

# CHAPTER - 04

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## 4. Brief Profile of the District of Coochbehar

Coochbehar District in the north – eastern frontier of India is included in the Jalpaiguri Division of West Bengal. Until the 28<sup>th</sup> day of August 1949 Coochbehar was an Indian state ruled by the Maharaja of Coochbehar who had been a feudatory prince under the British Government. By a document dated 28 August 1949 Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan of Coochbehar ceded his territory to the dominion government of India. The transfer to the administration to the government of India took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of September 1949, from which date Coochbehar was ruled as a chief commissioner's province by a chief commissioner appointed by the government of India. By an order under section 290A of the Government of India Act of 1935, Coochbehar was transferred and merged with the province of West Bengal on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1950. Since then Coochbehar is being administered as a district of West Bengal.

**4.1 Origin of the Name of the District:** - The name Coochbehar is of comparatively recent origin. Formerly, a tract of land now forming the district of Coochbehar was part of a much bigger kingdom of Kamrup. The earliest mention of Kamrup in epigraphic records is in the 'Allahabad Inscription' of Samudragupta (1). In later times, the kingdom of Kamrupa was split into two parts, the western part known by the name of Kamata containing Coochbehar. In the Blaeys map of 1650 Coochbehar has been mentioned as 'Comotay'. In 'Baharisthan – i-Ghaibi' the country was designated as Kamata (2). The name of Coochbehar appears to have been first used in relation to this country in 'Shahjahan Nama' about the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Major Rennell's map prepared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, designated Coochbehar as simply Behar. In the treaty between the East India Company and the ruler of Coochbehar in 1773 the kingdom was referred to as Coochbehar and the capital was referred to as Behar Fort. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton in his narrative written in the beginning of the last century mentioned only Behar. There have been conjectures about whether the second term in the name of the district, viz, Behar, has any connection with some early Buddhist monastery. This seems unlikely. Yet, it must be considered a probability because in the old ruins of the capital of the Khen kings at Kamatapur within the district of Coochbehar there is a raised mound which goes by the name of Raj – Pat. There is a suspicion that this might have been

the site of an early Buddhist monastery and the raised mound the remnant of a Buddhist 'Stupa' on an excavation of the place might provide a conclusive answer on this point. In the absence of any concrete evidence of the existence of a Buddhist monastery, the main word Behar must be etymologically derived as a place or abode of sport. Coochbehar thus is an abode of the Cooch tribe. There is a legend that Lord Mahadev had at one time engaged in dalliance with Cooch maidens and as the word 'Vihara' also means dalliance, this etymology may not be farfetched. But the balance of probability lies in favor of the etymology that Coochbehar means the land of the Cooch. Even shortly after the merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal the local people referred to the capital of the Maharaja or the city of Coochbehar as simply Behar, and Hunter in his 'Statistical Account' has recorded that the Raja of Coochbehar repudiates the theory of Cooch origin and calls his capital 'Nijbehar'. Considering the above circumstances, it is difficult to say whether the district took its name from the capital city, or the capital city took its name from the name of the country. The name of the kingdom was finally determined to be Coochbehar by an order of the Maharaja and published in the 'Coochbehar Gazette'.

**4.2 History of the District:** - No prehistoric facts have been found in Coochbehar situated to the east of the Karatoya which was the traditional boundary between North Bengal and Assam or Kamrupa, the early history of Coochbehar to be sought in the early history of Assam. In early times the territory was known as Pragjyotisha which is mentioned in the 'Ramayana', the 'Mahabharata', and the 'Vishnu Purana'. According to the 'Kalika Purana' 'Naraka' the child of Lord Vishnu defeated the Kirats and was ordained king of Pragjyotisha. The Puspabhadra copper plate of the reign of Dharamapala of the dynasty Brahmapala mentions Kamarupanagara as the seat of the king (3). This Kamarupanagara was most probably the same as 'Kamata' or Kamatapur whose ruins lie in the district of Coochbehar at Gossanimari. The last Pala king having died without an heir, there was anarchy for a time. In that situation a person of humble birth somehow acquired power and proclaimed himself king and assumed the name of Niladhvaja. Niladhvaja made Kamatapur his capital. After Niladhvaja his son Chakradhvaja ruled the Kamatapur state. Nilambara, the son of Chakradhvaja, was the last of this line of kings. At the time of Nilambara, a Muslim Army led by Ismail Ghazi destroyed the kingdom. After the expulsion of the Muslim army the Kamata kingdom was engulfed in anarchy and split up into petty principalities under small chiefs who are collectively known as Bara Bhuinyas in the local tradition.

The powerful Koch chief Hajo had two daughters, Hira and Jira, who were married to one Hariya Mandal. Jira gave birth to two sons, Chandan and Madan. Hira gave birth to two sons, Sisu and Bisu. One account states that Chandan was the king after the death of Hariya Mandal and after his death Bisu became king under the name of Visvasimha in 1510. Visvasimha died about 1533 and his second son Naranarayan succeeded the king of Coochbehar. After Naranarayan his son Laxmi Narayan became the king of Coochbehar. He was succeeded by his son Birnarayan and appointed Mohinarayan, another son, as 'Nazir deo'. Bhimnarayan died in 1632 and was succeeded by his son Prannarayan who reigned from 1633 to 1666. Prannarayan defeated Mir Lutfulla, a Mughal subahdar of Kamarupa. But Mir Jumla, the governor of Bengal, recovered the lost Mughal possessions of Coochbehar. He occupied the capital of Coochbehar on December 19, 1661 and the city's name was changed to Alamgirnagar. Prannarayan drove the Mughals from Coochbehar, but Mir Jumla, while coming back to reconquer Coochbehar, fell ill and died. Prannarayan offered submission of Coochbehar to the Mughal emperors on December 6, 1665. Modnarayan, the son of Prannarayan, became the king of Coochbehar in 1666. After Modnarayan his third son Vasudevnanarayan became the king of Coochbehar, but he was killed by Jayanarayan who declared himself as king. Jayanarayan was defeated at the hands of Raikats and Mahindranarayan became the king. After Mahindranarayan Santanarayan became the king but he was declared ineligible to sit on the throne and his brother's son Rupnarayan was raised to the throne. In 1711 a treaty was concluded with the Mughals. From his time the territory of Coochbehar was confined practically to the present boundaries of the district. Rupnarayan died in 1714 and Upendranarayan succeeded his father Rupnarayan in 1714. In 1763 the boy Devendranarayan was installed as king, seated on the lap of chhatra Nazir Lalitnarayan. After Devendranarayan, the third son of Khagendranarayan and brother of Upendranarayan, Dhairyendranarayan was installed as king of Coochbehar in 1765. After Dhairyendranarayan Rajendranarayan was raised to the throne by the Bhutias and after a nominal reign of two years he died in 1772. After Rajendranarayan, Chhatra Nazir Khagendranarayan installed Dharendranarayan, son of Dhairyendranarayan, on the throne. A company of soldiers of the East India Company under Lieutenant Dickson attacked Coochbehar by the order of Charles Purling, the collector of Rangpur in 1772. On January 12, 1773, Nazir Khagendranarayan and Raja Dharendranarayan met Charles Purling, the Collector of Rangpur. On 5<sup>th</sup> April, a treaty between the young Maharaja Dharendranarayan and the East India Company was finalized. Dharendranarayan died in 1775 and the son of

