

**Zamindars of Western Assam:
Their Contribution to the Socio-cultural
Development of the Region: 1765-1956**

**Thesis Submitted to the University of North Bengal
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History**



Submitted By

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Preface

The Ph.D thesis entitled, "Zamindars of Western Assam: Their Contribution to the Socio-Cultural Development of the Region: 1765-1956", deals with the zamindari system as it operated in Goalpara district in Western Assam and its impact on the socio-cultural evolution of this region as well as that of Assam. Though the period of the present study has been fixed in between 1765, the date of assumption of Dewani by the British East India Company to 1956, when the zamindari system was abolished, but I have stretched the period a little backward to highlight the background of the introduction of zamindari system in this region and its development under the Mughals.

The Zamindars has occupied an important place in the administrative and socio-economic history of Bengal. Their life and exploits which coloured the imagination of so many are engagingly presented in stories, poems and folk songs. On the other hand their love and affection to the people and to the society were reflected by their so many benevolent works, like construction of roads, bridge, embankment foundation of schools, colleges, temples, dispensaries, serais, excavation of water tanks, water reservoirs and other development works for the welfare of the subjects. We find lot of works and researches have already been carried out by many scholars on zamindari system in Bengal. Unfortunately, Goalpara, once forming a part of Bengal Subah had the same system as that of Bengal, but till the eightieth of twentieth century not a single work was done, nor any research was carried out on it, notwithstanding, zamindari system dominated the socioeconomic and cultural life of the people of the region for over three centuries. Professor Amalendu Guha, s lecture in a Seminar, organized by the teachers Association of B.N College, in 1984, which was published in a book, "Obibhakta Goalpara zilar Artha Samajik Awashtha: Eti Dristipath:", in

Assamese, was a first attempt to publish a book of this kind. But due to its limited scope it does not go into details of the working of the zamindari system, nor it throws any light on the benevolent works of the zamindars carried out for the welfare of the tenants and the society. Prof. A.K. Barua, s Ph.D thesis entitled "Zamindari Administration in Goalpara in Assam" 1987, has concentrated its attention on the zamindari rule, revenue administration and the relationship between zamindars and the ryots. It does not focus on the zamindari social works and contribution of the zamindars to the society. To the best of our knowledge, Santo Barman, s Ph.D. thesis, " A Study of the Zamindari System in Goalpara during British Regime", is a splendid works on the zamindari system of Goalpara. It categorically discusses almost every aspect of zamindari rule and its impact on economy. But, surprisingly, the benevolent works, which have been of great value in the development of the society of Goalpara as well as that of Assam, have not been brought into light by him. Despite the wealth of information unearthed by those scholars, the impact of the zamindari rules, relation of tenants and zamindars beyond economic transaction, zamindars' love and affection to the subjects, and to the society and also their contribution to the development of culture were not dealt at all.

This gap, mingled with my long cherished hope, therefore, has inspired me, to select the topic as my Ph.D Research, especially to investigate the unexplored aspects of the zamindari activities relating to the social welfare and development of the society and culture. It is an urgent need to have a systematic study of the benevolent works endeavoured by some of the zamindars of this region and to bring them into light for the comprehension of the present generation. In order to avoid misunderstanding on the term of Goalpara (old) and Goalpara (new) I have preferred the term Western Assam to cover the territory where zaminady system was in

operation. It is to be mentioned here that the old Goalpara district is presently divided into four districts, viz, Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon.

The work is based on two kinds of sources. For the first three chapters, dealings with the origin and growth of zamindari system, geographical identity of the region of Western Assam and Goalpara, review of zamindari system and formation of the heterogenic society of zamindars, I have largely depended upon the primary sources like district and provincial records, Bengal Revenue Boards papers, Gazetteers, official letters, Reports of survey and inquiry, census Reports, proceedings of legislature, memorials and other documents. But for the remaining chapters relate with the social welfare activities of the zamindars we, had no alternative but to depend upon the local records, especially the biography of zamindars, official documents of landlords, interview with the family members of the ex zamindars, some senior citizen of the localities and labourious field works, like visit of schools, colleges, site of ancient monuments, temples, embankment and various places connected with zamindari rules. However, due weightage has been given to the secondary sources.

It must be mentioned here that there are huge difficulties in the way of spading the source materials for the study of this kind. The family archives of the zamindars are immensely important but unfortunately, the practice of keeping Diary or writing Biography was not, perhaps, popular among the zamindars. Whatever few documents of this kind were in the possession of the descendants were neither in good condition nor were they willing to give for such study. Of course, due to passing of long time since abolition of zamindari system the most of the documents of Rajbari have been either perished or about to damage for lack of proper preservation.

Hence, the sources used for study have been mostly relevant official documents and private papers, supplemented by various

books and reports published. The field survey and interview with some persons as well as the documents found in Rajbari provide immense help in the study. A labourious field study was made to do the spade work of tracing the sources at the district level. I visited each Rajbari of the zamindars of Goalpara and interviewed with some of the members of the family. Some schools, colleges, temples, which were founded by zamindars have been visited and roads, sarai, embankment, hospitals that were connected with the zamindars house have been taken into account. A large numbers of articles, journal, periodicals, smritigrantha, biography, zamindary documents, and bangshabali have furnished a mass of information for the cultural development and the contribution of the zamindars to it. Some senior members of locality having notice of the zamindary administration and working have been interacted with. Unfortunately, tenants and leading personality witnessing the zamindary activities are hardly found in the position to speak any thing. Most regrettable fact is that what ever documents have had the possession of the zamindars family are not exposed to the private scrutiny.

My endeavour to study the zamindars' contribution to the socio-cultural growth had to reckon with the above limitation. Notwithstanding the difficulties of procuring the source materials in respect of the zamindary activities in the socio cultural fields, an all out efforts was made to secure relevant materials for this work upon which the present study has been carried out.

The thesis has been divided into eight chapters. Formulation of the chapters was done in such an away as would be convenient to deal with the topic methodically. To begin with the territorial identity of western Assam, boundary of Goalpra district, political journey of western Assam, background of zamindary system and emergence of numerous zamindary have been discussed in details in the chapter I. The second chapter deals with the working of

zamindari system in the title of "review of zamindari system" by which some important aspects are discussed along with the abolition of the system. Chapter three is concerned with the formation of the Goalpariya society. Attempt has been made to throw light on the historical evolution of the Goalpariya society with induction of several elements of immigrants and their influence on the society. Besides, zamindars' role played in the formation of such society has been also dealt with. All the six Permanently Settled zamindari along with the genealogy of the landlords, their social welfare activities, public works, contribution to the various fields of the society, like education, music, literature, religion, public entertainment, drama theatre, art handicrafts etc are discussed, analysed, examined in the chapter no. from four to seventh. Beside, Sidli being the temporarily settled estate has been brought under discussion in the seventh chapter. In the beginning of each chapter dealing with the zamindari benevolent works, brief history and genealogy of each of them have been added. All efforts have been made to examine the various aspects of the zamindars' benevolent activities, and their impacts on the society and finally, the out come and findings of the study have been dealt in the concluding chapter.

In its study, I have incurred debts of gratitude to many individuals and institutions.

I am grateful to all those who helped me in selecting such interesting topic of Research and for inspiring me to complete the present dissertation. The first person to be remembered in this connection is Professor (Mrs) Ratna Roy Sanyal, Professor of the Department of History of the University of North Bengal, Guide and Supervisor of this project, with out her direct and indirect help and guidance it would not have been possible for me to complete the work. She guided me all along and I express my gratitude to her, for valuable advice and method that I could follow in course of preparation of the thesis. I would also like to express my gratitude

to Late Ambikacharan Choudhury, a celebrating historian of Goalpara district (old), who extended valuable suggestions and help to me in many occasions whenever I approached to him. I am indebted to Late Sri Sibananda Sarma, a renowned historian and researcher who inspired me for this Research.

I would like to place my gratitude to all the authors whose works I have consulted. I also acknowledge my gratitude to the authority of National Library, Calcutta, State Archives, Dispur, Archaeological Survey of India, Guwahati, Kamrupa Anusandan Samiti, Guwahati, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, The Indian Council for Historical Research, Guwahati, Dhubri Museum, Dhubri and District Archive, Dhubri for their kind co-operation and valuable help. I would like to thank, the staff of the Library of North Bengal University, Gauhati University Library, Dhubri District Library, and B.N.College library for their help and co operation. I also sincerely express my gratitude to the representatives of the ex zamindar families for their kind co-operation and help, extended to me in the course of collection of source materials.

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Finally, I can't but admit here that my wife, Anju Monowara Begum who ungrudgingly weathered all domestic responsibility in my absence in course of my study and ever shared my feeling and desires over the years of my research. My daughter Nargis Ahmed and son Asif Iqbal Ahmed had always been source of inspiration of my research work. All of them deserve my heartfelt thanks.

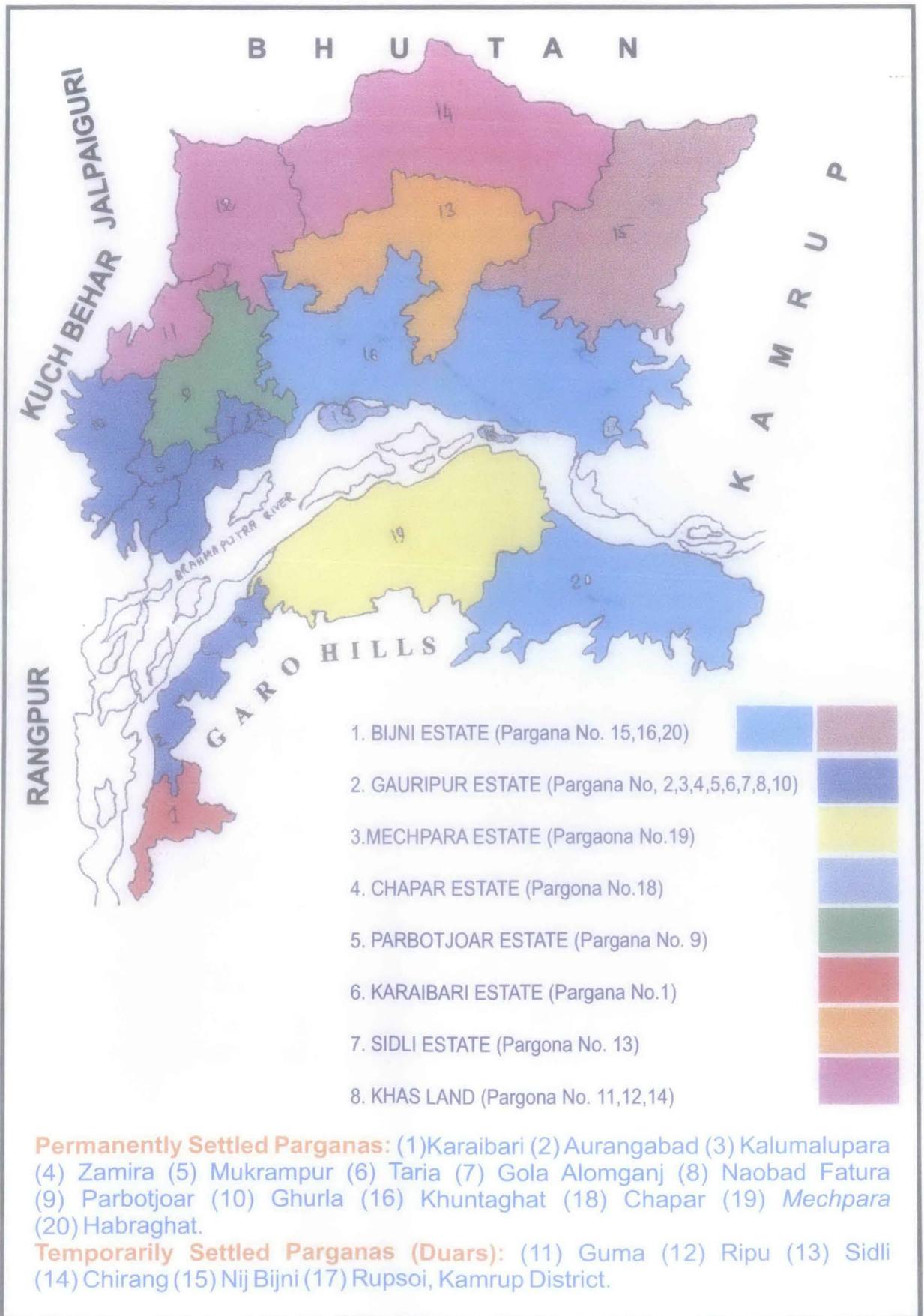
May it be recorded that there may be some errors and mistakes for which the sole responsibility lies on me.

Date: 24.2.2012



Akabbar Ali Ahmed

MAP OF THE ZAMINDARY ESTATES OF THE DISTRICT OF GOALPARA



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CHAPTER-I

Introduction

1. 1. Geographical Identity of Western Assam

Assam is situated in the Northeast corner of India in between 28° and 24° North -Latitude and $89^{\circ} 86'$ and 96° East longitudes. It is amply described as the land of the "Red River and Blue hills". The mighty river of Brahmaputra dominates the whole of Assam valley and the blue hills intersect most of the parts of the state with their evergreen forest and blue haze. This land is the home to a variety of exotic flora and fauna including the famous one horned rhinoceros. It is bounded by two foreign countries and seven Indian states. To the north, it is Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. To the east, there are Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur. Mizoram and Meghalaya skirt the southern boundary and to the west, there lies Bangladesh and West Bengal ² Except on the west, it is bounded on all sides by mountain ranges inhabited by different hill tribes, mostly of Mongoloid stock.

Her-extraordinary fertile soil, rich natural and mineral resources and a population of mixed character, offer interesting subjects of research and study to natural and social scientist. The mountain system of Assam, collectively known as the Assam range was broadly divided into two valleys- the Brahmaputra valley or Assam valley and the Surma valley or Barak valley. The Brahmaputra (son of Brahma) is one of the largest rivers of the world. It flows majestically through the heart of the Assam valley. Another river, the Surma with its tributary, the Barak, flows through the Surma valley. The Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial plain, about 720 k.m. in length with an average breadth of 96 k.m. The valley

spreading flat and wide from east to west in the lower portion, tends to project northward in its upper portion where it tapers off. There were seven districts in Brahmaputra valley Goalpara, Kamrupa, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur.^{2a} Presently, these districts have been divided into smaller parts for administrative expediency. The major part of the Surma valley falls within the present Bangladesh, only a small triangular part of it known as the Barak plains forming the district of Cachar, within the present state of Assam.

Assam is known by different names in the Epics, Puranic and early historical literature. It has mentioned as Pragjyotisha in the Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharat. Assam is known as Pragjyotisha in early times and Kamrupa in later times. In all classical literature, Assam is mentioned as Pragjyotisha and some times as Kamrupa. The medieval literatures, chronicles and the Persian literatures referred the name as Kamrupa. The earliest mention of the city of Pragjyotisha found in Ramayana and Mahabharata. There is no doubt that the same country called Pragjyotisha in earlier times and Kamrupa in later period.³ Pragjyotisha included not only the whole of Assam and parts of North and East Bengal (present Bangladesh) but also the hill tracts up to the border of China. According to Ramayana Amurtaraja, son of Kusa and grandfather of the famous sage Viswamitra founded this city. Divers opinions are there regarding the origin of the name "Pragjyotisha." According to the Kalikapuran, here Brahma first created the stars and hence the city is called Pragjyotishpur, a city equal to the city of Indra. Gait states that the name Pragjyotishpur is interesting in connection with the reputation wherein, the country is always been held as a land of magic and incantation.⁴ The name Pragjyotisha, however, is

most probably derived from the term "Pragjyotish" the eastern light. Hence it appears to mean "the city of the land of eastern light"⁵

The kingdom of Pragjyotisha came to known as Kamrupa during the Puranic times, based on the legend that Kamdeva, the God of Love, the Indian Cupid who had been destroyed by the fiery glance of Siva, returned to life in the country.⁶ In the Allahabad pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta, the term "Assam" has mentioned for the first time as "Kamrupa" and in early Puranas. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, who visited Kamrupa in seventh century, mentions the name of the country as Kamo lo po and also mentions that the county extends more than a myriad Li (1667 miles) in circuit. The territory called "Asham" in the Ain-i-Akbari and Asam in the Padshahnamah and Francis Hamilton in his Account of Assam, that compiled during 1807-8, applied the same name. Assam is apparently English form of "Asam."^{6a}

According to B. K. Kakati the name Kamrupa is derived from an *Austric* formation like Kamru or Kamrut, the name of a lesser divinity in Santali, which justifies the association of the land with magic and necromancy. Three hundred years before Hiuen Tsang, the famous Prasasti of Samudra Gupta mentions Kamrupa as frontier kingdom of India. No doubt, Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa is the same country. The famous poet Kalidasa, who, according to Vincent Smith, flourished in the 1st part of the fifteenth century, also mentions Kamrupa and Pragjyotisha as names of the same kingdom.⁸

The boundary of Pragjyotisha/ Kamrupa varied from time to time. In the Mahabharata, it has mentioned that it stretched southwards as far as the Bay of Bengal and its western boundary was Karatoya. In the Kalika Puran, it has said that the temple of Kamakhya near Gauhati was in the centre of Kamrupa and in the Vishnu Puran, it has further mentioned, that

the country extended around this temple in all directions for 100 Yajanas or about 450 miles. This may be held to embrace the whole of eastern Bengal, Assam and Bhutan. In the Juginitantra, it has mentioned that the boundary of Kamrupa extended from the Karloga River on the west to the Dikhou on the east and from the mountain of Kanjagiri on the north to the confluence of the Brahmaputra and Lakhya rivers on the south. Therefore, it included roughly, the Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Rangpur, Koch Bihar, the north east of Mymensingh and possibly, the Garo hills.⁹⁸

It was divided into four portions, as mentioned in Yuginantra, a work of 13th century viz. Kampith from Karatoya to the Sankosh, Ratnapith from the Sankosh to the Rupahi, Swarnapith from the Rupahi to the Bharali and Saumarpith from the Bharali to the Dehrang. Elsewhere, Ratnapith is said to have bounded with the tract of land between the Karatoya and Manas, Kampith between the Manas and Silghat on the North bank of the Brahmaputra and Bhadrpith, the corresponding portion of the South bank. Saumarpith included the land lying in the most easternly part of Assam.¹⁰ Sukapha founded Ahom kingdom in Saumar Pith in early thirteenth century. The country to the east of the Baranadi came to be known as Saumarpith and the Ahom Kings of the time were called Rajas of Saumara.¹¹ The area within the jurisdiction of Kampith and Ratnapith came to be known as western Assam as the Kamrupa was renamed as Assam in the later times.

Since the foundation of Ahom kingdom under Sukapha in the early part of thirteenth century in upper Assam, the Ahom followed the policy of consolidation and assimilation with the local people. At the same time, they followed the policy of expansion towards the west as well. For their bravery, heroism and ferociousness led the local people to call them as "Asaman" means incomparable, and slowly came to know as Ahom and

their conquered land known as Assam. Gradually they occupied almost the whole of the Brahmaputra valley that was previously included within the domain of Kamrupa kingdom and thus Kamrupa came to be known as Assam. Opinions differ as to the origin of the name Assam. Some think it is an Anglicized form of the Assamese word Asam meaning unequal, peerless, a term by which the Ahoms or the Shan invaders were called by the local people. Its several variants such as Asaam, Aasam, Asam and Acam have noticed in Assamese literature. Some are of the opinion that the word has derived from Asama in the sense of 'uneven' as distinguished from *Samatata* or 'even'. It is certain that the term "Asam" was not applied prior to the Ahoms occupation of the country; rather it was applied for the Ahoms than to their country. Famous historian, E.A. Gait, expresses his doubt about origin of the name Ahom. He opines that the Ahoms called them Tai, and it is not clear how they came to be known by their present name. Recent researches conducted by the scholars bring to the notice that all the tribes inhabiting the north eastern border of Yunnan and northern Myanmar called the Tai people as Asam, Lasam, Sam, Sem, Siem, Sen, Sham etc. It is presumed, that such terms were also applied for the Ahoms by the local tribes of eastern Assam who lived in close proximity with those in Myanmar. Much later, Assam was a Sanskrit derivation with meaning unequal or 'unrivalled'.¹² The Assamese historical tradition says, that the name Assam in the sense of unequal has been applied to the Tai conquerors by the local tribes when they entered the Brahmaputra valley in the early thirteenth century.

B. K. Kakati observes that Assam as applied to the Shans, is a hybrid formation of Assamese private-prefix A- with the Tai word Cham meaning to be defeated and hence Acham means undefeated.¹³ But there is non denying the fact that the name "Assam" is connected with the Shan

invaders who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the 13th century.

With the fall of the Palas in the mid twelfth century, the powerful kingdom of Kamrup disintegrated and the valley of the Brahmaputra was divided into numerous but independent principalities. The Chutias had erected a kingdom of their own to east of the Subansiri and the Desang while the Cacharies held their sway on the west on the south of the Brahmaputra, stretching to a part of the present district of Nowgong. Further west both the banks of the Brahmaputra was occupied by the Bhuyans and on the extreme west there was a kingdom retaining the name Kamrupa which was subsequently known as Kamata and Persianised Kamru.¹⁴ The Western part of the kingdom retaining the name of Kamrupa is said to have been the western Assam of medieval time.

The Ahom, who founded their kingdom on the southeast part of Assam, expanded their territory by subduing the neighbouring kingdoms. They with shrewd diplomacy brought the Borahis and the Morans under their control. Gradually they adopted the policy of expansion to the west, subdued the Chutias and the Cacharis, and reached the boundary of Kamrupa.

By the beginning of the 13th century, we saw two major events in the history of Assam. Of which, one was the beginning of a series of invasions from the west led by the Turks-Afghan rulers of Bengal and other was the foundation of a kingdom by the Tai-Shans, who came to be known as Ahoms in the Southeastern part of the Brahmaputra (Upper Assam or eastern Assam).¹⁵

The territory lying between Karatoya in the west and Baranadi in the east was called Western Assam by most of the historians, like Gait, Satyendra Nath Bhattcharya, S.N.Sarma and others, because this area

had been, infact, western part of Ancient Kamrupa kingdom. About the boundary of Western Assam of medieval period, S. N. Sarma observed, "The western Assam was a body of land comprising the district of present Kamrupa, Goalpara and some parts of North Bengal including Koch Bihar and part of Maimensing and Rangpur district of Bangladesh. It was ruled by the Khen or Khan dynasty till to fifteenth century but its last ruler Nilambar was defeated and overthrown in 1498 by Hussain Shah of Gauda, as mentioned earlier, and after a few years Viswa Singha laid the foundation of the Koch dynasty in western Assam"¹⁶. As the term "Kamrupa" is the synonymy with the term "Assam", the western Kamrupa and western Assam are the terms to locate the same place. The Koch kingdom was divided in to two branches during lifetime of Nara Narayan who ceded eastern part of his kingdom to his nephew, son of Chilarai as tributary ruler. Dissension crept out following the death of Nara Narayan and the two Koch kingdoms dragged in to war and sought intervension of the Mughals. In the early sixteenth century, the Mughal established their power on western Assam owing the quarrel between the two Koch kingdoms. Subsequently the Mughal ceded their territory to the British in 1765 by granting Dewani to the East India Company. Western Assam, thus, came under the British because of the accession of the Dewani of Bengal by the Company.

The Boundary of western Assam varied from time to time due to political reason. The western Assam, which had been comprised of the territory from Kartoya in the west to the Barnadi in the east during the Mughal rule, gradually, reduced to Sankosh in the west to Barnadi in the east during British rule. The territory west of Sankosh River was included to the Koch Bihar commissionership by the British, and the district of Rangpur was attached with East Bengal province. Finally, it is seen, that

western Assam of modern time includes the territory between the River Sankosh in the west to the River Barnadi in the east. This tract of land was divided into two districts, viz., undivided Goalpara and Kamrup under the British regime. Again, for the administrative convenience, the district of Goalpara has divided into four districts in 1983, viz., Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigoan and Chirang.

Sofar, the zamindary system in Assam is concern; this system was operating in Goalpara and Sylhet districts, introduced by the Mughals in the early 17th century. Goalpara is situated in the western part of Assam, while Sylhet was located southern Assam in the corresponding period, but most of the parts of Sylhet went to Bangladesh as a result of the Partition of India. In the present study the appellation; "Zamindars of Western Assam" is applied in place of the term "Zamindars of Goalpara" to avoid confusion and contradiction as to the application of the term "Goalpara" both for the district and for town. Apart from this, the present Goalpara district is a portion of the undivided district of Goalpara. Hence, there is a chance of misunderstanding on the application of the term, undivided and present divided Goalpara district. To avoid all these scope of misunderstanding, the term Western Assam is used to identify the area related with the zaimindary system in Assam which prevailed in undivided Goalpara district.

1.2: Brief political history of Western Assam till the establishment of the Mughal hegemony

The kingdom of Kamrupa started declining in the wake of the continuous invasion of the Muslim from Gauda. The first Muhammedan invasion of Kamrupa was led by Muhammed Bin Baktiar Khaliji, the Governor of Bihar under Kutub Uddin Aibak, who ruled the possession

of Muhammed of Ghor in India. In 1202, A.D. Baktiar occupied Lakhanavati, capital of Gauda, without facing any resistance and three years later (1205) A.D, he launched a campaign for territorial expansion to the east with his eyes fixed on the distant country, like Tibet, China or Turkisthan.¹⁷ At this time the ruler of Kamrupa bore the title of Kameswar and his western boundary was the Karatoya river.¹⁸ The march of Baktiar was disastrous one. The king of Kamrupa, Pirthu or Barthu defeated him. Baktiar along with a few of his soldiers escaped Nararowly. An epigraph engraved on the famous Kanai Borsi Rock, near North Guwahati, records the following few words "on thirteenth of chatra, in the year saka 1127, the Turks coming into Kamrupa were destroyed." Pirthu was, however, defeated and killed by Nasiruddin in 1227. As a result, we witnessed the emergence of several petty chiefs, the Bhuyans at different localities. In fact, the political history of western Assam remained somewhat hazy and confusing for nearly two centuries till the establishment of the Khen dynasty at Kamatapur towards the middle of fifteenth century.¹⁹

It is said that, King Sandhya shifted his capital from Kamrupnagar to Kamatapur near the present town of Koch Bihar. Thenceforth, the king of Kamrupa had assumed the title of Kamateswar or Kameswar and his kingdom came to be known as Kamata a Kamrupa Kamata.²⁰ K.L. Barua observed, that "It was very likely Sandhya, the king of Kamarupa who after defeating Tugril Khan Malik Ujbeq also known as Sultan Mughis-ud-din, in 1255 A.D. removed the seat of government from Kamrupanagar to Kamatapur about 1260 A.D. This removal was probably necessitated by the menace of the Cacharis and also by the fact that Gauhati was then easily accessible to raiding Muslim invaders from the direction of SoNaragaon."²¹

The Kamata kingdom survived until the end of fifteenth century A.D. Nilambar, the last king of Kamata was dethroned by Hussein Shah of Gauda, who invaded Kamata in 1498 and established Muslim colony on it. Hussein Shah returned Gauda leaving Danial, his son as the Governor of the conquered territory stationing a garrison at Hajo. But the Muslim rule did not perpetuate in Kamata and the Bhuyan chiefs, soon after departure of Hussein Shah, combined themselves against the common foe and destroyed Danial's garrison and began to rule independently in their principalities. The state of affairs continued for a few years and then the Koches under Viswa Singh made themselves masters of the country west of the Bar Nadi.²² During Muslim rule in Kamrupa, Gias Uddin *Aulia*, a Muslim Saint and Commander of Muslim army started building a beautiful Mosque at Hajo but died before its completion and buried there. The place is known as "*Poa Mecca*" (one fourth of Mecca) to reflect its sanctity.²³

According to tradition, Gias Uddin *Aulia* brought some soil from Mecca, which were poured on to foundation base of the mosque to purify the place. Since then the place is known as *Poa Mecca*. Besides, during that time the mosque of Rangamati (Panbari) was built under instruction of Hussein Shah

1.3: Evolution of Zamindary System in Western Assam

The zamindary system of western Assam had its origin in feudalism. It was developed as a part of the Mughal administration. Although, the Mughals are said to have been the originator of this system but it was not unknown in Western Assam before it was established by them in an organized manner. The feudal lords, the Bhuyans as they were called, flourished in this part of the country under the Kamata Kingdom towards the latter part of the fifteenth century. That the feudal lords of

Assam were known as “*Bhuyans*,” can be ascertained from the view expressed by late Dr. Wise, according to whom the word “*Bhuya*” or “*Bhuiya*” is a Sanskrit equivalent to Persian word “*zamindars*.” The word ‘*Bhuyans*’ means a landlord, which is synonymous with the Persian equivalent *Zamindar* and Sanskrit *Bhaumik*. The institution of the *Bhuyan* was also prevalent in Bengal and the tradition of the *Baro Bhuyans* is common to both Bengal and Assam. There are two opinions regarding the origin of the *Bhuyans* in Assam. According to one, which is much prevalent in western Assam, the *Bhuyan* of seven families were brought from Gauda in accordance to the term of the peace agreement made between the Gaudeswar DharmaNarayan and the Kamateswar Durlabh Narayan in the beginning of the 14th century. The Kamata king allowed them to settle down at a place called Lengamaguri situated to the east of Hajo and south of the river Barnadi. According to the Vaishnava literature, these *Bhuyans* returned to Gauda to take their families, family priests, friends and relatives. Accordingly, five Kayastha *Bhuyan* families joined the first batch of seven families so that their total strength rose to twelve, which constitute the *Baro-Bhuyan* or twelve original *Bhuyan* families of Assam.²³

The other opinion ascribes an indigenous origin to the *Bhuyans* and makes them descendants of Samudra, the minister of Arimatta. It states that Lakshmi, the grand daughter of Samudra had two sons, Santanu and Shyamanta. Both had twelve sons each. The son of elder was called “*Bara* (elder) *Baro Bhuyan*” and those of the younger ‘*Chota* (younger) *Baro Bhuyan*’. A study of the administrative history of Ancient and Medieval Assam shows that the institution of the *Bhuyans* had no outside origin. It was of an indigenous growth closely associated with the administrative set up of ancient Assam. The institution was originated

from the feudatory system. The officer was given land grants by the king in lieu of the cash salaries. Though such grants were usually made for a period covering the officer's life only and, therefore, were liable to reassignment on his death, they became, in practice, hereditary possession, owing mainly to the practice of the hereditary succession to the office, which was a convention, if not the rule. Their main source of income was revenue; paid by the cultivators and in order to facilitate the assessment of their income of a particular area they grouped the villagers' together in units of twelve or less than twelve. Each of these units was called "chakla" and placed under an officer called "Bhuyan". If the unit consisted of twelve villages, the the officer in charge was called a *Baro Bhuyan*. While the number was less than twelve he was called *Chota Bhuyan*, *Saru Bhuyan* or simply *Bhuyan*.²⁴ The *Bhuyan* who had close relationship with the cultivators on the one hand and also determined the fortunes of their overlords, on the other, found it easy to set aside the authority of their masters when they grew weak and acted like kings. Some of them bore titles like *Raja*, *Chota Raja*, *Gomatha*, *Kshatriya*, *Samajpati* and so on. Each *Bhuyan* was independent within his own domain, having arms under his control, but they used to stand united against a common enemy. As the central authority was almost non-existent in eastern Assam in between the fall of the Palas and the expansion of the Ahoms' power covering this region, the *Bhuyan* acted independently till they were subjugated by the Ahoms in the eastern part in sixteenth century. In western Assam till to the existence of powerful king, the *Bhuyans* offered allegiance to the king. But owing to the weakness of the king the *Bhuyans* emerged as independent ruler of their respective area. It is to be noted, in the event that when the central authority was strong they acted as the subordinate chiefs and they used to exercise wide administrative and judicial powers over their tenants. They

had their own courts known as "*Karkhana*", the mainstay of local authority. Sankar Dev, the great profounder of Vaisnavism in Assam belonged to one of such Bhuyan families headed by Kushambar Bhuyan²⁵.

According to one of the legends of the *Baro* Bhuyan, Durlabh Narayan, who was an Bhuyan ascended to the throne of Kamata and ruled it till the end of thirteenth century over the country between the Barnadi and the Kartoya. As mentioned earlier the Bhuyans in the Kamata kingdom some times became so powerful that some of them, like Naldhvaj, became the sovereign lord of the whole kingdom.²⁶ They have left a good account of themselves at the time of their kingdom being attacked by Alauddin Hussein Shah, Nilambar, the Kamata king was imprisoned but a number of Bhuyans gave battle to Hussein Shah. Mentions are found in the genealogical accounts of the Bhuyans and in *Riyaz-us-Salatin* of the battle and the Persian accounts further mentions such Bhuyans like Malkumar, RupNarayan, Gasa Lakhan and Lachmi Narayan who were subdued by Hussein Shah. It was the Bhuya again who took the lead to overthrow the Muslim Government founded by Hussein Shah in Kamata. They killed Danial, the Governor appointed by Hussein Shah, and made the kingdom free to establish their own rule.²⁷ The Bhuyan, again established their power in Western Assam but with the rise of Koches the power of the Bhuyans began to wane. Viswa Singha, who founded the Koch kingdom with its well-organized army, subdued the Bhuyans one after another. According to Rai Bahadur Kanaklal Baruah, after the death of Nilambar, the last powerful king of Kamata about the end of fifteenth century, a sort of *Matsyaya* (lawlessness) prevailed in Kamrupa. The country was ruled by a number of petty chiefs. This state of things could not naturally continue for long

time. Ultimately, a leader appeared who raised his head above all the other petty chiefs and gradually subjugated them all. This was Bisu, son of Haria Mondal, who subsequently became king and assumed the name Viswa Singha.²⁸ The power of the Bhuyans, thus, reduced by the Koch kings, finally, extincted from the Koch kingdom during the period of Mughal imperialism.

(A) Mughal conquest of Western Assam

As mentioned earlier, the Koch kingdom founded by Viswa Singha reached zenith of its power during the reign of Nara Narayan. But internal feuds crept in and Nara Narayan made his rebel nephew, Raghudeva Narayan vassal over the eastern portion of his kingdom, stretching from river Sankosh in the west to river Barnadi in the east. This portion of Koch kingdom came to be known as Koch Hajo, while the western one ruled by Nara Narayan and his successor as Koch Bihar.²⁹ After Nara Narayan's death, as mentioned earlier, Raghudeva declared his independence of Koch Behar. Lakshmi Narayan was a weak ruler who could not compel him to pay the tribute but he stirred up a rebellion headed by Parikshit Narayan against his father, Raghudev Narayan. But Raghudeva Narayan successfully quashed it capturing Parikshit Narayan and executing his associates. Naturally, this incident seriously intensified their relation and being frighten Lakshmi Narayan had no option but to seek protection from the Mughal Subedar of Dacca by becoming its vassal in 1596. He also gave his daughter in marriage to Raja Mansing, the then governor of Bengal in 1597.³⁰

As a result, a force was then sent by Man Singh for the protection of Koch Bihar. Parikshit Narayan succeeded his father, Raghudev Narayan who died then, and ascended to the throne of Koch Hajo Kingdom. He also refused to acknowledge the suzerainty of Lakshmi

Narayan, clashes occurred between the two rulers, and both of them sought the friendship of the Ahoms. Gait mentions that in 1600,AD Parikshit gave his daughter Mangal Dahi to Pratap Singha.³¹

Taking advantage of the struggle for succession between Parikshit Narayan and Indra Narayan, Lakshmi Narayan invaded Ghila Vijoypur, the capital of Koch-Hajo kingdom. By that time, Parikshit had secured the throne with the support of the nobles. In the war, Lakshmi Narayan was defeated and his beloved brother Balidev Narayan was killed. Encouraged by his victory, Parikshit Narayan took the offensive and led a series of attack on Lakshmi Narayan's territories who found it difficult to defend. This led Lakshmi Narayan to approach Islam Khan at Ghoraghat in 1600 AD and then to Mughal Emperor Jahangir for help by offering his daughter to him. Emperor Jahangir sent Mukarram Khan with twenty two Omraos to capture Parikshit alive if possible and bring him to Delhi. Thus; the Mughals started their campaign against Koch Hajo Kingdom under Mukaram khan. Parikshit Narayan for defence of his territory advanced to Dhubri fort and entrenched himself there to fight the Mughal general. On arrival at Dhubri he found the enemies besieged of the Koch fort, the foremost of all the forts in the Koch territory. Parikshit gave a stubborn fight against the joint army of the Munhall and Koch Bihar under the Supreme Command of Mukram Khan and it was only after a long and heroic struggle and the defeat of the Koch navy he had retreat.³²

Parikshit approached to the Ahom King for assistance and the latter invited him to Garhgaon, the capital of Ahom kingdom, assuring him all protection.³³ But at the instance of his minister he suddenly changed his mind and decided to initiate negotiation for peace with the leader of the Muslim expedition, Sheikh Kamal. Parkshit Narayan sent his envoy to

Mukaram Khan with the proposal of negotiation, informing him of his willingness to submit and pay regular tributes if his honour and security were granted. Mukaram Khan and Sheikh Kamal assured them by touching the Quran and the former advised Parikshit to accompany him to the Padshah, the interview with whom would be a great benefit to him.³⁴

Under this condition, Parikshit Narayan surrendered to Mukaram Khan; he was brought to Dhakha first to meet Subedar Islam Khan. However, by this time Islam Khan died and Kashem Khan, the next Subedar, who simply remanded him to the custody of his officers together with Lakshmi Narayan, who was also brought from Khunta Nagar by Raja Raghunath sent for the purpose. Before leaving Kamrupa, Mukaram Khan left conquered country of Kamrupa under the command of Abdus Salam. Mirza Quasim was directed to occupy all the thanas of Pandu and Mughal fleet were left under the command of Sahajit. According to the chronicles of Kamarupa that from that time Kamarupa came under the Mughal.³⁵

Both the kings were taken to Delhi, where Padshah Jahangir tried to bring about a reconciliation between Parikshit and Lakshmi Narayan and for the purpose asked the nephew to bow down to his uncle touching the latter's feet, but it was thought by Parikshit to be a humiliation and was not complied with³⁶. The Padshah then sent back Lakshmi Narayan to Koch Bihar with present of Iraqi horses and swords and Parikshit Narayan was allowed to resume his kingdom on condition of payment of four lakh rupees as peskosh and surrender of his four sons to the Mughals.³⁷ Accepting these terms while Parikshit was returning home he fell ill and died at Prayag. His dominions, as far as the Bar Nadi, were then annexed to the Mughal Empire. According to Khan Choudhury, the amount of the Peskosh was Rs. 7 lakh.³⁸

By the time when the Mughal had taken away Parikshit Narayan to Delhi as a war prisoner, his brother, Bali Narayan, fled away to the Ahom kingdom, Ahom king Pratap Singha gave him political asylum. This led the invaders to decide on the invasion of the Ahom territory. Thus began the Ahom Mughal conflict, which continued till 1638, when a peace was concluded between the Ahoms and the Mughals fixing River Barnadi as boundary between the Mughal and the Ahom. In the beginning of the war between the Ahoms and the Mughals, the Mughals were defeated and the north-eastern part of the Koch Kingdom besieged by the Muslim invaders was cleared off the Mughals, Bali Narayan was installed as a ruler in that part of Koch kingdom, later came to be known as Darrang, under Ahom suzerainty. Bali Narayan assumed the name Dharma Narayan and the kingdom comprised of the land between Barnadi in the west to River Bharali in the east³⁹

(B) Reorganization of Conquered Land by the Mughal

Rebellions broke out through out the Koch-Hajo kingdom after annexation of it, which had to be dealt with by the Mughals. Qasim Khan, the Governor of Bengal, appointed Mirza Imam Quli Shamlu as the chief administrative officer in Kamrupa and the latter arrived at Jahangirabad (Ghila Vijoypur). Mirza Imam Quli and Mirza Nathan with other officers and a force attacked the rebels at Dalgaon and defeated them and Mir Abdur Razzaq recaptured the fort at Rangamati from the rebels.⁴⁰

The Mughal commander Mukaram Khan rewarded the Koch ruler Lakshmi Narayan, for his royal services in the Kamrup war by placing the newly conquered Kamrupa under him at first temporarily with possibility of formal investment on his paying court to Islam Khan, the viceroy at Jahangirnagar.⁴¹ But death of Islam Khan; Governor of Bengal changed the arrangement of Mukaram Khan. After annexation of Koch



Hajo kingdom, Administrator or Thanadar was appointed in Rangamati and Hajo.

The Mughal Emperor Jahangir, with a view to revenue administration a high official of Koch Bihar, Kabi Sekhar was appointed as Naib Qanungo at Rangamati. It should be noted here that under the Mughal, the Qanungo being a revenue official performed the duty of attesting and registering grants and transfers of landed property. From the time of Emperor Akbar a chief Qanungo with the power to control and supervise the conduct of his deputies had been attached to every district and Pargana. The office of Qanungo, like other office, had become hereditary⁴². Sheikh Ibrahim Korari was deputed by the Emperor to make proper survey of conquered land and to carry out the settlement of it in the line of existing revenue settlement of Bengal. The whole area of conquered land of Kamrupa was divided into 4 Sarkars (1) Sarkar Dhekri, (2) Sarkar Kamrupa, (3) Sarkar Dhakhinkul and (4) Sarkar Bengal Bhum.⁴³ Again each Sarkar/Cirkar were sub divided into Pargana. There were seventy-five Parganas in the four Sarkars.⁴⁴ The Pyke system was replaced by Ryotary system like other part of Bengal. Korari went door to door of the villagers and assessed the rate of revenue and in some place they collected revenue also.⁴⁵

But the Koches, who were not prepared to accept Mughal domination, rose in rebellion under leadership of several Koch princes, such as Sanatan, Parsuram, and Madhusudhan. They withheld payment of revenue in cash, which introduced by the Mughals. The ryots were not adapted the system of cash payment, as the Pyke system was prevalent in Goalpara as in other parts of Kamrupa.⁴⁶

The Koch's resistance was indeed, a product of the wrong and unwise policy of Subadar Kashem Khan. The treacherous imprisonment

of the two Koch rulers in Koch Behar and Kamrupa, which not only dashed their hopes, but set the whole country ablaze. "No less serious than the wrong policy meted out to the late king of Kamrupa (Koch - Hajo) was administrative oppression and misrule of the local Mughal officers posted in Kamrup; for the first insurrection was caused by the oppression of Muhammad Zaman, the first Korari of Khuntaghat Parganah, his frequent changes in his land system caused agrarian instability that hit the people hard."⁴⁷

(C) Creation of Bijni Kingdom:

The collection of revenue directly from the peasant received a serious set back at the initial stage. Indeed this led to the change over of the collection of revenue direct from the peasant to the intermediary. With this view Chandra Narayan alias Bijit Narayan, son of Parikshit Narayan, who was fighting against the Mughal, was placed on a small tract of land between river Sankosh and river Manas as tributary of the Mughal, at the payment of an annual Peskosh of Rupees 5998.⁴⁸ The name of the kingdom of Bijni, is said to have been derived from Bijit Narayan, the founder king of the newly created principality. This was done with a view to pacify the Koch people and to put an end of the Koch insurrection. The responsibility of collection of revenue was given to Chandra Narayan, the ruler of Bijni Raj estate, by which the Mughal authority relieved from the burden of collection of revenue from Bijni estate. Thus, the Bijni Estate was created by the Imperialist Mughal for the convenience of the collection of revenue. The Bijni kingdom was, indeed, an estate created with a view for collection of revenue. Bijit Narayan, alias Chandra Narayan, though assumed the title Raja in pursuance of the family tradition; he was no more than a zamindar.

After annexation to the Mughal Empire, Parikshit's kingdom was divided into two portions viz, an area of 1005 square miles, consisting of the Duars viz; Bijni, Sidli, Chirung, Ripu and Guma was made *Khas Mahal*, the remaining area of 2384 square miles was divided into 12 Parganas, viz (1) Habraghat, (2) Khuntaghat, (3) Michpara, (4) Chapar, (5) Parbatjoar, (6) Ghurla, 7) Jamira, (8) Gola Alomganj, (9) Jaria, (10) Aurangabad, (11) Katumalupara and (12) Karaibari⁴⁹

The portion known as Bijni Duars was passed over to the administration of Bhutan Govt., as the Bhutias captured it taking the advantage of the Ahom Mughal conflict. It should be mentioned that in remote past Bhutan formed, occasionally at least, a part of the kingdom of Kamrup. "Apparently, the Bhutias have not possessed Bhutan more than two centuries earlier; it formerly belonged to a tribe called by the Bhutias as Tephu; they are generally believed to have been people of Koch Bihar. The Tephu were driven down into the plains by some Tibetan soldiers, who had been sent from Lhasa to look after the country"⁵⁰

As a matter of fact, at the death of Viswa Singha, his two sons, Nara Narayan and Sukladhvaj were away at Benaras for studies there. Their brother, Nara Singha taking advantage of their staying away from home proclaimed himself king of the Koch kingdom. Having heard of the news, Nara Narayan and Sukladhavaj hastened home; and raising an army defeated Nara Singha. It is said that Nara Singha subsequently became the ruler of Bhutan.⁵¹ Since then Bhutan had been under rule of the descendents of Narasimha. As stated in the History of the Bijni Dynasty, Bijni Raj surrendered the portion in question to the Bhutias during the administration of Sib Narayan.⁵² According to Francis Hamilton; the Koches lost it to the Bhutanis during the time of Bijni Raja Mukanda Narayan.⁵³

(D) Creation of other zamindaries in Western Assam:

The processes of disintegration of Bijni kingdom, started with the surrender of the portion of Duars to the Dev Raja of Bhutan. Bijni king failed to maintain peace and order in his kingdom which affected the collection of revenue. Owing to the weakness of the Bijni king, the Mughal Emperor installed the hereditary chiefs of different pargana, who extended help to the Mughals in their bid to fight with the Ahoms and the insurrection of the Koch princes, as zamindar in their respective pagana. In course of time, five more Estates were carved out of Bijni kingdom to setup as Semi-independent chieftainships under the suzerainty of the Mughal Empire, like, Gauripur, Mechpara, Chapar, Karaibari, and Parbatjoar. Out of the 12 parganas of Bijni chieftainship, Bijni retained only two Parganas of Habraghat and Khunlaghat, and Garo Mahal besides Bijni Duars. The Bijni king paid tribute to Deb Raja of Bhutan for Bijni Duars and to the Mughals for Bijni proper comprising, Habraghat and Khunlaghat parganas. Habraghat consisted of the territory lying south to the Brahmaputra and east of Goalpara town, and Khunlaghat situated on the North Bank of Brahmaputra bounded by Manas River in the east and Porbotjoar estate in the west. The Bijni Duar constitutes its western boundary. According to revenue survey of 1849-54, the total area of Habraghat and Khunlaghat was 916.03 square miles and that of Bijni Duars was 317.19 square miles; besides a Mahal in the Garo hills. The Bijni Raj paid an annual tribute of a sum of Rs. 5998-7-8-1 for Bijni Estates and a sum of Rs. 3486-14-1- for Bijni Duars.

The tribute afterwards commuted to an annual delivery of 68 elephants for Bijni and 40 elephants for Bijni Duars, the price of each elephant were fixed at Narayani Rs. 88-14-0.

1. Gauripur Raj Estate

Gauripur Raj Estate originated from the *Nankar* received from the Mughal emperor Jahangir by one Kabindra Patra, who was appointed to the post of *Naib Qanungo* of the Thana Rangamati. Since Rangamati was the headquarter of the outlying province of the Mughal empire in the east, much importance was attached to the post of *Qanungo* of the Rangamati Thana. The post of *Qanungo* conferred to Kabindra Patra was continued to be held by the members of his family for period of more than three centuries in succession without break. Kabindra Patra and his descendant received from Mughal emperor large quantity of rent-free lands as commission on the rents collected by them from the ryots. The commission was of two kinds, viz. *Nankar and Dastur*. As has been mentioned in the Sanads issued to Kabi Sekhar Qanungo in 1622 AD and 1635 AD respectively, the rate of Dastur was 2% of rent collection and 3 ½ % of the Sayers collection. Nankar was the main source of income of the Qanungo, Kabi Sekhar, who succeeded Kabindra Patra, received a Sanad in 1622, he was allotted Nankar of 4200 bighas of land, and this was increased to 9020 bigas in 1635 as the remuneration of his service⁶¹.

The large amount of land held by Kabi Sekhar as by virtue of his office eventually raised his position to a leading zamindar of this region. Since the office of *Qanungoship* of Rangamati was continuously held by the progenies of Kabindra Patra, every succeeding generation added still more quantities of additional *Nankar* to the credit of the qanungo.⁶²

Further, the Qanungo received Nankar gift from other Zamindars for his service in connection of assessment and collection of revenue. It is said that Kabi Sekhar Kanungo acquired 70,000 bigas of *Nankar* land in Khuntaghat and Habraghat Parganas alone.

These vast properties were not possible to maintain by a single hand. These were distributed to descendants, successors and relatives of *Qanungo* families and they were settled in different parts of Goalpara.⁶³ The zamindari of Gauripur was expanded in the following year by its successors. In 1778, Bul Chandra Baruah acquired the Zamindaries of the five Parganas of Ghurla, Aurangabad, Makrampur, Jamira and Gola Alomganj. Dhir Chandra Baruah purchased Pargana of Kalumalu Para, Noa-bad Futuri and Dhubri. Thus Gauripur Estate emerged as the biggest and prosperous Estate in Goalpara district of Western Assam.⁶⁴

2. Mechpara Estate

According to tradition, the Pargana Mechpara formed a part of the Bijni Raj. It was during the time of Raja Mukunda Narayan, the Pargana was taken away from his possession to form a separate estate by order of the Mughal emperor and Thana Kamal Loshan was conferred the responsibility of the estate.⁶⁵ According to Buchanan, One Bhagadatta Das Choudhury was the first Zamindar of Mechpara Estate. Santo Barman observes that if the claim of Buchanan is presumed to be true, then the traditional view that the Pargana was taken away from the possession of Bijni Raj in the time of Mukunda Narayan is not acceptable.⁶⁶ Mechpara estate was taken away from Bijni some time in the middle of the eighteenth century to form an independent zamindari with a view to stop the Garos incursion in the plain. Thana Kamal Lochan had been the founder zamindar of Mechpara whom was granted it by the Mughal Emperor, with the title Choudhury

According to Khan Choudhury Amanatullah, Mechpara and Chapar Pargana were separated from Bijni in 18th century. Thana Kamal Lochan founded Mechpara Estate and Jay Narayan Sarma founded

Chapar Zamindary. The area of Mechpara zamindary was 399 square miles and Chapar Estate was 201 square miles.⁶⁷

The Estate was a frontier tract bordering on the hills of the Garos and its original owners or chieftains practically exercised, under the Muhammadan Government, the Paramount Control over the people and Garos inhabiting the plains at the foot of the Garo Hills. As token of their acknowledgement to the Mughal Emperor, they paid a small tribute to the *Fouzadar* of Rangamati. The tribute was paid in the form of certain elephants and a small quantity of the precious wood called *Agar*.⁶⁸

According to B. C. Allen, Mechpara Estate covered on area of 399 square miles. The entire Estate was situated on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and was a long strip of land mostly lying within the Goalpara sub division, only a small portion falling within the subdivision of Dhubri of the old undivided district of Goalpara. The Estate had three main divisions, i.e. the Pargana of Mechpara, A Mahal and B Mahal, the last two being within the administrative jurisdiction of Garo hills.⁶⁹

3. Chapar Estate

According to Khan Choudhury Amanatullah, Chapar zamindary was carved out of the Bijni zamindary.⁷⁰ The local traditions mention that the Pargana Chapar was within the jurisdiction of Bijni Raj Estate and during rule of Bijni Raja Mukanda Narayan, the Pargana was taken away by one Joy Narayan Sarma, who obtained a grant of the Estate from Mughal Emperor.⁷¹ Although most of the documents of Chapar zamindary was destroyed by fire, while the family was residing in Chapar, authentic history of the Chapar zamindary can be traced from 1130-B.S (1623AD) as it is said that Joy Narayan Sarma was in possession of five "*Chowdhuries*". Thus, Joy Narayan Sarma secured the rank of zamindar

called Choudhury. He used to pay nominal tribute to the Mughal Fauzdar at Rangamati.⁷²

The Pargana Chapar was practically a compact unit, expanding from the Mouth of the river Manas to Pabomari Jan and from Pir Bagmara Dargah at the foot of Rangamati hill to Sootakhowamukh. It is found in the old records that whatever chars (riverine) were formed within the boundaries from Pirbagmara Dargah to the feet of Lengtiar Pahar (north bank), from Sootakhowa Chowkie to Pabomarijan (south bank), belong to the estate possessed and claimed possession of all char lands within the above limit.

4. Karaibari Estate

Dharmapala, alias Dharma Narayan the king of the Kamata kingdom, annexed the Kapili Valley to his kingdom by killing Suvahu, the last reigning king of Barahi Pala dynasty. The son of deceased king Padmanabha was driven away from the Kapili Valley. The fugitive king Padmanabha appeared to have wrested the Kalo-Jinjiram Valley at the foot of the Garo Hills from the reigning Garo chief in the middle of the fourteenth century. He married a Demacha-Bodo prince, and his son Kashyap established an independent kingdom there with its capital at Kashyapnagar, popularly known as Koshba near Garobandha, subsequently this Kashyabnagar came to be known as Karaibari.⁷³

The zamindars of Karaibari acquired the status of feudatory chieftainship, called the Choudhury from the Munhall Emperor. They had military ranks conferred on them for opposing the Garo mountaineers. They paid no revenue of any kind of their land but they paid small tribute to the Muhammadan *Fauzadar* at Rangamati in the form of elephant for the *Sayer* they levied on the Garos.⁷⁴ As, originally, the zamindary was

dismembered from the Garo Hills, it was surrounded by the hills and jungles and inhabited by the Garo tribes. Including the estate of Mechpara, this tract was in the south east of the country stretching from north to south over a tract of nearly 67 miles in length and about 23 miles in breadth. According to B.C Allen, the estate covered an area of 51 square mile.^{74a}

5. Parbotjoar Estate

Due to paucity of information, nothing can be said definitely about the origin of the Parbotjoar Estate. It is believed, that the Estate was created out of the Badshahi Grant some times after the Ahom-Mughal conflict of seventeenth century. It is likely that the originator rendered valuable service to the Muhammadans in their campaign against the Ahoms, and as a token of reward, the Estate was granted to him. B.C.Allen opines that one Hatibar Choudhury received the grant of the Estate twelve generations ago⁷⁵ According to Khan Choudhury, the tract was taken away from Bijni to form a separate estate, and it covered an area of 276 square miles. Originally, the estate was covered with jungles, only a small part being cultivable.

