Introduction

This research venture on "An Historical Re-readings of Evolving Land-man Relationship in the Princely State of Cooch Behar: Contextualizing Political Economy of Regional History in Perspective" traces the history of the specifies and inherent undercurrents of political economy evolving out of land-man relationships that the Cooch Behar State witnessed under pre-colonial and post-colonial situations. While analysing the history of land settlements and land revenue administration evolving out of land-man relationship in the changing context of political-economy of pre-colonial and colonial situations of the Cooch Behar State, the researcher intends to emphasise on the deductive method rather than the inductive method of analysis which means the history of aggregates (mega narrative) must be preceded by the history of the specifies. Although the macro-setting would not be ignored, an attempt will be made to look to the fact that the micro- local ambience is not overlooked.

One of the aspects of the pre-colonial discourses which appear to be well-suited for the purpose of this study is the question of land-man relationship that is to be seriously changed in an atmosphere of colonial economic penetration. A good number of studies have been undertaken by the historians and scholars of economic histories on the land problem in different pre-colonial and colonial situation. We now have a fair mount of historical literature on agrarian structures in India during the Muslim period and the British period. From a somewhat different point of view, agricultural economists have also given their attention to the problem. The level of academic perception that has been augmented to locate the problem of land is undoubtedly a major issue very central to the colonial studies now. To move forward, a synoptic view of historiographies belong to different school of thoughts becomes necessary. It is equally important to delineate the thought perception on which the present study is based on. The process involves argument, counter argument, thesis/antithesis of different discourses to reach and rely on specific discourse on which our research questions are based on.

Between 1870 and 1930, agrarian India assumed its modern intellectual appearance and acquired its own historiography. Old orientalist and official knowledge from the days of Company Raj were still basic. But the conjuncture of

famines (and, in Bengal, devastating cyclones) with the rise of the national intelligentsia in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s made a deep, lasting impression. Agrarian localism and diversity dissolved into a national history of endemic village distress, calamity, and poverty that demanded urgent attention from progressive agents of development.[1]

In the 1840s, we notice the early beginnings of a modern development discourse (which would provide a strong narrative centre for agrarian historical studies) in petitions by critics of the East India Company against excessive, coercive taxation, and in petitions by Arthur Cotton for increased government irrigation expenditure. In 1869, Lord Mayo argued for the foundation of an imperial department of agriculture in terms that indicate the tone of public discussion.[2]

Nationalists used Mayo's argument against his government. They argued that Indian prosperity had become poverty under the British. Famine deaths had increased. Excess taxation had ruined agriculture. Land settlements had punished investors. Deindustrialisation had forced workers onto the land. State expenditure for improvement was trivial and the government's claim to be working in the interest of the people was at best deceitful. The national agrarian scene became a ground for debate, research, and political action and they also developed an original theory of Indian economics, which stimulated the first round of village studies in the 1920s. The science of Indian economics was described authoritatively by Radhakamal Mukherjee, in 1916, in a textbook that began with a model of traditional village economy disrupted by heavy tax demands, private property laws, voracious money lending, and capitalist commercialism, all imposed by the British. Commercialisation loomed large for the early economists and, drawing on data going back to the 1840s, their studies often focused on problems of coercion. This focus was logical because their model of a traditional village economy did not include any indigenous commercial impulse or history, so that coercion would seem necessary to initiate agrarian commodity production and taxation. Forced sales, bonded labour, coerced revenue collections, and excess land alienation were seen as colonial pathologies, producing poverty and needing to be studied and remedied. Freedom from colonialism became widely identified with freedom from all the coercion and disruption of capitalism.[3]

By 1930, historians had also nationalised agrarian India. But they took a different path. A century before the convocation of the Indian National Congress, Indologists and Orientalists Indians and Europeans were composing texts that would inspire the national imagination. R.C.Dutt responded to W. W.Hunter's (1868) call for `rural history' with his own study of Bengal peasant conditions (1874); he wrote a serious study of ancient India (1896); and also wrote the first nationalist history of colonial agrarian policy (1908). With Dutt, history joined the national movement, and in the 1920s it became a national ground for debate and exhortation.[4]

In this context, in 1929, William Moreland published the first academic monograph on agrarian history, The Agrarian System of Moslem India. Dutt and Naoroji had set the stage by recounting the greatness of classical India and the depredations of British rule, and Moreland confronted the nationalist critique of British land policies with a study of pre-British north India, going back to the fourteenth century, to argue that old elements from India's past explained its agricultural backwardness, not British rule. He countered the national glorification of Indian tradition with an account of pre-colonial oppression, which put Muslim rulers specifically in a bad light. "Development', he said, `was already present in the fourteenth century, but the political and social environment was unusually unfavourable to its fruition'. Specifically, he said, from the Delhi sultanates (1206-1526) through the Mughal empire (1556-1707), `two figures stand out as normally masters of the peasants' fate . . . the [revenue] farmer and the assignee' who together waged `a barren struggle to divide, rather than . . . to increase, the annual produce of the country', a `legacy of loss, which Moslem administrators left to their successors and which is still so far from final liquidation'[5]

By 1930, agrarian history entered national policy debates and, ever since then, the writing of agrarian history has meshed with political disputation. Moreland pushed a line of argument against landlordism that was just gaining momentum when Jawaharlal Nehru became President of the All-India Congress Committee in 1930. He announced a radical turn in politics by writing this:[6]

> "The great poverty and misery of the Indian People are due, not only to foreign exploitation in India but also to the economic structure of society, which the alien rulers support so that their exploitation may continue. In order therefore to remove this poverty and misery and to ameliorate the condition of the masses, it is essential to make revolutionary changes in the present economic and social structure of society and to remove the gross inequalities."

With Independence, new questions within this stream of historiography were generated. As the direct compulsions of debate with British imperialism receded, there developed a greater readiness to study the factors of change and stagnation in our past and to identify various internal economic, social and ideological contradictions. Inevitably, Marxist influences began to be felt, especially under the impact of the Soviet Union's role in the Second World War and the lifting of the colonial ban on Marxist classics. In his *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1956), Kosambi fitted the medieval polities headed by Muslim rulers in his interpretation of "Indian feudalism", by special reference to the process that he designated "feudalism from above". To the cultural consequences of the Islamic intrusion he added the technological one, crediting "Islamic raiders" with "breaking hide-bound custom in the adoption and transmission of new techniques". Almost simultaneously, in a notable 102-page text (1952), Mohammad Habib offered an interpretation of the Ghorian-Turkish conquests of the 13th century and the early Delhi Sultanate in economic terms, with much use of Marxian concepts. Although the numerous insights of both these historians remain of lasting value, their major achievement was really to pioneer the exploration of a practically virgin domain. [7] In the subsequent period, possibly owing to the difference in the main source-languages, there were two points to which Marxist-influenced research came separately to be directed. In his *IndiaFeudalism*(1965), R. S. Sharma studied in detail the basic relationships in early medieval society down to the eve of the Ghorian conquests.[8] He argued in favour of a "feudalism largely realising the surplus from peasants mainly in kind through superior rights in their land and through forced labour, which is not found on any considerable scale... after the Turkish conquest of India."

The other attempt was directed to establishing what the later medieval class structures were like, whether different from those of the earlier period or not. Satish Chandra made an initial attempt to delineate the main features of the Mughal Indian political and social order (1959).[9] Irfan Habib presented (1963)[10] a detailed study of the agrarian system of Mughal India, in which he argued that there were two ruling classes, the centralised nobility and the dispersed landed gentry (*zamindar*s); and that the Mughal Empire collapsed because of agrarian uprisings in which the *zamindar*s utilised the desperation of the oppressed peasantry. In later writing (1969), [11] he

denied that the Mughal Empire had any potentialities for capitalistic development, despite a considerable presence of commodity production. The last thesis has been contested by Iqtidar A. Khan (1975), [12] while S. Moosvi (1987)[13] has patiently reworked the basic statistics in the *Ain-i-Akbari* on which all work on Mughal economic history must necessarily rely. M. Athar Ali (2001), [14] emphasising the centralised nature of Mughal polity, and the ethnic and religious compositeness of the nobility, has argued against Irfan Habib's thesis of an agrarian crisis in that Empire.

There is no suspicion that Marxist work has added considerable dimension to our study of economic and social history. By regarding itself especially with mode of exploitation and the struggles of the oppressed, it has helped the historian to identify with the mass of the people, who have been regarded more as the objects rather than the subjects of history. Mainly under Marxist influence one has learnt to look more closely than ever at the sweat strained ploughman or the oppressed woman slave, and set in their place the throne and the pulpit.

