

## Chapter- VIII

### **A DETAILED STUDY OF MERGER OF A TINY PRINCELY STATE: COOCH BEHAR EXPERIENCE**

Micro studies to understand the macro perspective of India's integration with five hundred odd Princely States have re-invited the attention of the contemporary scholars to understand the intrinsic realities of challenges involved in the merger process. Such challenges of contemporary kind have been rooted deeply in the process of merger during late forties and early fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The integration of the Princely States with the greater Indian State structure has, indeed, prevented the possibility of having so many Indias within India. The sovereignty issue or the independent legal structural consideration has been diluted by the process of integration of the Princely States with the Indian Union. However, the seperative identity perspective of the Princely States as community had been underestimated and to some extent ignored by the Indian nationalist leaders. The ethos of state building and institution building had received primary consideration in the national agenda and the local community aspirations of the merging States had been provided a back seat. Under such circumstances the assurances provided in the merger documents

have got diluted resulting in a kind of dissensions and aggrandisement. Keeping this perspective in mind a discourse on the merger story of tiny Princely State marginally situated in far north east of Bengal has been dealt herewith.

Such a kind search to understand the underlying forces behind the process of merger may provide a kind of micro level experiences and if such micro experience can be placed on a macro dimension may reveal a kind of experience which would help understand the factors and forces behind the process of merger of the Princely States in general and Cooch Behar in particular. Any discourse on merger of the Princely States with the Indian Union has been the analysis of ultimate surrenderence of the Princely States to the mighty Indian State craft. Despite the assurances made in the Government of India Act, 1947 for the Princely States to remain independent or either to merge with India or Pakistan, the non-viability factor had ultimately compelled the Princely States either to join India or Pakistan. The age old evolving relationship between the Princely States and the British India followed through ages helped building a kind of situation where the Princely States could have no options rather joining either of the two dominions. In this sense the administrative integration between British India and the Princely States was completed long before India's independence. However, independent India completed the process of political integration by merging the Princely States within its fold. On the

basis of the issues, a systematic search of the factor and forces of the issue, a systematic search of the factors and forces behind the merger of Cooch Behar may be highlighted.

Although tiny in form, the Cooch Behar State, having a legacy of nearly five hundred years, and ruled by a single dynasty, had been able to extract recognition and respect only during 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the Maharaja of Cooch Behar had come with a closer contact with the British Government. During the days immediately after independence, the rulers of Cooch Behar could well understand their possible future destiny like most of the Princely States. An amount of activism had been manifest in the soil of Cooch Behar. Such kind of political activism in fact gave birth to different kind of issues raised by the rulers, political and social elites on the question of future locus-standi of Cooch Behar. All these issues constitute the ingredients behind the process of merger of the Cooch Behar State. Such a kind of concerted process was consisted of three sub processes: (1) Process of remaining independent; (2) Process of merging with Pakistan; (3) Process of merging with India. An analysis of these processes can well present a true picture behind the merger of this tiny Princely State.

#### **ISSUES REMAINING INDEPENDENT:**

The independence of India registered the birth of a kind of sub-continental empire consisting of the major part of the British

administered provinces and nearly six hundred Princely States of different size and political content produced a kind of transplanted nationalist state formation which has indeed been the product of an anti-colonial political project. Such kind of a transplanted nationalist state had to confront with competing collective imaginings. Such imaginings had been the indispensability for a sub-continental state like India marked by intermittent tension between the Nationalist State and the Princely Kingdoms. It was, indeed, in a situation the tiny Princely State of Cooch Behar experienced with multidimensional forces and events operating in tacit or manifest manner. The demand of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar to remain independent came out of three major considerations. First, the Government of India Act, 1947 provided the right to the Princely States to merge with either of the two dominions or to remain independent. Second, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar had been a party to that section of the Princely States which voiced for sustaining their independence. Third, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar wanted to make a balance between the opposing forces within the local political elites propagating either that Cooch Behar should join India or merge with Pakistan. Moreover, Maharaja of Cooch Behar had never been a direct party to the anti-colonial political movements. Thus the so-called Indian

nationalist consciousness could not touch upon the minds of the Maharajas of Cooch Behar. The State Praja Mandal (a local democratic nationalist group) in a telegram<sup>1</sup> to Sardar Patel, depicted the inherent objective tendency and the purpose of the Maharaja and his associates to remain independent. To the view of Prajamandal, "His Highness, in collusion and collaboration with his favourite Muslim pro-League and scheduled castes ministers, thanks that he can still now play the same reactionary role as was done previously during the British era." Not only the Maharaja of Cooch Behar was atypically apathetic to join India or Pakistan, a section of his State Council favoured Cooch Behar to remain independent. Satish Chandra Singha Roy, the Education Minister of the State expressed his opinion in a meeting at Mekliganj, (a subdivision of the State of Cooch Behar) that he wanted Cooch Behar to remain independent of India.<sup>2</sup>

Despite, the presence of the opinions and forces favouring Cooch Behar to remain independent, the argument could not achieve foothold. The active presence of the pro Indian political forces in fact dominated the political scene. The State Projamandal, Cooch Behar People's Association, a considerable number of members of the State Council and the leading intellectuals of the region had urged the Maharaja of Cooch Behar to change his attitude to remain independent. It is not out of place to mention

that Swai Mansing II, Maharaja of Jaipur and brother-in-law, Maharaja of Cooch Behar, had played an instrumental role in changing the mind of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar<sup>3</sup>. Ultimately, the attempt which generated a kind of process of remaining independent had been thwarted by the dominant will of the socio-political agents propagating in favour of merging Cooch Behar with Indian State.

### **ISSUES MERGING WITH PAKISTAN**

When it was all set that Cooch Behar be merged with India a reasonably strong force argued in favour of merging Cooch Behar, with Pakistan. This pro-Pakistan propagandists in Cooch Behar, mostly constituted of the Muslim political elites in Cooch Behar State Council.<sup>1</sup> This elite group was primarily influenced by the Muslim League created aspirations to join Pakistan and the anxieties of the Muslim elites on the issue of their future position and possible role to be played and profits to be accrued if Cooch Behar be merged with India. In fact, most of the Muslim administrative elites working in different administrative positions of Maharaja's administration migrated from adjoining areas of Pabna and Rangpur. Naturally, when they have had an understanding that these adjoining areas were going to be included in the political map of Pakistan, the Muslim elites in Cooch Behar attempted to adjoin Cooch Behar with those merging districts of East Pakistan.

