

CHAPTER - III

East India Company and the years of Misrule in Cooch Behar 1774 - 1789

The anglo-Cooch Behar treaty (1773) succeeded in saving Cooch Behar from the clutches of Bhutan. But elimination of Bhutan's hold upon Cooch Behar did not result in peace and tranquility in that state. ⁽¹⁾ Old feuds and old jealousies between the branches of the ruling house that ^{had remained} (only lay) dormant for a few years again came upon the surface. The result was that from 1774 to 1789 the state was convulsed with internal disorders and confusion which had a great effect upon the people of Cooch Behar in the near future.

During the captivity of king Dhairjendra Narayan in Bhutan his son Dharendra Narayan ⁽²⁾ (1772-75) was the Naib-Raja or Deputy king of Cooch Behar. Rajendra Narayan, whom the Bhutanese agent in Cooch Behar had declared king in the fateful year of 1770 and kept him under Bhutanese protection, died within two years. ⁽³⁾ Bhutan then placed Bijendra Narayan on the throne but took him to Chechakhata to ensure his safety. British advance into Cooch Behar, however, turned the table against Bhutan. The Nazir Deo Khagendranarayan and the Naib-Raja Dharendra Narayan had their chance to set the house in

1. Sen, S. N. - Prachin Bangla Patra Samkalan, Introduction.
2. Ahmed, A., - History of Cooch Behar (in Bengali), p. 203.
3. Ahmed, A. - History of Cooch Behar (in Bengali), p. 201.

ibid.

order, (after (with British help Cooch Behar had got rid of
mit Bhutan.) But this was not to be. A new combination of
personalities had taken place and that ultimately decided the
future course of Cooch Behar's history.

Khagendranarayan, who had saved Cooch Behar by
timely imploring British help against Bhutan, and had installed
Dharendra Narayan as the deputy-king so long as Dhairjendra
Narayan was away from Cooch Behar, was soon disillusioned by
the prospect of a new combination aspiring for the real
authority in the state. This fortuitous combination was made
of queen Kamateswari, the royal preceptor Sarbananda and
Dewan Kashikanta Lahiri. While Sarbananda and Kashikanta
sought to enrich themselves at the cost of the kingdom, the
Queen, swayed by her reverence for the royal preceptor, failed
to see through his game and allowed herself to become an ins-
trument for satisfying the greed of Sarbananda for power and
riches. (4) There is no evidence of Dharendra Narayan taking
any step against those officers. The Nazir Dev also felt
helpless. Not even the return of king Dhairjendra Narayan (5)
to his capital after the Anglo-Bhutanese war was concluded saw
any improvement of the situation. It is said that Dhairjen-
dra Narayan was very much shocked to learn that Cooch Behar

4. Sen, S. N. op.cit., Introduction.

5. Choudhury, H. N. - Cooch Behar State and its land Revenue Settlement, p. 247.

had been rendered a tributary state. He is said to have rebuked the Nazir Dev for arranging the deal with the British and bartering away the independence of the kingdom. (6) He said to the Nazir - "Baba Nazir, why did you give the state to the Company?" Since his return Dhairjendra Narayan practically stood away from all state affairs and became more and more absorbed with religious rites. (7)

Dharendra Narayan dying in 1775, the officers requested Dhairjendra Narayan to look into royal affairs. But as he was totally indifferent to it, his second term of rule was insignificant for the country. The real administrative power lay with the queen Kamateswari whose evil genius was Sarbananda Goswami. On his part Sarbananda took the fullest advantage of the situation and became virtually the man behind the throne. (8) Within no time he became the "Mukhtiar" (representative) of the Maharani (9) and also the real administrator of the state.

With regards to the history of Sarbananda's rise to prominence it is stated that at the beginning of the 18th century two brothers Satananda and Panchananda Goswami came to Cooch Behar from Sadikhan Diara near Murshidabad. (10) Satananda became the spiritual preceptor to the ruler and Panchananda to

6. Ahmed, A. - History of Cooch Behar (in Bengali), p. 211.

7. Ibid.

8. Mercer and Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, pp. 11, 24, 152.

9. Ibid.

10. Ghosal, S.C., Ed., A history of Cooch Behar, p. 362.

the Nazir Dev and Dewan Dev. Satananda had a son Ramananda and Panchananda had three sons, Nayananda, Sarbananda and Asananda. When Ramananda was killed by the Bhutias, Sarbananda became Rajguru. There was also a dispute with regards to this. It is said that Maharaja Shivendra Narayan, in a letter dated in 1841 A.D. to the Agent at Gauhati had stated that the predecessors of Sarbananda Goswami were not Gurus of the Cooch Behar dynasty. Sarbananda first became Guru of Maharaja Dhairjendra Narayan. But Joynath Ghose mentioned that Sarbananda's uncle was Guru to Maharaja Upendra Narayan. (11)

Sarbananda Goswami was "intelligent" and "energetic", and would not easily deviate from his policy. (12) By ability and firmness he gradually became one of the most influential persons in the state. The Maharani was devoted to him and depended upon him. (13) All royal orders were passed through him. The influence of the Goswami thus gradually increased even in administrative matters. Papers sent to the Maharani for orders, were forwarded by her for disposal by Goswami. (14) Realising the power of Goswami, the principal officers of the king sided with him except Nazir Deo Khagendra Narayan and, the Dewan Deo Surendra Narayan. The seeds of future troubles were gradually visible in the state.