The zamindar family of Parbotjoar descended from Hatibar Choudhury. But the history of the family down to the beginning of the twentieth century was obscure. The Estate was partitioned off into three shares with different *Kutcheries* for management, viz.--/8/- *anna* -/5/- *anna* and -/3/- *anna*. The headquarter of /8/ *anna* share was at Bagribari /5/ *anna* share at Rupsi and that of /3/ *anna* share was located some where near Mahamayadham, which was situated few miles west of Bagribari. The divisions of the Estate were made due to acute differences among the successors in early twentieth century. Towards the second quarter of the

twentieth century, the Estate witnessed more divided interests as seen in the records of the Dhubri collectorate.

6. Sidli Estate

Sidli was a small principality under the Mughals. The entire tract to which Sidli formed a part, lay at the foot of the Bhutan Mountain and was occupied by the Bhutan Govt. some times during the later part of Mughal administration. As referred to earlier, this tract passed over to the British administration in 1865, when the Bhutan govt. ceded it to the British at the close of the Bhutan war in 1864. According to Dr. Buchanan, "the possession of the rank of Raja of Sidli in the year 1809 was the tenth or eleventh persons of the same family who had held these lands which they were conjectured to have received as an *apanage* (appendage) in virtue of their descent from Bisu (Viswa) Singh, the Koch prince. The name of the Sidli chief in that year was Surya Narayan and the same family appears to have held Sanads of appointment from Bhutan Government.⁷⁶ In the Sanads granted by the Bhutan government to the descendants of Surya Narayan, the title Raja was conferred to them.⁷⁷

According to the local accounts, the founder of the Sidli dynasty was Bhim Singh, who established the principality in the days of the decline of the Kamata kingdom. Chikna Narayan Deb succeeded him. Next in the line of succession to Sidli Raj were Shymak Narayan Deb, Viswa Narayan Deb, Samudra Narayan Deb, Bhuya Narayan Deb, Lakshmi Narayan and Surya Narayan Deb.⁷⁸ After the death of Surya Narayan there were controversy regarding succession between Indra Narayan and Dhur Narayan Kumar. Ultimately, Indra Narayan was appointed as Raja by the Bhutan king. A Sanad was granted to that effect on 27th Agrahan, 324, Bhutan Era. After Indra Narayan, Gauri Narayan

succeeded as Raja of Sidli during his tenure of office Bhutan war broke out and region was passed over to the British Govt. in 1865.⁷⁹

(E) Administrative re-organization by the Company Govt.:

With the assumption of the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughal Emperor, issued by the Farman of 12th February, 1765, the East India Company became the master of this region. As a result, Sylhet of southern Assam and Goalpara of western Assam, which had been considered as the parts of Bengal, went to the control of East India Company. But things continued in this region on the same footing as before. The zamindaries were left almost independent and the British used to accept the tribute they paid to the Mughal Government as land revenue. It may be mentioned here that during the rule of the Mughals, the fauzadar at Rangamati used to collect revenue in kind assisted by the zamindars and the contractors so appointed and now the Company Government retained the same system. But the mode of payment in kind was replaced by cash payment by the British Company Government in 1788.⁸⁰

Of course, the assumption of the Dewani, indeed, seriously affected the powers and status of the zamindars. The judicial, administrative and police powers, enjoyed hitherto by the zamindars were, later on, 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 a revenue contractor. Concerning collection of revenue, the Company Government made periodical agreement with the zamindars of Bengal on an experimental basis, first for yearly term and then five-year term. Cornwallis, then Governor General of Bengal had made the Decennial Settlement in 1789 with the Zamindars of Bengal as a part of reforms of

the revenue administration, which was declared permanent in 1793. The estates of Western Assam, like that of Bengal, came under the domain of Permanent Settlement. It was promulgated by Lord Cornwallis through Bengal Regulation, 106 of 1793 and the revenue was, thus, perpetuated for ever.⁸¹ The most disgraceful act on the part of the Permanent Settlement meted out to the *zamindars*, was the seizing away the especial privileges and status enjoyed so far by the representative of the hereditary native rulers and reduced them to the rank of the ordinary *zamindars*. 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 to the *zamindars* to the position of owner of the soil until they paid the stipulated revenue to the Government. They also acquired right of the enhancement of the revenue according to their suit. Eventually, unlike the *zamindars* of Bengal, the *zamindars* of western Assam rose to the rapid accumulation of wealth with passing of time, in consequence of the Permanent Settlement. All these chiefs and the Raja of Bijni were required to pay land revenue at the rate fixed in perpetuity but they, in turn, could realize rents from the tenants at whatever rates they liked. The *zamindars* paid to the British Government at the rate of 7/10th paise per acre but the rent ordinarily realized from the tenants by them at 2.31 paise.⁸²

After annexation of the territory of western Assam, which once formed a part of the eastern Koch kingdom of Parikshit Narayan bounded by river Sankosh in West and river Manas in the East, attached to Rangpur to form the Rangpur district of the Bengal Province of East India Company. This eastern tract of the Rangpur district was constituted into three Thanas of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari which were being held by a big *zamindars*.⁸³ With a view to promote law and order, the tract

covered by the Thana of Goalpara, Dhubri and Koraibari together with Garo hills frontier was exempted from operation of General laws and was separated by the Act X of 1822 to form a new district named "North East Rangpur" (afterwards Goalpara district) and placed under the charge of a special civil commissioner. David Scott was the first official to hold the charge. In 1825, the office of the Deputy Commissioner then designated as Principal Assistant Commissioner, first established at Goalpara. After expulsion of Burmese from the Assam valley and its annexation to the British territory in 1826, David Scott, the special civil commissioner of North East Rangpur was appointed as the commissioner of the new province. North East Rangpur incorporated into the new province as a separate district under the name Goalpara. Since then, it administered on the same system as the rest of Assam until 1866 with its Headquarter at Goalpara. During this period, several expeditions sent up to the Garo Hills against their frequent raids, which ceased from the said year when a British officer posted in the hills. In the same year, the Eastern Duars, a thinly peopled extensive tract along the base of Himalaya, which had been under the rule of Deb Raja of Bhutan, was annexed to the British Rmpire, on conclusion of Bhutan wars (1864-65) and was formed into a district.⁸⁴

These Duars added to the Goalpara district from 1 January 1867, in which year, the entire districts was transferred to the newly formed Bengal Commissionership of Koch Bihar. In the following year, the district was placed or judicial purpose under the judicial commissioner of Assam. In 1869, the Garo Hills were separated to from a new district by Act XXII of that year, which repeated the Act of 1822. When Assam was raised into a chief commissionership in 1874, Goalpara and the Eastern

Duars along with Garo hills were transferred to it. Since then Goalpara district became an indispensable part of Assam”⁸⁵

While the greater part of the district of Goalpara was under permanent settlement, an area covering 4143 sq. mile, extending on the foot of Bhutan Hills was under temporary settlement. The Eastern Duars viz. Guma, Ripu, Chirung, Bijni and Sidli were annexed from Bhutan in 1865 and merged with Goalpara District. The Revenue administration introduced in Guma, Ripu and Chirung Duars was on the same line as in the temporary settled areas of Kamrup and other districts of Assam. But in respect of Bijni and Sidli Duars, the British Government acknowledged the claims of Raja of Bijni and Raja of Sidli to have held them as tributary chiefs under the Bhutan king and made an arrangement which rather unconventional. It offered temporary settlement of these areas for a period of 10 years only with the two Rajas who were recognised as hereditary zamindars. This type of temporary zamindari had a parallel in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, but not in Assam. These were not *ryotwari* settlements either, because the two Rajas were professional rent-receivers and were never actual cultivators. Therefore, their Estates were neither permanently settled estates nor *ryotwari* estates. The British Government called them “acknowledged estates.”⁸⁶

Thus, *Ryotwari* system was prevalent in other parts of Assam, and zamindari system was in the district of Goalpara in western Assam and in Karimganj sub-division of Sylhet district in southern Assam. The major point of difference between the two systems lies in their origin and in the character of settlement, the distinguishing feature is that while in zamindari system the land revenue was collected by intermediary, called zamindar, who collected revenue from the tenants and deposited them to the government after deduction of their own share, but in *Rowatari*

system there is no middlemen and the settlement was made directly with the *ryots* by the government. Besides, in Zamindari System, revenue may be fixed in perpetuity, but in *Ryotwari* System, it is revisable. The other important difference between the Zamindari and *Ryotwari* system lies in the unit, which was adopted for the purpose of settlement. Under the former, the estat was the unit and the holder of the unit (commonly called proprietor), not the actual occupant of the land, who became responsible for the payment for revenue. Under the latter, the revenue was fixed on individual pieces of land and the actual occupants became liable for its payment.

The present work, "**The Zamindars of Western Assam: Their Contribution to the Socio-Cultural Development of the Region**" 1765-1956, is an attempt to make a comprehensive study on the unexplored aspects of the zamindari system and the benevolent works of the zamindars on the basis of the unearthed sources. It is to be mentioned here that the Zamindars, the feudal lords, who generally assumed title like Raja, Maharaja, Raibahadur and Choudhury and their spouse adopted the title of Rani and Maharani, lived a life of luxury with grandeur and pomp. They exercised unlimited power over agricultural products, trade and in some economic transaction and played important role in the socio-economic as well as cultural life of the subjects of their small kingdom. As a class, zamindars of western Assam, like that of Bengal played an important role in the history of Assam from the medieval time down to the British rule even there after. The history of zamindar of western Assam is so fascinated that it links up the history of Mughal and blossomed during British period. They not only influenced the economic transaction of the region for which they are often criticized, but simultaneously played significant role in the development of education,

communication, art culture, handicrafts and literature and also other benevolent works for public welfare. However, unfortunately, very little attention has been given by the historian to explore a comprehensive study on their history. It is a matter of great concern that hitherto no research work or any systematic study has been carried out on the benevolent works initiated by the zamindars and their family members for the welfare of their subjects. Although, a handful works have been done on zamindari system by some scholars like those that Dr. Santo Barman and Dr Ajit Kr. Barua, but their studies have been concentrated in the administrative and economic aspects of the zamindari rule, keeping out the benevolent works of the zamindars from the purview of their studies.

Under such situation, the present work is a humble attempt to explore some of the hitherto untouched aspects of the history of zamindars of western Assam and their benevolent works for the welfare of the subjects. In course of the study, special attention shall be given to analysis the primary as well as the secondary sources, which have so far not been dealt with by the scholars. The present work is, therefore, intended to embody the results of an intensive study of the rise of the zamindars in different pockets of the region, like, Bijni, Gauripur, Chapar, Mechpara, Parbotjoar, Koraibari and Sidli of western Assam and steps shall be taken to highlight the contributions of the zamindars to the socio-cultural development of the *region*.

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CHAPTER-II

A Review of Zamindari system in Western Assam along with the abolition of the system

2.1: Mughal Revenue policy

The Zamindari system of undivided Goalpara district in Western Assam was the by-product of the Mughal revenue policy, which introduced as a measure of Revenue collection. The Mughal authority employed some intermediaries, assigning them the responsibility of revenue collection from the *ryots* for which they were given some fixed commission.

It is worthy to be mentioned, that as in other parts of the country the zamindari system in Goalpara district of Western Assam also had its origin from the feudalism. It developed as a Part of the Mughal administration. The feudal landlords, the Bhuyans, who were the dominant force in this part of the country under the “Kamata kingdom,” towards the later part of Seventeenth Century.¹ The feudal chiefs of Assam were known as Bhuyans, which can be ascertained from the views expressed by late Dr. Wise who observes, “that the word *Bhuyan* or *Bhyuian* is a Sanskrit word for Zamindar”.²

According to Irfan Habib, the Mughal territories consisted of two divisions, i.e *Jagir* and *Khalsa*. The great bulk of cultivable land was ordinarily in the possession of Jaigirdars (assignees). The *Jagir* land was generally assigned to the *Mansabdars*, holding definite ranks bestowed on them by His Highness, the Emperors. They received their monthly salaries either in cash from the royal treasury or in most of the cases, they were assigned a particular land as Jaigir.³ Such a Jaigir had been awarded to Mirza Nathan, the commander of Mughal invading

force in Western Assam, in Khuntaghat pargana for some years. The Jaigirdars held their land for a short period not exceeding four years and as such, possessed no permanent right on the Jaigir they held. The *Jaigirdars* in exchange of their service to the state appropriated the revenue of the area assigned to them. It therefore, becomes important to bear in mind that the status of a *Jaigirdar* was determined by the social and economic terms. The *Mansab* was not inheritable, though it was normally conferred upon sons or relatives of high *Mansab* holders, thus creating whole families of Khanazads who subsisted on *Mansab* from generation to generation. A Jaigirdar had, therefore, no permanent rights in his assignment. His claims too confined to the authorized land revenue and taxes.⁴

On the other hand, certain tract of lands was reserved for Royal treasury, which was called *Khalisa land*. Land not assigned to Jaigir was known as *Khalisa*. Its revenues were collected by officials for the Imperial Treasury, which obtained the bulk of its income from these sources. The size of *Khalisa* varied from time to time. In Akbar, s later years, it accounted for quarter of the total jama, in at least three provinces. Under Jahangir, the proportion fell to as one-twentieth in the whole empire. Shahjahan gradually raised it to one-seventh.⁵ The Mughals instead of taking the trouble of collecting the revenue they appointed some intermediaries for collections of the revenue on some commission basis out of their collected amount or through Nankar land allotment, these intermediaries were called *Zamindars*.

“The term zamindar is a Persian compound meaning keeper or holder of land (zamin). The suffix dar implies a degree of control, or attachment, but not necessarily ownership. The use of this suffix may be seen in such compounds as *Faujadar*, *Thanadar*, *Jamadar*, or *Subadar*.”⁶

The term zamindar is defined by a *Ray Rayan*, principal of revenue department in the following words: "A zamindar is a person possessing hereditarily on the conditions of obedience to the ordinances of Government a tract of land...subject to the payment of revenue."⁷ Sir John Shore in reference to a zamindar observes that the relation of a zamindar to government and a ryot to zamindar is neither that of a proprietor nor a vassal but a compound of both. The former performs the acts of authority unconnected with property rights. The later has right without real property and the property of one and the right of other are in a measure held at discretion.⁸ The zamindari, whether acquired through conquest, colonization, purchase or imperial favour, could be held on the basis of paying a stipulated tribute or as a revenue assessment or as a non hereditary grant from the ruler. It varied from the share in a village to right over an entire district or *Sarkar*. However, it generally, appears to have been a saleable hereditary right with which the imperial authority did not normally interfere.

The word zamindar seems to have been used in the sense of the chief of the territory in fourteenth century. It was during Akbar's time that the term used frequently for any person having hereditary claim to a direct share in the peasants produce. It was the latter sense which became predominant during seventeenth century, the term zamindary replacing or altering with a large number of local terms for agrarian rights of different kinds, viz. *Khoti*, *Muqaddami* in Doab; *Satarabi* and *Biswi* in Awadh, *Bhumi* in Rajasthan, *Bhuyans* in Assam and *Banth* or *Vanth* in Gujarat. Where as in Bengal, the zamindar was called upon to answer for the payment of land revenue within the area of his Zamindary; he seems to have collected the land tax from the peasants at rates fixed by custom or by himself and to have paid the amount imposed on him by the Mughal

administration. The balance left with him constituted his income. In the large part of the Mughal empire, on the other hand, he was expected to collect the land revenue from the primary assesses (cultivators), in return he was given, simply an allowance of one tenth, either in cash or in allotment of revenue free land.⁹ If he failed in his duties, he would be excluded from the land altogether, but be paid 10 percent of the land revenue as Malikana.

The Mughal administrators made the persons zamindars of a particular territory on which they had hereditary right on the share of the produce of the peasants. It is found that the Mughal Emperor assigned the responsibility of collecting the land revenue on the Rajas or chiefs of the conquered territories for a stipulated sum of tribute. This was done as a part of their policy for consolidation of their empire.

“Historically, the zamindari right had close association with caste and clan dominance. Zamindars of a locality often belonged to the same caste. Moreover, a zamindar needed not only the support of his relatives, but also the possession of retainers (ulus) and forts to protect and enforce his claims. The “Ain i Akbari” in its celebrated account of the twelve subas, not only records the zamindars caste or castes, but also the number of horses and retainers employed by the zamindars in each parganas.”¹⁰ The zamindars thus formed a semi – military class, who could not be ignored politically by any regime. At the same time, the zamindari right was in itself an article of property. It inherited according to the same laws and customs as governed the inheritance of other property. We find ordiNaray zamindar, usually, was broken up into equal shares for distribution among sons.”¹¹

As stated by the writer of Cambridge Economic History of India “the zamindari right was what may be called the ‘uneven development’.

That is, within the same district some villages would lie in a full-fledged zamindari in the possession of a few persons: other villages used to be largely peasant held (ryoti) with no recognizable persons as zamindars. The peasants of the village might sell away their rights to a person, who would thus become zamindars of the village. In less orderly circumstances, force might also create a zamindari where no Zamindari existed before. Finally, the Mughal administration too might not only supplant zamindars, but even create new zamindars over peasant's village".¹²

The Mughals accepted the land of Hindu rulers throughout the country, who had sovereignty over their territories, but submitted to the Muslim ruler on conditions, which allowed them full authority with regard to internal jurisdiction. In return they had to pay fixed tribute or personal service to the Mughal Government, but in either case the Muslim administration, did not ordinarily interfere with the assessment or collection of the revenue so long as the terms were fulfilled.^{13s}

Amalendu Guha observes that there were two classes of zamindars in the Mughal Eastern India: one class was those who had been previously independent ruler and losing to the Mughal became tributary to them. They enjoyed zamindari hereditarily in their own land. Their annual payment to the Mughal was called *Peskosh* or *Nazrana*. The other class was formed by the person of influence in the region, having been delegated to collect revenue from the ryots for a particular pargana or a group of parganas. They were called *choudhuries*. Their right was also developed to hereditary but their payment of revenue was called "Jama" not *Nazrana* or *Peskosh*.^{13a} *Bijni Raj Estate* was the typical example of the former category while the *Gauripur Raj Estate* was an example of

later category. Besides, some local chiefs had limited right over the produce of the peasants. They were treated as primary Zamindars.¹⁴

Introduction of zamindari system in western Assam was the outcome of the Mughal policy towards the conquered land. Parikshit Narayan, the last independent king of eastern Koch kingdom better known as Koch-Hajo kingdom had no option but to surrender to the Mughal force after his defeat at their hand. He was taken to Delhi before Emperor Jahangir, who agreed to restore his kingdom as a vassal on a term of payment of *Peskosh*. Nevertheless, the sudden death of Parikshit Narayan on way home led the Mughal to annex his kingdom to the Mughal Empire. This caused wide discontentment among the Koch mass and armed resistance was offered by the Koch under the leadership of Koch princes and anti Mughal revolt was took place throughout the region. Chandra Narayan, the son of Parikshit Narayan, under such situation was installed as a vassal king on a small tract of land of Koch-Hajo kingdom of Parikshit Narayan. This kingdom came to be known as Bijni kingdom and it was the real base of zamindari system in western Assam. Chandra Narayan had to pay the fixed *Peskosh* to the Mughal. The Bijni Raja was the defacto ruler of the Bijni estate and thus the assessment and collection of revenue continued on the traditional line without the interference of the Mughal Emperor.¹⁵

Thus, the creation of Bijni Raj Estate was not out of the sweet will of the Mughal but as a part of their strategy of quelling the Koch opposition. They wanted to consolidate what they had acquired by conquering Koch kingdom. In the subsequent years, more zamindaries were carved out of the Bijni kingdom by the Mughal emperor. Thus, Gauripur, Parbatjoar, Chapar, Mechpara, and Karaibari Estates were created out of Bijni kingdom. Only Habraghat and Khuntaghat pargana

were with the Bijni Raj estate. The emergence of each zamindary was caused by different situations and reasons.

During early period of the Mughal's rule in western Assam, the northeastern frontier tract bordering the Garo Hills were divided into some estates and was held for the most part by their original hereditary chiefs, called choudhuries. They protected the lives and properties of the dweller of plain areas from the outrages of the hill tribes, the Garos. Their estates never subjected to revenue assessment. They paid tribute from sayer and not from land revenue.¹⁶ The zamindary of Mechpara and Karaibari were created under such circumstances.

Prior to the accession to the power in India by the Mughals, a peculiar practice was followed by most of the native rulers concerning the revenue collection. The revenue assessor made revenue settlement with village Headman, as each village constituted a small community. Indeed, the village Headman was the regulator of the village. When the revenue agents of the Government transacted village by village they levied a particular sum for each village as a whole, not on the separate portion of land or on the individual peasant. They came to term with the village Headman, who settled the individual quota due to the state, collected and paid to them.¹⁷ After their rise to power, the system was not altered by the Mughal. The villages brought under pargana or district. The Headmen of the pargana were elected initially, but subsequently, the state nominated the Headman and entrusted to them the collection of revenue of which a portion allotted to them as commission. They also received from the village subsistence allowance in the form of grant of Nankar. In course of time the office became hereditary.

The system was in practice in Kamata kingdom, which was disappeared during Koch rule, but there was a definite section of people

in eastern India who enjoyed certain privileges in matter of revenue collection, i.e. a portion of revenue collected from the peasant was left for their consumption. They were known as the zamindar, or Bhuyans, in different localities. In fact, their co-operation was indispensable for the collection of the revenue from the peasants of the pargans. In view of their dominating position, one leading zamindar was entrusted with the responsibility of collection of the revenue of one pargana or a group of parganas, and he was granted a commission thereof. Their hereditary right was recognized and they were treated on the same footing of the Choudhuries and the commission appropriated by them was called "choudhurai".¹⁸

The zamindari of Chapar and Parbatjoar of western Assam might have been created out of the anxiety of the Mughal govt. to extend cultivation to forestland in Parbatjoar and wasteland or char land in Chapar Pargana.¹⁹ The zamindar of Chapar and Parbatjoar estates were also choudhuries. It should be noted that the Mughal Emperor, in their anxiety to extend cultivated area, freely bestowed zamindari right on those who would bring forest and wastelands under cultivation.²⁰

In the later parts of the Mughal rule, especially during the second half of the eighteenth century, a new feature in the collection of revenue from the ryots was introduced. They entrusted to certain individuals, their officials or other to collect revenue from the peasants of a particular area irrespective of actual produce or collection made by the peasants who entered in such contract.²¹ This practice of contract or farming continued almost to the end of the Mughal rule and the practice was affected in the area under Khalisa. Land in eastern Bengal was mostly farmed out to a section of the people, who enjoyed certain privileged viz. a portion of revenue collected from the peasants was left for their personal

consumption, as in the case of Choudhury referred to.” They were also granted lands free of rent called Nankar. The zamindari of Gauripur was created in such a manner. Being appointed Kanungo, Kabindra Patra received huge Nankar in two times, and became a leading zamindar of the district of Rangamati. The family descendent from him was known Rangamati Barua.²²

Thus it is seen that the zamindars in western Assam, proceeding to the accession of Dewani by the East India Company, were created under different circumstances in different times.

Origin of the Bijni Raj Estate was due to loss of independence by Parikshit Narayan and his son was conferred with the zamindari of a small tract of land of the Eastern Koch kingdom. Estates of Mechpara, Kalumalupara and Karaibari were erected by acknowledging the old land holder of the border area of Garohills, who defended the people from the Garo outrages. Zamindari of Gauripur Raj Estate was emerged from Nankar land granted to one Kabindra Patra who was appointed as Kanungo at Rangamati. The post became hereditary and later on developed to a preserved right to the land of which they had been the revenue collectors; subsequently they came to be known as Raja of Gauripur. Zamindari of Chapar pargana and Parbatjoar estate were created for reclamation of land and the right became hereditary.

2.2. Revenue Administration of the British in Western Assam

After the accession to the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, by the East India Company, the region of Goalpara district in western Assam passed on to the possession of the Company as a part of Bengal. It is to be mentioned here, that while the British experimented with different modes of collection of revenue in Bengal, the zamindars of

Western Assam were left undisturbed, probably due to the peculiar geographical situation.²³ During the period from 1765 -1793, the main object of East India Company was to enhance the sum of the "jama", because by this they had to purchase the merchandise to export and incur the expenditure of the frequent wars in India for expansion of their territories. For this Warren Hastings adopted the policy of giving the *Ejara* of revenue collection to the highest bidder and experimented for the settlement with the zamindars for one year, five years and ten years.

Eventually the Company realized two things: 1) Due to frequent change of economic condition of the peasants, the income on revenue became uncertain every year affecting the preparation of Annual Budget of the Company, 2) without the help of old zamindars it was not possible to collect revenue. To remove these inconveniences the Company decided to make permanent settlement with the zamindars in Bengal.²⁴

The Decennial settlement of 1790-91 made by Lord Cornwallis, then Governor General of Bengal, was declared permanent by Regulation-1 of 1793. It extended to Goalpara, then forming part of Rangpur collectorate prior to Decennial settlement the zamindar was in reality a mere Head Receiver or collector of government land revenue from under tenants. There was no fixed principle governing the rate of rent, or the modes of its recovery from the under tenants. The want of settled rules and practice led to extortion, fraud concealment, and to remedy this unsatisfactory state of land management, the Decennial settlement was eventually made perpetual. The *onus* of payment of the revenue was thrown on the Zamindars, considered person of substance; the punctuality of payment from the zamindars was enforced by the penalty of confiscation of their Estates in case of delay but powers were given to the zamindars to collect from the ryots.²⁵

In Goalpara district of Western Assam, which was then treated as a part of Bengal, the Decennial Settlement was also made with the zamindars of it viz; zamindar of Bijni, Gauripur, Parbatjoar, Chapar, Mechpara and Karaibari Estates. Cornwallis, the then Governor General declared the Decennial Settlement to have been fixed in perpetuity. He declared that the zamindars, independent Talukdars and other actual proprietors of land with or on behalf of whom the Decennial Settlement had been concluded, no alteration would be made in the assessment which they respectively were obliged to pay, but that their heirs and lawful successors, would be allowed their estates at such assessment forever.²⁶ The article of Proclamation enacted into a Regulation, known as the Bengal Regulation 1 of 1793, on the First, May 1793. Under this Regulation, various landholders of Goalpara, as in other parts of Bengal, grouped in one class i.e., the zamindars and they were made proprietors of land. Their succession to the land were not made hereditary but they were also empowered to transfer their property right by sale, gift or otherwise. Of course, the state could transfer the property right conferred on the zamindars by open auction in the market for failing in punctual discharge of the revenue assessed upon their lands.²⁷

Concerning the "jama" the assessment of revenue, the Permanent Settlement fixed it at Tenth/Eleventh of the revenue which they paid.²⁸ But "Jama" fixed on the estates in western Assam was alterable. According to A.J.M.Mill, in 1853 the total Jama, in respect to the twelve Parganas of Goalpara district was Rs. 15330-13 anna 13.5 ganda but Rs. 5737,-2.a, -15 g were deducted from the amount as the compensation awarded to the zamindars for Sayer abolition. So the net Jama was reduced to Rs. 10158-10a-18.5g.²⁹ As stated by B.C.Allen, though the land revenue demand on these estates was Rs.11, 411. Government paid

back to the zamindars Rs.8556/ as compensation for the abolition of market dues and other illegal cesses. Thus, the net revenue was only Rs.2885/-³⁰

The revenue demand on the estates of Goalpara district in western Assam was low in comparison with the revenue fixed in Bengal. That is why the dispossession of estates for arrears of revenue was rare in western Assam; while more than half of the estates in the whole permanently settled areas were actually sold for arrears in 1797.³¹ The only Estate sold for arrear of revenue was Karaibari in western Assam, whose zamindar; Mahendra Narayan Choudhury was dispossessed of his zamindari in 1809, for arrear of payment. The fixation of "Jama" was assessed, based on the rent actually collected from the ryots by the zamindars of Goalpara during Mughal period.

The tribute money of Rs. 2000/ fixed on Bijni in 1788 was accepted in 1790 as Jama and the Bijni Raja.³² had paid the rate with a deduction of Rs.850 / as compensation.

In 1794, Karaibari, Kalumalupara and Mechpara were made Istimary Mahals (paying rent in perpetuity), but the assessment were low. The revenue demand on these estates, further reduced on the ground of abolition of Sayer dues, which these zamindars used to collect from the Garos, with a view to compensating the loss incurred. Due to abolition of Sayer dues, an amount equal to the income for Sayer, deducted from their annual Jama payable to the government. Incase of Karaibari the compensating amount granted to the zamindar exceeded the amount of Jama due from the estate³³

The British converted the tributes to land revenue before the Permanent Settlement. All the zamindars except the Raja of Bijni accepted the conversion of the tributes as land revenue. The Raja, to the

end claimed that he should be treated as a native ruler, as had been done on Koch Behar, which was ruled by another branch of the same original Koch dynasty.³⁴

Eventually, Bijni Kingdom was reduced to a zamindary comprising of pargana of Habraghat and Khuntaghat, and Nij Bijni. Habraghat and Khuntaghat were under the Mughal Empire for which the tribute was paid to them but for the Nij Bijni tribute was paid to Deb Raja of Bhutan who held the authority on the Duars (Nij Bijni). The argument of the Bijni Raja was that Nij Bijni was out side the British territory and what was paid to the British was tribute, not land revenue and he should be treated as tributary chief. However, Commissioner, Jenkins and collector, Reynold, turned down his claim. As to the claim, it is said, "he held this zamindary as an independent chief and that Government accepted the revenue under "Lalbandee". Jenkins was of the opinion that this was a mere act of courtesy: the Raja being of the Koch Behar Raj family, he was called Raja, but at the same time, he was also styled the zamindar of Bijni. Ultimately, the govt. of India concurred in the view of the officials and declared that the pretension of this person to be considered as holding the pargana by tenure, different from that of ordinary zamindars, appeared to be wholly groundless.³⁵

The objectives of the Permanent settlement were summarized in the preamble to Bengal Regulation. Contemporary opinions claimed a number of advantages for the permanent Settlement. As Grover observes, "Financially the Permanent settlement secured a fixed and stable income for the state and the state could depend upon that income, monsoon or no monsoon. Further, it saved the expenses that had to be spent in making periodical assessment and settlement.

Economically, it was claimed that the Permanent Settlement would encourage agricultural enterprise and prosperity, wasteland would be reclaimed and soil under cultivation would be improved, the zamindars would introduce new method of cultivation like better rotation of crops, use of manure etc. Thus, the settlement creates condition for the development of the fullest power of the soil. This, in turn would create a contented and resourceful peasants.

Politically, Cornwallis expected that the Permanent Settlement should create a class of loyal zamindars, who would be prepared to defend the Company. Thus, the permanent Settlement secured for the govt. the political support of an influential class in the same way as the Bank of England had for William III after 1694.

Socially, it was expected that the zamindars would act as the natural leaders of the ryots and show their public spirit in helping the spread of education and other charitable activities

Lastly, it set free the ablest servants of the Company for Judicial services; further, it avoided the evils normally associated with the cultivators, the tendency on the part of the cultivator to leave the land to deteriorate towards the end of the term to get a low assessment etc.³⁶

What was the expectation of Cornwallis on Permanent Settlement was not fulfilled in the end. Rather, it soon turned into an engine of exploitation and oppression. It created "feudalism at the top and serfdom at the bottom". Many of the advantages claimed proved to be illusory.

Financially, the state was proved great loser in the end. The advantages of a fixed and stable income were secured at the great sacrifice of any prospective share in the increase of revenue from land. Even when new areas of land were brought under cultivation and the

rents of the land already under cultivation had been increased manifold, the state could not claim its legitimate share in the increase. The state demand fixed in 1793 remained almost the same in 1954.

The Permanent Settlement retarded the economic progress of Bengal. Most of the zamindars did not take any interest in the improvement of land but were merely interested in extracting the maximum possible rent from the ryots. The cultivators being under the constant fear of ejection, had no incentive to improve the land. Besides, the zamindars did not live in their respective Estates; rather they lived an urban life in the cities where they wasted money and times in luxury. A host of intermediaries grew up between the estate and the cultivators. This process of sub feudalism, some times reached ridiculous proportions, they looked to their profits, and the ryots was reduced to the position of a pauper.

Of course, because of Permanent Settlement the zamindars along with other stake became the favourite children of imperialism. However, the British administration gained the loyalty of the few at the cost of the alienation of the masses. Besides, the system divided rural society into two mutually hostile classes; namely, the Zamindars and the Tenants.

The most devastating aspect of Permanent Settlement was that by recognizing the absolute right of ownership of the zamindars, the Company sacrificed the interest of the peasants, whether of property or of occupancy. In a way, the peasants suffered from double injustice, firstly, surrendering their property right, and secondly, left at the mercy of the zamindars, who perpetually exploited them.³⁷ It seems, that the British authority were liberal to the zamindars of Goalpara in western Assam, for no detail survey was made for the assessment of revenue on them, it was fixed in lump sum. But, all the expectations had been rudely ignored; the

zamindars did practically nothing for the improvement of their Estates, but renting out them frequently.³⁸

The revenue measures introduced by the British caused wide discontentment to some of the zamindars of Goalpara district of western Assam, as they considered themselves as the descendants of independent or semi independent chieftains. The spirit of disloyalty and rebellion was rampant amongst some of them. In November 1789, Ranaram Choudhury, the zamindar of Mechpara, with a band of 500 Barkandazes attacked the Company's factory at Goalpara. But being defeated in the engagement he retired to the nearby jungle and breathed his last there some time in February, 1790.³⁹ The Raja of Bijni refused to pay the money, but was induced to agree upon it.⁴⁰

Some of the zamindars of Goalpara, used to collect *Sayer duties* from the Garos on their produce sold at the border markets established by them during Mughal period. Though the Governor General issued an order directing the Sayer collection to be abolished, the border estates in Goalpara were being regarded as tributary Mahal, were exempted from the operation of the general rule in respect of *Sayers*. Thus, while the other zamindars of the country were deprived of this feudal right, the zamindars of Mechpara, Kalumalupara and Karaibari retained with them the right to collect the Sayer duties till 1813, when Sayers duties were abolished.⁴¹ But the govt. granted compensation on account of the abolition of Sayer dues, as has already been mentioned.

The Permanent Settlement secured for the zamindars of Goalpara in western Assam the whole advantages of raising rent. While the govt. revenue demand was fixed forever, the zamindary demand on the ryots was left undecided. It is seen that the period under Permanent Settlement, witnessed the increase of zamindar's rent in Goalpara. In 1825, the total

revenue of the entire Permanently Settled areas came to only Rs.11, 411/- , while the zamindar's rental exceeded almost six times of it.⁴² At the time, when Bijni Raj Estate was under the management of Court of Ward (1854-1874), its annual income was amounted to Rs. 121,599, but the government revenue was only Rs.2355/.⁴³After acquisition of the zamindari by the govt, in 1956, the total revenue assessed in the Permanently Settled areas of Goalpara was Rs.15,86,391/-, but according to the Permanent Settlement the government revenue share was only Rs. 11411/-.⁴⁴

There was gradual accumulation of huge amount of money in the hand of the zamindars; but contrary to the expectation of the framer of the Permanent- Settlement, the zamindars of Goalpara did not spend this money in capital investment; it spent for their personal pleasure only. Besides, the non productive consumption of the surplus value of the land settled with them, the zamindars belied the hope of the framer of the Permanent Settlement by not fulfilling the Patta Regulation.

“The framers of the Permanent Settlement Regulations, as referred to earlier, expected to have the zamindars turned into economic entrepreneur. But the historical backdrop of the social and cultural upbringing of the zamindars in Goalpara was not conducive to it. Being the descendents of independent and semi-independent chieftains, the zamindars were imbued with a sense of their own importance. They considered themselves to be looked as Raja, like the independent Rajas, they also in a befitting manner, issued grants of lands for the up taking of the religious institutions. Apart from the creation of rent free tenure for the estate's servants, the zamindars granted large Lakraj to their near relatives and other families of high status.”⁴⁴ Pratap Chandra Barua, zamindar of Gauripur married Anandamai, the daughter of one late

Kalikanta Basu in the year 1258 B.S. He gave, as a gift to his father-in-law's family, a big property in Mauza Kaldoba for their maintenance.⁴⁵ Raja Mukunda Narayan of Bijni granted Sanad to one Kamal Kanta Barua in 1191 B.S by virtue of which the donee received 700 bigas of land in Mauza Symraipara, 3500 bigas in Kayathpara, /Kayasthpara and 4450 bigas in Mauza Mauriapara as *Mukrari land*⁴⁶

The Permanent Settlement affected the relation of the zamindars and the ryots, where as it had been much cordial during Mughal rule. The ryots were granted exemption of rent by the zamindars in the case of damage of the crops by natural calamities. During Mughal rule zamindars right on land was not recognized. The zamindars could not evict the ryots from land in the case of default in payment of revenue. But the Permanent Settlement made the zamindars owner of the land. The occupancy right of the peasants on their land was not recognized.

It was expected that the availability of land and paucity of cultivators would force the zamindars to protect the customary system in favor of the ryots. The patta and Kabuliyat system would legalize the tenancy right. Part. 7 of regulation I of 1793 Act would have been enabled for the protection of the right of tenants, talukdars and the cultivators.⁴⁷

The exchange of *Patta* and *Kabuliyat* was rare in Goalpara.⁴⁸ By way of *Patta* system; the zamindars were directed to consolidate at their demand upon the ryots and to specify the amount to be paid for the lands they occupied. But Government did not define or limit the demand of the Zamindars and ryots. It was left to be decided by the mutual interest of the zamindars and ryots.

In fact, Government were not in favour of interfering between zamindars and ryots in respect of fixation of rent, as the government

considered that this would amount to breach of faith with zamindars.⁴⁹ As was pointed out by the Select Committee of 1836, the failure to define the right of the *Ryots*, practically, defeated the intension of the permanent settlement Regulation.⁵⁰

2.3. Goalpara Tenancy Act

There was no rent law in Goalpara up to the end of the nineteenth century. In 1892, the Bengal Act VIII of 1869 extended to this district after the lapse of seven years of passing of the Tenancy law (1885). Till then, the zamindars in western Assam were virtually left free to act according to their own sweet will in matters of fixation of rent and Abwabs. The ryots were not only to bear the burden of enhancement of the different officials of the zamindars.⁵¹ The relation between the tenants also tortured rent, but they and the zamindars in Goalpara were often vague and not all clearly defined. In fact, it differed from place to place even in some vital aspects, within the same Estate, as in the case of Bijni Estate.

The Goalpara Tenancy Act, wanted to give the people some rights, which had not then been enjoyed by them. In doing so, it was sure that some of the rights of the landlords would be curtailed. Goalpara of western Assam being the border district has very little affinity either with any district in Bengal or Assam. It has certain peculiar characteristics of its own, based on local usage and customs.

In 1886, the Assam land Regulation was passed which was theoretically, in force in the whole of Assam including Goalpara, although for all practical purposes Act VIII of 1869 was taken to be the law for the District.

As to whether Act VIII of 1869 should be allowed to continue in Assam or the Assam Land Revenue Regulation would be put strictly in force or whether a new law should be passed, these questions continued to vex the Govt. of Assam ever since Goalpara came under province of Assam in 1874. The question had, therefore, been allowed to drift away and perhaps to avoid difficulties, the Assam Government decided in 1881, that Assam land Revenue Regulations must supercede Act VIII of 1869 in the permanently settled Estates of Goalpara.

A special rent law for Assam was actually drafted in 1883 by a conference of Assam officers but the draft was never made public. It was however, dropped but would certainly throw some light about Government policy for Goalpara. In 1896, it was proposed to extend the Bengal Tenancy Law to Goalpara which was ruled out by Chief Commissioner. In 1902 there was attempt to extend some section of the Bengal Tenancy Act to Goalpara but it was not accepted. In 1907 Mr. Manahan, secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam held a special inquiry for advising on a general revision of the land law and submitted his recommendation. In 1912, the zamindars themselves moved to the chief Commissioner and were asked to investigate and report on the defects of the existing Rent Law.

The existing law with its imperfections and inadequacy to meet the needs and conditions in Goalpara had been frequently brought to the notice both of the Assam Legislative Council and outside it. In consequence of a resolution passed by the council in 1925, Govt. appointed a Representative Committee of 17 persons in November 1926 to produce a workable bill on the essentials of which it would be possible for both land lords and tenants to agree. The bill was the result of the

committee's labour and in 1929, 27 November the Goalpara Tenancy Act was passed.

The bill adopted the principles of the "settled ryots" contained in the Bengal Tenancy Act, and in the main, followed that legislation in regards to the actual and incidence of the occupancy right. It conferred a similar right on the Jotedars, who had played an important part in the agricultural development of the district and contained various other provisions not to be found in the Bengal Tenancy Act, but were required to meet local conditions. It made occupancy holding definitely transferable, subject to the payment of transfer fee to the landlords (clause 19 to 25). It regulated the unauthorized occupation of land, a question of peculiar importance in Goalpara, which had given rise to much dispute in the past, (clause 56 to 58), and the provisions in accordance with local customs, (clause 59 to 62), while another vexed question relating to the right of tenants and landlords in trees was dealt with in clause 82.

The Goalpara Tenancy Act wanted to give the people some rights which had not yet been enjoyed by them. The special character of the Goalpara Zamindars, as they were descendents of hereditary chiefs, was preserved and protected and they did not lose any rights and privileges, which were granted to them by the Permanent Settlement of 1793. The Goalpara Tenancy Act was applicable to the permanently settled portion of the district, but government reserved powers to extend it by notification to other portions.⁵²

The ryots under the zamindars of Goalpara in western Assam, prior to the enactment of Goalpara Tenancy Act, 1929 may be grouped under three categories: viz, 1) *Jotedar*, 2) *Chuknidar*, and 3) *Adhiar*. Jotedars were of two distinct classes, firstly, the Jotedars described in paragraph 10 of Mr. Manahan's Report, whose predecessors originally took waste

land from the zamindar for the sole purpose of cultivation.⁵³ Secondly, the Jotedar, who was a mere intermediary engaged by the zamindar between himself and the cultivators. Of these, the second class were the relatives and friends of the zamindar, who sought such position of the jotedar so that they might lord it over sub-tenants and under tenants or ryots.⁵⁴ Both the classes were the ryots with occupancy right under the Act VIII of 1869.

In western Assam the actual cultivators very rarely held their agricultural field directly from the zamindar. In certain cases, but such case were rare, the zamindar made a direct settlement with the cultivators themselves. These ryots were termed as the *Karori Karfa* ryots and were simply tenant at will. There were some other ryots, who held land directly from the zamindar, who in lieu of paying money rent rendered certain service to their landholders. They were known as the *Sickbays* or *Khudhas*.⁵⁵

2. The *Chuknidars* were the man who held land under the jotedars and sometimes, he was a sub-tenant of a sub tenants. He was regarded as a mere tenant at will, and if the jotedar delivered him a notice to quit, he was bound either to go at the end of the year or to accept whatever term the jotedar might think proper to impose on him. If he did not quit or agree, the jotedar sued him in the court, which treated him as a trespasser and passed order for ejection.

3. The *Adhiar* was of a still lower standing. The jotedar or lease holders parceled out the land of the adhiar who held land from him for a share of the crops. The adhiar was called the "Praja", the law of the land or custom gave him no higher status than under ryots liable to be evicted at the will of his employer.

Thus, between zamindar and actual tiller of soil there were a number of intermediaries. There was sub infeudation, which was the result of the Permanent Settlement. For the margin between the land revenue and the actual collection of rent from the tenant had permitted the creation of intermediate interest between the zamindars and the actual tiller of the soil.⁵⁶

2.4. Grievances of the tenants against the zamindars:

The relation between the landlords and the tenants in Goalpara of western Assam, therefore, has never been really cordial. As stated, the land lords were left free to act according to their sweet will in the matter of fixation of the rent by the permanent Settlement of 1793. They used to frequent enhancement of land revenue on the ryots and the later had to carry on the burden by dint of their economic hardship.

In western Assam, all classes of ryots had distinct grievances against the zamindars. Their grievances were related with 1. evils of management: 2. collection of illegal *abwabs*: and 3. Frequent enhancement of rent. The evils of the separate management of undivided estates caused undue harassment to the ryots. The management of zamindary was imperfect in case of all zamindars of western Assam. The officials and *Amlas* of zamindars were engaged in moneymaking and extortion from the ryots.

Though, the collection of *abwabs* was declared illegal by the Permanent Settlement Regulation, these were being collected by the zamindars of Goalpara. The illegal *abwabs* thus collected had no fixed limit and this caused discontentment among the tenants. The tenants were found to pay the *abwabs* without protest due to fear of displeasure of the zamindars and they were also not willing to quarrel with their land lords.

They paid up the *abwabs* to keep the zamindars and their Amlas in good tempers and thus, staved off the enhancement of rent, which could be legally demanded. Eventually the provisions of the Act VIII of 1869, provided for the recovery of the *abwabs* by suit with damage. But, this was not practicable. No tenant dared to file suit against their land lord because they simply avoided the incurrence of the hostility of their land lord. Besides, their financial condition did not allow them to go to the court to file suit. As stated in an official note, "He pays the *abwabs* which is the *dastur* to pay. It is only when new imposts are imposed that he moves, and when he does move, it is not only through appeal to the court but by a combination of measures to stop the payment of rent which leads to so many agrarian troubles in the Bengal part of this province".⁵⁷

Frequent enhancement of rent was a general feature of the zamindari management in western Assam (Goalpara district). Of the Estates, Gauripur, Mechpara and Karaibari enhanced rent frequently. It was pointed out by Boston Bell, Director of Land Records, in 1907 that rent in Gauripur estate had been raised by private contract: "I do not know what the total enhancement has amounted to, but I come across individual cases in which the new rent is much more than double to old rent".⁵⁸

The highest grievances of the ryots related with the frequent enhancement of the land revenue by the zamindars. In course of settlement commenced by the zamindars in the beginning of twentieth century, an all-round enhancement of about a rupee was fixed. In Mechpara, many of the jotedars fled away to other places owing to damage of crops caused by earthquake of 1897: many of them were induced to in the estate by the offer of lowering the rate of the rent. After some years, land had gradually improved and there came an inrush of the

new tenants from Maimensing and other part of East Bengal, consequent of which the demand for land increased. The Manager of these estates seized of the opportunity by enhancing rents. The system known as "*Hajat Jama*" in Rangpur was introduced in Mechpara: the rent was fixed at higher rate but "as a favour" only a part of this was demanded to pay. What is interesting was that the favored part itself was higher than the rate in existence, and this had undoubtedly created ill feeling among the jotedars. The rate fixed was rupee one, while the favored rate for collection was Anna / 10/. After five year the jotedars were required to pay the full Rupee. It was an increase of 100 percent over their previous rent. In Gauripur, too the system of *Hajat Jama* was practiced⁵⁹

The memorandum submitted from time to time to the govt. by the tenants bear witnesses of the fact that rents were being increased not only in the estates mentioned above but also in other parganas of the Permanently Settled tract. As had been stated in the Assam District Gazetteers, that "within the recent years rent of the tenants in Karaibari and Gauripur has been enhanced by about 24 percent"⁶⁰. Lain A.J, who was placed on special duty to enquire into the defects of the rent Laws in the Permanently Settled area and submit suggestions for its amendment ,mentioned in his Report that rent was enhanced three times within a period of seventeenth years in Karaibari.⁶¹

In a speech in the Assembly debate, Maulavi Abdul Majid Ziaosshah while referring to enhancement of rent in Goalpara said, "in cases I have found that when the original rent was Rs. 10/, the rental has been enhanced to Rs. 30/-"⁶². As per the provision VIII of the Act of 1869, a zamindar could enhance any rent by issuing 6 month notice and the tenants on whom such notice was served could contest their liability to pay the enhanced demand.⁶³ In practices, these provisions of law were

not followed, enhancement being secured by private negotiation between the parties concerned.

It was the enhancement of rent, which generated grievances of the Jotedars. However, the burden of enhancement was to be borne by under tenants. Taking the plea of zamindary enhancement of rent, the jotedars enhanced the rent on the under tenants. Eventually, the enhancement of the jotedars was much higher than that of the zamindars.

Another important ground of the grievances of the ryots was the non-reorganisation of their occupancy right and frequent eviction from their holding. There was no Tenancy Law, which could provide relief to the ryots. All the rights which accrued to the ryots under the act VIII of 1869 well absorbed by the jotedars and there were instances, where cultivators having holding rights for 30 years or more were evicted by the zamindars and there was no scope for redressal of such kind of harassment. The average *Chuknidar* was considered by the zamindars under which he held land as a tenant at will, even though he might expend labour and capital necessary for its original reclamation and subsequent improvement, he seldom possessed patta. The rent was treated as summarily enhanceable at an uncertain rate.⁶⁴

Thus, the position of *chuknidar* or the actual cultivators of the land, under zamindars in Goalpara were pathetic. The influx of the enormous immigrant settlers from Northern and Eastern Bengal brought about a new state of things. It had rapidly raised the value of the land and a rise in rent in consequence. The increasing demand of land had created a desire on the part of both zamindars and intermediary to take every advantage of the situation to take as much as possible out of the competing race of the new comers.

Reacting to the immigration problem of Goalpara district, Babu Mahendra Chandra De, the then E.A.C, pointed out in his note that the total population of the district in 1891 was 452,773; 462052 in 1901, and 600643 in 1911. The rapid increase of population during that period was due to immigrant settlers, the "Bhatias" as they were called in Goalpara district. During that decade, in South Salmara P.S alone including Mankachar out post, the increase in population was over 70%, Lakhipur area had a 61.81 percent increase. This large population was attracted by the presence of the char land of the Brahmaputra riverine tracts. The jotedars having jote in that tract of the district put these up to auction to the highest bidder. Naturally, those who could afford to pay heavy salami, in addition to rent, were allowed to take up land in detriment to the interest of those who were already in possession but were unable to satisfy the rapacity of these zamindars.⁶⁵ The immigrants were land hungry peasants, of whom 85% were Muslim.⁶⁶ The immigrants settled mainly in waste land and *Char elaka* (riverine). They were hard working, made excellent cultivation. According to the Census of 1911, there were 51000, such immigrants in Goalpara district and 3000 in rest of Assam. In 1921 Census their number rose to 153,000.⁶⁷ the indigenous people were pushed out by the Bhatia tenants. As stated in the official note, "owing to the pressure of the unruly Bhatia, who were accustomed to take law into their hands and to fight with spear and other weapons in order to secure what they want. Knowing as they do that the people of the country were legally defenseless as they were not protected in any way as to the security of their holding by Act VIII of 1869, they will do all to oust them."⁶⁸ One such case was the riot which occurred in Kaldangar char, within the jurisdiction of Lakhipur Thana, between the rival bands of new comers and old tenants under two rival jotedars of Mechpara Estate.⁶⁹ In

all the estates the immigrants entered by paying high salami occupied land under the jotedars ousting the local cultivators.

The zamindars resorted to multiple oppression in the matter of ruling the ryots of which the *club law* was common. They caused distress to the ryots by club law. The estate servants took the law into their own hands and resorted to club law. They tyrannically handled the ryots in case of any refusal on the part of the ryots in payment of the revised rate of rent. In Bijni Estate one Jogendra Nath Bhattacharjee, an employ .of the Estate who was in charge of cashbook, had been posted to Baitamari Cachari for collection of rent. A band of 6-7, clubman had been sent to that place before he came there in a *Palanquin*. He caused one Amrit Kanta Kalita to be seized who refused to pay the rent at revised rate, and had struck him with stick. Because of, grievously hurt Amrit died shortly after. Though he was arrested on the charge of murder, later on acquitted due to support of the Raja.⁷⁰

Thus, as a result of the Permanent Settlement, the ryots of the Estates in Goalpara were subjected to extortion by the zamindars. The ryots had neither hereditary nor permanent right on the land they held. It had caused a reversal in the position of the ryots in the status he enjoyed as a peasant in the pre-colonial rule. Whether state was the owner of the land or not but, the land belonged to the peasants. So long he paid his share of revenue he was not dispossessed of the land he held. But, as a result of Permanent Settlement the ryots became the tenants of the landlords instead of owner of land. They even lost their occupancy right. They were reduced to tenants at will. This state of affairs gave birth of unrest among the ryots and a series of agrarian protests were raised against the land lords in the subsequent years.

In the absence of Tenancy Law, the relation between the zamindars and the tenants of Goalpara district in Western Assam remained unsatisfactory. The rent law of 1869 of Bengal, which was in force in Goalpara from 1892, considered ineffective. The problems regarding rent enhancement and oppression of the landlords went to such an extent that the ryots had no alternative but to submit allegation to the Government and even they resorted to local agitation. Infact, it differed from place to place even on some vital issues, within the same zamindari, as was the case of Bijni Estate.⁷¹ Commenting on zamindar's tenants relation Amalendu Guha observes that the Nineteenth Century was remarkable for the zamindary tenants conflict in Goalpara.