During the half-century after 1947, agrarian India changed dramatically. During the 1950s and 1960s, state institutions charged with national development dominated politics and thinking about agrarian history. In these decades, historians focused primarily on state policy. Ranajit Guha's *A Rule of Property for Bengal* [15] and Irfan Habib's *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* both appeared in 1963, and they represent a historical perspective from which official statements of state ideology seem to determine state policy and to generate logical effects everywhere that policy reigns. The nationality of the countryside under British rule its national unity as agrarian territory seemed to be self-evident in these decades; and it was described beautifully in A. R. *Desai's* [16] *The Social Back-ground of Indian Nationalism* (1948), and many other books. But during the 1960s the decade of Nehru's death, of the early green revolution, and of continuing struggles for land reform arguments began to gain ground among historians to the effect that dominant state ideologies do not necessarily determine the content or conduct of state policy; and, in addition, that states do not dictate the course of history. How ideas about history changed so radically in the 1960s and 1970s remains to be studied.

By 1980, agrarian history had moved away from the State towards society When Ranajit Guha's first volume of *Subaltern Studies*[17] appeared in 1982 and his *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* arrived in 1994,[18] it was

clear that a major shift in historical thinking had occurred since 1963. In the 1980s and 1990s, the study of the state was further displaced by studies of social power. This trend was not confined to South Asia. The historical profession in general turned away from politics and economics toward society and culture. In these decades, national states also lost power in their own national territories as structural adjustment and economic liberalisation changed the role of the state in development.Nationalism became an object of academic and cultural criticism.State-centred development strategies came under attack; people-centred, grassroots development became prominent. Environmentalism, feminism, and indigenous people's movements challenge old development agendas. Historians began to look at both capitalist and socialist states with a new critical eye, "from the bottom up", which gave the state a new kind of theoretical meaning.[19]

Though the subaltern voices are dynamic but they pinpoint historical situation rather than describing agrarian change and they have said very little about the patterns of diversity. Everyday life obscures patterns of change across generations. As we accumulate more accounts of local experience, we need to step back periodically to assess the patterns of change, and that is my intention here.

There is a continuous debate among the historians about the impact of the British rule on the Indian rural society. The traditional view postulating a qualitative transformation of the rural society has recently been questioned. The opposing view is that what looked like transformation is really largely a continuation of pre-colonial system.[20] The nationalists blamed certain aspects such as the high pitch of land revenue demand, the cash payment mode of the British land revenue administration which resulted in increasing impoverishment of Indian agriculture. Later writers thinking in terms of structural change in the rural society emphasized other factors, such as the establishment of private property in land, the creation of "parasitic" landlords, the increasing burden of rent and rural indebtedness. But the opposite view is that the old agrarian society was stratified, the considerable redistribution of landed property rights which the British brought marginally affected the rural society.[21]

One of the most important aspects of change which was subjected to critical assessment was the *zamindari* system. It was argued by the critics of Company rule that the Permanent Settlement on the pretext of maintaining the old order had actually destroyed it. The elevated rate of revenue and the resultant sale of many *zamindaries*

had shifted the focus of power in the rural areas from the traditional *zamindar*s to the representatives of the merchant capital, or the *banias* of the Company officials, who had artificial link with the peasantry and who were interested in making quick profits.[22]

Against this background the first major work on the theme of continuity and change in Bengal appeared in the late 1970s. Ratnalekha Ray [23] arguing against the dramatic change pointed out the continuities in the Bengal countryside. She argued that the real power in the countryside was held by the rich peasants called the *Jotedars* and their powers had continued unabated in the post-permanent settlement era. Recently the arguments of Ray have been opposed by RajatDutta.[24] He argued that in the late 18th century it was the *zamindar*s and the marchants and not the *Jotedars* who dominated the countryside through their control over production.But he accepted that this class may have emerged in the 19th century. The recent studies of Kumkum Chatterjee and John Mclane argued that big businessman as well as large landed magnates continued to thrive in certain areas of eastern India even after the decline of Mughal Empire.[25]

Irrespective of their different names in different parts of Bengal the *Jotedars* of the 19th century obviously evolved from a position of power he had in the 18th century. After the mid-19th century he may have been a *Chukanidar* or *Dar-chukanidar*. But more importantly, the nature of the *Jotedar*'s power in the 19th century was of different type: its basis was different, as was its function.[26]

To substantiate this line of argument, the case of princely State of Cooch Behar is important. A long-term study of the changes introduced under colonial rule thus necessitates a venture into the socio-economic organisation of the pre-colonial period of the area. It is also important to reflect on the current debates over the nature of continuity and change between the pre-colonial and the colonial periods. The role of British Government in reframing the peasant society of Cooch Behar at the expense of all other forms broadens the perspective from which the 18th century is to be scanned, and helps to understand the change-over from the pre-colonial to the colonial era more distinctively.

Cooch Behar, the former Princely state was situated in the far eastern part of northern West Bengal surrounded by Bangladesh, Assam and the Jalpaiguri district of

West Bengal. The political status of the district has kept on changing, from a Koch Kingdom to a Princely State, then to a revenue paying state to the British, and finally it became a district town of West Bengal by its merger with India in 1949. The geographical boundary of modern Cooch Behar could be traced back to the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa, which was ruled by the Khen Raja Nilambar of Kamtapur. This has its reference in Hunter's Report.[27] It is said that Raja Nilambar had been defeated and was captured by Hussain Shah, one of the Afghan kings of Gour in the beginning of the 16th century. It marked the end of Khen dynasty. Since then, the kingdom of Kamrupa was broken up into numerous small principalities under local rulers and was frequently being attacked by tribal chieftains from the north-east region of India. In the meantime the Koch chiefs gradually rose into power. The political metamorphosis of conquest, superimposition, and assimilation ultimately led to the formation of Koch kingdom or the Cooch Behar state in the 16th century. The successors of the Koch rajas ruled this tiny State till its merger with India in 1949.[28]

From the very beginning of its birth, Cooch Behar State had to experience frequent attacks at different period of time and by several conquerors such as Muslim rulers of Bengal, the Mughals and sometimes by the rulers of Bhutan. Being threatened by frequent Bhutanese attacks during the period of 1771-72, the officials of the state sought the military help from the East India Company when the then Maharaja Dhairyendra Narayan was captivated by Bhutanese soldiers. The appeal was granted by East India Company on condition that the State will pay the half of the share of its revenue to the Company. The East India Company had accepted it as a golden opportunity to expand their territorial boundary as well as authority in the Cooch Behar State. Accordingly the Anglo-Koch Behar treaty was signed in 1773 and the State became a feudatory of the East India Company. After the intrusion of the Company in the State,the land revenue system had experienced a perceptible change in terms of its nature and its applicability. [29]

No accurate information regarding the Settlement of Land Revenue was available prior to Anglo-Koch Treaty of 1773.[30]Though it appears that the land was divided into two categories-1) Revenue paying and 2) Revenue free. The unit of land was *bish* which equals 12 *bighas* and 16 *kathas*. The persons holding the first kind of land had to pay revenue to the state and were called *Jotedars*. Lands were also granted to persons for rendering personal services to the state, and these were called *Jagirs*.

