

## Social Identity of the Zamindars of Rajshahi

### a. Social and Ethnic Composition of the Zamindars

Zamindars of different stature and religious faiths held Zamindarics in Rajshahi. Many of the Zamindars received the titles of *Raja*, *Maharaja*, *Ray Bahadur* and *Choudhury* as a mark of their recognition in lieu of their loyalty and obedience to the central authority - at first to the Mughals and then to the British. Again many small Zamindars could not gain any title. It can be noticed from the tradition that Zamindars were identified with Zamindars irrespective of having any title as such and their activities and obligations were the same. Their relation with the subjects however, remained unchanged.

In the present work there is a humble attempt to present fourteen families of Zamindars. It is found that out of fourteen families eight families were of Varendra Brahmin, one family was Vedic Brahmin while another was Kayestha and the rest were from the *Tili* and *Sudra* origin. There was also a family of the cowherd and the last one under consideration was a Muslim family. Beside these, one may come across other Zamindar families some of whom bore the family title *Talukdar*. (Owner of a *Taluk* or a few tracts of land)

Out of the Brahmin families two families came to the limelight of history. One of them which was identified within Varendra origin had the credit of founding the Raj family of Tahirpur. In fact this is the most oldest one amongst all the Brahmin families. Bishi family of Joari was of Vedic Brahmin group. The Zamindar family of Karachmaria belonged to Kayestha origin. The Zamindar family established in Dighapatia belonged to *Tili* community. The Raj family of Dubalhati was that of

the Sudra origin and by far the oldest of all under consideration. Being the Hindus of lower caste, the Zamindars of this family (i.e., Dubalhati) could not exert much influence over other Rajas and Zamindars. Darikushi Zamindar family also belonged to lower

The dynasties or the families which developed in Puthia, Natore Chougram, Baihar, Kashimpur (of the Lahiris), Chamrai were equally remarkable and played significant role in the socio-political life of the region.

Caste Hindu family. Khan Choudhury Zamindar family of Natore was the only Zamindar family that belonged to the Muslim community.

There was a devoted Brahmin named Shashadhar Pathak. He was well versed in Hindu *Shastras* and astronomy. Shashadhar Pathak had only one son named Batsacharya. Batsacharya was very pious even from his boyhood and he was devoted to the practice of *Yoga* (meditation). His knowledge on astronomy made him very famous during his lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

Batsacharya, in the later part of his life, lived in his own house as a *sanyasi* (saint). When the Jaigirdar of Laskarpur revolted, the Mughul Emperor sent his general with army to suppress the rebellion. The general met Batsacharya who told him the means of suppressing the rebellion. After winning the fight the general wanted to offer Batsacharya some landed property. When Batsacharya refused to take it, the general gave Zamindary to his son Pitambar.<sup>2</sup> A question arises here – as to the social position of Laskar Khan, the Jaigirdar of Laskarpur Pargana. Kalinath Choudhury the author of the famous research work *Rajshahir Sangkshipta Itihas* (*A Short History of Rajshahi*) has commenced that when childless Laskar Khan died, the property was given to Batsacharya.<sup>2a</sup> According to another source, the property was forfeited for the rebellion of Laskar Khan.<sup>2b</sup>

On the basic of the above information it may be assumed that the property of the rebel Jaigirdar would be forfeited and the forfeited Zamindari would be settled to other person. Here the difference of opinion runs as: whether the first Raja of Puthia was Batsacharya or his son Pitambar. Bimalacharan Moitra, another scholar on this regional history, however, argues in favour of counting Pitambar as the first Zamindar of Puthia.<sup>3</sup> Whoever might be the first Zamindar (sometimes called Raja) he gained it by dint of the deed of Batsacharya, and this point deserves a tittle elaboration.

The Rajas of Puthia who belonged to the Varendra Brahmin origin had much devotion to Hindu religion. The subsequent Rajas of this family were given the title of Thakur - the highest title of the Brahmin caste.<sup>4</sup> The subsequent Rajas of this family used the title 'Thakur'.

In the field of religion, most of the Zamindars or Rajas of this family had influence over the other Rajas or Zamindars. In various worships of gods and goddesses, they contributed money without any hesitation and they built many temples for worship of various Hindu deities. The house god of this family was an idol named "*Gavindaji*".

"*Gavinda Jayoti*"- the victory of Gavindaji was used to be written on the top of the ledgers of accounts and on the papers of administration.<sup>5</sup> The mention of a large number of examples of their contributions in the field of education and culture has been quoted in different sources.

