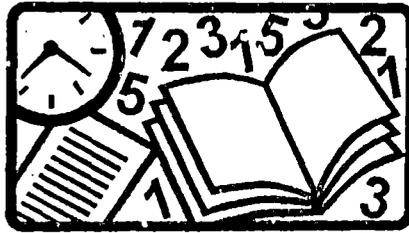


Chapter: 2



Colonial Physical Setting

Chapter: 2

Colonial Physical Setting

The colonial state is a basic part of the colonial structure. The basic character of colonialism and its different stages can be illustrated from the history of colonialism in modern India. This is specially so because historians agree on treating India as a classic colony. The basic character of British rule did not remain the same through its long history of nearly two hundred years. Indian colonialism can be termed as the period of monopoly trade and direct appropriation. The early days of the British power in India were the days of merchant adventurers who traded and plundered indiscriminately.¹ The East India Company and its agents carried off in this way a vast amount of the accumulated wealth of India. The company was a trading concern and its main object was to promote commerce and make profit.² During the first period of British rule, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the entire profit went one way – to England. The second period covered the nineteenth century, when India became, at the same time, a great source for raw materials for the factories of England, and a market for British manufactured goods. This was done at the expense of India's progress and economic development. Hence it took only such interest in political and administrative matters as was necessary for the promotion of its commercial interest. Between the economic interests of India and England there was an obvious conflict. Adam Smith had pointed out the harmful effects of the East India Company's rule in India. He remarks: "The government of an exclusive company of merchants is perhaps the worst of all governments for any country whatever. ... It is the interest of the East India Company considered as sovereigns that the European goods which are carried to their Indian

dominions should be sold there as cheaply as possible; and that the Indian goods which are brought from there should be sold there as dear as possible. But the reverse of this is their interest as merchants. As sovereigns their interest is exactly the same with that of the country which they govern. As merchants their interest is directly opposite to that interest."³

The British policy in India resulted in the death of Indian cottage industries and the drove the artisans to agriculture and the village; this was pointed out by Karl Marx, in his *The Future Results of British Rule in India*, published 1853. "they destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by leveling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India reports hardly anything beyond that destruction."⁴ The British parliament, however, paid increasing attention to Indian affairs. After the Revolt of 1857, the British Government took direct charge of India. But this made no vital difference in the fundamental policy, for the real power being wielded by the British Government, India was ruled in the interest of British capitalist's class as a whole.

India could not be exploited in the new way within its existing political, economic, administrative and socio-cultural setting. Therefore, the existing setting was necessitated to be replaced and transformed all along British requirements. India was thrown upon to British capitalists to develop tea, coffee and indigo plantations, trade, transport, mining and modern industries in India. The British Government extended maximum help to these capitalists.⁵ Karl Marx's remark, "the British in East India accepted from their predecessors the department of finance and of war, but they have neglected entirely that of public works" is of much significance.⁶ Cambell himself, greatly influenced as he was

by the prejudices of the East India Company, was obliged to avow, "that the great mass of the Indian people possesses a great industrial energy, is well fitted to accumulate capital, and remarkable for a mathematical clearness of head, and talent for figures and exact sciences."⁷ From the above account it is evident that colonialism entered India and exercised its control with a view to monopolise trade and destroy the local trade and industry. Lord Clive had described the city of Murshidabad in Bengal in 1757 as a city "as extensive, populous, and rich as the city of London, with this difference, that there are individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater property than in the last".⁸ No district of Bengal suffered more profoundly from the transition from Mughal to English rule than did Murshidabad.⁹ During the British era Rajshahi was the most unwieldy and extensive Zamindari of Bengal or perhaps in India. "The Zamindari of Rajshahi" wrote Warren Hastings in 1786, "the second in rank in Bengal and yielding an annual revenue of about twenty five lakhs of rupees, has risen to its present magnitude during the course of the last eighty years by accumulating the property of a great number of dispossessed zamindars, although the ancestors of the present possessor had not, by inheritance, a right to the property of a single village within the whole zamindars".¹⁰ According to J. Grants, it produced "at least four fifths of all silk, raw or manufactured, used in or exported from the effeminate luxurious Empire of Hindustan".¹¹ L.S.S. O'Malley wrote that the Permanent Settlement proved the ruin of the estate.¹²

This chapter will focus on the physical feature of the area under study under the colonial time frame. The cultural character of colonialism in India during different stages, its changing character and the reasons thereof shall also be examined.

