

## The Zamindar-Tenant Relations

The Zamindar tenant relations are such important issues which help to understand the position of the zamindars in a particular region. The case of the zamindari of Rajshahi is not an exception. At the outset the matter may be considered from two angles : (a) It is to ascertain the Zamindar-tenant relation before the grant of '*Dewani*' by the East India company in 1765; (b) It is to observe minutely how the Zamindar-tenant relations developed in the light of the policy when they (East India Company) were granted the '*Dewani*' of Bengal in 1765.

During the Mughal period, the person who was given the responsibility of collecting revenue in the respective 'Subah' or province was called the provincial '*Dewan*'. Besides collecting revenue he had to supervise the transaction of money of the government treasury. No government officer could spend government money without his prior permission.

For increasing the collection of revenue, he used to encourage the cultivators to boost up the production of crops and tried to increase the number of dwellers in the villages. He used to pay attention so that the officers or revenue collectors might not collect excess revenue from the cultivators. He used to manage the recovery of the outstanding revenue which became arrear due to the negligence of the revenue collectors, at an easy instalment of five percent of the total amount during each harvesting season.

He used to manage recovery of *tacavi* (advance loan) which was given to the cultivators to help them for cultivating land during the natural calamity, in the first season of the subsequent year.<sup>1</sup>

The employee called ‘Patwari’ used to preserve the deeds of lease containing the document showing the amount of revenue fixed for the villagers respectively with other accounts and help government officers to collect the revenue.<sup>2</sup>

During the Mughal period, the permanent tenants of land were the farmers who had been living in the homesteads for a long period of time. At the time of necessity, the government bought the land of the farmer concerned at a reasonable price. The farmers themselves could buy or sell land. But the new residents who newly settled on the newly reclaimed land and cultivated it did not have tenancy as like as those of the permanent tenants having deeds of lease and documents. At the time of the reclamation of land and getting permanent settlement on it, the local headman had an important role to play. In order to encourage the reclamation of land, the newly acquired land thereby was declared as rent free land for the first year and one-fifth land tax was fixed up in the second year of its cultivation. When the land gradually became cultivable within five years, land tax was fixed as per Govt. rules and regulations.<sup>3</sup>

In the Mughal revenue system, the Jaigirdar played a very important role. The Jaigirdars were interested in clearing land because it increased their income and the income of the empire. A Jaigirdar was made permanent on the basis of sincerity and honesty. In many cases after the death of a Jaigirdar, his son was appointed Jaigirdar. But the post of a Jaigirdar was not a hereditary one. Jaigirdars, however, could not impose tax at their discretion. Land revenue was assessed on the crops produced. The ownership of land was vested with the state. Subjects were permanent beneficiaries. There was no place of any

intermediary. In the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Abul Fazal mentions that the farmers of Bengal were not cunning or deceptive. Out of their own interest they used to pay off their annual revenue in eight instalments and in this way they became habituated.<sup>4</sup> In those days the village headmen had sufficient importance, they got allotment of additional land for assisting in the collection of revenue. The headmen were also farmers. It was essential to take the approval of higher authority to cancel headmanship. The power of headmen was unlimited in the newly established village as the primary responsibility of collecting revenue lay on them. They were also judges of the villages and in any sense they were dignified persons. So there was little chance of non-payment of revenue. But if any land kept uncultivated without any natural calamity the revenue should be paid and if the land was not cultivated for several years, it was allotted to other person. If the original owner began to cultivate the land again, his ownership was revived. As a matter of fact, farmers were encouraged to cultivate their land.