The position of the Raja of this family was partly degraded because of marrying Lilabati, the bride of Santal Raj family of Pabna.<sup>6</sup> Though they belonged to a Brahmin family, the people of different colours were involved in their administrative works.

It may specially be mentioned here that a *vaidya* (Physician practising *Ayurveda*) named Ishan Chandra imparted education to Maharani Sharatsundari. Many

examples are there as to the humanitarian works of the family. As like as the Raja of Puthia, Ramjivan's father Kamdev Moitra, the founder of Natore Raj family was a devoted Brahmin.<sup>7</sup> He also belonged to the Varendra Brahmin family. He lived in the village Amhati near Natore. He had no property excepting a few thatched houses and a small plot of land. He was the *Tahsildar* of Baruihati within the jurisdiction of the Raja of Puthia.<sup>8</sup> It is found from some sources that he started his professional career as a clergy man. Here a confusions arises as to whether he started his career as a *Tahsildar* or a clergy. The matter still remains under dispute.

Because of his poverty, he ran into debts. For the purpose of seeking their employment, he sent his sons to Puthia. Raghunandan and Ramjiban started their professional career as the detectors of lineage of the Raja of Puthia.<sup>9</sup> By dint of honesty and competence they gained the favour of the Raja and acquired learning. Later on they went to Dhaka and thereafter to Murshidabad as the lawyers of the Raja of Puthia. For his efficiency and satisfactory works, Raghunandan in a short period of time gained the favour of Murshid Kuli Khan, the then Nawab of Bengal, as a higher officer who appointed him in the Revenue Department. Perhaps this record has led some scholars to conclude that the Natore Raj family was founded by the grace of Murshid Kuli Khan.<sup>10</sup> By the influence of Raghunandan's service in the Revenue Department, he used to settle the Zamindaris of other Zamindars to his brother Ramjivan when they were held in auction for non-payment of rent. In this way the Zamindari of Natore Raj family gradually became one of the greatest Zamindar families of the then Bengal.<sup>11</sup>

It is worth mentioning that almost all the Zamindars of the Brahmin families had special contribution for the sake or religion. Rani Bhavani, for example, built many temples in Baranagar, Benaras and Kashidham.<sup>11a</sup> Rani Bhavani of this family gave away a lot of *Brahmattar land* (rent free land given away to Brahmins) to the

Brahmins. Raja Ramkrishna of this family was a saint. He was always busy with religious worship. Raja Viswanath of this family was turned into a devout *vaishnava* from his allegiance of Shaktaism.<sup>12</sup> The other Rajas continued their previous faith of Shakti Dharma, Biswanath had nine wives.<sup>13</sup> It may be guessed from it that he was a pleasure - loving Zamindar. This family had kinship with different Raj families of Varendra. Though they were Brahmins, many people of other castes enjoyed higher posts in the administration. It is specially noted in this connection that Dayaram belonging to a Tili community was the *Dewan* of the Natore Raj.

Among the greatest Raj families of Rajshahi, the family of Dighapatia is remarkable one. Dayaram Ray, the founder of this family, belonged to Tili community.<sup>14</sup> He started his professional career as a humble servant of a poor salary of 8 *annas* (half of one rupee) only under the Raja of Natore. By dint of his own competence and perseverance, the *Dewan* of Natore Raj was able to establish another Raj family. When Sitaram, the Raja of Jessore was rebellious, he joined the army of the Nawab as the representative of the Raja of Natore to subdue Sitaram and defeated Sitaram. As a reward he got some landed property of Dighapatia and lease of Noakhila Pargana from the Raja of Natore and got the title of *Ray-e-Rayen* from the Nawab of Bengal.<sup>15</sup> Dighapatia Raj family, founded by Dayaram Ray, in course of time emerged as the leading Raj family of Rajshahi. This Raj family played an important role in the field of development of Rajshahi. The Rajas of this family were more educated than the Rajas of other Raj families of Rajshahi. Their huge contributions in the field of religion and religious life of the subjects in general are noteworthy. After the defeat of Sitaram, he brought the idol of "Krishnajee" to Dighapatia, established the idol there and built a temple there.<sup>16</sup> As the Raja of Puthia had family idol namely Govindaji likewise the Raja of Dighapatia had family idol called "Krishnaji". Though the Rajas of Dighapatia belonged to Tili community, they had a great respect for the Brahmins. For the maintenance of the Brahmins,

