CHAPTER XIII

A REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM
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Originating in feudalism in the Middle Ages, the zamindary system in Goalpara developed as a part and parcel of the Moghul revenue policy. In the Muslim period, particularly during the period of the Moghul administration, the practice of collection of State revenue by the salaried officials directly from the peasants was followed. But the general rule was to delegate the work of the collection to a class of people who were conveniently described as Intermediaries, consisting of the Assignees, Chiefs, Headmen, and the Farmers. Under the Moghuls, the imperial territory was divided into two divisions, i.e., Jaigir and Khalisa. The great bulk of the cultivable land was ordinarily in the hands of the Jaigirdars (assignees). The Jaigir lands were usually assigned to Mansabdar, holding definite ranks bestowed on them by His Highness, the Emperor. They received their monthly salary either in cash from the State treasury or, in most cases, they were assigned particular areas of the country as

Jaigir\(^2\). In Goalpara, Mirza Nathan, the commander of the invading Moghul army, was assigned the Pargana Phuntaghat as Jaigir for some period of time\(^3\).

As matters stood the Jaigirdars held their lands for a short period (not exceeding four years) and as such possessed no permanent rights on the Jaigirs they held\(^4\). The Jaigirdars, in lieu of their services to the state, appropriated the revenue of the area assigned to them.

Certain tracts were kept reserved to provide the royal treasury with cash, and were directly managed by the revenue authority to the Government on the system of delegating the collection of revenue due to the state by the Intermediaries, other than the assignees referred to\(^5\). It should be mentioned here that the land once held as Jaigir could be transferred to Khalisa on resumption of the assignment. Similarly, land held in Khalisa could be assigned to Jaigirdars\(^6\), according to the sweet will of the Emperor.

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During the Moghul period, large areas of the country remained with the Hindu Chiefs,—

"who had at any rate, a claim to sovereignty, but had submitted to the Muslim rulers on terms which preserved to them internal jurisdiction; these terms might include the payment of a fixed tribute, or merely the personal service of the chief with his troops, but in either case the Muslim administration did not ordinarily interfere with the assessment or collection of the revenue so long as the terms were observed".\(^7\)

The Koch Raja Parikshit Narayan was such a tributary Chief. His kingdom suffered territorial loss, and was confined between the Manas on the east and the Sonkosh on the west. His son, Chandra Narayan, was confirmed to the tract as a zamindar under the Moghul emperor\(^8\), and he was the founder of the Bijni raj dynasty. The Bijni Raja was the de facto ruler of the Bijni estate, and thus the assessment and collection of the revenue continued on traditional line without interference of the Emperor.

In the days of the Moghuls, the North-East frontier tracts bordering the Garo Hills were divided into

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estates and were held for the most part by their original hereditary Chiefs, called the Choudhuries. They protect the life of the plains from the outrages of the Hill tribes, the Garos. In return for a small tribute paid to the Moghul Faujdar, posted at Rangamati as a token of acknowledgement to the Moghul Emperor, these Chiefs were confirmed in their possession, and were practically independent. Their estates were never subjected to revenue assessment. They paid tribute from the Sayar and not from land revenue.\textsuperscript{9}

It was a common practice for the revenue assessors to the Moghul Government to come to terms with the village headmen for the collection of revenue of the village as a whole.\textsuperscript{10} In fact, this practice was taken from the Hindu Princes. The establishment of villages as communities stood forth as a peculiarity in India. Each village constituted a small community which held a species of government within itself. Of the villages, one was a Headman, another was employed to keep and register the


\textsuperscript{10} Sir Burn, Richard, ed., \textit{cpr cit.}, p. 467.
account of the community. Such a person was known as **Patwari** in Eastern India. Sometimes the land of the village was held by the peasants as individual property; sometimes it belonged to the community as a whole, each **ryot** receiving a portion for cultivation. For the management of the land distribution and other transactions the village headmen were selected from amongst themselves, according to the custom of the locality. Indeed the village headman was the regulator of the village. When the revenue agents of the government transacted village by village they levied a particular sum upon each village as a whole, not on the separate portions of the land or on the individual peasant, they came to terms with the village headman, who settled the individual quota due to the State collected and paid it in lump sum

Villages were formed into **pargana** or district and besides a headman of individual village, there was a headman in the district. He might have been elected head in the beginning. Subsequently, he was probably nominated by the State to collect revenue due to the State, and entertained a percentage of the collection he made. He

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also received from the village subsistence allowance in the form of grant of land, known as Fankar. In course of time, the office became hereditary. There was a great convenience in preserving, in each district, the same great agent of revenue and after himself his son or successor because each was better acquainted with the people and resources of the district than, generally speaking, another could be expected to do so be. In this manner the situation of these agents became, in fact, hereditary.\textsuperscript{12}

It is not definitely known whether a village headman ever acted as revenue agent in Goalpara when it was under the Moghul administration. But there was a certain section of people in Eastern India who enjoyed certain privileges in matters of revenue collection, i.e., a portion of revenue collected from the peasants of the Farganas was left to their personal consumption. They were known as the zamindar in different localities. In fact, their co-operation was indispensable for the collection of revenue from the peasants of the Farganas. In view of their dominating position, one leading zamindar was entrusted with the responsibility of collection of revenue of the Pargana or a group of Farganas, and he was granted

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
a commission thereof. Their hereditary rights were recognised, and they were treated in the same footing as the Chaudhuries and the commission appropriated by them was called the Chaudhurai. InGoalpara, the zamindars of Chapar and Farbotjoar estates were also known as Chaudhuries. It should be noted that the Moghul Emperors, in their anxiety to extend cultivated area, freely bestowed zamindary rights on those who would bring forest and waste lands under their cultivation. It can be conjectured that originally, the zamindars of Farbotjoar and Chapar might have been created out of the anxiety of the Moghul Government to extend cultivation to forest land in Farbotjoar Pargana and waste or Char land in Chapar Pargana. Of them, the founder of the Chapar estate, Jay Narayan Sarmah, was found to have referred to as “in possession of five Chaudhuries”. Like Jay Narayan Sarmah of Chapar, the founder of the Farbotjoar zamindary, Hatibar Singha, was not formerly known as Chaudhury. In all probability they were raised to the rank of Chaudhury in the subsequent days.

