



**A History of Growth and Expansion of English Medium Schools in the Socio Economic Dynamics
of Cooch Behar District of West Bengal (1947-1986)**

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ABSTRACT

In this article an attempt will be made to show the history of Growth and Expansion of English Medium schools of Cooch Behar District in the State of West Bengal, India. Cooch Behar is one of the Underdeveloped district of West Bengal since independence. The growth of English Medium Schools in Cooch Behar is very sluggish and this district was not ready to accept English Education in the School level before Independence. No English medium school was set up in Cooch Behar before the Independence. However at the time while Cooch Behar was a princely state, then some of the members of the Raj Poribar or Family went to England to study for gaining Western Knowledge and light. One of Princess of Cooch Behar Sunity Devee played a pivotal role in the English Education in Cooch Behar Raj Family. Some of the members of the Cooch Behar Raj Poribar wrote books in English. However Setting up an English Medium School was difficult before independence and it did not exist also. After independence As people of Cooch Behar did not wish to see changes like Darjeeling District which has got English Medium School in 1846. One school named Falakata Raymond Memorial School was established in 1949 in Falakata which is presently situated in Alipurduar District. However, being late in existence, the English Medium Schools of Cooch Behar had been able to make a foundation of English Medium Schools in this district.

Introduction

The Socio Economic factor of Cooch Behar was mostly responsible for the sparse growth of English Medium Schools in Cooch Behar District in Between 1947-1986 .The Independence of India and and the National Policy on Education was soulfully responsible for the foundation of the growth and expansion of English Medium Schools. In Comparison to Bengali Medium Schools, the English

Medium Schools were less in number in this district as this district is an Agro based district. No big industries were set up in this area between 1947 -1986. This is indeed a fact that English Medium Schools provide costly education system and on the other hand the Kendriya Vidyalayas were restricted to the defence families. The commoners could not send their children in the Kendriya Vidyalaya despite of their will. Kendriya Vidyalayas were set up inside the Army Camp in Baburghat and in Gopalpur, respectively.

Socio Economic Scenario of Cooch Behar (1947-1986)

Koch Bihar /Cooch Behar

The name 'kuch Behar ' is derived from the Sanskrit vihara (Bengali bihar) ,meaning 'recreation 'especially applied to a Buddhist monastery. The latter is probably the historical basis of the name, as in case of our Province of Behar. This name, however, is used only by the outside world. The appellation acceptable at the court of the Raja, who repudiates the theory of a Koch descent, is Nij Behar, the word nij 'own, peculiar, being applied to distinguish the country from Behar proper. ⁽¹⁾

The former Kuch Behar or present Kooch Behar was historically very old settlement .It was a princely state and previously it was in Rajshahi Division. According to W. W. Hunter, "THE STATE OF KUCH (COOCH) BEHAR, which forms, for certain administrative purposes, a portion of the Rajshahi Kuch Bihar Commissionership or Division, is situated between 25o 57 '40" and 26 o 32' 20" south north latitude and 88o47'40"and 89o54'35east longitude. It contains an area, as returned by the Surveyor - General in January 1876,of 1291'83 sqare miles ,and a population, according to the census of 1872 ,of 532565 souls. "⁽²⁾So the description of W. W. Hunter regarding Kuch Behar in January 1876 is very vivid. Cooch Behar was a feudatory state and it was under the control of the Lieutenant -Governor of Bengal in the political or foreign department. It is once again important to quote W. W. Hunter who wrote, "It is administered directly by its own hereditary Raja, subject only to the payment of Rs 67.700.15(\$6770, 1s10 1/2d) into treasury of Gaoalpara. ⁽³⁾ As this part discusses on the socio economic profile of Cooch Behar it is to state that Cooch Behar was an agricultural state and in today's time this district of West Bengal is agriculturally sound. What Captain Lewin wrote in his account of Kuch Behar, "Kuch Behar forms a large, well cultivated' plain ' of a triangular shape, intersected by numerous rivers. ⁽⁴⁾ Koch Behar was very fertile and there was fertile land and there was no scarcity of water for agriculture. The sources of maximum rivers of Cooch Behar are Himalayas and they mixed to the Brahmaputra River in Bangladesh. These rivers have many tributaries and distributerics. Some of the