II

During British rule in India, the districts were the basic units of administration. In 1772, Warren Hasting's administrative plan was divided with a district as the unit. The territory of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was divided into a number of districts. In each district, an English servant of the Company was appointed as collector who was to be responsible for the collection of land revenue.¹³ In the regulation districts, as distinguished from the non-regulation ones, which had a special type of administration,¹⁴ there were, as far as the Bengal Presidency was concerned, at first two district officers, the judge-magistrate with judicial, magisterial and police powers, and the collector with fiscal powers only. But under Regulation IV of 1821 collectors of land revenue could, in certain cases, be empowered to perform the duties of a magistrate or joint magistrate, and likewise magistrates and joint magistrates could be employed in the collection of revenue.¹⁵ Further, by a regulation of 1831¹⁶ civil judges were invested with the duties of sessions, and were thus relieved of their magisterial functions which were transferred to the collectors.¹⁷ The offices of magistrate and collector continued to be in the same hands till 1837 when they were separated again. Thus in 1858 there were in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa 25 Magistrates, 25 Collectors, 3 Magistrates and Collectors, 8 joint Magistrates and Deputy Collectors holding independent charge of districts, and 1 Magistrate and Jail Superintendent.¹⁸ They were all members of the covenanted service. But Regulation IX of 1833 provided for the recruitment of uncovenanted Deputy Collectors in Bengal, for which Indians were declared eligible.¹⁹

Nineteenth century Bengal Presidency included within its boundary the regions of Bengal proper, Bihar and Orissa.²⁰ The Lieutenant – Governor was directly responsible to the government with the assistance of provincial secretariat.²¹

Bengal proper included the five Bengali speaking divisions of Burdwan, Presidency, Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong with an area of 77,521 square miles lying astride the tropic of cancer.²² It contains tracts of very different physical features, including the alluvial plains of the *Ganges* and the *Brahmaputra* and the deltas of those rivers. In historical times, the rivers have been natural arteries of communication and transportation and they have defined Bengals physical and ancient cultural sub regions- *Varendra*, the *Bhagirati- Hooghly* basin, *Vanga*, *Samata* and *Harikela*. *Varendra* included the territories now constituting the districts of Malda, Pabna, Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur. The *Bhagirati – Hooghly* basin included several ancient cultural sub regions which correspond to the modern districts of Midnapur, Howrah, Hooghly, Burdwan, Birbhum, and Murshidabad. Ancient *Vanga*, or Central Bengal, included the area corresponding to the modern districts of Dhaka, Faridpur, Jessore, Bakerganj, Khulna, Nadia, and 24 Parganas. *Samatata*, included the hilly region east of the Meghna river in the south eastern delta, corresponding to modern Comilla, Noakhali, and Chittagong. Ancient *Harikela* included the territories of modern Mymensingh and Sylhet.²³ Physically, the most distinctive feature of the province is its network of rivers, the *Ganges* and the *Brahmaputra*, with their effluents and distributaries. These rivers furnish an admirable and cheap means of transport; they contain an inexhaustible supply of fish and they bring down vast quantities of fertilizing silt, which they distribute over the surface of the delta. Great marshes or *bils* are often found within the enclosures thus formed by the high

banks of rivers. The natural tendency of these swamps is to fill up; in the rainy season the rivers drain into them and deposit their silt, and decayed vegetable matter also gradually accumulates.²⁴

The population of Bengal proper grew rapidly. In 1901 it was 41,259,982;²⁵ by 1931 it had become 50,114,002.²⁶ The two most important communities were the Hindus and the Muslims, besides a relatively small number of Christians, Buddhists and Jains. In Bengal, the Muslims were in a majority forming about 51% of the population in 1901. They were numerous in the fertile eastern districts of the province (Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi division) and by 1931 their number increased to 54% of the population. The Hindus, who were mostly concentrated in the western and central parts of the province i.e. Presidency and Burdwan division, formed about 46% of the population in 1901; by 1931, though their number increased, their percentage in proportion to population further decreased forming only about 43% of the total population.²⁷ The majority of the Muslim population in Bengal was converts.

