

CHAPTER - II

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The kingdom of Kamata was ruled by different rulers of different dynasties from the period of mid-13th century to the end of 15th century. Sandhya Rai is supposed to have established the Kamata kingdom in the 15th century comprising few portions of North Bengal and Western Assam. N.N Acharyya has written a brief account on the Kingdom of Kamata. He writes “shortly after the invasion of Kamrup by Tughril Khan Malik Yuzbeg , the capital of Kamrup was transferred by king Sandhya Rai from Kamrup nagar (North Guwahati) to Kamatapur (Coochbehar) in the west. From that time onward, the Kingdom of Kamrup was known as Kamata or Kamrup - Kamata. The rules of Kamata were designated as Kamateshwara or Kameswara (Lord of Kamata). The Kingdom of Kamata became however, much smaller in extent than ancient Kamrup. It included Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari, and Kamrup district of Modern Assam, besides portions of northern Bengal and Mymensingh (Bangladesh)”¹

In the second quarter of the 15th century, a new line of kings known as Khan or Khen dynasty ascended the throne of Kamata (1440 C.E). The first in this line was Niladhvaj. He was succeeded by his son Chakradhvaj. After him his son Nilambar became the ruler of Kamata.² Nilambar was one of the most famous King of Kamata and he still lives through tradition in the mind of the people of Assam and North Bengal. But with the invasion and destruction of the Kamata kingdom during the reign of Nilambar by Hussain Shah of Gauda (Bengal), the downfall of the Kamata kingdom founded by Sandhya Rai began. In fact the fall of Nilambar changed the history of Kamata in the later years and ultimately in the later centuries. Thus with Nilambar the reign of powerful rulers was brought to a standstill for quite sometimes. Rather a number of petty chieftains emerged. Among these petty chiefs the Koches were the most powerful under the leadership of Biswa Singha, son of Hariya Mandal from Sikonagram in present day Kokrajhar district of Assam.³

Biswa Singha with his finer intelligence and organized military strength was able to conquer the Bhuyans of the region one after another. Thus establishing his sovereign power over all the petty rulers of the region, Biswa Singha declared himself the King. Meanwhile, he had come under the swaddle of Hinduism. Thereafter the

Brahmins tried to associate divinity with his origin. Certain myths and legends were created and re-created in order to connect Biswa Singha as a direct descendent of Lord Siva and to attach a Kshatriya status to his origin.

Biswa Singha ruled for a long period of 25 years and his reign can be placed around 1515 C.E till 1540 C.E.⁴ He later transferred his capital from Siknagram to Kamatapur (present day Coochbehar) and his kingdom extended as far as the Barnadi in the east and the Karatoya in the west. After his death, he was succeeded by his son Naranarayan who took the Koch kingdom to the pinnacle of success and glory and whose reign remain till date as a glorious past for the present day Koch Rajbanshi.

Zenith of the Koch rule till it became a protectorate of the British:

Malladev, popularly known as Naranarayan (1540 C.E -1587 C.E.) succeeded Biswa Singha and he extended the Koch kingdom to its zenith. He was the most powerful Koch king and under him the empire was extended in almost all direction. The accession of Naranarayan to the throne was however not a smooth and easy one. At the time of the death of, Biswa Singha, both of his two sons Naranarayan and Sukhladhvaj, popularly known as Chilarai were at Benaras to study the art of administration and statecraft as well as religious texts and techniques of war.⁵ Therefore taking the advantage of their absence, Nara Singha, the eldest son of Biswa Singha, declared himself King and ascended the throne. But he could not sit on the throne for a long time. The supporters of Naranarayan and Chilarai communicated the developments in the Kingdom and requested them to come and take charge of the administration of the kingdom.⁶ As soon as the princes received the news they rushed to the capital city. Nara Singha tried very hard to resist the entry of Naranarayan and Chilarai into the kingdom with his supporters but failed in his attempt. Having failed, he fled to the Morung country along with his family.⁷ He was refused asylum in the Morung country. After that he went to Nepal and then to Kashmir. At last he settled himself in Bhutan where he continued to rule in the region which was conquered by his father.⁸

Thereafter Naranarayan ascended the throne amidst pomp and majesty. A seal was made on this occasion with his name 'Sri Sri Naranarayan' inscribed on it.⁹ Since the accession of Naranarayan the designation 'Narayan' was used to all the kings who followed him. It is highly probable that this was done at the suggestion of the

Brahmins in order to attach a divine origin to the ruling family, thereby elevating them to the status of Lord Naranarayan.¹⁰ With the reign of Naranarayan the history of the Koch entered into a brilliant chapter of military glory and cultural achievements. This illustrious ruler established the Koch sovereignty almost in the entire North East and made it important enough to get recognized in the court of the Mughal in Delhi.¹¹ His brother Sukladhvaj also known as Chilarai was appointed as his prime minister. He was a great conqueror and one of the greatest soldiers of his times. N.N Acharyya observes, “Chilarai had consolidated the power of the newly established Koch kingdom, eliminated the disruptive elements within and transformed what was an infant kingdom to a national domain. He left to his successor a mighty and extensive kingdom such as no monarch of Eastern India had ever ruled after the hey days of the Barman rulers of ancient Assam”.¹²

Naranarayan’s kingdom extended to the major part of eastern and north eastern India during the zenith of his rule. H.N. Choudhury observes that his conquests comprised “almost the whole of northern Bengal, Bhutan and Assam as well as the modern states of Kachar, Jaintia, Manipur and Tipperah, and extended upto the coast of the Bay of Bengal”.¹³ According to the Akbarnamah, the western boundary of Naranarayans Kingdom touched the Mughal dominion at Tirhut.¹⁴ It also informs us that the kingdom extended in the south as far as Ghoraghat.¹⁵ However, the territory under the direct rule of Naranarayan was much smaller than his conquered regions because he did not annex most of the conquered territories. Rather he allowed the defeated rulers to enjoy their autonomy by paying annual tributes.¹⁶ Therefore, the territories directly under his administration extended from Tirhut in the west to Narayanpur on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the east where he had a military outpost established and connected it with his capital at Coochbehar by means of a road called the Gosain Kamal Ali and on the south his direct rule extended up to the river Kalang.¹⁷

Thus we see that the conquest of Naranarayan was based more on military feats than on territorial extension followed by fruitful consolidation.¹⁸ But no sooner the Kingdom weakened, these feudatories stopped paying their allegiance to the Koch kingdom which was in the form of annual tributes. For a short while at least the sovereignty of the Koch kingdom spread to the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley upto Sadiya on the east and on the south-east as far as Manipur.¹⁹ Although apparently “the

net result of this expedition does not appear to have been nothing more than a lip-deep acknowledgement of political vassalage and a hollow promise of payment of tribute on the part of the defeated chiefs and as such seems hardly commensurate with the time, energy and resources spent thereon”²⁰ yet, it resulted to a large extent to certain cultural impact in the case of Assam and Cachar of the Barak Valley which is in existent till date and helped in the process of cultural assimilation in the northeast.

The reign of Naranarayan is important from the point that both Naranarayan and Chilarai were great patron of learning. His court was delighted with the presence of scholars like Sankardev, Ram Saraswati, Annanta Kandali, Bakul Kayastha and others.²¹ Sankardev composed most of his major work including Kirtana Ghosa - section 1, 17-28, 29, Rukminir Prem Kalaka, Bhagavata - Book I, II, IX, XIII, Rukmini Haran Naat and others including his last work Rama Vijaya Naat during his stay in the Koch kingdom from 1543 to 1568 till his death.²²

But the outstanding period of the Koch Kingdom under the rule of Naranarayan did not continue for a long time. The Koch kingdom soon split into two parts after the death of Chilarai. Even Naranarayan failed to check this division and ultimately had to accept it as a bitter truth. It was divided between Naranarayan and Raghudev, son of Chilarai as Koch Behar (presently known as Coochbehar) and Koch Hajo. This division of the mighty kingdom weakened the Koch power and it became prone to internal dispute and foreign elements which subsequently led to lose of independence of Coochbehar and annexation of Koch Hajo to the Mughal Empire. The circumstances leading to the division of the Koch kingdom vary in two different sources- the Akbarnama²³ and the Darrang Raj Vamsavali. According to the Akbarnama, Naranarayan married at a very late age and that too under much persuasion of Chilarai. Therefore, he had no son till a very old age. However the Darrang Raj Vamsavali states that though Chilarai married at an early age yet, he had no child for a long time and thus remained childless.²⁴ Therefore the son of Chilarai, Raghudev, was selected as the heir apparent to the throne.²⁵ But, things changed when Lakshminarayan was born. As he was the child of the ruling King he had a greater claim to the throne as per the law of inheritance which existed at that period. Raghudev had the fear of being ousted by his cousin Lakshminarayan.²⁶ Moreover, Raghudev was prompted by his relatives and counsellors that if Lakshminarayan became the King than they would cease to enjoy all the perks and privileges enjoyed

by them since the days of Naranarayan and Chilarai. Therefore, they suggested Raghudev to get a share for himself in the kingdom.²⁷

