

CHAPTER - I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF COOCH BEHAR

Cooch Behar was the only native state of undivided Bengal. Geographically, it was a part of greater Bengal and occupied a place in the north-east corner of the province. The present district of Cooch Behar was bounded on the north by the district of Jalpaiguri; on the east by Goalpara; on the south by Rangpur; and on the west by Rangpur and Jalpaiguri. The state lay between $25^{\circ}57'40''$ and $26^{\circ}32'20''$ north latitude, and between $88^{\circ}47'40''$ and $89^{\circ}54'35''$ east longitude. ⁽¹⁾

The state was a low-lying plain, almost of a triangular shape, intersected by numerous rivers, streams and marshes which appear to have been a great factor in the formation of its soil. The general direction of the river is from

1. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. x, p. 379.

Choudhury, H. N., Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement, p.2.

It is not possible to give the exact boundary of Cooch Behar State as it was in the second half of the Eighteenth century. The extension of the state during the time of Nara Narayan may be regarded as the probable boundary line of Cooch Behar in the later period also. During the time of Nara Narayan the kingdom extended to the east to the wild tribes near the borders of Burma, to the north to Tibet, to the west to the borders of Mithila or tirabhukti (Trihut) and to the south to Ghoraghat.

(Ahmed, A. - History of Cooch Behar, (In Bengali,) p. 123).

the north-west to the south-east. They originated in the Himalayas and fall into the main stream of Brahmaputra. The most important are the Tista on the west and Sankosh on the east. Between these two are situated the Dharala, the Torsa, the Kaljani, the Raidak and other small rivers. The Jaldhaka enters the state at the north-west corner and flows more or less parallel to Tista. The country is level and open, unvarigated by hills or any large sheet of water. The low lands are sometimes only few inches above the level of the marshes. The high lands were selected by the people for their homestead and garden which were also ordinarily fit for the cultivation of tobacco, the most valuable crop of the Cooch Behar rayats. The low lands were chiefly fit for winter paddy. The greater part of the land was well-cultivated. The Koch and Mech appears to have been the most prominent racial elements in the region. (2)

With regard to the ethonological entity and racial affinities of the Koch Scholars are not unanimous. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton, who visited eastern India in the beginning of the nineteenth century, is of opinion that all tribes having the name of "Koch" are sprung from the same stock, and that most of the Rajbansis are "Koches". (3) He regarded this Koch tribes to be

2. Choudhury, H. N. - op.cit., pp. 3-4

3. Hamilton, Buchanan - Eastern India, p. 25-26.

aboriginals of Kamrup and finds a common origin with the Chinese and other nations. He also distinguishes the Koches from the Garos, Rabhas, Meches and the like. ⁽⁴⁾

The widely accepted opinion of Risley is that the Koch are of Mongolo-Dravidian origin with the Dravidian elements predominating in them. ⁽⁵⁾ Waddel, on the other hand disagree with the view and describes the people as "distinctly Mongoloid", though somewhat heterogenous. Dalton, however, attributes their origin to the Dravidian stock, and therefore supports the contention of Risley. ⁽⁶⁾ Hodgson and Latham, on the other hand, identify the Koch as members of the Mongolian race. ⁽⁷⁾

W. W. Hunter supported the opinion of Hodgson and Latham, that the Koches are connected with the neighbouring tribes of Meches and Kachharis, and are of Mongolian or trans-Himalayan extraction. ⁽⁸⁾

4. Ibid.

Bhattacharjee, S. N. - A History of Mughal N.E. Frontier Policy, pp. 19-21.

According to Grierson the name Koch, in fact, everywhere connotes a "Hinduised Bodo". The later once spread over the whole of Assam West of Manipur and "one branch of the family, popularly known as Koch extended their power to far wider limits and overran the whole of northern Bengal, at least as far west as Purnea".

(Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. 1, p. 61-62).

5. Risley, Sir Herbert Hope - Tribes and Castes of Bengal, pp.27-34.
6. Dalton, - Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, pp. 89-90.
7. Hodgson, B.H., Essay on the first of the Kooch, Bodo and Dhumal tribe, pp. 137-42.
8. Hunter, W.W., Statistical Account of Cooch Behar, p. 331.

Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee classified the Koches as "Indo-Mongoloid Bodo" people.⁽⁹⁾ His contention was that "if the Lichhabis, Koliyas and Vajjis of North Bihar in the 6th century B.C. were of Indo-Mongoloid origin, pure or mixed, then it is quite easy to think of North Bengal as much as Assam as having an Indo-Mongoloid population from quite early times".⁽¹⁰⁾ S. K. Chatterjee supported the evidence of Tabaquat-i-Nasiri where it was stated that from early in the 13th century, the Koches, Meches and Tharus of pronounced Turkic or Mongoloid features and a distinct Sino-Tibetan speech populated in North Bengal. The Eastern Bodos (Chutiyas and Kacharis) and the western Bodos (the Koches of Hazo and Kamata and the Koches of Koch Behar) disputed the possession of the Brahmaputra valley with the Ahoms.⁽¹¹⁾ Though the Koches freely call themselves Rajbansis, it is believed that the two communities originally sprung from entirely different sources, the Koches being of Mongoloid origin, while the Rajbansis were a Dravidian tribe. So, in Cooch Behar, the persons known as Rajbansi are "either pure

9. Chatterjee, S. K., Kiratajana-Kriti, p. 111.

10. Ibid., p. 114.

11. Choudhury, H. N., op.cit., p. 1.

Koches who though dark have a distinctly Mongoloid physiognomy, or else a mixed breed in which the Koch element usually predominates".⁽¹²⁾ There are differences of opinion among the Scholars with regard to the meaning of the name "Cooch Behar". H. N. Choudhury, however, classified it as a compound of two words - Cooch and Behar. According to him "the term Cooch is a corrupted form of Coch, or Koch, being the name of a race of people inhabiting large tract of country in the north-east of Bengal and Behar or more properly, Vihara, denotes abode or sport. Taking the first sense of the second word of the compound Cooch Behar means the abode or land of the Koches." Regarding the meaning of the term Cooch Behar Hunter has some different idea. He identifies Cooch Behar with Sanskrit "Vihara" meaning "recreation" especially applied to a Buddhist monastery. H.N. Choudhury, however, put some argument before considering the opinion of Hunter. He denied any Buddhist influence in the name of Cooch Behar. The name 'Cooch Behar', according to Choudhury is of recent origin, particularly after the Koch Kings had come into power. In ancient time the country was called Kamrup.⁽¹³⁾ Taking into consideration the above opinion, it is justified to

12. Hunter, W.W., op.cit., p. 331.

13. Choudhury, H. N., op. cit. p. 1.

identify the term "Cooch Behar" as the land of the Koches.

