CHAPTER - VI

KARAIBARI ESTATE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ZAMINDAR FAMILY
Origin and Extent of the Estate:

Dharmapala, alias Dharmanarayana, the king of Kamata Kingdom, annexed the Kapili Valley to his Kingdom by killing Suvahu, the last reigning king of the Garahi-Pala dynasty. Suvahu's son Ruvar alias Padmanabha, was driven away from the Kapili Valley. The fugitive king Padmanabha appeared to have wrested the Palojinjiram Valley at the foot of the Garo Hills from the reigning Garo Chief in the middle of the fourteenth century. He married a Dimacha-Bodo princess, and his son Kashyap established an independent Kingdom there with its capital at Kashyapnagar, later known as Koshba near Garobandha. Subsequently, this Kashyapnagar came to be known as Karaibari.

As, originally, the Zamindary was dismembered from the Garo Hills, it was surrounded by the hills and jungles and inhabited by the Garo Hill tribes. Including the estate of Mechpara, this tract in the South-east of the Country

Stretched from north to the south over a tract of nearly 67 miles in length and by about 23 miles in breadth². According to B.C. Allen, the estate covered an area of 51 square miles³.

**Tribute and Revenue:**

Under the Moghuls, the *Zamindars* of Feraibari acquired the status of feudatory chieftainship called the *Choudhury*. They had military ranks conferred on them for opposing the Garo mountaineers. They paid no revenue of any kind for their land; they paid small tribute to the *Muhammedan Faujdar* at Rangamati in elephants for the *sayar* they levied on the Garos⁴. When the estate passed over to the British administration after the acquisition of the Diwani by the British East India Company in 1765, they used to pay revenue in cotton. The payment of revenue in kind was converted into money in 1791…⁵. Perhaps the estate was brought under the Decennial Settlement that year.

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⁵. Board of Revenue Papers, Letter to the Board of Revenue, dated 23rd Feb., 1791, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
In 1794, the estate was considered by the Commissioner of Koch Bihar as "istimary mohal", and the jama fixed in perpetuity was C. Rs.3062-7 annas 5 paisa.

Genealogy of the Zamindar family:

Padmanabha, who founded the petty feudal estate of Karaibari in 1350 A.D., was succeeded by his son Kashyap. In the local accounts, Kashyap is said to have continued his rule up to 1400 A.D. The name of the ruler who succeeded Kashyap is not known. Malkumar was mentioned as the feudal King of Karaibari. He submitted to Hussain Shah who invaded Kamata and Kamrup in 1498 A.D. Hussain Shah eventually conquered Kamata and Kamrup, and his son Dannial was made administrator of this conquered territory. Soon after the Bhuyan chiefs of the region combined together under the leadership of Malkumar, and attacked Dannial. In the engagement Dannial was defeated in 1505 A.D.

The next ruler in succession was one Nagakshya, who is mentioned to be the builder of Bilbeswar Temple.

Nagakshya's son and successor Durlabhendrā was killed by the Koch King Biswa Singha. His son Charu Chand is said to have become the administrator of the Karaibari Fort. He rebelled against the Koch King Nar Narayan, but he was defeated in 1555 A.D.

The history of Karaibari from 1555 A.D. to 1740 A.D. is obscure. Due to paucity of source materials nothing can be said about either of the position of the Karaibari estate or of its relation with the powerful Koch Kingdom. Perhaps after the fall of the Koch King Parikshit Narayan, Karaibari regained her former status. But she could not stand against the Muhammadans who invaded the Kingdom of the Koches. The whole of Kamrup was brought under their subjection. Karaibari submitted to them, and it was made a Pargana, forming a part of the Koch-Hajo under the Muslims. It was recognised as a frontier dependency of Bengal, and its de facto rulers were allowed to govern it as border Chieftain, called Choudhury. The sister estates of Mechpara and Kalumalupara were also placed on the same footing. It has been stated earlier that the Choudhuries of this border estate had to oppose the Garo mountaineers who were then in the habit of making annual plundering incursions in the plains. When the estate went under the British East India Company, they were left undisturbed.

13. Supra, Chapter I.
During the time of East India Company's accession to the Diwani of Bengal, Surjya Narayan (1740-1776 A.D.) was the Choudhury of Karaibari. Taking advantage of the feudal rights allowed to be enjoyed by the border Chieftains of this tract, he entered into a career of conquest, and attacked the Garos, and induced them to pay him tribute. His son Dharmanarayan (1776-1778 A.D.) followed his policy, and was successful in extending his jurisdiction over the Garo Hills. The last ruler Mahendra Narayan frequently carried out expeditions against the Garos. He built up several forts all along the passes of the Hills, viz., Fulbari, Belbari, Singimari, Baghargaon, Garobandha & C. and maintained a regular band of Barkandazes at each fort. He claimed control over the extensive territory of the Garo Hills.