15. Revenue 3, September, 1931, no 1-7, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
In the later period of Moghul administration particularly during the second half of the eighteenth century, a new feature in the method of collection of revenue from the peasants had arisen. The State revenue authority entrusted with certain individuals, its officials or others to receive a stipulated sum of money annually as revenue due from an area irrespective of actual produce or collection made by the persons who entered into such contract. This practice of contract or farming continued almost to the end of the Moghul rule. The duration of such farming was short at the beginning, one year being an ordinary term. But later on, particularly during the disintegration of the Moghul administration, the duration became indefinite, and, in practice, the position might even become hereditary. It should be mentioned that the Jaigir or assignment became restricted in Bengal, and the practice of farming out the areas under Khalisa assumed a peculiar position. Lands in Eastern Bengal were mostly farmed out to a section of the people, who enjoyed certain privileges, viz., a portion of revenue collected from the peasants was left for their personal consumption.

as in the case of the Chaudhuris referred to. They were also granted lands free of rent, called Pankar. It may be noted that the zamindary of Gauripur was created in such a manner. Being appointed kanungo, Kabindra Patra received Pankar for two times, and became a leading zamindar of the district of Rangamati. The family descended from him was known as the Rangamati Barua  

Thus, it can be ascertained from the foregoing account that there were four classes of zamindars in the district of Goalpara in the period preceding the acquisition of Dewani by the British East India Company in 1765, viz.;

i. The original independent but vanquished Hindu Raja being treated as tributary, i.e., the Raja of Bijni;

ii. the old established land holders, who became de facto rulers of their estates paying tribute as custom, i.e., the Chaudhuries of Mechpara, Kalumalupara and Karaibari;

iii. the Collector farmer, who held the Office of Revenue Collector for a generation of one or two, and later on developed a prescriptive right to the land of which they had been the revenue collectors, i.e., the Raja of Gauripur;

18. Supra, Chapter III.
iv. the landholders who were originally created for reclamation of land, but later on raised to the status of hereditary land holders, i.e., the zamindars of Parbotjoar and Chapar.

After the accession to the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Crissa, these areas comprising the zamindaries in Goalpara passed on to the possession of the East India Company. But, while the British experimented with a number of modes of collection in Bengal, the zamindars of Goalpara were left undisturbed, probably due to peculiar geographical situation. These zamindars were placed on the same footing as they held under the roohuls and for some years they were allowed to pay their customary tribute or revenue as before.

As matters stood, the revenue reform first introduced to this part of Bengal was the Decennial Settlement of 1789, by which the commuted tribute money was fixed as jama in respect of the Goalpara zamindaris, viz., Nijmi, Gauripur, Mechpara, Karaibari, Chapar and Parbotjoar. The next revenue reform introduced to the area was Cornwallis'

Permanent Settlement of Bengal, 1793. On 22nd March, 1793, Cornwallis, the Governor-General in Council, proclaimed the Decennial Settlement to have been fixed in perpetuity. He declared to the zamindars, independent talukdars and other actual proprietors of land, with or on behalf of whom the Decennial Settlement had been concluded, that no alteration would be made in the assessment which they respectively were obeyed to pay, but that their heirs and lawful successors, would be allowed their estates at such assessment forever. The articles of proclamation were enacted into a regulation, known as the Bengal Regulation I of 1793, on the 1st of May, 1793. Under this regulation various landholders of Goalpara, as in other parts of Bengal, were grouped into one class, i.e., the zamindar, and they were made the proprietors of land. Their succession to the land was not only made hereditary, but they were also empowered to transfer their property right by sale, gift or otherwise. Of course, the State could transfer the property right conferred on the zamindars by open auction in the market for failing in punctual discharge of the revenue assessed upon their lands.

21. Article III, Bengal Regulation I of 1793.
22. Article VI, Ibid.
As regards the *jama*, the assessment of revenue, the Permanent Settlement fixed it at ten-elevenths of the assets, which left to the *zamindars* one-tenth of the revenue which they paid\(^{23}\). But *jama* fixed on these estates was found not fixed forever, it was alterable. According to A.J. Moffat Mills, in 1853 the total *jama* in respect of these estates was an amount of Rs. 10,835, annas 12 and Gandas 3, after the deduction of Sicca Rs. 5,337 annas 2 and Gandas 15 on account of *sayer* compensation\(^{24}\). In 1886-87, the revenue demand on these estates amounted to Rs. 11,411; but out of this, Government paid back Rs. 1,507, as compensation for market dues. Hence, the actual land revenue was Rs. 9,904/- only\(^{25}\). As stated by B.C. Allen, though the land revenue demand on these estates was Rs. 11,411/- the Government paid back to the *zamindars* Rs. 8,556/- as compensation for the abolition of market dues and other illegal cesses. Thus, the net revenue was only Rs. 2,885/-\(^{26}\). As found in the latest records, it was Rs. 11,410, annas 9, after deduction on account of Lakhiraj land and market dues\(^{27}\).

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\(^{23}\) Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Govt. of Bengal, Alipore, 1940, p.18.


\(^{25}\) Land Revenue Administration Report, 1886-87, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.

\(^{26}\) Allen, B.C., Assam District Gazetteers, Goalpara, Shillong, 1905, p.112.

\(^{27}\) Forecast Report, Re-Settlement of erstwhile Permanently Settled areas of Goalpara, dated the 14th October, 1977, Dhubri.
This was not without reason. There were some causes leading to the alteration of the jama on these estates. It is noteworthy that the powers to collect sayam duties by the zamindars were curtailed in 1813, and they were granted remission from the land revenue demand of the amount equal to it. Different amounts, as referred to above, were fixed as compensation for market dues at different times, consequent of which the total revenue demand varied from time to time. The change over of the money standard from Sicca Rupee to Company Rupee might have resulted in the omission and commission in respect of the jama. Besides this, exclusion or inclusion of any part of the zamindary would have led to the variation of jama in respect of a particular zamindary. For example, the Brahmutar, granted to one Ram Prasad Chakravarty about 1775 A.D. by the zamindar of Jamira (Krishna Prasad Choudhury and Bishnu Ram Gupta), was considered invalid and therefore resumed by Government in 1848 A.D. It was put up for sale in auction and at the interval of every ten years, it was settled with the zamindar of Gauripur, who enjoyed it till 1868 A.D., when Dhubri was handed over to Government by the said zamindar²⁸.

²⁸ Dy File No. IV-6 of 1957, District Record Room, Dispur.
compared to other districts of Bengal. For dispossession of estate for areas of revenue was rare in Goalpara, while more than half of the estates in the whole permanently settled area were actually sold for arrears of revenue in 1797. The only estate sold for arrears of revenue was Karaiabari, whose zamindar Mohendra Narayan Choudhury was dispossessed of his zamindary in 1800, he being a refractory. The fixation of revenue in perpetuity was to be preceded by a detailed enquiry about the rents received from the ryots. But, the officers employed for conducting revenue settlement did not bother to ascertain the amount of rent actually collected from the ryots by the zamindars of Goalpara District and to fix the jama on the basis of such rent; they resorted to a short-cut method of converting the tributes paid at that time to the Moghul Emperor into revenue demand. The tribute-money of Rs.2000/- decided on Bijni in 1788 was accepted in 1790 as jama and the rate with a deduction of Rs.850/- as compensation had been paid by the Bijni Raj. In 1794, Karaiabari, Kalumalupara and Mechipara were

31. Notes by Forbes, Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara, on papers received from the Board of Revenue with Secy, to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, no 1846, dated 25th December, 1875, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
made Istmary mahals (paying rent in perpetuity). But the assessments were low. The revenue demands on these estates were further reduced on the ground of abolition of sayer dues, which these zamindars used to collect from the Garos. With a view to compensating the loss incurred due to abolition of sayer dues, an amount equal to the income for the sayer was deducted from the annual jamā payable to the Government. In case of Karaibari, the compensation granted to the zamindar exceeded the jamā due from the estate.

