

A Survey on the Unique & Composite Temples of Cooch Behar from (17th to 19th century)

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Abstract:

Temple in India is considered as an abode of God Almighty, a centre of reverence. The Hindu temple, in more than one sense, epitomises the numerous sides and complex processes of the cultural development of Hinduism through its architecture. The major temple styles listed and described in the “Vāstuśāstra” texts are the Nāgara, Drāvida and Vesara. All the available texts are agreed on the point that the Nāgara style was prevalent in the region between Himalayas and Vindhya. So, geographically Bengal belongs to the school of Nāgara style and Bengal temple architecture in its initial phase chiefly followed the Nāgara style though the process of the consequent development of Nāgara style can be traced through various regional schools, of which the major ones were Orissa (Kalinga style) & Central India (Mahoba style). But from the 17th Century, the history of Indian temple architecture witnessed the beginning of a distinct Bengal school which consisted of a series of parallel unique temple styles by which Bengal hold an important status in the architectural atlas in India. From the 17th to 19th Centuries Bengal may be categorised as a province that behold several innovative architectural styles. In this connection a noticeable point may also be noted here that though Cooch Behar is a part of Bengal, stylistically this part also shows its architectural uniqueness by consuming and admixing various local and also general attributes. By undertaking field survey at Cooch Behar district the author tried to trace these distinguishable features of these temples.

Keywords: Regionalism, Pluralism, Hybridism, Composite, Amalgamation.

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Early Temple Styles:**“Architecture is the matrix of civilization”**-Lethabyⁱ

The Practice of erecting sanctuaries probably goes back to the Pre Christian era apparently built in perishable materials (for example-the stone dolmen). Those stone dolmens which first appeared in the megalithic period were undoubtedly regarded as the earliest prototype of the flat roofed temples in India.ⁱⁱ

The Gupta period marks the beginning of structural temple architecture. As evident from the extant monuments, there was experimentation in a number of forms and designs, out of which two significance temple styles evolved, one in the north and the other in the south. The following well defined types may be identified: 1) flat roofed, square temple with a shallow pillared porch in the front. 2) Flat roofed, square temple with covered ambulatory around the sanctum and proceeded by pillared porch, sometimes with a second storey above. 3) Square temple with a low and squat *Śikhara* (Tower) above. 4) Rectangular temple with an apsidal back and a barrel vaulted roof above and 5) circular temple with Shallow rectangular projections at the four cardinal faces.ⁱⁱⁱ

The second and the third type of Gupta temple is to be called “*Vimana*” (Storeyed) and “*Śikhara*” (cruciform) types. In the following centuries, these two types supposedly underwent further improvements and crystallized to form two distinctive temple styles respectively in the South and North.^{iv}

Emergence of later temple Styles (Nagara, Dravida and Vesara):

The major temple styles listed and described in the “*Vāstuśāstra*” texts are the *Nāgara*, *Drāvida* and *Vesara*. All the available texts are agreed on the point that the Nagara style was prevalent in the region between Himalayas and Vindhya. The Dravida country is well known and the texts rightly confine the Dravida style to that part of the country lying between the river Krishna and cape Kanyakumari; while the *Vesara* style is sometimes associated with the area between the Vindhya and Krishna River.^v Hardy points out that *Nāgara* and *Drāvida* should be understood as architectural languages, in the sense that

they provide a vocabulary, a range of elements and a family of forms which can be put together in different ways.^{vi}

Bengal Temple Architecture: Initial Phase:

The history of temple architecture in Bengal suitably categorized into two periods: I. 'Early Hindu' (up to the end of the 13th century) & II. 'Hindu Revival' (16th to 19th century) mainly by eminent expert in this field David J McCutcheon^{vii} and also supported by Tarapada Santra.^{viii} In the first phase Bengal temple mainly known as one of the counterpart of the *Nāgara* style. The temples in this period have mostly disappeared but from the remains of the few structures we knew that the chief style prevalent in this period is the square sanctum cella with the common north Indian *latina Śikhara*.^{ix} Bengal temples in this period were mainly built under the royal patronage of the Pala & Sena rulers (8th -12th century C.E.). Siddhesvari temple at Barakar in Burdwan can be considered as the chief example of the earliest temples belonging to this group.^x

