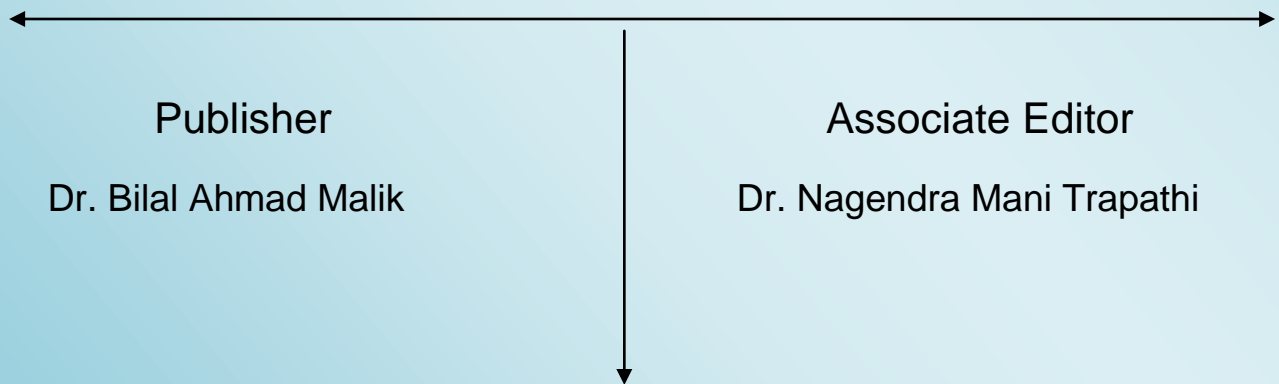


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HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF COOCH BEHAR

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ABSTRACT:

The history of Coochbehar has a unique past and characteristically differs from other regions of West Bengal. The Maharaja of Coochbehar Sate was the great patrons of art architecture. They erected many temples, administrative buildings, royal roads, forts, well in different parts of their kingdom. The Maharajas of Coochbehar gad issued coins which were known as 'Narayani Coins'. Besides the Narayani Coins, the coins of the Pathan rulers of Gour and Delhi , coins of Sikandar Shah and Hussain Shah have been found in Coochbehar. The archaeological evidences of Coochbehar are very much important in writing the history of Cooch Behar. The administrative building like Judge's Court, District Magistrate office, Sadar Sub-divisional office etc, schools like Jenkins School, Sunity Academy etc. and Victoria College\ (Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal College) shows the sign of development during the reign of the Maharajas of Cooch Behar. The inscriptions, sculptures and the coins are also regarded as source about Cooch Behar. The plenty of archaeological sites and evidences did not only flourish the history of archaeology but also help us to compose a comprehensive history of Cooch Behar.

[Key Words: Art and Architecture, Madanmohan, Kamateswari, Kamatapur, Gosanimari Dargah etc.]

INTRODUCTION:

At present Coochbehar is a district of West Bengal. But in ancient and medieval period Coochbehar was the Political gravity under the Khyen rulers of Kamatapur and the Cooch rulers and in the beginning of the 16th Century, a tribal leader named Haria Mandal organized his own clan and sowed the seed of future 'Cooch Dynasty'. Biswa Singha, the able son and successor of Haria Mandal ascended the throne of Coochbehar and from his reign onward the state emerged as one of the mighty kingdom in the political map of India. From the reign of Biswasingha, The Coochbehar state was able to maintain her independent status. In 1773 Coochbehar lost her independence and acknowledge the hegemony of the British East Company. Though India got its independence from the British rule, Coochbehar remained as a tributary till 28th August, 1948. At last Cooch

Behar State merged into India Union on 12th September 1949¹. Thereafter it is regarded as a district of West Bengal since 1st January, 1950².

The Maharajas of Cooch Behar State were the great patrons of art and architecture. They erected a large number of temples, buildings, royal roads like Gahai Kamal Ali, wells, ponds like Sagar Digha, Bairagi Digha etc. throughout the kingdom. Some temples have inscription which supplied some information's about it. The administrative building like Judge's Court, District Magistrate office, Sadar Sub-divisional office etc, schools like Jenkins School, Sunity Academy etc. and Victoria College (Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal College) shows the sign of development during the reign of the Maharajas of Cooch Behar. The inscriptions, sculptures and the coins are also regarded as source about Cooch Behar. The plenty of archaeological sites and evidences did not only flourish the history of archaeology but also help us to compose a comprehensive history of Cooch Behar.

