

# **The British Construction of Indirect Rule in Princely State of Cooch Behar (1773-1947)**

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That the British devised and then sustained a system of indirect rule can be experienced from the model of administration they developed in many parts of the World and the case of Kamata Koch Kingdom or Cooch Behar is a gleaming example of such a design. Michael Fischer studied the British residency System and he had explained indirect rule in India.<sup>1</sup> When British came to India; their main objective was to develop a congenial position of trade and commerce. But from the second half of the eighteenth Century, they created Political Residency system and gradually the trading interest was shifted to Political strategy and goal. These changes brought with them new relationship between the British and the indigenous rulers. As the Britishers realized their new opportunities and needs they began to transform their network of commercial representatives into a system of political Agents. From the middle of the nineteenth Century, the Residency system became one of the central pillars of the British Empire in India.<sup>2</sup>

The British experimented to maximize their commercial profits, to limit their political liabilities, and to reduce their operational expenses; they first tried to collect revenues through the administration of the Nawab of Bengal. The company soon discovered that this system enriched its servants but did not fulfill their need. So Warren Hastings, Governor of Bengal (1772-73), and the first Governor General of India (1773-85), introduced a more direct system of revenue collection through British Officers, which reached the highest point in the Permanent settlement of 1793. British also created a loyal, dependent intermediary group that would supply fixed revenue.

During the 1730s East India Company signed the treaties with the Indian two small coastal states of Sawantwadi and Jangira and one with the Peshwa regulated maritime and commercial affairs, especially the Suppression of Piracy. The years of 1759-65, the Company did not conclude any formal mechanisms of intervention in internal affairs or restrictions on the external sovereignty of the Indian states. The main purpose of the earliest Treaty was to maintain the friendship and alliance with vague promises of military assistance. In 1765 Robert Clive allied with Shuja – ud – Daula of Oudh to maintain a *Buffer* state between the Company's new base in Bengal and the Marathas. From 1765 to 1772 the administration of Bengal was carried on by two powers-the British and the Nawab of Bengal and hence this system came to be known as the "Dual System" in the history of India. This system of government was introduced by Lord Clive in 1765 and as it proved defective, it was brought to an end by Warren Hastings in 1772. Warren Hastings with great ability and courage faced the hostile powers and thus saved the British dominion at such a critical time.

After the departure of Lord Cornwallis, Sir John Shore was appointed as the Governor General of India in 1793. His time (1793 -98) was a period of peace and he avoided any kind of disputes with the Indian Princes. He was a staunch advocate of the policy of non-intervention. He did not interfere in the wars of the native rulers and adopted a policy of strict neutrality. In this way when the Marathas attacked the Nizam in 1795, the latter sought the help of the English on the basis of a former Treaty. Sir John

Shore flatly refused to interfere. Consequently the Nizam suffered a crushing defeat at Kharda and was forced to sign a humiliating treaty by which he was deprived of a large portion of his territory. This very fact made a large portion of his territory captured by the Marathas who became very powerful and turned Nizam a dead enemy of the English.

In 1798 – 1805, the period of Lord Wellesley and his *Subsidiary Alliances*, he inaugurated the second major phase of the evolution of the treaty system. When Lord Wellesley came to India in 1798, the English Company was passing through one of its most critical times, on the other side the English were surrounded by enemies and every-where the French influence had greatly increased. After pondering over the whole Problem very thoroughly Lord Wellesley gave up the policy of non-intervention and neutrality followed by Sir John Shore and adored the “Forward Policy” of interfering in the internal affairs of the Indian states. He perfected the subsidiary system and forced all the Indian States to accept it at any Cost. Some of the Indian States did not find it suitable to accept and got ready to measure sword with the English. But Wellesley, like a true Statesman, faced all his enemies one by one and won success in the end. Lord Minto, the governor –general from 1807 – 1813, is usually characterized as a pacific interlude between two expansionists. Thomson has described Minto as “Quiet and friendly” and a writer of letters that were “witty and observant, strangely modern in tone”.<sup>3</sup> While Minto remained steadfast in not extending Company Protection to the Rajput states, he transplanted several clumps, of smaller chiefs into the soil of British indirect rule.