Bengal Temple Architecture: Revival Phase with some unique features:

Temple architecture of Bengal received a new impetus in its later phase (popularly known as 'revival phase') by the emergence of unique Bengal school which comprises of a series of analogous distinct temple styles. In this phase Bengal temple differentiate itself from the mainstream North Indian *Nāgara*, style by incorporating some local and foreign attributes. The key elements which are mainly responsible for these innovative diverse stylistic trends in Bengal are regionalism, pluralism & hybridism. These elements played a very crucial role to set the background which finally helps to achieve a culminating phase of the distinct Bengal temple school. This was best illustrated by the origin of two completely new styles of temple in Bengal- I. *Hut* or *Chālā* style inspired by the secular village house made by bamboo with sloping thatched roof and II. *Ratna* or *Pinnacle* style is inspired by the Islamic architecture.^{xi} Specifically in the *Chālā* style undoubtedly we found the local architectural expressions corresponded with traditional Bengal cultural life. In addition to the regional identity from the 16th century onwards Bengal temple architecture showed its uniqueness by the successful amalgamation of two parallel different trends in a single architectural project (for instance combination of *Hut*

& *Pinnacle* styles).^{xii} From early to later phase Bengal temples can be classified on the basis of roofing structure into the following types:

1. ***Rekha*** or ***Nāgara*** or ***Latina*** type: Similar with the temples of this particular form in Orissa, the chief characteristics of this type of temples are the smooth curvilinear tower or ‘*Śikhara*’ with its finial crowned by the ‘*Āmalaka-Śīlā*’^{xiii} – which caps the tower and carries the kalasa (pitcher) on the top.^{xiv}
2. ***Pīṭhā*** or ***Phāmsana*** or Tiered type: Akin like the Jagmohan of Orissan temples, this type of temples is mainly recognised by its horizontal tiers progressively diminishing in upward direction finally capped by the ribbed ‘*Āmalaka-Śīlā*’ on its narrow beki.^{xv}
3. ***Valabhī*** or ***Khakhara deul*** type: This type of temple is generally consisted with a rectangular plan for the shrine. From *Pabhaga* to *Varandika* is similar like *Latina* shrine.

But this particular type of shrine differentiates itself from *Latina* shrine in *shikhara* and *mastaka* part which was eminent by its barrel-vaulted elongated roof on top.^{xvi}

4. ***HUT*** or ***CHĀLĀ*** type: This type of temple mainly consists with the slanting curvilinear thatched roof inspired by the thatched huts in rural Bengal. This type of temple style recognised as one of the innovative and unique temple style of Bengal.
5. ***RATNA*** or ***PINNACLE*** type: This type of temple mainly considered as the hybrid form of hut and rekha type with the installation of miniature turrets on the roof. Ratna style of temple also counted as another type of exceptional temple style of Bengal.^{xvii} Apart from these five major types of temple other minor styles of temple but unique in importance are- 6. ***DOMED*** Roofing, 7. ***SPIRED*** Roofing, 8. Flat-roofed (***DALAN/CHADNI***), 9. ***RĀSMAÑCHA***, ***DOLMAÑCHA & TULASĪMAÑCHA*** & 10. **Miscellaneous** types.^{xviii}



Siddhesvari temple at Barakar

*[Source: <https://1.bp.blogspot.com/> -retrieved on 05/08/2018 at 7 p.m.]

Cooch Behar is located in the north-eastern region of Bengal from very ancient times. Its geographical position is also very unique and interesting. Architecturally temples of this zone also demonstrated firmly its innovativeness along with fusion of different styles from late medieval times. Socio-cultural-political context & geographical condition chiefly exerted its influences on the style of temple architecture in Cooch Behar. Categorically temples of Cooch Behar are miscellaneous in nature. Before initiating a study about the distinguishable features of the temples of Cooch Behar, it is however, important to look into the contemporary socio-political status quo in understanding the background on which Cooch Behar has produced such ‘unique style’.