Dhairyendranarayan, Harendranarayan, became the king of Coochbehar in 1780. Harendranarayan was succeeded by Sivendranarayan, his eldest son, who was installed king. The new king devoted his attention to the internal administration of justice. Sivendranarayan had no son, so he adopted Chandranarayan who was named Narendranarayan and succeeded him after his death at Varanasi in August 1847. He was installed on August 23 in 1847. Narendranarayan had taken English education at Krishnanagar at first and then at the Wards Institution in Calcutta. In 1861 he established the first English school in the state and named it after Colonel Jenkins, the agent of the Governor General. After Narendranarayan his son Nripendranarayan became the king of the state. From his reign the administration of Coochbehar enters the modern phase. In March, 1878 Maharaja Nripendranarayan was married to Sunity Devi, daughter of Kesab Chandra Sen. In 1887 the construction of the new palace was completed. In 1893 the Coochbehar state Railway was opened for traffic. He died in 1911 and was succeeded by his eldest son Raja Rajendranarayan. He died in 1913 and was succeeded by his brother Jitendranarayan. Jitendranarayan married Indira Devi, daughter of the Gaekwad of Boroda. He died in 1921 and was succeeded by his minor son Jagaddipendranarayan. He was the last Maharaja of Coochbehar. On September 12, 1949, he signed the Instrument of Accession. He transferred the state to India on August 28, 1949. The transfer of administration of the state to the government of India came into force on 12 September 1949. Eventually, Coochbehar was transferred and merged with the province of West Bengal on 19 January 1950 and from that date Coochbehar emerged as a new district in the administrative map of West Bengal.

**4.3 Location and Boundaries:** - The district of Coochbehar lies between  $26^{\circ}32'46''$  north latitude and  $25^{\circ}57'56''$  north latitude. The longitude of the easternmost point is  $89^{\circ}52'00''$  east and the longitude of the westernmost point is  $88^{\circ}45'02''$  east.

With the exception of a few miles at the extreme southern tip of Tufanganj subdivision where the river Raidak forms the boundary and for about 8 km to the north of Mekhliganj Thana where the river Jaldhaka forms the boundary, there is no natural boundary of the district. Cooch Behar is a district under the Jalpaiguri division of the state of West Bengal. The northern boundary and most parts of the western boundary are formed by the district of Jalpaiguri. The state of Assam in the east, and Bangladesh in the west as well as in the south, make up the boundary of the district. The total area of the district is 3387 sq. km. which contributes 3.82% of the land mass of the state of West Bengal. 2530.63 sq. km. area is

agricultural land and 56.99 sq. km. is forest area. Coochbehar is essentially a flat country with a slight south – eastern slope along which the main rivers of the district flow.

Besides the congregated area included in the boundaries of the district mentioned above, there are enclaves or chhits which are outlying and detached tracts of land situated inside the Bangladesh. A geopolitical curiosity is that there are 92 Bangladeshi Enclaves, with a total area of 47.7 Km. in Coochbehar. Similarly, there are 106 Indian Enclaves inside Bangladesh, with a total area of 69.5 Km. The only one of the Bangladeshi Enclave are with in Indian Enclaves, and three of the Indian Enclaves are within Bangladeshi Enclaves. The largest Indian Enclave, Balapara Khagrabari, surrounds a Bangladeshi Enclave Upanchowki Bajni, which itself surrounds an Indian Enclave called Dahala Khagrabari.

**4.4 Soil of the District:** - Being the district near the eastern Himalayan foothills, after rains in the catchment area of each of the rivers, the rivers generally attain strong current and flood the adjacent area. The turbulent water carries sand, silt, pebbles which causes many problems in productivity as well as hydrology. The soil is formed by alluvial deposits and is acidic in nature. It is friable loam to sandy loam ranging in depth from 0.15 to 1 meter. The soil has a low level of nitrogen while potassium and phosphorus levels are medium. Deficiency of zinc, calcium, magnesium and sulphur is considerable.

**4.5 Topology of the District:** - Coochbehar is essentially a flat country with a slight south eastern slope along which the main rivers of the district flow. There are slight ups and downs and while some areas may be so low as to be inundated by the rivers during the monsoon, others are slightly higher and remain always above water even when the rivers are in spate. Most of the high lands are close to Lalbazar of Sitalkuchi area and most of the low lands lie in Dinhata area. There are neither mountain peaks nor any hills within the district. The greater part of the district is cultivated and is composed of green fields studded with timber trees. There is no deep forest area in the district. The forest cover area of the district is only 56.99 Sq. Km. Almost all of the forests are small in size. Most tracts of land of this district consist mostly of heavy grass and reeds are seen at places mostly in the oscillation areas of the rivers.

**4.6 River System of Coochbehar:** - The Rivers in Coochbehar flow in a slanting course from north – west to south – east. All of them originate in the Himalayas and enter the district

from the western Duars of the district of Jalpaiguri. Flowing through the district they pass on to the Rangpur district of Bangladesh to discharge their waters into the Brahmaputra. The banks of the rivers are abrupt and the beds sandy. There is generally a beach on one side though at places both banks are abrupt. The bed is sandy and the sands shift at the time of the monsoon when the rivers are in spate. The larger rivers bring down gravel in large quantities. When the rivers are in spate, trees which fall down owing to erosion of the soil on which they were rooted are carried along in the torrential current and pose a severe danger to the ferries over such rivers. The rivers in the dry season are tame and, with the exception of the Tista, mostly shallow. But due to the vicinity of the Himalayas, in which they originate, even an ordinary rainfall on the hills causes a sudden rise of these rivers which overflow the banks and the gushing waters destroy crops and even homesteads. Though generally the rivers keep to their beds small oscillations and throwing out of a channel are almost annual features of these rivers. Just as the water of these rivers rise suddenly, so also the fall is quick. The flooding water hardly remains on the fields for more than a day or two in ordinary inundations. The soil, through which the rivers flow, being alluvium of very recent origin and largely mixed with sand, is easily cut by the rushing water and deposited on the side on which the velocity is less. Thus alluvium and diluvium are almost annual happenings with these rivers and large sand banks are numerous near these rivers. By the end of October the waters come down considerably and by March the rivers become slow currents. Six river systems cut through the district flowing in a south easterly direction. From the west to the east these are :- i) the Tista system, ii) the Jaldahaka system, iii) the Torsa system, iv) the Kaljani system, v) the Raidak system, vi) the Gadadhar system.

**4.6.1 i) The Tista system:** - The Tista is the largest river of the district. Through it does not form a large system elsewhere, within this district it throws out no distributaries nor does it receive any tributary. It enters Coochbehar district near taluk Baxiganj. It flows for about 15 miles in this district and separates Haldibari from Mekliganj Thana and passes into the Rangpur district of Bangladesh. A small stream, the Shaniajan, flows for about 20 miles within the district and flows into the Tista near the border of Kakina and Patgram within Bangladesh.