The arrival of Lord Moira, later on became Lord Hastings, as Governor General in 1813, accelerated the incorporation of the Indian States on to the treaty map of India and inaugurated the era of Subordinate isolation for Indian Princes. Lee Warner portrayed Hastings as lacking Cornwallis faith that Strong Indian States would encompass weaker ones, and become good neighbours, on the model of Ranjit Singh, but also not believing as Lord Dalhousie would, that the good of the people required annexations.<sup>4</sup> Although most commentators mention that Hastings concluded more treaties than any other governor general. He was also a major participant in rounding out the company’s directly controlled territories. Administrative rationalization and social reforms were dominant. British concerned after 1823, annexations continued, especially on the borders of the company domains. When Dalhousie appointed Governor General (1848-56), he did not reintroduce a policy of annexation but naturally intensified it.<sup>5</sup> He extended the boundaries of the British Empire in every possible way and made it the only power in India. He introduced the doctrine of lapse greatly added to the territory of the company; it created very baneful influence on India.

After 1857, the British expansion over the Indian State were ended because the Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858 which guaranteed the rule of the loyal Princes of India. So the British Policy was changed its course of action. The number of Indian States and their relation with the British were stabilized. The British imperial administrators and officials held up the system of Indirect Rule in India as the model to be follow by much of the rest of the empire. The images of Indian rulers, loyal to the core, and the residents as their paternalistic guides became a matter of faith with in the empire.

The British system of indirect rule over Indian States and a limited ray even in directly ruled areas such as Bihar and the United Provinces provided a model for the efficient use of scarce monetary and personnel resources that could be adapted to imperial acquisitions in Malaya and Africa. Thus there were multiple reasons why the British continued a system of Indirect Rule after they were clearly the dominant power in India.

The origin of the Kamata Koch Behar can be traced back as early as to the Sixteenth Century. There is a great deal of security leading to some academic controversy about the way ancestry of its original founder. The credit of founding the Kamata Koch Behar goes without any shade of doubt to Viswa Singha, popularly known as Bisu. It is said that the Kamata Koch Behar could maintain her character of independence for a long time. But during the reign of Maharaja Dhairyendra Narayan, the independence of the Koch dynasty was under question. The reign of Maharaja Lakshmi Narayan, the supremacy of the Mughals of Koch Behar, was established on the Kamata kingdom, but Maharaja Mod Narayan recovered his independence. British East India Company's intervention in the affairs of Koch Behar presents an interesting narrative. British expansion in North-East Bengal was not so rapid as in other parts of the Country.<sup>6</sup> English East India Company's relations with Cooch Behar in 1772 was the stepping-stone of the British imperial expansion in the Northern Frontiers of Bengal. In the year 1772, Khagendra Narayan, the Nazir Deo<sup>7</sup> of Koch Behar applied to the East India Company for help against Bhutan, who had commenced hostilities and carried away the Raja and Dewan Deo<sup>8</sup> of Koch Behar as Prisoners.

The English East India Company had a soft corner to the State of Cooch Behar because they had a motive and plans to control over the State by any means. For this purpose, Company agreed to offer the military protection of the Cooch Behar State against the enemy of the Bhutiyas. But at the same time, there was no other way to save the throne of Viswa Singh than by seeking the support of the Company. The East India Company's policy in this area as mainly dictated by consideration of trade and commerce with the Himalayan States and the country beyond. It is true that the company's main occupation as traders and also desire to make territorial acquisitions. Firminger wrote "..... We find that the company was on that whole, averse to the acquisitions of "Territory" or "Possessions" and that their servants in Bengal, when actuated by some momentous emergency were unwilling to interfere in native politics or to depart from the position of Traders".<sup>9</sup> The Court of Directors had given some direction in their letter dated February 16, 1771, "Remember, we are not fond of much territory, especially if it lies at a great distance from you or is not pretty near the waterside, nor indeed of any, unless you have a moral assurance if it will contribute directly to our real benefit".<sup>10</sup> According to Dr. Surendra Nath Sen, "The growth of British Power in India has perhaps no parallel in History. It was not a case of outright conquest of one country by other but a story of slow penetration in which the people of the land themselves helped the intruders".<sup>11</sup>

