

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1. GENERAL OUTLINE

This work is mainly based on original records available in Cooch Behar Recrds. So far we know no one worked on the subject. This is the first of its kind. This is, therefore, an attempt for the advancement of learning in revenue administration in the regional studies, specially in a princely State like Cooch Behar.

The land revenue has been regarded as an instrument of vast social changes in the structure of rural society. It is closely connected with land tenure and the condition of agriculture. The history of land largely depends on the interaction between men and environment, and the environment is related to the topography of the land. As such, the knowledge about the topograhly always plays an important role in shaping the history of land. So it is said "the quest for said knowledge led to the introduction of land survey, which has always been related to the needs of the period"¹. The realisation prompted the State Government to introduce definite revenue policy as one of the important factors for development.

2. METHODOLOGY

We started the investigation of land revenue administration and taxation under the Maharajas of Cooch Behar from 1773 to 1949 in 1980 and collected the materials from the Council Record Room, Cooch Behar, North Bengal State Library, Cooch Behar, Palace Library, Cooch Behar (Later on the entire Library purchased by some outsiders and caused a heavy loss for future studies on Cooch Behar History). National Library, Calcutta, National Achieves, New Delhi, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, West Bengal Secretariate

Library, Calcutta, North Bengal University Library, North Bengal University, Cooch Behar College Library, Cooch Behar and records preserved by some individuals at different places.

3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In Cooch Behar, where agriculture was the principal source of the people's livelihood, where feudal and semi-feudal Land relations helped to perpetuate agricultural backwardness, where landlordism arrested the economic development in the country-side, the study of the land system and allied agrarian problems acquires a special significance.

Researches into the Cooch Behar State's Land revenue administration, Land rights and problems of Land tenure throw a flood of light on the diverse aspects of the agricultural economy of this region. The way in which the lands are held to-day, that is the existing land tenure system is, historically, the result of a gradual process of evolution which was, at different stages of the history of Cooch Behar, very materially influenced by socio-political factors. Thus the history of land revenue of Cooch Behar may broadly be divided into two periods, (a) Early period prior to British connection in 1773 and (b) Period beginning with the influence of the British since 1773.

After the connection with the British, the British engaged their immediate attention to bring about reforms in Land revenue administration of Cooch Behar and tried to place it on a new position. They were unable to attain this objective for long, a fact which substantiates the complex and profound nature of the problem. They had to work almost from nothing. Information about the land revenue administration of the State was either insufficient or wrong².

The replacement of a native Landlord by a foreigner caused the first breach in the existing land relations for now the landlordship began to pass from the class of aristocracy to a class called "Moneyocracy" in the words of Marx. Previously the king or the revenue Collector was an aristocrat whose interest was not so much in money making as in social leadership and political supremacy. In contrast, the sole aim of the State after the changed situation was to collect the largest amount of money in the quickest possible time just to pay the fixed tributes to the British and for meeting their own expenditures. So automatically very little care had been taken for the improvement and development of the State and its people.

What could possibly be the British motive behind the introduction of different measures for improvement of revenue administration ?

The modern apologists of the British rule, offer the explanation that the whole settlement was an innocent mistake, made through simple ignorance of the fact that the Zamindars or Jotedars were not owners of land. This fairy tale is a plain nonsense. The authorities were fully conscious that they were creating a new class of landlords and, also of their purpose in doing it. A. T. Embree is of the opinion that Lord Cornwallis introduced the Zamindari system because of his "prejudices in favour of the land owning classes to which he himself belonged"³.

A definite motive was to stabilise the hitherto uncertain and fluctuating income. With the introduction of new measures the State was assured of a certain minimum, whatever be the conditions of Production.

The most important aim was to create a class of rich and powerful landlords who from motives of self-interest, would be deeply interested in the

continuance of the State and would support the State in every hour of trial. In fact, as the preamble to Regulation 11 of 1773 stated, a landlord who was secure "in the quite enjoyment of a profitable estate could have no motive for wishing for a change. On the contrary, if the rents of his lands were raised..... he will readily listen to any of offers which are likely to bring about a change⁴. The revenue collectors, who overnight became landlords clearly understood that if they were to exist as a class, it was their duty to strengthen the hands of the State⁵.

By interfering in the affairs of Cooch Behar State the East India Company wanted to secure the Northern Boundary which was hitherto confined to Rangpur. It may also be pointed out that the Maharajas were at this time knocking at the door of the British. The rise of the Marathas have become a great menace to the security of the Company's possession and the company was also busy to fortify their North Western frontier. At the same time the disturbance in Cooch Behar posed a great menace to the Company's possession in the North. This consideration also led Hastings to involve in the affairs of Cooch Behar⁶.