Jagir, *Brahmattar* (donated to the brahmanas) *Debattar* (donated to the deities) *Mukarari* lands were all revenue-free lands. No regular *patta* (lease), however, was given to *Jotedars*. The settlement was renewed from year to year and the assessment was not fixed and based on the qualities of land. The mode of assessment and the system of the collection were both irregular and exploitative in nature which caused great sufferings to the people. The harassed and oppressed tenants left the State in large numbers. As a result the amount of the state revenue decreased.[31]

Looking at the sorry state of the State exchequer, Douglas, on behalf of East India Company, introduced the *Ijaradari* system in 1790 to obtain the highest possible revenue for a short period. The country was divided into small parcels and put up to auction and the highest bid was accepted. [32]As this system gave rise to greater abuses, steps had to be taken to put a stop to the evil effects of the system. As a remedial measure, a general survey of the whole State was initiated. Accordingly, under the supervision of O'Donnell first survey of the State was completed in 1870 and the first settlement was concluded in the whole state in 1877. The *Jotedari* system was the dominant pattern of the agrarian relation in Cooch Behar State. According to the Settlement the *Jotes* or revenue paying estates were demarcated. The *Jotedars* were to pay their revenue to the sub divisional *kutcharis*. Default of payment entailed annulment of the *patta*. Later the defaulting *jotes* were to be put to auction and sold for arrears of revenue.[33] As a result of this settlement the amount of the revenue increased. In order to enhance the revenue and maximise the profit, measures like land- revenue reforms, rent-revisions, and waste - land settlements took place a number of times in the course of little less than hundred years. The Second settlement locally called "*Rakam Charcha*" settlement took place in 1888.[34] In between the first and second settlement another petty settlement known as the *Patit charcha* (fallow land) had taken place between1884-86. The third settlement addressed to rent-revision was completed between 1912-1920 and the final settlement was completed during 1920-1927. Due to this settlement activities revenue of the Cooch Behar state went up from1.5 lakh to 17.5 lakh approximately.[35]

This quantum jump was achieved by conversion of waste-land into arable land, reduction of tax-free land grants and reclamation for revenue purpose a good part of *Debottar* (land donated to the deities), *Brahmattor*(land donated to the priests), *Mukarrari* and other service grants. The reclaimed lands were mostly being purchased

by the migrants of neighbouring areas. Besides the changes that were taking place in the economic sphere as a result of First World War, subsequent great depression of 30s and famine in Bengal also severely affected the existing pattern of land ownership in the Princely Cooch Behar. A crisis in rural credit that followed the depression compelled many small *Jotedars* to sell their lands. The beneficiaries from the crisis were the merchants, moneylenders and speculators who invested their capital in land. The net result of this development was the transfer of land from the Rajbansis to the non-Rajbansis.[36] Alienation of land of Cooch Beharis was, therefore an unavoidable corollary of the process. Further urgency to introduce commercial crops to boost revenue income necessitated new class of revenue farmers. It is needless to say that the burden of rent-escalation has caused a number of structural disorders in the peasant society of Princely State of Cooch Behar.It was seen that the small Rajbansi *Jotedars* had transformed into under tenants, subservient to a new class of immigrant landed gentry. The process of land transfer from the hands of the Rajbansis to the non -Rajbansis generated a sense of grievance among the dispossessed Rajbansi gentry in course of time. The proposed research is an attempt to investigate the degree of linkage between land-alienation caused by revenue reforms, migration of non-Rajbansis in the Princely State of Cooch Behar and the subsequent socio-economic changes in the State.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of some major changes in the methodology as well as the objectives of both the ideographic and nomothetic social sciences and due to the interruption at the conceptual level among the different social science disciplines, the study of colonial situation at the micro level too requires methodological updated ness. The Cooch Behar studies require conceptual reframing in terms of an appropriate "Paradigm". So this micro-level analysis of local history needs to be contextualised on a strong theoretical framework. According to Marx's 'materialistic interpretation of history' all historical events are the results of a continuous struggle among different classes and groups in the society and the root cause of this struggle is the conflict between the 'mode of production' and 'the relations of production'. The mode of production relates to a particular arrangement of production in a society that determines its entire social, political and religious way of living. Marx calls these relations as the relations

of production, which are continually changing.[37] The changing land-man relationship and the structure of the society of the then Cooch Behar State may be tested in the light of Marxian historiography.

Economy, State and society are intimately interconnected. A change in one brings about changes in the others. Marxian analysis sums up the three aspects of society into two categories, namely, the economic aspects into economic base and political and social aspects into the superstructure. Thus superstructure refers to the non-economic aspects of the socio-economic formation. It includes social relations and supporting institutions and associated socio-political behaviour patterns and value systems that protect and promote the interests of the ruling classes of the dominant mode of production. It embodies the social consciousness, the social ideas and social-psychological attitudes, in brief the social ideology that underlines social relations between people. The state is an important part of the superstructure. The superstructure contains the ideas and systems of authority (political, legal, military, etc) which support the class structure of that society- that is, the property and privileges of the ruling classes. It is an instrument of class rule.[38]

The economic base or the modes of production covers economic social relations between the people while the superstructure envelopes non-economic social relations between them. Both these are ultimately affected by the state of productive forces in society. The mode of production is the outcome of three basic components-i) The productive forces, ii) the form of ownership of the means of production, and iii) the economic relations arising in the production, exchange and distribution of goods and services. Specifically, it refers to the social relations between the people in a society in the context of the functioning of the economy. The mode of production shaped the nature of the mode of distribution, the mode of circulation and the mode of consumption, all of which together constitutes the economic sphere of the society. The three components of the mode of production are necessarily interdependent. The change in any one or more of the components causes changes in the other components. [39]

The Marxian approach to the study of changes in the socio-economic formation in a country is called dialectical historical materialism. It is dialectical as it recognizes that change is the inevitable outcome of the interaction between forces that make up the socio-economic formation. It is materialistic because it gives primacy of

place to the mode of production in the schema of dialectical change. It is historical because it studies the development of society over time. The dialectical process of change is summarised as thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. The process of change involving thesis, anti-thesis and syntheses operates simultaneously: the thesis is negated through contradictions to it, the syntheses in its turn negates this contradiction or negation by postulating a new thesis, in which the opposites which constituted the old thesis are replaced by a new thesis, a new unity of opposites which represents a higher stage of development of society. The Marxist analysis recognizes that change in socio-economic formations can originate at any of the three planes-productive forces, production-distribution relations, super structural factors (particularly the role of the state). The emergence of contradictions, the series of adjustments they induce and the changes they cause in the system in an effort to re-establish a realignment of forces cause some groups losing their pre-eminent positions that they held in the earlier social system. This realignment of group power can take place only through struggles between the opposing classes within a mode of production, on the one hand, and the dominant classes in the old and new modes of production, on the other. These struggles are class struggles: historically the transition from one socio-economic formation to another has taken place through violent revolutionary class struggles.[40]

As we all know that the analysis of mode of production is central to the Marxian analysis, the knowledge about the essential features of the different modes of production is necessary in order to understand how, when and why the change occurs, and how they interact with state of productive forces, on the one hand, and the nature and character of the superstructure, on the other. The modes we describe are those as described by Engels and Marx[41]-Marx was primarily concerned with the capitalist mode and therefore only briefly deals with the other modes. The socio-economic formation of a country is described in terms of the mode of production dominant at that time. Thus, the socio-economic formation where the primitive communal mode is dominant is called primitive communism. Ancient civilization is the socio-economic formation where the slave mode dominated. Similarly, feudalism is one where the mode of production is feudal and capitalism is one where the dominant mode is capitalist. Socialism is based on the socialist mode. The transition from one socio economic formation to another necessarily involves the mode of production. The mode of production can change either because of changes state of productive forces or

because of super structural forces. The reasons for the transition from one mode to another are complex and controversial: the controversies arise due to the lack of historical data and due to the fact that different countries have different pasts and are different stages of development.

Marx referred to another mode of production which could succeed or existed simultaneously with the primitive communal mode, namely, the Asiatic mode. Marx and Engels also discussed the Asiatic mode of productionas an alternative follow up to the primitive communal mode. The characteristics of the Asiatic mode[42] are as follows: The Asiatic village was self–sufficient since it combined agriculture and handicrafts. They therefore also tended to be isolated from the rest of the state. These communities were for geographical and climatic reasons dependent on irrigation. This required a centralised administrative apparatus to coordinate and develop large–scale hydraulic works. Production methods were simple and tended to be tradition oriented. Private property was absent-there was no private ownership of land. As Oscar Lange points out,[43] "Such state ownership of land existed in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, China, Ceylon and other eastern countries." Lange quotes Marx as saying, "Here the state is the supreme owner of land. Sovereignty depends on the ownership of land concentrated at the national level. For this reason there is no private ownership of land though the possession of land may be both private and common."

Relations of production were in many instances on a caste basis-this was viewed as a primitive form of class relationship. The Asiatic mode was regarded to be static and unchanging. However, the concept of Asiatic mode of production is problematic. It is used to describe any society based on communal ownership and self-sufficient villages where capitalist relations are absent. The absence of private property and the fact of communal appropriation of the surplus ruled out the development of social classes as agents of social change. Further, it is difficult to visualize a state of generalised slavery.

Irfan Habib[44]points out that, " the mode of production in medieval (pre-colonial) India had the two important features, village community and tax-rent equivalence, that Marx thought to be the basic elements of the 'Asiatic" form, but...It also had extensive elements of the petty mode of production...based on individual commodity producers.(rural and urban)."Irfan Habib again points out, "The fairly well developed system of commercial credit, deposit-banking, brokerage and

insurance, further demonstrated that a fairly extensive commercial apparatus had been constructed on the basis of petty production. It is difficult to see how such a degree of development of merchant capital can be accommodated in any variant of Marx's scheme of the Asiatic Mode". He adds, "It is indeed important to realise that the society of Mughal India was not only class-driven, but also as replete with class-struggles as other societies of the time. The widespread peasant and agrarian revolts was a noticeable feature of its political history. Thus, the "passive sort of existence" which Marx postulated for the pre-colonial Indian countryside is not historically borne out.''