Although British indirect rule is sometimes called the treaty system, Company wanted to enter into the Indian Princely States for this system. In case of Cooch Behar, Company also followed the same way. When Bhutanese captured the entire Cooch Behar there was no chance to save the State. At this stage, Nazir Deo Khagendra Narayan in consultation with other dignitaries of the state approached the East India Company for the help to drive out the Bhutanese forces. In the opinion of Joynath Munshi, it was promised to the Company on behalf of the minor king of Cooch Behar that a sum of rupees One Lakh would be paid to it if it could succeed in freeing the state from Bhutanese control. But the offer was not acceptable to the Company which wanted a sum of the annual revenue of the state as price for its help in expelling the Bhutanese and protecting the state in future.<sup>12</sup> However, a treaty was signed with the East India Company in 1773.<sup>13</sup> The Nazir Deo concluded the treaty on behalf of the infant king, Dhairyendra Narayan and the Company force facilitated quick despatches to Cooch Behar. Bhutanese were defeated by the Company's force and Dhairyendra Narayan, the abduct king of Cooch Behar was ultimately released

in 1774. W.W. Hunter remarked about this treaty, “that the option and ratification, implied in clause – 9, does not appear to have been carried into effect. It is also noteworthy that the half of the revenue to be paid to the English Government, is clearly marked out as a tribute and not as a tax, by the circumstance that its amount is to be fixed once for all, at a date which is twenty years prior to the permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis.”<sup>14</sup>

5<sup>th</sup> April, 1773<sup>15</sup> a treaty was concluded and following subjects were mutually agreed on:-

1<sup>st</sup> – That the said Raja will immediately pay into the hands of the collector of Rangpur Rs.50,000 to defray the expenses of the force sent to assist him.

2<sup>nd</sup> – That if more than Rs.50,000 are expended, the Raja make it good to the Honourable the English East India Company, but in case any part of it remains unexpended that it be delivered back.

3<sup>rd</sup> – That the Raja will acknowledge Subjection to the English East India Company upon his Country being cleared off his enemies, and will allow the Cooch Behar country to be annexed to the Province of Bengal.

4<sup>th</sup> – That the Raja further agrees to make over to the English East India Company half of the annual revenues for Cooch Behar forever.

5<sup>th</sup> - That the other might shall remain to the Raja and his heirs for ever provided he is firm in his allegiance to the honourable united East India Company.

6<sup>th</sup> – That in order to ascertain the value of Cooch Behar country, the Raja will deliver a fair last bud of his district into the hand of such person as the honourable the President and Council of Calcutta shall think proper to depute for the purpose, upon which valuation the annual Malguazari, which the Raja is to pay, shall be established.

7<sup>th</sup> – That the amount of Malgu-zari settled by such person of the Honourable the East India Company shall depute shall be perpetual.

8<sup>th</sup> – That the Honourable English East India Company shall always assist the Raja with a force when he has occasion for it for the defense of the country, the raja bearing the expense.

9<sup>th</sup> – That the treaty shall remain in force for the space of two years or till such time as advice may be received from the count of Directors, empowering the president and council of ratify the same for ever.<sup>16</sup>

British first step, after the conclusion of the treaty was to protect the Cooch Behar State against Bhutia. Firstly, English East India Company defeated the Bhutias and occupied the main fort of Behar. After that, the Bhutias took shelter at *Chechakhata* from where they made proposal for peace. British were compelled to attack Chechakhata because Bhutanese attacked the English troops continuously without any information. Lastly Lt. Dickson who captured Chechakhata and his opinion was, “the Bhutias behaved with amazing bravery, but their daring courage was only productive of a greater slaughter. They often rushed upon our bayonets and met their death at the very muzzle of our pieces. At Cooch Behar I fought for glory. But here I was obliged to fight for life”.<sup>17</sup> To the British, the victory against Bhutan was a “costly” one.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, the Bhutanese forces lay down their arms and Dhairyendra Narayan, the abduct King of Cooch Behar was ultimately released in 1774.

By the treaty of 1773, Cooch Behar came out, as is a tributary State. It was admitted that the State of Cooch Behar had made only a partial and voluntary surrender of its rights and maintained its independence, unimpaired in its domestic administration.<sup>19</sup> It was pointed out that “ he (the King of Cooch Behar) was left in the possession of the two great marks of sovereignty, the right of coining money

impressed with his own name, and the administration of justice”.<sup>20</sup> But the following events of the State marked by internal feud, discords and dissension opened the floodgate of interference and involvement. By the English with domestic affairs of the state on the hollow pretext of upholding the treaty at the initial stage.