Geographical background of Cooch Behar:

The geographical area of modern day Cooch Behar is originally a part of the *Kāmarūpa* which recognised as the medieval nomenclature of Assam.^{xix} In *Kalikapuran* & *Yoginitantra* this terminology (*Kāmarūpa*) used many times. So, the early history of Cooch Behar actually belongs to the broader history of *Kāmarūpa* state. Ancient Kingdom of *Kāmarupa* chiefly made up by four pithas- *Ratnapitha*, *Kamapitha*, *Subarnapitha* & *Soumarpitha*. Cooch Behar belongs to *Ratnapitha*.^{xx}

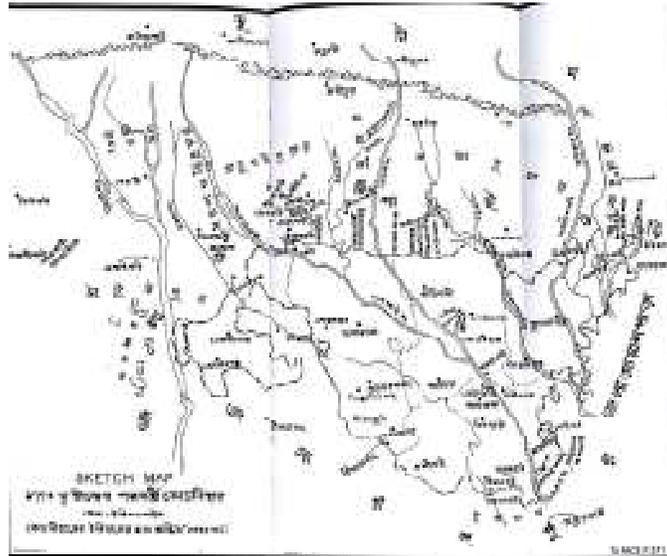


MAP: The Country of Kamarupa in the Puranas

*[Source: MAP-I- Ghosal, S.C. –*A History of Cooch Delhi*, Siliguri: N. L. Publishers, 1942]

Geographically Cooch Behar located in the North-eastern boundary line between Bengal and Assam. It lies between 25°47'40" and 26°32'20" latitude north and between 88°47'40" to 89°54'35", east longitude. This district encircled on the east by the Goalpara district of Assam and Parganas Gaibari and Bhitambar of Rangpur; on the west by the Kazirhat Pargana of Rangpur and Boda chakla of Jalpaiguri district; on the north by the western part of the Duars & on the south again bounded by the Parganas of Rangpur. Several rivers like Gadadhar and Sankosh in the east; Jaldhaka and Kaljani in the north & Dharla in the south constitute the natural boundary line for an extensive area. The natural area of this state cum district is near about 1,307 square miles (with its detached areas which popularly called as “*Chhits*”) which is approximately half of the size of Sikkim State.^{xxi} Undoubtedly on geographical point of view Cooch Behar is situated in very remote and peripheral part of Bengal. This part has many tracts of jungle mostly heavy grass and alluvial formation of soil with sandy and loose in nature which are to be seen for the most part in the north east corner of India and very few compact villages in comparison with southern part of Bengal.^{xxii} The prolonged distance of Cooch Behar from the south-western part of Bengal (especially Bankura, Bishnupur, Birbhum, Burdwan etc.) which can be considered as the place of ‘temple-hub’ in Bengal and the

comparative nearness with the adjoining state of Assam probably played a very important part for shaping the architectural form in Cooch Behar.