**4.6.2 ii) The Jaldhaka System:** - The river enters Coochbehar through the taluk Dhulia – Baldiahati. For the first 5 miles of its course after touching Coochbehar the river mostly lies in Jalpaiguri district. Just south of Moranga it enters the district. The Jaldhaka with its right

bank tributaries, the Satanga, the Dharala, and the Khutamari or Gidari and the left bank tributaries, the Kumlai, the Gilandi, the Duduya, the Mujnai and the Dolong form the Jaldhaka system within the district.

**4.6.3 iii) The Torsa System:** - The Torsa has been the ‘sorrow of Coochbehar’ for over two centuries and still shows no signs of having been appeased. It has so frequently changed its course during the last two hundred years that the entire northern position of Mathabanga Thana is a country laid waste by its caprice. The river enters Coochbehar from the north between taluks Latabari in Mathabanga and Bakshibos –Putimari in Coochbehar sadar and flows nearly south with a few tortuous bends up to the Baravita. Here the stream bifurcates: one takes the name Dharala and the other Torsa. The Ghargharia is only tributary of the river Torsa.

**4.6.4 iv) The Kaljani System:** - The Kaljani is formed in the western Duars by the combination of the Alaikuri and Dima in Alipurduar and enters Coochbehar by the north of taluk Khulta. It receives the stream, Gidari, Gadadhar and Katajani. The river Kaljani joins the river Torsa in Panisala in Coochbehar sadar.

**4.6.5 v) The Raidak System:** - The river Raidak enters the district in between the taluks Dorko and Chentimari. There are two rivers of the same name: Raidak – I and Raidak – II. The stream bifurcates in taluk Naratali of Jalpaiguri district presently Alipurduar district and the western branch enters Coochbehar at Dorko, while the eastern stream enters by the west of taluk khagrabari. The eastern branch falls into the Gadadhar in taluk Jaldhoa. The western branch, Raidak – I, flows by Andaran Fulbari, Chamta, Dipar–par and Rajarkuti taluks. The sub- Divisional town of Tufanganj is on the right bank of this river.

**4.6.6 vi) The Gadadhar System:** - The Gadadhar is called the Sankosh in its upper course and Gadadhar in lower course. It flows 10 miles within the district and passes the district by the south of chhat Baralaukuti. It enters Cooch Behar from the east in taluk Garbhanga. It receives streams like Takulla, Jorai, and Raidak – II.

**4.7 Climate:** - The climate of this district is characterized by a highly humid atmosphere and abundant rains, with the temperatures being seldom excessive. The cold session is from mid – November to the end of February. This is followed by the hot session from March to May.

The period from June to about the beginning of October is the south – west monsoon session. October to mid – November constitutes the post monsoon session.

**4.8 Temperature of the District:** - The cold session commences at about the middle of November when both night and day temperatures begin to decrease steadily. January is the coldest month of the year with the mean daily minimum temperature at  $10.4^{\circ}$  C and the mean daily maximum at  $24.1^{\circ}$  C. During the cold session, in association with the passage of western disturbances during January and February, night temperatures may drop down to about  $4^{\circ}$  C. Temperatures begin to rise by about the beginning of March, and by April which is the hottest month, the mean daily maximum temperature is  $32.5^{\circ}$  C, and the mean daily minimum is  $20.2^{\circ}$  C. Although the temperature by itself is not excessive, the dampness of the air makes the weather rather unpleasant. Even in the south – west monsoon period the day temperatures are not appreciably below those in summer, while the night temperatures are higher than those during summer. So even in this session, the weather is a little trying in between spells of rain. In the post monsoon session temperatures decrease progressively.

**4.9 Relative Humidity of the District:** - The atmosphere of this district is highly humid throughout the year. During the months February to May the relative humidity is less, being only between 50 and 70 percent. During the period October to April the sky is generally clear or lightly clouded. In May, cloudiness increases. In south west monsoon season, the sky is heavily clouded or overcast.

**4.10 Rainfall of the District:** - The average annual rainfall in the district is 3201.3 mm. (126.03"). The rainfall generally increases from the south west to the north east. About 70% of the annual rainfall is received during the south west monsoon season, June being the rainiest month. The variation in the rainfall from year to year is not large.

**4.11 Flora and Fauna of Cooch Behar:-** The flora of the district may be enumerated under some heads – i) palms, ii) bamboos, iii) plantations, iv) fruit trees, v) spices, medicinal plant and herbs, vi) creepers, vii) aquatic plants and weeds, viii) ferns and orchids, ix) aroid plants, x) fungi, xi) timber trees, forest trees and minor plants, xii) flowers, xiii) minor grasses and jungles and xiv) grains and vegetables.

- i) **Palms:** - The most common tree of the palm variety is the betel – nut palm. This is largely cultivated in this district with great success. Two varieties of betel –

nut are grown in this district. Date – palms (Khejur) and ordinary palm (Tal) and coconut palm are rare in the district and the few that exist do not bear any fruit.

- ii) **Bamboos:** - Five different kinds of bamboos are found in the district. These are – Bara bash, Makla bash, Jaouta bash, Beru bash and Nal bash.
- iii) **Plantation:** - Plantain grows in abundance in this district and is even seen wild. Some varieties of plantation are found in the district. These are Biche Kala, Jhama Kala, Kncha Kala, Manua Kala, Chini Manua, Champa Kala, Malbhog, Chini Malbhog, Jahaji Kala and Ram Kala.
- iv) **Fruit Trees:** - Almost all the common fruit trees of Bengal grow here. But by far the most abundant is the jackfruit. Some mango trees are also grown. Pineapple, papaya, palm shrub also grow in this district.
- v) **Spices, Medicinal Plants Herbs and Weeds:** - Cinnamon, Teipata, Pepper, Nim, Kutraj, Bach, Bhang, Gulancha are grown. Shatamul, Ananta mul are also found in the district.
- vi) **Creepers:** - The chief cultivated creepers are the Pumpkin and the Gourd. Cucumber is also grown in the district. There is one wild creeper found in the forest.
- vii) **Aquatic Plants and Weeds:** - The aquatic plants grown in this district are – lotus, kesur, pana, pith, kalmi, susni and dal grass.
- viii) **Ferns and Orchids:** - A few varieties of orchids grow wild on the trunks of trees. A parasitic growth going by looks like a bird on its wings.
- ix) **Aroid Plants:** - Various types of Aroid plants are found in the district. There are several varieties growing wild with spots on their very big leaves.
- x) **Fungi:** - Two varieties of fungi are found in this district. A kind of mildew also grows on trees.