rives of Cooch Behar are Sonkosh, Raidak, Torsa, Joldhaka, teesta, dhorola, mansai, godadhar etc. The main crops of Cooch Behar is paddy. Aman and Boro both are cultivated in this district. In Cooch Behar district Co operative movement started in the post independent time, specially in 1951 when 'Bakla Tontubai Cooperative society limited' was registered for the first time. This Co operative movement gave a new light to the Cooch Behar District. In 09/02/1952 Coochbehar Udbastu Boyon Silpo Somity was established .Later on Biri Cooperative was established in 13.6.1951⁽⁵⁾In 1953 Cooch Behar Co operative Banking Union has started their journey. Later on this organization renamed as Cooch Behar Central Co operative Bank in 1958 .This was set up with an aim to provide financial facilities to the people of Cooch Behar so that they don't have to face economic problems, deprivation and exploitation, at large. This Banking system helped the poor farmers to give them loans in low interest. Interesting in 1973 there were many Co operative were born in this district. Some more names of the CO operatives in Cooch Behar are Wholesale consumers Co operative, Central fishermen Co operative society, land development bank, Employees Co operative Credit Society ,Service Co Operative Society, Lamps, large size agricultur Co credit society, Small sized rindan somity, large sized somobai baponan somity, khudro somobai baponon somity, Creta baponon kendra, poribohan somobai somity, etc. Apart from these, Benfed is mentionable .It helps in agricultural productivity and development. According to Dr Nripendranath Pal, Coochbehar Udbastu boyon silpo somity has attracted attention of the people of Cooch Behar ⁽⁶⁾Agricultural development itself is a revolution in different civilisation. In comparison it may be showed that the farming development in England changed the lifestyle of the English people. Padmaja Ashok in book "The history Of Social England "wrote, "The great development in farming that resulted from a series of discoveries and inventions during the 1770s is known as the Agrarian Revolution .This revolution changed not only the landscape of England but also the lifestyle of the people "⁽⁷⁾. Padmaja Ashok put some other logic of why so many land and time were wasted before the revolution. He argued, "A farmer was forced to allow one third of his land to lie fallow since the soil would not bear crops continuously. The old strip system, where a farmer's holdings were scattered, forced the farmer to waste a lot of his time walking about from one strip to another. "⁽⁸⁾In the case of England and in the case of Cooch Behar both have a resemblance of banking or financial development through agricultural development. In case of Cooch Behar it has been observed that many Co operative have been born to meet the need of the farmers .In England also such practices found. Jethro Tull was the first inventor of Agrarian Revolution in England. He was a farmer who invented a machine to drill holes to sow seeds which saved time. According to Padmaja Ashok, "The Enclosure system forced even the rich landlords to borrow money to meet fencing costs. This the English Banking system

developed"⁽⁹⁾ But system affected the poor farmers. They started moving to the city. The villages of that time remain deserted. Oliver Goldsmith truly presented a clear picture of the farmers in his poem "The Deserted village "-

"Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.
Princes and lords may flourish or may fade
A breath can make them, as breath has made
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied "⁽¹⁰⁾.

Even in the case of Cooch Behar the farmers of remote villages of this are the worst sufferers. Shri Nishit Baral in his article, "Access to formal agricultural credit and income of the Farmers :A study of Cooch Behar district 'wrote, "Agriculture is the basic sector of development in Cooch Behar district. The majority of the farmers are in the nature of small, sub marginal and marginal land holders. "⁽¹¹⁾ .He later on added the suffering of the poor peasants. He wrote, "They are most neglected and are deprived of the agricultural facilities available in the economy. As a result, their input power is highly affected causing insufficiency of production and reduction of income. "⁽¹²⁾As this chapter deals with the socio economic profile therefore it is now focussed on the society of Cooch Behar since 1846-1986 as already the economic profile of Cooch has been given roughly. The society was intrigued by the system of the government and by the system of the king. The system of Satee was existed before 1849 in Cooch Behar. But the British government tried to abolish it some more years back. One letter which reads the conversation in between Rajah of Cooch Behar and T. H. Maddock through the letter between T.H.Maddock and F. Jenkins, is given here. This letter is directly taken from "Itikothai Cooch Behar "of Dr Nripendranath pal.