We get accounts of Cooch Behar State and her history from various writers who visited the state from early times. Cooch Behar and Assam's political relations with the Muslim Viceroy of Bengal was narrated by Munshi Ghulam Hussain Salim. (14) The history of the occupation of Mughal territory by the Koches and the Ahoms is also described here. Abul Fazl describes the extent of the Koch Kingdom. He also gives us an idea about the products of the Koch Kingdom especially in horses and elephants, the intervention of Isakhan and Man Singha in the Koch affairs and the expedition of Kalapahar to Assam. It was from the year 1578 A.D. that Cooch Behar began to pay peshkash to the Mughal Emperor. Rajah Balgosain (Nara Narayan), who was the Zaminder of Koch, submitted and sent valuable presents including 54 elephants. (15) The following passage from the same work gives a detailed account of the submission of the Koch ruler Lakshmi Narayan to Akbar. This was at the end of the 41st year of Akbar's reign. "About this time Lachmi Narain submitted. He is the ruler of Koch and has 4,000 horse and 200,000 foot, 700 elephants and 1,000 ships. His country is 200 ks. long and from 100 to 40 Koss broad, extending in the east to the Brahmaputra in the North to Tibbat in the south to Ghoraghat and in the west to Trihut". (16) Abul Fazl also in his Ain-i-Akbari, dealt with the Koch-Mughal relations as well as

14. Hussain, Ghulam, Riyaz-us-Salatin, pp. 10-54.

15. Fazl Abul, Akbarnama, Ed. III, p. 206.

16. Fazl-Abul, op.cit., p. 762.

also the products of the Koch Kingdom during this time. Abdul Hamid Lahori was the official historian of Shah Jahan. He, in his Padshahinama, describes the conflict between Lakshmi-Narayan (17) of Cooch Behar and Parikshit Narayan of Koch-Hajo .

Mirja Nathan was an important officer in Mughal Kamrup for a period of thirteen years (1612-25 A.D.). His account (18) was primarily a memoir. But it narrates the political condition of Sylhet, Cachar, Cooch Behar and Kamrup during the period (1608-24). It also portrays the dynastic history of the powerful Koch Kingdom (19) . His account also gives the history of the growth of Ahom power that halted the Koch-Mughal advance (20) towards Kamrup as far west as the river Manas.

Shihab-ud-din Talish wrote about Mirjumla's expedition to Cooch Behar and Assam. He gave an account on the history of Cooch Behar under its ruler Pran-Narayan (1632-65 A.D.). King Pran Narayan is described as a powerful ruler and owner of a magnificent palace. There are also references to the towns, war-weapons and spells and magic of the land. (21)

The history of Cooch Behar is described by the writings of the European travellers also. Ralph Fitch was the first Englishman to enter the territory of North-East. His

17. Lahori, Abdul Hamid, Padshahinama, p. 28.
18. Nathan, Mirja, Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, pp. 222-253.
19. Acharya, N. N., North East as viewed by foreigners, p. 57.
20. Ibid.
21. Acharya, N. N. op. cit. p. 57-58.

account⁽²²⁾ about Cooch Behar gives us some idea of the reign of Nara Narayan. Though Fitch mentions the king's name as Suckel Course which Sir Edward Gait⁽²³⁾ is disposed to regard as equivalent to Sukladvaj, a title borne by Silarai, the illustrious brother of King Nara Narayan.⁽²⁴⁾

Portuguese Jessuit travellers Father Stephen Cacella and Father John Cabral visited Hajo, Pandu and Cooch Bihar in A.D. 1626. Their account tells us that when the Koch King Parikshit Narayan and Lakshmi Narayan were kept under detention at Dacca, the people of Kamrup rose in open rebellion. Besides Koch-Mughal relation, this account narrates the contemporary transactions⁽²⁵⁾ between Assam, Cooch Behar, Tibet, Patna, Rajmahal and Gaur.

The Cooch Behar State, which is the subject of our present discourse, had its origin in the remote past. On the basis of the records available most of the historians generally confirm that the state was a part of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa. The geographical extent of the kingdom had varied from time to time. The extent of Kamrupa roughly comprised almost the whole region of Brahmaputra valley, the north east part of

22. Foster, W., Early travels in India - p. 24-25.

23. Gait, Edward, History of Assam, p. 59.

24. There is one difficulty in accepting Fitch's description as Silarai had died a few years before Fitch's arrival.

25. Wessels, S.G., Early Jessuit travellers in Central Asia, 1603-1721, pp. 123-27.

Mymensingh and possibly also ⁽²⁶⁾ the Garo hills. About the origin of Cooch Behar State, Hunter ⁽²⁷⁾ left behind an account that had been supported by Buchanan Hamilton. According to both Hamilton and Hunter, Kamatapur was the capital and the principal city of the kingdom of Kamrupa. Raja Nilambar described as an ambitious king, was the last independent ruler of Kamrup and belonged to the Khen community that dominated the country between the Karotoya in the west and Brahmaputra in the east. ⁽²⁸⁾ In the last decade of the 15th century Ala-ud-din Hussain Shah, the Afghan king became the ruler of Gaud. In 1498, ^(of the 15th century) ^{omit} he launched a vigorous campaign against Kamrupa. The invasion was led by the famous Ismail Gazi who overwhelmed the Khen resistance and captured the capital. The whole kingdom of Kamrup was eventually ⁽²⁹⁾ conquered and subjugated to Gaud. The Sultan then made a daring attack upon the Ahom domain, which, at that time stretched eastward of the Bara Nadi far into the upper Brahmaputra Valley. ⁽³⁰⁾ But the enterprise ultimately ended in disaster.