- xi) **Timber Trees:** - The Banyan, Peepul, Pakur, Sal, Sisu, Teak, Babla, Khayar, kadam, Simul, Haritaki, Behera, Amlaki trees are found in this district. These are all timber trees.
- xii) **Flowers:** - Coochbehar may aptly be called the land of flowers, which grow profusely all over the land. Roses of different varieties attain large size and give fine fragrance.
- xiii) **Minor Grasses:** - The reed known as Khagra grows profusely, especially near abandoned beds of rivers. A kind of aromatic smelling almost like lavender grows wild. Thatching grass grows in plenty. Hogla also grows.
- xiv) **Grains and Vegetables:** - The district produces the two varieties of paddy, two varieties of millet, and inferior varieties of wheat, barley and maize. The pulses grown include moong, masur, pea, arhar, khesari and thakri. Of the oil seeds, mustard, till and tishi are the ones generally cultivated. The fibre plants grown are jute, Mesta and Shan. Tobacco of two varieties is grown in this district. Among the garden vegetables potato, brinjal, radish, arum, onion and garlic are commonly grown. Water melons and musk melons are grown on the sand banks of rivers in autumn and winter.

**4.11.1 Fauna:** - Coochbehar district at present has no large forest. The only real forest area in the district is the Patlakhawa forest. Because of the clearance of forests and spread of human habitation, big animals have become more or less scarce in this district. Carnivorous animals, including only a small tiger-like creature called 'Go – Bagha' and the leopard, are occasionally found in these areas. Wild pigs, bears, barking deer or hog deer is seen in the riverine jungles. The tiger cat, civet cat, and mongoos are also found in the district.

Of the reptiles, snakes of different kinds are found in the district. Pythons are found in the forest areas. Rarely crocodiles are seen in the larger rivers. Lizard and frogs are also found in this district. The migratory bird like as lesser whistling teal, common teal, cotton teal, dabchick, bronze winged jacana, pheasant tailed jacana, shoveller, barheaded goose, white eyed pochard are found in Rasikbill, a recognized bird sanctuary in this district. Except these a lot of other aquatic birds like the small and large cormorant and openbilled stork are also found.

**4.12 Population of the District:** - There had been no attempt before 1871 – 72 to enumerate the people living in the tract of land now forming Coochbehar district. The first enumeration of 1871 – 72 was not a simultaneous count but was spread over three or four months beginning in November 1871 and ending in February 1872. This Census disclosed a total population of 5, 32,565 persons. The next Census was in 1881 when the total population was found to be 6, 02,624 of whom 3, 11,678 were males and 2, 90,946 were females. In 1941 the total population was 6, 38,703. In 1951 the population was 6, 68,949. In 1961 the population was 10, 19,806, an increase of 52.45%. In 1971 the population was 14, 12,148, the increase being 38.47%. In 2001 Census the total population was 24, 79,155 of whom 12, 72,094 were males and 12, 07,061 were female. The density of population was 732 per sq. km. Total SC population in 2001 was 12, 42,374 which was 50.1%. Out of this number 6, 36,446 were male and 6, 05,928 were female. The ST population was 14,246 which was 0.58%. Out of them 7,425 were male and 6,821 were female. According to the 2011 Census report the total population of the district is 28, 22,780. The percentage of population is increased during 2001 - 2011 in 13.86%, which is less than from the period of 1991 – 2001. Population increased during 1991 – 2001 was 14.9%. The present density of the population is 833 per sq.km, which were 732 in 2001. The present sex ratio is 942: 1000, which was 949: 1000 in 2001. According to the 2011 Census total numbers of literate persons are 18, 79,984. Out of them 10, 45,903 are male and 83, 4,081 are female. In 2001 literacy rate was 66.30%. This rate increased to 75.49% in 2011. Male literacy rate was 75.93% in 2001, which is increased to 81.52% in 2011. Female literacy rate was 56.12% in 2001, which increased to 69.08% in 2001. The district of Coochbehar share 3.09% of the total population of the state.

**4.13 Education of the District:** - The centers of learning in early times appear to have been the Royal Court and its surroundings. During that time in Khagrabari there were several ‘Tols’ and these were run on Royal patronage. In 1857, a vernacular school was started in Coochbehar town for the purpose of imparting education to the kinsmen of the Maharaja. This may be said to be the first step taken towards popular education in the country. An English school was founded in 1861 in the heart of the present town and named Jenkins School. In 1864, three other vernacular schools were opened in the interior areas. By 1870 the number of village vernacular schools went up to 58 of which 5 were meant were girls. A Madrasa for teaching Persian and three Sanskrit Tols were also started. A Guru training school was started in February 1873 and a normal school, a nucleus of which had existed in

1870, was formally opened in 1875 with the full complement of classes, teachers and stipends. A network of schools and pathshalas covered the entire state and for proper supervision the establishment of the superintendent of education was augmented between 1876 and 1878 by the addition of a deputy inspector of schools, a sub inspector of schools and four inspecting pundits. G.J.B. Tuite Dalton, the deputy commissioner of Coochbehar mentioned in the 'Annual Administrative Report' of the state 1876 -77 that the number of schools had increased from 282 to 323 and their pupils from 7238 to 7795.

The population of Coochbehar was estimated by Dalton to be 5, 32,565. Taking one-twelfth of the population as children of the school going age the figure comes to 44,3,80 and of this number 8,975 were in the schools. These were at the Jenkins school, the only English high school; two middle vernacular schools; two normal schools; one boarding school and one artisan school. Two hundred and thirty one schools were aided schools. Of these 3 were middle English schools, 88 were middle vernacular schools, 96 were lower vernacular schools, 24 were girls' schools, 19 were night schools, and one was a boarding school. In addition there were 4 middle class schools, 15 lower class schools, 32 pathshalas, 10 night schools, 11 girls' schools and 13 makhtabs which were privately managed.

In June 1888 the first college was established in Cooch Behar named Victoria College to commemorate the jubilee of queen Victoria of England. During the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century education made considerable progress and the number of persons able to read and write more than doubled during the period from 1881 to 1901. The number of pupils had been raised from 10,194 to 12,670 during the period 1881-82 to 1901 - 02. In 1903 -04, there were 12,639 pupils with 333 institutions including one art college, 43 secondary schools, 37 night schools and 9 girls schools. According to the Census of 1971, out of 3, 10,576 persons, 79,240 were female literates in the district. In 1971 Census 22.0% of the population was literate. Male literacy rate was 31.4% and female literacy rate was 11.7%.

The Census of 1961 recorded that 8, 05,636 were literates. In 1968-69 Primary Schools were alone 874, Junior Basic Schools 188 including 6 for girls. In the same year govt. managed one school for boys and one for girls, while there were 29 boys schools and 3 girls schools which were private aided. There were also 9 unaided private schools for boys the same year. The Senior Basic Schools were 43 in the district from which 41 were earmarked for boys and 2 for girls. There were 18 Higher Secondary Schools for boys and 3

for girls. There was a Govt. Junior Basic Training College in the district town, imparting training to 40 male students in 1967 – 68. A similar institution, sponsored by the govt., is named Nigam Nagar Junior Basic Training College. A combined general and teacher training college have also been functioning in the district town since 1965-66.