The duty of a Zaigirdar was not only to collect revenue but also to dig canals, re-excavate canals, excavate estuary of rivers, keep watch for preventing exploitation of the farmers, prevent floods, protect crops from insects and diseases, prevent epidemics of the cows, diseases, maintain peace and order, prevent famine, build roads and high ways, build embankments, maintain drainage of water, give agricultural loan free of interest, supply seeds, impart education and so on. In those days there was a *Dharmagola* (godown for keeping crops) in every *mauza*. A portion of land revenue (in the form of crops) was stored in those godowns for carrying out the above mentioned welfare works. Water tax, road tax, development tax, education tax etc. were not sent to the royal treasury but were preserved in the local treasury of the

godowns. The portion of government due was deducted there from. Considering every thing, the land revenue in Mughal period was minimum; it was generally  $\frac{1}{5}$  th to  $\frac{1}{10}$  th of the crops produced. It could be paid either in the form of crops or in the form of cash money. The rate of land revenue was flexible.<sup>5</sup>

To help the farmers to increase their production, the facility of irrigation was given. The big canals were navigable and suitable for irrigation throughout the whole year. Net works of canals were created by digging numerous canals so that excess water could not stand on the cultivable land to damage crops. The local volunteers used to dig smaller canals and during the dry season the respective owners of nearby pieces of land would dig the silt of the canals according to the convention and put it on their land. As a result the canals were never silted up and the fertility of land also increased. Every year canals and estuaries of rivers were dug or re-excavated either with the money of the *Dharmagola* (godown) or with voluntary work and because of this, devastating flood was never seen in the country. For the work of digging or re-excavating canals, specialists were engaged.<sup>6</sup>

If necessary the emperor would buy a lot of land in urban areas from the common owners and used it for his own purpose. The emperor bought land even for constructing forts, mosques and cemeteries. It thus appears that the emperor was not the owner of land but only the recipient of revenue. In those days the Zamindar was the government employee who received the commission of 10% of the collected revenue and for maintenance received 1 % as various kinds of taxes. But the Zamindar was not the owner of the land given under his management.

Zamindar is a Persian word which means the manager but not the owner of the land.<sup>7</sup> During the Mughal reign, it was more important for the rulers to hold the farmer on the land than to oust him from it. In those days the permanent and hereditary ownership of the farmer was admitted even by the emperor. The emperor directed not to oppress the tenant.<sup>8</sup>

During the conflict with the Twelve Bhuiyas – the twelve independent land lords – the Mughal emperor paid compensation for the damage of crops.<sup>9</sup> From this it appears that the farmers were always busy with cultivation and production of crops. At this not only the farmers but also the empire was benefitted. As a result the farmers led a peaceful life in the Mughal period. The solvent farmers had sufficient dignity in the society. If any Zamindar revolted he was dismissed from Zamindari and was punished.<sup>10</sup>

After the defeat of Nawab Siraj-ud-daullah in the battle of Plassey, Mir Zafar Ali Khan and Mir Kasim became the Nawab respectively. During their tenure, revenue was increased much and the tenants were fully victimized by it.

The East India company got '*Dewani*' of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal emperor Shah Alam in 1765. As a result the company got the power of collecting revenue: Lord Clive, the governor of the company instead of giving the responsibility of collecting revenue upon the employees, appointed a Naib Subahdar Reza Khan was appointed the Nayib Dewan of Bengal and Sitab Ray of Patna.<sup>11</sup> Reza Khan and Sitab Ray tortured and oppressed the tenants too much for collecting revenue. Later on in 1770, the power of Reza Khan was seized. The company in the first phase could not conduct the collection of revenue on a definite principle. So the lease was given for one year and then for five years and then

again for ten years. At that time a terrible famine broke out because of the corruption of the officers and natural calamity. About one third of the total population of Bengal died in the famine. Even in such a miserable condition, revenue from the tenants was collected by force. Helping hand was not extended to the suffering people rather excess revenue was collected from them. The sufferings of the tenants knew no bounds.

After 1765, the ten years' settlement was turned into permanent settlement in 1793 . As a result of the permanent settlement, Zamindars became owners of the land for ever and farmers lost their ownership of land. In the permanent settlement there were definite ordinances about the Zamindars' duties and rights. But the government ordinance about the rights of the tenants were not, at all clear.