All the zamindars with the exception of the Raja of Bijni accepted the conversion of tributes as land revenue and the resulting settlement as the Permanent Settlement under the Bengal Regulation I of 1793. The Raja of Bijni, to the end, claimed that he should be treated as Native Ruler, as had been done in Koch Bihar which was ruled by another branch of the same, original Koch dynasty. It should be noted here that Bijni zamindary was composed of the Parganas of Habrachat and...
Phungaghat in the Moghul Empire and Niz Bijni under the Bhutan Government. As Niz Bijni was outside the British territory, the Raja of Bijni could conveniently claim that what he paid to the British Government was still a tribute and not land revenue, and that he should be treated as tributary Chief. But after a prolonged correspondence with the British his claim was turned down. Commissioner F Jenkins and Collector Captain Reynolds did not lend their support to his claim. As to his claim that "he held these zamindaris as an independent fief" and that Government accepted the revenue demand under 'Lalbandee', Jenkins was of the opinion that:

"this was a mere act of courtesy; the Raja being of the Cooch Behar Rajah family, he was called Rajah, as many other members of it were, but he was also always styled at the same time the zamindar of Bijni. . . . Ultimately, the Government of India concurred in the view of these officials and declared that the pretension of this person to be considered as holding the Fargana by a tenure different from that of ordinary zamindars appears to be wholly groundless" 35.

The objectives of the Permanent Settlement were summarised in the preamble to the Bengal Regulation:

"In the British territories in Bengal, the greater part of the materials required for the numerous and valuable manufactures, and most of the other principal articles of export, are the produce of the lands, it follows that the commerce, and consequently the wealth, of the country must increase in proportion to the extension of its agriculture.

But it is not for Commercial purposes alone that the encouragement of agriculture is essential to the welfare of these provinces.

The Hindu who form the body of the people, are compelled, by the dictates of the religion, to depend solely upon the produce of the lands for subsistence; and the generality of such of the lower orders of the Natives as are not of that persuasion, are, from habit or necessity, in a similar predicament.

The extensive failure or destruction of the crops that occasionally arises from drought or inundation is the consequence invariably followed by famine, the ravages of which are felt chiefly by the cultivators of the soil and the manufacturers, from whose labours the country derives both its subsistence and wealth.

Experience having evinced that adequate from abroad supplies of grain are not obtainable in seasons of scarcity, the country must necessarily continue subject to these calamities, until the proprietors and cultivators of the land shall have the means
of increasing the number of the reservoirs, embankments and other artificial works, by which, to a great degree, the untimely cessation of the periodical rains may be provided against and the lands protected from inundation; and as a necessary consequence the stock of grain in the country at large shall always be sufficient to supply those occasional, but less extensive, deficiencies in the annual produce, which may be expected to occur, notwithstanding the adoption of the above precaution to obviate them.

To these improvements in agriculture, which must necessarily be followed by the increase of every article of produce, has accordingly been one of the primary objects to which the attention of the British Administration has been directed in its arrangements for the internal government of these provinces.

As being the two fundamental measures essential to the attainment of it, the property in the soil has been declared to be vested in the landholders, and the revenue payable to Government from each estate has been fixed forever.

These measures have at once rendered it the interest of the proprietors to improve their estates, and given them the means of raising the funds necessary for that purpose.

The property in the soil was never formally declared to be vested in the landholders, nor were they allowed to transfer such rights as they
did possess or raise money upon the credits of their tenures, without the previous sanction of Government.

With respect to the public demand upon each estate, it was liable to annual or frequent variation at the discretion of Government.

The amount of it was fixed upon an estimate formed by the public officers of the aggregate of the rents payable by the raiyats or tenants for each bigha of land in cultivation, of which, after deducting the expenses of collection ten-elevenths were usually considered as the right of the public and the remainder the share of the holder.

Refusal to pay the sum accrued of him was followed by his removal from the management of his lands, and the public dues were either let in farm or collected by an officer of Government, and the abovementioned share of the landlord or such sum as special custom, or the orders of Government, might have fixed, was paid to him by the farmer or from the public treasury.

When the extension of cultivation was productive only of a heavier assessment, and even the possession of the property was uncertain, the hereditary landlord had little inducement to improve his estate, and management had no encouragement to embark their capital in the purchase or improvement of land, whilst not only the profit, but the security for the capital itself, was so precarious.
The same causes, therefore, which prevented the improvement of land depreciated its value.\textsuperscript{36}

It seemed that the British authority were more liberal to the zamindars of Goalpara, for, no detailed survey was made for the assessment of revenue on them; it was fixed in lump-sum. But all the expectations had been rudely disappointed; the zamindars did practically nothing for the improvement of their estates, but renting out them to the tenants.

It may be noted that the zamindars of Goalpara were the descendants of independent or semi-independent Chieftains. They were proud of their position. And as such, at the initial stage, the revenue measures introduced by the British caused resentment to them. The spirit of disloyalty and rebellion was rampant amongst some of them.

In November, 1789, Rana Ram Choudhury, the zamindar of Mechpara, with a band of 500 barkandazes attacked the Company's factory at Goalpara. But, being defeated in the engagement, Rana Ram retired to the nearby jungle and breathed his last there sometime in February, 1790.\textsuperscript{37}


The Raja of Bijni refused to pay tribute money, but was induced to agree upon it. Mahendra Narayan Choudhury, the original zamindar of Karaibari, too evaded the payment of jama fixed on him with perpetuity, which led to his dispossession of the zamindary.

The zamindars in Goalpara, in the days of the Moghul rule, exacted sayer duties from the Garos on their produce sold at the border markets established by them. They continued to levy those duties in the earlier administration of the East India Company. On 28th July, 1790, the Governor-General in Council directed the sayer collections to be abolished. But these border estates in Goalpara were, being regarded as tributary mahals exempted from the operation of the general rule in respect of sayer. Thus, while the other zamindars of the country were deprived of this feudal rights, the zamindars of Karaibari, Pechpara and Kalumalupara retained with them the right to collect sayer duties till 1813, when sayer duties were abolished.

