

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 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 Dekrang. 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 Ujbeg 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 Dharma Narayan 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 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 inscreased 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 an 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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