TEMPLES:

The Maharajas of Cooch Behar have built many temples in their kingdom. Some of them are now in outside of present Cooch Behar district. Among the large number of temples the famous are Madan Mohan Temple at the heart of the Cooch Behar town, the temple of Anathnath, Bara Devi Mandir or Devi Bari, the temple of Hiranyagarbha, Rajmata Thakurbari, the Dangaraayee Siva temple of Cooch Behartown, the famous Siva Temple at Dhaliabri, the Siddheswari temple at Siddheswari village, the half-buried Harihara Siva temple of Hariharpur, the temple of Sandeswar Siva at Nakkathigachh, and the famous Kamateswari temple at Gosnimari in Dinjata Sub-Division.

The existing temple of Madan Mohan was established by Maharaja Nripendranarayan in 1890³. It is situated by the northern side of Bairaghi Dighi at the heart of Cooch Behar town. The temple has four corners and a dome on the top. The silver coloured dome has a Padma, Kalasa and Amalaka. Every room of the temple has some diety. It is a matter of regret that the image of the great Madan Mohan had been stolen in 1994. There after a 'Narayanshila' has been worshipped in place of Madan Mohan.

The famous Siddhanath Siva temple which is situated at Dhaliabri is a pancharatna temple. Harendranarayan Choudhury in his 'The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement' refers that the erection of the Siddhanath Siva temple started during the reign of Harendranarayan and was completed during the reign of

Maharaja Shivendranarayan⁴. The Islamic architectural impact has been noticed on the construction of the temple. The mehrab in the temple proved that the temple was planned by the Muslim architect⁵.

One of the notable temple of Cooch Behar is the temple of Kamateswari of Gosanimari in Dinhata Sub-division. Maharaja Prannarayan who was renowned in the history as the 'Builder of Temple' built the existing of Kamteswari temple in 1665⁶. The temple is 45 inches in height and 28 inches in length. The circular dome stands on the curved cornice of the temple. The existing image of Bhagavati is made of stone. An image of the God Sun which belong to the reign of the Palas has been found in the temple.

SOME ANCIENT MOSQUE AND DARGAH OF COOCHBEHAR:

There are some ancient Mosques and Dargahs throughout the Cooch Behar . Among these the notable mosques are Purani Mosque, New Mosque, Mosque of Khagrabari, Mosque of Suktabari, the Old Mosque of Sitai, Zama Mosque of Tufanganj Town, and Mahiskuchhi Mosque of Tufanganj Sub-Division and the half-buried Mosque at Haribhanga of Cooch Behar Sadar Sub-Division. The notable Dargahs are Shah Fakir's Dargah at Dhaliabari, TorshaPir Dham at Harinchawra near Cooch Behar town, EkramulHaque's Dargah at Haldibari in Mekhliganj Sub-Division etc. The Dargah of EkramulHaque is famous not only in Cooch Behar but in North Bengal and Assam also. Now it becomes one of the notable Pilgrimages of North Bengal. Every year in the Bengali month of Falgun the ursmobarak is celebrated here.

CHURCHES AND JAINA TEMPLES:

Cooch Behar district have few old Churches and Jaina Temples. Nilkuthi Swidish Mission (Luthern Church), GaroparaSwidish Mission, the Church of New Cooch Behar, Jorai-Rampur Luthern Church, Chamta Luthern Church, Putimari Swidish Mission, and Kuchlibari Swidish Mission may be mentioned in this regard. Among the Jaina temples, the Marwari Temple of Cooch Behar town and the Sri DigambariJaina Temple of Dinhata town are notable.