Apart from the Muslim elites migrated from the adjoining areas of Cooch Behar, some of the top political and administrative positions were distributed to some Muslim personalities brought directly from Baroda and its adjoining areas.<sup>5</sup> Such an occurrence was taken place due to the fact that Maharani Indira Devi, the King's mother was held form the palace of Baroda. Although minority in form, the migrated Muslim elites from Baroda to Cooch Behar joined hands with the local Muslim administrative elites. Such a move favouring Cooch Behar be merged with Pakistan had received acceleration when the Hitasadhani Sabha (State patronised organisation) launched its movements for merging Cooch Behar with Pakistan. The positional advantage of Khan Chaudhury Amantullah being the president of the Hitasadhani Sabha helped the Pro-Pakistani movement in Cooch Behar. As the Revenue Minister of the State Khan Chaudhury Amantullah tried for importing Muhammadans in Cooch Behar from the neighbouring districts of Rangpur, Maymensingh and Pabna, so that the Muslims could occupy majority to the total population of the Cooch Behar State.<sup>6</sup> Such a move witnessed a considerable increase in the number of Muslims population in Cooch Behar. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar remained passive in response to such move for he was more interested in earning revenues from this new settlement. Khan Chaudhury Amantullah has had also a greater design to transplant some

influential educated Muslim in different administrative position of the Cooch Behar State. Ansur Uddin Ahmed having British education was made the Finance Minister of Cooch Behar<sup>7</sup>. Ashadullah Siraji, leader of the Mujahid Fauj and a strong supporter of Pakistan was invited to Cooch Behar to free this tiny state from the Hindus.<sup>8</sup> Not only the Muslims political and administrative elites a section of Muslim pleaders and businessmen was also involved in the design of Khan Chaudhury Amantullah for turning Cooch Behar to Pakistan.

When the design crafted by Amantullah for merging Cooch Behar with Pakistan was about to fail, he demanded plebiscite to solve the problem.<sup>9</sup> Supporting the claim of Amantullah, Hekim Ahmed Hussain, S.D.O. Mathabhanga (a sub-division of Cooch Behar Administration) delivered a speech emphasising the merger of Cooch Behar with Pakistan. The Indian National Flag was dishonoured in Mathabhanga by the Pro-Pakistan supporters under the insistence of Hekim Ahmed Hussain.<sup>10</sup> The role of Maharaja of Cooch Behar was very much conspicuous in preventing the Pro-Pakistan move in Cooch Behar, rather Maharaja's administration in Mathabhanga was deployed to obstruct the celebration of Independence Day, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. People of Tufanganj celebrating the Independence had also received worst kind of treatment by the Maharaja Administration.<sup>11</sup> The State authority of

Cooch Behar had gone to the extent of arresting and extorting the leader celebrating Independence Day from the State. Moreover, Muslim elites having administrative position in Cooch Behar State Administration had started forcing people to voice against merger of Cooch Behar with India and support of Pakistan. Despite the presence of vigorous pro-Pakistan move the Maharaja's administration maintained a low profile while communicating necessary information to Mr. K.N.Katju, Shri Himmat Singh K Maheswari, a U.P., Civil Service cadre stationed in Cooch Behar pointed out that the reports regarding pro-Pakistan move were completely baseless.<sup>12</sup> There was absolutely no infiltration of Muslims of any kind and pro-Pakistani movement of any description. Such a misinformation was because of the fear of mighty Indian State and there is no ground in recognising the argument of Mr. Maheswari owing to the fact that a number of references has already been made to analyse the pro-Pakistan move of a section of ministers of Maharaja's Council and the tacit support of Maharaja to the move. Maharaja had, in fact, a kind of weakness to such move because of the fact that he was psychologically fixed to get rid of Bengal if ultimately Cooch Behar was to join with Indian union and probably he had a vision that Cooch Behar would ultimately a part of Bengal. Maharaja's weakness to pro-Pakistan move can be well justified by his activities even during the period of

signing the Merger Agreement. Prior to the signing of the Merger Agreement Maharaja of Cooch Behar made several appointments with Surwardy, the prominent Muslim League leader of Pakistan.<sup>13</sup>

### ISSUES MERGING WITH INDIA

Despite repeated attempt of the pro-Pakistani moves in Cooch Behar and a tacit support of the maharaja to such move, the pro-Indian moves in Cooch Behar had ultimately gained currency. The political, social and cultural canvas of Cooch Behar was such that it provided a congenial atmosphere with such compelling reasons which produced in turn a majority voice for turning Cooch Behar into India. The Indian nationalist political elites, the Bengal political elites have had also a deep seeded root in turning Cooch Behar towards India. The local, social and political groups, which formed the majority, voice and the intellectuals of the region favoured the merger of Cooch Behar with India. Certain examples of such pro-Indian moves would not be out of place to mention.

The Prajamandal later re-named as State Peoples' Conference was established in July, 1945 as a reaction to the State directed terrorism used against the students and teachers of Victoria College, Cooch Behar. Shri Umesh Chndra Mandal, a pleader of the locality and Shri Ramesh Roy were its President and Secretary respectively.<sup>14</sup> The member of the State Peoples' Conference were mostly educated youth of the area with a bent towards Indian

nationalists and throughly against the feudal state administration. This organisation, from its inception was favouring the issue of merging Cooch Behar with Indian State and was also interested against the designed move of Hitasadhani Sabha to divide the people of Cooch Behar on the principle of the son of the soil. The ouster move of Hitasadhani Sabha on the principle of Deshi (local people) and Bhatia (the outsiders migrated to Cooch Behar) was highly condemned and criticised by the State Peoples' Conference of Cooch Behar. Terming the Hitasadhani Sabha "a most reactionary group" although patronised by Maharaja of Cooch Behar, the State Peoples' Conference, in its resolution unequivocally resolved that "for the safety and interest of the people of Cooch Behar and also for the solidarity of the Indian Union, the State of Cooch Behar be at once merged with such a province which is indissolubly connected with Cooch Behar State culturally, economically, geographically, and linguistically."<sup>15</sup> The said organisation was also highly critical towards Maharaja of Cooch Behar, because, the Maharaja in collusion and collaboration with his favourable Muslim Ministers tried to play the Pakistan card. The Cooch Behararis (Deshi) and non Cooch Beharis (Bhatia) division was objectively designed to divide people on the issue of merger of Cooch Behar which ultimately would drag the State to be Pakistanised. Such a move was criticised by the said organisation i.e. the State Peoples' Conference. In a letter to Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel, the Secretary

of the organisation, sought the help of Sardar Patel for merging Cooch Behar with India.<sup>16</sup>