We find many instances of the conflict between zamindars ryots in Western Assam on the issues of enhancement of rent revenue, eviction from holding and zamindary oppression on the ryots. The tenants, some times, were bound to submit memorandum to the Government against the zamindar's oppressions.

In 1851, the *praja* of Ghurla pargana under Gauripur zamindar protested against the zamindar on matter of revenue settlement. The trouble occurred when the tenants of Ghurla pargana of Gauripur Raj Estate offered stiff opposition to the survey for fixation of revenue. Raja Pratap Chandra Baruah, of Rangamati, commissioned Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan, who was appointed temporarily the Sub Assistant of Goalpara, to enquire into the affairs that were going on in Ghurla. Ananda Ram went to Kaltara, the place of occurrence of the rebellion, and instituted the enquiry.⁷²

“It may be noted that the zamindars, who were the sole owner of land, were at liberty in respect of survey, settlement, assessment and collection of rent subject to enhancement. The tenants in general and

under tenants in particular had no permanent, heritable, and transferable right in land under their possession and therefore, they were treated as tenants at will. In matters of collection of rent falling in arrears repressive and coercive measures were resorted to, such as arrest and detention, though such cases were stated few in number. It should be mentioned that enhancement of rent was the inherent characteristic of the zamindari administration. And whenever there was an attempt on the part of the zamindars to impose a new rent or old ones were increased, the tenants combined together to stop the payments, which led to agrarian trouble in Goalpara.⁷³ In his report on the district of Goalpara A.J.M. Mill, mentions the quarrel had been going on in Bijni between Zamindars and the ryots since 1823, in the pargana of Habraghat.^{73a} The quarrel started when the new land revenue was imposed on the land other than the Sali land, which were opposed by the tenants. David Scott took up the matter and started new settlement after conducting proper survey. He concluded settlement only on the *Saliland*, before completing the whole process, he was away to take the charge of Commissioner of Assam. The ryots took the advantages of the state of things and set up a claim to hold all types of lands free of rent other than *Sali producing one*.

The reason of conflict, according to Gunaviram Barua, between zamindars and ryots in Bijni Estate was the half hearted land settlement, as consequences of which most of the ryots occupied lands in excess of land for which they paid rent. Further, a sizable section of the ryots kept pending the payment of rent for year together. Whenever, the zamindars attempted to start resettlement, the ryots got themselves together to oppose them.

Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan attempted to solve the existing problem, after assuming the charge of the Dewan of Bijni in 1849, framed

a set of regulations which were called “Phukan Hakimer Kaiddabandi”. He proposed amongst other things, to undertake a survey for the settlement of land in Bijni Estate and to apply the law of recovery for arrears of rent. This added fresh fuel to the fire. Though, both the parties agreed to retain ‘*Gujesthan*’ or earlier system without having clear conception over it, but, the Knot was continuing for several years. The matter referred to the Board of Revenue at Calcutta, which heard both the parties. Ananda Ram was sent to Calcutta to pursue the Board on behalf of the zamindars while Dewan Prem Narayan attended on behalf of the ryots.⁷⁴

In reference to the problem of Habraghat, A.J.M.Mill, writes in his report, “The Habraghat ryots under the evil influence of a designing person, called prem Narayan, are leagued together against their superior, the Bijni zamindar and will not come to an adjustment of their rent. The quarrel has been going on since 1823, and has caused not only great trouble but has led to violence and blood shed, and kept the whole country in a state of fermentation”.⁷⁵

The Board could not settle the Habraghat problem and it ultimately suggested for settling the problem by making an adjustment among the belligerents. Accordingly, the collector of Goalpara, Agnew took the initiative to call a tripartite conference. In May 1852, the conference was held but it was ended without any success. Again, in the same year the second conference in Dolgoma was held but yielded no result.⁷⁶

During the conflict of two queens of Bijni Estate, after suicide of Raja Kumud Narayan, the agitation of the *praja* took a very serious turn. Jivan Ram Phukan, the chief advisor of *bara* (elder) Rani Sidheswari fired in the air by his gun to disperse the mob assembled in Jogighopa. The agitating peasants were so discontented on *Bar Rani* that they

proclaimed one Chandra Narayan as Raja of Bijni. This incident is called “*Bar Patgirir Hangama*”. In this agitation Phukan was attempted on life by one of the agitators but he narrowly escaped his death at the cost of the life of one barkandaz, who was on duty.⁷⁷ Although, there was cessation of the acts of violence on the accession of the *Chota Rani*, Abheswari to the Gaddi of Bijni, agitation continued in organized form withholding the payment of rent, particularly in Habraghat and Baitamari.

Similarly, in Karaibari Estate the relation between the zamindar and the ryots was far from satisfactory. The hereditary chief of the pargana, Mahendra Narayan was dispossessed and the new Zamindar, Ram Chandra Lahiri could not maintain good relation with the ryots. He used to reside at Rangpur and his officials entrusted with the power to look after zamindari administration. The representatives of zamindar, often resorted to coercive and oppressive measures to exact more and more rent from the ryots, causing wide discontentment in the mind of the ryots.⁷⁸

The position of the Parbatjoar Estate and Mechpara Estates was no better than that of the other Estates. Family quarrels, which were rampant in these two Estates, ruined the management of the respective estates. The quarrels among the co-sharers in Parbatjoar Estate were so serious that the Deputy Commissioner sentenced one of them to imprisonment. In Mechpara, family feuds were so acute that it led to the split up of the management to four collecting agencies, which were considered as the engine of oppression.⁷⁹

Towards the second half of the nineteenth century, the relation of the zamindars with their tenants was strained. In 1892, the Bengal Rent Law of 1869 was extended to Goalpara district with a view to controlling the relation between the landlords and the tenants. The mismanagement of the zamindari, corruption of the Estates officials, collection of the

exorbitant *abwabs*, enhancement of rents and curtailment of the customary right of the tenants, enjoyed since the time immemorial were the main issues for conflict between zamindars and the tenants posing hurdles for maintaining good relation between himself and herself. These caused wide discontentment among the tenants, culminating in huge number of disputes between the zamindars and the tenants and the tenants and the under tenants.

The landlord and tenants conflicts, led the tenants to resort to legal action. Many cases were filed in the civil court of Goalpara and Dhubri. Not all disputes were plaed before to the court. Some of the disputes were settled by executive order, while others, referred to the courts. The number of civil litigations was increased in the beginning of twentieth century. Within a period of ten years, from 1907 to 1917, as many as 5,782 rent suits were instituted in Dhubri and Goalpara courts.⁸⁰

In Bengal, the Land law of 1869 was repealed and a more comprehensive Tenancy law was enacted in 1885. Being oppressed at the hand of the zamindars, the tenants of Goalpara influenced by the tenancy measures of Bengal looked for a better tenancy law for Goalpara district. Unfortunately, the government did not pay any attention to it. The zamindars were left free to manage the administration of their respective Estates according to their will. Enhancement of rent and *Abwabs* were the order of the day. Thus, ryots started agitation for redressing their grievances, especially for a rent law right from the beginning of twentieth century. The problems faced by the ryots were not identical in all estates. They combined locally as circumstances demanded so. The petitions and memorandum submitted to the government from time to time contained the grievances of the ryots against their land lords.⁸¹

The enforcement of Bengal Occupancy Act of 1869 in Goalpara district did not satisfy the jotedars and the tenants. After 1892, based on the act, the occupancy right of jotedars and tenants was recognized on the basis of their holding but due to lack of proper agreement, these rights were not confirmed. Besides, the jotedars were deprived of their transferable right of their jotes.

The *Jotedars* and the tenants of Goalpara demanded the enactment of proper Tenancy Law so that the traditional occupancy right be preserved and extended, the limit of the enhancement of the rent is fixed and illegal tax collection be stopped. The demand of the ryots was supported by most of the members of legislative council of Assam. Manik Chandra Barua, in this context demanded the extension of Bengal Occupancy Act of 1903 to Assam.⁸²

As stated earlier the discontented ryots submitted memorandum seeking redressal of their grievances. In 1905, the praja of Bijni Estate filed petition to the government against the oppression of Bijni Raja. In the same year, the ryots of Mechpara also submitted allegation against their landlord for illegal enhancement of rent. The ryots of Chapar estate expressed their discontentment over the settlement of Bhatias on the char land.

In 1913-14, five petitions submitted against the Zamindar of Gauripur. In 1912, under the leadership of Basuram Patgiri and Madhuram Das a group of tenants under Bijni Raj submitted petition to the government. Another agitation started in Parbatjoar Estate under Kalicharan Brahma. Their demands were 1). preparation of the record of tenancy right; 2) to declare perpetuity of the tenancy right; 3) framing rule for the enhancement of the rent. The "Times of Assam" published

editorial on the memorandum submitted by the praja of Bijni Estate in November, 1915.⁸³

As to the complaints, an enquiry was instituted early. The gist of the enquiry was "the raiyats had not much complained except that of the rent receipts granted to them which was vague and opened the door to abuses".⁸⁴

It should be noted that the tenants agitation in Goalpara during the period under review were widespread. Added to it was the agitation of Garos, who, under the leadership of Sonaram Sangma, rose against the opposition of Bijni Raj.⁸⁵

Though the agitating tenants, failed to be organized in a single body in the district level, they succeeded to draw the attention of the local press as well as the intelligentsia to their plight. In the wake of the Non Co-Operation movement, some tenants of Goalpara combined themselves together to refuse to pay their rents to the landlords. The tenants of Ghurla pargana of Gauripur Raj Estate, stopped payment of land revenue to the Raja in 1921, until an amicable settlement reached over the issue of the disputed rent enhancement.⁸⁶

The combination of tenant's agitations and the freedom movement compelled the Assam government to reconsider the situation in Goalpara and prepared a draft of rent law suitable for that district. But the measure was dropped due to the opposition of the zamindars.^{86a} ultimately; the Goalpara Tenancy Act of 1929 was passed by the government, which was the out put of the agitation of the tenants of Goalpara. The Goalpara Tenancy Act provided the occupancy right to the ryots who held land for twelve years or more. But the *Adhiars* were left on the same footing as they were before. There was no organization in Goalpara district to do spadework for redressing the grievances of the *Adhiar*.

2.5. Abolition of Zamindari system in Western Assam

However, by conceding to the demand of the ryots, the Assam Government passed the Goalpara Tenancy Act, 1929, by which the tenants secured the occupancy rights; it failed to solve the agrarian problems of Goalpara district. While the occupancy right of the tenants, who held land for twelve years or more, was recognized, the Act was silent about the right of the Adhiars. Though the eviction of the tenants was checked, the problems of the *Adhiar* demand for the reduction of the land revenue, and oppression of Zamindars and Mahajan failed to establish peace between the tenants and the Zamindars in one hand and the tenants and the Government on the other.

There was no *Krishak* organization in Goalpara as well as in Assam to do spade work for redressing the grievances of the peasants, especially the grievances of the Adhiar of Goalpara. As a result, the discontentment of the peasants of Goalpara against their land lords was still in roll. The *Krishak Sabha* of Bengal, which was advocating for the interest of the peasants, infact, encouraged, the intelligentsia of Assam to form such an organization and work for the interest of the peasantry. As a result, the first *Krishak Sabha*, an organization of the peasants, was organized in Assam, which was called, "*The Halowa Sangha*". The Congress workers of Assam formed this in 1935, in Golaghat. The name was changed to "*Golaghat Krishak Sabha*" in 1938 under initiative of Jadunath Saikia. In its third meeting in Kamargaon on 14th October, 1939, the conference urged upon the peasants to assemble under the Congress banner and demanded 50% reduction of land revenue.⁸⁷

Reference of Goalpara *Krishak Sabha* is found in the Assembly Proceeding in 1926, but no details of that are available. In the proceeding of 1933 reference was also made to the demand of the president of

Goalpara Krishak Sabha. Detail sources are available of the Krishak organization of Goalpara, formed in 1935 under leadership Jogendranath, Ripunja Singha, Gauri Pandit, Abaruddin and Fatik Chandra Das, which was a co organization of the Congress, are available.⁸⁸

While the landlords-Tenants conflict dominated peasant's agitation of Sylhet, it was the state and the peasantry, as a whole, that moved the peasant masses of Bhahmaputra valley. The peasants of Assam demanded 50% reduction of the land revenue. The demand echoed and re echoed in hundreds of Congress meetings and Ryot Sabhas till the advent of World War II. In 1935, the local Congress workers formed the Goalpara Krisak Samiti. On 29th November, 1939 the Nikhil Goalpara Krishak Samiti Presented an address to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was at Goalpara to draw his attention to some of the local problems including the absence of Tenancy Act. The Samiti claimed to have a membership of one lac, spread over several branches.⁸⁹

The Goalpara *Krishak Sabha* led the agitation of the peasants in Goalpara against the oppression of the zamindars and the Mahajan. It tried to organize the peasants under the banner of Congress. With the support of the Goalpara Krishak Samiti one Parmananda Das elected to Assam Assembly defeating Mechpara Zamindar.⁹⁰ The Krishak Samiti infused with new ideology led the people against the British imperialism as well as against Land lord's oppression in Goalpara.

Emergence of Abdul Hamid Bhasani added a new dimension to the anti Zamindary agitation of the district of Goalpara. He came to Goalpara from Pabna of East Bengal in third decade of Twentieth century and halted for a few days in a *Char* called later on *Bhasanir Char*, as a mark of respect to him. The Local people acknowledged him as the Peer. He shifted to Ghagmari, to the south bank of Bhahmaputra, where he

founded his residence and lived till to his return to East Pakistan. He was popularly called the Bhasani Maulana. He organized the immigrant peasants settling in different *Chars* of Goalpara and inspired them against the oppression of the Zamindari rule.⁹¹ He was not only the champion of the interest of the immigrant Muslim, but in practice he was such a peasant leader who advocated for the interest of the oppressed class of people irrespective of their caste and creeds. Hamid Khan Bhasani joined hands with the leader of Communist Party, Nandeswar Talukdar, Praneswar Nisswa, Viswanath Mukharjee and others and worked together for the interest of the peasants, though he did not belong to that party.

The *Krishak Andalan* (Peasants Movement) in Char land was started under his guidance in 1928 in Goalpara which took the shape of Gana Andalan (Mass movt.) in Goalpara, Dhubri, and Gauripur and in some other places. The object of the agitation was not to abolish the Zamindari system but to redress the Zamindari oppression and to acquire the occupancy right for the tenants and the under tenants.⁹² It was during the Second World War that the Communist party raised the demand of the abolition of Zamindari rule in Goalpara.⁹³ Maulana Bhasani became so popular in Goalpara that he was elected to Assam Assembly Council as an independent candidate in 1937. He introduced a Bill in the House for the amendment of Goalpara Tenancy Act, 1929, but due to the opposition of other members, it was dropped.

At his initiative, the Goalpara District Praja Conference was held in Ghagmari in December, 1940, with Nazi Ahmed being the president of the conference. It condemned those legislators who opposed the Goalpara Tenancy Act amendment Bill in the Assembly. Resolutions were adopted in the Conference for reduction of the rent, suitable rules for Debt Rebating Board and introduction of Bengali for the Bengali students. Due

to his ceaseless efforts the Amendment of Goalpara Tenancy Act, 1929 was passed in 1943 by the Assembly.⁹⁴

There was no demand of abolition of the Zamindari system in Goalpara till the outbreak of World War II. It was during the fourth decade of twentieth century that the peasants of Goalpara raised the demand for the abolition of the zamindari system. At that time the farmer's main demand was to abolish the Zamindari system to be relieved of the Zamindari oppression and harassment. Indeed, this demand was first raised by the under ground Communist League. The under ground Communist held a conference at Guwahati on 20th May, 1940 and formed the "*Krishak Banua Panchayat*" and advocated for the interest of the peasants and the labour.

In 1940 the fifth Session of Goalpara Krishak Sanmilian was held in Salkosa under Goalpara district. Swami Sahajananda, the president of All India Krishak Sabha, presided over that conference of Goalpara Krishak Sanmilian, which awakened the peasants of the district about their right and also boosted them for their emancipation from the Zamindari harassment. The peasants, infused by a new ideology started their agitation for the end of the Zamindari regime in a well-organized manner. In 1947, Krishak Sanmilian of Goalpara was held at Bilasipara with Gaurisankar on the chair. In this conference, resolution was adopted for immediate redressal of *Adhjar* problem. Owing to the pressure of the Goalpara Krishak Sanmilian, united agitation of poor Tenants and the *Adhjar*s and the Common workers of Assam, the Government of Assam passed the "*Assam Adhjar Protection and Regulation Act, 1948*". But the Act did not provide any benefit to the poor *Adhjar*, which, indeed, profited the rich peasants.⁹⁵

It is to be noted that in spite of the prolonged agitation of the peasants for the abolition of the Zamindari system in Goalpara, instigated by the Communist workers and the *Goalpara Krishak Sanmilan*, the Government was reluctant to do so, because of the loyalty of the Zamindars to the British Colonial Government in India. During the Colonial rule the semi feudal institution, the Zamindari system was retained for the interest of the British Imperialism. None can deny that the Zamindars of Goalpara in Western Assam acted as the ally to the British until the end of the British rule in India. This can be evinced by the tune of the expression in the memorandum, submitted to His Excellency, Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy of India at Amingaon, by the Zamindars of Goalpara in 1920. It expressed, "It is with humble pride that we respectfully assure your Excellency that the instinct of loyalty is a part of our nature. We have always done our best to co-operate with the Government in every direction in which our humble services have been sought".⁹⁶ It is to be mentioned that while the struggle for Freedom was gaining strength, the president of the All India Land Lords Conference, of which the Zamindars of Goalpara were members, in his presidential address he declared that, "if we are to exist as a class, then, it is our duty to strengthen the hands of the Government".⁹⁷

The Zamindari system had out lived its usefulness. The Bengal Land Revenue Commissioner, came to the conclusion, that, "this system is no longer suitable to the conditions of the present time and that it has developed so many defects that it has ceased to serve any national interest." But the system of lordism was carried on to its final absurdity. The system survived so long as the British were in power in India. The Estates were functioning under their respective management, even after India achieved Independence, though there was constant demand of its

abolition. Finally the Government of Assam passed the long expected, "Assam State Acquisition of Zamindaries Act, 1951."⁹⁸ This Act aims at abolition of the Zamindaries in the permanently settled portion of the district of Goalpara, and Garohills and the Karimganj subdivision of Cachar district. The Act also extends to the Lakhraj Estates within the boundaries of the permanently settled estates and the acknowledged estates in the Bijni and Sidli Duars of Goalpara district, settled with the Rajas of Bijni and Sidli. This Act has been enacted with a view to removing the intermediaries and bringing the tenants directly under the state and thus to give them better rights on their land. The Act was subsequently amended in 1953, 1954 and 1955 for removing certain difficulties in the implementation of it. Accordingly, under the Act, the Government has acquired the rights and interest of the proprietors and tenure holders in the Permanently Settle Estates. Thus, Gauripur and Karaibari Estates were acquired on 14 April 1957; Bijni, Parbatjoar, Chapar and Mechpara Estates were acquired on 4 April 1956. Immediately after acquisition of Zamindaries all lands and interest were vested with the Government and came under General Regulation of Land Laws applicable in other temporarily settled areas and districts.⁹⁹

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CHAPTER – III

Formation of the Heterogeneous Society in Western Assam (Goalpara)

Erstwhile Goalpara district of Western Assam has a unique socio-cultural heritage of its own, identified as Goalpariya Society and Culture. The society is a heterogenic in character, composed of diverse racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups. The medieval society that had developed in Western Assam, particularly in Goalapra region was seriously influenced by the induction of new social elements during the British Rule. It caused the reshaping of the society to a fully heterogenic in character with distinctly emergence of new cultural heritage, inconsequence of the fusion of the diverse elements.

Zamindars of Western Assam, as an important social group, played a very important role in the development of new society and culture. In the course of their zamindary rule, they brought Bengali Hidus from West Bengal for employment in zamindary service, Muslim agricultural labourers from East Bengal for extension of agricultural field, and other Hindusthani people for the purpose of military and other services. Most of them were allowed to settle in their respective estates, resulting in the increase of the population in their estate as well as in Assam. Besides, most of the zamindars entered in the matrimonial relations with the land lords of Bengal. As a result, we find great influence of the Bengali language and culture on this region. In the subsequent year, Bengali cultivators, business community of Bengal and Punjab and workers and labourers from other parts of Indian subcontinent, migrated in large number to Assam and settled down in different places including town, *Bazar* and waste land and char areas. The immigrants of land hungry

Muslim peasants from Maimensingh, Pabna, and Bogura and from other places of Bengal, entered Assam in huge number and settled down in various waste land and char areas, is known as Bhatia in Goalpar district. The demographical, social and cultural fabric of this region has been seriously affected by the subsequent immigration, beginning from the last decade of Nineteenth Century continued up to the partition of India and even thereafter. The immigration problem of Assam, has reached to a danger level, threading to the interest of indigenous people of Assam. Infact, the migration of people from Bengal and other parts of India, caused by the British Government and the local zamindars, gave birth of distinct misunderstand between the immigrants and the indigenous. It seems that some of the Assamese people have apprehended the immigrants to be illegal foreigners and treated erstwhile Goalpara district as the domicile of Bangladeshi.

So, an attempt has made in this chapter to focus on the formation of the heterogenic society and development of the culture in undivided Goalpara district in Western Assam. Endeavour has made, further to analysis the role of the zamindars of Western Assam that they played in the reshaping of such society and culture.

3.1. Formation of the Assamese society

Assam is the melting pot of human races and culture of both hills and plains. The composition of the population in Modern Assam is a complexion of diverse racial and ethnic groups poured into this region from time immemorial. Waves of people belonging to different ethnic groups migrated to Assam from South East, West and from the oceanic world, and even from different parts of Indian subcontinent right from pre-historic period. The medieval Assamese society was a tribal society that was formed because of the admixture of diverse racial and tribal

people migrated from the East and the South- East Asia. In course of time the Caucasian-Aryans stock came from the west and entered Assam and through long process of assimilation of the Aryans and Non Aryans people the modern Assamese society has come into being. The prehistoric and other remains definitely prove that Assam was inhabited by various racial elements and infact, this land is considered as a great anthropological museum.¹

In ancient time, the North Eastern Region, especially, Assam and its neighboring region, was known as the land of Kiratas, i.e. the habitat of the Indo Mongoloid people. During the time of the Mahabharata war and earlier, the tribes speaking the Bodo languages were called Chinas, Kiratas and Mlechhas. The ancient literature states, that Naraak, a prince of the Dravidian stock, overthrew Ghatak, the Kirata king of Pragjyotisha. Bhagadatta, who was probably a Kshatriya king participated in the war Mahabharata with an army, composed of Kiratas, Mlecchas and Cinas.² It must be admitted that his subjects were mostly non-Aryans and that is why he was called Mlecchadhinatha.^{2a}

The population of Assam during Medieval time primarily composed of the non-Aryans stock belonging to various Indo-Mongoloid tribes, speaking various Tibetan Burmese dialects. The Mongolians belonged to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Indo-Chinese group and are now represented by the Bodos, the Cacharis, the Morans, the Borahis, the Koches, the Rabhas, the Hajong, the Nagas, The Kukis the Chutias, the Ahoms, the Garos, the Dimachas, the Karbi, etc.³ They were called Kiratas in the Epics and Puranas and even in the Yuginitantra, a work of the late medieval period.^{3a} Different scholars of modern times are of the opinion that the geographical position of Assam is such that any movement of human races from south east towards the west and from

west toward the east could not be possible without entering Assam since the ancient time. The migration route of mankind from the remote past had been through Assam and various elements passing through it from India on one side and South East Asia on the other, leaving their substratum in both the hills and the plains.⁴

Based on some anthropometric data, the great anthropologist, A.C. Haddon found several ethnic types in Assam, such as: (a) delicocephalic Platyrrhine type (b) Delichocephalic-mesorrhine type (Nesiot element) (c) Mesocephalic-Misorrhine type, (d) Bracehycephalic-leptorrhine type, (e) Brachycephalic-platyrrhine type, and (f) Delochocephalic leptorrhine.⁵

Anthropologist, find traces that most of the tribes of Assam contains in varying proportions Negrotic, Austro-Asiatic, Alpine-Aryans and Mongolian elements.⁶ It is confirmed by scholars who have carried out extensive research on the prehistory of Assam that the principal races migrated to Assam in twilight of civilization are the Austro-Asiatic, the Dravidian, the Mongoloid of the Tibeto-Burman family of the Indo-Chinese group and the Aryans.^{6a}

No doubt, the tribes of North East India are predominantly Mongoloid. They entered Assam through various routes at different times. Though, these population differ from each other in respect of certain traits of physical features, culture and language, yet basically they are of Mongoloid origin and speak Tibeto-Burmese languages. In Assam the Mongoloid in the very early time intermixed with the Austroloids and Coucasoids from whom they accepted certain genes as a result acquired varied physical features. The northeast China was the original home land of the Tibeto Burmese. They at one time migrated to Burma and split up into two groups. One group went to further south and other group moved westwards along with foothills of the Himalayas to reach Nepal, Bhutan

and Tibet, from where they entered to Assam. They established themselves in different region and came to be known by various names, like Bodos, Garos, Rabhas, Hajong, Karbi, Koch, Mech, Cachari, Tiwa, Dimacha etc.⁷

Linguagically, the Tibeto Burman group, as a whole is divided into two main branches, North Assam and Assam Burmese. The North Assam branch is formed by the various Arunachal tribes; viz-Akas, Dafalas, Abors, Miris and Mishimis. The Assam Barman group includes three groups –the Bodos, Nagas, and Kukis-Chins. Thus the term Bodos is used to denote a large number of people, the Garos, Rabhas, Cacharis, Koch, Mech, Hajong, Lalung, Tiwa, Dimacha, etc. who speak Bodo languages. They occupied almost the entire Brahmaputra valley. They extended their area of occupation even to Northern Bengal, and Garo hills. They spread over to Northern Maimensingha where the Hajong still living, who belongs to Bodo stock. From the district of Nowgong in Assam their territory extended to Cachar, Syllhet and further south to Tipperah.⁸

The Bodos group includes most of the tribes, occupying not only the hills but also found spread over the valley from Dhubri to Sadiya, in modern Assam. They were once a very dominant people of the valley, and they established the petty kingdoms, such as those of the Cacharis and Chutias, even before the intrusion of the Ahoms.⁹

In course of time, some of the Mongoloid tribes accepted Assamese, an Indo- Aryan speech but few other still retained their own languages or dialects. The Indo Mongoloid was usually designated as Kiratas in the Epics and Purans, the word Kiratas, perhaps, used to mean the indigenous Mongoloid people of Assam.

After the Mongoloid, the Caucasian came to Assam in different waves or batches. Anthropologist has noticed strains of three Caucasiad types in Assam. In Yuginitantra it is stated, "There are evidences to prove that a type of Mediterranean people came to Assam at an early period, but it is difficult to ascertain the exact date of their arrival. Mediterranean elements are noticeable in the present day Assamese population. The other element, called Alpino-Armenoid has also entered into the Indid Assamese population. The Alpino Armenoids are broad headed people and thereby they are distinguished from the Mediterranean. Probably, they also came at the same time along with the Mediterranean, but following a different route."¹¹

The last element to ancient Assamese society was the Indo-Aryans strains that were with tall stature, long head, fair complexion and pointed nose. The migration of the Indo Aryans to eastern India can be traced back to the early century before Christ. References are made in Vedic literature, "Aitareya and Satapatha Brahma about the Aryan migration to Assam crossing the river Kartowa. Yuginitantra and Kalika Puran conceived the view that the Karatoya River was the boundary of ancient Assam or Kamrupa.

Narak is said to have settled Aryans in Pragjyotisha, which included then major part of Assam and North Bengal bounded by the Karatoya River in the west. There are evidence of even earlier settlement of Aryan in Assam from Ramayan in which it is stated that Pragjyotisha was founded by Amruta Raja , who was an Aryan king of Madhay Desha.^{11a} The Indo- Aryan had arrived North Bihar at leased by the 7th century B.C. From that region they moved to Assam in different waves. The Nidanpur Copper plate inscription of Bhaskar Barman which was a renewal of his grand father's charter contains no less than two hundred

name of Brahman who were said to be of the Indo Aryan stock. The different copper plate inscriptions issued during the rule of Barman dynasty indicate that the Indo Aryans people were invited by the Kamrupi king and settled them in their kingdom. They were granted rent free land and employed to the high offices of the kingdom. The Brahmans played the crucial role in transforming the society who entrusted with the duty of diffusing the learning to the people. The Barman king, in their bid to spread Aryanism, adopted a systematic policy of "Agrahara Settlement" for the Brahmans in the midst of the Non- Aryan people.¹² The Brahmanic mission, propagating Aryan culture and values, had apparently confronted stiff opposition from the Non Aryan and had to make large scale compromises in course of time. As a result, strict observance of caste rule and practices of untouchability failed to strike deep roots in this land.¹³ The Caucasoid, both pre-Vedic and post Vedic were responsible for evolving the Assamese language as well as Hindusing the people of this region.

Kautalya also referred to the conclusion of his book that during the Maurya period an Aryans wave entered the land. The Brhatsamhita's reference to Pragjoytisha and the Lauhita, based on the geography of the Parasara Tantra of the first century A.D, has an important bearing on the entry of the Aryans. From the fourth –fifth century A.D, we have a number of sources like the Raghuvamsa, Yuan Chwang's account and Purans, which definitely pointed to the settlement of the Aryan at least in the Brahmaputra valley.¹⁴

Most of the classical works have furnished the information that rulers of Pragjyotisha like Narakasur and Bhagadatta patronized the settlement of the Aryans. Kalika Puran states that Naraak patronized the

Aryans settlement. The Hara Gauri Samvada pointed out that Bhagadatta associated with the settlement of the hundred Brahman in Kamrupa.

The migration of the people speaking Indo-Aryan languages to Assam during first millennium A.D. was rapid and intensive and the process continued with varying degree of intensity during the next few centuries also. Kings of successive dynasties encouraged such migration and settlement of Brahmins and Kayastha in different parts of Assam.^{17a} The Assamese being an Indo-Aryan speech was powerful enough to influence the indigenous people residing on the periphery of the Indo-Aryan speaking settlement who in course of time accepted Assamese as their own language.

Dr. B.M Das divided Assamese people in two major groups, the 'Indid Assamese' and the 'Mongoloid Assamese'. Indid Assamese mostly comprises the Hindu castes and the Muslims who are of the Caucasoid blood.¹⁵ Most of the Mongoloid tribes became Assamese by embracing Assamese languages as their mother tongue and Hinduism as their creed. On the other hand, some of them retained their Tibeto-Burmese languages or dialects, but they use Assamese in dealing with the government as well as with the person of other communities. Some of these tribes, after their formal acceptance of Hinduism, treated as sub castes of the Sudras. The Ahoms, the Chutias, the Rajvamshi, the Moran, the Motaks are some of the Hinduised communities which accepted Assamese language centuries back as their mother tongue and became Assamese.¹⁶

The interaction of the Indo-Aryan speaking Caucasian stock and the Tibeto-Burman speaking indigenous people and the consequent fusion of blood contributed to the evolution of the society where in the Aryan and non-Aryan believes practices and way of living interfused to form a

composite culture of Assam. P.C Choudhury, one of the great Anthropologists of Assam, opines, “Assamese which was not fully developed in the ancient period, is now the only Indo-Aryan language; but the Austric and Tibeto-Burman elements have largely contributed both to the language and to the culture of Assam. Though the process of Hinduisation of the non- Aryan tribes carried on from early times, the conversion was very slow. The state remained; therefore, a land of heterogeneous racial strains with linguistic diversities, notwithstanding, the modern Assamese language has occupied the place of a vehicle of expression of a composite Assamese civilization”.¹⁷

The most notable contribution of the Ahom rule was the political unification of the country from Sadiya to Manas in the west under their rule. In consequences, in the course of time, it led to sociocultural and linguistic unity and succeeded in awakening the spirit of homogeneity among the people. Perhaps, the most important contributory factor for streamlining Assamese society was the Vaisnavite movement initiated by Sankardeva in the sixteenth century. The new Vaisnavite movement heralded a period of cultural renaissance that brought into being an efflorescence of literature, music, drama. The salient features of what is known at present as Assamese culture are mostly gifts of the Vaisnavite renaissance.

Close political and social contact for nearly two thousand years between the Indo- Mongoloid tribes and the Caucasian Aryans has produced a syncretic culture in which, though the Indo Aryan elements are predominant the tribal and non Aryan elements also played a conspicuous part in evolving the social and cultural life in Assam.

The Assamese society was further influenced by the growth of Muslim population in Assam from thirteenth century, A.D. The Muslim

invasion of Assam, under Turk-Afghan Sultan of Gauda and the Mughal, which continued for a period over four hundred years, resulting in growth of Muslim settlement in Assam.^{18a} It not only alter the demography of Assam but contributed a lot to the socio- cultural arena of Assam too.

The diversity of the Assamese population has been further expanded due to immigration of different classes of people from various parts of the British Empire. Thus, the Biharis, Marwaris, Oriyas, Punjabis, Nepalis, Tea garden labours, Bengali clerks and Muslim agricultural labourers imported from East Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and some other parts of India. The business community like Marwari, Punjabi and Bengali and others came to Assam with their commercial objectives, but most of them settled down here. The migration of agricultural labourer from Maimensing, Pabna, Bogura, districts of East Bengal right from the first decade of the twentieth century until the partition of India, even thereafter, and their settlement in different Char and Wasteland, not only increased the Muslim population in Assam but influenced tremendously the socio-economic condition of Assam. However, most of the immigrants accepted Assamese as their Official languages; they have been maintaining their own culture and speak their own languages at their home.

In the process of assimilation of these diverse elements of different races, tribes, ethnic groups, the great Assamese society has been formed and the colourful Assamese culture has been developed.

3.2. Background of the formation of Goalpariya society

Goalpara district had never been a separate political entity and it was an integral part of various kingdoms, like, Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa, Kamata and Koch, from the time of the traditional king Narakasur of

Pragjyotisha to Parikshit Narayan, the last king of eastern Koch kingdom or Koch Hajo kingdom. Ultimately, it came under the Mughals in 1613 A.D who ruled it till it was ceded to the British with rest of Bengal in 1765.

As mentioned in other references, that with the fall of the Pala dynasty in early part of twelfth century, the powerful kingdom of Kamrupa disintegrated, and numerous independent and semi-independent kingdoms were emerged. The western part of the kingdom retained the name of Kamrupa where a line of kings' exercised power till about the middle of the 13th century, after which the Bhuyans gradually rose to power.¹⁹ The kingdom of Kamrupa, came to be known as Kamata since its capital shifted to Kamatapur. In the closing decade of fifteenth century, Kamata kingdom declined in the wake of the invasion of Alauddin Hussein Shah, who conquered it in 1498, and established Muslim rule there. The Muslim rule was, however, short live, and with in a short period the Bhuyans unitedly uprooted it and established their power in Kamata.²⁰ Under such circumstances, Viswa Singha founded Koch kingdom on the ruin of the Kamata kingdom, subjugating the Bhuyans in 1515. The Koch kingdom reached its zenith during rule of Nara Narayan and Chilarai but the Koch kingdom disintegrated in 1580 when Nara Narayan ceded eastern part of his kingdom to Raghudev Narayan, the son of Chilarai, stretching the tract of land from Sankosh on the west to Barnadi on the East. The territory of the Goalpara district was an integral part of Eastern Koch kingdom, which was called Koch-Hajo in Persian literature.

The Mughal conquered eastern Koch kingdom in 1613, defeating Parikshit Narayan but soon war broke out between the Ahom and the Mughal on the question of the supremacy of western Assam. The Ahom

Mughal conflict, finally, ended with fixing river Manas as the boundary of these two powers. Since then territory west of Manas including territory under undivided Goalpara district came under the Mughal as a conquered land and became part of Bengal province who held it till it was, with the rest of Bengal ceded to the British in 1765 A.D.²¹

The district under went several changes in jurisdiction under the British. Initially the area of Goalpara district had been included to permanently settled district of Rangpur.²² For administrative convenience the area from Manas in the east to Sankosh in the west were divided into three Thanas, viz: Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari. By the regulation of 1822, the area comprising three Thana of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari separated from Rangpur along with Garo hills to form the district of North East Rangpur later came to know as Goalpara district. David Scott was appointed as administrator of the new district, called Civil Commissioner.²³ When Assam was occupied by the British in 1826, after first Anglo Burmese war, Goalpara was annexed to Assam Valley Division and its administration was placed in the hands of the commissioner of Assam.²⁴ Goalpara was again separated from Assam and placed under the commission of Koch Bihar division in all matters in 1866. After Bhutan war, the jurisdiction of Bhutan Duars were annexed to the British Empire and formed two districts, viz. Eastern Duar, and Western Duar; the Eastern Duar was added to Goalpara district in 1866.²⁵ Goalpara district was finally incorporated to the new province of Assam, when Assam was created into chief Commissioner Province in 1874.

It is seen that the fall of the kingdom of ancient Kamrup, in early twelfth century was, indeed, a thrusting of blow to the political social and cultural unity of the people of Kamrupa what had been existed since the

remote past. The absence of the central authority was a boon to the local chiefs to rule their respective territories independently. This political disunity helped the land thirsty foreign powers to invade Assam and we find that the Ahoms entered Assam from the East and the Muslim from the west in early thirteenth century. The introduction of Ahom kingdom in upper Assam in 13th century brought a major political change in Brahmaputra Valley. Within next two hundred years the Ahoms established themselves as the major political force on Brahmaputra valley and by 17th century whole Brahmaputra valley up to River Manas came under Ahom rule. The political unity of Assam was, thus, revived under the Ahoms, who ruled Assam for about six hundred years. During this long period of rule, Assam not only politically but socio- culturally also reorganized under the guidance of the Ahom ruling families. However, the Ahoms had their aboriginal language, religion and culture but for the greater political interest, they assimilated with the local people accepting Hinduism and Assamese. Under their guidance, the greater Assamese society and culture was reshaped.

By 16th century, we find two strong political powers in this region, the Ahoms and the Koch, under whom the ancient Kamrupa reorganized politically, socially and culturally, with distinct identical characters. The Assamese society was re-organized under the Ahoms and Kamatapuri society was re-organized under the Koch.

The division of the Koch Kingdom and occupation of its eastern part by the Mughals, comprising the land from Sankosh to Barnadi in 1613 A.D. laid the foundation of the separate society and culture in western Assam, especially in Goalpara district area. The Ahoms succeeded in recover the territory west of Barnadi up to river Manas from the Mughals in 1667. Since then the territory under Goalpara district

came under the Mughal who ruled it till 1765, a period of 152 years. During this period Goalpara had been part of Bengal Subah with a common administrative, economic and cultural condition. The British also followed the same path, and ruled this tract of land, incorporating with Bengal province till to 1826 a period of 61 years.

During this long separation of Goalpara from Assam and underwent separate political, administrative and cultural atmosphere unlike that of Assam, resulted in formation of a unique society in this region with separate cultural heritage. The region of Goalpara, after separation with rest of Assam, came in close contact with Bengal in political, administrative, social and cultural point of view under the Mughal and the British rule. As a result, Goalpariya society and culture witnesses the distinct influences of Koches, Mughals, and Bengal's socio-cultural features.

Though, there were affinities in regard to the racial and ethnic elements of the population of both the societies, Assamese as well as Goalpariya, composed under same kingdom of Kamrupa, but after fall of it, we can witness some political as well as administrative changes, influencing deeply on the society of Goalpara. As a result, Goalpariya society and culture attained some unique features of its own. The most important factor that contributed much in the growth of unique society in Goalpara is the prolong rule of the Muslim. Since the early part of thirteenth century Goalpara came to the contact of the Muslims, and went under Muslim rule occasionally even before the establishment of the Mughal rule on it. Goalpara came under the Mughal in 1613 who ruled it till 1765. Thus, the prolong Muslim rule, not only brought a demographical change in the society of the region but influenced on the socio, economic and cultural field too, especially, in language, food

habits, dresses, art architecture, revenue administration, war technology and way of living. The long attachment of the region with Bengal also influenced the Goalpariya society and culture. Goalpara had been considered as a part of Bengal and went through a long journey under common administrative, political, social and economic condition; in consequences, we find wide influences of Bengali society and culture upon the socio-cultural arena of Goalpara.

In the matter of revenue administration Goalpara came under zamindary system like that of Bengal which was unknown to rest of Assam. The zamindary system affected the people of Goalpara in such a way that most of the laymen of this region turned to poor due to the economic exploitation of the zamindars.

To sum up, the growth of unique Goalpariya society and culture was due to the long separation of the region from rest of Assam politically, socially and culturally in one hand and impact of long time attachment with Bengal under the Mughal and the British under same political, administrative, economic and socio-cultural condition on the other. As a result, the society that formed in Goalpara and the culture that developed there was unique in features unlike that of Assamese society and culture.

3.3. Ethnic elements of the population of Goalpara

The composition of the heterogenic society of Goalpara in western Assam was the outcome of admixture of various racial, tribal; and ethnic elements, both Aryans and Non Aryans stock, belonging to diverse linguistic and religious groups, like what was happen in the case of Assamese society. As stated earlier, the ancient society of Kamrupa of which Goalpara had been a part, a tribal society composed of Non Aryan

stock but this was Aryanised by introduction of Aryan population, brought from the west by the king of Kamrupa, who followed the policy of *Agrahar*. Thus, the Non Aryans tribal society of ancient Assam gradually Aryanised by the Royal patronage in ancient times and with due course of times various racial groups entered Assam in medieval period from the east and the west and even from different parts of India. The process of formation of the society of ancient Assam began in the pre-historic period and continued for several hundred years to attain its maturity. Goalpariya society has developed to an independent social unit due to historical evolution of a long course of period.

The Goalpariya society has been composed of various racial and tribal elements. Among the social elements are Garos, Rabhas, Hajong, Bodos, Cacharis, Chawtal, Koch Rajbangshi, Mech, Jaddha, Sutradhar, *Napit*, Jogi (Nath) Namsudra, Gossain, Mahanta, Kalita, Raslun, Hira, Kamar, Kaibarta etc.

Garos: The Garos inhabits the tract of mountainous areas to the South East of the district now with in the district of Garohills and formerly included in Goalpara district ²⁶. They are agriculturist people and live by villages. The Garos are sub divided into many petty tribes. Although they are hill tribes but a considerable number of Garos are live in plain area in Goalpara district, which returned in the Census report of 1872 at 9957. Many Garos migrated to Goalpara who are now dwelling in the north bank of Brahmaputra within the present district of Dhubri and Kokrajhar.

Bodo-Cachari: The Bodo-Cacharis are the most numerous tribe of the plain district of Assam. They are mostly concentrated in Goalpara, Kamrupa and Darrang district of Assam. According to the latest Census enumeration, their total population in Assam is over six lakhs. According to the census report of 1872, the numbers of Cacharis in Goalpara

excluding Eastern Duars was 22,755 and in Eastern Duar their number were much more. Presently in Kokrajhar and Chirang district of undivided Goalpara, the Bodos forms the predominant group of the population. Considerable sections of the Bodos are Hindus but the larger section still professes their aged old tribal faith of worshipping 'Bathau Brai'.²⁷

The Cacharis are called Bodo in Goalpara, Kamrupa and Darrang district. They are doubtlessly an offshoot from the original great Cachari race and speak a language similar to that of the people of Cachar. In addition to their language, the Bodo- Cacharis of Goalpara also understand Assamese and Bengali and speak it in dealing with those people or others not of their own tribe but with a strong nasal pronunciation.

Koches or Rajbangshi: The Rajbangshi or Koches constitute a sizable population of Kamrup, Goalpara and Koch Behar. The Koches are frequently referred to as *Kuvacha* in the Purans and Tantra.²⁸ Entomologically; they belong to the Mongoloid stock allied to the Bodos. They accepted Hinduism and entered into Hindu caste. They are dominating figure in Bongaigaon and Dhubri district of present times, which had been within erstwhile Goalpara district.

The Koches of Goalpara and North Bengal called themselves as Rajavamsi or Rajabangshi and claimed to be Kshatriyas having sprung from the same community to which Coch Bihar Royal family descended. The Rajbangshi speaks Assamese in their own intonation while the Koches of central and eastern Assam speak like any other Assamese of their locality. The Koches observe and perform the principal rites and observances according to the Hindu Smrities. Grierson sub divided Koches into six groups. The Rajbangshi or Koch and the Hajong,

principally engaged in agriculture. They were one of the tribes who ruled this part of the country in the past. Their number rose to 118,091 in 1872 excluding Eastern Duar. In the Census report of 1872 the Rajbangshi were subdivided to various classes and acquired social status as well. Some holding rank of Kayastha and Kalita and they were classed among the degraded Sudra caste.

Rabhas: The Rabhas belong to Mongoloid tribe akin to the Bodo Cacharis. The Rabhas are more Hinduised than the Bodos. The Rabhas are sub divided into Pati and Rangdheni. Rabhas, Maitaria, Jotla, Betlia, Kochrabha, Dahari. All of them speak their own language at home and accepted Assamese as official language. According to Census report of 1872 their number in Goalpara district excluding Eastern Duar was 30,124.

Bhutias: A few Bhutias inhabited in the Eastern Duars portion of the district and resemble in every respect their countrymen in the Bhutan hills . According to Robinsons Account of Assam, 1849 the Bhutias speak a language which is said to be a dialect of the Tibetan more or less blended with words and idioms. Their religion is a form of Buddhism.

Hajong: Another tribe called Hajong is living in Goalpara district on the slopes of the hills especially in the slope of Garo hills. They are Hindus in creed and language, Cacharies in blood. Their number in the population of Goalpara is small.

Mech: The Meches are also Cacharis, although they don't acknowledge the relationship. They belong to Mongoloid stock. The distinction between Mech and the Koch are meager and confused. The founder of Koch dynasty Viswa Singha was son of Hariya Mandal, a Mech chief. By accepting Hinduism Viswa singha identified them as Kshatriya. Still we

find some Mech family in Goalpara who speak their own language and profess their aboriginal faith.

Castes and classes: Casteism is a special feature of the Hindu social system. But in the modern context of civilization it has lost all of its former significance and as a rule, all caste distinctions are now on the wane and a casteless Hindu society is now in the offing.

High Hindu Castes

- (1) **Brahman:** Brahmin is the first or priestly caste in the Hindu social system. Its members were employed as priests, Spirituals instructors, ministerial officers, landowners etc. The majority of the Brahman of Goalpara is the descendants of early immigrants from upper India, Koch Bihar or Kamrupa. Some Brahmans belonged to Vedic class. The census report of 1872 records the number of Brahman in Goalpara is 2366.
- (2) **Kshatriyas:** They are next to Brahman in regard of high status in society. They were warrior caste now engaged in trading and works under the government. In Goalpara, the Kshatriya engaged in trade and commerce and in census of 1872, they were recorded as mercantile caste. Their number in Goalpara were 199.
- (3) **Kayastha:** Kayastha are also high-class people of Goalpariya society. They migrated from upper India or Bengal and employed in various respectable jobs under Kamrupa government. They were government official, clerks, accountants and landlords of Goalpara. Hunter mentions their number as 1438 in 1872. The Bhuyans of Goalpara belonged to Kayastha caste.
- (4) **Baidya:** Another high-ranking class in Goalpara was Baidya. It is an occupational class not caste. They were physician and later on they

abandoned their original profession and embraced government job and other professions. They are supposed to have originally been the off spring of Brahmans father and Sudra mother.

- (5) **Kalita:** Kalitas are said to have high rank in Goalpara, ranking above all the Sudra castes. Prior to coming of Brahman, Kalitas formed the highest class among the people and acted as priests. At present, they enjoyed high status in the society, exercises commanding influence over other castes, and held in high esteem by all. Their number was 11529 according to the Census report of 1872 and their main occupation was agriculture.
- (6) **Vaisya:** They are third or trading caste in original fourfold Sanskrit social organization. In Goalpara, they were degenerated to such a degree as to be classed among the Sudra castes.
- (7) **Ganak:** They were a degraded class of Brahman who has lost rank owing to their indiscriminate acceptance of gifts from low caste. Ganak are astrologers and fortunetellers.

Low caste or sudra caste

According to the census report of 1872, we find some Sudra Castes in Goalpara such as Napit, Kumar, Barai, grower of pan *Mali*(gardener) *Goala* or cattle keepers, *Madak* or sweet maker, Kauri or Madhukauri, *Kansari* or braziers or coppersmith, *Lahor*, *Tele* or oil pressurer, *Sutradhar* or Carpentars and Keot. Keots are two classes- *Halua* and *Jalua*. Halua belong to the profession of cultivation while the Jalua engaged in fishing.

Ahoms in Goalpara district migrated from Assam and intermixed with Rajvamsi, the Khen, a branch of Rajbangshi or Koch tribe resides bordering Rangpur. Besides, Hunter mentions some cultivating caste like

shalos, Balvia, Basiya, Bhatia who migrated from downwards their number were 45 in 1872 Census, *Behiya, Boria, Das, Haalgir, Jarua, Kaibarta, Kveri-Kurmi* etc There were some professional class, such as *Kandu*, preparers of Parched gram, *Suri* or *Sunri*, were makers, *Suburna* banik or bankers and jewelers, *SoNara* or gold smith.

Lower Caste: (professional)

We find some low caste Hindus in Goalpara, viz., *Dhoba, Kahar* (Palanquin bearer) *Jogi, Katuni, Dhunuk, Hira* (potter maker) *Dom, ChuNarai* or limeburners, *Tati* or weavers who were subdivided into many clans, *Baidyakar, Nat* or dancer, migrated from Assam, *Met* or seller of the fish and vegetable, *Jaluya, Jaladhur, Mala, Jhal, Palni* (ferryman) and other labourer class are considered lower caste of the society.

Semi aboriginal castes

The following are the semi-aboriginal caste, forming the very lowest section of the Hindu community. They are chiefly employed as labourer, such as, *Bagdi, Bediya, Chamar* or *Muchi, Chandal, Kaora, Hari, Dom, Methar* or sweeper, *Shikari* or hunters, Gold smith etc., are considered very low caste of the society.

Muslim community

The Muslim Population in Assam is Called *Garia, Mariya, Miah*, and *Bangladeshi*, in central and upper Assam, and *Deshi, Ujjani, Bhatia, Dakhina* and *Charua* in western Assam, especially in undivided Goalpara district. The original pattern of Muslim population in undivided Goalpara district is quite different from the Muslims of the other states of India. Like Hindus, Muslims of Assam also entered in different succeeding waves.²⁸

The Muslim people of Goalpara are profoundly divided into two groups, viz., *Ujjani* or *Deshi* and *Bhatiya* or *Dakhina*. The immigrants Muslim from East Bengal are called "*Bhatia*" or "*Charua*" in Goalpara and "*Miah*" or "*Bangladshi*" in rest of Assam. The indigenous Muslims are called "*Deshi*" in Goalpara and "*Garia*" in other part of Assam. The word *Garia* relates to the immigrants from Gauda, the former Bengal.^{28.b} The term *Bhatia* and *Ujjani* are relatively indicative of the original homestead of the Muslim residing in Goalpara. The term *Bhatia* is derived from the word *Bhati* or downward. This is used to indicate the immigrants came from downward, i.e. from East Bengal or East Pakistan, presently from Bangladesh. The *Deshi* Muslims are said to be the indigenous people of this region. The term *Deshi* is derived from the word *Desh*, which connotes the meaning locality.

3.4. Role of Zamindars of Western Assam in Reconstruction of the Society of Goalpara

In regard to the formation and expansion of the Goalpariya society, the zamindars of the district of Goalpara played an important role. As stated earlier, zamindars of this region procured huge agricultural labourers from Maimensingh, Pabna, Bogura, Rangpur and Rajshahi district of east Bengal of the British India for expansion of agricultural land. Besides, Bihari, Bengali, Rajasthani, Punjabi, Nepali and other Hindusthani people were invited and engaged in various works by most of the zamindars of this region. It is to be mentioned here that in the first decade of 20th century the zaminders of western Assam were offered opportunity of rent free for a term of five years by the British Indian government for waste and char land converting agricultural land in a bid to expand agriculture in such areas. As a result, each zamindar of Assam began to import agricultural labourers from East Bengal to clear off the jungles and bushes of the forest and riverine area and started cultivation thereof. The

land thirsty *Bhatia* were attracted with this opportunities and wave of huge crowd flowed to Assam. They were settled down in different char and the forest land of Goalpara district as well as to the various *khasland* of Assam. Thus, the population of Assam increased enormously from the first decade of twentieth century. The process of immigration was continued for several decades, which seriously altered the demography of Goalpara in particular and Assam in general. The large number immigration of *Bhatia* from east Bengal not only affected the demography of this region but influenced very seriously the socio economic and cultural foundation of Goalpara as well as of Assam. The British Government encouraged the immigration of the agricultural labourers from East Bengal to increase the agricultural production, especially, for the jute production in Assam. They mostly concentrated in Goalpara district, resulting expansion of Muslim population there. The flow of immigrants to Goalpara districts from Maimensingh, Pabna, Bogra and Rangpur districts of East Bengal began during the decade 1901-1911 and settled on Char land of Goalpara. During the decade, population of the district increased by 30 percent whereas its increase in earlier decade was 2 percent in 1891-1901 and 1.4 percent in 1881-1891.²⁹ The immigration of the land thirsty people from East Bengal continued after wards and it had become as a problem for the Assam Government even before independence. In the post Independence period the immigration of the people of East Pakistan was also continued. During freedom movement of Bangladesh, huge Bangladeshi both Hindus and Muslims took shelter in Assam and in West Bengal. Of these fugitives, a part did not return and remained in India, especially in Assam and Bengal. These immigrants have socio-cultural affinity with the people of present Bangladesh, for which the immigrants are called

Bangladeshi, Bhatia, Dhakhina and Miah. In Goalpara, they are generally called Bhatia.