But a small minority of the community could claim descendant from outsiders who came as traders and invaders.²⁸ This small minority of people regarded themselves as superior to the converted Muslims. By virtue of their close relations with the ruling and trading class they were usually landlords and were mostly absentee having no contact whatsoever with the masses. The members of the aristocracy were urban based, educated, professional and non Bengalis, the masses were rural, illiterate and deeply rooted to the soil and professionally speaking, they were, like the low caste Hindus, poor agriculturists and artisans.²⁹ Their language, culture, social status and economic position were far below those of the upper class Muslims. It was these aristocrats who took the lead in

educating and awakening the Muslim people and dominated Muslim politics in Bengal till the partition of Bengal in 1947.³⁰

On the other hand, socially and economically the Hindus were divided into four broad caste divisions – Brahmin, Kayastha, Vaishya and Shudra. Among the backward classes came the Mahisya, Namasudra and Rajbangshis. Demographically the Mahisya formed the largest Hindu caste and were confined practically to western Bengal. The Namasudras, who fall under the category of untouchables, formed the second largest caste and were numerous in Eastern Bengal. The Rajbangshis with their concentration in northern Bengal came third in number.³¹

(a) Rajshahi:

Rajshahi is a district in the south-west of the Rajshahi division. The district lies between 24°6' and 25°13' north latitude 88°2' east longitude.³² In the British period the head quarters were at Rampur Boalia on the northern bank of the *Ganges* which is known as the *Padma* in this portion of its course.³³ The *Ganges* from a natural boundary to the south and southwest. This great river separates Rajshahi from the districts of Nadia and Murshidabad. The other contiguous districts are Dinajpur and Bogra on the north, Bogra and Pabna on the east and Malda on the west.³⁴ The name Rajshahi is commonly believed to mean the royal territory, and it is a popular, but mistaken idea that the district was given this designation because it was the abode of many Rajas. The origin of the name is doubtful, but one plausible hypothesis is that it dates back to the beginning of the 15th century, when this part of the country was ruled over by Raja Kans or Ganesh, the Hindu chief of Bhaturia. The Raja having ousted the Mohammedan Governor of Gaur,

became king of Bengal, and, according to Professor Bloehman, was consequently known as Raja Shah; hence name Rajshahi.³⁵

The old district records of British administration used several spellings of Rajshahi such as Rajeshy, Rajeshey, Rajeshahy, Rajeshaye, Radshy, Radshi, Radshahy, Radshye, Radshay, Radshaye, Radshahye, Raudshehi Raujishy, Raujeshahy, Raujshahy Raajshahy, Raajshiey Rajshahy and Rajshy.³⁶ When the British took over the revenue administration of Bengal, Rajshahi formed a very big zamindari, or private estate, belonging to the Natore Raja, who was alone responsible for the payment of the land revenue. The average annual demand in the four years 1766-70 was Rs. 27, 02,000 (*sicca*), but the figure had fallen to Rs 22,86,000 (*sicca*) in 1778-79, during the time of the celebrated Rani Bhawani.³⁷ Rajshahi held the position of being the second zamindari in Bengal.³⁸ It had an area of nearly 13,000 sq.miles and included the districts of major part of northern Bengal and some portion of the district of Murshidabad, Nadia, Jessore, Birbhum, and even Burdwan. But unfortunately the permanent settlement proved the ruin of the estate.³⁹

Up to the time of the Permanent Settlement in 1793, Rajshahi formed the largest and one of the most important administrative divisions of Bengal. It could scarcely be called a district, for it corresponded with the great zamindari of Rajshahi, which was estimated in 1786 to comprise an area of 12,909 square miles: in other words, it was about several times the size of the present district. On the north of the Ganges is included the greater portion of the districts of Rajshahi, Maldah, Bogra and Pabna; on the south it included a large and important subdivision called *Nij Chakla* Rajshahi, which stretched across the districts of Murshidabad, Nadia and Jessore as far as the borders of Birbhum and

