
**The Socio-Cultural impact of the Growth and Development of the
Western Education in Princely State of Cooch Behar:
1861-1949**

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Abstract: *Education provides one of the most important channels of transition from traditional to modern. The vehicle of change is education. It extended its far reaching impact on society and culture. The modern education came in the Princely State of Cooch Behar with the hands of the English East India Company. Before the 'Anglo-Koch Treaty 1773' there was the indigenous education system. The education was limited in the Royal family and high official's family of the state. The common people or the mass people were deprived from education. The wave of the 19th century Bengal Renaissance reached in the state later. The modern education came and developed in the state in the later half of the 19th century. The main aims of the study are to highlight the socio-cultural impact of the modern education in the Cooch Behar state. No works focuses the issue. In this sense the study is new one. Emergence of a middle class, an intellectual society, new thought, Kshatriya Movement and ethnic identity question are the by-products of the modern education in the state.*

Keywords: *Brahmin culture, Education, Kamrupa, 'Pragjyotishpura', Sanskrit education.*

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Introduction

The present Cooch Behar or Kamata-Koch Kingdom was a part of ancient 'Pragjyotishpura', or 'Kamarupa'.¹ In the later period this region had got the various names such as 'Kamata', 'Kamatapur', 'Louhitya' and 'Kamata-Koch kingdom'.² Prior to the British contact, the Koch Kingdom was a centre of the Brahmin culture and education.³ Maharaja Viswasingha was a patroniser of education, and he opened the gate of education in the kingdom. He sent his sons Naranarayan and Shukladvaj (Chila Roy) to Baranasi, a the then famous centre of Brahmin education and culture. Brahmananda Bisharad was their teacher. Naranarayn and Shukladvaj had been taught on grammar, Vedic literature, Hindu Astrology, Smritis, Puranas, Nyaya and Mimangsa Philosophy.⁴ Maharaja Naranarayan (1554-1586) brought the educated Brahmanas from Mithila, Assam and Nabadip to extend education in the kingdom and gave tax free land. In this way Sanskrit education was extended in the kingdom. During his reign Sanskrit grammer 'Proyog Ratnamala' was prevalent. During the reign of Maharaja Laxminarayan (1587-1620) the Sanskrit literature got more importance in the Koch-Court.⁵ Maharaja Birnarayan (1627-1632) established many schools in different places of the kingdom. Maharaja Birnarayan was the first path-finder in the development of mass education.⁶ Maharaja Prannarayan (1632-1665) was another patroniser of Sanskrit education and 'five jewels' were in his court. After the reign of Maharaja Prananarayan an anarchical situation came into existence in the Koch-Kingdom due to conspiracy in royal family and invasion of the Bhutias. As a result was that the royal power became unable to give more importance in the field of education due to this condition.⁷

Prior the British contact the education sytem of the Koch-Kingdom was based on 'Tol', 'Chatushpathi' and 'Maktab'-'Madrassa'. In 1773 Kamata- Koch Kingdom signed the 'Anglo-Koch Treaty' with the British and subsdequently it became a Princely State of the British Raj.⁸ On behalf of the Kamata Kingdom Najir Deo Khagendra Narayan signed the treaty with the English East India Company on 5 April, 1773 at Fort William.⁹ Warren Hastings was the then Governor-General. A new change had come into the Princely State of Cooch Behar after the interference of the Company Raj. In the subsequent years many

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schools, girls' schools and boarding institutions were established in the state. Jenkins School, Sunity Academy and Victoria College were established. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur and Maharani Sunity Devi were the great patrons in the development of the Western education in the state. The year 1861 is the starting year of the study. Because in this year Jenkins School was established and it opened a new chapter in the field of education. The year 1949 has been chosen as the concluding year as Cooch Behar signed 'Merger Agreement' in this year.

