

The Pen and the Crown: The Practice of English Literature in the Royal Court of Cooch Behar

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Abstract

The wave of writing in English reached the state of Cooch Behar when British modernity and cultural imperialism touched this princely state. Westernization started in Cooch Behar with the introduction of British Commissioner in the state in 1789. Education was the most important area in which the company intervened and dominated in Cooch Behar. Despite the Maharani's opposition, Narendra Narayan was sent to Krishnanagar and admitted to the college in 1853. The royal members of Cooch Behar educated in English education, and enlightened by European thought accelerated the Indian renaissance with new enthusiasm. It is against this backdrop that they started writing literature and other writings in English. When discussing the English literary practice of Cooch Behar, the names that come in the forefront is Suniti Devi, Nripendra Narayan, Gayatri Devi and so on.

Keywords: Princely State, Cultural Imperialism, Post Colonialism, Patriarchy, Feminism, Indigenous,

Cooch Behar was not a part of British India, rather a princely state. However, if we want to discuss the English literary practice or the practice of writing in English by the royal family of Cooch Behar, we have to start the discussion from the larger context of English education and English literary practice in British India. The British East India Company

arrived on the shores of India with the intention of trade. There was no initial plan to establish a colony. Later the British emerged as the merchants and subsequently as a colonial power to fill the void left by the decline of the Mughal Empire. Rudyard Kipling beautifully illustrates this transition in one of his poems:

Once, two hundred years ago, the trader came

Meek and tame.

Where his timid foot halted, there he stayed

Till mere trade

Grew to empire

And sent his armies forth

South and north

Till the country from Peshawar to Ceylon

Was his own.(Kipling 76).

In 1757 AD, the British East India Company won the Battle of Palashi and gained possession of the province of Bengal, and started extracting wealth by shaking the Pagoda Tree of Indian wealth. But the colonialism born of the victory at the Battle of Palashi had a positive side. M.K.Naik writes, “ But those engaged in shaking the pagoda tree were also instrumental in planting the seeds of modernization process in the eighteenth century Indian Waste Land- seeds which started burgeoning in the nineteenth century. The rise of Indian English literature was an aspect of this Indian Renaissance” (Naik 8). Indian renaissance was born from colonial rule. Jawaharlal Nehru highlighted two important aspects of this renaissance, and according to him, “ She(India) looked to the West and at the same time, she looked at herself and her own past”(Nehru 330).

Some of the English scholars engaged in administrative work and visiting India played an important role in the rediscovery of Indian heritage. They wrote various survey

reports, and left important documents about the past history of India. “H.T. Colebrooke, the author of *Digest of Hindu Law on Contracts and Succession* (1997-98), and James Prinsep, the discoverer of the clue of Asokan inscriptions, were some of the representative white men in India then whose burden was certainly not imperial” (Naik 8). Along with these English scholars some Indians educated in English education and enlightened by European thought also accelerated the Indian renaissance with new enthusiasm.

It is true that the English first introduced English education in India. But initially there was no policy or plan for expansion of education system in India, they introduced English education on their own needs, “ There was an equally pressing need for the Indian clerks. Translators and lower officials in administration and knowledge of English were essential for these jobs. Furthermore, with the rise of Evangelical movement in Britain, the ideal of spreading the word of Christ among the natives assumed vital importance for some Englishmen. Even before the close of the eighteenth century, mission schools which taught English besides vernacular had already been started functioning in the South, while the beginning of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of similar schools in Bengal and Bombay” (Naik 9).

But along with this practical necessity, English cultural imperialism also worked in the promotion of English education. They realized that their rule would be more stable if India could be made a cultural colony, “They also thought that the spread of English education among the natives would lead to the assimilation of Western culture by the Indians and that this would make for the stability of the empire - a view strongly advocated by Charles Garnt who argues to introduce the language of the conquerors seems to be an obvious means of assimilating a conquered people to them” (Chopra 249.)