During the Mughal period there was clear mention of the rights of tenants on their land. In those days Zamindars could not evict any tenant from his land, rather it was the duty of a Zamindar to help the tenant in all respects. But in the permanent settlement Zamindars were made undisputed owners of the land. Farmers lost their rights and became tenants. As a result perpetual relation between tenants and Zamindars broke down only on the question of ownership of land.<sup>12</sup>

In the Permanent Settlement system, Zamindars were advised to behave well with the tenants without giving any right to the tenants. It was said Zamindars should not think tenants helpless and they were left at the mercy of Zamindars, if necessary, the government would come forward to protect the right of tenants. The government declared, "Whereas it is the duty of the government to protect the rights of all classes of people, specially those who

are comparatively weak and it is announced without hesitation that the Governor General, if necessary may implement laws to protect the rights of Talukdars and tenants under him and Zamindars are not allowed to oppose it".<sup>13</sup>

Zamindars were asked to write down the rights of tenants in the '*patta*' for the highest tenure of 10 years. Zamindars could offer '*Patta*' to tenants for not more than ten years. In that *Patta* the areas of land and the rate of revenue of the land under the tenants should be written clearly. Claiming revenue more than what was written in the *patta* was declared to be illegal and offensive.<sup>14</sup>

Zamindars should not impose any physical torture upon the tenants for collecting revenue, if any of them did so, the tenant had the right to file criminal case against the Zamindar. Laws were passed that Zamindars could not seize land or other property or cows or agricultural instruments. If any Zamindar had any legal claim, he could file civil suit without seizing the property of the tenant. It was the main effort of Cornwallis to establish the Zamindar-tenant relation on the economic basis.<sup>15</sup>

Zamindars could not be satisfied with those laws. In the eye of Zamindars tenants were those person whom they could arrest, imprison, inflict physical torture, evict from the homestead – in a word they were to be left at the mercy of Zamindars, they were to be treated as subjects without any right. In the laws of Permanent Settlement, Zamindars were not given arbitrary power. According to law it was punishable offence to arrest subjects or inflict physical torture upon them. Zamindars considered such provisions to be defamatory to their dignity and they started an opposition movement against those laws.

The complain of Zamindars was that as there was no provision of perpetual power given to Zamindars to compel tenants to pay revenue regularly, they became so daring that they were disobeying the order of Zamindars, trying to make the payment of revenue arrear and thus willing the fall of Zamindars. Zamindars argued that if revenue fell arrear the government had a right to realise the arrear revenue by selling the land at once, then why Zamindars should not sell the property of tenants for the same offence. As a matter of fact it was a trick of Zamindars to set aside the “sun-set-law”. Zamindars had much local influence. It was not possible for any tenant to challenge it. If any tenants failed to pay the revenue regularly, it might be for other reasons, surely the new law was not responsible for it.

In the face of the pressure and temptation of Zamindars, many district collectors advised the government to accept the proposal of Zamindars. The government did not agree to set aside the “Sun-set-Law”.

So without setting aside the original law, an amendment entitled amendment regulation No. 35 was made in 1935 giving Zamindars limited arbitrary power. The main sections of the amendment regulation are as follows:

“(1) To collect the arrear revenue the property of the tenants shall be seized. But the seized property shall be sold under the guidance of the local government officer (section 5).

(2) If the revenue is not paid within three days of serving the notice, the Zamindar can apply to the District Judge to arrest the tenant (section 10, 11)

(3) After arresting the tenant through the District Judge, the Zamindar can seize the land (section 12).

(4) If the tenant think the proceedings of the Zamindar illegal, the tenant can file a case against it in the court (Section 18).<sup>16</sup>

Zamindars were not satisfied even with these laws because in these laws they got the power to seize the property of the tenant but they did not get the power of selling the property themselves.

They got the right of arresting the tenant but they should get the prior permission of the district Judge. The tenant got the opportunity of challenging the validity of arrest in the court. It was the demand of Zamindars to have full power over tenants. They thought the interference of the government with the Zamindar-tenant relation undesirable. That is tenants would be as like as the personal property of Zamindars. They should be treated as Zamindars liked them to be treated, this is what Zamindars demanded. Their demand was that they were to be declared as the only owner of the land in the Permanent Settlement and so, on what conditions tenants would cultivate land and what would be the relation of Zamindars with tenants would be decided by Zamindars alone and not by the government.