Dayaram gave away huge *Brahmattar* land in their services. Beside this he also donated a lot of *Brahmattar* land for various religious functions.<sup>17</sup> This family had contribution not only in the field of religion but also in terms of education. They contributed huge amount of money to Rajshahi College. Beside this they patronised in various forms the P.N. Girls High School, Sabitri Girls High School, Basanta Kumari Agricultural College and a few other institutions.<sup>17a</sup> In the field of religion too, they were very generous. In those days the division in the society on caste question was very strong. Raja Sarat Kumar Roy of this family, overcoming all the barriers of differences, engaged a few Muslims and a cobbler as his cook.<sup>18</sup> The Zamindar of Karachmaria was Kayestha by caste. But the Raja of Dighapatia appointed him to a higher post. It is known from a source that most of the Zamindars of this family were highly educated in comparison with other Zamindars of Rajshahi. Though the founder of this family started his professional career as a humble servant, this family acquired the dignity of the greatest Zamindar family of Rajshahi. It is evident that when the property of the Raja of Natore was being sold by auction, the Raja of Dighapatia was extending the area of his Zamindari. It may be taken for granted that their position was recognised due to the honesty, integrity and service to the subjects at large.

Susen was the progenitor of the Tahirpur Raj family. The Rajas of this family were Brahmins by caste belonging to *Kasyapagotra* and their family title was Bhaduri.<sup>19</sup> The ancestors of this family were always busy with religious work. Unlike his forefathers Kamdev Bhatt was not so interested in religion, philosophy and literature. He became expert in wrestling, sword fighting and shooting even from his tender age.<sup>20</sup> Tahirpur Raj family was founded in the 15th century. The founder of this family was Kamdev Bhatta.

The Tahirpur estate was assigned by the *Mughals* by uprooting one *Pathan* Jaigirdar named by Tahir Khan.<sup>21</sup> It is found in this case also that a *Pathan* Jaigirdar

was deprived and Tahirpur estate was settled by Kamdev Bhatta as in the case of the Raja of Puthia who was given a estate by depositing a Pathan Jaigirdar.<sup>21a</sup> It appears that Pathan rule was effective in this region before the *Mughal* rule. This Brahmin family of Varendra contributed sufficiently in the field of religion. Raja Kansa Narayan of this family spent about nine lakh rupees for the worship of Devi Durga.<sup>22</sup> At that time Ramesh Shastri was the family priest or the head priest of the Raja. Later on the system of worship introduced by him was followed in the worship of Durga throughout Bengal.<sup>23</sup> It may be noted that there was remarkable influence of the Rajas of Tahirpur over the Zamindars of Varendra. They had kinship with the Zamindars of Chougram and those of Natore Raj. Though their Zamindari was not so extensive their position in the field of religion and the dignity of their family was high.

In respect of aristocracy, Chougram Raj family is held in high esteem (like Puthia, Natore, Tahirpur etc.) in the Varendra Brahmin society. The two great grand sons of Jagananda Ray were Panchu Ray and Bhuvan Ray. Rasik Ray, the son of Panchu Roy was the founder of Chougram Raj family.<sup>24</sup> Rasik Ray, in exchange of allowing his son Ramakanta to be the adopted son of Ramjiban, got the Pargana of Chougram (Present Natore district) and Islamabad of Rangpur.<sup>25</sup> Because of aristocracy and kinship between Tahipur Raj family and Natore Raj family, they had sufficient influence over Varendra Brahmin society. Besides establishing a school at Chougram, they contributed money for the development of Rajshahi town as a whole. It can this be concluded that this family had an aristocratic position long before the time of their recognition as Zamindars.

The Zamindar of Balihar was another remarkable family of the region. The Rajas of this family were Varendra Brahmins and the family title was Sanyal.<sup>26</sup> The progenitor of the family Dharadhar Sharma, a reputed scholar and a pious Hindu

belonged to the *Vatsa gotra* of the village Sanjibani somewhere of erstwhile Balihar (the village has yet not been identified. The founder of the Balihar Raj family was Nih Singha Chakravarty. He came from the family of one Ananta and he was the grandson of Ananta. He came from Vikrampur, Dhaka to Balihar and married a daughter of a Khan Zamindar and got landed property from the estate of his father-in-law. He got the title of Sanyal.<sup>27</sup> They had marital relation with the Zamindars of Natore. Ramakanta Sanyal of this family got the title of 'Ray' for the first time.<sup>28</sup> Krishnendu Ray, a member and one of the masters of this family was a great administrator. He made a remarkable contribution to literature side by side with his religious activities. He established educational institutions in his own estate and contributed money to the Rajshahi College. He founded a printing press called "*Sharadindu Press*". Books were printed in this press and were distributed among the common people free of cost.<sup>29</sup>

