Abu Rai, a Kayatriya from Punjab was the founder of the Burdwan Raj. In the year 1679 he was appointed to the most important and responsible post of Superintendent of Police (Kotwal) of the pargannah of Burdwan, as well as of pargannah Ibrahimpore and Sakally Bazar with the title of Chaudhurani, because of the fact that he helped the Faujdar of Burdwan with foodgrains and transport at a critical time. The Chaudhuris were the collectors of revenues of the Government. They collected the revenues from a number of Zemindars but, they themselves were mostly small zemindars.

Abu Rai was succeeded by his son Baboo. During this time one Ram Roy was the zemindar of the pargannah of Burdwan. But, he having failed in making good the payment of revenues, was ousted from the zemindary and the estates were made over to Baboo. At his death, his son Ghanashyam succeeded him to the zemindary. Ghanashyam was succeeded by his son Krishnaram.

A firman issued by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1689 shows that Krishnaram was confirmed in the possession of the title of 'zemindar' and 'chaudhuri' of the pargannah of Burdwan. This marks an elevation to the position and status of this famous Raj Family of Bengal. "A Zemindar is a person possessing hereditarily on the conditions of obedience to the ordinances..."
of government a tract of land under the denomination of a pergunnah or chakla subject to the payment of revenue. A zemindar is that kind of land lord registered in the records of government in the name of such a person."7. Krishnaram added to his ancestral property the zemindary of Awwmutshahi and "held the contract for the revenue collection of the Burdwan district............."8.

In 1696, Shova Singh, the Zemindar of Chitwa Bara, along with Gopal Singh, Raghunath Singh, zemindars respectively of Bishenpore and Chandrakona attacked Krishnaram at Burdwan. Rahim Khan, the Afgan Chief of Orissa, also lent his support to these insurgents. It is to be remembered here that Chitwa Bara, the zemindary of Shova Singh is now included in the jurisdiction of the Hooghly District. Krishnaram with a small band of followers came out to meet the combined forces and breathed his last after a gallant fight.

Jagatram, son of Krishnaram, took refuge at Jehangirmagar(Dacca), but his property and family fell into the hands of the rebels. The forces of the Faujdar of Jessore was too weak to put a stop to the advance of the enemy forces. Thus unchecked, they captured Hooghly and annexed most of the places lying to the West of river Bhagirathi.
It is worth mentioning here that the rebellion of Shova Singh links the formation of the towns of Calcutta, Chandernagore and Chinsurah respectively of the English, the French and the Dutch. Because after this rebellion of 1696, some permanent constructions were built in the villages of Calcutta, Chandernagore and Chinsurah by the English, the French and the Dutch in order to safeguard their trade and commerce in those above places from the hands of the invaders.

Shova Singh met his doom at Burdwan in the same year at the hands of Krishna Kumari, the virgin daughter of Krishnaram, whom he tried to outrage\(^5\). After the death of Shova Singh the insurgents were defeated and beaten back from Burdwan by the combined forces of Zabardast Khan (son of Ibrahim Khan, ex-Nawab of Bengal) and Nawab of Bengal, Azim-u-Shan in May, 1697\(^10\)*.

This event enabled Jagatram to return to his ancestral Zamindary of Burdwan and subsequently he added to it the pargannah of Ranbatty. But in 1701, he was stabbed to death. Jagatram left behind two sons Keerti Chand and Mitra Sen, the former being the eldest, succeeded his father to the Zamindary. Mita Sen was granted a fixed monthly amount from the exchequer. No war of succession followed which possibly led to the evolution of a practice that succession to the Zamindary in the Burdwan Raj
Family should be governed by the law of primogeniture

Keerti Chand (1701-1740) was a man of considerable talents and was very regular in the payment of the revenues. In 1703, the pergunnahs of Monoharshahi and Bhurseot were made over to Keerti Chand from the two defaulting landlords. In 1704, the Zemindar of the pergunnah of Chitwa Barda, a descendant of Shova Singh, rose in arms against Murshid Quli Khan, the Nabob of Bengal. But he was defeated and so lost his zemindary which was made over to Keerti Chand. At that time the Zemindary of Mundleghan pergunnah was held in coparcenary between Sukdebe and Jugannath Prasad. But their estates were incorporated in the Zemindary of Burdwan on account of their hostile conduct and revenue arrears outstanding against them.

Perhaps, for these acquisitions and extensions in the Zemindary, Ghana Ram, the eminent poet of early Bengali literature, referred to Keerti Chand as 'Maharaja' in 1709 in his famous Work 'Shri Dharmamangal'. But Keerti Chand had no royal firmans, either from the Nawab of Bengal or from the Emperor of Delhi, investing him with the title of 'Maharaja'. The above may well be cited as a case of literary excess.