According to Marx's observation feudal mode of production was the dominant mode in the Western Europe in the middle ages. The characteristic features of the feudal mode of production are summarised below:[45]

a) Production was for the immediate need of the household or village community, for the use-value of the products and not for a wider market or for gain. It was largely non-market production. b) The instruments of production are simple and generally inexpensive and the act of production is largely individual in character. c) Production relations were based on extra-economic force and not on economic forces, on customs and traditions, both being inextricably tied up with the feudal superstructure. d) The surplus was small and could have been consumed by the direct producers or labourers because of their lower level of consumption. e) The manor was the basic unit of rural organisation throughout the middle ages over the greater part of England. A manor was a large estate which consisted usually a single village and an extent of land surrounding it, often enclosed by a hedge. Every manor had a lord who, though not the owner, was granted assured fiefdom over the land in return for feudal service on condition of military service. f) Though production was predominantly subsistence, a market system also existed and grew as productivity and surplus grew. g) Production relations in the feudal mode were based on extra-economic force. This was the only way that surplus from direct producer could be extracted at a time when productivity of labour and hence consumption levels was low. The relationship between the feudal lord and the serf as well as the feudal lord and the free peasants under his fief were non-contractual and communal. h) While the characteristic unit of economic organization in the villages was the manor, the characteristic unit in the urban areas was the guild. In the feudal economy towns did exit because of

administrative reasons, religious and economic reasons. i) The feudal mode was inextricably linked with the super structure. The ownership of land, vested with the feudal lord, was conditional on some kind of service tenure, in terms of armed personnel, or in terms of monetary contribution or attendance in the king's court. In return the lord was entrusted with judicial or quasi-judicial powers in relation to the dependent population. j) The feudal system was obviously an exploitative system. Physical or military force enabled the ruling classes to appropriate much of the surplus from the serfs, peasants and artisans.

On the other hand the fundamental features of capitalism are private ownership of the means of production or private property, the existence of a proletariat dependent on wage labour and the pursuit of private individual benefit as the guiding principal of production and distribution relations. Land, labour and money become commodities. Capitalist production is commodity production, or production for exchange and private gain. Labour and capital are free to choose occupation and industry under capitalism. [46]

The reasons for the transition from one mode to another are complex and controversial.The focus of the transition is a change in the mode of production, whether the change is because of growth in productive forces or is brought about from the superstructure. Despite the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England in particular and western Europe in general, considerable difference of opinion exists about the prime causes that caused the change. There are two major debates on this matter- Brenner Debate and Dobb-Sweezy Debate.

Brenner critiques the demographic and commercialisation models, both of which stress economic factors to the exclusion of political factors.[47] Instead, he puts forward his class-based analysis of the transition. M.M.Postan's demographic model uses the changing demand-supply relations to explain the effect of population changes. He argues that the growth of population in 12^{th} and 13^{th} centuries weakened the position of peasantry in Europe. But in the 14^{th} and 15^{th} centuries the decline of population led to a rise in share of labour incomes and fall in rent. It also reduced the lord's ability to restrict peasant mobility and peasant's freedom in general. Ultimately demand-supply factors due to demographic factors were responsible for the decline of the feudalism. But Brenner criticises the demographic model on historical grounds and for its faulty analysis. Thus, he points out that "there were different outcomes

from similar demographic trends at different times and in different areas of Europe." He also argues that the situation of different outcomes in different places and times are because of difference in class relations. Secondly, the commercialization model was accepted by Henri Pirenne's thesis which showed the role of commerce in the development and decay of feudalism. He adds that expansion of market, towns, exposure of the inefficiencies of feudal production, expansion of the quantum and variety of consumption demand raised the demand for labour relative to its supply. This weakened feudal ties. Brenner believed that any analysis to the transition must explain two phenomena, namely, i) why serfdom declined in Western Europe but was intensified in eastern Europe and ii)why was there a rise of capitalism and agricultural productivity in England but not in France despite serfdom declining in both. The answer to both this questions according to Brenner is to be found not in economic factors but on class relations. He added that the difference in class structures in France and England is dramatically evident from the different sorts of peasant revolts. The economic development had taken place in England much earlier because of different types of property rights which also precipitated the growth process of feudalism.

The Dobb-Sweezy debate[48] centres on the fundamental nature of feudalism. Was the feudal mode of production essentially conservative and resistant to change so that its dissolution required an external factor or did feudalism carry within itself the seeds of its own destruction?

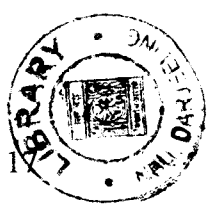
Sweezy recognises serfdom as the dominant feature in Western European feudalism and emphasises production predominantly not for exchange but for self-consumption. The growth of population worsens the instability and insecurity in the country but feudal society was intact.[49] But Dobb had asserted that serfs deserted the manor because they were over-exploited by the lords whose need for revenue was growing. These growing needs were attributed by Dobb to factors which according to him were internal to the feudal system. On the other hand, per capita productivity of agriculture was falling towards the end of the 13th century because of the increase in population on a limited land supply and more importantly, because of increasing extraction of surplus by the landlords. [50]

Sweezy argues that all these factors existed in the past as well without causing feudalism to collapse.He draws attention to the phenomenon of the flight of serfs being more or less simultaneous with the growth of towns, especially in the 12th and

13th centuries. These towns, to quote Sweezy, offered them 'liberty, employment and improved social status.'[51] In short Sweezy attributed the decline of feudalism to the growth of long distance trade and consequent growth of towns-both of these are external factors. These factors relate to the growth of towns, the growth of production for exchange and changes in consumption patterns. Exposure to foreign goods and foreign cultures had a demonstration effect on consumption patterns of the lords causing an increase in their demand for revenue and hence increased exploitation of the serfs. The new production relation under which commodity production took place had in built tendency to increase efficiency because it continually sought to reduce costs through improved techniques, division of labour and specialisation and more rational exploitation of human and material resources. Feudal production suffered in comparison because it was based on custom. So obviously, feudal order had to sooner or later succumb to the new types of production relations and new forms of organisation.

Dobb, on the other hand, argued that the decline of feudalism was due primarily to internal causes. Dobb emphasises production relations, specially their coercive nature, as the distinctive feature of feudalism. Coercion in production relations takes the form of direct labour services from the serfs or tributes from the peasantry in kind or in cash through various devices. Dobb argued that the feudal period witnessed considerable changes in technique: the later centuries of feudalism showed marked differences from the earlier systems. The emergence of three-fold system in agriculture, the rise of capitalist farmers, the enclosure movement, the use of horses in agriculture, introduction of the four-wheeled wagon contributed to the process of increasing social differentiation which eventually to shake loose the peasant from the feudal exploitation. All this led over time to diluting the coercive nature of production relations under feudalism. This paved the way for the emergence of the pre-condition of capitalism and the growth of a class hostile to the feudal aristocracy. Towns emerged because of internal conditions. Thus these favourable conditions already existed for a transformation of the economy and hence of society. If these favourable conditions were not existent then the growth of long distance trade would only have caused a further accentuation of the production relation characterising the pre-existing system. [52]

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But Irfan Habib in an article "Capitalism in History"[53], argued that the spread of the petty mode of production would not by itself bring about capitalism even if the labourer is the private owner of his own means of production. Manufacturing activity under the petty mode would only amount to "proto-industrialisation" He argues that technological discoveries by themselves do not bring about capitalism. The basic cause for the emergence of feudalism in Europe was according to Irfan Habib, thus external. The two major sources of primary accumulation were internal exploitation and external plunder linked to colonial dominance. Habib also points out that the major source of industrial capital has been colonial plunder.[54]

The Dobb-Sweezy debate and the Brenner's observation about feudalism relates to mediaeval Europe. But Kosambi is the first historian who began to apply Marxism to Indian history. He told, "Marxism is not a substitute for thinking but a tool of analyses." In the first place , Kosambi profoundly redefined the message that Marxism had for historians. In an attempt to impart to the Marxist perception of class struggle and its different forms the colour of universal application had led to the conclusion that the unilinear succession of modes of production, primitive community-slavery-feudalism-capitalism, was followed in practically all countries, except for those with very recent immigrant populations.[55]

Taking the case of India, Kosambi summarily rejected the view that it had ever passed through a phase of slavery. Rather it was the construction of caste-society that happened here-a cruel form of bondage, but different, nevertheless, from slavery. He argued that the term "Asiatic" occurring in Marx's passage in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* should be taken to cover a case like India's and, for this reason, the term should not be ignored. This did not mean that he accepted for the "Asiatic" the sense of a stagnant despotic system, as some of Marx's own words would suggest. Indeed, Kosambi directly contested Marx's observations about the "unchangeable ness" of Asiatic societies. What Kosambi set out to do in his introduction was, therefore, to investigate both the economic basis (he means and relations of production) and the changing beliefs, customs and culture ("superstructure') and their mutual relationships.