Since 1796, the Zamindar class had been forming a strong opposition to gain all powers. By filing thousands of false cases in the court and thus creating dead lock condition in the courts, by willingly keeping the revenue unpaid, buying own property by auction in the name of other person, not giving possession of the auctioned land to the buyer, instigating tenants against new Zamindars, deteriorating the law and order situation, indulging the robbers and terrorists and in various other ways they exerted a heavy pressure upon the government and created deadlock in the field of administration. At last the government was compelled to accept their unreasonable demand.<sup>17</sup>

In 1799, with the regulation No. 7, the Zamindar – tenant relation was radically changed. All the prohibitions imposed upon Zamindars according to regulation No. 17 of 1793, were withdrawn and Zamindars were given arbitrary authority. Several sections of the regulation No. 7 of 1799 are mentioned below:

“(1) The Zamindar can arrest a tenant without prior permission of the government (Subsection 1 of the section 15)

(2) The Zamindar can forfeit the property of the tenant while collecting the arrear revenue. The tenant can not challenge it in the court (Subsection 6 of section 15)

(3) While collecting the unpaid revenue, the Zamindar can evict the tenant from his homestead, if necessary.

(4) The Zamindar can force the tenant to attend the Zamindari court. For this he can not file a case in the Criminal Court against the physical torture (subsec 8 of sec 15).<sup>18</sup>

The officials of the company thinking about the right of the tenants withdrew the power of judgement from Zamindars to protect tenants from the oppression of Zamindars.

To observe the activities of Zamindars, at first supervisors and later on collectors were appointed. These may be considered as the better side of the company rule. On the other hand most of the Zamindars were the sons of this soil. No patriotic feeling was found in them. Their only motto was to earn money, legally or illegally, whatever it might be. So they never thought about the right of the people of the country or common tenants. Most of the tortures

were committed either by Zamindars or by their officers. For getting the power of oppression, they created pressure upon the government.

The government had nothing to do. At the beginning they could not acquire sufficient knowledge about land administration. They lacked in the knowledge of the native language and they lacked in extra man power. Extra man power was needed to extend their empire because they had not been able to conquer all India till then. So to make the British rule permanent in this country, they needed the Zamindar class as their collaborators and this is why they gave up all principles of humanity and basic human right and in the face of the pressure created by Zamindars they were compelled to implement the regulation No. 7 of 1799. To day in the age of civilization it can not be imagined how Zamindars could place those inhuman demands and how their British lords could act those hateful clauses.

The requirement of money of the company increased because of the fight against Tipu Sultan in the Deccan. So for the convenience of Zamindars to collect the outstanding revenue from tenants, Zamindars were given the right under the clauses of regulation 7 of 1799, to arrest, to seize the crops of their fields, ploughs, cows and other moveable property of tenants without the order of the court or the revenue authority. In that rule the magistrate was empowered to sentence the tenants to imprison or to impose fines on them if they fail to prove their allegation of torture by Zamindars or their employees and to pay compensation to employees of Zamindars.<sup>19</sup> Owing to misuse of this law it became notorious and was called "*Haptam ain*" or notorious law. As a result of arrest of tenants, seizure of their movable property, cattle, crops of the fields, etc., the independent 'khudkasth' tenants became virtually slaves