Sale of the estate to Ramanath Lahiri of Rangpur:

During the tenure of Mahendra Narayan Choudhury Karaibari was brought under the Permanent Settlement, but he evaded payment of revenue to the British East India Company. In 1798 A.D., Government had to send troops to realise arrear of revenue. His conduct was of considerable

anxiety to the Collector of Rangamati (Baillie). For, though the Collection of Sayer dues or miscellaneous dues was made illegal, Mahendra Narayan Choudhury continued to levy them from the Garos. He compelled the Garo Chief Rengta to bring all the cotton produced in the hills to market in Karaibari. This dragged him into conflict with the zamindar of Sherpur in Mymonsingh; for Rengta's people had been in the habit of trading in the market of Sherpur and Shoosung. Mahendra Narayan took steps to stop the Garo trade with Mymonsingh. Rengta opposed it, and he was arrested by Mahendra Narayan Choudhury. He was kept in confinement till he was released in 1790 through the mediation of Elliot, who was at that time on the frontier of Mymonsingh. On his release Rengta offered to become British subject, provided the Garos were protected from the yoke of the Karaibari zamindar. Accordingly, the British agreed to make him a zamindar under them. But the negotiation fell through, as the messengers sent to Rengta were arrested by Mahendra Narayan Choudhury. Subsequently, all the passes to the Mymonsingh were occupied by him. He even invaded Sherpur in 1805.15

The British considered his acts to be illegal. Mahendra Narayan was termed as a refractory zamindar and in 1809 his estate was sold by the orders of the Board of Revenue for arrear payment, which, however, Mahendra Narayan Choudhury never admitted. Ramanath Lahiri, a Brahmin of Rangpur, purchased it for Rs.23,500/-\(^\text{16}\). Lahiri found it difficult to take possession of the estate. Mahendra Narayan threw himself into the hills. He brooded claims to hold his estate free of revenue. Unfortunately a sudden uprising of the Garos in 1815 caused the whole family of Mahendra Narayan massacred, and Government succeeded in arresting him. The estate had to be attached and managed by the Government Officials for some years. Because the auction purchaser, Ramanath Lahiri, could not cope with the affairs of the estate\(^\text{17}\).

**Partition of the Estate:**

Ramanath Lahiri sold a quarter share of the Karai-bari pargana in 1810 to one Radha Krishna Lahiri, an ancestor of the \(-/4/-\) annas Karai-bari zamindars. In 1924 litigations commenced between the \(-/4/-\) annas and \(-/12/-\) annas proprietors, which after various stages ended in a

17. Mackenzie, A., Ibid.
partition of the pargana Karaibari in 1854 into two blocks including Garo Hills, Jungless, valleys and Jalkars etc., one representing the /-4/- annas share and the other representing the /-12/- annas share. The partition was confirmed by the Board of Revenue on 25th of April, 1854, and the parties were put into possession on 25th July of that year. Two separate touzies were created, -/4/- annas estate as Touzi No.16, and -/12/- annas estate as Touzi No.12 of the Goalpara Collectorate.

During the time when the partition procedure was completed Barada Sundri Debya and Gunamari Debya were the proprietors of the -/4/- annas share estate, and Nil Kamal Lahiri and others were the proprietors of the -/12/- annas share estate. After delivery of possession as above, the proprietors of the -/4/- annas estate brought a suit for mense profits against the proprietors of the -/12/- annas estate for excess lands which they got as a result of the partition of which they were kept out of possession. After passing different stages the suit went up to Judicial Committee. The amount of mense profits was ascertained and declared by A. Forbes, the then Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara district.

Like the sister zamindaries of Mechpara and Kalumalupara, the zamindars of Karaibari levied dues on the Garos, who turned to the hats or markets established by the zamindars at the border passes referred to above. The duties levied by the zamindars on the Hills produce, chiefly, cotton sold in the frontier markets, were known as Sayer duties or Sairat. As referred to earlier, the zamindars of Karaibari and Kalumalupara were entrusted with the responsibility to repress the incursions of the Garos in the plains in their respective estates. In order to resist and keep in check those Garos each zamindar of these estates had been obliged to keep a military establishment, and the expense consequently incurred he defrayed out of the collection of the sayer duty on cotton brought from the hills by the Garos for sale in the markets, the produce of their (zamindars) lands being inconsiderable and of itself totally inadequate to the support of a military establishment. It is to be noted here that, as per statistics of the district of Goalpara in 1853, out of the area of 800 square miles of Karaibari, 740 square miles were covered with forests and only 60 square miles were cultivable. In consequence of these