Kosambi accepted the stage of feudalism spanning the period from that of the Guptas to the Mughals. Kosambi recognised that the elements of demesne farming and serfdom, crucial to the Marxian perception of feudalism as a mode of production,

were missing here, but he believed that the other features were common between the Indian and European forms, viz. low level of production techniques, growth of rusticity and decline of urban life, political decentralisation and service tenure, and that these justified one to designate the mode of production in India for well over a millennium as "feudal".[56] In the political and fiscal spheres, he discerned two different processes of feudalisation: (i)"From above" ,when centralised states created local rights by grants and concession, (ii)"from below" when landowners developed from within the village[to stand] between the state and the peasantry."[57]

Irfan Habib through his extremely valuable writing[58], "The Peasant in Indian History" showed that the origin and evolution of peasant agriculture in Ancient India depends on technology. 'Technology played the crucial role in bringing about changes in the nature and organisation of the concrete labour process and the structure of social relation." Thus "with the introduction of sericulture by the 15th century made Bengal one of the great silk-producing regions of the world in the 17th," "after the discovery of the New World, India received important new crops, such as maize and tobacco", 'grafting practices spread too in the same century, resulting in the improvement of some fruits, notably the oranges". "Further, the argument that changes in techniques caused changes in the organisation of the labour process is entirely functional. Thus conditions of forest clearance also necessitated at the same time a form of non-peasant agriculture".

But there were some basic questions- such as who changed techniques? What were the social forces which discovered and initiated changes? Was there not a process- a political process-through which changes had to be made in the organisation of the labour process? Were all available techniques necessarily adopted, even if they were improved techniques? -which were never asked. "It is equally possible that the question have not been asked, since the functional interpretation of the connection between forces and relations of production finds a satisfactory explanation as soon as it can be established that 'improved" techniques have been introduced into the real appropriation process and the 'corresponding" changes brought about in the relations of production."[59] The crucial explanatory criterion is always provided by the assumption that "the productive forces tend to develop throughout history". But Partha Chatterjee said that "what is missed here is the crucial historical question of the political process of struggle through which, in a given structure of the social relations

of production, changes can be brought about in techniques, and the conditions of reproduction of social relations set on a new basis. This process cannot be understood if changes in the productive forces are seen as given exogenously, productive forces and production relations must be seen as changing in their specific forms of combination."[60]

That is why Irfan Habib finds it so difficult to characterise the nature of changes brought about in the structure of social relations by changes in agricultural technology. Many of such problems of the Marxist historiography have now been clarified as a result of the so-called 'structuralist" intervention of Louis Althusser and his associates. The structuralists have argued that the set of social relations which characterise any given social formation can be analytically looked at in terms of three instances: the economic, the legal-political and ideological-cultural.[61] The basic premises of my research hypothesis are mainly supported by above mentioned argument. In subsequent chapters an attempt would be made to explore the influence of change in "mode of production' (if any) on land-man relationship of the Princely State of Cooch Behar under the colonial intervention. Simultaneously, it will also be scrutinised that whether change in "mode of production" was having any impact on various attributes of superstructure.

Conceptual Framework

To analyse the land-man relationship of the Cooch Behar State at micro level the discussion on Land-man relationship of pre-colonial and colonial India and the Land-man relationship of Princely States under administrative purview of the British administrators should be taken into accounts to understand the conceptual framework of the research hypothesis.

Relations of production are a Marxian concept defined as the relations obtaining between different human agents around the act of production. But the most interesting fact is that most of our historical sources define the acts of revenue collection and not to the act of production. So definitely the land-man relationship of pre-colonial India is basically surrounded to the nature and magnitude of "land revenue"(*Mal,Kharaj*),since it accounted for the large part of the agricultural surplus of the country. [62] But it is very important to note that 'mal" was not a land tax it was

tax on the crop and from this point of view it was different from the British revenue as the "land revenue" under British land system was tax on the land irrespective of what grew on that land.

Now the question comes that who were the owner of the soil in pre-colonial India? Was there any communal cultivation or individual cultivation? According to Irfan Habib, in the Mughal period when peasants deserted old lands and settled in new ones they did so communally. But regarding the question of ownership of land different historians argue differently. European travellers who visited the country during the 16th and 17th centuries, commonly described the king as the owner of the all land in India, for he so obviously appropriated what seemed to be the rent of the soil [63] but this idea has now been largely questioned and rejected. Likewise, another idea inherited from the pat is that land was held in common and cultivated jointly. But this idea has also been questioned.

According to Neale, however, in some areas, in the *zamindari* villages, "the land owners claimed the land jointly and their respective shares were determined by the laws of inheritance" though "in the *Bhaiachara* village each family owned its own lands separately, as a rule each of the original settlers or conquerors received an equal share of land"[64] On the question of communal ownership Neale says that "the question whether the land was owned by the *raja, the talukdar, zamindar*, the cultivator or the king was not a real question Each had claim based upon custom or upon grants made by the king or a raja, or upon grants made by a *Talukdar or zamindar*. Actually the village did not hold its land in common. Common were its officials and servants. Though the idea of king as the owner of land has been rejected it does not mean that the king did not have ownership rights over some lands. King was the owner of all the waste lands" [65]

There were different system of land assessments for different regions under Mughals such as *ghalla-bakhshi, kankut and Nasq*. The *Kankut* system became transformed into *Zabt* system which involved annual measurement. Crop sharing was prevalent under Mughals. But the revenue could be paid in cash also. But the major aim of the Mughal administrators was to obtain bulk of peasants' surplus. But at the same time the peasants were also helped by the loans called *'taqavi*" in time of distress and crop failure.[66] Another question arises in the mind that whether tax should be collected from individual collector or from few intermediaris.According to Irfan

Habib the basic unit of assessment was village and the intermediaries were the real assessees.[67]We got the name of *Zamindar,Talluqadars,muqudams, patils* as intermediaries. The Mughals depended largely on the *zamindars* for the collection of revenue and in the process, reinforced their rights and powers which derived originally from outside the imperial system. The *zamindar* class was highly stratified: some *zamindar*s paying tribute, some *zamindar*s got *jagir* land while others acquired non-hereditary rights by royal order. The *zamindars* often claimed their right from settling a village and distributing its land among the peasantry. Not only that they were often credited with the right to evict peasants at will.[68] Historically, the *zamindari* right had close association with caste or clan dominance .*Zamindars* of a locality often belonged to the same caste.He got the support of his kinsmen and this way the *zamindar*s formed a semi-military class [69].Another question haunts that what is the position of peasantry in pre-colonial India? Is there any agricultural labour force? That we all know about the existence of self-sufficient peasants producing for their own consumption in the traditional village society, Habib writes, "To astute observers like Bernier, the Indian peasants, labourers, appeared an undifferentiated mass, all living miserably under a blind and increasing oppression. The picture was not an unfair one, it does not also conflict with the concept, developed later, of the Indian rural population divided up horizontally among 'village communities" each a self-sufficient entity, left to its own devices by the despotic regime of the court so long as the heavy land–tax was paid.[70]

"Speaking of average yields per cultivator, we ought not to overlook the fact that the Indian peasantry was economically highly stratified, on the one hand ,there were the big peasants, or headmen (*muquddam*) who organize"*Khud Kasht*(cultivation under their own management)". They employ labourers as their servants and put them to the tasks of agriculture and making them plough, sow, reap and draw water out of the well, they pay them their fixed wages, whether in cash or grain. At the opposite end, were small peasants (*rezariaya*), who engaged in cultivation but depended wholly, borrowing for their subsistence and for seed and cattle.''[71] About the position of the menial castes, we have very limited knowledge. According to Habib the menial population formed a reserve to be called upon to work in the fields; during harvests they were also uniformly liable to render forced labour (*begar*) for carrying baggage etc of the higher classes. Agrarian relationship in the South had many points of

similarities as well as dissimilarities with their northern counterpart. At any rate the *zamindar*i system of the north Indian type was generally absent in the Deccan. Though the *zamindar* and holder of revenue-free grant (*inamdar*) were familiar features of the agrarian system as were the agriculturist with hereditary superior rights in lands (*mirasdar*), and tenants holding lands from all these three groups on the basis of a variety of arrangement, but the entire character of the agrarian economy of the south is totally different in regard to specific agrarian institutions, rights in land, rights of sale, land transfer and mortgage dependent on the growth of land market- were more fully articulated than in the north , on the other, the agrarian structure in the south appears to have been bound up far more closely with social institutions in general, caste in particular.

