

CHAPTER – VIII

Conclusion

An attempt has been made in the forgoing chapters of the Thesis to focus on the various aspects of the zamindari system, which was introduced in Western Assam by the Mughals, especially of its origin and development in different phases. Chapter I and II have been dealt with the issue in details and also the abolition of the system. Special attention has been thrust on how the zamindars of different estates of Western Assam have made their valuable contribution to the socio-cultural development of the region. Chapter IV to VII, have been devoted to show what part did the landed aristocracy of this region play to the development of the society and culture of this region, especially in the field of education, religion, art architecture, handicraft, music and drama, literature and language, besides, general development works, like communication, health care, development of agriculture, etc.

Originating in feudalism in the Middle Ages, the zamindari system in Western Assam developed as an indispensable part of Mughal revenue administration. Although, it was introduced in this region by the Mughal, after occupation of Koch-Hajo kingdom in the first quarter of the 17th century, the zamindari system was in vogue in Western Assam even before. Infact, the Bhuyans, who exercised considerable power as feudal lords under Kamata kingdom, were synonymous to the zamindars under the Mughals and were ancestors of some of the zamindars of this region. The Bhuyans were so powerful that they, even, established their rule in Kamata uprooting the Muslim regime established by Alauddin Hussein Shah. They began to rule the tract dividing it among them, preceding to

the foundation of Koch kingdom. But they were subdued by Bishwa Singha and thus established Koch kingdom. After annexation of Koch-Hajo kingdom, the Mughal Emperor, instead of introducing own administration, Chandra Narayan alias Bijit Narayan was made zamindar of a small part of it, which comprised the territory between the River Manas in the east to the River Sankosh in the west with condition of payment of fixed Peskosh. The newly founded small principality came to be known as Bijni kingdom. The term "Bijni" has derived its name from Bijit Narayan, the founder king of the kingdom. The Bijni kingdom, thus, created, was subsequently divided into six zamindaries, viz, Bijni, Gauripur, Mechpara, Karaibari, Chapar, and Parbotjoar.

Almost all the zamindaries of Western Assam were caved out of the Bijni Kingdom in different times and under various circumstances by the Mughal Emperor. This was done with a view to develop administrative expediency and to increase the agricultural products by expansion of agricultural field. Most of the zamindars of Western Assam were hereditary chiefs of their respective estates. Indeed, the Mughal Administration was rendered valuable services in various occasions by the local chiefs or the Bhuyans, in consequences which they were rewarded zamindary of one or more pargans to which they had hereditary right. Thus, zamindary of Karaibari and Mechpara were created by the Mughals and the hereditary descendants of the parganas were entrusted the responsibility of collection of revenue, conferring title of Choudhury.

The zamindary of Gauripur originated from Nankar land, granted to one Kabindrapatra who was appointed as the Qanungo of Rangamati province of the Mughals, by Emperor Jahangir. The post of Qanungo became hereditary and the successors continuously received such grant that added the quantity of the land under their possession. The zamindary

of Gauripur was emerged from huge landed property, thus, accumulated by the successors of Kabindrapatra. Zamindary of Chapar and Parbotjoar were also carved out of Bijni Raj Estae by the Mughals with a view to expand agricultural domain to enhance land revenue. JoyNarayan Sarma and Hatibar Barua were granted Sanads by the Mughal ruler in this effexct as the Choudhury of these estates respectively. Thus, Bijni kingdom reduced to a standard of an ordiNaray estate retaining only two parganas, Habraghat and khuntaghat, besides, Bijni Duar, and a Mahal in Karaibari pargana.

The accession of Dewani by the East India Company resulted in, the passing over the zamindaries of Western Assam as a part of Bengal, to the Company in 1765. The British Company with out any alteration accepted the tributes paid to the Mughal as land revenue. Gradually, they tighten their grapes on the zamindars and the mode of payment in kind was replaced by cash. Of Course, the assumption of the Dewani, indeed, seriously affected the powers and status of the zamindars. The judicial, administrative and police powers, enjoyed so far by the zamindars were infringed by the British and left the zamindars as mere revenue contractors in their respective estates. The status of the zamindars was moved from a chiefs and native rulers to revenue contractors. The Permanent Settlement was concluded with all the zamindars of Western Assam, like that of Bengal, in 1793, by Lord Cornwallis and the revenue was perpetuated for ever. The Permanent Settlement denied the special privileges and status hitherto enjoyed by the zamindars belonging to the hereditary native ruling dynasty and reduced them to the rank of ordinary revenue collectors. Contrary, the zamindars were vested with the ownership of the land with transferable and inheritable right by the Permanent settlement. Thus, the Permanent Settlement promoted the

zaminders to the position of owner of the soil depriving the actual tillers of the land.

