

CHAPTER - I

**MAHARAJA NARENDRA NARAYAN
(1847 – 1863) - THE BEGINNING OF
DEVELOPMENT IN COOCH BEHAR**

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Maharaja Narendra Narayan (1847-1863) – The beginning of development in Cooch Behar

The glorious history of Cooch Behar represents a new era of advanced modern outlook under Maharaja Narendra Narayan. After Maharaja Harendra Narayan , his successor Maharaja Shivendra Narayan before his accession on 28th August, 1839 had a pro - British attitude . He, in fear of his future problem of succession, surrendered to the British Government.¹ Maharaja Shivendra Narayan was also the secret choice of the British as the future ruler of Cooch Behar .² On 23rd August , 1847, Maharaja Narendra Narayan , son of late Maharaja Shivendra Narayan ascended the throne of Cooch Behar , who started the era of advanced modern Princely State .³

Till the end of the 1st half of the nineteenth century, the relations between the East India Company and the rulers of Cooch Behar were not friendly , if not bitter . From 1848 Colonial Government tried to control the internal affairs of the State by engaging British resident at the court . Nevertheless , in 1848 Secretary of the British Government wrote a letter to J. P. Grant , Secretary of the Bengal Government which reads “ His Honour in Council concurs in the opinion of the Deputy Governor that it is managed or superintended in its management, should be placed under the jurisdiction of the Government of Bengal, all questions , however , of an important political bearing being referred for the orders of

the Supreme Government.”⁴

With the introduction of British overlordship in the years following the Mutiny, relations between the two developed steadily. During this period British Government announced that its policy of territorial extension was to be abandoned. So, friendly relations with the British was one of the vital grounds of the development of Cooch Behar State started under Maharaja Narendra Narayan. During the early years of his life, he was under the guidance of Mr. Moore, who performed the task of a private tutor (English education).⁵ Maharaja Shivendra Narayan, before his death, expressed a wish that the British Government should undertake the supervision of his son's education. As a result Maharaja Narendra Narayan went to Krishnanagar for undergraduate education. He came back to the Kingdom of Cooch Behar in 1859 after completing his academic career. This was unusual in the history of the State. No ruler of Cooch Behar before him, obtained English education. So it must be said that from the death of Harendra Narayan a new era started in the history of Cooch Behar with full modern outlook. The age-old traditional pattern was about to change and a modern outlook was visible according to British model. During this interval period East India Company, appointed an agent to protect Cooch Behar.⁶

In 1848, the territory of Cooch Behar, as long as it might be managed or superintended its management, was placed under the jurisdiction of the Government of Bengal in all matters specially in political bearing. In 1849 an important step was taken. During this year the custom of *sahamaran* (*sati*) was prohibited in

Cooch Behar . Such an attempt indicated that Maharajas' outlook was modern and may be compared with that of Raja Rammohan Roy , who fought against the cruel practice of sati which was abolished in 1829 by an Act . The next important step was taken in the demarcation of the boundaries between Cooch Behar and Bhutan. As a consequence to that effect, a survey was taken by Captain Mathew, under the order of the government , and the deputy collector Mr. Bedford laid the boundary in 1851 , which included the work of surveying the twenty - two challas (small pieces of land) in Maraghat .⁷ Major Jenkins proposed to consolidate these isolated pieces of land into one plot . However being approved by the Government only the necessary boundary - pillars were ordered to be erected .

Bhutan, however, respected this settlement of the boundary . In 1857 Bhutias committed several dacoities within the Cooch Behar territory . One of which was in the house of Sakalu Pradhan of Tenganmari in which a large amount of money was plundered .⁸ In 1861 due to the repeated raid by the Bhutias appropriate steps were taken for the protection of the boundaries in Cooch Behar.⁹ In November 1849 another boundary dispute evolved with Guma .¹⁰ These disputes has long been settled and the land formed the part of Chhat Bara Lowkuti .¹¹

In 1850 another boundary dispute with Rangpur aroused which was smoothly solved by the company officers on behalf of Maharaja Narendra Narayan . The Fouzdari Ahilkar on the complaint of the ryots of the state of Cooch Behar applied to the magistrate of Rangpur to send the defendants to him for the purpose of investigation. The dispute however, continued and in course of survey

of 1856 , Mr. Ryland, Deputy Collector was appointed under Mr. Pemberton to settle them with Cooch Behar authorities . It was ultimately solved in 8th May , 1861.¹²

After solving the boundary disputes , another step was taken in 1859 . During this year a topographical survey of Cooch Behar was made under the supervision of the revenue – surveyor Mr. J . G . Pemberton . It is important to note that Mr. Pemberton’s map was the first regular map of the State of Cooch Behar . From the letter of Mr. Pemberton it is obvious that the Raj of Cooch Behar was about 60 miles in length and its average breadth was about 20 , and it contained about 1,800 squares .¹³

The communication system of Cooch Behar was in a pitiable condition . So in 1859 Maharaja Narendra Narayan took initiatives for the construction of roads in the Town of Cooch Behar and for the management of the work a superintendent was appointed .¹⁴