Burdwan. So extensive was this territory that it was found impossible for it to be administered efficiently by a single collector with two assistants, one stationed at Muradabagh in Murshidabad and the other at the local head quarters of Natore. Rajshahi district was established in 1772. Malda, Bogra and Pabna districts were carved out of it in different phases from 1793 to 1947.⁴⁰

The first change took place in 1793, when the Government made a general redistribution of Bengal districts. The extensive tract lying south of the Ganges was then taken from the parent district and divided among the adjoining jurisdictions of Murshidabad, Nadia and Jessore. This transfer left Rajshahi with the irregular triangle lying at the confluence of the *Ganges* and the *Brahmaputra* with those two rivers as its natural boundaries. But the prevalence of crime in the remoter parts of the district made further reductions necessary. It was realised that the collector of Rajshahi was unable to exercise proper control over the most distant parts of his jurisdiction and that the district was too large for one central authority. In the year of 1813 the two thanas which had been hitherto parts of Rajshahi, viz., Rohanpur and Chapai were formed into a separate district of Malda. But when Bengal was divided in 1947 five thanas viz., Bholahat, Nachole, Gomastapur, Shibganj and Nawabganj of the former Malda district became part of Rajshahi.⁴¹ In 1821 four thanas namely Adamdighi, Naokila, Sherpur and Bogra, were separated from Rajshahi, and, together with two thanas from Rangpur and three from Dinajpur, formed into the present district of Bogra. Again in 1832 the district of Pabna was constituted in a similar way by the separation of the five thanas of Shahzadpur, Khetupara, Raiganj, Mathura and Pabna from Rajshahi, and of four others from Jessore.

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Natore was the head quarter of Rajshahi district until 1825. But the district head quarter was shifted to Rampur Boalia due to the unhealthy climate of Natore area. M. Nurrunnabi remarks, " This resulted in the influx of European officers, lawyers, businessmen and men of other professions. The Rajas and Zamindars of Puthia, Dublahati, Dighapatiya, Bolihar and others often came to this town erected their own bungalows to reside here with the object of supervising their own property and also to keep close contact with the government offices."⁴²

The subdivision of Natore was then formed; and the Naogaon subdivision was created in 1877. Before the partition of India in 1947, Rajshahi district was divided into three subdivisions. The average density of population was 566 per square mile. The following table shows the name of the Subdivisions, area in square miles and population.

Table: I

Area and Population in Rajshahi district in 1911

Subdivision	Area in Square miles	Population in 1911
Rajshahi Sadar	824	564224
Naogaon	860	517405
Natore	864	398258

(Source: L.S.S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Rajshahi*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot.. 1916, p.128.)

There were altogether 14 thanas (revenue units) in the district with 20 police stations (investigating centres) as shown below.

Table: II

Thanas in Rajshahi district in 1911

Sadar		Natore		Naogaon	
Thana	Police Stations	Thana	Police Stations	Thana	Police Stations
Bagmara	Bagmara	Baraigram	Baraigram	Mahadebpur	Mahadebpur
Boalia	Boalia Naohata Paba	Lalpur	Lalpur Walia	Manda	Manda
Charghat	Charghat Rajapur	Natore	Natore Bagatipara	Naogaon	Naogaon Badalgachi Nandanali
Godagari	Godagari	Singra	Singra Nondigram	Panchupur	Panchupur
Puthia	Puthia Durgapur				
Tanor	Tanor Mohanpur Khurd				

(Source: L.S.S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers, Rajshahi*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot., 1916. p.128.)