No .25

To -T. H. Maddock, Esquire, Secretary to the Government of India Political Department, Fort William

Sir,

I have the honor to report my having returned from visiting Cooch Behar. I beg to refer my diary for my proceedings whilst on this visit, which has been abruptly terminated by my having received intimation from Mr Princep of his intended departure from Calcutta in the Jumna steamer for Assam, and he having

expressed his great desire to meet me on the way up. I have hastened my departure in the hope of joining him as he passes Bugwah.

2. I beg to advert to that part of my conversation with the Rajah on the prohibition of Suttees, and I would beg to recommend that the Rajah be addressed direct by the government, and told that the Government expects that he will prohibit them throughout his territory. It might be desirable to show the Rajah the grounds on which Suttees have been abolished, and to finish him with copies of the Bywatahs of the Pundits who have advocated their abolition.⁽¹³⁾

After the death of Maharajah Shibendra Narayan, his adopted son Narendranarayan became the Maharajah. In 1849 the under secretary wrote a letter to Jenkins regarding the abolition of Suttees in Cooch Behar. A letter which is taken from Dr Nripendranath pal 'S book "Itikothai Cooch Behar "regarding this is given below .This was the original letter in between Major F. Jenkins and the Under Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

No 102 of 1849

From -The Under Secretary to the Government of West Bengal

To -Major. F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor -General,

North East Frontier.

Dated, Fort William, 20th September 1849

Sir,

In reply to your letter No 64,dated the 30th ultimo, I am directed to request that you will convey to the Sarbarakar of Cooch Behar intimation of the pleasure of the Government ,that the performance of the rite of Suttee be altogether prohibited in future in the territories of the Rajah of Cooch Behar.

2. You are requested to report, if these orders of Government are carried into effect by the Sarbarakar.

I have &c

(Sd. W. Seton -karr,

Under -Secretary of the Government of Bengal)⁽¹⁴⁾

Though the system of Satedah was abolished in rest of Bengal it has taken nearly more twenty years to abolish in Cooch Behar. It happened at the time of Rajah Narendra Narayan. Even after this treaty many other areas of Cooch Behar had been ceded to Bhutan. Many disputes arose in 1794, 1799, 1808 in between Cooch Behar and Bhutan. Sometimes East India Company failed to act as a fruitful mediator. There were many boundary disputes occurred. But later on Bhutan accepted the demarcation made by the British authority. But Bhutan was indomitable to Darjeeling and Duars in taking a control of these areas. However the Britishers took large part of Duars from Bhutan. These parts were actually the part of former Koch Kingdom. The Britishers tactfully occupied these parts. Now keeping aside the strife in between Bhutan and Cooch Behar some descriptions of Sunity Devee, Maharani of Cooch Behar are given. In her book "The Autobiography of an Indian Princess" she had given many wonderful descriptions regarding Cooch Behar. It would be easier to understand Cooch Behar and her people through her description. Sunity Devee was born in 1864 at Sen's house at Coolootola in Calcutta. She was the daughter of Keshub Chunder Sen who will be ever remembered for Brahma samaj. The husband of Sunity Devee exchanged letter to Kesav Chandra Sen regarding his opinion on Polygamy as polygamy was frequent of the Raja and Maharajas and even among the commoners. Polygamy was the part of social life in India. The letter by Maharajah Nripendra Narayan Bhup to Kesav Chandra Sen is given -

"I have been asked to let you know what my honest opinions are on the subject of polygamy.

In reply I beg to inform you that it has always been my opinion that no man should take more than one wife, and I can assure you that I hold that opinion still.

I give below a statement of my religious views and opinions. I believe in one true god and I am in heart a Theist.

