SYNERGY AND CONTRADICTION BETWEEN MODERNITY AND CULTURE-THE PRINCELY STATE OF COOCH BEHAR IN PERSPECTIVE (1773-1950)

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ABSTRACT
The term ‘modernity’ is a derivative of the word modern which characterises the present or the immediate past. Modernity, in general either focuses on ‘already changed past’ or the changes likely to take place in future. Modernity becomes contentious because it can bring oppression vis-à-vis liberation. Among many modernity is progress, and to many others it is a betrayal against tradition. So, how would we perceive modernity that evokes continuous debates among the social scientists? First of all we experience modernity as change. Modernity happens through what some believe is a process of social or cultural change. This change can be an improvement or decline. The cultural change has more to do with tradition and changing the culture and the way it runs. To change a culture into more of modern way, we normally lose much of the tradition that came with the culture from long ago. Contextualisation of culture in the framework of modernity thus demands serious interrogation because more than often it creates a conflicting scenario within the society, among the different stratum of the society.

Thus “Culture” appears to encompass two spaces: one defined by anthropology or the study of human activity its culture and society and the other defined by aesthetics or the study of art. Culture therefore is being imputed with some loaded meanings that i) culture cannot be passed without effort and ii) culture cannot be borrowed without change. But the post modern scenario appears to be different. The present day culture furnishes a new element in the metamorphosis of culture in a new direction and understanding of the new culture or popular culture suggests an understanding of the new dimension of the social history.

The theoretical position can be somewhat exemplified in my micro level study of Princely State of Cooch Behar. This paper unearths the archaeology of a complex cultural crisis at a micro level analysis of Cooch Behar State. Before the colonial cultural penetration in the Cooch Behar State there was no cultural dichotomy between the Cooch Behar Royal family and the Cooch Behar mass. But after the colonial cultural penetration there was a drastic change in the whole cultural scenario. Aesthetic culture replaced the anthropological culture. Understandably Cooch Behar culture lost its mass character. As a result two parallel cultural crises originated- one is among the members of the royal family itself and among the mass of the Cooch Behar State. The members of the royal family became the cultural construct of the colonial authority. On the other hand the common
people were also in a crisis. The subverted identity of the rulers led the process of its de-iconization amongst the mass.

**KEY WORDS:** contradiction, modernity, culture.

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