiary income to the agriculturists. These ghanies would manufacture and supply pure mustard oil both to the villagers as well as towns people of this state. The state produced the best mustard-oil in whole Bengal. Tufanganj was specially known for its mustard-seed and mustard-oil.⁶⁷ In 1941, one commentator said that 'only a few years ago there were cottage ghanies in almost every important villages of the Cooch Behar state, and the most important centres of oil industry Chilakhana and Balarampur ghanies would supply the major demand for mustard oil in the state. But now-a-days by the unequal competition of the mill oil, most of these Chilakhana and Balarampur ghanies have been compelled to cease their works as they possibly cannot supply oil as cheap as the mill can do under the present circumstances in which they work. A few Chilakhana ghanies are still working at a loss and disadvantage for unequal competition of the mill.'⁶⁸

In 1941, the same commentator also remarked that 'some gur from the juice is at present being manufactured in Barmaricha and other villages, and in the suburb of Cooch Behar town. But the quantity produced is so small that it can barely meet the demands of the local markets for a few days only, and even now local demands for gur, both Khejura (manufactured from the juice of palm tree), and kushari (manufactured from the juice of sugarcane) are being supplied by imports from other districts mainly by the Marwari Mahajans or aratdars (wholesale dealers). The present growth of this industry which is now in its infancy, is due to the state encouragement given to the cultivators for sugarcane cultivation and gur manufacture by the Department of Agriculture'.⁶⁹

It has already been stated that the industrial, agricultural and economic developments of the state had received due attention from Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan. He took a very keen interest for an all round industrial and agricultural improvements of the state. In April, 1937 a separate portfolio was created in the Department of Industries and Agriculture. Since then this Department was making efforts for the revival and development of the industries and agriculture of the state. How the works of the Department expanded in succeeding years may be observed from the following figures of the budget estimates for this Department.⁷⁰

Budget Estimates for the years

	1936-37	1937-38	1938-39	1939-40
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Department of Agriculture and Industries	2,170	28,292	64,189	54,109

In 1938, five candidates selected by His Highness in Council from among Cooch Behar subjects for practical training in the Industries Department of the Government of Bengal.⁷¹ They were appointed in June, 1939 as Sectional Demonstrators of the three different sections viz., (1) Brass and Bell-Metal section, (2) Soap section and (3) the Jute weaving section. Besides these, a Moulder and Castor was appointed in the Metal Casting section.⁷² Apart from the existing sections, the following new sections viz. (1) Biri making section, (2) Peripatetic Demonstration parties, (3) Industrial Museum, (4) Jute Spinning and Rope making sections were added to the Industries Department during the year 1940-41.⁷³ It may be mentioned here that after the completion of the practical training in the Industries Department of the Government of Bengal, Satyendra Nath Roy joined the Industries Department of the state as Supervisor of Industries during the year 1939-40.⁷⁴ His Highness' Government had also provided a number of suitable stipends for students during their training period in all the sections and a boarding house accommodation in premises of the Industries Office for the convenient accommodation of the moffussil candidates had also been provided.⁷⁵

With a view to making an investigation into the causes that led to the decay of village industries and the possibilities of their revival, the Supervisor of the Industries was asked to make an industrial survey during the year 1939-40. The sub-divisional Naib Ahilkars furnished with the nature and condition of the industries and the localities where such industries flourished but were now extinct. With the help of these reports the Supervisor of Industries started his investigation.⁷⁶ As a result of this investigation schemes were adopted for moffusil propaganda by sending Peripatetic Demonstration Parties in moffusil and some new sections were added to the Industries Department. Bengali translation of some portion of the industrial survey report was published in the Cooch Behar Darpan, an official fortnightly Bengali newspaper, for propaganda and to make known to the people of the state the condition of the existing industries of the state. Propaganda was also made with the help of the peripatetic demonstration party and through the medium of the Cooch Behar Darpan.⁷⁷

As before in 1927 during the Regency period His Highness' Government organised a grand Agricultural, Industrial and Public Health Exhibition in Cooch Behar town in November, 1937. It is known from the Administrative Report of the State that many interesting industrial exhibits were displayed and interesting lectures with lanterns and slides regarding agriculture and industries were held which gave stimulus to local industries and agriculture. The policy of holding such exhibition was to give publicity to this form of state enterprise, with a view to securing the popularity and success of future exhibition.⁷⁸ As an object lesson of industry and agriculture, small departmental industrial and agricultural museum had also been opened.⁷⁹