Another organisation, 'The Cooch Behar State Congress' was established in 1947 as a branch of Indian National Congress. The Cooch Behar State Congress had no hesitation in arguing for Cooch Behar State to be merged with India. The Cooch Behar State Congress was also only critical about the role of Hitasadhani Sabha playing with the son of the soil card. In its resolution taken at various times during 1947-48 the State Congress emphasised the urgency of merging Cooch Behar on several occasions.<sup>17</sup> The town Congress Committees and Thana Congress Committees under the jurisdiction of the Cooch Behar State Congress were also in favour of merging Cooch Behar with India. In a telegram sent to Sardar Ballabh Bahi Patel, the Secretary Bamanhat Thana Congress urged for immediate intervention of Sardar Patel into the affairs of Cooch Behar. The message of the telegram was, "Cooch Behar State authorities forcing people to sign against merger and making propaganda against Indian Dominion. Take action".<sup>18</sup> The Haldibari Town Congress Committee in an unequivocal terms pleaded for merger of Cooch Behar with India.<sup>19</sup>

The Cooch Behar Peoples' Association, a social organisation, actively worked for the interest of the people of Cooch Behar, however, remaining outside the territory of Cooch Behar State. The Association was formed in Calcutta by the educated elites having

Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri background. From the very beginning the Association insisted for bringing Cooch Behar to the Indian fold. In its meetings mostly taken place in Calcutta, the Association for time and again supported the urgency of merger of Cooch Behar with India. The Association received patronisation and support from most of the Bengal's political and social elites viz, Dr. B.C.Roy, Dr. S.P. Mukherjee, Shri Sarat Bose, Shri Probodh Sanyal, Dr. R.C. Majumdar, Sir J.N. Sarkar and others.<sup>20</sup> The Association was not only in favour of merging Cooch Behar with India, it also justified the claim of bringing Cooch Behar to the fold of West Bengal State. An analysis of the justification of their claims would be dealt elsewhere.

All the opposing forces operating in Cooch Behar soil during the days of merger had, ultimately, been put to a halt soon after the newly independent Indian State craft could able to persuade Maharaja of Cooch Behar for signing agreement determining the tying of the fate of this tiny Princely State with India. An analysis of the background of Merger Agreement between Maharaja of Cooch Behar and the Government of India would not be an exaggeration.

While persuading the Maharaja of bring Cooch Behar to the fold of Indian polity the Government of India assured that Cooch Behar would be given a special administrative status as a centrally administered area under a Chief Commissioner. Even after the

merger of Cooch Behar with India the prevalent contracts and agreements would duly be honoured subject to the non-repugnancy of the prevailing contracts and agreements with the laws of and general policy of the Government of India.<sup>21</sup> The material interests of the royal family would be protected with honour and the personnel of the royal administration and military force of Cooch Behar would be automatically converted to the Indian administration and military force. The Cooch Behar State sponsored temples and religious properties would be managed and administered by a religious trust to be headed by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. Moreover, interests, honour and prestige of the royal family of Cooch Behar would be ascertained and a principle of equality of treatment to be provided to the Maharaja of Cooch Behar along with other merging princely states with India. In addition to the assurance the Government of India had tried to persuade the Maharaja of Cooch Behar by exerting the influence of Swai Man Singh II, the Maharaja of Jaipur, as well as brother-in-law of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. Ultimately the Maharaja of Cooch Behar had to digest the proposal of merger of Cooch Behar with India and finally the Merger Agreement was taken place on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1949. Although the Maharaja of Cooch Behar as a signatory to the Agreement was apparently satisfied with the provisions (altogether nine in number) of the Agreement, an insight to the whole issue

would provide the scope to state that there had been wider gaps between the assurance provided by the Indian Government and the provisions enumerated in the Agreement of Merger. Soon after the Agreement had been concluded Cooch Behar was designated as a Chief Commissioner's province and was placed in the Part-C-of the First Schedule of the original constitution of India (1949). However, entry relating to Cooch Behar was omitted by the Constitution (amendment of the First and Fourth Schedule) order, 1950 (C.O.-3 dated the 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1950). Such a kind of move of re-arranging the administrative status of Cooch Behar provided a kind a complex political process that was prevalent in the Cooch Behar soil during 1949-50.

Soon after the merger of Cooch Behar State with the Dominion of India and the placement of the former as the Part C Category of State, political leaders in power of the adjoining states such as West Bengal and Assam were deeply interested to include Cooch Behar in their respective provincial territories. Indeed, it was apparently made clear that inclusion of the princely states (mostly minor) in Part C Category had been a compulsion for the necessary compliance of the condition enumerated in Article 290-A of the Government of India Act, 1935 which clarified the future administrative locus-standi of the princely States merging with the dominion. Such a kind of transitory situation gave birth to a

process of bargaining between the political leadership of Assam and West Bengal during the whole year of 1949 for establishing their respective claims to bring Cooch Behar to their respective folds.

The claim of West Bengal over Cooch Behar received adequate support from important social and political organisations excluding Hitasadhani Sabha. The Cooch Behar State Congress, the State Peoples' Conference, the Cooch Behar Peoples' Association and the emerging leftist groups whole-heartedly supported the demand for integrating Cooch Behar with the state of West Bengal. To support their claim these groups tried to raise the issues of long standing affinity and cultural assimilation of the Cooch Behar State with Bengal. In addition to this, the linguistic homogeneity and the geographical proximity were emphasised to justify the claim of West Bengal to include Cooch Behar within its fold. The above mentioned political and social organisations took strong exceptions to the move of Assam political leaders and the members of the Hitasadhani Sabha for their urge to include Cooch Behar in Assam.