Conservative class in India opposed English education, but some English-educated youths were very enthusiastic about spread of English and modern education. Among the

m the first to be mentioned is Raja Rammohan Roy. In a letter to Lord Amherst in 1923, Rammohan Roy argued strongly for the introduction of English education in opposition to the establishment of Sanskrit school, “If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of schoolmen, which was best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness... But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing...useful sciences , which may be accomplished by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with the necessary books instruments and other apparatus”(Roy302).

Rammohan Roy established a school at Suripara near Calcutta at his own expense to educate boys in English (1816-17). Later Meckler's Minutes (1835) and Wood's Despatches (1854) were important milestones in English education in India. English education started and spread in India through various steps taken by the British. Indians were educated in English education, and the English reader emerged in India. It is against this backdrop that Indians started writing literature and other writings in English.

English literature of the whole of India could not be discussed in a limited scope. However, if we want to discuss the English literary practice of the royal family of Cooch Behar, we have to write a couple of words about the English literary practice in the undivided province of Bengal. Raja Rammohan Roy's “A Defense of Hindu Theism” (1817) is considered the first original work in the history of Indian English literature.

Raja Rammohan Roy was the star of the Indian Renaissance who expressed his progressive thinking by writing about thirty four essays on various subjects in English. His writings can be considered as literature of knowledge. He popularized a distinguished prose

style in English, so he is called “begetter of Indian prose in English” (Naik 18). At the request of a friend towards the end of his life, Rammohan Roy also wrote a short autobiography. Neerad Chowdhury’s Autobiography, Suniti Devi's Autobiography, and Gayatri Devi's Autobiography are the ramifications of the genre created by Rammohan. Derozio's two students Krishna Mohan Banerjee (1813–1885) and Ram Gopal Ghosh wrote some essays in English on literature, culture, and politics.

Derozio’s (1809-31) name should be mentioned first in the English poetic literary practice. He composed numerous poems during his short life which were published in two books of poetry - *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). Then Kasiprasad Ghosh (1809-73) wrote his book of poetry, *The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems* (1830). Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-73) nourished the infancy of English poetry through a handful of poems. His two long English poems are “The Captive Lady” (1849) and “Visions of the Past” (1849). However, Taru Dutt (1856-77) brought English poetry from childhood to youth through his two collections-*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Field* (1876) and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882). Two more names have to be mentioned in the practice of English poetry. Arvind Ghosh enriched Indian English literature through prose and verse in his long literary career. His famous poem is *Savitri* (1954). Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) mainly practiced literature in Bengali, but translated some works into English, and won the Nobel Prize (1912) for *Gitanjali* translated into English. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) was the first Indian to write a novel in English - *Rajmohan's Wife* (1935).

The wave of writing in English reached the state of Cooch Behar. But before discussing the literary practices of the royal family of Cooch Behar, we need to see how British modernity and cultural imperialism touched Cooch Behar. The reformist policies followed by the British government for undivided Bengal also operated in Cooch Behar.

Cooch Behar was the only native state in the north-eastern corner of India. By the Anglo-Cooch Behar Treaty in 1773, the British brought Cooch Behar under their control. Here an attempt is made to briefly review the colonial cultural imperialism from the political implications of that treaty. Cultural imperialism in Cooch Behar was not an isolated policy, but the same policy that was followed in other native states. Company authorities in Calcutta also felt the need to introduce new systems of administration in Cooch Behar. Close geographical, ethnic and historical relations existed between the states of Bengal and Cooch Behar. The Company wanted to reorganize the administrative system of Cooch Behar, which was feudal and unpalatable to the then system, to keep pace with the administration of the rest of Bengal. Westernization started in Cooch Behar with the introduction of British Commissioner in the state in 1789. Harendra Narayan (1801–1839) was the last ruler of Cooch Behar to oppose the British, and he resisted British attempts to introduce the British model.