Cooch Behar being purely an agricultural state, His Highness' Government had made endeavour to encourage the establishment of factories and mills in production ancillary to agriculture. A Notification in this regard was published on the 1st April, 1937 offering special concessions to outside capitalists and induced them to invest capital in the state for suitable industrial enterprises.⁸⁰ In 1941, one observer said that 'there were Rice and Oil Mills in Cooch Behar and a Rice Mill in Changrabandha (Mekliganj sub-division) which were working well. Messers Ralli Brothers received a state licence to plant a jute press at Haldibari which had already been started and was working well. Babu Hari Ram Rathi also received a state licence for establishing a Rice Mill at Dewanhat in the Sudder sub-division.'⁸¹

The State Government had established an industrial school known as "the Cooch Behar Bayan Silpa Bidyalaya" which was the only Technical School in the state where a limited number of pupils could learn weaving. The school had got provision to provide some scholarships to its students while undergoing training. The school was popular among the local people for facilities it afforded for systematic training in the art of weaving. Apart from this, the Artisans School in Cooch Behar was a workshop of the Public Works Department of the state for brick grinding, smithy and carpentry and was run on the treasury advance system. It may be noted here that this Artisans School was originally established as a state institution for professional (vocational) training to the people of the state.⁸²

In January, 1940 the Government of India asked the Cooch Behar state to furnish about labour legislation in the state and if there were any modern factories compared with those in British India.⁸³ In reply, the then Acting Vice-President of the State Council in his letter No. 4465 dated 24th January, 1940 stated that "there are at present only three mills in the state, viz., two Rice Mills and a jute press. One of the two Rice Mills was started in 1937 and the jute press in 1935. The necessity of any labour legislation on the lines of the British Indian Acts has not yet been felt in the state. The Acting Vice-President further mentioned that '..... in 1935 the Regency Council did not think it necessary to enact any factory legislation in the state for reasons stated therein. The labour condition in Cooch Behar do not appear to be such as would require introduction of legislation measures which are in force in British India.'⁸⁴

The Fourth Minister of Education and Development, Cooch Behar State wrote on 12th December, 1941 to His Highness the President, State Council, that 'the Department of Agriculture and Industries was doing its best for the economic, industrial and agricultural development of the people of the state. With a view to helping the agriculturists and other unemployed people of the state by providing suitable subsidiary occupation of home industries, so that the people could earn some money from such home industries during their leisure-time or during cessation of their agricultural operation. The Department of Industries had launched in constructive schemes for providing free practical training to the Cooch Behari peoples in different cottage industries, e.g., handloom weaving, jute weaving, jute spinning, carpet making, knitting, eri-rearing, brass and bell metal casting, brass sheet metal works, welding works of brass and bell metal articles, washing soap making, biri making in a central institute at the Sadar composed of different sections of the Industries Department of the state and also by Peripatetic Demonstration Parties in different mofussil centres in the cold weather. For the encouragement of the students willing to learn cottage industries, there were arrangements for providing stipends to suitable candidates in different subjects of practical training. The Fourth Minister of the state further wrote that it had been the declared objective of the state in the Department of Industries to provide necessary finance in the shape of small industrial helps and loans on very easy terms of repayments to the trained students of the Industries Department and also to other small cottage workers either in cash or in the shape of raw materials or equipments.'⁸⁵

Education and Development Minister, Cooch Behar State, in another letter dated the 19th August, 1942 to H.H. the President, State Council, wrote that 'the Department of Industries was a propaganda and development department working for the industrial advancement or revival of cottage industries. The Industries Department was imparting practical training to young subjects of the state in several cottage crafts for a period of not more than one year for each candidate in several technical sections and its peripatetic mofussil demonstration units so that the trained and skilled workers could supplement their income by taking the industry as their spare time business. Provision had also been made for the grants of the stipends to the students in the different practical sections and for the

grant of free gift and industrial loans to trained students and other cottage workers for starting their industry or for improvement of their existing cottage crafts. Thus the purpose of the Industries Department was, according to the Minister, a propaganda and academical one, although some receipts were obtained from the sale proceeds of the products of demonstration and training units of the Department.⁸⁶