In 1736 a firman was granted to Keerti Chand by Emperor
Mahamad Shah of Delhi confirming him with the Zemindary of Chandrakona subject to the regular payment of revenues and maintenance of order and peace of that region. He was also empowered to collect 'nan car' and 'rusum' of these regions. Thus within a very short time Keerti Chand became one of the wealthiest Zeminders of Bengal and was reputed for his timely payment of revenues.

It can be mentioned here that in those days the zemindar was appointed by the sovereign authority. As a compensation for the discharge of public duties the zemindar obtained a subsistence in rent in the shapes of 'maskurat', 'nan car', etc. The Zemindar collected the entire revenues of the estates left into his charge and was allowed a commission of 5 p.c. on the actual receipts. The office of the Zemindar was practically, though not in theory, hereditary. 

Keerti Chand died in 1740 and was succeeded by his son Chitra Sen (1740–44). Grant in his "Analysis of the Finances of Bengal" described Keerti Chand as the 'first acknowledged legal occupant of Burdwan' But Grant does not explain his reasons for saying so. Prior to Keerti Chand, accession from father to son was continuous. Moreover, there was no usurper in the Raj Family except when after the rebellion of Shova Singh in 1696 Jagatram took refuge at Dacca. But after the death of Shova Singh, Jagatram was reinstated to the
ancestral zamindary and was succeeded by his eldest son Keerti Chand.

Chitra Sen (1740-44), son of Keerti Chand, added the pargannah of Arsha, to his zamindary, from Marsingdebo Roy, son of Govinda Deb Roy, in collusion with the officer of Nawab Sarafraj Khan. A 'firman' granted to him in 1740 invested him with these possessions subject to the payment of revenue and maintaining the law and order of these regions. Chitra Sen died in 1744 without any male issue and was succeeded by his cousin brother Tilok Chand (1744-70). This Tilok Chand was the son of Mitra Sen, the younger brother of Keerti Chand.

It is important to mention here that the Maratha invasions became chronic during the second part of the 18th century in Bengal. In 1741 they appeared at Burdwan and carried on a devastating plunder. In 1746 again, under the leadership of Habibullah Khan, the Marathas swept through Burdwan and so complete was the raid that no trace of people for cultivation of land was left. But Alivardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, by his skill and resources defeated the Marathas in a severe battle near Burdwan.

Still the Marathas appeared again and again to this heart of Bengal and laid waste this fertile land. A letter written by Tilok Chand to the Company after 1757 bears testimony to this grim situation. In Tilok Chand's opinion the Marathas 'laid waste'
the whole country i.e. the Zemindary of Burdwan. It is needless
to mention here that the Burdwan Raj Family suffered greatly owing
to these repeated Maratha incursions.

But the battle of Plassey in June, 1757 turned the table
against the Maratha raiders. The month of June saw the transfer
of power in Bengal. From now onwards the history of Bengal was
dominated by the servants of the British East India Company. It is
worth mentioning here that in 1755, Tilok Chand put an embargo on
the Company's business within his Zemindary and stopped it completely
owing to the attachment of his property in Calcutta by the orders
of the Mayor's Court. But Alivardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal,
settled the dispute in favour of the Company.

Nothing much, however, is known about the part, if any,
played by Tilok Chand during the battle of Plassey. But the
immediate effect of this transfer of power was the cession of the
districts of Midnapore, Chittagong and Burdwan on September 27, 1760
by Nawab Mirkashim to the East India Company. This cession was made
by Mirkashim for the payment of the army of the East India Company.
At this time when Burdwan passed into the hands of the East India
Company, Burdwan Chackla comprised besides the district of that
name, the whole of the present district of Bankura, formerly known as Western Burdwan together with parts of Hooghly and Birbhum.
REFERENCES

1. The ancestors of Aboo Rai came to Bengal from Punjab. They were the residents of 'Kotli' in Lahore (now in West Pakistan). His grand father Sangam Bai, settled at Baikunthpore, a place not far away from Burdwan (only 9 miles South West of the present town of Burdwan). Sangam Bai engaged himself to commerce and money-lending. Bemku Behari Rai, son of Sangam Bai, was the father of Aboo Rai.

2 (i) "Hindoo Patriot" - March 26, 1857
   (A genealogical account of the Burdwan Family'.
   Translated from a Persian Manuscript).