There are a number of colleges in the district which are affiliated to the North Bengal University. In 1971, there were six colleges in the district. These are – Victoria College (A.B.N.Seal College), Coochbehar; Dinhata College, Dinhata; Coochbehar College, Coochbehar; Mathabhanga College, Mathabhanga; University Evening & B.T.college, Coochbehar; and Tufanganj College, Tufanganj.

At present there are 1805 Primary and 120 High Schools in the district. Out of them some of the high schools are co- educational, some are boys' and some are only for girls'. There are 61 Higher Secondary schools in the district. Out of them some are boys' and some are co- educational and some are only for girls' schools. There are 5 High Madrasas and 2 Senior Madrasas in the district. There are 60 Junior High schools in the district and 16 Junior Madrasas, 1 Kendriya Vidhyalaya, and 1 Novadaya Vidyalaya in the district. There is one school for the blind students in the district.

There are two engineering / technical schools in the district. 16 professional and technical schools are in the district at present. There are 16 general degree colleges in the district. There are 110 libraries, both rural and urban, are in the district. There is an agricultural university named Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya at Pundibari, near to the Coochbehar town. There is a new State run University starting very recently in the coochbehar town for the expansion of higher education. Apart from these there are also some private schools in the district. 75.49% of the population is literate in the district, according to Census report 2011. Out of the literates, 81.52% are males and 69.08% are females.

**4.14 Health of People:** - Before the year 1819 the system of allopathic medicine was unknown in Coochbehar. In 1819 an Indian doctor was appointed in Coochbehar on a salary of Rs. 40 per month. In 1842, Dr. Syama Charan Sarkar, a medical graduate was appointed as medical officer at the maharaja's court. In 1865, the first dispensary was opened at Coochbehar. The first dispensary to be opened in the mofussil was on 13 June 1873 at

Dinhata. The Mekhiliganj dispensary was opened on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1874 and the Mathabanga dispensary on 28 September 1874. On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1885 an aided dispensary was opened at Haldibari for out patients. On 5<sup>th</sup> July 1898 a dispensary was opened at Fulbari (Tufanganj).

These dispensaries and hospitals were established at the state headquarters and at the sub divisional headquarters. But the rural people remained apathetic to the scientific treatment and they had faith in 'ojhas' and village 'quacks'. By the year 1937–38 four dispensaries had been opened at rural places, i.e., Bamanhat, Sitalkuchi, Sitai and Nishiganj, each under the charge of a sub- assistant surgeon.

At the time of merger of Coochbehar State with West Bengal the organization of the medical department consisted of one civil surgeon in charge of the Maharaja Jitendra Narayan hospital at Coochbehar with two assistant surgeons. The Jagadipendra Narayan Hospital at Rajarhat near Coochbehar was constructed as an infectious diseases hospital. Each sub divisional headquarters had a hospital with an out door department. An assistant surgeon was in charge of it. Besides these hospitals there were 24 charitable dispensaries in the rural areas.

Apart from these hospitals there were eleven primary health centers and twenty two subsidiary health centers in the district in 1971. A scheme of examination of the health of the school children has been started under the general supervision of the chief medical officer of health. Family planning center was started at district hospital under population control schemes. There are eleven family planning centers located within the district and 22 subsidiary health centers were provided with a sub- center for family planning. The National Malaria Control Programme was started in Coochbehar in 1953. In 1958, The National Malaria Eradication Programme replaced the previous programme. It consisted of spraying of insecticides and survey work was taken up. At present there are 10 hospitals including district, sub Divisional and Block hospitals. There are 391 health centers within the district. There are 25 clinics and 7 dispensaries in the district. Apart from such governmental assistance to matters of health, there are some private hospitals and nursing homes in the district.

**4.15 Communication:** - At the time of Coochbehar state, all places of importance in the neighboring British districts were connected to Coochbehar and all important villages and village marts were connected with roads to the sub-divisional headquarters and to

Coochbehar. Moreover, the country had a network of rivers which provided a system of communication in certain sessions. During the rainy season large boats could be easily admitted to almost every part of the district and small boats could easily make their way to the interior villages. In the dry season almost all parts of the district were accessible by bullock carts over a network of fair-weather tracks. The map of Major Rennell, dating from 1779, shows that ten arterial roads were in existence and were maintained by the Coochbehar state. In 1900 the main roads that were in existence and maintained by the Coochbehar state are –a) a road from Gitaldaha – Coochbehar – Alipurduar road from Coochbehar – Tufanganj, c) a road from Coochbehar – Ghoramara – and Fulbari – Laukathi and then turning north and passing through Mahishkuchi – Garad Hat, d) a road from Ghoramara – Natabari and a road from Baneswar to Natabari, e) a road from Coochbehar – Rajar hat – Pundibari – Patlakhawa and Pundibari – Giladanga – Moranga, f) a road from Coochbehar – Rajar hat – Khattimari – Mathabhanga – Balar hat, g) a road from Coochbehar – Rashidanga, Gossanimari – Sitai and a branch to Lal Bazar – Sitalkuchi, h) a road from Coochbehar – Nishiganj hat and to join Mathabhanga Sitalkuchi road, i) a road from Giladanga – Mathabhanga – Sitalkuchi, j) a road from Mathabhanga to Nishiganj, k) a road from Mathabhanga – Chokhekata – Falakata.

The original Coochbehar roads schemes were mainly in the north – south direction in order to utilize the river crossing facilities. Soon after the merger of Coochbehar as a district of West Bengal, the Government of West Bengal faced a major task. Of the four outlying sub- divisions of this district only Tufanganj lay on the road to Dhubri, a metal road. A rail cum roadbridge established easy communication with Coochbehar to Dhubri. NH 31 connected Coochbehar with other parts of the country. The Jalpaiguri – Siliguri state highway connected Haldibari and Dewanganj. In the 1960's there was a road joining Coochbehar town with Dhubri in Assam. The Buxa road connects Coochbehar town with Buxa via Alipurduar. The Laukuthi road connects Coochbehar town with Fulbari, Baxirhat and Mahishkuchi. By the 1970's all headquarters of the police stations were connected with the headquarters of sub- division and also headquarters of the district. At present more or less all panchayats headquarters are connected with important roads of blocks, subdivisions and district. More or less all headquarters roads of Panchayats are metalled roads.

Before 1876 there was no railway connectivity within Coochbehar state. In 1876 the North Bengal railway opened a station at Haldibari of Coochbehar state. Coochbehar state

constructed a railway line from Mugal hat to Coochbehar in 1894. Until the Assam link railway was constructed, Coochbehar railway remained moribund. Before the opening of New Jalpaiguri – Jorai broad gauge line there was no railway connection system; there was only Gitaldaha, a branch railway, through Bamanhat to Dhubri in Assam. The board gauge line from New Jalpaiguri to Jorai has provided a satisfactory railway communication in the district. At present a new railway communication system is under construction. Now all rail links of this district are broad gauge links. Bamanhat – Alipurduar linking railway line reopened after the gauge changed in the recent past. Another rail link from Coochbehar to Dubri via Tufangang has been partially opened.

