

E P I L O G U E

I

In the previous Chapters an attempt has been made to survey the origin and development of British Relations with Cooch Behar state which ends with the death of Harendra Narayan. We find that after the demise of this ruler (1839), no drastic measures were taken by the British Government towards this state. Cooch Behar remained as it was during the time of Harendra Narayan. If we look to the British policy and motives towards the other princely states of India during this period, it is really surprising on their part to follow such a policy towards Cooch Behar.

It is noticeable that by the 1840's most of the major states of India had found themselves deeply in trouble with the British suzerains. Mysore was taken under direct British rule in 1831, Coorg was annexed in 1834, Mandavi in 1839, Kolaba in 1840 and Surat in 1842. Jhansi was taken under direct British rule in the 1830's and restored to a new ruler in 1842. In Gawalior, the army of 40,000 rose in revolt during a minority and had to be engaged and defeated by company's troops in 1843. Oudh, Hyderabad, Travancore, Baroda and Indore were all badly managed and in grave disfavour in the 1840's. ⁽¹⁾ British Government, according to Lee Warner, viewed annexation as the only solution for aggravated misrule. ⁽²⁾ in the state.

1. Warner, Lee, Protected Princes of India - p. 145.

2. Ibid., p. 144.

Naturally, question may be arises why Cooch Behar got a respite from this aggravated policy of the British.

One possible hypothesis is that after 1839, Cooch Behar became a friendly state to the British Government. Harendra Narayan was the last ruler of Cooch Behar to oppose the British. His successor Shivendra Narayan, before his accession, had a pro-British attitude. He, in fear of his future problem of succession, surrendered to the British Government. ⁽³⁾ Shivendra Narayan, was also the secret choice of the British as the future ruler of Cooch Behar. ⁽⁴⁾ Naturally there was no need to follow any stern policy towards Cooch Behar and also of no question of annexation.

British contact with Cooch Behar started from the year 1773. The interests of trade was the predominant factor to the trading company during this time which make it involved in Cooch Behar's affairs. But in course of time the character and policy of the company changed. By the **Charter Act of 1813**, the company lost the monopoly of Indian trade and the Charter Act of 1833 took away company's monopoly on China trade. It converted the trading company into an administrative body. The interests of trade lost its priority and political involvements got the upperhand. The policy of expansionism started and one after another the Indian states came under the control of the company. As

3. For. Pol. Cons., March, 25, 1834, No. 65.

4. C.B.S.R. Vol. II, pp. 45-46, Govt. to Scott.

there was no problem from Cooch Behar's side, the Government did not want to take any drastic step towards her.

Cooch Behar accepted British overlordship of its own, though in its internal administration the authority of the ruler was unimpaired. But this legal position was drastically changed after the Revolt of 1857 by the Queen's Proclamation, This was a general policy towards India. The title of "Maharaja" was the traditional and hereditary title of the rulers of Cooch Behar. But in the year 1862, the granting of Sunnad conferring on the Raja of Cooch Behar the title of "Maharaja Bahadur" wiped away that traditional rights. The grip over Cooch Behar was thus tightened by the British Government. The result was that the lord of the land was converted to landlord.

IT

The other aspect of our present study is the effects of British contact on Cooch Behar. It may be said that Historical periods, in spite of some distinct features of each, are but one continuous process. To understand and evaluate the impact of British relationship with Cooch Behar it will be worthwhile to devote some pages about the state of Cooch Behar after the demise of Harendra Narayan, as these shows how British connection brought Cooch Behar to the threshold of modern age. The period of transition...

As regard to the history of Cooch Behar after the death of Harendra Narayan (1839) and the beginning of modern period (1863), it may be said that the end of medieval period always does not corroborate the beginnings of modern period. Historians very much likes to describe this gap period as a period of transition. If we critically survey the politico-socio-economic atmosphere of Cooch Behar, we can appropriately called this period as transition period. This is the impression which I wanted to convey.