In pursuance of the State Council orders contained in Council office letter No. 74981/20-1 dated the 4th November, 1942 to the address of the Education and Development Minister, a Committee was formed with Satish Chandra Roy Sinha Sarkar, B.L. as the Chairman to consider the usefulness of the Industries Department and the maintenance of the different sections for the benefit of the subjects of the state and to submit a report on the matter to the State Council. Accordingly the Committee held two meetings, one on the 19th November and another on the 6th December, 1942 and discussed all the matters concerning the Industries Department. The Committee were unanimously of opinion that "the works of the sections of the Industries Department should be conducted in such a manner as would enable the people of the state to take up these in the form of cottage or small scale industries and to supplement their income by earning something out of these. If the works can be successfully conducted it is sure that there would be appreciable development of cottage industries in the state."

The Committee further observed that for the achievement of appreciable success by all the different sections of the department, it was necessary to organise propaganda and to send demonstration parties all throughout the state during the winter season for more than six months in a year, and for this purpose all possible help viz, money, material and accessories should be afforded to the intending and enthusiastic parties.⁸⁷

The Post-war Reconstruction Conference held in Cooch Behar town in February, 1944, consisting of Chief Minister as the President, Revenue Minister, Education and Development Minister and other high officials of the state took up amongst others the subjects of Post-war industrial development and the possibilities of (a) heavy, (b) small and (c) cottage industries were considered separately. The Conference were of unanimous in opinion that without proper development of all possible heavy industries in the state 'the finance of the state and the wealth of its people cannot be much increased by agriculture alone.'⁸⁸ The Darbar had therefore formulated schemes for post-war agricultural and industrial development in the state. Under these schemes it was decided that facilities and official backing for starting mills etc. under the heavy and small and cottage industries should be given for the industrial development in the state. The Darbar also expected that within next twenty years a great industrial and agricultural development should be achieved in the state.⁸⁹

Industrial development was noticeable in Cooch Behar State owing to the facilities and official backing provided by the State Government. There were some crude jute presses scattered all over the state, especially in

several important market places. There was no curing factory for tobacco and whatever curing done was crude and intended for local consumption. After the end of the Second World War the State Government intended to set up a cigarette factory at Dinhata and imported one entire unit of cigarette manufacture. This unit remained unused in Cooch Behar till 1950-51. Since 1944 plyboard manufacture had been very popular in the town of Cooch Behar and several firms which manufactured plyboard in moderate quantities were set up.⁹⁰

During the Maharaja's administration a small but good distillery used to run in the suburbs of Cooch Behar, near the Torsha bridge. The products of this distillery used to find favour with several fashionable clubs and bars of Calcutta city. The owners of the factory cultivated good relations with reputed firms in Calcutta. Since 1950, however, this distillery had closed down. The Maharaja's administration had a state printing press and much good work used to be done at the Cooch Behar State Press, as the publications of Cooch Behar State testified it. The Cooch Behar State had a Transport Agency and maintained a workshop. This Transport Agency had been taken over by the West Bengal Government after Cooch Behar's merger with the latter, but the workshop was maintained. There was a small match industry in Cooch Behar. In 1951-52 the following factories were registered with the Chief Inspector of factories and all of them were located in Cooch Behar. The West Bengal Government Press (formerly the State Press), the West Bengal State Transport Workshop, the Artisans School, The Cooch Behar Distillery Company Ltd., the Cooch Behar Oil Mills Ltd., Wood Craft Production Ltd., East India Plywood Company Ltd., and the Cooch Behar Match Company Ltd.⁹¹

Trade and Commerce : According to the census of 1931, only 4.4 percent of the people of Cooch Behar state had for their occupation trade and commerce. Most of them, if not all, were Marwari traders, bankers, owners of jute firms or the up-country shop keepers. The cloth merchants, tobacco merchants, piece good merchants, rice-merchants, hardware merchants, even the fish merchants or importers were all either Marwaris or up-country people. Besides, the Ata, Dal etc. were also prepared by up-country people in the state. The local people had got no interest or enterprise in any of these commercial activities. They had lost practically all hold on the trade, industry or commerce of the state.⁹²