The present study focuses the socio-cultural impact of the growth and development of the Western education in the Cooch Behar State. It is true that the large number of population of the Cooch Behar State was Rajbanshi community during the 19th century and 20th century. Apart from the Rajbanshi community, there were also Mech, Koch, Rava and Boro (Lower Assam) in little level than the Rajbanshi community. The Muslim community was the second portion of total population of the State. The Muslims of the state were converted Muslims and they are known as 'Nasya-Shekh'. The 'Nasya-Shekh' is a part of Rajbanshi community. There are rival theories among the socio-anthropologists and the historians regarding the ethnological classification of the people of Cooch Behar.¹⁰ W.W. Hunter finds out a little doubt that the people commonly known as Rajbanshi, Mech and Pali are a very mixed race.¹¹ Here a list (Table No-1 and Table No-2)¹² on Rajbanshi people and others has been given below from the Census Report of the year 1872, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931.

Table No-1

Year	1872	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Rajbanshi	111125	299458	352409	333299	338623	329268	318846
Koch	-	-	-	-	1317	1261	1230
Tiyar	-	54152	7	14	4	-	-

Table No-2 will show the percentage of the Rajbanshis with the Hindu population.

Table No-2

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Year	1872	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Rajbanshi	86	85	85	90	85	80	80

The majority of the population belongs to the Hinduism, the Muslims though minority were not neglected in the society. They formed an efficient community in respect of cultivation.¹³ Some of them became big jotedars and were honoured by the State in the Raj Darbar.

Education provides one of the most important channels of transition from traditional to modern. The vehicle of change is education. It extended its far reaching impact on society and culture. The modern education came in the Princely State of Cooch Behar with the hands of the English East India Company. Before the ‘Anglo-Koch Treaty’ there was the indigenous education system. The system of education was limited in the Royal family and high official’s family of the state. The common people or the mass people were deprived from education than the rest of India. In 19th century Renaissance came in Bengal. Many schools, colleges and printing presses were established in Bengal presidency of the British India. But Cooch Behar was not a part of British India. It was a ‘Native State’ or later ‘Princely State’. The modern education came and developed in the state in the later half of the 19th century.

The establishment of Jenkins School in 1861 was a signal of a new epoch. After the following period many vernacular schools, M.E. Schools, boarding Institution and girls schools were founded in the state. In the Sub-Division Mathabhanga, Dinhat, Tufanganj and Mekhliganj, many schools (including girls schools) were established in there. The impact of the establishment of the modern schools in the state was far-reaching. Although the education was limited in the upper section of the society especially in the Royal house, it is seen that the education gradually filtered in the lower section or in the masses. ‘Down ward filtration theory’ of Macauley enacted here. An unexpectable change occurred in the socio-cultural side. Food habits, dresses, religious practices, customs and tradition have been influenced by the Western education that developed in the 19th century.

In the case of higher education Cooch Behar State shows a new path to Colonial North Bengal and North East India. The establishment of Victoria College was a milestone in that case. Because it was the first college of the then North Bengal nay North East India. It opens

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the door of higher education in the State. The students from Bengal Presidency especially from East Bengal and Assam come to take the admission. The portion of local students was very few. The Victoria College had name and fame in the the then time. The number of Rajbanshi pupils and Nasya-Sheikh pupils since the foundation of the college to the last decade of the 19th century was so short. But it is true that the college has brought a new awakening in the society and culture.

The discussion will be incomplete if I do not mention the role of Brahma movement in the development of education and the role of Suniti College and other girl's school in the development of female education in the State. Suniti College opens a new door to the women of the State. In the earlier stage the participation of women was few in number. Later on it has been increased day by day. The women got a college to educate themselves and they took part in the making modern society and culture. The leaders of the Brahma groups came to Cooch Behar State and Brahma Movement got a new impetus in the State as the Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur and Maharani Suniti Devi were both Brahmist and they supported and patronized it. The Royal house patronized the Brahma movement and a huge change of socio-cultural condition had come in the State.

It is also seen that the development of education was only in higher caste i.e. Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas. The lower caste peoples were deprived. The Rajbanshis, Muslims and Totos-Ravas were so far from education. The education filtered among them later. The jotedars of the Rajbanshi community and jotedar of Muslim community took a vital part to establish schools. Anyway the growth and development of Western education has brought the Modern Cooch Behar.