The futility of this campaign had an adverse reaction on the position of the Sultan of Gaud in the newly acquired

26. Bhattacharjee, S. N., A History of Mughal N.E. Frontier Policy, p. 48.
27. Hunter, W.W., Statistical Account of Rangpur, Vol. VII, pp.310-18.
28. Ibid., Statistical Account of Bengal, p. 331.
29. Sarkar, J. N. Ed., History of Bengal, Vol. II, p. 146.
30. Bhattacharjee, S.N., op. cit., p. 71.

territory of Kamrupa. The end of the Khen rule created a Vacuum in U that region, for Gaud did not provide for an organised Government, save an army of occupation to hold the country. The failure of the Campaign against the Ahoms made the role of that army of occupation ineffective. Political revolution followed in Bengal. Anarchy and lawlessness reigned supreme. A number of petty Chiefs (Bhuiyans)⁽³¹⁾ consolidated their position and set up small and isolated spheres of influence on the ruins of the old kingdom of Kamrupa. Of them the most prominent was Viswasingha, who organised the Koch people into a formidable power and coerced the neighbouring Bhuiyans into subjection. He extended his authority from the river Karotoya on the west to the Baranadi in the east. Thus under the leadership on Viswa-Singha, the Koch kingdom or Cooch Behar was born (1510).⁽³²⁾

At the time of the emergence of Cooch Behar as an independent principality in the northern fringes of Bengal, Gaud was having difficult times. Nasrat Shah (1519-32 A.D.), the son and successor of Hussain Shah proved to be an idle and inefficient ruler. Meanwhile, Ibrahim Lodi, the last Afghan emperor of Delhi was defeated at the hands of Babur, the Mughal adventurer. Nasrat Shah involved himself in this grave political complications which

31. Gait, Ed., Koch Kings of Kamrupa, p. 28.

32. Sarkar, J. N., Ed., op.cit., p. 158,
Gait, Ed., History of Assam, pp. 45-48.
Hunter, W.N., op.cit., p. 331.

prevented him from giving attention towards Kamrupa where things has began to take its own course. Viswa Singha did not fail to grasp this opportunity to consolidate his position. (33)

The early part of Viswa Singha's reign was spent in encountering the rival elements. The credit of eliminating the Muhammadan influence in Kamrupa may be attributed to him. No detailed account is available of his warfare against his neighbours. (34) He extended his kingdom right and left but took care to be on good terms with the Bengal Sultans on his south and the Ahom Rajas on his east. (35)

During his reign Assam was convulsed for many years by Muhammadan invasions. In 1533 A.D. the Ahoms defeated and followed the army of Gaud to the banks of Karotoya. At that time Nasrat Shah was the ruler of Gaud. Visvakosh, (36) mentions that Nasrat Shah, the ruler of Gaud was defeated by Viswa Singha and fled. Rajopakhyan (37) tells that Viswa Singha conquered Gaud, when Islam Shah was the emperor of Delhi. (38) But Muslim historians are silent about the achievements of Viswa Singha.

The first period of the independent sultanate in Bengal ended in 1538, when Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad Shah, the last

33. Bhattacharjee, S. N., op.cit., p. 75.

34. Bhattacharjee, S. N. op.cit.

35. Sarkar, J. N. op.cit., p. 134.

36. Basu, N. N. Viswakosh, p. 62.

37. This work is written in Bengali Prose by Munshi Joynath Ghosh.

38. Ghosh, Munshi Joynath, Rajopakhyan - Narakhanda, Adhyaya-I.

king of the Hussain Shah's dynasty died in his struggle against Sher Shah Afghan. Sher Shah also defeated Humayun and thus (39) Delhi also passed under his control.

During this period of political turmoil in Delhi and as well as in Bengal, the new born Kingdom of Cooch Behar was passing its golden days under King Nara Narayan (1533-1587 A.D.), the brilliant successor of Viswa Singha. Nara Narayan's brother and valiant general Chila Rai was also another illustrious figure of Cooch Behar during this time. After Nara Narayan's accession to the throne news came from Gaud that the power of the Muhammedans was increasing and that the territories subjugated by Viswa Singh, were being attacked by them. The king forthwith marched upon Gaud at the head of a large army, Sukladvaja (Chila-rai) being the commander in-Chief. The Governor of Gaud was defeated and the country as far as the Ganges was conquered. (40) Sukladvaja next invaded Ghoraghat and the adjoining tracts. After this Nara Narayan conquered Assam and reduced the neighbouring countries of Kachar, Manipur, Jaintia, Tipperah and Sylhet into submission. (41) Thus the state reached its high watermark of glory during his reign. The kingdom extended to the east to the all wild (42) tribes near the borders of Burma, to the

39. Bhattacharjee, S. N. op.cit. pp. 75-76.

40. Choudhury, H. N., op.cit., p. 230.

41. Ibid., p. 231.

42. Ghosh, Joyanath, Rajopakhyan, Narakhandā, A dhyaya-I.

north to Tibet, to the west to Trihut and to the south to
(43)
Goraghat.

Cooch Behar, however, could not enjoy her lonely eminence for a long time. In the last quarter of the 16th century Mughal-Afghan contest in Bengal reached her door and broke her peace. This resulted in Koch-Mughal friendship. The Afghan Chiefs, hard pressed by the invading Mughals chose Ghoraghat as their base of operations in North Bengal. The purpose of this strategy was that in the event of any reverse in battle it would be possible for them to take asylum in the neighbouring state of Cooch Behar. So, in order to hold the Afghans at bay, Akbar decided to make a friendly alliance with Nara Narayan. But paradoxically it was not the Mughal Emperor but the Koch ruler who broke the ice and took the initiative in contracting the alliance. Nara Narayan did not want to involve himself in the contest between the Afghans and the Mughals and invite the opposition of the Mughals, who were by far the most powerful. Moreover, during this time the position of the Koches in Bengal was also not favourable. (44) This enables the north-eastern states to reassert themselves. The death of Chilarai also make Nara Narayan's military strength to some extent weak. All these

43. Choudhury, H. N., op.cit., p. 232.

Ghosal, S.C., History of Cooch Behar, pp. 154-55.