However, Raghudev did not go for any open revolt against his uncle. Rather he pretended to go for a hunting excursion with a number of officials like Yudhisthir Kayastha, the Bhandari, Kabindra Patra, Sri Rai Laskar, Purandar Laskar, Kaipur Giri, Sardar Kabiraj, Gadai Bar Kayastha, Gopal Chaulia, Gadhadhar Chaulia and others.²⁸ He then proceeded towards the east and reached as far as the Manas river where he encamped at a place called Barnagar or Ghilajaypur.²⁹ Thereafter he declared himself king. Naranarayan made all effort to bring him back to the Kingdom but every effort went in vain. At the end he had no other option other than dividing the kingdom which he and his brother had built with so much of effort. Naranarayan did not take any offence at the conduct of Raghudev. Rather he sent Raghudev's queen, slaves and attendants to join him in the newly formed kingdom.³⁰

However, being ambitious Raghudev did not remain satisfied for long and soon he started eyeing on Naranarayan's kingdom. He attacked Bahirbandh, a fertile region within the kingdom of Naranarayan.³¹ This compelled Naranarayan to resort to arms against Raghudev. But, in the battlefield, Raghudev sent his queens in the first row of the army to fight against the soldiers of Naranarayan.³² This was a strategy of Raghudev since he was not prepared for such a course of action from his uncle. The strategy of Raghudev had the desired effect because when Naranarayan saw the queens on the battlefield he withdrew from the battlefield and made an agreement with Raghudev.³³ According to the new agreement, the Coochbehar kingdom was divided into two parts with the river Sonkosh as the boundary.³⁴ Naranarayan and his descendants would rule the western part while Raghudev and his descendants would rule the eastern part. Moreover, it was agreed that Raghudev would pay an annual tribute to Naranarayan and acknowledge his sovereignty.³⁵

The death of Naranarayan marked the end of the outstanding rule of the Koch political history. It was Naranarayan who made the Koch a power to be reckoned with in the political history of eastern India of the period. He had all the qualities of a great ruler. He has been compared to the greatest of mythological personalities in the Kamakhya Temple Inscription. The inscription reads as follows:

“Glory to the King Malladeva, who by virtue of his mercy, is kind to the people, who in archery is like Arjuna, and in charity like Dadhichi and Karna; in beauty he is as bright as Kandarpa, he is a worshipper of Kamakhya”.³⁶

The Stone Inscription of the Hayagriva - Madhava Temple also speaks about Naranarayan. It states that,

“The wisest King Malladev, was the conquerer of all enemies. In gravity and liberality and for heroism he had a great reputation and he was purified by religious deeds”.³⁷

The literary sources of the period also throw light on the personality of Naranarayan. Sankardev in Raja – Bhatima³⁸ states that Naranarayan was the jewel of his family, grave and patient like the ocean and like Indra among his courtiers. Further, he was the conquerer of his enemies, a patron of scholars, pious like Yudhisthira, in pride he equaled Durjyudhana, and in physical traits he was comparable to none. His appearance resembled a blue lotus (nila – padma).³⁹

In a colophon of the Adi Vana Parva of the Mahabharata, Ram Saraswati, the poet laureate, writes that Naranarayan who was incomparable with any other ruler, was also expert in all the Shastras and got assembled in his court numerous scholars from Gauda and Kamarupa.⁴⁰ In another context the poet calls him Raja – Sirumani⁴¹(King superior) and says that Naranarayan was a friend to the honest and fire to the enemy.⁴² The Akbarnamah also states that Naranarayan “possessed much enlightenment, and was adorned with excellent qualities”.⁴³

Thus we find that he was a great ruler and was admired by one and all. It is his reign which has left a lasting impact on the minds of the people of eastern India till date. He was a kind ruler who serves as an inspiration to the people of this region even in modern times. His humanitarian deeds are so many that he is sometimes even compared to Ashoka, the great Mauryan emperor. Full affection was extended not only to his subjects but also to the animal kingdom. This is very clear from the account of Ralph Fitch who made the following observation:

Here they (the people) all be Gentiles, and they will kill nothing. They have hospitals for sheep, goats, dogs, cats, birds and for all other living

creatures. When they be old and lame, they keep them until they die.....⁴⁴

Naranarayan was succeeded by his only son Lakshminarayan (1587 C.E – 1627 C.E). He was comparatively a weaker ruler than his father. He spent most of his complete career fighting against his cousin, the ruler of Koch Hajo, Raghudev, and then his son Parikshitnarayan. During his reign the Mughal power had the chance to enter into the Koch politics as well as into the territory of Kamata and Koch Hajo kingdom. According to Akbarnamah Lakshminarayan's country was 200kos long and from 100 to 40kos broad, extending in the east to the Brahmaputra, in the north to Tibet, in the south to Ghoraghat and in the west Tirhut.⁴⁵ Lakshminarayana did not have the vision and capability of his forefather. But his court was filled with great scholars of his time. He was the ruler who acknowledged Vaishnavism as the Rajdharm (state religion) of his kingdom. Madhabdev, the chief disciple of Sankardev took asylum in Kamata after Raghudev Narayan turned hostile against Vaishnavism and asked Madhabdev to leave his kingdom. Damodardev, another asset of his court wrote Bhakti Ratnawali and Krishna Janma Rahashya and Gobinda Mishra translated Madbhagavat Gita with the patronage of the King Lakshminarayan.⁴⁶

Birnarayan ascended the throne in 1627 C.E and ruled up to 1632 C.E. In his short spell of five year the Maharaja failed to implement any effective rule in the country. By his time, the power of the Koch dynasty started decreasing day by day and during the reign of Birnarayan, the king of Bhutan stopped paying tribute.⁴⁷ During this period Stephan Catchila, a propagator of Christinity while returning from Bhutan visited Koch Kamata and left a note on this country.⁴⁸ However Birnarayan took keen interest in education. He was the first to open schools in his kingdom. He arranged for imparting education not only to the princes, but also to the children of the royal courtiers. He used to inspect the schools personally and examine proper teaching of education. Under the patronage of Maharaja Birnarayan scholar Kabisekhar composed "Kirat Parba".⁴⁹ This book is still found at the royal library in Coochbehar.

Maharaja Prannarayan was crowned in as the next King and Mahi Narayan was adorned as the Nazir (summoner). He also issued currency in his own name and

ruled for long 33 years. He occupied an important place in the history of the Koch Kingdom as he tried to reoccupy the territories of the undivided Koch kingdom, which had gone into the hands of the Mughal during Laksminarayan time. He even captured Dhaka, the capital of Bengal for a short period while Suja (son of Shahjahan), the subeder of Bengal was away for fighting a battle against Aurangjeb in 1661C.E.⁵⁰ Like his ancestor Prannarayan too was a great patron of learning. With his patronage scholars like Jaykrishna Bhattacharya, Kabi Ratna, Srinath Brahman and others created valuable works like Proyog Ratnamala, Rajkhandam, Bishwasingha Charitam, etc.⁵¹ It is said that Maharastrian scholars named Jagannath in the Mughal court was so impressed by Koch king Prannarayan's learning that he left the Mughal court and came to Kamata and wrote Pranabbharnam, based on the writing period of Prannarayan.⁵² Prannarayan also rebuilt the famous Kamateswari Temple in 1665 C.E., which still stands tall besides other works.⁵³ He was a man with a optimistic mind, who had always a desire burning inside to rule independently in spite of so many constrains. During his time the Coochbehar kingdom expanded up to Tajhat Baharband Pargana in the south, Basakpur near Khutaghat of Goalapara district in the east and Bhatgaon within Morang in the west.⁵⁴ Maharaja Prannarayan rebuilt the temples of Baneswar and Shandeswar. He dug the pool adjacent to Baneswar temple. His rebuilding of the Kamteswari temple of Gosanimari can be seen inscribed at the temple's entrance even at present times. Architects were brought from Delhi for the construction of the Jalpesh temple. But he could not complete the construction within his lifetime. For his temple building attempt Coochbehar came to be known as the religious state. Maharaja Prannarayan's architectural mastermind can also be found elsewhere. To enable communication network he constructed several broad *rajpaths* (highways) and bridges. According to historian Sihabuddin, accompanying Mughal army commander Mirzumla, Coochbehar capital had many beautiful constructions. Maharaja Prannarayan was well-informed in Sanskrit grammar and literature. He was also a good poet and master in musical instruments. He created Pancharatna Sabha consisting of five jewels or intellectuals and used to discuss *shastras* (Hindu philosophy/ideology) and religion with them at the royal court.⁵⁵ Maharaja Prannarayan had three sons. The eldest son, Vishnu Narayan, passed away during his lifetime. The other two sons were Madannarayan and Basudevvarayan. In 1665 C.E. Maharaja Prannarayan fell sick badly and in spite of all possible treatments his ailing condition worsened. When Maharaja Prannaryan passed away in 1665 C.E. the Nazir

Deo Mahinarayan's four sons started to engage themselves into unhealthy competition to get the throne. At this Mahinarayan strongly felt that he might become a victim of these clashes among his sons and therefore after much thought Mahinarayan crowned Madannarayan, popularly known as Modnarayan, the second son of Prannarayan, as the next King and supported him in his ruling the kingdom.