Education was the most important area in which the company intervened and dominated in Cooch Behar. The British government started their modernization project through education. It can be seen that, from the reign of Harendra Narayan, the colonial government started interfering in the educational policies of the rulers of Cooch Behar. What would be the medium of education, who would be the private tutors of the royal family, where they would be sent for studies - all decisions were taken by the British government. The terms of the treaty of 1773 were not consistent with this policy of the British government. Despite the Maharani's opposition, Narendra Narayan was sent to Krishnanagar and admitted to the college in 1853. He was then about 11 years old. This system continued later.

M.K. Naik mentions the name of Suniti Devi in his book *A History of Indian English*. So the English literary practice of Cooch Behar is an integral part of Indian English

Literature. M.K. Naik in his book called the first period of Indian English literature as ‘The Pagoda Tree’ from the Beginning to 1857, the second period as ‘The Winds of Change: 1857-1920’, the third period as ‘The Gandhian Whirl Wind: 1920-1947’. Maharani Suniti Devi’s literary work belongs to the third phase.

When discussing the English literary practice of Cooch Behar, the name that comes in the forefront is Suniti Devi. Along with studying Bengali literature, he also studied English literature. His books written in English are:

1. *The Rajput Princess*
2. *The Beautiful Mogul Princess (1918)*
3. *Nine Ideal Indian Women (1919)*
4. *The Life of Princess Yashodara*
5. *The Bengal Dacoits and Triggers*
6. *The Autobiography of Indian Princess (1921).*
7. *Indian Fairy Tales (1922)*
8. *Prayers (Shil Sharma 87).*

Suniti Devi wrote her autobiography, *The Autobiography of Indian Princess*, at the age of fifty seven. The autobiography covers her childhood, family life, various festivals, married life, her time spent in Cooch Behar, her experiences in England and the social life there, her golden days back in India and her various social activities. In the first chapter of the autobiography, she goes back to her childhood based on memories. She has presented the golden days of childhood to the readers through reminiscences in a wonderful poetic language. The poetic language is reminiscent of the English essayist Charles Lamb. At the conclusion of the first chapter she gives an inimitable impression of the English language: “Oh happy days: I can still smell the incense which burnt before the idol at twilight when the elder ladies made their devotions. From across the gulf of time I can hear the faint tinkle of

the bells, and the peace of the past pervades my soul. It was a heavenly feeling when *arati* time came and the elderly ladies... bowed themselves in homage to their God in the sanctuary”(Devi 9).

At the beginning of the autobiography, it can be seen that she left the impression of a master craft in English writing. Father Keshav Chandra Sen was one of the pioneers of *Brahmo Samaj*. She drew a living character of her father. The description of his appearance given by the writer is in a word outstanding. She wrote, “My father had indeed a striking personality: tall and broad-shouldered, he gave one the impression of great strength. I always thought of him as an immortal; his eyes were homes of silent prayer” (Devi 4). Such a description may come from the pen of a literary figure of great merit. It reminds Chaucer's portrayal of characters in *The Canterbury Tales*.

She shed light on the philosophical side of Brahmo Samaj and her father's devotion to Brahmo Samaj. Suniti Devi was also inculcated in her father's liberal humanistic thinking. Therefore, while talking about Brahma religion, she talked about a human religion without caste. While doing so she has beautifully brought out the essence of Hinduism, “If my readers by some good fortune have read ancient Indian history they will know what real Indian religion was. There was one God and no belief in caste, in fact there was no such thing as caste” (Devi1-2).

In addition to reflections on philosophical thought and light on history, materials from children's literature are scattered throughout her autobiography. She presented the childhood stories heard from his father in the context of childish mentality. In her autobiography, Suniti Devi portrays an idealized character of her mother, “Gentle loving, and self-denying, her whole life was beautiful in its goodness and its simplicity” (Devi 1). Sunithi Devi spent an unblemished childhood with her siblings (Karuna, Bino, Nirmal, Prafulla, Saral, Subrata, Savitri, Sucharu, Monika, Sujata) in the village home of Sadhankanan near Kolkata. She

wrote, “How Happy we were!... I am happy and proud to say that my brothers and sisters have always been most kind and loving to me” (Devi 15).