3.5. Deshi (Indegenous) Muslim of Goalpara

The origin of the Deshi Muslim in Goalpara can be traced back from the invasion of Mohammed Bin Bakhtiyar on Kamrupa in 1206. Since then the Turk Afghan Sultan of Gour continuously invaded Kamrupa. This was also followed by the Mughal who invaded Assam in many occasions.³⁰ The Muslim invaded Assam from 13th century to 17th century for about 19th times.³¹ Though, the Muslim failed to establish their power on Assam on permanent basis, but they succeeded to bring western Assam, specially the territory between Manash to Sankosh under their control. As a result, the Muslim settlement was made in large number in Goalpara district during this period. Besides, a large number of local people converted to Islam due to existing caste system in Hindu society and liberal principles of Islam. Hussein Shah, the Nawab of Gauda established Muslim colony on Kamata kingdom. During this period huge Muslim settlement was made in Rangamati area under Goalpara district, and in Hajo under Kamrupa district. Hajo was one of the colonies of the Muslim.³²

From 1613 to 1765, the Mughal governed Western Assam. All the expeditions against the Ahom kingdom, comprised of Eastern Assam, carried out, from Rangamati Thana of the Mughals. During this period Rangamati was Headquarter of the Mughal soldiers, administrators, traders, preachers, and visitors. The *Peer*, *Aulia*, *Darbesh* and other religious Gurus frequently visited Goalpara and adjacent areas. Many of them settled down in this region. The *Panch Peer Dargah* of Dhubri and *Poa Mecca* of Hajo are some of the examples of these events. The religious priests of Islam were engaged in the propagation of Islam,

founding Dargah in several parts of Assam. For their restless efforts, many local people of lower castes converted to the Islam, which was the vital reason of the growth of Muslim population in Assam in general and in Goalpara district in particular. Thus, during Mughal rule Muslim Population in Goalpara was rapidly increased.

There is a general presumption in central and upper Assam that the Muslims speak Assamese at their home are Garia Muslims, and those speak Bengali, or dialect of present Bangladesh are Bangladeshi.

Garia Muslims are said to have come from Gauda (Bengal), so they are called Gauriya, alias Garia. But all the Muslim of Assam is not Gariya in that point of view. Infact, the composition of Muslim population of Assam in Medieval time made with the persons coming from Gauda, war prisoner, converted, and religious priests from Middle East countries. We find that huge local people converted to Islam due to the efforts of the famous Muslim Saints, like Giasuddin Aulia, Shah Akbar, Shah Milan, Shah Kamal and many others. Besides, some Muslim religious saints came from Arabian land, Turkey or Afghanistan who settled in Assam. They are of Sayyeid, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan clans. Although, the term Garia implies to identify the indigenous Muslims in Assam, infact, a portion of Assamese Muslim are Garia but it is too hard to distinguish the Garia from that of Sayyeid, Pathan or other clan of medieval immigrant Muslim. It is because of the long course of assimilation of various groups of Muslim population in Assam with the indigenous, accepting Assamese language and culture forms a single class, commonly known as Garia.

On the other hand, Goalpara, being the part of Gauda or Bengal till the formation of Assam as a province in 1874, the Muslim came during Sultanate period or Mughal period from Gauda to Goalpara are not called

Gouriya but are called *Deshi*. We find huge conversion of local people to Islam from the time of Baktiyar Khilji's invasion to Kamrupa to the last part of Mughal rule, even thereafter, and these Muslim populations are called *Deshi* Muslims. Beside, many soldiers, *Peers*, *Aulias*, *Darbeshes*, administrators, officials, traders' technicians, and cultivators came to Goalpara, some of them settled here and assimilated with the local people. The assimilation of the converted and the outsiders forms the basis of *Deshi* Muslim in Goalpara. The term "*Deshi*" derived from "*Desh*" or locality. They are presumed as the son of the soil, because major portion of the Muslim Population in Goalpara are converted of the lower caste Hindu of the locality.

According to the census report of 1872, the total population of Goalpara was 4, 44,761 of which 89,916 were Muslims. They constitute 22.05 percent of the total population of the district.^{32a} The term *Garia* which is prevalent in Assam other than old Goalpara district is synonymous to the term *Deshi*, prevailing in Goalpara. The indigenous Muslims are called *Garia* in central and upper Assam and *Deshi* or *Goalpariya* in Erstwhile Goalpara.

The *Deshi* Muslims are subdivided in Goalpara because of their origin and profession, viz, *Jarua*, *Daider* or *Maimmel*, *Bahirbandi*, *Bhitarbandi*, *Sandar* or *Bepari*, *Teli*, *Habraghati*, *Jola* etc. Commenting on the Muslim population of Goalpara, W.W.Hunter says, that almost the whole of the Muslim population of Goalpara belong to the Sunni Sect, although, Shiekh, Sayyied, Mughal and Pathan families are also found here.³³ They are not Indian, their original home was in either in Arabian world or Afghanistan or Turkey.

It is to be mentioned that the Muslim population of Goalpara except the immigrants from East Bengal or East Pakistan, are comprised

of the descendants of the Muslim coming from Gauda, as soldiers, administrators, officials, technicians and religious preachers like, Peer, *Aulia*, and *Darbesh* from Arabian world or from Afghanistan or Turkey, and the local convertents. They are the settlers of earlier period and hence they can be considered as the native Musalmans of Assam.³⁴

W.W.Hunter mentions, "Goalpara as being the frontier district of Assam, and having been often included within the political limit of Bengal, naturally presents mixed ethological features. Excluding the population of Eastern Duars, the census of 1872 registered 86,001 Hindus proper or 21.08 percent of the entire population of Goalpara. The Muhammedan of Goalpara, for the most part of the same ethnic origin, is 89,916 or 22.05 percent of the total population, being more than one half of the entire Musalman population in all Assam. The semi aboriginal is 1, 32,095 in number or 32.89 percent of the total population; and among them the Koches were especially numerous. The original tribes, numbering 97,732, or 23.99 percent, chiefly made of Rabhas, Meches, Cacharis and the Garos. Both the Meches and Garos of Assam appear to be absolutely confined to Goalpara district, which also contains just one half of the total Rabhas to be found in the province".³⁵

3.6. Immigration during colonial rule

As stated earlier, that after establishment of the British Rule in Assam the British administrators brought with them some persons, expert in some particular fields from other parts of India. Thus, they brought Bengali clerks from West Bengal, labourers for work in railways and in constructions of roads and bridges from Bihar, tea garden labourers from Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh. Owing to the British occupation of Assam, people of different classes came to Assam with a view to have their livelihood. Thus, Marwari, Panjabi, Bihari, Nepali, Munda, Bengali, and

some others came to Assam and most of them settled down here permanently including Goalpara district.

Shortly, before the Burmese invasion of Assam, a few hundred Sikhs brought from Punjab as sepoys by the British. They were stationed at Hadira Chauki, opposite of Goalpara town that fought against the Burmese. After British occupation of Assam, they scattered and settled in different places of Assam including Goalpara. They are still locally called Singhs. A few families are residing in Dhubri and Goalpara town and retained their national customs and habits. As they did not bring with them their wives, they married women of the lower caste Hindu, like Koch or Mech.

The immigration was the main factor contributing to the rapid growth of the population of Goalpara district. Its impact was increasingly felt in the district since the beginning of twentieth century. Goalpara had all sorts of immigrants, viz., inter district, inter states, international immigrants etc.

The flow of immigrants to Goalpara district from Mymensing, Pabna, Bagura and Rangpur districts of East Bengal (Bangladesh) began during the decade 1901-1911, the population of Goalpara increased by 30 percent, whereas in the previous decade its increase was 2% only. By 1921, a large batch of immigrants came and their movement extended as far as to Assam valley. The persons born in East Bengal but enumerated their name in Goalpara went rising decade by decade. Their number stood 77,000 in 1911, 151000 in 1921, and in 1931, it rose to 170,000, which visualized the picture of the large number of the immigrants from East Bengal. In 1941 no census were done due to World War II, but in 1951 census huge immigrants registered their name in Goalpara, who born in East Pakistan and their number were 136,000. As a

result of this influx, the population of Goalpara was rapidly growth. According to Census Report of 1951 the total population of Goalpara rose to 1108124 of which Muslims was 475828, constituting the percentage of total population was 42.94.^{35a}

The influx of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan constituted the highest migration stream into Assam during 1941-51 decade. There was steady and continuous influx of Hindu refugees to Assam during Noakhali riots and at the time of partition of India. Of these refugees, 85,986 were settled in Goalpara district. Out of 23611 families, 2827 were sheltered in urban areas of which 2544 families settled in Dhubri subdivision and 283 families were settled in Goalpara subdivision.³⁶

Though the immigrants from East Bengal, later on from East Pakistan were predominant in to the district, other immigrants except Nepalis were negligible.

3.7. Rural population

According to the census of 1872, there was not a single town in the district of Goalpara, containing population upwards of 5000. The population of Goalpara was entirely rural inhabitants. Mr. Magrath's District Census compilation had classified the villages of Goalpara according to the number of inhabitants. According to his survey there were 777 villages which had population less than 200 people, 306 villages having inhabitants between 200-500, 175 villages whose population were between 500-1000, 60 villages containing population between 1000-2000, 9 villages which had population between 2000-3000, and there only three villages having population above 3000.³⁸

In the beginning of 20th century the number of villages growth rapidly to Goalpara district which is shown in the following table.

B.C.Allen has described in his report the condition of the villages of the district of Goalpara, he writes, "These villages are not, however, well defined units, clusters of huts which stand out clearly in the centre of the fields tilled by their inhabitants. Rice the staple crop grown in wide plains, dotted over with clumps of bamboos and fruits trees in which are buried the houses of cultivators. It is groves and not villages that the traveler sees when riding through the more density-populated portions of the district, and not a house can usually be described until he has penetrated this jungle of plantains, betel nut trees and bamboos. There is no dearth of building sides, there are no communal lands, and there is nothing to keep the population together. Except in the Eastern Duars, it is difficult to tell where one village ends and another begins or to which of the larger clumps of trees should be assigned the smaller clumps that are freely dotted about amongst the rice fields. The result is that the statistics of villages are of little practical importance. Taking them, however, for what they are worth, it appears that villages as a rule run small and in 1901, nearly half the total population were living in hamlets with less than 500 inhabitants".³⁹

The growth of population in Goalpara resulted in cleaning up jungles and bushes, especially, in south bank of Brahmaputra for domicile and extension of cultivable lands and thus, converted the wilderness into prosperous villages. Roads and rails have penetrated deep into the villages and modern vehicles, where bullock carts reigned supreme. Villages, which were not well defined units having schools, colleges, hospitals, dispensaries, post offices and other basic amenities of life, especially after independence. However, villages are still islands of bamboos, betel nut groves and hidden homesteads in a sea of paddy fields.⁴⁰

The expansion of the population resulted to the increase of the number of villages in Goalpara, from the beginning of the Twentieth century. The following table shows how fast the number of the villages of Goalpara been increased. The table is prepared in decade wise.

Year	Number of villages in Goalpara
1901	1,461,
1911	2,135,
1921	2,550,
1931	3,188,
1941	3765,
1951	3990,

Sources: ⁴¹ Census of India shown in the Gazetteers of Assam State, Goalpara district, 1979, p=85

3.8. Urban population in Goalpara

“The population of Goalpara district is entirely rural and the people do not evince any tendency towards urban life” the aforesaid remark of W.W. Hunter reflects the picture of urbanization of Goalpara district in the second half of the 19th century. There was not a single town in Goalpara district having population exceeding 5000 souls. Hunter has mentioned some of the towns of Goalpara district. Among them important towns were: Goalpara, the civil headquarter of the district, inhabited by 4678 persons, Gauripur, next to Goalpara having population of 1805 as per census report of 1872, Dhubri, with population of only 477, being the sub divisional headquarter and the seat of the subordinate judge’s court and also the headquarter of the Executive Engineer of the Lower Assam division. He also mentions the name of some other town, like Lakhipur, Bilasipara, and Chapar being the residence of the respective Estate.⁴⁴

Census report of 1901 had mentioned only two towns in Goalpara district, viz, Goalpara with population of 6287 and Dhubri having population of 3737. Gauripur was declared as town in the census report of 1921, containing a population of 4311. Thus, in 1921 about 17230 persons found living urban areas in Goalpara. The urban population rose to 40629 in 1951. In the following decade six more towns were declared in Goalpara district, namely, Bilasipara, Kokrajhar, Mankachar, Bongaigaon, Sapatgram and Abhayapuri. Bijni and Lakhipur with increased of the urban population to 1, 72,294, forming 8 percent of total population of the district. Thus, over 92 percent of the total population of Goalpara was living in rural areas during the decade.⁴⁵

Thus, it comes clear that in the second half of twentieth century the Goalpariya society was predominantly a rural society, forming by the Aryans and Non Aryans stock, comprising of the indigenous and outsiders, of the diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups.

3.9. Languages

According to the Census Report of 1951 the people of Goalpara speak about sixty languages and dialects as their mother tongue. Assamese was the predominant language in the district and 56.29 percent of the districts of total population spoke it as their mother tongue.^{45a} Infacts, the record of the Census of 1951 reflects the number of people who accepted Assamese as their official language or medium of instruction. There are numerous classes of people living in Goalpara, who accepted Assamese as their official language but speak their own in home. The majority person of Goalpara people speaks their mother tongue, which is called Goalpariya language or Deshi language (a branch of Assamese).

The Koch Rajbangshi claimed that the language they speak to be Rajbangshi language. Presently, controversy is being going on the issue of the name of the langue prevalent in Goalpara region. A good number of the people of undivided Goalpara district are in the view that the language spoken in this region is called Deshi language. On the contrary, the Kosh- Rajbangshi claimed that the prevalent language in this region is Rajbangshi language. They put forward the comment of Grierson who termed this language as the Rajbangshi language in his work, the Linguistic Survey of India. The language that spoken by the indigenous people of Goalpara both Hindus and Muslims is neither akin with Assamese nor Bengali but a language developed by the admixing Assamese, Bengali, Rabha and Cacharies.⁴⁶ There are sharp controversy among the scholars about the origin and development of the Goal pariya language .

“The Assamese language spoken in the district of Goalpara is called (Goalpariya or Rajbangshi) in western Assamese, owing to its variance in pronunciation from the Assamese spoken in the eastern Assam.”⁴⁷ Grierson identified Goalpariya language as a branch of Bengali and termed it as Rajbangshi language in his book but this has not been accepted by the modern scholars like, Bani Kanta Kakati, S.N Sarma and some others. The nontribal people of Goalpara both Hindus and Muslims have termed their spoken language as Deshi or Goalpariaya language, what is called Rajbangshi language by the Koch Rajbongshi people. The latest researches has proved, that the prevalent language of Goalpara is a branch of Assamese not Bengali. They have forwarded their arguments, on the basis of the use of “Ra” in ancient plate, which has been discovered in Eastern Bengal and Goalpara in the shape of singular peculiarity of Assamese script.⁴⁸ Grierson also remarks that the

Rajbongshi dialect is not confined to the Bengal province but extends to the Goal Para district of Assam in which it gradually merge into Assamese.⁴⁹ Next to Assamese, Bengali is spoken by a large number of populations of Goalpara.

Besides, other language such as Bodo, Santali, Garo, Rabha, Nepali, and Kurukh are also spoken in Goalpara. The immigrants Muslim who are called "*Bhatia*" speak a language at their home, which is akin with the language what is prevalent in Maimensingh of Bangladesh.

Although there are numerous linguistic groups in the district, bilingualism has blunted the edge of their differences and has brought about emotional integration of the people. The spirit of tolerance and urge to live a life of love, friendship and co-operation has forged unity among different linguistic groups.⁵⁰

3.10. Religion

The religious life of the district is predominated by Hindus who constituted 53.92 and Muslim forming 42.25 percent of total population as per Census of 1951. The other religious communities, as Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains etc. together formed a very low percent of the district population. According to the Census report of 1951 the populations of Goalpara under religious banner are shown below:

Religious community	Population	%of total population
Hindus	57112711	51.54
Muslims	475828	42.94
Christians	31027	2.80
Others	30140	2.72

Sources: Census Report of 1951.⁵¹

The Hindus are divided into three principal sects viz. Saktism, Saivism and Vaishnavism. Nearly 6% of Hindus returned as such in 1901 and described themselves as followers of Sakta or worshippers of the reproductive power as manifested in the female. The percentage of follower of Saivism was four while 90% had registered as the follower of Vaishnavism in Census of 1901.

The Muslim population is said to have increased rapidly and census report of 1951 has shown their number as 475828 against 128388 in 1901. This large increased in Muslim population is attributed to heavy influx of East Bengal Muslim, which started with the beginning of the twentieth Century.⁵² Initially, the Muslim cultivators were procured from East Bengal by the Zamindars of Goalpara to expand agricultural product. The British government also encouraged the Muslim migration to Assam and they settled on Char and wasteland to expand agricultural product especially for Jute production for the industries of England.⁵³

It is to be mentioned that not only the Muslim but a large number of Hindus sheltered in Goalpara during Noakhali Riots and Partition of India. From 1941 – 51 about 85,986, Hindus settled in Goalpara district.⁵⁴ The advent of such immense number of East Bengal immigrants, whose language manners and customs differ widely from those of the indigenous people, has affected the economic Political and Social structure of the district.

The number of Christian population in Goalpara was 98 only in 1872. However, their number had grown in subsequent years due to conversion of the local tribal people through the efforts of Christian Missionaries. In 1951 the number of Christian Community rose to 31027. The other communities, such as Buddhist, Jain, and Sikhs are few in number.

3.11. Feast and Festivals of Goalpara Region

Colourful festivals in the district enliven the lives of the people. The feast and festivals are greatly influenced by the religions and the traditions. The Hindus, who constitute the bulk of the total population of the district, observe many festivals and ritualistic and other local nature.⁵⁵ Besides the Hindus, the other communities of the district observe their own festivals according to their rituals and customs.

Hindu Festivals:

The principal festival of the Hindus is Durga Puja, a festival held in honour of one of the incarnation of the wife of Siva, the Lord of Destruction. The town, tea garden, the thickly populated villages become agog with the Puja festivals from the *Mahalaya day* and continues for four days in the month of September or October. *Doljatra*, or swinging festival, is another festivals observed in Goalpara with great Joy and pleasure. It is observed in honour of Lord Krishna held in February or March. *Ashakastami* or Bathing festival is celebrated in April or May. Shivratri is widely observed in the district with much éclat in the Shiva temples of Jhogighopa, Marnai, Dalgoma, Bongaigaon, Boitamari and Lakhipur. Besides, Kalipuja, Rathjatra, Viswakarma Puja, Lakshmi puja, Kartik puja. Saraswati Puja etc are observed throughout Goal Para region. Guru Kirtan Puja, a Vaishnavit festival held in Aug or September celebrated by the Vaishnavit sect.

Among the traditional festivals observed in the area under review is "Bisua" festival or a New Year festival. All section of people of Goalpara observes *Visua* since the very early time. It is from the last day of month of Chaith to the 6th day of the 1st month of the year *Baisag* or *Bahag*. The festival is observed to welcome New Year. *Bisua* observed in

the spring or basant for which the festival is also called *Basanta utsav*. In Assam Bisua is being celebrated as “*Bohag Bihu*”.

Another traditional festival of Goalpara is “*Pushan*”. From the last day of the month of Push to 1st day of Magh, the festival is held. It is also called *Domahi* (Bimonth). After harvesting of crops, this festival is celebrated. The festival is called *Magh Bihu* in rest of Assam. *Kartigusha* or Kati Bihu being observed in the month of Kartik. It is also called Kangali Bihu. *Euri Magan* or *Pushna Khowa* is another festival of Goalpara. The boys collected alms from door to door in the month of Pus and arrange feast. This is a traditional festival in the rural area of Goalpara.

Among the Rajbongshi-Khatriya *Manasa Puja* is known as the *Bisahari Puja* or *Marai Puja*. Marai Puja is also chief Puja of the Cacharis and the Rajbangshi. In many places in the area under review, the *Marai Puja* is performed at the time of epidemic or at the fear of the snake, otherwise, *Marai Puja* or *Bisahari Puja* performed in the month of Shraban.

Muslim Festivals: Among the Muslim festivals mention must be made of *Id-uz-Zoha*, *Muharram*, *Fatiha-i-duaz daham* and Id ul Fitre are the important festivals of the Muslims of Goalpara like other Muslims. After one month fasting of the Arabic month “*Ramjan*” *Idd ul fitre*, a festival of joy is observed through collective Namaj in *Iddgah* or in Mosque. More stresses are given on the new dresses and on preparation of various kinds of foods.

Muharam is observed to commemorate the tragic episode of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the prophet who was slain on the bank of Karbala. Way of celebration of Muharram is different for *Shiya* and *Sunni*. The Sunni sect is the dominant part of the Muslim in Goalpara.

Though observe Muharram as a day of condolence of the slained Imam, but they don't support *Tazia* procession. *Tazia* are brought out in procession, which is marked by the display of mock fights, by the *shiya*. *Fateha duaz daham* is observed as the birth anniversary of prophet Muhammad. It is interesting to note that *Jikir*, a kind of folk song caught in Assamese language is popular among the Muslims. The object of these folk songs is to convey his word to all the believers. Several scholars are of opinion that *Jikir* shows te influence of the *Nam Kirtan* of the Hindus on the local *Kirtan* of the Hindus on the local Muslims.⁵⁶

Bodo Cachari festivals: The religious festivals of the Cacharis of the district are different from those observed by the Hindus. The impact of the Hindu proselytisation is noticeable among them. Some of the Hindu God and Goddess such as Lakshmi or Kali are worshipped by the Cacharis.

The main God of the Bodos is Sibrai or Bathau. "Of these house hold Gods by far the most important is the Bathau who is pre-eminently the guardian of the family interested and the family honour"⁵⁷. They believe in Bathau or Siju who is looked upon as the tutelary deity of the house. The Siju worship involves the slaughter of goats, chickens; pigeon etc and at times eggs are also offered to the deity.

The Cacharis believe in the super natural power and at times make some offering toward off the evil spirits. They observe, besides these, *Kheraipuja*, *Habajanai*, *Natpuja*, *Bagrumba* and *Maiganai* as their traditional festivals. The *Deodhani dance* is a common feature of the *Kheraipuja*. Large number of people gathers about the end of November or in the beginning of December and again in April to perform *Deodhani dance*. Among the spirits which are believed by the Cacharis, mentioned must be made to enjoy the of *Maian*, the Diety of food and drink,

Khober, the Diety of paddy field, Hashung Madai, the Diety of travelers,, besides a host of others *Dolagobang*, *Saraumarai*, *Buragohai*, *Hagrani Madai* and *Daini Madai*. These are only a few as festivals in which these spirits are propitiated.

The majority of the people of Goalpara are agriculturist and they live in villages, for which their all festivals related with the agricultural production, harvesting and with the Natural phenomenon. They observe *Baisaki*, *Pushnai*, *Kartik Puja* and other festivals, which are synonymous with the *Bahag Bihu*, *Rangali Bihu* and *Kangali Bihu* in rest of Assam. The people of Goalpara irrespective caste, tribe and creed are observing the Bihu of the Assamese society, now days. Besides, the National festivals, like, Independence Day, Republic Day and the People of the region like other Indian observe Gandhi Jayanti.

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CHAPTER – IV

Public Works and Social Welfare activities of the Zamindars of Gauripur and their family members

The British colonial power never realized the need to work for the socio-cultural development of the Indian people. Rather, the British neglected Indian in every aspect. Whatever they did in India was, indeed, backed by the interest of their imperial and the colonial design. Nevertheless, some of the Zamindars, as an important social force, had contributed a lot to the social and cultural changes unleashed in the 19th & 20th century. Even under the Mughals they had initiated many benevolent works for public interest, as expected by the Mughal Emperor for which they enjoyed rent free lands. Some of them, with a view to perpetuate their own or their kin's name founded educational institutions, Sadabrata, etc, some others for the hope of the blessing of Gods and Goddesses devoted themselves to religious works, like foundation of temples, arrangement of pujas, donation of land and money to such temples etc. Some of them, under pressure of the subjects and necessity of time, involved in public works, like, excavation of tanks, construction of roads and embankment, opening of dispensary etc. A few zamindars were, seemed, who initiated such benevolent works for the zeal of public services. The Permanent settlement of 1793 promoted the zamindars of Bengal as the owner of land that they held; so long they paid the stipulated revenue to the British Indian Government. Since then the zamindars of Bengal not only began to lead a life of grandeur and luxury, as they considered themselves as the local king and the master of their ryots, some of them felt the need to spent a part of their income for the development of subjects and the society. Although to meet their huge financial requirements for

maintenance such status and court ceremony, besides payment of their dues to the state, they some time resorted to oppressive and coercive measures in collection of revenue, but at the same time, some of them played a vital role in the socio-cultural development of their estates. They constructed roads, tanks for water, donated land for temples, founded schools, colleges, charitable hospitals and satras. They also patronized music, drama, art, handicraft and other cultural activities.

The zamindars of Western Assam were not only the followers of the zamindars of Bengal in the matter of zamindari administration and luxurious style of living but also of benevolent works of public importance as well. Though, they were fond of luxurious style of living for which they, some time, resorted to oppressive measures to exact more and more revenue, it can not be denied that the Zamindars of Western Assam did not contribute to the socio-cultural development of the region. Rather, some of the zamindars of this region were patron of learning, music, drama, literature, art handicrafts, besides, construction of roads, tanks, temples, and foundation of charitable hospitals. It is to be mentioned here that during the last part of 19th century and the early 20th century a wave of public welfare activities spread throughout the nation because of National Awakening and Freedom Movement, initiated by the native, rulers, landlords and even the British government of India.

An attempt has made, in this Chapter, to focus on the contributions of Gauripur Raj family to the socio-cultural development of Assam in general and Goalpara district in particular.

4.1. Brief history of Gauripur Raj Estate

Gauripur Raj Estate originated from the large Nankar lands received from the Mughal Emperor Jahangir by one Kabindra Patra, who

was appointed to the post of Qanungo of the Thana Rangamati. As stated earlier, after annexation of Koch Hajo kingdom of Parikshit Narayan, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir appointed its official for the revenue administration of the occupied land. Qanungos and Koraries were employed for the purpose in Thana of Rangamati; the administrative headquarter of the occupied territory. Qanungo, thus employed was invested special powers in the matter of civil, criminal and revenue affairs of the occupied territory. Kabindra Patra was granted huge Nankarland, in lieu of his service as Qanungo. The post of Kanongo held by Kabindra Patra became hereditary which continued for a period more than three centuries. After him his son Kabisekhar became Qanungo of Rangamati who received Sanad in 1622 and 1635 and was granted Nankarland of 9020 bighas and also permitted to hold the Nankar, granted to his father amounting 4200 bighas.

This big endowment of hundred bighas of land enjoyed by Kabisekhar by virtue of his office of Qanungo, eventually, raised his position to a leading zamindar of the region. Since the post of the Qanungo continuously held by the descendants of Kabindra Patra, every succeeding generation added still more quantity of Nankar lands to the existing quantity. Thus, there was an enormous accumulation of property in land to the credit of the Qanungo of Rangamati.¹

Thus, the Qanungos of Rangamati became zamindar of Rangamati in the course of time. Qanungo, being the sources of extensive power in regard of land settlement and revenue administration, exercised power to add further properties and facilities for their family members. The zamindari, thus founded by Kabisekhar, further expanded by his successors and one of his descendants, Bulchandra Barua, acquired five Parganas of Ghurla, Aurangabad, Mukrampur, Jamira and Gola

Alomganj. In due course of time, the zamindar of Rangamati added more Parganas by means of their power and capacity. The Zamindar of Rangamati was known as Barua and the latter descendants of Kabisekhar assumed the title "Raja". Since the capital was shifted from Rangamati to Gauripur in 1860, the estate came to be known as Gauripur Raj Estate.

Gauripur Raj Estate lay between 25° 58' and 26 19 North and 89⁵⁰' and 90⁰⁶' East in the western portion of Goalpara district (undivided), consisting of seven entire parganas, viz. Gurla, Jamira, Makrampur, Gola Alomganj, Naobad Futura, Kalumalupara and Aurangabad, with the part of Taria and certain Lakheraj grants, i.e. Srijangram and Adardiya in Khuntaghat pargana under Bijni Estate. The total area of Estate was 355 square miles.² In 1789 the Estate was placed under Decennial settlement of the East India Company which was declared perpetuated in 1793. Initially, the zamindar of Rangamati paid revenue to the British in the form of 21 elephants as it had been so to the Mughal. But the revenue in kind was commuted to cash in 1774 at C. Rs. 3,101 which was subsequently raised to Rs, 4221.

4.2. Genealogy of the Raj Family

According to the local sources, one Narahari Rai is said to be the ancestor of Gauripur Raj Family. He was a resident of Bethera in Tirhut Mozaffarpur who had been a minister of the court of Mithila. Eventually, he left his village and joined at service of Koch during the rule of Viswa Singha in early 16th century. He assumed the title Barua instead of Rai for which his descendants known as Barua. Maharaj Nara Narayan appointed his grand son, Kabindra patra as the Chief Minister of Koch Bihar kingdom. Earlier, Viswa Singha put Kabindra Patra in charge of guidance of Naraa Narayan and Chilarai while they were at Kashi for study. As a Minister, Kabindra Patra accompanied Chilarai in his campaign against

the kings of the North Eastern region. Unfortunately, Laksmi Narayan, son and successor of Nara Narayan, dismissed him from office. However, Kabindra Patra was sheltered and appointed as Chief Minister of Eastern Koch Kingdom by Raghu Narayan. As already mentioned, Raghu Narayan's son Parikshit Narayan, captured by the Mughal, who was sent to the Mughal Darbar at Delhi. It is said Kabindra Patra accompanied Parikshit Narayan when he was sent to Delhi, but Parikshit as his agent left him at Delhi while he returned home. So, after death of Parikshit Narayan and annexation of Koch Hajo kingdom, Kabindra Patra was appointed as Kanongo of Rangamati province of Mughal Empire and sent to Rangamati with Ibrahim Korari. Ibrahim Korari with a view to introduce Mughal revenue system in this occupied territory divided it into four Sarkars, viz, Kamrup, Dhekiri, Dhakhinkul and Bangalbhun and 12 Parganas. Rangamati made the Headquarter of Qanungo. Thus, Kabindra Patra established his influence overall territory of Koch Hajo from Rangamati to Guwahati. He received large amount of Nankar lands from the Mughal Emperor for his service as Qanungo, which considered as the foundation of the Gauripur Estate.

His son Kabisekhar succeeded to the post of Qanungo after him, who received two Sanads, issued by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir in 1622 and 1635. He was granted 9020 bighas of Nankar land. His son Kabiratna succeeded Kabisekhar, a Sanad is found issued in 1654 by the Mughal Emperor confirming him Qanungoship. His performance as Qanungo was praiseworthy, in recognition of which Sanads were issued to him by Emperor Shahjahan and Aurengzeb. But he was replaced from his post for the charge of his association with Pran Narayan, the rebel Koch King of Koch Bihar against the Mughals. In his place Jainand was appointed Qanungo, the son of his uncle, Kabiballabh. However, Devraj,

son of deposed Kabiratna secured the favour of the Mughal Emperor, who restored him to the post of Qanungo by issuing Sanad in 1665 A.D.³ He was succeeded by Debraj after him Gokul Chandra became Qanungo and he was succeeded by his nephew, Debiprasad, the son of his elder brother Devraj. During the tenure of office of Debiprasad the power and prestige of his family had raised to a great extent. He was addressed to several Sanads by Emperor Aurangzeb, which bore the testimony of his power and status. He was empowered to collect *Nankar and Dastur* of the Pargana Baharband, Duki and Bari. Gauriprasad was childless, so, he was succeeded by Surya Chandra, the eldest son of Gokul Chandra. Trilok Chandra, son of his brother Gopal Chandra, succeeded Surya Chandra. But Trilok Chandra failed to pay the *Peskosh* to the Mughal for which he was removed from the post of Kanungo and Bal Chandra was appointed in his place in 1732, who issued a *muchalka* to the effect that he would perform all the duties of the Kanungo.⁴ After Bal Chandra, Bul Chandra Barua succeeded to the Gaddi of Kanungo and the time of accession was 1778 as mentioned by B.C.Allen.⁵ But there is authentic document found in Gauripur Rajbari that Bull Chandra Barua exercised his power as Kanungo in 1766 in convincing the Mughal authority to dispossess Ranaram Choudhury, zamindar of Mechpara pargana and Umanath, the zamindar of Kalumalupara and appoint his cousin Duga Prasad as zamindars of those estates.⁶ Be that as it may, he held the post of Qanungo of Rangamati not late of 1766 and was, no doubt, a powerful zamindar of this region. He was succeeded by his brother Bira Chandra during whose rule East India Company brought Rangamati Raj Estate under Decennia Settlement, and ultimately converted it to the Permanent Settlement like zamindari of Bengal. During his tenure of office, Bijni Raja Balit Narayan was subjected of maltreatment at the hand of the

British official and it was Bira Chandra Barua who initiated a compromise between the belligerents. As a mark of gratitude, Bijni Raja granted certain rent free lakhraj to Bira Chandra Barua in Bijni Estate.⁷ On the death of Bira Chandra Barua, his wife Joy Durga Baruanee, adopted Dhir Chandra Barua, son of Gunananda, the 7th succession of Kabiballabh, brother of Kabisekhar.⁸ Dhir Chandra Barua purchased the pargana of Kalumalupara, Nabad Faturi and Taria.⁹ He was allowed to use Silver Stick with his equipage as a mark of his rank and family.¹⁰ He was succeeded by his son Pratap Chandra Barua who shifted the Headquarter of zamindary from Rangamati to Gauripur in 1860 (according to some others the date of shifting of capital was in 1856). Pratap Chandra died in 1880 leaving no child, for which his wife Rani Bhabani Priya adopted a son, named Prabhat Chandra Barua, and she ran the administration in the name of her minor adopted son, until 1896. Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua assumed the responsibility of the estate in 1896, which was the last zamindar of Gauripur Raj Estate. He died in 1940 and the Estate was placed under Trustee, according to his Will that executed before his death. Prabhat Chandra Barua had two wives, Sarajabala and Saralabala. He had five children from the line of Rani Sarajabala, namely: Pramathesh Barua, the great artist of Indian film world, Prakritesh Chandra Barua, the greatest elephant hunter, Raj Kumari Niharbala, Raj Kumari Nilima Sundari and Raj Kumar Pranabesh Chandra Barua. From the line of younger Rani, he had three sons, viz, Amal Chandra Barua, Ajoy Chandra Barua and Ajit Chandra Barua. Greatest singer of Goalpariya folk song, Pratima Pandey Barua was the daughter of Raj Kumar Pratikesh Chandra Barua (Lalji).¹¹ Raj Kumar Prakritesh Chandra Barua was the Executive of the Trust property of the Gauripur Raj Estate, during his tenure zamindary system was abolished by the Government in 1956.

From Kabindrapatra, the founder of Gauripur zamindary to Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, the last zamindar of this dynasty had administered the Estate for about four hundred years. During this long period of zamindary rule, though the feudal lords ran after the royal glamour and luxurious style of living but some of them and their family members did magnificent works for the welfare of their subjects and made splendid contributions to the development of the society and culture of this region.

4.3. Public Works of Gauripur Raj Family

The Baruas of Rangamati, popularly known as the zamindars of Gauripur, although, were craving of acquisition of land, even by any means, which lived a life of luxury and the pomp and grandeur, in the midst, some of them and members of their family paid their attention to benevolent works of public interest.¹²

Dhirchandra Barua is said to have founded a Sadabrata, a shelter house for his subjects at Rangamati. His wife Tarini Priya, who was a pious lady, established a Sanskrit Chatuspathy in Rangamati in 1834 to encourage Sanskrit education among her prajas. After Dhir Chandra Barua, his son Pratap Chandra Barua, who is said to be courageous zamindar, endeavoured some valuable services for the welfare of his subjects. According to local sources, he founded first Minor school (lower primary) at Gauripur. It was the first English school established in this area but exact date of the foundation of the school is obscure, because the school was later on promoted to High School in 1899 by his son Prabhat Chandra Barua and named it as "Pratap Chandra Institution". It is presumed that the school founded by Pratap Chandra Barua was, perhaps, in between the year 1860-1867 because in 1867 a School was established in Goalpara by Prithiram Choudhury and Pratap Chandra who claimed to

be the greatest zamindar of the this region could not be behind in establishing school in this region. Apart from this, Raibahadur Pratap Chandra Barua established a charitable Hospital at Gauripur to provide medical treatment to his subjects. His son Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua also founded such Hospital at Agomani to give free medical services to his tenants. Both these Hospitals brought tremendous change to the health care of the poor and distressed people under Gauripur Estate. The Salaries of the doctors and other staff were borne by the Royal treasury of Gauripur.^{12a} Prabhat Chandra Barua opened an emergency branch in Dhubri Hospital and donated land to Dhubri T.B. Hospital.¹³

To look after the public works, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua created "Public Works Department" and various schemes of developmental works carried out by this Department. The Department was staffed with an Engineer, an Overseer, Tindel Assistants, Peons, Mistry and coolies. The Department prepared plan and estimate of the infrastructural development within the jurisdiction of Gauripur Raj Estate. Construction of Roads, erection of deep well and tanks, temples, school buildings, Raj Hawli etc. are some of the benevolent works those were endeavoured by the zamindars of Gauripur Raj Estate. According to the personal Diary of Prakritesh Chandra Barua, alias Lalji, son of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, Sri Dharendra Chandra Barua was last engineer under Garipur zamindary rule.^{13a} Some of the public works executed under Gauripur Raj Estate as below:

(a) Construction of Road and Embankment: It is due to paucity of evidences nothing can be said firmly of the roads constructed by the zamindars of Gauripur Raj Estate. Before foundation of Gauripur zamindary, as mentioned earlier, that the territory of undivided Goalpara district had been within the jurisdiction of Koch kingdom and the road

communications had been made under Koch rule as per their military and commercial requirement. Under zamindari rule, according to some sources, some roads and embankment constructed for the public utility. Rai Bahadur Pratap Chandra Barua shifted his capital from Rangamati to a new place called Gauripur. Because of this change, with a view to setting up direct communication between capital and kutcharis for revenue collection, a new line of communication established between Gauripur and the Kutcheries under Gauripur Estate. The road between Gauripur and the Dihi kutcheries, like, Rangamati, Srijangaon, Binnachara, Pratap Ganj, Simlabari, Agomani, Dimakuri, Patamari, etc presumed to have been made under Rai Bahadur Pratap Chandra Barua. Singimari, Salmara, Fakirganj were communicated by boat across the Brahmaputra river. For this some specific ferry, ghates were set up under Gauripur zamindars. The zamindars had several small and big boats for maintaining communication with the kutcheries lying in the south bank of Brahmaputra. Rai Bahadur Pratap Chandra Barua had rendered valuable service to the British during Anglo- Bhutan war. He repaired the Road leading to Bhutan and helped the British forces by supplying food staff to the armies and the animals for which he was felicitated and conferred with the title of "Rai Bahadur" by Governor General.¹⁴

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was a benevolent zamindar who devoted himself more on the public welfare works. He is said to be the architect of modern Gauripur town. However, Gauripur was the creation of Pratap Chandra Barua but the modern infrastructure and beautification were the creation of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua. He developed it as a model town in Western Assam, in the model of Koch Bihar palace. The present structure of Raj Hawli, Hawakhana, Shismahal, Tajmahal and Attarokotta were built by Prabhat Chandra Barua which are, indeed,

beautiful specimen of high architectural development of feudal age. The Roads, gardens and tanks were erected with a view to add its beauty and easy communication. It is said that he built Rajhawli and Hawakhana of Matiabag with Chinese engineer and architect.¹⁵

Beside, he constructed an embankment on the bank of Lawkhowa River, stretching from Gauripur to Rupsi, to protect Gauripur from its flood. He is also said to have constructed road from Gauripur to Dhepdhepi and Gauripur to Kalahat. According to local sources, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua constructed the Road from Gauripur to Rupsi jointly with the zamindar of Rupsi. He also erected tanks and deep wells for drinking water. The remains of such tanks are still visible in Dhubri town, Gauripur town and adjacent places of Gauripur. The famous Mahamaya tank of Gauripur, and Jhapsebari tanks are some of the example of his public works.¹⁶

According to the statement of some senior citizens of Gauripur, like, Haji Deraj Uddin, aged 92 years old, Gias Uddin Pradhani, aged above 90, Nani Dihadar, above 90 years old, and some others, zamindars of Gauripur Raj Estate had the tradition of exemption of revenue to the tenants in the event of damage of crops due to natural calamities. They even extended aid to the prajas from Royal exchequer whenever emergency occurred. It was in 1897 due to severe earthquake, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua extended help to some of the victims. They built school buildings, Satras, temples, and Sadabrata for the sake of public benevolence.¹⁷

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua founded a public Library at Dhubri, which was named as Cotton Public Library, after the name of H.I.S. Cotton, then Chief Commissioner of Assam. He was a patron of education and learning and devoted himself for the spread of educations

among his subjects. He established many schools of all categories, such as lower primary, middle and high schools. He not only promoted Gauripur Minor School, founded by his father to High school, but established numerous L.P. and M.E. school in different parts of his Estate. He also introduced scholarship system to poor and meritorious students. Detailed discussion of which is made under heading "contribution of Gauripur Raj Family to Education & learning". Rani Bhabani Priya, mother of Prabhat Chandra Barua was a kindhearted lady who ruled the zamindari during the minority of Raja Pabhat Chandra Barua, did a lot of public welfare activities. According to some senior citizen of the locality, that she exempted revenues, on many occasions, to the distressed tenants and in case of damage of crops due to natural calamities. Among her public works it is worth mentioning that she opened a Satra at BeNaraas "Ganga Mahal", and fed twenty-five Brahmans daily, the cost involved was borne out of the exchequer of the Estate.¹⁸

(b) Foundation of township in Dhubri: The foundation of Dhubri Township as the Headquarter of Goalpara district by Rai Bahadur Pratap Chandra Barua was a very significant work. It was in 1879 he donated the territory of present Dhubri town under Ghurla pargana to the British Government for shifting of Headquarter of Goalpara district from Goalpara town. He even allotted land for the residences of each zamindar of Goalpara for their convenience of official business with the District Collector. He extended all round help to the Government in founding a High School in Dhubri in that year. The High School came to be known as Dhubri Government Boys High School. As a result, Dhubri emerged as an important town of Western Assam and gradually flourished to be the centre of commerce, learning and the culture of this region. In the following years, shipping port, railways station was founded and road

communications were developed. The foundation of Match factory in Dhubri, infact, developed it one of the important towns in Assam.

4.4. Contribution to literature

Not only a host of outstanding administrators and Qanungoes were born in Barua dynasty of Gauripur but numbers of celebrated learned and literary persons were also produced in Gauripur Raj Family as well. Kabindra Patra, the founder of Gauripur zamindary was not only a great statesman and warrior but also a great scholar who is said to have translated Mahabharata in indigenous language. His elder son Raghunath was called Kabisekhar for his wisdom and highly scholarship. Among the three sons of Kabisekhar, the eldest son Srinath was bestowed with the title "Kabiratna" for his literally works. Some outstanding personalities of the descendents of Kabiratna, whose contribution towards literature, music, art, drama, cinema and expansion of education will be remembered through out the ages.

To quote Santo Barman in this regard, "Of the zamindars of Gauripur Rajfamily, Raja Kabi Sekhar, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua and his son, Pramothesh Barua were the patrons of Arts and literature. Kabi Sekhar is said to have been the translator of the Mahabharata. A manuscript, considered by some scholars to be old copy of his translation of the Mahabharata, preserved in the library of late Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua Bahadur. Of course, there is controversy about the authenticity of his works. The transcript was edited and published by Gaurinath Shastri as Kabindra *be-rachita Astadas Parva* of Mahabharata. It is worthy of mentioning here that N.N. Basu, who laboured to prepare the genealogy of the family at the initiative of the zamindar, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua Bahadur, did not mention Kabindra Patra to be the author of the Said work. Thus, it seems to be matter of conjecture".¹⁹

Rai Bahadur Pratap Chandra Barua is said to be the patron of the publication of Yugbisists Ramayana.²⁰ Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua bore the full responsibility to publish "Social History of Kamrup" in three volumes, written by N.N.Basu. As a mark of gratitude, Basu dedicated all the volumes of the book to Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua. Though the said book was influenced by the Kayastha sentiment, it greatly helps in the study of the contemporary social condition of Western Assam as well as the history of Gauripur Rajfamily. Besides, Basu has given a genealogy of Gauripur Rajfamily in this book.

Another important work in the field of literature was done by Rajabahadur was the publication of "Kayastha Samajer Etibrita". Under patronage of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, "Kayastha Samajar Etibrita" was reconstructed and published by H. N. Dutta Barua, a book that deals with the history of Kayastha of Assam. Dutta Barua published the book with the financial assistance extended by Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua. A printing press was set up in Nalbari funded by Raja where twenty people worked and earned their livelihood. Thus, in other words Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua helped in employment of few people.²¹

Prabhat Chandra Barua patronised the publication of two Weekly, the "Advocate of Assam", edited by Mathuranath Barua in Guwahati, and the "Pranthabashi" edited by Gaurinath Shastri.²² Prabhat Chandra Barua inspired Amrit Bhusan Adhikary for interpretation and explanation of *Sonam Ghosa* and all expenditure of its publication were borne by him. He extended financial assistance to Ramanath Bidyalankar, the well-known Sanskrit Pandit of Assam for the publication of Sanskrit grammar which he wrote. With a view to spread Sanskrit education among the Kayastha, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua arranged to provide them with all

round assistance including free food and lodging. He was patron of Assam State Museum and Kamrupa Anusandan Samiti too.²³

Not only Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua but also most of the zamindars of Western Assam were more inclined to Bengali language and culture than to Assamese because of their close association with the zamindars of Bengal. Most of them established matrimonial relation with the zamindar families of Bengal, used to reside in Calcutta, and adapted with the Bengali culture and society. Pro Bengali attitude of Prabhat Chandra Barua was attributed with the honour, by electing him president of the All India Bengali Sahitya Parisad conference held at Dhubri in 1929.

Besides, He was a reputed scholar, music lover, political leader, patron of learning and was a great hunter. He was a famous tabalist (expert in Tabla). He patronized historical research, journalism and animal study and some of his descendants excelled to the field of arts and culture of Assam.²⁴

4.5. Development of Music and Culture

Gauripur is said to have been centre of Music Drama and culture of Western Assam. The ruling dynasty of Gauripur Estate has made splendid contributions to the development of Music, Drama, fine Arts and indigenous culture of this region. To the development of Music, Drama, Art and indigenous Culture, the contributions of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, his sons, daughters and grand daughters are worthy of high appreciation. Raja Prabhat Chandra himself was the patron of Music, Drama, Fine Arts, Sports and indigenous Culture of Western Assam. His son Pramathesh Baruah is said to be the pioneer of Hindi cinema, and Prakritesh Barua was a great hunter, his daughter Neharbala Baruah and

Nilima Baruah, were two stars of the cultural world of Assam. Niharbala was a great artist and social worker who contributed remarkably to the growth and expansion of Deshi songs and Dances and Nilima Sundari Barua is called Loka Silpi who made huge contribution to the development of indigenous handicrafts. His grand daughter Pratima Pandey Baruah, who is better known as Hastir Kainya, has made huge contribution to the cultural development of Assam, especially in the growth and development of Goalpariya Folk Songs. Another grand daughter, Parvati Barua was famous in elephant catching and domesticating them. She was the first lady elephant hunter in Asia.

(I) Contribution of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua himself possessed multifarious qualities. He was a patron of learning, promoter of music, drama, arts, sports and local culture and contributed a lot to the growth of Goalpariya *Loka Geet*. As mentioned already, he himself was a reputed tabalist and wrote a book on *tabla* called "Tarangani". He loved music from his core of heart for which he often arranged "Musical Night" in his Raj Hawli, Attarokotta where reputed singers from different parts of India were invited. The artists and ustads attended his musical programmes from Kashi, Kanpur and Delhi. He himself took part in such programme with tabala. Artists like Suresh Chandra Barua, Lalit Mahan Ganguli and others were his associates. He was patron of *Deshi songs* and encouraged the local *geedals*, i.e. singers of Loka Geet, to work for its development.²⁵

Under his patronage, the Deshi loka geet was popularized. Geedal Karitulla and Bayan Sk. were felicitated by the Raja and all assistances were extended to them in their efforts to develop Deshi culture. He even granted a plot of land to *geedal Karitulla* for his shelter. His incentive and encouragement boosted his grand daughter, Pratima Pandey Barua who

subsequently became a legend of Goalparia Loka Sangeet. During religious festivals, Raja Bahadur arranged some entertaining programmes for public recreation. Jatra parties imported from Bengal and staged their plays. Local artists also provided opportunities to display their talents for public recreation.²⁶

Prabhat Chandra had deep interest in drama and he provided his son Promathesh Chandra Barua with favourable environment to become pioneer of the Indian cinema. He never forbade his son, Pramathesh Barua from participation in cinema, which was not booked as a good job in the contemporary period rather he encouraged his son to work in the film in such a period of time when the involvement in the cinema was considered as an anti social act. Besides, he encouraged the dramatists and artists of jatraparties and extended all possible help to them. Promathesh Barua started a drama "Fulshor" at Gauripur and his father Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was the music director of the play. He encouraged and assisted **Brother Union** Dramatic Club by providing them with a permanent Stage and a drama hall. He even donated dresses and musical instruments to this club.²⁷

(II) Contribution of Pramathesh Barua

Pramathesh Chandra Barua, a legend of Indian Film who is said to be the pioneer of Indian cinema, was, indeed, a zamindar of famous Gauripur Raj Estate. He was the eldest son of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, the famous zamindar of Gauripur Raj Estate in Western Assam. Pramathesh Barua was a man with multifarious human qualities. He was as famous as a singer, producer, director, actor, photographer and writer. He was born in 1903 in the Barua family of Gauripur, a highly cultured family of this region. From his childhood, Pramathesh Barua involved in drawing, singing, Photographing, hunting and especially attracted to

drama and theatre. He was deeply interested in music, drama and sports from his childhood. As a hunter, he killed 11 tigers in his career and numerous ferocious animals. He was also a good tennis player and artist of Piano. Initially his father entrusted him with the responsibility of zamindari of the Estate but he felt it a burden, as he preferred to enjoy a free life. His artistic mind always swung in the world of drama, film and music.²⁸

Pramathesh Barua was elected twice as representative to Assam Legislative Council and offered ministry and the chair of the president of the Swaraj Party. But he didn't accept these offers because of his attraction to cultural world. He was also a member of Senate of Calcutta University. But nothing could attract him more than the film world. Indeed, Pramathesh Barua was a born artist who very cheerfully renounced the Royal comfort, luxury and pride for the sake of art and culture, especially for the attraction of the film world. His zeal to cultural world made him an outstanding personality and became a legendary artist of Indian cultural world.²⁹

Pramathesh Barua started his film career as the director under British Dominion Film Company. To acquire knowledge in film, he went to Paris to study film technology and worked there as Assistant cinematographer. When he returned home, he brought with him some important instruments of the film from Paris. He founded his own Unit of Film production known as Barua Film Unit and began production of film with his own direction and production. Under his own company he produced film like "Apparadhi", and "Ekada". Nevertheless, his Film Unit did not last long and he joined to the New Theatre Limited. Here a series of heart touching film, produced under his direction, like, Ruplekha, Devdas, and Grihadah. Film Devdas was his famous creation,

which made him superstar of Hindi cinema. He played the tragic role of Devdas and this film not only became popular but shook the whole film industry. Pramathesh Barua as an Actor and Director reached to the zenith in the film world and he popularly came to be known as Devdas Barua.³⁰

Pramathesh Chandra Barua was a first Assamese who occupied so high position in Hindi Cinema. None can deny the valuable contribution of Pramathesh Barua to the evolution of Indian cinema. He entered into film world in such a time when the then conservative society considered the participation to cinema as an act of jeopardizing self-dignity and ethical foundation. Being a member of a Royal family, with many opportunities of living a comfortable life, even with an opportunity of becoming a minister of Assam, Pramathesh Barua opted for cultural life and devoted himself in the development of the cinematography. He was a born artist and worked whole life for the interest of the development of music, drama and cinema. His dedication and love to the film made him one of the famous film artists of the contemporary time. His role as Actor left deep impression in the mind of the audience, especially his role in the film of "Devdas", "Shapmukti", "Mayer Pran" that can never be forgotten. Pramathesh Barua was such an artist who by application of high artistic skill brought a tremendous success to the film, Jugantar.³¹ Devdas was the greatest creation of Pramathesh Baruah and he himself became tangible in Devdas. Infact, Devdas opened a new chapter in the history of cinema. Appreciating Pramathesh Baruah for his lively acting in Devdas, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, the writer of Devdas, showered praise on him saying that Pamathesh injected life into his lifeless puppet.³² Famous Director Retwik Ghatak commented on the performance

of Pramathesh Chandra Barua as an artist that Pramathesh Baruah was the greatest Director of all times. None can be compared with him.³³

Pramatesh Baruah is remembered for his creative role in cinematography. He was the pioneer of Indian Cinema. He had conception and experience of various technical and human aspects of Cinematography. He was a Dramatist, Writer, Editor, Recorder, Photographer, Director and Producer all in one. His remarkable contribution to the film world was that he introduced modern systems in Indian Cinema and brought a revolutionary change to it for which he is often called the Pioneer of Indian Cinema. He first introduced artificial light in shooting of cinema. Before that all the shooting were done in natural light. Secondly, he was inventor of the flash back system in cinema. Thirdly, he introduced outdoor shooting in film. In “Mukti” he first applied outdoor shooting and most of the shooting were made in Gauripur Palace and its surrounding areas. Kabiguru Rabindranath Thakur named the film as Mukti.³⁴

Concerning film making, Pramatesh Barua observed strict discipline and did everything systematically. He emphasized more on songs in film for which he is said to be the pioneer of the new trend of film where song played important ingredient of the film. The Rabindra Sangeet, “Diner seshe ghumer deshe...”, became immortal in “Mukti”. Singer like Sayygal, Pankaj Mullick, Kanonn Devi, and Rabin Majumdar achieved their reputation as singer through the film of Pramathesh Barua.³⁵

It is to be mentioned here that the people of Assam have some grievances that being an Assamese by birth and sprit, Pramathesh Barua has not made a single film in Assamese as he did in Hindi, Bengali and

other languages. However, he started making film in Assamese but before its completion, he died in 1951 at the young age of 48 years.