In the absence of specialized department to look after the social service, development works or education through out the vast campus of the country, the Mughal rulers relied on the initiatives of the zamindars to carry the benefits of the Mughal rule to the rural areas .By granting rent free lands or deducting the jama, they encouraged the zamindars to take up the task of public service. The Permanent Settlement conferred the zamindars the ownership of the lands and provided them with the opportunity to accumulate huge properties. Thus, some of the zamindars were encouraged who spend a part of their income for the welfare of their subjects. To match the imperial expectation, or to satisfy their religious sentiments or craving to perpetuate their name or for the zeal to serve the people, some of the zamindars endeavoured various benevolent works in their respective estate even before assumption of Dewani by the British. Following the path of the zamindars of Bengal, some of the zamindars of Assam, carried out benevolent works of various categories for the benefit of their subjects. They constructed roads, bridges, embankments, Serais, charitable hospitals, excavated water tanks, water reservoirs etc. Roads were constructed connecting markets, forts, watching chowkies, commercial places, and temples with Sadar Kutchery and were maintained by them. These were kuchcha roads through which bullock cart and motor car could easily be run over. Plantation on beside of the road was done by some zamindars. Excavation of water tanks, water reservoirs, was usually carried out by most of the zamindars of the region for supply of water to the people and the animals. It deserves to be mentioned of the Peerer dighee, a tank excavated by Raja Mahendra Nararyan covering 80 bighas of land, was the biggest tank ever excavated

by any zamindar. With a view to save the crops from flood, some of the zamindars constructed embankment, canal to passage for rain water during monsoon. The embankment on the bank of Lawkhowa and Jinjiram River are some of the example of such embankments constructed by the zamindars of Gauripur and Karaibari estates respectively. Over and above, zamindar of Karaibari excavated a canal right down to the foot of Garo Hills to Jinjiram River, of a length of 3.5 miles with his own cost for the drainage of overflow rain water during monsoon.

Some of the zamindars were much aware of the health care of their subjects and founded charitable dispensary for their medical treatment. Such hospitals, though few in numbers, have carried the testimony of the social service on the part of zamindars. In this respect we have tried to record the contribution of the zamindars of Gauripur, Chapar, Mechpara and Bijni estates. The present State Dispensaries of Gauripur and Bilasipara are examples of such dispensaries those were founded by zamindar of Gauripur and Chapar estates respectively.

The most eulogized contribution ever made to the society of the Western Assam by the landed aristocracy of this region was the introduction of western education in this educationally backward part of Assam. Gauripur is said to have pioneered the formal education in this region and was said, duly, to be the "Nalanda" of Assam for its credit of being the centre of the Sanskrit learning of Western Assam as well as North Bengal. Tariniprya Chatuspathy of Gauripur was an oldest Sanskrit educational centre in this region which was entrusted with the responsibility to prepare syllabus and curriculum for Sanskrit learning of Western Assam and North Bengal. Besides, it also conducted examination and bestowed the certificates to the successful students. Some of the zamindars and their family members were patron of learning

and under their patronage; western education was introduced in this region. Primary and Middle English schools were founded in almost all parts of Goalpara district of Western Assam by the zamindars during the second half of the Nineteenth Century and early twentieth century. Zamindars were seemed to vie in establishing High Schools in their respective estates to perpetuate the name of their ancestors. Mentioned must be made of the name of zamindars like, Prabhat Chandra Barua of Gauripur, Prithiram Choudhury of Mechpara and Rani Abhayeswari of Bijni for their remarkable contribution to the promotion of learning and education in this region. Detail analysis and assessment have been made in this regard in chapter No. four to seven. Hostels for students, teacher's quarters, libraries and play grounds were available in some of the schools. Building construction and payment to the teaching and non teaching staff of the schools were borne by some of the zamindars. Stipend and scholarships were given to the poor and meritorious students by some of the zamindars like, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua and Rani Abhayeswari. Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was so dedicated to the expansion of learning that he organized a fund called 'Siksha Samiti' for providing scholarship to poor and meritorious students for higher education. With the scholarship received from Siksha Samiti of Gauripur, numerous students had made their fortune, acquiring high degrees in different fields from various leading institutions of the country and even, from London, Paris and Tokiyo. Female education was introduced in this region by some of the influential women of zamindar family, despite the protest of some of the people. It was Rani Sarijobala and Rajkumri Niharbala of Gauripur who took the initiative of opening the female education in this region; Colleges were, later on, founded by some of the family members of the zamindar family. It should especially be mentioned here the foundation of Bholanath College at Dhubri, one of the prominent colleges

in Assam, in pre independent period by Jotsna Choudhury of Mechpara zamindary.