As early as 1872, W.W. Hunter in his "Statistical Account" of Cooch Behar State has stated that 'nearly all the commerce of the state except such as was carried in the weekly markets, was in the hands of foreign merchants, chiefly Marwaris from Bikanir.⁹³ The chief exports from the state were tobacco, jute, mustard-seed, rice, and mustard oil, and the principal imports were piece goods, salt, brass and copper utensils, sugar, molasses, pulses of sorts, spices, cocoanuts, betel-nuts, beads, dried fish etc. The crops of the state not only sufficed for the local wants, but there was a large export of jute, tobacco, rice and mustard-seed. The native merchants estimated the exports at about £1,50,000 per annum and the imports at £90,000 per annum as follows :- Exports — tobacco, £70,000 ; jute

£40,000 ; mustard-seed and oil, £20,000 ; rice £10,000; miscellaneous £10,000. Hence total value of export was £1,50,000. Imports — cloth, £50,000; salt, £15,000; other articles, £25,000. Thus total value of imports was £90,000. The balance of trade was thus in favour of the state.⁹⁴ In 1872, a rough estimate was made of export and import, when the exports were valued at Rs. 19,20,000 and the imports at Rs. 9,00,009. Since that time jute trade had, thanks to the North Bengal Railway, more than doubled itself. As regards tobacco the extension had not been so marked.⁹⁵

Though nearly all the commerce in the hands of foreigners, chiefly Marwaries, there were also some European firms at Haldibari and Chawrahat, both by the side of the railway. With the spread of the railway, European merchants were opening business in other parts of the state also. Native enterprise was at a discount. The Cooch Beharis, like the Bengalis of other parts of the country, could but ill-afforded to compete with the European traders and were bound to fail. This was borne out by the gradual falling of the river traffic, which was almost entirely in the hands of Bengalis and the increase of the railway-traffic. The bridging of the navigable rivers very often acted as a deterrent to country-boat traffic and this was being gradually marked in this state also.

Before the opening of railways, nearly the whole of both inward and outward traffic used to be carried on by country-boats. The railways had considerably diverted the traffic from the rivers and had almost monopolised the export of jute. Tobacco, mustard seed, mustard oil and oil-cake were however still largely sent down by boats. Tobacco was very rarely exported by railway, as frequent trans-shipments damaged the leaves and deteriorated the quality.⁹⁶

The Gitaldaha Manshahi railway line (3'3³/₄" gauge) opened in 1893, followed by Manshahi Cooch Behar extension in 1898, and another extension from Cooch Behar to Alipur Duar in 1900. The railway which in 1913-14 became the Cooch Behar State Railway and the Bengal Duars State Railway did much to develop the resources of the state and greatly facilitated the disposal of produce of all kinds.⁹⁷ The prosperity of Haldibari was largely owing to its situation on the Eastern Bengal Railway.⁹⁸

The partition of the province of Bengal had hurt the river trade of the state, because all rivers in the state fell either into the Tista or the Brahmaputra both of which were, as of now, in East Pakistan (presently known as Bangladesh). As a consequence all river traffic was almost at a standstill and the railways and the Cooch Behar airfield then had to take all the inward and outward trade. Owing to the excessive freight charges the trade of jute had suffered very badly. The long circuitous rail route made it difficult for jute to arrive at Calcutta at the proper time. While transport by air was extremely costly, especially at a time when jute prices had slumped a great deal. The other chief article of export, tobacco, was very rarely exported by railway as frequent transshipments were liable to damage the leaves and spoil their quality. Tobacco was therefore mostly sent out by aeroplanes from the Cooch Behar airport.⁹⁹

Consecutive three historical events badly affected the economy of the Cooch Behar state. First, the outbreak of the first World War (1914-18) had caused dislocation of trade and disrupted economic life of the state. It seriously affected the jute market by lowering the prices¹⁰⁰ and contributed to the abnormal rise in prices of imported articles, specially of those which were required for necessities of existence.¹⁰¹ Cooch Behar State, in common with the rest of India and the British Empire, was passing through a period of financial stringency.¹⁰² Secondly, the trade and commerce was also seriously affected by the world-wide economic depression.¹⁰³ Owing to the low prices of agricultural products there had been an acute distress among the people throughout the state as in British India.¹⁰⁴ The trade depression brought about consequent scarcity of money in the State.¹⁰⁵ Thirdly, Cooch Behar State passed through a distinct economic crisis as a result of the outbreak of the Second World War.¹⁰⁶ After the declaration of War by Japan, there had been a deadlock in trade and commerce, specially in Bengal. There was no purchases of jute or tobacco, the two commercial crops of Cooch Behar. Money-market was also became very tight.¹⁰⁷