circumstances, and in consideration of these estates being regarded as Tributary Mahal, they were exempted from the operation of the general rules in respect of Sayer. But the conduct of the zamindars caused much anxiety to the British, who believed that the aggressions of the Garos were occasioned by the frauds and exactions practised on them by the zamindars. Therefore in 1813 an arrangement was effected for the abolition of Sayer duties, Government compensating the zamindars of the loss incurred by them by such abolition. According to the accounts produced for adjustment of the claim of compensation on account of Sayer, the zamindar of Karaibari's net receipts amounted to Rs. 3627/- per annum. The Sayer compensation thus paid was more than the revenue demand. The Government recouped itself for the loss caused by the grant of compensation by imposing a special house tax on the Garos known as the Karanjama in addition to the original house tax, known as Khuta imposed by the zamindars of Karaibari on them. In 1822, a regulation was passed (Regulation X of 1822) by which the Governor General in Council exempted Dhubri, Goalpara and Karaibari areas, forming parts of the district of Rangpur, from the operation of the general regulation, and placed them under the control of a special

officer. David Scott was the first official who was entrusted with the responsibility of collecting the rents claimed by the zamindars from the Garos, paying over to them the proceeds after deducting the cost of collection and administration. He took into his hands the collection in 1825.  

Loss of territory to the Garo Hills:

No sooner did David Scott proceed to conclude arrangements with the Garo Chiefs in respect of the regulation referred to above, the Burmese war broke out, and Scott's works ceased as he was appointed Governor General's Agent for the North East Frontier. There were further troubles in the Garo Hills border from time to time. Things went bad to worse after 1861 when the Mymonsingh zamindar attempted encroachment on the hills, consequent on which the Garos indulged in most murderous raids in the plains. Political expediencies demanded immediate action. In 1866, an expedition was sent to the Garo Hills, and the offenders were subdued. But enquiries made by the Government showed that the main cause of Garo raids in the plains had been an attempt on the part of the Soosang Raja, a Mymonsingh

zamindar, to levy rents on the hills. In view of the fact that the Regulation of 1822 referred to did not apply beyond the jurisdiction of the Thana areas of Dhubri, Goalpara and Karaibari, a new piece of legislation was required for the control of the affairs in the Garo Hills. Thus, Garo Hills Act (Act XXII of 1869) was passed. Most of the provisions of the Regulation X of 1822 were repealed by the new enactment, and section 8 of the Regulation was replaced by Section 7 of the Garo Hills Act. Section 4 of the new legislation defined the extent of territory known as Garo Hills, and in case there was any dispute as to the boundary of the territory the matter was to be dealt with under section X by which officers were to be appointed by the Lt. Governor of Bengal. W.O. Backett, who was thus appointed Special Officer to determine the boundaries, submitted a report on 3rd March, 1874, in which he sought a portion of Karaibari Pargana to be included in the Garo Hills district. According to Backett's determination of boundaries almost the entire block of the -4/- anna share, leaving a small portion to the west,

and a small portion of the \(-\frac{1}{12}\)- anna block were cut off from the estate and included in the Garo Hills.\(^{26}\)

**Agreement with the Government**

On technical grounds Garo Hills Act was repealed by the Schedule District Act of 1874 (Act XIV of 1874) which received the assent of the Governor General in council on 8th December, 1874, and negotiations were started with regard to the portions of Karabari estate included in the Garo Hills. Under the direction of the Government, A.C. Campbell, the then Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara entered into agreements with the zamindars of Karabari. During that time Gunamani Debya and Parada Sundari Debya were the proprietors of the \(-\frac{1}{4}\)- annas estate; Nil Yamal Lahiri, Hari Charan Maitra and Fanakda Debya were the proprietors of the \(-\frac{1}{12}\)- annas estate, and Bhubaneswar Debya was a share holder of \(-\frac{1}{12}\)- annas estate of Karabari Pargana. Owing to their divided interest Campbell concluded three separate agreements with them. By these agreements Government recognised the pre-existing rights of the zamindars to the portions of

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\(^{26}\) Letter from the Offg. Secy. to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Govt. of India, Military Department, dated 1st Sept., 1878, Ibid.
Karaibari Pargana which were included in the Garo Hills by said Backett, and took over the management of the area ceded on condition of paying to the zamindars 75 per cent of the collection, 25 per cent retaining as collection charge.

**Fixation of Annuity:**

The portion east of the Revenue Survey (1849-54) map of Goalpara to which the title of the zamindars was not admitted by the Government was relinquished in 1854 in favour of the Government in lieu of annuity. The area relinquished was nearly 400 square miles. After the agreement of 1878 the Government proceeded to determine the annuity and lay down the eastern boundary of the Pargana Karaibari between the tract to which the rights of the zamindars were recognised under clause 4 of the agreement, and the tract in respect of which the zamindars relinquished their rights under clause 3 of the agreement.