Some zamindars played conspicuous part in the cultural development of this region as well as of Assam. Under their patronage the indigenous music, drama, theatre, art, architecture, handicrafts and sports were flourished and developed to high magnitude. These have been vividly discussed on the reliable sources. It is for their endeavouring that Goalpara district has been able to occupy a very prestigious position in the cultural history of Assam, especially in the field of music, drama and fine arts. Under patronage of Prabhat Chandra Barua of Gauripur Raj Estate and his descendants, the local culture, better known as Goalpariya culture was flourished to such an extent that it is considered as one of the leading cultures of the nation. The traditional folk songs of Goalpara, which had been once looked down by the upper class people of this region as the song of the down trodden class, i.e., the “choto loka” has not only been rescued from the verge of extinction in the wake of modernization and urbanisation by Rajkumari Niharbala and Pratima Barua Pandey but familiarized it with national and international forum. Pratima Pandey Barua was awarded “Padma Sree” in recognition of her all time contribution to the development of Goalpara folk songs. She is popularly known as Hastir Kanya for her famous song of “Hastir kanya hastir kanya...”. Her devotion and hard work provides a new dimension to Goalpariya folk culture which has acquired a high position and dignity in the history of folk culture of the nation. Niharbala, another representative of Gauripur Rajfamily contributed valuably to the development of Goalpariya culture by organizing dancing group of the girls in the orthodox society of Goalpara.

Pramathesh Barua, the legendary artist of Hindi Cinema, who had risen to the highest magnitude of reputation for his incomparable contribution to the Hindi Cinema, was a representative of Gauripur Raj family. He was as great as an actor, director, producer, and writer of film. Pramathesh Barua was a pioneer of the modern technique of cinematography in various aspects and introduced a new style in cinema, which was unique and known as Barua style. His personality, dignity, and artistic quality was a source of attraction, indeed, he was model for the others.

Natya Andalan of Assam had developed to a new dimension for the patron of zamindars. On occasion of religious festivals, some of the zamindars of Western Assam invited drama and theatre parties from Bengal which influenced the local artist to organise such parties. We find that being influenced by the Calcutta theatre, many theatre groups came in existence in several parts of Goalpara district under zamindars' patronage. Surendra Narayan, zamindar of Bagribari played role in the drama organized by the local artist. He even wrote many books of drama some of which have been staged in the public programme. He had about 200 books of drama in his library. Besides him, zamindar of Chapar, Mechpara and Bijni was also patron of Drama and theatre. Nagendra Narayan Choudhury was a celebrated writer of drama and actor as well; who staged many of his dramas where members of the zamindar family played various roles. Thus, the Natya Andalan was originated and developed in the beginning of twentieth century under patronage of the local zamindars. Natya Manch was built with the estate fund in several places and Assamese scripts replaced Bengali in Abhayapuri and gradually in other parts. Thus, the zamindars of Western Assam have made valuable contribution to the Natya Andalan of Assam.

Narai Mukti Andalan got a new impetus under the patron of some zamindars and their family members, especially the zamindar Nagendra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara estate and his family members. Zamindar Nagendra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara took the initiative in the Narai Mukti Andalan in Assam under the banner of Assam Sahitya Sabha. The Assam Mahila Samiti got its birth in 1826 with Chandra Prabha Saikianee as its chairperson, a progressive woman of Assam. It chalked out a series of splendid schemes to bring awareness to the oppressed and exploited women of Assam through. Rani Prafullabala, wife of zamindar Nagendra Narayan led the movement as its chairperson after Chandra Prabha Saikinee. Rani Jyitkarna and Dipali Choudhurane of Mechpara Family also took part in this movement. In Gauripur, Rani Sarojabala with a view to enlighten the women section of this region started female education in Rajbari, and convinced Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua to open female school in Gauripur. Realising the need of economic independence for the distressed women of the neighbouring areas, Niharbal organized a Mahila Samiti for commercial production of weaving. Trained by expert the members of this society produced quality product of weaving, and the profits were distributed among the members which provided livelihood to many women. Thus, Gauripur Mahila Samiti was developed as a source of income for the distressed women of the region and developed as a model to others.