Since the Nineteenth Century the Colonial Rulers implemented various policies for the development of education in India and also in Bengal . In the Charter Act of 1813 one of the provisions was for the spread of English Education . In 1835 the famous ‘Macaulay Minute’ was introduced which enacted the Filtration Theory (education from the low level) . Similarly in 1854 ‘Wood Despatch’ was passed by the Government, which enacted some provisions for female education and also of granting scholarship to meritorious students . In the avenue of education Cooch Behar was not far behind . It was at first during Maha- raja Narendra Narayans rule that initiatives were taken for the establishment of a

English medium school for boys . Previously there was lack of educational facilities for boys in Cooch Behar . As a result in 1861 a boys' school , namely , Jenkins School was established , after Colonel Jenkins , Agent to the Governor – General , North – East Frontier , who was a good friend of the Maharaja and a good benefactor of the State of Cooch Behar .¹⁵

After the Mutiny of 1857, the policy of the British Government towards the native states softened . Accordingly in 1862 the British Government of India granted an amendment (Sunnad) to the Maharaja of Cooch Behar conferring on him and his successors the right of adoption on failure of natural heirs . In the same year the Government formally recognised the title of Maharaja Bahadur, and granted Maharaja Narendra Narayan a Sunnad conferring upon him that Distinction .¹⁶ In 1862 , Lieutenant Sadler was appointed to obtain information regarding roads and grounds &c., between Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri to the west , Dhubri to the east , and Rangpur to the South .¹⁷ This survey was undertaken with a view to facilitate the movement of troops .

Maharaja also took important steps regarding justice . A High Court was established in 1859 and Babu Kalikamal Mitra was appointed as the manager of the court .¹⁸ Not only that , Previously dewani , fauzdari court of appeal (Rajsabha) was in Cooch Behar . But the procedure of these courts was not well organised. Therefore, Maharaja Narendra Narayan laid down royal instruction for the modification of these courts .¹⁹

In the sphere of culture (Cooch Behar), Maharaja Narendra

Narayan's contribution was noticeable . In the festival of Durga Puja at Debibari , the temple of Debi Durga was decorated with flowers and candles and on the occasion of Dol jatra, the kingdom of Cooch Behar celebrated it as a royal ceremony .²⁰ This festival is the speciality in the North – Eastern Region .The festival of Durga Puja had a history of its own in Cooch Behar . The available sources namely, Khan Chowdhuri Amanutullah Ahmeds 'History of Cooch Behar', shows that during the rule of Maharaja Nara Narayan , his brother Sukladvaja committed treachery against Maharaja and prepared a plan to kill him . But before he fulfilled his desires , one day Devi Durga appeared to resist him from committing that sin and ordered him to tell Maharaja to organise Durga puja festival . Sukladvaja vividly described the matter to Maharaja and accordingly he organized Durga Puja at Devi Bari . One notable feature was that the icon of Devi Durga here is a fighter (her child like Ganesh , Kartik , Laxmi or Saraswati was not figured) who kill her opponent .

Scholarly persons were well patronized in the princely state of Cooch Behar . In this connection it is to be noted that during the reign of Maharaja Narendra Narayan special attention was given for the promotion of music and painting . At that time a singer namely Dangar Basu came from Dhaka, to perform music at the Royal Darbar of Cooch Behar .²¹

Maharaja also took initiatives for the introduction of stamp system for administrative purpose.²² Before him there was no evidence of the use of stamps . In the matter of official cases a charge was taken by the administrative department namely "institution fees". For the implementation of

paper stamp a Stamp Act was passed by Maharaja in 1861 . An interesting point is that when the Act was passed, there was Superintendent of stamp. But after the said office was abolished, the whole matter was conducted by the Duar Muktear (gateman of royal palace) .²³

Maharaja also purchased a coin printing machine for financial purpose and for printing of Narayani coins . Maharaja also established an assembly namely , Hitaisinee Sabha ---- where scholarly persons gave their views regarding (polity, industrial education, physics, agriculture, trade & commerce , antiquity) the development of the State of Cooch Behar .²⁴ Cooch Behar was a modern princely state , which was always thinking for public welfare . During his rule in 1854 a devastating famine broke out in Cooch Behar . Maharaja's royal officers at first closely monitored the situation and decided that grains should be collected from Seraj-ganj at a ceiling price and to be distributed among the people of Cooch Behar at a low price .²⁵

Regarding the history of CoochBehar, Maharaja Narendra Narayan's wife, Brideswari Devi , wrote a poetical history of Cooch Behar in her book 'Beharo Danta' in 1859, which is the first written document produced by the royal dynasty of Cooch Behar .²⁶ Such a work from a Maharani was an exceptional case and it highlighted the actual condition of the State .