"Yours truly,

NRIPENDRA NARAYAN BHUP " (15)

Sunity Devee has described the caste prejudices of India. She tried to explain it to Lady Dufferin, she wrote, "It is difficult to make my western sisters understand about caste prejudice in my country. When Lady Dufferin first began this training much discussion went on all over India. To begin with, women of high caste could not do work of the kind as they thought it lowered their position, secondly, zenana ladies, however poor, did not wish to be trained or study with men, therefore in the beginning only very

common women took up the medical profession, but now many advanced women have taken it up and have studied hard and taken degrees and thus serving the country, for which we owe much gratitude to Lady Dufferin. On talking about Zamindari system of Cooch Behar it was nearly nonexistent in Cooch Behar. However Jotedari system prevailed in Dinajpur, Rangpur and some parts of Jalpaiguri. According to Madhav Chandra Adhikary, who in his article "Changing Economic Status of the Rajbanshis from Domination to Alienation :A case study of Northern part of West Bengal 'wrote, "There was no Zamindari System in the Western Duars of Jalpaiguri and in Cooch Behar. The land was given to jotedars or rich farmers or rich farmers by the government in exchange of some undertaking to pay annual rent in these regions. Madhav Chandra then added the agricultural structure during the British rule in Cooch Behar.

Cooch Behar is place of high concentration of the Rajbhanshi Community. However they have struggled to survive due to changes of economic pattern time to time. Though they were forced to choose agriculture, except few percentages of people, as it was their family profession. However we have seen their migration from Cooch Behar to different parts of India due to financial pressure after independence. Once again we may add Paresh Chandra Adhikary's writes up on them, "One of the most significant changes was that the Rajbanshis who once dominated upper caste Hindus (elites). This domination of an essentially immigrant gentry as well as the cultural differences between them and Rajbanshis created a sense of community solidarity among the latter. Now this researcher is turning towards a Bhutanese Researcher Karma Phuntsho who has described the rise of Southward Relations and Internal Strife. Contextually he has nicely stated Bhutan's affairs with Cooch Behar.He has shown the Vigorous development of Bhutanese influence upon Cooch Behar's Politics towards the end of the Seventeenth century. According to him, "By 1768 ,when Zhidar became desi, Cooch Behar was virtually ruled by the desi through a frontier official known as Pagsam drungpa or chief of Pasakha, later known as Buxa Subah. There was disputes over land in between Bhutan and Cooch Behar over Maraghat. Cooch Behar took control of Maraghat of Bhutan by the support of the British. There were some disparity found in between what Cooch Behar ruler produced the decree to acquire Maraghat and with the paper related to the treaty signed by Warren Hastings. The paper of this treaty was lost or burnt in one of the fire. According to Karma Phuntsho, "The Bhutanese failed to provide any written evidence that Maraghat was under their Jurisdiction The complex situation arised in among Butan, Cooch Behar, Nepal and the British. The British sent Krishna Kanta Bose who was the British Officials, to Bhutan. Krishna Kanto Bose was accompanied by Raja Rammohan Roy, the luminary of Bengal Renaissance in