38. Supra, Chapter II.
39. Supra, Chapter II.
40. Section VIII, Bengal Regulation I of 1793.
41. Revenue B, September, 1930, no 259-629, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
But so anxious were the Government not to injure the zamindar that they were granted compensation on account of the abolition of sayer dues. As referred to earlier the amount sanctioned as sayer compensation to the zamindar of Karaibari exceeded the Government demand.\(^42\)

With regards to the relation of the zamindars with Garos, it was the opinion of the British administration in India that the illegal exactions of the sayer duties by the zamindars and their encroachment on the hills of the south embittered their relations with the hill tribes of the Garo Hills.\(^43\) Consequently, Garo Hills were made a separate district in 1869. But the Garos did not cease their raids on the plains even after the creation of their home district. On the northern frontier, the Rajas of Sidli and Bijni maintained good relations with the Bhutias. But the Bhutias forced exactions on the people of the plains. As has been already referred to the Bhutias even ransacked the Bijni Rajbari in their bid to enforce exactions. Thus, the views of the British administration that the exhorbitant exactions and encroachment on the

\(^{42}\) Supra, Chapter VI.

\(^{43}\) Physical and Political Geography of the Province of Assam (Reprinted from the Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam for the year 1892-93, and published by authority), Shillong, 1896, p.75.
hills tended independent Garos to become hostile to plains were not wholly tenable, for the reverse was the case with the Bhutias.

It is no denying the fact that the zamindars established their supremacy in the Hills in times of the Koches and Moghuls. Then the zamindars possessed military rank, and were looked on as superior by the hillsmer. The zamindars retained their positions as such long after the tract passed on to the British possession. The son of Ranta, one of the Garo Chiefs, attended the marriage ceremony of the zamindar of Karaibaris son when a Palanguin was presented to him. The diffusion of the British authority in Bengal had created a sense of hostile awareness amongst them. They were well informed that the zamindars were deprived of their feudal powers to enforce dues. This emboldened them to go ahead with a concerted action against those zamindars. Besides this, the weakening of the zamindars' police and military power made their retaliation more tempting. Although the zamindary Barkandiages guarded the hats on the passes, the zamindars did not keep armies sufficient to protect the borders from the hills tribes. Undoubtedly, the Garos had real grievances; they

were subjected to forced exactions. But the Garos traditionally believed that "the spirit of their headmen required the souls of others to attend them in the next world". There was "thus both an element of the universal warfare of the hills upon the plains and of that social banditry which Hopsbown calls the "endemic peasant protest against oppression and poverty, a cry for vengeance on the rich and the oppressors".

Be that as it may, the Permanent Settlement secured for the zamindars of Goalpara the whole advantage of a raise in their rental. While the Government revenue demand was fixed forever, the zamindary demands on the ryots were left undecided. Thus, the period under permanent settlement witnessed the increase of the zamindar's rental in Goalpara. In 1825, the total revenue of the entire permanently settled areas came to only 5,11,411/-, while the zamindars' rental exceeded almost six times to it. With regards to Bijni Raj estate, during the time when the estate was under the management of the Court of Wards (1854-1874) its annual income amounted to

47. A Study of the Land System of North-Eastern India, Cp cit., p. 36.
Rs. 121,599/- while the Government revenue was only Rs. 2,355/-²⁴⁸. After the acquisition of the zamindaris (1956) the total revenue assessed on the permanently Settled areas of Goalpara was Rs. 15,86,391/-, the same rent as fixed and realised by the zamindars being retained as rent realisable by the Government ⁴⁹.

The Abwabs existed at the time of the Permanent settlement were merged with the jama and levying on further Abwabs by the zamindars was made unlawful by Regulation VIII of 1793 (Section VIII). But various types of Abwabs were being collected by the zamindars of this district as a custom. In addition to it, the zamindars realised syrat though it was abolished in 1813, viz., khutagari and sthaljat or stocking rent. In Chapar, khutagari for pitching stanchions within the zamindary excise was charged at the rate of annas -/14/- for each small boat and annas -/8/- for all other boats having a tonnage of every fifty mounds per annum. Under an agreement with the Deputy Collector of Goalpara, dated the 3rd Sept. 1890, this estate has been levying stocking

rent at the rate of -/2/- annas per pair of logs felled by daffadars from Government forests and stocked in Chapar zamindary eleka (area) at a place to be annually selected by the forest officer attached to Bilsapara Government Forest Department.

Thus, there was gradual accumulation of huge amount of money in the hands of the zamindars. But contrary to the expectation of the framers of the permanent Settlement, the zamindars of Goalpara did not spend this money in capital investment; it was spent for their personal pleasures only. For example, in the forties of the current century, Gauripur Raj spent only 10 per cent of its total income in welfare scheme, the income being approximately Rs. 250 lakhs per annum. In 1920, experimental agriculture was started at the zamindar's bhanar land of 450 bighas. But only a very meagre amount (four to five thousand) was spent from the estate's exchequer.

Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua Bahadur, being an associated member to the Scientific and Industrial Association, Calcutta, took initiative to sanction financial assistance

50. Revenue & December, 1931, no 303-10, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur. Kamrupia
to Laksheswar Barthakur of Sibsagar for learning agriculture in Japan. After a term of four years (1905-1909), he returned as a scientist in agriculture, with a view to establishing a Sugar Mill at Tinsukia, Laksheswar Barthakur endeavoured to open a joint stock company with said Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua Bahadur as Chief patron. But the attempt ended in smoke due to Government's apathy to sanction financial grant adequate for the scheme. Subsequently Raja Barua Bahadur turned his attention to build film industry in Calcutta. It should be mentioned that only a meagre fraction of the estates income was spent for this. Similarly, the zamindar of Parbotjoar estate started a small soap factory in Calcutta, but it could not survive for long.

In 1935, the proprietors of Karaibari estate caused a canal 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 created 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.

52. Guha, A., Cp cit., p.57.
53. Revenue 3, Dec., 1938, no 547-630, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
In exception to the above there is nothing in the contemporary account of the Permanent Settlement in respect of the zamindaries in Goalpara, or subsequent history of the zamindary management, to show that the zamindars of Goalpara, as a class, did invest their accumulated income in the improvement of agriculture or development of industry and commerce.

Besides the non-productive consumption of the surplus value of the land settled with them, the zamindars belied the hopes of the framers of the Permanent Settlement by not fulfilling the Patta Regulation\(^54\). The reasons for the non-fulfilment of the expectations of the framers of the Permanent Settlement are not beyond reach.

The framers of the Permanent Settlement Regulations, as referred to earlier, expected to have the zamindars turned into economic entrepreneurs. But the historical backdrop of the social and cultural upbringing of the zamindars in Goalpara was not conducive to it. Being the descendants of independent and semi-independent Chieftains, the zamindars were imbued with a sense of their own importance. They considered themselves to be looked as Raja.