In various parts of the autobiography, the heritage of Indian culture has emerged. To the western readers who are curious about Indian culture, she brings out unknown aspects of Indian religion and culture, and uncovers the symbolic significance of idol worship. She emphasized, “Many of our customs are full of color and life, but few people of the west realize their inner and more sacred meanings. (Devi 17). However, despite being progressive, she sealed the idea of “the virtue of the husband and the virtue of the wife” in the traditional husband-wife relationship of the Indian patriarchal society, “The question will naturally arise as to what good resulted from this penance, but it proved my cousin’s love for her husband. And it showed that she lived up to the traditions of wifely devotion which are taught us from our infancy” (Devi 17).

In her autobiography, Suniti Devi writes candidly about various aspects of her marriage - her father’s proposal of marriage to the Raja of Cooch Behar through the English authorities before she was of marriageable age, the exchange of letters between Cooch Behar and Calcutta about the marriage, and finally her father’s consent to the marriage. There came differences of opinion, criticism, and vacillation over Hindu-Brahmin marriage rituals. Suniti Devi with her family overcame all obstacles to perform the wedding ceremony in Cooch Behar. Suniti Devi was very young at this time, and was ashamed to hear about marriage. She frankly admitted this in her autobiography. But as soon as she saw the *Maharaja*, love at first sight arose in her. She wrote: “I looked up, and as I did so I met the Maharajah's eyes fixed on me full of love, and I blushed. From that moment my future husband and I loved each other. He was so handsome and so charming”(26). She also feels “The fairy prince in my romance was the young Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur, Maharajah of Cooch Behar, who

had been a ward of the Government since his infancy, and carefully educated to be a model ruler” (21).

Soon after the marriage, Nripendra Narayan moved to England, and Suniti Devi to Calcutta. While in Calcutta, her first son Rajendra and first daughter Sukriti were born. But in the midst of this, father Keshav Chandra passed away, drowning everyone in the ocean of grief, “Our home had been for us an abode of sweetness and light; and now it was to be shattered by sorrow...whose departure had cast so deep a shadow on all our lives (Devi 42-43).

Then Maharani returned to Cooch Behar. She performed all the responsibilities of Maharani, and even took part in various domestic tasks. In the “Life at Cooch Behar” chapter, she beautifully showcases the beauty of the city of Cooch Behar and uncovers the unseen aspects of Cooch Behar. She tried to be an ideal queen, “For me to win the hearts of the people as woman as a wife and a mother. The more I saw Cooch Behar the more I liked it” (44). A sense of responsibility towards the common people was born in her from childhood, “Rajey was, even when a small boy impressed with a sense of the responsibilities whose destiny is to govern others” (50). After much anxiety, their second son Jitendra was born.

In 1857 the Queen visited England for the first time. She was impressed by the hospitality of the English there and was honored by Queen Victoria. The details of her first visit to England are scattered in two chapters of the autobiography. Since this autobiography is written in the colonial period, Queen Victoria is glorified here, otherwise there remains the possibility of her being resentful, “The year 1887 was expected to be a memorable one for India... India was anxious to show her loyalty to the sovereign whose high ideals and Humanity has endeared her to all her people” (Devi 52).

After returning from Vietnam, she again came to Cooch Behar, and had a good time in Cooch Behar. But she used to get sick during childbirth, especially with respiratory

ailments. However, nothing serious happened. In the “Happy Days in India” chapter, she gave a beautiful description of the hunting story of the kings of Cooch Behar, “Our shooting parties were the happiest, gayest affairs imaginable. We drove miles from the palace right into the jungle to the place where the shooting camp was pitched, usually on the bank of a river, and it used to be quite like a little town under the canvas” (Devi 75).