By the treaty Cooch Behar became a feudatory State and agreed to pay annually half of the revenue to the English East India Company⁷.

Six hundred and thirty five Princes rule two-fifths of India and a quarter of its population. Many are absolute monarchs linked only by treaty with the British Crown. Among these only seventy three of the Princes are entitled to salutes of more than eleven guns and to the prefix of Highness⁸.

The characters of the States are their treaties, made with the East India Company and the British Government. In the case of a hundred and

seventy five major principalities the suzerainty of the King Emperor can only be exercised through the Viceroy. With the five hundred smaller States varying degrees of control are vested in Provincial Governments.

It is, therefore, impossible to class all the States under one heading. There can be no common ground between small chieftainships covering a handful of square miles, and sovereign principalities such as Hyderabad, Gwalior, Mysore or Travancore, whose rulers are legally entitled to "unrestrained powers" of life and death over their subjects, who maintain their own armies, who makes and enforces their own laws⁹.

The Indian States were divided into three categories. First would come those which enjoy complete legislative and administrative independence within their own borders, whose laws are supreme, even to the Privy Council. In the second rank would come the principalities who, with partial executive independence, exercise their legislative powers as well as Criminal and Civil jurisdiction under British supervision. In the last category there would be the preponderating mass of small States who have no treaty rights and no legislative independence. Their positions were established by grants or (Sanads) and they should be differentiated from the other two classes of States, whose rulers are entitled to salutes varying from nine to twenty one guns.

The Cooch Behar State belongs to the second category of Princely States in India. The States of the Indian Principalities within the Empire has been more clearly defined than their position with regard to each other, for it has been laid down, by King's proclamation, that they must be consulted by the Viceroy in matters which concern their territories "jointly with British India or with the rest of the Empire".

The exclusion from the chamber of Princes in Delhi of all but twelve representatives of the States whose rulers are entitled to less than eleven gun salutes, may hasten a satisfactory demarcation. For there has been too much confusion between full-powered principalities and fiefs held under a grant from the paramount power¹⁰.

The treaty of Cooch Behar (1773) is not one of alliance, but is an admission of subjection, though the extent to which the sovereignty of that "State" may be held to have lapsed is a question not finally solved for long. The treaty with Bhutan was one of peace, whatever be the position of Bhutan, it is not that of an ordinary Indian State¹¹.

Many States of India have gone ahead and many are going for radical changes in land revenue administration, for that it is an important way for economic growth and social emancipation. It has been correctly said by R. C. Dutta that the history of the land revenue administration in India is of the deepest interest, because it is intimately connected with the material well being of an agricultural nation¹². It is with special emphasis on this that an attempt has been made in this thesis on land revenue administration in Cooch Behar during the period of Maharajas (i.e. on and from 1773 to 1949), to throw some light on the background on the present problems in the field. However, one of the main purposes of this thesis is to discuss the nature of feudalism prevailed in Cooch Behar State and the reasons for stagnation of the system in this princely state.

4. OVER VIEW OF LITERATURE

Many modern historians rightly emphasised the pressing need of the study of the princely States of India. So far a very little works have been

made by the researchers in this field. Under the patronage of the then Maharajas of Cooch Behar there were few books written and published which were partial in character and conventional in nature. For example :-

[1] "Rajopakhyan" was written in Bengali prose by Munshi Jynath Ghosh. The date of the beginning of the writing or the date of publication of this work has not been mentioned in the work. But it is considered from circumstances that composition of this work began between 1823 to 1833 and it was finished towards the end of the reign of Maharaja Shibendra Narayan (1845).

Rev. Mr. R. Robinson, formerly the Superintendent of Education, Cooch Behar State, translated "Rajopakhyana" into English. This is printed in the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta in 1874. There are 244 pages in this work.

[2] **Major Jenkins Report 1849**

Major Frances Jenkins was the Agent to the Governor General in the North Eastern Frontier Province. The report which he wrote in 1849 regarding Sikkim, Morang and Cooch Behar was printed in Calcutta in 1851 under order of the Government. The account regarding Cooch Behar begins in page 19 and ends in page 51. The account previous to Maharaja Devendranarayan was very briefly written and that following 1772 was given in detail.