During the reign of Modnarayan, the Nazir Deo Mahinarayan tried to remove him. Though he was crowned in as the King but in reality the Nazir Deo Mahinarayan had assumed all the powers and therefore the King was directed in all affairs of the State by the Nazir Deo. The Nazir Deo became so influential that he even began to ignore the Royal House. In this way Modnarayan was rendered helpless and powerless. At last he gradually succeeded in bringing some courtiers and soldiers faithful and loyal to his side. With their help Maharaja Modnarayan sentenced many who were loyal to the Nazir and started dismissing the rebels. Being aware of the changed scenario, Mahinarayan attacked the capital with his army and a violent battle was fought between the two sides. Mahinarayan was defeated and he fled in the guise of a *sanyashi* (Hindu monk). His sons also took shelter under the king of Bhutan. In that battle Mahinarayan lost his fourth son and many soldiers. In due course of time, Mahinarayan was ultimately arrested and put to death. Taking the help of the King of Bhutan his sons made several attacks to the Koch Kingdom but they lost at the hands of Modnarayan. After this Maharaja Modnarayan ruled peacefully for some time and after fifteen years of rule he breathed his last leaving behind no successor to succeed him.

Maharaja Modnarayan started the system of assessment of lands and registering of land record of his people. He accomplished the construction of Jalpesh temple which began at the time of his father. After finishing the *Shiva* temple building he offered 44 *jotes* (lease of lands) for the service of the deity. Revenue collected from those *Jotes* was used for *Sadabrata* (temple service). Maharaja Modnarayan used to respect scholars in his kingdom and his royal court was adorned by many intellectuals. Among them the most prominent was Dwija Kabiraj who composed "Drona Khanda".

Since Modnarayan died without any issue so after his death his brother Basudevvarayan ascended the throne in 1680 C.E.⁵⁶ Before his accession to the

throne, just after the death of his brother, when there was a lull in the Kingdom, an attack was made by the two sons of Mahinarayan, Jajna Narayan and Jagat Narayan. But the Raikats of Baikunthapur (descendants of Sisy Singha) came to the rescue of the Kingdom and the rebels were driven away. The Raikats then left after installing Basudev narayan on the throne. But, after becoming the King also he could not rule peacefully for a long time. He was disturbed frequently by the descendent of Mahinarayan and the Bhutias. Actually from this period the internal politics of the Koch dynasty became more dramatic and tragic due to the internal conflicts in the royal family, which opened the road for the outsiders to interfere in the Koch politics.⁵⁷ In the second attack to the kingdom Basudev narayan was killed when trying to flee. The Raikats, on hearing the turn up of the disastrous events then came to the scene to save the kingdom. Ultimately the rebels were driven away by the Raikats and after that they placed Mahendranarayan on the throne. From this period onwards the Bhutanese directly entered into the political arena of the Koch kingdom and they began to play a decisive role in the making and unmaking of the future Koch kings.

Basudev narayan was succeeded by Mahendranarayan (1682 C.E – 1693 C.E), the minor grandson of his elder brother. But he could not rule his kingdom peacefully because of the anarchy created by Jajnanarayan and Jagat Narayan. He being a minor was also not capable enough to rule the Kingdom competently. So, taking advantage of the chaos generated in the kingdom the rulers of the surrounding regions also declared their independence from the Coochbehar kingdom. It is also highly probable that it was during this period that the Koch principality at Khaspur severed all its ties with Coochbehar, declared its independence and emerged as a petty independent Koch territory at Khaspur. Jajnanarayan was in continuous opposition to the King and even collected an army and unsuccessfully attacked the king. Ultimately peace was made between them by which Jajnanarayan was made the general. After the passing away of Jajna Narayan, Shanta Narayan was sworn in as the new Najir and Rupnarayan, nephew of Jajna Narayan (son of brother Jagat Narayan), was made the army commander. Maharaja Mahendranarayan tragically breathed his last at the age of 16. This marked the end of the main stream of direct descendants of Maharaja Biswa Singha.⁵⁸

During this period, the Koch power had to fight with the Mughals who took possession of Boda, Patgram and Purbabhag. The King of Bhutan was also requested for help to fight against the Mughals but even after the joint effort of the troops also they could not defeat the Mughals and had to lose Boda, Patgram and Purbabhag to the Mughals.

Mahendranarayan was succeeded by Maharaja Rupnarayan (1693 C.E – 1714 C.E). He made truce with the Mughals and got back Boda, Patgram and Purbabhag.⁵⁹ But after some days the Mughals ignored the treaty signed between them and Rup Narayan and thus eventually war was initiated once again. In the war Maharaja Rup Narayan was defeated and he lost hold of Boda, Patgram and Purbabhag again. He then took a lease of the three Chaklas in the name of his Nazir under the Mughal hegemony. He was of kindly and wise personality. He had deep religious interest and was well skilled in the Shastras. His intellect and capacity for work commanded respect. Maharaja Rupnarayan moved his capital from Atharokotha to Guriahati Gram (village) on the eastern bank of river Torsha. Of his four sons he lost two of them, Narendra Narayan and Vidya Narayan, during his lifetime. The other two sons were Upendranarayan and Kharganarayan. Maharaja Rupnarayan constructed a beautiful temple of Sri Sri Madan Mohan Thakur in his capital. Inside the temple he established a beautiful idol of "Madan Mohan". Maharaja Rupnarayan was religious and well conversant person. After ruling for 21 years he breathed his last in 1714 C.E.

Upendranarayan succeeded his father in 1714 C.E supported by both Chhatra Nazir and the Dewan. By this time the Bhutias began to attack the plains and loot the northern part of the kingdom. The King of Bhutan had his influence over the mountain areas and the plains were then not under their rule. So, when they tried to invade the plains, the Maharaja and the Nazir Deo engaged them in battle but they were unable to effectively prevent the raid.⁶⁰ The friendship between Maharaja Upendranarayan and Murshid Kuli Khan, the Nawab of Bengal⁶¹ also did not extend till the next Nawab, Sujauddin. On the other side Maharaja Upendra Narayan being issueless, adopted Dina Narayan, the son of Dewan Deo Satyanarayan and gave him certain powers of administration. But the prince was not satisfied with it and attempted to extend a written authority from the king naming him as heir to the throne.⁶² Since the King did not agree to do such, Dina Narayan was annoyed with the King and gradually a rift between them arose. In due course of time the gap between

the two widened and Dina Narayan sought the protection of Saiyad Ahmed, the Fouzdar of Rangpur.⁶³ The Mughal Fouzdar was an opportunist and agreed to send forces against the King to help Dina Narayan. On the other hand, the King was also all set for the battle. But, at the last moment, the Dewan Deo Satyanarayan (the father of Dina Narayan) and Khasnavis Mahadev Ray had deserted the King. Thereupon the King appointed Gaurinandan Mustofi as Khasnavis. However in the battle Maharaja Upendranarayan was defeated and Dina Narayan was made the ruler of Coochbehar. However the king did not lose heart and collected a new army. A treaty was concluded with the Debraj of Bhutan who promised to provide aid. Thus, with rejuvenated spirit they attacked back and were successful in repelling Dina Narayan and his army. After this success, the influence of the Bhutiyas in Coochbehar increased to a large extent. The King also began to take utmost care not to displease them as they proved useful to him and had rendered him their help at the most crucial time.