ROYAL ROADS

The remains of some Royal Roads of the Khen Kings and the Cooch kings are still visible. Among these the Nilamber Road, DarparMalli. Gohaikamal Ali or GohaiKamaler Path is mentionable. GohaiKamaler Path was one of the greatest achievements of Maharaja Naranarayan⁷. This Royal Road extended from the range of Bhutan

Hills up Parsukunda. On the other hand it is said that this road stretched up to Narayanpur in Laxmimpur District of Assam. Maharaja Narannarayan gave the responsibility of the construction of the Royal Road to his younger brother Gohai Kamal. Darpar Malli stretched from near Baghduar up to the bank of river Ganga.

EARTHEN RAMPART:

The Remains of some earthen rampart are now visible in Cooch Behar. These are as follows:

THE GREART RAMPART OF KAMATAPUR FORT:

The famous fort of Kamatapur of the Khen kings was preserved by long and lofty rampart made of earth. To the north, south and western side of the Rajpat there was a high earthen rampart nearly 22 kilometers long. The existing rampart is nearly 30 feet in height and 53 feet in wide. It is said that Devi Gosani ordered Viswakarma to make this rampart in one night to preserve the fort. The fort had seven entrance points of which remains of six entrances are now visible.

EARTHEN RAMPART OF KING BISWA SINGHA

King Biswasingha made a big earthen rampart which extended from Karotoa to the bank of the river Brahmaputra⁸. A great portion of the rampart is now visible near Kundir in Rangpur District, now in Bangladesh.

THE RAMPART OF KING NAL:

The remains of an earthen rampart have been discovered in the Chilapata forest in the district of Jalpaiguri. It is known as the Rampart of King Nal. Some big stone pillars and bricks are found by the side of the Rampart⁹. Butsome said that this rampart belonged to Maharaja Naranarayan of Cooch Behar.

SOME FAMOUS BUILDINGS:

At present in the district of Cooch Behar we have found some old buildings which were built in different times during the time of the Cooch Kings. The most important buildings are: Jenkins School, Victoria College (Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal College), Sunity Academy, Judge Court, District Magistrate Office, Sub-Divisional Office, Cooch Behar Sathitya Sabha, Victor palace, North Bengal State Library, M.J.N. Hospital, Lanes Down Hall of

Cooch Behar town, the Nityendra Library and Hospital of Haldibari, the Red Building of Mathabhanga High School are the oldest building of Cooch Behar.

THE CAPITALS OF COOCH BEHAR:

The Cooch Kings has shifted their head quarter from place to place. Chikna, Hlingulawas, Siliaguri, Atharokotha, Guriahati, Dhaliabari. Bhetaguri and the Present town of Cooch Behar become their capital in different times. The existing Royal palace of Cooch Behar was built by Maharaja Nripendranarayan in 1887 A. D.

THE ROYAL PALACE OF COOCH BEHAR:

The existing Royal Palace of Cooch Behar is one of the notable among all other palaces in India. This Royal Palace was built by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan in 1889¹⁰. The architect of the palace followed the western architectural pattern. The famous architect Mr. F. Barcklay in his account refers of the characteristics which is the creation of a large dome in the middle on the top. He was the chief engineer of the palace¹¹. Its north-southern length is 396' 7" and east- western length is 296' 2". The Royal Court was situated at the ground floor of the palace. It is 72' feet in length and 65' 5" in wide. The palace is 29 feet 10 inches in height from the ground. Two large courtyards are attached with the palace. One is 75' 8" in length and 76' 9" in wide. It was used only for the ladies. The other is 48' 9" in length and 38' in wide. It was used only for the guest.

Italian architectural style and pattern of the palace is the source of attraction of the visitors. An enclosure made of iron is now visible which is partly damaged. The main gateway of the palace lies to the eastern side of the palace. The entrance is made of iron. There are two small apartment made of brick by the two side of the gate. Each of the two apartments has a dome on the top of it. On the top of the Southern pillar of the gate there is a figure of a lion and the northern pillar has a figure of an elephant.

FORTRESS:

The Khen and the Cooch kings built a large number of fortresses in various parts of Cooch Behar. Among these KumariKot. Satpangar, Atharokotha, Pinjarirjhar, VikramRajan Gar, Fenguagar, Jaldhoa, Fort of Chila Roy and Kamatapur Fort are notable. The remains of Kamatapur Fort, the Fort of Chila Roy and Biswa Singha Killa are still visible.