44. According to Stewars in 1569 Solimen Shah Kerony (Suleman Karrani) is said to have invaded and plundered Cooch Behar (Hist. of Bengal, p. 156).

compelled Nara Narayan to enter into a friendly alliance with Akbar⁽⁴⁵⁾ in 1578 A.D. The Mughal Emperor appears to have been highly gratified by this friendly gesture on the part of the Koch King and heartily reciprocated it.

After the death of Chila rai, his son Raghu Dev laid his claim on the throne of Cooch Behar and rebelled against Nara Narayan. Ultimately the Kingdom was divided into two halves by Nara Narayan before his death. The portion of his Kingdom lying to the west of the river Sonkos, which included Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur fell to the share of his son Lakshmi Narayan, while the portion lying to the east of Sonkos and a both banks of the Grahmaputra, which included Baharbund and Bhitarbund⁽⁴⁶⁾ was given to Raghudev, the nephew of Nara Narayan. Muhammedan writers⁽⁴⁷⁾ refer to the two kingdoms as "Koch Bihar" and "Koch Hajo"⁽⁴⁸⁾ respectively. The cousins bitterly differed on the said arrangement of their respective shares and indulged themselves in in-fighting.⁽⁴⁹⁾ These domestic disputes in Koch

45. Again in 1578 A.D. Hossain Kooly Khan, it is said, compelled the Raja of Cooch Behar to pay a tribute and to acknowledge himself a vassal of the Mughal Empire. Stewart - p. 166.

Akbarnama III, pp. 207, 762-63; Ain-i-Akbari (Garrett), pp. 190-95, Blochmann, op.cit., pp. 52-55.

46. Vas, I.A., Rangpur, p. 25.

47. Abdul Hamid Loheri in his Padshahinama describes the conflict between Lakshminarayan of Koch Bihar and Parikshit Narayan of Koch-Hajo.

48. Ibid., p. 26.

49. Bhattacharjee, S. N., op.cit., p. 105.

Vas, I.A., op.cit., p. 26.

Stewart, C. H. op.cit., pp. 187-88.

Politics offered the Afghans and the Mughals and ideal opportunity to advance their own political influence in this region. Lakshmi Narayan, on his part looked up the Mughals for help while his cousin Raghudev invited Isa Khan, the Afghan Chief of South-East Bengal, for assistance. With the help of the Mughals, Lakshmi Narayan ultimately defeated his cousin, but was obliged to enter into a subordinate alliance with the Mughals. (50)

The Mughals on the other hand, treated Cooch Behar as a vassal state but pursued an aggressive policy towards Kamrup. Raja Parikshit Narayan, son and successor of Raghudev, also had unfriendly relations with Lakshmi Narayan and thus incurred the displeasure of the Mughals. Parikshit strengthened his army and launched an attack upon Cooch Behar which resulted in Mughal expedition in 1612 A.D. Parikshit was defeated and was taken as a prisoner to the Mughal Court. His territory was also annexed to Mughal dominion. (51) Taking the opportunity, the Ahoms installed Bali Narayan, brother of Parikshit Narayan as a vassal ruler in Darrang whom they wanted to utilise as a buffer against the Mughals and the western Koches. (52)

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50. Sarkar, J. N., Ed., History of Bengal, Vol. II, p. 234. Akbarnamah - Lucknow Ed. III, p. 762 refers to the 41st year of Akbar's reign "About this Lachmi Narain submitted. He is the ruler of Koch and has 4,000 horse and 200,000 foot, 700 elephants and 1,000 ships, His country is 200 ks long and from 100 to 40 koss broad, extending in the east to the Brahmaputra in the North to Tibbat in the South to Choraghat and in the West to Trihut".
51. M.L.Bora, (tr.), Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, Vol. I, pp. 528-29.
52. Blochmann, H., op.cit., pp.54
- Datta, S.C., op.cit., Introduction.

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Thus the political condition of Cooch Behar State, during the seventeenth century was in a fluid state full of Chaos and confusion; because two imperial powers - Ahom on the east and Mughal in the west - vigorously followed the policy of expansionism and met with direct confrontation for the possession of Koch Kingdom. ⁽⁵³⁾ (The partition of the Koch territories not only weakened the material prosperity of the state but also sowed the seeds of ill-will between the two branches which had a disastrous effect, leading to imperial intervention in Koch politics.) ⁵⁴ Omit

The Mughals, during the reign of Emperor Jehangir, under subedar Islam Khan of Bengal, utilised the subordinate alliance with Cooch Behar as an alibi for subjection of the state and thereby succeeded in establishing political supremacy over the kingdom. The Mughals also conquered Kamrup and made it a part and parcel of the Bengal Subah. The boundary of Mughal India ⁽⁵⁵⁾ reached as far as the bank of the river Bara Nadi. The Mughals then advanced against the Ahoms in Upper Brahmaputra valley. However, the reigning Ahom King Pratap Singh was not to be vanquished with one blow. So hostilities ensued between the Ahoms and the Mughals and continued greater part of the seventeenth century which may be described as an eventful phase in the history of Mughal ⁽⁵⁶⁾ relation with the North East Frontier. The subjugation of Kamrup

53. Ahmed, Amanatullah, Cooch Beharer Itihas, (in Bengali), pp.141-42.

54. Blochmann, H., op.cit., pp. 54-59.

55. Bhattacharjee, S. N., op.cit., pp. 103-105.

56. Sarkar, J. N., Ed., op.cit., Vol. II, p. 235.

and the subordinate alliance with Cooch Behar had offered' the desired opportunity to aggrandise the Ahom territory.