In 1783, after the death of Dhairyendra Narayan, the critical situation arose in Cooch Behar State. The clash between Nazir Deo, Khagendra Narayan and Sarbanand Gosain led to a coup in June, 1787 in which the latter along with Harendra Narayan, the minor king and his mother, the widow of Dhairyendra Narayan were seized and confined at Balrampur, a place where Nazir Deo had a permanent residence. Harendra Narayan’s illegal confinement did not go unnoticed by the English Government. English Government was sent troops immediately for the release of the King.

For this complex situation at Cooch Behar brought home to the Company the need for an enquiry Commission to look into every detail of the native administration and “to make a report on the pretensions of the rival parties, on various subjects connected with the State of the Country, and on the mode in which English influence should be exercised for its better management in the future”.<sup>21</sup> A Commission consisting of Lawrence Mercer and John Lewis Chauvet, was appointed in April, 1788 which submitted its report on 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1788, the Subject was the nature of the treaty and the situation of the Cooch Behar State. In Cooch Behar treaty, East India Company had not at that time any desire to establish authority or territorial expansion, their main object was gaining money. There was an undefined expression regarding “Subjection” of the King, but it may be that this was written for facility in releasing money. There is no mention in this treaty that any rights or power befitting an independent King like declaring war, Concluding treaty, striking Coins, maintaining an army, internal administration etc. were curtailed or that political connections with other Royal powers were prohibited.<sup>22</sup> We had seen the same strategies were taken by the British Government of Princely States in India.

The Commission had given their opinion about the treaty, “It will be admitted, that under a liberal construction of the apparent object and spirit of the treaty no advantage can justly be taken of the loose and un-defined expressions of “Subjection” and “annexations”. That no diminution of the independent right of the rajah within his own government was intended is obvious from his having been left in possession of the two great characteristics of sovereignty, that right of coining money impressed with his own name and the administration of Justice and from this considerations collectively, our construction of the treaty, is that Cooch Behar was thence forward to be regarded in the light of a tributary district, deriving protection from the state to which for that purpose, it made a partial and voluntary surrender of its rights; but maintaining in its domestic administration its independence un –impaired”.<sup>23</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1789, Lord Cornwallis passed a resolution to the Report of the Commissioners.<sup>24</sup> The Court of Directors was supported and approved on the 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1790 A.D.<sup>25</sup> The Commissioners, Mercer and Chauvet had mentioned that the interest of the weaker of the contrasting parties might suffer if the stronger party be placed in the position of a judge.<sup>26</sup>

On the question of minority regime and the misrule by the State officials of the Cooch Behar Lawrence Mercer and John Lewis Chauvet recommended to the British Government to appoint the Resident.<sup>27</sup> The Government accepted the recommendation of the Commissioners and appointed Henry Douglas, British Resident in Cooch Behar in 1789. It is true that the British wanted to form their network to control over the Indian Princely States to enter the political agents or resident. We have seen that the Residency system became one of the central pillars of the British Empire in India.<sup>28</sup> Lord Cornwallis

appointed the British Commissioners of the unsettled affairs in the State of Cooch Behar from 1789 to 1800, which was called the Commissioner's Rule. In Cooch Behar, the Commissioners played a vital role to solve the problem and control the administration. 1789 to 1800, Henry Douglas, C.A. Bruce, T.W. Smith and Richard Ahmuty were the Commissioners. W.W. Hunter said about the Commissioner of Henry Douglas "to have supplanted entirely the authority of the Rani, and her Minister Sarbanand Gosain. He conducted himself all the office, whether judicial or Revenue of the State or at least Superintendent proceedings of the courts and control their decisions".<sup>29</sup> Henry Douglas wrote "since that time it was suffered a very considerable administration owing principally to the mal administration of the Rajah's Minister, who has not only himself been guilty of the greatest oppressions, but also connived at them in his dependence. Large portions of land have been alienated, a variety of new taxes introduced, every species of abuse committed in the collection of the revenue and the administration of Justice had been perverted to the purposes of emolument. Thus harassed and oppressed numbers of the ryots were obliged to leave their native country and the revenues falling short in consequence of this, and from the alienation of lands, the remaining inhabitants were obliged to make good the deficiency".<sup>30</sup> Douglas solved the different problems and also created some reforms about the State of Cooch Behar. At that time Harendra Narayan attained maturity in 1799 but management of the state was handed over to him in 1801.