\(^{54}\) Section 54, Regulation VIII of 1793.
Like the independent Rajas; they also, in a befitting manner, issued grants of lands for the uptaking of the religious institutions. Apart from creation of rent free tenures for the estate's servants, the zamindars granted large Lakhiraja to their near relations and other families of higher status, viz., Pratap Chandra Barua, zamindar of Gauripur married Anandamayi the daughter of one late Kalikanta Basu in the year 1258 B.S. He gave as a gift to his father-in-law's family a big property in Mouza laldoba for their maintenance. Raja Makunda Narayan of Bijnī granted a sanad to one Kamala Kanta Barua in 1191 B.S. by virtue of which the donee received 700 bighas of land in the Mouza Shyamraipara, 3500 bighas in Rayotpara/Kayathpara, and 4450 bighas in Mouza Mauriagaon as Mokrari land. It is known from this sanad that the donee's forefather Mathurnath Barua received 16997 bighas of land in Srigragram in the early part of the 18th century as Mankar. The old sanad being destroyed in fire, a fresh sanad was granted to him in 1191 B.S. 56.

Besides this, being proud of their positions, the zamindars were imbued with feudal instinct. In point of fact, the zamindary system, though introduced with

modifications, was itself a feudal institution. Thus the idea of converting them into economic entrepreneur remained as an ideal only.

Interchange of Pattas and Kabuliyaats was generally rare in Goalpara. This had farreaching effects on the ryots. By the Patta Regulation referred to, the zamindars were directed to consolidate all their demands upon the ryots and to specify the amount to be paid for the lands they occupied. But Government had wrongfully neglected to define or limit the demand of the zamindar on the ryots. It was left to be decided by the mutual interests of the zamindars and ryots. Although Government had reserved the power to enact such Regulations as if it might think necessary for the protection and welfare of the dependent talukdars, ryots and other cultivators of the soil, Government contemplated no such legislation. On the contrary, Government enacted rules from 1793 to 1822 which safeguarded the interest of the zamindars only. The result was that the zamindars wanted to have the ryots agreed upon their own terms. In fact, Government were not in favour of interfering between the zamindars and the ryots in respect of fixation of rent, "they considered that this would amount to breach of faith with the

zamindars. As was pointed out by the Select Committee of 1830, "the failure to define the rights of the raiyats defeated the intention of the Permanent Settlement Regulations to preserve the customary rights of the raiyats."

It was under review in the preceding chapter that agrarian trouble acted on the Government to pass rent laws in Bengal. But there was no rent law in Goalpara up to the end of the nineteenth century. In 1892, the Bengal Act VIII of 1869 was extended to this district after the lapse of seven years of the passing of the Tenancy Law (1885). Thus, the zamindars in Goalpara were virtually left free to act according to their sweet will in matters of fixation of rent and abwabs. The ryots were not only to bear the burden of enhancement of rent, but they were also subjected to oppression. This led to the local agitations which demonstrated the grievances of the ryots in different estates in Goalpara.

The ryots under the zamindars of Goalpara prior to the enactment of the Goalpara Tenancy Act (1929) may be grouped into three heads, viz., (1) Jotedars, (2) chukanidars and (3) Adhiars.

1. The Jotedars were of two distinct classes. First, there was the jotedars described in paragraph 10 of Mr. Manahan's report, whose predecessors originally took waste land from the zamindar for the sole purpose of cultivation. Second, the jotedar who was a mere intermediary engaged by the zamindar between himself and the cultivators. Of this, second class were the relatives and friends of the zamindar, who sought the position of the jotedar so that they might "Lord it over sub-tenants or under-raiyats". Both classes were the ryots with occupancy right under the Act VIII of 1869.

In Goalpara, the actual cultivators very rarely held his agricultural field direct from the zamindar. In certain cases, but rarely, the zamindar made a direct settlement with the cultivators themselves. These ryots were termed as the larori/parfa ryots and were simply tenants-at-will. There were some other ryots who held land directly from the zamindar, and who, in lieu of paying money rent rendered certain services (but not of

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50. Manahan's report no 1503 R & F, submitted to the Secy. to the Board of Revenue, Eastern Bengal & Assam, on 30th May, 1907.
manial nature) to their land holders. They were known as the Sakhbas or Khudhbas.\footnote{Hunter, \textit{w.w.,} Cp cit., p.66.}

2. The Chukanidar was the man who held land under the jotedar, and sometimes he was a sub-tenant of a sub-tenant. He was regarded as a mere tenant-at-will, and if the jotedar delivered him a notice to quit, he was either bound to go at the end of the year or to accept whatever terms the jotedar might think proper to impose on him. If he did not quit or agree, the jotedar sued him in the court, which treated him as a trespasser and passed orders for his ejectment.

3. The Adhiar was of still lower-standing. The jotedar or lease-holders parcelled out his land to the Adhiar, who held land from him for a share of the crop. The Adhiars were called the Prajas; the law of the land or custom gave him no higher status than under-ryots liable to be ejected at the will of his employer.

Thus, in between the zamindar and actual tiller of soil there was a number of intermediaries. There was sub-infeudation, which was the result of the Permanent Settlement. For, the margin between the land revenue and
the actual collection of rent from the tenant had permitted the creation of intermediate interest between the zamindar and actual tiller of the soil.

All classes of ryots had distinct grievances against the zamindars. Their grievances may be summed up as follows: evils of mismanagement, Abwabs and enhancement of rent.

The evils of separate management in undivided estates caused undue harassment to the ryots. There were four separate collecting agencies in the Mechpara estate during the closing years of the nineteenth century and opening years of the twentieth century. In a minor degree the Parbotjoar estate had three separate collecting agencies for two or three generations. In the first quarter of the current century, Taria Pargana was under five managements.

From time immemorial, Abwabs (illegal cesses) were collected by the zamindars in Goalpara. Although Abwabs were banned, these were being collected in contradiction to the Regulation. But mere fact that the illegal Abwabs were taken was no index of the extent to which the tenants were oppressed or discontented. In most part, Abwabs were paid up without protest by the tenants who were naturally unwilling to quarrel with their landlords.
They knew it well that the payment of the Abwabs kept the zamindars and his amla in a good temper and staved off the enhancement of the rent which could be legally demanded. Section II of the Act VIII of 1869 provided for the recovery of Abwabs by suit with damages. But the provision was practically dead letter. Because, the ordinary ryot did not like to incur the hostility of his landlord by entering upon a suit, which would cost him more than what he could ever recover. Thus, the ordinary ryot did not go to the court, where he had no practical hope of redress. As stated in an official note:

"He payed the Abwabs which it is the dastur to pay. It is only when new imposts are imposed that he moves, and when he does move, it is not by appeal to the court but by a combination to stop the payment of rent which leads to so many agrarian troubles in the Bengal part of this province."

