CHAPTER - XIV

CONCLUSION

We have come to the conclusion of our study. It is now necessary to state the major conclusions:

Originating in feudalism in the Middle Ages, landlordism or zamindary system in Goalpara developed as a part and parcel of the Moghul administration. The portion corresponding to the modern district of Goalpara (old) formed a part of the Koch kingdom and was ceded to the possession of the Moghuls when the fugitive King Parikshit Farayan was captured by the Moghuls. No sooner did the Moghuls employ revenue officials for the collection of revenue then the Koches, who were not prepared to accept the Moghul domination, rose in rebellion under several Koch princes. This led the Moghuls to follow a conciliatory policy. Thus, in conformity with their revenue policy, the Moghuls decided to introduce the rule of delegating the work of collection of rent to a zamindar. Koch Farayan’s son Chandra Narayan, alias Vijit Narayan, was confirmed by the Moghuls the zamindary of the tract which lay between the Manas on the east and the Sonkosh on the west. It may be noted that this tract formed the later day district of Goalpara (old).
Chandra Karayan was given the possession of this tract to rule over it as a de-facto ruler. He lived at Bijni and was the founder of the Bijni Raj estate, which in subsequent development broke into six zamindaries, viz., (I) Bijni, (II) Gauripur, (III) Mechpara, (IV) Chapar, (V) Paraibari, and Parbotjoar. It should be mentioned that these zamindaries were created by the Moghuls for the administrative expediency and were held, for the most part, by the descendants of the founders of the respective zamindaries. They had to pay a nominal tribute to the Moghuls in kind, i.e., a certain number of elephants or a small number of the precious wood, nag to support certain garrisons and to defray the Dacca Artillery Park.

When the British acquired the Dewani of Bengal this tract comprising the zamindaries under the Moghuls passed over to the administration of the East India Company. But, while the British introduced some revenue measures to some other parts of Bengal, these zamindars were left undisturbed. The British accepted the tribute paid to the Moghul Government as land revenue. This mode of payment in kind was converted to money payment sometime before the Decennial Settlement. In 1789, Decennial Settlement was concluded with the zamindars and the land revenue was fixed. The revenue fixed as such was made permanent by the Bengal Regulation I of 1793, promulgated by Lord Cornwallis. Thus the Badshahi
Zamindary began to operate in Goalpara under the patronage of the British East India Company.

Of these zamindaries, Bijni Raj estate was the earliest one, its zamindar being the descendant of the great Chilarai. Chandra Narayan was the founder of this estate, which at that time comprised 12 parganas, viz.,
(I) Habraghat, (II) Khuntaghat, (III) Mechpara, (IV) Chapar, (V) Faribari, (VI) Parbotijor, (VII) Churla, (VIII) Jamira, (IX) Taria, (X) Golamganj, (XI) Kelumalupara and (XII) Augangabad. By the time when the estate was brought under permanent settlement the Raja of Bijni put up resistance, but he was forced into submission. It may be noted that the Raja of Bijni paid tribute to the Moghuls. The British converted the tribute to revenue. The Raja accepted with reservation the conversion of the tribute as land revenue and the resulting settlement as permanent settlement. It may be noted that the Raja, to the end, claimed that he should be treated as a Native Ruler, as had been done in Koch Bihar, which had been ruled by another branch of the same original Koch dynasty. But the British authority refused outright to comply with it, and he was reduced to the status of an ordinary zamindar. It may further be noted that the Bijni Raja ruled over Bijni Duar as a tributary to Bhutan. The Raja claimed it when it was acquired by the British, and the claim was admitted.
Be that as it may, the Bijnī-Raj estate showed healthy growth. The revenue and local rates being light as compared to the income of the estate, the Raja enjoyed a surplus of an amount of \text{Rs.1\,}^{1/2} lakhs, as income on account of land revenue and abwab, besides the huge amount of income from other sources. But the management of the estate suffered setback occasionally due to internal squabbles. Consequently the estate had to bring under the administration of the Court of Wards for two terms.