The war of succession following the illness of Shah Jehan, however, halted the progress of the Mughals in the North-east frontier of Bengal. Taking advantage of the disorder in Mughal camp the Ahoms from the right and Cooch Behar from the left, started nibbling at the territories of Koch-Hajo or the eastern part of the Old Koch Kingdom. Pran Narayan, Raja of Cooch Behar made a series of plundering raids into the Ghoraghat region, carrying off a number of Imperial subjects as captives and declared himself as an independent ruler by stopping payment of tribute to the Mughal Emperor. ⁽⁵⁷⁾ The Ahoms thereupon took instant possession of Gauhati, Pandu and Saraighat and many war equipments were acquired. ⁽⁵⁸⁾ Pran Narayan advanced to Dhubri and took its possession by defeating the Mughal Faujdar of Kamrup. ⁽⁵⁹⁾ This attitude of the rulers of these territories made the Mughal position in the North-East-Frontier extremely precarious.

Meanwhile Aurangzeb emerged triumphant in the War of succession for Mughal throne. Immediately after assuming power he appointed Mirjuna as the subedar of Bengal (1661-1663 A.D.) to re-establish Mughal authority in the North-East Frontier,

57. Bhattacharjee, S. N., op.cit., pp. 293-300.

58. Bhuiyan, S. K., Assam Buranji, p. 75.

59. Bhattacharjee, S. N., op. cit., p. 302.

to crush the adventurism of the Koch ruler and to recover Kamrup from the Ahoms. The presence of Mir Jumla in the North-East Frontier, although for a very brief period, had a remarkable bearing on the history of this region. With him, in fact, there was a revival of military imperialism of the Mughals in the North East Frontier. ⁽⁶⁰⁾ (Mir Jumla immediately advanced to thwart the designs of the rulers of Cooch Behar and the Ahoms. He himself led a fairly large army against Cooch Behar. But Maharaja Pran Narayan fled the country. The subedar captured Cooch Behar and the state was ultimately annexed to Mughal India. The name of the town was changed to Alamgirnagar. ⁽⁶¹⁾ The subjugation of Cooch Behar was followed by the recapture of Kamrup. Apparently, after establishing his authority in Cooch Behar, Mir Jumla, on 4th January, 1662 launched a massive invasion in Ahom territories. He left behind Isfandier Beg ⁽⁶²⁾ as the acting faujdar of Cooch Behar, pending the arrival of Askar Khan, the faujdar designate. The Nawab halted at Cooch Behar for Sixteen days upto Jan., 3, 1662 and directed the officials to reorganise the political and revenue set up in the imperial line ⁽⁶³⁾ in addition to other administrative affairs. But the arrogant Mughal officers in Cooch Behar

60. Datta, S.C., op.cit.

61. Datta, S.C., op.cit., p. 61

62. Sarker, J. N., History of Bengal, Vol. II, p. 376.
Blochman, H., "Koch Bihar and Assam", J.A.S.B. Vol. XLII, Part I, p. 67.

63. Ahamed, A., op.cit., p. 68.

started introducing the revenue collection system of Northern India which was unknown to and unsuitable for Cooch Behar. This made the people of Cooch Behar revolt against the Mughals. Moreover, in the absence of the Subedar, the acting faujdar and his officers let loose a reign of terror by coercive means. Consequently the wrath of the people of Cooch Behar compelled Isfandier Beg to leave the country; and the land that had been very systematically captured by the Mughals, eventually slipped away from their grip.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Meanwhile Mir Jumla's operations against the Ahoms ended in disaster. The situation became worst by the death of Mir Jumla. The faujdar designate Askar Khan attempted to reconquer Cooch Behar but could only occupy Fatehpore - a Chakla or a revenue division of Cooch Behar at its southern gate and Askar Khan waited for the arrival of the successor of Mir Jumla.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The failure of the Assam operations of Mir Jumla obliged the Mughals to accept Ahom domination over Kamrup. All the efforts made afterwards to make a friendly relation with the Ahoms did not succeed. By all calculations the North-East Frontier policy of the Mughals was barren.⁽⁶⁶⁾ By 1632 they were ultimately forced to abandon their activities against Kamrup and to be contented with their limited authority over South-western part of the Brahmaputra valley upto Rangamatty as the frontier

64. Sarkar, J. N., Ed., op.cit., pp. 376-77.

65. Ibid.

66. Datta, S. C. op.cit., p. 34.

(67)
station. Despite Mir Jumla's unfulfilled mission in Assam and Cooch Behar, his military carnage left a sad memory full of agony and terror to the inhabitants of north-east India.

Shaista Khan, the successor of Mir Jumla as the Subedar of Bengal, arrived at Rajmahal in March, 1664. The Koch King feared that the new Subedar would attack Cooch Behar to retrieve the injured pride of the imperial Mughals. So he sent a proposal to the subedar admitting fealty and promising Rs. 5½ lacs as guarantee for preserving the safety of the kingdom. The subedar accepted these terms and as soon as the indemnity reached him, removed the army from the border of the kingdom. The "tribute" reached the Emperor on 6th December, 1665. (68)

After this Cooch Behar enjoyed a respite from the raids of the Mughals for about 20 years (1666-1685 A.D.). Maharaja Pran Narayan, who had consistently opposed Mughal expansionism and had offended Mir Jumla died in 1665 A.D. After his death the kingdom of Cooch Behar was under the grip of internal strifes and civil wars. This offered the Mughals again a good opportunity for extending their sway over the southern and eastern portions of the Cooch Behar Kingdom. But the Mughals failed to take advantage of the situation. The Bengal subedar was busy elsewhere. The Arakan pirates, the East India Company and the internal problems of their own occupied the energy and resources of