Pramarthesh Chandra Barua is not only the pride of Assam but also his creativeness, sacrifice, love, affection and devotion to the Indian film conquered the heart of the film lovers of the nation and of the abroad. Balraj Sahani, the famous artist of Hindi Cinema, in his inaugural speech of the “Gana Natya Sanga Sanmilan” in Guwahati in 1955, he proudly announced, “I am feeling proud being here in Assam, the birth place of the great artist, Pramathesh Chandra Barua”. This was no doubt, a splendid recognition of the greatness of Pramathesh Barua and the people of Assam. He is remembered for his own style in Hindi cinema that is called Barua style. He was such an Actor and Director who never accepted artificial, untenable and unhealthy story. His film was always based on reality. He was unique and really a legend of Indian Cinema.¹⁸

(III) Contribution of Princess Niharbala

Among the princesses of Gauripur Raj family Nihar Bala Baruah possessed various qualities and she contributed a lot to the cultural development of western Assam. She was the eldest daughter of Raja Prabhat Chandra Baruah and Rani Sarajbala Devi. In her early life, she was more interested in hunting and killed six tigers. Niharbala used to go for hunting along with his father in dense forest and stayed in hunting camp. It is to be mentioned that learning of gun operation for the children of Gauripur Raj family was more preferable to education. Almost all the children of Gauripur Raj family, irrespective sex, were acquainted with hunting and operation of gun, riding horse and elephant. Although Niharbala was not exception but she was familiar for her cultural activities and she, indeed, made huge contribution to the growth of Deshi songs and culture in this region.

Niharbala had deep interest in the prevailing cultural heritage of the backward and poor villagers of Gauripur Estate and its surrounding region. She had been impressed with the existing music, songs, customs, and nuptial traditions of the poor and backward people of this region. In her early life she was attracted to Deshi songs and dances. She, being impressed with the traditional Deshi songs and dances of maidservants of Rajbari began to practicing them in Andarmahal. She learned folk songs and folk dances from the maid servants of Rajbari which was considered as the songs of the “*Chota Loka*”, i.e lower class people. Other members of the family did not accept her involvement in Deshi songs and dances. Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua himself was worried of the involvement of his daughter, Niharbala in Deshi songs and dances. Strong protest was raised by Madhurilata Barua, wife of Pramothesh Barua, the sister in-law of Niharbala, who did not hesitate to remark that Deshi songs were for the down trodden people, “*Chota Loka*” not for the decent society.

To restrain Niharbala from the involvement in Deshi songs and her close association with lower class people, Niharbala was married to Mukunda Narayan Barua of Agomani in 1917 at the age of 12 years. Of course, the conservative society did not permit the involvement of the girls in music and dances and dancing girls were hardly married.¹⁹ But Niharbala was a born artist who never dishearten but her zeal towards the local culture inspired her to step forward to know the traditional culture of the illiterate people of the region. After her marriage the attitude of her father, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was changed, who, latter on inspired her to study the Deshi culture. To gather extensive knowledge she used to visit the remote villages in disguise and some times under veil to escape from the sight of the conservative society. She met the different classes of people and studied their traditions and culture.

Her simplicity and kindness impressed the poor illiterate women of the backward villages, with whom she spent most of the times and had food together. She collected songs of the boatman, Kaibartas, Mahut, Maisal, wedding songs and dances of Hindus, Muslims and tribal people. Not only that she sincerely learned them and started rehearsal at Royal Palace. She learned female songs from Sarat Sundari and Chitramala, Collected Muslim marriage songs from Amena and dances from maidservants of Rajbari. She along with her young sisters, maidservants and her niece Pratima alias Busu, used to practice in the "Andarmahal". Raja Bahadur appointed *Geedal* Karitulla and Bayan Sk. as the tutors of Deshi songs for her daughter. Her curiosity in Deshi songs and culture made her a prominent Researcher of local culture and a famous artist. She organized a Cultural group under her command and held musical programme of Deshi songs and dances in different occasions. Niharbala encouraged Pratima Barua to sing *Deshi songs* i.e Goalpariya songs, because of her melodious sweet voice. Her encouragement, in reality, stood as a booster to Pratima Barua Pandey who achieved a high position in the cultural world of Assam. She staged several programmes of Goalpariya loka geet in different parts of the Nation. No doubt, Niharbala played a vital role in the accession of Pratima Barua Pandey to the position for which she is called the Empress of Goalpariya Loka Sangeet. She introduced Pratima Barua Pandey for the first time in a musical function held at Calcutta in 1956, where she presented Deshi songs before a huge audiences winning over tremendous support and encouragement of the audience. This was the beginning of the journey of Pratima as a singer of Deshi songs, later known as Goalpariya Loka Geet.²⁰

A sudden change came in the course of the life of Niharbala with the immatured death of her mother that threw her towards sea of

mourning and went to Calcutta where she educated few years and got opportunities to meet some fascinated personalities of Calcutta. She came in close contact with the great litterateur of Calcutta, Sukumar Sen and under his influence she started publishing in “Desh Patrika” a series of songs such as *Namlukatir geet*, *Hudum Deopuja*, wedding songs, Goalpariya folk songs, tale of *Hastirkanya*. *Mahuter gan*. *Madan Kamarer geet*, *Dinmoni Chaudhuranir geeti*, etc., under the banner of the, “Pranti Bashir Jhuli.” Besides, she also regularly published her Pranti Bashir Jhuli, in the papers like “Pashim Bangar Prasai” and “Viswabharati” from 1931-1934.²¹

She came in close contact with some high profiled personalities like Hemango Viswas, Khalid Choudhury of Bengal and their inspiration led her to publish these *Deshi songs*, i.e Goalpariya songs and thus tried to spread Goalpariya songs in the national arena. Her mission achieved the success in putting Goalpariya folk songs to the position not below the other folk songs of the nation. It is to be mentioned that the Goalpariya or Deshi culture was the culture of the illiterate mass people of this region. The high gentry regarded *Deshi Geet* and Culture as the songs and culture of “Chota loka”, i.e., lower class of people. It is the credit of Pratima Barua Pandey and her ante Niharbala Barua, whose untiring efforts enriched the Goalariya Sangeet and Deshi culture to such an extent that it is recognized as the Sangeet and Culture of not only the villagers but also the culture of the decent society of Assam as well as of the nation. Not only that, Goalpariya culture was acknowledged as one of the rich cultures of the nation. Pratima Pandey Barua was awarded the prestigious award, “Padma Sri” by His Excellency, the president of India for her valuable contribution to Goalpariya folk culture.²² With a view to develop local culture and tradition she founded “Folk Music and Folklore

Research Institution” and visited many European countries where she held numerous musical functions on Goalpariya folk songs successfully.²³

The important contribution towards the cultural arena of Assam made by Niharbala was that she placed the Goalpariya songs or Deshi songs, hitherto identified as the songs of “*Chota Loka*” or lower class of people, to the rank of other folk songs of the nation. She, with a view to popularize Deshi songs and dances arranged musical programmes in various places in India and even in abroad.

In addition to this, Niharbala is said to be the forerunner of the higher education for the female students. She was, infact, the architect of the introduction of co-education in Pratap Chandra Institution. She advocated in strong voice for the female education and due to her efforts in 1941 girls students enrolled in P.C Institution. This was the beginning of the higher education for the girls in this conservative society.

She is credited for her zeal for founding a museum in Gauripur. She collected different eggs, feathers of the birds, colourful stones and tribal dresses and ornaments along with her sister Nilima Barua and preserved in the Royal palace.

(IV) Contribution of Pratima Barua Pandey

Pratima Barua Pandey is the legend of Goalpariya folk songs and she is better known as the Empress of Goalpariya loka geet. She is remembered for her contribution to the development of Goalpariya loka geet and Goalpayia culture, which had been known hitherto as *Deshi songs* and *Deshi Culture*. It is due to her devotion, efforts and hard labour that Goalparia culture has occupied a high position in the national and international arena. It is to be mentioned that Goalpariya folk songs so far known as Deshi songs had been considered as the songs of the lower

class people, i.e. the songs of the “*Chota loka*” and was considered unfit for the decent society. The work started by her ante, Niharbala in popularizing Goalpariya Folk culture was accomplished by Pratima. It was her credit that she has familiarised the people of India with Goalpariya songs and Goalpariya culture and secured a high position for it in the national forum.

She was daughter of Prakritesh Barua, the last zamindar of Gauripur Raj Estate, and grand daughter of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua. She is popularly called the Empress of Goalpariya folk songs, the Hastir kanya and Architect of Goalpariya culture. She was born in a family, which was culturally rich and brought up in an environment where music was the indispensable part of life. Pratima Barua Pandey was born artist who for the sake of Goalpariya loka Geet renounced the comfort and luxury of the Royal family. He dedicated her life for the development and the expansion of Goalpariya Sangeet and culture. It is due to her dedication and hard labour Goalpariya loka Geet has been placed in the national and international forum from a position of nonentity. Pratima Barua started her career as the singer of Rabindra Sangeet. Later on she inclined towards Deshi Sangeet or Goalparia Sangeet. Her father, Prakritesh Barua (Lalji) made a huge contribution to her outstanding career as an artist of Goalparia folk songs. He collected Deshi songs from different places and placed before her for practice.²⁴

She was called the Hastir Kanya, because her songs of Goalpariya folklore are related mostly with *Hasti*, *Mahut*, *Fandi* and the emotion of the family of the Mahut. Her famous songs “Hastir Kanya Hstir Kanya Bamuner a Narai” impressed her followers to such an extent that she was identified as Hastir Kanya. Pratima in her young age accompanied her father in elephant hunting and spent several days with the hunting group

in the camp. She watched with full attention the training of the wild elephants by the *fandi* after its capturing. The songs used at the time of training of the wild elephants impressed her and she learned them sincerely. This was the beginning of her career as the singer of Goalpariya songs. Pratima learned the songs of Mahut, “Hastir Kanya Hastir Kanya Bamaner a Narai” from the *fandi* who usually sang songs at the time of imparting training to the hunted elephants for domestication. Further Pratima learnt the songs “*Bhalkariya Bajan re Dotara Kamala Sundari Nase*” from the maidservants, who sings the same at the time of their dance in festivals at Rajbari and learnt from them the songs of *Maisal, Naiya, Sota Elis* and others.²⁵ She got a composite platform of Sangeet at her Rajbari where often songs and dances were performed. As mentioned earlier, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua held “*Jalsa of music*” in Attarokotta palace, and Pratima happened to enjoy such Jalsa. Besides, Pratima very curiously heard the songs of their maidservants in Rajbari during festivals and Puja. She along with her ante Niharbala and Nilima sundari participated in such programme. Niharbala was highly influenced with the Deshi songs and dances, and she organized a team at Royal palace comprising her younger sister Nilima Sundary, niece Busi and some other girls including their maidservants. For her sweet melodious voice Pratima was entrusted with the job of singing for the dancing programme. Thus Pratima was acquainted with the singing of Goalpariya folk songs in Rajbari.

Indeed, Rajbari was her place of rehearsal of music. She was not the writer of Goalpariya songs but she collected these songs from different sources and practises at Rajbari. She began to sing Deshi geet on stage first in Calcutta and since then her journey was non-stopping and she dedicated her whole life in the service of Goalpariya Sangeet and its

development. She possesses a high quality of sweet tune that the listener never forgets. Her songs are related with the illiterate mass people of the backward villages of Goalpariya society, the love, affection and the tragedy of the *Mahut, the Maisal, tha Naiya*, the frustration in love, comedy and tragedy; besides, some ethical and religious songs were the objects of her immortal songs of Goalpariya loka Sangeet.

She sang in the film with Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the legendary musician and singer of Assam who offered a chance to Pratima to sing in his film "Era batar Sur" an Assamese film. In 1959, she sang for another film "Mahut Bandu Re." Both these films virtually won the heart of the audiences. She also sang "Palasar Rang", Bagular Banga Darshan", Hastir Kanya, Gajamukta, etc. She released some popular audio and video cassette of Goalpariya loka geet like Mahut Bandu re, Hastir Kanya.²⁶

Pratima was a popular radio artist. It is her credit, that the Goalpariya folk song, which once had been neglected, now has spread over to every nook and corner through radio. In 1962 in Guwahati Radio Station broadcasted "Hastir Kanya". Since then she regularly sang Goalparia Loka Geet in All India Radio. Durdarsan also telecast her musical programmes. In 1975 Calcutta Durdarsan telecasted her Loka sangeet and in 1987 Guwahati Duradarshan for the first time started telecasting her Goalpariya Loka geet.²⁷ The popularity of Goalpariya loka geet has tremendously been increased which can be persisted looking to the growing demands for Goalpariya Sangeet to All India Radio, Durdarsan, audio and video cassette.

Her efforts made Goalpariya songs one of the popular Loka geet in Assam. In every musical functions, now, Goalpariya Lokageet is common song for entertainment. Pratima Pandey Barua was awarded many

honours and awards for her outstanding contribution to the cultural world of Assam. In 1989 she received Sangeet Natak Academy award and in 1991 she was conferred with the “Padma Sree” award by the President of India for her contribution to the cultural development of the nation. In 2000, North Bengal University awarded D.Lit Degree to her. Besides, she has been felicitated by numerous organization and institutions like Assam Sahitya Sabha, Assam Natya Samity and Ranindra Bharati University. She was recipient of Abbas Uddin Memorial award, Assam Silpi Divas Award, Joymati Award, Bisnurabha Award, and Assam Natya Samity Awards.

The legendary singer, the proud of Assam left for heavenly world on 27 December 2002. The All Assam students Union, as a tribute, made hers statue and places in various places of Assam.

Her great achievement is that she made Goalpariya language, culture to be one of the rich languages and cultures of the nation in general, and Assam in particular. Since the time of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, Goalpariya (Deshi) Language had been treated as the Royal Language instead of Bengali. Pratima Barua always speaks Deshi language and her Deshi Songs led the people to belief that Deshi Language or Goalpariya is a language of descent society too.

4.6. Contributions to Religious field

Most of the members of Barua dynasty of Gauripur were conservative in their outlook and pious who were believer of Shakti cult. Kabi Shekhar is said to have founded Mahamaya Mandir in Rajbari and since then Mahamaya became Kuldevi of the Rajfamily. He founded the Bigrah of Mahamaya Devi as the Royal Deity of Rangamati. He founded Mahamaya Mandir in Rangamati since then Mahamaya was being offered

puja regularly. His successors also acknowledged Mahamaya as their *Kul Devi* and continued offering puja with traditional method.

Though the Zamindars of Gauripur were Shakta believer, they did not hesitated to assist the other cult of their Estate. Bulchandra Barua is said to have extended help in foundation of Ramrod Kati Satra of vaisnavism, in Satrasal, the place where Bhubenswari the niece of great Sankardeva was married to Chilarai, the brother of Maharaj Nara Narayan of Koch Bihar. He granted 1300 bigas of land for the maintenance of Ramrod Satra.²⁸

Rani Bhabani priya, wife of Raibahadur Pratap Chandra Barua established a Satra at Benaras Gangamahal. Twenty five Brahmins were fed there daily and the cost involved was borne out of the exchequer of the estate.³⁰

Gauripur Zamindars were very liberal in religious matters. They built temples, Satra, and made land grant to maintain such religious institutions. It is said that Raibahadur Pratap Chandra shifted his capital from Rangamati to present Gauripur along with their Royal Deity. Kuldevi Mahamaya is known as Gauri too and the name Gauripur has been derived from Devi Gauri. Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, built the present structure of Mahamaya Mandir at Gauripur.³¹

According to the information furnished by Diary of Prakritesh Barua, that Gauripur Zamindar maintained a department called "*Devarsana*" to look after the religious activities. Following *Mandirs* (temples) Thans and Satras were with in the jurisdiction of Gauripur Raj estate, of which some of them were, ran by the Royal family out of the Royal exchequer. During zamindary rule priests were appointed by the zamindars and the salary of these priests was paid from the Royal

treasury. Some of the temples, thans and satras were granted plot of land for maintenance.

1. Kuldevi – Sri Sri Mahamaya – Rajbari

Chief Priest-1

Priest-1

Mahari-1

Deori-5

Pankaj lochan Ohakraborty was Chief Priest during headship of Prakritesh Barua.

2. Sri Sri- Kunju Behari and Madan Mahan Mandir, Raj bari Gauripur

Priest-1

Mahari-1

Deori-2

Watchman, Maliand

Bhaimali-7

3. Sri Sri Ganesh Akhra-

Payari-1

Mahari-1

Deori-1

Darwan-1

Mali-1

Jharudar-1

4. Rangamati Satra (BaNaraas)

Pujari-1

Deori-1

5. Alokjhari-Mahamaya Padasila

Land donated-1500 bighas

Pujari-1

Deori-5

6. Paglarthan-

Deori-1.

- 7. Dihi srijan gram-Ramchandra Than
Deori-2
- 8. Dihi Patamari-
Gopinath Bigra
Pujari-1
Deori-1
- 9. Symji Bigra-South Salmara-
Pujari-2
Deori-1
- 10. Sri Sri Kamakhya Than, Suckchar
Deori-1
Pujari-1
- 11. Bouch Kata waqt Property, south salmara. ³²

The Golden image of Mahamaya was stolen; later on a bronze image was made and installed in the Mandir. Apart from, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua built Madan Mahan Mandir in Rajbari. An image made of chandan wood of God Krishna and placed in the Mandir. Besides, the Radha Symsundar Mandir and Naraasingha Mandir were established in Gauripur during zamindary rule. Charak Puja is a traditional festival being observed in Gauripur under Royal patronage. Thousand of people gathered irrespective creed and castes to enjoy it. The religious traditions of Gauripur under Royal patronage have been developed to a general festival of the locality and after termination of zamindary system; the tradition is being still followed by the people along with the descendants of zamindars.

4.7. Contribution to the expansion of Education and learning

Zamindars of Gauripur have played a very important role in the expansion of education and learning in this part of Assam. The zamindars

of Gauripur are said to be the pioneer of the modern education system in this region. As has already been mentioned, the Permanent Settlement promoted the zamindars of Bengal as to the owner of the land. As a result of which some of them initiated the social welfare activities for the benefit of their subjects. They not only constructed roads, bridges, water tanks, founded charitable hospitals and temples, but also took interest for the expansion of education and learning among their subjects. They founded Schools, Colleges, Tols, Chatuspathy, Madrassa, Muktabs, Cultural Associations, Libraries, Publications, Dramatic Club, other Associations and local Festivals. They also extended help in establishment of such institution by the people of their estates..³³ It is to be mentioned here that the second half of the Nineteenth Century witnesses the introduction of western education in India, especially after the Wood Dispatch in 1854, which was considered as the Magnacarta in the history of the education of India. The landed gentry of Gauripur, who were the follower of the zamindars of Bengal, were not behind in pursuing the public welfare activities and they founded many schools, sanskrit tols and other educational institutions and extended help to the poor and the meritorious students.

(I) Introductions of Sanskrit education

According to Kayastha Samajar Ethibrita of H.N. Dutta Barua, the first educational institution founded by the zamindar family of Gauripur Raj Estate was the Sanskrit Chatuspatty opened by Tarinipriya Baruanee, wife of Dhir Chandra Barua, zamindar of Gauripur (Rangamati). Tarinipriya was a pious woman who with a view to encourage Sanskrit learning opened this tol in 1834.³⁴ However; Controversy prevails as to the fonder of the Chatuspathy. Some of the sources have claimed that Raibahadur Pratap Chandra Barua founded "Tarinipriya" Chatuspathy in

1834. But the date of accession of Pratap Chandra Barua to the Gaddi, as mentioned in "Gauripur Raj Bangsa" was 1868. It was not acceptable because, majority of scholars have opined that Pratap Chandra Barua shifted his residence from Rangamati to Gauripur in 1856. On the other hand, Nagendra Narayan Basu mentions in his Social History of Kamrupa, Volume II, that Raibahadur Pratap Chandra shifted his capital from Rangamati to Gauripur in 1850. Subscribing the view of N.N.Basu, we can assume that the date of accession to the Gaddi by Rai Bahadur was before 1850 but not before 1834 as he was minor at that time and the estate administration was ran by his mother Tarinipriya on behalf of his minor son. Taking this view into account the Chatuspathy can be said to have been opened by his mother Tarinipriya. Pratap Chandra might have renamed it as "Tarinipriya" in memory of his mother.

Whoever may be the founder, infact, the Chatuspathy played a very important role in expansion of Sanskrit education, not only in Assam but in North Bengal too. Most of the textbooks, prescribed for Sanskrit education in Assam and Bengal were published by this Chatuspathy.³⁵ Students from different part of Assam and Bengal came to this institution for Sanskrit learning. Rai Bahadur Pratap Chandra provided free food and lodging to the learners. Reputed Sanskrit pandit of the day, like Yaggyapathi Upadhaya, Jagannath Naya Panchanan, Radha Kanta Tarkalankar, Baikuntta Nath Bidyanidhi, Gopal Dev Bidya Bagis, Mahapadhaya Adaynath Nayabhusan, Ramanath Bidyalankar, Presidential awardee lakshmi pathi Tarkasashtri and some other renowned pandit served in this Chatuspathy as the teacher. Ramanath Bidyalankar wrote Sanskrit grammar.³⁶ Some of the students of this Chatuspati acquired high status and prominency in the society for their wisdom and personality.

Gauripur was considered as the centre of the Sanskrit learning of this region and it was accurately said as the Nalanda of Assam for its contribution to the development of Sanskrit learning in Assam and Bengal.

(II) English Education

The British Government established the first High School at Dhubri in 1879 and the School came to be known as Dhubri Government Boys High School. Raibahadur Pratap Chandra Barua extended valuable help to the British in establishment of this institution. It was one of the oldest High Schools in this region, which played vital role in expansion of higher education in this region. Pratap Chandra Barua is credited for opening English education in Gauripur. He established the first Middle English which was the beginning of English education in this region. It was probably, in the sixtieth of Nineteenth Century he founded the minor school in Gauripur after shifting capital from Rangamati to Gauripur. All the expenditure of this school was borne by the Royal treasury. Till then students were imparted only Sanskrit education which were confined with in the bracket of religion. He also established some lower primary schools in Gauripur. To the expansion of modern education in western Assam, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, the adopted son of Raibahadur Pratap Chandra Baruah, made remarkable contribution. During his tenure of office, numerous schools of different level were founded to expand education among his subject. He himself was a literary person and had great zeal of public welfare activities.

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua promoted the Middle English school founded by his father Pratap Chandra Barua to a High English school in 1899 and named it as Pratap Chandra Institution, in memory of his father. His motive was to see his Prajas to be educated. He provided free

education to the students with hostel facilities for the students of distant places. He founded hostels both for Hindus and Muslims students. Students from different places of Assam and Bengal, such as from Tufanganj of Cooch Behar district, Bhurangamari, sonahat, Nageswari, Kurigram of present Bangladesh and students from different places of Assam came to study in this high school being attracted with the facilities provided by the zamindar of Gauripur.³⁷

For the interest of better education, Raja Bahadur took special attention in appointment of teachers. This high school played very important role in expansion of English education among the people of Western Assam and in North Bengal. Pratap Chandra Institution produced a host of imminent scholars of which some earned National and International reputation. Scholar like Dr. Amiya Chakrabaty who was a Professor of Oxford University was student of this institution. Many high profiled personalities and eminent professionals, political leaders, Doctors, Engineers, Professors, High Ranking Administrators like-Deputy Commissioner and other administrative officers were product of this institution.

In his Report of 1905, B.C.Allen.D.C of Goalpara, mentions that there are four high schools in the district which are situated at Dhubri, Goalpara, Abhayapuri and Gauripur, The first is a government school but more than half of the total expenditure is met from the fees collected. The second, receives a grant in aid and the other two schools are respectively maintained by the Rani of Bijni and Raja of Gauripur.³⁸

A Survey has conducted on the production of Pratap Chandra Institution (P.C.Inst.) on the occasions of its centenary celebrations by Dr. K N Choudhury and prepared a list of the leading alumni of this premier institution of Western Assam. He writes, "This celebrated institution in

the second millennium can surely boast of her children who have become luminaries in various fields of Culture and civilization. This very centurion foster mother has fostered through the decades of her existence a good number of reputed educationists , artists, litterateurs Philosophers, Sportsmen, Civil servants and others who have left their contributions in several fields of human culture”³⁹

Some of the eminent persons, who were Alumni of this institution and enlisted by the School authority, the worth mentioning are like Pramathesh Chandra Baruah better known, Devdas Barua, son of Raja Prabhat Chandra Baruah, was student of PC Institution up to the eight standards, who later on passed his matriculation from Hare school, Calcutta who is said to be pioneer of Hindi Cinema. Ambikagiri Roy choudhury, popularly known as” Assam kesari” an eminent poet and littérateur of Assam, was also a student of this institution. The famous propagator of Assamese Vaishnavism from the line of Sankardev and Madhabdev, Krishnakanta Brahmachari was student of this institution.

Dr. Amiya Kumar, a world-renowned poet and prolific writer in Bengali, English, French and German who served as teacher in many universities of the world was also its student. The New York Times, published a statement in 1970 on Dr Chakrabarty, “The pride of India”, and calling him as “ambassador of the universal human spirit, poet and peacemaker, friend and intimate of such twentieth century giants as Gandhi, Schweitzer, Nehru and Einstein.”⁴⁰ The political leader of Assam like Anirudha Singha Choudhury, Azad Ali, Jainal Abedin, the ministers and MLAs of Assam, were students of this Institution. Some prominent scientist like Sibendra Narayan Barua, researcher of Mathematic, Dr P Dasgupta, the world famous medical scientist, who lived in London and made significant contributions to the field of medical profession and

research, Dr. Dipak Chakraborty, who held a very high position as teacher and research scientist in the Indian institute of technology, Bombay, were product of this institution.

Celebrated personalities, like Srinath Chakraborty, Director of Public Instruction, Haredranath Deka, who was Deputy Commissioner, Prof. Kalyan Datta Chaudhary, who was Professor in G.U; and technologist of Institutional repute, lived in USA. Moulavi Jamal Uddin Ahmed, Deputy Commissioner and many eminent IAS officers like Harendra Deka, S.Sarkar, late Agher Bhattacharjee, Kartikesh Bhattacharjee, Lt Jamal uddin Ahmed were the students of this School. Besides, having produced many doctors, Engineers, lawyers, eminent teachers, industrialist, etc.⁴¹

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua also founded many Primary and Middle English school in his estate. He was patron of three Middle English school established in Suckchar, Patamari and Satrasal.⁴²

With a view to spread education, Raja Prabhat Chandra and his descendants endeavoured in founding number of educational institutions within the jurisdiction of their estate. In addition to P.C.Institution of Gauripur and Middle English Schools, he also founded Town J.B School, Gauripur Sankar Hindi L.P School, Bisnupriya Sanskrit Tol, and Girls L.P School etc. Gauripur Girl's school was subsequently promoted to Girls M.E School. It is to be mentioned that Rani Sarojabala started a Girl's school in Rajbari with a view to spread education among the girls in such a time when women were confined with in four walls. Her efforts convinced the Raja to establish a girl's school in Gauripur. Apart from, Madhurilata Baruanee, wife of Pramathesh Chandra Barua, founded a Music School in Gauripur. Besides, under patronage of Gauripur Raj Family Dihidarpara M.V. School, Dhaju Patsala, B.C Memorial school of

Dhubri, Government Boys High School of Dhubri, Chapgar L.P School, 19 no. Silghagri L.P Schools were founded.⁴³

Prabhat Chandra Barua encouraged the foundation of schools by the local people in their own places. He was the patron of South Salmara high school founded in 1934; and he donated land and building materials of the high school. As a result, South Salmara High school came to be known as Rani-Bhabani Priya High school to memorize Rani Bhabani Priya, the mother of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua.

He also patronized the establishment of Madinatul High Madrassa in Gauripur and M.E.School in Mota khawa.

Fund allocation for Public works: Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua sanctioned every year ten percent of his total revenue for public works and the amount spent for different heads of public works as below.

- (1) Education - 52%
- (2) Public health – 16%
- (3) Sadabrata -18%
- (4) Donation – 12%
- (5) Drinking water- 2%⁴⁴

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was a farsighted personality, who adopted some policies for the spread of education among his subjects. He organised a fund called “Siksha Samiti” with a view to extend financial help to the poor and meritorious students for higher education. A General Body of the Siksha Samiti was formed in 1911 with the members of 100 representatives from different places of his estate, and Raja himself presided over the meeting of the Siksha Samiti. An executive body was constituted to run the fund properly.

He collected contribution from his rich tenants and jotedars. To raise the fund, he imposed two Anna on per rupee of the revenue as the

siksha donation.⁴⁵ Scholarships were given to students of different categories who were poor and meritorious. The scholarships were given to the following categories of students.

- (1) Post matric students reading Arts, Science, Medical and engineering were given Rs.30/= P.M, who were studying in India.
- (2) Poor and meritorious students were supplied books and examination fees.
- (3) Scholarships were given to students' studying in Entrance school at the rate Rs.9/-P.M, till to pass Matric examination.
- (4) Students must be bonafide residential tenants of Gauripur Raj Estate.
- (5) Students reading in foreign country were granted scholarship up to Rs.300/- P.M, till the completion of their studies and also provided conveyance allowance to them. With the financial assistance received from Siksha Samiti many students became doctors, engineers and some students went foreign countries for higher and technical education. This scholarship was awarded till the completion of education such as B.A., B.SC, M.A, B.L, MBBS, and B.E etc.

As per the rule of the Siksha Samiti, intending candidates are required to submit applications to the Samiti within seven days of the announcement of result and the Executive Committee shall decide the applications for scholarship. With the financial assistance of the Siksha Samiti many students built their fortune acquiring knowledge from various prominent institution of different faculties within the nation and abroad. Among the beneficiaries worthy of mentions are Manabinda Chakraborty, Srinath Chakrabaty, Kamakha Prasad Roy, and many

others. Lakheswar Barthakur went to Japan for studying in Agriculture who, later on founded a Sugar Mill in Tinsukia.⁴⁶

Dr. Kamakhya Prasad Roy, who did his MBBS in 1924 with the financial help from Siksha Samiti, mentioned that he received Rs.15 P.M from Siksha Samiti and Rs.10 from the Raja. He also told that he was provided books and instruments for medical science worth of Rs.450. For the spread of higher education, Prabhat Chandra Barua provided lodging, in their Gauripur House in Balyganj at Calcutta, to the students studying in the Colleges at Calcutta.

He founded a library in Rajhawli with large collection of precious books. He also donated land and books for foundation of cotton library in Dhubri. He was patron of Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, a prominent institution of research and investigation of local history of Assam.

After abolition of zamindari system in Assam, the representatives of the Royal House of Gauripur did not hesitate to liberally donate for the sake of the expansion of education in this region. The best example of which was the foundation of Pramathesh Barua College, in Gauripur in 1963, in memory of great artist Pramathesh Chandra Barua. Kumar Lalji alias Prakritesh Chandra Barua donated 6 bighas of land to the College, Madhurilata Baruanee, wife of Pramathesh Chandra Barua donated building materials with cash of Rs, 16000.

(III) Construction of school buildings and hostel

Rajabahadur built school buildings for Sanskrit Tol, P.C Institution High School, and Balika Bidyalay. He also constructed a hostel for Sanskrit Tol and two hostels one for Muslim students and another for Hindu students of Pratap Chandra Institution (high school). The Present building of P.C Institution was constructed in 1913 with allotting land of

24.1/2 bighas. He spent Rs.1440 for Sanskrit Tol and Rs.500 for P.C. institution yearly.⁴⁷

(IV) Introduction of female education:-

Rani Sarojabala, the wife of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was the architect of the female education in Gauripur. She first felt the need of the spread of education among the female. With a view to educate the female, Rani Sarojabala opened a private school in Raj Hawli. Female students were brought from the remote villages by the bullock carts under veil, because the conservative society did not allow the female out of the housing campus. She made all arrangement of the lodging of such female students in the Rajbari. This was the beginning of the female education in Gauripur. Under pressure of Rani Sarojabala, Raja prabhat Chandra founded a female primary school in Gauripur, which was later, come to be known as 1475 No. Gauripur Girls School. subsequently, has promoted to Midde English School for the girls students.

In regard to spread of female education, Raj Kumari Niharbala Barua did a lot who first raised the demand of the higher education for the girls students. It was due to her mother Sarojabala, girl's education was on the rolled in Gauripur but not beyond upper primary level. Niharbala felt the need of the higher education for the girls and advocated that they should be given opportunities to High school level educations. Considering no feasibility in the perspective of the contemporary estate economy because of the ongoing Second World War, Niharbala, instead of founding female High School, advocated for co-education in P.C Institution. She even took initiative in this regard and proposed the guardians of eligible female students. With this view she met the guardians and held meeting after meeting to convince both the guardians and the school committee. Her efforts, ultimately, resulted in the

introduction of the co- education in Pratap Chandra Barua Institution. In 1944 some girls student got admitted in P.C institution in class VII and in 1946 first girl passed matriculation examination, was Pushpa Sarkar.⁴⁸

4.8. Development of Arts and handicrafts

Gauripur has a long history of indigenous arts and handicrafts ranging from a remote past. Its Rajfamily has made a remarkable contribution to the development of such arts and handicrafts of this region, especially to the *sola evayfs*, terrocota, pottery, weaving and products of bamboo, cane, wood, metal etc. Gauripur was famous for its sola arts which were resemble with the sola arts of North Bengal and Bangladesh. With sola, the artists created various articles of children's Toys and Sacred celebration. They produced different kinds of dolls, icons of Gods and Goddesses and articles required for offering puja to Deities. The artist draws beautifully the images of the legendary heroes and heroines, such as Behula Lakhindar, icon of Kartic, Manasa, Saraswati, and Lakshmi with the sola. They also create different fruits, birds, animals, and decorating articles with this kind of materials. These arts have been spreaded through out nation due to the devotion of the artists under Royal patronage of Gauripur Rajfamily. Sudhir Malakar, a famous artist of this kind of art held exhibition in Madras, Tribundram, Delhi, and even in foreign countries like Japan, Switzarland and earned wide recognition.⁴⁹

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua encouraged this kind of arts by allotting suitable land to the artists for its manufacturing. Initially, *Sola silpa* started with, basically, on religious motivation and the artists had produced articles for sacred purposes. But this was promoted to secular and commercial enterprise with the efforts of some of the members of the Royal family of Gauripur, especially by Niharbala and Nilima Sundari. In

the field of Arts and handicraft Raj kumari Nilima Barua has made a tremendous contribution. She was the daughter of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua and sister of Niharbala Barua. From her child hood she was very much interested in local Arts, like terracotta pottery, sola silpa and the product of bamboos, cane, wood and metal.

For the interest of the qualitative products with export quality of local handicrafts, Nilima Barua made wide arrangement for training of the local artists by the expert artist, invited from outside. She encouraged the local artists for quality production of their arts to attract the attention of the customers in wide range. She even invited the unemployed persons to engage in this job to extend its domain and create employment for the people. It was for her, the indigenous handicrafts, especially terracotta, pottery, sola silpa and product of bamboo rapidly grown and extended in commercial point of view.

With a view to develop the indigenous handicrafts to a commercial enterprise through popularizing its products and create wide market, Nilima Sundari, even, visited Calcutta, Delhi, Mumbai, London and Paris and held exhibition of the products of Goalpariya handicrafts. These products immensely impressed the local viewers and large numbers of them were sold⁵⁰

She collected various handicrafts products of the local artists. She, along with her sister Nihabala Barua, also collected different natural articles, like clourful stones, eggs, feathers, snails etc. and preserved them in the palace. Later on a Museum was set up for the preservation of her collections in Rajbari. "It was due to her relentless efforts and patience, the indigenous Art and culture of Goalpara flourished and popularized throughout the nations"⁵¹ Nilima Barua intended to develop the indigenous arts and handicrafts to the commercial enterprise with distinct

objective to make the artists of this region economically solvent. She came across with some reputed artists of National and International level and learned wide knowledge about various arts and technicality of the improvement of their qualitative products of the different handicrafts and fine arts. She studied in Chitrakala in Viswabharati from Nandalal Basu.⁵²

Nilima Barua was called "Loka Silpi" for her dedication to the development of the indigenous handicrafts. Being the representative of the Royal house of Gauripur, she lived a simple life and assimilated with the down trodden people of Assam. She was felicitated and honoured by the government and private institutions for her contribution to the growth and development of the local arts and culture. As recognition of her superb creativity and artistic skill, she was appointed by Assam Government as the Technical Adviser of the Department of Handicraft and Cottage Industry in 1954-55. In 1958 she was appointed as the Assistant Director to All India Handicraft Board (Designing Department). In the same year she was employed as the In charge of Regional Designing Centre of Bombay. From 1950 to 1960 she served as the member of the Fine Arts Academy of India. She also worked as the member of the All India Handicrafts Council for the period from 1960-1965.⁵³

It was Nilima Barua for whose service; Gauripur became the centre of Handicrafts, Arts and Culture of Assam. Her efforts to develop indigenous handicrafts resulted in the foundation of All India Handicrafts Council in Gauripur for the development of the handicrafts of this region. This Council has been converted to the "Marketing and Extension Service Centre under Ministry of Textile and Weaving of the Government of India. Through this centre a direct communication has been set up between the Government and the artists, which stands to be a booster to

the development of the indigenous handicrafts of this region. The handicraft products of this part of country have been exhibited and marketed in the National and International markets.

Nilima Barua died in 4th Sept, 1997, but she is remembered for her contribution to the development of local handicrafts and the culture of this region. The collections of Nilima Barua have been preserved in District Museum in Dhubri and Nilima Barua Kala Sanskrity of Gauripur. The Nilima Barua Kala Sanskrity has been founded in 1997 in memory of Loka Silpi Nilima Barua, which was inaugurated by Prafulla Kr. Mahanta, then chief Minister of Assam.⁵⁴

4.9. Hastibisharat Prakritesh Barua and his contribution:

Prakritesh Barua, the last zamindar of Gauripur Raj Estate (executor of Trustee) was the son of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua and was the younger brother of Promathesh Barua, the legendary artist of Hindi Cinema. Prakritesh Barua is better known as Lalji for his red complexion and fairness. Lalji was a great hunter, an elephant expert, naturalist and environmental conserver. His love for wild animal and nature makes him a unique personality in the history of the nation. Almost of the whole life, Lalji spent his time in hunting, catching elephant, domesticating them and providing training to the wild elephants. Being the prince and the zamindar of Gauripur Estate, Lalji passed his time in hunting in the dense forest. Hunting was the important feature of the Royal blood of Gauripur Rajfamily. All the members of this family irrespective of sex, learned the art of hunting, but Lalji's engagement in hunting went such an extent that it became his hobby and profession. Ignoring princely life and Royal glamour he spent his time in dense jungle nearly of the whole part of his life. Prakriteh Barua was a born hunter who caught more than 1000

elephants, killed 111 leopards and 65 tigers.⁵¹ He even killed 27 insane elephants.⁵⁵

Prakritesh Barua though belonged to Rajfamily but led a life of ordinary people and ordinary *fandi* (elephant catcher). His dress was very simple and he usually wore a half pant and Nepali cap. Simplicity was the basic feature of his life. From the age of 7 years, Lalji acquainted with elephant ridding and taming (*kunte*) elephant with utmost skill. Gradually, he was deeply attracted with the elephant hunting and next sixty years of his life devoted in it as his hobby cum profession. After catching elephant, he domesticated it and provided full training before its sale. His long time involvement in elephant hunting enriched him with full of experiences about elephants and its behaviour of different stages. He was not only expert hunter and trainer of elephant but also acquired vast experiences of herbal treatment of the different diseases of elephants.⁵⁶

From 1937 to 1981 Prakritesh Chandra Barua caught 1005 elephants from Assam, Meghalaya and North Bengal forest. Hunting is said to be the symbol of the Royal glamour of Gauripur Rajfamily. About the learning of the children of Royal family of Gauripur Lalji told in his biography, “ we have to learn many things, first to ride on horse, then on elephant, then to drive boat, and lastly to learn to lead man and estate”.⁵⁷ Lalji had deep love for animals, though he was a professional hunter. He strictly followed some principles in hunting such as he never killed any mother animal grazing with baby, the pregnant animal and animal in close season. He never left an animal with injury lest it would be more ferocious. Lalji was the advocate of the environmental preservation. About the man and elephant clash, he has opined that due to expansion of human habitation and deforestation the herd of elephants moves to human

zone for search for food. For his love of animal and vast knowledge of elephant and its behaviour in different stages, his experiences of the herbal treatment of the diseases of different kinds of the elephants, Prakritesh Barua occupied a high position in the international forum. To appreciate Lalji, the famous elephant expert, Mr.P.D. Stracey wrote in his book, "Elephant Gold", "The case of owner rider is rare, most of the owners being staid or middle aged individuals. Nevertheless, there are one or two notable exceptions. One of them, most surprisingly, was the son of a Raja; Lalji as we called him because of his fair complexion, look to *mela shikar* (collective hunting of elephant) with his *fandis*. He was a born elephant man, with deep love for the animal and a most human approach to business of elephant catching. He could always be relied upon to observe the rules scrupulously and had great control over his men with whom he lived in the jungle."⁵⁸

Lalji's love for elephant went to such a magnitude that he offered puja to the Goddess Mahamaya for recovery of his beloved elephant, Pratapsing from illness. He even offered puja to Devi Mahamaya with the blood from his chest as the gratitude to the Devi for her kindness in recovering of "Pratapsing" from disease. After immatured, death of "Pratapsing" Lalji went to Gaya for offering "Pinda" of Pratapsing along with the "Pinda" of his father. He engraved Pratapsing in the lawn of Matiabag palace so that he could see it easily. Later he named the veterNaray hospital of Gauripur as the Pratapsing veterNaray hospital in the memory of his elephant. It is a unique event that for the first time that an institution is named after the name of an animal.⁵⁹

Prakritesh Barua was not only a famous hunter and naturalist but at the same time was a patron of music, sports and social worker. He has made tremendous contribution to the development of Goalpariya loka

sangit and Goalpariya culture. He was the last zamindar of Barua dynasty and the glorious history of twelve hundred years of the dynasty came to an end during his headship of Barua family, because of the acquisition of zamindari system by the government in 1956. In his early life Prakritesh Barua was qualified for King's scout badge and represented Assam in the Indian contingent participating in 7th world Jamboree in Holland in 1937. He ran the zamindari of Gauripur from 1941 to the last day of the zamindari rule when government acquired zamindari system in 1956. He represented to Assam Legislative Assembly and the Assam Olympic Association. He was Executive member of Assam Olympic Association.⁶⁰

Lalji has made huge contribution to the development of Goalpariya Folk culture and encouraged his daughter Pratima Barua to sing deshi songs to make it popular. It was Prakritesh Barua who extended support to his daughter, Pratima, who was opposed by some of the members of Barua family including wife of Pramathesh Chandra Barua for her involvement in Goalpariya sangeet, a culture of the lower class of people. Involvement of women in music and dance was considered as against the tradition of the contemporary conservative society. Even, remarks were made that Pratima's involvement in singing and dancing would create hurdle of her marriage. Pratikesh Barua was not retreated because of such remarks; rather he encouraged her daughter to work for the development of Deshi songs.⁶¹ Lalji collected Deshi songs from different places and asked his daughter Pratima to tune these. Pratima herself admitted that her father made her singer and her mother made her a good woman. In building of an outstanding career of Pratima Barua, as a star artist of Goalpariya Folk songs, Pratikesh Barua has made a remarkable contribution to it.

Prakritesh Barua was, no doubt, an internationally reputed hunter, naturalist, environment conserver for which he occupies a high status in the history of hunting. His daughter, Parvati Barua was said to be his real successor as a hunter. His elder daughter Pratima Barua was a famous singer of Goapariya Folk songs. Parvati Barua earned reputation as the first woman hunter of Asia. Empressed with the hunting and catching elephant, Parvati Barua involved in hunting and catching elephant in her childhood with her father. Gradually, she adhered with this business in such a way that later on she became a famous elephant hunter. She was expert in herbal medicine for the animal. She like her father caught many elephant and domesticated them. Her reputation in elephant catching and domesticating was widely recognized. She was invited to International Elephant workshop in Jaldapara Wild life Sanctuary in 1982, "A week with Elephant". She extended help to the Forest Department of Bengal, Bihar and Chattisgarh in controlling wild elephant atrocities. The International community acknowledged her talent and excellence. National Discovery has made a documentary on the life and career of Parboti Barua, "Queen of Elephant."⁶²

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CHAPTER – V

Public Works and Social Welfare activities of the zamindars of Bijni Raj Estates

5.1. Brief history Bijni Raj Estate

Bijni Kingdom, as already mentioned in the first chapter, was a little edition of Koch Hajo Kingdom alias Eastern Koch Kingdom of Parikshit Narayan. It was founded by his son, Bijit Narayan alias Chandra Narayan and, as presumed, the name 'Bijni' was derived from him, the founder of this kingdom. The history of Bijni kingdom is a component of the history of declining of the Koch as the super power and the establishment of the Mughal hegemony on Western Assam. Infact, the declining of the Koches rooted back when Nara Narayan divided his kingdom with his nephew, the son of Chilarai in 1581. Nara Narayan, instead of suppressing the rebel Raghudev, ceded eastern part of his kingdom to him as his tributary. The new kingdom came to know as Eastern Koch kingdom, stretching the territory from river Sankosh in the west to river Barnadi in the east. The territory retained by Nara Narayan was known as Koch Bihar Kingdom.¹ But after Raghudev, his son and successor, Parikshit Narayan refused to pay tribute to the reigning king of Koch Bihar kingdom, Lakshmi Narayan, the son of Nara Narayan. Thus, friction started between the two branches of the Koches and it dragged them into war in which Lakshmi Narayan was defeated. Eventually, Lakshmi Narayan sought the help of the Mughal Subedar of Bengal, who had covetous eyes on the Koch Kingdom from long before. The Mughal soldiers under Commander Mukram Khan invaded Eastern Koch kingdom and Parikshit Narayan was finally defeated after his heroic

resistance. He surrendered to the Mughal and was sent to Delhi. Emperor Jahangir agreed to restore his kingdom on payment of *peskosh* of Rupees four lakhs.² Parikshit Narayan was returning home, after this agreement but unluckily, he died on the way. The Mughal annexed Koch Hajo kingdom after death of Parikshit Narayan and placed it under their direct rule. They took up the administration of the occupied territory and Korari was deputed to carry out the settlement of the revenue on the Mughal line of revenue administration.

After the occupation of Koch Hajo, the territory divided into two portions, an area of 1005 square miles, consisting of Duars of Bijni, Sidli, Chirang, Guma, and Ripu, which was made Khasland. The remaining area of 2384 square miles was divided into twelve *parganas*, viz. 1. Habraghat, 2. Khuntaghat; 3. Mechpara; 4. Karaibari; 5. Parbotjoar; 6. Chapar; 7. Ghurla; 8. Jamira; 9. Taria; 10. Gola Alamgonj; 11. Aurongabad; 12. Kalumalupara.³

Revenue officers were employed for collection of revenue from the *ryots*. Nevertheless, the Koches rose in a revolt against the Mughal under several princes. In the following years, numerous engagements took place between the Koch rebels and the Mughal forces and on the other hand, the peasants withheld the payments of the revenue. In the meantime, Ahom armies, for the aid of Balit Narayan, fugitive prince who sheltered in the Ahom court, engaged in driving out the Mughal from the east. Under such situation, the Mughals changed their policy and decided to install a prince as a tributary ruler on a portion of the occupied land to pacify the Koches. Chandra Narayan, one of the sons of Parikshit Narayan was made ruler of a portion of the occupied land, stretching the territory from Sankosh on the west to Manas on the East, at the payment of annual *peskosh* of Rupees 5998/ only.⁴ Chandra Narayan resided in a

place from where he fought the Mughal, later on the place came to be known as Bijni and his kingdom came to be known as Bijni kingdom. The portion called Bijni Duar passed over to Bhutia king during the rule of Raja Mukunda Narayan.⁵

In course of time, most of the parganas were slipped out of Bijni kingdom to set up five more zamindaries, the semi-independent chieftains under Mughal suzerainty. The kingdom of Bijni reduced to a status of a zamindary comprising Habraghat and Khuntaghat parganas. But in pursuance of the Royal tradition the zamindar of Bijni estate continued to retain the title of Raja.

5.2. Genealogy of Bijni Raj Family

Bijni dynasty was a branch of Koch dynasty of Koch Bihar kingdom founded by Viswa Singha, son of Haria Mondal. His son Nara Narayan, who was the greatest ruler in this dynasty, succeeded Viswa Singha and during his reign Koch Bihar kingdom achieved highest power in the Northeastern India. Chilarai alias Sukladwaj, the brother of Nara Narayan was commander in chief of the Koch Bihar army for whose contribution Koch power rose to the status of the super power of this region. But the death of Chilarai marked the beginning of the decline of Koch Hegemony in this part of India, because his death was followed by the rebellion of his son Raghudev Narayan, who demanded partition of Koch kingdom. The Koch kingdom disintegrated when Nara Narayan ceded eastern part of his kingdom to Raghudev Narayan as his tributary. Thus, the Eastern Koch kingdom or Koch Hajo Kingdom came into being with Raghudev Narayan its first king. His son Parikshit Narayan, who was defeated and forced to surrender to the Mughals, as already mentioned, succeeded Raghudev Narayan. After Parikshit Narayan Bijni kingdom, comprising a small part of Koch-Hajo, was created by the

Mughals and Chandra Nara Narayan was enthroned as its first king under their suzerainty.

During the Koch insurrection against the Mughal aggression, Balit Narayan, one of the sons of Parikshit Narayan, took shelter of the Ahom King Pratap Singha, who promised to help him against the Mughal. The annexation of Koch Hajo kingdom to the Mughal Empire was considered as a threat to the Ahom kingdom, which led to the outbreak of the war between the Ahom and the Mughal. Though the Mughal won initial success on the Ahoms but they were annihilated, later on, in several encounters and the territory down to Barnadi was cleared off from the control of the Mughal forces. Balit Narayan was made king of the besieged territory, stretching from Bharuli in the east to the River Barnadi in the west, naming it as the Darrangi kingdom, under Ahom suzerainty.⁶ Balit Narayan assumed the title Darrangi Raja and he was conferred the title "Dharma Narayan" by the Ahom king, Pratap Singha.

Pratap Singha, encouraged by his success in Darrang range, took offensive against the Mughal and came down following the Mughal armies and conquered Hajo, the Mughal Thana. Owing the opportunity of the Mughal misfortune, Chandra Narayan with a view to make himself independent of the Mughal, joined the Ahom army against them. Unfortunately, Mughal ally, Koch Bihar King, Pran Narayan assisted by the Mughal forces marched against Chandra Narayan and defeated and killed him in the engagement.⁷ The Ahom Mughal conflict was resolved by the treaty of 1638 fixing Manas as the boundary of the two territories, leaving Bijni kingdom under the suzerainty of the Mughal.⁸

After death of Chandra Narayan his son Joy Narayan succeeded the throne of Bijni. During his rule Ram Singha invaded Assam and Joy Narayan extended valuable help to the Mughal forces. He even

accompanied Ram Singha in his venture of marching Guwahati. As a mark of gratitude Ram Singha exempted Joy Narayan from paying *Peskosh*. Unfortunately, Joy Narayan was summoned to Decca by the Nawab for allegation against him raised by a person belonging to *Goal caste*, for forcibly marriage to his daughter against the traditional caste rule. The case had been represented in the court of the Nawab of Bengal as an act of oppression on the caste of Goals. Joy Narayan with his family was detained in Decca till his last breath.⁹ After death of Joy Narayan, the Nawab of Decca released all the three sons of late Joy Narayan, Sib Narayan, Har Narayan and Dugdha Narayan and allowed them to return their mother land. According to local sources, Sib Narayan with all family members left Decca and on the way they conducted "*Sradha*" (funeral function) of his father on the bank of Ganges. He arrived in his country and captured Mughal Thana at Baitamari and looted its wealth as well. But he had to surrender Baitamari and even his two brothers because of the arrival of Mughal reinforcement from Guwahati which recovered Baitamari and detained two brothers of Sib Narayan.¹⁰

Incidentally, the political situation had been changed in Bijni because of the absence of the king for long time. Taking the advantages of the situation, the neighbouring Bhutias captured the northern tract of the estate, while one Chatur Singha established his control on the Bijni kingdom. Fortunately, Sib Narayan persuaded the Bhutia king, invoking the friendly relation between Bhutan king and his ancestors and with his help he recovered the throne defeating Chatur Singha.¹¹

His son Bijoy Narayan succeeded sib Narayan. During his tenure of office, the British East India Company acquired the Dewani of Bengal. Bijoy Narayan fell in quarrel with the British for which he was captured and sent to Calcutta as prisoner, where he committed suicide by jumping

into Ganges. The British authority placed one Rudra Narayan on the Gaddi of Bijni denying the claim of the sons of Bijoy Narayan. He had three sons, Devi Narayan, Mukunda Narayan and Madhab Narayan but none of them could ascend on the Gaddi on their own strength for few years. Ultimately, the three sons of Bijoy Narayan appealed to the Dev Raja of Bhutan and with his help, they drove out Rudra Narayan from Bijni and captured power. Mukunda Narayan ascended to the Gaddi of Bijni, though, he was not eldest but he did so because of the request of the subjects and the relatives.¹² Unfortunately, Mukunda Narayan had no son and he adopted Balit Narayan, the son of his eldest brother Debi Narayan.¹³ Balit Narayan was minor when Mukunda Narayan died in 1788, as a result, Hari Deb Narayan, another prince of this dynasty was chosen as the successor of the Gaddi on the advice of Grand Rani, mother of Mukunda Narayan. However, Hari Deb Narayan died two years later and was succeeded by Balit Narayan who, by this time attained majority. The administration of Balit Narayan was a turning point in the history of the Bijni Raj. The Peskosh received so far from the Raja of Bijni was converted to land revenue during his tenure of office. Bijni came under Decennial Sttlement in 1791 which was converted to the Permanent Settlement in 1793 by the Bengal Regulation 1 of 1793; the chieftainship of Bijni was turned into a zamindary under British East India Company.¹⁴

The power of Raja with regard to Dewani and Faujdari was curtailed by the British through appointment of Collector in Goalpara. Balit Narayan was succeeded by his son Indra Narayan. He was a competent zamindar who tried to enhance the rate of rent fixed during the tenure of his predecessors, but he did not success due to the opposition of the rytos.¹⁵ Indra Narayan was succeeded by his son Amrit Narayan who died in 1853 with out leaving heir to success him. As a result, he was

succeeded by his wife; Bhogeswari.¹⁶ The succession of Rani Bhogeswari to the Gaddi of Bijni was not accepted by the British government and forcibly took the possession of the part of the estate which had been within the jurisdiction of the British Empire. On the contrary, the British placed the administration of the pargana of Habraghat and Khuntaghat under the Court of Wards while the Rani Bhogeswari ran the zamindary on Niz Bijni portion as the zamindar under the Bhutia king. It is to be noted that Niz Bijni had been held by the Bijni Raja as a tributary to the Dev Raja of Bhutan.