the nineteenth century. Krishna kanto Bose left an impressive account on the state administration of Bhutan, its economy, and its natural environment etc. But it seemed to be fruitful of his arrival in Bhutan. What Karma Phuntsho wrote, The exchanges between Bhutan and the British continued even after his visit but eventually ended in Bhutan's favour. Maraghat was officially returned to Bhutan on 14 June 1817 by the British Authorities. We may say that the border disputes had become a greater cause for Bhutan for its economic downfall. May be such tensions were also natural in Cooch Behar. Like the tensions in between Cooch Behar and Bhutan, the tension was also there in between Cooch Behar and East India Company. Dr Ratna Roy (Sanyal) has put some emphasis upon this in her book, *The Raj and the princely states of Cooch Behar A study of Anglo Cooch Behar Relations 1772-1839*. According to her, "The conclusion of the Anglo Cooch Behar treaty in the year 1773 had a great bearing upon the state. Moreover, this treaty gave the East India Company in the firm footing in the eastern region and an opportunity for a new venture for trans-himalayan trade which was the long cherished desire of the company. She then added that the 1839 had a greater impact in the history of Cooch Behar as well as in the history of East India Company. In this year Maharaja Harendranath Narayan died. Maharaja Harendranath never obeyed the East India Company throughout his reign. After his death the Company became free to expand their trade. Cooch Behar became friendly. Cooch Behar was fortunate to have a queen like Sunity Devee who was an eminent writer who brought modernity through western education in Cooch Behar. She was a bilingual writer. Her Bengali writings include *Amritabindu*, *Sahana*, *Jhorer Dola*, *kothokothar gaan*, *Rabindra Janmatithi*, *Shibnath Sastri Jibanchorit* etc. On the other hand She wrote in English. Her English books include, *"The Rajput Princess (1917)*, *The Beautiful Moghul Princess (1918)*, *Nine Ideal Indian Women (1919)*, *The Life of Princess Yashodhara (1920)*, *The Bengal Dacoits and Tigers*, *Indian Fairy Tales*, *Prayers*, *Autobiography of an Indian Princess* etc. Through her book *Autobiography of an Indian Princess* she narrated Cooch Behar historically with the aesthetics of Literature. Her second son Maharajah Jitendra Narayan was a poet and a dramatist. He wrote in English language only. He established, "Cooch Behar Sahityo Sabha. His two books include "28th February and 4th of May. On the other hand he wrote a drama named "Hello Darjeeling ". His father and the husband of Sunity Devee, Maharajah Nripendranarayan wrote, "Thirty six years of BIG GAME SHOOTING -a rough diary. On the other hand the elder daughter of Maharajah Jitendranarayan and Maharani Indira Devi, Gayatri Devi wrote a joint book with Santha Rama Rao 'A princess Remembers :The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur. Entire Cooch Behar was benefitted by their cultivation of Literature. After the introduction of the State press in Cooch Behar in 1875, a little magazine movement started in this state. In 1877, "Cooch Behar Masik Potrika was released and edited by Kumar Rongilnarayan who was a

family member of the Raj Poribar. It was difficult for the common people to edit magazine, therefore it was started through the Raj Family. Later on in 1941 a little magazine named Cooch Behar potrika was published. Kulashastra Deepika was published in 1885. Sukotha was published in 1893. Kangal was published and edited by Krishnasundor Sen in 1895. In 1916 Poricharika used to get published. This was edited by Nirupoma Devi who was the wife of Maharajkumar Victor Nityendranarayan. Now turning towards some memoirs of some eminent personalities of Cooch Behar. Indeed Memoirs are grey sources of history. Hiten Nag, an eminent writer who was born in Joymoni Village of Rangpur in Present Bangladesh but he came to Cooch Behar with his family as a refugees. According to his account, there was a Swedish Mission High School. He was admitted there. He passed school final examination from this school. This was a Christian missionary school. He mentioned in his article, "Songo o Prosongo", "The school authority did not allow Saraswati Puja in their campus. But the students were adamant to introduce it in school" (Free translation from Bangla by me). The then king of Cooch Behar did not pay interest in this matter as the king did not wish to go against the Christian missionaries. However the students won in this fight after one month. The present name of this school is Maharajah Nripendranarayan High School. Hiten Nag has referred a barbaric act done by the Military of the Raja at Victoria College of Cooch Behar. The military beat the students. A revolution broke out in entire Cooch Behar after this news. This revolution reached to Calcutta also. By the protest of the students in Entire Bengal, the accused faced Court Martials. Hiten Nag was directly involved in social movement. He fought for the rights of the salary of the college teachers. They used to raise slogan, "Sromik, Krishok Khete khawa Manush, Chatro Sikhak Oikyo Jindabad". Hiten Nag has put a fair picture of unfair dealing of the examination by the students. He wrote, "The students used to write their paper opening their book in front of the invigilator. Students did not obey the norms of seating order. They used to sit as per their choices. Samir Chattopadhyay, an eminent writer, who was born at Chilakhana, wrote in his article, "Ei jibon, kobita, ei annesan", about the food movement in the post independent India. In the April, 1951 he heard a robust sound while he was taking his lunch. He wrote, "We all small boys came out from home to the street. Saw a group of wounded people are coming. Someone's head bleeding, some was walking badly with his bleeding legs. We came to know that Badal Biswas was shot dead by the Police. This was the first food movement in Cooch Behar after independence. At the same time the agro scenario of this District has not changed till 1986. These are the reasons of why Cooch Behar has seen less growth of English Medium Schools. However individual interest to send the children to a vernacular medium or to a free government school was much more pervasive.