Some of the notable royal courtiers of this period were Haradeb Khasnabis, Jaydeb Darbar Khan, Raghupati Rai, Chakrapani Jamdaria, Hareswar Karjee, Jagadish Karjee, Bireswar Karjee and Baleswar Karjee. The royal posts were Sardar, Aswayar, Kayastha, Nayeb, Ukil, Bakshi, Shikdar, Khannabish, Khas Dewaniya, Hisabnabis, Oyakkanabis, Patowari, Basunia, Tahasildar, Daptaria, Pujari, Kirtania, Patra, Bhandar Thakur, Chowdhury, Majumdar, Amin, Muhuri, Gomasta, Dalai, etc.⁶⁴

In 1763 C.E a minor king Devendranaryan was installed on the throne as the new King at the age of four. During his time the administration of the state completely broke down. The Bhutias by this time had started to trespass on the Coochbehar regions. As per previous treaty representative of the Bhutan King along with his associate used to stay in the capital city almost all the time. Apparently no necessary state decisions could be decided without the consent of that foreign representative. Every year the Bhutia ruler of Buxa Duar and other important Bhutia heads used to visit Coochbehar till Chekakhata. Their hospitality was looked after by the Dewan of Coochbehar. The Bhutia used to offer presents to the Maharaja in kinds and in return of which the Maharaja used to pay double the price of those gifts. Amidst such situation the ministers began to administer the kingdom on behalf of the minor King under the instruction from the Maharani (the mother of the king).⁶⁵ However after a short reign of two years the minor King of 5 year was assassinated while playing by

one Rati Sharma. Later it was found that the conspiracy of the murder was hatched by the Rajguru, Ramananda Goswami. During this time on 12th August 1765 C.E. Bangladesh (then consolidated Bengal) came under the jurisdiction of British East India Company as a rent for the regions of Boda, Patgram, Purbabhadra and other chaklas.⁶⁶

After the death of Maharaja Debendranarayan, Dhairjendranarayan, cousin of Debendranarayan and the son of his eldest uncle Kharganarayan who was also the Dewan succeeded him in 1765 C.E. During this time many provinces like Jalpeswar, Mandas, Jalash, Lakshmipur, Santarabari, Maraghat, Bholka and others went into the grip of the Bhutias. All these provinces were earlier under the Koch kingdom. By that time Maharaja Dhairjendranarayan married Kamteswari Devi and other five maidens. After some time Maharaja obtained his son Dharendranarayan. But, when Maharaja Dhairjendranarayan got the Dewan, Ram Narayan, who was also his eldest brother, assassinated, the Bhutan king Devraj decided to remove him from the throne. He was taken prisoner by the Bhutan Raj over dinner invitation in Buxa. Later he was taken back to Bhutan capital Punakh.

After imprisoning him, Debraj, the King of Bhutan crowned in Rajendranarayan, the second brother of Dhairjendranarayan as the next King. But the real power was with the representative of the Bhutan Raj 'Pen-Sutma'. Their influence in the kingdom increased to such an extent that the King along with the the Rajmata (mother queen) had to live upon the income from their personal farm and very little was granted for their living by the Pen – Sutma. Tragically the King also died on the fifth day after his marriage.

Maharaja Rajendranarayan died in 1772 C.E leaving behind no son to succeed him. Taking this opportunity in order to acquire the throne Baikuntha Narayan conspired with Bhutan king's representative Pen - Sutma. Pen - Sutma confiscated the royal throne, scepter & umbrella and kept in the Madan Mohan Temple under heavy guard of the Bhutia soldiers. On the other side, Najirdeo Kashinath Lahiri, Gosajideo discussed with the Queen and decided to enthrone Dharendranarayan (son of Maharaja Dhairjendranarayan) as the next king of Coochbehar.⁶⁷ Accordingly Najirdeo reached Madan Mohan temple armed with many soldiers. Other royal persons of high rank also gathered there. All of them expelled the Bhutia soldiers on

guard over there and crowned in Dharendranarayan as the next King. Najirdeo held the royal umbrella over the Maharaja and coins were issued in the name of Maharaja Dharendranarayan. This development in the state thus led to an inevitable clash between the two forces and Pen - Sutma was defeated and forced to retreat. On receipt of this information the Bhutan Raj sent a huge force along with his nephew Zimpe and the Koch force was ultimately routed out. The queen mother fled to Rangpur with the minor King and took shelter from the British and asked for help.⁶⁸ Meanwhile the Bhutan army commander Zimpe invaded the capital and captured the kingdom. Thereafter he installed Bijendranarayan, son of Dewan Ram Narayan, who was earlier murdered by Dhairjendra narayan, as the new King. The newly appointed King was then taken to Chakkhata in Bhutan but there he breathed his last in the mountains. Thereafter the Bhutiyas totally brought the Koch kingdom under their rule. They built a number of forts and posted their soldier over there. At such a junction the Rajmata after discussing along with the minister decided to seek help from the British in order to free their country from the control of the Bhutias.

Koch Kingdom as a British Protectorate till its Merger with Independent India:

Maharaja Dharendranarayan's letter was carried by Kashinath Lahiri to the Company agent Mr. Harris at Dinajpur and a proposal was made to him stating to give to the Company one lakh rupees and in return asking the Company to drive out the Bhutias from their kingdom. The then Governor General Hasting did not agree to this initial proposal and at last an agreement was made in 1773 C.E., according to which the Maharaja had to pay an annual tax to the company and in return the company would always protect the kingdom from any encroachment by the enemy. According to the agreement Coochbehar became a protectorate state of the British power.⁶⁹ Out of the critical situation and partly out of compulsion the authority of the Coochbehar state had to ask for help from the East India Company to protect the people and homeland from the Bhutanese aggression. But the price that the Coochbehar state and its people had to pay for the help of the East India Company was too heavy. The East India Company by then had already entered into the other parts of the country subduing many of the princely states with their organized military strength and for them Coochbehar was another instance wherein they could expand their supremacy. Accordingly, a treaty was signed on 5th April, 1773 C.E and the then Governor General of India Warren Hasting decided to undertake the defence of Coochbehar

with some conditions that were mutually agreed upon. These conditions can be enumerated as follows:

- 1) That the Raja will immediately pay into the hands of the Collector of Rangpur Rs. 50000 to defray the expenses of the force sent to assist him.
- 2) That if more than Rs. 50000 are expended, the Raja make it good to the Honourable the English East India Company, but in case any part of it remains unexpected that would be delivered back.
- 3) That the Raja will acknowledge subjection to the English East India Company upon his country being cleared of the enemies, and will allow the Coochbehar country to be annexed to the province of Bengal.
- 4) That the Raja further agrees to make over the English East India Company one-half of the revenues of the Coochbehar forever.
- 5) That the other moiety shall remain to the Raja and his heirs forever provided he is firm in his allegiance to the Honourable English East India Company.
- 6) That in order to ascertain the value of the Coochbehar country, the Raja will deliver a fair hastabud of his district into the hands of such person as the Honourable the President and the Council of Calcutta shall think proper to depute for that purpose, upon which valuation the annual Malguzari, which the Raja is to pay, shall be established.
- 7) That the amount of Malguzari settled by such persons of the Honourable the East India Company shall depute, shall be perpetual.
- 8) That the Honourable English East India Company shall always assist the said Raja with a force when he has occasion for it for the defence of the country, the Raja bearing the expense.
- 9) That this treaty shall remain in force for the space of two years, or till such times as advices may be received from the court of Directors, empowering the President and the Council to ratify the same forever.⁷⁰

With the involvement of the British force the Bhutias were driven out from the Koch kingdom, thus making it possible for Maharaja Dharendranarayan to enter his kingdom.

When Maharaja Dharendranarayan passed away in 1775 C.E leaving behind no son to succeed him, on the request of the Najir Deo, Khasnabis and other high ranking officials Maharaja Dhairjendranarayan ascended the throne for the second time. But he used to remain most of the time absorbed in religious activities. His attention towards the royal administration lessened and he was busy on making pilgrimage to holy places. In short, his second reign was an uneventful and peaceful one.