To be specific, the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee demanded the merger of the Cooch Behar State with West Bengal without any delay on the following grounds<sup>22</sup>. The grounds were: (i) geographical contiguity, (ii) cultural and linguistic homogeneity and close political relationship till independence; (iii) eligibility and equality of the Cooch Behar subjects in respect of Government's services in Bengal but not in other provinces; (iv) use of Bengali

language in speech and education in all spheres and in courts; (v) Calcutta is the main source of supply not only of foreign goods but also many goods produced in other parts of India, and at the same time Calcutta is the main outlet for the raw materials and other goods produced in Cooch Behar; (vi) Commercial life of Cooch Behar is indissolubly bound with the contiguous district of Jalpaiguri in West Bengal; (vii) The Cooch Behar State Congress is affiliated to the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee; (viii) The Pradesh Congress Committee also demands that the general election in Cooch Behar which is going to take place in course of next fortnight be stopped immediately as the verdict of the so called representatives elected thereby cannot reflect the real voices of the majority of the Cooch Behar people, because, the election rules have been framed with the deliberate objective to exclude a large number of people from participating in voting and also in standing as a candidate for election to the legislature and being exercised by the State sponsored party influencing the people to vote in their favour. The verdict of the legislature elected under the ensuing election will be a colossal fraud on all outsiders and the Indian States Ministry who are not familiar in the real situation in Cooch Behar State.<sup>23</sup>

While substantiating its argument in favour of the inclusion of Cooch Behar with West Bengal, the West Bengal Pradesh

Congress Committee argued for the existing linguistic homogeneity and the prevalence of Bengali as the official language of the Cooch Behar Court since 16<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the culturo-linguistic affiliation of the natives and non-natives living in Cooch Behar may be an important area to be considered for the inclusion of Cooch Behar with West Bengal <sup>24</sup>.

The various daily newspapers supported the demands of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee <sup>25</sup>. To prove that Cooch Behar had always been inseparably bound with Bengal, 'The Nation' cited example of the treaty of 1773. It was decided in the treaty that the Raja will acknowledge subjection to the East India Company upon his country being cleared of his enemies and will allow the Cooch Behar country to be annexed to the province of Bengal and ever since Cooch Behar has been looked upon as an integral part of Bengal. Moreover, during the partition of Bengal in 1905, the British Government affixed Cooch Behar with newly born Bengal province without recognising the separate entity of the latter. While arguing the case for Cooch Behar to be merged with West Bengal Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal an eminent social worker of the region emphasised on the point of administrative linkage by citing the fact that when the adjacent Jalpaiguri district had been created on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1869 it was tagged with the Cooch Behar division and placed under the supervision of the Divisional Commissioner of Cooch Behar. Such an occasion amply proves that Cooch Behar

had been a part and parcel of Bengal. To gather support in favour of his argument Dr. Sanyal published an editorial in his regional newspaper 'Janamat' and distributed leaflets supporting the cause for Merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal <sup>26</sup>.

Besides the Congress organisation, the State Peoples' conference demanded the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal for the safety and interest of the people of Cooch Behar. Cooch Behar peoples' Association propagated the merger of the State with West Bengal on grounds of cultural and linguistic homogeneity. It also demanded immediate establishment of the peoples' Government in Cooch Behar. It further emphasised that it was the duty of the government to get back the Bangalee speaking areas to the province, and if it was necessary they should make agitation for the inclusion of those areas to West Bengal. The citizens of Calcutta voiced their opposition against the 'sinister movement' made by the vested interested parties elsewhere to take away Cooch Behar from the bosom of West Bengal. They strongly urged the Central Government to resolve the deadlock by immediate merging of the Cooch Behar State with West Bengal <sup>27</sup>.

Different other popular organisations operating in Cooch Behar and outside sent telegrams <sup>28</sup> to Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India and the Congress President, stating the unanimous demands of all sections of the people of the State for merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. They also claimed that

there was absolutely no opposition on the merger issue with West Bengal amongst the Cooch Behar people only exception, the ruler and his satellites. An eminent administrator with a profound research experience of the region Nari Rustomji, the advisor to the Governor of Assam, interestingly, commented that while Cooch Behar had close affinities it should logically be merged with West Bengal<sup>29</sup>.

The visit of Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Ex-Premier of Bengal to Cooch Behar during 1948 generated hope and enthusiasm among the political and social organisations favouring its merger with West Bengal. Dr. Ghosh was objective in his mission enabling the people of Cooch Behar to understand the prospect if this area be merged with West Bengal. He cautioned those organisations playing the native card. As a result, people of Cooch Behar favouring merger with West Bengal got boosted. Moreover, Dr. B.C. Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal had whole-heartedly supported the cause for merger of Cooch Behar with the state of West Bengal for the greater unity and integrity of the newly emerged Indian Nation<sup>30</sup>.

The parallel force actively operating in Cooch Behar argued for and supported vehemently the cause for merger of Cooch Behar with Assam. The Hitasadhani Sabha, a selected group of elites in Cooch Behar Court and few other social groups were interested in tying the fate of Cooch Behar with Assam. This group of people

mooted a different kind of option urging for joining in proposed Uttarkhand State comprising of Darjeeling, Sikkim, Jalpaiguri, Dooars and Cooch Behar or Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar<sup>31</sup>. However, such an attempt proved futile and the idea of remaining a part of proposed Uttarkhand State was abandoned<sup>32</sup>. Such a move in Cooch Behar was sincerely welcomed by the political leaders of Assam cutting across the political boundaries. The Assam State Pradesh Congress Committee raised voice for the immediate merger of Cooch Behar with Assam<sup>33</sup>. It unanimously resolved further to make no stone unturned for getting Cooch Behar within the fold of Assam State. It justified its argument by way of showing close affinity of Assam with the people of Cooch Behar in dialect, customs, manners and their immortal association as a part and parcel of the old kingdom of Kamrupa (Assam) since time immemorial<sup>34</sup>. The provincial Congress Committee of Assam sent a memorandum to the Government of India urging not to merge Cooch Behar with any state without ascertaining the will of the people of Cooch Behar by democratic method.