Rani Bhogeswari adopted one Kumud Narayan as successor to the Gaddi before her death in 1861. But as the successor was minor, Bijni estate again placed under the administration of the Court of Wards and Kumud Narayan was sent to Benaras for Higher education. Meanwhile, Rani Opeswari who claimed to be the concubine of the late Raja Kumud Narayan succeeded Bhogeswari as the zamindar of Niz Bijni and was also exercising the right of legal guardian of the minor Raja, Kumud Narayan. Bijni estate had been under the administration of the Court of Wards till Kumud Narayan attained maturity in 1874.¹⁷ During the period of his minority, the affairs of the Raj was ill managed. Rani Opeswari did not possess political wisdom and farsightedness. As a result, chaos and lawlessness prevailed everywhere and the estate passed through economic and political instability. Taking the advantages of the situation, Bhutanese invaders under command of one Jhowlia raided Bijni and ransacked the Rajbari. According to Santo Barman, "the Raj family was put to harassment to such an extent as to shift the Headquarter to different places, i.e, Jogighopa, Deuhati and Baitamari".¹⁸ The aggression of the Bhutias to the Bijni estate and their oppression carried on the people alarmed the British Government and dragged the British to declare war

against Bhutan. The British army defeated the Bhutias and forced them to retreat from the Bhutan Duars, which were annexed to the British territory. Meanwhile the Raja of Bijni put forward of his claim to hold a large tract of land of the annexed territory which had been in their possession under the Bhutan Government. The claim was admitted and a settlement was made with the Court of Wards on behalf of the minor Raja, Kumud Narayan.¹⁹ Infact, Kumud Narayan assumed the power of the estate on 21st September, 1874 on attaining majority, from the Court of Wards.²⁰

Kumud Narayan was a highly educated and very kindhearted person who always thought about the well-being of his subjects. He introduced many benevolent works for the benefit of his subjects. Unfortunately, he committed blunder by marrying two wives; viz, Siddeswari and Abhayeswari, which made his life miserable and tragic. The internal rivalry of the two queens led the life of Raja as to utmost unhappy for which he preferred more to stay at his Calcutta residence. Under such situation, Kumud Narayan died in Calcutta in 1883 with out leaving heir to succeed him. His death was doubted to be a suicide.²¹

In the midst of the quarrel between the two queens, the Raja Kumud Narayan breathed his last and Rani Siddeswari took the possession of the estate. According to the local sources, the conflict between the two queens went to such an extent that life of the younger queen was in stake and she had to lose one of her eyes on the treachery meted out against her. The estate officials were distinctly divided into two groups. The estate administration and the revenue collection were badly affected. Rani Abhayeswari for her safety of life fled to Goalpara and took shelter there. She filed suit in the District court of Goalpara for

possession of the estate. The case was shifted under order of the High Court dated 6th June, 1888 for trial before the District Judge of Alipore, under 24 Pargana. The learned Judge in his judgment of 8th March, 1890 decided that the two Ranis were entitled to a joint estate for life with rights of supervisor ship and equal beneficial enjoyment.²² Eventually, Rani Siddeswari died on 7th May, 1891, and was succeeded by Rani Abhayeswari, who ran the administration until her death in 1918 on 17th October.²³

Rani Abhayeswari had no child to succeed her, so, she adopted Jogendra Narayan, son of Kriti Narayan on the descendent of the Raj family. Jogendra Narayan succeeded Rani Abhayeswari, but turned a lunatic. The management of the Raj was thus, brought under the Court of Wards on Third September, 1918. During the period of the second administration of the Court of Wards, different claimants filed suit for the rights and the possession of the estate. The succession issue of the estate was so complicated that a compromise was beyond the limit of the existing law and procedures. Under such circumstances, "The Bijni Succession Act" was passed in the Assam Legislative Council. According to the provision of the Act, Jogendra Narayan was declared the holder of the Bijni Raj during his lifetime with retrospective date from, September, 1895, the date of his nomination by Rani Abheswari. The Court of Wards would continue to rule the estate in his name.²⁴ On the death of Jogendra Naraay Bhup on 18th June 1937, Bhairendra Narayan succeeded him but the Court of Wards ran the management until 1944 when he formally assumed the power of the estate.

Bhairendra Narayan was the last zamindar of Bijni estate and during his tenure of office Bijni estate was acquired by the state

government of Assam in 1956, under the Zamindari acquisition Act of 1951.²⁵

5.3. Benevolent activities of Bijni Raj Estate

Like the other zamindars of Western Assam, some of the members of the Bijni Raj family indulged in the benevolent activities for the welfare of their subjects. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the land lords and the native rulers of India started some public welfare programme throughout the nation, especially in the beginning of the twentieth century. No doubt, it was, perhaps, due to the awakening of the people of India and the freedom movement assumed the national character. It is to be noted that the British Government in India changed their policy after the second half of the 19th century and adopted the policy of the consolidation. The landed gentry of the nation felt the need of the introduction of public welfare activities in the wake of the demand of the nationalist to justify their claim of the revenue from the ryots. They began to establish schools, colleges, Sarai, temples, Dargah, Dispensary, and constructed roads, digging of tanks, allotted land to the religious places and grazing field etc.

Unfortunately, due to paucity of evidences it is not possible to focus on what public benevolent activities were done by the Bijni Raj family in their estate ahead of the rule of Rani Abhayeswari. Of course, the Bhutias raids and the earthquake of 1897 brought havoc to the Bijni estate and all the infrastructural condition of the region were destroyed. Rani Abhayeswari was patron of public welfare who did a lot for the welfare of her prajas. She was called "Rajmata" by the subjects for her love and affection to the subjects. Apart from, Raja Mukunda Narayan, Kumud Narayan, Jogendra Narayan and Bharabendra Narayan were some of the zamindars of Bijni family who are remembered for their social welfare activities.

On the basis of the information gathered through different sources, like documents preserved in the archives, various periodicals, magazines, souvenirs, visit of zamindars Rajhawli, interaction with living members of the Raj family and the senior citizen of the estate, the following statements is prepared about the socio- cultural contribution of the Bijni Raj family.

a. Patron of learning

No much evidence is available about the contribution of Bijni zamindars to the field of education and learning of the estate until the accession of Rani Abhayeswari on the Gaddi in 1896. Of course, Kumud Narayan, who was a learned zamindar, founded few schools for spread of education among his subjects. Although, Rani Abhayeswari was a patron of learning, she could not concentrate her attention to it during first few years, for arising out of the emergent situations demanding her special attention. It was after shifting of the capital of Bijni estate to Abhayapuri, the Rani and her successors threw their attentions towards the education and learning of the subjects. Though, she herself was illiterate woman, she had great zeal to the education and learning and wanted to see her subjects educated. With this view, she devoted herself in expansion of learning with the cost of the Royal Treasury and founded many schools in her zamindary *elaka*.

Fondation of Abhayeswari High school: The most remarkable contribution of Rani Abhayaeswai to the field of education and learning was the foundation of a High school in Abhayapuri in 1904, which came to be known as the Abhayeswari High school. Till then there were only three High schools in Goalpara district, viz. Dhubri Govt. High school, Gauripur P.C.Institution and Prithiram Choudhury High school in

Goalpara. Rani Abhayeswari felt the need of a High school like in the other estates of Goalpara district and she founded it in 1904 in Abhayapuri. Rani Abhayeswari provided free education to the students during her life time. After her death half fees were levied from the students. For the accommodation of the students of the distant places she opened three hostels for the students. A hostel for the Muslim students and another for the non Muslim students were founded. The salary for the cook and other workers of the hostels were paid by the estate. The teachers, Chowkidars and other employees of the school were paid from the estate treasury. All the facilities were provided to the students. For the free education and hostel facilities a large number of students came from out side to get themselves admitted in this High school. Apart from these, the poor and meritorious students were given free studentship and monthly stipend.²⁶

Rani provided all round facilities to the teachers of the school. Most of the teachers were brought from Bengal and they were provided hostel and regular salary from the estate. She kept close watch on the teachers so that they could devote themselves in imparting teaching to the students. Initially, Bengali was the medium of the school.²⁷ A plot of 35 bighas of land was allotted for Abhayeswai High school. In the beginning, classes were held at Natya Mandir, near present Gandhi Maidan along with making temporary sheds for this purpose. It was in 1916, that the present school buildings were constructed with the fund of the estate. According to Prince Kabindra Narayan, one of the sons of last Raja of Bijni Raj estate, Raja Bharabedra Narayan Bhup Dev, the beautiful structures of the School buildings were constructed by the Chinese carpenters and the doors and windows of the school were made at Calcutta the timber procured from Burma.²⁸ The superstructure of the

Abhayeswari High school is a beautiful specimen of the architectural development under Bijni estate. The building made of wood and tin for Abhayeswari High school, is infact, stands as an evidence of an extraordinary craftsmanship under patronage of the Bijni zamindary. The long corridor of the Abhayeswari High school building is a source of attraction to the high craftsmanship of the past.

The school played a very important role in the expansion of education among the people of this backward region of Assam. Thousands of students built their career through this school. Many of them established themselves in the highest position of the society with high honour and reputation.

Foundation of Vernacular schools: Besides this, two vernacular schools were founded under the Bijni zamindary, as mentioned in the Statistical Account of Goalpara by W.W.Hunter. According to him, there were altogether five such schools in Goalpara district. The Bijni School and Dalgoma School were receiving estate fund at the rate of Rs. 100 and Rs. 16 per month respectively.²⁹ These schools were, no doubt, founded in the second half of the 19th century during the rule of Raja Kumud Narayan. The Royal house continued the financial assistance to these schools. For the expansion of the Sanskrit education among the students Rani Abhayeswari founded a Sanskrit Tol in Abhayapuri in 1907. The Royal priest imparted education in this Tol for which he was paid Rs. 10/ per month. But, later on, the school was closed due to lack of student later on.³⁰

Foundation of Girls M.V. School: A Girls M.V school was founded by Rani Abhayeswi in 1910 to impart education to the girls who had been deprived of the educational opportunity because of the

conservative society which opposed the co education in the Abhayeswari High school. The Abhayeswari High school was a boy's school and for cater the need of the female education Rani Mata founded the Girls M.V. School, known as Abhayapuri Balika Vidyalaya. This was only Girls school in this region which played an important role in the expansion of education among the female. The students used to call the teacher as "Guru Ma".

Foundation of L.P.Schools: Rani Abhayeswari also founded primary schools in her estate for the sake of the expansion of education. In 1901 she founded Deuhati L.P.School and in 1908 she founded another school in Dharampur. Students from nearby villages of Burigaon, Naraikala, Pahartuli, Pirdhara, Boalimari, Haripur, Roumari etc. came to these schools for primary education.³¹ In the post Abhayeswari period more schools were founded under the Royal patronage for the expansion of education among the subjects.

Though Rani Abhayeswai was illiterate woman, she was benevolent zamindar and was a patron of the learning. Till the foundation of Abhayeswari High school in 1904, there were only three High Schools in erstwhile Goalpara district of Western Assam, viz, Prithiram High School in Goalpara, P.C.Institution (High School) in Gauripur and Dhubri Boys High School and it was not easy to go to such places for education for all the aspirants of the higher education. The economic and communication conditions were not in favour to all of her subjects, desiring higher education, to go to such distant places for education. On the other hand, neighbouring estates like Gauripur and Mechpara where education was rolled in full swing under Royal care. Infact, it was considered as a part of the Royal dignity to provide educational facilities to the subjects. Encouraged by the exiting situation and to cater the need

of the subjects Rani Abhayeswari tried to educate the children of her subjects. She is remembered by the people of this part of Assam for her valuable contribution to the expansion of education in this region.

After death of Rani Abhayeswari in 1918, her adopted son Jogendra Narayan assumed the rein of the estate but due to his lunatic condition the estate affairs were placed under the administration of the Court of Wards. Mr. Burkley was appointed as the Manager of the Bijni estate, who introduced some reforms in the field of education. The estate Manager Burkley stopped the free education system introduced by Rani Abhayeswari in Abhayeswari High School and half tuition fee was imposed on the students. Though his new policy disappointed many guardians but none came forward to protest against the system. Of course, he introduced the system of granting stipend to the poor and meritorious students. Burkley, also, for the encouragement of the students granted exemption of tuition fee to the poor and the meritorious students and introduced post Matric scholarship. Students passing matriculation examination with first division who were not enlisted for government scholarship were granted post Matric scholarship from the estate for higher education. The scholarship was given up to completion of the graduation. Many students with the scholarship of the Bijni estate successfully completed their higher education and established themselves in the high position of the society.³²

Under Royal patronage Pasduar L.P. school was established in 1926 in the western part of Abhayapuri. Keeping in view of the rapid increase of the students of Pasduar L.P. School, zamindar Jogendra Narayan founded another school in Abhayapuri in 1930, taking away a part of the students of Pasduar School. The school was known as Balak Vidyalaya and presently it is known as 2 no L.P.School. Apart from the

foundation and running of schools on the part of Bijni estate, the zamindars extended help to the subjects in their efforts in foundation of schools. They granted land and monetary assistances to schools, founded by the local people. Zamindar extended help in the foundation of Baitamari High school with in Bijni estate.

Foundation of Girls High School: Another important contribution made to the expansion of education was the foundation of a Girls High School in Abhayapuri. It is to be mentioned here that though a high school was started in 1904 by Abhayeswari in Abhayapuri which was restricted with in the boys. For the female education, a M.V. school was opened in 1910 and the female education was restricted in Minor level only. As a result, the girls were deprived of the higher education. As mentioned earlier the co education of the boys and the girls was not permitted by the orthodox society. Considering the need of a girls High school, Estate Manager Ratikanta Dev, took the bold step to found a Girls High School in 1938 in Abhayapuri town. The Abhayapuri Girls High School came to be known as the Jogendra Narayan Memorial Girls High School. Raja Bharebendra Narayan Bhup Dev was closely associated with the foundation of the Girls High school. Initially classes were started at the Natya Mandir. For the accommodation of the students of distant places hostel facilities were provided them. It was the oldest Girls High school in Western Assam. The students were granted exemption of fees in the initial stage. Besides the Head Master, a post of Superintendent was created in the beginning. The Jogendra Narayan Memorial Girls High school has played a very remarkable role in the expansion of education among the female of this region. About the contribution of the Raj family to the spread of education the Inspector of Schools of the Assam Valley, Sarat Chandra Dev, who visited Jogendra Narayan Memorial School on

11th February, 1939 wrote in his inspection note that, "I am very glad to improvement of its finances and at the instances of the Manager, the Bijni Raj has assumed its old interest in the education of its tenants".³³

Contribution to the establishment of Abhayapuri College: In the absence of a college, the students of the Bijni estate were facing acute problem in getting higher education. Till then, Bholanath College of Dhubri was the only higher educational institution in Western Assam. For the economic problems and inconvenience of communication system a very few students of this region could be able to access to Bholanath or to any other Colleges for higher studies. The need of a college in Abhayapuri was first felt by the Raja Bhairabenra Narayan Bhup Dev who held a meeting in his palace on 9th March, 1945 to discuss about the foundation of a college in Abhayapuri and passed a resolution in this meeting to found a college comprising of Science and Arts stream. The then estate Manager of Bijni Durgeswar Sarma advised the Raja in this matter. With a view to raise the fund for the proposed college, it was decided to collect contribution from the tenants at the rate of one *anna* more on one Rupee of land revenue. On the following years several meetings were held in this regard. Various committees were also constituted and started functioning in this direction. But the planning of the college got a very setback when the Government of Assam passed the Zamindary Abolition Act, 1951. Raja Bharabendra Narayan turned disheartens and left attending in any public function, the planning of the college, thus, lost its earlier spirit. But the people of Bijni were determined to establish the college and it was finally started in 1955. Though, Abhayapuri College was founded by the people of this region, the contribution of the Raj Family and its Dewan can not be denied. Raja Bhairabendra Narayan granted 55 bighas land to this college

and many buildings of the Estate were allotted for the accommodation of the students and the teachers for the initial stages of the foundation of the college.³⁴ Besides, a rich library was founded in Abhayapuri College with the Royal patronage. Several precious books were preserved in the library including English literature, Grammars, Dictionaries and some important Bengali books. A series of Encyclopedia Britannica was also in this library. The library helped the students since its inception in their studies.

Role of Estate official of Bijni in expansion of Education

The Managers and the Dewans of Bijni estate have played very positive roles in spreading of learning among the students of this backward area of Assam. Among them, the worth mentioning were Burkley, who was Manager under the administration of the Court of Wards. The excellent works he did in his tenure of office was the introduction of monthly stipend and scholarship for the poor and the meritorious students of Abhayeswari High school. After Burkley, Gurucharan Choudhury joined as the Manager of the estate, who adopted polices to develop Abhayapuri as a planned town. He took the initiative in constructing the present school building of Abhayeswari High School.³⁵ Another Manager of the estate, who made huge contribution to the development of education in Bijni was Ratikanta Sarma. He was patron of learning and during his tenure of office Jogendra Narayan Memorial Girls High School was founded. After Ratikanta Sarma, Lakheswar Sarma became the Manager of Bijni, who took keen interest in expansion of education in this region. For his assistance the Raijhora High school was founded in Bahalpur under Bijni estate elaka.³⁶

Rani Abhayeswari was the pioneer of the spread of learning among the illiterate tenants of Bijni estate. Her greatest contribution was the foundation of Abhayeswari High School that lit the light of the wisdom

among the people of this region. Abhayeswari High School created a group of brilliant students who not only established themselves in the high position of the society but brought glory to this poor and backward area as well as to Assam. Their excellent services and outstanding contribution to the society have shown the path of the socio cultural change of this backward region of Assam. One of the students of Abhayeswari High School, Banamali Sarma passed Matriculation examination winning first position in Assam Valley in 1933 and won Government scholarship. Raja of Bijni awarded him with “Bailee Medal”, a Gold Medal. He also won “Campbell” Memorial Awards for obtaining highest marks in English in Assam Valley. He joined government service and promoted to the post of Labour Commissioner. Abhayeswari High School was famous for its strong football team. The Raja employed Coach for the training of the player under Royal expenditure. Abhayeswari High School football team earned good reputation in football game in the thirtieth of the twentieth century. It won the prestigious “Gauripur Raj Shield Competition defeating P.C. Institution football team in 1934.³⁷

Besides, Bijni estate donated 10 bighas land and materials of school building to the Committee of Hakama High School. It was the first Assamese school established in undivided Goalpara district in the year 1940.

b. Public works and contribution to Religious field

Till the beginning of the rule of Rani Abhyeswari the Bijni estate administration passed through confusion and instability for several decades because of the intrigue and conspiracy in the Raj Family and the Bhutias raiding. The severe earthquake of 1897 brought havoc to the estate in the early period of Rani Abhayeswari. It was after shifting of

capital of the estate to Abhayapuri the zamindar could throw her attention to the development of the estate and the tenants. However, the little public works that were done earlier were disappeared due to earthquake, Bhutias raiding and shifting of the capital. Rani Abhayeswari and her descendents did a few public benevolent works in the closing chapter of the zamindari rule.

Foundation of Abhayapuri Town: One of the important achievements of Rani Abhayeswari was the foundation of beautiful town of Abhayapuri. It was due to shifting of estate capital from Dimuria, which was completely damaged by the earthquake she founded a new Headquarter for the estate administration in Abhayapuri. Before shifting to Abhayapuri rani stayed at Jogighopa on the bank of Brahmaputra for two years. But she decided to found a new town for the estate capital and thus she selected Abhayapuri. The planning of the town was made by the P.W.D Department of Dhubri. The modern R.C.C. building was constructed after the model of Koch Bihar Palace; the roads were constructed straight connecting all the important places. The plantation was done to enhance the beautification of the town. Head Kutchery of the estate, temple of Kuldevi, residences of the officials, tanks was founded around the Raj Hawli. According to local sources the name of the town is derived from the name of Devi Abhaya, the Kuldevi of Raj Family. Of course, some of the people are of the view that the name Abhayapuri is derived from Rani Abhayeswari, who founded the town. But the living species of the Bijni family told that the name Abhayapuri represents the Devi Abhaya who was family Diety.³⁸

According to the local sources the road of Abhayapuri town was developed, probably, during the time of the successors of Rani Abhayeswari. The road was made with brick and stone which was unique

in comparison with the roads of other contemporary towns of western Assam.

There is lack of information as to ascertain the road communication system developed during the zamindari rule. Perhaps, the road was made by the paramount power for the military purpose during the medieval time. Under the zamindari rule road were constructed by the zamindars with a view to convenience of the communication system between the Sadar Kutchery and the revenue collection Kutcheries in each dihi. Bijni estate had revenue collection centre in Barahayari, Dumaria, Jogikatani, Birjhora, Boitamari, Bahalpur, Rokakhata, Raniganj, Futkimari, Fakragram, Dokara, dolgoma, Damara, krishnai, Rangjuli, Bickali, Bijni Duar and Patiladuha. The land revenue was collected in kinds for which road communication between Sadar Kutchery and the Dihi Kutcheries were essential. For their own need the zamindars constructed new roads between the Sadar Kutchery and the revenue collecting centre and repaired the existing roads. This developed the road communication in the estate. They cleared the jungles and filled up the hole in the way for convenience of the communication. According to the local sources the road between Abhayapuri and Jogighopa via Kabaitari was made during the rule of Rani Abhayeswari, after shifting of the capital at Abhayapuri. It can be presumed that the road connection between Abhayapuri and the Kutcheries of the Dihis were made during the time of Rani Abhayeswari.³⁹ According to Sunil Barman; a resident of Abhayapuri town who is 70 years old has told that the road with in Abhayapuri town was constructed by the zamndar in the early twentieth century with brick and cement. The kutchcha roads prevailed during the zamindari time, have been pitched by the Government after independence under various schemes.⁴⁰

The zamindars of Bijni like other zamindars of Assam founded Hat (weekly market) in different places. We have found references of such Hats founded by Bijni raja in Rang sai, Krishnai, Agia, Salmara, Baitamari etc. Apart from under zamindari administration tanks were digged in various places for drinking water for the ryots. They also founded dispensaries in several places within their estate.

Religious activities: Traditionally almost all the zamindas of Bijni estate were pious Hindu. They founded many temples and repaired the old shrines with the estate funds. They appointed pujaries in the temples and paid them regular salary and borne all expenditure of the temple. Most of the zamindars of Bijni estate made land grant to the temples, and satras within the jurisdiction of their estate.

Rani Abhayeswari is said to be the founder of the temple of Abhaya Devi and Lakhi Narayan in abhayapur. She at the time of shifting capital to Abhayapuri she brought the Kuldevi of Bijni Raj Family Devi Abhaya. Another temple was founded by Abhayeswari by side of the Abhaya Devi was temple of Lakhi Narayan. She appointed Raj Pujari for regular puja of the Gods and Goddesses. Besides, Durga Mandir, Manasa temple, Madan Mohan temple, Chengkal Mahakal temple, Kalibari, Jogganath temples etc. were founded under Royal patronage. Pujas were offered regularly and the pujaris were paid regular salary from the Royal treasury.

Apart from, the Bijni zamindas extended help to preserve the old and historic temples and *thans* in different places with in their estate. Among them, mention worthy, are Ganesh temple in Lalmati, Siva temple in Sivapur, Deohati Parbati temple, Siva temple in Lungai hill, Mahadev temple, Maharani temple in Khagarpur, Jogir dhap in Kakoijan,

and Ragunath Bigra in Srijan Gram. Some of these temples were granted Debottar land by the zamindars⁴¹

Raja Kumud Narayan was very pious zamindar who granted 41 bigas land to Amguri Satra, granted huge land to Bisnupur Satra, where padasila of Sankar Deva was preserved. He also said to have granted land to Kadalmari satra. He took the initiative of the arrangement of regular puja in Bhairab Mandir in Bhairabsura hill. He is said to have founded Dhakina Kali Mandir in Killarjhar and made arrangement of the regular puja in the temple and animal sacrifice to the Devi.⁴⁰ Further, for the maintenance of the Udasintila Siva temple Raja Kumud Narayan donated land to the temple and used to pay Rupees 6 per month to the pujari. In the response to the request of the tenants he founded a temple in the Tukreswari hill and made provision of the regular puja by appointing pujari.

In religious matter, Raja Kumud Narayan extended all round assistance to the tenants and granted Darmattor land for the maintenance of the temples. Both Rani Fuleswari, mother of Raja Kumud Narayan and Rani Abhayeswari were patron of religion and made wide land grants to different temples and satras for maintainence. Rani Abhyesari granted 65 bighas Debottar land to Rangjuli Satra under Habraghat pargan. She also donted 85 bighas land to Gossaibari Satra and extended financial assistance to Dharampur Satra in its repairing works which had been damaged by the earthquake of 1897. Further, she donated land to Nandeswar Devalaya of Dudnai for its maintenance.⁴³

The Bijni estate traditionally made arrangement of various religious festivals for public entertainment. Among these festivals the most important was Durgapuja festival which was considered as a source of public entertainment for the people of the estate.

Durgapuja was being celebrated in Abhayapuri under Royal patronage with great pomp and grandeur since the days of the Rani Abhayeswari. It was developed as an annual festival for the people of this region. Till the beginning of the twentieth century, Durga puja was not celebrated in this region other than Abhayapuri. So, people of all ages' irrespective caste and creed took part in the Durgapuja festival of Abhayapuri. All the days of Durgapuja, large crowd gathered in Abhayapuri to enjoy it. On the occasion of the Puja, Drama, theatre, musical *Jalsa*, different games were arranged in Abhayapuri. Jatra parties were imported from Calcutta and even *Ostad* and Singers from outside also invited. Band party from Punjab was also brought for the occasion of the Durgapuja festival. Besides the stage of Natyamandir, temporary stages were also prepared for this occasion and Drama, theatre, songs and dances were performed day and night during the period of the Durgapuja. Local artist with their traditional instrument presented their songs and dances. The folk songs and folk dances were presented by the local artists that attracted the mass people of this region. According to the local sources, in every year the zamindar expensed over 60-65 thousands to conduct this festival.⁴⁴

c. Development of Art, Architecture, Music and Literature

A few architectural activities were carried out by the Bijni Raj in the first half of the 20th century which is still there in Abhayapuri and its adjoining areas. The Rajbari, (Royal palace) constructed during the rule of Rani Abhayeswari is the best architectural icon of the zamindary period. According to the local sources the artisans and the engineer of the building were the Chinese and the sculpture engraved on the doors and windows also belong to Chinese sculpture. The building is still in the possession of the Raj family which remains in good condition. The

palatial building was built with brick and concrete after the model of Koch Bihar Raj Hawli. The front view of the building speaks itself the glory of the zamindary glamour, is indeed, a very beautiful specimen of the high craftsmanship. The wooden work of the building is outstanding in its sculptural design. It is said the doors and windows were made at Calcutta by the Chinese carpenters and the timber used in it was brought from Burma.

Another concrete building was built during the rule of Rani Abhayeswari in Jogighopa for her residence where she stayed for about two years before shifting of capital to Abhayapuri in 1900 A.D.

Apart from Palatial building few temple and school buildings were constructed during the early twentieth century. Among these, the noteworthy is the school building of the Abhayeswari High school which was the best *Assam type* building constructed ever during the zamindary rule. It was perhaps, made by the State Manager, Gurucharan Thakur under the administration of the Court of Wards. The wooden works of Abhayeswari High school and the long corridor of the school is a best example of the architectural development of the days which easily could attract the attention of the viewers.⁴⁵

Besides, few temples were constructed during this period which was made of wood and tin (aluminum). The temples, though made of wood and tin are beautiful in look at and exposes the high craftsmanship of the past. The temples of Abhaya Devi, Lakhi Narayan, Kalibari, Siva temple, Chengkal Mahakal, Natya Mandir are some of the epecimen of the zamindary architectural activities.

(II). Literary works: The zamindars of Bijni were not very much keen in the literary works like the zamindars of Gauripur and Mechpara.

The little works, those were done in this field were by some of the enlighten Dewans and Managers of the estate. The highly fascinated Manager of Bijnestate, Gurucharan Choudhury was a patron of learning who founded nine libraries in Abhayapuri. He founded the Abhayapuri Club and library in 1922, which was the centre of pleasure and entertainment of the estate officials. Many books both of English and Bengali were preserved there which greatly influenced the readers. The foundation of "Kalaparishad" by Manager Ratikanta Sarma in 1940 resulted in immense intellectual development among the people of Abhayapuri. With a view to attract the reader, various books, magazine, periodicals, newspapers, story etc. were supplied regularly to the Kalaparishad. It gradually developed to a centre of learning and played important role in the intellectual development in this region. It gave birth of many writers, poets, litterateurs, educationist etc. Later on Kalaparishad came to be known as "Bezbarua Bhowan".⁴⁶ More cultural clubs were funded in Abhayapuri in the subsequent period, among which mention can be made about, Bisnapur Sanga, Dharampur Milan Mandir etc. resulting in the rapid spread of the cultural activities in this region.

Rani Abhayeswari was one of the patrons of the Assam Sahitya Sabha Sanmilan held in Goalpara in 1918. She extended financial assistance to the organizers of the Session for the smooth running of the Conference. She also gave manuscript of the book written by Chilari in 1566 for Exhibition in the Session.

Under the patronage of Bijni estate literary works got a new life in Abhayapuri because of the literary zeal of some of the estate Dewans and Manages of Bijni. Radakanta Sarma, Gurucharan Choudhury, Durgeswar Sarma were the patron of literature who extended help in the matter of the literary activities. Under Royal patronage Radhanath Sarma, the Pandit of

Abhayapuri Sanscrit Tol wrote Sanskrit book “Bhabapushpamala”, which was a great creation of the contemporary time. The preface of the book was written by the great literary person of Assam, Kaliram Medhi. Some the estate officials of Bijni estate involved in the literary works and founded a branch of Assam Sahitya Sabha in Abhayapuri. The pioneer of the this noble job was Prabhat Chandra Adhikary for whose endeavour the branch Sahitya Sabha of Abhayapuri was recognized by the Assam Sahitya Sabha. He wrote few books like, ‘Madhab Dev’ in English, ‘Gurustuti’, ‘Dohati’, ‘Tathkakatha’, and ‘Krishnakumar’ in Assamese. The famous poet of Assam was encouraged by the literary movement started in Abhayapuri under the Royal patron published poetry books, like, ‘Arpan,’ ‘Laha’ ‘Ahuti’ etc.

(III). Development of Music and Drama: Bijni Raj family had significant contribution to the growth and development of the music and drama in this region. Indigenous music and culture were popularized under the Royal patron. Holding the musical programme in Rajbari was a Royal tradition of the landlords of Assam. Artists were invited from Bengal, Kanpur, Punjab and other parts of India. The Royal house encouraged the local artists to popularize the folk songs and dances by providing the platform of its practices. On occasion of the religious festivals, especially, during Durgapuja, wide musical programme were chalked out for all the days of the puja. Several local artists presented their songs and dances in the ‘Jalsa’ with their traditional musical instrument, held during the festivals. The indigenous music and musical instruments like, *Dotara*, Flute, Drum, *Khujuri*, *Khutital*, *Nupur*, etc, received impetus and earned huge support of the laymen. Generally, the artists engaged in the folk music were the resident of the remote villages

of Bijni estate. Their comedian, tragic, and legendary songs provided immense entertainment to the audiences.⁴⁷

In 1947, “Kamrupi Natya Sangha,” was founded by some of the drama loving persons of Abhayapuri with the help of Raja Bhairabendra Narayan Bhup Deb and estate official Kuldev Sarma. Kamrupi Natya Sangha played an important role to the promotion of the Natya Andalan in this region. It aimed in to bring a revolution in the Natya Andalan in Western Assam. The Kamrupi folk songs and dances were presented on the stages in Abhayapuri and its surrounding area and, thus, made it popular in this region. Till then, the role of female in drama and the dancing squad was played by male in disguise of woman. Abhayapuri Natyaparishad for the first time against the traditional system organized a dancing group with the girl members and staged dancing programme in different places and earned huge support and inspiration. Rani Sabita Devi, the wife of the last zamindar of Bijni Bhairabendra Narayan encouraged the Natya Parishad by giving financial assistance.⁴⁸ In the subsequent years “Jyoti Sanskritic Sangha”, another Cultural organization of Abhayapuri created ‘*sunami*’ in the cultural arena of this region.

Rani Abhayeswari prepared the base of the development of drama and theatre in this part of Assam. On occasion of the religious festivals, like Durga Puja, Rani Abhayeswari invited Jatra parties, drama parties and theatre groups from Calcutta for public entertainment. Huge gathering enjoyed the flavour of these dramas and theatres. In 1901 stage drama was held for the first time in Abhayapuri. Natya Company, Prabhas Opera, and New Prabhas Operara etc sent their Natya group to stage in Abhayapuri, which won the heart of the drama loving people of this area. Influenced by the Calcutta Jatra and Drama parties, some local people started to stage drama in Abhayapuri. They also staged drama in

Gandhi Maidan for the aid of Bapuji M.E School. Due to the absence of Assamese script, initially, the local drama party played Bengali drama. Later on, Bengali drama was translated into Assamese and thus, Assamese drama began to be staged in this area. Thus, the modern technique of drama, theatre and application of new apparatus in theatre, brought a dramatic change in the Natya Andalan in western Assam.⁴⁹

The abolition of zamindari system, however, no doubt, affected the progress of the Natya Andalan of western Assam.

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CHAPTER - VI

Public Works and Social Welfare activities of the zamindars of Mechpara Estate

6.1. Brief history and genealogy of Mechpara family

Like other zamindari of erstwhile Goalpara district of western Assam, Mechpara was also carved out of Bijni Raj kingdom. According to tradition, due to the intrigue of Thana Kamal Lochan, an official of Bijni kingdom, Mechpara estate was formed as a separate zamindari during the rule of Raja Mukunda Narayan.¹ Thana Kamal Lochan is said to have been the founder of this estate, who got this right from Mughal Emperor. But there were diversity in opinion on the issue of foundation of Mechpara zamindari. According to Buchanan, one Bhagadatta Das was the first zamindar of the Mechpara estate.² On the otherhand, Koch Bihar History has opined in reverse as Khan Choudhury Amanatulla mentions, that Mechpara zamindari had a chronological disparity of the rule of Mukunda Narayan and Thana Kamal Lochan. In fact, Mukunda Narayan was the king of Bijni from 1758-1788 and on the contrary Thana Kamal Lochan is said to have been founded the Mechpara estate in the closing decade of 15th century.³

Due to paucity of documents, it is too difficult to find out the actual founder of the zamindari of Mechpara. After close examination of the different views, one can be convinced that a Mech or Koch leader founded this zamindari. Majority of the scholars, like, E.A.Gait, Khan Choudhury, Rajen Saikia and some others, have agreed that Thana Kamal Lochan was, perhaps, the founder of Mechpara family preceding to the foundation of Koch kingdom by Viswa Singha.

Santo Barman prepared a genealogy in his Ph.D Thesis, entitled, 'Zamindari system in Goalpara District during British rule', where he has shown that Thana Kamal Lochan founded the Mechpara estate in the last quarter of the 15th century, which was conquered by Koch king Viswa Singha in the first quarter of 16th century.⁴ It may be presumed that after the fall of Parikshit Narayan, the last independent ruler of eastern Koch kingdom alias Koch Hajo kingdom, Mukunda Ram, the fourth generation of Thana Kamal Lochan was conferred with the zamindari of Mechpara estate by the Mughal Emperor in the middle of 17th century. Mechpara pargana was a frontier track of Garo hills, for which the Garos occasionally raided the plain and took away many inhabitants of the pargana leaving some others slain. The ruler of Bijni estate failed to provide protection to their *prajas* of plain of Mechpara pargana, which pushed the Mughal authority to think for the safety of the people of the plain. As a result, Mukunda Ram was installed as the Choudhury by issuing Farman in this effect with especial objective to withhold the Garo raiding. As a token of allegiance to the Mughal authority, the Choudhury of Mechpara ought to pay nominal tribute to the Mughal in the form of kind, such as certain number of elephants and precious wood, called *Agar*.⁵

E.A.Gait mentions that Viswa Singha was recognized as the head of the twelfth leading families of the Mech or Koch. Probably, Gabara was one of them⁶ His son Khana alias Thana Kamal or Kamal Lochon (1447-1504) succeeded him and Kamal Lochan was succeeded by his son Megaram as the head of the family (1504-1561). Gobindaram was son of Megaram who succeeded his father in 1561 and held power till 1621. Again Gobindaram was succeeded by his son Mukundaram as the head of the family in 1621-1674.

It was Viswa Singha who founded Koch kingdom subjugating the twelve families of the Bhuyans. Perhaps the local Bhuyans were put under strict control by the Koch kings till they exercised overwhelming power on the kingdom. But after the disintegration of the Koch kingdom, the Bhuyans, traditionally, raised their head again and availed the opportunities relinquished to them by the Bijni king through their incompetency to maintain law and order in the kingdom. The Mughal Emperor entrusted Mukundaram, the hereditary Bhuyan of Mechpara family with the zamindary of the pargana by issuing Farman. Mukundaram was succeeded by his son Sobharam in 1674 and ran the zamindary until 1730 and was succeeded by his son Ronaram. He was very courageous and patriotic person, who had involved in quarrel with the British Resident in Goalpara. Ronaram attacked the Headquarter of Resident Bailey with five hundred Barkandazes. His attempt was repulsed by the British leaving casualties of 50 Barkandazes and Ronaram was dethroned. His zamindary was confiscated but later on his son, Mahiram was recognised as the Choudhury by the British, due to fervent prayer of the mother of Mahiram. He was succeeded by his son Prithiram Choudhury who was said to be the last powerful zamindar of Mechpara estate.⁷ He was conferred with the title of Raibahadur by the British Governor General for his service rendered to the British during British expedition to Garo hills.

After the death of Raibahadur Prithiram Choudhury, dissension among his sons brought the estate to the condition of dismemberment. Disputes arose among his seven sons regarding succession to the estate leading to its partition among his sons. Four of the sons-viz, Khagendra Narayan, Udhab Narayan, Kamal Narayan and Bhadreswar Narayan took among themselves /11/ *anna* interest of the estate, while other three i.e

Bholanath , Tilaknath and Lokanath agreed to take the remaining *5/ anna* interest⁸ In the subsequent years *5/anna* was further divided into *2/anna* and *3/ anna* shares among their successors. Likewise, the *11/ anna* interest was also further divided into *6/ anna* and *5/* interest.

The perpetual family quarrel had utterly ruined the management which involved the tenants in all kinds of difficulties. The situation became so menacing that the British administration had no alternative but to place the estate under the Court of Wards under Section 9.5(a) of the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885 and the provision of the Bengal Court of Wards Act, 1879. On fourth April, 191, A.J.Laine, the then deputy Commissioner of Goalpara district assumed the charge of the estate on behalf of the Court of Wards. Even after Indian Independence and the departure of the British, the state of affairs of Mechpara estate did not improve and it was continued till 1956 when zamindary system was abolished by the government of Assam.⁹

It appears from the forgoing discussion that Mechpara zamindary was a creation of the Mughal administration with a view to offer proper resistance to the Garo intruders to the plain of the Mechpara pargana. The Mughal Emperor Bestowed the zamindar of Mechpara with the title of Choudhury with especial privileges as being the frontier pargana. After accession to the Dewani of Bengal by the East India Company, Mechpara estate came under the Company along with the other estates of Western Assam. Mechpara estate entered into the Permanent Settlement during the time of Lord Cornwallis. The British Government conferred the title of Raibahadur to Prithiram Choudhury for his outstanding service rendered during the Garo expedition. On 19th July Lord Canning, the Governor General of India granted him a Sanad.¹⁰

Due to the family strife The Mechpara zamindary came under the administration of the Court of Wards. The estate was divided among the successors of the family and the state of affairs of the family continued as before till the abolition of zamindary system on 14th April, 1956.

6.2. Developmental works of Mechpara family

So far public welfare activities are concern, mention must be made of the name of RoNaraam Choudhury, Mahiram Choudhry and Prithiram Choudhury, who were involved in the benevolent works for the welfare of their subjects. Due to unavailability of sources nothing can be said about how much public welfare activities were carried out by the ancestors of RoNaraam Choudhury. After Prithiram Choudhury, his descendants, like Khagendra Narayan Choudhury, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, Bholanath Choudhury, and Jotsna Choudhury were remembered for their outstanding public welfare activities

Ranaram Choudhury was a very courageous and patriotic zamindar who could not accept the British domination on him. He was the first Assamese who raised armed protest against the Imperialist British Paramount power. He didn't hesitate to attack the British Resident in Goalpara with 500 Barkandazs. Though he failed in his objective but did not bowdown his head to the British, rather he fled to Garohills where he died like Mirqasim, the deposed Nawab of Bengal who fought against the British for the independence of Bengal but fled to Nepal being defeated where he died. But his action encouraged the freedom fighter to fight for the cause of the motherland. The anti British attitude of the people of this region got their inspiration from the courage of Ronaram. The British Government dethroned him and his zamindary was confiscated and Mechpara pargana was attached with Rangpur collectorat. Ronaram is remembered by the people of Assam for his valour and heroic attempt to

drive out the British from Assam. In the subsequent period the freedom fighters of Assam drew inspiration from his action in driving out the British from India. Of course Ronaram was not given due tribute what he deserved and the Assam history has not make proper justice to him.

Mahiram was recognized by the British as the successor of Ronaram because of the request of his mother but not before 17th February, 1813, he was handed over the charge of the zamindary.¹¹ He often fought against the Garos who frequently raided the plain of the Mechpara pargana. With a view to strengthen the defence of the capital he shifted it to Joleswar from Tikkriquilla, a place bordering Garohills. As Garo incursion posed the greatest threat to the people and the estate, he decided to stop it once for all. Having shifted Headquarter across the Zinjiram River to make it invincible for the Garos who afraid of river, Mohiram Choudhury took offensive and invaded the interior of the Garohills, with the help of British forces and annihilated the raiding force. The Garo raiders were forced to surrender and acknowledged the subjugation of the Mechpara zamindary. Thus, Mohiram stopped Garo incursion to the plain. He was a pious zamindar who made land grant to Modan Mohan temple of Rajbari for its maintenance.¹²

Prithiram Choudhury was the ablest zamindar of Mechpara family, who received the title of Raibahadur from the British Government for his outstanding service to the British. He loved his subjects like his children and efforts were made for all round development of the estate.

Foundation of Lakhipur town: One of the important achievements of the rule of Prithiram Choudhury was the foundation of a new township for the capital of Mechpara estate, known as Lakhipur. Prithiram was also called Lakhi Narayan for which the new town came to be known as Lakhipur. The new township Lakhipur was founded with modern

planning after the model of Koch Bihar town. The construction of the roads and plantation by side of it were done to add the beauty of the town. He devoted much attention to the beautification of the new town for which he opened a fruit garden in the centre of the town. The roads were inter connected with each other and were done like that of the Koch Bihar town. In the subsequent time, Lakhipur developed as a educational and business centre of this region.

The settlement of the people in the town of Lakhipur is itself a testimony of the farsightedness of zamindar Prithiram Choudhury. The *Amlapatty*, *Barkandaz para*, *Brahman para*, and *Halowa para* of the present day Lakhipur are refreshing the memory of the planning of Prithiram Choudhury for the settlement of the persons related with the estate's affairs. Brahmans were the influential citizens of the society were employed in the estate administration and as pujari of the estate. They were allotted land for their settlement in town. Amlapatty was the residential place of the estate official, who was accommodated in the capital town. Barkandaz were the sepoy's of the estate who were allotted particular land for settlement. The business community, known as Hira, was allotted separate land for their settlement called *Hirapara*.¹³ They carried trade with the Garos. In the western corner of the town the Muslim people were allowed to settle down, who were basically cultivators. The Tribal people who were engaged in the cultivation of the *Halkhamar* (agricultural farm) of Royal house were allowed to settle in the outer part of the township. As they were engaged with *Hal*, i.e (plough) their village was called the *Hallowapara*.¹⁴ They had to look after the elephants of the zamindars.

Construction of roads: Besides the roads constructed in Lakhipur town, Prithiram Choudhury constructed many roads for the development

of the communication between the Estate capital and the Kutcheries. Under his patronage roads from Lakhipur to Zamadarhat, and Lakhipur to Jaleswar, were constructed. For the convenience of the devotees of Joibhum Kamakhya temple, a road was constructed from Lakhipur to Jaipur. He constructed another road from Lakhipur to Karaikata for the better communication of the devotees of Siva temple of Karaikhowa.¹⁵

Prithiram Choudhury was patron of learning who founded a primary school in Goalpara. This can be learned from the Report of A.J M. Mill on Assam in 1853, who mentions that there are 10 schools in Goalpara district, of these the Goalpara school was supported by the local fund, subscribed by the zamindar of Mechpara.¹⁶ It indicates that Goalpara school was founded before 1853 during the administration of Prithiram Choudhury, who ruled from 1822 to 1874. The school was promoted to Middle School in 1868 and subsequently to High School. The School came to be known as Prithiram Choudhury High School. Initially Bengali, English and Persian were taught in the School and Assamese became medium of instruction in 1936, when it was introduced as the official language in Goalpara district. Presently Prithiram Choudhury High School has been promoted to Higher Secondary School, which has played an important role in the spread of education in this region.¹⁷

Although the zamindari of Mechpara was partitioned among the successors of Prithiram Choudhury into two parts, /11/ *anna* share and /5/*anna* share, known as *Baro Taraf* and *Chota Taraf* respectively. Some of the family members of both the lines of successors initiated various benevolent works and contributed tremendously to the socio-cultural development of Goalpara as well of Assam. Bholanath Choudhury and

his son Jotsna Choudhury from Choto Taraf and Khagendra Naraaya Choudhury, his son Narendra Narayan and Nagendra Narayan, Udhab Ram and his son Rajendra Narayan, Jatindra Narayan and Surendra Narayan from Bara Taraf did lot of public welfare activities for the benefit of the subjects. They initiated in foundation of schools and colleges, temples, dargah, granted land to the religious shrines, like temples, satras, dargahs etc. Apart from, they also constructed roads, tanks, temples and educational institutions. Besides, the family members of Mechpara made huge contribution to the socio-cultural development, like literature, language, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and drama, etc. Not only that, the Ranis and other female members of this family did not lag behind in the contribution to the socio-cultural development of the region. The Nari Mukti Andalan got a new dimension with participation of the Ranis and other female members of Mechpara family.

Khagendra Narayan Choudhury of Eleven *anna* share adopted developmental schemes for Lakhipur town. He chalked out plan to convert Lakhipur to a leading town of Western Assam. He constructed new palatial buildings in Lakhipur by the Chinese architects and engineers and also carried out scientific plantations. Roads were repaired and new roads were constructed within the jurisdiction of the capital town. For cultural development, he encouraged expansion of education. He extended help in foundation of educational institutions. He invited some educated Bengali families from Calcutta and allotted land for their settlement. Among the immigrant Bengali families, Baroda Haldar was prominent, because of his daughter; Basanti Haldar was married to Chittaranjan Das of Bengal, the famous freedom fighter of India.¹⁸

6.3. Contribution to the development of Assamese literature

Mechpara family was well acquainted with the Bengal Renaissance, lead by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 19th century. As stated earlier that most of the Zamindar families of Goalpara had their second residence in Calcutta. Mechpara zaminder was not exception, they had their rented house at Kalighat of Calcutta, where most of the family members enjoyed their urban life and Children of this family educated in various institution of Calcutta. Being influenced by Bengal Renaissance, some members of Mechpara family felt the need to adopt policies for the development of the Socio-Cultural life of the people of Assam in general and Goalpara in particular. Zamindar Nagendra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara was the torchbearer of this noble job. He was highly enlightened and famous littérateur of Assam who acquired huge experiences on Bengali literature by his long association with the literary world of Calcutta. He came in close association with many famous personalities of Calcutta, like the famous musician Sachin Dev Barman, K.L.Saigal and many others. He enrolled himself in the A.S.L. club of Calcutta too.¹⁹

In his early life, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury started his literary works in Bengali. He wrote his diary in Bengali. His inducement in the literary works inspired other family members of Mechpara estate. His brother, Jatindra Narayan induced himself in literary work. He wrote two books of poetry in Bengali names “Anjali” in 1320 and “Banful” in 1322, (B.S.)²⁰.

H.H Bregnold, the General Manager of Mechpara Estate, did splendid contribution to the socio-cultural development of this Region. Due to his initiative, a library was opened at Lakhipur. A good number of books were collected from different places are preserved in the library. The Lakhipur library and Lakhipur Club provided valuable contribution

to the literary development by creating new literatures. An ambitious project was chalked out by the educated family members of Mechpara estate to develop Lakhipur to a modern town. Under his guidance, efforts had been made for economic development of the estate through opening a tea garden in Nidanpur. He even tried to export wild *Nalkhagra* (wild bush like small bamboo) to Calcutta paper mill to earn money, but he did not succeed. Unfortunately, he was opposed by the orthodoxy Brahmin of Lakhipur, as well as by some members of the Royal family. Being dishearten Brignold went back to London in 1917 and development plans of the estate were left out with his departure.²¹

Nagendra Narayan Choudhury often held meeting with Jatindra Narayan, Kaliram Medhi and some others littérateur and discussed about the development of Assamese literature. Though, Nagendra Narayan born and brought up in Bengali atmosphere with in Rajbari and out side, from his child hood he was curious enough for learning Assamese and gradually, he inclined towards Assamese language and Culture. Of course, his close association with the Assamese friends, like Tarun Ram Phukan, Kaliram Medhi,, Bisnu Ram Rabha and some others, influenced his life and thinking in great extent. No doubt, his matrimonial relation with Ahom Raj Kumari, Prafullabala, the daughter of prince Keshab Chandra Singha, the grand son of last Ahom king, Chandra Kanta Singha, exerted great influence on Nagendra Narayan Choudhury to be complete Assamese in spirit and action. Since then, he devoted himself for the development of Assamese language, literature and culture.

In the matter of re-establishment of Assamese language in Goalpara district, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury played a very remarkable role. Assam was annexed to British Empire in 1826; after signing of the treaty of yandaboo with the Burmese. Initially, the British

Company Government annexed lower Assam and 1838, the upper Assam also brought under the British rule. But the British administrator in Assam was guided by the Bengali officials, who misled the British that Assamese language was a branch of Bengali. As a result Bengali was made official language in Assam from-1836. In the wake of continuous protest of Assamese intellectual and Missionary, Assamese was re-installed as official language in 1873 in Assam except Goalpara district. Nagendra Narayan Choudhury took part sincerely in the movement launched for re-introducing of Assamese as official language in Goalpara. It was due to opposition of the zamindara of Goalpara district, Assamese was not introduced as official language of Goalpara, like rest of Assam in 1873, and rather, Bengali was continued as before. This was because of their close relation with Bengal for which they advocated for continuation of Bengali as court language. It is needless to mention that most of the zamindars of Goalpara district had their second residence in Calcutta and had matrimonial relations with zamindar familis of Bengal.¹⁹

Their estate officials were mostly Bengali who had guided them in running administration as well as in private family affairs. The landed aristocracy of Goalpara region were under great influence of their Bengali Amlas, consequently, they inclined towards Bengali language, culture and literature. Unlike the other zamindars of Goalpara; Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, the only zamindar of this region, loved Assamese language, culture and traditions. He was a true Assamese in spirit and left no stone unturned in re-establishing Assamese as language of Goalpara.