Cooch Behar State did not occupy a prominent position in the sphere of trade, commerce and industry. It had not attained even a moderate degree of prosperity therein.¹⁰⁸ In 1942, Cooch Behar Chamber of Commerce was of opinion that 'as the purchasing power of the people of Cooch Behar was very limited and as there was nothing like tea plantations and such other concerns providing employment to a large amount of men and requiring supplies of various materials, the trade and commerce in the state was not expanding and were not in a flourishing condition. Hence this Chamber maintained that merchants of standing had shifted to Alipurduar which had become the centre of supply to many tea gardens and its importance was daily increasing.¹⁰⁹

The trade of Cooch Behar consisted mainly of the export of agricultural products and the import of manufactured goods and other necessities of life.¹¹⁰ The table given below shows the quantity of jute, tobacco and paddy exported from the principal Bunders of the State during the year 1939-40.¹¹¹

Sub-Division	Names of Bundars	Paddy		Jute		Tobacco	
		Export Mds.	Import Mds.	Export Mds.	Import Mds.	Export Mds.	Import Mds.
Sadar.....	Cooch Behar.....	54,432	—	87,747	—	43,877	—
	Dewanhat.....	20,525	—	34,853	—	57	—
	Baneswar.....	2,597	—	—	—	98	—
		<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
		77,554	—	1,22,600	—	44,032	—

Sub-Division	Names of Bundars	Paddy		Jute		Tobacco	
		Export Mds.	Import Mds.	Export Mds.	Import Mds.	Export Mds.	Import Mds.
Tufangunj.....	Buxirhat.....	49,400	-	34,850	-	-	-
	Ranirhat.....	22,720	-	8,300	-	175	-
	Balarampur.....	18,500	-	9,500	-	300	-
	Chilakhana.....	2,400	-	450	-	-	-
	Tufangunj.....	2,140	-	750	-	-	-
		<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
		95,160	-	53,850	-	475	-
Mekhlignunj.....	Haldibari and Dewangunj	1,83,473	-	37,118	-	56,844	-
	Mekhlignunj and Changrabanda	11,320	970	11,462	-	42,798	99
	Jamaldaha.....	20,500	-	12,198	-	10,493	-
		<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
		2,15,293	970	60,778	-	1,10,135	99
Mathabhanga...	Calicangunj Bundar.....	16,835	-	19,388	-	33,852	-
	Ghokshadanga.....	5,000	-	1,000	-	6,000	-
	Gosairhat.....	5,000	-	1,000	-	15,000	-
	Sitalkhuchi.....	4,000	-	1,000	-	1,500	-
	Akrahath.....	3,000	-	1,000	-	2,500	-
	Sangarbari.....	5,000	-	1,000	-	2,000	-
	Siberhat.....	30,000	-	1,500	-	4,000	-
	Nishigunj.....	2,500	-	1,000	-	2,000	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	
		71,335	-	26,888	-	66,852	-
Dinhata.....	Chowrahath.....	50,000	-	36,000	-	60,000	-
	Gosanimarihat.....	10,000	-	4,000	-	42,000	-
	Nazirhat.....	2,000	-	10,000	-	1,000	-
	Chowdhurirhat.....	62,000	-	35,000	-	2,500	-
	Sitaihat.....	15,500	-	20,000	-	50,000	-
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		1,39,500	-	1,05,000	-	1,55,500	-

Incidentally, it may be noted here that during the year 1939-40 the price per maund of common rice ranged from Rs. 3 to Rs. 4-8-0; of mustard - seed from Rs. 3-8-0 to Rs. 6-12-0; of jute from Rs. 5-0-0 to Rs. 18-0-0 and of tobacco from Rs. 8-0-0 to Rs. 24-0-0 ¹¹²