MAP: The Kingdom of Cooch Behar-17th Century

*[Source: MAP-IV- Ghosal, S.C. –*A History of Cooch* Delhi, Siliguri: N. L. Publishers, 1942]

Socio-Cultural-Political Context of Cooch Behar:

The history of the modern day district is well connected with the *Prāgjyotisha* (ancient terminology) or *Kāmarūpa* (medieval terminology) as because almost the whole of its area included in this ancient kingdom. So we cannot dislocate and neglect the historical development of *Kāmarūpa* in order to perceive the socio-cultural and political background of Cooch Behar. We have found the earliest references of *Kāmarūpa* in the two epics which indicates that it is a hilly country and stretched as far as the sea.^{xxiii} The earliest tradition regarding the history of *Kāmarūpa* is that this area was given to the infidel (*Osur*) Norok, the son of the earth by Krishna in order to serve as a guardian of the temple of Kamakhya over the region of desire (*Kāmarūpa*).^{xxiv} In the *Mahābhārata* there was a frequent mentioning of Bhagadatta, the king of *Prāgjyotisha* who had a host of Kiratas, Chinas and several other warriors that dwelt on the sea coast.^{xxv} That's why this land popularly known as *Kirāta Bhūmi* (i.e. the land of the *Kirātas* or the various ethnic and semi ethnic groups).^{xxvi} Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* informs us about the economic pursuit

and various commodities found in this region.^{xxvii} We have found another important reference i.e. the famous Allahabad *prasāsti* of Samudragupta which also mentions *Kāmarūpa* as a peripheral kingdom of India.^{xxviii}

The first ruling dynasty on the basis of available abundant historical sources is known as the Varmans founded by the *Puṣyavarman* in the 4th century C.E which marked the historical beginning of the history of *Kāmarūpa*.^{xxix} From the Nidhanpur copper- plate inscription (610 C.E) of King *Bhāskaravarman* we have found the chronology of the kings of the Varman dynasty from *Puṣyavarman* to *Bhāskaravarman* (4th century C.E – 7th century C.E). It is very interesting to know that from the time of Bhaskaravarman (7th century C.E) there were Brahmans and Kayasthas in this region indicating the early arrival of mainstream culture in comparison with the neighboring province of Gauda.^{xxx} After the demise of *Bhāskaravarman* (650 C.E) ‘by an adverse turn of fate’ the kingdom was taken by ‘a great chief of the Mlechchhas’ *Sālastambha*.^{xxxi} The word ‘mlechha’ undoubtedly indicates a semi ethnic group of people. A tribe of those people is still known by the name ‘Mech’ which is probably the abbreviated form of ‘mlechha’.^{xxxii} The last successor of this so called ‘mlechha’ *Sālastambha* dynasty was Tyag Singh who died childless (1000 C.E) and immediately after that in order to bring back Naraka’s race the people of this kingdom choose Brahma Pal as their new ruler. This incident actually ushered to establish the new dynasty in *Kāmarūpa* and it seems that Brhama in imitation of the Pala rulers of Magadha and Gauda, assumed the surname Pala and that’s why this dynasty was known as ‘Pala Dynasty’ of *Kāmarūpa*.^{xxxiii} The dynasty of the Palas came to an end towards the early part of the 12th century C.E by the annexation of *Kāmarūpa* by Rama Pal of Gauda. After that this area drops into a full state of disorder and anarchy which continued almost two and half centuries.

It is very important to know that in late medieval period the western part of *Kāmarūpa* whose western boundary was Karatoya, have formed a single kingdom named as *Kāmatā*. The process of the art and architectural movements commenced from one of the important dynasty in this area i.e. the *Khyān* or *Khen* dynasty in 15th century A.D. Before the emergence of this newly empire in *Kāmarūpa* - *Kāmatā* region, the total area in a state of full disorder and was infested by various tribes like Koch, Mech, Garo,