Kendriya Vidyalaya, Baburghat ,Cooch Behar :

The oldest CBSE based English medium school of Entire Cooch Behar district is Kendriya Vidyalaya, Balurghat. This school is located in Cooch Behar city. It was established in 1 st September 1982 .The medium of instruction followed in this school from the beginning is English. The school was initially a primary school. Only 7 teachers were there to teach the students. The library facilities have been given to the students from the very beginning. However, students took little interest in going to the library and to read English story books, novel, science books etc. It cannot be denied that the parents of Cooch Behar town were not so interested in sending their wards into an English medium schools. And it was restricted to the wards of the defence. Other English Schools were also not set up during this period due to the attitude towards English medium schools. English was taught as a secondary language privately at home. The government policies did not encourage to promote English language. The land of the Baburghat Kendriya Vidyalaya was occupied by only 1 rupee stamp. That time only 10 rupees used to be paid in ten years as tax of the land. The land tax was paid at Seveoke Road, Siliguri according to S. Haque. Teachers from kolkata and different parts of India joined in this institution as a teacher. S. Acharya was recruited as librarian. His was wife became a primary teacher here. "Local teachers from Cooch Behar were restricted to teach at this institution in the initial days" according to Suman Bhattacharya , a teacher at Cooch Behar .⁽¹⁶⁾

Kendriya Vidyalaya, Gopalpur, Cooch Behar :

Kendriya Vidyalaya Gopalpur was established by the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan in 1984.This was established to cater the need of the children of the Defence personel and Border Security Forces. This school followed cbse board from its beginning. This is situated at Gopal our BSF camp. The campus was calm, serene and far away from the rustle and bustle from the crowd. Students took their education within strict Discipline. English was compulsory language for all the students and teachers. However, Hindi is also promoted unofficially .Students from different parts of India took education here. It is because of the shifting of parents duty this amalgamation of nationwide students happen here. As cbse board follows a national curriculum, therefore it remains a normal to get study on Nation ,it's history, geography, science, literature etc.Bengali as a subject was nonexistent in all kendriya Vidyalaya. So it was common that those students having a penchant for Bengali language did not take admission here. Making wall magazines were encouraged at Gopalpur, Kendriya Vidyalaya. English poetry, paintings, Hindi Poetry, Thoughts were the common subjects of the Wall Magazine.

St Mary High School, Cooch Behar :

St Mary High school was established in 1986 in Cooch Behar Town. This is a Christian Missionary School but open to everyone for studying here. In 1986 it was a primary school with very few students. Teachers were less in number. Interestingly the English medium centric parents got liberty to send their children in an English medium school for the first time as the other two older English medium schools were restricted to Defence People. According to Mithun Banerjee, "St Mary is oldest Private English Medium School of Cooch Behar Town. This school has been able to create a legacy. "⁽¹⁷⁾

KV Balurghat was the oldest one and KV Gopalpur was the second existing older school of Cooch Behar. St Mary High School was the third oldest existing English medium school of Cooch Behar District. 1986 is the year of the Rajib Gandhi Government. National Education Policy has been implemented in this year. Liberty has been given to private organisation to set up English schools and other educational institutions. This was common for entire North Bengal that from Year the number of privately run English medium schools will increase. On the other hand the Christian Missionaries were capable of running English medium schools in the adjacent districts of Cooch Behar, Specially in Alipurduar and Darjeeling.

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