The Bishi family of Joari was an outstanding one for many reasons. The Vedic Brahmins of Vashistha gotra of Joari were very famous. The *Pipariya Ojha* (Bishi) as they were called, belonged to *sandilya gotra*. The progenitor of this family was a courtier of Emperor Akbar and a judge of Hindu *Dayabhaga* Law. He was a great scholar of grammar, *Smriti*, *Veda*, the six philosophies, astronomy and scriptures.<sup>30</sup>

The two brothers Ramahari and Gangahari, the descendants of the Pipariya Ojha lived in Paraidingi (not identified). Talpe Chapila was an important area during the reign of Murshid Kulikhan. Gangahari was appointed an employee of the Chapila court. During the period of his service, he married a bride of Majumdar family living near Joari.<sup>31</sup> He became the owner of the whole property of his father-in-law as the later had no male issue. The Zamindari of Bishi family of Joari was flourishing since the tenure of Darpanarayan, the great grandson of Gangahari. This family had much fame in the field of education. Pramathanath Bishi of this family was a famous writer and essayist of Bengali literature.<sup>32</sup>

The Raj family of Dubalhati is one of the oldest Zamindar families of Rajshahi.<sup>33</sup> Jagatram Roy, the founder of this family was a rich merchant belonging to *Shuli caste* of the Hindu community. He lived at Jageswarpur in the district of Murshidabad. He came to Dubalhati for commercial purpose and settled there. According to a source, it appears that Jagatram was the founder of this family.<sup>34</sup> The names of 44 successive descendants next to Jagatram can not be ascertained but members of this family from the 45th descendant are available. There is again confusion and doubt whether Jagatram as it is believed had the credit to be the founder of the family. Tulsiram Ray Choudhury was the 45th member according to the Chronology and in this situation it may be relevant to note that the Zamindari of this family started with Tulsiram Ray Choudhury. The title of Raja was conferred on many Zamindars of this family. Thus it may be concluded that because of being the Zamindars of low Hindu caste, the Zamindars of this family did not have much influence over other Zamindars of the contemporary Bengal. Many contributions of the Rajas of this family towards education and culture have been recorded in the contemporary documents. A great peasant movement had taken place in 1873 and the main issue was against imposition of heavy taxation the peasants of the region.<sup>35</sup> The reigning Zamindar at that time was, however, Raja Haranath. As a result of this rebellion, the collection of excessive rent was stopped. The record of the hospitality to the guests and relatives of this family is proverbial. Almost all the Zamindars were concerned about rendering service to the guests and they are said to have not made distinction of religion and caste.<sup>36</sup>

The Ray Bahadur family of Kashimpur was equally a distinguished family. This family consisted of aristocrat Brahmins.<sup>37</sup> The greatest Zamindar of this family was Girish Chandra Lahiri (Ray Bahadur). He was a writer and his achievements are associated with the writing of the biography of Maharani Saratkumari of Puthia. Their contribution for the progress of education and literature are still known to

their posterity. This family became famous by rendering welfare activities to the subjects at large. The honourable Governor Sir George Campbell conferred on Girish Chandra Lahiri the title of “*Ray Bahadur*”.<sup>38</sup> He married off his five daughters to the bride grooms of the aristocratic families of Nirabil, Rohila, Bhusana etc. and thus enhanced his social prestige in the society. Like his father, Kedar Prasanna Lahiri, the son of Girish Chandra Lahiri also received the title of “*Ray Bahadur*” by the British Govt.<sup>39</sup>

The Bagchis of Chamari were Brahmin by birth. The Zamindari of this family was very small. They were much concerned about religious activities. The family god of Bagchi family was “Sri Sri Gopal Narayan”. Beside the daily worship of Gopal Narayan, they spent money liberally during the *Dolejatra* and the Durgapuja. During the season of Basanti puja, they used to spend a lot of money on this occasion. Ramendra Nath Bagchi of this family established a school in Chamari.<sup>40</sup>

A milkman named Rajkishore Sanyal of Darikushi village received a few *bighas* of land from the Raja of Natore as a help for the maintenance of his cows.<sup>41</sup> He established himself as a Zamindar by occupying some landed property by force. He also acquired some lands by cash. Like all other Zamindars, they also took part in various religious activities. They arranged songs, music and *jatra* (drama) during the worship of goddess Kali.<sup>42</sup>