67. Bhattacharjee, S. N., op.cit., p. 395.

68. Sarkar, J. N., History of Aurangzeb, Vol. III, p. 218.

(69)

the subedar. He had therefore, no time to engage in an expedition against Cooch Behar. Taking the opportunity of the pre-occupations of the Bengal subedar, several of the bordering zamindars and tributary Rajas withdrew their necks from the collar of obedience, and not only neglected to send any part of their revenues to the Imperial treasury, but even invaded the provinces. Amongst the most prominent of these was Beernarain, the Raja of Cooch Behar, whose country, although frequently plundered by the Mahammedans, and compelled to pay tribute, was never absolutely subdued. It was during the reign of Vasudeva's successor, Mahendra Narayan (1681-1693 A.D.), the great grandson of Pran Narayan, that the imperial policy of the Mughals again was given a trial. They began to encroach upon the southern and eastern parts of the kingdom of Cooch Behar. Ibrahim Khan was the subedar during this period. Ebadat Khan, son of Shaista Khan, captured the Central Chaklas of Fatehpore, Quazirhat and Kankina in 1687 A.D. and the Raja's officers-in-Charge of these places as well as other Parganas agreed to pay tribute to the sebedar of Bengal. After securing their authority over the Central Chaklas of Cooch Behar, the Mughals attacked the remaining three Chaklas of Boda, Patgram and Purvabhag. Cooch Behar resisted strongly. Simultaneously, however, Janga Dev and Bhuja Dev of Baikunthapur invaded Cooch Behar. In the face of this unprecendented danger Cooch Behar

69. Bhattacharjee, S.N., op.cit., p. 311.

70. Stewart, Hist. of Bengal, p. 287.

71. Choudhury, H. N., op.cit., p. 240.

72. Gruning, G. F., op.cit., p. 19.

73. Ibid.

74. Vas, J. A., op.cit., p. 27.

fought valiantly. But at last being exhausted agreed to a compromise with the Mughals. In 1711 A.D. a treaty was made by which the three Chaklas mentioned before were ceded to the Mughals who allowed them to be held in farm by Shantonarayan, the Nazir Dev, on behalf of the king of Cooch Behar.⁽⁷⁵⁾ King Rup Narayan (1693-1714 A.D.) was the ruler of Cooch Behar during this period of turmoils and he is regarded as the last Koch king who hold sway over western Kamrup. The fact that although the Mughal forced the cession, they never wrested these Chaklas from the hands of Cooch Behar princes. The reason for this may be attributed to the irregular boundary between the Mughals and the Cooch Behar proper.⁽⁷⁶⁾ After the conclusion of the treaty, friendship was established between Cooch Behar and the Nawab of Bengal and King Rup Narayan sent an Ukil (ambassador) to the Durbar of Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan.⁽⁷⁷⁾

Murshid Kuli Khan was the Subedar of Bengal from A.D. 1717 to 1727. The Subedar was an ardent champion of austerity in administrative expenses, and was essentially pre-occupied with economy measures in administration. Moreover the Nawab did not dare to antagonise the Raja of Cooch Behar keeping in view that there was every possibility of loosing the prospective revenues from the captured Chaklas. Cooch Behar, during this period, was

75. Vas, J.A., op.cit., p. 27

76. Ibid.

77. Gladwin, A Narrative of Bengal, p. 33.

fortunate to escape fresh troubles from the Mughals.

Shuja-ud-din (1727-1739 A.D.) succeeded Murshid Kuli Khan as the Subedar of Bengal. The friendly relation between Cooch Behar and Murshid Kuli Khan, ⁽⁷⁸⁾ did not ensure under Shuja-ud-din. He appointed Saulat Jang, the son of Haji Ahmad and the nephew of Alivardi Khan, as the Naib Faujdar of Ghoraghat and Rangpur. At that time Upendra Narayan (1714-1763 A.D.) was the Raja of Cooch Behar. His adopted son Dinanarayan was involved in bitter quarrels over the royal throne. Saulat Jang being approached by Dinanarayan, took up his cause and ⁽⁷⁹⁾ installed him as the ruler of Cooch Behar ousting Upendranarayan. However with the help of Bhutan Upendranarayan ultimately regained his position. Saulat Jang, in the meantime, invaded Baikunthapur and took away Darpa Dev and Bikram Dev - the Raikats* as hostages to Rangpur.

78. Datta, S. C., op.cit., p. 169.

79. Mercer and Chauvet's Report on Cooch Behar in 1788, Vol.II, p. 169.

Martin, M., Eastern India, Vol. III, pp. 419-20.

* The title "Raikat" (Raj-Kot-Chief of the fort) was created by Maharaja Viswa Singha. They (Raikats) became the hereditary grand minister of the kingdom and hold umbrella over the king during the time of his installation. Even when, this connection with the ruling family of Cooch Behar ceased; whoever was the zamindar of the Pargana of Baikunthapur, assumed the title Raikat (Choudhury, A., op.cit., p. 232)

Alivardi Khan who succeeded Shuja-ud-din as the Subedar of Bengal in 1740, handed over the charge of Rangpur to Qasim Ali, his borther-in-Law. The new faujdar released the two Raikat brothers held in captivity in Rangpur for 17 years. The collection of Revenue of Baikunthapur was sometimes made "by an officer supported by a force from the Phougedar of Rangpore", sometimes was "given into the management of the Cooch Behar Raja's Naib for Boda" and then "settled for with Durrup Deo". Baikunthapur, however, was completely separated from Cooch Behar since it had been first conquered by Saulat Jang. (80)

During the administration of Alivardi Khan the affairs of Cooch Behar were ignored as Alivardi Khan was fully engaged in meeting the menace from the Marathas. He had no time to attend to the problems of the North East Frontier nor his successors were in a better position to do so, encumbered as they were, by the political revolution of 1757. (81)

After the acquisition of the Diwani in 1765 by the East India Company, the northern frontier of Bengal again came into prominence. The Muhammedans called their conquests in North Bengal Fakirkundi after the Kundi Pargana which was situated across Ghoraghat. This territory together with the Pargana of

80. Com. cir. pros. ^{23rd Dec, 1772,} pp. 34-36. Letter from the Committee of circuit to Purding.
81. Ibid.

Kundi and the Chaklas constituted the district of Rangpur. It was the frontier district bordering on Nepal, Bhutan, Cooch Behar and Assam. (82) During this time Rangpur had an area of 2679 square miles. (83) The province was "productive of the valuable articles of raw silk, opium, tobacco, and sugar, besides a superabundance of grain with the other necessaries of life beyond the wants of home consumption carried abroad for sale." (84) The thanadari with the district of Rangamati which stretched on both sides of the river Brahmaputra extending eastwards to the independent kingdom of Ahom, was within the jurisdiction of Rangpur. (85)