The Professors of Victoria College, teachers of Sunity Academy and Jenkins School and other schools gradually formed a new 'intellectual group' or 'Saraswata Samaj' in the State. The Maharajas of the State and some Professors of the Victoria College had a close link with intellectuals of Rangpur and the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad' and 'Uttar Banga Sahitya Sammelan' or 'North Bengal Literary Conference'.¹⁴ Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur donated Rs. 500/ as contribution to the Rangpur Sahitya Parishad (RSP) and became its life-time member.¹⁵ Later on Maharaja Rajendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur and Maharaja Jitendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur became its life-time member by giving Rs.500/ as

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contribution.¹⁶ It is also true that most of the teachers of Victoria College and Sunity Academy were Brahmist. Apart from them, most of the teachers of the various English High Schools, Middle English Schools and Vernacular Schools were upper caste Hindus of East Bengal and other parts of Bengal Presidency. With them the 'Babu Culture' of Calcutta arrived in the Cooch Behar State slowly.

Modernization of Cooch Behar comes with the all round Anglicization in the State. The role of education is one of these.¹⁷ The royal house welcomed Western education. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur and Maharani Sunity Devi both played a vital role for the spread and development of education. The female education got a new pace under the patronization of them. It was a progressive initiative in the case of women emancipation. The result of the extent of education was the advent of modern mind set-up in the State. Many superstitions, social evils and customs disappeared due to the advent of modern education. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur's role in that case was notable one.¹⁸ The State patronized Barhma Movement. The result was that Brahma Movement got a new light in the State. The State language was English. It can say that after the coming of the Western education a new social and cultural awakening i.e. 'Renaissance' has come in the State.

Historically it is true that there was no middle class in India before the advent of the Colonial rule. But professional classes were existed in the royal houses and courts. Besides Indian society was based on caste, not on class like as Western Countries. The Western culture was based on economy. In the Princely State of Cooch Behar, there was also no middle class. The Rajbanshi community was the largest community in the State. This community was mentally land-centric community. They were not interested in Government services. They preferred their interest in agriculture.¹⁹ This community gave their interest in education only after the establishment of the Kshatriya Samiti (K.S.) in 1910 in Rangpur.²⁰ A very small group of Rajbanshi people obtained Graduate Degree and B.L. Degree. Panchanan Barma was the first M.A., B.L. of the Rajbanshi ethnic community. Besides Madhusudan Ray, B.L., Kshetra Nath Sinha, B.L., Nagendra Narayn Ray, B.L., Upendra Nath Barman, B.L., Tarani Kanta Sarkar, B.L., Premhari Barman, B.L. and so on acquired their degree. An

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educated middle class was originated in the Rajbanshi Community in North Bengal based on Rangpur.

The educated upper caste peoples were the dominating group in the administration of the Cooch Behar State. They controlled the whole administration. The Rajbanshis and the Nasya-Sheikh Muslims were neglected and deprived in various ways by the upper caste Hindus. The 'Babu culture' of Calcutta came into the State and the local people did not get importance to the State. Panchanan Barma was the first M.A., B.L. among the whole community. But in spite of his degree he did not get government service in the State. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur was a pioneer of introducing the Western and modern education in the State. Many primary and secondary schools were established and a College was established in the State. But it is seen the lion's portion of the opportunity of higher education was availed by the outsiders. Not only this, even the higher posts of administrative and of all the educational institutions were occupied by the non-Cooch Beharis. All the Head Master, Head Mistress, teacher of the Jenkins School and Sunity Academy and the teachers of Victoria College including Principal were the non-Cooch Beharis.²¹ The process of the dominance of the outsiders over the administration began with the advent of the Company's full control over the administration of the Cooch Behar State. The tension is seen in the case of land ownership. The State patronized the outsiders to settle here and fallow and jungle land was distributed among them for the cultivation.