-
11. Ghosh, Joynath - Rajopakhyan, Narakhand, Adhyaya - 12.
 12. Ghosal, S.C. - op.cit., p. 362.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Mercier and Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, p. 152.

Sarbananda Goswami was not satisfied with merely working as a disinterested adviser. ⁽¹⁵⁾ His greed knew no bounds. He acquired great wealth by purchasing landed property in Rangpur and also obtained many estates in Cooch Behar as Brahmottar. It is not possible to ascertain how much Brahmottara land Sarbananda owned in Cooch Behar. Rani Kamateswari had a blind faith in Sarbananda and the king was disillusioned by the queen's reverence for the royal preceptor. There is a mention of the names of 22 Dehas belonging to Sarbananda in the papers containing the orders of the East India Company. ⁽¹⁶⁾ In the papers preserved in the Council Record Room of Cooch Behar, there is a series of references of Dhairjendra Narayan's granting lands to Sarbananda. On 13th February, 1775, Maharaja Dhairjendra Narayan permitted Sarbananda ^{to} enjoying a fee of Rs. 1.8.0 per chala. (parcel of land). ⁽¹⁷⁾ In spite of Sarbananda's extensive property at Rajbari, he was further granted 2 villages in Punjarbarighar near Sitalkuchi. ⁽¹⁸⁾ There is a reference that on July 26, 1782, Sarbananda getting grant of 4 villages in Taluk Panimara. ⁽¹⁹⁾ On 12th February, 1783 Sarbananda was granted Brahmottara in Taluk Nabamidola. Again on 23rd May 1783 Dhairjendra Narayan ⁽²⁰⁾ granted 24 Chalas to Sarbananda in Taluk

15. Ghosal, S.C., - op.cit., p. 363.

16. For details of the names of the Dehas, vide Ahmed, 'A - A History of Cooch Behar (in Bengali)' p. 299.

17. Report of January, 1888 of Record Room, Basta-1, File 59, p.30.

18. Ibid. - Basta 1, File-66.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., Basta, 1, File-86.

(21)
Maghpala. In addition to these lands, Sarbananda extracted orders to realise one rupee and eight annas per house in the whole raj as Gurupranami (offering to Guru).⁽²²⁾ All these possessions of Rajguru help us to understand how much power he enjoyed during the lifetime of king Dhairjendra Narayan and even after his death.

The pattern of administration prevailing in Cooch Behar at this time was also ridden with medieval features. Community between the interests of the king and his people is the solid argument in support of the king's personal rule. But it was totally absent in Cooch Behar. The king was the head of the state and had the Nazir Deo and the Dewan Deo to assist him. The Nazir Deo was in charge of the army, and the Dewan Deo of Civil affairs.⁽²³⁾ They were all paid from the royal treasury. The three had, by an arrangement, distributed the revenue of the kingdom amongst themselves. While the Nazir Deo kept a little more than 56% of the state revenue for his expenses, the Dewan Deo was allotted only 12% and the rest went to the Maharaja.⁽²⁴⁾ This distribution of state revenue among the highest dignitaries of the kingdom lacked all principles of sound administration of the finances. The recipients enjoyed their portions without having much to do for the material well-being of the country and its

21. Ibid., File-89.

22. C.B.S.R. - Vol. 1, pp.72-73.

23. Bengal District Record, Rangpur, Vol. IV, Let. No. 237.

24. Long, C. - Selection from the unpublished Records of Bengal, Vol. I, pp. 542-46.

people. This unbecoming nature of the Nobility had a bad effect upon the country. They never bothered about the prosperity of the country. Moreover, the jealousy and distrust amongst the highest dignitaries were also harmful for the country.

The long-standing cold war between the family of Nazir Dev and the royal family was a great hindrance to the country's welfare. Ever since the time of Mahinarayan, the first Nazir Dev, from whom both the present king and the Nazir Dev traced their descent, the Nazir Dev cherished the ambition for the foremost place in the state, Shantanarayan, one of the grandsons of Mahinarayan, played the role of kingmaker and became the owner of the 9/16 of the states revenue for the maintenance of the army and the defence of the country against the Mughal subedar of Bengal. (25) Thus when the King's authority in the state had waned, the Nazir Dev became the most powerful prince of the royal house. No wonder he should try to secure the throne for a scion of his own family. Thus Rudranarayan, the Sixth Nazir Dev made a serious effort to place on the throne his nephew and the present Nazir Dev Khagendranarayan. A bid for supremacy among the princes of the blood was already in existence. The inglorious reign of Dhairjendra Narayan (1765-1783) marked the real beginning

25. Choudhury, H. N. - Cooch Behar state and its land Revenue settlement, p. 249.

Meser and Chauvets Report on Cooch Behar - Vol II-
Pp - 181-182.

of evil days for Cooch Behar. His neglect of kingly duties (26) let loose the forces of disruption and caused boundless misery to the subjects. There was no cohesion in any part of the administration. Every officer did whatever was right in his own eyes, acknowledged no authority but that of the King and his subordination to the crown again was in most cases only lip-service. (27) The enmity between the Nazir Khagendranarayan and Sarbananda Goswami was the greatest blow for the kingdom which was already in decadence. They were always intriguing against each other to succeed in their designs.