Kacchhari, Nepcha, Tripuri who were far away from Brahmanism and Bengali culture and language.^{xxxiv} At this critical junction of time a dynasty was established by a vigorous cowherd named Kanta Nath with the help of his Brahman master who later become his spiritual guide. This new king belonged to the Khen tribe. To what race the Khens are originated is still unknown. But most of the experts stated that they are belonged to Tibeto-Burman family of Indo-Chinese group but after ascending on the throne on the 1st half of the 15th century Kanta Nath assumed the title- **Niladhvaj**, embraced Brahmanism under the guidance of the said Brahman and made him his chief minister.^{xxxv} He also brought many Brahmans from Mithila, re-established the worship of Vedic gods with his family deity Komotesvari, the aboriginal tribal goddess in character who delighting in blood sacrifice.^{xxxvi} The development of Hinduism and Brahmanical culture also commenced positively since that time in this zone. From that period (2nd half of the 15th century) at first by the active patronage of the shortly ruled Khen rulers the extensive process of synthesize, amalgamation, unification, hybridism and composite character of temple architecture begun (example: Komotesvari temple) which finally culminates after that by the prolonged rule of Koch kings from 16th to 19th century (example: Baneswar, Sidheswari temple). The amalgamation of socio-cultural aspect in this area set the stage for the introduction and continuation of unique type of artistic movement which attract the attraction of the visitor and experts.^{xxxvii}

In addition with this from medieval period this region recognized as the centre of religious tolerance. Several religious reformers came to this area and preach their valuable religious and moral doctrines. The first notable person among these is “**Guru Goraksanatha**”, founder of the **Nathpanthi** religious sect. From the local song and popular talk in Northern Bengal, it is to be known that the birthplace of this pious man is to be near of Jalpesh in the 12th century A.D. Another two important reformers namely **Sona Ray & Rupa Ray** also visit this place before Mahomedan invasion but the actual timings of their visit is still obscure. Guru Nanak (originator of Sikh religion) Teg Bahadur (reformer of Sikh religion) also had visited **Kamarupa** in 16th and 17th century respectively. It is also stated that in the first half of the 16th century **Chaitanyadeva** (founder of the Gaudiya Vaisnavism), **Sankardeva** (initiator of Assamiya Vaisnavism)

and his two disciple **Madhavadeva** & Damodardeva had also preached the doctrines of Vaisnavism here. Apart from the various sects and sub sects of Hinduism these zone also the centre of preachers of Islam. From the 13th century onwards the preaching of Islam had begun in this area. Various notable preachers of Islam came in this place and advocate their doctrines. Among these **Torsa Pir, Pagla Pir, Ismail Gazi, Satyapir** are very important. Not only Mahomedan their moral doctrines also attracted several people of different communities of Hinduism.^{xxxviii} So from this discussion undoubtedly it is proved that this region is notable for the melting centre of various religious sects and sub sects which clearly marked by the amalgamated-composite-hybrid style of temple architecture in this region.

A Survey on the unique temples of Cooch Behar and there characteristic features:

Komotesvari Temple at Gosanimari: Cooch Behar recognized as an important Saktipitha in North Bengal. From earlier discussion it is to be known that Komotesvari is the family deity of Khen rulers. **Niladhvaj**- the founder of this dynasty first erected a temple for their family deity within the citadel area of his capital. But in 1493 C.E. during the invasion of Hussien Shah this temple was demolished. Subsequently Visvasinha-founder of the Koch Kingdom reestablished this deity and temple but again during the attack of Kalapahars and Mirzumlas, the temple and the icon was again destroyed in 1553 & 1665 C.E. respectively.^{xxxix} The present temple was constructed by the famous pious and learned Koch king **Maharaja Prannarayan** in 1665 C.E. This new temple was erected at a distance of 1.5 km. from the previous one. Present temple is encircled with well-built wall having two gateways. Western gateway is now considered as main gateway. Apart from main temple there were also small four two-storied minarets temples influenced by Islamic dome. The icons of these temples are- Vishnu, Tarakesvara Śiva, Vairabhi, Laksmi-Sarasvati and also one aniconic Śiva linga.