Gauripur Raj estate originated from a Nankar grant, which was received by one Kabintra Patra from the Moghul Emperor Jahangir in the first quarter of the Seventeenth century. Its founder, being a Kanungo, the estate emerged as one of the important centres of administration in the east. As days rolled on, the zamindars pursued a policy of absorption of the neighbouring parganas. Consequently, parganas of Ghurla, Aurangabad Tola-Alamgari, Makrampur, Jamira, Kalumalupara, Noabad Futuri, and a part of Taria were included in it. Gifted with capable zamindars the estate attained vigorous growth. The estate was undoubtedly viable, and economically solvent; for the estate received huge quantities of Nankar fee, besides usual dastur and other sources of income.
About the middle of the eighteenth century, the Pargana Mechpara was taken out of the Bijni estate to form it a separate zamindary under the Moghuls. The founder of this estate was one Thana Kamal. It seemed that the estate was created by the order of the Moghul Government for the sole purpose of safeguarding the border. The holders of this estate were known as Choudhury and they exercised paramount control over the people and the Garos inhabiting the plains of the foot of the Garo Hills. They were placed in the same footing as they were under the Moghuls when the estate passed over to the administration of the British. The estate was economically solvent till the administration of Prithi Ram Choudhury. But after the death of this capable zamindar dissensions among his sons brought the estate to a state of confusion. Consequently, the estate was partitioned into several managements. But, the situation became so menacing that the estate was brought under the administration of the Court of Wards in 1917, and it remained under the administration of the Court of Wards till the Country achieved her independence.

In the time of Bijni Raja Mukunda Narayan, the Pargana Chapar was taken away to form it a separate estate by one Jay Narayan Sarma Choudhury, who obtained a grant
of the estate from the Moghuls. In all probability, this estate was created for reclamation of land. In the time of the Permanent Settlement, this estate, too, was considered to be one of the old estates, and the tribute it had paid to the Moghul Government was accepted as land revenue. The financial position of the estate was not unsatisfactory, though the estate incurred debts in the thirties of the current century. After the death of Rohini Debi, the holder of the estate, it was engrossed in deep crisis. Her adopted son Kirtinarayan was then a minor. Thus, the estate was brought under the administration of the Court of Wards and remained under it from 1851-2859. Kirtinarayan died leaving no male issue to succeed to the gaddy. He left behind him a Deed of Adoption. Accordingly, the estate was administered by the adopted line of the zamindars.

Like Mechpara, Paraibari Pargana was recognised as a frontier dependency of Bengal and its de facto rulers were allowed to govern it as border Chieftain known as Choudhury. They had military ranks conferred on them for opposing the Garo mountaineers. They paid tribute in kind to the Moghuls not for the land they held, but for 3ayer they levied on the Garos. The British converted it into money payment and the estate was brought under the
Permanent Settlement. But, the zamindar Mahendra Narayan Choudhury evaded payment of the revenue to the East India Company. He was dispossessed and the zamindary was sold for arrears of revenue to one Rama Nath Lahiri. But he could not cope with the situation; eventually, he sold a quarter share of the estate to one Radha Krishna Lahiri. Thus, the estate was partitioned. A strip of land was taken away from this estate to the Garo Hills in the time when the Garo Hills district was formed. In 1937, the 4/- annas Lahiri estate was taken over by the Bengal Court of Wards. This 4/- annas Lahiri estate contained two shares; one of them was under the Court of Wards, the other was managed by the proprietor himself.

The founder of the Farbotjoar estate was one Hatibar Choudhury. The pargana was taken away from Bijni to form it a separate estate and was recognised by the Moghuls. The estate was included in the Permanent Settlement. But the management of the estate showed seeds of discord. The estate was, thus, partitioned. But the dispute amongst the share holders became so cumbrous that the Deputy Commissioner of the district had to interfere in the affairs of the estate and one of the co-sharers had to be imprisoned.
Of the zamindaries of Goalpara, Bijni Raj estate maintained friendly relation with Bhutan. In fact, Bijni Raj had to acknowledge the suzerainty of Bhutan over Bijni Duar till it was acquired by the British. But towards the later part of the eighteenth century, the connection between the Dev Raja of Bhutan and the Raja of Bijni constituted a sort of exchange of productions of the two countries. But unfortunately the Bhutias began to interfere in the affairs of Bijni. As matters stood, the Bhutias carried out incursions on the plains, and the entire frontier of Bengal was exposed to it. This led to the Bhutan War (1864-66) in consequence of which the Bhutan Government ceded the territory to the British.