The death of Maharaja Dhairjendra Narayan in 1783 left Cooch Behar at the tender mercy of the corrupt and irresponsible officialdom. Dhairjendra Narayan's written instructions gave all administrative power of the kingdom to Rani Kamateswari (28) as the guardian of the minor king Harendra Narayan. The dowager queen's blind faith in Sarbananda even in matters of the state irritated Khagendranarayan. The Nazir Dev considered himself as the saviour of Cooch Behar in the worst hour of Bhutanese oppression. When he found that he had been totally excluded from any share in the management of the State by the dowager queen, he

26. Ahmed, A., op. cit., p. 216.

27. Annual Administrative Report, 1865-66, No. 78.

28. Mercer and Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, pp. 152.

looked upon Sarbananda as an usurper. The Nazir Dev was deter-
mined to regain his rightful authority even by questionable means. (29)

Rani Kamateswari was not the mother of Harendra Narayan. Her position as the guardian of the minor ruler and the regent of the State during his minority was disputed. (30) The dowager queen drew the attention of the Company's authorities to the distress caused by the Nazir Dev to herself and to the minor king of Cooch Behar. She reported that Nazir Dev and his agent Shyam Chand Roy, in collusion with Goodlad, Collector of Rangpur had confined Sarbananda Gosain, the royal preceptor, Kashinath Lahiri, the Khasnovish and several other officials of the state. He had also forcibly taken away the King's seal, ignored the claims of Harendra Narayan to the throne, and gave out himself to be ruler and his son, the heir apparent. The Nazir Dev even struck coins in his own name and looted the properties of the palace. The people of the land, by his oppression and cruelty fled the country. Nazir Dev even planned to murder the minor king. (31)

The Nazir Dev also had his grievances against the Kamateswari-Sarbananda clique. It was he who had made Cooch Behar a protected state of the Company and ensured it of a handsome annual tribute. Ever since the late king of Cooch Behar

29. Long, James - op.cit., p. 11.

30. Proceedings of the G.G. in Council - Revenue Department, Vol. 129, pp. 83-4., 3rd April, 1786

31. Cal. Pers. Cores - Vol. VII. Lett. No. 968.
Sen. S.N.; op. cit. p. 7.

(Dhairjendranarayan) had grown indifferent towards the administration, Queen Kamateswari and her mentor, Sarbananda had virtually ruled the country; but theirs was a tyrannical rule. In 1783-84 Sarbananda had influenced Peter Moore, the Collector of Rangpur, and dared to humiliate the Nazir Dev. Nazir Dev was for sometime put behind the bars by Peter Moore. His estate was plundered and laid waste and he was ousted from power. (32) This inflamed the Nazir Dev and he decided to hit back. He fled to Assam and took shelter with Bulchand Barua, his father-in-law and the quanungo of Rangamatty. (33) There he gathered a force. He then attacked the Palace, seized the persons of the king and the Dowager queen, and kept them confined in his house in Balrampur. (34) He also won over to his side Gulab Singh, the Subedar, of the King's guards, who was on duty in the palace. The Nazir Dev forced the king and the Dowager-queen to put their seal on several blank sheets of paper and on some written documents. (35) He also drew support from the King's own uncle, his mother and grandmother who were very much displeased at the favour showered by the Dowager-queen upon Sarbananda who laid hands upon every piece of rich cultivable land in Cooch Behar. The priest-patron relation of the two was not favourably looked upon by the royal relations. (36)

32. Cal. Per. Corés - Vol. VII, Lett. No. 1183.

Sen, S. N. - op.cit., p.V

33. Cal. Per. Corés - Vol. VIII, Lett. No. 179, pp.74-76.

34. Long, J. - op.cit., pp. 542-46.

35. Cal. Per. Corés - Vol. VIII, Lett. No. 1901-2.

Sen, S.N. - op.cit., p. 5, Lett. No. 12.

36. Mercer and Chauvet's report - Vol. II, p. 286.

The consequences of the daring act of Nazir Dev was that Sarbananda Goswami lodged a complaint to Macdowell, Collector of Rangpur, who under orders of the Governor General, (37) sent forces to Balrampur and rescued the minor king.

The East India Company at first was indifferent towards the happenings in Cooch Behar. The Anglo-Cooch Behar Treaty did not say anything about the exact rights of the Company to interfere in the internal dissensions of Cooch Behar. The main point of that treaty was about the tribute payable to the Company and Cooch Behar's allegiance to the Company's authority. The present internal dissensions did not call into question her fidelity to the British but the growing disorder in Cooch Behar raised doubt about the payment of her tribute. The repeated complaints and claims of both the parties at last induced the Government to interfere in the internal affairs of Cooch Behar. A Commission consisting of Lawrence Mercer and John Lewis Chauvet was appointed to conduct a local enquiry into the recent happenings in Cooch Behar. (38) The Commissioner were also instructed to investigate various other issues of material

37. Proceedings of the G.G. in Council - Vol. 129, pp. 83-96, Brd
38. Cal. Per. Cores - Vol. VII, p. 130, Lett. No. 316. April, 1788