**4.16 Agriculture:** - ‘The Rakam Charcha Settlement’ (4) which followed the survey of 1868 – 70 was a monumental work in the matter of land administration. That operation found out that the total area of land cultivated was 4, 77,401 acres out of total area of 70, 7,998 acres. The statistics of 1901–02 (5) show that the total area of Coochbehar was 8, 36,480 acres. According to this survey the total cropped land or cultivated land was 4, 08,441 acres. The statistics of 1949–50 (6) show the total area of Coochbehar was 8, 20,600 acres. Out of the total area 4, 39,400 acres was cultivated land. The net cropped area decreased from 477.7 thousand acres at the revenue survey to 408.4 thousand acres in 1901 – 02. It increased to 439.4 thousand acres in 1949 – 50. The present total area of Coochbehar district is 3, 38,700 hectares. Out of this total area 2, 46,491 hectares is the net cultivated area. Out of these total cropped areas 24,900 hectares are single cropped, 1, 41,491 hectares is the double cropped area and 80,100 hectares is the triple cropped area. At present almost 85% – 90% of the total population depends on agriculture in this district.

The soil of Coochbehar is alluvial and of rather recent formation, and has large admixtures of sand and what in common parlance is known as sandy loam. The proportion of sand, silt and clay, however, varies from place to place. The soil is of light texture and can retain moisture and easily give it up. It neither becomes water logged easily nor does it form hard cakes when dry. The surface soil which is loam soil is hardly more than two feet deep and at places even less than that. Below the surface soil is fine sand. So the soil is thus unsuitable for deep furrowing and improved heavy ploughs and tractors can hardly be used on this soil with advantage.

The principal crops of the district are paddy, jute, tobacco, mustered seed, pulses, wheat, barley, millets, corn, potatoes, onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and sugar cane. Two kinds of paddy, 'Aus' and 'Aman' are grown in the district. Boro paddy is also cultivated in the district. Two varieties of jute, capsularies and the oliotaris are grown in this district. Pulses like moong, masur, khesari, thakri, kulti and arahara are grown. Coochbehar district alone supplies about 72% of the total tobacco output of West Bengal. Two kinds of tobacco, 'Rustica' and 'Virginia' are grown. In 2009 – 2010 'Aus' paddy was cultivated in 5,200 hectares, 'Aman' in 2,15,000 hectares, Boro paddy in 46,000 hectares, jute in 48,000 hectares, wheat in 10,600 hectares, potato in 26,700 hectares, tobacco in 12,050 hectares, oil seeds in 43,550 hectares, pulses in 9,620 hectares, sugarcane in 155 hectares, and winter vegetables in 25,000 hectares. Apart from these crops some perennial and non perennial fruits and some varieties of flowers are cultivated in the district.

Coochbehar district is an irrigation deficient district. There are no major irrigation schemes worth mentioning in the district. At present about 35% of the total cultivable lands is under irrigation. In 1958 – 59 there were 10,000 private canals, 18,500 wells and 3,100 other sources; this is reported in the statistical abstract of West Bengal in 1960. The district is however blessed with large numbers of perennial rivers, channels, water tanks, and water bodies. These resources presently are being utilized as a source of surface irrigation. Ground water potential of the district is very high. But ground water based minor irrigation is not sufficient. At present a total of 16,292 hectares of this district is under irrigation. According to 2001 Census 2, 90,598 persons of this district are cultivators and 1, 88,400 persons are engaged as agricultural laborers in the district.

**4.17 Industries:** - Coochbehar is essentially an agricultural district. Till 1950 it had a self-sufficient economy. The felt needs of the people were few and they adjusted their mode of life to the small compass of things available within the district. One of the oldest industries of the district was rearing, spinning and weaving of Eri. There are a few ironsmiths in the villages. There is no large scale industry in the district. Some small scale industries like handloom weaving, shoe making, brass and bell metal industry, paddy husking machines, bidi making, oil pressing, wheat crushing, bamboo crafts, printing press, cane products, bakery, etc. existed in the district before 1972. There is a tea garden in the district.

The following table shows the different categories of registered units functioning in the district.

**Table 01: Registered Small Scale Industrial Units in Cooch Behar District in 1972**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number of units</b>
Food products	84
Textiles	225
Beverage industries	08
Chemical & Chemical products	22
Footwear and other wearing apparels	12
Wood work other than furniture	53
Furniture	19
Metal products	18
Building materials	07
Tobacco products	24
Clay modeling	17
Printing and publishing	10
Miscellaneous	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>560</b>

Handloom is also an important industry in the district. The number of handlooms and workers was 3955 and 6192 respectively in 1972. The following table shows the number of handlooms in different sub-divisions of the district.

**Table 02: Number of Handloom Units in Cooch Behar District**

<b>Subdivision</b>	<b>Number of units</b>	<b>Number of looms</b>
Cooch Behar Sadar	765	1540
Dinhata	95	400
Tufanganj	110	280
Mathabhanga	115	180

Tobacco is the most important cash crop of the district. Good quality of tobacco is grown in Dinhata subdivision. The state government also opened a training – cum – production centre in Dinhata in 1966 for imparting training in the making of cigar and country cheroots. But the centre was closed down in 1968.

At present, Coochbehar, an industrially backward district, has undergone a tremendous growth in industrial development. A sizable number of industries have been set up in the district which is not any quantitative but definitely qualitative. Units for

unconventional and industrially-used products are now being set up in the district. As regards food processing units, 3 mechanized bread units and the biggest fruit processing unit have been commissioned in the district. There are five modern cold storage facilities in the district.

Apart from these big industries there are many industries in the district such as canned pineapple, flavored fruit juice, milk shake, fruit syrup, mustered oil mill, soya nuggets, vermicelli, bread and biscuits along with monofilament HDPE yarn, mosquito net cloth, pet bottle, electrical casing, jute twine and weaving, herbal oil, and fertilizer. In Coochbehar there are good numbers of plywood and veneer manufacturing units in operation. So far a total of 14 units for manufacturing of plywood and veneer have got the SSI registration.

Apart from the usual infrastructure available, an industrial area has been set up in 'Chakchaka' very close to the district town. The state comprises 131 acres of land. 52 entrepreneurs have already procured 32 acres of land in the industrial growth centre and 22 units have already started production and another 12 units have complied with the formalities and will be setting up in growth area.

**4.18 General Administration:** - The Governor of Lord Cornwallis appointed Lawrence Mercer and John Lewis Chauvet, commissioners to report on various subjects including the mode in which the British influence should be exercised for better administration of the state in future. Mercer and Chauvet were reported in 1788 that there was only one court in Coochbehar for the trial of all kinds of cases. In 1789 Henry Douglas was appointed as Resident Commissioner. He applied himself mainly to regularize the revenue administration. In 1791 Charles Andrew Bruse accepted the post and W. Towers Smith in 1797. Maharaja Harendra Narayan terminated the post of Resident Commissioner of Coochbehar in 1801. In 1803 the post of Commissioner of Coochbehar was revived and Francis Pierand was appointed as Commissioner of Coochbehar.