Lord Hastings was of the opinion that Cooch Behar was "A tributary State under the protection of the British Government, and depended even for its existence on that protection. He noted the charges against Harendra Narayan and held that the Treaty of 1773 imposes upon the Rajah, the duties and allegiance obligatory and can demand the penalty of a violation or disregard of those duties".<sup>31</sup>

That penalty was not merely the dissolution of the existing alliance but the actual annexation of Cooch Behar to the dominions of the Company. The Governor General, however, did not act at that moment contemplate the measures of assuming the full exercise of its right, but the circumstances in Cooch Behar made it necessary to interfere.<sup>32</sup>

The British policy of the little State of Cooch Behar changed radically as soon as when Wellesley came to power. The Governor General in Council, taking into his consideration the arrangements, necessary to be adopted for future management of that part of the possessions of the Raja of Cooch Behar which were situated beyond the limits of the province of Bengal. On that principal, when the Governor General in Council thought it essential to appoint a commissioner to restore order and tranquility in the unsettled and convulsed State of the Country in the year 1789, and to provide for the management of the affairs of the Rajah. During the minority of the present Rajah, it was expressly declared that it was not the intention of the Government in any respect, to injure the independent right of the Rajah.

It was further declared that, as soon as the Rajah should be capable of taking charge of his State, he would be restored to the full management thereof, and to all the independent rights and privileges, which had been secured to his family by the treaty of 1773.

The Commissioner was, at the same time instructed to transact the business in the name of the Rajah, and to fix his seal to all official papers, and like wise to preside in person on the part of the Rajah in the Courts of Justice.

Under the above circumstances whatever right it had been originally intended was that the Company should enjoy from the terms of the article, respecting the cession of Cooch Behar. The

Governor General in Council did not think it would be consistent with the justice and the honour of this Government to assert a title, at this distance of time, to the exercise of any power in that territory, except such as may appeared to be compatible with the construction, which had hither to been put on the treaty, with the measures, which had been in consequence, adopted by the Government relative to Cooch Behar, and with the sentiments expressed on the public records on the subject of that State.

On adverting, however to the tribute, which the Rajah was bound by the 4<sup>th</sup> article of the above mentioned Treaty to pay to the honorable company to the relation in which the native of Cooch Behar had so long stood towards this Government, with respect to the administration of Justice, and to the wishes, expressed by the Rajah himself in a letter, addressed to the Governor General in Council, on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1798, the Government should be pleased to establish such permanent regulations for Cooch Behar as they might think proper, His Excellency in council considers it to be the particular duty of this Government to adopt, with the concurrence of the Rajah, such measures as may be best calculated to enable the Rajah to provide for the regular payment of his tribute to the Company, by the establishment of proper rules for the collection of the Public Revenue, and to ensure a prompt and pure administration of Justice by means of the company's servants, and by extending the principles which have been adopted for that purpose in the company's territories, to Cooch Behar.

In admitting the receipt construction of the treaty as the basis on which the negotiation with the Rajah, for the adoption for further arrangements should be conducted, the Governor General in Council observes that this Government will not be precluded from exercising its right to decide on such points, as have before called forth the interposition and authority of this Government. Of this nature, are the claims of the Nazir Deo and Dewan Deo, upon which, owing to the intricate nature of the claims and the difficulties attending the investigation, on decision had yet been passed.

But neither in asserting the right, or in extending with the Rajah's concurrence the rules, in force in this province for the collection of Public Revenue and the Administration of Justice, will it be necessary or proper to subject the Rajah himself to the jurisdiction of the Courts, which may be empowered to take cognizance of civil and criminal causes in Cooch Behar.

It like wise appeared to the Governor General in Council that, as Criminal accusations had been from time immemorial tried in Cooch Behar by the Hindu Law, it would be advisable that all tribes and mis-demeanours should be tried by that Law, with which modifications and alterations, as may be deemed advisable.