(39)
importance to the British. Amongst them the primary investigations were connected with the disturbances in Cooch Behar after the death of Dhairjendra Narayan the real rights and powers over the kingdom of Cooch Behar of the king, the Nazir and the Dewan, nature of the Anglo-Cooch Behar treaty, the amount of tribute stipulated in the treaty, the rights of the king regarding maintaining a mint and administering the kingdom and the ascertainment of the real owner of the Chaklajat Zamin-

(40)
dary. In order to put an end to future disturbances the Board pardoned all the offences of Khagendra Narayan and issued a proclamation for his surrender within six months. The opinion of the court of Directors in this regard was the most effectual means of putting a final stop to any future disturbances in Cooch Behar would be by publishing an Act of Amnesty to Nazir Deo and others concerned in the late disturbances. (41) If Nazir Dev surrendered himself either to the Collector of Rangpur or to the Khalsa at Calcutta within six months from the date of the publication of the Act, he would be admitted to a full pardon for all his offences and would not suffer any punishment. But if he

39. Pro. of the G.G. in Council Vol. 129, pp. 83-96. 3rd April, 1788
For details of the issues of enquiry Mercer and Chauvet's Report - Vol. II, P.1.

There are twentyfour (24) Articles on which the Commissioners were instructed to investigate - See Appendix.

40. Ibid.

41. Lett. from the C. of Directors - Vol. 6 (1785-89) Para 47, p. 165.

failed to appear within the stipulated period, he would forfeit all claim to pardon. (42)

After the publication of the Act of Amnesty, the Nazir Dev appeared before the Commissioner and pleaded for mercy for his Companions too; but that was not granted. The Nazir then asked for the restoration of his official position with full dignity and power which he had been dispossessed of in 1785. He claimed nine-sixteenths of the revenue of the State, which, according to him, was his undoubted inheritance. (43) He laid claim to the Chaklas of Boda, Paigram and Purbabhag as his personal zamindari for which he formerly used to pay rent to the East India Company. He further demanded the prerogative of the Nazir Dev of Cooch Behar to install the ruler on the Throne. It was a prerogative that had been exercised by all Nazir Dev's before him. (44)

As opposed to the claims of the Nazir Dev the King's party insisted on the king's right to dismiss the Nazir Dev for his rebellious conduct. He, being a disloyal servant of the state had not only forfeited all claims upon Cooch Behar, but he ought to be brought to condign punishment for his past conduct. The Nazir Dev of Cooch Behar enjoyed lands only to defray the

42. Ibid.

43. Calender of Persian Correspondence, Vol. VIII, p. 333, Let. No. 803, 1st Nov, 1788

44. Mercey Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, p. 26.

military charges of the state. But after the treaty with the East India Company the office of the Nazir Dev was no longer necessary. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ He was only a subordinate officer of the crown and could not claim to have enjoyed any prerogative. Though the Nazir Dev's role during the installation of the king was important, this practice of installing the Maharaja was derived from the overgrown power of the Nazir Dev Shantanarayan and upheld ever since by the official influence of the subsequent Nazir Dev against the weakness of the crown. ⁽⁴⁶⁾ The institution of Nazir Dev, therefore, was by no means an indispensable part of the Constitution of the government of Cooch Behar. ⁽⁴⁷⁾

The Commissioners Mercer and Chauvet began to hold their enquiry at Mogalhat. Sibnarayan Roy and Krishnaprasad were appointed on behalf of the Maharaja and Maharani. On the other side, ⁽⁴⁸⁾ Baidyanath and Nemaicharan were pleaders for the Nazir. After a thorough investigation at Mogalhat and Cooch Behar, the Commissioners submitted their report to Lord Cornwallis on December, 10, 1783. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ According to their findings some allegations of the Dowager queen against the Nazir were established but others were found to be exaggerated. These were related to the Nazir's

45. Rangpur Dist. Records - Vol. IV, Let. No. 237.

46. Ibid.

47. Sen, S.N. - op.cit. p. vi.

48. Ghosal, S.C. - op.cit., p. 397.

49. Ibid., p. 40.

maltreatment of Sarbananda. The Commissioners were of opinion that the Dowager-queen was a helpless tool in the hands of the notorious Gossain Sarbananda, who had no natural connection with the country. (50) The complaints preferred by the Rani may be said in great measure to have been the effect of the Gossain's instigations, particularly when it is considered that the preservation of his own power depended on the depression and perhaps final ruin of the Nazir Dev. The letters written by the Rani from Balrampore were the effect of compulsion. (51)

As to the allegation against the Nazir Dev proclaiming himself the king of Cooch Behar and coining money in his own name, the Nazir Dev's confession was that "to prevent the disgrace of the infant Rajah, I sat upon the Raja's masnad and had it proclaimed that I had become Rajah; besides doing this, without driving the Rajah from Rajbari I could not have become Raja. The Gossain is my enemy; he now possess the whole authority of the Raj. The Mint is under him; he can easily coin money with my name impressed on them." (52) As to the tripartite division of the state revenues between the Rajah, the Nazir Dev and the Dewan Dev, the Commissioners were "fully convinced that such a division of Cooch Behar was real and not merely nominal". (53) "Dewan Deo" and "Nazir Deo" are titles only peculiar to the history of Cooch Behar.