The eminent leaders of Assam State countered and curtailed the arguments of the West Bengal leaders asking<sup>35</sup> for merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. The Assam leaders tried to prove the arguments of West Bengal leaders as cocktailed, designed and lofty without having any definite social base. To substantiate their arguments the Assam Congress leaders sharply pointed out the

linguistic, cultural, ethnological and religious affinity between Cooch Behar and Assam. They referred the example of the deep seeded influence of the Assamese religious prophets such as Shankar Dev, Madhav Dev and Shreedhar Kandali on the minds of the people of Cooch Behar through ages. Thus to deprive Assam from getting Cooch Behar in its fold would be an attempt to distort the history and to get the people of Cooch Behar stabbed right from back<sup>36</sup>. To accelerate the move and to boost the people in Cooch Behar demanding merger with Assam, the Chief Minister of Assam Shriu Gopinath Bordoloi had made a hurricane tour in Cooch Behar<sup>37</sup>. To expedite the merger with Cooch Behar and Assam some administrative higher officials of Assam also came to Cooch Behar and met with the officials of the Cooch Behar State. Various organisations of Assam, like Assam Pradeshik Kshatriya Samity, Assam Jatiya Mahasabha demanded the merger of Cooch Behar with Assam without any delay.

Nilmoni Fookan and Sarat Chandra Singha, eminent personalities of Assam came to Cooch Behar during this time and met with the Maharaja<sup>38</sup>. Mr. Fookan argued that Cooch Behar be merged with Assam and if it is merged with Bengal that will be harmful to the Indian Union. He further expressed that taking advantage of the troubled situation the communists will infiltrate in this region and the Central Government will be responsible for this.

An important point to be mentioned that Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan, could not remain impartial on the issue of merging Cooch Behar either with West Bengal or Assam. He tilted favouring the cause of Assam and openly state that the States merger with Assam would be preferable to that with West Bengal for strategic importance for the State was cut off from West Bengal by Pakistani territories. As a result communication to Calcutta was difficult. On the other Cooch Behar is directly connected by road with Guwahati, the capital of Assam State <sup>39</sup>. He further blamed that people from Bengal exploited the country for many years. Maharaja was confident enough that if there is a plebiscite, the people of Cooch Behar will vote in favour merger with Assam or any other province but not with West Bengal. The cultural homogeneity, Maharaja argues, between Assam and Cooch Behar justifies amply the basis of being Cooch Behar to be merged with Assam. The arguments of Maharaja clearly proved his reservations on the issue of merging Cooch Behar with West Bengal. However, Maharaja's stand was vehemently countered by various active social and political groups in Cooch Behar.

Rejecting the claims and blames of Maharaja the local congress leaders firmly argued that the Maharaja's arguments have been baseless and charged with emotions. Such a kind of comment is a sinister design of a negligible group of landed aristocrats and compradore bureaucrats living around Maharaja. The Cooch Behar

Congress leaders had been of the view that the objective propaganda and his associates bracketing Bengalees as exploiters was primarily designed to keep distance between the natives and Bengalees harmoniously living in Cooch Behar through ages. To the Cooch Behar Congress<sup>40</sup>, the exploiters have been the banyas and traders and not the Bengalees. Further, if the adjacent districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling can be connected by road and rails with Calcutta, Cooch Behar would not have to suffer much with the feeling of geographical isolation.

'The Nation' a leading newspaper published from Calcutta opposed firmly the views of Maharaja of Cooch Behar on the issue of merger. Countering Maharaja's argument, 'The Nation' observes, "Is there any country in the world where cultural affinity grew independently of linguistic affinity? The Maharaja Saheb overlooked the fact that like Bengal, Cooch Behar is also guided by Daibhaga School of Hindu Law which does not extend to Assam or any other Indian province. This is enough to demolish the Maharaja's fantastic theory that the people of Cooch Behar had cultural and social link with Assam<sup>41</sup>. The State Peoples conference mostly dominated by left wing political leaders strongly refuted the justification of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar favouring Assam<sup>42</sup>. The leader argues that the interest of the Maharaja and his associates in merging with Assam lies in the inherent objective of satisfying the vested interests of the landed aristocracy and a sublime hope in

retaining loyalty over the people of Cooch Behar, if it was associated with a state still experiencing and championing the traditional authoritarian society. Such a possibility of non resistance against the existing authority structure might have influenced the Maharaja to associate Cooch Behar with Assam in preference to associating Cooch Behar with West Bengal – a State which has already rejected the bastion of any kind of authoritarian regime and always upholds the democratic values. The fear of democracy and the fear of losing control over the people might have influenced Maharaja to speak for Assam<sup>43</sup>.

Another important event was taken place during the period on the issue of appointment of Akbar K. Haidari as political agent of the governor of India in Cooch Behar after violating the previous conventions<sup>44</sup>. During British regime, the Commissioner of Rajshahi Division acted as the Ex-Officio political agents of Cooch Behar. But after independence, the old order was suddenly changed and Akbar K. Haidari was appointed as political agent which the Bengalee people scented something wrong about Cooch Behar and its future. Sri Akbar K. Haidari and his successor Shri Prakash thought fit to encourage or connive at the integration of Cooch Behar with Assam. Akbar K. Haidari wrote a letter<sup>45</sup> to Sardar Patel pointing down the fact that, 'The danger of the situation lies in Cooch Behar on the fact that the Bengal Congress leaders are lending themselves to propaganda that Cooch Behar should be merged with West Bengal

and this made the Congress unpopular in Cooch Behar". Further he argued 'any attempt to bring Cooch Behar under the wing of the Bengal Provincial congress committee would be violently resisted and in the present state of feeling the Congress would find few Cooch Behari adherents'. To him 'The best would be let it be affiliated to the Assam provincial Congress', Haidari's observation might have been influenced basically by two factors (a) The enthusiasm of the Muslim elite of Cooch Behar Court for merging Cooch Behar with Assam and (b) the outright rejection of Bengal's claim to have Bengalee speaking areas of Bihar within the fold of Bengal by the Government of India. To react against Haidari's comment, Sarat Chandra Bose, President, Socialist Republican party, sent a telegram to Ballabh Bhai Patel in the following words, 'Reported attempts being secretly and insidiously made for merging 99% Bengalee speaking Cooch Behari with Assam which has to be thwarted for providing justice both the Bengal and Bengalee speaking Cooch Behar'<sup>46</sup>.