After colonial penetration, the question of land and land administrative arrangement in rural India received sea changes. The colonial interest over the issues of land and rural social system had been guided by the mercantile zeal of the Europeans. That is to say in other words, the question of land became economically rewarding soon it had been brought under the fold of systematic revenue administration, which helped the British to extract maximum amount of economic return in the form of revenue from the isolated agrarian fields of the countryside. The three land revenue arrangements promulgated by the British in this sense were of paramount significance. Each variety of legal-administrative arrangement had attempted to systematise the issue of land as a form of resource associated with different segments of rural social structure. For example Permanent Settlement, *Ryotwari arrangement*, and *Mahalwari* system attempted to systematise the issue of land associated with the *zamindar*s, the peasants and with the village community respectively keeping in tact the interest of the ruling class in the entire system of colonial political economy.

The policy of maximising land revenue, however, necessitated certain institutional changes which eventually affected the composition of the agrarian society. The land revenue experiment in Bengal and Bihar would probably have fundamentally altered the composition of the landed society as the government superseded very many old *zamindars* and the land was given to the highest bidders at the public auction.[72] This new group of *zamindars* made their fortunes through the association with new administration and the new economy. The British policy of

maximization of revenue also increased the hardships of the peasants. The composition of the landed society in Eastern India was also affected by the growth of land market with the growth of the land market the prices of the land also increased simultaneously. The immediate cause of the rise in land prices since 1855 was because of the rise in agricultural prices in Bengal and Bihar and disappearance of the agricultural depression in Orissa at the same time. The population growth and the resultant pressure on land, the increasing cultivation of the cash crops-jute and sugarcane made the grounds for rising agricultural prices as well as *zamindar*'s rental income. The competition for land among the peasants enabled the *zamindar*s to exact a bigger amount of rent from the peasants.[73] The exploitation level reached so high that the background was ready for the peasant movement. This was the common feature of all over India under British domination.

This mega narrative has some sort of similarities with the case study of micro level analysis of Princely State of Cooch Behar. Details about the land administrative system under the Koches are, however, lacking. But certain references in their chronicles and also in the records of the British officers throw some light in this matter. From these accounts it appears that lands were usually divided into two kinds – cultivable and uncultivable. Cultivable land[74] was again divided into two groups- taxable and non taxable. Assessment varied depending upon fertility of soil, amount of produce or number of ploughs used. There is no record to show that any survey of land was undertaken before the Mughal invasion. Although the actual procedure collection of revenue and rate of assessment in the Koch Kingdom is not known it appears that some sort of Paik-system, not similar in all respects with that of the Ahoms of upper Brahmaputra valley, existed there.[75]The *Durrang Raj Vamsabali* makes mention of *Paiks* attached to the royal officers of the state. These *paiks* had to serve the state with manual works, and to go to war as soldiers when necessary. In return they enjoyed some plots of lands free of revenue. Besides, the *zamindar*s like the *Bhuyans* and other high state officials like *Dewan, Kajri, Choudhury*, collected revenue from the peasants in their own way who were directly under their control, and sent a certain amount of their respective collection to the centre.[76]After the Koch kingdom had been annexed to the Mughal Empire, the system of collection of revenue was changed. The royal princelets and other *zamindar*s deposited with the imperial treasure a certain amount of their collections from the peasants. The settlement in such cases was made annually

and the procedure was to "settle the *jama* agreeably to that of the preceding year." Revenue was collected in cash or kind although the first was preferred. The *Katha Guru Charit* appears to inform us that the peasants were to pay 1/4th of their produce as rent to the royal treasury.[77]The king was the actual owner of the soil, but the cultivators' right over their hereditary possessions was never questioned by him. The estates given to the relatives of the king (*petbhata*) were subject to be taken over by the king after the guarantee's death. The *jagir* lands were allowed to be held by the state officers during the period of their service only and were thus transferable.[78] As the Koch rajas retained the Mughal land revenue system; naturally the survey of the land was made.

So if we analyse the indigenous land revenue system of the Koch kingdom before the coming of the Mughals and after that from the above discussion it appears that the Koch revenue system was an admixture of both Ahom and Mughal land revenue system. Like the Ahoms they were habituated with shifting cultivation, *paik* system, and cultivating *Ahu* rice and later followed like the Ahoms the wet rice (*Sali*) cultivation. On the other hand when they were influenced by the Mughals, they started to collect the land revenue in cash instead of kind.

But after being the feudatory State under British in 1773 the land administration of the State was controlled by the British administrators. As it was settled through the treaty of 1773 that the British will get the half of the revenue so the one and only objective of the Company was to maximise the revenue of the State at any cost. By introducing the *Ijaradari* system in 1790 the British administrators wanted to obtain the highest possible revenue for a short period. But it was in vain. After that the settlement was made in 1877. As the *Jotedari* system was the dominant pattern of the agrarian relation in Cooch Behar State, it was settled that the *Jotedars* were to pay their revenue to the sub divisional kutcharis.Default of payment entailed annulment of the *patta*. Later the defaulting *jotes* were to be put to auction and sold for arrears of revenue. As a result of this settlement the amount of the revenue increased. In order to enhance the revenue and maximise the profit, measures like land- revenue reforms, rent-revisions, and waste - land settlements took place a number of times in the course of little less than hundred years. As a result of these settlements the revenue of the State increased. This increase was achieved by conversion of waste-land into arable land, reduction of tax-free land grants and reclamation for revenue purpose a good part

of *Debottar* (land donated to the deities), *Brahmattor* (land donated to the priests), *Mukarrari* and other service grants. The reclaimed lands were mostly being purchased by the migrants of neighbouring areas. Besides the changes that were taking place in the economic sphere as a result of First World War, subsequent great depression of 30s and famine in Bengal also severely affected the existing pattern of land ownership in the Princely Cooch Behar. A crisis in rural credit that followed the depression compelled many small Rajbansi *Jotedars* to sell their lands. The beneficiaries from the crisis were the merchants, moneylenders and speculators who invested their capital in land. The net result of this development was the transfer of land from the Rajbansis to the non-Rajbansis. Alienation of land of Cooch Beharis was, therefore an unavoidable corollary of the process. Further urgency to introduce commercial crops to boost revenue income necessitated new class of revenue farmers. It is needless to say that the burden of rent-escalation has caused a number of structural disorders in the rural society of Cooch Behar.

Overview of Literature:

Before initiating the discussion on agrarian studies on Cooch Behar State, some major works on agrarian studies on India as well as studies on micro regional scale should be highlighted. At the very beginning of the modern study of India's past by James Mill, in 1817, agrarian policy was given major eminence as a theme of Indian history.[79]Mill justified the British rule over earlier forms of rule in India. But on the other hand he condemned Cornwallis reforms i.e Permanent Settlement with *Zamindar*s for its judicial and revenue provisions.