50. Mercer and Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, p. 188.

51. Ibid., p. 186.

52. Ibid., p. 188.

The business of the Kingdom was divided into three nominal branches and the resources of the country into three nominal divisions :

Rajah or offices of the Rajah - Annan	6
Dewan Deo or Naib Rajah	1
Nazir Deo or Commander of the forces and pay master	9

But these are only official distinctions, not personal appendages.

The office of Nazir Deo is that of "Senaputty" or Commander of the forces and pay master. He, from his allotted share, used to pay the troops, but after the treaty the responsibility of the defence of the country was transferred to the Company and the office of the Nazir Dev became *sinecure*. The Chaklas of Boda, Patgram and Purbabhadra were held by the Nazir Dev merely as a farmer on behalf of the king from the early 18th century. (54) These three Chaklas were taken possession by the arms of the Emperor of Delhi. A treaty was concluded by which for the consideration of a certain amount of revenue, these three Chaklas were ceded by the Emperor to the Rajah of Cooch Behar, who deeming it beneath his dignity to enter into such an engagement in his own name, requested the Emperor to give the Chaklas in farm to the Nazir Dev. (55)

53. Rangpur Dist. Records-Vol. II, Lett. No. 237.
54. Mercer & Chauvet's Report - Vol. II, pp. 181-82.
55. Ibid.

The Commissioners also opined that the right of appointing and dismissing the Nazir Dev was originally invested in the king till Nazir Dev Shantanarayan's rise to power in the early years of the century. Regarding the question of the settlement of succession, the Commissioners wrote "It was proved in a very satisfactory manner by their evidence that the ceremony of the investiture of the Rajahs, in which the Nazir Dev perform a principal and the Dewan Deo, a subordinate part, is deemed indispensable".⁽⁵⁶⁾ There is a point of ceremony respecting inheritance said to be peculiar to this family. It is that on the death of a Nazir Dev, no new one can succeed but by the Rajah's appointment, and similarly on the demise of a Rajah, no new one can be appointed but by the Nazir Dev.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The former part of this position is authentic for the office of the Nazir Dev is solely in the gift and disposal of the Rajah but the latter part of the position is founded on misinformation - a singular custom of this family that on the death of a Rajah, the successor shall be proclaimed and seated on the masnad before the funeral ceremony of the deceased be performed. At this ceremony the Nazir Dev holds Chattre (umbrella) over the new Rajah without which the ceremony would be incomplete. The Commissioners attitude towards the Nazir Dev⁽⁵⁸⁾ was found to be not unkind. The

56. C.B.S.R. - Vol. 1, p. 41.

57. Beng. Dist. Records, Rangpur, Vol. IV, Lett. No. 237.

58. Ibid.

grievances of the Nazir Dev succeeded in drawing their sympathy. They also held the view that the misery and sufferings which the Nazir Dev had to undergo since the disputes started were more than he deserved. "The total sequestration of his rights and an exile of four years under circumstances of the utmost indigeneous and distress will, we presume, be considered as a degree of punishment adequate to and capable of atoning for the greater of his offences".⁽⁵⁹⁾ Nevertheless there was an admirable frankness about Khagendranarayan. He did not hesitate to disclose before Commissioners Mercer and Chauvet that he had more than once administered corporal punishment on Goswami. Men who were suspected to intrigue against him, he often had beaten.⁽⁶⁰⁾

The Commissioners had also been directed to investigate the Dowager-queen's allegations against Lieutenant Duncanson and Subedar Gulab Singh. Duncanson had been appointed by the Governor General for the protection of the minor king and his mother.⁽⁶¹⁾ But Duncanson did not take proper measures for preventing the Nazir Dev from carrying off the minor king. Subedar Gulab Singh also neglected his duty. Another charge against Lieut. Duncanson was that of usury. Duncanson disclaimed any responsibility for the conduct of the Subedar, as he

59. C.B.S.R. - Vol. I, pp. 134-35.

60. Ibid., p. 174.

61. Calendar of Persian Cores- Vol. VIII, Lett. No. 569, pp.231-32, 23rd July, 1788

See, op.cit - Lett. No - 18, p - 8.

at that time, was absent from Cooch Behar. But his financial transactions were undoubtedly questionable. (62) At first Duncanson tried to avoid giving a straight answer but was at last compelled to admit that he had lent to the minor king of Cooch Behar a large sum of money at 7% interest and he had received the sum of Rs. 7,000 on the eve of his departure for Rangpur.* The Subedar's conduct was also highly suspicious. In the words of the Commissioners "he was shamefully deficient in his duty when he permitted the party under Dangar-Deo (Nazir's brother) to carry off the Raja and the Rani from the place of

62. Lett. to the C. of Director (Revenue), Vol. 7, 31st Jan. 1971, para 13, p. 72.

* The grievances of king Harendra Narayan was that he borrowed through his amlah (officer) from Capt. Duncanson Rs. 14,901 at one per cent per month but Duncanson made him to enter into a separate agreement to pay 7% percent, thus raising the total interest to 8 percent per month. In 1735 A.D. the king paid him (the Captain) Rs. 20,996 but he did not come to Cooch Behar on the plea of non-payment of dues. Finding no other way Sarbananda Goswami gave him a further sum of Rs. 7,000 upto May, 1787. Thus the total payment made over to Duncanson was Rs. 27,996. Moreover, Duncanson forced him to execute a bond in the name of Radha-charan Saha for Rs. 22,963/3 as and a promissary note for Rs. 2,425. Thus, the total amount was Rs. 25,388/8 as. (Sen, S.N., op. cit., p. 8).