The principal sites of commerce were the town of Cooch Behar, the sub-divisional stations and the important village bunders. Jute and paddy used to be exported from every part of the state. But after the merger of the state in the province of West Bengal the export of paddy had stopped, tobacco was mostly sent down from the airport of Cooch Behar and collected from the marts of Mekliganj, Mathabhanga and Dinhata sub-divisions. The bunders of Tufanganj sub-division largely exported mustard-seed and mustard oil. The chief jute exporting centres still were Haldibari, Changrabandha, Chawrahat, Mathabhanga and Cooch Behar; the principal tobacco centers were Mekliganj, Mathabhanga, Sibpur, Bawra, Gosanimari and Chawrahat; the principal marts dealing in mustard seed and mustard oil were Balarampur, Tufanganj, Ghoramara, Natabari, Ambari, Bakshiganj and Mahishkuchi. The chief bunders were Haldibari, Mekliganj, Mathabhanga, Dinhata (Chawrahat), Fulbari (Tufanganj), Dewanhat and Kholta in Cooch Behar Sadar, Gosanimari and Sitai in Dinhata subdivision, Balarampur, Ghoramara, Natabari, Lawkuti and Mahishkuchi in Tufanganj sub-division; Moranga in Mathabhanga sub-division and Changrabandha in Mekliganj subdivision. These bunders were seats of trade and commerce where merchants permanently resided and had firms and warehouses for the conduct of business. They were either situated on big rivers or by the side of public roads and commanded a large share of the outward and inward trade. The number of important bunders in the state was twenty five.¹¹³

There were 142 Hats or village markets which had been held twice a week for carrying on the internal trade.¹¹⁴ Of the Hats of the state the largest was the one at Dewanganj in Mekliganj; the next ones were Chawrahat in Dinhata, the sub-divisional hat in Mathabhanga and Changrabandha in Mekliganj which were equally important. The Dodeyahat, 3 miles north of Cooch Behar town was celebrated as large grain market.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

'In Cooch Behar', one commentator has pointed out, 'there was hardly any change of the society. Rather the society, in spite of so many changes, had remained pre-industrial and pre-capitalist'. The feudalism in Cooch Behar remained virtually static with a few cosmetic changes in the successive periods. There was no major industries and more so there was no steady movement for change. The fact remains that in Cooch Behar feudalism as introduced by the British did not give rise to industrialisation or capitalism.¹¹⁶

Of the total population of 5,90,866 (1931 census) not more than 18,000 persons lived in urban areas and the rest of the people lived in the villages. The vast majority of this rural population viz., 88.7 percent depended upon agriculture alone and had practically no other subsidiary calling for their subsistence. Moreover, as in Bengal and elsewhere, agriculture did not give occupation to the cultivators throughout the year owing to seasonal and other conditions. During the intervals of non-occupation the agriculturists had to pass their days in enforced idleness for want of work.¹¹⁷

As a consequence, the people of Cooch Behar were mostly poor, unenterprising, backward and ignorant, and for climatic condition they were a bit idle too. They were heavily indebted to their "Marwari Mahajans" who controlled the prices of their agricultural products, they being the only purchasers. The whole people had got no organisation among themselves for mutual economic advantage, such as co-operative banks or any other co-operative associations or warehouses through which they could sell their agricultural or industrial products and save themselves from the hand of the middlemen Mahajans.

The main income of the agriculturists was the produce of the land, chief of them being tobacco, jute, rice and mustard-seed. As has been already observed, owing to the economic maladjustment and deadlock during the 1930s the prices of agricultural products had fallen down heavily and this slump in prices had told very badly on the agriculturists of Cooch Behar State as it had been in Bengal. And the full brunt of this economic dislocation and crisis was being borne by the cultivators here owing to the fact that they had absolutely no subsidiary occupation to add to their income when their agricultural produce could not fetch even the cost of cultivation, not to speak of any profit. Besides, they had lost practically all hold on the trade, industry or commerce of the state.¹¹⁸

Before the advent of the British the life of the common people were comparatively easy. Food stuffs were comparatively cheap and within the reach of the people. More or less villages were self-sufficient. With the advent of the British and opening of the state with other parts of India through railways, and involvement of the Europeans in trade and commerce the prices of food stuffs were gradually increasing.¹¹⁹ Rapid price rise was not only responsible for misery of the common people but also brought disastrous result on the economic life of the people. Increase of taxes by the British was also one of the major causes of the price hike.¹²⁰ The prices of the necessities of life had been ruling high continually for a long period. Specially prices of food stuffs and clothing were very high.¹²¹ It was not surprising that a number of people should, under the circumstances, be driven to the necessity of disposing of their properties by sale or seeking the help of the money-lenders.¹²² Despite the introduction of rationing system and other ameliorative measures by the State Government, the price-hike of essential commodities continued to linger upto the later part of 1940s.¹²³