On the ground above stated, His Excellency in Council resolved that a Commissioner be deputed to Cooch Behar to form the necessary arrangement in Concern with the Rajah, for the collection of Revenue and for the administration of justice, and for the adoption of a proper and efficient system of police in the territory of Cooch Behar, and that the Governor General be requested to furnish the Commissioner with a letter, addressed to the Rajah, pointing out the principles, on which it was proposed that the negotiation between this Government and the Rajah should be conducted, and the advantages which may naturally be expected from the adoption for the salutary regulations, which it was the wish of Government to extend to that State.

His Excellency in Council, not being awared of any advantage, which would arise from committing to the commissioner the charge of the collection of the parganas of Bodah and Patgong, or the other Mahals which had been recently annexed to Rungpore, and it being advisable that the undivided

attention of the Commissioner should be directed to the formation of the proposed arrangements.

When Harendra Narayan came to Power in 1801, he strongly opposed the British interference with the sovereign authority of the Rajah. British East India Company was withdrawn the Ahmuty, the British Commissioner in Cooch Behar State and to give the whole authority to Rajah Harendra Narayan. After that the British Government made a fresh attempt to get involved in the internal administration of Cooch Behar in some matters. The British Government accepted “the Rajah of Cooch Behar..... as independent Princes, subject only to the payment of the tribute and deemed the consistent with the dignity and how of the British Government to extend the regulations to Cooch Behar, in opposition to the inclinations of the Rajah. And the same time; the Governor General in council.....impressed with a strong sense of the expediency of adopting that measure, as soon as may be practicable, with the two consequences of the Raja, with a view to the important benefits which must arise from the establishment of fixed laws and regulations in the territory of Cooch Behar, and from the administration of more laws and regulations by the servants of the Company”.<sup>33</sup> John French was appointed to act as Commissioner of Cooch Behar and his first object to establish with the concurrence of the Raja, the Rule of law in Cooch Behar, John French failed to realize the policy towards Cooch Behar and appeared to have interfered with the administration of Justice. But Harendra Narayan was not ready to accept the policy of British Govt. So, British Govt. abolished the separate office of a Resident Commissioner in Cooch Behar and the collector of Rungpore was made responsible for the execution of British policy in the native state. During the period 1805-1813, three successive collectors of Rungpore, Archibald Montgomery, James Morgan, and John Digby were ex-officio Commissioners of Cooch Behar State. In 1813 the British Government found when a serious criminal charge was made against Cooch Behar Raj and John Digby was sent to the Cooch Behar to make investigation. In same year, Macleod Resident Commissioner levelled serious charges against Harendra Narayan but Harendra Narayan proved base-less and “the Government took the Commissioner to task for allowing himself to be carried away by false reports and rumours”.<sup>34</sup> The Government wanted to change the policy and so liberal policy was introduced towards Cooch Behar.

The British Government felt the need to appoint a new Commissioner in the changed circumstances following the liberalization of British Policy towards Cooch Behar. In 1822, Scott was appointed Agent to the Governor General; the North East Frontier and Cooch Behar affairs came under the Jurisdiction of his Office.

The reign of Harendra Narayan was marked by a protected diplomatic battle and clash of interest between the authority of the king and the paramount power of the British. “During this period, the policy of the supreme government towards the country was finally decided upon and its formation was greatly influenced by the attitude of the ruler of the Raj. It was in the reign that the question whether Cooch Behar should gradually pass into a Zamindari of Bengal arose more than one and it was greatly due to the representation of the Maharaja Harendra Narayan that it is still a feudatory State.....”.<sup>35</sup>