Her autobiography reveals much about the relationship between the British and the native states. The native states were dependent on the British in some way. The British also interfered with the native states in all matters. The native kings had so much love for the British that when King Edward died, there was a feeling in the royal family of Cooch Behar as if a relative had died, “Just as we were going on board the steamer the news arrived that our beloved Sovereign was dead. We were filled with dismay and sorrow, and I feared the effect the blow would have upon my dear husband in his weak state” (92). This shows how deep the roots of British rule had penetrated.

Indian English literature belongs to postcolonial literature, as it expresses resistance and protest against colonialism. Throughout Suniti Devi’s autobiography, a kind of fondness for the British is evident. Despite that, post colonialism was born in her instinctively. Unknowingly she became a protestant; she did not want British interference in everything. In the autobiography, her protest against the British has emerged openly, “I am of the opinion that my people do not require a Western education. People seem to forget that thousands of years ago India produced astronomers, poets and sages, when most of the European races of to-day were cave-dwellers...I beg of all Maharani mothers in India that, if ever they are confronted with the same trouble, they will be firm, uphold their own judgment, and not allow the officials to interfere with their home-life” (81-82).

The tone of feminist literature is also observed in her writings. The details of the condition of women behind the curtain in the inner palace of the patriarchal society can be

seen here. She has given a breathtaking picture of women oppressed by patriarchy, “Caste religion and custom make it very hard and sad for the widow, whether she be old or young...a Hindu widow gets at all a bad name, she suffers greatly at the hands of both her own people and her late husband's" (97)97. The wave of rebellious feminism had not yet reached British India. Therefore, her writings only highlight the marginal status of women under patriarchy, without protesting against patriarchy.

She laments that there are no texts that detail the past traditions of the oldest places in India. The history of India is not the same as the western writers have distorted. India is an ancient land full of spirituality. She wrote, “In old history of India unselfish love was given to one and all, and the crown of India was love. We are lucky indeed to be the children of such a country... I am so proud of being an Indian “(118). The autobiography ends with the hope of regaining the glory of the country through the empowerment of women “Before many years have passed Indian women will stand in their right place and once again India will cry aloud: I am proud of my daughters” (122).

Bengal Dacoits and Tigers by Suniti Devi is basically a collection of stories. The stories about dacoits and tigers in this collection are based on the well-known incidents to which Maharani Suniti Devi was familiar. The rest of the stories, though fictional, paint a picture of the conditions of pre-independent India. Many of these stories deal with the struggle between man and beast. Tigers were huge in number when the story was written, especially in the Sundarbans, where they sometimes terrorized local villages. This collection of entertaining stories takes us back to the glorious days of the long-gone *Rajas*.

The context of Maharani's stories is about 150-200 years ago. At that time the wave of development did not reach rural Bengal; most of the area of Bengal was surrounded by deep forests. The fear of wild animals on the one hand and the fear of robbers on the other

created a frightening and exciting atmosphere. It is against this backdrop that Maharani's stories were written.

We have not only heard the stories of those heinous robberies from the elderly people, Bengali literature has also written thrilling books on the subject. There are two books called *Banglar Dakat* ; one is written by Khagendranath Mitra, the other is written by Yogendranath Gupta. Many stories have been written about the legendary 'Raghu Dakat'. Maharani Suniti Devi wrote a story about Raghu Dakat in her collection of stories. The story tells about Raghu Dakat's clever strategy of robbery and his popularity among common people. She wrote about Raghu Dakat, "At that time there flourished a notorious dacoit, Raghu, for whose capture Government offered a handsome reward. But like Robin Hood of old, Raghu Dacoit had caught popular fancy by his generosity to the poor. Though he looted the rich, to the needy, the famine-stricken and widows he was always kind. No one would inform against him" (25).