Rajshahi district board consisted of twenty-three members, of whom five were ex officio, eleven were elected and seven government appointed. The district magistrate was ex officio Chairman of the board. The income of the board had been steadily rising, from Rs. 1,26,000 to 2,33,000 in 1910-11.⁴³ Thus the board maintained three middle vernacular schools (at Basudebpur, Dharail, and Gangor); three upper primary schools (Berahmapur, Chakgauri, and Isabpur), and one hundred ninety seven lower primary

schools. It also gave grants in aid to twenty middle schools, sixty four upper primary schools, four hundred thirty six lower primary schools and twelve other schools, such as *tols*, *madrasas* and *maktabs*. In addition to these, it maintained the Diamond Jubilee Industrial School at Rampur Boalia. It also allotted building grants for primary schools from a special Government grant, with the help of which thirty two upper primary and two hundred five lower primary schools were provided with buildings. It maintained eight dispensaries and also gave scholarships tenable at the Campbell Medical School in Calcutta and at the Dacca Medical School.⁴⁴

Like other district of Bengal it mainly depended on agriculture. The predominance of agriculture in the economic life of the district is very clearly brought out by the returns of occupations made at the census of 1911. This reports show that 1,170,000 persons or 79% of the population were supported by agriculture.⁴⁵ Of those who derived their livelihood from agriculture, 164,000 lived on income derived from rent of agricultural land. They consisted of landlords and their families. No less than 340,000 persons worked as cultivators maintaining 740,000 dependants, who were permanently employed in cultivation and as field labourers.⁴⁶ Consequently, there was a large agricultural population in this district.

From the agricultural point of view physical factors always placed considerable restrictions on the extent of crop cultivation in Bengal. The land of Rajshahi is not uniform. The district is divided into three parts with different characteristics. The first is known *Barind*. This is a tract of comparatively high land, which, starting from near Godagari, stretches north wards along the western boundary and then bending to the east stretches along the whole of the north of the district. The soil is hard and less friable; and

it is of yellowish to red hue, but is in places yellowish to red. It is undulating, with gentle and gradual slopes, admirably adapted for rice cultivation.

The second region is a riparian tract along the Ganges: it consists of the thanas of Rampur Boalia, Charghat and Lalpur. It has a grey sandy soil, on which a variety of crops are grown. The level is relatively high, the land sloping down northward from the Ganges.

The remaining thanas Naogaon, Baghmara, Puthia, Panchupur, Natore, Singhra and Baraigram and some portions of the Gangetic thanas constitute the third area, whose characteristic features are marshes and swamps (*bils*), which in the rainy season often form large winding lakes. The rivers have high banks fringed with villages beyond which the land slopes away to cultivated paddy fields or perennial marsh.⁴⁷

The districts of Rajshahi carried on trade and commerce. The English had a Commercial Resident at Boalia, and their trade in the Rajshahi silk was very extensive. The town of Rampur Boalia itself had been an "important trade center".⁴⁸ Wazifa Ahmed remarks that "trade and commerce developed and expanded to a great extent during the colonial rule, particularly in the later part of the 19th century, due to the expansion of the communication system specially the Rail communication."⁴⁹

(b) Pabna:

The district of Pabna, which forms the south east corner of the Rajshahi division, is situated between 23°48' and 24°47' north latitude, and between 89°02' and 89°50' east longitude. At the time of survey and settlement operations in the years 1920 to 1929, the total area of Pabna was 1442 square miles.⁵⁰ The districts of Bogra bound it on the north,

while the Ganges in the south separates it from the districts of Faridpur and Kushtia. The mighty Jamuna runs along its eastern border separating it from the districts of Mymensingh, and Dacca and on the west it has a common boundary with the district of Rajshahi.⁵¹

The origin of the name "Pabna" is not found in history. There are different views about the origin of the name of the district of Pabna. Cuningham, a renowned archaeologist, conjectured that the name Pabna might have been derived from the old kingdom Pundra or Pundrabardan, the country of pods, whose capital was at Mahasthangarh in the adjoining district of Bogra, but it has not received general acceptance of the scholars.⁵²