In 1849 there was seven police Thanas and outposts under the Foujidari Ahilkar. These were located at i) Sadar or kotawali, ii) Dinjata, iii) Mekhliganj, iv) Giladanga, v) Bhavaniganj, vi) Shamganj, and vii) Changrabandha. Jenkins reports that the quality of the courts was more or less satisfactory. The British government decided to take over charge of the state during the minority of the king Nripendra Narayan and deputed Colonel J.C. Haughton as Commissioner in charge of the administration. H. Beveridge was appointed Deputy Commissioner in 1864. The state of the administration is best described in the words

of the first deputy commissioner Beveridge from the annual report for 1865 – 67. “Before the appointment of a British commissioner the government of Coochbehar was in a deplorable condition . . . . It was in fact a mongrel government, being a cross as it were between the Bhutia or the Koch idea of Government and those which the Bengali ‘Amla’ supposed to be ours”. “There was no cohesion or real subordination in any part of the administration from the top to the bottom. Every officer did what seemed right to him and acknowledged no authority but that of the Rajah and his subordination even to him was in most cases only lip – service”.

At the time of minor Nripendra Narayan, ‘Raj Sabha Court’ was abolished and the functions were transferred to the commissioner’s office. The Indian Penal code was introduced in 1866 and the Indian Evidence Act and the code of criminal procedure were introduced in 1873 with consequent changes in the court and in the police procedures. The first sub division was established at Tufanganj on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1866 and the four other subdivisions were created in 1872. The police force was recognized in 1876 – 77 and consisted of one Superintendent of police, three inspectors, eight sub inspectors, twenty six constables and two hundred and forty constables. The number of police stations was increased to five, viz. Kotwali, Tufanganj, Dinhata, Mathabhanga and Mekhliganj, and the number of outposts was increased to seven.

In 1883 Maharaja Nripendra Narayan issued the memorandum of administration. A council of state was established with the Maharaja as president and there members namely, the superintendent of the state, the Dewan and the head of the department of Civil Justice as members. The superintendent of the state was head of the department of general administration, the Dewan was the head of the department of revenue and the judicial officer was the head of the civil justice. In 1885 the commissioner of the Jalpaiguri division was appointed by the government of India to be the ex - officio political agent of Coochbehar and the superintendent of Coochbehar was appointed justice of the peace. In December 1891 the memorandum of administration was modified to some extent. The judicial function of the council was transferred to a court of two members of the council, the bench being constituted by the maharaja excluding that member against whose decision the appeal lay. The civil judge was appointed session judge in addition and the dewan was made an additional session judge. The session’s power hitherto exercised by the superintendent ceased. The power of the

Foujdari Ahilkar was redefined and made to correspond to the powers of District Magistrate of British district.

For the next fifty years, that is, till the merger of Coochbehar State into West Bengal and its formation into a district, the administrative pattern remained the same. The only change made was that the members of the council were designated ministers and their offices designated secretaries.

After the signings of the agreement of Accession on 28 August 1949, the government of India issued an order entitled the Coochbehar Order, 1949 and appointed a chief commissioner in Coochbehar. The chief commissioner was vested with all the powers which under the laws operating in Coochbehar were exercisable by the Maharaja. All the laws in force in Coochbehar or any part of there immediately before 12 September 1949 continued to remain in force until repealed or amended by a competent legislature or authority. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1950 Coochbehar was merged with West Bengal by a notification issued by the government of India on 31 December 1949 entitled the States Merger Order in 1949. A Deputy Commissioner and administrator of Coochbehar were appointed by the government of West Bengal and from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1950. Coochbehar became a district of West Bengal. As Coochbehar was a part of India and a part of West Bengal already on 26 January, 1950, the Constitution applied to Coochbehar from the very date on which the Constitution of India was adopted.

The administrative setup consisted of a Deputy Commissioner and an Additional Deputy Commissioner, one senior Deputy Collector, One Naib Ahilkar in charge of the sadar subdivision, one Naib Ahilkar each in charge of the treasury and the Khas Mahal departments., two Additional Naib Ahilkars for revenue work at sadar and one Additional Naib Ahilkar for criminal case work of the sadar subdivision. In each of the subdivisions of Dinhata and Mathabhanga, there was one Naib Ahilkar in charge of the subdivision and one Additional Naib Ahilkar. In the subdivision of Tufanganj and Mekhligangj there was only one Naib Ahilkar in charge of the subdivision. Initially, the Sub Divisional Officers acted as Munsifs and as Sub Registrars also. The police administration also remained as before. The force was under a superintendent of police with two deputy superintendents at headquarters.

The present setup of the district administration has the Deputy Commissioner as the head of the district administration; he is also appointed as District Magistrate under the

criminal procedure code. He is a member of the Indian Administrative Service. He is assisted in his administration by two Additional Deputy Commissioners. One Deputy Collector is in charge of the Office of the Deputy Commissioner while another Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector are in charge of the sadar subdivision assisted by one Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector and one Sub Deputy Magistrate and Sub Deputy Collector. One Deputy Collector is the Regional Assistant Director of the Panchayats and Executive officer of the Zilla Parishad while another Deputy Collector is the District Panchayat Officer. A Joint Magistrate is the Settlement Officer for Coochbehar. One sub Deputy Collector is special officer for SC/ST welfare. These entire officers are stationed at Cooch Behar.

At Dinhata a Deputy Collector and Deputy Magistrate were in charge of the then subdivision assisted by a Deputy Magistrate and a Sub Deputy Magistrate for general administration. At Mathabhanga a Deputy Magistrate is in charge of the subdivision assisted by two Sub Deputy Magistrate for general administration. At Tufanganj a Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector is in charge of the subdivision assisted by a Sub Deputy Magistrate for general administration. At Mekhliganj there was a similarly set up of general administration in the subdivision. At present the cadres of Deputy Collectors and Sub Deputy Collectors have been merged for the whole of West Bengal.

At present there are 12 Blocks in the district. These are: Coochbehar – I, Coochbehar – II, Dinhata – I, Dinhata – II, Sitai, Mathabhanga – I, Mathabhanga – II, Sitalkuchi, Tufanganj – I, Tufanganj – II, Mekhliganj and Haldibari. The Block Development Officer is the head of the Block. The Block Development Officer is generally a member of the West Bengal Civil Service. The other compliment members of the staff are the Agricultural Extension Officer, The Social Education Officer, the Sub Assistant Engineer, the Panchayat Extension Officer and the Inspector of Cooperative Societies etc.