Maharaja Dhairjendranarayan was succeeded by his son Harendranarayan. But till the time he was mature enough to rule, the Rajmata (Mother Queen) directed the administration. In the meantime the Nazir Deo was planning to crown in his own son Birendranarayan. Soon his motive soon became obvious to everyone and he was sent back to Balarampur. Reaching there he intimated the East India Company representative at Rangpur, Mr. Goodland, that he was insulted at the hands of Habilder Jital Singh. Trusting the Nazir's statement Mr. Goodland brought back Jital Singh to Rangpur and sent another Habilder along with fresh soldier to Coochbehar. Jital Singh was then dismissed. Seeing such turn of events the Najirdeo was emboldened and felt that Mr Goodland would always support him in the future so he had nothing to fear. Hence after ten days of crowning in of Maharaja Harendranarayan, the Najir Deo set off for Coochbehar to enthrone himself. He then ascended the throne and issued currency in his own name and created his own seal mohar (emblem). He then killed the entire kinsman loyal to the Maharaja. The Rajmata along with Maharaja Harendranarayan were held under home arrest. In the meantime the Rajmata secretly sent a letter to the Governor General at Kolkata through a Gosai and Khasnabis intimating about the crisis of the Maharaja of Coochbehar. Even Mr. Goodland was also informed about Najirdeo's activities. Thereafter Mr. Goodland at first imprisoned Najir's official Shyamchandra Ray and then the Nazir deo himself. The Governor General at Kolkata was not pleased with Goodland's initial step of trusting the Nazir deo without any evidence and therefore sent Mr. Peter Moore to Rangpur in his place. Mr. Moore stationed one company of soldier along with a Subedar Gopal Singh to protect the kingdom. After this, the

Rajmata directed the state administration in place of the minor king Maharaja Harendranarayan while Gosai and Khasnabis helped the Rajmata to look after the state duties. Meanwhile the Najirdeo passed away and his elder brother Bhagwant Narayan again attacked Coochbehar. The Rajmata along with the king were taken as prisoners to Balarampur.⁷¹ When the East India Company heard of this, they sent a contingent of fresh army under Captain Rawton to save the Rajmata and the King. On reaching there, fire was set to the Najir's house and both the Rajmata and the King were safely brought back to the capital. As ordered by the Governor General, Shova Singh Subedar along with one company of soldier were entrusted the duty of protecting the palace. Later Najirdeo was expelled from his duties. Apart from this, arrangements were also made for the education of Maharaja Harendranarayan by the Company. Since Maharaja Harendranarayan was of minor age, Governor General Lord Cornwallis appointed Henry Douglas to look after the administration of the state. Joining duty Mr. Douglas appointed Joygopal Singha as Dewan and Krishnaprasad Ray as the judge of Faujdari Court.⁷² It was also ordered that in every royal paper/letter there would be the British stamp of Douglas besides the Maharaja's sealmohar (emblem). Thus every royal order bore the Maharaja's signature on the above and Douglas signature below. Mr. Douglas personally looked after the lesson taught to Maharaja Harendranarayan. After he returned back to Kolkata first Mr. Lamsden and then Charles Andrew were appointed as the commissioner of Coochbehar.⁷³

After Maharaja Harendranarayan, his son Shibendranarayan ascended the throne in 1840 C.E. Maharaja Shibendra Narayan had a peaceful tenure and his subjects lived in peace. As the Maharaja was childless he adopted Karindranarayan, the son of Shambhunarayan of Balarampur. But as ill luck would have made it the Maharaja soon lost his adopted son. After discussing with the royal courtiers Maharaja Shibendra Narayan adopted Chandranarayan, son of his brother Brajendranarayan. Chandranarayan was later renamed as Narendranarayan. After this Maharaja Shibendranarayan set off on pilgrimage after which he breathed his last in 1847 C.E at Baranasi.

When Maharaja Shibendranarayan passed away in 1847 C.E, child Narendranarayan was staying with his father at Baranasi. Over there he was crowned in as the next raja. He was 6 year old by then. The Rajmatas Kameswari and

Brindeswari devi looked after the state administration till the Maharaja reached his adulthood.⁷⁴ In 1860 C.E Maharaja Narendranarayan took up the state administration in his own hand. For the first time, he prepared for modern education system in Coochbehar. He established Jenkins school in 1859 C.E to impart English education and higher studies. He also initiated the system of stamp paper in 1861 C.E.⁷⁵ He died at an early age of only 22 years in 1863 C.E.

After his death as per will of the Maharaja, his ten month son Nripendra Narayan was crowned in as the next King. At first the state administration was looked after by Queen Kamteswari, Brindeswari and Nistareni Eye Devi since the new king was a minor.⁷⁶ Later the power of administration was given over to the commissioner appointed by the British Governor General. Colonel Hawton was appointed as the commissioner in 1864C.E. He was given full authority to run the state administration. Colonel Hawton took utmost care towards the education and caring of the minor king. In 1878 C.E Maharaja Nripendranarayan married the daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen. He then left for England for higher studies. In 1883 C.E he assumed the authority of administering the state and ceremoniously ascended the throne. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan banned the practice of slave –keeping (kritadas pratha) by a law in 1884 C.E.⁷⁷ For higher studies in his state he established the Victoria college (now A.B.N. Seal College) in 1888 C.E. The present palace in Coochbehar City was constructed in 1887 C.E during the reign of Maharaja Nripendranarayan. The British Government conferred the title of “Guard Commander of Most Eminent Order” to Maharaja Nripendranarayan. He along with his wife Suniti Devi visited England to attend the jubilee celebration of Queen Victoria. On that occasion Suniti Devi was conferred the title of “Imperial Order of Crown”.⁷⁸ In the name of his queen he set up a girl’s school named as ‘Suniti College’ in 1881 C.E which was later renamed as “Suniti Academy”. She was also a prolific writer.

Rajendranarayan, the eldest son of Maharaja Nripendranarayan, was born at Woodsland palace of Calcutta on 11th April 1882 C.E. After his father he ascended the throne of Coochbehar in 1912 C.E. However because of the chest injury which he received while playing he could not live long and passed away on the midnight of 1st September 1913 C.E. His last rites were carried out in London and his corpse – ashes were brought back to and buried at Coochbehar .

Maharaja Jitendranarayan ascended the throne of Coochbehar in 1913 C.E. His tenure was a peaceful one. He was a good administrator. He passed away on 20th December 1922 C.E at London, leaving behind a son named Jagaddipendranarayan who ascended the throne on 6th April 1936 C.E. The state was administered by Regency council till he attained adulthood (i.e. from 1922 to 1936 C.E). Rajmata Indira Devi was the president of the Regency council.⁷⁹ His tenure is remarkable for the merger of Coochbehar kingdom with the Indian dominion. During his reign there was wide spread freedom struggle movement all over India. The effect and impact of the movement was also felt in Coochbehar. On 28th February 1947 C.E, the British government announced their intention to transfer power in British India to Indian hands. On 3rd June 1947 C.E the Congress and the Muslim League accepted the scheme for the partition of India, prepared by Lord Mountbatten, the then Governor General of India. The Indian Independence Act was passed in the British parliament on 18th July, 1947 C.E and India was divided. Pakistan became independent on 14th of August, 1947 C.E while India became independent on 15th August, 1947 C.E. A major portion of undivided Bengal with Rangpur district, and some portion of Jalpaiguri district just contiguous to Coochbehar state on its southern and part of eastern and western boundaries formed a part of East Pakistan.⁸⁰

When such changes were taking place in British India the local people of Coochbehar under the leadership of Satish Chandra Roy Singh, Khan Choudhary Amanatullah Ahmad, Dharani Sankar Bhattacharjee, Jaladhar Saha, Majir Uddin Ahmad, etc formed the Hitsadhani sabha.⁸¹ When India become free as the two dominions of India and Pakistan and paramount of the British government over the Indian state was withdrawn and three options appeared before the Indian state, such as – to remain as independent state – to accede to the dominion of India and to accede to the dominion of Pakistan. The intention of the Maharaja, Rajmata Maharani Indira Devi and the Hitsadhini Sabha at first was to maintain the Coochbehar state as an independent state. Both the dominions of India and Pakistan were then trying to get the Coochbehar state merged within their respective areas. However, finding that it would not be possible to remain independent the Maharaja of Coochbehar decided that Coochbehar state should accede to the dominion of India.

Thereafter the instrument of accession was signed on 9th August, 1947 stating

“ I hereby declare that I accede to the dominion of India with the intent that the Governor General of India, the dominion legislature, the federal court and any other dominion authority established for the purpose of the dominion, shall, by virtue of this my Instrument of Accession but subject always to the terms thereof, and for the purposes only of the dominion, exercise in relation to the state of Coochbehar (herein after referred to as this state) such function as may be vested in them by or under the Government of India Act, 1935, as in force in the Dominion of India on the 15th day of August, 1947 C.E (which act as so in force is hereinafter referred to as ‘the act’).⁸² **(Appendix – A)**.

Thereafter, the Standstill Agreement was signed by his chief minister Himmat Singh Maheswari on 14th August to the effect that:

“Until new agreements in this behalf are made, all agreements and administrative arrangements as to matters of common concern now existing between the Crown and any Indian state shall, in so far as may be appropriate, continue as between the dominion of India or as the case may be, the part thereof, and the state”. **(Appendix –B)**

The Instrument of Accession followed by the Standstill Agreement duly signed was then accepted by Lord Mountbatten on 16th August 1947 C.E. The Merger Agreement signed thereafter by the Maharaja on 28th August 1949 C.E was a natural corollary. **(Appendix – C)**

On the eve of the handing of Coochbehar, Maharaja Jagaddipendranarayan sent the following message to the people of Coochbehar:

“On this solemn occasion, which marks the end of long and happy association, my mother and I send our very best wishes to my beloved people. Wherever we may be, we shall never forget you, your loyalty, and your devotion. We hope you will always maintain the peace, goodwill and harmony, which has been our common heritage. We shall always watch with keen interest your moral and material welfare and always pray for your happiness and prosperity. May god bless you all”.