As has been referred to, Mechpara, Falumalurara and Farabari estates were created as border estates for the sole purpose of retaliating the incursions of the Garos, who proved to be terror to the plains. It should be mentioned that these border Chieftains, Choudhuries as they were called, were not to pay land revenue of their estates. The tributes payable to the Moghul Government were assessed on certain transit and market dues, which were realised on the trade carried on with the Garos at the hats established by the zamindars at the frontier. Be that as it may, the collection of such dues were made illegal at the time of the Permanent Settlement.
But the zamindars continued to collect the duties. This embittered their relations with the tribes of the Garo Hills. Consequently, Garo Hills were separated from these estates, and these estates were paid compensation for the loss of their money on account of Sayer duties. Moreover, they were paid annuity for the loss of their territories to the Garo Hills.

All the zamindar families had, as usual, tenants under them from the time of their ancestors. Of them, there had been a class of permanent tenure holders who had acquired from a proprietor or from another tenure holder a right to hold a heritable and transferable interest in land for the purpose of collection of rent or bringing it under cultivation either wholly or partially by establishing tenants on it. It should be mentioned that vast areas were lying fallow for centuries. With a view to earning quick money, the zamindars settled very big blocks of land called jotes with non-cultivating middlemen who were known as jotedars. These jotedars gradually brought the zamindars' waste land under cultivation either with the help of labours brought from outside or by letting on them tenants. Very often, these tenants themselves were non-cultivators, and they sublet tenants on their lands. As a result, there were even 6/7 grades of
intermediaries on the same plot of land. Sub-infeudation of tenancies was most prevalent in Gauripur estate, possibly, due to its proximity to thickly populated areas of erstwhile Pakistan. Bijni estate was, however, opposite to it, where majority of the tenants were directly under the zamindar.

It is well known that some of the ancestors of Goalpara zamindars, i.e., the Rajas of Bijni, were descendants of the sovereign ruling dynasty. Most of the ancestors of the Gauripur Raj family were the revenue officials of the Moghul Government. Zamindars of other estates rose to prominence by their valuable services first to the Moghul Empire and then to the East India Company. In fact, all the zamindars of Goalpara were de facto rulers under the Moghuls. Thus, they had, generally acquired administrative habits. They assumed administrative style of their imperial authority. They considered themselves as Rajas and lived as such. Be that as it may, the administration of the zamindaries was at their behest. The pattern of management was almost uniform. The administrative system was of two tiers, i.e., Sadar and muffasil. Sadar Iachari was situated within the vicinity of Rajbari and different grades of officials, viz., Dewan, Jamanavis, Subanavis, Tanurgo, Tankinavis and Amins etc. were employed in it for transaction of managerial business. For the collection of rent,
entire zamindary area was divided into circles known as dihis, and the officer-in-charge of the dihi was known as Tahsildar or Naib. In each dihi, there was a class of officials consisting of Jamanavis, Tankinavis, and Amins etc.

At the earlier stage, the relations between the zamindars and the tenants were, perhaps, satisfactory. The number of rent suits was comparatively small in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Towards the latter part of that century, the relations between the zamindars and the tenants were strained. In the changed circumstances, mismanagement of the zamindries, corruption of the estate officials, collection of exhorbitant abwabs, enhancement of rent and curtailment of customary rights enjoyed by the ryots from time immemorial caused widespread discontent amongst the tenants, culminating in a series of disputes between the zamindars and the tenants, and between the tenants and the under-tenants. Thus, agrarian trouble of greater dimension was seen in the rebellions that took place in Ghurla, Habraghat, Thunta-ghat and Jogighopa. It is no denying the fact that the tenants of different estates in Goalpara were not organised in a body. However, the tenants of respective zamindries could bring forth the organised resistance against the
zamindary management in the form of local agitation and submitted innumerable memorials to the Government for redressal of their grievances.