Enhancement of rent was a general feature of the zamindary management in Goalpara. Of the estates, Gauripur, Paraibari and Mechpara enhanced rents frequently. It was pointed out by Beatson Bell, Director of Land Records

in 1907 that rents in Gauripur estate had been raised by private contract; "I do not know what the total enhancement has amounted to, but I came across individual cases in which the new rent is much more than double to old rent".

There was discontent for this. In course of settlement commenced by the zamindar in the beginning of the current century, an all round enhancement of about a rupee was fixed. In parts of Mechpara, many of the joteldars, as referred to earlier, fled away to other places due to damages caused by the earthquake of 1897; many of them were induced to stay in the estate by the offer of lower rate of rent. After some years, lands had gradually improved, and there came an irush of new tenants from Mymonsingh and other parts, consequent of which the demand for land had increased. The manager of this estate seized of this opportunity by enhancing rents. But the system known in Rangpur as "Hajat jama" was introduced in Mechpara; the rent was fixed at higher rate but "as a favour" only part of this was demanded to pay. What is interesting was that the favoured part itself was higher than the rate in existence and this had undoubtedly created ill-feeling.

64. Extract from Mr. Allen's Note of the 3rd April, 1916, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.
amongst the jotedars. The rate fixed was at Rupee 1, while the favoured rate for collection was annas -/10/-. After five years the jotedars were required to pay the full rupee. It was an increase of 100 per cent over their previous rental. In Gauripur, too, the system of Hajat jamo was practised.

The memorials submitted from time to time by the tenants bear witness to the fact that rents were being increased not only in the abovementioned estate but also in other estates in the Permanently Settled tract. It is not possible to give a separate account of the rise in rent in different estates due to non-availability of statistical figures. Some references, though rare, made by competent authority may be cited as evidence of it. As had been stated in the Assam District Gazettes, "within the recent years rents of the tenants in Parai-bari and Gauripur have been enhanced by about 24 per cent." Mr. A.J. Laine, who was placed on special duty to enquire into the defects of the rent law in the Permanently Settled estate and submit suggestions for its amendment, mentioned in his report, referred to earlier, that the rent was raised three times within a period of 17 years in Parai-bari. In his speech in the Assembly.

debate Maulavi Abdul Mazid Ziaosshah, while referring to enhancement of rate of rent in Goalpara said, "in cases I have found that when the original rental was ₹.10/- the rental has been enhanced to ₹.30/-" 67.

It is noteworthy that under the rent law of the district (Act VII of 1869), a zamindar could enhance any tenant's rent by issuing a six month's notice, and the tenant on whom such notice was served could contest his liability to pay the enhanced demand of him 68. In practice, these provisions of law were not followed; enhancement being secured by private negotiation between the parties concerned.

It was the enhancement of rent that produced practical grievances of the jotedars. But the burden of enhancement was to be borne by the under-tenants. Making the plea of zamindiary enhancement of rent the jotedars enhanced the rent on the under-tenants and very often jotedars' enhancement was much higher than that of the zamindar's. The under-tenants had no alternative than to pay the enhanced rent. There was no tenancy law which

68. Sections 14, 15.
could provide relief to them. All the rights which accrued to the ryots under the Act VIII of 1869 were all absorbed by the jotedar, and that instances were there in which ryots who held and cultivated land for 30 years or more had been summarily ejected without any hope of redress.

The average Chukanidar was considered by the zamindar under whom he held land as a mere tenant-at-will, even though he or his ancestors might have lived on the land for years together, and though they might have expended labour and capital necessary for its original reclamation and subsequent improvement. They seldom possessed pattas. The rents were treated as summarily enhanceable at frequently uncertain rates.

Thus, the position of the Chukanidars, or the actual cultivators of the land, under the zamindars in Goalpara were pathetic. The influx of the enormous immigrant settlers from Northern and Eastern Bengal brought about a new state of the things. It had rapidly raised the value of the land and a rise in rent in consequence. The increasing demand for land had created a desire on the part of both zamindar and middleman to

69. Notes recorded by Savage, H., Cp cit.
take every advantage of the situation to take as much money as possible out of the competing race of the new comers. Referring to the situation, the then E.A.C. Babu Mahendra Chandra De, in his note dated the 13th February, 1914, pointed out that the total population of the Goalpara district in 1891 was 452,773; 462,952 in 1901, 600,643 in 1911. The increase during that period was due to the immigrant settlers, the Bhatias as they were called, into Goalpara. During that last decade, the South Solmara alone, including Mankachar outpost, gained over 70 per cent in population; Lahshipur thana area showed a large increase of 61.81 per cent and Bilasipara thana area an increase of 36.65 per cent. This large population was attracted by the presence of the Char lands which were and are situated in the river side tracts of the Brahmaputra. The jotedars having jotes in that tract of the district put them up to auction to the highest bidder. And naturally, those who could afford to pay heavy Salami, in addition to rent, were allowed to take up land in detriment of those who were already in possession but were unable to satisfy the rapacity of these jotedars.

70. Extract from Allen's Note, Cp cit.
The immigrants were land hungry peasants, of whom an estimated 85 per cent were Muslims. The flow of the immigrants to Assam was continuous. They had found the pressure on the land too severe in their home land. They were, thus, attracted to Assam by the report of wide existence of land on law revenue. In 1911 census there were 51,000 of such immigrants in Goalpara, and 3000 in other districts of Assam Valley. In 1921 Census about 20 per cent of the population of Goalpara were immigrants (roughly 153,000).

The immigrants settled mainly in the permanently settled tract. Of course, they were hard working, made excellent cultivators, and had taken largely to the growing of jute. They may be called enterprising cultivators. They were ready to offer higher rate of rent to the zamindar or jotedar. The hardship they experienced at their home land turned them desperate, while the Rajbangis and Meches, who composed the main indigenous classes of population, were easy going and were, in most cases, unable to satisfy the greedy land holders. Thus, they were pushed out by the immigrant tenants. As stated in an official note:


"owing to the pressure of the unruly bhatias who are accustomed to take the law into their own hands and to fight with spears and any other weapons which may come handy, in order to secure what they want. Knowing as they do that the people of the country are legally defenceless, as they were not protected, in any way, as to the security of their holdings by Act VIII of 1869, they will do all in their power to oust them." 73.

One such case was the riot which occurred in Kaldanga Char, within the old jurisdiction of Lakshipur thana, between the rival lands of new comers and old tenants under two rival jotedars of Mechpara estate. 74.

In Sijni Raj estate, originally lands were settled directly with the ryots. In the beginning of the current century, settlement of land with the immigrants from Eastern Bengal began, and in the process, many of the local people were dispossessed. The ryots of Khuntaghat and Habraghat claimed rights of occupancy by custom, but this was frequently contested by the zaminder who had styled the original indigenous ryots as karfa ryots, or tenants-at-will. The Raj had repeatedly brought suits against those ryots for arrears of rent as

73. Extract, from Mr. Allens Note, Cp cit.
74. Ibid.
well as for ejectment. Being afraid of large scale ejection, the ryots sought intervention of the Chief Commissioner of Assam. Though ejectment suits were stopped for the time being by the Chief Commissioner, Hari, Malla, Khaitu, Vandura and Keru and other ryots had been ejected from their holdings.