The rule of Maharaja Shivendra Narayan (1839-47)

marked a departure from that of his father. He devoted his attention to the internal administration of the state which was ignored for several years. A perceptible changes could be noticed in every sphere of administration. ^{process of modernisation started which reached its culmination} * The Maharaja established a ^{(5) time of} Dharma Sava for the discussion of the affairs of the state. ^{Maharaja Nripendra Narayan} Before him this type of practice was totally absent in the history of the state. Some of the oppressive taxes, such as Ban Kar etc. were abolished. Some changes were made in the court of justice. Kalibharan Lahiri was made the session Judge and other criminal works were made over to Kumar Mahendra Narayan.

Shivendra Narayan died at Beneras on 23rd August, 1847. As he had no male issue, he adopted, with the sanction of the Governor General, Kumar Chandra Narayan who was named Narendra Narayan.

Shivendra Narayan, before his death, had expressed a wish that the British Government should undertake the supervision of his son's education. This was unusual in the history of the state. No ruler of Cooch Behar before Narendra Narayan, obtained English education. So it must be said that from the death of Narendra Narayan a new era started in the history of Cooch Behar with full modern outlook. The age-old traditional pattern was about to change and a modern outlook was visible according to

5. Chaudhury, H. N., op.cit., p. 279.

Majumdar, Durgadas - W.B. Dist. Gazetteers - p. 39.

British model. During the minority period of Narendra Narayan the affairs of the state were managed by the Regents,⁽⁶⁾ but all political affairs came within the jurisdiction of Bengal Government.⁽⁷⁾ "All questions of an important political bearing were referred to the supreme Government."⁽⁸⁾

The British Government got an opportunity to introduce some reforms in the administration of the state. The judiciary was reformed and through it the subjects of the state associated largely with the administration. The officers were specially appointed to conduct the cases of criminal, civil and land-revenue. The Raj Sabha was there which was nominally presided over by the Maharaja. He was assisted by the Diwan. The post of Nazir Dev and Dewan Dev were abolished. The Raj Sabha⁽⁹⁾ was considered as the Supreme Court in all criminal matters. The practice of Suttee or the Custom of Sahamara was prohibited in 1849.⁽¹⁰⁾ The character of the administration began to change under the guidance of the British Commissioners. "The feudal character of the administration gradually changed into constitutional character."⁽¹¹⁾

6. During his minority first his natural father Bajrendra Narayan, and after his death 1857, his adoptive mothers Maharani Kameswari and Bindeswari managed the affairs of the state as regents.

7. Majumdar, Durgadas, op.cit., p. 39

8. Choudhury, H.N. - op.cit. p. 283.

9. Majumdar, Durgadas, op.cit., p. 135.

10. Choudhury, H. N. - op.cit.

11. Das, Kamallesh & Ghosh, Ananda Gopal - The Historical Review - Vol. II, July - December, 1987.

Maharaja Narendra Narayan died in 1863. He was succeeded by his minor son Nripendra Narayan, who was the next ruler of Cooch Behar. ⁽¹²⁾ As he was a minor, the three Maharanis were appointed as joint Regent of the state. But this was set aside by the Government. The government assumed charge of the administration of Cooch Behar and placed it under the management of the British Commissioners. Colonel J. C. Houghton, Governor General's Agent, ⁽¹³⁾ North East Frontier, was deputed to Cooch Behar as Commissioner-in-Charge of the administration. The Government took such a step "as the only means of effectually providing for the care and education of the young Maharaja, for the security of the tribute, and for the defence of the Bhutan frontier, for which the Government was responsible." ⁽¹⁴⁾ Thus, the direct supervision in the administration by the British Commissioner was established. [The dream of Narendra Narayan of protecting the royal 'dignity and honour' was at an end and modern period started in the history of Cooch Behar.] *Omit*

Col. Houghton brought to the state's development and prosperity. The modernisation of administration began in spite of the stiff opposition from the local elites. In his attempt, the Commissioner was assisted by Rai Calica Das Dutta, who was a

12. Choudhury, H. N. - op.cit. p. 287.

13. Ibid.

14. C.B.S.R. - Vol. 1, p. 275.

prominent figure in administration. There was a remarkable change in respect of land Revenue ⁽¹⁵⁾ and Judicial administration.