[3] **Completion of Settlement Report**

Mr. W. A. O. Beckett wrote this report. Mr. Beckett came as the Assistant Commissioner of Cooch Behar in 1871. Afterwards he was placed in charge of Settlement work and wrote this report in English in 1874. This was written regarding the final settlement of Cooch Behar and in it a short history of the State has been given.

[4] "Koch Biharer Itihas" written in Bengali by Bhagavati Charan Bandopadhyaya and printed in the State Press, Cooch Behar in 1882. This work was printed for the public. In the preface to the work, the author has mentioned that perusing the work "Kochbiharer Bibaran" written by him in Bengali, the then Dewan Rai Calica Das Dutt requested him to write a systematic history of Cooch Behar and accordingly he engaged himself in this work. After few corrections a second edition consisting of 170 pages was printed in 1884.

[5] **The Cooch Behar State and its land Revenue Settlements**

This work is generally known to the public as the Cooch Behar Settlement report. It was composed in English in 1903 by Harendra Narayan Choudhuri, the then Assistant Settlement Officer and printed in the State Press, Cooch Behar. It contains 705 pages with 40 chapters in 4 parts. The Survey and Settlement portion is in para 4 and contains from 441 to 593 pages.

[6] **The Resettlement of the town of Cooch Behar**

This work gives an account of the resettlement of Cooch Behar, the Capital of the State. This is written in English by Pramathanath Chatterjee. It was printed in the State Press, Cooch Behar at the cost of the State in 1913.

[7] **Mercer and Chauvet's Report**

At the end of the 18th century there was a quarrel between Chhatra Nazir Khagendranarayan and Rajguru Sarbananda Goswami (on behalf of the minor Maharaja Harendra Narayan) of Cooch Behar. M/s. Mercer and Chauvet, Commissioners appointed by the East India Company, enquired into the matter in 1778. This work consists of 205 pages.

[8] Cooch Behar Select Records

Two volumes in English named "Cooch Behar Select Records" were printed in the State Press. Cooch Behar, the first volume in 1882 and the second volume in 1884. The authority of the Cooch Behar State brought from the Government Duftar copies of most of the letters in English or Bengali exchanged between the King, the Commissioner, the political agent and the Government from 1777 to 1864 and had these printed. The then Dewan Rai Calica Das Dutt selected the English letters and these have been printed in two volumes in the name of "Cooch Behar Select Records". In the first volume there are 359 pages and in the second 290 pages. Many historical facts in the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century and the first half of the 19th century have been collected in these letters.

[9] The Koch Kings of Kamrupa

In 1893 Mr. E. A. Gait published an article in this name in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Vol. LXII, Part I, No. 4) and this was printed in book form in 1895 in the Shillong Secretariat Press. This work contains 35 pages. This book was compiled from works on Tantra, Purnea, local manuscripts of Vansavalis, Assam Euranjees and works of Mohomedan Historians. The whole account of his work has subsequently been included in the fourth Chapter of the History of Assam and this chapter contains 22 pages. (Published in 1906). The author while writing this portion of the History of Assam specially dependd on the manuscript of the Durrang Vansavali.

[10] A History of Cooch Behar

This is an English translation of the Bengali work "Koch Biharer Itihas" by Khan Choudhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, translated by Sarat Chandra

Ghoshal. This book contains 689 pages and was published from the State Press, Cooch Behar in 1942.

[11] **Princely Cooch Bhar : A Documentary Study on letters (1790-1836 A.D.)**, written jointly by Biswanath Das and Subhendu Mazumder, published from Calcutta in 1990. Besides Introductory Chapters along with a short history of Cooch Behar this work contains 40 letters (most of them are from "Cooch Behar Select Records", and contains 112 pages.

In recent times a few attempt has been made to study the regional Economic history in general and in particular the Princely States of India. We like to mention a few of them, such as, (1) Economic History of Hyderabad State (warangal suba : 1911 - 1950) by V. Ramakrishna Reddy, (2) Hyderabad in Transition under Salar Jung 1, 1853 - 1883 : An Indian State under British Influence by V. K. Bawa, (3) The History of a Himalayan Princely State by Atul Saklani, (4) Rajahs and Projas : An Indian Princely State - then and now, by Debdas Pillai, (5) British Crown and Indian States, compiled by Chamber of Princes, (6) British Policy and Administration in Bengal, by Richard Paul Croniu, (7) Revenue Administratin in Assam by D.D.Mali, (8) Aspects of Revenue Administration in Assam by Shrutidev Goswami, (9) Land problems and Land Reforms in Assam by Narendra Chandra Dutt, (10) Land Revenue Administration in Orissa :During the nineteenth century by Krishna Chandra Jana. All these studies concentrated other than the particular region we have selected for investigation. As regards the Economic History of the North Eastern Princely State - Cooch Behar is concerned there is no such work that has been made till now by any scholar.