**4.19 Local Self – Government:** - No details are available of the kind of rural administration prior to 1864. There was, however an institution known as ‘Dewani’. These ‘Dewanies were large ‘Joteders’ residing their firms; and the neighboring areas contained their tenants. These ‘Dewanies’ reigned as the civil heads of the community and arbitrated in all disputes amongst their tenants and dependents. Much depended upon the personal character and temperament of the individual ‘Dewanies’, For good or for evil he reigned supreme, and the only redress any one had against his vagaries was to appeal to the ‘Raj Sabha’. In 1876 some petitions were sent to the Deputy Commissioner for organizing a Village Chowkidari system on the pattern

obtaining in Rangpur and Jalpaiguri. During 1882 – 83 there were 1576 Chowkidaries in the state. The Coochbehar Village Chowkidari Act was passed in 1893 – 94 on the model of the Bengal Act of the same name of 1891. The collecting member of the Panchayats was appointed by the state and a Chowkidari rate in the terms of the act was levied on the residents of the Panchayat area by the collecting Panchayat and deposited with the Sub - Divisional Officer. The Sub – Divisional Officer paid the salaries of the Chowkidars at quarterly pay parades at the Thanas. This was the only partially self-governing organization in existence in Coochbehar in the rural areas till they were replaced by the creation of Gram and Anchal Panchayats under the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957.

In 1885 Coochbehar Town Committee Act was passed and a nominated committee of ten was created under the act to function as a municipality for the town of Coochbehar. The then Fuijdari Ahilkar was to be the chairman. Later by the amendment of the act in 1897 the superintendent of the state was made the ex–officio chairman. Municipal functions performed by the Town Committee included maintainance of some of the roads made over to the Town Committee, street lighting, conservancy and drainage, and maintainance of the town chowkider force. The finance was obtained partly by taxation of properties situated in the town and partly by a state grant. In 1897, the Town Committee Act was extended to the Sub – Divisional towns of Dinhata and Mathabhanga to the Haldibari. In 1931, the act was extended to the Sub – Divisional town of Mekhliganj. In 1944 the Coochbehar Municipal Act was passed and the Town Committee of Coochbehar was converted into a municipality. The previous functions of the Town Committee remained and further functions were added, such as sanctioning of building plans, power to demolish dangerous buildings, action against food adulteration, etc.

The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 was extended to the district in various stages from 7 June 1958 to 8 June 1960. The whole district was covered by the Gram and Anchal Panchayats. The old Chowkidari Panchayats under the Coochbehar Village Chowkidari Act of 1893 had been abolished and replaced by Gram and Anchal Panchayats. As the smallest territorial unit a Gram Panchayat normally has for its jurisdiction a revenue mauza with an approximate population of 1000. The number of its members varies from 9 to 15 who usually hold office for four years. They elect one amongst them as the Adhyaksha and another as the Upadhyaksha. For every Gram Panchayat, there is a Gram Panchayat fund to which are

credited the sum of sums assigned to it under the provisions of the act as also any gifts or contributions received and income derived from endowments and trusts made in favour of it.

The Anchal Panchayat comprises some contiguous Gram Panchayats or Gram Sabhas. Normally 8 to 10 contiguous Gram Panchayats with a total population of about 10000 constitute an Anchal Panchayat. The area of the Anchal Panchayat is roughly that of the former Union Board. An Anchal Panchayat consists of members elected by its constituting Gram Panchayats on the basis of one member for every 250 members of a Gram Sabha. The president of the Anchal Panchayat is called the Pradhan and the vice president Upapradhan. The Pradhan and Upapradhan usually hold office for a 4-year term. There is a salaried secretary for attending to the day to day work of the organization. The functions of the Anchal Panchayat are assessment and collection of taxes, maintenance and control of Dafadars and Chowkidars and the proper constitution and administration of the Nyaya Panchayats. The function of a Gram Panchayat, on the other hand, was to provide for sanitation, conservancy and drainage, curative and preventive measures, maintenance, repair and construction of roads, organizing voluntary labour for community work, and other delegated and discretionary functions.

There were 11 Anchalik Parishads set up under the West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act, 1964, corresponding to the 11 Blocks in the district. The Anchalik Parishad consists of the Pradhans within the Block, one Adhyaksha from each Anchal Panchayat, and M.P.s and M.L.A.s elected from a constituency comprising the Block or a part thereof having a place of residence in the Block, two women and two persons belonging to a backward community. Each Anchalik Parishad had a president and a vice president elected by the members from among themselves for a period of 4 years term. The Block Development Officer was ex – officio chief executive officer of the Anchalik Parishad. The Anchalik Parishad had the power to implement schemes relating to agriculture, livestock, cottage industry, water supply, irrigation, public health, etc. The Coochbehar Zilla Parishad started functioning in 1964.

At present in Coochbehar there are 128 Gram Panchayats, 12 Panchayat Samities and one Zilla Parishad. There are 1188 villages and 1165 moujas in the district. There is 1703 Gram Sansads in the district. There are also 6 Municipalities in urban areas of the district. There are 11 Thanas/ Police stations in the district for the maintenance law and order. All the institutions of local self government are functioning smoothly and successfully within the district as per provision of the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973.

The three-tier Panchayat systems have successfully been implemented in West Bengal in the year 1978. These three tiers are namely Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad. Gram Panchayat is the first tier of the Panchayat system at the grassroots level. One Gram Panchayat consists of a few Gram Sansads. Actually, Gram Sansad is the basic unit of Gram Panchayat. Gram Panchayat consists of a maximum of 25 members, out of which 1/3<sup>rd</sup> is reserved for women. Seats for representatives of SC & ST communities are also reserved as per their proportion of the population. The head of the Gram Panchayat is known as Pradhan and his deputy is Upapradhan. The Pradhan has the power of a DDO. The Gram Panchayat office is responsible for implementing various socio – economic development schemes which are sponsored by both state and central governments.

Panchayat Samity is the second tier of Panchayat system. The jurisdiction of a Panchayat Samity is one block development office area. Panchayat Samity consists of several Gram Panchayats. One Gram Panchayat may have 2 or 3 members for Panchayat Samity depending upon the total numbers of voters of the Gram Panchayat. Reservation of Women and for representatives of SC & ST communities is maintained as per Panchayat Rules. Panchayat Samity is headed by Sabhapati and assisted by Sahasabhapati. All development schemes at Block level are planned and executed by the Panchayat Samity with the help of the Block Development Officer. Panchayat Samity does the coordination between Zilla Parishad and Gram Panchayat. One of the major works of Panchayat Samity is preparing the block plan for various departmental development schemes approved through Block Planning Committee of which Sabhapati is the chairman and later on monitoring the implementation of those schemes.

Zilla Parishad is the third and topmost tier of the Panchayat system. The jurisdiction of the Zilla Parishad is the rural part of a whole district. Each block sends two members to Zilla Parishad. Reservation is maintained as per Panchayat rule. All the MLAs and MPs of the district are ex – officio members of Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad body is formed with the Sabhadhipati as the head, one Saha – Sabhadhipati and few Karmadhaksha from the elected Zilla Parishad members. Zilla Parishad has the responsibility of implementing various schemes with the close coordination with Panchayat Samity and Gram Panchayat.

According to 2008 Panchayat election there are 1,857 seats at the Gram panchayat level in Coochbehar. Out of these seats 1,553 candidates from various political parties

and some independent candidates also are elected as the members at the Gram Panchayat level.

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