It had been noted before that Harendra Narayan was the last ruler of Cooch Behar to oppose the British policy. After Harendra Narayan, no ruler of Cooch Behar State stood against the British Government or British policy. Sivendra Narayan, was also the secret choice of the British as the future ruler of Cooch Behar.<sup>36</sup> So, It was very interesting that there was no need to follow any strong policy towards Cooch Behar and also no question of annexation. After the death of Harendra Narayan, the eldest Son Sivendra Narayan became the king of the State. But his accession of the throne was challenged by his younger brother. Harendra Narayan did not want his eldest son to become his successor. Macleod, Scott



and Jenkins informed to the British Government about the unfavourable attitude. Lastly British Government decided to give recognition to Sibendra Narayan's succession to the throne as a King of Cooch Behar State. During the reign of Sibendra Narayan the economic condition of the state was developed. Sibendra Narayan paid all the taxes due at the time of Harendra Narayan. W.W. Hunter said, "By rigid economy and with the indulgence of Government, he cleared off all the arrears of tribute which encumbered the state. He also free himself entirely from the private debts inherited from his father, and is said to have by considerable accumulations. He paid particular attention to revenue matters and to the improvement of his estates at Rangpur; and was as careful in the regulation of his own expenses as in the supervision of the public offices of finance".<sup>37</sup>

Sibendra Narayan played an important role to introduce the western education in Cooch Behar State. Sibendra Narayan was assured of every co-operation by the British Government in the establishment of a school at Cooch Behar. One thing is rightly pointed out that Sibendra Narayan accepted the British over lordship. In 1841 Sibendra Narayan married to two girls and for this occasion Lord Auckland Governor General of India presented him with a pair of gun, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1847. Sibendra Narayan died at the age of forty-nine. After the death of Sibendra Narayan, his heir son became the king of Cooch Behar, but at that time he was minority King and he went to take education from Krishna Nagar.

After Sepoy Mutiny, the British Govt. was forced to pursue soft policy towards the native States. The policy of "Doctrine of Lapse" was withdrawn. In 1862, the Government of India delivered the *Sunnad* to Narendra Narayan, the King of Cooch Behar, on the Condition of their remaining loyal to the Crown and faithful to their engagements with British Government. In 1848, Secretary F.J. Halide wrote a letter to Secretary J.P. Grant (Bengal Govt.) "His Honor in council concurs in the opinion of the Deputy Governor that it is desirable that the territory of Cooch Behar, so long as it may managed or superintended in its management, should be placed under the jurisdiction of the Government of Bengal, all questions, however, of an important Political bearing an important Political bearing being referred for the orders of the Supreme Government".<sup>38</sup> British Government introduced some reforms in the administration of the State. Under Guidance of British Commissioner, the character of the administration began to change. "The Feudal character of the administration gradually changed into constitutional character".<sup>39</sup> An education, Narendra Narayan was very interested to spread the English education all over the State. So Harendra Narayan Chaudhuri said "presented a purse to Colonel Jenkins, worthy Colonel, however, advised the Maharaja to found an English School was established in 1861, which was named Jenkins School".<sup>40</sup>

After the death of Maharaja Narendra Narayan in 1863, his minor Son Nripendra Narayan was the next ruler of the Cooch Behar State, on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1864. British Government recognized Nripendra Narayan as a king - "It is expedient to recognize Nripendra Narayan, the only legitimate Son of the Late Maharaja, expressed distinctly before his death, where in possession of his senses, Nripendra Narayan is accordingly recognized and confirmed as Raja of Cooch Behar, in succession to his father, the question of investing him with the title of the "Moharaja" remaining in abeyance until he arrives at his majority".<sup>41</sup>

For this situation, Agent, North East Frontier, Major William Agnew wrote a letter to Maharani of Cooch Behar State - "I am instructed to acquaint you that the appointment of a British Commissioner to manage the Estate, during the minority of Nripendra Narayan, is considered by the Government to be imperatively called for, as the only means of effectively providing for the care and education of the young Rajah, for the security of the Government Revenue and for the defence of the Bhooteah Frontier, for

which the Government is responsible".<sup>42</sup> The Maharani of Cooch Behar was agreed about the opinion of British Agent and British Government sent Colonel Haughton to Cooch Behar State "to take charge of the entire administration in all its branches, exercising the subject to the control of the Government through the Agent, North East Frontier, the full authority of the Rajah, except in regard to the grant of land, pensions or gratuities, and the confirmation of capital sentences, but exercising it, for the present through the existing administrative machinery, and making no material change in the present arrangements without the sanction of the Government. An important part of his duty will be to see that the young Rajah is properly cared for and brought up, and the Rajah's education with hereafter became a subject of paramount importance".<sup>43</sup> The British Government ordered to Colonel Haughton "you shall exercise your authority subject to the direct control of the Government, and that, so far as regards the internal administration of the Cooch Behar state, the Agent, North East Frontier shall be relieved of all responsibility. You will therefore, correspond direct with the Government on all matters connected with your charge".<sup>44</sup>

When he succeeded the throne, he was one year old. During his minority the charge of the administration was placed in the hands of a Commissioner appointed by the Governor. From his reign the administration of Cooch Behar entered the modern phase. The Commissioner of Cooch Behar was vested by the Government with full authority of the ruler of the State.