In fact, the peasantry formed 88.7% of the total population in the state.¹²⁴ The structure of agrarian society that evolved over time under the royal ownership of land was of pyramidal shape in terms of number of holdings in different categories of land holding. The pyramid was however composed of three categories of land holders or tenants. First, at the top of the pyramid there were a few jotedars or large husbandmen who held land direct from the state. It was seldom that these jotedars cultivated themselves all the lands held by them. Secondly, in the middle of the pyramid, there were sub-tenants, namely, chukanidars. The numbers of chukanidars were larger relative to that of Jotedars. The chukanidars held land from Jotedars and paid cash rent to them. Finally, at the bottom of the pyramid,

there was a class of sub-subtenants, namely, adhiyars. The number of this class of tenants was the largest. The adhiyars held land from chukanidars and paid them kind rent to the extent of half share of their produce. It should be mentioned in this context that elsewhere these adhiyars had derivative sub-grade, namely, dar-chukanidar.¹²⁵

The rates of rent payable by each class of tenants were fixed by the settlement. The Jotedar paid his assessment direct to the state, and was only permitted to receive from the chukanidar a certain percentage above that assessment. In the same way, each successive undertenant was only allowed to exact fixed rates.¹²⁶

With the coming of the English, the older land system witnessed a change in the state. In 1790, the Izaradari system was introduced in the state.¹²⁷ This Izaradari system not only led to rack renting and extortion by Izaradars from the ryots, but also fostered extensive subinfeudation.¹²⁸ Ultimately, the Izaradari system was abolished in 1872, and Khas collection was introduced in the same year.¹²⁹ Under the new land revenue settlements introduced in the state, the holders of the temporarily settled tenures under the state were called jotedars. The tenants directly under the proprietors of revenue-free and mokarari (permanently settled at a revenue fixed in perpetuity) estates were also designated jotedars. As many as six grades of under tenures, namely, chukanidar, darchukanidar, daradarchukani, tasyachukani, talichukani and tasyatalichukani were recognised in the state.¹³⁰

In 1888, the Sub-infeudation Act was passed to check the further development of sub-infeudation in the state and to prevent the creation of new rights in place of existing ones when they lapsed or became extinct. By that Act, the letting by anyone but jotedar of any land that was not let already was prohibited and a jotedar was prohibited from letting out lands to persons other than actual cultivators.¹³¹ The Cooch Behar Tenancy Act (Act V of 1910) came into force in 1910 prohibiting the letting of land by an undertenant lower than chukanidar (i.e., an undertenant of the first grade) and a chukanidar might let only land which was in khas possession.¹³²

In course of time large number of new tenancies had, however, been created in contravention of the above law and generally at very high rates. Their number was estimated at 50,000 in the whole state in 1918. Therefore, the State Government conferred on the helpless illegally settled cultivating ryots a right and title to the land they held, defined the incidence of their rights and protected them from eviction in 1918. The then Dewan called these cultivating ryots or Krisi Prajas 'the backbone of the country' and as 'builders of its wealth.' According to his estimate, they constituted almost 90% of the cultivating population.¹³³ In view of creating of the innumerable illegal tenancies by verbal contract and of their recognition at successive settlements of the state, it must be said that the provisions in the existing Tenancy Act of 1910, though good in theory, had failed to produce the desired effect.¹³⁴

Originally the jotedars were the cultivators of the soil and residents of the state. Gradually there was an

influx of the foreigners from other districts. They were more intelligent than Cooch Beharis and they began to usurp all real power in the state. It was observed in 1930 that already more than half the temporarily assessed area in the Cooch Behar state was owned by foreign jotedars. Even during the Rakam Charcha resettlement a much larger quantity of land in the state was included in jotes belonging to foreigners than in those held by natives. The necessity of introducing effective rent law to prevent ousting of cultivating tenants by speculators was foreseen even during the first settlement of land revenue.¹³⁵

