

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

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

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