In 1857 Sepoy Mutiny occurred in the British regiment at Barrackpore . As a result a few disloyal soldiers including the brother of Nana Saheb escaped from the regiment and came to the princely state of Cooch Behar in

1861 , in the hope that the Maharaja of Cooch Behar would help them , and would give them horses with which they could escape the north- west frontier . But all the hope went in vain , when Maharaja gave order of arrest and sent them to the Company officers as prisoners .²⁷

This scattered event proved that Maharaja Narendra Narayan was a blind follower of the British Government in true sense . In this connection , it is to be noted that in the year 1861, Captain Hopkinson replaced Col . F. Jenkins as the Agent of the Company in the North – East frontier . The new Agent modified the previous Anglo – Cooch Behar relations which was as follows : “ Now it must be best way to keep the Rajah straight to advice him that while we acknowledge that the treaty gave us no right to regulate his conduct . So neither did it require us to protect him against the consequences of his misconduct, so far as domestic revolution was concerned . When the Rajah knew that we left him responsible to his subjects then he would probably either mend his ways and conciliate their support or fearing the responsibility. He would also seek to place himself more completely under our protection , and to that end , would be glad to accept such new terms as we might impose. They comprehended the appointment of an agent at Cooch Behar . Whose salary and establishment would be defrayed out of the revenues of Cooch Behar , and to whose advice the Rajah would be expected to defer or even a more comprehensive measure for limiting his present authority ”.²⁸

Apart from that , in the field of literature the interest of Royal dynasty of Cooch Behar during this period is noticeable . On the order of

Rajmata Kameswari Devi, Ripunjoy Das wrote a historical work in prose style , which is known as ‘ Maharaja Banshabali’.²⁹ This work highlighted the chronological history of Cooch Behar since the accession of Maharaja Vishwa Singha (1522) .

From the above analysis it is clear that during the reign of Maharaja Narendra Narayan some sort of advanced modern measure were taken in the State of Cooch Behar , which found a steady progress during the reign of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan .

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. *The C.B.S.R* , Vol. - II , pp, 45- 46 .
3. Chowdhury, H.N., *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement*, Cooch Behar State Press , Cooch Behar , 1903 ,p, 288
4. Ray , Swapan Kumar , *Prachin Kochbiharer Sampurna Itibritta* (Bengali), Baiwala, Kolkata, 2006 , p, 164 .
5. Chowdhury, H.N. , *op. cit.* , p, 288 .
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p,289.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p,290.

In reporting upon these outrages committed by the Bhutias , Colonel Jenkins , in 1859 , strongly urged the adoption of hard Measures towards Bhutan , and foreshadowed the occupation of the Duars as the only effectual means of putting

down these depredations . Scarcely had full two months passed when in the beginning of November 1861, a gang of 70 or 80 Bhutias from The Bholka Duar committed dacoity in Taluks Chhat Bhalka and Deotikhata Naziran . When such things were happening in the extreme north- east of the state , Bhutia outrages were also occurring in the tract of the state of Cooch Behar near Pundibari , where a guard of 10 sepoy had to be deputed for the protection of the subject .

10. *Ibid.*

In November 1849 another boundary dispute evolved with Guma . At that time Aran Sing , the Zamindar of Guma who lived in the east or left bank of the river Gadadhar , opposite of the taluk Chhat Bara Lowkuti , with a large body of armed men, encroached upon the char of the river on the west bank. In the affray that took place some rayots of the state of Cooch Behar were killed.

11. *Ibid.*, p, 291.

Captain Strat , Assistant of Goalpara , was deputed by colonel Jenkins to settle the boundary and had it laid down by Mr. Bedford . Mr. Kelso , sub - assistant revenue surveyor , who shortly after , surveyed this boundary showed the alluvial ground of the Gadadhar around Bara Lowkuti as in dispute.

12. *Ibid.*, p,292.

13. *The C.B.S.R* , Vol. - II, p,205.

14.*Ibid.*, p, 206.

Mr. Pemberton explain his arguments on the following plan of operations ---

“I intended to commence on the western side of the kingdom , and enclose in the first instance, a grand main circuit of about four hundred square miles

; this portion will be divided into three main circuits, and these again into Sub - divisions , the contents of which will fill a sheet of imperial paper . This I can do accurately by measurement ; The plan is simple , can be easily accomplished , and will ensure correct Topography ; the greatest attention shall be paid to the interior details”.

15. Chowdhury , H.N. , *op. cit.*, p,292.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Halder, Sashibhusan (ed.) , *Cooch Behar Hitaisinee Sabha Baktritāmala* ,Cooch Behar , 1965 , p,117 .
- 19.*Ibid.*
- 20.Chowdhuri, Deendayal , *Nripendra Smiriti* ,Calcutta, 1915 , pp, 34-35 .
- 21.*Ibid* .
- 22.Bandapadhaya, Bhagabatee Charan , *Cooch Beharer Itihas*, Cooch Behar State Press, Cooch Behar , 1882 , p, 76.
23. Chowdhury, H.N. – *op.cit.*, p, 381.
- 24.Ray, Swapan Kumar , *op.cit*, p,170.
- 25.Bandapadhaya ,Bhagabatee Charan , *op. cit.* , p, 76 .
26. Debnath , Mahendra , *Atma Kathane Maharanee Brindeswari o Jenkins School* (Bengali) , Lekhapara Publisher, Cooch Behar , 2010 , p, 32.
27. Ray , Swapan Kumar , *op. cit.*, p, 171.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, p,172.