Many folk assertions have locally taken roots and branches in search of the origin of the name of Pabna. One of these is that the area was named Pabna after a notorious dacoit of that time.⁵³ A statement by Radha Raman Saha in his *History of Pabna* strongly contradicts such views because he found, on search, nobody by this name was on the list of robbers of this district. It is probable that the region of Pabna got its name from *Pabnee* one of the confluent streams of the river Ganges flowing by the south of this land.⁵⁴ Perhaps this may be acceptable, because the district is intersected by rivers of varying magnitude. During the rainy season, consequent upon the rise of the rivers, and spreading of the spill water over the countryside, the villages stand out as small islands in a wide sea and present the spectacle of a certain quiet beauty. The *Ganges* and the *Jamuna* have special features here, in the district of Pabna. Lovant Fraser, mentions book enthusiastically about the charms of the rivers of this part of the country.⁵⁵ The impression of Sir Joseph Hooker while travelling along the *Ganges* and passing by Pabna made his

way up the *Jamuna* about clay coloured and turbid water and yearly changes of its course is interesting.⁵⁶ In 1632, Mughal Emperor Shahjahan on the way towards Dhaka by river through Chalan Bil, under the campaign against the Portuguese pirates, made a stopover in Potajia, a river-port near Shahjapur.⁵⁷

When the East India Company acquired the district in 1765 under the grant of *Diwani* it mainly included the land of *Bheturia Chak* (a sub division) of the great Rajshahi Zamindari which was a division comprising of parts of the districts of Malda, Rajshahi and Bogra and also some parts of the Zamindaris of Bardebaju and Kamri. At the time of the Permanent Settlement the greater part of it was included in the district of Rajshahi. It owed its creation as a separate charge in 1828 mostly to the prevalence of dacoities which were common in this area as in other parts of Bengal due to paucity of responsible officers of the government, the inefficiency of the police and the convenience or active abatement of the local Zamindars. Dacoits or *wandos* roamed about the country in large groups and consequently lawlessness and disturbed condition prevailed in the country at that time. Dacoity had long been prevalent specially in the neighbourhood of the *Chalanbeel* where the exploits of three bandit chiefs viz. Rama, Shyma and Beni Roy were still remembered. Many folk assertions have locally mentioned about the bandit chiefs of Chalanbeel.⁵⁸ In view of the necessity for establishing law and order in the district of Pabna and for ensuring security of life and property among its inhabitants, a Joint Magistracy was appointed temporarily at Pabna in 1828.⁵⁹ But Pabna district, when first formed in 1832, was placed under a Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector; and it was not until the year 1859 that a full Magistrate and collector was placed in charge. Since that date, numerous changes have taken place in the limits of the jurisdiction of the

district officers. The district of Pabna is bound on the north by the district of Bogra, on the east by the river *Brahmaputra* or *Jamuna* which separates it from the districts of Mymensingh and Dhaka, on the south by the river *Padma* or *Ganges* which separates it from the districts of Faridpur and Kushtia, and on the district of Rajshahi.⁶⁰ The jurisdiction of the district had undergone many alterations involving a considerable reduction in area in the passage of time. The Sirajgang thana was separated from Mymensingh and added to Pabna from 1855. The most important change was the transfer, in 1862-63, of the large subdivision of Kushtia from Pabna to Nadia. On the 1st May 1871, Pangsa thana was transferred from Pabna to the Goalanda Subdivision of Faridpur district; and Kumarkhali thana to the Kushtia Subdivision of Nadia.⁶¹ Thus the river *Padma* was made the southern boundary of the district. In 1875 Raigang was transferred back to Pabna from Bogra and in 1879 a separate judgeship for the districts of Pabna and Bogra was created. The district was divided into two sub division and several police stations. The names of the subdivisions and number of thanas within each are shown below:

Table: III

Area and Police Stations in Pabna district in 1931

Subdivision	Police Station	Area in Square miles
Pabna	Pabna Chatmohar Sujanagar Algharia, Sara Faridpur Santhia Bera	875
Sirajgang	Serajgang Chauhali Ullapara Rayganj Shahzadpur Kamarkhanda Belkuchi Kazipur Taras	943

(Source: *Bengal District Gazetteer, B Volume, Pabna District Statistics, 1921-1922 to 1930-1931, Table: I*)