Cooch Behar state, during this period, presented a very tragic picture. Repeated Mughal incursion had already made its foundation very weak. The Raikats of Baikunthapur ceased to pay their allegiance towards Cooch Behar. (86) To add to it, mutual animosity among the royal princes, internal disorder, incapacity and weakness of the ruler to impose a strong Government - all these let loose the forces of disruption. This was an opportunity for Bhutan, a northern neighbour, who had already fixed her eyes on Cooch Behar. This distracted state

82. Vas, J.A., Rangpur, Dist. Gazetteers, pp. 27-28.

83. Firminger, J. W. K., Fifth Report from the Select Committee, Vol. 2, p. 259.

84. Ibid., p. 341.

85. Ibid.

86. Mazumdar, A.B., Anglo - Bhotanese Relations, p. 31.

of affairs within Cooch Behar from the mid-eighteenth century revived the ambition of Darpa Dev to aggrandise himself, and in view of this, he entered into an alliance with Bhutan.

In the early period of their relations, Bhutan being the northern neighbour of Cooch Behar, carried their trade in Cooch Behar, and through Cooch Behar into Rangpur. Krishnakanta Bose, an officer of the Company, in his "Mission to Bhutan" (1815) stated that till the 17th century Koch tribes were the rulers of Bhutan. (87) Sir Ashley Eden says, "Apparently the Bhutias have not possessed Bhutan for more than two centuries; it formerly belonged to a tribe called by the Bhutias Tephu; they are generally believed to have been the people of Cooch Behar." (88)

The Tephu were driven down into the plains by some Tibetan soldiers who had been sent from Lhasa to take permanent possession of the country. According to the family history of the kings of Darrang in Assam, Prince Narasingha, the eldest son of king Viswasingha of Cooch Behar, was deprived of the throne. He left Cooch Behar and after much wandering came to Bhutan and became their Dharmaraja. (89) Sir Edward Gait, however, writes that

"Although there is no confirmation of this statement, the occurrence is not altogether impossible". (90) Alexander Cosma de

koros stated that the Bhutanese adopted in their manners and

87. Bose, Krishnakanta, Political Mission to Bhutan, p. 18.

88. Gruning, G.F., op.cit., p. 19

89. Goswami, H.C., Darrang Raj Vamsabali, p. 34.

90. Gait, Edward, History of Assam, pp. 48-54.

customs much from the Indians.⁽⁹¹⁾ This was evidently a result of Bhutan's early contact with Cooch Behar; the rulers of which had also adopted the traditional culture of the Hindus. The use of the Koch Raj Saka or the era of the Cooch Behar Kings (calculated from 1510) by the Government of Bhutan in its Bengali letters further testified to the impact of Koch influence upon that country.⁽⁹²⁾ The use of Narayani coins was prevalent in Bhutan for a long time. Sir Edward Gait has quoted the remark of Shihab-ud-din Talish, who accompanied Mir Jumla in Assam campaigns that the people of Bhutan "spoke a dialect allied to that of the Koches".⁽⁹³⁾

From all these opinions it might be presumed that Bhutan had (for sometimes) submitted to Koch influence; but that a prince of Cooch Behar sat on the throne of Bhutan can not be accepted without more definite evidence; In Rajopakhayan (story of the Kings of Cooch Behar) it is remarked that Prince Narasingha abdicated the throne "in fulfilment of a promise".⁽⁹⁴⁾ In the account of Ralph Fitch, who visited Cooch Behar during his travels in Bengal (1585-86), mention is made of Bhutan and her Dharma Raja⁽⁹⁵⁾ but there is no reference of so remarkable an episode of Narasingha in Bhutan, although Nara Narayan was then reigning in

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91. Koros, A.C., "Geographical Notice of Tibet", J.A.S.B., April 1832, p. 125.
 92. Majumdar, A.B., Anglo-Bhutanese relations in the 18th and 19th centuries, p. 31.
 93. Gait, Ed., op.cit., p. 49.
 94. Choudhury, H.N., op.cit., p. 229.
 95. Foster, W., "Ralph Fitch", 1583-91 (Early travels in India), p. 27.

Cooch Behar.

Considering all these aspects of Cooch Behar's influence over Bhutan from a very early period, the eventual deterioration of this relation was confusing. The paucity of evidence in this regard prevents us from determining how this cordiality turned into a hostile one. The nearest hypothesis is that Bhutan, during the period under review ~~was~~ under the rulership of Debraja, was aspiring for territorial expansion; and the gradual decline of Cooch Behar from the 17th century encouraged Bhutan to throw away her submissive attitude. Systematic expansion of Bhutanese power in the plains began during this period. They interfered in issues of succession in Cooch Behar as early as 1680. We have noted earlier, that Koch king Upendra Narayan sought the help of Bhutan to retaliate against Dinanarayan and to dislodge him from the throne. Debraja, who had already contemplated interfering in Koch politics, extended military help to Upendranarayan to retrieve his lost position. This dependence on the part of Cooch Behar ⁽⁹⁶⁾ afforded Bhutan the opportunity to fulfil their cherished desire. They now took advantage of the disorder and worthlessness of the ruling authority of

96. Ahmed, A., Hist. of Cooch Behar, (Bengali Ed.), pp. 183-84.

Cooch Behar and began to interfere into the domestic affairs of the state. A Bhutia representative named Pensu Toma permanently resided at the capital of Cooch Behar and his opinion about the succession to the kingly office was respectfully considered. At Chechakhata ⁽⁹⁷⁾ a border post of Cooch Behar towards Bhutan, the delegates of both Governments used to exchange their commercial articles ⁽⁹⁸⁾ as presents and a grand feast used to be arranged on this occasion. This ceremony was an annual feature, and illustrated the mark of friendship and cordiality that existed between the two countries. ⁽⁹⁹⁾ Ironically enough it was at this place that Bhutan demonstrated the worst type of treachery by capturing the ruler of Cooch Behar and taking him away as prisoner, and that brought the English at her door.