Thus although the founder of the family started his career as merely a milkman, the members of the family gradually became Zamindar by virtue of their talent and as pirations.<sup>43</sup>

Nimai Chand Sarkar was the founder of Karachmaria Zamindar family.<sup>44</sup> He carried on mortgage business and became the owner of huge amount of ready money. With such a cash he purchased the estate of Ray family of Kalyanpur. After the

death of Nimai Chand Sarkar in 1850, his son Ramkumar Sarkar established the Zamindari of Karackmaria. Again after the death of Ramkumar in 1857, Rajkumar Sarkar assumed the Zamindari. He looked after not only his own Zamindari estate but also the management of the estate of Dighapatia. He had been the manager of this Zamindari for a long time.<sup>45</sup>

The Zamindars of Karachmaria were Kayestha by caste. Raj Kumar Sarkar, later on adopted *Vaishnava Dharma* (religion).<sup>46</sup> Viswanath of Natore Raj family also gave up Shakti Dharma and adopted unfaith of Vaishnavism. As the two Zamindars of neighbouring estates adopted Vaishnavism, it may be assumed that Vaishnavism was one of popular and flourishing faiths at that time. Raj Kumar Sarkar was broad-minded in respect of religion. Though he was a Vaishnav himself, he was nominated a member of the Trustee of the “Original Brahma Society”.<sup>47</sup>

Though the members of this family could not earn much fame as Zamindars, they are famous in the field of education and culture of Bengal nay of the Indian subcontinent. Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar, the famous historian was a member of this family.

Muhammad Azam Khan, the progenitor of Natore Chaudhury family came of Afgan Yusufzai family. He was originally from Afghanistan. Coming from his homeland he settled in Burdwan. Muhammad Zaman Khan, the son of Muhammad Azam Khan came to Natore as the Nazim of Natore Sadar Court during the reign of the East India Company in the later part of 18th Century.<sup>48</sup> He saved a lot of money by doing his service. He established his Zamindari at Nazirpur of (Gurudaspur Police station). Muhammad Zaman Khan was the founder of the Choudhury family of Natore.<sup>49</sup> After the death of Zaman Khan, his son Dost Muhammad Khan purchased the *mahals* of Kholabaria, Pipru!, Kalam etc. by his savings. The contribution of this family to the field of education is proverbial. Abdur Rashid

Khan of this family established Anglo Persian School at Natore. Many reputed sons of this family were connected with politics.<sup>50</sup>

Discussing the administration of every Zamindar family it is found that men of all colours and faiths were associated with the administrative set-up. Because of the Brahmins having sufficient influence over the society and being educated they had the credit of establishing huge number of Zamindars.

### **b. Socio-political Tensions and the Zamindars of Rajshahi**

As we have stated a considerable number of new Zamindars were created during the reign of Nawab Murshid Kuli Khan<sup>51</sup>. In course of time they were involved in the administration of Bengal-nay the political activities of the them Bengal. During the period of Murshid Kuli Khan and Alivardi Khan they could not much interfere in the administration. After the death of Alivardi his grandson Siraj-ud-dullah became the Nawab of Bengal. Ghasetti Begum his aunt (the wife of the Nawab of Dhaka) and his cousin Saukat Jung, by no means, could accept Siraj as the Nawab of Bengal. They formed an anti Siraj coterie and hatched a conspiracy against Siraj. Some high officials and Zamindars were also involved in this plot. It was not possible on their part to dethrone Siraj and so they secretly made adherence with the British East India Company. It may be noted that though Alivardi Khan with his firm determination was successful in controlling the aristocratic, he could not assure favourable circumstances to continue for his grandson Siraj-ud-dullah. Actually these aristocratic Zamindars later on hastened the battle of Plassey and it may be concluded that this sort of treachery and lack of farsightedness had pored the way for the from was the victory and rise of the British in India<sup>52</sup>. It is known from a source that Raja Krishna Chandra of Nadia made alliance with the English and plotted against Siraj. It was sole aim of Maharaja Krishana Chandra to dethrone Siraj. After the victory of the battle of Plassey Lord Clive as a token of gratitude,

conferred on him (Krishna Chandra) the title of Rajandra Bahadur from Delhi and presented him 12 cannons which had been used at the battle of Plassey.<sup>53</sup>

Maharani Bhavani, of Natore requested the other **Rajas** of Bengal not to help the English at the battle of Plassey. Rani Bhavani presumed that Bengal and its people would suffer a lot if the English came into power.<sup>54</sup> She sent troops in order to help the Nawab. But the battle ended before the soldiers arrived.<sup>55</sup> Unlike Rani Bhavani, Tilak Chand, the Zamindar of Burdwan and Asaduzzaman of Birbhum did not join the battle of Plassey.<sup>56</sup>

No evidence is, however, available as to whether any other Raja or Zamindar of Rajshahi joined in favour of the English or Nawab in the battle of Plassey. It is likely that other Zamindaris (estates) were smaller than that of Rani Bhavani and because of their position they were least concerned about the then Politics of Bengal.