From 1864 to 1883, the Cooch Behar State was ruled directly by the British Commissioners. The Maharaja Nripendra Narayan attained Majority and was formally installed on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1883. The charge of the administration was formally made over to him by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and at the same time, Commissioner's post was withdrawn.

In 1883, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan became majority and lieutenant Governor of Bengal; Sir Reverse Tomson gave recognition as king of Cooch Behar State. Tomson wrote "I am present here today to formally transfer to your personal rule of this State of Cooch Behar, which owing to your long minority, has been now for 20 years under the British Control. I speak no conventional terms of gratification, when I say that it is exceedingly great pleasure to me to preside by virtue of my office at this ceremony, because in the first place I have had the pleasure of knowing you now for several years and have the confidence (which I don't think is misplaced) that in delegating authority to you we are delegating that which is not only yours by rightful inheritance, but by the fair equipment of your mental and bodily powers to exercise the prerogative of a high position; and secondly because in discharging finally the trust which the government has assumed and has exercised these many years, it does so with the justifiable consciousness of a duty which has been successfully and honourably fulfilled. I have the less hesitation in saying this because personally I can claim nothing of the praise which is due to those who have laboured incessantly for your interests in the advancement of the state; but I should be wanting in my duty if I failed to take advantage of this the first public opportunity which I have had of testifying to the merits of an administration, which in the hands of my friend, Lord Ulick Browne, the present Commissioner of the Rajshaye Division, has achieved results in the well ordered organization of a state which has now to be transferred to your own management".<sup>45</sup>

Nripendra Narayan gave answer—"I desire publicly to express my grateful recognition of the many obligations by which I myself individually and my state are bound to the British Government, and to assure you of my unflinching loyalty to her Gracious Majesty's Government at the hands of whose

representatives I have ever received such consideration and under whose fostering care my country so materially prospered".<sup>46</sup>

On 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1883 British Government formed 'Raj Sabha', Commissioner Major Evence Gordon prepared a memorandum for ruling the State. Maharaja did not change anything. Memorandum is like that – "The Maharaja is satisfied that the present system of Administration, under which the State and its people have prospered and made such satisfactory progress, and for which he is much indebted to the British Government, leaves nothing to be desired, and that if he were in a position to assume the functions and duties of supervision now discharged by the Commissioner and in some cases by the Government, no change whatever would be necessary".<sup>47</sup> According to Rivers Tomson (Lieutenant Governor of Bengal), Maharaja developed the good work, which had been begun, and to make the independent management of his State by native agency a model of administration.

Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan became the King of Cooch Behar State in 1922. Maharaja was the last ruler of Cooch Behar State. The Government of India had recognized the succession to the *Gaddi* of Cooch Behar of his Highness Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur. He always welcomed the British policy. In his time, there was no confrontation between Maharaja and Paramount power.

If one is to look at the other side of the history of the state at the far end of the 1940s when whole of India was passing through some political turmoil in respect of anti colonial movement, fact remains that the state of Cooch Behar was fully independent in between 1947-1949. The fate was however hanging on the question whether it would either join with India or Pakistan. Although it is not within the purview of our study it is suffix to conclude that the last Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan (reign period 1922-1949) was interested to join with India. Accordingly on 28<sup>th</sup> of August, 1949, the Cooch Behar was to accede to India when it finally signed the "Cooch Behar Merger Agreement". After two weeks on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1949, Cooch Behar was again incorporated in the Indian Union as a Chief Commissioner's province. In the last phase by the States' Merger (West Bengal) Order 1949, issued on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1949 under section 290A of the Govt. of India Act. 1956, Cooch Behar was transferred to and merged with the province of West Bengal on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1956.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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30. Douglas wrote the letter to Governor General of Corn Wallis (Letter No. I).
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