The main shrine is square in shape with approximate 45 feet in height and 28 feet 9 inches in length and width. It is a prominent example of Indo-Islamic architecture. The top of the temple is surmounted by half cut dome which resembles like Islamic mosque. The shape of the *bāḍa* part of the temple appears like bent bamboo including haunches, artificial doorway and window. The main revered object in the sanctum-sanctorum of this

temple is the aniconic amulet which represents Devi Komotesvari but the icon was stolen in 1964.^{x1} However, this temple is a perfect example of the unique temple architecture of Cooch Behar and also oldest in comparison to other temples of Cooch Behar district.



Komoteswori Temple at Gosanimari (Photograph taken by the Author himself)

Bhitarkuthi Terracotta Śiva Temple: Patronage for the construction of the Cooch Behar temples came from two sources. - I. from royal authorities & II. with personal initiative. The construction of Bhitarkuthi terracotta Śiva temple belongs to 2nd category. This temple was built by Gourinandan Mustafi approximately in 1720-1735 C.E., who was worked as a “Khasnobis” under Cooch King Maharaja Upendranarayan (1714-1763 A.D.) & later as a “Prodhan Karbari” (i.e. Prime Minister) under Maharaja Devendranarayan (1763-1765 A.D.). The temple is approximately 30 feet in height and there is an amalgamation of Bengali traditional *Charchālā* style surmounted by Islamic dome with unique octagonal projection. This temple is a finest representation of Indo-Saracenic architecture as because the shape and structure of the dome is very unique and

also considered as a sole representative in this periphery. A *Śiva linga* was also installed in this temple by Gourinandan Mustafi himself.^{xii} Another unique feature of this temple is its unique 93 quadrangular terracotta plaques which depict the relief sculptural panel of Brahmanical gods and goddesses. In these terracotta plaques the influence of religious, legendary and also folk elements are quite prominent. By the calamitous earthquake in 1897 the four-cornered decorative pillars on the top of the *Charchālā* roof (3 feet in height), broke into pieces and the temple also fell down to 8 feet. Since 1949 (after Cooch Behar merged with India) this temple actually became an enclave of Bangladesh. But after the famous “India-Bangladesh enclave agreement” in 2015 this temple is now a part of India.^{xiii}



Bhitarkuthi Terracotta *Śiva* Temple (Photograph taken by the Author himself)

Banesvar *Śiva* Temple: One of the most important *Śiva* temples in Cooch Behar district on the basis of popularity is the Banesvar *Śiva* temple, located 10 km away from Cooch Behar town in the middle of Cooch Behar-Alipurduar high road at Banesvar Village. The name of the provenance is also Banesvar, christened after the name of the sacred temple at the site. From the account of Khan Chowdhury Amanatulla Ahmed it is to be known that the famous Puranic giant *Banasur* installed the *Śiva linga* by his name and Khen king Nilambar erected this temple. *Kalikapurana*, *Yoginitantra* and *Lingapurana* also mentioned the name of Banesvar *Śiva*.^{xliii} But according to H.N. Chowdhury, the present temple of Banesvar was built by Koch King Maharaja Pran Narayan (1625-1665 C.E.) approximately in 1665 C.E.^{xliiv} The present temple has been renovated from time to time.

The disastrous earthquake in 1897 heavily affected this temple and its dome has been cracked at this time. The wall and floor of this temple including the sacred *linga* is now leaned towards east.^{xlv}

The present temple is square in shape (both inside and outside) and the west faces a well-planned entrance doorway. The top of the temple is surmounted by a half cut egg shaped dome which is approximately 40 feet in height. Its base has Brahmanical elements like *amalaka*, *kalsha* and *trisula*. The length and width of this temple are equal - 31.5 feet with 8 feet thickness of the walls and height is approximately 35 feet. On the outside below the dome of the temple, its cornice has uncanny resemblance with of a bent bamboo.^{xlvi} There is a tank to the south of the main shrine excavated by the King Pran Narayan which is popularly known as Mohandighi. The tank is the habitat of tortoise known as ‘Mohan’, as named by population. The sanctum-sanctorum, which thrust about 10 fit below the ground level, houses an aniconic *Śiva linga* (made of black basalt rock) with *gouripatta* as the principal object of worship. Apart from main aniconic *Śiva linga* there are also the icons of Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Ganga, Yamuna, Ardhanarisvara and these are in active worship. However, undoubtedly the architectural style of this temple bears the testimony to its uniqueness and composite features.