The English became victorious at the battle of Plassey and consequently, it may be noted that change came over in political life of the country. Soldiers of Nawab who lost their service, had grouped themselves as the Fakirs and *Sannyasis* who revolted against the English immediately after the Plassey (1757). Later on many cultivators also joined this revolt. Governor General Waren Hastings ascribed the revolt of the cultivators as Sannasi revolt.<sup>57</sup> A rebellion took place in the year 1763 against the exploitation of the English, Zamindars, landlords and so on. This challenge to the British authority in Bengal continued roughly from 1763 to 1800 A.D.<sup>58</sup> Various types of facilities were given to the *Fakirs* during the rule of Shah Suja, the Subahdar of Bengal in 1759. Pieces of fallow land were given to the *Fakirs* in the different regions. Fakirs of this privileged class lost their facilities during the policy of the British. So they started plundering the stored corns of the British and their associate Zamindars. As a result, the situation of law and order deteriorated very much. The local cultivators assisted the Fakirs in the act of

plundering. Their number rose up to 50 (fifty) thousand.<sup>59</sup> The Fakirs attacked the Rampur - Boalia (Rajshahi) *Kuthi* (stote house) and kidnapped Mr. Renate and later on killed him next year, i.e., in 1764 Rampur-Boalia *Kuthi* was plundered. Within a few days they spread their influence throughout the whole of North Bengal.<sup>60</sup> In this circumstances the English killed 150 Fakirs. Rani Bhavani, the Zamindar of Natore did not take much steps to stop the activities of the Fakirs. Even she did not assist the company to suppress the Fakirs. So it is presumed that Fakirs had much confidence on Rani Bhabani. Her relation can be guessed from a letter of Majnu Shah, the leader of the Fakir who wrote "we have for a long time begged and been entertained in Bengal and we have long continued to worship God at the several shrines and altars without ever once abusing or oppressing anyone. Nevertheless last year 150 Fakirs were without cause put to death. They had begged in different countries and the cloths and victuals which they had with them were lost. The merit which is derived and the reputation which is procured from the murder of helpless and indigent need not be declared. Formerly the Fakirs begged in separate and detached parties but now we are all collected and beg together. Displaced at this method they (English) obstruct us in visiting the shrines and other places - this is unreasonable. You are the ruler of the country, we are Fakirs who pray always for your welfare. We are full of hopes"<sup>61</sup> It is easily presumed that the leaders of the Fakir had much confidence on the Maharani Bahvani. Simultaneously in 1780 the Fakirs demanded Rs.50,000.00 from Sri Krishna Choudhury, the Zamindar of Karai, (Bogra district) and they also declared that if they did not get the said many they would plunder his house. Zamindar Sri Rrishna Choudhury fled with his family to the eastern side of the Brahamoputra.<sup>62</sup> Under the leadership of Majnu Shah, the rebels Revolutionists plundered the wealth of the rich oppressor and the British followers of the region of Natore.<sup>63</sup> At the end of the March, 1787 they entered Rajshahi and attacked the Borkendas, Piadas, of Rani Bhavani and the

men of Rani Bhavin were defeated.<sup>64</sup> Bimal Prasad Roy et. el. wrote in the *Natore Katha O Kahini*, a famous document on the Fakir rebellion, that – “They had no intention to do the least harm to the Rajas of Natore. Their target of attack was those Rajas and followers who got the favour and support of the English<sup>65</sup> from another source we come to know, “A pitched battle took place between the army of Rani Bhavani and the Fakris, but Rani Bhabani had no interest in this battle. At that time the East India Company engaged some police and *barkandaj bahini* under the disposal of the Zamindars and most probably Rani Bhavani only used the *barkandaj bahini* under the guidance of the Company.<sup>66</sup> It this may be taken for granted that some insignificant battles took place between the Zamindars of Rajshahi and Fakirs but no fatal incident took place. The English Kuthi of Rajshahi was plundered but no evidence is found that any Zamindar house was looted. But the Zamindar of Karai of Bogra had to leave his house. The letter of Fakirs to Rani Bhavani reveals that the Fakirs had much regards for Rani Bhavani.