THE FORT OF CHILA ROY:

The Fort of Chila Roy is one of the notable archaeological remains among all others in Tufanganj Sub- Division. It was situated at Andaran Fulbari, one mile away from Tufanganj town. This famous fort was built by the younger brother of Maharaja Naranarayan, before sending an expedition against the Ahom King¹². The remains of this fort are still visible. Perhaps the foundation of the fort was made of brick. Some bricks can still be seen. The present area of the fort is 83X65 meters. One and half mile away from Chila Roy's fort, another fort at KamatFulbari village is still now visible which was the farm -house of Sukladhawaj. It is known as Chila Roy's Bara Kot.

THE FORT OF KAMATAPUR:

Of all the forts of the former Cooch Kingdom, the fort of Kamatapur is extremely important. This famous fort is situated at Gosanimari Village in the Dinhata Sub-Division. The remains of the fort are still visible. The various sizes of mounds, brick, stone, stone-slab etc. are the remains of the famous fort. The palace was situated in the middle of the fort of which one part is now known as Rajpat. Various rumours go about the fort of Kamatapur. The ditch, rampart, mound, images of different deities and other remains have given birth various idle-talks. These also gave birth various legends. In this regard 'Gosanimangal' of the 18th century may be mentioned.

It has been said by the local people that for the purpose of the creation of the Kamatapur Fort king, Kamateswar vowed to his tutelary-deity Kamteswari Devi. It is also said that Biswakarmabuilt the fort within a night following the direction of Kamateswari Devi. The story goes on around king Kamaateswar.

In the year of 1808-1809 Buchanan Hamilton visited the Fort of Kamatapur and wrote an account on it. During the time of observation Buchanan Hamilton found a house made of brick by the Southern side of Bholanath Tank¹³. According to Hamilton this tank was dug by the Muslims because the tanks of the Hindus are not always square in shape. The tank of Bholanath is square in shape. Harendranarayan Chowdhuri in his account mentioned that there was a temple by the side of the tank of Bholanath which was later on destroyed by the Muslim force. They made it their residence.

The Citadel (Rajpat or Royal Residence) is situated near the centre of the city. It is of a quadrangular form and it is surrounded by a ditch about 60' in wide from north to south. Quite a few number of figurines made of stone are

lying on the Rajpat. But it is matter of regret that the Siva-Linga is absent there. The figurines are damaged. The figurines on the Rajpat are as follows:¹⁴

Balakrishna: The figure of Balakrishna is 34" X 34" in size. It is also called as Gopiraman Krishna. Both of the Gopies are ornamented. They wore bristles petticoate.

Female Figure:

This female image is 34" x 30" in size. Perhaps it was a dancing female figure. There is another female figure which is 37" X 36" in Size.

- King and king's Servant:

There are two figures. The Figure of king is decorated and ornamented and it is 36" X 23" in size.

- King and King's Attendant:

There are two figures; one is king and the other king's attendant. The figure of king is decorated and ornamented. It is 36" X 23" in size.

- Figure of king's Guard:

The Figures of a couple is decorated with weapons and 35" X 35" in size. Some said it is the figure of Rama and Laxmana.

- Two Figures:

This is the figure of a female and a male is 37" X 28" in size. At present the figure is partly damaged.

- Female Figure:

A female figure 37" X 29" in size. It is partly damaged.

- Female Figure:

It is perhaps a dancing female figure. It is 35" X 32" in size.

- Besides the figures, the remains of Takshal, bathing-pot, different sizes of

Pillars made of stone, figures, bhulka-bhulki, and many other remains have been found. According to Buchanan Hamilton and Harendra Narayan Choudhury the early temple of Kamateswari was situated at Rajpat. In 1800 the images which were found on Rajpat are now in the present temple of Kamateswari.