The zamindars resorted to multitude of oppressions in the matter of ruling the ryots, of which club law was common. They caused distress to the ryots by club law. The estate servants were tyrannical. If the ryots refused to pay rent at revised rate, the estate servants took the law into their own hands, and resorted to club law, viz., in Bijn Raj estate, one Jogendra Nath Bhattacharjee, employee in-charge of cash book, had been posted to Baitamari Kutchari for collecting rent. A band of 6 or 7 clubmen had been sent to that place before he came there in a palankeen. He caused private enquiry to be made, while collecting rent from the ryots. The ryots could not but carry on his mandate. He caused one Amrit Vanta Kalita be seized and had him struck with stick. In consequence of grievous hurt, Amrit died shortly after. Though apprehended on charge of murder, Jogendra was acquitted, as he had the support of the Raja.

75. Petition, dated the 20th Jan., 1913, submitted to the Chief Commissioner of Assam by Thandaram Das, Kaliram Das and others, Revenue A, Sept, 1913, no 86-102, Assam Secretariat Record Room, Dispur.

76. Ibid.
Thus, as a result of the Permanent Settlement, the ryots of the estates in Goalpara were subjected to extortion of the zamindars. The ryots had neither hereditary, nor permanent right in the land they held. It had caused a reversal in the position of the ryots in the status he enjoyed as a peasant in the pre-company rule. Whether State was the owner of the land or otherwise, land belonged to the peasants. So long as he paid his share of revenue, he was not dispossessed of the land he possessed. It appeared that the peasants enjoyed occupancy rights, which were inviolable. Even, his rent could not be increased by the zamindar beyond the customary nirikh (level). As a result of the Permanent Settlement they became the tenants of the landlord instead of owner of land. They even lost their occupancy rights.

The intention of the framers of the Permanent Settlement to give rights to the ryots to secure fixity of tenancy as well as rents could not be realised in practice. For, the ryots failed to produce any documentary evidence to prove their occupancy over the plots under their possession and the amount of rents payable to or paid by them.

Thus, the ryots were reduced to tenants-at-will.

In the absence of a tenancy law, the relations between the zamindar and tenants in Goalpara remained unsatisfactory. The rent law of 1869 (Act VIII of 1869) that was in force in Goalpara was considered to be defective, and thus tenancy law was passed in Bengal in 1885. In the face of agrarian trouble in the form of local agitation, Government appointed Monahan, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, to enquire into the affairs of the Permanently Settled estates and to advise the suitability of the Bengal Tenancy law for Goalpara. Monahan did not consider it to be applicable to Goalpara. But the acts of oppression meted out to the ryots by the Bijni Raj and its officers, and mismanagement of the Mechpara estate added fresh lure to the agitating peasants. By this time, the agitation of the peasants of Goalpara drew the attention of the intelligentsia and local press. The acts of oppression let loose on the ryots by the Bijni Raj and its official were editorially noticed in the "Times of Assam" on the issue of the November 6, 1915, and Raishahib Phanidhar Chaliha raised the point in the floor of the Assam Legislative Council. The mismanagement of the Mechpara estate and oppression of the ryots by its officials and servants were brought to the notice of the elite class, through

78. Manahan's Report, Cp cit.
the editorial notes, which appeared in the "Times of Assam" and the "Eastern Chronicle" in the issue of 26th August, 1916 and 15th Sept., 1916, respectively. Rai Shahib Phanidhar Chaliha raised the point in the floor of the said Council.\footnote{Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Council, 23rd October, 1916.}

In view of the public opinion, Government contemplated to enact a tenancy law for Goalpara, but the measure was dropped due to the opposition of the zamindars. It was in the wake of Non-Cooperation Movement that Government undertook the tenancy legislation (Goalpara Tenancy Act, 1929). Necessary amendments were made to the Act, in 1936 and 1943. Apparently, there were some advantages for the tenants under this tenancy law, which was enacted to safeguard the rights and interests of the tenants. Under the provisions of this Act, occupancy rights were secured to the chukanidars and under-ryots who occupied lands for a period of 12 years.\footnote{Section 4, Goalpara Tenancy Act, 1929.} The court had jurisdiction in almost all matters except in part II with records-of-rights. The Revenue Officer had very little power to discharge his responsibility in all disputes being required to be referred to the Court for decision. In case of enhancement of rent, the Courts were to fix the limit as it might
thought for and equitable. The Act restored the relations between the zamindars and the ryots in exclusion to the adhires, who were subjected to exploitation of the zamindars till the acquisition of the zamindaries.

The zamindars in most parts of Bengal farmed out their estates to the intermediaries, i.e., patnidars, talukdars etc. and preferred to live in towns with the rental collected by the intermediaries. But the zamindars of Goalpara in exclusion to the zamindar of Faribari, who was the only absentee zamindar in the district, lived in their respective estates. Of course, in order to lessen the trouble of collection of rent big plots of lands were settled with the jotedars, who might be regarded as middlemen. As the years rolled on and when they became well off, the zamindars in Goalpara, too, devested themselves of the trouble of directly managing and collecting rent from the ryots. The Bengal system of managerial management was introduced in every zamindary. In the first quarter of the current century, crisis took place in certain zamindaris. Quarrels amongst 12 annas share holders deepened crisis of management in Mechpara and the zamindary was brought under the Court of Wards. Similarly, succession question in Bijni Raj became so complicated that the estate

82. Section 16, Ibid.
was brought under the management of the Court of Wards. In 1937, Karaibari was brought under the administration of Government. Even, the Raja of Gauripur contemplated to hand over the management to the Government.

Thus, contrary to the expectation of Lord Cornwallis, the zamindars of Goalpara failed to discharge their responsibility of good management of the zamindaries. They turned parasites and were adepted to western way of lives that was brought by the imperialist Government. They frittered away their rental in luxurious modes of living. They became extravagant, and for every necessity that circumstances demanded of they taxed ryots by raising rent and Abwab.

In point of fact, Permanent Settlement was made neither for the interest of the zamindar nor that of the peasants, but for the stability of the imperialist Government. The East India Company in the pre-Permanent Settlement period was hardpressed for finance as it was involved in the war with Marattas and Mysore. But Company's revenue was dwindling.