their residence without any endeavour on his part to resist so flagrant an act of violence for which the force under his command consisting independently of his own sepoys, of a considerable number of Barkandazes was fully adequate to the prevention. (63) The Commissioners, therefore concluded that "he was in league with the party whom he so unwarrantedly allowed to besiege the Palace and carry off the persons of the Raja and Rany from under his immediate protection". (64)

The role of the Collector of Rangpur, during the period of turmoil, had not been to the best interest of Cooch Behar or its people. Goodlad had a blind faith in Khagendra-narayan. He was the Collector from 1781 to 1784 A.D. He (Goodlad), acting on the information from the agent (Shyamchandra) of the Nazir Dev arrested the Gossain and Kashikanta (65) and kept them under surveillance in Rangpur. Many officers of the Goswami's party were imprisoned at the same time, and the administration of the country was placed in the hands of the Nazir. Kashikanta Lahiri was dismissed and Shyamchandra Roy was appointed Khasnovis. (66) Repeated appeals on the part of the Goswami to Goodlad were in vain, the latter was convinced from the information of Shyamchandra that the ruler then a minor and his

63. Mercer and Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, p. 195.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., pp. 156-157.

66. Munshi Joynath Ghosh, Rajopakhyan Pratyakhasakanda, Adhyaya-1.

66. Mercer and Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, pp. 17, 22, 25.

guardians Rani Kamateswari ^{and} Goswami took no interest in the affairs of the State. Nazir Dev Khagendranarayan was the only reliable authority. (67) Repeated complaints of Goswami against the Nazir did not succeed to remove the favourable impression which Mr. Goodlad had formed of the Nazir. (68)

But the situation changed soon after with the arrival of Peter Moore as the Collector of Rangpur in place of Goodlad, Peter Moore came to Cooch Behar biased against Khagendra Narayan. Rani's faction succeeded in enlisting the support of Peter Moore. (69) Sarbananda and Kashikanta were set free. Moore, at Rangpur was welcomed by the skills of Sarbananda Goswami and Kashikanta Lahiri with many presents. (70) Evidently Sarbananda had succeeded in invoking the sympathy of Peter Moore. It was alleged that they had decorated the house selected for the residence of the new collector with furniture of good taste. Peter Moore appreciated their gesture and was well-pleased with them. The Maharani had sent information to the Council alleging plundering of the State by Khagendranarayan and his misappropriating the Chaklajat Zamindaries. (71) In 1784 A.D. under orders of the Council, the right to administer the raj and the royal seal,

67. Ghosal, S.C. op. cit., p. 276.

68. Ibid.

69. Sen, S. N. - op. cit., p.V.

70. Ahmed, A. - op. cit., p. 312.

71. Ahmed, A. - op. cit., p. 313.

were taken away from Khagendranarayan and given to the Maharani. It was also decided by the Council that the Zamindari of Chakla-⁽⁷²⁾ zat belonged to the Maharaja. The Petbhata Lands of Khagendranarayan situated in the zamindari were confiscated. Moreover Sarbananda conspired with the Collector (Mr. Moore) and deprived the Nazir of his lands and other property. Shyam Chandra was imprisoned. Besieging the house with the help of two to three hundred men including the sepoy's of Mr. Moore, Sarbananda arrested the Nazir Dev who was going to the Governor General to move him in the matters.⁽⁷³⁾ Not only that, the Nazir Dev was brought back to Cooch Behar and disgraced in the presence of three to four hundred men.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Major Jenkins, the agent to the Governor General in the North East Frontier at a later period, could not but make comments on this questionable conduct of the Collector of Rangpur. Jenkins reported that - "the Nazir Deo, who had solely projected and negotiated the treaty with the English Government, was entirely set aside, through the intrigues and influence of the Rani and the Gosain with the Collector of Rangpur, and the Nazir driven a fugitive from the Country."⁽⁷⁵⁾

72. Ghosal, S.C. - op.cit., p. 378, Ahmed, A, op.cit - p-312

73. Ibid.

74. Cal. Per, Cores, Vol. VIII, 9th March, 1787, Lett. No. 1183, p. 327.

75. Ibid.

The Commissioners Mercer and Chauvet at the end of their enquiry into the late incidents in Cooch Behar made an impartial Report on the affairs. There was no indication on the part of the Nazir Dev of throwing off allegiance to the British Government. The part he had played was only to suppress the power of his immediate rivals for the management of the affairs of the infant king. ⁽⁷⁶⁾ The disputing parties were by treaty wholly independent of this government with respect to the internal policy of the country any disturbances existing amongst themselves could not be considered as an offence against the laws of this government to which they were subject. ⁽⁷⁷⁾

It would be fair to mention that, the East India Company's main concern with regard to Cooch Behar was the amount of tribute which was agreed to by the treaty of 1773. So long as that tribute was regularly paid, the British government had no other stake in the internal disputes of Cooch Behar. It is true that the period of Lord Cornwallis administration was a period of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Indian States. ^{His war with Tipu and the annexation of a part of Mysore State was the best example of it.} But there were exceptions also. [^] The progress of the civil war in Cooch Behar gave real causes of alarm to Cornwallis. The reported behaviour of the Collector of Rangpur taking the side of the one or the other parties in dispute appeared

76. Major Jenkin's Report, p. 33.

77. C.E.S.R. - pp. 156-57.

unbecoming. The remedy lay in a friendly intervention in Cooch Behar and giving her administration a sound base.