In the story "A Punjabee Dacoit", the author describes how a Punjabi dacoit in the province of Punjab tries to commit a robbery on a railway track, and how the dacoit is caught with the help of a widow and an Englishman. In this short story the author's description creates a haunted atmosphere. She writes, "The little station had not been left far behind when a dark figure appeared on the foot-board of the ladies' carriage, and a man's head was thrust in at one of the windows"(35).

In the story "Girl as Kalima", the people of a house find out about the arrival of robbers through letters and move to a safe place. By mistake, one of the housewives stayed in the abandoned house. At night the robbers appeared. Then the bride stands there dressed like *Maa Kali* with ink smeared on her body relying on her intelligence and bravery. The gang of robbers, mistaking her for *Maa Kali*, prostrated at her feet and left without committing any robbery.

“A Thrilling Story” is a tale of the jungles of Assam. An English gentleman was driving in a car. Suddenly the horse senses the existence of the tiger and starts running. The tiger came and attacked the horse, and the Englishman got down from the car and tried to escape to safety. Sometimes he walks, sometimes runs, and sometimes crawls. He is overcome with psychological fear. The author has beautifully highlighted his mental state, “Often he fancied he heard an animal in pursuit of him, or he would imagine he was about to meet one coming through the jungle towards him. He pressed on as fast as he could, sometimes crawling and sometimes walking”(93). Anyway, he finally managed to get to a safe haven.

We know a lot about Gautama Buddha. He was the earthly Buddha. We do not know much about his wife Yashodara. What happened to her after Siddhartha left her? Suniti Devi sheds light on the unknown chapter of Yashodara's life in *Yashodara: Wife and Disciple of the Lord Buddha*. It is a tragic story, but also a story of awakening, joy and contentment. But how does this transformation happen and how does Yashoda find his true path? Princess Yashodara accepted Lord Buddha as her savior and became his most devoted follower. Her great love as a wife is glorified. Yashodara shines throughout the ages as a perfect wife, mother, and nun.

With some beautiful illustrations, Devi enlightens us about princess Yashodara, her early sorrowful life, her difficult realization and the final path to Nirvana. The book also contains stories of Gautama Buddha and Yashodara, and some other characters related to them. In the preface of the book, Suniti Devi mentions about the purpose and source of this book, “In placing this short life of the Buddhist Princess Yashodara before the public I must plead for leniency for any shortcomings. My one aim in the book has been to form a vivid word picture of a Princess born in the purple of royalty and married to the heir of a great

kingdom who became a saint...The works of the standard authorities on Buddhism have been of great service and have been freely quoted” (vii).

Gautama Siddhartha, the prince of Kapilavastu, was born in the midst of luxury and wealth. He was never aware of the world outside his own little luxurious world. He married Yashodara, the princess of the fairy tale world, and to Yashodara a son, Rahul, was born. The charm of those days was like music to their souls, and each day was full of beauty and sweetness, “I am proud of my love for my lord, and my face is but the mirror of my happiness. Does the river hide itself, or does the moon cover itself? Do they not both reflect the sun in their brightness? My beloved husband is my sun, and I reflect in my face his love for me”(18)

But this world of tranquility was shattered by the harsh realities of life outside. The harsh realities of the outside world disturb Siddhartha’s peace of mind. The restless Siddhartha became a traveler in search of a new path, and left Yashodara to set out for his desired goal. She was stricken with separation and grief as their love life fell apart, “I want him alone. Oh, Surama, oh, Ganga, call him, bring him, send for him; I cannot live without him” (30)!

After many years Siddhartha returned with full knowledge making him Lord Buddha. Many people accepted his teachings and became disciples. Many have reached the higher paths and attained bodhisattva. Yashodara herself joined Buddha, preached his words and followed the path of a nun. Her own life became devoted to the Buddhist path and when her time came, she passed to *Nirvana*, “They gathered round her in reverence, and presently noticed that she had ceased to breathe, and they knew that her sweet soul had fled to Nirvana, to wait there for her lord and master Gautama Buddha”(48).