Adhiars were a class of farm servants and generally poor men.¹³⁶ They cultivated land on the condition that they would get half the produce of the crop. They generally lived in the land lords' premises or on land in their khas possession, and paid rents for the same. Some times they cultivated land with the plough and cattle lent by the land-lords, but more generally they had their own implements of agriculture. Adhiars were generally regarded as labourers. They were not considered to have any right or title but to be liable to be ejected at the will of their employer.¹³⁷

As early as 1872 the State Government ordered that any adhiar who cultivated the same land with his own cattle for twelve consecutive years, would acquire a right of occupancy in respect of such lands. This provision was embodied in section 29 of the Cooch Behar Tenancy Act (Act V of 1910). Such occupancy right was inheritable but not otherwise transferrable. In the course of the settlement and re-settlement operations in this state, however, Terijes or record of rights were never prepared for the adhiars nor were attempts made to ascertain which of them had occupancy rights. Apart from this, the adhiary lands often changed hands and the adhiars were generally treated as labourers or tenants -at -will.¹³⁸

A new class of agricultural labourers emerged in Cooch Behar state partly as a result of largescale eviction of adhiars during 1940s.¹³⁹ Even Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan confessed in a letter to the Resident, Eastern States Agency, dated 6th July, 1943 that 'the number of landless subjects in the state is large and they have very very little sustaining power and always suffer badly every year when agricultural stocks run low.'¹⁴⁰ This was, no doubt, one of the vital factors that paved the way for the peasant as well as adhiar movement in some pockets of the state,¹⁴¹ which were the manifestations of the prevailing social tension arising out of the oppressive jotedari system.

On the question of the development of agricultural and industrial resources of Eastern States, Maharaja Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo, Ruler of Patna State made an important observation in a confidential circular letter dated the 16th November, 1940, addressed to Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan, Ruler of Cooch Behar. He expressed his view prophetically in the following words, "If we think a little about our present backwardness, we will simply be appalled. If we consider about the future and the necessity for our moving with the times, as well as doing our duty by our people, we will undoubtedly be dismayed at the bleak prospect and the apparent impossibility of our surviving as

separate administrative units in the not very distant future, because of our inadequate incomes. It has, therefore, been very rightly pointed out by a distinguished Ruler of this Agency, that our salvation as well as our safety lies in improving our natural resources and increasing our incomes. To my mind this will only be possible by the improvement of agriculture and the development of industries in the states."¹⁴²

In conclusion, it would not be out of place here to refer to the scholarly debate on industrialisation in the princely states which appeared during the 1970s. In his pioneering dissertation, John Hurd tried to compare 'development' in the princely states with that in British India. Hurd focused on three variables : the structure of the male labour force, migration and urbanisation and concluded that although economic development declined in both British and princely India from 1901 to 1931, the princely states in general lagged behind the British districts. Two basic categories of factors were responsible. One was British policies that hindered growth, such as the refusal to extend any guarantee for developmental loans. The other was the historical evolution of the states. For example, the higher the percentage of Jagirdars in a state, the lower was the level of development, and Hurd argued that the Jagirdars siphoned off revenue from the state treasury.¹⁴³ In another article on industrial development, Hurd claimed that the British acted ambivalently to safeguard their interests. They intervened in the princely states to secure the abolition of transit duties and the construction of trans-continental railways and roads to facilitate British trade. But they did not intercede for the princes in British capital markets since industrial development in the states was not a colonial priority.¹⁴⁴

But C.P. Simons and B.R.Satyanarayana challenged Hurd's argument on his selection of samples and asserted that comparisons between the states and British India are invalid. The economy of imperial India was indivisible, comparisons conceal more than they reveal and there are no scientific means to measure the factors that influenced economic development in such a heterogenous area as India. Rather they compared statistics on the princely states and British India as a whole. They concluded that differences in favour of British India were statistically insignificant and that economic development in British India and the princely states was commensurate.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the numerous general overviews of Indian economic development under the British do not evaluate in any depth agricultural or industrial activity in the princely states, even as part of the indivisible imperial economy. So once again, case studies must suffice to illustrate industrial development within the princely states.¹⁴⁶ According to Barbara N. Ramusack, the terms of this scholarly debate on industrialisation in the princely states have yet to be revised.¹⁴⁷

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