(ii) "Bardhaman Raj Bansanucharita".
   A book in Bengali - by Rakhan Das Mukherjee - published by the Burdwan Raj.

(iii) But in the "Burdwan District Gazetteer"(Year 1910, pp. 27) it is stated that Aboo Rai was raised to the position of 'Chaudhuri' and 'Kotwal' of the Pergunnah of Burdwan in 1657. And Firminger observed that Aboo Rai was appointed as 'Chaudhuri' and 'Kotwal' of the Pergunnah of Burdwan about the year 1690. (Firminger- "Historical Introduction to the Bengal portion of the Fifth Report - pp. 38).


5. Ibid.

6. (i) Burdwan District Gazetteer - Yr. 1910 - pp. 27.
(ii) "Bardhaman Raj Bansanucharita" - by Rakhal Das Mukherjee - The Chapter on Krishna Ram.

7. (i) Revenue Proceedings : (Governor-General in Council - Vol. 128 - Appendix).
(ii) In the words of Baden-Powell, the word 'Zemindary' means the right to the revenue share, power to dispose of waste and unoccupied lands, right to certain mineral royalties, etc. (B.H. Baden-Powell - Asiatic Quarterly Review - July 1894).


11. (i) "Hindoo Patriot", March 26, 1857.
(ii) "Bardhaman Raj Bansanucharita" - by Rakhal Das Mukherjee.
There is another story that Narendranarayan Roy, father of the poet Bharatchandra uttered some insulting words about Maharani Vismukumari, mother of Maharaja Keerti Chand of Burdwan in a case over a plot of land. The Maharani became so angry that she ordered her Rajput generals, Alamachandra and Ksemachandra to occupy Bhursoot and subsequently they captured the fort of Bhavanipura and the residence of Narendranarayana.

(i) "Introduction to Bharatchandra's Granthavali" - published by the New Victoria Press.

(ii) "Alivardi and His Times" - by K.K. Dutta - pp. 196.


17. (i) 'Firman' granted to Keerti Chand (1736):

"We have on the death of Subba and Himmat (who incurred the wrath of the King) and Raghunath Singh, the Zamindar of Chandrakona, appertaining to the zamindari of Chakla Burdwan etc. granted the pergunnah of Fatehpore etc. appertaining to Sarkar Selimabad to Keerti Chand, son of
Jagat Ram Rai and grandson of Krishna Ram Rai...after performing due homage and obedience in acknowledgment of the 'firmans'...he should take the fees and 'nankar' allowances of pergunnah Chandraltona etc. on paying the revenue due to government according to rules.....the pergunnahs alluded above are on condition of paying of revenue and maintaining order and peace granted to Keerti Chand."

(ii)'Firman'granted to Chitra Sen (1740).

"He should pay into the royal treasury the amount and continue to receive 'rasum' and 'nankar' after payment of the due amount of revenue.....he is to check and punish the mischievous evil doers so that none of the evil doers and evil disposed persons may have the courage to do wrong. He should try his utmost to increase the productivity of these pergunnahs and to keep its ryots satisfied by good behavior and treatment. He should strive hard for the realization of the revenue of the 'Khalsa' mahal of this 'Sarkar' and the Jagirdar and render assistance and help to the servants of the Throne and the 'gostahs' of the 'jagir' lands."

For (i) & (ii) vide - "Economic History of Bengal - Vol.II" by Dr. N.K. Sinha - pp. 11 - 12.
22. For 'Chakla' (See Appendix - ii).
   (ii) Sunnud in Burdwan.
   "Translation of a Sunnud under the Seal of Nawab Nasseerool Moolk Inteaso Dowla Mussurul Jung Meer Mahomed Cossim Khan Bahadur -
   To the Zemindars, Cammogoes, Talockdars, Tenants, Husbandmen, and Chief Villagers of the Pergunnah of Burdwan, & ca. -
   The zemindaree of Rajah Tilok Chand, in the districts of the Soubah of Bengal, be it known that whereas divers wicked people have traitorously stretched forth their
hands to plunder the subjects, and waste the royal
dominions, for the reason the said Pergunnah, & ca.,
is granted to the English Company in part disbursement
of their expenses, and the monthly maintenance of five
hundred European horse, two thousand European foot, and
eight thousand sepoys, which are to be entertained for
the protection of the royal dominions ........................

They shall continue the zamindars and tenants in
their places, regularly collect the revenues of the lands,
and deliver them in monthly for the payment of the expenses
of the Company, and the pay of the above mentioned forces...."

(Vide - "Some Unpublished Records of British
Government etc........." by Rev.James
Long - No.481 ).