The stories of the oppressions of the English of *Neel kuthi* are very well known in the history of Bengal. They oppressed the peasants of Bengal in different forms. The demand of *Neel* (Indigo) increased in England, consequently many Europeans came here to carry on business of indigo. Besides, many service holders of the company started to deal in indigo as it was a profitable business. The indigo planter who were British by birth and origin began to pay advance money to the cultivators. But the cultivators conceived were not in a position to pay back the money once they had received it previously. So farmers were compelled to cultivate indigo on the following years until they could repay their advance money.

From generation to generation they were compelled to cultivate (indigo) until they could repay their debts. The indigo producers were forced to sell their products to the British the indigo planters at the half or one third price of the actual market

price.<sup>67</sup> The financial condition of the farmers were very much effected due to the cultivation of the (indigo) their families were also victims as their daughters and sons had to work throughout the whole night at the indigo factory. Inhuman torture was made to the disobedient farmers.<sup>68</sup> They were beaten black and blue, rape of women (i.e., wife of the cultivator) was a common affair in the *Kuthi* and women had to lose their chastity at the *Kuthi*.<sup>69</sup> In many cases fine was imposed, crops were damaged, house were burnt, blood shed and murder were common events in the life of the indigo-farmers.<sup>70</sup>

In the light of the statement made before the Indigo Commission by an eye witness Mr. Tower, the English magistrate, some one has observed that – “He saw with his own eyes that a subject was pierced with a spear and a few subjects were shot dead. A few others were at first pierced with a spear and then were kidnapped.<sup>71</sup> Again many housewives were detained in the *Kuthi*.<sup>72</sup> It is known from the contemporary incident that the heads of the Tangail *Kuthi* kidnapped the wife of a man named Bishu.<sup>73</sup>

It may easily be guessed that an opposition would develop as the farmers were oppressed in different ways. It is seen from the available sources that the farmers of Bengal formed an opposition movement and revolted and it is known as the ‘Indigo Movement’ in history.<sup>74</sup> Revolts against the oppression of the English Indigo planters was also made in the district of Rajshahi and the following *Kuthis* were plundered and Dewans and employees of certain *Kuthis* were killed.<sup>75</sup>

The following *Kuthis* were attacked :

Nandakubja, Chandrapur, Gurudas Pur, Birabaria, Sidhuli, Naribari, Lalpur, Bilmaria, Kalidaskhali, Chorghat, Namdan, gachi, Aranis Rajapur, Sardah, Baghacharkasari, Pananagar, Durgapur, Domdama, Biralda, Namdanpur pathiljhara, Kanshat, Ramchandrapurhat of Nawabgonj<sup>75a</sup>.

In order to face the situation the Government appointed 'Indigo Commission'. According to the recommendation of the Commission, the Government declared that indigo cultivation was optional for the farmers. As a result of the revolts of the farmers, the cultivation of (indigo) came to an end.

Thus it appears that most of the Zamindars of Rajshahi did not help the farmers against the English indigo planters. Exception, however, was Raja Jogendra Narayan, the Zamindar of Puthia who, inspired the farmers in their movements against the English planters (indigo planters) and the indigo producers of his jurisdiction attacked the Neel Kuthi (office cum residence of the European indigo planters) and formed the opposition movements.<sup>76</sup>

During the period under review, the oppression of the European indigo planters was also noticed in the other Zamindari out side Rajshahi.

The native soldiers revolted in 1857 against the British rule and oppression. This revolt is known in the history as the 'Sepoy Mutiny' or First War of Independence of India. It has no doubt that this protest movement of India had weakened the foundation of the British rule considerably. The volume of this Mutiny was so alarming that the government was with the situation and had to seek possible assistance from the native rulers. Incidentally during this Mutiny, one Bijay Govinda, a Zamindar of Tantiband (Pabna) helped the Government. He made the arrangement of guards so that the *sepoy*s might not go from Dhaka to western region. After the Sepoy Mutiny was over, the Government offered him a few cannons.<sup>77</sup> No clear evidence is, however, at out disposal as to whether any of the Zamindars of Rajshahi ever helped the British Government directly or indirectly against the *sepoy*s during the Mutiny.