Baneswar *Śiva* Temple (Photograph taken by the Author himself)

Devi Siddheswari Temple: This temple is considered as one of the Saktipitha in Cooch Behar. It is very near from the famous Baneswar *Śiva* temple, near about 3 km in south-east direction. The village adjoining the temple is also known as Siddheswari. According to H.N. Chowdhury, this place is recognised to be a significant “Pitha-sthan” and second

in position after the famous temple of Kamakhshya.^{xlvii} We found the reference to the Devi Siddheswari in Kalikapurana where the goddess has been considered as a counter part of Jalpeswar *Śiva* and both formed the age-old concept of *Purusha-Prakriti*.^{xlviii} Chaudhuri also stated that this temple was built by Maharaja Pran Narayan during same time when Baneswar *Śiva* temple was renovated by the Koch King.^{xlix}

The temple is about 32 ft in height with concrete floor in front having a height of about 2.5 ft. The temple with its unique octagonal wall is surmounted by a half cut Islamic dome. The latter is capped by ribbed *amalaka*, *kalsha* and *trisula*. This temple is devoid of *beki* as the octagonal walls of the temple make a convenient base for the dome to rest. This temple is a sole representative of its type in this district and also in the total region of Northern part of Bengal with its exclusive innovative architectural features like Octagonal projection of wall, Circular Monumental typed pillars (this type of pillars are very unique in this part as because those type of pillars has been noticed in various churches and monuments of India in the primary stage of British rule) etc.¹ The sanctum sanctorum of this temple is 5 feet below from the ground level and the main object of worship is the Octo-alloy icon of Bhagavati with the aniconic stone *gouripatta*.



Devi Siddheswari Temple (Photograph taken by the Author himself)

Harihara *Śiva* Temple at Haripur: This temple is located in Haripur village which is 10 km away from Cooch Behar town and 1.5 km away from the adjacent famous Madhupurdham Temple. This temple is west-facing and is made of bricks.

Architecturally this temple shows its uniqueness for its *chālā* type but surmounted by diminishing pyramidal roof instead of domed roof.^{li} The present height of this temple is approximately 16 fit and the thickness of the wall is 5 ft. The sanctum sanctorum of this temple thrust 8 fit down the ground level. The terrible earthquake in 1897 has also heavily affected this temple and as a result, it subsided about 8 ft in ground and became slightly recumbent.^{lii} The *linga* installed in the sanctum (*garbhagriha*) popularly known as *Harihara Śiva* and this aniconic object is the prime object of veneration.

Though Saktism was the state religion in Cooch Behar but during the reign of Koch King Nara Narayan (1555-1587 C.E) Vaishnavism was rapidly developed and gained popularity by the influence of Sankar Deva.^{liii} He at first tried to propagate his views in Ahom kingdom but due to the enmity of Brahmans and Ahom King who were the ardent followers of Sakti cult, finally forced him to leave his native land and went to the Barpeta where under the generous rule of Nara Narayan he broadcasted his new faith.^{liv} The name *Harihara* clearly signifies religious and cult synthesis and fusion in Cooch Behar under the benevolent Koch Kings.^{lv} It is a much debatable issue that the patronized this magnificent temple. Some experts opined that it was built by Maharaja Upendra Narayan (1714-1763 C.E). But on another opinion, the present temple was erected by Maharaja Dhairyendra Narayan (1765-1770 C.E).^{lvi} However, this temple also exhibits an important example of the architectural uniqueness in this region.