But the successors of Mill elaborated the imperial historiography of India and they could not criticise the British rule, perhaps because many of the writers were serving or former members of the Indian Civil Service. Thus John Malcolm in his "*Political history of India from 1784 to 1823*," discussed only in his two volumes the land revenue policy of the East India Company.[80] W. W. Hunter's historical volume of The Imperial Gazetteer of India, entitled the Indian Empire, also put light on the policies and administrative institutions of the Raj. But Hunter also criticised the agrarian and revenue policies of the Raj in his other works and made an impact. His small volume,

"England's Work in India" is full of criticisms, accusations against British land policies. He questioned about the success of the British agrarian policies.[81]

But the superiors of Hunter started to neutralize the criticisms of agrarian policies. In 1888 Sir Edward C' Buck, the Secretary to Government for revenue and agriculture, decided that Hunter's charges had to be answered. Accordingly each of the Presidencies of British India was instructed to enquire into rural poverty. One result of this attempt to eliminate the poverty issue from Victorian India was a massive apologia by the Indian Official Seshiyar Srinivasa Raghavaiyanger.[82] *Administration of Land Revenue and Tenure in British India* by B.H. Baden-Powell, 1907, attempts to describe the Land Revenue Administration of British India and the forms of Land-holding on which that administration is based. Indeed, the magisterial three –volume compendium on the land revenue systems of British India by B.H. Baden-Powell in 1892 provided nothing but a detailed manual of established practices which was meant to inform land- revenue officials.[83]

By then the other Indian voices were being heard on the subject of agrarian policies and distress. The most famous of these was R.C.Dutta, a retired Indian official of Bengal. In his '*The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age (London 1908)*"and "*The Economic History of India under early British rule* (London, 1916), he criticised the British agrarian policies.[84] Others who wrote critically from this perspective were William Digby-*'Prosperous' British India, a Revelations from Records*,[85] and Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. These works confronted the notions of earlier British writers about a chaotic pre-colonial era that was made principled and systematic by the British rule. These texts became the classic texts for Indian nationalists. They view colonialism as an economic and political disjunction.[86]

Before the work of Eric Stocks, *The English Utilitarians and India* and Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, British land–revenue settlements were often seen as the outcome of a series of experiments. Reacting against this kind of historical analysis, historians in the late 1950s and early 60s emphasized the ideological roots of agrarian policy. 'British policies moved within the orbit of ideas primarily determined in Europe" wrote Stokes. And he proceeded to analyse the ways in which utilitarianism, liberalism, and the doctrine of rent developed by Multhus, James Mill and Ricardo shaped British legislation in the 19th century.[87] Ranajit Guha views the

introduction of the Permanent Settlement in Bengal as an indispensable measure to ensure private property right in land. Based as it was on critique of the earlier revenue policy, particularly revenue farming, it was said to have inaugurated a clear break with the past.[88]

Another group of scholars those who are not guided by an informing nationalist sensibility covered the late 18th and 19th century by representing in the second volume of the Cambridge Economic History of India.[89] The writers of this book provide valuable information on the economic and agrarian backgrounds to many policy questions, and several relevant aspects of agrarian policy. But it shifts the debate on agrarian and other policies, in fundamental ways, away from the manner in which imperialist historians and nationalist historians treated them. Large parts of CEHI are devoted to statistical analyses of income and agricultural prices, based upon assumptions no more convincing than those of nationalist or imperialist writers and therefore no better able to illuminate agrarian policies, their determination and their effects. The studies of B .B.Chaudhury and Sabyasachi Bhattarcharya, under this volume without diluting the focus on the political imperative of colonial rule, shift the discussion to the process of economic changes that early British rule initiated. They argue that early British rule initiated important changes both in the agricultural and as well as non- agricultural sectors. Whereas earlier labourers were low-caste domestic servants and victims of chronic indebtedness, now their social base expanded to include people who had suffered loss of land or gradual diminishing of per capita holdings, and impoverished sections of small peasants. At the same time, the famine of 1769-70 caused rural depopulation and a price rise, and added to the declining trend to the economy.

The economic trends in Bengal became the basis of a more general argument about the economic impact of early British rule. Irfan Habib, for instance, argues that the trading operations of the English East India Company dislocated and disrupted indigenous economies which caused large-scale de-industrialization. [90] In contrast, in some other regional studies the political economy of Indian States provides an explanation for the early phase of British expansion. Bayly,[91] Stein,[92] and Washbrook[93] through their regional studies on agriculture, merchants, and European trade attribute its success to the remarkable ways in which it grafted itself over the networks of the indigenous economy and infrastructure.

When Ranajit Guha and Eric Stokes focus on the "innovative" character of the Permanent Settlement, in contrary, Ratnalekha Ray, on the basis of local records from districts such as Rajshahi, highlights the limitations of the settlement in introducing any major transformation in the pre-colonial order. Changes were happened in the upper strata of rural society; at village level both landholdings as well as the agricultural base remained unaltered. Even at the upper levels of rural society, it was not land that changed hands but rather perpetual rights in revenue management. Proprietary rights were conferred on *zamindar*s that already held such rights over revenue collection on land. Pre-colonial rights were thus given exact definition. Ray thus makes a strong case for "continuity" within the traditional agrarian order.[94] In the similar way, N.Mukherji and Robert Eric Frykenberg emphasise continuity within the traditional agrarian order in the implementation of the Ryotwari Settlement in South India.[95]

Recently, the arguments of the Rays have been subjected to critical assessment by Rajat Dutta.[96] The basic point of Dutta's argument is that in the late-eighteenth century it was the *zamindar*s and the merchants and not the *Jotedars* who dominated the countryside through their control over production. Dutta explicitly denied the domination, or even the existence, of this class of rural gentry in the late 18th century, but appears to have implicitly accepted that this class may have emerged in the 19th century (due to the operation of the colonial revenue laws

Amit Bhaduri's article,[97] attempts to interpret some broad historical trends in the evolution of the *Zamindar*i System in the light of analytical economic argument. Biplab Dasgupta in his paper [98] critically examined the two dimensionally opposite view points regarding the pre-British Bengal society .Two recent studies by Kumkum Chatterjee[99], and John Mclane [100] show their assertion that big business as well as large landed magnets continued to thrive in certain areas of eastern India even after the decline of the Mughal empire.

In the most popular world-view of India under colonial regime,i.e the left-nationalist interpretation of Indian economic history, it is suggested that the decline outweighed growth, and that growth and decline derived mainly from colonial policies. But the study of Tirthankar Roy [101] deals with the economic history of colonial India and shows how history can explain the roots of economic growth and stagnation in South Asia. He argued that there was no quantitative evidence to prove

that decline outweighed growth. Throughout the colonial period Indian real incomes were growing. There was no strong ground to believe that the dominant source of economic transformation was colonial policy. Direct governmental intervention was limited in most sectors other than agriculture.

However, the aim of this study is not simply to show that colonial revenue policy in the mid-nineteenth century could dramatically transform a tiny princely state. Rather the intention is to use Cooch Behar State as a case study to examine the validity of recently popular models of sub-regional agrarian typologies developed to understand the "agrarian question" of Bengal.

The earliest attempt at delineating regional agrarian sub-structures in Bengal was by A Ghosh. [102] Ghosh classified Bengal into four regions on the basis of differentiation among the peasantry. Ghosh's study did not intend to relate the nature of pre-independence peasant politics to the nature of agrarian class structure. In fact, given the inclusion of such "dissimilar" districts as the 24 parganas and Dacca within the same region, and such "similar" districts as Dinajpur and Rangpur in different regions, Ghosh implicitly argued against the construction of any regional typologies, preferring to address the issue district wise. In 1982 Partha Chatterjee, in a seminal essay on the agrarian structure of Bengal, concluded that his findings confirmed Ghosh's analysis. [103] Chatterjee showed in his essay that it was possible to directly link the regional typologies of agrarian structure with the regional peasant politics of Bengal. He warned that the course of Bengal politics was not pre-determined by its agrarian structure. But his observations were limited to eastern and western Bengal only.

Sugata Bose in his study[104] applies this model to whole of Bengal. He attempted to explain the different types of peasant movements in late colonial Bengal, by arguing that the peasant politics took in the eastern, western and northern regions of Bengal had their roots in the particular type of rural economy of each of these areas. Bose identified three typologies in the agrarian social structure of colonial Bengal. The village landlord/rich farmer- sharecropper system predominated in the north, the peasant small-holding system prevailed in the east, and the peasant small-holding-demesne labour complex was the most common pattern in West Bengal. The crucial feature pf all these sub-types was the symbiotic relations between various classes through a network of agrarian credit.

Bose's assumption was that the peasantry of East Bengal was relatively undifferentiated. But Nariaki Nakazato [105] by his quantitative research showed that the east Bengal *raiyats* were stratified even before the 19th century. A new phase in the process of stratification began in the late 19th century. The most significant aspect of this process was that the poor raiyats turned into *Bargadars* and the rich upper strata of *raiyats* and some section of land owners into *Jotedar* type landlords. In a recent study Nakazato has extended his research on whole of Bengal and on the basis of volume and frequency of transfer of occupancy holdings between 1881 and 1947 and he divided Bengal into three regions.[106] It is true that the dominant pattern of the land tenure system of North Bengal was the *Jotedari-Adhiari* system as mentioned by Bose. The Cooch Behar State was not an exception. But that does not necessarily mean that the agrarian structure of the Cooch Behar State was wholly comprised of *Jotedars* and *Adhiars.* Besides there were many intermediaries and their interaction with the colonial revenue structure, market mechanisms makes the agrarian history of the small State of Cooch Behar.

