

A B S T R A C T

REPRESENTING COLONIAL MASCULINITY THROUGH HUNTING (1773 - 1949): A STUDY OF THE PRINCELY STATE OF COOCH BEHAR

The present work focuses on the hunting history of the princely state of Cooch Behar along with issues and events, covering a period beginning from the British political intervention in Cooch Behar state in 1773 which continued by British Government till the merger of Cooch Behar state with India in 1950. The study primarily explores the history of hunting as an expression of colonial masculinity, paternalism and supremacy of colonial rulers for acquiring legitimacy of the princely rulers. The coloniser, while realising such objectives, did follow the principle of accommodation and compromise of the hunting practices of the princely rulers. At the hindsight, hunting as a tool of forest clearance and reclamation of forest into cultivable land for revenue generation was insisted upon by the coloniser as a part of greater imperial political project. The study traces the anthropogenesis and biocentrism behind hunting, keeping in mind the basic intrinsic antagonism between colonial and indigenous hunting and to understand contestation and sharing of such nature of hunting in the perspective of nature, culture and colonialism. The study further explores the interrelationship of hunting with political authority, legitimacy, people, peasants, gender identity, and associated ecological concerns.

The study has covered themes such as the effects of colonial construction of masculinity on royal hunting in princely Cooch Behar and the development of leisure hunting or hunting as a sport under the influence of the colonizers. The study has highlighted hunting as an instrument to make a close connection between the British and the princely Cooch Behar. The purpose is to depict the real motive behind the increasing popularity of hunting in Cooch Behar during the reign of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and its continuity and changes in post-Maharaja Nripendra Narayan regime. The role of royal women hunters in Cooch Behar has also been an important pointer covered by this study.

In contemporary academic discourses, colonial Indian princely states have drawn considerable attention among the historians of South Asia. These peripheral regions have hitherto been located at the margins of the historiography of the subcontinent and used to be viewed as an integral part of colonial historiography. For over the last fifty years,

researches on princely states have been many. The Marxist writings emphasise on centre periphery thesis to understand the political economy of the princely states, while the subaltern theorists argue that colonialism was instrumental in destructing the pre-capitalist agrarian structures of the peripherally situated Indian states. N. Dirks has made an extensive study on Indian states by developing “Little Kingdom” model, where he has attempted to analyse the anthropological issues like castes and such other social and religious practices prevalent in pre-modern Indian society, which were absorbed and accommodated by the coloniser while dealing with the princely states assuming power as a cultural construction. Appreciating the contribution of Dirks, scholars like Hira Singh, Frank Perlin, Wallerstein have argued that the Little Kingdom model has failed to differentiate the British India and Indian India. Moreover, the princely states cannot be understood unless the power relations are to be construed in terms of people and given variegated land relations and proprietary hold of people over land centering around Rajas. This political economy model has been highlighted while dealing with the study of Indian princely states.

This study has attempted to represent the processes and practices through which the cultural representations of two differently positioned elites, i.e. the colonisers and the colonised, were constituted respectively as the 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in nineteenth-century India and how the rulers of the princely state of Cooch Behar had attempted to accommodate this cultural reflection by participating in the so-called masculine hunting.

The primary purpose of this exercise is to find answer to the question how did colonial hunting, in association with the princely ruler of Cooch Behar, focus on its symbolic political significance in which the sovereign displayed ability to rule and extract legitimacy from the subjects.

Masculinity, as exerted through hunting in the colonized forest of India, cannot be tailored to the general idea of masculinity as prowess. Thus, the imperialist idea of masculinity was transformed as a notion of upper-class and middle-class bourgeois mentality indicative of the Victorian and Edwardian values. To hide such collaboration, the British hunters derecognized, in most of the occasions, the reliance on the Indian shikaries (hunters), for the reason that their role as masculine hunters would have been undermined in their own society. Thus, hunting as a masculine power project helped

Britain for exploiting the process of colonization by the imperial sway over the natural world.

There is a debate on princely Cooch Behar hunting whether it was unnecessary destruction to wildlife or an endeavour to save the life & property of the common people and extension of agricultural land by destroying carnivorous. The princely hunting was motivated only by the creation of masculine identity, personal glorification, the leisure of time, fun, showing off boldness, skill, the establishment of a friendly relationship among the hunters etc. So, hunting was just unnecessary wildlife destruction, but in a few cases, it's undeniable that princely hunting also led to the protection of life and property of the common people by killing wild animals.

To adumbrate, this entire academic exercise has posited the place of hunting in the construction of identity for the indigenous princely elite as the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, located in the west of the North Eastern region of the British Indian Empire, explaining how contesting morale orders of a Maharaja of tiny principality are reconciled in the colonial encounter through the shared experience of hunting. The whole exercise as presented in the Thesis, has been an attempt to assess the place of a tiny princely state Cooch Behar located at the gate-way of India's North-East, within the history of South Asia and to weave together hunting hitherto least academically explored.