In the matter of the development of the handicraft of Assam, some zamindars of Western Assam and their family members have played important role, especially, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua and his daughters, Niharbala Barua and Nilima Barua. Under their patronage the indigenous handicrafts like, terracotta, *sola silpa*, different type of furniture and household articles made of bamboo, cane, wood, etc. were flourished and

developed as small scale industries in this region. It provided livelihood to thousands of people as a commercial enterprise. Under the able guidance of Nilima Sundari handicrafts of Gauripur entered into a new phase of development. She left no stone unturned for the development of this kind of handicrafts. The present dissertation has presented a thorough analysis in chapter IV, about the origin and development of such handicrafts and also attempt has been made to highlight the role played by the zamindar house of Gauripur in its development. As the region did not have any industries, Nilima Barua aimed at to develop the indigenous handicrafts as an enterprise to provide livelihood to the unemployed poor people of this region. She even encouraged high quality product to attract the attention of the purchasers. To popularize the handicraft products of Gauripur in national and international arena and to create its market she visited big cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and held exhibition of the local handicraft products which earned huge responses. She even held such exhibition in London, Paris and Tokiyo where the products were appreciated and sold out. Nilima was called Loka Silpi and for her dedication Gauripur became the centre of handicrafts and weaving of Assam. As recognition of her contribution, Nilima Barua was appointed as the Chairperson of All India Handicraft council, and its branch was founded in Gauripur to develop handicraft of Assam.

Painting being the highly fascinated hobby of the Aristocratic class was widely practised in some of the zamindar families of this region. Mechpara zamindar family was the forerunner in this field. Being impressed with the painting of Kalighat, which was the centre of the painting of Bengal, it was practiced in Lakhipur. Zamindar Nagendra Narayan and his family members involved in this art of drawing and painting. Trained by expert, Painting rapidly developed in Mechpara and

various beautiful portraits of God and Goddesses were illustrated and painted. Zamindar Jyotindra Narayan published book on painting which contains 51 portraits. Mechpara painting attracted many dignitaries and high profiles of Bengal and Assam. One of the beautiful paintings, illustrated by the zamindary family, was presented to Great Rabindra Nath Tagore when he visited Rajbari of Mechpara. Assam Assembly House also contains one of the paintings, illustrated by Mechpara family and some of them are preserved in Assam Museum. Thus, zamindars of Goalpara enriched the art of painting of Assam.

Some zamindars and their family members were closely associated with the scholarly works. I have elucidated this in the prescribed chapters for socio-cultural contribution of the zamindars. It is highly required to mention here some of the names of the zamindars who contributed a lot to the development of Assamese literature. Kabindra Patra, the ancestor of Gauripur Raj family is said to have translated 18th Parva of Mahabharata to local language is considered a profound creativity on the part of an administrator like him. Raja Prabhat Chandra was a profound writer in Bengali who also patronised in publishing two Weekly, "Advocate of Assam" in Assamese and "Prantibashir Jhuli" in Bengali. He also patronised in publishing "Social History of Kamrupa" in three volumes and "Pachim Kamrupar Kayastha Samajar Etibrtta" and all expenditure were borne by him. In the field of Assamese literature, Zamindar Nagendra Narayan Choudhury contributed in highest magnitude. He was a famous writer of Assam and contributed a lot to the development of Assamese literature. He wrote many books, articles, traveling accounts, poetries, short stories and dramas. Not only had that he also published an Assamese Weekly, "Awahan", through which his creativities were exposed. It is accurately said, that Nagendra Narayan created Awahan,

and Awahan converted Zamindar Nagendra Narayan Choudhury to writer Nagendra Narayan Choudhury. His multifarious writing was the valuable gifts to the Assamese literature which enriched the treasure of Assamese language. He was only zamindar who considered himself as an Assamese and devoted himself for the cause of Assamese language.