It is to be mentioned here that the landlords of Goalpra were not only the ardent supporters of Bengali language and culture, they also wanted Goalpara district to be a part of Bengal province. Despite the vehement opposition, the Government of India attached Goalpara distri

with Assam in 1874, which was beyond their acceptance. Still the landed gentry did not seat calm and continued their efforts of bringing back Goalpara to Bengal. They spoke Goalparia (Assamese) at home but educated in Bengali. They organized themselves into an association, called "Land Lord Association of Goalpara" in 1918 and efforts were made in creating public opinion in favour of Bengali. Even, under leadership of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, Public meetings were held to aware the people of Goalpara to voice in favour of Bengali language. Prabhat Chandra Barua funded in publishing Bengali Monthly "Prantibashir Jhuli" to spread Bengali language and culture in protest against the Resolution adopted in Assam Sahitya Sabha Session held at Dhubri in 1926. The Pro Bengali sentiment gave birth of "Prantibashir Jhuli" which used to criticize the Pro Assamese, and the Assamese Society and Culture.²⁰

Before publishing "Prantibashir Jhuli" The Land Lord Association of Goalpara under leadership of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua led the Pro-Bengali Movement. Even, a deputation of Goalpara zamindars submitted a memorandum to lord Chelmsford, the Governor General of India who was in official tour in Assam and stayed in Amingaon in 1921, urging him to amalgamate Goalpara district with Bengal Province.²¹

While Nagendra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara family opposed the demand of the Goalpara Land Lord Association, other members of his family, Bholanath Choudhury and Rabindra Choudhury, supported the Association. But the demand of the pro Bengali group was vehemently opposed by the tribal people of Goalpara like-Rabha, Bodos and the Goalpara Sanmilan, an organization of the indigenous people of Goalpara.

After Dhubri, session of Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1926, in the reaction of the anti Assamese attitude of the Bengali people of Dhubri, led by Zamindars Association, inspired some Assamese intellectuals to initiate a pro-Assamese movement in Goalpara to re-establish Assamese as an official language and Medium of Instruction. Dr. Dinonath Sarma, the Dewan of Sidli estate took the responsibility of publishing a Magazine in Assamese to popularize Assamese language and culture in Goalpara. It was Nagendra Narayan Choudhury for whom-Denanath Sarma could publish the first issue of "Awahan" in 1929 in Calcutta, a Assamese Monthly. Nagendra Narayan Choudhry bore all the expenditure of its publication. The Awahan is said to have been a milestone in the history of Assamese literature and Culture. Nagendra Narayan Choudhry loved Assamese from the core of his heart and devoted himself for the development of Assamese culture and literature. Nevertheless, he was- criticized by his close associates and family members and his fellow landed gentry of Goalpara. He was even looked down satiring him that he loved wife's tongue Assamese instead of mother tongue Bengali. He spent a lot of money for the publication of Awahan, for which he even sold the ornaments of his wife to meet the cost of the publications of the Awahan.²²

He was a great writer, littérateur dramatist, storywriter of Assam. He used to publish regularly his story writing in Awahan. Awahan gradually became very popular among the Assamese people. It created a new age and a set of new littérateurs. It published various kinds of articles, story, novel, poetry, prose and traveling account keeping in view the need of the reader. The publication of Awahan was a great contribution of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury towards popularizing Assamese literature. He was a great littérateur, and he had close

association with the outstanding literateurs of Assam. Laksmminath Bezbarua, Tarunram Phukan, Gopinath Bordoloi, Gyanichibhram Barua, Durgeswar Sarma, Raghanath Choudhury, Mahadeb Sarma, Bisnuram Rabha, Jatindra Duara, Gyananath Sarma, Ambhika Bora and Some others.

Apart from publishing of Awahan, Choudhury wrote many short stories, Proses, traveling accounts, dramas etc. and these were published in Awahan and other magazine. His potentiality as a writer was come out in Awahan. He founded Awahan and Awahan discovered litterateur choudhury from zamindar Choudhury. Assam Sahitya Sabha edited a book collecting his short stories. His writing was centred on the poor villagers and tribal society. He reflected the socio-economic picture of the villagers, their habits, customs superstitious believe, social oppressions. His story like 'Pohari' Juni love, Dhanbhoral etc were on the tribal life. Choudhury though was Zamindar but he lived a simple life having close relation with common people of the society. His writing induced his love and feeling on the oppressed people. His short stories, like "Ostadji", "lahar," "Vijaya," "Dodurba", "Binar Jhankar" "Pratigya Paribartan", "Adhikar Dabi" etc, were on the urban life. His notable creations were "Parchim Kamruper Kayashtha jati", "Bodo-Jatir Katha", "Monipuri Pauranik Nritya", "Sangeet Chiyahi", "Prabasir Sanglap", "Ahom Bhasar Puthi" etc. He also wrote many dramas, travelling accounts and biography. His drama Ranaram was on the life story of Choudhury RaNaraam, Kumbha Mela and Agra visit was his travelling accounts. His smirthigrantha was a valuable evidence of the events of contemporary time.²³

His untiring efforts, devotions, love, sacrifices and hard labours enriched the treasure of Assamese literature "The blue print of the

development of Assamese language and literature was prepared in Calcutta in the house of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury located in 4 B. Nafar Kundu Road, Calcutta 3. The planning of the Assamese Sahitya Sabha Session, Publication of the book under Assam Sahitya Sabha, Planning of dance etc., was decided at Kolkata house of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury. Assamese scholars' and litterateurs like Jatindra Nath Duwara, Raghunath Choudhury, Nalini Bala Devi and many others met him at Calcutta house. He was frequently met famous musician of Hindi Film Sachin Dev Barman, artists, like Saigal and Prithiviraj Kapoor in his Calcutta house.²⁴

History of Assam Sahitya Sabha has conceived the important contributions of the members of Mechpara family. Nagendra Narayan Choudhury has made outstanding contributions to Assam Sahitya Sabha for which he has occupied a high position in the history of Assam Sahitya Sabha. As a tribute of his love for Assamese literature and language, Nagendra Narayan was elected as the President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha Session, held at Sibsagar in 1931. He presided over the Sangeet Session of 16th Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha held at Tezpur in 1936.

His impressive Presidential address in Sibsagar Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha revealed his love, affection to the Assamese language and culture

Nagendra Narayan Choudhury felicitated the great comedylitterateur- of Assam, Laksminath Bezbarua with the title of '*Rasaraj*'.²⁵ Another family member of Mechapara estate-Rabindra Narayan Choudhury was elected as President of the Reception Committee of the 13th Dhubri session of Assam Sahitya Sabha held on 1926. Khagendra Narayan Choudhury and his mother Sarala Priya Devi induced in literary works. Goalpara was the host of 1918 Sahitya Sabha

Conference in which Jatindra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara estate was the president of the Reception Committee. Again Bholanath Choudhury of then Mechpara estate presided over the Reception committee of Goalpara session of Assam Sahitya Sabha, held in 1927.²⁶ These are some of the examples of the contributions made by the family members of Mechpara estate to the development of Assamese literature and culture

The relation of Mechpara family with Assam Sahitya Sabha was rooted in after one year of the constitution of Assam Sahitya Sabha. "The history of Assam Sahitya Sabha will remain incomplete without focusing the history of the contribution of Mechpara family to it."²⁷

6.4. Role of Mechpara family in freedom movement

Usually, the landlords and native rulers of India were ardent supporter of the British government throughout the country during freedom movement. When Mahatma Gandhi started Swadeshi movement in 1920 people started boycotting British goods, English school and started using native goods and native schools. The zaminders and rulers of Indian subcontinent extended their allegiance to the British master. All the Zaminder of western Assam sided with the Government except Nagendra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara estate, who secretly encouraged Swadeshi movement in his estate. His attitude was expressed through his writing. References of Swadeshi movement were found in his short stories, like boycotting the British goods, foundation of Mahila Samity, organization of volunteers, hand spinning, weaving, use of Swadishi goods etc. His stories like "love", "Durbhedya", "Osompurna," "Aain", have conceived such references. Nagendra Narayan Choudhury encouraged Swadeshi Aandalan and the people were asked to boycott foreign goods and use native one. Inspired by the Bengal Chemical

factory, founded by Prafulla Chawki, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury founded a Soap factory in Calcutta to produce soap locally. Many local people were employed in his soap factory. He encouraged the people for spinning and weaving to meet up their own need. He tried to encourage local made cloth, match, ink, dhup, colour, gunpowder and wooden furniture. Thus, he also created some scope of local employment

6.5. Contribution to Naraimukti Andalan

The year 1926 is very much important in the history of Assam Sahitya Sabha because of the birth of “Assam Mahila Samiti” under the banner of Assam Sahitya Sabha. The decision was taken in the 13th session of Assam Sahitya Sabha held at Dhubri in 1926, in the wake of the demand for separate women’s origination.

Until 1926, there was no woman organization in Assam. A handful of Assamese educated women taking part in the literary works and some of them participated in the meeting of Assam Sahitya Sabha. The Assam sahitya Sabha, in its every session, constituted a women cell to discuss the way and means of the women awakening. In Nowgong session of Sahitya Sabha held in 1925, Chandra Prabha Saikianee, the leader of “Narai Mukti Andalan of Assam” participated and she delivered an exciting speech for the women of Assam urging them to come out of the cage by breaking its wall and fight for their right and liberty. She criticized the existing *parda* system and the exploitation of the women by the man dominating society. She raised the question as to how they create literature keeping half of the citizen in the confinement. Her exciting lecture awoke the dormant consciousness of the women and a new spirit and awakening was glazing on the faces of the women present there.²⁸

As a result of the demand of Chandra Prabha Saikianee, a resolution was passed at Nowgong Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha to form Assam Mahila Samiti and Chandra Prabha Saikianee was authorized to take initiative to form the Samiti. In Dhubri Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha, held in 1926, President Benudhar Rajkhowa inspired Chandra Prabha Saikianee to convene the First Session of Assam Mahila Samiti.²⁹ She was guided by Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, Mahadev Sarma, Bhuben Chandra Dutta and many others for which the First Session of Assam Mahila Sabha was held in Bijni hall, where a Committee was constituted with Chandra Prabha Saikianee as a secretary. Thus, the Assam Mahila Samiti came in existence in 1926.

Mechpara Zamindar, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury played a very conspicuous role in formation of Assam Mahila Samiti and its growth and development. He helped Chandra Prabha Saikianee, while she came to Calcutta to raise fund for Mahila Samiti. Choudhury not only sheltered her in his residence at Calcutta but also gave her all possible help in collection of money for it. According to personal Diary of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, Chandraprabha was assisted by him in collections of subscription from Rani of sylhet, Rani of Jalpaiguri, Raja Ashru, and from many others in Calcutta. Chandra Prabha, thus, organized fund for *Mahila Samiti* and popularized the *Narai Mukti Andalan* in Assam.³⁰

Rani Prafullabala Choudharinee of Mechpara estate, the wife of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, led the “*Narai Mukti Andhalan*” after Chandra Prabha Saikianee. She was brought into the arena of Assam Mahila Samiti and ‘Narai Mukti Andalan’ by her husband, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury. The Assam Mahila Samiti chalked out plan for emancipation of Assamese women through spreading female education and bringing awareness among the women. Prafullabala Choudhuranee presided

over the Jorhat conference of *Assam Mahila Samiti*, held in 24th March, 1929. Commenting on the performance of Prafullabala Choudharinee as president of Jorhat Conference, Nirupama Borgohai has mentioned in *Abhijatri*, that the hard labour of Chandra Prabha has become successful with the successful conduct of conference by Prafullabala.³¹ Her successful conduct of Jorhat Conference, won lot of appreciations of the leading women of Assam including Ratna Kumari Raj Khowa, wife of Benudhar Rajkhowa. Prafullabala, in her presidential address threw the challenge against the male dominating social system which touched the hearts of the women attending the meeting.

Appreciating the performance as a leader and the influential presidential address of Prafullabala, famous littérateur Chandra Kumar Agorwala wrote in his article. "The rich lecture she delivered as president is an indication that if she involve in literary work she would be a successful litterateur".³²

As a progressive woman, Prafullabala contributed a lot to Assamese literature. Due to her efforts the Painting of "Lova Kusha Yudda" of Harihar Bipra was discovered and published in *Awahan*. Prafullabala served longtime for the *Assam Mahila Samiti*. A letter was found in Mechpara Zamindar family written to Prafullabala by Chandra Prabha Saikianee in 1949, by which she invited Prafulla Bala Choudhuranee to attend Dibrugarh Session of Assam provincial Mahila Samiti.

After Prafullabala, some other women from Mechpara Raj family also served to the Narai Mukti Andalan. Among them, Rani Joytikana Choudharinee, wife of Zamindar Jotsna Choudhury related with this organization. She also opened a weaving school, where she employed many women.³³ Her daughters in law, Dipali Choudharinee, wife of

Zamindar Phalguni Choudhury was also involved in this “Narai Mukti Andalan.

The Assam Mahila Samiti played an important role to bring an awareness among the illiterate women of the orthodox society. It tried to infuse the mind of the illiterate and oppressed women of Assam with their natural right and honour. It is due to the continuous efforts on the part of Assam Mahila Samiti the society of Assam began to realize about the right and honour of the half citizen of the state. As a result, gradually the status and position of the women in the society developed day by day. The *Assam Mahila samiti* is encredited for spread of education among the women and removing of the *parda* system. The contributions of the Mechpara family cannot be denied in the history of the *Narai Mukti Andalan* in Assam.³⁴

6.6. Contribution to Cultural Field

(a) Architecture

Present Lakhipur town is the creation of Mechpara Zamindar Prithiram Choudhury. It was the last capital of Mechpara estate. Lakhipur was selected as capital considering its naturally secured atmosphere, guarded by river Gara in the North and Jinjiram in the South. It is to be mentioned that the Garos feared to cross the river that is why Lakhipur was considered invisible for the Garos.³⁴

As mentioned earlier, Lakhipur town was erected on the model of Koch Bihar town. Roads were constructed straight inter connecting each other throughout the town. Rain trees were planted both side of the roads. Debdaru trees were beautifully planted on the front side of the palace which added exquisite beauty of the *Rajbari*. Garden of mango trees was founded in the centre of the town. The Royal palace built by Prithiram Choudhury was destroyed by earthquake in 1897 but the remains are still

conspicuous to speak the glory of the past. On the wall of main palace a statue of peacock was engraved which added the beauty of the *Raj Hawli*.

There were temples, *Sarai*, head *Kutchery*, hospital. *Vidyalaya*, tanks, residences for the estate officials, place for keeping Royal elephants etc. in the capital town. Royal Kul Devi temple Madan Mohan was near the palace. But the original temple was destroyed by the earthquake of 1897. The present temple was constructed in the subsequent year with wood and tin.

The palace of Mechpara Zamindar in Lakhipur made of wood and tin with outstanding craftsmanship speaks the glory of the Mechpara Raj family. Though the building has been made of wood and tin, the sculpture and decoration of the double storied building attracts the attention of the visitors. These are the witnesses of the glorious architectural and sculptural specimen of high craftsmanship of the feudal age.

One of the shareholders of Mechpara Estate, "*Tin Anni Tarafdar*" had two storied building comprising five rooms in each storey. There was another house ahead of the main Rajhawli-dwelled by *Barkandaz Amlas*, called the *Dewri house*. Tied security arrangement was followed and the security personnel were patrolling the Rajhawli day and night.

On the open field, in front of the Rajhawli, there was main *Kutchery* of the estate and the hospital. By the side of the hospital, there was "*Rangamanch*, "Stage Room" for drama and entertainment.

On the main gate there were two small houses and a statue of Peacock on the wall of the houses, which beautified the views of the gate. There was a high building bordering the house of Barkhdaz called "*Toskhana*" used for entertainment. The Zamindar family enjoyed dances; songs and the guest artists from abroad were welcomed. The

building was built by the architect, brought from China. The present Circle Office of Lakhipur was the office of the Court of wards. Although, the architecture and sculpture of the Mechpara Estate was inferior to that of the zamindars of Bengal, still the remains speaks of the glorious history of Mechpara Raj family and the architectural and technical development of the feudal age.³⁶

(b) Contribution to the Natya Andalan of Assam

It was in the first decade of the twentieth Century, the Natya Andalan is said to be began in lakhipur under Royal patronage of Mechpara family. After the foundation of Lakhipur Club in 1918 the *Natya Andalan* (Movement of Theatre), opened a new chapter in the history of the cultural development of Goalpara in particular and Assam in general. Many members of the raj family participated in the drama and theatre and acted as in different roles. Kiran Chakraborty, Nripendra Narayan Choudhury, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, Jatindra Narayan Choudhury and many others played role in various characters in the Dramas, those staged in Lakhipur *Manch* and earned huge reputation.³⁶

Reputed actress of Hindi Cinema, Mena Kapoor was the grand daughter of zamindar Nagendra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara estate and daughter of Bikram Kapoor. She has made huge contribution to the drama, theatre of Assam as well as to Indian Cinema. She was closely associated with the *Natya Andalan* of Lakhipur and played role in different capacities in the theatres those were staged in Lakhipur. She expressed her experience of the Natya Andalan of Lakhipur stating that staging Drama was a regular practice in Lakh where family members of the zamindar took part.³⁸

Participation of female character in Drama and Theatre in Lakhipur was the best gift of the Mechpara family to the Natya Andalan of Assam. Mechpara family was advanced in their outlook. They took initiative in the participation of the women in Stage Theater in such a period of time when the conservative society did not allow the women to go out of the four walls of the house. Nagendra Narayan Choudhury was the pioneer in this regards because for his constant endeavouring, the women were inducted in the Theatre and Drama and performed in the stages.

Jatindra Narayan Choudhury, another zamindar of this family also made valuable contribution to its development. Women from Zamindar family like Snehlata Choudharinee, Lily Choudharinee, Yuthika Choudharinee, Nirupuma Choudharinee, and Shanti Choudharinee acted in the stage along with other like Pirikiti, Khuku, Latifa, Feli, Haripriya and some others.³⁹

Nagendra Narayan Choudhury was famous dramatist and writer at that time who wrote numerous dramas on various stories. Some of his dramas were selected and staged in different rangamanch of Lakhipur. The most important Dramas, those staged in Lkhipur for public entertainment written by Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, were Basanta. Pramila, Oirabat Hathi, RaNaraam and Shiv Mandir.⁴⁰ The most popular actors of the period were Nripendra Narayan Choudhury, Salendra Narayan Choudhury, Prafulla Das, Sudangsha Chakraborty, Dharmeshwar Ghose and Rajni Kanta Singha. They were directed and encouraged by Nagendra Narayan Choudhury and local actor Kiran Chakraborty.

Arun Chandra Choudhury, the only living successor of Mechpara Family expresses his experience on Nagendra Narayan Choudhury who was Writer, Producer, Director and Actor of Drama. He told about the life

and works of the hero of Mechpara family and the martyr of Assam, RaNaraam. An act was played on him where Rajkumar Indra Narayan Choudharinee, Amalendu Choudhury, Tribendra Narayan Choudhury, Jaisree Choudhury, Tuku Barman, Amitabha Choudhury, Dev Kapoor and Mena Kapoor performed. Due to the efforts of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury 'Samrat' and 'Basanta Rani' staged in Rangamanch. Arun Choudhury was influenced by the ideology of Nagendra Narayan Choudhury such an extent that he went to Bombay to learn photography and worked there with famous Cameraman Sudhir Majumdar. Later on, he acted as Assistant Cameraman in the cinema like "Jog Biyog", "Uleroth" in Calcutta. He was associated with the film "Puberan" which was awarded silver medal.

Arun Choudhury with the help of some actors of Lakhipur founded "Anchalik Sangeet Natak Samaj" in Lakhipur. The 1st Drama Festival was organized in Lakhipur under the banner of Lakhipur Anchalik Silpi Samaj. The then Chief Minister of Assam Mahendra Mahan Choudhury participated in this festival.⁴¹

Thus the Natya Andalan in Goalpara developed day by day, due to the devotion, love and encouragement of the Mechpara Family and occupied an important place in the Natya Aadalan history of Assam.

(c) Music

Mechpara Zamindar Family closely connected with Music and Drama equally. Involvement in music began from the successors of Raibahadur Pritiniram Choudhury. His grand son Jatindra Narayan Choudhury was not only a litterateur and painter but was also reputed singer. His son Sourendra Narayan was a good operator of piano. Monindra Narayan Choudhury, the living successor of Mechpara family is a good singer who himself has written many songs and composed

music for them. He was an artist of All India Radio; Shillong Station in 1950.⁴¹ Arrangement of musical programme in Raj hawli was a traditional act of most of the zamindar families of western Assam. It was an aristocratic fashion pursuit from the zamindar family of Bengal. It is already mentioned that all the zamindar families of Goalpara district had their second residence in Calcutta for which they were well acquainted with the cultural development of Bengal under the patronage of zamindars in their respective estate. In pursuance of this, like other zamindars of Goalpara, Machpara family also arranged Musical Night in Rajhwali. Singers, Jatraparties from Bengal as well as from locality were invited to attend the programme for public entertainment.

For the teaching of music one Mostan Gama, a Punjabi musician was employed who taught music to Zamindars family members. Till to the partition of India he performed his duties in teaching in Lakhipur.

Mena Kapoor, the grand daughter of Nagendra Narayan Chourhury was a famous play back singer, who sung for the film in Bombay. In early life Mena Kapoor learned music from Nagendra Narayan Choudhury. Due to her enthusiasm, she came to Bombay and became famous playback singer. She performed as play back singer of Hindi and Bengali film.⁴³

According to Arun Choudhury, Mena Kapoor's mother used to sing Assamese rhymes and Kritan while she was in Bombay. Mena herself joined her mother in the singing which impressed famous singer Manna Dey, who had close relations with this family.

Another artist of Mechpara family was Rani Sabita Davi of Abhayapuri, who was niece of Khagendra Narayan Choudhury of Mechpara estate. She acted as the secretary of the Assam State committee

of All India Sangit Academy. It was for her efforts, first Bihu Celebrations was observed in Abhayapuri.⁴⁴

(d) Development of Painting

Painting was developed as a hobby for some of the members of Mechpara Family. A hall for the purpose was built in Rajbari which is still existed, where painting was practised. We find the influence of Bengal on painting of Mechpara Family. Kalighat of Calcutta, the centre of artistic activities of Bengal was the residence of this family, for which they came close contact with the painting of Bengal. Besides this, the involvement of painting was considered as aristocratic tradition. Thus, some of the members of Mechpara Family were attracted to painting. Expert painters were employed in Rajhawli for the training of the family members about the technic of drawing and painting.

Nagendra Narayan Choudhury and his brother Dinendra Narayan Choudhury educated in the art of drawing and painting from Calcutta Art School which also inspired the new generation of Mechpara family. Initially, Dinendra Narayan was tried to send to Japan for the study of drawing and painting but he refused to go there. Ultimately, he studied painting in Calcutta. He became good painters and has done many portraiture paintings of legendary events and heroes. His narrative painting on a "tribal way of living" received wide appreciation and admiration of the viewers, which is still seen in Rajhawli of Lakhipur.

Shadan Bhowmic of Dhubri was employed in Mechpara Rajhawli to train painting for the children of the zamindar family. As a result, some of the members of the family have been enriched with the experience of the art of drawing and painting. Mention may be made of them are, Jatindra Narayan Choudhury, Snehlata Singha, Nirupama Singha, Kanika

Singha, Bholanath Choudhury and some others. A painting stand is preserved in Rajhawli which is said to have been used by Bholanath Choudhury.⁴⁵

Zamindar Jatindra Narayan Choudhury published a book in Bengali "Chitraparichaya" describing the painting and drawing, portraited by the artists of the family member of the Tin Anni-branch of Mechpara Zamindary. The first volume contains the descriptions of 51 portraits but the 2nd volume is untraced. Unfortunately, only few of the portraits are in the disposal of the Rajhawli.

However, the paintings preserved in Rajhowli and the Chitraprichaya itself are the evidences of the pursuance of the art of drawing and painting by the family members of Mecpara Family. Practice of painting, drawing and illustration was a traditional act of the Mechpara Family.

Like the painting of Kalighat of Calcutta, the artist of Mechpara family illustrated portraits of the different Gods and Goddesses with colour painting. The basic Characteristics of the art of Painting are manuscript miniature. We find some specimen of the portraiture painting in Rajbari of Mechpara. The illustrated paintings are mostly religious. Some of the secular paintings were also executed. The portraiture paintings found in Rajbari are as Sri. Sri. Kamakhya Devi, Dhruba, Durga, Sita, Debdasi, Karna Kunti etc. The art and painting illustrated by the Mechpara family members are of various characters. Some portraits are classical and religious and some others are secular. Among the religious portraiture painting is Kamakhya Devi in Mahabirvab, Dhruba, Durga, Balmiki Sita, Har-Parbati. Among the legendary arts, mention can be made of Behula Lakhindar, Damayanti, Urbashi, Janmandha, Mira,

Pundarik Mahashita, Ahalla, Sayambar of Radha, Bettasur, Dusmanta hunting etc.

Among the secular portraiture those are mentioned in Chitraparishaya of Jatindra Narayan Choudhury are Rupdhup Chitragada, Monajit, Mayamukti, Ashok swapna vilas, Bidya Obidya, Anusashan, pragyan Progati, Jambubati, Kailas Gunjuri Sagar, Kirat Arjun, Purbi Rajini, first meeting of Sabitri Tilak Sita etc. Among the artists Nerupama Singha is the only living character who is residing in Calcutta. "Monajat" illustrated by Saurindra Narayan Choudhury was presented to Sir Sadullah, the chief Minister of Assam. His illustration of Mahatma Gandhi in the pose of Spinning with charka was presented to Moti Bora, Revenue minister of Assam which is now hanging on the wall of Assam Assembly house. According to local source a painting on "Goalini" executed by Kanika Choudhury was presented to famous Thakur family of Calcutta. Snehlatta illustrated portrait on "Jaymati" is preserved in Assam State Museum.

The Assam Sahitya Sabha in its Guwahati Session acknowledged and admires the artistic activities of the family members of Mechpara Family in fine arts and awarded them for their valuable contributions to the field. Accordingly, Saurendra Narayan Choudhury was given 1st prize, Nirupama Singha second and Snehlata Choudhury fourth.⁴⁶

One important characteristics of the paintings of Mechpara family, notwithstanding, some shortcoming, the illustrations lay in the fact that the narrative sense of the popular mythological topics are depicted in connected sequence and the figures are made big and small according to the necessity of the story. The technique and finishing applied to the illustrations and illumination of the painting reflected the Bengali influence on the paintings with some local elements naturally entered.

6.7. Contribution to Religious field

Most of the zamindars of the Mechpara estate were pious in heir religious attitude. From the time of the founder of Mechpara estate Thana Kamal Lochan down to the last Zamindar of this family made huge contributions to the religious field of the estate.

Initially, the Mechpara family was *Vaisnavite* and followers of *Mahapurusia sect*. The first zamindar of Mechpara estate adhered to the vaisnavism from one Narahari Thakr who was Satradhikar of Barpita Satra. Since then to the time of late Raja Bahadur Prithi Ram Choudhury, the family followed the Mahaparusia faith propagated by Srimanta Sankar Dev.⁴⁷ There are a legend about the foundation of Balijan Satra. According to Baneswar Dev, the Satradhikar of Balijansatra that after embracement of Vaisnavism, zamindar Thana Kamal lochan wanted to bring “*Padasila*” (footwear) of sankar Dev which was preserved in Barpeta Satra. But his proposal was vehemently opposed by the disciple (Bhakta) of the Satra. Surprisingly, the Satradhikar received a Devine message in dream that the “*Padasila*” be split-up and to give away one part to the zamindar. Indeed, he found the pada sila Splited and gave a part to Thana Kamal lochan accordingly. Since then, the part of *Padasila* was kept in Rajbari till the time of Rana Ram Choudhury. But contrary to their true faith Rana Ramm Choudhury used to perfom Sakti puja like Goddess Durga, Kali, and Parbati etc. It was said Rana Ram engaged continuous war with Garos for which he required blessing of the Devi Durga and Kali to win over it. As he started Shakti Puja at Rajhawli he shifted *Padasila* to ensure its sanctity from Rajbari to another place where it was setup founding Satra called Bapurbhita Satra according to the Vaisnavate manner. Radha Kanta Thakur was employed as its satradhikary and to take care of the holly Padasila.⁴⁸

There is a legendary story about the embracement of Shakti faiths by the Mechpara Zamindar". It is said that once one of the ears of the zamindar was torned away by an elephant while he was coming home from abroad. So, he was suggested to perform the Puja of the mother, "Goddess Durga" by a Pandit. Whatever may be the reason, the Mechpara family converted to Shakti belief during the time of Rana Ram Choudhury. In fact, the ancestors of Mechpara family had been believer of Saivism.

After RaNaraam, his son Mahiram Shifted Satra from Bapurbhita to Balijan and granted three thousand bigas of land for its maintainence.⁴⁹ The Satra is still functioning and descendants from Narahari line are functioning as the Adikary. Subsequently, the Zamindars of Mechpara founded more satras and extended help in spreading vaisnivsim in this region.

According to local sources, Mechpara zamindr founded the Baguan Satra, Baikuntapur Satra, Narayanpur Satra and Nalna Satra. The family Diety of Mechpara Family was Madan Mahan. The temple of Madan Mohan was built near Rajhawli and regular Puja was being offered by the Rajfamily.

Celebrations of Durgapuja with great pomp and glamour were a source of public entertainment under Royal banner. The Royal tradition regarding celebration of Durga puja is still being observed in Lakhipur. In pursuance to the Royal tradition during Durgapuja a colourful procession is being brought out with an open sword in hand in the style of a Barkandaz with sepoy uniform right from *Shashti*, the day of the installation of the Diety on the *Mondap* to *Dashami*, the day of Bisharjan.

There is an old Siva temple in Lakhipur which stands as an evidence to prove that the zamindar of Mechpara had been the believer of *Sivate cult* originally. It is said the Zamindar house built a beautiful temple in Lakhipur and Gopal Das, a Sage was employed as the pujari of the Siva temple who offered puja regularly. The zamindar bore all expenditure of the temple including the salaries of the pujari. The Royal house spent lot of money for the construction of the temples.

The Mechpara family arranged Melas and Festivals for public entertainment with Royal expenditure during Durga puja. The local source has furnished informations about the holding of Mela and festivals under Royal patronage at the time of Durgapuja and Bura Buri's Mela. Famous artist of Indian film, Meena Kumari wrote in her book "Lakhipurer lamba Katha" about these festivals which she attended.⁴⁹

On the occasion of Puja and Mela Musical programmes, game competitions and other entertainment programme were undertaken by the zamindar house. Local and guest artists performed their musical programmes which gave immense pleasure to the local audiences. "Jalsha" were held bringing singers from outside like, Calcutta, Lucknow, Kanpur and Punjab. Local artists delivered their music with their traditional musical instrument, like, *Dotara*, flute, drum, *Khunjhuri* etc.⁵⁰

The Mechpara Zamindar spent lots of money for the spread of religion and public entertainment. They made land grant to different satras and temples. As mentioned, 3000 bigas of land was granted to Balijan Satra. Zamindar Katiram Choudhury assumed the full responsibility of Jaibhum Kamakha temple (Sunarai). He granted 364 bigha land and Rs-968 yearly for the maintenance of the temple. After abolition of Zamindari system the Govt. of Assam took the responsibility of the temple and continued granting the said amount for the salary of the

pujari.⁵¹ Mechpara zamindar granted eight bigha lands to Shyamrai Satra established in Goalpara. We find the reference of the donation of 60 bighas of land to Baguan Satra.⁵² A road was constructed from Lakhipur to Jaibhum Kamakhya temple for the convenience of the devotees.

Thus, we find Mechpara Zamindars played a vital role in the matter of spread of religion and helped the subjects in their religious activities.

6.8. Contribution to the expansion of Education and learning

As we find that in the Second half of the 19th century a composite educational policy had been adopted by the British Indian Govt. throughout the country. The western model English education with secular syllabus and curriculum was followed in India. Higher educational institution like colleges and universities were founded in the big cities like Calcutta, Madrass, and Bombay. The new educational policy was expanded gradually in other parts of India. All categories of schools, i, e Primary, Middle and High schools were established in the last quarter of 19th century throughout the country including some parts of Assam.

The landed hierarchies of the country specially the Zamindars of Bengal took initiative in the introduction of educational system in their respective estates. Pursuing the foot steps of Bengal zamindars, zamindars of undivided Goalpara District of Assam took initiative in the establishment of schools for the spread of western education among their subjects. Zaminders of Gouripur Raj Estate first established school in this region. Gradually all the zamindars of western Assam started establishing educational institution in their respective estates.

The motives behind the establishment of schools, Madrassa and Sanskrit tols by the zamindars are: firstly, the Mughal Emperor encouraged the zamindars to take public sevice for the benefit of he

subjects, for which they were granted rent free land or deduction from jama.; secondly, pressed by the demands of the government and stressed further by the need of the subjects, zamindars participated in some agricultural development works; thirdly, some of them to satisfy their religious sentiments or craving for perpetuation of their names, built roads, bridges and *serais* and liberally maintained them; fourthly, responsibilities conjunction with the individual philanthropic zeal of some of the zamindars account for the public welfare works.⁵³

The zamindars of Western Assam, being the follower of Bengal zamindars endeavoured in public welfare activities. Some of them established educational institution to display that they were not behind to other zamindars regarding spread of education in their estate. Secondly some of the Zamindars felt the need of educating their subject for the progress of their estate. As expected by the framer of Permanent Settlement, some of the zamindars felt the need to expend a part of their income for the welfare of their subjects.

Like the other landlords of Western Assam, the Mechpara Zamindars felt the need of educational institutions for expansion of education among their *prajas*. Prithram Choudhury was an enlightened zamindar who did lot of benevolent works for the welfare of the subjects. He was patron of education and learning and founded schools for the education of his subjects. He is said to have founded primary and Middle schools in Lakhipur and Goalpara. The school founded in Goalpara was promoted to High School in 1868 that came to be known as Prithiram High school. It was the premier educational institution of this region and played an important role in spreading education in this backward region of Assam. He died in 1874.⁵⁴

Ananda Ram Barua, the famous educationist of Assam was a student of Goalpara School during the period of 1861-186 as mentioned in his biography, edited by S.K Bhuya. During this period his father, Garga Ram Barua served as Sadar Amin of Goalpara district and Anandaram Barua read in class v & vii in Goalpara schools. This indicates that there was a Middle English school in Goalpara before 1861, and might it have been founded earlier of 1853, as primary school by Prithiram Choudhury and later on promoted to High school. Probably, the name Prithiram was attached with the Goalpara High School to convert it to Prithiram Choudhury High School.⁵⁵ According to the report of A.J.M. Mill, dated 1853, there were 10 schools in Golapara District. He mentions them as –

1. Goalpara 2. Mornai 3. Kamarptah 4. Lachipoor 5. Juggeegopha 6. Singhamara 7. Kakripara 8. Bilasipara 9. Dhobree 10. Garaw School. It is presumable that Goalpara School and Lakhipur School were founded by Mechpara zamindars in the fiftieth of Nineteenth Century.

In addition to the financial help extended to the poor and meritorious students for their higher education, Tarun Ram Phukan, the freedom fighter of Assam and Minister, (after independence of India) studied his Bar at Law in London from 1901-1905, with the financial assistance of this family, because of his friendship with Bholanath Choudhury, son of Prithiram Choudhury of Mechpara estate. Tarun Ram Phukan, after his return, encouraged the members of zamindar family to go for higher study in abroad. Inspired by Phukan, Satyandra Narayan went to London for study Bar at Law. He returned home becoming Barrister, with an English spouse. After him, Rajendra Narayan also got his Bar at Law from London. Nevertheless, the family member of Mechpara Zamindary extended full co-operation to the aspirants of higher

education. Besides, Tarun Ram Phukan, Dr. Naraes Choudhury studied Medical Science and became Doctor, Annada Prasad Choudhury and Ghaneswam Thakur were also provided financial assistance. Anada Prasad Chakraborty won gold Medal in the agricultural exhibition in Dhubri.

The most important contribution ever made by the Machpara Family to the expansion of Higher education in this region was the foundation of Bholanath College at Dhubri, the district Headquarter of Goalpara district in 1946. Mechpara Zamindar, Jotsna Choudhury contributed one lakh rupees and 52 beghas land for the foundation of the College in the name of his father Bholanath Choudhury for which it came to be known as the Bholanath College. The college founded on 16th August, 1946 and its classes started in the residential building of Mechpara zamindar at Dhubri in ward No.1 under present Dhubri Municipality, along with some temporarily shed made with tin and bamboos. The College affiliated to Calcutta University until the foundation of Gauhati University in 1948.⁵⁶ Bholanath College, thus established in the pre independent period, was only College in western Assam, which played a very significant role in the expansion of higher education in this region. It was the only higher educational institution in lower or western Assam. Thousand of students have made their career bright and secured high position in the society by educating in this higher educational institution. The college produced high profiled figures of educationist who achieved high status and reputation in national and international arena.

Furthermore, Mechpara Family inspired higher education by giving stipend to the meritorious and poor students for their higher studies. In

1934 Kalipada Sen, who passed Matriculation with fame, was given Rs. 20/- per month as scholarship for higher education.⁵⁷

The students passing Matriculation examination with First division from Prithiram Choudhury High School were awarded Prithiram Award, by Mechpara Zamindar family. The topper of Goalpara district in Matriculation examination was awarded Khagendra Narayan Award which comprised of a Gold Medal. Apart from, two students having 1st division from Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley were awarded scholarship by the Mechpara zamindar family.⁵

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CHAPTER - VII

Public Works and Social Welfare activities of the zamindars of other Estates of Western Assam

(A) Karaibari Estate

7.1. Brief History of Karaibari Estate

Karaibari was one of the Permanently Settled estates of Western Assam. The territories of Karaibari estate are presently, shared by the West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and Dhubri district of Assam. The estate covered an area of 51 square mile.¹As stated earlier, Karaibari pargana was under Bijni kingdom within the jurisdiction of the *Dhakhinkul sarkar*, as constituted by the Mughal Korari. It was bordering with Garo Hills for which the Garos raided this plain frequently. This led the Mughal Emperor to entrust its administration to its hereditary chiefs conferring title of Choudhury. Thus, Karaibari estate was carved out of Bijni estate as frontier zamindary in the middle of 18th century.

Karaibari estate has its long history of its own. It had been an independent kingdom, known as Kashba kingdom with Kashyapnagar its capital. As mentioned earlier, Dharma Narayan, the king of Kamata annexed Kapili valley to his kingdom by killing its king Suvahu, the last king of Barahi Pal dynasty. His son Padmanabha, after fall of his father, fled to west and wrested the Kalo-Jhingiram valley at the foothill of Garohills from the reigning Garo Chief in the middle of fourteenth century. He married a Dimacha Bodo princess and consolidated his position there. His son Kashyap established an independent kingdom there with its capital in Kashyapnagar, later came to be known as Kashba,

situated near present Garobadha. The name Karaibari came out from Kashba in due course of time.²

During Mughal rule, Kariabari acquired chieftainship from the Mughal Emperor and the chief was called Choudhury. It was separated from Bijni kingdom with a view to resist the Garo insurgency that raided the plain occasionally. The Choudhury of Karaibari was exempted from paying land revenue but had to pay for the Sayer, they levied on the Garo mountaineers in the form of certain elephants to the Mughal Thanadar at Rangamati.³ In the initial stages of the British rule the zamindar of Karaibari used to pay cotton to the British as revenue. The payment of revenue in kind was replaced by money in 1791.⁴ In 1791, the estate brought under the Decennial Settlement which was converted to Permanent Settlement like other zamindari of Bengal and the Jama was fixed at C.Rs.3062-7anna-5 paisa.⁵

7.2. Genealogy of Karaibari Estate

Padmanabha, who is said to be the founder of the Karaibari estate in 1350 was succeeded by his son Kashyap.⁵ He was the real organizer of the Kashoba kingdom, later came to be known as the Karaibari estate, who founded his capital in Kashyapnagar.⁶ No information is available of his works and about of his successor. The history of Kashba is obscure from 1400 to 1495 A.D. When Alauddin Hussein Shah invaded Kamata kingdom in 1498 one Malkumar was mentioned as the Bhuyan of the Karaibari in some of the chronicles. Hussein Shah founded Muslim colony conquering Kamata and his son Danial was left as the Governor of the occupied land before his return to Gauda. Soon after the departure of Hussein Shah, the Bhuyans combined themselves together under Malkumar and uprooted the rule of the Muslim killing Dannial and his garission.⁷ The whole territory of Kamata came under the Bhuyans' which

were divided among them into small principalities, due to lack of central power. Thus Malkumar became independent ruler of Karaibari. Malkumar ruled till 1520 and was succeeded by Nagakha who ruled the territory till 1539. Nagakha was followed by his son Durlabendra, who ruled for one year and was killed by Viswa Singha. Karaibari came under Koch kingdom during the rule of Viswa Singha but this was accepted by Charu Chand, the son and successor of Durlabendra who revolted against Koch King Nara Narayan but he was defeated and killed by the Koches in 1555.

The history of Karaibari dated from 1555 to 1740 is obscure. Ram Govinda and Madusudan are said to be the ruler of Karaibari under the Koches. Due to paucity of the source materials nothing can be said firmly about the ruler of Karaibari or their relation with the powerful Koch kings. However, the Persian chronicles furnishes some information about Karaibari in connection with the war between the Mughal power of Bengal and the Koch Hajo kingdom. The Mughal invaded Koch Hajo kingdom of Parikshit Narayan and annexed it to the Mughal Empire, and thus, Karaibari came under the Mughal administration. It was made a pargana and recognized as the frontier dependency of Bengal and its defacto ruler was allowed to govern it as a border chieftain, called Choudhury. The Choudhury of Karaibari and Mechpara, as stated earlier, were entrusted with the responsibility to resist the Garo insurrection and raiding to the plain of the border areas of the Garo Hills. When British East India Company ascended to the Dewani of Bengal, Surya Narayan was the zamindar of Karaibari estate. Surya Narayan died in 1776 and was succeeded by his son Dharma Narayan, who ruled for two years only. The last ruler was Mahendra Narayan Choudhury, who was most powerful, vigorous and patriot one. Mahendra Narayan carried out

expedition against the Garos and forced them to acknowledge his suzerainty and agreed to pay tribute. The Garos, who had frequently raided plain and harassed the peasants dwelling in the slope of Garo Hills, To resist the further incursion of the Garos, Mahendra Narayan Choudhury built up several forts all along the passes of the Hills, viz, Fulbari, Belbari, Singimari, Bagargoan, Garobada etc. and maintained a regular band of Barkandazes at each fort. He claim control over the extensive territory of the Garo Hills.⁸

During the tenure of Mahendra Narayan Choudhury Karaibari estate brought under the provision of the Permanent Settlement but he evaded payment of revenue to the British East India Company Government. In 1798 the Government had to send troops to realize arrears of revenue. He challenged the British authority and involved in conflict with them sheltering in dense forest. Mahendra Narayan fought for long time with the British. He was declared as a refractory zamindar and in 1809 his estate Karaibari was sold out by the Board of Revenue to Ramanath Lahiri of Rangpur for arrear payment at Rs. C-23,500. Lahiri found it very difficult to take over the possession of the estate. Mahendra Narayan threw himself into the jungle. Unfortunately, a sudden uprising of the Garos in 1815 caused the whole family of Mahendra Narayan slained and Mahendra Narayan was arrested by the British. His territory was attached and managed by the Government officials for some years because of the auction purchaser could not cope with the affairs of the estate.⁹

Karabari estate was partitioned because Ramanath Lahiri, the auction purchaser of the estate, sold $\frac{1}{4}$ of its share to Radakanta Lahiri in 1810, which was called the $\frac{1}{4}$ *anna* proprietor of the estate of Karaibari. The portion under Ramanath Lahiri was called $\frac{1}{12}$ *anna* estate.

Litigation was commenced on the question of partition of the zamindary which ended with partition of the estate in two blocks. The partitioned was confirmed by the Board of Revenue on 25th April, 1884 with creation of separate *Touzie* for both the parties. *Touzi* no 16 was prepared for the 4 *anna* share and *Touziem* no 12 for 12 *anna* sharers under the Goalpara collectorate.¹⁰ At that time Balda Sundari Devi and Gunamari Devi were the proprietor of /4/ *anna* zamindary and Nilkamap Lahiri and others were proprietors of the /12/ *anna* zamindary. The formation of Garo Hills district in 1869 caused the loss of territory by the zamindar of Karabari. A large volume land of the /4/ *anna* zamindary and small portion of /12/ *anna* zamindary was taken away from the zamindar to form the Garo Hills district.¹¹

The zamindars of Karaibari (both /4/ *anna* and /12/ *anna* share) were absentee zamindars. They used to run the administration of the estates from their residence from Rangpur and Naldanga through their representatives. The zamindar of /12/ *anna* share resided at Rangpur while the zamindar of /4/ *anna* share resided in Naldanga, presently in Bangladesh. Ramanath Lahiri and his successors, Radhakrishna Lahiri, Bhabani Prasanna Lahiri, Krishna Prasanna Lahiri, and Gauri Pasanna Lahiri hereditarily enjoyed the zamindary of Karaibari.^{11a}

In 1937 /4/ *anna* estate came under the rule of the Bengal Court of Wards which was better called /4/anna Lahiri Wards estate. The Lahiri estate contained two shares, one was under the Court of Wards and other was managed by the proprietor himself. At the time of the abolition of the zamindary system the share holders of both the estates were increased. Following were the share holders of the Karaibari estate:

(a)./12/ *anna* estate

1. Babu Bhabani Prasanna Lahiri.

2. Krishna Prasanna Lahiri.
3. Sarojini Devi, widow of last zamindar Jatindra Mohan Lahiri.
4. Shitesh Chandra Maitra.
5. Bindu Basini Devi.
6. Naraesh Chandra Maitra.
7. Khitish Chandra Maitra.
8. Monoranjan Maitra.
9. Babu Munindra Lahiri, son of zamindar Jatindra Lahir.

(b): /4/ *anna estate*;

1. Naraesh Chandra Lahiri of Naldanga.
2. Kiro Chandra Devi.
3. Nipundra Chandra Lahiri and Nripendra Chandra Lahiri.
4. Sailesh Chandra Lahiri.
5. Dinesh Chandra Lahiri and Bhabesh Chandra Lahiri.
6. Nikhilendra Chandra Lahiri and Suchil Chandra Lahiri.
7. Namita Prabha Devi, wife of Nripendra Chandra Lahiri.

7.3. Benevolent works of the zamindars of Karibari Estate

So far benevolent works of the Karaibari estate is concerned, the estate can be ranked last in the list of the benevolent works of the zamindari of Western Assam. This is because of the reason that the hereditary ruler of Karaibari was ousted from power by the British in early Nineteenth Century and the estate was sold out on auction to Ramanath Lahiri of Rangpur. It is to be mentioned here that the benevolent works done by the native rulers and the land lords throughout the country were started in the second half of the 19th century. But hereditary rulers of Karaibari, who enjoyed power as a tributary chief under various paramount powers, did not find much opportunity to initiate the social welfare activities for their subjects due to their constant

struggle for survival. When the zamindars of other estates of Western Assam endeavoured in benevolent works in their respective estate, the hereditary zamindar, Mohendra Narayan was ousted from power and his estate was sold to Lahiri family who were absentee zamindars. The purchaser of Karaibari estate was outsider who had no direct relation with people of the estate and considered the estate as their colony. Naturally, they ignored the welfare of the people, unlike the other zamindars of Western Assam. Moreover, Ramanath Lahiri and his successors of his successors never could cope with the situation of the estate and preferred to keep away from the estate and resided in Rangpur from where they ran the estate administration. As a result, the zamindar's representatives was more inclined to his personal profit and collected more rent by means of oppressive and coercive methods rather works for the public benevolent. The little works of public benevolent which were done by the Lahiri family are in Naldanga of Bangladesh.¹³ That is why Karaibari estate did nothing significant benevolent works for the tenants and stand far behind of the other estate of western Assam in this regard.

However, some of the petty rulers of Koshba kingdom or Karaibari estate, preceding to the handed of the zamindary to Lahiri family, did little public welfare works, of which special mention can be made of Raja Mahendra Narayan, who endeavoured for the benevolent works for his subjects in the midst of his struggle with the British and the mountaineers.

(I) Raja Mahendra Narayan's benevolent works

Construction of Roads: According to the local sources, Raja Mahendra Narayan erected several roads for the development of the communication in his kingdom. Though the motive behind the construction of the roads was the convenient passes of his army and development of the trade with

the Hill tribes, it resulted in removal of difficulties of the ryots in their communication system. The important roads he constructed were Jungal to Tikrikilla and Jungal to Garobada. Present Jungal is said to be the place, called Kashyapnagar, the capital of Mahendra Narayan. So, capital was connected with the each Kutchery, hat, fort and strategically important places. A road extended from Mahendraganj to Purakashi, which is known as Raja Rama is said to be constructed by Mahendra Narayan. In Garo language the meaning of "Raja Rama" is "road of the king" which indicates its relation with the Raja or the king.¹⁴ He repaired the existing roads in his estate for convenience of the communication. Another important road, which is believed to be constructed by him is the road extended from Fotamari Kutcharighat near Chirakhowa under Mankachar Revenue Circle to Kumarighat via Chumrasali Kudalduwa. He connected capital Kashyapnagar (Jungal) with Jungal Chariali, and Kalapani. The most important road he constructed, was extended from Capital Kashyapnagar to Tura via Mahendraganj, which has been serving till date for better communication among the people of the region.¹⁵ It is to be mentioned that Raja Mohendra Narayan founded numerous forts in the border of Garo Hills, viz, Phulbari, Belbari,, Garobada, Bagargaon etc, and stationed a band of Barkandaz in each fort to keep vigilance there on the Garo incursion. Naturally, roads from capital to the forts had been opened and maintained by him, those have been developed at present time to be modern road communication system among these places.

Mahendra Narayan Choudhury is said to have planted trees on both sides of the road. This was done to shadow the travelers against the sun heat. References are found of the plantation of Simul trees (one kind of cotton trees) by the side of the roads to enhance production of cotton, the article to be paid to the Mughal as revenue.¹⁶

Excavation of Tanks: According to the local sources, Raja Mahendra Narayan erected many tanks throughout his kingdom for water supply to his subjects. Some of these tanks have already been eliminated and we seem still some remains of such tanks in this region. A few tanks are found intact as a witness of his glorious intention of public services. Among the important tanks he excavated are,

1. Nagapara tank near Garobada.
2. *Peerer Dighee*, (tank belongs to Peer), which is covering a plot of land of 80 bighas. This tank is said to be excavated by Raja Mahendra Narayan in the name of the Dargah of Hajrat Shah Kamal, a Muslim *Peer*, who came with Ramsing in his Assam campaign. It is said, in some Assamese history and Persian chronicles, Ramsing brought with him five Muslim saints to protect him from the *Jadu* (magic) of the Assamese people, who were identified as Panch Peer. Except Shah Kamal, other members of the Panch Peer founded dargah at Dhubri where they all died and engrave there, but Shah Kamal founded a dargah in a place two kilometres north west of present town of Mohendraganj in Garo Hills district of Meghalaya where he engaged to preach Islam. Shah Kamal died and buried in this place. Raja Mahendra Narayan donated 1600 bighas land to this dargah for its maintenance and a tank was excavated called '*Peerer Dighee*'.
3. *Jaluar Digheei* in Teparpara.
4. Duajani tank.
5. Pushkurniparar *Dighee*.

Besides, some remains of tanks are found in different places in the Karaibari region.¹⁷

Foundation of Hat: Raja Mahendra Narayan established many *hats* (weekly market) in the important border passes of the Garo Hills. The Mountaineers came down to the *hats* with their articles which were exchanged with the commercial representatives of the Zamindar and the people of the plain. It is to be mentioned here, that the tribute payable to the Mughal Government by the zamindars was assessed not on land but on certain transit and market dues, bulk of which was realized on the trade carried on with the Garoes at the hat established by the zamindar in the frontier passes, viz, Damura, Jira, Nibari, Lakhipur, Tikrikilla were founded by the zamindar of Mechpara, and in Rajabala, Bangalkhata, Singimari, Mankachar, Garobada, Putimari were founded by the zamindar of Karaibari. In these markets the Garo bartered cotton, chilies, wax, lac, rubber and timber with the merchants engaged by the zamindars in the trade with Garos, in return for which they received cows, pigs, goats, fowls, salt, earthenware pots, swords, spearheads and cloths.¹⁸ Raja Mohendra Narayan invaded Garo Hills with a view to subdue the Garos who used to plunder the plain occasionally. Even his predecessor suppressed the Garos in 1775-76. Ultimately, he made the Garo chiefs to pay tribute to him acknowledging the suzerainty of Karaibari. One of the heroes and prominent Garo chief, Ranghta was defeated and placed under his control. Ranghta was thrown into confinement by Mahendra Narayan when he refused to stop trading with Sherpur and Sooshung estate.¹⁹ Mahendra Narayan forbade the Garos from maintaining commercial relation with Sherpur and Sooshung. The Garos used to supply cotton to the market of these estates since long before. Ranghata opposed it for which he was arrested but later on released in the intervention of the British officer. The zamindar of Sherpur and Sooshung complained with the British against Mahendra Narayan.

With a view to draw attention of the Garo traders, Mahendra Narayan provided some facilities to the Garo merchants who came down to the market for selling their products. The zamindar collected *Sayer* from the Garos. According to local sources, the Garos came down from the Hills day before the date scheduled for marketing and the zamindar made arrangement of their staying in the night. After exchanging their articles; the Garos returned back to the Hills. It is said that the present town of Garobada derives its name from such halting place of the Garo traders. The word Garobada is the consonant of the word 'Garo' and 'Bada', means assembling of the Garos. It is that the Garos halted in that place for marketing and the place came to be known as Garobada.²⁰

7.4. Contribution to Religious field

Nothing can be said firmly about the religious activities of the zamindars of Karaibari due to lack of authentic sources. Little informations, those have been gathered are basically oral information and centred round on the activities of Raja Mahendra Narayan. According to local sources, despite of his constant fighting with the Garos and the British, Mahendra Narayan Choudhury is said to have build some temples, repaired old shrines and made land grant to religious institutions, like temples, Than and Dargah.