5. CHAPTER SCHEME

In this present study we have made Chapter scheme in the following manner :-

In the first chapter, we have explained the reasons for selection of the area of investigation and a general Introduction of the problem. In the next chapter we introduce the research area with the land and its people. In this chapter we discussed in brief the long history of Cooch Behar State. In Chapter 3, we discussed agricultural economy of the State ; and in the next chapter we have discussed the Economic condition of Cooch Behar during the period of study. In the subsequent chapters 5,6, 7 and 8 we have discussed different surveys and settlements made during the period of our study. In Chapter 9, we have discussed the survey and settlement of the Town Cooch Behar which is the capital of the State. In the next chapter we examined the position of 'Krishiproja' in Cooch Behar State. Chapter 11, examines the land tenure in Cooch Behar and the position of tenants at that time. In Chapter 12, an attempt has been made to examine the sources of revenue and taxation in Cooch Behar. Chapter 13 examines the effects of different surveys and settlements made during the period of our study and lastly we tried to draw a conclusion of the entire analysis made in earlier chapters.

6. SCOPE OF THE THESIS AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

In the discussion about the term of Settlements the authorities considered the various aspects from theoretical and practical stand point. It was taken from Adam Smith's argument that a period such as thirty years, so would be advantageous for agricultural improvement. That would also balance the vagaries of natural calamities and currency depreciation. The tax burden would be balanced and the impact distributed¹³.

On the beginning of this study on the Land Revenue Administration, we should naturally first know what was the nature of the contribution to the State income, known as the Land Revenue ?

It is a historical fact that from very ancient times, long before the Mughal Empire, the Kings or Rajas and other lessor chiefs were accustomed to take from the cultivators of the soil in their dominions or chiefships, a certain share of the produce of every cultivated area, unless as a special favour, that share was remitted¹⁴.

In Bengal (and the same is true of other parts when the districts came under the British rule) the land Revenue had for generations past been levied in cash payments, its assessment (often by contract for the year) was determined on no known principle¹⁵.

The first requirement of a good taxation is that the people should be accustomed to it, and that it should be collected with the minimum chance for oppression on the one hand and for evasion on the other¹⁶.

After the connection with the British, the British Administrators observed that while securing the State revenue, they must also secure private landed rights, if wealth and prosperity were ever to return to the agricultural population. Under previous system, there had been no such thing as legal security for titles to land ; specially not for interests that had been partially submerged or reduced to a secondary grade. There was nothing but the autocratic Government, whose will was law, but not very definite law and largely influenced by the great regulator of Indian affairs - CUSTOM.

The situation of the Indian States is unique in history and no known relationship provides to solve the problems they present. The analogy with a federation of independent States is not complete ; the analogy with the subject provinces of an Empire is not complete, and international law is of hardly any

assistance at all¹⁷. This is equally applicable in the case of Cooch Behar State.

Economic and fiscal relationships are partly a question of fact and partly of law. It is necessary to ascertain and record what payments are in fact made by one side to other and what are the services rendered in return, and what are the agreements or claims made by one side with or against the other¹⁸.

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in the study of regional history in India and several books were written on different aspects by scholars. Adequate attention has, however, not been paid to the economic history of Cooch Behar State in general and revenue administration in particular. Harendra Narayan Choudhury's remarkable work "The Cooch Behar State and its land revenue Settlement" published in the year 1903 dealt with the land revenue and other aspects of revenue administration in detail along with others. In that book there are only 7 Chapters in Part IV of the book which, though a notable work serves little purpose for a complete study of the revenue system of the princely State Cooch Behar. Most of the books written during the periods of Maharajas got support from the State and naturally they are partial in character and conventional in nature and Harendra Narayan Choudhuri is not an exception to it.

The period selected for this study is a significant one in the history of revenue administration. It begins with the connection with the British in 1773 and continues upto 1949 i.e. with the merger of Cooch Behar State with the Indian Union. We ~~hoped~~, the results and findings of this study will not only fill up the existing gap but also provide the necessary background for further investigation on the subject.

The British adopted the revenue administration of the Cooch Behar State though it was not without defects. Experience taught them not to make any sweeping change immediately. The changes introduced in the revenue administration in Cooch Behar were not sudden, but gradual and took place at different parganas.