In 1872-73 agrarian trouble, originating in the Yusufshai parganas of the Sirajgang subdivision broke out in the district. The unrest was caused by the efforts of the Zamindars to enhance rent beyond legal limits and to prevent the tenants from acquiring occupancy rights under the Act X of 1859.⁶² The actual rental of the estates in the disturbed *pargana* had not been raised for some years, but the Zamindars were in the habit of realizing heavy ceases of various sorts, which had gone on for so long that it was scarcely clear what portion of their collections was rent and what illegal ceases.⁶³ The *ryots* refused to pay the enhanced rents and challenged the zamindars in the courts. The struggle gradually spread through Pabna and then to the other districts of Eastern Bengal.⁶⁴ In 1885, therefore, a more comprehensive Tenancy Act (The Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885) was passed defining rights of the *raiyats* for protection of their interests. The Bengal Tenancy Act was amended substantially in 1928 and 1938.⁶⁵

(c) Rangpur:

The district of Rangpur in the Rajshahi division of the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam is situated between 25°3' and 26°19' north latitude and 88°44' and 89°53' east longitude.⁶⁶ The districts of Jalpaiguri and the Cooch Behar State bound it on the north, while the Brahmaputra river in the east separates it from the Goalpara by the Garo Hills and Mymensingh. The mighty Brahmaputra runs along its eastern border separating it from the districts of Mymensingh, and Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri on the west. On the south it has also a common boundary with the district of Bogra.⁶⁷ It contains a total area, as returned by the Boundary Commissioner in November 1874, of 3411.54 square miles. At

the time of Buchanan Hamilton's survey in 1809, the total area of Rangpur was 7400 square miles which included, besides other tracts, the whole of the district of Goalpara. In the following years several transfers of land took place e.g., Goalpara was returned to Assam so that at the time of the revenue survey of Rangpur the area was found to be 2,054, 183 acres, or 4615.91 square miles. Since 1869-70, however, the large *chaklas* of Boda, Baikunthapur, and Patgram had been annexed to the District of Jalpaiguri, and certain *parganas* formerly transferred to Bogra had been reannexed to Rangpur.⁶⁸ The jurisdiction of the district has undergone many alterations involving a considerable reduction in area in the passage of time. Rangamati and Dhubri, formerly included in the district under the name of North Rangpur, were detached to form the new district of Goalpara and placed under the adjacent province of Assam.⁶⁹ Gobindaganj thana was transferred to Bogra, on the formation of that district in 1821, but the greater portion of it was retransferred to Rangpur in 1871. The three thanas of Fakirganj, Boda and Sanysikata were transferred to the newly created district of Jalpaiguri in 1869. The thana of Patgram was also separated from Rangpur and added to Jalpaiguri in April 1870.⁷⁰ Rangpur town was turned into a municipality in 1869. Till 1947 the district was divided into four subdivisions which again divided into several police stations. The census report of 1872 disclosed a total population of 2,149,972 but in the year 1931 its total population was 2 594 786.⁷¹ The names of the subdivisions and number of thanas within each are shown below:

Table: IV

Area and Police Stations in Rangpur district in 1931

Subdivision	Police Station	Area in Square miles
Sadar	Pirgacha, Kaunia, Kotwali, Gangachara, Badarganj, Mithapukur, Pirganj, Kaliganj, Hatibhandha	1,151
Nilphamari	Dimla, Domar, Jaldhaka, Kishoreganj, Nilphamari, Saidpur	639
Kurigaon	Lalmonirhat, Fulbari, Kurigaon, Nageshwari, Bhurangamari, Ulipur, Rahumari, Chilmari	917
Gaibandha	Gobindaganj, Palashbari, Shaghata, Gaibnada, Fulchari, Sadullapur, Sundarganj	789

(Source: *Bengal District Gazetteer, B Volume, Rangpur District Statistics, 1921-1922 to 1930-1931*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1933 Table: I, p. 2)

There are different views about the origin of the name of the district of Rangpur. Various endeavours were made from time to time but no unanimous conclusion has yet been reached. Historians hold different opinion in this respect. The generally accepted derivation of the name Rangpur is *ranga*; and *pur*, place; that is, the place of pleasure or the abode of bliss. J. A. Vas wrote that, "Raja Bhagadatta, the mythological king of Kamrup, whose feats are recorded in the Mahabharata, possessed a country residence here on the banks of the Ghaghat. Parghana Pairaband, which lies seven miles south of Rangpur, is said to be named after Pairavati, a daughter of Bhagadatta."⁷² J.A. Vas suggested that Rangpur is derived from *ranga* which means a joke or jest. It will not be out of context to mention here a familiar Bengali proverb, that runs in this manner: "Range Rase Bharpur, Tar nam Rangpur." Again the name of Rangpur is commonly

believed to mean colour, which was used for the dyeing industry.⁷³ Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy was of opinion that the name might have been derived from the red soil area called '*ranga*' and the entire district has gradually come to be known as 'Rangpur'.⁷⁴