The Governor General informed the Raja that the British should temporarily take over the management of Cooch Behar till the king came of age. ⁽⁷⁸⁾ The Governor General also made it clear that the British Government had no other desire but to protect the country from being ruined by designing persons. The Ruler's independent rights and privileges which had been secured to his family by the treaty of 1773 would be honoured. A Commissioner for Cooch Behar ⁽⁷⁹⁾ would be appointed to discharge the duties of the Company towards Cooch Behar. The Control of the Board of Revenue over the Commissioner should not be extended beyond the limits prescribed for the Resident at Benaras. ⁽⁸⁰⁾

To the British government these happenings in Cooch Behar was not so serious. They held that "the disturbances excited in Cooch Behar, if they can properly be said to come under that appellation (rebellion), did not proceed so much from a desire in the authors of them to throw off their allegiance to this government, as to suppress the power of their own immediate competitors for the management of the

78. Mercer and Chauvet's Report - Vol. II, pp. 184-5.

79. Choudhury, H. N. - op.cit., p. 252.

80. Ibid.

affairs of the infant Rajah." ⁽⁸¹⁾ [They further observed that "as the parties were by treaty wholly independent of this Government with respect to the internal policy of the Country, any disturbances existing amongst themselves could not be considered as an offence against the laws of this Government, to which they are now subject." ⁽⁸²⁾] *Omit*

The Commissioner Mercer and Chauvet also had been asked to ascertain the most proper persons to be entrusted with the guardianship of the Rajah and the management of the country during his minority. The Commissioner's advice was against the Maharani's authority which would again mean the revival of Sarbananda's misrule. For the same reason, they were also equally opposed to "entrusting the management of the country to any of the Behar family as every person in the country at all qualified by his rank for so important a situation has been in some degree concerned in the late disputes, their passions and prejudices are so much inflamed against each other that slender hope of any permanent settlement of the country taking place could be entertained, while the sole management of it should remain with their party." ⁽⁸³⁾

81. Mercer and Chauvet's Report, Vol. II, pp. 134-35.

82. Sen, S. N. - op. cit., p. VIII.

83. Ibid.

Thus in 1789, Henry Douglas was appointed the Commissioner for Cooch Behar. Douglas was instructed to take upon himself the exclusive management of the Raja's territory of Cooch Behar, the Chaklas of Boda, Patgram and Purbabhag. He was also authorised to collect the Revenue thereof. Both the Nazir Dev and Dewan Dev were made to relinquish their offices. The Government granted 2 crosses or 4 miles of land around Balrampur to the Nazir Dev and Patchhara to the Dewan Dev, along with a monthly stipend of Rs. 500/- to each of them for their maintenance. The Maharani was also pensioned off. (84)

(85)
With the coming of Douglas the Chronic malady of Cooch Behar appeared to be over. The guardianship of the minor king and the management of the country during his minority was the bone of contention between the parties. Both the parties were guided by self-interest and material gains. Rani Kanateswari had exerted her influence in administration during the life time of king Dhairjendra Narayan. Her power, in fact, served the interests of Sarvananda than the welfare of the State. Dhairjendra Narayan, during this time was incapable of performing any royal duties. Half a century later Major Jenkins wrote - "Long before (Raja's) death he was reduced to such a state of imbecility as was currently believed by the machinations of the

84. Ibid.

85. Mercer and Chauvet's Report - Vol. II, p. 203.

Ranee and the Gossain, that he was quite incapable of performing any of the duties of his rank."⁽⁸⁶⁾

When Dhairjendra Narayan died, Harendra Narayan was a boy of three years and nine months. Rani Kamateswari was not his real mother. His mother, by an irony of fate, was thrown into the background and ever remained there. Rani Kamateswari was placed by circumstances in the forefront. Assuming the role of guardian of the minor king she promoted the interests of the vain royal preceptor and his favourite Kashikanta Lahiri, and with their help restored her position in the state, such were her bounties that even the greater part of the royal desmene were transferred to Sarvananda Goswami and Kashikanta Lahiri as gift.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Douglas wrote : "Maharani possessed for herself the whole of the Raja's private lands in Behar."⁽⁸⁸⁾

Sarbananda and Kashikanta annexed jaigirs and Devottora lands for their own benefit.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Douglas also reported, "As very considerable grants of Jagheer, Brahmattara lands etc. have been made, the possessor of them should be called on to produce their Sanads if I may credit the information I have received, the Gossain Sarbananda is in the possession of the greater part of these lands."⁽⁹⁰⁾ Moreover, from the days of

Dhairjendra Narayan Sarbananda enjoyed a daily Salami (Pranami)