Zamindar Nagendra Narayan also played an important role in the language movement of Goalpara, started for re-establishment of Assamese as official language in Goalpara. He led the pro-Assamese group and continued their demand until achieve it. He left no stone unturned, so far the re-establishment of Assamese language is concerned, against the Land Lords Association's claim for continuity of Bengali as official language of Goalpara. For creating public opinion in favour of Assamese and to bring awareness to the Assamese people of Goalpara, he published the Weekly magazine "Awahan", with co-operation of Dr. Dinonath Sarma, Dewan of Sidli estate. The issue has been analyzed in details in chapter VI. He successfully opposed the stand of the pro-Bengali group led by Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua of Gauripur Estate. It was due to the sincere efforts of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, the Government was convinced to re establish Assamese as the official Language of Goalpara instead of Bengali.

Most of the zamindars sincerely devoted to the religious works. Although, the zamindars of Western Assam were Hindus of Shakti cult, they were, secular in their attitude and outlook and extended assistance to other religious groups within the jurisdiction of their zamindaries. They founded temples, satras, and other religious shrines in their respective estates. They also generously donated land to these religious institutions and arranged regular pujas employing *pujaries* in such temples paid from their exchequer. Garipur Raj family maintained department, called

Devarsana to look after religious functioning in their estate. Raja Mohendra Narayan made grant of about 1600 bighas land to Shah Kamal Dargah situated near Mahendraganj of which 80 bighas were excavated for a tank called Peerar Dighee. Gauripur zamindar granted 1300 bighas land to Ramrai satra in present Dhubri district.

The zamindars of the corresponding period had on record the credit of foundation of new township, viz, Gauripur, Abhayapuri, Bilasipara, Bagribari, Lakhipur, Tikrikilla, Sidli and Mohendraganj, thus the contributed in urbanizing this region.

Almost all the zamindars of Western Assam founded library in their Rajbari and heaped various books of both English and Bengali. Even they founded such libraries in the High Schools they founded. Some of them even brought books and magazines from London and other foreign countries. Thus, they made huge contribution to the intellectual development of the region.

In contrary to the feudalist autocracy, some of the later zamindars, their spouses and children served the people as the public representative to the State legislative council as well as to the Parliament of India after Independence and even before. We find Pramathesh Barua (twice) and Prakritesh Barua to represented Gauripur constituency to Assam Legislative council and successfully presented the different problems of the local people in the floor of the Council. Raja Ajit Narayan Deb of Sidli Estate represented Bilasipara constituency to Assam Legislative Assembly and his wife Rani Manjula Devi represented Dhubri Parliamentary constituency to the Parliament. Manjula Devi was so popular that she was elected as M.L.A. from Kokrajhar constituency and served as a minister. They, contrary to the Royal comfort and Aristocratic luxury, served the people with utmost dedication. Ajit Narayan Deb,

worked as the Chairman of O.N.G.C and member of Assam Public Service Commission, and tried his level best to dispense justice to the appointment of the Assam Civil Servant. He helped many Assamese youth in their employment in O.N.G.C. Again, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua also involved in political arena of Assam being elected as the president of Assam Association in 1903, a body dealing with Assam political problems till its merger with the National Congress to form Assam Provincial Congress Committee. Thus, the zamindars and their kins have served to the society as the public representative under democracy.

It has become evident from the preceding discussion that the works and the personality of some of the zamindars of western Assam had a tremendous impact on the society of Goalpara as well as that of Assam in various aspects. Though the little oppression and extortion were resorted to by the zamindars as ruler and revenue collector, these are not unusual even to day in the present democratic society of the world. In the midst of their luxury style of living, the works they had done for the people and the society have carried great significance in the posterity, especially in the event of promotion of learning, enrichment of literature, development of Goalpariya folk culture and folk songs, promotion of indigenous handicraft, advancement of Narai Mukti Andalan and Natya Andalan as well as in the development of Assamese society and culture.

In fine, the zamindars have made valuable contributions to the socio-cultural growth in Assam in general and Goalpara of western Assam in particular. Not only the cultural history of Assam but that of India as well has offered high position to Pramathesh Barua for his magnificent contribution to Hindi cinema and Pratima Barua Pandey for her outstanding contribution to the Goalpariya folk songs and folk

culture. The history of education, language and literature of Assam will remember some of the zamindars for their services rendered to the development of society and culture, especially the great service rendered by Nagendra Narayan Choudhury to the development of Assamese language and literature. Had the zamindar invested their wealth in industrialization in their respective estates instead of spending for luxury and court ceremonial functions, Goalpara would not have been the poorest district in Assam.