Haidari's pro-Assam stand provoked the members of the Hitasadhani Sabha to make immediate connection with the Assamese leaders demanding the merger of Cooch Behar with Assam. Such a move of the leaders of Cooch Behar, Hitasadhani Sabha comprising mostly of educated upper class Rajbanshi, landed aristocrats was whole heartedly supported by the Muslim political and administrative elites of Cooch Behar Court<sup>47</sup>. Such a

kind of nexus for the cause of merging Cooch Behar with Assam called for certain immediate aspirations to be satisfied. These are; (a) realisation of distancing policy pursued both by the Muslim elites and a group of Rajbanshi Kshatriya vis-à-vis Bengal, (b) immediate tying up with the transplanted Muslim population in Assam nearly 4.5 Lacks in number; (c) linking up with the domicilled Rajbanshi Kshatriya in Assam Living mostly in lowerpart of Assam such as Goalpara district of the state; (d) satisfaction of the interests of the landed aristocrats comprising both Muslims and Rajbanshi Kshatriyas inhabiting in the districts of Assam adjacent to Cooch Behar<sup>48</sup>.

Amantullah Khan Choudhury, the Revenue Minister of Cooch Behar had been a strong proponent for merging Cooch Behar with Assam. To realise his zeal, he managed the Maharaja to appoint one Mr. Fookan an influential, political elite of Assam as Police Commissioner of Cooch Behar<sup>49</sup>. Such a move consolidated the aspiration of the pro Assam political and administrative elite of Maharaja's Court. In order to provide an emotional religious flavour to such a design, the death anniversary of Shri Shankar Dev, a celebrated religious saint of Assam was observed under direct state patronisation<sup>50</sup>. The pilgrims of Assam were cordially invited to observe the anniversary with an objective to have a huge gathering of Assamese and pro-Assam supporters at Cooch Behar. Moreover, again in a straightforward manner demanded for organising

plebiscite in Cooch Behar on the issue of merger either with Assam or Bengal.

At this scorched time, the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, came to Calcutta and announced in a public meeting that the question of merger of Cooch Behar should be settled by a plebiscite as there is a division among the people of that state<sup>51</sup>. Such an announcement evoked mixed responses. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, Assam Jatiya Mahasabha and other popular organisation of Assam gave thanks to Nehru for the announcement. Gopinath Bordoloi, the Chief Minister of Assam expressed his pleasure for Nehru's keeping of promise to declare a plebiscite for determining the future fate of Cooch Behar<sup>52</sup>. But the announcement of Nehru for plebiscite in Cooch Behar had been strongly resented by the pro-Bengal movement makers. The leader of the Cooch Behar peoples' Association argued that when the future of the other States in India had been settled without any plebiscite the same principle too should be applied in the case of Cooch Behar<sup>53</sup>. The Association also earnestly asks the Central Government not to inflict any further blow to the cultural and economic unity of West Bengal already groaning under the agony of many wounds by keeping Cooch Behar State separate from West Bengal. Expressing his anxiety Dr. B.C. Roy informed Sardar Patel that the State of West Bengal had been and still has been in firm conviction to have Cooch Behar with its fold for Cooch Behar has been an inseparable part of Bengal's history and culture.<sup>54</sup>

In the wake of this new situation the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee sent a memorandum to Sardar Patel, <sup>55</sup> urging for the immediate realisation of merger of Cooch Behar with Bengal without observing anything either against or for the so called plebiscite. Sardar Patel assured the pro-Bengal moves that after considering the whole issue proper justice will be done on the issue.<sup>56</sup> Patel was firm enough to convey Mr. Sarat Bose, the impossibility of merging Cooch Behar with Assam and the Bengal's claim for Cooch Behar's stands valid on the ground that the neighbouring States of the provinces should be merged with proper justifications. At the meeting of the All India Congress Committee presided by Sardar Patel resolved that Cooch Behar should be brought under the wing of West Bengal.<sup>57</sup> The recommendation of the All India Congress Committee was accepted by the Government. The Government of India announced finally on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1949 that Cooch Behar should be merged with West Bengal.<sup>58</sup>

The announcement of the Central Government regarding the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal was widely greeted by the people of West Bengal, different political parties, organisations and individuals. Such an announcement was countered by the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. It stated that after clear pronouncement of the Prime Minister of India in a Calcutta meeting, the question of merger of Cooch Behar would be decided according to the wishes of the people, but at present the merger of Cooch

Behar is going to be made with Bengal despite vehement protests of Cooch Behar people. The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee urged strongly the Government of India to stay the question of merger immediately and direct a plebscite on this issue as proposed by Nehru.<sup>59</sup> Assam Jatiya Mahasabha in a telegram<sup>60</sup> to Patel urged for stopping the merger of Cooch Behar with Bengal. Lilakanta Barak, the secretary of the Assam Pradeshik Krishak Sammilani argued that the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal is a proof of the Central Government's autocratic attitude and he gave a call to the people of Cooch Behar and Assam to launch a joint movement against the Central Government.<sup>61</sup>

Amidst the protests of pro-Assam protagonists, a public meeting was summoned in Cooch Behar to complete the process of merger with West Bengal as announced by the Indian Government. Dr. B.C.Roy and the Maharaja Jaggaddipendra Narayan delivered their complements for the people of Cooch Behar and thus by virtue of Section 29 (1) of Government of India Act 1935 Cooch Behar became a district of West Bengal with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, 1950.

The historical narratives on the merger of Cooch Behar State as presented in the paper, lead towards a set of conclusions of bias free nature. Such conclusions would call for a deep insight to understand the fate accomplice of a Princely State. There had been conspicuous absence of any mass movement in Cooch Behar for

either remaining independent or merge with India or Pakistan. Simultaneously there had been no people movement in Cooch Behar for joining Bengal or Assam. Thus whatever kind of forces operating actively in Cooch Behar or outside had always been devoid of any mass base social and political support. Indeed the people of Cooch Behar were given a back seat to decide upon their future political position. The indigenous landed aristocrats, local political and administrative elites and a section of intelligentsia had actively participated in the process of merger. The weak level of political socialisation of the local inhabitants because of the restrictive political policy of Cooch Behar Raj might have been a part of their weakness. In this sense the general people remained apathetic in participating in the merger movement. The general people of Cooch Behar had simply shown their acquiescence to the ultimate decision of merger without making any hue and cry. Thus the merger movement in Cooch Behar has been a saga of cleavages between the opposite forces comprising of mostly vested interested middle class and upper middle class people.