Other archaeological Remains of Cooch Behar:

Besides the temples, mosques, dargahs, churches, ancient buildings, forts, there are several other ancient remains have been found in various parts of Cooch Behar. Among these the following are most important:

1. The old house of Khan Choudhuri Amanatulla Ahmed, the former revenue minister of Cooch Behar State is situated at the village of Baramaricha of Mathabhanga Sub-Division. Now it is in miserable condition.
2. The remains of the Palace of Maharaja Harendra Narayan are now visible at Bhetaguri in the Dinhata Sub-Division. Some tall stone slabs, bricks, wells and the mound at Mahakal Dham are the main remains of the palace.
3. Cannons of the Koch kings:

One big cannon made of brass has been discovered which was used by Maharaja Laxminarayan in the naval war. It was discovered under the earth. Two cannons of Raghu Devnarayan have also discovered. The writing of the cannon of Laxminarayan are as follows:

“SrikrishnapadankaChandraprakasa (Sha)
Manobils Sri SriLaxminarayanBhupatimirmita”¹⁵.

4. The Wells of the Maharjas of Cooch Behar:

The Maharajas of Cooch Behar were the protector of the subjects of their kingdom. They dug many wells in various parts of the Kingdom. Among these the wells of Cooch Behar town, the wells which still visible at Jamaldaha and the well at Mahakal Dham are notable. But now these are not fit for the people.

5. The worn half-buried Mosque at Haribhanga:

A mosque of which lower portion has buried is situated at Haribhanga, eight kilometers away from Cooch Behar town. According the aged person of the area the mosque was built probably 100 years ago. This brick made mosque is now useless and surrounded by jungles and trees. Natural calamity was the main cause of its present condition.

6. The Hundred years Old Railway Bridge:

The hundred years old railway bridge still visible at Gitaldaha in the Dinhata Sub-Division. This old bridge was the link between Cooch Behar and Bangladesh. The bridge is now in poor condition.

7. The old House of Zamindar Mustafi :

One of the famous zamindar family is the Mustafa family at the village of Falimari in the Dinhata Sub-Division. The Old house of Zaminder Mustafa is now having been seen which is in very wretched in condition.

8. The Oldest Railway Station at Haldibari:

The oldest railway station of North-Eastern India was founded by Maharaja of Cooch Behar at Haldibari in the Mekhliganj Sub-Division. It was founded in the year of 1876. Now it has become an important historical illustration of Cooch Behar.

9. The Oldest Lamp post of Haldibari :

An oldest lamp post which is nearly hundred and fifty year's old has-been found at Haldibari in the Mekhliganj Sub-Division.

10. The famous Iron Chest of Chhatapari :

Jamaldaha in the Mekhliganj Sub-Division has many archaeological remains. One of the most important illustration is the iron chest of Chhatapari. Chhatapari, a woman had an iron chest which is 6' X 4.5" in size. She was the richest lady of the area at that time. The chest is nearly 200 years old but it is still now

free from rust. The chest has placed by the side of the Kargil Club of the area. Many visitors have come to see the chest of Chhatapari.

11. Newly discovered Jar-like broken tomb of Rajpat:

Gosanimari is the richest archaeological site of Cooch Behar. It preserved many archaeological remains. At the time of digging of a tank near Rajpat, some valuable historical materials have been discovered very recently. The owners of the tank have preserved all newly discovered materials. The materials are: jar-like broken tomb made of stone; some decorated stone slabs, figures of elephant made of terracotta and a fragement of a stone slab which was used for grinding grains in to floor.

12. The Old House of Abbasuddin Ahmed:

The world famous 'Bhawaiya' singer Abbasuddin Ahmed was born at Balarampur in Sadar Sub- Division of Cooch Behar. Later on he went to Bangladesh. But the house where he was born is now visible in miserable condition. The house is made of tin with wooden pillars which bears the memory.

INSCRIPTION:

Some temples have inscriptions which are valuable for the reconstruction of the history of the temples of Cooch Behar. The inscription which was discovered from the Madam Mohan temple read as follows:

Bidhu Bidhu Samit Gajabidhu Samit

Shakamithungatamitrey.

Narapanarendratna Nripendrahayaripati Sharanetra.

Din Eha Dibat Grihabhusthapita Makarodatmakren

Vastutritochita Rупpa Binirmita Shastra Bishesh Dharen.