But that the Zamindars of Rajshahi enjoyed the confidence of the British is proved by the fact that they were conference many titles like *Raja, Maharaja* etc.

during and after the Mutiny of 1857<sup>78</sup>. This may be as a prize for their silence or inactive role on the eve of the great incident called the Sepoy Mutiny. Here the case of the Zamindar of Dighapatia may mentioned as an example. In this family one Pramathnath is said have been conferred the title of *Raja* in 1875. It is likely that if the Zamindars of this country would have helped the people and the sepoys during the Mutiny, the history of India would have been written otherwise. But this did not happen and possible cause might be the fear on the part of the Zamindars who seem to have presumed that the death-Knell of the British Raj or any crisis as such would mean the end of the Zamindari too. The Zamindars of Rajshahi followed the same principle and their loyalty was fairly proved during the Santal Rebellion when the Zamindars of Rajshahi helped the British with soldiers and elephants.<sup>79</sup> To protect their existence, the British Government conferred on the Zamindars high sounding titles in addition to undue privileges and thus tried to enjoy their support. From the contemporary historical developments it is likely that the Zamindars were fairly successful in their efforts to this effect.

For the convenience of the administration, the partition of Bengal in 1905 was an important issue. As a result of running Calcutta centered administration, a new class of officers and exploiters was created. Zamindars, Usurers, Marwary traders conducted their economic activities from Calcutta. As a result, traders of East Bengal and the Muslim Peasaths in particular were being deprived. This victimised class of people welcomed the Partition of Bengal. On the other hand the Zamindar and the usurer class began to oppose it. It is known from a recent study that *Swadeshi movement* had taken place as a venture to oppose the partition cause of 1905 initiated by Lord Curzon and supported by the Muslims of Eastern Bengal and Assam.<sup>80</sup> It is known from the available source that the Rajas and Zamindars of Rajshahi acted against the partition of Bengal and cooperated with *Swadeshi Movement*.

Though the direct relation and the stand of the Zamindars with the anti-position movement cannot be ascertained, it is possible that they had a tacit support of this movement. This can be assumed from their association with in Indian National congress during the time. It is said that on the occasion of the provincial conference of the Indian National Congress held in the town of Natore from 10<sup>th</sup> June to 12<sup>th</sup> June 1897, Jogadindra Nath Ray of the Natore Raj family was the president of the Reception Committee.<sup>81</sup> In addition to that, references are there as to the members of that committee who were selected from other Zamindaris namely Kumar Ramanikanta Ray of Chougram, Kumar Basanta Kumar Roy of Dighapatia, Gopal Landra Ray of Puthia, Kumar Kedar Prasanna Lahiri of Kashimpur and so on.<sup>82</sup>

Thus it may be presumed that the Rajshahi as a whole had some sympathy for the anti-partition movement of 1905. At that time the Tagore family of Jorasanko, Calcutta could not avoid the spirit of the movement (anti-partition) and the support and association of the poet Rabindra Nath Tagore is a known fact<sup>82a</sup>.

There may be confusion as to the participation of the Rajas and Zamindars of Rajshahi in the anti-partition movement. The most acceptable view is that the Zamindars lived in Calcutta with their business centres while the Zamindaris estates situated in East Bengal. Beside it was an apprehension of the absentee Zamindars that if partition became a settle fact, after it, "their Zamindaris might be abolished in the Muslim *Praja* dominated East Bengal"<sup>82b</sup>.

It is found in the available data that many Rajas and Zamindars participated in the Indian freedom movement leading to the partition of India in 1947. When Mahatma Gandhi came to Rajshahi in 1925, Birendranath Roy, the Maharaja of Natore gave him Rs. 5000 as donation for the fund of the freedom struggle.<sup>83</sup> When Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose came to Natore in 1934, Pratibhanath Roy, the Raja of Dighapatia allowed Netaji to use his motor car.<sup>84</sup> Here it may be noted that the

Rajas and Zamindars of this region as a whole did not take part in the politics for the welfare of the subjects, but in every occasion they were guided by their self interest only. It is learnt from a source that "Maharaja Jagadindranath Roy while delivering speech at the Provincial Congress at Natore, said, "Recently few newspapers favoured by British officials advised the Rajas and Zamindars of this country to voluntarily keep away from politics. Rajas, Zamindars or officials whatever the rank they might be, if they kept themselves quite aloof from the politics, they would neither be able to protect their skin nor would they be able to make any welfare of the country. So in the present situation both to make welfare of the country and to ensure their existence unaffected, Rajas and Zamindars of the country must take part in the national movement along with the common people.<sup>85</sup> It is obvious from the remark of Maharaja Jagadindranath that they were infavour of active politics and that their existence langely depended on it .

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