86. Choudhury, H.N., op. cit., p. 252.

87. Major Jenkin's Report, p. 33.

88. Cal. Per. Cores - Vol. VIII, Lett. No. 1229. 9th June, 1789

89. C.B.S.R., Vol. I, pp. 23-32.

90. Ibid.

of Rs. 2/- as well as "a contribution of a rupee and a half levied upon every house within his raj".⁽⁹¹⁾

Their allegations against Khagendra Narayan as a conspirator and usurper were partially true. No doubt, the Nazir Dev's claim to be the Chief man of the realm was inconsistent with his status as a subject in relation to the crown. His arrogance, in fact, had its origin in the tradition of Nazir Dev Shanta Narayan who had enjoyed unlimited power and influence in the state.⁽⁹²⁾

The continuance of such pretension, was, however, inadmissible, as that would virtually establish that the king had ceased to rule. At the same time it was also doubtful if the Nazir Dev really had a dishonest motive. Had he any such motive within him, he could avail himself of the opportunity during the investiture of Dharendra Narayan - a time when the country was in a state of confusion and distress caused by Bhutanese invasion. In reality the highhandedness of the Nazir Dev was the occasion for the Rani and the Gosain to use it to their advantage by vilifying him.

Indeed, Khagendra Narayan was the person who planned and negotiated the treaty with the East India Company.⁽⁹³⁾ It was

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 72.

93. C.B.S.R., Vol. I, p. 72.

natural to expect that the British Government should at least consider the case of the Nazir Dev with full sympathy. The imploration of Murrichmutti, the aunt of the Nazir Dev, will bear it out. In her petition to the Company in December, 1787, she stated that - "the descendants of the late Nawab Jafar Ali Khan who handed over the country of Bengal to the Company as well as others who rendered any service to the Company, are in full enjoyment of their high rank and position. But the Nazir Dev who gave thana Behar into the Company's possession is suffering so miserably".⁽⁹⁴⁾

However, the attitude of the government towards the Nazir spoke of its displeasure. This was possibly due to Khagendra Narayan's involvement in Assam's affairs at about this time. He, as a fugitive, was in Assam for four years. Assam was then convulsed by the "Moamaria Rebellion".⁽⁹⁵⁾ The rebels succeeded in defeating Gaurinath, the reigning Ahom ruler and placed one of their nominee on the throne. The people of lower Assam were also disgusted with the Ahom rule. Haradatta was their leader. Khagendra Narayan succeeded in drawing his sympathy for his cause. He cherished within him the hope of making his son the king of lower Assam by getting him married to the daughter of Haradatta.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Unfortunately for Khagendra Narayan, king

94. Ahmed, A., op.cit., p. 333.

95. Pro. G.G. in Council, Vol. 124, pp. 229-34., Dec. 12, 1787
Sen, S.N., op.cit. p. 4.

96. Cal. Per Cores - Vol. VIII, Lett. No. 1884.

Gaurinath was able to enlist the sympathy of the East India Company and with their help succeeded in suppressing the "Moamaria Rebellion" and regained his former position. At this Khagendra Narayan gave up all his hopes of getting help from Assam. ⁽⁹⁷⁾ His contact with Haradatta only resulted in the Company's disgust for him.

Thus the struggle between the Goswami and the Nazir ultimately brought no gains to either of the parties. In (inter-
Considering (discussions)
preting) the struggle which followed it should be borne in mind that the real nature of the issues was only dimly realised by the two sides. ^{For} For both of them the question of power remained the most immediate and pressing issue. Satish Chandra ^{while} analyses the background ^{of} the rise of parties at the Mughal court. ^(He) emphasises that the decline in the prestige of the monarchy, civil wars following the death of the emperor - all these weakened the position of the monarchy specially as no competent monarch emerged successful from them. ⁽⁹⁸⁾ This ^{same} was the picture of Cooch Behar in the second half of the eighteenth century. Taking the opportunity, the leading nobles - the Nazir Dev, the Dewan Dev, the Maharani and the Gossain, who could have helped to institute policies and measures designed to consolidate and strengthen the state during the minority of King Harendra Narayan, became

97. Banerjee, A.C. - Eastern Frontier of British India, p. 11.

98. Ahmed, A. - opcit., p. 315.

Chandra, S. Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, p.258.

themselves a prime factor ⁱⁿ of the misrule in the country. None of them regained his former position. The management of the State eventually passed into the hands of the Commissioners appointed by the British Government. Douglas (1789-91), Bruce (1791-95), Smith (1795-97) and Ahmuty (1797-1800) were the successive Commissioners of Cooch Behar and for eleven years Cooch Behar was directly under the administrative control of the British Government. [It might have been reasonably expected that supervision of the State by British Officers would usher in a new era in Cooch Behar. The result, however, was far from it.]^{omul} The Commissioners were not inclined to reform the evil and corrupt administrative system of Cooch Behar. Their main concern was the Revenue administration of the state so that the Company's share of the Revenue was regularly paid. The British officers never tried to remove the anomalies in Cooch Behar's land Revenue by developing the resources of the State. When Harendra Narayan took the reins of the Government and British Commissioners were withdrawn, the state of the country was as pitiable as in the days of Harendra Narayan's minority.

★ Thus, for Cooch Behar, her independence was already compromised when the treaty with the British was

concluded. Helping Cooch Behar in her worst days, the Company presumed to be the paramount power and to have asserted its rights to interfere in the internal affairs of the state.