Suniti Devi's *Nine Ideal Indian Women* is written on the morals and values of our culture. The book contains the stories of nine ideal Indian women - Sita, Shakuntala, Sati,

Savitri, Suniti, Pramila, Uttara, Shaivya, Damayanti. From this book we can learn about their joys and struggles, wishes and conflicts, traditions and decisions, their dignity and integrity. *Indian Fairy Tales* is primarily a fairy tale work, while *The Beautiful Mogal Princes* is written for children's entertainment.

In British India, hunting was a hobby of Indian kings and a display of gallantry. The names of kings of Cooch Behar will be written in golden letters in the glorious history of hunting in India at that time. The Koch kings of Cooch Behar were skilled hunters. Nripendra Narayan is the foremost among them to be mentioned. Nripendra Narayan was the renaissance man of the Koch state. He is considered as the father of modern Cooch Behar as a well-educated and tasteful king. A favorite of Queen Victoria, he received a formal education and martial arts in England. On the other hand, he married Suniti Devi, the daughter of Brahmo Samaj movement leader Keshav Chandra Sen.

He took the small native state of Cooch Behar to a prominent place on the map of India. He was a skilled horseman. His arsenal consisted of about thirty seven types of domestic and foreign guns, the details of which we find in a story, "I BEGAN shooting in the days of muzzle-loaders, and have, during my time, tried almost every variety of weapon, from a 4-bore double-barrelled rifle firing 15 drams of black powder to the smallest bore modern up-to- date cordite rifle. For big game shooting off howdahs, the ideal battery for a sportsman of limited means in the present period when cordite rifles have been brought to such perfection is a '465 or 500 express firing 70 grain or more cordite and a combined ball and shot gun like Holland's Paradox or Westley Richard's Explora.' The 465 cordite is powerful 4 enough to kill an Elephant, and can also be used with smaller charges for Carnivora, Deer and Pig" (459).

He used to write down the details of the hunt in his diary. In 1911, that diary was published in book form, *Thirty-Seven Years of Big Game Shooting in Cooch Behar, The*

Dooars, And Assam : A Rough Diary. The book is divided into twenty nine chapters and spans over four hundred sixty one pages. Apart from all the detailed descriptions of the hunting stories, this book contains many old maps and some rare photographs. He was recognized in the forests of Cooch Behar and the foothills of the Himalayas. Thin Khawa, Takumari, Rasik Bill, Daldali, Chachachka, Mahakal Ghudri, Zorai, Tiamari etc. were his hunting grounds. In his confessional story, there are stories of various thrilling hunts spanning twenty seven years from 1871 to 1907. Many English gentlemen also used to accompany him. For example, in 1904, Lord Curzon came to Jaldapara on the invitation of Nripendra Narayan. Nirpendra Narayan's hunting story is not only literature but also an important document of regional historiography.

Much is known about the history and geography of the then state of Cooch Behar from the story of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan's hunting. Although primarily a hunting story, this book is of immense historical value. While narrating the story of the hunt, he presents a lot of information about Cooch Behar and the surrounding region. All the details of the areas where the huntings were organized, description of the hunting methods, statistics of the various animals hunted are given here. The area of the state is about 1,300 square miles, a flat area which forms a roughly triangular shape covered in twinning of rivers, canals and wetlands. There are no mountains and no large water bodies. Sal-tree forests were scattered in different areas. Dense herbaceous forests and reed forests were found, especially in the northern and northeastern parts of the state bordering Assam and Bhutan.