Broadly speaking the people of the Princely State of Cooch Behar were divided on two broad categories- Cooch Beharis and non-Cooch Beharis. Cooch Beharis meant the local Rajbanshi Hindus, Rajbanshi Muslims known as 'Nasya Sheikh', the Kamrupia Brahmins or the Maithili Brahmins and some other non-caste Hindus like as the Sahas, Jogis and some tribals. The non-Cooch Beharis meant the upper caste Hindus who had come from East Bengal and the rest part of Bengal and settled in the State. It is true that the ethnic feature, language, food habits and culture of the Rajbanshi Hindu and Rajbanshi Muslims are same. Because the origin of the both is same and the 'Nasya Sheikh' Muslim is the converted section.²² The social customs and the religious rituals of the Rajbanshis were largely the product of the Maithili customs. But the South Bengal or Rarh Bengal had followed the tradition of Kalinga. Besides there was no social communication between the Kamrupia

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Brahmins and the Brahmins of the rest of Bengal.²³ A psychological conflict was growing in the Cooch Behar State between the Cooch Beharis and non-Cooch Beharis. The son of soils or the Cooch Beharis called the outsiders as 'Bhatias' or 'Bahiragata'. On the other hand the 'Bhatias' called the local peoples as 'Deshi'. When the Rajbanshi Community launched a movement for 'Kshatriyahood', the 'Bhatias' opposed it.²⁴

Panchanan Barma was a great social reformer of North Bengal and also of North East India. It is historically true that the colonial North Bengal and the Cooch Behar Princely State is the Rajbanshi belt area. Rangpur was its heart centre. Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti, an organisation of the Rajbanshis, was formed in 1910 at Rangpur and in the first proposal of the meeting Thakur Panchanan Barma was elected as its secretary unanimously and he held the post until his death.²⁵ The Kshatriya Samiti under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Barma worked for the development of the Rajbanshi community. It began the movement to achieve 'Kshatriyahood' (Kshatriyatva) for the social status in the mainstream of the Hindu society. The leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti tried to spread education and preach ritual reforms and to develop the society economically. For the development of cultivation a 'Kshatriya Bank' was established at Rangpur. The role of Panchanan Barma in the field of female education and emancipation of women was notable one. He appealed to the Crown's Government to form a 'Rajbanshi Regiment' and he requested the Rajbanshi youths to join to the British army. Huge number of Rajbanshi youths participated in the First World War through the Kshatriya Samiti.²⁶ Naturally a new awakening comes in the Rajbanshi society of the Cooch Behar State. But the Cooch Behar State did not allow to open a branch of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti in the State. Even the propaganda of it was prohibited in the State by the Maharaja and the Royal administration. We found a separate 'Kshatriya Samiti' at Cooch Behar known as the 'Cooch Behar Kshatriya Samiti' which was founded in 1941 in Cooch Behar just after passing of 31 years of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti in Rangpur.²⁷

The intellectuals of the State had a close link with the intellectuals of Colonial North Bengal. Acharya Brojendra Nath Seal, the Principal of the Victoria College, participated many conferences as the representative of the Cooch Behar State. Panchanan Barma and Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed were two greatest sons of the state and both are top-ranking figures of the intellectual society. Again both of them were the inhabitants of Mathabhanga

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Sub-Division and both of them were the sons of the local jotedars. Khan Choudhury was the Revenue Minister of the Cooch Behar State. Although Panchanan Barma was expelled from the State for ever in 1927 and he took shelter in Rangpur, the nearest District town of the Bengal Province.²⁸ 'Bangiya Sahitya Parishad' was established on 23rd July 1893. But at the beginning of its foundation the name of it was 'The Bengal Academy of Literature'.²⁹ As a mufosil branch or District branch of it, 'The Rangpur Sahitya Parishad' was formed in 1905. Panchanan Barma was an active member of it. In the second conference of the working committee of 'The Rangpur Sahitya Parishad' which was held on 6th August 1906, Panchanan Barma was selected as Assistant Secretary and the secretary for 'The Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika'. The followings were the members.³⁰

Name	Post held
Raja Mahima Ranjan Roy Choudhury	President
Bhabani Prasanna Lahiri	Vice President
Probhat Kumaar Mukhopadhyaya	Vice President
Surendra Chandra Roy Choudhury	Secretary
Ambika Charan Bhattacharya	Asst. Secretary
Panchanan Barma	Asst. Secretary & Secretary of Patrika
Hargopal Das Kundu	Asst. Secretary for Patrika

Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed was also a member of 'The Rangpur Sahitya Parishad'. He participated in the 22nd conference of All India Conference of Historian which was held at Peshawar in 1945 as the delegate of the Cooch Behar State.³¹ 'Cooch Behar Sahitya Sabha' (CBSS) was established in 1915 and he was its secretary since 1915 to 1940. During his secretary-ship E.A. Gait took its membership who wrote 'Koch King of Kamrupa'.³² The CBSS was a literary and intellectual association. 'Paricharika', a literary journal, was started its publication under the direct supervision of the CBSS. This time it was edited by Nirupama Devi, wife of Prince Victor Nityendra Narayan of Cooch Behar Raj family. She was the youger sister of Maharani Suniti Devi. 'Paricharika' was a high standard literary journal. Rabindra Nath Tagore used to write in this journal.³³ Among other writers in

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this journal we can mention the names of Kazi Nazarul Islam, Banaphul, Kumud Ranjan Mallik, Kabi Shekhar Kalidas Roy and so many writers of Bengal.³⁴ In the Gouripur Session of ‘Uttar Barnga Sahitya Sammelan’ (North Bengal Literary Conference) , the 8 representative of the Cooch Behar State participated. Among them Panchanan Barma and Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed were notable figures. In the Guwahati session of the ‘Uttarbarnga Sahitya Sammelan’ in 1912 Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed gave the proposal to form ‘Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti’ or ‘Assam Research Society’.³⁵ At the 7th Annual General Meeting of the ‘The Rangpur Sahitya Parishad’, Panchanan Barma gave a call to form ‘Kamata Anusandhan Samiti’. It is very interesting matter to re-look that ‘Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti’ was formed, but ‘Kamata Anusandhan Samiti’ was not formed. ³⁶ In this regard we used to quote a remark of Professor Shekhar Bandhyopadhyay from his book ‘Caste, Politics and the Raj’. The quote is as follows:

“Panchanan not only ended his duties by giving self confidence and self pride to the Rajbanshis, he devoted his drop of blood in the welfare and benevolent activities of the mass people”. ³⁷

The another impact of the development of Western education in the State was the identity question. This identity question is related with the language, social and politic-cultural. It is true fact that the non-Cooch Beharis dominated in all sides of administration and education, profession and trade-business. So a social and cultural tension came in the state that the local peoples demanded their interest. A political party was formed in 1947 known as ‘Hitasadhani Sabha’. It started movement against the outsiders i.e. ‘Bhatias’. The office bearers of it were as following.³⁸

Name	Post held
Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed	President
Satish Chandra Roy Singha	Vice President
Dharani Shankar Bhattacharya	
Jaladhar Sen	Secretary
Majiruddin Ahmed	Asst. secretary

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In this connection a song which was composed in the names of the leaders of the 'Hitasadhani Sabha' can be mentioned here on the account of social tension.³⁹

“Othore native bhai, jagore native,
Tarao bhatia sab,
Gorji uthilo Sarat Singha,
Tuli hunkar rab,
Eso despran Jaladhar eso,
Satish sange kari,
Dharanir sathe eso Ansar, Kari gala dharadhari,
Kothay Majir majila edes,
Gelo bhatiar hate,
Jel khata bir Purnendu eso,
Khan Choudhurir sathe”

[Free translation: Native brothers, get up and drive out the bhatias. Satish Singha rises up finger with a great plea and please come patriot Jaladhar along with Satish Chandra Singha. Ansar come along with Dharani by shoulder to shoulder. The state handed over to the bhatias. Many warriors passed away and Purnendu come along with Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed]

Conclusion

It can be said that social upliftment of the Rajbanshi has been occurred. Although Rajbanshi society was land-base society but after the spread of education this society began to take other professions such as labour, trader, shop-keeper etc. The result was that a new generation originated. The culture has been evolved. The language and culture of the local peoples has been assimilated with the language and culture of the so-called 'Bhatias'. It is one

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of the impacts of the development of the education in the state. Before 1947 there was no Rajbanshi Head Master or Nasya Sheikh Head Master in North Bengal. But in 2018 we found 105 Rajbanshi Head Masters and Head Mistress in High Schools ⁴⁰ and college professors and doctors also. Besides the many Nasya Sheikh teachers are also examples for us. Its foundation began with the process of modernization of the Princely State of Cooch Behar.

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