It is wellknown that Permanent Settlement Regulation did not safeguard the interests of the ryots. On the contrary, the British opted to protect the interests of the zamindar, and thus Haptam Law (1799) was introduced to take drastic action against the ryots. It was, indeed, a mistake to arm the zamindar with such a drastic law without defining the rights of the ryots. Of course, with a view to mitigating the harshness of the Haptam Law, Regulation VII, known as Panjam, was passed. But the defects remained unsolved. The Select Committee, appointed in 1808 by the House of Commons, which produced five reports on the affairs of the East India Company, did not recommend any enactment as regards the rights of the ryots. The Second Committee, set up by the House of Commons in 1830, was, too, not in favour of taking any measure interfering with the powers of the zamindars. It should be mentioned that the law of 1869 (Act VIII of 1869) that was in force in Goalpara was defective. There was no rent law in Goalpara. Thus, the zamindars in Goalpara were virtually left free to act as they pleased in matters of fixation of rent and abwab. Nevertheless, due to exploitation let loose by the landlords and other intermediaries,
there was a demand from the people for enactment of tenancy legislation, and, thus, the Goalpara Tenancy Act of 1929, framed on the pattern of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, was passed. This law granted occupancy right to the tenants. It may be noted that this law, to some extent, had restored the relations between the zamindars and the ryots. But, the under-tenants were left exposed to the exploitation of the zamindars till the acquisition of the zamindary by the State Acquisition Act of 1956.

Thus, the zamindary system introduced by the British was in operation in Goalpara with some modifications. A review of the system brings home the following facts:

Prior to the introduction of the permanent Settlement regulation, the zamindars in Goalpara were rent collectors under the Moghuls, and the ryots were the owners of the soil they cultivated. It was the Permanent Settlement Regulation which gave the zamindars permanent, heritable and transferable right on the land settled with them without defining the rights of the ryots. As a result, the peasants became the tenants of the landlord instead of owners of the land. Thus, the measure caused a reversal in the situation in the rural society.
The abwabs existing at the time of the Permanent Settlement were merged with the jama and levying of the abwab in any form was made illegal. But abwabs did emerge as a matter of custom. Non-implementation of the Patta regulation, in practice, belied the hopes of the framers of the permanent settlement to protect the ryots from arbitrary enhancement of rent and exaction on the illegal cesses. Besides this, the zamindars failed to discharge their responsibility of the good management of the zamindaries. They even divested themselves of the trouble of directly managing and collecting the rent from the ryots. And, contrary to the expectation of the British authorities, the zamindars in Goalpara frittered away their huge economic surplus in non-productive consumption.

Thus, taking into account all these, it may be said that Cornwallis' model of land settlement, apparently, remained an ideal only. The main reason for the non-fulfilment of the expectations of the framers of Permanent Settlement was their failure to take note of the social and cultural milieu in which the zamindars lived in Goalpara.

It may be noted that the Permanent Settlement was made neither for the interests of the zamindars nor that of the ryots, but for the stability of the imperialist rule. As expected, it ensured the regular flow of revenue
from the zamindars, and their never-ending support for the survivals of imperialist Government.

Thus, our study, which was intended to be a case study of the zamindary system in Goalpara during British regime, is, to the best of our belief, analytical.

In fine, it may be noted that the zamindary system, as it was in Goalpara, was in vogue in some other parts of the Indian territory. It was indeed a feudal institution and outlived its usefulness. Thus, the zamindars, as middlemen, were peculiar to India. The landlords, as a class of intermediaries, ceased from land even in Ireland where it originated. But in India it continued to prosper so long as the ryots were subject to enhancement of rent. The system survived as long as the British ruled in India; it was done away with after the country achieved her independence. Our attempt has been to make a document-study of a phase of the system under the alien regime.