Harihara *Śiva* Temple at Haripur (Photograph taken by the Author himself)

Rajmata Temple: This temple is located on Raj Rajendra Narayan Road on the southern bank of another important lake in Cooch Behar Town, popularly known as “Rajmata Dighi”. This temple is south facing with a triple multi foil arched doorway. Architecturally this temple is exclusive in comparison to Anathnath and Hiranyagarbha *Śiva* temples. It is the first representative of flat-roofed (*DALAN/CHADNI*) typed temple in this zone surmounted by Islamic half cut egg shaped domed roof. The latter is elongated by lotus, *amalakasila* and *kalasa*. The “*Radhabinod/Radharaman*” icon is the main object of worship in this shrine. The founder of this temple was **Dangor Iye Kameswari Devi**- the chief queen (**Dangor = chief; Iye = queen**) of Koch King Maharaja Shibendra Narayan (1839-1847 C.E.).^{lvii} Under her direct supervision this unique masterpiece was raised in the last quarter of 19th century.



Rajmata Temple (Photograph taken by the Author himself)

Madanmohan Temple: The last but most popular temple in Cooch Behar is the Madanmohan temple which is situated on the northern bank of another famous lake “Boiragi Dighi” in the heart of Cooch Behar town. Madanmohan is the family deity of the Koch Kings. This temple was erected by the Koch King Maharaja Nripendra Narayan in 1889 C.E.^{lviii} The main shrine is encircled by a high wall and the south facing entrance gateway surmounted by a “*Nahabatkhana*”. Architecturally the main shrine is very unique because primarily it looks like a fusion of traditional Bengali *Charchālā* type

surmounting by Islamic domed roofing in peak. However, an influence of flat-roofed (**DALAN/CHADNI**) style made this temple quite unique in nature. The peak of this temple is elongated by *lotus*, *amalakasila* and *kalasa*. Two Madanmohan (Popularly known as **Bara & Choto Madanmohan**) icons made of Octo-alloy are the principal object of worship along with subsidiary *Katyani*, *Joytara*, *Mangalchandi* icons. There is also an important shrine in the temple compound apart from main temple. This south facing shrine is located on the eastern side of the main shrine and popularly known as **Bhabani Temple**. The height of this shrine is 28 ft approximately and it is also an example of the amalgamation of *Charchālā* type which is intermixed with Islamic domed roofing. Red coloured **Bhabani Devi** (1'6" in height) is the prime revered icon in this shrine. According to popular belief it is an iconic representation of Devi Komoteswori^{lix} - the most ancient goddess in this region.

Conclusion

So from the above all discussion it is clearly recognised that from the initial phase of the architectural history of Cooch Behar this peripheral part of Bengal is distinguished by the amalgamation of different traditional styles which ultimately paved the way for the introduction of distinct and composite typed temple architecture in this area. The general architectural features of most of the temples in this area were *Charchālā* type intermixing with Islamic art and structural decoration like the introduction of latticed window, *Mihrab* (i.e. semi-circular niche), hemispherical dome, haunches, arches etc. Not only two types but in one case we have found the intermixing of three different styles (*chālā*, *dalan* and also Islamic structural pattern) on in one architectural project of Cooch Behar which is a quite fascinating fact. Some key elements like regionalism, pluralism & hybridism are very much responsible for this unique and blended stylistic development in this periphery. In this context an important architectural feature also to be mentioned must. Professor Bagchi draws our attention by mentioning this noticeable feature i.e. the location of *garbhagrha* in some of the *Śiva* temples of Cooch Behar (like Banasvar and Harihara) are constructed underground. According to her it symbolizes the mother's womb and a devotee is resurrected to a new life after the visit to the divinity in the *garbhagrha* of these temples.^{lx} The architecture of Cooch Behar has also influenced the

adjoining Ahom architecture to such extent that this form of architecture popularly known as 'Nīlāchala' type in this area as because this type of architecture was experimented for the first time in the reconstruction of *Kāmākhyā* temple (1565 C.E).^{lxi} However, after discussing and considering all these facts certainly it can be said that the temple architecture of Cooch Behar did contribute impressively for the versatility & enrichment of Bengal & Indian temple architecture.

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