A.B. Smart, Deputy Superintendent of Survey of India was appointed to determine the boundary line. The former tract was generally known as Karaibari Mahal or shortly

27. Karaibari Pargana, Ibid.
K Mahal and the latter tract Govt. Mahal, or shortly G Mahal. The annuity was tentatively fixed at Rs. 4,975/- in 1878. After the completion of the survey work by A. Smart, the boundary between the said two tracts was permanently demarcated by Capt. Maxwell, Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills in 1883, which was known as Smart’s line. The annuity fixed on the basis of Smart’s demarcation was Rs. 2,102/- in place of Rs. 4,975/- in June, 1884. According to clause 6 of the agreement, the cost of survey in respect of the demarcation of the line was payable by both groups, i.e., -/4/- annas and -/12/- annas, and the annuity and house tax, collected on behalf of the zamindars, were payable to the zamindars jointly29.

Administration of the Court of Wards:

In consideration to the petition of the zamindar to the Government, dated 16th August, 1937, the estate was taken over by the Bengal Court of Wards, and it was known as the -/4/- annas Lahiri Ward estate. This -/4/- annas Lahiri estate contained two shares and one was under the Court of Wards, and the other was managed by the proprietor himself. During the time of assumption of the -/4/- annas Lahiri estate, the Government of Assam was

29. Pargana Paraibari, Ibid.
not informed. However, certificate was issued to collect revenue from the peasants by the Government under the provision of the Goalpara Tenancy Act, 192930.

Public Works of the zamindar:

The zamindars of Karaibari were absentee zamindars. Whatever amount of public works did they perform in Valdanga (now in Bangladesh) is not known to us. In Goalpara, the zamindars had caused a canal (in 1935) to be excavated from the foot of the Garo Hills right down to the river Jinjiram (3½ miles in length) for the drainage of overflow rain water during the monsoon and erected protective embankment at their own cost supplemented by free labour of the people of the locality, which measure had checked the annual flood and the crops were saved, and in addition to this, the zamindars made a free gift in the same year to their tenants in Karaibari seeds of various kinds of winter crop worth Rs. 1,000/-31.

### Name of different proprietors with respective shares registered in the Collectorate of Dhubri before Independence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of proprietors</th>
<th>Shares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babu Bhabani Prasanna Lahiri of Naldanga Pargana Bahirband, district Rangpur.</td>
<td>1. -/3/- annas 16 Gandas and 2 Kara of the estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarojini Debi, Widow of Late Jatindra Mohan Lahiri in place of Jatindra Mohan Lahiri.</td>
<td>3. -/5/- annas 3 Gandas share of the whole estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shitesh Chandra Maitra</td>
<td>4. -/1/- anna 1 Ganda and 1 Kara of the whole estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bindu Basini Debya in place of Khoka Maitra (dead)</td>
<td>5. 5 Gandas 1 Kara and 1 Kranti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naresh Chandra Maitra</td>
<td>6. -/1/- anna 1 Ganda 1 Kara, 1 Kranti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khitish Chandra Maitra, son of Umesh Chandra Maitra.</td>
<td>7. 5 Ganda, 1 Kara, 1 Kranti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monoranjan Maitra, Bishnu Nath Maitra, sons of Babu Umesh Chandra Maitra.</td>
<td>8. ⅛ of 1 anna 1 Ganda, 1 Kara, and 1 Kranti of the estate, 5 Gandas 1 Kara 11 Kranti each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babu Munindra Lahiri, son of Jatindra Lahiri.</td>
<td>9. -/5/- annas 3 Gandas of the whole estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the proprietors</td>
<td>Share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Naresh Chandra Lahiri of Naldanga</td>
<td>1. -/1/- anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kiran Shashi Devi, W/o Nripendra Ch. Lahiri, Guardian on behalf of her minor son Nikhil Chandra.</td>
<td>2. -/1/- anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Napundra Ch. Lahiri and Nripendra Ch. Lahiri of Naldanga.</td>
<td>3. -/1/- anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sailesh Ch. Lahiri, son of late Suresh Ch. Lahiri in place of Prafulla Nalini Debya.</td>
<td>4. 4 pies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dinesh Ch. Lahiri, Bhabesh Ch. Lahiri, son of Suresh Ch. Lahiri in place of Prafulla Nalini Debya, W/o late Suresh Ch. Lahiri.</td>
<td>5. 4 pies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Nikhilendra Ch. Lahiri and Sushil Ch. Lahiri, sons of Napundra Ch. Lahiri in place of Kiran Shashi Debi W/o Nripendra Ch. Lahiri.</td>
<td>6. ½ of -/1/- anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Namita Prabha Debi, W/o Nripendra Ch. Lahiri, respondent by his mother guardian Namita Prabha in place of Nripendra Ch. Lahiri.</td>
<td>7. 6 pies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32. Register No.1 of Revenue Paying Estate, Permanently Settled, Dhubri Collectorate.