Message from his Highness the Maharaja Bhup Bahadur of Coochbehar on the day 12-9-49 the state is integrated to the dominion of India.

Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur 12-9-1949.⁸³

In course of signing the agreement, His Highness the Maharaja sought for certain clarifications about the privileges he and his family would be entitled to after 12th September, 1949 on integration of the state to the dominion of India. In this connection V.P. Menon wrote the clarificatory letter to the Maharaja on 30.8.49 spelling out the arrangement. **(Appendix – D)** The documents contained the lists of motorcars, horses, elephants, and other livestock, shooting camp articles, tents, articles for ceremonial and religious functions, muslands etc, ornaments of elephants and horses and the statement No.III on Maharaj Kumar Trust Fund. The letter contained clarification about management of temples and Debutter properties, creation of Trust, list of members entitled to allowances, list of private properties, moveable and immoveable and so on. But surprisingly it did not contain anything about the subject of the Maharaja i.e. people of Coochbehar, their welfare or otherwise. In any cases, like all the rulers of the Princely States of India, the Maharaja of Coochbehar initially wanted to retain independence, but, ultimately being motivated partly by patriotism, partly by self-interest factors and mostly out of compulsion, signed the Merger Agreement.⁸⁴ The letter however made it clear that the intention of the Government of India was to administer for the present the territories of the Coochbehar state as centrally administered area under a Chief Commissioner.

Coochbehar – A Chief Commissioners State and then a district of West Bengal:

In terms of the agreement dated 28th August 1949, Government of India could administer the state of Coochbehar in such a manner and through such agency as it may think fit. By virtue of the said power and authority, Government of India brought the state under the administration of Chief Commissioner for specific reasons following the general principles in this regard.⁸⁵ The principles adopted by Government of India for Chief Commissioner's administration for the time being were enunciated in the following paragraph of V.P. Menon:

“There were some state over which, for administrative reason or strategic necessity or on other special ground, it was necessary that the Government of India should exercise direct control; such states were taken over as Chief Commissioner ‘s provinces’”. It is because of these reasons that the Punjab Hill states, Kutch, Bilaspurt, Manipur, Bhopal, and Tripura were taken over as Chief Commissioner’s states on 15th April, 4th May, 12th October, 1948 C.E and 1st June and 15th October 1949 C.E respectively. Punjab Hill states, Bilaspur were subsequently merged with Himachal Pradesh, Kutch merged to Gujrat and Bhopal to Madhya Pradesh. The same reason exactly applied in the case of Coochbehar. The state had common boundaries with East Pakistan, West Bengal and Assam. It was decided that until condition in the border area become stabilized, the state should be administered as a Chief Commissioner’s province. This is the sole reason given by V.P. Menon as to why the Government of India expressed its intention to administer the state as a Chief Commissioner’s province for the present. Once the situation in the border area became stabilized, V.I. Nanjappa assessed the situational factors and recommended for merger of the state with West Bengal.⁸⁶

Based on the report of V.I. Nanjappa, the chief commissioner V.P. Menon submitted a secret note to Sardar Vallabh Patel on 1/12/49 elucidating the internal and surrounding conditions of the state.⁸⁷

“Coochbehar was integrated and made into a Chief Commissioner’s province w.e.f. 12th September, 1949. The time has now come under when we should consider the question of its merger in west Bengal. Nanjappa, who belonged to neither Assam nor Bengal, after a careful study of the situation, is of the opinions that Coochbehar should merge in west Bengal. Coochbehar has little common with Assam. The language of Coochbehar is Bengali in both the rural and urban areas. Bengali has been the official language of the state for centuries. Commercial and cultural contacts are with Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. It is surrounded on practically all sides by west Bengal and east Bengal except a part of the eastern side which borders on the

frontier district of Assam. As regards the present state of public opinion in Coochbehar on the above question the least majority of the inhabitants is rural and backward and has no political consciousness. They are certainly not opposed to merger with West Bengal. The middle class and educated section of the public in the towns are unanimously in favour of the earliest possible merger with West Bengal".⁸⁸

After this V.P. Menon mentioned about some anti – Indian issues and commented “postponement of the merger of Coochbehar would unnecessary allow time and scope for the consolidation of these anti – Indian forcesfor the above reason I recommend that, if Home Minister approves, merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal be effected w.e.f 2nd January, 1960”. (**Appendix – E**)

B.C Ray, the then chief minister of West Bengal also wrote to Sardar Vallabhbai Patel.

To,

The Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbai Patel

Deputy Prime Minister of India

My Dear Vallabhbai Patel,

I have spoken to you already about Coochbehar and I have shown you certain papers regarding the subject I would like to take up these cases and their occasions to the West Bengal government.

I am very much anxious about Coochbehar because of certain developments, which have taken place there affecting the security not merely of West Bengal but also of the Indian union. I cannot say more at this stage, but when I see you next time I will tell you.

Yours Sincerely

B.C. Ray⁸⁹

Coochbehar's Merger as a District of West Bengal – From Kingdom to District:-

The merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal was not very popular among the people of Coochbehar. However the Government of India after evaluating the circumstances accepted the recommendation and V.P Menon informed Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan that after careful consideration, Sardar Vallabh Patel, has decided to merge Coochbehar with West Bengal. He also informed that Sardar Vallabh Patel was convinced that this merger would be in the best interest of the people of Coochbehar and of the country as a whole. The state will be maintained as a separate district with headquarters at Coochbehar. **(Appendix-F)**

It was necessary to assimilate certain state laws in force in Coochbehar to the state laws in force in the case of West Bengal, and this was done by promulgation of the Coochbehar (assimilation of state laws) Act, 1950 C.E.⁹⁰

Accordingly, minister of states, Government of India issued notification No.D11677-P/49 dated New Delhi, the 30th December, 1949 C.E. In presence of this order, West Bengal Government's home department's notification No. 3509GA dated 1st January, 1950 C.E. was issued to the effect.

The Coochbehar (Assimilation of state laws) Act of 1950 C.E., contained the following Acts in the first schedule were assimilated to the laws of the state of West Bengal:-

- 1) The Coochbehar Village Choukidari Act, 1893 C.E. (Coochbehar Act III of 1893)
- 2) The Coochbehar Revenue Sales Act, 1893 C.E. (Coochbehar Act V of 1893)
- 3) The Coochbehar Revenue Sales Act, 1897 C.E. (Coochbehar Act V of 1897)
- 4) The Kist Act, Coochbehar, 1898 C.E. (Coochbehar Act IV of 1903)
- 5) The Coochbehar Town Committee Act of 1903 C.E. (Coochbehar Act IV of 1903)
- 6) The Coochbehar Tenancy Act, 1910 C.E. (Coochbehar act V of 1910)
- 7) The Coochbehar Municipal Act, 1944 C.E. (Coochbehar Act III of 1944)⁹¹

Further enactments followed and most laws of the state of West Bengal became common to the district of Coochbehar. Coochbehar was declared a district of the state of West Bengal with effect from the 1st January 1950 C.E., and the District Officer came to be gazetted as Deputy Commissioner of Coochbehar, on the analogy of the designation of District Officers of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. The Deputy Commissioner was re-notified as the District Magistrate of Coochbehar, every time a fresh appointment is made. The following notifications are mentioned regarding the constitution of the Chief Commissioner's province of Coochbehar into a district in West Bengal.

Notification No.3509GA, dated 01/01/1950 regarding constitution of the chief commissioner's Province of Coochbehar into a district in West Bengal with police stations as follows :-

- 1) Kotwali
- 2) Dinhata
- 3) Sitai
- 4) Tufanganj
- 5) Mathabhanga
- 6) Setalkuchi
- 7) Mekhliganj
- 8) Haldibari⁹²

Notification No. 3549GA, dated 01/01/1950 regarding division of the district of Coochbehar into following subdivided namely:-

- 1) Coochbehar Sadar
- 2) Dinhata
- 3) Mathabhanga
- 4) Tufanganj
- 5) Mekhligang⁹³

Notification Nos. 9P1 to 16PI , dated 01/01/1950 regarding formation of police stations Sitalkuchi, Mekhliganj, Haldibari, Kotwali, Dinhata, Sitai, Tufanganj and Mathabhanga in the district of Coochbehar.