The reign of Nripendra Narayan can be regarded as the period of modernisation in the history of Cooch Behar. ⁽¹⁶⁾ He devoted personal attention in every branches of administration. ⁽¹⁷⁾ For administrative convenience the whole of the administration was re-organised. A Council was established to assist the Maharaja in governing the state.. It was a nominated body consisted of three members with the Maharaja as the President. The other members were the Superintendent of the state, the Dewan and a judicial officer. The three members were inter-dependent in any matter and they had the responsibility to watch over the smooth working of the Council. ⁽¹⁸⁾ In 1891 the Maharaja introduced certain reforms in administration and modified the memorandum of the Council of 1883. ⁽¹⁹⁾ The function of the Council was three fold : - **Legislative, Executive and Judiciary.** On the legislative side the Council passed laws. The Executive regulated the management of the different departments. In judicial matters the Council was the highest court of appeal, having final jurisdiction in civil, criminal and Revenue suits and proceedings. The Council was authorised to frame rules and regulations for the management of the judicial side. ⁽²⁰⁾

15. Campbel, Ibid., p. 299.

16. Meredith, Borthwick - Kesab Chandra Sen, p. 138.

17. Times, Sept. 19th, 1911.

18. Choudhury, H. N. - op. cit., p. 290.

19. Ibid., p. 291.

20. Ibid., pp. 301-302.

The establishment of state legislative Council in 1909 following the Morley Minto Reforms was a further step towards the modernisation of Cooch Behar state. It was a rare move and only two other Indian states, namely Mysore and Cochin had similar arrangements. (21) It was a nominated body but it represents the different sections of the society. Thus the western impact over the state was more and more visible. There was a qualitative difference between the state of Cooch Behar before and after the accession of Nripendra Narayan. (22)

The annual Revenue of the state increased to 300,000 rupees. The Maharaja regularised the administration, established the first railway link with Bengal. (23) There was a remarkable improvement in communication system with the construction of innumerable roads and bridges. (24) Planned sanitation and drainage system was introduced in the state for the first time. (25) For modern justice and administration in the country, new buildings were constructed. A large fully equipped hospital in the capital and a public dispensary were established in the state. (26)

21. From the letter of His Highness, Cooch Behar to the Chancellor Chamber of Princes, Maharaja Digbijoy Singh of Jamnagar, Council House, New Delhi, July, 28, 1893.

22. Kopf, David - The Brahma Samaj and the shaping of the modern mind - p. 328.

The marriage of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan with Sunity Debi, the eldest daughter of Brahma reformer Keshab Chandra Sen, had a great impact upon the State. Cooch Behar accepted Brahmanism to its own conditions. It was an experiment under the guidance of British officials "Ostensibly attempted to introduce modern reforms".

23.

24. Proceedings of the Cooch Behar state Council, 1892-94.

25. Kopf, David, op. cit., p. 329.

26. Ibid.

Cooch Behar's first public library was founded. (27) Public parks
and gardens, (28) a girl's school (29) college (30) and a public
market place was erected (31) Nripendra Narayan abolished polygamy
in the royal family (32) and capital punishment throughout the
kingdom (33). All these were definitely the results of the British
impact over the state.

Thus by introducing democratic pattern in the states
administration and giving his subjects the opportunity to share
in the administration, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan set an example
to other Indian Princely States to modernise their administra-
tion. (34)

-
27. Debi, S., Swargiya Kumar Gajendra Narayan, p. 26.
 28. Proceedings of the Cooch Behar state Council, 1892-94.
 29. "Sunity College Building Constructed" - Annual Administrative Report, Cooch Behar, 1889-1890, pp. 21-29.
 30. "Victoria College Opened," Ibid. 1888-1890, pp. 43-44.
 31. Hunter, W.W. - Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1886, p. 324.
 32. Debi, Sunity, Autobiography of an Indian princess, p. 78.
 33. Koch Bihar Darpan, Magh, 1935 B.S. pp. 163-64.