Debendranarayan (1763-65) was installed on the throne of Cooch Behar after the death of his father Upendranarayan. Misfortune dogged the Kingdom for a long time. Now it came upon the surface. Debendranarayan, soon after his accession was murdered at the instigation of Ramananda Goswami, the King's spiritual

97. Ghosal, S. C., *op. cit.*, p. 187.

Ahmed, A - op. cit. - p. 188.

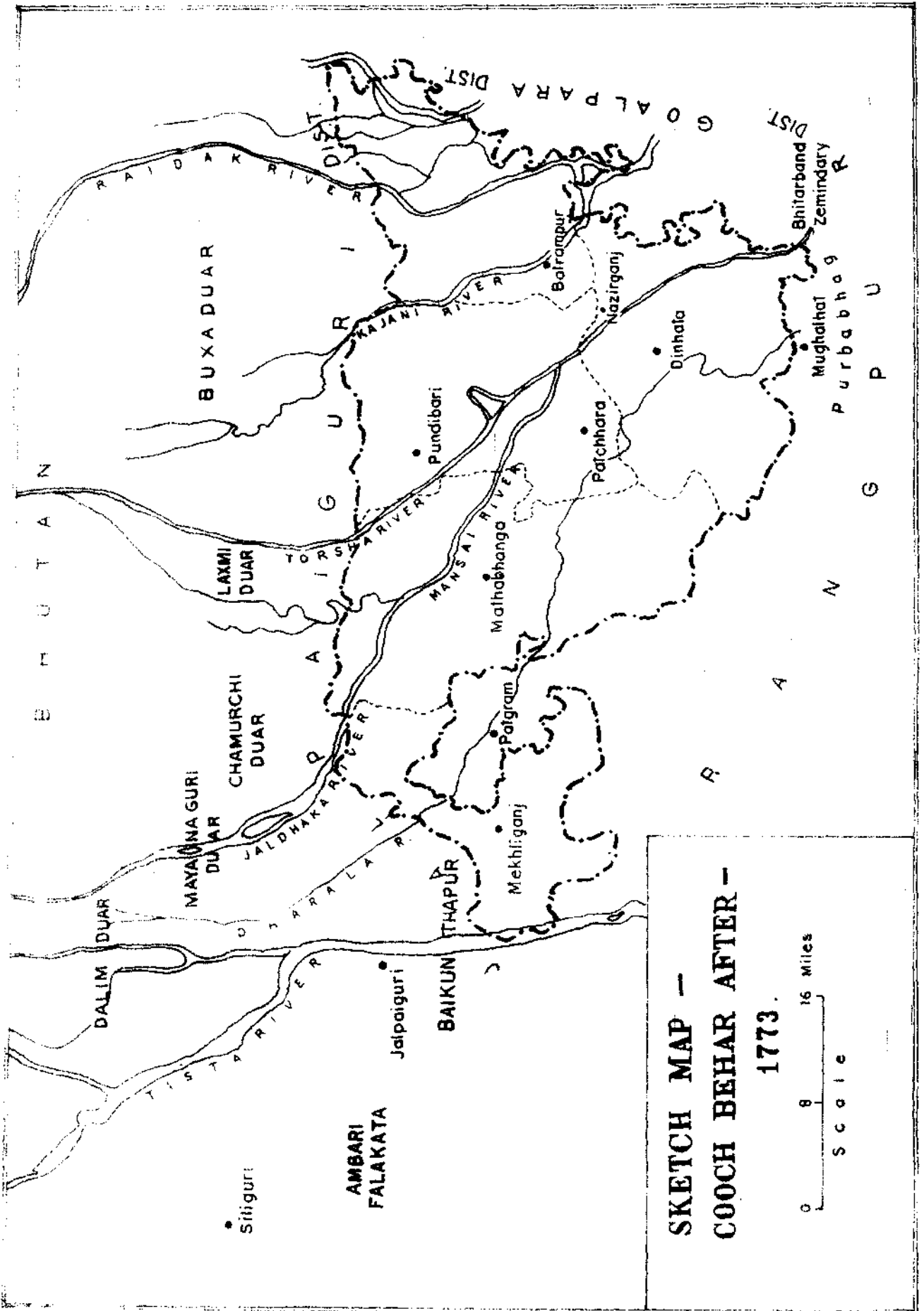
98. The Bhutias offered horses, Koch in and Babanga clothes, Svetamala, Bhotmala, musk, walnuts, Bot ghee, Bhot plums etc. the King of Cooch Behar presents worth double those brought by the Bhutias (S.C. Ghosal, *Hist. of Cooch Behar*, p. 234).

99. Op.cit., p. 183.

teacher. (100) Everyone ^{WTD} (took with) dismay^{ed} at this ghastly incident; the murderer was instantaneously disposed of, and that removed any possibility of probing the incident. The incident, however, offered Bhutan a plea to take Cooch Behar under her protection, as she had done, once before to ward off the Muslim invasion of Cooch Behar in early 18th century. This time Bhutan arrested Ramananda and gave him capital punishment. The ministers of Cooch Behar, during this time played no significant role. The ministers Gaurinath Bara Kayastha Karji, Gaurinandan Mustafi, Gauri Prasad Bakshi and others consulted together with the Dewan Deo Ramnarayan and the Nazir Deo Rudranarayan. As Upendranarayan had no son, Nazir Deo had a desire to make his son Khagendranarayan, the king of Cooch Behar. But it was averted by the presence of mind of Gaurinath. (101) Ultimately the selection of the king went to Dhairjendra Narayan, Upendranarayan's brother's son and third brother of Ramnarayan. The Dewan Deo, though he himself was ambitious, assented to the decision of the ministers. Thus Dhairjendranarayan became the king of Cooch Behar. The first part of his reign (1765-70 A.D.) from all aspects was a very significant chapter in the history of the State. These years were also important in the history of the East India Company. Having secured the Diwani (12th August, 1765) the East India Company became interested in the northern part of the Bengal Subah and eventually got involved in them.

100. Ghosal, S.C., History of Cooch Behar, p. 236.

101. Ibid., p. 238.



**SKETCH MAP -
COOCH BEHAR AFTER -**

1773.