of Zamindars. In this law tenants were given the right to file case in the civil court against Zamindars if they unlawfully seize their property and sell the property by auction or illegally evict them from their land in possession. But in most of the cases it was not possible for the poor tenants to get relief in this way.<sup>20</sup> In this connection an incident described by Suprakash Ray, some tenants of Sirajganj deposited their original amount of revenue in the court. The Zamindar got a decree against them in the lower court. But the Zamindar's demand did not last in the appeal. It was proved in the court of the District judge that the excess revenue which the Zamindar had demanded from the tenants was unlawful and what they deposited in the Lower Court was the actual revenue.<sup>21</sup> As the Zamindar lost the case, his employees became furious; they kidnapped one of the witnesses of the tenants on his way back home and hid him. In this respect Mr. Nolams, the S.D.O. of Sirajganj Said, "Even after 20 days I can not find out the place where the man has been detained."<sup>22</sup> From this it can be realized how difficult it was to file a case in the court against a Zamindar. Zamindar had a lot of money. On the other hand tenants were poor. So it was difficult for tenants to spend money to conduct a case in the court against Zamindar. Besides this many Zamindars had friendship with the magistrates.

So to prevent the misuse of this law, the power of Zamindars to arrest tenants was withdrawn by the regulation No. 5 of 1812. But for collecting the arrear revenue, the power of the Zamindar was retained to seize the property of the tenant and crops in his field if the tenant failed to pay the arrear revenue even after receiving the notice stating the amount of arrear revenue. This law was known as 'Panjam Law'. If that law the tenant was given the right to free his property from seizure by submitting a petition. But with that petition he

had to deposit *zamanat* to file the case against the Zamindar in the Civil Court within 15 days of submission of the petition. If the tenant failed to file the case within the specified period, summons were issued against the tenant and the person standing security.<sup>23</sup> It was about impossible for the illiterate and poor tenant to regain the property once seized by the Zamindar. The fear of the Zamindar and his armed men on one hand and inability of depositing money in the court and spending money for conducting the case on the other hand prevented tenants to go against the oppression of Zamindars. So in almost all cases the order of Zamindars to seize the property of tenants remained unaltered. Mr. Mesbahul Haque has written quoting from the magazine entitled *Tattabodhini*, how cruelly Zamindars oppressed tenants if they could not pay the revenue timely and how cruelly the Zamindars of 19<sup>th</sup> century oppressed the tenants. Perhaps the Bengali proverb “he who is the protector is the plunderer” might have originated from the torture of Zamindars upon their tenants. Tenants could not pass even a day in peace Zamindars had become the owners of land.

They were always afraid of unforeseen oppression that might befall them at any moment. Zamindars were not satisfied with collecting revenue only. They were determined to plunder all the property of tenants by hook or by crook to make them destitute. Their poverty stricken condition, Skeleton bodies, pale faces, patched clothes nothing could fill the stony heart of Zamindars with pity, nothing could fill their eyes with tears. Besides legal revenue, they gradually tortured tenants to collect various taxes, increased amount of unpaid revenue, increased taxes, subscription for ensuing festivals and so on.<sup>24</sup>

A list of different kinds of oppressions executed upon tenants by the exploiting class of mediocrities men like Zamindars, *ijardars*, creditors as published in the magazine “*Tattvabodhini*” is given below:<sup>25</sup>

- (i) whipping and caning;
- (ii) beating with sandals and shoes;
- (iii) rolling bamboos or thick sticks upon the chest of tenants;
- (iv) twisting ears or nose with a piece of broken earthen pot;
- (v) rubbing nose on the ground;
- (vi) bending hands behind the back and pressing with a piece of bamboo;
- (vii) rubbing poison ivy on the body;
- (viii) binding hands and feet with chains;
- (ix) compelling to hold ears and run;
- (x) binding two pieces of split bamboo at one end, placing hand between them and pressing the other end;
- (xi) compelling them to stand placing two feet apart in the scorching sun of the summer and placing bricks on the back and on the hands;
- (xii) immersing into water and throwing water on the body in the sever cold;
- (xiii) detaining into the granary and filling it with water;
- (xiv) binding with a tree or other place and beating;
- (xv) detaining in the granary of paddy in the month of *Bhadra* or *Aswin*;
- (xvi) detaining in the room of lime and spread the smoke of pepper in the room.