The Maharaja has written about the human settlement in the villages in Cooch Behar at that time. Apart from the forests, the remaining plains were agricultural fields. Farmers or *jotdars* used to settle within their agricultural land. Houses were built with bamboo or wood. There was also a flat house. This type of settlement was a feature of village Bengal at that time. As regards the people, there is one important difference between Cooch

Behar and other parts of India. This is due to the laws of land tenure, for the whole state is divided into small farms, and here the farmer has his home, with his nearest relations and occasionally a tenant or two. All the buildings are encircled by groves of plantain, bamboo and other quick-growing trees, and these homesteads form one of the principal features of the country (xxv).

Discussing Nipendra Narayan's Shikar story from a postcolonial perspective shows that the relationship between the native king and the British Raj centered on *shikar* is largely a matter of power politics. Bringing indigenous monarchs under the umbrella of hunting is a form of colonial rule. The British rulers succeeded in inculcating a kind of nobility among the native kings by accustoming them to the debauchery. As a result, they got all the support from the native kings to stabilize their colony.

A Princess Remembers, the autobiography of Gayatri Devi, Maharani of Jaipur and Princess of Cooch Behar, presents before the reader the unknown aspects of the life of one of the most beautiful women in the world, the glorious period of various Indian native states and their lost glory after independence. In the preface of the autobiography, the content is beautifully presented, “*A Princess Remembers* presents an intimate look at the extraordinary life of one of the world's most fascinating women, and an informal history of the princely states of India from the height of the princes' power to their present state of de-recognition” (5).

The autobiography is divided into four parts. The first chapter contains the visit to Baroda, the marriage of his parents, the children of the new Maharaja, the family life in Cooch Behar, the duties and pleasures of the king, the trip to England, and Calcutta, the story of the Maharaja of Jaipur, etc. The second chapter contains the marriage talk of Gayatri Devi, the palace life in Jaipur, the Rajpramukh of Rajasthan. The third chapter contains the details of the new government of India, independent parties, campaigning for elections, election of

members of Parliament etc. The fourth chapter contains the Emergency, Tihar Jail, Maharani's life in post emergency etc.

The autobiography opens with a description of the lavish lifestyles of the Indian royal family—the joyous celebration of festivals, foreign travel, hobby, and deer drives, lavish leisure activities. There is a description of the royal lifestyle. She even recorded the details of the Cooch Behar palace in her autobiography, “The palace was a blend of styles, partly Victorian, partly traditional Indian. There were courtyards with pools surrounded by ferns and palms. Persian carpets flowed down interminable corridors. The halls were filled with displays of shields and swords. The sitting-rooms were furnished with French furniture, with photographs in silver frames, with ornaments and knick-knacks on occasional tables. The palace also contained a gymnasium and a dispensary. Two doctors were permanently in residence, and one of them used to travel” (54).

Gayatri Devi's Autobiography shows a mastery in the presentation of the subject for which the reader eagerly waits for the outcome from the beginning till the end. In this autobiography we find the much talk about love story of his father Jitendra Narayan and mother Indira Devi. She wrote in detail about the relationship between the other members of the royal family. The members of the royal family were much more progressive than those times. Not only were they well-known among other native states, they also had good relations with the British. She candidly admits that her life was greatly influenced by mother Indira Devi and brother Indrajit. She mentions in detail her romantic love story with Raja Jai Singh of Jaipur.

The practice of English literature within the royal court of Cooch Behar was far more than a passive adoption of colonial culture. Under the leadership of rulers like Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and Maharani Suniti Devi, the princely state got transformed into an intellectual hub. This engagement with the English language provided a global platform to

reclaim a distorted heritage. For the royalty of Cooch Behar, literature became a tool to reassert that India is an ancient land full of spirituality. Writing in English, the Maharani proudly affirms, “In old history of India unselfish love was given to one and all, and the crown of India was love. We are lucky indeed to be the children of such a country... I am so proud of being an Indian” (118). The legacy of Cooch Behar actively reshaped the contours of modern education, nationalism, and literary cosmopolitanism.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of all the authors, declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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