Notification No. 7018J, dated 01/01/1950 regarding formation of subdivisions as detailed below:

- 1) Subdivision Coochbehar with Police Station Kotwali.
- 2) Subdivision Dinhata with – (a) Police Station Dinhata and (b) Police station Sitai.
- 3) Subdivision Tufanganj with Police Station Tufanganj.
- 4) Subdivision Mathabhanga with – (a) Police Station Mathabhanga and (b) Police Station Sitalkuchi.
- 5) Subdivision Mekhliganj with – (a) Police Station Mekhliganj and Police Station Haldibari.⁹⁴

Durgadas Majumder had written on this particular district of West Bengal in the West Bengal District Gazetteers that until the 28th day of August 1949 C.E. Koch Bihar was an Indian State ruled by the Maharaja of Koch Bihar who had been a feudatory prince under the British Government. By a document dated 28th August 1949 C.E. Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan of Koch Bihar ceded his territory to the Dominion of the Government of India. The transfer of the administration to the government of India took place on the 12th day of September 1949 C.E.; from when on Koch Bihar was ruled as a Chief Commissioner's Province by a Chief Commissioner appointed by the Government of India. By an order under section 290A of Government of India Act of 1935, Koch Bihar was transferred and merged with the province of West Bengal on 1st January 1950 C.E. Since then Koch Bihar is being administered as a district of West Bengal.⁹⁵

After the integration of Coochbehar with the Indian Dominion a few points were raised regarding the future of this 'C' category state. The then chief minister of West Bengal, Bidhan Chandra Ray and the Coochbehar Congress were very keen to merge Coochbehar with West Bengal from the very outset. However, this was not supported by the people of Coochbehar. Dharma Narayan Burma, the President of North Bengal Cultural Association, has recalled one incident in his article about the failure of the Coochbehar Congress to evoke any support in favour of their demand to merge Coochbehar with West Bengal among the general people of the State. In 1948 C.E., Mr. Burma attended a rally organized by the Coochbehar Congress in support of

the demand for inclusion of Coochbehar as a district of West Bengal at the Madanmohan Thakurbari field of Tughanganj, which turned out to be a big flop attended by only 20 – 30 people.⁹⁶

The inclusion of Coochbehar with West Bengal soon became a big issue and along with it a number of organizations like the Cooch Behar Congress and Prajahit Sadhini Sabha were born. Later, majority of the people of Cooch behar joined the Prajahit Sadhini Sabha which demanded that Coochbehar should not be merged with either Bengal or Assam, rather it should be a union territory under Delhi.⁹⁷

The following letter by Bidhan Chandra Ray also shows his keen political intention of merging Coochbehar with West Bengal: Calcutta, 11May 1949

To,

The Hon'ble Sardar Vallabh Patel
Deputy Prime Minister of India

My dear Vallabh Patel,

You remember I spoke to you on several occasions about allowing Coochbehar to be merged to West Bengal. I am perfectly sur you are inclined to the same direction. It may be that it will take a little time before the preliminaries can be settled before the merger is decided. You know that Sri Sarat Chandra Bose has filed his nomination for the assembly for South Calcutta. The last date of the nomination being 24th May, Polling is taking place in 12th June. I certainly expect help, advice and co – operation from you. In this connection may I suggest you that the announcement from the centre that Coochbehar could be merged to West Bengal would be a great help to us in the election campaign. When you have finally decided about this merging, kindly let us know so that we can keep the field ready and make our propaganda that the merging has not been effected by Sri Sarat Ch. Bose but by West Bengal Government. The Provincial Congress Committee has decided to put up a candidate a strong one against Sri Sarat Ch. Bose. But of course booth is always a tricky customer.

I hope you are keeping well. An early reply will be welcomed.

Yours Sincerely
Dr. B.C. Ray⁹⁸

Thus, we see that Bidhan Chandra Ray made all possible effort to convince Sardar Vallabhbai Patel, the then deputy Prime Minister of India regarding the merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal. However, Vallabhbai Patel was not very sure of the situation and therefore wrote a letter to the then Governor of West Bengal, Kailash Nath Katju. The letter goes as follows:

Dehradun, 26th June, 1949

My dear Katju,

Thank you for your letter of 23rd June 1949. I am glad to know your views on question of Coochbehar. From all evidence it seems that merger with West Bengal is locally unpopular. It is a difficult problem and we will have to think hard about it. Least we should provoke unpleasant local situation.

Sardar Vallabhbai Patel⁹⁹

During this particular period there was also another wave in favour of the merger of Coochbehar with Assam. As an observer of the situation, the Governor of Assam Mr. A.K. Hydari wrote a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister where he says, “.....best solution in present circumstances would be to let Coochbehar come under the wings of central congress, if that is not possible the second best would be to let it be affiliated to the Assam Provincial Congress.....”¹⁰⁰

Amanatulla Ahmed who was the president of the Cooch Behar State Praja Congress, later known as the Hitsadhini Sabha and others in a letter to the Advisor of States Ministry, New Delhi dated August 8, 1949 said, “The entire people of Coochbehar (excluding the microscopic Bengali element) are against the merger of the state with West Bengal. Coochbehar (both Hindus and Muslims) unlike the Bengalis, have peculiar characteristics of their own. Their spoken language Rajbanshi dialect – having greater affinity with Assamesethere grew a natural dislike for Bengalis among the Coochbeharis.”¹⁰¹

During this period the chief minister of Assam, Sri Gopinath Bordoloi also tried to change the direction of the wave in Assam’s favour. After visiting and hearing to the people of Coochbehar he made attempt to merge Coochbehar with Assam which later proved futile.

The support of the local Muslims of Coochbehar in the Prajahit Sadhini Sabha (Hitsadhini Sabha) also made the government at the centre suspicious about the role of East Pakistan in it. This is made clear by the letter of Sardar Vallabhbai Patel to the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru which reads as follows:

New Delhi, 28 December 1949

My Dear Jawaharlal,

Thank you for your letter of 27th December regarding Coochbehar and Bidarva Pradesh. I have examined the position in details in the cabinet and hope it was not necessary for me now to go in to the details again. As Menon has also told you the question of Coochbehar was mentioned to you some time ago. It is possible it was slipped from your mind. In view of that I did not think it necessary to refer to you again though it was my intention to mention it in the cabinet before a public announcement is made. As regards consulting the people of Coochbehar, I have already said that local congress has approved the merger. There is a local 'Hitsadhini Sabha', which is partly Muslims with its sympathies with neighbouring areas of East Pakistan and partly consisting of some numbers of hill tribes who are looking to Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan for formation of an 'Uttarkhanda Pradesh'. I feel certain that we should do nothing to encourage this kind of organization in its mischievous tendencies.

Assam's intention towards Coochbehar is directed only because on account of its geographical isolation from the main area of West Bengal, I had to entrust supervision over its administration to the Governor of Assam. Otherwise they have never bothered about it.

Yours Faithfully

Vallabhbai Patel¹⁰²

Thus, we see that the whole affair of accession and merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal was not a smooth one as it seemed to be. A great deal of turmoil took place during this particular period and the merger was not at all locally supported. Observing the complexity of the situation Jawaharlal Nehru had declared

earlier that the merger of Coochbehar would be decided on the basis of a plebiscite but in reality nothing of that kind took place.

This is the whole affairs of accession and merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal. The merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal at present plays a significant role in the social movement in North Bengal. At present, this merger has formed as one of the arguments for the Koch Rajbanshi demand for a separate state of Kamatapur. They feel that it was a 'conspiracy' of then Chief Minister of West Bengal government Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray and the Indian government. The All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union (AKRSU) has termed this merger as the beginning of conspiracy to disturb the unity of the greater Koch Rajbandi community.¹⁰³ They have even placed it as the main argument for the formation of separate Kamatapur state in their booklet titled "'Sukiya Kamatapur Rajya Kiyoy'" [why separate kamatapur]. The 'Greater Coochbehar People's Association' (GCPA) argues that the merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal by Bidhan Chandra Ray was fully illegal, unconditional and initially void.¹⁰⁴

Notes and References:-

- 1) Acharya, N.N., 1996, A brief history of Assam, rpt, New Delhi, p. 42.
- 2) Dutta, P.N., 2000, Glimpse into the History of Assam, rpt, Guwahati, pp 70-71.
- 3) Das, Arup Jyoti, 2009, Kamatapur and the Koch Rajbanshi Imagination, Guwahati, p. 43.
- 4) Nath, D., 1989, History of Koch kingdom (1515 - 1615) Delhi, p. 28.
- 5) Ibid. p.45.
- 6) Sharma, N.C., 1973, Darrang Rajvamsavali, Barpeta, vv. 290 – 293.
- 7) Ibid. v. 296.
- 8) Ibid. v.302.
- 9) In a letter of Bishnunarayan of Darrang he is referred to as Sri Naranarayan, letter No. 39, S.N. Sen, (ed.), Prachin Bangla Patra Sankalan, Calcutta University, 1942, pp, 49f. A second seal with the figure of a lion called Singha Chap was also issued to be used in special state affairs, S.C. Ghosal, A History of Koch Behar being a translation of Khan, Amatullah Choudhury's Koch Beharer Itihas, Koch Behar, 1942, p. 127.
- 10) Nath, D., op:cit., p. 46.
- 11) Choudhary, A.C., 1983, Sangram Singha Chilarai (Assamese), Bongaigaon, introduction.
- 12) Rajkhowa, J.P., 2001, Generalissimo Chilarai and His Times, Guwahati, p. 44.
- 13) Choudhury, H.N., 1903, The Coochbehar State and its Land Revenue Settlement, Coochbehar, p.232.
- 14) Beveridge, H., 1973, (tr.), Akbarnama, Vol. III, New Delhi, p. 1067.
- 15) Ibid.
- 16) Nath, D., op:cit., p.75.