The Sirajganj revolution is a remarkable incident in the history of revolution of the farmers of Bengal. The root cause of this revolution is the arbitrary domination, exploitation and oppression of the Zamindar class. Farmers of this region of Pabna were excitedly revolted in 1873 against Zamindar when the newly established Zamindars were crazy to collect excess revenue at their will and conspired against farmers to evict them from their land.<sup>25(a)</sup> It may be noted that sometime Pabna was under the Natore raj while some time it came under the jurisdiction of the others. However, this revolt exerted influence over the Zamindars of North Bengal nay Zamindars of Bengal and Bihar. As a result of this revolution, British government passed the Bengal Tenancy Act, VIII of 1885. This was the first step in the field of recognition of rights of possession of tenants on the land after the system of Zamindari had been introduced. This law of the right of possession of tenants on the land was very important. Before the implementation of this law there had been another law entitled as the "Law relating to land lords and Tenants Act VII of 1859". Later on it was named as "Bengal Tenancy Act, Act VIII of 1885".<sup>26</sup>

Because of the principle of land revenue of the company, the old Zamindars were unable to pay revenue. Specially the condition became more acute for the outbreak of famine Yousuf Shahi pargana of Sirajganj Subdivision (at present Sirajganj district) of Pabna district belonged to the Zamindar of Natore. This Pargana was auctioned for arrear revenue. As a result several rich families of different districts bought the estate. These landlord families were:<sup>27</sup>

- 1) the Tagore Zamindar of Calcutta;

- 2) the Banerjee Zamindar of Dhaka;
- 3) the Sanyal of Salop (In the pseu-do-nym of Bhattacharya)
- 4) the Bhaduri of Projana;
- 5) the Pakrashi of Sthal.

The tenants had been aggrieved for a long time. The new Zamindars adopted various policies for increasing revenue after buying the estates. They introduced new system of survey. Previously one cubit had been equal to 23½" to 26½" in practice. Later on the new Zamindars tried to introduce the length of measuring one cubit equal to 18". As a result the area of land of tenants decreased. So tenants were aggrieved. In this connection we may quote a record which runs as : "The quarrel arose losing to the purchase, by absent land lords (zamindars) of lands, which formerly belonged to Natore Raj. From the first the relation between the newcomers and Rayots were undriendly. The Zamindars attempted to enhance rents and also to consolidate customary cesses with rents and dispute arose over the proper length of the measuring pole".<sup>28</sup>

At that time as the Road-cess law was announced every where, Zamindars began to take from tenants the agreement of excess amount of rent in the pretext of road cess, by force. The revenue which was only one rupee during the period of Natore Raj was tried to be increased two rupees. The tenants bore witness before the Court that the officers of Zamindars had taken the deeds of agreement from tenants by force. About the cause of the revolt in Pabna, W.W.Hunter in his '*Statistical Account of Bengal, Pabna*' says: "These were the two original causer of the dispute: a high rate of collection as compared with other *Parganas* and an uncertainty as to how far the amount

claimed was due. The third and auxiliary cause is to be found in the violent and lawless character of some of the Zamindars and of the agents of others.”<sup>29</sup>

The most unbearable taxes which were collected were called ‘*Abwab*’ (extra charges) or extra income. The extra charges were as follows:<sup>30</sup>

- (i) Tahury (The extra payment for the officers) The extra amount of money was collected when the accounts of tenants were finalised at the end of the year.
- (ii) Money collected on the occasion of marriage ceremonies in the houses of Zamindars
- (iii) Parbani (Festival) : Tax was collected to meet the expenditure of Puja or worship and other religious festivals of Zamindar houses.
- (iv) School expenses: The money which the Zamindars donated to government schools was collected as tax from tenants
- (v) Pilgrimage expenses: The money spent when Zamindars or the members of their families went for pilgrimage was collected from tenants.
- (vi) Food expenses: The money spent for sending food items to magistrates, was collected from tenants.
- (vii) Village expenses : The money spent to meet all sorts of expenditure incurred for villages was collected from tenants.
- (viii) Postal expenses : The postal tax fixed by the government upon Zamindars was collected from tenants.
- (ix) *Bhiksha* : The money for repayment of loan of Zamindars was collected from tenants.
- (x) Police expenses: The money spent for the attendance of the police in the houses of Zamindars was collected from tenants.
- (xi) Income tax: The income tax which Zamindars had to pay was collected from tenants.