Despite the option provided by 1947 Act enabling Cooch Behar to remain independent the viability and potentiality of Cooch Behar to remain independent had broadly been questioned due to its tiny geographic configuration. It had been a compulsion on the part of Cooch Behar to take side of India for its strategic compulsion and the nature of demographic composition.

Despite the negation of Maharaja of Cooch Behar to join West Bengal, the issue of joining with Assam could not receive well attention of the national political leadership owing to the fact that the national leadership had a preconceived notion that while reorganising states no caste group dominated a particular territory. The potential solidarity of the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas as a strong caste group living in the area, if merged with Assam might have created a greater form of caste consideration in association with the Rajbanshis living in the Assam territories adjacent to Cooch Behar. Such a doubt might have made the mind of the national political leadership to include Cooch Behar with West Bengal where such a considerable configuration of caste would not have been taken place due to the heterogeneous composition of the districts of West Bengal.

The response and the reaction of the ruler and the administrative elites as well as the landed bourgeoisie of the Cooch Behar State had been conducive to the general sentiments of peripheral rulers and landed aristocrats of not responding positively to merger with greater Indian union. Such a kind of negative attitude arose out of the fear of identity crisis of a tiny state vis-à-vis the greater political system. Notwithstanding the immediate negative response of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, it had to merge with India owing to circumstantial compulsion. The role of Maharaja Swai Man Singh II of Jaipur in persuading the Maharaja

of Cooch Behar for finally signing the treaty of merger with India has been a significant point of reference. Even after the merger, the issue of merger with the state of West Bengal or the state of Assam had been volatile. Again there had been resistance posed by Maharaja and his allies to join West Bengal on the point of that the state of West Bengal would have made Cooch Behar its internal colony and Cooch Behar would simply be monopolised by the Bengalees from Calcutta. Despite prejudices Cooch Behar has been part of West Bengal since 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1950. Indeed, the saga of merger of Cooch Behar State has been the history of the region and the feuds between intra regional and inter regional politico-economic and administrative elites and has never been the history of the general people of the region fighting for or against the merger. Thus, the fate accompli of Cooch Behar State had been to merge with West Bengal followed by sectional dissent and general acquiescence.

The detailed discourse made above on the different political factors and forces on the issue of merger of Cooch Behar State into the Indian Union evidently proves beyond doubt that the Cooch Behar State was not at all at once ready to herself merged with the Indian Union. A deeper insight to this issue lead us towards a logical conclusion that the atmosphere so far built in Cooch Behar State provided a kind of compulsion in extending fears, worries and doubts towards newly built India State. Such compulsions had

emanated from a definite socio-cultural, economic ethno linguistic distinctiveness apart from distinct political identity which the Cooch Behar State had inherited as a legacy from a long standing definitive past. Without understanding these different areas of distinctiveness, it would not be justifiable to come to a conclusion that the Feudatory State of Cooch Behar entered into the Indian Union on a particular date and time. The Uniqueness which Cooch Behar State was having should be elaborated in detail to understand the logic behind the discontent of the ruler of Cooch Behar to merge with Indian Union on the one hand and the present day political upheaval in a concerted and regimented form demanding for a separate State under the new constitutional order, on the other. An analysis in brief of the different distinctive areas in worth mentioning.

### **ETHNOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVENESS:**

The indogenous populace of the erstwhile Cooch Behar State had formed an identity distinctively different from the populace living in Bengal, with the passage of time over years there had been a continuous interaction between the native people of the Cooch Behar State and the Hindus and Muslims of the bordering districts of Bengal. Cooch Behar had also witnessed Bengali intellectual infiltration since the last two decades of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As a result of

assimilation and cultural fusion witnessed by the people of the Cooch Behar State.

Scholars, historians and administrators of different rank and file of British administrative structure have contributed in identifying the origin of the indigenous populace of the Cooch Behar State<sup>62</sup>. In brief most of the scholars are of the opinion that the Rajbanshis, the most dominant ethnic group of Cooch Behar State has their origin in Bodo stock which in its course reflects Austro-Mongoloid tradition. The Bodo stock gave birth to different tribal formations such as Coch, Mech, Rava, Tharu and other subtribal formations. The Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar have their origin in Coch tribal formations. In the process of civil formation the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar got sanskritised and this dominant ethnic group had experienced a closer touch with two distinctive alien culture sets like Hinduisation and Islamisation resulting into a culture mix giving birth to a distinctive mixed variety of cultural fusion<sup>63</sup>. All these interactions have provided a kind of distinctiveness to the Rajbanshi populace of the Cooch Behar State claiming autonomy and originality as a distinct ethnic group.

Such a kind of above proposition has been outrightly rejected by the scholars belonging to Rajbanshi sect. The indigenous scholars have denied the so-called main stream writings depicting the indigenous tribal source of the origin of Rajbanshis. These scholars after denying the source of Rajbanshis in Coch Tribal

origin and inheritance of Bodo stock as identified by the main stream scholars has emphasised on a complete different proposition after tracing the pre-historic origin of the Rajbanshis with the help of mythological scriptures. According to indogenous scholars <sup>64</sup> the Rajbanshis have been the direct descendents of king Prithu who happened to be a dominant ruler of the Aryan heartland of present north India, with the support of the mythological scriptures of the Hindus, scholars of this region have been of the opinion that the policy of Parasuram (a mythological king termed saint) of dekshatriyaisation had augmented the ouster of a good number of population having distinctive Aryan origin and this groups of Aryan population after being fled away from the Aryan mainland due to fear of Parasuram had started settling down in the far northeastern part essentially surrounded by forests and ditches. This fled away group had to accomodate the indogenous culture, language habits, of the tribal populace living in forests. Thus the group, with the passage of time had to experience with the Sudraisation process. These group for got the culture of their ancestors and have to accommodate the culture of the forest people. Thus the present Rajbanshis have a definite Kshatriya origin, however, they can be well designated as bhunga Kshatriya, because of the fact that they have not been able to perform Kshatriya rituals even along period of time due to compulsions. So the Rajbanshis have never been a

cultural outfit of Cooch Behar having an Augro-Mongloid background rather the Rajbanshis have a distinctive Kshatriya past<sup>65</sup>.

