

ABSTRACT

The history of the Princely State of Cooch Behar (situated in the northern most part of India) is one of the interesting theme from the point of view of historical research . This Princely State represents one of the advanced and at the same time modern activities of the ruling Koch dynasty . Around 450 years , the royal dynasty in Cooch Behar formed a glorious history of its own . The kingdom was founded by Maharaja Bishwa Singha in 1522 . From 1522 to 1765 the history of Cooch Behar witnessed of an uninterrupted sway of the rulers . After 1765 the history of Cooch Behar entered in to an arena of political turmoil and in order to escape from political turmoil the rulers invited the British for military assistance . Such kind of an application gave an opportunity to the Colonial masters to interfere in the political matters of the State . Accordingly in 1773 a treaty was signed between the British Raj and the ruler of Cooch Behar , known as the Anglo – Cooch Behar treaty of 1773 . Through this treaty the British Government could not fulfill their dream of implementation of British Paramountcy in the State . Because since 1783 – 1839 was the period of reign of Maharaja Harendra Narayan, who could not bow down his head in front of the British . He was the last independent ruler of the State . With his death , the opportunity to run free in the State of Cooch Behar came to the British . Maharaja Shivendra Narayan (1839 – 47) the successor of Maharaja Harendra Narayan , was an automatic

choice of the British . His son Maharaja Narendra Narayan (1847 – 63) was under the guidance of the British (during the minority period) obtained English education . None of the ruler of the State before him got the opportunity to learn in English . Thus the tradition of the State transferred from orientalism to advanced modern culture . It can be stated that after Maharaja Harendra Narayan , a new era of modernity knocked the door of the State . Maharaja Narendra Narayan during his short period of rule took some advanced modern measures for the welfare of the State , which were as follows : to settle boundary dispute , to abolish sati system in the State , to establish English medium School , to start topographical survey etc . These measures prepared the ground for the successors to take important steps towards the development of the State . These measures ushered the period of modernization in the State of Cooch Behar .

The history of Cooch Behar turned into a new paradigm under the guidance of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan (1863 – 1911) . The impact of Western methods upon Oriental system of Government was leading gradually but surely to disappearance of the traditional character of the Indian Rulers . Maharaja of Cooch Behar was not an exception to this . An interesting point here to deserve mention that in all the departments in the administration, Maharaja took a very deep interest . He took active role in the development of education specially female education and also of Mahommedan education and for the spread of education, schools and colleges were established in the State . Maharaja was well aware of the unhealthy condition of the people in the State . New medical facilities and hospitals were introduced in every corner of the kingdom . It was he who felt then urgency of regis

-tration of birth and death , because such kind of calculation helped the State to understand what was its population and what was the condition of the health of the general people . Although in 1901 and in 1911 Census operations were organised in the State .

Maharaja was the first ruler of Cooch Behar, who introduced the work of copying from old records , which in course of time helped the successors to run the State successfully . During his rule the system of survey and settlement works were introduced in the town and in the sub – division -al area .

Maharaja was the towering figure of modernisation , a reflection of which was noticed in the introduction of Cooch Behar State Railway for better communi – cation . A picturesque town and a flourishing business centers were increasing day by day since the advent of the Railways . The State Railway was on the move at first for carrying commodities and later on for passengers which ushered in an era of development not only for Cooch Behar but also for the whole of adjoining areas .

Maharaja Nripendra Narayan also maintained a well formulated finance department , through which State could able to know what measures were appropriate to the situation and what was the income and expen -diture of the State . Maharaja also took initiatives for the development of muni -cipal work at Cooch Behar . Accordingly in 1883 a Town Committee Act was passed by the State Council of Cooch Behar . He was out and out modern in out -look . It was he who organized shooting arrangement as an adorer of English cul – ture . But he could not forget the modernization of the State which was the

specialty of the Maharaja .

Thus from the above analysis it is amply clear that Maharaja Nripendra Narayan was the harbinger of modernisation .

The successors of Nripendra Narayan followed the same line . During the reign of Maharaja Raj Rajendra Narayan (1911- 1913) and of Maharaja Jitendra Narayan (1913 – 1922) , in addition to , the traditional work, the Nripendra Narayan Hostel , the Nripendra Narayan Memorial Hall at Mekhligunj were made and such other construction works also deserve mention . Maharaja also nourished forests for saving the State from environmental pollution . Such an initiative during those days was a rare instance .

During his reign there were other fields where development took place - Veterinary Hospital , Sadar Police Training College ; etc . Nirupama Devi wife of Victor Nityendra Narayan (brother of Maharaja Jitendra Narayan) did much for the allround development of women of Cooch Behar . She started a journal namely 'Paricharika' in which welfare motivation of the royal authority reflected through the writings (continued for eight years) . Apart from this, education , medical , agriculture , industry , introduction of various acts for legislative welfare and all the other fields developmental work continued .

The development of Cooch Behar reaches the peak of success during the reign of Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan (1922 - 1949) . In fact his welfare measures can be divided into two parts . At first Maharaja followed the tradition in social , cultural and economic field and secondly , he implemented some new and modern schemes which were innovative in character .

Those innovative measures can be categories as follows –

- (A) Formation of Public Health Department ;
- (B) Implementation of Society for Cruelty to Animals ;
- (C) Introduction of new rules for medicine ;
- (D) The Cooch Behar Income Tax Amendment Bill of 1945 ;
- (E) Scheme of medical training to nurse ;
- (F) Municipal Act of 1944 ;
- (G) Formation of Cooch Behar State Transport ;
- (H) The Cooch Behar Air Craft Act of 1946 ;
- (I) Ancient Monument Preservation Act of 1947 and others .

Thus the period (1847- 1949) under review in Cooch Behar ushered in an era of modernity which set an example to other Princely State of India . More importantly such an approach of a royal dynasty was on the whole historically significant .