- (xii) Expense for the feast : The money required for all kinds of feast was collected from tenants.
- (xiii) *Selami* : When tenants built any house or took any lease of land, money was collected from them.
- (xiv) Mutation in the rent roll: While substituting the name of one tenant in place of another, money was collected from him.
- (xv) *Nazrana* (Honorarium) : When Zamindars or their agents went out for collecting revenue tenants had to pay Nazrana.

Before the revolt of the tenants of Pabna, besides giving regular taxes, tenants had to pay *Abwab* or additional taxes for the social occasions like *Annaprasan* (the ceremony of giving rice to a child for the first time), *Churakaran* (making a lock of hair uncut on the head), marriage, *Shradhya* (ceremony in honour and for the benefit of dead relatives).<sup>31</sup>

The only objective of the Zamindars was to collect excess revenue. When tenants in general were unable to pay the excess revenue and became the victim of the oppression of Zamindars in different ways, they had no way left for them other than revolt. Whatever might be the future position of the exploited, harassed and oppressed tenants they thought that revolt was inevitable for freedom. The influence of the tenant revolution of Pabna had effects on the Zamindari estates of Rajshahi.

Haranath Ray Choudhury, the Zamindar of Dubalhati, instead of following the existing survey, made a new survey with measuring pole shorter than previous measuring pole to collect excess revenue / rent from tenants. Consequently bitter feeling was created between the Zamindar and his tenants. When tenants protested against it, he did not pay heed to it.

As a result in 1893, about 50 thousand tenants under the leadership of Janab Astan Molla revolted against the Zamindar and barricaded the Zamindar house for three days. There revolted tenants had to face suit in the Court for about 7 years. But it did not bring any fruitful result.<sup>32</sup>

Raja Haranath Ray Choudhury wanted to give Astan Molla, the rebel leader, vast rent-free landed property to keep him aloof from the protest movement of the tenants. But he refused to take it for the interest of the tenants. Rather he continued the movement. At last Shyama Sundari and Umasundari, the two wives of Raja Haranath came out of the Zamindar house riding on an elephant and requested the rebel tenants to cooldown the movement. They told that the problems of the tenants would be discussed. With this request the tenant leader Astan Molla, his chief assistant Naru Molla and more than one thousand tenants were sent to the court of the Raja. At last when the merganser of the estate begged pardon to the revolting tenants in the presence of a Govt. officer a compromise was made and the problem were solved thereby . To see such a defeat of the Raja of Dubalhati, the Zamindars of Balihar, Mahadevpur, Kansat Chougram etc. gave up their plan of new surveying and increasing revenue.<sup>33</sup>

The mention of another revolt is found in Bilmaria under Lalpur Police Station of the district of Rajshahi (at present Natore). There was the estate of Midnapore Zamindari Company of the English at Bilmaria. In the past the Midnapore Zamindari Company used to plant indigo in this area. The story of their various types of oppression is well known. When the cultivation of indigo was stopped, the Zamindari Company began to oppress the tenants in different ways. More than 60 thousand tenants revolted and stopped paying

revenue. This movement became so severe that even washermen, barbers, cooks all went away leaving the *Kuthi* (house -cum office of the English). One of the leaders of this movement was Sri Someswar Choudhury, a student of Calcutta Medical College. Many rebel tenants including Someswar Choudhury were arrested because of the movement. Finding themselves in an awkward position, the Company was compelled to acquit Someswar Babu and to compromise with the tenants.<sup>34</sup>

Another protest against the principle of Zamindars and the British Government is found at Natore. An organisation named “Krishak Sammeloni” was formed at Natore. Munshi Muhammad Mahsen Ullah was one of the founders of this Sommelani (assembly).