According to some senior citizen of the locality, referring the traditional belief, the Chamrasali temple of Bagapara, about 20 K.M. north of Mankachar was built by Raja Mahendra Narayan Choudhury. Devi Chamunda, a Diety of the Sakti was believed to be the Kuldevi of Karaibari Rajfamily. Mahendra Narayan built the temple of the Devi and made all arrangement of its regular puja by appointing *Purahit* and paid him by the Royal treasury. *Debtoar land* was donated for its maintenance.

He built a temple in Cacharighat for the Garo subjects. *Religious Pith* was also founded there with the help of the zamindar. He also granted land to the Mahamaya temple in Singimari and Harigaon Mahamaya Mandir near Garobada. He is said to have founded Chenga Benga temple in Putimari. According to the legend, Chenga and Benga, the two brothers, was the wrestler of Mahendra Narayan. They were very popular among the people but their immatured death shocked them in such an extent that every year the people of Karaibari gathered together to remember them. Subsequently temple was built with a view to offering puja to them. Mahendra Narayan is said to have extended financial help to the Farangapara Mahamaya temple, a *jagrta mandir*, and Hatisila mandir of Ampati.²¹

Another important contribution was his land grant to Shah Kamal Dargah of Mahendraganj. He donated 1600 bighas land for its maintenance. A tank covering 80 bighas land was excavated by him, is still visibly existed. As mentioned earlier Hajrat Shah Kamal a Muslim spiritual Saint who along with other saints, known as Panch peer, accompanied Ramsing, the general of Mughal Emperor Aurongzeb who invaded Assam in 1667. Shah Kamal did not return and founded a dargah near Mahendraganj, presently within the district limit of West Garo Hills of Meghalaya, to spread Islam.²² Among the few social works carried out by Lahiri family, one of which was the rebuilding of Kamakhay temple in Mankachar by Krishnakanta Lahiri.

7.5. Other contribution

Mahendraganj, a small town under Garo-Hills district of Mghalaya, bordering Bangladesh, is said to have founded by Raja Mahendra Narayan and it derived its name from Raja Mahendra Narayan who was a very popular king of Koshba kingdom alias Karaibari estate.

A high School was established in Mankachar in 1937 to which Sarojini Devi, the wife of zamindar Jatindra Mohan Choudhury donated Rs. 2000/ and some building materials to the construction of the school building. As a result the High School came to be known as Jatindra Mohan High school. This was the only contribution to the educational field of the Lahiri family of 12 *anna* share of Karaibari estate.²³ According to the official documents, found in Assam Secretariat room The Karaibari zamindar excavated a canal in 1935 extended from the foot of the Garo Hills right down to Jinjiram river, about 3.5 K.M. length for the drainage of overflow rainwater during the monsoon. They also erected protective embankment at their own cost supplemented by the labour of the local people. This had checked the annual flood and the crops were saved. In addition to this, the zamindar made a free gift in the same year to their tenants in Karibari, seeds of various kinds of winter crops worth of Rs.1000/.²⁴

(B) Chapar Estate

7.6. Brief history of Chapar Estate

Like other estates of Western Assam, Chapar estate was also carved out of Bijni kingdom. It was during the rule of Raja Mukunda Narayan, Chapar pargana was taken away from Bijni kingdom by one Joy Narayan who obtained Sanad from the Mughal Emperor.²⁵ Earlier, Joy Narayan had been in possession of five "*chowdhuries*" (a small unit of territory for collection of land revenue) and secured the rank of Choudhury from the Mughal Emperor. Thus, Joy Narayan is said to be the founder of Chapar zamin in 1723. The status of Chapar zamindar was purely a revenue collecting Choudhry. Unlike, other zamindar of Western Assam, Chapar zamindar was not a hereditary chief of the estate. He had to pay a nominal tribute to Mughal Faujdar at Rangamati. The Mughal Emperor

made the settlement with Joy Narayan with a view to extend agricultural domain to increase land revenue. The estate was comprised of the territory mostly of the north bank of Brahmaputra River, extending from the mouth of the river Manas to Pabomari Jan, and from Bagmara darga at the foot of Rangamat Hills to Sotakhawamukh. It had two Chit Mahal, viz, Bamundanga and Paikandara. It had purchased 3417 bighas, 9 kattas and 11 dhar *Debattor* land. The char areas of the north bank of Brahmaputra formed a big part of the Chapar estate. After acquisition of the Dewani by the East India Company, considering Chapar estate to be one of the old zamindaries by the East India Company accepted the tribute paid to the Mughal as land revenue.²⁵ The Company Government made permanent settlement with the zamindar of Chapar and Jama was fixed at Rs. C-566/²⁶

According to Mills Report in 1853, Chapar estate had 197 square mile land with in its possession.²⁷ The zamindary was survived till 1956 when it was acquired by Assam Government along with other zamindaries of Assam under zamindary abolition Act 1951.

7.7: Genealogy of Chapar Estate

Joy Narayan Sarma, the founder of the Chapar estate ran the zamindary for two years only who died in 1725 with out leaving any son. As a result his grand son from the line of his daughter, Ratikanta assumed the power. Ratikanta was succeeded by his son Umakanta. Umakanta died with out leaving any heir to succeed him. He was, thus, succeeded by his brother Kamalakanta in 1162 B.S. He died with out leaving any issue for which Chandra Narayan, the son of his sister ascended to the Gaddi in 1173, B.S.²⁸ Chandrakanta died with out leaving any heir. As a result, his wife Rahini Devi adopted Kriti Narayan in 1847 and governed the estate as the guardian of the minor son. Unfortunately, she died in

1851 and the estate placed under the administration of the Court of Wards till 1859. During this period Dharani Kanta Bagsi worked as the Dewan or the Chief Officer of the estate, who played an important role in the history of the estate of Chapar.²⁹ Although, the adoption of Kirti Narayan was challenged by one Rabiram and his associates, the matter was settled by Col. Jenkins who in his judgment upheld the cause of Kirti Narayan on 23rd May, 1852.³⁰

Kirti Narayan assumed the responsibility of the estate from the Court of Wards in 1859 attaining majority. He shifted the capital of the estate from Chapar to Bilasipara. He was an ablest zamindar of the Chapar zamindari family. Unfortunately, he died in 1882 with out leaving any heir. Before his death he advised his eldest wife, Matangi Devi to adopt a son. Accordingly, Rani Matangi Devi adopted Indra Narayan in 1888 and ran the zamindari on behalf of minor Indra Narayan till 1902 when Indra Narayan assumed the charge attaining majority. Indra Narayan died in 1906 leaving his only son Nripendra Narayan who was one year old. Before his death Indra Narayan issued a Will by which he devised that the estate would be managed by an Executors and each of the family members would receive a monthly pension for maintenance. Thus the estate was managed by the Executor till 1923 when the responsibility of the estate was assumed by Nripendra Narayan in that year attaining his majority. Nripendra Narayan married Bedbala Devi, the eldest daughter of the second Maharaja of Hitampur, Rajkumar Maima Narayan Chakraborty in the district of Birbhum. Unfortunately, Nripendra Narayan was childless, for which he advised his wife to adopt as many as nine sons. Nripendra Narayan gradually loosing his interest on the estate affairs and his wife Rani Bedabala took the advantages of his indifferences. In 1931 Nripendra Narayan submitted an application to

Honble, A.J Laine, member of the Executive Council in-charge of the Revenue Department, Shillong, urging him that he might be declared as a disqualified proprietor under the existing law for the purpose of the management of the estate and his estate might be brought under the management of the Court of Wards.³¹ Upon the prayer of zamindar Nripendra Narayan Choudhury, the Court of Wards decided to take over the charge of the estate under Sec. 7 and 35 of the Act IX of 1879, the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara acting on behalf of the Court of Wards formally assumed the charge of the estate declaring Nripendra Narayan as a disqualified proprietor.³² After few years, Nripendra Narayan again submitted another application in 1934 praying the release of his properties and hand over of the management to him. Accordingly on 24th April, 1934, the estate was again released and zamindar Nripendra Narayan Choudhury resumed the administration of the estate.³³ He could not enjoy the zamindari long time because of his indifference on the zamindari administration. Ultimately, he handed over the charge of the estate to his wife in 1943 as the Executor of the Trust, constituted for the management of the estate. Under the management of the Trust the zamindari was acquired by the state government of Assam in 1956 along with other zamindari of the state.

7.8. Benevolent works of Chapar zamindars

We have noticed little information about the benevolent works initiated by the zamindars of Chapar estate for the welfare of their tenants. As far the sources are concerned, no zamindars of Chapar estate were involved in any significant public works except the last zamindar, Nripendra Narayan Choudhury. It is to be mentioned here, that the public welfare activities done by most of the native rulers and the zamindars of Bengal as well of western Assam were persistence from the last quarter of

the 19th century, but the period was not in favour for welfare works in case of Chapar zamindary due to absent of direct heir of the estate causing its management under the Court of Wards and the Executors. As a result, no development works was scheduled to be done during this period. However, Nripendra Narayan Choudhury who was an enlighten zamindar, carried out some benevolent works for the welfare of his subjects.³⁴

Public works of zamindar Nripendra Narayan: Zamindar Nripendra Narayan dedicated himself much in study and search of knowledge and wisdom. Though, initially he followed the traditional system of zamindary administration and led a life of luxury and grandeur like other zamindars, gradually lost interest on the glamour of such life and induced himself for the wellbeing of his tenants. Unlike the zamindars of other estate he used to live in his estate among his tenants instead of living in Calcutta. Indeed, he was influenced by the teaching of Swami Vivekananda and tried to follow his path, which converted him to an ordinary people from zamindar Nripendra Narayan Choudhury.³⁵

He was a great donor who tried his best to help his tenants in their utmost need. He was loved by his prajas for his generosity and charity. No body was deprived from his help and sympathy. He exempted land revenue for poor tenants in case of the damage of crops caused by natural calamities. He never evicted his tenants from the possession of land due to default in payment of land revenues. Unlike other zamindars, he never levied additional revenue on the tenants for the cost of pilgrimage and his foreign tour.

According to local sources, Nripendra Narayan planted trees on both sides of the road from Bilasipara to Fakrigrām. With a view to supply drinking water to the people, he excavated tanks, erected water

reservoirs, and deep well in various place within his estate. The remains of such deep well are visible in Bilasipara and Kadamtala under Bilasipara subdivision. He arranged street light in front of the Sadar Kutchery at Bilasipara with the help of kerosin lantern posting high on some wooden post by the side of the road.

Zamindar Nripendra Narayan provided shelter to many people in his Rajbari for about a week due to the continuous earthquake in 1934.³⁶ He endeavour to initiate anti erosion measure to check the erosion of river Gauranga, creating hurdle with bamboos, trees, stone etc, with the estate fund.

Another significant work of great value was the opening of a hospital in Bilasipara under estate management called Susma Clinical Hospital. The doctors and nurses were paid by the zamindar. Now it is State Dispensary in Bilasipara.

Patron of Learning: Nripendra Narayan Choudhury was a patron of learning who visited numerous foreign countries, viz., England, France, Belgium, and U.S.A. for the search of knowledge. During his tenure of office the M.E school of Bilasipara founded by Indra Narayan was promoted High School in 1928 which came to be known as Indra Narayan Academy. The only higher educational institution he founded to spread higher education among the children of this backward region. All expenditure of the school including the salaries of the teaching and non teaching staff of the school was borne by the estate till 1956. According to the records found in the zamindar's office, Rs 23 to Rs.150 was paid to the staff as their salary in 1950.³⁷

He provided financial assistance to the poor and the meritorious students for higher education. One Durlabh Das, a meritorious student who passed Matriculation Examination in 1939 from Indra Narayan High

School with First division was awarded and provide accommodation in Bilasipara house, the residence of zamindar of Chapar, in Calcutta for his higher study. All expenditure of Durga Das was borne by the estate exchequer. Hon'ble. Sarat Chandra Singha, ex-chief minister of Assam, who was a student of Indra Narayan High School, was sanctioned financial assistance by zamindar Nripendra Narayan Choudhury.

Apart from foundation of school building for Indra Narayan Academy, Zamindar Nripendra Narayan allotted 11 Nos. of building of the estate for the use of the teachers and the students. Of these buildings one Muslim hostel and one Hindu hostel was opened for the students of the Indra Narayan Academy. He granted land for play ground, new hostels for the students, teachers quarter etc. The outsider teachers were provided quarters by the zamindar. The students were provided free education. Of course, he received extra revenue from the ryots for education.

Sankar Dev Sisunikatan: He founded another institution called Sankar Dev Sisunikatan in Bilasipara for the spread of primary education in Assamese.

Bilasipara College: After abolition of zamindari system in Assam, the zamindar families underwent financial hardship. But the zeal of public welfare of Nripendra Narayan was not submerged by the poor economy of the family. He made a huge contribution to the proposed Bilasipara College. It was due to him the foundation of a college in Bilasipara in 1962 became possible. He granted land and building of Rajbari to the college. The Darbar Hall of the Rajbari "Kirti Bhawan" was allotted Bilasipara College which has been college office till date. Initially the College was named as Nripendra Narayan College; unfortunately, it is converted to Bilasipara College.³⁸

Foundation of Library: Nripendra Narayan Choudhury opened a Library in Rajbari with the collection of numerous precious books. The books were mostly of English and Bengali. He was a studious zamindar who spent most of the time in reading ignoring zamindary luxury and comfort. He collected books from Calcutta and abroad. Another library was founded in Indra Narayan Academy with huge collection of books. Library of Indra Narayan Academy was one of the prominent libraries of the contemporary Assam. Unfortunately, it was set on fire in 1947, burning all the valuable books.³⁹

Donation: Apart from the foundation of schools and college in Bilasipara he donated too many institutions for his zeal to spread education. Following are some of the examples of his donation:

1. Nripendra Narayan donated Rs. 10,000/- to Dhubri Girls High School.
2. Donated Rs. 5000/- to Viswa Bharati University of Santinikatan.
3. Rs. 5000/- was donated to Defence fund of India in 1962 during Indo- China war.
4. Rs. 5000/- was donated to Cancer Institution of Calcutta.
5. He donated Rs. 40,000/- to Bisudananda Kanan Ashram in Benaras, founded by his Guru, Yugirajadhiraj Bisudananda.

He was always thinking for the wellbeing of the subjects. He is said to have exempted revenues of the poor tenants whenever prayed so and in many occasions of the damage of crops caused by natural calamities. He allotted lakhraj land to poor people for rehabilitation. One of such prajas was Haran Sanakar who was granted land for his residence.⁴⁰

His greatness and affection to his subjects can be traced from the fact that in 1956 when the zamindary was acquired by the state

government by paying off compensation, there was at that time about Rs 2.5 lakh arrear in payment of the land revenue of the tenants. In response to the government inquiry of the land revenue arrear payable by the tenants, Zamindar Choudhury concealed the real fact and replied nothing of arrear of land revenue, of which he had 25% share. Thus he saved his subjects from burden of arrear revenue in the cost of his in own loss.

7.9. Festivals and Public Entertainment

Like other zamindars of the Western Assam, Chapar zamindar family took keen interest in religious activities within their estate. They founded temples of various Gods and Goddesses, granted land to the temples for its maintenance and extended help in conducting religious functions. They arranged puja and religious festivals in Rajbari with great pomp and grandeur.

“*Devi Ashtabhuj*a was treated as *Kuldevi* for chapar zamindar family. It is said Rani Matangi Devi discovered the “*Bigrah*” of *Astabhuj*a from one of his Muslim praja and founded it in Rajbari and started offering regular puja to it. Since then it had been treated as *Kuldevi*. They conducted Durga Puja in Rajbari with great joy and pleasure. The occasion was graced with observing festivals. Huge crowd gathered to share the entertainment of the festival.

During the time of Durga Puja, *Mela* was held which continued for one month. Various shops of the merchants came from Kashmir, Calcutta and different places of Assam taking part in the *Mela*. On occasion of religious festivals wide entertainment programme were chalked out for all the days of the *Mela*. Local artists held their musical programme with their traditional musical instruments, like *dotara*, flute, drum, *Jhori*, etc. The *Kushan* song, *Khemta* dances, with the boys dressed as girls took

part in such programme giving immense pleasure to the audiences. The local culture, thus, got encouragement due to such festivals under Royal patronage.

Chapar zamindar, like other zamindars of western Assam invited Jatraparties, and theatre parties from Calcutta to stage their acts on occasion of the festivals. Films were displayed in zamindar's hawli with artificial lights. Apart from these, circuses, *latikhela*, boat racing and other local games were played under zamindars' initiative. Encouraged by the Calcutta drama and theatre, local artists organized jatra and theatre parties and played them in public stages, which touched the heart of the music loving people of this region. From 1910 A.D. the Drama movement (*Natya Andalan*) stepped in a new turn in Bilasipara. Zamindar Nripendra Narayan Choudhury of Chapar estate and Surendra Nrayana Choudhury of Bagribari (Parbotjoar) played important role in the development of the *Natya Andalan* in Bilasipara and Bagribari. In Bilasipara Drama party was organized by Shasimahan Chakraborty, Rudra Chakraborty Mannath Nath Bhattacharjee and Bipin Chakraborty. They were assisted by the zamindar and the *Drama movement* was flourished in this region.⁴¹

In the *Andar Mahal* of the Rajhawli, on occasion of Kartik puja and *Sabitri broth*, huge entertainment programmes were carried out. The female of the localities took part in such programme. A colourful procession was led out on the main road of Bilasipara with the image of Gopinathjeu, placing on the back of an ornamented elephant before its installation on the *Mandap*. The devotees enjoyed the occasion playing with colours. The zamindars observed the *Ekadoshi* (eleventh day) as the *punnah* in which he received gifts from the revenue collectors, influential tenants and the jotedars.⁴²

(C) Parbotjoar Zamindary

7.10. Brief history of Parbotjoar Estate

According to Santo Barman, "Due to paucity of information nothing can be said definitely about the origin of the Parbotjoar estate. It is believed that the estate was created out of the Badshahi grant some time after the Ahom the Ahom Mughal confliction the seventeenth century. It is likely, that the originator rendered valuable service to the Mohammedans in in their campaign against the Ahoms and as a token of reward the estate was granted to him".⁴³ B.C.Allen, expressed the view that the estate was granted to one Hatibar Baruah twelve generation ago.⁴⁴ According to Khan Choudhury, the tract was taken away from Bijni to form separate estate and it covered an area of 276 square miles.⁴⁵

The estate went under the British when the East India Company acquired the Dewani of Bengal together with the other zamindaries in the district of Goalpara. The estate was included in the Permanent Settlement and the land revenue demand of the estate was C. Rs. 547, anna 13 and ganda 9.⁴⁶

Zamindar family of Parbotjoar was descended from Hatibar Baruah who is said to have founded Parbotjoar zamindary. But the history of Parbotjoar down to the beginning of twentieth century was obscure. The estate was partitioned off into three shares, viz, *1/8/ anna*, *1/5/ anna* and *1/3/ anna*. The Headquarter of *1/8/anna* share was in Bagribari, *1/5/ anna* share in Rupsi and *1/3/ anna* share in rear Mahamaya Hills, few miles west of Bagribari. In the beginning of twentieth century, Surendra Narayan Singha Choudhury was the zamindar of *1/8/ anna* share of Bagribari, Bimala Sundari Choudhury held *1/5/ ann* share and resided at Rupsi and Sushila Sundari was the zamindar of *1/3/ anna* share who used to live in Calcutta.

Towards the second half of the 20th century the estate was divided further as seen in the records of Dhubri collectorat. Parbatjoar estates were acquired by the state government of Assam in 1956.⁴⁷

7.11. Social welfare activities of Parbotjoar Estate

Nothing can be said firmly about the socio-cultural contribution of the zamindars of Parbotjoar estates due to lack of authentic sources. Whatever little information is available about their activities are related with the zamindars, ruled in the closing stages of their zaminadary rule. The nature of their public works was very much religious and few secular works are also noticed.

Zamindar of Parbotjoar discovered the image of Devi Mahamaya in the jungle of the Parbatjoar Hills, being reported by one timber merchant of Kishangonj of present Bangladesh who happened to visit the Parbatjoar Hills and got information in his dream. Accordingly, he reported to the zamindar of the estate, which discovered the image in the jungle and installed it founding a temple there. It is said the zamindar, thus, founded the famous Mahamaya Pith and temple in Mahamaya Hills under Parbotjoar estate. He introduced the system of offering regular puja in this temple appointing pujari and granted huge quantity of land for its maintenance.⁴⁸ Zamindar of 1/8/anna share of Bagribari, Sri Harendra Narayan Singha Choudhury rebuilt the Mahamahaya temple in 1280 B.S. His son Surendra Narayan Singha Choudhury established a Natmandir in the premises of the temple. During the rule of zamindar Jyotindra Narayan Choudhury, the temple was again repaired and erected the brick boundary around it. In 1293, B.S, a tank was excavated by the then zamindar Harindra Narayan Singha Choudhury.⁴⁹

Foundation of Schools: Like other zamindar of Western Assam a High School founded in Bagribari, by zamindar Surendra Narayan Singha Choudhury of Eight anna share holder zamindar of Bagribari in 1914. The School was named after his father, Harindra Narayan Singha Choudhury, for which it came to be known as H.N. SemiNaray. The zamindar bore all expenditures of the school, including construction of its building, hostels for the students, and quarters for the teacher and the books for the library. Free education was provided to the students with the facility of hostel to the students coming from distant place. H.N. Seminary played an important role in the expansion of education in this region.

The five *anna* share zamindar of Rupshi founded a High School in Rupshi by Jagadabindra Narayan Choudhury. The School came to be known as J.N. Academy after name of the zamindar Jagadabindra Narayan Choudhury. A Girls High School was also founded in Rupsi under patronage of the Rupsi zamindar family. The Girls High School came to be known as Jogendra Narayan Girls High School.

7.12. Contribution to other field

Zamindar Jogadabindra Narayan Choudhury was an enlightened land lord who induced himself in the welfare of the prajas and always visited through out of his estate to take stock of the grievances of the tenants. He was loved very much by the prajas for his kindness and simplicity. He even supported the freedom fighters unlike the other landed gentry of the country. He took part in the Non Co-operation movement and under his leadership the people of his estate took part in the movement. In 1934 Mahatama Gandhi visited Rupsi Rajbari in response to the request of zamindar Jagadabidra Narayan Choudhury, Jogat Chandra Roy, Ganesh Chandra Choudhury, Ketketu Prodhani and

some others. And a meeting was held in Rupsi where huge crowd took part in this meeting. All the joteders, tenants of Rupsi estate enthusiastically, participated in the Non Co-operation movement.

Zamindar Surendra Narayan Singha, who was childless, adopted Bhupendra Narayan Singha Choudhury from Koch Bihar Raj family, who succeeded him. Bhupendra Narayan Singha Choudhury was an enlightened zamindar of Parbotjoar estate that did lots of public welfare works for his tenants. Among others he opened a tea garden in Rupsi Hills. He brought labourer from Bihar, Jharkhond, and Chota Nagpur.⁵⁰

Besides, the road extended from Rupsi to Gauripur was constructed by a joint effort of Raja Prabhat Chandra Bauah of Gauripur estate and Jagadabindra Singha Choudhury of Rupsi estate. In Rupsi Rajbari a rich library was founded by the zamindar. Various books in English and Bengali were preserved there. The library was one of the important libraries in North East Region. Monthly journal from England were sent to Rupsi library regularly.

Among the zamindars of Parbotjoar estates, zamindar Surendra Narayan Singha Choudhury of Bagribari Eight *anna* proprietor was patron of Music, Drama and local Culture. Like other zamindar of Goalpara district he arranged *Mela* during Durga puja and wide entertainment programme were carried out by him with the Royal cost. During the festival musical programme of local artist as well as artist from out sides were held. Jatra parties from Calcutta were invited during the Puja festivals. Being encouraged by the Calcutta Jatra party local artist organized Drama Group in Bagribari with the help of zamindar Surendra Narayan Singha Choudhury. The first Jatra party was organized in Bagribari by Krishnamohan and Surat Adhikary called "Krishnajatra". It was the beginning of *Natya Andalan* in Bagribari. Zamindar Surendra

Narayan Singha Choudhury contributed a lot to the Natya Andalan in Bagribari. He invited teacher from Calcutta to train the artists of the Drama. Not only had that he built an extra ordinary stage for theatre that was considered a unique *Theatre Mancha* in Assam. There were about 50 pieces of cloth for the screen of the *Theatre Manch* of Bagribari. He had a very large library with numerous books of different languages and faculties. Of these books more than 200 were in Drama, which stands as an evidence of his great zeal for the Drama and Theatre. Under Royal patronage the Bagribari Theatre Party staged numerous theatres on the Manch in which zamindar himself acted. Among the Dramas they played were Shahjahan, Panipath, Kalapahar, Alibaba, Misor Kumari, Harichandra etc. Surendra Narayan himself wrote a comedian drama "Akkhelgurum" and he played a role in it.

(D). Sidli Estate: (temporarily settled Estate)

7.13. Brief history of Sidli Estate

Sidli was a small principality under the Mughals, comprising the Duars of Sidli, Chirang, Ripu and Guma, lying in the foot of the Bhutan Mountain. The ruler of the territory was conferred the title of Raja by the Bhutani king because of their dynastic line with the Koch Raj Family. Sidli kingdom was occupied by the Bhutan Government during the weak rule of the later Mughals. When the East India Company assumed the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the Mughals, Sidli king held it on payment of Rs. 2960/ to the Company in lieu of the 40 elephants that had been paid to the Mughals as tribute.⁵² It was during the Governorship of Warren Hastings in 1784, Sidli was passed over to the Bhutan Govt. as a part of the understanding between the two Governments. Thus, Sidli again became the tributary chieftain of the Bhutia kingdom till 1865. That is why Sidli estate was excluded from the purview of the Permanent

Settlement, what made with the other estates of Goalpara district of Western Assam. Sidli passed over to the British in 1865 as a result of the Anglo Bhutias war. It is to be mentioned that after Anglo Bhutan war in 1864-65, the Bhutia King ceded all the Duars (passes) including Sidli to the British. The British authority divided the Bhutan Duars in to two parts, Eastern Duars and the Western Duars. Sidli Raja Gauri Narayan claimed Sidli tract from the British because of his hereditary right and his claim was acknowledged by the British authority. Ultimately an agreement was made with the Sidli king in 1870 assigning him the charge of revenue collection for a period of seven years commencing from first April, 1870 with an allowance of 30% of revenue assessed. After the first year of Settlement, Sidli Raja defaulted in payment for which the management was taken out of the hands of the Raja. The estate was placed under the management of the Court of Wards.⁵³

According to the local source, the founder of the Sidli dynasty was Bhim Sing, who established the principality after the fall of the Kamata kingdom. He was succeeded by Chikna Narayan Dev. Next in the line of the succession to Sidli Raj were Shymukh Narayan Dev, Viswa Narayan Dev, Bhuja Narayan Dev, Laksmi Narayan Dev and Surya Narayan Dev.⁵⁴

After death of Surya Narayan Dev, his nephew Indra Narayan Dev succeeded him. Indra Narayan Was succeeded by his son Gouri Narayan during whose time British annexed all duars of the Bhutan Hills. Gouri Narayan retained the ownership of the principality under the British. Gouri Narayan died in 1884, leaving a minor son Bishnu Narayan. During his minority management of the estate was placed under the Court of Wards. Bishnu Narayan entered ten years Settlement with the Government of India in 1896 and he was treated as a zamindar like other

zamindars of Goalpara district. Tenant Act VIII of 1869 was extended to it, and as such placing him in the same footing with regard to collection of rents similar to that occupied by the other zamindars of Goalpara in the Permanently Settle tract.⁵⁵ Bishnu Narayan was succeeded by his son Abhay Narayan shifted his capital from Sidli to Bidyapur in 1901. His son Ajit Narayan was the last zamindar of Sidli estate, during his time zamindari system was abolished in 1956 under zamindari abolition Act of 1951.

7.14. Contribution of Sidli Raj Family to the Socio Cultural Development

No such significant contributions were made by the Raj Family of Sidli to the development of the region. We find that during the tenure of Raja Abhaya Narayan Dev, some Muslim farmers were brought from East Bengal to expand agriculture in his estate and thus, not only agricultural product and revenue were increased, it also resulted in the expansion of the population in the estate too. He shifted the capital from Sidli to Bidyapur near present Baitamari. He built a beautiful Rajbari in Bidyapur which stands as a witness of the feudal architectural development of the contemporary time.

Raja Ajit Narayan Dev, the last species of the Sidli Raj Family was the most popular zamindar in the dynasty. His benevolence and simplicity was the sources of love and affection of the subjects. He founded a High School in Sidli, known as Ajit Narayan Memorial High School. After Independence, Raja Ajit Narayan Dev, elected M.L.A in 1951, in the first election of Republic India, from Bilasipara constituency. His wife Rani Manjula Devi was elected as a M.P from Dhubri constituency. Being the descendant of the Royal family of Sidli, both Raja Ajit Narayan and Rani Manjula Devi ignoring Royal comfort, dignity and tradition served for the

wellbeing of the poor and distressed people of Assam. They crossed the traditional boundary of the distinction of Raja and Praja and used to live with the ordinary people, for whom they served. Rani moved village to village and took stake of the problems of the people and tried to remove these with utmost sincerity. She was elected as M.L.A from Kokrajhar constituency in 1967 to Assam Legislative Assembly.⁵⁶ Raja Ajit Narayan served as the Chairman of Oil India Ltd. and employed many Assamese youth in the Oil Company. He was also member of the Assam Loka Seva Ayogh, (Assam Civil Service Commission) and tried to dispense justice to the candidates. Rani Manjula Devi also served as the Chairman of the Assam Social Welfare Department, who, during her tenure of office stressed more for the awakening Assamese women for their right and privileges. The people of Assam, can never forget them for their service for the socio economic development of Assam in general and Goalpara in particular. Being the descendant of the Royal blood, both Raja Ajit Narayan and Rani Manjula set an example of the public services that the Royal blood can do under the democratic form of the government.⁵⁷

Sidli zamindar, like other zamindars of Western Assam, founded temples and granted Debottar land for the maintenance of the temples. They made wide arrangement for public entertainment during Durga puja. As a part of it various musical programme, presented by the local as well as the outsider artists. Drama and theatre parties of Calcutta were also invited to stage their plays. They also encouraged the local artists to work for the development of traditional folk culture.

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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.

GLOSSARY

Abwab	Miscellaneous cess, realised over and above the legally payable.
Adhiar	Tenant of share contract of agricultural Produce.
Agar	A kind of sandal wood.
Agrahar	A policy adopted by the king of Kamrupa for Aryanism the society.
Amla	Official of zamindar.
Amlapatt	Residential complex of the Amla.
Andar Mahal	In terior of the Palace.
Anna	One sixteenth of a Rupee, here denotes the share of the estate.
Apanage	Appendage.
Assam type	A building constructed with tin and wood.
Aulia	Muslim spiritual person.
Barkandaz	Zamindar's retainer.
Barkandazpara	Dwelling complex of Barkandaz.
Bahag	First month of Assamese year.
Baharbandi	Dweller of the pargana of Baharbandi.
Bahag Bihu	A festival of New Year in Assam.
Baidya	Herbal physician.
Baisag	First month of Bengali year.
Bagrumba	A folk songs of the Bodo.
Bara	Elder.
Baro Bhuyan	Twelve Bhuyan.
Barpatgirir Hangama	Quarrel of elder queen.
Basnavite	Follower of Sankar Dev.
Bazar	Market complex.
Be-rasita Astadas parb	Rewritten eighteenth part.
Bhatia	Immigrant Muslim from East Bengal are called Bhatia in Western Assam and Miah in upper Assam.
Bhaumic	Land Lords.
Bhitarbandi	Dweller of the pargana of Bhitarband.

Bhumi	Land lord of Doab.
Bhuyan	Feudal lord under Kamata kingdom, equivalent to land lord.
Bigra	Image of God.
Bishahari puja	Manasa puja.
Viswa	Land Lords.
Boria	Carpenters.
Brahman	Upper caste Hindu engaging in Royal service and conducted Religious functioning.
Brahmattor land	Land granted to Brahmin.
Chakla	A small unit of land.
Char elaka	Riverine areas.
Chamar	Low caste Hindu, sweeper.
Chandal	Lower caste Hindu engaged in dead body cremation.
Chatuspathy	Centre of Sanskrit learning.
Chota Rani	Younger queen.
Chota loka	Down trodden class of people.
Choudhury	A title conferred to the collector of revenue popularly called zamindar.
Chuknidar	Under tenant of the zamindar.
ChuNarai	Lime burner.
Club Law	It denotes the application of force of a band of People to suppress the Persons not comply with the orders of the zamindar.
Daide	A class of Muslim people of old Goalpara district engaging in Dry fish business.
Daini Madai	Deity of Ghost in the Bodo tradition.
Darbesh	Muslim Saint. in which immersion of Devi Durga is done.
Dasturi	A kind of commission.
Dastur	Traditional rule followed by the people.
Deb	Sur name of the zamindar.
Debattor land	Land grant to the name of God for maintenance of its puja and temple.

Dekial Phukanar-

Kaidabandi	A set of rules introduced by Adandaram Dekial Phukan, Dewan of Bijni estate.
Deodani	A kind of traditional religious dance of the Tribal people of Western Assam.
Deshi	Indigenous.
Devarsana	Related to the arsana or offering puja to the God and Goddesses.
Devi Astabhuj	Deity with eight arms.
Dewa	Manager of zamindar.
Deurihouse	A house built fr the Barkandaz used for the safety of Rajbari built by the zamindar of Mechpara estate.
Dhakhinkul	South bank area of Brahmaputra River.
Dhakhina	Immigrant from south.
Dhoba	Washer man.
Dhonuk/Dhonukar	A person engaged in cottongin for making quilt stuff.
Dotara	Musical instrument used for folk song that is made of two wires, hence called dotara.
Ejarardar	Leasee.
Ekadashi	Eleventh day of the luNara month fortnight.
Elaka	area.
Fandi	Elephant catcher.
Fauzadar	Provincial Governor of the Munhall administration.
Farman	Mughal Imperial order
Fate Ha i Duazdaham	Observation of the birth and death anniversary of prophet Hajrat Muhammed.
Gaddi	Post of zamindar.
Ganak	Fortune teller.
.Gariya	Muslim immigrants from Gauda. It denotes the Muslim settler in Assam accompanied the Invading force of the Sultan of Gauada.
Goal	Milkman
Gomatha	Owner of land.
Ghat	A landing place at the bank of river where tolls are collected.

Hal	Plough.
Halwa Sangha	Peasants Organization.
Halwa	Ploughman.
Hajat jama	Partial remission of rent.
Hat	Market place.
Habraghati	Dweller of Habraghat area.
Hira	Potter maker.
Hasti	Elephant.
Idd ul fitre	Festival of Idd, observed by the Muslim after one month fasting in the Month of Ramjan.
Ijara	Farming lease.
Ijardar	Farming lessee.
Jarua	A indigenous languastic group dwelled in esratwhile Goalpara district who speaks mixed language of Goalpariya and Assamese.
Jaigir	Land assigned to the military officer.
Jaigirdar	Assignee of Jaigir.
Jaladhar	Officer incharge of Water.
Jalua	Fisherman.
Jama	Total revenue demand or assessment of rent.
Jamadar	Officer of the small body of the troop.
Jamanavis	Revenue officer.
Jagrata mandir	Temple where Devata is said to be appeared.
Jaluar dighee	Pond belong to Jalua.
Jalsa	Musical programme.
Jogi	A lower caste Hindu.
Jola	Weaver of Muslim Sect.
Jote	A particular tract of land giving lease to a person for farming for fixed amount of revenue.
Jotedar	Person having right on jote.
Jikir	Religious chorus of the Muslim.
Kabuliyat	Counterpart of lease.
Kalita	A ethnic group entered Assam before coming of Aryans.

Kangali Bihu	Kangali means poverty, it is a kind Bihu festival observed in Assam in the month of Kartik, during which peasants facing shortage of food staff. So the Bihu is called Kangali Bihu.
Kansari	Branzier.
Karkhana	Court of Bhuyans.
Kayastha	An upper Hindu caste.
Keot	Hindu Sudra caste.
Khalsa	Imperial Exchquer of the Munhall.
Khalisa land	Land not assigned to the Jagir.
Khas land	Land not assigned to any intermediary for revenue collection.
Kheraipuja	A religious festival of the Bodo.
Khemta dance	A kind of folk dance.
Khunjhuri	A kind of small cup shaped cymbals used in folk song in Goalpara
Krishak	Peasant.
Krishak Andalan	Peasant Movement.
Kuldevi	Family Diety.
Kushan	A kind of folk song current in Goalpara society.
Kutuni	A lower class people.
Kutchery	Zamindar office.
Lakhraj	Rent free land.
Lohar	Black smith.
Lathi khela	An exhibition fight with sticks.
Lathi khela	An exhibition fight with sticks.
Loka Geet	Folk songs.
Madak	Sweet maker.
Madan Mohan	Family Diety of Mechpara family.
Mahal	A revenue division of pargana.
Maharram	A festival of the Muslim observed in memory of the Martyr of Hajrat Hussein in Karbala, the grand son of Haj. Mohammed.
Mahut	A keeper and driver of an elephant.

Maigani	Collection of articles from door to door on occasion of Magh Sankranti by the youth.
Maisal	Buffalo keeper.
Mali	Gardener.
Malwajib	Fixed and proper revenue to be paid to the government.
Mansabdar	Holding of rank bestowed by the Mughal Emperor.
Mela	Festival.
Mela shikar	A group of fancies collectively arranged catching of elephant.
Miah	An appellation affixed before the name of respectable person as a courtesy, here the term denotes the Bengali Bengal settled in Assam in a ridiculous sense By some of the Assamese people and Students organisation.
Mancha	Stage for drama and music.
Marria	A class of Muslim.
Matsayaya	Lawlessness.
Mouza	A fiscal division.
Mukarariland	Rent free land.
Muqaddani	Owner of land.
Much	Sweeper class.
Mochulka	Bond of written document.
Naiya	Boatman.
Nankar	Free of rent.
Ostad	Sashtri Musician.
Padsila	Stone carrying mark of foot.
Palni	Ferriman
Palquin	Carriage manned by man.
Panch Peerer Dargah	Dargah of five Peers.
Pargana	A revenue and administrative group comprising some villages.
Patsala	Lower primary school.
Patta	Land document.
Peer	Muslim Saint.
Peerpal land	Land granted to the Dargah of Peer.
Pith	Holy place.

Poa	One fourth of a unit.
Praja	Subject.
Puja	Worship.
Punnah Nazar	Complementary fee paid by the leading Tenants, invited to the ceremony of collection in the New year day.
Purahit	Priest.
Pushan	A festival observed in Western Assam in the last day of the month of Push.
Pyke	Physical labour to the government in lieu of payment of land Revenue under the Ahom rule.
Qanungo	Revenue officer and supervisor of Survey.
Rai Bahadur	An honor bestowed to the zamindar by the British.
Ray Rayan	Principal of Revenue.
Raj	Zamindary estate.
Raja	King.
Rajbari	Palace, here it denotes zamindary palace.
Rajhawli	Zamindary palace.
Ramjan	An Arabic month.
Rani	Queen.
Rasa Raj	Raja of Rasa , king of comedy.
Ryot	Tenant.
Royatwari system	Revenue settlement directly with the Ryots.
Sadar Kutchery	Central office of the zamindars.
Sadabrata	Rest house.
Sali land	Land producing winter paddy.
Sali	Winter paddy.
Samajpati	Head of the society.
Samata	Even, equal.
Sanad	Title deed of land by a written authority.
Sanyashi	Hindu Religious Devotee.
Sarkar	Fiscal division of province.
Saru Rani	Younger queen.
Satarabi	Zamindar of Awadh.
Satra	Institution for prayer of Vaisnavism.

Sayer	Duty collected at markets.
Shasti	Sixth day of the month.
Shikari	Hunter.
Shiya	A section of Muslim people, opposite of Sunni. Muslim, are divided into two sections, viz, Shiya and Sunni on certain principles.
Sivate cult	Believer of Sivaism.
Sola	A kind of article produced locally in the pond like jute and its inner stick which is very light, used for preparation of dolls and articles for Worship like garland, flower, etc.
Sola Silpa	Indigenous handicraft on sola..
Subah	Province.
Subahdar	Governor.
Tabla	An instrument of music in the category of drum.
Tati	Weaver.
Tol	A school of Sanskrit learning.
Touzie	Annual ledger Account.
Teli	Oil pressure.
Thanadar	Officer in charge of Thana, a unit of administration with revenue and Police authority.
Zamindar	Land lord.
Zamindary	Estate.
Ujjani	Indigenous Muslims live in Goalpara district are called Ujjani and immigrants are called Bhatia, the terms represented the direction of their place of origin, Ujjan or Bhati.
Uttarkul	North bank area.
Vaisya	Hindu professional class engaged in business.

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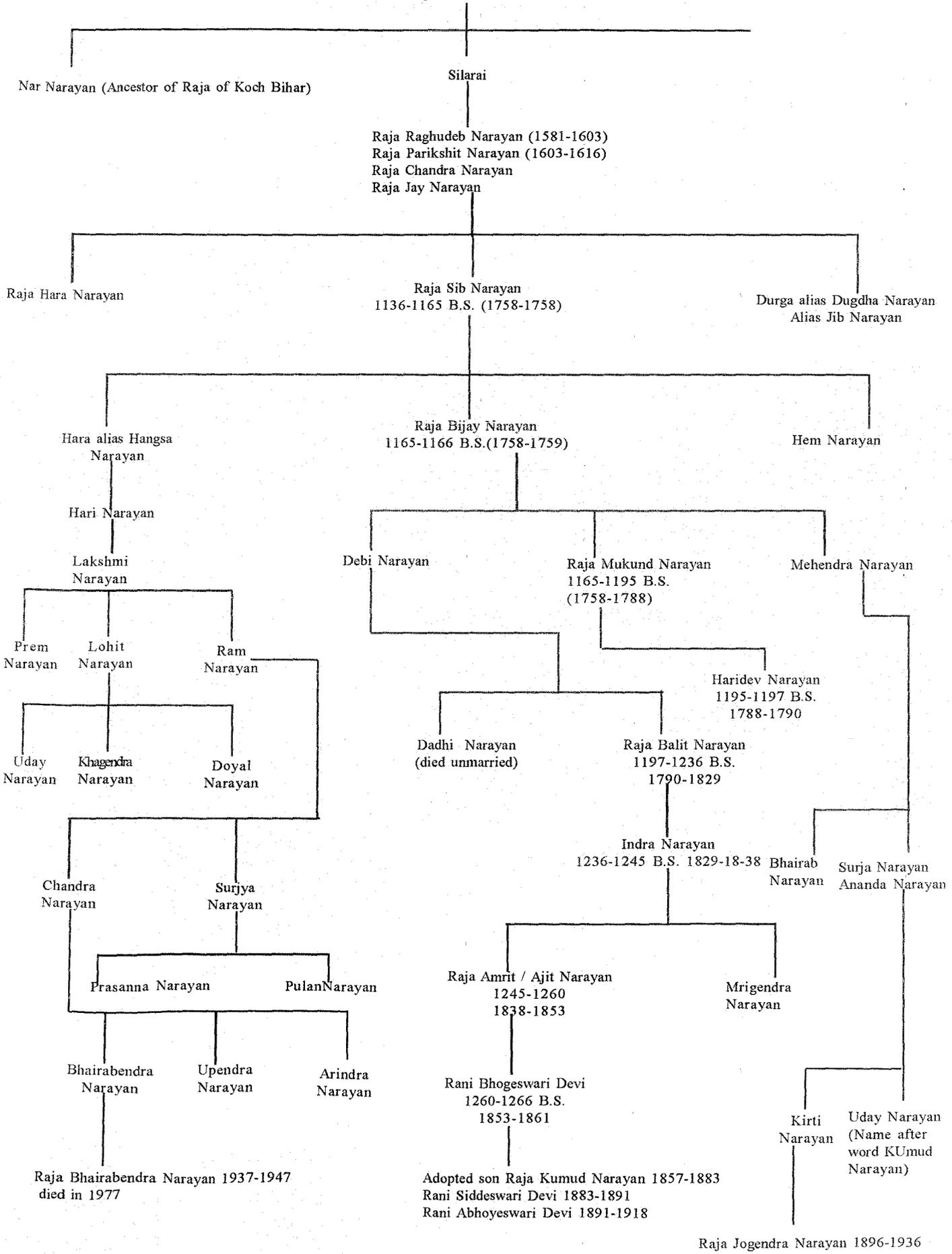
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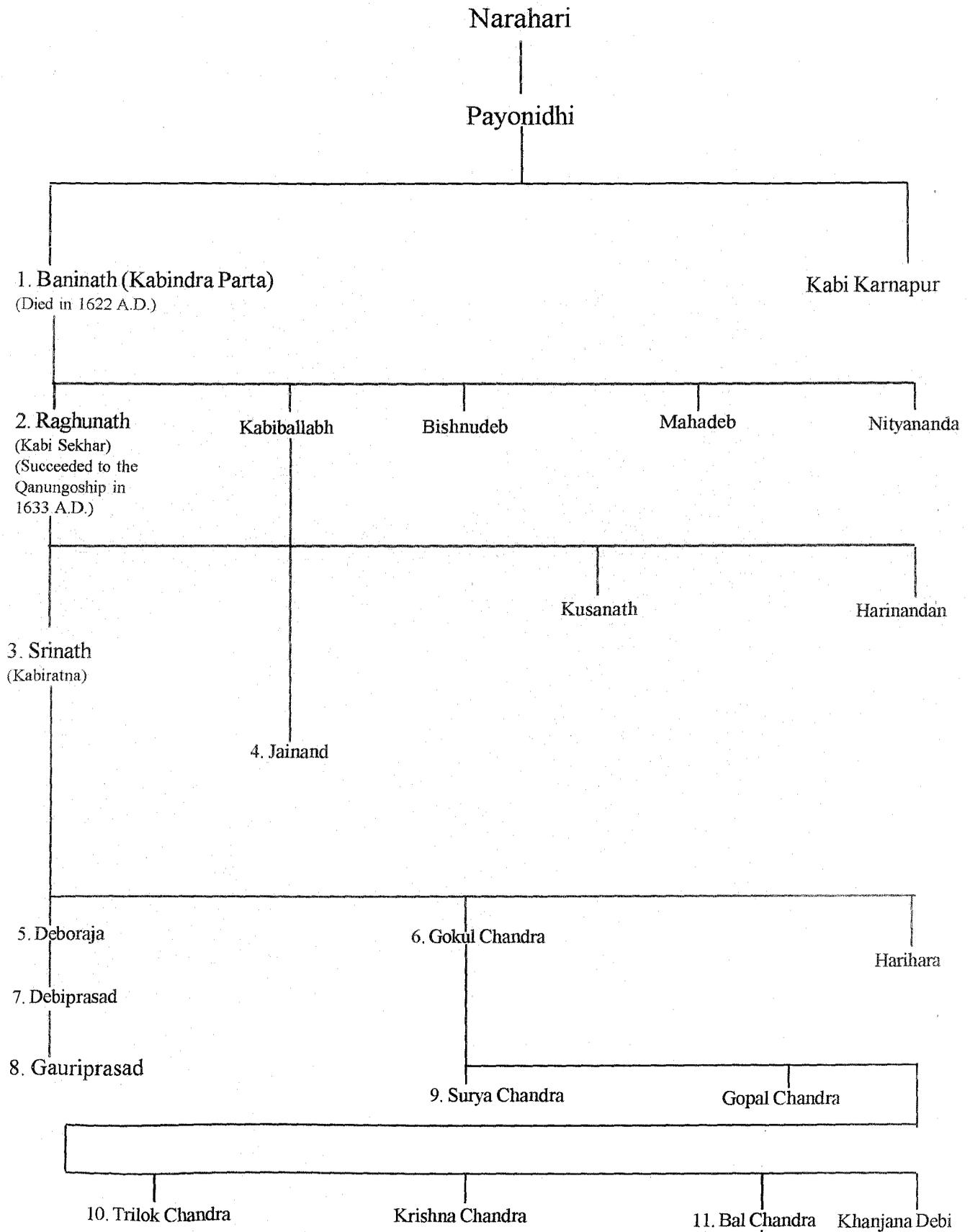
Appendix - I

Genealogical Table of Bijni Raj Family

Bishwa Singh (1515-1540 A.D)



Appendix - II Genealogical Table of the Gauripur Raj Family



Continued to next page

11. Bal Chandra
(Succeeded to the Qanungoship in 1732)

12. Bul Chandra
(Succeeded to Qanungoship in 1778)

13. Bira Chandra

14. Dhira Chandra
(adopted by Bira Chandra's Wife
and was 7th in Succession from Kabiballabh,
brother of Kabi Sekhar)

15. Pratap Chandra
(Died in 1880)

16. Rani Bhabani Priya
(Upto 1898)

17. Raja Bahadur Prabhat Chandra Barua
(Adopted by Rani Bhabani Priya and
Succeeded to the headship of the family in 1898;
died in 1940; had two wives)

Of the 1st Wife

Of the 2nd Wife

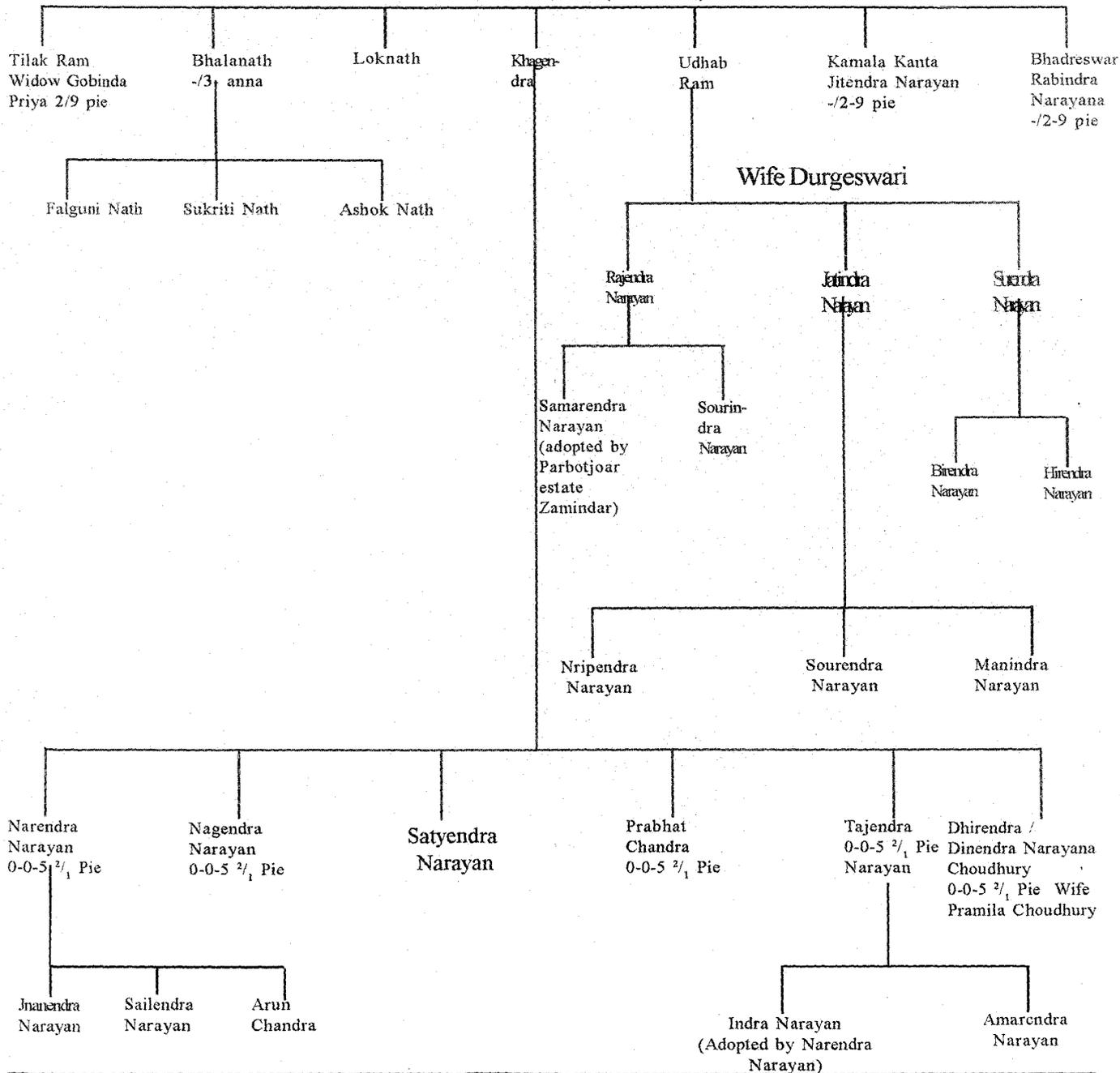
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- Kumar Pramathesh Chandra Barua
- Kumar Prakritish Chandra Barua
- Raj Kumari Niharbala
- Raj Kumari Nilima Sundari
- Raj Kumar Pranabesh Chandra Barua

- Saralabala
- Amal Chandra Barua
- Ajoy Chandra Barua
- Ajit Kuma Barua

Appendix - III

Mechpara Estate : Genealogical Table

Khana Gabura (1406 - 1447 A.D.)
 Son Khana (Thana) Kamal
 or Kamal Lochan (1447-1504)
 Son Magha Ram (1504-1561)
 Son Gobinda Ram (1561-1621)
 Son Mukunda Ram (1621-1674)
 Son Sabha Ram (1674-1730)
 Son Rana Ram (1730-1790)
 Son Mahi Ram (1790-1822)
 Son Prithi Ram (1822-1874)



* Anna and Pie indicate the share of property.

Sources : (i) Court of Ward's letter No. 25 dt. 11.4.22; (ii) Personal enquiry.

Appendix - IV

Genealogical Table of the Chapar Zamindar Family