- 17) Ibid.
- 18) Ibid., p. 76.
- 19) Ibid.
- 20) Bhattacharyya, S.N., 1929, A History of Mughal North – East Frontier Policy, Calcutta, p. 77f.
- 21) Rajkhowa, J.P.: op.cit. pp 44-45.
- 22) Gait, Edward, 1984, A History of Assam, rpt, Guwahati, p. 64.
- 23) Beveridge, H.: op.cit., p. 1067.
- 24) Sharma, N.C., op:cit., v.618.
- 25) This is also confirmed by the Akbarnama which calls him Patkunwar, which means heir apparent to the throne, Akbarnama,III,p.1067.
- 26) S.K. Bhuyan (ed), Kamrupar Buranji, Gauhati, 1958, p.13. Raghudev grew so much suspicious that when one day Naranarayan offered the Nirmali of the Durga Puja first to Lakshminarayan instead of offering it to him, as he usually had done, Raghudev took it as an indication that he would soon be deprived of his claim to the throne, U.C., Lekharu, (ed), Katha Guru Carit, Nalbari, 1952, pp.614f.
- 27) N.C. Sharma, op:cit., vv. 622 – 623.
- 28) S.K. Bhuyan, (comp.), Annals of Delhi Badshahate, 1947, Gauhati, p. 184, being a translation of the Padshah Buranji.
- 29) Sharma, N.C.: op.cit., vv.627-637.
- 30) Ibid. vv.648 – 649.
- 31) Nath, D., op:cit., p.84.
- 32) Ibid.
- 33) Ibid.

- 34) Ibid. pp. 84-85.
- 35) Sharma, N.C., op:cit., pp.648 – 649.
- 36) English Translation of the Kamakhya Temple Rock Inscription from E.A.Gait, A History of Assam (Revised), Calcutta, 1963, p.58. – “Glory to the King Malla Deb, who by virtue of his mercy, is kind to the people, who in archery is like Arjun, and in charity like Dadhichi and Karna; he is like an ocean of all goodness, and he is versed in many sastras; his character is excellent; in beauty he is as bright as Kandarpa, he is a worshipper of Kamakhya. His younger brother Sukladeb built this temple of bright stones on the Nila hillock, for the worship of the goddess Durga, in 1487 Sak (A.D.1565). His beloved brother Sukladhavaj again, with universal fame, the crown of the greatest heroes, who, like the fabulous Kalpataru, gave all that was devoutly asked of him, the chief of all devotees of the goddess, constructed this beautiful temple with heaps of stones on the Nila hill in 1487 Sak.”
- 37) English Translation of the Hayagriya – Madhava Temple Rock Inscription from E.A. Gait, A History of Assam (Revised), Calcutta, 1963, p. 64. – “There was a ruler of the earth named Bisva Singh; his illustrious son, the most wise King Malladeb, was the conqueror of all enemies. In gravity and liberality and for heroism he had a great reputation, and he was purified by religious deeds. After him was born his brother Sukladhvaj, who subdued many countries. The son of this Sukladhvaj was King Raghu Deb, who was like the greatest man of Raghu race; his glories spread out in all directions; the lord of Kamarupa, in obedience to the order of destiny, is the slayer of the wicked, who was like water to the flame of the fire of sorrow of the vast populace. Of the seed of Sukladhvaj, a king was born of the name of Raghu Deb, who consoles innumerable persons and is worshipper of the feet of Krishna; the king coming of age had a temple built on the hillock called Mani hillock in 1505 Saka (A.D. 1583). The most skilled and efficient artisan Sridhar himself built it.”
- 38) Saikia, K., 1965, (comp.), Gurucarit, Nowgong, p. 450f.
- 39) Nath, D., op:cit., p 88.

- 40) Barua, H.N. Datta, (ed.), Astadvas Parva Mahabharata, Adi Bana Parva Section, vv. 3103 – 3104.
- 41) Puspa Harana Bana Parva Section, v. 3935.
- 42) Ibid.
- 43) Beveridge, H., op:cit., p. 1067.
- 44) Risley, H.N., 1891, Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Calcutta, p. 111f.
- 45) Gait, Edward, op: cit., p.64.
- 46) Das, Arup Jyoti,: op.cit . p. 49.
- 47) Choudhury, A.C., 1993, Koch Rajbanshir Jatir Itihas Aaru Sanskriti (Assamese), rpt, Bongaigoan, p. 203.
- 48) Das, Arup Jyoti,: op.cit., p.50.
- 49) Barma, Hemanta Kumar Rai, 1988, Royal History: Book of Facts and Events, translated from ‘Kochbiharer Itihas’, 2nd edition, <http://coochbehar.nic.in/htmlfiles/history_book2.html#p1 p.1(accessed on 27/01/2015).
- 50) Choudhury, A.C.: op.cit., p.203.
- 51) Ibid. p. 209.
- 52) Adhikari, Ramendra, 1996, Satsho Bacharia Kaamata Koch Rajatwer Itihas (1250 - 1949) [Rajbanshi], p. 22.
- 53) Ibid p 22.
- 54) Barma, Hemanta kumar Rai:op.cit.
- 55) Ibid.
- 56) Choudhury, A.C., 1991, The Koches around the world, Bongaigoan, p.134.
- 57) Das, Arup Jyoti,: op.cit. pp. 51-52.
- 58) Barma, Hemanta Kumar Rai, op:cit.

59) Barma, Sukhbilas, 2007, “Greater Kuch Bihar – A Utopian Movement?”, Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal, Delhi, p.13.

60) Ghoshal, Sarat Chandra,: op .cit . p 198.

61) Murshidabad Itihas , p 357.

62) Ghoshal, Sarat Chandra,: op .cit . p 199.

63) It is written regarding Dinnarayan in the Vamsavali written by Durgadas – ‘He mentioned his sorrow to the Badshah, He took ‘khana’ (meal) of his own will. The Emperor of Delhi being pleased with the behavior of the Kumar, gave him five thousand soldiers to fight a battle” p. 80.

The taking of ‘khana’ (or in other words embracing Mohamedanism) may be probably but it is doubtful whether he went to Delhi. However he may have gone to Murshidabad, the capital of the Nabab. At this time, the Fouzdar of Rangpur took the assistance of the Nabab for the attack on Coochbehar.

He (the Fouzdar) obtained forces from Shuja Khan, and employed them against the rajahs of Coochbehar and Dinajpur, who confiding in their riches and strength, wanted to make themselves independent’. A Narrative of Bengal, p .83.

64) Barma, Hemanta Kumar Rai,: op.cit.

65) Ghoshal, Sarat Chandra,: op .cit . p.204.

66) Barma, Hemanta Kumar Rai,: op.cit.

67) Ibid.

68) Barma, Sukhbilas: op. cit. p.14.

69) Barma, Hemanta Kumar Rai, 1988, Translated from “Kochbihaver Itihas“ 2nd edition (1988), “ Kochbihar Parikrama” edited by Krishnendu.

70) Roy Sanyal, R., 2004, The Raj and the Princely State of Coochbehar: A Study of Anglo-Coochbehar Relations 1772-1839, Dipali Publishers, Malda, West Bengal.

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- 78) [http : //coochbehar.nic.in /html files/history – book 5.html# p1](http://coochbehar.nic.in/html%20files/history%20-%20book%205.html#p1)
- 79) [http : //coochbehar.nic.in /html files/history – book 6.html# p1](http://coochbehar.nic.in/html%20files/history%20-%20book%206.html#p1)
- 80) Barma, Sukbilas: op.cit.p 73.
- 81) Ibid p 73.
- 82) Ibid, p.352.
- 83) < [http :// www. Coochbehar.nic.in /htmfiles/royal _ history 2.html# cob _merger](http://www.Coochbehar.nic.in/htmlfiles/royal%20_%20history%202.html#cob%20_%20merger) >
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