From the discussions made above conclusion seems ineluctable that neither the so-called British and main stream scholars nor the indigenous scholars have been able to come to a unanimous conclusion. On the issue of the origin of the local people the first group of scholars hold contradictory arguments on the issue of the origin of the Rajbanshis and had attempted to a kind of tentative conclusion that they have a Coch origin having a legacy of Bodo stuck or have been rooted in Austro-Mongoloid tradition. Such a tentative conclusion does not provide many footholds because it is devoid of scientific genealogical studies. On the other hand the argument of the indigenous scholar emphasising their claim of having a Kshatriya origin does not stand on the ground that it is based on mythological scriptures. Thus a serious research venture is indeed required to reach a conclusion by using mobile methods of techniques and research and by way of forming and identifying accurate genealogical table.

Despite limitations of the studies so far made it can be well be argued that Rajbanshis as an ethnic group does have its distinctive characteristic. Rajbanshis are a ethnic group resulting out of multidimensional cultural fusion taken place over a long period of time. This distinctiveness as an ethnic group has provided a kind of

mindset which was distinctively different both from neighbouring Bengal and Assam.

### **LINGUISTIC DISTINCTIVENESS:**

The local inhabitant of the erstwhile Cooch Behar State used to speak a language of their own with a striking similarities and dissimilarities with the Bengali language and nearly similar to the Assamese language. The inhabitants of the Cooch Behar State majority of them, who are called Rajbanshis speak a language, to their term which is called Rajbanshi Kamtapuri language. However, most of the linguists are of the opinion that Rajbanshi or Kamtapuri is a dialect of Bengali language. Dr. Grienson proposed to call it Rangpuri or Rajbanshi dialects. Some scholar suggested the language spoken by the people of Cooch Behar is a form of Bengali language with important local or tribal variations. Some scholars have argued, 'Having many words in common with the Bengali language a part of the vocabulary of this dialect is indisputably its own, and forms one of the several points which mark it out from the standard Bengali <sup>68</sup>. The language of Cooch Behar had close affinities with Assamese language although certainly there had been differences. Thus the language which the people of Cooch Behar State inherited used to be the Spoken language and for its written form it had to depend on the Bengali alphabets. Thus the linguistic

distinctiveness provided a kind of difference between the Rajbanshis and the Bangalees and Rajbanshis and Assameses were a question of cultural contention among the natives of Cooch Behar and Bengal and Assam in the period of merger.

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS:**

Understandably, the indigenous people of Cooch Behar State had undergone a massive cross-cultural fusion over a long period of time. Such a kind of overwhelming interaction between the indigenous society and culture and the alien culture in Cooch Behar State with similarities and variations with the infiltrating culture and society. It has been observed by the scholars that the society and culture of Cooch Behar State had undergone a massive process of Hinduisation and Islamisation. Under the impact of the two processes the indigenous people of the Cooch Behar State adopted a new outlook to life and society as well as got sanskritised. The influence of Vaishnav cult under the aegis of Sankardeb had also exerted considerable impact on the life and society of the indigenous people of Cooch Behar State. Based on the principle of egalitarianism the indigenous society and culture of Cooch Behar had got transformed and societal hierarchical system began to develop. The varno system which was absolutely absent had started getting shape under the impact of the above processes. Despite

having tremendous similarities with the dominant Hindu culture steered by Brahmanic cult, the indigenous people, still practise certain social and religious rituals of their own which are absent in the Brahmanic tradition. The claim of the indigenous scholars of having direct Hindu Kshatriya origin does not hold much value while one observes the commonly followed non Hindu Kshatriya rituals observed by the indigenous people. However, arguments favoring the indigenous scholars may be extended by way of pointing out that the one Hindu Kshatriya social practices and rituals had to be observed by the fled away people belonging to Kshatriya category settled in a non Aryan geography had to accommodate the non-Aryan culture and rituals ever since the mythological age. The marital or nuptial relationship between the origin kshatriya people settled in 'Kiratbhumi' and the indigenous local tribal groups, since time immemorial, had yielded a mixed variety of society and culture for the people of Cooch Behar which is similar to the dominant Hindu culture as well as distinctively different from it, such a socio cultural setting, undoubtedly, had given rise to a definite and distinctive socio-cultural identity for the people of Cooch Behar State.

#### **ECONOMIC DISTINCTIVENESS:**

The feudal nature of the Cooch Behar State corroborated a maligning feudal economy purely based on agriculture. The agriculture based feudal economy correspondingly produced a

feudal society and authoritarian social structure. Evidently, the inhabitants of Cooch Behar State reflected a society, politics and culture fundamentally based on feudal economy since land was the only source of production. People had no option other than joining agricultural avocation. The land man relationship had never been balanced and lands were mostly occupied by a dominant section of the society. The general people were mostly agriculturist in the way that they used to be the small holder of land, agriculture laborer, land less marginal labourers. Since the condition of the economy had been bleak, technology to develop agricultural production was out of question. The people of Cooch Behar used to live a life below the level of subsistence even the natural growth of population had become mismatch with the land yielding. However, a particular section used to hold total control of land and could able to live an extravagant life. There had been no land settlement in Cooch Behar till the seventies of 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>67</sup>. There had been attempts afterwards to establish a balance between land man ratio. But those were failed miserably because of the interests of the upper section people of the Cooch Behar State. In addition to this process, there had been the process of migration experienced by the people of Cooch Behar since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The migrated people, by virtue of their intellectual and material capacity had started taking control over land. Such an incident pushed the general Rajbanshi population to the extent of marginality. This majority of the marginalised people became shaky with the objective fear of losing their means of subsistence if they were to merge with Indian State. Thus the nature of the economy usually reflected a distinctive

character quite different both from the economy of Assam and Bengal.

Such distinctiveness might have compelled a section of the people of Cooch Behar to think for a while whether they should join India and merging with Bengal or Assam or to remain independent. Even if they had to merge with India whether they should join with the province of west Bengal or Assam or they should remain as a province under Indian State had been the principal questions in their minds.

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