From the above mentioned inscription we ascertained that the temple of Madan Mohan was erected by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, son of Maharaja, Narendranarayan¹⁶.

The inscription which engraved in the foundation slap of the famous Kamateswari temple read as follows:

Om Namo Gosani
 Sammatyadhidhdek Zitter Bhujadanda Pratapajasya
 Krinakanduk Begavardhita Diss Sri Pranbumipate
 Sakabde Naganaga Margan Himojyotirnimita
 Sri Bhaja Kabimandalen Bhajata Bhabe Bhawani Matha.

From the above mentioned inscription it is known that the Kamateswary temple was built by Maharaja Prannarayan in 1665 A. D.¹⁷

SCULPTURE:-

The impact of the Pala and Sena art has been found on the sculpture of Cooch Behar¹⁸. Some images which are preserved in different temples proved the similarity with the 11th-12th century Pala-Sena arts. The Vishnu images of Kamateswari temple, Vishnu and Surya images made of stone of Sitalkhuchi and a Vishnu image at Nishigang in Mathabhanga Sub-Division may be mentioned in this regard.

CONIS:-

It is difficult to know the exact time when the coins were introduced in ancient Pragjyotish or Kamrupa. The Pala and the Sena Kings established their supremacy over Kamrupa but their coins have not yet been discovered. The coins of Giasuddin Euaz are the oldest than the coins of other rulers of Bengal¹⁹. Later on the coins of Samsuddin Ilias Shah along with other coins have been discovered. In 1863 some coins had discovered on the bank of the rivers Dharla. Some of them belonged to the Pathan rulers of Gour and Delhi. The coins of Sikandar Shah and Hossain Shah had also been discovered. But the coins of Nilamber and his former kings had not been discovered.

It is unknown to us about the introduction of coins of King Biswa Singha²⁰. His coins had not discovered. The Cooch Kingdom had no coins before king Biswa Singha. After accession on the throne, King Biswa Singha printed 'Sikka Rupees'²¹. But none of these have discovered till now. From the reign of Maharaja Naranarayan, son of Biswa Singha, the Cooch kings began to introduce their coins independently. That is why the coins are known as 'Narayani Coins'. There is another reason about the naming of Narayani coins. The name Narayani came after the name of Narayan, the Royal Deity of the Cooch Kings. In 'Alamgirnama' and 'Riaz-Us-Salatin we

have found the mention of 'Narayani Coins'. The image of 'Siva' or 'Siva-Durga' was engraved on the coins. That is why these are called 'Sivatanka' or 'Sivankatanka'. The coins were made in the mint of Takagachh²².

We have already known about the golden, silver, brass and copper coins of the Cooch Kings. But the coins made of brass have not yet been discovered. The round shape and the introduction of inscription is the main characteristic of the Narayani Coins. The title of the king was engraved on the obverse side and the name and date on the reverse side of the coins. This custom was followed up to the reign of Maharaja Laxminarayan. Later on the kings of Cooch Behar lost their authority to make their coins independently. Then they had only the right to make half rupee.

The inscriptions on the Narayani Coins were written in Bengali letter but they had the shape of 'Tanka'. The writings of the coins on one side read as follows:

Sri Sri	or	Sri Sri
Mannar Nara		Mannar Nara
Yana Bhupalsya		Yanasya Saka
Saka 1477		1477

The writing on the other side read as follows:

Sri Sri
Sivacharan
Kamal Madhu
Karasya.

From 1773, the East India Company tried to curb power of coin making of the Cooch kings. In 1886, the British government compelled the Cooch kings to stop the making and using of coins. Then the British government introduced their own coins.

CONCLUSION:

The history of Cooch Behar has a unique past and characteristically differs from other regions of West Bengal. The Kings of the Cooch Kingdom were the great patrons of art and architecture. They erected various temples throughout the Kingdom. Some of these are now in outside of Cooch Behar. The archaeology of Cooch Behar did not only flourish the history of the mighty Kings of Cooch Behar but also helps to compose a comprehensive history of Cooch Behar. The history of archaeology can reveal the cultural history of Cooch Behar and ascertain its position in the ancient neighboring states.

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