He not only organised the tenants but also published a Bengali book entitled “*Burir suta*” in the year 1316 B.S. (i.e., 1909) This book helped the tenants to unite.<sup>35</sup> During the contemporary period, a movement was being conducted against the oppression upon tenants by the local Zamindar at Brikutsa, Natore. The leader of this movement was Prabhash Chandra Lahiri. Prabhash Chandra Lahiri was arrested because of this movement. Later on this movement was led by Sri Manas Govinda Sen, a reputed leader of Congress party. When he was also arrested, the leadership of this movement was given by Naimuddin Miah.<sup>36</sup> This time another tenant movement was organised cantering Manda. Beside these, movements against Zamindars and the British Government is noticed at Patnitala, Naogaon and Natore. The Mahammadan Association of Naogaon played an important role in these movements.<sup>37</sup>

Information are also available of another movement against the Zamindar at Singra of Natore. The leadership of this movement was given by Jasimuddin, the teacher of Durmallika Primary School. He founded a peasant association with the deprived peasants. In the Raja and Zamindar dominated district (the then subdivision) of Natore, slaughtering or *Qurbani* of cows during the Eid-ul-Azha festival was prohibited in those days.

Jasimuddin, the most accepted leader started a strong movement against it. He discussed with the administrators of sub-divisional and district levels and made slaughtering cows in the villages and the system of *Qurbani* of cows during the Eid-ul-Azha festival, lawful. In those days *pikes* and *barkandazs* as (foot soldiers) of Zamindars used to snatch away the fruits of poor tenants by force. Even where the Zamindars had enough power they used to cut and take away the trees of helpless tenants. Under the leadership of Jasimuddin, poor and helpless tenants raised protest against this evil system. The Zamindars filed various false suits against Jasimuddin and they also tried to kill him, but they failed to do any harm to Jasimuddin. The Zamindar class made hundreds of efforts and measures to stop the Peasants but failed to do anything effectively against the activities this Peasant Association.<sup>38</sup>

When the Zamindars failed to control him by means of applying torture and oppression, Ray Bahadur Rajani Kanta, the influential Zamindar of Chougram wanted to offer him a lucrative bait of higher service with better salary (Rs. 200/- of those days) in the office of the Zamindar of Chougram. Besides this they proposed to offer him some rent free land. But he refused to accept anything. He had every sympathy for the peasants and his only aim was to make good of the farmers.<sup>39</sup>

Muslim tenants could never walk through the streets in the vicinity of the house of the Zamindar wearing shoes or carrying an umbrella over the head. Punishment for violating this order was either death or severe torture.<sup>40</sup> But there is no evidence as to any protest of such a custom or rule in the jurisdiction of the zamindars.

But it may be noted that they had much control over the tenants. Every Zamindar had his own lathial (armed with sticks) troops. And they collected high rate of revenue from tenants frightening them by showing their strength of lathi (Thick stick made of bamboo). In this way they collected *Abwabs* (illegal cesses) and *nazrana* (illegal gift) from tenants by force. If they refused to give it, they were beaten severely for such effessces.

Milkmen should give milk, fishermen should give fish, barbers should shave, coachmen should carry and shoe makers should give pairs of shoes without any price were some of the accepted norms and principles which were followed within the jurisdiction of almost each and every Zamindar of the time. There were also some prohibition and restrictions imposed on some particular communities. There was protest but no outburst against it.

However the book entitled “*Burirsuta*” (i.e., the cord of the old woman) contained many stories of these type of incidents and protest against these incidents, illegal construction of buildings, digging tanks illegally, cutting trees forcibly, taking he-goats forcibly to sacrifice during the worship, committing rape of beautiful women etc. which were written in the book with dates of occurrence.

From the above discussion, we may come to the conclusion that Zamindar-tenant relation was not at all praiseworthy. Zamindars considered their tenants as their personal property. They did not behave with them humanly although some educational and charitable institutions were established with their patronization and many tenants were educated from these institutions. They were able to improve their condition yet the fate of the tenants remained by and large unchanged.

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