It contains tracts of very different physical features, including the alluvial plains of the great rivers the Brahmaputra, Tista Karatoya and Dharla. Besides these main channels, the whole district is intersected by a network of watercourses, forming cross lines of communication between the great rivers. Owing to the number of the channels, their frequent changes of course, and the varying names of the same stream in different places, it would be hopeless to attempt a detailed description of all the rivers in the district.⁷⁵

The ethnic origin of the people this district could be divided into two classes Aryans and aboriginal tribes or races.⁷⁶ Hunter wrote that 'the first class consists of settlers from Bengal or other parts of India, who by the ride of conquest or desire of trade and employment have immigrated into the district and permanently settled there. These settlers are of various religions and sects, consisting of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Muhammadans.... The characteristic features of these people- flat faces, broad noses, and high cheek -bones- clearly show that they belong to the Mongolian race. They were the indigenous inhabitants of Rangpur, who founded the last local dynasty previous to the irruption of the Muhammadans; and the marked Mongol physiognomy of the people is unmistakable in the portion of the district bordering on Kuch (Koch) Behar.'⁷⁷ In 1931 census compilation for Rangpur the number of ethnical divisions of the people is given below:

Table: V

Caste, Tribe, Race or Social Group of Rangpur District 1931

Ethnical Division	Number of People
Rajbangshi	444974
Namasudra	36319
Baishnab	31274

(Source: *Bengal District Gazetteer, B Volume, Rangpur District Statistics, 1921-1922 to 1930-1931*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1933 Table: I, p. 6)

During the early period of the company's rule the *Fakir -Sannyasi* movement broke out in Rangpur. In the 1780s the district was infested with *dacoits* or *bandits*. 'A set of lawless banditti', wrote the council in 1773, "known under the name of *Sanyasis* or *Fakires*, have long infested these countries; and, under pretence of religions pilgrimage, have been accustomed to traverse the chief part of Bengal, begging, stealing, and plundering wherever they go, and as it best suits their convenience to practice. In 1784 we find that Swaruppur was infested by a herd of dacoits who had carried off 600 women and hanged a *Fakir* who dared to complain against them. Ensign Duncanson was despatched against them; he defeated them and rescued many of their captives. In 1787, Lieutenant Brenan was employed against a noted dacoit leader, Bhawnai Pathak, in this quarter. Brenan observed the complicity of the zamindars with these dacoits, with the following remarks:

I did not imagine that it was a matter of any importance to know that the principal zamindars in most parts of these districts, and I believe, I may venture to add, in most parts of the country too, have always a banditti ready to let loose

on such of their unfortunate neighbours as have any property worth seizing on, and in accomplishing which even the lives of the unhappy sufferers are seldom spared. The zamindars commit these outrages in the most perfect security, as there is no reward offered to detect them; and from the nature of independence of the dacoits on them it cannot be effected without bribery.⁷⁸

According to Bipan Chandra, displaced peasants and demobilized soldiers of Bengal led by religious monks and dispossessed zamindars were the first to rise up in the Sanyasi rebellion.⁷⁹ This was led by Bhawani Pathak with another Fakir Majnu Shah and a female Debi Chaudhurani who had a large number of boats at her disposal and a big force of *barkandazs* in her pay.⁸⁰ Her title of Chaudhurani would imply that she was a zamindar. This character was developed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his famous novels *Annada Math* and *Debi Chudhurani*. Disturbance in this part of the country in the first quarter of the nineteenth century is graphically described by Mr. E. Strachey, 3rd Judge of Circuit, in a letter addressed by him in 1808 to the *Nizamat Adalat* at Murishabad. The *Sanyasis*, practiced oppression on the zamindars and their officers, whom they captured and confined until their demands were satisfied.⁸¹

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