The tradition belonging to the north Indian Kings that all lands were of the Crown, was also applicable in case of the Cooch Behar Kings¹⁹. Not only this right was acknowledged over cultivated or waste lands, but also the King exercised his possession over all woods, forests, ferries, mines etc. After the death of Dhairyendra Narayan, a question arose on the ownership of lands and its share among the King, the Nazir and Dewan of the Cooch Behar State. Khagendranarayan, the Nazir Deo submitted a representation to the minor Maharaja Harendra Narayan. The Maharani who had to manage the affairs during the minority of the Raja answered, " the Maharaja holds the Divine rights and he is the sovereign of his own country. There are no partners who share it with him, (the Maharaja)²⁰ .

It has also been suggested that "the Raja of Cooch Behar is the owner of the soil, and stands much in the same relation to the Jotedars as does a Zamindar in lower Bengal to his rayats²¹. Maharaja's ownership over land was again questioned when the Chowdhuries (collector of revenue of Boda, Patgram and Purvabhag (the possession of which was granted to Dhairyendranarayan by Sannud within Sarkar Cooch Behar) sought to become Zamindars by filing a suit before the Collector of Rangpur against the Nazir and Maharaja of Cooch Behar by setting up a claim of title in 1778. The queries of Mr. Purling on the issue revealed that the Chowdhuries and the Nazir were merely officers of the three chaklas and the real owner was the King himself²² .

Though there is scope for future studies on economic history of Cooch Behar State in different aspects, still we like to point out some limitations of such studies as we faced during our work.

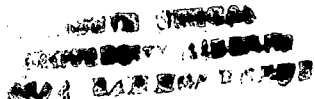
The Cooch Behar Record room was completely destroyed by fire in the year 1973 and the total collection of the palace library was purchased by some outsiders a few years back and these two events adversely affects detail studies of the past history of the State. Besides, the old records preserved in the North Bengal State Library are in a very poor condition and many of them could not even be handled at present as the conditions of those records/reports are very bad. Some individuals preserved few records, no doubt, but most of them don't want to cooperate with the researchers in this respect. This negative attitude actually limited the scope of our studies.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] P. K. Dutta, History of Land Survey in West Bengal - Glimpses of the past ; Centenary Volume, Directorate of Land Records and Survey, West Bengal, 1984, p. 22.
- [2] H. N. Choudhuri, The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements, Cooch Behar, 1903, p. 441.
- [3] Charles Grant and British Rule in India, p. 114.
- [4] Quoted in R. K. Mukherjee's Land Problems of India, p. 405 also see Bentinck's Speech of 8 November, 1827 in A.B.Keith's speeches and Documents of Indian Policy, 1750 - 1821, Vol. 1, p. 215.
- [5] Speech of Maharaja of Mymensingh at the first All India Land Holders Conference held in 1938 as quoted in R. P. Dutta's India Today, p. 219.

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- [6] P. Mehra, The Young Husband Expedition - An interpretation, 1970, p. 47.
- [7] C. U. Aitchison, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1930, p. 308.
- [8] Rosita Forbes, India of the Princes, London, 1913, p. 11.
- [9] Ibid, p. 12.
- [10] Ibid, p. 13.
- [11] British Crown and Indian States, Compiled by Chamber of Princes, Delhi, 1980, p. 8.
- [12] R. C. Dutt, The Economic History of India (Victorian Era), p. IX.
- [13] Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations, Book V, Chapter III.
- [14] B. H. Baden - Powell, Land Revenue and Tenure in British India, Oxford, 1907, p. 33.
- [15] Ibid, p. 43.
- [16] Reference should be made to the Government of India's Land Revenue Resolution of January 16, 1902, Lord Curzon's Government examined these at length the policy and the effects of the Land revenue system, and showed that it was not oppressive and that in many direction it had become increasingly liberal. Settlement operations has been cheapened and simplified, improvements are now protected from assessment, over-assessmnt is avoided, revenue collections are more elastic, and revenue is more freely reduced in cases of local deterioration of local production.

- [17] British Crown and Indian States, compiled by Chamber of Princes, Delhi, 1988, p. 135.
- [18] Ibid, p. 136.
- [19] E. A. Gait, A History of Assam, Goujati, p. 270.
- [20] Messieurs Lawrence Mercer and John Lewis Chauvert's Report, Vol. II, Cooch Behar, p. 19.
- [21] W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X, London, 1876, p. 388.
- [22] Mercer and Chauvet's report, Vol. II, p.p. 90, 97, 102.