"The year to year accumulated arrears were also causing anxiety both on the spot and in London. These difficulties inherent in the farming system led practical men to think it in terms
of restoring the old zamindars and settling jama with them for longer period 10 or 20 years lifetime and even perpetuity. The British learnt from experience how difficult it was to stabilise revenue collection by by-passing the zamindars and the local structures of power they controlled. Hence, the British rulers had not alternative left to them other than a compromise. Besides, the company was increasingly realising at that juncture of history that the basis of its trade was artificial and really uneconomic, and that, to meet its liabilities at home it must seek compensation in a secure and stable income from the territorial revenue. Thus permanent Settlement as expected, secured the regular flow of revenue from the zamindar.

It should be noted that East India Company had recourse to a number of land revenue measures which brought in a number of agricultural crisis. Consequently, the British colonial rule of the pre-Permanent Settlement was marked by a series of agrarian unrest, which engulfed almost the whole of the newly acquired territory. The rebellion of the Sanyashis spreaded from Srihatta district to a number of districts in the north-east and from Khulna-Murshidabad districts to Birbhum in Bengal and to Champaran.

district of Behar. Though started from a different premise the revolt of the Sanyashis was clearly an anti-imperialist struggle to which the aggrieved peasants expressed their solidarity by withholding payment of revenue, and donating the amount to the Sanyashis for continuing the struggle they started. The first formidable peasant uprising made its appearance in Sherampur (1783). It assumed the Character of an armed rebellion, in which both the Hindu and Muslim peasants fought side by side like brothers. Thus peasant uprising posed as a threat to alien rule and the British wanted to create an alliance in the class of the zamindars to win over their support in suppressing the peasant uprising.

While describing the purpose of the Permanent Settlement Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1824-1835, in an official speech during his tenure of office clearly referred to it as a bulwark against revolution.

"If security was wanting against extensive popular tumult or revolution, I should say that the Permanent Settlement, though a failure in many other respects and in most important essentials, has this great advantage at least of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people."

As observed by R.P. Datta:

"the purpose of the Permanent zamindari Settlement was to create a new class of landlords after the English model as the social buttress of English rule. It was recognised that, with the small number of English holding down a vast population it was absolutely necessary to establish a social basis for their power through the creation of a new class whose interests, through receiving a subsidiary share in the spoils (one-eleventh in the original intention), would be bound up with the maintenance of English rule."

There is no denying the fact that the zamindars, as a class, acted as an ally to the British down to the end of the British rule in India. The memorial (referred to) of the zamindars of Goalpara personally submitted by them


to His Excellency, Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy, at Mimgar, Assam, on 13th November, 1920, may be cited as a typical one:

"It is with humble pride that we respectfully assure your Excellency that the instinct of loyalty is part of our nature. We have always done our best to co-operate with the Government in every direction in which our humble services have been sought."...

It is heartening to note that while the Indian struggle for independence was gaining strength, the Presidential Address of the first All India Landholders' Conference, to which the zamindars of Goalpara were the members, delivered by the Maharaja of Mymonsingh declared that "if we are to exist as a class, then, it is our duty to strengthen the hands of the Government".

The zamindary system had long outlived its usefulness. The Bengal Land Revenue Commission, referred to earlier, came to the conclusion that "this system is no longer suitable to the conditions of the present time and that it has developed so many defects that it has ceased to serve any national interest". But the system of

89. Ibid., p.233.
landlordism was carried on to its final absurdity. The system survived so long as the imperialist Government remained. No sooner did the country achieve its independence, the system was done away with.

In non-official terms, Goalpara has been called the Bengal district of Assam due probably to the existence of zamindary system. Goalpara is still backward. Agriculturists are proverbially poor. They are still practising the primitive mode of cultivation. They are not inquisitive. They are satisfied with what they have got from their cultivation in the field. Good number of the agriculturists are landless; many have not got plough cattle of their own, and that may be had after sharing a considerable amount of their produce in return of the services from the plough cattle of their immediate landlords. So, the cultivators can't make their both ends meet from their cultivation. Generally, all the villagers live from hand to mouth, not to speak of the modern amenities of livelihood.

Its backwardness may be attributed to the existence of the Permanent Settlement with the zamindars. The zamindars did not encourage industry and commerce, nor did they encourage education on the ryots so that they could take initiative to shift to other vocations.
It deprived the Government of the close contact with the rural conditions; it had imposed an iron framework which had the effect of suffering in the enterprise and initiative of all classes of people. The Deputy Commissioner stated that during 1872-73 there was only one private Pathshala in the district, and the Deputy Inspector could locate no more such institutions though he always made every possible inquiry. At the beginning of the current century (1905), there were four High Schools in the district at Dhubri, Abhayapuri, Gauripur and Talpura, besides a few number of Middle English Schools. In 1903-04 there were 192 lower and upper primary schools in the district. In 1901, 49 males per mile and 2 females per mile were returned as literate in the district. Prior to it, many persons were shown as 'learning' whether they could read and write and as such it was difficult to form a current estimate of the position of literacy.

Though the succeeding years showed rise of literacy in the district, it was not satisfactory. Probably, it was due to peculiar zamindary system in the district. Literacy among the people is another factor.

that brings in its wake ideas of decent living. The rural people remained ignorant and unsophisticated, being confined in their traditional agriculture without contact with modernity of life. The conditions remained more or less the same during the following years till and even for some time after the independence. The zamindars of Goalpara, like their counterpart in Bengal, could not play any significant role in the cause of renaissance in Assam. The zamindars of Bengal devoted their leisure to the study of western ideas and thoughts, which were making its tremendous impact in Bengal. This was what is termed as renaissance of nineteenth century Bengal. Of the zamindars of Goalpara, Megendra Narayan Choudhury (1881-1947) devoted to the cause of Assamese literature. Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua made his common cause with the Assam Association, but his role in Assam politics was reactionary. There was a strong lobby of the zamindars which delayed the enactment of a tenancy law for Goalpara. For-seeing the possibility of enactment of a tenancy law for Goalpara in the Reformed Council, Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua and other zamindars submitted a memorandum to Lord Chelmsford, viceroy of

India, at Amingaon to transfer the district of Goalpara to Bengal. While placing their viewpoints in favour of the transfer of the district from Assam to West Bengal, the zamindars declared that "It is admitted that historically and ethnologically we differ considerably from the rest of Assam and it is but too true that we get little charity from them....."93.

The zamindars were disappointed with the move to have got the district of Goalpara transferred to Bengal. They fulfilled their desire by maintaining Socio-Cultural link with Bengal. Nay, two share-holders of Barbotjoar estate began to live permanently at Calcutta. Thus, the zamindars of Goalpara kept themselves out of the mainstream of Assam. As an ally to the British these zamindars could not lend their support to the struggle for independence. And after the acquisition of the zamindaries the zamindars ceased to serve as useful member of the society, and, being frustrated, lived in isolation.

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93. Memorial by the zamindars of Goalpara personally presented by them to H.E. Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy, at Amingaon, Assam, dated the 13th November, 1920.