Studies particularly on Cooch Behar may be categorised into: 1) Autobiographic studies, 2) Biographical studies, 3) Ethnographic studies, 4) Demographic studies, 5) Socio-cultural studies, 6) Descriptive historical studies, 7) Political studies including movement studies etc. Some of the studies may be focussed as under:

Among them the *Rajopakhyana* by Jaynath Munshi [107] is the first book to deal with the royal family matters. Maharaja Harendra Narayan had taken the initiative for the writing of this book. The writing of this book was completed in the year 1845 but it was published by the State Press in the year 1938.It was written in Bengali language. This book is considered not only the first historical document of the history of Cooch Behar but the first step to write the regional history of Bengal. Jayanath Munshi was in a responsible position in the royal administration. Naturally he got the opportunity to use the important official letter, *Dalil,* old books to build his argument. So the importance of this book can be understood. Through his study we got a perfect dynastic list of the Royal family in chronological order. Not only that , the socio, economic religious, political condition of the country, the relation between the foreigner and the Koch Behar Raj , the cultural development of the state-all were highlighted by him in an excellent manner. Another important document regarding the

history of Cooch Behar State is "Koch beharer Itihas"[108] (The history of Cooch Behar) written by Ananada Chandra Ghosh, the son of Jayanath Munshi.The date of this book is 1865 and it was written in Bengali. This book is a brief description of his father's writing. He only added some important geographical information in it. Bhagabati Charan Bandhayapadhay's book Koch Beharer Itihas[109] (the History of Cooch Behar.) was written in three parts. But no particular theme of history of Cooch Behar was discussed by him. From geographical description of the State to the administration of the State - everything was discussed by him. The book deals with the account of soil, cultivation, revenue reforms under different Commissioners of Cooch Behar State. The next important book about Cooch Behar was, "The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement" by Harendra Narayan Chaudhury.[110] It was published in 1903 by the Cooch Behar State Press. Though he discussed the history of the state but his main interest of discussion was the land tenure system of the royal Cooch Behar and the Land Revenue structure and the land settlements.

But the above mentioned books except the "*Rajopakhyana*" can not be considered as the wholesome documentary of the history of the Cooch Behar State. Perhaps the book written by Amanatullah is able to make up the gaps. He followed the scientific method of writing history to write this book. His book "Cooch Beharer itihas"[111] was first published in the year 1936. The book is very modern in outlook.Most important thing is that being a Muslim he had written about he Hindu Raja of Cooch Behar and he was not a bias writer too. The dynastic history of the state, the Muslim invasion, the currency system of the state, the relation between the Cooch Behar Raj and the other princely state all were nicely discussed by him. He was able to show the downfall of the feudal character of the state and the elite conflict which was common to the history of 17th and 18th century India in a very easier manner. He also discussed the British Intervention on the State and their interference in state matter. But the book is not flawless one. Still the importance of the book can not be denied. Thes study on the Koches was done by E.A.Gait. His book The Koch Kings of Kamrupa,[112] is a documented history of the Koches of Kamrupa. He discussed about the dynastic history of the Koch kings, their political situation and the administration of the kings of the Kamrupa. The study of Charu Chandra Sanyal on the Rajbansis of North Bengal[113] gives us the idea about the socio political life of the Rajbansis. He critically analysed different parts of their life .But he remained silent

about the cultural change among the Rajbansis under the colonial penetration. Koch Biharer Itihas, 1981[114], by Hemanta kumar Roy Burma is another necessary book to depict the history of the State. As he was an important royal officer we can know from his writing about different type of judicial law and administrative law. S.C. Sanyal's book[115] The History of Cooch Behar also added the valuable information about the history of Cooch Behar.

Besides there are some works on the political economy, the merger of the Cooch Behar State, the modernization of the Cooch Behar State , and the social mobility of the Koch-Rajbansis which categorically defined their different aspects of life. Mostly these are doctoral dissertations or monographs.

Research Gap

In the light of the aforementioned studies so far conducted by the scholars, it may well be argued that the problem of the proposed study, as specified, has still been unattended. Precisely, issues and implications involved in the land-man relationship in pre-colonial and colonial Cooch Behar resulting in the face of changing political economy has not been investigated by any scholar of history. The present study has attempted to bridge this academic gap with a potentiality of academic meaningfulness and would definitely logically find place.

Research Objectives

To adumbrate, the present study seeks to explore the evolving land –man relationship in the princely state Cooch Behar (1772-1949) in the perspective of the political economy of the region. The objectives may be specified as under:-

i) To study the overall profile of the princely Cooch Behar under the pre-colonial situation and the nature of land-man relationship resulting out of propriety over land as well as related indigenous system of land administration,

ii) To study the changing profile of land–man relationship and related politico-administrative arrangements e.g. land revenue and land settlement of the princely state Cooch Behar under colonial domination,

iii) To study the emerging socio-economic orders of the princely State Cooch Behar during its pre-colonial and colonial formations,

iv) To study the society, economy and polity of Cooch Behar both during pre-colonial and colonial situations contextualising the political economy after keeping the regional history as a frame of reference.

v) To study the nature and issues of land –settlements in Cooch Behar both in pre-colonial and colonial situation.

vi) Finally, the proposed study would attempt to reach a conclusion to understand the nature of political economy of a princely state and to argue whether such nature of economy basically feudal in nature would ultimately graduate to a capitalist formation or would remain static thereby giving birth to an abortive formation of capitalist economy due to pre-matured formation of its society, economy and politics.

Research Hypotheses

It is proposed that the under mentioned hypotheses would be dealt with through the different chapters for necessary verification for their required validation or invalidation. Arguably, the hypotheses are of assumptive value, at present, drawn out of available records, information and readings of the relevant literature.

- That the tiny principality of Cooch Behar in its pre-colonial formation witnessed an indigenous system of land propriety along with the Mughals' land revenue administration resulting thereby an indigenous political economy distinctively different from other native states of pre-colonial India.
- The colonial Cooch Behar has experienced unique features of society, economy and politics evolving out of an admixtured land settlements and land revenue administration after keeping the major remnants of indigenous land settlements and land revenue administration injecting thereby the colonial features of land settlements and land revenue administration.
- The pre-colonial Cooch Behar in the face of colonial situation has undergone a tremendous metamorphosis affecting thereby the land man relationship and the nature of political economy.
- The mega narratives on the societal development do not match with the experiences of Cooch Behar both under pre-colonial and colonial stages.

- The specificities of Cooch Behar need to be constructed to explain the largely agreed discourse on "national history localised" frame.
- While dealing with the experiences of agricultural history of Cooch Behar both during pre-colonial and colonial formation, it is assumed that a unique kind of feudalism aborted the way to pre-capitalist formation in Cooch Behar till the decolonization was taken place.

Research Questions

In order to test the validity of the hypotheses so formulated and to realise the objectives of the study, inter alia, the following research questions have been developed.

i) What are the distinctive features of the primary sector of the economy of the State of Cooch Behar under pre-colonial and colonial formations?

ii) What had been the nature of proprietary rights over land?

iii) What have been the distinctive features of land revenue administration and land settlements as well as land-man relationship?

iv) What had been nature of political economy in two different formations resulting out of indigenous system clubbed with Mughal system of land revenue and land settlements and British indoctrinated system of land revenue administration?

v) What have been the unique features that Cooch Behar held during the period under study and what made Cooch Behar a distinctively different society, economy, polity from mainstream states of the under study?

vi) What are other factors and forces, issues and events involved in the development process of Cooch Behar State?

vii) Did the land relationship, production relation give rise to different intermediaries?

viii) Had land alienation procedure any impact on the society, economy and politics of Cooch Behar State?

ix) What was the distinctiveness of such land alienation?

x) Did Cooch Behar State undergo from feudal formation to capitalist formation?

Study Methodology

The study is based on purely on library research, archival supports of the Government Departments and individuals' personal collection of the old documents since the universe of the study is the erstwhile Cooch Behar State documental investigation has been restricted in order to meet the requirements of scientific historical investigation .The design of the study has been mostly referential, observational, explanatory and analytical in nature. To make the study provocative and attractive, a cultural-ethnographical approach dovetailed politico-economic approach has been adopted.

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